

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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Bird Banding on Bear Creek *by Kylee Taylor*



Above, from top to bottom: Gray Catbird, Woodhouse's Scrub Jay, and Spotted Towhee. These birds were banded by trained and permitted scientists.

They say the early bird gets the worm, but when bird banding, the early participant gets the birds! Bear Creek Nature Center hosted Dr. Claire Ramos of CSU-Pueblo in October for another one-day bird banding station. Dr. Ramos studies the effects of climate change on birds as they migrate through extreme fires and drought.

Birds were captured with mist nets and their body conditions were analyzed and recorded. Birds were then fitted with a small, metal band around their leg- like a bracelet! The band has been imprinted with a number to be used for future research. These bands allow future scientists to track and study birds' migration patterns, health, breeding status, range, and site-specific information.

Dr. Ramos shared her extensive knowledge of birds with participants and community members were able to see science in action- learning more about the birds of Bear Creek with an up-close look.

If you are birding or find a deceased bird with a leg band, you can contribute to science! Head to ReportBand.gov to share the band number, the bird's species, the location and date of the sighting, and the condition of the bird. 🐾



Dr. Ramos carefully inspects a Pygmy Nuthatch while participants get a close look. Nuthatches are non-migratory, so be on the lookout for a nuthatch at the BCNC feeders with a shiny metal leg band!

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Editor: Jessica Miller

elpasocountynaturecenters.com



Volunteer Highlight: Peg Lewandowski!

by Kelly Ann Blanchard

Originally from Wisconsin, Peg Lewandowski moved to Colorado Springs over 40 years ago and loves that we can have snow and sunshine all in the same day!

Peg enjoys “normal” hobbies like reading, gardening, hiking, and biking. And kayaking every Saturday morning. And scuba diving in exotic locations multiple times per year in places like Mexico, Fiji, the Galapagos, Palau, and Yap.

“This year, I took up square dancing. I’m not the best dancer in the world, but I DO have fun!”

Peg’s varied interests keep her busy and supply her with exciting stories.

“I was in a bombing in Egypt... but on the bright side, I got to ride a camel to a dive site! Turns out, I’m a natural (at riding a camel, not bombing!)”

After working for the same company for 37 years and as a scuba instructor for over 20 years, Peg retired earlier this year and decided to volunteer. She had been to a few of our

bunco nights, so she

reached out about volunteering at the nature centers.

Peg hit the ground running as a volunteer at Fountain Creek Nature Center. She has claimed Wednesday mornings at the front desk, attended social volunteer gatherings, helped with various special events, and saved our bacon numerous times. Most recently, she participated in the Bear Run!

Peg shares her experiences with her two rescue dogs, Milo and Spencer.

According to Peg, “Life is an adventure, and if you’re looking for a partner in crime (new experiences or maybe old ones that are really fun) I’m your person!” 🐾



Peg with one of her dogs, Spencer.



Peg with one of her sealions, unnamed.



Peg at the Bear Run. If you told us this was not the first time she’s run with bears, we’d believe you.

Year-End Giving 2025

Dear Nature Center Friends,

The ongoing mission at Bear Creek and Fountain Creek Nature Centers is to **connect** people to their natural and cultural resources and **inspire** them to become stewards of the parks and our environment. Because of your support, we can offer affordable programs, field trips and nature camps that makes the mission a reality.

It has been another award-winning year at your nature centers. Bear Creek's Restoration Crew won an award from the National Association of Counties. Fountain Creek received the Sustainability in Action Award from Visit COS and, for the second year in a row, received a grant from The Broadmoor Garden Club to add native plants. We also received a grant from the Colorado Disability Opportunity Office to purchase a *third* terrain hopper for our immensely popular and growing Trailability Program.

While the Fox Run Nature Center project is temporarily paused due to economic conditions, the project is not cancelled. We remain committed to bringing a new nature center to northern El Paso County and are continuing to host seasonal programming at Fox Run Regional Park to meet community demand. The pause reflects a thoughtful approach ensuring responsible stewardship of county resources. County staff will keep evaluating the project and inform residents with updates as soon as new information is available.

Through October, over **7,200 students** have experienced a nature center field trip. Besides meeting school standards, our field trips are often a formative experience for the students. Staff and volunteers teach not only the facts but also respect and appreciation of our local wildlife and habitats.

"Best Nature Center in town!" "This field trip supports our thematic unit on ponds! Thank you!" "WE LOVED THE PUPPET SHOW!" These are some of the quotes from field trip evaluations.

Please make a year-end gift today to help the nature centers continue these programs, camps, and environmental education opportunities to inspire the next generation of nature stewards.

