

The Rectrix

A seasonal newsletter of the Missouri River Bird Observatory

Première Edition



rectrix |rek-triks| noun. (pl. -trices) any of the larger feathers in a bird's tail, used for steering in flight.



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Dear friends of Missouri wildlife,

It is with great pride that I share with you this first news-
letter from the Missouri River Bird Observatory. MRBO, as the
organization as come to be known, was incorporated in Missouri
in May 2010 and received its official designation as a non-profit
organization in August of the same year.

As you read through the articles that follow, you will learn
that this milestone was achieved through years of dedication to
the environment by the founding biologists and a commitment
to the state that they now call home. I first met Dana and Ethan
through my own interests as a Master Naturalist and the synergy
was instant. They are inspiring as professionals; understanding as educators; and tena-
cious in achieving the goals they have set forth.

In February 2011, I was elected to the position of Chairman of this fledging orga-
nization by the Board of Directors. Fledgling is an apt description because we were all
just learning the fundamentals of how to spread our wings at that time. In the six short
months since then, Dana and Ethan, the Board of Directors and the interns and volun-
teers who are an integral part of MRBO, have all had new and challenging experiences.

We have shared the beauty of nature with many friends and associates and we
will share their stories with you as well in the following pages. There were also endless
hours of research and bird monitoring in extremes of weather that should not go unno-
ticed.

There are many people who I would like to thank for helping MRBO to get where
it is today. First and foremost, Gene Gardner of the Missouri Department of Conserva-
tion, along with Rick Thom of the Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation, the staff
of Grand Pass Conservation Area, Katie Koch and Todd Jones-Farrand of the U.S. Fish and
Wildlife Service, Christine Kline, Craig Hensley, and Sherry Leonardo of Burroughs Audu-
bon Society, and the Missouri Master Naturalists of Cole Camp, are especially appreciated
for supporting MRBO in its very early development.

As we celebrate the first anniversary of MRBO we have reached another cross-
road. The growth of MRBO, like any organization, requires the support of many to
continue to provide services. A membership drive has been launched this month and
I sincerely hope that you will take the time to consider all that MRBO has to offer and
respond with a generous contribution to show your support. You will be kept informed
of all activities through quarterly newsletters.

I look forward to the public's response and hope to meet many of you at one of
our community programs.

Sincerely,

Jim

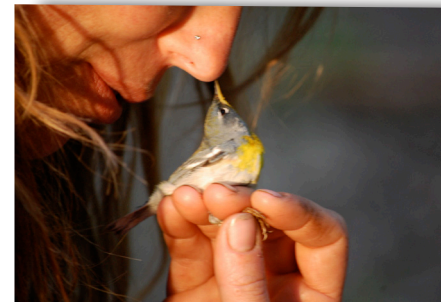


Dana is a native of Illinois but moved to Hong Kong with her family at a
young age and attended elementary and middle school there. She chose to return
to her hometown of Naperville where she received her bachelor's degree in biol-
ogy at North Central College. Although she earned the 1998 "Biology Student of
the Year" award, Dana missed her commencement ceremony as she was already
off pursuing her career with a posting at Long Point Bird Observatory in Ontario,
Canada. Already it was evident her focus would be avian ecology and conserva-
tion.

In 2000 Dana enrolled at Arkansas State University to obtain her Master's
Degree in Wildlife Biology. Her thesis on habitat use by Hairy Woodpeckers in
western Washington State took her again to the top of class and awards.

The move to Missouri in 2008 was a pivotal point in Dana's life. In a very
short time she established a relationship with the Missouri Department of Con-
servation. Her early work at Grand Pass in conjunction with MDC served as the foundation for the founding of
MRBO.

Anyone who has the opportunity to meet Dana will immediately feel her passion for avian conservation.
She will enthuse on her vision for research and monitoring of bird populations; not just for the sake of knowl-
edge in and of itself but for the purpose of putting that knowledge to work to save declining bird populations
across the state and beyond.



"Our work at MRBO needs to be executed on a long term basis", Dana
explained. "Monitoring in a fixed location must be ongoing to obtain proper
data. More widespread off-site monitoring is also necessary to assess a vari-
ety of different habitats and impacts on the landscape scale." The findings of
MRBO are shared with state, federal and private agencies.

