



Grassland Bird Habitat Management at the Hubbard Sanctuary



Joshua's Trust partners with a local farmer to manage the hayfield at Hubbard Sanctuary for nesting Bobolinks and Savannah Sparrows. Please do not enter the field between May and July to avoid any and all disturbance to nesting birds. All are welcome to walk the loop trail at the edge of the field at any time of year, and may enter the field only after the farmer has harvested the field for hay. Thank you for your cooperation!

What are grassland birds?

Grassland birds are birds that thrive in large open landscapes with few trees or shrubs. During the breeding season from early May to August, they build their nests on the ground, usually concealed in clumps of grass, and feed insects to their young.

Each species has specific preferences for habitat characteristics, such as grass height and type, field size, soil moisture, perches, and more.

Bobolinks, for example, like hayfields for their sturdy and tall structure, will use fields as small as 10-20 acres, and tend to build their nests on hill slopes.

Why are they disappearing from the Northeast?

Grassland birds, including Bobolinks, are experiencing the fastest population declines of any other group of birds in New England. In recent decades, they have been disappearing as farming declines, hayfields are converted to other uses, or fields are left to revert back to forest. Also, with the introduction of modern machinery, farmers and landowners now mow their hayfields earlier and more frequently in the summer, which eliminates the possibility of breeding success for these birds. Mower blades cause direct mortality to nestlings, and once no longer under cover of tall grass, young birds that do survive shortly succumb to avian and mammalian predators.

Once disturbed, many species, particularly Bobolinks, do not have time left to start nesting, incubating eggs, and raising chicks all over again before they must prepare for fall migration. Fields that attract grassland birds because of their size and shape but are repeatedly disturbed year after year become known as "population sinks." For reasons still unknown, grassland birds will attempt to use repeatedly disturbed fields each year and therefore never have the chance to nest successfully.

Learn More

- Visit joshuastrust.org/hubbard-sanctuary
- Take a brochure below to read about grassland bird habitat management practices in Northeastern Connecticut.
- Equipped with binoculars, take a walk at Hubbard Sanctuary and other like-managed fields to watch Bobolinks in flight display, and enjoy their songs.
- Visit websites such as allaboutbirds.org, administered by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, to learn more about grassland bird species, population trends, and their habitat needs.



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Savannah Sparrow



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Juvenile Bobolink



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Adult Bobolink

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