



BRAZOS BEND BUNCH BUGLE

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T'WAS THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS AT BRAZOS BEND

By David Heinicke

T'was the night before Christmas at Brazos Bend Park,
all the creatures were stirring, soon after dark.
The Gators were nestled, all snug in their dens,
to avoid foul weather and December's cold winds,
With the fire getting low and just about out,
I slid into my bag, and quickly passed out.
When up from the creek there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from my tent to see what was the matter.



Off toward the creek, I started to hike,
Through the bushes and briars and brambles like.
By the light of the moon, I could see where to go,
It lit up an object, in the creek down below.
I saw what it was with a lump in my throat,
It was eight alligators, pulling a flat bottom boat,
With a jolly fat man in red overalls,
I knew in an instant it was old Santa Claus.

More rapid than otters, his gators they came,
And he whistled and hollered and called them by name,
"Now Stimpie, Now Stumpie, Now Bumpie, and Cruiser,
On Tanker, On Tonka, On Bonker, and Bruiser,
To the edge of the creek and on up the draw,
Pull it up, Pull it up, Pull it up, Ye Haw!!".
So up to the campsite, making all sorts of noise,
Came old Santa Claus, with a boat full of toys.





He was dressed all in red, with a big cowboy hat,
 And mud on his pants that had splattered and splat,
 The beard on his chin was as white as a goose,
 And his tummy so fat, t'was bout to bust loose.
 He set out the toys by the light of the moon,
 Why, I think he even had toys for the coons,
 He put out some toys in each campsite,
 Then off to the next one, in the dark of night.

He finished most quickly, all 90 campsites,
 By the time he returned, his bag was quite light.
 He jumped in his boat and called to his gators,
 Smiled back at me and yelled, "See ya'll later,
 I've got a busy night, with many stops to make,
 So I better keep moving, cross river and lake",
 But I heard him holler as he floated away,
 "Merry Christmas to all, and enjoy your stay".



40-Acre Lake, Brazos Bend S.P.
 October 18, 2010
 Matthew Sabo, Flagstaff AZ

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK



The year-end holiday season is now behind us. I hope you enjoyed the time with family, friends, and the wonderful food that is more than abundant during this season. Please take some time to think about past events, make plans the year ahead, and give thanks for where we are in life. In your thoughts on the future, please include programs and projects for Brazos Bend State Park.

BBSP Simple Christmas was December 4 from 3:00 PM to 7:00 PM. The weather could not have been better, and attendance was high. Our visitors enjoyed the activities and refreshments, and we all had fun interfacing with the visitors. The hay ride was filled each trip including the last one at 6:00 PM. One of the last activities was live music by The Brazos Bend Pickers. If you have not taken the time to hear this group you need to put it on your calendar.

There is an engineering drawing of the Elm Lake viewing platform at the Nature Center. Please take time to look at the drawing. A bid package was issued to contractors in December with a pre-bid meeting on December 17. There were 9 potential contractors present for the meeting. The bids are due January 13, 2010.

Our next meeting will be January 8, 2011. If you have a project in mind please give the Executive Committee information prior to the general meeting. We look forward to your participation.

Offie Walker

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NOVEMBER MEETING NOTES

Offie Walker called the General Meeting to order on November 13, 2010. There were 12 members, 6 VITs, and 4 staff members present. The minutes were approved as posted. Staff members brought their reports, which are published elsewhere in the newsletter.

Budget report: Treasurer Dave Armstrong brought the Budget report and presented the income and expenses statements. He also presented an analysis of the CD types and interest rates we will get on renewal. We decided to renew all three at 9 months risk free and add funds to the Building Account CD.

The following **budget requests** were presented to the membership and approved:

1. A refrigerator for the Gift Shop for drinks. This is a free-standing display unit, like the one at Headquarters. It is larger and more reliable than our current one. The drinks will be more visible, which should increase sales. Funding is out of the General Fund.
2. Granite gravel to spread around the Nature Center, out of the general budget.
3. Funds for ATV repairs, to purchase 4 tires for the red mule and Kubota. Funds will come out of General Budget, Kubota supplies and maintenance.
4. Herbicides for prairie management out of Chemicals Fund, to control native and exotic trees on coastal tall grass prairie system
5. 800 pounds of catchable rainbow trout, to support the Family Fishing Event on January 15. The funds would come out of the Superintendent's Fund. The request meets the mission of the Department to provide recreation. They will be caught within 2 weeks. The funds will be matched by Inland Fisheries.

