



BRAZOS BEND BUNCH  
BUGLE

VOLUME 19, NUMBER 6

JUNE 2007

## MAY MEETING NOTES

*reported by Nicole Olson*

The President and Vice-president were not present at the May 12, 2007 meeting. Secretary **Nicole Olson** nominated **Treasurer Chuck Duplant** as pro-tem chairman and asked if all present were in favor. The vote passed. There were 7 volunteers and 2 staff members present. The minutes of the April meeting were approved as posted.

**Treasurer's Report:** **Chuck Duplant** brought the Treasurer's report. See the financial report in the lounge for complete information.

The following budget requests were submitted:

1. Construct a **covering over pier 7** at Elm Lake. Approved.
2. Request from Beth Debenport for a **printer** for the gift shop. **Joyce Blankenship** has a printer to donate. The request for a new printer was withdrawn.
3. Request for six (6) 4x **power magnifiers** and six (6) 6x power magnifiers for programs. Approved.

**Gift Shop:** **Beth Debenport** really appreciates everybody working in the gift shop. We are doing great stuff!

**Maintenance:** Report is in the newsletter. The main project was building a cover for the pier.

### Old Business

**Glen Kilgore** will be chairman of the **Nominating Committee**. Anyone who wants to be on the nominating committee should contact Glen.

**Tina Berman** visited at the park and talked with Ken Debenport. She was the first president before the volunteer organization was incorporated and before the gift shop was started.

The meeting was adjourned.

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# THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

*The captain of a ship does not actually steer the ship. So I have elected to ask one of the "crew" to write a guest paragraph for the President's Corner. The following is from my granddaughter, Mandy Hite.*

*Bruce Williamson*



Through the short time that I have been a volunteer at Brazos Bend State Park, I have learned an exorbitant amount of things, from simple things, like how to tell an alligator apart from a crocodile, to a numerous amount of hard things. Though I may not enjoy all the things that need to be done (leading hikes and trail trimming), I enjoy lots of other things (gift shop, nature center and wood tying). My time at the park is well spent, all the same. I'd have to say the main reason I do what I do at the park is for the bit of knowledge that I have made a difference at the park.

## STAFF REPORTS

### STEVE KILLIAN

The **equestrian area** has been cleaned; there are no remnants of anything left, and it looks really nice. We are also putting in a 2-inch hand pump.

**Prairie spraying** is continuing. We are moving the Force Account debris from public view. We are continuing to **spray the lakes** and **stock the lakes** with bass and catfish:

- 40-Acre Lake – 4,000 largemouth bass and 110 channel catfish
- Elm Lake – 8,300 largemouth bass
- Creekfield Lake – 200 largemouth bass.



Cost estimates for water and electrical upgrades were very high. We can only do the electrical upgrades now. TXDOT is getting closer to being done with the work – We are 98% satisfied.

Ken Debenport asked Steve Killian about the trail near the drainage behind the 100 loop camp sites and Big Creek wash. Steve stated that Fort Bend TXDOT is aware of the situation. The debris may have to be hauled away, or we may need to build a 30-inch drain pipe, since it is erosion prone. It's a tough location to work in. One week ago, the area was barricaded with tape and cones to keep people out.

Big Creek loop trail – we have put in four reflectors to show that this is an edge near the water. We are not going to use the ash from the power plant due to elevated levels of selenium in the ash, but the roads will be resurfaced nonetheless.

Windmill status – Some stumps around the windmill need to be removed, though they were treated with herbicides. The Boy Scouts also cleared the area. The whole purpose of clearing it out was to see the water! It would be nice to see the water pumping all the time. What's the timeline? Really none! It's a good place for historical interpretation, having benches and seeing the water. We are hoping to come up with a primitive camping site near the area. Otherwise, things are looking pretty good.

Alligator on bank  
Jerry Zona, 4/19/07



# SHARON HANZIK

**National Trails Day** is June 2 and there will be extra programming and interpretation. There are still a few **school groups** coming in. The field trip to the **Houston Museum of Natural Science** was a success! Thanks to **Carol Ramsayer** for pulling everything together.



