



# BRAZOS BEND BUNCH BUGLE

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## PRESIDENT'S CORNER



What an exciting time around Brazos Bend! A new class of trainees is beginning Phase I and II duties. The work crew will soon be finished with the raised walkway on the forest trail that branches off from Creekfield Lake. Dave, Chuck and David are busy planning a new sun clock. The park people are working on the new raised platform over Elm Lake, using Bryan Leach's memorial fund along with other grants. A new trail is being made; see Superintendent Steve Killian's report elsewhere in this newsletter for information. Eight volunteers went out last Sunday and planted trees around our lakes to provide some shade (which I knocked out).

Saving the best for last - the park's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, and our volunteer organization's 20th anniversary will be held April 4th. The volunteer association will be honored during the formal ceremonies. Hopefully, many of you will be able to attend.

It will truly be exciting when the Parks Department announces the beginning of our promised new building. We haven't heard any exact details yet.

Hope to see you all at the park soon!

*Carrie Sample*

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# FEBRUARY MEETING NOTES

*Submitted by Anna Dell Williamson*

President **Carrie Sample** called the meeting to order. There were 12 members, three volunteers-in-training, three staff members and one guest present. The VIT's were **Nancy Dobbs**, **Belinda DiMarcello** and **Connie Waltrip**. The guest was **Laura Babcock** from Lake Sheldon State Park.

Staff members brought their reports, which are published elsewhere in the newsletter.

## **Budget Report:**

Treasurer Diane Carpenter reported that the 2009 budget needs to be approved. This is usually done in January, but has been delayed while we moved our accounting system to Quick Books instead of Peachtree. Manual reports have been automated. Diane presented the proposed budget, which was passed. Copies of the budget are available to members. Diane then presented the January Financial Report, which is available in the volunteer lounge.

The following purchase requests were approved:

**Steve Killian:** Pest control sprayer, to be funded from the equipment purchase fund. It will be mounted in the new airboat, and used to spray herbicides on Pilant, 40-Acre, and Elm Lakes.

**David Heinicke:** 200 owl pellets for programs.

**Steve Killian:** 15,000 color park trail maps, changed to mention the volunteer organization and the web site for donations. The map will be modified to bring it up to date.

**Anna Dell Williamson** expressed thanks for the help with VIT training. She and **Beth Debenport** are working on a history of the BBSPVO for the anniversary celebration. **Chuck Duplant**, **Diane Carpenter** and **Pam Tatge** are working on brochures and posters for display and distribution at the celebration.

**Dave Armstrong** reported that he is working on rebuilding the sundial with **Chuck Duplant** and **David Heinicke**.

## **Maintenance Report:**

**Bruce Williamson** reported that **Willie Anderson** and **Don Nelson** have been repairing benches. Trail crews have nearly finished the Creekfield forest trail. The old bridge has been removed and the new bridge infrastructure and planking are done. The new bridge will be longer, higher, and wide enough to drive the gator across. Crews have been felling damaged trees adjacent to trails.

In the wood yard, wood continues to be split and tied.

## **Outreach:**

**Jerry Carpenter** reported that there will be an outreach on February 28 at Sea Center Texas in Lake Jackson. On March 7, we will participate in Brazoria Heritage Day, and on March 18 we will attend Children's Day at the Richmond Museum. Check the special events calendar to sign up.

**Carrie Sample** reported that Eco-explorers will continue this summer, June through August. Houston Audubon Society will be here one day. We are varying the program because we are hoping for some of the same kids to repeat next summer.

Thanks to **Carrie Sample** for the supper. The meeting was adjourned.

# STAFF REPORTS

## SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

### STEVE KILLIAN



January was a great month, the best ever, thanks to the volunteer organization.

We held a prescribed prairie burn over 200 acres. It was a good burn. A portion of the boardwalk was burned and will be repaired.

We are working on the Live Oak trail, which will begin and end in live oak forests. It will connect 40-Acre Lake and Pilant Slough, and will serve as a way back to the visitor's place of origin instead of the road. The first phase will be a regular trail, the second phase will have a grant to surface bridges. It will have a nice view, with wood ducks and animals. There are 1.7 miles of trail already in existence. Work crews will cut yaupon and build the connecting section.

