



2016 First Quarter Report
Nebraska Master Naturalist Program, January 1 -March 31, 2016

Current Metrics:

There were no Master Naturalist Core (basic) trainings held during this quarter, though planning for five Core sessions throughout the year was finalized and advertised by the Trainings Assistant. Consequently, no new members were added this quarter, so the current total of active **Master Naturalists is 279.**

Total Volunteer Hours & Activity: 1st Quarter, 2016: January 1 - March 31			
TOTAL Volunteer Hours	Total <u>Value</u> of Volunteer Time*	Contacts	Acres Impacted
1903	\$44,824*	20,750	1382
Total Program Life Volunteer Hours & Activity: 2010 through March 31, 2016			
34,631 hours	\$798,937*	445,316 Nebraskans	29,246 acres

*[Nationally estimated value of volunteer time for 2015 (& currently) is **\$23.56 per hour**, from https://www.independentsector.org/volunteer_time]

Overview:

An annual Nebraska Master Naturalist ‘Winter Gala’ party and education seminar was planned and presented in late January by a volunteer member committee with good attendance. Annual re-certification letters and award pins were also sent or presented to those attending, as were Master Naturalist name tags for the newest, 2015 trainees. Neither of these had occurred in over a year, however. Guest speakers, a silent auction of donated items, and a pot-luck were featured in the all-day event at Mahoney SP.

The 2016 Core training schedule for the program was set and advertised.

Developing NMNP partnerships emerged with volunteer or training opportunities with the Nebraska State Museum; Hyde Observatory; Heron Haven preserve; Platte River State Park and Homestead National Monument, largely initiated by certain Master Naturalist volunteers forging new relationships with prospective partners.

Other members acted independently or on teams to advance awareness and understanding of Nebraska’s biodiversity at schools, parks, museum events, a festival, and through a new field guide; as planning for the next Naturalist calendar was underway, while several notices of Master Naturalist activities appeared in the media or online.

The Coordinator was unavoidably absent and recovering from knee surgery for six weeks when the Executive Board met in late February.



Upcoming 2016 Master Naturalist Training Schedule:

- ~~○ April 7 - 9 Core Basic (Ponca State Park, South Sioux City - *Cancelled*)~~
- May 19 - 21 Core Basic (NE 4H Camp, NE National Forest, Halsey, NE)
- June 5 - 11 Core Basic (TNC Niobrara Valley Preserve, Norden NE)
- July 7 - 9 Core Basic (Panhandle Research & Extension Center, Scottsbluff, NE)
- Sept.30 – Oct. 1 Core Basic, pt. 1 (AkSarBen Aquarium at Schramm Park SRA, Louisville, NE)
- Oct. 7 – 8 Core Basic, pt. 2 (AkSarBen Aquarium at Schramm Park SRA, Louisville, NE)

Highlighted Projects:

Outreach publications: Naturalist Calendar Team members met twice this quarter to review past progress and consider revisions for the next (2017) NET supported *Naturalist Calendar*. Master Naturalists Paula Hoppe & the Coordinator called for fellow MN’s to contribute photos by the end of March, while she and Rebecca Osborn-Reagan kept drafting phenology texts, and Kristal Stoner of Nebraska Game and Parks Commission wrote sidebars and lent advice. Bruce investigated printing and budget costs and started another calendar intro.

Additional outreach for educating central Nebraskans was made possible with *The Explorer’s Guide to Central Nebraska Prairies* ([http://snr.unl.edu/naturalist/Documents/ Explorers%20Prairie%20Guide.pdf](http://snr.unl.edu/naturalist/Documents/Explorers%20Prairie%20Guide.pdf)), supported by the *Nebraska Environmental Trust*, the *Nature Conservancy*, and a *Watchable Wildlife* grant, collaboratively created by the Master Naturalist team of Karen Hamburger, Deb Miller and Deb Mowry, who will share it with both Boy and Girl Scout groups and gatherings, area grade school students, and SOAR camp participants in coming weeks, as with the *Crane Trust* and *Bader Memorial Park*.

Endangered Salt Creek Tiger Beetle Reintroduction Project: Five Master Naturalist citizen science monitoring teams which Bruce assigned for Endangered Salt Creek Tiger Beetle reintroductions visited their assigned sites a total of 15 times at Lincoln’s saline wetlands on mild days, over the reporting period since January 1. Spring planning for SCTB monitoring was scheduled for 4/22 by the interagency project planning team led by USFW rep. Bob Harms and NGPC T & E specialist, Mike Fritz.

