

The Brazos Bend Bugle

Brazos Bend State Park Volunteer Organization

Volume 33, Issue 2 September 2020



President's Message

by Wayne Wiegand

Volunteering in a Pandemic

Fellow Volunteers,

I hope this note finds you all well. While the pandemic continues to have a grip on our lives, I wanted to remind everyone that there are still a variety of volunteer opportunities at the Park:

* Roving Trail Interpretation, 7 days a week, anytime

* Nature Center and Gift Shop shifts available Friday, Saturdays and Sundays 11am - 3:30pm

* Junior Naturalist Program Patches, Mondays - Thursdays 11a-1pm (days may vary, weather permitting; check schedule)

* Firewood Restocking, Money Collection & Count, Saturdays and Sundays 9am-10a

With the exception of Roving Trail Interpretation you sign up on our website as normal.

Thanks for all you do!

Wayne



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News You Can Use!

Lisa Sanders

Innovation Amidst a Pandemic



Who could have predicted the impact of "Covid-19" in 2020. New social distancing rules and a global pandemic prompted Park closure, cancelled interpretive programs, forced business and school closures, and restricted group gatherings. As time passed it became clear a new approach was needed for Volunteering.

The determination and ingenuity of BBSPVO Volunteers and Park staff set to work. Creative brainstorming gave rise to new ways of providing Park experiences. If a pandemic meant visitors couldn't come to the Park, then perhaps there was a way to bring the Park to the visitors.

To keep the Gift Shop and Nature Center open, plexiglass barriers were constructed for social distancing. Touch tables were stripped. Interpretative programs were re-imagined into online video experiences via social media platforms. Volunteer interpreters known for their snake and alligator presentations, pond life, dog hikes and prairie experiences were recorded live outdoors as if a group of visitors were standing right in front. With wide camera views and scenes of trails, lakes, mossy trees, dappled sunlight and vultures soaring it creates the sense

of being present at the Park. Response has been positive with viewers. Short videos about Alligators, Owls, Snakes, Hiking with Dogs, Prairie life, Heat Safety and more are found on the Park's Facebook page. Featured are Park staff and BBSPVO Volunteers Sheri Meador, Mike Emmons, Chuck Duplant and David Heinicke. Our Volunteer interpreters are creating a collective virtual experience of the Park online. Take a moment and visit the Park's Facebook page to see true innovation in action. Remember, the glass is always half full.



Visit the Park Facebook page here:
https://www.facebook.com/pg/BrazosBendStatePark/videos/?ref=page_internal





Remembering Beth Debenport Volunteer Emeritus, BBSPVO

Editor

Mary Beth Peterson was born on Christmas Eve in rural east Texas, the third child of three following two older brothers. Mr. Peterson was a farmer and carpenter in the small town of Millville, with family roots tracing back to land grants with the Mexican government. Millville was known for its water mill serving miles of cotton and corn for settler farms. It was an important telegraph post along "Wire Road," an early telegraph route with wires tacked to trees between Jefferson and Henderson. It was also a stagecoach stop for travelers from Marshall headed to a wilder west along the Old San Antonio Road. Growing up in east Texas, Beth would have known the majesty of nature on display in the piney woods. The song of wind in tall trees, the whir of wings and faint honks overhead each spring and fall, the delight of cotton exploding into

a sea of white amidst buzzing insects, the snort and stamp of woodland deer, the low calls of owls as armadillos and raccoons rustled under shadowed



photo credit to Chuck Duplant

moonlight. She would have seen butterflies and bees savoring wildflowers before the shimmering heat at midday. She would likely have drifted to

sleep to a low roar of the nightly ritual chorus of Texas insects. We know that Beth loved the natural environment. Perhaps it was her early memories that first drew her to the Park, escaping the sounds of city life for more peaceful rhythms in the natural setting. Beth met her lifelong love Kenneth Debenport in her late teens in Longview. She and Ken moved farther south to the bustling sprawl of Houston and settled in Bellaire as they raised a son and daughter. Beth was very active in her local gardening club.



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Remembering Beth Debenport Volunteer Emeritus, BBSPVO

She appreciated the wide variety of flowers and birds, eager to explore and share the beauty of nearby parks and gardens with those around her. She and Ken discovered a new State Park just southwest of Houston called Brazos Bend. They soon became regulars with a growing passion for the Park and helped ignite the vision of the Brazos Bend State Park Volunteer Organization. They were early pioneers of the BBSPVO as we know it today. The Debenports' dedication to the Park and to enhancing the experiences of visitors was exceptional. They were regulars on weekends,



Volunteer Picnic, 2009 photo credit to Jerry Zona

where Beth could be found in the Gift Shop helping visitors select the perfect memory of their day. She shared her interpretive experiences in the Nature Center and on guided hikes, exploring the habitat of alligators, birds and rich diversity of vegetation and wildlife. I have to wonder if the Park reminded Beth of her childhood days in the piney woods before moving to Houston.

