

# 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.*



Volunteer Highlight	2
Why We Give	3
Fountain Creek Sightings	4
Bear Creek Happenings	4
Celebrating Sustainably	5
Recreation Roundup	6
Fox Run Nature Center Update	6-7
Volunteer Corner	7
Rick's Cartoon	8
Fall Program Highlights	8

## Birding at Fountain Creek Nature Center

by Jessica Miller



I may be biased, but Fountain Creek Nature Center and Regional Park is the best birding location in El Paso County. Nearly 300 bird species have been documented in the park, not surprising thanks to the mix of pond, wetland, creek, woodland, and meadow habitats. Add on miles of comfortable, free, public walking trails and the bird feeders at the nature center, and a formula for great birding is written.



*Say's Phoebes are a common sight at the nature center spring through fall.*

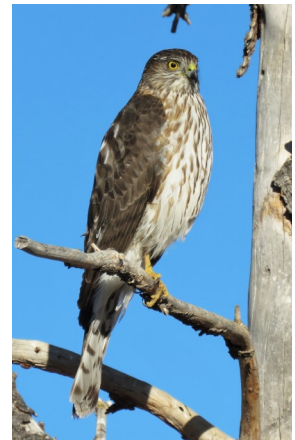


*Yellow Warblers sing "sweet, sweet, sweeter than sweet" all summer around the wetlands.*

Year-round, a variety of birds await you. **Winter** is filled with waterfowl and sparrows - you'll find ducks and geese aplenty on the ponds and in the creek, and sparrows flooding the feeders and bushes. **Spring** brings birds migrating to or through Colorado, and perhaps some that flew the wrong way! **Summer** sounds include baby birds chirping and parents singing. **Fall** offers migration excitement once again, and the arrival of wintering birds.

The bird feeders at both Nature Centers are excellent places to get great views of many local birds. We are thankful to **Wild Birds Unlimited** for donating all our birdseed at no cost to us! Through funds received via their **Daily Savings Club** program, Fountain Creek was able to purchase binoculars for you to borrow for free!

A walk here during the **Pikes Peak Birding and Nature Festival**, held annually during the peak of spring migration, typically yields over 50 species of birds in a few hours. Visit Fountain Creek and borrow binoculars from us to discover birds big and small, colorful and camouflaged. You might get hooked, and you'll certainly discover a lot. 🐦



*Cooper's Hawks nest in the woods and regularly hunt songbirds at the bird feeders.*



*Rare birds, like this Yellow-throated Warbler, benefit from the resources near the Nature Center.*

## EXECUTIVE BOARD

*Friends of El Paso County  
Nature Centers*

### President

Risë Foster-Bruder

### Secretary

Diane French

### Treasurer

Lynn Wilson

### At-Large

Eilleen Somers

Jill Wright

Jane Zook

## STAFF

### Division Manager

Theresa Odello

### Rec. Program Planner

Ryan Dorough

### BCNC Supervisor

Mary Jo Lewis

### Interp. Program Coord.

Kylee Taylor

### Interpreter

Brenda McCreight

### FCNC Supervisor

Jessica Miller

### Interp. Program Coord.

Victoria Dinkel

### Interpreter

Andy Talley

### Volunteer Consultant

Kelly Ann Blanchard

### 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](http://elpasocountynaturecenters.com)



## Volunteer Highlight: Bobbie & Sandy Lewis! *by Jessica Miller*

**B**obbie Lewis is a fixture at the front desk at Bear Creek Nature Center. She and her husband, Sandy, have been volunteering at El Paso County Parks for over 20 years, Bobbie working as a docent, and she and Sandy helping at special events and whenever needed. They began this work after Sandy retired from the Air Force following 28½ years of service. After Sandy's graduation from the Air Force Academy, they had embarked on a career that took them to assignments in Texas, Panama Canal Zone, South Carolina, South Korea, Oklahoma and Florida. At each location, while Sandy was flying, Bobbie was teaching elementary school and children with learning disabilities, instructing water aerobics, working at a health food store, or volunteering in various other capacities. Fortunately, the Air Force eventually returned these native Coloradans



*Bobbie and Sandy on the summit of  
Mount Lincoln, 14,293'*



*Sandy leads a history tour  
(above) and Bobbie leads a fall  
foliage tour (below) at Wichita  
Mountain Wildlife Refuge in OK.*



to their home state! Having both volunteered extensively at a National Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma and a National Seashore in Florida (and Bobbie at a Zoo in Florida), when they arrived in Colorado Springs, they were looking for a new place to share their love of the natural environment. El Paso County Parks (and specifically Bear Creek and Fountain Creek Nature Centers) turned out to be the perfect choice. The Centers gave them the chance to contribute through interactions with visitors, sharing the excitement of the natural world with children, and assisting with special events that help to fund El Paso County Parks priorities. A bonus is that Bobbie and Sandy truly enjoy spending time with and learning from the outstanding staff members. 🐾



