



# Audubon | NEBRASKA

## 2020 Spring Newsletter



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## Who We Are

Audubon Nebraska operates statewide from an office in Omaha and through two nature centers and wildlife sanctuaries, Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center and Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary, to protect birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow.



## Director's Corner

by Kristal Stoner

The future is always uncertain, but when the comforts of routines and connections were stripped from everyone, the unknown became more troubling. Recently, it was pointed out to me that our society will be forever changed by COVID-19. Someday, we will refer to the way things were before the pandemic, but what will our future look like? How will we be changed?

These thoughts came to me as I was hiking at a park with my family and a Bald Eagle swooped in and landed in a tree right above us. Majestic was an understatement, so I caught the attention of a nearby couple to point it out. They were amazed and rewarded me with the most brilliant smiles when responding, "Wow, I have never seen a Bald Eagle!"

There are so many who have forgotten the simple joys of the outdoors who are now exploring natural areas. Perhaps, as the world isolates, people will reconnect with nature, find joy in unexpected wild encounters, and value our natural resources.

# Faces of Audubon

Based out of:  
● State Office  
● Spring Creek Prairie  
● Rowe Sanctuary



**Kristal Stoner - Executive Director**

Kristal oversees Audubon Nebraska, with two centers as hubs of activity for statewide strategic bird conservation. She lays the groundwork to address new conservation challenges including drought, habitat loss and climate change.



**Allison Christenson - Communications Coordinator**

Allison handles all communications-related duties for Audubon Nebraska while assisting the two Audubon centers.



**Amy Plettner - Caretaker**

Amy has been with SCPAC for 12 years as caretaker and outdoor educator. Her poetry has been published in a variety of anthologies and journals.



**Meghan Sittler - Director**

Meghan oversees the care and management of SCPAC. She has a close connection to the prairie; her parents farmed land near SCPAC where her sister and brother-in-law now farm.



**Jason "the Birdnerd" St. Sauver - Director of Education and Outreach**

Jason oversees the planning and delivery of all education programs for the two centers, working with staff to provide quality nature experiences for all.



**Kevin Poague - Operations Manager**

Kevin has been the operations manager for SCPAC since 1998. He assists with education programs and helps conduct prairie bird surveys during breeding season.



**Andrea Bornemeier - Educator**

Andrea helps coordinate and facilitate school and youth programs and assists with community outreach programs.



**Ed Hubbs - Habitat Program Manager**

Ed manages the habitat at SCPAC, working closely with volunteers and local resource professionals.



**Victoria Lyons - Development Associate**

Victoria assists in securing donations to support our work across the state, working closely with both centers and our statewide program leadership.



**Bill Taddicken - Director**

Bill leads and oversees all Rowe Sanctuary programs and has worked extensively on conservation of the Platte River for Sandhill Cranes, Whooping Cranes, and other wildlife.



**Andrew Pierson - Director of Conservation**

Andrew is responsible for the planning, development, and implementation of Audubon's conservation programs in Nebraska.



**Rebekah Yates - Education Manager**

Beka oversees all education programming at Rowe including school, adult, and family programs and summer camps.



**Anne Winkel - Crane Festival Coordinator and Outreach Assistant**

Anne is the coordinator for Audubon Nebraska's Crane Festival and assists with community relations.



**Soncey Kondrotis - Office Manager**

Soncey oversees day-to-day management of Rowe Sanctuary.



**Cody Wagner - Habitat Manager**

Cody maintains the habitat programs at Rowe Sanctuary. He has previous experience from the US Fish and Wildlife Service refuge system, and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.



# Audubon | NEBRASKA

## Staying Home and Staying Positive | by Kevin Poague

In this unprecedented time of social distancing and staying home, it can be difficult to find positivity. Happiness is now something we almost have to make ourselves create and take part in, but it's not far from reach:

### BIRDS

- Audubon is all about birds, and the spring migration and summer nesting is right around the corner. Take part in the birdsong and colors of spring at your local nature area or around your own neighborhood. A brisk walk taking in the feathered flights is great exercise.
- You don't have to know what sounds they make or what they eat. Look for a variety of birds around lakes, woods, grasslands, city parks,



and urban areas. Birds are everywhere, take notice. And if you have questions, that's why we're here.

- Setting up your yard to attract birds can be as simple as putting out a water source, and a container for seeds, suet, jelly, or other tasty items. Look for resources on-line or email us for details.

