



## Birds, Badlands and Beauty

By Taylor Barnes, Colorado Kids Outdoors Intern

When I set out to shadow Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory field technicians across Colorado last May, most species were new to me, and I had never taken the time to appreciate the complexity of flight or the intricacy of a sparrow's wing. Each bird was a new discovery that deepened my desire to conserve these creatures.

Halfway through the field season, I was assigned to work in Badlands National Park in South Dakota and Nebraska. I had never spent time in this region, and the landscape did not disappoint. The jagged formations captivated me. While there, I discovered for the first time my favorite bird, the Red-headed Woodpecker. I spotted one clinging to a telephone pole, bouncing around with surprising agility searching for insects. I couldn't take my eyes off its bright red head and jet-black body.

No artwork I have seen compares to the beauty nature can produce. A wise man (my Dad) once told me, "Creativity is good for the soul." This summer the complexities of nature and the birds were undeniable proof of the importance of creativity.

I appreciated the solitude of the job, even though it could get lonely. Gazing across the land as the sun sets in an orange glow gives one a new perspective and time to think. Often society pushes us at a pace that leads us to forget the simple complexities of the world around us. This job granted me time to breathe and reflect. Life was, in a way, on a much-needed pause.

This experience gave me valuable skills for field work and identifying birds, and an appreciation of what we study and why we conserve birds and habitat. Conservation and science are rooted in passion and wonder that we must hold on to for our work to continue and for the birds to have a fighting chance for generations to come.

*Fence and formations near Chadron, Neb.*  
photo by Taylor Barnes

## Interns' season of discovery

Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory hired six interns for the 2011 summer season thanks to a grant from Colorado Kids Outdoors and the Department of Natural Resources. Two of the interns wrote the stories on this page about their on-the-job experience with RMBO.

Nicole McDaniel, 22, worked with RMBO's environmental education programs. She recently graduated from Colorado State University and is pursuing a career in conservation.

Taylor Barnes, 21, is a student at Colorado State University and spent the summer working with RMBO's science team. After graduating with a degree in wildlife biology in May, he plans to attend graduate school to further study endangered bird species.



Intern Nicole McDaniel, back left, "absolutely loved" her environmental education experience.

## Camping, Bird-banding and the Joys of Outdoor Learning

By Nicole McDaniel, Colorado Kids Outdoors Intern

I spent my college years focusing on research, but in my senior year a professor sparked my interest in education. This internship with RMBO gave me the opportunity to get more exposure to environmental education, and I absolutely loved it!

I prepared and led summer day camps for younger kids and also mentored teenagers during a one-week tent-camping trip. It

was amazing to be with kids who had never camped outside of an RV. I took them whitewater rafting for the first time, too.

In the fall I assisted with the bird-banding programs and learned a lot about birds and what it's like to lead children to a better understanding of the natural world around them. My last day at the Barr Lake banding station epitomized my internship experience. A group of first graders came to the station for the second time this season and showed me how CKO and RMBO's education program make a difference. I asked what birds they saw three weeks ago and was surprised by the enthusiastic chorus of



continued, back page

Couple has studied finches on Galapagos Islands for 40 years

## Famed scientists share understanding of the natural world

By Tammy VerCauteren, Executive Director

I am repeating myself, but it's important: All of us must be aware, informed and engaged to contribute to a healthy, sustainable environment.

So I am pleased to report that Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory staff and volunteers connected with hundreds of people this quarter at more than a dozen outreach events and presentations in addition to our education programs.

Recently RMBO partnered with the Denver Museum of Nature & Science to co-host Peter and Rosemary Grant's presentation, "The Evolution of Darwin's Finches," which 178 people attended, including many RMBO staffers, board members and supporters.

The Grants have devoted nearly 40 years to studying the processes by which several species can arise from a single, common ancestor (speciation). Working on the Galapagos Islands, the Grants were able to measure evolution through natural selection occurring in real time.

They found that natural variation in climate resulted in dramatic changes in the amount and types of food resources available to the finches. In turn, competition for food led to changes in the average size and shape of finches' beaks. Their work underscores the importance of maintaining intact ecosystems and species diversity so birds and other organisms will be able to respond to a changing environment.

