

THE PRIMARY SOURCE



NEWSLETTER FOR BIRD CONSERVANCY OF THE ROCKIES | FALL/WINTER 2020 | NUMBER 56

Conserving Grasslands for People and Birds

Expanding the network of Private Lands Wildlife Biologists

by Jessie Reese (Habitat Coordinator)

Driving backroads in Southeast Colorado, vast expanses of open grasslands stretch toward the horizon. Some areas conjure pastoral scenes with miles of fencelines enclosing herds of cattle, while other fields are seemingly empty seas of grass until you spot a pronghorn in the distance or hear a Western Meadowlark's bubbling song from a fencepost. Experienced birders know these fields are treasure troves on spring days, with plain brown Cassin's Sparrows performing extraordinary display flights and Grasshopper Sparrows defying gravity to cling to thin blades of grass while throwing their heads back in song.



Pronghorn, a symbol of the grasslands. | Photo: Jessie Reese

Conservation Reserve Program

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a voluntary program within the Farm Bill. It provides a rental payment rate per acre to agricultural producers, in exchange for taking land out of crop production and planting grass cover for a term of 10-15 years.

Bird Conservancy scientists recently studied the benefits of CRP participation to wildlife habitat in the southern Great Plains. They found grassland birds were more abundant on CRP-enrolled lands, which supported higher avian biodiversity than other agricultural lands. The study confirms the value of CRP to create habitat benefiting birds suffering serious population declines.



Colorado's state bird, the Lark Bunting, has declined by 86% since the 1970s. Habitat loss is suspected to be a major cause.

Declining CRP acres = habitat loss

From 36.8 million acres enrolled in CRP in 2007, we've seen a 12.8 million acre reduction in the federally-imposed cap on acres allowed in the program, along with decreased enrollment by landowners. If land returns to crop production or is developed for other uses, the result is a loss of grassland wildlife habitat.

With support from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation's inaugural Colorado RESTORE program, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and other generous funders, we recently hired two new Private Lands Wildlife Biologists in SE Colorado. These biologists work closely with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Farm Service Agency to provide landowners with viable options to keep their fields in grassland habitat once their CRP contracts expire.

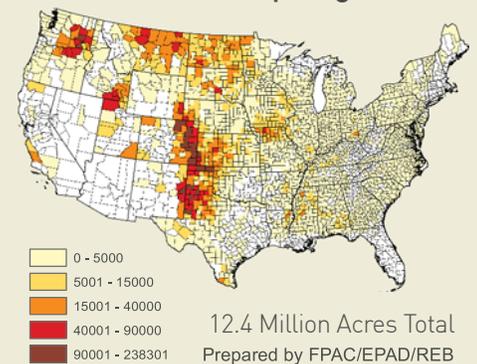
In addition to salary support, the grant provides funding to help landowners transition to wildlife-friendly grazing operations by paying for infrastructure like fencing and water development, and rental rate incentives for those wishing to re-enroll. These actions align with landowner values and motivations, including soil conservation, financial stability, and habitat improvement.

Looking ahead

We look forward to building on successes in southeastern Colorado as our biologists become trusted community members, advocating for a bird conservation model that equally values the role of ranchers and landowners in the process. And to the private landowners engaging in voluntary conservation, we extend a hearty thanks for your efforts!



CRP 2020-2022 Expiring Acres



The Great Plains has some of the highest rates of CRP participation in the nation. Between 2020-2022, Colorado alone is slated to have 1.4 million acres of CRP contracts expire, much of which is located in the state's eastern plains.

The future potential for quality wildlife habitat on land expiring from CRP contracts depends on landowner options, which includes applying for re-enrollment, transitioning to crops or grazing, or enrolling in other NRCS conservation programs.

Thank You

Colorado RESTORE grant partners!



and many other generous funders!

THE PRIMARY SOURCE

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

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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

Go Paperless

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From the Director

Staying the Course through Challenging Times

As I write this, I am sitting in my office with less than 10 people in our entire building, ensuring we operate at <50% capacity and provide a safe and flexible work environment for everyone amid a continuing global pandemic.

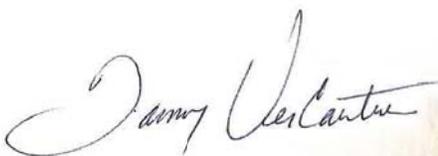
The situation can be frustrating and stressful, but there is hope and joy to be found in activities like hiking, birding, gardening and watching fledglings test out their wings. While they are learning and growing, hummingbirds and many other species are in full migration. Stop, watch, listen, get outside and enjoy.

