



THE PRIMARY SOURCE

Our mission is to conserve birds and their habitats.

Stewardship Division Fuels Landowners' Skills

Laura Quattrini, stewardship biologist

In 2008 the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory didn't exactly play with fire, but sparked interest in the use of prescribed fire as a land-management tool. RMBO received a Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to demonstrate the potential for safe and economic use of prescribed fire to sustain selected rangelands. The grant also allowed RMBO to better equip landowners and resource professionals with the technical knowledge and equipment needed to take advantage of prescribed fire, and to demonstrate the benefits to wildlife, particularly at-risk species. A major benefit is that burning stimulates the growth of new grass and shrubs, while retarding the growth of trees that can overtake a grassland or prairie, thus enhancing wildlife habitat.

A critical part of the program was to provide local communities with the knowledge, skills and capacity to use fire as a management tool. To achieve this, the Stewardship Division held its first Prescribed Burning School for landowners and resource professionals April 7-8 with great success. More than 50 people attended the workshop, half of whom were landowners, showing the immense interest in using prescribed burning as a management tool in the shortgrass prairie ecosystem.



John Weir (OSU) demonstrates equipment uses on a live fire. Photo by Laura Quattrini

It's no surprise the interest would be there. A burn association began several years ago in Las Animas County, Colo., but because of years of dry weather and the insecurities associated with potential landowner liability, very few people were doing controlled burns. The association became defunct. However, people in the county realize fire is a useful tool to keep or restore healthy prairies and shrublands. And they needed more information and technical expertise to make knowledgeable decisions and take appropriate action when performing prescribed burns.

Bring in John Weir. A research associate with Oklahoma State University's Natural Resource Ecology and Management College, John has been educating land owners and managers about the nuances of prescribed burning, and developing and forming prescribed burn associations for decades. He has conducted 721 controlled burns on 79,280 acres in four

states since 1988. He is the co-author of numerous publications concerning prescribed burning safety. John was just the person we needed to lead the workshop and assist RMBO and partners in planning for prescribed burns.

John thoroughly covered topics such as planning prescribed burns and making effective burn plans, putting in appropriate fire breaks, using different ignition techniques, and forming regional burn associations—all the information necessary to increase safety and reduce risk and liability. He opened the eyes of the majority of the school attendees, as they were not aware of all the issues to address before performing a prescribed burn.

The highlight of the school was experience with on-the-ground burning. As with many prescribed burns, we weren't sure we would be able to do this exercise. First, after months of dry weather, the Kim area received several inches of snow. It was simply too wet to carry out a controlled burn at a pre-determined site. But the day before our burn school started, we chose an alternate site—the grass oval inside the running track at the Kim school. This was a great location as it already had a fire break—the track. Windy weather during the burn school again made it uncertain whether any burning would happen; however a brief lull on the second day allowed John and the chief of the Kim Volunteer Fire Department, Harold Unwin, to give the

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From the director...

Tammy VerCauteren, executive director

Just as our birds have made their annual pilgrimage to their breeding grounds in the Rocky Mountains, Great Plains and beyond, so too have the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory science staff migrated to their summer survey locations. This year, those sites span from Montana to Texas. They are collecting breeding bird information to enhance our knowledge of distributions and densities and to help feed conservation planning. See Page 4 for a story about the new survey protocol we are implementing.



Through our Stewardship Division, RMBO did a full court press to help revitalize fire as a tool for habitat management in southeast Colorado, and we had more than 50 participants. The event culminated with a burn at the local high school track field in Kim to demonstrate proper procedures for burning. Though the drought, wind and then excessive moisture seemed destined to foil these efforts, the energy and enthusiasm of the partners made this a successful event. See Page 1 to learn more about the program.

The number of outreach events RMBO is doing has grown tremendously as we work to better serve our members and reach a broader community. We have Birding 101 classes set up for the summer, co-led bird hikes and bird festivals. Mark your calendars for Aug. 29th for our annual picnic at the Stone House at Barr Lake, and see the story on Page 5 for details. Come join us for some fun and to support our conservation efforts.