To learn more about the Grants' work, read their book, "How and Why Species Multiply: The Radiation of Darwin's Finches," or Jonathan Weiner's Pulitzer-Prize-winning, "The Beak of the Finch: A Story of Evolution in Our Time."

Presentations and events like this in-



Rosemary Grant, PhD, RMBO Board Chair Larry Modesitt, RMBO Executive Director Tammy VerCauteren and Peter Grant, PhD, before the Grants' November presentation in Denver.

form and engage people and help motivate positive contributions to bird and habitat conservation and a healthy, sustainable environment.

In this newsletter and at [rmbo.org](http://rmbo.org), read about some of the ways RMBO connects with people, and then I hope you will consider joining in as a volunteer citizen scientist (page 3) or making a donation or giving a gift membership (page 8).

## Larry Semo: RMBO Board Director Leaves Legacy as Biologist, Birder, Conservationist and Teacher

Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory staff and board members are saddened by the loss of Board Director Larry Semo to cancer on August 20, 2011.

Larry brought to RMBO a wealth of experience as a nationally known biologist, birder and conservationist. His full-time job was senior ornithologist/ecologist at SWCA, an environmental consulting firm, overseeing biological and scientific studies.

He was chairman of the Colorado Bird Records Committee since 2005, listing editor for the American Birding Association since 2003, and Colorado regional editor for the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and National Audubon Society's eBird program. He was a consultant for the Peterson Field Guide to Birds, the National Geographic Society's Guide to Birds, the Sibley Guide to Birds, and the National Wildlife Federation Guide to Birds. Larry also was an identification instructor for the Audubon Society's Master Birding Program and a regional co-editor for North American Birds.

In all of Larry's over-achieving in favor of birds, he gladly and tirelessly worked with others, helping them understand bird identification, habitat, biology and conservation. You witnessed Larry's friendly manner of teaching if you went on one of his bird hikes at an RMBO picnic. Larry was a great help to many of us, and he will be missed deeply.



**Board of Directors**  
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In Memoriam: Larry Semo

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The Primary Source logo with a baby Killdeer and a primary feather from a Pelican was designed by Granby, Colo., artist David Utterback. Primary feathers give power to a bird's flight. Our members, friends, volunteers and partners are the primary source of RMBO's power to accomplish its mission to conserve birds and their habitat.

Editing and design: Victoria Collier

## Volunteers count birds; birds count on volunteers

Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory is recruiting volunteers for 2012 to count birds, collect migration and nesting data, run education programs and so much more. These citizen scientists are essential to RMBO's work to conserve birds and habitat. Review the opportunities below and consider becoming a citizen scientist to:

- Enhance your knowledge of the natural world
- Have a rewarding volunteer experience that contributes to conservation & science
- Be part of a community that cares about the environment and inspires others

### ColonyWatch

**What:** Monitor colonial waterbirds to gather information about colony size and locations to help resource managers effect long-term conservation.

**When:** March through August

**Where:** throughout Colorado

**Who:** Anyone who enjoys birds and is concerned with their conservation. Requires only the ability to recognize the 15 species we monitor and to follow a simple monitoring protocol. Necessary skills are easy to acquire; technical support is always available from the project coordinator.

**Contact:** Jason Beason, RMBO Special Monitoring Projects Coordinator, 970-310-5117 or [jason.beason@rmbo.org](mailto:jason.beason@rmbo.org)

### HawkWatch

**What:** HawkWatch collects information about raptor migration, which is stored in a public online database and contributes to the understanding of raptor movements across North America.

**When:** Training the week of February 20. Official counts start March 1 and end May 7.

**Where:** Dinosaur Ridge in the Dakota Hogback Natural Area, Morrison, Colo.

**Who:** Anyone with an interest in birds of prey who would like to help. Experienced volunteers are paired up with those wanting to learn identification and data collection skills.

**Contact:** Jeff Birek, Biologist/HawkWatch Coordinator, 970-482-1707 ext. 25 or [jeff.birek@rmbo.org](mailto:jeff.birek@rmbo.org) (preferably before February 20)

### Bald Eagle Watch

**What:** Monitor and collect data on Bald Eagle nesting behavior and productivity and report any disturbances that may affect nesting eagles. The data helps wildlife managers and conservation organizations ensure continued healthy populations of Bald Eagles.

**When:** February - July. All volunteers must attend an orientation tentatively scheduled for January 21 at RMBO's Old Stone House in Brighton, Colo.

