

Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory



Annual Report
2007-2008

Mission

The mission of the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory is to conserve birds and their habitats. We work throughout the western United States and across international boundaries, emphasizing Mexico, the single most important country for our wintering migrant species. RMBO uses a full-circle approach to achieve its mission: All our programs — in science, education and stewardship — are connected. Our **science** provides information about bird species, their numbers, habitats and movements. This scientific information is used by natural-resource agencies, landowners and other resource management entities to help in their conservation planning and implementation efforts for sensitive species. We also use this information to design compelling **education** programs that are easily understood by children and adults, and which are intended to inspire effective conservation actions. Our **stewardship** efforts focus on outreach (increasing awareness and understanding of at-risk bird species and their habitat requirements), technical assistance (providing landowners and land managers tools to incorporate birds into their management activities), and habitat enhancement (working with interested landowners and other federal, state and private partners to design projects to maintain and enhance bird habitat on private lands). Our scientific, education and stewardship efforts come full circle when the scientific data show positive changes in bird populations.



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2007-2008

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**2007 only*

A message from the

Executive Director

Though I served in an interim role in 2008, it was not a “status quo” year. This was our 20th anniversary year, and just as RMBO staff, members and volunteers have never in those 20 years simply stayed in a holding pattern, so in 2008 we forged ahead to expand and improve our efforts to conserve birds and their habitats.



Through education and outreach programs, we engaged more than 40,000 adults and children in birds. The awareness that we cultivate opens the door for exploration and appreciation of the outdoors, and it plants the seeds for a life-long conservation ethic. RMBO staff members tirelessly dedicate their time and efforts to bird conservation, which is their passion. They believe wholeheartedly in the work they do and take pride in knowing they are making a difference.

RMBO has been at the forefront of bird monitoring efforts, collecting and providing data to help feed planning and conservation action. We are recognized as a leader for knowing how to engage private agricultural producers and how to create win-win partnerships that result in contagious conservation efforts.

The challenges we face in conservation are great, but the opportunities and partnerships to make a difference are solid. Through collaborative efforts, we can and are making a difference. We are helping create a legacy of hope for future generations, a legacy that includes healthy ecosystems, healthy human communities and healthy wildlife populations. Please join us in our campaign for bird conservation.

Jaime Van Couteren

A message from the

Board Chairman

In RMBO's 2001 Annual Report, incoming Board Chairman Paul Slingsby wrote, "RMBO has grown, and the board must concentrate on the responsibility to assure that RMBO has employee- and finance-management practices that meet legal and contractual requirements." In 2007, the RMBO Board of Directors made major breakthroughs in addressing the financial-management piece of that challenge, and those breakthroughs took flight in 2008.

As the financial statements in this report indicate, RMBO ended 2008 in a sound financial condition, well positioned to face the growing problems of bird conservation in our region. Credit goes to many people, including:

- ◊ Accounting Manager Jim Pauley, who put our cash flow management on sound footing;
- ◊ Executive Director Tammy VerCauteren, who worked closely with Jim to maintain financial discipline;
- ◊ RMBO's senior staff, who have developed increasing strength in budgeting and project management;
- ◊ the board's Finance Committee, which established a level of oversight that ensures increasing financial control;
- ◊ our auditors, ACM, who pointed us in the direction of the kinds of financial controls that will give our funders confidence that their resources are being well used.

Most of all, credit goes to Paul Slingsby. Even after giving up his role as board chair, Paul continued to lead the Finance Committee until leaving the board at the expiration of his term in December 2008.

Working from a sound financial base, RMBO's biologists and educators are in a better position to grow our bird conservation programs. Led by growth in science, stewardship and international efforts, RMBO's programs are poised to grow more than 25 percent in 2009. That means more work on the ground in habitat restoration as well as continued growth in the knowledge base that allows land management agencies to achieve bird conservation objectives. It also means progress in the race to identify and preserve critical habitat in Mexico where many of our breeding birds spend the winter months.

For the board, a major challenge will be building on our foundation of governance and oversight. I have been gratified by the dedication and energy that RMBO's membership and current board have devoted to the success of the organization. With that dedication and the commitment of our professional staff, RMBO should continue to be a vital force for the conservation of birds and their habitats.



History & Tradition

History is important to any organization. At RMBO, our history, which began with the formation of the Colorado Bird Observatory, reminds us of where we have been and provides insights about the future of our organization. We have come a long way in 20 years, including a name change to the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory in 2001, completion in 2000 of the first big steps in restoring the marvelous historic home that is now our headquarters at Barr Lake, and the development of many projects and partnerships encompassing several states and regions of Mexico. We have much work to do this year and in the next 20 years if we are to meet the increasing challenges of helping bird species survive and thrive. For now, we want to reflect on a celebration of RMBO's first 20 years.



