



VOLUME 19, NUMBER 12

DECEMBER 2007

NOVEMBER MEETING NOTES

submitted by Nicole Olson

President James Blankenship called the meeting to order on November 10. There were fourteen volunteers and three staff members present. The September 2007 meeting minutes were approved as posted.

Treasurer's Report: **Treasurer Diane Carpenter** brought the Treasurer's report for October 2007. Copies of the complete Financial Report are available in the lounge.

The following budget requests were presented and approved:

Steve Killian requested an IPod Nano 4GB with accessories for slide shows at headquarters

Steve Killian requested additional software (new version of Microsoft Office) for his laptop computer.

Training: **Vice-President Anna Dell Williamson** announced that the next volunteer training dates are February 9, 16, and 23. The next junior training date is April 12, 2008. Phase II training requires a VIT to attend a meeting. We have VIT Ian Randolph attending tonight.

Gift Shop Report: **Beth Debenport** reported on today's sales. The months of October, November, and December are shaky due to the weather but good months to shop. Inventory takes place in December.

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Maintenance Report: **Ken Debenport** reported that three cords of wood were split. Some of the trees at Hale Lake and Elm Lake were cut. Thanks to Jerry Zona for splitting wood himself over a few Sundays.

Outreach: **Chuck Duplant** reported that Texian Market Days had a lot of visitors. There were 1,600 people on Saturday, October 27 and 1,200 people on Friday, October 26. We are still looking for an Outreach Coordinator.

Old Business: This month will start work on the **Prairie Platform**. Help will be needed. The grant was denied to us but we had the money.

New Business: The **newsletter** will be available to the public on the website. It will no longer be in the Members' Only section.

The **volunteer roster** will be posted online. It will be password protected. An email will be sent out letting people know about the roster. It will be kept up on a regular basis, and it will not be printed. The roster will be posted in January 2008. We will take off information that people don't want to be seen. It will be found in the member's area only. The roster will be published for people who don't have email.

The **Budget Committee** has an open position: maintenance coordinator. The meeting was adjourned.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

A few months past, I was watching Chuck photograph his usual prey, insects! Watching Chuck go about his all consuming pursuit was quite interesting, although I don't necessarily share his passion for bugs! As I doggedly followed him around the flowers outside of the Nature Center, suddenly we were at the windmill in pursuit of a red dragonfly. His excitement was exuberant! We went inside to tell David of his find, and the next thing I knew, we were back outside with a net trying to capture this creature. I have a less than enthusiastic passion for bugs!



After several swipes with the net and several near captures, David succeeded, and we were back inside consulting various books about dragonfly. David and Chuck were certain that they had discovered a new find for the records. A new, never before seen **bug** at Brazos Bend, woo hoo! Remember my less than enthusiastic passion for bugs? After several more photographs, Chuck and David submitted them to some bug experts, via email, and excitedly chatted about the possibility that they were indeed correct. Along the way, Chuck and David shared some very interesting facts about dragonflies, and I did find them truly fascinating.

As I watched the two of them in their mutual excitement, I had a moment to think about the pleasure that this pursuit, research, and identification gave them. Later that evening as I reflected on the day's events, I realized that almost everything that I have been involved with at Brazos Bend has, in one way or another, given me some manner of pleasure and inspiration.

As we enter into the holiday season, it is my wish for you, that each and everyone of you find something in your life that parallels the excitement and pleasure that I witnessed in Chuck and David.

As a side note: If you are at all interested in the identification of this dragonfly, the expert did reply with the correct identification. If you want to know the exact details about this dragonfly, see Chuck or David. Remember my less than enthusiastic passion for bugs?

James Blankenship

STAFF REPORTS

STEVE KILLIAN

Superintendent Steve Killian reported personnel changes and additions. J. T. Kalina was promoted to the new Park Ranger III Resource Management/Maintenance position. Kyle Petkus was promoted to Park Ranger II. A new Park Ranger II is starting Monday, Steven Riddle; he comes from Sea Center. By December 1, the new Resource Management Peace Officer will be onsite; he comes from Stephen F. Austin State Park. The new personnel will help accomplish many things.



