Head: Conversation of natural grasslands and their birds

Summary lead: Colombia, Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina will promote the protection and restoration of their natural grasslands thanks to the financial contribution of BirdLife Americas.

Featured sentence: The Small Grants Program for the Conservation of Natural Grasslands is an initiative of BirdLife Americas that grants seed funds to encourage conservation and/or research projects in the region that contribute to preserving these ecosystems and their birds.

Body

The natural grasslands of South America are an imposing biome composed mainly of an undulating mantle of herbaceous vegetation. Also known as plains, plains, or pampas, grasslands provide essential ecosystem services for life such as purification and recharge of water sources, provision of fibers, food and fuels, carbon storage, and climate regulation. In addition, they are home to an exuberant variety of wildlife and are rich in culture, spirituality, and recreation.

About 600 native birds and thousands of migratory birds depend on this fragile and threatened ecosystem. Unfortunately, the intensification and expansion of mismanaged human practices such as agriculture, livestock, urban development, and the indiscriminate use of fire have drastically reduced its extension and health.

To address this problem, in 2006, BirdLife led the formation of the Alianza del Pastizal with the support of its partners: Aves Argentinas, SAVE Brasil, Guyra Paraguay, and Aves Uruguay. Since then, more than 560 thousand hectares of grasslands in the Southern Cone have been managed with responsible grazing practices that combine their conservation with sustainable production. At the same time, in Colombia, the Calidris Association, in association with 12 other organizations, makes up the Sabana Alliance, which focuses on implementing innovative conservation solutions for the Colombian Llanos.

Despite the outstanding achievements so far, there are still several challenges to face. Precisely, to promote actions for the conservation and restoration of this ecosystem, BirdLife Americas launched in early November 2021 a Small Donations Program for the Conservation of Natural Grasslands. These are seed funds to encourage conservation and/or research projects that contribute for a year to the conservation of natural grasslands in the region and the land, shore, and water birds associated with them.

Meet the six winning projects

The honey of biodiversity: gastronomic identity for the conservation of flooded savannas
With the support of *Asociación Calidris*

Technical team: Ocampos Andrea Barrera, Nelsy Niño, Beatriz Ramírez, Marcela Vega, Natalia Roa.

With a participatory and gender approach, this project will promote the conservation of the flooded savannas of Colombia in the Vereda Altagracia Reserves (an Important Area for the Conservation of Birds - IBAs, for its acronym in English). The idea is to empower and educate a community of women to make the most of their environment and biodiversity in their gastronomy in a sustainable way. The project encompasses conservation and restoration strategies to guarantee the food, materials, and nesting space necessary for the mansita bee (Melipona favosa), the technification to produce honey efficiently and cleanly, the dissemination of the added value of this product, and the

integration with the network of producers of meliponicultores of Casanare. In this way, it is intended to contribute to food sovereignty,

Study of carbon dynamics in different ecological sites and types of management in livestock establishments in natural grasslands of Paraguay

With the support of *Guyra Paraguay*

Technical team: Diego Ocampos

This initiative will be developed in at least three cattle establishments located in the departments of Caazapá and Paraguari; that base their production on natural grasslands. Various aspects related to carbon dynamics in soil and plants will be investigated. Carbon sequestration, botanical composition and nutrient characterization in natural grasslands will be estimated according to biodiversity and soil conservation variables, as well as the ecosystem characteristics present in livestock establishments and the types of grazing carried out. In this way, good pastoral management practices will be identified that allow the contribution of scientific evidence to the protection and sustainable production of grasslands as a strategy for the conservation of biodiversity and mitigation against climate change.

Optimization of the ecological restoration of fields in Pampa with a mechanized collection of seeds of native species

With the support of *SAVE Brazil*

Technical team: Rodrigo Dutra da Silva

Based on an existing reference in the market, a machine will be built to collect mature seeds by contact, practical, light, and accessible, which will strengthen the capacity and knowledge to carry out ecological restoration actions in the native fields of the Brazilian Pampas. This pilot project will seek to solve the lack of seeds of native herbaceous species for direct sowing in the territory that currently exists on the market, which constitutes a big problem in the productive chain between harvest and sowing. In addition, thanks to mechanized harvesting, it is intended to enhance and optimize large-scale interventions to recover large degraded areas. About 95 species of wild birds depend on the conservation of these Sulino grasslands.

Use of new technologies for monitoring good pasture management practices and conservation of threatened grassland birds in the province of Corrientes, Argentina

With the support of *Argentine Birds*

Technical team: Adrián Di Giacomo, Melanie Browne, Florencia Pucheta, Yamila Barasch.

This project will design a programming tool that combines remote sensing with knowledge about the biology of threatened birds to assess whether or not good practices for bird conservation are applied in grassland fields. A management instrument for impact monitoring, data analysis, and decision-making based on the Google Earth Engine (GEE) platform. The training of local actors is foreseen to use this tool in the proper management of their territory.

Conservation and management of the Loica Pampeana (LLeistes defilippii)

With the support of: *Argentine Birds*

Technical team: Candelaria Neyra, Igor Berkunsky, Clara Trofino, Gerónimo Peralta Martínez, Pablo Grilli, M. Gimena Pizzarello.

It consists of the generation of a long-term conservation program to prevent the extinction of the Loica Pampeana (Leistes defilippii), one of the two most threatened species in the grasslands of Argentina. For this, biotic monitoring will be carried out. Local networks will be established made up of livestock producers, academics, environmental

managers, and naturalists. A participatory system of generation and information will be promoted through citizen science platforms.

Management with the removal of invasives and grazing for restoration of mountain pastures in the Pampas region of Argentina invaded by Acacia melanoxilon: diversity of birds and C stocks as recovery indicators.

With the support of: *Argentine Birds*

Technical team: Juan Pablo Isacch, Esteban González-Zugasti, Facundo Pedraz, Paulina Martinetto, Augusto Cardoni, Gastón Morán, Pamela Rivadeneira, Tomás O'Connor, Stella Román and Sofía Martin-Sirito.

This proposal seeks to assess how the natural mountain pasture recovers after removing the Black Acacia (an exotic and invasive species) and the implementation of adequate agro-pastoral management. The researchers involved will constantly monitor how the diversity of birds, stocks, and carbon dynamics varies and the appearance of black acacia and native grassland as indicators of change in the study site: Estancia Paititi Sistema Serrano de Tandilia. Finally, the viability of different options that provide economic sustainability to acacia removal will also be evaluated.