

BRAZOS BEND BUNCH BUGLE

VOLUME 25, NUMBER 4

APRIL 2013

FROM THE PRESIDENT

COMMIT TO BEING COMMITTED



We are the Brazos Bend State Park Volunteer Organization! We are nearly 100 strong! We assist the rangers and park officials in helping to maintain the natural beauty of the park.

As volunteers, we are the “human face” of the park to many of our visitors. We are eager to share our various talents and enthusiasm as we proudly serve the public, the park, each other and the State of Texas. We have nearly 5,000 (five thousand) acres in which to explore, protect and share with nearby urban areas of nearly 4+ million people. We educate visitors in the park as well as outreach activities outside the park. All of this requires a firm commitment by us...the volunteers, to be the “human face”, to help the park staff maintain the park and to educate the visitors and to make them feel welcome.

This is a big responsibility! As volunteers we need to “commit to being committed”! We need to sign up for the various duties and to follow through with those commitments. If for some reason you can’t make your volunteer assignment, please notify someone to make sure that the assignment gets covered. This is very important for the successful operation of many aspects of the park.

It’s “who we are”! We are the Brazos Bend State Park Volunteer Organization!

Mary Lockwood

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MARCH MEETING NOTES

reported by Anna Dell Williamson

President Mary Lockwood called the meeting to order March 9, 2013. There were 13 volunteers, 2 VITs, and 3 staff members present. The minutes of the January and February meetings were approved as posted.

Reports:

Treasurer: Bob Kowalewski brought the Treasurer's report for February 2013.

The following requests for funding were presented and approved.

- Equipment for the sign shop: Light fixtures, bulbs, bins, wire guards, miter saw. This will finish up the new sign/wood shop. Funds will come from El Paso/Morrison account.
- Equipment for sign shop: Router and router bits, fonts, shop vacuum hose kit, tool mat. Funds will come from El Paso/Morrison account

Bob presented a summary of the Operating Budget for 2013, which was presented in detail last month. The Operating Budget was passed.

Gift Shop: Beth Debenport reported that we had the best February ever in the Gift Shop. Sales were 90% over Feb 2012. We are averaging about half of our sales with cash, half with credit cards, and very few checks.

Maintenance: Pete Hart reported on the Maintenance activities.

- We are starting the new storage building for the Gators on March 19.
- The crew works Tuesdays and Thursdays starting at 8:30 AM and will welcome more workers.
- Jim Calvert and Woody Scott caught 10 hogs this week.
- The Maintenance Crew worked 257 hours in February, with 1 to 7 volunteers each time.
- The multi-passenger Gator comes in very handy. The parking brake broke very early and is a design flaw. When you apply the brake, don't slam it down hard.

Wood sales: Chuck Duplant reported that wood sales were down in February, a fairly warm month. We received a 76% return, which is lower than it should be. Plenty of wood has been split and bundled by Maintenance

Blood drive: Chuck reported on the Blood Drive held March 2 at the Elm Lake Pavilion. There were 18 donors, with 2 deferrals. The drive resulted in a collection of 9 units of Whole blood, 3 units of Double Red Cell blood, and 4 units of Red Cell Plasma. (Double Red Cell and Red Cell Plasma count as 2 units donated.) This made a total of 23 units of donated blood. Our goal was 15, and the drive was a huge success, in spite of the cold weather and few visitors. Assistance from workers and donors was appreciated. Volunteers help with sign up, served refreshments and had as spotting scope at the Elm Lake Viewing Platform for visitors.

We are looking at repeating this drive 2 or 3 times annually. The next time, it will be in the Nature Center parking lot. We will only need one or two people for registration. We will not provide refreshments or activities. The Blood Center staff has their own routine and did not need our refreshments. The tentative date for the next drive is July 13. Thanks to Chuck for his efforts organizing this event. Chuck thanked all who helped with the blood drive – planning, registration, refreshments, spotting scope, and donating blood.

Cindy Peterson announced that VIT Veronica Vaneckova is expecting a baby girl on April 17. We are taking up a collection for a gift card for her. You can give money to Cindy, Beth Debenport, Anna Dell Williamson, Diane Carpenter and Judy Strauss by the end of March.

Newsletter: **Anna Dell Williamson** reported that the Newsletter will be posted on the web site this week.

Training: **Anna Dell Williamson** reported that the VITs are signing up for Phase 1 activities now and helping out with Spring Break.

Education Committee: **Sharon Hanzik** reported that Carrie Sample is planning the Eco-explorers program for this summer.

Outreach: **Mary Lockwood** and **Diane Welty** took a program to an Alzheimers nursing home, and it was very well received.

Offie Walker reported that Barbara Keller-Willy and he went to Austin last week. Barbara testified before the House Ways and Means Committee concerning a House Joint Resolution and 2 bills to improve funding for Texas parks and Texas historical sites. This would reestablish the funding from the sporting tax that has been designated to TPW but allocated for other areas. They received a favorable response and anticipate that there will be more funding for TPWD in the next 2 years. Barbara will follow up with emails, suggesting letters to Representatives or Senators. We will need to monitor what goes out for vote, and contact the Legislature about the issues.

