

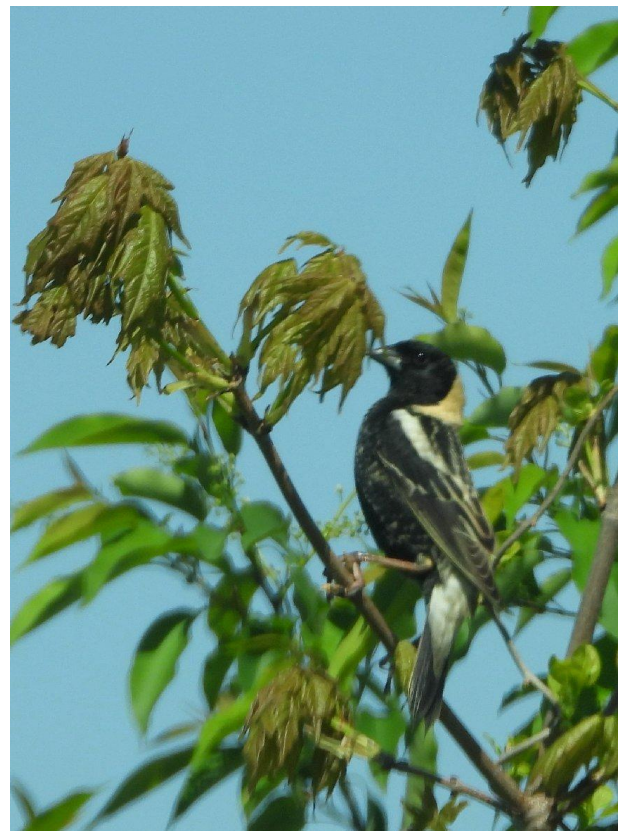


June 2025

\* \* \* **NATURE NEWS** \* \* \*

**STOP WISHFUL THINKING ABOUT BOBOLINKS**

Bobolinks are now nesting – or trying to nest – in fields throughout central Massachusetts. I recently visited a gentleman farmer to ask him if he would help protect a pair of Bobolinks that is nesting in one of the fields he leases from our local land trust. I was hoping for an exchange of good information and ideas. Instead I found myself listening to some misconceptions that I've heard time and again from people who cut and sell hay. It's like a bad penny that keeps circulating - a lot of wishful thinking that mowing hay in June doesn't destroy Bobolink nests and their only chance to reproduce in the season. June mowing DOES kill Bobolink nestlings and/or destroy eggs that are about to hatch. And Bobolinks can only manage one nesting per season, so the reproductive loss is significant.



*Photo by Ted Purcel*

As is usual when the subject of protecting grassland birds comes up, I was informed about 1) the necessity of haying for highest quality of hay possible; 2) the need to hay during a series of sunny, dry days in June; and 3) the deterioration of the quality of the grass and the field if haying is delayed into July. This was nothing new to me. I've researched this topic thoroughly over the years; I know there are many finer points and options to consider. If the desire is there, there are myriad methods for protecting Bobolinks and enabling them to fledge their young. There are also financial supports available.



But I can't even get to the finer points because many of the hay farmers I've talked with have convinced themselves that they are not harming Bobolinks. Furthermore, the joy of haying, especially the joy of haying according to a plan that the farmer has formulated and usually doesn't want to change, allows wishful thinking to persist.

The talking points from the farmer I visited and others I've conversed with in the past go like this:

*MYTH: I know Bobolinks are doing okay because I have loads of them in my fields.*

*REALITY:* Bobolink studies and research confirm that Bobolink populations are in steep decline. What you are seeing in your fields are survivors of multiple threats. We're lucky to see any at all these days. If you truly pay attention to the "loads" of bobolinks in your fields, you will see that males and females are in flight almost constantly during the breeding season. A handful of Bobolinks flying repeatedly over fields while circling and singing their boisterous song may seem like a lot. Take an honest look, and you'll see there are many fewer than were initially perceived.

*MYTH: After I mow I see the Bobolinks fly away and leave the fields, so I know I didn't harm them. And if I destroyed their nest, they can go somewhere else to nest.*

*REALITY:* The adult Bobolinks are departing because their nests have been destroyed and they have no fledglings to raise. As for going somewhere else to nest, where would they go, even if they could re-nest? A neighboring hayfield that's also due to be mowed?

