



The Prairie Sage

SPRING CREEK PRAIRIE Audubon CENTER

Spring 2007

McConnell Meadow Dedication held April 28



PHOTO BY DOUGLAS CAMPBELL

The McConnells (from left: Curt, Carolyn, Campbell, and Mem) with First Lady Sally Ganem and Rep. Jeff Fortenberry and daughter.

Beautiful sunshine, cool breezes, and the wonderful sounds of spring wildlife greeted a crowd of 80 for the dedication of McConnell Meadow, the new 168-acre tallgrass prairie addition to Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center (SCPAC). The celebration honored the McConnell family: Mem and Campbell McConnell, Curtis and Carolyn McConnell, and Lauren McConnell Davis, who made this addition possible and for whom it is now named. The ceremony also honored the additional supporters: Nebraska Environmental Trust, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Dick Denman, Wachiska Audubon Society, Lower Platte South Natural Resources District, and others. We deeply appreciate the contributions of all these supporters and partners for helping protect this prairie.

The program included comments from Ms. Sally Ganem, First Lady of Nebraska; Mark Brohman, Director, Nebraska Environmental Trust; Judy Greenwald, Chair, SCPAC Stewardship Advisory Board; Dave Catlin, Director of Field Support, National Audubon Society; and Marian Langan, Director, SCPAC.

Special guests at the dedication included Congressman Jeff Fortenberry and Nebraska Senator Norm Wallman.

After the reception and program, a ribbon-cutting was held at McConnell Meadow, followed by hikes in the prairie.

Teaming With Wildlife

Director Marian Langan visited the Washington D.C. offices of Nebraska's Congressional members as part of Nebraska's Teaming With Wildlife (TWW) delegation on February 27-28. The national TWW coalition consists of over 5,000 organizations that support the designated wildlife funding in the federal State Wildlife Grants program. This program is the nation's core program for preventing wildlife from becoming endangered in every state. Nebraska's TWW coalition has over 200 members representing conservation organizations, hunting groups, businesses, and many others.

Nebraska's Senator Ben Nelson was honored by national TWW for his continued leadership for the State Wildlife Grants program. The Nebraska TWW group was invited to be part of the presentation.

The Nebraska team also included Matt Hare, The Nature Conservancy; Mark Humpert, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission; and Bruce Stephens, Nebraska Wildlife Federation.



Marian Langan and Senator Ben Nelson

TWILIGHT ON THE TALLGRASS "LIVING LIGHTLY IN NEBRASKA"

Don't miss our annual prairie festival, Saturday, September 8, celebrating the wonder and majesty of the tallgrass prairie. Watch for details in the next newsletter or on our web site at <www.springcreekprairie.org>.

SCPAC Stewardship Advisory Board

Welcome to new Stewardship Board members: Dick Gray, Matt Harris, Susan Johnson, Curt McConnell, and Keith Schafer. The SCPAC Board is composed of a group of community leaders who apply their talents to further develop SCPAC as a vibrant, dynamic organization and to represent SCPAC in the community. Present officers are Judy Greenwald, Chair; Lisa Smith, Vice-Chair; Doug Campbell, Secretary; and Gerry Dimon, Treasurer. We deeply appreciate all of their efforts! (The full listing of Board members is noted on page 6.)

Student Haikus

After fifth-grade students from Sutton Elementary visited the prairie in late April, they decided to write some haikus describing their visit. Here are two of them:

The strong wind blows hard,
the grasses sway in the wind
just like one of us.

Cole Schelkopf

Down in the Spring Creek
I saw a bug, peek at me
The day was not still.

Ashton Griess



PHOTO BY ARNOLD MENDENHALL

Center's Bird List Reaches 200

by Kevin Poague

The number of bird species on our check list was frozen at 199 for quite awhile. Any birding trek around the trails was met back inside with the question, "Did you get species 200?" The answer was "no" so often we were beginning to think the birds were conspiring against us.

Then in late March the call came. Two trumpeter swans were occupying a small farm pond just one-half mile south of our property. Two excited staff members dashed to the parking lot and sped to the swan site. And there the birds were, lazily floating with some mallards and ring-necked ducks, oblivious to the quiet frenzy they were creating.

Trumpeters were not on the Center's list, and they are rare birds in this part of the state. So the question now was how to get

them to one of our ponds. We envisioned ourselves leaping and running down toward the pond, arms flailing wildly, in a totally unchivalrous and completely wrong effort to coerce the birds toward our inviting waters. Common sense prevailed, happily, as we remained in the car, and after watching the birds for several minutes, concluding the birds were completely content where they were, we headed back.

