

# Big Thicket Reporter - #99

## May-June 2009

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### FOUNDATION GENEROSITY

Big Thicket Association and the Thicket of Diversity (ATBI) have reason to be thankful for the generosity of foundations. New grants have been received from two foundations, the Brown Foundation (2009) and the T.L.L. Temple Foundation (2009-2010) that total \$80,000. Second year grants come from the Meadows Foundation and the Stark Foundation that total \$57,500. BTA is honored and humbled that these Foundations recognize the importance of the species inventory and have contributed significantly.

Earlier support from Brown and Meadows dates back to 2000 when they supported renovation of the Field Research Station, and both have supported Thicket of Diversity (ToD). Brown Foundation, helped purchase land surrounding the Visitor Center. T.L.L. Temple and Temple-Inland foundations also continue to fund the Thicket of Diversity. Because of their help, BTA

has been able to make a lot of progress and remarkable achievements. These foundation's good works extend far beyond Big Thicket, but they have made a genuine difference in Big Thicket.

## 6,600 ACRES OF WETLAND DONATED

*Andy Jones (TCF) and Supt. Todd Brindle (BTNP)*



The Conservation Fund and BP America, Inc. hosted a celebration for the donation of 6,600 acres of wetlands to the Big Thicket National Preserve. The event occurred at Riverfront Park in Beaumont on April 15, 2009. TCF's Andy Jones, Julie Shackelford and BTNP Supt. Todd Brindle recognized the partners who made the gift possible, including BP America, Entergy Corporation, the Stark Foundation, T.L.L. Temple Foundation, Walter Humphrey, Malcolm C. Damuth Foundation, Imperial Oil Company, and the C. W. Howth Estate. Funds also came from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act.

Using funds from several public and private sources and working with a variety of landowners, the Fund acquired the acreage that surrounds the Beaumont Unit and Village Creek Corridor Unit. The land protects stretches of the Neches River and Village Creek and contains bayous that flow through rich bottomland hardwoods and cypress-tupelo swamps. Of especial note is the magnanimous gift of 600 acres by Eddie Arnaud of Lumberton.

After the luncheon, Lamar University's Environmental Learning and Research Center's, Cardinal Neches River Adventures, conducted a boat tour of the area traversing Ten-Mile Creek.

## B.T.A. NEWS

### **BIG THICKET DAY 2009**

The 45th Annual Big Thicket Day occurs Oct. 10. Among the festivities will be updates on Big Thicket agencies / issues / pending legislation, recognition of past presidents and life members, presentation of annual awards, maybe some Indian dancers and country music -- and rubbing elbows with old friends. Put it on your calendar!

### **BTA BRAGS**

In October, BTA completes 45 years of public service, and we will be looking back with pride. In addition to leadership to establish the first National Preserve in 1974, state parks, wildlife refuges and private conservation efforts, we have worked for appropriations to buy authorized lands, served as a watchdog in the early days for spite cutting, ravages of Southern pine beetles, water projects, Ghost Road, etc.

Furthermore, our contributions and efforts in behalf of the Preserve have now reached the \$1million mark. These gifts include transfer of property and assets in 1994, grants received for renovating the former Museum for use as a Field Research Station, work with partners to purchase of land surrounding the Visitor Center, organizing Thicket of Diversity, and supporting environmental education programs. Another \$60,000 includes support of three science conferences, a Temple Big Thicket Series of publications (matched by services of University of North Texas Press), and interpretation of the Ghost Road County Park Scenic Drive. And that's just money. Add to that hours of volunteer services stretched over 35 years by our members.

BTA can be proud of this record, BUT our conservation record of 97,000 acres Preserve should be our first brag. Yes, we are a "Friend" of the Preserve, and we support them vigorously, but we are first and foremost a CONSERVATION organization, and, as such, we may occasionally disagree (privately and publicly). Our commitment continues to include preservation efforts that protect our natural and cultural heritage.

