



Audubon | GREAT PLAINS

2023 Fall Newsletter

Tall Grass,
Deep Roots
Spring Creek
Prairie celebrates
25 years



Plus: Northern Flicker • The Joy of Hog Island

2023 Audubon Great Plains Fall Newsletter

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ELEVATE / THE CAMPAIGN FOR AUDUBON NEBRASKA

Part of a comprehensive \$750 million national campaign, Elevate Nebraska is a call to action to protect birds, and in so doing, to protect our way of life and the landscapes we love across our state. We developed investment plans for five areas of our work:

1. Capital Expansion at our Centers
2. Statewide Programs
3. Working Lands Programs
4. Platte River Initiative
5. Legacy Gifts

Our statewide programs include funding for conservation and stewardship, education programs, the Platte River Initiative, and Working Lands programs.

\$35.7 million
raised

\$1.4 million
to go!

What we've done so far...

Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center
Funding and implementing a deferred maintenance plan, including:

- Habitat building completed
- Outdoor trail accessible bathroom
- New roof on the visitor's center
- Accessible entrances
- Pathway and parking lot lighting installed

• and 310 acres purchased!

Rowe Sanctuary

- Visitor's center renovation and construction begins in October
- New crane and river exhibits designed
- Donald and Lorena Meier Native Plants Restoration Program

Statewide Programs

Four new full-time positions to support research and conservation programs:

- Platte River Initiative Manager, Melissa Mosier
- Avian Biologist, Stephen Brenner
- Range Ecologist, Bill Sellers
- Great Plains Director of Conservation, covering Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota

\$1.4 m	To be raised
\$14.9 m	Future Bequest Intentions
\$6.7 m	Statewide Program Support
\$2.6 m	Spring Creek Prairie Capital
\$11.5 m	Rowe Sanctuary Capital

Letter from the Executive Director, Kristal Stoner

Dear Friends of Audubon Great Plains,

As the days grow shorter and the cool breeze of fall brushes across the landscape, it's a poignant reminder that nature's rhythms persistently dance to their own tune. In this intricate choreography, I am often reminded of the remarkable journeys of hummingbirds, their wings fluttering as they migrate thousands of miles to their wintering grounds. These tiny avian travelers, driven by instinct and determination, navigate through unfamiliar landscapes, and like all migratory species, they continue their journey even in times of transition and change.



It is with great joy and gratitude that I share with you the expansion of 310 acres at Spring Creek Prairie, a timely expansion as we celebrate its 25th anniversary, and our annual Taste of the Tallgrass fundraising event. Twenty-five years of stewardship, education, and a shared commitment to conserving grassland habitat at our beloved prairie does not go unnoticed. This milestone serves as a testament to the enduring dedication of our community and the unwavering support that sustains us.

In the past year, we've expanded our equity, inclusion, and belonging efforts recognizing that the beauty of nature should be accessible to all. Our efforts allow us to grow our network through the Larks Women's Birding Group, and the Nature Walk and Indigenous Language Talk, as well as representing at PRIDE festivities. These programs not only enrich our understanding of the natural world but also foster a sense of unity and belonging among all who join us in our mission.

As we approach the upcoming spring migration and crane season, I invite you to be part of the wonder at Rowe Sanctuary. While the experience may look different due to construction and leadership transition, rest assured that the spectacle of thousands of sandhill cranes filling the sky remains an awe-inspiring sight evident through viewing blinds, and we cannot wait to host you.

In closing, I extend my heartfelt gratitude for your support over the years and invite you to embark on this new season of discovery with us. Together, let's celebrate 25 years of Spring Creek Prairie, embrace the spirit of equity, inclusion, and belonging, and witness the incredible spectacle of migration.

Thank you for being a part of our journey and for helping us safeguard the wonders of our natural world.

With warm regards,

Kristal Stoner



Creating a Year-round Habitat for Birds

Creating small habitats is especially valuable if you live in an urban or suburban area, where green spaces are fragmented and often over-tended, making food and shelter harder to find.

