

THE PRIMARY SOURCE

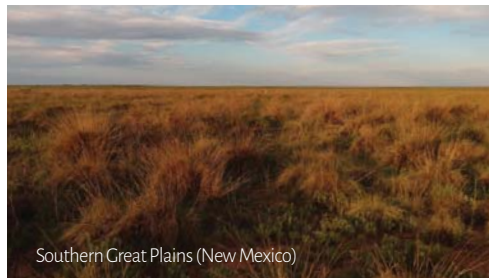


Bird
Conservancy
of the Rockies

NEWSLETTER FOR BIRD CONSERVANCY OF THE ROCKIES | SPRING/SUMMER 2021 | NUMBER 57



Northern Great Plains (South Dakota)



Southern Great Plains (New Mexico)



Chihuahuan Desert (Mexico)

1 Million Acres Monitored for Conservation

Monitoring is an essential part of wildlife management and conservation science. Monitoring and evaluation can identify at-risk species with declining populations, provide understanding of how management actions affect birds, evaluate population responses to landscape changes, and provide data on species distributions. Given the alarming declines of bird populations and loss of bird habitat, the need for monitoring is greater than ever.

Crossing a Major Milestone

This year, Bird Conservancy realized an amazing milestone with 1 million acres being actively monitored for bird responses to land improvement activities. This includes public and private lands from Montana to Mexico. To celebrate this achievement, let's take a look at some monitoring efforts and how they help inform conservation action on the ground.

Chicken Little & Friends

Lesser Prairie-Chickens (LEPC) are a focal species for conservation efforts in the Southern Great Plains through the Farm Service Agency's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and NRCS's targeted grazing through the LEPC Initiative. Bird Conservancy of the Rockies monitored birds on ranches enrolled in targeted grazing and lands enrolled in CRP to see what effect these programs were having on grassland birds. Our evaluation showed that these practices contributed to conserving over 1.5 million Grasshopper Sparrows in the region!

Easements aiding Conservation

In 2018, we began monitoring birds in the Northern Great Plains on private lands enrolled in National Fish and Wildlife Foundation conservation practices, including easements and grazing management. Preliminary results indicate a positive effect of conservation easements on Sprague's Pipit and a positive effect of grazing management on Chestnut-collared Longspur and Lark Bunting.

Last year, we studied the benefits to grassland birds of conservation easements and rotational grazing in the Southern Great Plains. We will monitor birds for at least two years, and compare populations on private lands enrolled in these practices to the surrounding grasslands to compare and contrast.

Good for the Herd and the Birds

From the Great Plains to Mexico's Chihuahuan desert (see sidebar), we are studying conservation practices and their benefits to rangeland health and resiliency. We share what we learn to help guide decision-making, use resources wisely, and foster voluntary conservation. Working in partnership with stewards of the land, we can deliver science based win-win solutions that benefit birds while also meeting landowner objectives.

by Jennifer Timmer, Conservation Delivery Lead
Her work focuses on engaging partners, developing tools and resources, and disseminating information to guide conservation on-the-ground.

Going Beyond Borders

The **Sustainable Grazing Network (SGN)** is a voluntary network of ranchlands in Northern Mexico that supports grassland bird habitat. Nearly 30 priority grassland bird species overwinter in the Chihuahuan Desert, making it critical to understand their populations and distribution in the region.

Since 2013, Bird Conservancy and our partners at IMC-Vida Silvestre have worked to maintain, enhance and restore Chihuahuan Desert grasslands through a science-based, working lands and adaptive-management approach.

We have implemented over 270 range and habitat projects to date on SGN lands, such as range management infrastructure improvements to support planned grazing. Habitat restoration and enhancements include shrub control and sub-soil aeration.



Monitoring bird populations and vegetation studies on SGN ranches show a significant increase (15%/yr) in Sprague's Pipits, a species of concern. Photo: Jose Hugo Martinez Guerrero

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 Director

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From the Director

A Spring Season of Hope and Opportunities



Spring is in the air and everyone is feeling it!

Though the groundhog said six more weeks of winter, I think the birds weren't listening. American Robins are out in full force, geese and ducks are migrating and owls are busy nesting. I hope this brings you some joy and a respite from the pandemic. A constant in our ever-changing world is the pleasure that nature brings to us — whether it is watching birds in our neighborhood or exploring a nearby park or natural area.