Our Science Team, in collaboration with partners, successfully and safely pulled off a field season across 14 western states and completed 23,000 point counts. Precautions were taken with partners and technicians to minimize risk to both staff and communities. Other team members are now busy setting up Motus towers on public and private land to fill knowledge gaps around migration paths, stopover habitats and breeding and wintering ground connectivity for grassland birds. For more on this project, check out the story on the next page!

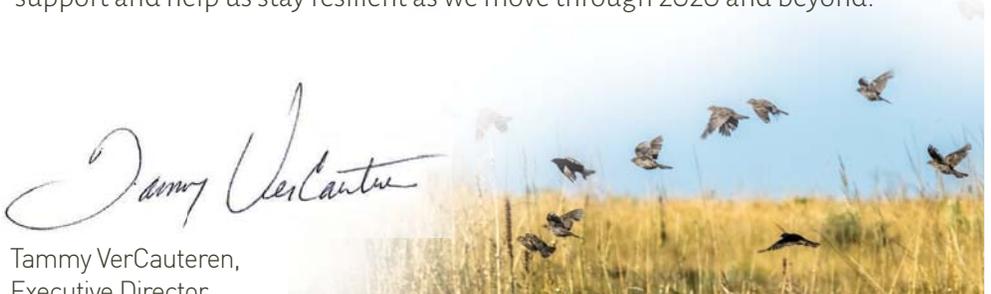
We just completed a 4-week multi-national grassland summit that brought together 150 diverse partners from the U.S., Canada and Mexico to chart a collaborative course forward to save the cultural and natural heritage of our grasslands and working landscapes. Adapting to the times, the event was completely virtual with folks tuning in from reservations, homes, offices, and the field — from Canada to Mexico, California to Washington D.C. A diverse team of partners, working with a professional facilitator, will take the volume of notes and feedback and develop the draft roadmap. The work includes planning for piloting priority actions over the next year to make advances in research and evaluation, partnerships and engagement, and policy and funding.

Summit participants will come together as a group again in Summer 2021 to finalize and commit to the roadmap for the next decade. We knew we were on a solid path when one participant, a landowner from Canada, said, "*The hair on the back of my neck stood up as I read the priorities for the roadmap and saw alignment.*" Others described this as a historic effort and recognized the team for promoting inclusivity and shared voices. Visit www.grasslandsroadmap.org to learn more.

You and your support are providing the critical resilience we need to navigate an ever-changing world. Thank you for donating, joining our virtual programs and ensuring conservation moves forward. We hope many of you will tune in for our Virtual Fall Fundraiser on October 16 (see pg. 5) so you can see the impacts of your support and help us stay resilient as we move through 2020 and beyond.



Tammy VerCauteren,
Executive Director



Expanding Motus Across the West

Using technology and collaboration to cover more ground

Project update from Mo Corell and Matt Webb (Motus project coordinators)

Grassland birds have declined by half over the past five decades. Many of these birds utilize the vast Great Plains and Chihuahuan Desert region at some point throughout their annual cycle. This region stretches from Canada through the central United States into northern Mexico, and contains the majority of remaining grasslands in North America. Bird Conservancy of the Rockies is studying grassland bird ecology during different parts of their full annual cycle with the goal of informing their conservation. One of the biggest knowledge gaps exists during migration. Little is known about specific routes used by these birds, or where they stop to rest and refuel.



Bird Conservancy Avian Ecologist Erin Strasser poses with a male Lark Bunting just fitted with a Motus transmitter.

The **Motus Wildlife Tracking System** (Motus) is a network of automated radio telemetry stations that offers an effective method to explore migratory bird movement. Coded radio transmitters can be attached to small-bodied birds such as Baird's Sparrows, Chestnut-collared Longspurs, Lark Buntings, and Sprague's pipits to track them without the need for recapture. A network of Motus stations across the Great Plains and Chihuahuan Desert can then track these birds over time to create a new understanding of how grassland birds move throughout their life cycles.

