



Audubon | NEBRASKA

2020 Winter Newsletter



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Thank you to the following sponsors of Audubon Nebraska's 50<sup>th</sup> Crane Festival:



# Faces of Audubon

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



**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.



**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.



**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.



**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.



**Andrew Pierson - Director of Conservation**  
Andrew is responsible for the planning, development, and implementation of Audubon's conservation programs in Nebraska.



**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.



**Rebekah Yates - Education Manager**  
Beka oversees all education programming at Rowe including school, adult, and family programs and summer camps.



**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.



**Anne Winkel - Crane Festival Coordinator and Outreach Assistant**  
Anne is the coordinator for Audubon Nebraska's Crane Festival and assists with community relations.



**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.



**Soncey Kondrotis - Office Manager**  
Soncey oversees day-to-day management of Rowe Sanctuary.



**Andrea Bornemeier - Educator**  
Andrea helps coordinate and facilitate school and youth programs and assists with community outreach programs.



**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.



**Ed Hubbs - Habitat Program Manager**  
Ed manages the habitat at SCPAC, working closely with volunteers and local resource professionals.



**Wendy Horine - Director of Community Outreach**  
Wendy oversees Rowe Sanctuary's volunteer program and works to increase community-based stewardship of the Platte River Valley.



# Audubon | NEBRASKA



## The Start of a New Year

by Kristal Stoner

Starting the new year when the days are short and chilly is always a time for me to pause, reflect, and set my sights toward a new year... and go owling.

Recently, I found myself in the woods in near darkness. As with the beginning of any adventure, I was filled with excitement and anticipation of what I may find. It was still and quiet, and many moments passed before, off in the distance, I heard the distinctive “Hoo...Hoo” call of a Great Horned Owl. I cupped my hands around my mouth, took a deep breath

and tried to respond with my best owl imitation. To my delight, the owl answered!

This year, I feel a similar sense of excited anticipation for what will be accomplished. In 2019, the Audubon team hosted over 70 events, restored over 100 acres from cropland to high-diversity prairie, managed thousands of acres of habitat, and engaged nearly 6,000 students in immersive, outdoor experiences.

There are challenges ahead of us to protect birds and the places they need, but the talented Audubon team is prepared, passionate, and willing to answer the call.



## Join Us at Our 50<sup>th</sup> Crane Festival!

by Anne Winkel

In its 50<sup>th</sup> year, on March 20-21, 2020, Audubon Nebraska’s Crane Festival will bring together crane lovers from around the country to Kearney, Nebraska.

This year’s Crane Festival will be filled with activities. Audubon Nebraska will host a wide range of environmental speakers including Drew Lanham, professor at Clemson University, and George Archibald, founder of the International Crane Foundation. We will also take trips to prairie-chicken leks hosted by two outfitters. Best of all, participants will be able to experience the world’s largest gathering of Sandhill Cranes!



To learn more about the festival’s exciting concurrent sessions and field trips, please visit [ne.audubon.org](http://ne.audubon.org); online registration is now open. Registration is \$150/person, covering lunch on Friday and meals on Saturday and Sunday morning, plus access to all speakers and concurrent sessions. Field trips are purchased separately.

## Who We Are



Audubon Nebraska operates statewide 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.



## Nebraska Reps Support the BEST Act

by Kristal Stoner

Audubon's most recent climate report, *Survival by Degrees*, demonstrated once again that a changing climate poses a tremendous threat to the birds we love and the places they need. However, the report also made it clear that we can no longer delay action, and that it's not too late. If we can limit warming to 1.5°C, then we significantly lessen the chance of extinction for 76% of the vulnerable bird species.

Investing in renewable technologies is a fundamental climate impact reduction strategy, and Nebraska has tremendous potential to advance multiple renewable energy sources. One example of positive federal legislation is the Better Energy Storage Technology (BEST) Act of 2019 (S.1602/H.R. 2986). It supports the research, development, and deployment of grid-scale energy storage systems. Energy storage is a key technology needed to build an efficient, resilient, and reliable grid that can support a greater share of renewable energy, like wind and solar. Congressman Don

Bacon (above right, with Kristal Stoner) supported this important legislation in June and Senator Deb Fischer recently added her name to the list of cosponsors. Audubon Nebraska applauds our federal representatives for supporting Nebraska's potential to advance our home grown energy.