Bruce Williamson thanked the organization and individuals for the get well wishes he received during his illness.

Bylaws and Standard Operating Procedures: **Anna Dell Williamson** presented proposed changes to the Bylaws and SOPs for consideration by the membership. She went over the proposals worked out by the committee of Mary Lockwood, Offie Walker and Anna Dell. The proposals will be sent out via email to the membership and posted on the web site. At the April meeting there will be discussion and a vote will be taken.

Mary Lockwood reported that during Spring Break, the Observatory will be open 5 PM to 10 PM on Tuesday and Thursday nights. There may be lots of visitors on Tuesday to view Comet Panstarrs. The meeting was adjourned.

STAFF REPORTS, MARCH 2013

JACOB DEMENT, ACTING SUPERINTENDENT



Jacob reported that February was the best February ever, with great attendance, double lanes out to the road Y many days.

- ◆ New fire rings have been made and placed in campsites, ready to use. There has been lots of positive feedback from visitors seeing changes, new tables, etc., in the picnic and camping areas.
- ◆ New signs have been built. We have a new park map on the wall behind the clerks showing all campsites (such as equine, camping loops, overflow, primitive) completely updated. The sign, 90 in. by 60 in., is the biggest sign ever made by Texas Correctional Industries.
- ◆ The Gift Shop has a new cooler for more soft drinks.
- ◆ We are putting the finishing touches on the new sign shop and pricing tools to go inside. BBSP is the only park allowed to have our own sign shop. Bastrop SP, the only one prior to ours, lost theirs in the fire, and it was down for months afterwards. We don't have to rely on them now, and we can make our own signage.
- ◆ Law enforcement report: There were no arrests in February; a few speeding tickets were issued. There are now signs posted at the entrance indicating that the exit lane at Headquarters is one-way only, and visitors cannot bypass Headquarters and go in the exit.

SHARON HANZIK, NATURALIST AND VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR



- There were 861 visitors in the Nature Center today.
 - We are ready for Spring Break, volunteers have filled the shifts and everything is set!
 - School groups and libraries are on the special events calendar for spring and summer. Please sign up to help where you can.
 - There were two Outdoor Family Campouts in February. Volunteer Dawn Tejero and her husband Oscar help see that everything runs smoothly.
 - We have lots of school groups in the spring. Some schedule hikes and visits, while others come on their own. In the 11-1 shift on weekdays, we need two people to staff the Nature Center for these unexpected groups.
- The Moody Gardens field trip for BBSPVO will be April 24. We can take 25 volunteers. Contact Sharon for information.

CHUCK HUBBARD, OPERATIONS TRAINEE

- ▶ February was an amazing month, with lots of good weather. In addition, the park looked amazing, and visitors commented on how good it looked.
- ▶ We will expand the trail system this summer. We have 37 miles of trail and will add 3.38 miles more from Live Oak Trail to loop into Creekfield Lake. This will give visitors the opportunity to enjoy more of the park and will also create a property boundary to use as a fire break. Beginning in May, the Americorps group will be here to work on the trail. It will be elevated and will drain well.
- ▶ Spring Break started today and we have been adding people to the campsites. There is lots of activity.



MAINTENANCE REPORT

The Maintenance Crew reported 256 hours for March in the following categories:

Wood Yard:

Constructed wood racks
Split and bundled wood on several occasions
Collected cut down trees

Mowing and Landscaping:

Worked on Creekfield Pocket Prairie, including planting grasses
Repotted and delivered Swamp Chestnut Oak seedlings

Trail Trimming and Trail Maintenance:

Trimmed Red Buckeye Trail

Construction Projects:

Built new vehicle shed in wood yard



CONGRATULATIONS



Ganene Steinhaus completed her training and is now a full volunteer. Be sure to welcome the newest member of our organization.

APRIL BIRTHDAYS

Leah Malone
Richard Taylor (Staff)

APRIL ANNIVERSARIES

Christine (Kovach) and Mark Britain
Virginia and Charlie Harrison
Jim and Jacqueline North



MAY BIRTHDAYS

Suzie Gann
Virginia Harrison
Ethan Hoover
Kathleen Hosek
JT Kalina (Staff)
Dennis Keprta (Emeritus)
Mikki Kilgore
Krista Ledman
Carrie Sample
Dawn Tejero

MAY ANNIVERSARIES

Jo Ann and Chuck Davis
Linda and David Heinicke

THANK YOU

to **Barbara Keller-Willy, Ron Morrison, Joe Southern, Paige Norwood, and Diane Welty** for articles and pictures for the newsletter.

to **Joe Southern** and **Nelda Gay** for volunteering to help Anna Dell Williamson with the newsletter. Joe will serve as an Assistant Editor, and Nelda will help with preparing articles for publication.

