Audubon | NEBRASKA 2019/2020 Annual Report

Mission Statement

Audubon Nebraska protects birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow.

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Why Audubon Nebraska?

Audubon works tirelessly in Nebraska to help ensure the future of the planet and the beings that live here. This important work needs to continue in order to care for our rivers, streams, grasslands, and more. By working to protect the environment and the places birds need, Audubon engages people with nature and builds a love of our natural world. This translates into hope for the future of birds.

Letter from the Director



In the "before times" is how I find myself reflecting on this past year to separate how society operated before March of 2020. In the before times, thousands of kids were immersed in one of the few remaining prairie remnants and splashed in the Platte River. We welcomed two new Marian Langan Young Leaders with a passion for delivering conservation in our communities. *Survival by Degrees*, a

nationwide analysis of climate impacts to birds, was shared widely with a call to address climate change, and our state and federal representatives debated new climate policy.

"Despite our changing perceptions, time and nature marched on."

When the world changed and people feared leaving their homes, time seemed to slow, and the world shrank to the view outside their window. Despite our changing perceptions, time and nature marched on. The Sandhill Cranes danced and flourished with no one to view their show. The Henslow's Sparrows and Meadowlarks set up their nurseries at Spring Creek Prairie. The animals, plants and ecosystems continued their annual cycle as they have for thousands of years. And then the people sought nature.

Spring Creek Prairie near Lincoln had record numbers of people using their trails this spring. While the center remained closed and staff worked from home, the center was flooded with letters of gratitude and surprise that this natural refuge was available.

Rowe Sanctuary closed during their busiest time of the year and

had to turn away thousands of people from around the world hoping to experience the Sandhill Crane migration. However, with the live Crane Cam, people were able to connect with the cranes from the safety of their homes and supporters sent contributions that buffered the financial loss of another canceled ecotourism season.

"Today, our sanctuaries are flourishing."

The Audubon team quickly pivoted and utilized cameras to lead people (who were safely tucked away in their homes) on bird walks, and to show the hidden secrets of a rotten

log, adorable coyote pups and beautiful wildflowers. We took advantage of center closures to build trails, make repairs and manage habitat with "all hands on deck." Today, our sanctuaries are flourishing. We rapidly created new curriculum and programs, and celebrated when schoolyards had newly installed native plant gardens and the Governor elevated the importance of native plants with a proclamation.

I hope you enjoy our highlighted accomplishments from last year, because time didn't actually slow down. Our team worked even harder while apart because our world is large and completely interconnected. I find myself re-invigorated for the conservation work we do not only for birds, but because now more than ever, people need nature too.

Kristal Aloner

Kristal Stoner Audubon Nebraska Executive Director

Letter from a New Board Member **≡**



My name is Halley Kruse and I am proud to be the newest member of the Spring Creek Prairie Stewardship Board.

As the Vice President of

Acklie Charitable Foundation (which has provided some funding to the sanctuary) and a resident of the Lincoln, NE area, I've had the opportunity to visit Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center several times before deciding to get involved. I've always loved walking the trails, taking in sunshine and fresh air, and just feeling connected to the prairie.

"My family history has always felt tied to Nebraska's lands."

As a fourth generation Nebraskan, my family history has always felt tied to Nebraska's lands. My grandparents and great grandparents were farmers,

3 and my dad grew up on a farmstead (while attending a one-room school

house!) in Custer County, NE. So, to me, the prairie feels special. It's a remarkable place that provides a glimpse into our ancestors' lives while showing the beauty that can be Nebraska's future. This sentiment has been

"After she came in to my life... I've been able to better appreciate the need to preserve this beautiful prairie."



especially true since having my daughter. After she came in to my life nearly two and a half years ago, I've been able to better appreciate the need to preserve this beautiful prairie to keep us connected with our history, to conserve natural landscapes and the wildlife that inhabits them, and to have places to truly enjoy and experience nature.

My decision to join Audubon struck me in 2019 after I visited the prairie during one of Spring Creek's Prairie Immersion sessions. It was wonderful to see so many fourth grade students having fun and engaging in science, nature, and history in a handson manner. That experience was a big part of why I decided to get involved with Audubon and to help support Spring Creek Prairie. I wanted to help make sure that humans and wildlife are able to enjoy this place a long time to come.

