

## **Friends of Friedrich Wilderness Park Report June 2014**

On January 24<sup>th</sup> 1966 a plea went out in the Austin American to save the remaining warblers. Staff writer Chris Whitcraft writes in his article, "They're Disappearing: A Plea is Sounded: Save the Warbler," that a visiting UT Architecture Professor, Patrick Horsbrugh, urges Texans and the Travis Audubon Society to lead the way in conservation and save a Texas icon, the Golden-cheeked warbler. In Whitcraft's article, a reported meager 500 migratory Golden-cheek individuals remain and the time to say "Stop: Enough is enough" has come. According to the article, Horsbrugh told the Audubon group that the warbler could be protected by preserving its "breeding territory...in perpetuity through law, force and public backing." By preserving this breeding habitat or territory "...all other species natural to that territory will also be saved...If you protect one thing, you automatically protect many others." Twenty-four years later, in 1990, the warbler was finally listed as endangered. Today, National Audubon reports that the population is estimated at 21,000 individuals but other sources list that figure for pairs. What is clear is that it is difficult to estimate the total population and hard to say if the figure reported in the 1966 article is close to accurate.

This past January, and close to the date of the article published 48 years ago, Patrick Horsbrugh passed away. I wonder towards the end of his life, did he look back on his talk to Travis Audubon and that news article and feel a sense of accomplishment? In the article he stated that "Society is divided into creators [conservers] and destroyers" and that "...the conservers are being vastly outnumbered by the destroyers." Did he feel that the "conservers" are now making a valiant stand against the "destroyers," and did he feel a sense of hope that some of the world's most wonderful creatures and places have a fighting chance? Did he smile at the fact that the Texas icon he so adamantly urged for protection is still around for his children and his children's children to admire? Additionally, all things within this wonderful little bird's territory are now preserved as well.

This article, brought to me by Sarah Dunkel, a dedicated park patron and volunteer, reminds me of how successful some of our conservation efforts can be. Though still critically endangered, the Golden-cheeked warbler has come a long way thanks in part to the efforts of those who love this bird the most like Patrick Horsbrugh and the park patrons, volunteers, birders and nature lovers alike. It reminds us that we should never give up on our conservation and restoration efforts because one day, maybe 48 years from now, we can look back on our efforts and accomplishments and smile.

-Wendy Leonard, Park Naturalist

\*scanned copy of article is available via email upon request ([wendy.leonard@sanantonio.gov](mailto:wendy.leonard@sanantonio.gov))

## ECOSYSTEM NOTES

### Birds

The period from March until June (or so) is typically a time when staff, volunteers, and patrons (including those who enter their data on eBird) observe an array of avian species in our Natural Areas. Listed below are the most unusual, interesting, or noteworthy of those observations.

Waterfowl: With the arrival of the May rains came a pair of black-bellied whistling ducks (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) on the ephemeral pond in the front of FWP.

Warblers: Although the golden-cheeked warblers (*Setophaga chrysoparia*, GCWs) did not arrive until March 11 (typically they arrive by March 4), they seem to have had a very productive breeding season (at least at Friedrich). At FWP, it was easy to see adult GCWs even without binoculars, and lately it has been common to see fledgling GCWs. On one day, staff saw four fledglings and one very busy adult male, all in the space of a couple of meters.

Other warblers observed include orange-crowned (*Vermivora celata*), yellow-rumped (*Setophaga coronata*), black and white (*Mniotilta varia*), Nashville (*Oreothlypis ruficapilla*), and a possible Canada warbler (*Wilsonia canadensis*)

Vireos: Although no black-capped vireos (BCVs, *Vireo atricapillus*) have been observed at FWP yet, several have been seen at RD. New this year, staff began surveying for BCVs at Woodland Hills West in habitat that was created as a result of Natural Areas' land management. No BCVs have been observed yet at Woodland Hills, but staff remains hopeful.

Other vireos observed include Hutton's (*Vireo huttoni*), blue-headed (*V. solitarius*), and white-eyed (*V. griseus*).

Sparrows and towhees: White-throated sparrows (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) top the list of those observed. Others include clay colored (*Spizella pallida*) and chipping (*Spizella passerina*) sparrows as well as the spotted towhee (*Pipilo maculatus*).

