



Birds

Horned Lark

Eremophila alpestris

Priority 2 Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN)

Class: Birds (*Aves*)

Order: Perching Birds (*Passeriformes*)

Family: Larks (*Alaudidae*)



General comments:

The Horned Lark is a small, pale-brown songbird with a black mask, breastband, and tiny feather tufts that resemble horns. In Maine, it nests in open, sparsely vegetated habitats, with breeding birds largely restricted to the Aroostook Lowlands. They are more widespread in winter, using open agricultural and coastal areas across southern and central Maine. Populations are declining due to habitat loss from changing agricultural practices, coastal development, and human disturbance.

Species Conservation Range Maps:

Town Map: [Eremophila alpestris_Towns.pdf](#)

Subwatershed Map: [Eremophila alpestris_HUC12.pdf](#)

SGCN Priority Ranking - Designation Criteria:

State Special Concern:	Horned Lark is listed as a species of Special Concern in Maine.
High Regional Conservation Priority:	Partners In Flight: Regional Concern: No, Regional Stewardship: , Regional Importance: No, Continental Importance: Yes

Habitat Associations:

Formation: Agricultural

Macrogroup: Agricultural

	Habitat System: Agricultural Macrogroup - Unknown Habitat System <i>Captures general open, human-modified areas used by Horned Larks, especially in winter.</i>
	Habitat System: Cultivated Crops
	Habitat System: Pasture-Hay

Formation: Coastal Scrub-Herb

Macrogroup: North American Atlantic Coastal Beach & Rocky Shore

	Habitat System: North American Atlantic Coastal Beach & Rocky Shore Macrogroup - Unknown Habitat System
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Macrogroup: North American Atlantic Coastal Dune, Grassland & Rocky Headland

	Habitat System: North American Atlantic Coastal Dune, Grassland & Rocky Headland Macrogroup - Unknown Habitat System
	Habitat System: Northern Atlantic Coastal Plain Dune and Swale

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Formation: Developed

Macrogroup: Maintained Grasses and Mixed Cover

	Habitat System: Maintained Grasses and Mixed Cover Macrogroup - Unknown Habitat System
	Habitat System: Urban & Recreational Grasses

Threats

Threat Priority Level based on Severity and Actionability		Moderate Severity	High Severity
	Highly Actionable	Medium-High	High
	Moderately Actionable	Medium	Medium-High
	Actionable with Difficulty	Low	Low

IUCN Level 1 Threat Agriculture and Aquaculture

IUCN Level 2 Threat: Annual and Perennial Non-timber crops

Severity: Moderate Severity **Actionability:** Moderately Actionable

Notes: Conversion of small, diverse farms to intensive row crops and other changes in agricultural practices, such as shifts to earlier planting dates, denser cover crops, or reduced tillage, can reduce the availability of bare or sparsely vegetated ground necessary for nesting. Shifts to less suitable crops or loss of field edge structure may reduce both nest site availability and foraging habitat. These changes reduce habitat quality even where farmland remains in active production. Encourage farmers to maintain small patches of bare ground in large fields during the nesting season, especially in core areas of the Aroostook Lowlands. This may include rotational tillage, delayed planting in select areas, or maintaining lightly disturbed fallow strips. These practices can provide critical nesting habitat without significantly reducing crop yield and may be compatible with broader soil conservation goals.

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IUCN Level 1 Threat Natural Systems Modifications

IUCN Level 2 Threat: Other Ecosystem Modifications

Severity: Moderate Severity

Actionability: Moderately Actionable

Notes: Abandonment of farmland or reduction in field management (e.g., grazing, tilling, mowing) can allow former Horned Lark nesting areas to become overgrown and unsuitable. Horned Larks require sparse or bare ground with minimal vegetative cover, and benefit from early successional conditions maintained through disturbance. As fields in Aroostook County and elsewhere in Maine are left idle or shift toward reforestation, habitat loss occurs even in the absence of development. Management should aim to maintain a mosaic of field conditions, where compatible with broader grassland bird conservation goals. For this species conservation actions should focus on an effort to maintain early successional conditions on marginal or idle agricultural lands through mowing, grazing, or shallow tillage to prevent succession.

