



PRIMARY SOURCE



Elk to be barred from bird haven

It is common to see elk grazing around the Stanley Hotel or rambling across streets in Estes Park, Colo. The large herds charm visitors and offer wildlife photo and viewing opportunities without trekking into the wilderness.

These abundant wapiti also add to the competition for habitat among humans and various wildlife in an urban/wilderness interface area like Estes Park. Elk often congregate in small areas with suitable forage, leading to the eventual overuse of those places.

Three acres of the Matthews-Reeser Bird Sanctuary in Estes Park will soon be protected by fencing specifically designed to keep out elk while allowing smaller animals and humans to easily cross. The fencing has been used effectively in Arizona, and its rustic aesthetic suits the high-country landscape.

The Sanctuary was created by the Estes Park Bird Club and the Estes Valley Recreation and Parks District (EVRPD) in 1997. Bisected by a stream and the Lake Estes Trail, the predominantly riparian area attracts many migrating birds, and the flat, paved trail is a popular destination for both visiting and local birders. The bird club's records show that 289 species have been detected at the site.

Elk also find the area attractive, and lush willow and alder thickets are giving way to dead or dying plants, invasive weeds and non-native grasses. The number and diversity of birds at the site will diminish without proper management.

Colorado Division of Wildlife District Wildlife Manager Rick Spowart, along with the EVRPD and the bird club, sought help with this problem last winter



Partners check out fence designed to keep elk at bay in Estes Park bird refuge where they are destroying native vegetation.

Photos by Seth Gallagher

and called Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory's Stewardship Director Seth Gallagher. He had some ideas and \$12,000 remaining in a U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service grant designated to enhance and restore riparian habitats for migratory birds. EVRPD and the Town of Estes Park Tree Board also had funds to contribute.

"Our stewardship projects usually involve working on private lands with ranchers or farmers and have little public exposure," Gallagher said. "The Estes Lake Trail has 100,000 visitors a year and is an exciting new setting for our habitat conservation efforts."



Success of RMBO's first walkathon will be measured in feet

Spend a beautiful fall morning beside a shimmering lake strolling, or if you prefer, sauntering, striding, toddling or ambling, at Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory's first-ever walkathon – *Walk on the Wild Side: Take Steps for a Healthy Community* – on October 1.

"I want this event to benefit RMBO's environmental education programs and also to give people a pleasant place to get outside, have fun and learn something about conservation," Education Director Kacie Ehrenberger said. "I'd like to see lots of feet on the ground and smiles."

The action is centered at RMBO's Environmental Learning Center at Barr Lake near Brighton, Colo. Individuals or teams are welcome in any of three levels:

- 8 a.m.: 10K loop includes a visit to our bird banding station
- 9 a.m.: 5K loop crosses the dam
- 10 a.m.: 1K trail ideal for small children

Walks include activities along the way, healthy snacks and water.

Register and find more information at <http://walk.birdday.org/rmbo>, or call 303-659-4348 ext. 16. Those unable to attend the walkathon can participate "virtually" by making a donation at the website.

Inside the Source:

What will Colorado's governor, the author of "The Big Year," the entire staff of Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, and you (we hope) be doing on Saturday, August 27?

Turn to page 2 to find out!

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Page 6 Rapid land changes in Mexico

Page 7 Fall bird-banding open to public

Page 8 Good coffee for birds

Join Governor Hickenlooper, author Mark Obmascik and RMBO for a special celebration

It's a big year for the BBQ for the Birds

By Tammy VerCauteren, Executive Director

Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory's annual BBQ for the Birds picnic will be groundbreaking this year, literally and figuratively.

Built by pioneers 122 years ago, the Old Stone House at Barr Lake near Brighton, Colo., has been our headquarters for 12 years, and at the BBQ on August 27 it will officially become RMBO's Environmental Learning Center, too.

Following years of planning, fundraising, digging and building by many people, Governor John Hickenlooper will lead the celebration to initiate the house as a place where the community can connect with and learn about nature and conservation. Local officials including the mayor, county commissioners and board members from Adams County Open Space and the Scientific & Cultural Facilities District will join him for the literal groundbreaking by putting in native plants to launch new demonstration gardens.

To cap off the BBQ in a big way, "The Big Year" author Mark Obmascik will entertain with stories about birding, the book and the movie (see sidebar).

