

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: **Buddy Hollis** (BH)

INTERVIEWER: David Todd (DT)

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Please note that the recording includes roughly 60 seconds of color bars and sound tone for technical settings at the outset of the reels. Numbers indicate time codes for the VHS tape copy of the interview. "Misc." refers to various off-camera conversation or background noise, unrelated to the interview.

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DT: My name is David Todd. I'm here for the Conservation History Association of Texas. It's March 1st, 2008 and we are in Newton, Texas and we have the good fortune to be visiting with Buddy Hollis who had a career as an operator of a chemical plant in—in Deer Park and later in La Porte and subsequent to that, he returned to—to Newton where much of his family is from and has been a nature guide and naturalist of—of many years here an—we look forward to learning more about the habitat and wildlife around this area. Thank you for taking the time.

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BH: Thank you.

DT: I thought we might start by visiting about your childhood and if there were some experiences that you can remember of—of finding out about the outdoors and—and learning about it. Does anything come back to mind?

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BH: Well I can remember things like the first fish I caught. First fish I caught was over in the old river bottom off the Neches River. I remember my dad taught me how to cast a rod and reel. The first thing I did was cast out; the bass caught it. I started to reel it in and got a big backlash in it, which I don't even know if they still allow to happen anymore these days. But I threw it over my shoulder and I ran back up the bank and I got that fish. That was my first one. I can remember things like when I was a kid growing up in Deer Park, laying in my bed in the morning when I wake up and hearing the Atwater's Prairie Chickens boom in Dal Park which was a couple of miles away. It's something at the time we never thought of; it wouldn't always be there. In fact, I think after I got out of high school, af—after—they were

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probably gone that year—the next Prairie Chicken I saw I was probably 45 years old and it was out at Eagle Lake and they're not there anymore. We just don't seem to realize when we see something today; enjoy it. It may not be there tomorrow. So much of it isn't there anymore. I can remember my brother coming home from school carrying a Horned Toad. How many people th—these days have seen Horned Toads? Not many people because they just—is something there that's in the past. We seem to think about it as the "good old days." Well they were the good old days I guess. Maybe not as "good" as ones that came before that but we're getting to where nowadays everything is exotic or brought in from someplace else that's not ours anymore.

DT: You mentioned these two creatures; the Atwater's Prairie Chicken and then the Horned Toad that they're no longer common. In fact, quite rare. Why do you think they slipped away?

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BH: Well one is a habitat. The Atwater Prairie Chicken needed the—I guess you would—in their case it would—it—they needed the prairie. Well where the prairie they needed was normally many, many, years ago was grazed by the buffalo. Now we don't have that anymore and you start thinking you don't have much prairie at all. In fact, like here in a Big Thicket, we never had prairie here so we didn't have the Atwater Prairie Chicken around here. The Horned Toad—I think there are several reasons why they're not here—one is loss of habitat—other is I understand is attributed to fire ants because they seem to be really, really decimating our—the population of a lot of our wildlife, including quail.

DT: You mentioned that—that changes in the habitat have affected both of those creatures and I—I was hoping that you could talk a little bit about the habitat in Newton County and more generally about the Big Thicket—it's I've heard known as sort of a biological crossroads—a great deal of diversity—richness. How would you describe it?

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BH: Well I think that one of the best examples of an explanation that I've heard was from Geraldine Watson, who's probably the most well known for knowing the flora and the fauna of the Big Thicket when she said Newton County is the ark of the Big Thicket—it's the treasure trove of the Big Thicket. We have just about every habitat that the Big Thicket has. Some places we don't have as much, but we've got Sandyland, we've got Bay Gulls, we've got—the—really have a lot more of the Upland Pine lands than they—we—have what is called "hanging bogs" where pitcher plants and things that are in bogs in pine forests and this is the old pine—this is a Southern Yellow Pine—this is not the modern pine, the Slash and the Loblolly that

