



BRAZOS BEND BUNCH BUGLE

VOLUME 24, NUMBER 1

JANUARY 2012

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

In 2011 Brazos Bend State Park benefitted from our Volunteer Organization through your individual activities such as staffing the Nature Center and the Gift Shop, Outreach Programs, leading hikes, presenting programs, working to maintain the park trails and patrolling the trails. The Park also benefitted from our group actions using funds received as grants or funds that are generated by the Gift Shop and wood sales to add features in the Park and procure equipment to maintain the Park. Attendance at the Park continues to increase, which means there is an increasing need for more volunteer hours. In 2012, let's all encourage our friends to consider joining our Organization so that we can continue to support the Park in the outstanding fashion of years past.



November 6 was Prairie Heritage Day with a number of organizations coming to BBSP to inform Park visitors of their activities. They also shared their knowledge of nature with our visitors. BBSPVO was an active part of this day.

Our Simple Christmas Celebration was on December 3, and, as in years past, was well attended. This is a fun event for our visitors, volunteers, and staff. There are a number of very popular features each year such as the hay ride, s'mores, refreshments, face painting, and SANTA. The Brazos Pickers were with us for a program that evening. Our visitors really appreciate the effort the Staff and Volunteer Organization put into this annual event.



In this issue:

President's Report.	1
Important Meeting in January.	2
December Meeting Notes.	2
Staff Reports.	4
Message from Dan Sholly.	6
Congratulations.	7
Moody Gardens Field Trip.	7
Thank you.	8
November/December Scenes at BBSP.	8
BBSP Outreach.	9
Nature Center Attendance Records.	9
Nature Center Report.	10
Maintenance Report.	11
BBSP Christmas Bird Count Results.	11
Christmas Bird Count, Vermont Style.	12
New Park Sign.	13
Journeys with Jaci.	14
Message from Carter Smith.	15
Upcoming Events.	15

During the next year we will be making decisions on the expenditure of funds to move toward a new Brazos Bend Environmental Education Center. These are steps that we will take to develop an accurate cost figure for the project and develop fund raising skills that will be needed when we receive permission from Austin to move forward. All the members of our organization need to be a part of the decisions that will be made regarding this needed project.

Offie Walker

IMPORTANT MEETING IN JANUARY

Please reserve January 14 on your calendar for a very important afternoon general meeting of our organization. This meeting will start at 2:30 PM in the dining hall with deserts, coffee, and tea. As soon as you have selected your refreshments and are seated, we will have a Park Staff report followed by a Financial report. As you know, we have a real need for a BBSP Environmental Education Center to replace our current Nature Center. There are a number of actions we need to take to be prepared to start and finish this future project. A strategic plan has been developed for this project by Chuck Duplant, Dave Armstrong, Mike Manley, and Hannah Meddaugh which will be presented for your approval and support. This is a major undertaking, and we all need to work together to make BBSP a grand experience for our visitors and a major factor in Environmental Education.

DECEMBER MEETING NOTES

Offie Walker called meeting to order at 5:30 PM, December 10, 2011.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Bob Kowalewski presented the Treasurer's report, followed by the following requests for purchases, which had been approved by the budget committee and were approved by the membership.

Chuck Duplant:

- Request to transfer funds from the McGovern Fund to the Building Fund.
- Request to transfer a set amount each month from the General Funds to the Building Fund.

Cord Eversol:

- Request for funds to carry out research on alligators: two catch poles, three spotlights for night surveys, and a depth sounding sonar to find water depth in lakes. All the equipment will stay with the organization for continued research.

Ron Morrison:

- Materials to replace existing Pilant Slough walkway with a new bridge. Labor will be done by the maintenance crew. Funds will come from the El Paso restricted account.
- Rebuild water retention rings around trees on Creekfield Forest Nature Trails out of El Paso Restricted account.

David Heinicke:

- Portable PA system for the amphitheater, special events and programs.

Diane Carpenter:

- Shelving for the Gift Shop and a new cashier's desk, with funds from the Carpenter fund and the General Fund.

If a member knows of an anticipated expense for 2012, give the information to Bob for next year's budget.

CHAIR REPORTS:

GIFT SHOP: Anna Dell Williamson, standing in for Beth Debenport, thanked volunteers for taking shifts in the GS and for helping with Inventory.

