

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.



Both Nature Centers Launch “Nature’s Classroom” *by Jessica Miller*

We talk a lot about adaptations in all our programs, so it makes sense that we are an adaptable group of interpreters! Due to you-know-what, schools cannot send scores of students to amazing field trips at the Nature Centers, and the Nature Centers cannot host large groups. We’ve adapted by offering our ten great field trips as a public program series called Nature’s Classroom! On our schedules are multiple opportunities for small groups to journey through Bear Creek’s foothills or Fountain Creek’s wetlands as they are taught lessons that meet various Colorado State Learning Standards for grades Pre-K through 8th grade. From history, maps and compasses, to insects, water quality, and habitats, children and their families have connected with nature and learned outside their classrooms and away from computer screens. To see which Nature’s Classroom programs are best for your family, check out our schedule and read about the field trips at

www.elpasocountynaturecenters.com.



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Nature’s Classroom engaging activities

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Recreation Services

Theresa Odello

Volunteer Consultant

Paula Megorden

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: Nancy Bernard

www.elpasocountynaturecenters.com



Why Do We Give to the Nature Centers? Featuring Janet & Jerry Bahner

An interview with Janet Bahner by Nancy Bernard

There's no support like long-term support! Janet and her late husband, Jerry Bahner, began supporting parks decades ago because, as Jerry used to say, "Once lands are gone, they're gone! Keep nature pristine!" The Bahner family has cared for parklands in multiple ways throughout the years from picking up trash, planting trees with the Optimists Club, to Jerry's service on the EPC Parks Advisory Board, participation in the Fountain Creek Nature Center Art Shows, to generous donations to the nature centers. Janet is dedicated to preserving Jerry's legacy of financial commitment to support the work of the nature centers as well as to other deserving nonprofits. The Bahners understand how vitally important the work of the nature centers is in preserving the environment for generations to come. Thank you Janet and Jerry!



Janet & Jerry Bahner

An Enduring Gift

Be like Janet and Jerry. Give a year-end gift to the Friends of El Paso County Nature Centers. Here are some ways to give:

- Donate at our website www.elpasocountynaturecenters.com, click on "Donate."
- Look for the **Year-end letter** in your mailbox, mail your check or credit card information.
- Visit the nature centers and put your donation in the donation boxes.
- For Planned Giving opportunities call Todd Marts at 520-6399.



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.

Fountain Creek's "Habitat Connections" by Andy Talley

How do you stay connected with nature and each other at times like this? Sometimes you just need to get creative. Current conditions have forced our nature centers to limit the number of participants and visitation inside the nature centers. To help maintain our connections with our visitors we have taken our programs to the trails.

Fountain Creek Nature Center staff started a new program, set out along the trails, called Habitat Connections. Staff members set up at a various spots along the trail to interact with hikers and visitors, helping them to better connect with the habitat that they are hiking through. You never know where you might find us: perhaps by the pond talking about turtles, frogs, herons, and muskrats; or along the creek next to a beaver chewed tree, interpreting these masters of engineering; maybe observing activities in the prairie dog town or making cattail boats at the marsh. Meadow, marsh, woods, creek, or pond, there are

always fascinating connections to be made with the natural residents of each habitat. If you come out to hike the nature trails at Fountain Creek Nature Center, look for a staff member in a blue shirt. We would love to connect with you and help you to make connections with one of our five beautiful habitats.



Andy Talley connecting to guests in the woods

New "Partner in the Park" for Bear Creek by Mary Jo Lewis

The *Partners in the Park* program was created in 2009 to provide financial support for El Paso County parks, trails, and nature centers. Bear Creek Nature Center has gained a new Partner in the Park this year, the Scott Lauther Foundation. Scott Lauther was a 5th generation Colorado Native who connected deeply with

the outdoors and local open spaces. It was second nature to Scott not only to spend quality time in the outdoors, but also to share his love of outdoor spaces with others. Sadly, Scott passed away in 2016. Scott's sister, Wendy, started the Foundation as a way to honor and foster a legacy for Scott by supporting causes near and dear to his heart.

Wendy explained that Bear Creek Nature Center's mission aligns well with the Foundation's aim to enhance and support outdoor locations and projects, and to cultivate appreciation and respect for the natural world. These goals were important to Scott. So far, the Scott Lauther Foundation has supported a new tracking exhibit at Bear Creek Nature Center and a new in-the-works education program that can be taught in schools, senior living facilities and other offsite locations.

Wendy describes Scott as a "friend to everyone he met" and hopes that the endeavors funded by the Foundation "bring the same joy to people that Scott did." We are truly grateful and honored to be a part of Scott's legacy and we aim to connect people to the natural world through projects that honor Scott's memory.



Mary Jo Lewis, Dana Nordstrom, Wendy Kinney & family—Scott Lauther Foundation

Volunteer Corner *by Paula Megorden, Volunteer Consultant*



Brittney Diaz, new volunteer

Once again, we extend a sincere thank you to our volunteers for your commitment to Bear Creek and Fountain Creek Nature Centers. With your help we are able to hold revised special events, offer programs for small groups, and operate the nature centers.

