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Distributed to Volunteers and Supporters of the Oklahoma Chapter of The Nature Conservancy

IN THE NEWS, A SURPRISE

—Andrew Donovan-Shead

The Tulsa World newspaper reported this week that J. M. Huber Corporation made an unsolicited donation of \$20,000 to the Oklahoma Chapter of The Nature Conservancy. Huber claims a long-standing relationship with the Conservancy in other states and encourages its employees to volunteer at Nature Conservancy preserves. Company officials said that future donations will be scaled according to the number of hours volunteered by employees.



Road Cleanup and Hike, by Van Vives

ROAD CLEANUP AND HIKE

—Van Vives

We were blessed with beautiful weather on

May 14th for the road cleanup and hike. The large turnout of new and seasoned, not old, docents made the cleanup a pleasant and easy chore. At noon we were treated to a hamburger and sausage cookout. Ann and JB Briggs, who had his young son riding piggy back, produced a fine feast for the hard working crew.



Road Cleanup and Hike, by Van Vives

After eating, about thirteen docents gathered together for a hike to Wild Hog Creek. We had a motorcade, led by JB, to the eastern part of the preserve. The view was fantastic! Along the way we saw a flock of about thirteen wild turkeys running over the bright green rolling hills. What made this hike special was that we got to see areas of the preserve that we rarely see.

The terrain changed from rolling hills of grass to wooded areas with some rocky bluffs along the Wild Hog Creek and Sand Creek.



Road Cleanup and Hike, by Van Vives

JB, still with his son on his back, led us on the hike. It was great to have JB with us since he is so familiar with every inch of that part of the preserve.



Road Cleanup and Hike, by Van Vives

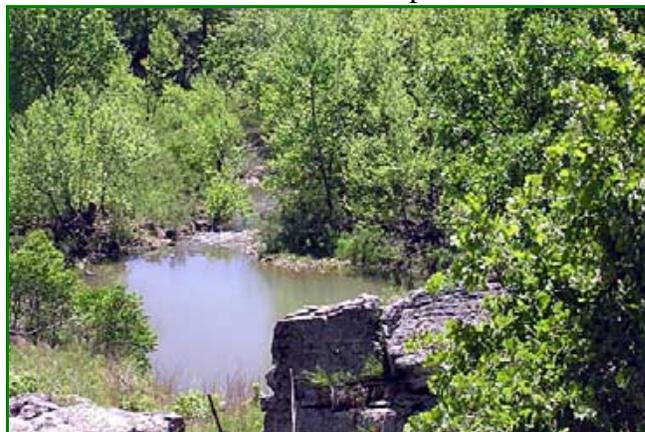
We did not see any wild hogs, although he assured us that there were some in that area. JB warned us about not going to a rocky hill along the

creek area because of a profusion of snakes. The warning was well received!



Road Cleanup and Hike, by Van Vives

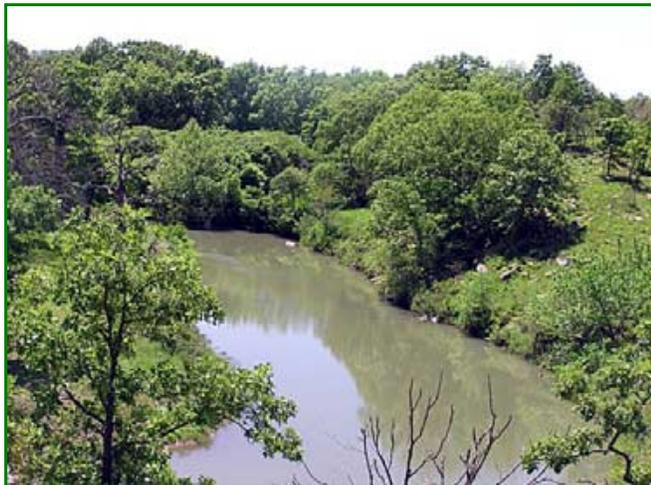
After hiking along Wild Hog Creek for a while, we came upon a bluff overlooking Sand Creek. That part of Sand Creek was wide and deeper than the part we are more familiar with. The view was well worth a few pictures.



Road Cleanup and Hike, by Van Vives

With JB's help we made it back to the cars for another beautiful return trip. We got to see another flock of turkeys near the Science Building. I know

everyone felt that we had spent a wonderful day on the Prairie.



Road Cleanup and Hike, by Van Vives

SNAKE-BITE

—Betty Turner

Betty Turner reports an incident of snake-bite among students visiting the Preserve early in May.

From the little information that I saw in the Tulsa World I would guess that the students were in a non-mowed area, not watching where they were placing their feet and probably walking close together (or running, as 12 year-olds do), which would have made it difficult to see the snake before it was too late. Some people will probably be more nervous about walking our trails, but I am convinced that if people stay in the mowed areas and walk slowly enough to see where they are placing their feet that they will not step on a snake or be bitten by one. I suspect that careless walking on the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve was the cause of this snake bite.

