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SUBMISSION TO THE NWMB FOR

Information:

Decision: X

Issue: COSEWIC Assessment for Buff-breasted Sandpiper



Background: The Buff-breasted Sandpiper was assessed by COSEWIC in May 2012. The Committee recommended that this species be listed as Special Concern because the species which was once common and possibly even abundant suffered big declines due to intense market hunting. Hunting is now banned in North America but the numbers are still much lower than before the species became hunted. Loss of habitat on the wintering grounds in South America and along the migration routes is believed to be the biggest threat (see Figure 1).

Under SARA, there are no requirements to restrict harvest or regulate habitat for species that are listed as Special Concern. There is a requirement to develop a management plan within 3 years of a species being listed.

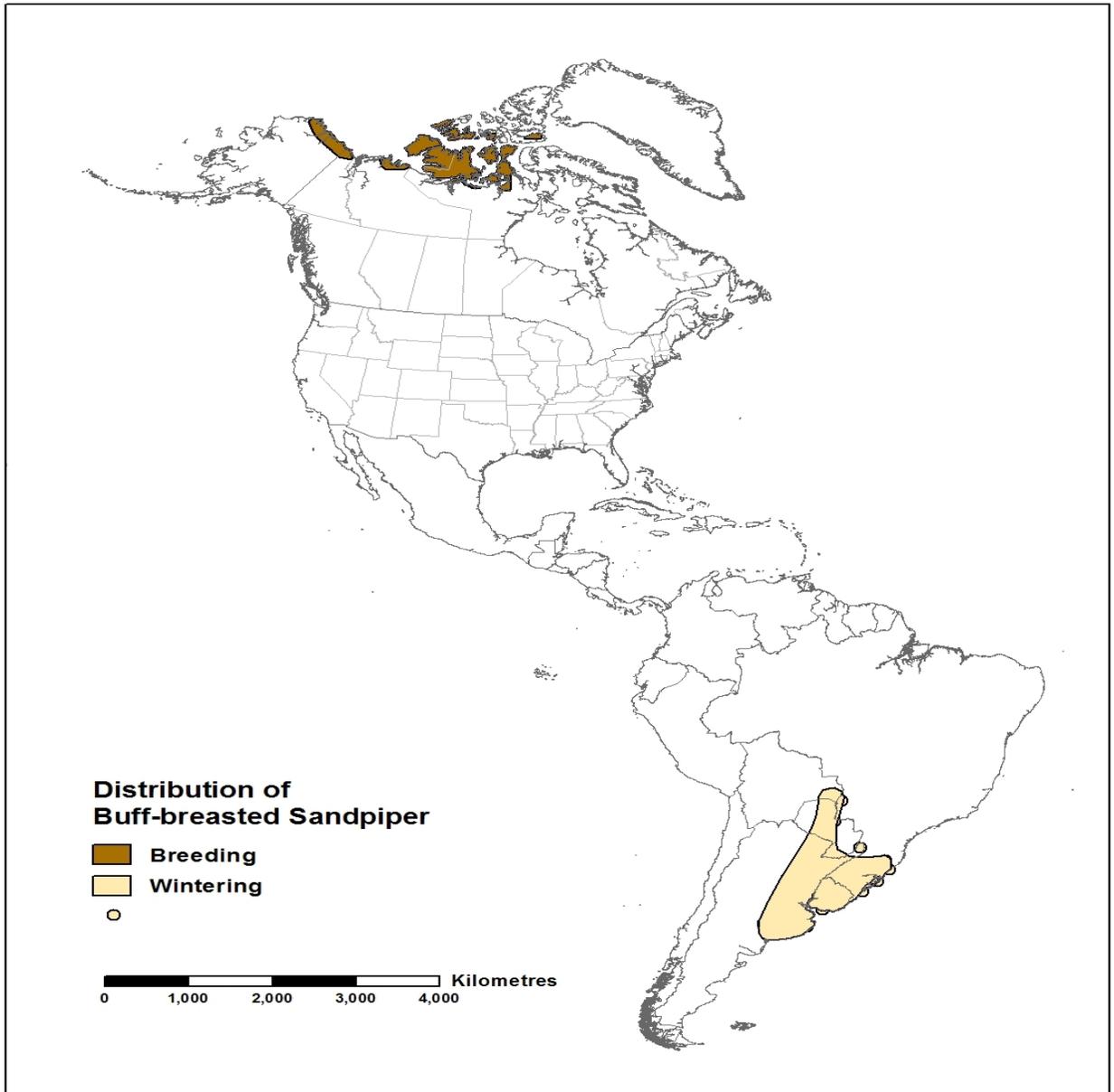


Figure 1. This is Figure 1 from the COSEWIC Assessment and Status Summary. It shows the distribution of Buff-breasted Sandpiper on its North American breeding grounds (orange) and South American wintering grounds (peach).

