

Out on the

BOARDWALK

NEWSLETTER OF THE JOHN BUNKER SANDS WETLANDS CENTER | SPRING 2014

SPRING Highlights

JOHN BUNKER SANDS POND TRAIL IS OPEN Join us on the 3rd Saturday of every month to walk the John Bunker Sands Pond Trail. Learn about the natural and cultural history of the area as we walk this 1.8 mile loop trail.

TEXAS NATIVE BUTTERFLIES WITH DALE CLARK
Saturday, June 7th,
10:00am-12:00pm
\$10.00 per person
(includes admission
fee; Members \$5.00)

EARLY BIRD HOURS HAVE BEEN EXTENDED
The Early Bird hours have been extended to the months of March-October. The Walk & Talk Bird Tour will start at 7 a.m.

From the Director

On Thursday, March 20, 2014 at 11:57am the sun will shine directly on the equator and night and day will be of equal length all over the world. This is commonly known as the Spring Equinox which is taken from the Latin words meaning *ver* (Spring) *aequus* (Equal) and *nox* (Night). This is a measurable change in the motion of the Earth around the Sun which welcomes in warmer, longer days and the awakening of dormant plants and hibernating animals.

The Wetland begins its march through this most noticeable transition as well when the air and ground temperatures reach 70 degrees and above. The appearance of hummingbirds and waterfowl migrating northward, early blooming wildflowers, small green stalks peeking above the water's surface, and of course the inquisitive laughter of learning students all herald the arrival of spring. In this issue of "Out on the Boardwalk" you will observe many signs of the change in seasons... shedding snakes, humming Hummingbirds, eager Eagles, and the Wetland on fire!

outreach rocks!

Spring time is outreach time and it most definitely goes along with Earth Day! Earth Day this year is Tuesday, April 22, however, many organizations are celebrating early! These celebrations are a great opportunity to see what the DFW area has in terms of programming and resources related to all things earth friendly. John Bunkers Sands Wetland Center will be represented at the following events:

Learn 2 Live Green EXPO, Saturday, April 12
in Plano www.learn2livegreen.com

Oak Cliff Earth Day, Saturday, April 12, Oak
Cliff www.oakcliffearthday.com

After you digest the great information here, shed your skin and come out for your own wetland experience.



*Behold, my friends, the spring is come; the earth
has gladly received the embraces of the sun, and
we shall soon see the results of their love!*

— *Sitting Bull*

Earth Day Texas, Saturday, April 26 & Sunday,
April 27th at Fair Park

Love Your Native Plants & Prairie Day,
Saturday, May 3 at White Rock Lake

We encourage everyone to attend one of these events, or others, spending the day learning about all that Dallas/Ft. Worth has to offer. Come and visit us at our booth or perhaps you would like to help out at our booth at either of these events. If so, please contact us at 972-474-9100 or email ldunn@wetlandcenter.com. We always have a fun time!



NOTES *from the field*

by John DeFillipo



Prescribed Burn in the East Fork Wetland Project

The idea of deliberately setting the Wetland on fire to help manage the overall function of the ecosystem might seem like a crazy idea but it increases the productivity of the Wetland in many ways. During the months of February and early March, Loretta Mokry, Environmental Scientist, prescribed a controlled burn for parts of the northern, central, and southern sections

of the East Fork Wetland Project.

This prescribed burn will help the wetland to:

- Reduce heavy cattail thatch that inhibits growth of more desirable species.
- Improve water flow distribution and water treatment performance.
- Promote new plant growth and maintain plant & wildlife diversity.

Prescribed burns are conducted during the winter months when the plants are dormant. When the wetland soils warm above 70 degrees this spring, the seed bank (existing seeds planted years ago) will re-germinate. A new vibrant plant community will hopefully take place of the cattails, and water quality and habitat will continue to improve.



Another Successful Christmas Bird Count

John Bunker Sands Wetland Center and Audubon Dallas hosted the 3rd annual Trinity CBC on January 4, 2014. A stunning lift off of 10,000 geese at JBS started off the count. The forecasted high winds held off until noon which allowed participants to get off to a better than anticipated start.

A total of 127 species were detected; 14 fewer than last year. The cold weather and/or low food availability resulting from the drought probably caused some species that regularly winter in the area in small numbers to move south this winter. Overall, the total

number of birds detected was nearly three times higher this year than last year.

