

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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Fox Run Nature Center - Updates!

by Theresa Odello, Recreation & Cultural Services Manager

Dear Friends, with a new season just around the corner, I want to thank you for your continued support of the El Paso County Nature Centers, as well as share some updates about the Northern Nature Center, now called Fox Run Nature Center.



For many years, one of the most in-demand summer nature camp weeks is at Fox Run.

The need for a northern nature center was identified in the El Paso County Parks Master Plan in 2013, based on projected population growth and public surveys. Then the Feasibility Study in 2020 recommended Fox Run Regional Park as the ideal location. Currently, we have established a design team that is working on a comprehensive design for the new center and how it fits into the location and surroundings. The process includes determining the exact location, engagement meetings with stakeholders and the public, creating the concept design, then more public meetings before the final design. Currently we are on track to have construction beginning in 2024: isn't that exciting?!?

To get this building constructed, our team will also be working on finding funding for this project. El Paso County has already shown support by approving to spend \$1.5 million. The capital campaign has kicked off with a goal to raise \$3.5 to \$5 million, and significant donations have already been received.



The Nighttime Eggstravaganza is a popular springtime event

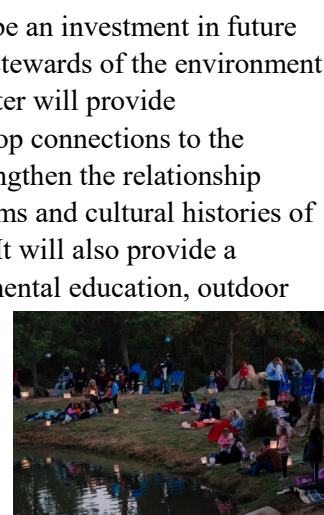
involvement in the northern El Paso County.

Help us move forward together to build a new nature center at Fox Run Regional Park! To find out more about the Fox Run Nature Center or how you can help, please contact me at theresaodello@elpasoco.com, 719-520-6981. 🐾

The need for a northern nature center was identified in the El Paso County Parks Master Plan in 2013, based on projected population growth and public surveys. Then the Feasibility Study in 2020 recommended Fox Run Regional Park as the ideal location. Currently, we have established a design team that is working on a comprehensive design for the new center and how it fits into the location and surroundings. The process includes determining the exact location, engagement meetings with stakeholders and the public, creating the concept design, then more public meetings before the final design. Currently we are on track to have construction beginning in 2024: isn't that exciting?!?



The 2021 Happy Trails fundraiser was beautifully set around the Fox Run Ponds



The 2022 Water Lantern Festival attracted hundreds.

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Nature Centers*

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Bear Creek Nature Center

245 Bear Creek Road
Colorado Springs, CO 80906
719-520-6387

Fountain Creek Nature Center

320 Pepper Grass Lane
Fountain, CO 80817
719-520-6745

Editor: Jessica Miller

elpasocountynaturecenters.com



Volunteer Highlight: Eileen Somers, Parks Volunteer of the Year

by Kelly Ann Blanchard, Volunteer Coordinator

“What would we do without Eileen?” How many times have we uttered this question over the last seven years? Since 2015, Eileen has been a dedicated, dependable, and hard-working volunteer who truly cares about connecting people to nature. And now, we are so proud to see her recognized as El Paso County Parks’ 2022 Volunteer of the Year!



Eileen can really get into character for holiday events!

Eileen has been described as “a jack of all trades and a master of them all” when it comes to volunteering. She is a wonderful ambassador for the nature centers, greeting people with kindness and guiding them through our exhibits with enthusiasm. She is also a fantastic environmental education leader during field trips and summer camp. Her nature name, Great Horned Owl, fits her perfectly as she embodies wisdom and grace when working with children of all ages. She is also a regular at almost all special events.

Given the many talents she shares with us, it’s no wonder she consistently volunteers over 200 hours per year with the nature centers. We are so excited to see her many achievements recognized. Thank you, Eileen, for all you do! 🦉



Eileen was honored by the Parks Advisory Board for earning “Volunteer of the Year” for all of El Paso County Parks



Eileen is always ready to help by watching the front desks, leading field trips, or assisting during special events. Last year she wrangled live, craft, and Easter bunnies!