1 Leave the leaves

Our first tip is to do less! Leaving leaves on the ground creates a natural mulch with several benefits:

- Creating shelter for birds and beneficial insects
- Fertilizing the soil as it decomposes and providing food for the soil’s micro-organisms
- Protecting plant roots from the cold
- Keeping moisture from evaporating
- Preventing runoff in areas with compacted soil

Gather leaves from driveways and sidewalks for free mulch and compost. Spread a thick layer at least 2 inches deep over each garden bed. Leaves can inhibit grass growth, but you can gather more mulch by raking from the center of your yard outward and onto border gardens, around trees and shrubs, or making tidy piles in protected places that can be used as winter shelter. Another option is to let your mower do the work of chopping and empty it over your garden.

2 Save the seeds

Native plants like coneflowers and black-eyed susans are a great food source for winter birds. Leave seedheads on their stems or gather pruned stems and leaves into piles in one area that can be used for shelter and/or spring nesting. Native grasses add visual interest over the winter and can be trimmed back when blooms begin in the spring.

3 Pile up some brush

As you pick up fallen branches or trim trees and shrubs, find a place that is protected from the wind and build a little brush pile. Birds can find shelter and feed on the insects as the brush breaks down. This is sometimes called a ‘passive compost’ pile and can be used as mulch in the spring.

4 Plant natives

Native wildflower seeds that naturally drop in the fall have a harder shell that prevents them from germinating too early. Native forbs that should be seeded in the fall or require cold stratification for spring planting include:

- Anise hyssop (agastache)
- Black-eyed susan (rudbeckia)
- Blazing star (liatris species)
- Cardinal flower (lobelia cardinalis)
- Coneflower (echinacea, some varieties)
- Milkweed (asclepias)
- Golden alexander (zizia aurea)
- Spotted Joe Pye weed (eutrochium maculatum)
- Wild blue phlox (phlox divaricata)
- Wild geranium (geranium maculatum)

These seeds can be scattered after the first frost of the season, but before the ground freezes; scatter generously, then gently step on the seeds to keep them in place. Seeds planted in the fall can germinate and bloom up to two weeks earlier than those planted in the spring.



Northern Cardinal gathering nesting material. Photo: Peter Brannon.



Both above: Volunteers created a bird-friendly native garden with prairie blazing star, butterfly weed, common milkweed, and plains grasses at Stick Creek Kids in Woodriver, Nebraska. Photos: Evan Barrientos.

Bird Feature: Northern Flicker

Colaptes auratus

Family: Woodpeckers

Habitat: Open forests, woodlots, groves, towns, semi-open country. With its wide range, from Alaska to Nicaragua, the flicker can be found in almost any habitat with trees. Tends to avoid dense unbroken forest, requiring some open ground for foraging. May be in very open country with few trees.

Conservation status: Although still abundant and widespread, recent surveys indicate declines in population over much of the range since the 1960s. Introduced starlings compete with flickers for freshly excavated nesting sites, may drive the flickers away.

Climate change is pushing the Northern Flicker north. If current trends are not reversed, the species could become rare to most of the United States, including South Dakota and Nebraska.

Conservation challenges:

