

Connecting More People with the Prairie

Jason St. Sauver, Community Education Director

Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center helps people connect with the prairie. This connection enriches lives and helps grow support for conservation. As we broaden our program and event offerings, we provide opportunities for larger and more diverse audiences to experience our shared tallgrass prairie heritage. As more people connect with the prairie, we strengthen the voices for bird and prairie conservation in our community.

Building on 2015 Successes



Families enjoyed counting winter birds on the prairie at our first Christmas Bird Count for Kids.

Last year was a banner year for events that brought people to Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center. In 2015, both our Tastes in the Tallgrass fundraising dinner and our Twilight in the Tallgrass prairie festival

introduced more people to the prairie than ever. We also piloted several new citizen science programs: our first annual Christmas Bird Count for Kids, our first Monarch Monitoring citizen science team, and the new, fun, and "buggy" Insectigations program. Not to mention a successful summer camp program and seeing over 2,000 school kids exploring the tallgrass. Very exciting!



Conservation is fun! Elliott Elementary Community Learning Center 2015 summer camp students enjoy a hayride back to the nature center after spreading native prairie plant seeds.

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Director Glynnis Collins speaks with volunteers Bill and Diane Edwards at our February Volunteer breakfast. Guests enjoyed pancakes, beautiful weather, and tens of thousands of migrating snow geese overhead!

New and Expanding Programs for Adults and Families

Program attendance is already growing in 2016 with a great crowd for our Winter Walkabout in January and at multiple Great Backyard Bird Count events in February.

There is much more to come! We are adding programs on new subjects from dragonflies to prairie-chickens. April will see two new programs. For Chilly-Chicken/Chicken Chili Day on Saturday, April 9, we're inviting the public to join us to look and listen for booming Greater Prairie-Chickens. After a brisk morning trying to track them down, we'll return to the center to warm up with homemade chicken chili and cinnamon rolls. And to celebrate National Poetry Month, we'll be hosting our first ever Words 4 Birds event on Sunday, April 17. Four local writers will host writing workshops for kids and adults in the morning, and read their works about birds and nature in the afternoon. We are expanding our May Bird Bonanza weekend to two days May 21 & 22, to celebrate the return of migratory birds.

continued on page 2

Letter from the Director Glynnis Collins



Thank You, Volunteers!

In my early months on the job as Director, I continue to learn about Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center's inspiring conservation

work. I have had the privilege of meeting many of the generous people who share of their time and expertise to advance the vision we all share. With a full time staff of only four people, it would be impossible to do all the work before us. But with a team of dedicated and talented volunteers, the sky's the limit!

Our volunteer Stewardship Advisory Board members serve up to two three year terms. The full board and its committees support the organization by providing strategic guidance on conservation, education, fund development, marketing, and overall operations. Perhaps most importantly, they are our goodwill ambassadors in the community – they introduce people to the prairie and connect us with people who can help us achieve more.

Our volunteer Discovery Leaders make it possible for us to provide one-of-a-kind outdoor learning experiences for over 2,000 students each year. By letting the students' interests and natural sense of wonder lead the way, our aptly-named Discovery Leaders help the students discover what is thrilling to them on the prairie. (See Education Director Jason St. Sauver's article on pg. 1 about our growing programs in the coming year to connect people with the prairie.)

Our burn crew volunteers get out and dirty on the prairie, helping Habitat Program Manager Ed Hubbs conduct controlled burns each spring. Supplied with training and equipment, they may light fires, serve as lookouts, lay down a water line – all essential jobs of the large crew needed to safely manage fire on the prairie. (See Ed's article on pg. 7 about this season's burn season.)

There are many other ways volunteers help Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center. From staffing the Center front desk and gift shop on weekends and holidays to clearing invasive plants from the landscape to helping arrange for contractors for facilities maintenance, the prairie and its community of supporters could not be here without them.

If you are a past or current volunteer, thank you. If you are interested in volunteering, please give us a call!

