



Audubon *The Prairie Sage*

Spring Creek Prairie
Audubon Center

SPRING/SUMMER 2019

SCPAC to be Demonstration Site for Quality Habitat Management

by Ed Hubbs

Audubon Nebraska is partnering with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to use Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center (SCPAC) as a demonstration site for Nebraska landowners to see firsthand the benefits of quality habitat management. Through the Nebraska Natural Legacy Project (see sidebar this page), SCPAC is targeting over 170 acres for improvement from spring 2019 through fall 2020, predominately focusing on combating invasive woody plant species.

Eastern tallgrass prairie, and the plants and animals that depend on this ecosystem, are in decline. One of its biggest threats is the invasion of woody plant species. These invaders have gained a foothold in places where historically they would have been kept in check by frequent and sometimes intense natural disturbances — floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, disease outbreaks, and insects. In the tallgrass prairie, the primary disturbance was fire.

SCPAC will continue to use prescribed burning as a management tool to introduce disturbance into the system. But some portions of the prairie are so overrun by woody invaders that prescribed burns alone will not be able to return the land to its natural state. A more intense disturbance is needed. At these parts of the prairie, we will be utilizing machinery and herbicide applications as needed to set back the invaders and allow the native prairie to re-establish itself.

By strategically planning the areas where the work will take place, we will be able to have the greatest impact on

the woody invasives while still leaving much of the prairie undisturbed and welcoming to our native grassland species, not to mention our two-legged visitors. Occasionally, individual trails may close for a few days or a week, but the majority will still be open as usual.



So, things may look a little different the next time you visit the prairie. Just remember, the prairie evolved with regular disturbances over thousands of years, and it is up to us to incorporate disturbances in our management plans.

The first round of shrub clearing has been completed, and all trails are now back open. The next phase will take place later in July and August.

Nebraska Natural Legacy Project

By Melissa Panella, Wildlife Diversity Program
Manager, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

The Nebraska Natural Legacy Project carries out conservation strategies identified in our State Wildlife Action Plan. The Plan serves as the blueprint for conserving Nebraska's at-risk species and keeping native common species common. Wildlife biologists implement the Plan and put wildlife habitat on the ground. It provides numerous opportunities for collaborative conservation by working with conservation partners and landowners in Biologically Unique Landscapes.

The benefits of the Legacy Project are far reaching. Maintenance and improvement of the landscape are only part of the story. More abundant and sustainable wildlife populations enhance recreational activities such as birding, wildlife viewing, hunting, fishing, hiking, and canoeing. Nebraska also benefits economically from healthy fish and wildlife populations as people travel to seek out our state's opportunities for special experiences in nature. The Legacy Project works to conserve our native species so that they may continue to be a source of pride for Nebraskans.

Letter from the Director

Meghan Sittler

Spring on the tallgrass prairie arrives with a crescendo of activity. Wood ducks, geese, gulls, Harris's sparrows, phoebes, and finches arrive either as a stopover on their migration or to call Spring Creek Prairie their home until the next winter slumber. Muskrats busy themselves in our ponds with their work, accompanied by chorus frogs. Turkeys wander our trails in the tracks left by deer and coyotes. The grasses and wildflowers slowly start to turn green and grow again while still holding the remnants of the signs of life of the birds and other wildlife that were busy during the winter.

The season also means a crescendo of activity for the Spring Creek Prairie team. Ed Hubbs, our habitat manager, has spent the winter months planning for needed habitat restoration work to remove many of the invasive woody species (see page 1). This work, coupled with our normal rotations of prescribed fire, will reclaim areas to a diverse tallgrass prairie landscape and provide important and improved habitat for our grassland birds.

School field trips begin again as the weather warms and plans for our summer camps ramp up. This year, Jason St. Sauver, our director of education and outreach, and Andrea Bornemeier, our



education assistant, are working on exciting new curriculum and experiences for our summer camps done in partnership with the Lincoln Community Learning Centers and many other community partners. Summer camps will not only have an impact here and for the students involved but also at many locations within Lincoln.

