



Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative Newsletter

Working together to conserve bird populations and their habitats

Note from the Chair

by Allison Vaughn

Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative Chair

The world of conservation in Missouri and throughout the country has witnessed dramatic changes this year with millions in budget cuts and staffing for our public lands and conservation programs. The recent Audubon report, [State of the Birds 2025](https://stateofthebirds.org/2025/download-pdf-report)¹, indicates that since the five years after the original research in *Science*, [3 Billion Birds Lost](https://www.3billionbirds.org)², the trends for birds in the Midwest are continuing to plummet. The glimmer of hope in the 2019 report showed that diving and dabbling duck populations were increasing. The 2025 report shows that today, these same bird populations are declining. In the past five years, Eastern forest birds have declined by 27% and grassland birds by 43%.

In this issue, we'll hear from partners in conservation who are working hard to reverse the trends through research and education. The primary focus of MoBCI is and has always been to work together to restore natural communities for the benefit of all wild bird populations. This year's conference will be centered around ongoing maintenance of our natural communities and the valuable projects that MoBCI helps fund. As one of our Steering Committee members succinctly put it, "habitat management is not a 'one and done event.'" In ecosystem

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management, many times this comes in the form of emulating natural disturbance factors like prescribed fire and flooding, processes that gave rise to Missouri's rich natural communities. Of course, part of ongoing ecosystem management is dealing with exotic species encroachment, as well, an ongoing threat worldwide. We've invited leaders in the field to talk about how much work goes into making Missouri's ecosystems—from prairies to woodlands to wetlands—healthy and vibrant, not just for birds but for all facets of biodiversity.

We hope you'll join us at the conference for networking and general camaraderie, and great information to help birds and their habitats. Registration is currently available at <https://mobci.net/registration>.

Happy Birding! 

1. <https://stateofthebirds.org/2025/download-pdf-report>

2. <https://www.3billionbirds.org>



This Wood Thrush decoy was used to help lure Wood Thrush near an avian mist-net to capture birds for banding and Motus-tagging.

Multinational Range-Wide Wood Thrush Motus-Tagging Project in Full Swing

Sarah Kendrick

Migratory Bird Biologist, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

In 2024, a multi-national group of bird-conservation partners across the hemisphere initiated a massive research project to track the survival and migration of Wood Thrush across its breeding and nonbreeding ranges over the next two years to target conservation efforts for the Wood Thrush, an important forest-breeding bird.

Between May and July, I coordinated over 60 partners with the support of our agency to deploy 589 Motus Wildlife Tracking System tags on Wood Thrush in 24 U.S. states and Ontario across the species' breeding range. Project co-lead SELVA, a Colombian bird-conservation organization, deployed over 120 more Motus tags in five countries of the species' nonbreeding range this past winter, making this the largest Motus project to date.

The Motus Wildlife Tracking System (Motus) is an international collaborative

research network that uses coordinated automated radio telemetry to facilitate research and education on the ecology and conservation of migratory animals. Motus is a program of Birds Canada in partnership with collaborating researchers and organizations. ([Learn more](https://motus.org) at motus.org.)

With hundreds of tags deployed on the species over its full range, we will better understand Wood Thrush migratory connections, routes, timing and survival across the full annual cycle to inform conservation action. 2025 will be just as exciting with a second breeding season tagging effort of about 500 more tags across 27 states and Ontario. The Wood Thrush is a priority species for conservation in 25 states and holds threatened status in Canada. Improving our understanding of the ecology of this spe-



cies' full annual cycle is essential to better understand conservation needs throughout its range and to improve the design of targeted habitat management actions. With all these factors in mind, an international group of bird-conservation partners initiated a hemispheric Motus-tagging research and conservation project to better understand migratory connections, routes, timing and survival across their full annual cycle.

In spring 2023, I approached state wildlife agencies via the Nongame Bird Technical Sections of the Mississippi and Atlantic Flyway Councils to ask if they were interested in being part of a large-scale research study on Wood Thrush. The project goals were to tag the species with Motus Wildlife Tracking System tags across their breeding range in the eastern U.S., in partnership with SELVA, who would coordinate Motus-tagging on the nonbreeding grounds. The pitch was that, if states or organizations could commit the funds for 25 tags and coordinate the deployment of those tags on Wood Thrush in their state with permitted banders, I would handle the coordination and logistics of the project, and we could do something really big and unprecedented to learn a lot about this species together. To my surprise, many states and federal agencies, and organization signed onto the project to participate! Mass planning commenced.

