



# THE DOCENT NEWS

Of The Tallgrass Prairie Preserve Docent Program

The Nature Conservancy  
SAVING THE LAST GREAT PLACES ON EARTH

NOVEMBER 2007

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For the Volunteers and Supporters of the Oklahoma Chapter of The Nature Conservancy

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## DOCENT RECOGNITION LUNCHEON

—Andrew Donovan-Shead

At 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, 20 October 2007, Dennis Bires convened our annual Docent Recognition Luncheon and first fall field day at the Research Station of the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve. He introduced Kim Shannon, our guest speaker.



Kim is an environmental scientist who holds a Bachelor of Science degree in biology from Oklahoma State University and a Master of Science degree in natural and applied science. She is known to long-term docents from her time with The Nature Conservancy, since those days she has worked for the Oklahoma Biological Survey

and for the G. M. Sutton Avian Research Center. Today she is employed as an environmental scientist by Enercon Services, Inc.

Kim provided us with hand-out notes and some grass, not the hallucinogen, but examples of Big Bluestem, Switchgrass, and



Indiangrass. She continued with a slide presentation in which she reviewed the flora of Oklahoma, the classification system, major plant families, plant morphology and terminology, and how plants are identified by their morphology and family type.

The morphology of a plant is its growth and form. In biology it is the study of these plant forms and their habits of growth that describes their varieties and helps with identification.

Our hand-out notes introduced us to Oklahoma flora: "The vascular flora of Oklahoma comprises 173 families, 868 genera, and 2,540 species. It is a complex assemblage of plants representative of different phytogeographic regions. Species characteristic of the eastern deciduous forest and central grasslands are most common; however, taxa from the Rocky Mountains, Chihuahuan and Sonoran deserts, the gulf coastal plain and the Ozarks are also found in the state. Approximately 86-percent of Oklahoma's flora is native. The four largest plant families in Oklahoma include the Asteraceae (sunflower family) with 96 genera and 305 species, the Fabiceae (legume family) with 40 genera and 154 species, and the Cyperaceae (sedge family) with 14 genera and 155 species."

Kim reviewed "plant habit, growth forms,



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and other terminology:"

- ▷ Herbaceous: an erect ascending, or prostrate plant growth form characterized by either leaves or soft, non-woody stems at the base; with or without branching above.



- ▷ Woody: plants that are characterized by their secondary growth (bark) that forms a protective outer layer; typically trees and shrubs.
- ▷ Tree: an erect plant growth form typically characterized by a single main trunk at the base with branches above; with woody secondary growth (bark) on the trunk and branches. Leaves typically occur on the branches.
- ▷ Shrub: an erect plant growth form characterized by small multiple trunks at the base with branches above; typically with secondary growth (bark) on the trunk and with or without bark on the branches. Leaves typically occur on the branches, but may also occur on the trunk.
- ▷ Forb: an herbaceous plant other than grasses and graminoids.
- ▷ Graminoid: grasses (Poaceae) and other plants (sedges and rushes) characterized by their grass-like morphology.
- ▷ Inflorescence: the arrangement of flowers on a floral axis, whether determinate or indeterminate.
- ▷ Node: the point of leaf attachment to a stem.
- ▷ Internode: the space on a stem between nodes.

- ▷ Leaf: the major photosynthesizing organ of most plants consisting of a petiole, blade and stipules.

-Simple leaf: a leaf with an undivided blade

-Compound leaf: a leaf with a blade divided into two or more parts.

Kim explained that identification of plants requires more than a leaf, it needs the leaves attached to the stem so that the phyllotaxy can be seen: that is the arrangement of the leaves on the stem. How leaves are attached to their stems, leaf shape, how each leaf is veined, what the edge of the leaf looks like, all of this and more contributes to successful identification and placement within the system of classification.

Three plants are endemic to Oklahoma, meaning that they are found nowhere else. Ground flox, Flox *Oklahomensii*, commonly



found at the sides of roads; Longhaired Flox found only at Quartz Mountain, and Oklahoma Beardtongue found in the central portion of Oklahoma and on remnants of the tallgrass prairie.

After lunch, Kim led our hike around the



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trails. We didn't go farther afield because roundup is in progress and most visitors, if they do hike, will follow the trails therefore we can make our discoveries do double duty by informing ourselves and, in turn, our adventurous visitors.

The weather was bright, clear, and windy. The Big Bluestem was very tall at eight to ten feet. We walked along the Study Trail by Sand Creek through the woods and up onto the prairie. During our walk, we stopped to examine a Blackjack Oak (*Quercus marilandica*) and could see from its habit of growth why it made the Crosstimbers an impenetrable barrier.

Oklahoma is a major ecological crossroads where the western prairie merges with the eastern deciduous forests. Southern Oklahoma is home to lots of orchids. We walked along the Prairie Earth Trail to visit the bison wallows that were full of water and on up to the highest point to see the Eastern Gama Grass, a blade of which can be made to produce a manic buzzing noise when stretched between the thumbs and blown across.

By about 3 p.m. we were ready to return home.

## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

—John Fisher

The Tallgrass Prairie Preserve Christmas Bird Count will happen on Jan. 5, 2008. Please contact Don Wolfe for area assignments, meeting places, and times by telephone at 918-336-7778 or by email at:

dwolfe@ou.edu

We finish the day and compile the list at the Stucco House and eat some great chili made by Don and Bob Hamilton. Bring veggies, crackers, dessert, etc. to share for dinner. Bring a lunch and be prepared for the weather. In addition to a chance to see some great birds, this is also a chance to see and explore parts of the preserve that aren't open to the public. See ya there.