## A Year with Audubon: An Opportunity to Grow

by Jason St. Sauver

After a successful launch of the Marian Langan Memorial Internship Program last summer, we are thrilled to announce the program will be expanding to two year-long young leader positions for 2020!

Originally as a way to remember our dear (and deeply missed) friend and past executive director of Audubon Nebraska, Marian Langan, a memorial fund was set up in her name to hire summer interns at both of our centers. This will carry on her legacy of helping to create the next generation of conservation leadership, something Marian was passionate about. With the help of a grant from the Maggie Walker Incentive Fund Program within the National Audubon Society, these two summer positions will be expanded in 2020 to be year-long positions and will also have a focus on Audubon's Plants for Birds initiative. This work will focus on getting more native plants on the landscape, in both urban and rural communities, and partner with local municipalities and organizations to educate on the importance of native plants in planning and development.

Providing the opportunity for young leaders to experience aspects of conservation (habitat work, education, advocacy) and the chance to network with conservation leaders nationwide will take more than what we currently have in the bank. National Audubon Society Board Chair, Maggie Walker, invested in and then challenged selected states to elevate and expand their work. Nebraska was one

of just a few states to receive the Maggie Walker Challenge Grant at the top level of \$100,000.

Several significant donations have been received, but we will be seeking additional supporters to ensure this program continues.



Just as these positions in 2019 gave experience to interns Megan Petsch (above right) and Sam Cubrich (above left), the positions in 2020 will give the young leaders the opportunity to grow in their knowledge, experience, and leadership skills by providing hands-on training, chances to attend conferences, work with volunteers and partner organizations, and create their own conservation/education project to benefit birds, people, and Audubon in Nebraska.



# Audubon

Spring Creek Prairie  
Audubon Center



## Mammalogy Camera Research

by Nate Wehr, UNL Lecturer

In autumn 2019, two dozen students from the School of Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (SNR-UNL) taking an upper division course in mammalogy used SCPAC to conduct research as part of their collegiate coursework. Supervised by Nathaniel Wehr and Dr. John Benson, these students deployed 20 game cameras during the months of September and October. The cameras recorded images of eight mammals (beaver, coyote, rabbit, fox squirrel, opossum, raccoon, striped skunk, and white-tailed deer), and three birds (Great Blue Heron, Great Horned Owl, and Ring-necked Pheasant).

The purpose of this research was two-fold. First, the students contributed the images to a nationwide game camera project entitled "Snapshot USA", which is being led by the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. through their eMammal data management system. This project is relying on mammalogy classrooms and researchers throughout the United States to conduct research simultaneously across all 50 states in an effort to investigate mammal community diversity and behavior. The SNR-UNL students were representatives of Nebraska in this venture.

The second part of the research project was to provide students with a special opportunity to conduct their own research within the classroom. Students spent the month of November analyzing the images and conducting data analyses. Each student was afforded the opportunity to produce their own research questions surrounding the activity patterns of species observed. Some students asked whether or not predator species such as coyotes would be active at the same time as prey species like rabbits and deer. Meanwhile, other students wanted to determine if the type of habitat made a difference in the activity patterns of individual species. The students found that raccoons, rabbits, and coyotes were largely nocturnal, while deer were crepuscular (active near dawn and dusk) and squirrels were diurnal (active during the day). Students also found that deer were more likely to be found in areas of open grassland in the evenings, whereas they were more often found in cover in the mornings.

The students and instructors would like to express their gratitude to SCPAC's staff as well as friends and supporters of the preserve for helping make this project possible. Protected areas like SCPAC are both important refuges for wildlife and places of great opportunity for students to gain knowledge and skills surrounding the ecology and management of important wildlife species.