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took its place. But the habitat that we have here—a lot of it in the—even in the main units of the Big Thicket. Most people think that the Big Thicket is a particular place—it's not a particular spot—it's you can't say, "I'm going to this spot and I'm going to "the" Big Thicket." You're going to this spot and you're going to part of the Big Thicket because there are so many different habitats. Actually the original Big Thickets started around where Interstate 10 crosses the Sabine River at Orange—goes up the—almost half—over halfway up the Tobeda—Toledo Bend along the Sabine until it gets almost to Logan's Port and back across below Lufkin out west of Huntsville near Roans Prairie back down to Montgomery and back across to Liberty. It's a—millions of acres. And a lot of people don't realize that it's actually divided into two sections itself. It's what's called the Lower Thicket and the Upper Thicket or Stream Thicket—right here is what we consider the Stream Thicket. We

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are higher habitat and a lot of the plants of the Big Thicket are down in the lower spots along the streambed. That's why it's called the Stream Thicket. And the Big Thicket is differentiated in—into area by not only the plants in it but also by some of the animals.

DT: Can you tell us a little bit about the vegetation that's—that's typical of these various ecosystems within the Big Thicket?

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BH: Well you—you—your sandy—sandy lands are generally like up north of us—you—you

start in the northern end of the county—there's a place called Scrapping Valley. It was Temple-Inland's property. They kept it for years—and there's fact that now that they've sold they still kept it. It is a major stand of Longleaf Pine. Well it takes about 75 years for Longleaf Pine to grow. So people generally don't grow Longleaf Pine anymore—they want something like the rest of our population. They want it quicker and faster. They don't want to let it grow like that, but they took very good care of that and it's a marginal land and it grows better on marginal land and it takes time. That's where you will find such an— animals as the Louisiana Pine Snake, the Red Cockaded Woodpecker and things like that. Your Bay Gulls, that's your watery places with the—that's mainly known by—your Gallberry Holly,

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Sweet Bay Magnolia and some of the other—and some of the other plants like that. It's usually—as I say—they like their feet to be standing in the water. The Oak Prairies—here you have a few Oak Prairies—you have a few mixed forests—you have the riparian or the streamside thickets. We have very, very little left that's in one complete unit. Most of it— like—is like the Big Thicket itself. It's was designed is what they call a “string of pearls”. There would be a spot here—spot a few miles away and another spot that they managed to save. But there needed c—a corridor to join them together or the animals going in one wouldn't have much of a chance in another. You take some poor turtle—he's got trouble crossing an interstate and if he doesn't find a mate, he's going to have to try it anyway. So it's—the highways—lot

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of people don't realize how much they kill—highways are the number one killer of our small animals. And a lot of them go that way and it breaks up a lot of habitat. I don't care what kind of animal you are—if you need seclusion and you're sitting there trying to sleep or trying to find something to eat and a four-wheeler or truck or jeep comes roaring through, it tends to mess up your day.

DT: You told us about some of the vegetation that is native to these different elements within the Thicket. I was hoping you could talk about some of the wildlife and maybe we can talk first about some of the larger kinds of animals that you've seen and heard about in the Thicket and then go towards the smaller.

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BH: Well we still have very few cougars. I guess you could also say we have very few pumas and we have very few mountain lions bec—also very few panthers because tho—all of those are terms people use for the same cat—mountain lion—we have very few of them left and they keep very, very low. They're very shy because they're going to get shot if they show up. People do not seem to realize that we're sharing the world with something else and they get hungry too. So we have to do something about it. At one time, there were r— reports of jaguars in the Big Thicket and some people are beginning to think that the term “black panther,” which if you do much reading on the Big Thicket you will always read about black panther—is a term that was picked up because somebody saw the black face of a jaguar. The

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cougar doesn't come in black faces—the jaguar does. And they were here and, in fact, the biologists had a report that they s—seem to have—think there's some good fact in, that the last jaguar in Texas was killed in Newton County about 1963-'65—along in that area just

south of Bleakwood. And there's some pictures around that they have seen of it. The wild turkey—the wild turkey was one that was exterminated from East Texas and has made a comeback now. And we're real lucky up here because nobody knows how to hunt them so they're fairly safe. Red Cockaded Woodpecker—Red Cockaded Woodpecker now the people that really deserve the accolades for restoring the Red Cockaded Woodpecker are Pi—Parks and Wildlife and Temple-Inland. I know it seems kind of odd—keep bringing up a timber