Cuckoos and roadrunners: Staff observed a yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*), also known as the rainbird, just days before the Memorial Day rains. The calls of the greater roadrunner (*Geococcyx californianus*) have been common.

Buntings: Staff observed painted buntings (*Passerina ciris*), always a treat to see.

General Avian Notes: The "Natural Areas Nursery" has been full of nestlings and fledglings, including young cardinals, white-eyed vireos, golden-cheeked warblers, eastern phoebes, and wrens.

## **Other Fauna**

Staff and volunteers have observed white-tailed deer, rock squirrels (seem to be as many, or more, rock squirrels as fox squirrels at FWP), coyotes, a huge porcupine, eastern cottontail rabbits, and an array of herptofauna (including rose-bellied, alligator, TX spiny, and racerunner lizards; and an eastern blackneck garter snake).

## **Exotic Species**

Exotic species observed included brown-headed cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*), feral pigs (*Sus scrofa*), malta star thistle (*Centaurea melitensis*), musk thistle (*Carduus nutans*), and beggar's ticks (*Torilis arvensis*). Staff and volunteers pulled by hand and removed malta star and musk thistles, but beggar's ticks have gotten away from staff. Thankfully, beggar's ticks seem to be restricted mostly to the front of the parks, (at least this is true for both Crownridge Canyon and Friedrich).

Staff at RD worked at removing ligustrum (*Ligustrum lucidum*), nadina (*Nandina domestica*), and tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) in addition to malta star thistle.

## **FRIEDRICH WILDERNESS PARK & WOODLAND HILLS**

Mature trees continued to fall or drop major limbs. In an effort to insure the future of our woodlands, staff and volunteers continued building tree protection. Over the last couple of months, volunteers built and placed about 25 wildlife exclosures (called such because they exclude deer and feral hogs) in golden-cheeked warbler habitat. On at least 3 different occasions, volunteers were treated to appearances by golden-cheeked warblers, thus confirming that the volunteers were indeed working in golden-cheeked warbler habitat.

### **New trails**

After the heavy rains, staff walked most of the new trails on the north side, and was pleased to report that the new trails shed water just as they were designed to do. Staff is working on new maps and signage to guide visitors when the new trails open.

### **Existing trails**

Staff and volunteers worked on improving water flow and safety on sections of the Fern del, Vista Loop and Main Loop trails. Improvements completed include removal of rocks and mulch that had built up to such an extent that water was funneling down the trail, instead of following natural drainage patterns. Staff also widened the drainage channels next to water bars.

To improve safety, staff added and/or repaired steps and posted additional directional signage.

Staff and volunteers also worked on hiding/blocking/closing unauthorized trails, especially those that come off Fern del, Vista Loop, and Main Loop trails.

### **Oak Wilt Management**

The contractor completed the trenching necessary to isolate the diseased live oaks from those believed to be healthy.

When a trench fails (the disease gets beyond the trench), there is usually no way to know for sure why it failed. This is because we cannot see underground. However, everyone agrees that the 3 main reasons that trenches fail are:

1. The trench was improperly placed and there were already diseased trees beyond the trench. (All the experts approved our trench location).
2. The trench was not deep enough. (Our trench was the maximum recommended depth; but there is really no way to be absolutely certain that there were no roots below the depth of our trench).
3. Roots graft from the diseased side to the healthy side of the trench (As long as there are living oaks on both sides of the trench, it is possible for their roots to graft. The time required for grafting depends on the health of the trees, weather conditions, and other factors.)

Staff is also researching:

1. Rogue only the oaks that are closest to the trench. The challenge is in deter 50 ft? Or do you rogue the first live oak of size no matter how far it is from the trench?
2. Watch the progression of the disease, and be prepared to dig a second trench if there is "breakout."
3. Treat selected "high value" oaks on both sides of the trench with the fungistat, propicanazole. While propicanazole usually does not cure the disease, it can reduce the damage. Propicanazole is most effective when trees are treated before they show symptoms.
4. Treat with propicanazole a band of live oaks just inside the trench (on the diseased side). The idea is to reduce the oak wilt fungus inoculum in these trees so that there is less fungal inoculum "available" to spread via root grafting.

## **New Phones & Network**

Friedrich offices now have new 207 exchange phone numbers, moving our communications systems into the City of San Antonio networks. In addition, our computers are now on a fiber optics network greatly increasing the quality and speed of our connection, enabling GIS applications and graphics-heavy projects. The classroom, offices and surrounding area have COSA wireless access, and these areas along with the entire parking and entry pavilion have public wireless access as well.

