



AUDUBON CONSERVATION RANCHING'S

2023 Impact Report for Audubon Certified Bird-Friendly Lands



Because _____.

We Can Bend the Grassland Bird Curve Because _____.

More than a decade ago, Audubon recognized that any successful grassland bird conservation approach needed to work collaboratively with the landowners and land managers who are the stewards of the vast majority of America's grassland landscapes—the essential places for grassland birds. The Audubon Conservation Ranching program was conceived as a market-based conservation approach that would use a bird-friendly land certification as a driver to incentivize grassland habitat conservation. With more than 110 certified ranches covering nearly 3 million acres across 14 states, we are already making an impact, one we truly believe can be scaled to 10 million acres and beyond.

We have a window of opportunity to change the trajectory of grassland bird populations, and the commitment of the cadre of Audubon staff, enrolled ranchers, and our conservation partners to doing so is unwavering. With Audubon's new strategic plan in hand—our Flight Plan—we are aligning behind a common goal: to bend the bird curve, which means halting, and ultimately reversing, the steep decline of grassland birds. For those of us who have always lived among meadowlarks, bobolinks, or bobwhites, bending the bird curve means keeping the things that matter—not just for ourselves but for all the generations that will follow us.

I hope that by reading through this Impact Report, you will realize what I already believe to be true: Audubon Conservation Ranching is the right program for this important moment we face—and we have the right people working together in the right places doing the right things for all the right reasons to ensure we are successful.



Chris Wilson

Program Director

Audubon Conservation Ranching

Christopher.Wilson@audubon.org

Because of your generosity.

Anonymous

California Wildlife Conservation Board

Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies

Cedar Tree Foundation

Dixon Water Foundation

Gates Family Foundation

Knobloch Family Foundation

Edward K. Love Conservation Foundation

Helene Marsh

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

North Dakota Natural Resources Trust

North Dakota Outdoor Heritage Fund

Kristi Patterson

Sand County Foundation

Shield-Ayres Foundation

Thornburg Foundation

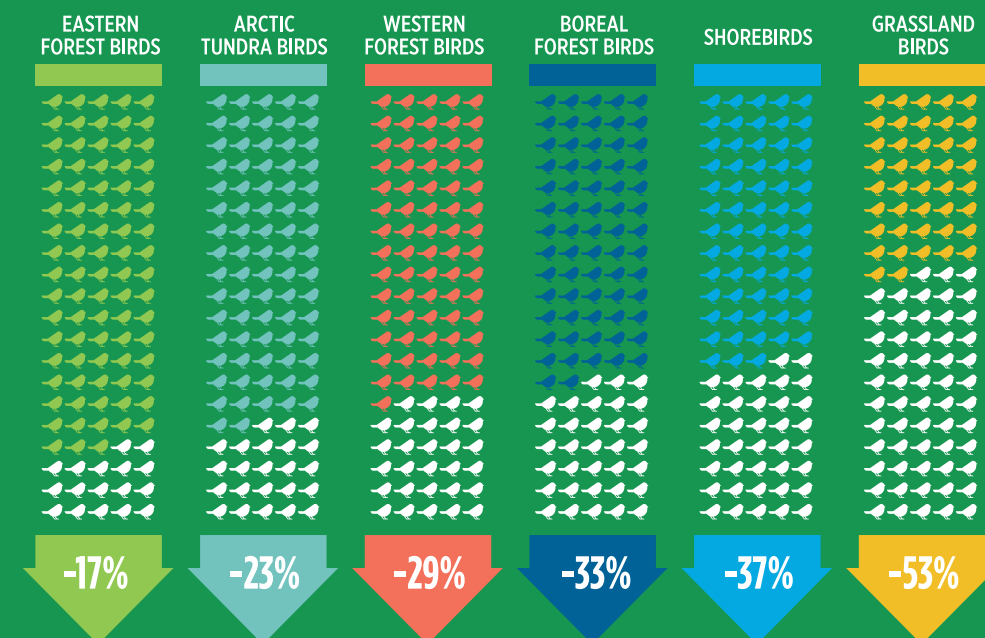
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Van Sloun Foundation

The Volgenau Foundation

Because if we don't, grassland birds could be gone.

DECLINING BIRD POPULATIONS SINCE 1970



Because

Ranchers Value Birds & Biodiversity.

“Our birds on the prairie are the same thing as a canary in a coal mine,” rancher Kim Shade (pictured, below) says. “If we lose them, something’s wrong.” Shade’s southwest North Dakota ranch received Audubon’s bird-friendly certification in the last year.

From reduced inputs to improved forage and eventual increased customer demand for the Audubon Certified bird-friendly seal, there are plenty of bottom-line reasons why more and more ranchers desire our certification. But don’t overlook the simplest of values: They cherish birds and want to create high-quality wildlife habitat.

