

BRAZOS BEND BUNCH BUGLE

VOLUME 25, NUMBER 1

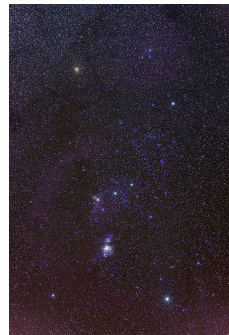
JANUARY 2013



FROM THE PRESIDENT

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

2012 is behind us and 2013 lies ahead. May your new year begin with many “happy trails to you” (from Roy Rogers), “somewhere over the rainbow” (from Oz), and “wish upon a star” (from Peter Pan). And while you’re at it, when Orion winks at you over the next few months, remember to wink back.



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DECEMBER MEETING NOTES

reported by Anna Dell Williamson

Mary Lockwood called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM on December 8, 2012, in the Nature Center classroom. There were 13 volunteers, 6 VITs, 3 staff and 1 guest present. The minutes of the November meeting were approved as posted. Thanks were expressed to **Lindsey Kahn, Cindy Peterson** and **Pete Hart** for chile, sausage and beans, and chocolate cake for the meeting supper.

The VITs present were introduced and welcomed: **Krista** and **Cole Ledman, Adrian Michel, Joe** and **Colton Southern**, and **Veronika Vaneckova**.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Bob Kowalewski, Treasurer, brought the financial report.

The following requests for funding were presented as approved:

Bison on the prairie – request from Barbara Keller-Willy for sealant and stain to weather-proof the bison to make this a permanent display in the park.

Water testing equipment - request from Hannah Meddaugh to re-establish water testing in the park and to incorporate this into school groups coming out for hand-on experience.

MS Office 2010 for Gift Shop and Comptroller - request from Diane Carpenter to have the same version of the software on both computers in the park.

Increase the Gift Shop Open to Buy balance - request from Beth Debenport to allow purchase of more inventory to meet increased sales.

Mary Lockwood reported that the Observatory Gift Shop is expanding and moving better items.

Gift Shop: Beth Debenport reported that November was the best month ever for sales. Sales have almost doubled since we started accepting credit cards. Thanks to all who help.

Maintenance: Pete Hart reported that the Maintenance Crew put in 299 hours in November. Five workers worked two days a week on the following:

- ▶ Live Oak Platform
- ▶ Build building for the new gator at the wood yard
- ▶ Repair platform on prairie trail, it needs replacement.
- ▶ Work on new pocket prairie. The Friday group has been planting flowers, etc.
- ▶ Cut and collected split wood, Thanksgiving week, put out 125 bundles that week. Need help tying and bundling wood now. If anyone wants to help, they will be trained in machinery, equipment, etc.
- ▶ Jim Calvert treated tallow trees and cleaned off trails.
- ▶ Assisted rangers on hunt.
- ▶ The new gator is in, we are waiting for Austin approval before we use it. It's a 4-passenger vehicle. Only 4 seatbelts, may add belts to put 6 people in it. We may transport visitors, but the driver must be a volunteer. It has a shorter bed, windshield, and is fully equipped.

Wood Yard: Chuck Duplant reported that November was a great month. We need wood tied. With the cooler weather, there are more fires, and wood is going fast, 5-6 cords a month.

Training: Anna Dell Williamson reported that the February class will be a large one.

NEW BUSINESS:

Chuck Duplant proposed a new project – Sponsor a blood drive with the Gulf Coast Regional Blood Center. We would need about 6-8 people to assist at the donation station, and a guarantee of 20-25 people signed up in advance to donate. It would be at the Elm Lake Picnic Pavilion. BBSPVO would provide soda, cookies, juice, and we would have spotting scopes on the observation platform to give donors time to recoup before going out on the trails. The purpose is to perform a service, and promote health and wellness in State Parks. The Blood Center provides promotional materials, signs, etc. We could advertise on the website and send out press releases. Volunteer donors could sign up the Special Events calendar with name, phone number, and email.

Mary Lockwood announced that the Executive Committee has appointed **Barbara Keller-Willy** as **Director of Fund-raising and Development** for BBSPVO.

PROJECTS GIVE PARK A NEW LOOK

Thanks to an Eagle Scout and his troop, the amphitheater received a facelift recently. With donated lumber, all seats have been replaced. The same Scout and troop are also constructing a safety fence around the Slough Spillway down the hill from the Nature Center.

You may also notice new benches that are either Eagle Scout projects or park projects funded by donations from the public.