As vaccines roll out, we see hints of optimism. Small groups are visiting to view Bald Eagles at Barr Lake. Activity is high as eagle pairs prepare for breeding season, tending to nests and performing annual courtship rituals. You are reaching out about upcoming birding adventures, dusting off binoculars and sharpening your identification skills. We hope you'll join us for a day of birding on May 8 for Colorado Field Ornithologists' inaugural Colorado Birding Challenge (see pg. 5 for details). All proceeds benefit our science and conservation actions for grassland birds.

Our team is busy prepping for field season, which kicks-off in just a few weeks. Letters are in the mail to landowners, seeking permission to assess their properties for bird surveys.

You have also helped us reach a new milestone: **1 million acres**—from Montana to Mexico—actively monitored for bird responses to land improvement activities. This is a great achievement and critical to helping bring back the 3 billion birds we have lost over the past 50 years. This knowledge will be shared with land managers so they can adopt proven practices, replicating and expanding strategies which deliver a positive return on investment for bird conservation.



We are also prepping for banding season and summer camps, taking precautions to ensure safety. We are excited to bring back our full array of summer activities, including new family programs for all ages. These kiddos will be among the first to enjoy our updated outdoor learning center and new sensory garden.

Thank you for staying in touch, being engaged and ensuring our resiliency. We wish you a healthy 2021 and are thrilled about transitioning to time together again in the great outdoors. We hope to hear your children and grandchildren in the backyard at the Old Stone House and see you in the field. Together, we continue to make the world a better place for people, birds and the land.

Tammy VerCauteren, Executive Director





Big Backyard Makeover!

Visitor Improvements at the Old Stone House

Project update from Sherry Nickolaus (Education Director)

In recent months, the backyard at the Old Stone House at Barr Lake looked like a scene from a home improvement show. It's the first in a series of planned upgrades at our Environmental Learning Center, designed to enhance the visitor experience and functionality of our facilities for educational programming.

Let's face it, our backyard lawn has long been a rough weed patch! Every season, it died back to sand and dirt—usually just in time for the summer camps to start. There was nowhere for campers, students on field trips or families to sit and enjoy the birds, or to learn about bird friendly landscapes. It was time for a change.

Last summer, thousands of weeds were pulled, and rocks and sticks removed. Time was spent researching native plants and grasses that would not only thrive on our site, but also be bird friendly. The goal was to improve the habitat for wildlife and people. We wanted a space where visitors could enjoy native plants and learn how to use them in their own backyards—an inspiration point for others to create their own bird friendly oases.

Our ***Guide to Backyard Birds of the Front Range*** served as both inspiration and valuable reference. We planted native buffalo grass to provide seeds and habitat for beneficial insects. Four distinct areas feature native grasses, trees, shrubs and forbs to show how different species could be used. Habitat types demonstrated include grasslands, shrublands, forests and wetlands. Our plants will use little to no supplemental water once established, being well-suited for the Colorado environment. We are eagerly anticipating summer to see how our new plants will fill in and provide enjoyment for people, and habitat and a haven for birds and other wildlife.

www.birdconservancy.org



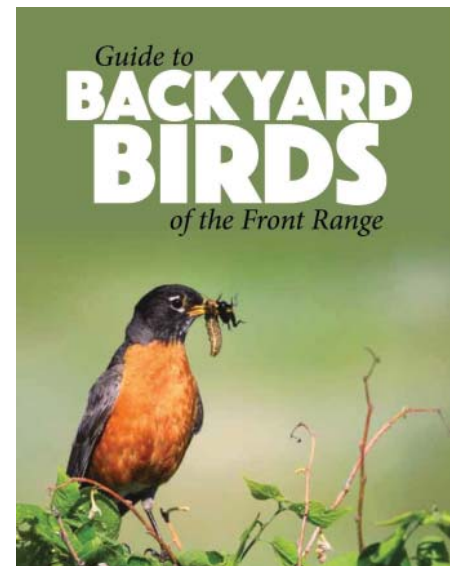
Installing buffalo grass sod on the freshly-scraped earth



New beds with a diverse array of bird-friendly native plants



Elegant native grasses demonstrate how drought-resistant plants can beautify the landscape and provide food and cover for birds and other critters.



Share the joy of birds and birdwatching with our ***Guide To Backyard Birds of the Front Range!*** Use it as a field guide while out enjoying local open spaces, natural areas, parks and backyards.

Take it with you to the local nursery to stock up on bird-friendly native plants, and create your own backyard oasis for birds around your home, schoolyard or in your community.