to **everyone who helped with Spring Break**, keeping the NC open, working the GS and presenting programs and hikes, providing trail interpretation and everything else that was done to make this a great Spring Break for BBSP and its visitors.

to **everyone who helped over the Easter weekend**. Friday, Saturday and Sunday were very busy days at the park, with high Nature Center attendance and Gift Shop sales, and lots of park visitors everywhere.

to **Jennifer** and **Curtis Parent** for the nice hot dog lunch for the volunteers on Easter Sunday.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO THE ORGANIZATION

The Volunteer Organization received the following notes from Veronika Vaneckova and husband Martin in March and April. Veronika is a VIT in the September 2012 class whose progress toward completing her requirements was interrupted by her pregnancy with "Jenny". Here are the two notes from her.

March 13, 2013:

We would like to thank you all for your kindness and unique family atmosphere. I appreciate your support for me and our baby girl Jenny. It is very heartwarming. We love to come to BBSP - being around nice people like you, who taught us a lot about our beloved natural beauties. Walking in the nature and having possibility to see and handle wildlife animals is something we always look forward to. Thank you for enabling me to finish my training later; you can bet I will be there as soon as I can. We look forward to see you later together with Jenny! With love, Veronika, Martin and Jenny

BBSPVO members donated and sent her a gift card for baby supplies. Here is her response:

April 6, 2013:

Thank you very much for the gift card we have just received from you. It was a great surprise and we really appreciate such help!

We hope you all guys doing well, making our visitors happy as always and have fun in the park. We are now probably only a short time from Day D - now starting the week number 39. Jenny is ...ready to go ...and we are curious when it comes. We will let you know and hope we can come soon as a family to see you guys. Please give our regards to everybody. We look forward to you!

OUTREACH PROGRAM QUALITY LIVING PERSONAL CARE FACILITY

by Diane Welty

On March 8, Mary Lockwood and I went to Quality Living Personal Care Facility, (located in Missouri City). Quality Living is dedicated to Elder Care. Many of the residents have Alzheimer or Dementia. Though some may think we should have stayed, we went to present a program on the Brazos Bend State Park.



We gathered some props from the Nature Center. Of course we took one of our star "show and tell" items, (aka baby 'gator). We took a coyote pelt, a skunk pelt, as well as an alligator skull and skin. We also took the corn snake. It turned out that it just went along for the ride. The manager at the facility vetoed a snake. We had 14 people come to view our presentation.

We spent an hour and a half showing our items and telling all we knew about them. Much to our surprise; we also were told many stories by the residents. It was interesting to see them get excited when telling us where they had seen an animal, or what they had done with them in their youth. The residents were very interesting, as they explained things in great detail. We were the high point of their week, and Mary and I had a very interesting afternoon.

NATURE CENTER REPORT

MARCH 2013

Below are the totals of the various activities and attendance recorded for the Nature Center, hikes, and programs for March 1-31, 2013. We had 9 days of consecutive weekends (Spring Break). Attendance topped all March's since 2007 (since I started keeping records), and more than doubled since 2007.

PROGRAMS	TOTALS MARCH
NATURE CENTER ATTENDANCE Mar. 2013 - 14,361 Mar. 2012 - 11,252 Mar. 2011 - 12,427 Mar. 2010 - 11,816 Mar. 2009 - 9,669 Mar. 2008 - 10,684 Mar. 2007 - 6,835	Saturdays (5) - 4,390 High, 1,321 (3/16) Average: 878
	Sundays (5) - 2,914 High, 855 (3/17) Average: 583
	Weekdays (21) - 7,057 High, 1,188 (3/15) Average: 336
CREEKFIELD HIKES (12)	170, Average: 14
SNAKE PROGRAM(8)	253, Average: 32
CHILDREN'S STORY TIME (9)	155, Average: 17
ALLIGATOR PROGRAMS(7)	282, Average: 40
BIRD HIKES (4)	100, Average: 25
OUTREACH(5)	1111, Average: 222
WILDLIFE VIEWING (7)	391, Average: 56
POND LIFE (2)	95, Average: 47
OTHER PROGRAMS (4): Owls (3), Photo Hike, Tracks, Sundial, Poison Ivy, Geocaching, Mammals	184
TOTAL VISITORS SERVED IN HIKES AND PROGRAMS	2756
VOLUNTEER HOURS	Interpretation = 977 Maintenance/Other = 256 TOTAL = 1233
PARK ATTENDANCE (Percentage reflects the percentage of total visitors in each category.)	Total 39,089 Day use (80%) 31,215 Overnight (20%) 7,874 NC (37%) 14,361

SPRING BREAK REPORT

from Sharon Hanzik

Between Saturday, March 9 and Sunday, March 17 with the Nature Center open 8 hours each day, we served 7,794 visitors! Thursday 3/14 - Saturday 3/16 were 1000+ visitors each day with the highest total on Saturday 3/16 of 1321.