This difference was largely due to the massive number of geese (10,000+) and blackbirds (151,000+) that roosted at JBS. Duck and raptor numbers were similar to those reported on last years' count while shorebird, gull, and in general wintering passerine numbers were lower than the past count. The exception was higher numbers of American Robins and Cedar Waxwings in 2014.



EAGLE ROOST UPDATE



It was a long hard wait for the Eagles this weekend. I arrived at 10:00am on Saturday, February 15th and had planned to leave by no later than 12:00pm. But by 12 o'clock there were still no Eagles.

The nest is now so big and deep that it is impossible to verify if it is occupied or not in the field unless you actually see an Eagle enter or exit. Even zooming in on images recorded on my camera did not help. So, I waited. At first I gave myself an extension to 1:00pm. When 1 o'clock came and went and there were still no Eagles, I bumped that deadline up to 2:00pm. And at 2 o'clock, I moved it out to 3:00pm. After already stayed too long, it becomes very difficult to justify leaving without getting at least some pictures. So, I waited.

In the end I was glad I stayed. When the relief Eagle finally showed up at 2:20pm—after four and a half hours of waiting—the two adult birds put on a really nice show for me, including some very unexpected behaviors. It was the big female that returned to the nest today...that was my first surprise. I know that both the male and female Eagles share in the incubating duties, but I was under the impression that the female was responsible for the lion's share.

In that scenario, I wouldn't have expected her to be gone for 4.5+ hours! As the female approached the tower she did

not go directly to the nest as I might have expected her to.

Instead she landed at the top of the transmission tower and stayed there for several long minutes without making a move for the nest. Further, I could not detect a reaction to her arrival in the nest.

After several more minutes the big female took to the air and flew off to the east, quickly disappearing from view. At this point I became a little worried because I really expected her next move to be toward the nest. I was briefly afraid that this behavior meant that the nest had failed. But, almost immediately the male Eagle sprang from the nest and chased after her. He had been on the nest the entire time! The male also soon disappeared, but within a couple of minutes both Eagles were back tracing out lazy circles in the sky above my head. After a few minutes of this behavior, they both again drifted off to the east and vanished behind a distant tree line. It struck me as odd that they would leave the nest unattended for so long, I do not remember seeing this kind of behavior last year. But the weather was balmy and there



Photos©Chris Jackson

was no need for concern...the eggs would be fine through a short absence.

When the female Eagle returned roughly 5 minutes later she surprised me again. Even though she had left the nest heading east, she returned to the tower from the west. She must have flown a huge circle around the Wetland Center! I think she was messing with my mind! After this amazing display of behavior, the female Eagle finally settled back in the nest for another long stay.

This newsletters Eagle Roost was taken from the www.dfwurbanwildlife.com blog written by Chris Jackson. Please keep posted to his blog for the next series of observations. Thanks Chris!



Male Eastern Bluebirds

© Jim Nest

CRITTERS in the Classroom

by Maureen Nitkowski

When I started working as an educator at John Bunker Sands Wetland Center last March I knew that my desk would be located in a classroom which also housed two snakes, Amber and Chex.



As roommates go snakes are undemanding; they only require water, clean bedding material and the occasional mouse-meal. Amber is a corn snake with lovely burnt orange markings on her five foot long body and tends to be interested in classroom activities. She rarely hides and is frequently noticed by students.

In contrast Chex is a hognose snake, about two feet long, and wears a checkered pattern. He can stay hidden for so long that I sometimes search his cage to be certain he is still there and breathing. Hognose snakes can play dead as a defense mechanism which leads me to believe Chex is practicing this skill. To be even more convincingly dead the hognose can also produce an odor very similar to carrion and drip a bit of blood from its eyes and mouth. I am very glad that Chex has not demonstrated these abilities in my classroom.

Sharing space with the snakes went along predictably until November when both snakes were about to enter a state of torpor for the winter. Chex became very visible and seemed to be actively searching for food or escape. Amber was hiding and had not completed her shedding. John DeFillipo suggested “we” help Amber to complete the shed. **Step one**, fill a pan with a few inches

of warm water; **step two**, insert snake into the water (head above the surface of course); **step three**, gently grasp the snake where the shed skin still remained and allow her to pull through your hand thereby removing the last of the dead skin. The operation was a success, and I can now add “snake peeler” to my resume.

