A Restorative Vision for Naturalist Education
by Sarah Bailey, Prairie Plains Resource Institute

Since 1980, Prairie Plains Resource Institute (PPRI) located in Aurora has been working to maintain and restore Nebraska ecosystems and create opportunities for education, research, stewardship, and community development. PPRI specializes in high diversity, local ecotype prairie and wetland restoration in Nebraska. They harvest seed from native plant populations, create high diversity seed mixes, provide planting services, and consult on management. As an educational land trust, PPRI owns and manages eight prairie preserves in Nebraska, encompassing about 6,500 acres. These preserves are representative samples of the North American grassland ecosystem. Whether it is kids discovering, scientists researching, or families spending time together, PPRI provides places that allow people to enjoy the land. PPRI’s two main educational programs, SOAR and the Youth Naturalist Program, get youth outdoors to gain valuable knowledge about nature and our Nebraska ecosystems and have fun participating in outdoor recreational activities such as canoeing, kayaking, and camping. This provides them with a connection to the natural world and a sense of place. PPRI also hosts a number of school groups on the prairie during the school year as well as hikes and other events. With the completion of the Charles L. Whitney Education Center nearing, PPRI is excited to expand educational programming. This is a critical time to discuss land management and restoration in the Great Plains and educate future generations.

Join Sarah Bailey, PPRI’s greenhouse manager for the past eight years, to learn about its educational programming and ecological restoration work in Nebraska. Sarah will focus on her work with the Youth Naturalist Program and the partnerships she has been building with schools to educate high school students and teachers about the importance of ecological restoration work and engage them in the process.

Sarah is a Nebraska native with a B.S. in biological sciences from UNL. During her college years, she discovered Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center and fell in love with the prairie. Hiking through the tallgrass and photographing landscapes and insect life there left a lasting impact that changed her career path. She has a passion for nature photography and enjoys hiking across the prairie to photograph native plant communities, landscapes and insects. Sarah also plays music and enjoys cooking, camping, and backpacking.

Prairie Plains Resource Institute will be presented with the Lyman Award during this program.

Join Wachiska on Thursday, November 8, at 7:00 p.m. This free talk will take place at Lincoln’s Unitarian Church, 6300 A Street. Free parking is available in the church lot with overflow parking in the Pius High School lot across the street to the west. There is easy access to the church with no steps and plenty of space for mingling while enjoying refreshments after the meeting.
Exploring Holmes Lake with Esa Jarvi

It's hard to imagine a more convenient birding site than the smorgasbord of diverse habitats that Holmes Lake provides in the middle of Lincoln. Esa Jarvi will guide our exploration as we scout the lake and surrounding park's marshy edges, prairie grasses, and stands of pine trees. Esa's passion for nature is apparent in the knowledgeable insights he's willing to share and his avian tidbits that birders can appreciate. Holmes Lake attracts an assortment of waterfowl during the late autumn season, with migrant sparrows and conifer-loving birds like red-breasted nuthatches found in the habitat around the lake's perimeter.

We'll meet at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday, November 3, in Lincoln at the Holmes Lake parking lot on the north end of the lake accessed east of the dam from Holmes North Shore Road off Normal Boulevard. Bring binoculars and scope if you have them and dress to spend time outdoors. Porta-potties are available at the park. There is no fee required and the public is welcome. If you have questions, call Esa at 402-440-6357.