Dana went on to express her enthusiasm for MRBO's Community Out-
reach Program: "There is no way we will ever be able to conserve anything if
people don't know or care about it. Birds are great ambassadors for conser-
vation. I've seen people who seemed afraid of even the smallest of birds but once a colorful wild bird is held in a
hand just inches for their peering eyes, they become enamored and want to become a part of this beautiful world
that we call nature."





The rural northern Appalachia area of western New York State offers a wealth of biodiversity and it was here that Ethan grew up and experienced a childhood surrounded by many of the wonders that nature had to offer.

Four years in the service of our country as a member of the US Air Force took Ethan overseas. He earned a number of Air Force medals for achievements and several Commanders' awards for his work.

Upon returning to the States, Ethan earned his Bachelor's degree in Wildlife Management in 2006 from the State University of New York at Cobleskill. During these and the following years he also gained invaluable knowledge for his work at MRBO.

Extensive experience in research and monitoring of several avian species, including Pileated Woodpeckers, Veerys, Cerulean Warblers and American Redstarts, was gained across the United States. Work with game species and grassland birds rounded out skills.

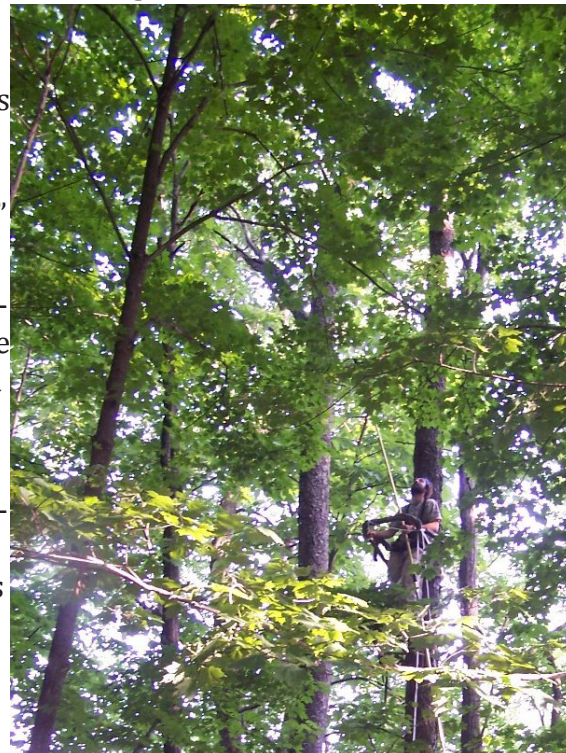


All of this led to further assignments in recent years gathering data for universities as well as state and federal agencies for conservation programs. This became an important feature in the founding of MRBO.

One of Ethan's fortes is avian vocal communication or more simply put, bird songs. He willingly shares his thoughts on this, "There is something about listening to a bird sing that I will never grow tired of. Birds are such an enjoyable medium through which MRBO can connect with people and this enables us to employ a seamless integration of research, education and conservation."

Bioacoustics, a science involving recording and analyzing sounds, has become an integral component in avian research and monitoring. This new technology will be employed by MRBO in the Secretive Marsh Bird project that is being done in conjunction with the US Fish & Wildlife Services and Missouri Department of Conservation.

Ethan has deployed Autonomous Recording Units (ARU) in the field to supplement MRBO's Grand Pass Conservation Area banding station data as well as using the devices for the statewide Purple Martin project and at MAPS stations. He enthused, "I find the potential results fascinating and this will prove invaluable in our conservations efforts".



In late January 2011, we were contacted by Marshall resident Randy Harlin, who expressed interested in doing some research with his Purple Martin colony. In collaboration with the Purple Martin Conservation Association (PMCA) we launched a banding project in which Purple Martin nestlings were fitted with special color bands that will allow Martin "landlords" across the state to identify individual fledglings and adults when they return next spring. This re-sight data will enable MRBO and our landlord colleagues to track longevity and dispersal of the fledglings produced at their colonies. The landlords who take part in this banding project are highly dedicated individuals who spend a large amount of time observing their birds for bands.



