

THE PRIMARY SOURCE



NEWSLETTER FOR BIRD CONSERVANCY OF THE ROCKIES | SPRING/SUMMER 2019 | NUMBER 54

Connecting People, Birds and (Grass)Lands

Human dimensions shaping conservation on private lands

by Jessica Weathers, Private Lands Wildlife Biologist

Working ranches in North America are home to a unique ecological network of grassland-dependent wildlife and native plant species. In addition to supporting a wide range of native flora and fauna, ranchers themselves are dependent on the grasslands for survival.

For over a century, ranching has kept millions of acres of grasslands healthy and intact. Unbroken tracts of land help preserve wildlife migration corridors, sequester carbon and improve water quality. Cattle grazing mimics the behaviors of bison which promotes diversity in plant height and composition.



Abandoned homestead at Thunder Basin National Grasslands. Photo: Jessica Weathers

Ranching in the U.S. is declining as modern day pressures proliferate, forcing ranchers to divide or sell their land, resulting in millions of acres of grasslands becoming fragmented or developed. Grasslands are now one of the most threatened terrestrial ecosystem in North America.

The situation spells disaster for grassland and sagebrush dependent wildlife, prompting unprecedented collaborations between government agencies, non-profits/NGOs, ranchers and the agricultural community to develop effective conservation programs. Bird Conservancy is rising to the challenge,



Our full annual cycle research (see page 6) is focused on grassland species like Sprague's Pipit. Photo: Jose Hugo Martinez Guerrero

using scientific research and monitoring of grassland birds to identify critical habitat and causes of declines. Guided by decades of data, we strategically position Private Lands Wildlife Biologists (PLWBs) across western North America as part of our Land Stewardship program to deliver conservation where it's needed most. The biologists learn from private landowners, and help connect them with tools, information and programs designed to enhance their ranching operations while also improving habitat for birds and wildlife.

Understanding real-world challenges facing ranchers is vital to the success of conservation programs on private lands. This summer, we will share some of those stories through the lens of a small community in northeast Wyoming. We'll explore the world of ranching through family dynamics, the influence of the oil and gas industry, modernization of ranching, conservation practices, and challenges facing the future of ranching in rural America.

Jessica's four-part series "*A Day in the Life of a Rancher*" debuts on Bird Conservancy's website over the summer—check it out!

birdconservancy.org/stories



Grasslands & Working Lands By the Numbers

85%

Approximate amount of grasslands in the U.S. that are privately owned (Drum, 2015)

4.2 million

Acres of grasslands converted to row crops or urban development in 2016-2017 (WWF 2018 Plow Print Report)

20%

Beef production decrease since the 1990s (CEC., 2015)

300+

Species of birds make their homes in the grasslands of America's Great Plains.

Bird Conservancy of the Rockies works with private landowners, land managers and resource specialists to implement habitat enhancement projects.

Our biologists and rangeland ecologists identify wildlife-habitat potential and help modify or develop on-the-ground practices that maintain or increase agricultural production and benefit wildlife habitat.

More information at:

birdconservancy.org/stewardship

Springing to Life!



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

4502 Avenue I, Scottsbluff, NE 69361

The *Primary Source* refers to a bird's primary feathers which power its flight. You, 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.

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This is always my favorite time of the year as the days get longer, yards get noisier and migratory traffic in the skies picks up. It's springtime in the West and things are happening—from bird migration to festivals, camps and more. Our education team is busy connecting people of all ages with exciting opportunities to get outside and experience nature firsthand through Spring Break camps, field trips with schools, and expansion of our bird banding programs and partnerships.



Visit our spring bird banding stations to see wild birds and real science (and scientists!) in action. More information at: birdconservancy.org/birdbanding

We are excited to kick off bird banding in partnership with the City of Longmont, Colorado this spring. It's a great opportunity to apply and increase our knowledge of birds in urban areas during migration, while also providing those awe-inspiring moments for people of all ages to see a wild bird up close. Spring banding season starts soon—check out a station near you.

