

# THE PRIMARY SOURCE



NEWSLETTER FOR BIRD CONSERVANCY OF THE ROCKIES | SPRING/SUMMER 2017 | NUMBER 51

## Taking flight with Neighborhood Nestwatch

Discover the wonders of birds in your own backyard as a citizen scientist!

**H**ave you ever wondered what the birds in your backyard are up to when they aren't gorging themselves at your feeders? Or whether that robin you see every day is the same bird, or just a series of lookalikes? Or whether there are birds living in your backyard that you've never noticed before? Now, you can find out by inviting Bird Conservancy biologists to your backyard through Neighborhood Nestwatch!

Neighborhood Nestwatch is a national citizen science program created by the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center which monitors birds in the urban areas. Rather than trying to answer a single question, Neighborhood Nestwatch aims to collect data that can help answer many questions about how birds interact with people and urban/suburban environments.



**Banding a Grey Catbird**

Bird Conservancy biologists schedule a visit with volunteers in their backyards to conduct an initial assessment of the birds and habitat. That means bringing a mini-banding station to your backyard! The Neighborhood Nestwatch team catches and bands targeted bird species with a color combination unique to your backyard, so that you can recognize those same individual birds every time they return. Biologists also survey your yard for nests, signs of bird activity, and plant diversity.

Once the Nestwatch biologists leave your backyard, it's your turn to be the scientist! Nestwatch participants have the opportunity to report sightings of their banded birds to the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center in order to fully contribute to the Nestwatch project. Participants also get to monitor any nests that are found on their property during their initial visit.



**Alie Mayes with a Tufted Titmouse**

Bird Conservancy's Outreach Coordinator, Alie Mayes, is leading the charge to bring Neighborhood Nestwatch west. Before coming to Bird Conservancy, Alie worked as a Nestwatch technician on the East Coast, first in Washington D.C., and later as part of the first Nestwatch crew to work in Atlanta.

Alie is eager to bring Nestwatch to Denver not only for the purpose of contributing valuable data on bird populations, but also for the opportunity to provide the community with meaningful and unique experiences with the birds in their backyards.



**This House Wren is color banded and ready to be released back into the wild.**

### Neighborhood Nestwatch



#### Join the Program!

#### Be among the first in the Denver area to volunteer your backyard!

Volunteers must be located within fifty miles of the Denver Museum of Nature and Science and willing to commit to three years of citizen science participation. Initial site assessments take about 3-4 hours, starting at around 7 a.m. Birds are color-banded, and we also search for nests in your yard and inventory plant species. At the end of the site visit, you will receive a color band I.D. sheet to keep track of color-banded birds and monitor nesting activity on your property. Summer is the busiest time for data collection, and participants typically spend about an hour a week on data collection and reporting, your findings to the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center's online database.

#### For more information, contact:

Alie Mayes, Outreach Coordinator  
303.659.4348 x10  
alexandra.mayes@birdconservancy.org

#### To register for consideration, visit:

<http://www.birdconservancy.org/what-we-do/education/register-for-programs/>

*In collaboration with:*



Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center

## THE PRIMARY SOURCE

*The Primary Source* is the member newsletter of Bird Conservancy of the Rockies

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(970) 482-1707

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*The Primary Source* refers to a bird's primary feathers which power their flight. Our members, Friends, volunteers and partners are the primary source of Bird Conservancy's power to accomplish its mission to conserve birds and their habitats.

### Editing and design:

William Bevil, Communications Manager

### Go Paperless

If you prefer to receive an electronic-only version of this newsletter, please email [william.bevil@birdconservancy.org](mailto:william.bevil@birdconservancy.org) to update your subscription preferences.



### Advertise in The Primary Source

Looking to promote your business and help conserve birds and their habitats? Ad rates start at just \$50 with a distribution of over 500 members and supporters! Contact us to learn more: [info@birdconservancy.org](mailto:info@birdconservancy.org)



### From the Director

## Pride of Association

As you receive this issue of *The Primary Source* in your mailbox, you'll notice summer is in full swing. Our

teams are in the field, tracking and counting birds across the western United States, from Montana to Arizona, to Texas, and even California. Meanwhile, here in Colorado, our summer camps are inspiring kids of all ages, fostering new skills and confidence they will use throughout their lives.

As we work to address bird conservation needs at a large scale, we recognize the importance of personal connections with individuals. That first handshake, that first conversation, has lifelong effects and is core to achieving our mission

We think and care a lot about our associations with people and organizations. Over 200 partners, dozens of volunteers, and scores of private landowners enrolled in our programs have chosen to associate with Bird Conservancy because they believe in our mission and trust in our ability to innovate, lead and deliver.