WOOD SALES: Chuck Duplant reported that wood sales are up, and the maintenance crew has been splitting and bundling purchased wood.

BBECC BUILDING COMMITTEE: Chuck Duplant reported that the Building Committee will be meeting Friday with Gordon Bohmfalk, head of Design and Planning Group in TPWD Austin, to talk more about the scope of the building, and show us sketch designs. We are all excited about the project. It will be a Q/A type meeting.

At the January meeting, Dave Armstrong and Mike Manley will present the business plan for continuing forward with plans, fund raising, etc. We need people to run different sections of the project, including design, fundraising, education, and overall project. We need volunteers for leadership, grant writer training and many other jobs. Lots of work is coming up as we move forward.

Bob has a source of some grants from Sharon, which he will send to Chuck. We will try again for the Everyday Grant.

Offie Walker emphasized that the meeting in January is very important. It will start at 2:30, in the Dining Hall. Dessert will be served, and we will have the presentation on the Building project and the General Meeting. Contact your friends in the organization to let them know how important this meeting is. This is an important presentation on the future of the organization.

MAINTENANCE HOURS: The Maintenance Crew stacked up 140 hours in Nov. They have been busy with the new splitter in the wood yard.

OUTREACH: Judy Strauss had a program today with Kids Unlimited, which is an organization for children with cancer and their families. She was impressed with the positive attitude of the children and families. She plans on going again.

Anna Dell Williamson reported that we are getting ready for February training, and you will be asked to help with various activities, as usual. Dates are February 4, 11 and 18.

Be sure to come to the meeting January 14. We are looking for a big crowd.

STAFF REPORTS

PARK SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT, TED STEVENS



Ted Stevens reported for Steve Killian.

The sign in front is wonderful A press release has been drafted, and the sign dedication will be January 14 at 11:00 AM.

There have been 11 media events, in which Carter Smith and Regional Directors have brought to the public the financial situation of TPWD. Between the drought, wildfires and decreased visitation, the parks are \$4.6 million in hole. This means there will be more park closures and personnel cuts. The information made the front page of the *Houston Chronicle*. Brazos Bend stands good and is not currently in danger of cuts or closing. BBSP is reaching lots of people and is a premium park. We are all park people and want to see parks open. 98% of lands are privately owned and need donations. A YouTube video on Facebook page makes a personal appeal to help donate to state parks.

The public can help in three ways:

- First: Make a donation on line. We already have 155 donations, and \$12,000.
- Second: Beginning in January 2012, when you register your vehicle, you can check a box to donate \$5 to state parks. We hope to generate \$1.6 million.
- Third: Visit parks and bring in revenue dollars.

Christmas events: Christmas movies are coming up, and we just completed Simple Christmas. The staff Christmas party is Dec. 22 in the Dining Hall at 6:30. It is a pot luck dinner with no gift exchange. All are invited.

Projects: Staff is working on taking down trees and grinding stumps of drought victims for safety reasons. TxDot will be here to straighten out, resurface and level the Observatory Road.

Primitive Premium sites have a new parking area which TxDot will blacktop to extend parking.

Centerpoint identified over 100 trees on power lines that need to be topped or removed. Power has been out twice in the past month related to trees falling on the lines.

First Day hike: There is a push nationwide through the State Parks Organization to have hikes across the nation on January 1, to get people energized to get out and walk on the first day of the year. Creekfield will be at 1:00 PM, not 10:00 AM, that day and there will be media coverage from Austin.

Internet reception at the Nature Center is dragging on. Two towers are in the maintenance yard, one 80 foot and the other 60 foot. The 80-foot tower will be installed at the Maintenance Yard to beam Internet to the Nature Center. Ted is trying to get Ft. Bend and Needville Fire Department to use the emergency AM station and repeater for Sheriff deputies. Maybe they will pick up the bill for installation, and we will all share the equipment. The Needville Fire Department Board will meet in January for their decision. A private company is putting up a wifi tower in Pecan Bend; or we could pay a company to get internet here. Ted is working on this project. Mary pointed out that the Observatory has internet. DSL at Maintenance is bad and is not available to the Nature Center. Ted will talk to the Observatory about their service.

An Eagle Scout has talked to Richard Taylor about rebuilding the wood kiosk in the 200 camping loop. They seem to be in agreement on the project.

The Live Oak Platform has received all the natural resource clearances, and Richard is handling materials.

