

Sibley Nature Center

2008

Annual Report

## Programs and Operations

### **Sibley Website –**

The 2008 Sibley website, [www.sibleynaturecenter.org](http://www.sibleynaturecenter.org), garnered significant attention in the environmental education industry. The national *Orion Magazine* published a short interview with Sibley's Executive Director Burr Williams. Williams was quoted for an article on the No Child Left Inside Act and went to Washington D.C. on a trip paid for by the Texas Nature Conservancy to educate Texas politicians about funding needs for wildlife programs. He was also asked to speak about the website at the Borderlands Environmental Education Association Conference in Juarez, Mexico and at the annual meetings of the Texas Outdoor Education Association, the Texas Association of Environmental Educators and the New Mexico Association of Environmental Educators. Before the year was over, Williams was selected to speak at the World Environmental Education Conference in Montreal, Canada and to serve on a review committee for papers presented at the North American Association of Environmental Educators in Portland, Oregon. As an added feature of the Sibley website, the center staff now produces five newsletters that are emailed to designated recipients and then posted on the website. The El Despoblado e-newsletter focuses on the activities of naturalists in West Texas and Eastern New Mexico, the No Child Left Inside e-newsletter, going to 161 Midland Independent School District teachers, correlating place-based information with the new C/scope curriculum used by the district. The Texas Trails e-newsletter investigates the history of the region bounded by Midland and Del Rio and west to the Pecos River. It is disbursed to chambers of commerce, Main Street offices, and historical organizations in the region and is part of the "Trails" program by the Texas Historical Commission. Finally, the website features Sibley's quarterly center newsletter, the El Llanero and the center's monthly outdoor club newsletter Trails. At the end of 2008, plans were being made to begin posting video on the website utilizing YouTube and a "Kids Corner" initially using digital jigsaw puzzles of nature scenes for kids to solve and a "morphing" program for children to find hidden animals in their natural habitat. Over one hundred and fifty essays by local naturalist JoAnn Merritt have been added to the website. Volunteers have been scanning 35 years of monthly essays (possibly as many as 700) by the late pioneer West Texas ornithologist Frances Williams who wrote on all aspects of West Texas ecology. These essays will be added to the website in 2009. Finally, the Sibley Nature Trail's virtual trail will be enhanced by 360 degree panoramas, which are currently being created.

Around 1,000 pages of the website are downloaded daily with peaks as high as 10,000 pages in one day. One photo essay received over 5,000 hits. Numerous emails, as many as 30 a day have been generated from as far away as Europe and Australia regarding articles posted on the website. The Sibley Nature Center website is now linked to over 300 other websites including the Southern Nature Writers website.

### **Master Naturalists –**

Executive Director Burr Williams became the instructor for most of the classes for the Llano Estacado Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist program in 2008. Eight field trips to each of the major habitats of the region were taken. Students also visited each habitat on their own where they were instructed to photograph what they saw. This produced almost 10,000

photographs that were eventually processed into 23 photo essays for the Sibley website. The Texas Parks and Wildlife agency trained Master Naturalists techniques to take DNA samples of horned lizards. In addition, the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center trained the group and Sibley members in seed collection for the Millennium Seed Project begun by the Kew Gardens (in England). This led to the Sibley Nature Center becoming an affiliate of the Wildflower Center. The group also volunteered to man the Sibley Nature Center on Saturdays to provide additional visitation opportunities to the public.

### **Teacher Training –**

In 2008, the Sibley Nature Center staff (with help from other educators in the region) produced two teacher trainings for the Region 18 Education Service Center. A two-day program at the Mott Creek Ranch in Motley County had 9 participants. A one-day training was held at the center for over 60 teachers of the Gifted and Talented. The overwhelming success of these two events has led to 8 training events being planned for 2009.

