



Water Works

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

June 2011

Come meet other Texas Master Naturalists at the Well

Two other Master Naturalist chapters will be visiting Jacob's Well in June. Come join the fun and meet people with similar interests from nearby areas in Texas.

On Saturday, June 11, the Capital Area MNs will have a tour, picnic and a swim at the well. Fifteen have already signed up, with more expected. Our HCMN President, Jeff Vasgaard, will lead the tours.

The Highland Lakes MN, centered in Marble Falls, will have a "Cypress Creek Day" on Friday, June 17. They will begin at Jacob's Well and then move on to the Blue Hole for a sack lunch. Jeff Vasgaard is coordinating this one, so please let him know if you would like to be a part of this venture. He will need help with the aquifer models, in particular. Any other ideas are welcome. Ray Franklin will talk about native grasses on the June 17 visit.

Jacob's Well volunteers help with Blue Hole Project

by Jeff Vasgaard

The planting at Blue Hole on May 21 was a huge success. Thanks again to all of those that attended.

About 20 Hays County Master Naturalists worked on the project. A total of 70 volunteers throughout the morning planted natives grasses, trees and shrubs along the new walkways and trails. In addition to HCMN, Boys Scouts, Friends of Blue Hole, Friends of Jacobs Well, Keep Wimberley Beautiful, and many other groups and individuals pitched in. Hays County Commissioner Will



Conley, his wife and daughter also helped.

The grand opening for the new Blue Hole Park is June 11. Everyone is invited to attend.



Jacob's Well is on the list as a site for families to visit as part of the Nature Challenge Central Texas. As of May, 143 teams and 583 people registered to complete "missions" at participating natural areas throughout the state. The goal is to get people outside for their physical, mental, and emotional health.

Their mission at JWNA, should they choose to accept it, is to learn about aquifers and become a good steward for water. They can do this by taking one of our regular Saturday morning tours and telling their tour guide three ways they can think of to save water. The challenge runs until July 16, with a closing ceremony at Zilker park in Austin. There will be awards for the most sites visited, the best scrapbook, and the best photo. The event is sponsored by the Texas Forest Service, Texas A&M, and Texas Agrilife Extensions Service, and is administered by the Austin Nature Center.

If a team shows up, they get a sticker for completing the mission. (The stickers are on the main table at Camp Jacob.)

Read about the mission they need to accomplish: <http://naturechallenge.tamu.edu>.

The shortage of fresh water is the major ecological problem of this moment.

--Mikhail Gorbachev, 2001

Meet Ray Franklin, the “Grasses Man”

by Barbara Attwell

Meet Ray Franklin, hero to tall grasses everywhere. Ray raises the public's awareness of the value of native grasses with his extraordinary storytelling capabilities, entrancing audiences of all ages.



Ray demonstrates the Rainfall Simulator at Katherine Ann Porter School.

Ray is the product of the small Texas town of Sinton, just North of Port Aransas. Sinton's ecosystem is a transitional zone between the Gulf Prairies and the South Texas Plains. The flora of this region includes 218 species of grasses. Although Ray was “not into grasses until 15 years ago,” he has definitely stumbled upon a connection between then and now.

Ray's father was in the natural gas business, his mother a homemaker. The family, including a sister, lived in the town. But his uncle was a farmer and Ray was in FFA, so they ingeniously figured a way for Ray to keep two milk cows by leasing 3-4 acres of pasture from the railroad. The cows needed milking twice a day, which in winter was well before sunrise. Selling milk produced enough money to pay for four years of college, but upon graduation from high school, the first thing he did was sell the cows.

After getting a Petroleum Engineering degree from Texas A&I Kingsville, he went to work for Phillips Petroleum. Ray had a draft deferment during the Korean Conflict of 1951 while at Phillips, but when he was transferred from the Sweeney Refinery to work in Exploration and Production, the deferment was dropped -- unbeknownst to him. It seems that his new job was not deemed essential. To his great

surprise, he soon was living in Ft. Bliss, a place that “must have been named by a sadist.” He married his wife Janet, and was subsequently deployed to Japan. He missed the birth of his son by 3 months, but considered Japan to be a wonderful place.

Ray was flexible and well educated, which was reflected in his career within the petroleum industry. He ran labs, worked in Engineering Design and Processes, Research and Development, and in the Operations and Management of plants – refineries, chemical plants, and a coal gasification plant. Coal gasification is the process of pulverizing coal in a pressurized reactor, creating a burnable gas. Most of his 35-year career was spent with Shell Oil in Houston.

Retirement came in 1991. Ray and Janet moved to Dripping Springs in 1995. They were planning on buying about 15 acres, but on a cold rainy day his realtor took him to see a 60-acre piece of hill country. Ray fell in love with it, and commenced to do a happy dance right on the spot. Evidently the realtor joined the dance, too.

