



PRIMARY SOURCE



Black Hills banders capture owls – and a 9-year-old’s attention



Photos by Nancy Drilling, RMBO

Biologists Nancy Drilling and Britta Schielke banded 85 migrating Northern Saw-whet Owls in the Black Hills of South Dakota last October. This group of banded owls is the first step in a long-term study of these little-known birds’ migration patterns and local conservation status.

With continued banding over the next few years, these Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory researchers also expect to understand the region’s role in mid-continent owl migration.

As part of a continental network of banding stations called Project OwlNet, this study will contribute to continent-wide owl population monitoring and conservation planning.

Nancy will make a presentation on the Saw-whet Owl project at RMBO’s annual BBQ for the Birds on August 25.



Owl banding makes impression on visiting dad and son

In addition to collecting scientific data, the biologists shared close-up looks at the Saw-whet Owls with adults and children who visited the banding stations, including Ethan Tussing and his father Chad, a wildlife educator with South Dakota Department of Game, Fish, and Parks. They shared their impressions of their visit:

Ethan (age 9): “One of the things I learned was the owls we caught were small and white. Every time I went out to the nets we caught an owl. They came into the nets because we had a thing that sounded like other owls. This is something funny: we put the owls in empty juice containers! We measured and weighed them and then we let them go.”

His dad Chad: “My oldest son Ethan has always been in love with animals and the outdoors. I was excited to involve him in a real wildlife research project, so I volunteered us to help with the Saw-whet Owl banding. Ethan loved the opportunity to help check nets, take measurements and release the birds back into the wild. He even kept his own notes and data record of the owls we captured that evening. I can’t help but feel proud in seeing one of my children take as much enjoyment in learning about the outdoor world as I have.”



Photos by Jeff Birek, RMBO

Decoys to attract birds for study in Rocky Mountain National Park

Wooden decoys of a Western Tanager and a Swainson’s Thrush (above) will play a role in a study that begins in Rocky Mountain National Park this summer.

Two Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory biologists will use the decoys to attract birds on which to attach geolocators that will track their migration routes, stopovers and destinations. This information will help identify important areas for focusing conservation efforts.

These two species were chosen for the study due to their size (geolocators are not available for birds weighing less than 19 grams), their declining population trends and the likelihood that the birds could be recaptured in consecutive years.

This project follows successful use of the lightweight, light-level geolocators for research on small birds, including RMBO’s recent discovery of Brazil as the winter destination of Colorado’s Black Swifts.

Jack Whiting, a Friend-level RMBO supporter and former board member made the decoys and donated them to the project.



New Environmental Learning Center welcomes busloads of students

“It is so much fun having kids coming to the Old Stone House — finally!” gushes Kacie Ehrenberger, RMBO’s director of education. After years of planning, fund-raising, digging, building and cleaning, she and her staff and volunteer naturalists are elated to welcome students to the Environmental Learning Center (ELC). In nine days during the first half of April more than 500 kids engaged in programs and activities at the Center.

The staff’s joy is echoed by the teacher who sent this email following a recent program for a Denver-area school:

“You have no idea what a tremendous job the RMBO instructors have done with our elementary students. They had an absolutely wonderful time learning and

experiencing science from a perspective that is rarely seen by low-income students ... I can’t express a big enough “THANK YOU” for taking this on and doing such a remarkable job.”

More improvements are on the way for the ELC. A new community educator, partly funded by generous Friends of Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, will join the staff in May. Also, the Adams County Open Space board has recommended granting funds for staff and volunteer support, program scholarships and additional site improvements, including an outdoor vault restroom, a park host site, shade for the amphitheater and grove/prairie restoration.

Mission in action: Going all out(side)

By Tammy VerCauteren, Executive Director

Spring! The birds are back or en route, our yards are filling with their songs, Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory biologists are heading out to survey birds across the mountains and plains, and our new Environmental Learning Center (ELC) is abuzz with students, staff and volunteers.



My spirit soared as I arrived at the ELC in April during one of the school field trips and saw buses in the parking lot and scores of children all around the Old Stone House. They were exploring the prairie, learning about water conservation, discovering how birds are engineered and engaging all their senses in the natural world.

Talking about our mission is inspiring, but seeing it in action is beyond words. I invite you to take advantage of the abundant opportunities to join the action and learn more about birds, nature and conservation (see below and page 3). And I challenge you to get yourself and your kids, grandkids, parents and friends outside — it revitalizes the mind, body and spirit.



Visitor Aspen Potter holds a Warbling Vireo as it prepares to fly away after being banded at the Chico Basin Banding Station.

Photo courtesy of Sarah Driscoll

Banding Together

Watching research in action at a bird-banding station is a great way to spend a morning. Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory wildlife biologists capture resident and migrating birds in mist nets, place bands on their legs, and measure and weigh them before releasing them back into the wild. Teachers and others can arrange group visits.

Chatfield Banding Station

Open April 28-June 3, 8 a.m. - noon, weather permitting, (station closed May 18 & 19), near the Audubon Center on the southwest side of Chatfield State Park in Littleton, Colo. Registration is not required for individuals. Schedule school visits and field trips at education@denveraudubon.org or 303-973-9530. See www.denveraudubon.org.

