

incubate. The young hatch in three to four weeks and are precocial—born with eyes open and capable of leaving the nest soon after drying. The young feed themselves but are accompanied by the adults until fledging occurs in four to five weeks.

Upland Sandpipers hunt by sight, and their foraging typically involves short runs followed by a pecking bout when a prey item is sighted. Their diet is more than ninety percent insectivorous, with a wide variety of terrestrial invertebrates consumed. They will, however, eat weeds, seeds, and waste grain following harvest.

Upland Sandpiper populations peaked in the mid-nineteenth century, when most of New England was farmland. They unfortunately became a favorite target of the market hunters in the 1880s about the time when Passenger Pigeons became rare. In the west populations declined as the prairie was converted to farmland, but recovered somewhat as they adapted to agricultural conditions. In New England populations have declined in the twentieth century as farmlands have reverted to woodlots. The Upland Sandpiper is but one of many grassland species that have been seriously declining in the east. With continuing loss of habitat in the United States, continued massive use of pesticides in agricultural areas, and problematic conditions on their wintering grounds in South America, their future is uncertain. One can only hope that these elegant birds will continue to raise their wings aloft on the fence posts of our roadways into the indefinite future.

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#### ABOUT THE COVER ARTIST

Barry Van Dusen last provided cover art for the October 1994 issue. He was the illustrator for *A Birder's Guide to Eastern Massachusetts* and *Birds of Massachusetts*. He can be reached at 13 Radford Road, Princeton, MA 01541.

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### AT A GLANCE February 1995 \_\_\_\_\_ Wayne R. Petersen

To assist in identifying February's puzzler, it is useful to have a fundamental understanding of general passerine plumage characteristics and plumage acquisition. In general, the majority of North American songbirds wear at least four to six more or less distinct plumages during the course of their lifetime. Variations of this rule are many, however, and often differentiating subtle characteristics between certain plumages can be difficult. Fortunately, the sequence of plumage acquisition is pretty much the same for most species.

When first out of the egg, many nestlings have a soft downy covering. This down covering is rapidly replaced by the first true coat of feathers—the juvenal