We are asking TXDOT to put up a **sign with icons** on Hwy 59 showing BBSP. Approximately a billion people per year potentially pass the sign. We are charged with increasing revenue for the park. Steve and Dennis Jones will present some ideas for more revenue.

New equipment: Two 4-wheeled drive Gators for trails project. It's to help with resurfacing 40-Acre and Elm Lake trails. This is a sad month because Bryan Leach was to take over the project. We need to come up with a plan for trails on the maintenance side. There's some money available to buy materials.

Question from Diane Carpenter: The recent Proposition passed, so what kind of expenditures will we have now? Steve answered that there will be upgrades to electricity and plumbing in restrooms. We plan to redo the insides of the restrooms. We'll improve on internet access with wireless routers. We will also try to get more people into the park, maybe with the proposed Grand Parkway passing near the park.

Let's put our heads together for a memorial for **Bryan Leach**.

DENNIS JONES



Assistant Superintendent Dennis Jones came out of respect for **Bryan Leach**. He was a good man and would want us to move on. Dennis expressed his deepest sympathies.

We are still killing **tallow trees** and will start controlling vegetation in the early spring on the lakes. Celebrate if we see **ducks**...they haven't been too numerous.

The Texas Master Naturalists in general will offer **courses in ornithology**. There will be four 3-hour sessions held at the George Observatory in January/February/March. It will help create more bird watchers. The prairie program held today will hopefully be an annual event, to be called Prairie Heritage Day.

I hope you enjoy my articles in the newsletter. The **night hikes** are starting again, and volunteers are welcome. The hikes start at 6:30 – 9:00 pm from Headquarters every Friday.



Snowy Egret
Jerry Zona
Nov. 2007

White Ibis with prey
Jerry Zona
Nov. 2007



DAVID HEINICKE

Park Naturalist David Heinicke gave the schedule for November and December:

The Nature Center will be open on Thanksgiving Day and the day after.

A Simple Christmas, December 1

Deer Hunt, December 10-14th – closed on Sunday at 10:00 pm and re-open on December 14th at noon. We hope to remove 60-80 deer.

Annual bird Count, December 15 – meet at 6:30 AM at the Nature Center



David is splitting time with Varner Hogg Park and thanks the volunteer organization for all the help. His vacation starts next Wednesday-Sunday, November 14-18.

Susie Gunn and Carrie Sample helped with the Girl Scouts – a success! It was good exposure, but we don't want to do it more than twice a year.

The kestrel died; we had her for eight years. We may get another bird next year.

Thanks to the Carpenters, Blankenships, and Williamsons for covering today for people who needed to go to the funeral for Bryan Leach. We need to think about a memorial to Bryan Leach.

TRIBUTES TO BRYAN LEACH

Bryan was born in Herrin, IL on the 15th of June, 1946. He graduated from SIU in Carbondale, IL in 1966. He then went to work for Shell Chemical in Wood River, IL in 1967. In 1975, Shell transferred Bryan to Houston. In 1998, he retired from Shell after 32 years of service. Bryan leaves behind his wife of 41 years, Jean Leach; his parents, Niles and Virginia Leach of Energy, IL; Jean's brother, Jim Stewart and his wife, Joan; Jean's sister, Judy Brown and husband, Don; and numerous nieces and nephews.

Bryan also leaves behind a very large group of friends here at Brazos Bend State Park, where he volunteered for 5 years, serving as Maintenance Coordinator most of that time. Bryan will be deeply missed at all of us. We all have our special memories of Bryan, and here are some tributes written by volunteers and staff.



From David Heinicke

All of you that know Bryan knew that he was a great friend, a kind generous individual and a tremendous asset to whatever he was involved in. He will be missed by all who had the pleasure of knowing him.

From Jerry Zona:

This week at the Park, we lost a great friend, Bryan Leach. Bryan, we will miss you. We will miss your physical presence, we won't forget you and as you have always said before, " We'll see you at the Park."

Bryan (on the far right) at a Friday morning hike *Jerry Zona*



From Joan and Warren Jackson:

Bryan was a good friend to all that he met. He treated both of us with a generous helping hand. He was the best leader that the work crew in the volunteers has ever had. His ability to organize along with his natural tendencies to know how to do the work that was required went a long way to insure the success of all of the projects that were undertaken by the group.

