

# Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory

Annual Report 2009



*Conserving birds and their habitats*



# 2009 Milestones Pave the Way to Healthier Bird Populations

The world is a better place for all of us, thanks to the RMBO team members who selflessly dedicate themselves to bird conservation. From humble beginnings to international recognition for conservation achievement, RMBO is on a path of success for bird conservation. In 2009, we experienced 20% growth in income and staff donated nearly 8,000 hours to bird conservation above and beyond normal work hours. Thousands of additional hours were donated by board members and volunteers who assist with citizen science efforts, data entry, and education programs

We reached important milestones in 2009 including enrolling the 100,000<sup>th</sup> acre of private land into conservation programs that promote native bird conservation through the Stewardship Division. In cooperation with state agencies and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, with our private lands wildlife biologists paving the way, we will be able to double this milestone in no time. Another milestone came from our Science Division and the first ever broad-scale bird and habitat monitoring program at a biologically defined region, namely the Badlands and Prairie Bird Conservation Region (BCR 17). The cutting-edge science being implemented will allow RMBO and partners to better detect population trends for birds including common and rare species. Through our International Program, nearly two dozen Mexican biologists were trained on grassland bird identification and monitoring techniques, building the capacity of our partners across the border to achieve bird conservation. We also worked hand-in-hand with our

national and international partners to complete the first-ever conservation assessment for Mexican bird species to identify priorities for conservation. Our International Program complements our bird conservation efforts in the United States by engaging and working with partners in Mexico where the majority of our grassland and montane birds spend the winter.

The Old Stone House is another milestone for RMBO. Just 10 years after the Old Stone House at Barr Lake State Park became our headquarters we are ready for phase two — an environmental learning center. The Environmental Learning Center, which we will start developing in 2010, complements our education efforts and our drive to get children and families engaged in nature. We are committed to engaging the next generation as they will determine how lands are managed and conserved for people, agriculture, and wildlife. We are excited to create and develop demonstration grounds around the Old Stone House that teach us how to live more sustainably and as better neighbors to wildlife.

RMBO is on a solid financial foundation and we are committed to broadening and diversifying our partners and support. This will allow us to better address priority conservation needs for birds including sound science, an engaged citizenry, and partnerships on the land. This also includes focusing on conservation in Mexico, the likely weak link for many of our priority bird species of concern.

2009 was a challenging year for many partners and friends. We thank all our partners, members, and donors for helping it be a year of growth and significant accomplishments for bird conservation locally, regionally, and internationally. We are eager and excited about our future, and efforts to conserve birds from the mountains of Montana to the tropics of Mexico. The challenges are great but with your help and support we can achieve our mission of conserving birds and their habitats.

– Tammy VerCauteren  
Executive Director



# RMBO is on the Move — Come Join Us!

Two decades ago, centered in a Barr Lake State Park trailer, RMBO quietly began monitoring birds. Today, RMBO is helping to conserve birds and their habitats in twelve states and Mexico! How did this growth come about? RMBO's unique method of helping starts by our collecting data and developing knowledge through our scientific studies. Land owners and managers need our accurate information to make informed decisions regarding uses of their lands. Our Education Division then engages people in what we have learned, thus completing a full circle approach.

Ten years ago, it became apparent that purchasing land for conservation was not enough. Most valuable habitat still is in private hands. So RMBO initiated the Stewardship Division to work with private landowners—for both better land productivity and bird conservation. It also became apparent that conserving birds only on their breeding grounds was not sufficient. So RMBO formalized its International Division five years ago to monitor conditions and recommend solutions for our birds on Mexican wintering grounds. Not surprisingly, the issues affecting birds in the US—expanding row-crop agriculture, population growth, and climate change—also impact birds severely in Mexico. Our data and recommendations are making a difference!

Despite the economy, RMBO remains strong. Our biggest challenges relate to unfunded or underfunded projects. It could be maintaining staff after one contract has ended but before another begins. Or purchasing equipment such as field vehicles or a GPS receiver. Some of the better known volunteer projects—Bald Eagle Watch, Colony Watch, Hawk Watch and various banding projects—also need to cover expenses. For uses such as these, RMBO requires funds from membership and contributions, currently only 2% of our \$3 million budget.

To address these needs, we have communicated much more. We presented programs to many organizations to surprise audiences with the volume and quality of RMBO's work. By reaching more people, we hope we will

secure even more public involvement, in membership, volunteerism, and contributions.

Thanks to all the employees, members, contributors, board members, and volunteers for helping RMBO in its mission to conserve birds and their habitats. A special thanks to retiring board members Chuck Bell and Linda Luther, and to Chuck Hundertmark for his difficult-to-follow service as Chairman.

Do you believe birds matter in our lives? Then help RMBO now. Join, volunteer and contribute!

– Larry Modesitt  
Board Chair



# Environmental Learning Center



A vital piece of Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory's mission is helping people understand and contribute to conservation of birds and their habitats. To give that goal a boost, in 2009 RMBO began planning a new environmental learning center. The organization's Old Stone House property at Barr Lake State Park in Brighton, Colorado, is ideally suited for this, sitting at the interface of urban and rural environments and boasting a mix of habitats. Barr Lake, important for nesting and wintering birds and as a migratory stopover, has a diverse bird community year round.

