

Management of Ashley Field at Bartholomew's Cobble

July 12, 2023

- Bartholomew's Cobble has a mix of grasslands which provide important ecological and scenic values. Fields occur on a little more than 1/3 of the acreage of the reservation and include hayfields, pastures, non-woody old fields, and patches of wet meadow within the larger fields – a mix that contributes to diversity of habitats for wildlife and plants.
- Field management is accomplished using a mix of staff resources (mowing, invasive plant control), contractors (heavy mowing for restoration, invasive plant control), and local farmers (mowing, liming, fertilizing, seeding) and depends on the goals for the fields.
- Ashley Field, in particular, supports bobolinks and has had a consistent population for many years averaging approximately 8-10 males (assuming pairs) annually.
- Between 2005-2016, the Trustees conservation ranger was monitoring Ashley Field for bobolinks with weekly (or more frequent) observations recorded by section of field. Based on this intensive monitoring that noted both numbers of bobolinks and where they were observed in the field, we began to allow small sections of the field (usually a small strip close to the road) to be mowed between July 1-15, although the majority of the field was delayed until after July 15. This provided an opportunity to work to support both our ecological goals (support grassland birds) and provided enough benefit to the local farmer for him to hay the field for us to maintain the grassland habitat.
- Although we were not doing weekly observations after 2017, observations by both staff and trained volunteer bird monitors for Ashley Field were continued which allowed us to continue the year by year evaluation of whether the hay could be cut in sections of the field between July 1 – 15.
- In 2023, we continued this monitoring protocol and allowed the small portion of the field south of the tractor path to get mowed, while the remainder of the field will not be mowed until after July 15th.
- Waiting until August 15th to mow the field will impact the habitat in several ways in our experience, including the shift from a field dominated by grasses to one that will become more dominated by forbs such as goldenrod. This shift in composition will make the field unsuitable for grassland birds. By working with a local farmer who has the equipment to harvest the hay according to our schedule, the vegetation composition can be better maintained with a mix of grass and forbs and a dense thatch layer is not developed. Several fields at Bartholomew's Cobble are not mowed until the fall to provide habitat for plants, pollinators, and other species.
- We will also be conducting vegetation monitoring in 2023 to determine if the structure and composition of the field is still meeting our goals.