Sincerely,

continued from page 1

School Kids and Other Audiences

We're reinforcing already great partnerships with other local organizations and creating more opportunities for the public to enjoy a day on the prairie. We are thrilled to be scheduling five weeks of summer camp in 2016 for kids & families from five different Community Learning Centers in Lincoln, giving many of these folks the opportunity for a first-time visit to connect with the prairie first-hand.

The great team at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center, which includes amazing volunteers, Board and committee members and



Our generous volunteers, including our 2015 corps of Discovery Leaders pictured above, make it possible for more and more people to experience the prairie.

"The students had a great time learning and exploring. Many stated it was the best field trip ever!"

- feedback from a teacher after a school visit to the prairie

staff, has plans to do even more outreach in 2016 by creating programming for local senior centers, blind and visually impaired audiences, and after school programs.

We are looking forward to a GREAT year and we hope you'll continue to join us along the way!

Be a Discovery Leader!

Do you love the outdoors and sharing your passion for nature with others...especially children? Then there is no better time to join the volunteer team at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center as a Discovery Leader! Discovery Leaders help facilitate exploratory learning for school students during field trips to the prairie by leading hands-on activities in the tallgrass, at the pond's edge, or on the woodland trail. Most field trips take place between 9am – 2pm on a weekday, so availability during that timeframe at least once a week is preferred. Training is provided, you must be able to attend one of the two training sessions: Wednesday April 6 from 1-5 pm or Thursday April 7 from 1-5 pm.

Letter from the State Director
Marian Langan

Greetings! As you well know, the work to help protect and promote nature wears a lot of different faces. It can include everything from fixing fences to writing articles, from prescribed burns to bird surveys, and from sandbar clearing to helping a child look through an insect viewer. Every single one of these is important.



This time of the year brings a special focus on another face of conservation, working with our Nebraska legislature. The short session this year brings about a flurry of activity with senators working hard to get their prioritized bills to move forward on this short timeline. As is usual, it is a mixed bag of bills on which we are working both for and against. Our priorities this year include the protection of the Nebraska Environmental Trust and the right to have conservation easements. In addition, we are supporting a variety of efforts for the Niobrara River and Niobrara Council. Thanks for support you have given toward this work and feel free to call me if you have any questions, (402) 797-2301.

Sincerely,

Marian Langan

Mark your Calendars:



Tastes in the Tallgrass
September 18, 2016 from 3:30-7:00pm

give
To Lincoln Day
May 26, 2016
LINCOLN COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION

Mark your calendars for the
5th Annual
Give To Lincoln Day
on May 26, 2016!

Message from the Stewardship Board

Thank you, Supporters!

The winter season is always a wonder to me. I love the crisp white blankets of snow Mother Nature delivers occasionally — so clean, reflective and vibrant. Cold temperatures make me also appreciate those animals and birds that are hardy and sturdy enough to live in the Nebraska outdoors through the long winter.



However, I also enjoy the thaws that come in between the snows and the crisp arctic blasts. The hints of green growth that peek through — promising a new coat soon of even more colors. And of course the elegant migrations that grace our air space as the current outdoor residents are joined by even more voices and activity.

Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center offers that same renewal opportunity for many. The solace, the space... where you can feel the magnitude of what Mother Nature has to offer to all who are willing to listen and observe. A vital local component of how we ground ourselves to what is important in the bigger global picture. A glance from the past to the future.

You keep this gem healthy and thriving. The supporters listed on pages 4-5 have provided financial support for Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center in 2015. These donations are essential for maintaining the tallgrass prairie habitat and offering the popular educational programs that connect our community with Nebraska's wild heritage. Thank you for your continuing support. Together, we can make this all happen!

Fondly,

Lana Flagtwet

Lana Flagtwet
Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center
Stewardship Board President

2015 DONORS

TALLGRASS PRAIRIE SOCIETY

The Tallgrass Prairie Society is a group of individual contributors whose generous annual support of \$500 or more honors our natural and cultural prairie history. We are grateful for their vision and their gifts. We hope that you will consider joining them. You can help make tallgrass prairie not only our history, but our legacy.

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The support and recognition of all our supporters is important to us. Please let us know of any missing names so corrections can be made in the next issue.

