

Songbirds of Missouri Dickcissel



Vocabulary

Match the word with the definition, then write a sentence using each word. Share your sentences with the class.

___ Sorghum	A. A large, level expanse of grassland with flowering plants and usually no trees
___ Mobile	B. Plentiful
___ Abundant	C. Automatically
___ Prairie	D. Meadow land or permanent pasture
___ Fledge	E. A classification of animals that have distinct characteristics in common and can interbreed
___ Abandon	F. To travel from one region or country to another
___ Despised	G. A cereal plant cultivated for fodder, grain and juice
___ Grassland	H. Shape resembling the curved shape of the moon in its first or last quarters
___ Conservation	I. To acquire the feathers necessary to fly
___ Crescent	J. The natural living area of an animal that contains the resources it needs to survive
___ Native	K. The act of conserving and protecting
___ Embryo	L. Hated
___ Vulnerable	M. Able to move about
___ Species	N. In a position to be harmed
___ Migrate	O. To leave behind
___ Instinctively	P. Something original to a particular area or region
___ Habitat	Q. A multicellular organism in the early stages before birth or hatching

(Missouri Show-Me Standards: CA.1, CA.6, Goal 2.1)

Classroom Activity

(Missouri Show-Me Standards: S.3, S.4)

Objectives:

After completing this activity, students will be able to:

- Explain what grassland birds need for good habitat
- Explain what factors influence grassland habitat
- Explain how these changes affect grassland birds

Materials:

8 chairs; an assortment of toy cars, clumps of fescue grass, toy cell phones and small doll house or some other type of toy home

Background:

Dickcissels and other grassland birds have specific grassland habitat requirements. This activity demonstrates problems that can arise when habitat alterations occur.

Procedure:

Prior to the activity, use class time to explain what a grassland habitat is and how native plants are important. On the day of the activity, create an open space in the classroom by moving desks to the side or use the school auditorium if available. This is your native grassland.

1) Place eight chairs in this space to use as "nesting" sites. Pick eight students to be birds. Have remaining students stand to the side while the eight "birds" find a chair and sit down to "nest." After a few moments, have the nesters "migrate" back to the side of the room they came from. They have nested, raised young and migrated south – their work is done!

2) Give several students toy cars, remove

two chairs and have these students sit in those spots. This is a new highway that has removed habitat. Now, have your eight "birds" fly back for the next nesting. Two should fly away because there are no nesting spots for them. The six remaining birds should "nest," then "migrate" to the other side of the room.

3) Have students come in holding clumps of fescue grass to replace three "nests" or chairs. These are exotic plants that have eliminated more native grass.

4) Have the eight birds fly into the area again; now only three can find nests. The other five should fly away. The remaining three birds should nest in the chairs left, then migrate.

5) Now, other students bring a doll house into the area and remove a chair – someone has built a house. When the eight birds fly to the area, only two can find nests. They nest, and the other six fly away.

6) Bring in students holding toy cell phones and remove the last two chairs – a business has taken over the remaining habitat. Eight birds fly through the area and don't stop because no nesting sites can be found.

7) The teacher explains that, after noticing no birds are nesting in the area, people learn they can bring birds back by planting areas of natural grass. Place eight chairs around the area or off to one side. These are re-planted stands of native grass. Have the eight birds fly back and sit in the chairs; they are nesting in the area again.

Grade levels: K-1

Math-Minder

(Missouri Show-Me Standard: M.1)

Facts:

The population of the dickcissel is declining because they are losing much of the grassland habitat they depend on for nesting and breeding. A pair of healthy dickcissels will normally produce four chicks.

Solve: Four pairs of dickcissels fly into a grassland site looking for a place to breed and nest one spring. When they arrive, they find there is not as much room as the previous year. Some of the land has disappeared. Two of the pairs find enough room to nest successfully, but the other two pairs must fly away and never find a suitable nesting site. Out of the four pairs, how many babies were produced that spring? If four pairs had nested successfully instead of two, how many babies would they have produced that spring?

Short Answer Q&A

1. What habitat do dickcissels depend on for survival in North America?
2. What is the range of the dickcissel in North America?
3. What country does the dickcissel migrate to for winter?
4. Why do farmers kill dickcissels during winter?
5. What are two reasons the dickcissel population is declining?

(Missouri Show-Me Standard: Goal 1.5)