



# THE PRIMARY SOURCE

*Our mission is to conserve birds and their habitats.*

## RMBO Leads Landmark Meeting in Costa Rica

**By Teddy Parker-Renga  
Communications Manager**

In March, Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory spearheaded the first-ever conservation assessment of the birds of Central America.

At the meeting held in San Vito, Costa Rica, 30 participants representing the seven Central American countries, Mexico and the U.S. assessed all 407 bird species unique to Central America, as well as 500-plus species shared between Mexico and Central America. This included landbirds, shorebirds, waterbirds and waterfowl.

During the assessment, birds were assigned scores for three factors (threats

to breeding, threats to non-breeding and population trend) using the Partners In Flight species assessment process. Scores ranged from 1 (low vulnerability) to 5 (high vulnerability) for each factor, with a higher overall score indicating a greater vulnerability to population decline or extinction.

International Director Arvind Panjabi said partners who attended the meeting saw tremendous value in the process as a way to establish conservation priorities for birds and habitat in their own countries. Since many bird species that breed in the Rockies and elsewhere in the western U.S. winter in Central America,

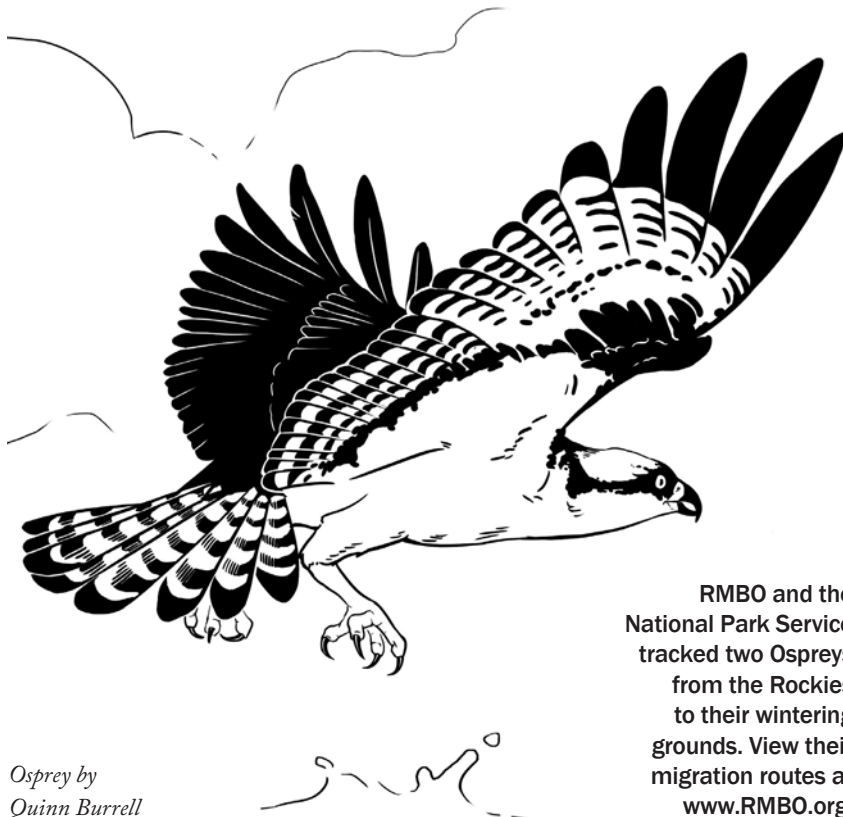
it's important for RMBO and partners to support and advance conservation abroad, he said.

Next steps include developing communication tools and messages to engage stakeholders in conserving at-risk species.

Thank you to all of the partners who attended the meeting and Environment Canada, Missouri Department of Conservation and USGS for funding.

*View photos from the meeting and the amazing species we saw birding in Costa Rica at [www.facebook.com/RMBObirds](http://www.facebook.com/RMBObirds).*

*To learn more about the Partners In Flight species assessment process, visit <http://rmbo.org/pifassessment/>.*



*Osprey by  
Quinn Burrell*

RMBO and the National Park Service tracked two Ospreys from the Rockies to their wintering grounds. View their migration routes at [www.RMBO.org](http://www.RMBO.org).

## Where Do Colorado Osprey Go in Winter?

**By Jason Beason**

**Special Monitoring Projects Coordinator**

On June 19, 2013, Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory and the National Park Service attached satellite transmitters to two Ospreys in the Arapaho National Forest just west of Rocky Mountain National Park.

Specific locations were at Rainbow Bay at Lake Granby and Shadow Mountain Reservoir in Grand County, Colo. The birds were named "Rainbow" and "Shadow" after their nesting areas.

Both Ospreys were females and successfully bred after satellite transmitters were attached. Rainbow fledged two and Shadow three young Ospreys during the 2013 breeding season.



See **OSPREY** on page 9

# From the Director: Opportunities to Explore Nature for All Ages

From being key partners in a new community-based festival to expansion of our bird banding season in Fort Collins, spring is off to a great start. The parking lot and hallways have thinned as our biologists have spread out across the Rockies, Great Plains and elsewhere in the West to conduct bird surveys on public and private land. Spring seems to be a bit delayed this year, so it will be interesting to see what our crew leaders and technicians have to report from the field.

RMBO was excited to collaborate with local partners in Fort Collins and bring our combined expertise together for Poudre RiverFest. It is amazing what can happen with an idea that a team latches



onto and makes a reality. The morning was filled with activity at our bird banding station, as well as at the education classrooms at the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery and cleanup efforts along the river. My heart skipped a beat as I drove into the festival grounds in the afternoon and observed

40 partner and sponsor booths, activities for people of all ages, a stage, bike racks filling up and people heading into the venue. Our sponsors and the team spirit made the day a great success and we can't wait for next year.