You and your support are instrumental in helping us serve as an inspiration point to nature. As we launch our next 30 years, your ongoing support is the wind beneath our wings, soaring to new heights. Thanks to a matching gift, we are launching the Birds Forever Endowment Fund. The vision began with the late Jim Duggan, birder, volunteer and Old Stone House steward who supported and believed in Bird Conservancy across the decades. Today, with support from Ed Warner and Jackie Erickson, the endowment has been formally established. Read more about this special announcement on page 4.



Our friends Jim Duggan (left) and Paul Slingsby, visiting the Barr Lake banding station back in 2009. Our organization has grown a lot since then, but our dedicated supporters continue to be the heart and soul of our success.

We look forward to celebrating this milestone with you at the BBQ for the Birds on May 18th. Fingers crossed the sun is shining this year! Either way, we're guaranteed to see lots of birds with it being the height of migration. Join us and experience first-hand the science, education and land stewardship work you make possible and get quality time with our amazing staff and board.

Tammy VerCauteren
Executive Director



Read more about the 2019 BBQ for the Birds, as well as other calendar items, on pg. 6-7



Inspiration Points

A view into the life of a student with Bird Conservancy

by Kelsey Mazur, Programs and Volunteer Coordinator

Each fall, kids step off the bus at Barr Lake State Park's Nature Center for a special field trip. They discover how to use binoculars, learn about challenges migratory birds, and visit a banding station during peak migration. Not only do they get to see birds up-close and interact with experienced bird banders, but a few lucky students get to release a newly-banded bird back into the wild. This unforgettable hands-on experience can be a real spark, connecting students with nature using birds as the 'kindling.'



Inspired by the field trip, the following spring a student might ask her family to attend the Bald Eagle Festival at Barr Lake State Park. Bird Conservancy is there, providing bird walks with trained educators, teaching bird identification skills, sharing information about eagles and other birds, and engaging the community in our ongoing mission to conserve birds and their habitats. At this event, the student picks up a summer camp flyer—and the 'fire' really begins to grow. Inspired by seeing migrating songbirds at the banding station and her experience at the family festival, a love of birds is starting to emerge!

At camp, she meets other budding ornithologists, Leaders in Training (LITs) and Bird Conservancy staff. Able to learn, play, and discover the natural world alongside others, her passion continues to grow as she is encouraged to ask questions and learn more.



In the weeks, months and years that follow, her growth continues—perhaps with overnight camps, and becoming a Leader in Training herself. Her passion has become a campfire, warming and sharing the light with others.

And it all started with a bird in the hand!

Bird Conservancy's education team provides year-round programming for people across Northern Colorado's Front Range, with a focus on the Denver metro area. Homeschool and classroom programs, as well as Bird Camps, engage kids (and their families) at a young age and are designed to progressively build confidence, skills and curiosity over time. See page 6 for more information about our upcoming Bird Camps, or visit our website: www.birdconservancy.org/education

www.birdconservancy.org



BIRD BANDING



Bird Conservancy of the Rockies conducts banding at three stations each spring in Colorado and visitors are welcome!

Teachers and leaders can arrange a visit for groups. Individual visitors are also welcome. Registration is required for groups. Hours of operation vary and are subject to weather conditions.

CHATFIELD BANDING STATION

Operated in partnership with Audubon Society of Greater Denver

Open daily April 25th-May 31st.
Closed May 9-11 & May 27.

Location: Audubon Center on the southwest side of Chatfield State Park, Littleton, CO.

Registration is required.
Contact communityoutreach@denveraudubon.org or call (303) 973-9530.

LONGMONT BANDING STATION

Open every Tues & Thurs in May from 7 a.m.-11 a.m.

Location: Rogers Grove Park, 220 Hover Street (City of Longmont)

Registration not required for individuals. Pre-registration requested for groups; contact Kelsey Mazur, Program & Volunteer Coordinator, at kelsey.mazur@birdconservancy.org or call (303) 659-4348 x10

CHICO BANDING STATION

In partnership with Chico Basin Ranch.

Open Mon-Sat, April 24-May 24, 7 a.m.-11:30 a.m.

