



FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK



The Elm Lake Wildlife Viewing Platform is finished. On July 23 at 6:30 p.m., we will have a ribbon cutting and dedication of this platform for our park visitors. Elected officials from Ft. Bend and adjoining counties will be invited to this event. This will give us a chance to make

them more aware of BBSP, BBSPVO, and the value that the park adds to the citizens and schools of this part of Texas. Please plan to attend this celebration and bring your family and friends as we open this BBSPVO-funded project. Light refreshments will be served after the program.

On June 16, 2011, the *Houston Chronicle* published a full page article on our park. It was in the Ultimate section which is a Thursday feature on Ft. Bend and the cities in the county. The article was written by Tess Livingston and included an interview with Steve Killian and several park visitors. Pictures were included from the BBSP portfolio and by Chronicle staff. You may access the article at www.ultimatefortbend.com using the following link:

<http://www.ultimatefortbend.com/stories/249285-there-s-much-more-than-gators-at-brazos-bend-state-park>

In May, we approved funds for a viewing platform on Creekfield Forest Trail and the replacement of the Lexan glass in the alligator diorama. Ron Morrison has directed the Creekfield project and the Maintenance Group is putting the finishing touches on this platform. Be sure and visit the site to see their great work. Now we need rain so we will have water around this platform. On Friday, June 24, the Lexan glass was installed and the alligator diorama was cleaned up. Rich Jespersen, David Heinicke, Richard Taylor and I participated in the installation.

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Our next general meeting is July 9 at 5:30 p.m. with food at 5:00 p.m. There are also Budget and Executive meetings at 3:00 p.m. We need you at any or all of the meetings to help set the direction of our support of Brazos Bend State Park.

Offie Walker

Ed. note: Chris Bishop sent an alternate URL if you are unable to get the article from the one above. <http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/zones/7611645.html>

JUNE MEETING NOTES

submitted by Linda Heinicke

The meeting was called to order by Vice-President Mary Lockwood. There were 14 members, 2 VIT's and 3 staff members present. The minutes were approved as posted. Thanks to Judy Strauss for the dinner.

REPORTS:

BUDGET: Dave Armstrong reported that there will be no Treasurer's Report this month due to Internet problems and the death of Comptroller Rachelle Watson's father. The report will be mailed at a later date. We expressed our condolences to Rachelle and family.

The following budget requests were presented and approved:

David Heinicke:

New front desk for the Nature Center. Funds will come from the following accounts: Fletcher Morgan memorial, Marty Gay memorial, Elmer Aden memorial, Stacy Hobbet fund, and McGovern fund.

A venomous snake skeleton encapsulated in plastic for display and for snake programs. Funds will come from Ramsayer account.

A new lexan front for the alligator diorama. Funds will come from McGovern fund. We also need to clean the inside of the display.

Chuck Duplant:

New spotting scope and stool for the Elm Lake platform. Funds will come from the Kilgore/Exxon Mobil fund. The scope will be 20 x 60 power and will not be permanently mounted. We can use it for various locations and events,

GIFT SHOP: Judy Strauss reported that sales are going great. We are just trying to keep up with sales and stocking.

BBEEC: Chuck Duplant reported that there is no news on the new building.

WOOD SALES: Chuck Duplant reported that wood sales are slow, but we do have wood that needs to be bundled.

ECO EXPLORERS: Carrie Sample reported that 30 children are signed up, and it is a good group. She thanked everyone for all the help.

VIT TRAIL TRIMMING TRAINING: Judy Strauss reported that about 2 wks ago, she and 11 VITs trimmed and cleared a space in the 40-Acre Lake picnic area. They worked hard for 2 hours and did a great job.

MAINTENANCE: Karl Franke reported that the platform on Creekfield forest trail is almost complete. We still need some dirt to fill it in. Jim Calvert is working on clearing Tallows everywhere. They are also working on smoothing the Live Oak trail. Next they plan to work on Creekfield forest trail to smooth it. They have been leveling dirt around the wood yard and have built a new stall for the new gator that is coming!



