

**Bright Leaf T-Shirts, Caps, & Patches
in Vibrant Colors**



Caps \$20



Friends of Bright Leaf
Patches \$5



T-Shirts \$15

To order, contact Sally Scott at 453-2289

Calendar of Events

June Event—National Trails Day
Saturday, June 3rd, 9:00am—1:00pm
(early hike starts at 7:30am)

June Program Meeting
Bill Stout, National Wildlife Federation
Tuesday, June 13th, 7:00 pm

July Board Meeting
Tuesday, July 11th, 6:30 pm

Monthly Interpretive Hikes

Interpretive Hikes are scheduled for the second Saturday and second Sunday of every month. Meet at the parking lot at the north entrance to the park.

June Interpretive Hikes
Saturday, June 10, 8:30 - 10:30 am
Sunday, June 11, 8:30 - 10:30 am

July Interpretive Hikes
Saturday, July 8, 8:30 - 10:30 am
Sunday, July 9, 8:30 - 10:30 am

August Interpretive Hikes
Saturday, August 12, 8:30 - 10:30 am
Sunday, August 13, 8:30 - 10:30 am

May Interpretive Hikes
Sunday, September 9, 8:30 - 10:30 am
Saturday, September 10, 8:30 - 10:30 am

Thanks to our 2006 Sponsors



Friends of Bright Leaf
P.O. Box 27921
Austin, Texas 78755-7921

Friends of Bright Leaf



Friends of Bright Leaf

Summer 2006

National Trails Day
Saturday, June 3rd
9:00am—1:00pm
(early hike at 7:30a)

JUNE Program Meeting
Bill Stout, National Wildlife Federation
Tuesday, June 13th, 7:00p.m.
Lucas Conference Center

Snakes in the Park!

There are several species of snakes that may, upon occasion, be seen at Bright Leaf. Most are not venomous and should not be cause for alarm. In fact, snakes are more afraid of people than vice versa and will gladly escape if given the chance. Many snakes are very beneficial because they control rats and other animal populations. It is worth the effort to learn about the more common snakes in Austin, because you may even see some of them in your own backyard.

First some common snake myths and the facts. *Are snakes slimy? No. They actually are dry and feel smooth. *Are snakes cold? No, but they are cold-blooded like other reptiles. They depend on the temperature around them to keep their bodies at the just the right amount of warmth. They like to sit on a warm rock when it's cold and in the shade when it is hot. They hibernate or become less active in winter when it is very cold and also in summer when it is very hot. They are more active in spring and that is also when mating takes place. *Do snakes lay eggs? Some do, they are called oviparous. Others keep the eggs inside their body until they hatch and give birth to live young. Their young do not have a placenta like mammals. They are called ovoviviparous. *Can snakes sting with their tongue or tail? No. They flick their tongue a lot because that's how they smell and taste the world around them. *Do snakes hypnotize their prey? No. Snakes don't blink their eyes because they don't have eyelids. They have a clear scale over their eye for protection. And prey ani-



Blotched Water Snake

mals will often 'freeze' after darting away in an attempt to hide in plain sight. Their coloring is often fantastic camouflage when they stay still. Some snakes are able to locate prey by body heat. This is the purpose of 'pits' on the pit viper's face. A rattlesnake is an example of a pit viper. *Will a snake chase me? No. Snakes do not chase after people. Humans are not their food. But snakes will try various defense tactics if they feel threatened. Both venomous and non-venomous snakes may sometimes bite. Some snakes play dead. Some mimic the behaviors of more dangerous snakes. Many emit a foul smelling substance when handled. And some just try to 'run' away. *Do snakes have to be coiled to strike? No. They can bite from almost any position. *Can you tell a rattlesnakes age by counting its rattles? Not really. A new rattle is formed every time a rattlesnake sheds its skin. That may happen quite often or very rarely. And the snake may lose its rattles through some accident and have to start over. *Do poisonous snakes have triangular heads? Not always. And sometimes non-venomous snakes can flatten out their heads when threatened so they look triangular.

