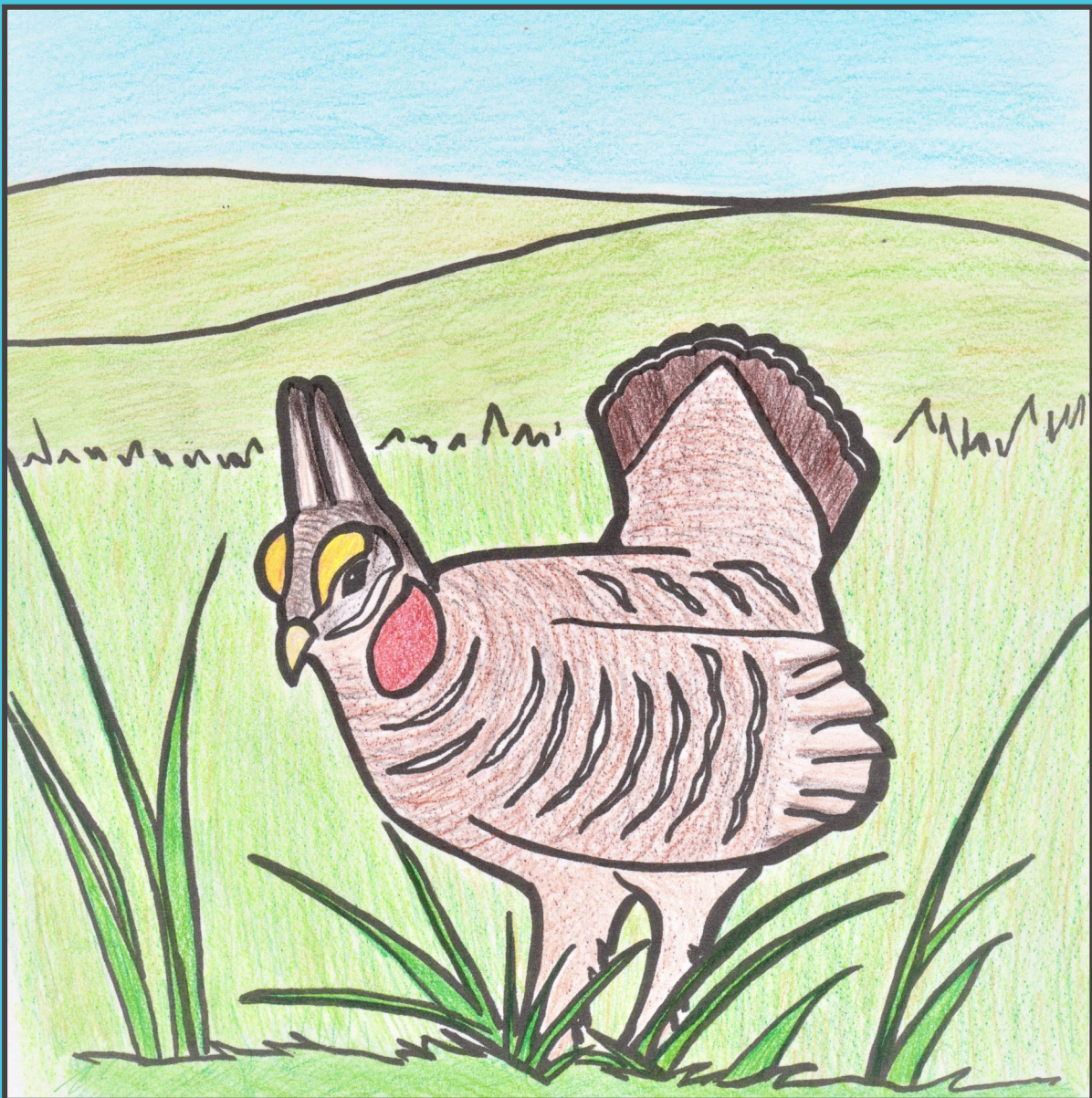
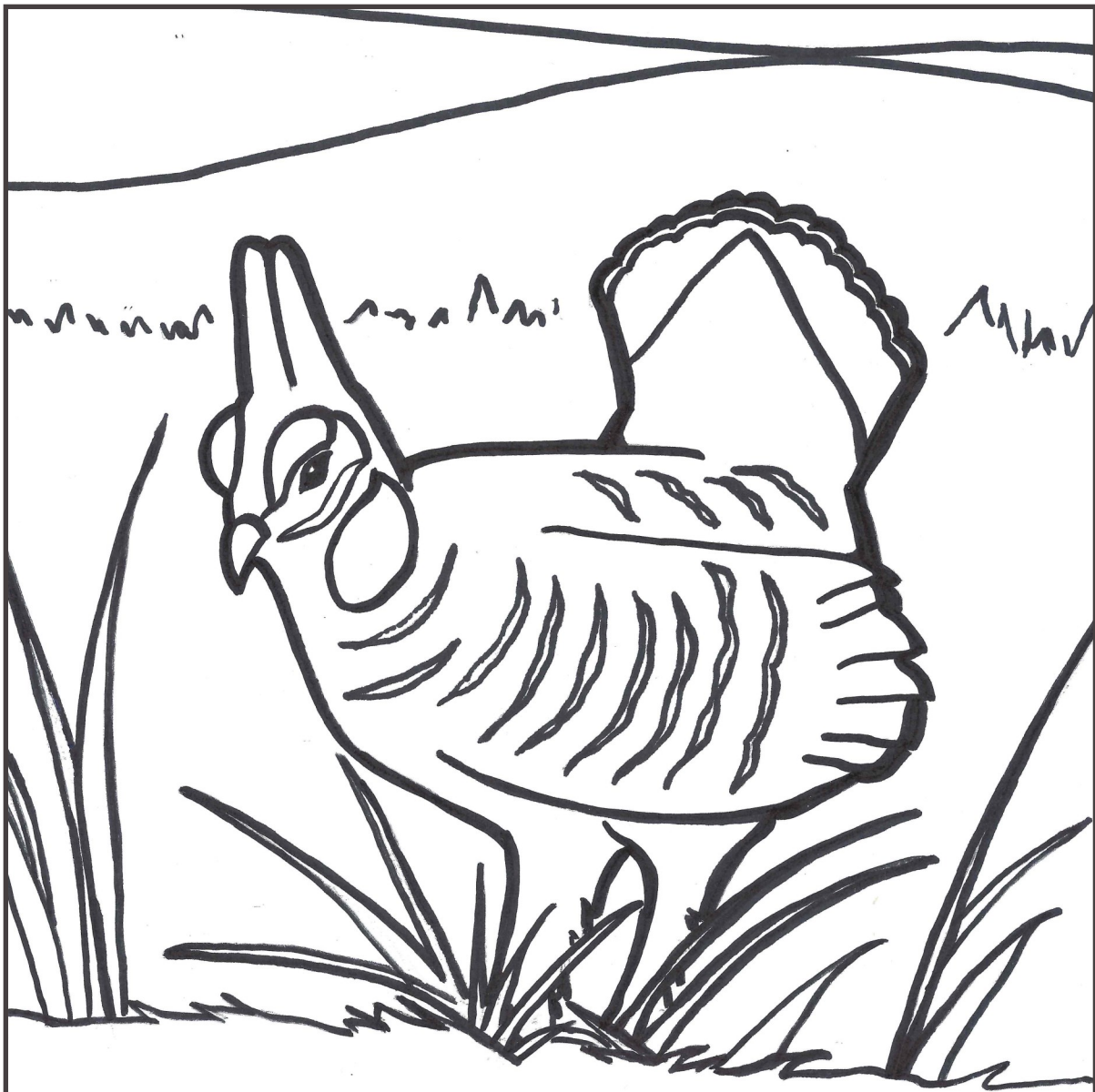