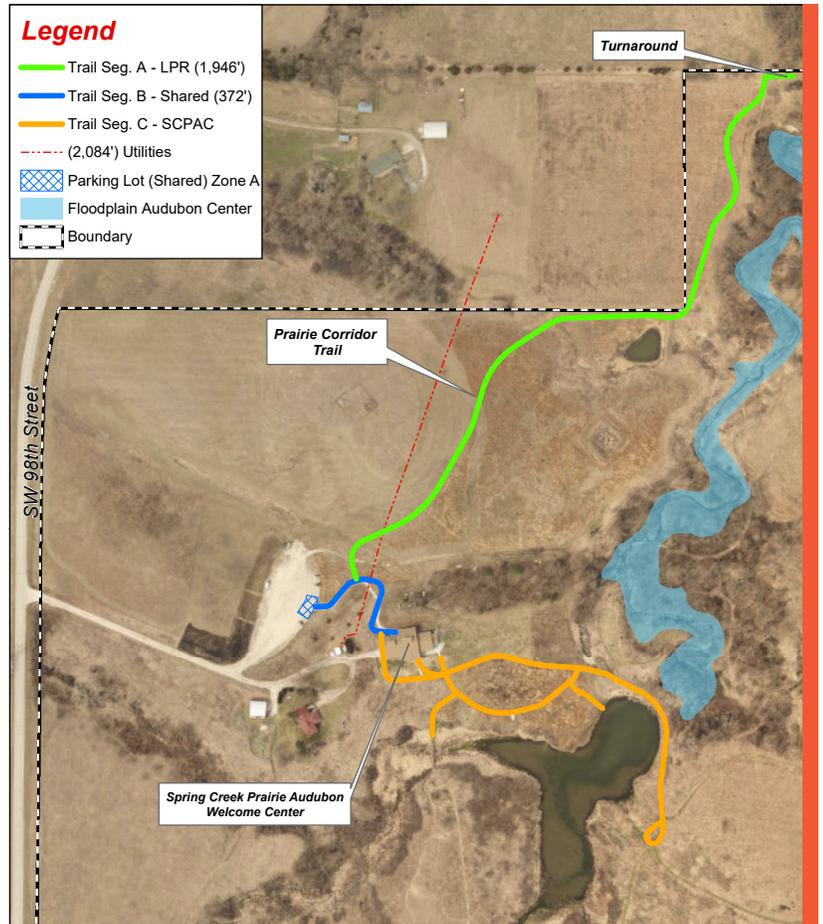
## Prairie Trail Projects on the Horizon

by Meghan Sittler

Exciting changes are ahead for the trail network at Spring Creek Prairie in 2020! The current crushed limestone trail loops will be improved for accessibility for visitors. All existing limestone trails will be widened to six feet. The crushed rock trail loops will be extended to reach the wagon ruts on the east side of the pond. New features include an improved pond access trail and landing to allow students and visitors to more easily experience the pond and wetland area.

A concrete trail will be installed from the parking lot down to the visitor center's front door and around the west side of the building. This will allow for improved accessibility to the building and connections to the limestone trail on the south lawn. New concrete parking stalls will be installed as will a loading and unloading area for buses.

We are also excited that construction will begin soon on our portion of the Prairie Corridor on Haines Branch trail (information can be found at [www.prairiecorridor.org](http://www.prairiecorridor.org)). The crushed limestone trail will start at the existing information kiosk and angle north, ending at a turnaround by Spring Creek at our north property boundary. Completion of our section of the trail is expected by late spring.



The project is being done in partnership with City of Lincoln Parks & Recreation Department. All project funds have been provided by generous private donations to Spring Creek Prairie and to the Prairie Corridor project. Check our website and social media for project updates!



## Volunteer Training Workshop & Appreciation Supper

by Kevin Poague

*Thursday, Feb. 27 - 3:30-6:30 pm*

It would not be possible to achieve all of our successes without the help of our wonderful volunteers. For people who are interested in joining this group, or for current volunteers who want to learn more, we are offering a training workshop. Learn about the different ways people can help, from administrative duties (helping out with visitors at the front desk, weekend staffing), education opportunities (school tours, public outreach events), and land management practices (prescribed burning, invasive plant removal). Find out more about these projects and see if any of these would be of interest.

