
Announcing the 1st Annual Fall Symposium of the
NEBRASKA PARTNERSHIP FOR ALL-BIRD CONSERVATION



Grassland Birds:
Their biology and conservation in a modern landscape

October 28-29, 2003

Lied Conference Center – Nebraska City, NE

October 28, 2003 – Symposium Program

8:45 – 9:00 **Welcome Address**
Steve Moran – Rainwater Basin Joint Venture

Plenary Sessions

9:00 – 10:00 **Biology and behavior of the Great Plains' grassland birds**
Paul Johnsgard – University of Nebraska-Lincoln & Nebraska Ornithologists' Union

10:00 – 11:00 **Grassland ecology and the forces shaping their bird communities**
Doug Johnson – Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, North Dakota

11:00 – 12:00 **Fragmentation and other conservation issues facing tallgrass prairie birds**
Jim Herkert – The Nature Conservancy, Illinois

12:00 – 1:00 **Lunch** (Partially funded by a Nebraska State Wildlife Grant)

1:00 – 3:40 **Concurrent Sessions** (25 minute presentation plus 15 for questions per talk)

Session Moderators:

John Dinan – Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
LaReesa Wolfenbarger – University of Nebraska-Omaha, Department of Biology

Session I: The Management of Grasslands for Birds

- **Platte River wet meadow management for grassland birds**
Felipe Chavez-Ramirez – Platte River Whooping Crane Maintenance Trust, Inc.
Chris Helzer – The Nature Conservancy, Nebraska
- **The effects of bison grazing and burning on Sandhills grassland birds**
Al Steuter – The Nature Conservancy, Nebraska
- **Cattle grazing management for prairie grouse conservation in the Sandhills**
Greg Schenbeck – United States Forest Service, Nebraska National Forest
Bill Vodehnal – Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
- **Managing CRP and agricultural program lands for grassland birds**
Tim McCoy – Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Session II: Research Topics in Grassland Bird Ecology, Behavior, & Conservation

- **Nest predators of grassland birds**
Pam Pietz – Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, North Dakota
- **Fledgling behavior of grassland birds**
Kimberly Suedkamp Wells – University of Missouri-Columbia
- **The identification and observation of grassland birds in Nebraska**
Kevin Poague – Audubon Nebraska
- **Effects of human disturbance on prairie grouse**
Robert Robel – Kansas State University

3:40 – 4:00 **Wrap Up and Closing**

If you are interested in attending this meeting and/or field trip, please **RSVP by October 21, 2003** to:
Justin Boner at jboner@ngpc.state.ne.us or 402-471-5413.

October 29, 2003 – Tallgrass Prairie Tour

From 8:00am until noon, there will be a tour of grassland/prairie sites around southeast Nebraska. Transportation will be provided on a first-come, first-serve basis. Others may carpool and join the caravan.

7:45 – 8:00 Gather in the Lied Conference Center lobby

8:00 – 8:25 Travel to Dieken Prairie – Wachiska Audubon Society, Unadilla

From Lied Conference Center: Head west on Highway 2 for about 21 miles to Unadilla. There will be a sign on the Highway telling you to turn left (south). Continue south for 2 miles then turn right (west), and go for about 1 mile.

8:25 – 9:00 Tour Dieken Prairie
Ernie Rousek – Wachiska Audubon Society

9:00 – 9:25 Travel to Twin Oaks Wildlife Management Area – Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Tecumseh

From Dieken Prairie: Get back on Highway 2 and head east (right turn) for about 5 miles to Syracuse. At Syracuse, turn right (south) on Highway 50 and continue for about 20 miles to Tecumseh. At Tecumseh, continue 1 mile south of Highway 136 and turn left (east). Continue for 2 miles and turn right (south). Twin Oaks WMA will be about 2.5 miles down this road. There will be a wooden kiosk and parking lot on your left (east side of the road).