Several new volunteers have joined the volunteer team. **Deborah Germeroth** and **Suzanne Newell** became volunteers in February and March. New volunteers this fall are **Denise Billington-Just, Francie and Greg Brent, Jonathan Bryant, Brittney Diaz, Judy Feland, Barb Janssen, Heather McNeil, Andrew Reesman, Al Rodney and Ralph Sepulveda**. They are helping with special events and at the

information desks. We appreciate their interest in volunteering and look forward to working with them. Please check the *Program and Events* brochure for programs of interest to you. Staff is scheduling some very innovative programs, so please invite your friends and enjoy these great programs and events.

Become a Volunteer-

Anyone interested in becoming a volunteer, please contact the Volunteer Consultant at bcfevolunteers@gmail.com or either nature center.



Ralph Sepulveda, new volunteer

Recreation Roundup

by Theresa Odello, Recreation Coordinator

Autumn is a second spring when every leaf is a flower," -Albert Camus. This year I have spent more time outside watching nature's colors change as the world changes. We are lucky to still be able to share nature experiences with others through our programming. In September we shared Rainbow Falls with a group from a senior living community, and they learned about the geology and the history of the area. The group loved the experience, and so did the other over 40,000 who visited the Falls this season. Other programs at Rainbow Falls included a photography class and two yoga classes. While the historic site is officially closed for the season, keep an eye out for upcoming special winter programs at the site. With people spending more of their time outdoors, learning basic first aid is a great help when you encounter those occasional blisters and scratches. The First Aid, CPR, and AED class has been adjusted and is now a blended learning class, with participants completing an on-line portion then completing a skills demonstration at one of the nature centers. Participants, volunteers, and staff have appreciated the new format, and are glad they can get certified in a safe class environment. There are a couple of classes coming up in the winter, or if you have a group of three to four participants you can schedule your own private class. Stay tuned for more fun recreation events!



Rainbow at Rainbow Falls

Volunteer Highlight

Diane Salkovich: Spreading Enthusiasm for Nature

by Paula Megorden, Volunteer Consultant

With an interest in volunteering, Diane was drawn to El Paso County Nature Centers because she loves people and the outdoors. She enjoys the staff and volunteers, and her enthusiasm and excitement are contagious as she greets visitors and shares nature with them.

Growing up in Michigan (the “Mitten”), Diane lived near a lake surrounded by lots of woods in which to roam. She remembers a camping trip at Pictured Rocks National Seashore as a time when she noticed a feeling of connecting with the outdoors. In college she studied Industrial Administration and later worked in the automotive industry. Now she enjoys her work in the arts as Operations Manager at the Millibo Art Theatre.

Enthusiasm for travel has been a major part of Diane’s life and her travels are not done yet. Some of her adventures have taken her to Alaska, Europe, the U.S., and even new parts of Colorado Springs.

The closeness she shares with her family gets stronger as time goes by; that is probably why she enjoys seeing families at the nature centers discovering nature together. “The look in a person’s eyes when they’ve experienced a piece of nature, activity or event that sparks happiness and understanding,” and the “inquisitiveness of a child full of enthusiasm and fun,” are special experiences for her.

Thank you Diane, for spreading your enthusiasm, energy, excitement and sense of curiosity to the nature center visitors.



Diane Salkovich, enthusiastic volunteer

“On the Trail Fridays” at Bear Creek Nature Center

by Autumn Moser



Interpreter, Autumn Moser, with guests

This year has been all about finding new ways to connect with visitors. Here at Bear Creek we found a new way of connection through our “On the Trail Fridays” program. Every Friday we had a fun topic and activity planned for visitors somewhere out on the Nature Center trails. This program was completely free and offered a small sample of what we love to do. Some of the themes included: Partying with Pollinators, Birding Bash, Habitat Bingo, and Creepy Crawlies. Most were geared towards families, but we saw and welcomed visitors of all ages. Some weeks we would see 15 to 20 people while other weeks we saw upwards of 50! One of the best parts about this program was seeing all the repeat visitors who would come back week after week to see what we had next. With everything so uncertain this year, it was nice to reach out and connect with visitors on a weekly basis.

New Fall Events Safely Combat COVID Isolation

Fountain Creek: Spooky Tales Along the Trail

What's better than getting scared on Halloween? Getting scared 10 times! Fountain Creek Nature Center partnered with young, volunteer actors in the community to put on a trail



Seasonal Interpreter, Brenda

full of spooky stories. The program was the brainchild of Seasonal Interpreter, Brenda McCreight. Small groups of participants who signed up for the frightful activity, left every 15 minutes from the parking lot. A friendly spider greeted each group, prepared them for the ensuing legends and lore, and sent them on their way to encounter bone-chilling and hair-raising tales.

About 120 participants in all had a great time enjoying a sunny Halloween day. Perhaps we have started another new Halloween tradition for the community. Who knows what next year will bring? Ooh, that is a scary thought!