Chico Basin Ranch Banding Station

Monday – Saturday, April 23-May 19 at Chico Basin Ranch, 35 mi. southeast of Colorado Springs. Reservations required. Contact Katie Miller at 970-310-0852, katie@chicobasinranch.com or Lee Derr at 719-634-2305 or 719-338-8651. See www.chicobasinranch.com.

Fall Banding Stations

Banding stations operate at four locations in Colorado and two in Nebraska on various dates from late August to mid-October. Watch for information at www.rmbo.org.

Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory 2012 Events & Activities

May

- 12: Front Range Birding Co. Bird Festival, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m., NE corner, Kipling & C470, Littleton, Colo. Visit RMBO's booth.
- 12: Chico Days, Chico Basin Ranch near Colo. Springs. Information at www.chicobasinranch.com.
- 18-20: Colorado Field Ornithologists Convention, Trinidad. See www.cfo-link.org.
- 19: Field trip to Briggsdale/Pawnee National Grasslands led by RMBO Stewardship Director Seth Gallagher with Legacy Land Trust and Wild Birds Unlimited of Fort Collins. Info/register by May 16 at francynce.debaug@rmbo.org or 970-482-1707 ext. 32. \$20 includes lunch & transportation.
- 19: Wildcat Hills Wildlands Day, 6:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. at Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area, just south of Gering, Neb. Info at 308-220-0052.



The Chico Basin Ranch Banding Station kicked off its 2012 season by capturing and banding three Long-eared Owls on April 24.

- 24 & 26: Songbirds Up Close & Personal, two-part experience: May 24, 6:30-8:30 p.m., behind-the-scenes at Denver Museum of Nature & Science. May 26, 7:30 a.m., Chatfield Bird Banding Station. RMBO or DMNS members \$25; non-members \$30. RSVP: andrew.doll@dmns.org or 303-370-8387.
- 31: Chatfield State Park Birding Excursion with RMBO and Denver-area Wild Birds Unlimited stores. Learn to identify birds beyond your backyard with the help of experts. RSVP at francynce.debaug@rmbo.org or 970-482-1707 ext. 32 by 5-28.

June

- 2: 7 a.m. Poudre Canyon birding hike with RMBO biologist Jeff Birek. Meet at Young's Gulch parking lot 13 miles up Highway 14 from Ted's Place near Fort Collins, Colo.
- 9: National Get Outdoors Day, 10 a.m.-3:30 p.m., City Park, Denver. Join RMBO at the Junior Ranger Camp.
- 15-16: Overnight in North Park. Tour of a working ranch and visits to high-country birding hot spots. Vans from Fort Collins and/or Denver. Info/registration by June 7 at francynce.debaug@rmbo.org or 970-482-1707 ext. 32

July

- 18: Pagosa Springs, Colo. RMBO Private Lands Wildlife Biologist Martin Moses talk on wildlife and habitat at Weminuche Audubon Society.
- 21: Durango, Colo. RMBO Private Lands Wildlife Biologist Martin Moses talk on wildlife and habitat at For the Birds, 1560 E. 2nd Ave.
- 28: Eat Like a Bird Dinner. Watch for details at www.rmbo.org.

August

- 16: RMBO Wing Ding: Have a Brew for the Birds, 5 -7 p.m. Avogadro's Number, Fort Collins, Colo. Music, wings, fun. (Date tentative - check www.rmbo.org)
- Late August to mid-October: Bird banding stations, various locations. See story page 2.
- 25: 7 a.m. - 2 p.m. RMBO Annual BBQ for the Birds at the Old Stone House Environmental Learning Center. Watch www.rmbo.org for information.**

Summer camp fun for ages 4 - 12

This summer Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory is offering entertaining, educational day camps for youths ages 4 to 12. Camps are at RMBO's Old Stone House Environmental Learning Center at Barr Lake State Park near Brighton, Colo. Information on costs, registration and scholarships is available by contacting Emily Snode at emily.snode@rmbo.org or 303-659-4348 ext. 11.



- Young Ecologists camp for ages 11 - 12 is June 25 - 29, 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. With binoculars, spotting scopes, hikes and games, campers discover the secrets of Colorado habitats.
- Young Naturalists, ages 4 - 5, gather Tuesdays in July from 9 to 11 a.m. engage their senses to appreciate Colorado's natural habitat through hands-on discovery, crafts, games and hikes.
- Nature Investigators, ages 6 & 7, will enjoy hikes, scavenger hunts and games each Monday & Thursday in July, 9 a.m. - noon, as they explore a different nature topic each week.
- Habitat Explorers meet Wednesdays from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. in July. These 8 to 10 year olds will explore habitats that make wonderful homes for Colorado wildlife.

On the Wing camp for teens will not be held this year, but will return next summer.



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3636 S. College Ave., Fort Collins, Colo.
7200 Montgomery Blvd. NE, Albuquerque, N.M.

And at: For The Birds, 1560 E. 2nd Ave., Durango, Colo.



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Please make check payable to Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory and mail with this form to:
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Chip in at www.rmbo.org
 or call 303-659-4348 ext. 17, or e-mail rachel.bock@rmbo.org

THANK YOU for supporting bird and habitat conservation!
 Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

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Wood Duck family enjoys March swim at Barr Lake near Brighton, Colo., home of RMBO's Environmental Learning Center.

Photo courtesy of Dawn Wilson



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The Primary Source logo with a baby Killdeer and a pelican's primary feather 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: Victoria Collier