2023 Pikes Peak Birding and Nature Festival

May 18—21

pikespeakbirdingandnaturefestival.org



Bear Run *by Brenda McCreight, Interpreter, Bear Creek Nature Center*

2022 was a “bear-y” wonderful year for the annual Bear Creek Bear Run! With a grand total of 362 human runners and 38 canine paw-ticipants, there were lots of smiles, yips, and laughter. Before the walk many participated in “Bear Yoga” and got freebies ranging from coffee to free water bowls for their doggie friends.



Four-legged runners supported the Nature Centers and their humans, too!

Thanks to our many partners for making the pre-festivities amazing! Special thanks go to our sponsors, Black Bear Diner, Peaceful Warriors/Praxis Yoga, and X1039 Radio. They make our event possible. Many thanks to all our volunteers who kept things organized and running smoothly. Our most festive activity was definitely the Bear Costume Contest. With a record 30 contestants, people and puppies strutted their stuff while the crowd cheered. Prizes were awarded to Best Adult, Best Child, Best Group, and Best Canine. After all this, the racers ran with their heart and souls (and their bear costumes) along the 3K and 5K routes! Everyone was a winner and Bear Creek Nature Center was too, with a net income of \$12,215. 🐾



Mary Jo can't contain her excitement for Black Bear Diner's support.



Runners often get silly for this annual fundraiser fun run!

Volunteer Corner *by Kelly Ann Blanchard, Volunteer Coordinator*

A big thank you to our volunteers for all their hard work last year – we couldn't have done it without you! Please welcome new volunteers **Suzanne Meek, Trent Smith, and Sally Ziegler**. We are also very thankful for our Trailability volunteers who have branched out to volunteer in other areas during the off season.



Friends of El Paso County Nature Centers can do it all — even pose for a group picture!

Mark your calendars! Our **Annual Volunteer Recognition Event** will be **March 2, 2023 at 5 p.m. at Fountain Creek Nature Center**. You can look forward to dinner, socializing, music, and fun while we recognize volunteer efforts in 2022. Check your mailboxes in February for an invitation.

Continuing Education:

- March 7 Discover Bear Creek, Training 10:30a.m.-12pm, Observation 1-2:30 p.m.
- March 11 Engagement Strategies Training at BCNC, 1-3 p.m.
- March 18 Trailability Volunteer Training at FCNC, 1-4 p.m.

Become a Volunteer – Interested in volunteering with El Paso County Nature Centers? Please contact the Volunteer Coordinator, Kelly Ann Blanchard, at bfcvolunteers@gmail.com. 🐾



Trent (above) and Sally (below) are two new volunteers.



Thank you to 2022 Donors

Steward: \$1,000 - \$5,000+

Gold Hill Mesa
The Scott Lauther Foundation
Olson Plumbing & Heating Co.
Megorden, Frank and Paula
In Memory of Terry Poe
The J&R Group
Wilson, Lynn
Anonymous
Anonymous
Paterson, Charles and Shirley
Heuberger Motors

Champion: \$500 - \$999

Odello, Theresa
Lewis, Bobbie and Sandy
Bailey, Robert and Jennifer
Foecking, Joseph
Tomas Montoya
Schuch, Alli and Rob
Poe, Connie
In Memory of Terry Poe
Miller, Rex and Sally
French, Diane and Richard
In Memory of Terry Poe
Bassein, Laura
In Memory of Beth Ann Bassein
Bassein, Katherine
In Memory of Beth Ann Bassein
Anonymous

Guardian: \$250 - \$499

Wolken, Tim and Veronica
Williams, Mollie
Smith, Phyllis
Marts, Todd and Jennie

Markus, Marti and Maurice
Chatham, Richard and Rene
Bernard-Wilson, Nancy and Sue
In Memory of Nancy Smith and Terry Poe
Weipert, Donn
Miner, Sara
Anonymous
Hickey, James
Bailey, Ed and Thelda