**Where:** Colorado's Front Range from Brighton to Fort Collins

**Who:** Volunteers who can monitor designated nest weekly for a minimum of one hour, fill out data sheet and enter into an online reporting system; can drive to nest site; enjoy monitoring either alone or with another person; have a spotting scope or binoculars.

**Contact:** Cindi Kelly, Bald Eagle Watch Coordinator, 303-775-1918 or [cindi.kelly@rmbo.org](mailto:cindi.kelly@rmbo.org) (preferably by January 11)

### Volunteer Naturalists

**What:** Teach citizens of all ages the importance of bird and habitat conservation through interactive in-class programs, field trips and educational outreach events.

**When:** 40 hours of training in March (basic ecology, ornithology, teaching techniques, public speaking); volunteer at least 40 hours of service in a year following training

**Where:** Denver Metro Area

**Who:** We are looking for individuals who are passionate about education and the outdoors to join our team. No experience in the fields of environmental education or ornithology is necessary.

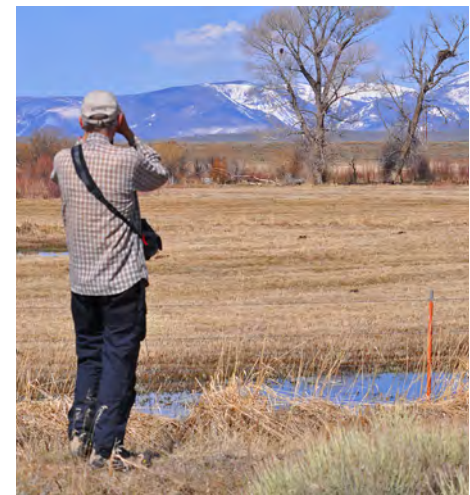
**Contact:** Kacie Ehrenberger, Director of Outreach and Education, 303-659-4348 ext. 16 or [kacie.ehrenberger@rmbo.org](mailto:kacie.ehrenberger@rmbo.org)

Photos of American Kestrel and RMBO volunteer citizen scientists by Chuck Hundertmark



"Paul Slingsby and I set out in a canoe on a beautifully still, warm morning and paddled around reed clumps to search for grebe nests and sitting grebes. We managed to locate numerous nests with eggs. It was amazing to see how close to the water those eggs are. One turn the wrong direction or an increase in water volume, and the breeding season takes a hit. They are amazing birds and have cute little "punk looking" chicks!"

Toni Rautus, 2011 Volunteer  
North Park ColonyWatch



(and meeting and playing and talking and eating and planting and walking)

# Environmental Learning Center Springs to Life



Top: RMBO CEO Tammy VerCauteren welcomes Governor John Hickenlooper to the BBQ for the Birds as RMBO Board Chair Larry Modesitt looks on.

Center: RMBO Stewardship Biologist Laura Quattrini holds a mirror so her daughter Katielle can see face-painting results at the BBQ.

Bottom: "The Big Year" author Mark Obmascik entertains the BBQ crowd with stories about the characters in his best-selling book and the challenges of making the movie, which was released in theaters nationwide in October.



Photos by Jenny Berven, Kacie Ehrenberger, Greg Levandoski, William Bond

Since well before the BBQ for the Birds in late August, Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory's Old Stone House at Barr Lake State Park near Brighton, Colo., had seen considerable activity.

Staff, partners and volunteers had built trails, an outdoor amphitheater (below) and a parking lot, installed benches and interpretive signs, and remodeled an indoor classroom — along with hosting dozens of kids at summer day camps.

Then, at the BBQ in front of a crowd of 360, Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper (left) officially opened the Environmental Learning Center. The event offered workshops, bird walks, games, food, exhibits and a silent auction that raised more than \$6,000 for education programs.

The governor, his son Teddy and Colorado Board of Education member Jane Goff (top right), along with other state and local officials, put in the first plants for the Center's demonstration gardens. Volunteers installed nearly 1,000 more native plants (opposite page, bottom) in September.

On October 1, the new Center was the scene of RMBO's first walkathon — Walk on the Wild Side — which raised another \$4,000 for educational programs and scholarships (bottom right).

The fall schedule has also included a homeschool program about bats, a landowners' workshop and Great American Turkey Day — a fun, outdoor, community event.

