

# Fall Events Delight Friends Members

*Sharon McKone, Friends Marketing / Communications*

Fall 2019 provided some excellent opportunities for Friends members to enjoy the Nature Center. Nearly back-to-back dates in October and November allowed those members lucky enough to reserve a spot to participate in some exciting members-only events. We enjoyed hosting these events almost as much as attendees seemed to enjoy participating! All of these events will be returning this spring and summer, so watch your inbox for upcoming information.

## Bagels with "Botany Bob"

Our favorite botanist, Bob O'Kennon, Resident Research Associate at the Botanical Research Institute of Texas (BRIT), has earned the affectionate moniker "Botany Bob" after leading an informative walk for 20 Friends members to see the wild plants found at the Nature Center. Members were not only able to see the plants up close, they were able to learn fascinating facts about them as well due to Bob's vast wealth of knowledge.

After rescheduling twice due to inclement weather, a morning in mid-October dawned bright and beautiful as eager participants met at the Nature Center's Service Center to fuel up on a light breakfast of bagels, fruit, and juice and coffee before beginning their walk.



*During Bagels & Botany, "Botany Bob" explains about cochineal scale insects that live on prickly pear cacti. The insects produce a white, fluffy coating to provide protection. FONC Photo.*

Anyone who has spent any time with Bob knows what a gift he has for finding unique plants and imparting thought-provoking information about them. Saturday, October 19 proved to be no different. For two hours, Bob led the group around Broadview Park, looking at anything that caught his or the members' interest. Along the way, Bob identified several plants, including the prickly pear cactus, which provided an interesting transition into additional information about the insects that



*During Breakfast with the Bison, Nature Center Manager Rob Denkhuis discusses the Nature Center's bison herd, educating attendees with fun information about its origins and genetic makeup. FONC Photo.*

live on them. For example, cochineal scale insects are parasitic bugs native to the southwest U.S. that live on prickly pear cacti, feeding on their moisture and nutrients. They can be found on the plant's pads and produce a white, waxy coating that looks like cotton and helps protect them from other insects, birds, and the sun. In addition, the insects produce carminic acid as protection, which, when extracted and mixed with aluminum or calcium salts, make a safe, natural red dye called carmine.

Thank you, Bob, for making this an event members will remember and want to repeat as often as possible. Thank you also to Friends volunteers and Nature Center staff for helping get everything ready. We will host Bagels & Botany with Bob again this spring, so look for more information soon.

## Breakfasting with the Bison

On a chilly November morning, 20 hearty souls excitedly made their way to the Nature Center for a sunrise breakfast inside the bison range on National Bison Day (November 2). The herd, including 2019's calves, was munching grass contentedly next to the fence as attendees ate a catered sit-down breakfast.

While members were enjoying breakfast, Nature Center Manager Rob Denkhuis spoke about the history and makeup of the Nature Center's bison herd, including in his presentation interesting facts



*A young attendant of S'mores by Starlight intently looks for bones and other material in an owl pellet that will help her discover what owls eat. FONC Photo.*

such as the bison herd made its debut on November 9, 1973, with the arrival of three 2.5-year-old bison—a bull and two heifers—donated from the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge. One of the heifers was pregnant, so the first Nature Center bison birth occurred on May 21, 1974. It was a girl. In addition, the Nature Center's bison are genetically pure according to the most current testing technology available. For this reason, many herd managers look to these animals as another resource for genetic diversity when managing their own herds.

After breakfast, members were able to toss specialized feed pellets to the bison over the fence and ask Rob and his staff questions about the herd. Several members commented at the end that this was one of the most enjoyable events they had attended at the Nature Center.

We would like to extend a special thank you to Rob and his staff for helping make this such a memorable occasion. We will be hosting Breakfast with the Bison again in the next few months. It

sold out very quickly in November, so when you see the announcement that registration is open, don't delay in signing up.

### **A Night of Stars and S'mores**

On November 16, in the middle of an extremely cold wintry spell, Mother Nature gave Fort Worth a much-needed break from the chilly conditions and gifted us with a sunny day in the upper 50s and lower 60s. Nearly 100 Friends members took advantage of the warmer weather to attend S'mores by Starlight at the Nature Center.

A variety of activities entertained attendees, giving all ages something fun to do. The makings for s'mores were provided next to a roaring fire so members could roast their marshmallows on a stick to the perfect doneness. In addition, fudgy hot chocolate was on hand. In addition to the food, members were able to dissect owl pellets to discover what types of creatures make up an owl's diet, participate in a couple of guided night hikes to listen for the wildlife that inhabit the Nature Center at night, and, one of the highlights of the evening, view Saturn (including its rings!) and countless stars and constellations through the high-powered telescopes provided by the Fort Worth Astronomical Society. Society members were on hand to answer questions and point out the more-interesting panoramas in the sky.

Thank you to the Fort Worth Astronomical Society and all the volunteers from the Friends and Nature Center who made this evening possible! This event will take place once again soon, so look for details in an upcoming email.

We would like to encourage you to invite your family and friends to attend an upcoming members-only event. If they are not a member, it's easy to sign up online [here](#).