

Prairie Partner Update

A publication for and about Blackland Prairie Texas Master Naturalists

Zen and the Art of Prairie Restoration *by Gwen A. Baumann*



Dave Powell has been restoring land at the Wylie Municipal Center to a native prairie.

Ask a teacher about the Positive Behavior Support (PBS) system and she'll tell you it's a labor-intensive process of dealing with student behavior problems. An alternative to corporal punishment and suspensions, its goal is to identify what the child is "getting from" misbehaving, remove that boon, and replace it with highly-enticing rewards for small behavior improvements. It requires an abundance of patience and self-restraint on the part of the teacher but, when well done, can reap positive rewards. Dave Powell could have written the book on PBS - Prairie Style.

As the immediate past president of the BPTMN, Dave has spent the past two-and-a-half-years coaxing the short-grass prairie back to its natural state on 30 acres of land owned by the city of Wylie and adjacent to its municipal headquarters. You can find him on the land most mornings from about 9:30 until noon, after which he'll begin the 45-minute trek back home to west McKinney. The gas is on his own dollar, and the income is non-existent, but the reward can be heard in his voice as he surveys and walks the land. He doesn't really claim the project, though. "It is [Wylie's] property. It's their place. I can make

suggestions." The final decisions, though, rest with the city, he said.

Throughout the life of the project, Dave has made several suggestions. First, he suggested that rather than hiring a company to create a tall-grass prairie (which the city wanted), they let Powell — and BPTMN volunteers — do the work to restore the short-grass prairie native to the area. "I wrote a proposal with 12 points. We reached an agreement and began that same month — October," he said. That was two years ago.

The land that is now marked with Prairie Restoration signs had been used as a makeshift parking lot for construction vehicles when Country Club Road was being expanded from a two-lane asphalt road to a six-lane highway. Crews had spread gravel on the land before parking vehicles there. When the project was completed and the vehicles were gone, the city prepared to remove the gravel, but Dave suggested that wasn't necessary.

He asked the city to buy 20 pounds of Blackland Prairie grass seed from the Native American Seed Company and then worked with volunteers to spread it by hand and "walk it in." "We do it like nature does it," he said. "We seeded on top of the gravel. It grows. It just takes longer to get started."

When the city was planning to pave trails around the complex, Dave suggested they circumvent the prairie
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Happy Thanksgiving!

by paving around the tree line that surrounds the grassland. Wheeled strollers and cyclists can enjoy the area when the mulched prairie trail proves challenging. That was his idea, too. Rather than using the expensive mulch from the Parks and Recreation Department for the 1/2 mile prairie trail, Dave put the city in touch with a Wylie company that cuts down trees and provides free mulch.

Dave's positive approach continues to be the same: don't focus on getting rid of things that can be corrected in a natural way. Rather than buying enough seed to scatter throughout the property, he and volunteers seeded grass and forbs on the north side of the city parking lot so the winds would spread seed naturally. He also teaches volunteers how to naturally harvest existing seed.



Lovergrass lines the trail leading down toward the creek. Maximillian sunflowers grow in the background.

When faced with a Johnson Grass problem, he avoided a fast fix. "I know some of this stuff does not belong," he said, "but if you get the right stuff growing, you will see what happens to the stuff that doesn't belong. You don't just kill off everything with poison."

And his "positive prairie support" is working. The amount of Johnson Grass is decreasing as the amount of native grasses increases. "Most of the growth (of Johnson Grass) is runners that don't get deeper than 6 inches. You can get native grasses with 12 - 14 inch roots growing, so the water seeps in and [the Johnson Grass] really has to fight to get the water."

That's not to say he and other volunteers haven't put in a lot of effort removing some non-native vegetation. Volunteers cut down 30 to 35 Eastern Red Cedars, along with other woody plants and small trees —again with no chemical use — and removed barbed wire fencing from land that was cotton fields back in the day. This allowed more freedom of access for native animals. And Dave has spotted many an animal on the land.

"I like seeing the diversity that happens here," Dave said. Coyotes, raccoons, opossums, skunks, armadillos, bobcats, rodents and other small creatures leave evidence of their return to the area. "In winter, you can see where the grass is pushed back and can follow animal trails and see where they go."