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Wildlife of New Mexico's Grasslands



Wildlife of New Mexico's Grasslands



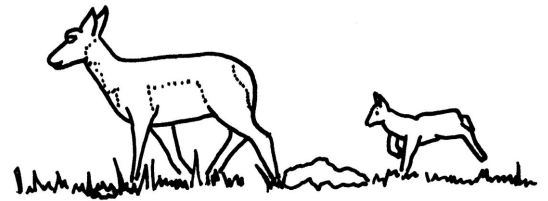
About this Book

Why did we make this?

We hope this activity book helps kids and families learn and care about the wildlife found in New Mexico's grasslands. We are at a critical moment for the protection of grasslands and our entire planet. We will need many passionate people to help us take care of and appreciate the natural world.

*"In the end we will conserve only what we love;
we will love only what we understand;
and we will understand only what we are taught."*

(Baba Dioum, 1968)



Who is Audubon?

The National Audubon Society is one of North America's oldest conservation organization. Since 1896, Audubon has been working to protect birds and their habitats for the benefit of wildlife and people. Today, there are offices, chapters, staff, and members across the United States. In New Mexico, Audubon has been around for over 50 years, working together to protect birds and our beautiful landscapes.

Acknowledgements

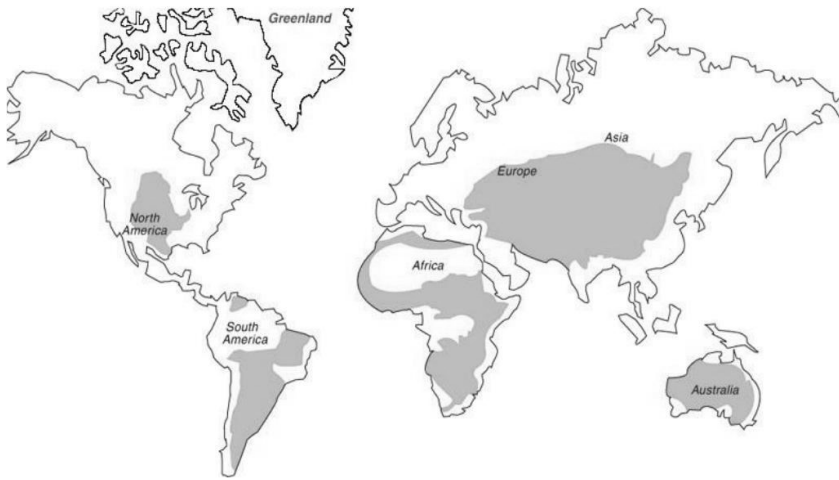
This book was created by the education staff at Audubon New Mexico. Thank you to the help and support of all the staff, past, present, and future, who work to conserve birds and their habitat.

Funding and input were also graciously supplied by CEHMM. Thanks also to the staff of the US Fish and Wildlife Service for their continued support and input.



