



STUDY GUIDE: ENHANCE BIRDING BY EAR SKILLS TO IDENTIFY THE GRASSLAND NESTING BIRDS IN THE BCN DATABASE

THE STATISTICS UNDERLYING THE BCN POPULATION TRENDS DATA FROM 1999-2020

Trend : Average annual population change (up or down) over the 22 year study period

% Error : When this # is larger than the Trend average #, the latter is uncertain

Points : # of individual points where the species was recorded at least once

Records : Total # of birds of a specific species, seen across all survey points

Frequency : % of survey points where a species was seen at least once; assesses overall abundance - more common species show approx 30-50% frequency

Credibility : Informed method of assessing the accuracy of the population Trend #; Higher % error reduces Credibility of the Trend value

The links to species songs and calls are from xeno-canto.org

In most cases, the recordings are from Illinois or nearby states, to avoid 'dialects' (many species songs vary with geography). Be sure to read the [terms of use](#) and the [FAQs](#). Click on [advanced search](#) and type in a species name should you want to explore the available recordings for a particular species

Cautionary Note: The 30+ species contained in this study guide breed primarily in grasslands, yet likely will be observed in other habitats (notably shrublands) while monitoring. This will be also true for species that primarily nest in other habitat types. Why? Many species have adapted, breeding in different habitats, Red-winged Blackbirds and Common Yellowthroats, for example. Woodland species also will widely forage for food for their nestlings during the breeding season. Non-native plants in woodland habitat tend to be 'insect poor', so woodland nesters must extend their search. Various studies have shown that 'insect poor' habitats reduce nesting success.

The other factor influencing occupancy overlap: Fragmentation of habitat types – aka edge effects. BCN monitoring counts birds at points within 'natural areas' (approx 10% of the land area across the CW region) there is a significant edge effect – shrubland birds heard/seen from a woodland point, for example.

Regular (and rare) BCN grassland breeding birds - in alphabetical order



Species	Trend	% Error	Credibility	Points	Records	Frequency	Trend Status
American Kestrel	-2.27%	4.78%	Good	54	85	2%	Uncertain
American Woodcock	0.19%	7.61%	Mod	32	51	1%	Uncertain
Barn Swallow	2.60%	1.13%	Good	810	3847	33%	Moderate Increase
Bobolink	-2.87%	0.74%	Good	790	16571	32%	Moderate Decline
Brown-headed Cowbird	-1.27%	0.74%	Good	1288	8081	52%	Moderate Decline
Clay-colored Sparrow			Poor	18	42	1%	Poorly Known
Common Nighthawk			Poor	5	12	0%	Poorly Known
Common Yellowthroat	5.10%	0.52%	Good	1488	13757	60%	Moderate Increase
Dickcissel	5.49%	0.84%	Good	841	11724	34%	Moderate Increase
Eastern Bluebird	0.74%	1.63%	Good	413	1302	17%	Stable
Eastern Kingbird	0.30%	0.98%	Good	838	2526	34%	Stable
Eastern Meadowlark	-1.04%	0.56%	Good	991	12335	40%	Moderate Decline
Field Sparrow	0.14%	0.65%	Good	1119	8592	45%	Stable
Grasshopper Sparrow	-2.72%	0.89%	Good	731	5238	30%	Moderate Decline
Henslow's Sparrow	3.38%	0.92%	Good	652	5465	26%	Moderate Increase
Horned Lark			Poor	12	34	0%	Poorly Known
Killdeer	1.86%	2.14%	Good	327	1033	13%	Stable
Lark Sparrow			Poor	3	4	0%	Poorly Known
Mourning Dove	-0.52%	1.12%	Good	715	2658	29%	Stable
Northern Bobwhite	-0.59%	8.06%	Mod	24	31	1%	Uncertain
Northern Harrier	-1.84%	7.33%	Mod	21	24	1%	Uncertain
Northern Mockingbird	4.35%	3.01%	Good	155	319	6%	Moderate Increase
Red-winged Blackbird	1.79%	0.45%	Good	1947	73222	79%	Moderate Increase
Ring-necked Pheasant	-1.22%	1.84%	Good	286	630	12%	Stable
Sandhill Crane	7.30%	4.39%	Good	78	175	3%	Moderate Increase
Savannah Sparrow	-3.40%	0.99%	Good	599	5180	24%	Moderate Decline
Sedge Wren	-1.23%	1.47%	Good	394	1565	16%	Stable
Song Sparrow	0.81%	0.45%	Good	1675	17789	68%	Moderate Increase
Tree Swallow	2.27%	0.90%	Good	994	9403	40%	Moderate Increase
Upland Sandpiper	-10.44%	5.19%	Mod	48	65	2%	Steep Decline
Vesper Sparrow	-3.02%	5.62%	Mod	52	90	2%	Uncertain
Western Meadowlark			Poor	14	24	1%	Poorly Known

