

# Bobolink

## *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*



### Agriculture and Grassland Wildlife on PEI

PEI was once nearly completely forested. However, that changed in the early 1700s with the arrival of French settlers and the beginning of agriculture. The first open lands used were salt marshes, likely the only home of native grassland birds at that time.

Grassland species expanded in PEI when hay land and pastures were abundant, and long rotation schedules meant ground-nesting birds were unlikely to be disturbed during May and June. It has only been in the last few decades that early harvesting of grasses for silage and haylage and intensive insecticide use were adopted. Today, fewer grassy fields remain undisturbed through the bird breeding season.

### IDENTIFICATION

- Breeding male bobolinks are easily distinguished from other grassland birds because of their unique colouring.
- **Breeding male:** black belly and sides; yellow back of head; black bill; white back, shoulders and rump
- **Female:** yellowish belly; black streaks on sides, back and under tail; light stripes above eyes and center of crown; brown tail and wings; pale bill
- Immature bobolink looks like female, but more yellow
- Males have a distinct song that is often described as bubbling and metallic
- Feed on weed seeds, grains, insects



Caroline Palmer

Female bobolink



Male bobolink in flight

### HABITAT ON PEI

Bobolinks are seen across PEI in the summer, near hay fields and wetlands. Females are harder to identify because they do not display as the male does on posts, trees and tall grasses.

### BREEDING BIOLOGY

Bobolinks arrive on PEI in May. Nests are built on the ground, lined with dead grass and leaves, and are usually well hidden in vegetation. On PEI bobolinks nest in grassy fields, almost exclusively in hay fields. One to seven eggs are laid in early June and incubated for 10-13 days. Both parents feed the young. Fledging occurs in late June-early July, 10-14 days after hatching. Male bobolinks often have more than one female partner. Pairs raise one brood a year.

In Canada, bobolinks breed from southern British Columbia to Western Newfoundland. They are long distance migrants, spending their winters in South America.

Donna Giberson

## CONSERVING OUR FARMLAND BIRDS

# Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*



### Contact Us

If you would like to report a bobolink sighting, please contact Island Nature Trust.

Phone: (902)892-7513

Email: [landbirds@islandnaturetrust.ca](mailto:landbirds@islandnaturetrust.ca)

“Endangered species are sensitive indicators of how we are treating the planet, and we should be listening carefully to their message”

**Donald Falk**  
*restoration ecologist*

### THREATS

The bobolink’s biggest threat on PEI is the early harvesting of silage and dry hay, which coincides with their breeding season. Harvesters drive over nests, resulting in destroyed eggs, nests, young and even adults. Another threat is habitat loss.

Hayfields are disappearing on PEI. Less livestock is being raised on the island, meaning less demand for forage crops like hay. Increasingly, hay fields are being planted in soy beans and potatoes, which are more profitable than forage crops but not useful to bobolinks. Hay fields are also being converted for development (housing, commercial, etc.) and being abandoned and lost to natural succession (reverting back to forest).

Other threats to the bobolink include: pesticides, wind power development, excessive predation and invasive species. Bobolinks face multiple threats on their wintering grounds as well.



Hay harvesting often coincides with bobolink breeding season

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Report bobolink sightings to a local group such as Island Nature Trust. Citizen scientists and the data they collect are crucial in our understanding of local bird species
- Consider harvesting dry hay later (after July 15) to avoid killing nesting bobolinks
- Establish refuge areas- areas of uncultivated land that provide undisturbed cover and nesting habitat for ground nesting species. For example, grassy buffer zones surrounding waterways can be widened, allowing birds to nest while also preventing erosion and filtering runoff
- Mow unused fields once every two years to maintain grassland habitat. Avoid mowing until after ground nesting birds have finished nesting
- Do not use insecticides on grassland and pastures and reduce pesticide use throughout the farm

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