

## HOT Summer Fun and Learning on the Prairie!

Jason St Sauver, Community Education Director

This summer, not only have the temperatures soared to new levels sooner than ever, but so has our partnership with the Lincoln Community Learning Centers to provide summer camp experiences on the prairie.



Culler Community Learning Center students enjoy a wagon ride on the prairie.

## More summer campers, more great encounters with nature

After a successful camp in 2015 with Elliot Community Learning Center, this year we expanded our offerings and saw six weeks of four-day-long day camps for Learning Center kids from Elliott, McPhee, Culler, Norwood Park/Brownell, Goodrich, and Arnold schools. Other Learning Center locations at Dawes and Belmont schools, as well as Air Park Recreation Center, also squeezed in several summer day field trips.

*"Dear Jason, thank you for letting me see the prairie. My favorite part was fishing because I caught a sunfish. I really like the prairie, it felt like I was free. It was amusing all the different kinds of bugs."*

- Allyson

Each day came with a different set of exploratory activities. Campers took part in a prairie scavenger hunt; caught and released insects and other prairie beasts to explore biodiversity and adaptations; created bird nests; took part in habitat management work by pulling some invasive musk thistles; participated in citizen science projects by looking for monarch

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*"Dear Jason, thank you for letting us come to Spring Creek Prairie. My favorite part was, well, there were too many things to choose from because there were so many good things that happened. I would go back again."*

- Jess

butterfly caterpillars on milkweed, and counting eggs and chicks in the swallow nests along the building. Campers were also treated to a wagon ride through the tall grass, complete with views of the rolling hills all the way to the capitol building. And at the end of each day, campers wrote or drew in journals they created – reflecting on the adventure they completed.

Highlights were many, but one was getting to learn about prairie mammals by trapping small rodents, observing them safely, and sketching them before releasing them back into their habitat. And to top each week off, the campers' families were treated to a picnic where the kids themselves could lead their families around the prairie and show off all they had seen, created, explored, or discovered.

*"Dear Jason, thank you for the prairie tour and a great and fun time. My favorite part was getting to see new plants and animals because I like to see new things and explore."*

- Hailey



Drawing prairie activities!

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**Message from the Director**  
*Glynnis Collins*



I'm delighted to be able to share stories from some of our summer campers with you in this issue of The Prairie Sage (see our cover story). Our summer camp program brings participants out to the prairie for several days over the course of a week, with each visit usually lasting longer than a typical school field trip. This gives the kids a chance to see more, do more, and learn more on the prairie. Our aim with the summer camps, and with all of our education programs, is to provide inviting, invigorating, and inspirational encounters with the prairie and the birds who depend on it. We believe these encounters foster a connection with nature that enriches people's lives and inspires conservation values. The heartwarming pictures and messages the kids put in thank-you letters are a wonderful indication of our success. You'll see some examples in our cover story – the next time you are out at the prairie, stop by and take a look at the many others that grace the walls of the education center.

With back-to-school around the corner (already?!), our Community Education Director, Jason St. Sauver, is now gearing up for Prairie Immersion, our biggest program for schoolchildren. Throughout the fall, every Lincoln Public Schools fourth grader visits a prairie – half of them come to us and half visit Pioneers Park Nature Center. We typically see around 1,500 fourth graders. This year, the Lower South Platte Natural Resources District will be providing supplemental funds to make the program available to other school districts, so we may see even more students this year. If you are interested in helping out with this great program, and are available on at least some weekdays in the fall, please consider becoming a Discovery Leader (see page 6) – we can promise a ton of fun and some inspirational prairie moments!

With best wishes,

SAVE THE DATE

**TASTES  
IN THE  
TALLGRASS**

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2016  
4:00 TO 7:00 P.M.

SPRING CREEK PRAIRIE AUDUBON CENTER  
DENTON, NEBRASKA

Online Registration is now open at  
[SpringCreekPrairie.Audubon.org](http://SpringCreekPrairie.Audubon.org).  
Seating is limited, so please make  
your reservation today.

## Thank You!

People support Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center in many ways. From monetary donations to gifts of items to time spent on needed repairs or jobs, we appreciate everyone who can help support our conservation mission.

We'd like to thank the following for their gifts over the past few months:

- For helping with the summer camps family picnics: Paul Canny, Dave and Emilie Ellingson, Sue Guild, Jeff and Ann Hagaman, Barb and Bruce Johnson, Moni Usasz, and Sue and Dave Van Horn.
- Bill and Diane Edwards drove the trail wagon during summer day camps and provided excellent assistance around the property.
- Board member Jeff Jewell donated used office chairs.
- Arnold Mendenhall gave us some electric fence wire.
- Karen and Charlie Messenger gave a box of education supplies.
- George O'Neal sent us two new binoculars.