DECEMBER STAFF REPORTS

JACOB DEMENT, ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT



We have been very busy, and November was a record November, with more visitors than any other November. Events included:

- a successful public hunt, with 38 deer taken. The goal of 80 should be taken in the December hunt. Every hunter got a deer, and one large hog was taken.
- renewal of the contract with Criminal Justice from January to June for many man hours of work. The inmates help in trail maintenance.
- addition of host sites, bringing to total to 9 host sites full. Eighteen volunteers now live on site, taking care of projects, painting signs, helping in the office, trash pickup, and trail maintenance.
- Boy Scout projects, replacing benches. Richard Taylor is leading the project.
- A safety barrier was put in place on Pilant Slough.
- Rangers and hosts are actively replacing bollards around park, maintained and in good condition for safety and appearance.
- Park law officers are stepping up use of radar guns to slow drivers.
- Staff is re-evaluating speeds in the whole park. Some are not realistic. We are trying to get a speed trailer to remind visitors of how fast they are going.

New staff:

- New Operations Trainee, Chuck Hubbard, from Caddo Lake Park, where he was an Interpreter. He will start December 15 and will be introduced at the next volunteer meeting.
- New office clerk, Giselle Ramirez, year round part time

SHARON HANZIK, NATURALIST AND VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR



- ▶ Thanksgiving week was successful, with the Nature Center open all week and many good programs offered to the public.
- ▶ Simple Christmas was probably the busiest one we ever had. The hayride is a very popular event, and we can expect to run out of tickets.
- ▶ Family Adventure Day was an activity of the Children in Nature Initiative, sponsored by the American Diabetes Society and the Pasadena Independent School District. There were several stations staffed by volunteers for the students to stop by.
- ▶ February volunteer training application deadline was November 30, and we have 9 confirmed applicants. Training dates are February 9, 16 and 23. Any future applications may be submitted for September.
- ▶ Texas Outdoor Families will be at BBSP for 2 weekends. Volunteer Dawn Tejero works with these groups.

DECEMBER MAINTENANCE REPORT

The Maintenance Crew reported 106 hours of work in December.

Wood Yard: Split and bundled wood and load kiosks

Trail Trimming and Trail Maintenance: Cleared blowdown trees and limbs

Special Projects: Seeded and planted prairie areas



☺ to those volunteers who brought the pine cones for the Simple Christmas. The activity was very successful because of them!

☺ to Lindsey Kahn, Cindy Peterson and Pete Hart for the meeting supper.

☺ to all volunteers who present programs, lead hikes, walk or bike the trails as interpreters, or otherwise make a visit to the park a positive experience for our visitors.

☺ to the maintenance crew and others who work behind the scenes to keep the park neat, clean, updated, safe and attractive for our visitors.

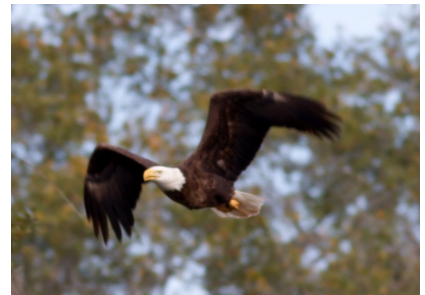
☺ to the Gift Shop and wood yard workers who provide us with important funding to carry out our many projects.

☺ to Chuck Duplant, Bill Godley, David Heinicke, Rich Jespersen, Krista Ledman, Mary Lockwood, Hannah Meddaugh, Barbara Nelson-Willy, Paige Norwood, Cindy Peterson, Diane Welty, and Helen Wright for contributing photos or articles to this newsletter.

EAGLE SIGHTING

by Chuck Duplant

David Heinicke spotted this eagle on December 2,9 flying from the Nature Center parking lot to Creekfield Lake, where it perched in a tree near the large pier. It then flew to a tree near the small pier. From there it flew towards the small bridge, then back over the Nature Center parking lot towards Elm Lake, where Cindy Peterson spotted it flying into Elm Lake near Pilant Slough trail.



When the eagle was perched in the tree over Creekfield Lake, all the Coots and Moorhens that are normally out in the water were hiding under the bridge and beneath the cypress trees. It is always a great day at Brazos Bend.

BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING

Budget Committee meetings can be lively. Here, Volunteer Hannah Meddaugh requests a bigger VO lounge, more cookies, cappucino machine, and flying gator.



Budget and Executive meetings are open to all members. Only committee members have a vote, but all members have a voice. Come join the fun.

