



Audubon *The Prairie Sage*

Spring Creek Prairie
Audubon Center

WINTER 2018

Seed Harvest 2018

by Ed Hubbs

Fall can be an intimidating time to identify prairie plants. Grasses are fading to hues of brown, yellow, and red, leaves are shriveled, and flowers are non-existent. However, that was no problem for our great group of habitat volunteers (pictured below busily gathering seed). They arrived in full force to harvest native plant seeds on a gorgeous fall day in October.

Over 40 gallons of seeds and seed fluff was collected. The seed will be used to supplement native plants on degraded portions of the prairie. By collecting seed on site, we know our efforts will do well thanks to plants that have evolved with our soil type and climate. This gives us the best chance for germination success.

Our harvest targeted grass species such as big bluestem, indiangrass, Canada wildrye, and our state grass, little bluestem. That does not mean that we ignored the many forbs on the hillsides. In particular, legumes were emphasized for their ability to add nitrogen to the soil. Some of the legume seeds harvested were roundhead lespedeza, purple prairieclover, and Illinois tickclover — yes, the one that sticks to your clothes. When spring comes, many of these legumes will be sought out by insects, who, in turn, will become food for the growing chicks of our grassland birds.

Even a few flowers of the secretive downy gentian were discovered, a prairie gem indeed. A late bloomer, the gentian was not ready for harvest that day. We have since returned and

collected some of the seeds, while making sure to leave enough to keep that small population thriving.

A big thanks to all of the volunteers who came to help out. We couldn't have done it without you.

Late Season Burn

Prescribed burns usually take place in spring around here, but in October Ed Hubbs, SCPAC Habitat Program Manager, and his volunteer crew completed a successful late-season burn. Almost 30 acres were burned in the southwest corner of the property by West Bennet Road and SW 100th Street.

This fall fire phenomenon is all part of our patch burn grazing plan to encourage native grasses and flowers and restrict the growth of unwanted species such as smooth brome. The collection of cows that were still on the prairie were let into the burned area soon afterwards and immediately began searching for new, green growth.

Also this fall, 15 students from UNL learned about prairie management and patch burn grazing on a trip to SCPAC. The students compared restored prairie sites at various stages of re-establishment.



Letter from the Director

Meghan Sittler

It's hard to believe that as this newsletter arrives in your mailbox we are turning our eyes to a new year. In 2018, Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center hosted more than 4,000 students to explore and investigate the prairie as part of summer camps and school programs.



Several seasonal burns helped to continue to restore and expand the diversity of the tallgrass prairie and allow it to work for birds, other wildlife, cattle, and people. Visitors enjoyed quiet walks on the trails, bird counts and walks, evenings of music, food, and exploring the prairie's history and ecology.

While I was only able to be part of one full season at Spring Creek Prairie, I am excited about all that 2019 will bring. I also continue to be so impressed with the dedication of our staff, volunteers, and supporters.

Thank you for helping to make 2018 such a fantastic year. Please consider helping us grow the reach and impact of Spring Creek as you make your year-end gifts and please come visit us on the prairie soon. See you all in 2019!

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

Meghan Sittler
Center Director

HOLIDAY HOURS

We will be closed
Dec. 24-31 and
Jan. 1, 2019.

Trails always open,
sunrise to sunset.

Happy Holidays!

 Audubon | Spring Creek Prairie
Audubon Center

Winter Program Highlights

(See the Events section of our website for registration details.)

The 22nd Great Backyard Bird Count will take place Feb. 15-18, 2019, and to celebrate we are offering two new programs:

Birds and Brews - For Mature "Owl"diences Only

Friday, February 15 from 7:30 – 9:00 pm

Enjoy crazy owl trivia and mating facts while sampling some free beverages from a local brewery. \$15/person (adults 21+).