**Vacation** for Sharon is first part of June. She will have Sundays and Mondays off starting June 14 until September.

## CONGRATULATIONS

**Carrie Sample** and **Staci Hobbet** are our newest members. Be sure to give them a friendly welcome to BBSPO.



## BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES



### JUNE BIRTHDAYS

Anna Dell Williamson  
Glen Kilgore  
Judy Huber  
Jacob Ramirez

### JUNE ANNIVERSARIES

Joe and Sue Carmichael  
Nelda and Martin Gay  
Joan and Warren Jackson  
Chuck and Jane Minard

### JULY BIRTHDAYS

Barb Tucker  
Susan Walther  
Susie Taylor  
Martin Gay  
Carlos Torres  
Frank Smith  
Diane Carpenter  
Ronn Washington  
Suzanne Elliott-Coats (VIT)  
Debra Baker

### JULY ANNIVERSARIES

James and Joyce Blankenship

## NATURALPERL NEWS



Laszlo of Naturalperl® led his free Photo walks at Brazos Bend State Park for landscape on March 3, for plants on April 7, and for birds on May 12. On this last workshop, we had great participation; a total of 20 photographers walked along Elm Lake and looked for birds at their natural feeding areas. We observed and photographed several feeding American Coots, Purple Gallinule, Anhinga, Whistling Ducks, Yellow- and Black- Crowned Night herons, Great Egret, and a blue heron at sunset. The weather was great, and finally we got gret sunset and the special pinky reflections during the afterglow. The next Brazos Bend State Park Photo-walk will be on May 2, 2007. We will meet at the Nature Center at 5 PM, and then we will look for closeups, and will photograph flowers, bugs, butterflies, dragonflies, or treebarks at sunset.

# NATURE CENTER REPORT

## MAY, 2007

by Anna Dell Williamson

Here is a breakdown of the various activities and attendance recorded for the Nature Center, hikes, and programs for May 1-31. This month included Memorial Day and lots of school groups during the week. 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
<b>NATURE CENTER</b> Total for May, 5633	<b>SATURDAYS (4)</b>	<b>1798</b> - High, 545, 5/5
	<b>SUNDAYS (4)</b>	<b>1562</b> - High, 442, 5/27
	<b>WEEKDAYS (23)</b>	<b>2273</b> - High, 298, 5/3 & 5/15
	<b>CREEKFIELD HIKES (9 days, 15 groups)</b>	<b>155</b> - High, 68 (3 hikes), 5/19
	<b>ALLIGATOR PROGRAMS (5)</b>	<b>145</b>
	<b>WASP PROGRAM (1)</b>	<b>40</b>
	<b>SNAKE/REPTILE PROGRAMS (2)</b>	<b>61</b>
	<b>CHILDREN'S STORY TIME (1)</b>	<b>17</b>
	<b>OTHER PROGRAMS (6)</b> includes pond life, photo, bird, swamp critters, bats and armadillo	<b>112</b>

## JOHN MALONE

by David Heinicke

Below is an email from our friend **John Malone** (Frog Guy), soon to be **Dr. Malone!** John first came to Brazos Bend about ten years ago as part of an Eagle Scout project that he designed to look at the amphibian populations in the park, when he was a junior in high school. Over the next 6 years or so he would spend countless hours "mucking", as he called it, around the park, scientifically locating and documenting breeding areas for local amphibians. Sleep all day and "muck about" all night was John's favorite activity.

On Saturday and Sunday morning John would always have stories and usually specimens from the night before, that he was eager to share. I remember walking in to my office, only to find John with a box of 200 tree-frogs to tag and release, or to see John with a large cottonmouth stretched out on my desk while he tagged and sexed it. And you'll have to ask Ken why our whole accounting system at BBSPVO is based on John's frog research.

Many of us (myself included) learned a great deal about frogs and toads, as well as field investigation techniques from this young man. The Volunteer Organization assisted with his funding on several projects, and we should all feel proud to say that Brazos Bend and the Volunteer Organization had a small part in the creation and success of Dr. Malone. Good Luck, John!

Howdy all,

It's hard for me to believe, but I will be defending my PhD dissertation this summer. It would be a great pleasure to have you present, as you have played more than a small part in helping me to get to this point. The dates and times are as follows:

Title: Genetic Determinants of Reproductive Isolation in *Xenopus*  
Monday, 30th July 2007, 1:00 PM  
University of Texas at Arlington, Life Science Building Room 124

You can find a map at <http://www.uta.edu/maps/map?id=ls>

I suspect that it will be fairly difficult for those on various parts of the globe to make it! But, if you have Skype or something similar, I can beam you in via video conference, so just let me know, and I will arrange for this.

I will be heading to the National Institute of Health in Brian Oliver's lab for post-doc work and will start there on 1 September 07. I am really excited about this position!

Cannot thank you enough for helping me so much and hope that some of you might be able to make it, if not in person than at least in video!

