

BRAZOS BEND BUNCH BUGLE

VOLUME 24, NUMBER 11

NOVEMBER 2012

OCTOBER MEETING NOTES



President Mary Lockwood called the meeting to order after the picnic dinner on October 13, 2012, in the Dining Hall. She introduced the new officers who were elected in September and thanked Offie Walker for his two years of service as President. Offie said a few words of thanks and encouragement.

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Bob Kowalewski presented the following requests for purchases, which were approved.

New posts for new signs and replacement of decayed posts, 112 – 6” sq x 6’ poles, for new signs to be prepared in the new sign shop.

Material to sheath walls and ceilings of sign shop, benches, paint. Funds will come from the Morrison/ El Paso restricted fund.

Richard Taylor: Park benches, treated lumber on memorial benches for Brian Nelson and David Norton.

Two Apple I-pads with wi-fi, apps, software, ½ from Kilgore Exxon Mobil fund, other half from Ramsayer Exxon Mobil, to schedule work in the park. One for David, one for Sharon for interpretive programs.

Six-seater vehicle, from Morrison El Paso fund. Weekday work crews exceed the seating capacity of the John Deere's, and we can seat more VITs at one time for the training trail tours. We will add windshield, cargo rails, speedometer, and incidentals.

STAFF REPORT, STEVE KILLIAN, SUPERINTENDENT:

Last fiscal year was the best ever. We are at the highest level of state parks in Texas, with only four parks that generate more revenue than BBSP, and we're getting better. This would not be doable without volunteers. There are 19 paid employees, and way more than 19 staff members here this evening. What volunteers do is directly related to what we fund, the fun visitors have, etc.

Brent Leisure refers to us as the biggest volunteer organization in the state. We want more, we want a new BBEEC, we want the park to grow while we're building the BBEEC. This is only the beginning. Thanks for all the help.

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COMMITTEE REPORTS:

GIFT SHOP:

Beth Debenport reported that the GS has a new mug that sells for \$12.00. Volunteer photographers donated the pictures around the mug. September was our best month ever, with substantial funds over last September due to now accepting credit cards.

OUTREACH:

Judy Strauss reported that Texian Market Days is coming up in 2 weeks. You may sign up on the Special Events Calendar. We will be there Saturday only. VITs are welcome.

STAFF REPORT, SHARON HANZIK, INTERPRETIVE RANGER, VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR:

Sharon repeated that this was the best year ever, and we wouldn't have gotten through without the volunteers. Everyone is valued, no matter how many hours they put in. For Fiscal Year 2012 (September 1, 2011 to August 31, 2012), volunteers put in over 23,000 hours. We will figure our own total from January 1 to December 31, 2012. Sharon recognized the VITs from the September class who were attending tonight.

Sharon made the following service and special awards to volunteers.

5-year awards:

Doris Dahse,
Maureen Goode
Virginia Harrison
Teresa Jones
Carrie Sample
Brian Watson
James Watson
Joseph Watson
Molly Watson
Rachelle Watson

10-year awards:

Curtis Parent
Jennifer Parent
Carol Ramsayer

20-year awards

Judy Strauss
Ron Dearman
Ray Anderson

25-year awards

Frank Gregg, Emeritus
Chuck Duplant

The following special awards were presented to volunteers who go above and beyond service:

Leadership - Dave Armstrong, Mike Manley
Customer service – Dawn Tejero and Ethan Hoover
Conservation – Jim Calvert
Teamwork – Outreach, Judy Strauss, Woody Scott
Education - Austin Hager
Excellence – Nancy Lynn Jones
Emeritus status – Jerry Zona, Bill Godley

A large, stylized graphic of the word "CONGRATULATIONS" in a bold, blocky font. The letters are filled with a blue and purple diagonal striped pattern. The text is slightly slanted upwards from left to right.



FIVE-YEAR AWARDS

Front: Joseph Watson, Molly Watson, Rahcelle Watson, Virginia Harrison, Teresa Jones, Carrie Sample; Back, Sharon Hanzik, James Watson, Brian Watson



CUSTOMER SERVICE

Ethan Hoover



TEN-YEAR AWARDS

Jennifer and Curtis Parent



TEAMWORK

Judy Strauss, Woody Scott



TWENTY-YEAR AWARDS

Ron Dearman, Judy Strauss, Ray Anderson



EMERITUS STATUS

Bill Godley



TWENTY-FIVE-YEAR AWARD

Chuck Duplant



NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Ray Anderson
Nelda Gay (Emeritus)
David Heinicke (Staff)
Steve Killian (Staff)
Patricia Marshall
Tori Matta
Curtis Parent
Sarah Petrisky (Staff)