Our sympathy is extended to his family for I know that he will be sorely missed by all of them. Of course it does not need to be noted that Brazos Bend volunteers has a hole in our group that will not soon be filled.

From Dennis Jones:

What is the measure of a man? If you want an answer to that question look to Bryan Leach and you will have your standard. Honestly, I didn't know Bryan as well as I would have liked, but I will tell you what I did know about him.

First of all and most importantly, he was a GOOD man. He was honest, and upstanding. In a time when some volunteers avoided contact with me, Bryan always had a smile, a hello and a question about how the progress was going on my old truck I call Desdemona. We would talk about mechanical things and then part ways. He went to line out the Woodchucks for their days work at the park and I would go about my business of taking care of the park as well. That's certainly something that Bryan did well; taking care of the park.

Through his leadership, the Woodchucks (as I affectionately call the weekday work crew) surfaced trails, split wood, removed dead trees installed covers on fishing piers and maintained equipment to name just a few things that were accomplished. Do you see what they all have in common? I do. They were all about service, cheerfully given, with long lasting benefits for our park visitors.

I always admired his ability to organize and lead. He seemed to do it effortlessly and with a confidence seldom found in folks like me. I never saw him angry or cross with anyone and if he was I am sure it was warranted. I might also add that if he never got angry or cross with me it is likely that he seldom got angry or cross with anyone.

The last time I saw Bryan was at the maintenance yard a few days before his surgery. In the middle of the yard we shook hands, and I wished him well. I told him that I would see him when he got back to us and until then he would be in our prayers. God had a different plan for him. I suspect he is building trails in heaven now and continuing to provide service to his fellow man, cheerfully given, with a smile and no other expectation than the satisfaction from a job well done.

I will aspire to be such a man through his example and strive to meet his measure. God Bless you all, and God Bless Bryan Leach.



Bryan on ladder,
working on pier.
Jean Leach

Bryan with
walking stick of
Brazos Bend
River ash.
Jean Leach



OUR SINCERE SYMPATHY

to the following volunteers
who have lost family members

to Emeritus Member **Rita Cooper** on the death of her son
after a long battle with lung cancer

to **Milton Legendre** on the passing of his mother

to **Tom Kanak** on the loss of his father

to **Bruce Williamson** on the loss of his cousin

WEB SITE NEWS

The Executive Committee has agreed to post the **BBSPVO membership roster** on our website, members only section. This will allow us to have more current information available to our members. When we post this information, we will also be changing the user name and password that is used for volunteer documents.

If you do not want your address, telephone and email information included on the roster, please notify **Diane Carpenter** at dcarpen25@yahoo.com immediately. We will still include your name and training year unless you indicate otherwise.

The web site is getting a new face, so check it out in about a week. Among the web site changes, the **newsletter** will no longer be in the members only section - it will be included in the public area.

SIMPLE CHRISTMAS A SUCCESS

by Sharon Hanzik

Although I cannot say how many attended, we were busy! We operated only one hayride trailer instead of the normal two, and it was packed at least 6 times, approximately 150 people. Although most had to wait twice to get on the trailer, everyone was able to ride, I hope. All activities were constantly busy. Santa arrived at 5:00 and was busy for about an hour and a half. The Brazos River Pickers had attendance ranging from 70 to almost 120 at any time during their performance. See the Thank You article for the lists of participants.

Activities included:

Face Painting

Dutch oven cooking demonstrations

Hayrides

Children's Story Time – Making natural bird feeders

Santa's Arrival

Brazos River Pickers (old time/bluegrass at the amphitheater)

Refreshments and marshmallow roasting / s'more making.

