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THE DOCENT NEWS



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Tracks in the Tallgrass

- Jerry Wagener

Time to kick off another year. Hope you are rested up and ready to hit the ditches on February 28th for a cleanup of the winter accumulation on the preserves roads, undergo the annual attitude adjustment,er, reorientation on March 6th, and begin greeting visitors again on March 7th. As I write this, on January 30th, there are already a number of names on the March schedule.

On January 24th we had our annual docent coordination meeting, which in some ways sets the initial tone for the docent program for the year. In the paragraphs below I want to report to you the results of that meeting. But first, let me tell you about two significant improvements in the docent program coordination for 2004.

As many, perhaps most, of you know, since it was mentioned at the recognition dinner in November and discussed at the coordination meeting last week, Jean and I will be relocating to New England,

yeah, that frigid part of the country, this spring. I'm sad to leave the prairie, and my coordination role in the docent program, but I'm glad to report that the docent program will be in the excellent hands of Dennis Bires. I hope to do at least the required number of shifts this year to remain an active docent, assuming out-of-staters are allowed.

I'm also happy to report that George Pierson, a new docent in 2003, will take over the web work, for both the docent program and the Oklahoma TNC chapter. I'm delighted that in Dennis and George you will no doubt have more effective leaders, in their respective roles, than with me.

January 24 Coordination Meeting Report

At the beginning of the meeting I announced that at the end of the year I had given a one-day service credit to each adopt-a-mile person, as well as to each coordinator. The group approved of that action, and in addition would like to see a day's credit given to each instructor/presenter in the 2004 new-docent training. That led to a discussion of what the annual service

requirements are and should be. The more experienced docents pointed out that the requirement of three days has always applied to working the gift shop. Some newer docents thought that all three days could be earned with workdays such as cleaning the roads, maintaining the trails, etc. In retrospect, I may be guilty of contributing to that last impression, apparently having not sufficiently internalized the third bullet on the second page of the third section of the *Docent Manual*. In any event, you can imagine that a spirited discussion ensued, resulting in a straw vote of whether or not we should increase the requirement to four days instead of three; the straw vote went in favor of four days by a two to one margin. In the end we decided to discuss this at reorientation, and decide at that time what our policy will be. So come to reorientation prepared to speak and vote on this issue.

Related to the preceding issue was the concern that there were a number of days in the fall for which no one had signed up to work the visitors center. The consensus in the

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group was that we needed someone to call people on a weekly basis, especially those that had not worked much, or any, thus far in the year. Karen Harris volunteered to do such calling. Three cheers for Karen!

This could possibly alleviate another problem, namely that over a third of the active docents did not meet their three-day commitment in 2003. Of course there are extenuating circumstances in some cases, but that is still a disturbingly high number. The recommendation from the group was that I contact each of these people, identify those cases in which there were extenuating circumstances, and advise the rest that they need to come to reorientation and reconfirm their commitment to the docent program in order to remain an active docent. Accordingly, I have written each a letter along these lines.

Of course the other two thirds have done yeoman work this year. We had a total of 690 service days in 2003, an average of seven days for each docent contributing to that total. The docent return rate for 2004 is running about 85%, so it appears we do not need a large class of new docents. Therefore we decided to recruit only in Bartlesville and Tulsa this year. Betty Turner volunteered to coordinate the recruiting activities in Bartlesville and Dennis Bires volunteered to do the same for Tulsa. We had about a dozen

recruits last year who could not fit the training into their schedules. I will contact those to see who might still be interested. The recruiting meeting dates for Bartlesville and Tulsa will be on the calendar.

As for new docent training, which probably will be in early April again, we decided that there would be just one day of classroom training in Pawhuska, relying more on the docent manual for the details, and one day of on-site training patterned pretty much after last year's.