Yellowstone Landing Trail and Launch is in the northeast corner of the park, for kayaks and canoes. Visitors can walk to the river for fishing or birding. No fishing license is required in the park for bank fishing; however, fishing in the water from a boat requires a license.

Staff is interviewing for Parks Specialists I, II, and III, and the Park Police Officer/Resource Management position. We will have a Resource Management Intern for summer for 400 hours. This person will be spraying the prairie and the lakes.

We have applied for a FEMA reimbursement for work done due to Hurricane Ike damage.

In April, BBSP will appear on the front cover of the parks brochure.

Plans are being made for the 25th Anniversary celebration. There will be a meeting February 20 to develop a marketing package, including t-shirts, brochures, and press releases. **Carter Smith**, TPWD Executive Director, will speak and the Needville Choir will perform.

Work on prairie management will take place next week, and lake management will be in early March.

The pier project memorial is well on its way and moving forward.

There are plans to convert two screened shelters into mini-cabins. We have received funding to close them in, provide air conditioning, heat, bunk beds, and a desk. There will be no inside water.

The new Visitor Orientation Panels are almost complete, with new trails on the maps. Volunteers will work with David to put up the maps. Trail maps have been updated, and 15,000 maps lasts five to six months.

There is no news now regarding park funding. The new Nature Center is in the Appropriations Committee and will be approximately four times the size of our current Nature Center. Volunteer input will be needed when we get final approval.



## RICHARD TAYLOR, LEAD RANGER

Everybody on site is requested to attend a quarterly safety meeting. Volunteers should hold a monthly safety meeting. These are short meetings to remind everyone about safety issues on the job. These can be presented by David, Sharon or other volunteers. We all need to be on the same page. At the last quarterly staff meeting, the emergency codes were discussed. If you hear "secure your radio", that means there is an emergency and you should turn down your radio and stay off the radio so you don't interfere with emergency messages.

The burn team did a great job with the prairie burn. Nine other parks observed our crew, which was good recognition. Centerpoint Energy had changed out damaged poles and inspected all right of ways. We need to get the right of ways cleared up before hurricane season. Volunteers have almost finished construction of the Creekfield Forest trail bridge. Headquarters took the old materials for a chemicals shed. The maintenance crew expresses its thanks. Volunteers mentioned that the dump station lights are not working and some lights on the sidewalk to the parking lot are not working. The Nature Center roof leaked during a recent hard rain.

Headquarters has been remodeled, making a new office for **Dennis Jones**, and a new gift shop storage closet. Steve's office remodeling is almost done. Staff has been cleaning around Headquarters, and the roof has been washed. In addition, the Nature Center will be power washed and spruced up for the anniversary celebration.

In the shop, Jeff has been changing oil for vehicles, and mowing will start soon. We are looking for a good windmill for HQ. We will take out power to the old barn on the new wetlands property and start trimming trees throughout the park for mowing purposes. The fire truck clutch went out, and is not repairable. We are looking for a new one, along with other donations to the fire team and equipment.

For the new trail mentioned by Steve, TxDot will put walks across the road with pedestrian crossing signs.

## SHARON HANZIK, INTERPRETIVE RANGER

Nature Center numbers have been up, although park numbers have been down due to rain. Last weekend, we had new volunteer training, and five Birds of Prey programs over Friday, Saturday and Sunday, with a total of 523 visitors. **Jerry Carpenter** helped **Doris Mager** with the birds. Next week **Jeff McMullan**, beekeeper, will present a program on bees. School groups have begun booking hikes, and several are booked in April and May. If you are able to help with school groups, outreach programs or other special events, sign up on the events calendar.

The **Brazos River Pickers** will be present on March 14 and April 4. A Celtic band called **Fish & Chips** will also begin programs here one Saturday a month for April, May, and October.

Last Saturday was the busiest February day ever, with Nature Center attendance topping out at 1065. Spring Break is March 16-20, and the Nature Center will be open 9:00 to 5:00 every day. We now have high speed Internet in the Nature Center, thanks to Bruce Williamson.