Our Education Division is also working in overdrive to deliver environmental educational programming throughout Colorado and Nebraska. Summer camps, festivals and plans for banding programs are in full swing. Our education program offers unique opportunities for students and families to get into nature - to touch it, feel it, learn about it and develop an appreciation for it. These experiences are more important today than ever as we are losing touch with where our food comes from, the birds in our backyards and their local habitats.

RMBO is also working to broaden its financial profile, including appealing to members and partners more frequently and getting our information out for online giving. We just joined Giving First, a program offered by the Community First Foundation to serve as an online resource for information about Denver area charities. This is a way to get out to a broader audience the message of who we are and what we are doing for conservation. Our hope is to gain members, volunteers and contributions. Check us out at <http://givingfirst.org/RMBO>.

Hope your summer is off to a great start,

Conservation Birding in West Mexico

Arvind Panjabi, International Program director

Wo-óoh, wo-Óoh, wo-ÓOH, wo-ooh. A slow, subtle crescendo of soft barks carries from the forest through my bedroom window. My sleepy brain sends the message: Mottled Owl. Now awakened by the cognitive process of indentifying bird songs, I look toward the window – still pitch dark, but I can sense morning is almost here. A few minutes later, sure enough, I hear the now-familiar wake-up call broadcast through the residence hall at the Las Joyas Research Station in the Sierra de Manantlán Biosphere Reserve: *I'd rather be a sparrow than a snail... Yes I would. If I could, I surely would....*

The beckoning Peruvian flutes on Simon and Garfunkel's ode to the magnificent condor compel me to get out of my warm bed and venture into the clearing to greet the cool dawn in this magnificent cloud forest. Joining me are the eight other birders who are taking this first West Mexico Conservation Birding Tour. In anticipation of what the dawn chorus will bring, we enjoy our morning coffee and the last few calls of a Buff-collared Nightjar and Whip-poor-will. Then, a Blue Mockingbird begins a strange discourse with himself, almost fooling us into thinking a new species has appeared. As daylight emerges, the

musical sounds of Russet Nightingale-Thrushes transcend the forest edge, and before long, from all around, the ensemble of voices from the Mexican cloud forest saturates our senses. Thankfully, our expert bird guide, Siux Diaz, calls off the names and points out the dozens of species we are hearing all at once. Soon thereafter, we make what will turn out to be one of the most interesting sightings of the trip: a small flock of what appear to be Black Swifts flying quite low overhead, apparently traveling between roosting and foraging areas. But it is early March, and Black Swifts are likely still on their wintering grounds somewhere in South America. It dawns on us that what we just observed was the recently described White-fronted Swift, a poorly known resident endemic species, very similar to the Black Swift. And so begins another day of discovery in western Mexico!

Participants on this trip, organized and co-led by the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory and the University of Guadalajara, visited tropical deciduous and semi-deciduous forests, dry oak forest, humid pine-oak forest, palm forest, mangroves, coasts, scrub, wetlands and many other stops along the way. We chose West Mexico as the destination for our first Conservation Birding Tour as it is the primary winter home for migratory birds from western North America and hosts a large number of endemic species. Our tour group observed 217 bird species, including 48 endemic and near-endemic species. We experienced firsthand the diverse ecological niches and relationships of migrant and resident birds, and learned about the long and varied history of the region, its biological resources, and current conservation needs

and efforts. We even got to participate in a morning of bird banding.



CBTer's enjoy some ceviche on the beach. Photo by Manobar Panjabi

Everywhere we went, we dined on typical local fare, which was always accompanied by fresh-squeezed juices, fresh fruit, warm tortillas and homemade salsa. Amongst all the birding, education and eating, we managed to squeeze in a few trips to the beach to take in the different bird life, enjoy an eye-opening boat ride through crocodile-infested mangroves, do some swimming and snorkeling (in the ocean, not in the mangroves), and enjoy some ice cold Pacificos and some of the best ceviche ever.

