



FRIENDS

OF GUADALUPE RIVER STATE PARK
HONEY CREEK SNA



SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2025

A Message from the President

by Bob Morris

Howdy Folks,

The Friends have had a busy spring, and to all of our donors and volunteers who supported our endeavors, I wish to thank you. Without your assistance the Friends Group would not be successful.

I was privileged to lead the Mother's Day Walk down to Honey Creek along with my guide partner, Mary Habib. It was fab, bar none! Actually, Mary was doing the leading and I was the caboose just to make sure no one got lost, For Mary's reflections, on the walk, see p. 7.

We had thirty-one participants: twenty adults and eleven children. This was the greatest number of participants during my tenure as a Board Member. Hats off to Jessica Bergner, TPWD Resource Specialist who planned this event.

Every participant was given a wildflower brochure which was created by Craig Hensley, former Park Interpreter.

So this was a cool part of my experience: I am behind two mothers who have three little girls, probably between ages six and seven. They stop at every flower and open the brochure and attempt to identify them. They were not always right but pretty darn close. I marveled at their degree of interest.

When we arrived at Honey Creek, everyone had the opportunity to see a water moccasin swimming to the opposite bank and nestling in amongst some cypress knees. All phones and cameras came out to take pictures.

The walk included some serious bird watchers. One mother heard a Golden-cheeked Warbler and got a pretty good snap of a male.

I was pleased to receive this remark posted on our Facebook page: "Hi just wanted to say thank you for the wonderful Mother's Day hike! It was beautiful & Mary and Bob were excellent guides. The pastries, cards and mimosas were such a nice addition." Now while Mary and I appreciate the praise, we did next to nothing... **Mother Nature** was fully in charge.

Stay Cool & Hydrated!

Bob

From the Superintendent's Desk

by Brandon Lopes-Baca

Hello Park Friends!

I can't believe we are approaching the last quarter of our Fiscal Year. It still feels like we just started.

The Park has enjoyed the rainfall as of these last couple months, and we certainly hope it continues. The Hill Country is still in extreme drought, and it's getting hotter outside. So please be ready and careful when coming to enjoy the Park. Always be sure to check any Park alerts and other communication via our websites prior to coming out. As the Friends' President Bob reminds us, stay hydrated!

We continue our efforts to become fully staffed and are in the process of hiring three more team members! During the last quarter, we hired our new Operations Trainee, Evan Clites. We "stole" Evan from Cedar Hill SP, and he is off to the races in his new role as he continues his journey to possibly becoming a Park Manager in the future. We also hired Nicolette Gale as our Assistant Office Manager. She came to us via Blanco SP via a "trade." This time – we "stole" from each other! Both Nicolette and Evan are doing amazing jobs for the team!

As always, there is plenty of work to do in the Park and SNA. We've had some really great events throughout the year and continue to develop and execute more as the team grows. We are always thankful for the many volunteers who help support us!

I'd like to take a moment to shout out and be thankful for one of the many volunteer scenarios that really makes us smile. Former Park Manager, Joel Parker, and his family came out to the park on Mother's Day to pick up trash along the river for service hours. WOW – they did an amazing job (unfortunately) filling up multiple bags.

Little things such as that show a lot of care and dedication to our mission statement and core values, and we appreciate you all!

Please be safe and courteous of others when visiting the park. Please ensure dogs are always on a leash! Our visitation has increased since last year, and it looks as if we may have a busier summer this go around. We look forward to seeing you at the Park!

Brandon

Knibbe Ranch Revisited

by Charleen Moore and Mackenzie Brown

How would it feel to pack all your worldly possessions in a trunk and ship the trunk and a wagon from your homeland in Germany to a new country almost halfway around the world with you and your spouse, only to have all your possessions tossed overboard to get the ship off a reef on the coast of Texas. This is how Hans Heinrich Dietrich Knibbe and his new bride, Sophie *Richenburg*, arrived in 1845. But their troubles were not over yet. The years 1845-1846 were filled with epidemics that brought fevers, dysentery, and numerous deaths on the road from the coast to New Braunfels. Dietrich was ill for two years and his wife, Sophie, after giving birth to a daughter Caroline in April 1846, died in December of that year from hepatitis. A widow, Bernadine Eliza *Schloemann* Fledermann, who had given birth the previous month to a son who died a few months later, was brought in to care for Caroline and, in a few months, she and Dietrich married (Fig. 1). Bernadine and Dietrich had a daughter, Anna, and five sons, August, Herman, Dietrich, William and Charles. From this stark beginning, one of the founding families of Spring Branch arose which still has a strong presence today.