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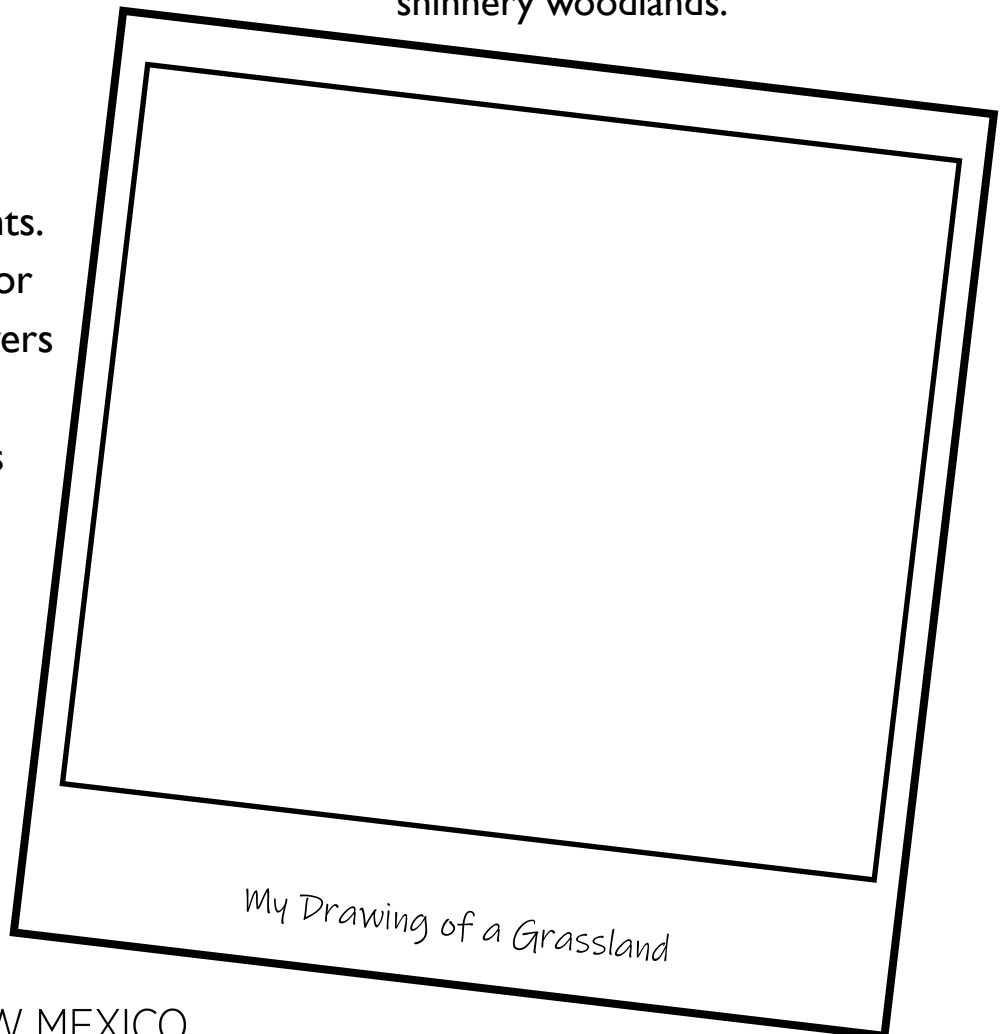
What is a Grassland?



Grasslands are found around the world!

Grasslands are areas of land covered by grass and other low-lying plants, with few large bushes or trees. They are fairly dry, with little rainfall each year. These important places are found on every continent except Antarctica. Scientists estimate that almost 1/3 of the earth's land is covered in grasslands. Around the world, they have different names including prairies, pampas, savannahs, or steppes. In New Mexico, grasslands cover the Eastern part of the state. These ecosystems are called shortgrass prairie and sand shinnery woodlands.

Grasslands provide important habitat for a variety of wildlife and plants. They are also important for storing carbon in deep layers of topsoil. Ranchers and farmers rely on grasslands and their soil for their livelihood. However, grasslands are also one of the most threatened ecosystems in the world, with many acres disappearing every day.

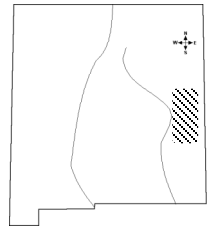


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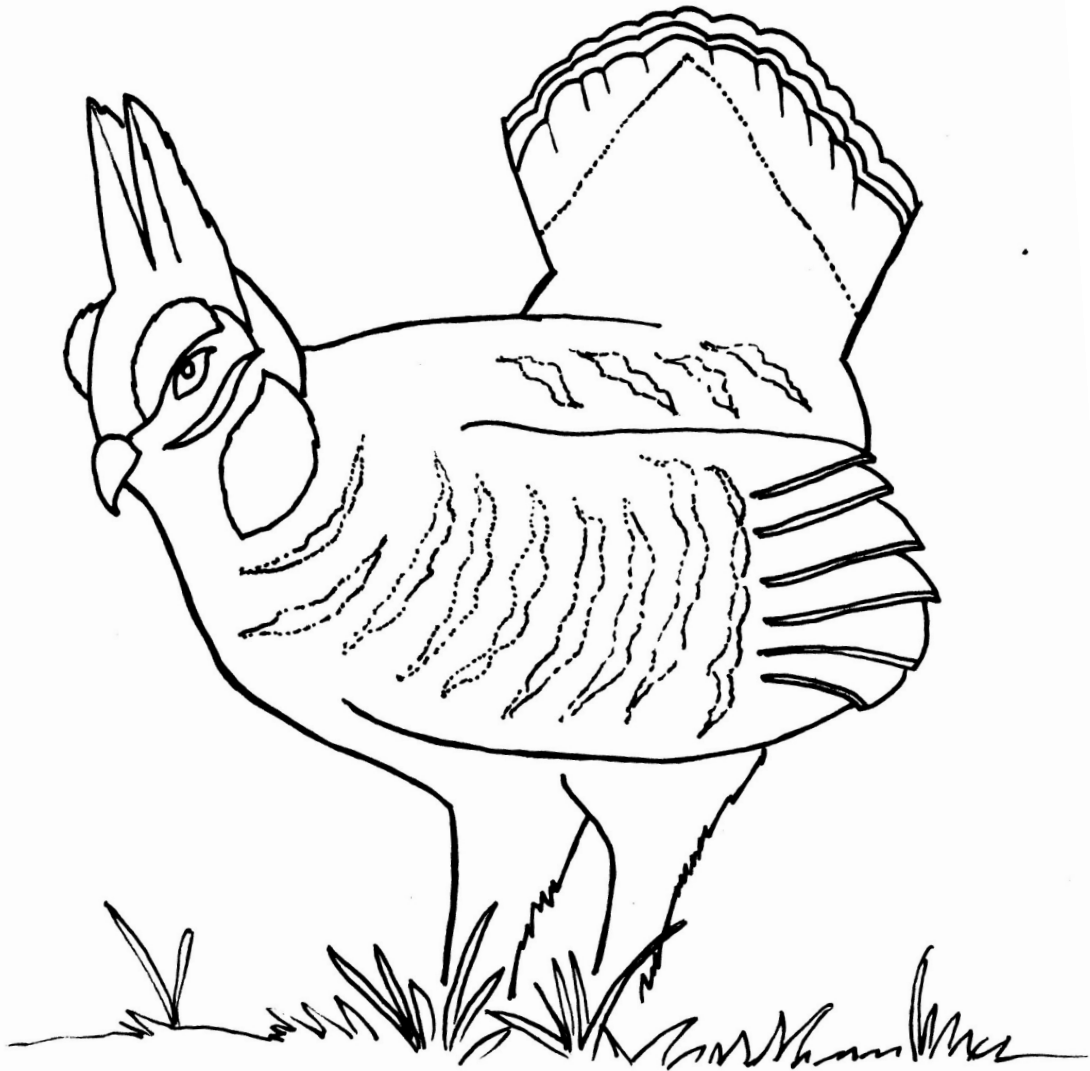
Lesser Prairie Chicken