According to Texas Parks & Wildlife, there are 115 species & subspecies of snakes in Texas. That's the highest number of any state. Of those, only 15 are poisonous. There are only four main types of poisonous snakes: The pit vipers, which are the rattlesnakes, cottonmouths, and copperheads.

(Continued on page 4)

Letter from the Board President

Dear Friends of Bright Leaf,

April was an eventful month at Bright Leaf. Our new website, www.BrightLeaf.org went 'live'. You can now find information about the Friends group, about Bright Leaf, check the calendar of hikes, and lots more when you are on the internet. Next, we had a Boy Scout refurbish the kiosk and bench at the trailhead off 2222 and Creek Mountain Road. Site Manager, John Mahan, helped this young man earn his Eagle Scout award for this project. Then, John and I worked to get the trail in good shape and John put in stepping stones at the lower Dry Creek crossing.

All of this activity was done with an eye towards Austin Nature Day which took place April 15th this year. This is a citywide event that encourages people to get outdoors and appreciate all the wonderful sites and organizations around town. Check out the brochure online at www.AustinNatureDay.org. Even though the event is over, there is still a lot of good information if you want to get outdoors, but have run out of ideas of where to go or what to do. At Bright Leaf, we had over forty five visitors on Austin Nature Day. It was

the day before Easter, and many of our visitors were families with children. On one hike I led, we even got to see a bunny rabbit! We had six Capital Area Master Naturalists on hand to answer questions and two people came out from REI to talk to the kids about being considerate hikers and 'leaving no trace'.

In June, on Saturday the 3rd, will be a special open house event on National Trails Day. Come out for a hike and bring a friend who's never been to Bright Leaf. Not enough people know about Bright Leaf, so spread the word. We'll also have our usual monthly hikes on the 10th and 11th at 8:30am. Call us at 459-7269 if you ever want more information or want to schedule a hike. There will be a program meeting at the Georgia Lucas house at 7:00pm on the 13th. Bill Stout with the National Wildlife Federation will talk to us about that organization and about backyard habitats. Program meetings, like our hikes and open house events, are free and open to the public.

See you at Bright Leaf!

Nancy Woolley
Friends of Bright Leaf

Letter From the Park Manager

Thank you for your hard work on Austin Nature Day. It was a beautiful day of guided hikes and interpretation.

Spring brings new opportunities for wildlife observation. Golden-cheeked Warblers have been sighted at Bright Leaf. A Roadrunner has been demonstrating mating behavior near the southern portion of the trail system. Normally a shy and reclusive bird, spring brings out the Romeo in him. He runs chest out, tail high, clicking for a mate.

We recorded more than five inches of rain during

recent storms. These have engendered some debris and limbs on the trails. Following some cleanup, we will be ready for National Trails Day.

Thanks again for your hard work. I look forward to seeing you National Trails Day, June 3rd.

John Mahan 512-459-7269

Membership Application

New Member Renewal

Annual memberships to **Friends of Bright Leaf** provide funds to help preserve, protect and make accessible this treasure. Become a member and help assure that Georgia Lucas' dream will last many lifetimes.

Individual \$25 Family \$35 Supporter \$50+ Sponsor \$100+
Patron \$250+ Corporate \$500+ Life Member \$1,000+

I would like to help with the following activities: [Please circle all that apply].

Trail/Brush Work Clean ups Lead Hikes Train Docents
Membership Recruitment Bookkeeping Publicity Event Planning
Fund-Raising Desktop Publishing Educate Children Educate Adults
Educate on Plants Educate on Birds Educate on Geology Scientific Studies
Other: _____

NAME(S): _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

HOME PHONE: _____ WORK PHONE: _____

E-MAIL: _____ (for reminders of hikes and other events)

CHECK #: _____

As a member of the Friends of Bright Leaf, I will support the decisions of the management of the park. My signature releases Friends of Bright Leaf and its members from any responsibility for accidents or death as a result of use of the Bright Leaf property. I understand that the Friends of Bright Leaf will not sell or loan my membership information to any other entity.