Hope all has been well and take care.  
John



## VOLUNTEER INTERN

*by Sharon Hanzik*

Please join me in welcoming **Mallory Curl**, who will be assisting us this summer. She will be with us approximately 14 weeks. She will be spending most of her time with the interpretive staff and may also spend some time assisting the Headquarters staff. Mallory is earning a Bachelors of Science Degree in Recreation Management and Youth Leadership from Brigham Young University. She is a native of Brazoria where she currently resides. She has previous experience as a naturalist intern, secretary/hostess, snowboard instructor and deckhand. Her experience includes creating and implementing a program for elementary students visiting on field trips and presenting live animal programs to groups of various ages. Her interests include coordinating events and activities and ensuring for the safety and happiness of visitors.

## LEGISLATION PASSED!

*by David Heinicke*

*Below are details about how we fared with the legislature. All in all we did great! I would like to thank all of you all who contacted your local representatives and other politicians and helped make this possible. Of course all eyes will be on TPWD to insure that we spend the additional money wisely! Thanks again for all your help, hard work and dedication!!!!*

## LEGISLATURE APPROVES ADDITIONAL PARK FUNDING

Thanks to support from House Speaker Tom Craddick, Lt. Governor David Dewhurst, and key committee chairs in both the House and Senate, the 80th Texas legislature has approved HB 12. The bill has passed the House and Senate and is headed to the desk of Gov. Rick Perry, who now has final authority to sign it into law. HB 12 was championed by its author Rep. Harvey Hilderbran, who chairs the House Culture, Recreation and Tourism Committee which oversees TPWD affairs in the House, and sponsored by Sen. Craig Estes on the Senate side. Also instrumental in supporting TPWD in the closing days of the session were Senate Finance Committee Chairman Steve Ogden, House Appropriations Committee Chairman Warren Chisum, Senate Natural Resources Committee Chairman Kip Averitt, Rep. Carl Isett and many other legislators.

"All Texans owe a debt of thanks to our state elected leaders," said Joseph Fitzsimons, TPW Commission chairman. "Because of the unwavering support of Gov. Perry and our friends in the Texas Legislature, we are on the road to fulfilling a vision of great parks for a great state."

If HB 12 is signed by the governor, it and several related provisions in HB 1, the appropriations bill, will provide approximately \$182 million in additional funding for state and local parks in the 2008-2009 biennium. This additional funding includes:

- \$25.6 million to operate state parks, including 229 additional FTE positions
- \$8 million for state park minor repairs
- \$9.7 million for state park capital equipment, such as vehicles and computers
- \$3 million in additional support for state parks, including new architects and estimators in TPWD's Infrastructure Division to fulfill recommendations of the recent SAO state park audit.
- \$44 million for major repairs to TPWD sites. This bond package includes the necessary appropriation funding to support bond debt service for FY08-09. Of the total, \$17 million is Proposition 8 bond funding approved by Texas voters in 2001, and \$27 million is a new bond issue that must first be approved by voters this coming November.
- \$13.9 million in land acquisition funding. This includes \$9.6 million from the sale of the undeveloped Eagle Mountain Lake State Park property near Fort Worth. It also includes \$4.3 million for acquisition of inholdings and properties adjacent to existing state parks.
- \$36.3 million for local park grants to cities and counties. This restores full funding for local park grants to cities and counties to \$15.5 million per year, plus the appropriations bill allocated an additional \$16.7 million for specific park projects.
- \$16 million in appropriation authority if TPWD implements SAO state park audit recommendations. This essentially allows the department to spend revenue it brings in above projected estimates from sources like state park entrance and camping fees.
- \$25.1 million in a new bond issue to fund dry berthing and repairs for the Battleship TEXAS in La Porte, bonds which must first be approved by voters this coming November.

HB 12 transfers 18 state historic sites from TPWD to the Texas Historical Commission, and it earmarks 6 percent of state sales tax attributable to sporting goods to the THC. The bill also sets up a legislative task force to study sporting goods tax funding and make recommendations for the next session.

As HB 12 neared passage in conference committee last week, a number of other bills that affect TPWD were attached to it and are now all headed to the governor's desk for consideration as part of HB 12. These include HB 1309, relating to possession or transportation of certain snakes that are not indigenous to this country; HB 2001, relating to a program to control or eradicate nuisance aquatic vegetation; HB 2414, relating to hunting from public roads or rights-of-way; HB 3765, relating to the taking or unloading of fish in this state; SB 775, relating to an interim study concerning this state's hunting and fishing license systems; SB 1172 relating to the disposition of income at Palo Duro Canyon State Park; and SB 997, relating to the regulation of commercially operated party boats on public water of this state.