Halley Krise

Halley Kruse Spring Creek Prairie Stewardship Board Member

Our Strategic Priorities



Bird-Friendly Communities

Audubon Nebraska protects bird populations in our cities and towns by providing food, shelter, safe passage, and places for birds to raise their young. Communities meet those needs through individual and collective actions—actions that also contribute to more sustainable human societies.

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Climate

Leveraging our climate science, Audubon Nebraska creates far greater demand for change on the climate issue by tapping into people's passion for birds while seeking workable climate solutions for Nebraskans.



Water

Audubon engages and involves the public on issues surrounding water for wildlife, restores habitats along rivers and wetlands, and engages in policy surrounding Nebraska water.



Working Lands

Audubon collaborates with landowners, land managers, government agencies, and private industry throughout the state and the Central Flyway to improve and expand grassland habitat.



Jain Nicolson

Rowe focuses on the conservation of the Platte River ecosystem and the birds that rely on it.

Rowe is a worldwide community that joins together to protect, restore and expand places for birds on the Platte River. The conservation work listed below is only possible because of caring people like you. Please enjoy some of the important results of what you are doing in this place of cranes, water and wildlife!



Cranes vs. people 200.000 - 0

Not exactly accurate but with the closure of the center last spring Rowe had many Sandhill Cranes but few people. Rowe continually has some of the largest roosts with upwards of 200,000 cranes. The total population is doing well with over 1 million estimated. Rowe also hosted seven

- Whooping Cranes this spring. You are
- 5 making a future for this great migration!



Annual river clearing and invasive plant removal continues to keep Rowe's channel wide and shallow for cranes and other birds. This would all be lost in 3-5 years if the management stopped. It is you and your gifts that keep this river great for cranes





Rowe education has gone digital due to the pandemic. The "Camp Close to Home" program is a great example of getting children outside and even onto the sanctuary with hands-on programming delivered digitally. Other programs that you make happen are on the website at: rowe.audubon.org/kids-and-families.

Spring Creek Prairie focuses on the Audubon | Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center conservation of the tallgrass prairie 🖌 ecosystem and the birds that rely on it.

Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center is nestled in the heart of one of the largest remaining tracts of tallgrass prairie in Nebraska and the United States. Only 2% of this amazing and diverse landscape remains to support the birds, other wildlife, and people that call this landscape home. Your support allows so many important things to happen at Spring Creek Prairie such as those listed below.



In summer and fall 2019 we hosted more than 1,600 students as part of two of our core education programs and partnerships. Students from five Community Learning Centers came to "summer camp" on the prairie. Fall 2019 was busy as usual with half of fourth graders from Lincoln Public Schools once again immersing themselves in the prairie through our Prairie Immersion program. Spring 2020 saw a shift to provide virtual programming to schools and partner organizations.

In our effort to continue to **make the** prairie more open and accessible to all, construction on an improved, expanded and accessible limestone and concrete trail network began and will be completed in late 2020. Amid the construction we saw many more visitors to our trails as the pandemic continued to point people towards a refuge in nature.





Throughout 2019-2020, prairie restoration and management continued with a focus on targeting the control and removal of woody invasive shrubs over 170 acres. The work to remove the shrubs was followed by prescribed fire in April 2020 and opened up many acres of the prairie to allow grasses and forbs to thrive! The ongoing management of the prairie through grazing, prescribed fire, having and rest is essential to keep the 6 diversity of the prairie thriving.

Our Response to COVID-19

The coronavirus affected everyone worldwide seemingly overnight, and our centers were not immune. For the safety of our staff, volunteers, and visitors, we made the decision to close the centers and the state office in March, abruptly ending crane season and other in-person events.



This was especially difficult for Rowe Sanctuary as this was during the peak of the Sandhill Crane migration – their biggest revenue-generating time of the year. However, this did not halt their passion to share the beauty of the migration. By partnering with Explore.org, Rowe was able to provide a free livestream for people across the world to

experience the Sandhill Crane migration. This "crane cam" was one of Explore. org's most streamed cameras during that timeframe with over 240,000 page views and a total YouTube watch time of over 49,000 hours.

The crane cam had over 240,000 page views & over 49,000 hours in total YouTube watch time

While the crane cam garnered online viewers, another unforeseen success came from

Spring Creek Prairie – an increase in trail use. Though the trails at Rowe remained closed for the safety of the cranes, the trails at Spring Creek Prairie were open and saw a considerable increase in hikers after the shutdown. The center received many letters from people that were grateful for the ability to leave their home and explore a new area, one they didn't know existed so close to Lincoln.

