Taking the High Ground for Conservation

I've been a Private Lands Wildlife Biologist with Bird Conservancy of the Rockies for over six years. Each landowner I've worked with has a unique approach to how they run their ranch, their objectives, and who they will work with. I strive to find common ground between helping ensure sustainable operations while also improving wildlife habitat. This often requires compromise.

The Neff family of Crawford, Colorado purchased 3,090 acres in the North Fork Valley specifically to protect it from development and provide wildlife habitat. Located in the foothills of the West Elk Mountains, **Higher Ground Ranch** supports diverse wildlife, including deer, elk, bear, turkey, quail, dusky grouse, and many non-game birds like Juniper Titmouse, Western Scrub-Jay, and Common Nighthawk. Their property is also home to a genetically pure population of Colorado River cutthroat trout, which may be used for reintroductions elsewhere.

Their approach is multi-faceted with strong ties to family and community. Cody and Stephanie run operations along with ranch manager Marta Laylander. Business endeavors include Vegetation Management West, specializing in transmission line management and which also provides employment opportunities following the closure of coal mines in the area. Their non-profit, Cleft of Hope, provides first responders a peaceful ranch retreat where they can escape from the stress of work and find renewal.

The Neff family of Crawford, Colorado purchased 3,090 acres in the North Fork Valley specifically to protect it from development and provide wildlife habitat. Located in the foothills of the West Elk Mountains, **Higher Ground Ranch** supports diverse wildlife, including deer, elk, bear, turkey, quail, dusky grouse, and many non-game birds like Juniper Titmouse, Western Scrub-Jay, and Common Nighthawk. Their property is also home to a genetically pure population of Colorado River cutthroat trout, which may be used for reintroductions elsewhere.

Their approach is multi-faceted with strong ties to family and community. Cody and Stephanie run operations along with ranch manager Marta Laylander. Business endeavors include Vegetation Management West, specializing in transmission line management and which also provides employment opportunities following the closure of coal mines in the area. Their non-profit, Cleft of Hope, provides first responders a peaceful ranch retreat where they can escape from the stress of work and find renewal.

For more information, please visit **www.birdconservancy.org**.

Thank you to the many partners, funders, volunteers and in-kind supporters of conservation efforts at Higher Ground Ranch: USDA/NRCS, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service - Partners for Fish & Wildlife, Colorado Parks & Wildlife Trust for Public Lands, Trout Unlimited, Bureau of Reclamation, Down to Earth Land Management, Pilot Rock Ditch Company, West Slope Bird Dogs Club, Western Colorado Community Foundation, Redemption Mill, and Western Colorado University.

Marcella Tarantino (marcella.tarantino@usda.gov) is a Senior Biologist in our Stewardship team and is based in Gunnison, CO.
At Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, our pillars for conserving birds and their habitats are science, education and land stewardship. As we welcome spring, we are working to combine these disciplines to truly be effective and ensure our work is relevant and sustained for the future.

We are fortunate to have amazing staff who are passionate about their work and incredibly gifted in their ability to foster collaboration toward shared purpose. The cover story from Marcella about her work with the Neff family and Higher Ground Ranch, as well as the article on collaborative conservation for grasslands, highlight the power of these partnerships.

The challenges we face are many. Declining bird populations, degraded landscapes suffering from drought and other ailments, and people not feeling like they are part of the conversation are just a few. The problems are larger than any one organization can solve alone. Together, with our diverse strengths, and the contributions of existing and new partners, we can and are changing the trajectory for conservation.

This shared model broadens our reach by providing landowners more options in their land management toolbox, richer learning environments for kids, real-world field experience for college students, and opportunities to engage and welcome new audiences to the conservation conversation. The connections our staff create are like a spider web of partners, all working tirelessly and in unison to make the world a better place.

When you invest in Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, know we are leading efforts to bring people together, elevate and unify voices and ensure a healthy future for birds, people and the land.