In related park funding action, SB 1659 passed, a bill relating to the transfer of the Texas State Railroad. SB 1659 will transfer railroad operations to a new railroad authority. The appropriations bill provides \$2 million to serve as a match for a \$10 million federal grant through the Texas Department of Transportation for railroad capital repairs and improvements.

## CREEKFIELD REMINDER



**Creekfield Hikes** will move up one hour to **10:00** during the heat of the summer. They move back to 11:00 after September. It is already listed this way on the web calender.



- ☺ to **all the guys** who come out on Tuesday and Thursday and work on our projects, whatever they are and no matter what the weather, a great big Thank You. from *Bryan Leach*
- ☺ to **Carol Ramsayer** for organizing the field trip to the HMNS frog exhibit, and to **Sharon, Susie** and **Barbara** for passes
- ☺ Thank you to all for Earth Day! After Earth Day on Sunday, **Susie Gann** and her husband tied 60 cords of wood, which is beyond the call of duty. **Noel Duncan** got 80 bundles of wood out for use. from *Ken Debenport*
- ☺ Many thanks to **Beth Debenport** and **Judy Strauss** for the meeting dinners for April and May
- ☺ To **Judy Strauss, Carol Ramsayer, Willie Anderson, Teresa Jones, Jerry Zona** and **Anita** and **Gene Mitey** (camp hosts) for recent outreach activities.
- ☺ to **James** and **Joyce Blankenship** for donation of a printer for the Gift shop.
- ☺ to **Jim Calvert, Suzanne Coats, Gerald Forest, Nelda Gay, Virginia Harrison, Johnny Hite, Staci Hobbett, Rich Jespersen, Sandy Jespersen, Don Johnson, Teresa Jones, Carolyn May-Monie, Ron Morrison, Tom Prentiss, Carol Ramsayer, Tracie Teague,** and **Anna Dell Williamson** for helping lead school group hikes
- ☺ to **Al Childs, Rick Dashnau, Sharon Hanzik, David Heinicke, Johnny Hite, Mandy Hite, Dennis Jones, Bryan Leach, Nicole Olson, Laszlo Perlaky,** and **Jerry Zona** for NL articles and pictures
- ☺ to **Teresa Jones** for making “Gator-wise” buttons
- ☺ to **Bryan Leach** for putting up the bulletin boards in the Nature Center display cases
- ☺ to **all of you** all who contacted your local representatives and other politicians regarding HB 12, and helped make passage of this bill possible

## MAY MAINTENANCE REPORT

by *Bryan Leach*

### Wood Yard:

Tied wood and delivered tied wood to the wood racks in both camping loops

### Mowing and Landscaping:

Used a weed eater around the windmill at the Nature Center, around the trees at Hale Lake Point, and around the Orienteering post

Mowed the Hale Lake Point and the Mouse Trap

Cut off 24 stumps and did some trimming at the windmill area on the River View Trail

Used the DR Trimmer around the pond on the River View Trail

Planted some Mexican Milkweed plants in the beds at the Nature Center

Worked in the flower beds at the Nature Center on 2 different occasions

### Trail Trimming and Trail Maintenance:

Cut up downed trees across the Creekfield Forest Trail and the Red Buckeye Trail

Removed a precarious leaning tree on the Red Buckeye Trail

Did some trail trimming on the Red Buckeye Trail

Removed a huge Oak limb and debris off the Hoots Hollow Trail

### Equipment Maintenance:

Changed the engine oil and filter on the K2 Kubota.

Changed the engine oil and greased the 06 Gator and the 07 Gator

Replaced the fuel gauge in the 06 Gator

### General Maintenance:

Hauled 4 Kubota loads of fill to the unused culvert at the Nature Center parking lot  
Used the tractor and box blade to level out 12 loads of trail topping hauled to the Elm Lake Trail by the park staff  
Painted the curbing in the Nature Center parking lot  
Striped the No Parking Zone in the Nature Center parking lot  
Removed the broken up concrete tank and the 3 trees that were growing inside it at the windmill area on the River View Trail

### New Projects

Started building a cover over Pier #7 at Elm Lake

## TURTLES AND ALLIGATORS

*(Ed. Note: This article is a combination of a description of an event, and reactions to a couple of photos. Thanks to **Bryan Leach**, **Jerry Zona**, **Jeff McMillan** and **Rick Dashnau** for sharing the pictures and thoughts with us.)*



**“This is a hardy turtle”** (photo left)  
**Bryan Leach**  
April 24, 2007

A **Red Eared Slider Turtle**, who was chewed on by a alligator. I felt inside the wounds, and it was hard; he must have been injured a while back,  
**Jerry Zona** (photo right)  
April 18, 2007



**Jeff McMillan**” I'll say!! I read an interesting study one time that presented data showing that red-eared sliders under heavy alligator predation were "thicker". The ones without alligators to deal with were notably flatter. The conclusion was that flat shells made it easier to get around to catch prey, but a rounder cross section was more resistant to an alligator's crushing bite. I wonder if the conclusion should have been a flat turtle in a fat shell can survive an alligator bite?