### VISTAS

- Sometimes it's enough to just get outside and lose yourself in serenity and calm. Lay down in the grasses, feel the wind and sunshine, breathe deeply.

### WILDLIFE

- Enjoy butterflies, bees, turtles, frogs, and other critters.
- You likely won't see other animals, but you may see their tracks and traces. Look for prints and other signs like scat.

### WILDFLOWERS

- Wildflowers are easier to see than birds, as they don't fly off when you're focusing your binoculars. A leisurely stroll along the trails at Rowe or Spring Creek can be great for the soul. Take in the smells of the prairie as you see

what's blooming along the next path.

- › Prairie flowers bloom at different times. The April bloomers will be replaced by different species in a month or so. Visit often to see the ever-changing colors.

- Fill your yard with beautiful wildflowers and other native plants. Search [audubon.org/native-plant](https://audubon.org/native-plant) to see what plants are best for birds in your area.

### ONLINE

- Audubon wants to be a source of happiness for supporters, so we created *Audubon at Home* ([ne.audubon.org/audubon-home](https://ne.audubon.org/audubon-home)). This new webpage has positive articles, DIY projects, kids' activities, and more!

We hope you find positivity, stay happy and stay healthy.



## Audubon Receives Funding from the Nebraska Environmental Trust

by Kristal Stoner

This spring, the Nebraska Environmental Trust ranked two Audubon grants highly with final approval pending. The Spring Creek Prairie proposal will expand its mission to be an anchor for tallgrass prairie conservation and collaborative prairie management on private lands within the Denton Hills landscape. Ed Hubbs, Habitat Program Manager, will have an elevated role of private landowner habitat work and will formalize a new partnership with the Center for Resilience in Working Agricultural Landscapes at UNL.



The Rowe proposal will launch a new phase of conservation, restoring essential interconnectedness of habitats across the sanctuary. The project will be at the core of the protected prairie/river complex and focus on expanding our conservation footprint and creating a stronghold for vulnerable species in the face of existing and emerging threats.



## Audubon's New Young Leaders

by Allison Christenson

The Marian Langan Memorial Young Leaders Program is a new program creating career pathways for young people interested in education or conservation. Audubon recently hired two young leaders to work at Spring Creek Prairie and Rowe Sanctuary for one year.

The young leader working primarily at Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary is Amanda Hegg (left), a graduate from the University of South Dakota with a B.S. in Conservation Biology and Sustainability and an M.S. in Biology. She hopes to grow as a conservation leader through community outreach projects surrounding Audubon's Plants for Birds initiative and to gain experience in habitat management.

The Spring Creek Prairie-based young leader is University of Nebraska-Lincoln graduate Cacey Wilken (right). She has a Fish and Wildlife degree with plans to attend graduate school. Cacey is excited to gain experience in environmental education and conservation by developing a Plants for Birds PRO (Proclamation, Resolution, and Ordinance), assisting in education programs, and helping with Habitat for Humanity plantings.

"I remember visiting Spring Creek when I was in fourth grade," Cacey said. "I loved being outside and getting to explore the prairie."

Amanda and Cacey emphasized their excitement to work with community members and hope people will reach out to them. If you are interested in learning more about the Plants for Birds initiative and potentially setting up an event or program, email [nebraska@audubon.org](mailto:nebraska@audubon.org).



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## Audubon Nebraska Needs Your Help to Make a Difference for Birds

by Victoria Lyons

During spring, Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary and Spring Creek Prairie fill with young children, families, and a variety of guests to learn about and experience the wonders of nature. Sounds of birds fill the air and prairie grasses begin their transition from winter browns and yellows to spring greens peppered with wildflowers. Audubon holds programs and other educational events to give people hands-on experiences with nature, but this year the story is different.

Audubon had to make the difficult decision to close our doors this spring in response to the COVID-19 situation. This decision resulted in a great loss of funds needed to protect the prairie and Platte River habitats birds depend on.

With water shortages, a changing climate, and a loss of revenue for conservation, birds face a tough road ahead.

Please consider a gift to Audubon Nebraska to help support programs, preservation and restoration of the tallgrass prairie and Platte River, and protect birds like the endangered Whooping Crane and Greater Prairie-Chicken.

Together we can make a difference and ensure a future where birds flourish.