## Two-Year Action Plan

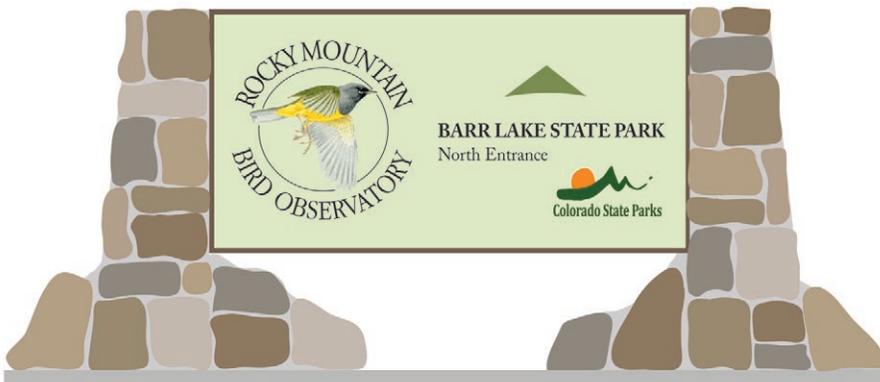
In June, RMBO hosted a week-long National Association for Interpretation training course at the Old Stone House where 20 board and staff members and landscape architects, interpretative guides, and park rangers from across the country focused on how to make the property into an environmental learning center.

*We strive to ensure that the habitats of our region do not go silent and a legacy of bird songs and healthy environments are left for our children and grandchildren.*

Consolidating recommendations from all the participants resulted in a two-year action plan that includes trails, an amphitheater, backyard habitat demonstration gardens, bilingual interpretive signage, and improvements to the building's classroom. Local partners who will help implement the plan include Adams County Open Space, Colorado State Parks, National Park Service, Butterfly Pavilion, the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District, and Wildland Restoration Volunteers.

## Messaging

Core messages for the new center are: "A healthy home for birds is a healthy home for all of us" and "Invite an international traveler, a migratory bird, to your backyard or community." The center will offer landowner workshops, student field trips, family programming, and professional development opportunities for teachers, which together will empower the community to take responsibility for conserving natural resources.



New signage will welcome visitors and reflect the history of the Old Stone House.

## A Sense of Place

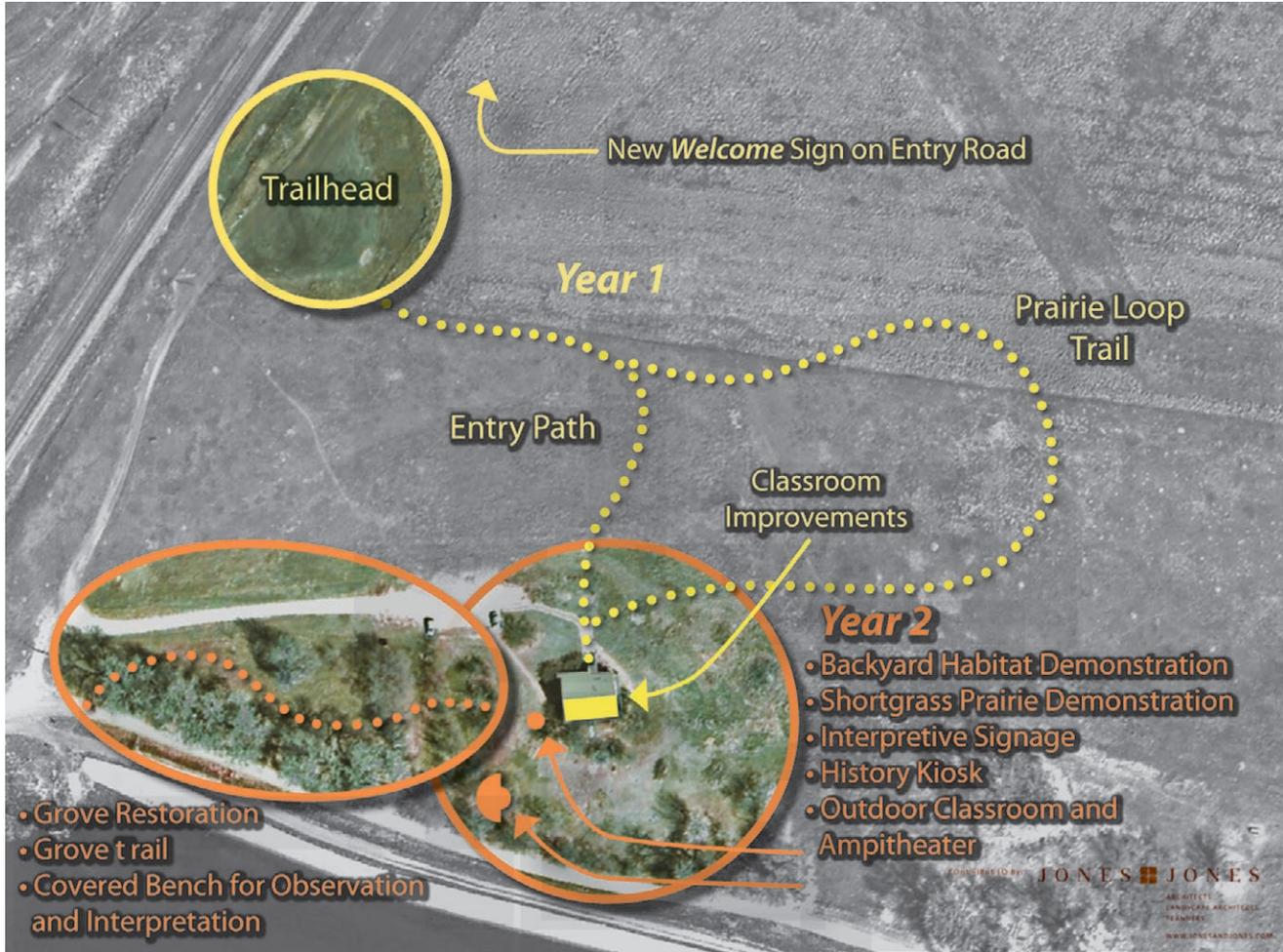
The Old Stone House has a long history as a location for studying birds, with records stretching back more than 100 years. Built in 1889, it is considered one of the finest Swiss-style stone farmhouses remaining in the U.S. and is listed as a State Historical Property by the Colorado Historical Society. The environmental learning center will capitalize on the natural and cultural history of the site to engage Brighton, Adams County, and Denver Metro area homeowners, city