Committee Reports:

Outreach: Judy Strauss reported we had a good **Texian Market Days**, with almost 2000 kids on Friday, and 1558 general public visitors on Saturday. For **Prairie Heritage Day**, we were going to have a booth outside, but decided to bring everything inside. We will need more help from volunteers to do Outreach events. If we don't have enough help, we can't take out the animals, and there is not as much interest in our booth. Participation counts toward volunteer hours, but not toward quarterly required hours. Upcoming events include the Sea Center in March; a new event, Pride Day, is coming up in Sweeney on May 7.

Gift Shop: Beth Debenport appreciates the new refrigerator for the Gift Shop. It will help us advertise our cold drinks. We will need to remodel the Gift Shop a bit to make it fit.

Wood Sales: Chuck Duplant reported that we sold 170 bundles of wood in September and 720 bundles in October. We need more people to bundle. The bundles need to be tied tightly and of the right size. We have received 4 cords and need to order 4 more. We are setting more records every day.

Building Committee: Chuck Duplant reported that the district managers did not get to our request yet. Justin Rhodes sent it to Region, and it needs to go to Infrastructure. Everything about the project is looking positive. We need to come up with simple ways to generate more money. We will be working on several ideas during the next month. The Building Committee meets at 1:00 on meeting Saturdays. All meetings are open to the general membership.

Volunteer shirts: Cindy Peterson will order volunteer t-shirts and/or sweatshirts when she has 12 orders.

Carrie Sample read a letter from **Justin Rhodes** for the presentation of the viewing platform check. He sends thanks to the Volunteer Organization for such great park support.

Old Business: The new maps that were funded by the Volunteer Organization have been printed and were shown at the meeting.

New Business: Carrie Sample pointed out the mold in the ceiling of the classroom. We need to repair the roof in the Nature Center. This will be brought up with Steve.

Offie Walker thanked **Cindy Peterson and Linda Keltner** for the supper tonight.

Jim Calvert and the **Tuesday/Thursday Maintenance Crew** are working hard to build pecan log benches for the park. They have been planing, coating and sealing the logs.

Sharon Hanzik presented a cap and patch to **Mike Manley**, who is the first VIT from the September class to complete training. The meeting was adjourned.

DECEMBER MEETING NOTES

President Offie Walker called the meeting to order on December 11, 2010. There were 14 volunteers, 1 VIT and 2 staff present. The minutes of the November meeting were approved as posted. Thanks to **Chuck Duplant** and **Mary Lockwood** for the dinner tonight.

REPORTS:

Dave Armstrong brought the Treasurer's reports. See financial records on file. The Financial Report was accepted. **Rachelle Watson** was reappointed as Comptroller for the next year.

The following **budget requests** were made and approved.

1. New electrical box on the outside of the shed in the wood yard, and clearance of the wall where the old ones are.
2. "Crocodilians of the world" exhibit panel, from the Ken Debenport Memorial Fund
3. Trees for the Creekfield Forest Nature Trail.
4. Printing and binding of information booklets for the new BBEEC to be presented to TPWD leadership and Infrastructure in January.

Chuck Duplant reported on the woodyard. Sales were good, although we had some theft early in the month. We ended the month at about 89% sales. There will be major changes when we switch to pre-bundled wood. We will add a kiosk at overflow to sell wood we bundle.

Beth Debenport brought the Gift Shop report. We will be doing inventory Tuesday and Wednesday of the hunt week. We are starting to rearrange things in anticipation of the changes when we get the new refrigerator. With the new refrigerator, we may carry a bigger variety of beverages, including Coke products. The Coke machines outside are for visitors' convenience when the shops are not open. We will not be competing with the park.

Offie Walker announced that **Marty Gay** has resigned as webmaster after 12 years. The Executive Committee appointed **Anne Shelton** as webmaster, and **Pam Tatge** as assistant webmaster.