Habitat: Short-grass prairie and sand shinnery in Eastern New Mexico*

Status: Climate-threatened; priority bird for Audubon conservation.



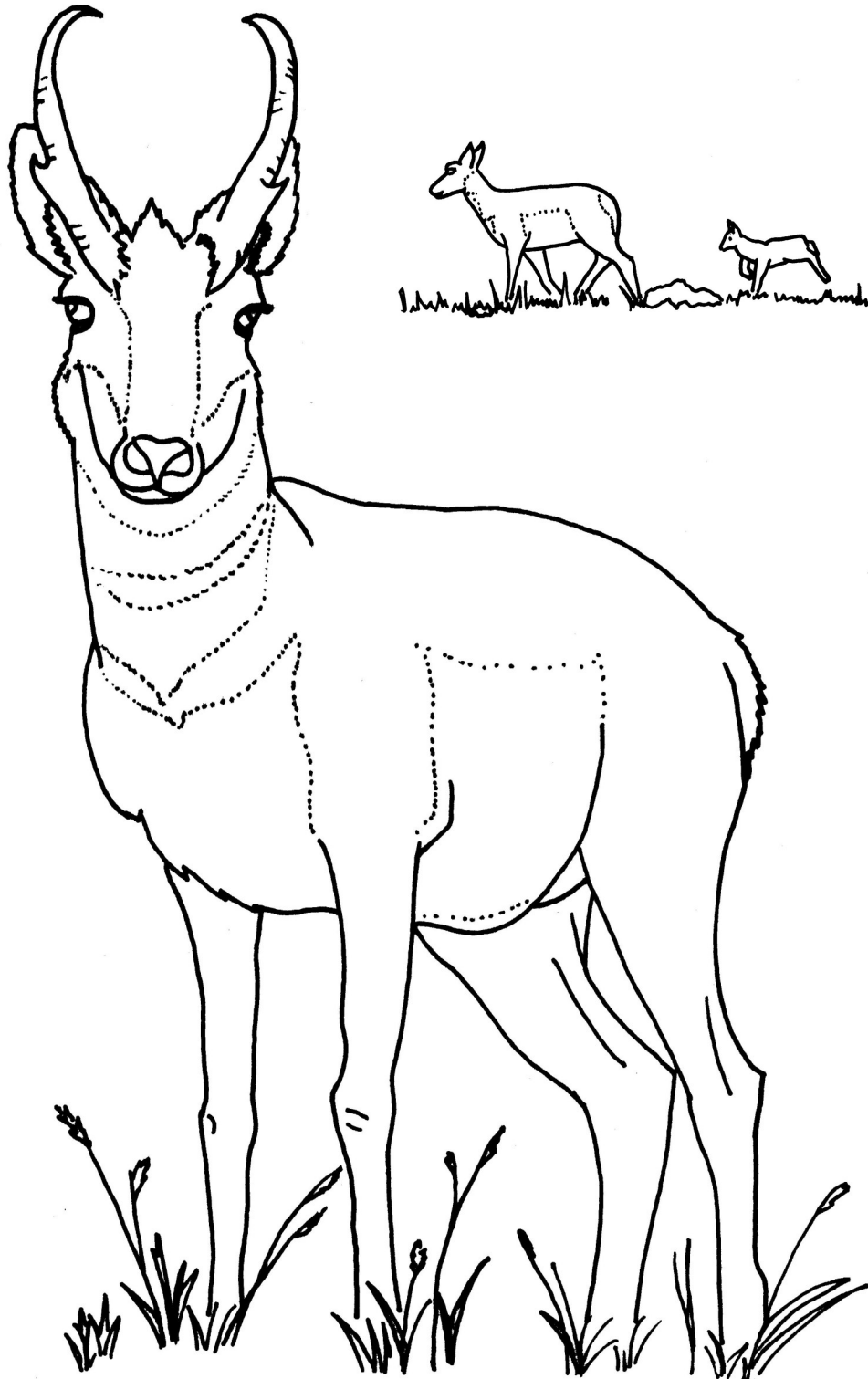
*Has been designated a **Global Important Bird Area (IBA)**, so it's recognized as a critical area for prairie chickens and other bird species



Lesser Prairie Chickens (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*) are not actual chickens, but grassland birds with unique breeding rituals! Males stamp their feet, puff up their bright orange neck sacs, and make loud booming noises to attract females. Their **leks**, or breeding sites, are called “booming grounds” and can be heard from miles away! Their biggest threats are loss of grassland habitat from energy development, woody shrubs, & fragmentation.

