

Continentially Important Proposal for the Chihuahuan Desert



*Advancing
Integrated Bird Conservation
in North America.*

**NORTH AMERICAN BIRD
CONSERVATION INITIATIVE**

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Lupland Longspur/James Leupold



Grasslands are among the most threatened habitats on earth and are under-represented in protected area systems. The grasslands of North America are no exception and their disappearance has led to equally severe declines in the bird species that inhabit them, many of which are endemic. Grassland birds and their habitats span the continent; therefore, their conservation depends on coordinated action in Mexico, the United States, and Canada.

This proposal focuses on the conservation of high priority grasslands in northern Mexico, with an emphasis on two critically important areas for migrating and wintering grassland birds: the Janos Valley Grasslands in Chihuahua and the Altiplano Grasslands in Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and San Luis Potosí. The species that use these areas depend upon an extensive network of existing and proposed conservation areas throughout the U.S. and Canadian Great Plains during the breeding season. In the fall, some of these species migrate south through Mexico to overwinter in the grasslands of South America's Southern Cone, thus linking the hemisphere's grassland ecosystems.

The report, *North American Grassland Priority Conservation Areas*, produced by the Commission for Environmental Cooperation and The Nature Conservancy, identified a total of 55 priority grasslands for conservation in the three coun-

tries, ranging in size from 206,000 to 3,650,000 acres. If conserved, these areas would protect over ten percent of the entire North American Great Plains. These areas are critically important for many priority migratory bird species, such as Long-billed Curlew and Lapland Longspur, as well as resident species like Worthen's Sparrow and Pronghorn.

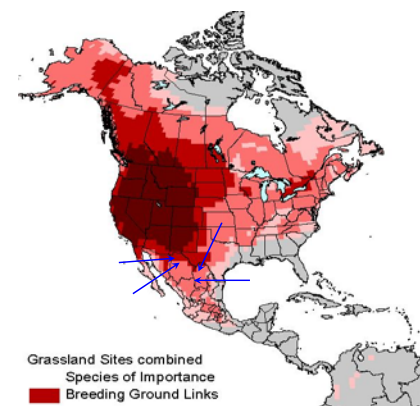
This proposal supports a long-term tri-national partnership focused on training, technical assistance, and acquisition and enhancement of grassland habitat. Canadian and U.S. partners include the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy, and the Prairie Pothole and Prairie Habitat Joint Ventures. Mexican conservationists in both Janos Valley and Saltillo Grasslands have been active in these partnerships since their inception. Funding for this proposal will support conservation projects in Mexico and link them to U.S. and Canadian activities, thus transforming the partnership into a vigorous tri-national venture over the next five years. Activities include on-the-ground habitat conservation, integrated grassland bird monitoring in the three countries, and outreach and education programs focused on the conservation of grassland ecosystems for birds and other wildlife.



Long-billed Curlew/ Gary Kramer

This proposal concentrates on the two Mexican priority grassland areas mentioned above and has a five-year budget of \$US17 million. Partners will provide matching funds at a 1:1 ratio. Specific activities include:

- Support for a Northern Mexico Regional Grassland Bird Conservation Alliance Coordinator to engage all partners, carry out education and outreach activities, and conduct annual meetings.
- Protecting and managing over 2 million hectares, including purchasing Ranch El Uno and other critical habitats and grazing rights, and restoration.
- Creation of a forage bank in Pronatura's Reserves, collecting seed for restoration purposes, and training more than 2,000 cattle producers.
- Educating new generations from both regions through a bi-national approach in the Northern Border.
- Implementing a comprehensive grassland bird monitoring and inventory program across the Chihuahuan Desert.
- Ensuring the long-term protection of key grassland tracts across northern Mexico using a variety of conservation tools, such as biosphere reserve and ecological ordainment.
- Implementing a self-financing strategy to ensure the operation of Pronatura Reserves, including a Patrimony Fund for \$2 million that will support their long-term operation.



Breeding ground links for priority birds of the Chihuahuan Desert Grasslands