Our partner SELVA and I wrote a common (and required) project protocol to ensure that all project partners were using the same field methods, Motus tags, attachment harnesses and bird-handling permitting process.

Our Midwest U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Migratory Birds Program hosted a Wood Thrush Motus-tagging training for project participants in Kentucky. Participants learned how to tag birds from trainers from Willistown Conservation Trust in Pennsylvania and BirdsCaribbean, in part-



Photo by Sarah Kendrick/USFWS

The Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*) is a medium-sized songbird of eastern deciduous forests known for its flute-like, ethereal, *ee-oh-lay* song. The Wood Thrush is a long-distance Neotropical migrant, meaning it spends over half the year in tropical forest from Mexico to Panama; full annual cycle conservation means working to identify and address threats that migratory birds face through all stages of their year, including breeding stage, migration stages, or nonbreeding stage. The Wood Thrush acts as a flagship species for full annual cycle conservation work in the Neotropics because they require a mid-elevation forest structure on nonbreeding grounds that is also needed by many other forest-breeding migratory songbirds.



Photo by Andrew Dreas/USFWS.

Kendrick holding a tagged Wood Thrush ready for release.



Wood Thrush measurements taken in-hand include weight, sex and aging by plumage; the birds are also federally banded and fitted with a Motus tag.



Motus stations like this one at Stegall Mountain Natural Area in Missouri use antennas to detect the signals emitted from Motus tags attached to birds within range of a station.

nership with Kentucky Department of Game and Fish staff. Biologists and researchers from state agencies and organizations gathered from seven states to learn how to safely fit birds with Motus tags.

Partners across the eastern U.S. and Ontario deployed 589 tags on Wood Thrush across 24 states and Ontario in summer 2024. Partner SELVA wrapped up nonbreeding deployment of over 100 Motus tags in Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica in February, and a second year of breeding-season tagging will occur in coming days/weeks.

One particularly exciting aspect of the project is that we asked partners to deploy their tags on thrushes within range of an active Motus station on breeding and nonbreeding ranges. This allowed us to gather data on breeding and nonbreeding within-season movements prior to migration and to test tag-detection ranges. Wood Thrush Motus tags last over a year; each day during the current spring migration, we are seeing return Motus detections of tagged Wood Thrush back on their breeding territories at last year's tagging sites. We hope that these return detections will give us much more information on interannual survival, which can be difficult to study in migratory species.

Many aspects of this project are providing us a positive proof of concept, including unique funding streams. A number of private, in-state funding streams are helping numerous states fund their project's Motus tags or field work. One example includes our birding groups in Missouri, including the Missouri Birding Society, Burroughs Audubon Society, Columbia Audubon Society and other private donors that have funded Missouri's Motus tags for the project.

Keep your eyes peeled when you encounter Wood Thrushes this spring — you may just see it carrying a Motus tag. 🐦



Feeding in a pinwheel fashion (where they swim in circles). They do this to stir up the water and bring food to the surface.

Wakonda State Park as a Waterfowl Refuge

Kyle Scott

Superintendent, Wakonda State Park, Missouri Department of Natural Resources



Wakonda State Park is located in the Southeast corner of Lewis County in Northeast Missouri. The park is seven tenths of a mile west of the Mississippi River and the Great River National Wildlife Refuge.

Wakonda State Park's original 257 acres was acquired in 1960, opening to the public in 1963. In 1992 an additional 777 acres that included several bodies of water was acquired. This portion of the park was scheduled to open to the public in the summer of 1993. In the spring of 1993, park superintendent Ron Sutton visited with staff members of Missouri State Parks, the Missouri Department of Conservation and

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop a comprehensive approach to providing a sanctuary for migrating waterfowl along the Mississippi River Flyway. The goal was to provide a refuge during peak migration times, without affecting recreational opportunities provided at the facility.


Wakonda State Park continues to provide a waterfowl refuge area consisting of two bodies of water: Jasper and Agate Lakes. Agate Lake (168 acres) and Jasper Lake (48 acres) are closed to all watercraft use from November 1 to January 31 and again from February 15 to March 31 to limit human disturbance during the annual spring and fall waterfowl migrations.

Birdwatchers will enjoy the thousands of waterfowl that flock to the lakes, including Canada Geese, Snow Geese, Trumpeter Swans, Mallards, Lesser Scaup, Northern Shovelers, Great Blue Herons, Snowy Egrets, and many other species of ducks, wading birds and gulls.

