

COASTAL PRAIRIE COURIER



CPTMN Field Trip to Lake Jackson

Saturday March 15, 2014

Our Chapter had its first field trip of 2014 to Lake Jackson for what ended up being too brief a sampler of all the interesting things to see and do in that town. Despite leaden skies and occasional drizzle, we had a very successful and comfortable trip.

First stop was the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory. Cecilia Riley, Executive Director, welcomed our group and introduced us to the area, and specifically their plans for a nature center, the Avian Conservation Science Center, which is underway and scheduled to open this summer. The original engineering assessment was done when the water table was lower than the norm due to drought conditions. When construction was to start the water table had risen and the engineering plans had to be updated. Cecilia pointed out how important it was to have a person on staff that understood construction. Since this is going to be a public building it must meet city codes, be handicap accessible and more. City codes required a fire hydrant within 150 feet of the building, which required them to pay to have one run under Texas Highway 332 onto their property. The construction was originally budgeted for \$900,000, took 10 years to raise the money, and has overrun at this point to \$1.1 million. They are still raising money, some with engraved pavers. When completed, the building will be 4,000 square feet with classrooms and offices. Additional future construction will be in separate housing, campus-style.



Robert & Kay Lookingbill then treated us to their efficient bird banding process, which they perform on the third Saturday of each month. Nets are set up to catch local and migrating birds so that they can be banded by these expert volunteers. For information on bird banding programs, see the following link: <http://www.fws.gov/fag/bandingfaq.html> The handling of the birds was done so gently and with such expertise, they didn't seem to mind being tossed about by this gentleman with the gestures he made using his hands as he talked to the crowd

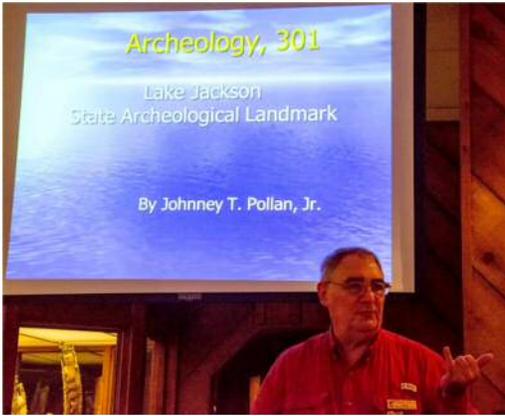
around him. See link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PMvN2tAPvvg>



He delighted everyone showing how he had discovered that if he tapped on the table and waved his fingers in front of cardinals, they fell over temporarily into a trance and lay perfectly still for quite a while before suddenly coming to their senses and flitting off to freedom. See Diane Russell's video at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ea9EN3RSu-l>

A few people were able to do a little birding on their own on the trails that are open to the public, but most headed over for authentic German food at the Wurst Haus nearby. The service, atmosphere, food, and prices were great at this restaurant - thanks to Bill Johnson for the recommendation!



In the afternoon we visited the Brazosport Museum of Natural Science, which was also nearby. This little jewel has been named as one of the ten best museums in Texas by Frommer's Travel Guide, with unique displays of seashells, fossils, dinosaur skeletons, rocks and minerals, and is run completely by volunteers. Johnney Pollan, the State Archaeological Steward for Brazoria County and a natural story teller, treated us to a fascinating talk about the history of the nearby Lake Jackson Plantation, which is now a state archaeological landmark. A group continued to the site with Johnney to tour the ruins of the area.



There are monthly walk and talks at the Lake Jackson Plantation site on the first Saturday of the month. It is located just north of TX-332 on FM 2004 at the Park and Ride. To access the site you have to take a bridge across a creek which is only unlocked when there are volunteers onsite. The lake for which the town takes its name, is an oxbow lake left after the Brazos River changed its course. This was a large sugar and cotton plantation, with an impressive antebellum home. Skilled slave labor did most of the building which included a home, several cisterns, kitchen, carriage house and the sugar cane crusher. At another time convict labor was used, but they weren't as skilled, and it shows in the difference in the bricks and bricklaying. Unfortunately, the site has become a deteriorating ruin, so we were fortunate to see the foundations before they are gone too soon.

Members who attended this field trip were: Lisa Marler and Bill Sewell, Diane and Bill Russell, Karl Baumgartner, Barbara Willy, Carrie Sample, Jerry Carpenter, Reene and Ron Spahr, Lisa Feighery, Pat Mollere, Bob Schwartz, Carol Pawelek, Bill Johnson, Vicki Poorman, Susan and Bill Archer, Linda Lourim, Gloria Scheel, Karen Showalter, and Bruce Vest. There were also some members of the new class.

Many thanks to Lisa Marler for suggesting this field trip venue, to Diane Russell for the videos, to Ron Spahr for the photos, and to Lisa and Diane for writing the article.