Tammy VerCauteren, Executive Director

---

**Rufous Hummingbird** (*Selasphorus rufus*)

A favorite harbinger of migration and the undisputed busy-bodies of the bird world, hummingbirds are fast, feisty and fun to watch. The Rufous Hummingbird is one many species seen in the Western U.S. during the warmer months. Such high-energy antics require high calorie food! Using their long bills and tongues, and precision flying, they make the rounds in search of sweet flower nectar. Get tips for attracting hummingbirds to your patio or garden on our website: [www.birdconservancy.org/hummingbirds](http://www.birdconservancy.org/hummingbirds)

Photo by Aleshia Rummel

---

**Keep on trucking!** This site restoration day photo at Higher Ground Ranch illustrates the diverse array of partners who came together for conservation—including Pilot Rock Ditch Company, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Trout Unlimited, Colorado Parks & Wildlife, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Colorado State Forest Service. Photo by Marta Laylander.

---

Go Paperless

If you prefer to receive an electronic-only version of this newsletter, please email info@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 $100 with distribution to over 500 Friends, supporters, volunteers and! For more info: info@birdconservancy.org

---

Visit [www.birdconservancy.org](http://www.birdconservancy.org) for a complete staff list.

---

**THE PRIMARY SOURCE**

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

**Board of Directors**

Eric Lane, M.S., Chair
Eileen Dey, B.S. Vice-chair
Peter Ampe, Esq., J.D., Secretary
Garth Spellman, Ph.D., Treasurer
Chrisy Coolidge
Jack Ferguson
Geoffrey Geupel, B.S.
Grady Grissom, Ph.D.
Larry Modesitt, M.B.A., CQE, CTP
David Otis, Ph.D.
Nathan Pieplow, M.Ed.
John Sanderson, Ph.D.
Garth Spellman, Ph.D.
D. Jean Tate, Ph.D.
Ed Warner, M.S., L.H.D.

---

Visit [www.birdconservancy.org](http://www.birdconservancy.org) for a complete staff list.

---

**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

---

**From the Director**

**Together we make conservation happen**

At Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, our pillars for conserving birds and their habitats are science, education and land stewardship. As we welcome spring, we are working to combine these disciplines to truly be effective and ensure our work is relevant and sustained for the future.

We are fortunate to have amazing staff who are passionate about their work and incredibly gifted in their ability to foster collaboration toward shared purpose. The cover story from Marcella about her work with the Neff family and Higher Ground Ranch, as well as the article on collaborative conservation for grasslands, highlight the power of these partnerships.

The challenges we face are many. Declining bird populations, degraded landscapes suffering from drought and other ailments, and people not feeling like they are part of the conversation are just a few. The problems are larger than any one organization can solve alone. Together, with our diverse strengths, and the contributions of existing and new partners, we can and are changing the trajectory for conservation.

This shared model broadens our reach by providing landowners more options in their land management toolbox, richer learning environments for kids, real-world field experience for college students, and opportunities to engage and welcome new audiences to the conservation conversation. The connections our staff create are like a spider web of partners, all working tirelessly and in unison to make the world a better place.

When you invest in Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, know we are leading efforts to bring people together, elevate and unify voices and ensure a healthy future for birds, people and the land.

Tammy VerCauteren, Executive Director

---

---
Combining Forces, Unifying Voices
Coming together for Conservation
In addition to our hands-on science, education and land stewardship initiatives, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies staff are also playing leadership roles in collaborative efforts for conservation. Cultivating partnerships and working with others is a trademark strength of our organization, and we are excited to share updates about some of the initiatives that we are helping catalyze and deliver...

Central Grasslands Roadmap
Update from Tammy VerCauteren, Roadmap Convenor

Grasslands form one of North America’s largest and most vital ecosystems, supporting crucial environmental functions like water supply, soil health and biodiversity. Grassland birds have suffered some of the greatest population declines in recent years, due in large part to habitat loss. Tensions between conserving grasslands and converting them to accommodate growing populations and resource use have revealed an urgent need to chart a more sustainable and resilient future.