Wakonda State Park is becoming one of the best places to observe waterfowl in northeast Missouri. Visitors can access the lake edges by walking the Agate Lake Trail and the Jasper Lake Trail. The Agate Lake Trail travels the edges of Agate Lake and is a 3.5-mile loop. The Jasper Lake Trail travels around Jasper Lake and is a 1.9-mile loop. Visitors can also access portions of Agate Lake from the Sand Prairie Trail that is a 1-mile one way trail that travels onto a peninsula of Agate Lake and has a small observation deck located on the end of the peninsula. This is a great location to observe many different species of waterfowl.

Observed migrations at Wakonda over the last couple of years have included:

- Wading birds and Teal that begin arriving in August and September.
- Pintail, Gadwall, Widgeon arriving mid-October and November.
- Middle to late November usually brings a migration of Bluebill (Scaup).
- Trumpeter Swans reach peak numbers in November and December.
- December and January see Canada Geese, Mallards, Goldeneye, Canvasback and Mergansers.
- February and March bring White-fronted, Ross, Snow and Blue Geese.

During the winter and spring, most male waterfowl are displaying brilliant plumage in preparation of the beginning of the breeding season. Bright plumage attracts females and plays an important role in courtship displays. Spring return migration is usually very weather dependent and birds generally visit Wakonda for a short period on their return north. 

Northern Migration of Snow Geese and Ross geese.



Photo by Kyle Scott

Giant Cane and the Swainson's Warbler

Implementing Innovative Monitoring Techniques for Species of Conservation Concern

Gabriela Carroll

Graduate Student, Missouri State University

Giant river cane (*Arundinaria gigantea*) is an evergreen bamboo that is native to 22 states across the southeastern United States and forms monoclinal thickets referred to as canebrakes. Once a dominant ecosystem, this species has been reduced to about 2% of its original extent and is now listed as a critically endangered ecosystem. Canebrakes once provided a great deal of resources and habitat for nearly 70 animal species, from the specialist Southern Pearly Eye butterfly to the generalist American Black Bear. The extinction of the Bachman's warbler has been associated with the decline of canebrakes in the U.S.

Among those species that have been documented to use canebrakes as habitat is the Swainson's Warbler (*Limnothlypis swainsonii*), a migratory bird that is one of the rarest songbirds in North America. Though not a cane specialist like the Bachman's warbler, the Swainson's Warbler likes to inhabit canebrakes during its breeding season, as the habitat provides the ideal conditions for this leaf-flipper species to forage for insects.

In Missouri, this bird species is currently listed as endangered, and we know little about its actual range within the state. This is likely because the species is rare, secretive, and difficult to spot. For instance, it has never been recorded by the North American Breeding Bird Survey in the state, and reported sightings on eBird are mostly confined to Mark Twain National Forest.



Photo by Gabriela Carroll

Arundinaria gigantea canebrake at Eleven Point State Park, June 15, 2024.



Inside the canebrake at Eleven Point State Park, June 15, 2024.



Wildlife Acoustics Autonomous Recording Unit (ARU) at Lewis Conservation Area.

We know of a few existing canebrakes in the Ozarks that could provide habitat for the Swainson's Warbler, so we set out to discover if they were being used by the species either during migration or as breeding grounds. To explore this question, we had to get creative and use techniques that would allow us to efficiently survey as many canebrakes as possible. We were looking for a needle in a haystack.

In recent years, the use of Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM) has gained a lot of attention as it is a great way to survey rare species in remote areas. PAM is often done with the use of Autonomous Recording Units (ARUs), which function similarly to game cameras but capture sound recordings instead of images. With funding from the Missouri Birding Society and Missouri State University, we obtained 29 ARUs and distributed them throughout 13 different canebrakes in the Ozarks and 1 within the Mark Twain National Forest during the 2024 breeding season. This latter site (Greer Crossing Recreation Area) was used to gather recordings from Swainson's Warblers after visually confirming their presence, which became useful once we began analyzing our recordings.

The units were out in the field for anywhere from 7 to 10 weeks and were set to record 1 hour before and after sunrise, and 1 hour before and after sunset. This generated an immense number of recordings for us to analyze, so we once again got creative and found a tool made for this purpose. BirdNET is an algorithm developed by the K. Lisa Yang Center for Conservation Bioacoustics at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in collaboration with the Chemnitz University of Technology, and it has been programmed



Gabriela Carroll installing an ARU at one of the testing sites.

to automatically identify thousands of bird species based on their vocalizations. The program is trained with recordings from sources such as the Macaulay Library and Xeno-Canto to inform its decisions on what species a certain vocalization belongs to. We input our recordings into BirdNET, and the algorithm made predictions about which species each vocalization belonged to much faster than a human listener could have.