After the workshop, all volunteers are welcome to join us in appreciation soup supper. (You don't have to attend the workshop to come to the supper.) We'll have several recipes to sample and all the extras as a thank you for everyone who helps keep the prairie thriving. If weather allows, a hike may also be on the schedule. Watch our website, Facebook page, and your e-mail for further announcements.

Thanks to all for a great 2019!



# Audubon

Iain Nicolson  
Audubon Center  
at Rowe Sanctuary



## Community Science Programs at Rowe Sanctuary

by Bill Taddicken

Community science is on the rise at Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary. In the last year, three new community science projects started that will contribute to science, not just on the sanctuary itself, but also across the entire country. The largest of these efforts is the recent expansion of National Audubon Society's Climate Watch program to Nebraska.



Climate Watch is a project where volunteers look for target bird species within assigned areas across the country two times of the year. The reported numbers of these birds inform Audubon scientists on how bird populations are moving in response to a changing climate. This information can then be used to adapt management to maintain those species and provide habitat for new birds. This allows land managers to create flexible, climate-resilient landscapes based on the patterns of bird species movement seen.

In addition to Climate Watch, Rowe Sanctuary's Fourth of July butterfly count (one of the longest running butterfly counts in the country) will be contributing data to Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Monarch Watch survey. Volunteers and staff walk defined paths in the prairies and report how many monarchs they see. This survey also tracks all other butterfly species including regal fritillaries, which are on the decline across the United States. This information is used to inform management decisions to provide the most habitat for these species, creating a more diverse prairie in return.



Finally, wildflower walks began this past June along Rowe Sanctuary's trails. Community members joined Rowe Sanctuary staff in walks on the trails from June to October to record flowering plants. This important inventory will track the variations from year to year in flowering plant species plus the habitat and wildlife value they provide. Information like this can be used to identify when management may be needed to increase diversity.

Through the information these community science projects provide, in addition to past projects, Rowe Sanctuary will continue to be a great home for the wildlife we all love.



## The Success of our Homeschool Programs

by Rebekah Yates

For over a year now, Rowe Sanctuary has been offering monthly programming for area homeschool students. These students come out for two hours a month to learn all about nature with each month focused on a different topic. Programs are designed to use open-ended inquiry activities. So far, students have explored prairie and wetland habitats, as well as different animal groups, like insects and birds. Students are divided based on age, so the younger students and the older students have more age-appropriate activities on each topic to keep the students more engaged. Many students love being able to get their hands dirty while exploring and making personal connections to nature.

Since this program began, 41 families have come out to attend at least one homeschool program and most of these families have attended most or all of them. Homeschool families have been underserved



in programming in the past, but they are now regular visitors to Rowe. The families have formed a community, of sorts. Some families knew each other before coming to these programs, but many children have met new friends and they keep in touch throughout the year. By having this recurring program, many children are getting multiple exposures to nature, which has been shown in studies to increase the likelihood that they will implement conservation actions in their life as they grow up.



## New Viewing Blinds Completed

by Cody Wagner

Photographers will have a new view of the cranes for the upcoming annual migration. Rowe Sanctuary has completed the construction of four new public discovery stations for viewing Sandhill Cranes when they return to the Platte River during the spring migration. One of these discovery stations will be set aside for 12 photographers every morning and evening to capture the beauty of these birds. Reservations are now open and are \$100 per person.

You can make your reservation online at [rowe.audubon.org](http://rowe.audubon.org), by emailing [rowesanctuary@audubon.org](mailto:rowesanctuary@audubon.org), or by calling (308) 468-5282.

# Save the Dates!



**Audubon**

Spring Creek Prairie  
Audubon Center

[springcreek.audubon.org/events](http://springcreek.audubon.org/events)

## Great Backyard Bird Count

February 14 & 15, 10:00 - 11:30 am

## BIRDS & BREWS: Goatsuckers, Nightjars, & Timberdoodles!

February 16, 4:00 - 5:30 pm

Must be 21 or older to attend.

## Salon Series: NE Invasive Species

March 23 & 30, 7:00 - 8:00 pm

Learn about invasive species plus how to prevent and remove them.