We have highlights from our fall 2013 banding stations in this issue, and though the spring season is winding down, be sure to mark your calendars for the fall 2014 banding season. We are coordinating a meeting this summer with researchers from the University of Colorado Denver and the Smithsonian to discuss our long-term data sets from banding stations and how we can collaborate to analyze and apply the data to understand connectivity, full life cycle modeling, climate change and more.

## Nature Camps, Field Trip

We're thrilled to be offering another full schedule of camps this summer. Our Taking Flight overnight camp for 12- to 14-year-olds in the Rockies is full, and other camps are nearing capacity. We have a new camp this July for younger kids on Fridays, as well as a Leaders-in-Training program for teens and preteens, inspired by older RMBO campers who volunteered to help out and work with kids during day camps in 2013. Sign up

your kids and grandkids for camp if you haven't already. See page 3 for info.

For all of you older folks, we've got opportunities to get you outdoors as well. Gain a unique, historical perspective on birding in Colorado with our very own Jason Beason and Norm Lewis of the Denver Museum of Nature & Science as we follow the birding trail of Alfred Bailey and Robert Niedrach across this beautiful state. See the events calendar to the right for info on this one-of-a-kind field trip.

## No BBQ for the Birds in 2014

After 11 great years of annual picnics for our members, we've decided to take a year off from the BBQ for the Birds in 2014. Don't worry; we plan to bring back the picnic in 2015 and have plans for a gathering this fall, just not the BBQ. I also encourage you to attend the Fall Birding Festival on Sept. 6 at Barr Lake State Park. It's always a blast!

Also this fall, we're bringing back our popular speaker series with the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. We'll be hosting two avian experts from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology: evolutionary biologist Ed Scholes on Sept. 11 to share images and adventures from the Birds-of-Paradise Project, and audio curator Greg Budney on Oct. 21 to present bird sounds, from the beautiful to the bizarre. A third presenter is also in the works. Stay tuned to [www.dmns.org/afterhours](http://www.dmns.org/afterhours) for details on getting tickets.

Have a happy spring and summer. I hope to see you out in nature!

- Tammy VerCauteren  
Executive Director

## The Primary Source

*The Primary Source* is the member newsletter of Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory.

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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 habitats.

Editing and design: Teddy Parker-Renga

## Thank You to Thrivent!

In November of 2013, four individuals directed nearly \$2,000 in Thrivent Choice funds to Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory.

Members of Thrivent Financial have a voice in where some of Thrivent's charitable funding is distributed through this program. We are grateful for this gift and appreciate the support of Thrivent members. Thank you!

# 2014 Calendar of Events

For the latest on events, activities and programs, visit [www.RMBO.org](http://www.RMBO.org), sign up for our e-newsletter on our website or become a fan of RMBO on Facebook.

**July 12:** Barr Lake Appreciation Day, 7 a.m. to 2 p.m., Barr Lake State Park, Brighton, Colo. Stop by the Old Stone House and pitch in!

**July 20:** Food Coop Earth Day (event rescheduled from April), downtown Fort Collins, Colo. Stop by RMBO's booth!

**Aug. 16:** Outdoor Mentors, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Barr Lake, Brighton, Colo.

**Late August to mid-October:** Bird banding stations, various locations in Colorado and western Nebraska. Visit [www.RMBO.org](http://www.RMBO.org) for information.

**Sept. 5-7:** Niedrach and Bailey Field Trip, 3 day, 2 night all-inclusive trip that will follow the trail of famed ornithologists Robert Niedrach and Alfred Bailey in Colorado. Stops include Barr Lake, Arapaho National Forest, Box Canyon near Ouray for Black Swifts and San Luis Valley. RSVP: [jason.beason@rmbo.org](mailto:jason.beason@rmbo.org)

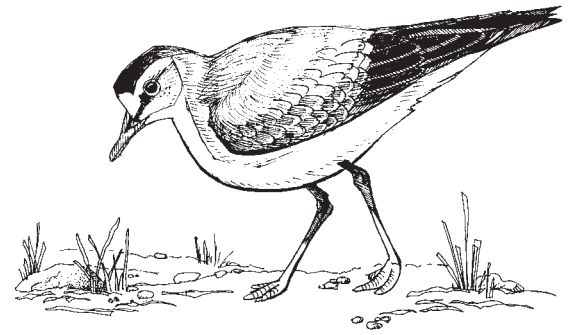
**Sept. 6:** Fall Birding Festival, 7 a.m. to noon, Barr Lake, Brighton, Colo.

**Sept. 11:** Speaker series at DMNS: Birds-of-Paradise with evolutionary biologist Ed Scholes, time TBD, Denver Museum of Nature & Science. Info and tickets posted soon at [www.dmns.org/afterhours](http://www.dmns.org/afterhours).

**Sept. 12-15:** Yampa Valley Crane Festival, various locations, Steamboat Springs and Hayden, Colo.

**Sept. 20:** Brighton EcoFair, Brighton Cultural Center, Brighton, Colo.

**Sept. 20-21:** Sustainable Living Fair, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Sat. and 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Sun., Legacy Park, Fort Collins, Colo. \$10/day or \$15 both days. Kids under 12 FREE. Stop by RMBO's booth!