Photo by Steve Killian

*Congratulations and best wishes to
Paige O'Neal
on her marriage to Brandon Norwood
in Denton, TX, on December 12, 2012.*

BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES:

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

Dennis Akkola
Dave Armstrong
Justin Bower
Joe Carmichael (Emeritus)
Sherida Carpenter
Nancy Dobbs
Sharon Hanzik (Staff)
Jim Hiatt
Nancy Lynn Jones
Rosemary Kennedy
Jane Minard
Ron Morrison
Jim North
Laszlo Perlaky (Emeritus)
Marilyn Vossler
Diane Welty
Bruce Williamson (Emeritus)



FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

Jerry Carpenter
Noel Duncan
Devin Elster (Staff)
Carl Franke
Bill Godley
Sid Jones
Cole Ledman
Cindy Peterson
Judy Strauss
Pam Tatge

FEBRUARY ANNIVERSARIES

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



CONGRATULATIONS

to **Krista** and **Cole Ledman** and **Bob Schwartz** for completing their training requirements. Be sure to welcome our new members to the organization.



NATURE CENTER REPORT DECEMBER 2012

Below are the totals of the various activities and attendance recorded for the Nature Center, hikes, and programs for December 1-31, 2012. The Nature Center was closed 3 days for the hunt and Christmas day. Cold, rainy weather slowed down attendance some, but Simple Christmas was the biggest ever.

PROGRAMS	TOTALS DECEMBER
<p style="text-align: center;">NATURE CENTER ATTENDANCE</p> <p>Dec. 2012 - 4,750 Dec. 2011 - 3,864 Dec. 2010 - 4,841 Dec. 2009 - 2,999 Dec. 2008 - 3,600 Dec. 2007 - 4,285 Dec. 2006 - 4,286 Dec. 2005 - 2,410</p> <p style="text-align: center;">TOTAL 2012: 76,082</p>	<p>Saturdays (5) - 2,505 High, 777 (12/1) Average: 501</p> <hr/> <p>Sundays (5) – 983 High, 288 (12/23) Average: 197</p> <hr/> <p>Weekdays (17) - 1262 High, 304 (12/27) Average: 74</p>
CREEKFIELD HIKES (8)	83
CHILDREN'S STORY TIME (3)	43
SNAKE PROGRAM(5)	184
BIRD HIKES (5)	94
SIMPLE CHRISTMAS	600
WILDLIFE VIEWING (2)	185
ALLIGATOR PROGRAMS (6)	69
OTHER PROGRAMS (4): Photo walk, pond life, geocaching and 40-Acre hike	53
TOTAL VISITORS SERVED IN HIKES AND PROGRAMS	1,311
VOLUNTEER HOURS	Interpretation = 945 Maintenance/Other = 106 TOTAL HOURS = 1,051
PARK ATTENDANCE (Percentage reflects the percentage of total visitors in each category.)	Total 14,586 Day use 10,262 (70%) Overnight 4,324 (30%) NC Visitors 4,750 (33%)



Bill Godley in the Nature Center



Santa and an elf visit the campground on Christmas Eve.

BIRD BLIZZARD

by Bill Godley

If you have enjoyed the evening roosting of Purple Martins or Chimney Swifts in the past, we offered our first of the season "Observation Tower Bird Blizzard" at 4:45 PM, December 8. The results were **stunning**. The Red-winged Blackbirds and other friends historically use the Southern Wild Rice as their refuge of safety. In the early days of the park, Bob Honig and others reported "Tower Roost" numbers in the millions at the annual CBC. Nature's event is all best viewed from the tower itself at 40-Acre Lake, and it lasts less than an hour. About the time the "blizzard" seems to peak, it gets even better. They "party like rock stars" til dusk.

When you come to BBSP to enjoy the sight, you will see loads of several blackbird species as well as hawks, roosting waders, waterfowl and others. Recently even the park's first ever Eurasian Collared-Dove made an appearance.

Here are a few pointers in choosing your timing:

- ▶ Pick any day from now until early February. The sooner the better.
- ▶ Pick a day without rain, fog or significant wind, if possible - clear evenings with gorgeous sunsets are a bonus.
- ▶ Dress properly and bring binoculars for everyone in your party and one scope, if available.
- ▶ Arrive at the Observation Tower no later than 4:45 if possible. A bit earlier in late January or early February.
- ▶ Go to the top of the tower if able. If not, witness the show from the area below the tower.
- ▶ Count each and every bird and see which of your group gives up first. We ranged between a hundred thousand and a million birds on December 8.
- ▶ And if you really enjoy the sight, try it in reverse! Arrive at the park at 5 a.m. and walk to the tower in the dark. Watch out for photographers who are addicted to this and the "Blackbird Liftoff" which takes only about 15 minutes. By sunrise itself, they are long gone.