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Pronghorn Antelope



Pronghorn Antelope

(*Antilocapra americana*) are the fastest land animal in North America, running up to 60 mph! Their speed, coupled with incredible eyesight, helps them detect and escape predators. These native antelope can be found across Western plains, where they spend most of their time grazing on grasses and shrubs. Pronghorns get their name from the distinctive horns that grow directly from their skull. Both males and females grow horns, although females' are small and sometimes just a bump.

Habitat: Wide open grasslands, brush, and deserts. Pronghorns often migrate between feeding grounds in summer and winter.

Status: Lowest conservation priority. Overhunting once decimated their populations, but regulation and management has helped their numbers grow.

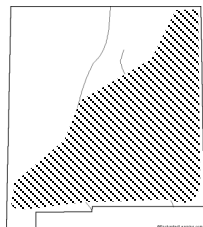


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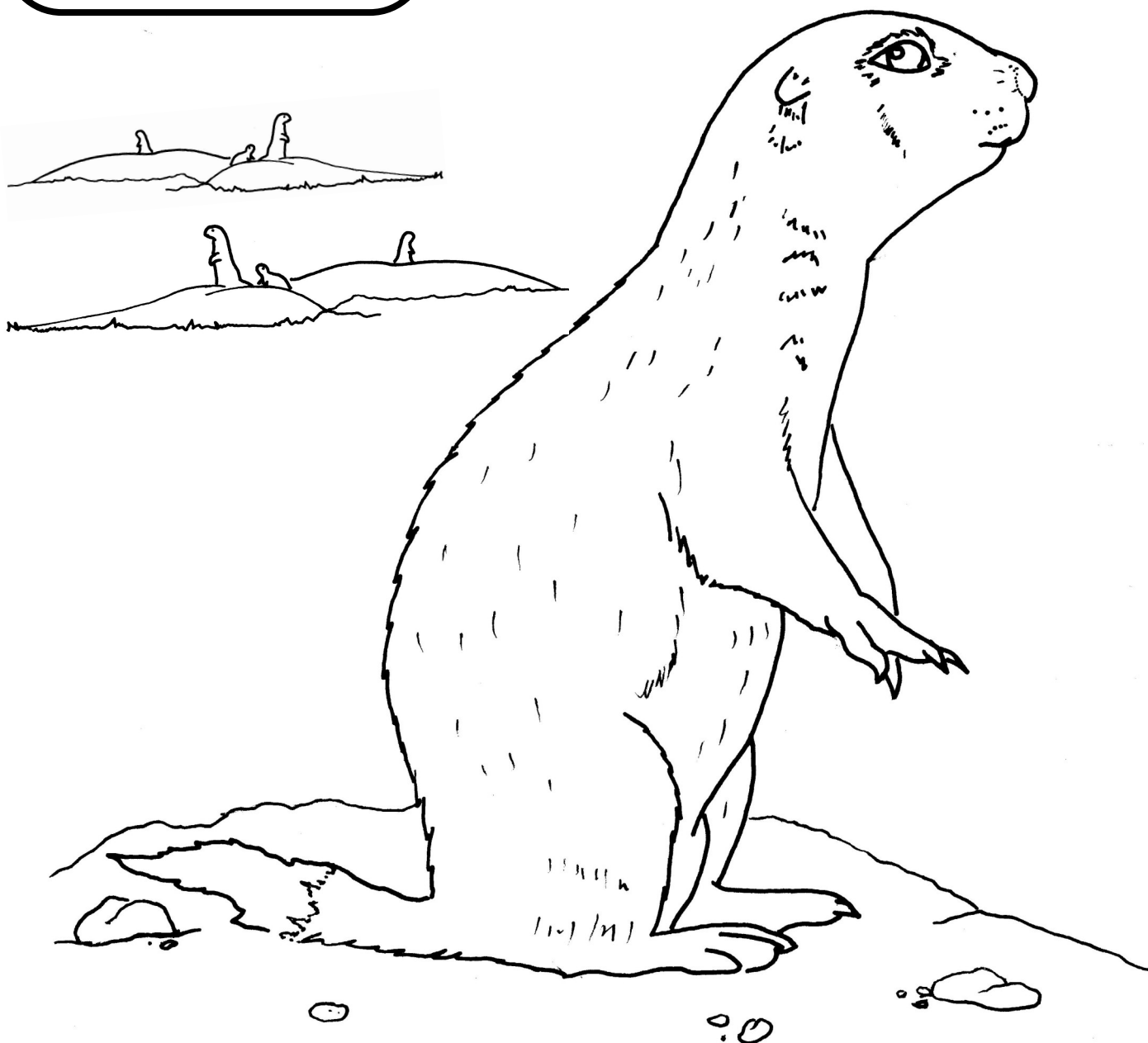
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Habitat: Digs burrows in open grassland and prairie with short grass.

Status: Lowest conservation priority. Many other animals depend on their burrows for survival.

