

Iowa County Success from the Field

Grazing and Grassland Birds

Background

When David and Diane Anderson purchased their Iowa County farm in 2005, the agricultural land consisted primarily of cropland enrolled in the Farm Service Agency's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The management of their acreage continued in this fashion until a portion of the land under the existing CRP contract expired. As an avid birding enthusiast and conservationist, David was interested in keeping this acreage in perennial vegetation for the primary purpose of grassland bird conservation.

Highlights

When David contacted the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in late 2012, he was interested in developing a prescribed grazing system to maintain an open landscape and provide a benefit for grassland birds. During the planning process, a grazing system with 11 paddocks on a total of 44.7 acres was designed. The original design included deferred grazing until late summer on land adjacent to existing CRP to provide additional grassland nesting habitat.

To implement the system, David enrolled in the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) in 2013, under the Beginning Farmer Initiative. He completed forage and biomass planting in 2013 and installed livestock pipeline, watering facilities, as well as additional fence in 2014. "David is now in his fourth year of seasonally contract grazing beef heifers and the results have been outstanding," said Andy Walsh, NRCS District Conservationist. He adds, "The forage production has increased each year through intensive management and the livestock are in excellent condition." David has also been pleased with the grazing system, noting "the prescribed grazing in conjunction with existing CRP has really served to boost grassland bird populations on this property. Several State Threatened and Species of Special Concern such as Henslow's Sparrow, Bobolink, Dickcissel, and Eastern Meadowlark are now common occurrences on-site.

Since his initial success with grazing, David has also implemented pollinator habit, as well as enrolled in the NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program. Future plans include the development of a Conservation Activity Plan for the woodlands on the property.



David with his herd of beef heifers, which are seasonally grazed.



A Henslow's Sparrow from the Anderson farm. Photo courtesy of David Anderson.