dwellers, agricultural producers, youth and families in bird conservation.

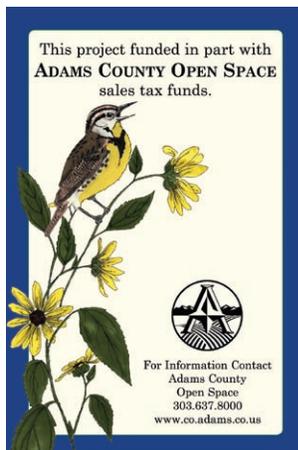
Over the long-term, the project will help more teachers incorporate environmental education into their classrooms; promote more backyard habitat for wildlife and water conservation; and help enhance native habitats for

agriculture and wildlife conservation. In addition, the environmental learning center will give more families a place to enjoy outdoor activities and nature exploration.

The environmental learning center will start to take shape this fall with the trailhead and Prairie Loop Trail. Visit [www.rmbo.org](http://www.rmbo.org) for progress updates.



We plan to take advantage of the environment surrounding the Old Stone House for educational activities.



*A healthy home for birds is a healthy home for all of us*

# Collecting and Interpreting the Information



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**T**he Science Division is working in 12 states with many partners to coordinate bird monitoring efforts at large spatial scales. We accomplished the first-ever Bird Conservation Region (BCR) monitoring design throughout the Badlands and Prairies region (BCR17). We are also developing programs to gain knowledge of species like the Northern Goshawk, Black Swift, Mountain Plover, and Ferruginous Hawk.

## New Approaches for Monitoring

The new design implemented in BCR 17 serves as a model for other long-term monitoring efforts because of its ability to address the conservation and management needs of a wide range of landowners and government entities at both local and regional scales. The design achieves effective collaboration in North American bird population monitoring.

Monitoring population trends of both common and rare species is a fundamental goal of the Science Division. In 2009, we worked with US Forest Service (USFS), Colorado State University, Colorado Division of Wildlife, and others to develop new ways to analyze point-count data (point counts are the standard method of collecting data on bird populations). These new analyses will allow us to discover population trends for uncommon species across the landscape, enhancing our ability to monitor all species.

New models are allowing us to create maps of breeding bird distributions at large spatial scales. This can be useful in predicting species distributions and determine how species are responding to certain habitat features. We can then work with land managers to promote essential habitat features on the landscape and identify important areas for conservation.

## Breeding Bird Atlas

RMBO, in cooperation with South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks, conducted the second field season of the second South Dakota Breeding Bird Atlas. This project aims to map the current distributions of all breeding birds in the state and then compare these distributions to those mapped 20 years ago to see if bird populations have changed. New projects in 2009 included special owl surveys in the Black Hills and repeat surveys to estimate species detection probabilities. We already have confirmed 223 bird species, the same number that was documented during the entire five years of field work during the first atlas. Check out the atlas web site at <http://www.rmbo.org/sdbba2>.

## Special Species

RMBO completed a regional Northern Goshawk survey for three partners in 2009, including the Rocky Mountain and Southwest Regions of the USFS and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. Technicians covered approximately 760 square miles of forested land using recorded calls to elicit responses from goshawks. Survey results can be used to determine population trends and the status of goshawk populations can be evaluated in response to environmental changes, such as logging practices or even climate change.



Norbert Kennner

In August, we placed light-level geolocators on four Black Swifts in western Colorado in order to determine where Colorado Black Swifts go during the winter months. The wintering range and migration patterns of the Black Swift is perhaps the least understood of all the birds breeding in the contiguous United States.



A Black Swift patiently waits to receive its geocator.

Since 2001, Nebraska Prairie Partners, a cooperative effort between RMBO and Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, have protected nearly 450 Mountain Plover nests from tillage operations in Nebraska. Mountain Plover nests in Nebraska are very successful, and the local population is larger than anticipated with more than 1,000 individuals. In 2010, we want to learn more about this population including evaluating if young from nests we protected are surviving to adulthood.

