

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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Trailability Rolls On! *by Kylee Taylor*

Trailability is back! 2022 was a whirlwind as we kicked off the Trailability program at both Nature Centers. This program utilizes Terrain Hoppers, off road mobility vehicles, to ensure everyone has the chance to get outdoors and enjoy the beauty and independence of hiking on the Nature Center trails. Twenty-eight participants hiked the trails with one participant saying, “I loved the ability to be able to go to the top of the hill, that we’ve never experienced before. Actually, the freedom was an amazing experience. I felt *empowered*” and another saying, “[My favorite part was] the freedom of seeing new areas and my ability to take myself there.”

Registration for the 2023 Trailability season is open now and hikes will take place May 1st-October 31st. Participants can hike in the morning or afternoon at Bear Creek and Fountain Creek Nature Centers on 1-3 miles of trails alongside family, friends, and a Nature Center staff member or volunteer.



Participation in the program is **completely free!** Just follow the QR code to the left to register today.



A Trailability Hiker enjoys the views.



Mobility-limited riders can get out on the trails with their friends



The vehicles are quiet, but the laughter is not.

Questions?

Call Kylee Taylor at Bear Creek Nature Center- 719-520-6972 or Victoria Dinkel at Fountain Creek Nature Center- 719-520-6767.
communityservices.elpasoco.com/trailability/ 🐾

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Volunteer Corner *by Kelly Ann Blanchard*

A big thank you to all our volunteers for their support so far in 2023! We are happy to welcome new volunteers **Catherine Gilsey** and **Mary Ranade** to our team.

On March 2nd, a whopping 65 volunteers and guests attended our **2023 Volunteer Recognition Event**. We enjoyed a delicious pasta dinner while serenaded by Pepper Grass, followed by a lively awards ceremony showcasing all our volunteers' achievements in 2022. We laughed and we cried, but most of all, we enjoyed the opportunity to spend time together for the first time in a long time.



Staff celebrated the tremendous help our volunteers provide at this spring's Volunteer Recognition. We can't do what we do without them!



Left: Lyn is given the Chocolate Hat to recognize his attention to detail at recent events needing loads of hot cocoa. Center: Gloria is awarded a pickle jar bouquet for getting staff out of a pickle. Right: A packed house celebrates a variety of achievements.

Batten down the hatches... Coming **June 2023** – a new way to **record volunteer hours online!** More details to come soon, but rest assured that we will help volunteers every step of the way during the transition.

Upcoming Training Opportunities:

June 29 - Trailability Training 2 - 5 p.m. at BCNC
July 8 - Leave No Trace Training, 9 a.m. - 12 p.m. at FCNC
August 12 - Trailability Training 9 a.m. - 12 p.m. at FCNC

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



Volunteer Highlight: A Two-for One Deal!

by Kelly Ann Blanchard

Picture this: reciting your wedding vows surrounded by friends, family, and a babbling brook. Nature center volunteers, Francie and Greg Brent, experienced just that when they got married on the banks of Bear Creek near the Solar Trails Center, just before it was renamed Bear Creek Nature Center.



The Brents have enjoyed the trails around Bear Creek for a long time.

“The boardwalk felt like walking down an aisle,” said Francie. The couple bought a house just down the street, and Bear Creek became a core location for their family.

Greg served in the Army before eventually settling into a job with the state labor department. Francie is a retired play therapist as well as a talented artist. After their retirement, the Brents sought out a way to contribute during



Greg & Francie Brent enjoy learning and teaching others.

the pandemic and chose to volunteer with the nature centers.

Francie loves interacting with visitors, helping with special events, and attending training courses. Greg likes the convenience of volunteering so close to home as well as sharing his knowledge of the trails and roads on the west side. “A busy day at the desk is fun,” according to Greg.

You can find this nature-loving power couple swapping desk shifts at Bear Creek Nature Center or lending a hand at special events. 🐾



Recreation Roundup by Ryan Dorough



Above: Get ready to jam out at the many Concerts in the Park events. Below: Celebrate the outdoors and wind at the 2nd annual Kite Festival.