Audubon hosted 16 online events and made over 35 educational videos

Though the centers were closed, the staff did not stopped working. Since March 1, we were able to host 16 online events through Zoom or Facebook Live and created over 35 educational videos. Habitat management has continued on the sanctuaries with smaller groups and social distancing requirements.

This has been a learning experience that will last for years with innovating developments used to reach new audiences even after we can fully welcome people back to the centers.

Our offices are continuing to monitor the situation and follow the advice of local experts. For updates on hours, events, and more, visit our Facebook pages **7** @RoweSanctuary, @SpringCreekPrairie, and @AudubonNebraska.



Marian Langan Memorial Young Conservation Leaders

Amanda Hegg based at Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary



Since starting at Rowe, I've learned a broad range of new skills to take into my conservation career. These include software training, a chemical application course and field work for invasive species management, drone and machinery operation, prescribed fire techniques, and experience assisting with bird and butterfly surveys. I was actually able to develop methods for grassland bird nest surveys in Rowemanaged prairies.

"I was able to develop methods for grassland bird nest surveys in Rowemanaged prairies."

Another valuable experience has been working on Audubon's Plants for Birds program and learning about the benefits of native plants. Through the program, I assisted UNL's early childhood development specialists and Stick Creek Kids, a new nonprofit and child development center in Wood River, Nebraska, with the creation of an

immersive native plant natural playscape. This project not only allowed me to gain skills in project management and interdisciplinary coordination, but also in...

- native plant gardening,
- writing grants, articles, press releases,
- generating social media content,
- and interviewing with media outlets.

Moving ahead in my position, I look forward to presenting conservation topics to diverse audiences, promoting Audubon's Plants for Birds initiative, and networking to achieve shared goals and open doors for collaboration. I am also excited to assist with interpretation and presentation of data from Rowe's scientific efforts while developing new methods that inform and benefit management at Rowe Sanctuary.



Cacey Wilken based at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center

The first time I visited Spring Creek was for the Prairie Immersion program in fourth grade. Now, nearly 15 years later, I'm thrilled to be back contributing to tallgrass prairie conservation.

Through Audubon's Plants for Birds intiative, I've picked up valuable skills pertaining to community outreach, social media content creation, native plant policy and landscaping, and project management. I have accomplished so much within this program; so far...

- I was the lead in getting the first week in June proclaimed as Nebraska Wildflower Week, I coordinated with a local girl
- I coordinated with a local girl scout and planted over 200 native plants at the Crete Public Library,
- I organized community presentations aiming to bring environmental

leaders together for climate change action and native plant use in urban landscapes.

I've had a multitude of engaging training and field experience opportunities in habitat management, from invasive species control to equipment and vehicle maintenance. So far, my favorite has been burning with members of Spring Creek, Rowe, and the Tri County Prescribed Burn Association.

I look forward to contributing to projects focused on renewable power and GIS, and engaging local landowners in a variety of conservation techniques.



the first week of June

Wildflower Week."

proclaimed as Nebraska

8

Camp Close to Home provided online materials for teachers and parents to have summer camp in their own backyard or nearby nature area.

Planning and development has begun for a native plant playscape at a local Nebraska daycare, Stick Creek Kids.



Bird-Friendly Communities

Audubon finds it increasingly important to invest time and resources to build up bird habitat in urban areas as communities continue to grow.

Through education programs at Rowe and Spring Creek, students are learning the importance of native plants and providing habitat for birds regardless of where they live.

Cacey Wilken, the Marian Langan Young Conservation Leader based at Spring Creek Prairie, wrote a proclamation and had it signed by Governor Ricketts that proclaimed the first week of June as Nebraska Wildflower Week. This promoted native wildflowers to help birds, other wildlife, and people.

Thanks to efforts from Rowe staff and volunteers, a new project is underway to create a native plant playscape for

Stick Creek Kids, a local daycare center. Though most of the plantings won't take place until late fall, the plans have been approved and prep work has started.

While the pandemic halted in-person programming, virtual learning was implemented at Rowe and Spring Creek Prairie. Camp Close to Home provided online materials for teachers and parents to have summer camp in their own backyard or nearby nature area. We posted multiple social media series focusing on birds and the places they need, and we hosted over 16 virtual events just since March.

