

Naturalist Notes



MISSION

El Paso County Parks Nature Centers connect people to their natural and cultural resources and inspire them to become stewards for the parks and our environment.



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Holiday Favorites For All:

- ♦ Bear Creek by Candlelight
- ♦ Nature Hikes with Santa
- ♦ Horse-Drawn Wagon Rides



Mark your calendars! Bear Creek Nature Center's holiday tradition, **Bear Creek by Candlelight**, will take place on **December 7 from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m.** Walk on enchanting luminary-lit trails then warm up in the nature center with hot cocoa, cookies, and a chili dinner from Texas Roadhouse. Pepper Grass will deliver their signature toe-tapping live music, Rocky Mountain Wildlife Foundation will be on-site with a live wolf dog, and the most important guest, Santa Claus, will be waiting to meet you and maybe share a dance or two!



Santa Claus comes to **Fountain Creek Nature Center December 8 and 15, 10:00-11:30 a.m.** Help Santa find his way to the nature center by ringing the jingle bells during an interactive reading of *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*, and make a snowflake craft. Then take a hike with him and discover the gifts that nature has for you. Sip some hot chocolate afterwards to warm up!



Complete your holiday season with a clip-clopping adventure over the trail and through the woods on a wagon pulled by **Suffolk Punch draft horses** generously provided and driven by the Miller and Evans families. **Saturday, December 8 and 15, 11:30, 12:00, and 12:30.** Prepaid reservations required.

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Nature Centers*

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Nature Center

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Give the Gift of Vitamin N

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, adults spend 93% of their lives inside a building. It's not only the kids who need to get outside! Help yourself and the children in our community by donating to our Year-End Campaign. Then take a stroll over to the nature centers to see your gifts at work. You'll feel better for giving the Gift of Vitamin N to yourself and others.



A nature camper enjoying some Vitamin N

Together we can positively connect children and adults to meaningful outdoor experiences. **Together** we will make a child smile as s/he discovers the joys of nature. **Together** we will raise the next generation of environmental stewards. **Together** we can give the gift of Vitamin N through nature center programs, camps, and other outdoor adventures.

Three ways to give:

- **Colorado Gives Day**, December 4 at www.ColoradoGives.org.
- The **year-end letter** in your mailbox.
- Donate at our website, www.elpasocountynaturecenters.com.

Thank you!

Friends of El Paso County Nature Centers is a non-profit, 501(c)3 organization and your contribution is tax deductible to the extent of the law.

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Interpretive Volunteer Rick Flores, keeps us laughing with cartoons of his experiences at the nature centers.

Why Do I Give to the Nature Centers? Special Feature by Jane Dillon



Jane Dillon having fun preparing for a fund-raising event

The first time I heard about the Bear Creek nature center was when it burned. I had not lived in Colorado Springs very long at that time. I had joined TOSC (Trails & Open Space Coalition) shortly after I moved here because I have always been interested in open space. I think the first time I visited it was during an art exhibit during the holidays. I was amazed at the range of programs they offered and by how large the whole park was. I knew this was very important for the citizens of our community. It was later that I learned about the Fountain Creek center and visited it. Today children do not have the freedom to roam that I had as a child. They need wide open spaces where they can explore and invent. Imaginations

are fueled by time in nature and time by yourself. Adults need places to get away from their hectic lives too. Our nature centers provide that. My schedule does not allow me to volunteer very much time with the centers so I give in the way that I am able. Our volunteers are so very important, but funds are always needed to continue the programs and maintain the property. I travel some and have never seen nature centers like the two that we are fortunate to have here. We must cherish them and support them. These nature centers are crown jewels within our community. Please join me in giving generously to the Friends of El Paso County Nature Centers this giving season.

~Jane Dillon is an active citizen and a current El Paso County Park Advisory Board Member

***Nature Centers Mission Statement:
El Paso County Nature Centers connect people to their natural and
cultural resources and inspire them to become stewards of the parks
and our environment.***

*The
richness I
achieve
comes
from
Nature, the
source of
my
inspiration
~Claude
Monet*

Volunteer Corner by Paula Megorden, Volunteer Consultant

"We will be known forever by the tracks we leave!" ~ Native American Proverb

Welcome to our new volunteers! **Thomas Diehl, Christina Fischer, Monica Gimbel, Julia Hilliard, Jessie King, Micheline Perreault, Rachel Salpeter-Levy, and Justin Walker** have become Interpretive Volunteers. We look forward to working with you and thank you for choosing Bear Creek and Fountain Creek Nature Centers' volunteer program.

Upcoming Training-Orientation Training- Saturday, January 26, 10 a.m.-Noon, Bear Creek Nature Center.

Environmental Education Leader Training- March 2019, dates to be determined.

Continuing Education – Please check the *Program and Events* brochure for programs of interest to you; up to 6 hours of continuing education credit may count toward the minimum annual contribution of 40 hours.

