



## OUR CONSERVATION WORK

### Managing Open Space Fields & Meadows for Grassland Birds

With grassland bird populations plummeting in New England, they need your help. As a landowner, you can make a real difference in protecting these species by implementing a number of simple management practices that are greatly beneficial for grassland birds.



#### Adjust Cutting Schedules to Avoid Killing Grassland Birds

Prime breeding season for Massachusetts grassland birds starts in late May and runs through mid-July. Grasslands should be cut every 1-3 years to prevent forest succession, but such cuts should not occur until after August 1. Cuts during June and July will almost surely cause grassland bird mortality and reproductive failure.

#### Avoid Fragmentation of Fields and Maintain Connectivity with Adjacent Meadows

Visual openness is an important aspect of habitat suitability for grassland birds, as many species will only nest in large patches of grassland habitat. By removing hedgerows and tree lines you can effectively increase the perceived size of available grassland habitats. Additionally, you can decrease habitat fragmentation by locating barns and other infrastructure along the edges of fields.

#### Remove Hay and Stubble Soon After Cuts are Completed

In spring, grassland birds are most attracted to fields that do not have previous years' cut grass. If stubble is not removed, forbs (weeds) tend to out-compete grasses, and fields take longer to "green up" in the spring making them less attractive as nesting sites.

#### Replace Non-native, Cool Season Grasses with Native, Warm-season Grasses

Non-native, cool-season grasses such as smooth brome grass, timothy, and tall fescue are often associated with reduced biodiversity. In contrast, native warm-season grasses such as switchgrass, indiangrass, broomsedge, and bluestem provide excellent wildlife habitat, are well adapted to various site conditions, are inexpensive to maintain once established, do not require ongoing insecticide, fertilizer or herbicide applications, and are drought resistant. For properties where viewshed or conservation is a primary objective, conversion of fields from cool-season to warm-season grasses should be a long-term goal that will benefit grassland birds.

#### Coordinate Your Management Practices with Neighbors

The amount of habitat available to breeding grassland birds can be increased by eliminating treelines and hedgerows between adjacent properties. Encourage your neighbors to mow later, ideally after August 1.