If you helped present a program or demo, they were also very successful - every one of them "made".

I told you, YOU ROCK!

Ahh, sure is quiet today :)

UPDATE ON STEVE KILLIAN

Steve is on temporary assignment at Enchanted Rock SP, and we just found out that he will probably be there through the end of July. Hurry back, Steve.

CONTINUING EDUCATION ALLIGATORS

by Sharon Hanzik

You may be well-educated on the subject of alligators but you just may learn something new. Please make sure you read and learn the information under the heading "We've Got Gators" located in the top menu of your website, www.brazosbend.org.

Even if you do not handle animals, your duty is to educate and inform. Here are a couple of reminders to help make our interpretation of alligators more accurate and consistent.

- ★ Remember that when it comes to numbers - "approximately" (or something similar) should precede any information.
- ★ The whole point of keeping live animals in the Nature Center is not just the opportunity for visitors to touch them, but also for them to learn the facts about them.
- ★ Always remember to verify before you repeat.

I have emailed a summary of the Live Animal Policy for you to review, and you will find a summary following this article. These safety guidelines are not optional. Unsafe, unethical handling of display animals may result in the removal of that privilege for any volunteer.

Thank you for your continued cooperation and support.



DISPLAY AND USE OF LIVE ANIMALS SUMMARY

This is a summary of the policy regarding the display and use of live animals at BBSP. A copy may be found on the web site and in the training manual. It applies to live animals being displayed or used for educational and interpretive programs, primarily reptiles, amphibians, insects, spiders, birds and small mammals.

The purpose of this policy is to insure the all live animals are properly cared for and treated with respect and dignity, and to insure the safety of the visitor, the interpreter and the animal.

Handling of live animals by the interpreter:

No dangerous animals (i.e. venomous snakes) should be handled.

The animals should always be treated humanely while being handled.

The animals should not be teased or prodded to perform or react.

Animals that are showing signs of stress or restlessness should not be handled.

The visitor should never be allowed to hold the animals.

The animals should never be placed in "cute" or "funny" positions. Don't put the animals on your head, around your neck, etc....

The interpreter should not "up stage" the animal. This is not a time for egos or to act tough. Hold the animal securely without causing undue stress.

Never startle, surprise or scare visitors with the animal. This is counterproductive to our mission. If practicable, inform visitors why this animal is in captivity (injury, rescue, display, education, rehabilitation) and whether or not it will eventually end up being released back into the wild. Explain to visitors that wild animals don't make good pets and that some are illegal to keep.

Touching of the live animals by the visitor:

Use the word "touch" instead of the word "pet".

Only animals that have a calm disposition should be touched.

Urge visitors to use one or two fingers only. No thumbs!

Touch the animal gently. Watch out for people "poking" or "slapping" at the animal.

Do not allow visitors to touch the animal on the head or around the mouth.

Visitors should never be pressured by the interpreter or others to touch an animal if they are reluctant to do so.

Do not approach the visitor when holding an animal, let the visitor approach you to avoid startling the visitor.

Encourage visitors to wash their hands or use hand sanitizer after they have touched an animal.

Always keep an eye on the animal; never assume visitors are touching it gently when you are not watching.

Position the head away from visitors when holding the animal to be touched.

Do not allow more than one person at a time to touch the animal.

Using live animals or displaying them is a privilege that comes with a responsibility, a responsibility to the animal, to the visitor and to the educator. All should be treated with the respect and admiration that they deserve. Each new employee or volunteer that will be involved with interpretation or education should be made aware of this policy and should adhere to it.



OUR VIT EXPERIENCE

by Joe Southern

When I lost my job in March 2012, one of the first things I did was take a day by myself and go fishing at Brazos Bend State Park. I caught my first-ever catfish, but released it because it was too small. That day was therapeutic because it was so beautiful and peaceful outside. I was able to forget my troubles and lose myself in the beauty of God's creation.

Little did I know then that it would be six months before I would be employed again. In the meantime, a friend told me about the Brazos Bend State Park Volunteer Organization's need for someone to design a logo. That friend put me in touch with her mother, Nelda Gay, who worked with me as I went through dozens of versions of the logo design. I didn't have much else to do that summer, so working on the logo gave me a sense of purpose and something constructive to do.

Along the way, Nelda encouraged me to join the volunteers. The more I thought about it, the more excited I became. Growing up along the foothills of Colorado, I always wanted to be a forest ranger. That was my career path until my sophomore year in high school when I got sidetracked by journalism, but that's a different story.

My youngest child, Colton, caught my enthusiasm for the park, especially when he met Austin and learned children could become full-fledged volunteers. We signed up for the September training and couldn't wait to start. The training was incredible. Everyone was so friendly and the instructors were very patient and informative.

