



Outdoor education = flora, fauna, fun

By Kacie Ehrenberger, Director of Education and Outreach

Crisp mornings and yellow school buses make it official – a successful summer camp season has ended, and fall field trips to Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory's bird banding stations are underway.

Forty families sent kids to one or more of the seven RMBO camps in Colorado and Nebraska this summer. The campers – and our staff – reported having a “fabulous” time being outside exploring wildlife and their habitats. Parents were positive about their children's camp experiences, with one mother writing that her son was so excited telling his siblings what he did at camp that he “couldn't even finish his lunch.”

Stories and memories shared at a January reunion of 2009 campers, along with suggestions from parents, helped shape 2010 camps held at RMBO's Old Stone House at Barr Lake in Brighton, Colo.

If you ask the 11-to-13-year-olds who were at the 2010 Young Ecologists camp



for their favorite memory of camp, they may tell you about getting a truck stuck in the mud at Prewitt Ranch near Brush – or maybe how proud they were of taking a nine-mile hike around Barr Lake to kick

off their camp week. They also remember seeing American Avocets at Pawnee National Grasslands, exploring a forest in Boulder, touring Barr Lake – from a boat this time – and discussing natural resource management with professionals.

At their camp, Habitat Explorers, ages 8 to 10, visited MacGregor Ranch near Estes Park, Roosevelt National Forest and Barr Lake to study wildlife management, forest fire and pine beetle ecology, and aquatic organisms. They made bird feeders and houses and learned how to help conserve birds.

Young Naturalists (ages 4 and 5) and Nature Investigators (ages 6 and 7) enjoyed games, crafts and hikes at the Old Stone House. These young campers brimmed with enthusiasm for every living thing they encountered outdoors.

RMBO's High Plains Science Adventure Camp in Scotts Bluff, Neb., included

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People & Partners Who Make It Possible

Volunteer naturalists contribute significant time to Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory. For example, Dan Staley shared his forestry expertise with the Young Ecologists, and Georgie Bohlinder worked with the Young Naturalists this summer. Amber Tyler planned all four Nature Investigators camps and led their activities. Teen volunteer Zoya Schroeder prepared supplies and assisted at every session.

Thank you to RMBO funders and partners: Vestas Nacelles America, Inc., which offered scholarships to every camper, Adams County Open Space, Citizens of the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District, Emily Weber (Butterfly Pavilion), Pat Gebauer & Luan August (Cardinal Charolais at Prewitt Ranch), Ken Morgan (Colorado Division of Wildlife), Dianna Moore (Pawnee National Grassland), Julia Stennes (Roosevelt National Forest), Boulder County Open Space, Nebraska Environmental Trust, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Agate Fossil Beds National Monument, Scotts Bluff National Monument, Children and Nature In Our Parks, Nebraska Educational Service Unit #13, Western Nebraska Community College, Platte River Basin Environments, Inc., Soroptomists International, Rotary International and Baltes Foundation.

Scientists closing in on Black Swift mystery

“A 75 percent recapture rate might just qualify as a miracle!” gushed Special Monitoring Projects Coordinator Jason Beason after a third geolocator from a Black Swift was recovered at Fulton Resurgence Cave in the Flat Top Wilderness on August 23.

Geolocators were placed on four Black Swifts in western Colorado a year ago. One was recovered on July 21, also at Fulton Resurgence Cave, and the second at Box Canyon in Ouray on August 14.

Of all bird species in the mainland U.S. and Canada, only the Black Swifts' winter destination is unknown. Jason expects the geolocators' data interpretation to be completed later this year, including a much-anticipated map showing where the birds have been for the past year.

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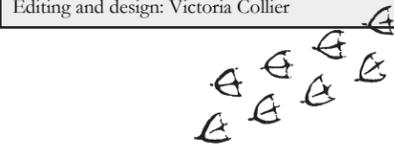
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The Primary Source logo was designed by Granby, Colo., artist David Utterback with a baby Killdeer and a primary feather from a pelican. Primary feathers give power to a bird's flight. Our members, friends, volunteers and partners are the primary source of RMBO's power to accomplish its mission to conserve birds and their habitat.