Mountain Plover by Sherrie York

**Sept. 27:** NoCo Nature Festival (formerly known as the Northern Colorado Birding Fair), location TBD, Fort Collins, Colo.

**Oct. 21:** Speaker series at DMNS: World of Sound with Greg Budney, curator of audio at the Cornell Lab's Macaulay Library, time TBD, Denver Museum of Nature & Science. Info and tickets posted soon at [www.dmns.org/afterhours](http://www.dmns.org/afterhours).

**Nov. 5:** Speaker series at DMNS with Joel Greenburg, author of *A Feathered River Across the Sky: The Passenger Pigeon's Flight to Extinction*, time TBD, Denver Museum of Nature & Science. Info and tickets posted soon at [www.dmns.org/afterhours](http://www.dmns.org/afterhours).

## Get Your Kids Outdoors

### Nature camps for ages 2 to 9

Spots are still open for several of our fun, educational day camps. Camps are held at RMBO's Environmental Learning Center at Barr Lake State Park near Brighton, Colo.

For information on costs, scholarships and registration, contact Tyler Edmondson at [tyler.edmondson@rmbo.org](mailto:tyler.edmondson@rmbo.org) or 303-659-4348 ext. 15, or visit [www.RMBO.org](http://www.RMBO.org).



### 2014 Summer Nature Camps in Colorado

**Young Naturalists** (ages 4-5): June 30 & July 7, 14 & 21  
Campers engage their senses to appreciate Colorado's unique habitats through hands-on discovery, games and supervised, unstructured outdoor play.

**Nature Investigators** (ages 6-7): July 1, 8, 15 & 22  
With a new nature topic each week, campers enjoy scavenger hunts, games and hikes.

**Habitat Explorers** (ages 8-9): July 2, 9, 16 & 23  
Campers learn about the birds, wildlife and unique habitats of Colorado and Barr Lake State Park.

**NEW Friday Mornings for Fledglings** (ages 2-5 and parents/accompanying adults): July 11, 18 & 25  
Campers explore and learn about nature through puppet shows, songs, stories, crafts, snacks and more.

**Winged Wonders** (ages 5-9): July 28 - Aug. 1 and Aug. 4-8  
This camp is offered with the Butterfly Pavilion. Combine with the Bugabilities morning camp for a full day of fun!

**NEW Leaders-in-Training Program** (ages 12-17): Offered during day camps listed above  
Teens and preteens gain leadership skills and share their passion for birds and nature with younger campers.

# Volunteer Profiles: High School Senior Hooked on Science

By Teddy Parker-Renga  
Communications Manager

Francis Commercon first learned about RMBO's bird banding station at Chatfield State Park on a nature walk with the Audubon Society of Greater Denver.

The walk leader described "this magical place where special things happen," Francis said, and he just had to check it out. He was only 11 years old at the time but already an active birder.

After visiting the banding station, "I got really into it," Francis said, and he became a regular there. Eventually, with tutelage from bird bander Meredith McBurney and encouragement from his mom, he started volunteering at the Chatfield station.

He's assisted with collecting data, releasing birds and, over time, going on net runs and removing birds from nets. The first bird he ever took out of a net was a Yellow Warbler, he said.

Now a senior at Highlands Ranch High School, Francis spent his seventh season volunteering at the Chatfield station this spring. He also volunteers at the



Francis Commercon volunteers with RMBO through bird banding and HawkWatch.

banding station at Barr Lake State Park in the fall and participates in RMBO's HawkWatch citizen science program.

Francis said he enjoys teaching visitors to the banding stations and HawkWatch

site, located at Dinosaur Ridge west of Morrison, Colo., about birds. "I can instill an importance for conservation and appreciation for nature in others through volunteering with RMBO," he said.

But really, Francis said, he loves the science. He said he's learned a ton about the migration, molting and behavior of birds, as well as how research on bird populations can offer valuable insights into the health of the greater ecosystem.

He said he's also gained useful field skills through RMBO. This summer, he's interning with the Avian Science Center in Missoula, Mont., and will attend Colorado State University in Fort Collins this fall to study biology. He wants to be a professor, he said, and continue to be part of the solution for conservation through education and science.

His volunteer experiences with RMBO have been – and will continue to be – instrumental in his career. "I've learned about responsibility as a researcher, to be careful with and respectful of life and what you're studying," Francis said.

## Mariana Right at Home Studying Birds in Mexico

Mariana Jovita Silva Piña began as a volunteer on RMBO's project investigating winter sparrow survival in the grasslands of northern Mexico. She did such a great job that we hired her as a technician for last winter's field season!

### Tell us about yourself and your work with RMBO.

I am Mariana Jovita Silva Piña. I am 24 years old and am from Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico. I have a degree in ecology from the



Mariana releases a sparrow in the Chihuahuan Desert grasslands.