- Wild fires
- Spring heat waves

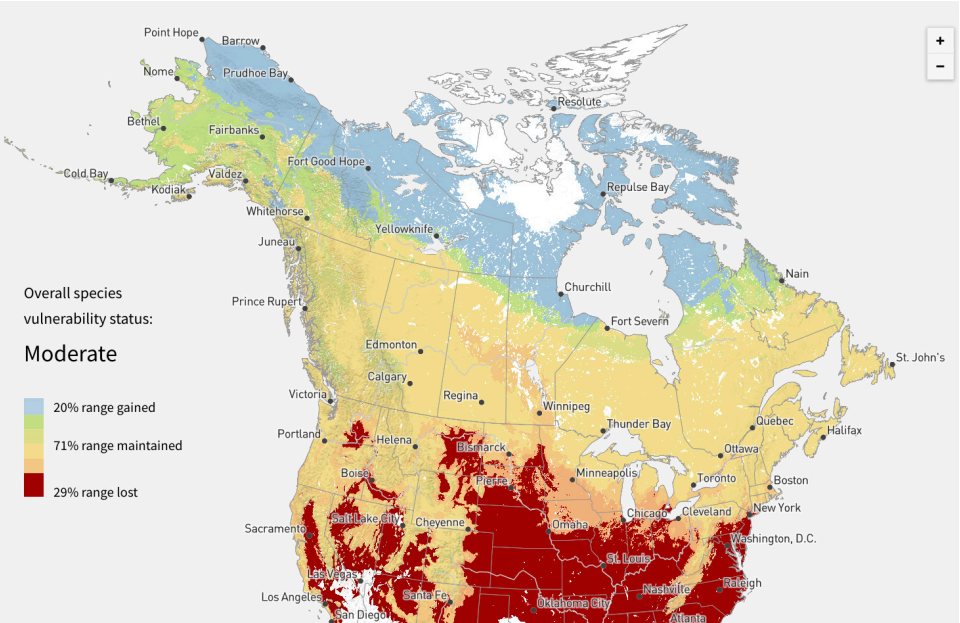


Northern Flicker, male and female pair. Photo: Jeffrey Kauffman.



Northern Flicker. Photo: Sheen Watkins

Potential Lost Range Summer range at +3.0 C



Donald and Lorena Meier Native Plants Restoration Program

Amanda Hegg



In addition to the center renovation at Rowe Sanctuary, Rowe conservation staff plan to remodel an out-of-use crane viewing blind into a native plant greenhouse thanks to a generous donation from the Donald and Lorena Meier Foundation. The greenhouse project marks the beginning of the Donald and Lorena Meier Native Plant Restoration Program, which aims to expand Rowe Sanctuary’s capacity for prairie restoration projects, enhance plant diversity across the sanctuary, and provide native plants to support community projects that benefit urban wildlife.



Another goal of the program is to generate native plant educational materials for central Nebraska residents that feature some of the best native plants for local urban spaces, information on planning and maintaining landscapes with native plants, and the multitude of benefits of native plants for both people and wildlife. These educational materials will be available on Rowe Sanctuary’s website.



This program contributes to a growing movement in the United States to make community spaces more bird and insect friendly by increasing the availability of plants that provide food, shelter, and the appropriate habitat structure to raise young.

Bobolink. Photo: Caroline Samson.
Rowe Sanctuary staff removes invasives and relocates sand to create new sandbars and nesting islands for Least Terns and Piping Plovers.
Bee on Solidago in an Audubon native garden. Photo: Evan Barrientos/Audubon.
View of the river and surrounding vegetation from a Rowe trail.



Native gardens are also growing in popularity because of the lower water and fertilizer requirements and reduced time and cost of lawn maintenance. Non-native plants, or those that originate from places like Europe and Asia, do not provide the same function for wildlife. However, they still represent a majority of plants available at landscape centers and in central Nebraska urban landscapes.

Over the past two years, Rowe Sanctuary has installed over 1,000 native plant plugs in playgrounds at childcare centers in Kearney, Kenesaw, and Wood River to promote physical and mental well-being through early childhood encounters with wildlife like butterflies and birds while supporting the needs of local wildlife. The restoration program will help Rowe to expand upon this work, along with other community projects and large-scale landscape restoration efforts. Our goal is to enhance diversity of native plant communities on the sanctuary, by providing a space for conservation staff to grow native plants from seed harvested from the sanctuary and other nearby locations.

The Foundation’s gift will sustain the program through 2028.

Embracing Diversity and Belonging in the Heart of Nature

Amanda Booher and Juli Bosmoe

In the world of birdwatching, there’s a magic that comes with spotting and identifying a bird based on its song, wing shape, or size; a magic that transcends boundaries and backgrounds. At Audubon Great Plains, we believe in fostering a community where everyone can experience this magic, regardless of who they are or where they come from.

That’s why we’re proud to champion equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging (EDIB) in all of our endeavors. In the last year, our team has developed an EDIB committee to support our work and nurture our community. As a regional office of the National Audubon Society, we are proud to work alongside efforts made across the organization.

Birding and Belonging
One of our most cherished initiatives is the Larks Women’s Birding Group. Starting in March of 2023 in Fargo, North Dakota, this female-centric birding group is more than just a club; it’s a community where birders of all levels, from beginners to experts, can come together and celebrate their shared passion for birding. Throughout the year, the group has explored various Urban Woods and Prairie nature parks in Fargo, Grand Forks, and even visited our beloved Edward M. Brigham III Sanctuary. Each Larks bird outing is providing new sites to explore, different species to identify, and lasting connections.