Another Eagle Project: there is a canoe kiosk upriver, and a paddling trail from their park down to us. Scouts would build an interpretive sign panel for information on the paddling trail. There will be more recreational areas along the Brazos River. Highway 59 is a sanctioned put-in point from TXDot. FM 1462 is a sanctioned TxDot take-out. Hopefully Yellowstone Landing will be a camping mid-point on the paddling trail.

We have had a large group in the park today occupying 95% of the campground. It is the Pathfinders, a Seventh Day Adventist group from 15 different churches. They will be leaving tomorrow.



SHARON HANZIK
INTERPRETIVE RANGER AND VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

Simple Christmas last weekend was a great success. There were eight activities, including the hayride, which was filled up every time. Everything was accessible. A reporter from the *Fort Bend Sun* talked to Ted and ran a front page article. It was a good success because we have volunteers.

The Watson Family will do a Christmas movie. There is a flyer posted on the web site. It will be next Saturday, December 17, weather permitting.

Emails have been sent out for holiday needs, and the times are on the signup calendar. The Nature Center will be closed Christmas Day.

The Park will be closed December 13 – 15 for the deer hunt, reopening at 2:00 Thursday.

Training: Applications have been received, and interviews are going on. Sharon has interviewed 4 new applicants, and 3 were accepted last time but unable to complete training. There are still a few more to interview. February usually has a smaller class.

A Rufous Hummingbird was sighted here Friday. The south end of Creekfield is full of wood ducks. We have seen Gadwalls, Northern Shovelers. Least Grebes, and Water Thrush. Live Oak trail is closed because one section has no topping and is very wet.



DAVID HEINICKE
INTERPRETIVE RANGER AND LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER

Several birds have been sighted this week: really neat Fox sparrows and Harris sparrows. The Christmas Bird Count starts at 6:30 AM on Saturday, December 17, and ends with dinner in the evening.

Signage for Bird ID for the Elm Lake platform was installed last Sunday. It doesn't block the view, and supplies a list of common birds. Purchase of the signs depletes the money sent to Austin to build the platform.

There was a major archeological discovery about a month ago by kids fishing. Please be on the lookout for people who look like they are poking around the lakes for items, and report it to Staff.

David is back working weekend nights and will be here less during the week.

Cord Eversol, a Graduate Student at Texas A&M in Kingsville, has requested an equipment grant for doing alligator research in the park. The Executive Committee asked him to present his project to the membership. Cord's Master's project is research on American alligators. BBSP is a good study sight and

source for equipment. He will be looking at habitat (water) quality and how that affects hunted and non-hunted alligators. The volunteers will receive the two project reports. As of now, TPWD has a one-size fits all management plan for alligators through the state. Not much research has been done in this area. This grant will help in data collection. The JD Murphy area in Port Arthur has a hunted population, and we don't know how hunting affects alligators. The study will be looking at different regions for management plans. Volunteers are welcome to help. There is value for interpretive and public education in what he's doing. He will do interpretive programs describing the work, the type of data collection, and tagging alligators. He will be proactive and inform visitors of what he is doing. Other studies have been done in BBSP by Louise Hayes-Odom, when the park first opened, and by Dr. Henry Gomez, a volunteer, doing research on alligator immune systems.

The study will take 1½ to 2 years, and then about six months to write up and analyze the data. There will be four study sites: BBSP, Armand Bayou Nature Center in this area, and King Ranch and Welder Wildlife Refuge in South Texas. All equipment provided by the grant will stay with the Organization to continue research. Armand Bayou plans to continue research. Information collected will include size, weight, population density, site structure, reproduction success, and water quality. The study methods will be both hands-on and observations.

The type of tagging has not been determined yet (on claw, fish tags, cattle tags), but other grants have been requested for tracking equipment. He hopes to tag with telemetry tags, at \$250 each. He has a receiver, but needs tags. He will determine the time spent in water and out, what is the optimum habitat. The study will be done during the week and at night. Traps will be placed where visitors don't go. Everything will be coordinated with our staff and TPWD.

Cord has been around the park for a long time, both as a summer seasonal and as a volunteer.

MESSAGE FROM OUR PARKS DIVISION DEPUTY DIRECTOR DAN SHOLLY

To all Parks Division staff

I found an article by Doug Cartland, a management trainer, about Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak's relationship particularly appropriate to us and our relationships with each other in the work place. There is a close correlation between how the Steve(s) made Apple into such a successful and strong corporation and product, with a successfully operating park or program. Whether at the park, region, or program level, we all depend on each other to do our job in support of the mission. Collaboration creates teams.