In the other classroom here we have two young American alligators. Somewhere in my position description John (again) assures me that I agreed to wrangle alligators as part of the job. Being a biologist I had some knowledge of the adaptations and life cycle of alligators but had only seen them behind glass at a zoo or at a distance in the Everglades. **Step one**, grasp the alligator firmly behind the front legs and remove him from the water where he is hiding; **step two**, lay the alligator along your outstretched arm being careful not to get slapped in the face by his tail; **step three**, turn the alligator as is needed to display protective coloration, third eyelid, etc.; **step four**, talk reassuringly to the alligator about his performance.

As you might have guessed by now, working at John Bunker Sands Wetland Center is never dull and can definitely add to your professional qualifications. 



POND TRAIL NEWS!

If you haven't been to the Center in awhile, you may not be aware of the John Bunker Sands Pond Trail. The trail follows an old railroad track, goes out to the East Fork of the Trinity River and loops back around to the Center via the high levee road that you can see out the window of the Center. We are excited to announce that the North Texas Master Naturalists will be holding a trail maintenance project in March to benefit this trail and make it more user friendly and interesting!

Trail markers will be set up so the trail is easy to follow and maintenance will be

done to make walking the trail more enjoyable. Information will be coming this summer to go with each marker, telling the story of the trail and interesting points along the way.

The trail is 1.8 miles long and is a great family trail. The habitat explored is much different than walking the levees of the Wetland. This trail offers shade provided by the bottom land hardwood forest that was left and a view of the river where the old railroad track and bridge used to be. Wildlife and habitat spotted along the trail include native dogwood trees, a resident Barred Owl, Kingfishers nesting in the banks of the river, and the original pond John

Bunker built to attract ducks. Next time you are out to the Center, consider taking this trail and learn about a different side of the Wetland.



STEWARDS – GET YOUR PIN ON!

When our Stewards volunteer at the Center or spend anytime related to Wetland Center activities, they are asked to record the number of hours they gave of their time to the Center. Many of our Stewards have literally logged hundreds of hours in time given to the Center. Although we have recognized our Stewards as a whole, the time is well over due that we recognize the

many hours our Stewards log in such a way that those visiting the Center can see their commitment. Starting at the next Steward banquet, we will acknowledge different levels of service based on the number of hours given at the Center.

Various pins will be given to Stewards, each pin representing a certain number of hours.



Not wanting to ruin the surprise as to what the pins will be, the clue I will give is this: each pin will represent a member of a wetland food chain. Here is a picture of one of those members. Can you figure out what the rest of the food chain will be? With that said, if you are a Steward who does not record your hours, now is the time to do so; you will want to complete the food chain because the pins are so cool!



Texas Native Butterflies With Dale Clark

Saturday, June 7th, 10:00am-12:00pm
\$10.00 per person (includes admission fee; Members \$5.00)

If you are fascinated by butterflies or moths and want to know more about the native species in Texas, come to the presentation on Texas Native Butterflies by Dale Clark on June 1st from 10:00am-12:00pm at the John Bunker Sands Wetland Center.

Dale is the founder of the Dallas Lepidopterist Society established in 1995. Its purpose is to provide a forum where people may gather to share an interest in butterflies and moths, whether that interest takes the form of collecting, gardening, photography, study or casual observation. Learn about the life cycle and behaviors of some of our common butterflies and see how easy it is to

attract them to your own yard. Dallas County and surrounding counties have over 170 species of butterflies recorded for the area.

Plants to attract butterflies will also be discussed.

RSVP by emailing ldunn@wetlandcenter.com or call 972-474-9100.



ON THE EDUCATION FRONT

by Linda Dunn

It has been a busy school year this year and things have not slowed down even for the month of January. Of the number of days available for school programs, we were at 90% capacity! That is amazing considering many schools stay away from fieldtrips after the holidays. Taking into consideration Spring Break periods and STAAR testing dates, we will be close to that same capacity for the months of March – April.

One program many people don't know we offer is a monthly Wednesday Home School Class. This is a great class to teach because many of the students come back every month. With ages ranging from 5 years old to 14 years old, it is always fun making sure the lessons are reaching a wide age range. Some of the classes covered this year have been Wild Edibles, Predator/Prey and Birds – We are Lucky to have them! One class that is getting a lot of attention and will be offered in March is “Scatastrophy – All God's Critters Gotta Poop!” During this class students will be taking on the role of “Crime Scene Investigator” as we try and



discover what is traveling the boardwalk by using scat (animal droppings) and tracks as our only clue! If you know of anyone that

home schools their children, please share these classes with them - we always have a great time!