*MYTH: Climate change has pushed nesting dates back to a much earlier time frame, therefore the young are hatching before haying commences.*

REALITY: *It's true that climate change has affected nesting and fledging dates, but not to the extent that early-to-mid-June mowing allows nestlings to fledge.*

MYTH OR REALITY? - *I love nature and birds, that's one reason I'm a farmer.*

I could continue, but you get the idea. Many hay farmers delude themselves that they are maintaining healthy, productive hay fields and not knowingly killing birds, and also making good money trading in a commodity that is important to agriculture, i.e. food for cows and horses. Even if farmers fully understand that they're destroying the nests of grassland birds, the joy of harvesting and selling hay of the highest quality (I understand there are contests whereby farmers are lauded for producing hay of excellent quality) outweighs any interest in protecting birds.

It's always been my hope that lands that are held in the public trust for conservation purposes will be managed to protect grassland birds. And other wildlife species, too, for that matter, since private landowners have little or no incentive to help Bobolinks. Unfortunately, that isn't always happening.

Every year at this time I hope for circumstances that will buy the nesting Bobolinks a little more time to fledge their young. I've learned I can't expect farmers to put the birds first. Now I just want them to be honest with themselves and own up to their roles in contributing to the decline of a species.



*Photo by Alan Rawle*

NB: *The farmer in this situation said he will try to mow around the Bobolink nest if I can find it and mark the location clearly.*

~ WH



# Massachusetts Grassland Birds

## Calendar of Nesting Events

*Spring migration:*  
Male birds arrive about  
a week before females

*Mate pairing*

*Nest building  
and  
egg laying*

**MOST CRITICAL  
PERIOD OF  
NESTING:**

*Incubating eggs  
and  
feeding nestlings*

If disturbed, birds will  
not have time to re-nest.

Haying or mowing  
before June 1 can allow  
for re-nesting, only if  
the field is not  
disturbed for the  
next 60 - 65 days.

*Disturbance okay for  
most birds*

### MAY

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<i>Bobolinks have one of the longest migrations, traveling to and from Argentina every year.</i>				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

### JUNE

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	<i>Fledglings are chicks that have walked out of the nest. They cannot fly for at least one more week.</i>				

### JULY

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31	<i>Disturbance okay for all birds</i>	



