



PRESS RELEASE

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Media Note: Photos to accompany this article and a MS Word version of this press release are available for download at <https://ow.ly/T8yj50Qhmcb>

BIRDS GEORGIA RECEIVES GRANT FOR HABITAT RESTORATION WORK IN EVANS, GEORGIA

(ATLANTA, GA) May 20, 2024 – Birds Georgia was recently awarded a \$25,000 grant from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative Program for a project titled, *Grassroots Grasslands: A Community Restoration Effort to Re-establish Native Plants for Pollinators and Birds in Evans, Georgia*.

As part of the grant work, Birds Georgia will partner with the Central Savannah River Land Trust, among other local partners, to restore 11 acres of fallow pastures to native grassland habitat for pollinators and birds within a recently donated preserve, engaging the local community through volunteer workdays and educational opportunities.

“Birds Georgia was thrilled to learn of this grant to restore grassland habitat at Laverlea Preserve,” says Jared Teutsch, Executive Director of Birds Georgia. “We are keenly interested in the response of bird species to this work, including Grasshopper Sparrow, American Kestrel, and other species of concern identified by the Georgia State Wildlife Action Plan.”

In recent decades, many birds that rely on open and early-successional habitats have seen a decline in population due to habitat loss, pesticide use, and a variety of other factors. Grassland birds in particular have seen a decrease in population by about 53% since 1970 according to a 2019 study (<https://www.3billionbirds.org/findings>) conducted by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon Society, and other partners.

Additional declining species that utilize grassland habitat include Eastern Meadowlark, Northern Harrier, Field Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, and Common Nighthawk. By restoring native grasslands and reducing the presence of non-native and invasive plant species, Birds Georgia will create suitable habitat for these grassland-dependent bird species.

Per the wishes of the donor, the goal is for Laverlea Preserve to become an ecological and education site for the community. The preserve comprises upland and mesic forests, bottomland hardwood forests, wetlands and streams, grasslands, and pastures. There are already plans in place to thin the dense mixed hardwood/pine stands that surround the pastures, which will promote more open groundcover and encourage native plants. The preserve also contains over 6,200 feet of the Euchee Creek and adjacent riparian forest buffer that will become a part of a public greenway trail being established by the county. Laverlea is ecologically important and is a remarkably large tract of land in the rapidly-urbanizing town of Evans (near Augusta, Georgia), where the average parcel size is less than one acre.

“Work is expected to begin in early July, and the first step will be cataloging birds, plants, and butterfly species that are present on the preserve so that we can see how these species respond to the treatment,” says Heather Levy, Birds Georgia’s stewardship coordinator who will oversee the restoration project for Birds Georgia. “The next steps will be to conduct a controlled-burn to cull invasive grasses and remove built up thatch so that native plants and wildflowers can thrive. Finally, we will plant a seed mix for warm-season, native grasses across the 11-acre restoration site to encourage the establishment of native grasses and to control weedy plants. In the following years, we will plant native wildflowers, shrubs, and other plants. The long-term goal is to create a habitat where native grasses and wildflowers can flourish and provide support to grassland bird species and butterfly species.”

In addition, Birds Georgia and the Central Savannah River Land Trust will host volunteer work days and public bird walks on the site with the goal of fostering a diverse group of environmental stewards to assist with the project and to empower and educate individuals about habitat restoration.

The grant is for a one-year period, but Birds Georgia and the Central Savannah River Land Trust intend to use the funds to initiate long-term ecological education at the site. The one-year grant cycle will serve as a kick start to develop a management plan, treat invasive species, and establish the first round of native plantings. Following year one, the partners plan to monitor native plant growth, add additional native grasses and wildflowers, and seek additional funding for large-scale restoration and maintenance of the Laverlea Preserve.

About Birds Georgia: *Birds Georgia is building places where birds and people thrive. We create bird-friendly communities through conservation, education, and community engagement. Founded in 1926 as the Atlanta Bird Club, the organization became a chapter of National Audubon in 1973, and continues as an independent chapter of National Audubon Society. Learn more at <https://www.birdsgeorgia.org/>.*

About Central Savannah River Land Trust: We are the Central Savannah River Land Trust: a nationally-accredited, local non-profit, passionate about the future of these special places throughout our community. Since 2001, the Land Trust has protected over 10,000 acres of land throughout Georgia and South Carolina. Places like the Augusta Canal Trail, where families can enjoy an afternoon on the river, and scenic views of the Savannah River like the ones from the I-20 bridge, and several Columbia County neighborhoods are just some of our more well-known success stories. Learn more at <https://csrlt.org/> .

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