



# El Llanero

The Newsletter of the Sibley Nature Center

Volume 1, Issue 1

## Phase I of the Sibley Nature Trail Improvements Funded

The \$630,500 Phase I of the Sibley Nature Trail Capital Improvements Project is fully funded. It was the intent of the Sibley board and staff to raise the total funds for Phase I of the total \$1,000,000 project by the end of fiscal year 2007 and we hit that mark at noon on December 31st. Construction will not happen before the plans are reviewed and passed by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in May of this year but the center is now free to concentrate on raising the remaining funds for Phase II. The cost of construction has forced us to increase funding for the entire project

to \$1,027,000 but we are confident that those funds are attainable.

The improvements include a new Teaching Pavilion that features a fire pit for evening programs, a Wildlife Feeding area complete with a glassed addition to the center's Learning Center overlooking the feeding area, an acequia (water feature), a windmill, new habitats, several gardens, a new entry into the center entitled "Icons of the Llano Estacado, new shelters with interpretive signage, and many, many new additions to the trail to enhance the visitor's enjoyment of the Sibley Nature Center.

If you are interested in donating to Phase II, please contact us at the center and we will acknowledge your gift immediately. Remember, all donations to the center are tax deductible and will contribute greatly to the center's ability to deliver programs.

If you find the time, come by and see the plans! We're excited about our future and we hope that you are too.

## Bug Camp

This summer Michael Nickell will hold "Bug Camp". Details have not been finalized. When Michael enthusiastically proposed the idea, Executive Director Burr Williams immediately approved the idea. For 14 years Williams held

such a summer camp, but during the last four years, Sibley has not held the camp as the Center reorganized and embarked on its substantial Llano Estacado room display project and began creating the Sibley website. In the May news-

letter we will reveal the details of the summer camp.

The camp is designed for 4th through 6th graders. The fee will be announced in the May newsletter.

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### Special points of interest:

- *Phase I fundraising for Nature Trail improvements successful!*
- *New programs at Sibley are planned for this summer*
- *Sibley Annual Meeting Planned for March 12th*
- *Sibley Website takes off!*

## New Programs

Sibley staff met with representatives of the High Sky Children's Ranch. Some of the students there will come to Sibley each week, beginning in March, and have a garden in the Junior Master Gardener compound. In March, Sibley staff will go to the Ranch and lay out a nature trail through their mesquite pastureland and hold a training session for High Sky staff on activities for the trail.

Recently Sibley staff did some "safety meetings" for oil companies. We created a Powerpoint program about the "emergency responses to wildlife dangers in the oilfield." For a fee, staff members traveled to Midkiff and near

San Angelo, as well as to a location in Midland. We are working to develop more contacts within the oil industry to continue this project.

The staff of the Eaton Hill Nature Sanctuary in Sonora, Texas visited the Sibley Nature Center and contracted us for a staff member to visit Sonora in April for a three day visit to help them develop more trail brochures and to give school programs, and to help them further develop other school programs.

As is normal during the winter months, school visitation slowed but the spring calendar is filling up rapidly. The teachers are excited about utilizing the

Sibley website for pre-visit activities. Sibley staff is praying for rain-the dry winter will diminish the numbers of insects and wildflowers along the trail.

The Sons of Confederate Veterans are planning a small living history event for April 18th along the trails of the Sibley Center for local school children.

On April 26th another trip to watch the lesser prairie chickens "boom" is planned. If you are interested, please call Burr at 684-6827 to sign up. The cost will be \$150. The 2008 Master Naturalists class will be going, as well as some guests from the Alpine area.

## Campfire After School Program

In January Campfire USA hired Kayla Perkins, a former San Angelo Nature Center employee, to head up their program at the Sibley Center every school-day afternoon. Kayla has done a superb job. The kids are outside almost every day doing some sort of project-from creating a bird feeder outside of the Llano Estacado room, to making rock chald and drawing on the sidewalk, to creating "trash cities" from the trash they pick up along the trails. Kayla is keeping a notebook of all the

activities she has the kids do, so future Campfire teachers will know what to do here at the Sibley Center. She is using Sibley's library for program development. (Ms. Perkins' husband will be going to medical school this fall, so we know we will lose her!) Ms. Perkins is also starting a small garden in the Junior Master Gardener compound for the Campfire kids, too.

***Remember to give us your email address if you haven't done so yet so that we can send you a full color copy of this newsletter!***

## Master Naturalists

The 2008 class of the Llano Estacado chapter of the Texas Master Naturalists began on January 5th with a two hour orientation. On January 19th the class explored the mesquite brushland habitat here at Sibley. Before the class, the students visited Sibley and other mesquite filled pastures with their digital cameras. The photoessay that resulted was selected for the State Master Naturalist website, so Master Naturalists all across the state have now seen the work of our local chapter. It also

serves as the January 2008 Virtual Trail on the Sibley website. There are some tremendous photographs of birds in it, so check it out! On February 23rd, the class went to the alkali soils habitat on a local ranch. In early March another photoessay will be uploaded of their work in that habitat. The group's photographic explorations of the habitats help the staff of the Sibley Center prepare teaching materials.