For two years, over 200 partners representing eight diverse sectors across three countries (Mexico, Canada and the U.S.) have collaborated to create the Central Grasslands Roadmap: A Collaborative Strategy for a Working Lands Biome. In May, the Roadmap community will come together for an in-person summit meeting in Fort Collins, CO. The gathering aims to celebrate accomplishments, build shared understanding and create opportunities for networking and dialogue. Delegates will solidify commitments and collectively prioritize actions over the next 1–3 years.

To learn more about this important initiative and how it stands to benefit wildlife and human communities, visit www.grasslandsroadmap.org

Get to know our grasslands...
Visit our website to learn more about the many benefits that grasslands provide for wildlife and people. You can also download this colorful “Grasslands & You” poster to print and share with others.

birdconservancy.org/grasslands-and-you

In our fall issue of the Primary Source:
R2R: The Road to Recovery Initiative
Brandt Ryder, Chief Conservation Scientist, will provide an update about the collaborative effort to identify the specific causes of bird population declines and the actions necessary to reverse those trends.

Learn more at www.marralab.com/road-to-recovery

www.birdconservancy.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.

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

---

**BIOBLITZ**

and **Community Science Celebration!**

**Saturday, June 4 2022**

**Barr Lake State Park**

*Do you enjoy...* exploring the natural world and discovering new things, building your bird list, picnics & cookouts, and connecting with fellow nature lovers? **Then join us for the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies BioBlitz and Community Science Celebration at Barr Lake State Park!**

**What is BioBlitz?**
A BioBlitz is a celebration of science and nature that brings together community members, students, naturalists, and scientists to find and identify as many birds, plants, insects, reptiles, mammals and other organisms as possible in a short period of time. The result is a snapshot of the biodiversity of a specific place. It's a great way for people of all ages to learn about the world around them, personally contribute to the biodiversity data for Barr Lake, and connect with fellow nature lovers.

**What to Expect**
You'll join scientists and experts on short walks around Barr Lake State Park where you search for, identify and record as many species as possible! *Do you like birds?* Join the ornithologists group! *Do you want to learn about plants?* Join the botanists group! *Just want to hang out and enjoy a beautiful Colorado day?* There will be lots of things to do at the Nature Center base camp!

You can join groups anytime between 7 a.m. and 2 p.m. There will be a cookout lunch served at 12 p.m.

*BioBlitz participation is FREE but registration is required* to participate in BioBlitz surveys. Entry to Barr Lake State Park is included. **Lunch is $5 per person** and includes a drink, hamburger or hot dog and a side. Participants are encouraged to purchase lunch during sign-up.

Register online at: **www.birdconservancy.org/2022bioblitz**

Please note that space is limited and registration closes 5/28/2022.

Questions? Contact us at info@birdconservancy.org

---

Thank you to our Event Sponsors:

*United Power*
Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

*Bank of Colorado*
There's Only One

---

**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](http://www.facebook.com/birdconservancy)
- [Twitter](http://@BirdConservancy)
- [YouTube](http://www.youtube.com/BirdConservancy)
- [Instagram](http://@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](http://birdconservancy.org/stories)
SPRING/SUMMER PROGRAMS

Take flight at Bird Camp!
Our year-round camp experiences get kids outside to have fun and explore nature while making friends, developing leadership skills and gaining new insights. Our camp activities connect children to the outdoors using birds and their habitats as inspiration.

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 experiences. Day Camps take place at our Environmental Learning Center in Brighton, CO, led by a team of professional environmental educators.

More info at: birdconservancy.org/daycamps

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 and in Brighton.

More info at: birdconservancy.org/overnightcamps

Inspired by past campers who wanted to give back, 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, June 3 at our Environmental Learning Center in Brighton, CO. LITs sign-up to assist with programs throughout the year, and come together for group presentations in the spring.