*Sandy at pilot training, Reese  
AFB, Texas*



*Bobbie and Sandy ready to taxi  
a T-37 as part of Operation  
Petticoat, Laughlin AFB, TX*

## Year-End Giving 2024 *by Risë Foster-Bruder*

**Y**ou are an important and steady support base at Bear Creek and Fountain Creek Nature Centers and we need your continued support. Our mission is to connect people to their natural and cultural resources and inspire them to become stewards of the parks and our environment. The Friends group and nature center staff do this on a daily basis.

Our popular Trailability Program, which provides trail access via all-terrain vehicles to those with disabilities, has been nationally recognized; receiving a **Universal Accessibility Award** from the **National Association of County and Park Officials**, an **Achievement Award** from the **National Association of Counties** and a **Columbine Award in Programming** from the **Colorado Parks and Recreation Association**.



*Bear Creek's VIP Trail and Fountain Creek's Audio Tour have helped create more connections to the outdoors.*

In June, there was a ribbon cutting for a new VIP (Visually Impaired Persons) Trail. Visitors with visual impairments can now better interpret nature along the Songbird Trail and interactive displays inside Bear Creek Nature Center. But while we opened a new Bear Creek trail, Fountain Creek Nature Center closed due to major flood damage. Initially, it was only going to be a few days; in reality it was 2.5 months. Remarkably, the nature center staff did not cancel any scheduled program and even hosted summer camp! Our nature center staff members are the best!

Over the past five years, southern Colorado has witnessed an extraordinary population growth, over 10% annually. As people are drawn to the area's natural beauty, we are moving forward and building a new, northern nature center in Fox Run Regional Park so everyone in El Paso County will have access to places where fun learning happens. We can make the northern nature center a reality and have a positive impact in El Paso County. But not without your help. 🐾



*The Trailability Program rolled into its second year, winning hearts and three awards*



*Fountain Creek Nature Center closed for over two months, but staff continued all-outdoor programs and nature camps.*

## An Enduring Gift

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

### *Donate by mail*

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

### *For planned giving opportunities*

Call Theresa Odello at 719-520-6981.



### *Donate by PayPal*

Scan this QR Code with your smart phone's camera:



### *Thank you!*

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



## Fountain Creek Happenings

by Andy Talley

**T**urkeys are back at Fountain Creek Nature Center. While turkeys are not an unusual site here at the Nature Center, they are seen more often in the late fall or spring and early summer. In the spring and summer, turkeys will nest and raise their young. Often several hens will group together to share in the care and protection of their poults. During the summer, they tend to disperse into more sheltered areas in the woods.



*The local turkey flock visits the nature center bird feeders year-round.*

They often make their appearance around the Nature Center once again around October or November. Do they know that they are safe from hunting here and the Nature Center will protect them from becoming someone's Thanksgiving dinner? As winter is making its approach and food is getting harder to find in the woods, perhaps they have learned that there is a readily available supply of food at Fountain Creek Nature Center's bird feeders. 🦃



*In the fall, hens and "teenage" poults are most commonly seen.*



## Bear Creek Sightings by Kylee Taylor

**T**hough no official program took place on October 14<sup>th</sup> at Bear Creek, staff, volunteers, and visitors stood on the back patio in awe of our cosmos to view the partial solar eclipse. During a partial solar eclipse, the moon moves between the sun and Earth, blocking the sun until a small crescent



*Shadows were obscured by the crescent-shaped light beams.*

of the sun is all that shows. Viewers of the eclipse were treated to a "dimming" of the sun, strange shadows across the ground, and (with solar glasses) views of the small crescent left behind.

Areas further south of Colorado Springs were lucky enough to see a total eclipse, when the moon fully covers the sun to create a "Ring of Fire" in which solar glasses may be removed and the sun can be viewed safely for a brief period of time. The next partial solar eclipse viewable in Colorado is April 8, 2024! 🐾



*Glasses made it safe for staff and visitors to watch the magic.*



# Celebrating Holidays Sustainably

by Victoria Dinkel

For some, the holiday season is a time of excess – which can have negative consequences on our environment. Regardless of how you spend the holidays, we’ve compiled a small list of changes we can make to reduce our impact on the planet. Check out our recommendations below and see what you can incorporate into your plans this year!



