

THE PRIMARY SOURCE



Bird
Conservancy
of the Rockies

NEWSLETTER FOR BIRD CONSERVANCY OF THE ROCKIES | SPRING/SUMMER 2016 | NUMBER 49

The Accidental Naturalist

...or, what could happen when you take your granddaughter to bird camp!

by Cynde Barnes, Volunteer Naturalist and NAI-Certified Interpretive Guide

Last July, I started an unexpected journey as a Volunteer Naturalist that began by taking my 3-year-old granddaughter to Bird Conservancy's Wild Nestling Day Camp. Immediately, I could tell this was a quality organization, staffed by amazing people. As a lifelong lover of nature and birds, with time in my life to volunteer, I was inspired to go further.

Bird Conservancy staff and volunteers welcomed me with open arms. I started the following fall by assisting with the Bird Banding station at Barr Lake State Park, and with in-classroom education programs. I found my "nesting" spot in Bird Tales, an adult program for residents in memory care facilities. After that, I was ready to engage in the full Volunteer Naturalist training, which enabled me to "fly" on my own.



Cynde Barnes seen here with fellow Volunteer Naturalist trainees Diane White, Erica Bean, Aileen Palma. Photo by Peggy Watson

Naturalist training is an amazingly in-depth program that emphasizes Bird Conservancy's use of science, stewardship and education to further its mission. Environmental Education is new to me, and helping kids and adults explore their environment with the ultimate goal of creating a more informed community was challenging. I enjoy helping people to truly connect with the natural world, without telling them what, or how, to think.

If I can enrich the lives of those around me by cultivating Bird Conservancy's mission, I feel I will have paid forward the opportunities afforded me by the Volunteer Naturalist program. Bird Conservancy of the Rockies staff's own dedication and commitment to the mission of Bird Conservancy has ignited a bonfire in my own heart and as the song says... "it only takes a spark to get the fire going" in the hearts of those around us.



2016 Nelda Gamble Award

Congratulations (and THANK YOU!) to our volunteer-of-the-year award recipients **Jan and Bruce Snyder**, who were honored with the award at our annual BBQ for the Birds on May 21.

Jan and Bruce have donated almost 400 hours of their time to the Bald Eagle Watch program monitoring nests, preparing datasheets and sharing news and updates with BEW coordinators and Colorado Parks and Wildlife. They've driven hundreds of miles and located 7 new nests in 2015! Bruce also donated his considerable technical skills to create a new database for the program. Thank you again Jan and Bruce for everything you do!

The **Nelda Gamble Award** recognizes outstanding service as a volunteer. Nelda started the Bald Eagle Watch program as CBO/RMBO was beginning 26 years ago. Previous winners of the award are: Paul Slingsby, Amber Tyler, Cindi Kelly, Dale Jones, May McCoy, Rachel Dunbar and Steve Fisher.

THE PRIMARY SOURCE

The Primary Source is the member newsletter of Bird Conservancy of the Rockies

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Visit www.birdconservancy.org for staff list.

Main Offices:

14500 Lark Bunting Lane
Brighton, CO 80603
(303) 659-4348
230 Cherry Street, Fort Collins, CO 80521
(970) 482-1707
330243 County Road H, Minatare, NE 69356
(308) 783-1019

The Primary Source refers to a bird's primary feathers which power their flight. Our members, Friends, volunteers and partners are the primary source of Bird Conservancy's power to accomplish its mission to conserve birds and their habitats.

Editing and design:

William Bevil, Communications Manager

Go Paperless

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From the Director: The Journey Continues

We're all on a journey. Our birds have completed their annual journey north looking for healthy habitats to breed.

Our organization is on a journey, moving towards three decades of conserving birds and their habitats; and I have been on a journey towards becoming a more effective leader through my participation in the Institute for Leaders in Development Program (ILD).

