

THE PRIMARY SOURCE



NEWSLETTER FOR BIRD CONSERVANCY OF THE ROCKIES | FALL-WINTER 2022 | NUMBER 60

A Hard Day's Night: The Search for the Mexican Spotted Owl

Marion Clément, Mexican Spotted Owl Coordinator

In a dark forest of the southwest, a male Mexican Spotted Owl flies silently through a thick stand of pines, oak and aspen. The owl veers from its course, a woodrat dangling from its beak, and lands atop a Douglas Fir. Perching on a small branch, the owl waits for the quiet begging calls of its mate. The hungry female sits snugly on two pale eggs. After quickly transferring the woodrat to its mate, the male finds a new perch from which to scan the forest floor in search of its next meal. Its attention is soon interrupted by a familiar, yet unwelcome sound: an intruding Spotted Owl calling in the night. Or is it?

Down below, two wildlife technicians play a pre-recorded call of a Spotted Owl, hoping to get a response from the territorial male. Luck is on their side this evening, and both technicians gasp as an ascending hoot breaks up the repetitive calls coming from their speaker. The male is perched about 200 feet away, but its loud calls can easily be heard in the still night. As one technician turns off the speaker, the other carefully triangulates the owl's position using a handheld GPS and compass before recording it on a pre-printed datasheet.

Bird Conservancy of the Rockies works with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and U.S. Fish & Wildlife (USFWS) Service to monitor Mexican Spotted Owl populations. One of three subspecies of Spotted Owls, the Mexican Spotted Owl is smaller and lighter in color than its more northerly counterparts. It has a broad range, spanning from southern Utah and Colorado to the Sierra Madre mountains in Mexico.

In 1993, the USFWS assessed that logging and wildfires were substantial threats to this owl's long-term survival and listed it as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Federal agencies are required by law to prioritize conserving owl habitat, mitigating

threats, and tracking population trends. Beginning in 2014, Bird Conservancy partnered with the USFS Southwestern Region to monitor the owl for a ten-year period. Since then, annual surveys were done on approximately 200 sites across Arizona and New Mexico. Data are used by scientists and land managers to estimate changes in occupancy and population trend throughout the region. As the only long-term, large-scale monitoring effort for the Mexican Spotted Owl, this study is key to helping guide future conservation management efforts, as well as informing federal listing status updates and recovery goals.

Surveying for Mexican Spotted Owls is hard work! They often nest in rugged drainages and dense mixed-pine forests at high elevations. Working late into the night, technicians trek across loose terrain, steep ridges and dense thickets of thorny vegetation to access our survey sites. Encounters with mountain lions and bears are common and certainly memorable! But the rewards are often greater than the sacrifice. As Adrienne Cunningham, a crew leader on the project, said: *"Encountering Mexican Spotted Owls in their natural habitat is truly an honor... [Knowing] this project contributes to our knowledge of the species to protect it is a rewarding experience in many ways"*.



2022 MSO Field Season Technicians (left to right): Christian Renteria, Oliver Schalet, Annie Hatch and Chris Ajello | Photo by Marion Clément, Spotted Owl Coordinator
Mexican Spotted Owl (header/top photo) by Shaula Hedwall, USFWS Biologist

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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

All Access Pass



Access is a common thread across conservation, yet it has many meanings. Throughout this newsletter, we explore access across disciplines and in the places where we work.

One example is meeting birds where they are—documenting habitats, behaviors and population levels. Mexican Spotted Owl habitat is rough terrain for our staff to access, made more challenging by unpredictable wildfires that create dangerous conditions. Why do we go to such effort? We need those eyes and ears out there, counting and documenting these birds. The data is vital to helping recover this threatened species across its range and inform future conservation strategies. We invite you to imagine being transported to a remote forested landscape in search of these magnificent birds.

Facilitating access to information and knowledge is a Bird Conservancy “superpower.” Across the grasslands of the Great Plains, using birds as a touchstone, we connect landowners with resources to help them and their land thrive. Habitat, birds and people go together. Access in this context requires trust and meeting people where they are so that we can share, grow and learn, from ranching economics workshops to working side-by-side in the field. The work goes deep—literally—to the roots, soil and water that are building blocks needed to support healthy grasslands. As we conserve and restore habitat for grassland birds, we also ensure a future for rural communities to provide our food and support clean air and water for us all.

