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Coliseum site drawing crowds of birds rarely seen in Ohio

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Richfield Township- There's a rare and indescribable singer in town, at the site of the former Coliseum arena.

Admission is free. Seating is limited.

"Bink, bwink, bink, bwink," hardly describes the exuberant song you'll hear as he flies across his stage.

He's a bobolink, a black and white grassland bird that has been all but wiped out in Ohio as the state lost 99 percent of its original grasslands to agriculture and development.

More than 30 pairs of bobolinks are raising their young this year where the massive sports and concert arena stood until it was demolished six years ago. The National Park Service bought the site, some 300 acres, for \$9 million to prevent it from being developed.

The park spread topsoil and 5,000 pounds of grass seed. Just a few bobolinks called it home in 2001.

But the word "bwink" has spread.

The meadow is the largest in Northeast Ohio, and bobolinks like their meadows large, park biologist Lisa Petit said Wednesday, peering through binoculars.

When bobolinks perch on the waist-high grasses of the meadow, at the western edge of the 33,000-acre park along the Cuyahoga River, their song becomes a "bubbling, jangling, rising warble of short notes," writes David Allen Sibley in his Field Guild to Birds of Eastern North America.

Nice try, Mr. Sibley.

"But you really can't describe the song," birder Dwight Chasar said.

"I go there and drink it all in."

Park officials had planned to let the meadow mature and gradually become a forest. That plan changed when Chasar and his wife Ann reported seeing the bobolinks, Petit said.

The park will now mow part of the land every fall, after the birds migrate south, to prevent it from becoming a forest. Snakes and butterflies like the meadow, too.

Except for the occasional researcher or school group, park officials discourage walking through the meadow, because the birds hide their nests on the ground.

The park may build an observation deck for the public in the next few years, Petit said.

Until then, audiences can gather off the north side of Ohio 303, just west of Interstate 271 and about 20 miles south of Cleveland.

Roll down the car windows, and, between passing cars and trucks, listen.

There's lots of bwinking going on.

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