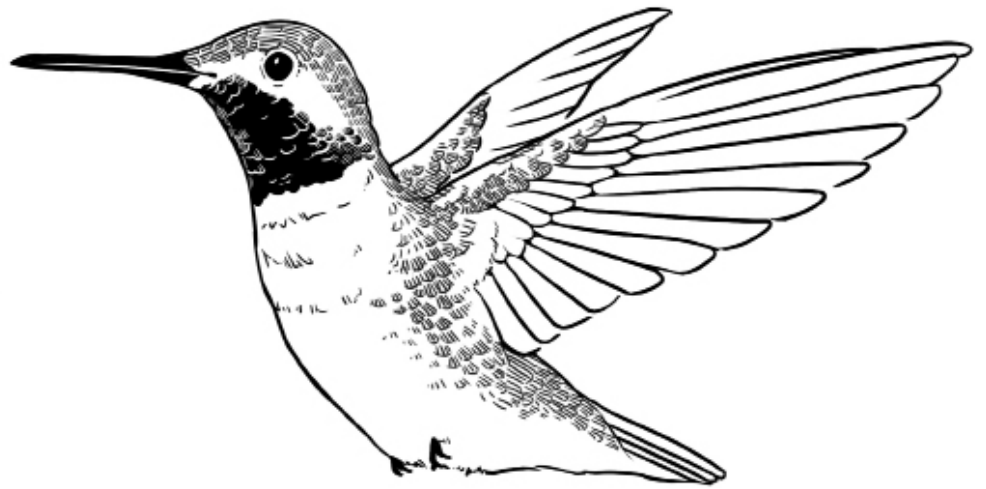
Sonora State University. I have always been very interested in wildlife conservation and volunteering with RMBO has helped me define the area that interests me most: bird conservation. Working with RMBO has given me experience working in the field with a field crew of passionate people with the same goals. I can assure that this work has opened windows to new areas of my profession and more importantly has provided me with the knowledge and capacity to grow professionally.

### Why do you volunteer to help conserve birds?

Initially I began as a volunteer with RMBO to acquire experience in the management and conservation of birds; however, over time, I developed great joy working with birds to such a degree that I plan to continue studying them. Volunteering with RMBO was a decision that has changed my life in a good way.

### Tell us about your life outside of RMBO.

After I finished volunteering with RMBO, I had the opportunity to continue working with birds for the Autonomous University of Nuevo León in Coahuila and Nuevo León. I then returned to RMBO as a technician. My goal is to start graduate studies in the management and conservation of birds.



*Broad-tailed Hummingbird by Quinn Burrell*

# Attracting Spring and Summer Hummingbirds

By Scott Menough

Owner of Wild Birds Unlimited - Denver

Spring has arrived, and every year at this time my mind turns to the same thing. No, not taxes. Hummingbirds!

Four species of hummingbirds can be seen in Colorado. The most common is the Broad-tailed Hummingbird. There's also the Rufous Hummingbird, a rusty-colored bird found here in July and August, and the Calliope and Black-chinned hummingbirds.

## Tips for Your Feeder

In the mountains, it's easy to attract hummingbirds. In cities along the Front Range, however, you have to work a little harder. Fortunately, the effort is worthwhile. I have a few suggestions to increase your chance of attracting them to your yard.

Keep the feeder very clean. Replace the solution every three to five days, and more often in hot weather. If a bird tastes fermented or moldy sugar water, it may not return. Prepare hummingbird nectar by mixing one part table sugar with four parts water. You can make large quantities by boiling the solution and refrigerating it. Do NOT add red food coloring to this mixture. Never use honey. Honey could result in the bird's death.

When you select a hummingbird feeder, consider the following: number of feeding stations, capacity, resistance to wind, resistance to dripping and ease of cleaning.

Also, determine whether ants and bees will be problems.

When placing a feeder, consider the "bird's eye view." Place it out in the open where the birds can find it. Add red color to a feeder by hanging red ribbons near it. Flowers in your garden can help to attract hummingbirds. Especially attractive varieties include agastache (hyssop), butterfly bush, salvia, hollyhocks, impatiens, columbine and penstemon. Consider planting a combination of annuals, perennials and vines.

## Perseverance Pays Off

Don't give up! Two peak periods for attracting hummingbirds happen in Colorado. The first is from mid-April to the end of May. This is when hummingbirds are first migrating into the area. The second – and most important – period is

from the Fourth of July to the end of September. Leave your feeder up until mid-October. A feeder will not prevent their migration.

Attracting hummingbirds is an enjoyable way to observe and interact with nature. Whenever you are dealing with wildlife, it is important to remember that patience and persistence will often reward you. Creating a wild bird habitat in your yard can attract a variety of wildlife, including those spectacular hovering jewels of nature ... hummingbirds!

*Scott and his wife, Sandy, own the Wild Birds Unlimited Nature Shop at 2720 S. Wadsworth Blvd. in Denver. Call them at 303-987-1065 with questions, or visit [www.WildBirdsColorado.com](http://www.WildBirdsColorado.com).*

*Other WBU Front Range locations:*

- *Arvada, 7370 W. 88th Ave.*
- *Fort Collins, 3636 S. College Ave.*

## Get More Tips on Bird-Friendly Living

Visit our blog at [www.RMBO.org](http://www.RMBO.org) for more advice on backyard birding from our friends at Wild Birds Unlimited. Topics include:

Binoculars 101: What You Need to Know to Get a Perfect Pair

Bushes for Birds: What Flora Best Attracts Avifauna?

How Can You Help Birds Beat the Heat?

Squirrels: Feed Them or Defeat Them

Live along the Front Range? Tune in to Scott and David Menough at noon on Saturdays for BirdTalk Radio on 710 KNUS.

# Heavy Rains, Cool Species at Banding Stations

## At least one new bird species caught at all seven stations

By Teddy Parker-Renga, Communications Manager

As I prepare this issue of *The Primary Source*, RMBO is busy banding birds in Colorado during spring migration. But before we compile data from the spring, I wanted to share with you highlights and photos from the fall season. Enjoy!