This reminds me of the one and only time in being a trail guide leader (over five years) of seeing a snake on the trail. That day I saw two, both thought to be non-poisonous snakes. I was leading two males from an Oklahoma City hiking club. As we left the big rock at the top of the hill on the two-mile trail, one of the guys began walking ahead of me. He was about four feet ahead of me a few yards down the path when I saw that he was stepping over an outstretched snake that was moving straight across the path from left to right. Being a surprised female, I yelled “snake”. The snake quickly disappeared before we had a good look but guessed it to be a king snake. This one was about thirty inches long and about one and a half inches thick, although I don’t think any of us ever saw the head.

After that incident, I certainly found myself watching the trail even more carefully as we walked. As we got back to the place where the short and long trails divide (where we now have the bison statute), we saw the second snake. It was about ten yards south of this intersection and was stretched out, moving across the trail from left to right—and it was moving FAST. We also thought this was a king snake. It was three to four feet long and was two to three inches thick—a really large snake! It quickly disappeared into the grass.

I came away from these two experiences realizing that: (1) snakes are very difficult to see on the trail even when you are looking for them; and (2) snakes move quickly and can be there

before you know it. You have to really watch for snakes but it is rare to see one on the mowed trails.

WHAT'S BLOOMING

—Van Vives

May was a fantastic time for wildflower viewing on the Preserve. There were white vistas of Fleabane mingled with abundant purple Scurfy Pea. Toward the end of May the Spider Wort was prominent and I found a Butterfly Weed in bloom on RD 4220. At the corner of the North Road, west of the Bunkhouse, was a patch of Wild Four-o'clocks. I have not mentioned this plant before in any of my articles. I confess that I had to get Mike Palmer to help me identify it. He is very helpful. On the long trail, at it's highest point, are many plants of the blue Wild Hyacinth. During the last two weeks of May the yellow Coreopsis was springing up everywhere. Let's look at a few of the wildflowers blooming last month.



Butterfly Weed, Asclepias tuberosa
by Van Vives

Wild Four-o'clock, *Mirabilis nyctaginea*: This is a weedy plant found in disturbed open areas. It grows two to four feet tall and has branching stems. The leaves are opposite, broad and triangular. Flowers are on hairy stems at the end of the stems. The petals are pink and there are three to five protruding, yellow-tipped stamens. The flowers open in the afternoon. The plant is considered poisonous. Native Americans used the roots to treat swellings, sprains, and burns.



Scurfy Pea, Psoraleum tenuiflorum
by Van Vives

Butterfly Weed, *Asclepias tuberosa*: This beautiful milkweed started blooming in May and will continue to bloom at least for half of June. The stems are hairy and do not have the milky latex sap that other milkweeds have. The color of the flower can range from bright orange, deep red, to light yellow. It was considered a cure for pleurisy and some call the plant "pleurisy root." The roots were also used to treat swellings, bruises, wounds, dysentery, diarrhea, constipation,

lung inflammations, rheumatism, fever, and pneumonia. The leaves were used to induce vomiting. Monarch butterflies feed on the nectar, while their larvae consume the leaves.



Pink Poppy Mallow, Callirhoe alcaeoides
by Van Vives

Scurfy Pea, *Psoraleidium tenuiflorum*: Leaves are alternate and divide into three to five leaflets which radiate from a common point. The flowers are in clusters on small branches that originate where the leaf stalks join the stem. The flowers are purple. The Lakotas made tea from the root to treat headaches. The root was burned as incense to repel mosquitoes.

Pink Poppy Mallow, *Callirhoe alcaeoides*: This is a perennial herb with a thick turnip-like root. Stems are few to many and branched from the base. Leaves are alternate. Flowers are solitary or in small groups on stalks up to four inches long. The color varies from pink to white.

Wild Hyacinth, *Camassia scilloides*: A plant

with a stout stem emerging from a bulb. It grows up to two feet tall. Leaves are grasslike and are about one foot long. The flowers are on a stem and form a cluster of up to fifty flowers about one inch wide. The color of the flowers range from almost white to light blue to lilac. Comanche Indians ate the root as a food source.



Wild Hyacinth, Camassia scilloides
by Van Vives

NEWS FROM THE NICKEL PRESERVE

—Chris Wilson

Elk have returned to the Nickel Preserve! On March 8th, twenty animals, five males and fifteen females, were transported to the preserve from the Groendyke Ranch in Blaine County. John Groendyke generously donated the elk to make the project happen. The elk were placed in a ten-acre enclosure to allow them to acclimate to the area. On April 11th, the gates were opened, allowing the elk to become free-ranging over the 15,000-acre preserve and beyond.