Beth had a smile and a heart as big as Texas. She and Ken spent decades together as BBSPVO Volunteers supporting the Nature Center and helping to create the best experiences for visitors, rain or shine.



photo credit to Sandy Jespersen



Remembering Beth Debenport Volunteer Emeritus, BBSPVO

Beth's friends recall how much she and Ken enjoyed exploring the trails and interacting with visitors in the Nature Center. She particularly enjoyed working with the birds of prey, as Volunteer David Heinicke recalls this issue. Volunteer and historian Marianne Feeney remembered how Beth enjoyed hiking the trails with a custom made walking stick, shown here with frog and Brazos Bend logo.

Three decades of Volunteering will forever be an inspiration to all BBSPVO Volunteers. Ken and Beth leave a legacy and a true pioneering spirit. Their passion for the Park, their fellow Volunteers, and encouragement of others in the outdoors will be remembered. They lived the true mission and soul of the Brazos Bend State Park Volunteer Organization.



photo credits to Marianne Feeney

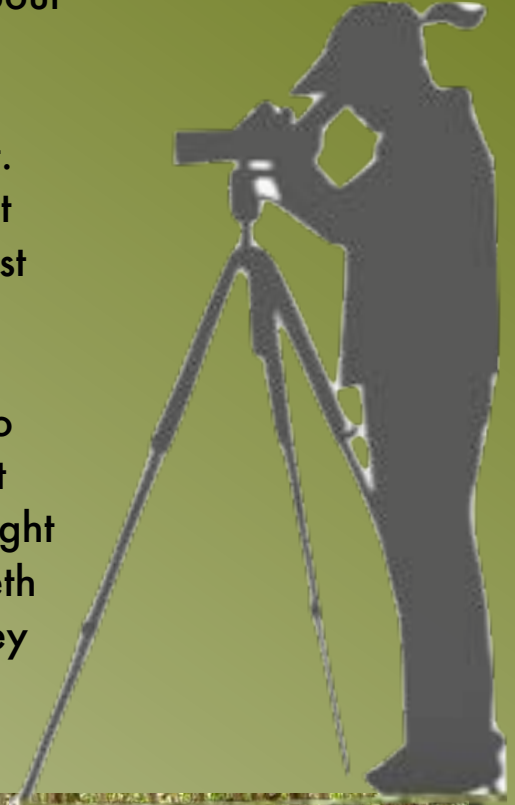




Remembering Beth Debenport Volunteer Emeritus, BBSPVO

- David Heinicke

When I started volunteering at Brazos Bend about 30 years ago Ken and Beth Debenport were some of the first volunteers I got to know. I actually thought they were park rangers at first. Over the years both of them filled many slots at Brazos Bend. In the early years they spent most of their time out on the trail. I think they were probably the first volunteers to grab a spotting scope and a clicker and head out on the trail to see what they could find to show the visitors. It might be an alligator, it might be a snake, it might be a bird nest, it might be a big Bullfrog but Beth and Ken always had a big crowd wherever they went with the scope.



Beth Debenport talks with visitors about birds of prey. Photo credit to David Heinicke

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Remembering Beth Debenport Volunteer Emeritus, BBSPVO

- David Heinicke

Later Ken became involved in Firewood processing and Beth was in charge of the Gift Shop (or that's the way it seemed).

Gift Shop ready to open. They would both spend the rest of Saturday and Sunday working in the Nature

For probably the next 10 - 15 years Beth and Ken spent almost every Thursday, Saturday and Sunday at the park. They would both come out on Thursday. Ken would bundle and put out firewood and Beth would clean up around the

Center, Gift Shop, either working with the little alligators or roaming the trail pointing out the alligators to park visitors.

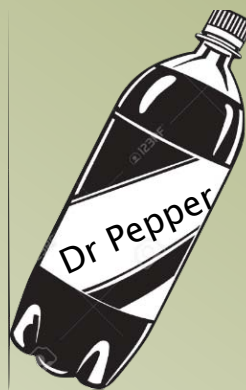


Beth also spent a lot of time working with the Kestrel and Screech owl in and outside the Nature Center.

Nature Center and see that the Gift Shop was running smoothly and was well stocked.

