



Water Works

A monthly newsletter for friends of Jacob's Well Natural Area

April 2011

New Partnership forms with Austin Nature Center

Jacob's Well and the **Austin Nature Center** will be partnering for the ANC's **Summer Camp Program**.

They offer day programs for the Adventure Groups (ages 9 - 12) that combine science and outdoor exploration, and have some caving camps and water themed weeks that would be truly ideal at Jacob's Well. These programs will be followed by swimming from 2-4 every day.

The ANC is very excited to have this opportunity, and we are looking forward to having them help us develop summer programs.

Jacob's Well Frog Walk May 7 – 7:30-9:30 p.m. Speaker: Lee Ann Linam

Amphibians around the world are disappearing, but Texas Amphibian Watch is checking to make sure that doesn't happen in Texas. Join TPWD biologist Lee Ann Linam for an introduction to the frogs and toads of the Wimberley area, and find out how you can become a "citizen herpetologist."

A brief Powerpoint presentation will be followed by a hike to Cypress Creek to listen for the calls of local amphibians. This will be an easy walk along the flat side of creek on an ADA designated trail. Following the first part of the presentation, anyone with mobility issues can take their car to the beginning of the trail. Participants should bring flashlights.

It is not only that there is water in the world,
but there is a world in water.

- *Buddhist Waters Sutra*

Restoration Rangers secure new tracts

by Anne Child

Warbler Way is a private road that splits the two new tracts of the Jacob's Well preserve. Soon after acquisition, it was reported that trespassers cut down a tree for firewood on the property. That needed to stop. During two workdays in March, the Restoration Rangers took on the task of mending the fences on either side of the road.

Two Rangers grew up on farms so they taught the rest of us the fine art of stringing fences. The existing fence lines were cleared. Posts were inspected, replaced and/or fortified. Wires were untangled, stretched and secured in place. Now the fence will deter unwelcome entry.

It all sounds so easy, but realize barbed wire and cedar trees are sharp and Texas limestone and dry cedar posts are unrelenting. We had great weather, the right tools, good supplies, enthusiastic strong teams and a vision for a better future for this land.



Restoration Rangers pause during their fence-mending morning at the edge of the new JW property. L to r: Anne Child, Tom Hausler, Bob Mobley, Jean Richmond and Gary Child. They are listening to Jeff Vasgaard.

*The future of Jacob's Well is uncertain. In Texas, 63 out of 281 significant springs have altogether failed.**

Get your feet wet and jump into
water protection!



BECOME A JACOB'S WELL NATURAL AREA VOLUNTEER

Come join us for 2 consecutive Saturdays
of training with area Scientists,
Environmental Educators and others who care.

SPRING 2011 VOLUNTEER TRAINING
Saturdays, April 9 and April 16
9:00am – 3:00pm

Cost: Free

Lunch: Please bring your own lunch and utensils.
We will provide drinks and snacks.

We ask for a commitment of 24 hours a year,
excepting Master Naturalists, who follow their MN
Requirements. All MN hours will belong to the MN
program.

PRESENTERS:

Chad Norris of Texas Parks and Wildlife on
Springs in Crisis
Jason Pinchback of the Texas Stream Team
Doug Wierman of the Hays-Trinity Groundwater
Conservation District, teaching Aquifer 101
Gregg Tatum and Krista McDermid Divers, Biologists
with Zara Environmental, Endangered Species
and Hydrology Consultants
Executive Director David Baker + WVWA President
Jack Hollon on Jacob's Well
Hays County Master Naturalists + JWNA Volunteers
with Interpretive Demonstrations

Interested? Contact Barbara Attwell:
battwell@earthlink.net; 512-263-2054

*Larry McKinney. *The State of the Springs*. Texas Parks and
Wildlife Magazine July 2005

Art and Conservation Exhibit



**Please join us for this
three-day exhibit:
FRIDAY, APRIL 8 to
SUNDAY, APRIL 10**
Hours: Friday: 10 - 5
Saturday: 10 - 8
Sunday: 11 - 5

Twenty-six Texas artists spent a year or more exploring 19 Hill Country properties to interpret their experiences in nature through art that will be on exhibit and for sale during "Art and Conservation: Hidden Treasures," on view April 8-10 at the **Cibolo Nature Center** as part of the Boerne Professional Artists' 15th Annual Parade of Artists.

