

NEWSLETTER FOR BIRD CONSERVANCY OF THE ROCKIES | FALL/WINTER 2018 | NUMBER 53

# Chasing the 'Coolest Bird' - the Sequel!

# The quest continues to uncover the mysteries of the Black Swift

by William Bevil, Communications Manager

The aerodynamic form, blade-like wings and jet black coloration of the Black Swift (Cypseloides niger) make it a beauty to behold. Their reclusive nature and tendency to nest in extremely difficult-to-reach places (high elevation waterfalls and rocky cliff faces) only add to their reputation for elusiveness.



Black Swift. Photo by Todd Patrick

Until just six years ago, the Black Swift was one of the last birds that breeds in the U.S. and Canada with a completely unknown winter destination. It was then that Bird Conservancy (then RMBO), along with partner biologists Carolyn Gunn and Kim Potter, confirmed the location of their wintering grounds—over 4,000 miles away in lowland rainforests of Brazil.

We still have much to learn about Black Swifts. According to Partners in Flight, their population has declined by 94% between 1970 and 2014, and the causes are still unknown. Bird Conservancy is advancing the quest using the latest technology to fill critical information gaps that can help inform conservation efforts across these birds' range. We are off to a great start. In July, our Black Swift monitoring team recovered a GPS tag from a swift tagged last year at Box Cañon near Ouray, CO.

Early analysis of the data is remarkable. For the first time, we can see Black Swift foraging flights during the breeding season. Some trips averaged up to 60 km away from the nesting site and covered a larger area than anticipated.

The data also provides a partial view of the bird's 2017 fall migration, revealing that it stayed close to the western coastline all the way to South America. Unfortunately, the data logger filled before reaching the final destination. For future deployments, we'll reduce the frequency of data points collected, enabling us to obtain locations over a longer time span. That information is vital because we still don't know *exactly* where they go in Brazil. 2012 devices were accurate

only to within +/-100 miles. With today's tech, we can pinpoint much more precise locations across a Black Swift's full annual cycle—on the breeding grounds, during migration, and at the wintering grounds.



GPS "backpack"

A 2016 study of European Common Swifts revealed they stayed aloft for 10 months of the year, eating and sleeping on the wing. Bird Conservancy is collaborating with the team that led this research, and using the same devices to study Black Swifts in Colorado and beyond.

What mysteries will be uncovered about Black Swifts in 2019? We are excited about what next year will bring. You—our partners and supporters—make the discoveries possible!



Deploying a wing activity data logger on a Black Swift at Zapata Falls. Photo by Rob Sparks



# Visit our Black Swift campaign page: birdconservancy.org/blackswift

Your support fuels our efforts to help understand the conservation footprint needed to conserve Black Swifts in Colorado and beyond. Together, we can ensure a future where the 'Coolest Bird' continues to soar through the skies!

For more information about our Black Swift monitoring, contact Rob Sparks (rob.sparks@birdconservancy.org)



## THE PRIMARY SOURCE

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

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#### Main Offices:

14500 Lark Bunting Lane Brighton, CO 80603 (303) 659-4348

230 Cherry Street, Fort Collins, CO 80521 (970) 482-1707

4502 Avenue I, Scottsbluff, NE 69361 (308) 633-1013

The Primary Source refers to a bird's primary feathers which power its flight. You, 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

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## From the Director

# A Summer of Discovery!

ield season always brings interesting stories and updates, but this year has been particularly eventful. I'm excited to be sharing the news with you—our supporters—who along with our amazing staff make the discoveries possible!

I'll begin in Northeastern Colorado, where, after several weeks of intensive nest searching and observation, our full cycle monitoring team confirmed that Baird's Sparrows were breeding at Soapstone Prairie Natural Area.



Juvenile Baird's Sparrow at Soapstone Prairie. Photo by Andy Bankert

It's a remarkable finding, as it is the first breeding record in Colorado and the heart of their breeding range is hundreds of miles away in northeastern Montana, western North Dakota, and southern Canada. This discovery is also heartening news because it indicates that this grassland specialist species, whose population has declined roughly 77% since 1966, has the ability to successfully colonize and nest in habitat quite far from its typical range. Our grassland bird research continues, both on the breeding and wintering grounds, as we seek to learn more about migration routes, survival factors and habitat needs. We also look forward to continuing to engage partners to help support Baird's Sparrow habitat in Colorado.