Enjoy it folks.

FAMILY ADVENTURE DAY AT BRAZOS BEND STATE PARK

DAVID HEINICKE



Partnering with the **American Diabetes Association, Houston Wilderness** and the **Pasadena ISD**, Brazos Bend State Park hosted a first of its kind "**Family Adventure Day**" on December 8, 2012. In an effort at combating childhood obesity and diabetes the American Diabetes Association, working with the Pasadena ISD, selected students grades 4 – 7 whose Body Mass Index (BMI) was either obese or showed a high likelihood of diabetes in the future. Recognizing that living a healthy, active lifestyle is not just the burden of the child but is the responsibility of the entire family, the parents and siblings were invited to participate in this event also.

One hundred students and their family members signed up to participate in this pilot program. Our goal was not only to show these visitors that being active is fun and healthy, but also to let them know that State Parks are a great place to get outdoors and get active!

On the morning of Family Adventure Day, students and their families boarded buses at local Pasadena elementary schools and started the ride to Brazos Bend State Park. With games and park information provided along the way, the ride was over before they knew it. Once at the park each group was given a short introduction, and it was off on the adventure. In polling this inner city crowd we found that only 4 or 5 had ever even visited a state park before.

Brazos Bend State Park staff and park volunteers had interactive games set up for the families that required them to run, jump, crawl, flap their arms and get moving! There were also 4 learning stations on Alligators, Birds, Mammals and Aquatic Life set up along the Creekfield Lake Trail. Visitors could explore the wildlife and stations along the way at their own pace. Other park volunteers were stationed around the trail to answer questions and point out wildlife. Families also visited the park's Nature Center where they could learn more about the local flora and fauna and even touch a hatchling alligator or snake.

After learning about the natural world and working up an appetite, the families hiked another ½ mile to a picnic pavilion where they enjoyed a healthy picnic lunch. The lunch menus were pre-planned by the students based on nutrition classes they had taken at school. Drawings for prizes and play time followed. By the early afternoon everyone agreed that the day was a big success. Not only had the students learned about local flora and fauna, hopefully everyone got the message to get active! Get moving! Eat right! And do it all at your local State Park!

With continued funding from The American Diabetes Association and others, this program will continue to show children and their parents that a healthy, active lifestyle can positively affect the rest of their life. We are already starting plans for a similar event with two other Houston area school districts for 2013.



VOLUNTEER PARTICIPANTS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES

BARBARA KELLER-WILLY

I was helping a group of kids put on "wings" when I heard a mother and boy yelling back and forth at each other. I looked up to make sure he wasn't heading for the road. Hannah had a group of 2-3 between him and the road, so I went back to wings. I kept hearing him shrieking what sounded like "come on poharo" and his mother was speaking quickly and loudly in what sounded like agitated Spanish, so I watched for a minute to try to figure out what was going on. About that time the wind blew, and he started going round and round yelling "I can feel the wind on my wings. I can really feel it," in English. Turned out mom was trying to take a picture and he wouldn't be still because he was so excited. Hannah brought rest of group back, and then I had the large last group to fit with wings, and he was still out there going in circles.

I wore the wings with the first group and when the wind blew they actually lifted up off your arms, so I recognized what he meant. I'm signing up now for the next event. I volunteer for many reasons, but helping children see/feel the wonder I feel for nature is near the top.



DIANE L. WELTY

Hannah Meddaugh and I were able to assist Barbara Willy with the activities on the lawn in front of the Nature Center. Barbara had everything planned and prepared for five activities. We learned there would be several groups coming to the area. Barbara, Hannah and I quickly decided to break each group into smaller groups of approximately 8 each. It was apparent that we were not going to have a lot of time, so we began the activities quickly.