Dave Armstrong reported that his daughter and her husband and the grandkids cleared brush in the area where the viewing platform is on Elm Lake, clocking a total of about 100 hrs. They plan to make this an annual event.

Cindy Peterson commented that the new platform on Elm lake looks good, and recommended taking time to see it if you haven't already.

Nelda Gay questioned that the Nature Center building is not insured, and wondered if the things inside are insured? David and several others responded...NO, they won't insure contents in a building if we don't own the building. There is also the fact that the distance from fire hydrant is too far. The Gift Shop has liability insurance but that does not cover contents.

OUTREACH: Judy Strauss reported we will have an outreach event at the Missouri City library in August. Texian Market Days at George Ranch will be in October.

OLD BUSINESS:

Mary Lockwood reported that we did not get the Every Day grant from the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF). There were 300 applicants with only 20 grants. We are still eligible for E/webinars hosted by NEEF. We are waiting to learn more about this. The letter from NEEF was circulated.

Mary circulated the letter from Austin saying they requested we wait on fund-raising efforts for the BBEEC. Mary also circulated the letter to Carter Smith in response to their letter to delay fund raising. We should be contacting local elected officials to develop better relationships to get more support for building in the future. Please put in a good word for the park with your local officials.

KROGER NEIGHBOR TO NEIGHBOR

The Kroger Neighbor to Neighbor Donation Program donates \$1 million annually to charitable organizations in Texas and Louisiana. Brazos Bend State Park Volunteer Organization's share for the last program year totaled over \$800.

All organizations and participants must re-enroll for each program year. Enrollment is June 1, 2011 through Dec 31, 2011. The Neighbor to Neighbor Program accumulation is July 1, 2011 through April 30, 2012.

You can link Brazos Bend State Park Volunteer Organization to your Kroger Plus card by printing the flyer at the following website and taking it to your local Kroger store. Please pass this along to friends and family.

<http://krogerneighbortoneighbor.com/pdf/10000081267.pdf>

STAFF REPORTS



CHRIS BISHOP

ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT AND LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER

There was an 11.3 acre fire last week from a lightning strike on an oak tree near the front entrance at headquarters; we received help from the local volunteer fire department.

The budget is still very tight. At the regional meeting, they announced some reorganization and regrouping of parks.

Chris is grateful for all the help from the volunteers.

Steve Killian and Chris are looking at ways to get corporate sponsorship for activities. Academy was not interested, and they are now looking at Whole Foods. They may look into a donor wall using alligator eggs instead of bricks. Steve mentioned possible target donation boxes that would be placed at specific areas, such as 40-Acre, etc. They want to continue moving the park forward with projects that are low cost to do but make a big difference, such as expansion of the prairie trail to tie into the Live Oak trail; parking for walk-in sites at camping loop; making a formal trail from overflow area to headquarters; expanding the Creekwood trail, etc.

Last weekend was National Trails Day and Healthy Parks/Healthy People Day, which was a big success. The people who hosted the big race last January said they are interested in doing it again next year and maybe doing a 5K race at the Healthy Parks/Healthy People event.

The Americorps crew delayed their arrival again but should be arriving in the next week or so.

Headquarter restroom renovations are scheduled to start up again next week.

Brazos Bend never aired on the Swamp Brothers show. Chris is not sure why, but there are mixed feelings about whether it would have been good publicity.

May 24, Steve and Ted Stevens had a meeting with Ft. Bend Green group, who is proposing canoe trails involving Yellowstone Landing for area paddlers. They are still working on the administrative details.

Jeff Orsak welded new BBQ pits for Elm, Hale and the Dining Hall areas. The Eagle Scout project of a new interpretive panel for Live Oak trail has been completed and looks good.

The George Observatory will be open on both Friday and Saturday for the summer. We are not sure if they did a press release. Chris will check to see if we should do one.



DAVID HEINICKE

INTERPRETIVE RANGER AND LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER

We will soon be having the 13th annual Fourth of July Bike Parade. We hope to have Chris drive his truck. We need help with decorations, serving refreshment, riding bikes, etc.