ILD was designed to help leaders grow, professionally, as we learn more about best practices in philanthropy. Supported by the Denver, Boettcher and Anschutz

Family Foundations and the University of Denver, ILD helps participants learn how we are wired, how we think and behave and where we are in terms of emotional intelligence. The 360 degree view of myself, and the organization, that ILD provided will be critical for moving the organization forward for the next 30 years.

A few highlights include receiving guidance from experts in financial health, building relationships with supporters, creating development plans and planned giving. They helped us craft individualized strategies for our unique organizations. Also, each participant was assigned a mentor. Mine was Gordon Smith, with National Jewish Health. Gordon has challenged my thinking and helped me become stronger, both personally and professionally. I am grateful to have worked with Gordon. To build on lessons learned from ILD, our organization also benefitted from mentoring. Ellie Cohen, with Point Blue Conservation Science, visited us this spring, inspiring our Board and Staff and helping us chart a course for our organization's future.

As you read this, I'm at the tail end of my journey, having presented on my capstone project to my peers and the organizations they represent. My presentation builds on the organization's first development plan that our new Development Director, Sonja Macys, and I created.

While my program has ended, Bird Conservancy's journey has just begun. We've already made an investment in upgrading our financial management systems and infrastructure. Having accounting staff do the accounting allows our scientists, educators and biologists to focus on what they do best- making our mission happen.



The ILD Class of 2016

It is an honor to be leading such a dynamic organization. I look forward to making our conservation outcomes more powerful and known more broadly; advancing our strategic plan to guide us for the next 5 years; and making our work relevant and motivational both to current members, donors, staff and board and those we have yet to meet.

I would love to check in with you this year. Let's visit about why you are invested in Bird Conservancy. It is members like you that make our critical work possible; just imagine what we could do with more supporters like you! Together we make connecting people, birds and land for a healthy world possible.

- Tammy VerCauteren
Executive Director

Promising News for the Aplomado Falcons of the Chihuahuan Desert

by Greg Levandoski, Habitat Program Manager, International



Photo by Denis Perez

Aplomado Falcons (*Falco femoralis*) once ranged across the northern Chihuahuan Desert in Arizona, New Mexico and Texas, as well as in the Tamaulipan shrub-lands of coastal Texas. They vanished by the 1930s with agricultural expansion and degradation of grasslands as the suspected causes. In the 1990s a population of Aplomados was discovered in the Valles Centrales ("Central Valleys") grasslands of central Chihuahua, Mexico.

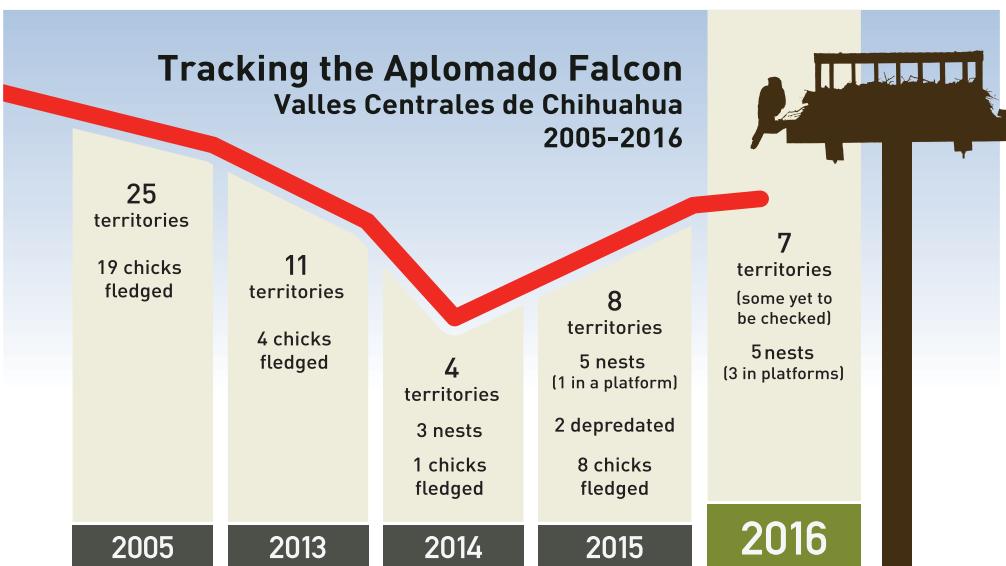
The Peregrine Fund and the Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua Profauna began monitoring Chihuahua's Aplomado Falcons in 1996. In 2013, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, together with local partners IMC-Vida Silvestre (IMC-VS), the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León and the Universidad Estatal de Sonora continued the work. In 2005, 25 territories were still occupied, however in recent years that has dropped to as few as four.

