



▲ BROWN THRASHER
A thicket and grass-nesting bird



SHORT-EARED OWLS do not nest at the Pole Farm, however they do rely on it as their winter habitat. Unlike most owls, short-eared owls roost on the ground, in tufts of grass. This behavior makes them especially vulnerable to disturbance by humans and their dogs. If disturbed too often, these birds, just like nesting songbirds will abandon these fields to find other suitable wintering habitat.

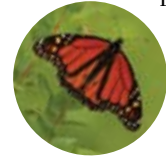
Why Dogs Must be LEASHED!

▲ GROUND-ROOSTING WINTER OWLS

MANY DOG OWNERS feel great joy to see their beloved pup run free through parks and fields, however this “harmless” form of play is not so harmless to the wildlife that call those fields home. Domestic dogs have been bred to track, pursue and even herd other animals and the wild animals in parks can activate their “prey drive.” *Repeated and regular disturbance and chasing by off-leash dogs will cause animals to abandon their habitat.* In addition to wasting energy reserves, off-leash dogs interrupt necessary activities such as feeding, bedding, courtship and rearing young. Some dog pursuits end in injury and even death for the wild animal.

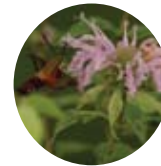
GROUND NESTING SPRING BIRDS

The Pole Farm hosts ground nesting birds from early March through July. Ground nesting birds are very secretive nesters due to the vulnerability of their nest and regular disruption will cause the birds to abandon it. Off-leash dogs running through the fields in pursuit of wildlife create new trails that lead to nests. These trails become wildlife highways that lead ground predators such as skunks, raccoons and foxes to easy meals. If a dog does chase a parent bird from its nest, the resulting chaos may alert other predators of the nest location, specifically hawks.



MANAGING THE POLE FARM as a grassland requires an agreement between the Park Commission and the users of this park. The Park Commission follows a USDA-NRCS created mowing plan to keep the grassland a prime habitat. However, park visitors must do their part and abide by regulation set by the Park Commission to keep the common and rare wildlife in the park. These regulations include staying on the trail and keeping all dogs leashed. Park Commission Rules and Regulations, in accordance with provisions of N.J.S.A. 40:37-95.21, state that all owners are responsible for cleaning up after their dog(s) and disposing of the waste properly. *A dog, cat or other furred animal must be in the custody or under control of its owner and restrained by a leash not exceeding 6 feet in length.* Violators are subject to fines up to \$100. Please report any misconduct to the Sheriff Department at (609) 989-6111 to have a Park Ranger dispatched to the park.

▲ MONARCH BUTTERFLY & HUMMINGBIRD MOTH ►



CREDITS:

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Rare & Endangered Bird Species



MERCER COUNTY PARK NORTHWEST

Also known as the “Pole Farm”



Rare & Endangered Bird Species

of MERCER COUNTY PARK NORTHWEST



EASTERN BLUEBIRD



SAW-WHET OWL

SPECTACULAR BIRDS and other fascinating wildlife call the Pole Farm home. Comprised mostly of grassland habitat—land dominated by grasses and wildflowers with few or no trees, MCP-NW is a rare habitat and critical local resource. Its grasslands support complex wild plant communities and diverse wildlife, including species that are threatened and endangered. Nationally these vital ecosystems are disappearing at an alarming rate due to land development and fragmentation, resulting in the decline of many grassland animals.

To preserve this rare habitat, the Mercer County Park Commission, in conjunction with the USDA-NRCS WHIP program, has managed the Pole Farm's

485 acres of grassland since 2005. Because the Pole Farm has some of the best remaining grassland habitat in central New Jersey, it has been designated an Important Bird Area by New Jersey Audubon Society in partnership with the NJ Endangered and Nongame Species Program and National Audubon Society.

The Pole Farm's inventory of breeding birds includes cavity nesters such as the eastern bluebird and tree swallow and species that nest in scrubby fields such as the yellow warbler, prairie warbler, blue-winged warbler, and field sparrow. Maintaining fields in different stages of growth provides habitat for these birds. To prevent nest destruction or injury to nestlings, all mowing at the Pole Farm is delayed until after July 15 each year.

Winter avian visitors include the short-eared owl, long-eared owl, saw-whet owl, and the occasional rough-legged hawk. Red-tailed hawks and northern harriers inhabit the Pole Farm year round and great horned owls have also nested here.

In addition to the park's spectacular bird population, the Pole Farm supports a variety of wildlife. Coyotes and foxes are common field predators. Reptiles include the eastern garter snake, eastern milk snake and northern black racer, all of whom consume small vertebrates and invertebrates in the field. Eastern box turtles also frequent the Pole Farm grassland, as do white tailed deer. And, at least 28 butterfly species have been documented at the Pole Farm.

THREATENED



BOBOLINK

(Dolichonyx oryzivorus)
Require large tracts of grassland for nesting; practices nest site fidelity; builds nest on ground.

SPECIAL CONCERN



EASTERN MEADOWLARK
(Sturnella magna)

Year-round resident. Nests in farm fields and meadows. Builds a dome-shaped nest on the ground, intertwined with live grasses.

SHORT-EARED OWL ▶

(Asio flammeus)
Breeding population extirpated in New Jersey since 1984. Winters in mid-Atlantic States and mid-west. A nomadic species relying on abundant prey sources.



GRASSHOPPER SPARROW
*(Ammodramus saviarum—*not pictured). Absent or rare in fields less than 75 acres.

BOTH SPARROWS THREATENED



SAVANNAH SPARROW ▶
(Passerculus sandwichensis)
Another ground nesting sparrow.

AMERICAN KESTREL
(Falco sparverius)

Cavity nester; prefers trees in the field or field edge. Populations declining in Northeast, most likely due to habitat destruction and lack of old trees for nesting sites.

SPECIAL CONCERN



BOTH BREEDING POPULATIONS ENDANGERED, NON-BREEDING POPULATIONS SPECIAL CONCERN



◀ **NORTHERN HARRIER**
(Circus cyaneus)
Nests on the ground and roosts in the field in winter. Sometimes roosts communally with short-eared owls.