Here and There, Around the Well

The June 4 date celebrating the joining of forces between the Wimberley Valley Watershed and Hays County has been moved to September, to allow for more involvement on the county's part.

David Baker won the 2011 Texas Environmental Excellence Award in the Individual category. TEEA came out recently to make a short film about the work being done at Jacob's Well. More information can be seen at <http://texasishotblog.org/?p=1167> and www.teea.org/winners.htm.

John Muir in the New World, produced by American Masters, premieres April 18 on PBS in honor of Earth Day, **Mar 22, 2011, at 10:30 pm**. This documentary explores the life of preservationist, naturalist, author, explorer, activist, scientist, and farmer, John Muir, Sierra Club founder and pioneering environmentalist.

Jamie Kinscherff will guide the Jacob's Well volunteers on the **Canyon Gorge Tour on May 14**, and Deb Bradshaw will be the docent. When you email Deb to sign up (debradshaw@yahoo.com), she will confirm in late April. Deb says of Jamie: "He is the BEST at all the interpretive techniques taught at JW docent training... lots of related interesting stories... it will be good!"

Volunteer Extraordinaire

Jeff Vasgaard

by Dorothy Knight

He is thoughtful and yet direct, capable of leading or following a proven path in order to achieve the identified goal. He can be seen leading a tour of the Jacob's Well Natural Area or supervising a work crew dedicated to the restoration of the newly expanded natural area. He has also joined the board of the Wimberley Valley Watershed Association to help provide direction in leadership at a critical time for the organization.



Jeff Vasgaard is a native of South Dakota who grew up on a farm and studied agricultural engineering at South Dakota State University. After seven years in the Army, he and his family (three boys) moved to Dallas where Jeff worked for Texas Instruments as a manufacturing and equipment engineer. They next moved to Wimberley where Jeff worked in San Antonio and eventually San Marcos, where he continued to work in equipment design.

In 1992, Jeff and Karen bought an old house (aka, "money pit") on Eagle's Nest Drive in Wimberley. In 2008, they rebuilt that house, from the slab up. Jeff's engineering experience and Karen's professional expertise in the field of sustainable home design made it possible to build a very efficient home that includes a rainwater system capable of meeting all their needs.

While completing the Master Naturalists program in 2009, Jeff became a volunteer at Jacob's Well Natural Area, which he finds very interesting because of its biodiversity. "Everything's here," he says of the nearly 100-acre preserve that surrounds the artesian springs that pump thousands of gallons of water into Jacob's Well daily. He enjoys working on the trails that wind through the natural area and provide a means for visitors to learn more about the environment and the significance of this relatively small but special place.

As a docent for the Jacob's Well Natural Area, Jeff leads tours on Saturday mornings, enabling him to

connect with people and spread the word on the importance of water conservation. As a member of the Wimberley Valley Watershed Association Board, Jeff brings his experience as a planner and a designer to the table. He identifies the task of revising the existing Master Plan for the natural area as the top priority of next steps for the association to take.

"It's necessary to complete the plan," he says, "so that we can fine tune the ongoing work already underway." The existing network of trails has benefited from the work of the crews that he supervises every other Saturday. Access for handicapped visitors and handrails on parts of the trail are welcome improvements. The current habitat restoration underway is evident in the fields of grass on the savanna overlooking the creek. Jeff has been an active force in the planning and execution of this work.

