

VISIONS

WINTER 2024/25 • VOLUME 38, ISSUE 4

NAI SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

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VISIONS

Newsletter for NAI SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

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*Title photos from
Dreamstime.com*

Bald Eagle: National Symbol or National Bird?

By John Miller, retired

As of you reading this article today the answer is BOTH. In what was thought to be an already done deal, that there has



Bald Eagle - MO Department of Conservation

always been a US national bird before now, has been turned upside down because there was no national bird before mid-December 2024. The efforts to secure the American Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) as the US national bird passed its final hurdle by being approved by the US House of Representatives on Monday, December 16th.

How is it that the bald eagle was not already our national bird? Well, you see the image of the US Seal/Emblem does indeed have the image of a bald eagle. But it was the emblem/seal, not the bird, that was approved by Congress in 1782 to grace official

documents, flags, passports, and military insignia.

For 242 years nearly everyone assumed, incorrectly, that the national emblem meant that the eagle was then by default our national bird. Over the years, many reputable organizations have claimed that the bald eagle has al-

ways been the National Bird, but there was never any documentation that explicitly stated it as such.

To read the extraordinary story how one man, Preston Cook, made it his life's mission to have the American Bald Eagle become the US National Bird, read the story from National

Public Radio at <https://www.npr.org/2024/12/18/nx-s1-5231827/bald-eagles-national-bird>. He explains how several teams scoured the national archives to find what was not to be found...proof that



Seal of the United States

somehow, someone, somewhere had granted national status to the bald eagle. He even had the honor of writing the bill that was passed by both the US Senate and the US House of Representatives.

As of writing this story, President Joe Biden had not yet signed the bill enshrining the American Bald Eagle as our national bird, but most likely it has happened by the time you read this article and link. In doing so, 242 years of incorrect assumptions that we already had a national bird will be quietly forgiven.



Photo by Jerrel Geisler

Winter 2024/25 - Director's Report

by Ken Forman, South Central Region Director, Arkansas

There is summer music, and there is winter music. Today I'm listening to winter music, which makes sense, I suppose, since it's the first week of January 2025. "What makes a particular type of music "sum-



mer" or "winter", you may ask? The mood, the tone, which particular instruments are used, things like that contribute to the seasonality of the music. Examples of summer music include much of the Beatles'

catalog, Cheap Trick, most Ska, most reggae – music like that. Winter music is more along the lines of Genesis, The Eagles, St. Louis blues, Billie Holiday. * Today the particular winter music on my speaker is Pink Floyd's The Wall. Heralded as one of the band's seminal albums, it tells a complete story of a rockstar's rise to fame, and eventual fall. One of the singles released from the album is the song "Mother". That song's last line, "Mother, did it need to be so high?", has me asking a similar question when I think of barriers to interpreters working and educating in the field. Do the barriers need to be so high? The answer, of course, is "no, they don't".

One goal of your South Central Region's board is to increase accessibility to services that members can actually use. In the next half-dozen months I expect a few things being updated in the way our region addresses scholarships and grants, how we communicate with our members, and ways members can

express their very valuable opinions to the board.

Members can ensure the contact information associated with their NAI membership is up-to-date. If you're reading this newsletter via a means that did not include your current e-mail (e.g., found it posted on the website or shared on social media), please check your NAI account. If it's current, but you're still not receiving the distribution e-mails, and if it's not in your SPAM filter, please let the editors know so we can work out a solution.

In the meantime, boot up some winter music to match the mood, or queue up some summer music to lighten the load. Either way, leap over those barriers. And don't forget: Be Outside Often.

* It's an incomplete and hugely apocryphal hypothesis. Just go with it, okay?

Does Bird-watching Include "Skeletons" at Lake Hefner?

By Neil Garrison, retired

(First published in the December 9th, 2024 edition of The Oklahoman newspaper. Lake Hefner is in Oklahoma City.)

I'd venture a guess that you have not had the pleasure of meeting my Ma-In-Law. I'm of the opinion that she would not take affront if I described her as not being a spring chicken. Her birth date was in the year 1923. You do the math.

Likely as not, this centenarian's age has some small measure of influence on my difficulty in engaging her in conversation. I will often say one thing; she will hear another. If you need an example, let me tell you about my recent bird-watching

trip to Lake Hefner. I was excited by my sighting of the seagulls. I estimated the flock to be no less than 10,000 birds. (That's a count of 20,000 gull legs, divided by 2.) I mentioned as much to my wife's mother. Her response was something like: "That's a lot of eagles!" (Close...but no cigar.)

