

Big Thicket Reporter - #92 Mar-Apr 2008

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WILDERNESS POW WOW IN BIG THICKET

April 25-27

Register Now for Campsites / Boat Trips

The 29th annual Texas Wilderness Pow Wow is shaping up to be a "doozy." Headquarters are at Village Creek State Park. Field trips and leaders are scheduled plus numerous added attractions. Cheryl Roy of Texas Conservation Alliance has booked exhibits, including the Neches River exhibit done by Humanities Texas. Shelby's Stories and Tipi Tellers will tell environmental stories in their tipi all day. The Village Creek Dutch Oven group will provide dinner for a donation after the program. Bill Oliver and Larry Shelton will perform a new skit for us at the evening campfire, and the Saturday afternoon program will bring us up to date on conservation issues.



Canoeing on Village Creek

If you haven't booked your campsite and reserved space for a boat or canoe trip, better get crackin'! Space may be limited at Village Creek State Park, and it will be necessary to share campsites. BTA has prepaid for campsites, and TCA has booked a few cabins at the Beaumont ISD Education Center. You can reserve campsites and boat/canoe trips online at www.bigthicket.org. Or if you saved the Pow Wow flyer from the last newsletter, fill that in and forward it to Box 198, Saratoga TX 77585.

The BTA/TCA/GT Sierra folks will set up registration tables around noon on Friday. Field trips will assemble and caravan to sites on Saturday AM and PM as well as Sunday AM. You can also walk trails in Village Creek State Park between events.

SHANGRI LA RE-OPENS

MARCH 11



After 50 years, Shangri La is back -- but with a difference. Director Michael Hoke and his staff

unveiled the magnificent nature preserve in Orange on March 11. Open from March through October (closed holidays). Cost: \$6 adults, \$5 senior citizens, \$4 for children. Call 409-670-9113 for further information.

Tours of the 262-acre preserve include a boat trip on Adams Bayou and walking tours of gardens, greenhouses, etc. The heronry is mind-boggling, and there are towers for long-eared bats, frog ponds, and a 1,226 year-old cypress, "the Survivor."

Damaged trees from Hurricane Rita have been "recycled" and used throughout the buildings and various structures. Environmental education exhibits are numerous and instructive.

CONSERVATION OUTLOOK

LITTLE PINE ISLAND BAYOU AGAIN -- BUYOUTS PENDING

by Maxine Johnston



Lisa Jameson, BTNP biologist, organized a canoe/kayak trip down Little Pine Island Bayou from Pinewood to its confluence with Pine Island Bayou on Feb. 14. Accompanying us were Dusty Pate, Leslie DuBey and Paula Rivers. We had to go through, under, around and over numerous obstructions. On the positive side, the obstructions were not impounding water but flowed through freely. The banks were mostly about 5+ feet above water level, so presumably the stream can handle a considerable volume of water.

Hardin County News on March 5 reports that Hardin County received \$2 million for buyouts and appraisals are being made, possibly buying as many as 15 homes. One Lumberton home owner was quoted as unwilling to sell: "If I had to go without insurance, that's how it would

be... When you live in between a creek and a bayou, you have to take the wet with the dry." Judge Billy Caraway said, "It's the only real permanent solution for the homeowners." The Corps of Engineers Feasibility Study of 1985 reported that there were over 1200 structures subject to flooding.

TRINITY RIVER N.W.R. NEWS

The USFWS partnership with The Conservation Fund and Environmental Synergy, Inc. (ESI) held an event on Jan. 29 to announce a restoration project of 158 acres of forestland that will address climate change, restore sensitive wildlife habitat and enhance public recreation areas at Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in East Texas. Over their lifetime, the newly planted bald cypress, oak and pecan trees will trap more than 63,000 tons of carbon dioxide – a potent greenhouse gas.



Partners recognized in Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge Restoration Project

“The Fish and Wildlife Service and the American public are the true beneficiaries of this partnership,” said Benjamin Tuggle, Southwest Regional Director of the USFWS. “Through the efforts of Dell, Travelocity, Universal, The Conservation Fund, and all others involved in Go Zero, lands held for the American public will be improved, and the global environment for both people and wildlife will benefit.”