Brown-capped Rosy Finch at Wheeler Peak Wilderness Area in New Mexico. Photo by Raymond VanBuskirk

To the south in New Mexico, our Science Director Luke George joined Central New Mexico Audubon Society members Jill Wussow and Raymond VanBuskirk for a challenging, 12,000-foot elevation hike into the craggy peaks of Wheeler Peak Wilderness in search of Browncapped Rosy Finches.

Nesting at extremely high elevations, these birds are also steeply declining in number, possibly due to low snowfall in the mountains and increasing temperatures. In 2016, Bird Conservancy launched a program aimed specifically at studying this species in the Rocky Mountains in the hopes of getting more data to aid in their conservation.

The scouting party discovered a small population nesting near Williams Lake, the first record of this species breeding in New Mexico in nearly 30 years. While significant, their future remains imperiled. Hopefully this discovery will lead to strategies to help ensure they remain part of the natural heritage of New Mexico and beyond.

Last but not least, our work with Black Swifts continues Bird Conservancy's tradition of providing leadership and expertise as we seek to decode the mysteries of population declines and conserve iconic species.

This newsletter is filled with stories of discovery, engagement and collaboration. I'm filled with pride, and also gratitude for the support that you, our supporters and partners, make possible and the dedicated team of staff that tirelessly work to advance our knowledge and conservation efforts for birds across the West. We celebrate these milestones with you and look forward to continuing the journey!

Dany ClerCantu



Black Swift. Photo by Rob Sparks



# Coming together to meet challenges

### Across the West, habitat is changing.

Like it or not, the secret's out about our beautiful western landscapes, agreeable climate and healthy lifestyles—and people and businesses are moving into the Rocky Mountain region at a record pace. With all of this growth comes development and increased use of natural resources. Energy production facilities dot the horizon, whether it's natural gas, oil or wind power. Food production is also booming and huge areas of native prairie grassland are being converted for row crop agriculture. People and commercial operations also require significant amounts of water, a precious commodity in the arid West.



Colorado is forecast to receive three million new residents in next three decades.

How do we balance the demands of our growing population with the conservation of natural resources? How do we successfully engage others to reduce our impact and impart a land stewardship ethic?

Our organization is known for innovative partnerships. We've engaged farmers and ranchers throughout the West and Mexico for more than a decade with tremendous success, and they continue to be critical partners in our habitat conservation efforts here and abroad.

Recognizing the scale of growth and diverse interests involved, we must also explore new partnerships, increase engagement, and broaden our circle of support.

Examples include land developers and energy companies who share an interest in responsible stewardship of natural resources. Two success stories worth mentioning are our collaborations with Whiting Petroleum (highlighted in the sidebar) and our partnership with Sterling Ranch, a new housing development outside of Denver.



Bird Conservancy is working with Sterling Ranch to conserve Burrowing Owls and other grassland birds. Photo by Tasha Blecha.

Visit our website to read the full story: birdconservancy.org/breakingnewground

These and similar partnerships are bringing people together to share resources, expertise and leadership to achieve common goals. Bird Conservancy is proud to be known for our inclusive approach, willingness to engage new partners, and ability to bring diverse groups together. We are leading these efforts at the local, state, national and international levels.

By working together—engaging everyone—we strive to soften our environmental footprint on the land, reduce negative impacts on birds and their habitats, and find common ground for the benefit of people and birds.

Do you like how Bird Conservancy of the Rockies works in partnership? Support our efforts.

Contact us to learn more about partnership opportunities and other ways you can get involved: info@birdconservancy.org



# Diverse partnership brings exceptional results

What can you get when you combine willing landowners, nonprofits, federal government and an oil and gas company? Beautiful, healthy wetlands filled with birds!

A recent collaboration between Natural Resources Conservation Service, USFWS Partners for Fish & Wildlife, Ducks Unlimited, Colorado Open Lands and Whiting Petroleum enabled us to enhance and restore wetlands at Prewitt Ranch outside Greeley, Colorado.

Wetlands are important to a healthy landscape. Birds rely on these areas for replenishing nutrients needed for migration, producing and raising their young. Wetlands also provide many other benefits like flood mitigation, erosion control, groundwater recharge, water filtering and recreation. Today, thanks to this combined effort, you can hear the chatter, quacking, and honking of birds using the wetland.

