

Dear Friends,

Here in Colorado, our migratory birds have long since headed for warmer places. The majority of those birds are in Mexico, and they will soon be followed by a small horde of biologists who will be looking for them, hoping to learn where they are wintering, what they need to survive and what threats they face.

In particular, we hope to answer these questions for our migratory grassland birds, which are increasingly threatened by habitat loss and degradation, both at home and abroad. Grassland bird species have experienced steeper, more widespread and more consistent declines than any other group of North American birds. The reasons are many, but perhaps the single most important threat is the accelerating loss of high-quality grasslands



Photo by Greg Levandoski

in Mexico. Many species that winter primarily in Chihuahuan grasslands – including Baird’s Sparrow (pictured here), Mountain (Plover, Sprague’s Pipit and Grasshopper Sparrow - have lost 60-80 percent of their population in the last 40 years. Unless a massive effort is undertaken to halt the loss and begin restoration of this important ecosystem, this trend will almost certainly continue. Fortunately, such an effort is taking shape and RMBO is a critical partner in its success.

But how can habitat protection and management even begin before we know what is important to conserve and where? Surprisingly, aside from a few well-known areas, very little data is available on where important grasslands and the associated birds occur in Mexico. RMBO is the only organization conducting broad-scale regional grassland bird monitoring in northern Mexico. After three years of winter bird monitoring, we are finally beginning to define patterns of species’ distribution, abundance and habitat use.



Photo by Loni Beyer

RMBO field technician Jose Garcia tracks a bird using a telemetry receiver.

Now that we have identified key wintering regions and habitat specific species, we are expanding our research to the next questions: Is low winter survival driving population declines, and is management a factor? We are using radio telemetry to measure survival rates and home-range movements of wintering grassland birds in well-managed and degraded grasslands in Chihuahua. The answers we find will help inform a successful strategy to conserve grasslands across this region.

We are also moving beyond science by engaging people living and working in grasslands to raise awareness about birds and their needs, and take action to conserve their habitat. In 2010 we will distribute thousands more copies of our Pocket Guide to Chihuahuan Grassland Birds and engage hundreds of people in conversations about birds and conservation. We’ll develop a Best Management Practices manual to distribute to land owners and managers through workshops we will conduct with our Mexican partner organizations. And we’ll take school children on field trips to explore their grasslands and learn about the birds that depend on them.

We have learned from our experience in Colorado that these steps can lead to huge advances through increased awareness and appreciation, and voluntary cooperation and partnerships. Armed with good science, we can present a case for the conservation of grasslands in key areas to benefit grassland species.

You can play an important role in the success of RMBO's full life-cycle approach to conservation by supporting our work this winter. Your gift of \$25 would cover the cost of gas for a biologist to conduct a day of bird surveys and outreach in Chihuahuan grasslands. A gift of \$75 would allow us to purchase an additional mist-net for research and education programs. A gift of \$100 would cover the cost of a field trip for school children. A gift of \$250 would allow our biologists to attend a meeting of local community leaders in Mexico, to be a voice for the birds, and \$500 would support a week of training for a Mexican biologist in grassland bird identification and research and monitoring techniques.

Please help RMBO achieve its mission by supporting our efforts to conserve habitat for grassland birds on their wintering grounds. **To make a gift in support RMBO's work in Mexico, [click here](#)**

I appreciate your interest and support. We'll be posting on our Web site, www.rmbo.org, news of the project during the field season and, later on, the report of our findings. I hope you'll log on to keep up with our progress.

Sincerely,



Arvind Panjabi, Director
RMBO International Program



Photo by Loni Beyer

RMBO Chihuahuan Desert Program Manager Greg Levandoski explains how mist nets work to a group of students.