### Barr Lake State Park, Colorado

It was the 27th season of banding birds at Barr Lake north-east of Denver. Like many areas along the Front Range, last fall was a wet one at Barr Lake. Biologist Meredith McBurney said although the rain had little direct negative impact on the station itself, the heavy rains changed the landscape greatly north of Barr Lake and likely had a major impact on migration. A total of 1,031 individual birds of 52 species were banded in the fall, including the first-ever Ash-throated Flycatcher, Eurasian Collared-Dove and Great Crested Flycatcher, which was caught the day after the storms along with a rare Golden-winged Warbler. Meredith noted the pace of captures waned after the flooding, and the numbers of some typically late arrivals, such as Chipping Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos, were well below normal.

### Chico Basin Ranch, Colorado

Biologist Nancy Gobris and volunteers caught and banded a record total of 1,696 individual birds at Chico Basin Ranch, located 35 miles southeast of Colorado Springs. They had eight days of 100-plus individual birds ... wow! Nancy said they caught birds of 57 different species, including the station's first-ever Great Crested Flycatcher and 185 Brewer's Sparrows. In 12 years of banding at Chico Basin Ranch, only 21 Brewer's Sparrows had ever been banded there.



A visitor to the banding station in Fort Collins releases a Wilson's Warbler. Photo by Greg Levandoski.

### Lee Martinez Park, Colorado

This was a new station for RMBO in 2013, located a grouse's flight away from our office in Fort Collins. After piloting it in the spring of 2013 for International Migratory Bird Day, we operated the station for three weeks in the fall despite a late start due to the Cache la Poudre River flooding the banding area. In that time, we captured and banded 63 individual birds of 14 different species, including a Wood Thrush, an uncommon visitor typically found in the eastern U.S.

### Ridgway State Park, Colorado

Located on the West Slope, RMBO operated this station in partnership with the Black Canyon Audubon Society from

See **BANDING** on page 7



First-ever Ash-throated Flycatcher banded at Barr Lake (photo by Emily Snode)



First-ever Great Crested Flycatcher banded at Chico Basin (photo by Nancy Gobris)



First-ever Dusky Flycatcher to be banded in Nebraska (photo by Michael Novak)

# Bald Eagle Watch Update: 3 Eaglets at Barr

By Jeff Birek, Outreach Biologist

As of May 28, citizen scientists with RMBO's Bald Eagle Watch are monitoring 13 nests that have eaglets. At the 13 nest sites, there are 26 eaglets total.

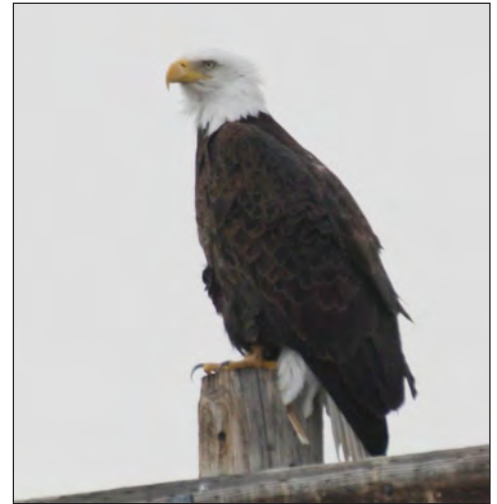
The nest at Barr Lake State Park has three eaglets, and they are doing well. One of the eaglets is smaller than the other two, which is often seen in nests with three birds. The smallest bird is the least likely to fledge, but we could see all three leave this nest ready for their lives!

Other nests monitored by Bald Eagle Watch volunteers along the Front Range of Colorado, from Big Johnson Reservoir

in Colorado Springs to Ted's Place northwest of Fort Collins, have had no nesting activity or have failed due to storms and other unknown reasons.

Volunteers did alert Colorado Parks & Wildlife to a couple of potential disturbances near nests this spring, but the disturbances did not seem to have an affect on nesting success.

A Bald Eagle perches on a pole at Terry Lake in Fort Collins, Colo. Photo by Dick Irwin.



## **BANDING** *continued from page 6*

Sept. 6-17. A total of 152 individual birds of 20 different species were banded there, including the station's first-ever Nashville Warbler, 50 Wilson's Warblers and 17 MacGillivray's Warblers.

### **Ela Wildlife Sanctuary, Colorado**

RMBO operated this station near Grand Junction in partnership with the Grand Valley Audubon Society from Sept. 20 to Oct. 18. A total of 177 individual birds of 22 different species were banded there, including the station's first two Cassin's Vireos.

### **Chadron State Park, Nebraska**

It was a record season at our banding station at Chadron State Park, with 433 individual birds banded of 41 different species. This included eight species banded for the first time at the

station: Belted Kingfisher, Blue Grosbeak, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Lazuli Bunting (three of them!), Veery, Western Tanager, Western Wood-Pewee and Dusky Flycatcher (the first of this species ever banded in Nebraska!).

### **Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area, Nebraska**

Not to be left out of the fun, our banding station at Wildcat Hills had its own first in the fall, a Baltimore Oriole. A total of 369 individual birds of 33 different species were banded there, including 151 Chipping Sparrows and 46 Red Crossbills.

We appreciate the many schools, families, community groups and others who visited our banding stations to learn about bird anatomy, migration, conservation and more. Thank you to the many partners and funders who helped us operate these stations. You help make it all possible!



This was the first Baltimore Oriole ever banded at the Wildcat Hills station. Photo by Melanie Mancuso.



Colorado Parks & Wildlife biologist Jeff Thompson visited the Barr Lake station with his daughter on her birthday. Photo by Meredith McBurney.