Volunteer storyteller at Spooky Tales

Bear Creek: Making Boo-tiful Memories

On October 23, Bear Creek Nature Center unveiled *Boo! At Bear*

Creek, a new Halloween-themed special event. Staff put their creative skills to use, not only in planning the thematic stations and décor of the event, but also in considering how to offer an event that was fun, interactive, and met all COVID-related protocol and guidelines.



Throughout the evening, small groups of participants were led by volunteer guides along a spooky trail, the leafless silhouettes of the tree branches illuminated by an almost-full moon. On their journey, they encountered costumed characters who unraveled myths about some of nature's "creepy characters" that have a prominent place in Halloween lore including spiders, bats, rats, snakes and crows. They also encountered a troll lurking under a bridge, ghouls, and even a werewolf!

This was a family-friendly event and while spooky, the goal was ultimately to educate the 100+ attendees. Evaluation comments indicated that the event was successful in that regard. When asked about what they learned, participants' responses included, "Crows can remember a face", "Bears can chomp through a bowling ball", and "Daddy long legs are arachnids but not spiders."



Ghoul roaming the woods

It is safe to say that the staff and volunteers enjoyed themselves just as much as participants and plans are already in the works for next year's Boo! At Bear Creek! We'll see you there- *If you dare!*



Fountain Creek Happenings *by Andy Talley*

November is a great time for observing White-tailed deer activity at Fountain Creek. The fawns from this spring are almost as big as the adults and can be seen hanging around in small groups with the does. The bucks are in rut and looking for a mate. This has these otherwise elusive creatures out, active, and on the run.

They even made an appearance at our recent “Scary Tales Along the Trail” on Halloween. While they were not actually scheduled performers at the event, several does and yearlings were relaxing in the woods behind one of the performance areas. They stayed quiet and were barely noticed until a large buck showed up on the scene. He put on quite a performance himself as he began chasing around the does right behind our storyteller.

That is one of the blessings and hazards of putting on a show outdoors in a nature preserve. Sometimes nature itself steals the show!



Bucks in rut caught on the critter cam



Bear Creek Sightings *by Molly Hamant*



Comically large-eared mule deer

Coming from a zoo world, my coworkers would usually scoff when I told them that deer are my favorite animal. “With all the animals in the world, you pick the deer?” they would ask and I would reply, “Absolutely.” Now imagine my joy to see a new species of deer almost daily from my office window—the mule deer.

Prior to my time at Bear Creek, I had never seen the mule deer’s characteristic scraggly coat or comically large ears. I’ve now spent a lot of time over the last few months watching our daily hooved visitors. They stand in the patches of grass directly outside my window doing what any good ungulate does—eat and eat and eat some more! I’ve watched as they grab a bunch of grass or clump of leaves from a low hanging branch and their mouths move in a circular motion as they munch and chew.

The deer are a spectacular visual of life as I’ve watched mothers with speckled babies that grow larger with each passing day. Now into November, there are large groups of does that graze along the building while pairs of bachelor bucks watch from nearby and try to impress.

I look forward to continuing to watch as the mule deer visit and continue on their circle of life. Ungulate? More like FUN-gulate!



Nature Centers Winter Program Highlights

Kids' Saturday Morning: Preparing for Winter
Saturday, December 12, 10:00 a.m.—2:00 p.m.

Winter Saturday Strolls
Every other Saturday beginning December 12

Bird House Decorating Contest
Saturday, January 16, 9:00 a.m.—Noon

Active Adults: Full Moon Walk
Thursday, January 28, 5:00-6:30 p.m.

Kids' Night Out: For the Love of Nature
Friday, February 12, 5:30-9:00 p.m.

Art to Dye For—Creation with Natural Dyes
Saturday, February 20, 10:00 a.m.—Noon

Nature's Ornaments Workshop
Saturday, December 5, 9:00—11:30 a.m.

Active Adults: Crafting a Decorative Yule Log
Saturday, December 5, 1:00 p.m.—3:30 p.m.

Save the Eagles
Saturday, January 16, 10:00 a.m.—Noon

Canvas & Cookies
Saturday, Jan. 30 & Feb. 13, 9:00 a.m.—Noon

Active Adults: An Afternoon of Native American Flute Music
Saturday, February 20, 3:00-4:30 p.m.

Trolls in the Woods STEM Competition
Saturday, February 27, 9:00 a.m. —Noon

Recreation Program Highlights

Full Moon Photography Workshop at Paint Mines Interpretive Park
Tuesday, December 29, 4:00 p.m.

Geology and History Talk at Rainbow Falls
Saturday, Jan. 9 & Feb. 20, 10:00-11:00 a.m.

First Aid, CPR, AED Class
Thursday, January 21, 6:00-7:30 p.m.

Winter Hobby Wine Competition
Entries must be submitted by February 1

Rainbow Falls Winter Waterfall Viewing
Saturday, February 6, 11:00 a.m.—3:00 p.m.

Partners in the Park



Scott Lauther Foundation

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