Editing and design: Victoria Collier



Flora, fauna, fun ...

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a hike to look for bighorn sheep and chances to learn about science career options. Our final summer camp was in partnership with the Butterfly Pavilion of Westminster, Colo., which led a morning session on insects, followed by our afternoon exploration of bird adaptations, identification and migration.

Fall brings more opportunities for kids to see birds up close and learn about what biologists do. Thousands of migratory birds are heading south, and RMBO has six bird banding stations set up in Colorado and western Nebraska to study these international travelers and to share their journey with hundreds of school children. Programs for families, scouts, nature clubs and other groups are available, too. All the stations will have open house events and most are open daily to the public in September and October. See page 7 for more information.

From the director...

Tammy VerCauteren, Executive Director

While our work at Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory is serious, it also brings us plenty of joy, satisfaction and excitement, as you can see in this newsletter.

I had the pleasure this summer of seeing and hearing young explorers bring the backyard to life at our Old Stone House at Barr Lake in Brighton, Colo. Such scenes will multiply as the Environmental Learning Center takes shape at the site. The project began moving from dream to reality this summer with work on a new parking lot that will accommodate more outdoor enthusiasts and buses for field trips. For the first time, multiple classrooms can learn and have fun in our backyard. A full summer of camp programs and new infrastructure will boost our commitment to connecting children and families with nature.

Exciting new discoveries punctuated the summer. While traveling between "official" field surveys, seasonal technician Eric Ripma identified the first-ever Orange-billed Nightingale-thrush in South Dakota. The thrush was well outside of its breeding range, which reaches northern Mexico. Then our special species monitoring coordinator Jason Beason, along with our partners, collected three (!) of the four geolocators they placed on Black Swifts last summer. He is analyzing the data to figure out where these amazing birds spend the winter. Learn more about them in a wonderful new e-book, "The Coolest Bird: A Natural History of the Black Swift and Those Who Have Pursued It," by the late Rich Leivad. Rich was an RMBO staff member who dedicated the last decade of his career to studying Black Swifts in Colorado. The book is available on our home page at www.rmbo.org via a link to www.aba.org/thecoolestbird.pdf.

The serious work we do at RMBO includes monitoring bird populations, identifying habitat needs, connecting people with nature, working with private landowners to improve bird habitat, and more. The staff and board will have a three-day retreat this fall to discuss this work and how we can better achieve our mission in the 21st century.

Members, volunteers, donors and partners have supported RMBO's growth and success for 22 years. We appreciate your continued investment and hope you will spread the word about our work. Many of you were in the Old Stone House's backyard on August 28 for our annual picnic – the biggest yet. About 200 folks came out for workshops, bird hikes, face-painting, good food and many other activities. It was a memorable day, celebrating the joy, satisfaction and excitement that come with the serious work of conserving birds and habitat from the mountains of Montana to the tropics of Mexico.

Nebraska students break out in bird-calls

RMBO's Nebraska Prairie Partners Educator Amanda Filipi remembers that students visiting bird banding stations last fall had a great time learning the calls of area birds, including American Robin, Spotted Towhee, Black-capped Chickadee and many others.

Eight months later the students attended another program where Amanda asked them to make their favorite bird call. "To my surprise, all 40 students

started singing the same call, 'chick-a-dee-dee-dee'."

On the way to the bus, the teacher told Amanda that the students loved learning the bird calls and get excited at recess when they hear a bird call they are able to identify. Chuckling, the teacher said the only down side is that for the past eight months the students would randomly break out with the Chickadee call!



Tammy with daughters Karlie, left, and Grace at RMBO's annual BBQ with the Birds in August.

Photo: Victoria Collier

Biologists share Wyoming "office" with birds and bears

By Nick Van Lanen, Biologist

I drove westward across Wyoming in mid-July to meet up with another Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory biologist, Chris White. Ordinarily, field technicians work independently to conduct bird surveys; however, we were scheduled to survey in remote, roadless areas in north-west Wyoming. Grizzly-bear country.