The land was in good shape, not burdened with ash juniper or over-grazing. Ray tried adding five cows to keep the agricultural exemption, but those five cows stripped the land of vegetation in a short time. Soon, and to his great delight, conservation-minded legislators realized that much of our Texas land was not “productive” and was headed to either over-grazing or development. Thus the wildlife management exemption was created, and Ray went with it. Ray called his Houston friends to get them to vote for the



Ray shows how long the roots of beneficial grasses can grow.

legislation, even though they had no idea what it was about. He does now let his neighbors occasionally graze their two horses, one donkey, and four goats on his land. With all that grass, it makes for some very happy animals.



Ray's interest in grasses started while walking around his land, curious as to what all those grasses were and what they were up to. Soon he was on the phone to Texas A&M, learning everything he could. He obtained a photocopy of "Know Your Grasses" and just about wore it out carrying it around in his back pocket. Presently he can ID around 40 – 50 grasses. There are better-illustrated books now, such as "The Grasses of the Texas Hill Country," by Brian and Shirley Loflin, but Ray says, "Everyone should keep a copy of 'Know Your Grasses' in his pocket."

Ray took the Master Naturalist training in 2003, with the Wildthings class, and he did hear many renditions of the song by the same name. For more than four years he led the Nature Watch segment, where members are invited to share their wildlife observations. Ray says he adds to this, since he can't resist an opportunity to talk.

When not tracking grasses, he spends time trading stock, caring for his property, and reading. He is also a member of The Nature Conservancy. His wife Janet is an accomplished water color artist. The two of them have a son and grandchild living in Colorado, a child in Houston and two in Austin.

This summer they have plans to take advantage of the exceptional museums in Ft. Worth. One of Ray's favorite vacations was a bicycle trip with his daughter from Warsaw to Vilnius to Minsk, Russia, riding up to 70 miles a day, staying in small towns and in hotels with no hot water. While on an American Museum of Natural History tour in Portugal, he noticed a stand of trees that looked very similar to our Redwoods. It turns out that they were – explorers had brought back seedlings from California and planted them there.

We salute Ray Franklin for so successfully educating us about the importance of grasses. His message has become one of the foundations of what we teach at Jacob's Well.

Website update

The new **Volunteer** area on our website is almost finished. The area will be password protected, and information on how to sign on will come out soon. Under the Volunteer Tab you will find:

- Calendar -- See what is coming up and sign-up
- Reporting Volunteer hours -- Both online or with a printable, mail-in form
- Forms -- Applications, Sign-in sheets, Project Proposal forms, Emergency Contacts
- Educational Materials -- How to interpret, and info for school visits
- Public Tours -- Tour Script
- Booth -- Everything needed to represent JWNA at a local festival event
- Games -- such as those used at school events
- Newsletters -- Current and past
- Restoration Rangers
- Photo Gallery site with ability to upload
- Bird List
- Plant List -- A link to our list housed at the Wild-flower Center

Jacob's Well web site: www.jacobswellspring.org

Blanco River flows into Barton Springs

Research by Nico Hauwert, a Ph.D. hydrogeologist employed by the City of Austin, undertaken during the 2008/2009 drought, led him to conclude that Blanco River flows may provide 50 to 100 percent of flows at Austin's Barton Springs during low flow conditions. This was a surprising finding. Fluorescent dye injected on the Blanco arrived at Barton Springs about three months later.

Hauwert, who is a neighbor of Barbara Attwell, says "This opens the door for us to conduct cooperative studies of Jacob's Well and share our interest in sustaining its flow."

Baker featured in Wimberley View

David Baker, winner in the "Individual Category" of the Texas Environmental Excellence Awards, was recognized for this honor with a large story and photo in the May 28 issue of the Wimberley View.

Volunteers enjoy special guided tour of Canyon Gorge



With Jamie Kinscherff as their guide, there was not one moment on the tour of Canyon Gorge that wasn't awe-inspiring. Jamie introduced Jacob's Well volunteers to a world rich with ancient history – dinosaur prints, waterfalls and seeps, rare plants, fossils,

and Caribbean-colored blue pools.

In a matter of weeks, in 2002, floodwaters had exposed a world that took a hundred million years to create. The canyon presented trekkers with the immensity of time, and brought each of us to the awareness that our individual lifetime amounted to a flash in the pan. Thanks to organizer Deb Bradshaw and to Jamie, the knowledge shared was hands-down inspiring.



Fresh Water

GBRA is installing a water quality kiosk at the Wimberley Community Center. It will give citizens the opportunity to access real-time water quality data for Cypress Creek. They are planning to hold a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Tuesday, June 7. The time has not yet been announced.



Put September 17 on your calendar!

Jacob's Well Grand Celebration

Jacob's Well and Hays County are in the planning phase for an event on September 17, 2011, to celebrate that the Jacob's Well Natural Area now belongs to the people of Hays County. We are excited about the event and hope that it will inspire the community to be good stewards of this vital part of our natural heritage.

Invited participating organizations are The Nature Conservancy, Hays County, and The River Systems Institute.

The afternoon will start with entertaining and educational family activities. Friends of the Well and JWNA Volunteers will be entertaining and educating the crowd with scavenger hunts, eco art, watershed models and games, and seed ball construction. Scuba Diver Gregg Tatum will be on hand with equipment and stories for people to marvel at.

