



VOLUME 20, NUMBER 9

SEPTEMBER 2008

## AUGUST MEETING NOTES

*Submitted by Nicole Olsen, Secretary*

The meeting was called to order August 9, 2008, by President James Blankenship. Seventeen members, four staff members, five VITs, and one visitor attended. The minutes of the July 2008 meeting were approved as posted.

Staff reports were presented and are published elsewhere in this newsletter.

### OFFICER REPORTS:

#### Treasurer's Report:

Treasurer **Diane Carpenter** presented the budget report. The following budget reports were approved:

- A bar code scanner including accessories for the gift shop. **Glen Kilgore** approved use of the Exxon-Mobil fund for this item.
- **Steve Killian** requested 77 tons of dust to ¾-inch limestone gravel for trails in order to use the \$2,000 previously approved for a dump truck last month which was not used.
- **Steve Killian** requested an external hard drive (500 GB) to back up his data and data transfer to the TPWD system.

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Maintenance Report:

The Maintenance Report is included elsewhere in the newsletter.

Gift Shop Report:

**Beth Debenport** reported that July sales were better than last year. She appreciates everybody's help.

Outreach Report:

**Judy Strauss** announced that Texian Market Days will be October 24-25 at the George Ranch. We always need volunteers. Also, the **Watson family** presented two programs at the George Library in Richmond. There were 113 and 121 people for the programs.

**Bruce Williamson** received an invitation for two functions on August 20 at the Houston Zoo concerning TPWD. We've been invited to send representatives. One is a public hearing that starts at 2 pm and the other is a reception honoring Houston area partners from 6-8 pm. We need to RSVP if interested.

Training:

**Anna Dell Williamson** indicated that training is the first three Saturdays in September (6, 13, and 20). E-mails requesting help were sent and many volunteers responded. The orientation is a lunch meeting. Please bring meat, bread and sandwich trimmings. The volunteers attending will talk about their volunteer experience. I appreciate the feedback on the parts of the training you thought were helpful. We need more mentors. There are 10-11 trainees and three of them are young people (ages 15, 17, 18).

**OLD BUSINESS:**

The Nominating Committee presented the following list of nominees:

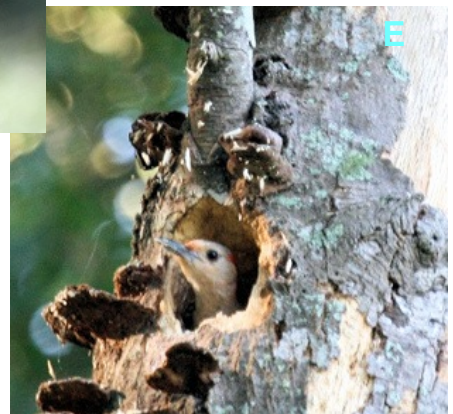
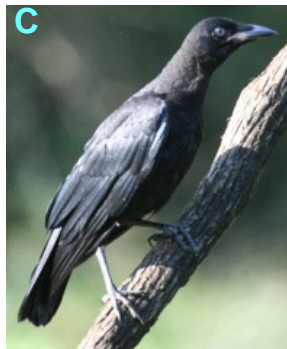
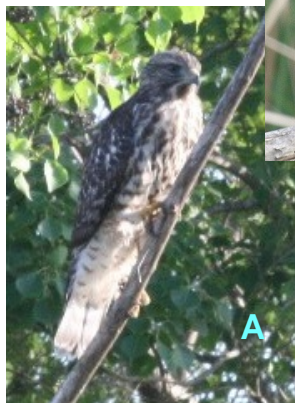
President - <b>Carrie Sample</b>	Vice President - <b>Suzie Gann</b>
Secretary - <b>Eddy Grizzaffi</b>	Treasurer - <b>Diane Carpenter</b>

There were no additional nominations from the floor. Since there is only one nominee for each office, no ballots will be distributed. The election of the nominees will be formalized at the September meeting. It was moved, seconded and passed to accept the slate of nominees.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

**Sharon Hanzik** conducted a mini ceremony to present two new volunteers with their caps and pins: **Dawn Tejero** and **Joan Hebert**, both from the Spring 2008 class. There being no additional business, the meeting was adjourned.