Pyramid Magnolias: Robert Wilson, Campbell Group Forester, led a field trip to sites of pyramid magnolias and silky camellias on Saturday, May 16. These species occur only in Newton County in Texas. Sixteen folks participated including not only BTA members, but also Native Plant Society, Sierra Club, Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust, and Texas Conservation Alliance. The group also visited the property of Mark and Susan Karpel (Susan is an officer of the Newton County Chamber of Commerce). The Karpel property also has pyramid magnolia populations.



*Robert Wilson on May 10, 2009 Field Trip*

Name Contest: In the last Reporter and on the website, we ran a picture of a ravine in the Canyonlands Unit filled with cypress roots and knees, and we invited folks to name the picture. D. W. Ivans (BTNP) and James Caccioppo (BTA member) who participated in the Canyonlands field trip were judges for the contest. Fourteen suggestions were submitted, and the judges chose as #1, "Tree Knees Pass," and #2, "Horns of Plenty," and #3, "Root-deer." The winner was Talena Fowler, who will receive a copy of Sitton and Hunt's Big Thicket People as her

"prize."

## DIVERSITY DISPATCH

Dr. Dale Kruse, President, Thicket of Diversity Executive Council, and his TWIG group were in residence at the Field Research Station May 15-17. The group collected bryophytes in the Canyonlands Unit.

Dr. Carl Knight arrived with his Eastfield College students June 6 through June 16. During that period they will participate in mini-bioblitzes conducted with several TWiG Principal Investigators, afternoon seminars, and a mushroom walk on Saturday, June 13 led by Dave Lewis.

**Gulf States Mycological Society:** A Mushroom Walk will be held in the Preserve Saturday, June 13, 2009. at 10:00 AM. The group will meet at the Big Thicket Field Research Station (FRS) located in Saratoga, and will foray into the nearby Lance Rosier Unit and collect and record species. This activity is part of the Thicket of Diversity (ATBI). The collections will be displayed, identified, and dried for deposit in an herbarium. Collection labels will be provided.

The mushroom walk will be led GSMS President David Lewis, who is also the ToD-ATBI Taxonomic Working Group (TWiG) leader. Heinz Gaylord will also be present. Following the foray, species will be displayed and discussed. Bring a sack lunch, a basket, waxed or paper bags, knife or spoon to dig specimens, water, hats, rain gear, and bug spray. --David & Patricia Lewis 409-423-3776 plewis@jas.net

## TAXA WORKING GROUPS (TWiGs)

The following TWiGs are at work collecting and recording data.

## AMPHIBIANS

Paul Crump, Houston Zoo

## AQUATIC BUGS

Paul Tinerella

University of Illinois @ Urbana

## AQUATIC ECTO-PARASITES

Michael Barger and Scott D. Snyder

Peru State College

## BRYOPHYTES

Paul G. Davidon, Univ. of North Alabama

Dale Kruse, Tracy Herbarium, TAMU

## FRESHWATER FISHES

Chad Hargrave

Sam Houston State Univ.

## FRESHWATER MUSSELS

Marsha May, TP&W

Bob Boensch, Nature Conservancy

## GYRINID BEETLES

Jerry Cook and Edward Realzola

Sam Houston State University

## LEPIDOPTERA

David Henderson

Butterfly Enthusiasts of S.E. Texas

## LICHENS

Robert Egan

Univ. of Nebraska

## MACRO FUNGI

David Lewis

Gulf States Mycological Society

## ORCHIDS

Joe Liggio

Author / Photographer (TXDoT)

## PYRENOMYCETOUS FUNGI

Larissa Vasilyeva

Russian Academy of Sciences, Far East Branch

## SLIME MOLDS

Steven Stephenson and Kate Winsett

Univ. of Arkansas

## TARDIGRADES

Harry Meyers and Juliana Hinton

McNeese State Univ.

## TERRESTRIAL ARTHROPOD

Jerry L. Cook / faculty & student volunteers

Sam Houston State Univ.

