Cajun Prairie Habitat Preservation Society

"A PRAIRIE CHICKEN IN EVERY PLOT"

VOLUME 37, July 2010

CAJUN PRAIRIE SUMMER MEETING
Saturday August 28, 2010

800 AM: Tours of Duralde Restored Prairie. Join us at any time after 8 and we will wander around and enjoy this site until about 930. Directions: Take La 13 north out of Eunice and after crossing a bridge, go about 1.5 miles and turn left onto La 374. If coming from the north on La 13, about 6 miles south of Mamou, just past the Fire Station, turn right onto La 374. Follow La 374 west and it will take a sharp right then a sharp left. After straightening out from the sharp left, go about 0.5 miles and turn left at the first double intersection. You will be turning left onto a gravel road that is Parish Road 6-29S. Parish Road 6-29S is about 2 miles from La 13. Follow Parish Road 6-29S and it will take a sharp right and then will start a sharp left but you will not turn at the left but drive straight into Duralde Prairie.

10:00 AM Eunice Restored Prairies; meet at the corners of Martin Luther King and East Magnolia and enjoy the best restored prairie in the United States. This site is north of U.S. 190 and east of La 13. For those of you coming from the north on La 13, turn left (east) at the first paved road (East Magnolia) to the east after you ross the railroad tracks in Eunice. Go a couple of blocks and the prairie is on your left. For those coming from the east on U.S. 190 turn right (north) at the first red/green traffic light and follow Martin Luther King Drive for a couple of blocks and the prairie is on your left. For those coming from the west on U.S. 190, follow U.S. 190 through Eunice and after crossing a railroad track, go to the next red/green traffic light and turn left onto Martin Luther King Drive (See above). For those coming from the south on La 13, when you reach the stop sign, turn right onto Maple Ave. Follow Maple for about 3-4 blocks and at the 2nd four-way stop sign, turn left onto Martin Luther King Drive. Follow this street across U.S. 190 and see above.

12 noon Lunch at Rockys Restaurant and Cajun Prairie Society meeting. Presentations from North American Prairie Conference. 1415 E Laurel Ave, Eunice, LA 70535 (337) 457-6999

SO YOU WANT TO JOIN US OR RE-JOIN?

Dues are $20 per person, $25 per family, and $10 for students.
Make checks payable to Cajun Prairie Habitat Preservation Society and mail to:
CPHPS/CO Patricia Lewis
262 CR 3062
Newton, TX 75966

Minutes The Cajun Prairie Habitat Preservation Society, Inc.
May 15, 2010

Jackie Duncan, Vice-President and Chair, opened the general meeting of the members of the Cajun Prairie Habitat Preservation Society at 11:45 am May 15, 2010 at the Cajun Prairie Restoration Project site in Eunice, Louisiana.

Sonnie and Kent Milton provided a meal (bar-b-que and all the sides) for the members present.

The business meeting was called to order.

Malcolm Vidrine provided minutes in the newsletter from the previous meeting. Jim Foret moved for the acceptance of the minutes and Mac Meyers seconded the motion. The minutes were accepted by a majority vote.

Pat Lewis provided a treasurer's report. The society has a current balance of $11,558.77 (end of year 2009). Charles Allen motioned for acceptance of the report. Paul Fontenot seconded the motion. The report was accepted by a majority vote.

Sara Simmonds motioned that we extend our appreciation to the Miltons for their effort and that each attendee contribute $5 to cover the expenses of the lunch. Patricia Lewis seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously accepted.

Old business:

Margaret Frey provided a report on the progress of the creation of lesson plans on the Cajun Prairie.

Malcolm Vidrine provided a report on the progress of the book entitled "The Cajun Prairie: A natural history" to be published by the ULL Press. Permission was requested to use the society seal on the spine of the book. A request for $2500 to cover part of the publication costs was also presented as proposed in a previous meeting. Charles Allen motioned for the granting of both requests. Margaret Frey seconded. The motion was unanimously supported.

New business:

Sara Simmonds motioned that a reminder be sent to members to pay dues on a routine basis. After an extended discussion, no second was found. Jackie Duncan suggested that she will see to it that at minimum 'post-cards' are mailed as reminders. No further action was taken.

