

Grassland Birds

Hundreds of species of birds breed on the Great Plains of North America each year. These are some of the most common in Alberta:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Chestnut-collared Longspur | 5. Horned Lark |
| 2. McCown's Longspur | 6. Savannah Sparrow |
| 3. Lark Bunting | 7. Vesper Sparrow |
| 4. Western Meadowlark | 8. Clay-colored Sparrow |



Dave Prescott

Clay-colored Sparrow

Several species of grassland birds are at risk in Alberta:

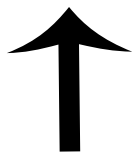
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|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Baird's Sparrow | - May be at Risk |
| 2. Long-billed Curlew | - Sensitive (Special Concern) |
| 3. Sprague's Pipit | - Sensitive (Special Concern) |
| 4. Upland Sandpiper | - Sensitive |
| 5. Bobolink | - Sensitive |
| 6. Grasshopper Sparrow | - Sensitive |

Life Cycle

April - May

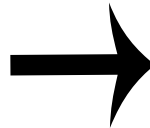
Return to Alberta from wintering grounds in USA and Central and South America.

Build nest, find mate and lay eggs. Some birds are capable of having multiple families in one season.



October - March

Spend winter in south. Birds may pair up before heading back north or they may choose mates upon arriving on their breeding grounds.

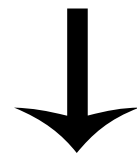


Dave Prescott

Savannah Sparrow

May - June

Young hatch. Some species are very territorial during the nesting season. If a mother is excessively disturbed she may abandon her nest or avoid the area next season.



June - July

Young are reared. They learn to fly and leave nest.



August - September

Leave Alberta and return to wintering grounds.

Beneficial Management Practices

On native prairie: The best decision you can make for all species at risk is to preserve your native grasslands.

General:

- Maintain native prairie in its natural state.
- Minimize pesticide use.

For Grazed Land:

- Grazing management should employ light to moderate grazing which will maintain overall rangeland health.
- Create variability in the pasture by strategically placing salt blocks and watering sites. A range of grass heights and litter cover is desirable.
- Encourage rest and low use of riparian zones.
- Defer grazing on native prairie between March to late May or July 15th if possible. If a rotational grazing system is being utilized, try to allow at least one pasture to remain undisturbed between these dates.
- Pasture rotation should be based on forage utilization and availability, not a fixed schedule.
- Avoid long-term intensive grazing because this results in short, uniform grass heights and loss of litter and carry-over.
- Fall/Winter graze fescue grasslands instead of spring/summer.
- Ensure carry-over is sufficient to maintain plant vigour and range health for next year.
- Maintain records of range health and in and out dates to ensure close monitoring of impact areas.

On cultivated land and tame pasture:

General:

- Consider seeding winter wheat to reduce disturbance during critical nesting periods in spring and early summer.
- Minimize pesticide use. Birds naturally control pests by eating them.
- Use zero or minimal tillage to reduce disturbance.
- Defer haying until July 15 whenever possible.
- Use flushing bars on haying equipment to avoid killing wildlife.
- Where multiple hay fields are adjacent to each other swath fields on a rotational schedule leaving one untouched each year to provide space for movement. Divide fields if needed.
- Remove marginal cropland from production and seed back to native grasses or to permanent cover for use as a tame pasture.

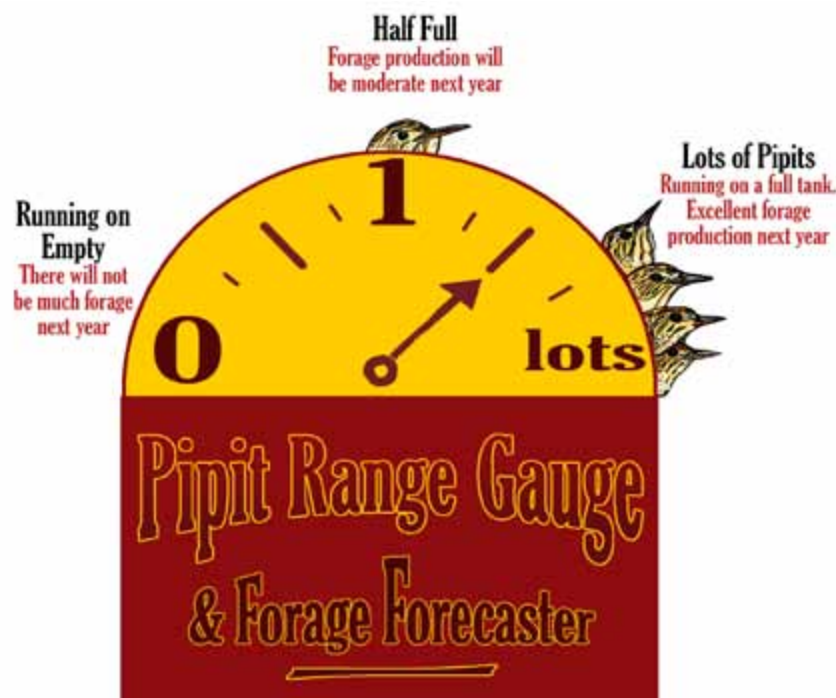
For Grazed Land:

- Allow pastures to rest after grazing.
- Restrict use of riparian zones, especially when wet.
- Create variability in the pasture by strategically placing salt blocks and watering sites. A range of grass heights and litter cover is desirable.

Industrial Guidelines for all land types:

From April 15 to July 15 there may be large numbers of grassland birds nesting on your native prairie. Nests are small and difficult to see but will be scattered throughout a pasture. Industrial developers should restrict activity as much as possible during this time period when grassland birds are especially sensitive to disturbance.

Measuring range health with Sprague's Pipits



The presence of sprague's pipits is a good indicator that you are leaving enough carry-over to ensure a good supply of grass for the future.



Sprague's Pipit



Long-billed Curlew

For more information see the MULTISAR Grazing BMP Factsheet and the MULTISAR Industrial Guidelines Factsheet in your binder or online at www.multisar.ca.

Grazing Impact on Grassland Bird Habitat

Grazing Pressure

Excessive ← Heavy — Moderate — Light → None



McCown's Longspur

Horned Lark

Long-billed Curlew

Upland Sandpiper

Sprague's Pipit

Baird's Sparrow

Bobolink

Longer grass is used to nest and hide in while shorter grass and bare ground makes it easier to move around and forage for food.

Some birds prefer very short grass and bare ground while others live in long grass and shrubs. Most species will use more than one grassland type in their life cycle.



Bare ← Short — Dry-Mixed — Mixed — Fescue → Shrub-Ecotone

Grassland Type

(Adapted from F.L. Knopf, 1996. *Prairie Legacies-birds. Prairie Conservation.*)

Grassland birds evolved in a dynamic landscape influenced by fire, drought and vast herds of bison and other herbivores. Because of this, grassland birds are adapted to a wide range of habitat conditions including varying grass lengths, highly disturbed and untouched areas and varying mixtures of shrubs and grasses. Different species became adapted to each of the different habitat types and thus became spread across the landscape, each with their own role in the web of life.

Contact:

MULTISAR
2nd Floor, YPM Place
530 - 8th Street South
Lethbridge, Alberta
T1J 2J8

MULTISAR Coordinator
403-381-5318

www.multisar.ca

