

Bachman's Sparrow

Peucaea aestivalis

Identification

The Bachman's sparrow, also referred to as the pine woods sparrow, is approximately 6 in/15 cm in length and weighs 0.7 oz/20 g. Its back is gray-brown with a slightly lighter colored underbelly. This small bird is shy and relies on grassy habitat to provide cover while it forages on the ground for grass seeds and insects such as grasshoppers, beetles, and caterpillars. Additionally, the Bachman's sparrow is used to indicate the health of longleaf pine forests in the southeastern United States.



Photo credit: [Andrew Cannizzaro](#)/Flickr

Observation Tips

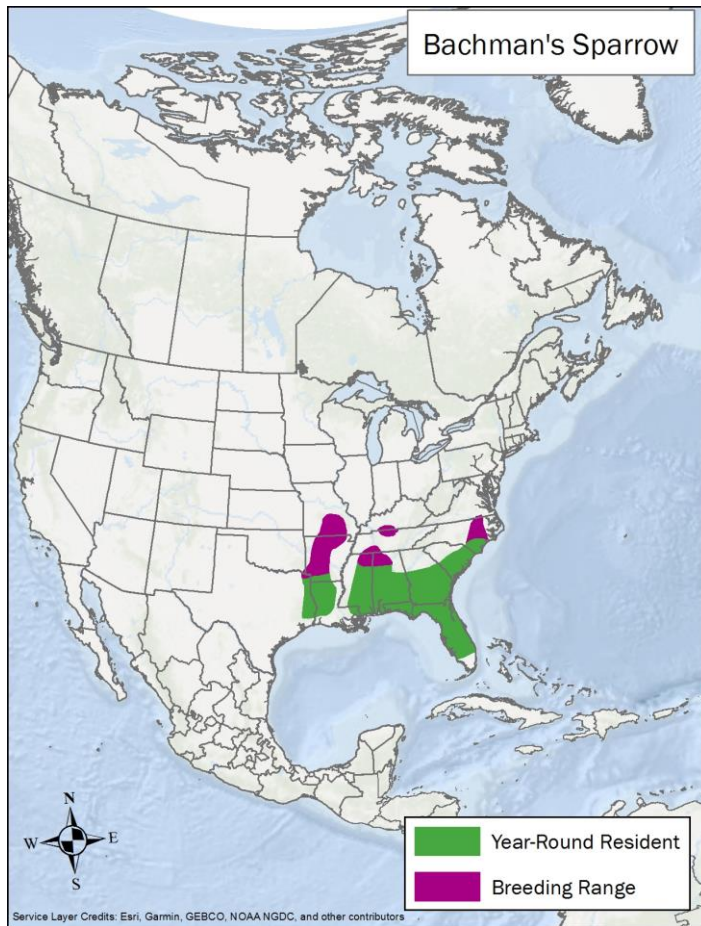
Bachman's sparrow can be seen singing while perched on branches low to the ground. Singing displays begin up to two months before the breeding season, generally between April/May and July/August. The female will typically lay 2-3 broods per year containing 3-5 eggs. The Bachman's sparrow does not fly directly to and from its nest and often walks some distance before flying out or landing. The Bachman's sparrow builds its nest on the ground. The nest is usually under a shrub, grass, or palmetto and is an open dome or cup built of fine grasses and other vegetation.

Interesting Fact

Only the female incubates the eggs, and then both the male and female care and feed the young after they hatch. During this time, the female will begin building a new nest for her next brood.

Ideal Habitat

The Bachman's sparrow prefers mature (>80 year old) open-canopy (<50% cover) pine stands with a grassy savanna understory. Sparrows are more abundant in areas with vegetation < 3 ft/1 m, and >80% herbaceous cover with some patches of bare ground for movement and escape. In addition, low shrubs (<30% cover) provide cover for nesting and perching. Frequent slow-moving ground fires are essential for maintaining a matrix of suitable habitat patches of >185 ac/75 ha of mature and younger forests with corridors to allow movement between patches. Nest sites within areas burned the previous 12 months are highly favorable. Bachman's sparrows also use recently planted clear-cuts and young pine plantations of longleaf, loblolly, shortleaf, slash pines where native grasses dominate the ground cover and perches are available. Alternatively, they will occupy relatively grassy open fields and prairie sites with extensive grass or forbs.



Range map provided by BirdLife International

Management Activities that Benefit Species – Best Management Practices (BMPs)

Allow natural fires or proactively conduct prescribed burning every three years to reduce canopy cover and understorey woody shrubs, and promote the growth of grasses and forbs. Where possible, protect sites that currently support Bachman's sparrow and restrict timber harvest except for that needed to maintain habitat.

Management Activities to Avoid

Avoid suppression of natural fires where possible and conducting prescribed fires during nesting season. Farming practices and development that encourage pine monocultures, eliminate grasses, shrubs, and other ground vegetation should be avoided. Bachman's sparrows also do not do well in small isolated patches of habitat.

Other Species that Benefit from Similar Habitat Management

Red-cockaded woodpeckers, indigo buntings, and pine warblers benefit from forest management practices that maintain open longleaf pine forests with grasses. In addition, other bird species that live in a savanna longleaf pine habitat will benefit from management for Bachman's sparrow.

Other Resources

BirdLife International and Handbook of the Birds of the World. 2019. Bird species distribution maps of the world. Version 2019.1 [Bachman's sparrow](#)

Fish and Wildlife Service: [Bachman's sparrow](#)

Audubon Guide to North American Birds: [Bachman's sparrow](#)

NatureServe: 2021. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application] Version 7.1. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. [Bachman's Sparrow](#)

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission: [Bachman's Sparrow](#)

US Fish & Wildlife Service: Division of Strategic Resource Management & the Division of Fire Management, Southeast Region, Fire Management Species Profile, [Bachman's Sparrow](#)