That pride of association also goes the other way. Throughout this newsletter, you'll see the names of people and organizations whom we are fortunate to call supporters and partners. We celebrate the much-deserved recognition of Leopold Award winner Grady Grissom who embodies the

meaning of a land ethic. We are also saddened by the much-too-soon departure of our friend and Board Vice-Chair, Steve Bloom. Both of these men are shining examples of how to live life to the fullest, share your passion and expertise, and achieve great things.

It was wonderful to see such a great turn-out for our annual BBQ, including new faces and faces of supporters who have been with us for decades. We had a gorgeous day, filled with fun and conversation, along with the opportunity to honor volunteer-of-the-year winner Cynde Barnes, as well as our many other outstanding volunteers and members.

Every one of us can make a difference for bird conservation with our actions, choices, and our associations. I invite you to spread the word and get your friends, loved ones and even co-workers involved! We have a goal of 1,000 members – can you help us reach it? As we grow through new programs like Neighborhood Nestwatch, we become more relevant in people's communities and come closer to achieving our mission. I'm excited about the people I'll meet as they join our flock and look forward to our journey together.

- Tammy VerCauteren  
Executive Director

## In Memoriam



### Vice-Chairman Steve Bloom

Wisdom, warmth and wit—was what many well-known CEOs and boards of directors received from organizational psychologist and consultant Dr. Stephen Bloom. His service to Bird Conservancy, however, included more than strategy and governance advice. He also coached key employees on multiple aspects of leadership, developed evaluation approaches, and helped recruit board and staff members. We value his enormous and long-lasting contributions, and we cherish the memory of our trusted friend.



# Solving the Mystery of Rosy Finches

by Luke George, Science Director

**B**rown-capped Rosy Finches (*Leucosticte australis*) nest at higher elevations than any other bird species in the United States, and their breeding distribution is almost entirely limited to Colorado. They spend most of the year well above tree line, feeding on seeds and insects on snow fields and in short tundra vegetation moving to lower elevations for short periods during winter storms. Despite residing in an almost pristine environment for most of the year, Brown-capped Rosy Finches (BCRF) have declined by as much as 95% over the past 50 years and, unfortunately, we don't know why.

In order to obtain a better understanding of the movement patterns and intermixing of breeding populations, the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies in collaboration with the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, the University of California at Santa Cruz, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the US Forest Service have started colorbanding BCRFs on their wintering and breeding grounds.

We are asking hikers, climbers, and birders that visit the high country of Colorado in the summer to keep their eyes out for rosy finches and report sightings. If you see a Brown-capped Rosy Finch, please report the date, time, location (latitude/longitude), the number of birds, and, if the bird is colorbanded, the band color and leg (left or right -- see sidebar for color band information). If possible, include photos of the birds in your report.



Luke George inspects a banded Brown-capped Rosy Finch before releasing it back into the wild.



Brown-capped Rosy Finch with colorband on left leg.

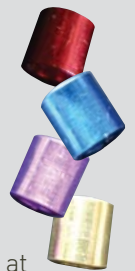


On the cover: **Brown-Capped Rosy Finch**  
Photo by **Tony Leukering**

## Keep a Lookout!



Birds have been banded with a single colorband on one leg and a silver-colored numbered aluminum band on the other. The color bands are red, blue, purple and gold.



Sightings can be entered into eBird, on the Rosy Finch page at [www.CitSci.org](http://www.CitSci.org), or using the CitSci app available for iPhones and Android devices.

**eBird**  **CitSci.org**

**Thanks for your help in learning more about this iconic Colorado bird!**

For more information:  
[luke.george@birdconservancy.org](mailto:luke.george@birdconservancy.org)  
or by phone (970) 482-1707 x13



## STAFF MIGRATIONS

*Welcome* to our new Staff!



**Sarah Burnett**, Membership & Development Coordinator, is based in Fort Collins where she is helping to enhance and grow our membership and private contributions through donor-focused programs, services and events.



**Allison Fowle**, Camps and Family Programs Coordinator, is based in Brighton where she creates student-centered, inquiry-driven environmental education programs designed to engage and inspire kids of all ages.

*Farewells:*

Jason Beason, Jeff Birek  
Valerie Marshall, Mary Ferraro



**Jacy Bernath-Plaisted**, NGP Demographic Monitoring Coordinator is based in Fort Collins and plays a key role in our full life cycle monitoring programs focusing on grassland birds and survival rates on their wintering and breeding grounds in Mexico and the U.S.



