

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.



At home resources +	2
Volunteer Corner+	3
Volunteer Zoom	4
Projects at BCNC	5
New Staff	6-7
Projects at FCNC	7
Summer Nature Camp Updates	8
Recreation Roundup	8
Fountain Creek Happenings	9
Bear Creek Sightings	9
Summer Program Highlights	10

Staying Connected & Inspired



Todd Marts, Recreation & Cultural Services Manager

I wanted to share how great the Nature Centers' team has done with their innovative ideas to keep our audience connected online and how they have carried our mission forward to inspire! However, Facebook, emails, and the Gazette have already done a great job of spreading these connections. So instead, I want to share how the Nature Center team has connected and inspired *me*.

I hope most of you would consider me to be an optimist and typically upbeat and encouraging. I really try to share my confidence in that what we do is significant and truly makes a difference in our participants/campers/visitor's lives.

With the nature centers closed, I went in to prepare dozens of refund checks for cancelled programs and camps. I just couldn't get my head around how to get us out of this spiral. The more I thought about it, the more I focused on the negative. I headed back to my temporary home office feeling very discouraged.

When I got home, I checked the Nature Center Facebook page and saw some of the brightest professionals in our field. Mary Jo and her husband doing a puppet show, Nancy sharing her spot in her backyard, and Jessica making suet in her kitchen and pajamas. Ellie and Theresa had been putting the nature center resources on the website and sharing them. I heard from an out-of-state relative that these resources were being used and shared well beyond our local audience. The final rung in my ladder out of the dumps was the note from a mother who thanked us for the efforts and included a photo of her kids sitting on the floor watching Mary Jo's puppet show on a laptop.

I am now convinced beyond a doubt that we will return stronger and more committed than ever. If you have not already checked out the online videos and resources, please do so and share them. But if you do nothing else, please thank Mary Jo, Nancy, Jessica, Theresa, Ellie, Autumn and Andy for their outstanding commitment, innovative thinking, and positive attitudes in this troubling time. I know I am!



A Little Quarantine Humor...

Q: How many miles per gallon are you getting these days?

A: Three weeks to the gallon!~

- They said that a mask and gloves were enough to go to the grocery store. They lied, everyone else had clothes on. ~
- 2020 is a unique year. It has 29 days in February, 30 days in March, and 10 years in April! ~



EXECUTIVE BOARD

*Friends of El Paso County
Nature Centers*

President

Anne Schofield

Vice President

Donn Weipert

Secretary

Diane French

Treasurer

Lynn Wilson

At Large members

Sally Miller

René Chatham

Meg Poole

STAFF

Division Manager

Todd Marts

BCNC Supervisor

Mary Jo Lewis

Interpretive Prog. Coord.

Ellie Hopkins-Brown

FCNC Supervisor

Nancy Stone Bernard

Interpretive Prog. Coord.

Jessica Miller

Recreation Coordinator

Theresa Odello

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

elpasocountynaturecenters.com



At Home Activities, Resources & Reminders *by Andy Talley, FCNC Interpreter*

In these days of “Stay-at-Home” recommendations, it is important to remember that Stay at Home does not necessarily mean “Stay in the House.” The great outdoors is still a safe and healthy place to be as long as you keep at least the recommended physical distancing of at least 6 feet from other people. Get out! Many of our local hiking trails are still open. When visiting public parks or trails, remember to give other people their proper space and keep in mind that restrooms and other such amenities may not be available. Plan accordingly.

Your own backyard or local park (not the playground equipment!) can be a great resource for natural adventures. Explore these places with new eyes. Now is the time to get to know your neighborhood and backyard wildlife.

- Make a bird feeder and make a record of its visitors.
- Observe an ant hill.
- Capture some pictures of your backyard wildlife.
- Begin a backyard nature journal or phenology notebook.
- Take a backyard mini-hike! Explore a 3’ section with magnifying lenses; use containers for storing treasures, and a notebook and pencil to record or sketch your findings.

