

FEBRUARY
2009



RIVERSIDE NATURE CENTER

RIVERSIDE NATURE NOTES



From the Director...

Water 2009

by Barbara Stidham

THE THEME of the Earth Day 2009 Celebration to be held this April 18 is water, specifically rainwater. We will have speakers on the topic of rainwater harvesting and the children will come in rain drop/cloud costumes for the rain parade and dance. We will have lots of information on rainwater harvesting and other water related brochures and handouts. Water is a hot topic these days and getting more important every day. The extended, extreme drought conditions are taking a toll on the land, plants and wildlife and from what I hear are not letting up any time soon.

What can we do? Hope for rain; have the kids dress up in rain costumes and do a rain dance? Yes, we can do that because we might as well have fun while we are working to educate people about the real things we can do. And there are real things we can do.

What about water conservation? Since we have been in this drought, have you made efforts to really conserve water? Have you deliberately made a choice to completely fill the dishwasher before running it and to turn off the shower while you lather up?

What about using water efficiently? **Just the other day I filled a small cup with water to wash down a pill.** Even though it was a small cup, after I swallowed my pill, I still had water left in the cup. Before I even thought about it, **I poured the extra water down the drain.** I could have poured it on my houseplants or added it to the dog's water bowl, a small thing: but small things add up, especially when a lot of people do small things.

Human beings are the only beings that waste water and the only ones that can make a difference by conserving water and using water more efficiently. Sure, my 7-month-old Labrador retriever plays in her water bowl until all the water is splashed on the ground or too dirty to drink. And yes, I lecture her on how naughty and wasteful she is being but she just doesn't get it! But we, the only beings who can be good stewards of our natural resources need to get it!

April showers bring May flowers or at least we can hope. And we can play and parade with the kids and have a good time at Earth Day. We can also learn more about our water resources and how we can make a difference by collecting rainwater, conserving water and using this precious and scarce resource more efficiently, the real purpose of Earth Day 2009.

"Collecting rainwater, conserving water and using this precious and scarce resource more efficiently [is] the real purpose of Earth Day 2009."



What is a Nature Center?



John Quinby

I have heard a number of comments from various people about the ‘look’ of the nature center grounds recently. These include: “*The nature center must be for sale because it looks so unkempt*”; “*I wouldn’t take my friends to the nature center because it looks so ugly*”; and “*Doesn’t anyone maintain the grounds?*” I find statements like this disturbing, but they do have some basis in fact and they need to be addressed. This article is intended to address only the grounds and not all of the educational programs available at Riverside Nature Center.

Maybe the best way to start out is to address what our nature center is not.

Riverside Nature Center is not a botanical garden (it’s not really meant to be a ‘garden’ at all) -- it is not meant to look like an English garden or a garden you might find in Dallas, Houston or some other cities further to the north. There is good reason for this. Kerrville is on the very edge of a desert. Therefore, many of the plants, flowers, shrubs and trees that you see in these other regions do not do well here. The

Kerrville ecosystem supports a wide variety, but different, set of plants. Now you might ask, “I’ve seen other gardens in Kerrville that have pansies, mums and other colorful plants, so why can’t we have some of these at Riverside?” The answer is -- you can. But it takes a lot of extra water, which is a rare commodity around here and getting scarcer. It also takes a lot of extra time and effort that is also a scarcity at Riverside. Those types of plants just don’t do well here. To educate the public and to stay close to what nature can provide on its own, the nature center has a policy of planting mostly (but not all) native plants in the various beds on the grounds.

Native plants are very beautiful given the right conditions. Although sometimes nature doesn’t cooperate and provide the right conditions. During the winter, things are going to look rather dull because most plants are dormant. I think everyone understands that. Sometimes native plants may not look as attractive as at other times because the conditions aren’t right; lack of sun, lack of water, lack of care. However native plants require a lot less care than non-natives. They require a lot less water also. As a side issue, we hope you have noticed our new rainwater harvesting system. Natives certainly do better when given more water, but when water is scarce they generally do not die back like many non-natives do.