Great Flora and Fauna Abound at Salt Marsh

by John Carlini and Shari Schwartz

Sometimes salt crystals coat the low-lying plants of our unique saline wetlands with a white layer that resembles frost, but the morning we arrived at Little Salt Fork Marsh for our mid-October field trip, we found an actual blanket of frost on the prairie. Sunlight sparkled on the frosty tallgrasses and diamond-like droplets dangled from jeweled spider webs. The day's chilly start gave our group of 15 participants a welcome reprieve from the insatiable mosquitoes that often inhabit the marsh. Everyone got great views of a northern harrier as it soared back and forth hunting for breakfast. Sparrows posed more of a challenge, but determined birders combined their efforts to tally six different species: Lincoln's, Harris's, savannah, LeConte's, swamp, and Nelson's (the crème de la crème of migrant sparrows). Sedge and marsh wrens spied on us at close range from their hiding places in tall vegetation, and a flock of barn swallows zipped around overhead after the temperature warmed. In between our searches for sparrows lurking in the narrow leaf cattail stands, we examined other unusual salt-tolerant plants and sampled the salty tips of a state-listed endangered saltwort specimen. Our morning ended with a monarch butterfly flying valiantly into the south wind.

Annual Meeting in November

Wachiska’s November general meeting also serves as the annual meeting according to the chapter’s bylaws. On November 8, the following slate of officers for 2019 will be presented by the nominating committee:

President – Stu Luttich
Vice President – Theresa Pella
Recording Secretary – Cathy Shaner
Treasurer – Jerry Wiggle

Before the vote takes place, nominations will be accepted from the floor provided each candidate is currently a Wachiska member and has given consent to be nominated.

If you are interested in running for one of the above positions, chairing a standing committee, or serving as a director at large, contact Gary Fehr, fehrgary@gmail.com, 402-570-4382; or the Wachiska office, office@wachiskaaudubon.org, 402-486-4846. Officers serve a one-year term which may be extended two times. Terms will begin January 1, 2019.

Lyman Award to be Presented to PPRI

The Edwin and Elvina Lyman Award for Environmental Stewardship is named for the founders of Wachiska’s Population and Environment Committee. The Lymans provided the initiative and energy to bring more attention through Wachiska to the critical programs of local organizations working to promote biodiversity, healthy landscapes and rural communities, and many dimensions of human and societal issues in examining our population and its impact on the environment.

Wachiska’s population & environment committee will present this award to the Prairie Plains Resource Institute at the November meeting.

Christmas Bird Count Plans are Underway

by Jason St. Sauver

The 119th Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is fast approaching, and Lincoln’s count will take place on Sunday, December 16, this year. Jason “the Birdnerd” St. Sauver is coordinating this event and is looking for lots of local birders, birdnerds, bird lovers, or just nature nuts to help us count them. This long-running community science project helps scientists both locally and nationally to understand more about our resident and local bird populations, their habitat, and the effects from a changing climate. To sign up to help, email Jason at jsstauer@audubon.org (those without email can reach him at 402-797-2301) and join the fun! (Kids and families are welcome, but note that the count is long and usually cold, but we will have options for kids and families to help!)
Memories of Prairie Winds and Naomi Brill

In this month of Thanksgiving, the Prairie Plains Resource Institute (PPRI) is presented the Lyman Award by the Population & Environment Committee, and we fondly remember the late Naomi Brill as an early member of this group. Naomi joined founders Ed and Elvina Lyman and T.O. Haas in implementing the committee’s vision of recognizing human population growth and loss of habitat as crucial to the future of birds and other wildlife. Naomi was also a strong supporter of PPRI since its beginning and served on that board (1987–1999). With the help of Jan Whitney, I am sharing our vivid memories of Naomi’s wisdom, wit, ready laughter, understanding of human/natural systems relationships, and our mutual musings and fascination with prairie wind. To capture the essence of her dedication, here is an excerpt from Naomi’s column, The Amateur Naturalist, in the Lincoln Journal Star reprinted in the Prairie Plains Journal Number 14:1999, pages 73–76:

It was once believed that prairie wind originated with trees beyond the horizon...that all winds developed out of trees. Winds move soil and moisture, create climate, and take a direct hand in our lives from time to time in great storms that upset ‘the best laid plans of mice and men’. They are a vital, and many consider an ever present, part of our daily lives. We work with them, we plan around them, occasionally we swear at them, but for the naturalist they are one more aspect of a vast, interrelated world. On the prairie they buffet the walker, bringing the sounds and smells of the season. ... they send the grasses moving in slow undulating waves or dancing lightly; they cause the leaves of cottonwoods to flutter and sing, and eventually, to spread in a multicolored carpet; they create currents on which raptors and cranes soar in glorious flight.