We also have been fortunate to have our team numbers expand this spring and into summer, with six students from Doane, Nebraska Wesleyan, and UNL completing experience internship hours as part of their coursework or degree programs. We are also excited to announce the initiation of the Marian Langan Internship Program (see page 3).

Finally, there is so much more on the horizon through the summer months. Please come see us soon for a Tuesday bird walk or one of our other fun events, or simply get lost in the prairie's sights and sounds. I also hope you'll consider helping us ensure this crescendo of life, activity, and impact continues by making a donation directly or through the city-wide Give to Lincoln Day on May 30. Your support of Spring Creek Prairie is so appreciated and so critical. Thank you for being part of our team and we will see you on the trails soon!

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Meghan Sittler".

Meghan Sittler
Center Director

Message from the Board Chair

by Jeff Jewell

With spring emerging and meadowlarks (both Eastern and Western) singing, we invite you to come explore the sights and sounds of the prairie trails. As Chair of the Stewardship Advisory Board, I am excited to be a part of an organization that celebrates nature, conservation, and education for all ages. I hope you'll be able to visit this spring.

Spring also brings what has become a wonderful tradition in our community. On Thursday, May 30, we will come together once again for the eighth annual Give to Lincoln Day through the Lincoln Community Foundation. This inspiring day has been a huge success for the Center in the past, and we look forward to another impactful day in 2019! Please join us and support the prairie on Give to Lincoln Day.

Whether you are a donor, a volunteer, a visitor, or an advocate in our community, we could not accomplish our mission without your passion for and support of our organization. Thank you for all you do to help Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center focus on conserving the tallgrass prairie ecosystem and the birds that rely on it.

See you on the prairie!

Challenge Grant!

The J.A. Woollam Foundation has provided a 2-to-1 challenge grant that will match every new or increased donation contributed to Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center by June 30, 2019, up to \$10,000. Your contribution could go twice as far to protect tallgrass prairie and the birds that call it home.

give
To Lincoln Day
May 30, 2019

LINCOLN COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION

Marian Langan Memorial Internships

We are excited to announce the initiation of the Marian Langan Memorial Internship Program through Audubon Nebraska. Marian served as the first center director at Spring Creek Prairie and then went on to lead Audubon Nebraska until her passing in early 2017. Marian's legacy is defined not only by her love of the tallgrass prairie, birds and wildlife, but by the impact she had in developing the next generation of conservation leaders.

In early May, we welcomed two of those future conservation leaders. Megan Petsch is the conservation education intern; Sam Cubrich is the conservation intern. Megan and Sam will be with us for three months this summer and will spend the majority of their time at Spring Creek Prairie. They will travel to Rowe Sanctuary to gain experience at both Audubon Nebraska centers and across different landscapes.

The internship program has been made possible through gifts from Marian, her family, friends, and many of you reading this newsletter today. If you see Sam and Megan please welcome them to the Audubon team.

Climate Watch Kicks Off!

Our climate is changing. How will it affect our birds? For some birds it means habitat restrictions; for others, possible range expansion.

Audubon's Climate Report shows 314 species are either threatened or endangered by climate change, but there are many ways we can help. One way is to verify that Audubon's climate modeling for bird species is accurate by participating in Climate Watch.

2019 marks the kickoff for Climate Watch in Nebraska. This national community science project looks at populations and distributions of Eastern Bluebirds and White-breasted Nuthatches. After a volunteer training about the project last December, 15 volunteers completed 13 survey routes of 12 points each during January and February to look and listen for bluebirds and nuthatches all around Lincoln. Results were entered into eBird to be available to the Audubon Climate Watch science team for further analysis.



White-breasted Nuthatch.
Photo by Larry Umthun/Audubon
Photography Awards

This summer, routes will be surveyed again, and we plan to add several surveys around the Omaha and Kearney areas as well.

Volunteers are always welcome. If you would like to join the project and help us learn more about how our changing climate is affecting our local Nebraska birds, contact our state Climate Watch Coordinator, Jason "the Birdnerd" St. Sauver.

