

El Llanero

Special points of interest:

- Come to Sibley this Summer!
- Sibley now open on Saturdays
- Clubs of Sibley
- Wildfires!

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Sibley Summer

Are you elderly? Even if you are handicapped and live in an assisted living facility, you can come to Sibley each Friday at 9 a.m. for a guided walk along Sibley's Nature Trail. Sibley owns a multi-passenger cart, donated by ConocoPhillips for anyone that is unable to walk the entire trail. Join Burr Williams or Michael Nickell for a talk on the flora and fauna of our trail! Every walk/ride is different! Call 684-6827 to reserve a seat. We also have *family walks* along the Nature Trail every Monday at 9 a.m. during the school year. The kids always have a chance to taste a wild plant, catch a baby horny toad or investigate a bird's nest!

A number of members have joined us for "*Gardening with Burr*" every Monday at 10:30 a.m. We spend a lot of our time talking about the plants, the birds and insects that come to the gardens but we have also planted plants, pruned trees, pulled weeds, potted up seedlings, and planted seeds. When we transplant plants, you get to take some home!

Michael Nickell's *Bug Camp* is being offered again this summer. The camp will run for one week in June, one week in July, and one week in August. Camp is held from 9 a.m. to noon Monday through Thursday each

week of the camp. Kids "graduate" from the camp with a certification for having successfully attending the camp. Children going into grades 4 through 6 are welcome. Participants will collect insects, watch PowerPoint presentations in the Sibley Auditorium, and wander the Nature Trail. The camp fee is \$80 for non-Sibley members and \$50 for Sibley members. Call Michael at 684-6827 to enroll your kids.

Michael Nickell is also offering *art classes* on Saturdays for ages 14 to adult. Class fees are \$80 for non-Sibley members and \$50 for Sibley members. Check the Sibley Nature Center website at:

www.sibleynaturecenter.org for more details.

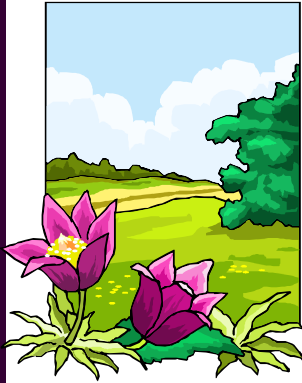
The *Llano Estacado Chapter of the Master Naturalists* will take a field trip in June and will have citizen science training programs in July and August. Adults are welcome to come check out the Master Naturalist program. The group often goes to private ranches that few people get to see! Call Burr for more details.

On the last Monday in June, June 27th, we will have another *Brown Bag Luncheon*. We hope to have a program from the

Texas Forest Service about wildfire—firefighting is a complex endeavor and the mechanics of wildfire are fascinating.

During the summer, the staff at Sibley will be working with the Gifted and Talented students of Ector County Independent School District for a couple of weeks, as well. We also have a teacher training scheduled and we still have openings for day care facilities to set up the summertime visits too—be sure to tell your day care to call us. The kids hear a story or two and then go out on the trail for a scavenger hunt.

Finally, the Permian Basin Outing Club is planning a May trip to Pandale Crossing for canoe/kayaking, will be traveling to Palo Duro State Park in June to day hike and see the play "Texas", travel to Davis Mountains Preserve in July to day hike and climb the second highest mountain in the range, and go to the Summer Mummies (for a summer break) in August and a trip to Enchanted Rock for climbing, day hiking and rappelling in September. The club takes trips every month to different destinations and "high adventure" venues. Call Richard Galle at Sibley if you have an interest in any of these trips.



Facebook

Join Burr Williams Facebook page where Burr posts 1 to 2 posts and several photos every day. The subject matter concentrates on West Texas. With permission, we might use some of your photos for the Facebook page and on the Sibley website. We publish two newsletters weekly so request to be put on our email list! One newsletter is about the flora and fauna found wild in the urban environment: "This Week in the Llano Estacado" and the other newsletter lets you know what

is happening at the Sibley Nature Center the following week: "La Comancheria—This Week at the Sibley Nature Center." Send an email to Burr at:

bwilliams@sibleynaturecenter.org to sign up for these publications.