9:25 – 10:20 Tour Twin Oaks WMA
Mike Remund – Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

10:20 – 10:25 Travel to a private landowner's Conservation Reserve Program high diversity planting site, Tecumseh

From Twin Oaks WMA: Head north back toward Highway 136 (about 3.5 miles). The property is on the corner of this road (CR 34) and Highway 136, and it will be on your right (east side of the road).

10:25 – 11:10 Tour CRP high diversity planting site
Matt Steffl, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

11:10 – Noon Travel back to Lied Conference Center, Nebraska City

From CRP site near Tecumseh: Get back on Highway 136 and head east (right turn) for about 17 miles to Auburn. At Auburn, turn left (north) on Highway 75. Take Highway 75 for about 19 miles to Highway 2, just south of Nebraska City. Turn left (west) on Highway 2, and continue for 2 miles to the Omaha/Nebraska City exit. Exit here and you will notice a fork in the road denoting left to Omaha, right to Nebraska City. Bear right here and travel approximately 1.2 miles to Steinhart Park Road. It follows a large left curve in the road and is amidst the golf course area. Turn left at Steinhart Park Road and continue approximately 3/10 of a mile to Sylvan Road. Turn left and you will notice Lied Conference Center about a block down Sylvan Road.

Directions to Lied Conference Center

2700 Sylvan Rd.

Nebraska City, NE 68410

402-873-8733 or 1-800-546-LIED (5433)

www.liedlodge.org

From Omaha, NE – Take either Interstate 29 south or Highway 75 south.

For I-29 South:

1. Travel about 40 miles on I-29 to Exit 10 (Nebraska City).
2. As you exit, turn right onto Highway 2. Continue on Highway 2 over the Missouri River Bridge until you come to a traffic signal. You will notice a Factory Stores of America mall on the left. Continue from this intersection exactly 2 miles to the Omaha/Nebraska City exit.
3. Exit here and you will notice a fork in the road denoting left to Omaha, right to Nebraska City. Bear right here and travel approximately 1.2 miles to Steinhart Park Road. It follows a large left curve in the road and is amidst the golf course area.
4. Turn left at Steinhart Park Road and continue approximately 3/10 of a mile to Sylvan Road.
5. Turn left and you will notice Lied Conference Center about a block down Sylvan Road.

For Highway 75 South:

1. Continue south on Highway 75 (about 35 miles) until it intersects *Business* Highway 2 (not the state Highway which runs south of town). Turn left (east) onto Business Highway 2 and go approximately 1.2 miles to Steinhart Park Road. It follows a large left curve in the road and is amidst the golf course area.
2. Turn left at Steinhart Park Road and continue approximately 3/10 of a mile to Sylvan Road.
3. Turn left and you will notice Lied Conference Center about a block down Sylvan Road.

From Lincoln, NE

1. Get on Nebraska Highway 2 heading East.
2. Continue east on Nebraska Highway 2 traveling past Bennet, Palmyra, Unadilla, and Syracuse. Continue to travel on this divided highway to the Nebraska City exit. Take the first exit into Nebraska City.
3. Travel an additional 2 miles from this curving exit road to Steinhart Park Road. Steinhart Park Road is on a big left curve in the road and is situated amidst the golf course.
4. Turn left and continue 3/10 of a mile to Sylvan Road.
5. Turn left and you will find the entrance of Lied Conference Center about a block down Sylvan Road.

From Kansas City, MO

1. If coming from downtown, take I-35 north to I-29.
2. If coming from south Kansas City, take I-435 to I-29 North.
3. Take I-29 approximately 120 miles to Exit 10 in the state of Iowa. (It will be noted as the Nebraska City Exit.)
4. After exiting, turn left onto Highway 2. Continue on Highway 2 over the Missouri River Bridge until you come to a traffic signal. You will notice a Factory Stores of America mall on the left. Continue from this intersection exactly 2 miles to the Omaha/Nebraska City exit.
5. Exit here and you will notice a fork in the road denoting left to Omaha, right to Nebraska City. Bear right here and travel approximately 1.2 miles to Steinhart Park Road. It follows a large left curve in the road and is amidst the golf course area.
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★
Dieken Prairie