RMBO's Conservation Birding Tours are a new concept in Ecotourism, a development that aims to raise awareness about globally significant bird areas while simultaneously raising money to support conservation programs in these special places. The trips integrate world-class birding and field-based education in conservation sciences, all during an insider's tour of research stations, biosphere reserves and other off-the-beaten-path places. Visit <http://www.rmbo.org> for a complete bird list from the 2009 trip and check back for news and updates about our 2010 trip to West Mexico and other destinations. *Go birding, support conservation!*



A Slaty Vireo is ready for release at the Las Joyas banding station. Photo by Manobar Panjabi

RMBO Helps Lead Development of a Better Bird Monitoring Design

David Hanni, Science Division director, and Jennifer Blakesley, biometrician

A new approach to monitoring bird populations will help the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory relate changes in those populations to changes in habitat over time.

Historically, RMBO collected bird-point-count information within separate habitat types, such as sagebrush and ponderosa pine. However, vegetation may change in sampling areas over time because of plant succession, fire, drought, bark beetle infestation, land-use changes and other factors. The new design randomly selects survey locations without regard to current habitat conditions, and calls for the same locations to be surveyed year after year. This will allow RMBO to relate changes in bird populations to changes in habitat conditions over time.

The new design was created after the U.S. North American Bird Conservation Initiative Committee released its "Opportunities for Improving Avian Monitoring" report in February 2007. Birds do not recognize administrative boundaries, so our design uses the initiative's bird conservation regions

to estimate population trends on a biologically meaningful scale. The North American Bird Conservation Initiative defines bird conservation regions as "ecologically distinct regions in North America with similar bird communities, habitats and resource-management issues." We are able to estimate population densities within administrative units ranging in size from a national grassland to an entire state. Built into our new sampling design is the ability to combine data across monitoring programs in order to estimate bird-population trends across large areas. In cooperation with the United States Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management and state wildlife agencies, RMBO implemented the new monitoring design throughout Colorado in 2008. The sampling design will be implemented throughout Wyoming and in parts of Arizona, Kansas, Nebraska, North and South Dakota, Montana and Texas in 2009.

The data we collect will be added to RMBO's Avian Data Center, available through our Web site, www.rmbo.org.

Providing these data at a variety of spatial scales will allow biologists and land managers to compare state, local and regional information about bird distributions, densities and population trends.



Jason Beason, RMBO's Special Monitoring Projects Coordinator, and field technician Eva Crane collect bird-population data in North Park in Jackson County, Colo. Photo by Kelly Hutton

Upcoming Events

Chautauqua lecture series

Admission: \$5, with part of the proceeds going to RMBO. Tickets are available at the Chautauqua box office or online at www.chautauqua.com

July 20: "The West Mexico Connection," Arvind Panjabi, International Program director

Aug. 10: "Banded Birds Stories; How We are Connected," Seth Gallagher, Stewardship Division director; Jennifer Blakesley, RMBO biometrician; Tammy VerCauteren, RMBO executive director

Barr Lake Appreciation Day

July 18: A full day of activities (free for volunteers) to celebrate and enjoy this haven for birds, including a clean-up of areas around the lake. If you'd like to join RMBO staff in helping out, contact Kacie Ehrenberger at 303-659-4348, ext. 16, or e-mail at kacie.ehrenberger@rmbo.org.

BBQ with the Birds

Aug. 29: RMBO's annual picnic and open house at the Old Stone House on the northern tip of Barr Lake. Admission: \$10 RMBO members; \$12 nonmembers; children 10 and under, free; children 11-17, half price. See story on Page 5.

