

BIRD WITHOUT AN EQUAL:

A WEB PAGE ON PAINTED BUNTING BIOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT



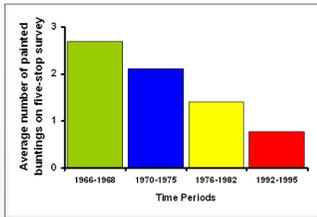
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SONGBIRD POPULATION DECLINES

Since 1966, thousands of volunteers have assisted wildlife biologists in conducting the annual North American Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), which is organized and managed by the USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. Based on the BBS, we know that many songbird populations, especially those species that migrate from the tropics to North America each year, have declined significantly throughout their range. These songbird population declines have been associated with fragmentation of eastern forest habitat into isolated patches, loss of wintering habitat in Central and South America, loss or significant alteration of optimum breeding habitat, increased predation related to habitat alteration, and nest parasitism by the Brown-headed Cowbird, scientific name: *Molothrus ater*.

The Painted Bunting, scientific name: *Passerina ciris*, ranks high for need of attention in important coastal areas of the southeastern United States. Unlike declining populations of forest interior migratory birds that need large areas of unbroken forests, the Painted Bunting depends on young shrub and grassland habitat for breeding and nesting primarily in upland maritime shrub-scrub habitat of the South Atlantic Coastal Plain from North Carolina to northeastern Florida. Painted Buntings can also use shrub-scrub habitat in open pine and maritime oak forests. This upland coastal habitat on barrier islands and coastal mainland is highly vulnerable to loss from development. Habitat loss alone, however, may not be the cause of an annual population decline of >3.4% (1966-1996) for the bunting. Actual causes for decline are unknown, but may include degradation or loss of breeding habitat, nest parasitism by the Brown-headed Cowbird, changes in climate, or increased predation in breeding habitat that could be related to warmer weather, or habitat alteration.



Recently wildlife biologists in Georgia have completed studies that provide some important information on Painted Bunting survival and habitat use. Although not all the answers have been found to restore the Painted Bunting population to levels of the 1960s, it is clear that many management practices can be modified or done to enhance the population of this declining species. I hope that the information and recommendations provided on this web page will not only stimulate interest in the recovery of the Painted Bunting, but also become a stepping stone to many other conservation issues in our coastal wildlife habitats.



Sunrise on the northern half of Jekyll Island in Painted Bunting habitat – maritime shrub-scrub near the beach.

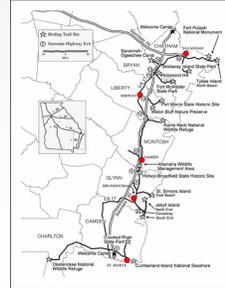
WEB PAGE OBJECTIVES:

- (1) to educate people on the biology, management, and conservation of the Painted Bunting in Georgia and South Carolina;
- (2) to provide managers and interested land owners with current information on conservation of the Painted Bunting;
- (3) to provide an entertaining reference on Painted Buntings with photographs of biology, birding, management, and conservation "how to."

WEB PAGE TOPICS: HOMEPAGE

- Songbird Population Declines
- Biology of the Bunting – A Species at Risk
- What Do We Know? Habitat changes
- Management Guidelines for homeowners associations, public land managers, managers of beach-dune habitat, and forest land managers.
- The Future of the Bunting – Can this species survive?
- Selected Readings
- Virtual tour of Painted Bunting research emphasizing habitat and management on the Colonial Coast of Georgia

Virtual Bunting Tour Map



Click on red dots and photo boxes to see a virtual tour for 7 locations and 49 photos.

WEB PAGE HIGHLIGHTS

While reading



to



Female Painted Bunting



Male Painted Bunting, 2 yrs old

click on photos to enlarge them for more details.



Aerial and ground view of optimum Painted Bunting habitat at Nanny Goat Beach, Sapelo Island, Georgia, as seen in the virtual tour.



Close-up of used nest (flagged) of Painted Bunting located in wax myrtle and vines on Nanny Goat Beach.



Painted Bunting displays; males have intricate courtship behaviors ("dances"). Moving and overlapping sequences are seen in the virtual tour on the web page.



Three nestlings from one nest. What bird is the largest nestling?



Prevent cowbirds from feeding by using this type of feeder. Also, use white proso millet for buntings.



Prime real estate – this \$4.3 million home was built in Painted Bunting optimum nesting habitat along the beach dune system of South Carolina.



Coastal marsh-island lots, selling for \$500,000, will eliminate Painted Buntings in the area if habitat is not managed.



Poor bunting habitat in a subdivision next to the marsh. Non-native shrubs and mowed grass provide little for foraging and nesting Painted Buntings.



Good bunting habitat in a subdivision (front of lot) next to the marsh. Leave unmowed 30-ft. strips next to woodlands for bunting feeding areas.