★
CRP Site

★
Twin Oaks WMA

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October 28-29, 2003

Lied Conference Center – Nebraska City, NE

Workshop Summary

PLENARY SESSIONS

Biology and behavior of the Great Plains' grassland birds

Paul Johnsgard – University of Nebraska-Lincoln & Nebraska Ornithologists' Union

All bird species in grasslands nationwide are declining at a rapid rate. Data from the Breeding Bird Survey shows that 33 species from the Great Plains grasslands are suffering from dangerous declines. The Greater Prairie Chicken is one of the species to decline fastest – the population consisted of about one million birds in the 1970's, now it is down to around 300,000. The last strongholds for this species are in Nebraska and Kansas, and these states will be primarily responsible for saving this species. Habitat fragmentation and degradation have been widespread in the Great Plains, and three habitat types that have suffered significant losses include shortgrass prairie, sandsage prairie, and prairie marshes.

Grassland ecology and the forces shaping their bird communities

Doug Johnson – Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, North Dakota

Prairies are grassland habitats dominated by relatively few trees. North America's grasslands change from tallgrass to shortgrass as you migrate westward across the continent. Prairies exist in areas where there is little precipitation because the plants' deep root structure allows them to capture moisture from various soil horizons. Grasslands are very disturbance-driven ecosystems, which is why fire is a critical component of the landscape. Both richness and variety of bird species in grasslands are low, and the types of birds that do occur there are seasonal. Grassland bird numbers are declining due to the following reasons: canid population changes, fires regime changes, planting of trees for windbreaks, and wetland draining. Unfortunately, very little prairie is protected in the national park system and the US Forest Service is focusing on waterfowl management. Our biggest task is to preserve and protect the remaining grasslands.

Fragmentation and other conservation issues facing tallgrass prairie birds

Jim Herkert – The Nature Conservancy, Illinois

A minimum patch size is necessary for a species to establish and maintain a territory. Habitat diversity (i.e. large patches versus small ones) is most beneficial for species diversity, richness, reproductive success, and survival. The larger the patches, the more birds present. Birds in larger fields have higher reproductive success. Nest success is positively related to patch size. Daily nest predation rate for larger patch sizes was much lower. Woodland-grassland edges have large impacts on birds – as you move away from the woody areas, grassland bird densities go up. Nesting success for grassland birds near the woody edges is very low. Woody encroachment is a major concern for grassland bird habitat, as all forms of woody vegetation have a negative effect on the survival and reproductive success of grassland birds.

SESSION II: RESEARCH TOPICS IN GRASSLAND BIRD ECOLOGY, BEHAVIOR, & CONSERVATION

Nest predators of grassland birds

Pam Pietz – Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, North Dakota

In North Dakota, western Minnesota, and Wisconsin the following species were observed removing or destroying the contents of songbird nests: ground squirrel, cowbird, mouse, hawk, badger, deer, canids, weasel, skunk, raccoon, garter snake, weasel, thirteen-lined ground squirrel, opossum, domestic cat, fox snake, and cattle. Most of the predator species documented in these studies are not known to specialize on songbird nests, and probably depredate nests opportunistically. Given the wide variety of predators, it would be difficult to improve nest success of grassland songbirds by directly managing predator populations (an approach used successfully to increase survival rates of duck nests). Removal or exclusion of larger predator species from grassland nesting habitat actually may cause population increases of smaller predator species. Studies of habitat use and movement patterns of predator species in different landscapes reveal ways to reduce predation on grassland-nesting birds through habitat management. Research on red fox and skunk, for example, suggests that increasing the size and extent of grasslands on the landscape can dilute the effects of these predators. Wetland location also may influence predator activity in grasslands.