Much more is on the way, says RMBO Director of Education Kacie Ehrenberger. "The governor said this is a place where people will want to be, and we're going to welcome them with lots of opportunities to enjoy and learn about the magnificent outdoors."



# Bird Feats: RMBO makes strides for conservation

## Science team hosts partners


Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory held the second annual Integrated Monitoring in Bird Conservation Regions (IMBCR) partners meeting in the Fort Collins office, November 15 to 17. RMBO Science Director David Hanni reports that fifty representatives from 20 partner organizations discussed current goals and future directions of the IMBCR, which is conducted annually to track the health and sustainability of bird populations in all or parts of 13 western states.

## Observatory scientists publish in pre-eminent wildlife journal

David Pavlacky, an RMBO biometrician, is senior author of an important paper that has been accepted for an upcoming issue of *The Journal of Wildlife Management*, a leading publication on wildlife science and conservation. The paper advances wildlife population monitoring in general and estimation of site occupancy in particular. Estimating the proportion of sites occupied by a species is a significant aspect of the Integrated Monitoring in Bird Conservation Regions (IMBCR) program and is notably useful for monitoring populations of rarer species.

RMBO biometrician Jennifer Blakesley and Science Director David Hanni also contributed to the manuscript titled, "Hierarchical multi-scale occupancy estimation for monitoring wildlife populations." An abstract can be viewed online at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/jwmg.245/abstract>.

Feet graphic courtesy of Bonnie Cleaver



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## International director talks up grasslands from Mazatlan to Ithaca



*International Program Director Arvind Panjabi discusses the need for grassland conservation at the International Symposium for Grassland Management in Chihuahua City in September.*

Birds know no boundaries and neither does Arvind Panjabi who crisscrossed the continent this fall promoting Chihuahuan Desert grassland conservation to key audiences. Arvind, RMBO's International Program director, gave keynote addresses at the International Symposium for Grassland Management in Chihuahua City, Chihuahua, and at the annual congress of the Society for the Study and Conservation of Mexican Birds (CIPAMEX) in Mazatlan, Sinaloa. In October as an invited speaker at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Monday night lecture series in Ithaca, New York, he spoke on "North America's Grassland Birds: Going, Going, *Gone?*" In addition to presenting results from five years of winter-grassland-bird monitoring, Arvind is building support to launch a new RMBO effort to halt grassland loss in Chihuahua. With a broad network of partners, RMBO aims to restore at least 100,000 acres of grasslands in the next three years.

## Fellowship funds education project

RMBO Education Director Kacie Ehrenberger is one of 40 individuals nationwide selected as a 2011 TogetherGreen Fellow for innovative environmental leadership.

Through a conservation alliance between Audubon and Toyota, each fellow receives \$10,000 toward a project to engage local communities in conserving land, water and energy and contributing to environmental health.

Kacie will use her fellowship to develop an education module to highlight grasslands, their importance for agriculture and wildlife, and challenges facing them. She will pilot the module, designed for 4th-8th grades, at Hemphill Middle School in Strasburg, Colo., a small rural school with an interest in tying students' outdoor experiences to their curriculum.

Local landowners and resource managers will be invited to interact with students and teachers on field trips that showcase examples of integrating the needs of agricultural producers and bird populations.



*Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory received the 2011 Blue Grama Award for Outdoor Recreation/Environmental Education (above) from the Colorado Open Space Alliance in September. The beautiful award is on display at RMBO headquarters at Barr Lake (in the background). Adams County Parks nominated RMBO for the honor.*

# Staff Migrations



**Noah Bates** is a private lands wildlife biologist based in the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office in Kremmling, Colo., working on the Sage-Grouse Initiative. He has a bachelor's in urban and regional planning from the University of Colorado and worked as a land use planner with the City of Pueblo and Boulder County for five years. He earned a master's at Colorado State University in agricultural science, integrated resource management, combining his love of rangeland ecology with production agriculture. He developed a passion for sagebrush ecosystems working as a rangeland specialist for a private ranch near Gunnison, Colo.



Service, a Native American tribe, private landowners and other entities to implement wildlife, wetland and soil conservation projects in California, New Mexico, Mexico and the Dominican Republic. Colin earned undergraduate degrees in natural resources management and international development from the University of California at Berkeley and a graduate degree from New Mexico State University, where his thesis focused on Northern Pintail wetland use and winter survival in New Mexico and northern Mexico.