## VASCULAR PLANTS 1

Stephan L. Hatch and Dale Kruse

S.M. Tracy Herbarium, TAMU

## VASCULAR PLANTS 2a- Loblolly, Becch Creek Menard Creek Units

Larry E. Brown, Spring Branch ESC

Michael and Barbara McRoberts, Bog Research

## VASCULAR PLANTS 2b- Jack Gore Baygall

Larry E. Brown, Spring Branch ESC

Michael and Barbara McRoberts, Bog Research



Note: Inquiries have been received to inventory certain taxa groups: small mammals, vascular plants, tardigrades, zooplankton, water beetles, earthworms and millepedes. TOD solicits participation from, scientists to serve as principal investigators to inventory species not now covered.

## CONSERVATION OUTLOOK

Black Bear Alliance met April 7 at Ellen Trout Zoo in Lufkin. Nathan Garner (TP&W) gave an update on the Black Bear Conservation Committee. Membership is \$35; contributions of \$100+ at various levels may include a bear T-shirt, Polo-shirt and cap. Updates were provided by Rickey Maxey (TP&W) on bear sightings and Brent Kartye (TCA) on the Neches NWR.

Committee breakout sessions were followed by reports. Richard LeTourneau (TCA) reported election results; Chris Comer (SFASU) was elected chair. The next meeting is scheduled July 30 in Nacogdoches, SFASU, Arthur Temple School of Forestry.

Informative handouts included: 1) Northeast Texans Attitudes Towards and Acceptance of Black Bears...[Keul et al]; 2) Spatial Distribution of Attitudes Toward Proposed Management Strategies for Wildlife Recovery [Morzillo, Mertig, Garner and Liu]; 3) Stakeholders' Attitudes Concerning Black Bears in North East Texas .. [Keul, et al]; and 4) Louisiana Black Bear Critical Habitat. On March 10 USF&WS designated 1,195,821 acres as critical habitat in 15 Louisiana parishes.

## TEXAS CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

30th Wilderness Pow Wow: The Pow Wow this year was a scaled-down version of former events. No campfire; no Bill Oliver. But there were the usual Saturday field trips led by Larry Shelton, Heinz Gaylord and Dave Lewis, AND a Neches River Canoe Trip. The afternoon program included reports on various conservation initiatives, especially the Neches Scenic River.

TCA Lifetime Achievement Awards: Genie Fritz presented the 2009 Ned and Genie Fritz Lifetime Achievement Awards to both Larry Shelton and Janice Bezanson. The tributes for both were long and definitive.



*Janice Bezanson and Larry Shelton at Catahoula Forest*

Among the kudos, Genie Fritz said, "Larry has been the eyes and ears of conservation in the national forests of East Texas for 25 years." Shelton pushed for an ecosystem approach to management of our public forests, working cooperatively with the USFS. He is now involved in revising the Land and Resource Management Plan for national forests. His company, Osage Woodworks, specializes in custom cabinetry and restoration of historic structures.

Mack Turner, TCA chair, presented the Fritz award to Janice Bezanson. Janice inherited a lot of wisdom and know-how from our "Texas Green Pioneer" Ned Fritz, but she brings her own organization skills and personal leadership qualities to the benefit of the Alliance agenda: protection of rivers, forests, and other special landscapes; campaigning for wildlife refuges and other natural areas, supplying water from existing reservoirs rather than building new dams, and improving forest management on public lands.

Fritz Memorial at Catahoula Forest: Genie Fritz invited friends to gather at Catahoula Forest at 10:30 a.m. on Sunday April 26 to share in the spreading of Ned's ashes. Richard Donovan led

the devotional, members of Ned's family read some of his poems, and friends offered remembrances.

## **NATIONAL PARKS CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION**

NPCA released April 9th a long-term strategic proposal called Toward the Next Hundred Years. The document notes that the economic stimulus package approved "more than \$900 million of federal reinvestment in park infrastructure includes \$589 million for park construction, \$160 million for reducing maintenance backlogs, and \$150,000 for road repair. NPCA has demonstrated that every federal dollar spent on national parks generates at least four dollars in direct benefits to state and local economies.

