

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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A Fitting Tribute *by Mary Jo Lewis, BCNC Supervisor*



New bubbling rock feature in the Bear Creek nature Center garden

In the past year, Bear Creek Nature Center has continued to upgrade the pollinator garden areas surrounding the building. Since the garden updates began in 2020, staff hoped to add a water feature. We researched and discussed different water feature possibilities that would increase the beauty of the gardens while providing a beneficial water source for birds, bees, and other pollinators. Funding was a limiting factor to bringing this goal to fruition.

At the end of last year, we were approached by Ned Aldrich. Ned's mother Nancy McInnes was a former volunteer at Bear Creek Nature Center and Ned and her other sons Jeff and Brian hoped to make a donation for a project in Nancy's honor and memory. Ned thought a bubbling rock water feature would be an ideal way to honor Nancy.

Nancy was a professional photographer with a special affinity for animals. She traveled extensively for her photography and has had pictures published in National Geographic and Ranger Rick. Nancy used to share her talent and passion with the community by leading photography workshops at Bear Creek Nature Center.

The bubbling rock feature was installed in the nature center gardens this summer. It adds a peacefulness to the gardens and refreshes the many birds, butterflies and other beneficial creatures that stop for a drink or to take a dip in its waters.

How fitting of a tribute to a woman who had a keen eye for beauty and a big heart for earth's creatures.

Thank you to Nancy for her support of Bear Creek Nature Center and thank you to her sons for allowing her legacy to benefit Bear Creek Nature Center's human and wildlife visitors. 🐾



Nancy's sons with the new feature. L to R Brian, Jeff, Ned

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Summer Camp Assistants

by Jessica Miller and Molly Hamant Takeute



Emily Randolph

Fountain Creek Nature Center is pleased to have Emily Randolph on board this summer as our Camp Assistant! Emily has a BA in English from James Madison University. She grew up in Richmond, VA but her heart (her family) is in Marin County California. Emily’s past experiences with action, writing, and kids have prepared her for her role now. She’s worked as an editor at USA Triathlon, a trainer at a boxing gym, a counselor at multiple summer camps, a blog writer for a tech startup, and a script writer for a sports show on YouTube. “I like getting to see kids gain a new appreciation for something they learned. It’s always fun to see kids getting their hands dirty, literally, and get excited about being outside and away from screens. When Emily isn’t watching the monarch caterpillars munch or the great blue heron hunt, she enjoys hiking, gravel biking, obsessing over the USWNT, creating reasons for parties so she can smash a pinata, singing Taylor Swift very loudly, sunset chasing, and trail running during thunderstorms. 🐾

Bear Creek Nature Center was THRILLED to bring back on board Hailey Robe as our 2021 Camp Assistant. If you’re thinking, “hmm I’ve seen her before”, you’d be absolutely right! Hailey joined us as our 2020 Camp Assistant and had been a volunteer prior to that. Hailey will enter her final semester at University of Colorado Boulder this fall to earn her Bachelor of Environmental Studies. After graduation, Hailey hopes for a future in arctic or alpine research and conservation. We know that she’ll make it big! When not working or studying, Hailey enjoys paddle boarding, chilling with her pups, or eating ice cream.



Hailey Robe

Hailey’s favorite part about being on the nature center team is meeting lots of people, connecting them with nature, and learning something new every day—on the day I interviewed Hailey for this article, she figured out that it would take a snail 71 minutes to walk (scooch?) from one end of the Bear Den to the other! She enjoys Nature Camps because she gets to really connect with a group of young naturalists and build on a theme throughout a week. When asked what animal she would like to be, Hailey quickly replied “A Bear. I could eat and sleep all day!”. We also see a bear’s keen intellect, passion for others (in a bear’s case, their family), and love for the natural world in Hailey. We’ll always be glad you were a part of BEAR Creek Nature Center! 🐾

Summer Seasonal Interpreter at Fountain Creek

by Andy Talley

Brendan joined the Fountain Creek Nature Center team as a Seasonal Program Interpreter in May of 2021. He came to us well prepared to help with our summer camps and public programs. After graduating from East Stroudsburg University with a degree in Recreation Management, he worked an internship with Oakland County Parks in eastern Michigan. He has also worked Park Ranger positions in Utah and South Carolina and as a Nature Center Program Specialist at Edisto Beach State Park in South Carolina.

Brendan moved to Colorado in November of 2020 for the outdoor recreation opportunities that abound here. Just before joining the El Paso County Parks, he worked as a seasonal Ranger at John Martin Reservoir State Park.