Regular (and rare) BCN grassland birds - ranked by abundance



Species	Trend	% Error	Credibility	Points	Records	Frequency	Trend Status	
Red-winged Blackbird	1.8%	0.5%	Good	1947	73222	79%	Moderate Increase	
Song Sparrow	0.8%	0.5%	Good	1675	17789	68%	Moderate Increase	
Bobolink	-2.9%	0.7%	Good	790	16571	32%	Moderate Decline	
Common Yellowthroat	5.1%	0.5%	Good	1488	13757	60%	Moderate Increase	
Eastern Meadowlark	-1.0%	0.6%	Good	991	12335	40%	Moderate Decline	
Dickcissel	5.5%	0.8%	Good	841	11724	34%	Moderate Increase	
Tree Swallow	2.3%	0.9%	Good	994	9403	40%	Moderate Increase	
Field Sparrow	0.1%	0.7%	Good	1119	8592	45%	Stable	
Brown-headed Cowbird	-1.3%	0.7%	Good	1288	8081	52%	Moderate Decline	
Henslow's Sparrow	3.4%	0.9%	Good	652	5465	26%	Moderate Increase	
Grasshopper Sparrow	-2.7%	0.9%	Good	731	5238	30%	Moderate Decline	compare Savannah Sparrow
Savannah Sparrow	-3.4%	1.0%	Good	599	5180	24%	Moderate Decline	compare Grasshopper Sparrow
Barn Swallow	2.6%	1.1%	Good	810	3847	33%	Moderate Increase	
Mourning Dove	-0.5%	1.1%	Good	715	2658	29%	Stable	
Eastern Kingbird	0.3%	1.0%	Good	838	2526	34%	Stable	
Sedge Wren	-1.2%	1.5%	Good	394	1565	16%	Stable	
Eastern Bluebird	0.7%	1.6%	Good	413	1302	17%	Stable	
Killdeer	1.9%	2.1%	Good	327	1033	13%	Stable	
Ring-necked Pheasant	-1.2%	1.8%	Good	286	630	12%	Stable	
Northern Mockingbird	4.4%	3.0%	Good	155	319	6%	Moderate Increase	
Sandhill Crane	7.3%	4.4%	Good	78	175	3%	Moderate Increase	
Vesper Sparrow	-3.0%	5.6%	Mod	52	90	2%	Uncertain	
American Kestrel	-2.3%	4.8%	Good	54	85	2%	Uncertain	
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Grassland Birds - the 'Regulars' - sounds and mnemonics
notes, pitfalls, other species to consider or rule out



Mourning Dove Ooh 'la ooh ooh ooh'

Eastern Kingbird twitters

Sedge Wren 'chit chat chug chug chug chug'

Field Sparrow (for primary song, imagine a ping pong ball dropping, with ending notes getting faster and descending-also note chattery call)

Song Sparrow (contact call resembles **House Sparrow**-song has a lot of variations, but can include three repeated notes, usually in beginning: 'maids maids maids put on your tea kettle-ettles')

Grasshopper Sparrow 'tick tack tuh ZEEEE', learn alternate twittery song too, which sounds like a cassette tape being rewound

Henslow's Sparrow-'teesleep or sulick'

Savannah Sparrow 'take-take it Easy'; -compare with **Grasshopper Sparrow**)

Bobolink-mechanical sounds

Eastern Meadowlark 'spring of the year', rattle call heebiebeebee

Red-winged Blackbird 'konklaree', and many sounds and whistles

Brown-headed Cowbird 'bubble zee', rattle calls

Common Yellowthroat 'witchity, witchity' (rattle call is wren-like)

DICKCISSEI 'DICK DICK CISSEI CISSEI'

Priority grassland species of conservation concern

LEVEL 1 - HIGHEST CONCERN

LEVEL 1: Henslow's Sparrow,
Bobolink

LEVEL 2: Grasshopper Sparrow,
Sedge Wren, Upland Sandpiper,
E. Meadowlark

LEVEL 3: Dickcissel, N. Harrier,
Swainson's Hawk, American Kestrel,
Common Nighthawk, Horned Lark, Barn
Owl (Rare)

For certain species on this list, BCN's monitoring area represents a core/important breeding area, significant for sustaining the individual species' population; other BOC species listed here are currently rare or

