

## Streamside Science Station on Spring Creek (and You Can Help!)

*Ed Hubbs, Habitat Manager*

For years, students at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center have gotten their toes wet at our ponds, catching bugs, having fun, and making a lasting connection with the natural world. They have caught dragonfly and damselfly larvae and used bug viewing jars to inspect their catches up close. The various species found can be indicators of water quality. For example, students often nab mayfly larvae, which are only found in relatively clean water. In this case, "clean" is referring to the amount of foreign pollutants – anything from chemical runoff to cow manure - in the water system.



*Students exploring pond habitat*

For students, pond investigations are both fun activities and good learning opportunities. But what about the creek that gives us our name? After flowing across the prairie and collecting in the ponds on our property, the water eventually works its way into Spring Creek and joins fresher, colder water flowing from springs along the creek's route. While some of the water itself may be the same as in the ponds, the similarities stop there. The constant flow of the creek, among other things, makes for a very different ecosystem than a pond. And a different ecosystem means different critters!

In the past, education programs here did use the creek, allowing students to compare two different aquatic systems. But without ongoing maintenance, the access became overgrown and the creek hasn't been used in several years. Community Education Director Jason St. Sauver asked me for help in reclaiming a trail and landing area to add a streamside science module back into our educational programming.

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*Spring Creek in winter — note the frozen waterfalls formed by the springs*

It was time to get out the heavy equipment. On a brisk, 30-degree day in January, we began to clear over 30 feet of creek bank to allow easy access to the flowing stream. Additional areas creek-side were also cleared and leveled to make space for tables for the students to continue their investigations with places to support microscopes and collection dishes. As with our other learning locations throughout the prairie, ongoing maintenance will be needed as plants grow and the creek occasionally floods and changes course. **If you would like to explore the creek, or assist with the upkeep of our natural learning areas, don't be shy. We have the tools and the habitat, the only thing missing is you!**

## Letter from the Director

*Glynnis Collins*



### Springtime Renewal and Thanks

The prairie is coming alive with spring, providing an oasis for birds, bugs, and all kinds of wildlife. Right outside the door of the education center, the air is suddenly full of swooping barn swallows, their aerial acrobatics stunning. Farther afield, dragonflies and butterflies are back, and the songs of meadowlarks can be heard everywhere. Birders have been excited to see brown thrashers, greater and lesser yellowlegs, Eastern phoebes, and an early Henslow's sparrow.

As the natural world becomes more active with the warmer weather, so does the education and conservation work that you make possible.

Jason St. Sauver, our community education director, is getting our corps of volunteer Discovery Leaders prepared for the busy season of school field trips and summer camps. The spring and summer calendar (see back page) is filled with old favorites and exciting new offerings like May's "The Bs," a weekend festival celebrating birds, blooming flowers, bugs, and some local brews. We look forward to connecting with new people in new ways in the coming months.

In addition to (re-)clearing a path to Spring Creek (see article on front page), habitat manager Ed Hubbs, with the help of good weather and great volunteers, completed most of his planned prescribed burns. Within days of the fire, a green carpet of grasses could be seen pushing up through the charred soil, taking advantage of the sun and nutrients released by the fire. Soon the cow-calf pairs will be back to do their part to sustain the healthy landscape, always going to the burned patches first if they have a choice.

You are the reason this treasure is here and healthy, inspiring awe and wonder. Donors to Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center (see our 2016 donors on pages 4–5), volunteers, partners, visitors, neighbors, and friends – you are prairie champions, making sure that people have the chance to connect with Nebraska's natural heritage. Thank you!

Hoping to see you on the trails soon,

# 10<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL *Tastes* — IN THE — *Tallgrass*

Save  
**Sunday, September 17, 2017**  
4:00 to 7:00 P.M.  
Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center  
Denton, Nebraska

**Funding hope for birds,  
wildlife and future generations.**



*Ed Hubbs, with his mighty volunteer crew, burned about 80 acres this spring. And now that the herd of cows has moved onto the property, we are ready for the growing season. Thanks as always go out to our volunteers (who have already put in over 110 hours this year in land management duties) and our donors who allow us to effectively manage this prairie for future generations. You are all great!*

## Message from the Board Chair

*Mari Lane Gewecke*

Big things tend to capture our attention: the enormity of mountains, the vastness of oceans, the expanse of a Nebraska sky, the view across acres of prairie. They are all beautiful.