IUCN Level 1 Threat Residential and Commercial Development

IUCN Level 2 Threat: Housing and Urban Areas

Severity: Moderate Severity

Actionability: Moderately Actionable

Notes: Residential development along southern Maine's coast and in agricultural valleys has reduced or fragmented wintering habitat. Coastal dunes and upper beaches used are especially vulnerable to infill, lot expansion, and construction.

Species Level Conservation Actions:

None. Only species specific conservation actions that address high (red) or medium-high (orange) priority threats are summarized here.

Conservation Actions Associated with the Grassland Birds Guild:

Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Develop an outreach program to inform small landowners of the best methods for keeping fields open for grassland wildlife.	Public Outreach	high	on-going

Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

- Fire and Fire Suppression
- Habitat Shifting or Alteration
- Annual and Perennial Non-timber crops
- Livestock Farming and Ranching

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Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Develop a BMP guide for farmers to minimize negative effects of cutting hay/silage during the grassland bird nesting season. NRCS recommendations should be viewed as a start with increased emphasis on timing, field size, and bird behavioral cues.	Species Management	high	on-going

Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

- Livestock Farming and Ranching

Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Prioritize acquisition or long-term conservation of high-value grasslands through fee ownership or easement.	Habitat Management	critical	new

Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

- Habitat Shifting or Alteration
- Other Ecosystem Modifications

Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Map and monitor priority grassland sites statewide to inform conservation targeting.	Survey and Monitoring	high	new

Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

- Other Ecosystem Modifications

Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Support programs such as Ag Allies that provide incentives to private landowners and working farms for grassland bird habitat management.	Habitat Management	high	on-going

Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

- Habitat Shifting or Alteration
- Annual and Perennial Non-timber crops

Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Develop and implement standardized monitoring programs to more effectively document and understand environmental contaminant and disease exposure at state and regional scales.	Survey and Monitoring	high	new

Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

- Industrial and Military Effluents
- Agricultural and Forestry Effluents
- Invasive Non-native-Alien Species-Diseases
- Problematic Native Species-Diseases
- Problematic Species-Diseases of Unknown Origin
- Annual and Perennial Non-timber crops

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Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Develop and implement outreach, partnerships, and other strategies to increase the adoption of practices that minimize the exposure of grassland birds to environmental contaminants.	Public Outreach	high	new

Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

- Agricultural and Forestry Effluents
- Annual and Perennial Non-timber crops

Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Develop a comprehensive outreach program and to promote beneficial management practices, including habitat and pest management, and to highlight opportunities for involvement in species management and monitoring through community science programs.	Public Outreach	high	new

Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

- Habitat Shifting or Alteration
- Fire and Fire Suppression
- Habitat Shifting or Alteration
- Livestock Farming and Ranching
- Annual and Perennial Non-timber crops

Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Advance understanding of how existing grassland bird data can be used to identify information gaps and determine where additional survey efforts may be needed to guide habitat conservation prioritization, habitat management, outreach, and species-specific conservation planning.	Research	high	new

Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

- Lack of knowledge
- Annual and Perennial Non-timber crops

Broad Taxonomic Group Conservation Actions:

Additional relevant conservation actions for this species are assigned within broader taxonomic groups in Maine's Wildlife Action Plan: Element 4.

Habitat Based Conservation Actions:

Additional conservation actions that may benefit habitat(s) associated with this species can be found in Maine's Wildlife Action Plan: Element 4. Click on the Habitat Grouping of interest to launch a habitat based report summarizing relevant conservation actions and associated SGCN.

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The Wildlife Action Plan was developed through a lengthy participatory process with state agencies, targeted conservation partners, and the general public. The Plan is non-regulatory. The species, threats, and voluntary conservation actions identified in the Plan complement, but do not replace, existing work