It is only through donors like **you** that the nature centers and the Friends Group can have such a positive impact in El Paso County. **To give**, simply scan the QR code below to make your tax-deductible contribution or online. **Nature is for everyone.**



Risë E Foster-Bruder, President, Friends of El Paso County Nature Centers



An Enduring Gift

Donate by mail

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

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 Keegan Calnan*

F all is a time for the kids to finally leave the nest and go off to college where they can become adults and learn to fend for themselves. Here at Fountain Creek we have something similar, our juvenile red-tailed hawks leaving their parents and hunting all on their own. Hawk parents do not have to wait eighteen years like humans, chicks fledge after about six weeks in the nest, but still stick around their parents to learn flying and hunting skills for another six weeks. Juvenile red-tailed hawks can often be identified by having a lighter belly and the lack of the namesake red tail of mature adults. One of the very lively juveniles at the park has been seen perching on the nature center's back deck, unsuccessfully hunting Gadwall in the pond, and even joined us the afternoon of Jack-O-Lantern Trail when it was hunting a snake with an audience of turkeys. While this young hawk still has a lot to improve on, we all will be watching their career with great interest. 🦅



After a successful hunt, our young red-tailed hawk is surrounded by our local curious flock of turkeys. Many of our turkeys are first-year birds themselves, still hanging out with mom!



Bear Creek Sightings *by Brenda McCreight*

Sometimes sightings aren't seen. The 16 children who joined us from the Deaf and Blind School for a field trip on November 5th "saw" many things with their noses, their hands, and their ears. They smelled the Ponderosa Pine and said it smelled like



Certainly, the most fun way to identify a Ponderosa Pine is to smell its vanilla-butterscotch bark.

goodness. They listened to the creek rush by and heard goodness. They held acorns in their hands and understood the beginning of a gnarled tree whose bark was rough to the touch.

And I saw the wonder on a face that had never touched a tree. I heard the giggles of the

boys behind me in their Spider-Man hoodies pretending to web me with their Spidey powers. I felt the white cane on the back of my shoe as a child worked hard to follow me. I saw joy! 🐾



Fall leaves on the ground are crunchy under shoes and crispy between fingers. The fall breeze is cool and the sun's rays are warm on cheeks.



Bear Creek's Circle of Life

by Adrian Douglass

The circle of life moves through Bear Creek; life, death, life again. Life. Over the summer here at Bear Creek we have stumbled across three different deer carcasses. How they died is unknown; our leading theory points to a very hungry mountain lion. Two of the deer had broken necks, and the other deer, we have only ever found the head. The typical strategy of a mountain lion is to sneak up on it's prey and go for the neck. By biting the neck it tries to suffocate and cripple the deer reducing the risk of it getting away.

Death. Now if you're like many of us at the nature center, the death of an animal is heartbreaking. Many of the guests in the park who have stumbled across the carcasses have told us how sad it is the deer died, how the brutality of nature has taken this



A charm of black-billed magpies enjoy a feast. One way or another, this deer will nourish nature long after its death.

innocent life.

Life again. While the death of a creature may seem cold and cruel, what that death provides is life. The mountain lion kills the deer which keeps the deer population under-control; too many deer can lead to overgrazing and cause major harm to the ecosystem. The mountain lion eats what it wants and moves on. What's left is eaten by the scavengers - the bobcats, coyotes, and magpies. The scraps are then left to the decomposers - the flies, beetles, and bacteria eat what is left, leaving nutrients in the soil for new life to grow. 🐾



A coyote inspects the carcass at night, only its reflective eyes and big ears seen by the camera.



Save the Date!

Pikes Peak Birding and Nature Festival

May 14 - 17, 2026

Registration Open April 11 - 26

pikespeakbirdingandnaturefestival.org



Fall Interns at Fountain Creek *by Andy Talley*



Emily (above) and Tahji (below) are returning interns this fall from the spring and summer semesters, respectively! Emily has gone to lots of outreach events, while Tahji has been designing upcoming special programs. Welcome back!



Jenny Clark is another intern working with us at Fountain Creek Nature Center. Born in Texas, Jenny moved here with her family when she was only 4 years old. Jenny always wanted to be a teacher and to work with animals. Early on, in college she started working toward a teaching degree. Later in life, she changed to zoology. She is currently enrolled in the Zoo Keeping Technologies program at Pikes Peak State College. Jenny chose Fountain Creek Nature Center for her internship because she wanted to get more experience with the educational aspects of the job. She thought this would be the perfect combination of her interests. Her favorite part about being an intern here is leading field trips and seeing the kids' reactions and thoughts to what we teach them. Outside of work, Jenny enjoys writing, hiking and hanging out with her two boys. 🐦



Jenny teaches a students about snakes.