Bird is the Word

Sunday, February 17 from 2:00 – 3:30 pm

Ever wonder how some birds got their names? Or who Wilson or Henslow were that Wilson's Warblers and Henslow's sparrows are named after? Come and find out in this fun and informal workshop on bird names, how birds got them, and the people involved! \$10/person.



*Wilson's Warbler. Photo: George Scott
Audubon Photography Awards*



Our wagon/trailer got some much-needed attention this fall. The old boards on the bottom and sides were replaced, so it is now safe and ready for another season of wagon rides enjoyed by our summer campers.

Many thanks to our volunteer crew: Bill and Diane Edwards (Bill is a former board member); Arnold Mendenhall, former board member and habitat manager; and current board members Bruce Johnson and Tom Tallman.

Two Native Nebraskans Join Audubon Ranks: One Connected to the Prairie, One from the River

by Meghan Sittler

Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center Director

"As I looked about me I felt that the grass was the country, as the water is the sea... And there was so much motion in it; the whole country seemed, somehow, to be running."

- Willa Cather, *My Antonia*

That quote has resonated in me from the moment I first read it as a fourth grader. Reading those words helped explain what I had felt and seen all those hours that I had spent in my family's tallgrass prairie exploring, splashing in the spring, or simply resting against the big rock half way up the east hill deposited by glaciers long ago. From that vantage point, when the grass was tall the entire horizon around me was prairie rolling as an inland sea. I'd close my eyes and listen to the wind in the grass, the birds, and the sound of the country around me running. I'd open my eyes to watch the cattle grazing, the hawks diving, and the meadowlarks posing on the fence and think about all the life that relies on those rolling waves.

Those childhood experiences, which occurred just down the road from what is now Spring Creek Prairie, sparked my appreciation of the beauty, value, and uniqueness of tallgrass prairie. That appreciation and love has always carried me back to the prairie.

I have remarked numerous times in my first months at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center that it feels like I'm going home each day to go to work. Not just because I grew up down the road, but because the prairie has always felt like home to me. I know that Spring Creek Prairie feels like home to so many of you that visit, volunteer, and donate to help us protect and restore the prairie for birds, other wildlife and the people who, like me, find inspiration and a home in the prairie.

I am so very excited to join the talented and dedicated staff at Spring Creek Prairie, and across Audubon Nebraska, to continue to build from the many successes and to jointly meet challenges we face to ensure that the prairie remains full of life for all that call it home.

by Kristal Stoner

Audubon Nebraska Executive Director

As a child, I remember climbing into my treehouse in the spring as the sun was setting. It was a platform treehouse that opened to the sky, so I would lay on my back and watch the Sandhill Cranes fly overhead. It appeared to me that they just barely cleared the tops of the bare tree branches, so I waited to see if one accidentally got caught. At the time, I took this spectacle for granted. I had no idea I was watching one of the last great migrations, or that people from all over the world would come to watch these birds congregate on such a small stretch of river. At my childhood farm just two miles from the Platte River, Sandhill Cranes simply signaled spring.

I have carried these memories of Sandhill Cranes with me all my life, but now their rattling call is more than a seasonal announcement: it is a call to action. Fluctuations in the populations of Sandhill Cranes, Prairie-Chickens, Bobolinks, and many other birds are signals of how our natural world is changing, which is why I am excited to join Audubon's team and the broader Audubon network that seeks balanced ways to utilize our natural resources. There are challenges ahead, but also many possibilities as we launch the next chapter of bird conservation in Nebraska.



Greater Prairie-Chicken.
Photo: Don Brockmeier

Visitor Center Available for Rent

Don't forget about Spring Creek Prairie when you are planning your next get-together. Our meeting room is available year-round, seven days a week during regular business hours, and the entire visitor center can be rented for after hours.

The center is a beautiful destination for your wedding and reception, business retreat, or educational workshops. Amenities include use of the kitchen, projector, and wi-fi.

Write or call us for information on availability and prices.