Location: 35 miles southeast of Colorado Springs, CO.

To schedule a visit, contact learning@ranchlands.com or call (719) 683-7960.

To learn more, visit birdconservancy.org/birdbanding

OUR MISSION

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

OUR VISION

A world where birds are forever abundant, contributing to healthy landscapes and inspiring human curiosity and love of nature.

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.



Facebook

www.facebook.com/birdconservancy



Twitter

@BirdConservancy



YouTube

Search: Bird Conservancy of the Rockies



Instagram

@birdconservancyrockies

Get the Full Story

Bird Conservancy's blog is the place to go for news and information about Bird Conservancy's migratory milestones and the positive impacts we are having on bird conservation efforts across the West.

birdconservancy.org/stories



Birds Forever Endowment Fund

Photo: Mark Byzewski; Flickr CC 2.0

Bird Conservancy launches endowment fund supported by a generous \$100,000 Matching Gift Challenge from Ed Warner and Jackie Erickson

With more than three decades of success in helping conserve birds and their habitats from the Northern Great Plains to Mexico, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies is pleased to proclaim that these efforts endure for future generations.

This announcement is possible thanks to the generosity of conservationists **Ed Warner and Jackie Erickson**, who provided a matching gift challenge up to \$100,000 to establish Bird Conservancy's Birds Forever Endowment Fund at the Community Foundation of Northern Colorado.

Your investment in the Birds Forever Endowment Fund ensures the lives we touch—from kids discovering their first American Goldfinch, to a rancher seeing their land through the lens of birds, to the habitat we conserve—are here for the future.

"Many of you have been with us several years including some of you for nearly three decades. This is an amazing opportunity to protect your investments and ensure your legacy of conservation continues beyond your lifetime. The people, birds and land are counting on you. It is important to continue to invest and support us with your annual gifts while also helping secure the future," said Tammy VerCauteren, Bird Conservancy's executive director.



ENVISION

A bright future for people and birds



INSPIRE

Raising the next generation of scientists and leaders



CHAMPION

Be a steward of the land and champion for conservation

Donate to the Birds Forever Endowment Fund

More than \$30,000 has been raised for the Birds Forever Endowment Fund! Every dollar donated up to \$100,000 total will be matched 1:1.

Will you make a special gift to the Birds Forever Endowment Fund?

To make your gift—which may include stock, securities or IRA distribution—or if you have questions, contact:

Bird Conservancy of the Rockies

Kelli Hirsch, Development Manager

14500 Lark Bunting Lane | Brighton, CO 80603

303.659-4348 ext. 12 | kelli.hirsch@birdconservancy.org

You can also make a donation online at www.birdconservancy.org/birdsforever





Across the Full Annual Cycle

by Maureen Correll, Landscape Ecologist



Bird Conservancy has studied wintering grassland birds in the Chihuahuan Desert for over a decade. These declining songbirds breed across much of North America but migrate south for the winter, concentrating their numbers in the deserts of the southwestern US and northern Mexico.

This winter we began a new survey effort on the wintering grounds to measure the populations of several grassland birds including Sprague's Pipit, Chestnut-collared Longspur, and Baird's Sparrows as well as predator species such as Loggerhead Shrikes and raptors. This new project is part of our efforts to study the entire annual life cycle of grassland birds, and how management actions on the wintering grounds (like shrub removal) affect these species. This program helps us track bird population numbers across the region. This winter we surveyed six ranches in west Texas, U.S.A. and plan to expand this effort to cover much of the desert grasslands of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona in upcoming years.

Learn more and follow our progress on our website:
www.birdconservancy.org/chihuahua

This project is made possible through the generous support of people like you, and our partners at



Top: A Loggerhead Shrike surveys the Texas landscape. Feb.1, 2019 west Texas U.S.A., Bottom: An observer aligns their bird survey transect with a compass. Feb. 1, 2019 west Texas, U.S.A. Photos courtesy of Denis Perez.



STAFF MIGRATIONS

Welcome to our new Staff!