Our somewhat fiendish plan, though, did not go unfulfilled. A half an hour later some workmen went down to that same pond and scared the birds off themselves. The birds took off to the north and (drum roll, please) settled on our pond! The proof is in the photo above, snapped too late to get the wary white birds on the water. No matter — number 200 was now official.



The Meadowlark Music Festival is coming to Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center on **Friday, July 20!** Join us for an evening of fun, food, and music.

Gates will open at 6:00 p.m. Wetland and prairie trail activities will be presented from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m., or just enjoy the trails on your own. At 8:00 p.m., the Harvey Pittel Saxophone Quartet will perform.

Bring a picnic dinner and your choice of beverages. Create your own themed picnic to enter our picnic contest. Prizes awarded.

Admission is \$15/adult, children under 16 FREE with adult admission.

Tickets go on sale May 14. Purchase by phone, mail, or on-line. Visit www.meadowlarkmusicfestival.com for more information. Direct questions regarding ticket sales to Kim at kim@meadowlarkmusicfestival.com.

If the weather is questionable, listen to NET radio 91.1 FM for information, or call the festival's office at 402/488-9555 for the most current information.

PROGRAMS

Class sizes are limited, so register early by calling 402/797-2301, unless otherwise noted.

CELEBRATING THE TALLGRASS PRAIRIE THROUGH ART EDUCATION

All illustration workshops will be taught by scientific illustrator and Nebraska Statewide Arboretum Botanical Print Winner **Karina Helm** (www.helmillustration.com) and will be held in the education building, unless otherwise noted. Workshop enrollment: minimum of 3 – maximum of 12.

YOUTH

PAINTING INSECTS OF THE PRAIRIE

Saturday, June 23 1:00-3:00 p.m.
Sunday, July 15 1:00-3:00 p.m.

Do you like looking at insects? Have you ever wanted to draw and paint a cicada or a grasshopper? Whether you prefer beetles or butterflies, we'll have a great time discovering all sorts of insects. Karina will show you simple steps to easily draw different insect shapes, and then we'll paint them. No experience required; just an interest in insects and art! All materials provided. \$20/child.



DRAWING THE LIFE CYCLES OF ANIMALS

Thursday, June 14 1:00-3:00 p.m.
Saturday, July 28 3:00-5:00 p.m.

Do birds always have feathers? What do frogs look like when they're born? Do dragonflies ever swim? Explore the physical changes animals go through as they develop and the various environments they live in at different stages of their lives. Discover the simple steps to drawing and painting different animal shapes. No experience required; just an interest in animals and art! All materials provided. \$20/child.

SPIDER SKETCHING

Sunday, June 17 1:00-3:00 p.m.
Saturday, August 25 1:00-3:00 p.m.

Are there spiders in the prairie? What do they eat? Where do they live? What other types of spiders live in Nebraska? Spend two hours learning about spiders by drawing different species. We'll work from local live and preserved specimens caught by UNL biologists, as well as from photographs. Discover what makes spiders different from insects, while learning the simple steps to drawing spider shapes. No experience required; just an interest in spiders and art! All materials provided. \$20/child.

ADULTS

NEBRASKA WILDFLOWER WEEK: BOTANICAL ILLUSTRATION

Sun., June 3	Neb. Wildflowers	2:00-5:00 p.m.
Sat., June 9	History and Genes of Botanical Illustration	10 a.m.-1:00 p.m.
Sat., June 9	Color Theory and Matching	2:00-5:00 p.m.
Sun., June 10	Contemporary Botanical Art	10 a.m.-1:00 p.m.
Sun., June 10	Botany: Botanical Terminology and Dissections	2:00-5:00 p.m.

Celebrate Nebraska Wildflower Week by joining us for a series of botanical illustration workshops. Each three-hour workshop will offer a different presentation prior to participants creating their own botanical illustrations. Karina will introduce participants to drawing and painting skills, while working in graphite and watercolor techniques with local wildflowers as subjects. Join us for one workshop or all five. All skill levels are welcome and materials will be provided. \$30/adult/workshop, all 5 for \$135.

PLANTS OF THE PRAIRIE: BOTANICAL ILLUSTRATION

Sunday, July 22 1:00-5:00 p.m.
Saturday, Sept. 22 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.

Learn the basics of drawing and painting tallgrass prairie plants. Through demonstration and presentations, Karina will introduce participants to drawing and painting skills, plant anatomy, and the purpose of botanical illustration. Participants will work in graphite and watercolor techniques. All skill levels are welcome and materials will be provided. \$40/adult.

DRAWING PRAIRIE GRASSES

Sunday, July 8 1:00-5:00 p.m.