Our annual picnic has taken place at our headquarters at the Old Stone House, at the northernmost tip of Barr Lake, for almost a decade. Each year, the BBQ with the Birds starts with a bird walk along Barr Lake, and in 2008, a Bald Eagle was spotted. The majestic bird was symbolic of RMBO's 20-year history, for we started monitoring Bald Eagles at Barr Lake when the Colorado Bird Observatory was founded. Now, we continue to monitor the nesting eagles at the lake as well as Bald Eagle nests across the Front Range and the South Platte River corridor. The first record of nesting eagles in the northern Front Range was in 1987 at Barr Lake State Park.

Good food, fun, stories and a focus on birds were the themes of our celebration. Young and old were treated to guided bird walks, up-close encounters with birds at our banding station, updates on the conservation efforts of RMBO and our partners, and one of the best barbecues the area has to offer. Youngsters and the young at heart enjoyed making feeders and playing migration games, including “Pin the Tail on the Migrating Duck.” Friendly competition in a lively silent auction garnered more than \$1,000 in scholarship funds for our education programs.



At the picnic, founding Director Mike Carter took attendees through RMBO's 20 years, documenting how we fledged from a one-person show with a large volunteer base to become an international organization with a full-time staff of nearly three dozen people and more than 50 seasonal field technicians, and an annual budget of more than \$2 million. We've grown from working in Colorado to working in 12 western states. That's something to celebrate!



Science

For science, 2008 was a year of discoveries and development of new methodologies. Working with partners at the Colorado Division of Wildlife and the U.S. Forest Service, we had spent several years designing a grid-based survey protocol that would allow us to more effectively identify bird population trends, and that could be scaled to state and Bird Conservation Region levels. We needed a design that allowed habitats to be dynamic, as they are by nature, yet would yield credible data to help identify population trends and guide management decisions. In 2008 we field-tested the protocol in Colorado. The 2008 field season served as a pilot effort for a broader launch of the survey design in 2009.

2008 also saw the launch of RMBO's Avian Data Center. The center serves as a portal to data collected by RMBO scientists, collaborators and volunteers. Through the RMBO Web site, individuals involved in bird conservation, land management, and habitat conservation and restoration can gain access to information about bird species in the Rocky Mountains, Great Plains and Intermountain West. Real-time information is available on species distribution, along with raw-count data and general species/habitat associations. Reports, database metadata and data sheets are also available for download at www.rmbo.org/public/monitoring.



An exciting find in 2008 was the confirmation of Yellow-billed Cuckoos nesting in western Colorado. With financial support from partners and the work of a dedicated team of volunteers, we found cuckoos at 13 percent of 80 locations surveyed and confirmed nesting at one location. The survey results are good news, as Yellow-billed Cuckoos are considered an imperiled species west of the Continental Divide.



Nocturnal surveys in western Nebraska showed that the Northern Saw-whet Owl is more widespread in the Pine Ridge region and Wildcat Hills than previously suspected. We also confirmed suspicions that Poorwills are common and widespread throughout western Nebraska. These surveys are critical for ensuring that wildlife action plans, management decisions and conservation efforts are informed by up-to-date and reliable data on species.

Our vision for the Science Division is to continue to fill in knowledge gaps on special species, including the Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Mountain Plover and Burrowing Owl. At a larger scale, the division is working to implement the new monitoring design in Bird Conservation Regions from Montana to Arizona. This will promote consistency in data collection, analysis and interpretation, and ensure that birds are being monitored based on biological landscapes.

"The Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory's Science Division is an outstanding partner for the US Forest Service. Together we are able to implement strong science-based monitoring programs to work toward the goal of achieving proactive bird conservation. This would be a very difficult goal to achieve without working with RMBO's Science Division, as it is a critical link in bringing partners together to achieve mutual objectives." — Robert Skorkowsky, Region 2 Avian Program Coordinator, USDA Forest Service



Education

We reached thousands of schoolchildren through RMBO education programs in Colorado and Nebraska in 2008. Fields trips are at the core of these programs as we strive to get children outdoors to learn about nature in a setting where they can see, hear, smell and touch it. Through our bird camps and other programs, we bring students and teachers to our headquarters at Barr Lake State Park and accompany them to other locations, such as Chadron State Park in Nebraska and Chico Basin Ranch, a working cattle ranch near Colorado Springs. Positive experiences in nature are critical to teach lessons that last a lifetime, to establish a desire for continued learning, and to instill an appreciation for nature that will lead to an understanding of the need for individual stewardship. We provide these positive interactions through summer camp programs, up-close experiences at our bird-banding stations, and Hawk Watch and Bald Eagle Watch programs.

