

## 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. Currently, native perennial grassland only occupies about 23 acres of the preserve. 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. The quality of the grassland on the Preserve has declined since 2007 when livestock grazing was removed and thatch was allowed to build up. Since then, the cover of nonnative grasses has overwhelmed the cover of native grasses, and the amount of bare ground is nearly nonexistent.



Grasshopper Sparrow, California Bird Species of Special Concern (breeding). *Image from audubon.org*

This project will support 2-years of a grazing program that will allow sheep to graze 45 acres during 2 grazing periods per year. This project will allow for adaptive management, biological monitoring, invasive species removal, native grass seeding and planting, and habitat enhancements where needed. 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. Additional funding sources will be sought to continue this program.