“Confirmation through Audubon Conservation Ranching’s bird species counts has been very rewarding. We view diversity as confirmation that our management style has been positive,” Montana rancher Jaimie Stoltzfus (pictured, right) of Audubon Certified bird-friendly P Bar Ranch/Cowgirl Meat Co says.





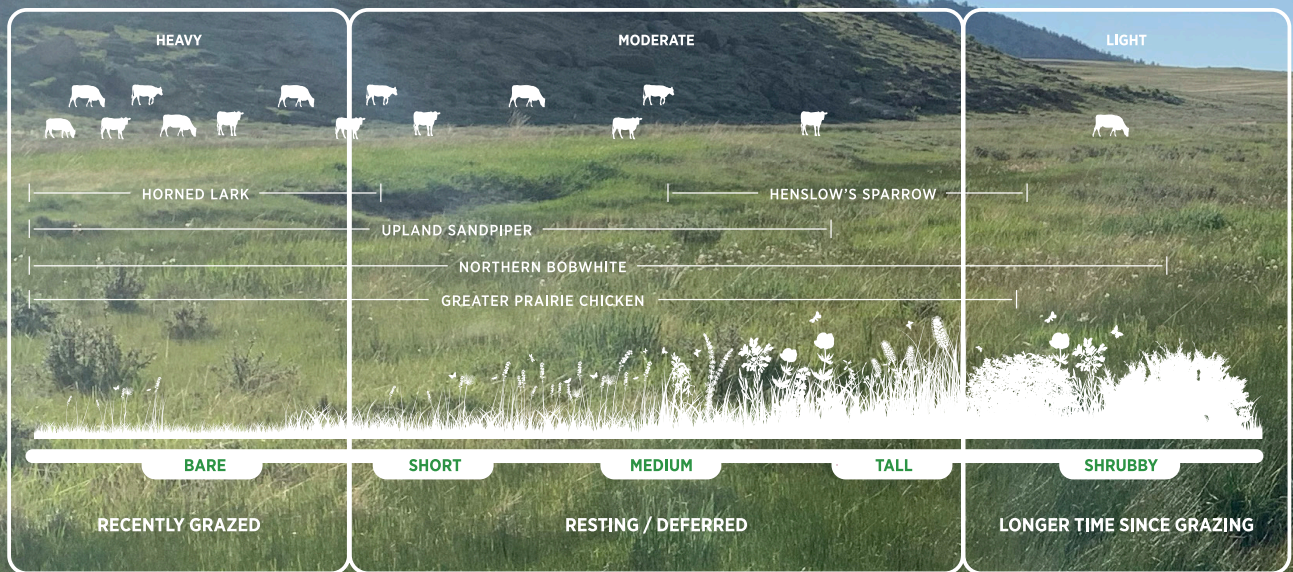
The Audubon Certified bird-friendly seal recognizes lands managed for birds and biodiversity.

Because

Audubon Certified Bird-Friendly Lands Work for Birds

Christian Meny, Director of Conservation and head of the Conservation Ranching program for Montana Audubon, says the program's formula of ranch-specific Habitat Management Plans and rotational grazing works because it's modeled on how native bison herds once roamed and foraged.

"It's like quilting, but with the land," Meny says. "We want to stitch together areas that have been freshly grazed, areas that were grazed a month ago, and areas that haven't been grazed all year. With this patchwork of habitat, we can benefit the biggest array of grassland bird species and other wildlife."



Because

Our Habitat Hoofprint Keeps Expanding .

When Chrissy and Dave McFarren's Badger Creek Ranch in central Colorado received its certification from Audubon, it marked a milestone—the 100th Audubon Certified bird-friendly ranch habitat.

The McFarrens manage their family ranch to provide a mosaic of habitat for priority birds, including the Brewer's Sparrow, Burrowing Owl, Loggerhead Shrike, Mountain Plover, and Vesper Sparrow.

"We build relationships with our customers, and we want them to view Audubon Certified as we do," McFarren says. "That it's more than meat production, but a regenerative movement. We're seeing bare areas of our ranch recovering with prairie grasses."

114 ranches – spanning 3 million acres –
are Audubon Certified bird-friendly

Key
Stat:

Because

We're Connecting More Consumers to Conservation.

We've updated the online Audubon Conservation Ranching Retailer Explorer, making it easier for consumers to find retailers—ranches, butcher shops, grocers, and online shops—that carry beef and/or bison products grazed on Audubon Certified bird-friendly lands.

Another testament to the increasing awareness of the Audubon Certified bird-friendly seal, Audubon was invited to participate at the 40th anniversary of the prestigious FOOD & WINE Classic in Aspen, Colorado. Through our participation in the Grand Tasting Pavilion, we introduced Audubon Conservation Ranching and bird-friendly beef to food lovers, generated brand awareness around the Audubon Certified bird-friendly seal, and positioned our partner Audubon Certified bird-friendly ranch – P Bar Ranch/Cowgirl Meat Co – squarely in front of a new audience of potential consumers.