Become a Volunteer- Please contact the Volunteer Consultant, Paula Megorden, to become a volunteer. bccfvolunteers@gmail.com

Events from Recreation Services

by Theresa Odello, Recreation Coordinator

Fall has been a busy time of the year for Recreation Services! We started with **National Take-A-Kid Mountain Biking Day** in October at Fox Run Regional Park, where kids learned about mountain biking and went for a guided trail ride. Even though it was 40°, forty-five people came out to ride and to score some great raffle prizes.

The **Cornhole Tournament** at Black Forest Regional Park was on a beautiful warm day in October. The winning team appreciated the sponsors when they won a gift pack from Black Forest Brewing, pizzas from Papa John's, and sandwiches from Jimmy John's. Other prizes included free kid's meals to Chili's for all that participated, gift certificates from Three Margaritas, Chili's, and Chick-fil-A.



Obstacle course at Mountain Biking event

Do you know the Rule of Threes for Survival? If you don't, you missed the **Introduction to Wilderness Survival** class in the Bear Den in October. Jason Marsteiner from The Survival University taught about the top ten must haves in the backcountry, top ten mistakes people make in the outdoors, wild animal safety awareness and more. We hope to host another class in the Spring. Stay tuned for more fun recreation events from Recreation Services!

Volunteer Highlight

Theron Jeppson: Making a Difference with a Musical Flair *by Paula Megorden*

The water, wildlife, meadows, woods, marsh and creek drew Theron to Fountain Creek Nature Center shortly after retiring in 2004. He completed a career with the Air Force followed by subsequent work for a newspaper, bus terminal and pharmaceutical company. After talking with Ken Pals about opportunities as a volunteer, he was ready to give it a try. "If I could help educate young people to become aware of the importance of becoming responsible stewards, perhaps I could make a difference," recalls Theron.

Theron has two children, six grandchildren and numerous nieces and nephews, so leading children on school programs came quite naturally, coupled with his keen interest in and appreciation for the natural world. One memorable experience with children involved an oriole's nest. When talking about their discovery, one youngster raised his hand and seemed confused. He thought an "oriole" was a cookie!



Theron with his harmonica

Growing up in a musical family, he enjoys sharing music. He plays the mandolin, guitar, bass, and harmonica and is a member of the all-volunteer band, Pepper Grass. They sing and play songs of Grandfather Cottonwood, the wetlands and Bear Creek. "Sharing my discoveries with others is very fulfilling, and I enjoy the fellowship that exists among the volunteers," he smiles.

Thank you Theron, for your friendly welcome to young and old as you make a difference at our nature centers.



New intern Becca—the one on the right

New Intern at Fountain Creek

by Alayna Schmidt

We are very happy to welcome Becca Ostenberg, Fountain Creek Nature Center's very first intern! Becca is a third-year student at Pikes Peak Community College in the Zoo Keeping Technology program. Her degree requires a 225-hour internship, and she was excited to reach out to Fountain Creek Nature Center to learn more about the wildlife here.

Becca grew up around Bear Creek Nature Center and has fond memories of exploring the park and playing in Bear Creek as a child with her grandfather, Thomas Ostenberg, who was a docent at Bear Creek and served as treasurer of the Friends organization.

Becca loves sharing her passion for Colorado wildlife and is an engaging field trip program leader. Visitors, volunteers, and staff appreciate her knowledge of local animals, especially birds. She believes it is important to show younger generations the wildlife they share a home with. "Guiding programs and adding to my knowledge of wildlife has been so much fun and a great experience. I have met and worked with amazing people throughout my internship, and I love it here."

Two New Interpretive Program Coordinators!

by Nancy Stone Bernard, FCNC Supervisor and Mary Jo Lewis, BCNC Supervisor

Fountain Creek Nature Center is happy to welcome Alayna Schmidt as the new Interpretive Program Coordinator. She came on board May 15th and jumped right into leading nature camps with great enthusiasm! Hailing from North Carolina, she loves finding creeks and riparian corridors in Colorado to remind her of home. She grew up off the grid enjoying nature as a major part of life.

Alayna earned a self-designed Bachelor of Arts degree in Biological Sciences from North Carolina State University. She describes herself as a creative person who loves to take inspired ideas and turn them into reality whether it is through knitting or nature programs. She has great artistic ability as well!

She says, “Leading nature camps is my favorite part of working at the nature center—facilitating self-guided experiences, using the senses, creating deep relationships with campers, and having fun in nature.” Welcome Alayna!



*Alayna Schmidt, Interpretive Program Coordinator—
Fountain Creek*



*Ellie Hopkins Brown, Interpretive Program Coordinator—
Bear Creek*

In August, Bear Creek Nature Center welcomed a new Interpretive Program Coordinator, Elizabeth (Ellie) Hopkins Brown. Ellie is a Maine native who recently graduated with her Master of Natural Resources from the University of Idaho. Her previous work experience and graduate studies have been focused on environmental education and science communication. Ellie enjoys hiking, knitting, trail running and rock climbing and can often be found with her camera in-hand.