So Dave Powell, the teacher, continues to make suggestions, avoid a heavy hand, and encourage 12 native grasses and numerous native forbs to reach their full potential on this small plot of land. "Our goal is to use this property as an educational tool," he said. "Our biggest challenge this time of year is to be sure you don't put your foot in a crack. There are places in our trail where you can see almost four feet down." He doesn't fill in the cracks, though. "That's just our Blackland clay," he notes, and then he steps around them.



Calling all Birders!

Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society (PTAS) is co-hosting the Texas Ornithological Society (TOS)'s Winter Meeting from January 14 to 17, 2016. There will be noted speakers, field trips and workshops during the 3 day event. The meeting will take place at the Hilton Garden Inn in Allen, Texas, at Bethany Road and 75. It's a great way to begin the new year if you would like to see the winter resident birds with knowledgeable bird guides. There will be a Saturday night banquet and silent auction/raffle at the Hilton. Funds raised benefit coastal and inland bird sanctuaries, raptor rehabilitation and education and college level avian research. Registration will begin on November 15 through accessing the TOS online website (<http://www.texasbirds.org/>).

Master Naturalists Make Something Good Even Better! *by Lisa Runyon*

Armed with tillers, shovels, and big hearts, a hard-working group of master naturalists, gardeners and volunteers from several corporations are digging in to transform a parcel of Children's Medical Center Plano's 155-acre campus into a colorful garden and meadow for their young patients. The hospital already sits among tranquil pastures, but the east-side rooms will have a bonus – a view of four raised beds, a 36-foot-long half-moon garden, and paths to frame the year-round bursts of color.



Patti Tuck, Al Baume and Mittie McDonald

The Children's meadow, spearheaded by BPTMN and Plano Garden Club member Al Baume, has been months in the making. The Plano Garden Club originally approached Children's with an offer to help in some capacity and soon they envisioned a plan to revitalize four existing raised beds, create a wildflower garden and reclaim the meadow on the east side of the property.

With support from Carol Schauer, vice president of development, Collin County – Children's Medical Center Foundation, and Barbara Green, volunteer services coordinator for Children's Medical Center Plano, Al has collaborated with corporations, municipalities, civic partners, and individuals who funded and provided expertise, supplies, and hands-on labor for the Children's meadow project. For example, FMGlobal and their employees donated money and volunteers to purchase and install native plants. The City of Plano Environmental Learning Center sourced plants and



PepsiCo employees gave their time and plants to the Children's Medical Center project.

compost, as well as designed a bio-swale of swirled berms to prevent the garden from washing during heavy rains. Bob Mione from Connemara Conservancy tilled and tilled and tilled! Carol Clark from the Native Plant Society worked with Al to harvest seeds of native plants to reduce the cost of the project. PepsiCo employees participated by planting their donated plants as well. Over the months, master naturalists pulled weeds, mowed, mulched, laid paving stones, repaired irrigation heads and cleaned up debris.



Bob Mione tills the soil.

After weeks of work preparing the garden area, October 15 arrived — time for “the first planting” of the wildflower entrance to the Children's meadow. Michael Wiggins, administrator of Children's, recognized the volunteers present from FMGlobal, Plano Garden Club, and local master naturalists, then acknowledged the work and support from Amy Fortenberry, Director of Plano's Parks and Recreation Department, Clyde Camp of BPTMN, Bob Mione of Connemara and the Native Plant Society.

A second work day on October 22, saw 35 enthusiastic volunteers from PepsiCo continue the work in the half moon garden as part of their corporate day of giving. Basketflower, guara, Russian sage, Indian blanket, gold yarrow, bluebonnets, tickweed, milkweed, coneflower, horsemint, rosemary, and black dalia will cover the half-moon shaped garden. The selection of native plants

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Master Naturalist Volunteers

Gwen Thomas, Our Chapter's Transplant/Invasive Species by Nancy Hoke



Yes, Gwen Thomas thinks of herself as an invasive species. She is from Boston, but moved to Texas with her husband and daughter about five years ago from Madison, Wisconsin. But looking at her past, you can readily see she is definitely one of us. She relates the following:

"I felt extremely fortunate to learn about the master naturalist program not long after we

arrived. I have a background in forestry and resource management, but not being familiar with Texas, I jumped into the program as a way to learn about my new environs. Little did I know that in addition to learning about Texas, I would meet kindred spirits among this great group of folks concerned with our local environs and committed to giving back to our communities. It was a stroke of luck for me.