2016 NMNP Executive Board meetings:

- (February 26 Hardin Hall, UNL East Campus)
- May 13 *-revised-* Mahoney State Park, Ashland
- Aug. 26 *-revised-* (tbd)
- Nov. 18 (tbd)

Master Naturalist Trainings & Report (Matt Jones, Trainings Assistant):

Matt Jones developed the 2016 training schedule, proposing 5 core training dates at sites far and wide, with two in new locations: the Halsey Youth 4H Camp in the Nebraska National Forest, and Ponca State Park, (unfortunately cancelled, due to insufficient registrants). By February Matt had recruited and scheduled 80% of instructors for this year.

In January, Matt researched recertification data for 223 members, so that our on-call Assistant, Doug Wells could tailor letters drafted by Bruce to be sent out with packets. They provided a snapshot of the total hours served by those members



in 2015; *and* the overall total hours they have served since their original certification through the end of 2015. The packets also contained service-year awards, honoring their participation in the program. This sizable undertaking could not have been completed without Doug's capable support. Jacki Loomis of the SNR Maps and More Store processed postage for mailing these packets.

On 2/27, a "Weather Workshop" was held at *The Nature Conservancy's* Derr House in Wood River, with speaker Mike Moritz, meteorologist from the *National Weather Service* office in Hastings. It was initiated by central Nebraska Master Naturalist Karen Hamburger, and Matt promoted the event in the region. 25 Members attended the half-day Core+ continuing education session.

Prof. Dennis Ferraro presented Nebraska Frog & Salamander Watch Training Schramm Park, Saturday, Mar 5, 2016 with 33 (mostly) Master Naturalist attendees. Doug assisted with support.

Matt developed & ordered new NMNP marketing ads for *NebraskaLAND* magazine (runs the last half of 2016), and for *Nebraska Life* (for 3 issues, starting in July). He drafted and sent a press release about 2016 trainings through UNL and Nebraska Game and Parks channels, and to all of our partners and networks across the state. He also sent them directly to news outlets in northeast Nebraska to advertise the Ponca SP training.

Matt also polled MN members about new MN merchandise, apparel and gear, via *Survey Monkey*.

Program Partner development:

University of Nebraska State Museum (Morrill Hall): After developing plans with museum staff, Bruce posted the invitation & request from the *University of Nebraska State Museum Education Department* (Sarah Feit), for volunteers needed for a Saturday family event, "Investigate Owls (and their owl pellets)," on January 9. Six avid Master Naturalists showed up to engage a stream of curious young museum visitors (see **Outreach** section of this report), with great effect:

(1/9/16 e-mail after Owl event) "We had 140 people attend Investigate Owls, by far our highest attended Investigate to date. So many kids stayed for much longer than anticipated; this is truly a testament to your instruction and skills as educators. As people left, many also remarked on how wonderful they thought the program was; the museum could not offer such events without volunteers so we thank you!" --Sarah Feit, Volunteer Coordinator, University of Nebraska State Museum"

Master Naturalists Bill Smith, Tim Olin and Tim Tharp also volunteered with public outreach at "*Get to know C.N. Lincolniana*" at the 2/27 *National Geographic Photo Ark* event at the *Nebraska State Museum* to engage children and families on the conservation of SCTB's. Bill wrote,

"We answered questions about the SCTB project including why we care, and the NMN program itself (a few people were interested!). I had photos of the beetles, larvae, and reintroduction in the field, as well as (my) slide show... and I made a hands-on simulated SCTB larvae release activity (wooden box filled with dirt, where the kids would release meal worm larvae into burrows). I think they really enjoyed the hands on part!"

Hyde Observatory/Prairie Astronomy Club: After exploring a partnership with the *Hyde Observatory Board* in Lincoln late last year, (when referred by *Prairie Astronomy Club* member and Master Naturalist, Beth Jenckes); UNL



Emeritus Professor Edward Schmidt, of the *Hyde Obs. Board* drafted an outline for a spring MN Core + Astronomy workshop to train and enlist Master Naturalist volunteers for supporting their public astronomy viewings at the observatory. Bruce and Matt scheduled & posted two-part sessions to be held at the observatory on 4/11 & 4/18.

Homestead National Monument: Alerted by Master Naturalist Malia Robinson, (who had previously been volunteering there with other MN's), Bruce met with interpretive Park Ranger Susan Cook of *Homestead National Monument* to discuss and explore a potential partnership to enlist Master Naturalists for their support with NPS public outreach and education programs at the site. Bruce thus attended and helped with the 3/23 family activities at the Education Center, and with the Junior Ranger hike, led by Malia. *Nebraska Educational Television* promoted the event and featured showings of their nationally syndicated PBS "Nature Cat" program, with local volunteers assisting (*see attached flyer & media section*).

Heron Haven preserve:

Bruce explored a partnership with the (Omaha) *Heron Haven* organization, (as suggested by Master Naturalist volunteer/contact there, Chris Robie), leading to the 1/9 Omaha group greet & meeting on site.