Fall Bird Fest

Sept. 12: Celebrate the fall migration at Barr Lake State Park's 11th annual Bird Fest. For details, go to the park's Web site, <http://parks.state.co.us/Parks/BarrLake>. If you'd like to join RMBO staff and volunteers to help with activities, contact Kacie Ehrenberger at 303-659-4348, ext. 16, or e-mail at kacie.ehrenberger@rmbo.org.

Northern Colorado Birding Fair

Sept. 26: A fun day of bird-related activities, including games, bird walks and presentations with live birds. Again, RMBO will be on hand with a booth and activities. If you'd like to help, contact Kacie Ehrenberger at 303-659-4348, ext. 16, or e-mail at kacie.ehrenberger@rmbo.org.

BBQ with the Birds Bigger and Better Than Ever

This year's celebration of avian life, educational activities and outdoor eating will be more fun than ever. Scheduled for Saturday, Aug. 29, at the Old Stone House on Barr Lake, RMBO's annual BBQ with the Birds will have something to interest and entertain everyone. A complete schedule of events is included on our Web site, but here are some highlights:

The day will begin at 7 a.m. with the first of three guided bird walks and the opening of our banding station near the Barr Lake State Park Visitors Center. This year, in an effort to reach out to our neighboring community of Brighton, which is 38 percent Hispanic, we've added a bird walk for Spanish speakers, led by RMBO International Program Director Arvind Panjabi. Fun activities and games for kids and adults are planned between 9 a.m. and 2:45 p.m. The day will include a demonstration on making your backyard a great place for birds and presentations by RMBO biologists about their work.

You can learn about Whitey, the Steller's Jay during RMBO member and wildlife photographer Bill Schmoker's keynote address about bird coloration, and meet some live raptors up close and personal during a presentation by the Raptor Education Center. Back by popular demand, Boulder author and illustrator Susie Mottashed will present beginner's and advanced field sketching workshops. The workshops are free, but preregistration is required for Sketching Birds in the Field I and II; go to www.rmbo.org and follow the picnic link from the home page or call Karri Claridge at 303-659-4348, ext. 12.

You'll also have a chance to pick up some terrific items (such as a half-day rafting trip and birding items) at our silent auction. Your purchases will help support RMBO's education programs.

And, of course, there will be great food. The grills will be fired up at about 11:30, and the line for the lunch buffet will form at noon.

The cost for the picnic is \$10 for RMBO members, \$12 for nonmembers; kids 10 and under get in free; tickets for kids between the ages of 11 and 17 are half price. To make your reservation, go to www.rmbo.org or call Karri Claridge. We hope to see many of our members and supporters at the picnic; this is your chance to meet the folks at RMBO who are conducting the surveys and research.



Grants and Awards

Grant funding is critical to the work of RMBO biologists and field staff. The following grants and awards were received in the first six months of 2009:

- Adams County: \$5,000 for Bird Camp.
- Air Academy High School Kadets: \$500 community service grant for the Chico Basin Ranch Fall Banding Station.
- Intermountain West Joint Venture: \$15,000 for habitat tracking and Private Lands Wildlife Biologist coordination.
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation: \$150,000 for the "Enhancing Bird Habitat on Private Land in Colorado" project. Funds are matched 1:1 by RMBO.
- Nebraska Environmental Trust: \$74,496 for developing a Kimball County Conservation Cooperative, and a Mountain Plover Nest Marking Awareness and Education program in Nebraska.
- Nebraska Game and Parks Commission: \$24,825 for writing manuscripts and best management practices manuals for several at-risk bird species.
- Playa Lakes Joint Venture: \$17,600 capacity grant for helping develop and implement the Kimball County Conservation Cooperative; \$20,000 for Prairie and Wetlands Focus Area and Private Lands Wildlife Biologist coordination.
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: \$99,564.04 for a cooperative project with Colorado State University, Colorado Division of Wildlife, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Playa Lakes Joint Venture and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, "Advancing the Protection of Playa Wetlands Through Effective Buffers." The project will focus on the eastern Colorado/western Nebraska regions of the Playa Lakes Joint Venture.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: \$244,351 for the "U.S.-Mexico Grassland Bird Conservation VII" project, with a partner match of \$888,625. The project will focus on conserving habitat for high-priority and declining grassland birds in western North America.
- U.S. Forest Service International Program: \$30,000 for production of a Spanish-language Chihuahuan grassland range-management manual for wintering grassland birds, and support for three workshops to promote use of the manual and other conservation tools and programs.

