

## McCown's Longspur (*Rhynchophanes mccownii*) Proposed as Threatened in Nebraska



### **Species Description:**

McCown's Longspurs (*Rhynchophanes mccownii*) are medium-sized birds. Breeding male is streaked above, with black crown, whitish face, black whisker markings, and a black band across breast. Females and winter males are duller in color and more streaked. Tail pattern in flight is largely white, with central pair of tail feathers black and with narrow black band at tip. Large conical bill.

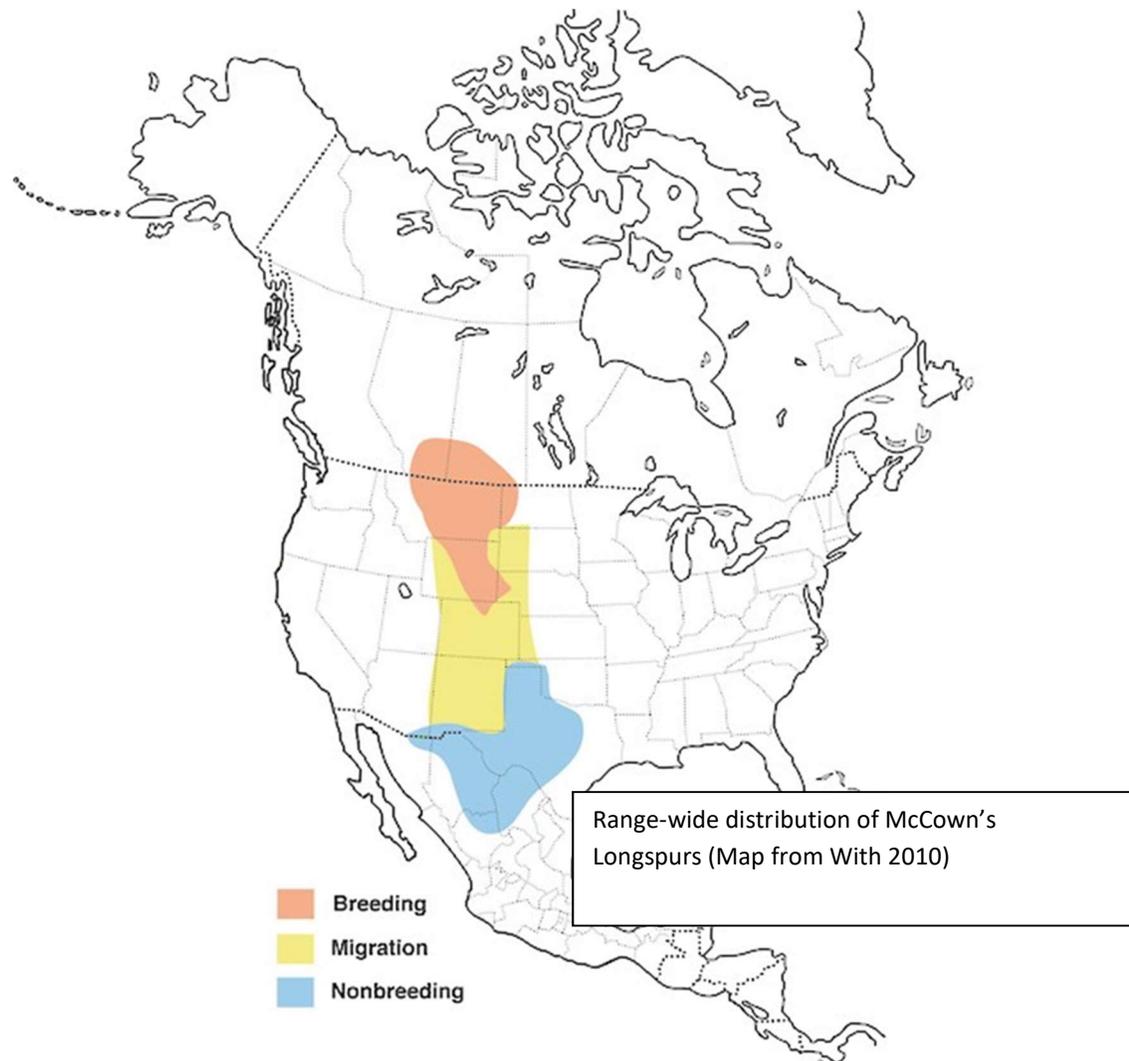
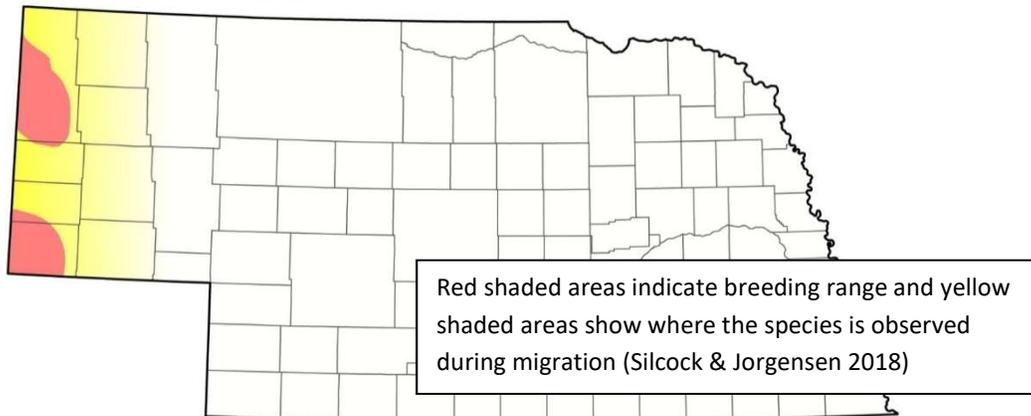
### **Habitat:**