After months of roaming the state



alone, I welcomed Chris's company and frequent loud laughter.

RMBO conducted surveys this summer in 166 randomly selected sites in the state, starting at lower elevations and working up to more than 10,000 feet. We began in grassland and sage habitats and moved into montane shrublands, pine for-

ests and, ultimately, alpine tundra.

Over the next few days, Chris and I traveled dusty and rocky back roads around Cody, Meeteetsee and Dubois. The rugged, craggy slopes and prominent ridges were gorgeous, yet we viewed them with apprehension knowing that some of our surveys were likely to fall on steep mountainsides miles from the nearest road.

At trailheads we met friendly hikers and anglers heading for swift-moving, icy streams, swollen from late snows and frequent rains. All of them carried pepper spray or side arms and were eager to tell rumors of nuisance bears and female moose with calves. Warning signs at the trailheads lent support to their stories.

We spent mornings surveying birds and afternoons backpacking to the next survey site. We camped close to our backcountry survey locations so we could sleep in until just before sunrise. We both relished watching the sun rise and set over the surrounding mountains.

In forest habitats we counted Yellow-rumped Warblers, Mountain Chickadees, Clark's Nutcrackers, Stellar's Jays and Ruby-crowned Kinglets. In the tundra, American Pipits, Rock Wrens and Horned Larks were abundant. One morning we watched Black-rosey Finches flying between patches of snow in search of food.

After driving into Grand Teton Na-



The summer workplace of the author, above, and Chris White, left, has obvious amenities — and potential perils.

Photos: Nick Van Lanen, Chris White

tional Park for our last survey together, we spent the morning in a beautiful forest of spruce, Douglas-fir and Lodgepole pine with the most diverse bird community we had seen. MacGillivray's Warblers, Black-headed Grosbeaks and Red Crossbills mixed in among more common species.

For the first time, Chris and I saw signs of bear and understood why it was such a hot topic of conversation in the area. Hiking through the wild lands, we repeatedly hollered, "Hey bear!," to give any large wildlife an opportunity to avoid us.

We concluded the survey in an open area with a view of the Teton Range and lingered there, basking in the warm sun. Our feet were blistered, our muscles sore, and our faces sunburnt, but we knew that soon we'd be missing the singing birds and incredible scenery.

Back in the office, Chris and I pause occasionally between sending emails and sorting through data to look at pictures we took when our work space was the forest and our job was looking at birds.

FAMILY CORNER FALL ACTIVITY: Hammered Leaf Print

Comfortable, long days and bright, beautiful plants make fall a great time to go outdoors as a family. Enjoy fall colors year-round by making a hammered leaf print.

Materials: Leaves from trees, plants or grasses—any color or type work; Watercolor paper or another rough, acid-free paper or cloth; Hard surface to work on (cutting board or scrap of wood); Paper towels; Hammer; Acrylic finishing spray.

1. Collect moderately juicy leaves while hiking with your family. (Note: this is a great time to learn the names of local

vegetation. Avoid poison ivy. Remember, "leaves of three, let them be.")

2. Place paper or cloth on work surface.
3. Arrange leaves to your liking, and cover them with 2-3 layers of paper towels.
4. Hammer through the paper towel with small even taps. Peek to be sure you have hammered all parts of the leaves.
5. Once all parts are hammered, remove the paper towel and gently pull away the leaves. Pigments from the leaves will have stained your paper or cloth.
6. Spray your print with Acrylic finishing



spray to ensure bright, long-lasting color. Try different kinds of leaves. The moisture level of the leaf can make very different prints. So can different kinds of hammers. It is important to use high quality paper or to use a cloth. This technique can make unique handkerchiefs or napkins.

Volunteer witnesses stormy life of bird colonies

By Chuck Hundertmark, Immediate Past Chairman of the Board

It was 3:50 the afternoon of August 6. The waters of MacFarlane Reservoir rippled gently in the breeze, a mild remnant of the stiff wind that had roiled the lake two hours before when I had stood in the same spot looking down on a colony of 91 Eared Grebes on nests bobbing in the open water.