Bridging Cultures Through Nature
This July, we hosted the first

Nature Walk and Indigenous Language Talk in partnership with the FM Indigenous Association. This event had over 50 participants join and served as a testament to the power of a natural setting to illustrate the benefit of inclusivity, belonging, and learning from one another in a welcoming environment. Held at Forest River Nature Park in Fargo, this walk provided participants the opportunity to learn indigenous names of native plants and their use in indigenous communities. Experiences like this offer a profound opportunity to deepen our connection of the land we share and the people who’ve called it home for generations. This was the first of an annual series.

PRIDE: Celebrating Love and Acceptance
Diversity and belonging extend far beyond the prairies. We proudly participated in the PRIDE parade in Nebraska, where we celebrate love, acceptance, and the rights of our LGBTQ+ community members. At Spring Creek Prairie, we believe that the natural world has the unique power to bring people together, to dissolve boundaries, and to nurture a sense of belonging.

By expanding our diverse and inclusive programs like the Larks Women’s Birding Group, Indigenous Language Nature Walks, and our presence at events like the PRIDE parade, we’re committed to continuing our learning and understanding of what it means to foster equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging.



Two participants at the Nature Walk and Indigenous Language Talk in partnership with the FM Indigenous Association, Fargo, ND.

Spring Creek Prairie staff and friends at the Star City Pride Parade in Lincoln, NE.

Tall Grass, Deep Roots: Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center Celebrates 25 Years

- Major Milestones
- 1998 – 610 acres

O’Brien Ranch is purchased by Audubon and renamed Spring Creek Prairie
- 2003 – 626 acres

Wachiska Audubon Society donates 16 acres in celebration of its 30th anniversary, 19th century trail ruts at SCPAC added to the National Register of Historic Places
- 2004

SCPAC and Rowe Sanctuary are designated ‘Important Bird Areas’
- 2006 – Visitor’s Center

New visitor’s center opens
- 2006 – 808 acres

Audubon purchases 168 acres of land just east of Spring Creek Prairie
- 2009 – Prairie Immersion Program

In its inaugural year, one-half of all fourth-grade students from the Lincoln Public School system visit the prairie
- 2013 – 850 acres

SCP purchases an additional fifty acres of land
- 2014 – Exhibits

The visitor’s center debuts new educational exhibits
- 2023 – 1,160 acres

Audubon purchases 310 acres of pristine grassland and woodlands, connecting SCPAC to the Prairie Corridor

Recollections from Kevin Poague

When we moved to the ranch at 11700 SW 100th Street, the house had one dial-up internet connection.

Those of the internet age will not remember, but this meant that only one computer could be on the internet at a time. When you were done with your email – which always took longer than it should have – we shouted “Next!” for another coworker to log in and take their turn. Efficient it wasn’t, but we made it work.

1999 seems like a long, long time ago. We felt so fortunate to be able to set up an office in a decades-old farmhouse and work while overseeing a beautiful landscape. We also knew it would not be without its challenges.

The property needed a lot of restoration management to support the bird and wildlife we knew it could. We removed dozens of honey locust and elm trees along Spring Creek and around the pond. Keeping woody invasives back is a constant battle, just as it is for ranchers in the Sand Hills. Musk thistles are another problem, but over the years, through the hard work of staff and many volunteers – who just love to release their anger and frustration on these noxious

weeds – the huge swaths of musk thistles have been whittled down to manageable levels.

Sadly, seasons of rebirth have been hampered by seasons of loss. Up until recently, Greater Prairie-Chickens could be heard calling from grasslands nearby and found on a booming ground in the early spring. Small groups of them could be observed in the fall. But we haven’t seen or heard chickens here for a number of years. There seems to be too much development around the area to support this species, which needs thousands of continuous acres of prairie to support a population.

As the property has been restored and grown, our work shows signs of success. Bobolinks, grasshopper sparrows, dickcissels, field sparrows, willow flycatchers, Bell’s vireos, to name some, are thriving according to our summer bird surveys.

We are experiencing a dramatic growth spurt this year: 310 acres of tallgrass prairie and woodlands. This land links us to the Prairie Corridor and city of Lincoln trails, more than 10 miles of open walking trails, public parks, and continuous habitat for native grassland wildlife. In the next 25 years, we will continue to grow and restore.



Opposite page, top: A group explores the prairie on horseback.
Bottom: 1999 Prairie Festival.
Left, top: Omaha World Herald features the precursor of the Prairie Immersion Program, October 7, 1999.
Middle: The Visitor’s Center today.
Bottom: Haybale construction begins in 2005.
Background: SCPAC. Photo: Luke Franke/Audubon.