We still do not have internet at the Nature Center, and we're not sure when we will. Hughes Net has not proved satisfactory.

The Elm Lake viewing platform is open and we hope to have the dedication late in July. We are waiting for the bronze plaque. We want to get representatives from TPWD in Austin and from the state to come out in support. There is a great view from the platform, except for the restrooms across the lake. The Jespersons suggested planting trees that would partially block them from sight. David will check on that.

There is an alligator nest on Creekfield Lake and we should be seeing more nests.

Chris is working evenings and this will bring David back to more days at the park and so he will do more interpretive work.

We will need volunteer help with foot races in October and in the spring.

It's hot out there so watch out for heat problems in staff, volunteers and visitors.

Thanks to Rich Jespersen for help getting the Lexan out.

There are plans for more signage on Elm platform that shows plants, wildlife, etc.



SHARON HANZIK
INTERPRETIVE RANGER AND VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

Three VIT's have completed their training recently: Patty Henry, Mike Sanderson and Ethan Hoover. At the recent Open House for potential volunteers, we had seven attending and four have already passed the background check for training. We gained one maintenance volunteer, Bob Long, who will be starting soon on the maintenance crew. There are 14 applications for training. Applications are due June 30. Sharon needs time to get all the background checks through, and set schedules for interviews. A press release will be sent out next week, and volunteers are asked to post the fliers advertising training in their neighborhoods.

The wounded alligator is now the dead alligator on the back side of 40-Acre.

The *Houston Chronicle* had a couple of articles: one about owls, another article on wildlife. The Texas Monthly mentioned Brazos Bend as one of the "Parks Worth Visiting."

Comment cards from the public were read.

Rich Jespersen commented that new volunteer Ethan Hoover worked with him and does a great job.



CONGRATULATIONS



JULY BIRTHDAYS

Debra Baker
Christopher Bishop (Staff)
Diane Carpenter
Jo Ann Davis
Jaci Elliott
Drake Hacker VIT
Joan Hebert
Cynthia Morales
Susie Taylor (Staff)
Barb Tucker
Elizabeth Villanueva (1997)
Denise Wilks (Staff)

AUGUST BIRTHDAYS

Sylvia Carrillo (Staff)
Jim Gilliam (Staff)
Eddy Grizzaffi
Lara Malone (VIT)
Frank Seay
Rob Thacker

August Anniversaries

Ray and Dana Anderson
Jim and Lorena Calvert
Ron and Margaret Morrison
Laszlo and Lexi Perlaky
Frank and Stacey Seay
Bruce and Anna Dell Williamson

Congratulations to Patty Henry, Mike Sanderson, and Ethan Hoover for completing their training. Please welcome these three new volunteers to the organization.

Thank you!

to **Offie Walker, Rich Jespersen, Richard Taylor, and David Heinicke** for replacing the Lexan on the alligator diorama in the Nature Center.

to **Judy Strauss** for the June meeting supper.

to **Diane Carpenter, Jo Ann Davis, Jaci Elliott, Dennis Jones, Tom Prentiss, and Offie Walker** for articles and pictures for the newsletter.

Correction!

In last month's article about the field trip to the Levi Jordan Plantation, it was stated that Levi Jordan is owned by TPWD. It is owned by The Texas Historical Commission (THC). It was once ours, but was transferred. Our sincere apologies for the error.

JOURNEYS WITH JACI

submitted by Jaci M. Elliot

It's June and I'm sitting on the banks of the lake where I used to attend college in central Illinois and where, one summer, I taught a water safety course (complete with canoes and PFDs - personal flotation devices—neither of which the public would see out at BBSP, of course!) I hear the raspy squawk of a GBH (great blue heron), consider the duckweed-blanketed lake, and momentarily reassure myself that no alligators are present in this calm body of water, so very unlike my previous weekend out at BBSP.

There and then, several alligators cruised back and forth in the slough across from the water station at Elm Lake and the spillway trail, much like crocodiles gathering in a dwindling Serengeti watering hole (or, more to my personal experience, like the growing number of elementary students at the school where I teach, lining up to the limited water fountains), a few tempers started to flare.