Chuck and **David** reported on the **new Nature Center**: Austin Headquarters has invited the volunteers to present the BBEEC plans to Infrastructure, to give them an understanding of what we want and how we will meet park needs. Regional and State people will be there. In the past we put together a booklet on the project, which we will revise for this presentation. It will include location, needs, expectations, justification for the building, growth of visitation, fund raising, endowment fund, programs, money put into existing Nature Center as maintenance, upkeep, exhibits, sizes of rooms, design features, our goals, and future expansion of visitation. The State is inviting us to make this presentation. Now we have to work hard to find donors to finance the project. There is a lot of work ahead of us, and it will take a long time. The meeting was adjourned.

STAFF REPORTS, NOVEMBER

STEVE KILLIAN

Steve Killian reported that this October was the best ever, in terms of revenue and visitation. We have had visitors from all over world, including Norway, France, and Houston.

TxDot completed work down the hill. The major erosion on the campground road, both sides, is now stable.

Recent publicity for BBSP:

1. The **Discovery Channel** is creating a new series at the park and filmed a segment of the series here in October. David Heinicke and Steve appear in some segments. It will probably air in **April, 2011**. The cameramen were impressed with the beauty of the park and its proximity to Houston.
2. **Fox 26** is doing a segment on park finances. Their focus is on the renovations to the park. The 100 Loop restroom should open mid-November and the 200 Loop should open toward the end of November. The HQ restroom is still closed.
3. There is an outstanding article in the *Sugarland Magazine*. **Chris Bishop** is featured in the article, and a copy is available at the front desk. **Sharon Hanzik** was featured on the front of the *Ft. Bend Chronicle*.

The **Deer hunt** begins on Tuesday, and the park will be closed Tuesday, Wednesday, and half day Thurs, reopening at noon. To manage the deer herd, we need to remove about 50-60 deer and 25-30 feral hogs.

There have been a lot of improvements in park building appearance. The Dining Hall and all shelters have been repainted, and there is a new floor in the Dining Hall. There are plans to repaint all the park buildings in a brown color. We are using volunteer money, park host time and staff hours. Staff alone couldn't have done it.

The annual managers' meeting was held at BBSP in October, and they were impressed with how clean and beautiful the park is. Thanks for the volunteer help to maintain the standard.

Jeff Woolsey and the Dancehall Kings will perform at the amphitheater tonight, 6:30 - 9:00. Host Dave will be on the guitar for this group, which is coming out for this one special event.

SHARON HANZIG

Sharon reported that we have had good publicity coverage in October. **Volunteer recruitment** is going slow. There are recruitment announcements for volunteers to put out in public places. At present we have six interested and some to be interviewed.

Thanksgiving week we plan to have the Nature Center open full hours every day. 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM is OK but it is the minimum. The park will be open Thanksgiving Day, but the Nature Center will be closed. The same is true Christmas Day.

Simple Christmas is scheduled Dec.4. This popular event has no major changes. We will issue hayride tickets as last year and add Victorian era games.

Emeritus status was granted to Bruce Williamson (21 years) and Bob Haynes (5 years). Welcome to VITs **Paige O'Neal, Debbie and Kent Fewell, Mike Manley, Sammie Miller, and Linda Keltner**, who all are attending this evening.

The **Customer Service Award** was given to **Cindy Peterson**, who was unable to attend the Annual Volunteer Picnic awards ceremony.

DAVID HEINICKE

The **Annual Christmas Bird Count** will be December 18. **Bill Godley** and **Justin Bower** are co-counters for the event, which takes place from 6:30 AM until dark, and is followed by a BBQ dinner.

David has drafted a two-foot by three-foot sign on the **history of sundials**, and how it works. Construction of the sign will be paid for by Regional Office, and the sign will be mounted by the sundial.

He has also designed a sign about **crocodilians of the world**, with funding from the **Ken Debenport Memorial Fund**. It is five feet by eleven feet and will hang behind the skeleton display in the Nature Center.

Volunteers are encouraged to get out on the trails on a gator to watch people and pick up litter.

STAFF REPORTS, DECEMBER

TED STEVENS

Ted has been in Firefighter Training School this past week, and came back to the park to see lots of visitors today. There is a large group of youth here today, and this is our chance to reach them.

In the Deer Hunt in November, 50 deer were taken. Seven were bucks with 13" or better spread. The next hunt will be December 14-16.