Just as training started, the kids went back to school and I found a job. Between work, school, Scouts and church (Colton signed up for the children's Christmas musical), we were on the go. It took us a while to advance from Phase 1 to Phase 2 of the training, but we did it. Our schedules lightened up considerably after the holidays and we rapidly worked through the last of the training and earned our caps and patches in January. About that same time, my new job ended for me, once again freeing me to do more volunteer work.

Since becoming a BBSPVO member, I have developed an even deeper appreciation for nature and the abundant wildlife at the park. I now regularly see (and hold) things that I only saw pictures of as a boy. I've learned much about reptiles and birds. I always thought alligators were ferocious eating machines that were always on the prowl. Boy, was I surprised to learn just how lazy they really are. I guess that's your prerogative when you're on top of the food chain!

Colton has also learned a lot and grown through this experience. As much as he loves movies and video games, he'd much rather be outdoors at the park or teaching people about animals in the Nature Center.

Being a part of this excellent organization has rekindled my desire to work as a park ranger. I hope someday to parlay my volunteer skills into a new career. In the meantime, we will enjoy every moment we can working with this fine crew at Brazos Bend.

REPORT ON STATE FUNDING OF STATE PARKS

by Barbara Keller-Willy

Offie Walker and I both had the opportunity to testify before the Ways & Means Committee on March 4th. Thank you for supporting us with your emails and letters. The BBSPVO is having a positive impact on the Texas State Parks issue! Below is an excerpt from Representative Lyle Larson's (Author/Co-author of the bills) newsletter expressing his opinion of the Ways & Means Committee's positive reaction to the testimony and Bills.

"HB 105, HB 162 and HJR 40: Protecting Our Parks by Restoring Integrity in Budgeting
For several years, we've worked to restore truth in budgeting, especially in the way we collect and appropriate tax revenue for our state park system. If we're going to restore integrity in the budgeting process, there is no better place to start than providing parks the funding that has been promised. Our state parks have a profound impact on every person who lives in or visits our great state, and they are the most visible example of how the state takes care of its most iconic Texas institutions. Last week in the Ways and Means Committee hearing, we presented these bills, that include 3 different strategies to end the practice of diverting sporting goods sales tax revenue from its intended purpose: our state parks. The committee reacted very positively to our legislation, and we are fortunate to have Ways and Means Committee Chairman Harvey Hilderbran as a joint author on these bills."

Offie and I heard the following comments after our and others' testimony, "We all agree this dedicated stream needs to return as voters intended." and "It sounds like we are suggesting 3 biennium of 94%, then a Sunset Review". This sounds very promising, but we are only at the beginning of the process. Next, the hearing will generate a report to the full legislature for vote.

Thanks again for all your support!

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE TURNS 50 THIS YEAR

In the late summer of 1963, the most popular show on television was “The Beverly Hillbillies,” a gallon of gas cost 29 cents, the University of Texas Longhorns were headed toward their first national football championship, “My Boyfriend’s Back” was the top hit on AM radio and Texas had a new state agency called the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Earlier that year, Texas lawmakers had begun consideration of House Bill 21, introduced by State Representative James M. Cotton. The measure, part of Gov. John B. Connally’s campaign to modernize state government, would merge the Game and Fish Commission with the State Parks Board to create a new agency dedicated to conservation, parks and outdoor recreation. The final bill passed in the Senate in April, and Connally signed it into law with an effective date of August 23.

This year, TPWD will mark its 50th anniversary using technology not even imagined in 1963. The department has set up a 50th anniversary web page at www.lifesbetteroutside.org where people can share stories and photos about their memorable moments in the Texas outdoors, and thereby inspire others to enjoy nature. While online, the agency hopes people will sign up to become a Texas Parks and Wildlife ambassador and pledge to do things like visit state parks, take a kid hunting or fishing, and watch and share a video showcasing what’s made life better outside in Texas.

“With all the bounty and beauty of our natural places, our parks, our wildlife, and with everything that’s at stake in our state today, we are excited about our 50th birthday,” said TPWD Executive Director Carter Smith, “but we don’t want it to be all about us, and we want to look to the future as we celebrate our past.”

While acknowledging the many contributions of former and current TPWD employees, Smith says the agency wants the half-century celebration to focus on the people who support the department, and to inspire a new generation of supporters.

“We’re a successful organization in large part because of those who support us,” Smith said, “and we can’t fulfill our mission without help. If you love wildlife and parks, step up to be a TPWD ambassador and join us in shaping the Texas outdoors we want to see in the next 50 years.”

POLYPHEMUS SILKMOTH

Antheraea polyphemus

by Barbara Keller-Willy



On March 8th, a maintenance work crew spotted a female Polyphemus Silkmoth preparing to lay eggs, along Red Buckeye Trail. Females can be identified by the swollen abdomen which is full of eggs and the narrow antennae. Males have wider, bushier antennae. She will lay up to 3 broods of eggs per year in the mild Texas weather.

