



# A Home on the Range



Cut from the vast deciduous forests that once cloaked the Tennessee River Valley, northern Alabama's fertile farmlands have become home to a variety of birds and other wildlife. However, as more and more fields become residential or commercial developments, many familiar grassland species are beginning to decline.

Many grassland bird species such as the Northern Bobwhite have distinct far-carrying calls and intricate plumage with brown, yellow, and black patterns. These patterns allow them to hide amongst the grass and wildflowers and elude detection from predators. Other species to look for at the agriculture research station include Eastern Meadowlark, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Dickcissel.

In addition to distinctive avian species, another great attraction to grasslands are the numerous wildflowers whose vibrant blooms are constantly changing the color of the landscape. A wonderful variety can be found, with colors ranging from the vivid yellows of Coneflowers and Black-eyed Susans to the deep reds and oranges of Indian Blanket and Butterfly Weed.

## Alabama's New Residents

In recent years, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers have been found in the surrounding area. This graceful bird normally nests further west in Texas and Oklahoma but has been expanding eastward. The

long streamer-like tail, subtle pale gray body, and soft salmon-orange underwing make this jewel a welcome addition to the list of breeding birds in Alabama. Look for scissortails perched along fencerows and in small isolated trees.



Scissor-tailed Flycatcher/Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Greg W. Lasley



Northern Harrier/Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Robert E. Barber

## Value of Farms to Birds

Many grassland birds use hayfields, meadows, and pastures for breeding, while others nest in nearby woods or shrubby margins. Crop fields and other open areas are often used for hunting and foraging by raptors and sparrows in the winter while flycatchers hunt insects in these same fields each summer. In return, these birds limit potential threats to crops.



Dickcissel singing/USFWS, Steve Maslowski

## Grassland Birds are Declining

Across North America grassland bird species are declining. Although the reasons for the decline are not fully understood, in many cases these declines are due to loss of breeding habitat. As more open fields are paved and alien species choke out native ones, these birds are losing their homes. The ADCNR is working with numerous partners to reverse this trend by managing selected remaining grasslands for native birds.