After taking photos of the colony in the less than optimal light, I had driven to the northeast side of the reservoir to check the status of a Black-crowned Night Heron colony. The team of Colonywatch volunteers I work with had discovered the colony earlier in the season. Newcomer Betsy Shaw first spotted it. We had suspected its presence since the late Rich Levad turned over North Park Colonywatch tasks to us in 2003.

As I walked along the willows this August afternoon, dozens of newly fledged night herons took flight, confirming the colony's success. Coming out of the Rabbit Ears Range, a thunderstorm moved over the lake with more wind than rain, in typical North Park fashion. By the time I got back to my truck, the winds had abated and the skies cleared.

I decided to return to the grebe colony for photos in better light. Below the bluff where I stood, dozens of grebes swam around as if bewildered. It was bewilderment I shared. All 91 nests that had been there two hours before were gone, torn apart by the choppy waves of the lake.

The loss of the grebe colony at MacFarlane in August was a disappointment, though we often see little or no nesting there by this species. Eared Grebes are more regular at Walden and 18 Island Reservoirs and the Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge. MacFarlane has more reliably been home to colonies of American White Pelicans, Double-crested Cormorants and California Gulls. In recent years, however, many of the pelicans have moved to a new colony at Walden Reservoir, one of many events that keep the task of monitoring dynamic and interesting.



Eared Grebes at Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge.

Photo: Lee Farrell



American White Pelicans and California Gulls at Walden Reservoir.

Photo: Chuck Hundertmark



The author (left) and former board chair Paul Slingsby flush grebe at Walden Reservoir.

Photo: Lee Farrell



Colonywatch volunteer Jim Duggan.

Photo: Chuck Hundertmark



Colonywatch volunteer Nina Routh at North Park.

Photo: Chuck Hundertmark

Colonywatch: Teams use scopes, kayaks, provocation to monitor birds in North Park

The Eared Grebes and Black-crowned Night Herons in the story on page 4 are just two of the 14 species Colonywatch volunteers monitor in North Park in northern Colorado.

The others are Western Grebes, American White Pelicans, Double-crested Cormorants, Great Blue Herons, Snowy Egrets, Osprey, Willets, Franklin's and California Gulls, and Forster's and Black Terns. In recent years, White-face Ibis has been added to the target list, but their nesting location has eluded colony watchers.

Most water-bird observations are from shore by scope, but a few species require other protocols. For Willets, walking the perimeter of Walden Reservoir and other nesting locations can attract territorial attacks, which confirm probable nesting. On lakes where grebes, gulls or terns nest in cattails, a kayak flush may be used to gain a count of nesting adults.

Former RMBO Board Chairman Paul Slingsby, Jim Duggan and Chuck Hundertmark teamed up to cover the prolific wetland breeding habitats of North Park in 2003. David Fletcher and Nina Routh have since joined the team as regulars, and Meredith Anderson, Allison Hilf and more than a dozen others have helped with monitoring North Park's dynamic water-bird populations.

Colonywatch is part of Monitoring Colorado Birds, a program established by RMBO and its agency partners to monitor all nongame bird species in the state to detect long-term population trends. In addition to colonial water birds, the 80-plus Colonywatch volunteers monitor other colonial species including Black Swifts and Purple Martins.

Birders interested in volunteering with Colonywatch can contact Special Monitoring Projects Coordinator Jason Beason (jason.beason@rmbo.org, 970-527-4625).



Western Grebe pair building a nest at Lake John.

Photo: Chuck Hundertmark

Mountain Plover chicks survive late Nebraska snow

Bartholomew L. Bly, Nebraska Prairie Partners Coordinator

Are Mountain Plover chicks struggling to survive in the southwest part of Nebraska's panhandle? What habitats are the birds using after their chicks hatch?

Nebraska Prairie Partners (NPP), a cooperative partnership of the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory and Nebraska Game and Parks Commission investigates such questions in its work to conserve this species.