Consultation:

EC sent consultation packages (in English and Inuktitut) to 6 Hunters and Trappers Associations in Nunavut (Gjoa Haven, Taloyoak, Cambridge Bay, Bay Chimo, Grise Fiord and Resolute Bay) by mail and email on 7 February 2013. Consultation packages consisted of:

- A plain language summary of the COSEWIC Assessment and Status Report for Buff-breasted Sandpiper. It provided information about the species, threats facing the species and the reasoning behind their recommendation for listing.
- A narrated powerpoint presentation providing detailed information about the Buff-breasted Sandpiper, the COSEWIC assessment and details on what the proposed listing means.
- The complete COSEWIC Assessment and Status report for Buff-breasted Sandpiper (a digital copy in English only).

Communities were asked to review the information in the packages and to respond in writing (by 12 July 2013) to the Canadian Wildlife Service with their formal position on the proposed listing (i.e. oppose, support or are indifferent) and with any other comments, concerns or information that they feel should be considered.

Recommendations:

The NWMB is asked to consider whether or not they wish to make a formal decision on supporting COSEWIC's proposed listing of Buff-breasted Sandpiper as a species of Special Concern on the federal Species at Risk Act (SARA).

Prepared by:

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30 July 2013

COSEWIC Assessment and Status Report for Buff-breasted Sandpiper (*Tryngites subruficollis*) in Canada

SUMMARY

This is a summary of the information provided in the COSEWIC Assessment and Status Report for Buff-breasted Sandpipers in Canada. The Buff-breasted Sandpiper is being recommended for listing as a species of Special Concern under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA).



Assessment Summary – May 2012

Common name

Buff-breasted Sandpiper

Scientific name

Tryngites subruficollis

Status

Special Concern

Reason for designation

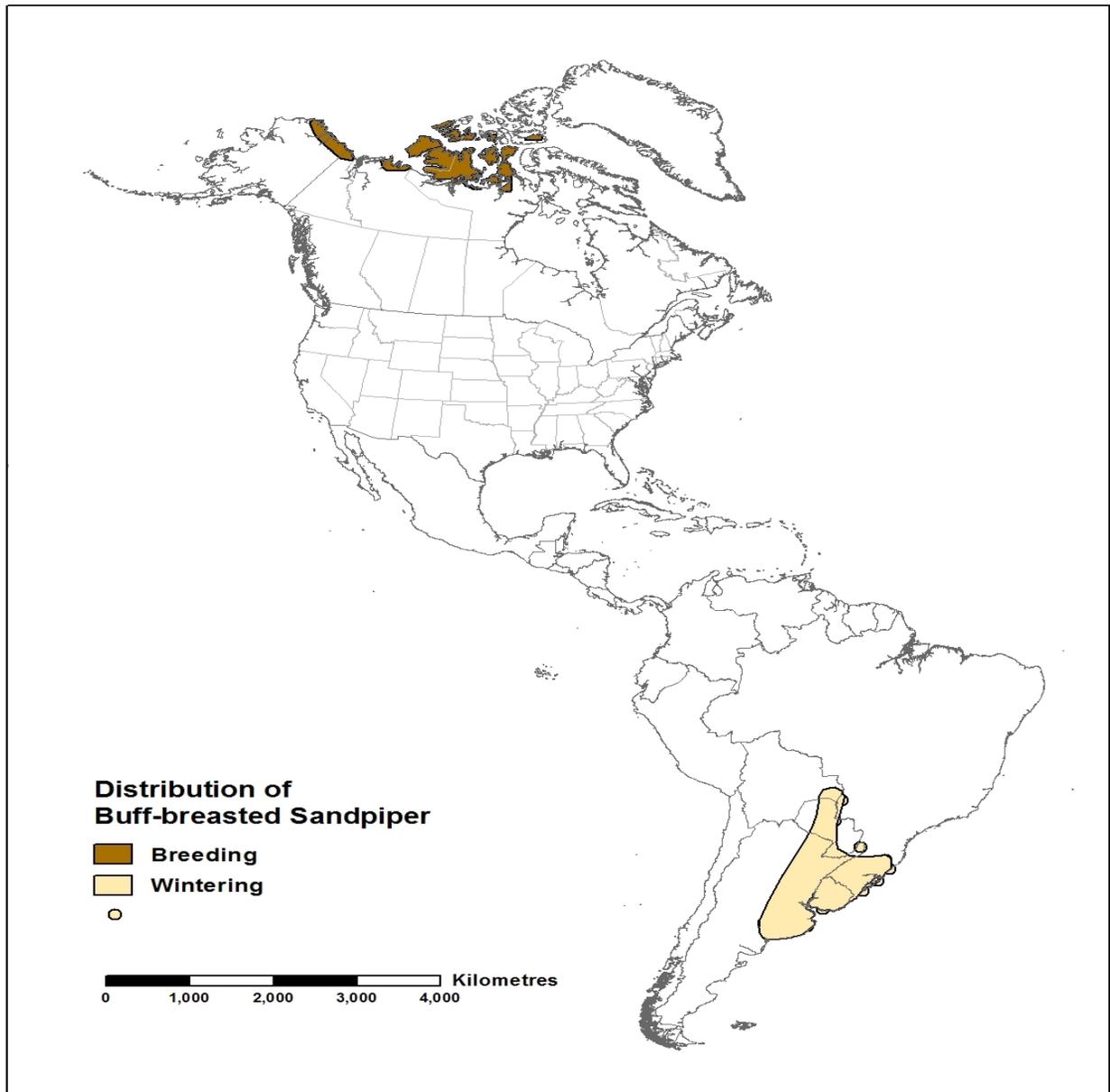
The Canadian Arctic supports about 87% of the North American breeding range of this shorebird, and about 75% of its global population. The species was once common and perhaps even abundant historically, but it suffered severe declines stemming from intensive market hunting in the late 1800s and early 1900s. By the 1920s, it was thought to be at the brink of extinction. Its population has grown since hunting was banned in North America, but numbers remain much lower than those before hunting began. There is evidence for population decline in recent decades, and many conservation organizations consider the species to be of concern throughout its range. However, this species is difficult to monitor effectively, and data necessary to estimate population trends are currently lacking. Outside the breeding period, loss and degradation of its specialized grassland habitat, both on its wintering grounds in South America and along its migration routes, are believed to pose the most significant threats.

