

## Christmas Bird Counts and Other Citizen-Science Opportunities

By Jason St. Sauver, Community Education Director

### Christmas Bird Count

One hundred and sixteen years ago, the very first Christmas Bird Count started in response to the long-standing tradition of Christmas hunts, with hunters competing to bring in the most game. We've come quite a long way since that first census! National Audubon Society's annual count is the longest running citizen-science project in the world, and the data from it have helped bird population science and habitat management all across the nation. This December, we have two great Christmas Bird Count events going on in our area. Wachiska Audubon Society is coordinating Lincoln's participation on Saturday, December 17. Participants with all levels of birding skills are welcome to join in the fun. To participate, contact Lauren Dinan at [ngpc.nongamebird.temp@nebraska.gov](mailto:ngpc.nongamebird.temp@nebraska.gov).



2015's Christmas Bird Count for Kids was (brisk!) fun for the whole family.

### Christmas Bird Count for Kids

As great as the main bird count is . . . it can be a bit daunting for beginners, especially kids and families. That is why for the second year in a row, Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center will offer a Christmas Bird Count for kids (CBC4Kids)! Held on December 29, during winter break from school, the CBC4Kids is designed especially for kids and their families to learn about birding and citizen science. After a nice morning walk, participants will warm up inside with hot chocolate while tallying birds they've seen. To register, email [scp@audubon.org](mailto:scp@audubon.org). So, no matter what your birding level or age, get out and help the cause. Be a bird's friend this winter and count them with Audubon!

### Project FeederWatch

Project FeederWatch is a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders at backyards, nature centers, community areas, and other locales in North America. FeederWatchers count the birds they see at their feeders from November through early April. FeederWatch data help scientists track movements of winter bird populations and long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance. Visit <http://feederwatch.org/> for information.



### Great Backyard Bird Count

Launched in 1998 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, the Great Backyard Bird Count was the first online citizen-science project to collect data on wild birds and to display results in near real-time. Now, more than 160,000 people worldwide join the four-day count to create an annual snapshot of the distribution and abundance of birds. See <http://gbbc.birdcount.org/> for details on how to join in the fun, February 17-20, 2017.

**What:** 117th Annual Christmas Bird Count

**When:** Saturday, December 17 – all day

**Where:** Various locations around Lincoln

**To Register:**

[ngpc.nongamebird.temp@nebraska.gov](http://ngpc.nongamebird.temp@nebraska.gov)

**What:** Christmas Bird Count for Kids

**When:** Thursday, December 29 – 10 am-12 noon

**Where:** Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center

**To Register:**

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

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



Like Mari Lane Gewecke (see Message from the Board Chair on the facing page), I also find myself reflecting upon community, especially as I wrap up my first year here getting to know our community. Community is the “why” and the “how” of Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center. These gorgeous 850 acres comprise one of the largest tallgrass prairie remnants in our region. They are a perfect tool for inspiring a sense of community with eastern Nebraska’s native landscape and with the larger natural world. When people come and have a positive experience here, they take that away with them. And that sense of kinship with this place and with the creatures and plants we share it with, builds a sense of membership in that community and a willingness to take action to protect it.

This past year we’ve done a lot to increase our impact (see an overview on pages 4-5). Our habitat manager Ed Hubbs is keeping up the rotation of burning, grazing, and rest that keeps the prairie healthy. This spring he burned 125 acres with the help of a great volunteer crew, and he was also able to help two of our neighbors conduct burns on their land. One of the neighbors had never used fire before; but with a good experience this year, we’re optimistic that they will add that bird-friendly practice to their land management, amplifying the effect of the work we do here. On page 6 you can read about the demolition of the old buildings on the new Bennet Road property, clearing the way for Ed to begin restoration of tallgrass prairie to those 47 acres.

Community education director Jason (the Birdnerd) St. Sauver has (I hope!) recovered from an intense two months leading our flagship Prairie Immersion program, where half of Lincoln Public Schools’ fourth graders come on field trips in September and October. That’s about 1,300 kids in 8 weeks having fun and learning on the prairie with the help of Jason, caretaker Amy Plettner, and our corps of volunteer Discovery Leaders. Jason has also been offering new programs - from an evening salon series for adults, to citizen science projects, to weeklong summer camps for kids at Lincoln’s Community Learning Centers – these new programs help expand and diversify our community. Longtime favorites like Twilight on the Tallgrass (page 6) and Tastes in the Tallgrass (page 3) bring old and new friends together to nurture lasting relationships.