Yet one more "for instance" is when on one other day, my wife and her mom took a drive around that same body of water. My wife was driving, of course, and my in-law asked why she was braking the car to a halt. My wife explained that she wanted to snap a photo.

"Of what?," asked her mom. My

wife told her what it was that had caught her attention. My in-law's next question was: "Why? Why in the world would you want to take a picture of that?"

My wife explained that she was taking the photo so she could share it with me when she got back home. "Of skeletons?!", my in-law remarked. For the life of her, she could not figure out why her son-in-law would have even an inkling of an interest in seeing pics of skeletons.

"Pelicans! Not skeletons!," my wife exclaimed.

Welcome to my world.

Thank you, Neil Curry

By Ken Forman, Arkansas

When I describe the group of interpreters that make up the South Central Region, I often refer to them as “family”. It is always my hope people understand I mean that which connects us is



more than business or casual acquaintances. Our family has lost a brother, uncle, cousin. James “Neil” Curry was more than just those labels, though. He was a mentor, a cheerleader – a friend.

His obituary reads in part: *Neil’s dedication to the Natural State is remembered through his almost 40 years of service to Arkansas State Parks and the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission as Chief of Education and Director of the Little Rock Nature Center. His mentorship impacted countless others in the field of nature interpretation.*

Neil was a champion of doing activities that he loved with people that he loved. Those often involved a host of outdoor pursuits, including hunting, fishing, hiking, backpacking, and the like. He was a lifelong United Methodist and

a man of deep faith and quiet strength. Neil was also a man of great humor and wit, often quick to crack a goofy joke with anyone he met.

I met Neil over 16 years ago this month when I interviewed for a position at the newly opened Witt Stephens, Jr. Central Arkansas Nature Center. There was a smile – a way about him that is hard to describe to anyone who hasn’t met him. Those of us lucky to have a life path that intersected with his know that smile all too well.

Working for him meant time talking with him – and I say “with



him” as opposed to “to him” since his way was to be inclusive in all things. He included you in the conversation so that it was always a “with” sort of thing.

To be honest, reciting a narrative of Neil’s life and accomplish-

ments would be unnecessarily long. Even he would advise against it. “Let the story be the story,” he’d often advise. So, I won’t mention his work with the National Park Service, or the Arkansas State Park system, or the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. I won’t mention his guidance to numerous new interpreters (I count myself as one of many) making the field a better place. I won’t mention his unwavering support for anyone with a story to tell – support, and an eager ear.

But I will say thank you, Neil. Thank you for all that you’ve done. Those who you’ve inspired are going on to inspire others. The ripples continue to grow from the splash of your passion.



An Emergence of Mycological Workshops in Arkansas State Parks

By Brandi Hanson, Park Interpreter, Lake Chicot State Park, Lake Village, Arkansas

November 8th, 2024 was the first ever Mushroom Identification Workshop at Lake Chicot State Park. Working with volunteers from the Gulf South Mycological Society, the park had professional mycologist Kerri McCabe and member Logan Wiedenfeld present and lead a group on mushroom identification in situ through the park.



Auricularia nigricans

The logistics of this workshop took many months of planning and included the following. Kerri McCabe applied for a collection permit with the Department of Parks, Heritage, and Tourism that allowed her to collect specimens during the identification in situ portion of the workshop. This required a general description of the activities, the objective, the methods and procedures, and detailed the records to be kept. The permitting process took three to four months, lasts one year after issuance, and may be renewed in one-year intervals. Park planning included the designation of a collection area, the furnishing of the presentation area, and advertising.

Overall, this workshop was attended by eight participants of various my-

cological knowledge and lasted 5-6 hours. The cost to provide a workshop like this can vary from free to \$250+. We had a max capability of 30 participants. One thing to note is that mycological collection and knowledge benefit greatly from light rainfall, as many species solely fruit with condensation, and fall is the most active season for fruiting fungi in Arkansas.

Thirty-nine species were recorded during the workshop. Kerri McCabe took specimen samples of each species found to be sequenced and identified on the genetic level, which is frequently the only way to positively identify many mushroom species. These results may require up to a year of turnaround time and will be provided to the Park Interpreter and Arkansas State Parks.



Fungi photography

Outside of the positive experiences all around, this group can also brag about the potential of having found the first ever *Auricularia nigricans* in Arkansas and potentially the furthest North ever recorded. This information was provided by Mycologist Kerri McCabe, and authenticated by Park Interpreter Brandi Hanson, to the best of their ability. The *Auricularia nigricans* is a subspecies of wood ear mushroom that has previously only been found around the Gulf Coast. This subspe-

cies can be categorized as having a deep magenta ring along the outer edge of the ear, a smooth, light brown, russet backside that attaches to the bark, and a fuzzy amaranth skin on top. The texture is similar to that of the human ear lacking dense cartilage.