Occurrence

Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec

Status history

Designated Special Concern in May 2012.



This is Figure 1 from the COSEWIC Assessment and Status Summary. It shows the distribution of Buff-breasted Sandpiper on its North American breeding grounds (orange) and South American wintering grounds (peach).

This summary is based on the information in the full English version of the COSEWIC Assessment and Status Report for Buff-breasted Sandpiper in Canada. It is a summary of information in the report that is either of particular interest or is directly relevant to Nunavut (arranged by page numbers).

The original English copy of the COSEWIC Assessment and Status Report has been provided for reference.

Information about Buff-breasted Sandpiper (pages 4-6)

These pages describe what the Buff-breasted Sandpiper looks like and other basic information about them.

- The Buff-breasted sandpiper is a medium sized shorebird.
- Males and females look the same however females are smaller than males and males have larger spots on the underneath of their wings.
- Buff-breasted Sandpipers have a buffy colour (pale yellow-brown) all over their feathers. They have brown spots or streaks on the top of their head, back of neck and on the sides of their breast, and dark brown feathers on their back, tail and wings. Their legs are yellow and their eyes are dark with a white eye ring.
- They are on average 18-20 cm in length and weigh from 41-117 g.
- The Buff-breasted Sandpiper typically bobs its head up and down when walking.
- It is the only member of its genus *Trygnites*.
- Its primary breeding grounds are in North America with most breeding in the Canadian Arctic.
- It is the only species of shorebird in North America that has a lek mating system. This means that males gather together and display to females looking for mates.
- Males only participate in breeding, they do no help with nest building, incubation or raising the young.

Distribution and range of Buff-breasted Sandpiper (pages 6-11)

These pages describe the distribution of Buff-breasted Sandpipers throughout the world and more specifically within Canada.

- The Buff-breasted Sandpiper breeds in the Arctic regions of Canada, Alaska and eastern Russia.
- It winters in South America, mostly in coastal Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay.
- Buff-breasted Sandpipers occur in Canada both during migration and during the breeding season.
- An estimated 87% of the species' North American range occurs within Canada.
- The Canadian breeding range extends along the northern coast of Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut and accounts for 75% of the North American breeding range.

Habitat and Biology (pages 11-21)

These pages describe the habitat requirements and habitat use by Buff-breasted Sandpipers, their biology, physiology and behaviour.