Finally, access may refer to the ability of all people to recreate in and enjoy nature. Time spent in nature is a respite for many of us, bringing joy and a chance to disconnect from our busy world. However, because most things are built with only able-bodied people in mind, folks with disabilities may find the outdoors unwelcoming or unsafe. They may find it difficult to enjoy and explore spaces that many of us take for granted. We want to ensure nature is accessible to people of all backgrounds and abilities. Accessible birding programs in October spotlight an opportunity for those with disabilities and other health concerns to not only access the outdoors, but also discover wonderful experiences on their own terms. Personal guides and tools like mobility carts help remove barriers and create those opportunities. If you know of someone who would enjoy these special programs, we hope you will join us!

Your partnership, donations and support help us provide access to knowledge, collect scientific information and ensure a safe, engaging place for people in nature. Thank you for helping us connect people, birds and the land.

Tammy VerCauteren, Executive Director



Celebrating Welcoming & Inclusive Birding

Programs update from Sarah Doxon, Education Programs Manager

Bird Conservancy's Education team works diligently to help everyone find and grow a unique and meaningful connection with birds. It's very important that participants feel safe and welcome at our programs. Whether it's the thrill of a bird banding station or birding in nature, or bringing the magic of birds to a classroom, we strive to ensure our experiences are accessible and inclusive to everyone.

When thinking about accessibility, what often comes to mind are physical challenges requiring people to use wheelchairs or other mobility devices. **Birdability**, a nonprofit dedicated to raising awareness about accessible and inclusive birding, goes further and defines accessibility challenges more broadly:

"The difficulties someone experiences in interacting with or while using the physical or social environment while trying to engage in a meaningful activity (in this case, birding). This may be a result of a mobility challenge, blindness or low vision, or developmental disabilities (including autism), mental illness, being Deaf or Hard of Hearing, or other health concern. Accessibility challenges may also be related to factors such as someone's race or skin color, financial barriers, or lack of available transportation; and many birders who experience accessibility challenges may also experience other barriers that impact their ability to go birding."



Barr Lake State Park's Track Chair is available for rental at no cost. Call the Nature Center at (303) 659-6005 to reserve.



The Birdability Map currently includes listings for access-friendly birding locations and programs across the U.S. and Canada.

"Birdability Week" is celebrated each October to raise awareness of accessible and inclusive birding and opportunities to participate. Often it is the setting or location—rather than the person—who is disabled. The **Birdability Map** (www.gis.audubon.org/birdability) is a free resource where people can identify and share access-friendly locations and plan accordingly for their birding adventures!

Birdability Week 2022

October 15-22, 2022



Drawing inspiration from Birdability, in October Bird Conservancy of the Rockies will host several accessible bird outings and activities at our Barr Lake Environmental Learning Center, including a visit to our Barr Lake Banding Station!

Learn more at birdconservancy.org/events

These programs will be provided at no cost through the support of Colorado Parks and Wildlife Partners in the Outdoors Grant, Adams County Open Space Grant and the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District. Please note that at \$9/vehicle State Park entrance fee is required at Barr Lake State Park at all times.

As we continue our journey to increase our engagement with Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) in mind, we welcome your questions, comments or suggestions. In the words of Maya Angelou, "*Do the best you can, until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.*"

Learn more at: birdconservancy.org/DEIA

Food for Thought



Birding vs. Birdwatching

The term *birding* is more inclusive when describing how people engage with and enjoy birds.

Most birders don't just look, but also enjoy listening to birds. This language automatically includes birders who are blind or have low vision.



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



FALL PROGRAMS



COLORADO Educational Programs

 Colorado programs are at Barr Lake State Park unless indicated otherwise

Night Hike! Family & Homeschool Program

 Thursday, Oct. 13 | 6:30-8 p.m.

 \$7/child (1-17 years); \$1/adult (+ \$9/vehicle State Park entrance fee)

Beautiful Birds! Family & Homeschool Program

 Thursday, Nov. 10 | 9 a.m. - 11 a.m.

 \$7/child (1-17 years); \$1/adult (+ \$9/vehicle State Park entrance fee)

Christmas Bird Count for Kids!