To improve habitat for declining migratory grassland birds, which are the Aplomado's prey base, we are working in Mexico with IMC-VS and other partners to support landowners seeking additional financial resources to start grassland improvement projects. The relationships with private landowners are backed by 15 year collaborative agreements and guided by jointly developed management plans that transition ranches to more sustainable grazing systems. The changes are costly and require redistributing water lines, adding water storage capacity and modifying fences.

Our ranch-level monitoring of grassland bird communities and habitat conditions informs land management and measures the effects of our conservation efforts on bird populations. Our goal has been to support five successful breeding pairs of Aplomado Falcons and enroll 500,000 acres by 2020. We are well on our way there with 97,000 acres enrolled in 2015.

These efforts are about finding the right balance that supports sustainable cattle production alongside conservation of the grassland ecosystem. The results benefit not only Aplomado Falcons, but all migratory grassland birds whose populations are declining faster than any other group of birds in North America.

Tracking the Aplomado Falcon Valles Centrales de Chihuahua 2005-2016



The Valles Centrales, located midway between El Paso, TX and Chihuahua City, is the largest Grassland Priority Conservation Area (GPCA) in the Chihuahuan Desert. These grasslands are home to an endangered Mexican population of pronghorn as well as a large suite of declining grassland birds. The area provides critical habitat for up to 50% of all Baird's Sparrows and Chestnut-collared Longspurs and up to 25% of all Sprague's Pipits.

Hundreds of thousands of acres of these high quality valley-bottom grasslands have been destroyed by a revolution of agricultural modernization and expansion that started in 2004. Sixty-three percent of the valley bottoms in the Valles Centrales GPCA are now occupied by agricultural fields whose long-term sustainability is doubtful given the over-exploitation of local aquifers.

Lack of prey, nesting sites, drownings in stock tanks, as well as depredation by Great Horned Owls and ravens are major causes of low reproductive rates. Our partnership is working to improve habitat to support prey populations, to mitigate risks from water tanks and to provide nesting sites that protect the falcons from predators.

Since 2013, we have placed 43 nesting platforms and 94 stock tank ladders in current, historic and potential Aplomado territories. The efforts are paying off. IMC-VS reports that of the five nests this year, three pairs used platforms we installed. The barred entrances of these platforms protect falcon nestlings from Great Horned Owl depredation. Stock tank ladders benefit many raptors, other birds and a variety of thirsty mammals prone to falling into deep water storage tanks. We hope that the increased use of these artificial nesting sites marks the beginning of a turn in the falcon's fortunes.

How you can help



Buy a stock tank ladder,
We'll install it!
\$79 (30 needed)



Sponsor a day of
Aplomado Falcon
nest monitoring
\$98 (8 needed)

Make a contribution online. Visit our website and click "Donate Now" in the top right. You can specify your donation go to support Aplomado Falcons.



Bird-Friendly Living Going Native

Planting a bird friendly space with Grasses and Flowers

by Amy Hahn, Pawnee Butte Seed Company

Attracting birds to a beautiful outdoor space takes a little planning and patience, but it is oh-so worth it. The key is a diversity of native plants, including grasses and forbs (flowers). A simple native mix can supply you with a beautiful, bird-friendly yard that will grow more abundant by the year.