## Food:

- Reduce your carbon footprint by selecting in-season and locally grown food whenever possible.
- Nearly 40% of all food in America is wasted – try to only cook what you need and donate or compost any unwanted leftovers.
- Ditch the single-use cookware, plates, and utensils and opt for reusable items instead. Beeswax wraps and silicone sandwich bags are excellent alternatives and make great gifts!



## Décor:

- Get crafty and make your own garland or ornaments from upcycled and natural materials such as fallen leaves, pinecones, wine corks, or dried citrus.
- Choose LED lighting options when shopping new and recycle any old or broken strands. **American Iron & Metal Co.**, **Colorado Industrial Recycling**, and **Urban Recycling** all accept old holiday lights!
- While there are arguments in favor of both real and artificial trees, we encourage you to choose a real tree and participate in a compost or recycling program such as **El Pomar Youth Sports TreeCycle**. This allows nutrients to

be returned to the environment rather than adding more plastics to a landfill. If you select an artificial tree, try to get as many years of use out of it as possible then recycle it at **Urban Recycling**!



## Gifts:

- Plan ahead and do your shopping early to avoid extra emissions from expedited shipping.
- Most wrapping paper with glitter and foils is not recyclable, however boxes and bags can be reused.
- When searching for gifts, shop locally at small businesses such as: **Poor Richard's**, **Eclectic CO**, **Heartshake Studios**, **Yobel**, and more!
- Experiences also make great alternatives: gift tickets to events at **The Broadmoor World Arena**, **Pikes Peak Center for the Performing Arts** or local attractions like **Cave of the Winds** and **Colorado Wolf and Wildlife Center**. 🐾



## Recreation Round-Up *by Ryan Dorough*

This Fall has been one of the busiest times ever for Recreation Services! In total, 11 programs and events occurred during the month of October alone. Starting the Fall season, the September Lights Festival was a new and fun spin on the traditional Lantern Festival. Colorful LED lights were used, creating a fun and uplifting atmosphere. We started October with National Take-A-Kid Mountain Biking Day, which occurs every year on the first Saturday of October at Fox Run Regional Park. Fifty-five kids learned about mountain biking and went for a guided trail ride. In addition, over \$1000 of donated biking swag items was given away to the aspiring riders, a new record high for the event. Another record was set for the month of October at Paint Mines Interpretive Park, where four different programs were executed, with the interpreters leading over 80



*Kids learn to ride safely at the annual Take-a-Kids Mountain Biking Day.*



*The Paint Mines are a beautiful place to enjoy cooler days.*

people through the amazing formations while doing interpretations on the geology and the human history of the area. This, of course, is in addition to the 1289 people they interacted with during their regular patrol of the site. Stay tuned for more fun recreation events from Recreation Services! 🐾



*This year's Lights Festival was fun, bright, and colorful!*



## Fox Run Nature Center Update! *by Theresa Odello*



*The Fox Run Nature Center will fit into the landscape while offering the same great facilities and programs as Bear Creek and Fountain Creek.*

The arrival of summer brought a flurry of excitement as we embarked on a mission to engage our local community in a transformative project – the development of a new nature center. This center, with a mission as an investment in future generations to inspire and create stewards of nature in the Pikes Peak region, is a testament to our commitment to a sustainable, eco-conscious design. To ensure the center resonates with the needs and desires of our community, we initiated a series of outreach opportunities during the summer, inviting people to provide feedback and actively participate in shaping the project's direction.

Public meetings provided bookends for our outreach season, starting with one in May and ending in November. Participants had the opportunity to see the design plans, share their ideas, and offer insights on how the center could best serve the community.



*A fox (of course) joins the bear and the heron to be the newest Nature Centers logo*



## Volunteer Corner *by Kelly Ann Blanchard*

A big thank you to all of our volunteers for their support so far in 2023! Special shoutout to all the new volunteers who have joined us over the fall: **Suzy Houser, Ruth Lyons, Tati McAlister, Roger McFarland, and Jonna McKitrick.** Welcome to the team!

**Fox Run Volunteer Day:** Thank you to those who joined us for a special volunteers-only sneak peek of Fox Run Nature Center in August! We visited the site of the future nature center, hiked the surrounding trails, and enjoyed lunch together.

Mark your calendars for the **January Jubilee**, a Winter Volunteer Potluck Party, on Thursday, January 18th at Fountain Creek Nature Center! Look for the Docent Dispatch email for more information and to RSVP.