2018 Tastes Our Biggest Ever!

Our 2018 Tastes in the Tallgrass fundraiser was the biggest success in the event's history. Raising over \$50,000 for our education and conservation programs, it was the most profitable in the event's eleven years.

Our gratitude and thanks go to event chair Deb Dahab and her planning committee who organized a wonderful party on a rather warm September evening. Guests enjoyed walks among the beautiful prairie flowers and grasses. Lively musical numbers from the Lightning Bugs and Kellyn Danae Wooten had toes

tapping. Jason "the Birdnerd" emcee'd, keeping the energy going during the short program and into the rousing live auction with auctioneer Tom Bassett that ended the evening.

We're grateful to the auction committee and all the people who helped in the event's smooth operation. Thanks to their planning and creativity, and all the wonderful people and organizations who donated to the live and silent auctions. Thanks to all of you who supported the event.

And mark your calendars for next year's Tastes, Sunday, September 15, 2019.



(Photos by Nick Manes/Manes Media)

Top left: The Lightning Bugs perform for the guests.

Top right: SCPAC Board Chair Jeff Jewell gives the welcoming address.



Wildlife By the Numbers

236

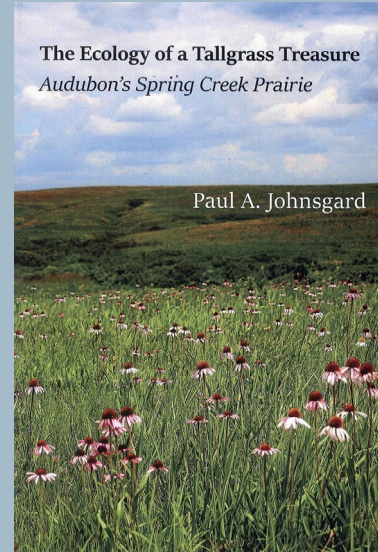
This is the number of bird species that have been identified here at the prairie over the past 20 years. In 2018, one new bird was added: the least bittern. A photo of it was taken by our trail camera in June.



Least Bittern. Photo: Hannah Meddaugh/Audubon Photography Awards

55

Here is our butterfly species total to date. A bordered patch was the latest addition, observed in our butterfly garden in September.



New Paul Johnsgard Book

Noted ornithologist and educator Paul Johnsgard has published a new book. "The Ecology of a Tallgrass Treasure: Audubon's Spring Creek Prairie" is a richly illustrated and detailed guide to the flora and fauna of this special place.

Copies are available for purchase in our nature store.

A Snowy Open House

Meghan Sittler

It certainly looked like winter during our Holiday Open House in early December. About two to three inches of snow blanketed the area overnight, making for a beautiful snow-filled landscape for the families who ventured out.

Our thanks to Arbor Road (top photo) who performed some wonderful seasonal songs, and to all of our volunteers who helped kids create holiday crafts, led wintry walks along the trails, and assisted with the yummy refreshments.

And thanks to Paul Johnsgard who signed copies of his latest book. We plan to have another event in the spring where Paul will be there to sign books once again.

(Bottom photo: Families and volunteers worked in the craft nook to create holiday cards and ornaments from recycled materials.)



IRA Rollover Gift Supports Conservation and Has Tax Advantages for Donors

Thanks to a law passed in 2015, donors can support Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center with a gift that gives back a tax advantage. Making a qualified charitable distribution from your IRA enables individuals 70 ½ and older to give up to \$100,000 total to their favorite charities, without claiming the distribution as income.



Timing is important as all donations need to be received before December 31 for the current tax year.

Important points to consider:

- For donors age 70 ½ and older.
- The gift must come directly from your IRA account administrator, in the form of a check.
- The gift may come from a ROTH or a Traditional IRA (special exclusions may apply to other types of IRA accounts).
- There is NO income tax on the distribution; there is also no charitable deduction for your gift.

What are the advantages?