TPWD staff first-person interpretation of Stephen F. Austin's Texas Rangers

Story telling presented by the staff of the George Ranch Historic Park

HOUSTON CHRONICLE ARTICLE

by Sharon Hanzik

Houston Chronicle reporter Kristin Finan was out a couple of Saturdays ago, and another photographer was at Simple Christmas taking photos. She interviewed me and a few volunteers and took lots of pictures and video. Look for Brazos Bend to be the featured park in the *Houston Chronicle* series on Texas State Parks. Target date is December 16. Keep an eye on Kristin Finan's blog at [chron.com](http://blogs.chron.com/kristin2go/2007/11/on_the_prowl_for_alligators.html):
http://blogs.chron.com/kristin2go/2007/11/on_the_prowl_for_alligators.html

PHOTOWALK NEWS

by Laszlo Perlaky

At the BBSP Photowalk on November 3, 2007, we looked for fall colored landscapes nearby New Horseshoe Lake and Old Horseshoe Lakes. The fall colors are not very intense in this year, but we got a few nice sidelit and backlit images. There were two dark red and yellow trees with dark, large oak trees in the backdrop and colorful trees with yellow-green in the foreground. We stayed there until dark, but we did not get the dark pink and blue coloration of the sky. Maybe next time. Laszlo's next free photo walk at Brazos Bend State Park for Landscape will be on December 1, 2007.

Naturalperl has installed Laszlo's and Lexi's two new exhibitions at the Clear Lake City-County Freeman Branch Library Internet Café Gallery (16616 Diana Lane, Houston TX 77062). Laszlo's "On Wings" and Lexi's "Reflections" portfolios (total 22 large prints) are on view until January 5, 2008.

VOLUNTEER HOURS REMINDERS

from Sharon Hanzik

This is a reminder that you have less than a month to log at least 48 hours for this calendar year and log at least 6 hours in the quarterly requirements of Gift Shop, Nature Center, leading a Creekfield hike and/or working with firewood.

New members this year are responsible for all remaining quarters after their training completion date. **Emeritus Members** need to record your hours. Even though you don't need them the organization does. **Travel Time:** Many members are not recording their travel or monthly meeting time resulting in lost hours that we send to Austin. Thank you to those who are now **totaling** their hours across the page. You're saving me precious time.

The Nature Center will be closed Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. If a volunteer needs to work Christmas Eve, they are welcome to do so 11:00 - 3:00. Please let me know and I'll alter the calendar.

We would like to have the center open on New Year's Eve and Day at least from 11:00 - 3:00. It's a four-day weekend and if the weather is nice we could be really busy.



Two butterflies on freeze plant
Jerry Zona, Nov 2007

GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER HOURS

Below is a reminder of some of the guidelines regarding serving and reporting volunteer hours.

REQUIRED HOURS

Each volunteer is required to complete 48 hours of volunteer service per year. Six of those hours must be fulfilled each quarter (24 hours per year) in one of the following required areas. Volunteers may mix and match areas as they prefer.

Gift Shop - GS (2 hour shifts)

Nature Center - NC (2 hour shifts)

Wood preparation - hour or more per shift)

Creekfield hike (counts as two hours, including follow-up with visitors in the NC), weekends at 10:00 AM.

Water Station (counts as two hours each run; April through October, 9:00 AM and 1:00 PM. Includes picking up trash on trails and trail interpretation.)

The other 24 hours may be earned in any approved volunteer activity, including, but not limited to, the following:

scheduled programs

administrative responsibilities

individual study

maintenance

committee meetings

ongoing education activities

indoors and trail interpretation

newsletter

training

special hikes and programs

outreach

Meetings and travel time are also reported to TPWD, but are not counted in the required hours.

CREEKFIELD HIKE

Normally one volunteer is needed every Saturday and Sunday. The volunteer signed up in advance will receive credit for the hike even if it does not make. The Creekfield Hike sometimes requires several leaders in the spring and fall. If more than one leader signs up and there are not enough visitors for separate groups, the guides will lead the hike according to the order in which they signed up. If there is a last-minute request for more than one leader, all volunteers who respond will receive credit if all are not needed.

WEB SITE CALENDAR

Volunteers must sign up on the web site in advance for shifts in the Gift Shop, Nature Center and Creekfield hike. The following procedures apply:

There can be only one volunteer and one VIT in the Gift Shop for one shift

There can be only two volunteers and two VIT's signed up for the NC for one shift.