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company—but these people actually I'm—we're sorry that they have sold out now because they were our friends. They worked with us and they helped restore things. They would restore the Red Cockaded Woodpecker to their property up at Scrapping Valley. Now the problem—for those of you that don't know the Red Cockaded Woodpecker—the Red Cockaded Woodpecker has to have a living tree to make a nest in. Well the only living tree that will work is a tree that has red heart disease, which tends to soften the center of the tree. So that means first of all, the little guy's got to find a sick tree and the second of all, he's got to find one that's old enough to be big enough to have a red heart disease. Now these trees live for—don't even really mature good for 60 or 75 years. And what are the two things that

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the modern day forester is not going to allow to grow in his woods? Generally, it's a sick tree and second, why let that sucker grow to be s—seventy-five when you can cut it at 25 and get some money out of it. So they had problems. Then I believe it was—ya'll might remember—I'm not sure of the date—but 1988, h—hurricane Hugo hit South Carolina—wiped out hundreds of Red Cockaded Woodpecker—cavity trees. Now it takes about two years for them to dig a hole. So here they have hundreds of Red Cockaded Woodpeckers—no nests. So some guy says why don't we take a common Loblolly Pine, cut a notch in it, make a fake hole in it, stick it up in a tree and see if that will work. And people told him 'you're crazy man, there's no way that will work,' he said, 'let's try.' They did and it worked. That's what we've got up here in Scrapping Valley now. We've got the artificial nests. Now probably we like to think we're going to bring something back and it's going to stay there forever on its

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own. Probably not—probably that's is the only way we'll be able to keep the Red Cockaded Woodpecker is to keep providing nests for it. But that's much better than letting it go because extinction is forever.

(misc.)

DT: When we were last speaking you were telling us about the Red Cockaded Woodpecker and—and its life history and the reintroduction here in—in East Texas woods. Do you have any familiarity with the Ivory Bill Woodpecker and the effort to find it now that it's become so rare or perhaps extinct?

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BH: A friend of mine that taught me birding had a real good friend. I can't—Paul Sykes was his name, worked for the US Fish and Wildlife Service that was over the program back in the '60s trying to relocate the Red Cockaded Woodpecker. And he had been here in this area looking for it. And I've talked to him several times over the years and personally he didn't believe that there was any around but always hoped, but he was telling me that the—

the area that they generally thought was over along the Neches River rather than over this way. But he also said that one of the things that you can tell the Red Cockaded Woodpecker—I mean not Red Cockaded—pardon me, but the Ivory Bill—is by the trees it uses. It favors Sweet Gum trees—large Sweet Gum trees to feed on. And so I’ve—I’ve known—I—I know

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that much about it. And I know that about four years ago, I was at the Whispering Creek Motel and there was a man came in and it was in February—and February is kind of an odd time to be paddling up and down the Sabine River. It’s kind of cold. And he was telling—told me that he was there for a day or two trying to warm up, that he was paddling from the Toledo Bend Dam all the way down to Niblett’s Bluff, which is almost on the coastal prairie. And he has his binoculars—I said, “What are you doing,”—he said, “Birding.” I said, “Well you seen any yet?” He looked at me real funny and said, “Seen what?” I said, “The Ivory Billed Woodpecker.” He said, “How do you know I’m looking for the Ivory Bill Woodpecker?” I said, “Just an educated guess.” And he was. He said that that was one of the—that place and—