We found that every single one of our sites had many Swainson's Warbler detections. However, we knew there would be some false positive predictions, so we decided to manually review a sample of the predictions.

We quickly realized that some species were particularly confusing for the algorithm. The Indigo Bunting, White-eyed Vireo, and Louisiana Waterthrush had songs similar enough to Swainson's that BirdNET repeatedly misidentified them as Swainson's Warbler.

One of the drawbacks of BirdNET is that the recordings with which it is trained tend to be high-quality and made in low-noise conditions. Since our recordings were made with lower-quality microphones in noisy environments (most of our sites were right next to streams), the mismatch with the training data may have increased our rate of false positives. We decided to train a custom

classifier using the same algorithm but with a subset of our own recordings from the field.

We made sure to include Indigo Bunting, White-eyed Vireo, and Louisiana Waterthrush recordings from various canebrakes in our new training dataset. We also included Swainson's Warbler recordings from Greer, since we knew those represented true positives. Our goal was to fine-tune the algorithm so it could better distinguish between these problematic species and true Swainson's Warbler songs.

During this process, we found that the Louisiana Waterthrush song is more than confusing for the algorithm, it is almost indistinguishable from that of the Swainson's Warbler. We realized that we needed to take a step back and figure out how to differentiate one species from the other in a consistent way. To do this, we used 30 songs of each species from the Macaulay Library and obtained acoustic measurements from each song's notes. Despite running multiple statistical tests, we were unable to find notable differences between the songs.


While we were not able to find ways to clearly differentiate between their songs, we did find that the Swainson's has one version of its territorial song that is very common in our Greer recordings, the Macaulay Library, and Xeno Canto. This specific song has a distinctive note that does not appear in most of the songs of the Louisiana Waterthrush.

Once we had fine-tuned our custom classifier and determined which variant of the Swainson's song we were looking for, we reviewed our custom classifier's new predictions to see if it had detected any Swainson's Warblers in our canebrake sites.

We found that Swainson's Warblers are present at one of the canebrakes at Eleven

Point State Park, which is about 24 miles away from Greer Crossing Recreation Area. Though their presence at this site is not surprising given the proximity to the Mark Twain National Forest, we were able to use this site as a positive control, showing that our custom classifier works well at detecting Swainson's Warblers when they are present. It is worth noting that we had a lot of predictions at many sites that we could not confirm or deny as true Swainson's detections given their similarity to the song of the Louisiana Waterthrush. To avoid false positives, we were very conservative in deciding which Swainson's Warbler detections to confirm as "true." As a result, we cannot conclude definitively that Swainson's Warblers were detected at our canebrakes except at Eleven Point State Park.

We demonstrate here the importance of using a custom training dataset to build a custom classifier when searching for specific species, and we advise caution when using PAM and BirdNET to survey bird communities, since not all species can be reliably identified. While PAM is a very useful tool, it still has limitations, especially when dealing with rare species that have similar vocalizations to more common ones.

The results of this study suggest that the Swainson's Warbler is confined to a relatively small portion of Missouri, with the species inhabiting the areas around and within Mark Twain National Forest almost exclusively. It is possible either that the canebrakes located in the southwest part of the state are not large enough to attract the species or that there are other constraining factors for this species' range. Further research is needed to determine why this species' range is so limited in Missouri. 

2025 Birding Challenge Summary

Kristen Heath-Acre

State Ornithologist, Missouri Department of Conservation



The inaugural Missouri Birding Challenge took place May 1–15th, organized by Missouri Department of Conservation, Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation, and U. S. Fish and Wildlife. The purpose of the Missouri Birding Challenge was to engage new bird watchers, promote visitation to Missouri's natural public areas, and raise awareness and funds for bird conservation. All in all, it was a huge success.

More than 630 participants formed 441 teams between May 1st and 15th. These teams logged over 2,600 eBird checklists, observing 160,600 individual birds of more than 300 bird species in 95 Missouri counties. The most species seen by one team was 244! The team, Chuck-will's-Winners, included birders Zachary Haring and Kendell Loyd.

Participants entered into categories based on skill, age, and comfort level: Nestling and Fledgling categories for under 16-year-olds, a Backyard category for more casual, at-home birding, Dabbler for beginner to intermediate birders, and Competitive Coot for more advanced birders looking for more of a challenge. If a team completed the requirements for that category, they were entered into a random drawing for fun prizes like binoculars and bird-friendly gift cards, funded by Columbia Audubon Society and Missouri Birding Society. Participants logged their bird observations into eBird and submitted

Trip Reports with all of their checklists. As a primer to the Challenge, there was a webinar series of birding and bird conservation topics given by MDC, USFWS, and Missouri River Bird Observatory.