During Dietrich's life he acquired over 22,000 acres of land.¹ This included the original property that is now the Knibbe Ranch, bought in 1852 (Fig. 2). Dietrich purchased the land for less than \$1.00 per acre, twice as expensive as other property he could have bought near Seguin and San Marcos, but he felt this area looked more like his homeland with wooded hills, fertile valleys, and numerous creeks and rivers that increased the land's value.



Fig. 2. Knibbe Ranch entrance, Spring Branch Road. Photo by Lucy Cruz.

The creek that made this land so valuable was named Spring Creek (Fig. 3). Its name was changed to Spring Branch Creek when the community acquired a post office called Spring Branch. Five families bought property along the creek and the Knibbe Ranch is the only one still intact today.

Dietrich also bought a store and sawmill in the 1860's, which served the Spring Branch area until tragedy struck again. In 1869, the Guadalupe River experienced a heavy flash flood that damaged both the store and sawmill. Dietrich immediately rebuilt and added a shingle mill as well. The following year, however, the Guadalupe flooded even higher, an event that took all the new structures and, more tragically, drowned Dietrich's nephew, Dietrich Woehler, who had just arrived from Germany to help run the mills.²



Fig. 4. August Knibbe bringing supplies to Knibbe Ranch from San Antonio. Photo courtesy of Knibbe Ranch.

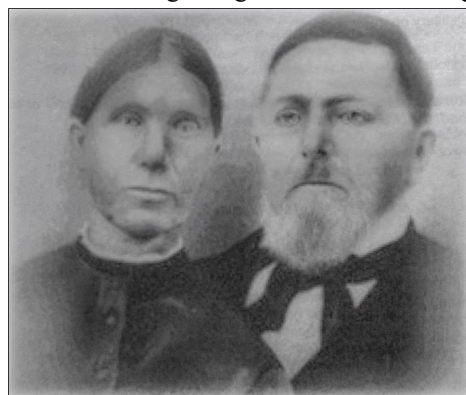


Fig. 1. Bernadine and Dietrich Knibbe. Photo from Brenda Anderson-Lindemann, *Bridging Spring Branch and Western Comal County, Texas*, p. 31.



Fig. 3. Spring Creek. Photo by Mackenzie Brown.

Dietrich's sons helped run the various enterprises on the ranch that included at one time or another, the Spring Branch post office, a general store, a cotton gin, a blacksmith shop, a dance hall and saloon and a one-room school. Their oldest son, August Knibbe, also had a freighting business (Fig. 4). While returning home one evening in 1871, he was attacked by Native Americans who were being pursued after the children, Clint and Jeff Smith, were kidnapped from their home near Cibolo Creek and later raised by Lipan Apache and Comanche Indians. An arrow pierced August's calf and wounded him severely.

The youngest son, Charles, his wife and family, including his son Herman, grandson Lawrence, and great-grandson Chuck, have run the ranch until the present day.

¹ <https://knibberanch.com/about/>.

² See "A Conduit for Danger: The Guadalupe River in Flood," *Friends Newsletter*, Spring, 2019, pp. 2-4.

In 2015, the Friends of GR/HC held the 9th Homesteaders Homecoming at the Knibbe Ranch, hosted by Chuck Knibbe and his wife Sharon.³ Ten years later, on March 18 of this year, several members of the Friends Board of Directors and guests returned to learn more about the archeological studies as well as the operation of the Knibbe Ranch by five generations of Knibbes (Fig. 5). Chuck Knibbe was a gracious host, sharing the history of the ranch and the joys and difficulties of ranching in the Hill Country.