SANDHILL CRANES NEST IN HARDWICK  
FOR SIXTH YEAR

Arrival date: March 21, 2025

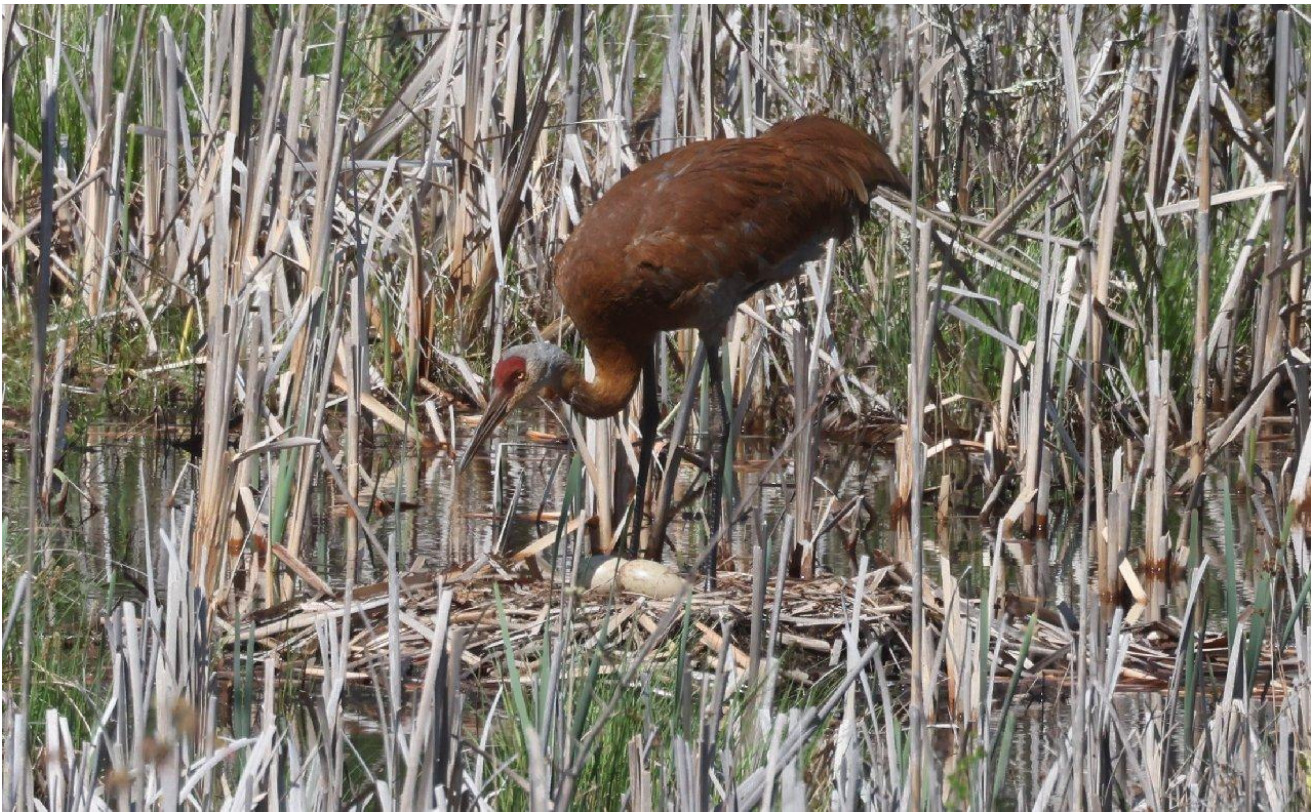


Nest-building April 5th



Crane on completed nest April 8th





Two eggs revealed May 3<sup>rd</sup>



Two chicks hatched May 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup>  
(One covered by adult)



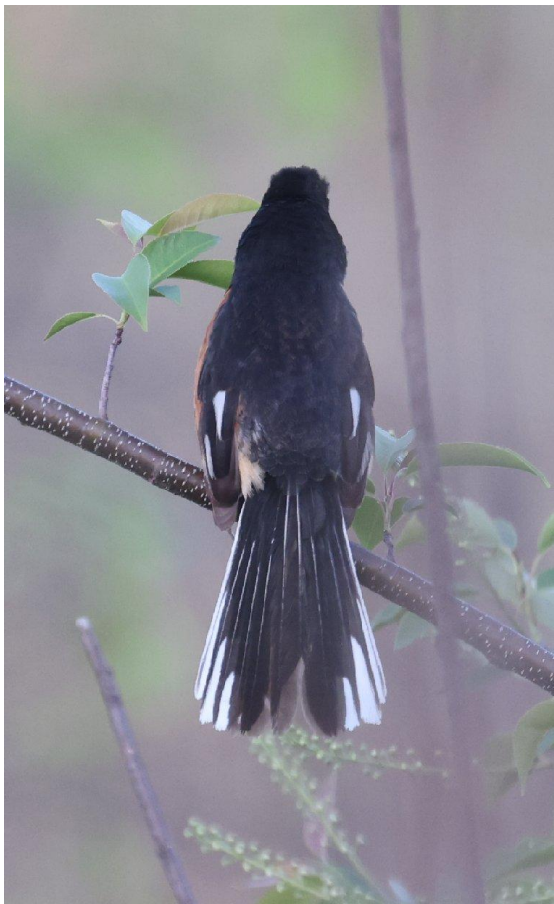
Two small chicks present May 12<sup>th</sup>







*May 30<sup>th</sup>*  
*Photos by Alan Rawle*



*MYSTERY PHOTO*

*Can you identify this bird?*  
*Answer at the end of the newsletter.*



# \* \* \* UPCOMING EVENTS \* \* \*

## FORBUSH BIRD CLUB

BIRDING BARRE  
FALLS DAM~WARE  
RIVER WATERSHED  
Hubbardston ~ Barre  
Saturday June 7<sup>th</sup>  
7 a.m. – mid-day

Leader: Dave Ammerman  
508-930-0356 [ammsus@comcast.net](mailto:ammsus@comcast.net)



We will bird the fields from the parking area to Route 62, hike Brigham Road over the Ware River West Branch crossing, and return along the river via Tracy Lane to the parking area (~2.5-mile loop). All welcome. Come check out FBC, established in 1931! Meet at the parking lot above the Dam, 1/2 mile south of Route 62 in Hubbardston. Restrooms are available at Barre Falls Picnic Area on Coldbrook Road across the Dam.



MASS WILDLIFE & EAST QUABBIN LAND TRUST

## EVENING WHIP-POOR-WILL WALK

Muddy Brook Wildlife Management Area, Hardwick

Saturday June 7<sup>th</sup> 7 – 9 p.m.



Thanks to over 10 years of habitat restoration, you can experience the iconic song of the whip-poor-will firsthand. Birders of all experience levels are welcome. Participants should be prepared for a ~1.5 mile walk on uneven ground.

Limited space available.\* Register at: <http://tinyurl.com/muddybrook25>  
For more information about Whip-poor-wills in Massachusetts:

<https://www.mass.gov/doc/eastern-whip-poor-will/download>

*\* If there is no space available, contact [warerivernatureclub@yahoo.com](mailto:warerivernatureclub@yahoo.com) to schedule a walk with WRNC on another evening.*



PRINCETON OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE - PRINCETON HIKES!