For more ideas on activities to do in your backyard visit our

Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/BearFountainCreekNatureCenters/> and **El Paso County Nature Centers website:**

<https://communityservices.elpasoco.com/nature-centers/nature-center-videos-activities-and-resources/>

External Resources

ACTIVITIES, LEARNING RESOURCES, AND LESSON PLANS

<https://cpw.state.co.us/thingstodo/Pages/KidsFamilyLearnParks.aspx>

<https://www.nps.gov/kids/junior-rangers.htm>

https://rangerrick.org/?_ga=2.217490325.2046165259.1584717122-1328690130.1584717122

<https://www.neefusa.org/education/environmental-education-home>

<https://www.audubon.org/get-outside/activities/audubon-for-kids>

<https://www.birds.cornell.edu/k12/get-started/>

These are unusual and challenging times for many of us and we hope you enjoy these resources. Thankfully, we do not need to distance ourselves from the beauty and healing of the natural world. May the trails and open spaces of El Paso County Parks and Nature Centers bring you solace and peace!



Volunteer Corner *by Paula Megorden, Volunteer Consultant*

Three new volunteers are ready to welcome visitors and get involved with programming and events at the nature centers. Our newest volunteers are **Tristan Benoit, Debbie Germeroth, and Suzanne Newell.**

Thank you for choosing to volunteer at El Paso County Nature Centers.

Annual Volunteer Recognition Night—Recognition will be rescheduled. We are eager to recognize and celebrate those who completed **40 or more hours of volunteer service**, to include **13 individuals who contributed over 100 hours**, and **eight volunteers who contributed over 200 hours** during 2019. The nature centers are very fortunate to have these amazing volunteers and we extend our sincere appreciation and gratitude to them.

Training—Environmental Education Training will also be rescheduled. Shorter sessions throughout the year for new volunteers interested in becoming school program leaders are planned in addition to interpretive training. When dates and times have been determined, information will be circulated by the nature centers.

Become a Volunteer—Anyone interested in becoming a volunteer please contact, Paula Megorden, the Volunteer Consultant at bfcvolunteers@gmail.com or either nature center. 🐾

Farewell Shirley, Hello Lynn!



Shirley Gipson

The Friends of El Paso County Nature Centers regrettably bids farewell to a long-time member, volunteer, friend and advocate for the nature centers. Shirley and Royce Gipson will depart Colorado Springs for their next chapter. Shirley is the Executive Board Treasurer for the second time during her 17 years as a remarkable, do-it-all volunteer. She also served as President, Vice President of the Friends Board and on the Parks Advisory Board for six years. What an incredible amount of devotion to our nature centers and the community!

She recalls many memories, “a night hike with no flashlights and seeing a porcupine in a tree during Family Fun Day. So much has changed in 17 years and both centers have grown. I am grateful to have had the experience to learn and work with such wonderful people. Oh, and I won’t forget having a python wrapped around my shoulders.”

We are delighted to welcome Lynn Wilson as the new Treasurer, a volunteer with many contributions to both nature centers over the past eight years. She helped create temporary exhibits for Bear Creek Nature Center. Her favorite activities are Kids’ Nights Out, the Bear Run and Night Hikes.

Lynn says, “I am honored to support the nature centers’ mission from behind the scenes as Treasurer. I will miss Shirley. She and I worked together with numerous school groups and day camps, and she and her husband are my Manitou neighbors! I wish them the best in their next adventures!”

Farewell Shirley. We extend our greatest appreciation and utmost gratitude to you for sharing so many years with us. Lynn, thank you for becoming our new treasurer. 🐾



Lynn Wilson

Zooming in to Connect with Our Volunteers



The Nature Center Staff missed our wonderful volunteers so much, we had our first virtual gathering on Zoom technology on Friday, April 17. If you are a volunteer and missed this opportunity you can see from the screen shot above (thank you Rachel Salpeter-Levy!) that we had a great time. It was clear to us all how much we enjoy and miss each other and the work we do with the public.

