

The Beastie Boys and The Grasshopper Sparrows*

“... this event is absolutely happening,”
avows promoter of “Field Day Festival,” June 7-8, 2003
acclaimed and assailed
as one of the most massive rock concerts on Long Island,
thirty-five thousand fans flying in, driving in, motorcycling in
from upstate New York, from Washington, from the Pacific Coast
to Long Island’s old 2,900-acre U. S Navy site in Calverton,
parking, pitching tents
rocking to the Beastie Boys, Radiohead, Beck, Liz Phair.

Calverton, almost the last savannah on Long Island,
one of the most important northeastern grasslands
for birthing generations of Grasshopper Sparrows,
Ammodramus savannarum, a species of “special concern.”

Early June,
Grasshopper Sparrows on territory,
courting, building grassy cupped nests
in sight, hearing of concert platform, strobe lights, amplifiers,
60-foot towers of steel scaffolding for speakers
heaping up volume of rock, rap, heavy metal,
Beastie Boys barreling forth “Hello Nasty,”
“No Sleep ‘til Brooklyn,” “Putting Shame in Your Game.”

Come,
watch a yellow-shouldered five-inch bird balance on little bluestem,
hold erect his brown and whitish striped head,
his bill quivering, zip forth lengthening lines,
tik-zzzzzzz, tik-zzzzzzz, tik-zzzzzzz,
female answering with sweet trills.

Come,
enjoy this tiny avian recital
before arrival of boot and blare.

Maxwell Corydon Wheat, Jr.

*Note: The concert was moved to New Jersey. The cancellation was not entirely because of conservation protests, but they undoubtedly played a role.