Of course, this sight couldn't compare to the alligator smack down I witnessed one Saturday afternoon in early April. Center Stage was the pond area just down the hill behind the Nature Center, and in the ring were two 10+-foot males going at each other. First one gator would circle the other, and then the water would churn, and you could hear what sounded like concrete cinder blocks being dropped on each other. In reality, it was the crash between the more aggressive gator and his subordinate—the upper teeth-filled jaws of the former colliding with the scute-armored, bony back of the latter. The sound seemed to astound many of the twenty or so park visitors, who had been summoned to the water's edge, enticed in a similar fashion, like the cardinals to the bird feeder just up the hill from the commotion.

The reason for the ruckus appeared to be an 8-foot female gator, who lazily drifted into the fighting area, barely rippling the brackish water. Could she possibly be enjoying all of the attention, both reptilian and mammalian? A vertically 6-foot human witness observed, "This is just like a soap opera." As I looked for some form of physical reaction to pain from the soon-to-be vanquished gator, who now sported a four-inch long gash on his back and whose rear left leg had been firmly locked in the apparent victor's maw for the last five minutes, I was inclined to agree: akin to an actor whose face has been frozen by Botox or other age-staving procedure, the suffering gator showed absolutely no expression!

IN THE NEWS

Chris Bishop has sent us links to some reports featuring BBSP. Follow this link to a recent article about the park in the *Wharton Journal Spectator*:

<http://www.journal-spectator.com/articles/2011/06/18/sports/doc4df7dda7cb089370216777.txt>

Here's a link to an article that [virtualltourist.com](http://www.virtualltourist.com) compiled on the "10 Best Camp Sites Around the World" . . . and I wasn't a bit surprised to find Brazos Bend State Park on the list:

<http://www.secondact.com/2011/06/10-best-camp-sites-around-the-world/>

"Alligators lurk around every corner?"

(Ed. note: And the article links to the volunteer website.)

NATURE CENTER REPORT

JUNE 2011

Below are the totals of the various activities and attendance recorded for the Nature Center, hikes, and programs for June 1-30, 2011. June brought school vacation and lots of hot, dry weather.

PROGRAMS	TOTALS
NATURE CENTER ATTENDANCE JUNE 2011 - 4,913 JUNE 2010 - 6,070 JUNE 2009 - 6,068 JUNE 2008 - 5,109 JUNE 2007 - 4,025	Saturdays (4) - 1647 High, 448 (6/11) Average: 412
	Sundays (4) – 1222 High, 340 (6/26) Average: 85
	Weekdays (22) - 2044 High, 260 (6/16) Average: 93
CREEKFIELD HIKES (8)	93
ALLIGATOR PROGRAMS (5)	100
SNAKE PROGRAMS (3)	97
CHILDREN’S STORYTIME (5)	93
OUTREACH (4)	500
WILDLIFE DEMOS (4)	105
SUNDIAL PROGRAMS (3)	56
ECO-EXPLORERS & TADPOLES	210
OTHER PROGRAMS (8) include birds, pond life, and Healthy Parks/Healthy People activities, new volunteer Open House, spotting scope, and mammals.	223
TOTAL VISITORS SERVED IN HIKES AND ONSITE PROGRAMS	1464
TOTAL REPORTED VOLUNTEER HOURS	Interpretive: 708 Maintenance: 164



WE GET COMMENTS

compiled by Diane Carpenter

Many of our Nature Center guests sign our visitor sheet or complete the visitor survey. They help let us know if we are accomplishing our mission: Here are some of last month's comments from our Nature Center visitors:

LOCATION

COMMENTS

Vancouver, BC, Canada

Thanks – great information

Hilo, Hawaii

Wonderful park

Chicago, Illinois

Great! Very friendly

Covington, Louisiana

Awesome. We'll be back!

London, UK

Jolly good show

Pullman, Washington

Thanks for showing us the baby alligator
Very nice staff!

Dublin, Ireland

Wonderful experience

Houston, Texas

Great place – Hidden gem!