The transition to online education was quick, but our staff adapted and moved forward with a positive attitude and eagerness to engage people with bird-friendly communities in new ways.

- Audubon released Survival By Degrees: 389 Bird Species on the Brink, a scientific report showing how 2/3 of North American birds could go extinct if the global temperature continues to rise.
- Audubon Nebraska met with state representatives to discuss environmental issues and bills that would benefit birds and the places they need.





Climate

Climate Watch is a nationwide community science project providing Audubon scientists with data on how North American birds are responding to climate change. Nearly 30 volunteers surveyed around Lincoln, Omaha, and Kearney for climate data on Eastern Bluebirds, Whitebreasted Nuthatches, and American Goldfinches.

Audubon's climate report, *Survival By Degrees: 389 Bird Species on the Brink*, illustrated the existential threat climate change has on two-thirds of North American birds. 76% of these birds can be protected if we can prevent the global temperature from rising.

Nebraska has 85 climate-vulnerable species in summer, meaning they stand to lose more of their summer range across North America than they gain under a warming climate. These include the Piping Plover, Red-headed Woodpecker and Lark Bunting.

Following the release of the report, Audubon Nebraska's executive director Kristal Stoner met with representatives in Washington, D.C. about several bills we supported. The Great American Outdoors Act will provide permanent funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund and address the backlog of maintenance projects on federal lands and waters. Recovering America's Wildlife Act continues to gain traction and is adding both Republican and Democratic supporters. It would fund conservation efforts for many climate-vulnerable species.

These policy wins are important in the fight against a rising global temperature through preservation and protection of habitat that is not only crucial for birds but for people as well.

- The Platte River Recovery Implementation Program was extended for 13 more years, funding conservation efforts for threatened and endangered species of the Platte River Basin as well as the people who live here.
- Audubon assisted in a PRRIP test for the North Platte choke point to enable better water conveyance in the Platte River.





Water

Audubon works diligently to protect and preserve the Platte River and wetland habitats in Nebraska. These areas serve a wide variety of wildlife including some of the most threatened bird species.

The Platte River is essential for the annual Sandhill Crane migration and for several endangered species like the Whooping Crane and Piping Plover.

The federal authorization funding the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program was scheduled to end. Extending this funding was discussed when Kristal visited with representatives in Washington, D.C. Thankfully, a bill including the extension of PRRIP was passed, ensuring 13 more years of the program that protects threatened and endangered species of the Platte River Basin as well as the people who live here. Following this extension, we worked with PRRIP to test the North Platte choke point to enable better water conveyance in the Platte. Important projects like this will help to protect the Platte River from water diversion.

Our wetlands and rivers are incredibly important, which is why we invested in virtually educating people about them when COVID-19 forced the closure of the centers. Rowe worked with Explore.org to make our crane cam available to people around the world to witness the Sandhill Crane migration. We created videos showing invertebrates that live in wetlands, and we hosted crane cam Q&As and a Crane Behavior Basics webinar.

With habitat management and education, we will continue working to preserve Nebraska's wetlands and the Platte River.

- Just under 200 acres burned at Rowe Sanctuary and Spring Creek Prairie.
- Audubon Nebraska has its first certified ranch in the Audubon Conservation Ranching program.
- *Rowe reseeded 20 acres of ag land to high diversity prairie.*
- Spring Creek Prairie had a Thistle Thrash day where volunteers and staff dug up over 1,000 invasive musk thistle plants.





Working Lands

In addition to improving habitat at Spring Creek Prairie and at Rowe Sanctuary, Audubon also works with private landowners to improve habitat on their lands for the betterment of birds and the planet. Each center practices many management techniques including grazing, mechanical clearing, and prescribed burning.

As a demonstration site for the Nebraska Natural Legacy project, Spring Creek Prairie utilized different management methods to control invasive woody vegetation over 170 acres, including mechanical and chemical treatments plus prescribed fire.

Spring Creek Prairie works with the Tri-County Burn Association to host prescribed fire workshops at the center. Landowners and others join these workshops to learn the benefits of adopting prescribed fire techniques and how to do it safely. Part of the workshop includes a live fire demonstration on the sanctuary.

To combat the negative effects of grassland degradation, Audubon developed the Conservation Ranching program (ACR). This market-based approach offers incentives for good grassland stewardship through a certification label on beef products. This way, consumers can contribute to grassland conservation by purchasing beef from Audubon-certified farms and ranches.

