



Next 2010 class experience planned

■ The class visits I-20 pond on Saturday July 10 to study playas.

We will meet on the west side of the preserve at 8 a.m. (go on the access road west of Midkiff, go past Warehouse Road, go to the next road (Midland Drive), turn right, take the first dirt road to the right, and go past the first set of oilfield tanks to the gate.

Recent rains will probably bring out hungry bugs and some muddy patches may be left to slip on.

Burr Williams said we will quit about noon and eat at Reyna's on south Midkiff.



Please send your stories and jpeg photos to cherrytree@sbcglobal.net for the next newsletter.

The newsletter is edited by Barbara Cherry.

Nature unfolds for June lesson

Butterflies, fruit, and cool breezes keep field trip full of surprises

The ongoing cold weather that followed the Master Naturalists' monthly lessons really paid off for June. Although the days had recently been 100-plus degrees, the morning of June 12 was partly cloudy, and the breeze kept us cool.

Thank goodness! We spent more than three hours tramping through the backside of the trails.

We met in the parking lot of the Comanche Trails park in Odessa. While the loud traffic from Interstate 20 muffled many of his words, Burr told us about the area. He said the name Comanche didn't have actual connection to the Comanche Indians, although they could have been through there, but there wasn't overwhelming evidence of it.

He said this area included a pocket forest, and it was filled with soapberry trees. It also collected debris from the recent rains, and we saw evidence of this from trash, piled-up brush, and lots of pinecones although there were no pine trees. This also resulted in non-native plants growing in the low-lying areas. Seeds were washed in from the residential areas and

took root there. A trumpet vine with scarlet flowers was growing in one spot. One of the first things we saw was new to several of us – a disc golf catcher. Some of us had no idea this sport existed, and later



Dave Taylor and others take photos of the nesting doves in the soapberry trees.

someone found a lost disc or Frisbee.

As we entered the area, we saw dock which can be used in a salad, we saw Johnson grass which was brought in to feed mules in the early 1900s but it began to take over so then it was banned from planting, there was lots of pale pink evening primrose flowers, and there were soapberry trees which spread with rhizomes.

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Nature unfolds . . .

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The pocket forest of soapberry had tiny yellow flowers which were all over the trail, were stuck in the spider webs, and filled the animal tracks so that when Annaliese Scoggins was looking for tracks, she had to recognize the shapes in the

flowers first then blow them away to see the track. These trees attracted butterflies and we saw many Queens, a few Monarchs, swallowtails, and of course sulphur and cabbage varieties. There were also fritillaries and bluehairs, and others. One moth species was so numerous and so fast we just had fun walking in clouds of them. The soapberry trees also housed dove nests. We saw a mother dove sitting on her nest, and it was low enough for us to get lots of photos of it. Later we saw others like it, and even saw nests with babies, but no mother to protect it. We

could have reached in and taken the birds from their homes, they

chimney to house crawdads. Zach later found one in some water and brought it around for us to see. It was a feisty red crawdad about three or four inches long in the body. We also saw cylindrical snail shells about one inch long.

Farther along we were looking at barley growing in the area, and we found fire ants. They work fast. Before you really recognize that they are there, they are crawling all over your feet. We finished exploring the area and moved on to the open parts, close to the Comanche Trails pond. We found harvester ants there, and of course, evidence

of lizards who like to eat these ants. At this part we also saw a javelina bush, which doesn't have anything to do with javelina, but the



Lily puckers up from the wild plums.



were built so low. But we took pictures instead.

Set aside from the line of trees was a field of cattails and bulrush. On the other

side of it was a line of plum trees, ripe for picking. And we did. A few faces puckered from the tart taste of the tough skin, but the fruit was sweet. Burr said that local farmers would plant lots of these to make plum jelly from. We were wary about snakes, but I don't think anyone saw any. In

this area we began to see lots of tracks. Annaliese spotted deer, raccoon, dog, and armadillo prints. Also in this area there were rolled-up dirt clods which formed a

birds like to eat the berries.

The pond finished the morning's trek. While some of us cooled off under the pavilion (this was me – the sun was full force now) others kept at it looking for an albino catfish and other kinds of animals in the water.

At 11:30 many of us went to El Primo Burrito and we took the scenic trail. It's probably good that the police were busy in another part of town because a few road rules were relaxed during the burrito hunt. The restaurant was good, so thanks for the suggestion, Charlotte and Sandy!



Ladybugs explore a soon-to-bloom sunflower.

Quarterly meeting

Quick session goes over technology, projects

Cameras for kids to use while visiting Sibley Nature Center, website volunteer training, and placing signs to name the draws were prime topics of the quarterly meeting June 15. Members moved to the auditorium after eating in the new viewing area.

Providing digital cameras for visiting children to use while exploring the nature trail at Sibley came from a discussion about the excitement and learning that resulted from a hummingbird project that Emmy Ulmschneider and her students completed. Also, Sandy Elms and her students took nature photos, some of which are on display at Sibley. People in the discussion wanted to capture the energy that resulted and use it to make children more aware of the Llano Estacado.

"You'd build that knowledge forward and backward," Travis Bennett said about the impact of using digital photography on a field trip. This would also benefit all children, not only public school students, President Chris Cherry said. Past President Sammy Hunnicutt suggested that the Master Naturalists look into providing a Saturday program for homeschooled children to learn from.

Other technology that was discussed was the website. In

addition to the Facebook site, the group discussed getting a volunteer to run the website for the Master Naturalists for the rest of the year and to attend training. The state will provide the training.

"The number of hits on that Facebook page are outstanding," Chris said.

The plan is to make the website more of a resource for the members.

Paul Brown introduced a new discussion thread. He pointed out that the draws are "one of the primary regions of the Llano Estacado." He suggested that the group pursue a way to put up signs to let people know the names of the draws. Sibley Director Burr Williams suggested that we get a grant from the city to have the signs put up. Paul was named committee chair to look further into the topic.

Other topics included creating a list of who is on which committee. Also members discussed should the group pursue nonprofit status and become tax exempt. Cathy Lupardus said it would cost about \$600-700 and take about six

months to do this. She volunteered to look into it.

At a previous meeting scholarships were brought up.



Paul Brown proposes signs for the draws while Travis Bennett listens.

Cathy suggested that we could think about paying speakers to come in for the advanced training and use the money that way. On a side note, Burr said that two speakers are scheduled soon, one about insects and the other about nature journaling.

Quick topics included the annual meeting of Master Naturalists which is the first weekend in October, and for the past three years, the group has sent someone. Word was that openings were already full. The Tahoka Lake Project is stalled until it gets 501C3 status. The treasury had \$2,282.98, and volunteer hours needed to be turned in still so the state could create reports and get grant money.

Members finished by using the new video/sound system to earn advanced training time while watching a video about playas.



Sammy Hunnicutt and Emmy Ulmschneider visit in the viewing area before the meeting.

**Photos by
Annette
Moellering**