Interns for Credit

This spring we have had a great start to our Interns for Credit program, working with students from Doane, Nebraska Wesleyan, and UNL and their advisors to provide internship experience on the prairie for class credit or class community service hours. Celeste Kenworthy, Christine Olson, and Devine Gines are helping with our education programming. Maggie Eubanks and Logan Morgaridge are helping with habitat management and water quality testing. Ryan Jenkins will also be getting habitat management experience. The program is the perfect way to continue Audubon's goals of creating the next generations of conservation professionals.



Volunteers Celeste Kenworthy (left) & Christine Olson (right)



Volunteer Maggie Eubanks (right) with Ed Hubbs

2018 DONORS - THANK YOU!

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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. This generous support ensures the legacy of the tallgrass prairie will live on for future generations.

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Camp is for the Birds!

Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center is excited to announce some special programming for our summer camps. This will be our fifth summer of providing day-camp activities for youth in the Lincoln Community Learning Center programs. Over the past four years the program has given over 500 youth the opportunity to explore the tallgrass prairie for over 20 hours in the summer — investigating the insects, catching aquatic invertebrates, and learning about our priority grassland birds like Bobolinks and Meadowlarks.

Thanks to grants from BirdNote and National Audubon Society's Coleman and Susan Burke Center for Native Plants, youth from ages 7–14 will get the added bonus of learning about birds from the BirdNote podcast. Campers will become part of NEST — the Nebraska Environmental Student Team. The team will explore the importance of native plants to bugs and birds and use that knowledge to plan plantings and projects both at Spring Creek Prairie and in their local community centers, parks, and neighborhoods!



The projects these youth will create as part of the NEST team will involve the whole community, from families and schools, to local partnerships with Habitat for Humanity, Family Service Lincoln, Kiwanis Club of Lincoln-Lincoln Center, YMCA, Campbell's Nurseries, and more. And the fun doesn't end when summer is over. To wrap the great summer season up, some of the youth will present their projects at our Fall Festival in September along with an amazing native plant giveaway to the public attending.

If you would like more information on the NEST project, or would like to be involved in a community planting, please contact Jason "the Birdnerd" at the center.

2018 By the Numbers

- Nearly **3,000** students explored the prairie during a school or summer program.
- NE Tourism Passport Program brought almost **1,500** visitors to the center during the summer.
- Over **3,500** people learned about Audubon programs at off-site events & festivals.
- The center offered over **30** public programs about birds and conservation throughout the year bringing over **1,000** visitors to the tallgrass.
- Over **175** species of birds seen during third Tuesday bird walks.
- Over **250** youth from Lincoln Community Learning Centers spent **20** hours or more investigating prairie habitat.

Prairie Corridor Kick-off!

The City of Lincoln, Lincoln Parks Foundation, the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District, and 24 organizations announced in May the official start to the Prairie Corridor on Haines Branch project to restore a tallgrass prairie corridor and trail between Pioneers Park and Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center.

We are thrilled to be part of such a wondrous project for this area. Please watch our website and future newsletters for all the exciting details and improvements to our trail system. More information can be found at the project's website: prairiecorridor.org.

Burn Association Assists with Habitat Improvement

Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center is nestled into one of the largest remaining complexes of tallgrass prairie in Nebraska. Through its work at the center, Audubon Nebraska has partnered with the Tri-County Prescribed Burn Association, a group of local landowners and volunteers who encourage proper stewardship of our remaining grasslands by utilizing prescribed burning.

The TCPBA was formed when landowners realized that fire was missing from the landscape. By joining together they could share manpower and equipment to safely conduct prescribed burns.

In partnering with the group, Audubon is able to share its prescribed burn equipment and expertise — sometimes even serving as a staging location for nearby landowners who are conducting their own prescribed burns.

If you have questions or would like to join the association, contact our habitat manager, Ed Hubbs.

KUDOS AND THANK YOUS

... to Lon Flagtwet!

Habitat work, such as prescribed fire, will be a whole lot more efficient and easier thanks to an amazing gift from Lon Flagtwet! Lon provided a gift, in memory of his late wife, Lana, that allowed us to purchase a new UTV (below) that is capable of hauling equipment and people necessary for management work on our property. A portion of Lon's gift will also go toward a new water tank and pump for use on prescribed burns.