Why natives? There are many beautiful native plants well-adapted to our climate, and using natives results in less water requirement, less additives, and less work for you! Natives can survive our fickle weather, take best advantage of our unique growing season, and thrive on a limited watering schedule. Insects (a favorite food of many birds) are also better adapted to native plants. Plus, bird species that have adapted to this region know to seek out native plants for food, shelter and nesting materials. Natives are the ideal first choice, but non-native, non-invasive plants can also provide benefits for birds. Your local nursery can help you make great choices.

Grasses and flowers often grow together in the natural environment. A diverse plantscape will bring a diversity of bird species, making for "one-stop-shopping" for birds. When birds don't have to travel to eat and build nests, they save energy for raising babies. Some great native grasses that birds love include little and big bluestem, yellow indiangrass, Canada wildrye, buffalograss and switchgrasses—just to name a few. When choosing grasses be sure to mix cool season grasses with warm season grasses, and plant appropriate types for your elevation and precipitation ("USDA hardiness zones"). Plant grasses of various heights, and allow them to go to seed.

Forbs offer a lot of bang for your buck. They create eye-candy for us, their seeds are rich in protein, and they also attract insects that many birds love to eat! Think about the Echinacea coneflower—in the summer the beautiful blooms attract scores of pollinators, then in the fall the dry seedheads attract finches and sparrows. Again, choose flowers that grow and bloom at different times throughout the growing season, and use different colors and shapes. Sunflowers are climatologically diverse and appeal to many different birds. Other favorites in this region are asters, black-eyed Susans, and coreopsis. There are milkweed species adapted to every climate hardiness zone, and although the seed is pricey, it takes a very small amount to kick off a few great plants.

Seeds vs. Plants: Planting seed enables you to create denser stands of grasses that fill in better over time, and it's also easier on your budget. Purchasing plants from a reputable nursery costs more but shows results more quickly.

Patience, Grasshopper! One thing to know about native plants is that it often takes more than one season to get a good stand. If you opt to plant seed, be patient. Your first season will be good, but your next year's stand will be KAPOW!

Our special guest writer Amy Hahn oversees Sales and Business Development for Pawnee Butte Seed Company in Greeley, CO.

She can be reached at amy@pawneebuttessseed.com



PO Box 100, 605 25th Street
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Guide to **BACKYARD BIRDS** *of the Front Range*



Create a Backyard Bird Oasis!

Share the joy of birds and birdwatching with this essential resource for the home gardener and bird enthusiast. The book includes a detailed field guide of regional bird species as well as great tips and ideas for bird-friendly living in the home landscape.

"Wild Birds Unlimited sponsored the Guide because we realized that there were very few resources like it available to the backyard bird enthusiast. This unique and easy to read reference will appeal to the seasoned birdwatching veteran and the passionate novice just getting started. Few guides have such broad appeal."

- Scott Menough
Owner, WBU Denver



Available at the following stores:

Arvada: 7370 West 88th Ave.
Fort Collins: 3636 S. College Ave.
(303) 467-2644

Denver: 2720 S. Wadsworth
Denver, CO 80227
(303) 987-1065

Fort Collins: 3636 S. College Ave.
Ft. Collins, CO 80525
(970) 225-2557



Upcoming Events

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS



Please note that pre-registration is required for all Educational Programs. For additional information, contact Lily Hynson, Community Programs Coordinator at **(303) 659-4348 ext. 18** or lily.hynson@birdconservancy.org

Scholarships are available to help cover program fees and transportation costs. Contact us for more information.

THANK YOU to all of the generous donors who provide scholarship funds that make these life changing programs possible!

COLORADO

Barr Lake Fall Birding Festival

Saturday September 10th, 7am - 12pm
Barr Lake Nature Center
13401 Picadilly Rd, Brighton CO

Fly over to Barr Lake State Park to celebrate the fall bird migration, an experience worth sharing with others. Be entertained at this festive community event filled with food, fun, and lore, something for everyone. Admission per vehicle is a \$7 daily or annual Park Pass.