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Robert Aaron
Katy Childs
Beth Debenport
Kathy Nevotti
Jeff Orsak (Staff)
Reyes Torres

NOVEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

Holly and Gene Haynes
Mike & Paige Manley



DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

Troy and Patty Henry
Dennis and Dorothy Keptra

A SIMPLE CHRISTMAS

BBSP celebrates A Simple Christmas on Saturday, December 1, 2012, from 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Nature Center. We will again need quite a bit of help. Nothing is due to change. If you have an idea for something to add, be prepared to volunteer for it and don't forget to keep it simple. Below is the schedule for this annual event. Sign up to help on the Special Events Calendar and join in the fun. All activities take place at the Nature Center. Cold weather will not stop us, high winds might, but rain will. (Photos from A Simple Christmas, 2011, by Offie Walker.)

- 3:00 - Santa's Arrival
- 3:00 – dark - Visit with Santa
- 3:00 – dark - Face Painting
- 3:00 – dark - Refreshments and marshmallow roasting / s'more making.
- 3:00 – 5:30 - Dutch oven cooking demonstrations
- 3:00 – 7:00 - Hayrides (approximately 45 minutes long) Last ride begins at 6:30



- 3:00 – dark – Victorian Era games
- 3:30 – Children's Story Time - "Night Tree" by Eve Bunting. Meet at the Amphitheater by the Nature Center. After the story make pine cone bird feeders.
- 5:00 – 7:00 - Brazos River Pickers (old time/bluegrass). Meet at the Amphitheater.

FAMILY ADVENTURES PROGRAM

David Heinicke

As I'm sure you're aware, childhood obesity is a huge problem facing today's youth. TPWD is partnering with American Diabetes Association, National Wildlife Refuge System, Houston Wilderness and others to help combat childhood obesity and promote healthy living. On December 1 (yes, that's the same day as Simple Christmas) Brazos Bend is going to host the first outing of this pilot program with Pasadena ISD. The event is in the morning and shouldn't interfere with our annual Simple Christmas event. As I'm sure you've guessed by now, we need your help.

Here's an overview of the program: Certain students at Pasadena ISD schools have been identified by the American Diabetes Association as being "pre-diabetic" based on their body mass index. These students are attending after school activities to try to interest them in a more active healthy lifestyle. So far this program has been very well attended. There was a "Night of Empowerment" rally to kick off this new "Get Outside Houston" program in Pasadena ISD on October 30. In the month of November myself and several other interpreters from several agencies will be visiting the Pasadena schools to try to interest the kids in outdoor activities.

On December 1 approximately 100 students and their families will ride buses to Brazos Bend for the "Family Adventure Day" arriving at about 9:30 AM. There will be several outside groups setting up activity booths around the Nature Center and activities in the lawn. The families can wander around the booths and through the Nature Center, and we'll direct them to walk around Creekfield on their own. This is where you come in----- I would like to set up several "Learning Stations" around the trail to educate participants (and the general public) as they walk around. Here are some ideas for learning stations:

Birds - Spotting scope, field guides, bird skins or bones set up on long pier.

Pond Life - Table with tank full of pond critters and dip nets.

Insects - Sweep netting in grassy area to the north of Creekfield trail.

Alligators - Table with baby gator and gator paraphernalia.

Mammals -Table with mammal skins and skulls.

I'd also like to have a few volunteers around the Creekfield trail to answer questions and point out things of interest as folks walk around. I'm open to other suggestions too!

The tables need to be set up and manned from 9:30 - 11:30 AM by BBSP volunteers if possible. If you are interested in setting up and manning one of these tables or roaming the Creekfield trail to answer questions, please let me know.

At 11:30 the families will walk to the Elm Lake Pavilion for a healthy catered lunch and a class on healthy eating. The whole event should be over by 1:30 or so. This is the first of these events that will be spread out over the state in the coming years, Let's make the first one a big success! Thanks for your help.

LIBRARY BOOKS

Sharon Hanzik

There are several books that have been checked out for months that need to be returned. We ask that you keep a book no longer than 1 month. You may not even remember that you have a book, so please check around to see. We are also missing some interpretive guidebooks that need to be returned as well.

We love being able to offer this resource so please return the books in a time manner. Thank you!

HAPPY HALLOWEEN

Sharon Hanzik

A BIG THANK YOU to all who helped out with our Creeeepy Halloween special programs and Outreach!
NC attendance for Sat = 809, Sun = 382, Texian Market Days = 1861 (Sat)

Friday, October 26
Night hike = 42!



