

## Consultation on the Recovery Strategy for the Bobolink

Environment and Climate Change Canada wishes to consult with you regarding the proposed Recovery Strategy for the Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) in Canada. Here are some frequently asked questions on the Bobolink.

### Frequently Asked Questions

- What is a Bobolink?
- Why is the Bobolink at risk?
- Why did I receive a consultation postcard or see a consultation advertisement on social media?
- How can I comment on the recovery strategy?
- What habitat does the Bobolink need to nest and breed?
- How is the Bobolink protected?
- What is critical habitat?
- How is critical habitat defined for the Bobolink?
- How does the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) protect species at risk on private land?
- Are there any exceptions to the prohibitions?
- How can I help the Bobolink?
- If I have critical habitat on land I own or manage, what kinds of activities could destroy it?
- How can I share my Bobolink observations?
- How were Indigenous People, provinces, and others consulted on this recovery strategy?

### What is a Bobolink?

The Bobolink is a medium-sized migratory songbird. The species has a distinct, bubbly, musical song. During the breeding season, males have black underparts and lighter upperparts with a yellow patch on the back of the head and neck. Females, as well as males outside of the breeding season, are light beige streaked with brown.

### Why is the Bobolink at risk?

In 2010, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) assessed Bobolink as Threatened due to both long and short-term population declines. At the time, the species had experienced population loss of 88% since 1970, with a continued loss of 38% between 1998 and 2008. Currently, the species' population trend has improved slightly but is still declining, with losses of about 25% between 2009 and 2019. The species is threatened by mortality from agricultural operations (e.g., haying and mowing during the nesting period), habitat loss, and pesticide exposure. The Bobolink was listed as Threatened on the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) in 2017.

### Why did I receive a consultation postcard or see a consultation advertisement on social media?

If you have received a consultation postcard or saw a consultation advertisement on social media, it is because some of the proposed critical habitat for the Bobolink is on or near your property. The purpose of this notification is to seek input on the **content** of the proposed recovery strategy for the Bobolink from landowners with critical habitat on or near their property during the 60-day public comment period, now underway.



### How can I comment on the recovery strategy?

Comments on the **content** of the proposed Recovery Strategy for the Bobolink in Canada are being sought during the current 60-day consultation period.

To submit comments or for more information on the consultation process, contact us at [RecoveryPlanning-Planificationduretablissement@ec.gc.ca](mailto:RecoveryPlanning-Planificationduretablissement@ec.gc.ca) or 1-800-668-6767 (toll-free).

In your message, please state your name, email address, telephone number, and province so we can direct your inquiry to the correct regional staff.

### What habitat does the Bobolink need to nest and breed?

Bobolinks depend on open grassland habitats including meadows, hayfields, and pastures. The species breeds in all provinces across Canada, ranging from southern British Columbia to the island of Newfoundland. Bobolinks establish breeding territories that are used for many different activities such as mating, nesting, feeding, and raising their young.

The Bobolink typically migrates to Canada in early May, and the breeding season extends to the end of August. Nests are built on the ground and consist of two distinct parts: an exterior layer of coarse dead grass and weed stems, and an interior layer of fine grasses. Males establish pair bonds with several females (1 male: 2-3 females) and each female will build a nest and lay eggs. Males will help feed and raise the young birds. This is known as polygyny, so where there is one male there are likely two or more active nests!

### How is the Bobolink protected?

The Bobolink is a migratory bird protected by the *Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994* (MBCA) in Canada. The nests and eggs of Bobolinks are also protected in Canada under the MBCA, which was first passed in 1917.

Because the Bobolink was listed as a species at risk in 2017, it is also protected by the Canadian *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). Residences of species at risk are also protected under SARA; the Bobolink's nest is considered its residence.

The Bobolink might also be protected by provincial laws. It is your responsibility to know which laws and regulations apply in your area.