# Stewardship Spotlight: Survey Explores Incentive to Conserve Plovers

By Angela Dwyer, Wildlife Biologist

Mountain Plovers are small, ground-nesting birds living on the shortgrass prairie ecoregion of the Rocky Mountain West.

Since the 1920s, native shortgrass prairie habitat has diminished as much as 52% due to conversion of grasslands to cropland agriculture, diminished fire frequency, destruction of prairie dog towns and bison population decline.

As the native prairie habitat has dwindled, so too have Mountain Plover populations. Since the 1960s, the plover's population has decreased approximately 3% per year. Declining plover populations are a concern for RMBO and landowners alike as both groups work to conserve this iconic prairie species.

In Nebraska, the Mountain Plover breeding range occurs primarily on privately owned lands in Kimball County, as well as parts of Banner and Cheyenne counties. The plover has adapted to the changing landscape by nesting in cultivated croplands.

Focusing nest conservation efforts on cropland is vital, as an average of 95% of plover nests are found on croplands in Kimball County. The occurrence of plovers on cropland – and the general rarity of this species – has led to a proactive response by state and federal agencies and nonprofit organizations to work with private landowners to protect nests without inhibiting farming operations.

## Landowner Payments

To promote landowner involvement, RMBO awards Landowner Incentive Payments (LIP) to farmers who protect nests from accidental tillage during agricultural activities. These incentive payments have been instrumental in recruiting landowners to join the program and to encourage them to find and protect plover nests. In 2006, when the incentive program began, 14% of landowners found and marked nests; by 2012, this effort had increased to 42% of nests found by landowners.

Unfortunately, LIP funding has ended,



**A Mountain Plover protects its nest on a crop field in Nebraska. Landowners receive payments from RMBO to protect plover nests from accidental tillage during agricultural activities, but the Landowner Incentive Payments fund has run dry. Photo by Colin Woolley.**

leaving RMBO biologists to wonder whether landowners would participate in nest-marking without a monetary incentive. In 2013, RMBO partnered with Virginia Tech's Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation to develop a landowner survey. Larry Snyder, a landowner outreach biologist who has worked for RMBO since 2002, distributed the survey to 77 landowners in Nebraska who are involved in the nest-marking program.

RMBO and Virginia Tech sought to answer several questions: Are landowners driven to participate in conservation programs because of a monetary incentive? Will landowners in Nebraska continue to allow nest-marking without a monetary incentive? In addition, because many landowners have been working with RMBO for more than a decade, a section of questions related to organizational affinity was included. How many landowners participate because they have a strong connection with RMBO?

## And Our Survey Says ...

We received 41 surveys back for a 53% response rate. Most (89%) of the farmers first learned about the Mountain Plover nest-marking program through Larry, and

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*As the native prairie habitat has dwindled, so too have Mountain Plover populations. Since the 1960s, the plover's population has decreased about 3% per year.*

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71% indicated their continued participation was influenced by their interactions with him. Furthermore, 71% of landowners would continue to allow RMBO biologists to mark nests without an incentive.

These results are promising and point to the landowner-focused design of the program that minimally impacts farming activities while protecting the plover's nests. We are thankful for the decade-long partnership between RMBO and our partner farmers in Nebraska. This long-term partnership with farmers and support from the Nebraska Environmental Trust and Nebraska Game and Parks Commission are vital to the conservation of this imperiled species, while ensuring farming and livelihoods continue.

*Read more about Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory's efforts to conserve Mountain Plover populations in Nebraska and Colorado on our blog at [www.RMBO.org](http://www.RMBO.org).*



# Member's Visit to Karval Reveals Awe of Playas

By Karen von Saltza, RMBO Member

For the past three years, Celia Greenman, a retired geologist, and I have attended the Karval Mountain Plover Festival in late April in Karval, Colo.

Each time, as part of the festival, we were driven by school bus on private land over shortgrass prairie to visit several large, barren, completely dry sink holes known as playas.

The ranchers would tell us how, in good years, they could waterski on this dried-out land, American Avocets would make their nests here and waterfowl were abundant. This did not seem believable to me, especially since we visited Karval during the last three years of a severe and extended drought.

So, on the morning of Sept. 22, 2013, Celia and I decided to drive to Karval to see how the playas had responded to the massive rainstorm and flooding that had occurred along the Front Range the week before. Reports of 8 inches of rain on the eastern plains were one of the few pieces of good news we had had following the devastation in the foothills.

As we drove east from Denver, we called the rancher to ask permission to drive out on his property to visit the playas. Not only were we given permission, but Jeff and Tammy gave us directions and said they would meet us to drive us out in their truck. Approaching the playas, we suddenly looked out upon water, smooth and still, to the horizon. A flock of 13 American Avocets were feeding near the shore and, yes, it was possible to see that one could waterski on this once barren land.

RMBO has fenced the largest playa in order to manage grazing and access to enhance water quality and vegetation structure for migration and nesting. The water that day completely surrounded and passed beyond the fenced 67-acre playa, which is



Celia Greenman snapped this photo of a playa lake, complete with an island, on a visit to southeast Colorado last fall.

one of largest out of about 8,000 playas in Colorado. Only days before, the water was high enough to connect it and the others into a very large lake.

I asked if the water would remain and was told by Jeff that most of it would, that if the winter were cold and snowy, the prairie would go a long way to recovering from the previous difficult years. As we drove away from the playas, it was hard not to notice that the grasses were green and tall and swaying in the wind.