After months of hard work and preparation, Audubon Nebraska now has a certified ACR ranch. Follow our Facebook page @AudubonNebraska and keep an eye on our website for an upcoming in-depth profile of the rancher, the ranch itself, and the products offered.

Volunteer Spotlights



Neil Dankert Rowe Sanctuary volunteer

Neil Dankert has played a large role in the butterfly surveys conducted each summer at Rowe Sanctuary. These surveys record every butterfly species seen, but the goal is to record sightings of Regal Fritillary butterflies, as

their numbers have been in significant decline over the years.

Neil's interest in Lepidoptera, an order of insects that includes butterflies and moths, started back when he attended Kearney State College. Although Neil was not employed in conservation work, he often searched the state for different butterflies. For over 40 years he's done surveys across the state for multiple entities including Rowe Sanctuary.

Neil is also the state coordinator for The Lepidopterists' Society in Nebraska. He compiles the records of butterfly sightings from around the state and puts together an annual summary highlighting significant finds in the state. As a result of this record keeping, there are now

compiled lists of butterflies found in every county of the state plus a database of moths.

He's recently retired and decided to do a "Big Year" to celebrate by traveling all over the state to see as many butterflies as possible. With the help of Jonathan Nikkila (Rowe stewardship board member and master naturalist), he's started a blog at nebraskalepidoptera.com to document his findings.

Tarie Hoverman has been regularly helping with habitat management and maintenance projects at Audubon's Spring Creek Prairie since 2017. Over the last 3 years she has volunteered 750 hours, and counting!

Tarie Hoverman Spring Creek Prairie volunteer

Tarie said her favorite volunteer activities are "fire and running a chainsaw." She is a member of the Tri-County Prescribed Burn Association and has volunteered on several Spring Creek fires, as well as many on private land. Tarie's chainsaw skills come in handy when prepping for burns, and this spring they were put to work cutting up dead and downed trees in the windbreak next to the center. She also admits to getting "particular joy out of whacking large musk thistles with a shovel."

According to Spring Creek Prairie Habitat Manager Ed Hubbs, "Tarie is one of the hardest workers I know, and her help has been invaluable these past few years. Never willing to accept an incomplete job, you can count on Tarie to be looking around for 'one more thistle' while the rest of us are packing up and calling it a day."

Tarie said, "I volunteer at Spring Creek Prairie because it makes me feel useful. I know the managers
value my opinion, expertise, and hard work. After working 30+ years in the resources management field, mostly wildlife and fire, I can pay it forward at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center."



Donor Spotlight: Dr. Anne M. Hubbard

It's safe to say that 2020 has not started off the way any of us planned. The unpredictability of the COVID-19 pandemic has changed all our plans in one way or another. During times such as these, it's not only the generosity of Audubon supporters but also their flexibility toward continually shifting needs that can make all the difference.

Prior to the onset of COVID-19 in the United States, Dr. Anne M. Hubbard generously committed \$25,000 through the Claire M. Hubbard Foundation to support Audubon Nebraska's burgeoning work with tribal communities on native plantings. Dr. Hubbard has a passion not only for conservation, but also for supporting Nebraska's tribal communities. For years, Dr. Hubbard, a pediatric radiologist in Omaha, has volunteered at St. Augustine Indian Mission in Winnebago, NE, working to expand opportunities for Native children in higher education. The tribal work has also given Anne a greater connection to land and sky through learning

about traditional environmental knowledge. "It's not us and nature. We are nature."

"It's not us and nature. We are nature."

As Audubon worked to implement the native plantings program, initial meetings were held with the Winnebago and Ponca Tribes of Nebraska and the native plantings program was beginning to grow roots. But shortly after, COVID-19 dealt significant challenges for the tribes and it became clear the program would need to take a pause. At the same time, Audubon Nebraska began dealing with a shortened crane season, canceled events, taking programming online, and more. Dr. Hubbard graciously extended flexibility to utilize the grant in whatever way would lend the greatest benefit to Audubon Nebraska throughout this time and provided additional operating support to help sustain overall conservation programs in the state.

Dr. Hubbard's belief in the importance of environmental education for both children and adults can be evidenced through the many programs she supports across our state. "My passion lies in children, education, and the environment. At Audubon, the intersection of these values is prominent and has earned Audubon a reputation as the preeminent nonprofit organization in the environmental education space."

