

# THE BULLETIN

*Belterra Community News*

January 2017 Volume 11, Issue 1

News for the Residents of Belterra

## NATUREWATCH

### THE PRESERVES AROUND US

*by Jim and Lynne Weber*

One of the main reasons Austin is such a wonderful place to live is because it is interlaced with a patchwork of preserves, which together comprise the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP) System. In 1992, voters in the City of Austin passed Proposition 10, approving \$22M in bonds for the sole purpose of acquiring and improving lands to protect air and water quality, conserve endangered species, and provide open space for passive public use. Jointly owned and managed by the City of Austin, Travis County, the Lower Colorado River Authority, the Nature Conservancy, the Travis Audubon Society, and private landowners, the BCP's ultimate goal is to set aside 30,428 acres that contribute to the quality of all life here in Austin.

A multi-agency conservation effort that operates under a regional permit issued under the Endangered Species Act by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the BCP consists of several tracts of land in western Travis County. It is important to note that a 'preserve' is different than a 'park', and is set aside for the purpose of maintaining a natural state rather than developed for recreational use. The BCP protects prime habitat for the endangered Golden-cheeked Warbler, a bird species that is found only to breed within Central Texas' specialized mix of native, mature Ashe Juniper (often incorrectly called 'cedar') and stands of Live, Spanish, and Shin oak trees. This type of mixed oak-juniper woodland grows mainly on our moist steep-sided canyons and slopes, providing the warbler with the food, water, and nest-building material it needs to breed.

In addition to the Golden-cheeked Warbler, 7 other endangered species make the preserve system their home, including the Black-capped Vireo, Tooth Cave Ground Beetle, Tooth Cave Pseudoscorpion, Tooth Cave Spider, Kretschmarr Cave Mold Beetle, Bone Cave Harvestman, and Bee Creek Cave Harvestman. These last 6 species are called karst invertebrates, arthropods that spend their entire existence underground in karst formations. These karst



*The endangered Golden-cheeked Warbler.*

features, such as caves, sinkholes, cracks, and crevices, were formed by the dissolution of calcium carbonate in limestone bedrock by mildly acidic groundwater. Over 70 other rare plant and animal species also exist on the preserves, making this region one of the most biologically diverse areas in the country. As such, Central Texas is happily home to more habitat conservation plans than any other region in the United States.

These wild and beautiful areas require management plans in order for them to remain pristine habitats. This includes establishment of secure boundaries and rules for access control, maintenance of appropriate trails, species monitoring, habitat enhancement, and – last but not least – public education and outreach to promote good neighbor relations. As Austin residents, we can do our part to become stewards of these unique habitats. While in the preserve system, we can stay on marked trails, travel only on foot, and “take only photographs, leave only footprints.” In our neighborhoods, especially those that border preserve tracts, we can landscape with native plants, remove invasive plants, eliminate pesticide use, be responsible pet owners, practice water conservation, and always respect preserve boundaries.

Most importantly, we can all minimize further negative impacts on the fragile habitat that surrounds our neighborhoods by caring for the preserves through volunteering. Some of the activities you can become involved with in the preserve system include long-term habitat restoration, gathering and planting native seeds, removing

*(Continued on Page 2)*

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*(Continued from Cover)*

non-native invasive plants, leading guided hikes, and learning about and sharing your knowledge of the native plants and animals that make this such a special place to live. For more information, visit the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve website at <http://www.austintexas.gov/bcp>.



*The endangered Black-capped Vireo.*

Send your nature-related questions to [naturewatch@austin.rr.com](mailto:naturewatch@austin.rr.com) and we'll do our best to answer them.

If you enjoy reading these articles, check out our two books, **Nature Watch Austin & Nature Watch Big Bend**, both published by Texas A&M University Press, and our blog at [naturewatchaustin.blogspot.com](http://naturewatchaustin.blogspot.com).

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## Tree Cavities

I took some time to go over the articles of the past couple of years. I have covered many topics that I commonly deal with during consults with clients regarding their trees. This month and next month I will cover three related concerns that I address at just about every appointment: tree cavities/hollows, and next month -fungi that grow on trees and rot that they cause. I hope the next three articles will effectively demonstrate the relationship between them.

It is very common for trees to be hollow to some degree – especially if they are of considerable size and age. In most cases, it is a result of one primary, precipitating event – lightning. Other precipitating events can be wind sheering of large branches, improper pruning of large branches and unhealed deer rubs on trees when they were young.