Fungi identification in situation

Mycology is an up-and-coming field of interest for the outdoor enthusiast and Arkansas has an environment conducive to frequent and varied identification opportunities. With appropriate leadership, these events can serve twofold by providing opportunities in outdoor recreation and citizen science. They engage and emerge the mind within the resource, providing meaningful and memorable experiences. Lake Chicot State Park was able to provide this for eight guests in 2024 and hopes to provide more experiences like it in the years to come. When planning for the new year, keep a mycological event in mind to provide an experience like this at your site.

Many thanks and see you soon

by Jerrel Geisler, *Visions* Co-Editor

Thank you, NAI South Central, for your support. Since I began assisting with the production of the NAI South Central/Region

we have lost respected members, mentors, and friends.

role within NAI South Central.

I have been using my learned journalism skills these few years in doing the layout for *Visions*. I relied on my other partners and others to assist with gathering



6 *Visions* newsletter I have enjoyed being a part of this team.

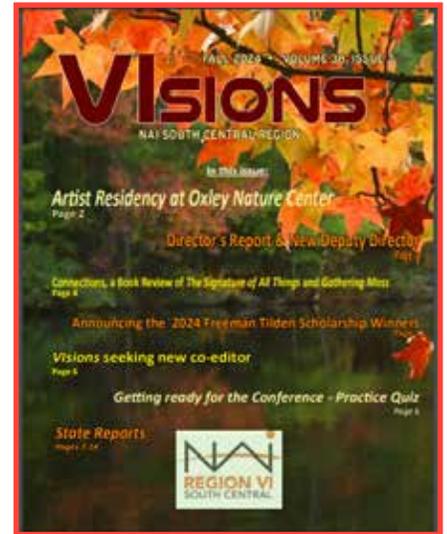
I began with the Spring/Summer issue of 2016, assisting Katie Raney from Texas, with the publication, and I have enjoyed my part in every way. I have seen your ups and your downs. I have watched as leaders have changed,

I have decided after this issue to step down as co-editor of *Visions*. Do not worry, you have a talented group of people that will continue the “vision” and the work we have done and will continue to do.

I want to thank everyone who has supported me over the years. From Katie who helped me figure out what I was doing and how to get it done. Thanks to Ken Foreman who stepped up when Katie stepped down, now to Chris Pistole who stepped up when Ken decided to take the well-deserved role as our director. John Miller had just left as director when I started. He helped me figure my way around since I had just joined NAI overall in 2012.

Now Katie Huffman has chosen to fill in for me as the newsletter begins in a different format and

the news, the stories, and the great interpretative information that all of you have produced and



**Many thanks
continued Page 10**

Editor change comes to *Visions*



Kate Huffman, Missouri

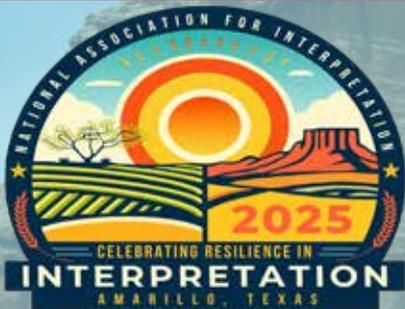
As some of you already know, we rely on two people to produce the *Visions* newsletter. Chris Pistole gathers the information for the newsletter and edits the copy, while Jerrel Geisler has done the layout. As Jerrel prepares to step down from this role, we want to thank him for his years of service! Well done, Jerrel!

We are excited to announce that Kate Huffman will be taking on this role! Kate is a historic interpretive guide at the Historic Daniel Boone home and St. Charles County Heritage Museum in Missouri. Welcome, Kate!

If you value your newsletter, please help us out by contributing news or articles, accompanied by photos if possible, to your state representative when they reach out to you.

We hope that you enjoy reading the newsletter and that it helps to build a sense of community among all of us in the interpretive field in the great South Central Region of NAI.

2025 REGIONAL CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS



**Embassy Suites Hotel
Amarillo, Texas
February, 16-19, 2025**

Celebrating Resilience in Interpretation

Sunday, February 16

Pre-Conference Workshop (separate fee)

**Registration Opens - 3:30 PM
Evening Social - 6:30-8:30 PM**

Monday, February 17

Concurrent Sessions

Tuesday, February 18

**Field Sessions & Skill-building Sessions
Brian Barnette Interpreter's Quiz - 4 PM
InterOlympics & Dinner - 6:30 PM**

Wednesday, February 19

Concurrent Sessions

Scholarship Auction, Awards Dinner, and World Groove - 3:30-10 PM

Nightly Activities:

Sunday to Wednesday - 8:30-10 PM

Hospitality Room open for networking. Bring your own snacks and beverages (due to hotel policy). Musical instruments are encouraged and board games, crafts, and other activities will be available for all.



