

# 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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## The Trailability Program Takes Off

by Brenda McCreight, Bear Creek Nature Center Interpreter

The road to the Visually Impaired Persons' Trail was a long, winding one. Our first thought was to create a "Braille Trail" along our boardwalk trail. But when my friend and Nature Center Volunteer, Monica Gimbel, who is a blind person, heard the idea, she laughed. "No one uses Braille anymore!" You want to do something with

audio." We purchased two "Pen Friends" and recording began. Recordings of all the signs along Songbird Trail and in our Habitat Exhibits were created.



*Students from the Colorado Deaf and Blind School experience the VIP trail.*

result was a trail both accessible and beautiful.

Two high school groups from the Colorado Deaf and Blind School came to test out the trail in May. They thought the access was excellent, the recordings "made pictures in their minds", and the trail gave them independence. With our Ribbon Cutting on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, the VIP Trail is officially open. We hope lots of people will take advantage of it! 🐾



*Tim Gimbel, Commissioner Steve VanderWerf, Monica Gimbel, Mary Jo Lewis, and Guide Dog Cambridge cut the ribbon to the VIP Trail at Bear Creek Nature Center.*

Meanwhile, our maintenance team researched the best rope and post materials to make Songbird accessible to the visually impaired.

Steven Rodbourn especially took a personal interest in the project, spending his own time at hardware stores trying to find the best materials. The



*PENfriend devices can be borrowed from Bear Creek Nature Center*

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## Fountain Creek Nature Center Summer Staff

by Victoria Dinkel and Andy Talley

Spencer Kessinger has been an outdoor enthusiast and problem solver since childhood. She recalls getting stuck on a sandbar while kayaking the brackish waters of Maryland with her mother as a toddler. The solution? Piling sand and mud on top of the kayak to patch the (nonexistent) hole! This freedom to make messes and explore without restriction granted by her parents quickly shaped Spencer's life. As soon as she was old enough, she started volunteering at a local nature center before earning a degree in environmental studies with minors in biology and education from St. Mary's College of Maryland. Some of her favorite memories from her career include dressing up like a cockroach, creating enrichment toys for the otters at a marine museum, and painting her face with mud during nature camp. Still new to Colorado, Spencer is enjoying the opportunity to learn about the flora and fauna and exploring trails with her pup, Obi. 🐾



*Spencer carefully selects her target during a game of Drip, Drip, Splash during Nature Camp.*



*Lanai feels at home at Fountain Creek Nature Center.*

Lanai Bartlett joined the Fountain Creek Nature Center team as a Seasonal Program Interpreter in May of 2023. A Colorado native, she was born right here in Colorado Springs. She is currently a sophomore at Colorado Mesa University in Grand Junction, pursuing a degree in communications with an emphasis on media. Before joining us as an employee, Lanai had nearly 6 years of experience as a volunteer with Fountain Creek Nature Center. While planning a wilderness survival themed birthday party for her brother, Lanai met Nancy, the nature center supervisor back then. Nancy recruited Lanai as a teen volunteer. She helped as a docent for programs like Family Fun Day, Nature Hikes with Santa, and 3 years as a teen volunteer with our summer day camp programs. Lanai is thrilled to be part of the team here and we are thrilled to have her. When she is not working at Fountain Creek, Lanai enjoys reading, hiking, and camping. 🐾



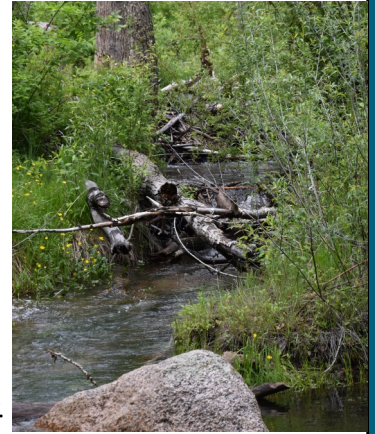


## Bear Creek Nature Center Summer Staff

by Brenda McCreight and Kylee Taylor

Bear Creek's Summer Seasonal, Jacki Bakker, arrived on June 5<sup>th</sup> and jumped into nature camp! With a degree in Natural Resource Management and a background in water, she has been an asset in sharing the importance of water and how it shapes our everyday lives with campers and guests. A lover of water recreation, she and her husband have kayaks. In the past, she even built a sailboat. Jacki is an avid gardener, with a self-proclaimed "plant problem". She hauled 11 pots of house plants from North Carolina to the Springs in August. Ask Jacki about herself and she'll tell you she is a Navy veteran and a military spouse. She also has two Miniature Schnauzers and a Red Bone Coonhound Mix that doesn't know she is *not* a schnauzer. Jacki is also a passionate nature photographer. She's taken lots of great pictures of our wildflowers this summer! 🐾

