

# Around the Refuge

*Daniel Price, Natural Resource Manager*



*A doe with her twin fawns alerted to the photographer's presence. FWNC&R Staff Photo.*

Summer is upon us, and, like spring, we are still seeing new critters appear and a plethora of wildflowers in full bloom. Spring sprung like clockwork, and wildflowers roused from their winter dormancy. Refuge staff also sprang into action with iNaturalist. Winter is typically a slow period for documenting observations of flora and fauna on iNaturalist, but when spring arrives, we all perk up and take note of the wildflowers, insects, reptiles, and amphibians that emerge. Summer is no different. Since winter, the Refuge iNaturalist project has grown to more than

6,305 observations of 1,534 plant and animal species, with 146 observers. In April, volunteers and staff participated in the nationwide iNaturalist City Nature Challenge. Together, we helped the Dallas-Fort Worth region achieve the prestige of the number-one rank for “city with highest percentage of verifiable observations” with 96.3%!

With the help of a few large volunteer groups, we have reached a stopping point on the Greer Island triangle corner. In the last issue, we mentioned that the Texas A&M “Big Project” group and AmeriCorps teamed with our Natural Guard volunteers and made a great start opening up that corner. Since then, Natural Guard has also teamed with the TCU Geology Club and an all-female Trinity Valley High School class to create a phenomenal opening that will be managed as a post oak savanna, utilizing continued mechanical operations, herbicide, and potential prescribed burning.

Privet is a summer maintenance problem on our trails because of its rapid growth, requiring constant trimming during the growing season. To address this, we have implemented a trail widening project on Wild Plum using the skid steer. In the fall and winter, we will restore the cleared area with native plants from the greenhouse.

Even with the focus on clearing privet and general maintenance of the Refuge, we were able to dedicate some time for outreach. We hosted several volunteer groups and provided tours to accompany their projects, and we gave off-site presentations on a number of topics, including pollinators of North Texas, fish of the West Fork of the Trinity River, *Prairie Seekers* field training, and mammal skull identification. In the fall, we will be gearing up to implement the *In Your Face* mock waterfowl hunting program, where we will bring waterfowl to the “hunters.” In this case, our hunters will be birding enthusiasts and photographers. This new program is funded, in part, by the Fort Worth chapter of the Audubon Society.

Spring and summer bring new growth, not only for plants, both native and non-native, but for wildlife as well. When you are out on the trails or driving through the Refuge, look carefully to



*A 2017 bison calf nursing. Calves are born with lighter fur but eventually transition to a darker color.  
FWNC&R Staff Photo.*



see the growth in our wildlife populations. For one, our bison herd is expanding. To date, we have six new calves and could expect more before the end of the summer. When it comes to



*Armadillos typically give birth to identical quadruplets. Can you tell the difference? FWNC&R Staff Photo.*

bison reproduction, cows will typically have only one calf a year, with rare occasions of twin births. An animal that typically has twins every year, however, is the white-tailed deer. Keep an eye out for the fawns that have started appearing around the Refuge. On the other end of the birth scale, the nine-banded armadillo is unique in that it will always give birth to four identical quadruplets. In addition, the feral hog, our greatest animal nemesis, is capable of producing two litters a year, with anywhere from four to

twelve young per litter. We are continually monitoring our feral hog population while actively trying to control their numbers.

On May 30, 2017, we welcomed two Refuge interns: Bren Ledbetter and Joelle Holtman. Bren interned with us last summer and returns for 2017 as a veteran. She graduated UT Arlington with a BS in Biology and serves as the current Cross Timbers Texas Master Naturalists vice president and programs chair. Joelle graduated from Iowa's Cornell College with a BA in Biology. She joins us after working at Camp Grady Spruce as an outdoor education naturalist. Joelle also has ranch experience with Holtman Land & Cattle.

After much anticipation, we finally received two replacement John Deere Gators. We were very excited, as you can see here in the photo with our first new gator. This modeling session may be the impetus for a staff calendar! We have field tested the Gator and give it our seal of approval.

As we move further into summer, we will be maintaining trails, constructing new



*Nic Martinez, Nick Griffin, Elizabeth Bittner, and Daniel Price (L-R) show off the new Gator UTV. FWNC&R Staff Photo.*

bridges for the Canyon Ridge and Riverbottom trails, working on installation of an interpretive sign at Chisholm Trail Park, and helping with some of the summer outdoor education programming. Look for us out on the trails or driving the Gator the next time you visit the Refuge!