

2008 GRASSLAND BIRD SURVEY PROTOCOL

Volunteer Commitment Dates: April 12, 2008 – July 31, 2008

Time of day to conduct surveys: 5:30 am – 9:30 am

Pre-survey Wait Period	Wait 2 minutes prior to starting survey
Number of minutes at each point:	5 minutes: separated into 3- and 2-minutes
Number of visits per point:	Two (bird surveys only, no habitat surveys in 2008)
Bird surveys	One from May 15-31 and one from June 1-15
Data Entry	Entered electronically and mailed to NJAS by July 31, 2008

Minimum number of points surveyed in one day: 1 Route/Site

Protocol for volunteers

All citizen scientists are required to attend a training workshop. During this workshop, routes and/or sites will be assigned and corresponding maps will be handed out. Each volunteer will be required to do at least one route/site. We will make every attempt to match volunteers to their preferred counties. Volunteers are welcome to survey multiple routes; but do not try to be too ambitious and take on more than you can handle. It will be much more difficult to reassign routes after the surveys have been initiated, and they all need to be completed this year.

Reporting Time

All volunteer hours spent performing grasslands bird surveys must be recorded on the provided timesheet. The project name is 2008 Grasslands Bird Surveys. In addition to the project name please record the Site Code, especially if you are working on more than one route/site. Make sure that all information is filled in every time you go into the field to work on this project. This includes scouting, bird surveys, data entry, etc. Also be sure to record the miles traveled during each survey. NJAS must provide this timesheet to our partners at the Division of Fish and Wildlife. It is essential that this form be completed and returned to NJAS with your data sheets at the end of the field season.

Scouting

Prior to the first bird survey, every point in each route/site needs to be scouted to determine suitability and accessibility. This initial visit must take place from April 12 – May 14. If a point is inaccessible or unsuitable, the point may be moved to suitable habitat at a nearby location. To move a point, choose a location with suitable habitat on your route map that is at

least 0.5 mile (straight distance) from any other point. Suitable habitat is an open area (no trees or shrubs), greater than 5 hectares (12.5 acres) and dominated by grasses and forbs. When you find the new point location, draw an arrow on the route map from the old point location to the new one and indicate why it was moved (developed, inaccessible, etc). If there are no other suitable locations that meet the criteria to move a point, then mark it on the map with an X and indicate why it was not surveyed (developed, inaccessible, etc.). PLEASE LET US KNOW (kristin.mylecraine@njudubon.org) about any points that you move. If the area around the original point is not a grassland habitat anymore, for example, it has been developed, please let us know immediately.

Bird Surveys

Make sure you are familiar with the songs of species likely to be seen during your surveys, and the points on identification. Some species are rather secretive and do not allow close approach for visual identification. We have provided CDs of songs to all participants in the training workshops, and you are encouraged to keep practicing. We recommend you use a good field guide for visual identification.

Each volunteer will be responsible for one or more routes and/or sites. A route follows existing roads through grassland habitat and consists of survey points. Each point is located at a pre-determined location from which the observer conducts the bird survey. The radius around each point for 100 meters is considered the “map-circle”. An interior circle with a 25 meter radius is also part of the map-circle. Routes vary in length and have different numbers of points.

A site is a property that contains grassland habitat, which is being managed for grassland bird species. Observers are granted permission by the landowner (through their contract with the State) to enter the property to survey. Site sizes vary, but most contain 1-5 survey points with the same count circle method employed.

*****Note on Routes: those of you who have been assigned a roadside route must run the first bird survey in numerical order by point from the lowest number to the highest number. The second run is done in reverse going from the highest point number to the lowest. This is done so that points aren't surveyed at the same time of day during each survey period.***

Surveys should not be conducted during rain or during periods of high winds (greater than 12mph {Beaufort 3}, which is enough to constantly move leaves or twigs and to extend a light flag). Every point in a route must be surveyed on the same day. Surveys will take place from one half hour before to four hours after sunrise (approximately between 5:30 AM and 9:30 AM), two times during the breeding season, preferably from May 15-31, and June 1-15. Surveys must take place at least 7 days apart. For example, do not conduct one of your surveys on May 31st and the other one on June 4.

Once the observer arrives at the survey point wait 2 minutes before beginning the count. This enables the observer to prepare for the count and allows the birds to calm down and return to normal activity. During the survey the observer stands at the point for 5 minutes and records on the data sheet all grassland bird species seen or heard. This 5-minute period is divided into

two periods; a 3- and a 2-minute period. The observer records the species and number of birds seen or heard during the first 3 minutes separately from those encountered during the next 2 minutes. Record all birds as less than 25 meters, 25-100 meters or greater than 100 meters away from the survey point on the data sheet. Plot all individuals of target species observed at less than 100 meters on the circle map with the abbreviation of the common name (see Appendix III). ***Do not count longer than five minutes.*** Do not exceed the 5-minute time limit because you are sure a certain "good bird" is there and not calling -- it will probably be recorded some other year, and valid negative data are as important as positive data in this survey. Species recorded that are not found on the form should be added at the bottom. ***If you observe a target species before or after the 5-minute survey, write it down in the margin or blank spaces on the bottom of the datasheet with a "before" or "after" next to it.***

One and only one observer should conduct the count. Counting should be done from outside the car from a stationary point. Absolutely no method of coaxing birds should be used during the 5-minute survey period. This means no "spishing", tape playbacks or any other method of enticing a bird to sing or call or make itself visible. It is crucial that all surveys be done consistently. Target birds observed between stops should not be counted, but may be noted in the margin of the route map with a line indicating the location of the species. Such birds are of interest, but do not spend extra time pursuing them, as it is important to finish within the time limit; bird activity changes drastically after this time.

