

# Saving Southern Maryland's Grassland Birds through Bird-friendly Mowing

A Collaborative Project of

Farmers Feeding Southern Maryland  
Historic Sotterley, Inc.  
Southern Maryland Audubon Society  
Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust

Contacts: David Moulton 240 278 4473, [Moulton.DavidH@gmail.com](mailto:Moulton.DavidH@gmail.com)  
Joe Goldsmith 301 643 5617, [JWGoldsmith@yahoo.com](mailto:JWGoldsmith@yahoo.com)  
BJ Bowling 301 399 3405, [NewportValleyFarm@gmail.com](mailto:NewportValleyFarm@gmail.com)

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## FIRST MOWING OCCURS IN HOLLYWOOD, MD “BIRD-FRIENDLY MOWING” EXPERIMENT



Eastern Meadowlark Photo credit: Bill Hubick

Dear Friend:

We now have initial data from five successive weeks of point counts in our hayfield, confirming that we have significant activity in all 3 count circles. Both Eastern Meadowlarks and Grasshopper Sparrows are present and singing. There have been incidents of pair chasing by both species, which appeared to be courtship displays, not hostile territorial defenses. As yet, we have not observed confirmed breeding, such as carrying nesting material or food for young. While it is difficult to observe these grassland species at a distance of up to 100 meters (the radius of our count circles), it would appear that we are not yet at the stage of females on nest.



Grasshopper Sparrow

Photo credit: David Moulton

This week, the mowing is occurring on the largest portion of the experiment site, so this will really change things. Birds that were ready to nest are going to find that their nesting locations have been stripped of grass cover. They will be forced to scramble for new nesting sites. Will they try to relocate to the unmowed section? Is this “early mowing” early enough to have avoided any significant egg damage? How long will it take for the birds to return to this section to attempt another nest? How has this early mowing date affected the value of the hay harvest?

We hope to get some answers to these questions soon. We need to find the right balance between the commercial needs of hay farmers and the reproductive needs of these threatened grassland species of birds. Over 90 percent of Maryland’s land is held privately, so we cannot save these birds if we look only to public landowners.

Thanks again to our partners in this collaboration – Farmers Feeding Southern Maryland, Southern Maryland Audubon Society, Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust and Historic Sotterley, Inc. And a special thanks as well to the volunteers who are helping David with the point counts – Tyler Bell, Marcia Watson and Bob Boxwell.

Sincerely,

Co-coordinators:

*David Moulton*

*Joe Goldsmith*

*BJ Bowling*

For further information, contact David Moulton at 240 278 4473, [Moulton.DavidH@gmail.com](mailto:Moulton.DavidH@gmail.com).