None of us can individually carry out the total mission and responsibility of state parks. In order to be successful, we must be a good team. We can choose to be a good team...or not. Like any relationship, being a good team requires effort and work by team members. The more we collaborate and communicate, the stronger our team will be. You can see it in successful parks and programs where there is a cohesive and productive team. The team spirit is effervescent. The job always gets done.

In this season of spirituality and during this most challenging era of limited resources for state parks, we all need to redouble our efforts to make sure that we are good teammates. Treat each person you work with and deal with as you would want to be treated yourself. Be honest, forthright, and a good listener. That's how you develop trust and respect, even if there is disagreement. Forgive and move forward as quickly as possible when it is appropriate. Only you control your attitude....might as well make it a good one.

Bottom line... We need each other. Might as well make it fun also. Have a great and safe holiday season!

CONGRATULATIONS



JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

Dave Armstrong
Justin Bowers
Joe Carmichael (Emeritus)
Sherida Carpenter (VIT)
Nancy Dobbs
Sharon Hanzik (Staff)
Jim Hiatt
Nancy Lynn Jones
Rosemary Kennedy (VIT)
Jane Minard
Ron Morrison
Jim North
Laszlo Perlaky (Emeritus)
Marilyn Vossler
Bruce Williamson (Emeritus)

JANUARY ANNIVERSARIES

Cathy and David Nevotti

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

Jerry Carpenter
Noel Duncan
Devin Elester (Staff)
Carl Franke
Bill Godley
Sid Jones
Cindy Peterson
Judy Strauss
Pam Tatge
Lisa Wells (Staff)



FEBRUARY ANNIVERSARIES

Robert and Shannon Aaron
Suzie and Rick Gann
Pete and Carol Hart
Tom and Candice Kanak



Congratulations to Leigh Allen and Earline Okruhlik, who have completed their VIT requirements. Give them a friendly welcome to the Organization.



MOODY GARDENS FIELD TRIP

The volunteer field trip to Moody Gardens is scheduled for Tuesday, February 7, at 10:00 AM and is now open to all VITs and volunteers. The field trip has two parts - the behind-the-scenes aquarium tour, and the regular aquarium and rainforest pyramid tours. The behind-the-scenes aquarium tour is limited to 22 people, but there is no limit to the regular aquarium and rainforest pyramid tours. However, you must register for all tours, first come, first served. The deadline to register with Sharon Hanzik is January 27.

Thank you!

to Diane Carpenter, Beth Debenport and Anna Dell Williamson for cleaning out the closet in the volunteer lounge.

to all who helped with Simple Christmas in preparation, presentation and clean-up, THANK YOU! It was a great success. (Ed. note: The following people signed up to help. There were others, and all help was appreciated.)

- Hayride Trailer Decoration and Ride-Alongs- Jerry Carpenter, Eddy Grizzaffi, Rosemary Kennedy, Mary Lockwood, Carrie Sample, Woody Scott, Judy Strauss, Offie Walker
- NC area Decorations - Kent Fewell, Sharon Hanzik, Barb Tucker, Offie Walker
- Refreshments - Beth Debenport, Debbie Fewell, Holly Haynes, Linda Heinicke, Rosemary Kennedy, Mary Lockwood, Pam Tatge, Anna Dell Williamson
- Face Painting - Kathy Owens, Aunnie Peterson and Crew
- Victorian Games - Woody Scott, Judy Strauss
- Rag Doll Making - Diane Carpenter, Suzie Gann, Holly Haynes, Linda Keltner, Sammie Miller Anne Shelton
- Marshmallow and S'more Roasting - Jerry Carpenter, Kent Fewell, Linda Heinicke, Rosemary Kennedy, Paige O'Neal
- Victorian Games - Suzie Gann
- Brazos River Pickers

to Beth Debenport, Diane Carpenter, Jerry Carpenter, Anna Dell Williamson, Nancy Partlow, Bob Kowalewski, Judy Strauss, Kent Fewell for completing the Gift Shop inventory in record time.

to Judy Strauss for her dedication to the Outreach program.

to Judy Strauss and Woody Scott for taking an outreach program to Kids Unlimited

to Dave Armstrong and Kathy Nevotti for taking an outreach program to Sugar Land Atria Assisted Living Center

to Diane Carpenter, Christine Kovach, Nelda Gay, and Anna Dell Williamson for bringing the supper for the December meeting.