In the questionnaire that I distributed in December, there was a place for "any other comments/suggestions". By far the most popular write-in (eight respondents) listed reinstatement of the trail-guiding program. After a lengthy discussion the sense of the group was that I should again discuss this matter with Harvey. I have done so, and the policy of the preserve remains that the trail-guiding program will not be reinstated. Here are the reasons: (1) TNC world-wide has eliminated all education and outreach programs; local TNC funds modestly support the docent program, e.g. record keeping, newsletter mailing, etc., and Harvey is concerned that expanding the outreach beyond the visitors center could jeopardize that support. (2) In view of the new TNC outreach policy, the liability exposure far outweighs the benefits of a

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TGP Docent Contacts

Program Coordinator

Jerry Wagener
(918) 742-2566 - home
(918) 636.6361 - cell
Jerry@Wagener.com

Tour Coordinator

Dick Baker
(918) 747-2495
Dbakertul@aol.com

Docent Scheduler

Kara Morgan
(918) 272-9433
morgan1477@aol.com
Karen Harris
(918) 663-8306
kharris@hollandhll.org.com

Newsletter Editor

Kim Hagan
(918) 494-8892
kimhagan@sbcglobal.net

New Docent Recruitment

Dennis Bires: Tulsa
(918) 341-3908
dennisbires@lycos.com
Betty Turner: Bartlesville
(918) 333-7864
BBturner999@aol.com

Reorientation and Kickoff

Don Bruner
(580) 237-4199 - home
(580) 213-9217 - work
dbruner@groendyke.com

Docent Awards

Monica Murray
(918) 587-3701 - home
(918) 556-5327 - work
monica.murray@oden-ins.com

Nature Room

Doris Mayfield
(918) 743-6922
dbmayfield@mindspring.com

Workday Coordinator

Dennis Bires
(918) 341-3908
dennisbires@lycos.com

Web Coordinator

George Pierson
(918) 744-0554
zqlp01@cox.net

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trail-guiding program. (3) The preserve is besieged with many outreach requests of all kinds, not just trail-guiding requests; it is best to be true to, and focus on, the conservation mission of the preserve.

After spirited discussions on the above topics, which exhausted most of the time, and many of the participants, the remaining agenda item was *Docent Mission*. There wasn't much energy left to tackle that one, so it was suggested that we each review the current mission statement, which comprises the first four paragraphs on the first page of the *Docent Program* section of the *Docent Manual*; it's also on our web page; click on the *Volunteer Program* link. Please review the current mission and send me and/or Dennis any suggestions you have for changes. The two of us will figure out how best to process those suggestions.

Best wishes for a really great year, and I hope to see you at reorientation.



Back to the Prairie - Dennis Bires

As Jerry Wagener has indicated in his *Tracks in the Tallgrass* column this month, he and Jean will be moving away later this year, though returning periodically to keep in touch. I think I speak for everyone involved in the

docent program when I say that Jerry was an absolutely wonderful Program Coordinator. The transition to *independent* status for our group raised all kinds of uncertainties about how and even whether our work would continue, but under Jerry's leadership things have worked out splendidly. He exercised just the right level of guidance versus delegation to allow our volunteer efforts to flourish. Let's just hope the next Coordinator is half as effective.

Behind almost every successful man is an equally successful woman, and often vice versa. Jean Wagener's contribution to our work was often behind the scenes, but always substantial. Her knowledge of Jerry's numerous databases and graphics sometimes exceeded Jerry's own. And all those goodies don't just appear at docent meetings on their own. Jerry, your leaving wouldn't be quite so difficult if you could just leave Jean here with us. But we all wish you and the kids and grandkids the best.

Apparently at Jerry's urging, and seconded by Tim Grogan, Harvey Payne asked me to take over as Program Coordinator, and I agreed to do so. I'm flattered at the vote of confidence from each of them. And thanks to all those who have expressed their confidence that I can do a good job, especially Marian,

my wife. Tim, who heads the Oklahoma Nature Conservancy office in Tulsa, told me that our volunteer operation is the envy of numerous other state directors, and pledged his support for our efforts. I feel that everything we're doing now we're doing quite well, so I don't have plans to institute any changes. But I'm always open to suggestions from docents, and I hope no one will hesitate to offer them. My email address is dennisbires@lycos.com, our home number is (918) 341-3908, and the office is (918) 631-2443.

As winter comes to an end, mark your calendars for a number of occasions to get back to the prairie:

On Saturday, February 28th, we'll have the first Prairie Road Crew cleanup day, which always proves to generate not only the most, but the most interesting roadside trash of the year.

On Saturday, March 6th, we'll have Docent Reorientation at the Senior Center in Pawhuska. Always interesting and always a good time.

On Sunday, March 7th, the Visitors Center opens for 2004. It's not too early to sign up for shifts via the website.