Of course, many dozens of volunteers are essential members of our community – I hope you’ll enjoy getting to know one of them a little better in this issue (page 7).

As we move into the winter holiday season, I thank you for the part you play in sustaining the natural world that sustains us.

With gratitude,

**Message from the State Director**  
*Bill Taddicken*



Hello,  
Most of you know me as the Director at Audubon’s Rowe Sanctuary. I am now also the interim Audubon Nebraska State Director as our friend and colleague Marian Langan takes time off to recover from some personal health issues. I assure you that Audubon’s important conservation work in Nebraska and all through the Central Flyway continues to be at the forefront of what all of the staff, volunteers, and supporters continue to do all year long. Protecting, restoring, and expanding our important grasslands throughout the state as well as the habitat on the Platte River are of the highest priority. Audubon’s work in Nebraska has seen tremendous success for more than 42 years and will continue to be critical to protect these natural treasures so important to wildlife.

We are looking far into the future to ensure these places continue to be important to wildlife and loved and cared for by people. Part of that future vision must include engaging our children with the natural world so they too become caretakers. That is why one of the most important tools for conservation continues to be the experiences created for youth and adults in our education programs at both Spring Creek Prairie and Iain Nicolson Audubon Centers. Thank you all for caring enough to help protect our natural world and engage our youth in a culture of conservation.

Sincerely,



**Audubon’s Nebraska Crane Festival**  
**March 16-19, 2017**  
[ne.audubon.org/birds/crane-festival](http://ne.audubon.org/birds/crane-festival)

Photo: Don Brockmeier



*Cindy Rose celebrates her winning auction bid!*

## **A Prairie Dinner for Prairie Conservation**

*By Kevin Poague, Operations Manager*

Our ninth annual Tastes in the Tallgrass outdoor dinner was another great success! Nearly 200 people dined on elegant food on a beautiful autumn evening, enjoying spirited conversation and lively music, all while helping support prairie conservation at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center.

Prairie supporters helped raise more than \$33,000 that will nurture and grow our community of conservationists. Money was also raised specifically toward the purchase of an urgently-needed riding mower.

Big thanks go to the volunteers who worked tirelessly to put the evening's program together, especially the event's co-chairs, Kim Morock and Chris Zygielbaum. And the best news is that Kim and Chris have agreed to be co-chairs again for next year's gala. We're looking forward to an exciting evening for our tenth anniversary of Tastes in the Tallgrass next year!



*Tastes in the Tallgrass guests enjoy a beautiful evening.*

## **Don't Forget this Charitable Giving Option!**

If you are age 70½ and older, you can make an outright gift from your IRA to Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center without claiming the distribution as income. This is a great way that you can support our work, conserve the tallgrass prairie, educate youth and adults, and provide a safe haven for birds and wildlife in our area.

If you would like more information, please contact Melissa Filipi at (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).

Qualified distributions should be sent directly from your IRA plan administrator to: Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center, PO Box 117, Denton, NE 68339.

## **Message from the Board Chair**

*Mari Lane Gewecke*

Mild fall weather brought many visitors to Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center over the past few months. Along with the Prairie Immersion program for fourth grade students, our annual Tastes in the Tallgrass fundraising event, and Twilight on the Tallgrass fall festival, more than two thousand people saw the prairie in its autumnal glory. I hope you were able to visit this fall.



I like to think of our visitors, donors, and friends as a community – the Spring Creek Prairie community.

Aldo Leopold, the late conservationist, wrote about enlarging "the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land." Leopold noted our role as humans is to be a "member and citizen" of the land, which implies respect among fellow members and "respect for the community."

What brings you to the Spring Creek Prairie community? Is it because time on the prairie is an opportunity to reconnect with the land and a heritage that dates back long before European and other nonnative settlers arrived? Or is it a commitment to conservation efforts to protect tallgrass prairie, along with the grassland birds and plant species within? Or simply appreciation for the awe-inspiring beauty of nature?

