

Knobs and Knolls

January 2016

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Nature Center Expansion

The long awaited expansion of the Nature Center will soon become a reality. Architectural plans are now being finalized and we anticipate that construction on the new wing of the facility will begin in late spring.

The expansion will more than double the floor space of the Nature Center and will allow for greatly expanded and improved exhibits and educational facilities. A few of the planned features include:

- a banked array of aquariums - providing better access for viewing by children of all age and improved staff access for maintenance;

- a beaver lodge diorama , and a woodland diorama with specimens of flora and fauna found in the Park;

- viewing stations, with binoculars, overlooking the lake and nearby woods;

- computerized Interactive educational displays, featuring the natural history of the Park and the region.

In addition, there will be a large, multipurpose education/conference room on the first floor. This space will be easily adapted for use as a classroom, a learning laboratory, a conference room for meetings and presentations, and a reception/party room.

Additional space will be designated for an expanded library, the herbarium, Nature Center staff use, Friends use, and storage.

Our Friends organization is working closely with the Nature Center and Parks and Recreation staff to assure that the new Nature Center will be a state of the art facility that can serve as an educational center for the entire region. To do this, Friends will be conducting a major fundraising effort this year and into the future. We welcome your assistance with ideas, donations and volunteer time to help us in this effort. If you are interested in helping in any of these ways, contact us at mail@friendsofstelecreek.org.

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Top Ten Sightings of 2015

From Larry McDaniel's Recent Sightings

Assistant Naturalist Larry McDaniel periodically sends out notes on interesting sightings at the Park. His posts can be found on our [Recent Sightings blog](https://steelecreekfan.wordpress.com/) (<https://steelecreekfan.wordpress.com/>). In keeping with many of the other annual "top ten" lists, at the end of 2015 Larry identified his list of top ten sightings at Steele Creek Park. Here it is:

10 - Two Bonaparte's Gulls were at the lake on Mar 28.

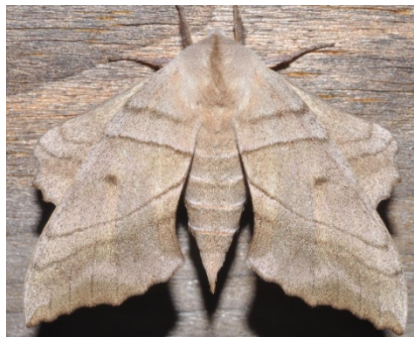
9 - A Prairie Warbler was found on Apr 26.

8 - Don (Holt) saw a blue morph Snow Goose on the lake on Jan 2.

7 - There was a Great Egret perched on a dead tree by the lake on Oct 3.

6 - Don and Jeremy (Stout) saw 2 Bank Swallows on May 21. There are very few records of this species in the park.

5 - A Walnut Sphinx Moth was on the Lodge building on May 6 and 7. Many school kids got to see this moth and learn about how they blend in with surfaces they choose to rest on. It was a park record.



4 - Don saw a Cliff Swallow flying over the lake on May 4. That was only the second record for the park.

3 - Don found a Southern Broken-Dash (butterfly) on Aug 11 which was a park record.

2 - Don found a Willow Flycatcher on May 23 which was a Park record and our 204th species of birds found in the park.

1 – There were two beautiful male Common Mergansers on the lake on Mar 3. That was another park record.

Happy sightings for 2016!

Elements of Nature Photography

*In this issue, we continue a series of articles on using your camera to capture nature, **by Sonie Schermer**. Sonie is a founding Board Member of Friends, and an accomplished amateur nature photographer. Additional articles will appear in subsequent issues of Knobs and Knolls.*

COMPOSITION

Opportunities for great photographs can happen anywhere, anytime. Check 360 degrees around you - the best shots could be behind you. Check above, below and underneath you. Walk around your subject whenever possible. Pay more attention to “seeing” and thinking. Keep your eyes and mind open. The difference between taking a snapshot and making a great photograph is controlling the exposure.

Shoot the picture like you want it from the start and you will have less work on the computer later on. Right brain aesthetics of exposure consist of *composition, depth of field, and lighting*.

We are going to look at composition first, breaking it down into *wildlife photos, flower and plant photos, and landscapes photos*.

Composition Tips for Wildlife Photos

- The most useful lens for wildlife is a telephoto or zoom lens.
- Get as close to your subject as safely as possible.
- Lure birds with a feeder at home.
- Shoot at the subject’s level; see them eye to eye.
- The point of focus should be the animal’s eyes; whether your subject is standing still or in motion, always focus on the eyes.



Elements of Nature Photography (Continued)

Composition Tips for Wildlife Photos (Continued)

- Capture a sense of motion; focus on the center of interest and the motion blurs. (Hummers are great for this.)



- Capture motion by including dust trails, splashes or wind.
- Give the subject room to “move” into; place the subject at the edge of the frame in the direction it is moving or looking.



