

ESTABLISHED IN : 1999, to support National Audubon Society activities in Colorado  
 STATE BIRD : Lark Bunting, *Calamospiza melanocorys*  
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## SOARING TO SUCCESS

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**Global Warming: Canaries in the Coal  
 Mine Warn That Humans Are In Trouble**

By Holly Carpenter, Global Warming Coordinator

Global warming is now broadly accepted as the greatest conservation challenge facing birds – and humans. The science is now accepted around the world that the earth is becoming hotter and threatening wildlife and humans alike in the near future. We are fortunate in Colorado to have one of the highest concentrations of climate scientists in the world associated with NCAR, NOAA, and CU Boulder which means we have available some of the best science in the world for our region. We are unfortunate in that CO and much of the west is heating up more than most of the rest of the country.

*Impacts on Birds and Other Animals*

Global warming is not just about longer, hotter summers but will likely include increased wildfires and drought, decreased snowpack and upwardly-moving treelines, and more invasive plant and animal pests. The International Panel on Climate Change predicts that 50-52% of all avian species will decrease in abundance by at least a quarter of their current population, due to changes in geography, reproduction, migration, and pest outbreaks all precipitated by global warming. According to the IPCC, we could see 1/3 of all animal species disappear from complexities associated with the warming of our earth. As in the historical coal mines, these losses with birds and other wildlife predict problems for humans as well.

*Impacts on Humans*

In human terms, we could see hundreds of millions of environmental refugees in this century, increased air pollution, the spread of tropical diseases, water shortages and contamination, and increased frequency of famines. Colorado farmers, ranchers, anglers, and hunters will see the land and habitats they depend on change and perhaps become unusable. Coloradoans who live at or below the poverty line may face problems in hotter months when they can't afford air conditioning.

*Solutions*

Humans have caused this and we can reverse it. Whether it is by changing things at home and at work or by becoming involved with local, state and/or federal governments, your actions will make a difference with global warming. Go to our website: [www.auduboncolorado.org](http://www.auduboncolorado.org) to find solutions that you can enact. Also, you can find tips on writing your congressmen and letters to the editor. Lastly, sign up on our e-activist list (<http://audubonaction.org/campaign/climateactionpledge>) and we will send you updates on ways to take action. Audubon Colorado is working with Al Gore's Alliance for Climate Protection and the WE campaign and with the C-Campaign on solutions and to facilitate individual participation. We all want to make sure that canaries and all birds continue to sing so please help reduce global warming in any way you can.

**TogetherGreen Schools**

Audubon Colorado, in collaboration with Front Range Earth Force, is teaming up with Denver metro area youth to tackle global warming in their schools. TogetherGreen Schools will empower middle school-aged children to learn about the negative effects of global warming in their communities and take practical actions to decrease energy use in their schools. Audubon and FR Earth Force will work with youth to conduct energy audits of their schools and assess their own personal carbon footprints. Then, they will be given the tools to implement simple and affordable changes in their schools that will save money and decrease energy consumption by thousands of kilowatts a year. Ideally, children will take what they have learned in their assessments and implement changes in their own homes that will save them and their families money and energy.

TogetherGreen Schools was made possible by a significant grant from Toyota Motor Company and will be initiated in Denver Public Schools this year.

## Energy Development, Sage-Grouse and the Battle for the West

By Gary Graham, Audubon Colorado Executive Director

Over the last year, Audubon Colorado made major progress in our campaign to protect sage-grouse and their habitat in the West. We worked with Governor Ritter's offices to develop regulations that will minimize wildlife population loss and habitat degradation and loss within oil and gas development areas. These enforceable rules are particularly important in that they will minimize the development impact on Gunnison and Greater Sage-Grouse populations and sage brush habitats.

Colorado has more species of grouse (eight) than any other state in the country. Unfortunately, all five of the "prairie grouse" species living in open land habitats have suffered significant population declines over the past 50 years and all have been proposed for federal listing under the Endangered Species Act. The decisions to not list two of these species, Gunnison and Greater Sage-Grouse, are currently being litigated. Gunnison Sage-Grouse is the most endangered with only about 5,000 individuals left in the world. Greater Sage-Grouse have suffered the greatest impacts by oil and gas activities with many populations being extirpated while others have declined by 85%.