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and a lake in Arkansas were the two places that they thought might be the best areas to look for them. A few years before that, they had a expedition (?) binoculars sponsored went into the Pearl River area of Louisiana looking for it. Somebody had reported one over there—or several—and I knew s—three of the guys that were on that expedition. And was real funny. We—we—there was two guys we knew—one of them we said if somebody opened a—the book to Ivory Bill Woodpecker and he just happened to be within a hundred yards, he would claim he’d seen one. And the other guy, Rick Knight, we said hey said if it’s got 27 points that you’ve got—got to see to identify them and he’s only sees 26 of them he won’t even tell you he thought he saw one. But they didn’t find anything either. So I was real skeptical when they said they had found that one up in Arkansas because those things are so big and if

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you’re just around this part of East Texas, you see it’s little cousin, the Pileated Woodpecker—he doesn’t do much moving or calling without you knowing he’s in the area and I find it real hard to believe that for 60 or 70 years nobody has heard or seen an Ivory Bill Woodpecker.

DT: Maybe you can tell us about some other birds that are distinctive to this area—Swallow-tail Kite?

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BH: The American Swallow-tail Kite—this—that was one of the main reasons for Newton being on the Texas Coastal Birding Trail. This—at the time, more Swallow-tail Kites were seen along the river here and then just about anywhere else in Texas. Now they are making a real good comeback. They’re seen in bunches along the Neches River. They have nested in downtown Orange—almost downtown Orange, in Liberty, little Cypress-Mauriceville school. They’ve nested right by the baseball field and they are getting a little more common. Of course, they’re kind of like a lot of other birds, they are maybe a little more common in this area because they’re getting so compressed from their other habitats that they have no other place to go

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but this few areas that are left here in the area. But I've had some reports—talked about seeing 50, 60, 70 of them together at times, especially during migration.

DT: We talked about the Ivory Bill Woodpecker. Maybe you could tell us about another bird that's—that's gone now or—the Carolina Parakeet.

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BH: Now the Carolina Parakeet is something I basically know nothing about except that it was a pretty little bird and that people used it not only for pets but for eating. And that and th—I think probably a lot of passenger pigeons probably came through this area too at one time. But of course, they're gone too. That's the thing about it. We keep looking back; we see more and more that was here that's not here anymore.

DT: Now some of these creatures that—that were common then scarce seem to be coming back—I think you mentioned the Black Bear is—is being seen from time to time in the area.

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BH: It's being seen from time to time but not because it's coming back from restocking. It—most of the people up in this area don't want the Black Bear back. It's real odd. They seem to think that if it's a Black Bear here, it's going to eat the kids. Well you tell them, they're grow—they're all over Tennessee, West Virginia, M—Maine—up in—well that's a different kind they put—these will eat our kids and they—they're scared to death of them. And most of these Black Bears we get or they have brought—they have imported them from Arkansas to Louisiana to try to deepen the gene pool of the Louisiana Black Bear and a lot of them take off and

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leave and they come to Texas and that's how we see them and there have been quite a few sightings the last few years but that's what they're all in East Texas are attributed to is—I guess you could say 'roaming' animals from Louisiana.

DT: How about another good sized mammal—the—the Red Wolf. What can you tell us about...

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BH: You know, the Red Wolf was actually—I think was the smallest of the wolves—weighed about 35 pounds. I remember when I was a kid duck hunting down on the Coastal Prairie. I did not realize at the time—I realized years later that that was—had to be Red Wolves we were looking at because these dogs or—they weren't dogs—I—I—they had to be the Red Wolves—I thought at the time they were coyotes—were crossing a—a dike in the rice fields and doing their little yipping racket. And there was—oh—8 or 10 of them. And that was supposedly the last area where they looked for them and they were estimating at the time there were about 3000 left and they found three. So that was a pretty bad guess. And then after I got out of the Navy this must have been in 1968. It was—I think it was the year I

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went to work for Diamond Shamrock. I was up hunting north of—of Moss Hill in the Big Thicket and we were trying a squirrel dog out in—I wasn't hunting, we were trying the squirrel dog. We didn't even have any guns because it was April—didn't have a squirrel season in the Spring that—back then. And one of the squirrel dogs came running back with his tail between his legs and this wolf-looking animal, which definitely wasn't a coyote, followed him up right in front of us, stood there and looked at us and turned around and ran off. And I'm pretty sure that was a—only close-up that I ever got of what I think was a

Red Wolf. Now coyotes are all over the place now. They used to not be but especially the last 10 or 12 years they've—they've filled the gap.