- On their breeding grounds, Buff-breasted Sandpiper occurs in tundra habitat.
- In Canada, breeding Buff-breasted Sandpipers occur primarily in wet/lowland habitats, often near a pond, lake or wetland, where there is mostly sedges.
- During migration they prefer open terrestrial habitats such as short-grass prairies.
- On their wintering grounds they occur mostly in meadows heavily grazed by livestock.
- Buff-breasted Sandpipers begin breeding at approximately 4 to 5 years of age.
- Nests are usually small depressions often lined with grasses, moss or lichens and females usually lay four eggs.
- Females provide all the parental care.
- Little is known about what Buff-breasted Sandpipers eat, however during spring migration they feed on terrestrial invertebrates such as spiders. In the fall they eat copepods, crane-flies and crustaceans.

- Nest predators of Buff-breasted Sandpipers include Arctic Fox, Arctic Ground Squirrel, Ravens, gull and falcons. Jaegers, Snowy Owl and Wolverine also hunt the shorebirds during the breeding season.

Population Size and Trends (pages 21-26)

These pages describe sampling efforts to determine Buff-breasted Sandpiper population size, abundance of Buff-breasted Sandpipers and trends and fluctuations in their populations.

- It is difficult and costly to estimate the abundance of Buff-breasted Sandpiper on the breeding grounds because it is randomly distributed, and because of its lek mating system where groups of displaying males and nesting females are clumped.
- Most population estimates have been made based on limited surveys on the wintering grounds and along the migratory route.
- Population estimates have not been reliable and have changed quite a bit over the last twenty years.
- The most recent population estimate suggests that the current population of Buff-breasted Sandpipers worldwide is 56,000.
- The species was believed to be close to extinction in the early 1920s because of intensive commercial hunting in the late 1800s and early 1900s.
- It is believed that the population has still been declining over the past several decades even after commercial hunting was banned.
- Data from the Northwest Territories/Nunavut Bird Checklist Survey (1971-2009) show no significant changes in Buff-breasted Sandpiper habitat occupancy for the last 40 years.
- Should the Buff-breasted Sandpiper population in Canada decline to a point where it needs to be rescued it would be difficult to repopulate the Canadian population because only 25% of the North American population breeds elsewhere.

Threats and Limiting Factors (pages 26-30)

These pages describe the things that threaten Buff-breasted Sandpiper populations or keep their populations from increasing. These threats include:

- Habitat loss
- Environmental contaminants
- Climate change
- Hunting in Latin America

Protection, Status and Ranks (pages 31-33)

These pages describe international and Canadian protection and the status of Buff-breasted Sandpiper.

- Outside of Canada the Buff-breasted Sandpiper is listed as an endangered migratory species in the Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals.
- It is protected under Canada's federal Migratory Birds Convention Act.
- It is also protected under provincial/territorial legislation, such as Alberta's Wildlife Act, Saskatchewan's Wildlife Act and Nunavut's Wildlife Act.
- The existing protections only protect the bird but do not provide conservation of the birds' habitat.
- The Buff-breasted Sandpiper is considered 'Near Threatened' by the World Conservation Union (IUCN)
- The Canadian Shorebird Conservation Plan designates the Buff-breasted Sandpiper as a species of high concern.
- The U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan recently upgraded their designation for Buff-breasted Sandpiper from 'high concern' to 'highly imperiled'.
- NatureServe ranks Buff-breasted Sandpiper as 'apparently secure' in both Canada and the United States.
- In Canada, the species is ranked nationally as 'sensitive'.
- In the provinces/territories the ranking for Buff-breasted Sandpiper is variable. In the Yukon it is ranked 'may be at risk'; in the NWT, Nunavut, Manitoba and Quebec 'sensitive'; in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Prince Edward Island 'secure'; in Ontario its status is undetermined and in New

Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador it is considered 'accidental'.

- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service considers the Buff-breasted Sandpiper as a species of high conservation concern.
- Buff-breasted Sandpipers are classified as threatened in Argentina and vulnerable in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul. It is identified as a priority species for conservation in Uruguay and listed as near-threatened in Paraguay.
- A small proportion of Buff-breasted Sandpiper's total habitat is legally protected. On the breeding grounds some habitat is protected by the State Nature Preserve on Wrangle Island, Russia and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska. In Canada, it is protected in the Queen Maud Gulf Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Nunavut, Aulavik National Park, NWT and Ivvavik National Park, Yukon. It is also protected in National Parks down south where it migrates through.