Our Purple Martin banding follows PMCA protocol, which has been successfully adopted by banders in many different states.

Each state receives their own color for Martin bands and each band is etched with the state abbreviation and a serial number (such as A001). Birds banded by MRBO receive a yellow aluminum band with black numbering. These auxiliary bands are in addition to the standard aluminum federal band. The serial numbers are legible on perched birds with a spotting scope.

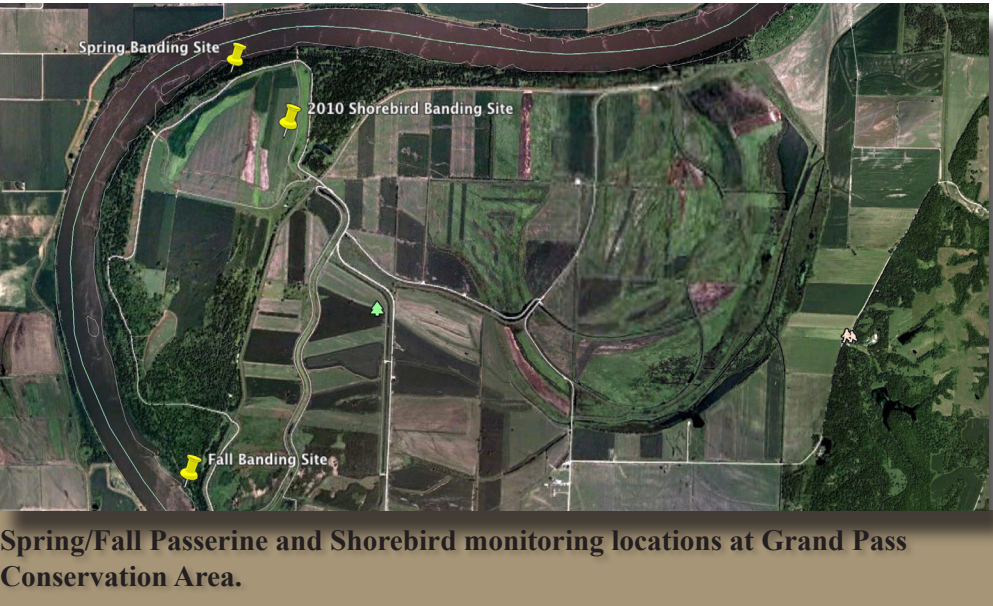
In addition to nestling banding, we recorded Martin vocalizations at each colony in various stages of the nesting cycle. The analysis of these opportunistic recordings will be used to assess colony condition and to elucidate phonological diversity expressed in dialect.

This year, we banded 800 nestlings and 16 adults at four colonies located in Marshall, St. Louis, Licking, and Platte City, Missouri. Purple Martin nestling banding will continue again next summer, and we are interested in adding a few colonies in other parts of the state to increase the likelihood of resightings. This was an excellent opportunity to aid citizens involved with conservation and bring the concept to the public eye through extensive media coverage. Articles about this project were published in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the Marshall Democrat-News, and the Licking News.



Above: Randy Harlin and Dana Ripper bring in a gourd-style nestbox containing young Purple Martins.





The original impetus for the formation of MRBO was the need to monitor birds that use the Missouri River corridor as stopover habitat during migration. By the very nature of bird migration, the journey is perilous and tests the limits of endurance. Before migration, birds are capable of storing up to 50% of their body weight in lipids. They rely upon stopover sites to rebuild these reserves. Stopover habitat is increasingly becoming important for many bird populations in decline due to habitat alteration on wintering grounds and fragmentation throughout their ranges.

In order for land managers to make sound decisions considering multiple landscape scales and diverse taxa, consistent and standardized monitoring efforts throughout species' life history cycles are needed. Resulting information can inform decisions based on migration timing of various avian species, condition of birds in migration, as well as habitat associations. To begin tracking spring migration along the Missouri River corridor, we selected Grand Pass Conservation Area (GPCA) as the primary sampling site.