Landscapes planned for oil and gas development also unfortunately contain the largest populations of Greater Sage-Grouse. Lease sales within sage-grouse habitat continue, and no comprehensive national plan is in place to protect sage-grouse populations from oil and gas. A study commissioned by Associated Governments of Northwest Colorado (AGNC) projected for Garfield, Mesa, Rio Blanco and Moffat counties around 50,000 additional wells over the next 30 years on top of the 7,500 operating wells already in the region. Over 90% of Greater Sage-Grouse habitat in Colorado has already been leased for energy development.

In the face of such an intensive economic force, voluntary guidelines and best management practices simply do not work. The propensity to maximize profits, if there are no consequences, will trump the good intentions of many stakeholders. If the oil and

gas development impacts are not minimized, then there will be little or no sage-grouse and sage brush left and the West will have lost a significant part of what defines it. We can not create new species or replace those lost. We even have a very hard time creating any new habitat once it is irreversibly changed. When all of this is lost or so seriously compromised as to be uninviting to grouse, hunters, other recreationists, and people in general, then the world loses.

Audubon Colorado helped pass enabling legislation (Colorado House Bills 1298 and 1341) during the 2007 legislative session that led to an extensive oil and gas rulemaking process. Audubon was an early, effective, and ongoing participant in the stakeholder process that included the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (COGCC), the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW), several other nongovernmental conservation organizations, private landowner affiliated groups, and representatives from most of the major oil and gas companies working in the state.



After a lengthy stakeholder process, the COGCC issued a final draft of proposed rules that simplified the previous rules by requiring consultation with CDOW before any drilling permit could be issued in Sensitive Wildlife Areas, which included sage-grouse core areas as Audubon Colorado recommended.

Also, with support from the Colorado environmental community, Governor Ritter, added balance to the COGCC by including additional members from wildlife and environmental interests. This was a very important factor in allowing the passage of these regulations. During the past year, however, the intensity of oil and gas development has increased as the industry attempts to secure as many leases as they can while the current federal administration is in place. Coincident with that has been a tremendous, very well funded, media push by the oil and gas industry to mislead the public into thinking the rules were bad for Colorado and the economy. This oil and gas propaganda occurred as gas prices rose significantly and together placed a great deal of pressure on the Governor and the COGCC to weaken the rules. Fortunately for Audubon and more importantly, the birds and other wildlife living in oil and gas zones, neither the Governor nor the COGCC backed down.

### The Jake and Terry Hershey Audubon Outreach Project

by Becky Gillette, Southwest Regional Director

This has been an exciting year for our new Southwest Regional office in Pagosa Springs. Thanks to the generosity and vision of Mrs. Terry Hershey, and with additional support from the National Recreation Foundation, Toyota (TogetherGreen), and the Jacob and Terese Hershey Foundation, southwest Colorado now benefits from new opportunities for environmental education, research, conservation and community activism.

The Jake and Terry Hershey Environmental Education Program served more than 700 elementary school children this year, in a combination of classroom- and field-based programs focused on hands-on science education. Field programs took place on the Hershey's Four Mile Ranch just north of Pagosa Springs, where students explored their local environment and discovered the science hidden in rivers, ponds, meadows, spruce forests and cottonwood groves. Eighteen adult community members were trained and certified as Volunteer Educators, donating more than 1100 hours to allow students to learn science directly from the natural world in a way not possible inside a school building.

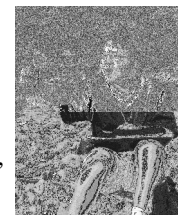


The 2200 acres of Four Mile Ranch are under conservation easement, providing a valuable connection to surrounding National Forest lands for wildlife corridors.

We're working toward Important Bird Area (IBA) designation for the area, and our initial assessments showed that the ranch provides especially good woodpecker habitat. All of southwest Colorado's woodpecker species have been documented, including the elusive American Three-toed Woodpecker! Other species of interest include Grace's and Virginia's warblers, more commonly seen farther west and south. Further research will focus on documenting populations of specific birds, as well as assessing the value and extent of bird habitats in the area.

