

## Recovering Grassland Birds

Brad Andres 08/30/2020 :

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### Audubon's Conservation Ranching Initiative



Pronghorn Ranch, part of Audubon's Conservation Ranching Program, Converse County, Wyoming, June 7, 2018. Western Meadowlark — Evan Barrientos (c)

In last year's publication of the *Decline of the North American Avifauna* by Ken Rosenberg and colleagues, the authors reported that grassland birds experienced the largest loss of any bird group since the 1970s — more than 700 million breeding individuals. Of 31 grassland bird species, 74% are declining. Only 40% of historical grasslands that stretched from Canada to Mexico remain. These alarming trends have sparked a coordinated effort to develop a roadmap for the recovery of North American grasslands and their birds.

For their part, National Audubon and Audubon Rockies developed the [Conservation Ranching Initiative](#) as a market-based approach to incentivize bird-friendly livestock management practices. Ranchers who comply with Audubon-approved habitat management plans earn the right to use the "Grazed on Audubon Certified Bird Friendly Land" certification mark in product promotion, attracting conservation-conscious consumers, and supporting premium pricing.



Mike Fernandez/Audubon (c)

These regenerative grazing practices ensure environmental sustainability, and well-managed grasslands can sequester carbon that can provide economic benefits to the rancher and ecological benefits to birds, pollinators, and other wildlife. To measure success, Audubon devised a *Bird Friendliness Index*, and ranches are periodically audited to ensure compliance. In addition to benefitting birds, the Audubon certification affirms that the cattle receive no antibiotics or hormones and are treated humanely.

Currently, more than 2.3 million acres on 96 ranches across 11 states are certified or in the process of being certified through the initiative. Products with this certification are available from 26 retailers and 12 restaurants across 7 states, and 11 companies sell the products online. Audubon's goal is to have 2.5 million acres enrolled by the end of 2020. Here in Colorado, [Corner Post Meats](#), located northeast of Colorado Springs, became the first ranch certified by Audubon's Conservation Ranching Initiative. As with bird-friendly coffee, being a conscious beef consumer can help recover our grassland birds. More information can be found at the websites above and on Audubon Rockie's [Ranching page](#).

(adapted from Audubon's Conservation Ranching websites)