Everyone loves a good series. Whether it's your favorite tv series, a series of collectables, or maybe even a lecture series, everyone needs something familiar, fun, and exciting to look forward to. That is something you can and will find at a Nature Center or a County Park this summer. Bunco, Paint Mines hikes, and Concerts in the Parks; these are just a couple of different series that you can take part in this shorts season. We have three different concert series happening this year. Catch one this summer at Fox Run, Bear Creek, or Fountain Creek Regional Parks. Looking for something to do every season? Join in one of our inclusive Bunco nights where everyone ages 13 and older are invited, nacho bar included.

Something bigger and more exciting coming up is our 2nd annual El Paso County Kite Festival at Falcon Regional Park! This free community event takes place on the Saturday before Father's Day every year. This year, we are bringing in more vendors and even more special treats! Stay tuned for more exciting things happening in your Regional Parks! 🐾



Make plans to attend a Bunco Game Night at one of the Nature Centers!



Celebrating Spring *By Victoria Dinkel and Brenda McCreight*



Above: Sometimes eggstra help is needed to find the right eggs. Below: Fountain Farmers 4H brought some cute rabbits for us to pet and learn about.



Fountain Creek Nature Center's annual event, The Chocolate Bunny Egg Hunt, was a great success yet again with over 150 children participating. A blend of both education and fun, families and friends gathered indoors for an interactive presentation about rabbits before following the bunny guide down to the woods in search of the elusive rabbit eggs. Excitement was palpable as children ran about in search of their eggs with more rabbit facts hidden inside. After collecting their set, the children returned to the nature center to exchange their eggs for a delicious chocolate bunny, make a craft and even meet some real rabbits thanks to the Fountain Farmers 4H club! It was lovely to watch everyone, regardless of age, get something out of the event whether it be education, the thrill of the search, or simply the joy of meeting some cute, furry critters! 🐰



Above: Volunteer Paula helps guests with the very bouncy craft. Below: Watch out, Rabbit, the kids are coming for your eggs!



Things were really hopping at Fox Run Regional Park and Bear Creek Nature Center this spring! On the evening of Friday, April 7th, a capacity crowd of approximately 270 participants competed to hunt for glow-in-the-dark eggs and solve the "quiz" contained within them, which educated our guests in the flora and fauna specific to Fox Run Park and won them prizes of candy and stickers. Participants were very positive about the event and enjoyed our new format and trail. 🐰



Matching skills are tested at our eco-friendly egg hunts.

The next day more eggs were uncovered at Bear Creek Nature Center with the help of our Bunny, aka Diane Salkovich, one of our gallant volunteers. Rabbit trivia taught our young participants some cool facts. Plastic eggs were traded in for (yum!) chocolate bunnies! Live bunnies on our patio entertained one and all before and after egg hunting. Many participants even made a cute "Bunny Bag" craft. 250 children hunted for eggs, with 1,000 plus people attending the event. We had many comments about the egg hunting procedure making it a pleasant and fun time for everyone. A "hoppy" time was had by all at both events! 🐰



Above & Below: Mysterious glowing eggs signal hidden clues in Fox Run Regional Park.





Fountain Creek Happenings *by Andy Tally*

Often our favorite memories are filled with firsts. The first time we rode a bicycle. Our first camping trip. The first time we saw a bear in the wild. One of the wonderful things about our earth's seasonal cycles is that each spring brings a whole new series of firsts. It is always exciting when you see a creature for the first time each year. The month of March was full of firsts at Fountain Creek Nature Center. The first warm sunny day of March brought the first turtles out on the logs. Turkey vultures made their first appearance. The Adult Bird Club spotted our first cinnamon teals swimming in the creek. One



A male Cinnamon Teal swims in the waters near Fountain Creek Nature Center.

