



Audubon & World Wildlife Fund: Protecting Grassland Birds Through Ranching & Conservation



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Birds are highly sensitive to landscape changes which makes them excellent indicators of overall ecosystem health. Grassland birds, as a group, face the steepest decline of all North American birds. The loss of intact grasslands throughout the region has played a major role in their decline, so working in partnership with ranchers who are also striving to keep the grass right side up is a natural fit. Ranchers appreciate birds for many different reasons and look to them as signals for seasonal changes, as game species, and agents of insect control. For other members of ranching communities across North America, birds simply improve the quality of life through their beautiful songs and coloration.

Audubon and WWF's shared mission is to demonstrate the value of working ranches for wildlife and gain insight into the incredible opportunity ranching offers to sustain healthy bird populations. Most species of grassland birds in the Northern Great Plains depend on habitats maintained by grazing. Recent WWF bird surveys of the region, conducted in Montana, South Dakota and Nebraska, showed that up to 90% of priority bird species were detected on study ranches.

Audubon & WWF: A Shared Vision

Audubon and WWF are working with ranchers in the Northern Great Plains to maintain rangelands that provide food, shelter, and nesting grounds for grassland birds. WWF is using an industry-wide approach, working with all segments of the beef supply chain, to ensure that ranching, as a livelihood, remains viable in the region and is valued by the evolving beef marketplace. Audubon is helping individual ranchers improve sustainability of their grazing practices to directly access premiums for grassland habitat stewardship. These complementary approaches have different scales and audiences within the ranching community, but common metrics and communications will be accomplished in support of both. Grassland birds and ranchers stand to benefit from this win-win, because after all, where birds thrive, people can prosper.

GRASSLAND BIRDS THAT HAVE DECLINED >80% SINCE THE 1960s



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Chestnut-collared Longspur

The Chestnut-collared Longspur historically bred on sites that were recently burned or grazed by a diversity of herbivores. Today, Chestnut-collared Longspurs rely on grazing by cattle to maintain the breeding habitat that they require for survival.



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Sprague's Pipit

This grasslands songbird is a year-round resident of grasslands without shrubs or trees. Males have the longest flight display of any bird, often remaining airborne for as long as three hours.



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Lark Bunting

The Lark Bunting—a popular rangeland bird, and the state bird of Colorado—has traditionally been common throughout the Great Plains. The male's coloration changes greatly from spring to winter, transitioning from bold black and white markings to a subtle streaked brown.



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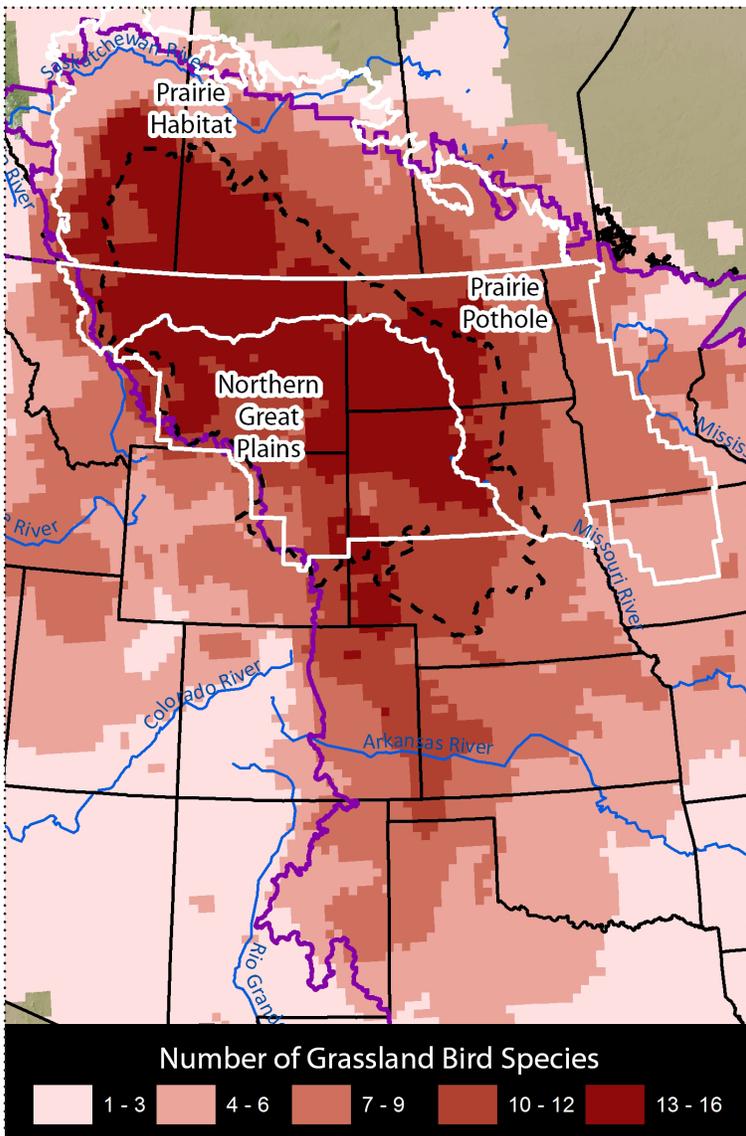
McCown's Longspur

Male McCown's Longspurs perform acrobatic aerial displays to defend and advertise their territories. This species' preferred habitat is shortgrass prairie and ground with sparse vegetation.



Grassland Birds: By the Numbers

This map illustrates the high diversity of grassland bird species found on healthy lands within the Northern Great Plains and Mississippi Drainage. A high percentage of these lands are well grazed grasslands. Ranchers make natural partners for conservationists working to keep grasslands intact and the species that inhabit them healthy.



Two Approaches, One Goal

Audubon is working within the pasture-raised industry segment to:

- Create a decision support tool for bird-friendly land management practices
- Host regional rancher workshops to share and encourage uptake of bird-friendly land management practices
- Create premium beef market opportunities to reward bird-friendly land management practices

For information, please contact: Alison Holloran, Executive Director, Audubon Rockies; Vice President, National Audubon Society. Contact Audubon Rockies at 970-416-6931 or aholloran@audubon.org.

World Wildlife Fund is working industry-wide to:

- Connect ranchers to educational opportunities, financial and community resources, and stewardship recognition programs
- Influence national and global leaders in the beef industry to ensure that grasslands continue to support communities, producers, and wildlife
- Build capacity within regional rancher-led groups
- Increase public awareness about the value of intact grasslands and the role ranchers play

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