



Friends of Guadalupe River Honey Creek, Inc.

A non-profit organization

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Superintendent's Corner

by Duncan G. Muckelroy

Rain, Rain, go away, come again, another day! On Saturday, October 17, the park and virtually all of Comal County received over fourteen and one-half inches of rain between 4:00 a.m. and noon. Most roads in the area were impassable by mid-morning. At daylight the Walk-in Tent Camping area (sites 86 thru 105) were evacuated as a precautionary measure. Although the road to the Walk-In Tent Camping area was not rendered impassable due to flood waters, it was a "close call". Fortunately, heavy rainfall did not occur up river from the park, consequently flooding due to a high rise of the river did not occur at the locations of the park. Of course, everyone is aware of the flood waters that caused the horrendous destruction down river from the park. On Sunday morning, October 18, it rained an additional seven inches at the park, which compounded the devastation down river from the park.

Understandably, the Volksmarch sponsored by the Friends of Guadalupe /Honey Creek had to be "canceled" due to area flooding on October 17 and 18. All of the hard work that was invested in the planning and preparation for the Volksmarch resulted in naught. However, let's also count our blessings as we were indeed blessed at the park with no major damage to property and most importantly no loss of life or personal injury.

Operationally the big news at this facility is as of Wednesday, November 4, we "went live" on our Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Computerized System. Although this somewhat panics me, everyone else in the office has a big smile on their face. In addition, to the reservation system at the park being computerized, the operational aspects of almost every park administrative activity is now "paperless". For example, all financial transactions and routine office transactions are now accomplished entirely by use of our computers. All this computer generated activity is occurring just before I was beginning to feel comfortable with a fax machine in the next office.

The most rewarding and exciting event scheduled on the horizon is our Outdoor Educational classroom. Once again the Friends Organization is planning to reach out and bring every sixth grade student in the Comal Independent School District to the Honey Creek State Natural Area for a full day of outdoor classroom activities. Weather permitting, an estimated 800 students will benefit from this educational program. Hopefully, the support of volunteer instructors will meet this tremendous challenge as they have in past years.

Wishing everyone a safe and happy holiday season!

Volunteer Appeal for 1999 Honey Creek Outdoor Classroom Education Program

May of 1999 will be our third year to offer free of cost a curriculum based hands on outdoor classroom for Comal County 6th graders. We have many positions open for volunteers who would like to help with this enjoyable program.

We need volunteers that will facilitate and teach students at each of the activity stations. The program will begin at the end of April (schedule to be determined) and run through May 1999. About 800 6th grade children from Comal I.S.D. will attend the program. This year we are expanding the program to include New Braunfels I.S.D. 6th graders and other local children in the Fall of 1999.

Volunteers will be trained during March and April for the Spring session. Requirements for volunteers:

1. A love of nature and the outdoors
2. The ability to work with children
3. Be available to volunteer from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. two or more days per week (Monday - Friday), for six weeks beginning at the end of April 1999.

Your help will make it possible to continue offering this program to comal county school children who otherwise would not be able to participate in an outdoor environmental program. This is the only such program in our area and is conveniently offered to the children through the Intermediate schools as part of their school day. It is environmental education that leads to an appreciation and protection through wise and ethical use of our beautiful natural resources like Honey Creek Canyon.

Please contact Penny Solis at (830) 935-4011 for more information.

Membership Renewal Time Again!

All newsletter memberships renew January of each year. We hope you will renew your membership for 1999. Your dues help support the Honey Creek Classroom, Earth Day, student community service projects, scout environmental projects and more!

Dues are painless at \$8.00 for an individual membership, but all donation levels are tax deductible!



News from Churchill H.S.

Monarch Watch Fall '98 Results. This Fall brought a nice, long lasting migration of Butterflies to our area and Guadalupe River State Park. The Churchill ECHO students faithfully manned the nets and stations on Saturday mornings and were able to tag a respectable number of Monarch Butterflies. The students are going to help design handouts for visitors to our program with complete information about why we are tagging the Monarchs and how they can contact The Texas Monarch Watch to become involved too.

This Fall, I was recruited to help in a production of a radio program on the tagging of Monarchs in Central Texas. Scott Laningham from Austin was given my name by the Texas Monarch Watch and we enlisted the help of a fourth grade class at Mountain Valley Elementary School to be tape recorded for a radio program that will air eventually on the CBS, Osgood Files, plus the kids got some great local coverage by the Canyon Lake Times Guardian newspaper.



Open Sesame

How does a Cardinal open sunflower seeds so easily?

This winter as we enjoy our favorite armchair pastime - watching the birds eat at our feeders. Here's a little trivia about how they so skillfully open sunflower seeds. This article is about the Cardinal but house finches, and many other winter guests like the gold finches share this interesting skill. The Cardinal's nutcracker-like bill, strong jaw muscles, and tongue work together. The seed

lodges in a groove on one side of the upper bill while the lower bill's sharp edge cracks off half its hull. Then the Cardinal shifts the seed to the groove on the other side of its bill and cracks off the other half of the hull.



Northern Cardinal

You can watch a sunflower seed move around a cardinal's bill like a can going around a can opener, with hull falling off on each side. Neat, nifty, and fast - like supper from a can!

If you have your own bird feeder or have been where there is a feeder in use, it's likely that you saw one of its most popular visitors, the Northern Cardinal. The male cardinal's bright red plumage is certainly a standout; he is often one of the first birds that a beginner identifies. Cardinals are particularly fond of sunflower seeds, and

their handling of them is impressive. But there is more to that than just large size and strong jaw muscles; the bill's biting surfaces are specially modified for cracking seeds, which explains the speed with which cardinals hull one of their favorite foods.