Sara Simmonds motioned that up to $100 per month to be disbursed to provide security and clean-up of the Cajun Prairie Restoration Project site in Eunice. Charles Allen seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously accepted.

Larry Allain made a brief presentation on the Coastal Prairie Partnership (a new coalition of prairie enthusiasts currently based in the Texas coastal prairie). As a board member, he extended several invitations to the society: 1) a teaching and curriculum workshop to be help in June, 2) a State of the Prairie Conference in November, 3) membership (free) as a participating institution in the coalition, 4) an available seat on the board, and 5) an opportunity to sponsor the November conferences. Actions taken: 1) Malcolm Vidrine volunteered to serve as a representative of the CPHPS on the board, and 2) Charles Allen motioned and Sara Simmonds seconded the donation of $100 to sponsor the conference and to place our society in membership (and also using the society emblem on the supporting paperwork). The motion was unanimously supported. Larry noted that he was currently serving as a member on the board for the USGS.

Larry Allain also reported that the prairie remnants were undergoing some management by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. The south Fenton remnant had been mowed in 2008. New mowing and hopefully burning were planned on the Midland and Estherwood remnants. Union Pacific and local farmers were on board to help with this management.

Tyrone Foreman made a brief presentation on his restoration project in Lafayette Parish. The site is 7-8 years post-seeding. He proposed donating the property to the society for the purpose of education with the provisions that it be named after his grandfather and be used with certain restrictions. After discussion, Jackie Duncan appointed a committee consisting of Larry Allain, Jim Foret, Charles Allen and Malcolm Vidrine to consider the legal and other aspects of such a donation.

Patricia Lewis proposed that the society interact with the Mayor on the ongoing property issue under legal action by Kenneth Pitre dealing with the corner gas plant and the Magnolia Street ownership. Malcolm Vidrine agreed to contact the necessary parties to determine the nature of the delay of action. No further action was taken.

Charles Allen presented two issues. First, a day of labor on the site employing chemical spray is in the offing this summer (date not yet determined). Second, a small remnant north of Mamou appears to be available for purchase. The deed of land needs to be checked in Ville Platte in order to determine ownership.

Three separate proposals were considered with a single motion. Domingo Jariel, Gabriel Gotte and Malcolm Vidrine requested in writing each $500 to cover expenses to present papers at the North American Prairie Conference in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, during the first week of August 2010. With the

provision that receipts for all reimbursed expenses be provided, Charles Allen motioned and Patricia Lewis seconded that travel awards be provided at $500 per request. The motion was unanimously accepted. Marc Pastorek sent in a request, which was considered at a brief meeting on June 19, 2010, at the prairie site. Charles Allen motioned for approval, Jackie Duncan seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Sara Simmonds and Chris Naquin volunteered to work toward having the locks and keys replaced on the display board at the restoration site.

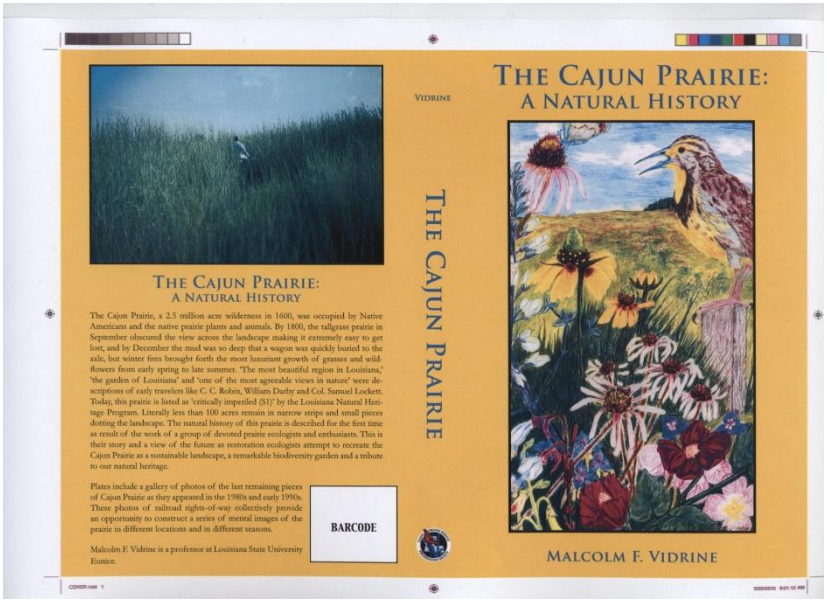
Sympathies by the members of the society were extended to Patricia Lewis on the loss of her mother and son on March 7 and 8, 2010.