## JOSIE BRIGGS

—Andrew Donovan-Shead

It is with delight that I introduce you to JOSIE OF THE PRAIRIE. Josie is our youngest photo-journalist and writer. She is the daughter of Carmon and Joe Bob Briggs.

Josie lives on the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve and will be giving us her unique perspective of its life and times. It was her eye for the interesting photograph that drew Van Vives' attention, causing him to suggest that we engage her as a contributor to the newsletter; my only stipulation was that Josie write a few words to go with her pictures. Please welcome JOSIE OF THE PRAIRIE.

## JOSIE OF THE PRAIRIE

—Josie Briggs

Hi, my name is Josie Briggs and I am 12 years old. I live on the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve. My Dad and Mom work on the preserve. My Dad is a ranch hand and my Mom helps with the housekeeping at the Headquarters. I have a little sister, Jennie Beth who is 4 years old. I also have two dogs, two horses and a miniature donkey. I love living on the Preserve. I have so many opportunities to take lots of great pictures and see some of the most beautiful land in the world. Most kids my age never get to see a bison, but I see them every day. I can look out my window and see whitetail deer. So, I feel very blessed to live here. I would like to share some of my pictures and a brief story with you about a day in my life when Dad and I fed the bison.



It was time to round up the bison for their yearly shots and brand the new calves. My Dad, Joe Bob Briggs, said: "Come and go with me and I'll get you close enough to take some pictures with your new camera". So, we left the house at 7:00 a.m. Dad has a feeder on his company truck and we filled it up with cattle cake. The bison love this stuff. He started blowing the siren on the truck and they came running from all directions. The purpose of this is to bring all the bison into



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the smaller traps by the bison pens for the working. It is less stressful on the bison and so much easier on the cowboys. So, here we were in one of the bigger pastures waiting on all the bison to come to the feed truck. Dad told me to get on the back of the truck and I got some really GOOD shots with my camera. We got back in the truck and started driving slowly, blowing the siren. The bison followed behind and all around the truck. One big bull even stuck his head up to my window. I thought he was going to get in the truck with us. He backed up and made a funny ROAR as if to tell us he was HUNGRY and would we please hurry up and start dumping out the feed. We finally led these bison into another pasture close to the bison pens where the cowboys will continue to "feed" them until it is time to work the bison.



by Josie Briggs

## VISITOR COUNTS

—Iris McPherson

Here's the rundown on the number of visitors we had at the prairie in August and September. August was unusually low with a total of 384 visitors, but September was back up with 636. Oklahoma led the way, as usual, with 211 in Aug. and 455 in Sept. The top three states in Aug. were Texas (23), Missouri (16) and Kansas (15). For Sept. the top three states were Texas (29), Missouri (17) and California (16). The counts for the top four places for the year to this point are Oklahoma (2,563), Texas (238), Kansas (147) and Arkansas (105). North Dakota and Wyoming are the only states still not represented this year. Visitors from Iran, Tanzania and Malaysia were the first representatives from their countries in the 12 months, since I've been doing the counts. There were visitors from 6 countries in Aug. and 12 in Sept. There have been 235 foreign visitors this year with Germany in the lead with 52. The year-to-date number of visitors

is 4,388.

## BA FAMILY FIELD-TRIP

—Van Vives

On October 13 we had the largest visitor's group at the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve. Originally the school system in Broken Arrow wanted to have a field-trip for students from all schools in BA. Due to



Broken Arrow Families Field-trip by Van Vives

difficult in procuring enough school buses, the field trip was cancelled. In its place they decided to have a Family Field-trip on a Saturday. There were 42 cars and an estimated 150 people in the caravan. Thanks to Ann, Dan Martin, and Rebecca Renfro for helping me handle such a large group. Rebecca took half the group and gave them a talk on The Nature Conservancy and its philosophy and information on the bison. I



www.chrisharrisphoto.com



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took the other half at the Headquarters Building and talked to them about ranch history and history of the Osage Tribe. Then we switched groups and did it all over again.

I thank the Broken Arrow people for being so attentive and I have never seen a more well-behaved group of students.

## CHRIS HARRIS PHOTOGRAPHY

—Andrew Donovan-Shead

Chris Harris is a photographer based in Seattle, WA. He spent five days in October photographing the tallgrass on our preserve and at the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve outside Strong City, KS. Chris is a different photographer in that he uses a pinhole camera to produce pictures that enhance the abstract, geometric qualities of the images. Chris wants to return in the spring of 2008 specifically to capture the sweep of the prairie in full bloom. You can see other examples of Chris's work at his web-site:

[www.chrisharrisphoto.com](http://www.chrisharrisphoto.com)

## NO TRASH SERVICE

At the Visitor's Center there is no trash service, therefore please carry away your trash for disposal at home. White plastic kitchen trash bags should be available in one of the sink-unit cupboards, to replace filled bags in the waste baskets.

## NEWSLETTER PUBLICATION

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, university scientists, philosophers, and historians are welcome to submit articles and pictures about the various preserves in Oklahoma, but of course the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in particular.

## NEWSLETTER BACK ISSUES

Back issues of the Docent Newsletter, to September 2007, can be found in the two green zip-binders, stored in the Perspex rack by the file cabinet in the office of the Visitor's Center.





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## The Nature Conservancy Offices & Preserves

Tulsa Office	918-585-1117
Oklahoma City Office	405-858-8557
Tallgrass Prairie Preserve	918-287-4803
J.T. Nickel Wildlife Preserve	918-456-7601
Pontotoc Ridge Preserve	918-585-1177
Four Canyon Preserve	580-488-2657