CREATE YOUR LEGACY

Melissa Filipi, Director of Philanthropy

Leaving a gift to support a cause that has been important in your life is easier than you may think! Many of our supporters have arranged to leave money to Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center in their wills or estate plans. This is a simple way to provide for your heirs and include the prairie in your plans as well.

You can also name Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center as a beneficiary of a retirement plan, life insurance policy, or other financial account. These gifts cost you nothing now, require no minimum contribution, and allow you the option to change your beneficiaries at any time.

For more information, request our free guide today by contacting Melissa Filipi at 402-797-2301 / mfilipi@audubon.org, or Shari Kolding at 512-236-9076 / skolding@audubon.org. You may also download our guides and other information at www.audubon.org/legacy.



MAKE A DIFFERENCE

There are many ways that you can help us fulfill our mission of conserving the tallgrass prairie by engaging people in our natural and cultural resources. Support of all types makes such a difference, with your help we can make the world a better place!

- Become a volunteer. Our volunteers are an important part of our successes. There are many opportunities available that can fit in to any schedule. We're happy to play "matchmaker" and find the perfect volunteer opportunity for your interests, skills, and time!
- Tell your friends and family about us! Raising awareness of our work opens many doors, and introduces a new group of volunteers, donors, and supporters to our mission.
- Become a monthly donor. You can provide regular, ongoing support for our work by visiting our website, SpringCreekPrairie.audubon.org.
- Donate. We rely on the generous support of our donors for the work that we do. We do not receive funding from any national organization. All money raised here, stays here. You can return a gift in the envelope provided, visit our website to donate online, or stop by our Education Center to make a gift in person.
- Commemorate a life event with a gift in honor or memory of friends, family, or occasions.
- Take a look at our wish list (page 8) for additional gift ideas.
- Include us in your estate plans. Several simple, flexible, tax-advantaged options can benefit your heirs and Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center at the same time.

VISIT OUR NEW WEBSITE

Kevin Poague, Operations Manager



Come explore our new website at SpringCreekPrairie.audubon.org

Following the National Audubon Society's website redesign and launch in 2015, Spring Creek Prairie's website has now also been updated and is up and running at SpringCreekPrairie.audubon.org.

More photos and easier navigation let visitors keep track of events and happenings at the prairie, as well as allow newcomers to learn all about our conservation efforts, history, and opportunities. One new feature is a list of notable bird species found here at the prairie, with links to the National Audubon Society website giving more information about these birds.

The websites for the Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary (rowe.audubon.org) and Audubon Nebraska (ne.audubon.org) have also been given upgrades.

SPRING BURNS FOR A HEALTHY PRAIRIE

Ed Hubbs, Habitat Program Manager



A volunteer lights a prescribed fire at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center.

As we transition from snow and cold winter months into brisk spring days, it is time to turn our focus to one of the most exciting tallgrass prairie management activities at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center. The spring prescribed burning

season is upon us! You may notice columns of smoke rising from the prairie on a spring day. These fires are not a cause for alarm, but instead should impart awe and wonder at the fascinating dynamics of the prairie landscape.

Prescribed burning is more than just a tool to manage the prairie. It is an ecological process that is required for a healthy prairie. Over thousands of years, prairie plants and animals evolved with periodic wildfires that raced across the landscape. Society's rather recent suppression of wildfires has left a gap in nature that cannot be replaced by any other process. Prescribed burning is a method to replicate wildfires in a controlled manner. By following a plan or "prescription," we can design when and how we will intentionally set a fire to benefit the prairie, while avoiding costly and hazardous wildfires.

These prescribed fires are a source of disturbance that allows for the regeneration and growth of prairie plants. A hillside that is

burned will quickly recover where there is adequate soil moisture. With old grass litter burned away, new, bright green shoots will poke out from the ash in a matter of days or weeks. The improved health of the plants is proven by the increased number of animals visiting the area. Benefits of fire move up the food chain as insects move in to eat the new shoots. Native and migratory birds capitalize on the plentiful insects that provide an important source of protein for growing chicks. Even deer and cattle prefer to graze on these quality shoots.