If you're hiking the trails in early spring, please push aside any branches that have blown onto the trail. We
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(Continued from page 3) haven't scheduled a docent trail maintenance day because Boy Scout Troop 1 of Tulsa has offered to spread new gravel for us on March 27th as a service project.

There has been strong sentiment to schedule another docent special activity this year, along the lines of the quite enjoyable waterfall hike last May. Our plan is once again to schedule a second Prairie Road Crew half day in late spring, followed by a cookout at or near the Headquarters, and an afternoon hike. Our tentative destination this year is the Western Wall Unit of the Osage Wildlife Management Area, adjacent to the Preserve on the eastern boundary. Harvey has agreed, schedule permitting, to lead the hike. Keep an eye on the calendar of events for details. And welcome back.



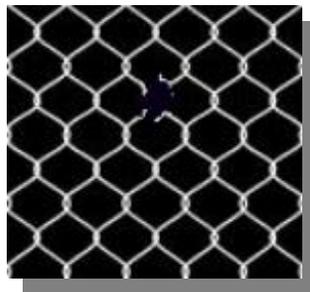
Species Extinction, Illustration - Van Vives

I have found that it is hard to impress upon people the seriousness of species extinction. It is perhaps harder to explain to children. The use of illustrations or symbols can offer some degree of enlightenment.

I have had some success using the idea of a very large net.

Each knot in the net represents one species. The knot (species) is directly dependent upon other knots for strength and stability.

Let us cut out and remove one of the knots (species) and immediately the knots surrounding that position have become weakened and the dangling dependent ends of the twine can now move about with some freedom, but in doing so can allow the attached knots to loosen.



Continue cutting knots out of the net at random and large holes develop until the integrity of the net is destroyed and there is no resemblance between the remaining fragments and the original net.

So the destruction of only one species affects the well being of many others.



Docent Awards for 2003

- **Monica Murray**

Awards are given for first four shifts a docent works and for every 10 shifts served. The 2003 Docent Award Recipients are listed below.

4 Shifts - Lapel Pin

Bridget Barry
 Deana Brewster
 Dennis Brewster
 Rick Burton
 Maureen Forsythe
 Steve Forsythe
 Neil Garrison
 Jan Henkle
 Chuck Russell
 Dale Sevcik
 Rose Whitekiller

10 Shifts - Key Tag

Mary Bernd
 George Brenner
 Andrew Donovan-Shead
 Charlotte Evans
 Larry Hicks
 Cela James
 Monica Murray
 Peggy Selman
 Jim Thayer



Jerry Wagener, Docent Program Coordinator spoke to the group

20 Shifts - Coaster

Beverly Atteberry
 Don Baird
 Art Browning
 James Deming
 Nancy Irby
 Jim Walker

30 Shifts - Paper Weight

Dennis Bires
 Nicholas DelGrosso
 June Endres
 Jan Hawks
 Larry Myers
 Jerry Wagener

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40 Shifts - Round Box
 Phyllis Connally
 Pat Jaynes
 Jenk Jones
 Betty Turner

50 Shifts - Square Box
 Jo Brooks
 Pat Jaynes
 George McCourt
 Loretta Vives
 Irene Ward

60 Shifts - Clock
 Barbara Bates
 John Boxall

70 Shifts - Coaster Set
 John Boxall
 David Turner



Tim Grogan, Director of Conservation, updated guests



Bob Hamilton, Director of Stewardship, spoke

80 Shifts - Bookends
 Dave Dolcater
 Stuart Marshall

90 Shifts - Crystal Tumblers
 Iris McPherson

100 Shifts - Docent Hall of Fame
 John Fisher
 Doris Mayfield
 Iris McPherson
 Van Vives



Docent Hall of Fame Award winners Van Vives, Iris McPherson and John Fisher



Docents and guests



Names of Flowers and Plants - Van Vives

Perhaps it would be a good idea to start the season with a review of the scientific naming of plants. Generally, we use common names to describe wild flowers and plants, but one wildflower may have several common names depending on the geographical location. The scientific name, however, is more definitive and the same in all geographical locations.

Bidens bipinnata, for example, may be known as Spanish Needles, Beggar Ticks, Beggarlice, or Pitchforks, depending on which part of the country one is from. Scientific names are Latin words or words that have been Latinized. They are universal in meaning and convey information about the relationships among species.