Fledgling behavior of grassland birds

Kimberly Suedkamp Wells – University of Missouri-Columbia

The dominant paradigm for grassland bird conservation is generally focused on the nesting portion of the breeding cycle. However, the post-fledging period comprises the second half of the breeding cycle and has received little research attention until recently. Estimating juvenile survival during the post-fledging period is critical for developing population models that allow us to assess the impact of management activities on grassland bird populations. As a result, our objective was to evaluate the habitat use, movement patterns, and survival of Eastern Meadowlarks (*Sturnella magna*) and Dickcissels (*Spiza americana*) in southwestern Missouri. We located nests of both species during the summers of 2002 and 2003 and then used radio telemetry to track the fates of individual birds. Our preliminary results show that woody cover, height of emergent vegetation, and forb cover were the best predictors of Dickcissel presence. Forb cover was also an important predictor of Eastern Meadowlark fledgling presence. Movement patterns for both species show two distinct types including stationary and exploring home ranges. Finally, approximately 50% of all radio-tagged fledgling die within the first two weeks out of the nest after fledgling, primarily due to snake predation.

The identification and observation of grassland birds in Nebraska

Kevin Poague – Audubon Nebraska

This program was for beginning birders or for anyone who breaks into a cold sweat when asked to identify a brown sparrow-like bird sitting on a tuft of grass. Slides of some of the most common birds that use Nebraska grasslands were offered, as will identification tips for these species. Grassland birds can be a challenging suite of species to sort out, even for experienced birders. There are many to choose from and they can be easily missed and overlooked. While some sing readily from exposed perches, others are more cautious and tend to skulk about along the ground out of view. Their colors are typically in shades of brown, yellow, and white, which afford excellent camouflage amid the grasses. Finally, birders may not visit grassland areas as often as forests or lakes, and thus may not get as many opportunities to practice their identification skills on these birds. Whatever the reasons, grassland birds need our attention. Many are experiencing drastic population declines. To help reverse this trend, it is important to educate what species use grasslands and what they look like, with the ultimate goal of preserving and better managing these vulnerable habitats. One resource is the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission website, which has section on Nebraska birds, including photos and habitat information (www.ngpc.state.ne.us/wildlife/birds). Another good resource is the book, *Prairie Birds: Fragile Splendor in the Great Plains* by Paul Johnsgard.

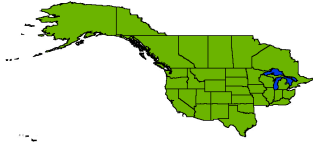
Effects of human disturbance on prairie grouse

Robert Robel – Kansas State University

The lesser prairie-chicken (*Tympanuchas pallidicinctus*) has sustained marked reductions in numbers over the past 100 years. It is now being considered for listing as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. Conversion of its sand sagebrush (*Artemisia filifolia*) habitat to irrigation agriculture in the 1970s and early 1980s was thought to be the primary reason for the recent decline in lesser prairie-chicken populations in southwestern Kansas. The conversion of sand sagebrush habitat to irrigation agriculture slowed or stopped in the mid 1980s, but the lesser prairie chicken population continued to decline. Since the 1970s, southwestern Kansas has been subjected to expanded oil and gas exploration/production, increased electric power generation and distribution, construction of natural gas compressor stations for the movement of product through pipelines, and the establishment of wind generating facilities. A six-year research project in southwestern Kansas determined that poor nest success and low chick survival were the causes of the lesser prairie chicken population decline, and documented avoidance by nesting lesser prairie-chicken population decline, and documented avoidance by nesting lesser prairie-chickens of oil and gas wellheads (200m), irrigated fields (300 m), electric transmission lines (375 m), improved roads (675 m), and elevated structures (1,100 m). These factors and conditions most likely apply to all species of prairie grouse, and have the potential of causing the continuation of the widespread decline of prairie grouse populations nationwide unless prompt action is taken on a landscape scale.