Park administrators had selected a Water Plant Ranger, but then TPWD went under a hiring freeze, so the position has been posted as an internal position. Hopefully it will be filled soon.

Texas Outdoor Family Event was held last weekend with 14 families participating. The fire ban was lifted in time, and volunteers helped with nature hikes, geocaching and fishing.

Texas Outside.com certifies the top 25 Texas parks, which includes state, county, city, and other parks. BBSP was in the top 10, and was the top on the list of state parks. This is possible only with tremendous help from volunteers.

We have had a major sewage issue in the past month. Pipes from the woodyard to the Nature Center were completely blocked. Staff dug up sewer lines and worked late nights to get the problems fixed for weekends. Kudos to the ranger staff.

We will be hosting a Student Conservation project for trail building. College-aged kids will participate in this project. We are also working on a program with Americorps, to get 10-15 college aged workers for two months in the summer of 2011. They will be housed in the dining hall and participate in various projects, like regular rangers.

Chris Bishop graduated from law enforcement training yesterday as Salutatorian. He will be at the park some in December and January, then January 24 he leaves for eight weeks TPWD new officers training. He will be back full time in late March.

Walt Bailey, Regional Interpretive Specialist, developed a new interpretive sign for Yellowstone Landing, which has been installed. Volunteer money was used for the materials.

The restroom renovation project is behind schedule. The 100 camping loop restrooms should open in early January, and the 200 loop restrooms should open at the end of January. It was discovered that the HQ restrooms have extensive wood damage, requiring wall replacement. We hope to have HQ restrooms open in early February.

Elm Lake Viewing Platform pre-bid construction meeting will be Friday, December 17. BBSP management and rangers will meet with Infrastructure and volunteer representatives to get the platform built.

Geocaching training will be held after Chris Bishop gets back. Ted Stevens will lead this, and BBSP will be the hub park for the Austin HQ Geocaching program. We have \$1000 for GPS units. Volunteers will be trained how to geocache, and their feedback will help refine the program.

Offie Walker mentioned that after the Pre-bid meeting Friday on the Elm Lake Viewing Platform, Austin will be receiving bids on January 1, and sending out the notice to proceed by January 18. Completion date is June 17. This project is moving along nicely.

DAVID HEINICKE

Simple Christmas was warm, with a good turnout and lots of volunteer help.

Sharon Hanzik reports that we have new volunteer applicants. Eleven have been confirmed at this time and three more will be interviewed.

Linda Keltner and Sammie Miller completed their training with the alligator program today. Welcome to our newest volunteers.

During Christmas Break we need to keep the Nature Center open as much as we can, and we will need help doing that. January 1, Saturday, Sharon will be on vacation, and David will arrive late. We need a volunteer to do a program, and one or more to cover Creekfield. This can be a busy day.

January 18 is the next volunteer field trip, a "behind the scenes" to Moody Gardens. There is plenty of room, and you can sign up on the volunteer events calendar. There is no charge for this visit to the Aquarium. We have an exchange program with Moody Gardens, and their volunteers will be invited to the park for a hike and program.

David showed a slide of the new crocodilians panel. It is ready for final editing and will be made out of the same materials as the map behind the NC calendar. It will be mounted behind the alligator skeleton.

Doris Mager will be here with her bird programs February 11, 12, 13.

December 11 was an unusual day at BBSP. A large church group had all the campsites, shelters and primitive sites. At 2:00 PM, we had had only 90 visitors to the Nature Center, and we ended the day with 911.

SIMPLE CHRISTMAS

BBSB annual Simple Christmas was held on December 4, and there was a good turnout and lots of volunteer help. The pictures below are of Marissa Matthews (Beth Debenport's granddaughter) with our Southern Santa, Lawrence Folse, a former volunteer who has been our Santa for at least 10 years.

The first picture was taken around 2000, when Marissa was 5 years old. (Former volunteer Monique Greene with hubby Dave and daughter Elizabeth are in the background).

The second picture was taken 2010. Marissa is now 15 years old.



DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Robert Aaron
Katy Childs
Beth Debenport
Melissa Moody (Staff)
Jeff Orsak (Staff)

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

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

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

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



FEBRUARY ANNIVERSARIES

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

CONGRATULATIONS

Mike Manley, Linda Keltner and **Sammie Miller** have completed their training requirements. Mike Manley was the first one from the September class to finish. By press time, **Debbie** and **Kent Fewell** will also have finished their training. Give these new volunteers a hearty welcome.