Bringing children outside is not always possible, especially as funds for field trips become more limited and curriculum standards become stricter. We bring the outdoors inside through classroom programming, including our Panhandle Eco-Extravaganza About Prairies (PEEP) program. In our PEEP program, fourth- and fifth-grade students had a chance to become “Critter Scene” investigators, following clues and figuring out who was leaving the clues; played Shortgrass Prairie Jeopardy; learned about



Mountain Plover and Killdeer; and designed campaigns for saving plovers on agricultural fields. Students also learned about predator/prey relationships and got to see a live Burrowing Owl.

“Young Biologists” was a new program in 2008, designed to be an in-class follow-up to our banding stations. We used data that students collected at banding stations to help them make connections to math, science and geography. Students graphed banding data and learned how these data help us identify trends. We used maps to show students where individual birds breed, stop on migration routes and spend the winter, helping students make geographic connections to the world around them and learn why conservation at local, regional and international levels is important.



Our vision is to increase both the number and kind of contacts we have with youth and adults, and to take them from awareness to learning to active conservation. Over the next three years, we want to triple—from 10,000 to 30,000—the number of youth we reach through environmental education programs. To accomplish this, we need to build our capacity to deliver programs by increasing the size of our education staff, increasing existing funding and finding new funding sources, and building new partnerships. We will expand and strengthen our volunteer program in order to reach more students and new audiences, including families.

“There were lots of comments from students on my year-end survey in which I ask the kids, among other things, which labs to keep. TONS said how cool the bird banding was.... You guys rock!” — Charlie Leech, biology teacher, Steamboat Springs High School, Colo.



Stewardship

Several new on-the-ground conservation projects came to fruition in 2008 in Colorado and Nebraska, shepherded by our Stewardship Division. We received a Conservation Innovation Grant from the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural

Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to teach the principles and methods of prescribed burns and to encourage their use. This land-management tool helps reduce woody species such as one seed juniper and increase plant species diversity and grassland bird habitat. Through training for landowners and resource professionals, demonstrations and purchase of equipment, we will help empower people in the Brason/Trinchera Conservation District to keep fire as a management tool in southeastern Colorado.



Nebraska Prairie Partners, a cooperative program of RMBO and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, built and began installing 20 nesting platforms in western Nebraska at historic Ferruginous Hawk nesting sites with large tracts of native grassland. The goal of the project was to increase the number of Ferruginous Hawks, a species of concern in Nebraska. Funding came from the Nebraska Environmental Trust. Agricultural producers were excited to help monitor hawks' use of the platforms and to help return our largest hawk in North America to their lands.



In 2008, our Stewardship Division worked to expand its reach beyond the prairies. In September we were awarded a contract with the Colorado Division of Wildlife and the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service to place four private lands wildlife biologists in NRCS offices around the state. The positions — based in Durango, Greeley, Pueblo and Steamboat Springs — focus on providing technical assistance to private landowners and NRCS staff. These biologists implement habitat-improvement projects, using federal Farm Bill funding, that focus on species of conservation concern. We look forward to new programs, new projects and new partnerships to benefit other habitats and regions of Colorado.

Our vision is to put more biologists in the field to reach out to private landowners, help obtain financial assistance for them and encourage them to implement practices to enhance populations of species of conservation concern, including the Mountain Plover, Sage Grouse, Mountain Bluebird, Lark Bunting and dozens more.



"RMBO is unique among conservation groups because it recognizes landowners as part of the conservation equation and people as part of the ecosystems they strive to preserve."
— Grady Grissom, Las Animas County, Colo., landowner

"RMBO changed my life. Before I met and worked with RMBO staff I had a shoot, shovel, shut-up attitude, but after working with them and partners, I have engaged in conservation, including enrolling our family ranch into a perpetual conservation easement." — Russell Davis, Lincoln County, Colo., landowner

In 2007, RMBO's International Program took flight in earnest with the launch of our Chihuahuan Grassland Bird Monitoring project. Thanks to this binational collaboration, we are learning about the distribution, abundance, habitat use and inter-annual movements of wintering grassland birds in the Mexican Chihuahuan Desert. This information is urgently needed to address population declines and prioritize and conserve rapidly shrinking wintering habitat for North American grassland birds. For the first time, we have obtained rigorous density estimates for more than 30 wintering grassland bird species in the most important grasslands across seven states in northern Mexico. We have gained insight into the ecological diversity and status of these grasslands and the relationships of bird species to specific conditions. We have also trained more than 20 Mexican biologists in grassland bird identification and survey techniques.