Burn School (from page 1)

thumbs up to get outside to get over fire equipment and more safety.

John showed all of the typical equipment one should have and know how to use when doing controlled burns, including proper clothing, drip torches, fire engine (with water and hoses), and swatters. He reminded the school participants of the ignition techniques they'd been taught and allowed them to practice. Within 30 minutes, the inside of the track was a charred field. The school had a beautiful green track field by May.

School attendees also were able to learn about other issues associated with prescribed burning in Colorado. The school was kick-started with an invigorating presentation on the legal considerations for prescribed burning in Colorado by Toby Gass, a doctoral student at Colorado State University and author of "Reducing Barriers to Use of Prescribed Fire in Privately Owned Forests," a Colorado Forest Restoration Institute and CSU publication.

Other presentations covered fire's ecological effects on vegetation, animals, soil, air, water and cultural resources; how the NRCS can help landowners plan burns, provide technical expertise and help with the approval process for prescribed burns; and a discussion of the misconceptions about what type of controlled burns require smoke permits. A theme that grew out of the presentations was, "Communicate with others." While that may seem like a trivial thing, working with the many agencies, from county sheriff to health departments to local fire departments and neighbors, can make or break the success of a prescribed burn.

It is the goal of RMBO's Stewardship Division to continue to arrange opportunities for agency employees and

landowners and managers to learn more. Two prescribed burns are planned for this coming fall/winter in hopes to get the community involved and to have demonstration sites for future field days.

Many thanks are extended to RMBO's CIG partners who assisted with planning for the school, including The Nature Conservancy, Branson-Trinchera Conservation District, Baca County Conservation District, NRCS employees from the Springfield and La Junta offices, and the Kim Volunteer Fire Department. Special thanks go to Harold Unwin, who was especially instrumental in making arrangements for the burn school.



Workshop attendees practice igniting fires with drip torches inside the Kim School track (Stewardship Biologist Laura Quattrini on the right, workshop participant on the left).

A New Flock of Ideas for the Stone House

Some things you just don't want to leave open for interpretation. Instead, you want to interpret them for people so they're getting accurate information and having their curiosity piqued. A good share of the work of the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory is interpreting scientific information—along with general information—about birds and their habitats and presenting that information to the public.

Garnering ideas for using the Old Stone House to perform those tasks better was one of the primary goals when RMBO hosted a course for interpretation professionals, presented by the National Association for Interpretation June 1-5. The not-for-profit organization provides training, certification and resources to people involved in the interpretation of natural and cultural heritage resources in settings such as parks, zoos, museums, nature centers, aquaria, botanical gardens and historical sites.

Students in the course included RMBO's executive director, Tammy VerCauteren, two board members, two staff members and a volunteer. In addition, 12 professionals from across the country, another from Canada and a naturalist guide from

Panama spent the week at the Stone House.

The course was intense. The students spent their mornings in class, learning how to create an interpretive plan, and their afternoons in small groups, developing a plan specifically for the Stone House. They often were hard at work until well after 9 p.m.

The course culminated in the presentation of five plans for enhancing the use of the Stone House. Ideas ranged from a name change (to the Bird House) to improving access and the grounds of the house (adding trails, a backyard birding center and better outdoor gathering areas, for example) to turning the library into an attractive, intimate setting for small-group scientific discussions and meetings.