# FEBRUARY MAINTENANCE REPORT

*Submitted by Ron Morrison*

## Wood Yard:

Split 1 cord of wood. Moved an unused metal wood rack by the wood splitter for an official "Volunteer Wood Rack"

## Trail Trimming and Trail Maintenance:

Mulched and watered the Burr Oak tree on Creekfield Forest Trail. Repaired a bench on the Red Buckeye trail. Repaired the gate on Hoots Hollow trail

## Equipment Maintenance:

Serviced Gators 06 and 07. Picked up the wood chipper from Vermeer service center (the problem was a loose belt). Replaced a bad wheelbarrow tire

## Construction Projects:

Designed, purchased and delivered materials, and built the bridge on the Creekfield Forest Trail.

## Special Projects:

Cleared and filled a hole left by the stump of a blow down by the road at the entrance to the maintenance yard.

# NATURE CENTER REPORT

*Submitted by Anna Dell Williamson*

Here are the totals for the various activities and attendance recorded for the Nature Center, hikes, and programs for February 1-28, 2009. There was one holiday, February 16, when the NC was open 9-5. Weather was erratic. Attendance was very high some days.

PROGRAMS	TOTALS
<b>NATURE CENTER ATTENDANCE</b> February 2009 - 5950 February 2008 - 4827	<b>Saturdays (4) 2894-2/7, 1036</b>
	<b>Sundays (4) 1747- 2/22, 601</b>
	<b>Weekdays (20) 1309- 2/16, 272</b>
<b>CREEKFIELD HIKES ( 9)</b>	<b>182 – highest day, 2/28-120</b>
<b>BIRD PROGRAMS/HIKES (6)</b>	<b>536 -- highest day, 2/7, 276</b>
<b>SNAKE PROGRAMS (4 )</b>	<b>125 – highest day, 2/28-58</b>
<b>CHILDREN'S STORY TIME (3 )</b>	<b>37 – highest day, 2/28, 15</b>
<b>OUTREACH (3)</b>	<b>734 -highest day, 2/27, 540</b>
<b>OTHER PROGRAMS (7) includes Turtles, Pond Life, Photo Walk, and Bees</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>TOTAL VISITORS SERVED IN HIKES &amp; PROGRAMS</b>	<b>1731</b>
<b>TOTAL VOLUNTEER HOURS</b>	<b>358</b>

# OUTREACH REPORT

*Contributed by Judy Strauss*

There has been a new Outreach added to our schedule: Envirofest 2009 in Lake Jackson on Saturday, April 18th, from 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the Brazos Mall. It is a short event, but we will still need several Volunteers to help. More details will go out as soon as I receive them. It is on the "Events Calendar", so please feel free to sign up. And don't forget the Children's Festival at the Fort Bend Museum on Saturday, March 28th from 11:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Help is still needed for that event, also.

For those of you not really familiar with just what Outreach is, I will try to give a bit of information that may make you more aware of what we do. Outreach is sort of like working in the Nature Center, but we take the Nature Center OUT to different schools, events, etc, in order to educate the public, not only about our alligators and snakes, but about Our Park in general. Along with a couple of snakes and a couple of alligators, we also bring many touch items, which always seem to bring about questions galore! Educational and informative pamphlets are taken in order to discuss the different areas of the Park, as questions are asked. It is really amazing just how many people within a very close distance are unaware of Brazos Bend State Park.

If you are not comfortable handling the snakes and/or alligators, you don't have to. Many who come to help with Outreach prefer to mingle with the crowds and answer any questions that may be asked about our Park and our Organization. That is just as important, if not more so! Why do we need so many Volunteers to run the booth? The more we have, the bigger the opportunity is for us to visit the other booths and take time out to enjoy the other festivities going on. All events are free to those who come out to work the booth, and occasionally we are invited to an event that even furnishes us free food! You can't beat free food!

If you have any other questions about our Outreach Program, please feel free to ask David or Sharon, or to call me. I can be reached at 281-980-4104 (work); 979-793-7392 (home), or 281-389-8617 (cell). Thank you for your interest and for your continued help with these programs. There is no possible way that we could be a part of these events without your help.

# ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

*Contributed by Anna Dell Williamson*

Get ready to celebrate on Saturday, April 4. We will commemorate the 25th Anniversary of Brazos Bend State Park *and* the 20th Anniversary of the BBSP Volunteer Organization. There will be exhibits from other TPWD parks and divisions, and many interpretive programs and guided hikes for the public.