# Audubon

## Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center



### The Grass Keeps Growing and Our Work Continues

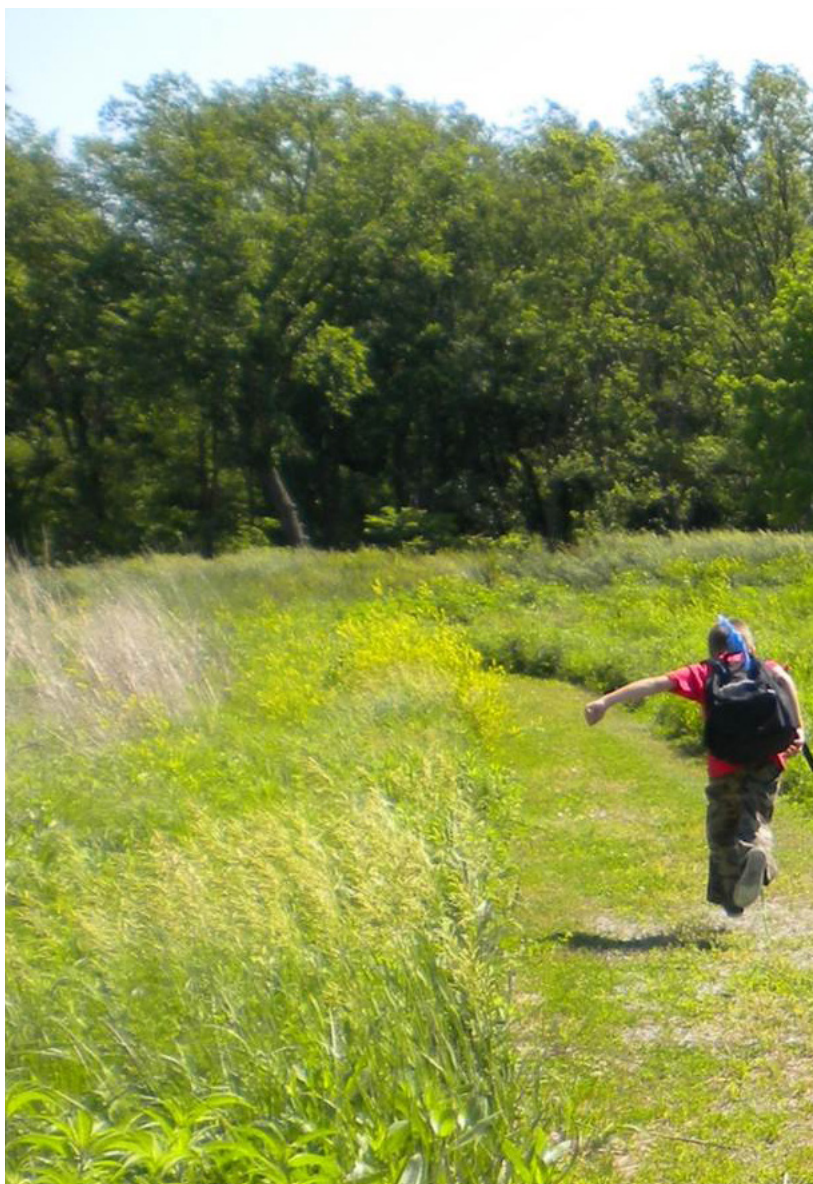
by Jason St. Sauver

Since early March, and earlier for some, our lives have been forever changed and affected by the outbreak of the novel coronavirus. But with all the frequent updates and changes for the safety of our staff, volunteers, and visitors, Spring Creek Prairie and the full Audubon Nebraska team have been busy keeping up with important conservation work and refocusing our education and outreach to online venues. In this time of great uncertainty, we wanted to take the time to share with you the things we ARE doing as well as the things that ARE certain, like the return of spring and summer.

Spring and the migration of millions of birds through Nebraska are not cancelled this year, and we are continuing our habitat management to the best of our abilities to ensure the prairie, wetlands, and woodlands at the center can provide these feathered friends what they need whether they stay or just stop over. Wildflowers are not cancelled either and will continue to bloom along the tallgrass trails while non-cancelled bees and bugs move from petal to petal pollinating as they go. And grasses continue to grow... and grow and grow!