Nebraska's prairies contain beautiful native grasses, many of which are at Spring Creek Prairie. Learn the steps necessary to compose a detailed line drawing to document the identifying characteristics of a native grass. Learn basic and advanced drawing skills, depending on individual ability, while working in graphite and pen and ink techniques. Sharpen your observational skills while learning plant anatomy and botanical terminology. All skill levels are welcome and materials will be provided. Class held inside and outside. \$40/adult.

PROGRAMS

ILLUSTRATING THE BUTTERFLIES OF THE PRAIRIE

Saturday, July 14 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.

The tallgrass prairie contains numerous beautiful butterfly species. Learn how to accurately illustrate these local butterflies by observing live and pinned specimens. Participants will render accurate proportions, wing venation, and colorful patterning using graphite and watercolor techniques. This workshop will be a great introduction to properly identifying species during the NABA Butterfly Count July 21 (see description on this page). All skill levels are welcome and materials will be provided. \$40/adult.

ILLUSTRATING PRAIRIE LANDSCAPES

Sunday, June 24 2:00-5:00 p.m.

Sunday, Sept. 9 2:00-5:00 p.m.

The tallgrass prairie is a beautiful and surprisingly varied setting for drawing and painting landscapes. Join Karina for an afternoon of sketching various landscape scenes along the prairie trails, using pencil, pen, watercolor, and colored pencil techniques. Following demonstrations of techniques, participants can make their own small soft-bound journal, purchase a handmade hardbound journal, or bring along their own sketchbook. With journal in hand, we will head out onto the prairie. All skill levels are welcome and materials will be provided. \$30/adult.

ALL AGES

KEEPING AN ILLUSTRATED FIELD JOURNAL

Saturday, June 16 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.

Saturday, July 28 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.

Sunday, August 26 1:00-5:00 p.m.

Saturday, Sept. 15 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.

Sunday, Sept. 23 1:00-5:00 p.m.

Learn a range of field-adapted color sketching techniques to quickly illustrate the plants, animals, and landscapes that surround you using pencil, pen, watercolor, and colored pencil techniques. Following demonstrations of techniques, participants can make their own small softbound journal or purchase a hand-made hardbound journal, and then we'll head outside. (On hotter days, prairie subject matter will be brought inside for comfort.) Participants will learn to sharpen observational skills and increase their awareness of the natural world. All ages and levels of experience are welcome and materials will be provided. \$40/person.

EARLY MORNING BIRD WALK

Saturday, June 16 8:00-10:30 a.m.

Join Kevin Poague, our resident birding expert, for a guided walk through prairie and woodland habitats in search of spring migrants. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Preregister by May 21. \$6/person.

SUNDAY EARLY BIRD WALK AND BRUNCH

Sunday, June 3 8:30-11:30 a.m.

Migration should be in full flight in late May. We'll walk the pond, prairie, and woodland habitats in search of those elusive spring birds and finish the morning with a light brunch. See red-headed woodpeckers, Baltimore orioles, yellow warblers, grasshopper sparrows, and more. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Preregister by June 1. \$12/person.

FIREFLY PICNIC

Saturday, June 9 7:30-9:30 p.m.

Saturday, June 23 7:30-9:30 p.m.

A warm summer's evening is the perfect setting for a firefly picnic. Participants are invited to pack a "light" snack and bring a blanket to sit on while they enjoy a beautiful prairie sunset. Later, we will explore the trails to discover the magic of firefly habits and habitats.

This program is designed for children 3 through 8 years accompanied by an adult. Great for grandparents and their grandchildren. Space is limited. Preregister by June 7. \$6/adult-child team, \$2/each extra team member.

NABA BUTTERFLY COUNT

Saturday, July 21 9:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Spend a morning with the butterflies! Take part in the 32nd annual butterfly count sponsored by the North American Butterfly Association (NABA). All participants will begin with an informative hour-long introductory slide show in the Prairie Building at Pioneers Park Nature Center (PPNC). From there they will divide into smaller groups and disperse with count leaders to PPNC, Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center, and Nine-Mile Prairie. The count involves walking about two hours and covering two to three miles. No need to be an expert; an experienced butterfly watcher will accompany each group. After the count, those who wish may gather at SCPAC to compare notes and share a light lunch. Fee includes payment required by NABA for each participant. Children must be accompanied by an adult. To register, call PPNC, 441-7895, before the July 18 deadline. \$5/adult & \$2/child (12 and under).

Thistle Research at the Prairie

The School of Biological Sciences at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has several students conducting research projects at the prairie this summer. Jim Eckberg is researching how insects affect the bull thistle. Specifically, he wants to know how native insects feed on the bull thistle and what influences insects have on exotic plant invasions.

To find the answers, he planted bull thistles at different densities to see if native insects have the same impact on both low and high densities of thistles. The bull thistles he planted will not germinate and spread out onto the prairie.