Other volunteers who see a need and help out in the NC may record that time under "Interpretation". It will count toward the 24 "other" hours.

If you do not sign up in advance, you may check the sheet for that day behind the NC desk and sign up if the above criteria are met.

WEB SITE PROTOCOL

When you sign up on the web site, do not delete another person's name. After their name in the sign-up slot, place an "&" sign and then your name. Delete the "Put Name Here" notice when you sign up. If you have to remove your name later, replace the "Put Name Here" notice if no one else is signed up.

PROGRAMS AND SHIFTS

Arrive for your work shift at least 10 minutes prior to your assigned time. Arrive 20 to 30 minutes early for a hike or program. If you cannot make a shift you signed up for, or if you are going to be late, please phone the NC desk, 979-553-5122. Do not phone Sharon or David's phone, leave them a voice mail, or send an e-mail to them the same day, as they often do not have time to check for messages on weekends.

BREAKS FOR NATURE CENTER AND GIFT SHOP

If you are working only a two-hour shift, (11-1 or 1-3) try to eat lunch before or after your shift. If you are working consecutive shifts, you can take a lunch break of approximately 30 minutes some time during the shifts. Ask another volunteer to cover your site while you're on lunch break or if you need a restroom break.

VOLUNTEERS IN TRAINING

Volunteers in Training should put (VIT-1) after their name when they sign up for the Phase 1 requirements, and (VIT-2) when they sign up for Phase 2 requirements.

Phase 1 shifts in the NC, GS, and Water Station require that the VIT be assisted by a full volunteer.

Phase 2 shifts in the NC, GS and the Creekfield Hike are independent activities and require no assistance, but must be signed off by a volunteer.

Some **Phase 2 activities**, such as Trail Interpretation and the ATV tour, require that the VIT contact a full volunteer to assist.

It is not necessary to sign up to attend a program or hike – the schedule is on the web site and the VIT-2 can just show up.

To present the alligator video program the VIT-2 should contact Sharon or David at least a week in advance so it can be placed on the weekend calendar.

AMERICAN KESTRAL OBITUARY

by David Heinicke

I'm sorry to have to let everyone know that our American Kestrel Passed away November 5. We received the Kestrel from a Wildlife rehabilitator in February of 2000, and since then she has participated in hundreds of programs, traveled to dozens of schools, had her picture published in magazines and even appeared on television twice. I'm told that Kestrels don't normally live past 7 years old even in captivity; this one was at least 8 years old and served to educate, entertain and impress thousands and thousands of people.

I want to thank all the volunteers that helped take care of her and work with her over the last 7 years. I'm going to check into getting another bird after the first of the year.

Adult Male American Kestrel
wikipedia



CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to **VIT Rob Wolfinger** and his wife Erin on the birth of **Baby Kelly**, who was born November 28, at 6:32 AM. She weighed in at 7lb 10oz and is 20 inches long. Mom and baby are doing great. Thank you to everyone for your thoughts and prayers.

Congratulations to Milton Legendre, who completed his volunteer training. Be sure to give him a warm welcome to the organization.

Congratulations to our newest Junior Volunteer members, **Madeline and Mallory Warren**. They join **Joseph and Molly Watson** to complete the first class of Junior Volunteers.



BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS
Beth Debenport
Angie Gruber
Frank Willett



JANUARY ANNIVERSARIES
Fletcher Morgan

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

Joe Carmichael
Sharon Hanzik
Jim Hiatt
Warren Jackson
Jane Minard

Ron Morrison
Jim North
Laszlo Perlaky
Marilyn Vossler
Bruce Williamson



MEETING NIGHT SUPPERS

by Anna Dell Williamson

We have a **supper** every month on meeting nights at 5:00 PM. Charge for the supper is \$3.00. The supper is prepared by a member who is reimbursed for their expenses when they submit receipts. If we are going to continue having this time to eat and socialize together, we need more volunteers to share responsibility for bringing the meal. Please sign up in the lounge to provide a supper for a future meeting, or call Judy Strauss. January and February are covered, but after that we need some help. Thank you to **Judy Strauss** for the December meeting meal and for coordinating the dinners. ♦

NATURE CENTER REPORT NOVEMBER 2007

by Anna Dell Williamson

Here is a breakdown of the various activities and attendance recorded for the Nature Center, hikes, and programs for November 1 - 30, 2007. A mixture of nice weather and cold wet weather are reflected in the visitation numbers. Numbers come from the calendar in the Nature Center and may not reflect all activities. Be sure to report Nature Center visitation on the calendar, and attendance for all programs and hikes on the form on the clipboard next to the calendar behind the front desk. The form asks for the date, name of program, presenter, type of program, and total number of visitors, plus a breakdown of the approximate number of adults and of children at the program.