Sometimes, though – by focusing our attention on big things – we miss the just-as-remarkable little things: dragonflies hovering over the water, fledging birds learning about life beyond the nest, grass sprouting from the ground beneath our feet.

In many ways, it is more interesting to discover the small. And the prairie is a wonderful place to do just that. While I always enjoy looking across prairie grass to the horizon, I make a point to look down at the ground. And look to the right and to the left; even behind me. To notice what is present right where I am and not just what is off to the horizon.

As board members, we are responsible for doing the same thing for this organization. While charged with having a big-picture vision for Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center, we must also pay attention to the here and now. And to those who help make each day possible at the prairie. Like our donors, to whom we are indebted for their unwavering support of our work. And our volunteers, without whom we could not operate.

On your next visit to the prairie, look for the small things. Watch for life along the trail, by the ponds and in the wetlands. Stop and savor the color of a wildflower. Close your eyes and listen for the sounds of birds, insects and other wildlife. And know how much we appreciate you.

Sincerely,

*Mari Lane Gewecke*



## In Memoriam

**Lyle D. Sittler**

**1942 – 2017**



We mourn the passing of Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center Stewardship Advisory Board member Lyle Sittler. As a teacher, coach, church youth group leader, and former Huskers football star, Lyle was widely known and loved in our community.

Lyle's forebears have been farming and ranching in southeast Nebraska since 1873, with a guiding principle to "leave the land better than you found it." Lyle and his wife, Alice, carried on that tradition when they took over the family farm in the 1980s. They have been recognized with awards and accolades over the years for their innovative practices and conservation ethic. As a member of our board and its conservation committee, Lyle provided advice on how to sustain the health of the prairie here, and how to build bridges with our neighbors to inspire conservation practices beyond our property boundaries.

We sorely miss Lyle's good humor and wisdom.

**give**  
To Lincoln Day  
May 18, 2017

Thanks to a special matching grant from Lincoln Community Foundation, your gift to Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center will go farther on Give to Lincoln Day! ([givetolincoln.com](http://givetolincoln.com))



## TALLGRASS PRAIRIE SOCIETY

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. With your generous support, you ensure that the legacy of the tallgrass prairie lives on for future generations.

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## Birds Connect Us with Stories and Songs

On an unseasonably warm Saturday in February, a full house in the visitor center enjoyed *For the Birds*, a cabaret of songs, poetry, and spoken word performances, celebrating the Great Backyard Bird Count. The performances ranged from the humorous ("Poisoning Pigeons in the Park") to the poignant ("Green Finch and Linnet Bird") to an uplifting singalong of "I'll Fly Away". Under the direction of Angels Theater Company Director Judy Hart, our own Jason "the Birdnerd" St. Sauver performed, along with Brian, Gretchen, and Mike Foley; Marikita and Marissa Saure; Joe Shaw; and accompanist Jan Malone. We are grateful to these artists for sharing their considerable talents with us!



Joe Shaw shared a story about the healing power of birds and nature, printed below.



### Saturday, May 20

Birding BY Ear Workshop - 8 am  
Kids' Birding! - 10:30 am  
Plants 4 Birds: Grass & Grassland Birds Walk & Picnic - 12 pm  
Wildcrafting & Wildflowers - 2 pm  
Plants & Pollinators - 4 pm  
OWL You Ever Wanted to Know - 7 pm

### Sunday, May 21

BioBlitz & Brunch - 10 am  
Feathered Friends & Families - 1 pm  
Woodlands and Wetlands Walk - 2:30 pm  
Birds, Bark & Brews @ Van Dorn Park and Blue Blood Brewery - 4:30 pm  
How NOT to Take a Bird Photo - 7 pm

*All programs are free, though a suggested donation of \$5 is greatly appreciated. Check out our website for full program descriptions and to sign up as space may be limited.*

## My California to Nebraska Story

*Joe Shaw, Associate Director,  
Lux Center for the Arts*

**The birds at the Bolsa Chica wetlands in Huntington Beach, California, inspired me.** They thrived on about 1,500 acres of undeveloped wilderness surrounded on one side by ocean and on three sides by the megalopolis of southern California.