**CAN YOU IDENTIFY THESE . . .  
Birds?**



**Photos by Jerry Zona**

*Answers are on page 8*

# STAFF REPORTS

## SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

### STEVE KILLIAN



July was a fantastic month! A great month! Visitation was good. TPWD Director Walt Dabney mentioned that July 2008 was a record month of all time.

This past month we completed a lot of work on the trails, especially Elm and 40 Acre trails. Most of the materials have been put down (limestone gravel). We are happy with the trail material. This is an example of volunteers and staff working together.

We are spraying prairies, establishing firebreaks, and planning to burn prairies in the fall. If not, it's not the end of the world. We helped at Galveston to burn 670 acres of prairies. They had not been burned in 10 years. However, we were not responsible for burning the building down!

**Diane Carpenter** mentioned that some visitors were really pleased about the park. The revenue won't increase if we don't provide what the people want.

There are some ideas on a project – we have a few extra dollars dedicated to the Nature Center area and must spend it by the end of the fiscal year. We can build an addition to the deck and extend it out to the bike rack. The park would cover about half of the cost of materials, and the volunteer organization would be asked to give the rest of the money. It would be a separate deck around the two trees near the bike rack.

There was nice article in the *Houston Chronicle* about the river trip. The *Texas Highways Magazine* has an article about BBSP and trails in Texas. The 40 Acre Lake trail was highlighted.

There was a question about the spraying around 40 Acre lake - why no biodiversity? Can't we leave some green area? Steve responded that it will be noted. Another question concerned the dead trees around 40 Acre lake; can we plant some live ones? Steve responded that we will look into it but it takes man hours. It was suggested that we can perhaps plant some willows, they are easy to grow.

## INTERPRETIVE STAFF REPORTS

### DAVID HEINICKE

The annual Brazos Bend Butterfly Count is September 21st at 9 AM; meet at 40 Acre Lake. **Rich Jespersen** is the contact person. The new trail marker posts turned out really well, and colored trail maps are done and being handed out to visitors. Alligator eggs – there are some nests reported by the maintenance crew. We may need to rescue some alligator eggs. The Family Camping Program was originally scheduled for the same weekend as the TPWD Expo (October 3rd) so it was changed. We will need help for the program. The amphitheater was rewired and new speakers were installed.

Six people are signed up for the TPWD Wildlife Expo (Sharon to lead). It's a big outreach program. Thanks to **Ron Morrison** for cutting the tallow trees in such heat. Also, there's a flathead soapberry borer beetle infestation, which explains the dead trees around the park and the bark knocked off. Thanks to everybody for your help!

## SHARON HANZIK



July was a record month that carried over from visitation to volunteer hours! Volunteer hours in July have normally been 1,000 to 1,200 hours. The highest ever was 1,600 hours. For July 2008 there were 1,800 hours; we beat the record by 200 hours. There were lots of folks helping with Eco-Explorers programs.

A few nice things – I visited with **Rita Cooper** (emeritus volunteer) at Wal-Mart. She then came in last Sunday. Also, former volunteer **Mike Weigel** stopped by.

Some new members and VITs are at the meeting: **Cindy Peterson**, member; **Veronica Telthorster**, **Robert Aaron**, and **Joyce Giese** (VITs). Two VITs to finish tonight are **Joan Hebert** and **Dawn Tejero**...welcome to all! Thank you for making the place what it is!

## LABOR DAY KUDOS

*by Sharon Hanzik*

Thanks for the labor, which I know is not as much labor as it is fun. Volunteers in charge again - covering all the bases including programs. Four hundred and forty visitors that day. I am so proud of this organization that doesn't need "baby-sitting". All that time invested in training really pays off for both parties. Time to "grow another crop" of volunteers!