"Until our daughter was born, much of my work was in Central America working with international NGOs on local park protection projects, environmental policy issues and institutional strengthening of Central American NGOs. My husband and I were based in Costa Rica for four years and Honduras for another couple of years. Both of us worked throughout the region. When our daughter Stephanie was born, I really wasn't game for continuing the jet setting lifestyle and decided to stay at home for a bit working on local environment and community activities and in the local school systems where we lived.

"We started our westward migration just after September 11th. My husband worked in the World Trade Center and, of all things, was late for work on September 11th. His company, on the 22nd floor of the WTC lost everything, except lives (everyone made it out), on that day. We decided then, that it was time for a major life change and wound our way to Texas via Phoenix and Madison (for a number of years each). Who would have thought this Boston girl would end up in Texas and become enchanted by this amazing state?

"At the moment I am working part-time for the Texas Society for Ecological Restoration as their chapter

coordinator. I work with a great group of folks on our board who are dispersed across the state and involved in all kinds of great restoration projects. I am still keeping my eyes open for that full-time position, but am loving where I am at the moment.

"As a master naturalist, well... I have worked on the Jr. Naturalist team since its inception and have watched that program blossom. I have pitched in at Connemara, the Heard, Heritage Farmstead, BRIT, AgriLife, PISD Outdoor Learning Center, and others. Over my desk I have a quote by Margaret Mead that reads: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has. The master naturalist program has this in spades, and I am fortunate to be a part of this great environmentally committed, caring, and concerned community.

"I was born in what was then East Pakistan and is now Bangladesh and lived there on two separate occasions while in grade school. I lived in Kenya for a number of years while in high school. I also studied while in college in Nepal and a number of years later returned to work there for a bit. I have the international bug in my blood. This year I was able to join my husband and his UTD international business class on a spring trip to Cuba, and we are thrilled to learn that he will be taking his class to Brazil next spring. Nothing is going to keep me from joining him on that trip as Brazil has always been on my wish list of places to visit."



Gwen worked with the junior naturalist program for several years.

Winter is a wondrous miracle of nature. The ground covers itself with frozen water, the sun barely shines over the land, and animals go to sleep for stupendous amounts of time. Yet the world doesn't just drop everything because of winter — it has to keep moving!

Mammals hibernate by storing fat, and birds fly to a warmer climate. But, what about reptiles? What do our scaly friends do during the cold months? What do they eat when there is hardly any food out? These creatures have developed interesting adaptations to survive the harsh winter climate.

In order to understand our reptilian buds better, we need to know that reptiles are *ectothermic*. This means that they are cold blooded and can't regulate their body temperature on their own. Now that we know this, we can proceed to *brumation*. Brumation is like hibernation, but is more commonly used for reptiles. Brumation is when the animal becomes so cold, it goes into a passive state, where it can sit still for the whole cold season. These reptiles will find a place called a *hibernaculum*, which is simply a safe place where the animal can rest.

For a Mediterranean House Gecko, this may be under a log, piece of bark, or maybe a rock.



Mediterranean House Gecko

Reptiles have to brumate because of their inability to control their body temperature. When a reptile gets too cold or hot, its body systems will shut down, making the animal incredibly slow and lethargic.

If we ponder this we can think, "Well okay, reptiles brumate so their body systems will keep running, but how on earth can they sit still for SO long?!" I can't even sit still just to read this article!" Well, reptiles slow their heart rate down to a bare minimum, so they can just stay still, without even eating, so they can

survive the harsh climate. For example, if a lizard were to step in the snow and not freak out, its blood temperature would drop to match the snow. The lizard would then start moving VERY slowly, and its heart rate would shoot down, as well as its other body systems.

So now we know that our friends the reptiles brumate in the winter because they are ectothermic. They have to find a hibernaculum, so they can rest and slow their body systems down in a safe place where they can survive until the spring. All it takes is a little research, and your intellect will grow!

Nikki Lefebvre Reaches a Milestone *by Debra Canterbury*

Congratulations to Nikki Lefebvre for reaching the amazing milestone of 5,000 volunteer hours. She helps take care of all the resident education birds at Blackland Prairie Raptor Center. That includes the opportunities to clean their enclosures, feed them, take them for walks and whatever else might come up, such as minor medical problems.

