



Audubon

Hayfield Mowing and Grassland Nesting Birds

CREDIT: STEPHEN CRAVEN



CREDIT: JIM RATHERT

Dickcissel



CREDIT: JIM WILLIAMS

Bobolink



CREDIT: REBECCA REID

Eastern Meadowlark



CREDIT: JIM WILLIAMS

Sedge Wren



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Savannah Sparrow

Can Minnesota farm practices protect these species?

Grassland birds once found in abundance throughout Minnesota are disappearing just as quickly as patches of their native grassland habitat. Grassland birds throughout the state are attracted to farmers' hayfields for breeding and cover. You may not realize it, but several native species of sparrow, two species of meadowlarks, the sedge wren, bobolink and many others may find your hayfield the perfect place to lay eggs and raise their young.

Prime breeding season for Minnesota grassland birds starts in late May and runs through mid-July. For birds nesting in hayfields, mechanized mowing of the field during this time of year can be fatal. Chicks who have not yet fledged and adults protecting their nest are often unable to escape the mower and perish.

With grassland bird populations plummeting in Minnesota, they need your help. **Please consider taking these actions to give grassland birds in your hayfields a better chance of survival:**

- Complete the first cut of your field before June 1st and wait 65 days until the second cut, OR
- Postpone the first hay cut on a portion of your land until after July 15th
- Avoid mowing at dark, when most adults return to the nest to roost
- Avoid mowing your hayfield in a circular pattern, which tends to corral and trap adults and chicks into the center of the field where escape is not possible and instead mow your field from the inside out
- Attach a flusher to your mower to allow for easier escape of adults

Audubon Minnesota is interested in pursuing partnerships with Minnesota farmers, the University of Minnesota, the Land Stewardship Project, Farmers Union and others to look more in depth into this issue and determine if a schedule for hay mowing in Minnesota can be identified that would protect nesting grassland birds and yield high quality hay for farmers. If you are interested in being a part of this partnership, please email darnosti@audubon.org or shannonlynnmartin@gmail.com.

For more information on grassland birds in Minnesota, please see the back of this flyer for species descriptions.

Grassland Birds in Minnesota

- **DICKCISSEL** – This sparrow-like bird can show up in different locations from year to year. After spending the winter in Central or South America, Dickcissels may arrive anywhere in the grasslands of southern and western Minnesota in May or early June. Nesting begins around the first of June. The male has a black bib on a yellow chest, similar to the meadowlark’s pattern. The name derives from their harsh-sounding song.
- **BOBOLINK** – *An Audubon Minnesota Stewardship Bird Species.* The handsome male Bobolink, with its cream-and-black plumage and tinkling song delivered on the wing, adds sparkle to grasslands throughout Minnesota. After wintering as far south as Argentina, Bobolinks return to Minnesota in May, and begin nesting around the second week of June. Approximately 13% of the world’s Bobolinks nest in our state.
- **EASTERN MEADOWLARK and WESTERN MEADOWLARK** – The two meadowlark species overlap in Minnesota. The Eastern species is found in roughly the eastern half of the state, while the Western species inhabits grasslands throughout the state. These look-alike species are best distinguished by their unique songs. They are hardy birds that return to Minnesota in March or April and begin nesting by mid- to late May.
- **SEDGE WREN** – *An Audubon Minnesota Stewardship Bird Species.* Thirty-two percent of the world’s Sedge Wrens nest in Minnesota. They are found throughout the state in late spring and summer, most abundantly in central and western Minnesota. Sedge Wrens like damp grasslands, and will nest in hayfields, typically starting about the first week of June.
- **SAVANNAH SPARROW** – A common resident of grassy fields throughout the state, Savannah Sparrows return to Minnesota in late April or May and usually begin nesting in early June. The male sings a buzzy song that begins with a series of “chip” notes.

<< Learn more about these bird species at audubonbirds.org >>