Staff gave updates on the virtual and video work and planning being done by the interpreters and we discussed our hope for and desire to be back at work safely at the nature centers. We know there are many unknowns, but Todd assured us all that we would take the proper precautions and that staff will be very innovative to carry out our mission to:

**CONNECT PEOPLE TO THEIR NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES
AND INSPIRE THEM TO BE STEWARDS OF THE
PARKS AND OUR ENVIRONMENT.**



Due to COVID-19, the cancellation of field trips and programs means that the steady stream of funds to Friends of the Nature Centers has dried up. You can easily donate to keep our funds flowing at <https://communityservices.elpasoco.com/nature-centers/>. Just click on “Donate.” Donations are tax deductible. Thank you for your continued support!

On-going Projects at Bear Creek *by Mary Jo Lewis*

“We might think we are nurturing our garden but of course it’s our garden that is really nurturing us.” - Jenny Uglow

This spring, Bear Creek Nature Center will add to the beauty and the habitat value of the space surrounding the nature center building with updated and improved gardens. The Broadmoor Garden Club recently awarded a generous grant to the center for garden improvements. This grant, combined with funds from El Paso County and Friends of El Paso County Nature Centers, will bring this project to fruition.

We hope that the new gardens will not only beautify the space surrounding the nature center, but also increase the habitat value for pollinators, birds and other species. We aim to take a “whole system” approach to gardening with our plant selections. This includes choosing important host plants for native moths and butterflies to lay their eggs on, important food source plants for insects and local birds, and plants to provide shelter for birds and other species.

We also hope that the gardens will educate and inspire visitors. Plans include a demonstration area that will identify some easy-to-grow local native plants. Hopefully visitors will walk away with new ideas about how they can create beautiful healthy habitats in their own backyard spaces.

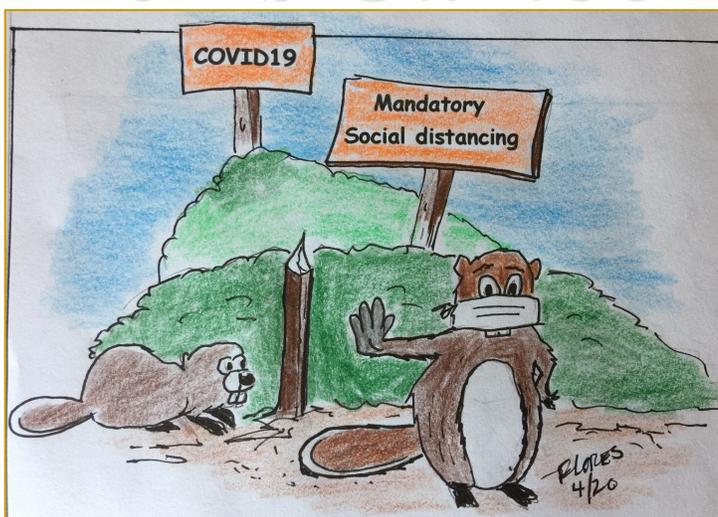
We look forward to beginning this labor of love and seeing how it will nurture us and the wildlife residents of Bear Creek Nature Center!



Site of demonstration gardens area at BCNC

Rick's Cartoon

COVID-19 vs. CORVID-19 (Humor)



Rick Flores is an Interpretive Volunteer for the nature centers, who keeps us laughing!

Corona virus is COVID-19, not CORVID-19. A corvid is a member of the crow family. 19 crows are probably not gathering to kill you. But if they are...it’s truly a murder!

Credit: National Association for Interpretation, Interpretive Naturalist Section, Spring 2020

Corvids are a group of birds that include ravens, crows, and jays. They are fascinatingly social and are eco-engineers who cache and spread seeds through a behavior called scatter-hoarding. They help colonize many oaks and pines.