At 11:00 there will be a special Anniversary Ceremony under a large tent. **Justin Rhodes**, Regional Director, Region IV, will open the ceremony and recognize visiting officials. Musical entertainment will include the Needville High School Choir and our own **Frank Seay**, who will present his original composition, "Ballad of Brazos Bend." There will be brief presentations on the history of Brazos Bend from the Native Americans to present; Introduction to Natural Resources by **Andy Sipocz**, Natural Resource Specialist, Region IV; Conservation through Education by **Walt Dabney**; Volunteerism, Lending a Helping Hand by **Lori Reiley**, Staff Services Officer, TPWD; and the Future of Brazos Bend and State Parks by **Carter Smith**, Executive Director of TPWD. Both the Volunteer Organization and **Steve Killian** will receive special recognition.

Plan to come out and enjoy the fun. Contact **David Heinicke** if you can present a program, lead a hike, or help in any other way. See the events sign-up page on the web site to sign up. This is a big event for the park and the organization.

# MEET THE VITs

*Compiled by Carrie Sample*

We would like to welcome our new group of trainees. To help you get better acquainted with them, they have shared with us the following information about themselves.

**Zoe Boyer** is a student at Pershing Middle School. She has one older sister and two little sisters. She shares her love of nature with her grandfather, **Glen Kilgore**. Zoe is anxious to start helping at the park!

**Lyz and Jeff Culpepper** live in League City with their 2 children, Meredith (14 years old) and Embry (11 years old). Lyz works at UT Houston Medical School in the Medical Center, and Jeff works at Clean Harbors Environmental Services in LaPorte. You will see them camping at Brazos Bend with their pop-up camper.

**Belinda DiMarcello** is originally from West Virginia. She has a B.S. in Chemistry. Belinda and her husband, Dave, both work at BASF Corporation in Freeport, TX. Belinda's hobbies include gardening, traveling, and just being outside.

**Nancy Dobbs** is a retired elementary school administrator from Alief ISD. She is a former elementary science teacher and coordinator. Nancy is married and has 2 grown sons and 4 grandchildren. She lives in Sugar Land.

**Shanay Kapadia** was born in Bombay, India. He is currently attending Travis High School in FBISD. He would like to major in ecology/environmental science. He has a big interest in birds and mammals.

**Christine Kovach** works in Human Resources at St. Luke's Health System in the medical center. Her work responsibilities include helping managers and employees in the workplace. She lives in southeast Houston.

**Bob Kowalewski** is a retired accountant who is still working part time. He is married with 5 kids and 9 grandchildren. (Can another BBSPV top that number of grandchildren?) He lives in Needville and is an avid camper.

**Mary Lockwood** was born in Kansas and raised in Oklahoma. She graduated from the University of Oklahoma at Norman with a BS and a MS in Geology and a teaching certificate in science. She has one son, Peter, who is 29 and a math teacher. She taught secondary science for 5 years in Tulsa Public Schools and 31 years in Alief ISD. She has been Building Manager and volunteer at the George Observatory since they opened in 1989. She retired May 31, 2008 and has various volunteer commitments.

**Adrick Velasco** is a high school student who has been serving as a Junior Volunteer for over a year, waiting for regular training.

**Connie Waltrip** is a retired teacher.

Let's all make them feel welcome and at home as we are helping them with their phase I and II training!

# JUNIOR VOLUNTEER TRAINING

by Carrie Sample

Do you have children or grandchildren between the ages of 8 and 11 who would like to become a Junior Volunteer? We are once again revamping our Junior Volunteer program. The idea is that they will have a specific adult (parent, grandparent, sponsor) working with them at the Nature Center and on the trails. The sponsor must be a volunteer who will work alongside them.

If you know someone who would like to be a Junior Volunteer, please e-mail me and we will put together a training class tailored to their needs.

## WHITE PELICAN

Contributed by Jerry Zona



White pelicans are not birds we normally see at the park. They are considered "vagrants", birds whose natural range is close to this area but will be seen only on occasion. Normally the pelicans inhabit the saltwater of the coast. Nevertheless, I observed this one on January 4, 2009. He was feeding, intermingled with our winter and year-round residents the coots, moorhens, black-bellied whistling ducks, blue winged teals, ringed-neck ducks, and snowy egrets -- and seemed quite content. Ain't nature great!