Over the centuries people have recognized the physical and psychological impact of winds on their lives, giving names, affectionate and otherwise, to this diverse movement of air, and striving to understand and explain them.... The results of their passage can be devastating and destructive, but they are life-giving and a source of great beauty and variety. Without them we probably would exist, figuratively as well as literally in the doldrums, and life would be a lot less interesting.

Naomi authored the social work textbook, Working with People: The Helping Process. She understood the importance of working with people as an inextricable feature of care for the natural world, and the challenge of finding workable ways to influence attitudes and behaviors. When I was well beyond the age of 40, Naomi encouraged me to memorize Robert Louis Stevenson’s poem, The Wind (https://www.lnstar.com/mall/literature/rls/Wind.htm). She would be delighted by the work accomplished today by all of us in PPRI, Wachiska, Audubon Nebraska, and other groups. With her wisdom and good humor, Naomi would certainly tolerate and understand these ramblings to memorialize her special character and articulate our gratitude.

From the Board …
by Colleen Babcock, Chair
Population & Environment Committee

Moorland
by Richard Peterson

I like a good mystery; whether a book or a movie, a good who-dun-it has my attention. Probably goes back to when I was young and Sherlock Holmes entered my world. I eventually read every Conan Doyle story about the good detective. The urban settings I could always feel and almost taste: foggy London, the sound of hansom cabs on cobblestone streets, and the inviting pubs. But there were the outdoor settings which were less easy to imagine. Words like “moor,” “heather,” and “gorse” were terms with which I was unacquainted.

“Moorland” or “moor” is a type of habitat found in upland areas in a variety of biomes. The word “biome” is not easily defined as there are researchers who have divided up the world according to their own definition of the word; very simply, a biome is a community of plants and animals with common characteristics for survival in their environment.

When talking of moorland, the word “heath” will usually be included in the conversation. “Moor” generally refers to highland areas with higher rainfall, whereas heathland refers to lowland areas which more than likely have been affected or altered by human activity. There are gradations between moor and heath. Gorse, on the other hand, is a legume in the genus Ulex—a thorny, evergreen shrub native to Western Europe and elsewhere which prefers sunny sites with dry, sandy soil.

Moorland today generally means uncultivated hill land (such as Dartmoor in South West England). But the same area nearby also includes low-lying wetlands (such as Sedgemoor) with plants more typical of heathland. The heath or heather family (Ericaceae) of plants includes cranberry, blueberry, huckleberry, rhododendron as well as heath (Erica) and heather (Calluna). These plants are generally fond of acid soils and infertile growing conditions.

Moorland and heathland are the most extensive types of semi-natural vegetation in the British Isles. Semi-natural? It is unclear how many moors resulted from human activity. Some moorland in northern Scotland, for example, has been shown through pollen analysis to have never had trees on the land. Much of the Pennines moorland, however, was forested in Mesolithic times. Deforestation was probably the result of humans and climate fluctuations.

Sheep breeds such as Scottish Blackface and Lonk thrive on the austere heather moors. When moorland is overgrazed, woody vegetation is frequently lost, being replaced by coarse, unpalatable grasses and brackens.

The birds of Europe’s moorlands include red grouse, harrier, merlin, golden plover, curlew, skylark, meadow pipit, whinchat, ring ouzel, and the twite.
Luncheon Highlighted Prairie Preservation Successes and Challenges

by Elizabeth Nelson, Donor Development Committee Chair

Nearly 40 people attended Wachiska’s Prairie Preservation Luncheon held October 15 at the Unitarian Church. After lunch, speakers explained that securing a conservation easement on a prairie is only the beginning of the work needed to preserve it.