Bird banding, bird talks and walks, live raptors, children's activities, workshops, a



Tammy welcomes guests to 2010 BBQ for the Birds picnic at RMBO's Old Stone House.

Photo by Victoria Collier

silent auction, music and, of course, food will round out the festivities.

I always look forward to our BBQ for the Birds. It's fun, and it's an opportunity for the staff and board to meet and visit with RMBO supporters and to make new connections. This year, especially, I'm grateful to all the members, friends, donors, volunteers, partners and staff who brought us to this day by supporting restoration of the Old Stone House and creation of the learning center.

Come check out the new trails, amphitheater and interpretive signs and enjoy celebrating this old place and its new mission to show that a healthy home for birds is a healthy home for all of us.

The Big Year: the movie

With Steve Martin, Owen Wilson, Jack Black and Rashida Jones, "The Big Year" promises to appeal not only to the birding community but to anyone who enjoys a comedy-adventure. Directed by David Frankel ("The Devil Wears Prada," "Marley & Me"), "The Big Year" is scheduled for release on October 14. The movie is based on "The Big Year: A Tale of Man, Nature, and Fowl Obsession," Mark Obmascik's popular book about three extreme birders racing around North America to find the most species in a year and become the continent's birding champion. The author will tell tales about writing the book and the making of the movie at the BBQ for the Birds on August 27.



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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



With a variety of day camps for youths aged 4 to 10 and a week-long camp in the mountains for 13 to 15 year-olds, Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory offered plenty of opportunities for kids to get outside and connect with nature this summer.

Two girls (above) look for evidence of wildlife at the Young Naturalist camp for 4 and 5 year-olds in July.

Nature Investigators (top), ages 6 and 7, roam the prairie around RMBO's Old Stone House Environmental Learning Center, the site of the day camps.

Hayden McNulty (center) measures the diameter of a tree as part of his research project at the weeklong On the Wing camp near Granby, Colo.

On the Wing campers (far right) explore nature — including dead trees — with U.S. Forest Service Wildlife Biologist Brock McCormick.

Bella Shroeder (bottom right) uses a clinometer to measure tree height at July's On the Wing camp. The teen campers presented their research projects at the end of the week to wildlife biologists from RMBO, the Forest Service, and Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife and RMBO's environmental educators.

On the Wing offered outdoor recreation in addition to nature study, with a raft trip, horseback riding, hikes and other activities.



BBQ for the Birds

Saturday, August 27

Old Stone House Environmental Learning Center at Barr Lake,
 14500 Lark Bunting Lane, Brighton, Colo.

Register and submit payment at rmbo.org/blog or 303-659-4348 ext. 12
 by August 19 for the "early bird" \$1 per person discount.

Admission at the door:

\$10 members

\$12 non-members

\$6 ages 5-12

under 5 free

Includes lunch & all activities



Just Another Day (Not) in the Office

RMBO Biologists Spread Out Across the West to Gather Bird and Habitat Data

Golf-ball-size hail, big winds, wildfires, deep snow, big bears, 12,000 feet of altitude, alarms going off in tents at 3 a.m.

Such inconveniences are all in a day's work for Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory's biologists and seasonal field technicians during most of May, June and July. That's when they are traversing the Southwest, Great Plains and Rocky Mountains looking and listening for birds for the Integrated Monitoring in Bird Conservation Regions (IMBCR) program and for the National Park Service.

Each year the data they collect during the breeding season feed into an ever-growing knowledge base about bird population trends and occupancy rates to inform habitat management and conservation on public and private lands.