Other highlights include expansion of the AmeriCorps program, fund for acquiring inholdings (within 55 parks over 2 million acres are privately-owned inholdings), halting commercial exploitation within and adjacent to park boundaries, and organizing a Centennial Coalition (park communities, travel and tourism groups, garden clubs, businesses, and park retirees) to help shape goals and priorities for the next century.

## **GUNS IN NATIONAL PARKS**

NPCA and National Recreation and Park Association have both labored diligently to stop the passage of legislation that would allow guns in our national parks. Unfortunately, House Democrats, many from states in the South and Midwest, joined nearly all House Republicans to back the gun bill that passed 279 to 147 in the House with the help of 105 Democratic votes; 145 Democrats opposed the bill. According to the Washington Post Sen. Tom Coburn [R-OK, attached the amendment to credit card legislation that is one of Pres. Obama's top priorities. The move effectively forced Democrats to vote on the gun provision if they wanted to pass the credit card bill.

Bill Wade, Executive Council Chair of the Coalition of National Parks Service Retirees said:

"Passage of this legislation ... is an absolute travesty... Legislators who voted for this Amendment now have to live with the fact that they have, in fact, increased the risk to visitors and employees, as well as risk to wildlife and some cultural resources ..." Scot McElveen, Pres., Association of National Park Rangers said: "...this is a fundamental reversal from what preceding congresses created the national park system for..." There should be a chorus of "Amens" to those statements.

BTNP legislation allows hunting in the Preserve in designated areas during hunting season, and Preserve law enforcement officers register hunters and monitor use. The program is cost-intensive when considering Preserve time and funds invested in the program.

## **NATURE CONSERVANCY AND LARSEN**

by Wendy Ledbetter, Southeast Texas Project Director

**Science and Stewardship:** Science experts from Texas and Missouri visited the Sandyland Preserve to collect data points for the statewide effort to enhance the classification of vegetation communities. The Texas Ecological Systems mapping project's goals are to develop a vegetation community spatial database based on NatureServe's Ecological System Classification. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Missouri Resource Assessment Partnership (MoRAP) are working together on this multi-year project scheduled to be completed in 2012.



*Wendy Ledbetter (TNC), David Diamond (MoRap) and Jim Neal (USFWS). Photo by Lee Elliot.*

Staff Work: Program and statewide Conservancy staff and a volunteer completed three prescribed burns totaling approximately 640 acres on the Sandyland Preserve. This acreage was burned as part of the cost-share program EQIP through the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

Staff members worked with the Texas Trailing Phlox Recovery Work Group that reintroduced a population of 125 plants on Hancock Forest Management lands in Tyler County. Conservancy staff monitored the plants following a February prescribed burn to maintain open ground cover conditions. In the Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary, volunteers and members of the Work Group surveyed areas for spring blooming Texas trailing phlox. Three new additional plants were located.

On the Horizon: Field investigations on rare bat species will begin June 2009 at the Sandyland Preserve by Stephen Austin State University in cooperation with the Texas Parks & Wildlife

Department. Southeastern myotis and Rafinesque's big-eared bat are species found in bottomland hardwood forests of the southeastern United States. Based on previous field work this study will 1) identify and delineate bat distribution, 2) relocate old and attempt to find new roost and maternity sites, 3) quantify relevant environmental physical characteristics of roost sites and associated habitats and 4) estimate potential roost site availability.

## PRESERVE OVERVIEW

BTNP headquarters: Preserve staff have worked in rental headquarters for over 30 years. Now funds are finally available to restructure the Maintenance Complex to provide offices for the superintendent and administrative staff, resource management, visitor and resource protection, interpretation, facility management, a small library, and a conference room. A mezzanine will be constructed over bays for additional space.