Katy, Texas

Educational and fun!

Unknown

Advertise the banana spiders too.
They are an amazing spectacle.
(Ed. note: the golden silk spiders are prevalent during the summer)

St. Louis, Missouri

Pretty cool

Kobe, Japan

Wonderful!

Houston, Texas

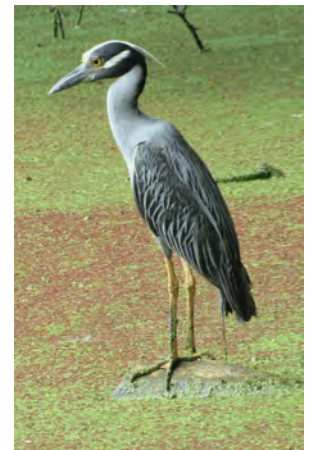
Everyone was very friendly

Texas

Park has improved greatly; the energy of the staff and volunteers is very positive and uplifting. Great job.

Unknown

Love coming here. You take excellent care of this park.





Left: View of new platform on Elm Lake

Right: View of Elm Lake from new platform

Photos by Anna Dell Williamson



ELM LAKE WILDLIFE VIEWING PLATFORM

The Elm Lake Wildlife Viewing Platform is complete and open to the public at Brazos Bend State Park. The 250-square-foot covered elevated platform will be used for public wildlife viewing, educational programs, demonstrations by park staff and serve as an outdoor classroom. The platform has a 40-foot wheelchair ramp and is completely handicapped accessible. The platform was paid for by funds raised and donated by the Brazos Bend State Park Volunteer Organization.

The public dedication ceremony for the viewing platform will be Saturday, July 23, at 6:30 p.m. Tentative activities will include comments from Justin Rhodes, Steve Killian, TPWD senior staff, volunteer representatives Offie Walker and Carrie Sample, and elected officials & commissioners. Offie Walker, Carrie Sample, Steve Killian, TPWD senior staff, and donors will cut the ribbon, after which refreshments will be served by park staff. The total program should take about 45 minutes, and all volunteers are encouraged to attend. In case of rain, the formalities will take place in the Elm Lake Picnic Pavilion.

INFORMATION FROM SHARON

As of Wednesday, June 14, 2011, we have a visible gator nest on Creekfield Lake. It is on a "former" island. Walk counter-clockwise from the parking lot and go around the lake as usual. Once you pass the armadillo display keep your eyes to the left and you will see it as soon as the trailside vegetation clears. It is a large pile of decayed vegetation - very brown.

As long as the mother is able to stay in the area, we will not interfere. If drought causes her to leave, we will collect eggs. (We will most likely collect some eggs from the nest as we usually do, but leave enough behind for her to hatch and care for). Since it is on the island it should be safe from normal lake levels if rains refill the lake before the end of summer--and let's hope they do!

The wounded gator that most of us have been monitoring in 40-Acre Lake died last Thursday or Friday. (June 9 or 10)

JUNE MAINTENANCE REPORT

The Maintenance Crew clocked 164 volunteer hours in June on various projects.

Wood Yard:

Level wood yard gravel, prepare Gator shed for new Gator, paint parking stripes, install signs and holder for vehicle log.

Mowing and Landscaping:

Rebuild water rings and water trees on Creekfield Forest Trail

Trail Trimming and Trail Maintenance:

Remove downed tree on Old Horseshoe and from prairie
Put trail material at both ends of Creekfield Bridge

Equipment Maintenance:

Wash 06 gator

Pest Control:

Kill Tallow trees, Creekfield and Old Horseshoe
Clear dead Chinese tallow around Platform, 3 hrs, 8 vols
Clear vines and Chinese tallow trees from Creekfield Forest Platform viewing area

Special Projects: Creekfield Forest Platform

Set posts
Cleared drilling mud from around Platform
Installed floor joists on platform
Leveled the floor joists
Worked on deck
Worked on approach



LIGHTNING STRIKES TWICE

by Dennis Jones



Photo by Jo Ann Davis

Lightning struck the prairie on the south side of the entrance road in the afternoon of June 6, 2011. It is possible the lightning struck a tree or the ground nearby the trees and with the prevailing winds from the south and southwest the fire slowly moved toward the roadway and headquarters, consuming 11.3 acres in total.