## WHAT'S IN THE GARDEN?

By Joan Jackson

Red Buckeye Tree

*Aesculus pavia*

Also known as "Dwarf Red Buckeye"



Image Courtesy Missouri Botanical Garden

One of the first flowers in spring attractive to hummingbirds is the red buckeye. It is a small tree or shrub, which grows beneath larger trees in moist soils. It is a native of the southeastern parts of the United States from North Carolina south to Florida and west to Texas. It can be found along stream banks, swamps and on flood plains. It will bloom better if it gets some sun. One of the hiking trails in our park is named for the Red Buckeye. The trailhead is located in the Hale Lake area. The bloom period is March and April, and taking a hike along this trail in the spring will reward you. The flowers are beautiful, and you might spot a hummingbird visiting the blooms.



# VOLUNTEER NEWS & NOTES



... from **David Heinicke** to **Bruce Williamson** for researching, pricing and arranging the satellite internet service at the Nature Center, and to the Volunteer Organization for paying for it. It's wonderful!

... to **Carrie Sample** for the delicious dinner last meeting night. It was really enjoyed by all!

... from **Judy Strauss** to **Anna Dell Williamson** for the wonderful job with the new VIT training. I have heard nothing but raves about it, from both Volunteers and the VIT's. Another fantastic job!

... from **Judy Strauss** to **Jerry Carpenter** for heading the Sea Center Texas Outreach on February 28th for me. It was such a comfort knowing that you would have everything under control, and that I was free to enjoy "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang" with my girls!

... to **Diane Carpenter** and **Rachelle Watson** for their work on the 2009 operating budget.

... to **Diana Morrison, Bill Godley, Joan Hebert, Rick Dashnau, Carrie Sample, Linda Heinicke,** and **Chuck Duplant** for planting the willow trees around the lakes.

... to everyone for the support of the new volunteers at orientation, road tour, and during Phases I and II of their training.

... to **Jim Calvert, Chuck Duplant, Suzie Gann, Sharon Hanzik, David Heinicke, Glen Kilgore, Steve Killian, Ron Morrison, Tom Prentiss, Carrie Sample, Richard Taylor, James Watson,** and **Bruce Williamson** for their part in

the new volunteer training program in February. Without their support, training would not be possible.

... to **Rick Dashnau, Chuck Duplant, Dennis Jones, Ron Morrison, Carrie Sample, Judy Strauss, Richard Taylor** and **Jerry Zona**, for pictures and articles for the newsletter.



## March Birthdays

**Elmer Aden** (Emeritus)  
**Willie Anderson** (Emeritus)  
**Rita Cooper** (Emeritus)  
**Joan Jackson** (Emeritus)  
**Herb Mann** (Emeritus)  
**Jennifer Parent**



## March Anniversaries

**Glen and Maureen Kilgore**  
**Dawn and Oscar Tejero**

# RANGER CONFERENCE

*Contributed by Richard Taylor*

On February 24, 2009, Rangers from BBSP went to Camp Allen in Navasota for Region 4's first Annual Ranger Conference. Among those in attendance were Rangers and Lead Rangers from all the parks and the Battleship, plus **Jimmy Watson**, Regional Maintenance Specialist. The Ranger Conference has been in the works for quite a while and has been talked about for years. Camp Allen is nestled amongst the tall pine trees just outside of Navasota. It has many venues, catering to church groups and corporations as well as a summer camp for kids.

We were in meetings all day, with breaks and lunch. A lot of our time was spent interacting with other rangers from the region, getting to know one another and learning about their parks. Jimmy was the speaker and conducted the meeting. Many topics were discussed, such as status of parks, budgets, equipment, teamwork, housekeeping, etc. **Jerry Collier** and myself conducted a segment over TPWD Park Ranger Uniforms in an effort to ensure uniformity amongst all rangers at all parks.

Deputy Director **Dan Sholley** presented us with a slide presentation and lecture, "Seeing Your Park in the Eyes of a Visitor", that proved very informative. We tried to focus on ourselves as rangers, our region as a whole, and our customers, the public.