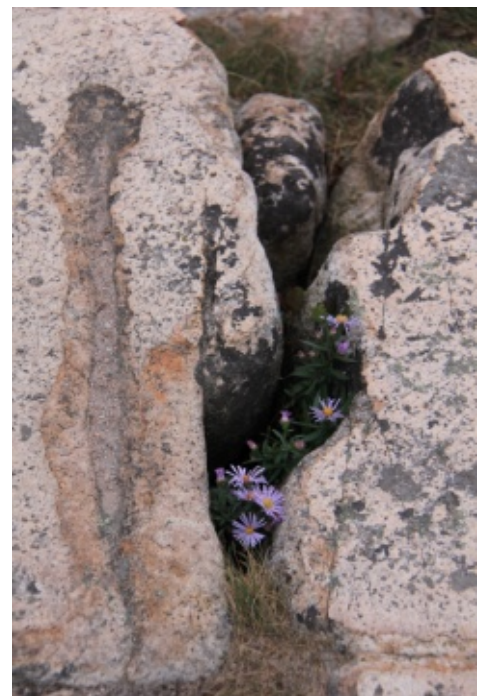
Elements of Nature Photography (Continued)

Composition Tips for Flower and Plant Photos

- Shoot plants and flowers with a zoom lens or up close (F/5.6), preferably with a tripod; use a macro lens to get extremely close.
- Try to capture them with a companion - a child, a hummingbird, bee, butterfly or other insect.



- Take flower photos on a cloudy day, just after the rain, or on a sunny day early in the morning or late in the afternoon.
- When you have a point of interest to draw the eye to use the elements to frame it and the frame can be in focus or blurred.



Elements of Nature Photography (Continued)

Composition Tips for Flower and Plant Photos (Continued)

- Don't shoot down on them.
- Light and shadows form texture in photos; look for subjects that convey different or contrasting textures to the surroundings.



- Patterns appear in all of nature; look at the big picture, or at the minute or the contrast of patterns.
- Look for interesting or unusual patterns or designs in plants and objects. Focus on the pattern.



I hope these tips are helpful. In the next article we will look at the composition of landscape photos.

Nature Center Activities

Saturday, January 30th, 2:00 pm - Winter into Spring. It's the dead of winter, but believe it or not, there are still signs of life to behold in the cold! Bundle up and meet Don at the Nature Center for an easy walk and talk learning the many ways that our wildlife copes with winter.

Saturday, February 6th, 9:30 am - Winter Bird Walk. Bring your binoculars and meet Larry at the Nature Center for an easy walk looking for some of our winter birds! Don't have binoculars? Borrow a pair of ours!

Saturday, February 20th, 2:00 pm - Basic Aquarium Keeping. Interested in starting an aquarium? Want to learn how to better take care of one you already have? Meet Don at the Nature Center for an engaging discussion on aquarium keeping as a hobby, and learn from the animals at the Steele Creek Nature Center.

Saturday, March 5th, 9:30 am - Winter Woodpecker Walk. Bring your binoculars and meet Larry at the Nature Center for an easy walk looking for some of our winter birds, especially woodpeckers!

Save the Date - Saturday, March 12th! TREE KEEPERS WORKSHOP

The Department of Parks and Recreation will be hosting the annual "Tree Keepers Workshop" in the Park Lodge during the day. This will be an in-depth event focusing on practical tips for planting and maintaining your garden trees. Call the Department of Parks and Recreation (423-764-4023) for more information!

Did You Know?

Over 200 species of birds have been recorded in Steele Creek Park. One of the newest to be recorded was a willow flycatcher, spotted by Don Holt on May 23rd of 2015.

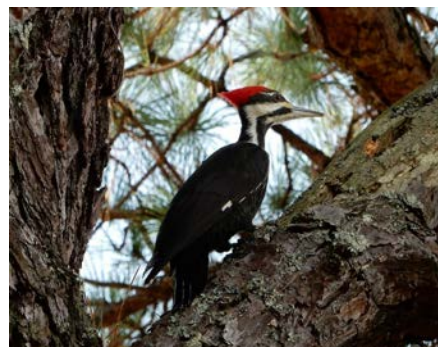
Here are a few photos of SCP birds from Larry McDaniel's Recent Sightings posts.



Screech Owl



Great Blue Heron



Pileated Woodpecker

Steele Creek Park Winter Images



You can keep up with what's going on at the Park and with Friends by following our webpage at <http://www.friendsofsteelecreek.org>.

We appreciate feedback about our communication. Let us know if you find these newsletters interesting and/or useful. If you have suggestions for topics to be covered, or other formats that we could use, let us know by e-mail at mail@friendsofsteelecreek.org.

If you prefer to not receive these newsletters, simply let us know at mail@friendsofsteelecreek.org.