Fun Fact:

Products from Audubon Certified bird-friendly lands are available at more than 250 locations/outlets.

Because

We're Growing Our Team of Bird-Friendly Experts .

Thanks to growing demand for our program as well as generous funding from all our donors (see page 3 for a full list), Audubon Conservation Ranching continues to grow, and this year added new staff positions in California, Minnesota, Texas, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

Our new employees add coverage for private landowner outreach across Audubon's flagship grassland habitat program, ensuring land in new locations will soon become Audubon Certified bird-friendly. Naturally, the best bird conservation starts with the best people.

"I am passionate about bridging the gap between agriculture and grassland bird conservation," says Anita Hoskins, who joined Audubon Texas this year as a Senior Private Lands Coordinator working as the lead for the Conservation Ranching program in the Texas Panhandle.



The Audubon Conservation Ranching program is active in 15 states

Key Stat:

Because

Bison Are the Original Rotational Grazers.

Matt and Sarah Skoglund started North Bridger Bison in 2018. In 2023, North Bridger Bison became the first bison ranch in Montana to become Audubon Certified bird-friendly.

“The bison on our ranch help build soil, improve the quality of the soil, increase the amount of water retained in the ground, increase the amount and diversity of the grasses, forbs, and wildflowers on the landscape—which helps birds, wildlife, and our bison—and helps reduce climate change through carbon storage in the soil,” Matt Skoglund says.

In late 2023, Cheyenne River Ranch in South Dakota, the home ranch for Wild Idea Buffalo Co., earned its Audubon bird-friendly certification. With a growing number of bison ranches, we unveiled a bison-specific version of the Audubon Certified bird-friendly seal.



New!
↪

Fun Fact:

During spring bird monitoring, 26 species were documented at Audubon Certified bird-friendly Gleason Bison Ranch in Colorado.

Because

We Scientifically Monitor the Impact of Bird Management Actions.

Audubon's science team developed the Bird-Friendliness Index, an accountability metric that quantifies the impact of the Audubon Conservation Ranching program on vulnerable grassland birds. Specifically, the metric measures the abundance, diversity, and resilience of a bird community.

The Bird-Friendliness Index results in a value between 0 and 1.0. In simple terms, a value below .5 is not as bird-friendly, while a greater than .5 means a ranch habitat is bird-friendlier than the surrounding area. Audubon Certified bird-friendly lands have a mean value of .55, or five points higher than nearby, non-certified lands.

At .86, Avenales Ranch in California holds the highest Bird-Friendliness Index score among Audubon Certified bird-friendly ranches.

Key
Stat:



Because

Great Grassland Bird Habitat Starts Below Ground

Audubon Conservation Ranching does other environmental assessments on our Audubon Certified ranches to see how the land responds to bird-friendly management like rotational grazing.

This includes soil monitoring. With funding support from the Natural Resources Conservation Service and in partnership with EarthOptics, a soil data measurement and mapping company, Audubon has begun a rigorous soil analysis project that eventually will collect meter-deep soil samples from 100 certified ranches in our program.

Healthy soils help build better bird habitat, and grasslands are also a natural climate solution.

This initial sampling will give ranchers and Audubon a baseline of the current soil-based carbon sequestration that exists across 3 million acres of Audubon Certified bird-friendly ranches. We will then use this baseline to track continued improvement to soil health and soil-based carbon storage capacity from bird-friendly practices.

Key Stat:

Average organic carbon levels on the Audubon Certified bird-friendly Downey Ranch in northeast Wyoming are 88.8 tonnes/ha.

Because

Habitat is Always the Answer

As an Audubon Certified bird-friendly ranch, Lonetree Ranch (Wyoming) landowners, in partnership with Audubon Rockies regional staff, developed a comprehensive, ranch-specific Habitat Management Plan, which requires regular engagement so Audubon can provide technical assistance and help realize positive conservation outcomes for focal bird species and other wildlife.

With project support from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Audubon is directly enhancing and restoring 200 acres of degraded sagebrush habitat. Through the use of grazing adjustments, sagebrush thinning, and re-seeding with native species, an improved sagebrush habitat mosaic will provide better nesting and brood-rearing cover for Greater Sage-Grouse. This habitat enhancement will also influence the 7,500 acres surrounding the habitat treatment areas.