*Read All About It!*

*Glen Kilgore received the following note of recognition from a big group that he took on a special hike around 40 Acre Lake:*

Mr. Kilgore,

This is just a short note to say "thank you" for your willingness to give the Capital Cities Adventurers a personal tour of Brazos Bend State Park this past Saturday (July 26, 2008). Your patience, enthusiasm, and knowledge of the park are attributes which contribute to you being a "top-notch" volunteer! A great time was had by all!

Again, thank you and may God bless you!

Sincerely,

Cislyn Brunn, Area Coordinator,  
Adriene Swinton, Asst. Area Coordinator,  
Stacy Griggs, Nature Coordinator

The *Fort Bend Herald* has been running several articles about BBSP or by BBSP personnel. **Dennis Jones** has had a couple of feature articles published, and the 17 baby alligators got a nice write-up about the hatching. One of Dennis' articles is about the not-dead alligator.





# NATURE CENTER REPORT

## August 2008

by Anna Dell Williamson

Following are the totals for the various activities and attendance recorded for the Nature Center, hikes, and programs for August 1-31, 2008. This attendance reflects one closed weekday (Hurricane Edouard) and Labor Day weekend (but not Labor Day) with the threat of Hurricane Gustav.

PROGRAMS	TOTALS
<b>NATURE CENTER ATTENDANCE</b> August 2008 - 3985	<b>Saturdays (5) 1540</b> <b>Sundays (5) 1276</b> <b>Weekdays (20) 1169</b>
<b>CREEKFIELD HIKES (10)</b> (One special hike for a group)	<b>98</b>
<b>ALLIGATOR PROGRAMS/HIKES (10)</b>	<b>182</b>
<b>ECO-EXPLORERS (2)</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>SNAKE (4)</b>	<b>149</b>
<b>CHILDREN'S STORY TIME (9)</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>BIRD PROGRAMS/HIKES (3)</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>OUTREACH</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>BEES</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>OTHER PROGRAMS (7):</b> Creatures of the Night; Ask the Ranger; Trees; BBSP videos	<b>34</b>
<b>TOTAL VISITORS SERVED IN HIKES &amp; PROGRAMS:</b>	<b>739</b>

## AUGUST MAINTENANCE REPORT

by Ron Morrison and Noel Duncan

### Wood Yard:

Split 5.25 cords of Willie wood. Cleaned out the volunteer wood pile that was overflowing. Delivered 3/4 cord of wood to the wood yard.

### Mowing and Landscaping:

Mowed the grass at the entrance to the maintenance yard.



### Trail Trimming and Trail Maintenance:

Trimmed 40 Acre Lake Trail and the Mile Stretch; a portion of the Spillway Trail between Elm and 40 Acre Lakes; a portion of the Creekwood Trail; the Bluestem Trail from the primitive camping area to Big Creek Bridge; and portions of the Bayou Trail. Cleared the Creekfield Lake Trail, Bluestem Trail, and the Red Buckeye Trail of several blowdowns. Mounted "Bottomland Hardwoods" sign on a post on the Red Buckeye trail and completed installing the trail markers. Assisted the rangers in adding 20 yards of topping to Elm Lake trail.

**Equipment Maintenance:**

Serviced the Vermeer wood chipper for the 100 hour service mark. Replaced two broken grease fittings on the wood chipper.

**General Maintenance:**

Built a backstop to keep logs from pushing the fence over. Chipped several blowdown limbs at campsite 206 and Hale Lake road at the bridge, at the 100 and 200 camping loops, and at Elm and Hale picnic areas.

Added fill dirt at campsites 4, 7, 12, 225, 233, 234 and at the Dining Hall and restroom. Trimmed overhead branches at shelters 2, 9, 10, 12 and at the restroom. Cleared a blowdown from the 100 camping loop road. Trimmed the 40 Acre Lake picnic ground trees over the tables.