ECO-EXPLORERS 2013

The popular summer Eco-Explorers program will hold classes on the following dates. The Coordinator is Carrie Sample, and volunteers interested in helping with this program should contact Carrie. All classes consist of indoor/outdoor activities including games, literature, crafts and snacks.

TADPOLE CLASSES (Suitable for ages 2 ½ - 6 years)

JUNE 11 – Insect Inspection – (Presented by Fort Bend Master Gardeners)

JUNE 18 – Shake, Wiggle and Roll – animal movement

JUNE 25 – Eight is Great! – spiders

JULY 9 – Pouched Parent – opossums

JULY 16 – Habitat Match

JULY 23 – Peepers & Croakers – frogs and toads

JULY 30 – Chipping & Chirping – birds

REGULAR CLASSES (Suitable for ages 6 – 11)

JUNE 13 – Must Be a Mammal

JUNE 20 – From Feathers to Flight - birds

JUNE 27 – Micro-Monsters – pond life

JULY 11 – Living Off the Land – daily lives of Native Americans

JULY 18 – Insect Inspection – (Presented by Fort Bend Master Gardeners)

JULY 25 – On the Wild Side – Project Wild games and activities

AUG 1 – Sky Hunters – birds of prey (Presented by Houston Audubon Society)

FEE - \$2.00 per class, \$12.00 for all 7. Adults will be charged the regular park entrance fee of \$7.00

REGISTRATION – Please send fee, email address, class choices and names of participants to:

Brazos Bend State Park, ATTN: Eco-Explorers, 21901 FM 762, Needville, TX 77461

SAFETY NEWS

The TPWD Safety Manual is required reading and compliance for all BBSPVO members. The manual is on the website in the Members section. Please read the manual as soon as possible and comply with all the mandates. In order to help you become acquainted with the Manual, the newsletter will contain a summary of various portions of the manual over the next few issues. This summary does not take place of reading the entire manual, but it will provide you with an overview and where to find items of special interest to you. You are personally responsible for finding out exactly what is in the manual regarding safety for staff, volunteers and others.

OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION, pages 1-12

There is an Executive Directive from Carter Smith authorizing the Safety and Risk Management Program to oversee and govern this program. The Safety Program Manual is the foundation to guide safe conduct and compliance. The TPWD Safety Program Manual applies to all TPWD personnel, volunteers, contractors and interns. The mission of the TPW Safety and Risk Management Program is to prevent death, injury and illness of employees, volunteers, contractors and the visiting public and damage to or loss of state property through Commitment, Accountability and Training. The goal is to protect the agency's most precious resources, its employees and volunteers, and to provide a safe environment for the visiting public.

The various sections under this Introduction include the following:

1.1 Authority and Responsibility

Defines the responsibilities of the Agency Safety Officer, the Agency Risk Manager and the Safety and Risk Management Committee; identifies Current Committee Members; defines the responsibilities of all Directors, Managers Supervisors. Safety Officers, and Employees.

- 1.2 Division Safety Committees
Lists the responsibilities of the committees, and authorizes Regional Safety Committees.
- 1.3 Adherence to Safety Practices and Disciplinary Action
- 1.4 Safety Bulletin Boards
- 1.5 Safety Time Accounting
- 1.6 Available Resources

Additional sections, to be reviewed in later issues, include the following topics:

INJURY AND ILLNESS PREVENTION PROGRAM

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY PROGRAM, including:

motor vehicle safety

visitor transport guidelines

fire protection

machine and equipment safety

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH PROGRAM

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

ALLIGATOR EATING

by Rick Dashnau

Sunday, March 17, 2013. I started walking around Elm Lake at about 8:30am. The temperature had gone up, and I expected to hear bellowing from some of the large alligators that I knew were there. Alligator mating season starts in March. I was disappointed. Not only was there no bellowing, but I only saw 3 alligators as I moved west on the south side of the lake.

I was near pier 6, and I was looking at some visitors on it, when movement in the lake made me turn towards the island. I just caught a glimpse of an alligator giving something in its mouth one last shake before lowering its head. I thought the carcass was dark, so I just assumed it was a Nutria. When the visitors got closer, I pointed out the alligator and described its condition, and we waited for the alligator to try chewing again. I knew that we could possibly wait for 15 to 30 minutes. And we did wait. And nothing happened, so the visitors moved on. I waited, because I wanted to see what the alligator had in its mouth.

The alligator moved to the far side of the island (which was mostly submerged), but I thought it would be moving towards the part of the island that was above water so it could eat. Eventually it did move towards the high ground. I waited for an hour before the alligator lifted its head high (at about 11am), only to rest again. I took pictures anyway; even though the alligator was on one of the islands. I still couldn't tell what the carcass was. The island was about 50 yards or more away, and even with binoculars, I couldn't tell what the alligator had. I estimate the length of the alligators to be 8 - 9 feet.