In early May, NPP began looking for and marking Mountain Plover nests on private agricultural lands so they could be monitored all season. We located 19 nests in the first week, a good start.

Then a late snowstorm dumped eight inches on the entire study area, burying or partially burying many of the located nests. We were unsure if the nests were still viable given temperatures as cold as 21 degrees the morning after the storm.

Monitoring the nests and floating eggs to determine their age during the weeks following the snowfall revealed that: 1) Many nests found prior to the storm went beyond the 29-day average incubation period (at least 37 days for one), and 2) a majority of the nests were successful, but did not hatch their full complement of eggs.

Despite the storm, muddy fields, and considerable precipitation and cool weather, we located 109 nests in 2010. Landowners located 18 of them, a substantial number given the tight schedules they faced due to the wet spring.

Of the 109 nests, 72 hatched at least one egg, 18 were predated, mostly by coyotes and foxes, six were abandoned, six were lost to weather events, five were destroyed by ATVs during nest marking, and two were lost to tilling by farmers. Interesting finds included:

- a large increase in nests with fewer than three eggs.
- our first-ever four-egg clutch in Nebraska. It was nearly ready to hatch when it was predated in early June.

- our first Mountain Plover nest that was initiated in growing corn. All three eggs hatched when the corn was knee high.
- our first nest with pink eggs since the 2006 field season.

Just before eggs hatched, NPP staff trapped 37 of the adult birds to attach a USGS band, a cohort color band sequence and a radio transmitter. One bird we radio-tracked had been banded as an adult about 25 miles away in Colorado in 2009. Two of the birds died within two weeks after we began tracking their broods, both following major storms with hail. Eight radio transmitters fell off for unknown reasons. We tracked the remaining Mountain Plover broods daily to get an estimated chick count so that we could use a statistical model to estimate chick survival. We also tracked four birds whose nests were predated before hatching.

The broods were radio-tracked through at least day 34. At that point many adults had raised complete broods



Bands and radio transmitters are attached to adult Mountain Plovers to monitor the fate of their broods.

Photo: Bart Bly

through the chick stage. Our raw data indicated that nearly 60 percent of the chicks we followed were alive. Since we incorporated all dropped transmitters and pre-hatch predated nests as failed chicks, the survival number is likely to be larger as the dropped transmitters were likely due to attachment issues rather than the birds being deceased.

As our chick-survival and habitat-use



These Mountain Plover nests found in the 2010 field season are unusual for different reasons: one is nestled in snow, the other has four eggs.

Photos: Top by Bart Bly, bottom by Megan DeMory

work progressed, we never observed any of the broods on any habitat other than agricultural fields. We found no use of Conservation Reserve Program lands or native prairie for brood rearing or pre-staging prior to fall migration. In fact, we found relatively small home-ranges for these broods – they rarely left the 640-acre section where their nests were located. This suggests that agricultural fields are key habitat for Mountain Plover in Nebraska, and the conservation of this species there depends on working with the private parties responsible for managing those lands.

We hosted two hands-on trainings this year to teach local farmers techniques for identifying and locating Mountain Plover nests. These trainings and an increased incentive payment for nests landowners find are two methods that NPP used this season to support the eventual transition of the nest-marking program to a voluntary, landowner-led initiative.

We believe our data will show that chick survival is not limiting the Mountain Plover population in Nebraska, and that nest marking there could have high conservation value for the species.

Staff Migrations



investigating the potential competitive interaction between Northern Spotted and Barred Owls.

After graduate school Nick started working for RMBO as the Wyoming field crew leader. Now a full-time biologist on the Science Team, Nick assists with data analyses, report writing and publications. He's excited to be using his experience and education to help conserve bird populations. (See Nick's story and photo on page 3.)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Barr Lake Bird Banding Station
Barr Lake State Park, Brighton, Colo.
Oct. 9: *Family Day, 9:30-11:30
Oct. 11: *Homeschool Day, 9:30-11:30
Oct. 16: *Girl Scout Day, 9:00-2:00
*For reservations, contact 303-659-4348 ext 15 or cassy.bohnet@rmbo.org