"Today I gave the peregrine falcon a "pedicure," which is just rubbing in some medication on the bottom of her feet," she said.

Nikki also takes the birds to raptor outreach programs at schools, libraries, festivals, etc., which is her favorite activity — especially when children are involved. Now that the center has gained additional rehab certification, Nikki takes care of the injured and orphaned birds that come into the center.

Her dedication is a family affair. Her husband, Richard, received his 5,000 hour pin for his volunteer hours at the Raptor Center in December.



If you are interested in an event, be sure to call ahead to check about reservations, pricing, and details. Always dress in layers for our crazy Texas weather, and take plenty of water.

Blackland Prairie Raptor Center's

"Ribs and Raptors" fund-raiser luncheon

Saturday November 14, 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m. For more info, and to RSVP, contact rsvp@bpraptorcenter.org by November 9.

Heard Natural Science Museum and Wildlife Sanctuary. One Nature Place. McKinney, TX 75069. 972-562-5566

Second Saturday Bird Walks: 8-9 a.m.

November 14, December 12, January 9

Fall Night Hike

Saturday November 14, 6-7:30 p.m.

Ropes Course Adventure Day

Saturday December 5, 1-4 p.m.

Holidays at the Heard

Saturday December 12, 6:30-9 p.m.

Friday December 18, 6:30-9 p.m.

Saturday December 19, 6:30-9 p.m.

The Heard will need lots of help getting the sanctuary ready for the Holiday fund-raiser. For this, and other volunteer opportunities, contact Darlene Sumerfelt dsumerfelt@heardmuseum.org

John Bunker Sands Wetland Center. 655 Martin Lane, Seagoville TX, 75159. (972) 474-9100

Beginning-Intermediate Bird Walks: 9-11 a.m.

November 7, December 5, January 2

Advanced Bird Walks: 9 a.m.-noon

November 7, December 5, January 2 Contact ldunn@wetlandcenter.com to pre-register.

Third Saturday Bunker's Pond Trail Walks: 10 a.m.

November 21, December 19, January 16

John Bunker Sands Wetland Center is also home to a pair of nesting Bald Eagles. Be sure to inquire!

City of Plano

Texas Recycles Day Plano's "Texas recycles day"

Saturday November 14, 9 a.m.-noon

Chase Oaks Church parking lot, 281 Legacy Drive, Plano TX 75023.

A drop-off collection event to give unwanted items new life. Visit livegreeninplano.com for more info.

Community Clean Up

1) Choose a date/time.

2) Choose a location (in Plano) that could use some litter removal.

3) Register your group:

<http://www.plano.gov/FormCenter/Sustainability-and-Environmental-Service-4/Community-Cleanup-Online-Registration-Fo-117>

And request your free cleaning supplies.

4) Pick up free cleaning supplies.

5) Carry out the Community Clean Up.

6) Return supplies and report results.

Contact Heather Harrington for more details. (972) 769-4313

Oak Point Park Nature and Retreat Center 5901 Los Rios Blvd. Plano, TX. Open daily. For more information, contact Chauncey Deller (972) 941-5400

In Sync Exotics Wildlife Rescue and Educational Center. 3430 Skyview Drive, Wylie TX 75098. (972) 442-6888

For volunteer opportunities, contact Chemyn Reaney at creaney@insyncexotics.com

Fall Festival/Turkey Toss

November 28

LLELA (Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area) (972) 219-3930

iNaturalist Workshop

Tuesday November 17, 7-8:45 p.m.

Get in touch with the digital nature community! Limited space. iNaturalist Workshops are held in the computer lab of the Lewisville Public Library (1197 W. Main St). Contact Erin.Taylor@UNT.edu

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Outings and Opportunities (continued)

LLELA (Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area)

Calling all artists! "[Aves in the World](#)" is now seeking submissions from artists (of all walks) who are inspired by the natural world. Accepted works may be featured on exhibit or in the documentary film of the same name. For more information contact (940) 601-2837 or avesandtheworld@gmail.com

Second Saturday Bird Walks 7:30 a.m., November 14, December 12, January 9

Nature Photo Safari, Saturday December 12, 1-3 p.m.
All levels welcome (ages 10+)

Texas Discovery Gardens. 3601 Martin Luther King Jr Blvd, Dallas, TX 75210. (214) 428-7476

Butterfly House Discovery Tour 11 a.m.