Awards & Recognition

- 2001 – National Friends of the Trail Award

Oregon-California Trails Association
- 2003 – Environmental Education and Awareness Award

Lincoln-Lancaster County
- 2006 – Environmental Education and Awareness Award

Lincoln-Lancaster County Department of Health
- 2006 – Tributary Award

Lower Platte South Natural Resources District
- 2007 – Blazing Star Award

Nebraska Statewide Arboretum
- 2008 – Marian Langan receives national TogetherGreen Conservation Fellowship
- 2009 – Deb Hauswald is named Tamar Chotzen Audubon Educator of the Year by the National Audubon Society
- 2011 – Jane Goodall

SCP hosts the Northern Great Plains Regional Roots and Shoots Summit, with founder Jane Goodall in attendance
- 2019 – Jason “The Birdnerd” St. Sauver is named Tamar Chotzen Audubon Educator of the Year by the National Audubon Society

Climate and Culture: a Conversation at Spring Creek Prairie

Melissa Amarawardana

Monday morning, I sat at the table with my daughter and a hot cup of coffee, gripping my eyes tight to hide my tears from her. All the positivity from my weekend evaporated; today’s high temperature was predicted to be 103 degrees. This bizarre heat wave is the future we’ve been warned about.

The day before, at the Climate and Culture conservation at Spring Creek Prairie, participants were asked why they were there: climate anxiety was one recurring answer. Multiple panelists at the event stressed that they have noticed an increase in climate anxiety, marked by feelings of fear, grief, and hopelessness around both the future of the world and their own personal future. Participating educators talked about how to navigate this in age-appropriate ways. But panelists stressed that these emotions are powering a major cultural movement.

Martha Durr, Nebraska State Climatologist, discussed a palpable shift after the devastating floods in 2019, not just from those directly affected but also from rural and agricultural communities. “The tone and the questioning was suddenly very different. It was ‘are we going to get more of these floods?’ and ‘What about solutions?’...the level of concern in some people who didn’t want to address climate change has now shifted into talking through solutions.”

“People are understanding that we can’t just continue to do what we’ve always done,” added Kristen Eggerling. “We have these great ideas, but we have to make them *feasible* for everyone.”

Kristen and Todd Eggerling are neighbors of SCPAC who farm and graze cattle on property that has been in Kristen’s family as far back as 1873. Farmers and ranchers, she said, have to be creative and respond to conditions throughout the growing season. But politicians and decision-

makers seem to be too risk-averse to explore that kind of creativity with sustainability solutions. “Can we value a green lawn less, because we don’t have the water to sustain it?” Eggerling said. “And in agriculture it’s that same thing: do you value raising a particular crop because that’s what you’ve always done or because that’s what we have the knowledge to do or do we look at other options, can we look at other ways.”

There are significant financial barriers for farmers and ranchers who might want to use new technology, but there are also really basic infrastructure problems, like whether new electric vehicles can handle narrow dirt roads. Just as we need to tackle climate change on global and individual scales, many of the solutions communities are trying are a child of new technology and a return to the ways of the past.

Colleen New Holy, a member of Oglala Sioux Tribe, talked about her community in Pine Ridge building generational homes with solar and passive design to withstand extreme conditions and end reliance on the external power grid. She calls this development “a reconstruction of our past.”

“We understand that there is no permanence, and I think that has to be a major collective switch with the older generations,” New Holy said. “Development can happen, I think it just needs to be handled in a thoughtful way where your ultimate goal is that you’re not building something that permanently affects the environment.”

Later, in small group discussions, Renée Sans Souci, a member of the Omaha tribe of Nebraska, talked about the recent dedication of Chief Big Elk memorial at Omaha’s Lewis and Clark Landing. Inscribed beneath the statue are words from his prophetic ‘Great Flood Speech.’ Sans Souci, speaking with measured

words, told us that the Chief’s message was about survival: adapt in order to survive.

I felt grief in that word, ‘adapt,’ signifying all we have lost and all we have to lose. But we must adapt: change our habits, change our energy systems and economy, and change the way we relate to the natural world.