The activities will be followed by a welcoming ceremony with speakers and a Native American Blessing of the Spring. The evening will end with two hours of fabulous music.

We expect at least 500 people to attend, and need everyone to join in to help. If you want to help in the initial planning, contact Linda Lang, lolang1@verizon.net. If you have any ideas for the name of the event, send them to Barbara Atwell, battwell@earthlink.net.

Around the Well

Painted Bunting

A member of the finch family, the Painted Bunting has been described as “the most gaudily colored American bird.” The male sports the bright colors, but the female is much plainer, with bright green above, paling to lemon-green below. Mature birds are about 5 ½ inches long.



Painted Buntings migrate to Mexico and Central America. When nesting, they construct a cup of grass, lined with animal hair, usually in a tangled mass of vines. They have 3-5 eggs, pale blue with brown markings. Both members of a pair build the nest and feed the young.

Its call is a loud, clear and varied warbling.

Dwarf Palmetto

Usually found in wet riparian areas, the Dwarf Palmetto (*Sabal minor*) is an understory palm that does not grow a trunk like other palms. This plant can be found alongside the backflow of the spring, on the ADA Trail side.

Dwarf palmetto has a dense cluster fan-shaped leaves, spiraling around the stem, that can spread to 6 feet in width.



The fruit is ½" wide, grows in loose clusters on the distal half of the long stalk, and ripens from green to lustrous black on a branched cluster shorter than the leaves.

The leaves spiral around the stem. They are circular in outline and are usually 2' to 3' across. They are deeply divided into many dagger-shaped segments. The leaf stems are about 2' to 3' long and sharply saw-toothed.

Want to find out more about the geology of the area? Check out *The Guidebook to the Geology of Travis County*, <http://lib.utexas.edu/geo/ggct/toc.html>.

Out and About

Water pact helps Galveston Bay

Houston will set aside a share of the city's treated wastewater for the benefit of Galveston Bay under the terms of a landmark deal between the city and five conservation groups.

The agreement, which is the first of its kind in Texas, ends years of debate over the fate of the water released from the city's treatment plants and into the streams and bayous that feed the bay. The fight pitted the needs of a growing metropolis against one of the most productive fisheries in the nation.

Under the deal, Houston will release at least 50 percent of its treated wastewater into the bay — unless under order from regulators or the courts to withhold more. The city will pipe its share directly from its treatment plants for municipal and industrial use.

Houston Mayor Annise Parker said the pact essentially secures the city's water supply late into the century without neglecting environmental needs.

“It's a matter of balancing those various needs rather than fighting,” Parker said. “We're doing the right thing for the city, and we're doing the right thing for the bay. It's possible to do both things at once.” (More information at Houston Chronicle site: www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/metropolitan/7463191.html)

Volunteers needed for visits by Summer Campers

The Austin Nature Center loves to share their knowledge of nature with young people. JW is hosting groups of 13 of ANC campers, aged 9-14, several times this summer.

They will arrive by bus at 10:30 and stay until 3:30, along with two counselors and a life guard. Our plans are to give them a tour in the morning while it is cool, back to Camp Jacob for lunch, water models and activities (similar to what we do for schools), and end with two hours swim time. As this is summer camp, the theme is relaxed and fun.

Want to help? We need two volunteers each day. Send an email to Barbara Attwell, battwell@earthlink.net. ANC Camp Website: <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/ansc/programs.htm>.

JW Visit Dates:

June 14
June 22
July 22
July 29
Aug. 9



Jeff Vasgaard demonstrates the aquifer model to school children.

Water Aid

Please sign up to be a Saturday Tour guide this summer. These tours are our main events throughout the summer months, along with the Austin Nature Summer Camps.

Interested in heading a Jacob's Well presence at the Wimberley 4th of July Parade? This is your chance to shine. Email Barbara Attwell, battwell@earthlink.net

Wish List

Needed:

* Volunteers to establish a bird list, an aquatic list and a mammal list. Meg English has just finished our plant list, which will be housed at the Wildflower Center.

* Funds for setting up the front room at Camp Jacob for use as an education center.



Contact: battwell@earthlink.net

A great web site on water resources

National Geographic Fresh Water, www.natgeo-greshwater.com has an interactive "Water Footprint Calculator" that lets you see how much water you are using and then gives you ideas on how to reduce it. There are also resources on Restoring Rivers and many other issues in water conservation.

JWNA Current Calendar - Spring/Summer 2011

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

Volunteer and Advanced Training Opportunities

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 17	Highland Lakes MN visit
June 22	Austin Nature Center Science Camps: "Caves and Life Underground"
July 4	Wimberley Parade
July 22	Austin Nature Center Science Camps: "Science Safari -General Science, Anything Goes"
July 29	Austin Nature Center Science Camps: "Water Conservation and Aquifers"
August 9	Austin Nature Center Science Camps: "Caves and Aquifers"
Sept. 17	Jacob's Well Celebration

