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# Western Regional News

## Western Bird Banding Association Grants for 2010

The Western Bird Banding Association (WBBA) offers up to two \$1,000 grants each year, one each for research and monitoring. Grants are open to individuals and organizations engaged in projects in the New World using marked birds. Two research and two monitoring proposals were received for consideration in 2010. The proposals receiving grant awards are listed below:

### **Monitoring**

**Award Recipient:** Jared Wolfe, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

**Title of Proposal:** Bluebonnet Bird Monitoring Project

**Project Summary:** Louisiana is home to an impressive diversity of migratory and resident birds which rely upon vast tracts of Louisiana wilderness in which to breed, overwinter, and/or refuel during migration. Unfortunately, many wild areas in Central Louisiana are under threat from development, urban sprawl, and habitat degradation. The Bluebonnet Bird Monitoring Project (BBMP) is a grassroots, volunteer effort focused on documenting habitat-species relationships and avian demographic fluctuations in-and-around the capital city of Baton Rouge. More specifically, we conduct constant-effort mist-netting coupled with audiovisual surveys in some

of the last vestiges of mature forest located within the urban matrix of Baton Rouge. Our efforts also provide opportunities to local schools, university students, and the general public to learn about avian conservation from the best teachers themselves: the birds! Within the first year, BBMP has safely banded over 900 resident and migrant birds, thereby laying the ground work for in-depth demographic analyses. BBMP has also taught several hundred school-aged children about avian ecology, thereby preparing the next generation of Louisiana's conservation advocates. You can learn more about BBMP here: <http://www.braudubon.org/bluebonnet-swamp-bird-monitoring.php>.

### **Research**

**Award Recipient:** Matilde Cavalli, Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata, Mar del Plata, Argentina

**Title of Proposal:** Natal Dispersal of Burrowing Owls (*Athene cunicularia*) in Southeastern Pampas of Argentina

**Project Summary:** The Burrowing Owl is a raptor which inhabits the temperate shortgrass prairies of the Nearctic and Neotropical regions. In Argentina, this raptor is a common species in the Pampean region where it is often found in human-altered environments, such as periurban systems.

In these habitats, Burrowing Owls usually nest close to each other due to the scarcity of adequate nesting places. Since dispersal in this species is related to nest density, this factor would be particularly important for juveniles that disperse for the first time (natal dispersal). The main objective of this proposal is to evaluate natal dispersal of Burrowing Owls in three coastal villages of southeastern pampas of Argentina. The study will be performed through a mark-resighting method. During the first breeding season, nests will be located and Burrowing Owls banded. During the second breeding season each village will be surveyed with the goal of resighting individuals banded in the previous year. The natal dispersal rate and dispersal distance will be calculated in order to evaluate if they change according to nest density. The results of this work will help to understand the role of the adaptability of these important predators to human-induced habitat changes.

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**Report of Western Bird Banding  
Association's 2010 Annual Meeting  
Starr Ranch Bird Observatory  
Orange County, California**

In late September and early October, WBBA had its 2010 meeting at the Starr Ranch Sanctuary <http://www.starranch.org/> a 4,000-acre National Audubon Society preserve in Trabuco Canyon, in the foothills of the Santa Ana Mountains, an area adjacent to large wilderness areas. We had very pleasant weather and exciting demonstrations and workshops of banding, data management, raptor capture techniques, new trap designs, and analyses for publishing of banding data.

The long-running banding station is on a historic ranch in a riparian corridor amongst coastal sage scrub. Many of the participants camped in a field next to an old orange grove, while others stayed in nearby motels. Field trips were to the nearby Irvine Ranch Land Conservancy properties and the Santa Ana Mountains and were expertly led by Rob Hamilton and Karly Moore.

Our gracious hosts were Pete and Sandy DeSimone who manage the scientific and logistic portions of the Sanctuary. They helped in many ways to make this an experience to be remembered fondly. Copious amounts of delicious food were provided by a local caterer. We had 20 talks on a variety of topics, and Pete Bloom, a nationally recognized raptor biologist, gave an entertaining keynote address on his doctoral work: "Lost and found to the north: vagrancy, philopatry and migrations of southern California nestling Buteos."

Among the field experiences, mist nets were operated for the first time at Starr Ranch during fall migration and a NABC certification for banders and trainers was conducted, organized by Josée Rousseau and others. Very much a highlight was Friday and Saturday nights of owl trapping with Scott Thomas and Pete Bloom, who had two sets of nets and produced Barn and Screech owls whose features for ageing and sexing were instructive to all. A special treat was a Common Poorwill, a life bird for some participants! Susan Craig had an interactive display and demonstration of shrike trapping and handling which met with much interest.

The 53 participants were from 10 states (California 34 people, Oregon 6, Washington 4, two each from Arizona and Texas, and one each from Nevada, Utah, Alaska, Louisiana, and Colorado), as well as Peru and Costa Rica. Pablo Elizondo, the PIF Coordinator from Costa Rica, and the director of the Costa Rica Bird Observatories, added a lot of interest as we learned about the programs at various stations there. Jared Wolfe from LSU told us about the newly fledged Bluebonnet Bird Observatory near Baton Rouge with its very active program and enlightened us on molt and plumage terminology.

For many, the highlights were life birds, such as the California Gnatcatcher, California Thrasher and Cactus Wren. Among other taxa, we were entertained by coyotes singing in the night and sightings of tarantulas, tree frogs, and praying mantises.

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