State reports

Arkansas - Chris Pistole

Kansas - Lindsay Evans

Louisiana - Rusty Scarborough

Missouri - John Miller

Oklahoma - Neil Garrison

Texas - Lisa Cole



ARKANSAS REPORT

Arkansas Report compiled by Chris Pistole

Jay S. Miller, CEO, Interpretive Communications: Fall fly fishing for bass was great when 6am temps were in the low 60s. This year I completed phase 1 interpretation plans for six Mississippi state parks. In that process I taught about the value of interpretation in telling park-specific stories and increasing respect for park management, as well as recommending media and best locations to fit their capabilities. I have a CIG Workshop in Mineral Wells State Park, Texas beginning January 13, then am looking forward to our Region 6 workshop in Amarillo.

Chris Pistole, Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area: We are excited to welcome David Armstrong as our new assistant superintendent. David comes to us after being an interpreter at DeGray Lake State Park Resort for the past 14 years. He will supervise the park interpreters as one of his many tasks. David is a sawyer and tree climber and we'll definitely put those skills to the test!

We had an incredible turnout once again for our First Day Hikes. We had over 250 people attend a total of 3 different hikes of various distances and difficulty, including one that is on an ADA accessible trail. The cool but sunny weather worked in our favor, for sure. Everyone appreciates the First Day Hike sticker we give out to all that complete the hike. Participants could also partake of hot cocoa and make a s'more at our outdoor pavilion before or after their hike. We're glad we didn't have to do the fire ban s'mores like we've had to do at some previous events! What is a fire ban s'more? You just spread marshmallow cream on the graham cracker instead of roasting marshmallows. You can also substitute Nuttella for chocolate bars, which lately has actually been cheaper too. For those with nut allergies, just sprinkle chocolate chips on the marshmallow cream. First Day Hikes are definitely one of my favorite ways to connect the park resource with our visitors, and everyone is so upbeat and positive! What a great way to kick off a new year!



Kansas State Report compiled by Lindsay Evans, Ernie Miller Nature Center, Olathe, KS:

NO REPORT AVAILABLE

for Kansas

Catch you in the next Edition.

Send any State updates to your state representative or the *Visions* editors by the deadline posted on the publication information page.

Many thanks

from page 6

will continue to produce.

At the end of this first quarter of the 21st century many wonder if the written documentation of newspapers and newsletters is still valuable today? It is. I hope you continue this tradition and keep this document alive. Maybe just make it a little easier to view on your devices.

While it has been an added treat to be a part of the South-Central board in an ancillary role, I have enjoyed seeing where NAI and South Central are headed. Now, I do not plan to disappear com-

pletely from roles within NAI, I just want to sit in the back seat for a while.

I also plan on fully retiring by the end of September and just wish to free up some of my time. Even after I leave my paying job I will continue volunteering as a Texas Master Naturalist and other organizations. I hope to be able to continue being involved in NAI activities and hopefully start teaching CIG training. I look forward to adding that “volunteer interpreter” moniker to my roles. I have seen many changes while I have been involved. When I

first started with the newsletter, many of my coworkers and colleagues knew little about NAI. Now it seems close to 50% of my coworkers and people I recently met at the Texas Master Naturalist State Meeting have at least taken the CIG course. I know we are moving in the right direction, and I am glad to have been a part of it.

Thank you again for all the help you have given me, and I will see you around. I hope to see you at the upcoming Amarillo Regional Conference. I am looking forward to heading up the Brian Barnette Interpreter’s Quiz. See you soon!

LOUISIANA REPORT

Louisiana State Report compiled by Rusty Scarborough:



Marty Young of LSU Shreveport Pioneer Heritage Center reports that: The LSUS Pioneer Heritage Center continued its normal interpretive programming at our facility and at local schools for the year. We also did interpretive programs at Fort St. Jean Baptiste (Louisiana State Historic Site), The Louisiana State Exhibit Museum, The Louisiana Folk Festival and Cane River Creole National Historical Park. Program topics were Blacksmithing and Historic Foods/ Cooking. The Center continues to revolve around our mission to collect, preserve and interpret the artifacts of Northwest Louisiana pioneers and settlers

< *LSUS Pioneer heritage Marty*

Rusty Scarborough of Walter B. Jacobs Memorial Nature Park reports lots of movement on the new nature center project. In spite of regular and heavy rains over the past several months we are on schedule and we now

have steel being erected!