Emily Chavez, Private Lands Wildlife Biologist, recently returned to her hometown of Alamosa, Colorado where she is helping landowners in the region deliver conservation of grasslands, wetlands and riparian habitat.



Kaitlyn Nafziger, Private Lands Wildlife Biologist, is based in Clayton, New Mexico, where she works with landowners to promote land-stewardship conservation of breeding and wintering grassland birds, wetlands and riparian habitat.



Ryan Parker, Private Lands Wildlife Biologist, works out of our Rocky Ford office where he's focused on conservation of shortgrass prairie, wetlands, and riparian habitat across the rangelands of SE Colorado.



Jennifer Perkins, Private Lands Wildlife Biologist, is in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, leading conservation efforts on private lands for sage-grouse, Sandhill Crane, Bobolink and other sage- and grassland-dependent birds.



Jessica Weathers, Private Lands Wildlife Biologist, is based in Gillette, Wyoming, where she is connecting ranchers with conservation efforts for wildlife habitat improvement and to promote sustainable management practices on private lands.

Farewells:

Erin Divine, Luke George, Veronica Grigaltchik and Amber Schiltz



UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Pre-registration is required for all Camps/Educational Programs.



Bird Conservancy of the Rockies offers year-round camp experiences for kids ages 4-17. All camps are about getting kids outside to have fun and explore nature while making friends, developing leadership skills and gaining insights into their relationships with themselves, others and the natural world around them.



DAY CAMPS (Ages 4-12 • July-August)



Day Camps are the perfect introduction to science and nature for younger kids, fostering a positive learning environment through hikes, games, crafts, and outdoor play. Day Camps take place at our Environmental Learning Center in Brighton, CO, and led by a team of professional environmental educators.

For more info, visit: birdconservancy.org/daycamps



OVERNIGHT CAMPS (Ages 12-17 • June)



Overnight Camps are a welcoming learning environment for kids who have outgrown our Day Camps, as well as those new to our programs. Camps are led by professional educators with backgrounds in science, education and youth development. Camp takes place at Highlands Camp in Allenspark, CO, with drop-off and pick-up at our Environmental Learning Center in Brighton, CO. For more info, visit: birdconservancy.org/overnightcamps

LEADERS IN TRAINING (Ages 13-17 • July-August)

Inspired by past campers who wanted to give back (and didn't want to stop coming to Day Camp!), the Leaders in Training Program gives teens the chance to mentor and teach younger campers while learning about science and leadership skills. LIT training is on Monday, July 8, at our Environmental Learning Center in Brighton, CO. LITs sign-up to assist with one or more Day Camps, and end the summer with a campfire celebration in August. For more info, visit: birdconservancy.org/LIT



Online registration is required for all camp sessions. We cannot accept walk-ins. Scholarships available for all camps! Apply online: birdconservancy.org/scholarships



The Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (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 supports Bird Conservancy's education and outreach programs, helping us connect, engage and inspire thousands of Denver Metro residents in nature and the outdoors. SCFD dollars help cover transportation, scholarships and program costs and are critical to our ability to deliver diverse, high-quality programs that are a hallmark of our organization.

Thank you to the citizens of the SCFD for your support!



VOLUNTEER!



Are you passionate about connecting others with nature and science? Be part of the solution for conservation! We are still accepting Education Volunteers to assist with field trips, in-class programs and events in the Denver area.

Registration is required for all volunteer trainings and events. For more information or to register for any of the volunteer programs listed below, please contact:

Kelsey Mazur (Program & Volunteer Coordinator)
(303) 659-4348 x10
kelsey.mazur@birdconservancy.org

UPCOMING VOLUNTEER EVENTS:

Education Volunteer Training: Bird Banding Field Trips

Wed, Aug. 21 from 8 am -1 pm

Learn the basics about bird banding field trips including curriculum, teaching methods, and how to become a bird banding field trip program leader.

General Education Volunteer Training September 14 from 9 am-12 pm

Join us to learn about our different program curriculums, teaching strategies, and find out what it means to be an Education Volunteer!

