

## New Exhibits Add Insight to Prairie Life

Through videos, activities, and touch-screen technology, Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center's new interactive displays tell the story of the tallgrass prairie in Nebraska and its role in Nebraska's environment and culture.

The exhibits are divided into thematic sections that allow visitors to explore the prairie as a living part of our community. Nebraska State Poet Twyla Hansen and renowned nature photographer Michael Forsberg share how the prairie has been a muse to their creative processes in "Inspired by the Prairie." The exhibit also includes a giant collage that encourages visitors to make their own creative expression using Twyla's words coupled with images taken at the prairie.

"Living on the Prairie" focuses on life on the prairie — humans and animals both. Video clips illustrate how humans earn a living through careful and thoughtful use of the prairie. Voices include local ranchers who rely on a healthy prairie to sustain their herd; Native Americans who describe their people's relationship to the land; and Kathie O'Brien, who shares stories of growing up on this section of land that became Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center.



"Studying the Prairie" looks at the science being done on the land and what it is telling us about the prairie and the world around us. It also looks at work going on

across the region to sustain birds that make their home at SCPAC at some point in the year. The impressive life-sized (12') photograph of a big bluestem grass plant highlights exactly how much of prairie life occurs below the surface.

Modern day visitors explore key landmarks on the electronic map table before they head out to the prairie itself. "On the Trail" features the story of the historic wagon ruts from

*"The exhibits are impressive, and present a variety of ways to love tallgrass prairie," said Twyla Hansen. "They provide a meaningful glimpse into the prairie's artistic, cultural and biological attractions — for all ages and for those who are already familiar with prairie and those who are less familiar but would like to learn more. It's a classy addition to Spring Creek Prairie that facilitates appreciation of a unique ecosystem."*

the Oregon Trail Cutoff and the settlers who crossed this land 150 years ago. Young and old alike can closely examine the fascinating discoveries they make while out on the trails at the magnifying camera inside.



Each thematic section corresponds to one or more of our Discovery Packs. The differently themed packs include tools, guidebooks, and prompts that help you experience the prairie from different perspectives. Discovery Packs are available to explore the prairie from the perspective of a photographer, a writer, an ornithologist, a botanist, an artist, and a burrowing animal. These packs can be checked out from the front desk at no additional charge.

*"I love these exhibits," said one visitor. "There is a nice balance of content. They draw you in without overwhelming you with information. And they are visually very interesting. I feel like I learned a lot about the prairie that I didn't know."*

Visit us and get lost in Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center!

## Letter from the Interim Center Director

Gerry Dimon

As a long-time supporter of Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center, I'm excited to join the team as the Interim Director! I want to thank Roger Furrer for his work on behalf of SCPAC and wish him well as he pursues new challenges. A lot of great things are happening out at the prairie and I look forward to continuing that momentum.



The new interactive educational exhibits are in place – I can't wait to see the excitement on the faces of the children this spring as we gear up for school programs, summer camps, and other youth groups to visit! Speaking of which, our calendar is already filling with these groups, and we are always looking for volunteers to help us meet the demand for our education programs. Call or email if you are interested in learning more.

Our featured story highlights these exhibits and how the prairie is a living, breathing part of our community, our history, and our legacy. Come out to the prairie, experience the exhibits, then explore the prairie itself – the exhibits are designed to lead you from the front entrance right out the back door and into nature, afterall....

In addition, the SCPAC board has been diligently working on an updated strategic plan. This will provide ongoing guidance for our decisions over the next three to five years. We are setting some ambitious goals, and with your help – we WILL reach them.

With your support, this imperiled native tallgrass prairie will continue to inspire our youth and adults for generations to come. Thank you for being part of the success at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center.



## Letter from State Director - Marian Langan

Greetings! We are thrilled to have Gerry Dimon serving as the interim director for Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center. Gerry has been part of the leadership of SCPAC since our beginning as a Board member, volunteer, and financial supporter. We deeply appreciate his service in this new role, and thank Roger Furrer for his efforts for the prairie.

As is ever the case, the conservation successes we deliver for birds and habitat year after year are the result of community leadership. Our Board members, volunteers, donors, and chapter members are the people who actually make this all possible. The power of people to make a difference in the world has never changed, and we have the great good fortune to see that in action every single day.