DT: That the Red Wolf had left behind?

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BH: That the Red Wolf I—left—that the larger wolf left—anything, they are opportunists.

DT: Let's look at—at aquatic creatures. You—you had mentioned earlier that your dad had seen Paddlefish as a young man. Tell us about that.

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BH: Well my dad ta—talked about catching Paddlefish when he was a kid. I believe it was probably over in the Neches River area because that's where he did most of his fishing. And of course, now all of that, I think what happened was that the Paddlefish needed a sort of a—I think a gravel bed to spawn in and with the slowing down of most of these rivers by dams, they silt falls out and covers the spawning bed. And there are several other fish that are hurt—the Appaloosas or Yellow Cat—they used to be real, real common and it's not too common anymore.

DT: Well what can you tell us about the, I guess, the waxing and waning of the—the alligator. I imagine one time they were quite rare and now they're—they're back.

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BH: Boy that alligator's a tough critter. They—I don't—I don't think too many people up in this area hunted them. You get down around the coast and over in Louisiana, they really hunted them heavy. But up—up here it's not quite as easy to get to them. I have s—up here I can remember the first alligators that I saw must have been about 9 or 10 years old and it was the year that they started putting in B.C. [B.A.] Steinhagen Lake and it was back up the Neches River, and we were going swimming and my dad took us down to a sand bar and we came out on a bank and he stopped and (whispering) said, "Come here and look." Come

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here and there was two big alligators on the sand bar. That's the first ones I've remember seeing. Then about 7 or 8 years later, I remember fishing up on the—up on Lake B.C. [B.A.] Steinhagen, which was called "Dam B" then and I remember there was a cer—commercial fisherman that we got to know that camped with us and he went to take us out to run our trot lines and we ran ours and caught some fish and we went to run his and there were a couple of alligators around. He wouldn't even go near the trot lines. But I—as far as the area, if they're doing near as well as they're doing down on the coast, they're doing fine because I can

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remember on the—oh, I forget—not Offatts Bayou—but Onion Bayou between the Anahuac Na—Na—whew—Anahuac Wildlife Refuge and the mouth in East Bay which is probably about 8 or 10 miles going down there and counting a hundred—a hundred and fifty on the bank.

DT: Maybe while we're talking about water borne creatures, talk a little bit about beaver and otter. I understand that they've made a recovery in there.

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BH: They have made a recovery. They are actually—the otter's not so much—the—they pro—a lot of people—otter's a problem because it gets their fish. It eats their fish. You try to raise fish commercially and an otter gets in there. It's like a kid breaking into a candy store. I mean, hey, why should I go (?), when I can just lay on the bank a while and go get

me another fish—that's the way they are. The beaver has a bad habit of damming up culverts and things—the—of lakes and stuff and creating their own wetlands. Now the timber companies don't like that. They don't mind too much them keeping their own wetlands but they don't like them establishing wetlands in the middle of theirs. And they're—they're doing real well.

DT: And what about—I guess, a couple of birds that I think you—you discussed in the past, one is the Wood Duck and the other is the Eastern Bluebird.

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BH: Now the Eastern Bluebird and the Wood Duck now—the Wood Duck—one—one of the problems other than over-hunting was the fact—I—I would equate the Wood Duck with the—like your Red Cockaded Woodpecker. The fact that their nesting facilities disappeared because you've cut down a tree with a hole in it—that's a potential nest. Same way with Bluebirds—that's a potential nest. That's why people building the artificial nest boxes are having so much success bringing the birds back. And it doesn't have to be—I—I—I've got to tell you this—this story because to me it's just kind of funny—it shows you you don't have to be rich or you don't have to be poor to—to get out and help. I was given a program up in Palestine on birds of East