### **Outreach –**

Outreach to smaller school districts became a priority in 2008. A teacher and an administrator from Tahoka (Region 17 Education Service Center) attended the Mott Creek workshop and later contacted Burr Williams regarding the development of the Tahoka Lake and its historic and ecological significance. A program was also provided to the Tahoka Middle School horticulture class. Burr was also asked to serve on an advisory board for the eventual creation of a nonprofit to oversee the lake. Another participant of the Mott Creek workshop invited Sibley staff to Fort Stockton for field investigations of the creosote bush habitat bordering their school. Field investigations were also held for the Forsan Middle Schools and the Rankin High School science students created a nature trail behind their school. The Andrews Middle school consulted with Sibley staff about the creation of a Xeriscape/ethnobotany garden at the Andrews Middle School. Instruction was given to students from Garden Ciy, Odessa's Jordan Elementary and their gifted and talented summer camp, Andrews home schoolers, Lovington, New Mexico, Big Lake, Elbow, Whiteface, and Sundown and the Sibley staff worked closely with the Eaton Hill Preserve in Sonora, training them both in strategic planning and educational programming.

### **In-House Programming –**

Two small-scale programming initiatives had mixed results. A Summer Bug Camp, led by staff Michael Nickell, had four week long sessions and 25 students producing over 300 specimens for the new Sibley Invertebrate collection. In addition, the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute gave a series of four lectures over the year at the center. Only one of their programs reached levels of over 30 people.

Midland schools receiving instruction included Lee High School, Midland High School, Lee Freshman High School, De Zavala, Santa Rita, Scharbaeur, Washington, Houston, Bunche, Crockett, Bonham, Bush, Ben Milam, Fannin, Jane Long, and the Carver Gifted and Talented school. Private schools included Grace Lutheran preschool, St. Ann's, St. John's of Odessa, First Presbyterian preschool, and the HiSky Children's Ranch. Several home school groups also attended as did the child care services Envirokids, Peppermint Plantation, Campfire, and the YMCA.

### **Civic Groups –**

Civic groups receiving programs were the Sierra Club, Society of Petroleum Engineers, Petroleum Museum members, Awanas Baptist youth group, Kiwana's, Chevron and Mobile retiree groups, Manor Park residents, Boy Scout and Girl Scout groups in both Midland and Odessa, the Mustang Draw woodturners, and the Association of Energy Companies and the Midland City Council. Out of town civic groups included were the Native Prairies Association at a meeting in Colorado City, the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute near Fort Davis, the Ector County Library, Stanton retirees, the Texas Holistic Ranch Management Association near Sweetwater, the science club of the College of the Southwest in Hobbs, the San Angelo and Big Spring Garden Clubs. Burr Williams serves on the board of directors of the Texas Pecos Trail Association of the Texas Historical Commission and networked with city leaders during board meetings in Sonora, Ozona, Fort Stockton, Pecos, and Monahans.

### **Other Programming –**

Another significant initiative for the Sibley Nature Center in 2008 was the Sibley Nature Center's greenhouse and plant sales. The sales grossed over \$10,000 and increased attendance to the facility as well. Over 400 people purchased plants and over 30 new Sibley members were acquired by offering a "Plant Buyer's Club" wherein members received pre-sale notifications and were afforded the opportunity to pre-order plants at a member discount. Another spin-off of the greenhouse program was the formation of a Plant Propagation group. Over 20 members helped staffer Mark Webb propagate plants and took these plants home for their own landscaping. Most of these plants will be available for purchase by the public in 2009.

The Permian Basin Outing club, an affiliate program of the Sibley Nature Center, continued to take monthly trips throughout Texas and eastern New Mexico. The group participates in high adventure programming such as caving, climbing, canoeing/kayaking, backpacking, and other outdoor adventures. The club also provides a monthly e-newsletter and includes a dual membership to the Sibley Nature Center.

### **User Groups –**

The Sibley Nature Center continued providing housing for many user groups in 2008. These groups included the Midland Archeological Society, the Midland Naturalists, the local chapter of the Master Naturalists, the Midland Gem and Mineral Society, the urban 4-H group, the Comanche Trail Woodcarvers, the Master Gardeners, the Desert Bloomers of the Junior Master Gardeners, the Farm Service Agency public and regional staff meetings, and the Environmental Professionals Association. The Region 18 Education Service Center also presented one training at Sibley. The Permian Basin Speleological Society held its annual regional meeting at Sibley, as well.

### **Volunteerism –**

The Volunteer Program at Sibley continues to grow. The center began opening on Saturdays in 2008 with the help of the Master Naturalist program volunteers. Help with plant propagation and the plant sales was also afforded by the Master Naturalist group. Library work, clerical work, newsletter collation, transcription and scanning of existing document, trail cleaning and

maintenance, fence building, and untold hours of volunteer service by the Sibley Board of Directors all contributed to the success of the Sibley Nature Center in 2008. Over 1,400 hours of volunteer service was logged in 2008.

