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Archbold scientists awarded by USFWS

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Archbold scientists at work.
COURTESY/ARCHBOLD BIOLOGICAL STATION

LAKE PLACID — Archbold Avian Ecology Director Dr. Reed Bowman and research assistants

Rebecca Windsor and Greg Thompson received a United States Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Director Honor Award this past June, along with the entire Florida Grasshopper Sparrow Working Group Team, affectionately known as ‘Team Sparrow.’ These awards recognize “extraordinary performance in a job, team, or volunteer assignment, demonstrated through exceptional innovation or ability.”

For 20 years, the Working Group has been dedicated to saving North America’s most endangered bird from extinction. The Florida Grasshopper Sparrow is geographically restricted to Florida and is resident year-round. Like most grassland birds in the U.S., these birds have experienced dramatic population declines. As of 2020, there were fewer than 200 Florida grasshopper sparrows in the wild. The Working Group was established so that different agencies and organizations working with Florida grasshopper sparrows could share knowledge with each other. The Working Group includes state and federal agencies, managers, researchers, captive breeders, and NGOs, including Archbold Biological Station and Audubon Florida. Everglades Science Coordinator for Audubon Florida Dr. Paul Gray stated, “Audubon is a founding member of the Working Group, and it has been a long hard haul to get this far, but the partners stuck together, and there looks to be light at the end of the tunnel for the sparrow.”

Scientists in Archbold’s Avian Ecology Program have been members of the Working Group since its inception. Archbold researchers study Florida grasshopper sparrows (*Ammodramus savannarum floridanus*) in native prairies and on ranches, trying to understand how the sparrows respond to different prescribed fire regimes, predator communities, habitat structure, and grazing.

Reflecting on his work with the sparrows, Thompson, Archbold research assistant and one of the recipients of the USFWS Regional Director Honor Award, said, “It’s a dream of many early career



biologists to be on the front lines of conservation, helping to save endangered species. Starting my career working with such a critically endangered species in my home state has been an amazing experience. I feel incredibly fortunate to have found a project where I can put my skills to use for such an important cause. Receiving this award feels very validating. One thing that I've learned is that it takes a lot of different people with a lot of different skill sets to save a species. This award recognizes and celebrates our combined contributions.”

Andrew Schumann, animal collections manager at White Oak Conservation and member of 'Team Sparrow' reflects, “Despite the threat of extinction looming in recent years, the Florida grasshopper sparrow Working Group has been a source of hope and security because we are all working together to save the bird that represents Florida's dry prairies. We are very proud to have received the USFWS Regional Directors Award with all of our partners and colleagues, and to continue our efforts to bring the buzz song of the Florida grasshopper sparrow back to the prairie.”

Congratulations to Archbold staff and the entire Working Group for their dedication to the conservation of the Florida Grasshopper Sparrow. Their work is a shining example of the success large collaborative groups can have in the field of conservation and is well deserving of the USFWS Regional Director Honor Award. To learn more about the award, please visit [fws.gov/southeast/regional-director-honor-awards-2021/#honor-awards-for-conservation-partners-section](https://www.fws.gov/southeast/regional-director-honor-awards-2021/#honor-awards-for-conservation-partners-section).