Visit our website to read the full story: birdconservancy.org/waterislife

Thank you to all of the partners and supporters like you that make our habitat conservation work possible. Together we are better!

www.birdconservancy.org The Primary Source

# **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, sign up for our e-newsletter on our website or become a fan of Bird Conservancy of the Rockies on Facebook.



#### Facebook

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# Get the Full Story

Bird Conservancy's blog is the place to go for news and information about Bird Conservancy's migratory milestones and the positive impacts we are having on bird conservation efforts across the West.

birdconservancy.org/news-and-events



# **Commemorating 30 Years of Volunteer Spirit**

30 years ago, something amazing was happening — Bald Eagles were returning to nest on the Front Range of Colorado.

In 1988, a pair of Bald Eagles arrived at Barr Lake and decided to call it home. It was at that time that a small group of people decided to document and monitor that nest, and **Bald Eagle Watch** was born. Over time, this small grass roots effort expanded to include the monitoring of many other species and eventually grew into what we know today as Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, with monitoring programs in 15 U.S. states and Mexico.

While our sole focus may have shifted away from Bald Eagles as their status improved, the organization has not forgotten its roots. As Bird Conservancy grew, so did its efforts to monitor Colorado's growing Bald Eagle population.

In 2018, Bald Eagle Watch collected data on more than 100 Bald Eagle nests, and citizen scientists donated almost 1600 hours to that effort. With Colorado's Bald Eagle nesting population approaching 200, Bald Eagle Watch is now monitoring approximately half the nests in the state, and maintains the most complete database of Bald Eagle nesting in Colorado. Data gathered through Bald Eagle Watch is shared with Colorado Parks and Wildlife and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to better understand and inform Bald Eagle management across the Front Range landscape.

Bald Eagle photo by Anne Whithurst

## Become a Citizen Scientist!

### **2019 TRAINING DATES:**

## **Bald Eagle Watch**

Barr Lake State Park Saturday, January 19 9 A.M. to 12 P.M.

#### **HawkWatch**

Dinosaur Ridge Discovery Center Classroom session:

Tuesday, Feb. 19 from 5:30-7 P.M.

Field training:

Saturday, Feb. 23 from 9 A.M.-12 P.M.

For more information: Matt Smith (Outreach Biologist) (970) 482-1707 ext. 32

matt.smith@birdconservancy.org

# **Sharing Your Land** with Northern Prairie Birds

A Land Manager's Guide

We're excited to announce our latest publication which is available FREE on our website as a digital download.

This comprehensive guide is designed to provide landowners and managers with information and ideas to help birds, people and working lands thrive in unison. The quide is made possible with support from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, North Dakota Games & Fish, and the U.S. Forest Service.



Download at: www.birdconservancy.org>Resource Center>Publications>Manuals & Guides

# BioBlitzing Nebraska's Panhandle!

On a warm weekend in July, families and scientists—over 80 participants—gathered together for the second annual Wildcat Hills Bioblitz in Western Nebraska. Armed with field quides, binoculars, bug nets, and natural resource experts, the group set out to answer one big question: How many plants, animals, and other living things call Wildcat Hills home?

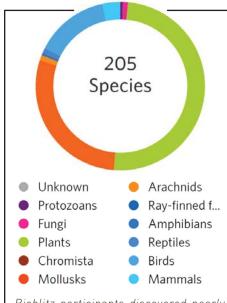
Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area, a 1,094 acre Nebraska state park which overlooks the North Platte River valley, contains both short-grass prairie and pine covered rocky bluff habitats. During the Bioblitz, children and their families get a first hand, up-close look at the incredible variety of living things that live in the park—and gain an appreciation for the diversity of life in their own backyard.

Shawna Payne, a local community member who brought her family of six out to the event, reflected on her experience by saying, "The program content was simply fantastic - perfect for all ages, thought out, and engaging! It is obvious Bird Conservancy's team have poured their hearts into the success of this event. We had taken our girls to the nature center, but had never hiked in the Wildcat Hills. The sights and sounds behind the roadway we've traveled so many times were absolutely awe-striking!"

