MS Graduate Opportunity: Grassland Birds

The Avian Science Center (ASC; http://www.cfc.umt.edu/asc/), part of the Wildlife Biology Program at the University of Montana (UM), invites MS applicants to participate in research that aids in identifying the conservation of grassland songbirds in central Montana. The student will aid in 1) understanding the impacts of rangeland management on breeding demographics and 2) identifying the various spatial scales of landscape characteristics that influence grassland avian communities. The overarching goals of the research project are to 1) determine breeding demographics, particularly for Thick-billed Longspur and Chestnut-collared Longspurs, on different types of rangelands, 2) identify landscapes characteristics that support grassland songbird communities, and 3) provide information that will aid in conservation strategies for songbirds and grassland ecosystems. The position requires collecting field data (~ April – July) and compiling of landscape features from remotely sensed data. Applicants should be highly interested in advanced estimation of breeding demographics and spatial ecology.

This position is currently supported by a partnership with the North Great Plains Joint Venture and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The start date is contingent on additional funding but is expected to be summer or fall of 2024. It includes an annual graduate stipend of $23,800, tuition/fees, and health insurance.

Qualifications:
Applicant must have a Bachelor’s degree in wildlife biology, biology, ecology, statistics, or a related field. Experience and/or high interest in quantitative ecology aspects that include estimation of demographics such as nest success, nest density, and abundance. Experience in programming (e.g., program R, Python) or other ecology-related software is desired. Field experience, especially on birds in remote settings, is also highly desired. The position requires decision-making and communication skills and the ability to work with multiple natural resource stakeholders.

Diversity Statement: The University of Montana values leadership, engagement, diversity, and sustainability because our institution is committed to respecting, welcoming, encouraging, and celebrating the differences among us. As members of the University of Montana community, we aspire to: (1) Respect the dignity and rights of all persons. (2) Practice honesty, trustworthiness, and academic integrity. (3) Promote justice, learning, individual success, and service. (4) Act as good stewards of institutional resources. (5) Respect the natural environment.

The Wildlife Biology Program has adopted a holistic approach to graduate admissions as part of our efforts to achieve a more diverse cohort of graduate students with varied experience, backgrounds, and expertise. Graduate admissions rankings will be based on GPA, demonstrated ability to learn necessary skills, achievements in research, outreach, education, and community activities, strong motivations for the degree, demonstrations of leadership, adaptability, accomplishments, and letters of recommendation.

How to apply:
Interested individuals should complete the first step of the application process by emailing Dr. Victoria J. Dreitz (asc@umontana.edu) the following information as 1 attached file (PDF is preferred) with “MS Grassland Birds” in the subject line. Applications will be reviewed as received until the position is filled:
1) Cover letter – briefly describe a) your interest in the project including how you meet or have interest in stated Qualifications as described above, and b) the alignment of your professional interests with the Avian Science Center at the University of Montana (max 1-page).

2) Statement of Purpose outlining the following:
   a) Motivation - describe your motivations for obtaining a graduate degree and highlight some of your professional goals. (300-word limit)
   b) Accomplishment - what accomplishment makes you most proud? For example, discuss a challenge you overcame and/or an initiative you led. (300-word limit)
   c) Abilities - provide a statement that illustrates your capacity to learn new skills, adaptability, willingness to challenge yourself, passion, and/or where you have been key in completing a project. (300-word limit)

3) Resume/CV
4) Transcripts (unofficial are acceptable for stage)
5) Names and contact information for three references
6) Any additional information you feel is relevant to this position.

The top applicant(s) will be asked to apply to the Wildlife Biology Program within the UM Graduate School as the second step of the process. Application materials may or may not be the same as the first step of the process. This position can only be offered after applicants are accepted into UM’s Wildlife Biology Program.