- ▶ There was a food web (pictures) to allow the participants to see how the food chain can work.
- ▶ One table had a rattlesnake (PICTURE!) to discuss how rapid it can shake its tail, (approximately 50 times per second). With the use of cat toys, everyone got a chance to see if they could duplicate that feat. Even the adults, who thought they could hide in the back, were reaching for the cat toys to give it a shot. We also discussed and attempted to flap wings (arms) as fast as a hummingbird. (approximately 70 times per second). EVERYONE tried! Nobody succeeded.
- ▶ There was the Squirrel and Kangaroo jump. With the grass marked, the people tried to see how many jumps it took to accomplish the distance. When I suggested this could be done at home, too, one lady wanted to know the distances we had marked. (Squirrels about 6 feet. Kangaroos about 20 feet.)
- ▶ The next event consisted of many segments. We slithered like a snake, swam like a fish, hopped like a frog, waddled like a duck, walked like an alligator. We even had a log to leap over like a deer. This took some “teasing” to get everyone involved. They all came through in each segment. I don’t know what kind of fish swims like the examples I saw. I have not seen alligators walk on two feet before. (Here the idea was to use the arms also, and “suck that tummy in,” don’t drag your tummy.)
- ▶ The exciting final event was Soaring like an Eagle. Barbara had prepared cardboard wings. Everyone was eager to try. I offered a prize for the first person to actually take flight. Nobody claimed it.

There were many smiles and laughter while doing the events. All the people had fun in the outdoors.

HANNAH MEDDAUGH

When I was growing up we spent countless hours playing in the woods by my house. Not many kids get that chance nowadays. But I think kids still have a “natural” interest in the outdoors that comes out any chance they get. You could really see that in the kids we had out today. Most of them probably live in the middle of the city, but they took to the park like ducks to water. They ran around, looked at birds, learned how fast rattlesnakes rattle and how the foodweb works, and just generally had a great time. It’s moments like these that make being a volunteer so rewarding.

MARY LOCKWOOD

There was a video on Channel 26 about the event, with good pictures of Jerry Carpenter and the kids. The pond life station seemed to excite just about every kid who got to pick through the water and muck and look at various life forms under the small viewing scopes.



HELEN WRIGHT

Alejandro and I were at the alligator table. We really enjoyed the experience, especially being that the majority of the people in the group were Hispanic. At the beginning they were a bit hesitant and nervous about the baby alligators, especially the adults. As soon as they realized Alejandro and I were able to answer their questions in Spanish, they loosened up and began asking all sorts of questions regarding the alligators and the park.



The children close to Alejandro's age gathered around Alejandro and were asking him how often he came out to the park, how he became a volunteer at the park, why he had become a volunteer, if he was not scared that the baby alligators were going to bite him. :-) To which he answered that we tried to come out as much as we can, that he became a volunteer because of his love for nature and animals, and how much the experience has educated him and actually helped in school with science. At one point a boy asked him why he liked coming to the park so much, and he answered, "It is the only place were I can ran around, climb trees, and handle snakes, baby alligators and a tarantula!"

One father approached me to ask me how Alejandro and I had become volunteers, how long it took us, how hard it was, etc.. He said that he was looking to do something with his son that would help them bond. I explained to him how this experience from the beginning of the training to the present day has really been a great bonding time for Alejandro and me, and that it continues to be quality time together and a great educational experience for both of us. Quite frankly I don't know who had more fun, the Diabetes group or Alejandro and me!

BILL GODLEY

I was thrilled to be a part of the Family Adventure event on the 8th. Given the perfect weather conditions, I can testify to the thrill that it must have given volunteers and guests alike. I think the children, their parents and leaders equally shared in the reality of nature that was available to them. The timing was also superb for anyone interested in birds for several reasons. First, the groups were early enough to benefit from the presence of more birds....especially the vultures! Second, the winter period always allows folks to see a greater variety of bird species than are on hand during the summer heat. And, finally, it is always great to witness anyone's first look through a nice spotting scope at their first "up close and personal" bird. "WOW" was a word heard often from start to finish! It was a great privilege to be a part of such an event. Given the weather and all, it may be hard to match! We'd better try!

RICH JESPERSEN

Sandy and I had some bird study skins and binoculars on the Creekfield pier and Bill Godley had a spotting scope. Every group was interested in hearing what we had to tell them about birds, and they all enjoyed looking at the birds with binoculars and scope. Some of them appeared to have never used binoculars before, so it was especially exciting for them. One teenage boy sat on the bench busily texting on his cell phone. When Sandy told him we would not sign his activity sheet until he participated, he good-naturedly put down the phone and joined in. Once he got started, he seemed to enjoy it. I think all the families had a good time and enjoyed some new experiences. Hopefully, many of them will be stimulated to return to Brazos Bend on their own.