Saturday, October 27

Creekfield Hike= 16	Geocaching 101= 17
Story time, Tarantulas = 43!	Creepy Crawly hike = 55!
Owls = 40!	Movie = 40! (! because it was COLD)
Ghosts of Prairies Past hike = 18! (! - because it made at all - difficult getting visitors excited about prairies)	

Sunday, October 28

Creekfield = 41! (two hikes were led)	Story time bats = 13!
Spiders = 5!	Snakes = 42!

(If you are around the Nature Center on Sundays or a Sunday program presenter, you know that sometimes we cannot get many people to come to the programs - if any. This attendance was very high for a Sunday, and that is why they all have an "!" next to the attendance number.

Great Job Everyone!!!!

While the Nature Center folks were busy interpreting in all of these programs, Headquarters was busy greeting our visitors in appropriate Halloween fashion. They had fun and enjoyed comments from the public, especially on Elvis - "So this is where you have been hanging out".

Lady Bug - Customer Service Rep, Tina Ibarra
Clown -- Office Manager, Susan Taylor
Elvis - Asst. Office Manager, Sarah Petrisky
Tex (A&M)-Customer Service, Amanda Elsworth
Tex - Customer Service, Sylvia Carrillo

Photo by Steve Killian



BBSP DEER HUNT DATES

The annual deer hunts will be held in November and December. The park will be closed Tuesday, November 13 through Thursday, November 15, and Tuesday, December 11 through Thursday, December 13. The volunteer calendar has been updated to reflect the park closures on those dates. Volunteers are not allowed in the park during the hunt without prior approval. Thanks to those who signed up so far in advance. You have the day off!

GEORGE OBSERVATORY SCHEDULE

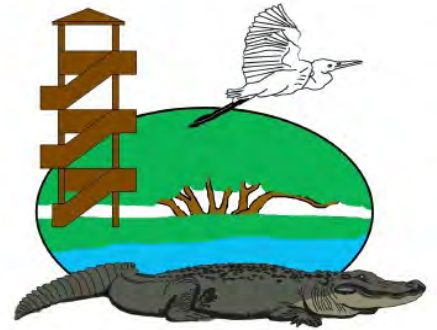
The George Observatory will be opened to the public on Sundays from 12:00 noon to 5:00 PM. This will start October 7 through the end of November.

BBSPVO LOGO

Nelda Gay

Here is the logo the BBEEC Steering Committee has chosen as the BBSPVO official logo. It will be used on letterheads, business cards, brochures, and other publications. The wording on the different printed items will vary based on the publication.

Many, many thanks go to those on our Partnership Task Force who contributed to the result, and especially to Chuck Duplant and Joe Southern.



NEW VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

from Sharon Hanzik

We are recruiting volunteers for our next class on February 9, 16 and 23. Please give interested parties a brochure that is on the wall by the alligator skeleton and advise them that applications are due November 30th. Applications are done online so that they are legible and all necessary information is filled out.

Children need to be at least 9 or 10 years old and must go through the training with an adult. There is no separate Jr. Volunteer Program. We adjust the training requirements accordingly.

If you'd like, you may take brochures to place in your community, etc. There are plenty in the closet across from the alligator skeleton.

Thanks for your help in recruiting.

CHECK OUT THE WEBSITE

There is a short survey regarding the Brazos River Corridor on the home page at www.brazosbend.org. It's also on Facebook. Please take a few minutes to complete it.

MOM AND BABIES

On October 25, Diane and Jerry Carpenter spotted this mother alligator with at least 20 babies in the water next to the trail at 40-Acre Lake.



THANK YOU

😊 E-mail from Justin Rhodes, State Parks Region 4 Director:

Thank you. We had our annual superintendent meeting recently, at which Steve Killian gave a brief presentation on his new I-Pad. When done, he had many envious colleagues in the room. These are a great tool for the management team, and I see additional benefits for the interpreters as well. Thank you as always for your continued support.

😊 to **Ray Anderson, Diane Carpenter, Jerry Carpenter, Suzie Gann, Nelda Gay, Barbara Keller-Willy, Glen Kilgore, Woody Scott, Diane Welty, and Anna Dell Williamson** for yet again pulling off the largest school group field trip we host each year! I have no doubt that you are capable. Compliments from Needville Elementary came in the very same day! Despite the plumbing problems, they had a wonderful time. My sincere gratitude to all of you. KUDOS!