Since leaving the pen, the elk have ranged over

quite a large area. Each animal is fitted with a radio collar that allows staff to track their movements. Several of the elk have wandered off the preserve, but most have returned. In fact, many of the animals continue to return to the enclosure—it must feel like home. One female is currently exploring an area about ten miles east of the preserve. This was expected, and animals will not be relocated unless they become a nuisance to a private landowner.



Wild Rose, Rosa setigera
by Van Vives

Elk can sometimes be seen along the drive through the preserve, especially around the big pond on Pumpkin Flats. However, since most of the preserve is inaccessible, the elk will most often be out of sight. Stop at the headquarters if you visit during the week, and preserve staff will be happy to clue you in on the best viewing possibilities.

Nickel Preserve staff and statewide conservation staff conducted three prescribed

burns this spring totaling 2,500 acres. About half of this acreage encompassed tracts of eleven different neighboring landowners. These cooperative burns should prove to be quite valuable in getting fire back in the system at a larger scale.



Pale Purple Coneflowers
by Van Vives

Dr. Bruce Hoagland and Amy Buthod of the Oklahoma Natural Heritage Inventory have nearly completed a floristic inventory of the preserve. The preliminary list includes more than five-hundred species!

Self-guided trails are always open. Spring and early summer are a great time to visit.

THREE REMARKABLE CONSERVATIONISTS

—Van Vives

In March I received a message through my website from a woman in Seattle, Washington. She wrote that she has been wanting to visit the Tallgrass Prairie for a number of years and it looked like it might be possible this year. Her

name is Reliance Ricketts. She said that she and her two sisters-in-law, all senior citizens, were planning to visit the Prairie in May. All three were familiar with the mission of The Nature Conservancy and are focused on preserving lands, both wild and farm, for the future of open spaces.

Reliance said that part of their extended family, three generations, spent a week at the The Nature Conservancy preserve at Ramsey Canyon, Arizona. They helped the naturalist staff construct a butterfly pollinator garden, removed invasive plants, created paths and built benches. She stated further that one cannot overestimate their interest in environmental issues.

Her family has owned small farms in central western Illinois for over three generations and they have a great interest in, and knowledge of, land types and conservation. One of her farms in Illinois has recently planted three acres with tall prairie grasses. She said that that may seem like a small area, but it is not the smallest prairie parcel in the area.

Every year her family gathers in Illinois for a family business meeting. She felt that this provided an excellent opportunity to come to Oklahoma after the meeting. Reliance offered to do any service project we might have available, but after talking to Bob Hamilton and again to Reliance, it was decided that their stay of three days would not be long enough for them to see the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve and complete a project.

I have to say that I was eager to meet these remarkable women and show them what we have at the preserve. On May 22nd, Reliance Ricketts and Nancy Bradley from Seattle, and Shirley Winer from Chester, Massachusetts arrived in Tulsa and they met me at the Information Center the next morning. I took them on the short trail and showed them the gift shop and Headquarters Building. It took about two hours or more to hike the short trail because they were interested in every plant and bird along the way. I soon found out that they had more to teach me than me them. Shirley was the most knowledgeable about grasses and birds. We had a picnic lunch and we all enjoyed the day. On Tuesday I took them on the long trail and spent all morning doing that. Their appreciation of nature and fervor in conservation were astounding!

Reliance would like to return in the fall when the grasses are mature. I feel sure that if she has the opportunity she will be here.

I thoroughly enjoyed my two days with them and was disappointed that more of the docents could not meet them and enjoy some of their enthusiasm.

DOCENT EVENTS

—www.oklanature.com/prod/docents.html

- Butterfly Identification Workshop: Jim Thayer will lead a butterfly identification workshop at the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve. No experience necessary. Meet at the Visitors' Center at 10:00

a.m. on Saturday, June 18th. Bring binoculars and guidebooks if you have them. Please telephone Jim at 918-494-3784 if you plan to attend so that he can plan to receive you, or telephone the Pawhuska office at 918-287-4803.

- Four Canyon Preserve annual butterfly count: June 18th at 10:00 a.m. Meet at the preserve entrance, thirteen miles west of Vici on Hwy 51 and eight miles south. Contact John Fisher at 918-245-8662 or via email at jfisher@tnc.org.
- J. T. Nickel Preserve annual butterfly count: June 25th at 09:30 a.m. Meet at the preserve headquarters in Sawmill Hollow. Contact Walter Gerard at 918-747-4771
- Tallgrass Prairie Preserve annual butterfly

count: July 2nd at 09:30 a.m. Meet at the Visitors' Center. Contact Walter Gerard at 918-747-4771.

NEWSLETTER PUBLICATION

—Andrew Donovan-Shead

Deadline for submission of articles for inclusion in the newsletter is the 10th of each month. Publication date is on the 15th. All docents, Nature Conservancy staff, and university scientists are welcome submit articles and pictures about the various preserves in Oklahoma, but of course the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in particular.

For scientists, this is your opportunity to talk for the general interest. We would like to read of your adventures and know what interesting things you are doing.

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