STUDENT PROFILE

Alejandro (Alex) graduated from Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León with a Biotechnology and Genomics degree in 2016. His passion for science compelled him to become a field technician for two years in Mexico, and in the US and Canada collecting data for bird ecology research projects. During this time, he chased many species of birds and learned to love them; these experiences inspired him to draw pictures of birds and nature. Motivated to go back into science and have his own project, Alex began his graduate degree at Sul Ross State University. He describes graduate work as hard but fulfilling, and he hopes his work will contribute to the conservation of grassland birds.

PROJECT PROFILE

Grassland-obligate bird species (GOBS), are a group of specialized birds that live in pristine grasslands. In North America, habitat changes such as shrub encroachment are some of the causes for the decline in GOBS. To control invasive shrub species, two ranches in the Trans-Pecos were treated with herbicide to selectively remove shrubs and enhance the grasslands. We are comparing the bird communities in these treated areas with control areas by performing transects. In 2019 and 2020, we performed 30 transects per strata with four vegetation survey points per transect. During this two-year study we performed over 600 transects and detected more than 16,000 birds, and we aim to start a long-term bird monitoring program on restored sites. Additionally, we are designing a strategy to estimate abundance of grassland birds in the winter using systematic mist-netting. With the help of many volunteers from the US and Mexico, we capture birds using mist nets and keep record of all birds detected as we sweep the area.