The principal monitoring tool used by MRBO is bird-banding, which consists of the following:

- Fixed placement of at least fifteen 12-m long by 3-m tall mist-nets on the north side of GPCA, erected in early April and operated daily until late May.
- Nets are opened each day one half hour before dawn, weather permitting, and run until capture rate decline
- Each bird receives a standard, individually-numbered U.S.G.S aluminum band, is identified to species or subspecies, and aged as precisely as possible.

	Spring Passerines 2009	Fall Shorebirds 2009	Spring Passerines 2010
Number of Birds Banded	418	64	1154
Number of Species Banded	53 Species	5 Species	72 Species

Species	Total
Acadian Flycatcher	5
American Goldfinch	21
American Redstart	19
American Robin	2
Baltimore Oriole	17
Black-and-white Warbler	16
Black-capped Chickadee	2
Blue Jay	10
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	2
Blue-headed Vireo	2
Blue-winged Warbler	1
Brown Thrasher	15
Brown-headed Cowbird	10
Canada Warbler	4
Chestnut-sided Warbler	1
Chipping Sparrow	1
Clay-colored Sparrow	1
Common Yellowthroat	80
Downy Woodpecker	2
Eastern Tufted Titmouse	6
Eastern White-crowned Sparrow	5
Eastern Wood-Pewee	5
Field Sparrow	1
Golden-winged Warbler	3
Gray Catbird	66
Gray-cheeked Thrush	6
Great Crested Flycatcher	4
Hairy Woodpecker	2
Hermit Thrush	8
House Wren	9
Indigo Bunting	94
Kentucky Warbler	3
Least Flycatcher	15
Lincoln's Sparrow	6
Magnolia Warbler	9

Marsh Wren	2
Mourning Warbler	11
Myrtle Warbler	60
Nashville Warbler	6
Northern Cardinal	22
Northern Parula	1
Northern Waterthrush	39
Orange-crowned Warbler	7
Orchard Oriole	7
Ovenbird	13
Red-bellied Woodpecker	2
Red-eyed Vireo	4
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	26
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	36
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2
Slate-colored Junco	1
Song Sparrow	4
Summer Tanager	1
Swainson's Thrush	83
Swamp Sparrow	27
Tennessee Warbler	6
Traill's Flycatcher	57
Veery	3
Warbling Vireo	22
Western Palm Warbler	1
White-eyed Vireo	1
White-throated Sparrow	114
Wilson's Warbler	17
Winter Wren	1
Wood Thrush	10
Yellow Warbler	5
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	5
Yellow-breasted Chat	2
Yellow-shafted Flicker	2
Yellow-throated Vireo	1
Grand Total	1054

- Standard morphological measurements, including fat and muscle condition, are documented.

Beginning in Spring 2011, we also deployed an Autonomous Recording Unit at the banding site in order to record night flight calls of migrants from sunset to sunrise. Recordings will allow us to supplement banding data by determining the relative presence and abundance of species that are not captured or otherwise observed at GPCA.

Spring 2011 was the third season of operation of the permanent field station on the north side of GPCA. With 22 nets, including one elevated net, in operation from 15 April to 27 May, we captured 1054 birds of 70 species (please see table). Weather posed more of a serious challenge than it did in the spring of 2009 or 2010. High south winds, often exceeding 20 m.p.h., pushed migratory birds through Missouri quickly and forced daily efforts to be reduced in order to prevent injuries to birds. The Missouri River inundated the banding site and forced operations to end on 27 May, but that did not significantly affect results.

This spring season saw the capture of our 100-104th species at GPCA, which were Blue-grey Gnatcatcher, Marsh Wren, Clay-colored Sparrow, Blue-winged Warbler, and Western Palm Warbler. Other highlights included the capture of three Golden-winged Warblers, high numbers of Swainson's Thrush, and returning individuals from several species (e.g., Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Baltimore Oriole) originally banded in 2009 and 2010.