- Meet your Minimum Required Distribution (MRD).
- Pay no income tax on the amount withdrawn for your gift.
- Give above your deductible limit of 50% of adjusted gross income.
- Benefit Audubon's work in a meaningful way.

If you are interested, please contact Autumn Taddicken, Audubon Nebraska Director of Development, 308-390-3505 or ataddicken@audubon.org. You can also contact Shari Kolding, Director of Gift Planning, National Audubon Society, 512-236-9076 or skolding@audubon.org.

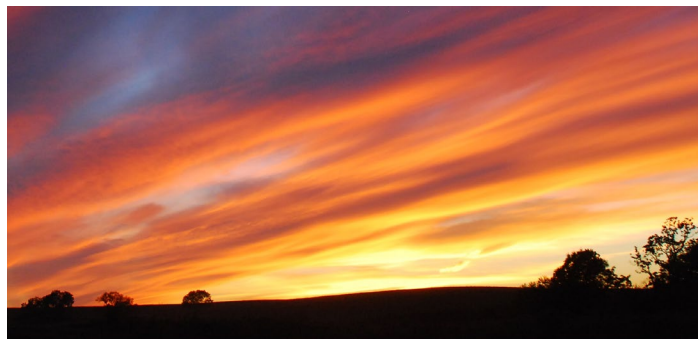
Please have your IRA plan administrator make the check out to National Audubon Society. Our tax identification number is 13-1624102. Accompanying paperwork should identify your name and address and whether your gift is intended for Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center or another Audubon program.

Gifts can be mailed to:
Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center
P. O. Box 117
Denton, NE 68339

Your Legacy Can Have an Impact: A New Year's Resolution That is Easy to Keep

Donors are making a real difference today for birds that rely on prairie ecosystems. There is also a way donors can create hope for the future of these birds. When you make a planned gift to Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center, you are leaving a legacy so that birds can always find a home in the prairie and children can always find new discoveries at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center.

The holiday season is a great time to consider a planned gift. If it's been more than five years since you've updated your important documents, this is a great time to do so and feel a sense of accomplishment. Major life events (such as a marriage, death, or birth in your family) can change your intentions as well. In addition to your will or living trust, you may also need to update the beneficiary designations on retirement accounts, bank and other investment accounts, and life insurance policies. Keeping copies of your beneficiary designations with your will makes your plans more clear and accessible to your executor.



Suggested language: "I bequeath _____ (dollar amount or % of estate) to the National Audubon Society, Inc., a not-for-profit organization, with its principal offices located at 225 Varick Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10014, tax ID # 13-1624102. My gift shall be used to benefit Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center."

We encourage you to share information about your gift intentions with our office. You will be eligible for membership in our Grinnell Legacy Society or you are able to remain anonymous if you prefer. For information contact Autumn Taddicken, Audubon Nebraska Director of Development, 308-390-3505 or ataddicken@audubon.org or visit www.audubon.planyourlegacy.org.

New Prairie Sponsorships

New opportunities are available for local corporations to support our nature education programs, our tallgrass prairie conservation work, and Tastes in the Tallgrass, our annual outdoor fundraiser.

There are lots of benefits with becoming a sponsor (the number and type depending on gift level), including advertising, free rental space, guided prairie tours, and more. If you are interested in receiving a sponsorship pamphlet, just write or call us.

A Season of Transformation

by Autumn Taddicken

One of the joys of working for Audubon is experiencing the transformative power of giving. I first began working with Audubon in 1997 and I have had the pleasure of watching the O'Brien Ranch transform into Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center. There have been people who have made remarkable contributions to its success. There have also been many more people who quietly gave what they could because they knew it was needed.



When you make a gift to Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center, we put the money to work right away. There is so much to be done to protect tallgrass prairie, the only limiting factor is adequate funding.

It isn't just Spring Creek Prairie that your gift may help transform. Research shows that giving not only makes us feel good, it is good for us.