Sustainer: \$100 - \$249

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McAuliffe, Teresa

Lawrence, Erica
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Kluge, Mary and Sylvester, Ken
Jones, Gerald
In Memory of Terry Poe
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Gilbreth, Matt and Kristi
Anonymous
Frohring, Connie
Anonymous
Anonymous
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Cinlemis, Michelle

Advocate: \$51 - \$99

Wright, Jill and Chad
Prosuch, Scott and Karen
In Memory of Terry Poe
Bentley, Nancy and Atkinson, John
Jeppson, Theron
Edgar, Susan

Friend: \$1 - \$50

Young, Ann and Jim
Vogan, Carol
Anonymous
Spelman, Tim and Diane
Anonymous
Rodbaum, Steven
In Memory of Martha
Pierre, Dena
Anonymous
In Honor of Geiger-Pavri Family

Thank you to 2022 Donors

Leveille, Patricia and Denis	Kogan, Alexandra	Puente, Angela
Laybourne-Pont, Brad and Sarah	Klein, Aster	Powell, John
Hellerud, Wendy	Harry, Harry and Cecilia	Orfan, Thomas
Gertzman, Henry	Gervais, Sharon	Nelson, Phillip
Drummond, John	Garner, Beth	Meek, Suzanne
Butler, Susan	Finley, Kellen	Lowery, Magdalena
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Anonymous	Ebbs, Tara	Kittel, Bonnie
Anonymous	Day, Kari	Jackoway, Geta
Billington-Just, Denise	Cummins, Elizabeth	Huskey, Ingrid
<i>In Memory of Lou Just</i>	Bowen, Barbara	<i>In Memory of Gene Huskey</i>
Helton, Melanie	Barker, Fern	Hudson, Eddie
Alexander, Peter	Anonymous	Hansen, Nancy
Stuart, Tyler and Jessica	Somers, Eileen	Halla, Michael
Zaremba, Joanna	<i>In Memory of Terry Poe</i>	Gibson, Judy
Wooldridge, Cory	Rogers, Judy	Gardner, Dallas
Walsh, Melanie	<i>In Memory of James Rogers</i>	Edwards, Sylvia
Tipton, Maria	Anonymous	Downey, Tim
Taylor, John and Jennifer	Marsh, Pamela	Di Padova, Regina
Szalay, Missy	<i>In Honor of Eileen Somers</i>	Chansky, Suzanne
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McGuirt, Stephanie	Smith, Kristin Mae	
Matthies, Daniel	Smith, Jo Anne	
Marvin, John	Slike, Sheri	
Lor, John and Jennifer	Scofield, Debbie	
	Reher, Blake	
	Ranade, Arun	



***Donate
Today!***

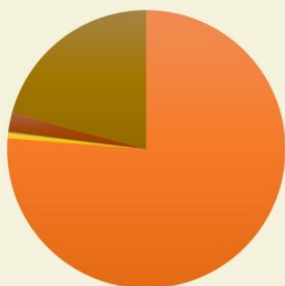
2022 Annual Snapshot

El Paso County Nature Centers Mission Statement

To connect people to their natural and cultural resources and inspire them to become stewards of the parks and our environment.

Financial Report

Revenue - \$177,274



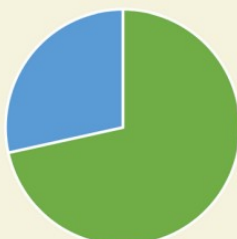
Program fees - \$136,957 Grants - \$1,080 Interest - \$247
Memberships - \$3,948 Contributions - \$37,347

Expenditures - \$131,520



Equipment/Supplies - \$9,940 Educational Programs - \$37,742
Nature Center Support - \$30,000 Fox Run Nature Center - \$13,151
Marketing - \$11,447 Memberships - \$253
Books & Subscriptions - \$402 Administrative - \$10,189
Insurance - \$2,286 Registrations & Training - \$7,115
Volunteer Program Expenses - \$4,835 Exhibits & Displays - \$4,162

Merchandise - \$5,567



Sales - \$9,239 Purchases - \$3,672



2022 Accomplishments

- **Developed** the Trailability Program that enabled those with physical limitations a chance to "take a hike" by using our off-road mobility vehicles.
- **Updated** the pollinator garden at Bear Creek with new interpretive signs, additional native plants, and improved insect hotel.
- **Created** a new exhibit at Fountain Creek that now houses a live box turtle and a bull snake (not together).
- **Designed** a new Geology field trip program at Bear Creek.
- **Established** a VIP (Visually Impaired Persons) trail using our existing Songbird Trail at Bear Creek with a device that audibly projects interpretive stops.
- **Transitioned** to electronic forms for ease of use by our participants for camp registrations and other uses.