Master Naturalist Community:

Fellow Master Naturalists initiated efforts on teams or as individuals to: plan recognition of fellow members; or promote awareness of, and create learning opportunities for biodiversity. The paid staff from the NMNP home and Kearney offices facilitated and supported this leadership. Some members also posted volunteer & learning opportunities on the NMNP ListServ.

The Annual Meeting and Training Event: The Winter Gala Gathering and Education Seminar, a daylong event, was held at Mahoney State Park on January 23rd, after much dedicated preparation by Omaha-members of the planning committee, including Board members Joanne Langebee, Leslie Kwasnieski and Deb Woracek, and Master Naturalists, Annabel Lee Major, Candy McDermott, Sandy Douglas and Kris Chavez. Kris led solicitations for silent auction items from 15 gracious donors. It was the largest gathering yet of the Master Naturalist community with 112 attending--and the first, since 2013. (*see attached itinerary*).

Seventy-five of the top achieving Master Naturalist volunteers were recognized with volunteer service recognition certificates which Matt had created after researching those having served the most volunteer hours during their entire certification membership. Certificates ranged from 100 hours, to 1,200 hours served. All Master Naturalist trainees new to the program in 2015 also received their magnetic name tags, which Bruce had ordered & then correctly produced from *Rixstine Recognition* in Lincoln.

Educational speakers at the event included:

- Michael Forsberg, Nebraska-based, renowned photographer, presenting on photography
- Evan Barrientos, Hubbard Fellow, *The Nature Conservancy*: "How TNC Restores Biodiverse Prairie in Nebraska"
- Jeremy White, Biology Dept., University of Nebraska Omaha: "Wind turbines and whitenose syndrome: A wicked time for bats!"



This amazing event was made possible through the vision and advance groundwork carried out by the Master Naturalist event planning committee. It was also a great opportunity for members to reconnect and make new acquaintances.

River City Chapter news: The Omaha Group met monthly at three sites this quarter: *Heron Haven* preserve in west Omaha on 1/9; at the *Backwoods Omaha* store on 2/11; and at *Glacier Creek Preserve* on 3/18 where they discussed on-site citizen science project needs.

In early January and on their own, participating Executive Board Member Leslie Kwasnieski and former NMNP Coordinator, Annabel Major had created a *separate* Omaha Google Group (listserv). Bruce facilitated this by revising and sending out the VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT form to again update membership contact preferences for all recent and participating Master Naturalists. The Omaha group then invited all Master Naturalists in the greater MN Community to “opt-in” to their open-ended membership via the ‘official’ Master Naturalist ListServ, and to thereby dialog on local ‘River City’ MN activities of the Omaha Google Group.

They next held a planning meeting at the *Do Space* in Omaha on 1/15, to draft by-laws (under the existing NMNP By-Laws) soon to be voted upon by participating Master Naturalists in the new Omaha Google Group. By 3/31, that vote established the new River City Chapter “by a landslide,” the *first local chapter* of the *Nebraska Master Naturalist Program*! Chapter Officer elections are forthcoming...

Elsewhere:

Lincoln area MN’s met at Spring Creek Audubon Center in Denton, on 2/20.

Central NE MN’s met up in Kearney on 1/30 at Deb Mowry’s home.

Outreach and Media:

The Nebraska Master Naturalist training schedule and program were promoted through a number of newspaper articles and notices, along with informal in-person contacts, through program e-newsletters and the online events calendar listings at the MN website. Specifically:

- A few *Naturalist* Calendars were still being distributed in the new year and continue to be very effective introductions to engage interest in the program.
- 1/1/16 - *Scottsbluff-Gering Star-Herald* journalist, Steve Frederick gave us a plug by voluntarily mentioning his goal of becoming a Nebraska Master Naturalist in signing up for the July Core Training in Scottsbluff, after he was sent a courtesy copy of the 2016 *Naturalist* calendar:
http://www.starherald.com/opinion/frederick-a-hike-in-the-snow-with-friends/article_10c98d02-b0e0-11e5-af85-876632734eb3.html .
- 1/9 - The *Lincoln Journal Star* posted photos of the Investigate Owls” Saturday Science family event with Master Naturalist educators volunteering at Morrill Hall (UNL State Museum):
http://journalstar.com/news/local/second-saturday-science-lab/image_20d45d07-898e-525d-a4d2-f18e60d122d1.html ; http://journalstar.com/news/local/second-saturday-science-lab/image_20d45d07-898e-525d-a4d2-f18e60d122d1.html ; a gallery of photos from the event:
<http://journalstar.com/search/?k=%22owls%22>



NEBRASKA MASTER NATURALIST

Explore. Contribute. Connect.