Photos by Chuck Duplant and Beverly Lannou

ALLIGATOR STUDY REPORT

Cord Eversol brought a report to the December General Meeting on the alligator research project he is leading. Research has slowed down now, after a very busy summer. We are now doing monthly surveys, and seeing interesting things not documented before:

- ▶ Numbers were low in the summer in lakes; as we progressed into fall, we see more and larger alligators. Numbers have more than doubled, and now we are seeing larger alligators. During the summer we found 2 or 3 over 7 feet, and in November, we found several 8 feet long. Why? Perhaps the Park serves as an over-wintering ground and large individuals move out for deeper water and cooler sites for bigger gators. But we have Hale and Horseshoe for cooler water. Maybe they use dens in the summer or hide in tall grasses, but banks aren't collapsing when the water is down. Other crocodilian species use communal dens. Do ours? Cord will consider studying these issues. No one surveys for alligators during the winter. What effect does that have on Parks and Wildlife population projections, harvest regulations, etc.?
- ▶ Nest surveys showed 44 nests this year. This is a steady increase from years past. Is it increasing because there is no pressure here, or is it due to urban sprawl?
- ▶ Out of all nests surveyed, there was an average of 38 eggs, and about 22 hatchlings

Research is to be presented at conferences at Galveston A&M, Kingsville A&M and the East Texas Herpetological Society in Houston. Data will be entered into the computer this winter, and recapturing will start the end of March for a growth study. There are plans to apply for grants to continue the alligator studies.

General discussion:

- ▶ Dens have a small entrance hole, which goes into the bank and opens up. We haven't determined if there is one alligator per den or if there are communal dens. There is one on Hale Lake, where a limb is sticking out from the bank, next to limb. It is near a female nest and may be her den.
- ▶ Males and females both make dens, and we don't know how they inhabit the dens.
- ▶ There have been reports of males "adopting" babies of a dead mate.

BRINGING BACK THE PRAIRIE HIKE

Volunteer Barbara Keller-Willy has been working on developing a program to inform visitors about the prairie and its importance. Her prairie study work with Master Naturalist training brought her to the realization that only 1% of former Coastal prairies exist today. This information led her to develop a fun interactive children's hike for Halloween and Thanksgiving called Ghost of Prairies Past. Participants play a character of destroyer, destroyed or rehabilitator.

After the 1st hike (18 visitors) she polled frequent visitors around 40-Acre about their activity along the prairie trail and heard 2 comments repeated over and over. No shade and you never see anything. She decided that one approach would be to show people the animals they no longer see on the prairie and tell them why... so she made a bison, 2 red wolves, 6 black footed prairie dogs, a burrowing owl which needed the prairie dog burrows to survive and declined with the prairie dog, and an Attwater prairie chicken. She roughly times the sequence of character cards with placement of the animals. She doesn't tell people that there are animals along the trail, but they are easy enough to see, and the participants enjoy them. She has a



scat/track app on her phone, and participants determine what animals are still on the prairie using the owl pellets, bone remnants and scat found on the trail.

Finally, on the way back they talk about medicinal value of plant diversity, digitalis from foxglove, how we can help the prairie by planting backyard, school yard, roadside, and pocket prairies. With parental permission and a signed promise to become a prairie rehabilitator, she gives participants a tiny 1x2" bag with a tiny bit of Texas roadside mix purchased from Texas Native Seed and teaches them how to remove a seed from a plant along the trail. These activities capture the curiosity enough to get people to listen to the message. While kids are searching for the next animal, they aren't saying, "It's too hot," or "When is it over?", etc., and parents walk away with a positive experience.

Barbara is going to schedule 4 to 6 hikes for January/February for several groups, including the BBSPVO, who have indicated an interest in the hikes. Participants will be asked to RSVP so she doesn't end up with 50 on 1 date. If you're interested in taking one of these hikes, check your email for announcements of the dates.

TARANTULAS

by Paige Norwood



A recently aired video, "Tarantulas and Their Venomous Relatives", reminded me of the beauty and diversity tarantulas possess. Though stigmatized by their Hollywood portrayal in *Indiana Jones* (the hairy spiders creeping across Harrison Ford's back in the *Raiders of the Lost Ark*) or the 1950's Clint Eastwood flick *Tarantula* (in which Eastwood blasts the huge mutant beasts with napalm), the animals' temperament actually ranges from docile (Western Hemisphere) to defensive or aggressive (Central and South America, Africa, the Middle East to southern Asia, the Indo-Pacific and Australian). Tarantulas reside in varied climates across the globe and come in an array of colors; their size runs the gamut as well. In short, these *mygalomorphs* or giants of the insect world are actually *giant* sweethearts (for the most part).

Did you know? It's not a true spider – it's a mygalomorph. A mygalomorph does not produce elaborate webs composed of sticky silk for prey capture. Mygalomorphs account for only about 7 percent of the world's spider species. Other notable mygalomorphs include purseweb and trapdoor spiders.