The UTV has a blade that will allow us to move snow much easier on our trails and around the buildings. It also has comfy seats and a cab, making guided tours of our site that much more enjoyable. We are extremely appreciative of Lon's generosity and continued support!



... to the Lincoln Running Company and THREADS Footloose & Fancy

We now have a great supply of old shoes that our campers can wear where when they go wading in the ponds or stream. For everyone who donated shoes, thank you!



Spreading Wings

by Kristal Stoner, Audubon NE Director

Spring is a signal for birds to spread their wings, launch themselves skyward, and seek out their peers on a journey with the promise of new life and beginning. Audubon Nebraska is similarly spreading its wings.

Audubon Nebraska has a solid foundation with two Audubon centers, Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary and Spring Creek Prairie, which are well known hubs for exploration, scientific discovery, and conservation, but the impact of Audubon Nebraska extends well beyond the boundaries of these centers. From Rowe Sanctuary, conservation work to restore the Platte River ecosystem and the birds that rely on it extends to Wyoming and Colorado. Spring Creek Prairie's strength is on prairie restoration and is supporting neighboring working lands by collaboratively fighting threats such as cedar tree encroachment while advocating statewide for prescribed fire as a management tool.

Audubon Nebraska now has a presence in Omaha and will be seeking opportunities to add native plants to small and large landscapes. Audubon Nebraska is also meeting with landowners in western Nebraska and, in collaboration with Audubon Dakota, is working to create continental-scale grassland restoration one landowner at a time to improve ranch management practices. Additionally, Audubon Nebraska is reaching out to many other audiences and seeking their insights, because our work is enriched and made stronger by the contribution of the experiences, perspectives, and values of diverse individuals and communities.

It is certainly an exciting time at Audubon Nebraska. To our supporters and volunteers at both centers and statewide, we salute your efforts and contributions. As we spread our wings, we look forward to all that we can accomplish together.

For the Calendar

Tastes in the Tallgrass

Sunday, September 15 from 4:00 – 7:00 pm

Join us for our annual fall fundraiser. Enjoy a catered buffet dinner overlooking the beautiful autumn prairie while listening to live music and bidding on great silent and auction items. All proceeds benefit our education and conservation efforts.

Fall Fest

Friday, September 27

Our annual fall festival is a fun, family-oriented celebration of the tallgrass prairie.

Upcoming Events at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center

Wednesday, May 22

Saturday, June 1

Saturday, June 8

Sunday, June 9

Tuesday, June 18

Tuesday, July 16

Wednesdays, July 17, 24, 31

Saturday, August 10

Tuesday, August 20

Sunday, September 15

Friday, September 27

Birds & Brews at the Happy Raven, 7 – 8 pm

Project Learning Tree, 10 – 12 noon

Wildflower Walk, 10:00 – 11:30 am

Habitat Work Day, 12 noon – 2:00 pm

LGBT: Let's Go Birding Together, 10:00 – 11:30 am

Third Tuesday Bird Walk, 8 – 10 am

Third Tuesday Bird Walk, 8 – 10 am

Summer Serenity, 7:30 – 8:30 pm

Paws on the Prairie, 9:30 – 11:30 am

Third Tuesday Bird Walk, 8 – 10 am

Tastes in the Tallgrass, 4 – 7 pm

Fall Fest

For additional information and events, visit springcreekprairie.audubon.org

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

Meghan Sittler - Director

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

Kevin Poague - Operations Manager

Ed Hubbs - Habitat Program Manager

Andrea Bornemeier - Educator

Amy Plettner - Caretaker

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Autumn Taddicken - Director of Development

Brad Anderson - Development 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

In the giving spirit?

Review the list below of items to make your favorite prairie even better (see our web page for item details).

New Binoculars

Nest/Feeder Camera

Garden Wagon

Prism Microscopes

Small Loppers

8 lb. Sledge Hammer

Angle Grinder

Axe

New iPad for bird and habitat surveys

New canister-style vacuum

Milk Crates

CONTACT US:

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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.