### **Marketing –**

Media outreach continued in 2008 through 50 columns printed in the Midland Reporter Telegram. Several small town newspapers reprinted MRT articles as did the Old Sorehead Gazette in Stanton. Sibley staff appeared on television eight times and at least once on the radio. Articles by Sibley staff appeared in several environmental education association newsletters. Several civic group newsletters also reprinted MRT articles including the Texas Range Management Society. Sibley staffers were interviewed by the Odessa American newspaper twice. The Sibley Nature Center spent a small amount of funds on paid advertising as well by placing an ad on a website devoted to West Texas Tourism and with a company that produces maps featuring tourism. Two travel industry publications also devoted some space to the Sibley Nature Center in their annual brochures and the center provided pamphlets for the visitors center located at the city's entrance on Interstate 20.

### **Facility Improvements –**

Over one million dollars was raised for the new Sibley Nature Center Nature Trail Capital Improvements project through a \$500,000 matching fund provided by the State of Texas and through many donations by foundations, companies, and individuals. Construction of the project should begin in the spring of 2009.

Two other major projects have altered the appearance of the main lobby at the center. Additional artwork and interpretive panels were added to the Phytosaur skull display. Three more geological displays were added as well—two are collections of fossils of the Triassic and Cretaceous eras, and a third display in an interactive fossil display. With the donation of a buffalo hide and other skins, a “please touch” table was added along with new interpretive panels. Curator Michael Nickell has also redeployed a number of the mounted animals and is planning to add more interpretation and stand-alone displays.

The Sibley Gift Store was completed in 2008 with new counters and many new items for sale including science instruments, toys, books, posters, and apparel.

### **Membership –**

The Sibley Nature Center enjoys the continued support of well over 300 members. This number has risen dramatically from just under 100 members two years ago. Counting group memberships the number could be well over 500 members.

### **Board of Directors and Staffing –**

The Sibley Nature center is staffed by Executive Director Burr Williams, Director of Operations Richard Galle, Curator and Museum Specialist Michael Nickell, and Horticulturalist Mark Webb. Webmaster Eric Siegmund continues his sterling performance in maintaining the Sibley website.

The Sibley Nature Center Board of Directors include Board President Jan Artley, Board Vice President Tom Johnson, Board Treasurer Travis Durham, and Board Secretary Mary Anne Dingus. Other board members include Chuck Henderson, Mark Nicholas, Frank Cahoon, Wallace Craig, David Crum, David Eyster, and new 2008 board members Marc Maddox and Jeff Smith.

Sibley Nature Center  
Balance Sheet  
As of January 1, 2009

	<u>Jan 1, 09</u>
<b>ASSETS</b>	
<b>Current Assets</b>	
Checking/Savings	
Petty Cash	713.33
TexStar Bank	
Greathouse Fund	1,926.41
Hispanic Library	612.50
Permian Basin Area Foundation	19.61
Two Bros. - Special Event	124.34
TexStar Bank - Other	14,899.01
<b>Total TexStar Bank</b>	<u>17,581.87</u>
TexStar Certificate of Deposit	41,878.27
TexStar Money Market Account	397,019.99
<b>Total Checking/Savings</b>	<u>457,193.46</u>
<b>Other Current Assets</b>	
Money Market Account - Ops	112,599.24
<b>Total Other Current Assets</b>	<u>112,599.24</u>
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	569,792.70
<b>Fixed Assets</b>	
Camping equipment	5,258.39
Computer Equipment	6,339.19
Furniture and equipment	6,252.83
<b>Total Fixed Assets</b>	<u>17,850.41</u>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<u><u>587,643.11</u></u>
<b>LIABILITIES &amp; EQUITY</b>	
<b>Liabilities</b>	
<b>Current Liabilities</b>	
Other Current Liabilities	
Payroll Liabilities	1,010.92
Sales Tax Payable	71.00
<b>Total Other Current Liabilities</b>	<u>1,081.92</u>
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	<u>1,081.92</u>
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	1,081.92
<b>Equity</b>	
Retained Earnings	586,561.19
<b>Total Equity</b>	<u>586,561.19</u>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES &amp; EQUITY</b>	<u><u>587,643.11</u></u>