Tell me what motivates you to be part of the Spring Creek Prairie community. Email me at [MLGSpringCreek@gmail.com](mailto:MLGSpringCreek@gmail.com).

My hope is that we can deepen the sense of community among us. I look forward to hearing from you!

# A Look Back at 2016



As we approach the year's end, we're happy to share with you a snapshot, by the numbers, of the past year at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center.

Thank you to our volunteers, supporters, and community partners for another great year of connecting people with nature and preserving Nebraska's native tallgrass prairie and the birds, plants, and other animals that depend on it!

**850** acres of native tallgrass prairie, wetlands, and woodlands are protected at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center. We provide a core of high-quality habitat within a growing network of managed grassland in order to protect fast-disappearing grassland birds.

Volunteers contributed over **700** hours on conservation activities: burns, musk thistle removal, tree clearing, and more.



Kids visiting the prairie caught and observed (and released!) over **10,000** insects & arachnids.

Habitat manager Ed claims he swallowed at least **A MILLION** bugs while driving the new Gator on the prairie – yum!



School, family, and public programs at the prairie served over **4,000** visitors. At offsite outreach events we connected with over **1,000** more people.



We monitored **342** milkweed plants for monarch eggs, caterpillars, and adults.



**199** bird species were spotted here this year, some up close, like this nuthatch fledgling on a student's shoulder!

**1,300** fourth graders visited the prairie through Lincoln Public Schools' Prairie Immersion partnership, learning about Nebraska's natural and cultural history.

Over **500** families, businesses, foundations, and other organizations provided financial support to keep Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center thriving. Thank you!



We conducted prescribed burns on **125** acres of the prairie to help native plants flourish and keep invasives at bay. We also helped neighbors conduct burns on an additional **195** acres, helping to keep our regional grassland network thriving.

Birdnerd (and community education director) Jason has enlivened field trips **HUNDREDS** of times by talking about, teaching about, and looking at...scat!

**90** students from **7** Lincoln Community Learning Centers visited in the summer for week-long summer camps – each participant enjoyed **20** hours of prairie fun and exploration!

**16** volunteer Discovery Leaders assisted with school field trips, ensuring that we can work with students in groups of **12** or less.

**1** staff member got married this year. (Congratulations, Kevin!)

## Why Did the Prairie-Chicken Cross the Road?

By Ed Hubbs, Habitat Program Manager



*An excavator makes way for prairie restoration at the Bennet Property.*

Many of you will remember that in 2013 Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center was expanded to the south by approximately 47 acres. Volunteers and staff have adopted the name “Bennet Property” when referring to this area as this is the only portion of the property that lies south of W. Bennet Road. Slated for residential development, this area would have quickly filled with houses, much to the detriment of our native plants and animals.

In the time since the property was purchased, restoration work has been ongoing. Thousands of trees and shrubs that had essentially taken over the property were cut down and put in piles to be burned. With the trees removed, native plants have gained access to valuable light, nutrient, and water resources. A late spring burn in 2015 on half

of the property further encouraged native prairie plant recovery. A similar burn is planned for the other half of the property in 2017.

With the native plants beginning to recover and reclaim ground, it was time to turn our attention to the old, run-down farmstead. In September, power poles were removed, which opened the skyline and made building demolition possible. After volunteers helped clean up trash around and inside the buildings, five buildings were buried over the course of two days. With the help of the Spring Creek Prairie Stewardship Advisory Board, we broadcast seeds on all bare dirt left from the demolition to prevent erosion and further establish the native plant community.

We conduct annual bird surveys on the property, allowing us to monitor how the bird community responds to our work. Prairie-chickens are one of our most important indicators of healthy habitat. Though we have not yet recorded them in surveys of the property, they are not taking long to show themselves. On the second day of building demolition, I spotted four of them crossing the road onto the Bennet Property.

So why did the prairie-chickens cross the road? We like to think it was to show their approval for turning a dilapidated eyesore back into native tallgrass prairie.