SIGNATURE: _____ Date _____

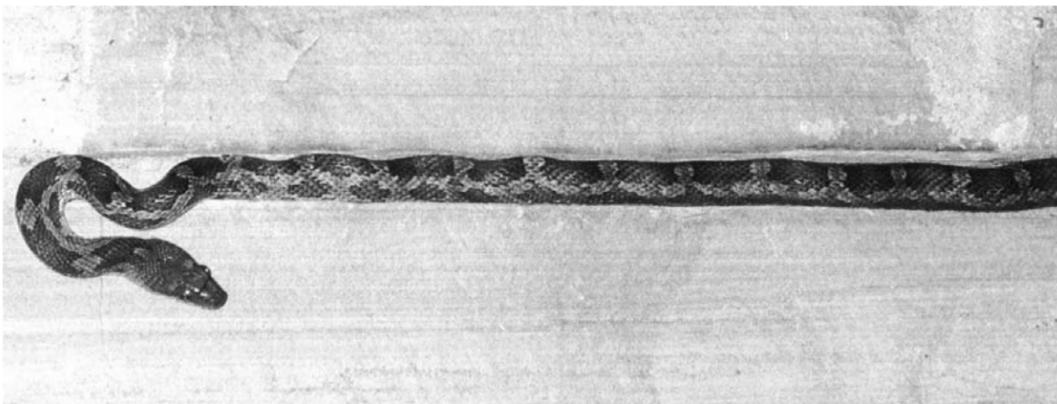
Friends of Bright Leaf
P.O. Box 27921
Austin, Texas 78755-7921
(512) 459-7269

(Continued from page 1)

And the coral snakes. The coral snakes are brightly colored and easy to identify. Remember the rhyme, "Red touch yellow, kill a fellow. Red touch black, venom lack". These are very poisonous, but lucky for humans, they are very shy and bites are rare. The harmless milk snake has the same colors but in a different order. Copperheads and cottonmouths, or water moccasins as they are sometimes called, are not common in Austin. The snake that is often confused with the cottonmouth is the blotched water snake. It is dark in color, either with dark markings or nearly without, like the cottonmouth. Like its name indicates, it is often seen near water because its preferred food is frogs and toads. Look at the picture of a blotched water snake that was taken at Bright Leaf. The marks below the mouth are the sure way to ID it. Also, the cottonmouth will have a black mark going back from its eyes, like a raccoon mask. Hard to make an ID? Always stay back from any snake and look at it with binoculars or with a camera that has a zoom lens.

The western diamondback rattlesnake is the most common and widespread venomous snake in Texas. It has the brown diamond shaped markings we are all familiar with. It also has black and white rings around its tail and the rattles that it's famous for. Rattlesnakes can live up to 25 years and females reproduce once every other year. Many people who are bitten are reaching into places where they can't see. Like picking berries in brush and tall grass or reaching into rock piles or wood piles.

Reaching into the rock piles in the rock quarry area of Bright Leaf would not be a wise move. And watch where you step. Snakes have the patterns they do because it's good camouflage. Even



Rat Snake

rattlesnakes have predators, and those include the roadrunner, hawks, and owls, the kingsnake, cats, and most of all, humans.

Another snake in the area that can reach a large size is the Texas rat snake, sometimes called the 'chicken snake'. It ranges in size from 40 to 70+ inches long! It sometimes might be mistaken for a rattlesnake. It has brown saddle-shaped markings on its back along with a yellowish color. There may be a red color visible in-between the scales. Look for a slate grey head. If this snake feels threatened it may curl up, flatten its head, wiggle its tail, and try to bite. If you are bitten by this snake, a good thorough washing with antibacterial soap is probably all that you'll need. The rats that are prey for this snake pose a much greater threat to humans. They carry a great number of germs, fleas, and diseases that can make us sick. This makes the rat snake one of the most beneficial snakes in Austin. They don't eat chickens. More likely they are hanging around the hen house to find the rat that also lives there.