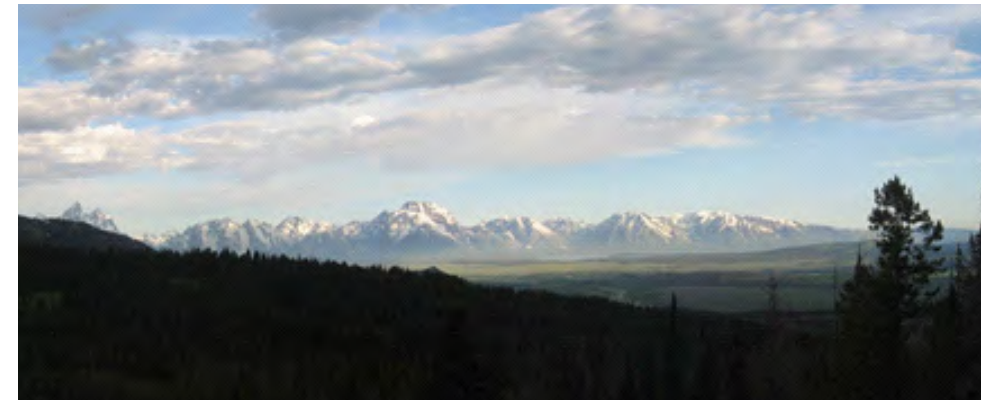


Field technician Matt Gracey (above) conducts point counts at Pawnee National Grasslands in northern Colorado. He also worked in migratory stopover habitat on the Platte River and saw some not-so-typical Colorado birds like Great Crested Flycatcher, Field Sparrow, Baltimore Oriole, American Redstart and Eastern Bluebird. (Photo by Taylor Barnes, a summer intern funded by a grant from Colorado Kids Outdoors and the state's Department of Natural Resources)

Field technician Michelle Moravec (left) surveys in May at Washita Battlefield National Historic Site in Oklahoma. She was a member of wildlife biologist Ross Lock's crew, which encountered smoke from wildfires, high winds and extreme drought conditions while surveying in National Parks in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, New Mexico and Colorado. (Photo by Max Goldman)



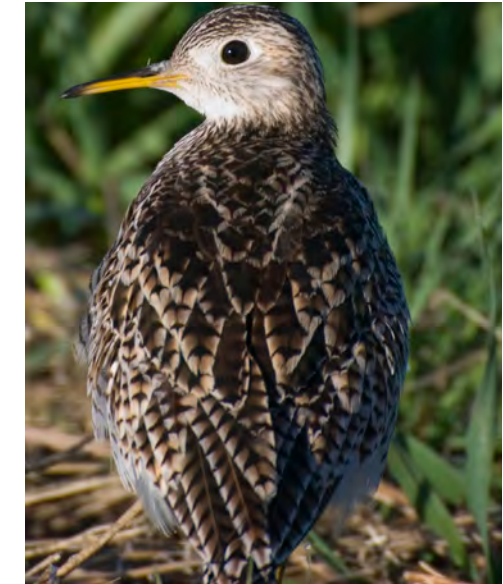
Field technicians ham it up during training in May at French Creek Natural Area in Custer State Park, South Dakota. Field crew leader Jeff Birek reported that during the crew's mid-season training camp, just after finishing "one of the best black bean burrito dinners I've ever made, we heard rumbling off to the southeast. Our intern, Taylor Barnes, commented on the green hue to the sky. Suddenly lightning struck on the next ridge over and we decided to head for our field vehicles. The rain came down in big, heavy drops and, before we knew it, golf-ball-sized hail stones were falling from the sky. The whole thing lasted just a few minutes but managed to damage all our vehicles!" (Photo by Jeff Birek)



Field tech Tim Forrester hiked into Wyoming's Bridger-Teton National Forest in the pre-dawn hours of July 4, singing loudly so as not to surprise any animals. With a steep, 700-meter climb ahead to reach his study site, he stopped for a snack and to enjoy the cool morning and the chorus of birds. That didn't last for long. Tim writes: "I had stopped making noise as I ate, and glancing to my left I saw a grizzly bear ambling toward me, oblivious to my presence. After a moment of panic, instinct took over and I screamed as loud as I could. The grizzly looked up, and then took off into the forest. I was relieved the bear was gone, although he ran straight toward my transect. My work was a bit delayed that morning as I hung around making lots of noise. I felt that my crew leader would understand. As it got lighter, I saw more evidence of bear activity, so I kept up my guard. As if I hadn't already been thrilled enough by nature that morning, I was treated to spectacular views as I navigated my study site counting birds such as Red Crossbills, Pine Grosbeaks, Mountain Chickadees and Gray Jays. I admired the morning light illuminating the Tetons as our beautiful country turned a year older and I couldn't help but think, 'I'm getting paid for this?'" (Teton sunrise and bear track photos by Tim Forrester)