### What is critical habitat?

Critical habitat is the habitat that is necessary for the survival and recovery of the species. Identifying critical habitat for species at risk is a key part of a recovery strategy. In order for an area to be identified as critical habitat, it must have a specific set of characteristics required by the species (these are referred to as biophysical attributes in the recovery strategy). Critical habitat also needs to contribute towards meeting the goals that are set in the recovery document for the species to achieve recovery and/or survival in terms of its population numbers and the area across which it is distributed (Population and Distribution Objectives).

### How is critical habitat defined for the Bobolink?

Proposed critical habitat is found in the areas identified in the proposed recovery strategy for the Bobolink. Proposed critical habitat for the Bobolink includes a specific set of habitat characteristics necessary for the survival and recovery of the species, within areas that have evidence of breeding

(occupancy) by the species. These characteristics are typically present in open habitats such as native grasslands (tallgrass prairies, alvar grasslands, beaver meadows, pastures, grassland restoration sites and grassy peatlands) and agricultural grasslands (hayfields, pastures, meadows, and uncultivated fields).

Places unsuitable for the Bobolink to nest and forage are not critical habitat. Those places include roads, parking lots, and waterbodies. **Remember** that nests, eggs, and individuals of the Bobolink are protected everywhere under the MBCA and SARA, even outside areas of critical habitat.

How does the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) protect species at risk on private land?

You can learn about the protection of species at risk and their habitats on private land by visiting the [Education Centre Webpage](#).

Are there any exceptions to the prohibitions?

You can learn about the exceptions to the *Species at Risk Act* prohibitions by visiting the [Education Centre Webpage](#).

How can I help the Bobolink?

Ways you can help the Bobolink include, but are not limited to:

- Practice voluntary stewardship activities and best management practices for grassland birds;
  - If you have hayfields, pastures or other suitable habitats:
    - Know which birds are present, or could be present, on your property
    - Refrain from mowing/cutting until the nesting season is over
    - Manage stocking rates to avoid degraded habitat conditions and trampling
    - Remove or limit shrubs and small trees encroaching into grassland areas
    - Ensure areas remain grass-dominated (at least three different species), and limit alfalfa to <25%
- Support local producers using best practices for wildlife and grassland birds
- Horse owners and riders can support bird-friendly hay producers
- Work in cooperation with Environment and Climate Change Canada and/or local conservation groups
- Submit your sightings of Bobolink to eBird, iNaturalist, or your provincial conservation data centre

If I have critical habitat on land I own or manage, what kinds of activities could destroy it?

Bobolinks need appropriate habitat to nest and forage. There are certain activities that are likely to result in the destruction of Bobolink critical habitat. These include, but are not limited to:

- Conversion of native grassland habitat that results from activities such as agricultural, urban/commercial, and recreational/tourism development, oil and gas drilling, mining and quarrying, renewable energy development, road building, and tree planting (i.e., habitat loss);
- Conversion of agricultural grassland habitat that results from the same activities listed above, and causes a net loss in habitat (in other words is not offset by providing another area of suitable habitat);
- Mowing or cutting that would lead to the reduction and/or loss of vegetation used for nest building and cover during the breeding season;
- Indiscriminate pesticide use;

- Livestock grazing that leads to degraded habitat conditions; and
- Prescribed burning during the breeding season.
- Find out if you need a permit to conduct activities on or near critical habitat
  - [Species at Risk Act: information note for landowners - Canada.ca](#)

How can I share my Bobolink observations?

You can share your observations with your provincial conservation data centre, or on the [eBird](#), or [iNaturalist](#) platform. Remember to:

- Provide the precise location of your observation;
- Describe the place where the observation was made; and
- Indicate how many Bobolinks you saw

How were Indigenous People, provinces, and others consulted on this recovery strategy?

Environment and Climate Change Canada has worked with provinces, Indigenous People, as well as the Parks Canada Agency, to develop the recovery strategy for the Bobolink. Environment and Climate Change Canada also worked with a technical working group to develop the strategy; participants of this group are listed in the Acknowledgements section of the recovery strategy.