NEBRASKA

Public Days

September 3-5
Chadron Banding Station/ Sawmill Shelter House- Chadron State Park, NE

September 10
Wildcat Hills Banding Station & Nature Cntr.
Gering, NE



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SCFD supports more than 300 arts, cultural, and scientific organizations within the Denver metro area through a voter-approved penny sales tax on every \$10 purchase. SCFD directly supports our education programs, helping us connect, engage and inspire more than 36,000 people in nature. For more information: www.yesonscfd.org

VOLUNTEER TRAININGS



Are you passionate about connecting others with nature and science? Volunteer with Bird Conservancy of the Rockies and be a part of the solution for conservation!

Volunteer Orientation

Early September (exact date to be confirmed)
Environmental Learning Center
14500 Lark Bunting Lane, Brighton, CO

Learn about our organization, volunteer positions and the basics of being a Bird Conservancy volunteer.

For more information, contact Alie Mayes at alexandra.mayes@birdconservancy.org

BIRD BANDING STATIONS



Barr Lake State Park Banding Station

August 27 - Oct. 16
Open 6 days/week, closed Mondays
West side of Barr Lake State Park
13401 Picadilly Rd., Brighton, CO

Chatfield Banding Station

April 27 - June 2.
Closed May 13-14 and 30 (Memorial Day)
in partnership with Audubon Society of Greater Denver
Audubon Center on the southwest side of
Chatfield State Park, Littleton, CO

Chico Basin Ranch Banding Station

September 1 - October 1
Open Monday - Saturday
35 miles southeast of Colorado Springs, CO

Ridgway Banding Station

September 9 - 16
in partnership with Black Canyon Audubon Society
and Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Ridgway State Park, 28555 US-550
Ridgway, CO

Chadron State Park Banding Station

Aug. 29 – Oct. 15
Open Labor Day weekend
15951 Hwy. 385, Chadron, NE

Wildcat Hills Banding Station

August 29 - October 15
Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area
Gering, NE

For more information

visit www.birdconservancy.org
and search for "Bird Banding"



Connecting People, Birds and Land

OUR MISSION

Conserving birds and their habitats through science, education and land stewardship

OUR APPROACH

Our mission is advanced through sound science, achieved through empowering people, realized through stewardship and sustained through partnerships.

Our work radiates from the Rockies to the Great Plains, Mexico and beyond.

Together, we are improving native bird populations, the land and the lives of people.

Connect with Us

For the latest on our upcoming events, visit www.birdconservancy.org, sign up for our e-newsletter on our website or become a fan of Bird Conservancy of the Rockies on Facebook.



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Going Beyond Birds on Nebraska's Private Lands

by Erin Divine, Coordinating Wildlife Biologist - Chadron, NE

I joined Bird Conservancy in December 2015 working as a Coordinating Wildlife Biologist (CWB) in partnership with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC). I'm excited to be working with two great organizations, doing what I love, and in my home state.

There's lots to learn! My previous experience was on federal lands with few opportunities to work with private landowners—a big part of my new job. I spent a decade working seasonally as a Wildlife Technician for the US Forest Service in Arizona, Oregon State University in Oregon and Boise State University in Utah. This included significant field work surveying for wildlife including Spotted Owl and Northern Goshawk.

My focus today is on improving habitat that benefits both birds and other species living on private lands and biologically unique landscapes as identified in Nebraska's state wildlife action plan, *The Nebraska Natural Legacy Project*. I'm currently working with NGPC's Shelley Steffl on several state wildlife grant projects to conserve habitat



The Hoary Bat (*Lasiurus cinereus*) is the largest of Nebraska's 13 species of bats. Photo by Matt Steffl.

for another winged wonder: bats! Bats are important for ecosystem health as pollinators and eaters of mosquitos. Many bat species are in decline due to habitat loss and white-nose syndrome, a fungus.

