



# A Call to Action

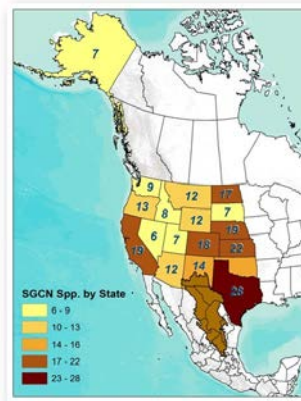
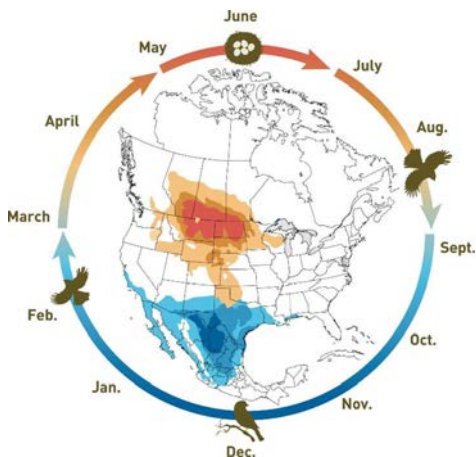


## Conserving North American Grassland Birds

Birds remain some of the most notable and beloved wildlife in the United States, and retain an integral part of our nation's imagination. From the sight of a singing meadowlark to the trilling of a Baird's Sparrow, migratory grassland birds play an important ecological and cultural role in the United States. Protecting this heritage of grassland ecology is difficult, however. Conserving migratory birds requires a flexible, sustainable, comprehensive conservation approach. It involves international, coordinated efforts year-round. Southern Wings partners with Bird Conservancy of the Rockies to help facilitate conservation of grassland bird species in the western U.S., through the protection and conservation of the Chihuahuan Desert grasslands in Mexico.

Complementary to this is the on-the-ground work across the U.S. states. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks supported conservation of grassland habitat in the Chihuahuan Desert by leveraging their purchase of a conservation easement on 2,778 acres of grasslands in northeastern Montana. It allowed Bird Conservancy of the Rockies to secure a \$200,000 grant from the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act to support private lands conservation efforts in northern Mexico. This collaborative approach allowed the state of Montana's to invest not only in the breeding habitat for their Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), including Baird's Sparrow, Chestnut-collared Longspur and Sprague's Pipit, by also in the protection and improvement of wintering habitat for these same species. Full annual-cycle conservation is the only way to have successful long-term conservation of these species.

**Project Successes:** 308,000 acres have been enrolled in the Sustainable Grazing Network since 2013, with more than 90,000 enhanced and 5,000 acres restored. Bird Conservancy of the Rockies hopes to have 500,000 acres enrolled by 2020.



Number of SGCN species in each state that depend on the Chihuahuan Desert

The western states in the U.S. have seen a dramatic decline in grassland bird populations. At least 28 species of grassland birds breeding in western North America overwinter in Chihuahuan Desert grasslands for up to 8 months per year. These grasslands face several threats, most notably their conversion to cropland agriculture and the encroachment of shrubs due to poor grazing practices.

**Vision:** Healthy and sustainable populations of migratory birds throughout the Western Hemisphere that are enjoyed for generations to come.

**Mission:** Encourage and facilitate state fish and wildlife agency participation in conservation projects for shared priority birds in Mexico, Central America, South American and the Caribbean.



Keyline plowing sowing native grass seed in overgrazed area

## ON THE GROUND PARTNERS

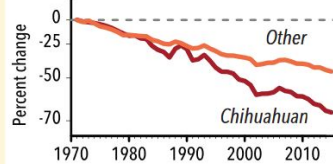
- Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
- IMC Vida Silvestre
- Autonomous University of Nuevo León
- Juarez University of Durango
- Sul Ross State University
- State University of Sonora
- Ranchers
- Schools in Chihuahua
- Pronatura Noreste

## STATE FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCY PARTNERS

- Arizona Game and Fish Department
- New Mexico Game & Fish Department
- Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife

The Sustainable Grazing Network (SGN) is an important program developed by Bird Conservancy of the Rockies and IMC Vida Silvestre to engage ranchers in conserving and restoring their grasslands and implementing sustainable practices. Monitoring bird populations and gathering data have also been an important facet of Bird Conservancy of the Rockies and IMC Vida Silvestre's efforts. By gathering data and making decisions based on it, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies is prioritizing and developing frameworks of action. Bird monitoring also helps to engage landowners in better understanding how their management affects wildlife.

**ONE-THIRD OF ALL GRASSLAND BIRD SPECIES** are on the Watch List due to steeply declining populations and threats to habitat. Birds that breed in the Great Plains of Canada and the U.S. and winter in Mexico's Chihuahuan grasslands are experiencing exceptionally steep declines, a nearly 70% loss since 1970. Other temperate grassland birds have declined by 33% in that time.



Populations of Chihuahuan grassland migrants have declined twice as much as other temperate grassland birds.

North American Bird Conservation Initiative. 2016. *The State of North America's Birds 2016*. Environment and Climate Change Canada: Ottawa, Ontario.



Baird's sparrow tagged with light-weight radio transmitter

## MOVING FORWARD, FUNDING IS STILL NEEDED TO:

- put more boots on the ground in Mexico;
- improve and restore more habitat;
- monitor and evaluate SGN ranches and habitat projects;
- develop integrated population models to identify limiting factors across species' full annual-cycle;
- work with the Rio Grande Joint Venture and others to develop a conservation investment strategy for grassland birds in the Chihuahuan Desert;
- host an annual meeting of ranchers, conservation groups, and other grassland stakeholders in the Chihuahuan Desert; and
- hold a "Central Grasslands Roadmap Summit" in 2020 to assess alignment and gaps in past, current and future grassland conservation investments and to secure commitments for cooperation and actions over the next 10 years.