The fall meeting was scheduled for August 28, 2010.

David Lewis motioned to adjourn, and Tyrone Foreman seconded. The motion was unanimously supported.

Respectfully submitted

Malcolm F. Vidrine, Ph.D.
Secretary



By the time that you get this, the wonderful book on the Cajun Prairie by Dr. Malcolm Vidrine should be available for you to purchase. From Dr Vidrine "I would like to advertise the new book in the newsletter and provide a special price for members ($20, shipping included). Order copies from malcolmvidrine@yahoo.com , with a further discount for multiple copies. The book contains 314 pages with 32 color plates and 26 appendices". You can buy thru Paypal online to Malcolm's email or mail a check for $20 to Dr. Malcolm Vidrine; 1932 Fournerat Road; Eunice, La 70535.

Making hay while the sun shines
By Marc Pastorek

Over the last ten or so years, I have been able spend some time at the Eunice restoration and in some of the prairie remnants. It's pretty depressing sometimes to see the remnants because they have been and continue to be mowed and raked and herbicided and run over by tallow. A recent ditch cleaning exercise at Frey prairie resulted in the loss of one of the most significant parts of this remnant. The machine operator covered it in a foot of soil. But I've never been disappointed on a visit to the restoration site. It always has something cool happening in it, even on the hottest day. I've rarely seen the same thing twice. It's always different: always exciting. Last year while collecting seed, I saw a single coco orchid plant in seed in an area it hasn't been seen before. The last time we saw this plant, it was in bloom during one of the meeting days in the northern and central part of the property. It is tiny and certainly not

particularly beautiful when in fruit, but I was really excited to stumble upon it. Orchids are a good sign that the prairie garden at Eunice is continuing to mature.

In Dr Vidrine's upcoming book The Natural History of the Cajun Prairie due out this month, he puts all of the pieces of the puzzle together for us prairie enthusiasts to make sense of the prairie and prairie gardening: to understand it. He calls our work with prairie "a tedious but exceptionally rewarding task". It is clear that this book will be indispensible for anyone interested in the specifics of biodiversity gardening or designing a landscape to include an authentic representation of the Cajun Prairie. The Eunice restoration, a repository for plant species from the waning remnants, fits nicely into this picture by providing a safe haven for the elements of what was once a vast, stunningly beautiful habitat. Dr Vidrine states that "the remnants would be the sole source for the new restorations and in essence, the creation of the prairie true to type (and genetics) could occur". Since the remnants are especially threatened, the restoration site increases in genetic value. This makes the Society's work more significant every day.

Prairie gardening is totally different than regular gardening. Rather than maintaining and manicuring as one would do to assist a regular garden. The prairie, for the most part, manages and maintains itself. Instead of us teaching the garden how it should look, the prairie garden teaches us how it should look. It is the challenge for the prairieist to stand back and learn. It is a lesson in patience. If there is one thing that we need to have while doing this work, it is patience: to resist getting in there and putting our signature on it. We must if we can, help a little by removing invasive plants and such. Otherwise, there is no hurry in a biodiversity garden. It has to be left to itself to mature. The reward for this patience is huge. Each year I see a new species or two that was not there the year before. And, each year, the number of plants of many existing prairie species increases.

The more we neglect the planting, the more it benefits from our neglect. This is what attracted me to prairieing. I had been growing lots of prairie plants as ornamentals in gardens. I was weeding them and mulching them and fertilizing them and cutting them back winter. I was using design to arrange them into a certain order for best display. Then I attended a native plant symposium in Lafayette and saw Dr. Allen and Dr. Vidrine present a lecture in the Cajun Prairie. It's been all down hill since. It changed the way I looked at my work and my world in general.