Along with maintaining habitat, our education team has created online content for families and for visitors that want activities leading them along the prairie trails when visiting for prairie social-distancing. The team has also been working to prepare for programs like our salon series of workshops and spring school field trips that now have virtual or video components for teachers and prairie friends alike. And as for other onsite public programming, such as free bird walks and the upcoming Bioblitz, we continue to work toward providing ways for the public to enjoy them virtually if we are unable to have visitors to the prairie.

We encourage you to check our social media and website, and sign up for our enews for updates on all future programs. But, just as spring brings rebirth and hope, all of us at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center have hope we will be back together in the tallgrass soon.





## Trail Upgrades are in Progress

by Meghan Sittler

Spring Creek Prairie's limestone trails are getting a major facelift as well as some new and expanded segments. The trails around the south side of the building have been widened to 6 feet, shoulders have been added to aid in accessibility and expanded from the Center building all the way to the wagon ruts.

Construction is made possible by a long-held gift from the Hugo A. and Thelma Aspegren Charitable Trust, as well as two other private donations. Additionally, a portion of the project is funded by private donations given to the Prairie Corridor on Haines Branch project. Construction began in January after several years of planning.

In early April, work shifted to new concrete features including several accessible parking stalls and a bus loading and unloading area, as well as a new concrete path from the parking lot to the Center building. This phase also included an expanded loading and unloading area on the west end of the building plus a concrete path around the building to aid trail access. Improving drainage around the building was also a goal of this phase to ensure safer passage for visitors.

Work in April also included the start of construction of the new Prairie Corridor trail segment at Spring Creek Prairie. The new trail will extend from the kiosk near the parking lot north through the prairie to our northern property boundary. We are excited to be able to add trail access on the northern part of our property.

Construction and finishing touches will likely extend through May and June so please check our website and social media for updates. We look forward to having all the new trails open for your use later this summer!

## *Tastes in the Tallgrass*

Sunday, September 13, 4:00 - 7:00 pm

Save the date for our annual dinner at sunset - prairie style!

- Enjoy appetizers, champagne bar, beer, & wine
- Delight to live music
- Leisurely prairie walks
- Dine in the splendor of the prairie
- Bid on fabulous art and experiences

Email [scp@audubon.org](mailto:scp@audubon.org) for more information. Tickets will be available soon at [springcreek.audubon.org/events](http://springcreek.audubon.org/events).



## Free Admission and New Operating Hours Begin at Center

by Kevin Poague

When reopened (tentatively set for July), Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center will no longer charge admission. We are elated to offer our visitor center and trails free of charge to everyone regardless of the ability to pay, thanks to a sponsorship from Liz Lange Consulting. Freewill donations to support our conservation and education efforts are welcomed and greatly appreciated.

The visitor center's hours of operation will change to 8:30 am to 4:30 pm on weekdays and 8:30 am to 12:30 pm on weekends (except major holidays). The trails will be open daily sunrise to sunset.

We hope people will spread the news so everyone can enjoy and experience the beautiful tallgrass prairie, eastern Nebraska's native landscape, and the plants and wildlife that depend on it. Along with the accessible trails currently being constructed, this is a start to a new, exciting time for Spring Creek Prairie.

Join us soon to take part as the prairie blooms and the birds sing.