*Right: Jacki has captured many beautiful shots of Bear Creek.*



Silas started working at Bear Creek Nature Center early this summer and has been loving it. This is his first job, and it has been a wonderful experience for him. He really enjoyed learning about the local plants and animals. Identifying specific plant or animal species was new to him but he is learning and improving. Silas said, "I am grateful to work in a place as beautiful as this. I'm also enjoying teaching everything I'm learning to all the campers. All the kids that have come have been really sweet, and it has been a joy to see them get so excited about nature." Silas just finished his first year at college at UC Berkeley and is spending his summer here in Colorado where his family just moved. We have been grateful for his enthusiasm, joy, and hard-working personality at Bear Creek, and he will be greatly missed! 🐾

*Left: Silas made fun memories for himself and for the campers as the Bear Creek Camp Assistant.*



## Updates: Fox Run Nature Center

by Theresa Odello, Recreation and Cultural Services Division Manager

Greetings fellow nature enthusiasts! Our community is buzzing with anticipation as we move along with our design plans for the new Fox Run Nature Center! With a mission of the nature center as an investment in future generations to inspire and create stewards of nature in the Pikes Peak Region, we are continuing our thrilling journey to bring our community a place where both young and old can discover, learn, and revel in the wonders of our natural world. While the picture here of the nature center is in draft form, it helps to give a better idea of what we are creating. As you can see, the building will be carefully designed to harmonize with its surroundings and provide a viewing tower to see and learn about the canopy forest from up above. Please consider helping us share this vision with the community by talking to friends and neighbors about the future Fox Run Nature Center, and by supporting us with a donation to make this center come to life! Let's keep this excitement going and we will see you at the new Fox Run Nature Center in 2025! 🐾



*Fox Run Nature Center designs focus on innovation and immersion in the outdoors.*



# Nature Camp Memories

*"The staff are excellent at caring for and being role models for our kids"*



*"Different than any other camp - fosters a love and appreciation of the outdoors."*

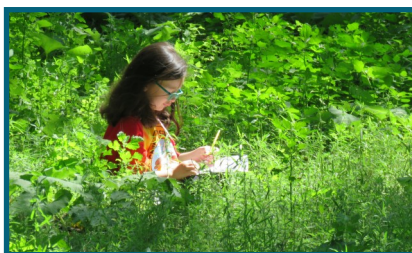


*"My son speaks highly of quiet time in the woods and likes the opportunity to look at nature."*



*"My child loves the hiking and free time outside-it makes her so happy."*

*"She's not afraid of things outside like she used to be"*





# Nature Camp Memories



*"They love re-teaching us everything they learn at camp. Passing on the education."*



*"Nature camp has given my children a true appreciation of the natural world."*

*"We didn't think the girls would enjoy the camp and outdoors as much as they did. Excellent job on keeping them busy, learning, and having fun all at the same time. They LOVED each day. Thank you to all the instructors for making this epic!"*



*"He has never been more excited to look for 'cool bugs' and enjoy and explore the environment around him."*

*"Thanks to nature camp all these years my children have grown to really appreciate the wonders of nature. Thank you for keeping camp going even without the use of the Nature Center building!"*



*"My children have so much fun learning about the natural world and thrive with so much time outside."*





## Recreation Round-Up *by Ryan Dorough, Recreation Program Planner*

It is that time of year again. The time when the days start to get shorter, temperatures start to drop, and life of summer starts to go into its dormant stage. Fall is just around the corner. Here is a glimpse into what has been happening this summer in and around your regional parks.



*Archery Camps at Bear Creek are a blast!*

**Archery Camp** was five weeks of success, with each camp completely filling up. One thing that was especially exciting was that the weather always cooperated, shockingly, allowing for every camper to get the maximum amount of time out at the range.



*Concerts in the Park celebrates great music in the great outdoors*

**Concerts in the Park** at Bear Creek and Fox Run Regional Parks are yet again having another successful season of live music in our parks. In total, 14 concerts will have taken place by the end of the season, with the series finale on September 7<sup>th</sup> at Fox Run Regional Park, featuring a local favorite, Wirewood Station!

**Paint Mines Interpretive Park** yet again has been a beehive of activity this summer. With the amazing rains we have received, the wildflowers have been otherworldly.



*Interpretive Naturalists at the Paint Mines enhance learning opportunities.*

This has been especially exciting for participants of the interpretive guided hikes that have been occurring two Saturdays a month since June. Hikes will continue on through the end of October.

