



# Cider Mill Grassland Preserve: A Sanctuary for Imperiled Grassland Species

*This land was permanently preserved by D&R Greenway Land Trust in 2010 in partnership with the New Jersey, Fish and Wildlife Division and East Amwell Township.*

## Hundreds of Years of History

Agricultural land has provided home and sanctuary to grassland birds and other wildlife for hundreds of years in the Northeastern United States. Birds such as bobolinks and eastern meadowlarks nested, hunted for food, and returned each spring to continue this cycle. As land was cleared for farming in the 1800s, grassland-dependent species expanded their populations.

Grassland birds use hayfields, meadows, and pastures for breeding, building nests on the ground and foraging exclusively within these areas. Other birds nest along the edges of the fields and rely upon the open areas for feeding on insects and seed. In the fall, the fields provide food for migrating sparrows, larks, and warblers. Raptors including American kestrel, northern harrier and short-eared owl rely on grasslands for hunting small mammals such as meadow voles and jumping mice.

Over the last 100 years, the quality and quantity of grasslands for wildlife has declined due to changes in land use and agricultural practices. Remaining fragmented farmland is no longer suitable for species that require large unbroken tracts. Hayfields that were traditionally harvested late in the season, avoiding impacts to nesting birds, are mowed earlier and more frequently during the growing season.

## Preservation Priority

The 89-acre Cider Mill Grassland Preserve is part of the NJ Natural Heritage Program's designated "Amwell Valley Grassland Macrosite" that totals approximately 1,600 acres. A prime example of agricultural grasslands, this sweeping complex is critical for grassland birds and is a high priority for protection.

## Good Land Stewardship

D&R Greenway Land Trust manages this preserve as a safe haven for grassland-dependent species. Stewardship practices include: mowing later in the season to avoid disturbances and mortalities during the nesting bird breeding season; rotational mowing of fields to enable a wider variety of species; and removing hedgerows to create larger, open grasslands. Patches of milkweed were planted to provide habitat for the vulnerable monarch butterfly that relies on this plant for survival.

*Funding for this interpretive sign provided by Washington Crossing Audubon Society*

**D&R GREENWAY**  
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One Preservation Place, Princeton, New Jersey 08540  
609-924-4646  
[www.drgreenway.org](http://www.drgreenway.org)

Photo credits: Bobolink – Kelly Cogan Azar, Grasshopper sparrow – Rick and Nora Bowers, Horned lark – G. Lasley, Eastern meadowlark – Frank Shufelt, Monarch – Mary Anne Borge, Short-eared owl – Gregg Thompson, Common buckeye – S. Lark