But how did the tarantula get its name and reputation? Well, that's an interesting story. We have the Italians to thank. Tarantula comes from the Italian word "tarantolo," which is derived from the Italian town of Taranto, home of the European wolf spider (*Lycosa tarentula*). Townspeople kept calling them "tarantolo" and the name stuck. As to the size and fear factor, explorers and naturalists to the New World documented one species, "the bird-eating spider" or Goliath birdeater, feeding on small birds or hummingbirds. These gentle giants do possess venom, but it's to break down or liquefy food for digestion. If a person is bitten, the bite is no worse in pain or intensity than a bee sting.

Did you know? During the Renaissance, local peasants believed that Lycosa bites caused a disease called tarantism, cured only by a frenzied dance, the tarantella - a good excuse for wild abandonment during an age of religious repression.

There are 800 *documented* species of tarantulas across the globe (with estimates of another 800+ undiscovered species). Most of those live in Central and South America or Africa, Caribbean to Africa and the Middle East to southern Asia, the Indo-Pacific and Australian prairies and grasslands or rainforests. Each ecosystem offers cracks and crevices in rocks/logs or trees for out of the way spaces to snag meals. Some of the most colorful are the Costa Rican Zebra, Brazilian Bluegreen Pinktoe, Yucatan Rustrump, Mexican Red Knee, Pink Zebra Beauty, and Gooty Sapphire Ornamental (pictured at left).



Did you know? Tarantulas don't spin hanging webs. Instead, they lie in wait or use a ground-based spun silk that alerts them to passing prey.

In North America, tarantulas can be found west of the Mississippi, as far North as Missouri, to Utah and South to Texas. In fact, Texas boasts approximately 14 species of tarantula throughout the state. They are commonly found in the grasslands or open areas and feed on crickets, June beetles, ground beetles, grasshoppers, cicadas, and caterpillars. They make their home in burrows, natural cavities under logs or stones, or spaces under loose bark of tree trunks and even old rodent burrows.

Did you know? The abdomen is generally one way to differentiate between males and females. The female's abdomen is as wide as or wider than the cephalothorax, giving her an hourglass or figure-eight shape. The male's abdomen is generally thinner than the cephalothorax. Tarantulas are among the biggest spiders of the New World, and this species is by far our heaviest. Females are slightly larger than males, reaching a body length up to 1.5 inches and a leg span of almost 4 inches.

Despite their mostly placid nature, tarantulas are capable of defending themselves or escaping predators. Their first tactic is simply to run for cover. When the predator pursues, they will flick urticating hairs from their back legs or abdomen, causing an allergic reaction in the pursuer's eyes and/or mouth. If the threat continues, they will rise up on their hind legs with the front legs raised and fangs exposed, and will bite. But, as mentioned before, the severity of the bite is no worse than a bee sting.



Rio Grande Gold

Unlike web weaving spiders, most *female* tarantulas will live up to 20-30 years, and lay 100 to 1,000 eggs in a web which is constructed like a hammock. She'll guard the egg sac in the burrow for 45 to 60 days. Spiderlings hatch in July or later within the egg sac. Once they leave the egg sac, the spiderlings may stay with the females for 3 to 6 days or longer before dispersing. Many of the young fall prey to other spiders or predators as they disperse to begin their own burrows. Females have lived in captivity for over 25 years. Males in Texas rarely live over two or three months after they reach maturity at the ripe old age of 2 or 3 years.

For more information, check out any of the sources below. I particularly recommend Dale Weisman's *Tarantula!* article featured in the March 2010 issue of Texas Parks and Wildlife Magazine.

Images

Gooty Sapphire Ornamental photo courtesy of Pamela Courson via Tumblr, Oct 2012

Brazos Bend Nature Center tarantula photo courtesy of David M via Big Bend Chat, Feb 2010

Rio Grande Gold photo courtesy of Lynn McCutchen via Arachnology at Junction, 2011

Informational Resources

American Tarantula Society – www.atshq.org

Arachnoboards – www.arachnoboards.com

Price, Michael. *WILD ABOUT TEXAS: Fear not: Tarantula is scary but placid*. San Angelo Standard Times, 2010. Accessed on December 9, 2012 via URL: [http://www.gosanangelo.com/news/2010/oct/23/fear-not-tarantula-is-scary-but-placid/?partner=yahoo feeds](http://www.gosanangelo.com/news/2010/oct/23/fear-not-tarantula-is-scary-but-placid/?partner=yahoo%20feeds)