WBJ Steel progression >



Just last week I traveled to visit Taylor Studios Inc in Rantoul, IL to inspect the 70% completion work progress.

It was impressive and amazing and I cannot wait for this project to be completed and share it with the public and you all!

Also a monumental task was completed in October in that the Caddo Parish Parks & Camp; Recreation Department was awarded our CAPRA accreditation! We are one of 212 out of over 10,000 Parks departments in the country to have completed the application and receive our accreditation through the Commission for Accreditation of Parks and Recreation Agencies.

Pictures below (*L to R - WBJ Exhibits - Vulcan, WBJ Exhibits - White Oak, WBJ Exhibits - Fallen Log*).



MISSOURI REPORT

Missouri State Report compiled by John Miller, Reed Spring, MO:

Jesze Doleh, MO DNR Naturalist, Thousand Hills State Park: Thousand Hills State Park in Kirksville, Missouri is excited to announce their *Urban Night Sky Place Certification* through DarkSky International. This certification came about after over three years of work to learn about protecting dark skies, acquire letters of support, update management plans, complete a light inventory, develop educational programming, and so much more.

Thousand Hills has beautiful night skies and often has visitors from larger cities come and comment that they have never seen the Milky Way before. Not only is our work important to protect the beauty of the night skies but it also is beneficial to people and animals at and around

the park. When we use responsible lighting (what we need, when we need it, and the proper amount) we are paving the way for a healthier future.



Our night sky programming came about as a partnership with the local university and public library. We aim to share the planets, constellations, galaxies,

and more with all attendees. We also educate the public about the concern with light pollution, ways that too much light is not safe, and how to be more responsible with light. Light pollution is the only pollution that we currently know of that once it is mitigated is gone. I like to say that when it comes to protecting the night skies, don't be the light!



John Miller, retired: At the 2024 NAI National Conference in St. Augustine Florida, **Jeanne Spencer** was awarded the **2024 Outstanding Volunteer Interpreter**. Jeanne who works for the Community and Children's Resource Board of St. Charles County MO is an amazing volunteer on many levels. Jeanne Spencer is one of the most amazing and talented interpretive volunteers whose career path was not interpretation.



As a full time employee of St. Charles County, Missouri, she already devotes her time and efforts to underserved children in her local community. She was bitten by the "interpretation bug" when she volunteered at the MO First State Capital (St. Charles) when she was an undergraduate in college. Now, her passion allows her to devote over 200 hours per year to FOUR different St. Louis area organizations including the Daniel Boone Home (St. Charles County), 1820 Col. Benjamin Stephenson House (Edwardsville, IL), the Mourning Society of St. Louis (St. Louis), and the Bellefontaine Cemetery (north St. Louis). She is an active volunteer throughout the entire year at these facilities. Jeanne also currently serves NAI's South Central Region as its awards chair. Please find Jeanne at the upcoming South Central Regional Conference in Amarillo, Texas and congratulate her on this monumental achievement.

**MO Report continued
Page 13**

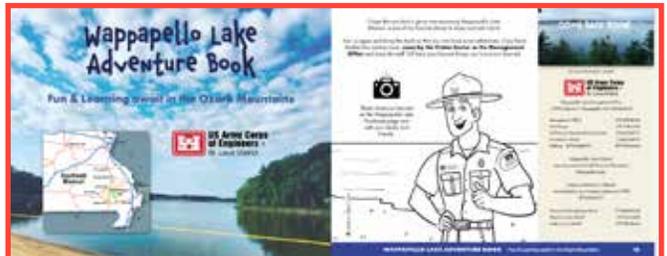
MISSOURI REPORT



[< IN Section Award presented by Mary Loan (Right) to John and Kathy Miller (Left) at the 2024 NAI National Conference in St. Augustine Florida.]

At the recent NAI National Conference, the **Thomas Say Award of Excellence for Outstanding Publication** was awarded to the **Wappapello Lake Adventure Book**. This 16-page book was created by the team of John & Kathy Miller (lead interpreters) in Missouri, Juliana Castro (Graphic Artist) in Florida, and Stan Cain (Graphic Designer) in New Jersey for the US Army Corps of Engineers Wappapello Lake Project in Southeast

Missouri. The book was innovative in that it was oriented to maximize readers participation by opening 22-inches across (instead of the usual 17-inches) and having a non-linear direction for the reader to follow. The beautiful artwork by Juliana provided wonderful illustrative media that could also be colored by readers. John and Kathy created 6 interpretive modules to engage families to Explore, Share, and Protect the amazing area of Wappapello Lake. Each module also included cool facts and key words to know.