Arnold Mendenhall was the featured speaker. After 33 years as a USDA grassland management specialist and seven years at Spring Creek Prairie, Arnold has spent the past decade as a Wachiska conservation committee volunteer focused on managing and restoring our prairies. Arnold spoke of our immense responsibilities. In essence we burn; chop; hay; seed; manage grazing; build and repair fences, water lines, and signs; apply for grants; negotiate with tenants; pay taxes; and do our best to control invasive species. Wachiska volunteers did all these things this year and last year, and we’ll do it again next year and the year after. Easements and maintenance are forever. This means in perpetuity. That’s a long time.

Larry Fletcher spoke about the prairie that he and his wife Peg established just east of Lincoln over the past 25 years. Larry and Peg also built a two-room schoolhouse on their land and have hosted hundreds of students over the years, supporting a new generation of prairie enthusiasts. The Fletchers chose Wachiska to hold the easement to their prairie as they want to see the prairie protected for generations to come.

Wachiska currently holds 30 conservation easements and provides annual written inspection reports to the landowners of each. If the conditions of an easement are not being met, Wachiska works with owners to resolve issues or takes legal action if needed.

Tim Knott showed slides of the historic range and current locations of tallgrass prairie, the most quickly disappearing ecosystem in North America. Then speaking to the value of preserving prairies, Tim outlined the many education and research activities that take place on our prairies. He used examples from our own Prairie Discovery Days, birdwatching trips, and seed collecting as well as university research on our prairies to study nematode variety, antibiotic-resistant soil, butterfly health, and more.

Marilyn McNabb spoke about why she gives to the Wachiska Prairie Management Fund through current gifts and a bequest. She spoke of the beauty of the prairies and the human need to have places to appreciate the beauty of the natural world.

Elizabeth Nelson summarized our fundraising efforts. Our Prairie Management and Prairie Defense Funds are held at the Lincoln Community Foundation (LCF). There are many ways to give, from monthly credit card donations, to a tax-saving rollover of IRA required minimum distributions, to bequests, and more. Information on the many giving options is available from Elizabeth, enelson555@gmail.com, the LCF or a financial advisor.

The development committee is proud to announce that we have surpassed the $250,000 mark this year on our way to reaching our $1 million goal. When reached, the income from this investment will be used to pay for a part-time prairie manager to help Wachiska meet the wide-ranging responsibilities we have taken on in our efforts to preserve an important part of our heritage, tallgrass prairies, in perpetuity—that’s a long time.


Upcoming Programs/Volunteers Needed at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center

by Jason St. Sauver, Director of Education and Outreach

Volunteers are needed to help with Climate Watch at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center. This is a new, important community science project from National Audubon to check on how local birds are being affected by climate change. It is fun and easy, and staff at Spring Creek Prairie will train you. All you need to do is two short bird surveys a year—one between January 15 and February 15 and the other between May 15 and June 15—and look and listen for Eastern bluebirds and white-breasted nuthatches. It’s that easy! If you can help, contact Jason at scp@audubon.org or 402-797-2301.

On Sunday, December 2, from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m., join us on the prairie to celebrate the season during the holiday open house with snacks, cider, live music, recycled holiday crafts, and more. This year as a special treat, help us celebrate the release of The Ecology of a Tallgrass Treasure, Paul Johnsgard’s new book about Spring Creek Prairie. Dr. Johnsgard will be signing books from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. that day. This book would make wonderful holiday gifts.

Audubon Calendars Have Arrived

If you ordered 2019 Audubon calendars this fall, they are now in the Wachiska office. Customers should have received an email the last week in November. Please let Arlys know when you will be able to stop by and pick them up. Payment will be due at that time. There are three extras available if you didn’t get your order in by the deadline. Every month contains truly beautiful images.
Kristal Stoner Named Executive Director of Audubon Nebraska

The National Audubon Society and Audubon Nebraska have announced the appointment of Kristal Stoner as executive director of Audubon Nebraska and vice president of National Audubon. Kristal joins Audubon after a successful tenure at the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) where she most recently served as wildlife diversity program manager.