😊 WOW! What a nice job the volunteer cleaning crew did for all of us! The NC, classroom and lounge look wonderful! Thanks to **Carrie Sample** for organizing and to **Carrie, Beth Debenport, Chuck Duplant, Austin Hager, Adrian Michel, and Anna Dell and Bruce Williamson** for participating!

😊 to **Offie Walker, Mary Lockwood, Belinda DiMarcello and Bob Kowalewski** for all their work and effort as 2011-2012 Officers of the BBSPVO.

😊 to **Mary Lockwood**, President; **Glen Kilgore**, Vice-President, **Belinda DiMarcello**, Secretary; and **Bob Kowalewski**, Treasurer, for accepting leadership positions for BBSPVO for 2012-2013..

😊 to **everyone** who helped make the BBSPVO Annual Picnic a success. As usual, we had lots of volunteers, staff and families, and lots of wonderful food.

😊 to **Jerry Carpenter, Chris Hofferber, Rich Jespersen, Barbara Keller-Willy, Hannah Meddaugh, Paige O'Neal, Pam Tatge and Woody Scott** for articles and pictures for the newsletter.

😊 to **Cynthia Morales** for her help for the past year and a half with the layout of the newsletter.

MAINTENANCE REPORT, OCTOBER 2012

The October Weekday Maintenance Crew reported 253 hours for the month of October.

Wood Yard:

- Split and bundle wood

Mowing and Landscaping:

- Plant Elm trees on Creekfield Forest Trail

Trail Trimming and Trail Maintenance:

- Filled approach to Pilant Slough Bridge

- Repair banister on Creekfield Lake Trail

- Clean up dead trees on Creekfield Lake Trail, Red Buckeye Trail

- Trim Red Buckeye Trail

Pest Control:

- Chinese Tallow tree control

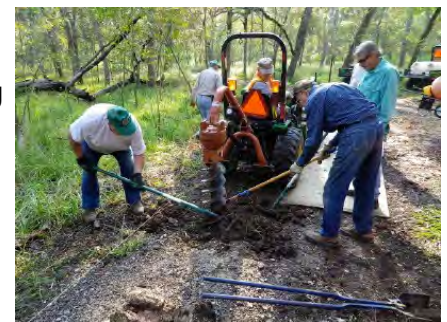
- Treat invasives on Creekfield Forest Trail

- Treat fire ants, Nature Center, Creekfield Lake Trail and 100 Camping Loop

Special Projects:

- Completed Pilant Slough Bridge

- Lay trail material on Prairie Trail





Working on Pilant Slough Bridge

NATURE CENTER REPORT

OCTOBER 2012

Below are the totals of the various activities and attendance recorded for the Nature Center, hikes, and programs for October 1-31, 2012. Visitation for fall has picked up and Astronomy Day and our Halloween program attracted lots of visitors..

PROGRAMS	TOTALS OCTOBER	Photos of Dungbeetle Project
NATURE CENTER ATTENDANCE		 <p style="text-align: center;">Hannah Meddaugh, Maureen Goode, Glen Kilgore and Chuck Duplant (Photo by Jerry Carpenter)</p>
Oct. 2012 - 6,083	Saturdays (4) - 2909 High, 927 (10/20) Average: 727	
Oct. 2011 - 7,564	Sundays (4) – 1506 High, 473 (10/7) Average: 377	
Oct. 2010 - 7,855	Weekdays (23) - 1668 High, 298 (10/10) Average: 73	
Oct. 2009 - 6,258		
Oct. 2008 - 3,759		
Oct. 2007- 4,809		
Oct. 2006 - 5,258		
Oct. 2005 - 4,878		
CREEKFIELD HIKES (9)	165	
CHILDREN'S STORY TIME (6)	112	
SNAKE PROGRAM(4)	98	
GEOCACHING 101 (4)	64	
SPECIAL HIKES (Creekfield Night,	207	
OUTREACH (3)	2321	
OWLS (2)	82	
OTHER PROGRAMS (9): Bird (2), bats, spiders, photo walk, Halloween movie, animal tracks, wildlife viewing (2)	84	
TOTAL VISITORS SERVED IN HIKES AND PROGRAMS	2475	
VOLUNTEER HOURS	Interpretation = 1,184 Maintenance/Other = 671 TOTAL HOURS = 1,855	
PARK ATTENDANCE (Percentage reflects the percentage of total visitors in each category.)	Total 18,129 Day use 13,457 (74%) Overnight 4,672 (26%) NC Visitors 6,083 (34%)	 <p style="text-align: center;">Chuck Duplant (photo by Hannah Meddaugh)</p>

DUNG BEETLES

Parte Deux

by Hannah Meddaugh



A merry band of hunters set out August 30 for our second try at catching the elusive dung beetle, *Phanaeus triangularis*. Our first expedition in late June landed just 19 lonely beetles from 10 traps. This was far short of the 200 beetles requested by Dr. J. Mark Rowland of the University of New Mexico (see July BBSPVO newsletter for a description of his research or read the original article based in part on BBSP dung beetles, *Science* 6, February 2009: Vol. 323, No. 5915, pp. 773-776).