Fall Bird Banding Stations
• **Barr Lake State Park**, Brighton, Colo., through Oct. 15. Info: see above for contact.
• **Grand Valley Audubon, Ela Wildlife Sanctuary**, Grand Junction, Colo., through Oct. 15. Info: Cary Atwood, 970-201-9651, catwood814@gmail.com
• **Chico Basin Ranch**, Colo. Springs, Colo., through Oct. 9. Call ahead: Caroline Ferguson, 719-683-7960
• **Chadron State Park**, Neb., through Oct. 6., Mon.-Fri.
• **Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area**, Harrisburg, Neb., through Oct. 6, Mon.-Fri.

Oct. 18-21: RMBO offices closed for staff and board retreat.

Delta County Reservoir Field Trip
Oct 30: Black Canyon Audubon Society, 9 a.m. at Confluence Park. Bring lunch. Contact: Jason Beason, 970-527-4625.



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Alberto Macias-Duarte joins RMBO as a research ecologist on the International Team. Alberto grew up in Hermosillo, Mexico, and obtained a bachelor's in ecological engineering at the Sonora State Center of Higher Education in 1997 after working on the biological control of mosquitoes. In 2000, after working for the Sonoran Reforestation Program, he pursued graduate studies at the Autonomous University of Chihuahua. He obtained a master's in Natural Resources Management while working with the endangered Aplomado Falcon and grassland birds in the Chihuahuan Desert. Alberto is a Ph.D.

candidate in Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences at the University of Arizona. For the last seven years he has investigated the impacts of irrigated agriculture in northern Mexico on Burrowing Owls. Alberto's professional interests include desert wildlife and habitat conservation, bird population ecology, and the applications of mathematics and statistics to ecological research. He, his wife Maria, and their children, Alberto and Mariana, are happily moving back to Hermosillo where he will support RMBO projects in Mexico.

Victoria Collier migrated to Colorado's Front Range from the Western Slope to "wield her wicked red pen" as RMBO's new communications and membership coordinator. She previously worked in communications and public relations for the Sonoran Institute, the City of Tucson's recycling program, Durango School District and many private clients. Vicki/Victoria has a bachelor's in journalism from Western Washington University. She loves the planet, especially the West, and enjoys the outdoors, yoga, unadulterated food, jazz, road trips and taking the back roads.



Abby Churchill is "thrilled" to come to RMBO to continue her service as a AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer. She recently relocated to Colorado from Madison, Wis., where she worked with the University of Wisconsin's Precollege Initiatives program designing an outdoor education program for bright yet underachieving 9th graders. She earned a bachelor's from UW-Madison in Gender & Women's Studies and Sociology with a minor in LGBT Studies. Abby enjoys camping, hiking, biking, traveling, Ultimate Frisbee, "really anything outdoors," singing, reading, cooking, and drinking locally brewed beer!



AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer **Amy Rotter** returned home to Michigan in September after a year with RMBO serving as the volunteer coordinator with a focus on building capacity for education programs. She developed the RMBO Volunteer Naturalists program to help with environmental education, family programs and outreach events. She trained and activated 10 volunteers, allowing RMBO to offer more programs and accommodate larger groups. The number of children attending programs almost doubled since last year, partly due to this increase in volunteers.

Amy also worked to enhance HawkWatch, which monitors the spring raptor migration at Dinosaur Ridge near Morrison, Colo. An RMBO project for nearly 20 years, HawkWatch only recently became a citizen science volunteer effort. Amy worked with RMBO biologist Jeff Birek to get more volunteers out on the ridge collecting data this year. This helped improve the quality of data, and it also engaged volunteers on the west side of Denver.

Wisconsin native **Nick Van Lanen** earned a bachelor's in Wildlife Ecology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2002. He has spent 12 seasons studying birds in seven states and 18 months as an interpretive naturalist on the Georgia coast. While he enjoyed birding and kayaking for a living, he realized that conducting research aimed at conserving birds was his true passion. He earned a master's at Colorado State University in 2010 for his research



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Primary Source #36 September 2010

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