



Nebraska is a vital corridor for the monarch migration, which spans Canada, the U.S. and Mexico. Thousands of the butterflies made a “pit stop” in Aurora and surrounding area on September 29. These appeared at The Leadership Center.



Sarah Bailey, displaying the Joel Sartore print awarded her as Conservationist of the Year, with Rosemary Thornton, who nominated her for the honor.

Sarah Bailey named 2019 Conservationist of the Year by the Nebraska Wildlife Federation

The Prairie Plains greenhouse manager, restoration ecologist and naturalist-educator received the award on Thursday, October 17, at the Nebraska Wildlife Federation (NWF) Fall Fundraiser Gala near Ashland.



NEWSLETTER
October, 2019

Retired Lincoln teacher Rosemary Thornton, longtime member of both NWF and Prairie Plains, nominated Sarah for the award, having followed her accomplishments in the *Prairie Plains Link* over the last several years. Rosemary shared excerpts from a letter from Prairie Plains Director Bill Whitney while introducing Sarah to the group. Bill recounted that in July of 2010 we were looking for someone to serve as greenhouse manager under a State Wildlife Grant we’d received to build a greenhouse for growing prairie plants, with an emphasis on prairie violets—a species vital to the regal fritillary butterfly. Unaware

of this opening, Sarah just happened to contact us and express her interest in prairie restoration. She was hired following a strong recommendation from a researcher she’d worked for at Kansas State, who’d simply stated “Just hire her!” That’s a decision we’ve never regretted; it didn’t take long before we realized we’d have to find a way to make Sarah’s position permanent. Over the last nine years she’s become not only an excellent greenhouse manager, but an impressive restoration ecologist, naturalist-educator (notably founder/director of the Youth Naturalist Program) and photographer. As Bill’s letter stated, “She is very worthy of the award. We need to cultivate more young people in this work, especially more young women - then get out of their way!”

The award was presented by NWF President Bruce Kennedy and Conservation & Education Chair Marge Kennedy. The event also included dinner, a silent auction and other fund-raising activities for the statewide organization—as well as a program about a pollinator project presented by NWF’s Carolyn Butler. Carolyn is founder/director of the 13th Street Pollinator Flyway in Lincoln, an endeavor to establish a 9-block pollinator habitat corridor along 13th Street from R Street to the Lincoln Mall. The flyway includes 69 permanent beds filled primarily with native grasses and wildflowers. Partnering with NWF on the project are the Downtown Lincoln Association, the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum and the UNL Bee Lab.

Note: Check out the film about Sarah Bailey by Mitchell Lyon— <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E6U9Em0OV1E>

Educator Spotlight: Tony Sigler



Tony Sigler, Aurora High School Agricultural Education Teacher, with student Ford Ekhoft during the Environmental Ag class's milkweed harvesting day, September 20. This was the third year the class has participated in the Prairie Plains "Milkweed Blitz."



Besides harvesting milkweeds, the students learned about pollinators and critical pollinator plants—as well as a lesson about the value of wetlands—from Prairie Plains Director Bill Whitney at Gadwall Wildlife Management Area.

The eight Prairie Plains land preserves are living natural history museums, relics of what was once the great American prairie with its rich native flora, fauna, soils and landscapes. Ecological benefits of these prairie remnants include wildlife habitat, preservation of native plant genetics, and soil and water conservation.

These lands also serve as outdoor classrooms and research sites for students of all ages. Besides developing our own programs such as SOAR and the Youth Naturalist Program, it has always been our mission to connect area schools and teachers to these lands to supplement their classroom curricula. There is a growing number of success stories toward that end, including the Boone Central & Nebraska Christian Schools' greenhouse classes (see next page).

One local teacher that has taken the initiative to include Prairie Plains lands as a routine part of his curriculum throughout the school year is Aurora High School Agricultural Education Teacher Tony Sigler. An Aurora native, Tony was already familiar with our local preserves, having been a SOAR camper (1993-94) and later, a bow hunter on what was then known as "Griffith's Pasture." After graduating from AHS in 2002, Tony earned his B.A. in Agriculture Education at UNL, then taught in Lexington from 2006 to 2009. He began his Aurora High School teaching career in 2010, returning to his home town with his wife, Haley, also a teacher (Title I Reading). Tony wasted no time getting his students out to the prairies.

Over the last nine years, Tony, being a licensed driver of the school's 15-passenger mini-bus, has taken his Environmental Ag and Wildlife Management students to Prairie Plains sites at least 25 times per school year. They have visited Lincoln Creek Prairie, Marie Ratzlaff Prairie Preserve, Gjerloff Prairie, Sherman Ranch and our prairie restoration sites at The Leadership Center as laboratories for learning prairie ecology, land management, and plant identification. For the Environmental Ag students, having easy access to rangeland sites (i.e. prairie preserves) has been a huge asset, with their diversity of native range plants. About 2/3 of range judging contest questions involve plant identification.