Kim Morrow, Lincoln’s Chief Conservation Officer, talked about effecting change on multiple scales. “The city of Lincoln adopted its climate action plan in 2021. We are the first city in the state to have one...That plan has been enormously helpful laying out a roadmap for us to achieve our goal of reducing our emissions by 80% in 2025. Our electric utility, Lincoln Electric System, has a goal of becoming net zero emissions by 2040. LES has already reduced their emissions by 36% since 2010.”

The city of Omaha and Nebraska Department of Energy and Environment have both received federal grants to develop climate action plans – 46/50 states will be initiating a climate plan with funds provided by the IRA.

I know I’m not the only person who feels the weight of upheaval – 2019 and 2020 was a barrage of successive disasters that re-directed my life. But I have reconstructed a life centered on what I value: my family, independence and self-reliance, a close community, a job I believe has positive impact. And, yes, a yard full of native plants over grass. The tide is changing.

Climate and Culture: a Conservation was organized by the Spring Creek Prairie Board and funded by Humanities Nebraska as part of “Weathering Uncertainty” and the Democracy and the Informed Citizen initiative administered by the Federation of State Humanities Councils.

Tastes in the Tallgrass: Our Past, Present, and Future



Above: Visitors were greeted with live music from Kellyn Wooten, Vince Learned, and Mike Youngmans, and a celebratory cocktail from The Other Room.



Above: Mary and Jim Pipher were recognized as “Heros of the Prairie” for their years of service and support.

Left: Emcee Scott Young, along with Nicole Fleck-Tooze, and Meghan Sittler.



Photos by Melissa Amarawardana and Brady Karg.

The Joy of Hog Island

Brady Karg

It's late June 2nd, and I am frantically trying to edit down my overpacked carry-on bag. Whatever happens, at least I packed the essentials: my "Birds of Maine" field guide, hiking shoes, rain jacket and pants, binoculars, and my camera. In less than 24 hours I will be leaving the tallgrass prairie of Eastern Nebraska for an island off the coast of Maine.

When I started my position as the Education Coordinator for Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center, one of the first things brought to my attention was the potential to attend a session at Hog Island Audubon Camp. Without knowing much more than it's essentially a summer camp centered around birds, I quickly signed up for the "Joy of Birding" session. I had NO idea that this spontaneous decision would hold a place in my heart forever.



For those who have never heard of Hog Island, it is a small island off the coast of Maine, with an extensive and elaborate history of ornithology. It is the home of Project Puffin and is operated by the National Audubon Society under the Seabird Institute. Hog Island offers a large selection of programs, including their camps which range from Field Ornithology to Family Camp and so many more. They also offer an Artist-in-Residence program. As a new Audubon Employee, I was made aware of the many opportunities at Hog Island, but the sessions are open to anyone.

As early June was fast approaching, the butterflies in my stomach began to flutter around. On top of travel logistics, I began worrying about how my experience would be. Am I going to enjoy this? Will I make friends? Will I learn anything new? Good grief, I sure worried over nothing.

Upon arrival, we lifted our luggage onto a boat and grabbed life jackets. The Queen Mary, a historic building with a museum space and lodging, greets us from the corner of Hog Island as we take a short boat trip from the mainland. The cold salty sea breeze somehow managed to provide a warm welcome.

Within a few hours, the magic had already begun to settle in. We were welcomed by the buzzy trill of the Northern Parula, which would continue every day until we departed. A song I will never get tired of. Many Ospreys could be seen and heard chirping and catching fish, with their large stick nests perched right on top of multiple buildings on the island. The wildlife only multiplied from there. A pair of Dark-eyed Juncos guarded a trailhead, and a short 2-minute walk down the trail led us to a Merlin nest camouflaged atop the thick conifer overstory.

Left, above: The historic Queen Mary sits on the edge of Hog Island. Left: the author, Brady Karg, at Hog Island/Seabird Institute. All photos by Brady Karg/Audubon.

