

Habitat Restoration for Grassland-Dependent Birds in the San Marcos Foothills Preserve

Organization: Channel Islands Restoration

Project Period: January 2019 – December 2020

Amount: \$64,540

Location: San Marcos Preserve, Santa Barbara County

Project Description: The San Marcos Foothills Preserve is a 200-acre permanently protected nature preserve that is owned by Santa Barbara County. Channel Islands Restoration (CIR), in partnership with the San Marcos Foothills Coalition has prepared a native grassland restoration plan that will expand native grassland on the Preserve to support populations of grassland-dependent birds. CIR proposes to restore up to 45 acres of the Preserve to native perennial grassland through the initiation of a grazing program. This project will support 2-years of a grazing program that will allow sheep to graze 45 acres during 2 grazing periods per year. The restored grassland will benefit many insects, mammals, reptiles, and is expected to particularly increase the presence of grassland-dependent bird species such as grasshopper sparrows, lark sparrows, western meadowlarks, burrowing owls, loggerhead shrikes, and white-tailed kites.

Progress: CIR grazed over 400 sheep on 27 acres of grassland on the Preserve. Grazing used an intense, short-duration grazing regime whereby all of the sheep were in pastures, each about 1.4 acres in size for about 1.5 days. Qualitative vegetation monitoring across the grassland on the Preserve after the grazing was completed. CIR also conducted bird surveys during the 2019 breeding season, many species were observed and this data will help serve as baseline information to compare to future data collected on the Preserve. Overall, this project has seen increased growth of native grasses and increased seed production in response to the sheep grazing.



Native grassland dominated by *Stipa pulchra* on the Preserve in the spring