© Jim West

STEWARD SPOTLIGHT

It is always a great pleasure for us to have Stewards that spend the time learning our lessons in order to teach our education programs. Maggie Garrett is the newest of our Stewards to participate in school programming at the Center. Maggie is a



retired nurse so we always feel safe with her in our classes and she also has another talent we all enjoy – she bakes cookies and loves to share them with us! Next time you see Maggie ask her how her latest bass fishing tournament went – another activity she participates in with her husband. Maggie is a joy to be around, always smiling and looking at the positives of every situation. Thank you Maggie, for making our school classes more fun than they are already and for your commitment to all we do at the Center.



TALES OF AN EDUCATOR

by Jacob Gordon

So loyal readers, when last our paths crossed you were left amid the story of Alex as he made his way off of the trail...but night had fallen.

THE BOY WHO WALKED INTO THE WOODS AND CAME OUT A FOREST PART 2

Alex knew that to touch the nest or to disturb the eggs was a poor choice for both the soon to be young turtles and him, no matter how badly he wanted to look. He also knew that if he could somehow remember the spot, he would be able to see those young turtles he waited so patiently for. Luck was on Alex's side. It so happened, there was a bundle of dew berry vines rich with berries from green to red and some were the darkest shade of purple...those were the sweet ones! So Alex named the nest "TurtleBerry Point" as the berries did point him in the right direction and because that name made him laugh...he could imagine little turtles with berries for bodies or big berries with a turtle's head and tail...

As Alex turned west and was ready to walk all the way home, he noticed that the noises had changed from grasshoppers and song birds to frogs, toads and the distant hoot-hoot of an owl. Alex remembered that owls hunt at night and because of the way their bones and feathers worked, they flew in complete silence! Alex was not afraid of the owl though, he knew it ate (or preyed on) small rodents and reptiles and wanted nothing to do with something the size of a nine year old boy. Suddenly all the noises stopped completely...everything went quiet, even the usual "paper shuffling" sound of leaves, even the quite too noisy bull frogs, even Alex's heartbeat...everything went quiet, except... Except somewhere in the not far enough away woods, a howl of tremendous, stupendous, somewhat horrendous nature, filled the night with a noise that could make mice of all nine year

old boys! Alex could not move, he did not and dared not...in his head he knew that howl was from a coyote (ky-oat) but in the darkening night he could imagine a creature with long curled teeth, the eyes of an owl, the body of a wolf and ran on two goat like legs.

—In the darkness of night, the absence of mind can give us such a fright— In the middle of the path of earth, sand and rock stood Alex, his shoes covered in his favorite superhero's picture, had not moved an inch since the howl; he, himself, had been holding his breath and listening – almost leaning – into the tree line for some



or any sign of danger. Many animals "freeze" when frightened, not because they want to pretend to be a statue, but to calm down and to listen intently for warning signs, for any of a number of reasons to flee or to fight. Alex was one of the fastest kids in his third grade class but even with all the help of his superhero shoes, he knew running (in the dark of night) would just get him in more trouble; his best bet was to stay put and listen...listen...listen..... shhhhh calm down and listen. Dark has

settled in and the path that was once splashed with moonlight and wavering shadows has fallen under a blanket of night.

Alex, now more relaxed and breathing regularly, had not heard another howl, a growl, a woof, a wimper or likewise; he sighed with relief when the Barred Owl hoot-hoots once again and like an "All Clear" to the woodland creatures they slowly join in on his chorus. First came the Bull Frogs low, low bass, then tree frogs with their whiny rhythmic sounds and finally the crickets joined in with enthusiastic chirps. The nine year boy moved his left foot, then his right...Alex was walking,

cautiously, peering through the trees at the emerging light of his own back porch. The light was a beacon to the young boy "almost there" he said quietly as the familiar smell of mother's cooking filled his nose. Alex arrived at his back porch, climbed the four creaking steps and spun round to face the woods...a smile broke his worried face like a crescent moon "I'll see you all soon" he yelled into the darkened canopy of sound. Pride is what the boy was feeling. Joy in his adventure; Satisfied in his quest and Happy to make it home. That day Alex had walked into the woods but reemerged a Forest; a forest of knowledge, a

forest of independence, a forest of discovery and most importantly... a forest of hope. The boy hoped his return to the trail and missteps through the woods, to meet a newborn turtle and perhaps to see that elusive owl. "Goodnight" he whispered and shut the back door as the chorus from those darkened woods sang like never before.



