



WELCOME to Rosaryville State Park!

Native Grassland Bird Trail

What are Grasslands?

Grasslands are those tracts of land with a vegetative cover of grasses, but they may also contain a sizable mix of flowers and non-woody plants. The key feature is the absence of trees, so that the vegetation remains low and un-shaded. To qualify as a grassland, a tract of land must be larger than some minimum size, considered to be ~



Northern Bobwhite

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40 acres. Although small clearings of a few acres in the midst of a woods are not considered grassland we have chosen this area to introduce native grasses in an attempt to attract grassland species.

These birds require grasslands in order to survive since their life cycles have evolved in close harmony with that type of habitat. (There are also butterflies and dragonflies with an analogous dependence). So, we may call these "grassland obligate" species. This explains one reason why grasslands must be relatively large - grassland birds avoid predators by dropping into the grass before they can be spotted. To do this they need a very long line of sight and a very low horizon, and so

they key in on those features in selecting their breeding territories.

In the course of time, trees may gradually invade a grassland, their seeds being carried in from surrounding woods. Patches of shade accelerate the process. Eventually, the grassland reverts to forest in a natural process called "succession". If this were the whole story, there would be no grasslands left. But many natural processes work to



Vesper Sparrow

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maintain grasslands. In pre-colonial times, these were fire (some started by lightning, some set deliberately by the Indians), grazing by elk and bison (which once ranged nearly to the Atlantic coast), and storms downing the trees. Aside from these processes, some terrain (called "shale barrens", such as "Soldiers' Delight" in Baltimore County), lie over such thin soil that nothing else but grass can grow on them. Yet others were so large to start with that trees can encroach only gradually and so they have remained open for centuries. Thus it was that when the Europeans arrived in Maryland they found vast stretches of grasslands as part of the landscape.



Brown Spotted Yellow-Wing Dragonfly

©R.Phebus



Allow others to discover the Native Grassland Bird Trail by following Leave No Trace Outdoor Ethics

● Grassland Bird Trail

● Orange Trail Markers

● Two Mile Loop

● Difficulty—Moderate



Bobolink

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Why is it especially important to preserve and restore grasslands?

Grassland species (including butterfly species) are in more rapid decline than the species of any other habitat type, including forests or wetlands. The once familiar Bob-white and Whip-poor-will (which though nesting in woods is considered a grassland species because it soars over wide-open fields at dusk to feed on air-borne insects)

have now vanished from Prince George's County



Dickcissel

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Agriculture practices have changed. Formerly, farmers mowed hay once a year, and as it happened, at the end of nesting season. Now 2 and even 3 hayings are common. The heavier reliance on fertilizer has obviated the practice of leaving some fields fallow every few years. "No-tilled" croplands are left sterile over the winter. The suppression of fire promotes the more rapid succession of grasses to woods.



Horned Lark

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As the populations of native warm season grasses have declined over the past 50 to 100 years, so too have the native birds (pictured here) and native butterflies. Big Bluestem, Indian Grass, Little Bluestem and Eastern Gamagrass are just some of the grasses that serve as the foundation for this unique ecosystem.

As indicated by the most recent Maryland Audubon Breeding Bird Survey, the obligate grassland birds described here have suffered declines of 80%-90%.

Disappearing habitat has also contributed to the decline of many of our native butterflies. The Baltimore Checkerspot, our State insect, and the grass skippers are rapidly declining. The Regal Fritillary butterfly is believed to be extirpated from Maryland.

Birds that depend on grasslands for nesting and foraging make up the "suite" of grassland species. Here in Maryland these include Bob whites, Horned Larks, Grasshopper Sparrows, Vesper Sparrows, and Eastern Meadowlarks as summer nesters, and longspurs as winter visitors.



Grasshopper Sparrow

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Eastern Meadowlark

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Please report any problems to a park employee or call **Park Watch** 1-800-825-7275.

State Forest and Park Service General Information: 1-800-830-3974

Plan your outdoor adventures on our website! www.dnr.state.md.us



Fritillary Butterfly

©R.Phebus



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Pets

Pets on a leash are welcome in Rosaryville State Park.

For the Grassland Trail please follow the orange trail markers in the field. Remember our park is trash-free. Pack it in, pack it out.

Martin O'Malley, Governor
Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor

John R. Griffin, Secretary
Eric Schwaab, Deputy Secretary