The Knibbes were not the first settlers on the land that became the Knibbe Ranch. Several archeological sites have been found on the ranch near Spring Branch Creek dating from the Paleolithic to Late Archaic periods. Chuck took us out in a wagon with haybale seats to look at one of the sites (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Ride on haybales to archeological site at cliff base where hundreds of artifacts have been found. Photo by Mackenzie Brown.

We stopped in a pasture bordered by the creek and a 25-foot cliff. Middens were discovered at the base of the cliff along with hundreds of Native American stone tools. Chuck showed us samples (Fig. 7).

Along with shells and projectile points, bison bones were found (Fig. 8). Their presence at the cliff suggests a very rare buffalo jump (Fig. 9).



Fig. 7. Mr. Knibbe showing artifacts found on the Ranch. Photo by Mackenzie Brown.



Fig. 8. Framed collection of bison bones, clam and snail shells, and projectile points found on the Ranch. Photo by Mackenzie Brown.



Fig. 5. Chuck Knibbe introducing five generations of Knibbe Ranch owners. Photo by Lucy Cruz.



Fig. 9. Archeological site with high cliff at the base of which were found bison bones, projectile points, and middens. Photo by Mackenzie Brown.

The ranch now survives due to a change in the cattle they raise, a hybrid F-1 Tigerstripe between a Brahman and a Hereford (Fig. 10), that is well adapted to the Hill Country and is juicy and delicious. But cattle-raising alone would be insufficient. Most importantly, the Ranch works in partnership with the Marriott Rivercenter/Riverwalk hotels for guests to have a taste of the ranch experience with rodeo events, music and dancing, plus a classic steak dinner in the Ranch's great barn (Fig. 11). Holding such events is the only way to finance the operations of the Knibbe Ranch and keep it together. Otherwise, it would be lost to home developers as other neighboring ranches have been.

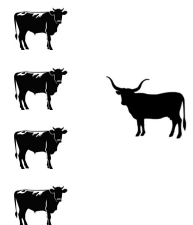


Fig. 10. Chuck Knibbe with herd of hybrid F-1 Tigerstripe cattle with calves. Photo by Charleen Moore.



Fig. 11. The barn at the Ranch, with 3 former and honored residents hanging on the end wall of the hall. Photo by Mackenzie Brown.

Thanks again to Chuck Knibbe for an inspiring and informative visit.



³ See *Friends Newsletter*, Summer, 2015, pp. 2-3.

The Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) and Brood Parasitism

by Gilberto Martinez, Superintendent, Honey Creek State Natural Area

A (very) brief summary of brood parasitism. Brood parasitism is a behavior where an animal (in this case, a bird) lays its eggs in the nest of another species (host) instead of raising the young themselves. There are two types of brood parasites, obligate and non-obligate, with the cowbird (Fig. 1) being an obligate species. Across its range, the Brown-headed Cowbird is known to parasitize approximately 240 species, including the Golden-cheeked Warbler and the Black-capped Vireo (Farrell et al. 2010, Lignac and Mumme 2023). Brood parasitism has evolved independently seven times in birds, with two of those times among the passerines (Sorenson and Payne 2002, 2005). Six of those evolutionary occurrences involved altricial species, in which the young when hatched are underdeveloped (eyes closed, featherless) and thus in need of extended care. This suggests that the benefits of brood parasitism are higher in this group where the costs of reproduction are much greater (higher investment from the parents towards the developing young) (Lyon and Eadie 1991). If we look at the evolutionary timeline between brood parasites, Brown-headed Cowbirds are among the most recent to evolve this behavior at just under 5 million years ago (Sorenson and Payne 2002). There are many myths regarding brood parasitism, but research shows that this behavior in the passerine group was already expressed in a common ancestor and co-evolved with its hosts over time.



Fig. 1. A Brown-headed Cowbird, male. Photo by Jessica Bergner.



Fig. 2. Eastern Phoebe nest with cowbird eggs. Photo courtesy of New England Birds Plus.