Nebraska Prairie Partners is advancing our knowledge of Ferruginous Hawks in western Nebraska. Ferruginous Hawks are selecting trees for nesting sites near prairie dog towns. As a result, we are constructing and installing nesting platforms in suitable areas throughout western Nebraska to provide this threatened bird with more nesting substrate. These nesting platforms may serve as mitigation sites should wind development displace breeding pairs from their historic sites. See the Stewardship Division (page 10) for more information.

### Future

The Science Division will continue to gain insight into understudied species such as the Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Flammulated Owl, and Black Swift. We will continue to cooperate with the Avian Knowledge Alliance and our federal and state partners across the nation to fill in information gaps for large-scale monitoring programs. We will work with partners to ensure the data we collect are being used to guide land management decisions at all geographic levels, from the local management unit to the state and the Bird Conservation Region. We will design and implement workshops for land managers that provide tools for working with the data and applying it in the field. All of our efforts will support our goal of using science to provide our partners with the information necessary to make informed decisions about bird conservation.



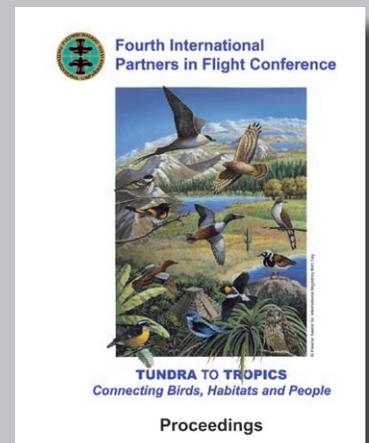
Science Division field crew trains on bird identification and data collection.

### Publications

Drilling, N. 2009. Breeding Colonial Waterbirds. South Dakota Conservation Digest 76(4):12–15.

Snyder, L. and B.L. Bly. 2009. Differential use of agricultural fields and rangeland nesting habitat by McCown's Longspur (*Calcarius mccownii*) and Chestnut-collared Longspur (*Calcarius ornatus*) in western Nebraska. Nebraska Bird Review 77(1):35–41.

Stephens, J.L., D.J. Hanni, J.D. Alexander, G. Ballard, G.R. Geupel, and B. Sullivan. 2009. The Avian Knowledge Alliance: A Network of Non-Governmental Organizations Working Together on Bird Conservation. Pp. 412–414 in T.D. Rich, C. Arizmendi, D.W. Demarest, and C. Thompson, eds. Proceedings of the Fourth International Partners In Flight Conference, McAllen, TX.



# Instilling a Conservation Ethic



**D**uring a Barr Lake Bird Hike, Amaya turned to an RMBO naturalist and said, “I could not sleep last night.” When the 9 year-old was asked why, she responded, “Because I was so excited about coming here to see the eagles!” Fast forward about 10 years, and you can picture Amaya telling her college classmates that the reason she majored in wildlife management was because of her 4th grade experience of writing a report on eagles and then seeing them in the wild. This experience, facilitated by RMBO, had opened her eyes to the natural world, her role in it, and the idea of a career in conservation. Add another 10 years, and Amaya is pausing from writing her dissertation to check an eagle nest camera website. Add five more years, and Amaya is spending a weekend camping and bird watching with her young family.

## Disconnect with Nature

A major factor in declining wildlife habitat and populations is the disconnect between humans and the natural world.

Most citizens lack understanding of natural systems and the skills necessary to be stewards of the environment.

To combat this, RMBO uses the environment as a context for learning. This creates an awareness of the outdoors and teaches critical life skills, including problem solving and decision making. We believe that birds are the perfect “hook,” or gateway, to get people outdoors and interested in conservation because birds are attractive and easily seen in most places. As people’s interest in birds develops, so too will conservation-oriented values and an understanding of complex issues such as migration, habitat protection, and

sustainability. This progression will occur if we offer repeated, mentored experiences in the outdoors.

## Full-circle Approach

Perhaps one of RMBO’s greatest examples of our full-circle approach — using science, stewardship, and education together to achieve conservation — is through the work of our Nebraska Prairie Partners program. Our biologists work together to educate students, teachers, resource professionals and landowners on pine forest and shortgrass prairie ecology. For example, in 2009, 60 educators and landowners participated in a Pine Ridge Biodiversity Workshop. Participants enjoyed an owl prowl, learned about the area’s history and the Nebraska Natural Legacy Project, and toured an existing pine-thinning area as an example of a project they could implement on their land. Students learned similar concepts through our Panhandle Eco-Extravaganza about Prairies (PEEP) program. Our biologists bring PEEP to schools around the panhandle and

engage the students through interactive presentations and activities such as role-playing in predator-prey games and as “Critter Scene Investigators.” Six months after PEEP, an RMBO educator had another program with one of the schools, and many of the kids asked to be a Ferruginous Hawk in the predator-prey game because they remembered factual information about the species. We were excited to hear what the students remembered and the opportunity for a second program allowed us to build on this learning and take conservation concepts further.



The young and young at heart enjoy seeing birds at our banding stations.

## Making Connections

In 2009, RMBO engaged over 23,000 citizens in conservation via school programs, workshops, and public events throughout Colorado and Nebraska. RMBO works in 12 states and Mexico, but we currently have educators in just these two states. Nearly 7,000 of these participants were students on a field trip or attending a special program at their school. In Nebraska, RMBO works with nearly a third of the western panhandle's K-12 students every year. Our Colorado education programs focus on the Denver metro area, but through our banding station partners, we reach students from Colorado Springs to Grand Junction.