## Thank you to our sponsors and partners!

The Wildcat Hills Bioblitz was facilitated by Bird Conservancy of the Rockies in partnership with Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Funding for the Bioblitz was provided by the Nebraska Environmental Trust and through Nebraska's Wildlife Conservation Fund, with additional support from private donors.

Read the full story on our website: www.birdconservancy.org/bioblitz2018



Bioblitz participants discovered nearly 30 species of birds, 60 species of insects, 3 species of reptiles and amphibians, 7 species of mammals, and over 100 species of wildflowers, grasses, trees and other plants.



To view the detailed list, visit www.inaturalist.org and Naturalist search for "Wildcat Hills"



# STAFF MIGRATIONS

# Welcome to our new Staff!



Sarah Doxon, Environmental Educator, is based at our Environmental Learning Center (ELC) at Barr Lake where she is pursuing her passion for bringing kids and families closer to nature through engaging firsthand experiences.



Tyler Cash, Environmental Educator, is based out of our ELC at Barr Lake where he brings a love of birds, knowledge of the outdoors and innovative teaching techniques to our camp and education experiences.



Kelsey Mazur, Programs and Volunteer Coordinator, is based out of our ELC at Barr Lake where she helps coordinate educational programs while simultaneously building a thriving volunteer program.



Stacey Monahan, Camp and Family Programs Coordinator, is based at our ELC at Barr Lake where she creates student-centered, inquirydriven environmental education programs designed to engage and inspire.



Jenn Lutze, Private Lands Wildlife Biologist, works closely with private landowners and managers in northwestern South Dakota (based in Sturgis) to restore and conserve healthy working ranchlands to benefit grassland birds and other wildlife species.

# Welcome to our newest Board Members!



David Otis, Ph.D. has a 34-year career as a biometrician and wildlife research biologist working in federal wildlife research centers and land grant universities. David is an Affiliate Faculty member at Colorado State University and active member of The Wildlife Society.



Nathan Pieplow, M.Ed. teaches writing and rhetoric at University of Colorado. He has been fascinated by birds since his childhood in South Dakota, and intensively studies bird sounds. In 2016, he authored *The Peterson Field Guide* Bird Sounds of Eastern North America.

Farewells: Jennifer Meyers-Watson, Becky Jones, Mary Beth Albrechtsen

www.birdconservancy.org THE PRIMARY SOURCE | 5



Bird Conservancy of the Rockies conducts banding at seven stations each fall in Colorado, Nebraska and South Dakota. Teachers and leaders can arrange a visit for groups. 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

### BARR LAKE BANDING STATION

Aug. 25 - Oct. 15 - Tuesday through Sunday (closed Mondays), 7 A.M. - 11:30 A.M.. Location: Barr Lake State Park. 13401 Picadilly Rd. Brighton, CO 80603. To schedule a visit, contact Kelsey Mazur via email: kelsey.mazur@birdconservancy.org

### RIDGWAY BANDING STATION

Sept. 4-14. Operated in partnership with Black Canyon Audubon Society. Location: Ridgway State Park. 28555 US-550, Ridgway, CO. To schedule a visit, contact Ridgway State Park via email: ridgway.naturalist@state.co.us

### CHICO BANDING STATION

Sept. 5-Oct. 5. Operated in partnership with Chico Basin Ranch. Located 35 miles southeast of Colorado Springs, CO. To schedule a visit, contact learning@ranchlands.com or call (719) 683-7960.

#### GRAND JUNCTION BANDING STATION

Sept. 17-Oct 13. Location: Connected Lakes Section of the James M. Robb Colorado River State Park. To schedule a visit, contact Cary Atwood (Grand Valley Audubon Society) via e-mail: catwood814@gmail.com

### **CHADRON BANDING STATION**

Aug. 28-Oct.12. Location: Chadron State Park, 15951 Hwy. 385, Chadron, NE. To schedule a visit, contact: Amber Schiltz (Nebraska Wildlife Education Coordinator) email: amber.schiltz@birdconservancy.org or (308) 783-1019

## WILDCAT HILLS BANDING STATION

Aug. 28-Oct. 12. Location: Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area, Gering, NE To schedule a visit, contact: Amber Schiltz (Nebraska Wildlife Education Coordinator) email: amber.schiltz@birdconservancy.org or (308) 783-1019

## BLACK HILLS BANDING STATION (owl banding)

October, 2018. Location: Black Hills, SD. Station operates every weekend (Fri, Sat, Sun evenings) in October starting at sunset. To schedule a visit, contact: Nancy Drilling (Dakotas Projects Coordinator) by email: nancy.drilling@birdconservancy.org



For the past 30 years, the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD) has been a catalyst for culture across the Denver metro region. SCFD funding supports Bird Conservancy including our education programs, helping us connect, engage and inspire thousands of people in nature each year.