Public/Private Partnerships: Joining private landowners in grassroots wildlife conservation

A symposium sponsored by:



- Nebraska Partnership for All-Bird Conservation
- Midwest Private Lands Wildlife Management Group
- Western Private Lands/Public Wildlife Committee



March 11, 2003

Holiday Inn – Kearney, Nebraska

Successful locally led conservation efforts have overcome histories of mistrust and miscommunication and enabled landowners, agencies, and conservation organizations to join in collaborative habitat conservation initiatives. There is no single model for all such initiatives to follow. The symposium objective is to gather those with experience in the partnership approach to share their experiences with those considering the approach.

- 8:00 – 8:05 Introductions – Stan Staab, Manager, Lower Elkhorn NRD and NPABC Steering Committee Member
 8:05 – 8:15 Welcome Address – Rex Amack, Director of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
 8:15 – 8:30 Opening Remarks: Why we are here & why it is important to organize partnerships by:
 Steve Moran, Rainwater Basin Joint Venture Coordinator and
 Steve Riley, Assistant Administrator, NGPC

Session Moderators:

- Al Steuter – Director of Conservation Programs, The Nature Conservancy and NPABC Steering Committee Member
 Felipe Chavez-Ramirez – Ecologist, Platte River Whooping Crane Maintenance Trust and NPABC Steering Committee Member

Session I 8:35 – 9:15	<p>Nebraska Sandhills Taskforce – Gene Mack The Sandhills Task Force is an organization committed to bringing landowners and conservation groups together for conservation practices on privately owned lands in Nebraska’s Sandhills.</p> <p>Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, Colorado-Prairie Partners Program – Tammy VerCauteren RMBO was founded in 1988 to address a bird conservation and related public education need in the western U.S. Their mission is the conservation of Rocky Mountain and Great Plains birds through research and public education.</p>
Session II 9:20 – 10:00	<p>Nebraska Eastern Saline Wetland Conservation Partnership – Ted LaGrange & Terry Genrich Consisting of nearly 20 partners with 5 full-share partners, this Partnership’s mission is the protection, restoration, and assessment of a 100mi² wetland complex in Lancaster and Saunders counties.</p> <p>Oklahoma Wildlife and Prairie Heritage Alliance – Trapper Heglin Formed in 2002, the Alliance encourages conservation of Oklahoma’s wildlife and prairie heritage by increasing landowners’ awareness of incentive funding, technical assistance, education and rangeland programs guidance.</p>
Session III 10:05 – 10:45	<p>Nebraska One Box Hunt – Bob Allen For over 40 years, the One Box has been involved in activities to increase pheasant populations in central Nebraska. Their current focus is on 5-acre nesting areas and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) renewal projects.</p> <p>Kansas Tallgrass Legacy Alliance – Greg Wingfield & Tom Moxley Formed in 1999, the Alliance helps private landowners voluntarily manage the remaining Kansas Tallgrass Prairie in a manner that fiscally supports the ranching culture and does so in an ecologically sound manner.</p>
Session IV 10:50 – 11:30	<p>Rainwater Basin Joint Venture – Steve Moran The Rainwater Basin encompasses 4,200 square miles in south-central Nebraska of which 95% is cropland. The Joint Venture facilitates development of projects that restore, enhance, and protect wetland and upland habitat.</p> <p>Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams – Tim Christian With over 100 partners, the mission of the Alliance is to “to ensure the future of wetlands, streams, and their adjacent riparian areas as an integral part of Kansas’ heritage and landscape.”</p>

- 11:30 – 11:45 Locally Led Conservation: Necessity or Luxury – Steve Chick, NRCS State Conservationist
 11:45 – 12:00 Concluding Remarks – Gloria Erickson, NPABC Steering Committee Chair & Landowner
 12:00 – 1:00 Lunch (*Provided*)
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Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams – Tim Christian

The mission of the Alliance is to ensure the future of wetlands, streams, and their adjacent riparian areas as an integral part of Kansas' heritage and landscape. Plans of action results from the identification and prioritization of projects by local chapters. The Alliance maintains project spreadsheets for each chapter and helps match the funding need and technical help for the projects. In order to be most effective, the Alliance is not politically motivated, driven by special interests, or an agency rubberstamp competing for agency workload or money.