Brendan is thrilled to be part of the team here and we are thrilled to have him. When he is not working at Fountain Creek, Brendan enjoys fishing, hiking, and watching soccer. 🐾



Brendan Westley

Volunteer Corner by Paula Megorden, Volunteer Consultant

Please welcome our newest volunteers, Rani Almuti, Nancy Bernard, Lyn Myers and Deborah Webb. They are joining an amazing and dedicated group of people who are truly an asset to the nature centers. All of our volunteers are greatly appreciated!

A Continuing Education program, “The Wildflowers of Summer”, was held on July 24th in the foothills of Bear Creek. Volunteers received two hours of training credit as they viewed the show plants have put on this summer. More Continuing Education is planned for later this year.

Volunteers interested in leading environmental education programs are welcome to shadow programs. Contact the nature center staff to find out dates and times. Please check the *Program and Events* brochure for programs of interest to you. Staff is scheduling some very innovative programs so feel free to enjoy.



*Friends of El Paso County Nature Centers
are all smiles after a wildflower walk*

Become a Volunteer - contact the Volunteer Consultant at bcfcvolunteers@gmail.com or either nature center. 🐾

Nature Camp Memories



I wish I had signed my kid up for more than one week. She loved it! The schedule was perfect, and the staff was amazing!
~ Parent



Truly the best camp for our child! There is nothing better than knowing he is spending the day in nature, learning about animals, and cultivating a love for the outdoors. The staff and volunteers are the absolute best! Thank you!
~ Parent



I cannot say enough good things about this camp! Cost effective, absolutely wonderful and communicative staff, our first grader had the best time! Will be back!
~ Parent

I loved learning about the environment. They do such fun crafts. People are always there when I need them. Oh and going in the creek was so much fun! I found rocks.
~ Nature Camper



Nature Camp Memories



You guys always do such a wonderful job and my son always comes home happy. It would be great if the camp days were longer. He just loves it! ~ Parent



Thank you for continuing COVID precautions since kids are not vaccinated. ~ Parent



My son enjoys the games and fun experience learning about nature. ~ Parent



This is one of her favorites; [she] loves the staff and being outdoors. ~ Parent

He is more aware of his impact on the outdoors and environment. He had a wonderful time! ~ Parent



Love the topics, time in nature, and teaching methods! You inspired my son to stop keeping wild bugs in captivity. Thank you! ~ Parent



Recreation Round-Up *by Theresa Odello, Recreation Coordinator*



A Concert at Fox Run Regional Park

Now is the time to enjoy the last of the summer weather! Personally, I've been enjoying this summer by spending my time exploring new hiking trails (with shade), enjoying concerts in the park (in the shade), and spending time on my swing with a tall lemonade (in the shade). But as you know, the heat can't stop us from providing fun summer events!

Archery Camp was seven weeks of success, with each camp totally full of participants ranging from 5 to 53 years old.

Concerts in the Park has been very successful this summer, offering 16 different concerts at Bear Creek Regional Park, Fox Run Regional Park, and Homestead Ranch Regional Park. This year offered a variety of music, including jazz, rock,

country, funk, bluegrass, pop and more. We were very lucky to receive sponsorships from Classic Homes, Sanctuary Pointe, and Line-X for our Fox Run concerts.

Rainbow Falls Historic Site has had a very busy summer averaging about 400 people per day, and we offered programs such as a Geology Walk and a Volunteer weed removal Day. Rainbow Falls will be open on Saturdays and Sundays between 10am and 4pm and will close for the winter in November.

As we look forward to the fall, some programs include Opt Outside Black Friday Hike, Take a Kid Mountain Biking Day, Photography at Rainbow Falls, and more First Aid/CPR/AED classes. Stay tuned for more fun recreation events! 🐦



Fountain Creek Happenings

by Brendan Westley, Seasonal Interpreter



A monarch butterfly rests on rabbitbrush

The weather is warm and activity around Fountain Creek is bustling. As you take a stroll along the nature loop trail, it would be almost impossible not to notice the large (and beautiful) number of milkweeds growing. On these big colorful plants that leak bitter white ooze, you may find all sorts of insects. Thankfully, one of the most common insects we have been seeing around the milkweeds near the nature center are the monarch butterflies and monarch caterpillars!