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER SCENES AT BBSP

Prairie Heritage Day



A Simple Christmas



BBSP OUTREACH

THE SUGAR LAND ATRIA ASSISTED LIVING CENTER

On December 19, Cathy Nevotti and Dave Armstrong packed up pelts, skulls, shells, scutes, teeth, two alligators, the milk snake, and the Eastern corn snake and visited the residents at The Atria Assisted Living Center. This was the second visit to ALC, and the Activity Director has requested that we revisit the Center in February. Approximately 26 residents were in attendance and enjoyed the presentation, especially the hands-on opportunities offered to them.



The attendees enjoyed stroking the pelts and, in some cases, modeling them as if they were boas or scarves or folding one into the shape of a coonskin cap. They were awed by the sound that results from thumping a turtle shell and exploring the tooth indentations most likely made by a large alligator. Their eyes sparkled, and there were oohs and aaahs as Cathy and Dave presented the alligators for touching. At first, attendees were reluctant to touch the snakes, but after a little coaxing, they beamed with joy as they experienced the feeling of a live snake's skin. The presentation must have been a success because most stayed awake and actively participated in the questions and the tactile activity.



Outreach events to the general public, especially to those who are shut in and unable to visit the Park, take on a new importance as we begin the campaign to raise funds to build the new Brazos Bend Educational and Environmental Center.

NATURE CENTER ATTENDANCE RECORDS

Here is a recap of the Nature Center attendance for the past 5 years. You can see that there has been a general increase from year to year, in spite of setbacks like park closings for hurricane damage repair, drought and other weather related events. Project this to five years from now, and you can see how important it is to have our new Environmental Education Center as soon as possible.

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
JANUARY	4,577	4,197	5,143	4,710	4,078
FEBRUARY	2,247	4,827	5,950	4,320	5,340
MARCH	6,835	10,684	9,669	11,816	12,427
APRIL	7,399	6,387	5,739	8,300	9,206
MAY	5,633	7,060	8,578	8,979	8,131
JUNE	4,025	5,109	6,068	6,070	4,939
JULY	2,825	4,484	4,298	4,683	5,469
AUGUST	2,788	3,985	4,542	3,243	3,000
SEPTEMBER	5,142	1,386	4,535	4,112	4,676
OCTOBER	4,809	3,759	6,258	7,855	7,564
NOVEMBER	4,577	6,312	7,488	5,338	6,091
DECEMBER	4,285	3,600	2,999	4,841	3,864
TOTALS	55,142	61,790	71,267	74,267	74,785

NATURE CENTER REPORT

DECEMBER 2011

Below are the totals of the various activities and attendance recorded for the Nature Center, hikes, and programs for December 1-31, 2011. The NC was closed for 4 days - deer hunt, plus Christmas Day. The entire Christmas vacation period was marked by heavy visitation, weekends and weekdays.

PROGRAMS	TOTALS
NATURE CENTER ATTENDANCE December 2011 - 5,314 December 2010 - 4,841 December 2009 - 2,999 December 2008 - 3,600 December 2007 - 4,285 December 2006 - 4,286 December 2005 - 2,410	Saturdays (5) - 1,959 High, 608 (12/3) Average: 392
	Sundays (3) - 446 High, 214 (12/17) Average: 149
	Weekdays (19) - 1909 High, 427 (12/28) Average: 110
CREEKFIELD HIKES (7)	119
ALLIGATOR PROGRAMS (5)	38
SNAKE PROGRAMS (5)	80
CHILDREN'S STORYTIME (6)	42
BIRD PROGRAMS/HIKES (5)	78
GEO-CACHING (3)	53
OTHER PROGRAMS (7): special hikes(3), skulls, movie, wildlife observation, and outreach	166
TOTAL VISITORS SERVED IN HIKES AND PROGRAMS	576
VOLUNTEER HOURS	INTERPRETATION = 647 MAINTENANCE = 143
PARK ATTENDANCE, DECEMBER 2011	Total 14,099 Day use 9,246 (66%) Overnight 4,843 (34%) NC Visitors 3,864 (27%)