New, Permanent Interpreters! *by Nancy Bernard & Mary Jo Lewis*

Andrew Talley

Fountain Creek Nature Center is pleased to welcome Andrew Talley to the team. Andy comes from Illinois with a Bachelor's degree in Biology from Lewis University in Romeoville, IL. He and his wife, Madonna, met on a wilderness canoeing trip in the Boundary Waters of Canada and Minnesota. After 10 years with the Forest Preserve District of Will County and retiring from 20 years with the McHenry County Conservation District as an Environmental Educator and living on site, he and his wife, Madonna, had to explore new living arrangements. Since their youngest son and family had recently moved to Colorado Springs, and having visited the Colorado mountains and loved them, Colorado is where they chose to land! Two of his career highlights thus-far are the summer camp programs he led and established, and his own development as a professional storyteller, creating a character, Andre St. Pierre, based on the early French trappers of Illinois. When asked about his perspectives on changes in Environmental Education over the years, he replied that, "Now the focus is more on stewardship than conservation, and it is harder to make connections with students in the technology age who may be reluctant to go outside. We have to work harder to make connections for them." We look forward to the connections that Andy will make using his special talents!



Autumn Moser



Bear Creek Nature Center is thrilled to announce that the new position has been filled with a returning staff member! Autumn Moser served as a 5-month Seasonal Interpreter at Bear Creek in 2019. Autumn's can-do attitude, strong work ethic and great rapport with people make her a wonderful fit for this role.

Autumn has a BA in Geography & Environmental Studies from the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. Her work experiences prior to Bear Creek Nature Center include Helen Hunt Falls, Starsmore Visitor Center and Cheyenne Mountain State Park. She has worked in visitor services at these locations as well as leading hikes and educational programs.

When asked what aspects of the job she is excited about, Autumn explains, "I look forward to helping people learn about the natural world and all the amazing ways it can be explored. I am excited to use my creativity and passion in long-term projects that will inspire others in the future. Also, I really missed the staff and volunteers when I left last season so I am excited to be able to continue building those friendships!" The nature center is already reaping the rewards of Autumn's creativity and we are thrilled to have her on-board as a permanent member of the team!



On-going Projects at Fountain Creek *by Nancy Bernard*



*New taxidermy Great Horned Owl
Photo credit Birdman Studios, Trinidad, CO*

Fountain Creek Nature Center will be the recipient of a beautiful new Great Horned Owl that will grace the walls of the Exhibit Room hopefully very soon. What is the story behind this new addition? Colorado Springs resident and conservation champion, Ann Young, was walking her property of scrub oak and ponderosa pine habitats when she found this beautiful specimen laying in her meadow. Sadly she noted that it was in perfect shape and wondered what had happened. She called around to find a “home” for it and was ultimately connected with Mary Jo at Bear Creek Nature Center. Mary Jo knew that one of the goals at Fountain Creek this year was to

update and expand the animal mounts in the Exhibit Room. Ann was willing to donate the owl and even better, she was willing to donate all the fees, which are considerable, for it to be preserved. Staff found a skilled bird taxidermist (which wasn't easy!) in Trinidad, CO, called Birdman Studios. The owl was kept frozen in the freezer at BCNC until Nancy could arrange for an overnight FedEx shipment of the owl to Birdman Studios. The owl arrived in perfect condition and you can see from the photo above it looks spectacular! Birdman Studios has agreed to keep it until such time Nancy can pick it up. We are sad that this beautiful raptor lost her life, but thankful that her beautiful body will educate and engage visitors for decades to come. Ann said, “Children are key. Whatever we can do to inspire them are key to the preservation and conservation of wildlife for the future.” Thank you Ann Young!



Rainbow Falls Park Interpreters/Caretakers

There are some great people taking care of Rainbow Falls Historic Site. Meet Robyn and Curt Elliot. Robyn, a native of Colorado Springs, is an active artist on the Westside. Together the two operate a small business focusing on wheel thrown and hand-built pottery. With a background in teaching adults and secondary students, Robyn taught science education for multiple years in the fields of Earth Science, Geology, Biology and Environmental Education. She has gained a deep appreciation for the beauty of our mountains, trails, unique geology and abundant wildlife. Our other Caretaker, Curt, was a teacher in public schools, the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind, and a counselor for State Vocational Rehabilitation. Sharing the history of our region with visitors and putting past events into today's context comes naturally to him. With the support of his wife and two Great Danes, he continues to create and sell their hand made pottery in galleries found in Manitou Springs and Old Colorado City.