The guide is available online as a **FREE** download in Spanish & English at:

birdconservancy.org/birdguides



Visitor experience and educational program facilities updates at our Environmental Learning Center are made possible with support from



...and many other generous supporters who make our educational programs possible.

Thank You!

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.



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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/stories



Golden Eagle Society Update

Former Bird Conservancy Employee Leaves \$50,000 Estate Gift

by Kelli Hirsch, Development Director

Victoria Collier was a pioneer for then Bird Conservancy's (then Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory) communications program. She used her talents and mastery of the written word to introduce others to our work, helping raise our profile with external audiences and setting a high bar for excellence in communications.

Vicki's work at RMBO was more than just a job that utilized her Journalism degree. Vicki was a devoted conservationist and nature lover. Growing up in Michigan, her family loved to camp. That outdoor spirit followed Vicki throughout her life leading her to the Southwest where she discovered a special love for the San Juan Mountains.

Vicki felt so passionate about the integrated work of science, stewardship and environmental education at RMBO, she included us in her estate plans. Her estate gift of \$50,000 was placed into our Birds Forever Fund where it helped us surpass our \$100,000 matching gift challenge established by Ed Warner and Jackie Erickson. Future estate gifts will be placed into this endowment fund to grow over time so that Bird Conservancy's mission to conserve birds and their habitats can continue to respond to the forever-evolving landscape.

To honor Vicki's love of sustainability, please recycle this newsletter after you have finished reading, or share with a friend and help us grow our flock. She would be proud to know the power of printed words inspired you to take action and support our conservation efforts.



Victoria was one of the first donors to include Bird Conservancy of the Rockies in her estate plans and became a Golden Eagle Society member. We would like to recognize and welcome the following forward-thinking individuals who included Bird Conservancy in their legacy plans in 2020.



2020 New Golden Eagle Society Members:

Kevin Bliss • Martha Dick
Deborah Hagood • Jean Morgan



Spring Birding to Benefit Bird Conservancy!

May 8, 2021 | cobirds.org/CFO/COBC

Are you ready to go spring birding and support Bird Conservancy at the same time?

Colorado Field Ornithologists (CFO) invite all Colorado birders to participate in the first annual Colorado Birding Challenge! CFO is generously donating 100% of proceeds to Bird Conservancy of the Rockies' conservation efforts in Colorado and Mexico.

Create your own team of 2-4 members, join an existing team, or sponsor a team!

For more info, visit cobirds.org/CFO/COBC



SPRING/SUMMER PROGRAMS

Pre-registration is required for all Camps/Educational Programs.



Bird Camps Return!

The COVID-19 pandemic brings unique challenges to delivering our award-winning environmental education programs. Our Education Team has risen to the occasion, preparing an array of virtual programs and getting us ready for a safe and enjoyable in-person summer camp season!

DAY CAMPS (Ages 4-12 • July-August)



Day Camps are the perfect introduction to science and nature for younger kids, fostering a positive learning environment through hikes, games, crafts, and outdoor play. Day Camps take place at our Environmental Learning Center in Brighton, CO, and led by a team of professional environmental educators. More info at birdconservancy.org/daycamps



OVERNIGHT CAMPS (Ages 12-17 • June)



Overnight Camps are a welcoming learning environment for kids who have outgrown our Day Camps, as well as those new to our programs. Camps are led by professional educators with backgrounds in science, education and youth development. Camp takes place at Highlands Camp in Allenspark, CO, with drop-off and pick-up at the camp facility. More info at birdconservancy.org/overnightcamps



LEADERS IN TRAINING (Ages 13-17 • July-August)

Inspired by past campers who wanted to give back (and didn't want to stop coming to Day Camp!), the Leaders in Training Program gives teens the chance to mentor and teach younger campers while learning about science and leadership skills. LIT training is on **Friday, July 9** at our Environmental Learning Center in Brighton, CO. LITs sign-up to assist with one or more Day Camps, and end the summer with a Bird Walk Celebration in August. More info at birdconservancy.org/LIT



Scholarships available for all camps and programs!
Apply online: birdconservancy.org/scholarships



"Growing Naturally" - Monthly Family Programming

Coming soon—bring the whole family and learn about raptors, birding by canoe, creating nature art, and more! Activities are tailored to different ages to meet the needs of your group. Programs are year-round on a monthly basis, Mondays or Saturdays from 9-11 a.m. More info at birdconservancy.org/family_programs

SPRING BIRD BANDING

Chatfield Banding Station

April 25 - May 30 | Closed on Tuesdays

In-person visits are by appointment only. Registration required; cost is \$6 per person. Weekdays are 7:30 to 8:30 a.m., with three one-hour time slots on weekends: 7:30-8:30, 8:30-9:30, and 9:30-10:30 a.m. Groups are limited to 10 people. Face masks and social distancing are required.