The Eastern black-necked garter snake and the ribbon snake are two of the snakes most often seen at Bright Leaf and

in local gardens. They are thin and about 20 to 30 inches long when fully grown. They both have a stripe down their back. The garter snake's stripe is orange, while the ribbon snake's stripe may be yellow, orange, or red. The garter snake has a checkerboard like patten on its sides and black on its neck behind the jaw. The ribbon snake has another light stripe that runs down each side and no checkerboard. Its neck is white or a very light color. When these snakes are moving through leaf litter, their stripes make it appear they are moving very slowly when actually they can move very quickly. When a predator, such as a hawk, owl, skunk, or raccoon, reaches out to get them, they are already gone. They are much more obvious when out in the open and vulnerable. Ribbon snakes and garter snakes feed on small frogs and toads, earthworms, and other small creatures. In our yards, they often fall victim to lawnmowers. While these snakes may make attractive pets and may be available at local pet stores, be sure you know what you are doing before you adopt one. Research their requirements carefully; this should not be a spur of the moment decision. Keeping animals is a responsibility. Locally, Westgate Animal Clinic treats exotic animals and reptiles, including snakes. Contact them or your own vet for the needs of any animal that you adopt.

If you are ever bitten by a snake, call 911 immediately. Try to remember a description of the snake even if you can't ID it exactly. STAY CALM. And don't try any "home remedies" like applying a tourniquet, cutting and sucking out venom, or

applying ice. These may all cause much more damage than the snake bite itself. Getting to a hospital ASAP is the best advice. Children should be taught that playing or provoking a wild snake is never a good

idea. And just because a snake is a baby or young doesn't mean it's less dangerous than its fully grown parent. It may actually be more dangerous since it hasn't learned to use only a small amount of venom. Snakes shouldn't cause irrational fear, but snakes should be respected because it is true that some are very dangerous. They should also be valued for the role they play in our environment. They are really fascinating fellow inhabitants in our world.

Just a few of the snakes in our area are mentioned in this article. An excellent book for more information and pictures is: A Field Guide to Texas Snakes by Alan Tennant in the Texas Monthly Field Guide Series.

Nancy Woolley
(photos & article)

June Event

National Trails Day at Bright Leaf Saturday June 3rd from 9:00 am until 1:00 pm (Early 7:30am hike with Joe Beach) Guided Hikes / Refreshments

Wear hiking boots or sturdy shoes. Bring a water bottle.

PLUS: REI PEAK Program for Kids

REI will be presenting their PEAK program at Bright Leaf Preserve. The PEAK Program is a fun way to educate kids about Leave No Trace Principles. It's great for teachers, parents and youth groups. PEAK stands for Promoting Environmental Awareness in Kids. The goal of this program is to educate children about enjoying and caring for the outdoors.

Directions:

- Take RR2222 west from Mopac.
- Go one block west of the traffic light at Mesa.
- Go left (south) onto Creek Mountain.
- When it dead-ends in two short blocks, turn right onto Old Bull Creek.
- The parking lot is on the left.

Friends of Bright Leaf 2005-2006 Board of Directors

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Joseph Beach		342-0588
Bruce Bigelow		327-4748
Marshall Johnston		335-9525
Kurt Hill		343-5550
Sally Scott		453-2289

Park Managers

Jeff Hershey John Mahan

Newsletter Editors

Steve Gerson Beck Runte

Donors to Friends of Bright Leaf will be recognized once per year, in the September issue of the newsletter. We appreciate your continued support. If you would prefer that your name not be listed in the newsletter, please let us know when you make a donation.

Special Thanks to:

- The **docents** who lead hikes for the public every month.
- Contributors to **Friends of Bright Leaf**

The mission of the **Friends of Bright Leaf** is to conserve and enhance Bright Leaf and promote the public's enjoyment, understanding, and appreciation of this urban jewel.

Our budget is posted on the Friends of Bright Leaf e-group web site --

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/fobl/>

The board of Friends of Bright Leaf approved restated Articles of Incorporation which have been filed with the Texas Secretary of State. In the future, any change to the bylaws by which Friends of Bright Leaf are governed must be approved by a 2/3 vote of the members in attendance at the annual meeting in October.