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Texas. It was through a garden club. And this little old lady, she says, "You know," she says, "I have been raising Bluebirds for years," she told how many she's got, she says, "I've got one little box out there," and she says, "I take it down every year and I scrub it and every—everything," and she says, "It's just," she says, "it's so much fun." Now, she—she said, "It makes me want to get up in the morning." I said, "Well good." And the—this—this other lady came up and she says, "You know," she says, "we have a Bluebird trail," says, "we've got 400 boxes on the Bluebird trail." I said, "Well that's real nice." I said, "That's a lot of boxes." She says, "Oh yes," she says, "it's—it's a lot of boxes," but said, "it's worth it, like the lady said, it's really worth it." And I said, "That's nice." I said, "How many people do you have

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helping you?" "And," she says, "Uh, four or five." And I said, "Well how many different people's land is it on?" "Just—just ours and on our ranch." So that shows you you can go from the small end or the big end and you can still do good on it. My jaw must have dropped a—she looked at me real funny after that, but I never expected somebody to have—go out and just stick up 400 Bluebird boxes on their own property. But the Bluebirds are doing real well and you see them here especially in the wintertime.

DT: We've talked about some of the—the native animals around here and—and native plants. I guess everything changes over time. In recent years, there have been a lot of exotics that have been seen and become more common in the area. I think Chinese Tallow and feral hogs and so on. What do you see in that regard as far as these animals and plants from other areas that are (?)...

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BH: Well the Chinese Tallow is—is a huge problem. I don't think we'll ever—I think it's more or less naturalized now. The fire ant—oh the fire ant is a terrible problem. I don't think we'll ever see the end of that. And the fire ant is really, to me, causing more problems than the Chinese Tallow because there are a lot of animals that it is disrupted and it's one of the—one that a lot of people are blaming for the loss of the quail because they're getting on

the young quail and killing the young quail. There's a plant starting up now on—I—I've seen it mostly at Village Creek State Park. It's called "Coral Ardisia". It is a plant with red berries, beautiful landscaping plant that has gotten away and come down on the floods of—growing all over the woods.

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Problem with most of these things is they have no natural enemy. So where birds will eat something else, they probably won't eat that. A lot of times they plant with red berries—is bad tasting to birds. Well if they've been around enough plants with red berries that have good taste, if they eat them and then they get mixed up with the other ones and they don't know what they eat. There's a Japanese Fern—climbing fern—that's beginning to take over big time in the Big Thicket. There are several—I forget—weird clams that are beginning to really cause problems around.

DT: Do you have feral hogs?

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BH: Feral hogs? Everybody's got feral hogs. I—I think that one of the things that has—that caused a lot of the problems more recently with feral hogs is up to not too many years ago, they could sell the feral hogs that they caught to—at auction barns. And they would go into the food chain. Now they can't do that, so there's not much incentive for people to go out and hunt feral hogs unless they want to eat a hog and if you want to eat a wild hog, you probably not going to want to eat it all the time so you not going to put much of a dent in the property. But especially n—now around here, where they're doing so much clear-cutting lately, it's compressing them from the woods where they used to be out into people's pastures and things. And you see more and more of them dead on side of the highway where for years, you didn't see one.

DT: What about Kudzu and Hydrilla—do you get...

(talking over each other)

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BH: Hydrilla—there's some Hydrilla in Toledo Bend—Kudzu—I understand there's Kudzu in a couple of spots but not really bad yet like it is further east, but I think they've pretty well tried to clamp down on Kudzu sales, especially they were finding there were some people selling it in nurseries. And there is a giant—I forget what the last name of the plant is—it's beginning to really take this area over too—in—a water plant.

DT: You briefly mentioned that feral hogs, for example, fluctuate with the kind of land use—the fact that there's more clear-cutting. I was hoping that you could—could walk us through how land use has changed over the years in Newton County from when the settlers first came or actually before that when the—the natives were here.

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BH: Well there is a book...