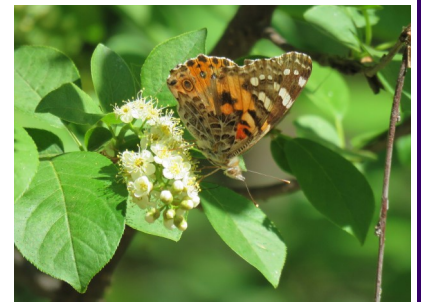
Photo by John Bruder



Garter snakes are often seen relaxing at Fountain Creek.

cool morning we saw our first garter snake of the season by the bird feeders, and our first fence lizard was spotted sunning itself on the rocks. Visitors spotted a mourning cloak butterfly flitting along the regional trail. Kingfishers have been fishing along with our first white pelicans on the pond.

Come out to the nature center to enjoy a hike. If you meet an old friend along the way for the first time this year, come in and share your memories with the nature center staff. 🐦



Blooming chokecherry bushes are a delight for spring pollinators.



Bear Creek Sightings *by Kylee Taylor*

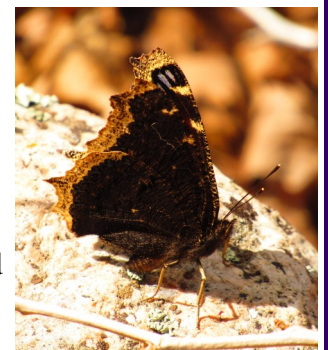


Mourning Cloak Butterflies are a cause for celebration each year.

There are many ways to track the “official” start of spring. It may be the equinox, the first flowers in bloom, or that first day in March that it doesn't feel bitterly cold. My personal indicator is the first mourning cloak! When these beautiful butterflies begin flitting down the trails, I know spring is near. This year, that day was March 22, 2023.

Spring is the best time to see them as they awaken from hibernation to begin breeding and laying their eggs until June. They then go into a “dormant” state until fall when they hibernate in tree cavities for the

winter. March seems a little early for flowers but no worries! Mourning cloaks are slurping up tree sap rather than nectar from flowering plants so they aren't considered pollinators. Despite the sad name, the wings of a mourning cloak (when open) are a striking combination of yellow, blue, and mahogany. The underside of their wings looks rather drab but is the perfect camouflage to blend into tree bark to avoid predators. Take a walk outdoors to see them all spring! 🐾



Closed wings camouflage the striking butterfly.



Winter Fun at Fox Run *by Brenda McCreight*

Roasting marshmallows over an open fire, Jack Frost nipping at your nose! These were just a little of the “fun” at Fox Run on Saturday, February 4th. Hotdogs with all the fixins’ and the richest hot chocolate ever kept everyone’s stomachs happy.



Above: Wagon rides gave families a fun look at the park. Below: Come inside to warm your hands and make a craft.



The Canine Costume Parade was a cute celebration of our four-legged friends.

Wagon rides let participants enjoy the beauty of Fox Run Regional Park and “Minute to Win It” games and stories entertained the crowds. The wagon rides filled up quickly with many families holding on tight as they traversed the park. Thanks to Brian from Fox Run’s maintenance team for pulling the wagon! Fountain Creek’s interpreter, Andy Talley, regaled guests with stories of the Native Indians centered around flora and fauna at Fox Run several times during the day. The games were popular all during the event. Families enjoyed challenging each other to build marshmallow snowman, carry cotton ball “snowballs” and drop candy canes onto ropes. Many people made nifty bookmarks as a remembrance of the special event as well. Interpreters taught about the animals in the area with pelts and skulls. A canine costume contest and parade was great fun, too!

With the goal being to raise awareness of and raise funds for the new Fox Run Nature Center, our Winter Fun at Fox Run was extremely successful! One hundred fifty people pre-registered, although that wasn’t required. A beautiful day with comfortable weather brought a total of approximately 550 participants to the event. After expenses, we raised over \$2,500.

Many people became informed and excited about the construction of a new Nature Center at Fox Run, and some donated even more. Feedback about the Winter Fun event was very positive! A few evaluation comments include, “GREAT event with fun activities.” “The staff was great and friendly.” “Our family enjoyed all of the events. Great variety and lots of learning opportunities. Big fun!” We look forward to more fun at Fox Run in the years to come! 🦊



A huggable fox made an appearance!



Tricky, fast-paced games were played all day.