Ken served as our Treasurer and was Comptroller for many years, but he would be the first to tell you that Beth played a big role in the book keeping and financial statements.

They were both fans of Dr. Pepper, which is why we stocked it in the Gift Shop and still do! On weekends Ken would collect firewood money while Beth was getting the Nature Center and



Ken passed away in 2008 but Beth continued to volunteer for years after that.



Remembering Beth Debenport Volunteer Emeritus, BBSPVO

- *David Heinicke*

Beth Debenport has been a big part of Brazos Bend State Park and especially the Volunteer Organization as long I've been involved with it. During my early career their presence and support gave me the confidence to expand the interpretive program and try new

things. They were both always there to encourage me and lend a hand as needed. The lessons they've taught me, the wisdom they shared and the example they set plays a big part in my career and personal life. The Park is a better place because of them.

photo credit to David Heinicke



*Beth and Ken Debenport
Forever with us on the trail*

Hitchhiker to the Galaxy



by Jason Castle, Assistant Park Superintendent

On 7/23 at dusk I was sitting in my truck on Park RD 72, just before you get to HQ. I was talking with incoming visitors to make sure they knew to purchase permits online since HQ had closed for the night.

The sun was beginning to set and birds were returning to their favorite trees to roost for the evening. I couldn't help thinking the night was going to be great for viewing the icy comet, NEOWISE. While observing the beauty of the sun working it's way down past the horizon line, I noticed a light tickle on my right hand as it was resting on the steering wheel. I'm very used to having the occasional jumping spider on me, so I

didn't really react right away. When I looked over, it was not a jumping spider at all... it was a black widow spider. The markings on the back lead me to think that it was a different species all together, but the 'hourglass' was definitely visible. I learned that this was an immature black widow. The colors will fade and they become more black as they molt into adulthood. I didn't panic, but I gave a light shake to my hand to knock it off. It landed on my clipboard, where I was able to see the 'hourglass,' and from there I transferred it safely outside of the truck and into the grass.

Just another day in the office.





Purple Gallinules

by Janey Woodley

Purple Gallinules come to the Park in the spring to nest and raise young. Besides their iridescent colors, the light blue patch on their forehead is a primary field mark. They are omnivores (I didn't know that!) and even prey on the nestlings of other birds. They are remarkable fliers and have been found in Iceland,

Switzerland, the Galapagos and South Africa. *All about Birds* says in the Tropics they have multiple broods a year with the early hatchlings helping to feed and protect the later arrivals. I think they might do this in the Park too.



photos by Janey Woodley

Henslow's Sparrow

by Robert Schwartz

photos by Robert Schwartz



The Henslow's Sparrow lives in thick, weedy fields in the Midwest. It winters in similar habitat along the Gulf Coast states from TX east to the Carolinas. It is a very secretive bird, staying mostly on the ground where it feeds on insects and seeds. They nest on the ground as well.

The song of the Henslow's Sparrow is unremarkable but is one way to try to locate the bird. If the bird is flushed, it will fly a short distance and then dive back into the grass. I located the one I photographed by walking into the prairie between the entrance road to the park and headquarters. I flushed up a couple of Lincoln Sparrows first and then looking over at another bush, I noticed a small bird sitting quietly. When I looked at it

with my binoculars, I realized I was looking at the Henslow's Sparrow. I had not heard it but it popped up and was very cooperative, letting me shoot and just sitting there for me. It did fly down to the grass but when I walked toward where it flew, it reappeared and again let me photograph for some time. I know there have been many people out looking for the bird and perhaps it has become somewhat accustomed to people. I was very happy to have been able to see and photograph this beautiful little sparrow.



BBSPVO Officers

2019-2020 Officers

Wayne Wiegand, President

Janey Woodley, Vice President

Lisa Sanders, Secretary

Pam Trimble, Treasurer

Sherri Meador, Member at Large

Judy Strauss, Member at Large

Newsletter Editor

Lisa Sanders

Webmaster

Anne Shelton

Thank You, Volunteers of the BBSPVO

Thank you for sharing these outstanding photos and your experiences in the Park.

Technical Support/Webmaster

- Anne Shelton

BBSP Park Staff:

- Montse Canedo, Volunteer Coordinator
- Jason Castle, Assistant Superintendent

Want to contribute to the Newsletter?

Do you have a passion for birding? Hiking? Texas history? Photography? Maybe you enjoy Sky Gazing, or know a little about the history, geology, ecosystems and biology of the area. If so, please consider sharing your experiences in the *Brazos Bend Bugle!* If you would like to be a contributor to the *Bugle* please contact Lisa Sanders with photos, short story or articles. Everyone has a story to tell!