ADOPT A
HIGHWAY
NEXT 2 MILES
VOLUNTEERS
OF
JBS WETLAND
CENTER

ADOPT-A- HIGHWAY 2014

Wetland Center Volunteers
in Action



In the early morning sun of February 22, community residents, and the volunteers & staff of the John Bunker Sands Wetland Center cleaned a 2 mile section of FM 1389 South leading to the City of Combine. Our third annual highway cleanup had 21 participants making up four teams. Each team tackled a 1 mile section of the highway

picking up bottles, cans, tires, toys, cookbooks, construction material, and many other unique finds. After the cleanup, the volunteers gathered back at the Wetland Center to enjoy a pizza lunch and vote on the most unique item found that day.

This year, Katy Guerin from Barbara Walker Elementary, made the best find with

a complete set of Barbie Toys... shoes included! Many thanks to Katy and all of our wonderful volunteers and community residents for lending a helping hand. We hope to keep FM 1389 clean and safe for our local community. Come out and join us next year on the third Saturday in February!



HUMMERS ARE ARRIVING SOON!

Interested in being a Hummer Watcher? Join us on Saturday, March 1, from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm for a training workshop on how to identify hummingbirds and how to garden for hummingbirds. The training will prepare you to participate in the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Texas Nature Trackers' annual hummingbird survey. Your participation as a hummer watcher will help TPWD to determine more about range, distribution, favored sites, and feeding habits of hummingbirds. The survey is also a way to share information about their natural history. Information collected from the Texas Hummingbird Roundup will provide more insight on conservation and habitat needs for these wonderful birds.

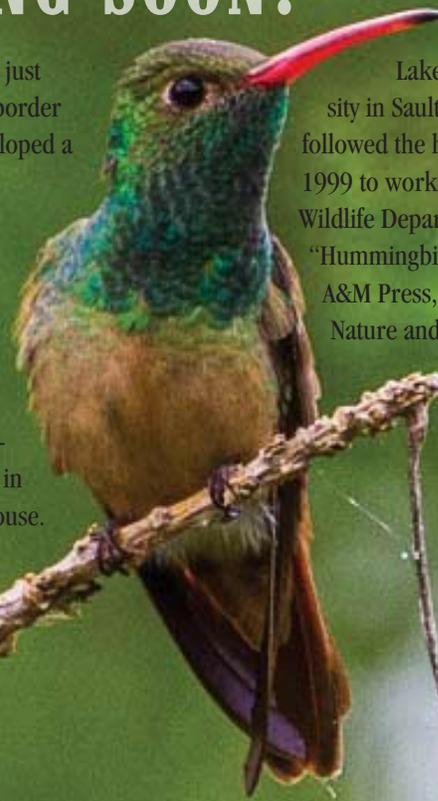
The training will be conducted by Mark Klym, coordinator of the Texas Hummingbird Roundup and Texas Wildscapes programs at the Texas Parks and Wildlife

department. He grew up just across the international border in Canada where he developed a love for the outdoors – spending time fishing, birding, and hiking. His special interest in hummingbirds developed early, when he found a male Ruby-throated Hummingbird exploring the plants in his grandfather's greenhouse.

Mark received baccalaureate degrees in

Biological Science and in Fisheries & Wildlife Management from Lake Superior State University in Sault Ste Marie, MI. He followed the hummingbirds to Texas in 1999 to work with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. He is coauthor of "Hummingbirds of Texas" by Texas A&M Press, editor of the Eye on Nature and Texas Hummer newsletters and author or editor of several booklets and publications from TPWD.

Reservations are required. The cost of the program is \$10.00, which includes free entry into the Center. Member cost is \$5.00



© Keith D. Crabtree

March

Saturday, 1st

Walk & Talk Bird Tour
7:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

Open, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Hummer Watch Program
9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Saturday, 15th

Open, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Bunker's Pond Trail Walk
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

April

Saturday, 5th

Walk & Talk Bird Tour
7:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

Open, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Saturday, 12th

Visit us at:

Oak Cliff Earth Day or the Learn 2 Live Green Event in Plano

Saturday, 19th

Open, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Bunker's Pond Trail Walk
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Wildflower Walk
1:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

April 26th and 27th

Earth Day Texas at Fair Park

May

Saturday, 3rd

Walk & Talk Bird Tour
7:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

Open, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Visit us at the "Love our Native Prairies" Event at White Rock Lake

Saturday, 17th

Open, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Bunker's Pond Trail Walk
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

June

Saturday, 7th

Walk & Talk Bird Tour
7:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

Open, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Butterflies with Dale Clark
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Saturday, 21st

Bunker's Pond Trail Walk
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Open, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.