Fox Run Nature Center Updates!

by Theresa Odello, Recreation & Cultural Services Manager

There are so many things to be excited about with the Fox Run Nature Center! The design team meets regularly to develop the building concept design. Not only are we designing the building and surrounding areas, but the team is planning the building to incorporate interpretative themes of the nature center. In October of 2020, the County completed the Master Interpretive Plan for the Northern Nature Center, and from that plan, the four main interpretive themes were chosen include:

Ponderosa Forests of the Black Forest: Connect to Community/Inspire Care: Living in the black forest, trail etiquette, forest as educational resource, importance of forest health.

Ponderosa Pine Tree: Role in biodiversity, unique attributes, ambassador species, sensory engagement.

Fire's Importance: Forest management, forest response to human action, risk for forest and community.

Palmer Divide: People, specific area attributes, water, weather, and geological uniqueness of the divide.

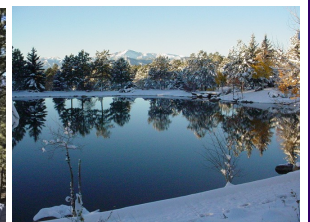


The latest concept designs include an outdoor canopy walk, an indoor tree to ascend, and spots for guests of all ages to learn and relax.



Above: Fox Run is already host to many programs throughout the year, including the Eggstravaganza and a week of summer nature camp.

Below: Besides the towering ponderosa pine forest, Fox Run boasts other beautiful scenes like Pikes Peak views and the ponds.

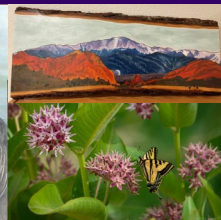


To tie the building into these themes, some design ideas that are being considered includes a tower and viewing platform so visitors can have a view of the tree canopy from above, a large artificial Ponderosa tree inside the building for interpretation, and perhaps even a canopy walk. The sky is the limit! Well, funding is our main limit, so please help support the creation of a new nature center by donating today! Also, let your thoughts on the new center be heard by attending a public meeting (dates announced soon). Let's keep this excitement going and we will see you at the new Fox Run Nature Center in 2025!



Artist Exhibition at Fountain Creek Nature Center

Visit each month to enjoy new pieces from local artists.
Purchase a piece to benefit the Nature Centers!





*Partners in the Parks
for EPC Nature Centers*



Summer Recreation Highlights

El Paso County Kite Festival-Falcon Regional Park
Saturday, June 17, 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.

Bunco at Bear Creek Nature Center
Friday, July 28, Starts at 5:00 p.m.

Paint Mines Interpretive Hikes
Saturdays (check online for dates), June-October

Summer Concert Series

Bear Creek Regional Park Jazz Concerts
Wednesdays, 6:00-8:00 p.m., July 12-August 23

Fox Run Regional Park Concerts
Thursdays, 6:00-8:00 p.m., August 3- September 7

Fountain Creek Regional Park Concerts
Every other Tuesday in August, 6:00-8:00 p.m.,
August 1, 15, and 29

Rick's Cartoon



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

Summer Nature Program Highlights



Peaceful Warriors Yoga in the Park:
Flow with Bear Creek Tuesdays,
June 6, July 11 and August 1, 5:30-6:30- p.m.

Sustainability Series: Watershed Wonders
Saturday, June 10, 10:00 a.m.

Forest Bathing Saturdays,
June 24, July 22, August 19, 1:00 - 3:30 p.m.

Kids' Morning Out: Foothills Detectives
Saturday, August 5, 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Happy Trails BBQ Fundraiser
Friday, August 18, 6:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Bear Creek A'Buzz: Annual Honey Harvest & Pollinator Celebration Day
Saturday, August 26, 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Who Dung It?

Saturday, June 10, 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.

Milkweed Menagerie

Saturday, June 24, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Firefly Night Hike & Celebration

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

Saturday, July 8, 8:00 - 9:30 p.m.

Mush Ado About Mushrooms

Saturday, July 22, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Native Pollinator Class & Hike

Saturday, August 5, 9:00- 11:00 a.m.

Top 10 Most Wanted: Noxious Weeds

Saturday, August 19, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Monarch Magic

Saturday, August 20, 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.

www.elpasocountynaturecenters.com