As we look forward to the fall, some programs include September Lights Fest, Take a Kid Mountain Biking Day, Bunco at the Nature Centers, and of course, all the fall holiday programming! Stay tuned for more fun recreation events! 🐾

## 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 summer: **Amy Barger, Jayson Borgen, Ron Essex, Alice Harris, Wendy Hellerud, Carmen Martinez, Jacki Mueller, Michael Plowman, and Dan Vallejo.** Welcome to the team!

Upcoming Volunteer Events:

Fri, Aug 25 – **Fox Run Volunteer Day!**

Fri, Sept 8 – **Youth Mental Health First Aid Training**

**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). 🐾



*Volunteers were ready for the 2023 Trailability Program season.*





## Fountain Creek Happenings

by Spencer Kessinger

This summer has been full of changes due to increased rainfall. One interesting observation Fountain Creek Nature Center staff have made is an uptick in Colorado Checkered Whiptail (*Aspidoscelis neotesselatus*) sightings. While we can't know for sure if this is due to the increased rainfall or perhaps just because our staff has spent more time outside this summer, we do know that it has been awesome observing these fascinating lizards! Colorado Checkered Whiptails are native to southeastern Colorado and the species developed as a hybrid between the Common Checkered Whiptail (*Aspidoscelis tessellatus*) and the Prairie Racerunner (*Aspidoscelis sexlineatus viridis*). This hybridization led to them being triploid, or having three sets of chromosomes, and means that every individual is female! These ladies reproduce asexually using a process called parthenogenesis in which the eggs are fertilized without male gametes. The offspring are genetically identical to their mothers! Next time you pass one on the trail, (quietly) say hello to the little lizard lady. 🐸



*Checkered Whiptail lizards seemed to be prominent at Fountain Creek Nature Center this summer.*



*Clockwise from bottom left: Mariposa Lilly, Indian Paintbrush, Wild Geranium, and Spiderwort*



## Bear Creek Sightings

by Jacki Bakker

Greetings from BCNC! According to National Weather Service, Colorado Springs has received over 20 inches of rain and the Nature Center is reaping the benefits! Many of our volunteers have commented that they have not seen so many blooms in years. There has been an abundance of Sticky Geranium, Prairie Spiderwort, Mariposa Lily, and Harebell. The blossoms on the New Mexico Locust were stunning. Along the creek, the vegetation is lush and green and the grasses in the meadows are over 5 feet tall! As you walk through Paula's Meadow, you will see a great amount of diversity in grasses, including Little Bluestem, Blue Grama, Western Wheat grass, and many others, along with a single Orange Indian Paintbrush, one of Paula's favorites! As the monsoons start to move in, we anticipate more beautiful blooms and growth, so come out and see our late summer and fall wildflowers at Bear Creek Nature Center! 🐾



**Thank you to our generous  
Happy Trails 2023 sponsors!**



## Fall Recreation Highlights

### September Lights Festival

Friday, September 22, 4:30 - 8:30 p.m.

### Take a Kid Mountain Biking Day

Saturday, October 7, 9:00 - 11:00 a.m.

### Bunco at Fountain Creek Nature Center

Friday, October 20, Starts at 5:00 p.m.

### Paint Mines Guided Hikes

Saturdays, through October, 9:30-11:30 a.m.

## Partners in the Parks for EPC Nature Centers



## Rick's Cartoon



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

## Fall Nature Program Highlights



### Moths' Night Out with the Mile High Bug Club

Friday, September 8, 7:30-10:00 p.m.

### Adult Day Camp— Arthropods

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

### Streams & Storms

Saturday, September 23, 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

### Lego Habitats

Saturday, September 30, multiple times

### Lil' Pumpkins Boo Bash

Saturday, October 21, 10:00 a.m. or 11:30 a.m.

### Boo! At Bear Creek

Saturday, October 20, 6:00—9:00 p.m.

### Bear Run

Saturday, November 4, 10:00 a.m.



### What Lives in Fountain Creek?

Saturday, September 23, 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

### Nature Haiku Class for Kids

Saturdays, Sept. 23 & Oct. 21, 1:00 - 3:30 p.m.

### Active Adults: Autumn Equinox Evening Hike

Saturday, September 23, 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.

### Archaeology Day Celebration

Saturday, October 14, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

### Pumpkin Carving Party

Saturday, October 28, 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

### Jack-o-Lantern Trail

Saturday, October 28, 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.

### Holiday Craft & Vendor Fair

Saturday, November 18, 10:00 a.m. - 3:00p.m.

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