The 22,500-acre Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge is a broad, flat (cont. next page) floodplain made up of numerous sloughs, oxbow lakes, and artesian wells. Home to bald eagles, white-tailed deer and more than 640 plant species, the Refuge is a patchwork of forests, wetlands, and fallow agricultural lands. Much of the nearby land is for sale, and a high priority of USFWS is working with partners of public and private interests to protect more of the area.

THICKET OF DIVERSITY

The Database Manager search committee for the Thicket of Diversity (Linda Brindle, Chair, Lee LeJeune, Robert Craig, Dale Kruse, Stephanie Glenn and Whitney Granger) reviewed resumes and conducted interviews of the top applicants. The committee recommended hiring Mona Halvorsen to fill the position. In addition to Mona's skills and experience, the search committee was impressed with her in-person interview that demonstrated an "expert" knowledge of Microsoft Access, and Excel, good communication skills, ability to instruct others in Access, and an enthusiasm for the Big Thicket. Mona reported to work on Monday, March 3.

The Executive Council of the ToD will meet Thursday, March 27, 1:00 PM, Sam Houston State University in Huntsville. A mini-Ento-Blitz is scheduled April 17-20, and a Mushroom Bioblitz on June 16.

Thicket of Diversity (ATBI) T-shirts

Now available with donations

- T-Shirt in natural color, S, M, L, XL each \$15.00
 - Polo shirt (collar- lt. grey), 60/40: S, M, L, XL each \$20.00
- May be ordered [online here at this web site](#) or by mail to BTA, Box 198, Saratoga TX 77585.

IVORY-BILL CHRONICLES

By John C. Arvin, Research Coordinator

The first year of our survey of the historic Texas range of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker (IBWO) officially concluded at the end of November. We found no evidence that Ivory-billed Woodpeckers persisted in the search area (the Big Thicket National Preserve on the lower Neches River including the Village Creek drainage, and the Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge on the lower Trinity River).

Our search techniques included stationary watches at strategic locations, playback of recorded calls and drum-notes, and locating cavities and bark work indicative of known or suspected Ivory-bill examples. These were then monitored either directly by observation or remotely by time-lapse still video cameras. In addition, remote Autonomous Recording Units (ARUs), on loan from our friends at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, were deployed in areas that were thought to have higher than average potential for birds to be present. These deployments were for two week periods, during which time the ARUs recorded all sounds in the vicinity on a fixed schedule...

On June 13, as I was measuring trees in the Trinity River bottom, a bird making loud wooden wing beat noises approached me from behind. I assumed that it was a Wood Duck, a common species in that habitat. As the bird passed me on the left, I half turned to see it. It dodged behind some canopy foliage but I caught a brief glimpse as it passed an opening in the foliage. It was a large black-and-white woodpecker. Most of the early ornithologists who wrote about Ivory-billed Woodpeckers mentioned a mechanical wing noise such as this. An example was even recorded on the brief recording made by the Cornell Lab expedition to the Singer Tract in 1935. I have never heard a similar wing noise from flying Pileated Woodpeckers.

I waited in the vicinity for an hour or so but the bird had gone and did not come back. I immediately sent inquiries to all the people I could think of who know Pileated Woodpeckers well. None had ever heard a wooden wing sound. On that slender thread hangs my hope that a remnant population might remain in Texas. It is ranked as a “possible encounter” among a number of others from searches conducted in other southern states.

We have recently received funding from the US Fish and Wildlife Service for another year of surveys in Texas forests. Our plan for 2008 is to conduct searches from the air when the trees are completely leafless in January and February, ideally covering the entire lower drainages of the Sabine, Neches, and Trinity Rivers.

THICKET MISCELLANY

MARKING HISTORY: KOUNTZE BAPTIST COLLEGE by Ryan Myers

[Excerpts from *Beaumont Enterprise*, 2/20/08

Before becoming principal at Kountze's black high school, Margie Ann Frazier Renfro attended the Kountze Baptist Negro College near where the town's City Hall is today. At a historical marker unveiling Friday, Renfro's niece, Kountze City Councilwoman Mary Coleman Adams, spoke of her appreciation to the Hardin County Historical Commission for helping to remember the school's importance...