I could go on for days about all the birds, and since you've made it this far, please allow me to continue. Eastern Wood Peewees, Great Crested Flycatchers, and Song Sparrows could be heard from every corner. Red-breasted Nuthatches were busy collecting bugs for nestlings tucked into a tree cavity. Red Crossbills frequented the tops of the conifers utilizing their namesake beaks to pluck the pinecone seeds. Winter Wrens sang among the lichens, while Pileated Woodpeckers dug through snags. A couple days were spent on bird outings offsite. We traversed different locations and habitats on the mainland and were greeted by Bobolinks (a bird I know very well from the tallgrass prairie in Nebraska), a Ruffed Grouse drumming, which is often felt as much as it is heard, Hermit and Swainson's Thrushes, Baltimore Orioles, a couple of Yellow-bellied Flycatchers, and almost every warbler you can find in Maine including but not limited to American Redstarts, Black-and-white Warblers, Common Yellowthroats, Black-throated Green Warblers, Yellow Warblers, Black-throated Blue Warblers, Ovenbirds, Magnolia Warblers, Nashville Warblers, Palm Warblers, Northern Parulas, and Blackburnian Warblers, to name a few.

I needed to start a new paragraph for the SEABIRDS! From the main island you will find Greater Black-backed Gulls soaring and landing on rocks. Guillemots bobbing by like rubber ducks floating in a tub. Terns (Common, Arctic, and an occasional Roseate) cut through the air like fighter jets targeting the fish below. Common Loons and an occasional Red-Throated Loon disappearing under the choppy water for what seems like too long, and Common Eiders hanging out with seals on rocky sea beds. Double-crested Cormorants perched atop their jagged stick nests only a few inches apart from each other.

Of course, you can't go to Hog Island without taking a boat ride to Eastern Egg Rock Island to see the Atlantic Puffins in all their glory! The nerf football-shaped bodies appear much smaller than one would think. Observing the Puffins is truly a spectacle. The even cooler thing? Their success story, which was chronicled in Audubon Magazine this summer, in celebration of its 50th anniversary. Since Project Puffin began, scientists across the world have employed and expanded upon methods pioneered there at more than 500 sites, targeting one-third of seabird species.

I knew I would have marvelous experiences with birds, but what I wasn't prepared for was the overwhelming acceptance and feeling of home.

Within the first couple of hours, the butterflies in my stomach had settled, and I knew I would not want to leave. I will never forget the friendships I made while on Hog Island. The instructors and staff felt like longtime friends excited to be hosting a reunion. The guest speakers connected us to birds with stories, research, and experiences in ways I never imagined. I can't even begin to fathom the amount of knowledge I gained in less than a week's time, but nothing can compare to the friends I made.

When the dreaded day finally came to leave Hog Island, I hugged my friends and instructors and boarded the boat. I wiped the tears from my face as I watched Hog Island get farther away, but not all was sad as I realized this was not goodbye forever, just goodbye for now. A piece of my heart is on Hog Island, and I WILL return to the newest place I call home. And to think, all of this happened because of one thing: birds.

Top right: Common Eiders resting on rocks, five males and one female. *Can you spot the female?*

Middle: The Joy of Birding instructors holding me up. Bottom: An Atlantic Puffin floating near Eastern Egg Rock.



Enhancing Conservation In The Community: Urban Pollinator Plots

Amanda Booher

The Urban Pollinator Plots project is a testament to the power of collective action and the growing recognition of the importance of restoring critical wildlife habitat. In partnership with the Fargo Parks District, North Dakota State University, the United Prairie Foundation, and the North Dakota Heritage Fund, we launched the Urban Pollinators Plots project to transform pockets of Fargo, North Dakota, into vibrant and welcoming habitats for pollinators and wildlife. With the goal of establishing more than 50 acres of high diversity, forb-rich, native prairie plantings in urban parklands, the UPP project enhanced our landscape for people and wildlife to enjoy, while increasing awareness and education on the importance of protecting our natural resources.

Diverse Plantings for a Resilient Ecosystem
One of the project’s defining features is the careful selection of native plants that are not only beautiful but also crucial for the health of local pollinators. Under the direction of United Prairie Foundation, a non-profit that has prided itself as an implementation group dedicated to restoring diverse prairie habitats

and educating the public of the need to propagate native plant communities, over 80 species of native forbs were hand selected and planted for Urban Pollinator Plots. Native plants provide a sustainable source of food and shelter for birds, bees, butterflies, and other pollinating insects. By planting a diverse array of native species, the UPP program supports the resilience of these urban ecosystems.

Community Conservation
As we lean into National Audubon’s strategic plan, we pivot our “Bird-Friendly Communities” focus to a broader more expandable spotlight known as “Conservation Communities.” An uplifting aspect of the UPP project has been the incredible community support. With over 100 volunteers, we were able get hundreds of plants in the ground and restore over 50 acres of habitat.