We are working closely with partners tri-nationally to develop and implement a collaborative Motus network in the Great Plains and Chihuahuan Desert region. Our goals are to 1) rapidly develop a strategic plan for station placement, 2) install stations following this regional plan, 3) deploy tags on grassland birds that communicate directly with these stations, and 4) collect data to fill knowledge gaps for these declining species. So far, we have deployed two stations and nine tags in Colorado and recruited funding for an additional 30 stations and 230 tags to be deployed in the next two years in the GPCD. Bird Conservancy is also working with Fort Collins Museum of Discovery to deploy a station at the museum and collaboratively develop educational outreach about this innovative science.



Name a Motus Station!

Are you interested in having a Motus Station named after you or a loved one? Bid on your chance to name a Motus Station during the Live Auction at our Virtual Fall Fundraiser (info on page 5).

Your support helps cover more ground to track bird migration!



Grasshopper Sparrow with a Motus transmitter

What is MOTUS?



Technological advances in the miniaturization of electronics has resulted in the development of tiny and affordable radio transmitters that can be attached to small animals (even butterflies!) to then follow them through their annual cycle.

These advances can be coupled with a growing network of automated radio telemetry stations and a centralized data management system. As the tagged birds pass within 15 miles of a Motus station, a detection is logged at that station.

The tags may last for several migratory seasons, and there is no need for researchers to recapture the tagged individual birds in order to retrieve data.

Motus stations can be freestanding like this one, or attached to buildings or structures. Off-the-grid stations are solar-powered.



For more information:
birdconservancy.org/motus
www.motus.org

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**
www.facebook.com/birdconservancy

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 **YouTube**
Search: Bird Conservancy of the Rockies

 **Instagram**
[@birdconservancyrockies](https://www.instagram.com/birdconservancyrockies)

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/stories

Our Digital Nature

Pandemic spurs innovation and creativity in delivering educational experiences

by Tyler Cash (Environmental Educator)



As we are all aware, COVID-19 greatly affected our world. Bird Conservancy's Education Team quickly recognized that our programming for the year was going to be impacted. Spring, one of our busiest seasons, is normally filled with a variety of programs: field trips at the Environmental Learning Center, classroom visits, interactive booths at events, and so much more. Practically overnight, our extremely vibrant calendar became empty.

When the country began shutting down, our Education Team was already brainstorming how to bring high-quality environmental education to not only students—now being homeschooled—but also to wider audiences. As educators, we thrive on helping others explore, ask questions, and find curiosity in nature through personal engagement. Could we give learners a quality “outdoor” experience, indoors? Could we inspire them through a computer screen?

Luckily, our team enjoys a challenge and is used to adapting to different situations. We held virtual meetings to determine the best online platforms, decided which programs would work well for online purposes, and discussed ways to radiate positivity, even amid a public health crisis.

Creative thinking paid off. We offered weekly webinars about birds, and assisted teachers by leading virtual programs. Summer Bird Camps transformed as well, and engaged new families.



Bird Conservancy's Education Team seeks to *engage people in conserving birds and their habitats*. Whether that's through virtual programs or in-person, our mission remains the same. 2020 was different than past years, but we learned new skills and our reach has extended well beyond the Front Range of Colorado. The future of education is changing and we're ready to take flight for whatever may come!

Our online and virtual programs were warmly received!

Explore the natural world with us at one of our upcoming virtual programs! Events are posted on our website Event Calendar and Facebook page:

 birdconservancy.org/Facebook

 birdconservancy.org/Events



View past presentations at
www.birdconservancy.org/YouTube



EAGLE VISION 2020 & BEYOND

You're invited to Bird Conservancy of the Rockies' VIRTUAL Fall Fundraiser

Friday, Oct. 16 | 6-7:30 pm MDT via Zoom
\$20 per individual ticket. Register at www.birdconservancy.org/vision2020

The evening features a live program and silent auction to raise critical funds for Bird Conservancy.

Together we can envision a better world for people, birds and land beyond 2020!

Photo: Dan Walters



Who CARES about Birds?

Ways to Maximize Charitable Giving in 2020 from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Stimulus (CARES) Act

- Tax filers who do not itemize their deductions are eligible to claim an "above the line" or "universal" charitable deduction of up to \$300 this year and in future years.
- In 2020 only, deductions for cash contributions to public charities can now qualify for up to 100% of adjusted gross income (previously limited to 60%).
- In 2020 only, deductions for corporate giving can now qualify for up to 25% of taxable income (previously limited to 10%). Does your employer match charitable giving?
- In 2020 only, required minimum distributions from individual retirement accounts are waived.