[Award plaque and examples of the cover and modules in the Adventure Book.]

Leah Eden, Shepherd of the Hills Conservations Education

Center: With much fanfare, the new Shepherd of the Hills Conservation Education Center in Branson, MO held a ribbon cutting ceremony at 10 am on December 19th. More than 200 people attended the event, including many current and retired employees of the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) who had waited more than 20 years to see a larger facility built here. Friends from Missouri State Parks, the US Army Corps of Engineers, and the Neosho National Fish Hatchery, joined with local and state dignitaries to help usher in a new era for the staff who work at the Education Center and the adjacent Fish Hatchery.

The new building is 2.5 times larger than the original visitor center (which was constructed in 1980) and includes offices and an employee break room. The break room in the old building consisted of a closet with a shared desk and an outdoor picnic table. The new facility has animal enclosures that we can access from behind without disturbing visitors and a large multi-purpose room that can be divided into 2 classrooms. One of the major welcome changes was an increase from 2 full-time and 2 part-time staff to 5 full-time and 3 part-time staff. As we anticipate an increase in the number and variety of interpretive programs, this increase in staffing was greatly appreciated.

The three people who had managed the visitor/education center over the past 44 years were present at the ribbon cutting ceremony. April Dozier (1980-1999), John Miller (1999-2018), and Alison Bleich (2019 to present) all lived with the promise of a new building during their tenure as manager. They now got to see the fruits of their labors. As Alison said during the ceremony, "we can now move from operating in survival mode to thriving and better serving our visitors."

To learn more about the Shepherd of the Hills Conservation Education Center, go to

**MO Report continued
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MISSOURI REPORT

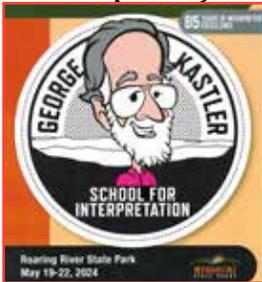


<https://mdc.mo.gov/discover-nature/places/shepherd-hills-conservation-education-center>.

[< Past management staff of the Shepherd of the Hills Conservation Education Center. Left to Right: April Dozier, John Miller, Allison Bleich, and Leah Eden. Special Note, Leah worked under each of the three managers in her 28 year career!]



[Ribbon cutting: Dignitaries involved in the Shepherd of the Hills CEC ribbon cutting ceremony. Cutting the ribbon is MDC Commissioner Margaret Eckelkamp; to her left (black vest) is MDC Director Jason Sumners. >]



The MO Department of Natural Resources will host the annual George Kastler School of Interpretation at Roaring River State Park May 18-21, 2025. In addition to learning new interpretive skills for new seasonals and volunteers, they will conduct a CIG class during the training. If you know of someone who needs their CIG or would like to take part in this Award-winning training, contact Alison Dubbert at alison.dubbert@dnr.mo.gov.

Jessie Ballard, Naturalist, Shoal Creek Conservation Education Center: SCCEC continues to encourage Joplin and surrounding communities to get outdoors and discover the wonderful world of natural resources. Winter can be a challenging time to get folks outside but thankfully the prairies have an answer. Short-eared owls can be found searching for voles and other rodents in these grassy seas during the colder months. Shoal Creek naturalists led a group to look for short-eared owls at Shawnee Trail Conservation Area near Mindenmines, MO.

Owls graced the sky at the tail end of a beautiful sunset. Along with highlighting local birds, annual fly fishing and fly-tying classes are underway at the center. It is a wonderful partnership with our local MAKO (Missouri, Arkansas, Kansas, & Oklahoma) fly fishing group. As all interpreters do, we look for new ways to engage our audiences. This past year we found new audiences in the world of tabletop games. While focusing on nature themed games, we brought the exploration of nature indoors. It has been an opportunity to bring new folks to the center and connect them to other programs as well.



[< Short Eared Owl hike, Sunset on Short-eared Owl Hike - SCCEC]

[Games at SCCEC, Fly Tying at SCCEC >]



OKLAHOMA REPORT

Oklahoma State Report compiled by Neil Garrison, Yukon, OK:

Neil Garrison, retired, Oklahoma City: Nature education programs have been offered every summer at Oklahoma City's Camp DaKaNi since 1956. (It was a facility of Camp Fire Heart of Oklahoma.). The sad news is that this venue is closing due to financial shortfalls. More information is available at: campfirehok.org

"Saving Our Red Grandfather" is a new documentary film that was produced by the **Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma**. The subject of the film is the Red Wolf, a critically-endangered species with only 20 of these wolves remaining in the wild. The Cherokee people have long considered this animal sacred.

