

Pines and Prairies

Bastrop Caldwell Fayette Lee Counties of Texas

Newsletter of the Pines & Prairies Land Trust Vol. 6, No. 1 Spring 2008

Colorado River Refuge Grand Opening on Earth Day April 22!!

Come celebrate Earth Day with us at the Grand Opening of the Colorado River Refuge from three to seven on April 22. We'll have smoked sausages and Dennis Kestner's famous bar-beque beans. You'll have a delightful afternoon strolling among giant trees along the banks of the Colorado River. Bastrop's own Sean Orr will stroll the trail playing his fiddle in counterpoint to the trilling birds.

If you choose, you can let us know your plans and arrive by canoe or kayak from Fisherman's Park in Bastrop. We'll get you back to your vehicle. (Be sure to call 925-2437 to make arrangements.)

The Colorado River Refuge is now in full spring mode. A carpet of the brightest green is two feet tall in some areas. Canopy trees such as the Cottonwood Kings are leafing out. Understory small trees, shrubs and bushes such as the roughleafed dogwoods, and yes, the poison oak and ivy are already leafed out.

The most prolific of the shade blooming wildflowers are in full display. Baby blue eyes, a reliable annual wildflower can be seen almost everywhere. Tall purple spiderwort, a fragrant perennial wildflower blooms on the steep hillsides amongst the boulders of the Quesadilla Cliffs. Shade growing grasses such as

Directions: From TX 71, east of the commercial part of Bastrop, turn onto Tahitian Drive. Drive 2.2 miles until Tahitian Drive dead-ends at Riverside Drive. Turn right onto Riverside Drive, and drive another 2.2 miles to the Colorado River Refuge. Someone will direct you to parking.

inland sea oats are thick and dark green. Spring along the Colorado is beautiful to see.

Spring is also beautiful to hear in the Colorado River Refuge. Northern cardinal couples sound out more than any of the other songbirds. For most species of songbirds the male is the outstanding singer and the female chirps and passes judgment on his songs. But northern cardinal females are also accomplished singers so the cardinal songs are doubled in the trees along the river.

Carolina wrens, the little birds with the great big voices sing almost non-stop "*Liberty, liberty, liberty,*" or "*Dirty, dirty, dirty socks,*" depending on the accent of the individual wren. Red shouldered hawks scream above the treetops and several different kinds of woodpeckers can be heard calling and pecking in tree trunks. White eyed vireos, the little gray birds often heard but seldom seen constantly demand "*Quick, three beers here quick!*"

The river itself is cool and calm, the water clear and inviting. Small areas of ripples tinkle over rocks and cows can be heard mooing on the opposite shore. The trails are dry now with one or two small exceptions due to the recent rain and these are easily avoided. Spring in the Refuge is a magical time.

Field Day at The YKP

Ah, Springtime on the Yegua Knobs Preserve! We'll have our annual Spring Field Day at the YKP on Saturday, April 26 from morning until 5 PM.

Bastrop County Audubon Society will conduct a bird census in the morning, the most enthusiastic of whom will probably begin *early*, with a more leisurely group starting at about 9 AM. Call Priscilla Jarvis for details and directions at 512/281-2762.

Master Naturalists will be there to point out the poison ivy you're standing in.

Bring your walkin' shoes, a camera and binoculars and plan to enjoy a day of hiking and exploring and gawking at the natural beauty of the place. Or, bring a lawn chair and some snacks and just hang out in a quiet, peaceful place in the country.

Our composting toilet, in its own shabby little hut, is available for those not quite so comfortable conducting their business in the woods.



If you want to explore the bog and watch the water bubble up from the ground, bring some rubber boots or crummy shoes in which you're willing to slosh through several inches of yucky bog water. It's a curious sight and always changing.

You can also check out the Beaver Pond in that same classy footwear, but you're not likely to see a beaver during the daylight hours.

Join us at the Knobs for a reminder of why it's so important to preserve as much remaining natural landscape as we can.



Nature Lessons at the CRR

In March Joan Russell and Louise Ridlon gave the first in a series of eleven nature lessons created specifically for the Refuge to 13 children and 6 adults. The children ranged in age from 6 to about 13 and were all homeschoolers. The adults, 5 moms and one dad participated in the very informal lesson.

The one and a half hour lesson was all about bird songs and why birds sing. Children were encouraged to listen and learn to recognize the bird species from the song.

Two 20 minute hikes were bracketed between brief talks about bird songs and listening sessions. The students, children and adults, found many fascinating things along the hikes.

The object of these relaxed "lessons" is to get children out in the woods to just enjoy, appreciate and mostly have fun in the natural world. The lessons are designed to add to the fun and not to be like "school."

The response from the children and their parents and their enthusiasm to schedule the next lesson indicates that the effort to bring children and nature together in the Colorado River Refuge will be an enjoyable and successful experience for students, young and old and for the leaders as well.



April Events of Interest

April 9 Lost Pines Sierra Club
contact Phil Cook 512/321-4964

April 12 Bastrop and Caldwell
Counties Annual Wildlife Man-
agement Association
Extravaganza at Smithville's
Riverbend Park from 1 to 4 PM

April 15 Bastrop Co. Audubon
Society monthly meeting con-
tact
Priscilla Jarvis 512/281-2762

April 18 Cooper Farm Wildlife
Activities & Practices Workshop
at LCRA's Cooper Farm in
Fayette County. Contact Lee
Fritsch at 979/249-3974

April 19 Colorado River
monitoring trip led by Allan
Kugler 512/581-2631

April 22 Grand Opening of
CRR

April 26 Spring Field Day and
Bird Count at Yegua Knobbs
Preserve

President's Message

Well folks, spring has sprung and what passes for winter in Central Texas has bid adieu. Our natural environment is changing into summer mode. Such is the way of the world – constant change. We humans often observe such change with mixed emotions. We may be glad to see winter's cold gone, sorry to see summer's heat coming on, happy to be able to go swimming or sad to see our plentiful winter birds moving on. However we view it, change is inevitable.

Change is also coming to our built environment. This is a theme I often write about. New roads mean new growth, new commercial areas mean new business, new subdivisions mean new neighbors. But what of the old? What can we preserve of the old that is important to us? How can we embrace the new without forgetting the old? This is where PPLT comes in. As many of you know, Pines and Prairies Land Trust's business is to conserve and protect the old. By old, I mean land and an environment that is as old as time. By old, I mean a rural lifestyle and feeling that is time honored and people approved. By old, I mean wildlife habitat and fresh clean water that never goes out of style.

And what of the new? New growth is an opportunity to get more folks interested in our work. New business is an opportunity to get more donations and exposure for our work. New roads can even provide access to areas folks could not enjoy before. Change provides much opportunity. Change is inevitable. Let us all look for the good in change while cherishing and conserving the best of the old.

PPLT will do its part by helping folks protect their family lands with Conservation Easements. PPLT will reach out to new business to invite participation in our mission. PPLT will help educate our children about why it is important to protect the natural world.

You can do your part to celebrate change while honoring the old by donating time and money to PPLT and making your voice heard to our elected officials about what is important to you.

Remember, land conservation is for all, forever.

Carrie F. Knox, President

Kay Rogers is Our Newest Board Member

Kay Rogers joined our board of directors in February. She has been practicing law in Bastrop since coming to work here for Legal Aid in 1978. Her interests include canoeing, gardening and golfing, all of which she prefers to lawyering. She appreciates the Colorado River, the fertile soils and the fine golf courses that grace our shared environment. Thanks for joining us, Kay.

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