Consult with your tax advisor to see how any of these charitable options can benefit you, Bird Conservancy, and your tax situation.



To make a gift of stock, securities, wire transfer, IRA distribution or information on how to include Bird Conservancy of the Rockies in your estate plan, please contact:

Kelli Hirsch, Development Manager
14500 Lark Bunting Lane | Brighton, CO 80603
(303) 659-4348 ext. 12 | kelli.hirsch@birdconservancy.org



You can also make a donation online at birdconservancy.org/donate



FALL BIRD BANDING



Barr Lake Banding Station

Tues & Thurs-Sun through Oct. 11 | 8-11:00 a.m.

See real science in action and experience an up-close and personal encounter with migrating and resident songbirds. To maintain safe social distancing at the banding station, all visitors must register prior to visiting. Groups limited to six and masks are required.

Register online at birdconservancy.org/bandingregister

Scholarships are available; please apply here: birdconservancy.org/bandingscholarships

Enjoy a virtual banding experience!

We broadcast live from the Barr Lake banding station every Wednesday from 8-9:00 a.m. through October 7.

Register online: birdconservancy.org/events

Colorado educational programs made possible with generous support from



Nebraska Banding Stations

Our western Nebraska stations at Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area and Chadron State Park will be running and open to the public five days a week (closed Sunday and Monday) through October 9.

To schedule a program or more info, contact Delanie Bruce, NE Wildlife Education Coord. delanie.bruce@birdconservancy.org

Nebraska educational programs made possible with generous support from



Welcome to our new Staff & Board!

Delanie Bruce

NE Wildlife Education Coordinator (Scottsbluff, NE)

A Nebraska native, Delanie brings a wealth of environmental education expertise and experience to communities across the NE panhandle. She loves to share her passion for hiking, traveling, reptiles, amphibians, and birds with everyone she meets. In her spare time, Delanie enjoys skydiving, searching for rattlesnakes, and snuggling with her cat, Bentley.



Annie Hawkinson

Avian Ecologist (Fort Collins, CO)

Annie grew up in Minnesota, then spread her wings abroad while studying and working with neotropical bird species. Later, she expanded her knowledge of avian communities to include owls, marshland and boreal species, as well as management applications for grassland birds. She enjoys hiking, textile crafts, and visiting her second home, Colombia.



Katie Merewether

Private Lands Wildlife Biologist (Rocky Ford, CO)

Katie discovered her love of birds during a childhood growing up on her family's cattle ranch in eastern Colorado. That love transformed into a career and today Katie is sharing her passion for birds and conservation with private landowners across the plains of SE Colorado. During time off, she enjoys reading with her cat, hiking, and birding.



Matt Webb

Avian Ecologist (Fort Collins, CO)

Born and raised in Salida, CO, Matt's family moved to the 'boring' plains of Northern Colorado when he was around age 10. To his surprise, he fell in love with the big sky and seemingly endless shortgrass prairie landscape. Today, Matt's extensive knowledge and experience in wildlife biology is being put to good use expanding the Motus network (see pg3) across the Northern Great Plains and Mexico.



Elinda Dennis

Chief Administrative Officer (Brighton, CO)

Elinda is a native of Missouri and grew up on a small cattle ranch. Her professional career includes over 30 years experience in business and accounting. Elinda loves the outdoors and enjoys hiking mountain trails and spending time with her husband in their mountain retreat in Estes Park, Colorado.



Neal Martorelli

Private Lands Wildlife Biologist (Gillette, WY)

An East Coast transplant from New Jersey, Neal has lived and worked through the Northern Great Plains. His schooling focused on upland nesting waterfowl and gamebird ecology, a great foundation for his current role working in private lands conservation. Neal spends his free time enjoying the outdoors with family.



Jessie Reese

Habitat Coordinator (Fort Collins, CO)

Originally from Virginia, Jessie's interest in birds has taken her from Latin America to the Rockies, including several seasons with The Institute for Bird Populations. In addition to avian ecology, she brings expertise in human dimensions in conservation. She enjoys hiking, birding, backpacking and climbing.