	PROGRAMS	TOTALS
NATURE CENTER TOTAL: NOV. 2007, 4577	SATURDAYS (4)	2148 - High, 879, 11/10
	SUNDAYS (4)	862 - High, 367, 11/11
	WEEKDAYS (22)	1567 - High, 363, 11/23
	CREEKFIELD HIKES (6days)	132 - High, 73, 11/10
	BIRD PROGRAMS	48
	ALLIGATOR PROGRAMS	47
	SNAKE/REPTILE PROGRAMS (5)	143
	CHILDREN'S STORY TIME (4)	116
	OTHER PROGRAMS (7) includes photo hike, pond life, armadillo, tracks, turkeys, skulls, and hike	142

Thanks

- ☺ to Beth Debenport for the November meeting night dinner and Judy Strauss for the December dinner.
- ☺ to **Diane Carpenter, Marty Gay, and Staci Hobbet** for their work on the revisions to the web site.
- ☺ to **all** who helped with Simple Christmas: The following signed up to help and others pitched in but we don't have all the names.

**Judy Strauss
Carrie Sample
Sid Jones
Peggy Farley
Jane Minard
Offie Walker
Candice Kenyon**

**Tom Kanak
Rich and Sandy Jespersen
James and Joyce Blankenship
Ken and Beth Debenport
Frank Willet
Anna Dell Williamson**

**Diane & Jerry Carpenter
Diane Kerr
Glen Kilgore
Nancy Partlow
Patricia Marshall**

Thank you to our **exhibitors**:

James and Karla Eilbeck and Chuck Duplant: "On and Open Fire" Dutch oven demonstration
Ronnie Primrose, Game Warden Barry Eversole and son **Colin** for more Dutch oven demonstrations
Bryan McAuley from the George Ranch Historic Park for old-fashioned games for kids of all ages

The Brazos River Pickers

Dennis Jones and **Regional Interpretive Specialist Walt Bailey** for first-person interpretation of Stephen F. Austin's early Texas Rangers.

JT Kalina, Blake Flessner and **Kyle Petkus** for preparation help and driving hayrides.

Another thank you to those who took care of business as usual in the gift shop, nature center and Creekfield Hike.

HOW TO MEASURE AN ALLIGATOR, OR HOW TO KEEP ALL OF YOUR DIGITS AND LIMBS

by James Blankenship

If you are a typical volunteer at Brazos Bend you've grown to love our alligators. Which begs the question, so frequently asked, "How long is that alligator?" Well, there are many tales as to how to judge an alligator's length. We are all well versed in the nostril to eye method or judging the length of the tail method. But, what if I want more than just an approximate judgement?

John Bradford and I had been on Water Station duty one Saturday morning and were returning to the Nature Center when we noticed a large crowd gathering near the Pilant Slough spillway. A rather large group of Boy Scouts and their leaders were watching a rather large gator cross the road. As is typical gator fashion, the alligator dropped to it's belly and began to rest. It must have been exhausted from the road crossing, a grand twenty feet or so.

John and I stopped and began to visit with the scouts and leaders. John fielded many questions. This appearing to be a rather large alligator, I asked John how we could determine it's length, and he suggested that I take my tape measure and measure it. I might look like a fool, but the lights were on that day. So after some argument from me, John suggested a rather effective and less perilous method. John said that he would drop a stick at it's snout, and I would drop one at it's tail. Then, we would wait for it to move on down the road, and we would measure the distance between the two objects to determine it's actual length. Brilliant! Well, as you know, the alligator is a patient animal. We waited and waited for it to move so that we could use our best observational powers to determine it's length. And we waited. And we waited.