As head of Audubon Nebraska, Kristal will oversee conservation strategies spanning the state’s prairies, rivers, working lands, and bird-friendly communities. In the coming months, she will meet with partners, donors, funders, and chapter members to strengthen community connections and lay the groundwork for Audubon Nebraska to address new conservation challenges including drought, habitat loss, and climate change.

At NGPC, Kristal implemented the State Wildlife Action Plan to conserve at-risk species by developing and coordinating initiatives across numerous divisions within the Commission. She also managed the Nebraska Natural Legacy Partnership Team which provides guidance for Nebraska’s Wildlife Action Plan implementation. The Team includes members from state and federal agencies and non-profit organizations representing wildlife conservation, agriculture, and education.

Kristal holds a M.S. in ecology, evolution and behavior from UNL and a B.S. in biology from Nebraska Wesleyan University. Her first day on the job was September 24.

Spring Creek Prairie has a New Director

Meghan Sittler began working as the new Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center Director on September 28.

Meghan has close personal connections to Spring Creek Prairie and its conservation mission. She grew up in Martell and attended Crete public schools. Her parents, Lyle and Alice Sittler, farmed land near Spring Creek Prairie; her sister and brother-in-law now farm there. Before his passing, Lyle was a Spring Creek Prairie board member. Lyle and Alice were keen proponents of conservation and have been recognized with many awards and accolades over the years for their conservation ethic.

Meghan joins the Audubon team with a strong background in natural resource conservation and collaboration. Her professional experience includes eight years as the coordinator of the Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance, a stakeholder-driven partnership aimed at protecting the unique and critical resources of the Lower Platte River. Most recently with UNL Extension, she served as the domestic water/wastewater management educator where she helped to facilitate and coordinate a statewide partnership focused on the protection of Nebraska’s water resources.

Meghan is a good fit for Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center’s director. Her knowledge, connections and passion for the mission will be tremendous assets in her work at the Center. The previous director stated that Meghan will be easy for the staff, board, and other volunteers to work with, and she’ll do well sustaining relationships with current supporters and partners and cultivating new ones.

Benefit Wachiska While Shopping Online

AmazonSmile is a simple, automatic way to support Wachiska Audubon every time you shop on Amazon at no extra cost to you. Using your existing Amazon account, prices and selected choices are the same as Amazon.com, with the added bonus that a portion of the purchase price will be given to Wachiska.

To shop at AmazonSmile, go to smile.amazon.com from your computer’s web browser or mobile device. Before you begin shopping the first time, select Wachiska Audubon as your designated charitable organization to receive donations from eligible purchases. Amazon will remember Wachiska to receive 0.5 percent of the purchase price of your purchases each time you shop. Donations are made by the AmazonSmile Foundation and are not tax deductible by you.

Our Birds Are Happy Once Again

by Lana Novak, Birdseed Sale Committee

The 2018 Fall Birdseed Sale is history with the following numbers tallied: $3,844 in receipts for seed sold, $68 in donations to education and conservation, and $44 designated to the Prairie Management Fund. There is no seed remaining. Thank you to these folks who helped in some way with this fall’s sale: Ethan Freese, Carol Stewart, Ruthann Nahorny, Elizabeth Nelson, Arlys Reitan, Cathy Shaner, and Lana Novak. We again thank all our birdseed customers for their support. Watch this newsletter for the next sale which will be announced in February or March of 2019.
The big news about climate change is, of course, the warning by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in its new report that we have only 12 years to take steps to limit climate change, and that the previous international goal of limiting warming to two degrees C is inadequate to lessen risks of severe droughts and floods, extreme heat, and displacement and poverty for hundreds of millions of people.

But let’s acknowledge a smaller but happier event. Congressman Jeff Fortenberry is co-sponsoring the “Challenges and Prizes for Climate Act,” a bill with bipartisan support now in the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology. This bill would authorize $10 million to create competitions in five areas: carbon capture, energy efficiency, energy storage, climate adaptation and resilience, and data analytics. National Audubon has given strong support for this bill. It might be a good idea to drop a note of thanks to Fortenberry.