**Pest Control:**

Cleared Chinese Tallow trees encroaching on the area around campsite 120, the roadway near the Big Creek Bridge, and the entrance to Pilant Slough Trail. Sprayed the five Hale Lake viewing areas. Treated 500 Chinese Tallow trees with herbicide.

## SATURDAY TRAIL TRIMMING

*by Ron Morrison*

I find we have sufficient interest at this time to start a Trail Trimming Team to meet one Saturday per month. The first group met August 9th. Interested volunteers will be sent an e-mail announcing the date each month. We will determine which trail to work on after everyone has responded.

Bring with you: Work gloves, long sleeve shirt, long pants, well broken-in boots or sturdy shoes, insect repellent and plenty of water. We will work with the wood chipper so please bring eye and ear protection. Check the weather and bring rain gear if necessary.

The group will meet at the Nature Center at 8:30 a.m. on the designated day. If you are interested in receiving e-mail notices of these workdays, contact Ron Morrison.

## ECO-EXPLORERS WILL CONTINUE

*by Carrie Sample*

Our Thursday morning children's program, Eco-Explorers, has ended for the summer. We are hoping to continue it next summer. We had a total of 207 children and 102 adults attend the sessions. One Grandfather brought one to five of his grandchildren to almost all of the sessions. One mother with a small baby and two other children also attended many of them. We gave out eleven Brazos Bend frisbees to children who came to five or more sessions.

Thanks and gratitude goes to the many who helped. The list of names is in the "Thank You" column of this newsletter. I sure hope I haven't forgotten someone who also helped - let me know if I did.

If anyone else would like to help next year, that would be great! Next summer, we may have to revamp our topics, because we will probably have some of the same children.

# VOLUNTEER NEWS & NOTES



... to **Dennis Jones, Rick Dashnau, Jenn Mantei, Carrie Sample,** and **Sharon Hanzik** for articles for the newsletter.

... to **Jeff McMullan** for developing and presenting the Beekeeper Program.

... to our present officers: **James Blankenship, Anna Dell Williamson, Diane**

**Carpenter,** and **Nicole Olson.**

... to **Cindy Peterson, Joyce Giese** and **Joan Hebert** for the meeting night dinner.

... to **Warren and Joan Jackson** and **David Heinicke** for the installation of handrails at the steps into the lounge.

... to volunteers for filling in on interpretive programs: **Carrie Sample, Maureen Goode, Tom Prentiss, Rick Dashnau** and **Jaci Elliott.**

... to host **Charen Teague** for her assistance with the care and feeding of the hatchling alligators.

From **Carrie Sample** to the following for help with the Eco-Explorers summer program: **Eddy Grizzaffi** who registered the children each week and set out the refreshments; **Pam Tatge** for leading two of the sessions while I was on vacation; **Diane Carpenter** for opening the gift shop each Thursday and pitching in whenever she could; **Patricia Marshall** for attending many of the sessions and helping with whatever needed to be done; **Suzie Gann** for leading the Armadillo story session and also helping out in many sessions; **Jerry Carpenter** for assisting and leading several hikes; **Tom Prentiss** for his talks on alligators and snakes; **Bill Godley** for helping with the birding; **Jaci Elliott** for sharing her book, song, and the shadow plays; **Sharon Hanzik** for her support, giving our sessions such cute names, and publicizing the program.

From **Jennifer Parent** to **Carrie Sample, Maureen Goode, Chuck Duplant, Beth & Ken Debenport** and **David Heinicke** for their concern when I was stung by a paper wasp at the wood yard on Saturday, August 2. Also, a special "thanks" to **Curtis** for getting me medical attention. I had a nasty allergic reaction, and I am still itching but should be better in a few days.

From **James Blankenship** to **Diane Carpenter, Nicole Olson** and **Anna Dell Williamson** for their help.