## STERLING RAIL TRAIL HIKE

Wednesday June 11<sup>th</sup> 10 a.m.

For participants who prefer a short, slow, and easy hike, this walk will cover about 1 mile.



## WACHUSETT MOUNTAIN HIKE BALANCE ROCK TRAIL TO SUMMIT

Saturday June 14<sup>th</sup> 9 a.m.



This will be a difficult 4-5 mile hike up the Old Indian Trail, although there is an alternate easier hike which avoids the summit if some hikers are interested.





*Photo by Alan Rawle*

## HIKING RUSSELL CORNER TRAILS, PRINCETON Wednesday June 18<sup>th</sup> 10 a.m.

This easy-to-moderate hike of about 3 miles is along Princeton Land Trust trails and includes Hall Field and the beaver pond.

For more information or to register: [TrailaroundprincetonMA@gmail.com](mailto:TrailaroundprincetonMA@gmail.com)

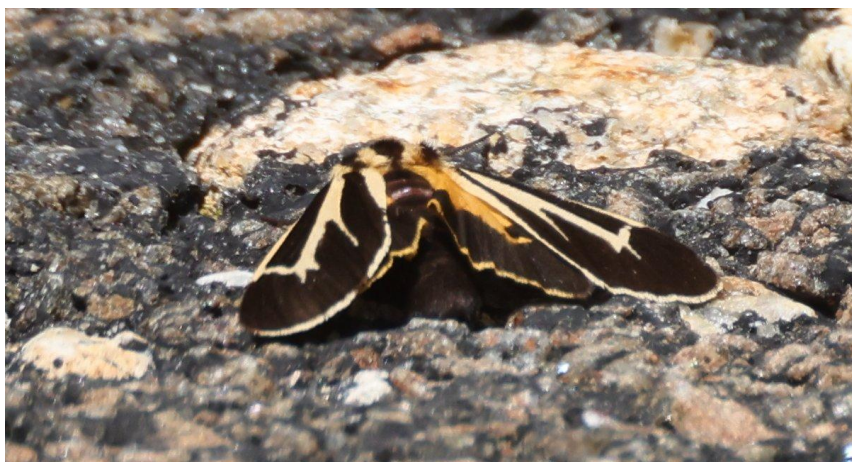
*Tree Swallow nest at DCR  
Prison Camp fields, Rutland  
May 26<sup>th</sup>  
Photo by Jordan Stanley*



WARE RIVER NATURE CLUB

INSECT QUEST  
DCR WATERSHED PRISON CAMP AREA  
RUTLAND

Saturday, June 21<sup>st</sup> 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.



Grab your binoculars, camera, magnifying lens, and/or favorite insect identification guides and join us to look for a variety of invertebrates at this interesting locale. We'll work collaboratively on our observation



and field identification skills as we seek out small creatures in the variety of habitats encountered here. We should find different species of butterflies, dragonflies, beetles, bees, and many more. No capture or collecting, just close-up viewing and photography. Dress for the weather and bring snacks and beverages if you wish. Insect repellent with natural ingredients only, please. Pre-register:

[warerivernatureclub@yahoo.com](mailto:warerivernatureclub@yahoo.com)



PRINCETON OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE - PRINCETON HIKES!

MONOOSNOC  
TRAIL HIKE  
LEOMINSTER  
Saturday June 28<sup>th</sup>  
9 a.m.



*N. Akkash*

Offering attractive views, this hike from West Street in Leominster to South Monoosnoc is about 4-5 miles round-trip. A moderate-to-difficult hike with some rocky scrambles.

For more information or to register: [TrailaroundprincetonMA@gmail.com](mailto:TrailaroundprincetonMA@gmail.com)



*Ovenbird*

*Photo by Alan Rawle*

WARE RIVER NATURE CLUB

**BIRDING & NATURE WALK**  
**RUM ROCK & OSGOOD SWAMP**  
**MASS AUDUBON RUTLAND BROOK SANCTUARY**  
**PETERSHAM**

**Sunday June 29<sup>th</sup>**  
**9 a.m. – mid-day**



Join us for this walk through a lovely forest to Osgood Swamp and the glacial boulder known as Rum Rock. We can expect to encounter a variety of resident bird species along the way, and we'll watch for interesting plants, animal sign, and more.

Pre-register:

[warerivernatureclub@yahoo.com](mailto:warerivernatureclub@yahoo.com)

MYSTERY PHOTO:  
Eastern Towhee