Thanks

to **Cindy Peterson and Linda Keltner** for the November meeting supper and to **Chuck Duplant and Mary Lockwood** for the meeting night dinner in December.

to the Williamson's friend **Frank Burgett** for sharing the Santa Gator picture his son-in-law took last fall.

to the **Tuesday/Thursday Maintenance Crew**, led by **Jim Calvert**, for building two pecan log benches.

to **Sharon** and to the **volunteers** for covering when David has been out for law enforcement or training activities.

to **Marty Gay** for serving as BBSPVO webmaster for 12 years.

to **Anne Shelton** for agreeing to serve as our new webmaster and to **Pam Tatge** for serving as assistant webmaster

to **Linda Keltner** for covering Fridays in the GS for me while I was out with surgery, from Anna Dell

to **Kent and Debbie Fewell** and **Tom Prentiss** for hikes and programs during Christmas Break.

to **Chuck Duplant** and **Mary Lockwood** for the meeting night dinner in December.

to **Judy Strauss** for all her help with Outreach this year.

to everyone who helped with **Texian Market Days** (see Judy's article for a list of names)

A SPECIAL THANK YOU

Mrs. Clara Martin and her camping group most graciously donated \$734.00 to BBSP via BBSP Volunteer Organization. They have camped with us for many years during the latter part of the month of October. If you have not seen their camp set-up, you will be in for a surprise.

Brazos Bend State Park is so very fortunate to have such supporters as Clara Martin and her group. They do make a difference.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS



- January 7, 2011 Bird Hike, 8:00 AM, 40-Acre Lake Restrooms
 January 8 BBEEC (New Building) Committee, 1:00 PM, open to all interested
 Budget and Executive Meetings, 3:00 PM
 Regular Business Meeting, 5:30 PM (Supper, 5:00 PM)
 January 9 Bird Hike, 8:00 AM, 40-Acre Lake Restrooms
 January 15 "Bird Blizzard at Sunset" program, 5:00 PM, Observation Tower
 February 4 Bird Hike, 8:00 AM, 40-Acre Lake Restrooms
 February 6 Bird Hike, 8:00 AM, 40-Acre Lake Restrooms
 February 12 BBEEC (New Building) Committee, 1:00 PM, open to all interested
 Budget and Executive Meetings, 3:00 PM
 Regular Business Meeting, 5:30 PM (Supper, 5:00 PM)

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

by Bill Godley



Cool cloudy weather on December 18 gave way to a glorious sunny afternoon for the 26th Brazos Bend Christmas Bird Count. Again this year, a record number of 83 participants set an all time high for the event, recording 159 species within the State Park and surrounding areas among the quarter million birds. This is a remarkable species total for an inland site in North America.



David Heinicke, who compiled the previous record of 154 species a decade ago, won the "Big Bird" award with a Bullock's Oriole at Hale Lake. However, our most significant first CBC sighting was two Glossy Ibis in different parts of the park. Brown Pelican, Rusty Blackbirds, Nashville Warbler, American Redstart, Purple Finch, Common Goldeneye, Dunlin and our returning Ladder-backed Woodpecker (6 years in 7) highlighted the countdown suspense. Not unexpected, the population of geese continued to be reduced.



Swinging Door BBQ was enjoyed by all at the countdown conclusion, and the date was set for next year as Saturday, December 17th, 2011. Hope to see you there! Complete results will be posted to the Brazos Bend State Park website within the week.



PHOTO CREDITS:

Photo of David Heinicke - Candy McNamee
 Bullock's Oriole, Cinnamon Teal, Vermilion Flycatcher - Greg Lavaty
 Bald Eagle - Chuck Duplant

VOLUNTEERS EXPLORE LAKE TEXANA STATE PARK

By Carol Ramsayer

Lake Texana has always been a bit of a mystery for me. While driving south on FM 59, I've often noticed the sign post for the reservoir and wondered about the wildlife that live in the state park there. Halfway between Houston and Corpus Christi, it seemed like a place that called out to be its own outing. On Wednesday, November 3, Sharon arranged a field trip to Lake Texana State Park, giving our group of 9 volunteers just this chance to explore what the park has to offer.