DECEMBER MAINTENANCE REPORT

Wood Yard:

Split, bundled, and delivered wood

Mowing and Landscaping:

Clean up blow-down at Elm Lake Picnic Ground

Clear pepper vines and youpon from Creekfield Forest Trail

Trail Trimming and Trail Maintenance:

Clean up brush left by power company

Pest Control:

Clear invasive plants

Special Projects:

Planning Creekfield Pocket Prairie

BRAZOS BEND CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS

by Justin Bower

The Brazos Bend CBC held December 17th had another great turnout this year, with over 60 participants scouring the various properties within the Count Circle. Despite the ravages of drought conditions and the forecasted threat of rain, counters enjoyed a beautiful day in the field. An Eastern Screech Owl barely nosed out a Summer Tanager for the coveted Big Bird award. Other highlights included 18 species of Sparrows and Towhees (including Green-Tailed and Spotted Towhees).

The Count wrapped up the day with a fantastic BBQ dinner, courtesy of NRG, at which we held our countdown. Thanks to the great efforts of our participants, the tentative total is 157 species (only two less than our all-time record!). We thank all of the participants, property owners, and Brazos Bend State Park volunteers and staff who continue to make this CBC event a success.



Everyone seemed to have loads of fun. The Count date for next year is Saturday, December 15th, so mark your calendars now!

Bill Godley and Justin Bower, Co-compilers.

TEXBIRDS help file and Texas birding links at: <http://moonmountaingroup.com/texbirds>



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT, VERMONT STYLE

by Carol Ramsayer



So, who did I think of this past Sunday morning as I stood on the shore of Lake Champlain bundled up head to toe, in 9 degree weather? Bill Godley! David Heinicke! They were the ones who started all this! Way back in 2003 (or so) they introduced me to the concept of the Christmas Bird Count – the idea that all over the country groups of birders would count numbers and species of birds within 15 mile radius “circles.” They insisted that experience was not essential – that even beginners could contribute by spotting movements of birds that others would identify. So I joined the group and off I went. And by the end of the morning I was hooked! I had spotted a pink shadow, a Roseate Spoonbill resting along the edge of 40-Acre Lake. And that one contribution was enough to keep me coming back.

Now we live in Vermont, and for the second year in a row I was part of the Middlebury circle. It’s a thrill to be living in a whole different part of the country now, and yet still be a part of the same citizen science effort to monitor bird numbers. My group of 3 women counted from 7:00 am until darkness set in, at 4:15 pm. Winter days are short this far north! We drove down dirt roads, some still icy from a snowfall the day before. Much of our area was farmland edged with shrubby hedgerows – great habitat for the

American Tree Sparrow that spends the winter here.

We checked out brown blobs in tall trees, hoping to

spot a Red-tailed Hawk or a Rough-legged Hawk (see photo, left). Part of our territory reached down to the shores of Lake Champlain. Ice had started to form the night before; around the edges were hundreds of Common Goldeneye, and a group of Common Merganser. All the time we kept glancing up, keeping an eye on the sky. While the day before we had seen over 6,000 Snow Goose overhead, on this day we saw none. I guess they had decided that yesterday was the day to migrate. We did have 3 Bald Eagle, though, so that made our sky searches well worth it!



Our “best” bird of the day? For me it was a Northern Shrike, which I had never seen before. Not only was he a “lifer,” but while we were watching, he took off from his tree-top perch and chased a smaller bird (unidentified) around and around, doing loops across a field. The little bird escaped that time, but we had the treat of watching his hunting behavior, similar to his Texas cousin, the Loggerhead Shrike.

After darkness fell, the groups gathered to share a potluck meal (What! No BBQ?!) and compile our lists of bird species seen. The grand total: 77 species. A far cry from last year’s BBSP total count of a record-setting 159! But that was to be expected since so many Vermont birds have already flown south for the winter. The unexpected part was that there were so few birds counted this year. In some species we were seeing half last year’s numbers. As it turned out, birders around the state were seeing the same trend.

Then it was time for everyone to go home and return to busy holiday activities. Whether in Texas or Vermont, it’s always a challenge to carve out an entire day for the Christmas Bird Count. But give it a try next year! You might get hooked as I have – thanks to Bill and David and that Roseate Spoonbill!

