

THE BIRD CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

Saving Birds, Together

More bird species are of conservation concern in the United States today than at any time in the past, and there has been a significant increase in the number of bird species listed as endangered over the past 20 years. Almost 500 bird species in the Americas are listed as threatened with extinction. Breeding and non-breeding habitats for many migratory birds are in severe decline. The underlying threats to birds and their habitats continue to grow as human population expansion and development constantly press on the environment.

With the growth of interest in birds and bird conservation, however, there is a tremendous opportunity for collaborative ventures by individuals and organizations dedicated to birding, education, research, and conservation. The untapped potential for bird conservation lies with the large numbers of birders and the organizations to which they belong.

The American Bird Conservancy (ABC) has a vision for reaching this vitally important audience. The ABC has created the Bird Conservation Alliance (BCA), a coalition of bird clubs and conservation groups working together to play an important role in helping to ensure healthy populations of birds for the future.

The Alliance's goals are to prevent further bird extinctions, to reverse declines in bird populations, and to ensure the protection and management of sufficient habitat to effectively conserve populations of the full range of native, wild bird species. The BCA brings like-minded groups together to make positive changes to benefit birds, focusing on issues about or directly related to bird conservation in the United



The Bird Conservation Alliance is a coalition of birding and ornithological organizations united toward the goal of protecting bird species such as the **Peregrine Falcon**. *Salton Sea, California; January 2006. © Bob Steele.*

States, and facilitating stronger collaboration between bird groups and bird conservation throughout the Americas.

Membership in the Alliance has grown rapidly to more than 130 groups today. Members work on the key issues that impact birds, among them the following: working to enact the Neotropical Migratory Bird Act legislation into law and ensure that it is fully funded; working on bird conservation priorities funding in Interior Appropriations and other bills including state wildlife grants, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and national wildlife refuges; creating

The Bird Conservation Alliance is a network of organizations whose focus is the conservation, study, and observation of birds. Through the Alliance, birders and concerned citizens are united with conservation professionals, scientists, and educators for the conservation of wild birds. The Alliance is facilitated by the American Bird Conservancy <www.abcbirds.org>, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to conserving native wild birds and their habitats throughout the Americas. For more information about the Bird Conservation Alliance and its projects and issues and about the benefits of membership, please contact Alicia Craig by telephone (317-251-2473) or by e-mail <acraig@abcbirds.org>. Check out the Bird Conservation Alliance web site <www.birdconservationalliance.org> to learn more.

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The Mexican endemic and globally endangered **Worthen's Sparrow** persists in high-quality Mexican grasslands that the Bird Conservation Alliance is working to preserve. *Las Esperanzas, Nuevo León, Mexico; June 1994. © Greg Lasley.*

information on how individuals and birders can support bird conservation through consumer choices; linking local issues to national policy change; preventing weakening of the Endangered Species Act; maintaining conservation programs within the Farm Bill; and helping to protect U. S. migrants and endangered birds south of the border.



Members of the BCA have launched a Mexican Grasslands Appeal to help a vital bird conservation project in the Saltillo region of northern Mexico. The aim of the project is to provide a single international bird conservation issue that all BCA members will be able to support. By focusing member fundraising potential on a single project, the Alliance can achieve measurable bird conservation goals in just one year.

A little ways south of the Texas border, in the Mexican state of Coahuila, lies one of the last intact prairies in North America—a 40,000-acre jewel in the eastern Sierra Madre Oriental called the Saltillo Savanna. But it only just survives, threatened by the extremely rapid conversion of land to irrigated agriculture. Degradation of the land following several years of agriculture is so severe that restora-

tion of these areas to healthy grassland habitat will be greatly challenging.

This complex of grassland sites, maintained by grazing by the endemic Mexican prairie dog, provides excellent habitat for key grassland bird species such as the Burrowing Owl and the endangered Worthen's Sparrow, and migratory shorebirds such as the Long-billed Curlew and Mountain Plover. Sprague's Pipit and Ferruginous Hawk, two species of conservation concern in the U. S., also occur in this area in winter.

These grasslands are under threat from the conversion of land to potato farms. This conversion is a profitable short-term endeavor, but is ecologically and economically unsustainable. Urban development and the suppression of naturally occurring fires have also taken a toll on the grassland ecosystems of the region.

The following BCA member organizations have pledged to support the Grasslands Project:

- American Bird Conservancy (will match contributions up to a total of \$20,000)
- American Birding Association (has pledged \$5,000 toward the project)
- BirdPAC (has pledged 10% of its 2006 birding fundraiser)
- Los Angeles Audubon Society (has pledged \$5,000 toward the project)



Grasslands in the foothills of the eastern Sierra Madre Oriental provide critical habitat to both local breeders and wintering species from the U. S. and Canada. *Rancho Los Angeles, Coahuila, Mexico.* © Miguel Angel Cruz.

In response to these threats, BCA members are supporting efforts to permanently protect large areas of remaining habitat. Their efforts will include the purchase of more than 1,000 acres of prime habitat for conservation of the Worthen's Sparrow, whose last stronghold is in this area. The areas to be purchased are strategically positioned

Please join BCA member groups in making this grassland appeal a success. Organize a fundraiser such as a bird-a-thon, big sit, auction, dinner, or private party for the appeal. Tools are provided to organizations wishing to become involved, all downloadable from the BCA website.

around a 7,000-acre land easement for a prairie dog colony. In addition, funds will be used to manage the area to maximize its potential for migrant birds. For example, a much-needed small lagoon will be created to provide a drinking area for birds and to compensate for a fall in the water table due to agricultural pressure.

In total, BCA is seeking to raise \$100,000 to safeguard some of North America's most endangered species and to save this great North American grassland. Organizations and individuals are invited to help raise funds for this vital conservation project. Support is needed to protect this key area and to develop and implement a conservation plan to save the Worthen's Sparrow from extinction. Please help BCA members protect this important grassland area.

Membership in the Alliance is open to groups whose work includes a major focus on bird conservation, education, advocacy, observation, and research. Members include local, state, national, and international groups.