We entered 2015 with more potential than ever to make a difference. Last year we reached even more people and positively affected more habitat at our Center sites. This year we are building a new partnership to help bring attention to the conservation needs of the Sandhills, leading a legislative effort to improve the management of the Niobrara Scenic River Corridor, working with local chapter members to meet with Congressman Fortenberry about the needs for leadership regarding climate change, and we brought Audubon's climate initiative director, Joe Ryan, to speak and meet with members at our crane festival (held March 19-22).

There is an important place in these efforts for each and every one of you. Please join us. You'll be glad you did!



## Land Dedication

Friends and supporters gathered in October to formally dedicate 47 acres of habitat recently added to Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center. Mark Brohman of the Nebraska Environmental Trust, Cathy Rustermier of the J. A. Woollam Foundation, and former SCPAC Stewardship Board Chair Christie Dionisopoulos all spoke about Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center's important role in bringing people together to protect the tallgrass prairie ecosystem and Nebraska's natural heritage.



Our sincerest thanks to: The Nebraska Environmental Trust, J. A. Woollam Foundation, Jennifer and Randy Speers, Donlan Foundation, GR's Foundation, Mosby Lincoln Foundation, Judy and Jeff Greenwald, Curt and Carolyn McConnell, Doug and Mary Campbell, Allen Freye, Union Bank and Trust Co., Don and Judy Dworak, Lana and Lon Flagtwtet, UBS Financial Services, Cindy and Dana Rose, C. John Guenzel, Donald Campbell, Gerry and Kit Dimon, Christy and Pete Dionisopoulos, Steve Gage, Lorraine Ford and Sean Barnawell, Allison and Gary Petersen, Neal Ratzlaff, Keith and Sherry Schafer, Julie Schroeder, Lisa and Tom Smith, Linda Brown, Bob and Candy Campbell, Mark and Dee Hutchins, Trixie and Dave Schmidt, Art and Carol Thompson, Mari Lane Gewecke, Ferne Furrer, Dave Palm and Alice Henneman, Chris and Tyler Thody, Meg and Jim Lauerman, Sue Quambusch and Len Sloup, and two anonymous donors. Additional thanks to Cline Williams Wright Johnson Oldfather, LLC.

## 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.

# HABITAT

## Prescribed Burn Preparations

by Ben Mullarkey, Habitat Program Manager

If you've been walking our trails recently, you may have noticed some sections have been widened. In addition to providing easy walking space, some of our trails also serve as fire breaks for prescribed burns. Fire plays a critical role in maintaining a healthy prairie ecosystem. We use prescribed fire to control woody vegetation, to manage invasive species such as smooth brome, and to stimulate native plant growth. It's one of our most efficient and cost effective management tools.

A primary management goal for Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center is to create better habitat for grassland birds. Fire is essential to achieve that goal. In combination with grazing, prescribed burns create different types of plant structure in the prairie. Much like prairie plants, prairie birds have adapted to survive and thrive in a fire dominated landscape. Each species has its own niche with specific habitat requirements, especially when it comes to nesting. Henslow's Sparrows, for example, require a thick thatch layer that accumulates in areas that haven't burned for several years. Killdeer, on the other hand, prefer recently burned areas. Most other species, such as Meadowlarks, have needs somewhere in between those two extremes.

Some species occupy different habitats at different stages of their life cycles. The Greater Prairie-Chicken has different habitat structure requirements for breeding, nesting, brood rearing, and winter cover. We use the Greater Prairie-Chicken as an umbrella species. By meeting the complex needs of this species with our management practices, we meet the needs of most other grassland birds as well.

With these management goals in mind, we look forward to our spring burn season. Preparations started late last summer. Fire breaks have been mowed and hayed, including sections of trail adjacent to areas of the prairie we intend to burn. Well prepared fire breaks save us time and effort when it comes to a burn day, which is critical when many burns get squeezed into the few days each spring when weather conditions align to let us burn safely and effectively. So when you see those widened trails, it should remind you of warmer days ahead.



## Message from SCPAC's Stewardship Board

Take a deep breath, everyone. Spring is close and the prairie is about to come alive with the vibrant colors and sounds of spring that we have all grown to appreciate. Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center is a gem that needs to be preserved for all future generations. That is why it is so very important that we all help to continue the work that makes this a special place.



While we are always looking for donors who can support the work that helps the prairie flourish, volunteering is an equally vital way of helping at the prairie. We need gallant individuals who can help with all of the daily tasks that keep Spring Creek Prairie running smoothly.

It is with the realization that "it takes a village" that we ask you to consider volunteering your time and energy. SCPAC needs assistance in the forms of front desk staff, gift shop operators, conservation and maintenance volunteers, and educational assistants (Discovery Leaders). Besides helping us accomplish our mission, our volunteers' enthusiasm makes them ambassadors who help us connect with the communities we serve.