More info at: birdconservancy.org/LIT

Space is limited, register now to save your spot! birdconservancy.org/events

Pre-registration is required for all Camps/Educational Programs.
Scholarships available for all camps and programs!
Apply online: birdconservancy.org/scholarships

www.birdconservancy.org

Wild Wednesdays
Nature Play
Join us every Wednesday for a morning of wild fun!
This program is designed for children 4 and under and their grown-ups, however older siblings are always welcome!
Free play in nature helps kids to develop mind, body and soul; it gives them the space to explore, take healthy risks, and form meaningful connections with the world around them. Some activities might include; examining a cool bug, building with sticks and logs, playing in the mud or snow, learning about wildlife, and going wherever our curiosity and imagination takes us!

Cost: $7/child; $1/adult
Date/Time: Every Wednesday (except July 6!) from 9-11:00 a.m.
Location: Environmental Learning Center (Old Stone House) at Barr Lake State Park 14500 Lark Bunting Lane, Brighton CO

Birding by Canoe
Gain a new perspective on the birds of Barr Lake – from the water!

Cost: $7/child; $1/adult
Date/Time: Wed. May 11 & Sat. May 14 from 9 a.m - 12:00 p.m.
Location: Barr Lake State Park Boat Ramp

Nature Art
Practice your budding art skills by creating masterpieces made from found natural objects!

Cost: $7/child; $1/adult
Dates & Times are TBD! Contact Sarah Doxon via email (sarah.doxon@birdconservancy.org) for the latest schedule information.

Colorado & Nebraska Educational Programs
are made possible with support from

Pre-registration is required for all Camps/Educational Programs.
Scholarships available for all camps and programs!
Apply online: birdconservancy.org/scholarships

The Nebraska Environmental Trust and Friends Paul & Bea Sauer
Welcome to our new Staff!

Mandy Ensrud
Private Lands Wildlife Biologist (Sturgis, SD)
Mandy comes from Sacramento, CA and received a BS in Zoology / minor in Wildlife from Humboldt State University, with her Wildlife Sciences MS in progress at South Dakota State University. Previous roles involved studying the impacts of wind energy on grassland birds. Mandy lives in Sturgis, SD, with her fiancé, dog, cat, and turtle, where she loves hiking, birding, and watching reality TV.

Skye Newman
Education Programs Coordinator (Brighton, CO)
Skye earned their BS in Environmental Science from Cornell University’s Lab of Ornithology, studying mycoplasma in house finches and helping develop the Lab’s All About Birds website. They moved to Colorado to pursue an MBA in Leadership & Sustainability in 2020. In their spare time, they enjoy cooking, strategy games, and aquaria.

Kathleen Lich
Environmental Educator (Brighton, CO)
Kathleen earned her BS in Environmental Sustainability Studies & Geography from Indiana University. During her time at IU, she worked for the Critical Food Studies Lab and spent her summers as an environmental educator in Alaska. After college, Kathleen continued her career in Environmental Education with several organizations. She is very passionate about helping people connect to nature, especially birds.

Ashley Mertz
Private Lands Wildlife Biologist (Greeley, CO)
Ashley was raised in Kansas and received her BS/MS in Wildlife Biology from Fort Hays State University. She worked for the USFWS as a biologist at Aransas (TX) and Bosque del Apache (NM) National Wildlife Refuges. In her spare time, she enjoys hiking and exploring nature with her family, as well as a good podcast while running with her dog.

Rachel Belouin
Program Manager - Watershed Health (Fort Collins, CO)
Rachel holds a BS in Natural Resources from the University of Mass. Amherst, a MFA in Non-Fiction Writing from Antioch University, and a MS in Natural Resource Stewardship from CSU. Rachel has experience working and living on a third-generation cattle ranch and enjoys riding her horse, trail running with her son, and a great book.

Qing Zhao
Research Associate (Fort Collins, CO)
Qing is a quantitative ecologist with a BS in Ecology/Environmental Biology and a PhD in Zoology from Peking University, and a MS in Statistics from the University of Toledo. Qing’s current work as part of our Science Team focuses on developing population models to understand grassland bird population declines.

