



# GRASSLAND BIRD TRUST NEWSLETTER

FALL 2022

News on the Wing Delivered to Your Mailbox

## GRASSLAND BIRD TRUST'S VIEWING AREA ADDED TO THE NEW YORK STATE BIRDING TRAIL!

Upstate New York is one of the top bird watching destinations in the northeast, attracting birders from around the world. In May, New York State opened the Capital Region portion of the NYS Birding Trail, with 29 car accessible locations in five counties with places for people to park and see some spectacular birds.

The Grassland Bird Trust (GBT) is proud to announce that one of these world-class birding locations is GBT's Alfred Z. Solomon Grassland viewing stand located in Fort Edward at 160 County Route 42!

The NYS Birding Trail is not a walking, biking or other similar type of trail. Rather, it is a network of top-notch birding spots you can drive to by car to enjoy an inclusive experience for everyone. Once you're in the car, all you need is a map and a pair of binoculars to get started. Google *New York State Birding Trail*. There, you will find information about what you are likely to see at each site. The website offers a great way for beginning birders to prepare for a visit to the Important Bird Area.

The trail is managed by the Department of Conservation in collaboration with the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation.

*Grassland Bird Trust, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit land trust conserving critical habitat for endangered, threatened, and rapidly declining grassland birds. Visit [GrasslandBirdTrust.org](https://GrasslandBirdTrust.org) to learn more.*



# AUTUMN BIRDING IN THE GRASSLANDS

By Roberta Kravette

*Listen!* There is something in the rustling leaves.

As our colorful, boisterous, fair-weather friends head south, others breeze in. And this season means fewer distractions and less camouflaging foliage! For me, photo ops are a big autumn bonus. The season's burnished reds, oranges, and golds with autumn's amber-tinged light make stunning backdrops for avian photography. Sparse foliage can mean an excellent lens view of our more reserved cold-weather residents.

Our state is fortunate to be situated on the Atlantic flyway – a giant, ancient highway of avian migration. Twice yearly, everything from warblers to raptors wing their way north in the spring and south again in the fall. Our grasslands and wetlands provide these birds with a “pit stop” of berries, bugs, and (little) beasts.

Changing seasons and restless birds always remind me of the road trips with our parents as kids. After driving for hours, we would burst

out of the car and into a Stuckey's truck stop, exploring the aisles and clamoring for snacks. Well, for migrating birds, Fort Edward is just that, a welcoming Stuckey's – minus the pecan rolls, but heavy on the seeds.

Some birds are just passing through, and others will stay the winter, joining our all-year residents and spreading a little brightness across our (soon-to-be) winter-cast skies. So, grab your binoculars and camera. Let's see who is rustling those leaves!



## LOOK FAST! SOME OF THESE BIRDS ARE JUST PASSING THROUGH.

More arrive soon. Stay tuned! Happy birding, and don't forget to share what you've seen!



### RUSTY BLACKBIRD

*Euphagus carolinus* arrive from far north boreal forests when (to my mind) the males become interesting – turning from deep black to – well – rusty! But, what do *beavers* have to do with rusty blackbirds? Scan the QR code below to find out!



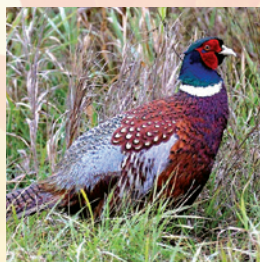
### COOPER'S HAWK

*Accipiter cooperii* are short-distance migrators. They summer near our northern border and Canada; if we are lucky, some may winter in our grassland. Cooper's hawks are famously skillful flyers, careening through trees at speed. Look for the long tail with dark bars.



### DARK-EYED JUNCO

*Junco hyemalis* range across North America, but their colors and patterns vary significantly region to region. In our area, they dress-for-success in (mostly) gray and white. But all have those black, eager eyes. These are not quiet birds; you'll hear them first hidden in a bush.



### RING-NECKED PHEASANT

*Phasianus colchicus* are year-round residents, but to me, the male's iridescent coppery and gold plumage, long elegant tail feathers, and bright red face are autumn's epitome!



### THE MERLIN

Look out for incoming raptors! Most *Falco columbarius* are passing through – some may stay for a while – but better look for these now. If you see a flock of birds suddenly burst into flight, watch closely, they may be trying to escape from a Merlin.



### AMERICAN GOLDFINCH

And then there are birds, like *Spinus tristis*, that change their entire wardrobe becoming so different, you might mistake them for migrants.

Scan the QR code to read the full article. ➡





# A RISKY EXPERIMENT IN THE GRASSLANDS?

It's more than likely that two or three years from now, say in 2024, a \$750 million Canadian company named Boralex will have carpeted 750 acres of the Important Bird Area (IBA) around GBT's Alfred Z. Solomon viewing stand in Fort Edward, New York, with solar panels.