The Bolsa Chica wetlands were once destined to become a massive development of 5,000 homes and a marina with thousands of boats and a four-lane highway right down the middle – a paved paradise.

Developers salivated at the chance to turn nature into cold hard cash. But the people had a different vision. They enjoyed walking in the wetlands along the ocean, seeing pelicans doing high dives for fish, the mighty blue herons, predators perching in eucalyptus and building their large messy nests. The enjoyed watching the elegant snowy egrets, shaking their feathers like a Hollywood ingénue's powder puff.

The people loved the birds and the wetlands. So they resisted.

They raised a ruckus, they went to meetings. They called their representatives in Congress. At first, everyone thought they were crazy. But their cause was just, and even more important, their cause was popular. Bit by bit, a couple of hundred houses here, a lawsuit or two there, and soon those 5,000 homes turned into 3,000, then 1,000, until only about 400 homes actually were built on a ridge, and the rest was miraculously saved and restored, and the wetlands and the birds won because the people resisted.

Every New Year's Day, I joined a group of these mighty wetlands warriors to gather in a circle on a mesa that overlooks the newly protected wetlands. There we watched the sun rise on this precious place, huddled in the frigid mid-40s temperatures. Each year, the sun would rise, its beams sparkling across the waters in hues of orange and red, and we celebrated our resistance and what we had won for the birds.

My last California sunrise was in 2015. 2014 had been a bruising year. My head was foggy. My job was more than I could handle, and I was lost. All my efforts to change things, to make my small place in the world better seemed to be for naught. Despite many small and not-so-small victories, I was rejected and, as a result, dejected. The one bright spot was far away, in Nebraska, a place I knew very little about, closer to Canada than I ever thought I'd be.

*continued on page 7*

## **In California I helped save the birds, and in Nebraska, the birds saved me.**

After seeing the sun rise over the wetlands in January 2015, I headed for Nebraska the next day. In the dead of winter.

After 25 years of mild California "weather," the Nebraska winter was harsh. North and south winds that chill you to the bone. Bitter cold and little or no sun was a shock to my system. Willa Cather wrote about Nebraska winters: "Winter lies long...hangs on until it is stale and shabby, old and sullen." And after my last bruising year in California, I felt shabby and sullen.

Walking Sookie, my dog, required me to go outside against all my instincts. Lucky for me, the park by my house became my inspiration. Even in winter, this public space, its manicured curving walkways and public art revealed innate beauty.

Southern California has no seasons and one temperature – sunny and 70. Such temperate tyranny made me forget the natural cycle of the seasons, the clear demarcation of death and life, end and begin. Winter was bleak but amid the icy waterscapes, landscaped beds of dried grass and seed pods lurked an inkling of new life, new possibilities, new growth.

Spring and almost summer came and nature woke and began to reveal herself. Daffodils popped up from their wintry beds, wildflowers bloomed.

Then the rains came. They called it a hundred-year flood! I raced to the park to see it filled nearly to the brim with water, dangerous currents that took a life. I wondered if the park would survive.

But the waters receded and the strong native plants, a little waterlogged, survived. The park soon returned to its former state, as it was intended to do, and wildflowers sprung up, carpeting the parks' slopes and surfaces. The park was better than ever.

And then the birds, in the form of a mother and her ducklings, who took residence between P and Q streets in the park. Twelve ducklings. Every trip to the park became "Where's mama duck?" "Count the ducklings, are they all still there?" Biologists told me it was highly unlikely all 12 ducklings could survive an urban environment. And that they would mature in about seven weeks. Seven weeks! Those seven weeks gave me life. And mama duck gave me hope. That mama duck kept all 12 of those babies safe and secure in downtown Lincoln. She was a tough bird. One by one, those ducklings grew up and flew off, leaving that tough old mama behind. The fall flowers came, the air became brisk and the cycle began again. The wheel turned.