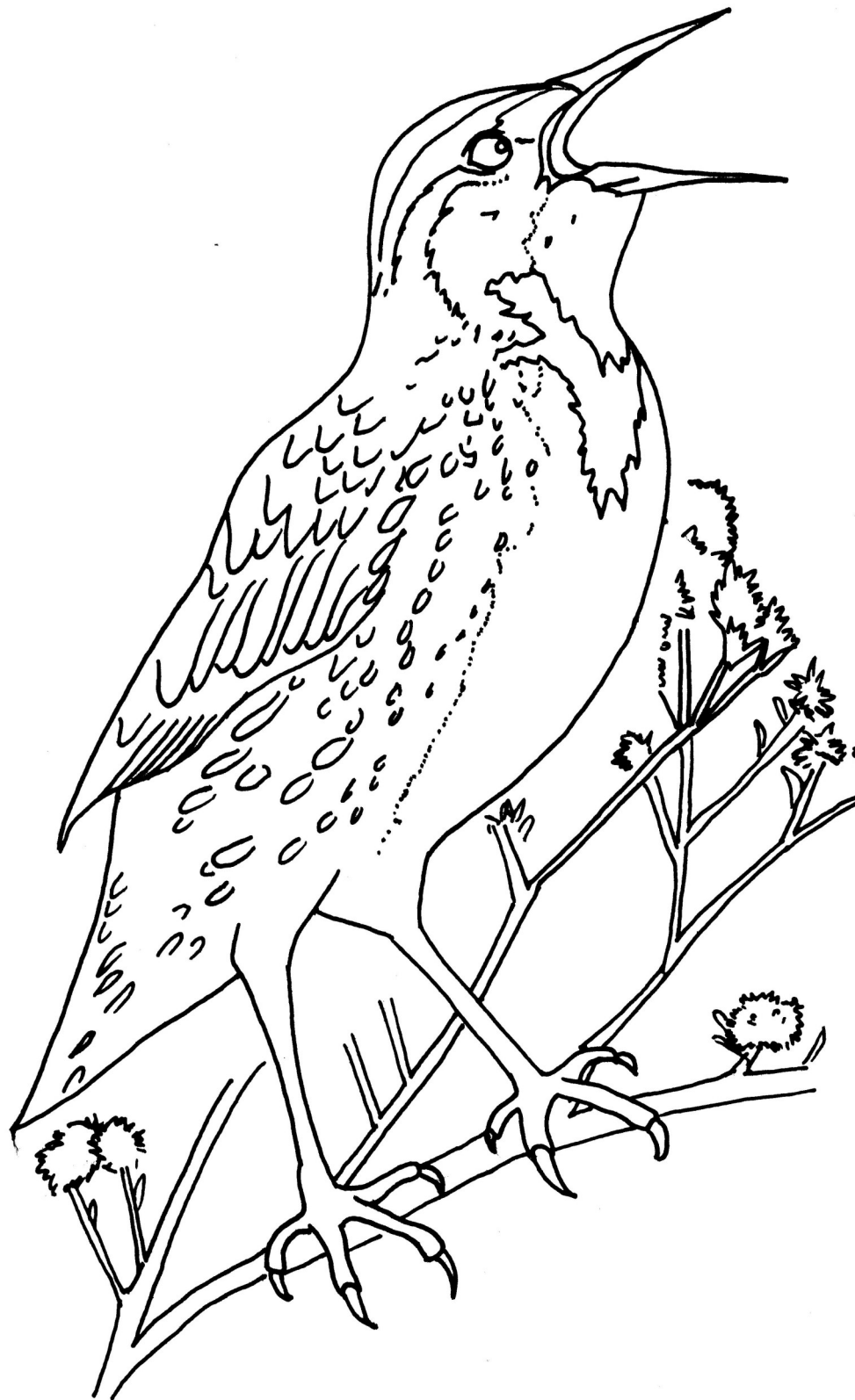


Black-tailed Prairie Dog



Black-tailed prairie dogs (*Cynomys ludovicianus*) are small grassland rodents closely related to squirrels. Prairie dogs live in large colonies or “towns” made up of multiple family groups. Families live in burrows with a variety of chambers. Prairie dogs can often be seen sitting on the pile of dirt at the burrow entrance. Their calls can be heard across the colony, including barks, yips, and whistles.

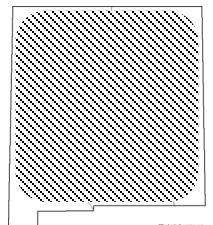
Western Meadowlark



Western Meadowlarks

(*Sturnella neglecta*) are common singers found across North American grasslands. Their melodious song is used by males to defend their territory as well as attract females. Males will puff and flash their yellow and black chest feathers while projecting their flute-like song across the prairie. Meadowlarks are often seen singing on fence posts or bushes, or foraging along the ground looking for insects and seeds to eat.

Habitat: Wide ranging and found in diverse types of grasslands and habitats. They are found across New Mexico



Status:

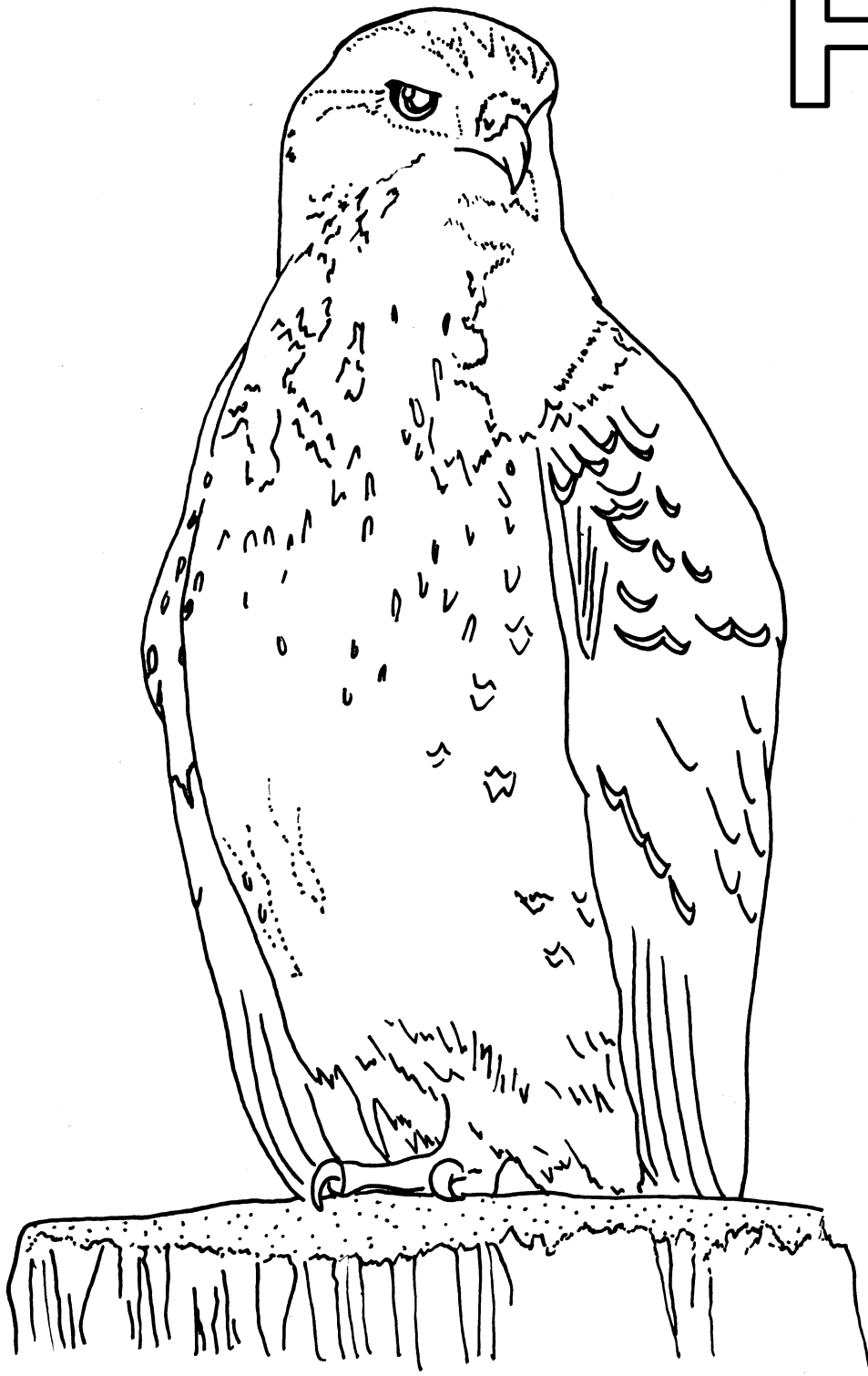
Declining populations, but lowest conservation priority.



