



# Audubon Conservation Ranching

*Behind the Biodiverse Benefits of the Audubon Certified Bird Friendly Seal*

## Our Purpose

**Audubon Conservation Ranching** is a wildlife habitat program of the National Audubon Society. Audubon Conservation Ranching's purpose is to stabilize declining grassland bird populations in partnership with ranchers.

## The Audubon Certified Bird Friendly Seal

**The Audubon Certified bird friendly seal recognizes lands managed for birds and biodiversity.** This seal appears on beef or bison products that were grazed on bird friendly land. Through their purchases, consumers transform into grassland-supporting conservationists.

## Regenerating Habitat, Rebuilding Ecosystems

Enrolled ranchers implement bird friendly habitat management practices on their lands. This is accomplished through a variety of regenerative grazing approaches, including Holistic Planned Grazing, Adaptive Managed Grazing, and Patch-Burn Grazing. Conservation ranchers use their herds to manipulate a mosaic of habitat for priority bird species, but the practices have restorative effects that ripple across the ecosystem, from the soil, to vegetation, to birds and other wildlife.

## Focusing on Birds AND Biodiversity

Audubon Conservation Ranching's focus on birds is beyond self-serving: Grassland birds are key "indicator species," their abundance (or lack thereof) reflecting the condition of the environment around them – including soil health, plant life, water conservation, and wildlife diversity.

- **Wildlife Diversity** – Audubon Conservation Ranching practices create a patchwork of habitats that support dozens of grassland bird species, diverse insects, and myriad mammals.
- **Plant Species Diversity** – Conservation ranching techniques support a diversity of grasses and forbs, making the overall grassland more resilient.
- **Pollinator Diversity** – A diversity of plants species, namely forbs (flowering plants), provides pollinating insects – like monarch butterflies and wild bees – the essential habitat they need to survive. Pollinators are highly sensitive indicators of the environment's health, in addition to playing a crucial role in pollinating our food and flowers.
- **Below-Ground Biodiversity** – Conservation ranching's regenerative grazing practices are valuable tools to increase soil organic matter. Increasing plant species diversity then increases diversity in soil microbial species and macro-organisms, meaning more root exudates, more root biomass, and greater rooting depth. This abundance of life equates to stored soil carbon.

## Grassland Conservation is Water Conservation

Fertilizers and pesticides are restricted in Audubon Conservation Ranching, ensuring waterways are protected from contamination. Program practices also include protection of riparian areas and wetlands to reduce runoff and improve water quality. Healthier grasslands also retain more groundwater.

## Going Deeper: Carbon and Conservation Ranching

Conservation ranching is an important tool to prevent the conversion of grasslands into other agricultural uses or development, scenarios that result in significant loss of currently stored/sequestered carbon. Scientific evidence is mounting that healthy grasslands capture carbon at levels that can play a major role in mitigating climate change.

### Benefits for Birds & Biodiversity

	Habitat Management	Grassland Conservation	Bird Diversity	Wildlife Diversity	Pollinators	Plant Species Diversity
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Below-Ground Biodiversity	Soil Health	Water Quality	Water Conservation	Carbon Sequestration	Climate Resilience
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

### Monitoring & Measuring Regenerative Outcomes

Audubon Conservation Ranching measures regenerative effects associated with habitat management practices at the ranch level, across these four areas:

- **Bird Monitoring** – Bird monitoring is conducted on all ranches (every 2-3 years) in the program to measure changes over time as a result of habitat management actions. Audubon uses a “Bird Friendliness Index” to compare certified ranches to other public and private lands in the region.
  - Grassland bird abundance increased by 36% at the first Audubon Certified bird friendly ranches monitored.
- **Vegetation Monitoring** – This data is used to measure progress in accomplishing habitat diversity and ground cover goals defined in ranchers’ Habitat Management Plans.
- **Soil Monitoring** – Audubon Conservation Ranching is initiating soil monitoring projects on all ranches to build our understanding of how our ranch management contributes to carbon sequestration and other measures of soil health.
- **Water Infiltration** – Water infiltration sampling uses an automated dual head infiltrometer near the soil carbon sampling points. This measures the improvements in soil-water relationships. As water moves into the soil, it is absorbed by roots, which enhances drought resilience, increases productivity, and can enhance carbon sequestration.