

HABITAT SELECTION BY DICKCISSELS

Dickcissel populations are confusing. The birds increase and decrease in numbers for reasons that are often not apparent. However, some of the changes are clearly related to land use and farming practices. It would be interesting to document exactly how farming practices effect the birds. This study is designed to do that by counting Dickcissels in various types of field and relating changes in their populations to changes in the field and neighboring fields.

Male Dickcissels are relatively easy to count, since they sit up on tall perches and sing all morning long. Counts can be done in mid or late morning. Keeping the number of birds straight is easiest if you have a map of the field and record bird locations, noting which birds are different. You know two birds are different if you hear or see them both at the same time, or if they are very far apart. Dickcissels have fairly small territories. Adequate maps can be sketched in the field or traced using slides that are available from the county ASCS (Agricultural Stabilisation and Conservation Service).

Virtually any field 15 acres or larger is worth studying. Interesting fields include prairies, pastures, hayfields, oat and wheat fields, cornfields, soybean fields, and fallow fields. An 80-acre field is as much as one would want to check.

Once you select one or more interesting field(s), ask the owner for permission to study it. Locate the field on a county map (available from your county engineer in the county courthouse) and send in the map with the completed forms. Determine how large the field is (ask the farmer or inquire at the local ASCS office). Fillout the description questionnaire below. Then visit the field several times on the the late spring and summer, counting Dickcissels. The field should be visited about * May 15, May 29, June 12, June 26, July 10, and July 24. More trips would help, but are not necessary. Fill out the census sheet for each visit.

Return the map and questionnaires to ** by August 1. The results will appear in the fall issue of Iowa Bird Life, to be set out in the winter.

* change dates so these are Saturdays

** whoever

DICKCISSELS - FIELD DESCRIPTION

1. This field is in _____ county and is owned by _____.
2. This field is a
___ prairie
___ pasture
___ cultivated field planted to ___ corn, ___ soybeans,
___ milo, ___ wheat, ___ oats, ___ other _____
___ hayfield, planted to ___ alfalfa, ___ red clover,
___ grass (name the species, if possible _____)
___ other (Name _____)
___ fallow field covered with _____
___ other (specify _____)
3. This field has
___ terraces. Are the faces of the terraces covered by plants
___ different than those in the main part of the field? _____
___ sod waterways
___ sod endrows
___ hedgerows
___ trees
___ open water
___ other interruptions (specify _____)
4. Are there grassy road ditches at the edge of the field? _____
5. What are the habitats found around the edges of the field?
6. How big is the field? _____
7. Is there anything else we should know about the field?

Name _____

Address _____

DICKCISSEL CENSUS SHEETS

What management practices have affected this field since you visited it last? Please give a date or approximate date for the management practice,

- ___ None
- ___ Plowing, disking, etc. Date _____
- ___ Planting. Date _____
- ___ Mowing hay. Date _____
- ___ Harvesting. Date _____
- ___ Mowing stubble. Date _____
- ___ Clipping weeds, cultivating, bean wiping. Date _____
- ___ Crop cut for silage. Date _____
- ___ Grazing. Date it began cracked _____
- ___ Burning. Date _____
- ___ Other. Explanation and date _____

What management practices have effected other fields of all types in the neighborhood since your last census?

- ___ Plowing, dicking, etc.
- ___ Planting
- ___ Mowing
- ___ harvesting small grains
- ___ cutting silage
- ___ harvesting other crops
- ___ cultivating, clipping weeds, etc.
- ___ grazing which began recently
- ___ harvesting silage
- ___ burning
- ___ other. _____

Date of this count _____

Number of male Dickcissels _____

Number of female or immature Dickcissels seen _____
(Usually few or none will be seen)

Describe any evidence of nesting
___ Adult carrying nest material
___ Nest found (describe contents _____)
___ Courtship or copulation observed _____
___ Adult carrying food
___ Fledgling seen

Other species present in the field (optional, sometimes interesting)

Name _____

Address _____