- 1/30 - Winter discovery with Master Naturalists at Homestead National Monument: <https://www.nps.gov/home/learn/news/join-master-naturalists-exploring-the-winter-outdoors-and-earn-a-special-centennial-junior-ranger-badge-at-homestead-national-monument-of-america.htm> .
- 2/15 - Grand Island Master Naturalist, Robert Pore, of the *World Herald News Service* voluntarily wrote about seeding the *Nature Conservancy Platte River Prairie* sites with help from MN volunteers: http://www.starherald.com/news/regional_statewide/nebraska-volunteers-endure-the-cold-to-spread-seeds-of-more/article_e22db8c6-a2e2-54af-83ec-95db76e992ca.html
- 2/22 - Matt posted a notice of the Master Naturalist-sponsored “Weather Workshop” held at the *Nature Conservancy’s Derr House* in the *Grand Island Independent*: http://www.theindependent.com/news/local/weather-workshop-planned-saturday/article_1bb4b6b0-d9c1-11e5-beb0-bb4385e30a0e.html
- 2/27 - Matt posted a notice in the *Scottsbluff Star Herald* about the July NMNP Core training there: http://www.starherald.com/news/tidbits/nebraska-master-naturalist-program-to-offer-training-sessions-in-july/article_e67be3ac-ddac-11e5-922b-272fc0f6b156.html
- 3/22 - Bruce forwarded Matt’s 2016 Training Schedule for Core instruction to the *Nebraska Game and Parks Commission* news line: <http://magazine.outdoornebraska.gov/2016/03/master-naturalist-training-scheduled-across-nebraska/>
- 3/26 - *Homestead National Monument* and *Nebraska Educational Television* promoted a “Nature Cat” showing with bird discovery & hike with Master Naturalists in the *Omaha World Herald* and the *NPS Homestead NM Facebook* page: http://www.omaha.com/calendar/community_events/nature-cat-special-showing/event_8020c60e-ed5b-11e5-b10f-1cc1def177a4.html ; & <https://www.facebook.com/HeritageHighway136/posts/10154820490680190:0> .
- Bruce and Matt also posted continuing educational and volunteer opportunities, along with program-related links, public activity notices and factual info on the *Nebraska Master Naturalist Facebook* site: <https://www.facebook.com/masternaturalist>; and on the (NMNP website) Online Master Naturalist Events Calendar, with increasing help from new-hire, on-call office assistant, Doug Wells.

Website, Digital Resources, ListServ, Staffing:

Bruce and Matt also responded to several MN e-mail inquiries about the program, training, volunteering, website and tracking input, re-setting passwords, to gain confidence with more effective reporting.

The Coordinator again reminded Master Naturalist volunteers in mid-March to submit their activity hours (volunteering and continuing education) on the website tracking system by the end of the month (1st quarter, 2016) for better metrics reporting & accuracy

Bruce & Matt oriented new-hire Doug Wells to routine administrative tasks and website updating. He’s been most supportive with readying the labor-intensive re-certification mailings and compiling the bi-monthly NMNP e-newsletter. Bruce introduced Doug at the January winter party/education seminar and invited him to also share his plans for reviving the NGPC *Naturalists in Parks* program at Platte River State Park, where he also works part-time.



Matt also hired and trained part-time assistant Allison Dush to support his training schedule and central NE efforts. She is a UNK 2014 graduate who majored in Tourism, Parks, and Recreation, emphasizing Natural Resources & Park Management. Allison also attended the NMNP Core training in February, 2015.

Bruce completed the SNR *Strengths Finder Assessment* & reminded Matt to confirm his required attendance at Hardin Hall on May 12 & June 2 for the *Strengths Finder* follow-up trainings, together with Dennis & Bruce, for employee development.

What's Ahead:

We will welcome those new registrants attending the 2016 Core-24 trainings which Matt has arranged, along with promoting continuing education hosted by partnering organizations; and support them fully in achieving their certifications by finding further learning and volunteer opportunities.

We continue to seek out, facilitate and develop new opportunities for partnerships in conservation and education, promoting them to our members.

We welcome the input and talent of new-hire Allison Dush, assisting Matt, as with Doug Wells in the home office.

We stand amazed at how our fellow Master Naturalists gain vitality and commitment in forging their own personal partnerships as volunteers and learners in diverse ways, toward promoting awareness of biodiversity and with acting to conserve precious natural resources in ways that are personally meaningful to them.

We continue to encourage our fellow members to stay connected with their passion for nature, to record their hours, and to seek out others who share their interests, to expand their awareness and further their understanding of why native resources matter to them, and to discover new ways to conserve and sustain habitats and biodiversity through their remarkable investments of effort, time, reflection, fun, and community.

This report was drafted and submitted by Bruce Mellberg, Nebraska Master Naturalist Program Coordinator. Details from Matt Jones, Nebraska Master Naturalist Program Trainings Assistant, and guidance from UNL Professor Dennis Ferraro, Principal Investigator for the supporting grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust, both helped tell the story of this quarter's progress.

Bruce Mellberg, Coordinator

Nebraska Master Naturalist Program

April 20, 2016

