

2024 BIRD SPECIES OF CONCERN SURVEY AT WHITEWATER CANYON

by members of the Dubuque Audubon Society

2024 represents the final year of a 3-year survey of grassland nesting birds in Whitewater Canyon. 6 sites in the grassland areas of Whitewater Canyon were surveyed from May 18th through July 12th. Each site was monitored for approximately 10 minutes with special emphasis on identifying nesting grassland species of birds. Special attention was given to locating Henslow's Sparrows, Grasshopper Sparrows, Bobolinks, and Sedge Wrens. The 6 survey sites are described as follows:

Site 1: Gate Post Parking Lot—site is bordered on the east by the main parking lot and contains a thick stand of restored prairie which extends to the north and west. This site was burned in the spring of this year.

Site 2: CRJB Family Bench—site is located approximately ¼ mile straight west of Site 1 and is at the intersection of hiking trails. The vegetation is predominately restored prairie grass with forbes and has a medium number of invasive trees and shrubby plants. This site was burned in the spring of this year.

Site 3: 2nd Bluebird house on Stream Bottom Trail—site is located north of the other sites and has a narrow band of restored prairie adjacent to woodlands on both sides of the trail. This site was burned in the spring of this year.

Site 4: Astronomical Post off trail—site is directly south of the trail and has a food plot on its west side and the prairie on the east side was burned in the spring of 2023.

Site 5: Where terrace meets path—site is approximately ¼ mile south on the same trail as Site 4 and is where an old terrace meets the trail. Vegetation includes restored prairie grass with some sumac and tree invasion. There is a pollinator mix of prairie forbes planted here.

Site 6: Bluebird House #9—this site is located approximately ¼ mile west of Site 2 on the Overlook Trail. It is surrounded by a mature stand of restored prairie with some invasion of sumac and trees.

TOTAL SPECIES OF CONCERN DOCUMENTED:

(see attached Site Map for locations)

DATE SURVEYED	SURVEYOR/S	Henslow's Sparrow	Grasshopper Sparrow	Sedge Wren	Bobolink
May 18	Jim Oleson	2	4	2	0
May 25	Bob Walton & Mary Leigh	4	3	1	2
May 31	Ken Kiss & Mary Leigh	1	0	0	0
June 6	Bob Walton	2	1	1	5
June 13	Bob Walton	3	0	0	1
June 21	Ken Kiss	0	0	0	0
June 28	Bob Walton & Paul Winer	3	1	0	1
July 8	Jim Oleson	4	3	2	1
July 12	Ken Kiss and Mary Leigh	1	0	1	0
	TOTALS:	20	12	7	10

CONCLUSIONS:

All 4 species of concern were observed at the 6 sites, and observations totaled 20 Henslow's Sparrows, 12 Grasshopper Sparrows, 7 Sedge Wrens, and 10 Bobolinks.

Bobolinks were sighted for the first time in the 3-year study, with nesting sites located in the portions of the grasslands that were burned in mid-April.

The Henslow's Sparrow population appeared to be stable and was in the older, unburned, tall stands of prairie grass that were scattered with small, shrubby sumac and multiflora rose near Sites 4,5, and 6.

The Sedge Wrens continued to be found in a moist area near an old field terrace, approximately 100 yards southeast of Site 2. They showed a modest increase over past years, probably due to the wetter conditions in 2024.

Grasshopper Sparrows were mostly located near the short-grass, spring-burned prairie areas near Sites 1 and 2. The number of Grasshopper Sparrows in their recently burned areas had a large increase over prior years.

Additional grassland birds found in extremely high numbers at all sites included Dickcissels, Common Yellowthroats, American Goldfinches, Field Sparrows, Eastern Meadowlarks, Eastern Kingbirds, and Red-winged Blackbirds. Song Sparrows and Ring-necked Pheasants were also observed in good numbers, along with several sightings of Vesper Sparrows.