**Kristina Kline**, Private Lands Wildlife Biologist, is based in Durango, CO and works closely with private landowners, land managers and resource professionals to foster proactive, voluntary conservation efforts on working lands.



**Maryanne Murphy**, Chief Administrative Officer, is based in Brighton and is leading efforts to streamline and improve our financial, operational and information technology systems to take Bird Conservancy of the Rockies into the next 30 years!



## OUR MISSION

Conserving birds and their habitats through science, education and land stewardship

## OUR VISION

A world where birds are forever abundant, contributing to healthy landscapes and inspiring human curiosity and love of nature.

## OUR APPROACH

Our mission is advanced through sound science, achieved through empowering people, realized through stewardship and sustained through partnerships.

Our work radiates from the Rockies to the Great Plains, Mexico and beyond.

*Together, we are improving native bird populations, the land and the lives of people.*

## Connect with Us

For the latest on our upcoming events, visit [www.birdconservancy.org](http://www.birdconservancy.org), sign up for our e-newsletter on our website or become a fan of Bird Conservancy of the Rockies on Facebook.



**Facebook**

[www.facebook.com/birdconservancy](http://www.facebook.com/birdconservancy)



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Search: Bird Conservancy of the Rockies



**Pinterest**

[www.pinterest.com/BirdConservancy](http://www.pinterest.com/BirdConservancy)

# BBQ for the Birds a Big Hit

Event recap by William Bevil, Communications Manager

This year marked our 14th BBQ for the Birds, our annual member picnic and thank you celebration honoring our generous volunteers, members, and supporters.

About 250 people came out for the May 13 event at the "Old Stone House", our Environmental Learning Center at Barr Lake State Park. Mother nature treated us to beautiful weather. Activities included live raptors, conservation-themed games, staff presentations and guest exhibitors. In the afternoon, guests sheltered in the shade to enjoy a delicious lunch accompanied by live music and conversation. New and long-time supporters mingled to share stories about how they got involved with Bird Conservancy.



Congratulations to **Cynde Barnes** (center), recipient of the 2017 **Nelda Gamble Award**, which was given at the event. Named after Nelda Gamble, who started the Bald Eagle Watch program in 1988, the award recognizes outstanding volunteer service. Previous recipients include Jan & Bruce Snyder, Paul Slingsby, Amber Tyler, Cindi Kelly, Dale Jones, May McCoy, Rachel Dunbar, and Steve Fisher.

Coinciding with International Migratory Bird Day, the BBQ aimed to be both fun and informative. Presenters shared information about new citizen science initiatives including Nestwatch Denver and Brown-capped Rosy Finch monitoring efforts in Colorado.



**Bird Talk Radio** broadcasted live from the BBQ on AM radio 710 KNUS and 1690 KDMT. Hosted by Scott and David Menough, owners of Denver-area Wild Birds Unlimited stores, the program featured interviews with Bird Conservancy staff sharing stories about our work and programs. The show is available for download on iTunes!

If you missed the BBQ, you were missed! We hope you will join us for future programs and events in 2017 and beyond. Next year, we celebrate our 30th Anniversary, and are already working on plans to commemorate this important milestone. We invite you to get more involved with Bird Conservancy and our mission to conserve birds and their habitats! Become a volunteer, give a gift of membership, take someone birding and help spread the word!

## THANK YOU to our Event Sponsors!







## Supporter Spotlight

# Board Member Grady Grissom receives Leopold Conservation Award

On March 31, The Sand County Foundation announced Rancho Largo and Grady Grissom as the winner of the 2017 Leopold Conservation Award for Colorado.

The Leopold Conservation Award Program recognizes agricultural landowners actively committed to a land ethic and celebrates extraordinary achievement in voluntary conservation by private landowners. This special award also acknowledges the important role that agricultural community leaders play as conservation ambassadors to the general public and fellow producers.

Grady has been a manager/partner at Rancho Largo Cattle Co. east of Walsenburg, Colorado, since 1995. Rancho Largo is a 14,000-acre ranch where the fundamental philosophy is: maximum ecosystem health equals maximum ranching profit.

Grady's leadership in his field is well known by his friends and colleagues. He consistently seeks to innovate Rancho Largo's operations and regularly shares his knowledge with others, participating in workshops, writing papers, serving on conservation-focused Boards, and staying



engaged with the scientific community. He isn't afraid to try novel and unconventional techniques in land management and adopt what works and adapt what doesn't.

Grady has served on Bird Conservancy's Board since 2011, acting as a source of inspiration and expertise to inform our private landowner engagement efforts and stewardship programs. Grady exemplifies the characteristics deserving of this prestigious award, and we are proud to be associated with such an outstanding individual. Congratulations Grady!