Look for us at Denver Museum of Nature & Science's Community FREE DAY on **Sunday, Sept. 30**. Experience bird banding, interactive games and activities, and special presentations. Join Bird Conservancy staff for tours of the museum's dioramas. Visit www. dmns.org for more information.



Are you passionate about connecting others with nature and science? Be part of the solution for conservation! Volunteers assist with in-class programs, field trips and events in the Denver area.

### **UPCOMING EVENTS:**

### **Volunteer Appreciation Day**

Saturday, Sept. 15 from 8 A.M.-12 P.M. at Barr Lake Nature Center. Bring your family and friends and enjoy a special day just for volunteers at Barr Lake's Banding Station!

### **In-Class Volunteer Training**

Friday, Oct. 26 from 9 A.M.-2 P.M. at our Barr Lake Environmental Learning Center. Learn about our inclass curriculums, how to facilitate programs and teaching strategies. All volunteers welcome; RSVP required.

### Monthly Volunteer Bird Walks

Join us every fourth Monday of the month for a casual bird walk around the north end of Barr Lake State Park.

For more information or to RSVP: Kelsey Mazur, Program & Volunteer Coordinator; (303) 659-4348 x10 kelsey.mazur@birdconservancy.org



# Have you included Bird Conservancy of the Rockies with a gift in your estate plan?

If so, please let us know so you can become a member of the Golden Eagle Society. We would be honored estate plan that won't affect your to recognize your demonstration of faith in our mission that extends beyond your lifetime.

Are your wings outstretched, willing to make an estate gift, yet you haven't been able to take flight on making that a reality? There are simple ways you can include Bird Conservancy of the Rockies in your budget today and still ensure you and your loved ones are cared for beyond your lifetime.

# Other Ways You Can Help Birds

You can make an IRA Charitable Rollover Gift to help Bird Conservancy this year! Are you 70 ½ or older? If so, you can give up to \$100,000 per calendar year through your IRA. Your gift must be complete on or before December 31, and distributions must be made directly from your IRA to Bird Conservancy. Do not withdraw the funds yourself and pass to Bird Conservancy or your gift will not qualify for the IRA Charitable Rollover and will be included in your taxable income.

### Advantages:

- You can count your gift towards your annual required minimum distribution
- Your distribution is not recognized as income on your federal tax return (Note you cannot take a federal income tax charitable deduction for your gift)
- Keeping your IRA distribution out of your adjusted gross income may save you taxes. (Be sure to consult your tax advisor)
- The transfer process is quick and requires minimal paperwork
- You can help Bird Conservancy conserve birds and their habitats!

### Taking Stock

As fall approaches, take stock in what is important in your life – family, friends and causes that are important to you. This year, have you considered giving a gift of stock? Your gift of appreciated assets can provide an income tax deduction at fair market value and can avoid capital gains tax. Be sure to check with your tax advisor to see how this can benefit you.

For more information about the Golden Eagle Society or to make an IRA Charitable Rollover Gift or stock gift before December 31, contact:



Kelli Hirsch Development Manager (303) 659-4348 ext. 12 kelli.hirsch@birdconservancy.org



presented in partnership with



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

# October 30, 2018 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 in Colorado and beyond, these little gray birds are easily overlooked. But for scientists who study animal behavior, ecology, and evolutionary biology, the Junco is a rock star!

# November 14, 2017 Kirk Wallace Johnson

Author of *The Feather Thief* (named one of the 10 best non-fiction books of 2016 by the Wall Street Journal)



Johnson shares the story of his relentless worldwide search for missing bird specimens, stolen from London's Tring museum in 2009 by Edwin Rist, an American flautist and flytier who wanted them for their feathers—worth staggering amounts of money to obsessed flytiers like himself. Book sale and signing follows the presentation.

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

For more information or to purchase tickets: www.dmns.org/adults/after-hours



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