Taylor Dziedzina
Environmental Sustainability Manager (Fort Collins, CO)
Taylor has experience as a wildlife biologist, most recently leading surveys in Utah. She also spent time with CPW as a Statewide Volunteer Program Assistant. Taylor holds a BS in Fish, Wildlife and Conservation Biology from CSU. In her spare time Taylor can be found hiking and backpacking with her dog, Delilah, birdwatching, or curled up with a good book.

Rob Fenwick
Program Manager - Watershed Health (Fort Collins, CO)
Rob grew up camping, fishing, and hiking on Colorado’s western slope. He holds a BS in Marine Biology and a MS in Natural Resources from Utah State. He helped lead the creation of resource and waterbird stewardship programs for CPW and the USFWS. Rob enjoys mountain biking, birding, herping, caving, growing orchids, and exploring the outdoors with his wife and children.

Pam McCulloch
Executive Assistant (Fort Collins, CO)
Pam has worked for a wide variety of organizations assisting with office coordination, billing, partner relations, and more. She brings strong planning, problem-solving skills and customer service experience. She grew up in the company of relatives who were well-known for wildlife/nature photography, and she still enjoys visiting wildlife refuges, birding festivals, botanical gardens, and hiking with family.

Farewells: Jennifer Blakesley, Michael Getzy, Faye Lamb, Justin Lambert, David McNitt, Laura Quattrini and former Board Members David Charles and Jim Strickland
Members of our Golden Eagle Society are forward-looking, generous donors who have included Bird Conservancy of the Rockies in their estate plans. Their gifts enable Bird Conservancy to pursue our vision of a future where birds are forever abundant, contributing to healthy landscapes and inspiring human curiosity and love of nature.

Will you consider joining the Golden Eagle Society by making a planned gift? We would be proud to be part of your legacy for birds, people and the land!

**It’s Easy!**

You do not need to be wealthy or have a team of lawyers to make a planned gift. Whether it is naming Bird Conservancy in your will or trust, making a gift of real estate, or including us on your life insurance policy or retirement assets, there is an easy option that is right for you. The best part, a planned gift has little to no impact on your current budget.

**It’s Not All or Nothing**

Golden Eagle Society members often include multiple charities in their estate plans in addition to leaving funds for their loved ones.

**Membership Has Benefits**

Golden Eagle Society members receive immediate exclusive and early access invites to Bird Conservancy special events. They also receive and are recognized in multiple publications throughout the year. Beyond membership benefits, short-term and/or long-term tax benefits may apply. Consult with your financial or estate advisor for more specifics.

**Is Bird Conservancy already named in your estate?**

Thank you! Please let us know about your intentions because it helps us plan for the future. If you are concerned about remaining anonymous, rest assured that Bird Conservancy takes confidentiality very seriously and will respect your wishes for anonymity.

**Don’t Have a Will?**

You’re not alone, but it’s never too early to start planning! Please consider including Bird Conservancy in your estate plans. Contact Joe Pettit for suggested “bequest language” and the Bird Conservancy tax ID for you to share with your attorney.

We appreciate your gift of any amount! Donations can be made online at [birdconservancy.org/donate](http://birdconservancy.org/donate). For more information, please contact Joe Pettit, Development Director | joseph.pettit@birdconservancy.org | (303) 659-4348 x12
YOU make a difference for birds & their habitats!

Make a secure donation at www.birdconservancy.org/donate
Your support helps ensure a better world for people, birds and land!

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
☐ Other: ____________________________

☐ Birds Forever Endowment Fund: ____________
☐ Count on me for a monthly gift!
☐ I have included Bird Conservancy in my estate plans
☐ Please contact me about including Bird Conservancy in my estate plans

Name ________________________________
Address ______________________________
City/State/Zip ________________________ / __ / ______
Email ________________________________
Phone ________________________________

Bird Conservancy of the Rockies is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Your gift is tax deductible.

Please mail to:
Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
14500 Lark Bunting Lane
Brighton, CO 80603

THANK YOU for supporting bird and habitat conservation!