Registration and more info at
denveraudubon.org/events

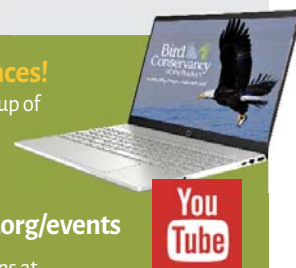
Scholarships are available; please apply here:
birdconservancy.org/bandingscholarships

Virtual Experiences!

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birdconservancy.org/events

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Welcome to our new Staff!

Eric Chabot

GIS Biologist
(Fort Collins, CO)

Eric Chabot grew up in the woods of Vermont, and earned a B.A. in economics from Vassar College in 2008. After graduating, he began a career focused in natural resources, working in various conservation-related fields until specializing in ornithology and GIS. His previous research focus was on Golden Eagles in the Great Basin. Eric loves spending time outside and is an avid rock climber, backcountry skier, and bow hunter.



Trent Delehanty

Private Lands Wildlife Biologist
(Rocky Ford, CO)

A native of Wisconsin, Trent received his B.S. in Wildlife Ecology-Research and Management from the Univ. of Wisconsin- Stevens Point in 2016. He then moved to SE Colorado to study and track Lesser Prairie-Chickens with CO Parks & Wildlife and Kansas State University. Passionate about habitat, he is excited to work with landowners in the area he's called home these past few years.



Chelsea Forehead

Private Lands Wildlife Biologist
(Chadron, NE)

Born, raised, and educated in the Cornhusker State, Chelsea holds a B.A. in Spanish, Anthropology, and Environmental Studies and an M.S. in Biology. She brings a passion for prairies, fascination with birds, and knowledge of conservation on working lands to facilitate habitat improvement on Nebraska's private lands. In her free time, she enjoys birding and making jewelry.



Faye Lamb

Grant Writer (Brighton, CO)

Faye is an award-winning editor and photojournalist with the Nebraska Press Association. Raised in Michigan, Faye is an alumnus of Northwood Univ. where she founded the school's first newspaper. That journalism background has contributed to her track record as a grant writer, securing funds for nonprofits for prairie grassland habitat restorations, nature centers, and zoos, and pollinator programs. In her free time, Faye is president of the Longmont Theatre Company.



Photo not available at time of printing. Michigan's State Bird representing!

Justin Lambert

Private Lands Wildlife Biologist
(Springfield, CO)

Justin holds a B.A. from the College of Charleston and four technical certificates in Wildlife Tech, Forestry, Nat. Resources and GIS from Front Range Community College in Fort Collins. His Colorado field experience includes rangeland health assessments, ecological monitoring, as well as wildlife research of bighorn sheep, pronghorn, deer and breeding bird populations.



Brittany Leslie

Program Manager
(Fort Collins, CO)

A Michigan native, Brittany holds a B.S. in Geography, Environmental Analysis & Resource Mgt. from Western Michigan Univ. She previously worked with Bird Conservancy's IMBCR program where she managed the monitoring effort in the Southern Great Plains. Brittany loves being outside with her family and in her spare time enjoys gardening, hunting, camping and sewing.



David McNitt

Private Lands Wildlife Biologist
(Woodland Park, CO)

Dave grew up on Maryland's Chesapeake Bay. He holds a B.S. in Wildlife Science from Paul Smith's College in NY and a M.S. in Wildlife Conservation from VA Tech. His experience includes studying jaguars in Belize and bobcats, bears, & coyotes in the Appalachians. His last role with BLM focused on conservation of Mexican Spotted Owls, Mountain Plovers, Pinyon Jays, and more. He enjoys cooking and backcountry exploring.



Kaitlin Nafzinger

Private Lands Wildlife Biologist
(Canon City, CO)

A Pennsylvania native, Kaitlyn received a dual B.S. in Wildlife Biology and Earth & Environmental Science from Unity College in Maine. She has traveled the country studying and working on the conservation of puffins, loons, Snowy Plovers, Least Terns and other sea/shorebirds. Kaitlin's last job (with NRCS) added soil conservation science to her list of skills — perfect for her current role!