The Missouri Birding Challenge Planning Team is thrilled with how this year's competition went and is very excited to start planning for next year's Challenge! 🐦



Courtesy of Missouri Department of Conservation



Bill from Operation Wildlife uses Louie to demonstrate the value and amazing talents of Turkey Vultures to a fourth-grade class from North Platte Elementary school during Wings Over Weston.

Weston Bend State Park is for the Birds

What can a state park really do?

Annie Hartley-Thomas

Park Specialist, Weston Bend State Park, Missouri Department of Natural Resources



Missouri has 93 state parks and historic sites and manages over 160,000 acres. Within that acreage you can find some of the highest quality examples of natural landscapes. Here in the Northwest corner of our state, we are a bit scarce of true forest settings except for along the Missouri River, (historically this was true too, but that is a whole other natural history lesson) and vast amounts of wildlands. Historically, those wildlands were prairie and savanna with woodlands and forest along the river. The rich prairie soils led to the demise of native prairie as the land was converted to farmland. Today, north of the Missouri River habitat is fractured into

pockets with few connective corridors for animals to safely travel. When you are a bird, that's less of a problem, but still a problem. There are fewer and fewer places for birds to stop, rest, and refuel on their journey north. I suspect each year as the birds move along their migration paths, they spy the relatively large patch of 1,133 acres of woodland called Weston Bend State Park.

Located on the Missouri River just north of Kansas City, the park's intact forest and woodland communities are welcome sights after potentially thousands of miles traveled. To date, 233 species have been documented from the park, including forest interior birds like Veery, Hooded Warbler

and Townsend's Solitaire. Over 25 species of wood warblers are documented from the park. To see a bird checklist from the SPARKS project spearheaded by the Missouri Birding Society, [see here](#)¹.

Weston Bend SP is part of a designated IBA (Important Bird Area), a global program started by BirdLife International and implemented by National Audubon and local partners in the United States. Weston Bend is part of the Iatan/Weston River Corridor to be exact. This corridor stretches from Kansas City to St. Joseph and encompasses around 99,600 acres. While it may sound like a lot of land, it is a mere drop on the continental landscape. To a person it would be like passing through a town with a population of a couple hundred people, blink and you will miss it. In this tiny town you may or may not find what you need. If you're tired or low on gas and there is none to be found, your only choice is to keep going and hope you can make it to the next stop. For us that's an inconvenience of a few hours waiting for help. For a bird that means death. For the majority of birds they can stop and find what they need here at the park. Most, if not all dedicated birders already know what an IBA is: an exceptional place to find birds! Of course they are more than that, they are locations identified as being critical habitat for migrant and resident birds, which is what makes them exceptional places to find birds. This is because they contain habitat types rapidly disappearing. For the Iatan / Weston IBA that is the loss of bottomland prairies, forests, woodlands, marshes and upland hardwood forests. The habitat selection isn't haphazard either, there are target conservation bird species that utilize these rapidly disappearing habitats. A few of those species are Bitterns (Least and American) Marsh

Wren, Red-Headed Woodpecker, Cerulean, Prothonotary, and Kentucky Warblers and Wood Thrush to name a few. With constant development comes constant loss of wild spaces, at a detriment not only to birds but ourselves as well.

Weston Bend SP has a pretty special neighbor. Just across the Missouri River is Fort Leavenworth. Established in 1827, the fort is around 5,600 acres with 1,500 acres of riverine bottomland forest dominated by large bur oaks. Together with Weston Bend SP, this represents the largest contiguous, mostly undisturbed, patch of forest left along this stretch of the Missouri River. 150 acres of Fort Leavenworth are considered old growth and were standing at the time Lewis and Clark passed through the area July 2, 1804. There are many journal entries by The Corps of Discovery about these Missouri River areas speaking to the vast amount of wildlife, and a special note about a grove of large pecan trees. This patch of old growth, combined with mature trees of Weston Bend SP, allows for the multiple mating pairs of Pileated Woodpeckers.