How cowbirds do what they do. There are a few hypotheses as to how a cowbird identifies a nest to be parasitized (Kruger 2007). One theory is that the cowbird uses cues from the host to find an active nest (Clotfelter 1998), while another states that cowbirds look for conspicuously placed nests, usually at the edges of their preferred habitats (Hauber 2001). Once the cowbird selects a nest to be parasitized, she removes most, if not all the hosts' eggs, but is careful not to be seen. If she is spotted, she risks being injured or her eggs being rejected (Strausberger and Burhans 2001). Once laid, the eggs develop rapidly, usually hatching before the hosts' eggs (Fig. 2). Having the advantage of hatching a day or so earlier, the cowbird chick begins to be fed sooner, thus growing faster and outcompeting its nest-mates for resources. Soon, the nest-mate starves and expires, and is removed by the adult hosts (Friedmann 1963). Very rarely does the cowbird chick evict its nest-mate. If it does, it is by accident, and not an intentional act (Friedmann 1963).

Managing cowbirds. Cowbird management is costly in time, money, and effort, so it is important to identify the factors that can predict the frequency of parasitism to help the site managers in determining what management tools are to be implemented (Farrell et al. 2010). Here at GRSP/HCSNA, we have opted to stop trapping and instead focus on enhancing habitat. The few birds removed a year will not significantly reduce the occurrence of brood parasitism and instead we will redirect staff time and resources to better understand how we can improve habitat to limit the edge habitat where Brown-headed Cowbirds occur.

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Celebrating Bob Hansen: 2024 Texans for State Parks Outstanding Volunteer Award Winner for Region 3 Parks

by Jessica Bergner, *Resource Specialist*

We are thrilled to share some exciting news from our park community—Bob Hansen, longtime Friend and dedicated volunteer, has been named the 2024 Outstanding Volunteer by Texans for State Parks! This award from Texans for State Parks recognizes individuals who go above and beyond in their service to Texas parks—and Bob is the perfect example of that spirit. Bob's name is synonymous with stewardship, generosity, and a deep commitment to Guadalupe River State Park and Honey Creek State Natural Area. His contributions over the years have left a lasting mark, and his passion for sharing the Park with others—especially young visitors—continues to inspire.

Bob has worn many hats during his time as a volunteer. He's a certified guide for Honey Creek State Natural Area, where his knowledge of the landscape and engaging storytelling bring the natural world to life for visitors. He also serves as a scenic overlook guide, greeting guests with a smile and helping them connect with the beauty of the Hill Country. On top of that, you'll often find him volunteering at the Discovery Center, assisting with interpretive programs and supporting school field trips with his characteristic warmth and enthusiasm.

What makes Bob truly exceptional is his willingness to help wherever he's needed. Whether stepping in to assist a fellow volunteer, helping prep for a public program, or guiding children through hands-on learning experiences, Bob always shows up with a positive attitude and a deep sense of purpose. His love for helping steward children through nature education is especially noteworthy. Bob understands the importance of fostering a connection to the natural world in the next generation, and his patient, thoughtful approach makes every young visitor feel welcomed and curious. We are incredibly proud to celebrate this honor with him and so grateful for everything he continues to do for our park community.



Bob Hansen receiving 2024 Outstanding Volunteer Award. Photo by Brady Hansen.

Congratulations, Bob—and thank you for being such an invaluable part of the team!

Birds, Binoculars, and Big Fun: Big Sit Success at Guadalupe River State Park

by Jessica Bergner, *Resource Specialist*

On Saturday, May 3rd, the Woodland Blind at Guadalupe River State Park buzzed with bird calls, excited chatter, and the occasional celebratory cheer. It was the site of another successful Big Sit, a relaxed yet highly engaging birding event proudly sponsored by the Friends of Guadalupe River State Park/Honey Creek State Natural Area. With the support of the Friends group, our birding team—the Guad Squad—perched in one spot from 9am-1pm, tallying every bird species we could spot or hear from within a 50-foot circle.

So what exactly *is* a Big Sit? Think of it as a tailgate party for birders—part birdwatching blitz, part community celebration. Participants stay in one location and identify as many species as possible, all while enjoying the camaraderie of fellow bird lovers and the ever-changing soundtrack of nature.

Our Big Sit was more than just a fun day in the park—it was part of a larger effort: the Great Texas Birding Classic (GTBC). Hosted by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), the GTBC is an annual, statewide birdwatching tournament that raises awareness (and funds!) for bird conservation projects across Texas. It's one of the largest birding competitions in the nation and a wonderful way to support habitat protection, engage new audiences, and celebrate the incredible diversity of avian life in our state.