Fall Passerines 2010	Fall Shorebirds 2010	Total
447	75	3212
45 Species	14 Species	104 species



Black-and-White Warbler



Kentucky Warbler



Magnolia Warbler



Red-bellied Woodpecker

Top 20 Species	Spring 2009
White-throated Sparrow	87
Indigo Bunting	31
Northern Waterthrush	31
Grey Catbird	28
Swainson's Thrush	25
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	24
Common Yellowthroat	20
Northern Cardinal	15
Ovenbird	14
Warbling Vireo	12
Carolina Wren	9
Wood Thrush	8
Hermit Thrush	7
Brown Thrasher	7
Song Sparrow	7
Lincoln's Sparrow	6
Red-winged Blackbird	6
Slate-colored Junco	6
Swamp Sparrow	5
Orange-crowned Warbler	5

Top 20 Species	Spring 2010
Indigo Bunting	160
Common Yellowthroat	127
White-throated Sparrow	91
Swainson's Thrush	85
Grey Catbird	73
Northern Waterthrush	38
Northern Cardinal	36
Wilson's Warbler	34
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	29
Least Flycatcher	29
Traill's Flycatcher	27
Ovenbird	25
Black-and-White Warbler	21
Grey-cheeked Thrush	19
Warbling Vireo	18
Swamp Sparrow	17
Baltimore Oriole	16
Orchard Oriole	16
House Wren	16
Mourning Warbler	16

Top 20 Species	Fall 2010
White-throated Sparrow	94
Wood Thrush	61
Northern Cardinal	46
Hermit Thrush	37
Winter Wren	22
Swainson's Thrush	19
Brown Creeper	18
Ovenbird	16
Gray Catbird	12
Red-winged Blackbird	11
Nashville Warbler	10
Tufted Titmouse	10
Golden-crowned Kinglet	9
Northern Waterthrush	9
Indigo Bunting	7
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	7
Carolina Wren	6
Orange-crowned Warbler	5
Slate-colored Junco	5
Song Sparrow	5

Species	Fall 2009 Shorebirds
Baird's Sandpiper	2
Least Sandpiper	50
Lesser Yellowlegs	1
Semipalmated Plover	2
Semipalmated Sandpiper	9
Grand Total	64

Species	Fall 2010 Shorebirds
Killdeer	4
Least Sandpiper	31
Lesser Yellowlegs	1
Pectoral Sandpiper	12
Solitary Sandpiper	5
Spotted Sandpiper	4
Grand Total	57



Brown Thrasher



Golden-crowned Kinglet



Brown Creeper



Yellow-billed Cuckoo

The Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) Program was pioneered in 1989 by the Institute for Bird Populations to assess and monitor the vital rates and population dynamics of North American birds and inform bird conservation efforts. A MAPS station is operated very differently from a migration banding station. MAPS stations consist of 5-10 nets placed within a defined 20-hectare area, opened only once every ten days throughout the summer breeding season. This allows us to monitor the presence, abundance, and reproductive output of passerine birds by trapping both adults and fledglings over the course of the summer. Operation once in ten days will ensure that the local, territorial birds do not become “net wary”.

MRBO's three MAPS stations are located in the prairies around Cole Camp and Sedalia. With assistance from MDC staff, we selected three prairies in which to use MAPS protocol as a tool for comparing breeding bird productivity in prairies that are in various stages of restoration. These sites are Ionia Ridge (early stages of restoration; low quality site), Grandfather Prairie (medium vegetative diversity; mid-quality site), and Paintbrush Prairie (later restoration stages; high vegetative diversity; high quality site).

The first season of this project, Summer 2011, was extremely successful both in terms of numbers of birds caught and observed, and diversity documented. A total of 682 birds of 41 species were captured over the course of the summer (please see table below). These numbers were quite surprising as MAPS stations generally have low capture rates, and grassland habitat is a particularly difficult place to catch birds!