This is where Missouri State Parks balances things beautifully. People need access to the outdoors as that access is essential to our physical and mental health. State parks offer a plethora of outdoor activities while still protecting and preserving the landscape; we are like mini-National Parks with free access! Another free and invaluable service provided by the park is interpretation. Anyone can come to the park and make of it what they will. Maybe they will connect to nature on their own. Maybe visitors will attend a program, guided hike or an event and get a true understanding of the importance of our parks. At Weston Bend one of our big topics is birds. Each spring we offer many bird-related activities. Perhaps the most important of those

1. <https://sparks.mobirds.org/Default.aspx?id=1146>



A local wildlife rehabilitator shows off a rescued Peregrine Falcon while informing folks about the conservation efforts to save raptors like this from harmful effects of DDT.

activities is the youth-focused “Wings Over Weston” event. It is essential to connect youth with the outdoors as they are the next generation of land stewards, biologists, conservationists, and ornithologists. What better way than exploring the colorful world of birds? Wings Over Weston, or WOW, was created by Kristine Cline roughly 15 years ago with the help of Burroughs Audubon, Platte County Parks, the City of Weston, and Missouri State Parks. The City of Weston takes great pride in this event as the charming historic river town hangs beautiful banners down main street proclaiming “Migration in Weston,” with photos of different warblers. The event offers a field trip day every year on the first Friday in May. Several rural schools in the area send their 4th graders to experience the outdoors and learn about birds. While here, the kids rotate through eight stations where they experience the challenges of migration, the difficulty of raising a brood of chicks, they figure out the adaptations of different beaks, learn how to birdwatch and use

binoculars, see the magnificent migration of monarch butterflies, make their own field journals, get hands-on with a stream table, and the best part of all to see live raptors from Operation Wildlife. WOW is a full day that gets youth excited and helps them understand the essential services provided by green spaces like our State Parks.

We then follow field trip day with a public day. Families can come to the park go on guided bird walks, purchase native plants, build bird houses, and so much more. While there are some standard stations, each year is a little different in what it has to offer, regardless of the changes the core idea is to educate on the topics of bird migration and conservation. WOW has been a staple event that reaches hundreds of children and families every year. When we ask ourselves what can a State Park really do? The answer is foster an interest, passion, and concern for the future of wild places while generating curiosity that will drive the next generations to appreciate and strive to holistically protect nature. 🦅

Early Bird Gets the Worm

A New Initiative in Missouri — Bird City!

Kaylee Woelfel

Bird-friendly Communities Coordinator, Missouri River Bird Observatory

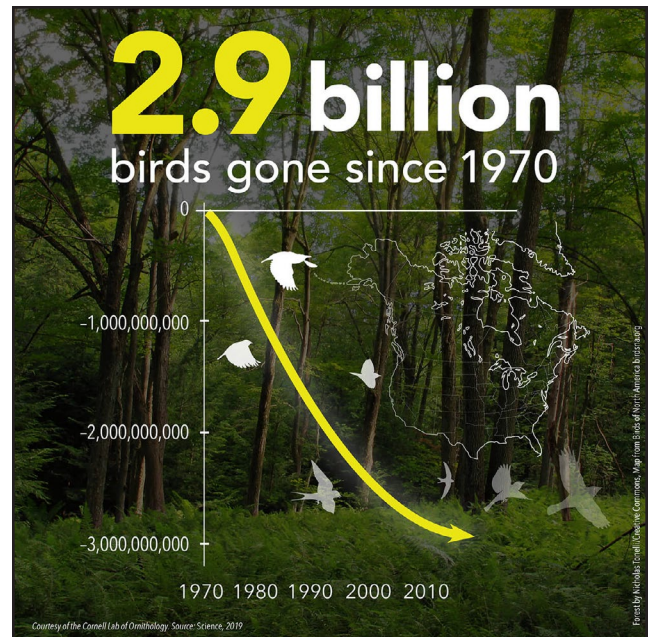


The Challenge

As MoBCI members are aware, North American bird populations are experiencing drastic declines due to anthropogenic factors including habitat loss, predation by cats, light pollution, window collisions, plastic pollution, pesticide use, and other ecological threats. As urbanization and degradation continues to increase and expand, the urgency for bird conservation efforts increases. Urban areas pose significant threats to birds due to dense infrastructure and human activity that disrupt natural habitats. However, these same spaces also present valuable opportunities to support bird populations. By reducing threats and enhancing habitats, cities and communities can become crucial sanctuaries for birds. Prioritizing green spaces, reducing hazards, and fostering community engagement can create bird-friendly environments that benefit both wildlife and people. Programs such as the Urban Bird Treaty and Bird City can play a pivotal role in guiding and recognizing community efforts, encouraging meaningful action, and promoting a healthier, more sustainable urban ecosystem.