When asked what experiences thus far at Bear Creek have been the most memorable, Ellie cited having several close sightings of black bears and bobcats. She then went on to explain, “Above all, it has been a joy to begin working with students from Colorado Springs to facilitate educational experiences for them in their natural spaces. It is always exciting to teach environmental education in a new place, to be learning alongside my students about an area’s unique flora and fauna and to have their questions inspire me to keep learning, exploring, and wondering.”

Welcome to the Bear Creek Team, Ellie! We are thrilled to have you!



Fountain Creek Happenings

by Alayna Schmidt



Who do you think is perched here?

One of the great things about working at a nature center is that there is always someone around willing to share their knowledge and experience with you. Setting out for a hike around the Nature Loop Trail, I spotted a large raptor perched in the branches of a cottonwood tree. “He’s too dark for a red-tailed hawk,” I thought. “What is this thing?” Luckily, two of our volunteers, Eileen Somers and Terry Poe, were in the nature center at the time. I excitedly pulled them out into the cold and pointed to the mysterious large bird. The sparkle in Eileen’s eyes told me it was something special and Terry pointed out some distinguishing features: long talons wrapped completely around the branch, a fine curved beak, and white peeking through the dark feathers. After gazing in awe at the powerful looking bird, we retreated back to

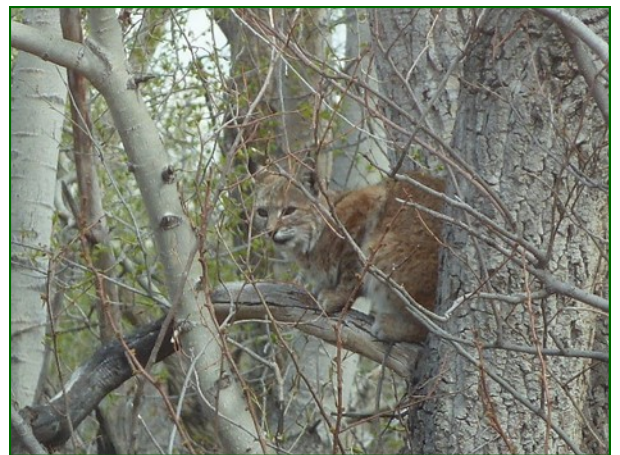
the warmth of the nature center and pulled out some field guides. Flipping through the pages, we got more and more excited. We felt sure our visitor was a juvenile bald eagle! But avid birder and volunteer, Risë Foster-Bruder drew our attention to some subtle features: small beak size and golden eyes. Our would-be bald eagle is more likely a juvenile red-tailed hawk. I am grateful for the wealth of knowledge our volunteers bring.



Bear Creek Sightings

by Ellie Hopkins Brown

As the gambel oak and narrowleaf cottonwood trees drop their leaves in late autumn, wildlife sightings abound as we are able to more easily see into the riparian and shrubland habitat of Bear Creek Nature Center. This fall, visitors, volunteers, and staff alike have been delighted by several sightings of a bobcat – some have even seen her along with her two yearlings! The majority of these sightings have occurred early in the morning or in the hours before sunset, which falls in line with the bobcat’s crepuscular nature (in other words, they are most active around dawn and dusk: the twilight hours). Bobcats get their name from their short, “bobbed” tail, and are about twice the size of an average house cat. While they are certainly fluffy and adorable, the bobcat is a ferocious predator. They typically hunt small animals such as rabbits and rodents, but have been known to successfully hunt adult deer as well! If you’ve been dreaming of getting to see one of these elusive creatures in action, head down to Bear Creek Nature Center – these sightings likely won’t be the last.



Bobcat perched in a cottonwood tree



1917-2017 A CENTURY OF SERVICE

Partners in the Park:

Gold Hill Mesa for Bear Creek Nature Center

Olson Plumbing & Heating for Fountain Creek Nature Center

THANK YOU!



Winter Program Highlights



BEAR CREEK
NATURE CENTER



FOUNTAIN CREEK
NATURE CENTER

Film Screening of "Ode to Muir- a Film by Teton Gravity Research"

Wednesday, December 5, 6:30 p.m.

Engaging the Senses Through Nature and Art

Saturday, January 19, 9:00 a.m.- 12:00 p.m.

Active Adults Snowshoeing Hike & Snow Science at Dome Rock State Wildlife Area

Saturday, February 9, 10:00 a.m.- 12:00 p.m.

Winter Stroll at Fox Run Regional Park

Saturday, February 16, 9:00 a.m.- 11:00 a.m.

Fungi: The Forgotten Kingdom

Saturday, February 23, 10:00 a.m.

Morning Hike & Campfire

Saturday, January 5, 10-11:30 a.m.

Wolf Moon Hike

Saturday, January 19, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Live Birds of Prey!

Saturday, January 26, 10-11:00 a.m.

Spinning/Weaving/Dyeing

Saturday, February 2, 10:00 a.m.—12:00 p.m.

Valentine's is for the Birds

Saturday, February 16, 10:00 a.m. –12:00 p.m.

Julia Archibald Holmes: The Bloomer Girl on Pikes Peak

Saturday, February 23, 10:00 –11:00 a.m.

For a full listing of Winter programs, visit elpasocountynaturecenters.com