At 11:19. the alligator did shake the carcass, but only once, and I shot some photos and hoped for the best. I waited for another hour, and noticed another alligator moving towards the first one. It crept closer and closer, moving towards the carcass that was hidden behind the alligator's head. The alligator suddenly twisted the carcass away from the interloper, then moved into the water. A short chase began and ended, and the alligator moved over the island with the carcass. I left.

I have observed that alligators don't like to share, and don't cooperate. But, when one has a carcass and is working on it, the movement and the smell can draw the attention of other alligators in the area. The "thief" alligator usually approaches cautiously, and doesn't attack the alligator that has the food. Instead, it goes for the food. The reluctant "host" alligator usually tries evasion or bluffing (thrashing, hissing) instead of a direct counterattack; at least from what I've seen.

On Tuesday I heard about some visitors that saw an alligator eating another alligator on Monday from a couple of different sources. I finally got a chance to review my photos and video clips. It turns out that what I'd been calling a Nutria was actually an alligator carcass. It's possible this was the same alligator that was witnessed being eaten on Monday.

And that's when a Nutria carcass isn't a Nutria, but an Alligator.

RED WOLVES

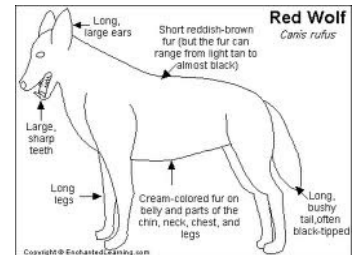
by Paige Norwood



A recent past *Texas Parks and Wildlife Magazine* article had me pondering, “What if red wolves still roamed the prairie of Brazos Bend?” The other connection to this story is that a professor from my alma mater, Austin College, was the individual who sounded the alarm on the species’ eminent demise back in the early 60’s and was the catalyst for their conservation efforts. One of our own volunteers, **Barbara Keller-Willy**, recently conducted a prairie hike to show visitors why species such as the red wolf have disappeared from the prairie. At the time of this writing, she is scheduling more of these hikes – **Ghosts of Prairies Past**.

What do they look like?

The red wolf is a lanky member of the canine family, smaller than the grey wolf and larger than the coyote. Contrary to their name, the coat color ranges from tan to black with reddish highlights. They have longer legs, smaller feet, more slender bodies, shorter fur, longer and narrower muzzles, and longer ears. They are similar to Mexican wolves, but the face shape and larger ear size separates the two. Adult males can reach 60 to 80 lbs. Adult females can reach 40 to 60 lbs., 26 inches at the shoulder and 4 feet from nose to tip.



Did you know? The absence of the red wolf’s howl alerted biologists and researchers that population numbers had drastically declined in established areas and that other species such as the coyote had taken over.

Range?

Historically – Eastern Texas to Florida, as far north as New England. As of the 1980s, the red wolf was declared extinct due to dwindling number but later reintroduced through captive breeding programs.

Today – Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge, Eastern North Carolina and Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (post re-introduction) as well as zoo facilities such as the Texas Zoo in Victoria, TX

Not so fun fact... Red wolves were eradicated by government policy via poison, trapping and shooting because they were thought to consume livestock. In the early 60’s, wolves roamed the marshlands near Houston, Galveston and Beaumont. By 1970, red wolf howls were only found in Liberty, Chambers and Jefferson counties.

Did you know? Throughout the reintroduction, national areas such as Horn Island and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park were used as captive rearing or reintroduction sites for the red wolf.

Where do they live?

The red wolf lives in brushy areas, forests, and marshlands, as well as coastal areas. Dens are made in hollow trees, stream banks and sand knolls.

What do they eat?

Their diet consists primarily of small animals (rabbits, rodents, etc.) as well as berries, insects, and occasionally deer. They live and hunt alone or in a small family pack.

When could I see them?

The red wolf is a nocturnal/crepuscular animal (active at dawn and dusk).

About how many young do they have?

Red wolves form pair bonds and mate for life. A litter consists of 3 to 6 pups, with a January to March breeding season. Both male and female raise the pups with help from members of the pack. Young typically leave at 15 to 20 months of age.



Species Status?

Critically Endangered. There are approximately 130 red wolves in the wild and 175 in captivity. A couple of factors led to the extinction of the red wolf – government mandated eradication and loss of habitat due to land clearing for agriculture. They were hunted extensively. This was also furthered by the secondary loss of animals due to isolated cross-breeding with coyotes. Young produced from the coyote-red wolf cross led to diluted red wolf traits in the animals and susceptibility to skin mange, heartworm, and other parasitic disorders common in the canid family. In the 1970s, of the 400 animals captured for a U.S. sponsored recovery program, a significant portion of them were coyotes and/or hybrids. There were just 43 wolves not thought to be tainted with coyote genes and of those, 17 were identified as pure red wolves after subsequent cullings.



