



### A WIN-WIN OUTCOME

The Mt. Jefferson Conservation Area is for the enjoyment and use of all the citizens of Hubbardston. The interests of wildlife observers, photographers, and researchers should be balanced with the other uses of the property, such as hiking, hunting, and agriculture.

We would like the Town to adopt a sensible and compassionate strategy for the Mt. Jefferson Conservation Area that will not only protect nesting birds and other wildlife, but will also ensure that the fields are cut once or twice annually to keep them open and free of shrub and tree growth. This is a **win-win** proposal!

Our proposal, which includes a pledge that **the Town will not lose out financially**, allows two marketable hay harvests of the fields after July 21<sup>st</sup> and also affords a good measure of protection to the birds that need our help. There are local farmers who are willing and able to follow a delayed-cut mowing plan.

**AT TOWN MEETING ON JUNE 4<sup>TH</sup>  
PLEASE VOTE FOR A DELAYED  
MOWING PLAN**

### WHAT HAPPENS IF THE BIRDS ARE NOT PROTECTED?

It would probably be just a matter of time before Bobolinks would be eradicated from these fields. In some years of very wet summers, or in the case of other unforeseen delays on the part of the leasing farmer, Bobolinks may successfully nest and return the following year. Some Bobolinks spill over from other privately-owned farms and fields.

But continued haycropping during the active nesting season, added to the pressures these birds are already facing, would most likely result in their eventual decline and complete absence from this location.

**We have an opportunity to offer one safe sanctuary for Bobolinks in Hubbardston.  
Let's do it!**



**THANK YOU FOR HELPING TO PROTECT THE  
WILDLIFE of the MT. JEFFERSON  
CONSERVATION AREA!**

**PROTECT**

**BOBOLINKS**

**AND OTHER WILDLIFE**

**at**

**MT. JEFFERSON**

**CONSERVATION AREA**

Bobolinks, Savannah Sparrows, and other wildlife use the hayfields of the Mt. Jefferson Conservation Area for food, nesting, and shelter. Bobolinks nest in the tall grasses of the fields and are especially in need of protection.



## SOME BOBOLINK FACTS

- ◊ Populations of grassland birds, including Bobolinks, are in steep decline in the northeast and other parts of the country. Bobolinks lead a precarious existence, depending on protected areas to sustain their numbers.
- ◊ Bobolinks need grassy fields in which to breed and raise their young, and these habitats are becoming fewer. They raise only one brood a year.
- ◊ After arriving back from their wintering grounds in mid-to-late May, Bobolinks mate and build nests in the growing hayfields. Females are sitting on eggs and baby birds are hatching throughout the month of June. Dependent young may still be in the nest as late as July.
- ◊ Although not easily seen, Bobolink families remain in the fields for 1-3 weeks after the young birds have left the nest.
- ◊ Insects constitute the bulk of the Bobolink's diet, and most of the insects they eat are harmful to crops. The plant material part of their diet consists of weed seeds or seeds of plants that are of no commercial value.

## THE MT. JEFFERSON CONSERVATION AREA HAYFIELDS

The Town acquired the Mt. Jefferson Conservation Area for the protection of open space and wildlife habitat and for agricultural and passive recreational use. The Town leases the 40 acres of open fields to a farmer who harvests hay twice each season. The first cut is generally made in June or early July.

**Numerous studies have shown that haycropping in June or early July results in the destruction of nests, the killing of any Bobolink nestlings that have recently hatched, 50-100% of young birds that are just leaving the nest, and, in some cases, incubating adult female birds.**

Most years the hay quality is optimal in June and therefore worth more to the farmer. The farmer who is currently leasing the town fields is not agreeable to doing a late first mowing.



## ARE BOBOLINKS PROTECTED AT THE CONSERVATION AREA?

Bobolinks and other birds and wildlife that use the fields during the breeding season—Savannah Sparrows, rabbits, Wild Turkey, deer, Meadow Voles, etc.—are **not** protected. No specific wildlife or wildlife habitat protection measures are in place for the Mt. Jefferson Conservation Area.

The Open Space Committee does not want to change the present situation. The Committee believes that the needs of the leasing farmer should determine how the fields are managed.

## HOW CAN BOBOLINKS BE PROTECTED?

There are various strategies that landowners can employ to protect Bobolinks. Ideally, Bobolinks would be monitored each year and mowing would take place after the birds have dispersed.

Another easy and practical way to protect nesting birds is to delay the first cut of hay until late in the season when young birds can fly on their own.

The Open Space Committee is opposed to these and other management suggestions.

## WHAT IS THE BEST “OKAY-TO-CUT” DATE?

Experts and wildlife managers suggest August 1<sup>st</sup> or later as the earliest first-cut date. Observations and studies show that Bobolinks and their young are still present at the nesting area throughout August. Although fields may appear empty of Bobolinks in late summer, adult birds and their dependent young are “laying low” and trying to be inconspicuous in the protective grass cover.

Nesting dates may vary slightly from year to year. But in most years it is likely that most of the young Bobolinks have fledged by the end of July.

Therefore, **we are proposing a compromise first-cut date of July 21<sup>st</sup>**. Hay mowing at this time should result in killing fewer birds, and hay harvested at this time is of sufficient value to provide a benefit to the farmer.

A second cut before fall, as occurs now, could continue with very little or no risk to nesting birds.