At the close of the session each Lead Ranger was given time to speak about their park and rangers. I felt very honored to give praise to the people who work with me. My tenure at BBSP is short, but during this time I have presented challenges to the Rangers to teach me and for them to gain strength in knowledge and teamwork. So to all who read this, remember, "Where there is a will, there is a way". When you see a ranger at Brazos Bend, please thank them for all the hard work they do. Rangers in attendance at the conference were **Richard Taylor, Jeff Orsak, Blake Flessner, JT Kalina, Jim Gilliam, Gary Bialas, and Kyle Petkus**.

On a final note, I must not forget the one ranger who stayed behind, **Devin Elster**, who attends school on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Devin, along with Park Management, Hosts, Volunteers, and others, maintained the BBSP Operations while we were gone. Many thanks to all. Devin takes care of the sanitary needs for us around the Park and definitely needs to be applauded for his efforts.

# OTTER SIGHTING

*Contributed by Rick Dashnau*

On Sunday, February 22, I was part of the group that **Chuck DuPlant** had organized to plant willow trees around various lakes in the park. That was fun, and although I tried, I didn't fill my boots with water. Afterwards, I left the NC to go back to 40 Acre Lake to see if I could get lucky and see something interesting, like a bald eagle...or an otter. And, perhaps because I did something for the park today, the park gave me a treat.

I walked to the Observation Tower from the 40 Acre parking lot, talking to people and enjoying the wonderful day. There were two big FAT nutria lying around the "island" with the small tree directly north of the Tower. I wandered back west, and at about 1:50 p.m., I saw movement to my left in 40 Acre Lake. There, between me and the island, was an otter, just leisurely paddling along. It stopped, dove, and then reappeared a few seconds later. It repeated this cycle, moving west, so I walked along with it, moving when it was submerged.

There was a small group of people on the trail, and I walked toward them. Finally, I called to them when the otter was underwater. I pointed, and told them if they'd watch that area, they'd see an otter. And they did, when it popped up. As the otter swam, it looked towards our bank, then moved on. I knew it wanted to cross the trail. So, when I got a few paces past the group of park visitors, we stopped and waited. It was really cool. We watched the otter just cruise by.

Meanwhile, I grabbed my video camera. The otter moved a bit further along, and then swam towards our bank. It came ashore, paused, stuck its neck WAY up... slid up on the bank, and then moved up to the trail. Further to the west, and heading our way, another park visitor was walking along quickly, listening to music through ear buds. The otter crossed the trail. I filmed it... with hands shaking with excitement (yeah, I was really happy to see an otter). Meanwhile, the otter got to the other side, paused, and looked back at the approaching fast walker, and then moved into Pilant Lake. And that was it. Judging by the time stamps on my short short video clips, this all took about six minutes.



The park visitors were all happy to see this. The otter crossed about 20 yards from us. The ipod girl coming from the other direction (her feet are in some of the pictures) was also impressed...but she kept walking. So...no really clear photos from this encounter. But, some short video clips. There are more image captures from the video, and links to the video on my webpage here: <http://67.15.110.101/mycam.html>

## **WHEN THE ROBINS COME BOBBIN' ALONG**

*Contributed by Jenn Mantei*

It's barely five a.m., and the sun hasn't yet grazed the horizon. In the dark, an American Robin begins piping his melodic dawn song: "Day is here! Time to rise! Awake! Awake!" They say the early bird catches the worm, but I prefer another couple hours of sleep.

Growing up in Wisconsin, robins were the first sign of spring, bringing sun and warmth back to the winter-dreary landscape, notice that it was time to stow the snow shovels for another year. Legend held that the person who saw the first robin of spring would have good luck all year long. I'm sure I saw that first robin quite a few times.

By the end of April, Mr. and Mrs. Robin would have a clutch of speckled blue eggs in their nest, built a few weeks earlier in the needley protection of our blue spruce tree. My dad would drag out the ladder and each of us kids would climb up to peer into the nest while the adult robins stood sentry nearby, ready to sound the alarm if we got too close. Soon we'd hear the first faint peeps of the baby birds, with their Einsteinian fluff and mouths bigger than their heads. We'd continue to watch the nest, eager as mother robins for the babies to fledge. Then we'd cheer them on from indoors, assigning each a score like olympic divers. Not all of the babies survived the initial flight, of course. When one of us found a crash victim, we'd provide a proper burial in a Kleenex-lined box. Once the nest was empty, we'd collect the eggshells (and sometimes the nest itself) to take to school for show and tell.