**Message from the State Director**  
*Marian Langan*

What a year! Summer may be a relaxing time for many - school is out, vacations are planned, and many use this time to recharge our batteries. For Audubon, summer brings the end of one fiscal year and the start of the next. It also brings the start of our nature camps, summer bird monitoring, and many more habitat management activities.



I am always amazed at everything you help us do! You've read about the great work you brought to life at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center, but did you know you also had a larger impact across our state?

- You helped us partner with the Sandhills Task Force, Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition, Center for Rural Affairs, and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to host the Summer Grazing and Birding Tour in the Sandhills.
- You helped us build partnerships to protect the Niobrara Scenic River.
- You helped us protect the Platte River in central Nebraska.
- And, of course, you helped protect the tallgrass prairie for birds, wildlife, and our communities.

Your support makes all the difference and we deeply appreciate it!

Sincerely,

**New Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center  
Stewardship Advisory Board Members**



*Marilyn Moore*



*Larry Williams*

**Message from the Board Chair**  
*Mari Lane Gewecke*

With grateful appreciation to those who have gone before me in this role, I was honored to begin my term as chair of the Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center Stewardship Advisory Board on July 1.



A special note of gratitude goes to outgoing chair Lana Flagtwet, who served in that position for two years and helped move our organization forward in so many ways and who, thankfully, will remain on the board this coming year.

In June, we bid adieu to retiring board members Christie Dionisopoulos, who gave six years of dedicated and enthusiastic service – two of those as board chair – and Matt Gonzalez, who leaves us after serving a three-year term.

We are thrilled to welcome two new members to our board: Marilyn Moore, retired President of Bryan College of Health Sciences, and Larry Williams, Executive Director of the Malone Community Center.

All of us on the board recognize that at the heart of this organization are the donors who make possible everything that Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center is able to do. From educating children about the natural world to conserving and restoring tallgrass prairie, it is your generous support that makes it all happen.

I hope to see you at our annual Tastes in the Tallgrass fundraising dinner on September 18. Details on the event can be found elsewhere in this newsletter as well as on our website at [springcreekprairie.audubon.org](http://springcreekprairie.audubon.org).

Sincerely,



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## HOT Summer Fun

### Junior Counselors

Seven children who attended with Elliott CLC last year came back this summer as junior counselors, helping Jason as team leaders, supply gatherers, game instructors, and more. The CLC and Elliott school staff were thrilled with the impact the camp experience has had on these seven youth, from behavior to grades in school. Thank you!

We're thrilled that more young people are able to have in-depth experiences in nature through this new program. Thank you to our great partners at Lincoln's Community Centers and to our donors and volunteers for investing in our community's children.



Campers from Elliott Community Learning Center; several returning campers served as junior counselors for their peers.

## Birds and Butterflies on the Prairie

Jason St Sauver, Community Education Director

Like our human visitors, birds and butterflies are most abundant here at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center in the summer. This is the best time of year to survey these animals to get a sense of overall populations and to be able to track trends through time.

### Grassland Birds

Grassland bird populations have declined more than any other group in recent years as their habitat has been converted to farming and other uses. The Missouri River Bird Observatory works closely with the National Audubon Society and other partners to survey grassland birds on thousands of acres of private land. Much of this survey work is performed for the Prairie Bird Initiative, a program that targets private grasslands for conservation-oriented management. One of the main goals of the Initiative is to increase the economic incentive for landowners to practice bird-friendly livestock production.



Northern Bobwhite,  
Photo by Gordon Warrick

In June and early July, staff and volunteers at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center participated in the Prairie Bird Initiative for the fourth year by completing breeding bird surveys. With the aid of an iPad and survey software, the numbers and locations of prairie birds were recorded on 16 predetermined routes around the property.

This year, the number of Dickcissels seems to be higher than in years past. We also continue to record encouraging numbers of Henslow's Sparrows, Bobolinks, Grasshopper Sparrows, and Meadowlarks, particularly the eastern race. On the down side, Upland Sandpipers and Field Sparrows have been noticeably absent. The occurrence or absence of these species will help us judge the impact of our prairie management on these birds. Then, our management activities can be adapted to better suit the needs of these important species.