"It's gonna be a no from me, dog" *by Adrian Douglass*

“No dogs Allowed”. A simple sign, but why is it in one spot, but not another? Colorado is one of the most dog-friendly states in the US. Why can't we bring our dogs here?

Our *regional trail* network covers large parts of the County, and on those trails dogs (yes, on a leash, even though yours is very well behaved), horses, and bicycles are allowed. We have our reasoning for limiting where our furry friends can go. Our natural spaces are homes for our wildlife. By making the *nature trail* only available to human foot traffic we minimize our impact in their space, increasing the chances of seeing wildlife. The scent and sound of pets can scare away wildlife. We also want to prevent you from having to clean.. dead deer off your dog. 🐾



Left, top and bottom: A trail camera watching for scavengers on a deer carcass photographs off-leash dogs.



Volunteer Corner

by Kelly Ann Blanchard

We gained some top-notch volunteers this fall! Shoutout to our newest additions: **Bailey Hewlett, Julia Talbott, Emily Parrish, Marisa & Randy Novobilski, Randi Mitchell, Jenny Charlier, Kamryn Sundling, and Emily Price.** Welcome to the team!

Volunteer Field Trip: On October 6th, fourteen eager volunteers and staff converged on the Air Force Academy Planetarium. We were treated to a private night sky viewing by the planetarium administrator followed by a screening of the beautiful documentary, *The Great Bear Rainforest*, on the huge planetarium screen.

Said one volunteer: “I enjoyed the whole experience, especially seeing kids enjoying their learning experience (like the children at our nature centers); it’s always uplifting and inspiring.”

Stay tuned for more volunteer field trips, social gatherings, and learning opportunities in 2026!

Become a Volunteer – Interested in joining our volunteer team with El Paso County Nature Centers? Please contact the Volunteer Coordinator, Kelly Ann Blanchard, at bcfcvolunteers@gmail.com. 🐦



Volunteers were treated to a fun field trip to the USAFA Planetarium. Some of them are used to leading field trips themselves at the Nature Centers!



Recreation Roundup

by Theresa Odello

Fall was a busy and rewarding season for El Paso County Parks recreation programs! At **Paint Mines Interpretive Park**, interpreters led hundreds of visitors on guided hikes, sharing the park’s unique geology while helping protect its fragile formations. Over 678 guests enjoyed the tours this season, staff spoke with over 18,000 visitors, and staff also educated more than 120 dog owners about park rules to preserve this remarkable landscape.



Paint Mines Interpreters have so much to teach—Indigenous history, geology, wildlife, plants, and Leave No Trace principles!

The **Bear Creek Dog Park Cleanup** during Creek Week drew 20 enthusiastic volunteers—including Commissioner Bill Wysong—who filled buckets and bags to keep the park clean for people and pets alike. Meanwhile, **Rainbow Falls Historic Site** wrapped up a vibrant season, welcoming more than 10,000 visitors. Adventures Out West provided shuttle service to the Falls, making for a smooth and successful partnership. The site will reopen this spring for another year of outdoor adventures! 🐾



Seasonal Interpreters at Rainbow Falls have a unique way of taking a break!



*Partners in the Parks
for EPC Nature Centers*



Summer Nature Camp 2026



**Camp Registration opens
January 31 at 8:00 a.m.!**

Rick's Cartoon



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

Winter Nature Program Highlights



Kids' Morning Out: Nature's Gifts
Saturday, December 13, 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

**Sustainability Series – Sourdough Success
with Hatch & Gather**
Saturday, January 17, 9:30-11:00 a.m.

Puppet Theater
Saturdays, 1:00-2:00 p.m.
January 24, February 28, & March 28

Nature's Classroom—Homestead Field Trips
Winter Adaptations: Thurs., Jan. 22, 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.
Ute Knowledge & STEM: Thurs., Feb. 19, 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.
Discover Bear Creek: Thurs., Feb. 19, 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.

Winter Bird Watercolor Class
Saturday, February 21, 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.



Solstice Celebration
Saturday, December 19, 4:30 - 6:30 p.m.

Morning Hike & Campfire
Saturday, January 3, 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.

Build a Bird with Bricks & Minifigs
Saturday, January 17, 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.

Live Birds of Prey!
Saturday, January 31, 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.

Drawing Winter Trees in Ink
Saturday, February 17, 6:00 - 7:30 p.m.

Intro to Wildlife Tracking
Saturday, February 14, 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Freaky Flora
Thursday, February 26, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

www.elpasocountynaturecenters.com