 Saturday, Dec. 3 | 9:30 a.m. - 12 p.m.

 \$7/child (1-17 years); \$1/adult (+ \$9/vehicle State Park entrance fee)

Birds of Winter Day Camp (Ages 6-10)

 Wed., Dec. 28 - Fri., Dec. 30 | 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. daily.  \$138.00



Barr Lake Bird Banding Station

 Open to the public through October 23, six days a week (closed Mondays).

Weekday programs 7:30–8:30 a.m. Weekends: 8-9, 9-10, and 10-11 a.m.

 Cost is \$6/visitor (ages 3 and up). Visitors under 2 years are free.

 More info at birdconservancy.org/birdbanding

NEBRASKA Educational Programs



Birding at Scotts Bluff National Monument

 Saturday, Oct. 8 | 8 a.m. - 10 a.m.  **FREE!** Registration required.

 Scotts Bluff National Monument - 190276 Old Oregon Trail, Gering, NE

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

Register online at birdconservancy.org/events

Scholarships available for all camps and programs!

Apply online: birdconservancy.org/scholarships

Colorado & Nebraska Educational Programs are made possible with support from





Photos from the Field

For your enjoyment, here are a handful of photos and accompanying stories sent in by our staff, taken during spring and summer adventures in the field...



"Growing Scientists" from Ellis Elementary enjoy a spring bird walk | Photo by Sarah Doxon



In July, Private Lands Wildlife Biologist Tayler Scherr flushed up a Lark Bunting and decided to take a closer look. She was rewarded with this discovery of a late-season nest filled with beautiful blue eggs! | Photo by Tayler Scherr



Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher at Chico Basin Ranch on Sept. 1. Normally seen in Mexico and SE Arizona, it was well out of usual range. This marks the second time the species was recorded in Colorado, with the first back in 2002. | Photo by Colin Woolley



A Baltimore x Bullocks Oriole hybrid showed up at our Wildcat Hills banding station in western Nebraska, kicking off the fall season with a colorful start! | Photo by Delanie Bruce



Two enlisted officers do the honors of installing a new Motus station at McConnell Air Force Base in Kansas. | Photo by Mike Jungen



Three previously-banded Black Swifts were recaptured by our research team in August at Colorado's Zapata Falls. This event broke the longevity record (18 years) for the species! | Photos by Colin Woolley & Rob Sparks.



Participants had a great time at our 3rd Annual Barr Lake State Park BioBlitz, held in June. Over 70 species of plants and animals were recorded | Photo by Eric Tokuyama

A Night for the BIRDS

BIRD CONSERVANCY OF THE ROCKIES FALL FUNDRAISER • OCTOBER 14, 2022

Join us for our biggest fundraising event of the year! Celebrate big wins and help raise critical funds for bird conservation! There will be games, delicious hor d'oeuvres, exciting guest speakers, and live and silent auctions. Purchase your tickets now before they sell out!

birdconservancy.org/2022fundraiser



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Thank you to our Event Sponsors!



Welcome to our new Staff!

Kyle Deschenes

Private Lands Wildlife Biologist
(Rocky Ford, CO)

Kyle is from Florida and grew up fishing, hiking, snorkeling, and watching wildlife. Upon graduation from college, he worked as a Colorado Parks & Wildlife naturalist and then a wildlife technician working with deer, elk, and mountain lions. Kyle is extremely passionate about restoring wildlife habitat to its historical structure and function. In his free time, He enjoys fly fishing and hiking with his dog.



Olivia Laws

Private Lands Wildlife Biologist
(Sterling, CO)

Olivia's love of wild animals and places has fueled a career working across the country. Wetlands are her favorite! She has worked with wetlands across Colorado. Passionate about stewardship and working with the public, Olivia describes her role at Bird Conservancy as the best of all worlds. She enjoys hiking, paddle boarding, and time with her cat.



Renea Wilson

Private Lands Wildlife Biologist
(Fort Morgan, CO)

Renea grew up in Southern Indiana and previously worked six years as an endangered species specialist in the private sector studying bats, snakes, freshwater mussels, and more. As a new upland hunter, her passions include pursuing and learning about game, training her pup, and an ever-growing list of outdoor activities.