- Sparse shortgrass prairies and areas with little vegetative litter or bare ground
- Plowed and stubble agricultural fields
- Nests in light to moderately grazed native shortgrass prairie
- Occur frequently at prairie dog colonies

### **Distribution & Temporal Occurrence:**

- A species of the western Great Plains of North America
- In Nebraska, they inhabit wide expanses of high-plains shortgrass prairie located west of the Sandhills
- Migratory; breeding and wintering range is entirely within N. America. Southern limits of the breeding range include east-central CO and extend north into the southern Canadian provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta. Winter in the southwestern U.S. and northwestern Mexico. Wintering range includes OK and NM and extends south into grasslands of the Chihuahuan Desert.
- Common spring and fall migrant in the western Panhandle and breeds locally within 2 primary areas, the southwestern Panhandle including most of Kimball, southern Banner, and western Cheyenne counties and the prairies of central and southern Sioux Co.

- Migrants common in the Panhandle but casual elsewhere in Neb. Spring migrants arrive typically in Apr. but sometimes as early as Mar. (Sharpe et al. 2001). Fall departure occurs normally in late Oct., sometimes Nov. Occurrence of McCown's Longspurs during winter in Neb. is hypothetical.
- Nests in localized areas mid-Mar. to mid.-Aug.
- Nests frequently located on top of hills and buttes where males perform courtship displays.
- Unknown if nesting in fallow ag. fields occurs regularly or if ag. habitats can serve as a suitable substitute to grasslands for nesting



### **Factors Affecting the Species:**

- Relatively small range and broad, long-term declines; breeding range reduced.
- Listed as a species of greatest conservation need in the bordering states of KS, CO, and WY.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Bird of Conservation Concern
- U.S. Forest Service Sensitive Species
- Listed on the Partners in Flight Watch List with up to 95% decline
- North American BBS trend analysis for the McCown's Longspur shows sharp annual declines of -5.9% (95% credibility intervals; -9.06, -2.83) survey-wide during the period 1966–2015.
- Reports of McCown's Longspurs in the Second Nebraska BBA showed a decline from 2% ( $n = 9$  reports) to 1% ( $n = 6$  reports), with only a total of 7 nests detected in the state, even though there had been an increase in survey effort.
- Breeding habitat fragmented as the landscape has been converted from grassland to other uses.
- Threats:
  - Conversion and fragmentation of shortgrass prairie habitat.
  - Management practices that maintain higher vegetation structure create unsuitable conditions.
  - Elimination of colonies of black-tailed prairie dogs negatively impacts habitat
  - Utility structures may increase perching for avian predators and lead to more predation on McCown's Longspurs.
  - Brood parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*) can occur, but it is unclear if this is having a significant effect on populations of McCown's Longspurs.
  - Overuse of pesticides may increase mortality of McCown's Longspurs and limit availability of insect prey such as grasshoppers.

(viii) For species proposed to be added under this subsection but not for species proposed to be removed under this subsection, developed an outline of the potential impacts, requirements, or regulations that may be placed on private landowners, or other persons who hold state-recognized property rights on behalf of themselves or others, as a result of the listing of the species or the development of a proposed program for the conservation of the species as required in subsection (1) of section 37-807.

### **McCown's Longspur (*Calcarius mccownii*)**

#### **Implications:**

- I. McCown's Longspur and their nests and eggs are currently protected under the provisions of state law (e.g., Neb. Rev. Stat. § 37-540).
  - A. The collection of a McCown's Longspur may be allowed with a Scientific and Education Permit issued by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.
- II. Any project that is permitted, funded, or carried out in part or full by any state agency on public or private land requires that state agency to coordinate with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to prevent the "take" (take means to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect or attempt to engage in any such conduct) of species on the Nebraska State Threatened or Endangered Species List.

- A. Site Specific requirements to prevent “take” of this species will be recommended during coordination between the state agency and the Nebraska Game and Parks commission. Such requirements will only be applicable within or near the modeled distribution of this species, and may include, but are not limited to:
- i. Ground disturbance may be limited during the nesting season.
  - ii. Survey for nests may be required for projects that take place during the nesting season.
  - iii. Planting of non-native species and trees in prairies may be limited.
  - iv. Conversion of nesting habitat to a different land use or vegetative cover may be limited.

Proposed Wildlife Regulation:

004.02 Include McCown’s Longspur in Table of Threatened Species, Location: Entire