**Rick:** You bet! Is the date stamp on the picture correct? (Photo left) It was shot yesterday? So that turtle is still around? How cool! Where was the turtle when the picture was taken? I think it's pretty unlikely that another turtle is swimming around with gaping holes like that, so I probably saw the same turtle on March 11 and March 26, 27. I really didn't think it would make it. That's excellent! That's almost a month later and it's still around.

Also, can anyone actually identify what kind of turtle it is? (Photo left) I don't think it has enough lines or colors on its head (and no red ears) to be a red-eared slider. Maybe one of the cooters?

**Here's a story about a another turtle's lucky day.** The pictures and video clips are currently on my web page here: <http://67.15.110.101/mycam.html>, and here's the text version:



April 23, 2007---This drama took about 45 minutes to unfold. I discovered this turtle (probably one of the "cooters", possibly a Florida cooter *Chrysemys f. floridana*) excavating a nest on the Spillway trail. I thought it would be a good opportunity to film. After a few minutes of watching, I decided to move a bit closer to find a better camera position. As I did, I happened to look down at the water's edge, and straight into the eyes of a stalking alligator!

The turtle urinates on the ground to soften it for digging. It is during trips back and forth to the water for "refills" that the turtle is vulnerable. The alligator was about 20 feet away, and below me. The raised head, the body out of the water, and its alert appearance told me that it was probably stalking the turtle--as unlikely as that sounds. I'd heard that alligators would lie in wait for the nesting turtles and pick them off as they'd return to the water from a park visitor a couple years ago. It appeared that I'd blundered into such a situation.

I decided to back off and see what happened. I moved my camera back, to where I thought I'd be out of the alligator's perceived threat range. After a few minutes, the alligator backed into the water, but stayed in position. The turtle continued working. After a few minutes more, the alligator climbed ashore, and began to climb the bank. Although it moved slowly, it did NOT move silently. It made a large amount of racket, crackling branches and brush. I've mentioned before that I thought alligators move quietly on land. They do, sometimes. Not this time.

When it was within the growth, the alligator stopped to rest for a few minutes. The turtle kept working. The alligator moved a bit more, climbing, and stopped to rest for a few more minutes. The turtle kept working. The alligator moved again, and finally pushed through the weeds at the edge of the trail. There was a LOT of noise. Not quite the stealthy movement of a stalking hunter. However, turtles don't have ears. So, the turtle kept working. The alligator moved forward, rested, and then grabbed for the turtle, which--finally aware of the alligator--moved out of the alligator's jaws! But only for a few steps, whereupon both reptiles stopped and eyed each other at touching distance.

What was going on here? Were they both resting? Were they, in their reptilian way, trying to determine the next course of action? Imagine the nightmare of watching something that wanted to eat you gathering the energy to do so while YOU were trying to gather the energy to escape-- if that is what was happening. The alligator tried again, and missed while the turtle slipped out of its jaws. The alligator actually tried for a total of 5 times. Each time, the turtle moved just enough to avoid being grabbed. During one rest period, a couple of humans on bicycles passed by, but neither reptile seemed to notice them.

While reviewing the video, I noticed an odd sideways tilting of the turtle's shell towards the alligator's jaws. I couldn't tell if the gator's lower jaw was pushing the shell down and tilting it, or if the turtle was pushing up with the legs on the opposite side. It seemed to prevent the alligator from getting its bottom jaw under the turtle's shell so it could pick up the turtle. The alligator rested from 2 to 5 minutes between each attempt--while the turtle stayed right there near it. Perhaps it's possible that this is a defensive strategy against the alligator's response to movement.

After one more try, the alligator---GAVE UP! One of the park Kubotas was on the end of the trail, by the water station, at least 100 yards away. I don't think it drove the alligator off. The alligator walked back down to the water's edge, while the turtle watched it leave. When the Kabota approached, the turtle quickly crossed to the other side of the trail (away from the alligator and across the path of the approaching large vehicle) and entered the water there. If this is because the alligator entered the closest water to the turtle, then perhaps turtles are more aware than we realize.

