

The Bobolink is a common but declining breeder and common migrant in hayfields and meadows in the Hudson River Valley.

Conservation Status

Breeding Bird Survey data show a continuing decline in Bobolink populations in New York since 1966. Partners in Flight list it as a Species of Regional Concern in Bird Conservation Region 13. NYS Breeding Bird Atlas data show a reduced distribution in the Hudson River Valley, particularly in the southern part of the valley.

Identification

The Bobolink is a distinctive, easy-to-recognize bird that somewhat resembles a large, colorful sparrow. The male is a white and black bird with a black head, wings, tail, and underparts, with a buff nape, and distinct white wing patches and rump. The female is smaller than the male, and is brownish-buff with a streaked appearance. Both have a short, heavy, pointed bill.

Habitat

This species is found in open grasslands, old hayfields with a mix of grass and broad-leaved forbs, wet meadows, and fallow fields. It is more abundant in fields with a high proportion of grass and deep litter cover. Approximate minimum size requirement for a breeding field is 5-10 acres.

Food

During the breeding season, Bobolinks eat seeds and a variety of larval and adult insects, spiders, and harvestmen. During migration and winter it feeds on small grains, corn tassels, weed seeds, and occasionally insects. It feeds as it walks slowly on the ground or as it climbs onto vegetation, perching near the top, and carefully extracting and eating the seeds.

Nesting

Bobolinks nest on the ground in a small hollow containing a thin, shallow cup of dead grass and weed stem lined with finer grasses. Birds are semi-colonial. Territory size is 1-6 acres.

Threats

- Habitat loss, particularly from development.
- Reforestation of agricultural lands.
- Conversion of agricultural lands from hayfields and pastures to row-crops.
- Nest destruction or abandonment because of early or more frequent mowing.
- Trampling of nests by deer and livestock.



The distinctive black and white color of the Bobolink is hard to miss.

Management Recommendations

- Create large habitat patches (greater than 20 acres) and minimize woody edges whenever possible. Suitable habitat includes grasslands of moderate height (8-12") and density, with adequate litter.
- Protect nesting habitat from disturbance during the breeding season (early May to August 1) by postponing haying, burning, and moderate or heavy grazing.
- Perform management activities in early spring, several weeks prior to the arrival of adults on the breeding grounds, or in the late summer or fall after the breeding season.
- Use a rotating management schedule on several nearby grassland fragments to provide a variety of habitat conditions. Adjacent patches of similar habitat provide refuge for fledglings to escape from mowed areas and for late-nesting females.
- Create or maintain patches of relatively sparse, grass-dominated vegetation resembling old hayfields (more than 8 years since planted).
- Encourage scattered forbs, such as clover, for nest-site cover and also for seeds and host plants for various invertebrates, which are critical for feeding rapidly growing nestlings.
- Mow or burn patches every 2-3 years to prevent development of woody vegetation.
- Avoid disturbance of suitable habitat (e.g., mowing) during the breeding season, May 1 to August 1.



Grassland habitat in NY

This management summary was adapted from Martin and Gavin 1995 and NatureServe 2008.

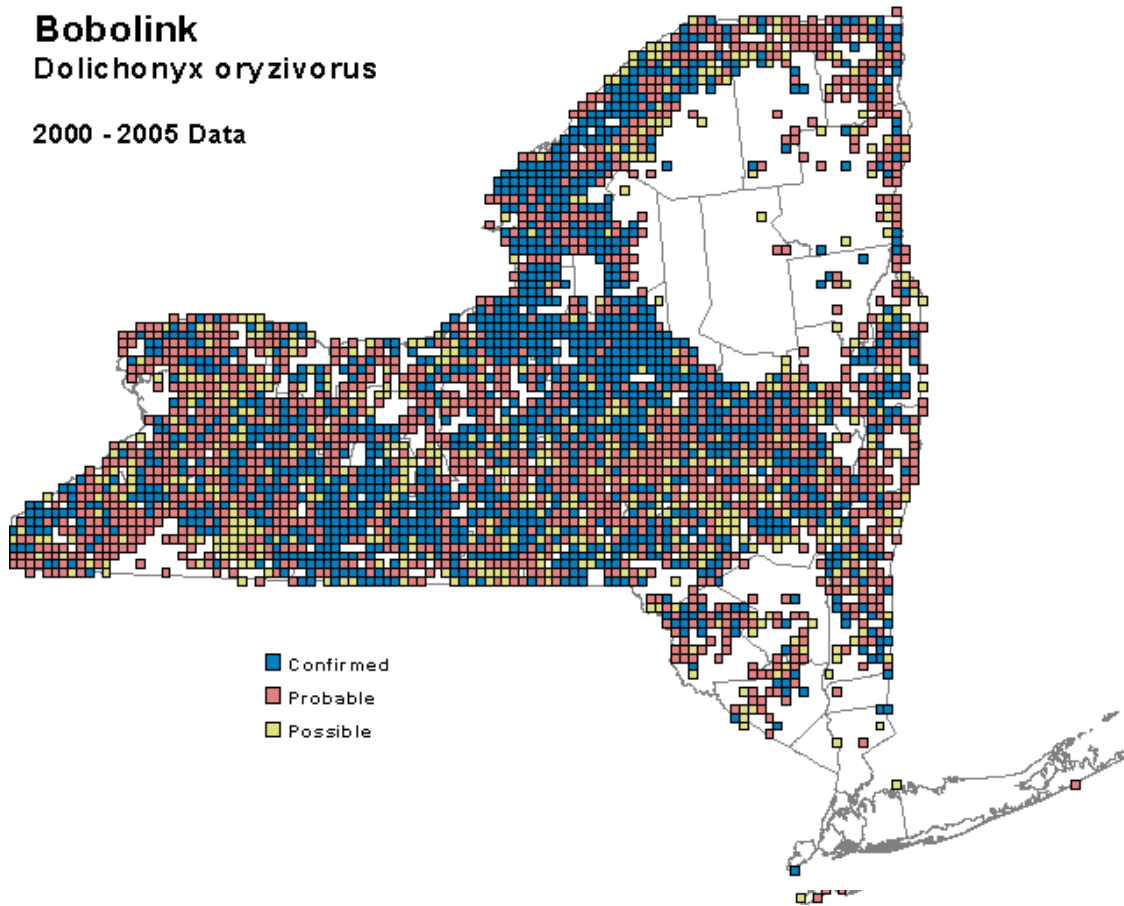
For additional information, see the following references:

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NYS BREEDING BIRD ATLAS COMPARATIVE DATA

Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*

2000 - 2005 Data



Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*

1980 - 1985 Data