# Audubon

Iain Nicolson  
Audubon Center  
at Rowe Sanctuary



## Audubon Enrolls First Nebraska Ranch in Bird-Friendly Program

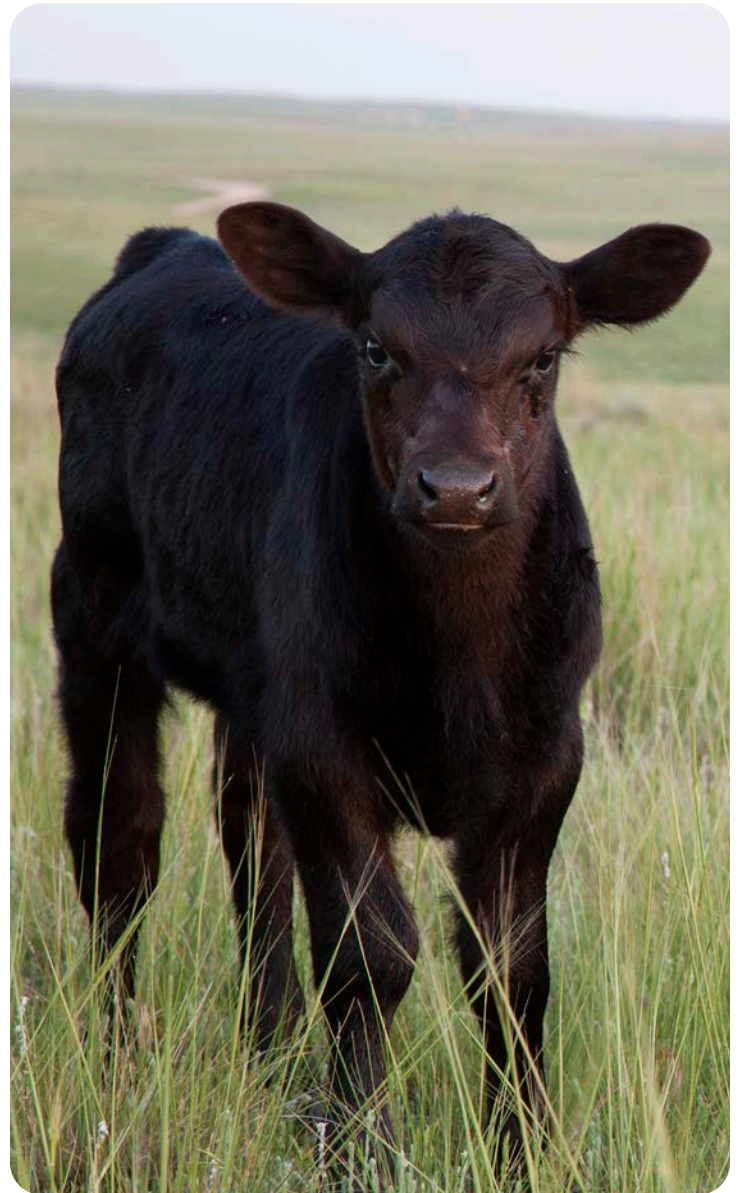
by Andrew Pierson

Nebraska is a prairie state, lucky to still have some of the largest intact grasslands remaining in what once was the more than 300-million-acre Great Plains. As a result of much of this vast ecosystem being converted to crop production and other uses, America's grassland birds have declined more than any other bird group on the continent – some species by as much as eighty percent.

To combat the negative effects of grassland degradations—and to keep grass on the landscape—Audubon worked with cattlemen to develop the Conservation Ranching Initiative. This market-based conservation approach offers incentives for good grassland stewardship through a certification label on beef and bison products. For the first time, consumers can contribute to grassland conservation efforts by purchasing beef from Audubon-certified farms and ranches.

Many have come to believe that ranching degrades the environment because of methane production and other practices, but that's only part of the story. Ranchers are great stewards of Nebraska's grasslands and while there are parts of the beef industry that have a significant impact on the environment, grasslands can sequester as much carbon as forests and research is beginning to show that carbon sequestration due to good grazing will help offset beef's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions.

By restoring prairie habitats through stewardship of grazing lands, producers who meet Audubon's stringent requirements are awarded a green 'grazed on bird-friendly land' seal. Our seal marks a premium product for consumers who want to know their purchases contribute to sustainable land use.



Nebraska's first ranch enrolled to the program raises grass-fed beef and bison in the beautiful Sandhills. Soon, we'll be sharing more about this ranch and how consumers and bird enthusiasts can connect with their story.

In the meantime, you can learn more about the Conservation Ranching Program and current opportunities to purchase products raised on Audubon-certified lands at [audubon.org/ranching](https://audubon.org/ranching).



## Rowe's 2020 Crane Season

by Bill Taddicken

Cranes arrived at the Platte on schedule, with the first birds spotted around Valentine's Day and great numbers here for the opening weekend of tours on March 6. The first week of tours was fabulous with visitors experiencing and loving the views from the new Discovery Stations. All was good until the news of the increasing spread of the coronavirus. We cancelled tours and closed the center for public safety on March 13. Because

the cranes roosts are too easily disturbed, it was also necessary to close the entire Sanctuary to public access.

To provide opportunity for people world-wide to witness the migration, Audubon's Crane Cam was featured by the National Audubon Society and Explore.org. We had two Crane Cam Facebook Live events, and Explore.org made the Crane Cam their feature cam the last week of March. Both Facebook Live events were highly viewed



and the evening show was especially spectacular.