Obviously a second attempt was called for. This time we had some things working in our favor. Rainfall was much greater: over 2 inches in the past two weeks, and almost three inches over the whole of August. Also, to give the beetles more time to find the traps, the traps were set out at 9:00 AM on August 29, and collected at 3:00 PM on August 30, for 30 trap hours. This was much longer than the six hours we left the traps out back in June. However, based on personal observations, David Heinicke felt that the rainfall, not the extra trap time, made the difference for the beetles.

And what a difference! The first trap held over 100 beetles piled on one another in an open Tupperware. Despite the crowding, the beetles were lively and in fine shape. Why didn't they fly out? Maybe they thought the other beetles were on to something. The next trap held just as many beetles. And the next, and the next....we stopped counting after 220 beetles. But we estimate the traps held approximately 800 beetles, maybe more.

Did Dr. Rowland need more beetles, say four or five times more? We called to check. No, he did not. So the rest of the beetles were released, to roll another day. (Photos by Hannah Meddaugh and Jerry Carpenter)



BLESSING OF THE ALLIGATORS

David Heinicke

With a survival rate of just 2-3% we figured the little guys could use all the help they could get.....

On Sunday, October 7, we took one of our hatchling alligators (representing his/her siblings) to St. Mary's Episcopal Church in West Columbia for their annual blessing of the animals. This custom is conducted each year in remembrance of St. Francis of Assisi's love for all creatures. After being blessed (see picture) by Father Peter, the little gator was returned to Brazos Bend with great stories of adventure, not to mention some good publicity.

When asked why he didn't take the little alligator out of the tank, Father Peter replied, "I might have half a brain but my good half said: 'Don't take it out!'" He also thanked Brazos Bend for bringing the most "exotic" animal of the day to be blessed. I'm sure this is somehow a violation of the whole separation of Church and State doctrine, but it was a big hit with the kids, provided some educational opportunities, and was good advertisement for the park.



SPECIAL NATURE CENTER VISITORS

by Barbara Keller-Willy

What does the Mezzo Soprano from the Houston Grand Opera's production of "Italian Girl in Algiers" do on her day off?

If you are Daniela Barcellona and her equally accomplished husband, conductor Alessandro Vitiello, you leave the bustle of Houston and the busy routine of practices as lead mezzo soprano role in "Italian Girl in Algiers" behind for a few hours to connect with nature and seek out the alligators at Brazos Bend State Park. Escorted by long time Houston Grand Opera Guild volunteers, Fred and Imelda Gott, the friendly quartet of visitors spent time learning about the display animals in the Nature Center.

They shared stories of the career progressions that led Daniela and Alessandro to Houston with Nature Center Volunteers. An award winning soprano across Europe, Daniela now has an American agent and we can expect to see, and more importantly, hear much more of her beautiful voice in the United States. For more pictures of Daniela, go to www.houstongrandopera.org and follow the links to "Italian Girl in Algiers".

Photo by Barbara Keller-Willy



ZEBRAS IN THE PARK!

Rich Jespersen, Compiler



Zebra Heliconians, that is. These beautiful and delicate-looking long-winged tropical butterflies occasionally stray north and find their way to Brazos Bend. They appeared in late September this year and stayed long enough to be recorded on the Brazos Bend Butterfly Count for the first time ever. Several participants made a special effort to find them and a British visitor, Bryan Roberts, got some nice photos which are published here. The rarely-seen-here Clouded Sulphur and Great Purple Hairstreak, in addition to the Zebras, were highlights of our 17th annual count on October 7.

Following last year's severe drought, Brazos Bend has had ample rain. The flowers are abundant and beautiful, providing plenty of nectar for butterflies. On count day there was a record turnout of 33 eager observers: Brazos Bend Volunteers, Master Naturalists and other enthusiasts, including two families with children.

