

Hello Bob and Open Space Committee,

The volunteers working for our Grassland Bird Initiative have been monitoring the Bobolinks at Mt Jefferson Conservation Area since May. You mentioned last year that you have someone monitoring the Bobolink situation at Mt. Jefferson, so maybe you are aware of some of these observations.

Our volunteers recently discovered two pairs of Bobolinks using the small field at the end of Malone Road. Although it is not common for Bobolinks to use fields smaller than 5 acres for nesting, it appears that this season that field likely was chosen as a nesting site. The proximity to the larger Malone Road could have something to do with this. These birds may be late nesters. I'm letting you know because you indicated last year that you would be developing a haying plan in consideration of nesting Bobolinks, but you also indicated you were going to base your plan on studies that show that Bobolinks prefer fields of 10 acres or more. Unfortunately, the birds at Mt. Jefferson Conservation Area haven't read all the studies!

Haying operations at the conservation area have commenced. Every year the leasing farmer seems to pursue the same strategy, cutting first the field near the picnic table--which in some years holds one Bobolink nest--then the field opposite, which the Bobolinks use along with their preferred area at the corner of Malone and Mt. Jefferson Roads. Usually there is at least one pair nesting in the section across from the picnic table; they don't seem to understand that they should stay in the Malone Road section where haying is delayed!

The northernmost 5-acre field has not been used by Bobolinks for many years. Ideally this field would be one of the first ones mowed, but usually it's the last (before the Malone Road/Mt Jefferson Road corner). The other field that is usually unused is the northwest segment, so mowing this field in June is less destructive to the birds. Again, this is usually not one of the first fields to be mowed.

Until this year, the second most-preferred area for the Bobolinks is/was the sloped section of the northeast field. Volunteers are not sure about use this year since they can't see the distant sections of the field from the road.

Last year you stated:

*"As we move forward with a new hay contract for 2018, elements of the contract will include considerations for grassland bird protect. [sic]"* and you indicated you were going to develop a protection plan dealing only with the larger field. Unfortunately, we're finding that Bobolinks in central MA are utilizing fields much smaller than 10 acres or even 5 acres, perhaps because they are unable to locate suitable (and survivable) fields in this region. There are very few hayfields in central MA that are hayed late in order to allow the birds to nest successfully.

We urge the Hubbardston Open Space Committee to adopt a grassland bird protection plan for Mt. Jefferson Conservation Area, a public property, based on what the birds are actually doing, as well as best practices put forth by Mass Audubon and other experts, not a plan in which the Open Space Committee selectively applies elements of Bobolink ecology based on the desire to maximize hayfield income.

We hope you can use this information to work with the leasing farmer to delay mowing where Bobolinks are present. Based on our observations, young have recently hatched and will be fed in the nest for two weeks. (The birds at the end of Malone Road may not fit this timeline.)

Please let us know if you would like more specific details.

Thank you for your attention.

Wendy Howes, Organizer  
Grassland Bird Initiative