Ionia Ridge Prairie	
Species	Total
American Goldfinch	6
American Robin	5
Bell's Vireo	1
Blue Grosbeak	1
Brown Thrasher	10
Common Grackle	5
Common Yellowthroat	9
Dickcissel	32
Downy Woodpecker	1
Eastern Kingbird	1
Eastern Phoebe	1
Field Sparrow	22
Grasshopper Sparrow	1
Gray Catbird	1
Indigo Bunting	4
Northern Mockingbird	4
Red-winged Blackbird	21
Song Sparrow	1
Traill's Flycatcher	2
White-crowned Sparrow	1
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	2
Grand Total	131

Paintbrush Prairie	
Species	Total
American Goldfinch	32
Barn Swallow	5
Bell's Vireo	20
Black-and-white Warbler	1
Blue Grosbeak	1
Brown Thrasher	3
Brown-headed Cowbird	6
Carolina Wren	1
Cedar Waxwing	1
Common Yellowthroat	17
Dickcissel	15
Downy Woodpecker	1
Eastern Kingbird	1
Eastern Towhee	1
Field Sparrow	12
Grasshopper Sparrow	1
Gray Catbird	50
Great Crested Flycatcher	2
Henslow's Sparrow	2
Indigo Bunting	13
Least Flycatcher	1
Northern Cardinal	1
Orchard Oriole	5
Traill's Flycatcher	8
Yellow-breasted Chat	13
Grand Total	213

In addition to mist-netting, we are recording vocalizations daily at each site and documenting all observations of territorial birds and nests, such that our banding data will be complemented by survey and vocalization data. The MAPS project will be operated yearly for at least the next 15 years, allowing us to accumulate long-term data on bird response to prairie restoration and management.

Grandfather Prairie	
Species	Total
American Goldfinch	26
Baltimore Oriole	4
Bell's Vireo	8
Black-capped Chickadee	7
Blue Grosbeak	4
Blue Jay	1
Brown Thrasher	4
Brown-headed Cowbird	12
Common Yellowthroat	21
Dickcissel	36
Downy Woodpecker	6
Eastern Meadowlark	1
Eastern Phoebe	1
Eastern Towhee	1
Field Sparrow	12
Grasshopper Sparrow	1
Gray Catbird	41
Henslow's Sparrow	1
Indigo Bunting	22
Least Flycatcher	1
Northern Cardinal	8
Northern Mockingbird	1
Orchard Oriole	20
Ovenbird	1
Red-winged Blackbird	1
Summer Tanager	1
Traill's Flycatcher	9
Wilson's Warbler	1
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	2
Yellow-breasted Chat	12
Grand Total	266

Our first class of school-age children visited MRBO's Grand Pass CA field station in Spring 2010. Due to positive results from this class visit, Marshall's Bueker Middle School brought three more classes to learn about birds, research, and conservation in the Fall of 2010. By the end of Spring 2011 we had classes visiting each day during peak migration, hosted the entire Higginsville Immanuel Lutheran School at Van Meter State Park, received visits from home-schooled families, and made education-focused trips throughout the state, reaching both children and adults at high-profile public events as well as in the classroom! Overall, we have reached over 1500 in small-group educational settings, including more than 700 elementary and middle school students.

We have found bird-banding to be an extremely engaging tool for reaching all age groups amongst diverse audiences. Giving students and adults an up-close and personal experience with a colorful wild bird has been an excellent way to open conversations or lessons about wildlife biology, research, and conservation. Thus, banding demonstrations have provided the cornerstone of our education program, and are complemented by bird walks, age-appropriate discussions, and Flying and Project WILD activities for school groups. Whether classes visit our field stations or demonstrations are brought to them, an outdoor component is present in at least 90% of our education events.

Throughout the winter of 2010/2011, we visited 16 private homes and two businesses as part of our community outreach Backyard Banding program. This resulted in 160 people having experiences with birds literally in their own backyard. In the spring of 2011, MRBO collaborated with Craig Hensley, educator from the Kansas City, KS Schlagle Library and Environmental Learning Center, and Burroughs Audubon Society board member Christine Kline to provide educational demonstrations at the Wings Over Weston migratory bird festival at Weston Bend State Park. Over two days, hundreds of children and adults observed bird banding and learned about migration and conservation. MRBO also served at a similar community event hosted by the Friends of Squaw Creek at Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge. Additionally, education programs that included bird-banding and guided field hikes for the general public were conducted as part of University of Central Missouri's spring Bio-Blitz and Bray Conservation Area's summer Bio-Blitz.



There is something transformative that occurs when you put binoculars in the hands of kids. Bushnell donated 25 pairs of binoculars to MRBO for use in education and outreach programs.