Lake Texana was formed from the 1978 impoundment of the Navidad River. The state park, with 125 miles of shoreline along the lake, has been open since 1980. It offers fishing piers, a boat ramp, canoe rentals, and opportunities for water skiing and jet skiing. Camping facilities include one loop with water only, and another with water and electric hookups.

On this blustery morning we met the park ranger, Cindy Baker, at the nature center, a small temporary building located in the day use area. Cindy opens this center on Fridays and Saturdays; a park host shows videos on Sundays. She invited us to look around inside, where our attention was immediately drawn to the 14' 4" alligator hide draped from the wall. At 900 pounds, it was for a while a Texas state record.



There were several live animal exhibits, including a Snapping Turtle, several snakes, and two 2-year-old alligators. Cindy held a Texas Rat Snake that was one of the babies hatched at our Brazos Bend State Park Nature Center this spring. Today Cindy was happy to receive one of our hatchling alligators that Sharon had brought. It was most interesting to see this new home for these Brazos Bend State Park offspring. Behind the nature center, where we saw bird feeding amphitheater and a fire ring. She then invited us to explore 6 miles of trails.



Next, Cindy took us stations, a small on our own the park's

Bundled up against the wind, four of our group walked the mile long Texana Trail. It led through a lovely forested area of live oaks. We saw several Eastern Phoebe, a Downy Woodpecker, a Ruby-crowned Kinglet and numerous deer tracks. A House Wren scolded us from a brush pile. Sharon convinced us to taste peppervine berries. Then Carol became nostalgic when we happened on a very large armadillo rooting next to the path. Approaching a wetland area, we flushed 3 Wood Ducks. The path emptied onto the camping loop road where we had a chance to see Inca Doves, an Anhinga, a Great Blue Heron and a Belted Kingfisher flying just above the water's surface.



After our exploration, the whole group drove to nearby Edna where we enjoyed lunch at The Lariat restaurant. Our thanks go out to Sharon for making the arrangements for this field trip to Lake Texana State Park, and to Cindy for showing us around. Despite the challenging weather we all enjoyed the day together, and the chance to explore a new Texas state park – no longer such a mystery.

THREE OTTERS

by Rick Dashnau

On Sunday, November 21, 2010, I was enjoying the day. At about 10:20 AM I was on the trail on the west side of Elm Lake. I'd just talked to two pairs of park visitors about Aningas (one was standing on a submerged log right in front of me) and cormorants. Both couples had moved on, and were heading south, towards the water station. As I was looking through my camera at the Anhinga, intending to film it diving, I heard one of the park visitors say, "Excuse me, but do you have otters here?"



Most of you know the effect the word "otter" can have--especially on me.

"Yes," I answered, "Why...did you see one?"

The visitor replied, "Yes, I think so. Right over there." And then he pointed.

"WHAT!?" I said, and walked quickly over to where they were, about 12 yards from me. "Where is it?", I asked.

"There are two of them." said one couple.

"Three! One ran in front of us and went towards them.", said the other couple as they walked up.

"WHAT!? THREE!?" I said, probably losing any credibility as the cool observer of nature that I'd just built up not 10 minutes hence as I talked about the Aningas. If that didn't do it, then when I said, "It ran right in front of you!? How cool is that!", probably did.

And sure enough, there were three Otters in Elm Lake, swimming around and making their way south. When otters swim, they sometimes move through the water with powerful undulating movements of their bodies; moving forward while diving and surfacing. I call this "porpoising" since, in my mind, they are moving like porpoises ("Dolphining" just doesn't sound right.) They were swimming pretty quickly, but I didn't want to run after them and scare them away. It seemed like they were heading towards our trail, so I hung back a bit to see if they'd cross the trail and go into Pilant Lake. They did, but they took advantage of cover around a slight bend to do it. I just barely got the camera up in time to catch a blurry view of the last one crossing the trail--just a bit north of the Elm Lake water station.

Since they'd already crossed, I walked up fairly quickly and saw them swimming in Pilant lake, along the Spillway Trail. The otters were still porpoising, spending just a second above the surface, diving, then repeating the cycle. While they were under, I tried to walk faster to get closer to them, then when they surfaced, I'd slow. They approached the floodgate just past the water station gazebo and I could tell by the water movement that they were right at that opening, but I couldn't sneak up to get a close look at them. As I slowly walked forward, two of the otters swam away from me. The third was ahead of them, and closer to the rice and the trees.