Regardless of the cause, the present question is: Now that there is a cavity - What is to be done? Some “home remedies” I’ve come across in my years of caring for trees are quite interesting – from filling them with rocks (maybe as much of a way to get rid of the rocks from view as a tree remedy), concrete, filling them with expanding foam, and mechanically removing everything inside the tree possible.

First, it is critical to not do any of the first three in any circumstance! There are many reasons for this, but the principle one is that what will result is more moisture will remain inside the tree for longer, facilitating rot. Rot is by far the worst debilitator of tree health and

structural integrity. As with most cases, Mother nature knows best – air flow is the best way for moisture to dissipate. Removing non-structurally assisting material in the cavity (i.e. organic litter: rotting wood, leaves, sticks, squirrel stashes, etc.) will help by eliminating those objects which will sponge and hold moisture in the hollow longer. Do not try to pry out hard heartwood though by any means. In those cases where a proportional and moderate-sized drill hole can assist with air flow and future water drainage from a cavity, as well as also function as a port for evacuation of organic litter by water-flushing of the cavity (least intrusive, damaging means of cleaning decades of litter out at once I’ve found and employ regularly), in some cases a drilling injury is warranted. To keep out animals from the cavity – a chicken wire mesh with stout fence staples holding it in place will work quite effectively.

The goal of cavity “repair” is to allow the tree a better environment to slow the rot – thereby enabling the tree’s response of wound wood and callus growth, as well as changing the density and location of its new growth in order to compensate for the changes in wind pressure resistance resulting from its cavity.

*Questions or comments this article or previous articles have generated, may be directed to me at: [kevin@arborcareandconsulting.com](mailto:kevin@arborcareandconsulting.com)*

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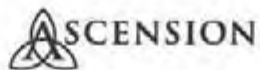
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## Hitting the slopes this ski season?

### Keep in mind these tips to preventing injuries on the slopes.

As a former US Olympic Men's Ski Team physician and orthopedist, every year during the winter months I treat many ski & snowboard injuries in Austin recreational athletes of all ages and abilities.

For 15 years, as a traveling doctor for the team, I accompanied the athletes throughout the US, Canada and Europe on the World Cup tour and was responsible for the triage, stabilization, and treatment of injuries in these world-class skiers.

One of the most frequent questions I get this time of year from my patients who ski is

#### **"How can I avoid hurting myself on the ski slopes?"**

So what do I tell recreational skiers about staying healthy on the hill?

First and foremost, adjust to the altitude in your first few days. While there are medications that will improve your blood oxygen, they require a prescription and can have side effects. Perhaps the easiest to take along are low-dose aspirin or ginkgo biloba, as both are safe (unless allergic) and easy to take. Low-level exercise and lots of water (especially during the first night) are also key, as is abstinence from alcohol during the first 24 hours at altitude. Early trip moderation equals a better mountain experience!

Modern skis, boots, and bindings are universally safe now, unlike in decades past. Multi-release bindings help you come out of your skis safely in a fall and with less stress on your knees, the most commonly injured joint in a skier. Make sure they are set correctly.

Speaking of knees, in most solid, intermediate skiers, unlike beginners (learning to stop) and racers (ACL injury from shear forces), serious knee injuries are actually quite rare.

#### **The best way to protect yourself from ski injury is:**

- **Get in good "ski-shape"**  
6 weeks of strength and some aerobic training will suffice
- **Ski within your limits**
- **Stay relaxed, focused & well hydrated**
- **Watch out for that last, fatigued run of the afternoon**

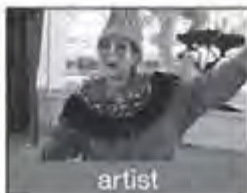
- **If you fall, fall forward and throw your hands in front of you** it's proven that less knee and shoulder injuries occur in the forward lean of a fall.

- **And always, always, wear a helmet!**

Before you ski, take time to take stock of your physical condition, especially your knee, shoulder and hip joints. Pre-trip aches and pains will not make for an enjoyable ski trip!

*Written by Kelly Cunningham, MD Orthopedic Specialist and Founder, Austin OrthoBiologics Sports Medicine Clinic*

*Austin resident Kelly Cunningham, MD is board certified by the American College of Orthopedic Surgeons, and an active member of the Arthroscopy Association of North America and the International Cartilage Repair Society.*



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