

Glorious Meadow



Meadows are a major component of Vermont's open landscapes, but they are rapidly disappearing throughout the state due to the spread of development. The meadow in Otter View Park offers opportunities for study, teaching and recreational nature observation. The meadow is also important for its contribution to the area's biodiversity—the summertime buzz of insects, the springtime birdsong and animal tracks in the snow are seasonal signs of biodiversity.

Periodic mowing in Otter View Park not only supports passive recreation like nature walks, but also maintains the open field by preventing forest regrowth. Mowing takes place three times per year: 1) in early spring before plant growth, 2) in mid-July and 3) in late fall. This careful approach to stewardship encourages meadow birds to nest and produce offspring in the Park between mowings.



Middlebury Area Land Trust/Hannah Penci



Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)

USFWS/Ronald Laubenstein

Open meadows are important to biodiversity and overall ecological health because they provide habitat for many plant and animal species, some of which can only be found in meadows. Some insects and small mammals, such as grasshoppers and meadow voles, may spend their entire lives in a single field. Larger predatory animals with greater ranges, such as foxes, bobcats and red-tailed hawks, hunt in meadows. Deer, rabbits and other edge species can often be seen grazing in the meadow.



Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*)

USFWS/Steve Maslowski

Some birds, such as the Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*), prefer to nest in tall meadow grasses. After wintering in South America, these “New World blackbirds” fly north in the spring to lay their eggs. The population of Bobolinks has declined dramatically nationwide over the past century in part because of habitat loss and modernized hay harvesting regimes, which may destroy the birds’ nests due to the frequency of mowing. After the spring mowing, this meadow is not mowed again until after mid-July to insure that all Bobolink chicks have fledged and left their nests.