Understanding the prairie process boils down to interpretation. One man's junk is another man's treasure, the old adage says. One of the most popular gardening aspects integrated into the Botanic Gardens and Arboretums across the country is the Natural Garden. In fact, there are Arboretums and Botanic Gardens solely dedicated to the natural habitat specifically for the education of the value of habitat and the critters that live in them. Crosby Arboretum is a good local example of this. It was on the cutting edge when it was established twenty odd years ago. As was the Cajun Prairie Restoration site. Both of these significant public venues are dedicated to the preservation of habitat and the education of our children. The difference between the two is that CPHPS provides specific genetic material (seed) for other restorations to occur and actively restores habitat. Crosby is focused on interpretation and display. The Louisiana Arboretum and the Caroline Dorman Nature Preserve are two more very good examples of destinations to learn more about our native plants and habitats.

After some years of observing Eunice prairie, some of the more subtle signs of succession have become clear. When I see early succession species like briars and johnson grass, ragweed and vasey grass growing together, I know that that particular spot has seen some soil disturbance. Walking along the new sidewalks for instance, I can see a dramatic distinction between the rank growth along the walk and the lower growing, high diversity of late succession species in the distance. When I first planted my seed fields in Mississippi, I waited for some years to see the transition from early succession to late succession dominance. Upon inquiring, I was told by Dr. Allen more than once to "Just wait. Be patient. It'll do fine". I admit that I had my doubts. In time though, his words came true. My seed fields are rapidly becoming dominated by the high target value species I was after back in those heady days.

Last year I took a trip to Mississippi State University in Starkville to meet with a professor who specializes in quail habitat restoration. We spent the day looking at several sites where he had done his work. I was very impressed with the system he had set up for preparation, planting and management of his installations. But the diversity of the plantings is hugely lacking. The genetics (seed) he uses are "prostituted" selections (named varieties or cultivars) from breeding programs from across the eastern U.S. He is very successful in his work. Quail populations increase dramatically due to his efforts. He installs hundreds of acres each year as part of the Federal government's initiative to take out highly erodible land from crop row use. The plantings contain at most fifteen or twenty species, mostly grasses.

There is a middle ground between his work and the Cajun prairie: a highly mechanized, non-local genetic, low diversity planting vs. hand collected, local genetic, high diversity planting. This is where the future of the local genetic, high diversity grassland seed initiative must go.

There are at least two types of high diversity meadows plantings to use in the design of landscapes. One is the model represented at Eunice Prairie. Another is one made up mostly of low growing grasses and forbs that is over seeded occasionally with low growing annual flowering species so that patterns of color are incorporated for the purpose of attracting the eye of the doubters. So there is the highly diverse association that can be used in the less visible back round areas of the landscape and the less diverse but more consistently attractive association that can be used in the more visible foreground areas of the cityscape. More experimentation has to be done to formulate the components of the less diverse, consistently attractive stand of species.


Wild Coco Orchid left flower, right fruit

natural color variation of the normal white to light pink Rosemallow (Hibiscus moscheutos) found in the Cajun Prairie by Malcolm Vidrine. Marc Pastorek is suggesting the name "cajun twilight"

News from the Northwest Section:

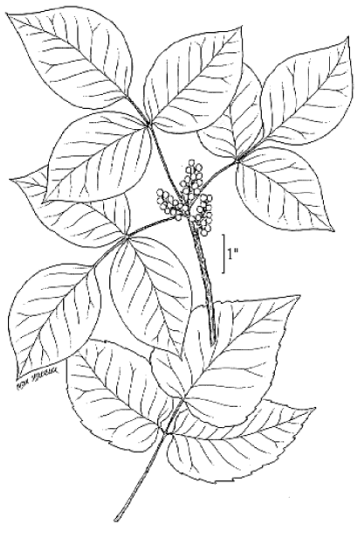
The 2.5 acres that the Society inherited from Union Pacif9ic that is north of the railroad and west of the rice dryer has been a headache for years. There is a drain that runs down the center and it seems that every time that we transplant into the area, the trees take over. A portion east of the drain is fairly good prairie but the area to the west and along the drain is terrible. But, Marc Pastorek has taken a giant step forward in this section: To quote Marc "I made a visit to the Eunice City Hall to ask if we could get permission to do away with a ditch that runs right through our North West Eunice property. They we very helpful there and gave me the name of the city engineer, Jeff Fruge. He came by to meet me that afternoon and offered not only to allow us to fill the ditch, but also to bring loads of dirt to fill it. We just need to cut down the weeds so trucks could get in to drop their loads. So I got permission from the Big Chief (Charles) and rented a bush-hog type mower to cut with. Within a few days Mr. Fruge had us loaded up with fill for the ditch. We still have to move the dirt around to finish and we have work to do to remove trees on the west side, but we are now in a better position to take on seeding and plugging at that site in the winter". Yea Marc!!!!!!

