

GRASSLAND BIRD TRUST NEWSLETTER



SPRING 2023

News on the Wing Delivered to Your Mailbox



NESTING AND OTHER NEWS...

Dr. Samantha Carouso Peck, former Grassland Bird Trust (GBT) Executive Director, had a baby girl last August and decided to focus full time on her new role as a mother. We are so grateful for Sam's leadership at GBT. Many of our supporters will remember Sam's "Singing with the Birds" talk at Hicks Orchard on Global Big Day last year. We miss her and look forward to seeing her out on the birding trail soon.

We will hire a new executive director in the future, but until then, we are relying on our stalwart Board of Directors and volunteers to keep us soaring into the future. We are laser focused on ways to conserve grassland bird habitat while continuing to offer bird surveys, bird walks and other events, beginning construction on a trail at the Alfred Z. Solomon viewing stand in Fort Edward, and planning our upcoming Raptor Fest at Hicks Orchard on May 20, 2023.

In other bittersweet news, Paloma Spina is retiring from the Board after five years as she embarks on her masters degree in environmental geochemistry while continuing her job at Arcadis. We can't thank Paloma enough for all that she did over those years, working tirelessly to support GBT with her expertise in technology, communications, birds, and having fun. But stay tuned, she just might be joining another GBT trip to an exotic birding location somewhere around the globe next year!

While we will miss Paloma, GBT welcomes Ryan Van Meter to its Board of Directors. Ryan owns and manages two companies in the technology sector. In addition, he brings many skills to the Board, including a keen interest in mapping grassland biodiversity, communications, graphic design, and bird photography.

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 to learn more.



WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE SPRING BIRD? WE NAME OURS.

By Roberta Kravette

Since time immemorial, birds have migrated thousands of miles along traditional routes. These are the eco-friendliest of flights, powered by insects, seeds, and non-vegan morsels. Most of these journeys are flown in darkness, but all are flown with driving determination!

WHO DO YOU WAIT FOR? WE ASKED OUR VOLUNTEERS.

The spring migration has begun as these lightweight, efficient, feathered flying machines head north! The birds of spring are on their way, guided by the sun, the moon, the stars, and the Earth's magnetic field; we are still learning how they do it. But you can be sure that the grasslands, wetlands, and woodlands will explode in a few weeks with color and sound.

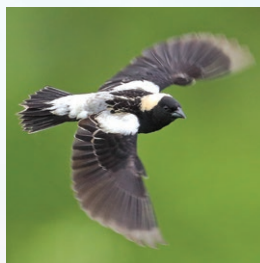
Many of us have a favorite bird that signifies spring. I wanted to find out what some of our Grassland Bird Trust family is most excited to welcome back...

Here they come! Some will hang around, others will keep heading north.



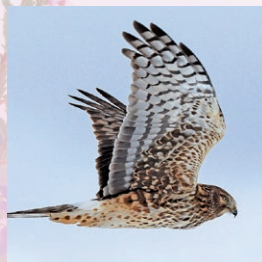
EASTERN MEADOWLARK

Most of us know **Gordon "Gordie" Ellmers** from the beautiful bird images he captures almost daily. Some of Gordie's favorites: Eastern Meadowlark, Bobolink, Eastern Bluebird, and Yellow Warbler. Why? Gordie's laconic answer: "They are very pretty birds."



BOBOLINK

Volunteer **Kate Schnurr** says: "I first learned about birds from my father and grandfather. Bobolinks always make me smile. They sound like R2D2." Her favorite place to bird? The grasslands in Fort Edward, not far from GBT's Alfred Z. Solomon Viewing Stand.



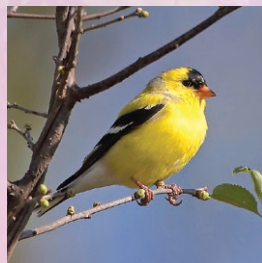
NORTHERN HARRIER

Says GBT volunteer **Mark Di Ianni**: "Since I am a birds-of-prey birder, my favorite year-round bird is the Northern Harrier. I love the way it flies low over the grasslands, with its unusual 'owl-like' face and wobbly hunting technique."