RMBO's seven banding stations engage students in ornithology by providing opportunities for seeing birds up close and biologists in action. Students get to collect and analyze data and watch the banding process firsthand. Most classes also go on nature hikes, learn to use binoculars, and discuss migration. Banding also provides a wealth of biological information about bird populations. In 20 years, RMBO has banded more than 180,000 birds. Our data contribute to knowledge on migration (timing and routes), population dynamics (sex and age ratios), body condition of individuals, and longevity records for individual species.

## Future

Over the next several years, we want to double the number of students participating in our programs. To strengthen knowledge comprehension and skill development, at least a quarter of these students will have multiple experiences with RMBO. We will accomplish our long-term goals by continuing the successful programs mentioned above and through the following new initiatives:

- **Old Stone House site plans.** We will develop our headquarters, The Old Stone House, into an environmental learning center (see details on page 4).
- **Volunteers.** Through volunteers, RMBO is increasing our capacity to deliver quality environmental education programs and collect scientific data. In 2009, we received a grant from Colorado Youth Corps Association that enabled us to hire an AmeriCorps\*VISTA as our first Volunteer Coordinator. The VISTA position is focused on recruiting and retaining education and citizen science

volunteers. We are developing an RMBO Naturalist program which will train new education volunteers in content and teaching techniques. In 2010, we will improve our "citizen scientist" efforts of ColonyWatch, Bald Eagle Watch, Hawk Watch, and other programs, including more staff support, training, and online data entry.

- **Clubs and Camps.** To further cultivate a sense of place and interest in spending time outdoors, RMBO is starting after-school and family nature clubs in Brighton, CO and Scottsbluff, NE. Leisure time spent together will positively impact family interaction and stability, and outdoor activities will help families to become better stewards of the environment. We are also offering summer camps in both locations and plan to bring back "On the Wing," RMBO's overnight camp for young teenagers, in 2011.



Campers take a break in the shade from exploring nature.

Our education programs are considered successful when they contribute toward the full-circle approach to conservation by fostering connections between humans and the natural world. In the next few years, we expect to see increases in the programs we offer, schools and families returning for multiple outdoor experiences, volunteers joining RMBO, and financial support for RMBO. In the long term, these successes will lead to more students choosing natural resources as a profession, more citizens being environmentally literate, and on-the-ground changes such as increased habitat for birds.

"Thank you for answering my questions at the end of the hike. Throughout the hike, I liked it when we saw two hawks flying in the sky. I liked it because it was my first time to see a hawk.... I liked it when you showed us some bird feathers. They were soft. When you were talking I learned a few things. I learned that hawks don't have to flap their wings as much as other birds. I learned that the place we went hiking used to be a swamp. Thank you helping me learn more about rocks and hawks."

– 4th-grade participant in RMBO's HawkWatch program



# Improving the Land



**T**he Stewardship Division marked a huge milestone for RMBO with our 100,000<sup>th</sup> acre of wildlife habitat enhanced! This goal, set back in 2004, was reached through partnerships with other organizations and the hard work and relationships built by the biologists working in the Stewardship Division.

## Private Lands Biologists

Our joint partnership with the Colorado Division of Wildlife and the Natural Resources Conservation Service supports four Private Lands Wildlife Biologists in the Colorado communities of Durango, Greeley, Pueblo, and Steamboat Springs. These biologists provide technical assistance to landowners and resource professionals on projects and management practices enhancing habitat for species such as Greater Sage-Grouse, Lesser Prairie-Chicken, Northern Bobwhite, and Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Projects in 2009 included grazing management, riparian and wetland restoration, and removal and management of invasive exotic species. These efforts have been augmented with additional support from the Playa Lakes Joint Venture, the National Fish and Wildlife

Foundation's ConocoPhillips SPIRIT Grant, and an Intermountain West Joint Venture Capacity Grant. In Nebraska, our Nebraska Prairie Partners staff including a Coordinating Wildlife Biologist in Scottsbluff continued our habitat enhancement and landowner outreach efforts, such as implementing pine thinning and invasive species projects. A Farm Bill Biologist in Imperial focused on playa lake restoration and restoring prescribed fire where appropriate.

## Cooperative Conservation

In 2009 Nebraska staff was instrumental in formulating the Kimball County Conservation Cooperative, bringing together landowners and natural resource professionals to discuss issues and provide a forum to network. Our efforts continue with support of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund. Similar partnerships and cooperative conservation efforts are ongoing in Colorado through the Prairie and Wetlands Focus Area, a group promoting upland and wetland habitat enhancement in eastern Colorado. Partnerships with other conservation groups have developed as a result and several have formed around geographic areas of the Colorado plains:

- **The Three Rivers Alliance.** RMBO is working with this landowner-led group in Yuma and Washington Counties to address riparian habitat enhancement including invasive species removal along the Republican River.
- **Branson-Trinchera and Double El Conservation Districts.** RMBO is partnering with these conservation districts to provide fencing and watering facilities to convert expiring Conservation Reserve Program grasslands back into grazing systems. Such use will be far more compatible with the needs of grassland birds than returning to a cropping system.



Newly hatched Mountain Plover chicks.

