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Ag Day Highlights

The South Dakota Grassland Coalition recently set up a booth at the Washington Pavilion in Sioux Falls for their annual Ag Day Celebration. Ag Day is part of Ag Appreciation Week and it provides organizations the opportunity to teach young children about the importance of agriculture in the state and the world. At our booth we had the opportunity to visit with hundreds of young children. We had a “Plant a Brand” activity from the Ag in the Classroom organization where the children made up their own brand on a piece of construction paper and then trace it with glue. Then we sprinkled grass seed over the brand and the students could take it home, plant it, and watch it grow. Ag Day is an excellent way for the South Dakota Grassland Coalition to get their message to a different group of people that we don’t reach at our other workshops.



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For more information or other events the **SOUTH DAKOTA GRASSLAND COALITION** is involved with, please contact Kyle Schell or visit the website: <http://www.sdgrass.org>

Grassland Birds, At Home on the Range

By Silka Kempempa

As you drive the roads and trails along and within South Dakota's rangelands, have you ever wondered what kinds of birds make a living out on those vast expanses of rangeland? Although they are difficult to see if you don't keep a sharp eye, there is a unique community of birds that specialize in making their living on the rangelands of our state. Of importance is that most of these areas are privately owned and managed, making privately owned ranchlands pretty important grassland bird habitat.

So what bird species use South Dakota's rangelands? What role does privately owned range and pastureland play in supporting this bird community? The South Dakota Grassland Coalition has organized an annual event to help folks find out.

Beginning in 2007, the Coalition spearheaded an annual bird tour event held on privately-owned ranches to provide information to a diverse public demonstrating the relationship between land stewardship and grassland wildlife. Each year a different privately-owned ranch hosts the tour. The Coalition teams together with the private rancher, SD Department of Game, Fish and Parks, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, SD Association of Conservation Districts, Dakota and South Dakota State Universities, Rocky Mountain Bird

Observatory, and South Dakota Ag in the Classroom to make this event happen.

During this two-day event individuals participate in several mini-tours of different habitats found on the ranch. During these mini-tours, participants learn to identify birds and other types of wildlife and learn about the habitat needs of these wildlife species. In concert, ranchers share how they manage their grazing lands with cattle. University professors illustrate the connection between the grassland wildlife habitats created by grazing cattle.

South Dakota's grazing lands are diverse in habitats and bird species. During the 2007 tour in the Rapid City and St. Onge areas, we observed almost sixty bird species ranging from the black and white Lark Bunting to the red and yellow of the Western Tanager. During the 2008 tour held in Day County, we heard the "pill-will-willit" of the Willet, a long-legged shorebird with black-and-white wings. Tour participants also saw an assortment of grassland sparrows including the Vesper Sparrow and its chestnut-colored shoulder and white eye-ringing were pointed out as key identification characteristics. Those are just a few of the over sixty bird species observed on the Bristol-area ranch.

In addition to bird watching, participants can see first hand how migratory songbirds are banded and learn why biologists collect this type of information. Turning attentions from the sky to the ground, participants also are informed about the different

kinds of insects, especially beetles that live on rangelands. And looking at the vegetation that makes both ranching and bird watching possible, plant specialists are on hand to talk about the grasses and forbs that make these grasslands so diverse. To sum up the tour, participants are encouraged to take digital photos during the two-day event. These photos are showcased at the end of the tour in a slide show presentation.

The tour emphasizes the importance of involving and educating youth and provides a discounted registration rate to individuals who bring students. Expanding our emphasis on education, this year the tour is offering continuing education credit for teachers through Dakota State University.

This year the tour will be held west of White River on the Rasmussen Lehman 33 Ranch on June 5th and 6th. Cost to participate in the tour is \$20 per person or \$35 per couple if accompanied by a student. Students (high school age and under) are free. To register for this year's tour contact Judge Jessop at jjessop@sdconservation.org or 605-280-0127. For more information on past tours please visit <http://sdgrass.org/>.