Thanks to volunteer birders John Carlini, Shari Schwartz, and Ruthie Stearns.



Grasshopper Sparrow,  
Photo by Gordon Warrick



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## **Birds and Butterflies on the Prairie**

### **Haines Branch Prairie Corridor Surveys**

We also conducted bird surveys on two properties of the new Haines Branch Prairie Corridor. We walked two sites near Denton to determine what birds are using these areas now. In the future, this information will help Lincoln Parks and Recreation staff make sure that habitat restoration and conservation activities along the corridor are helping birds.

### **Monarchs & Milkweed**

With recent decreases in monarch butterfly populations across the continent, we're proud to continue our participation in the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project this summer. Each Tuesday morning, volunteers scour milkweed plants for monarch eggs and caterpillars, and look for adult monarch butterflies drifting about our butterfly garden and surrounding prairie areas.

The survey area has been expanded from past years, and we can always use more volunteers to help with this project throughout the summer. Milkweed has been plentiful this year. So far we have seen 75 eggs; we expect to see many more as the third generation lays their eggs now through September. Our monitors are also improving our butterfly garden by pruning and weeding small trees or invasive plants in the search area.

We'd like to thank our great team of monarch monitors: Christy Buhrmann, Barbara DiBernard, Emilie Ellingson, and Patti Spitzer.



*Monarch butterfly caterpillar on a milkweed plant,  
Photo by Gordon Warrick*

## Charitable Giving Made Easy!

*Melissa Filipi, Director of Philanthropy*

The IRA Charitable Rollover enables individuals age 70½ and older to make outright gifts up to \$100,000 total from their IRAs to charities, without claiming the distribution as income. In December 2015, this legislation was made a permanent part of the tax code.



All donations must be completed before December 31 to be eligible for the IRA Charitable Rollover in the current tax year. Gifts must be made directly from the qualified IRA administrator to the charity.

Important points to consider:

- You must be at least age 70½.
- The gift must come directly to Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center from your IRA account administrator, in the form of a check.
- The Rollover gift may come from a Traditional or a Roth IRA (special exclusions may apply to other types of IRA accounts).
- There is NO income tax on the withdrawal, there is also no tax deduction.

What are the advantages?

- Benefit Spring Creek Prairie's work in a meaningful way today.
- Meet your Minimum Required Distribution (MRD).
- Pay no income tax on the amount withdrawn for your gift.
- Give above your deductible limit of 50% of adjusted gross income.

If you are interested, please contact Melissa Filipi, Director of Philanthropy, Audubon Nebraska, (402) 797-2301 or [mfilipi@audubon.org](mailto:mfilipi@audubon.org). You can also contact Shari Kolding, Director of Gift Planning, National Audubon Society, (512) 236-9076; [skolding@audubon.org](mailto:skolding@audubon.org).

Please have your IRA plan administrator send a check to:

Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center  
PO Box 117  
11700 SW 100th St  
Denton, NE 68339  
(402) 797-2301

**Did you know**, if you include Audubon in your estate plans you become part of a great legacy! You join with others who have made a commitment to our shared vision and become part of the Grinnell Legacy Society. This is our way of recognizing friends like you who have provided for the future of birds and their habitat. Membership in the Grinnell Legacy Society involves no dues or obligations. It simply allows us to thank you and, with your permission, to recognize you for the plans you have made.

## We need YOUR help! Become a Discovery Leader!

Do you love the outdoors? Like to share your passion for nature with others, especially children? Then there is no better time than now to join the team at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center as a Discovery Leader. Discovery Leaders help facilitate exploratory learning for Nebraska elementary school students during their field trips to the prairie.

**Availability & Qualifications:** Most programs take place during the school day (Sept/Oct) from 9:00 am – 2:00 pm. Prairie trail walking and love of exploration and discovery is required.

Our next training session is Monday, Aug. 22, 9:00 am – 12:00 noon. Training is free and fun, and there is an opportunity for CPR/ First Aid training right after from 12:30-5 pm. Call (402) 797-2301 or email [scp@audubon.org](mailto:scp@audubon.org) for more information.



*Our 2015 Discovery Leaders corps displays their certificates – don't you want one?*



## Time to Plan for Next Year's Prescribed Fires

*Ed Hubbs, Habitat Program Manager*

It may be hot out and spring feels far away, but now is the time to start thinking about next spring's prescribed fire season. At Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center, we will soon be haying firebreaks in preparation for safe burning. Haying firebreaks removes leaf litter, which reduces the fuel load and allows our breaks to be more effective. Removal of litter also makes firebreaks green up faster, which lessens the chance of a fire jumping a firebreak line and allows more efficient use of water and crews on the fire line.

