

Birds of the Fort Edward Grasslands Important Bird Area



Red-tailed Hawk – This common hawk can be seen throughout the year soaring over fields or perched in a tree looking for prey. It's often identified by its faint breast band, rufous upper tail, and dark leading edge of wings when in flight.

Rough-legged Hawk – This hawk over-winters here from northern Canada. Two color phases occur. The light phase is best told from the Red-tailed Hawk by its darker belly, dark band on its tail, and dark wrist patches when in flight. The dark phase is almost completely dark brown with partial white underwings that show in flight.



Northern Harrier – This raptor soars low over fields searching for prey. It's best told by its white rump. It also has a faint facial disk, used for enhanced hearing, which can be seen at close distances. The males are grayish above. Females are brown above and often larger than the males. Listed as threatened in New York.

American Kestrel – North America's smallest falcon, it is often seen on utility wires. Male has bluish-gray wings and rusty-orange back. Female is duller with brown wings. Both have two black sideburns on each side of their face. This species is in rapid decline across New York State.



Short-eared Owl – This owl is best seen at dusk during winter where it hunts low over the ground after Northern Harriers have returned to roost for the night. It has irregular wing beats that may cause this bird to appear bat-like when observed from a distance. It appears neck-less in flight giving its body a teardrop shape from head to tail. Listed as endangered in New York.

Killdeer – This shorebird is often found in fields running along the ground or circling above. It nests on bare ground with minimal nesting material. Identified by its two neck bands and *kill-deeaaa* or *kill-a-dee* call, it can be very noisy when more than one are present.



Upland Sandpiper – This bird can be seen perched on telephone poles and fence posts. Slightly larger than a Killdeer with a proportionately longer neck and black beady eyes, this overall brownish bird gives a drawn out *whoop-woooooo* call and prefers the camouflage of tall grass exposing only its head. Listed as threatened in New York.

Bobolink – This bird has the longest migration of any songbird – 11,000 miles from Ft. Edward to its wintering home in the east Andes of South America. Bobolinks are one of a few species that employ nannies – unmated males and females – to help care for their young! Males are black underneath and yellow and white above. Females are light brown with darker streaks on their back and crown.





Eastern Meadowlark – Once extremely common, this bird has declined 72% in the last 40 years, largely due to loss of grassland habitat. Its yellow underside and the black “V” on its chest are distinct. It can be seen perched on fence posts singing.

Horned Lark – Most often seen in late fall and winter in agricultural areas. Look for this species foraging on recently plowed or manured fields. They have a distinct black mask, black necklace, and a dull brownish back. Habitat changes in its Arctic breeding grounds caused by global warming, as well as fragmentation and destruction of grasslands, have caused populations to decline 56% in the last 40 years. Listed as species of concern in New York.



Snow Bunting – A winter resident in the Fort Edward Grasslands IBA, this is North America’s “whitest” song bird. It’s often seen in flocks on the roadside eating salt and gravel. It may form mixed flocks with Horned Larks and Lapland Longspurs. This species breeds in the Arctic Tundra and has declined 64% since mid-60s due to habitat changes in its breeding area and an increase of predators—both a result of global warming.

Field Sparrow – This sparrow is often identified by its song which starts with a few down-slurred separated whistles that gradually speeds up—similar to a bouncing ping-pong ball. Each male has its own distinct version of this song that may help distinguish individuals. It has a tan to gray unstreaked breast and a distinct white eye ring. The species has declined 68% in last 40 years.



Savannah Sparrow – This small brown bird often runs on the ground or flies just above the grass to avoid predators. It has a streaked breast that may form a central dot similar to a Song Sparrow, but its tail is short and notched instead of long and rounded. It also often shows bright yellow between the base of the bill and the eye.

Grasshopper Sparrow – This sparrow is identified by its call—a drawn out “buzz” similar to an insect. When disturbed, it will fly a short way then drop out of sight into the tall grass. Nests of this species are often destroyed by early mowing of hayfields. It has a clear tan breast and sides and a brown crown with a thin white central stripe. 65% decline since 1967 due to loss of habitat. Listed as species of concern in New York.



Henslow's Sparrow – This is the most elusive sparrow in the area. Often hidden, it gives a *tis-sip* call (like a zipper or a hiccup) and often calls at night. It has an olive-green head and neck, thin brown streaking on the upper breast, and broad dark streaks on the back. Listed as threatened in New York.

Vesper Sparrow – Another resident sparrow of the grasslands, it has a thin white eye ring, grayish-brown streaked back and white underneath. It sings from the highest perch in its territory. It does not drink water but gets the water it needs through eating insects, seeds, etc. Listed as species of concern in New York.