Tarantulas & Their Venomous Relations. Allumination, 1999. Science Channel HD. 9 Dec 2012. Television. *Tarantula Species List*. Arachnofreaks, (n.d.). Accessed on December 9, 2012 via URL: [http://www.arachnofreaks.com/info sheets.htm](http://www.arachnofreaks.com/info%20sheets.htm)

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. *Tarantula. A Field Guide to Common Texas Insects*, 1998. Accessed on December 9, 2012 via URL: <http://insects.tamu.edu/fieldguide/cimg366.html>

KEEP ON TRUCKIN'

Brazos Bend is hosting the Keep on Truck'in half-marathon, marathon and ultra-marathon on January 27, 2013. As usual, the sponsors have promised the BBSPVO a substantial donation, and, as usual, they are asking for some volunteer assistance. This year's race will require much less volunteer effort than in years past. If you are interested in helping, please find details and times on the volunteer "Special Events Calendar" and sign up.

INVITATION TO PUBLIC WORKSHOPS

Fort Bend Green, along with other county partners on an initial steering committee, is developing a Recreation Master Plan for the Brazos River Corridor in Fort Bend County. As part of this process, we will hold three Public Workshops listed below. These workshops will give interested individuals an opportunity to participate in the master plan. You need only attend one of the workshops as the same information will be presented at each. We need your help! Please RSVP for the workshop of your choice.

January 27, 2013 2:00 to 4:00 PM

Brazos Bend State Park- George Observatory

NOTE: Park entrance fees are waived for meeting participants.. A complimentary tour of the Park's river access sites will also be offered. Interested participants are asked to meet at the Brazos Bend State Park-Equestrian entrance at 11 am.

January 28, 2013 6:00 to 7:30 PM

Irene Stern Community Center, 6920 Katy Fulshear Road, Fulshear, TX 77441

January 31, 2013 3:00 to 5:00 PM

Sugar Land Recreation Center, Multi-Purpose Room, 234 Matlage Way, Sugar Land, TX 77478

Sincerely, Kim Icenhower, Fort Bend Green

Brazos River Corridor Master Plan Steering Committee, 713-504-4378

kim@icenhower.com; <http://www.fortbendgreen.org>

UPCOMING EVENTS

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| January 27 | Keep on Truckin' Trail Races, 7:15 AM |
| February 1 | Guided Bird Watching Hikes, 8:00 AM, meet at 40-Acre Lake restrooms |
| February 2 | Bird photography Photo-walk, 3:00 PM, meet at Nature Center
Brazos River Pickers, 5:00 PM, Amphitheater |
| February 7 | Doris Mager Birds of Prey Program, NC Classroom, 3:00 PM |
| February 8 | Doris Mager Birds of Prey Program, NC Classroom, 3:00 PM |
| February 9 | Budget and Executive Meetings, 3:00 PM
Regular Business Meeting, 5:30 PM (Supper, 5:00 PM)
Volunteer Training Orientation and Luncheon, 9:30 - 3:00, NC
Doris Mager Birds of Prey Program, NC Classroom, 3:00 PM |
| February 10 | Doris Mager Birds of Prey Program, NC Classroom, 11:00 AM |
| February 15 | Guided Bird Watching Hikes, 8:00 AM, meet at 40-Acre Lake restrooms |
| February 16 | Volunteer Training, 9:00 - 5:00 |
| February 23 | Volunteer Training, 9:00 - 5:00
Texas Outdoor Family Weekend |
| March 1 | Guided Bird Watching Hikes, 8:00 AM, meet at 40-Acre Lake restrooms |
| March 2 | Landscape photography Photo-walk, 3:00 PM, meet at Nature Center
Brazos River Pickers, 5:00 PM, Amphitheater |
| March 9 | Budget and Executive Meetings, 3:00 PM
Regular Business Meeting, 5:30 PM (Supper, 5:00 PM) |
| March 15 | Guided Bird Watching Hikes, 8:00 AM, meet at 40-Acre Lake restrooms |

Brazos Bend State Park

Texas Parks and Wildlife
21901 FM 762
Needville, TX 77461

FIRST CLASS MAIL



☆☆☆☆☆

NEXT MEETING
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2013
5:30 PM, NATURE CENTER

REGULAR VOLUNTEER EVENTS

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

BRAZOS BEND STATE PARK VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION

VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION OFFICERS

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

NEWSLETTER TEAM

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

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

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

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

**BABA DIOUM, SENEGAL
AFRICAN CONSERVATIONIST**