## Cranes, Bison, and Snakes, Oh My!

By Jason St. Sauver, Community Education Director

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*Crane kites grace the sky during a traditional water ceremony.*

A black snake slithered down from the sky, over the land and into the water. The cranes soared and sang above; the bison pounded and protected below. This was the scene during Twilight on the Tallgrass, Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center’s annual fall festival. This magical performance from Heather Henson and IBEX Puppetry, along with local Nebraska artists, was the centerpiece of the evening on the prairie and incorporated indigenous tribal chanting and water ceremonies, children joining in a dance of cranes, and – while only in puppet form – the return of bison to roam and dance on Spring Creek Prairie’s native Nebraska prairie.

Before the twinkling twilight and glowing full moon rose on the evening for nighttime activities, the trails and tallgrass were filled with over 300 folks, many of them first-time visitors to the prairie, enjoying activities like “Build-a-Bison,” “Do the ROT thing,” and “Painting Prairie Postcards” led by volunteers and other local partner organizations like Pioneers Park Nature Center, Nebraska Master Gardeners, and the LUX Center for the Arts. Families picnicked while enjoying delightful tunes from Downtown Dave & Papa Bob and the Toasted Ponies on the mainstage. And while kids enjoyed crane kites, animal Olympics, and capturing insects with UNL’s Entomology department, parents could peruse nature items from local vendors, learn about the Prairie Corridor Project, or take a wagon ride through the prairie with the whole family. And as the sun set and darkness arrived, visitors of all ages joined in the nighttime activities like experiencing life as a badger or coyote at the Night Crawl, or just enjoying the huge, amber, full moon shining above like an autumn pumpkin.



*A bison on our prairie!*

## Volunteer Spotlight –

### Jane Reinkordt

By Glynnis Collins, Director

Jane Reinkordt has volunteered at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center since 2008. She mainly volunteers as a Discovery Leader, helping to facilitate school field trips to the prairie. Discovery Leaders are particularly important team members for Prairie Immersion, when about 1,300 Lincoln Public Schools fourth graders visit the prairie during September and October. Leaders allow us to keep student groups small (12 or fewer students per group) so that kids get the most out of their visit.



Volunteer Discovery Leader  
Jane Reinkordt

Jane and her husband, Peter, who also volunteers here, live a few miles north of Spring Creek Prairie on a small farm that includes some areas in prairie conservation. They have been able to apply some of the things they have learned here to management of their prairie.

I spoke with Jane in early November. Our conversation is summarized below.

#### **How did you first get connected with Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center?**

*I started working here in 2008 after I retired from teaching. I had been teaching German at Southeast High School. I received a letter from [former education director] Deb Hauswald inviting me to be a part of the Discovery Leader group. It was a very effective letter!*

*It was a perfect volunteer job for me – I like to be outdoors, to walk and be active. While I was tired of many aspects of teaching in the school system (such as paperwork, homework, etc.), I still liked kids and enjoyed teaching. Also, I live close by, and it was an opportunity to get to know my local community better, having worked in Lincoln for my entire career.*

#### **What volunteer tasks do you do here?**

*I help in the spring and fall with the student groups. I often help direct parking for some of the big events like Twilight on the Tallgrass. It is fun to act as a greeter as everyone is arriving. I could help with controlling musk thistle, but we have our own to deal with!*

#### **What do you like best about spending time here?**

*Generally, it is the feeling of being in an expanse of prairie, where you are surrounded by that environment. It is very nice to have a place where you can walk around over such a big area. I also find that it has the right combination of wildness and accessibility.*

#### **What do you wish more people knew about Spring Creek Prairie?**

*I think there are many local people who don't appreciate how special this place is, that this place is valued by people from all parts of the world. But of course, some do understand that, which makes me very happy.*

*It would probably be good if more people knew how many ways there are to enjoy this place, such as the educational displays and the discovery backpacks.*

*As a Discovery Leader, I have learned how to look close. People might come wondering "where are the buffalo?" but there is amazing stuff all over the place if you get in close and look. Once we encourage them, the kids love to touch and pull apart the seed heads on many of the fall plants. They are amazed to see the tiny green perennial plants that will survive the winter under the thatch.*

