



Trip Report for Readfield Conservation Commission

Date: Monday, August 30, 2021

The Readfield field is a small, diverse grassland habitat with little invasive species pressure and as such, it is an important resource for wildlife and worth preserving.

Grasslands of all sizes are a critical habitat for many wildlife species, including pollinators, songbirds, raptors, deer, fox, turtles etc. throughout the year. Though lacking some of the nesting habitat value of large (greater than 10 acre) fields, fields smaller than five acres still provide very important habitat. Some benefits your grassland provides:

- Pollinator and beneficial insect habitat: The plight of honeybees, monarch butterflies, birds, bats and other native pollinators have recently placed a renewed sense of urgency on the conservation of local pollinator habitats. The mix of species in this field provides blooming plants for much of the season. Abundant goldenrod and other late blooming species present on the site provide pollen for native bees, butterflies and other pollinator species and are home to even more beneficial insects. It has been shown that goldenrod is a critical protein source for our native bees to make it through the winter. The field also contains a significant amount of milkweed, a required species for our important and seriously declining monarch butterfly population. (Note on Monarchs: Monarchs may soon be a protected species. On the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service web page it states “On December 15, 2020, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced that listing the monarch as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act is warranted, but precluded by higher priority listing actions. The decision is the result of an extensive status review of the monarch that compiled and assessed the monarch’s current and future status. The monarch is now a candidate under the Endangered Species Act; we will review its status annually until a listing decision is made.”)
- Nesting birds: According to the State of the Birds ([www.stateofthebirds.org](http://www.stateofthebirds.org)), grassland birds and their habitat are disappearing fast. Bird species that depend on grasslands have declined, along with their habitats, faster than any other group of birds in New England. Ground-nesting sparrow species (Song and possibly Savannah) may nest in this field in the spring. For use as nesting habitat, it is important to have field centers remain undisturbed, as this is where the nesting activity will take place. (Field edges will be avoided due to increased predator pressure.)
- Wildlife foraging area: For resident and migrating songbirds, the field provides food in the form of insects and seeds. Mice and other small mammals inhabiting the field will also



provide a food source for raptors and mammalian predators such as foxes. Once other larger fields have been mowed, smaller standing fields such as this one, are even more important as feeding areas for all of these species. The benefits of this as a forage area extends both ways beyond the nesting calendar, as migrating warblers, sparrows, bobolinks and other birds species moving through in the spring and fall will use these areas to feed.

- Cover and protection for species: The field will also provide cover for many animals, including juvenile birds working to build up flight muscles after fledging, and fawns that are left in grasslands by their mothers for protection in the spring before the fawns are mobile enough to travel. Though they are considered a woodlands species, American Woodcock (also in population decline) will use fields during different periods of their life cycle.

#### Recommendations:

- Mow as late in the fall as possible (September-October) to allow late-blooming wildflowers (such as asters and goldenrod) to serve as nectar sources for migrating butterflies, hummingbirds and other pollinators. Furthermore, letting these plants go to seed provides a food source for many birds as well.
- Consider mowing the field or part of the field only every other year to help increase wildflower and insect diversity. Alternatively, consider establishing a rotational mowing program in which different parts of a field are mowed at different times. This creates a patchwork of different grass heights that provide cover and feeding opportunities for the greatest number of wildlife.
- Consider the possibility of adding nest boxes to the site to allow other birds to take advantage of the habitat benefits of this site.
- Consider the possibility of pollinator enhancement of the site with additional plantings of high value pollinator species.

I am happy to discuss any of these ideas further or help with the siting of the softball field if the project moves forward. Please feel free to contact me via email or phone.  
([laura.lecker@me.nacdnet.net](mailto:laura.lecker@me.nacdnet.net) ; 207-790-0617).

Sincerely,

Laura Suomi—Lecker

Technical Director and Manager of *Ag Allies* statewide grassland bird program