Building upon community conservation, the UPP project beautifies the Fargo-metro community while increasing awareness and education on the



importance of protecting our natural resources. These transformed plots are not only aesthetically pleasing for community members to explore, but also serve as crucial areas for pollinators as they navigate the urban landscape. This interconnected network of wildlife habitat is essential for the survival of these pollinating insects and survival of birds. Pollinators play a vital role in sustaining bird populations by facilitating the availability of a diverse and abundant food supply.

Looking Ahead
The success of the Urban Pollinator Plots project in Fargo serves as a shining example of what can be achieved when communities, conservation organizations, and volunteers come together with a shared goal.

welcome even more visitors in the coming decade. Our habitat and conservation team has the support they need to keep the nearly 3,000 acres at Rowe Sanctuary healthy so that the Platte River will be a safe haven for the cranes. We are creating new sandbars as Mother Nature used to for nesting birds and collecting seeds for the surrounding prairies.

We also assure you that the mission of Rowe Sanctuary, strengthened through your service and your gifts, will continue to protect the Platte River and the birds that depend on it. You have created a global community based on love of Rowe Sanctuary and Sandhill Cranes that continues to grow. We are enthusiastic about what’s to come for the Sanctuary and greatly appreciate your support as we navigate these changes.

Changes Ahead at Rowe Sanctuary

This crane season is going to look quite different: the Visitor’s Center is under construction and staff are working out of the Cottage.

Bill Taddicken, long-time Director of Rowe Sanctuary, is no longer working at Audubon. Over a decade ago, Bill became the Center Director at the Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary, and under his leadership the number of visitors to the Center has grown to over 35,000 people annually, with visitors from all over the world. In addition, during his 26-year tenure at Rowe Sanctuary he has led Audubon’s conservation efforts on the Platte River creating a future for America’s Greatest Migration. We thank Bill for all his contributions and wish him well in his future endeavors. His efforts were absolutely an important part of Rowe’s growth; however, credit belongs to the

community as a whole, including Rowe staff, volunteers, Stewardship Board members, contributors, and community leaders.

Kristal Stoner will be the interim director, as a national search takes place for a replacement. Kristal has worked in tandem with Bill throughout the project and is fully aware of all the details, she will continue to run point with the contractors. Minor delays have been caused by the need for supplemental surveys and more detailed architectural drawings for the boardwalk section.

Children are still arriving by bus at Rowe and are filled with new knowledge and experiences by our education team. Our capital construction project will continue as planned and we will be able to

Who we are

Nebraska
Kristal Stoner, Executive Director
Stephen Brenner, Avian Biologist
Bill Sellers, Range Ecologist
Melissa Mosier, Program Manager, Platte River Initiative
Lizzy Gilbert, Director of Development
Cat Henning, Development Coordinator
Melissa Amarawardana, Communications Manager

North and South Dakota
Josh Lefers, Working Lands Programs Manager
Juli Bosmoe, Senior Range Ecologist
Charli Kohler, Range Ecologist
Cody Grewing, Range Ecologist
Meghan Carter-Johnson, Senior Engagement Coordinator
Amanda Booher, Communications Manager
Lindsey Lee, Operations Manager

Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary
Sonceyrael Kondrotis, Operations Manager
Cody Wagner, Conservation Program Manager
Amanda Hegg, Conservation Program Associate
Anne Troyer, Senior Outreach Coordinator
Beka Yates, Education Manager

Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center
Meghan Sittler, Director
Kevin Poague, Operations Manager
Ed Hubbs, Habitat and Private Lands Manager
Jason “The Birdnerd” St. Sauver, Senior Education Manager
Dylan Owen, Habitat Management Senior Coordinator
Brady Karg, Education Coordinator
Amy Plettner, Caretaker
Matt Harvey, Project Assistant
Megan Petsch, Educator
David Saling, Seasonal Educator
Davis Parry, Seasonal Habitat Technician

Opposite: A volunteer works on an Urban Pollinator Plots project. Photo: Camilla Cerea/Audubon.

Where we are

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Get Involved




Make a Cash or Online Donation
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100% of contributions made to Rowe Sanctuary and Spring Creek Prairie stay with them.

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