John Sanderson

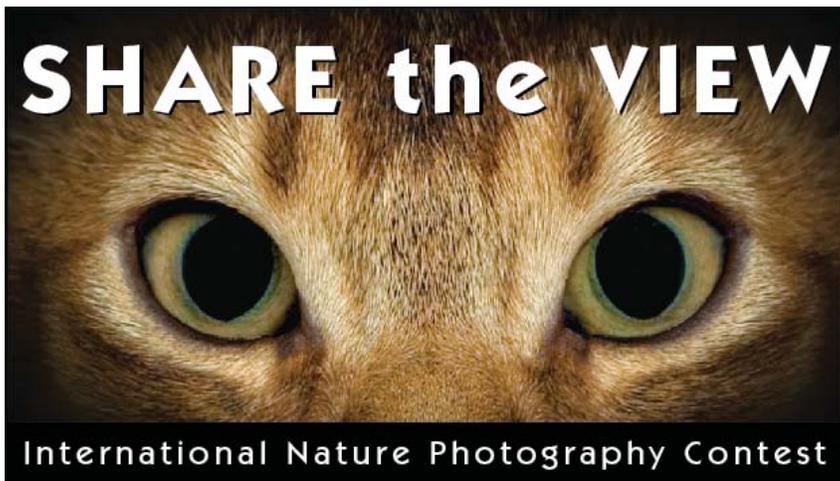
Board Member

John is Director of Colorado State University's Center for Collaborative Conservation, where he focuses on building the capacity of education and research institutions, organizations, communities, and future leaders to achieve conservation impact. His career spans over 25 years, including work for the Colorado Natural Heritage Program and at The Nature Conservancy.



Farewells: Sarah Burnett, Nancy Drilling, Adam Green, Chaley Jensen, Wendy Lanier, Brittany Leslie, Maryanne Murphy, Ryan Parker, Jennifer Perkins, Alex Van Boer, Nick Van Lanen, Jessica Weathers, Tyrel Woodward.

* NOTE that staff updates reflect Oct. 2019 - present, as there was no spring 2020 issue of *Primary Source*



Calling all Photographers!



The Share the View international photography competition celebrates its 10th year!



This annual event aims to increase appreciation of the natural world by highlighting images from outstanding nature and wildlife photographers. 20 cash prizes amounting to \$5000 will be awarded! Photographers worldwide are eligible for entry. Landscapes, wildlife and nature images from anywhere in the world qualify. Proceeds from contest entry fees are used to support nature and wildlife initiatives

Enter online beginning Oct 15, 2020 through Dec 1, 2020:
www.sharetheview.contestvenue.com

Bird Conservancy of the Rockies is honored to be selected as one of the beneficiaries of this year's event proceeds! **Thank you** to the Share the View organizers, and to participating photographers. We look forward to seeing the amazing images you share!



Photo by **Day Scott**

On the cover:

Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*)

Nicknamed the 'Butcher Bird', due to its habit of impaling food on barbed wire for later use, this tiny terror has a reputation! Although no larger than a robin, its hooked bill and sharp talons make the shrike an effective predator of insects, reptiles, rodents and even other songbirds. Shrikes inhabit grasslands across North America but their numbers have declined dramatically in many regions. Learn more about Bird Conservancy's research on shrikes at:

birdconservancy.org/shrike



“Black Faces, White Spaces”

A Conversation with Carolyn Finney



Christian Cooper. John Muir. George Floyd. What does race have to do with it? In the compelling book “Black Faces, White Spaces”, Carolyn Finney explores why African Americans are so underrepresented when it comes to interest in nature, outdoor recreation, and environmentalism. Finney argues that the legacies of slavery, Jim Crow, and racial violence have shaped cultural understandings of the “great outdoors” and determined who should and can have access to natural spaces. As a National Parks Advisory Board member from 2010-2018 and a scholar-in-residence at the Franklin Environmental Center at Middlebury College, Finney is at the forefront of a movement to understand how people negotiate their relationship to the environment. During this evening of impactful discussion, Finney will address how art, science, and popular culture create frameworks for engagement among individuals, communities, and organizations to nurture healthy relationships between humans and the environment.

presented in partnership with



Promotional support provided by Denver Audubon and Audubon Rockies

This is a FREE program. Registration required:
dmns.org/visit/events-and-activities



Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
 14500 Lark Bunting Lane
 Brighton, CO 80603
www.birdconservancy.org

The Primary Source No. 56 - Fall/Winter 2020



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Your gift can help:

- \$50 to be part of our flock
- \$100 bring science & nature to people of all ages
- \$250 ensure healthy landscapes and communities
- \$500 to help unlock migratory mysteries
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THANK YOU for supporting bird and habitat conservation!