



Grassland Birds Found in Greene County, New York



Bobolink: A distinctive bird of open grasslands, the Bobolink is the only American bird that is black underneath and white on its back. This coloring makes the male stand out during the breeding season. After breeding, he changes into a drab, camouflaged plumage to spend the rest of the year. Females have yellowish underparts with brownish tail and wings. The Bobolink feeds on seeds, grains, insects and spiders, eating primarily on the ground or perched on vegetation. Its song in flight is a series of rolling, bubbling notes. Bobolinks have an extraordinary migration distance of 12,500 miles round-trip as it winters south of the equator. Bobolink populations are in decline due to loss of habitat and nest destruction from the mowing of hayfields during the breeding season.

Grasshopper Sparrow: Small songbird, mostly brownish with an unmarked buffy breast, dark crown with a pale middle stripe, a large head and short tail. This sparrow gets its name not only for its diet, but also for its insect-like song. It makes its nest on the ground creating a cup of grass stems and blades, well-concealed as a dome with overhanging grasses and a side entrance. Habitat loss and fragmentation is causing population to decline.



Savanna Sparrow: Brown overall with streaking on back, breast and flanks with a yellowish eyebrow stripe. This small songbird eats mostly insects, insect larvae and seeds. Its nest is located on the ground with an outside layer of coarse grass with a tightly woven inner cup of finer grasses. The Savanna Sparrow's song consists of several short notes followed by two or more high, long buzzes.



Eastern Meadowlark: The clear, melodious whistles of the Eastern Meadowlark are a familiar and welcome sound across farms and grasslands in North America. The Eastern Meadowlark is a medium-sized, stocky songbird with a short tail; a yellow belly, chest and throat; and a black "V" across its chest. Eating insects, especially grasshoppers and crickets, the female builds her nest on the ground with grasses woven into surrounding vegetation, sometimes with a runway leading to the entrance. The Eastern Meadowlark is declining drastically in its range due to habitat loss.



Northern Harrier: This long-winged, long-tailed hawk is a New York State threatened species and can be found in Greene County year-round. This raptor hunts for prey in open fields by flying slowly and low with wings held in a slight "V". The male is white below with a white rump and light gray back, the female is mottled in browns. The harrier feeds on small mammals, birds, reptiles and frogs. Formerly known as the "marsh hawk", the harrier can be found near wetlands and wet meadows. Populations of the harrier have declined due to loss of wetlands and changes in farming practices.





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Horned Lark: The only true lark native to North America, the Horned Lark is a small songbird with a pale brown back, black chest patch, black face patch, yellow throat and small "horns" on the top of its head. Feeding on weed and grass seeds, the adults feed their babies insects. The Horned Lark is a year-round resident in Greene County grasslands and prefers a habitat of mostly bare ground and short grasses. Its nest is a basket woven of fine grass and plant materials, placed in a depression on the ground. The song of the Horned Lark is a series of high, musical tinkling notes, "weet" or "su-weet".



Eastern Bluebird: This marvelously bright bird is a small thrush with a big, rounded head, large eye and plump body. Males are a vivid blue above and rusty on the throat and breast. Females are grayish above with bluish wings and tail and a subdued orange breast. Bluebirds perch on wires, posts and low branches scanning fields for their prey of insects. They also eat berries. Bluebirds commonly nest in old woodpecker holes in trees, but utilize suitable nest boxes. They may use the same nest for multiple years. The Eastern Bluebird song is a fairly low-pitched, warbling song made of several phrases lasting about 2 seconds. Typically, unpaired males will sing from a high perch as they try to attract a mate.



Short-eared Owl (winter only): A New York State endangered species, this medium-sized owl is mottled brown with a large buff wing patch on outer wing visible in flight. This owl spends only winters in Greene County grasslands and is characterized by "floppy" flight patterns as it hunts over large grassland areas for prey such as the meadow vole. The Short-eared Owl hunts day and night, mostly at dawn and dusk in winter, locating prey by ear. The call of the Short-eared owl has been described as a "scratchy barking". Loss of habitat has caused populations of this owl to decline dramatically as it needs large, contiguous patches of field (250 acres or more) as habitat.



American Kestrel: Perhaps the most colorful raptor in the world, the American Kestrel is a small hawk that watches for prey (large insects, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians and birds) from tall perches such as telephone wires and trees. The male has blue-grey wings with black spots and an orange back and rump. The female's wings are rust-colored barred with black with underparts creamy and heavily streaked with brown. This kestrel nests in tree cavities, in buildings and in nest boxes. The call of the American Kestrel is a series of "klee-klee-klee" notes when excited.



Upland Sandpiper: This shorebird inhabits grasslands, not shores, and is identified by a small head, long neck, straight bill, long legs and small eyes. The Upland Sandpiper walks along the ground, feeding on insects including weevils and other beetles, grasshoppers and crickets, as well as some weed seeds. When building a nest, the Upland Sandpiper pairs scrape multiple depressions in the ground, but use only one for their actual nest. Loss of habitat has caused populations to decline dramatically and is listed as a NYS threatened species. Its song is a long series of mellow notes, ending with a descending whistle. Its flight call is a bubbling "quip-ip-ip-ip-ip-ip-ip".



Snow Bunting (winter only): This small songbird is aptly named with lots of white in the plumage, especially in the breeding male. The non-breeding male is white on the head, breast, belly, flanks and rump, but its forehead, crown, nape and face feathers are tipped with brown. Females are white on the head, breast, belly flanks and rump. The Snow Bunting spends its winters in the grassy fields eating grass and weed seeds. In the summer, it flies to the northern Canadian tundra where it builds its nests in rocks on the ground. Its song is a low, husky warbling including a clear "chew", a husky rolling rattle, a short buzz, and a sharp

