

JOHNSON - CEDAR CO. BREEDING BIRD ATLAS NEWSLETTER

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Breeding season is in full swing now so I hope you're all out there diligently working. I've been enjoying the BBA work. I've found that it has improved my observation skills as well as my knowledge of bird calls. I've chosen to concentrate on grassland birds for this issue. Most of our blocks have some suitable habitat for most of these species. You'll notice that I emphasize songs for many of these birds. Many of these species will be missed if you don't know the songs. I think the I.C. Public Library has a collection of bird songs. I would also be glad to lend my records or tapes for anyone to copy or listen to.

I will be out of town from June 6th till at least the 28th so I will not be able to bird during this time. When I get back, however, I will be happy to go out and help confirm species with anyone. Have a good June.

Bell's Vireo

This is a common nester to our southwest, but it is frequently overlooked. It prefers overgrown pastures with shrubs or newer willow thickets. It is best identified by voice which is very distinctive. It would be nice to document some additional occurrences of this bird.

Bobolink

I have found this bird on all but one of my blocks. Check grasslands, hayfields, and weedy fields. If brushy vegetation is present it will often sing from this brush, however it spends much time on the ground. Easily identifiable in flight, it's song is distinctive and they are often heard before they are seen.

Willow Flycatcher

This species seems to be uncommon and localized. I have documented only one sighting. They prefer dry brushy fields and thickets along streams and roads. Although it is one of those 'confusing flycatchers', it is readily separable by voice which really does sound like a raspy "fitz-bew".

Dickcissel

Abundant and widespread, however Iowa Birds states that they have been declining in Iowa over the past fifteen years. Try to keep track of the number seen for this species. Also since it has been reported that there are a disproportionate number of males to females, lets keep track of the numbers of each. Lives in pastures, grassy fields, ditches.

Eastern and Western Meadowlarks

Both nest here in a fairly even ratio. They can only be separated by song. Keep track of the numbers of each kind.

Field Sparrow

Common nester, often heard before seen. Call is a rising trill. Light pinkish bill and legs are diagnostic. Nests in brushy pastures.

Grasshopper Sparrow

Common. Occurs in grasslands, alfalfa fields. Best located by voice which is a grasshopper-like buzz. They often sing from cover, but they can be sighted if patient. A very small sparrow.

Savannah Sparrow

Uncommon and local nester primarily found in northern and central Iowa. They superficially look like the more common Song Sparrow. They are best located by voice, although they prefer shorter grassy fields where they are more easily seen.

Vesper Sparrow

Also looks somewhat like Song and Savannah Sparrows. Common summer resident. They like both grasslands and fencerows along cultivated areas. The white outer tail feathers are conspicuous in flight.

Lark Sparrow

Locally common. I have seen only one in one block. Very distinctive when seen. Often hangs out on roads. It would be nice to locate more of both Lark and Vesper Sparrows in Johnson and Cedar counties.

Nesting Locations

Ground -- Dickcissel, Bobolink, Meadowlarks, Vesper, Grasshopper, Savannah, Lark Sparrows.

Ground or Short Brush -- Song, Field Sparrows.

Shrub or Tree -- Bell's Vireo, Willow Flycatcher