Rangers, J.T. Kalina and Cord Eversole were first to arrive on the scene, and they were quickly joined by Ranger Jeffery Orsak in the park fire truck. They guarded the upwind flanks of the fire and prevented the fire from getting out of control. Soon other park staff arrived on scene and assisted in traffic control, as well as monitoring for potential

sparks igniting the prairie across and downwind from the main road. (Because the fuel was so fine and burned so quickly, no embers were carried over the roadway)

By definition, this was a naturally caused Wildland Fire, and we are allowed to let such a fire burn if no persons or property are threatened. If it had been caused by humans, we would have been obliged to immediately extinguish it. Because the weather was unstable and had the potential to shift, we did not allow the fire to expand, but the fire was allowed to burn itself out.

In the mid-1990's a fire caused by lightning occurred on the same prairie. Prairie fire is a rejuvenating process for prairies. It retards woody plants from growing and removes the biomass decomposing underneath the grasses, and this enables additional plant growth.

To learn about prairies, fire ecology, and prairie ecology, see the website: [The Prairie Ecologist](#).

DROUGHT CONDITIONS ON CREEKFIELD LAKE

This picture of the great egrets on Creekfield Lake, taken by Tom Prentiss in late June, shows how much effect the drought has had in a very short time. The birds congregate where they can find some water, even if it's not very much.



Photo by Tom Prentiss

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

July 2	Close-up photography Photo-walk #2, 5 PM.
July 3	13th Annual Independence Day Bike Parade, 6:00 PM
July 9	BBEEC (New Building) Committee, 1:00 PM, open to all interested Budget and Executive Meetings, 3:00 PM Regular Business Meeting, 5:30 PM (Supper, 5:00 PM)
July 23	Grand Opening of Elm Lake Wildlife Viewing Platform, 6:30 PM
August 13	BBEEC (New Building) Committee, 1:00 PM, open to all interested Budget and Executive Meetings, 3:00 PM Regular Business Meeting, 5:30 PM (Supper, 5:00 PM)
September 3	Amphibian and reptile photography Photo-walk, 5 PM.
September 5	Labor Day - busy day in the park
September 10	BBEEC (New Building) Committee, 1:00 PM, open to all interested Budget and Executive Meetings, 3:00 PM Regular Business Meeting, 5:30 PM (Supper, 5:00 PM)

NEW DATE FOR THE VOLUNTEER PICNIC

from Sharon Hanzik

It appears that we will need to have the annual picnic one week later this year. Due to either my oversight or some other issue, we did not get the dining hall reserved for October 8. Rather than try and have the picnic at one of the pavilions, it would be best to postpone one week and keep it at the dining hall (where we are also safe from inclement weather.) Another good reason to postpone is that the annual Astronomy Day at the George Observatory will be on October 8, and this an extremely busy day for the park. There are no conflicts with special events or outreach on the 15th. I have asked park HQ staff to reserve the hall for October 15.

Please mark your calendars.

Brazos Bend State Park

Texas Parks and Wildlife
21901 FM 762
Needville, TX 77461

NEXT MEETING



FIRST CLASS MAIL

SATURDAY, JULY 9, 2011

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:	Offie Walker
Vice-President:	Mary Lockwood
Secretary	Linda Heinicke
Treasurer:	Dave Armstrong
Past-President:	Carrie Sample

NEWSLETTER TEAM

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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> or <newsletter@brazosbend.org>). Notify Anna Dell (281-485-2843) well in advance of any events you want announced in the newsletter.

**IN THE END, WE WILL CONSERVE ONLY WHAT WE LOVE,
WE WILL LOVE ONLY WHAT WE UNDERSTAND,
WE WILL UNDERSTAND ONLY WHAT WE ARE TAUGHT.**

**BABA DIOUM, SENEGAL
AFRICAN CONSERVATIONIST**