*Curt and Robyn Elliot—spouses,
interpreters, caretakers*

Have you been to Rainbow Falls Historic Site within the last two years? There have been many changes that you need to see! One of the most impressive is the graffiti removal from all the rocks in the area, and the place looks great. Another new addition are two interpretive signs: one addressing the history of the falls and the other discussing the geologic significance of the area. Of course, due to COVID-19, currently Rainbow Falls is closed but we hope to open as soon as restrictions are lifted. For updates check elpasocountyparks.com.



TO COMBAT THE COVID-19 VIRUS, ALL PROGRAMS ARE TENTATIVE. PLEASE CALL OR CHECK THE WEBSITE TO CONFIRM PROGRAMS BEFORE ATTENDING OR REGISTERING.



Bear Creek Nature Camp Plans

We are SO close to nature camp! We have a lot of fun new activities to keep campers active and excited to learn about the world around them. First up will be geology camp, where campers will study fossils, be WOW-ed by fluorescent rocks and go on a hike to an ancient “beach.” Next is our parading pollinators camp, where we will make seed bombs for pollinator gardens and put on a parade to help spread the word about our pollinating friends. Middle school campers will practice their skills at the archery range and learn how to find their way using a map & compass for an epic scavenger hunt. Finally, our half-day camp will have campers knee-deep in their favorite part of the nature center—Bear Creek! Together we’ll play water games, create water crafts, conduct watery experiments, and do our best getting soaked & silly in the process. We look forward to enjoying it with you!



Fountain Creek Nature Camp Plans



Next Generation Naturalists will fight the fear and find friends through exploration of the tiniest and creepiest critters, along with a new “Sound Discovery” activity in three habitats. Cattail Kids at Fountain Creek and at Fox Run Regional Park will get muddy, fishy, buggy, and stinky while learning new outdoor skills in the woods and at the ponds. Wild Child Adventures (middle school students) will explore the Six Arts of Tracking, have new daily team challenges, hear about diverse outdoor careers from super duper professionals, make natural campcrafts, plus have a raft challenge at the end of the week! Eco Engineers will find out what animals in addition to humans have the greatest impact on their environment from prairie dogs to beavers. The best parts of camps are songs, crafts, games, time exploring the Magic Woods, and raising our awareness of the natural world around us together. Hope to see you soon!



Recreation Services Round-up *by Theresa Odello, Recreation Coordinator*

Just as the Pasqueflowers started peeping out of the ground, April snow covered the region. Even though it seems to happen every year, many people are craving the spring season and are greatly looking forward to going outside and resuming our outdoor activities. Pineries Open Space is a new place to visit that will be opening this summer. In February, Recreation Services led a walk of the area in partnership with TOSC and enjoyed learning about the open space and the reforestation work that has been done to re-grow the park after the Black Forest Fire. As we look forward to the summer, be sure to check out the Concerts in the Park at El Paso County Parks, including Wednesday night jazz concerts at Bear Creek Regional Park, and concerts at Fox Run Regional Park and Homestead Ranch Regional Park. If you have little ones, don’t miss the Tiny Tot Games on June 27, which will introduce a variety of sports geared for children ages 2 to 6 years old. Stay tuned for more fun recreation events!





