



VFWD Guidelines for Grassland Bird Surveys in Regulated Projects

Doug Morin, February 2022

Goal

Surveys should be designed to detect all grassland-obligate birds, including

- Priority Species: Bobolink, Grasshopper Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark, Sedge Wren, Henslow's Sparrow, Upland Sandpiper
- Other Species: Northern Harrier, American Kestrel, Barn Owl, Killdeer, Horned Lark, Savannah Sparrow

Survey design

Surveys must be carried out only under the following conditions:

- **between the last week in May and July 1 (inclusive)**
- **two or more surveys of each site, at least 14 days apart**
- during daylight hours, preferably from first light through 9:00 AM
- under low wind and noise conditions, to the greatest extent possible
- surveyors must be capable of identifying all birds listed above

Recommended Method

The simplest method generally permissible is an "area search." In an area search, observers walk the site carefully, recording all birds seen or heard. (Alternate methods including point count or transect may be used.)

- Observers may move freely within the site but should come within 50-meters of all portions of the site during the search.
- Observers should differentiate birds detected
- Searches should require no less than 1 person-hour for each 20 acres surveyed. Minimum observation time for any site, regardless of size, should be no less than 30 minutes.
- Surveys should begin with passive detection methods.
- If a priority species (see above) has not been detected with passive methods, a recording should be broadcast to enhance detection for that species. For each species, the playback should consist of one 1-minute period of playback, followed by a 1-minute listening period.

Data Collection:

Data to be collected for each survey include:

- Date
- Start and Stop Times
- Location (latitude & longitude, and written description)
- Weather Conditions and Wind Speed (calm, light, moderate, strong)
- Noise Level (0-no disruptive noise to 3-unable to hear bird songs)
- All bird species detected, including number of individuals categorized as inside, outside, and flying over the area.
- Behavior of any grassland bird species, if observed
- Habitat description