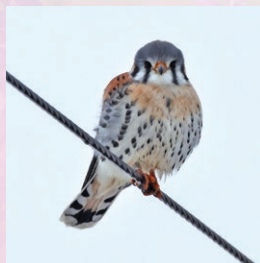
EASTERN BLUEBIRD

Says **Keith Swensen**, GBT Board Chair: "In my mother's youth, Bluebirds were common but due to habitat loss, nesting competition, and pesticides the population declined. Conservation measures have saved the birds and they are no longer endangered."



AMERICAN GOLDFINCH

For **Elizabeth Nichols**, another invaluable GBT volunteer, it's the American Goldfinch: "I love watching the males turn to yellow at my feeder during spring. Their new, sunny-yellow feathers and the sounds of their calls are harbingers of spring."



AMERICAN KESTREL

Board Member **Kathy Roome** picked the year-round American Kestrel. "They look like they're wearing tiny helmets when perched on a telephone wire. I love the way they dive bomb over the GBT grasslands and, oh, the slate blue color of their wings!"

Many thanks to the Grassland Bird Trust volunteers who shared their thoughts on the birds of spring. What are your favorites? We'd love you to share some thoughts... **Scan the QR code to read the full article.**



NOW YOU SEE BIRDS, SOMEDAY YOU WON'T?

There have been grassland birds in the fields around Fort Edward since farmers cleared those fields for agriculture in the 19th century. In 1979, New York Audubon designated 13,000 of those acres an Important Bird Area (IBA) in recognition of this exceptional breeding and wintering habitat for at-risk grassland birds.

Grassland birds **must** have grasslands to survive. Grasslands are disappearing in New York State so fast that the Fort Edward IBA is now the second largest Grassland Bird Conservation Center remaining in Eastern New York according to the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).



In our Fall 2022 Newsletter we alerted our supporters to a solar project that Boralex, a Canadian company, is planning to build right in the heart of the IBA.

Given New York State regulations designed to deliver 70% of the state's electricity from renewable sources by 2030, the project is likely to be approved. We support renewable energy, but consider the IBA to be a very poor choice for a solar project of this size.

THE LATEST INFORMATION

According to the latest information we have, the proposed Boralex solar project will cover 650 acres with solar panels and eat up an additional 220 acres for roads, fencing, transmission lines, etc. The panels will be there for probably 30 years and we believe will cause a permanent decline in the birds that rely on the IBA to survive.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

We hope you will support our efforts, whether with financial donations, volunteer time, and/or showing up for our events. Check out our website for opportunities at GrasslandBirdTrust.org.

We know that the panels will disrupt the low aerial hunting style of the endangered Short-eared Owls and threatened Northern Harriers.

Based on our understanding of the New York State regulations, Boralex is only required to conserve 338 acres in exchange for the 870 acres that they are taking away from the birds for the solar project.

We believe that the birds need and deserve more.

WHAT GBT IS DOING NOW

We are in regular discussions with Boralex and, assuming this solar project gets built, we will dedicate ourselves to working with Boralex, local landowners, and others to increase the amount of land that is conserved for birds. **Watch for our e-blasts as we will keep you updated as we learn more.**



DONATE TODAY!

Visit GrasslandBirdTrust.org/donate or scan the QR code.

Your donation of any amount will protect the grassland birds in the Important Bird Area.



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A HOOT HOOT HOORAY FOR THE GBT VOLUNTEER HONOR ROLL!

While we don't have room to thank all of our wonderful volunteers, we want to call out a few very special people who show up time and again to help GBT conserve critical habitat for grassland birds:

- Linda Anderson
- Peter Benoit
- Tracey Boyd
- Karen Chapman
- Mark Di Ianni
- Tom Federlin and Nancy Sutin
- Mark Janey
- Elizabeth Nichols
- Robert Parker
- Steve Sanford
- Edwin and Anna Schiele

And special shout outs to Ron Renoni, Conservation and Stewardship Committee Chair, and Gordon Ellmers whose wondrous photos keep us inspired and grace so many of our communications!



Volunteers out on a winter survey