Founded in 1910 by a black church group, the Trinity Valley Baptist Association, the Kountze Baptist College was erected as a small wooden building initially enrolling 15 students, according to information from the Texas State Historical Association... More a primary and secondary grade school than a college by today's terms, the school grew in 1915 into a larger three-story

building containing dormitory rooms, classrooms and a chapel. Enrollment increased to as many as 25 students...

The Rev. W.H. Jermany served as president from 1910 to 1927 and the school was often referred to by his name, according to the Hardin County Historical Commission... Jermany and four other teachers, including his wife, taught reading, writing, mathematics, home economics and agriculture. A small farm on the 81 acres school grounds helped support the college... In Jermany's tenure about 1,000 students were educated at the school... The building was eventually demolished for its lumber. The school's large doors were installed in the parsonage of Beaumont's Starlight Baptist Church.

Dr. H.A. Hooks is chairman of the Hardin County Historical Commission... The marker was funded by the Kountze Economic Development Commission, whose president is Carl Richardson.

PRESERVE OVERVIEW

By Ann Roberts

Supt Todd Brindle (BTNP) reports that **David Roemer** began his service as Resource Management Chief on March 16. David comes to Big Thicket from Bryce Canyon National Park in Utah where he was a natural resource specialist. His time there included a stint as interim chief of the Resources Stewardship and Science Division. Before Bryce he was a biologist and the park GIS specialist at Carlsbad Caverns. While at Carlsbad he spent seven years as the lucky resident at Rattlesnake Springs - a birding oasis. David started with the National Park Service as an SCA at Carlsbad in 1989.

David earned a B.A. in Environmental Communications from Antioch College in 1991 and an M.S. in Environmental Studies from the University of Montana in 1997. During graduate school he completed a thesis on prairie dogs, studied bats for the Montana Natural Heritage Program, and authored and spearheaded passage of the Montana Cave Conservation Act, signed into law in 1993.

The new Law Enforcement Ranger is **Josh Clemons** who comes to us from Shiloh National Military Park and Stones River National Battlefield. Josh has been with the National Park Service since September 2001.

Field Research Station Visitors: So far in 2008, the Station has housed visitors from the

University of Tennessee, University of Nebraska, Rice University, University of Kentucky and Texas A & M University.

NSF Chatauqua: Dr. Jim Westgate, Professor of Earth & Space Sciences, Lamar University, received funding for a National Science Foundation Chautauqua at Big Thicket May 28 - 31. This is a three-day field course which explores the ecology and biodiversity of the Big Thicket National Preserve in southeast Texas where eastern hardwood forests merge with western prairies in a subtropical coastal plain setting. The course explores the diversity of BTNP via hiking trails and canoes in the company of BTNP ranger-naturalists.

Chautauqua Short Courses are forums in which scholars at the frontiers of various sciences meet intensively for several days with undergraduate college teachers of science. The series is held at colleges and universities throughout the United States as well as at selected special sites. Scholars communicate new knowledge, concepts, and techniques directly to college teachers that benefit their teaching.

For college teachers of all disciplines, there are no prerequisites. Teachers of undergraduate students in degree-granting institutions of higher education in the United States in the fields of natural or social sciences, mathematics, or engineering are eligible for participation. Applicants are selected by the Field Center Directors using criteria for potential benefit to the applicant, ability to influence the teaching of colleagues, or improvement of the undergraduate science curriculum at the applicant's institution.

BIG THICKET EVENTS

Mar. 27 Thicket of Diversity, Executive Council, Sam Houston SU, 1:00-3:00

Mar. 29 Liberty Jubilee

Apr. 12 BTA Board of Directors, FRS, Saratoga

Apr. 17-20 Thicket of Diversity EntoBlitz

April 19 Earth Day Event, Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge

April 25-27 Wilderness Pow Wow, Village Creek State Park, Lumberton

May 28-31 NSF Chautauqua at Big Thicket

June 16 Thicket of Diversity, Mushroom Bioblitz

Oct. 10 Hardin County Sesquicentennial History Conference, Courthouse

Oct. 11 Big Thicket Day, Saratoga

Oct. 6-19 Native Plant Society Conference, Beaumont

Oct. 25 History Comes Alive, Sesquicentennial Finale, Kountze, Kirby-Hill House grounds