Upcoming events include Cole Camp Prairie Day, at which MRBO will provide banding demonstrations in conjunction with scheduled prairie tours, and the Missouri State Fair, at which we will give two presentations on Missouri's birds as part of the Floriculture Building exhibits. We are also co-hosting several workshops for educators with the MDC, which will result in Missouri teachers being trained in bird ID and ecology, allowing them to integrate field experiences into classroom curricula.

"Our Field trip was the best thing I've ever been to. It is my first time touching a bird. It was like an adventure to me. Thank you for inviting us. I've learned so much, I even try to look for birds."

~Dashawn, 5th Grader

"I think that the bird banding was very fascinating because I didn't know half the stuff Ms. Dana showed us... I liked the Blue Jay. I've never seen one up close. Bird banding seems a lot of fun. It makes me want to be a bird-bander."

~Zion, 5th Grader

"I think that it was awesome to watch the banding of birds. I liked to touch the bird. I have never in my whole life seen the birds that we saw, like a blue jay, and yellow warbler. I loved to go out there and I will probably go out there again."

~Maddie, 5th Grader

August 12th, Clinton: Nature Unleashed workshop for educators: MRBO will assist MDC Education Specialist Cynthia Green with a teacher training focused on birds and the Discover Nature Schools 3rd - 5th grade curriculum.

August 17th, Sedalia: "Missouri's Backyard Birds" presented at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. in the Floriculture Building at the Missouri State Fair. MRBO will have a booth near the presentation theater and be on-hand all day with information and merchandise.

August 19th and 20th, Columbia: Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative (MoBCI) annual meeting. Any and all people interested in the conservation of Missouri's birds are welcome to attend!

August 29th, Saline County: Fall migration banding begins at Van Meter State Park and a second site TBD, likely the City of Marshall's Indian Foothills Park. The fall migration season will last until the end of October.

September 30th-October 1st, Chesterfield: The Missouri Bluebird Society Annual Conference, with presentations by MRBO, Missouri's own Purple Martin expert John Miller, and Eastern Bluebird experts Bob and Judy Peak from Kentucky.

October 8th, Cole Camp: Cole Camp Prairie Day in conjunction with the town's Oktoberfest weekend. Activities include prairie tours, bird-banding on the prairie, and booths, tents, food, and games in downtown Cole Camp.

October 15th, Sedalia: Latest in a series of educator workshops with the MDC's Cynthia Green, MRBO will co-host a training focused on birds, field techniques, and conservation.

In the next issue of *The Rectrix*...

Fall migration monitoring
Northern Saw-whet Owls

Species Profile: Indigo Bunting
Kids' Corner: content for youth



Ethan bands a Greater Prairie Chicken at Prairie Days in Cole Camp, MO in 2010.

MRBO Mission

To contribute to the conservation of Missouri's migratory and resident birds through scientific research and monitoring, community outreach, and education.

To gather information about avian communities and habitat use that will assist state, federal, and private natural resource managers in their efforts to implement conservation programs.

To provide opportunities for Missouri students to learn about species and habitat conservation.



Join us in conserving Missouri's birds.

You are cordially invited to become a member of the Missouri River Bird Observatory. Your membership is a direct contribution to avian conservation projects and environmental education in Missouri. MRBO members will be recognized on our website and in annual reports, and will be provided with unique field opportunities and special event invitations in addition to the membership benefits detailed below. Membership dues are considered a donation and are tax deductible.

Membership Level

____ Student \$20

____ Individual \$50

____ Supporter \$100

____ Contributor \$250

____ Steward \$500+

Includes

Our seasonal e-newsletter.
MRBO aluminum water bottle.

Our seasonal e-newsletter.
Choice of MRBO coffee mug or hat.

Option of a printed or e-newsletter.
Choice of MRBO T-Shirt, coffee mug, or hat.

Option of a printed or e-newsletter.
Choice of any one MRBO merchandise item.

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To join, please fill out, detach, and send this page along with your personal check to: MRBO
Membership, 27331 Highway WW, Marshall, MO 65340.
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our projects and education programs!