Leetex/Hill & Wilkinson, LLC of Dallas have begun structural work. The firm also built the Fire Management facility in Woodville. Displaced employees will be temporarily working in other locations, including the annex on Milam in Beaumont. Preserve officials hope the work will be completed by September, and a public event will be scheduled.

Other projects funded: The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Stimulus) provided \$667,000 to support three projects: (1) \$540,000 to remove two plugged and exposed oil & gas wells in the Neches River and restore the natural landscape; (2) \$76,000 to restore facilities damaged by hurricane Ike; (3) \$51,000 to repair hurricane damage on the Kirby nature trail.

Chautauqua: In partnership with Lamar University Geology Department, a Chautauqua was held May 27-30 based at the Field Research Station in Saratoga. On May 28, the group convened at the Visitor Center with welcomes and management overviews by Preserve division chiefs Mark Peapenburg (Resource Protection), David Roemer (Resource Management), and Leslie DuBey (Acting Chief, Interpretation). Participants hiked Kirby Nature Trail, had lunch at the Pickett House, and toured Rush Creek Ravines led by Dr. Jeff Pittman and Dr. Randall

Terry (Lamar). The group finished the day at Smith Woods Rookery (High Island) and had dinner at Al T's in Winnie.

On May 29th, fire management personnel briefed Chautauqua participants, and after lunch toured Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary, followed by a canoe trip from Baby Galvez to Village Creek State Park.

Texas Forest Expo: BTNP Teacher-Ranger-Teachers Keith Glazener and Susan Middlebrook joined Ann Roberts at the Lone Star Convention Center in Conroe for the 2009 Texas Forest Expo. Visitors were given brochures and information on the BTNP and the Field Research Station. Ranger Keith instructed young visitors in becoming a Jr. Park Ranger. BTNP's Mark and Chris Peapenburg attended some of the classes.

START- Southeast Texas Area Recreation and Tourism: BTA will host the next START "Tourism Talk Around," on Thursday, July 16 at 9:30 a.m. at the FRS. Lunch and beverages will be provided for participants.

## EAST TEXAS MISCELLANY

"Life on the Neches": The Museum of East Texas in Lufkin held its "Life on the Neches" Exhibition, March 21-May 29. A program on April 19 featured Dr. F. E. Abernethy (Dean of Texas Folklore) and Janice Bezanson (TCA) as speakers. BTA manned the BTNP exhibit at the event. A large crowd turned out to enjoy the exhibits and the speeches.

Kountze Chamber of Commerce sponsored the 2nd annual Hardin County Music Festival on May 15 & 16, 2009. The festival had good weather and a great turn out to enjoy all the music and events. Some of the music was provided by Corey Morrow, Mickey and the Motorcars, Ian Moore, Easy, Herbie Stutts, Keith Frank, and Rachel Brown. Vendors with arts & crafts, clothing, purses, belts, wood and metal art, and good food kept everyone happy. There was also a motorcycle rally and a 4x4 truck show with a mud pit for folks to enjoy. The BBQ Cook-Off sponsored by Western of Texas and the Gumbo Cook-Off sponsored by Douget's were huge

successes.

**Batson Oil Patch Festival:** The 23rd annual Oil Patch Festival in Batson, is scheduled June 13th, but festivities begin May 28 with an Oil Patch Beauty Pageant with categories from newborn through high school age.

All the booths, vendors and attractions set up shop on Friday afternoon June 12. The parade starts at 10:00 AM, Saturday, June 13 with the theme "The Way We Were." The Oil Patch Museum is open all day. There's a Bar-B-Q Cookoff, booths for sales of foods and crafts, carnival attractions for the kids, entertainment and games. Funds provide for college scholarships as well as upkeep on the museum and Community Center. This popular event always attracts a crowd.

## EVENTS

June 13 - Batson Oil Patch Festival

July 11 - BTA Board Meeting @ FRS

July 13-17 - Environmental Sciences Workshop, Lamar University

July 16 - START Tourism Talk Around @ FRS

October 10 - Big Thicket Day