Thank you for your generosity. I encourage you to spend time during this season reflecting on the transformations your gifts have helped create.

As always, we love to hear from our supporters. Please contact me to share your own stories of transformation or to discuss your personal philanthropic goals at ataddicken@audubon.org or 308-390-3505.

The Perfect Gift

Don't waste time fighting the crowds at the shopping centers this holiday season.

Gift-giving is easy when you make a contribution to Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center in honor of someone.

A donation to Spring Creek Prairie is a gift of better habitat for birds, more children exploring nature, and greater protection for prairie. What better gift is there to give?

You can even make your donation on-line at springcreekprairie.audubon.org. Just click on Donate! and mark the box to make your gift in honor of someone.



Audubon's Nebraska Crane Festival

March 21-24, Kearney, Neb.

Audubon's Nebraska Crane Festival brings together hundreds of crane lovers from around the country to Kearney, Nebraska, to interact with a wide range of environmental speakers, take part in incredible birding trips, and, best of all, experience the world's largest gathering of Sandhill Cranes!

Three great main speakers have been scheduled: Michael Farrell, local photographer and co-founder of the Platte Basin Timelapse project, will speak at noon on Friday. Actress and National Audubon Society board member Lili Taylor will be the speaker during lunch on Saturday. And presenting that evening at the banquet will be David Mizejewski, who is a television host, media personality, author, blogger, and a naturalist with the National Wildlife Federation.

For information on the festival's field trips and other speakers, see the Audubon Nebraska website, <http://ne.audubon.org/birds/crane-festival>.



Sandhill Cranes. Photo: Vaughn Cottman

Details about the Sandhill Crane migration through central Nebraska can be found at the website of the Iain Nicolson Center at Rowe Sanctuary: <http://rowe.audubon.org/>. Reservations for trips to Rowe's crane viewing blinds along the Platte River will be taken beginning January 2, call 308-468-5282.

Upcoming Events at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center

Thursday, January 3

Saturday, January 5

Saturday, January 26

Friday, February 15

Friday, February 15

Saturday, February 16

Sunday, February 17

March 21 – 24

Christmas Bird Count 4 Kids! 10 am – 12 noon

Winter Walkabout, 2 – 3:30 pm

Snug-as-a-Bug, 10 am – 12 noon

Great Backyard Bird Count Bird Walk, 10 am – 12 noon

Birds & Brews: For Mature "Owl"diences Only, 7:30 – 9:00 pm

Great Backyard Bird Count Bird Walk, 10 am – 12 noon

Bird is the Word, 2 – 3:30 pm

Audubon's Nebraska Crane Festival (Kearney, Neb.)

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 - Community Education Director

Kevin Poague - Operations Manager

Ed Hubbs - Habitat Program Manager

Brad Anderson - Development Coordinator

Andrea Bornemeier - Educator

Amy Plettner - Caretaker

Stewardship Board

Brianne Bayer

Bruce Johnson

Cindy Morris

John Becker

Sue Kirkpatrick

Adrian Olivera

Judy Carter

Mari Lane Gewecke

Chris Sommerich

Deb Dahab

Liz Lange

Tom Tallman

John Heineman

Jenni Lesoing-Lucs

Jeff Jewell

Marilyn Moore

Audubon Nebraska Staff

Kristal Stoner - Executive Director

Autumn Taddicken - Director of Development

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 webpage for item details).

New Binoculars

Nest/Feeder Camera

Garden Wagon

Prism Microscopes

Small Loppers

8 lb. Sledge Hammer

Angle Grinder

Hardhat with hearing protection for chainsawing - \$60

New iPad for bird and habitat surveys

New Canister-style Vacuum

Old t-shirts, towels, sheets, etc., for rags

CONTACT US:

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

To receive this newsletter electronically, let us know at scp@audubon.org; (402) 797-2301.

PHONE: (402) 797-2301

EMAIL: scp@audubon.org

WEBSITE: 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.