Save the date for the annual **Volunteer Recognition Dinner** on Thursday, March 21st at Bear Creek Nature Center! **Become a Volunteer** – Interested in volunteering with El Paso County Nature Centers? Please contact the Volunteer Coordinator, Kelly Ann Blanchard, at [bfcvolunteers@gmail.com](mailto:bfcvolunteers@gmail.com). 🐦



*Staff and volunteers took a hike in Fox Run Regional Park to explore plants, animals, and locations to teach about during programs!*

## Fox Run Nature Center Update, continued from page 6

Outreach at community events included the State of the Outdoors, concerts in the park, Get Outdoors Day, Black Forest farmers market, Panorama Park Backpack Bash, and more. Participants provided feedback on what they like best about nature centers, what features, programs, and opportunities they would like to see, and obstacles preventing them from visiting nature centers.



*An accessible canopy walk and tower will help connect visitors to the Black Forest, Palmer Divide, and other unique characteristics of the region.*

Summer was a season of connection, growth, and inspiration as we embarked on our journey to create a new nature center that resonates with our community's values. The diverse insights and enthusiasm gathered from these outreach initiatives have become an integral part of the center's design. With the invaluable input of our community, we are one step closer to creating a nature center that truly reflects our collective love for the environment and our commitment to its preservation. Join this effort by donating to this nature center and together we will build a lasting legacy that will inspire generations to come.

**If you donate to the Fox Run Nature Center through the Enterprise Zone Contribution Project Program, you may earn a state income tax credit equal to 25% of your generous monetary donation.** Contact Dana Nordstrom at [DanaNordstrom@elpasoco.com](mailto:DanaNordstrom@elpasoco.com) to learn more and for other giving opportunities. 🐦



*Partners in the Parks  
for EPC Nature Centers*



## Winter Recreation Highlights

### **Bunco**

*Bear Creek Nature Center*  
Friday, January 12, 5-8pm

### **Fishing 101**

*Bear Creek Nature Center*  
Friday, February 2, 3-5pm

### **Youth Dungeons & Dragons Adventure Club**

*EPC Fair & Events Center*  
4<sup>th</sup> Mondays, January-March, 5:00p-7:30pm

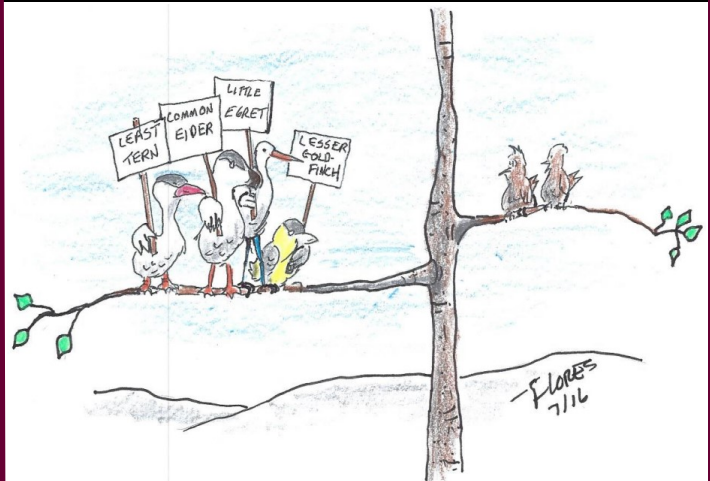
### **Winter Fun at Fox Run**

*Fox Run Regional Park*  
Saturday, February 10, 10am-2pm

### **Intro To Indoor Gardening**

*Bear Creek Nature Center*  
February 17, 9am-12pm

## Rick's Cartoon



"They're upset at the A.O.U. about their name classification."

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

## Winter Nature Program Highlights



**Kids' Night Out: A Winter Evening in Nature**  
Friday, December 15, 5:30-9:00 p.m.

### **Gingerbread Habitats**

Saturday, December 16, 10:00-11:30 a.m.

### **Theater Along the Trail: A Bear Creek Living History**

Saturday, January 6  
1:00-2:00; 1:15-2:15; 1:30-2:30; 1:45-2:45

**January Make & Take with Bricks & Minifigs**  
Saturday, January 27, 10 a.m., 11:30 a.m., 1 p.m.

### **Beer & Burns**

Tuesday, February 13, 5:30-7:30 p.m.

### **Restoration Crew- Fire Mitigation**

Saturday, February 3, 10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.



### **Nature Hikes with Santa**

Saturdays, December 9 & 16, 10:00a.m. & 1:00p.m.

### **Solstice Celebration**

Thursday, December 21, 4:30 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

### **Morning Hike & Campfire**

Saturday, January 6, 10:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

### **Winter Bird Count**

Saturday, January 13, 8:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

### **Live Birds of Prey!**

Saturday, January 27, 10:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

### **Game Night!**

Saturday, January 19, 6:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

### **Upcycled Craft Workshop**

Thursday, February 8, 6:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

[www.elpasocountynaturecenters.com](http://www.elpasocountynaturecenters.com)