The alligator stayed near the area, and even bellowed some time later. The images and video clips on the web site show this next exchange. How did the alligator know the turtle was up there? It couldn't see it, even though it could have seen it leave the water. If so, then how did it go through all the plants and come out directly behind the turtle? I believe that the cloudy skies, which prevented the sun from showing much at all, is what saved the turtle. Although it wasn't cold, the alligator wasn't warmed up enough for vigorous movement.

This is the second time I've seen an alligator's unsuccessful attempt at attacking a turtle. I learned a few things from this. First, a hungry alligator will move some distance from the water if it perceives a possible meal. Second, once out of the water, an alligator is not nearly as efficient a hunter as it is in the water. I suspect if the alligator was warmer, the turtle might not have made out so well. It also seems strange the turtle moved around the alligator's head, instead of just moving straight away from it. Wouldn't YOU?

I tentatively identified the turtle as a "Cooter" because my field guide to reptiles says that these turtles have a marking that resembles a small "c" on the top edge of the second scute of the carapace. My identification is tentative at best.

# BROWN LEGGED GRASS CARRIER WASP

by Glen Kilgore

## *Isodentia auripas*

This is one of the less well known species of wasps found at Brazos Bend State Park, and it is frequently ignored, largely because of its resemblance to the Blue Mud Dauber (*Chalyion Californicum*). It differs most obviously in having brown legs, and does not have the blue iridescence (except under flash photography) of the mud dauber.

The Brown Legged Grass Carrier is a solitary wasp. It makes its nest in a natural cavity such as a hollow twig or an abandoned carpenter bee tunnel. The female provisions her nest with crickets, which she stings to paralyze them. She lays her eggs in the cavity and seals it off by plugging it with grass, which she carries to the nest. Hence the name grass carrier.

On May 12, I observed two grass carriers preparing their nests in the 40-Acre Lake fish cleaning station. The wood of the fish cleaning station was riddled with the holes of the Carpenter bee (*Xylocopa*), and there were what seemed to be thousands of these large bees buzzing about, fighting over mates and tunnels. Both grass carriers were finishing up nests in abandoned tunnels. One was stuffing grass into her tunnel, while the other had brought up a large clump of Spanish Moss and was working it into hers. I got several pictures of these insects at work.

When I returned several hours later, I expected to find grass and moss sticking out of the holes, but there was none. Apparently the tunnels were so deep that none of the plugging material protruded out. David mentioned, however, that he has seen grass and moss protruding from Carpenter bee holes, so this isn't always the case.



Brown-legged grass carrier, BBSP, Glen Kilgore, May 12, 2007



## PRAIRIE VIEW, MAY, 2007

by Al Childs

Hello, prairie enthusiasts and volunteers

Some of you as new volunteers to the BBSPVO may have heard my talk about the early history of prairies, how they began, and the eventual formation of three distinct types of prairies. They are the short-grass prairie, mix-grass prairie, and tall-grass prairie. Each is uniquely different in its own way. We use the word prairie to describe any predominate treeless grassy plain. Definitions such as "any land where grass or grasslike vegetation grows and is the dominant form of plant life", or "an extensive area of flat or rolling, predominantly treeless grassland, especially the large tract or plain of central North America", are hardly adequate when talking about the many different types of prairies and their biodiversity of plant and animal life. But those definitions do provide a starting point from which we can build a short essay to describe each in a little more detail and perhaps generate a better understanding of where they came from and why they are so important to preserve. With your permission, I would like to begin this discussion with a short narrative of the shortgrass prairie.



Example of a High Plains short-grass prairie in Crowley County, Colorado with mixed Blue Grama and Buffalo Grass.

Formed by extreme forces of nature over millions of years the **Great Prairie** stretched from Saskatchewan, Canada in the north to Central Texas in the south and from the Rockies in the west to Indiana in the east. In this vast area, covering approximately 1.4 million square miles, the **short-grass prairie** lies as a vertical belt nestled in the shadow of the Rockies. Also known as the Great Plains or High Plains, its most significant feature is the small amount of precipitation it receives. Average rainfall can be as little as 10 inches with most of the precipitation occurring during the growing season, May through July. This arid condition is due primarily to the Rockies blocking almost all of the moist Pacific air. What little moisture falls is quickly absorbed, and the vegetation goes into a dormant state during the summer. Other environmental conditions such as high velocity winds and frequent hail storms keep plant species constantly battling for dominance within a given community. It has been described as grazing disclimax of the mixed-grass prairie or a true climax short-grass prairie.