Did you know? *The red wolf was one of the first species listed in the 1973 Endangered Species Act? The U.S. government declared the species extinct in hopes it could be reintroduced into the wild at a future date.*

Since its “extinct” declaration in 1980, several sites around the country have been utilized for red wolf captive breeding programs and re-introduction sites. The Point Defiance Zoo in Tacoma, WA, and Horn Island were start points for the breeding program. The program has since expanded nationwide with zoos such as Fossil Rim Wildlife Center in Glen Rose, TX and the Texas Zoo in Victoria, TX currently participating. Currently, Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge has been home to red wolves kept in captivity since 1987. Though the beginning was uncertain, the 17 remaining wolves have flourished into a surviving population. Managers have noted that wild-born wolves are raising wild-born pups.

What threats do they currently face?

Increasing encroachment – still – by the coyote and subsequent hybridization. Wildlife managers are currently sterilizing coyotes and putting them back to keep other coyotes out. Gunshot mortality – 7 or 8 animals every year – accidental deaths by hunters mistakenly identifying them as coyotes. As of February 2013, there are 4 confirmed red wolf fatalities. There are currently no plans for a reintroduction of the red wolf back to Texas – BUT red wolf genes can still be seen in some coyotes in prairies and marshland in the Southeast Texas area.

Credits

Photos

Red Wolf diagram/color sheet courtesy of www.enchantedlearning.com
Red Wolf image courtesy of the Tallahassee Museum at <http://tallahassee-museum.org/index.php?page=red-wolf>
Red Wolf image courtesy of the Houstonian blog c/o www.wildlifesciencecenter.org
Red Wolf image courtesy of the Federal Wildlife Service at www.fws.gov

Resources

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Social Media

Facebook – Wolf Conservation Center

DO YOU READ YOUR NEWSLETTER?

from Anna Dell Williamson, Editor

I'm looking for some feedback and ideas to improve the newsletter, and I would appreciate it if you would send the following information to me at <newsletter@brazosbend.org>

1. Do you read the Brazos Bend Bunch Bugle?
 - Always
 - Usually
 - Sometimes
 - Never
2. Do you read the entire newsletter or just selected articles?
3. How do you prefer to receive your newsletter?
 - An email notification that it's on line
 - By email
 - Paper copy
4. What types of articles do you prefer?
 - Volunteer Organization: business and activities
 - Park events
 - Continuing Education (nature-related articles with info you can use for interpretation)
 - TPWD events and information
 - Articles from other like-minded organizations
5. What suggestions do you have for improving the newsletter?
6. Are you interested in being on the Newsletter Team in some capacity?
 - Assistant Editor - you would do an entire issue from beginning to layout 2 or 3 times a year
 - Editing assistant - you would edit articles and send them to the Editor for publication
 - Layout Assistant - help Editor with layout
 - Reporter - write occasional or regular articles for the newsletter every month or two, about animals, trees, conservation, history of the area, etc.
 - Other

I will send the membership a copy of this questionnaire in an email. If you click "Reply", and have your computer set to include the original in the reply, you will be able to mark your answers on the original form, or you can just put numbers and type your answers in. Any comments are welcome.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- | | |
|----------|---|
| April 26 | Guided Bird Watching Hikes, 8:00 AM, meet at 40-Acre Lake restrooms |
| May 3 | Guided Bird Watching Hikes, 8:00 AM, meet at 40-Acre Lake restrooms, followed by optional "Migration Madness" trip to Quintana Nature Sanctuary, finish after lunch |
| May 4 | Sweeny Pride Day Outreach, 10 AM - 5 PM - <i>See Special Events Calendar</i> |
| | Bird photography Photo-walk, 5:00 PM, meet at Nature Center |
| May 11 | Budget and Executive Meetings, 3:00 PM |
| | Regular Business Meeting, 5:30 PM (Supper, 5:00 PM) |
| May 24 | Smith Elementary Outreach - Richmond, Texas 8:00 AM – 2:00 PM - <i>See Special Events Calendar</i> |
| June 1 | Amphibian and reptile photography Photo-walk, 5:00 PM, meet at NC |
| June 8 | Budget and Executive Meetings, 3:00 PM |
| | Regular Business Meeting, 5:30 PM (Supper, 5:00 PM) |
| June 12 | University Library Outreach - Sugar Land - 2:00 PM – 3:00 PM <i>See Special Events Calendar</i> |
| June 18 | Fulshear Library Outreach - 3:00 PM – 4:00 PM - <i>See Special Events Calendar</i> |
| June 27 | Freeport Library Outreach - 5:00 PM– 6:00 PM - <i>See Special Events Calendar</i> |

Brazos Bend State Park

Texas Parks and Wildlife
21901 FM 762
Needville, TX 77461



NEXT MEETING
SATURDAY, MAY 11, 2013
5:30 PM, NATURE CENTER

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:	Mary Lockwood
Vice-President:	Glen Kilgore
Secretary:	Belinda DiMarcello
Treasurer:	Bob Kowalewski
Past-President:	Offie Walker
Comptroller:	Nancy Lynn Jones

NEWSLETTER TEAM

Editor	Anna Dell Williamson
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**