Whatever I had left behind was tilled under, mulch for what had begun, a new chance to bloom, like my park had bloomed. A new life in a new place. A chance to fly.

Since, I have discovered the joys of sandhill cranes, rising as a mighty multitude from shallow waters, bald eagles watering from the Sandhills to the Missouri, and a peaceful place near Denton, where I can walk among the birds of the prairie preserve in spring, and where I've become hardy enough to take a snowy walk looking for the birds of winter amid brown feathery stalks and cattails, along water that will soon be teeming with life. The wheel turns. **And I've become a tough old Nebraska bird.**

## **Make a Difference**

There are many ways that you can help us fulfill our mission of conserving the tallgrass prairie by engaging people in our natural and cultural resources. Support of all types makes such a difference, 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 in to any schedule. We're happy to play "matchmaker" and 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 (page 8) for additional gift ideas.
- Become a monthly donor. You can provide regular, ongoing support for our work by visiting our web site, [springcreekprairie.audubon.org](http://springcreekprairie.audubon.org).
- Include us in your estate plans. Several simple, flexible, tax-advantaged options can benefit your heirs and Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center at the same time.

## **Best wishes, Melissa!**

Melissa Filipi, Director of Philanthropy for Audubon Nebraska since 2014, has moved to a new position as Executive Director of Community Services Fund of Nebraska. We'll miss her leadership here, and we know her talents will serve her well in this new position.





# Upcoming Events at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center

**Saturday, May 13**

**Tuesday, May 16**

**Saturday & Sunday, May 20 & 21**

**Sunday, June 4**

**Saturday, June 10**

**Tuesday, June 20**

**Saturday, June 24**

**Friday, June 30**

**Saturday, July 8**

**Sunday, July 9**

**Tuesday, July 18**

**Tuesday, August 15**

**Monday, August 21**

**Sunday, September 17**

LGBT: Let's Go Birding Together, 8 – 10 am

Third Tuesday Bird Walk, 8 – 10 am

The Bs! (Birds, Blooms, Brews, Bugs & Brunch)

Wildflower Walk, 2 – 3:30 pm \*

LGBT: Let's Go Birding Together, 8 – 10 am

Third Tuesday Bird Walk, 8 – 10 am

Family Firefly Picnic, 7:30 – 9:30 pm \*

Meghan Stratman Art Exhibit Opening, 6:30 pm

Family Firefly Picnic, 7:30 – 9:30 pm \*

Dragonfly Day, 2 – 4 pm

Third Tuesday Bird Walk, 8 – 10 am

Third Tuesday Bird Walk, 8 – 10 am

Eclipse Viewing

Tastes in the Tallgrass \*

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

*\* Program fee*

**Trails** *open daily sunrise to sunset*

## Visitor Center

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

*All year (except major holidays)*

## Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center Staff

Glynnis Collins - Director

Jason "the Birdnerd" St. Sauver - Community Education Director

Kevin Poague - Operations Manager

Ed Hubbs - Habitat Program Manager

Amy Plettner - Caretaker

## Stewardship Board

Deb Dahab

Bruce Johnson

Sam Seever

Judy Dougherty

Mari Lane Gewecke

Daniel J. Semrad

Lana Flagtwet

Jenni Lesoing-Lucs

Scott Stuckey

Stephen J. Gage

Marilyn Moore

Tom Tallman

Jeff Hagaman

Cindy Morris

Larry Williams

Jeff Jewell

Cindy Rose

Barbara Wright-Chollet

## Audubon Nebraska Staff

Bill Taddicken - Interim Director

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 & Under**

**FREE**

**Tuesdays**

**FREE**

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

## Wish List

Portable tables (\$60/each) - call us for requested model

Nest/feeder camera

Head Lamp (2 or more preferred)

Binoculars - new, requested model available from Eagle Optics

Boot Cleaner Station

New roof for caretaker house

## CONTACT US:

Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center  
11700 SW 100th St. P.O. Box 117  
Denton, NE 68339

To receive The Prairie Sage electronically, let us know at [scp@audubon.org](mailto:scp@audubon.org); (402) 797-2301.

**PHONE:** (402) 797-2301

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

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

**FIND US ON:**



**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.