Each scientific name contains two words; the first word is capitalized and is the *genus*. It refers to a group of plants with similar general characteristics. The second, in lower case letters, is the *specific epithet*, which identifies the particular species. An example is *Asclepias tuberosa*. *Asclepias* identifies the plant as one of the milkweeds and *tuberosa* refers only to the orange-flowered Butterfly Milkweed.

An authority citation may follow the Latin name. That is the name or abbreviated name of the individual who first described the plant according to the rules of nomenclature. For example, *Asclepias speciosa* Torr. Torr. is a standard abbreviation for John Torrey. We may also gain additional information from the specific epithet such as *Elymus canadensis* and *Elymus virginicus*, which are Canadian and Virginia Wildrye.

I will use both the scientific and common names for plants in my articles.





TNC Oklahoma Chapter Preserve Updates

Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy

- Jay Pruett
Director of Conservation

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, in collaboration with wildlife stakeholders, including state and federal agencies, farm and ranch groups, conservation and sportsmen's groups, academic professionals and other Oklahomans, is now on the onset of an ambitious new project to further understand Oklahoma's wildlife habitat needs. The group is creating a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy that will address the needs of all fish and wildlife species in the state.

Hunters, anglers and boaters have traditionally funded the majority of fish and wildlife conservation. This funding has provided the means to restore deer populations, stock striped bass and many other successful conservation efforts. Unfortunately, this funding has not been enough to address the needs of all 800 plus wildlife species in Oklahoma. That is the case nationwide, and state fish and wildlife agencies have

been working for 20 years to fill this funding gap. This new strategy is designed to find a way for a diverse group of wildlife stakeholders to work together towards common conservation goals.

The Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy is now on the brink of the next critical step in the process: public meetings. The opinions and desires of sportsmen, birdwatchers, landowners and anyone else with an interest in wildlife are an important component of the strategy.

Public meetings will be held across the state during the first week of March in Oklahoma City, Woodward, Lawton, McAlester, and Tulsa. Anyone with an interest in wildlife is invited to attend and voice their opinions on a variety of topics. Individuals can also express your thoughts about the strategy by logging on to wildlifedepartment.com.

All of the regional meetings begin at 6:30 p.m. and end at 8:30 p.m. Specific meeting sites are:

March 1: Oklahoma City, Metro Tech Spring Lake Campus, Business Conference Center, 1900 Springlake Drive

March 2: Woodward, City of Woodward Building, Pioneer Room, 1219 Eight Street

March 3: Lawton, Cameron University, Shepler Mezzanine, North of F Street, between the North and South Shepler Dormitories

March 4: McAlester, Ramada Inn, 1500 S George Nigh Expressway

March 5: Tulsa, OU Tulsa, Schusterman Center, 4502 East 41 Street



Crosstimbers and Southern Tallgrass Prairie Ecoregion

Overview

The Crosstimbers and Southern Tallgrass Prairie (CTSTP) Ecoregion spans more than 75,250 square miles, touching the Kansas and Arkansas borders, occupying much of central Oklahoma and penetrating as far south as San Antonio, Texas. Soils and geology and therefore, vegetation are diverse. In general, the ecoregion can be divided into numerous strata, or subregions: perhaps as many as six in Texas, and perhaps somewhat fewer

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than that in Oklahoma. These subregions are often segregated by those unique soils, geology and vegetation.

In Oklahoma CTSTP, the matrix vegetation is Oak forest, woodland and savanna, containing innumerable prairie openings. Recent research has indicated that some of the Crosstimbers forest of both Texas and Oklahoma represent perhaps the greatest extent of old growth forest in the eastern half of the United States. Post Oak, Black Jack Oak and Eastern Redcedar are the common tree dominants. Numerous creeks and rivers supporting bottomland forests dissect the landscape. South of the Red River, in Texas, the Crosstimbers forests form two discrete and narrow extensions: the Eastern and Western Crosstimbers of Texas. The sandstone geology supporting these Texas extensions are surrounded by primarily calcareous soils, which support tallgrass prairie.

More than 150 vertebrate and invertebrate animal species and almost 70 plant species have preliminarily been identified as being of special conservation concern, having become rare or imperiled. Further, plant communities and ecological systems are currently being evaluated to determine status as conservation targets.