Do you know of retirees, empty nesters, religious organizations, or service groups that would be interested in spending some time volunteering to help us with these staffing needs? We need individuals who can work with a minimum of supervision and available on an on-call basis. Please call 402-797-2301 or e-mail [scp@audubon.org](mailto:scp@audubon.org) with your suggestions and/or contact information. Thank you for helping us continue our important work.

Gratefully,  
Lana Flagtwet  
Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center  
Stewardship Board President

## Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center Newsletter

The Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center newsletter is written especially for you. We would like to get your feedback and suggestions on the newsletter content, layout, timeliness, and frequency. Please go to this link <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/SCPAC> and complete a brief survey.  
**Thank you for your input!**

# BIRD CALENDAR

Here's a brief yet helpful guide listing when one can see what birds this spring at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center:

## March/April

Ducks - Common early migrants as the ice starts melting on the ponds, most often seen species here include Blue- and Green-winged Teal, Scaup, Northern Shovelers, Wood Ducks, and Gadwalls.

Greater Prairie-Chicken – These grouse are year-round residents, but beginning in March birds will congregate at sunrise at booming grounds where males display for females. These grounds, called leks, are not consistently found here at SCPAC because the population of chickens is low, but the birds often can be heard, a sound often described as one blowing across an empty glass pop bottle. Leks are active through April into May.

Other early species include Red-winged Blackbird, Killdeer, and Eastern Phoebe.



*Sprague's Pipits are shy migrants that hide in the short grass areas along the north-south ridgetops in the middle of SCPAC. Look for them in April into May. (Photo by Phil Swanson.)*

Meadowlarks – SCPAC is a great place to hear both the Eastern and Western Meadowlark. Don't try to tell the species apart by sight, learn their songs to know one from the other.

Eastern Bluebird – Usually migratory, some bluebirds will overwinter here if snowfall is light. When April arrives, individuals that did migrate start heading north, and their numbers increase as they scout tree cavities and bird houses in which to build nests.

Upland Sandpiper – The unmistakable rising and falling call of this prairie specialist is one of the treats of spring birdwatching trips.

Lots of other species start showing up: Ruby-crowned Kinglet, native Sparrows (Swamp, Vesper, Field, Grasshopper, Henslow's, among others), Brown Thrasher, Yellow-rumped and Orange-crowned Warblers, Barn Swallow, and Eastern Towhee.



*Willow flycatcher taken by Gordon Warrick.*



*Bobolink photo by Paul Johnsgard.*

## May

Bobolink – A species on the increase here at the prairie, these beautiful grassland birds emit a wonderful jack-in-the-box-like whistle.

Bell's Vireo – A specialist of thickets and shrubs, this small bird is much easier heard than seen.

Dickcissel – Perhaps the most common prairie bird at SCPAC, Dickcissels are easily seen as they perch atop grasses and flowers announcing their presence almost continually throughout the day.

Other species of note: Baltimore and Orchard Orioles, Eastern and Western Kingbirds, Red-headed Woodpecker, Yellow Warbler, Gray Catbird, and Willow Flycatcher.

# WILDFLOWER CALENDAR

Wildflowers bring a wonderful array of color to the prairie, delighting us with their variety as we hike along the trails. Here is a list of some common spring flowers and when they begin blooming at Spring Creek Prairie:

## April

Ground-plum, narrow-leaved puccoon, prairie violet, plainleaf pussy-

toes, wild onion, wild parsley, wild strawberry

## May

Blue-eyed grass, cobaea penstemon, daisy fleabane, goat's beard, plains wild indigo, prairie larkspur, prairie ragwort, prairie wild rose, purple poppy mallow, prairie spiderwort



*Narrow-leaved puccoon taken by Gordon Warrick.*

# WHY DONORS CREATE LEGACY GIFTS

At SCPAC, we owe many of our successes – and in some ways even our very origins – to supporters who recognized a need, shared our vision and our mission, and chose to create their legacy by leaving us a gift in their will or other estate plans.

In 1998, Kathie O'Brien sold the family ranch, with nearly 500 acres of unplowed tallgrass prairie, to Audubon so it could remain native prairie. This allowed her to create a charitable remainder trust that will pay Kathie income for life.

Why do people make planned gifts as part of their legacy?