Main Line	207-3780
Don Pylant (Park Operations Supervisor)	207-3781
Peggy Spring (Education Coordinator)	207-3782
Thomas Paine (Crew Leader II)	207-3783
Curtis Shackelford (Crew Leader II)	207-3784
Jayne Neal (Park Naturalist)	207-3785
John Nickler (Crew Leader II)	207-3786
Fax Line	207-3790

## **RANCHO DIANA**

Staff did golden-cheeked warbler surveys on selected sections of Rancho Diana. The areas targeted either had not been previously surveyed, or had only been surveyed incidentally and without following US Fish and Wildlife protocols. Preliminary analysis indicates there were 2-3 warbler territories in the golden-cheeked habitat at the south end of Foreman Rd.

With the assistance of 3 US Fish and Wildlife biologists, staff did a complete survey of the recently fenced bracted twistflower (*Streptanthus bracteatus*) colony and the disturbed areas just outside the fence. Although only 22 plants were found (the year the plants were discovered, the number of plants was in the hundreds), this year was still better than last year when none were found. Interestingly, the most robust plants were found in the open in heavily disturbed areas, one even on the edge of a fence post concrete footing. Moreover, all plants with siliques (fruit) were in heavily disturbed areas.

### **Fencing of Prop 3 Areas**

The fencing contractor has reported that all fencing is complete on the sections of Rancho Diana and Cedar Creek preserves included in the contract. Additionally, there is now a tall enclosure fence around the bracted twistflower population. Staff has inspected most of the project and we are very pleased with the product.

The fencing contractor has also reported that all fencing is complete on the sections of Woodland Hills included in the contract. Staff has inspected most of the project and we are very pleased with the product.

### **EISENHOWER PARK**

A group of volunteers tackled the Malta star thistle along Cedar Flats Trail and in the parking lot over spring break. The nest box monitoring team continues to monitor the nest boxes and thus far has found Bewick's wren, Ash-throated flycatchers, Black-crested titmouse, and possibly Carolina wren nesting in these boxes. This spring we noticed 1 Death Camas (*Zigadenus Nuttallii*) plant in the meadow. Hopefully this is a start to another colony of this neat lily.

The bracted twistflower (*Streptanthus bracteatus*) population has had a difficult year as the dry winter and much of the spring has taken its toll on the population. The population peaked in November at 36 individuals, and then decreased to 20 individuals for February, 19 in March, 18 in April and just 5 in May. By the end of April 13, plants were blooming, but by the end of May only 3 plants had siliques (fruits).

New critter resistant trash can and recycling container enclosures were constructed in 5 locations by an Eagle Scout. A modified version of enclosures at Friedrich Park will be installed in remaining locations, as well as at Friedrich Park by future scout projects.

### **SCENIC CANYON**

Staff is currently working diligently to remove 3 patches of Malta star thistle. All 3 patches were located in the old ranch roads. Staff and volunteers completed Golden-cheeked warbler surveys for most of the property and will work to compile the data in order to try to obtain an approximate number of Golden-cheeks on the property.

## **CROWN RIDGE CANYON NATURAL AREA**

A substantial leak developed in the water supply line and proved difficult to locate, being somewhere under the parking lot. A new HPDE pipe was laid outside the parking lot and the leaking line has been capped off. The trench has settled nicely and been overseeded.

Staff began checking all the wildlife exclosures to assess their condition and the status of trees being protected. Staff and volunteers will repair, repurpose, or expand the exclosures as necessary.

Staff completed the Fish and Wildlife required red imported fire ant mound count near Crownridge Canyon Cave (which is occupied by the endangered *Cicurina madla* spider). No active fire ant mounds were found.

## **EDUCATION**

From March through June, Outreach Programs reached 173 people (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday hikes) and 1744 people through education programs.

**Special Note!** Esther Yoon, one of the members of our Young Birders Club, won third place in her age division in the American Birding Association Young Birder of the Year contest. This national contest had components of writing, illustration, photography, field notebook and conservation/community projects. Esther won first in photography, second in field notebook and third in conservation/community. Esther has also been attending our Explore programs since their beginning. Congratulations to her, her family and Patsy and Tom Inglet who faithfully lead the young birders club!