Volunteer Work Day & Open House

June 22 and Aug. 24 • 9am-11:00 am

Join us for our bi-monthly Volunteer Work Day & Open House! We will be landscaping, gardening, and doing maintenance projects as well as talking about other ways to get involved. Volunteers of all ages welcome. Coffee and snacks provided.

Bi-Monthly Volunteer Bird Walks

Tuesday, May 28 from 8-9 am

Monday, July 22 from 8-9 am

Monday, Sept. 23 from 8:30-9 am

Join us for a relaxing, fun bird walk to meet other volunteers and staff. We'll meet at the Environmental Learning Center. Please dress to be outside and bring a water bottle and binoculars.

SAVE THE DATE!



Mark your calendar to join us for the BBQ for the Birds, our annual celebration of people, birds and land!

May 18, 2019 • 8:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Barr Lake State Park Nature Center

Visit with Bird Conservancy staff and learn more about our science, education and land stewardship programs and how to help conserve birds around your home and in your community. Planned activities include:

- Guided bird walks
- Live birds and bird banding demonstrations
- Educational games and activities
- Live airing of Bird Talk Radio
- Native plant demonstrations
- Displays & presentations
- Catered lunch

Take a ride on the Eagle Express!

State Park shuttles will depart at 10 a.m. to carry passengers to eagle viewing areas. Space on the shuttles is limited; reserve your spot by calling (303) 659-6005.

Admission \$5 per person (ages 12 and under FREE) which includes park entrance fees, lunch and event activities. All proceeds benefit Bird Conservancy of the Rockies

To register, visit:
www.birdconservancy.org/bbqrsvp

THANK YOU to our Sponsors and Event Partners!



1 Year = 365 Opportunities!

Volunteers helping conserve birds, build community and change lives

by Kelsey Mazur, Program and Volunteer Coordinator

Volunteers are priceless!

Volunteers gave over 6000 hours in service in 2018 alone—the equivalent of approximately 3 full-time employees which equates to \$166,651 of donated time (each donated volunteer hour is valued at \$26.78). Because of volunteers, Bird Conservancy is able to provide high quality educational and citizen science programming to the community to accomplish our mission and achieve our vision.



Volunteer Leah Dempsey leads a group of students on a field trip



Volunteers take a deep-dive into field trip and in-class curriculum training in preparation for delivering summer educational programs.

Ways to get involved

Most of our citizen science projects, including Bald Eagle Watch, HawkWatch, and Eastern Screech-Owl Monitoring, have already begun for the year. If you are interested in gathering research as a citizen scientist, please be on the lookout for trainings early next year.

Many education opportunities remain! We are looking for volunteers in the Denver-metro area to assist with ongoing field trips and in-class programs, as well as community events and festivals. We are also currently expanding our Bird Tales program that improves the quality of life of seniors living in memory care units through sensory programming.

Got mad skillz? We need you!

We are always looking for volunteers to share their skills with us; if you are interested in landscaping, maintenance, painting, gardening, photography, cataloging, or anything else, we would love to have your expert assistance! We greatly appreciate any amount of time, skills, or dedication you are able and willing to share with us.

Check out our website for upcoming opportunities and trainings. If you have any questions about our volunteer program or would like more information, please contact Kelsey Mazur, Program & Volunteer Coordinator, at kelsey.mazur@birdconservancy.org or 303-659-4348 x10.



Volunteers constructing the Prairie Welcome Trail near Bird Conservancy's Environmental Learning Center at Barr Lake.



Photo by Colin Woolley

On the cover: **Mountain Plover** (*Charadrius montanus*) Mountain Plovers make their nests and fledge their young on flat, bare ground. Agricultural fields provide ideal habitat as long as their nests are not accidentally tilled. By locating and marking plover nests, farmers can avoid them when plowing. Bird Conservancy engages farmers in Nebraska and Colorado to raise awareness of this species on working lands, as well as how to participate in voluntary, proactive efforts to conserve the "Ghost of the Prairie."



Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
 14500 Lark Bunting Lane
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www.birdconservancy.org

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Your gift can help:

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- \$250 ensure healthy landscapes and communities
- \$500 to help unlock migratory mysteries
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