To everyone's dismay the arrival of a cold front the night before left the morning chilly, with a 100% overcast sky. As a result no butterflies were stirring for the first two hours of the count. Determined to make the most of an otherwise wonderful day for an outing, many of us enjoyed a nature walk, observing the flora and fauna of the Park. Bryan Roberts got a great photo of a Cottonmouth. He said "In case anyone is wondering, this was taken at 18X zoom and then cropped even further. I'm not *that* daft!"



The observers were divided into seven parties. Mine included a family who were very interested in nature. They had recently attended the hummingbird banding by naturalist David Heinicke and had gone on a guided nature hike. They enjoyed telling us things they had learned then and helping us find such wonders as a green toadstool and a pocket of water in the base of a tree which was home to six tree-frogs. We even saw a dragonfly shiver to warm his wing muscles before taking flight.

Brazos Bend Volunteer Linda Heinicke led a party consisting entirely of a mother and her three young daughters. Linda said the girls were great butterfly spotters, and the mother told me they all had a great time.

About 11 o'clock a few butterflies began to move and by lunch time 24 species had been seen. Several determined observers went out again in the afternoon, by which time the temperature was up to 70 degrees and the sky was just a bit brighter. Butterflies had become fairly active, and sightings included 11 additional species.

Although total numbers were low, most of the expected species were eventually seen. Notably missing were Hackberry Emperors and Common Checkered-skippers, seen on every previous count, and the Julia Heliconians that had been present along with the Zebras in recent days.

Observers were Marie Asscherick, Chris Carey, Janet Clemenson, Susan Conaty, Emma Connolly, Chuck Duplant, Jerry Eppner, Julia Geisler, Bill Godley, Linda Heinicke, Rich Jespersen, Sandy Jespersen, Julie Morgan Lock, Calynn Lock, Patricia Lock, Cassandra Lock, Kim Lytle, Candy McNamee, Gary Moore, Kathy Moore, Shelley Penrod, John D. Rippert, Linda Rippert, Bryan Roberts, Carrie Sample, Misty Shimada, Nobu Shimada, Ren Shimada, Andy Smith, James L. Smith, Pam Tatge, Barb Tucker and Diane L. Welty. The next count will be held on October 6, 2013.

There was a total 372 individual butterflies spotted, with 35 species represented. Following are the statistics from the count:

SWALLOWTAILS

- 1 Black Swallowtail
- 2 Giant Swallowtail

WHITES & SULPHURS

- 2 **Clouded Sulphur**
- 3 Cloudless Sulphur
- 13 Little Yellow
- 1 Dainty Sulphur

HAIRSTREAKS

- 1 **Great Purple Hairstreak**
- 3 Red-banded Hairstreak
- 5 Dusky-blue Groundstreak
- 2 *Hairstreak species*

BRUSH-FOOTED

- 2 **Zebra Heliconian**
- 30 Gulf Fritillary
- 1 Silvery Checkerspot
- 27 Phaon Crescent
- 13 Pearl Crescent
- 1 Painted Lady
- 1 Red Admiral
- 2 Common Buckeye
- 1 Viceroy



- 4 Tawny Emperor
- 1 *Emperor species*
- 7 Gemmed Satyr
- 50 Carolina Satyr
- 3 *Satyr Species*
- 1 Monarch
- 11 Queen

SKIPPER

- 13 White-striped Longtail
- 2 Long-tailed Skipper
- 1 Dorantes Longtail
- 5 Tropical Checkered-skipper
- 49 Clouded Skipper
- 3 Fiery Skipper
- 1 Southern Broken-Dash
- 3 Little Glassywing
- 8 Broad-winged Skipper
- 4 Yehl Skipper
- 23 Dun Skipper
- 1 Ocola Skipper
- 70 *Skipper species*
- 1 *unknown butterfly*

TEXAS OUTDOOR FAMILY PROGRAM AT BBSP

Texas Parks and Wildlife's Outdoor Family Program is designed to let new campers experience a night of camping with help from outdoor specialists and camping equipment furnished by program sponsors. The Texas Outdoor Family Program will be hosted by Brazos Bend State Park on the weekends of December 1, 2012 and December 8, 2012. Details and schedule can be found on our website

ECOSYSTEM SPOTLIGHT

by Paige O'Neal



With the new prairie loop trail under construction and nearly at completion, it begs mentioning a very different, but no less beautiful, part of Brazos Bend State Park - our tall grass coastal prairie. At first glance, it looks like a jumble of grasses and flowers, but a journey into this strange new world delivers an unforgettable experience. Way before the park's inception – like around the mid-1800's – Texas was covered with tall coastal prairie which reached heights of 8-10 feet. This sea of grass was part of a larger prairie ecosystem that stretched from

Southern Canada to Mexico, and as far east as the Appalachian Mountain range to as far west as the Rocky Mountain range. That's over **9 million** acres! Early homesteader's traveling the Oregon Trail dubbed their covered wagons "prairie schooners" because the wagons traversed the vast expanse of grass.