Threats to conservation targets are various. For

example, in the more intact portions of the Crosstimbers forest of Oklahoma, fire suppression has caused the phenomenon of *thicketizing*. Where once open woodland and savanna supported great diversity much has succeeded to closed canopy forest composed of fewer species. In particular, Eastern Redcedar has drastically increased in the absence of fire, which is thought to lead not only to lowered biodiversity, but to the loss of habitat for game species as well. In more urbanized areas, landscape fragmentation, e.g. chopping up large tracts into smaller, and land conversion are the primary threats.

Ecoregional Planning

In May of 2003, The Nature Conservancy embarked on an extensive and intensive planning process to conserve the biodiversity of the Crosstimbers and Southern Tallgrass Prairie Ecoregion. This is a process of selecting and designing networks of conservation sites that will conserve the diversity of species, communities and ecological systems characteristic of the ecoregion.

Oklahoma and Texas staff is working together on the project within technical and management teams coordinated by the Ecoregional Manager. Some, but not all, of the essential steps are:

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TNC Contacts

Tulsa Office

State Director

Tim Grogan

(918) 293-2929

Director of Conservation

Jay Pruett

(918) 293-2917

Director of Operations

Eileen Jobin

(918) 293-2920

Director of Philanthropy

Deirdre McArdle

(918) 293-2912

Director of Environ.

Affairs

Grant Gerondale

(918) 293-2921

Oklahoma City Office

(405) 858-8557

Assoc. Dir. of

Philanthropy

Keven Virgilio

Land Protection Specialist

Chris Hise

Tallgrass Prairie Preserve

(918) 287-4803

Preserve Director

Harvey Payne

Director of Stewardship

Bob Hamilton

J.T. Nickel Family Nature & Wildlife Preserve

(918) 456-7601

Preserve Director

Chris Wilson

Pontotoc Ridge Preserve

(580) 777-2224

Preserve Director

Jim Erwin

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1. Identification of conservation targets (species, systems and communities)
2. Siting and mapping of targets
3. Assessment of target viability
4. Development of implementation strategies

In some cases, direct protection of land (fee acquisition, conservation easements, etc) may be the preferred strategy, and in other cases, multi-site conservation strategies may be appropriate. Multi-site conservation strategies seek to effect land use on a broad, perhaps regional, scale by working with human populations living and working within the landscapes we wish to effect. Examples would include sustainable forestry initiatives, fire management cooperatives, and freshwater initiatives. Emphasis is placed on conservation at landscape scale, large areas of land where essential ecological processes are intact to the extent that targets can be sustained across time. Substantial completion of the CTSTP ecoregional plan is slated for June 2004.

Pontotoc Ridge Preserve

Pontotoc Ridge is The Nature Conservancy's only CTSTP preserve in Oklahoma. The 3,000 acre preserve is sited on Pontotoc Ridge, an east-west trending ridge on the eastern

edge of the Arbuckle uplift, lending diversity in aspect, slope and vegetation. Along the foot of relatively steep north-facing slopes are high quality examples of bottomland forest, approaching old growth in structure and diversity. Tallgrass prairie is found on deeper soils associated with the bottomland sites, while mixed grass and dry glade communities are found on west facing ridgetops. The site supports more than 60 butterfly, 23 snake, and a suite of neotropical migratory bird species. More than 400 species of vascular plant are known from the preserve, including rarities such as the Oklahoma Beardtongue, and Rock Scurf Pea. Further, the preserve protects the Oklahoma Cave Amphipod, an extremely rare Oklahoma endemic. The vision for the preserve is a dynamic, landscape-scale site encompassing a diverse array of native plants, animals and

natural communities representative of the Arbuckle Mountain region, spanning approximately 38,000 acres of protected lands. The strategy for land protection includes fee acquisition and conservation easement.

Pontotoc Ridge Preserve is serving as a regional incubator for multi-site conservation strategies. Currently, it is the focal point for the development of one of the first fire management

cooperatives in the state. Fire management cooperatives help land owners restore fire as a component of their land management. Landowners realize increased forage productivity and improved game habitat as well as increased native biodiversity. Toward this goal, the Preserve has conducted landowner fire educational programs in conjunction with Oklahoma State University, assisted landowners in structuring the cooperative and in obtaining necessary equipment.