BRAZOS BEND STATE PARK BOASTS NEW CURBSIDE APPEAL

NEW 3-D SIGN REPLACES AGING, STORM-DAMAGED ONE

As one of the most visited outdoor and camping destinations in Texas, Brazos Bend State Park is a familiar, well-loved sight for thousands of people every year. With 35 miles of hike and bike trails, more than 100 campsites and shelters, six lakes, and perhaps the best place in the Lone Star State to glimpse the American alligator, Brazos Bend has a loyal following of regulars as well as national and international visitors.



Current visitors who travel to this touted tourist destination will likely notice that one of the park's old original landmarks is missing. Gone. Vanished from the park's renowned scenic landscape. But despite its very noticeable absence, park staff isn't all that sorry to see it leave. In fact, they helped accelerate its demise. No need for alarm—thankfully, it's not one of the park's signature, huge live oak trees; they're hanging on pretty well despite the drought. What's missing is the park's old, dilapidated entrance sign, which had been clinging to life after years of sun, rain and hurricane-force winds had battered it to beyond function.

"You know, that sign served its purpose, plus a whole lot more," said Park Superintendent Steve Killian. "It lived well beyond its expected years. If we hadn't replaced it, it was most likely going to meet with a much less pleasant end. It really was just about to collapse. Our rangers had anchored, painted and propped it up remarkably well considering its condition. We just never had the money to repair it." Until now, that is, thanks to money set aside for basic repair and improvement projects by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department - Austin Headquarters.

But, if you're going to replace the roadside image of one of the state park system's iconic places (Brazos Bend has garnered consistent acclaim over the years, recognized as one of the best state parks in the U.S. and a top 10 camping destination in the world), it needed to be a special kind of sign, a fitting tribute. An entrance sign communicating the park's valuable interpretive message of marshes and wetland wildlife. Well, it's taken more than two years, but finally, Brazos Bend State Park has a new entrance sign.

"We're all really excited to finally see it go in," said Richard Taylor, the park's Lead Maintenance Ranger. "We think it helps communicate to visitors what awaits them inside the park gate. It might even entice some people to stop and visit who happen to be driving by."

The sign, which is more than six feet tall, and 15 feet wide, so that it can be easily viewed from passers-by on FM 762, is constructed out of durable, stucco-like material and features a bold, 3-D rendition of the park's most notable resident, an alligator, as well as the parks' name in bright colors.

Thor Holder, owner of local business Signs by Tomorrow, was commissioned to design and build the innovative marquee from park staff's original conceptual ideas. Even though its production was labor intensive, Holder kept prices low (donating much of his time) to accommodate the park's modest budget.

In honor of the new sign, the park is hosting a ceremonial dedication and ribbon cutting scheduled for 11 a.m. on Saturday, January 14, 2012.

JOURNEYS WITH JACI

PADDLING AND PEDALING

By Jaci M. Elliott

It's an exercise in contrasts: what paddling is to kayaking, pedaling is to cycling. One gives your arms a real workout; the other, your legs. The former is a form of marine transportation; the latter, terrestrial. I've also had to throw in a type of mechanical transportation, a petrol-powered vehicle, to make the entire expedition possible, but I'd like to share with you my method for soloing one of the best outdoor adventures you'll find in our state: the Texas Parks and Wildlife Paddling Trails.

My plan is first to drive the Ford 150 truck to the take-out area, unload and lock up the bike, then drive to the put-in place, lock up the truck and launch the kayak. When I've reached the end of the paddling portion, I pull the kayak up the riverbank (flipping the kayak over and placing the larger items too difficult to carry by bike under the boat), unlock the bike, attach the bike lock and cable to the kayak, and pedal back to the original point of entry via the road; whereby I load the bike back into the truck and finally drive back to the take-out area and retrieve the kayak, rearranging and stowing both bike and boat for the return truck trek back home.

A bit preposterous, yet practical, it is somewhat similar to the proverbial logic puzzle: the one concerning a fox, a chicken and a sack of corn and all three of them having to cross a creek by boat, but with just two passengers (the inanimate sack of corn constitutes as a passenger here) allowed at one time on the boat.

I normally find the water way, the paddling trail, to be the most scenic and serene segment of the entire trip. And while the cycling section of my circuit is more noisy and populated (after all, the paved streets and bridges exist to support the motorized traffic in town) I enjoy seeing the local city squares and their inhabitants from the view of my unenclosed two-wheeled vehicle.