Our efforts are timely; we are discovering that many Chihuahuan grasslands are increasingly threatened by conversion to cropland, and that over-use and poor management is widespread and causing desertification and habitat loss for grassland species. In 2008, we expanded the scope of our project to address bird education needs in northern Mexico by producing and printing 15,000 copies of a Spanish-language pocket guide for Chihuahuan grassland birds. This compact, illustrative and informative guide will be distributed to landowners, students and other targeted audiences. We also received funding to expand our monitoring efforts into grasslands in western Texas and southeastern Chihuahua in 2009, support an M.S. research assistantship for a Mexican biologist, and begin new research efforts on overwinter ecology, physiology and survival in the Chihuahuan Desert and its associated habitats.

We put the finishing touches on RMBO's first West Mexico Bird Conservation Tour, designed to highlight the rich habitats and wonderful birds of western Mexico. The tour, which took place in March 2009, traveled to tropical forests, montane pine-oak and cloud forests, and coastal scrub and wetlands. The tour was a collaborative effort with the University of Guadalajara and the Manantlán Institute of Ecology and Conservation of Biodiversity, with proceeds benefitting Mexican conservation efforts, including training local biologists and supporting long-term bird-banding research.

RMBO's international efforts are essential for North American bird conservation. Mexico is the most important country for wintering neotropical migrants from western North America, including both grassland and montane species, and is a critical stopover area for migrants traveling further south. Through partnerships and collaboration, we are making strides to build a legacy of conservation across international boundaries.

Our vision is to locate conservation biologists in each Grassland Priority Conservation Area that we work in. These biologists will reach out to engage local landowners and communities in conservation practices that benefit grassland birds and improve range health, agricultural production and economic stability.



Supporters

The work of the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory is dependent upon the **generous support** of contributors each year. We are honored to recognize the following individuals, organizations and corporations that made gifts in support of RMBO's work in science, education and stewardship in 2007 and 2008.

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In 2008, the Richard G. Levad Memorial Fund for Special Species Research was established to honor the memory of our good friend and longtime coworker. Donations are used to continue the work that Rich initiated, including exploration of Purple Martin genetics and Black Swift migration; installing, maintaining and monitoring Long-eared Owl nest baskets; estimating Black Rail populations and distributions; and other work on special species.

If you would like to contribute to this fund, please send your donation to:

The Richard G. Levad Memorial Fund
Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory
ATTN: Jim Pauley
P.O. Box 1232
Brighton, CO 80601-1232

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The Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory **depends on partner organizations** to fund its research projects. We gratefully acknowledge the following governmental, educational and private organizations that provided critical grants and contracts to support RMBO's efforts in 2007 and 2008.

Adams County Open Space
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With the support of our partners, RMBO works in the Rocky Mountains, Great Plains, Intermountain West and Mexico



Volunteers

Each year, volunteers help the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory through their invaluable contributions of time, creativity and energy. They help RMBO with monitoring projects, bird banding stations, education programs and public events. We gratefully acknowledge the following individuals who volunteered in 2007 and 2008.

Susan Allerton	Rebecca Deurksen	Mack Hitch	Stan McGrew	Karen Shramo
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Publications

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Finances

Assets	2008	2007
Cash	\$ 333,338	\$ 188,095
Contracts and grants receivable, net	\$ 314,179	\$ 243,006
Prepaid expenses and other assets	\$ 16,776	\$ 17,199
Property and equipment, net	\$ 393,853	\$ 407,076
Total assets	\$ 1,058,146	\$ 855,376

Liabilities and Net Assets

Accounts payable	\$ 24,372	\$ 19,008
Accrued payroll	\$ 153,787	\$ 48,091
Deferred revenue	\$ 42,263	\$ 0
Note payable	\$ 0	\$ 99,504
Total liabilities	\$ 220,422	\$ 166,603

Commitments

Net assets		
Unrestricted:		
Invested in property & equipment	\$ 393,853	\$ 407,076
Undesignated	\$ 440,299	\$ 281,697
Total unrestricted	\$ 834,152	\$ 688,773

Temporarily restricted	\$ 3,572	\$ 0
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Total net assets	\$ 837,724	\$ 688,773
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Total liabilities and net assets	\$ 1,058,146	\$ 855,376
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Revenue