An earlier, similar contest reordered the priorities of lightbulb maker Philips Lighting enough to speed up bringing LEDs to the marketplace, a very significant achievement. The next challenge for wind and solar energy generation is the creation of batteries whose cost would not raise consumer electric rates. In the last five years, the costs of storing power in batteries have decreased by half. As the IPCC has reminded us, time is of the essence.

Another bipartisan climate initiative that Audubon is enthusiastic about is the Market Choice Act initiated by Rep. Carlos Curbelo of Florida. His district includes the Florida Keys, the Everglades, and southwest Miami-Dade County where interest in climate change is not academic, but a matter of day-to-day observation of spilled seawater on roads and yards. There is a risk of saltwater intrusion on drinking water. Fixes are not cheap.

The Market Choice Act would eliminate the gas tax and replace it with a tax on carbon emissions, starting at the rate of $24 per metric ton and increasing annually. National Audubon’s senior vice president for conservation policy, Sarah Greenberger, says that while Audubon would hope for a higher price, there would be substantial emissions reductions on a par with the standards of the Paris Accord. The bill sets annual rates for emissions reductions and if the targets are missed, the tax rate goes up. The bill would send 70 percent of the revenues to infrastructure through the Highway Trust Fund; 10 percent would go to low-income households to cushion rising costs of electricity and gas. Other funds would be directed to job training of displaced workers, energy research, and coastal resilience.

Audubon’s CEO David Yarnold praised the bill as “a marker bill—something to spark debate and innovative thinking.” Greenberger said, “It asks questions that should be debated from a variety of perspectives. What is the right price? Where should the revenue go?" As Curbelo put it, “We need to be focused on solutions and on answers.”
Join now! Become a Friend of Wachiska Audubon Society!

This local chapter membership provides you with voting privileges and access to all our events, programs, and committees, plus 100 percent of your membership donation goes directly to the Wachiska chapter. In addition, Friend members receive our monthly newsletter, The Babbling Brook, in their choice of print or electronic form.

Friends of Wachiska (local membership)

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____ $25 Individual/Friend
____ $35 Family Friend
____ $50 Black-capped Chickadee Friend
____ $100 Northern Cardinal Friend
____ $250 Western Meadowlark Friend
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____ $1000 Peregrine Falcon Friend

Select the level of support that is right for you and make your check payable to Wachiska Audubon Society. All funds remain with our local chapter and are tax deductible. Mail to:

Wachiska Audubon Society
Attention: Membership Committee
4547 Calvert St Ste 10
Lincoln NE 68506-5643

____ I prefer to receive my newsletter by email.

Please note: If you are already a member of National Audubon Society (NAS) you automatically become a member of Wachiska, but not a Wachiska Friend member. Only Wachiska Friends receive the printed newsletter each month. If you wish to join NAS or receive Audubon magazine, please contact the National Audubon Society directly.

American Goldfinch Family
Save Those Unwanted Calendars

Once again Wachiska will be collecting and recycling unwanted calendars. Bring them to the Wachiska office or to a general meeting, and we’ll see that a school or nursing home gets them. Oftentimes our own members see a title they like and take those home.

New calendars you get for next year are shared with local retirement and nursing homes; local schools and day cares use the old ones from previous years to cut out the pictures and stories. Last year about 200 calendars from chapter members were recycled in this way.

Thank you ahead of time for helping in this way.

NEBirds Website

Check out the email discussion at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NEBirds to learn of the latest sightings and interesting tales of Nebraska’s most avid birders and those interested in Nebraska birds and their ecology. Posts change daily—and even more often when excitement arises. Offerings of recent sightings, questions, and new photos are all welcome.

A Gift to the Future

A bequest to Wachiska Audubon Society is a gift to future generations enabling our natural heritage to continue. For wills, trusts, and gifts, our legal name is Wachiska Audubon Society. Our Federal Tax ID number is 51-0229888.