Recommended items to take on these expeditions include: two water bottles, some snacks (you'll notice consumables are at the top of my list), a small back pack, a bike helmet, a bike lock and cable, a towel, a double-bladed paddle, your cell phone, travel ID and keys in a hip pack and your preferred mode of location and direction (in a GPS world, I still much prefer the ole' map and compass combo.)

So far I've "given a go" to five inland routes out of the 22 waterways which compose the TPWD Paddling Trails compendium, and they are, from west to east: Lady Bird Lake in Austin, from just below the Tom Miller Dam to Barton Springs on the formerly Town Lake reservoir of the Colorado River; throughout the town of Seguin on the Guadalupe River; the northwest to the southeast of Luling (the take-out is at a quaint "village" called Zedler Mill) on the San Marcos River; the north side to the south side of Cuero on the San Marcos River; and the northwest side to the south side of Columbus at Beason's Park on the Colorado River.

To date, my best moments include several wonderful wildlife encounters while on the water (directly tailing a bald eagle and playing a game of peek-a-boo with a curious raccoon are just two off the top of my head) and a friendly commercial exchange in the tourist trade posts in town while on the bike (a unique birdfeeder for a birthday gift from a cute boutique).

My not-so-great moments thus far were when, on two separate trips, I had to haul my kayak and gear up an unexpectedly steep 25-foot embankment (yes, I had taken a look at it earlier but not from the river's viewpoint), and when I paddled past a partially submerged, odiferous and bloated bovine (the majority of the paddling trails run through ranch land, so one is bound to discover a drowned cow every now and then—though it did give me pause about swimming in the water downstream, as I so happened to observe with some teenage boys a half-mile away and at an otherwise idyllic swimming hole.) Then there was the time I had to drive to a hardware store several miles off my planned route to purchase a bolt cutter for my malfunctioning bike lock in order to retrieve my kayak and take it back home with me...well, that wasn't exactly the best way to close an otherwise pleasant adventure but it did teach me a thing or two about cheap combination locks (I use a sturdier key lock these days) and about keeping a better fortified tool box in the truck.

These solitary sojourns are a quiet kind of fun (and I will continue to take them), but I must say that I am looking forward to co-paddling with my husband in our new canoe here in the not-so-distant future. I suppose our new challenge will be fitting a *bigger* boat and *two* bikes into the same trusty truck.

MESSAGE FROM CARTER SMITH, TPWD EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As you may know, these are extraordinary times for our state parks. Record drought and heat, devastating wildfires, and a drop in visitation have led to a critical situation for state parks. We need to raise \$4.6 million to help keep state parks open, and we can't do it without you.

Here are three simple ways you can help:

Make a tax-deductible online donation.

Make a donation when it's time for you to renew your vehicle registration.

Most importantly, because visitor fees pay for about half of all park operating costs, visit a state park often with your family and friends.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| January 8 | Keep on Truckin' Trail Races, 7:15 AM
Bird hike, 8:00 AM, 40-Acre Lake restroom building |
| January 14 | Budget and Executive Meetings, 1:00 PM
Important Business Meeting, 2:30 PM, desserts, Dining Hall
"Bird Blizzard at Sunset", 5:00 PM at the Observation Tower
Brazos River Pickers, 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM |
| February 3 | Bird hike, 8:00 AM, 40-Acre Lake restroom building |
| February 4 | Brazos River Pickers, 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM |
| February 5 | Bird hike, 8:00 AM, 40-Acre Lake restroom building |
| February 10-12 | Doris Mager Raptor Programs, details TBA |
| February 11 | 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 Volunteer Orientation and lunch 9:30 - 3:00 |
| February 18 | New Volunteer Training, 9:00 - 5:00 |
| February 25 | New Volunteer Training, 9:00 - 5:00 |

Brazos Bend State Park

Texas Parks and Wildlife
21901 FM 762
Needville, TX 77461

NEXT MEETING

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 14, 2012
2:30 PM, DINING HALL**

FIRST CLASS MAIL



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	Belinda DiMarcello
Treasurer:	Bob Kowalewski
Past-President:	Carrie Sample
Comptroller:	Nancy Lynn Jones

NEWSLETTER TEAM

Editor	Anna Dell Williamson
Layout	Cynthia Morales
Production Assistant	Bruce Williamson
Distribution	Carol Ramsayer
Web Master	Anne Shelton

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**