Brazos Bend's prairieland got its start from the Brazos River, which brought sediment into a shallow ocean, laying a foundation for the grassland to come. After the waters receded, the grassland took its place (**note**: many visitors and regulars watched the transformation of Creekfield from lake/marshland into prairie during the summer of 2011 due to extreme drought conditions). If you were around during the prairie's early years, you'd have seen herds of buffalo, pronghorn antelope, red wolves, black bears, prairie chickens, cougar, and wild turkey.

Much of the prairie in Texas (and across the U.S.) is gone now due to man – the fertile soil for crops and it's elevation for extensive development. Today, less than 1-2% of natural, undisturbed prairieland remains. But there are still good reasons to preserve this unique environment.

So, why's it worth saving, you ask?? Whether you realize it or not, the prairie is teeming with as much life as the park's other ecosystems – which are the marsh and lakes or the lowland forest. The prairie boasts a wide diversity of plant life, including the little bluestem, bushy bluestem, Indian grass, sideoats grama prairie grass, switch grass and countless wildflowers, such as spider lilies, snow on the prairie, Texas coneflower, Virginia dayflower, and much more. These grasses and flowers are home to many varieties of butterflies and other insects.



The prairie land hosts not only butterflies but others as well. Gophers and other burrowing animals take advantage of sandy deposits in the area. Other mammals and reptiles such as rodents, coyotes and bobcats, slithering prairie king snakes and crawling slender glass lizards, and even two species of turtles – the three-toed and ornate box turtle make their home in the prairie. Several species of sparrows, warblers, Bobwhite Quail, Sand hill cranes, red-tailed and red-shouldered hawks, and even great-horned owls dart and dive among the grasses.

Surprises await you when you venture out into the prairie. You just have to look.

Resources

Photos courtesy of Paige O'Neal

Hanzik, Sharon. (2008). *Tall Grass Coastal Prairies of Brazos Bend State Park*. Accessed on August 22, 2012 from <http://brazosbend.org/florafauna/TallGrassPrairies.pdf>.

Native Prairies Association of Texas. (2012). *Learn*. Accessed on August 23, 2012 from <http://texasprairie.org/index.php/learn/>.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Society and U.S. Geological Society (1999). *Paradise Lost? The Coastal Prairie of Louisiana and Texas*. Accessed on August, 22, 2012 from <http://digitalmedia.fws.gov/cdm/ref/collection/document/id/77>.



NEWS FROM CHRIS HOFFERBER

Tex Critter Hofferber, adopted and beloved large white cat owned by Chris and Jim Hofferber, former BBSP volunteers who moved to Arkansas, went on to his 10th life in August of 2011. He was an avid wildlife observer and has written two wildlife reports for the Brazos Bend Bunch Bugle in the past. He and Chris were working on an article at the time of his passing. He is missed, but he lives on through this report. Thanks, Chris, for sharing this story with us.

Hello, Brazos Bend Volunteers and Staff:

Since moving here to northwest Arkansas and having a great view from my deck from the upper level of our house, I have learned to watch and listen (that is, when I'm not napping). I have seen so much! This is about some of the things I've seen.

Our constant resident is a really big red-tailed hawk, who was named Rudy by Daddy Jim. He sometimes sits on my deck rail, but he never bothers me. I think he wants to see what I'm looking at all the time. He's very vocal and doesn't want Mom and Dad in the front yard. He scolds them when they're anywhere near the front. Dad can't even get the paper or the mail without him making a lot of noise.

He doesn't seem to mind if anyone is in the back yard, though. I guess he feels the front yard is his territory. When Mom planted her first garden, he flew down and sat on a limb that was close to the ground and close to Mom. He watched her every move, over several hours, while she planted the whole garden. As soon as Mom went inside, he flew away. Several of our neighbors have bird feeders, and he thinks "bird feeder" means something else. Occasionally you will see him sitting on the roof of one of those feeders, eating a bird.

We also have occasional visits by coyotes and a big red fox. Daddy Jim named him "Burney", and he marks different areas of our yard. He's just telling any other fox in the area that this is his property. The armadillos like Mom's flower beds. She really gets mad when they dig up her flower beds night after night. She knows they're just after the worms that keep her soil loose and fertilized, but they can take out a lot of plants in one night. Armadillos are prevalent here. We see more here than we ever saw in Texas.