The NGPC works with researchers to learn more about bats in Nebraska, recently purchasing detection equipment for surveying project areas. Sites are chosen near ideal bat roosting habitat such as rocky escarpments and forested areas.

Improving habitat along streams, removing invasive species and allowing native vegetation to thrive provides better foraging areas, clearer flight paths for bats and also benefits many other wildlife species, including birds.

Staff & Board Migrations



Welcome to our new Staff!



Mary Beth Albrechtsen is a Private Lands Wildlife Biologist working with landowners to conserve grassland and sage-steppe habitats in South Dakota.



Mo Corell is a Landscape Ecologist working with our International team researching the habitat needs of grassland birds across their full life cycle—and across borders, too!



Adam Green is a Biometrician working with the Science team in Fort Collins to develop large-scale, robust monitoring tools that address scientific and management needs.



T. Luke George, Science Director, is based in Fort Collins where he oversees Bird Conservancy's extensive scientific monitoring and research programs.



Kelsea Holloway is a Private Lands Wildlife Biologist specializing in wetlands and based in Greeley where she works with the NRCS Wetlands Reserve Program.



Jennifer Meyers is Education Assistant at our Environmental Learning Center in Brighton helping to deliver amazing nature-based experiences.



Matt Smith is Citizen Science Coordinator for Bald Eagle Watch and HawkWatch and works across Colorado's Front Range keeping tabs on both birds and volunteers.



Alex Van Boer is a GIS Biologist with the Science team in Fort Collins and is in the midst of wrapping up a busy summer field season.



Ty Woodward is a Private Lands Wildlife Biologist in Woodland Park, CO specializing in forest ecosystems and working with landowners on wildlife habitat improvement projects.

Welcome to our new Board Members!

Maryanne Murphy, Board Treasurer, is a certified public accountant with 30 years experience, including six as controller at Denver Museum of Nature & Science. Maryanne has a reputation for attention-to-detail and an ability to streamline organizational processes. She earned her BS in accounting from Drexel University in Philadelphia. In her leisure time, Maryanne enjoys walking tours of foreign lands and has explored Zambia, Morocco and Turkey on foot; the theater and recreational softball.



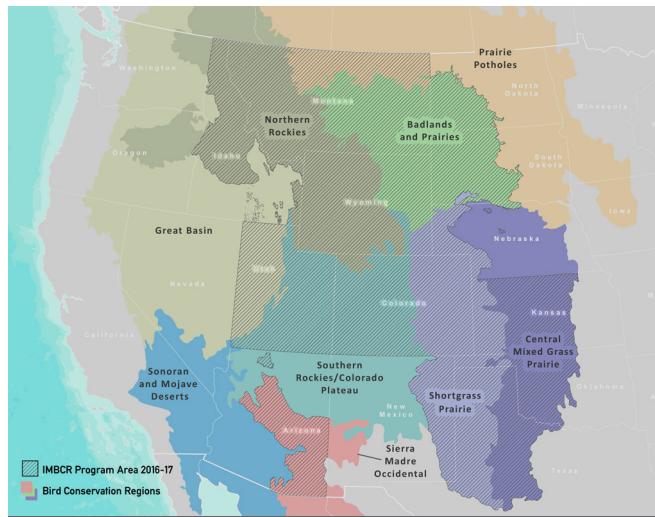
Geoff Geupel is Director of Emerging Programs and Partnerships at Point Blue Conservation Science and has extensive experience in bird banding, monitoring, private lands stewardship, fundraising and development. He is on Partners in Flight's Executive Steering & Science Committees, chairs CA Partners in Flight and the Sonoran Joint Venture Management Board, and is involved with Bird Habitat Joint Ventures and Landscape Conservation Cooperatives of the USFWS.