*To learn more about playas, visit [www.RMBO.org](http://www.RMBO.org) and search under Our Work, Stewardship Team, Habitat Enhancement Projects then Wetland/Riparian.*

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## OSPREY *continued from cover*

Shadow was the first to begin migrating south. On Sept. 14, she began her journey and traveled about 45 miles that day over the Rocky Mountains and south along the Front Range. Her path continued into southeast Colorado and eventually followed the Arkansas River into Kansas, where she then headed south through Oklahoma and Texas.

Shadow's biggest day during the fall migration was Sept. 21, when she traveled 305 miles from northern Texas into southern Texas. Her total journey encompassed roughly 1,100 miles into Mexico, just south of where the Rio Grande enters the Gulf of Mexico.

Rainbow was a little slower to begin her journey, but on Sept. 20 she took a similar path to Shadow's and went about 100 miles over the mountains and south along the Front Range. On her biggest

day, she flew about 310 miles from Kansas into Texas. Eventually, she found a suitable winter home near Tamaín, Mexico, about 1,300 miles from her nesting area.

Shadow's chosen overwintering location is an important refuge for many bird species that is officially recognized as a wetland of international importance by the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network. Rainbow's overwintering site, after viewing the satellite images of Google Earth, appears to be an agricultural area near Rio Tampaon.

### Where Are They Now?

Tracking both Ospreys has provided exciting and frustrating moments. In late March and late April, we lost signals for Rainbow and Shadow, respectively, and are uncertain why. There are several possibilities: Feathers have covered the solar panels on the transmitters and they cannot charge, the

tracking units have failed and are no longer working, something has happened to the birds, or the units have fallen off the birds.

We have been communicating with Arapaho National Forest biologists that monitor the Grand Lake Osprey population to determine if Rainbow or Shadow returned to their nests. We remain hopeful. In addition to searching for the Ospreys, we plan to capture and attach a satellite transmitter to a Peregrine Falcon near the park this summer.

There are no guarantees for success when tracking migration. We are fortunate to have gathered valuable data about Osprey migration to inform future efforts to conserve Colorado's Osprey and develop education programs to teach students in Colorado and abroad about bird migration.

Thank you to the Arapaho National Forest and Mountain Parks Electric for assisting on this project.

# Bird Feats: Making Strides for Conservation

## Sec. Jewell Visits Colo. Ranch

On Jan. 22, Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell and Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper took a tour of a private ranch in northwest Colorado to view conservation efforts promoting sage grouse habitat.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe and BLM Management Principal Deputy Director Neil Kornze also took part in the tour of Boyd Gulch Ranch near Craig, where RMBO has been a proud partner on sage grouse conservation projects.

After the tour, Sec. Jewell commended ranch manager Ray Owens for the innovative conservation efforts that led him to recently being named one of the two recipients of Colorado Parks and Wildlife's 2013 Wildlife Landowner of the Year award.

"Ray Owens is a model of the 21st century western rancher with his outstanding stewardship of this working landscape," Jewell said, in a press release from the Inte-

rior Department. "He represents the spirit of partnership that can be replicated across the West as we develop landscape-level strategies to lessen the threats to the sage grouse and conserve its habitat."

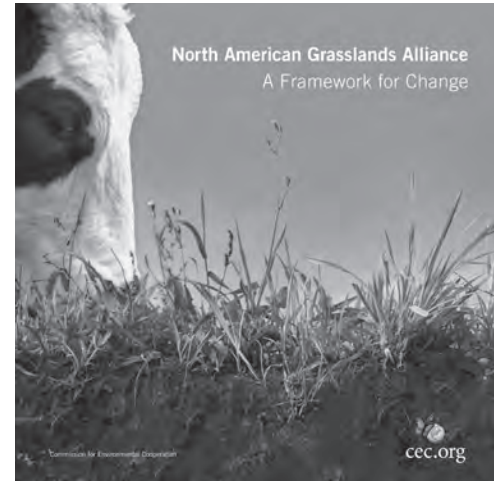
## Conservation Champion Award

In March, Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory received the 2014 Migratory Bird Joint Venture Conservation Champion Award for a non-governmental organization. Woo-hoo!

RMBO won the accolade for its work with joint ventures across the western and central United States and northern Mexico to support bird and habitat conservation.

## New Grasslands Document

Staff from RMBO's international team joined more than 70 grassland experts from Canada, Mexico and the U.S. in developing a new publication from the Center for Environmental Cooperation.



*North American Grasslands Alliance: A Framework for Change* lays out the foundational principles, objectives and priorities to sustain working lands, conserve biodiversity and support vibrant rural communities across North America.

The document is available in English, Spanish and French.

Download it at [www.cec.org](http://www.cec.org).

## Poudre RiverFest a Big Success!

On May 10, RMBO co-hosted Poudre RiverFest in Fort Collins, Colo., to celebrate and restore the Cache la Poudre River.

More than 1,000 people joined us at the festival, organized by RMBO, the Sustainable Living Association, Wildlands Restoration Volunteers, Save the Poudre and the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery.

The idea was simple: What can a group of partners do together for a common cause to make a community impact. The heart of Fort Collins is the Poudre River, as it provides amazing bird habitat, recreation and water. The river was impacted by the 2013 floods, so the festival was a chance for the community to clean up and restore the river while enjoying and celebrating it. The festival was held on International Migratory Bird Day ([www.birdday.org](http://www.birdday.org)).

RMBO ran a bird banding station in the morning and led bird walks along the Poudre River. Best of all, we got to share the beauty and science of birds with the many families who attended the festival.