With the goal of establishing both the ranch and the Pagosa Springs region as birding destinations, we've worked with the Pagosa Springs Chamber of

Commerce on informational brochures and exhibits for public education. Collaborations with the Colorado Division of Wildlife and the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory are also in progress as we work to create a southwestern loop for the Colorado Birding Trail.



Southwest Colorado faces numerous conservation issues including oil and gas development, water management, and residential and commercial development, and we're bringing new ideas and energy to focus on these concerns. Our efforts are strengthened by the work of the newly formed Weminuche (wim-in-ooch) Audubon Society, promoting the conservation of birds, wildlife and habitat through educational programs, habitat restoration projects, and positive collaborations with local organizations and agencies.

In May, the Weminuche chapter received its first grant from Together Green for *Volunteer Days*, a series of six events focused on volunteer recruitment for on-the-ground conservation projects. Efforts this fall proved successful – eighty volunteers gave more than 300 hours to build and install roosting boxes for overwintering birds, and to protect the valuable habitat of standing dead ponderosa pines in San Juan National Forest.

Our plans for 2009 include additions to the environmental education program, expansion of the bluebird monitoring trail at Four Mile Ranch, and collaboration with the Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas program. Be sure to let us know if you're in the area – we'd love to show you around!

Audubon Colorado would like to express our deepest gratitude to the following sponsors who make our work possible:



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### The Audubon Program for Conservation Careers

Audubon Colorado has made significant progress over the last year to put education programs associated with the APCC on the ground in the Denver metro area.



We teamed up with Front Range Earth Force and Toyota Motor Company to work with youth in Denver metro area schools to implement a global warming and energy reduction education program, TogetherGreen Schools. Through this initiative, we will be actively engaging with middle-school youth across the Denver metro area.

Also, Audubon plans to expand the APCC into new conservation fields, including habitat restoration and water/river quality issues.

We are particularly thankful for the partnerships and generosity of our corporate partners including Xcel Energy, the ECA Foundation and Toyota Motor Company, who made this program possible.

### Audubon at the Capitol: The Year in Review

Audubon Colorado once again benefited from the work of Jennifer Boulton, during the 2007/2008 Colorado Legislative Session. Jen worked tirelessly toward the passage of several conservation-related bills including:

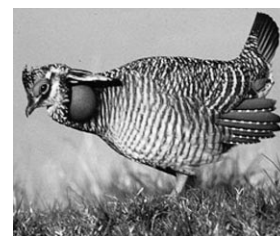
- SB 221. Bonding for Forest Health—the passage of this bill allows the Colorado Water and Power Development Authority to issue bonds to governmental entities who take on forest health and watershed protection projects.
- HB 1137. Limit Division of Wildlife Acquisitions. We fought to kill passage of this bill as it would have required the Division of Wild-

life to release land or water of equal value whenever it acquired property.

- HB 1141. Sustainable Water Supply. Audubon worked to pass this bill, which requires that developers demonstrate, during the approval process, that they have a sufficient water supply for the proposed project.
- HB 1069. Off Highway Vehicle Enforcement. This bill, signed into law by the Governor, allows state peace officers to enforce off highway vehicle regulations on federally owned public lands.
- HB 1304. Bald Eagle Protection. This bill, signed by the Governor, adds bald eagles to the list of species for which Colorado levies heightened fines for illegal take or possession.

In addition to the bills highlighted above, Audubon Colorado promoted legislation that advanced solar technologies, improved net metering for residential and commercial sites that put energy back into the grid, and insured more protective mining practices. The full list of legislation Audubon worked on can be found on our website, <http://auduboncolorado.org>.

### Featured Colorado Bird: Lesser Prairie-Chicken



Once hunted as a game species, the Lesser Prairie-Chicken is now a candidate species for protection under the Endangered Species Act. This species is vulnerable because of its limited range and small population size. These birds are heavily dependent on sand sagebrush and shinnery oak grassland habitats. Lesser Prairie-Chickens have experienced a population decline of at least 90% since 1800s and like many other grassland birds continue to show widespread losses. From 1963 to 1980, the distribution of this species in the 5 states it inhabits declined by 78%.