They moved close to the rice, and were swimming along the boundary until they got to one of the low islands. There, they stopped their swimming, and were craning their necks, raising their heads above the water and looking for...something. Meanwhile, I tried to shoot some video, trying to catch the otters together, or pick one to film. Suddenly there was an explosion of water near them! They'd surprised an alligator--or the alligator had surprised them--and the three otters retreated a few yards. Then, they calmly regrouped and moved back towards the gator; and then moved into the trees and out past the islands where I lost sight of them. All of this took about 10 minutes. What a morning!!

I shot some video clips and edited them together. You can see it here:
http://rickubis.20m.com/otters_11212010.wmv

TEXIAN MARKET DAYS

by Judy Strauss



Texian Market Days at the George Ranch was, again, a record-breaking event for BBSPVO. Friday, October 22nd, which is set aside for mostly school groups and maybe a few general public, brought nearly 2,000 to our booth. Teachers were in a hurry to get to a specific area at times, so there were many groups that were not allowed to stop by and visit. But we all had a good time and enjoyed interacting with the school groups of all ages.

I want to thank Susie Gann, Noel Duncan, Doris Dahse, Sherida Carpenter and Ray Anderson for their help. Some came early and some stayed late, just to fill in the gaps, and I really appreciate each one of them for their time and dedication.

Saturday's hours were a bit longer and we drew in nearly 1600 to our booth. This time they weren't coming in groups of 50 to 100 at a time, so it was much easier to get in our interpretive talks about BBSP and the BBSPVO. Many visitors were past or current visitors to the Park, but there were also many who had not been to BBSP and were unaware of its existence, and were very interested in visiting. Although we were very short on staffing, we did manage to keep it all flowing, and had a great time.

Thanks to Anna Dell & Bruce Williamson, Christine Kovach, Connie Waltrip, Jane Minard, Marilyn Vossler, Ron Dearman, Jim North and Jaci Elliott for all of their help. Again, some came earlier than their shift and some stayed past their shift, and I really appreciated everyone's help. It was a lot of work, but also a lot of fun.

A special thanks to Jim North for coming out Thursday evening to help me set up the tents, and to Jim North and Jaci Elliott for staying late on Saturday to make sure that everything was taken down and tucked away in my car safely! Thanks, guys!

This Texian Market days was even more special to me than I could have ever realize that it would be. Besides our mission of promoting the Park at these events, I especially enjoy seeing lots of friends and people that I may only get to see once a year. One person in particular that has been a friend since I used to work out at the George Ranch, was Orin Covell. I did get to talk with him for a few minutes and get my usual hug; spend a few busy moments with him (as is usually the case), and share a smile as we passed throughout the two days. Then, as some of you might know, Orin passed away suddenly 9 days later. This was one huge loss to our communities, as Orin was that type of person to everyone he ever met. But I feel extremely lucky to have been one of the many who was able to share this Texian Market Days with him. So, thanks, again, to all of you that came out to help with this event. It could not have taken place without you!

We have other events that will be scheduled in the future, and I hope that I will be able to have more of you join me in these events. There is nothing more heartbreaking than having to cancel an Outreach event because I do not have enough Volunteers to make it a go. Please keep an eye on the events calendar for these events, and I will also send out reminders as they are posted. The hours you spend in the booth and your travel time DO count towards your yearly requirements.

Thanks, again, to everyone!



TEXAS OUTSIDE REVIEW OF BRAZOS BEND STATE PARK

Texas Outside Guide rated BBSP as one of the best parks of all types in Texas. Steve Killian received the following from Mike Sharp of Texas Outside Guide:

Steve - wow, what a fantastic park and an outstanding staff. Here is a link to our review of Brazos Bend State Park: <http://www.texasoutside.com/txorails/public/reviews/show_campground/60> .