The following have been keys to their success:

1. Value diversity
2. Get to know each other on a social level first
3. Know why each person is "at the table"
4. Share "wish lists" and ask for ideas
5. Express any concerns/problems and talk through them
6. Communicate "way too much"
7. Keep things coming up from the local level
8. Don't allow any "regulation" talk

LOCALLY LED CONSERVATION: NECESSITY OR LUXURY – STEVE CHICK

In order to take full advantage of increasing funding levels, partnerships must be formed. Since local workgroups are not all that active, they need to become more active by forming an overall template that they can share with the next level up to find a way to share the costs. Set and meet a challenging goal. Start a strategic planning session, and remember to think outside of the box. The only way to achieve the challenge is through partnering, which gives you access to a diversity of expertise. The public is looking for more accountability from governmental agencies and other professional organizations, and we need to take advantage while we have support from Federal Level.

CONCLUDING REMARKS – GLORIA ERICKSON

Partnerships are very important in getting things done these days. The most effective way to get things done in regards to landscape is through Partnerships, which allow you to do the following:

1. Focus on what you are doing – the goal at the table
2. Minimize the differences among the partners
3. Build relationships (biggest challenge that we face) – Must court the landowners by inviting them to join in the activity and don't pick partners just because you want something from them
4. Make sure that the plans that you make are flexible, things don't have to always be perfect

CAPACITY BUILDING – Rachel Brewster

Conducting a survey to determine topics at next Spring's capacity building Partners meeting and gathering information to post on the website.

SCIENCE ADVISORY – Larkin Powell

How do we prioritize species: Is this a scientific process or a reflection of stakeholder priorities? Decided to focus on species at risk from local/regional/global extinction, and developed two categories: At-Risk (Threatened or Endangered, Species of High Concern – PIF 23 or higher) and Species of Moderate Concern (PIF 20-23). The workgroup will continue to refine priority list of species, develop regional risk areas for some species, work with habitat associations list developed by Conservation Strategies & Implementation workgroup and add habitat associations to list of species, ultimately creating an extensive database for use by Partners/

CONSERVATION STRATEGIES & IMPLEMENTATION – Kevin Poague

Developed and distributed Partners Survey, made a map of the Ecological communities of Nebraska, helped with the database that the Education workgroup created, working on focus areas by looking at Nebraska's landscape and locally led initiatives for bird conservation, and expanding the scope of the workgroup.

BREAKOUT SESSION: How do we get started with our landscape approach to bird conservation?

GROUP 1

1. Identify focus areas and partners
2. Identify opportunities
3. Scoping

Other Action Items: Inventory work, Identify threats to targets like drought, Identify conservation strategy, Market project, Funding opportunities, Education-Outreach-Awareness

GROUP 2 – Start small and think BIG

1. Increase "our" awareness and appreciation of landowner needs
2. Know our resources: wildlife, habitat, people...
3. Be very careful in communication – communicate effectively: honesty, non-threatening, avoid buzzwords, recognize current statewide stewardship efforts

Other Items: Search for common ground, Educate

GROUP 3

1. GIS Landscape picture of habitats (high resolution) and map of species
2. Define "landscapes" – functionally, biologically (habitat and species), management related
3. Identify gaps in management landscape (stakeholders)
4. Create new partnerships in gaps

GROUP 4

1. Continue to promote/support Statewide Conservation Plan by developing a species/habitat database
2. Find partners that complement your skills/resources and have similar interests
3. Marketing NPABC & partner/species databases

GROUP 5

1. Learn about all bird species in landscape
2. Education (single species vs. multi-species)
3. Identify landscapes (science-based) – identify critical issues, stakeholders (landowners, etc.)

Other Items: Conduct biological surveys, Find out what the common goals are, Learn about the local people, Find role model landowners