TC Walker

Avian Ecologist (Fort Collins, CO)

TC's schooling focused on GIS and avian ecology, which paired well with his love for birds and the outdoors. TC brings years of experience conducting bird surveys (grassland breeding birds, sage-grouse and raptors, to name a few), leading field crews, as well as providing GIS support within the IMBCR program. He can often be found in the forest four-wheeling to the best spots for fishing, camping and birding.



Welcome new board members!

Chrissy Coolidge

Board of Directors | Governance Committee

As a seasoned executive with more than 20 years in tech, Silicon Valley native Chrissy Coolidge brings a wealth of strategy, intelligence and operations experience. From pre-seeded ventures to launching billion dollar Go-To-Market Web 3.0 transformation initiatives, Chrissy has held numerous advisory roles with digital media, mobile and commerce companies. In addition, she has held senior leadership roles at McCann Erickson (NYSE: IPC), FreeWheel (acquired by Comcast), Gigya (acquired by SAP), and Marketo (acquired by Adobe), establishing a strong track record of hypergrowth for new products brought to market.



Farewells: William Bevil, Mandy Ensrud, David McNitt, Sofia Prado-Irwin, and Erin Strasser

Ranching for Profit Workshops

Update from Stewardship Program Managers Rachel Belouin & Angela Dwyer

Ranchers play an integral role maintaining grasslands and supporting avian diversity and habitat through managed livestock grazing. With more than 50% of grassland birds in steep decline, sustainable ranching on private lands is a vital part of Bird Conservancy's conservation strategy.

Why is grazing important? Many grassland birds depend on grazing. In the Great Plains, grasses co-evolved with bison, prairie dogs and antelope migrating across the prairies. Grazing by native animals created a diversity in grass species and a variety of vegetation heights to support a diverse array of habitats for grassland birds. Livestock grazing mimics those conditions.

In June, Bird Conservancy along with partners from Audubon, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Natural Resource Conservation Service, World Wildlife Fund, and local conservation districts brought Dallas Mount from Range Management Consultants to present seven Ranching for Profit workshops across the Western Great Plains, with almost 100 landowners and resource professionals in attendance.

The groups talked economics, wildlife, soil health and best practices for managed grazing. They put boots to the ground, digging into the soils of each region, and discussed scenarios of grazing management and forage production. They identified grasses and forbs, and observed the curious birds, including Dickcissels, Bobolinks, and Grasshopper Sparrows. It's all connected—from roots below ground to the grasses, forbs and birds above. Take care of the basic building blocks of grassland health and all organisms thrive, from plants and wildlife, to people and human communities.

Our Private Lands Wildlife Biologists (PLWBs) shared knowledge and learned from Dallas and landowners. Just as important were the relationships formed, demonstrating that Bird Conservancy cares about the livelihoods of ranchers. Chelsea Forehead, PLWB in Nebraska, commented that in her workshop there were poignant conversations about ranching and family. PLWB Katie Merewether in Southern Colorado had great discussions with producers and encouraged participants to help each other assess new management strategies.

Profitable operations lead to long-term health of the grasslands. Workshops explored ways to achieve sustainability and ensure grassland biomes continue to provide benefits. The themes hit home with ranchers, with many indicating interest in improving soil health with more diverse grasses as well as grazing management to prevent over-grazing and increase forage productivity.

Partnerscapes, a national landowner-led organization that works to sustain working landscapes, took positive notice of how the workshops combined economic considerations in the same discussion as bird conservation.

With such encouraging and enthusiastic responses, Bird Conservancy is excited to continue the partnership with Dallas Mount and Ranching for Profit by bringing more conversations, community building, and opportunities in the coming year to strengthen managed grazing practices, and grassland bird habitat, to the western Great Plains.

www.birdconservancy.org



Workshops included both classroom and field components, with opportunities to get hands dirty and see the effects of management practices on grassland productivity firsthand.

"Ongoing learning isn't always about coming across something breathtakingly new. Sometimes it's hearing how the principles are deployed in different contexts or seen from other perspectives. Other times, just being in the context of a group discussion is inspirational and aspirational."

~Landowner/Rancher Workshop Participant

For more information about future workshops, contact Rachel Belouin (rachel.belouin@birdconservancy.org) or Angela Dwyer (angela.dwyer@birdconservancy.org)



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