The three itchy plants; poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac

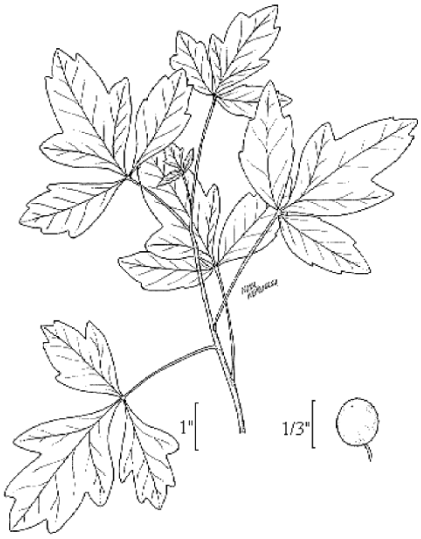
By Charles Allen

I am one of the lucky people who are not allergic to either of the three itch causing plants that are found in our area, poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac. All are in the genus Toxicodendron in the Anacardiaceae. The genus name, "*Toxicodendron*", is from the ancient Greek and means "poison tree". It includes vines, shrubs, and small trees. The leaves are alternate, deciduous, and compound. The flowers are greenish-white and in axillary clusters. The fruits are globose to subglobose greenish white drupes. All species can cause allergic reactions in many people including blisters, eruptions, itching, and burning as a result of a nonvolatile, poisonous oil known as toxicolendrol or urushiol. Probably, the best method of removing the oil before inflammation begins is to wash with laundry soap. Also, do not scratch the irritated area since this helps to spread the toxic oil. Even in winter months or in water, all plant parts can cause an allergic reaction. Breathing the smoke can cause irritation of the respiratory tract. The sap has been used as a tincture to treat rheumatism, ischia, neuralgia, fever, and eye hypertrophy of the heart. It is sometimes used for making varnish. The Indians used the powdered root as a poultice to cause a swelling to open. Goats that eat poison ivy get dry milk. Ants and 75 species of birds eat the fruit. Deer browse the foliage in spring and summer.

The most common and widespread of the three is poison ivy (Toxicodendron radians aka Rhus radicans) . Unfortunately, like so many plants the common name of this and the other two can overlap and can mean a different plant to different people. So, this is what I call poison ivy. But is also known as Three Leaf Ivy, Climbing Ivy, Poison Oak, Mercury, Black Mercury Vine, Markry, Mark Weed, and Picry. The specific epithet, "*radicans*", refers to its climbing habitat. It varies from an erect shrub to a high climbing vine that climbs with aerial roots. These high-climbing vines may attain a diameter of 6" and sometimes will display more foliage than the supporting tree. The twigs are glabrous to pubescent but become very pubescent on large stems. The leaves are alternate, pinnate compound (3 leaflets), and deciduous. The blades are oval to lanceolate, 1-8" long, 0.5-5" wide, apex acuminate, base cuneate to rounded, upper surface dull green and glabrous, lower surface paler and glabrous to slightly pubescent, and margins entire to dentate or lobed. The lateral leaflets are slightly smaller and asymmetrical. The drupes are waxy, 0.2-0.4" diameter, and glabrous to pubescent. Both poison ivy and poison oak (more about poison oak shortly) have compound leaves with three leaflets, hence the saying "leaves of three, let it be". Not to be picky but it should be leaflets of three….since it is a compound leaf with three leaflets and often there are more than three leaves on the plant. Poison ivy leaflets differ from poison oak in having pointed or acuminate tips with margins that are toothed to entire but not lobed and the leaf is glabrous. Its habitat is moister than that of poison oak. It is found along the edges of the Cajun Prairie in the gallery forests and is very common.