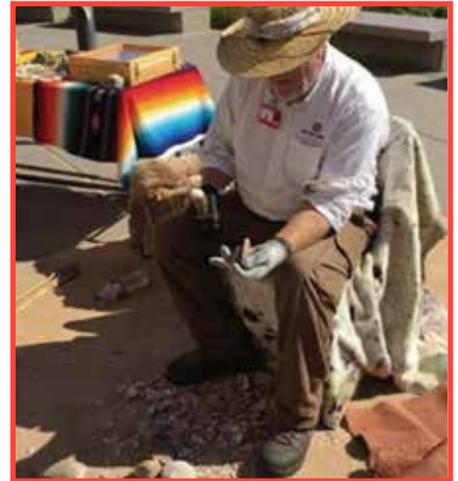
Ever since his retirement in 2009, **Neil Garrison** has been afforded much more leisure time to devote to his avocation: flintknapping (i.e., chipping arrowheads out of stone). Neil was the subject of a profile feature in the latest issue of *The Community Archaeologist* magazine. The magazine article goes into more detail in how Neil has resurrected this ancient art through public education events at various local museums and festivals. Read the article here: <https://indd.adobe.com/view/03f421e9-0378-4e7d-bf8a-5fe95336bb0b>.

[Neil knapping at Sam Nobel Archeology Day event - from magazine article >]

LeeAnn Bunn is the Naturalist at **Lake Tenkiller State Park** and is retiring. Enjoy your retirement, LeeAnn!

The future of the **Sutton Urban Wilderness Area** (Norman, OK) may be in jeopardy. That municipality's Parks Department reported that they are entering into talks as to a possible sale of the land to another entity. (Which would be a darn shame!)

The **"Friends of Martin Park Nature Center"** organization (Oklahoma City) is in the process of publishing a new book on the history of that environmental education facility. The organization's President, Jim Priest, is the book's author. Neil Garrison was the Naturalist at this nature center for 30 years. The first couple of pages of the new book include a dedication to Neil, in recognition of his years of work at the park.



TEXAS REPORT

Texas State Report compiled by Lisa Cole, Helotes, TX:

Katie Raney, Field Interpretation Coordinator for TX State Parks: The Texas State Parks' Regional Interpretive Specialist (RIS) team certified 14 new Certified Interpretive Guides (CIG) at **Lake Brownwood State Park** in December. This class was comprised of state park staff in all kinds of positions, from office managers to park ops trainees to maintenance rangers to Texas Outdoor Family training assistants. Despite the chilly weather, we got cozy with interpretation and saw awesome final presentations about wood ducks, aquatic invertebrates, mushrooms, camping, geology, snakes, and more! These 14 CIGs will take their new skills and techniques back to their parks and programs.



Erin Piper, Outdoor Recreation Supervisor at the Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area (Lewisville, TX) reports that this year's Christmas at the Cabin event on Dec. 14th was a huge success. Over 600 visitors learned about the historic Minor-Porter Log House and enjoyed traditional crafts like candle-dipping, wreath-making, and more...plus the weather was perfect. This long-running special event gets a little bigger every year and has become a part of many families' holiday traditions.

Christmas at LLELA ^

Looking back at 2024, **Chantelle Ruidant-Hansen** at the **San Antonio Missions National Historical Park** says one of their most significant events this year was the Missions' addition to the National Park Service's National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom. The recognition was announced last spring by National Park Service Director Chuck Sams at Mission San José, the scene of an 1833 armed conflict over slavery. Created by Congress in 1998 and administered by the National Park Service, the Underground Railroad Network to Freedom recognizes places and programs with verifiable connections to the Underground Railroad and the resistance to enslavement through escape and flight. Recent scholarship conducted by the NPS in collaboration with local partners, including the San Antonio African American Archive and Museum, shed new light on the stories of freedom seekers who fled south through Texas to Mexico.



[< Mission San José Church and Convento within San Antonio Missions National Historical Park. Credit Paola Longoria for the National Park Foundation]

If you visit San Antonio Missions NHP, you can join a National Park Service ranger for a guided tour of Mission San José every day of the week at 10 am, 11 am, and 2:30 p.m. Tours are free and open to the public—no reservations needed. Check their website for holiday closures.

