



Building Partnerships for Regional Grassland Bird Conservation in the Southeastern US

06-105

Background:

Grassland birds have been declining at greater rates over the past 35 years than any other avian group across North America. Several of the key priority species are declining to the point that listing for protection under the Endangered Species Act is a possibility if significant conservation efforts are not focused on this critical problem. Eastern military bases are in a unique situation because these bases support many of the priority species that are at risk and military bases also are vulnerable to major disruption if listing were to occur. Proactive management by the military may very well help solve this problem, thereby minimizing impacts on the primary military mission. Our research has been focused on helping the military develop conservation strategies for grassland birds to mitigate potential impacts in the future.



Photo by Jim Giocomo

Fort Campbell provides significant habitat for nesting Henslow's Sparrows, a rare and declining grassland bird.

Objective:

The overall purpose of this project was to develop a partnership among Fort Campbell, KY and other conservation organizations, and use that partnership as the vehicle to promote grassland bird conservation on public and private lands surrounding Fort Campbell. We also provided an inventory of breeding and wintering grassland bird populations and habitat within and adjacent to Fort Campbell as a means of identifying potential cooperating landowners, and we used Fort Campbell as a case study to identify specific management recommendations to meet military training needs and winter habitat requirements for declining grassland bird species.

Summary of Approach:

We built upon the information already collected at Fort Campbell by expanding the area and time we monitor grassland bird populations. One of our goals was to see if and how the populations within the base are different from

the populations in the grasslands outside the base. We inventoried the presence, abundance, return rates, and productivity of grassland birds in fields within and outside the base during the breeding and winter seasons. We presented this information at regional and national meetings to promote cooperation between the military and other conservation partners.

Benefits:

This project provides a proactive strategy for integrating grassland bird conservation into the military mission by demonstrating generally how it can work at Fort Campbell. This project helps land managers understand the relative role of military lands compared to the surrounding private lands in the productivity and survival of grassland birds for breeding and wintering. Finally, this project is bringing together local and regional resources to help ensure the region surrounding Fort Campbell is managed to increase the quality and quantity of grassland habitats thus helping to reduce the relative management burden on DoD lands.

Accomplishments:

- Inventoried grassland birds during the breeding and wintering seasons and associated habitats at Fort Campbell and surrounding region, including documentation of one of the largest eastern Henslow's Sparrow populations.
- Documented that DoD is sustaining grassland bird populations through their land management practices at Fort Campbell.
- Documented the compatibility of military training practices with grassland bird conservation practices.
- Develop web-based informational materials for grassland bird conservation on eastern military installations.
- Promoted grassland bird conservation through working with the Southeastern Partners In Flight working group.

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