Come August, the milkweed meadow on the Fountain Creek Nature Center loop should be flooded with Monarch Butterflies. As the Monarchs migrate south to Mexico, they will lay eggs on milkweed, and thankfully Fountain Creek milkweeds are a hot ticket. Once the eggs hatch, monarch caterpillars will feast upon the milkweed plants. After, the caterpillars will form into a chrysalis, and hatch into the lovely monarch butterfly. Our campers have also been spotting lots of eggs, caterpillars, and butterflies! It certainly adds excitement to what we can all look forward to this coming September. Just as sure as "where there is water, there is life", it can also be said that "where there is milkweed, there is monarch". 🐦

Volunteer Highlight

Kara Laszczyk: Hooked on Parks and Nature Centers

by Paula Megorden, Volunteer Consultant

After moving to Colorado Springs with her family, Kara connected with a local group of moms that walk at Fountain Creek Regional Park. Fountain Creek and Bear Creek became a favorite walking and birding destination for Kara and her son Luke. She was hooked! As a volunteer, she could give back to the community and share her love of nature with others.

A California native, Kara looks forward to new adventures that await her in Colorado. She has lived throughout the West- Idaho, Nevada, and Utah. Someday she hopes to experience the East Coast. Her recent travels have taken her to the Gulf Coast and the Padre Islands where she and her son added 25 birds to their life lists.

Who would guess that a mechanical engineer would enjoy jumping into a beaver or bear suit? Kara is eager to fill any volunteer opportunity that comes her way. Helping with nature camp at Bear Creek she watched the excitement of campers exploring and discovering macro-invertebrates in the creek. Early one morning, she was thrilled to see her own children excited about observing two beavers swimming in Fountain Creek. “Since becoming an active volunteer, I have learned so much! I love interacting with the visitors, especially the kids. Kids are full of so much imagination and wonder.”

She proclaims, “Whether it’s answering questions at the front desk, or dressing up as a beaver, bear, or bunny, I love volunteering!” Thank you, Kara, for sharing your excitement and love for nature with the visitors. 🐾



Kara can do it all!



Bear Creek Sightings by Mary Jo Lewis, Nature Center Supervisor

Strolling along the trails of Bear Creek Nature Center this summer, you may notice an interesting plant with seeds that resemble...tails? Feathers? Curly-cues of some sort? It is the Mountain mahogany shrub. Bear Creek Nature Center’s foothills are prime habitat for this plant, which is not a true mahogany, but belongs to the rose family. Mountain mahogany inhabits environments that are unfriendly for most other tall plants- rocky, gravelly slopes with little water and abundant sun. The fuzzy “tails” you see attached to the fruits help with wind dispersal. Once the seeds land in the dry, rocky soil, isn’t it challenging for them to grow? There is more to these wispy little seeds than meets the eye! When they become moist, they straighten out and as they dry, they curly-cue back up, creating a corkscrew effect into the ground over time. How well-adapted they are to their challenging environment! To me, this natural phenomenon is a great reminder about finding creative ways through obstacles! 🐾



Mountain Mahogany waves its “tails” in the air like it just don’t care.

Partners in the Parks for EPC Nature Centers



Thank you to our generous Happy Trails 2021 sponsors! Stay tuned for the full report from the event in the next issue!



Sovereignty Wines
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Buffalo Gals
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Fall Recreation Highlights

Rick's Cartoon

Rainbow Falls Geology and History Talk

Friday, September 10, 9:00 a.m.

Rainbow Falls Geology Walk

Saturday, September 18, 8:30 a.m.

Take a Kid Mountain Biking Day

Saturday, October 2, 9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Photography Opportunity at Rainbow Falls

Monday, October 11, 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Scarecrow Contest

Saturday, October 30, 4:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Opt Outside Black Friday Hike

Friday, November 26, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.



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

Fall Nature Program Highlights



Mindfulness Photography Workshop

Saturday, September 18, 3:00-5:00 p.m.

Sketching Autumn's Bounty

Saturday, September 25, 9am-11am

Fall Harvest Festival at Gold Hill Mesa to benefit Bear Creek Nature Center

Saturday, October 9, 11:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Boo! At Bear Creek!

Friday, October 22, 6:00-9:00 p.m.

Bear Creek Nature Center's 7th Annual Bear Run; Fun Run & Walk Fundraiser

Saturday, November 13, 10:00 a.m.



Girl Scout Badge Event

Saturday, September 19, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.

Active Adults: Gourd Art Workshop

Saturday, September 25, 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Kids' Morning Out: Invasive Intruders!

Saturday, October 2, 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Canvas & Cookies: Teen Painting & Nature Class

Saturday, October 9, 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Pumpkin Carving Party

Saturday, October 30, 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Forest Therapy for the Immobile

Saturday, November 13, 10:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.