2022 Annual Snapshot



Our Impact . . .

- **869** Nature Center Programs
23,075 Participants
- **5,324** Volunteer Hours
+\$85,000 Value
- **363** Environmental Ed. Field Trips
5,556 Students Reached
- **101** Preschool Programs
2,489 Children Reached
- **42** Birthday Parties & Room Rentals
847 Participants
- **16** Nature Camps
347 Campers
- **32** Trailability Program Participants
- **27,105** Non-Program Visitor Contacts
- **4.96** Average Rating out of 5.0
- **Staff and Volunteers**
6 Full Time Staff
2 Part Time Staff
4 Seasonal Staff
65 Volunteer Naturalists



Innovative New Programs & Events

Kite and Wind Festival
 Coco, Cookies & Comrades
 Into the Woods
 Frozen Fauna
 Live Birds of Prey
 For the Love of Nature
 SCAT! Who Dung It?
 I Spy a Nest
 Organic Vegetable Gardening
 Green is Great
 COS Women's History Walk
 ColoradoLand
 Playful Prairie Dogs
 That's Gross!
 Going on a Bear Hunt
 Egg Dyeing with Natural Dyes
 Eggsploring Eggs
 Wildflower Photography Workshop
 Nature's Music
 Rollie Pollie Roundup
 Evening Bat Quest
 Leaf it to Me
 S'mores Under the Stars
 Ghost Fish: Theater on the Trail
 Water Lantern Festival
 Winter Wildcats



Partners in the Parks

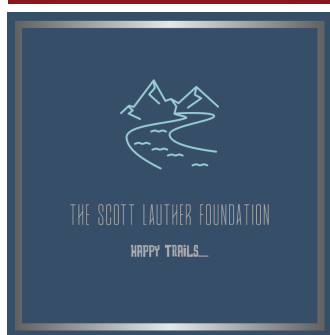


Partners in the Parks was created thirteen years ago to provide financial support for El Paso County Parks, Trails, Open Spaces, and Nature Centers. Partners donate a gift of **\$5,000 annually** for three years to provide essential operating and maintenance support. Contact Dana Nordstrom at dananordstrom@elpasoco.com to become a partner.

Partners in the Parks for Bear Creek Nature Center

Gold Hill Mesa

The Scott Lauther Foundation



*Partner in the
Parks for
Fountain Creek
Nature Center*
Olson Plumbing
& Heating Co.

Program Sponsors and Allies

Ace Face Painting
Aiken Audubon Society
Air Force Academy Falconers
American Kite Association
Angler's Covey
Anonymous Presents
Archery School of the Rockies
Bear Creek Garden Association
Bear Creek Senior Living
Broadmoor Garden Club
Black Bear Diner
Blue Line Sound
Bon Pet Supply
Boy Scout Troop 71
Boy Scout Troop 220
Buffalo Gals/ Picnic Basket
Chevy's Gumbo
Cheyenne Mountain Zoo
Classic Homes
Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum
Colorado Springs Astronomical Society
Comparion Insurance Agency/ Heidi Bowers
Colorado Springs Utilities Volunteers
Colorado Springs Visitors Bureau
Cool Science
Corrall Bluffs Alliance
Cowgirl and Kettle
Crepes-N-Go