In addition to his activities at the preserve, Jeff still works in the field of Industrial Engineering, keeping him busy and involved in many ways. With a no-nonsense attitude that makes him a great addition to the team, the Wimberley Valley Watershed Association is grateful that Jeff has joined their ranks.



Jeff demonstrates the JWNA Aquifer model at the Emily Ann Butterfly Festival in 2010.

Editor's Note: Jeff Vasgaard is also 2011 President of the Hays County Master Naturalists chapter.

Bamboo Reduction

by Jeff Vasgaard

One of the first habitat related projects for the JWNA volunteer group (later named the "Restoration Rangers") was reduction of the bamboo on the property.

After the first assault, we cut back the new growth weekly for two months, then every two weeks. The "vigor" of the new growth has steadily declined over the course of the year. Very little growth was observed this winter (Dec-Jan).

Bamboo spreads through rhizomes and is fairly aggressive. There are two types (we found both):

Running bamboo gets this name because the rhizomes spread out quickly and will create a wall of bamboo in a short time. Running bamboo is the most hated type of bamboo, but it is also the most effective if you want to create a privacy wall.

Clumping bamboo stays in a tighter clump and grows more slowly than does running bamboo, but can be just as difficult to kill.

We considered three control methods in the beginning:

1) Dig up each shoot to remove the entire root and rhizomes. Repeat as new shoots reappear. This



Hauling bamboo out

seemed like too much labor.

2) Cover with plastic for an extended period. We decided against this since it is a fairly large area and we did not feel we could maintain the plastic against sunlight, wind, etc. We have read since then that this method may cause the roots to spread outside the area covered.

3) Cut the shoots close to the ground, frequently. 5 to 6 people could do this area in 30 to 40 minutes, once the initial overgrowth was removed.

We found out later that the American Bamboo Society recommends the cutting method, as follows:



Bamboo Shoot

- 1) Cut the bamboo shoots down.
- 2) Apply water to the area.
- 3) Cut down the new crop of bamboo that will result.
- 4) Repeat the above, as needed.

This is the second year of our bamboo control efforts -- so we will monitor things closely this spring. A recent look at the area indicates minimal efforts will be needed this year to complete the job.

KAPS students provide willing hands

by Margaret Baker

Sixteen students from Katherine Anne Porter Charter High School worked at JWNA on March 11 doing a variety of tasks:

- Weeding the beds at the entrance gate
- Planting native plants--Texas sotol, salvia greggii, Mountain sage, daminita, evergreen sumac, silver germander, lantana and a few native grasses. (The new tree at the gate is Mexican Plum.)

- Mulching all the beds
 - Watering
- Some of the students gathered rocks to begin bordering the granite path from the parking lot to the Camp Jacob building.



Volunteers from JWNA gave a short presentation on the history, background, mission and work that volunteers have been doing.

The plants and materials were donated by KAPS from a grant they received to do these service projects around the community. Our contribution was in the form of the four hours donated by some of our regular JWNA volunteers to assist and supervise the project.

Photo by Anne Child

Deborah Vatalaro, Chicken Wrangler

by Barbara Attwell

Last Saturday, the Jacob's Well Passport Speaker Series introduced us to local Chicken Wrangler Deborah Vatalaro. Deborah describes herself and her spouse as "two tech geeks creating a small family farm in the beautiful Texas Hill Country." Her presentation was not only informative but oh so entertaining.

Deborah not only grows organic fruit, selling it to farm markets and co-ops, but raises ducks, geese, laying hens, and chicken-guarding dogs. Becky Northcut organized the event, and Linda Lang brought her luscious brownies to share again.

Woven in with instructions on feeding, coop styles and veterinary care, was her sage advice -- tips like being sure to develop a retirement plan for your chickens after they stop laying eggs, either with a life of luxury or the stewpot.