Be sure you record the survey site code, survey point number, observer, recorder (if applicable), date, start time and weather conditions on every datasheet.

Each survey will be undertaken singly or by two people. We prefer single observers because we do not want the volunteer's ability to concentrate on the birds to be compromised by the presence of another person. However, if you want to conduct the surveys with your birding partner, please take all precautions to avoid being distracted. Remember, only one person should be the primary observer. The second person can act as the recorder in this situation. If there are two observers, the primary observer says what she/he sees or hears to the recorder in a quiet voice and the recorder repeats back what she/he heard as the data is recorded. Only the birds seen and heard by the primary observer get recorded on the forms. ***If the recorder sees or hears a target species before or after the 5-minute survey, write it down in the margin or blank spaces on the bottom of the datasheet with a statement that this is a recorder observation.***

*****Note on Counting the Same Bird: The same bird seen/heard in the 3-minute portion of the survey, then seen/heard again in the 2-minute portion is ONLY recorded in the 3-minute period as this is definitely a single individual. If you are sure that a bird observed in the 2-minute period is different from the one observed in the 3-minute period, by all means record it as a different individual in the 2-minute time slot. Noting on the data sheet that you were sure two different birds were observed will help with our data entry.***

In all situations, avoid biasing the data by disturbing the birds. Walk out of your car quietly, approach the survey point cautiously, avoid unnecessary movements and try to blend in as much as possible.

Data Entry

All observers will have access to NJAS's online data entry website. Go to http://www.njaudubon.org/Research/CitizenScience/Grassland_Surveys.html. At the bottom of the page you can click on **Enter Data**. This will send you to a new page. Click on the link: <http://www.njaudubon.org/GrasslandWeb>. At the bottom of the page click **Create a New Account**. Enter a User ID for yourself. Enter a password (at least 5 characters) and confirm that password. Enter your name, phone number and email address in the appropriate box. In the **Site Password** box type **grassland**. A page will open that asks you for the new User ID and password. Type them in, hit enter and you should be relocated to the data entry page. If you have any technical difficulties with this please let me know immediately so we can correct the problem. Once you have entered all of your data please mail all data sheets by August 31, 2008 to:

Kristin Mylecraine
New Jersey Audubon Society
Scherman-Hoffman Wildlife Sanctuary
11 Hardscrabble Road
Bernardsville, NJ 07924

Thank you for your assistance and good luck with all of your surveys.

Appendix I. WEATHER CONDITIONS (FROM BREEDING BIRD SURVEY)

WIND SPEED CODES:

Beaufort Scale	Wind Speed in mph	Indicators of Wind Speed
0	Less than 1	Smoke rises vertically
1	1 to 3	Wind direction shown by smoke drift
2	4 to 7	Wind felt on face; leaves rustle
3	8 to 12	Leaves, small twigs in constant motion; light flag extended
4	13 to 18	Raises dust and loose paper; small branches are moved
5	9 to 24	Small trees in leaf sway; crested wavelets on inland waters

SKY CONDITION CODES:

- 0 Clear or a few clouds
- 1 Partly cloudy (scattered) or variable sky
- 2 Cloudy (broken) or overcast
- 4 Fog or smoke
- 5 Drizzle
- 7 Snow
- 8 Showers

NOTE: Surveys *should not* be conducted when wind speeds exceed Beaufort 3, and/or during sky conditions 5-8 (drizzle, snow, rain showers).

Appendix II: Equipment Checklist

Clipboard & Pencils, Erasers, etc.
Bird Count Datasheets for all survey points
Overall Site Maps on aerial photo
Survey Point Maps with Count Circle on aerial photo (one for each point)
Route Map(s)
Binoculars
Watch with second hand (or timer)
Compass (optional)
GPS Unit (optional)
Thermometer (optional)

Appendix III: Target Species and Abbreviations

Target Grassland Species	
American Kestrel	AMKE
Bobolink	BOBO
Dickcissel	DICK
Eastern Meadowlark	EAME
Grasshopper Sparrow	GRSP
Henslow's Sparrow	HESP
Horned Lark	HOLA
Northern Bobwhite	NOBO
Northern Harrier	NOHA
Savannah Sparrow	SAVS
Sedge Wren	SEWR
Upland Sandpiper	UPSA
Vesper Sparrow	VESP
Scrub-Shrub Dependent Species	
Black-billed Cuckoo	BBCU
Blue Grosbeak	BLGR
Blue-winged Warbler	BWWA
Brown Thrasher	BRTH
Chestnut-sided Warbler	CSWA
Eastern Bluebird	EABL
Eastern Towhee	EATO
Field Sparrow	FISP
Golden-winged Warbler	GWWA
Indigo Bunting	INBU
Prairie Warbler	PRAW
Red-winged Blackbird	RWBL
White-eyed Vireo	WEVI
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	YBCU
Yellow-breasted Chat	YBCH

You will undoubtedly observe many other species. Though data regarding these species are interesting to NJAS, the main focus of the project is to record the required information pertaining to the target grassland species. We recommend not spending considerable time focusing in on the more common species (i.e. Song Sparrow), but feel free to note them on the datasheet.