TEXAS REPORT



[< Park Ranger leading a tour in the granary of Mission San José.
NPS Photo/ Chantelle Ruidant-Hansen]

Tiara Chapman (San Antonio, TX) reminds us that there's another opportunity to network and learn coming up right before the South Central Regional Conference in Amarillo. The **Informal Science Education Association's 2025 Annual Conference** will be in San Antonio at Morgan's Wonderland, February 12-14, 2025. Learn more at <https://www.texasinformalscience.org/conference>

Allie Vanderhider, Interpreter at Levi Jordan Plantation State Historic Site (Brazoria, TX), shared some events coming up soon at her site and at nearby Varner-Hogg Plantation SHS:

Levi Jordan Plantation State Historic Site:

Preserving Pictures: Photography Presentation & Workshop, Saturday, January 18th from 2 to 4 p.m.. Included with regular admission. Photographs are important for studying history and for telling your family's story. Learn how to digitally preserve your family photos with nothing but your iPhone and discover how your photographs can be used for genealogy research in this hands-on workshop.

Public Guided Tours: Black History Month, Saturday, February 1st from 2 to 4 p.m.. Included with regular admission. Join us for a tour for Black History month at the Levi Jordan Plantation State Historic Site. Learn from site staff about those who were enslaved or sharecropped during the plantation and post-emancipation eras and the archaeology associated with them.

Varner-Hogg Plantation State Historic Site:

Roots of Healing: Peppermint Tea, Saturday, January 11th from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m.. Included with regular admission. Come join us on January 11 at 11 a.m. and learn about the different types of herbal teas and remedies used by the enslaved people during the Patton Plantation era. You will learn about Judah Smith, an enslaved woman who was the plantation cook and a medicinal herb expert who used herbs and teas to treat the other enslaved people.

Public Guided Tours: Black History Month, Saturday, February 22nd from 2 to 4 p.m.. Included with regular admission. Join us for a tour for Black History month at the Varner-Hogg Plantation State Historic Site. Learn about those who lived here throughout the site's history including the enslaved people's skills and the accomplishments of cowboys like Hal Fields.

Voices of Varner-Hogg: Guided Oral History Tour, Saturday, March 8th from 2 to 4 p.m.. Included with regular admission. Hear over a century of stories from cowboys, the enslaved people, roughnecks, and many other people who lived and worked at the Varner-Hogg Plantation Site in a special guided tour.

More practice for the Brian Barnette Conference Quiz

Some additional practice questions to get you ready

by Jerrel Geisler, Texas

As has been mentioned in previous *Visions* newsletters and has currently made it to your in-boxes, I will be heading up the **Brian Barnette All American Naturalist Quiz** during the upcoming Amarillo, TX conference.

As I have stated, I always love games and trivia. But better than playing the game is designing it.

In this issue, my final issue to help publish, I will be publishing one more set of questions prior to the Amarillo Conference.

Feel free to work to answer these questions.

Those who bring me these questions answered, prior to the Barnette Interpreter's Quiz on Tuesday, Febru-

ary 18 will get a special prize.

Start checking your answers now.

Again if anyone wishes to assist with the quiz, please let me know before February 18.

Jerrel Geisler, *Visions* Co-Editor, Texas

More Quiz Practice Questions:

#1: A **group of pandas** is called what?

A/An _____

#2: Of the following fruits, which one does not ripen after picking?

A - **Banana**

B - **Apple**

C - **Orange**

D - **Strawberry**

#3: The medical condition **Somnambulism** is more commonly known as what?

#4: What is the common name of this animal which lives in the South Central Region?

masticophis flagellum flagellum

#5: **Cynophobia** is the fear of what?

#6: Where can you find the following items?

The hammer, the anvil, and the stirrup,
also referred to as the *mallus*, the *incus*, and the *stapes*

See you at the Quiz, at the Conference.
See if you can answer these without a device, as you won't be able to use your devices during the quiz.

**Brian Barnette Interpreter's Quiz
4 PM - Tuesday, February 18**

NAI SOUTH CENTRAL REGION VISIONS NEWSLETTER

PUBLICATION INFORMATION



Visions Newsletter is the newsletter for South Central Region of the National Association for Interpretation (NAI). The South Central Region includes states of Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas. For Region 6 information go to www.nairegion6.wordpress.com. Board member email: NAISouthCentral@gmail.com. The national office for NAI is located in Ft. Collins, Colorado. The website is www.interpnet.com.

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DEADLINES FOR *VISIONS* ARE:

Spring: March 20 • Summer: June 20 • Fall: September 20 • Winter: December 20