All the ideas are being reviewed by the RMBO facilities committee and will be discussed next by the board of directors. Steve Deitemeyer, who chairs the facilities committee, hopes to have a plan for moving ahead with some improvements to the grounds of the Stone House soon. As a participant in the interpretive planning course, he's still full of creative energy.



Nada Martin, a Brighton elementary school teacher, explains part of her group's plan for the Stone House grounds. Photo by Kacie Ehbrenberger

Staff Migrations

Jenny Berven joined the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory in February 2009 as the Northern Goshawk Project coordinator. Stationed in the Fort Collins office, she will work with the U.S. Forest Service and Wyoming Department of Game & Fish to implement Goshawk surveys throughout the Central Rockies and Southwest. Jenny received her Bachelor of Science degree in wildlife biology in 2003 and her Master of Science degree in biomedical sciences in 2007, both from Colorado State University. Since moving to Colorado, she has worked and volunteered for a variety of agencies, researching multiple avian species including raptors, waterfowl and upland game birds. Most of her research experiences have concentrated on how diseases, such as West Nile virus and avian influenza, affect individual birds and avian populations. As a hobby, Jenny has volunteered for the Rocky Mountain Raptor Program for several years and values the opportunity to interact with birds of prey requiring rehabilitation.



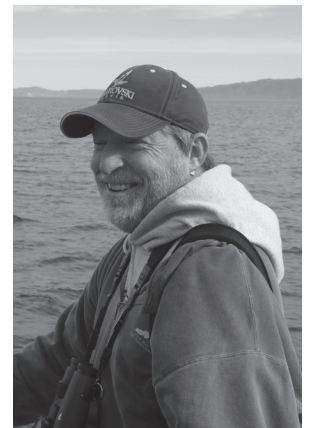
Mindy Harmon joined RMBO as the new environmental education intern in May. While growing up in Utah, Mindy gained a love and respect for nature. After high school, Mindy moved to Wisconsin to attend Northland College and majored in outdoor education. After two years there, she transferred to Colorado State University, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in environmental communication. Mindy feels lucky to have found such a great organization to work with and is looking forward to sparking an interest for birds in many RMBO visitors.



Jora Rehm-Lorber joined the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory in April 2009. She will work with the Regional Bird Monitoring Program out of the Fort Collins office and is currently the Wyoming crew leader. Jora graduated from The Evergreen State College in 2003 with a Bachelor of Science degree in ecology and received her Masters of Environmental Studies in ornithology in 2009. Jora moved to Colorado from California, where she worked as an avian field biologist for the Point Reyes Bird Observatory; the University of California, Berkeley; and the Tahoe National Forest. Her graduate work focused on the design and implementation of an avian monitoring program for her college's forest reserve. She continues to be passionate about the value of long-term monitoring to conservation efforts.



Tony Leukering has conducted and worked on a wide variety of field ornithology projects across the country, particularly serving as RMBO's monitoring coordinator for 11 years, and designing and running the massive Monitoring Colorado's Birds program. Tony is now back with RMBO as a research associate. In addition, he is currently coordinating for Geo-Marine a large-scale effort to obtain baseline data on birds found 0.5-20 miles off New Jersey's coast in anticipation of the construction of offshore wind-power projects. Tony has strong interests in bird migration and identification, with his latter interests being on display through his role as quizmaster for both the Colorado Field Ornithologists (www.cfo-link.org) and American Birding Association (www.americanbirding.org) online photo quizzes.



RMBO Board Wants More Members

The RMBO Board of Directors would like to add several new members as it works to better serve the organization. Candidates should have a strong interest in wildlife or ecosystem conservation, preferably with an interest in birds. The RMBO board meets quarterly, and committees meet at least once between meetings of the full board. If you are interested in service on the board, or know someone who should serve, please contact Warren Taylor, chair of the Governance Committee, at 303-287-7621 or taylorwg@comcast.net; or Chuck Hundertmark, board president, at 303-604-0531 or cahmark@comcast.net



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