

Embargoed until August 25, 2026

A New Tool Puts Thousands of Maps to Work for Grassland Birds

Bird Conservancy of the Rockies and partners launch *SPARRO*, putting powerful conservation information directly into the hands of grassland managers working across the Great Plains

FORT COLLINS, Colo., August 25, 2026

What if conservationists working across the Great Plains – could carry thousands of maps showing where grassland birds are struggling, what threats they face, and where conservation could make the greatest difference – in their pockets? Today, they can. Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, the Central Grassland Bird Working Group, and partners across the Central Grasslands are launching SPARRO (Spatial Prioritization for Avian Recovery and Rangeland Opportunity), a new interactive web tool that brings a vast collection of grassland bird and habitat information together in one place and makes it easier to turn science into conservation action.

“SPARRO is more than a mapping application, it’s an iPod moment for grassland conservation,” said Chris Latimer, co-chair of the Central Grassland Bird Working Group. “We’re putting thousands of maps in managers’ pockets so they can make better-informed decisions. It also provides a strong foundation for conservation planning that facilitates coordination and collaboration among the many organizations, businesses, and communities living and working across this vast landscape.”

And those decisions are increasingly urgent. Since 1970, North America’s grassland birds have declined by more than 70%, among the steepest losses of any group of birds on the continent. Their disappearance is also a warning sign for the grasslands that support wildlife, ranching, tribes, and the rural communities whose livelihoods depend on these grasslands and working lands. We already are at a tipping point and we need to collaboratively work to increase available acres of grasslands on the landscape.

SPARRO grew out of the Central Grasslands Roadmap Initiative (CGRI), a partnership working to address the biggest challenges facing grasslands across the region. Its Central Grassland Bird Working Group saw a critical gap: conservationists lacked consistent, reliable information on grassland bird population health, and where limited time and resources could make the greatest difference.

Over the last three years, scientists, economists, and conservation partners worked together to close that gap. “This is a working landscape and to recover grassland birds we need integrative solutions that can work for both birds and people,” said Brandt Ryder, Chief Scientist at Bird Conservancy of the Rockies and co-chair of the working group. “This is a huge biome that is essential for food and fiber production, yet the conservation

community is perpetually understaffed and underfunded.” “We need to make the best possible decisions with the best available information and resources we have right now,” added Maggie Hanna, Director of the Central Grasslands Roadmap Initiative.

SPARRO turns that knowledge into actionable information conservationists can use for decision making. The tool brings together some of the best available information on grassland bird populations, habitat, and threats in one easy-to-use resource. Users can explore the population health of 17 grassland bird species of conservation concern, see where pressures such as conversion to cropland and the spread of woody plants are greatest, and compare conservation opportunities across the landscape without having to piece together many separate datasets and maps.

SPARRO was developed by the Central Grassland Bird Working Group with conservation partners across the Central Grasslands. By putting shared science and landscape information in one place, SPARRO gives conservationists across the Great Plains a common decision-making framework. “We believe SPARRO can help change the trajectory of grassland conservation,” said Ryder. “By showing us where the need is greatest and where conservation can have the greatest impact, we can work together to put limited resources where they can move the needle the most to support birds, ranching and grass-based communities, and healthy, resilient grasslands.”

Conservationists, partners, and the public can learn more about SPARRO and begin exploring the application at <https://www.birdconservancy.org/sparro>.

About Bird Conservancy of the Rockies

Bird Conservancy of the Rockies is a Colorado-based nonprofit that works to conserve birds and their habitats through an integrated approach of science, education, and land stewardship. Our work extends from the Rockies to the Great Plains, Mexico, and beyond. Together, we are improving native bird populations, the land, and the lives of people. We envision a world where birds are forever abundant, contributing to healthy landscapes, and inspiring human curiosity and love of nature. Visit <https://www.birdconservancy.org> for more information.

Media Contact

Jacob Job

Senior Director of Engagement & Development
Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
Jacob.job@birdconservancy.org
970-482-1707 x30

Press kit materials included:

PDF of release: SPARRO_PressRelease_BirdConservancy_20260825.pdf

Word Doc of release: SPARRO_PressRelease_BirdConservancy_20260825.docx

SPARRO logo: SPARRO_20260818.png

Bird Conservancy of the Rockies logo: BCR_Vertical_Slogan_FullColor_1.png

Central Grasslands Roadmap Initiative logo: Central Grasslands Roadmap.png

Images:

SPARRO screenshots:

SPARRO_17Species_GrasslandPrioritization.png

Caption: **SPARRO Grassland Opportunity Map.** SPARRO allows users to explore priority areas for grassland conservation and restoration based on the needs of multiple bird species and threats including agricultural conversion and woody plant encroachment. Users can directly examine the total area needed to meet 2026 Partners in Flight population targets and how consistently individual areas are identified as priorities across a range of conservation targets. Credit: Bird Conservancy of the Rockies/SPARRO

SPARRO_GrasslandPrioritization_CustomPolygonAnalysis.png

Caption: **SPARRO Custom Analysis Opportunities.** SPARRO allows users to examine overlapping conservation priorities for 17 grassland bird species and analyze areas of interest across the Central Grasslands. Credit: Bird Conservancy of the Rockies/SPARRO

Grassland bird photos:

ThickBilledLongspur_BrandtRyder.jpg

Caption: **Thick-billed Longspur (*Rhynchophanes mccownii*).** The Thick-billed Longspur has reached a 'Red-alert tipping point' under the Road to Recovery initiative. Long-term monitoring by Bird Conservancy of the Rockies and its partners provides critical information about the status and trends of conservation-reliant grassland birds like this one, while tools like SPARRO help translate that science into decisions about where conservation can make the greatest difference. Credit: Brandt Ryder/Bird Conservancy of the Rockies.

Partners: Central Grasslands Roadmap Initiative, <https://www.grasslandsroadmap.org/>

Website URLs:

Bird Conservancy: birdconservancy.org

Central Grasslands Roadmap Initiative: grasslandsroadmap.org

Social media handles:

Bird Conservancy: Facebook: @birdconservancy Instagram: @birdconservancyrockies

Central Grasslands Roadmap Initiative: Facebook: Central Grasslands Roadmap Initiative or facebook.com/61564477630978 Instagram: @central_grasslands_roadmap