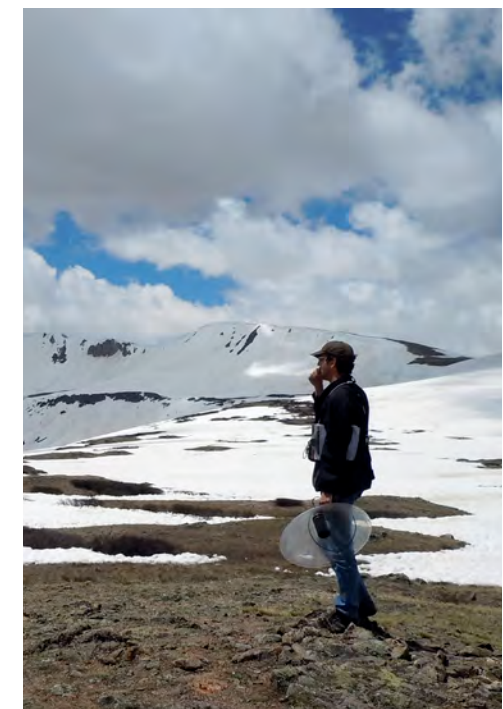


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"You lookin' at me?" This Upland Sandpiper is among the birds counted at Fort Pierre National Grassland in South Dakota. (Photo by Jeff Birek)

Nathan Pieplow (below) holds a microphone used for recording bird songs during mid-season training in June at the top of Independence Pass near Leadville, Colo. Field techs reviewed bird and plant identification at higher elevations before they began surveying their mid- and late-season transects. When the season ended in July, Nathan told field crew leader Jora Fogg that he was surprised during the season to spot a White-eyed Vireo just outside Boulder and a Rose-breasted Grosbeak on a transect at Pueblo Reservoir State Park. (Photo by Mary Henson)



Mexican grasslands rapidly give way to the plow

RMBO encourages sustainable ranching to help both birds and bottom line

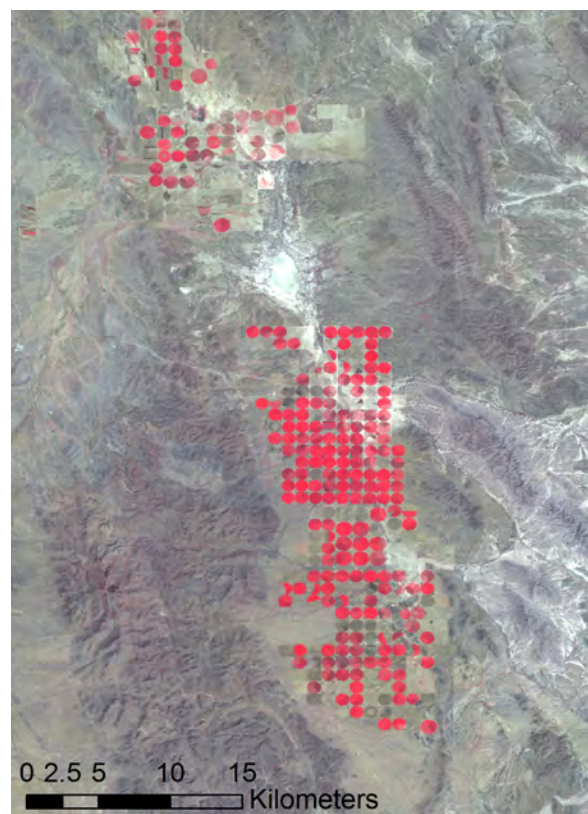
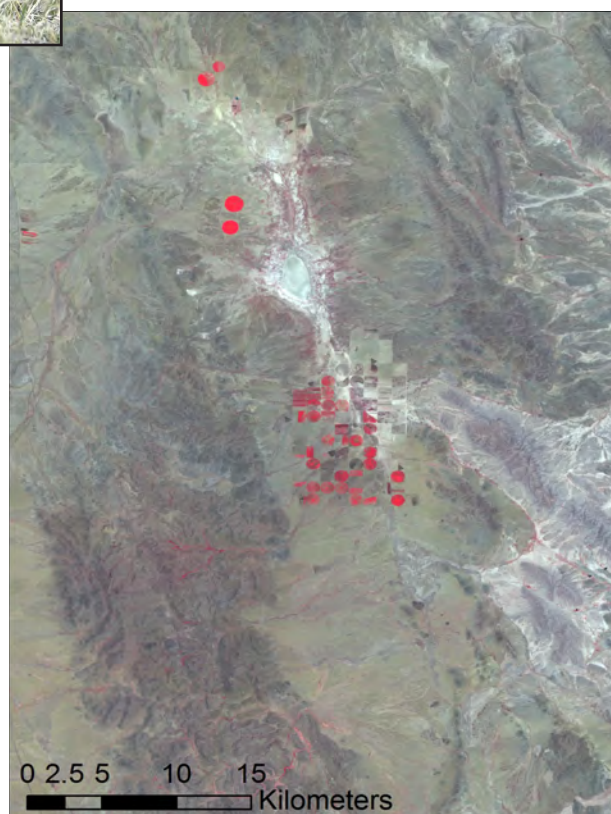
Native desert grasslands, a critical winter habitat for dozens of North America's most vulnerable bird species, are being relentlessly plowed under by farmers in central Chihuahua, Mexico.