## CONGRATULATIONS

... to Junior Volunteers **Jose Velasquez, Ethan Aaron** and **Maria Orozco**, who have completed the Junior Volunteer requirements. All of the candidates from this class have completed their training with the exception of **Adrick Velazco**, who is going through adult training with the September class.

... to adult volunteers **Robert Aaron, Joyce Giese, Veronica Telthorster, Dawn Tejero** and **Joan Hebert** from the February '08 class who have completed their training requirements.



### September Birthdays:

Ron Dearman  
Linda Oden Heinicke  
Frank Gregg (Emeritus)  
Jim Calvert  
Gary Bialas (Staff)  
Barry Eversole (Staff)  
Tina Ibarra (Staff)

### October Birthdays:

Nicole Olson  
Mozelle Franklin (Emeritus)  
Fletcher Morgan (Emeritus)  
Dennis Jones (Staff)  
Buddy Franklin (Emeritus)  
James Blankenship  
Diana Kerr  
Tom Kanak



September Anniversaries:  
Jim and Patricia Hiett  
Don and Marilyn Vossler (1966)  
Jaci Elliott  
Eddy and Sam Grizzaffi  
Dave and Gay Armstrong (1967)

October Anniversaries:  
Diane and Jerry Carpenter  
Pam (VIT) and Reid Tatge

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## MEETING NIGHT SUPPERS

Remember that you may now sign up for meeting night suppers on the Volunteer Calendar. If you must cancel, please notify **Judy Strauss** or **Anna Dell Williamson**. You will be reimbursed for your expenses (try to keep it between \$35 and \$50) when you present your receipts. We charge members \$2 to \$3 for the supper. Attendance usually runs between 15 and 20. Plates, bowls, plastic ware, napkins, glasses and tea and coffee are provided.

There are crock pots and a microwave available for your use. The next supper we need covered is the November meeting.

Contact **Judy Strauss** if you have any questions.



Answers to “**Can You Identify These...**” Quiz (from page 2):

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| A. Hawk                 | D. Green Heron                                |
| B. Red-winged Blackbird | E. Red-Bellied Woodpecker (in nesting cavity) |
| C. Young Crow           |   |

## ANNUAL VOLUNTEER PICNIC

The annual volunteer picnic will be held Saturday, October 11 in the Dining Hall. We will need a Chairperson to form a committee to plan the picnic. Volunteers interested in serving on the committee or being chairperson should contact Sharon Hanzik as soon as possible.

The picnic is preceded by a group picture of the organization members at 5:30 PM. The potluck meal is served at 6:00, and after the meal, we have awards and other activities.

In addition to the picnic, the park has generously given us a shelter again for those who would like to tent camp the night or weekend of the volunteer picnic. We set up our tents in the area of the shelter, and can use the shelter to lock up our food and belongings. Anyone with only a cot is more than welcome to sleep in the shelter; just be aware that people may be coming in and out.

We are usually given the shelter behind the dining hall, but I will not know this for sure until closer to the picnic. As soon as I am given the shelter number for sure, I will send out an e-mail. We will have the area from Friday afternoon thru Sunday check-out time, the weekend of the picnic. After the picnic, we have a campfire for more togetherness, conversation and fun. You do NOT have to be camping in order to come and visit with everyone at the campfire...the more the merrier! Just bring a chair.

Please let Judy Strauss know if you will be wanting to camp this weekend. You can call her at work at 281-980-4104, or leave a message at 979-793-7392.



# GATOR HATCHING

Story by Sharon Hanzik  
Photos by Carol Ramsayer



**This just in!** These baby 'gators, hatched on August 21, are lively new additions in the Nature Center.

The 34 eggs were kept in an aquarium on top of the red tool chest in the garage. On Thursday, August 21, an e-mail went out informing the members that hatching would occur that day, around 11:00. After just one week in our care it was announced that every developed embryo hatched successfully! There are 17 babies (17 eggs had no developed embryos, just goo.) Most had no signs of the yolk sac. Only two or three had a little bit left and all are healthy and active. They got a meal of earthworms on their first afternoon.