POISON OAK (***Toxicodendron pubescens***) is also known as Oak Leaf Ivy, Oak Leaf Poison Ivy, Poison Wood, Poison Weed, Scratch Ivy, Poison Ivy, and Poison Sumac. The specific epithet "*pubescens*" refers to the pubescent leaves. It is a low, erect shrub to 3 ft. The leaves are trifoliolate. The leaflets are ovate to obovate, 2-3.5" long, 1.5-2.75" wide, apex acute to obtuse, base cuneate to obtuse, upper surface dark green, lower surface paler and densely pubescent, and margins dentate to 3-7 lobed. The lateral leaflets are slightly smaller, asymmetrical and usually entire apically and lobed basally. The drupes are pubescent when young but becoming glabrous with age and about 0.2" diameter. (syn. *Toxicodendron quercifolium, Toxicodendron toxicarum, Toxicodendron toxicodendron, Rhus toxicodendron, Rhus toxicarum*) Some people reverse the two common names using poison oak for the vine that climbs in trees but I am describing here what I and others use with poison oak being the shrub like and poison ivy the vine. The use of poison oak for the climbing vine is not necessarily wrong as a common name is never wrong but one should be aware of the different uses of the common names. Poison oak has leaflets that are blunt at the tip, are often lobed like an oak tree along the margins, and are pubescent. Poison oak is a shrub with usually only 2-3 leaves (of course each leaf has the three leaflets) and does not climb. It is also grows in very sandy soil so it is found to the north and west of Cajun Prairie in the pinelands.



The third itch causing plant is poison sumac (Toxicodendron vernix aka Rhus vernix). It is also known as Poison Dogwood, Poison Elder, Poison Ash, Poison Tree, Poison Wood, and Thunder Wood. The specific epithet, "*vernix*", means "varnish", erroneously referring to the Japanese Lacquer Tree. It is a shrub or small tree up to 25 feet tall. The bark is thin and light gray. The twigs are stout, brown to orange, and glabrous. The leaves are alternate, deciduous, and one odd pinnately compound. The 7-13 leaflets are oblong, oblong-ovate, or oval, 2.5-4" long, 1-2" wide, apex short acuminate, base cuneate or rounded, upper surface dark green, lower surface paler and pubescent, and margins entire. The petiole, rachis, and petiolules are often red. The flowers are in panicles up to 8" long. The drupes are glabrous, and 0.2-0.3" diameter. This is very different from the other two in having not three leaflets but seven to eleven leaflets. The leaf reminds me a lot of an ash or hickory leaf. There is almost always some reddish color to the rachis of the leaf. The plant is an erect shrub to small tree with white bark and one unusual characteristic is the trunk is almost always bent near the base. The habitat is the acid ph baygalls and bogs and the nearest records to the Cajun Prairie are in Beauregard, Vernon, and Rapides parishes.

We received a poem from a ghost writer:

Hibiscus by Bobby Gramma

Hot biscuits! Hot biscuits! Your flowers are wow!
I see you grow in the prairie right now.
Standing up tall as a soldier on guard
A sentry of light bringing color to yard.

Bumble bees gather yellow pollen of mallow
your roots settled in, water puddles of shallow.
Dusting the anthers this bright sunny day
Is it work for the bees? are they laboring or play?

Hot Biscuits! Hot biscuits! You grow in the water!
Why certainly I can, I could and I aughter
I grow with the iris, eleocharis and lily,
my favorite friends, wet feet, soggy and silly

Do I need to mowed, chopped down, herbicided?
Heck no! wanna grow! They quickly decided
Wanna bask in the sun, produce seed generation
Wanna show my true spirit, am a gem of the nation

Hot biscuits! Hot biscuits! I will nurture and care for
the seed you produced that the bee fluttered air for.
Will water and pamper till you get to the stage
that I put you in shallow so you grow to old age.

Hairy Sunflower (Helianthus mollis) should be in flower in August

Wild Petunia (Ruellia humilis) may be seen in August