Tomomi Suwa is also conducting research on the bull thistle, trying to find out what limits the invasiveness of this plant in Nebraska. She believes that the combination of herbivory by native thistle-feeding insects and plant competition from other prairie species limits bull thistle performance significantly, keeping it from becoming an invasive plant here.

Natalie West is studying how insects impact Flodman's thistle. Her technique consists of bags tied over the seed heads of some thistles and not others to see what impact insects have on the plants' pollination and seed production.

Not all thistles are alike

The Good: Flodman's thistle (*Cirsium flodmanii*) is a native thistle that only grows 1-2 feet tall. Its stem is white with short



Musk thistle

hairs, not spines, and sports a purple flower in July and August. It is not invasive and is beneficial for such insects as the painted lady butterfly and the bumblebee. Natalie says Spring Creek Prairie has one of the larger populations of Flodman's thistles in the area.

The Bad: The bull thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*) is an invasive, exotic thistle that grows 2-5 feet tall or taller. It also has a purple flower in August and September, but the flower's base is covered in long, yellow-tipped spines. The plant is native to Eurasia, but was introduced in North America over 100 years ago. Often listed as an invasive and noxious in the U.S., it is not considered a noxious weed in Nebraska. Rather, it is sparsely distributed.

The Really Bad: The musk thistle (*Carduus nutans*) is a too well-known and too common invasive noxious weed and is actively controlled at the prairie through digging.

Two Denton Sites for Bright Lights Summer Programs

Attention 3rd-5th graders! Spend some time this summer discovering and investigating some of nature's most interesting invertebrates. Again this year, Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center (SCPAC) and Bright Lights Summer Enrichment Program are partnering to provide a week-long class for children in grades 3 through 5.

"Science: Nature's Spineless Wonder of Spring Creek Prairie" will take place at SCPAC the week of June 18, Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon. Worms, slugs, snails, insects, spiders, and other fascinating critters thrive in the prairie, woodland, and wetlands habitats at SCPAC. Each day will focus on one type of animal with discovery hikes to different habitats; careful collection of specimens; and student-directed, humane experiments to learn more about individual species. Taught by Deb Hauswald, Education Coordinator at SCPAC and Nebraska Wildlife Federation's 2006 Educator of the Year, this class is a nature lover's dream come true. Also being offered that same week is "Farm School" in Denton for grades K-2 with LPS teacher Jeanette Maas and her husband, Roger.

Classes are first-come, first-served. Class tuition for each three-hour, five-day class is \$95. Meet daily at 8:00 a.m. at Randolph Elementary School to ride a bus to SCPAC. Bus fee \$10. Register on-line at <www.brightlights.org>.

Addition to Staff

We are pleased to welcome Amy Plettner to the staff of Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center as the part-time on-site caretaker. Amy is a long-time volunteer for us helping out at prairie festivals and leading journaling workshops.

Amy and her family will be living in the ranch house at the prairie.



A Prairie Legacy

Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center, a tribute to the past and a legacy for the future. You can help ensure a bright future for the prairie and the generation who will follow you by making a bequest in your will or estate plans. The following language may be used:

I give \$_____ (or _____% of my residuary estate) to **Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center**, a program of the National Audubon Society, a not-for-profit organization, located in New York City.

If you have a question, please call the center at (402) 797-2301.

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Open: Mon.-Fri. 9-5
Sat.-Sun. 1-5
All year, except major holidays
Admission charge

Director: Marian Langan
Education Coordinator: Deb Hauswald
Development Associate: Ann Ames
Office Manager/Important Bird Areas
Coordinator: Kevin Poague
Habitat Manager: Arnold Mendenhall
Caretaker: Amy Plettner

Stewardship Advisory Board

Robin Bates	Susan Johnson
Bob Campbell	Curt McConnell
Douglas Campbell	Nadine McHenry
Gerry Dimon	Jim Neid
Bill Edwards	Julie Pokorny
Katherine Endacott	Ernie Rousek
Michael Farrell	Keith Schafer
Dick Gray	Trixie Schmidt
Judy Greenwald	Lisa Smith
Matt Harris	Rich Vierk
Barb Hoppe	

CALENDAR

JUNE

- 3 SUNDAY MORNING BIRD WALK AND BRUNCH
- 9 FIREFLY PICNIC
- 16 EARLY MORNING BIRD WALK
- 18-22 BRIGHT LIGHTS: "NATURE'S SPINELESS WONDERS"
- 23 FIREFLY PICNIC

JULY

- 20 MEADOWLARK MUSIC FESTIVAL
- 21 NABA BUTTERFLY COUNT
- 24 DENTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

(SEE PAGES 3 AND 4 FOR COMPLETE LIST OF PUBLIC PROGRAMS)



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