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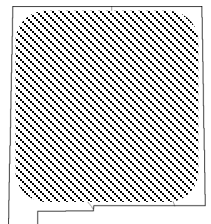
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Swainson's Hawk



Swainson's Hawks (*Buteo swainsoni*) are large raptors found across North American grasslands. They can often be seen soaring across prairies or perched on fence posts, scouting for prey like rodents, rabbits, and grasshoppers. Swainson's Hawks have two different color variations: a light and dark morph. In light morphs, the adults have a brown head and breast that looks like a hood against a white belly and brown wings. Dark morphs are entirely brown with tinges of orange. During winter migration, hundreds of Swainson's Hawks will form flocks and fly all the way to Argentina, one of the longest raptor migrations in America.

Habitat: Wide ranging and found in diverse types of grasslands and habitats. They are found across New Mexico



Status: Declining populations, but lowest conservation priority.



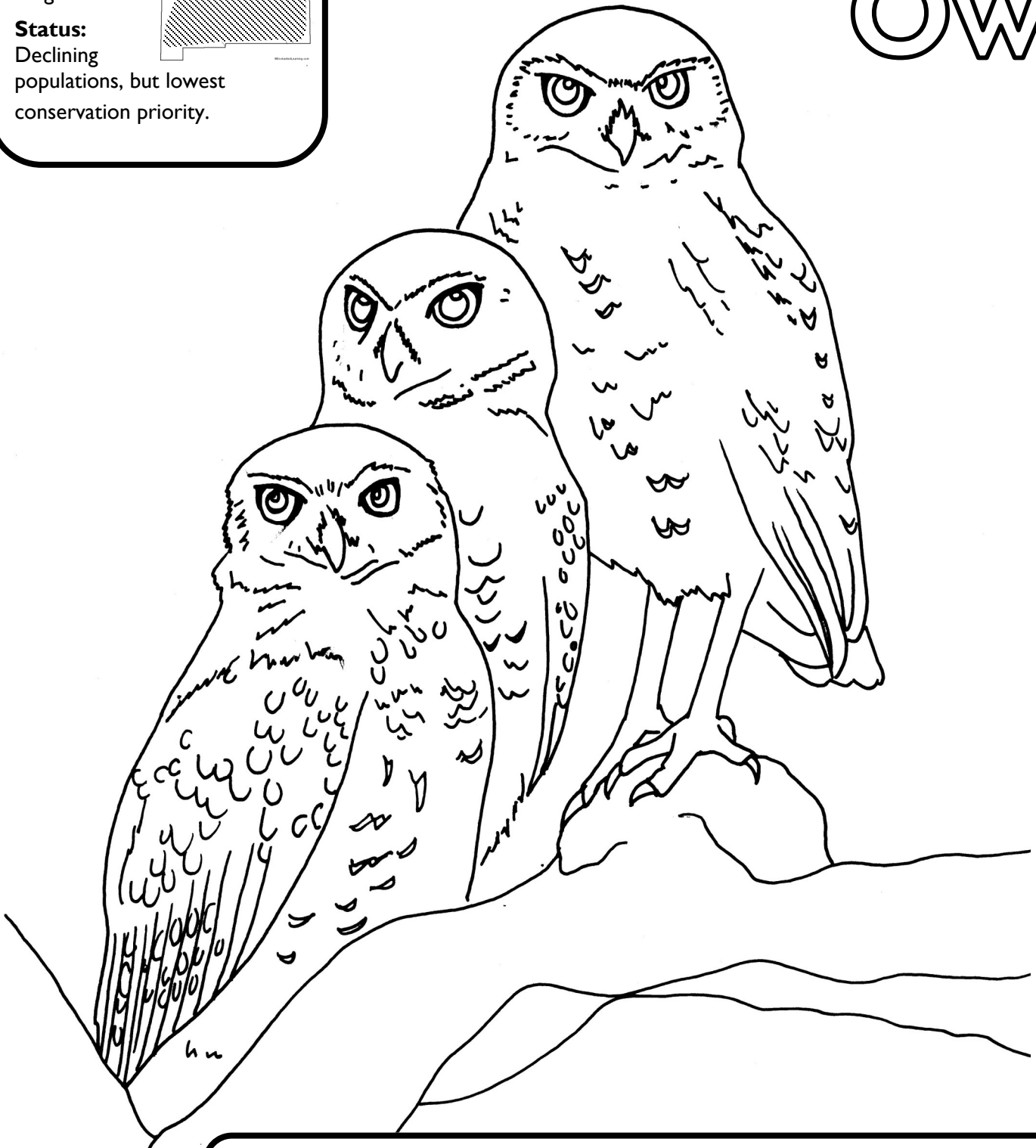
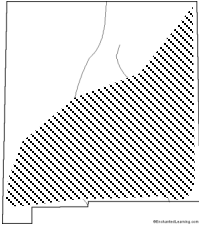
Burrowing Owl