Through her world travels, Dr. Hubbard has been able to observe some of the most heralded migration spectacles Mother Nature serves up, such as the monarch butterfly migration in Mexico. "Even after extensive travel, I remain in awe of the environmental wonder my home state of Nebraska has to offer." Although she has witnessed the Sandhill Crane migration many times, she fondly recalls one of her favorite experiences at Rowe Sanctuary where the golden glow of the sunset, while birds swirled down onto the Platte River, was simply incredible.



"Her care and concern for birds shine through."

"Anne's passion for the environment can be seen not only through her Foundation's giving, but simply in how she lives her day-to-day life," said Kristal Stoner, state director for Audubon Nebraska. "When I connect with Anne, I love hearing about the Cooper's Hawks that she's observed successfully nest and fledge young near her home. She has terrific stories of watching Great Blue Herons fish in Omaha's lakes. Her care and concern for birds shine through."

\$20,000 +

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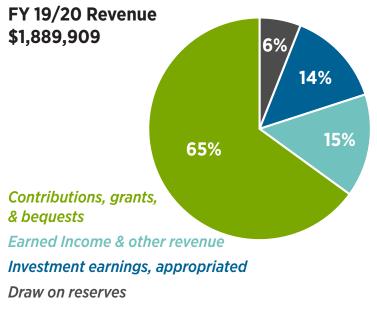
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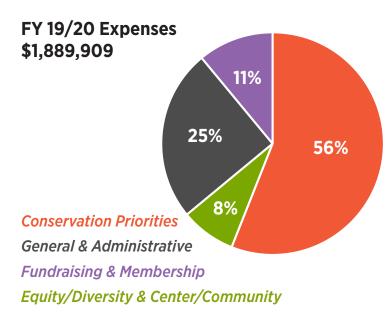
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Financials ≡





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Total	\$1,889,909
Draw on reserves	\$114,959.95
Investment earnings, appropriated	\$264,142.12
Earned Income & other revenue	\$283,013
Contributions, grants, & bequests	\$1,227,793.93

EXPENSES

Equity/Diversity & Center/Community	\$138,812
General & Administrative	\$474,285
Fundraising & Membership	\$213,870
Conservation Priorities	
Water	\$442,104
Bird-Friendly Communities	\$227,462
Working Lands	\$253,511
Climate	\$139,865
Total	\$1,889,909

Boards and Staff

Staff Based at the State Office

Kristal Stoner Executive Director Lizzy Gilbert Director of Development Victoria Lyons Development Associate Allison Christenson Communications Coordinator Melissa Mosier Program Manager, Platte River

Staff Based at Rowe Sanctuary

Bill Taddicken Director Andrew Pierson Director of Conservation **Beka Yates** Education Manager Anne Winkel Crane Festival Coordinator and Outreach Assistant Soncey Kondrotis Office Manager Cody Wagner Habitat Manager Cody Grewing NE & SD Range Ecologist Amanda Hegg Marian Langan Young Conservation Leader

Rowe Sanctuary Board

Meghan Sittler Director Jason St. Sauver Senior Education Manager Kevin Poague **Operations Manager Ed Hubbs** Habitat & Private Lands Manager Andrea Bornemeier Fducator Amv Plettner Caretaker Matt Harvey Project Assistant Cacey Wilken Marian Langan Young Conservation Leader

Spring Creek Prairie Board

Staff Based at Spring Creek

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National Audubon Society

225 Varick St, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10014 (212) 979-3000 www.audubon.org

Audubon Nebraska

10665 Bedford Avenue, Suite 202, Omaha, NE 68134 (531) 867-3128 | nebraska@audubon.org | www.ne.audubon.org

Centers

Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center

11700 SW 100 St, Denton, NE 68339 (402) 797-2301 scp@audubon.org www.springcreek.audubon.org

Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary

44450 Elm Island Rd, Gibbon, NE 68840 (308) 468-5282 rowesanctuary@audubon.org www.rowe.audubon.org

Chapters

Audubon Society of Omaha Wildcat Audubon Society

PO Box 3542, Omaha, NE 68103 (402) 445-4138 www.audubon-omaha.org 170188 Spring Creek Road, Mitchell, NE 69357 www.wyoneb.net/-delara/WildcatAudubon

Wachiska Audubon Society

4547 Calvert St, Suite 10, Lincoln, NE 68506 (402) 486-4846 office@wachiskaaudubon.org www.wachiskaaudubon.org

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