Criterium Bike Shop
Fountain Creek Watershed Flood Control and
Greenway District
Fountain Farmers 4-H Club
Friends of El Paso County Nature Centers
Furry Friends
Garden of the Gods
Girl Scouts of Colorado
Girl Scout Troop 44213
Gold Hill Mesa
High Grade Catering
Hueberger Subaru
Jack Quinn's Running Club
Jamie Nicholas of Mighty Mindful Kids
Kids on Bikes/ Pedal Station
Kona Ice Pikes Peak
KRDO
Line-X
Medicine Wheel Trail Advocates
Meridian Service district
Mike Pach of 3 Peaks Photography & Design
Milberger Farms, Pueblo
MTB with Stacy
Mile High Bug Club
OCC Brewery
Old Town Bike Shop
Olson Plumbing & Heating Co.
Omelets etc.
Papa Murphy's Pizza, Fountain, CO
Peaceful Warriors Yoga

Peaceful Warriors Yoga
Pet Pantry
Phantom Canyon Brewing Company
Pikes Peak Beekeepers Association
Pikes Peak Community College Wild Things
Praxis Yoga
Pikes Peak Jazz & Swing Society
Pikes Peak State College
Pikes Peak State College Wild Things
Pixie Sparkles
Ranchlands – Chico Basin Ranch
Ray Weddle
Rocky Mountain Dinosaur Resource Center
Rocky Mountain Kite Association
Scott Lauther Foundation
Sovereignty Wines
Summer Lajoie of Listening Pines
Sunbelt Rentals
Theatre Across Borders
Texas Roadhouse
The Pet Gal
The Independence Center
The J & R Group
These Girls Got Beef
Tossed
Wild Birds Unlimited
Woodmen Hills
X1039
YMCA of the Pikes Peak Region

Thank You!

Recreation Services Updates

by Ryan Dorough, Recreation Program Planner

“I wonder if the snow loves the trees and fields, that it kisses them so gently? And then it covers them up snug, you know, with a white quilt; and perhaps it says, ‘go to sleep, darlings, till the summer comes again.” -Lewis Carroll. The trees may have gone to sleep, but things are starting to ramp up



Nature lovers flock to the region for the Pikes Peak Birding and Nature Festival.

around El Paso County as we begin to roll out 2023 programming. Learning a new skill is a great way to start off the new year. Our Fishing 101 class on February 17th will teach you about fishing in our local area and get you ready for the spring thaw. Emerge from winter this year by participating in the county-wide Wild Goose Chase scavenger hunt! A fun technology-driven activity that will be free to participate in for the entire month of March. One event you certainly cannot miss is the 8th Pikes Peak Birding and

Nature Festival! Early-bird registration opens March 25th. Other special events and activities coming up include night disc golf, survival courses, and the Great American Cleanup to get our public spaces looking great for summer. Stay tuned for more fun recreation events! 🐾



Explore the parks this spring during March's Wild Goose Chase



New to the Team: Education Reptiles!

by Jessica Miller, Supervisor, Fountain Creek Nature Center

Fountain Creek Nature Center is now the home of two new education reptiles! Ferdie the Bullsnake and Kéya the Ornate Box Turtle were both donated to the Nature Center and were originally born in and taken from the wild right here in El Paso County. They will live out their days in human care while performing a very noble duty - teaching visitors about their species, both of which can be found in Fountain Creek Regional Park.



Kéya the Ornate Box Turtle soaks up her new-found fame as an ambassador reptile.

Ferdie the Bullsnake is pretty shy, so when he isn't napping under his log he enjoys burrowing underground in his habitat. Bullsnares are nonvenomous and not a threat to people. In the wild they eat rodents, rabbits, and occasionally even birds, lizards, and other snakes. They are common along our trails and can grow past six feet! Ornate Box Turtles like Kéya are terrestrial, living in prairies, pastures, and open woodland unlike their aquatic cousins. They are omnivores and enjoy a variety of fruits, veggies, and bugs. A favorite food in the wild are dung beetles found in cow patties! Populations are declining due to habitat loss, road mortalities, and being taken from the wild to be pets.



Ferdie the Bullsnake scopes out his new workplace.