Riparian Grazing Training in Sturgis: June 9-11

The National Riparian Service Team will travel from Prineville, Oregon to conduct a 3-day riparian grazing course from June 9 to 11, 2009. Course participants will

examine the unique value of creeks, streams, and surrounding land; learn to recognize signs of healthy and unhealthy riparian areas; learn grazing management strategies to improve riparian areas, and develop techniques to track the success of management changes. Special emphasis will be placed on western South Dakota grazing management and riparian grazing techniques that are economically feasible for the private ranch.

This training is intended for ranchers and government agency employees that regularly deal with grazing management issues.

The course will be a combination of classroom and field training, with field training on area ranches and classroom training at Western Dakota Vo-Tech on the campus of Sturgis Brown High School.

Cost to attend will be \$10 per person. Space will be limited, so interested parties should send your name, address, phone number and number of people attending with your payment by **May 8** to:

Matt Stoltenberg
3824 Jet Drive, P.O. Box 725
Rapid City, SD 57709-0725

Questions? Call Matt Stoltenberg at (605) 394-6432

More information on the National Riparian Service Team can be found at:
www.blm.gov/or/programs/nrst

Cover Crops Workshop in Clark April 2

The NRCS, SD Association of Conservation Districts, and the SD Cooperative Extension Service are sponsoring a Cover Crops Workshop at the Clark County Courthouse Community Room on Thursday April 2. The program will begin at 9:30am with Kim McGraw, Clark County Agronomy Educator, speaking on Growing Cover Crops. Following Kim, Duane Marxen and Rebecca Schafer, livestock educators from Grant and Deuel counties, will talk on the grazing and feed value of cover crops at 10:00am. Then at 11:00, NRCS Agronomist, Jason Miller, will discuss selecting cover crops and his 2008 research with cover crops. After Jason's presentation, there will be a question and answer session for participants to ask questions about cover crops. For more information or to RSVP, call the De Smet NRCS office at (605) 854-9123 ext. 3 by March 30th.

New Pasture and Range Blog set up for S.D. Producers

A new Extension blog focused on pasture and range livestock production is up and running on the Internet.

The SDSU "South Dakota Pasture and Range Livestock Production" blog is available at this link:
<http://sdpastureandrangelivestockproduction.blogspot.com/>.

Extension Livestock Educator Rebecca Schafer is the author of the blog, and she hopes it provides another avenue for

producers to connect across South Dakota.

"We created the blog to serve as a way to get a better understanding of producers' interests and programming needs," said Schafer. "While it is very new, we hope it will help serve pasture and range livestock producers, giving them a chance to ask questions and get answers."

Schafer said the blog, like all blogs, thrives due to community involvement.

"We want this platform to be a place where many share ideas and perspectives on a wide range of topics," she said. "While I will create content for it, we hope to have more and more producers leaving comments or creating threads on which Extension personnel can assist them. We want the blog's content to create a more personal connection with producers."

SDSU Range Sciences professor Sandy Smart said the blog can serve as a vehicle for news and information, as well as a place for peer-to-peer idea sharing.

"This blog has the potential to speed up the process of getting answers to producers," he said. "It also can serve as a database of frequently asked questions because more than likely someone else has thought of the same question."

Call Schafer at (605) 874-2681 for more information about the SDSU Pasture and Range Livestock Production blog.



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Brookings, SD 57007

Calendar of events:

| <u>Event</u> | <u>Date</u> | <u>Location</u> | <u>Contact Person</u> | <u>Phone No.</u> |
|---------------------------|-------------|-----------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Cover Crops Workshop | April 2 | De Smet | Kim McGraw | 605-532-3681 |
| Bird Tour | June 5-6 | Belvidere | Judge Jessop | 605-895-0127 |
| Riparian Training | June 8-12 | Sturgis | Judge Jessop | 605-895-0127 |
| Deuel County Pasture Walk | July 14 | Clear Lake | Kyle Schell | 605-688-6623 |
| McPherson Co. Range Day | July 16 | DU Goebel Ranch | McPherson NRCS | 605-439-3336 |
| Bus Tour | July 21-22 | Yankton | Kyle Schell | 605-688-6623 |
| Grazing School | Sep 15-16 | Oacoma | Kyle Schell | 605-688-6623 |

Please remit any comments, suggestions, or topics deemed necessary for further review to: Kyle Schell, SDSU Box 2170, Brookings SD 57007, kyle.schell@sdstate.edu, (605) 688-6623