Many wildflowers, like this gayfeather, will bloom with gusto in the summer following a prescribed fire. Some of these wildflowers are rarely seen until after a fire has allowed them access to abundant sunshine.

This spring when you see a column of smoke rising from the prairie, do not worry. Know that we are continuing our efforts to maintain this unique ecosystem in the way Mother Nature intended. For more information or to get involved with prescribed burning, give us a call.

Prairie Burn Partners

Burning the prairie in a controlled, safe way takes a lot of experience, equipment, and people. The TriCounty Prescribed Burn Association is a cooperative organization that helps landowners and managers access all three, making it easier for more people to use burning in managing pasture, conservation easements, and protected lands like Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center. Members who pay a small membership fee and agree to volunteer on at least two burns carried out by Association members can rent equipment at a low rate, request volunteer help, and even get assistance with planning their prescribed burn. We are stepping up our involvement with TriCounty this year, which will give us access to bigger water tanks, an extra pick-up truck, and more volunteers to help us with our prescribed prairie burns. If you would like more information, contact them at tricityburn@gmail.com.



Tri-County Prescribed Burn Association's water tank will be parked at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center this year.

Upcoming Events at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center

April 9 (Saturday)	Chilly Chicken/Chicken Chili Day*, 7-11 am
April 17 (Sunday)	Words 4 Birds!, 11 am-2:30 pm
May 7 (Saturday)	Planning Your Native Garden*, 2-4 pm
May 14 (Saturday)	Second Saturday Bird Walk*, 8-10 am
May 17 (Tuesday)	Third Tuesday Bird Walk*, 8-10 am
May 21-22 (Sat & Sun)	Bird Bonanza Weekend*, Various times
June 4 (Saturday)	Native Prairie Plant Walk*, 2-3:30 pm
June 11 (Saturday)	Second Saturday Bird Walk*, 8-10 am
June 18 (Saturday)	Birding by Ear*, 8-10 am Firefly Family Picnic*, 7:30-9:30 pm
June 20 & 27 (Mondays)	Wildcrafting: Edible Plants of the Prairie*, 6:30-8:30 pm
June 21 (Tuesday)	Third Tuesday Bird Walk*, 8-10 am
July 9 (Saturday)	Butterfly Count*, 9 am-12:30 pm Firefly Family Picnic*, 7:30-9:30 pm

For additional information and events, visit SpringCreekPrairie.audubon.org *Program fee



We captured this badger photo late at night with our trail cam - we had been hoping to see who was digging holes in the hillside near the visitors center and making themselves right at home!

Trails

Trails open sunrise to sunset, daily

Center

*Open Monday - Friday 9 - 5; Saturday - Sunday 1 - 5
All year, except major holidays*

Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center

Staff

Glynnis Collins – Director
Jason St. Sauver – Community Education Director
Kevin Poague – Operations Manager
Ed Hubbs – Habitat Program Manager
Amy Plettner – Caretaker

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Admission

SCPAC Supporters (\$50+)	FREE
Adults	\$4
Seniors (60+)	\$3
Students	\$3
Ages 6-17	\$3
Ages 5 and under	FREE
Tuesdays	FREE

*Members of National Audubon Society and
Wachiska Audubon Society receive \$1 off admission.*

Wish List

Truckload of river rock
New duplexing color printer
Pitchforks (4-tined and 10-tined)
4 lb. mallet
ATV to borrow during prescribed burns
Portable battery jumper with air compressor
Binoculars (new or gently used)
Portable AM/FM radio

CONTACT US:

Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center
11700 SW 100th St. P.O. Box. 117
Denton, NE 68339

If you would like to receive *The Prairie Sage* electronically,
write scp@audubon.org or call (402) 797-2301.

Looking for a Place to Host an Event?

Remember Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center when planning business meetings, wedding and anniversary receptions, and other get-togethers. Call (402) 797-2301 for information and rates.

PHONE: (402) 797-2301

EMAIL: scp@audubon.org

WEBSITE: SpringCreekPrairie.audubon.org

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Also find us on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.