

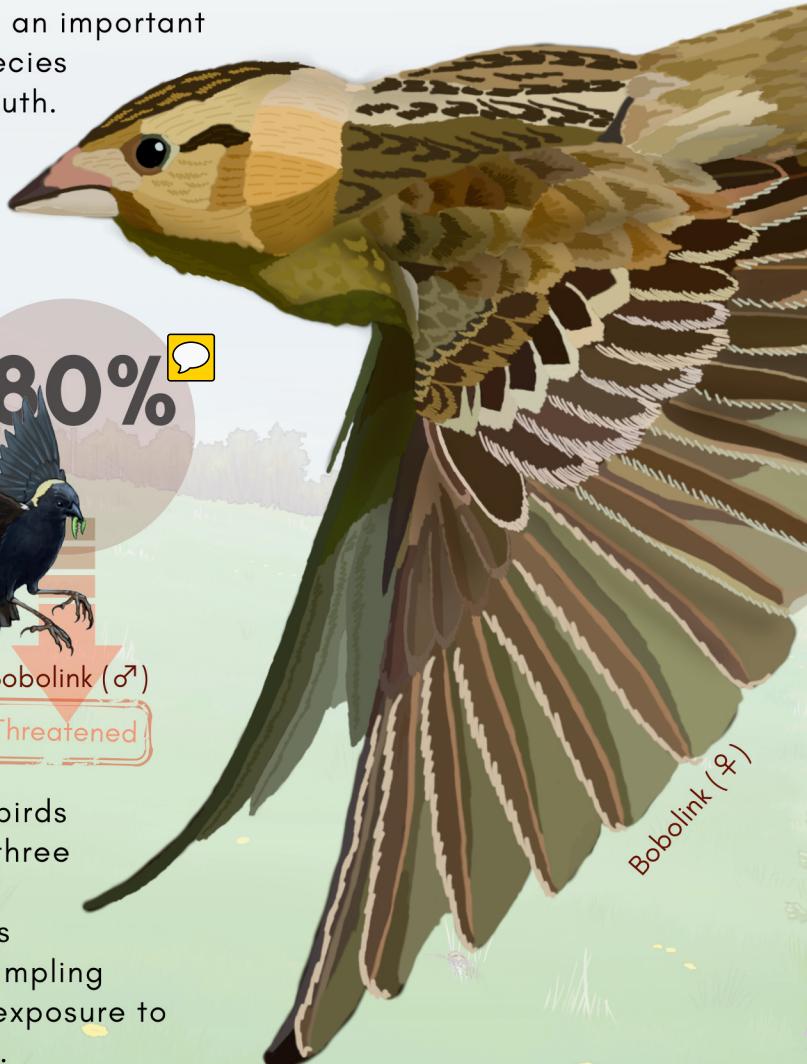
# Grassland Birds in Ontario

## Balancing Agriculture and Conservation



### About grassland birds:

Bird species that nest exclusively in grassland 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.



84%



Eastern meadowlark

Threatened

79%



Grasshopper sparrow

Special concern

80%



Bobolink (♂)

Threatened

Over the past 50 years, the number of grassland birds across North America has decreased by 53%. All three species above are listed as at risk in Ontario and Canada. 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:



Medium to large grass-dominated fields with few shrubs, adjacent to open areas. Vegetation preference varies by species. Bobolinks typically nest in grasslands with tall, dense vegetation; whereas grasshopper sparrows prefer shorter and sparser vegetation. All three species sometimes nest in the same field.



Fact sheet designed by Sunny Tseng  
Illustration by Emily S. Damstra & Sunny Tseng



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# Conservation on farms

Farmers who manage agricultural grassland are integral to grassland bird conservation. The actions below 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 (or most suitable habitat) 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

## Pastures

Create a nesting refuge: 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 in fields with high bird abundance

MAR APR MAY JUN JUL AUG SEP OCT NOV

peak nesting

Attempt 2 broods



Eastern meadowlark



Grasshopper sparrow



Bobolink

arrival

breeding

post-breeding migration

Attempt 2 broods

Attempt 1 brood

Bobolink and eastern meadowlark breeding territories frequently contain more than 1 nesting female, whereas grasshopper sparrows pair with only 1 mate.