The babies are now on display in the Nature Center aquarium, and getting used to touches from an admiring public.



Junior Volunteer **Jose Velasquez** was on hand for the hatching. That's staff member Susie Taylor's 3-year-old granddaughter, **Avery**, supervising.



Interpretive Ranger **Sharon Hanzik** oversees the 34 incubating alligator eggs.

## Some Alligator Facts

(from the BBSP Web Site)

- Alligator breeding season starts in April and continues until the end of May. Nesting starts in June and eggs hatch in late August and early September, depending on temperatures.
- Alligators grow about one foot per year until they reach about six feet in length. After that their growth rate slows and they start getting wider. Females usually get 6 to 8 feet long; males average 12 to 14 feet long.
- There are an estimated 250 to 350 adult alligators (6 feet and over) living in Brazos Bend State Park.

# ANNUAL BUTTERFLY COUNT COMING UP

*by Rich and Sandy Jespersen*

The annual Brazos Bend Butterfly Count will be held on Sunday, September 21, 2008 at 9:00 AM. Meet at the 40 Acre Lake parking lot (on the left just past headquarters).

This citizen science project is one of several annual butterfly counts in the Houston area (and many more nationwide). Participants divide into small groups and patrol areas within BBSP and vicinity counting all species and individual butterflies they see. We gather at the Elm Lake picnic ground to tally our results and eat our sack lunches. Those who wish to continue the count in the afternoon patrol other areas outside the park within the official 15-mile count circle and email their results to us.

Bring drinking water, mosquito repellent, sun protection, and (if you have them) butterfly field guides and close-focusing binoculars. Note that some trails may be muddy. There is a \$3.00 per person fee to participate, but the Park entry fee will be waived.

Actual hours spent counting count as Volunteer Hours.

Everyone is invited and no experience is required. Beginners will be paired with experienced counters. The extra eyes are very helpful and it is a fun way to learn to identify our local butterflies.

For additional information contact us at: richj@consolidated.net, or phone 979-553-3575. Cell phone during the count is 713-703-9871.

## PHOTO WALKS

*by Laszlo Perlaky*

The free photo walk at BBSP was on July 5 for plant close-ups. We looked for Passion Flowers and huge blooming hibiscus. We parked at 40 Acre Lake and went through the tall grass of the prairie to reach the blooming beauties. Some areas were filled with leg-grabbing thorny bushes, and huge colonies of angry fire ants made our journey lively... but finally we reached the beautiful flowers, photographed those and enjoyed the outing.

The next Photo Walk will be on September 6 from 5-7 p.m. We'll look for amphibians and reptiles, but based on previous outings, may photograph something else too. Please bring your telephoto lens and do not forget your solid tripod. For more info visit <http://www.brazosbend.org/calendar/photowalk1.htm>.

## PRAIRIE HERITAGE DAY

Prairie Heritage Day will be held on Saturday, November 15, 2008, at Brazos Bend State Park. Activities will include guided hikes, wagon rides, story corner, wildfire education, prairie birds, edible plant talk and other presentations on the prairie's past, present and potential — from people who are passionate about prairies!

Participating organizations include: Texas Master Naturalist, Native Plant Society of Texas, Nature Conservancy, Native Prairie Association of Texas, Houston Audubon and others.

For more information, visit [www.coastalprairie.org](http://www.coastalprairie.org).

# WHAT I LOVE ABOUT BRAZOS BEND

## -The Volunteers-

by Carrie Sample

Brazos Bend has old oaks with moss hanging down. Birding that surpasses most places. Alligators and other animals to entertain. But what keeps me loving the park is its volunteers.

Recently, Cindy Peterson was doing her first dinner for the Saturday meeting. She pulled me aside and asked me how to lay out the food, since she had never done it before. I told her, not to worry, that when it was time, people would be coming out of the woodwork to help. Sure enough they did!

