

Southern Cone Grasslands Alliance activities support shorebird conservation in Uruguay

Title

Annually, **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** *Tryngites subruficollis* and **American Golden Plover** *Pluvialis dominica* undertake some of the longest journeys of any migratory birds in the world, from their breeding grounds in the tundra of North America (Canada and Alaska) to wintering sites in the grasslands of Southern South America. **Aves Uruguay (BirdLife in Uruguay)** and partners have secured approximately 3000 hectares for both species of shorebirds through good management practices of the natural grasslands.

Both species have suffered significant population declines due to habitat loss on their migration and wintering grounds and through hunting (in the Caribbean, and historically in North and South America). Their primary wintering grounds are the Southern Cone or Pampas grasslands of South America, and **Laguna de Rocha** in Uruguay is one of the few sites globally where they can be found in large numbers on a regular basis. Consequently, Laguna de Rocha has been identified as an **IBA** for both species (**IBA UY019**) and in 2010 was designated as a site of regional importance within the **Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN)**. Importantly, the lagoon and surrounding grasslands have recently been declared Protected Landscape within the new National Protected Areas System.

Laguna de Rocha is one of the pilot sites for the **Southern Cone Grasslands Alliance** www.alianzadelpastizal.org where, through collaboration with local ranchers, best practices for the management of natural grasslands are being developed which enable ranchers to conserve the unique biodiversity of their grasslands through livestock ranching. A combination of academic research, traditional knowledge and the monitoring of grassland bird populations are being used to develop the most appropriate grassland management practices for each species of conservation concern.

The work at Laguna de Rocha is being led by Aves Uruguay with the support of the national university (the Universidad de la República). A research and monitoring program has been established for both species, with the goal of understanding the main factors determining habitat preferences, and the relationship with land use, diet, territoriality, site fidelity (between

years) and spatial segregation of the sexes. The program will also assess the local population status, estimate demographic parameters (e.g. survival), local movements and help identify the migratory flyways used by both species. Through the program, college students will receive training in topics such as migration ecology, behavioral ecology, biodiversity conservation and field techniques.

Information generated through the research and monitoring program is being used to inform decisions regarding stocking rates, rotation cycles and other aspects of livestock management by producers to help create appropriate habitat for Buff-breasted Sandpiper and American Golden Plover. This synergy has been made possible in part thanks to the support of the “[Responsible Production Project](#)” of the Uruguayan Ministry of Livestock, Agriculture and Fisheries.

Aves Uruguay’s work at Laguna de Rocha is made possible through the project "Connecting people and places for the conservation of Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngenites subruficollis*” financed by the [Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act \(NMBCA of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service\)](#) and the [Eastern Regional University Centre \(Centro Universitario Regional Este, Universidad de la República\)](#). It is also supported through the [Southern Cone Grasslands Alliance](#), which is supported by the [Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation](#), [Canadian Wildlife Service](#), [NMBCA](#) and [U.S. Forest Service – International Programs](#); in addition to support from the Responsible Production Project, the Basic Sciences Development Program of the Universidad de la República and [WHSRN](#).

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