You can see them in their enclosures at Fountain Creek Nature Center, and you may get to meet them during some programs! Their beautiful cages are thanks to our Partners in the Park, Olson Plumbing and Heating, and the Friends of El Paso County Nature Centers supports their daily care. Perhaps one day Ferdie and Kéya will write an article for the newsletter... 🐍



Nature Camper Profile

by Kylee Taylor, Interpretive Program Coordinator, Bear Creek Nature Center

Name: Donovan Corbett
Age & Grade: 17
Years in Nature Camp: 10 (including volunteer years)

For a decade, Donovan has excitedly bounded into Bear Creek camps with an open mind and caring heart. He realized the importance of nature camp as he made new friends, learned how to be a leader among peers and a role model for young campers, and was exposed to hands-on appreciation for the environment. His favorite memory from camp was, "Playing thicket in Sherwood Forest one of the first years that I was at camp. It was such a new experience, and it gave me a greater appreciation for nature."

As his camper years ended, Donovan wasn't ready to leave Bear Creek behind, so he became a teen volunteer. "I wanted to come back because I admired and looked up to the teen volunteers when I was a camper and I wanted to help out the staff that had helped me so much as a camper."

In his free time, Donovan likes to play soccer, read, and spend time with family. This is especially evident when all the Corbett siblings arrive to volunteer for camp week after week. Donovan's future plans include studying aeronautical engineering and playing soccer at college. 🐾



Teen Camp Assistant Donovan Corbett (front left) helps connect Middle School Campers to nature

Wanted: Teen Camp Aides

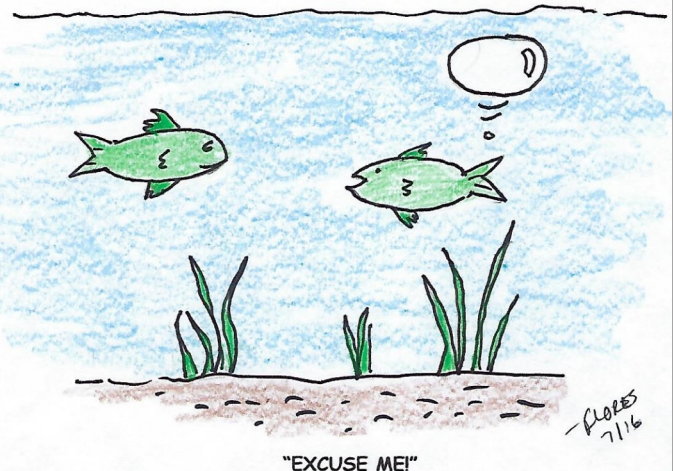
Teens 14+ are invited to help us with summer nature camps! Enjoy a week (or more!) guiding kids through nature. Contact Nature Center Supervisors for more information and applications!

Bear Creek Nature Center
Mary Jo at maryjolewis@elpasoco.com

Fountain Creek Nature Center
Jessica at jessicamiller@elpasoco.com

Applications, interviews,
and training required

Rick's Cartoon



Rick Flores is a nature center volunteer who keeps us laughing with his nature observations.



Fountain Creek Happenings

by Victoria Dinkel, Interpretive Program Coordinator, Fountain Creek Nature Center

Winter can be a challenging time of year for me. The combination of colder temperatures, fewer daylight hours, and disappearance of some wildlife is tough for someone who loves spending their free time outside and observing! Despite these challenges, winter provides the perfect opportunity for honing one's detective



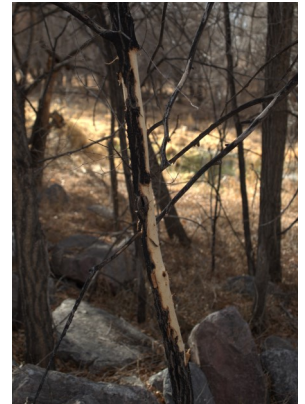
Above: Look and listen carefully to discover deer hiding in the woods.