These cooperative efforts are true partnerships between RMBO and private landowners. **We recognize that, for conservation to be effective and sustainable, it requires relationships with people and it has to occur at the local level.** We are at the forefront of creating the initiatives that yield grassroots conservation efforts.

### Special Species Conservation

In 2009, the Nebraska Prairie Partners continued transitioning the Mountain Plover Nest Marking Program to a landowner-led conservation initiative. **Landowners located nearly 25% (19 out of 80) of the Mountain Plover nests during the 2009 field season.** Annually, we meet with local producers to share information on the past field season and future directions as part of an adaptive management approach to conservation. The percent of nests located by landowners has climbed over the years. We expect this trend to continue to a point where a sustainable Mountain Plover population can be achieved solely by landowners who locate and avoid nests during their tillage operations. Landowners in Colorado will be transitioned in 2010 through a US Fish & Wildlife Service Neotropical Migratory Bird Act grant.

Nebraska Prairie Partners also completed the installation of 25 Ferruginous Hawk nesting platforms throughout western Nebraska.

The purpose of these platforms was to: 1) provide the state-threatened Ferruginous Hawk with more suitable nesting sites, and 2) involve landowners in a hands-on way to promote the conservation of this native prairie bird. We sought landowners whose property contained ideal nesting habitat for Ferruginous Hawks, and who also wished to



Scouts pitch in to make a home for nesting Ferruginous Hawks.

engage in citizen science. As part of receiving a nesting platform on their property, landowners are required to check for nesting activity and report back to Nebraska Prairie Partners biologists. The project has been a success, with landowners playing a larger role in conservation and with two of our nesting platforms having nest-building activity.



Participants enjoy a relaxed ride at an RMBO workshop.

### Future

The Stewardship Division strives to build a coalition of landowners and managers across the Great Plains and Intermountain West who are actively involved in the conservation of lands important to birds. To that end, we will continue to spend the majority of our time raising awareness about birds and their habitat needs and encouraging private landowners to incorporate those needs into land management plans. We will build relationships with landowners and find funding to enhance habitat across Colorado, Wyoming, and western Nebraska. A particular focus will be on our Private Lands Wildlife Biologist program. Due to this program's immense success the Stewardship Division is working to expand. Specifically, we are focusing on putting biologists in eastern Wyoming and the Gunnison Basin of Colorado and one who will focus on wetlands conservation throughout Colorado. These positions will engage more landowners and assist with the conservation of grassland, sage shrubland, and wetland species. In addition, much national conservation concern is focused on declining Lesser Prairie-Chicken populations and the potential for Endangered Species listing. **We will assist landowners and enhance habitat in southeastern Colorado to promote sustainable populations and preclude the need for regulation.** With more biologists bringing more landowners to our team, we expect we will achieve our new goal of enhancing 200,000 acres of bird habitat within the next few years.

RMBO's popular "Pocket Guide to Prairie Birds", first printed in 2003, underwent a significant revision in 2009. The new guide features larger, crisper photos and information on conservation for each species. This little guide has been our most successful outreach publication, with more than **60,000** copies distributed to landowners, land managers, K-12 students, residents, and tourists throughout the Great Plains. Its success inspired a series of pocket-sized field guides by other conservation organizations and government agencies. In 2008, RMBO produced a Spanish-language guide built on this model and in 2010 we will release two new guides, one on birds of the northern Great Plains and one on sagebrush birds.

### Pocket Guide to Prairie Birds



Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory

# Mexico: Critical Link for Conservation



Our International Program continues to focus on the conservation of Chihuahuan grasslands in Mexico, one of the most vital and threatened ecosystems in North America. These grasslands support more than 90% of grassland bird species from the western Great Plains during the non-breeding season. Grasslands cover less than 10% of the Chihuahuan Desert region and are increasingly being lost due to cropland conversion and shrub encroachment. The significant concentration of grasslands birds into this region in winter, coupled with the extensive loss of habitat both past and present, point to a major bottleneck in the life-cycle of migratory grassland birds on their wintering grounds, and a possible explanation for their decline.

## Winter Bird Monitoring

RMBO is the first organization to conduct wintering grassland bird research at a scale and intensity that covers the core range for most species. Through our



Chihuahuan grasslands, where many of our grassland birds spend the winter.

efforts, we are discovering important areas for steeply declining species like Baird's and Grasshopper Sparrows, increasing our understanding of rare species like Mountain Plover and Long-billed Curlew, learning about winter habitat requirements of ecological specialists like Chestnut-collared Longspur and Sprague's Pipit, and gaining insight into factors that limit overwinter survival of grassland species like Vesper Sparrow. This information is essential for building a sound scientific basis for advancing strategic habitat conservation in the region. Work in Mexico requires cooperation with landowners, thus we are engaging this key constituent, building a foundation for collaboration with those who ultimately control the fate of Mexico's desert grasslands.

## Local Conservation

In addition to our grasslands focus, RMBO continues to support community-based efforts in Mexico that empower local citizens to take a greater stake in conservation. In El Cielo Biosphere Reserve in Tamaulipas, Mexico, we are partnering with researchers from the Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas and a local bird guiding



Eco-tour participants spy a Boat-billed Heron.

cooperative to measure overwinter survival of migrant and resident birds, strengthen reserve management, and diversify the livelihoods of local residents. In the Sierra de Manantlán Biosphere Reserve in Jalisco, Mexico, we are partnering with the Universidad de Guadalajara to offer educational eco-tours to see first-hand the many migrant and resident bird species found in western Mexico, and learn about the importance of this region for North American bird conservation. Proceeds from these trips support the University's long-term bird research and conservation programs, local communities, and RMBO's work in this area.