Habitat:

Open grassland and prairie with short to no grass.

Status:

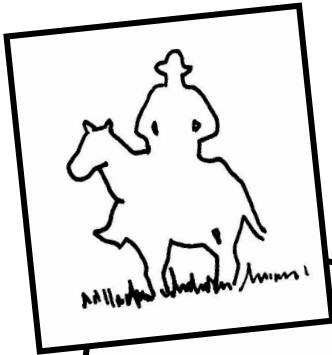
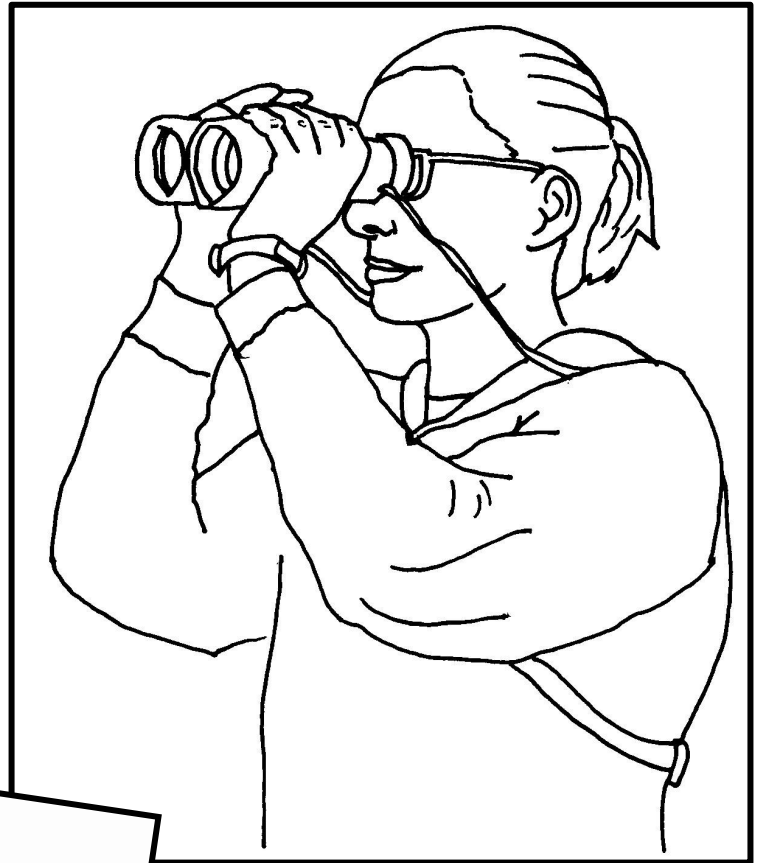
Declining populations, but lowest conservation priority.



Burrowing Owls (*Athene cunicularia*) are unusual birds that were once called “Howdy Birds” by cowboys due to their head bobbing behaviors. Although they can fly, these small owls prefer flat open ground where family colonies live in abandoned prairie dog and ground squirrel burrows. Their biggest threats are loss of habitat and burrows due to prairie dog control programs.

Using Science to Conserve Grasslands

Grasslands are in trouble. However, people are working together to protect these important places. Scientists work with ranchers and farmers to study and manage the land. Wildlife biologists go out into the field to collect data and study the natural environment. Ranchers and farmers use the information and their experience to take care of the land. They all hope that this cooperation will help protect grasslands and the wildlife that live there.



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Protecting Our Grasslands For The Future



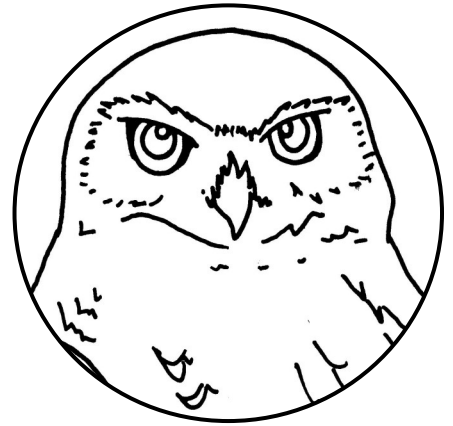
Grasslands and the animals that depend on them face an uncertain future. Development and threats from climate change will continue to threaten their existence. However, by working together and using science, we can make sure our grasslands are protected for the next generation!



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To learn more, check out:

- *Audubon Adventures* for kid's activities and educational resources about bird conservation
- Audubon New Mexico's Conservation Ranching program
- *The North American Grasslands & Birds Report* by the National Audubon Society



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Black-tailed Prairie Dog, Evan Barrientos, National Audubon Society: Conservation Ranching Program

Western Meadowlark, James Halsch, Audubon Photography Awards

Swainson's Hawk, Paul Gardner, Audubon Photography Awards

Pronghorn Antelope, Evan Barrientos, National Audubon Society: Conservation Ranching Program

Scientists, Evan Barrientos, National Audubon Society: Conservation Ranching Program

Rancher, Will van Overbeek, Nature Conservancy

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