

# Prairie Periodical

Pines and Prairies Land Trust Newsletter

Fall 2020



*Great Blue Heron, photo by Joshua J. Cotten*

## Evolution of a Bird Nerd

BY MELANIE PAVLAS

I always thought of birders as super nerds that I would have nothing in common with (as I rolled my eyes). That was until I got my first job after completing my degree in environmental biology. I had no experience identifying birds, but a wildlife consulting firm was desperate to replace a birder mid-survey season so they took a chance on me.

I only had a couple weeks to binge study the local birds and I continued studying them as I conducted baseline bird surveys in cotton

fields in and around College Station. Despite having to get up before dawn and drive to remote fields in the dark, walking through cotton plants up to my armpits, getting the company truck stuck in the mud and nearly being sprayed by a dust cropper, I fell in love with birds and found myself birding on my days off as well.

During that first job surveying birds I was able to apply what I learned in college about birds being indicator species of environmental health. Birds are sensitive to changes in their ecosystems and will “tell” us when things

are changing – for the good or bad. Biologists can track changes in their ranges, diversity and numbers to learn about habitat degradation or improvement, effects of climate change and many other impacts to our world. Biologists and land managers can use birds as a tool for targeted habitat restoration as they are an “umbrella” species, meaning if you manage for native birds (or rare species in general), you manage for all species utilizing that ecosystem.

Birds are also a gateway to developing a

caring spirit for the land; I've witnessed it many times. After a landowner who had little interest in conservation is introduced to birding for the first time on his or her property, hearing their unique songs and studying their delicate features through binoculars, they can quickly evolve into a naturalist and teacher.

I think what makes birds so special- their unassuming stature, sweet songs and the incredible

details in their feathers, colors and physical features- really hits home with people. The amazing things birds can do (like fly nonstop across the Gulf) and still be so incredibly delicate make them superstars that can connect people from all generations, beliefs and socio-economic backgrounds.

Watching birds is something we can all do, even from inside our homes. We can find joy in feeding birds, watching them nest and rear their young, learning their

songs or simply sitting quietly and listening to them chat. Identifying birds by their songs and calls is like learning a new language, but to me is so important because you can hear many more birds than you'll ever see. Listening to birds singing is a whole other wonderful experience that for me, brings the same benefits as meditating. We can't wait to spread the joy of birding with our community through guided birding hikes which we hope to resume next spring!

A baby Barred Owl investigating its domain.



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# Remembering William "Alan" Jaeger

## A legacy of service and dedication to conservation

BY MELANIE PAVLAS

Pines and Prairies Land Trust has lost a longtime friend and advocate, Alan Jaeger. Alan served on our board for many years, including as Treasurer. I worked with Alan on finances my first years as Executive Director. And while this subject matter could bring out a grumpy side in both of us (I mean, who doesn't get grumpy over finances?!), he and I always valued each other and kept marching forward with mutual respect. What I valued most about



Alan was his friendship, caring heart and above all, his dedication to his wife, Vera, whom he loved and admired dearly. He also gave me a lot of honest advice about life that always pointed toward positivity. After retiring from the board, Alan kept in touch and checked in regularly. He was also dedicated to several other causes in his community and beyond. These characteristics made him one of the most honorable people I've known. His absence will be profound, but his legacy will continue.



# Notes From The Preserves

## Billig Ranch

Pines and Prairies Land Trust has completed a five year prairie restoration project on 145 acres at Billig Ranch with Partners for Fish and Wildlife. This entailed extensive removal of exotic grass ("improved grass") and nearly 900 pounds of native grass and wildflower seeds planted using a no-till seed drill to ensure a diverse prairie ecosystem. PPLT will continue to monitor and treat regrowth of exotic grasses over the next few years and use prescribed burning to maintain the prairie in the future.

## Yegua Knobs

This summer at Yegua Knobs Preserve, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) entomologists began the search for a rare bee. Botanists from UT Austin

are also studying the range expansion of *Croton heptalon*. For the second year in an ongoing study TPWD staff collected recordings of frogs and toads which identified eight unique species. YKP is now enrolled in the Houston Toad Safe Harbor Agreement with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. More info on this program to come!



TPWD entomologists collecting bees.

## Colorado River Refuge

The Texas Society of Professional Surveyors began surveying the Colorado River Refuge in June. This important task will help PPLT conserve the preserve more effectively and improve relations with neighbors. The survey is conducted entirely by volunteers- we can not thank them enough for their hard work during the hot summer months! The work, including boundary marking, will continue into the fall. If you have any questions or concerns please let us know.

Phase one reconstruction at the Two Bridges trailhead is complete, phase two is awaiting approval and cooler weather. Remember to stay on the roped pathway at this trailhead to prevent erosion.

## Show Your Support for PPLT

Pines and Prairies Land Trust appreciates all that you do to support our work and mission. Here are a few ways you can continue to help:

1. Become a *Prairie Partner* by setting up a recurring monthly donation on our website. This easy gift provides the reliable income we need to continue our important mission. Go to [www.pplt.org/donate](http://www.pplt.org/donate) to join this group of distinguished supporters.
2. Include Pines and Prairies Land Trust in your long term plans. Many PPLT supporters have included us in their wills, ensuring a lasting impact on Central Texas landscapes.
3. Volunteer at a First Saturday Service Day! These regular volunteer opportunities are back on after a summer off with added safety precautions. See [www.pplt.org/events](http://www.pplt.org/events) for more information.
4. Make a one time donation with the included envelope or on our website at [www.pplt.org/donate](http://www.pplt.org/donate). Consider donating in honor of a friend or loved one like Alan Jaeger.



Conservation  
News Inside!

Conservation Excellence



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The Colorado River Refuge remains open seven days a week, dawn to dusk.  
Explore three miles of hiking trails in Bastrop County!



**Our mission is  
to protect open  
space through  
land conservation,  
stewardship  
and community  
engagement.**

Serving Central Texas since 2001