

# Audubon/WDFW Shrubsteppe Breeding Bird Survey

## PROTOCOL for collecting field data rev. 1.31.2019

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This survey effort, a joint project between Washington Department Fish and Wildlife and Audubon Washington, is a project aimed at a comprehensive state-wide examination of breeding bird populations in our shrubsteppe ecosystems. Our initial goals for the survey are to establish the distribution of key species of conservation concern in Washington and to build a framework for monitoring these species over time.

### Focal Species for these surveys:

- Sagebrush sparrow
- Sage thrasher
- Brewer's sparrow

### Other species of interest:

- Savannah sparrow
- Grasshopper sparrow
- Vesper sparrow
- Loggerhead shrike
- Golden eagle (especially pairs)

### When to survey:

- 15 April to 30 June (actual dates will be selected during training sessions)
- Dawn to 9:00 AM (begin as early as you can, but do not extend beyond 9:00 AM)
- Not raining (a light drizzle is OK, but do not survey in rain; it effects both behavior of the birds and your ability to detect them by sight and by sound)
- Not windy (light wind or gusts of moderate wind are acceptable; wind of varying degree is almost a constant in Washington's shrubsteppe!)

Use the following numeric scoring system to record the wind for your survey:

- 0 This score indicates negligible wind
- 1 Indicates light wind (grass moving; smaller twigs on tops of sagebrush moving, but larger branches not moving)
- 2 Indicates moderate wind (larger sage branches moving in the wind).

Enter this value in eBird in the "Comments" field (e.g., "Wind = 1")

### Who can do the surveys?

- Anyone who has completed the training provided by Audubon or received the OK from the Audubon project manager.
- For each visit to a survey point up to 4 individuals may participate and contribute to the bird list for that morning. One trained individual must be responsible for accurately completing the survey form and seeing that the data are entered into eBird.

### Survey Types

- The surveys will include both point-counts and traveling counts. Basically, you'll be doing a traveling count as you walk from the parking area to the marked point-count center; stopping at the survey point and doing a 10-minute point count; and then doing a second traveling count as you walk back to the parking spot.

- You may find that you are more distracted as you use your GPS to navigate to the survey point and perhaps miss some birds; that's OK, you'll probably pick them up on the second traveling count as you walk back to the parking spot.
- The 10-minute point count is the focus of this survey effort and it is during this survey that you likely will be most efficient at detecting birds. The purpose of the traveling counts is to pick up species of interest that may not have been near the marked survey point and to make the most of your time in the field.

#### Instructions for Traveling Counts

- Record the straight-line distance you will be walking from the parking spot to the survey point (this is displayed on the GPS unit when viewing the compass screen).
- Record the time when you begin walking to (or from) the survey point (Time start)
- Note birds while walking from the parking area to the survey point and on return trip
- Note ONLY individuals you can positively identify to species
- Record time when you arrive at your destination (Time end)
- If you detect new birds after arriving at the survey point but before you start the actual 10-minute point count you can add them to the list for your traveling count.

#### Instructions for Point Counts

- When you arrive at the flagged survey point take 2-3 minutes to let things settle and get your bearings; this is a good time to do your sagebrush count.
- Record the time you begin looking and listening for birds (start of your 10-minute survey)
- All participants must remain at the point and note ONLY individuals they can positively identify to species
- Do not use recorded vocalizations to illicit response or to attract birds
- STOP recording birds at the 10-minute mark
- At the end of the 10-minute survey you can follow-up individual birds to confirm identification if needed.

#### What to record

- Note each bird that you can positively identify by either sight or sound.
- If the individual is a singing male, enter "yes" for Singing?
- Record the sex of the individual as "M" or "F" in the column Sex; if you cannot tell the sex of the individual record it as sex unknown (or "U")
- Tally similar observations in column Tally;
  - For example, if you have 4 singing male sage thrashers they all could be recorded on one line and your tally column would look like this: I I I I
- Note anything unusual in the behavior of the bird that might indicate its breeding status (e.g., carrying nesting material or carrying food in its bill) and record this in the Notes column. You should enter this information in eBird using the "Breeding" drop-down list under "Details" for each observation. Please enter a breeding code for each of our focal species or species of interest that you observe on the survey.

- Feel free to note all bird species that you encounter during the survey to make your personal day list complete; however, remember that we're most interested in the species listed above and these species should be the primary focus of your observations.

### Instructions for Sagebrush Count

Sagebrush is an important species for many of the birds in our survey. We can use remote imagery to estimate the cover of shrubs around each of the survey points, but it is not always possible to identify the actual species of all shrubs. Also, changes in shrub cover that result from wild fires or land management activities may not be documented in our latest remote imagery meaning that estimates based on that imagery might be misleading. For these reasons we are asking you to provide a rough estimate of the number of sagebrush shrubs near the survey point.

- Count the number of sagebrush plants within about 100 yards of the survey point.
- Include only sagebrush; do not include rabbitbrush, a common shrub in disturbed areas
- Include only bushes that are at least 0.5 meters in height (about knee-height). Shrubs less than knee-height are less likely to be used for nesting.
- Record the number as either zero or as increasing bins of 10:
  - "0" (no shrubs present)
  - "1-10" (there is at least one shrub but no more than 10 shrubs present)
  - or "11-20", "21-30", "31-40", or ">40" (more than 40 shrubs present)
- Enter this value in eBird in the "Comments" field (for example: "Shrubs = >40")

### Shrub Identification Tips

- Sagebrush leaves are grayish in color and have fine hairs giving them a velvety feel.
- Sagebrush leaves are wider at the tip ("wedge shaped") and have 3 lobes at the tip.
- In rocky soils sage leaves may be more dissected, the lobes at the end forming 3 "fingers"

- Rabbitbrush leaves are long and thin and may be gray or green.
- Rabbitbrush appears lighter in color than sage when viewed at a distance.
- Flowers shown here bloom in the fall and may be present in spring as brown, dried flowers.



Big sagebrush



Rabbitbrush