#### **What do you find rewarding about working with the kids?**

*Their enthusiasm, excitement, and openness. The fourth graders are a good age, they are not afraid to show their excitement, they aren't yet "too cool for school." I really enjoy leading the insect biodiversity module, they are always really excited by that.*

*I am often surprised by how much they know and how bright they are. I think the schools often don't get much credit, but these kids are learning a lot more in school than I did. They are also learning at other places, many of them share things they have learned at home in their garden, or from hunting trips and other nature experiences.*

*I often wish I could give them another hour to run around free on the prairie after our sessions. I always tell them to come back with their families so they can do that!*

*I am always impressed by the diversity of kids in the Lincoln schools. It really makes me optimistic about the future to see how easily they get along. I have worked with groups where there are kids with disabilities, or kids who speak very little English, and have been inspired to see how naturally these kids are treated by their classmates, without condescension. These kids are learning so much by having this experience.*

#### **Do you have any funny stories to share?**

*Probably my most told story is when I was taking a group to visit the woodland. I told them that on the way there, I would take them someplace to see a special surprise. The surprise was a little waterfall that we can see from the trail. One of the kids was a little ahead of the group, and when he got to the end of the trail, he exclaimed, "Oh man, this is fantastic!" I was a bit surprised by his enthusiasm, I wasn't expecting quite that much excitement. But it was explained when he followed up with, "It's a dead mouse!!!"*

*It's always fun because it's not predictable. You have your goals, but you never know how things will work out!*

We are incredibly grateful to Jane and the dozens of other volunteers who put in hundreds of hours each year to keep tallgrass prairie a permanent part of our landscape so that we and future generations can continue to enjoy it. Are you interested in joining their ranks? Please get in touch, we'd love to have you on the team! (scp@audubon.org; (402) 797-2301)

## Nick Manes Photo Installation

The photographs of Nick Manes are being featured in an installation in the Ethel S. Abbott Grand Prairie Hall. A UNL School of Natural Resources student, Manes hopes to segue his natural resources studies into a career in conservation photography.

The idea to synthesize his love for nature with a love for photography emerged during a presentation given by conservation

photographer Michael Forsberg. "It was one of those cheesy 'aha' moments," described Manes. "He was talking about what he does, and I thought, 'That's exactly what I want to do.'"

His nature images will be on display through next spring.



Nick Manes

# Upcoming Events at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center

**Thursday, December 29**

Christmas Bird Count 4 Kids! 10 am-12 noon

**Saturday, January 28**

Snug-as-a-Bug \* 10 am-12 noon

**Friday-Monday, February 17-20**

Great Backyard Bird Count

**Thursday-Sunday, March 16-19**

Audubon's Nebraska Crane Festival (Kearney, NE) \*

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

## Trails

*Trails open sunrise to sunset, daily*

## Visitor Center

*Open Monday - Friday 9 - 5; Saturday - Sunday 1 - 5*

*All year, except major holidays*



**Visit our gift shop in December  
for our annual Holiday Sale.  
Many items are discounted.  
Supporters receive  
10% discount even on sale items.**

### 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

Jeff Jewell

Dan J. Semrad

(Chair)

Bruce Johnson

Lyle Sittler

Deb Dahab

Jenni Lesoing-Lucs

Scott Stuckey

Judy Dougherty

Marilyn Moore

Tom Tallman

Lana Flagtwet

Cindy Morris

Larry Williams

Stephen J. Gage

Cindy Rose

Barbara Wright-Chollet

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Marian Langan – Executive Director

Bill Taddicken – Interim Executive Director

Melissa Filipi – Director of Philanthropy

Carey Collingham – Corporate and Foundation Coordinator

Cindy Houlden – Donor Relations Coordinator

## 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.*

## We'd like to thank the following who responded to our wish list:

Nancy Savery, who donated some  
bungee cords and a gas can.

Mark and Stacy Rolland, who gave us a telescope.

## Here is our current wish list:

Minor electrical work

New roof for caretaker house

Truckload of river rock

Nest/feeder camera

Portable battery jumper with air compressor

Leaf blower

3/8" drive torque wrench

## 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.