We have eagles that winter here, and some that live nearby all year round. Mom and Dad came back from Branson, telling about two eagles they saw in a tree, a short way away from the highway, early in the morning. Then they saw one right next to traffic in Springfield, Mo., sitting in a tree. It was mid-February, about the time many were heading back north.

I watch the rest of the animals (birds, deer, ground hogs, gray and ground squirrels, etc.) but they are pretty uneventful. I still haven't seen a bear or a turkey from my deck, nor a feral hog, thankfully. Wildlife officers did take a 4½ foot alligator out of a small lake a few weeks ago, but they assume it was someone's pet that just had gotten too big to handle. When will people learn that wildlife does not make good pets? My advice: If you want a pet, get a cat!

OCTOBER NEWS FROM TPWD

compiled by Pam Tatge

* Following a 549th birthday celebration, "Old Baldy," McKinney Falls State Park's beloved bald cypress, was named Austin's official 2012 Tree of the Year. In July, the Texas Forestry Service recorded Old Baldy's measurements at 103 feet tall with a circumference of 16 feet 3 inches. The tree's root system extends roughly two school bus lengths in all directions.

* The alligator gar stars in its own YouTube video news report at <http://youtu.be/9IXQXyS7gLQ>. The prehistoric-looking creature has gained a bad reputation. But as anglers are discovering the merits of this meaty species, biologists are starting to take note.

* According to a new report, the first statistically valid, range-wide population estimate for the lesser prairie chick is an estimated 37,170 birds. These results could be significant as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service prepares its proposed rule expected in November about whether to list the species under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

* Texas rainbow trout season is just a few weeks away. Trout stocking locations and the 2012-2013 calendar will be posted in mid-November.

* Deer hunting season kicks off Nov. 3, and Texas hunters should see deer in good condition and an above average number of mature bucks.

* Texas Parks & Wildlife airs weekly on PBS and Cable. Check their web site for upcoming segments (www.tpwd.state.tx.us/newsmedia/tv/).

UPCOMING EVENTS

November 9	Guided Bird Watching Hikes, 8:00 AM, meet at 40-Acre Lake restrooms
November 10	Budget and Executive Meetings, 3:00 PM Regular Business Meeting, 5:30 PM (Supper, 5:00 PM)
November 23	Guided Bird Watching Hikes, 8:00 AM, meet at 40-Acre Lake restrooms
December 1	Texas Outdoor Family Camping Program, Saturday and Sunday Family Adventures Program, 9:30 AM - 1:30 PM A Simple Christmas, Nature Center lawn, 3:00 - 7:00 PM Brazos River Pickers, 5:00 PM Landscape Photography Photo Walk, 5:00 PM, meet at Nature Center
December 7	Guided Bird Watching Hikes, 8:00 AM, meet at 40-Acre Lake restrooms
December 8	Texas Outdoor Family Camping Program, Saturday and Sunday Budget and Executive Meetings, 3:00 PM Regular Business Meeting, 5:30 PM (Supper, 5:00 PM) "Bird Blizzard at Sunset", Observation Tower
December 15	28 th Christmas Bird Count, 6:30 AM to dusk
December 21	Guided Bird Watching Hikes, 8:00 AM, meet at 40-Acre Lake restrooms

2013

January 4	Guided Bird Watching Hikes, 8:00 AM, meet at 40-Acre Lake restrooms
January 5	Brazos River Pickers, 5:00 PM
January 12	Budget and Executive Meetings, 3:00 PM Regular Business Meeting, 5:30 PM (Supper, 5:00 PM)
January 18	Guided Bird Watching Hikes, 8:00 AM, meet at 40-Acre Lake restrooms
January 19	"Bird Blizzard at Sunset", Observation Tower
January 27	Keep on Truckin' Trail Races, 7:15 AM

Brazos Bend State Park

Texas Parks and Wildlife
21901 FM 762
Needville, TX 77461

☆☆☆☆☆

NEXT MEETING

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2012
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
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The **Brazos Bend Bunch Bugle** is the newsletter of the Brazos Bend State Park Volunteer Organization, A.K.A. The Brazos Bend Bunch. It is distributed monthly to volunteers through the BBSPVO web site. For further information on this newsletter or the volunteer program, contact David Heinicke or Sharon Hanzik at Brazos Bend State Park, phone 979-553-5101.

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

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

**BABA DIOUM, SENEGAL
AFRICAN CONSERVATIONIST**