1. A Positive Legacy. An enduring legacy influences future generations and reminds them of your values and commitments.
2. Benefits to You and Your Heirs. Some gifts provide income for life or relieve you and/or your heirs of additional taxes.
3. Perpetuate Annual Gifts. Planned gifts are a way to underwrite your regular giving. A gift through your will of \$20,000 could create an annual "gift" of \$1,000 for example.
4. A Stronger SCPAC. Gifts left through estate plans can be placed in a reserve fund to supplement operating needs and help us plan more confidently for the future.

At SCPAC, we recognize the importance of your legacy and will work with you to arrange a gift that suits your needs and desires while providing for the future of the tallgrass prairie. If you would like to learn more about planned giving, please contact Melissa Filipi, Director of Philanthropy, at [mfilipi@audubon.org](mailto:mfilipi@audubon.org) or (402) 797-2301.



## Do you have a CD maturing soon?

With recent rates as low as 0.65% for Certificates of Deposit (CDs), you may be disappointed with your return. If you want to reinvest, you may want to consider a gift that pays you annual income through Audubon's Pooled Income Fund (current yield is 4.1%) or a Charitable Gift Annuity (4.7% to 9% based on your age). Contact us for more information on finding the right type of gift for you, Melissa Filipi at [mfilipi@audubon.org](mailto:mfilipi@audubon.org) or (402) 797-2301 or Shari Kolding at (512) 236-9076.

## How You Can Help

Support of all types makes such a difference, and 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 into any schedule. We'll 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.
- 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 visitor 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 on page 8 for more gift ideas.
- Become a monthly donor. You can provide regular, ongoing support for our work by visiting our website.
- Include us in your estate plans. Several simple, flexible, tax-advantaged options can benefit your heirs and SCPAC at the same time.



## Culvert Update

Pam Dingman, Lancaster County Engineer, answered our questions about a stone bridge discovered on the south side of our property written about in our last Prairie Sage. She said it was built in 1941, the third such structure at this location, for under \$5,000. It is believed the rocks came from the Lancaster County Engineering Quarry outside of Roca. Because the structure's span is less than 20 feet long (12 feet), it is not considered a bridge by today's standards, but is a culvert. Thanks, Pam!

# SPRING CREEK PRAIRIE AUDUBON CENTER DONORS

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.

## **Prairie Heritage** **\$10,000 and above**

Lauren Davis  
Julie Schroeder  
Jennifer Speers

## **Prairie Star** **\$5,000-\$9,999**

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*The support and recognition of all our donors is important to us. Space limitations require gift recognition to begin at the \$35 membership level. Please let us know of any missing names so corrections can be made in the next issue.*

**Admission**

<b>SCPAC Members</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.*

## Exhibits Open House

Donors, supporters, and friends of Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center gathered to celebrate the installation of our new permanent exhibits in the Ethel S. Abbott Grand Prairie Hall last December. These exhibits would not have been possible without the generous contributions of Lancaster County, Kenneth J. Good Endowed Fund (Lincoln Community Foundation), Elizabeth Rubendall Foundation, Peter Kiewit Foundation, Abel Foundation, Humanities Nebraska, Toyota TogetherGreen, J. A. Woollam Foundation, Katherine and Richard Endacott, and the Fredrickson Family.

Thank you to our featured speakers: Nebraska State Poet, Twyla Hansen, photographer Michael Forsberg, and Lancaster County Commissioner Deb Schorr.



### Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center

11700 SW 100th Street  
P.O. Box 117  
Denton, NE 68339  
Phone: (402) 797-2301 (-2304/fax)  
scp@audubon.org  
<http://springcreekprairie.audubon.org>

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

**All year, except major holidays**

*Admission charge; Tuesdays free*

Gerry Dimon – Interim Director  
Ben Mullarkey – Habitat Program Manager  
Kevin Poague – Operations Manager/Important Bird Areas Coordinator  
Amy Plettner – Caretaker

### Audubon Nebraska

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

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## Spring Creek Prairie Wish List

### Thank You!

Heavy Duty, 14-Foot Steel Tube Gates - Donated By Art Thompson

### We Still Need:

*Flora of Nebraska*, Robert Kaul et. al., 2nd (new) edition. Available at a discount at the UNL Maps and More Store

Metal detector

Truckload of river rock to extend the permanent fire break around center

Pop-up tents

Coolers (rectangular)

Trail Camera

Periodic Use / Purchase of telescoping pole pruner (Stihl HI3I power pruner, e.g.) & backpack leaf blower (Stihl BR500, e.g.)

\$5 million Endowment



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