Thanks to the Friends group's sponsorship, the Guad Squad proudly represented our Park and contributed to this year's GTBC conservation grants. And if that wasn't exciting enough, a TPWD film crew was on-site during the Big Sit, capturing the action, the scenery, and the spirit of our event. You might just spot some familiar faces and favorite places in an upcoming episode of the TPWD PBS show—airing just in time for the 40th anniversary of the Great Texas Birding Classic!

As we look ahead, we're already dreaming up ways to participate in the GTBC again—perhaps by mixing things up and competing in a different tournament category next year. Whether we're sitting, sprinting, or scouting across new terrain, one thing's for sure: the birds of Guadalupe River State Park and Honey Creek State Natural Area never disappoint.

A huge thank you to our Friends for making this event possible. Stay tuned for more birding adventures and conservation wins in the seasons to come! (For photos from the Big Sit at the Park, see p. 7.)

The Friends Annual Pollinator Fiesta

by Doug Starasinic

March 15, the date for the annual Pollinator Fiesta, was quite a windy day, but we all had a great time! There were over 300 visitors to the event, including 120 children. There were displays on butterflies, local plants, water conservation, the San Antonio Zoo, the importance of retaining the night skies, and the very popular face painting among many other wonderful exhibits (see Figs. 1-3).

The kids that were able to visit 10 of the exhibits were able to select from a prize box. They all seemed to enjoy the adventure while learning about pollinators and the natural world. Thanks to the park staff, volunteers, and Friends of Guadalupe/Honey Creek for all their efforts to make this event a success. See you next year!



Fig. 1. Future geologists exploring porosity of aquifer rocks. Photo by Greg Elmendorf.



Fig. 2. Learning about the benefits of dark skies for pollinators. Photo by Greg Elmendorf.



Fig. 3. Claiming a prize for attending at least 10 exhibits. Photo by Greg Elmendorf.

Guadalupe River SP and Honey Creek SNA Join the Global Spotlight in City Nature Challenge 2025by Jessica Bergner, *Resource Specialist*

Guadalupe River SP and Honey Creek SNA were buzzing with excitement during this year's City Nature Challenge (CNC)—a global community science effort that encourages people to document wild plants, animals, fungi, and other life forms using the iNaturalist app. Our local events made a meaningful impact. Three CNC public bioblitzes were held in late April: an aquatic bioblitz at Guadalupe River State Park, and terrestrial bioblitzes at Honey Creek State Natural Area and Honey Creek Ranch. A bioblitz is a concentrated period when volunteers, staff, and members of the public work together to find and identify as many species as possible within a set location.

Our Park and Natural Area fall within the San Antonio metro area, and this year's results were nothing short of outstanding. Thanks to the collective effort of thousands of observers across the region—including many who participated at our sites—San Antonio ranked #1 in the United States and #2 in the world for the total number of observations recorded! These observations help scientists and land managers better understand biodiversity, monitor trends, and protect important ecosystems. And for our Park, they offer a powerful way to engage our community in citizen science and environmental stewardship.

We're incredibly proud of how the Park and SNA, with support of the Friends, contributed to this effort. We're grateful for all the participants who made it possible. We're already looking forward to next year—though we may mix things up a bit with new event formats or locations. One thing is certain: this annual global snapshot of nature is here to stay, and our Park will continue to be a vibrant part of it. Thanks to everyone who helped put our corner of Texas on the global map for biodiversity!



Bioblitzers in the Park and SNA. The first 2 photos are by Jessica Bergner. Cute fellow 2nd from left is a soft-shelled turtle. The last 2 photos are by Ed Van Reet.



Photos from the Big Sit (continued from p. 5). Participants counting birds at the Woodland Bird blind. Photos by Jessica Bergner.



Mother's Day Celebration at Honey Creek by Mary Habib

On May 11th, the Friends were honored to host thirty-one guests for a relaxing walk to Honey Creek and to enjoy our Spring color show of wildflowers - Celebrating Mother's Day! Our guests included the youngest explorers with their Moms, Moms with adult children, and Grandmoms. Also, among our guests were those celebrating wonderful memories of nurturing Moms that are held near and dear in their hearts.