Along with birdy fun, festival attendees participated in kids' activities at the museum and a river cleanup hosted by the City of Fort Collins in the morning. That afternoon,



Justin Roth performs at Poudre RiverFest. Photo by Kimberly Stein.

they headed across the river to Legacy Park for a celebration of the Poudre River that included booths and educational activities from more than 40 partners.

Proceeds from the festival will be shared among the festival organizers, with RMBO using funds to support our Fort Collins banding station.

View photos at [www.facebook.com/RMBObirds](http://www.facebook.com/RMBObirds).

Poudre RiverFest was such a success we're already planning for next year!

# Staff & Board Migrations

## Welcome ...

**Casey Cardinal** grew up on a small farm in Wisconsin. She earned her bachelor's degree in wildlife ecology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. After receiving her degree, she worked as a field technician on projects with small mammals in northeastern Colorado, Mississippi Sandhill Cranes along the Gulf Coast, sage grouse in south-central Idaho and prairie chickens in north-central Kansas. Casey is in the process of completing her master's degree from Utah State University, where she's studying sage-grouse ecology and habitat use in southeast Idaho and northeast Utah. She has a fondness for game birds and is working out of the NRCS office in Lamar as a private lands range/wildlife ecologist. Casey will be assisting with Lesser Prairie Chicken Initiative projects and providing technical assistance on wildlife conservation to landowners.



**Katy Kuhnel** grew up in the small mountain town of Granby, Colo. She earned a bachelor's degree in fish, wildlife and conservation biology from Colorado State University. Katy moved to western Nebraska in 2012, where she is completing a master's degree in organizational management in natural resources at Chadron State College. Katy has field experience with the USDA Forest Service in Chadron and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in Valentine, Neb. She loves sharing her passion for conservation and wildlife with others and is working out of Chadron, Neb., as the shortgrass prairie coordinating wildlife biologist.



**Chase Taylor** grew up in the desert lands of southern New Mexico, capturing horned toads and exploring nearby Caliche pits with his brothers. He attended New Mexico State University and Texas Tech University, where he was an active ecological technician and certified prescribed burning contractor. Chase earned a bachelor's degree in rangeland science and a master's degree in rangeland ecology from Texas Tech, where he studied the survival, behavior, predator-prey interactions and habitat preference of Rocky Mountain Mule Deer in New Mexico. Chase is working out of the NRCS office in Pueblo, Colo., where he provides technical support to landowners along the south-central Front Range as a private lands wildlife biologist.



**Aaron Trujillo** grew up in Pueblo, Colo., where he spent his time hunting and fishing in the Rockies. He earned a bachelor's degree in wildlife biology from Colorado State University in 2008. After college, Aaron served in wildlife positions with CSU, USDA Forest Service and the Colorado Division of Wildlife,

ranging from work with boreal toads and Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, to hunter outreach and education. In 2011, his adventures took him north with Wyoming Game and Fish, where he worked with private landowners to gain hunter access and as a game warden involved with wildlife management and enforcement. Aaron is working out of the NRCS office in Fort Morgan as a private lands wildlife biologist.



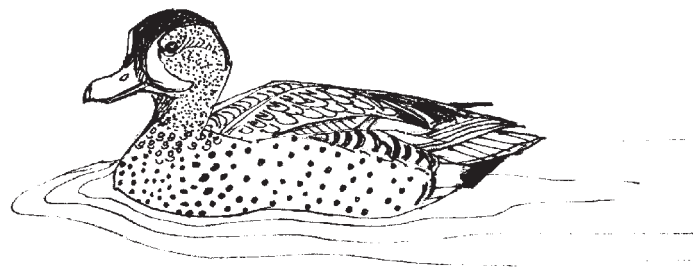
**Brittany Woiderski** grew up chasing cows on her family's dairy farm in northern Michigan. In 2006, she earned a bachelor's degree in environmental geography from Western Michigan University and then moved west to volunteer with AmeriCorps in Yosemite National Park. She spent six years with the National Park Service helping to develop Yosemite's Visitor Use and Impact Monitoring Program and serving as the field crew leader and GIS specialist for many riparian and meadow health monitoring projects. Brittany found her way to RMBO through her love of birds and conservation and wasted no time in volunteering her GIS skills to the organization after moving to Fort Collins in the fall of 2012. She joined RMBO as a field technician in the spring of 2013 and now works as a GIS specialist and biologist.



## Farewell ...

Thank you to the following people for their service to RMBO:

- Susan Heinz, Staff Accountant
- Ross Lock, Wildlife Biologist
- Alberto Macías-Duarte, Research Ecologist (Alberto will still be collaborating with RMBO as a researcher at Colorado State University)
- Judith Spiegel, Chief Financial Officer
- Magdalena Vinson, Nebraska Education Coordinator



*Blue-winged Teal by Sherrie York*



Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory  
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**THANKYOU** for supporting bird and habitat conservation!  
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PS45

## 25th Gear on Sale!

We distributed more than 250 shirts during our 25th anniversary in 2013 but, shoot, we've still got a few left on the shelf.

Both short-sleeve and long-sleeve shirts are left in select sizes and colors.

Get yours before they're history!

**Cost:** Short-sleeve: \$10, or \$8 for RMBO members and volunteers; long-sleeve: \$15, or \$13 for RMBO members and volunteers (additional costs will apply for shipping)

**To Order:** Contact Teddy Parker-Renga at teddy.parker-renga@rmbo.org or 970-482-1707 ext. 30 to see what sizes are left, or stop by the Fort Collins office.

**Signed 25th prints also available!**