Anna Stearns

Private Lands Wildlife Biologist
(Clayton, NM)

Anna holds a B.S. in Fish, Wildlife, & Conservation Biology from Colorado State University. A love for birds led her to roles in wildlife rehabilitation, citizen science, and two seasons as an avian field technician. Later, she became a wildlife biologist/NEPA specialist in WY, MT, and NM, conducting wildlife surveys for sensitive species and monitoring nesting birds of prey. She spends free time with her dog and cat—Daisy and Shadow.



Laura Smedsrud

Wildlife Education Assistant
(Scottsbluff, NE)

Laura grew up in Minnesota and became a nature lover at an early age through fishing, camping, gardening, and birdwatching. She earned a B.S. in Natural Resources & Wildlife Management from University of Minnesota. Her environmental education career has taken her from the Black Hills of S. Dakota to the forests of Illinois, and now to Nebraska where she shares her excitement for nature and birds with all. In her spare time, Laura enjoys hiking, reading and houseplants.



Farewells: Maureen (Mo) Correll, Alex Van Boer, Emily Chavez (departing in May)
Yvette Martinez (former Board Chair)



BECOME A VOLUNTEER!

Are you passionate about connecting others with nature and science? Be part of the solution for conservation! For more information, contact:

Kelsey Mazur (Program & Volunteer Coordinator)
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VIRTUAL VOLUNTEER OPEN HOUSE

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Celebrating Our Differences, Breaking Barriers

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA)



Bird Conservancy of the Rockies is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to conserve birds and their habitats through science, education and land stewardship. We believe that birds and their habitats are natural wonders to be appreciated by all.

However, we acknowledge that a long history of deep-seated discrimination and exclusion has influenced who has access to and feels comfortable in the outdoors and in the conservation movement. We

want to make our view clear: we condemn the unfair treatment that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities face from systemic racism.

Many other communities—including LGBTQ+, people with disabilities, and religious minorities—experience similar injustices. Such oppression is increased when these identities intersect with race.

We also recognize that these realities are reflected in the limited diversity within our organization, the range of audiences we serve, the partnerships we forge, and the wider scientific and conservation communities. Our community of practice is to be an organization that empowers people of all backgrounds, beliefs, colors and creeds to join in, benefit from and contribute to our mission.

We strive for inclusivity of all persons regardless of race, color, sex, age, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other status. We believe that being inclusive and equitable is essential to our work of inspiring the next generation of conservationists, creatively answering research

questions, or learning different ways of knowing how to steward the land. Just as successful bird conservation requires participation by all people and communities, dismantling systemic oppression and exclusion as well as overcoming our implicit biases will not be achieved without everyone on board.

This policy statement bolsters intentional and thoughtful commitment to promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in our organization. Using Denver Foundation's Inclusiveness Project as a guide, we commit to moving beyond our past history, implicit biases and organizational culture to greatly expand and improve our prior efforts to engage historically-underserved audiences of all types.

We commit to integrating these principles of practice into every aspect of our work. This includes improving equitability and inclusivity of hiring practices and supporting and fostering new partnerships. Our work in the rural and urban communities we serve will be built on a foundation of honoring diverse voices, listening to different perspectives, and co-creating solutions that provide benefits for all.

We welcome feedback and suggestions as we navigate our collaborative path forward. Please contact us at dei@birdconservancy.org to discuss opportunities to partner with and support this work, or simply to share your ideas and thoughts.



On the cover:



Photo by Bill Schmoker

Thick-billed Longspur

(*Rhynchophanes mccownii*)

In August 2020, the American Ornithological Society officially renamed the McCown's Longspur—originally named after John P. McCown, an amateur avian collector who defended slavery as a Confederate general and waged war against native tribes. The decision was part of the larger societal reckoning around historical injustices, and the recognition that eponyms and honorific names also carry the weight of the people they are associated with.

Thick-billed Longspurs love open spaces and grace shortgrass prairies of the Northern Great Plains throughout the breeding season. Males perform spectacular aerial flight displays, accompanied by song. They spend winters in the central southern U.S. and Chihuahuan Desert of Northern Mexico.

Like many grassland birds, their populations are declining rapidly. Ranching, grazing and rangeland management practices on private lands play a critical role in providing healthy habitat for grassland birds like the Thick-billed Longspur.



Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
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Brighton, CO 80603
www.birdconservancy.org

The Primary Source No. 57 - Spring/Summer 2021



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- ☐ \$250 ensure healthy landscapes and communities
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