Summer evenings, we would sit on the back patio enjoying the warm breeze and watching the sun sink low as the fireflies began to flicker. Then the male robin would begin his evening serenade: "All is well, time to rest. Sleep well, goodnight, goodnight!"

In fall, when a whiff of coming winter arrived and the leaves began to take on flame hues, the robins would become strangely quiet. No more early-morning warbling, no more evening song reminding us to relax after a long day. Now they channeled all their energy into hunting grubs and worms, fattening up in earnest for the long trip south. When the first flurries of snow flew in, the robins would be gone.

Moving to Texas meant saying goodbye to that old friend. I traded my beloved robin for his thrushy cousin, the Mockingbird. Oh sure, the Mockingbird has those flashy wingbars and can mimick my neighbor's car alarm. But their middle-of-the-night oratorios don't come close to the robin's cheery songs and unobtrusive demeanor. The robin's taxonomic name doesn't sound terribly flattering: *Turdus migratorius* (despite the sound of it, it means "thrush" and "change of home"), but robins are smart: They are one of the few bird species who recognize and reject cowbird eggs in their nests. They'll band together in large flocks to keep predators at bay. They've even appeared on Canadian paper money and have been the subject of at least two popular American songs. I missed them immediately, their cheeky music and pumpkin breasts.



Here in Texas I see robins most often in the park, bounding across the grassy expanses, their heads cocked to listen for the slow shuffle of an insect in the sod. They join the ranks of other migrating birds in the spring and fall, stopping here to rest and refuel before continuing their commute between central Mexico and points north. If you happen to see them, I hope you'll stop a minute to enjoy them. In another couple of weeks, they'll be gone again.

## Black Willow Planting

*Contributed by Chuck DuPlant*



It was a cold but sunny day, and we managed to plant approximately 180 black willow cuttings in 14 different sites around the lakes and on the slope at the river. These cuttings were planted near the lake trails to replace the trees that have died and those blown down by Hurricane Ike. Hopefully many of them will take root and provide shade and habitat. Thanks to everyone for their help and great work!

## Elmo

*Contributed by Dennis Jones*

These days I am not surprised by reports of strange animal sightings. As the world gets smaller, animals are crossing continents and hemispheres (with human help) easier than ever before. It began with domestic animals (cats, dogs, goats, hogs, cows). Then came the exotic or introduced animals, such as the pigeon (a.k.a. the "flying rat"), house sparrow (not really a sparrow at all but rather a weaver finch) and the European Starling, to play havoc with nature's balance (they interfere with native nesting birds). I have seen a huge python's shed skin that was over 10 feet long, and even found crocodiles at Brazos Bend. They were Morelet's Crocodiles from the Yucatan, apparently smuggled across the border as pets and

released at the park when they became troublesome. Don't worry, the weather gets too cold here for them to survive. The crocs we found were under two feet long and dead from the cold weather we had experienced. The list is endless, as everything from hedgehogs to ferrets to Easter bunnies find their way into the wild. Some make it, but most don't.

Feral and exotic animals are a problem. Hogs introduced centuries ago became "feral" or wild and plow up thousands of acres foraging for anything edible. They make no distinction – pecans, acorns, baby bunnies, flowerbeds, lawns, snakes, fawns, nesting birds and eggs (such as quail and turkey) are all pig food. If it can be eaten, hogs will eat it. The population is growing in Texas and with intelligence equal to or exceeding dogs they may even be in your neighborhood soon.

A few years back people thought they might get rich raising Australian Emus. They were very expensive to purchase initially, and the expectations were they could be used for meat, leather and oil. The market for emus never seemed to get off the ground, and people found themselves stuck with birds that stood well over six feet tall, weighed up to 132 pounds, and could run over 30 miles per hour. That's a lot of bird. Over time most of the birds vanished from our rural landscapes. Some actually went to market, I suppose; some just died, and some were simply turned loose.

