

# Grassland Birds in Ontario

## Balancing Agriculture and Conservation

Grassland birds are species that nest exclusively in grassland. They are an important part of Ontario's biodiversity. These migratory species nest in Canada and the USA, and winter in the south. The majority of grassland bird nesting habitat in Ontario occurs in grass-dominated hayfields and pastures on farms.



Over the past 50 years, grassland bird populations have declined markedly in Ontario and across North America. All three species above are listed as at risk. Because grassland birds build their nests directly on the ground, nests are vulnerable to trampling by livestock, destruction by farm machinery, and exposure to predators after heavy grazing and hay harvesting.



### Suitable habitat:

Large open grass-dominated fields with few shrubs, adjacent to open areas. Preference differs by species.

low --- vegetation height & density --- high

# Conservation on farms

Farmers who manage agricultural grassland are integral to grassland bird conservation. These actions aim to balance farm management with providing grassland bird species at risk time and space to raise young in some actively-farmed areas. Targeting areas with the most nesting birds for conservation actions will have the greatest positive impact.



## In Hayfields

Delay haying until **mid-July** or later

### Alternatives:

- Delay as long as possible, even early July is better than mid-June
- Cut perimeters first, delay interior cut
- Cut fields with high bird abundance last
- Cut large fields last



## In Pastures

Delay grazing until **mid-July** or later

### Alternatives:

- Delay as long as possible, even early July provides some birds a chance to raise young
- Light spring grazing from late May to the beginning of June, then rest paddock until mid-July (bobolink will stay and renest if enough vegetation remains)
- Lengthen rest period between grazing to at least 40 days (if vegetation is short after grazing, bobolink will disperse, but eastern meadowlark and grasshopper sparrow will stay and renest).
- Reduce grazing pressure during peak nesting



Eastern Meadowlark



Attempt two broods

breeding

post-breeding migration



Grasshopper Sparrow



Bobolink