IMBCR Reaches Southern Climes

by Brittany Woiderski, GIS Biologist and IMBCR Crew Leader

2016 marks a big year for the Integrated Monitoring in Bird Conservation Regions program with a major expansion in partnership with Playa Lakes Joint Venture (PLJV). This complements monitoring efforts across the Western U.S. and promises encounters with even more bird species.



The Integrated Monitoring in Bird Conservation Regions (IMBCR) program is one of the largest bird monitoring programs in North America, covering a work area of 450,545 square miles across all or parts of 13 western states in the U.S. This map shows the sampling extents for IMBCR in 2016.

The partnership enables PLJV to expand their monitoring efforts into the Southern Great Plains and greatly increase its ability to focus and evaluate habitat work and support proactive, targeted conservation action.

In order to tackle the addition of over 200 new survey locations, we combined the new surveys with the well-established effort in the Northern Great Plains. We hired and trained 17 field technicians to participate in a northward migration of breeding bird surveys, beginning in Texas, New Mexico,

and Oklahoma, and continuing onto Kansas, Nebraska and the Dakotas. In mid-April, we gathered for a 1-week training at Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma. The refuge provided a variety of habitats (grassland, oak woodland, riparian) and fantastic bird diversity, including Black-capped vireo, an endangered species and life bird for many on the crew.

From the Wichita Mountains, we moved north and were warmly received by the town of Elk City, Oklahoma. We spent time at the Elk City Carnegie Library, wrapping up training and contacting landowners. Word got around quickly and before long folks came to the library looking for us and asking about local bird lists. Bird Conservancy and our monitoring efforts were also featured in an article in the Elk City Daily News, which has a circulation of around 6,500 readers.

After training, technicians dispersed to begin their two-month season counting birds. The Great Plains never disappoint and so far it has been a successful and rewarding season. Technicians have been busy counting species such as Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Painted Bunting, Lesser-prairie Chicken, Fish Crow, Greater Roadrunner, Eastern and Western Meadowlarks, Grasshopper Sparrow and Long-billed Curlew. The team's work finishes in July, concluding a successful and rewarding field season.



Photo by David Wade

2016 SPEAKER SERIES

in partnership with



BIRDS AND CHANGE: Adaptation, Survival and Our Changing World

Three special presentations exploring new ideas and cutting-edge science by leaders in the fields of ornithology and evolutionary biology.

November 7, 2016 at 7:00 p.m.

Christopher C. Witt, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Biology/Curator of Birds, Museum of Southwestern Biology, University of New Mexico. Chris will share his biogeographical research pertaining to bird adaptations at high-altitudes.

November 15, 2016 at 7:00 p.m.

Dr. Garth Spellman

DMNS's Curator of Ornithology uses the Planetarium's digital dome experience to explain how environmental changes affect bird species.

November 29, 2016 at 7:00 p.m.

Dr. Renée Duckworth

Assistant Professor of Ecology & Evolutionary Biology at the University of Arizona explores the interspecies dynamics of Mountain and Western Bluebirds living in fire-affected landscapes.

\$12 Bird Conservancy of the Rockies and DMNS members, \$15 nonmember

For more information or to purchase tickets online, visit:
www.dmns.org/adults/after-hours

On the cover: **Prothonotary Warbler** (*Protonotaria citrea*)

Sometimes spring migration brings surprise visitors like this male Prothonotary Warbler which appeared in April just steps away from the Bird Conservancy offices in Fort Collins. Prothonotary Warblers overwinter primarily along the gulf coast of Central and South America and spend the summer months in the eastern U.S. Uncommon west of longitude 100° W, this little guy was making quite the detour to get to his summer home. No one is quite sure why

migrating birds sometimes go off-course. This bird was observed for several days in its temporary haven, flitting about near the water's edge of small ponds and creeks. Usually strays spend a few days fattening up before setting out again on the next long distance flight.

Learn more about North America's migratory birds and tri-national conservation efforts at www.stateofthebirds.org



Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
14500 Lark Bunting Lane
Brighton, CO 80603
www.birdconservancy.org

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PS49

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