Elmo the Emu was probably one of the latter. It began one morning when my wife woke me from a sound sleep to tell me there was an "ostrich" in our yard. She is adept at finding ways to prevent me from sleeping in on my days off, but this seemed a bit out there. She insisted, and though it wasn't an ostrich it was certainly a BIG bird and it seemed to have adopted us. His owners must have gotten tired of feeding him and had let him go. Candy immediately named him Elmo, much to my dismay as names imply pet status. I wasn't sure we needed an emu as a pet, but Elmo seemed content to stay in close proximity to our house and roosted in our fenced back yard. He would make strange rumbling noises and more than once sent Candy's cats up a tree, even though I don't think he ever intended to hurt them.

Candy could call Elmo from the fields near the house by rattling a can of corn. I tried to remain neutral in the matter; after all, we live in a state park. Normally feral and/or exotic animals are discouraged from living in state parks with extreme prejudice. We are not a shelter for unwanted pets or introduced species. But because we weren't concerned about making baby emus, he stayed near the house, and since we are allowed to have "pets", I figured it was okay, even though this might be carrying it a bit too far. Also I did not want WWII at home with my darling bride.

Elmo stayed with us for several months and taught us a lot about emus and how amazing they are. He began to occasionally roost in a grove of trees near the house, and then one day he was gone. He just disappeared. We suspected poachers, but there was no evidence to show that. A week or so later while driving down a farm road about two miles from our residence I saw the crumpled, decomposing body of an Emu. Was it Elmo? Was he hit by a car? Was he shot? Where was he going? Those questions go unanswered even today. We would like to believe he found a new, better, home, but it is more likely that it was Elmo. He suffered the fate that most exotic and unwanted pets suffer: abandonment and death. He was a neat animal, but if he and his kind fully succeeded on their new continent, they would pass certain death on to native species, because everything is linked to everything else. When we break the natural chain of life, the consequences are disastrous. But I am glad I got to meet Elmo even though I wish I hadn't. I still kinda miss him, but don't tell my wife.

## 2009 CALENDAR OF EVENTS



March 14	Regular meeting, 5:30 PM	April 11	Regular meeting, 5:30 PM
March 16-20	Major Spring Break	April 12	Easter
March 23-27	Additional Spring Break	May 9	Regular meeting, 5:30 PM
April 4	Anniversary Celebration	May 25	Memorial Day

**Brazos Bend State Park**

Texas Parks and Wildlife  
21901 FM 762  
Needville TX 77461

FIRST CLASS MAIL

→ **NEXT MEETING DAY AND TIME** ←  
**SATURDAY, March 14, 2009 at 5:30 PM**



**REGULAR VOLUNTEER EVENTS**

- |                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Creekfield Hikes  | Every Saturday and Sunday at 10:00 AM, led by volunteers    |
| Photo Hikes       | First Saturday of each month                                |
| Volunteer meeting | Second Saturday of each month at 5:30 PM; Supper at 5:00 PM |
| Bird Hikes        | See schedule in calendar                                    |

**BRAZOS BEND STATE PARK VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION**

**VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION OFFICERS**

- |                 |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| President:      | Carrie Sample   |
| Vice-President: | Suzie Gann      |
| Secretary:      | Eddy Grizzaffi  |
| Treasurer:      | Diane Carpenter |

**NEWSLETTER TEAM**

- |                        |                                      |
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| Production Assistants: | Bruce Williamson<br>Terry Williamson |

The **Brazos Bend Bunch Bugle** is the newsletter of the Brazos Bend State Park Volunteer Organization, A.K.A. The Brazos Bend Bunch. It is distributed monthly to volunteers through the BBSPVO web site. For further

information on this newsletter or the volunteer program, contact David Heinicke or Sharon Hanzik at Brazos Bend State Park, phone 979-553-5101.

Opinions expressed in this newsletter are the opinions of the author of the article and do not necessarily reflect the official position of Brazos Bend State Park Volunteer Organization nor of BBSP administration. The deadline for Newsletter contributions is the Saturday following the monthly meeting, if mailed to Anna Dell Williamson, or at the meeting if delivered to the park. (E-mail address: [awilliamson4@comcast.net](mailto:awilliamson4@comcast.net)). Notify Anna Dell (281-485-2843) well in advance of any events you want announced in the newsletter.