Suddenly and most unexpectedly the gator moved off into Big Creek. John and I seized the opportunity we had waited so patiently for. But wait, I don't have a tape measure! So, I stepped off heel to toe, heel to toe, until I had stepped off approximately 10-1/2 steps. Great! What does 10-1/2 steps tell me about the length of the alligator? We concluded that if we measured the length of my boot and multiplied by 10-1/2 we would have in inches the near total length of said gator. As it turned out after doing the conversion, this particular alligator was near 11' 6" long. As you can see this is a fairly safe measure, and John and I still have all of our appendages.

Once again, I pray that your experiences at Brazos Bend are as enthralling as mine.

Merry Christmas. Happy Holidays and a Wonderful 2008 to all

WHAT'S SO GOOD ABOUT A PRAIRIE AND WHY SHOULD IT BE SAVED?

by Dennis Jones

So what's so good about a prairie, indeed? Most folks don't seem to care much about them, seeing how less than one percent of the once largest ecosystem in North America is left. We like trees. Why should we save wetlands? Rainforests? Whooping cranes? Old growth redwood forests? Hula Hoops? It's not as easy to answer the question as saying that it needs to be done.

I am not sure most folks, including myself, can give an answer that doesn't ultimately return to one's character. When we say "SAVE THE RAIN FOREST! (or "Stop global warming!") it is really a cry to save ourselves from ourselves. Subconsciously I think we know that everything on this planet is connected in some way or the other and what we do to one part of it affects everything else in some way, like the ripples made by a pebble dropped into a pond. The change may take some time and go unnoticed, but the ripple effect is still there.

The passenger pigeon numbered in the billions at one time. Now they are extinct. Martha, the last passenger pigeon, died in the Cincinnati Zoo in 1914. There were once at least 32 million bison wandering the prairies and plains of North America. Now there are a few pockets of them here and there, relegated to something slightly above "zoos". Among several reasons for the demise of the buffalo is the fact that they were too difficult to domesticate and would compete with our cattle for food on the prairies, so they had to go. Their demise and that of numerous other plants and animals in North America can be directly attributed to human causes: habitat destruction, overuse of resources, etc. It would seem that in general we think that resources are inexhaustible and consume them until they are gone.

Along those lines, we continue to consume the fragments of prairies that are left as well. They make excellent master planned communities, pastureland, and farms. Corn, wheat, and rice now replace Big Bluestem, Indian Grass and sedges. Each season the soil is turned and a new crop is planted and then harvested, only to start the cycle over again. This is not wildlife habitat; it is farmland. The wildlife that has survived in these areas is relegated to the edges of the plowed field. The prairie sod is gone, never to return. We feed the world

A good while back, I read an obituary about the extinction of the Dusky Seaside Sparrow. (June 17, 1987. His human name was "Orange Band") The fellow that wrote its obituary said that the measure of a civilization is how much it cares about the demise of the seemingly insignificant creatures of the earth. Another wrote; "To forget what we had is to forget what we have lost, and to forget what we have lost means never knowing what we had to begin with." This leads, in my opinion, to an impoverishment of the spirit that affects us all.

Lastly, in pushing other species to extinction, humanity is busily sawing off the limb on which it is perched. (Paul Ehrlich, 1973) I can only hope we save humanity, by creating a civilization that understands the meaning of the fall of a sparrow... and a prairie. dj



Spider

Jerry Zona, Nov. 2007

Brazos Bend State Park

Texas Parks and Wildlife
21901 FM 762
Needville TX 77461

FIRST CLASS MAIL

→NEXT MEETING DAY AND TIME←
SATURDAY, JANUARY 12, 2008, 5:30 PM



REGULAR VOLUNTEER EVENTS

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

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.

**BRAZOS BEND STATE PARK
VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION**

VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION OFFICERS

- President:** James Blankenship
- Vice-President:** Anna Dell Williamson
- Secretary:** Nicole Olson
- Treasurer:** Diane Carpenter

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). Notify Anna Dell (281-485-2843) well in advance of any events you want announced in the newsletter.

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