***"In Summer,
the song sings
itself." -
William Carlos
Williams***

Sibley open on Saturdays

In an effort to better serve the public (and for those of you that can't take off work at will!), the Sibley Nature Center will begin opening on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The staff at Sibley is small in numbers and many times we are "off campus" doing Sibley work and can't be two places at the same time. However, we do have a cadre of volunteers that have taken training regarding the operation of the Center and

have generously volunteered their time and talents to making the Center available to those of you that cannot otherwise make it to the facility. Of course, Sibley's Nature Trail is open for visits any day and at any hour, but we have much to see in the building facility and we want to make that available, as well. Saturday hours have already taken effect so we invite you to come see us on the weekends!

We also welcome any suggestions that you might have for programs and services. We have diversified our programs and services greatly over the past several years but claim no market on new ideas that you might have. We will make every effort to accommodate your wishes if it is within our capacity to do so!

Sibley's Outdoor Club and Camera Club



Brandon and Richard "jonesing" for new outdoor club members at the recent Outdoor Expo— picture by Jan Artley

We've mentioned it before but allow us to mention it again: As a member of the Sibley Nature Center, you are entitled, at no additional cost, to become a member of the Permian Basin Outing Club and the Sibley Camera Club. The outdoor club plans and takes "outdoor adventure" trips every month of the year except the rare "in town" event and the annual December Christmas party. Trip "themes" include backpacking,

climbing, caving, canoe/kayaking, and many other activities that should satisfy the tastes of anybody. We make every attempt to make each trip accessible to everyone regardless of age or abilities. Our members age from 3 to 80 and there are singles, families, and the occasional "old curmudgeon." Call Richard Galle at Sibley for additional information or to join.

The Sibley Camera Club is

about a year old now and has many members. The club consists of "Pros" to people that have just bought their camera and aren't sure how to turn it on! The club meets the second Thursday of every month at 6 p.m. here at Sibley. Call Richard at Sibley if you need more information and/or wish to be placed on the mailing list for upcoming events and meetings.

The Year of the Wildfire! - Burr Williams

The Kwerkenuh (an old name the Nemeneh used for themselves, since "Comanche" means "enemy" in Pawnee) were no fools. Buffalo medicine is the art of knowing the very best time to set a fire to get the grass green quickly, magically drawing the buffalo close for a successful spring hunt.

Lightning from the irregular spring thunderstorms would also catch the prairie on fire and the insistent southwest winds herded the fire for days. Flaring up during windy days and slowing to a smolder on calmer nights, the fires burned for miles until stopped by the rocky country of the breaks or a draw with lush green winter grass that snuffed the flames quiet. For a hundred miles, or two hundred, or even three, the fire rode the will of the winds. Afterward, remnants of winter moisture fed quick growth; within two weeks a blackened prairie became green.

Knowing that fire meant food, buffalo turn and walk towards thunderstorms climbing fifty thousand feet into the sky, or turn into winds laden with the

scent of old and traveled grass smoke. Shamans shaking rattles and singing songs, tossing special herbs into the breeze; it was not superstition, but sophisticated ecological understanding dressed up as a pageant.

The landscape of Central and West Texas has become mostly covered with mesquite, juniper, and other species of brush since the days of the Indians. In the past one hundred and fifty years, species of woody trees and shrubs have increased a thousand fold. Fires today burn wooden fence posts, houses, barns, and sometimes livestock, so we seek to put fires out as soon as possible. The fires of 2011 are a reminder of the past.

"This is the worst year ever for wildfires!" Landowners, oil field personnel, and many others have commented on the multitude of fires in the rural landscape during the first five months of 2011. A number of people have asked the staff of the Sibley Nature Center for an explanation. Part of the answer is obvious; much of last year's above average rainfall came during the warmer

months when grasses grow fastest. We have had other wet years before (especially during the 1980s), so why are there more fires this year?

In the last twenty years a couple of things have changed. Fewer landowners "optimize the forage potential" of their land. Very few landowners rely on livestock production as their primary source of income. Ranches are lightly stocked for the most part. Many ranchers have absentee ownership, more interested in their property's hunting potential. The other major change is the increase in population in the region. Midland County, for example, has almost 40,000 more people than in the 1980s. In a number of areas in West Texas there is considerably more oilfield activity. Not everybody is as careful as old timers are in their efforts to prevent wildfire. Some people are downright ignorant.

Come to the Brown Bag Luncheon the last Monday in June and learn more!



***I will be the
gladdest thing
under the sun. I
will touch a
hundred
flowers and
not pick one. -
Edna St. Vincent
Millay***



EL LLANERO

**THE NEWSLETTER
OF THE SIBLEY
NATURE CENTER**

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**We're on the web at:
www.sibleynaturecenter.org**

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