The short-grass prairie derives its name from two dominant grasses, which are **Blue Grama** and **Buffalo Grass**. **Blue Grama** may grow between six to twenty inches and is easily recognized by delicate arched flower stalks with flowers lined up along one side; wiry and sometimes curled tufts (many stems growing in clusters which are attached at the base and free at the ends) of blue-green arched flower stalks with flowers lined up along one side; wiry often curled tufts of blue-green basal leaves. **Buffalo Grass** on the other hand is a much shorter plant with above-ground stems and can grow as much as an inch or two a day and therefore it can easily colonize a bare site. **Short-grass prairie animals** include the **prairie dog** and **pronghorn** which depend on wide open spaces in order to see predators at a great distance. **Burrowing owls** hatch and raise their young in the burrows of prairie dog towns. They eat the young prairie dogs while prairie dogs eat burrowing owl eggs. This is a natural dependency between both species. **Rattlesnakes** also frequent prairie dog towns, sometimes eating young prairie dogs. And of course let's not forget the bison which preferred these sites for feeding and wallowing.



**Blue Grama, viewed by many range scientist as the single most important range plant in North America from the standpoint of its wide geographic distribution, dominance of total land area, impact on range ecosystems within its range, and forage contribution to range animal diets.**



**Buffalo grass is a dominate species of the Short-grass prairies.**



**Close-up of staminate inflorescence of Buffalo grass**

Speaking of **bison**, the short-grass prairie co-evolved with grazing due primarily to large populations of bison. It is estimated that in the late 1800's the Great Plains contained 60 to 70 million buffalo which were reduced to approximately 16 million by 1870. This was due to intense hunting by Europeans. The impact of grazing is evident through the morphological, physiological, and chemical characteristics of the grasses. The bison were critical in maintaining the short-grass prairie. There has also been a dramatic decline in prairie dog population of about 99%. This reduction is also due primarily to the Europeans. Other factors include conversions to croplands, habitat fragmentation, oil and gas extraction, and urbanization. Today the short-grass prairie is mostly used for domestic livestock grazing and agriculture (approximately 60%). The rest is used for dryland and irrigated farming. When considering livestock grazing, the short-grass prairie is the third most important rangeland community.

This has been a very brief discussion about short-grass prairies, but one in which I hope you have learned a little more about the world around us, especially the prairies, and realize why we must do what we can to protect and preserve what we have left. You can help us to do that by participating in our monthly prairie transect surveys. They take about an hour or so to complete and the data we collect will tell us so much about what we have right here at Brazos Bend State Park, and what we can do to restore it. In June we will meet on the 17<sup>th</sup> at the 40-Acre parking lot at 9:00am. From there, we will walk to Prairie #3. If you can make it, please join us in supporting a very important research effort. Until next month, take care.

## THE NOT DEAD ALLIGATOR

by Dennis Jones

Quite a few years ago, some volunteers came to me at the state park to tell me there was a dead alligator in Creekfield Lake. I was in my ornery mood and my reply was, "Are you sure? If it doesn't have flies buzzing around it and it doesn't stink, it's not dead." Soon the volunteers were back assuring me it was indeed dead. I decided to see for myself at this point for two reasons. If it was indeed dead I wanted to get his bones, and secondly, this is the only way the volunteers would be satisfied.

It was late February about midday when our entourage arrived at Creekfield. On the northern end of the lake was the body of a very large alligator. His head could not be seen as it was below the water. He also appeared to be rolled over on his side, and his forearm was pointing into the air as if he had *rigor mortis*. The volunteers were right: he sure looked dead, and in that case I had to have his bones.

I retrieved my chest waders and after a while I was ready to enter the water and recover my prize. The water was cold, and the water began to get deeper and deeper as I pushed the floating vegetation out of my path. It closed in behind me as quickly as I pressed forward. Before I actually got to the animal, I broke a dead branch from a nearby tree to take along with me. Not for defense but rather to poke the alligator with before I put my hands on it. At arm's length plus the 3 foot twig I gently poked the alligator.

Time seemed to slow down when I poked the alligator's side a second time. It pushed in. "If it was dead, that shouldn't have happened," I thought. Maybe its not dea..." It was at that moment that the alligator woke from its slumber. Like a rocket. Its entire body leaped into the air before it dove beneath the water.