I started the Eco-Explorers for the summer and asked a few people to help. Pretty soon I had four people coming every time to do whatever needed to be done. The men's work crew even pitched in. They helped me carry things from here to there. They even helped distribute the ice cream to the kids on the last day!

Whenever I need more information for my story times, I only have to ask and the information is obtained from my fellow volunteers or David and Sharon. If it is only me doing the water station, I have always had people offer to help. Slow days in the nature center are not boring, because conversations with other volunteers are always fun and informative!

Isn't it great to be part of a team!!!!!!

## BEEKEEPER PROGRAM

Volunteer and beekeeper Jeff McMullan recently presented a slide show and demonstration on the lives and social order of bees, plus beekeeping and honey producing. Jeff showed the audience a "demonstration hive" and how it works, as well as how to use the smoking apparatus. Jeff's program was a success as one can clearly see that he held the interest of eight- and nine-year-old boys for at least an hour.

I'm sure we'll be seeing this program again soon. Thanks, Jeff.



Jeff McMullan points out a hole in a live oak near the Nature Center that was once an active beehive.

## ANHINGAS and CORMORANTS

Story & Photos by Rick Dashnau



**Chuck Duplant** and I have been discussing Anhingas. It started when I posted some videos and images featuring an Anhinga on my website. I mentioned the commonly-held notion that Anhingas don't have oil (preen) glands like other birds and so their feathers don't repel water. Chuck sent me some photos that he took showing... preen glands on an Anhinga. Hmmmmmm.

After several other discussions, I found two interesting papers online. One is a physiological comparison between our Anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*) and the Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*): "Adaptations For Locomotion and Feeding in the Anhinga and the Double-crested Cormorant," by Oscar T. Owre, at <http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/om/om006.pdf>.

The other addresses the risks of generalizing similar behaviors between two species, "Energetics and Spread-winged Behavior in Anhingas and Double-crested Cormorants: The Risks of Generalization," by Willard W. Hennemann III, *American Zoology*, 28:845-851 (1988). That paper can be purchased at: <http://icb.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/reprint/28/3/845.pdf>. I've bought a copy, and a printout is in David and Sharon's office or in the visitors' lounge notebook. I've paraphrased portions of the second paper below:

The wettable feathers of Anhingas and Double-crested Cormorants is an adaptation for underwater hunting. The feathers don't repel water, but allow water to wick into them. The Anhinga feathers allow water to penetrate to the skin, while only the outer parts of the Cormorant feathers get saturated, maintaining air insulation near the skin (page 846).

Anhingas use spread-wing behavior to increase the surface area available to absorb solar energy for regulation of metabolism. Anhingas seem to do this more often when they are dry than wet, usually standing with their back to the sun (page 850).

I believe that this "stockpiled" heat would allow the Cormorant to maintain a constant metabolic rate through all activities, whether submerged or not. Dennis postulated that the Anhinga might use the preen gland to waterproof the head, helping stabilize temperatures in the critical brain area. Chuck says it could also lessen water resistance during those spear fishing lunges.



Additional details and photos can be found on my website, <http://67.15.110.101/mycam.html>. The pictures above show the transformation of an Anhinga from a glistening, sleek submarine hunter to a beautiful creature of the air.

## BUD and TWINKIE

by Dennis Jones

Living in the country has its advantages: less traffic, less crime, actually less of everything, except wildlife. City folks move to the country to get away from the traffic and crime, but they don't understand the wildlife component. The critters were here first. Just as city folks have strategies to keep them safe in the city, when they move to the wildlands, they must adapt to their new environment. Or maybe not.

I remember a call I received from an older lady once. "You've got to come and get this alligator! He's in the bayou behind my house!". "Well ma'am, that's his home, and if he hasn't done anything to warrant moving him, he needs to stay where he is," I replied. "He's done something all right!" she snapped. "I've been feeding him every day, but last night he ate my cat! He's got to go!" Needless to say, she was not pleased to hear that no action would be taken against the alligator.