Eco-tour participants observed a Slaty Vireo in the hand at the Las Joyas banding station.

and engage partners in habitat enhancement, restoration, and protection. **Only through voluntary partnerships that meet the needs of both people and wildlife can we hope to stem the tide of Chihuahuan grassland loss in time to make a difference for declining grassland species.**

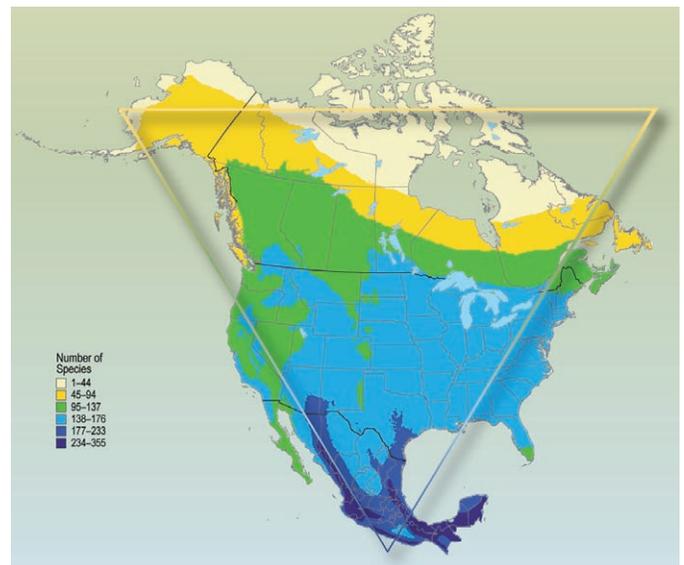
### Identifying Priorities for Conservation

Prioritization of conservation actions, based on the vulnerability of species, is an essential tool in bird conservation. Since 1992, RMBO has played a major role in the conservation assessment of birds in Canada, USA, and Mexico. These assessments, which are conducted in coordination with our partners and maintained by RMBO, form the scientific underpinnings of state, regional, national, and continental conservation plans that prioritize actions for birds. In 2009, we also coauthored the first-ever tri-national assessment and analysis of the continent's landbirds, which will be released in 2010 as part of Partners in Flight's Tri-national Vision: *Saving our Shared Birds*.

### Future

While we made significant strides in 2009, much, much more needs to be done. In the Chihuahuan grasslands, we aim to identify critical areas for conservation and increase international awareness about the plight of these important grasslands. Next, we envision establishing a conservation presence in key grassland areas by deploying biologists with expertise in range management and outreach to build local support for conservation

In western Mexico, we aim to engage government, academic, non-governmental agency, and community partners to take a more proactive role in maintaining functional ecosystems, protecting key habitats, and promoting sustainable use of natural resources. Lastly, we plan to continue improving our scientific knowledge of bird conservation needs, especially in Latin America, where so much basic research remains to be done. These steps, while only part of the solution, will help address some of the most urgent and neglected bird conservation needs in North America.



Birds funnel from their breeding grounds across the U.S. and Canada and concentrate on their wintering grounds in Mexico. *Adapted from Berlanga et al. 2010.*

"This project changed my life", said Jose Hugo Martinez Guerrero, after working on RMBO's Chihuahuan grassland wintering bird survey. A game biologist with the Universidad Juarez del Estado de Durango, Jose Hugo is now leading a study on Baird's Sparrow, a species that has declined by nearly 80% since 1966. Baird's Sparrow winters entirely in the western Chihuahuan Desert and Sierra Madre Occidental, but it has never been studied in Mexico. As part of his work toward his PhD, Jose Hugo is describing the species' wintering ecology in his home state of Durango, where it is locally common. He has already documented previously unknown habitats and behaviors of this poorly known species. He is also committed to conservation. "All the data I collect is to help conserve the species," he says. "I am so thankful for RMBO's support."



# Donors & Members

*We greatly appreciate all the gifts of time, energy, and funds we received in 2009 from the following supporters:*

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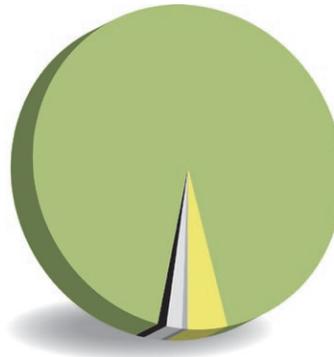
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*We thank the following partners and funders who supported our conservation work in 2009:*