**Rachel Bock** is RMBO's new accounting and office assistant in the Brighton, Colo., office. Born and raised in the Rocky Mountain region, Rachel is an "alumni" of RMBO's summer camp program, where she came to love bird-watching. She graduated with honors in mathematics with a minor in economics from the University of Colorado, where she also studied computer science and finance. She has experience as an actuary and investment performance analyst, payroll specialist and accountant. Rachel enjoys her family, animals, rock climbing, hiking and camping.



**Joseph Parsons** is a private lands wildlife biologist in the NRCS office in Saratoga, Wyo., where he assists landowners in conservation efforts to help improve sage-grouse habitat. Joe was raised in a rural community in northeastern Wyoming. After serving in the United States Marine Corps, he completed a bachelor's in wildlife biology and management at the University of Wyoming. He has contributed to research on the impacts of wind farms on sage-grouse nesting success. He also has been a member of a team conducting Whooping Crane surveys in North Dakota and rare plant surveys in Wyoming.

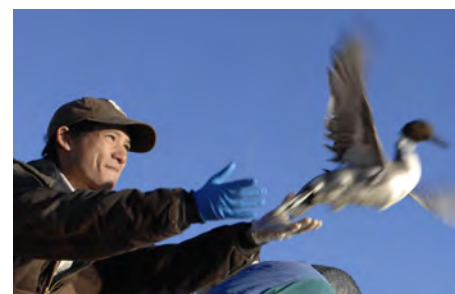


**Bill Tiedje** is the new landowner outreach and program technician for RMBO's International program. Bill developed a passion for wildlife and conservation growing up on a family farm in central Iowa. While attending Colorado State University, Bill worked part-time for RMBO, assisting in data proofing and digital mapping. He graduated from CSU in May 2011, completing bachelor degrees in agricultural economics and natural resources management.



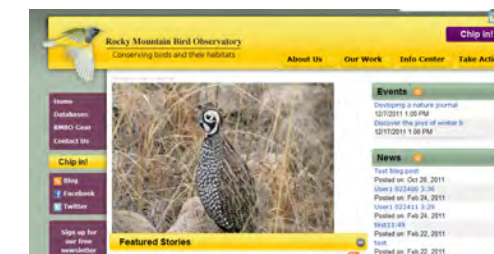
**Kelly Corman**, a private lands range/wildlife ecologist in the Lamar, Colo., NRCS field office, works with landowners to deliver habitat conservation projects through Farm Bill funding sources. A Nebraska native, Kelly grew up on a row-crop and cattle operation and has been involved in natural resource management and research on fish and grassland birds. He has a bachelor's in fisheries and wildlife from the University of Nebraska - Lincoln and studied conservation and landscape genetics of the Lesser Prairie-Chicken for his master's in range and wildlife management at Texas A & M University - Kingsville.

**Colin Lee** is a private lands wildlife biologist based at the NRCS Area Office in Greeley, Colo. In cooperation with the NRCS



and Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife, he works to protect wetland resources on private lands in the South Platte and North Park watershed basins. He has worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife

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for the new year.





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Primary Source #40, November 2011



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## Add birds to your gift list!

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 a healthy home for birds is a healthy home for all of us!

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- **Donate on Tuesday, Dec. 6, 2011** at [www.givingfirst.org/cogivesday/](http://www.givingfirst.org/cogivesday/) to  
 have your donation boosted by the Colorado Gives Day incentive fund

**THANK YOU**

for supporting bird and habitat conservation!

## Summer intern loves environmental education

continued from page 1

“Wilson’s Warblers!” These kids remembered the name of the birds and told me what those birds ate, the shape of their beaks, why they store fat, why they migrate, and that we need to take care of nature. They focused on bird-bander Meredith McBurney as she shared the birds she caught and were in awe as each bird was released and flew away. Every moment was a wonderful adventure.

Those 25 seven-year-olds were passionate about birds and nature because they were experiencing them. That is why I enjoyed my time at RMBO sharing nature with children, and I believe the time these children spent at Barr Lake helped nurture a love for the environment that will last for the rest of their lives.



Fun at camp for the kids and the teacher, intern Nicole McDaniel