Many times attempts to help folks solve their "wildlife problems" take on a circular logic. A family came to me with an "owl problem": The owl's feeding perch was over the area where they parked their car. After telling them how much I would like to have a Great Horned Owl in my yard, I began going down a list of things they could do to prevent their car from being whitewashed with owl poop.

Move the car. "We can't do that, it would be too far to walk". Saw off the limb perch he uses. "We can't do that, it's too high". Scare the owl away. "We can't do that, he comes too late at night." Build a carport. "Can't do that, too expensive." "Kill the owl," I said, tongue in cheek. "Oh no, we can't do that!" I replied, "You're right, it's against the law, and I said that to get your attention. Living in the country and sharing it with wildlife sometimes requires compromise. We've exhausted all our options and none of them is acceptable. Someone or something must adapt. I think you can find a solution if you try. But YOU must adapt." That's not what they wanted to hear.

My wife "had" two parakeets. They were called Bud and Twinkie. She used to hang their cage on a hook on the back porch to allow them to get fresh air and look at freedom. The problem was, she would never bring the birds indoors in the evening. That duty fell to me. One night after finishing my watch, I decided to leave the birds to stay outside all night. The weather was balmy, and I saw no harm in it.

The next morning I was awakened to my wife gasping for air. Sitting straight up in the bed, I asked her what was wrong. "A snake ate Bud and Twinkie." I ran out to the cage to see a five foot long rat snake curled up in the

bottom of the bird cage. The two large lumps in his body attested to my wife's lament. The birds were gone. I poured the snake out of the cage and it crawled away.

I went back to comfort my wife. Being a naturalist and nature interpreter by profession, among my repeated apologies were words about how the snake was just being a snake and that it did not know the birds were pets. "The worst part is," she said "one bird had to watch the other being eaten." I couldn't argue with that. My wife understood what I was trying to say intellectually and told me so. After years of marriage to me she had come to expect things like this to happen to us from time to time. Then she said, "I understand the snake was just being a snake, but the next time I see him, his butt belongs to me." I couldn't argue with that, either.

## WHAT'S IN THE GARDEN?

By Joan Jackson

### Mexican Petunia

*Ruellia britoniana*



There are two varieties of this plant in our garden. The tall ruellias grow as much as two to three feet in height while the dwarf variety, Katie, is more like a ground cover. Both multiply so that one or two plants will become a colony in a short span of time. Ruellia is a perennial that will freeze with a severe frost but will emerge from the root in the spring.

These plants like good, fertile soil with moisture, but are drought tolerant once they are established. They bloom best in full sun. Although the flowers only last a day, with a little water during dry spells and a little extra high-phosphorus fertilizer, there will be an abundance of blooms day after day. This is an easily maintained plant with disease and pest resistance as an extra feature. It can be grown from cuttings, divisions and seed. Now pink- (Bonita) and white-flowering dwarfs are available in the nurseries.

The Texas Crescentspot butterfly may utilize this plant as a food source for its larvae. Butterflies are drawn to these plants for nectar. Plants in our garden are found in the bed to the right just outside the back door of the Nature Center.

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

September 6	Photo Walk, 5:00 - 7:00 PM, Amphibian and Reptile Photography
September 13	Regular meeting, 5:30 PM
October 4	Photo Walk, 5:00 - 7:00 PM, Bird photography
October 11	Volunteer Annual Picnic, 5:30 PM
October 24-25	Texian Market Days
November 1	Photo Walk, 3:00 - 5:00 PM, Landscape Photography
November 4-6	Deer Hunt
November 8	Regular meeting, 5:30 PM
November 15	Prairie Heritage Day

**Brazos Bend State Park**

Texas Parks and Wildlife  
21901 FM 762  
Needville TX 77461

FIRST CLASS MAIL

→ **NEXT MEETING DAY AND TIME** ←  
**SATURDAY, September 13, 2008, 5:30 PM**



**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
Bird Hikes	See schedule in calendar

**BRAZOS BEND STATE PARK VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION**

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