Sustainable grazing and better grassland management are the most effective and immediate ways to prevent grasslands from going under the plow. Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory is working with ranchers in the Chihuahuan Desert to help them improve the condition of their grasslands, both for birds and their bottom line.

The red circles on the Landsat images below represent irrigated cropland in Chihuahua's Tarabillas Valley in 2006 and 2010 and highlight the magnitude of grassland loss in northern Mexico. The valley is in the 6.7-million-acre Valles Centrales Grassland Priority Conservation Area in Chihuahua, where RMBO estimates that croplands increased by more than 600,000 acres in that time frame. One of the largest grassland areas in northern Mexico, the region supports diverse species, including the only native breeding population of Aplomado Falcons, which formerly occupied the Tarabillas Valley but now hover on the brink of extinction there.

Based on RMBO survey data, the Valles Centrales has also seen the loss of more than 500,000 wintering Chestnut-collared Longspurs, a species that has declined by more than 84 percent since 1966, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey.

RMBO plans to secure funding for a private-lands biologist to assist landowners with sustainable ranching in Mexico. To learn more, contact international@rmbo.org or 970-482-1707 ext. 20.



The red circles on these Landsat infra-red composite images represent irrigated cropland in Chihuahua's Tarabillas Valley in 2006 (left) and 2010 (right). Chestnut-collared Longspurs (above) are one of the species sharply declining in the region.

Photos: top by Angel Montoya; Chestnut-collared Longspur by Bill Schmoker; Landsat images by Duane B. Pool, Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory International Program

Staff Migrations



Reesa Yale Conrey came to RMBO in March to lead research on Mountain Plovers in western Nebraska after completing post-doctoral research at the U.S. Geological Survey Fort Collins Science Center on the effects of climate on nest survival of shortgrass prairie birds. She has a doctorate in ecology from Colorado State University, a master's in wildlife biology from the University of Montana, and bachelor's in biology from Dartmouth College. She has worked on the population ecology of Burrowing Owls nesting on Colorado's prairie dog towns and on population connectivity in small mammals living near highways in western Montana. For fun Reesa hikes, travels, gardens, reads and spends time with her husband and cats. She is based in Fort Collins.



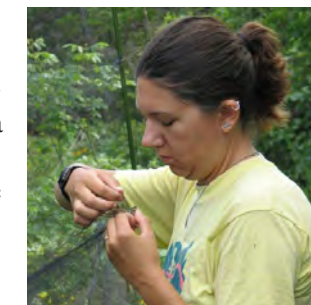
Mathew McLaren has joined RMBO as a full-time biologist, working in the bird monitoring program. After graduating from the University of Colorado with a degree in biology and environmental science, he spent five years conducting field work in Alaska. Since then he has worked on several projects in Colorado and Wyoming, including studying Mountain Plover nest success and habitat use in Wyoming and assisting with RMBO's Mountain Plover nest-marking program in eastern Colorado. He is based in Fort Collins.



Christina Santana is a private lands wildlife biologist stationed in the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Gunnison Field Office. She works with landowners to develop conservation plans funded through Farm Bill programs. Her primary focus is Gunnison Sage-grouse (GUSG) habitat improvement. She has a bachelor's in wildlife biology from Colorado State University and eight years of GUSG field experience including serving as the GUSG lek coordinator for the Colorado Division of Wildlife.