The IBA is not just any open land conveniently – for the purposes of solar companies – located near a power grid. The IBA is the largest area of grasslands in Eastern New York. **Grassland birds cannot survive without this highly specialized habitat.** The remaining 100 breeding pairs of short-eared owls in New York State live only in grasslands. The grasslands support 10 other grassland birds that New York State categorizes as “species of greatest conservation need,” including kestrels, northern harriers, and meadow larks.

**There is very little research on how grasslands covered with solar panels affect birds.** It seems more than likely that short-eared owls and northern harriers can't breed or hunt while dodging solar panels. As to whether smaller “at risk” species such as upland sandpipers and horned larks can live among solar panels while breeding and feeding, no one really knows.

## GBT SUPPORTS RENEWABLE ENERGY BUT...

New York State is working hard to deliver 70% of the state's electricity from renewable sources by 2030. GBT supports that goal. It is not GBT's goal to stop this project.

**But we ARE concerned that these solar panels might effectively turn rapidly diminishing grassland bird species into flying guinea pigs.**

So, what can a small nonprofit like GBT do?

Boralex will shortly be applying to the New York State Office of Renewable Energy Siting (ORES) for a permit to start installing these panels. As of January 2022, there are new regulations requiring Boralex to offset (mitigate) the damage they are doing to wildlife species at risk. Under an older set of regulations, Boralex would have been required to conserve (give back to the birds) three acres of habitat for every one acre they covered with panels. Under the new regulations, Boralex may be required to conserve under 100 acres to compensate for the entire 750 acres of habitat they are taking away from the birds.



## THIS IS WHERE GBT COMES IN

The IBA is precious, rapidly diminishing habitat. **We want ORES to require Boralex to give back to the birds substantially more than the 750 acres Boralex covers with panels.**

GBT is still considering the best way to achieve this goal. We will probably need to hire expert witnesses and attorneys to give the birds a voice in this matter. And it will take a lot of GBT's limited staff resources to do this effectively.

## WE CAN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU AND YOUR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Please be generous when you receive our Fall 2022 appeal for your support!

If you want to be kept advised on how this is going, we will keep you posted on our website at [GrasslandBirdTrust.org](https://GrasslandBirdTrust.org).



**DONATE TODAY!**

**Visit [GrasslandBirdTrust.org/donate](https://GrasslandBirdTrust.org/donate) or scan the QR code.**

Your donation of any amount will unlock a one-year GBT membership for you and your family.





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# INVASION OF THE INVASIVE SPECIES!

Grassland birds don't like certain weeds any more than gardeners do. In fact, there are some grassland birds that literally can't live or breed among these plants. For instance, grassland birds hate toxic wild parsnip – the stinging stuff that looks like Queen Anne's lace and grows along the roads – as much as we do.

So, if you like grassland birds (and also bees), you have to do something about certain plants which are not native to our area and are aptly referred to as invasive.

Ron Renoni and Mark Janey, GBT's Land Stewards, successfully applied for funding to eliminate some of these invasive species from GBT's 78 acres at the Important Bird Area (IBA) in Fort Edward. This will keep grassland birds from abandoning this unique habitat. The funding came from PRISM (short for Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management) which is administered by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) using funds from the NYS Environmental Protection Fund.

GBT is testing whether most of the wild parsnip can be kept under control with strategic mowing twice a summer before the plants go to seed.

There are two types of knapweed on GBT's land. Brown knapweed can be reduced by applying agricultural lime and regular mowing before the plants flower. The other type of knapweed, spotted knapweed,



INVASIVE SPECIES  
MANAGEMENT  
CAPITAL REGION

may possibly be best controlled with insects. Currently, a scientist at Cornell University is testing to determine which types of bugs prefer to dine out on spotted knapweed.

Sometimes mowing isn't enough to get rid of either wild parsnip or brown knapweed. In certain limited areas, GBT is using a highly selective herbicide that attacks these invasive weeds without harming birds, other animals, insects or other plants.

Reed canary grass is a whole other kettle of weeds. It thrives in wet areas such as GBT owns, and grows so thickly that birds cannot, ahem, frolic in it during breeding season. Some scientists think that raptors won't hunt in it either. Currently, GBT is trying to out compete the canary grass by reseeding areas with fescue and perennial rye grass.

PRISM considers all of this work to be a valuable experiment in the field to test local control of these very stubborn and common invasive plants known as "Tier 4" plants. So, what GBT is doing up at the Important Bird Area in Fort Edward matters not only for the beautiful birds we watch all year long, but for grassland birds everywhere.

You can read more about these efforts  
at [GrasslandBirdTrust.org](https://GrasslandBirdTrust.org).