So what is Riverside Nature Center supposed to be? Our mission statement says it best. “...to foster greater public awareness & appreciation of the Hill Country’s natural resources through education, information and by example.” So, to this end, the ‘grounds’ of the nature center are meant to demonstrate and educate people not familiar with the Hill Country ecosystem what is best suited to this area. Our intent is to keep the parking lot and entrance to the Visitor Center as attractive and well maintained as time permits. This should provide a welcoming atmosphere for new visitors.

A reason behind the Visitor Center are intended to be more natural and they will, by intent, look less groomed. The wildflower meadow has a wide variety of different plants and is meant to be just that: ‘a meadow’. It provides seed base for the gleaners and a working area for the great plant variety that this ecosystem can support. As such, it will never look like a well

groomed and clipped garden. We are creating ‘pocket gardens’ within the meadow that demonstrate how well various plants do under certain conditions. To complement the meadow, we are developing educational beds inside the tall fenced area. These demonstration areas will be groomed to a greater extent than the meadow





and will offer plant alternatives that might be appropriate to neighborhood yards. They also demonstrate a variety of mulching and landscaping techniques that are common in the Hill Country.

Now, having said all of the above, I will admit that we might do a better job at making things look a bit more maintained and not so scrubby. To do so, however, will take more volunteers and money. We are a non-profit, membership, donation and volunteer based organization. We value volunteers that we have, but we lack enough volunteers to make the center grounds look more inviting and to accomplish all of our educational objectives. To address this, we are setting up workdays this winter and spring to help spruce up the grounds, and we encourage you to be a part of it. I welcome your comments, encouragement and assistance.

I hope that this article will clarify the objectives of the nature center's Building and Grounds Committee. If you have visitors to the area, please say to them: "Go by Riverside Nature Center and take a look. It is really pretty nice over there." And the place isn't for sale!

Welcome

Denise Henneke Joins RNC Board

RNC is pleased to welcome its newest Director, Denise LeTard Henneke. Denise, who is a CPA, has extensive experience in MIS and Systems Planning, and in health care management and consulting. Denise has worked with the Peterson physicians' organization, and owns a company that provides operational and financial consulting to hospitals and physicians. She has been on the Board of the Texas Heritage Music Foundation, and has been active in the Chamber of Commerce. Denise will provide grant-writing expertise for the Nature Center, working collaboratively with Barbara Stidham. Denise is married to Fred Henneke, Kerrville attorney and former Kerr County Judge.

I am pleased to welcome Denise to the RNC Board of Directors!

Gloria Olsen — President, RNC Board of Directors

New Members of RNC

David & Laura Baker

Bill & Cyndy Cantrell

Jeffery & Suzanne Castner

Mark & Celia Cawthon

Scott & Julia Clay

R. Bernadette De Shields

Trevor & Jennifer Hyde

Bill Kightlinger

Juli Koroly

Sandy Merritt

Kerrville Garden Club

Oliver & Donna Scofield

Kenneth Smith

John & Kim Surovik

Robert & Doris Tyler

Don & Terry Whitehill

Don Willoughby



FEATURED VOLUNTEER BRAD COX

“THE BAMBOO SLAYER”



Brad Cox

Brad, finding himself in the Big Bend area some 17 years ago, and being a good son, brought a present back to his mom, Nita Carlyle, in Kerrville. It was a cactus plant. She was very successful with the plant and eventually it grew so large that she donated it to RNC. It was on a subsequent visit to Kerrville years later, before he moved back, that she took Brad to see his present at the center. While impressed with the size and girth of the cactus he also found Riverside fascinating and realized how much work there is to do around here.

He picked out a task – clearing the bamboo from our property – and set to work. It didn’t hurt that he found an old, donated wood chipper in the tool shed and thought it would be fun to clean it up and use it. Now four months later there is a half-acre of the Center that is completely free of invasive bamboo and looks a lot more open and generally nicer. Brad says, “the good things about working with bamboo is that it doesn’t itch and stick like cedar. And it’s straight and chips easily.” It also makes great mulch as it rots and it is bug resistant. The bad thing, of course, is that this imported grass is very invasive. His next project: controlling the Ligustrum, also a non-native, along the river. Since Brad likes to work outside and with his hands, RNC is the beneficiary of some real great synergy. We are also grateful to John Quinby for pointing out his involvement and his contribution to improving our sight.