Fountain Creek Happenings *by Jessica Miller, FCNC Program Coordinator*

Once again, my nature report from Fountain Creek is about birds of prey. I'm definitely biased towards birds, but also, our birds of prey seem to be always showing off! I've been working from home, but I've needed to pop into the nature center a few times, and each time I do, the Cooper's hawks have been impossible to miss. I spotted this female Cooper's hawk last week just north of the nature center. She was posing so wonderfully that I began to video her, then the male flew into the shot and copulated with her! He then posed on the branch to her left, and the view I received was perfect to see the identifying characteristics of Cooper's hawks as well as the size difference between sexes. Cooper's hawks are accipiters, or forest hawks, and have shorter wings and longer tails that enable them to move nimbly and quickly through wooded areas to catch their favorite prey, songbirds. A few days later when I visited again, they were both flying back and forth in the woods and over the milkweed meadow, calling frequently. Watch for a fast gray hawk with a striped tail, reddish breast, and dark gray cap next time you visit the Cattail Marsh Wildlife Area.



Most male birds of prey are smaller than the females. Can you tell who's who?



Bear Creek Sightings *by Ellie Hopkins-Brown, BCNC Program Coordinator*



Mourning cloak butterfly posing on Ellie!

One of the most exciting sightings I've had this spring has been of butterflies! I've seen them chasing one another through the skies, resting on tree branches, and excitedly congregating on the bluestem willow buds along Bear Creek. It would appear, however, that the butterflies did not get our physical distancing memo: one decided to take a rest on my hat, likely seeing the colors and perhaps thinking it was going to find some lunch (nectar)! The butterfly in this image is a mourning cloak butterfly, the most common mariposa species you'll see at the start of spring in Colorado. Rather than die off before winter or migrate to warmer climates, the mourning cloak butterfly hibernates in place for the cold season, finding shelter in tree cavities or beneath loose bark. The adult mourning cloak butterflies you'll see at the start of spring can be as much as 10 months old and are likely just as thrilled as we are to finally welcome spring!





To combat COVID-19 all programs are tentative. Please call or check on-line for up to date information about programs.

Nature Center Summer Program Highlights

Same Tree Different Day

Tuesday, June 9, 6:30 p.m.

Geology of Bear Creek & Pikes Peak Region

Saturday, June 20, 9:00 a.m.- 12:00 p.m.

Full-Day Adventure at Bear Creek

Thursday, July 2, 9:00 a.m.- 3:00 p.m.

About the Trout of Bear Creek for All Ages

Saturday, July 25, 10:00 a.m.- 12:00 p.m.

Active Adults: Hike & History of the Greenback Cutthroat Trout

Saturday, August 8, 8:30 a.m.- 12:30 p.m.

Honey Harvest Extraction Demonstration

Saturday, August 29, 10:00 a.m.- 1:00 p.m.

Jr. Bird Club-Nesting

Saturday, June 20, 8:00-11:00 a.m..

Grandfather Cottonwood's Birthday Party

Saturday, June 20, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Annual Firefly Celebration & Night Hike

Friday, July 3, 7:30-9:00 p.m.

Reptile Roundup

Saturday, July 18, 9-10:30 a.m.

Jr. Bird Club-Bluestem Prairie Open Space

Saturday, August 22, 8:00-11:00 a.m.

Monarch Magic

Saturday, August 29, 10:00-11:30 a.m.

Recreation Program Highlights

First Aid for Outdoor Kids, Fox Run

Regional Park, Saturday, June 6, 9:00-10:30 a.m.

Tiny Tot Games, Bear Creek Regional Park

Saturday, June 27, 10:00 a.m.—12:00 p.m.

Family Hiking Safety, Fox Run Regional

Park, Saturday, August 1, 9:00-10:30 a.m.

Cornhole Tournament, Fountain Creek

Regional Park, Saturday, August 29, 10:00 a.m.



To combat the COVID-19 Virus, the Festival Committee has made the difficult decision to cancel the 2020 festival. While we are anxious for the opportunity to celebrate spring bird migration and our wonderful outdoors in the Pikes Peak Region, it is better done on your own while practicing safe physical distancing and restrictions.

We are excited to announce the dates for 2021. Please mark your calendar for

May 21-23, 2021.

www.pikespeakbirdingandnaturefestival.org

For up to date info and a full listing of Summer programs visit

www.elpasocountynaturecenters.com