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5% of Colorado sales go directly to support Bird Conservancy of the Rockies!



Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center

## Broaden the Circle!

Introduce someone to a vibrant community that cares about the health of our natural world. We've made it easy! Simply fill out the form included in this newsletter and return it to us—or give us a call, we'll walk you through it!

### Member benefits include:

- The Primary Source newsletter
- Recognition in our annual report
- Discounts on special events and gear
- Invitations to our annual member picnic, birding trips and special events
- The satisfaction of knowing you're conserving birds and their habitats!



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**Keynote by George Archibald of  
International Crane Foundation  
Birding Editor Ted Floyd  
Sandra Noll & Ery Nichols**

**STEAMBOAT SPRINGS**

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**Schedule & festival info at  
coloradocranes.org**



## SEASONAL EVENTS



Western Scrub-Jay

Illustration by

John Burgoyne from

the cover of *The Genius of Birds*

### 2017 FALL SPEAKER SERIES

*presented in partnership with*



Exploring new ideas and  
cutting-edge science by  
leaders in the field of  
ornithology.

**October 25, 2017**

#### **Dr. Ellen D. Ketterson**

Professor of Biology at Indiana University

Ellen's presentation will explore how bird species respond to environmental change, using Dark-eyed Juncos as examples. Readily observed in backyards, city parks, and forests alike, these little gray birds are easily overlooked. But for scientists who study animal behavior, ecology, and evolutionary biology, the Junco is a rock star. Join us to find out why!

**November 2, 2017**

#### **Jennifer Ackerman**

Science writer and author of *The Genius of Birds* (named one of the ten best non-fiction books of 2016 by the Wall Street Journal)

Birds are astonishingly smart creatures. Like humans, many have enormous brains relative to their size. Jennifer Ackerman explores our newly-discovered appreciation for the brilliance of birds, and the scientific research that has produced a revolution in our understanding of avian intelligence.

\$12 Bird Conservancy of the Rockies  
and DMNS members, \$15 nonmember

For more information or to purchase tickets:  
[www.dmns.org/adults/after-hours](http://www.dmns.org/adults/after-hours)

### FALL BIRD BANDING



Bird Conservancy of the Rockies conducts banding at five stations each fall in Colorado and Nebraska. Teachers and group leaders can arrange a visit for groups of students and individual visitors are also welcome. Registration is required for groups. Hours of operation vary and are subject to weather conditions. To learn more, visit [www.birdconservancy.org/what-we-do/education/bird-banding](http://www.birdconservancy.org/what-we-do/education/bird-banding)

#### **CHICO BANDING STATION**

Operated in partnership  
with Chico Basin Ranch

Located 35 miles southeast  
of Colorado Springs, CO

To schedule a visit, contact:  
[learning@ranchlands.com](mailto:learning@ranchlands.com)  
or (719) 683-7960.

#### **CHADRON BANDING STATION**

Location: Chadron State Park  
15951 Hwy. 385, Chadron, NE

To schedule a visit, contact:  
Amber Schiltz, Nebraska Wildlife  
Education Coordinator  
[amber.schiltz@birdconservancy.org](mailto:amber.schiltz@birdconservancy.org)  
or (308) 783-1019

#### **WILDCAT HILLS BANDING STATION**

Location: Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area, Gering, NE

To schedule a visit, contact:  
Amber Schiltz, Nebraska Wildlife Education Coordinator  
[amber.schiltz@birdconservancy.org](mailto:amber.schiltz@birdconservancy.org) or (308) 783-1019

#### **RIDGWAY BANDING STATION**

Operated in partnership with  
Black Canyon Audubon Society  
Location: Ridgway State Park  
28555 US-550, Ridgway, CO

To schedule a visit, contact:  
Nancy Gobris, Banding Coordinator  
[nancy.gobris@birdconservancy.org](mailto:nancy.gobris@birdconservancy.org)  
or (478) 361-0954.

#### **BARR LAKE BANDING STATION**

Location: Barr Lake State Park  
13401 Picadilly Rd. Brighton, CO

To schedule a group visit, contact  
Jennifer Watson, Edu. Program. Mgr.  
[jennifer.meyers@birdconservancy.org](mailto:jennifer.meyers@birdconservancy.org)  
or (303) 659-4348 x19



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us connect, engage and inspire thousands  
of people in nature each year.