Our ‘Bamboo slayer’ was born in Alpine, Texas but grew up here and even played football for Tivy. By trade, Brad is an electrician, and has worked in 10 different states. He has always been fascinated by the different types of vegetation that he has encountered in the different regions of the US. He particularly likes the beauty of the Hill Country and the high mountain country of New Mexico where he plans to relocate to eventually. His preference and plan is to find some rural acreage and, using his construction and electrical skills, build a house for himself. Yes, with his bare hands. Did we say that Brad likes the out of doors and enjoys the physical aspect of working with his hands? We and our RNC visitors, of course, enjoy more open, less bamboo clogged spaces.

Brad Cox is a multiple generation Texan tracing his family’s roots back to the 1800s with kin involved with the Alamo and Sam Houston. His grandfather was a rancher and took pride in caring for the land. Brad has one sister who currently lives in Houston. His mother is a very long time, but still young, KISD teacher. Growing up he had access to the Hill Country through family ranches in Leakey. Brad comes by his love of the outdoors almost genetically. His other grandfather, R. S. Cox, was head of the Real County highway department in Leakey for 41 years. A large bag of state supplied wild flower seed was always in his car. For years he hand seeded wild flowers (Bluebonnets, Indian Paint Brush and many other species) up and down the right of way during his travels. Lady Bird Johnson was so impressed that she gave him a commendation.



When Brad does uproot and wander over to NM in search of his next dream, we will miss him and his hard work but will always be thankful for it and what we don't see in the way of the bamboo forest. Good luck, Brad, and thanks.

This little story begs for a commercial: Whether you are a Bamboo slayer or even know what [Poaceae](#), [Bambusoideae](#) is, there is always help needed around our campus. Currently, there is a series of sessions going on to let people – volunteers and potential volunteers – learn just what is needed and how we go about getting the work done.

So, folks, what do you say? If you would like to keep the Center well maintained, please offer to volunteer with whatever you think you can offer. Practically everything that is done on the grounds is done by a volunteer. Sign up for the many different training classes. Thanks!

At the San Antonio Cactus & Succulent Society's March 16, 2009 meeting, **award-winning garden photojournalist Debra Lee Baldwin** will give a presentation on "Using Succulents in Your Home & Garden Landscapes." For details go to the following link: <http://home.windstream.net/wildfong/KCCSSfiles/SACXSmeeting090316.pdf>



Debra Lee Baldwin



Earth Day will be here soon. Call the RNC office to sign up to work the event. It takes a lot of people pulling together to make the day a success.

We are still trying to convert many of our Newsletter recipients to receiving the Newsletter electronically to cut costs, save paper, and be able to provide color pictures that are available through the internet. Please take a minute and either call us at 830-257-4837 or send us an email at office@riversidenaturecenter.org to let us know you are willing to receive the Newsletter by electronic means. Thanks



ANNOUNCEMENTS

We had a good turn out for our volunteer training on how to conduct a Star Party. Some of those volunteers are now attending Star Parties to get the hands on experience needed to feel comfortable staffing the program. We also had good results at the Building and Landscape Committee workday and volunteer training. Several new volunteers worked along side the regulars for the morning, cleaning up the grounds and getting tips on the RNC approach to landscaping and yard work. A few of those new volunteers have already returned to RNC to put in some additional hours.

Thanks to those of you who helped get volunteer training started and **THANKS** to the many wonderful folks who came to learn and volunteer. We can't do it without you; and with you we can do so much more!

We have more volunteer opportunities and volunteer training coming. Please consider these training opportunities and help RNC reach its program and educational goals.

February 21st 10 am -12:00 pm Girl Scout Overnight Program. The Girl Scouts come to RNC to get their Wildlife Badge. Come see how it is done and whether you might be interested in volunteering in the Girl Scout Program.