Contributions	\$ 27,695	\$ 31,888
Memberships	\$ 17,853	\$ 15,373
Scientific & Cultural Facilities Dist.	\$ 134,099	\$ 131,961
Contracts and grants	\$ 1,952,749	\$ 2,012,522
Other	\$ 7,198	\$ 7,751
Total revenue	\$ 2,139,594	\$ 2,199,495

Expenses

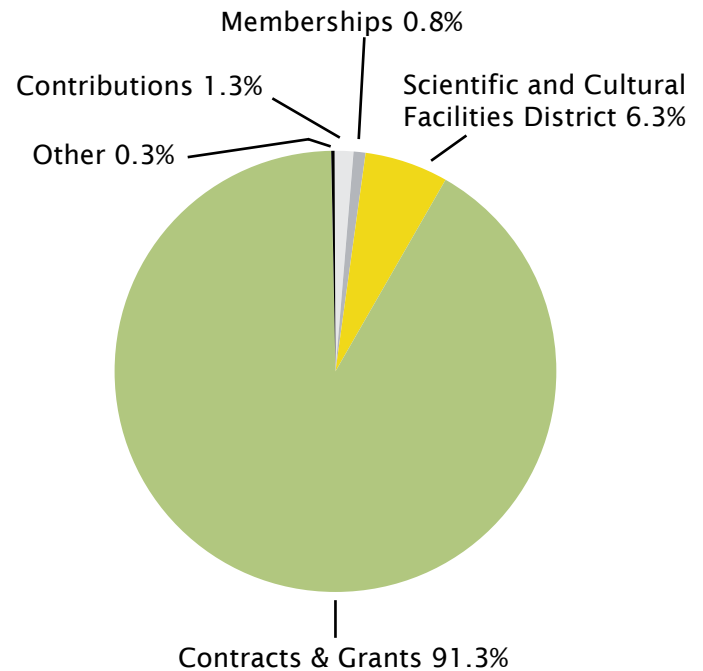
Program	\$ 1,663,474	\$ 1,749,646
General and administrative	\$ 315,775	\$ 331,167
Fundraising and development	\$ 11,394	\$ 12,361
Total expenses	\$ 1,990,643	\$ 2,093,174

Changes in net assets	\$ 148,951	\$ 106,321
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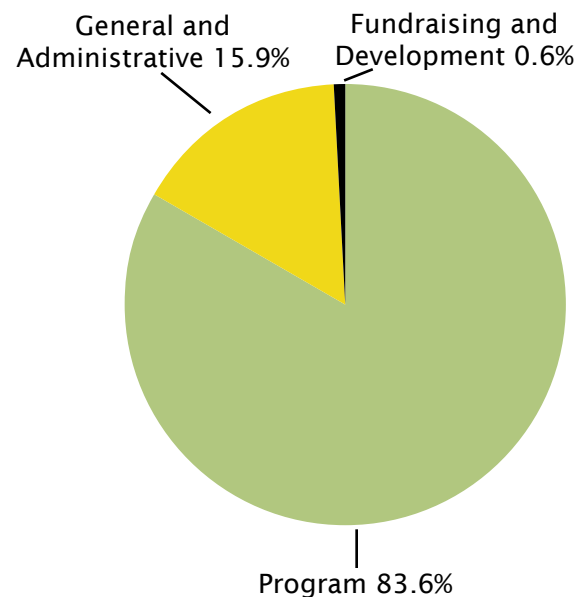
Net assets, beginning of year	\$ 688,773	\$ 582,452
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Net assets, end of year	\$ 837,724	\$ 688,773
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2008 Revenue



2008 Expenses



Future

In 2009, RMBO will look at ways to increase the use of the Old Stone House as a bird education and stewardship center. One of our newest board members, Steve Deitemeyer, is heading a committee to tackle this challenge in coordination with the new education team of Kacie Ehrenberger and Cassy Bohnet. The success of this project will depend on the support of the board and staff as well as our members, partners and the Brighton community. We will need to build both our membership and our volunteer forces to accomplish our goals.

With strong leadership from Executive Director Tammy VerCauteren and Communication Specialist Linda Alexander, 2009 will also see increased outreach to communicate the needs of bird conservation in our region. Cooperative programs have already been launched with the Colorado Mountain Club and Boulder's Chautauqua. RMBO's dedicated professional staff will meet with audiences around Colorado, Nebraska and the broader region to communicate the challenges birds encounter on their breeding grounds, migration routes and wintering grounds.

To continue the work we're doing, we need your help. We hope you'll consider renewing your membership or becoming a new member, and supporting our work through charitable contributions.





Conserving birds and their habitats

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