

AG ALLIES: BALANCING THE NEEDS OF BIRDS & FARMERS



Male bobolink. pc Laura Suomi-Lecker

GRASSLAND BIRDS NEED OUR SUPPORT

→ Bobolinks need immediate conservation actions

Bobolinks are on the [State of the Birds Tipping Point Species List](#) - meaning they could be among the next to face threatened or endangered status without immediate conservation actions.

Each May, Bobolinks return to the fields and meadows of Maine to breed and raise their young. Males, recognizable by their distinctive reverse tuxedo coloring and cheerful, R2D2-like song, are easily identified from a distance. Bobolinks are remarkable migrants, arriving here all the way from their winter habitat in Argentina, Bolivia, and Paraguay. They travel about 12,500 miles round-trip every year, in one of the longest migrations of any songbird!

Unfortunately, Bobolinks and other grassland birds, like Eastern Meadowlarks and some sparrow species, are suffering severe declines because of habitat loss, agricultural management changes, and other factors. Research published in 2019 by Cornell in the journal [Science](#) shows grassland birds have undergone a staggering decline of 53% in the last 50 years, the most dramatic loss experienced by any of the major bird families.

Why are these birds in trouble? In addition to threats to grassland habitat from loss of farmland, changes in timing and frequency of hay harvesting have exacerbated grassland bird species decline. Bobolinks, Eastern Meadowlarks, and sparrow species require undisturbed fields for nesting. Due to climate changes and other farming pressures, haying occurs earlier and more frequently and coincides with the nesting period. Unfortunately, field cutting before baby birds are fully able to fly results in total chick mortality. Thus, the human impact on breeding populations is significant and results in widespread nesting failure across much of Maine's habitat.

Ag Allies, here to help: Since 2016 Ag Allies has worked to provide nesting habitat while balancing the needs of farmers. Without farmers, Maine would not have grassland habitat for birds, so it's critical that we support and recognize their conservation efforts. Ag Allies provides grassland managers technical and financial assistance to allow for delayed harvest of nesting fields. We have a successful history of building strong relationships, working one-on-one with each of our farmers to find best-fit practices and offering support that benefits both the farm and the birds.

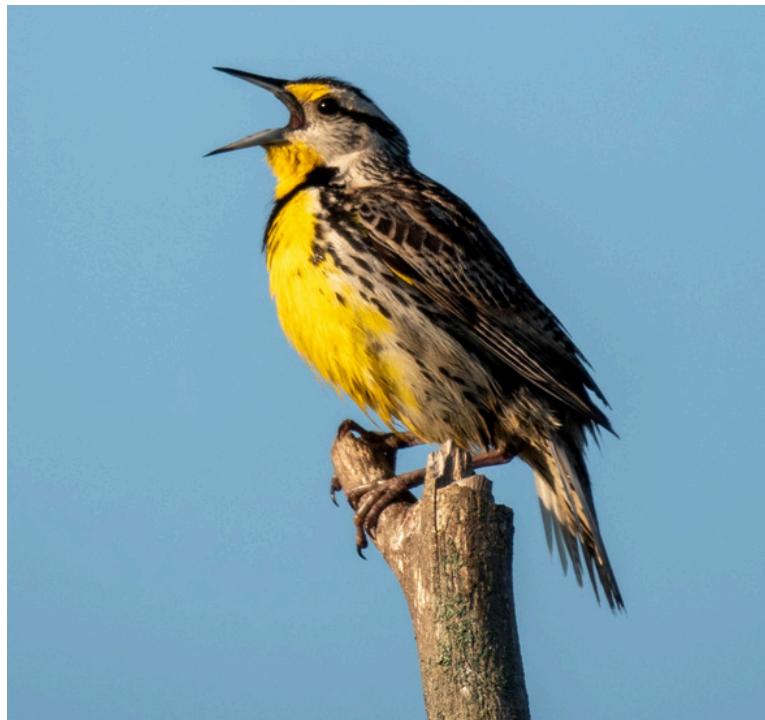
→ What Can You Do?

If you manage fields and have nesting grassland birds, delaying a cut until at least July 15 will allow the birds a chance at nesting success. However, if the field is not needed as livestock feed, leaving grassland standing until August 15 or later is a great practice to allow grassland birds, pollinators, and other wildlife feed and cover.

TOGETHER, WE ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

This past year, Ag Allies protected more than 2,000 acres of habitat working with more than 130 landowners and land trusts across Maine, providing habitat for over 700 breeding pairs of Bobolinks, Meadowlarks, and Savannah Sparrows.

Additionally, over 500 acres previously enrolled in the program are being managed for grassland birds without further need for assistance. This long-term adoption of improved management practices is critical in meeting our vision of sustainable habitat conservation throughout Maine.



Eastern Meadowlark. pc Wildhood

HOW WE WORK

Process for Participation:

- Contact us to start the process!
- Ag Allies conducts spring site visits once the Bobolinks return.
- We work with landowners to implement practices to improve breeding success of their grassland birds.

Landowner and Land Trust Ag Allies Services:

- Technical assistance – helping landowners and managers find ways to make room for nesting grassland birds:
 - Spring site visits – to determine nesting species, numbers, general location, and field conditions
 - Field checks for farmers – to determine when young are flighted for safe mowing before July 15
 - Habitat signs – to celebrate our conservationists and educate others about the importance of grassland habitat
 - Incentive payments for farmers are available as needed
- Field refurbishment demonstration – Ag Allies, in conjunction with the US Fish and Wildlife Service Partners Program will provide technical and financial support for selected land trusts and landowners to undertake field refurbishment practices for nesting fields. These sites will showcase practices for grassland restoration.
- Presentations for communities, land trusts and others, including field walk and talks

Partnerships

Ag Allies is a Conservation Collaborative through the Cornell Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative. Ag Allies leverages the technical expertise of our staff with a robust network of partners including Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, land trusts, farmers, and landowners across Maine. To see our full list of partners, please visit our web site at agallies.org.

Contact Ag Allies

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