February 28th Building and Landscape Committee Workday and Volunteer Training, session 2, 9:00 am-12:00 pm Volunteers are needed to help clean up and beautify the grounds in preparation for spring. New volunteers and others interested in volunteering are invited to participate and learn.

March 21st 10 am – 12:00 pm School Programs Learn how you can conduct or assist in the educational programs for school children. Many school groups come to RNC each year to get on-field experience. Come see how it is done and whether you might be interested in volunteering in the School Program.

March 28th Building and Landscape Committee Workday and Volunteer Training, session 3, 9:00-12:00 pm All volunteers are needed to help clean up and beautify the grounds in preparation for spring. New volunteers and others interested in volunteering are invited to participate and learn.

May 9th 10 am – 12:00 pm Summer Day Camp RNC is host to children who want a fun camping experience that is also educational. These camps are held in June and July. Training will focus on the types (theme) of camps offered, the lessons taught and the activities that engage the kids for the week- long sessions. Would you like to volunteer to help with summer day camps? Come see how camps are conducted and where you might be able to assist.

Other volunteer opportunities:

As you know we have a library of donated books. We need a volunteer to come in occasionally and catalogue new books . Training is available. We want to thank Wanda Dobie for her years of dedicated service to RNC. Our library is well organized and user friendly thanks to Wanda.

We need someone who doesn't mind getting on a ladder to change our air filters every 45-60 days. We have low filters (no climbing required) but we also have a couple of filters that are in our high ceilings. If you are not afraid of heights we need you!

We still need a few more pots for repotting plants for the plant sale. If you have plastic nursery pots please bring them to the pavilion at RNC.



IT'S TRUE – PLANT IT AND THEY WILL COME

by Susan Sander

It's hard to imagine the scene of 150 Lemos Street in July of 1992. The old farmhouse was sorely in need of paint. Chinaberry trees hovered throughout the property, and there were at least 17 stumps or dead live oaks – victims of oak wilt that had marched through the neighborhood in the late 1970s. Bur clover seeds were literally a blanket on the ground. And it was bone dry and dusty.



Susan Sander

Only the small fenced yard around the house had been mowed, all else was left “wild” – but unfortunately wild did not mean native: the empty field was full of thistles, Johnsongrass, and horehound – plants that indicate neglect. Giant ragweed covered the hillside, and a forest of bamboo (grass on steroids) claimed more than 1,000 square feet, and had stalked along the north property line until it reached the street. Japanese honeysuckle had taken over a fence, and Chinese and Japanese ligustrums intruded wherever their seeds landed.

But the confluence of Town Creek and the Guadalupe River was a great location, a wildlife corridor in the heart of the city. (Although RNCA does not own frontage on either – it does have an agreement with the City and the Town Creek property owner for access to do walks and programs). A giant baldcypress still stands along Town Creek, testament to Kerrville's founding as a shingle camp.

The first year was spent assessing our new site, reigning in the alien plants, and developing plans. The old farmhouse became our headquarters as we started to offer programs on-site. New partnerships took shape as Ronny Rotge's Community Ed stone class built the 3 benches near the front entrance of the Visitors Center. (The sandstone rocks were salvaged from a building being torn down near HEB). We held a house-painting party to spruce it up and put in a field of wildflowers (seeds courtesy of Wild Seed Farms) in the front.

Many ideas surfaced once the old garage and house next door had been salvaged. The original property was about 3 acres including the slope. Even the upper level (where the buildings are today) is considered floodplain. One of our charter members remembered that during the 1978 flood, the river reached the crest of the hill. When we dug we found only rock-less alluvial soil as deep as 12 feet!

By 1993 Stan Albus, a local landscape architect, came on board and drew up the guiding concept plan. Dr. Bob Dewers, a retired dendrology professor, helped RNCA apply for the first urban community grant from the Texas Forest Service; our goal was to plant an arboretum of native trees. Over the winter of 1993-94, 100+ volunteers dug holes and planted 106 species of trees (thank goodness for that alluvial soil).

