

Bartramia longicauda (Upland Sandpiper)

Family: Scolopacidae (Sandpipers)

Order: Charadriiformes (Shorebirds and waders)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. Upland Sandpiper, *Bartramia longicauda*.

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Upland_Sandpiper/id

TRAITS: Characterized by its small head, slim neck and a relatively short beak, the *Bartramia longicauda*, also known as the upland plover or ganga, is a medium-sized sandpiper, with both the male and female, being approximately 28-32 cm in length (Raffaele et al., 1998). The upland sandpiper can be identified by its thin, long yellow legs; accompanied by its dark brown breast and upper parts streaked with white and a white underside - belly (Fig. 1). Due to its disposition, preferences and choice of habitat, this bird is more reminiscent of plovers rather than sandpipers. It resembles the golden plover but is easily distinguishable due to its longer bill and pointed tail.

ECOLOGY: The upland sandpiper is completely terrestrial (Casey et al. 2001) found primarily in North America; it is known to be a rare migrant in Central America and parts of northern South America (Blake, 1977) (Fig. 2). It can be found in southern South America – Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina, during the winter (Bond, 1936). It is a near passage migrant to Trinidad and Tobago, though its presence is recorded fairly often, during its seasonal migrations. Records show its earliest appearance in Trinidad and Tobago being the 26th of August and its latest appearance being 27th October (French, 2012). It has a very rare transient presence in the West Indies during the periods August-November and again between March-May. This species prefers dry grasslands over wetlands and as such is found primarily in open areas of short to mid-height grasslands, regularly frequenting places such as savannahs, golf courses, pastures, agricultural fields and flood plains. It prefers low to moderate forb (grasslands and understory) cover with moderate amounts of vegetation. Being an area-sensitive species *B. longicauda*, usually tend to build nests in areas of appropriate habitat, of at least 25-50 ha; preferring areas ranging from at least 100 ha or larger. It has been suspected that the bird initiates nesting in areas with such sizes in order to have an open, available place to carry out foraging, looking for mates and to raise young. The nest (10-11 cm in diameter and 2.5-5 cm deep) is found as a depression in open grasslands, usually lined with feathers and grasses (Buss and Hawkins, 1939).

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION: These sandpipers usually nest in small colonies and can also rarely be found nesting solitarily. Male sandpipers are not territorial however they do possess a mate-defense mating system where they guard the female until she lays (Casey et al. 2001). Although they have been found in pairs specifically during the mating season in loose colonies, their breeding home ranges tend to be very large (>200ha) and are often overlapping (Casey et al. 2001).

ACTIVITY: Upland sandpipers are typically found perched on fences and poles roosting or displaying their feathers, in an attempt to attract a female or alert predator/prey of its presence (Fig. 3). It characteristically raises its wings on descent (showing the white underside of its wings) – post flight (Blake 1977). Despite having the ability to fly, this species of Sandpiper prefers to run when disturbed (French, 2012). It is able to endure long flights, and is usually able to migrate from North America to South America within a week; where it will stay for up to eight months during the winter. Both the adults and even young birds ‘teeter’ or sway back and forth with their body moving up and down, while their heads remains stationary. Reasons behind these movements are unknown. This movement is not as aggressive, and does not last as long, as in Spotted Sandpipers (Ailes 1976).

FORAGING BEHAVIOUR: Both pairs and solitary birds have been seen moving freely through open feeding areas – showing no attachment or particular preference for a specific area. Feeding occurs primarily in open grassland areas, preferably with short grass – shorter than the grass found in their nesting areas (Buss and Hawkins, 1939). This sandpiper preys on small, low-flying insects and a wide range of invertebrates found on the ground; these include: grasshoppers, ants, moths, crickets, spiders, weevils, flies, beetles and other arthropods. Its diet also includes some types of seeds and grains.

COMMUNICATION: When alarmed, feeding or even resting on a fence or pole, this species is easily identifiable, by its voice: a piping *quip-ip-ip-ip* or *quip-di-di-du*, with the last syllable being lower in pitch than the rest of the cry (Arlott, 2010). While flying high or during landing it is identifiable by a more whistled *huu-hui* sound (Restall et al., 2012).

SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR: During late April into early May, these birds reach their targeted breeding grounds and the process of courtship usually begins with the males flying overhead,

releasing an attractive, whistling song, in attempts to gain the attention of a female. They are found in pairs during the mating season, carrying out duties such as foraging, feeding and flying together (Buss and Hawkins, 1939). They carry all these duties out together, all the while, avoiding conflicts and no behaviour of territoriality is displayed by either mate. Males tend to defend their mates when challenged by other males. Clutch size of this species range between 2-7 eggs; the first of which is laid within a few hours to a day after finding and building the nest. Incubation begins after the laying of the first egg, and is carried out by both the male and female parent (Casey et al. 2001). However, males are more responsible for tending to the offsprings after hatching since females tend to leave between 0-5 days after hatching (Casey et al. 2001). Hatchlings emerge after 21-27 days of incubation (Buss and Hawkins, 1939).

JUVENILE BEHAVIOUR: Within one month of hatching, juvenile Upland sandpipers fledge and are able to fly when they are 27-37 days old. Shortly after learning to fly, the young birds tend to leave the nest and go hunting for their food. This species of bird is precocial (born in an advanced state) and are able to feed themselves not too long after birth.

ANTI-PREDATOR BEHAVIOUR: Over evolutionary time, *B. longicauda*, has gained adaptive characteristics when it comes to its primary area of habitat – grasslands. Its cryptic coloration allows it to camouflage within its natural environment. It exhibits the ability to perform diversionary displays when needed, in times of distracting predator or prey. It participates in ground nesting and undergo relatively short incubation and nesting periods to lessen the frequency of predator/prey interactions.

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Posted online: 2018

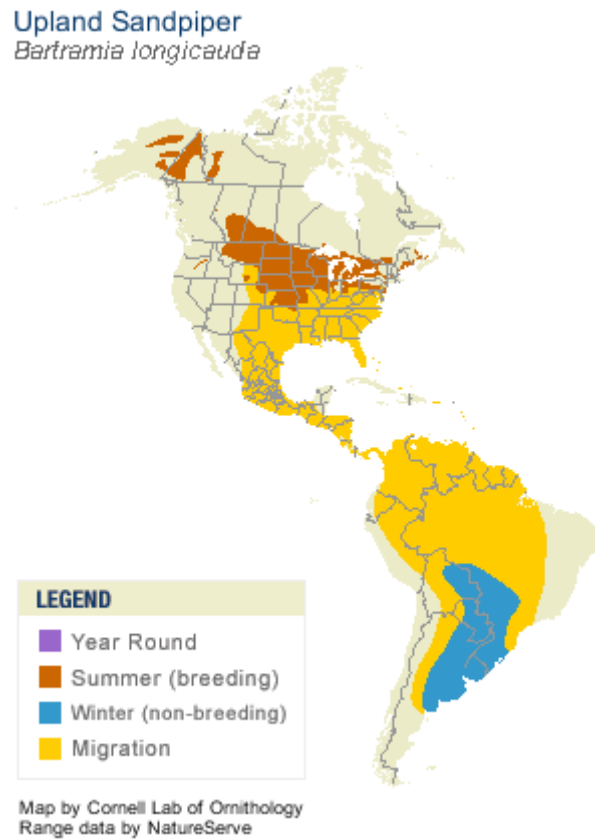


Fig. 2. Geographic Distribution of *B. longicauda*.

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Upland_Sandpiper/id



Fig. 3. An Upland Sandpiper displaying its feathers while perched on a pole.

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