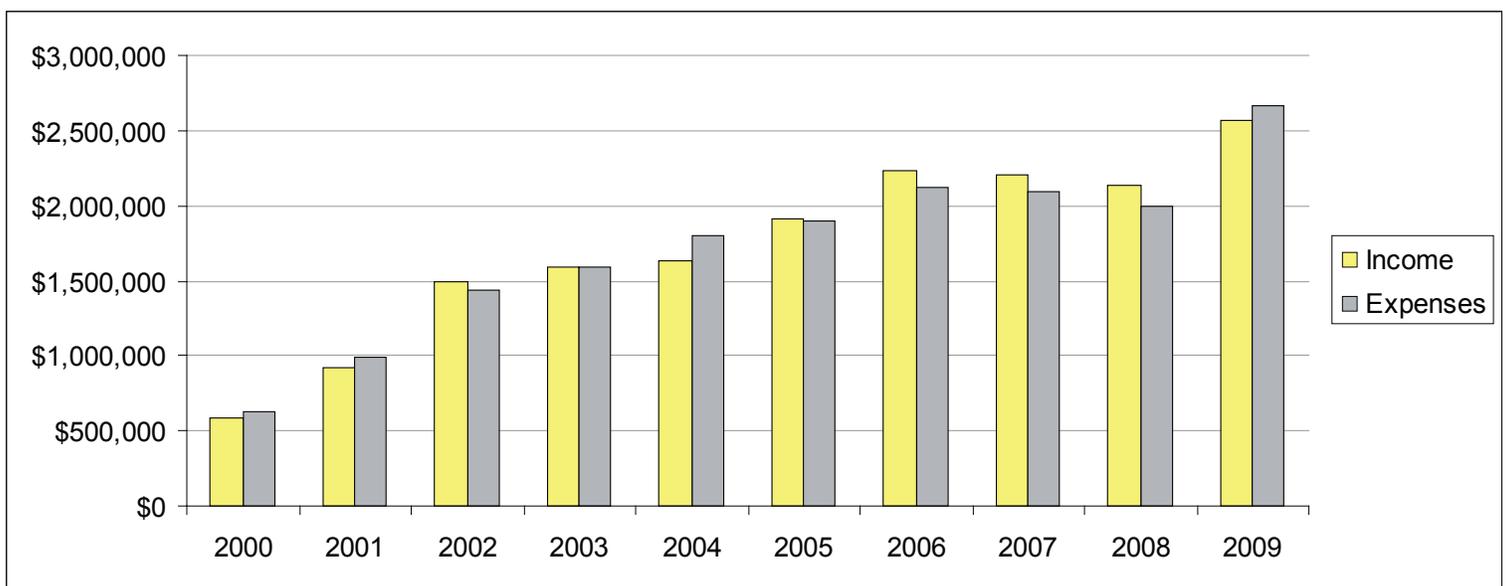
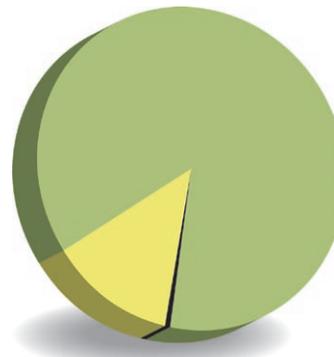
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Rio Grande Research Center (Sul Ross State University)  
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South Dakota Department of Game, Fish & Parks  
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The Tamarisk Coalition  
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USFWS Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act  
US Geological Survey  
USGS Bird Banding Laboratory  
Wild Birds Unlimited  
Wildcat Hills Audubon  
Wildcat Hills Recreation Area  
The Wildlife Experience  
World Wildlife Fund  
Wyoming Game & Fish Department  
Wyoming Natural Diversity Database

# Finances

Revenue	2008	2009
Contributions	27,695	37,790
Memberships	17,853	14,878
Scientific & Cultural Facilities District (SCFD)	134,099	104,634
Contracts and grants	1,952,749	2,390,867
Other	7,198	25,584
<b>Total revenue</b>	<b>2,139,594</b>	<b>2,573,753</b>



Expenses	2008	2009
Program	1,663,474	2,301,169
General and administrative	315,775	346,643
Fundraising and development	11,394	16,858
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>1,990,643</b>	<b>2,664,670</b>



Fiscal History 2000-2009

# Volunteers

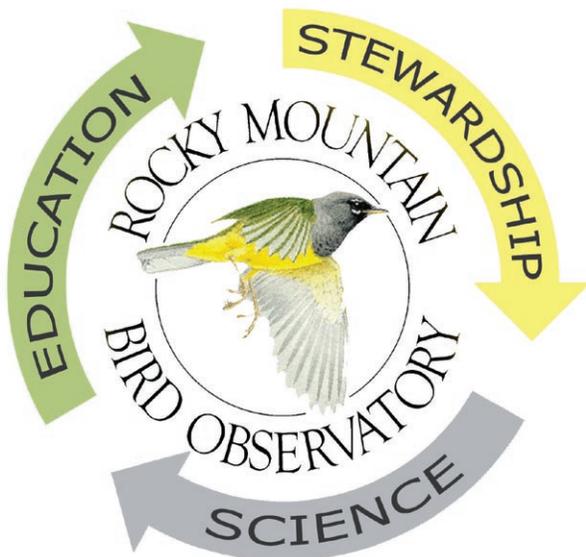
*A hearty thank-you to the following individuals who donated their time and talents to RMBO:*

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**The mission of the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory is to conserve birds and their habitats.**

We work throughout the western United States and across international boundaries, emphasizing Mexico, the single most important country for our wintering migrant species. RMBO uses a full-circle approach to achieve its mission: Our programs — in science, education, and stewardship — are linked to one another in a unique way that drives our conservation actions.

For more information about RMBO, or to offer your support, please visit our website at [www.rmbo.org](http://www.rmbo.org) or call our Brighton office at **303-659-4348**. Thank you!

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