Whose scat is that?

skills. While some animals have migrated to warmer latitudes and others have settled in for their long winter nap, there are still plenty of creatures that are around and active at Fountain Creek Nature Center; you just have to look for the clues they've left behind! Watch out for trees with bark stripped by a white-tailed buck marking their territory and preparing for rut, raccoon and bobcat tracks in the snow or mud, coyote scat along the trail, disturbed squirrel caches, and take advantage of the bare branches to find nests among the

treetops. Being a detective is fun but when I am feeling less investigative I can almost always count on seeing white-tailed deer in Magic Woods, fox squirrels chasing each other around the trees, and our winter birds watching from the feeders. What clues will you uncover the next time you visit one of our trails? 🦋



Who's been rubbing or chewing on bark?



A fox squirrel enjoys the quiet, winter trail.



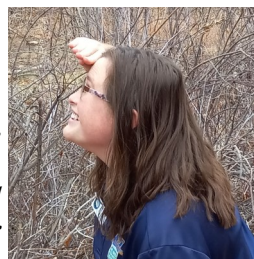
Bear Creek Sightings—The Curse of the Blue Shirts

by Brenda McCreight, Interpreter, Bear Creek Nature Center

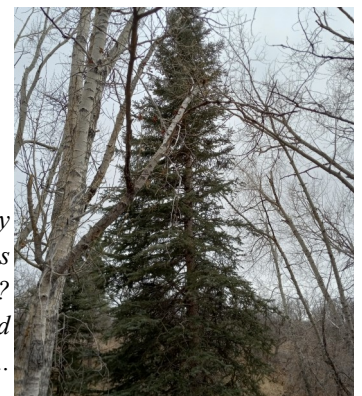
Walking into work one morning in late fall, a hiker excitedly informed me that he'd just seen twin bobcats in a tree nearby. I raced inside to grab my comrades and we jogged quickly to the tree in question. What did we see? **Nothing.** A couple of weeks later, several sets of guests created a fervor with the tale of sighting a bear along Creek Bottom. Once again, led by Mary Jo, the staff searched diligently along the trail where the guests said they saw the bear. We even went further along to make sure we didn't miss it. What did we see? **Nothing.** When several groups of walkers let us know with utmost certainty that they'd seen a big bear down near the bridge on the Regional Trail, some of us didn't even rise from our chairs. However, Kylee, Ryan, and Sherry, undaunted, went on the search. What did they see? **Nothing.** And so, the phenomena we call "The Curse of the Blue Shirts" has continued since fall. Theories abound as to why our staff never saw the interesting animals our guests report but we're hoping it doesn't last all winter. 🐾



Left: The bridge where we did NOT see a bear.



Right: Kylee searches in vain for a just-reported black bear



Right: See any bobcat kittens in this tree? Neither did we...

El Paso County Nature Centers
245 Bear Creek Rd.
Colorado Springs, CO 80906

Spring Program Highlights



Sustainability Series: Cheyenne Mountain Zoo's Black-Footed Ferret Breed & Release Program
Wednesday, March 15, 6:00-7:00 p.m.

Pikes Peak Beekeeping School
Saturday & Sunday, March 18 & 19, 8:30 - 3:45 p.m.

Nighttime Eggstravaganza at Fox Run Park
Friday, April 7, 7:45 • 8:00 • 8:15 • 8:30 p.m.

Kids Morning Out– Minecraft
Saturday, April 22, 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Ute History Education Program
Saturday, May 13, 10:00 a.m.- 1:00 p.m.



Sunset Snowshoe Hike at Fox Run Regional Park
Saturday, March 18, 6:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

Springing Back to Life
Saturday, March 25, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Chocolate Bunny Egg Hunt
Saturday, April 8, 9:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m., & 1:00 p.m.

Family Fun Day
Saturday, May 6. 10:00a.m. - 2:00p.m.

Sunset Bird Photography Workshop
Saturday, May 13, 6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Spring Recreation Highlights

Fishing 101 at Bear Creek Nature Center
Friday, February 17, 3:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m.

Wild Goose Chase Scavenger Hunt
March 1-March 31

Wilderness Survival: Thurs., May 4, 6:00-8:30 p.m.
Navigation & Maps: Thurs., April 13, 6:00-8:30p.m.
Night Disc Golf at Widefield Community Park
Wednesday April 12th, Tee off at 8:30 p.m.

www.elpasocountynaturecenters.com