Many of the birds that come to our feeders, including the Northern Cardinal, goldfinches, sparrows, and House Finches, are members of the finch family, the Fringillidae (frin-JILL-ih-dee). This largest family of North American birds contains about 83 species, including some of our better songsters. In general, the finches have cone-shaped, strong bills, with an angled cutting edge adapted for seed-cracking, although they do eat a variety of other foods, including many insects and wild fruits. Percentages differ,

cross section of bill showing removal of sunflower hulls



depending upon whom and how one asks, but the fact remains that a very large number of people all across the continent feed birds. It has only been since the 1930's that bird feeding has become a popular pastime, complete with specialized equipment. "Feeding" birds may run the gamut from throwing scraps onto the snow to placing elaborate bird feeders in strategic places around the yard, with special foods to attract specific kinds of birds. It is widely accepted that bird feeding has affected bird populations, but to what degree and in what manner is not so easily agreed upon. Does it make them dependent or not? Except for really weak individuals, birds do not appear to depend on bird feeders, nor do they seem to forget how to find their own natural foods. Birds are simply quick to take advantage of any easy food source. If you stop feeding them, they will go to other bird feeders or rely on wild foods entirely. The high mobility of birds is a real asset; when the need arises, they have no problem going elsewhere. No matter what the birds gain from visiting your feeder, it's clear what you gain - a great deal of pleasure!

Honey Creek Canyon Walks

Every Saturday morning at 9:00 a.m. this winter join us at the Rust House for a beautiful hike along Honey Creek Canyon. An interpretive guide will talk about the geology and cultural history of the area.

The Stargazing Tips and Christmas Trivia



Blue Moon. The sky is full of wonders every night of the week. Use Star Date Online at www.stardate.utexas.edu to keep up with the latest stargazing tips.

There will be two Blue Moons in 1999. The first dates are January 1 and 31. The second occurrence will be March 2 and 31. The term Blue Moon refers to an event of infrequent occurrence. On the average there is a blue moon every 2.72 years, so two Blue Moons in the same year is quite a treat. It's unusual to have two full moons in the same month because the moons cycle is 29 days from new to full.

The second full moon of the month is on January 31. When two full moons occur in the same month, the second is referred to as a "blue moon." January's blue moon also undergoes a rather unusual total penumbral eclipse.

This event comes near the time of Earth's perihelion to the sun on January 3 -- a time when the umbra is at its smallest and the penumbra is at its largest. Only 1.2 percent of the 10,936 lunar eclipses in 45 centuries are total penumbral eclipses. Alas, The eclipse is visible only from the extreme western portions of the United States and Canada.

Saturnalia. Astronomical events have long played crucial roles in human events. The positions of the Sun and stars dictated planting and harvest seasons. Unusual events, like comets, were considered omens of good or evil. And many of our modern celebrations evolved from ancient festivals that coincided with events in the sky.

One long-ago celebration that plays a role in our modern lives is Saturnalia, a Roman festival that began on December 17th and continued through the winter solstice -- the shortest day of the year in the northern hemisphere.

Saturnalia honored Saturn, the Roman god of agriculture. In the beginning, the festival celebrated the end of the autumn harvest and the beginning of the winter planting. But it soon lost its agricultural significance, and became simply a week-long period of

gift giving and feasting.

The most interesting aspect of Saturnalia was its topsy-turvy social structure. During the festival, slaves were allowed to move freely, and were even served by their owners. And the Roman army wasn't allowed to start any hostilities during Saturnalia.

Several present-day Christmas customs -- such as the use of holly branches -- evolved from Saturnalia. In fact, the early Christian Church may have adopted December 25th as the date for Christmas to counteract the effects of Saturnalia and other ancient festivals.

Orion and the three wise men. Three stars represent the wise men on their journey to Bethlehem. The stars form the belt of Orion, one of the brightest and most familiar constellations. To find Orion, look toward the south on winter evenings. In particular, look for three stars aligned in a short, straight row. The stars are Alnitak, Alnilam, and Mintaka.



Mystic Mistletoe. Mistletoe's symbolism dates back to pagan ceremonies which hailed its ability to produce fruit in winter.

The Gauls of pre-Roman Britain ascribed great significance to mistletoe, although it may have been much earlier that this unusual plant gained its special status. The Gauls believed that mistletoe was sent down from heaven -- a reasonable assumption, since it clearly didn't grow from the ground up! -- Druid priests would cut mistletoe from a tree using a golden sickle, then use it to encourage fertility and cure all manner of illnesses. In fact, small doses of mistletoe have been used to help control spasms but large doses can actually cause convulsions. A kiss under mistletoe signaled an end of enmity. According to what historians have been able to piece together, it was not until the 1600's that mistletoe became a part of the English Christmas tradition. It became traditional to demand a kiss under mistletoe, plucking a berry for each kiss. When the berries were gone, the mistletoe lost its power.



Membership Application

Friends of Guadalupe River/Honey Creek, Inc., Membership Application *Dues are annual and renew each January. Dues paid after June 30th of each year are prorated at half of the full membership fees.* Make check payable to: Friends of GR/HC, Inc., 3350 Park Rd. 31, Spring Branch, TX 78070. \$5.00 Classroom: students or youth organizations ages up to 18. \$5.00 Student: Age 13 to 18 \$8.00 Individual: Adult over 18 \$12.00 Family \$50.00 Supporting \$100.00 Sustaining \$500.00 Corporate \$1,000.00 Life

Date **Name** Renewal New Membership

Street, City, State & Zip

Phone: home, Optional: e-mail, work, fax

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