Bird-Friendly Living

# Attracting Backyard Birds

by Scott Menough, Wild Birds Unlimited

Creating your own backyard bird sanctuary starts with providing four essential elements: food, water, cover/shelter, and a safe place to raise young. Food is provided with our plantings and bird feeders. Water is provided with bird baths and landscaped water features. Cover from predators or shelter from inclement weather is provided with trees, shrubs, and bird houses. A safe place to raise young is provided with trees, shrubs, and bird houses.

## Benefits for birds

*"Effects of Bird-feeding Activities on the Health of Wild Birds"* was a three-year study by Millikin University that used six sites – 3 with feeders, 3 without. Good quality seed was used. Several birds of many species were banded, recaptured and measured for body condition, physiological stress, antioxidant levels, nutritional conditions, reproductive physiology, immune function, and disease.

The study showed a consistent pattern of greater overall health for the birds at the sites where supplemental feeders were present. It also showed that supplemental food did not create a dependency among birds. Birds that had access to supplemental food were in better physiological condition than those that did not, as demonstrated by increased antioxidant levels, reduced stress levels, more rapid feather growth, improved body condition index scores, and a stronger immune defense system.

## Getting started

The easiest element to start with is bird seed appropriate for your region in a bird feeder that is easy-to-fill, can hang or mount, long-lasting, and safe for birds' use. A tube-type seed feeder is a great way to get started. A beginner's field guide helps one identify the new feathered visitors.

## Ensuring safety for birds

Domestic cats kill millions upon millions of wild birds in North America each year. It is instinctive for cats to kill birds, but it is not a natural occurrence for a domestic animal to prey upon a wild animal. Surprisingly, a well-fed cat will kill more birds than a hungry stray. Keep cats indoors for the health of

the cat and the life of the birds. At our Wild Birds Unlimited stores, we have store cats, but they are all indoor cats. (And they keep the mice out of the birdseed in the store.)

## Choose high-quality seed

If offering seed, consider blends designed for birds in your area that have no shells and no "filler" seeds. Filler seeds are included in many mixes of wild bird seed found in grocery, hardware, and big box stores. Filler seeds are seeds that birds won't eat and just grow weeds under the bird feeder. These fillers include milo, wheat, oats, and canary grass seed. They tend to cost less but end up being more expensive since so much is not eaten. No-waste blends attract birds that eat at different levels – on the ground or above the ground – and are less likely to grow weeds under the feeder or leave shell litter that needs to be cleaned up.

## Give them a drink

Providing a consistent source of clean drinking water will attract many birds, including some you may not be able to attract with bird seed alone. Bird baths come in various materials and sizes. Before choosing one, consider the location, access for cleaning, and the size. Larger baths can accommodate more birds, but they take more effort to clean. The bath should not be more than 1-2 inches deep.

Moving water, such as fountains, bubblers and drips, will attract even more birds. Pump kits and other contraptions are available at Wild Birds Unlimited stores, and some are even powered by solar! Adding a heater to your birdbath during cold winter months will keep water unfrozen and available to birds.

## Home and haven

Nesting options, whether it be nest boxes or natural, provide places for birds to raise young. Before putting up any boxes, do some research about each species preferences in regards to materials, size, location and other factors. If you live in the Denver Metro Area, consider enrolling your backyard in the new Neighborhood Nestwatch citizen science program!



Scott and his wife, Sandy, own the Wild Birds Unlimited Nature Shop at 2720 S. Wadsworth Blvd. in Denver. WBU stores specialize in bird feeders, bird baths, houses, field guides, nature-related gifts, binoculars, and quality seed blends.

Thank you also to these other WBU Front Range locations that support Bird Conservancy of the Rockies:

### Wild Birds Unlimited of Arvada

David Menough (owner)  
7370 W. 88th Ave.

### Wild Birds Unlimited of Fort Collins

Lauren DeRosa (owner)  
3636 S. College Ave.



A great starting guide for beginners is the *"Guide to Backyard Birds of the Front Range"* by Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, available at the Wild Birds Unlimited stores listed above.



## Have more bird questions?

For answers to wild bird and bird feeding questions, listen to the **BirdTalk** radio show. BirdTalk is presented by Wild Birds Unlimited and airs Saturdays from noon to 1:00 on AM radio stations 710 KNUS and 1690 KDMT. Podcasts of past shows are available at [www.wildbirdscolorado.com](http://www.wildbirdscolorado.com)



Bird Conservancy of the Rockies  
14500 Lark Bunting Lane  
Brighton, CO 80603  
[www.birdconservancy.org](http://www.birdconservancy.org)

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## Chip in for Birds!

Help protect some of the world's most important, enjoyable and beautiful creatures.

**Make a gift to BIRD CONSERVANCY OF THE ROCKIES today!**

Donations are welcome in any amount and can be made via our website  
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PS51