## Salon Series: Native Plant Power

April 9, 16 & 23, 6:30 - 8:00 pm

This three-week workshop teaches you how to provide better bird & wildlife habitat where you live. Fee includes beverages, snacks, & copy of David Mizejewski's book!

## Free Guided Bird Walk

April 21, 8:00 - 10:00 am

## Bird Banding Demonstration

May 1, 7:00 - 8:30 am



**Audubon**

Iain Nicolson  
Audubon Center  
at Rowe Sanctuary

[rowe.audubon.org/events](http://rowe.audubon.org/events)

## Great Backyard Bird Count

February 15, 9:00 am - 4:00 pm

## Wild Experience Room

February 29, 10:00 am - 2:00 pm

Kearney Public Library

## Guided Crane Viewing Experience

March 6 - March 7, 5:00 am & 5:00 pm

March 8 - 29, 6:00 am & 6:00 pm

March 30 - April 12, 6:00 am & 6:30 pm

## Guided Photography Experiences

March 13 - March 29, 6:00 am & 6:00 pm

March 30 - April 12, 6:00 am & 6:30 pm

## Overnight Photography Experience

March 13 - April 11, 4:45 pm

## Indoor Crane Viewing Experience

March 6 - March 7, 5:00 pm

March 8 - March 29, 6:00 pm

March 30 - April 12, 6:30 pm

## Indoor Family Crane Viewing Experience

March 11, 18, 25 - 6:00 pm

April 1 and 8 - 6:30 pm

## Crane Behavior Basics

March 6 - April 12

Held daily at 3:30 pm before daylight savings time and 4:30 pm after.

Need a place to host an event?  
Contact either one of our centers!

## Thank you to the following corporate sponsors of our centers:

### Spring Creek Prairie Sponsors:

Eagle Printing & Sign  
David Clark Framing  
Duteau Chevorlet-Subaru  
Ameritas  
Pinnacle Bank  
GIS & Human Dimensions  
Union Bank & Trust  
Doane University  
Aveda Salons

### Rowe Sanctuary Sponsors:

Kearney Visitors Bureau	Humanities Nebraska
Nebraska Central Telephone Company	Microtel Inn & Suites
Platte River Recovery Implementation Program	Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
The Archway	Prairie Chicken Dance Tours
Copycat Printing	Sandhills Publishing
Mac's Creek Winery and Brewery	Wells Fargo
The Nebraska Environmental Trust	First National Bank
Younes Hospitality	Headwaters Corporation
Burchell's White Hill Farmhouse Inn	Aveda Salons
Calamus Outfitters	Adventure Bus & Charter
	Broken Bow Wind II

## How You Can Help

### Make a Cash or Online Donation

*Money order or check donations can be mailed to the centers directly or you can donate online.*

### Volunteer

*Call, email or stop in to either center for info on volunteering.*

### Sign up for Audubon Nebraska's eNews

*By signing up for our eNews, you will receive opportunities for advocacy throughout the state in addition to bird-related news.*

### Contribute to Science

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

**Iain Nicolson**  
**Audubon Center**  
**at Rowe Sanctuary**

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**Spring Creek Prairie**  
**Audubon Center**

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## *Photo Credits*

### **Front Cover**

Cooper's Hawk. Photo: Lauren Harnett / Audubon Photography Awards.

### **Page 1**

House Finch. Photo: Michelle Black / Great Backyard Bird Count.

### **Page 3**

Great Horned Owl. Photo: Maryah Bell / Great Backyard Bird Count.

Sandhill Crane. Photo: Lorenzo Cassina / Audubon Photography Awards.

### **Page 5**

Greater Prairie-Chicken. Photo: Howard Arndt / Audubon Photography Awards.

Game camera photos submitted by UNL Mammalogy students.

### **Page 8**

New Viewing Blinds. Photos by Cody Wagner / Audubon Nebraska.

### **Page 9**

Dark-eyed Junco. Photo: Deborah Bifulco / Great Backyard Bird Count.

### **Back Cover**

Red-tailed Hawk. Photo: Christopher Ciccone / Audubon Photography Awards.