If firebreaks can't be hayed, then an alternative is to shred or mow them. If this approach is used, it is even more important to start now and allow the leaf litter to break down over winter. For landowners who are considering using prescribed fires, it is important to keep in mind your equipment and crew as you are working on your firebreaks. Make sure that your firebreaks are accessible by the equipment you have and that you have a good feel for the minimum number of people you will need to safely conduct the burn.

Although it takes a little extra planning, preparing your firebreaks in the fall makes for a much safer, and less stressful, spring burn.



*Visiting cattle are enjoying the fresh vegetation that sprung up in the wake of our May prescribed fires. Thanks again to all our volunteers who made for a safe and effective burn.*



*Thanks to our hearty volunteer thistle diggers!*

## Thwarting Thistles

*Ed Hubbs, Habitat Program Manager*

We have been extra busy this year ridding the prairie of an unusually large number of musk thistles. From staff and a great crew of volunteers, we have put in over 70 hours of weeding, filling several trash cans with spiky, purple thistle heads.

The musk thistle is a non-native species of thistle that is considered a noxious weed. It is a prolific seed producer, and can dominate a grassland if not controlled. One large plant can produce over 20,000 seeds, making our removal activity an annual chore.

## Fall Colors Close to Home

*Kevin Poague, Operations Manager*

The deciduous trees of the northeastern U.S are famous for their fall color changes. But why should that part of the country get all the headlines when our own beautiful tallgrass prairies also provide a brilliant change of color? Native prairies undergo a beautiful transformation when the temperatures get cooler – the greens and yellows of summer fade to beautiful shades of orange and russet. Create a new tradition and experience the prairie colors close to home. Plan a visit in September and October to experience this wonderful phenomenon for yourself. Come join one of our fall programs (see back page), experience Twilight in the Tallgrass (see pg 5), or just venture out on our trails on your own. You don't want to miss Mother Nature's kaleidoscope of colors!

## Upcoming Events at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center

<b>Saturday, August 13</b>	Second Saturday Bird Walk, 8-10 am *
<b>Tuesday, August 16</b>	Third Tuesday Bird Walk, 8-10 am
<b>Saturday, September 10</b>	Second Saturday Bird Walk, 8-10 am *
<b>Sunday, September 18</b>	Tastes in the Tallgrass, 4-7 pm (Ticket purchase required)
<b>Tuesday, September 20</b>	Third Tuesday Bird Walk
<b>Sunday, October 9</b>	The Big Sit!, all day
<b>Saturday, October 15</b>	Twilight on the Tallgrass, 5-9 pm (Suggested donation)
<b>Saturday, November 12</b>	Nocturnal November, 7-8:30 pm *

For additional information and events, visit [SpringCreekPrairie.audubon.org](http://SpringCreekPrairie.audubon.org) \*Program fee

### Trails

*Trails open sunrise to sunset, daily*

### Center

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

### Admission

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

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

#### 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

##### Stewardship Advisory Board

Mari Lane Gewecke (Chair)	Jeff Jewell	Dan J. Semrad
Deb Dahab	Bruce Johnson	Lyle Sittler
Judy Dougherty	Jenni Lesoing-Lucs	Scott Stuckey
Lana Flagtwet	Marilyn Moore	Tom Tallman
Stephen J. Gage	Cindy Morris	Larry Williams
Jeff Hagaman	Cindy Rose	Barbara Wright-Chollet
	Sam Seever	

##### Audubon Nebraska Staff

Marian Langan – Executive Director  
Melissa Filipi – Director of Philanthropy  
Carey Collingham – Corporate and Foundation Coordinator  
Cindy Houlden – Donor Relations Coordinator

### Wish List

New, foam-filled front tires for tractor  
Fire extinguisher for shop  
Leaf blower  
Plug kit for ATV/UTV tires  
3/8 inch drive torque wrench  
Assorted bungee cords/straps  
Red 5-gallon gas can  
Trail camera with time lapse ability  
Gas powered generator  
Zero-turn lawn mower  
Weed eater  
New roof for caretaker's house

### 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](mailto: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](mailto:scp@audubon.org)

**WEBSITE:** [SpringCreekPrairie.audubon.org](http://SpringCreekPrairie.audubon.org)

**Flickr:** <http://www.flickr.com/groups/scpac/>

Also find us on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.