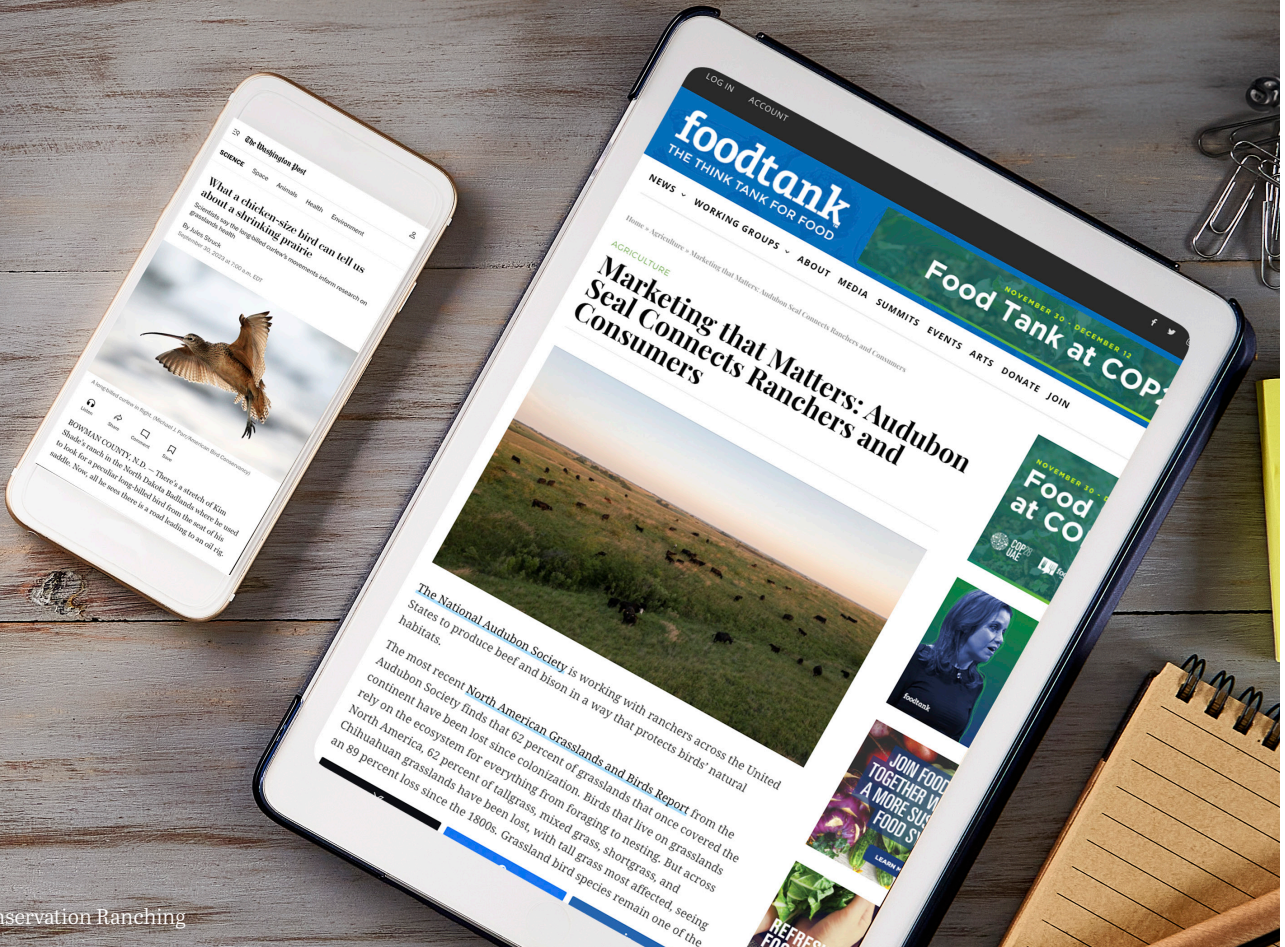


Because

Headlines Lead to Habitat

Positioned at the unique intersection of land, wildlife, climate, food, and people, Audubon Conservation Ranching continues to garner earned media coverage that's broadening the reach of the Audubon Certified bird-friendly seal.

Audubon Conservation Ranching was even named one of the 124 Food and Agriculture Organizations to Watch in 2024 by Food Tank, listed among a top group that is continuing to push for food and agriculture systems that are economically, socially, and environmentally just and equitable.





Because

Education is Good for the Environment.

With funding support from the Edward K. Love Conservation Foundation, we developed an Audubon Certified bird-friendly educational & promotional kiosk to better integrate our flagship grassland habitat initiative with Audubon's educational centers. The first kiosk stands at the Audubon Center at Riverlands in Missouri, with plans to place kiosks at more centers across the country in the next year.

“

Our birds on the prairie are the same
thing as a canary in a coal mine.
If we lose them, something's wrong.

-KIM SHADE, RANCHER
MEDORA, NORTH DAKOTA



Want to learn more? Email conservationranching@audubon.org or visit audubon.org/ranching