

Nature with a Mission

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A mission is essential to conveying a message to a community. A critical component of our mission at the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge is "educating our community in the preservation and protection of natural areas." This spring, we wanted to host an event where Fort Worth and surrounding communities could learn about conservation and enjoy recreating in nature. After months of brainstorming and planning, staff created Nature Con...servation. We wanted the community to convene and celebrate nature by exploring the Refuge, learning from experts in the wildlife and conservation community, and contributing data to a bio-blitz using iNaturalist (an app documenting flora and fauna with a geo-referencing component). Nature Con allowed us to fulfill this mission and provide the community with a full day of nature-oriented fun.

Enjoying an Educational Day in Nature

Nature Con took place a few days after Earth Day. Visitors were able to enjoy nature through a series of exploratory activities using different means of navigating the Refuge. The event began with a fun run to Greer Island. The Nature Center started at Greer Island in 1964, so it was fitting to begin our event by taking runners to our origins. Eventgoers were also able to explore the Refuge via guided hikes, bison-feeding hayrides, and paddling along the West Fork of the Trinity River. Our guests were given many opportunities to learn about how we are conserving our natural resources and simply enjoy being outside.

Throughout the day, experts from several agencies and organizations shared information about their roles in conservation. Groups such as the Dallas-Fort Worth Herpetological Society, Texas Parks & Wildlife, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, Fort Worth Urban Forestry, CCC Legacy Chapter 123, Texas Wildlife Association, and more were available at booths to answer questions and share their conservation work with the community. In addition to sharing information, they led visitors along trails, continuing to share their knowledge of local flora and fauna and the many ways plants and animals are connected to our local ecosystems.

City Nature Challenge

We wanted to ensure our guests were part of something bigger than both themselves and the Nature Center. While Nature Con was underway, experts, staff, and visitors were also participating in the City Nature Challenge. This event, normally hosted around Earth Day, has become an annual global effort to document the many forms of flora and fauna found in cities across the world, celebrate the diversity found in urban areas, and demonstrate the



value that places such as the Nature Center hold for area wildlife. Using iNaturalist is a way to showcase what is around us and provide true value to our natural areas. As attendees dispersed across the Refuge, they documented and inventoried the many species that call this area home. Citizen science projects and events such as this only validate how special habitats are for our community and for the plants and animals we protect through land management and education about our natural world.

We rely on the help of many people to put on events such as this. We would like to thank the volunteers who assisted at booths, helped navigate our guests around the Refuge, and aided in setup and breakdown. We would also like to thank the organizations that came out to present and speak to our visitors. With a great staff, volunteers, and peer groups, future Nature Cons will remain a fun and educational annual event that will encourage people to learn about ways to advocate for nature. Mark your calendars for April 25, 2020, when the Nature Center will host the **Second Annual Nature Con...servation!**