Ever ready and poised, I proceeded to fall on my behind and fill my chest waders with cold water. The back stroke seemed in order as I reversed my course away from the last known whereabouts of the big alligator. Trusty Park volunteer Donnie Albertie tossed the rope that I had intended to use to haul my catch to shore and instead hauled me to shore in record time. It seemed as if I was skimming across the water as they reeled me in.

I have been around a lot of alligators and been in the water with some, and I will tell you it can't help but cross your mind that you might become part of a food chain when you are in the water with them. I know it crossed mine for a moment that day. When I got ashore, I felt as if my eyes were twice their size, either from fear or cold water or a combination of the two; I am sure it was the cold water. The alligator had disappeared and wasn't seen again for quite a long time. I wonder who frightened whom? I reiterated my mantra about odor and flies to the volunteers, having graphically demonstrated its validity, but I am not sure anyone really cared at that point.

Just another day at the office. dj

**P.S.** - Several years later I met the alligator again. He was dying. His right forearm had been broken and had mended in an awkward position, probably the result from a fight with another alligator. That's what had given him that deathlike appearance in the water several years before. I suspect he was ill when we had our encounter, but at this point he was literally skin and bones. He was over eleven feet long when he died. Never did get his bones but that's another story. dj

# RACCOONS DON'T NEED SPOONS

by Sharon Hanzik

Raccoons don't need spoons or knives or forks.  
They have their own tools, they have what works.

Two little hands like yours and mine  
Hold on to their food whenever they dine.

They'll eat crayfish, minnows, even frogs  
Or worms they find while digging in logs.

No matter the place, no matter the meal  
They can hold on, they can even peel!

Campers beware! Lock away your food.  
These masked bandits will rob you good!

Zippers and snaps won't hold them back.  
They are always ready for a sneak attack!

Able, smart, their learning is quick.  
They share with each other every new trick.

If you feed them, there will be regret.  
No wild animal makes a good pet!

Never invite them into your home.  
They belong in the wild, free to roam.

Raccoons don't need spoons or forks or knives.  
They have everything they need for their clever little lives.

## TEN FACTS ABOUT RACCOONS

1. Raccoons are mammals – this means they have hair or fur, are warm-blooded, give live birth to their young and the mother nurses the young with her milk.
2. Raccoons live in Mexico, Canada and all of the United States except Alaska and Hawaii.
3. They are found in almost any place where there are streams, lakes, ponds and rivers.
4. They are omnivorous – which means they eat many different types of food: fruits, nuts, grains, insects, frogs, crayfish, bird eggs – anything that is available.
5. May dunk their food in water before they eat. (Scientists are still studying this curious habit.)
6. Raccoons have five toes on each foot. Their forepaws are just like little hands!
7. Raccoons usually have dens in hollow trees, logs, rock crevices or ground burrows where it gets very cold.
8. Baby raccoons are born during the months of April and May.
9. Raccoons may live as long as 16 years but most live about 2 to 5 years.
10. Two relatives of the raccoon are the coati and the ringtail.

*Peterson Field Guides – Mammals*  
William H. Burt/Richard P. Grossenheider



## Brazos Bend State Park

Texas Parks and Wildlife  
21901 FM 762  
Needville TX 77461

**FIRST CLASS MAIL**

→ **NEXT MEETING DAY AND TIME** ←  
**SATURDAY, JUNE 9, 2007, 5:30 PM**

☆☆☆☆☆☆



### REGULAR VOLUNTEER EVENTS

Creekfield Hikes	Every Saturday and Sunday at 11:00 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

### BRAZOS BEND STATE PARK VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION

#### VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION OFFICERS

President:	Bruce Williamson
Vice-President:	Anna Dell Williamson
Secretary:	Nicole Olson
Treasurer:	Chuck Duplant

#### NEWSLETTER TEAM

Editor	Anna Dell Williamson
Production Assistants	Bruce Williamson Terry Williamson

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@houston.rr.com](mailto:awilliamson4@houston.rr.com)). Notify Anna Dell (281-485-2843) well in advance of any events you want announced in the newsletter.

#### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

June 5	Weekday work crew, NC, 8:15 AM
June 7	Weekday work crew, NC, 8:15 AM
June 9	Regular meeting, 5:30 PM
June 12	Weekday work crew, NC, 8:15 AM
June 14	Weekday work crew, NC, 8:15 AM
June 19	Weekday work crew, NC, 8:15 AM
June 21	Weekday work crew, NC, 8:15 AM
July 7	Photo-walk, Close-up #2, 5 PM
July 14	Regular Meeting, 5:30 PM