Our wildflower show offered stunning Standing Winecups (*Callirhoe pedata*), crowd pleasing Mexican Hats (*Ratibida columnaris*), hummingbird havens of Cedar Sages (*Salvia roemeriana*), butterfly friendly Texas Thistles (*Cirsium texanum*), waving Greenthreads (*Thelesperma filifolium*) and bee friendly Two-leaved Sennas (*Senna roemeriana*).

A shout out to the Dads who joined our very special morning for helping with the younger kiddos and assisting our hosts with our post-program culinary Celebration of MOMosas (Ice-cold OJ and Sparkling Grape Juice) and a variety of yummy pastries, muffins, and cookies!

Volunteer, Learn, and Explore: Upcoming Opportunities at Guadalupe River State Park by Jessica Bergner, *Resource Specialist*

Summer is heating up, and so are the opportunities to get involved and make a difference at Guadalupe River State Park and Honey Creek State Natural Area. Whether you're ready to roll up your sleeves for hands-on conservation work or looking to expand your knowledge and skills, we've got something for everyone coming up in the next few months.

Resource Volunteer Opportunity: Riverbank Restoration – Phase II

As part of Phase II of the Day-Use Restoration Plan, we are seeking volunteers to help with the mechanical removal of invasive plant species along the riverbank in the Day-Use Area. Removing invasive vegetation is critical to restoring the health and diversity of native riparian habitat—and your help is needed!

Volunteer Dates: Monday, June 3rd Tuesday, June 4th Thursday, June 6th Time: 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Interested in lending a hand? Please contact Jessica Bergner at jessica.bergner@tpwd.texas.gov for more details or to sign up. No prior experience is needed—just bring your gloves, a water bottle, and your passion for protecting native ecosystems!

Save the Dates! We have two exciting upcoming events you won't want to miss:

Lunch & Learn: Chronic Wasting Disease Presentation

When: Tuesday, July 29th | 12:00 PM – 1:00 PM

Where: Mammen Family Public Library

Presenters: Jessica Bergner and Olivia Kost

Join us for an informative midday session exploring Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)—a contagious and fatal neurological illness affecting deer species in Texas. Learn how CWD is monitored, its potential impact on ecosystems, and what you can do to help. Bring your lunch and your curiosity!

Explore Bowhunting

When: Saturday, October 25th | 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM. **Where:** Guadalupe River State Park. Get hands-on and experience the basics of bowhunting in a safe and educational environment. Perfect for beginners, families, and anyone interested in outdoor skills, this interactive event is designed to foster a deeper connection with wildlife and conservation through responsible hunting practices.

Friends of Guadalupe River/ Honey Creek, Inc.

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The Friends of Guadalupe River/Honey Creek, Inc.
is a non-profit organization working with
Guadalupe River State Park and
Honey Creek State Natural Area.

The Board Members of the Friends meet monthly,
usually on the third Thursday at 2:00 p.m.
at Honey Creek Ranch.

To request to attend the Board Meeting,
contact us at:

friendsofgrhc@gmail.com

To submit articles for publication in the Friends
Newsletter, email them to one of the Co-Editors:
Mackenzie Brown, mbrown@trinity.edu
Charleen Moore, mackandchuck@gmail.com
Deadlines are the 20th of Feb, May, Aug, Nov.

Join Us!***2025 Membership Dues *****Become A Friend / Renew Your Friendship Today:**

Memberships at all levels directly support Guadalupe River State Park /Honey Creek State Natural Area. You will be kept up to date on all the upcoming programs, events and park news as well as information on volunteer opportunities through our quarterly newsletter and park updates. As a Friends member you and your family will also have access to member only events. Membership dues renew in January.

Fill out the section below and mail to the address below:

Name(s): _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____

Membership Type: New Member _____ Renewal _____

Student or Senior (over 62) \$20 _____ Individual \$25 _____

Family \$40 _____ Lifetime \$1000 _____ Other _____

If you are also interested in helping the park through volunteering, please
tell us your areas of interest: _____

Make checks payable to Friends of GR/HC, Inc.

Mail to: 3350 Park Road 31, Spring Branch, TX 78070

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