One audience member asked Deborah, "Do you name your chickens?" She replied that chickens are like people - some are intensely interesting and others kind of "blah." It's the characters that get a name. Pirate Chicken prefers shoulders to roost on. Lady Gray (named after Lady Jane Gray who stated her preference of a single life) didn't like people and didn't like other chickens. Instead she preferred to go alone on walk-about for days on end. She did protect the flock of girls one day by fighting off a hawk, and thus joined the "No Kill Inner Circle" of chickens - those with the luxury retirement plan instead of the stewpot.



After you get chickens, Deborah says that you won't need to watch television.



Watching chickens, or "Chicken Television," is much funnier and you can watch all day long. She did add that the chickens have a dark side in their tendency to peck at each other's wounds. Deborah and her spouse found



Frau, the Barred Plymouth Rock hen, resting herself upon Bandit, the much put-upon Great Pyrenees livestock guardian dog.

Deborah sells her goose and chicken eggs through the Bountiful Sprout (www.bountifulsprout.com), a local food co-op. You can also follow her adventures on her blog, <http://farmnatters.blogspot.com>.

themselves wondering: If they were to drop dead on the pasture, who'd be the first to start chewing on their carcasses? Dogs, geese, ducks, or chickens? We both, agreed, hands-down: the chickens.

Wishing Well

We need a volunteer to keep our Jacob's Well fliers stocked around town. We already have them at the Wimberley Visitors Center, but need them at other sites like the Woodcreek POA, the Chamber of Commerce, and stores in the square. Contact: battwell@earthlink.net if you are interested.

We need **Tour Docents** for every weekend in April. In addition to the usual Wimberley tour visitors, we are a feature in the Austin Nature Days Calendar, as a place to visit. One of the very best ways we can teach water respect is with these tours. They allow for one-on-one dialogue, which gives visitors that chance to raise their level of water consciousness and develop a relationship with the well. Once an individual cares, they become a steward of water.



Hill Country Alliance 2011 Photo Contest

March 1- May 31

It's time to dust off your cameras and capture the magic and beauty of the Texas Hill Country! Winners will appear in the HCA 2012 Hill Country Calendar. Go to www.hillcountryalliance.org for details on the how to enter the contest.

JWNA Current Calendar - Spring/Summer 2011

(Saturday Tours are written in only for April)

To volunteer at these events, e-mail Barbara Atwell: battwell@earthlink.net.

Volunteer and Advanced Training Opportunities

- April 2 Master Naturalists Work Day Picnic
- April 9 & 16 Volunteer Training, Saturday Tours
- April 14 Practice for Jacob's Well Elementary visit (10am - 11am)
- April 19-20 Jacob's Well Elementary 5th graders 9am – 1pm (Total students: 150)
- April 21 Agrilife Officers Tour (20)
- April 23 Saturday Tours
- April 30 Bird Walk with Tom Toporowski, Wimberley Birding Society (8:30 am); Saturday Tours

- May (TBA) Jacob's Well Elementary 2nd grade water cycle activity (at the school)
- May 7 Frog Walk with Lee Ann Linam (7:30pm - 9:30 pm)
- May 14 Canyon Gorge trip
- June 11 CAMN (Austin's Capital Area Master Naturalists) Tour
- June 14 Austin Nature Center Science Camps: "Wilderness Wise - Conservation and Leave No Trace"
- June 22 Austin Nature Center Science Camps: "Caves and Life Underground"

- July 4 Wimberley Parade
- July 15 Austin Nature Center Science Camps -- "Science Safari - General Science, Anything Goes"
- July 28 Austin Nature Center Science Camps -- "Water Conservation and Aquifers"

- August 9 Austin Nature Center Science Camps -- "Caves and Aquifers"



Barbara Atwell demonstrates water conservation at a KAPS fair in 2010. She is explaining how many gallons of water it takes to produce such things as:

Cup of coffee	37
Hamburger	634
Glass of milk	53
Cotton t-shirt	766
Pair of blue jeans	2,900

Gary Child, with help from fellow Restoration Rangers Bob Mobley and Tom Hausler, shows there's more than one way to drive a fence post in.