What is Bird City?

Bird City is a recognition program that was first launched in 2009, with its inaugural designation in Wisconsin. Since then, this initiative has quickly gained momentum. Today, more than 200 communities across four countries are actively participating



Nearly three billion birds lost due to human-caused factors.



Bird City Missouri Logo

Artwork by Adrienne Luther

and committed to creating healthier environments for both birds and people. This program serves as a guide, in which communities come together to identify the challenges birds face and implement practical solutions aimed at reversing the decline in bird populations.

Focused on Four Categories:

1. Improving habitats
2. Addressing threats
3. Engaging people
4. Promoting sustainability

Bird City Missouri: Seeking Pilot Cities and Communities!

Missouri is now seeking pilot cities to lead the way as the first ever [Bird City Missouri](https://birdcity.org/missouri/)¹ designation. This is a unique opportunity to recognize and celebrate your community's dedication and efforts towards bird conservation and creating bird-friendly environments.

1. <https://birdcity.org/missouri/about>

Let's Get Your Community on the Map!

There is no population size requirement for this program, but designation requires a total of 10 actions (six predefined actions plus four additional custom actions). Interested communities will form a local team to review a list of tailored, bird-friendly actions here: [Bird City Missouri Action List](https://birdcity.org/missouri/pdf)².

MoBCI affiliates and partner organizations are strongly encouraged to include this initiative on the agenda of their upcoming meetings. Your leadership can play a vital role in fostering bird conservation efforts and supporting communities in achieving official Bird City designation across Missouri. For more information, please review the [Application Steps](https://birdcity.org/missouri/applyAndRenew)³ and email [the program](mailto:birdfriendlycommunities@mrbo.org)⁴ with any other questions or concerns! 🐦

2. <https://birdcity.org/missouri/pdf>

3. <https://birdcity.org/missouri/applyAndRenew>

4. birdfriendlycommunities@mrbo.org

Jerry Wade Youth Habitat & Education Program

MoBCI offers grants to promote bird habitat conservation projects that provide an educational component for youth.

These grants may be awarded to private and public organizations, or to individuals who partner with organizations. Eligible activities include projects that protect, enhance or restore bird habitats on any lands in Missouri. All projects should be habitat based and include a specific educational component for youth.

For more information or to apply for a Youth Habitat and Education Program grant, please visit: mobci.net/yhep.




MoBCI Member Organizations

As of July 2025, the following 80 organizations have signed a Memorandum of Agreement to participate in the Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative:

Academy of Science of St. Louis
American Bird Conservancy/
Central Hardwoods Joint Venture
Audubon Center at Riverlands
Audubon Society:
• Chariton Valley Chapter
• Columbia Chapter
• Grand River Chapter
• Greater Kansas City Chapter,
Burroughs Audubon Society
• Greater Ozarks Chapter
• Midland Empire Chapter
• River Bluffs Chapter
• St. Louis Chapter
Avian Conservation Alliance
Bellefontaine Cemetery & Arboretum
City of Des Peres Parks & Recreation Department
Clay County Dept. of Parks,
Recreation & Historic Sites
Coldwater Outing and Game Preserve
Conservation Federation of Missouri
Ducks Unlimited
Eleven Point River Conservancy
Forest Park Forever
Forrest Keeling Nursery
Great Rivers Habitat Alliance
Greenbelt Land Trust of Mid-Missouri
Kansas City Wildlands/Bridging The Gap
L-A-D Foundation
LaBarque Watershed Stream Team Association
Litzsinger Road Ecology Center
Mark Twain National Forest, USDA Forest Service
Massasauga Flats, LLC
Missouri Army National Guard
Missouri Bird Conservation Foundation
Missouri Birding Society
Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation
Missouri Department of Conservation
Missouri Department of Natural Resources,
Division of State Parks