A central irrigation system looped around the hilltop to all the trees. We put up hand-made signs on bamboo stakes. An Eagle Scout project resulted in a wood-chip trail. Berms were constructed using the cut bamboo as the base with a covering of topsoil. After weathering an ice storm in February the arboretum was dedicated on Earth Day 1994. We were most fortunate that at that time a number of area nurseries were growing a wide variety of native trees.

With trees providing the backbone, other areas were planted in wildflower and native grass seeds. Perhaps the biggest lesson that has been learned is this: it takes only an afternoon with a bulldozer to rip out an ecosystem, but it takes decades to get it reestablished. Our soil is sometimes a challenge (particularly for bluebonnets), droughts have not helped (although the trees are on an irrigation system), and deer have found our plants to their liking.



NOTES FROM THE MEADOW

Two-Flower Anemone

Martha Miesch

The first time I took a serious look at this pretty flower, I was driving along a country road. I spotted a cluster of these white beauties along a shaded fencerow close to the road drainage. They were such a welcome sight at the end of winter when the landscape was still looking rather bleak. I pulled off the road to get a closer look and took a bloom home to ID in my Enquist book Wildflowers of the Texas Hill Country that I had purchased at the Nature Center gift shop. This was a Two-Flower Anemone, *Anemone edwardsiana*, which starts to bloom in February and continues through April. It is also called Thimbleweed and is a perennial bloomer in the Edwards Plateau. When things start to heat up, you can no longer see it and a profusion of other blooms show up.



Martha Miesch

At the Nature Center we have been looking closely in the meadow for the appearance of rosettes, or the beginning new green leaves of wildflowers that we know are seeded there. Recognizing the new green growth doesn't take an experienced eye. If you remember roughly where you see a bloom one year, you normally will find the rosettes appearing early before you start to see the flower. Obviously, this will not be a normal year due to our extended drought. That doesn't mean we won't see Anemones if rains do come soon. We watch and hope.

If rain does come, this flower is easy to ID. There are few leaves on the 6 to 10 inch stem and the white center flower branches along the stem with a second bloom that can be blue or lavender in color. This flower likes moist and shady growing places. If you really enjoy this flower, do what the Gleaners do. When you see the flowers go to seed, take a few and store them in an envelope to distribute at another spot, thus increasing its blooming area.

One reason we continue to be hopeful to see *Anemone* in our meadow is because they are deer resistant and we know they were undisturbed last year. Deer quickly learn plants that are toxic and move past these blooms to a different salad bar. We know the seeds are there. All we need is rain to see this early meadow bloomer.

Another species of *Anemone* called Windflower, *Anemone heterophylla*, is also seeded in the meadow. Its flowers are white, lavender, or purple and blooms from February to April. The Windflowers are naturally found in grassy areas and rocky soils and will tolerate drier conditions. Maybe our best chance to see *Anemones* this year will be this specie.





Coming Events at Riverside Nature Center

www.riversidenaturecenter.org

Adults \$6.00, \$3.00 for members and children under 12 years of age unless otherwise stated. Call 830-257-4837 for more details

FEBRUARY

18th Brown Bag Lunch and Learn “Home Energy Conservation” 12 noon- 1:00 pm Presented by Bob Keeler, KPUB. Save energy and money, from simple steps you can take to cut energy use to increasing energy efficiency through out your home. You can help the environment and your pocket book.

21st Volunteer Training 10 am – 12:00 pm Learn how to conduct the Girl Scout Overnight Program. The Girl Scouts come to RNC to get their Wildlife Badge. Come see how it is done and whether you might be interested in volunteering in the Girl Scout Program. **FREE**

21st “Star Party” 7:00 pm View Venus in the night sky. Venus will be in good viewing position by 7:00. There will be an entertaining program for adults while children engage in astronomy related games and activities. Then go out for some spectacular stargazing.

28th Building and Landscape Committee Work day and Volunteer Training 9:00 am-12:00 pm All volunteers are needed to help clean up and beautify the grounds in preparation for spring. New volunteers and others interested in volunteering are invited to participate and learn. **FREE**

MARCH

21st Volunteer Training 10 am – 12 pm Learn how you can conduct or assist in the educational programs for school children. Many classes come to RNC each year to give the children hands on field experience. Come see how it is done and whether you might be interested in volunteering in the School Program. **FREE**

21st “Star Party” 7:30 pm Scott Magee, an amateur astronomer of 12 years and member of the San Antonio Astronomical Association will present “Telescopes for Beginners”. Learn how you can get involved in amateur astronomy. There will be an entertaining program for the kids as well. Afterward go out for some spectacular stargazing.