At times the teacher and his students are on their own, or come out to watch our staff in action on the land, witnessing, for example, a prescribed burn or invasive tree removal.

Other times presenters are brought in to cover certain topics in more detail. So far, Bill Whitney and Sarah Bailey (Prairie Plains), and Chris Helzer (Director of Science for The Nature Conservancy in Nebraska) have filled that role.

Tony's students are familiar with the greenhouse and seed barns, and have observed parts of the prairie restoration process. And, beginning in 2017, the Environmental Ag class has participated in the Prairie Plains September "Milkweed Blitz," learning about pollinators and contributing 180 gallons of milkweed pods to the 2019 harvest.

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September 30: It was a productive day spent harvesting *Liatris* at Sam and Vicky Cowan's land near Beatrice—land where we'd also done a planting in 2009. We are grateful to the Cowans for allowing us to collect there, and beyond that, for assisting with the harvest. From left, Prairie Plains staffers Jared Sullivan, Sarah Bailey, Mike Bullerman and Bill Whitney, and Sam and Vicky Cowan.

Boone Central & Nebraska Christian Schools Greenhouse Classes

Our cooperative working-learning relationship with these schools continued this fall. Both classes visited Gjerloff Prairie, the greenhouse and seed barn—learning about prairie ecology and management, along with the prairie restoration process. The students also hand-collected seed that will be used in their greenhouses, and planted seedlings (including prairie violets) into a restoration site at Gjerloff Prairie. Prairie Plains Greenhouse Manager Sarah Bailey and teachers Dee Flynn (Nebraska Christian) and Katie Wilson (Boone Central) are making this program possible.

Sarah will visit both classes in early December, delivering more seeds and teaching planting and transplanting techniques. The students will then grow 30-40 species of native plants destined for tree-cleared areas at the Sherman Ranch (Nebraska Christian) and our ongoing restoration work along Beaver Creek at Olson Nature Preserve (Boone Central). The students will be transplanting the seedlings they've grown into these sites in late April or early May 2020.



Record-breaking Forb Harvest

It was a most gratifying way to end the harvest season for Restoration Director Mike Bullerman. In spite of worrisome low seed production in the first half of the growing season, a record 3,668 gallons of forb seed was hand-collected, not including common milkweed.

Mike reports that this totals 234 species. Breaking down the quantities, collecting from May 17 to August 23 yielded 519 gallons; from August 28 to October 24 yielded 3,149 gallons. The total is approximately 1,000 acres' worth of seed.

The common milkweed harvest yielded 759 gallons of pods, 65% being collected by volunteers.



Now that the harvest is over, it's time for seed processing. It's Jared Sullivan's first experience with the task, but probably not Ava Bullerman's. She's already an experienced apprentice!



Instilling an appreciation for prairies goes beyond Tony Sigler’s role in the classroom. As he explains, “I want my students—and my kids—to grow up experiencing these lands, just as I did at Gjerloff Prairie.” The Siglers—Tony, Haley, Colton, Kendall and Ruby (front, right)—appear to be doing just that!

Wildlife Management students have benefitted from hiking through a diversity of habitats, most especially at Sherman Ranch. For several years they have set up a game camera there during the nine weeks’ class time. So far, they’ve seen deer, turkeys, coyotes, cows, and oddly enough, something resembling a Platte River Yeti. What they can’t wait to see is a bobcat—as we did record one on a different field camera set up at Gjerloff Prairie a few years ago.

Do the students appreciate these prairie “classrooms?” No question about it. In fact, once a student passes a class, he or she can repeat it (without credit) just for the added experience—and according to Tony, it’s a fairly common practice in his “prairie classes.” He has also noted that the farm kids with pasture land are paying closer attention to that land, and suggesting that prescribed burns may be in order!

Educator Tony Sigler emphatically states his primary goal: “I want to instill an appreciation for the prairie—and I succeed!” We congratulate him on his success, and for setting an example for others.

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THANKS to Britt & Barb Bailey for greenhouse work!

**Bader Park Hike
Saturday, November 9, 9:00 a.m.**



Continuous progress at Education Center: From left, Center architect Lee Schriever, Prairie Plains Director Bill Whitney and metal fabricator/designer Traver Demaranville discussing plans for handrails and other metal work on the south patio entrance.



Tumbleweed storm at Olson Nature Preserve! Sarah Bailey and Amy Jones (struggling to snap photo) found themselves engulfed in a torrent of tumbling witchgrass while harvesting wetland species on October 8.