MAINTENANCE REPORT NOVEMBER/DECEMBER

Wood Yard:

Split and bundled firewood, filled 2 cords purchased wood

Trail Trimming and Trail Maintenance:

Removed blowdowns, dead tree at Hale Lake

Trimmed Creekfield Lake Trail

Trimmed Creekfield Forest Trail by persimmon tree

Collected mulch from last month's trimming

Equipment Maintenance:

Changed oil in splitter

Repaired pole saw, new sprocket

General Maintenance

Winterized water stations

Repaired benches

Survey benches, map and number them

Installed bench on Creekfield Forest Trail

Filled holes by sidewalk at parking lot

Replaced bench at Observation Tower with New one

Cleared area for old bench on Creekfield Forest Trail

Construction Projects

Remodel shelves in Gift Shop for new refrigerator

Pest Control:

Kill Chinese Tallow trees on Elm Lake islands and Creekfields Forest Trail

Special Projects:

Purchase, deliver, mulch and water trees for Creekfield Forest Trail

Build tags and put on trees for Creekfield Forest Trail

TPWD NEWS RELEASE NEW STUDY SHOWS HARM CAUSED BY CHINESE TALLOWES

A study by a USDA Forest Service Southern Research Station scientist shows the number of non-native Chinese tallow trees in Louisiana, Mississippi and East Texas grew by about 370 percent over a 16 year period. Experts say Chinese tallowes can change the chemical properties of soil and alter the composition and structure of native plant communities. Additionally, litter from the plant may alter habitat in invaded wetland areas, which could affect some frog and other amphibian species.

"This is the first report to show how infestations are composed of thousands of small stems per acre that tightly grip lands in a near monoculture, excluding diversity with very little potential for wood resource value," said Jim Miller, a Forest Service ecologist. "The crisis is worsened by the plant's rapid occupation of the highly diverse wetland prairies and marshes in East Texas and Louisiana, which are special habitats for many rare plants and animals and often productive native grasslands."



In East Texas, the number of the invasive tree increased by 174 percent between 1992 and 2007.

NATURE CENTER REPORT NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2010

Below are the totals of the various activities and attendance recorded for the Nature Center, hikes, and programs for November 1-30, and December 1-31, 2010. The NC was closed 2 ½ days for the Deer Hunt each month and 1 day each for Thanksgiving and Christmas. We had excellent attendance before and after the holidays.

PROGRAMS	TOTALS	
NATURE CENTER ATTENDANCE November 2010 - 5338 November 2009 - 7488 November 2008 - 6312 November 2007 - 4577 November 2006 - 4286 December 2010 - 4841 December 2009 - 2999 December 2008 - 3600 December 2007 - 4285 December 2006 - 4286	Saturdays (4) - Nov. 2599 (3) - Dec. 2164 High, 911 (11/20), (961 (12/4) Average: 650 / 721	
	Sundays (4) – Nov. 1218 (4) - Dec. 863 High, 411 (11/7), 298 (12/26) Average: 304 / 215	
	Weekdays (18) – Nov. 1521 (20) - Dec. 2028 High, 281 (11/23), 406(12/30) Average: 85 / 113	
CREEKFIELD HIKES (11)	Nov. 157	Dec. 84
ALLIGATOR PROGRAMS (7)	Nov. 42	Dec. 112
SNAKE PROGRAMS (7)	Nov. 190	Dec. 128
OWLS (3)	Nov. 105	Dec. 90
OUTREACH (3)	Nov. 189	
OTHER PROGRAMS (7) include storytime, mammals, photo hike, bird hikes, wildlife watching, insects, skulls, turkeys, pondlife, spotting scope, reptiles	Nov. 121	Dec. 207
TOTAL VISITORS SERVED IN HIKES AND ONSITE PROGRAMS	Nov. 804	Dec. 531
VOLUNTEER HOURS IN NC, PROGRAMS AND OUTREACH	Nov. 1096	Dec. 1035



Brazos Bend State Park

Texas Parks and Wildlife
21901 FM 762
Needville, TX 77461

NEXT MEETING
SATURDAY, JANUARY 8, 2011

FIRST CLASS MAIL



REGULAR VOLUNTEER EVENTS

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

BRAZOS BEND STATE PARK VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION

VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION OFFICERS

President:	Offie Walker
Vice-President:	Mary Lockwood
Secretary	Linda Heinicke
Treasurer:	Dave Armstrong

NEWSLETTER TEAM

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

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

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

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

**BABA DIOUM, SENEGAL
AFRICAN CONSERVATIONIST**