Saturday November 7 and Saturday December 5

Homemade Holiday Decor

Saturday November 21, noon-2 p.m. Create festive garden themed gifts. Registration and fee required.

A Natural Winter

December 1-31, Enjoy activities throughout the month in the Texas Discovery Gardens winter wonderland.



Blackland Prairie Raptor Center Invites You to
Ribs n' Raptors
Raising Funds for
Raptor Rehabilitation

An afternoon of music, fun, great Texas BBQ and helping the raptors of North Texas

Saturday, November 14, from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.

1625 Brockdale Park Road, Lucas TX 75002

RSVP by Monday, November 9 to

rsvp@bpraptorcenter.org

Rain or shine! We have secured a facility in case of inclement weather

Tickets: \$75/person or \$250 for family of four

For more information: 469-964-9696, or info@bpraptorcenter.org

Websites of Interest...

Blackland Prairie Texas Master Naturalist Calendar <http://bptmn.org/calendar/>

Cornell Lab of Ornithology - <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/Page.aspx?pid=1478>

Earthkind Landscaping
<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/earthkind/>

Green Source DFW
<http://www.greensourcedfw.org/>

Insects in the City - <http://citybugs.tamu.edu/>

Ladybird Johnson Wildlife Center
<https://www.wildflower.org/>

Prairie Partner Update past issues
http://bptmn.org/_BOARD_FTP/newsletter/

Texas Aggi Horticulture
<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/>

Texas Parks & Wildlife Updates
<https://tpwd.texas.gov/>

Texas Smartscape <http://www.txsmartscape.com/>

Texas Superstar Plants <http://www.texassuperstar.com/plants/>

Texas Tree Planting
<http://texastreeplanting.tamu.edu/>

Upcoming BPTMN Meetings 2nd Tuesday, 7 p.m.

Heard Museum Science Resource Center
Each meeting counts as one hour of
advanced training

- **November 10** - Gailon Brehm - "Little Brown Birds"
- **December 8** - Randy Johnson - "Pollinators and Natives: An Ancient Marriage" & Officer Election

Volunteering

Blackland Prairie Raptor Center

Brockdale Park, Lucas, 469-964-9696
(www.bpraptorcenter.org)

Contact Erich Neupert

erich.neupert@bpraptorcenter.org, or
Dick Zartler, zartler@verizon.net

These are just a few groups where you can earn volunteer hours. More approved activities for volunteering and advanced training can be found at

<http://bptmn.org/info/project-opportunities/>.

Send your questions about volunteering to Melanie Schuchart at VHAT@bptmn.org.

Collin County Adventure Camp

https://www.ymcadallas.org/locations/collin_county_adventure_camp/

1180 W. Houston, Anna, 972-832-4791

(www.collincountyadventurecamp.org)

Contact Ron Bamberg, rbamberg@gmail.com,

Connemara Meadow

300 Tatum (near Alma & Bethany), Allen, 214-534-1900, (Connemaraconservancy.org)

Contact Bob Mione, meadowmanager@connemaraconservancy.org

Heard Museum and Wildlife Sanctuary

1 Nature Place, McKinney, 832-332-9099,

(www.Heardmuseum.org)

Contact Wes Morrow, Wesmorrow39@yahoo.com, and Dave Powell, powell1217@yahoo.com.

Junior Master Naturalists

Contact: Mandy Carrasco or Judy Rowe

Meets every Wednesday during the school year, from 3:30-5 p.m. at Wilson Middle School, Plano

The class is for 6th-8th graders.

Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area (LLELA) 201 E. Jones, Street, Lewisville, TX
www.ias.unt.edu/llela

Contact Education Coordinator Lisa Cole at lisacole@unt.edu or Mike Petrick at mike.petrick@verizon.net

Plano Environmental Education Center

4116 West Plano Parkway, Plano, TX

Contact Heather Harrington, heatherha@plano.gov or 972-769-4313

To volunteer, create a volunteer profile online then sign up at eeoc@plano.gov for volunteer activities.

If you have friends or family who are interested in becoming a Texas master naturalist, please advise them that the application packet and class schedule for the 2016 training class will be available at the BPTMN website on Sunday November 1. Unlike past years, applications are being accepted in the order they are received. The class is limited to 40 trainees, and there are a limited number of need-based partial scholarships. Questions may be sent to