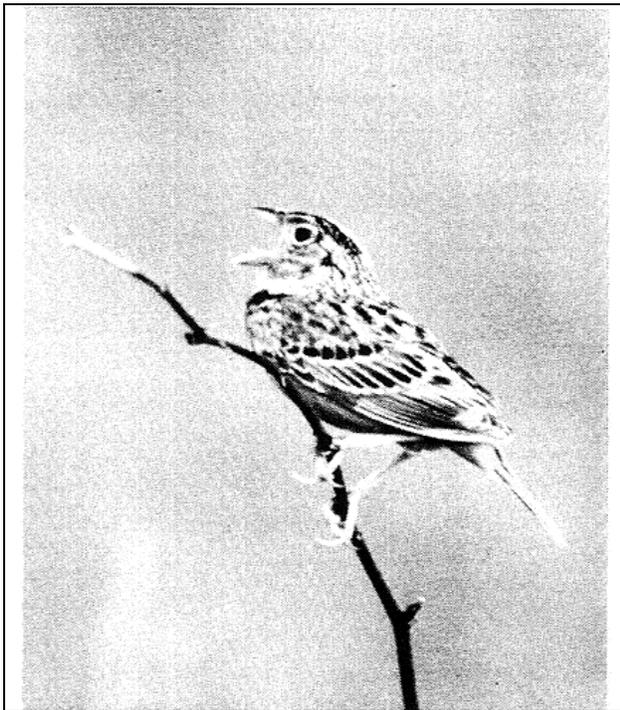
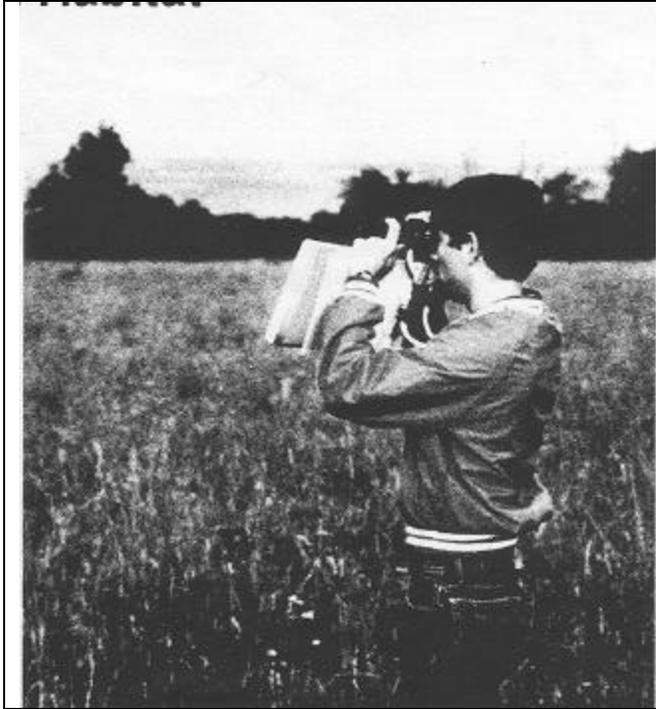


**SHARING SUCCESSES-Saving Neotropical Bird Habitat  
Finger Lakes National Forest**

**CHALLENGE:** A decision made in the 1930's to maintain 4,000 acres of the Finger Lakes National Forest in grazing pastures led to the restoration of habitat for several declining species of migratory birds such as the Grasshopper and Henslow's sparrows.



The Henslow's sparrows prefers high-quality, tall-grass pastures of at least 70 acres in size. These birds evolved with the native tall-grass ecosystems dominated by bunch grasses. These bunch grasses grow in clumps with openings between the plants that provide easy access for travel and a sure seed source for ground nesting birds. Much of today's agricultural practices on surrounding private lands have favored replacement of the tall grasses with introduced mat-forming grasses, like alfalfa and clover, that limit sparrow movement and hide any seeds that shatter and fall to the ground. Such large-scale changes in habitat contribute to the marked population decline of migratory birds in the Northeast.



**SETTING:** The Finger Lakes National Forest (FLNF) occupies southwestern New York near Montour Falls. The decision made in the 1930's to maintain land here for grazing livestock has also created critical habitat for several species of neotropical migrant birds. These are birds that nest in northern latitudes but migrate to Central or South America in the winter.

**APPROACH:** The forest began investigating habitat relationship of birds which use the grass and forb communities of the maintained tall-grass pastures. This habitat was found to be critical for the Henslow's and Grasshopper sparrows. Dr. Charles R. Smith, the Laboratory Ornithologist at Cornell University, determined these sparrows have very specific habitat preferences.

**RESULTS:** The investigation identified critical relationships for the Henslow's Sparrow and provided management direction designed to provide nesting habitat stability on the Finger Lakes National Forest. Dr. Smith and his undergraduate students determined that the Henslow's sparrow has very specific habitat preferences. It prefers high-quality, tall-grass pastures of at least 70 acres. Sites meeting these criteria are abundant on the Finger Lakes National Forest.

Because of Dr. Smith's findings the forest has adjusted management to meet the needs of these sensitive bird species. Instead of early summer mowing which would destroy nesting habitat, the Forest Service will not mow the pastures until fledglings have hatched and left the nest. Cattle producers benefit from the availability of pasture land and hay fields, while several special bird species continue to thrive in the maintained pastures.

**PARTNERSHIP:** This project is a continuing program with Cornell University and The Hector Cooperative Grazing Cooperative, according to Jim Favil, Secretary-Treasurer and Director of the Association.

**RESEARCH:** Cornell University's Laboratory of Ornithology published a paper entitled "Partners in Conservation," by Dr. Charles R. Smith, in the University's periodical, "The Living Bird Quarterly".

**FUTURE PLANS:** An international movement is underway to conserve the habitats and populations of all neotropical migratory birds. The forest's work on Grasshopper and Henslow's sparrows are contributing to this conservation effort. The forest will incorporate the results of this investigation into the Forest Management Indicator Species program, which is a long-term monitoring effort.

**SHARING:** Currently, these pastures serve as a demonstration area to show the nearby private landowners how they can help conserve habitats of neotropical bird species. A free bird checklist available at the district for the public to aid in viewing these and other birds in the area.

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