Chapter President Pat Hunter contacted the staff of the Sibley Nature Center about having the group build a new elevated walkway to the photography blind at the Sibley Pond. This winter the last few feet of the trail had been underwater, so we are all looking forward to "not getting our feet wet" in the future.

## The Sibley Nature Center Website ([www.sibleynaturecenter.org](http://www.sibleynaturecenter.org))

During the last three months the Sibley Nature Center Website's visitation has increased tremendously. For most of 2007 we averaged 13,000 page requests per month, but it is now averaging 19,000. Server requests, which count the loading of the images on the website went from 90,000 requests per month to an average of 150,000 per month. Over 1,400,000 server requests have occurred since January of 2007. During the last three months an average of 2,100 "distinct hosts" (or computers) log on each week, up from 1,300. A total of over 36,000 computers have now logged on to the site. Six thousand "new" com-

puters have logged on since January 1st.

Recent additions to the website (beyond the weekly column) have included a photoessay done by the Master Naturalists on the mesquite brushland habitat and a bird behavior phototessay. All of the introductions to the 8 major habitats have been added except for the "shallow soil" habitat, which will be uploaded by the first week in March. There is now 17 "Virtual Trails" to be found on the "About the Center" page, representing two full years of recording

what can be seen along the trail at the Sibley Center. We also have created a link for recording the development project on the website. When construction begins we will post photographs weekly of all of the new happenings.

## Permian Basin Outing Club

The outdoor club has been active already this year, taking trips to Big Bend National Park and Big Bend Ranch State Park in January and February. Upcoming trips include a rappelling trip to the Davis Mountains (jumping off of a 280 foot cliff backwards!?), a train trip in Chama, New Mexico, archeology in the panhandle and many other fun activities....one a month.

As a member of the Sibley Nature

Center, you can automatically become a member of the outdoor club simply by letting us know.....and at no extra cost; it is a dual membership! We produce a monthly "e-newsletter" with trip reports, meeting times and sites, and details on upcoming trips. The club presently has over 100 members (they don't all take each trip..thank goodness) and we grow each month. If you're interested in being a part of this group, call Richard at the Sibley Center and he will get you on the mailing list.

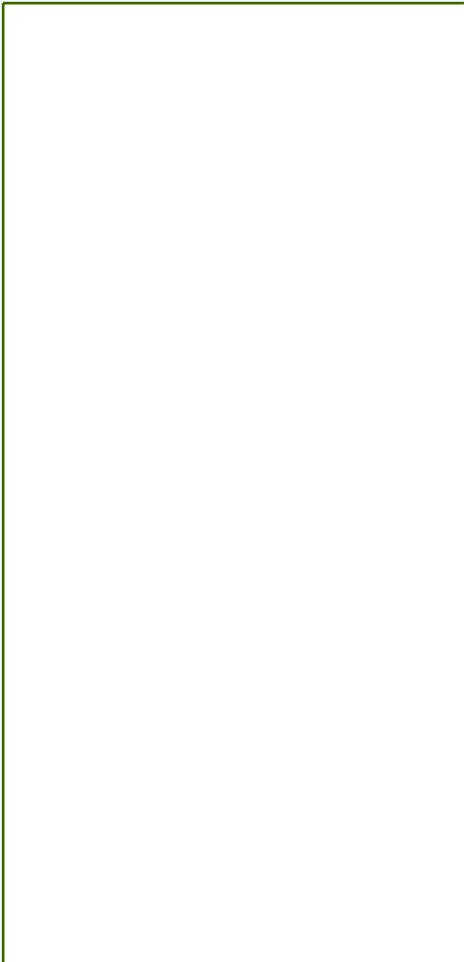
*For inclusion in the PBOC, call Richard at 684-6827 or email him at: [richard@sibleynaturecenter.org](mailto:richard@sibleynaturecenter.org)*

## Sibley Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting for the Sibley Nature Center will be held at the center on March the 12th at noon. A short program will provide information to our members regarding the state of the agency and future plans, programs, and services. Refreshments will be provided. This meeting is a nonprofit version of the "State of the Union" address and provides members with pertinent

information about their agency. We try to make it entertaining, as well. Please make plans to attend if you can. This is also a wonderful opportunity to bring a guest that might be interested in the programs and services of the center. Weather permitting this is a great time to take a walk on the NatureTrail after the meeting!





**The Sibley Nature Center**  
**1307 E. Wadley**  
**Midland, Texas**