28th Building and Landscape Committee Work day and Volunteer Training 9:00-12:00 am All volunteers are needed to help clean up and beautify the grounds in preparation for spring. New volunteers and others interested in volunteering are invited to participate and learn. **FREE**

APRIL

4th “Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Compost” 10:00am (presented by Art Stokes Master Composter.) Mr. Stokes is certified by the state of Texas as a Master Composter and has presented on this topic to many groups. Dubbed “The Worm Man” by school children in Hunt, he enjoys working with worms and likes to introduce others to the fun of composting with worms. He will also talk about other varieties of composting, materials to include in compost, and how to get a compost pile to “work.” Handouts will be included.

18th “Earth Day Celebration and Native Plant Sale” 8:00 am-3:00 pm, FREE. Riverside Nature Center and the Kerrville Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas co-sponsor a celebration of spring and the earth. Includes a huge native plant sale as well as educational programs and great activities for kids. Bring the whole family and enjoy a day of fun.



MAY

2nd Attracting Butterflies to Your Garden” 10:00 – 11:00 am Presented by Kathy Lyles who will bring chomping caterpillars to demonstrate that if you have butterflies you have to have caterpillars.

9th Volunteer Training 10 am – 12:00 pm Summer Day Camp season is upon us. RNC is host to children who want a fun camping experience that is also educational, for most of June and July. This training will focus on the types (theme) of camps offered, the lessons taught and the activities that engage the kids for the week- long sessions. Would you like to volunteer to help with summer day camps? Come see how camps are conducted and where you might be able to assist. **FREE**

Events (except S.E.E.D.) held at Riverside Nature Center 150 Francisco Lemos Street

Girl Scout Overnight Volunteer Information:

We have a specialized training class on Saturday Feb 21 from 10 to 12 AM here at the Riverside Nature Center for those that are interested.

This program is offered to Girl Scout groups at the Junior/Cadette level (9-11 years old) accompanied by their adult leaders. It consists of an evening event beginning at 6:30 pm. A pizza dinner is served followed by educational activities. At 10:30 pm scouts and leaders spend the night in the two main classrooms. At 7:15 am, breakfast is served and a short morning event follows. Program concludes at 9:30 am. The girls earn their Wild-life badge upon completion of our Overnight program.

Objectives of program:

Children:

- distinguish between wildlife and domestic animals.
- identify the Texas state bird, flower, and tree.
- use binoculars, magnifying lens, and microscopes to observe wildlife.
- distinguish the common characteristics of major groups of vertebrates.
- observe live animals and learn about their habits.
- identify poisonous plants and animals and learn precautionary/first aid measures.
- play a game called “Eyeshine” designed to simulate the tapetum (reflective membrane in the eyes of many animals) of nocturnal animals.
- explore nature at night by going on a night hike to the river
- learn how a plaster cast of an animal track can be made in the field.
- play a game called “Mystery Tracks” which identifies various animal tracks.
- explore various frog calls using simulated sounds.
- take a morning hike down to the river in conjunction with a scavenger hunt on the grounds.
- make a nature related craft to take home.

Volunteers are needed in the following areas:

1. serving meals
2. assisting instructors with activities
3. room arrangement
4. clean up
5. preparation of materials
6. assisting scouts with activities
7. instruction (requires specialized training)

Please let us know by return email —office@riversidenaturecenter.org , or call us at 830-257-4837 if you are able to volunteer and / or wish to attend the training class.

Thanks!

RIVERSIDE NATURE CENTER

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Dedicated to appreciation of the Texas Hill Country education, information, and example



Facts and Figures

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<i>New Members</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Rentals</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Rental Income</i>	<i>\$1,200</i>
<i>Donations</i>	<i>\$1,000</i>