Missouri Department of Transportation
Missouri Falconers Association
Missouri Master Naturalists:
• Boone's Lick Chapter
• Great Rivers Chapter
• Hi Lonesome Chapter
• Loess Bluffs Chapter
• Osage Plains Chapter
• Osage Trails Chapter
• Springfield Plateau Chapter
Missouri Native Plant Society:
• Hawthorn Chapter
• Osage Plains Chapter
Missouri Native Seed Association
Missouri Park and Recreation Association
Missouri Prairie Foundation
Missouri Quail & Upland Wildlife Federation
• Grouse Chapter
Missouri River Bird Observatory
Mussel Fork Legacy Marsh LLC
National Wild Turkey Federation, MO Chapter
North American Grouse Partnership, MO Chapter
Ozark Land Trust
Ozark National Scenic Riverways
Pheasants Forever
Platte Land Trust
Quail and Upland Wildlife Federation Inc.
Quail Forever
Sierra Club, Ozark Chapter
The Nature Conservancy, Missouri Field Office
Truman State University
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service:
• Big Muddy National Fish & Wildlife Refuge
• Ecological Services
• Great River/Clarence Cannon National
Fish & Wildlife Refuge
• Loess Bluffs National Fish & Wildlife Refuge
• Mingo National Fish & Wildlife Refuge
• Missouri Private Lands Office
• Swan Lake National Fish & Wildlife Refuge
University of Missouri-Columbia
Watershed Institute, Inc
and The Watershed Land Trust
Webster Groves Nature Study Society
Wild Birds for the 21st Century
Wild Bird Rehabilitation Inc.
Wildcat Glades Conservation & Nature Center
Wings Over Weston
World Bird Sanctuary

To find out more about the Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative and how you can participate as a member organization, visit our website: www.mobci.net 



Annual Conference • August 21–22, 2025

Columbia Country Club, 2210 Country Club Dr., Columbia, Missouri

Online registration and schedule at <https://www.Mobci.Net/registration>

CONFERENCE THEME

**“20 Years of the Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative
Conference: Gathering to Help Birds and Their Habitats”**

SPONSORS



SCHEDULE

THURSDAY, AUGUST 21

5:00 pm	Registration
6:00 pm–7:30 pm	Social time, with heavy hors d'oeuvres and cash bar available
7:30 pm–8:00 pm	Welcoming remarks/housekeeping John Burk (MoBCI Steering Committee) Open Silent Auction.
8:00 pm–9:00 pm	Keynote speaker: Jim Guldin Over the last 20+ years the population trends of bird species whose lifecycles are either completely dependent upon or at least seasonally dependent upon systems that require a lot of disturbance to restore and maintain are alarming. Our speaker will cover the importance of disturbance-dependent habitats, trends in disturbance-dependent bird species, landscape changes that are driving these trends, and what is being done to address the issue. The speaker will also touch on public perception of habitat management and how policy changes can influence conservation outcomes, both positively and negatively based upon these perceptions.
9:00 pm–10:00 pm	Continue social time

	FRIDAY, AUGUST 22
7:15 am	Coffee and tea for conference registrants
8:00 am–9:00 am	Welcome and highlights of the year Allison Vaughn (Chair, MoBCI Steering Committee) General Assembly Meeting
9:00 am–10:15 am	3, 20-minute examples of disturbance-dependent systems, what species they benefit, and how they must be managed for the sustainability of wildlife: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Wetland restoration.</i> Neil Baalman (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) and Doug Helmers (USFWS, retired) • <i>Prairie restoration.</i> Bruce Schuette (Missouri Prairie Foundation) • <i>The Fragility of Fens.</i> Frank Nelson (Missouri Department of Conservation)
10:15 am–10:30 am	Project poster session and break
10:30 am–11:30 am	3, 20-minute project history examples of habitat management: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Wild Turkey decline and the Turkey Habitat Initiative Designed to Address It.</i> Nick Oakley (Missouri Department of Conservation) • <i>The Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) that led to the recovery of the Brown-headed Nuthatch.</i> Rebecca Landewe (Mark Twain National Forest) • <i>The Sad Story of the Greater Prairie Chicken that is leading to successes in Grassland Bird Conservation.</i> Tom Thompson (Missouri Department of Conservation)
11:30 am–12:30 pm	Lunch with Presentation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Eastern Whip-poor-will Research Project Update.</i> Natalie Ramos (University of Missouri–Columbia)
12:30 pm– 1:30 pm	3, 20-minute talks on projects requiring frequent disturbance that MoBCI has supported through the years: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Missouri River Hills Project.</i> Tom Westhoff (Quail and Upland Wildlife Federation) • <i>Missouri State Parks Open Woodland Restoration.</i> Ron Colatskie (Missouri Department of Natural Resources) • <i>An update on the North American Wetland Conservation Act Projects that MoBCI Supports.</i> Dave Graber (Ducks Unlimited)
1:30 pm–3:00 pm	Open discussion to brainstorm on on the Strategic Guidance Analysis to chart the future of MoBCI
3:00 pm–3:30 pm	Wrap-up and closing comments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Summarize ways we can make a difference for birds.</i> Allison Vaughn (MoBCI Chair)