Magdalena "Maggie" Vinson relocated from New Hampshire in June to join RMBO and the Nebraska Prairie Partners team in Scottsbluff. She coordinates education and outreach activities, focusing on wildlife habitat of the ponderosa pine and shortgrass prairie ecosystems. Maggie has a bachelor's in Russian language and literature from Smith College and a master's in environmental studies and education from Antioch University New England. She loves to bike, run, cook and explore the lands near where she lives.



Erin Youngberg first came to RMBO as a volunteer intern for the Bald Eagle Watch program. A bird lover from a young age, she jumped at the chance to get involved with such a great organization. After working as field technician for a grassland nest study in summer 2010, she was hired as a full-time biologist on RMBO's International program based in Fort Collins. When she isn't observing baby birds, she performs with her bluegrass band, Finnders and Youngberg. Originally from Jackson, Wyo., Erin has a bachelor's in wildlife biology from Colorado State University.



UPCOMING EVENTS

August

- Late August to mid-Oct.: Bird banding stations, various locations. See below.
- 13-14: New West Fest, downtown Fort Collins, Colo. Visit RMBO's booth.
- 27: 7 a.m. - 2 p.m. Annual BBQ for the Birds. See page 2.

September

- Say hello to RMBO staff at these fall events!
- 10: Fall Bird Festival at Barr Lake State Park, Brighton, Colo.
- 17-18: Sustainable Living Fair, Fort Collins, Colo.
- 24: Northern Colorado Birding Fair, Fossil Creek Park, Fort Collins, Colo.
- 24: EcoFair, Brighton, Colo.

October

- 1: Walk on the Wild Side walkathon at RMBO's Old Stone House, Barr Lake. Brighton, Colo. See page 1.
- 2: Family Program: Migration at Barr Lake Banding Station, 10-noon. Watch biologists band birds, tackle a migration obstacle course, make a bird feeder. Register: cassy.bohnet@rmbo.org or 303-659-4348 ext 15.

FALL BIRD BANDING STATIONS

These are fun places to see birds "in the hand." Check with contacts to see when stations are open or to schedule programs. (Most are open 5-6 days a week.)

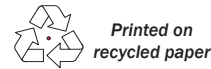
- Chico Basin Ranch, Colo. Springs, Colo., Sept. 8-Oct. 8. Lee Derr: theriverkids2003@yahoo.com or chico-basinranch.com
- Ridgway State Park, Ridgway, Colo., Sept. 8-16. Arlene Crawford: ourayout-post918@hotmail.com
- Ela Wildlife Sanctuary, Grand Junction Colo., Sept. 19-Oct. 14. Cary Atwood: catwood814@gmail.com
- Chadron State Park, Chadron, Neb., Aug. 29-Oct. 7. Open House Sept. 10. Maggie Vinson: magdalena.vinson@rmbo.org or 308-220-0052
- Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area, Gehring, Neb., Aug. 29-Oct. 7. Open House Sept. 17. Maggie Vinson: magdalena.vinson@rmbo.org or 308-220-0052
- Barr Lake State Park, Brighton, Colo., Aug. 27-Oct. 8. Cassy Bohnet: cassy.bohnet@rmbo.org or 303-659-4348 ext. 15



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Primary Source #39, August 2011



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<input type="checkbox"/> Contributor.....	\$250

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 P.O. Box 1232
 Brighton, CO 80601

MEMBERSHIP QUESTIONS?

Visit www.rmbo.org, call 303-659-4348 ext. 12, or e-mail kelly.thompson@rmbo.org
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Most coffee Americans drink today is grown in sun with chemical fertilizers and pesticides on farms that clear-cut the tropical forest, destroying habitat for birds and other wildlife. Shade-grown-organic-coffee farms in Latin America provide shelter and sustenance to huge numbers of migratory birds as well as resident birds found nowhere else.

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“Our biologists work on bird conservation across borders, but it is also vital for the public to be involved. An easy way for people to help birds is by the coffee they choose to drink,” says RMBO Executive Director Tammy VerCauteren.

Learn more at www.birdsandbeans.com.



American Redstart, Western Wood-Pewee, Wilson's Warbler

Photos by Bill Schmoker