After last year's weather turned our road to 12 inches of mud for most of the season, this year's closing has once again devastated the important revenue we rely on to protect, enhance, and expand the habitat for the cranes. If we stop this important work on the

river, in 3-5 years we will lose much of the habitat for these birds. Many people have come forward already to help support Rowe at this time. We are confident that because of the amazing people that love the cranes, Rowe Sanctuary will always continue providing a future for America's Greatest Migration.

## A River Runs Through It

Saturday, October 3, 6:00 - 9:00 pm

Save the date for our annual sunset dinner on the river!

Savor the sunset on the Platte River while enjoying a unique culinary experience and fine wines.

*Email [rowesanctuary@audubon.org](mailto:rowesanctuary@audubon.org) for more information. Tickets will be available soon at [rowe.audubon.org/events](http://rowe.audubon.org/events)*

## Our Dedicated Volunteers

by Wendy Horine

The annual crane season at Rowe Sanctuary is a monumental undertaking, with preparations taking place weeks to months in advance for some tasks. Although crane season doesn't officially start until mid-February, the staff begins taking reservations for viewing blind experiences the first working day of the new year, and volunteers pitch in just as early. After inclement weather, flooding, and impassable muddy roads curtailed most of the 2019 season, staff and volunteers were very excited and on track for a much better season this year. Our first distance volunteers arrived on February 16, and along with other volunteers from local

communities, they jumped into action, deep cleaning the visitor center, pricing merchandise and stocking the gift shop, answering phones and taking reservations, performing trail maintenance, and readying the viewing blinds. The cranes were arriving on schedule and so were early visitors from around the globe. We were ready for the nearly 28,000 anticipated visitors.



Unfortunately, like so many businesses and organizations, the decision was made in mid-March to shut down operations as a precautionary safety measure against COVID-19. Although this was disappointing, our volunteers understood and were appreciative of Audubon's concern for their health and safety.

Rowe is very fortunate to have such a passionate, dedicated group of volunteers. They work tirelessly to support Rowe's mission because they truly love the cranes and want to share their joy with others. We could not offer the unforgettable experience of America's Greatest Migration to so many without these hardworking, talented folks. From everyone at Rowe - thank you, volunteers!

## Thank you to the following corporate sponsors:

### Spring Creek Prairie Sponsors:

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### Rowe Sanctuary Sponsors:

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Microtel Inn & Suites  
Nebraska Central Telephone Company  
Platte River Recovery Implementation Program  
Sandhills Publishing  
The Archway  
Wells Fargo  
Younes Hospitality

## How You Can Help

### Make a Cash or Online Donation

*Money orders or checks can be mailed to centers directly or you can donate online.*

### Sign up for Audubon Nebraska's eNews

*By signing up for our eNews, you will receive Audubon Nebraska and center updates plus so much more!*

### Volunteer

*Call or email either center for information on volunteering in the future.*

### Contribute to Science

*Audubon offers opportunities to get involved in community science projects. Read more at [audubon.org/science](http://audubon.org/science).*

# Audubon Centers & State Office

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## Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary

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

## Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center

11700 SW 100 St, PO Box 117  
Denton, NE 68339  
(402) 797-2301  
scp@audubon.org  
www.springcreek.audubon.org

## Audubon Nebraska

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

## Audubon Chapters

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### Audubon Society of Omaha

PO Box 3542, Omaha, NE 68103  
(402) 445-4138  
Nebraska Bird Line (402) 721-5487  
www.audubon-omaha.org

### Wachiska Audubon Society

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

### Wildcat Audubon Society

170188 Spring Creek Rd, Mitchell, NE 69357  
www.wyoneb.net/-delara/WildcatAudubon

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## Photo Credits

### Front Cover

Indigo Bunting. Photo: Sunil Gopalan/Audubon Photography Awards

### Page 1

Least Tern. Photo: Kathy Cline/Audubon Photography Awards

### Page 3

Cedar Waxwing. Photo: Roger Dietrich/Audubon Photography Awards  
Platte River sunset. Photo: Cody Wagner

### Page 4

Tree Swallow. Photo: Lynn Cleveland/Audubon Photography Awards

### Page 6

Eastern Meadowlark. Photo: Sandra Rothenberg/Audubon Photography Awards

### Page 7

Domestic Cow. Photo: Evan Barrientos/Audubon Rockies

### Page 8

Sandhill Crane. Photo: Andrew Byerly/Great Backyard Bird Count

### Back Cover

Sandhill Crane. Photo: Madeline Poster/Audubon Photography Awards