DT: (talking over each other)

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BH: ...book in here somewhere—I don't know where it is—I found when my aunt died—she had it—was doing the family history and she left the book and it was an interesting book here from 1888—Texas Almanac. The two most common plants growing for money in Newton County at the time were cotton and sugarcane. That was it. Most of the—back then the timber had been cut the first time. That was e—easier to get to and the—the land that was good for farming and it was subsistence farming. There was a lot of farming. In fact I

think Newton only got back into where it was in 1940, about the year 2000. That's how our population fell off. People began moving to the city, companies began buying up all the land and planting

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timber. So we went from timber to subsistence farming back to timber. The only problem is we went from mixed forests and Longleaf Pine forests to subsistence farming, back to monoculture and not mixed forests—even age forest and that's what we've got now. And that's why there's so much clear-cutting. Back in the old, old times, they would go in and cut this big tree because it was big enough to cut, leave this one over here, and now they're all the same age so they cut them all. And we've—we're pretty much—there's very little farming done in Newton County now. At one time about 7 miles north of here in a little community called L—Liberty, they even had a canning plant where they canned beans and tomatoes and

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stuff like that. You can't even hardly grow tomatoes and beans up here anymore. The weather has changed, the diseases that they get and lack of water, uneven watering. This used to be the wettest county in Texas. And used to get sometimes up to about 65 inches of rain here.

DT: Is there—is there a way to sort of correlate these—these land use changes with how habitat and wildlife have fared in Newton County? What does it mean when you've got—say selected management of—of trees versus even age and clear-cutting? What does that do to the wildlife in your experience?

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BH: Okay, select—selective management—all right now let—let—let's say for instance we're talking just pine—pretty well pine—like your—well the only pure pine you would have had originally would have been your Longleaf Pine. It was in more of a poor habitat but it was open where—and got fire pretty regular—so the sun would reach the ground and there was a lot of grass. So you had grazing as well. Now you have a mixed forest—you have oaks, you have hickories, you have things like that—they produce nuts. That's food for the animals—that's browse. You have just straight even age pine trees. Animals don't like to eat pine needles. In fact, most of them's systems won't handle it. So that cuts out a big section right there.

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And we have seen time—I remember I was on a hunting lease back in the early '70's—I remember the company that owned it came in and cut almost 6000 acres of hardwoods and just let it lay there to rot. They wouldn't even let people come in to get firewood. They said that well it's extremely dry now. By the time, we get ready to plant it will be rotted. So it—it was wasted. And that—that's basically what has happened. We—we—we keep taking more and more of the land that will support other things and putting it into the pure pine forest.

DT: Has there been a change in—in the habitat and the wildlife as—as more of the chip mills have been built and—and they're producing less dimensional wood?

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BH: Well, they don't have to—they don't have to wait till the—the—they don't have to let the logs go through the complete cycle. Before if you had to go 20, 25 years to cycle pine, you don't have to do that now if you get—if you get chips. A lot of—a lot of them are using chips, I understand, chips is real, real high now. And I know that when they took up about

four miles south of here, when they—they cleared out all the—most of the oaks down one section of Cow Creek, they chipped a large part of it. Used to they didn't do that. They used it for either ties or crossties or—or some—or furniture. At one time, we had a lot of—of companies come from the east coast to get certain logs out of the forest here because that was the only place they could still find them. Now they're—most of them are gone.

DT: Well you've talked about how the—the management of the woods around here has changed. It seems that the species have changed along with it. I think you at one point had said that there were the old Yellow Pine and—and Longleaf Pine were pretty common and now it's more—I think you said—Slash and Loblolly?

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BH: Loblolly. Slash didn't really work out too good, but Loblolly is the most com—hybrid usually Loblolly. And the Longleaf is that pretty, beautiful—I say beautiful pinewood—that's—you see specially in old schools, churches and furniture and it's—like I say it takes 60, 75 years for it to mature where they can get—in 20, 25 years get the Loblolly.

DT: And—and are these modern Loblollies—are they genetically similar to one another?

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BH: I don't exactly how far they are—I know they doing a lot of cloning on—on them so that—there—I've been at the Clyde Thompson Nursery over in Jasper, which was Temple's old nursery, and there was a program over there on cloning the trees.

DT: It's clear—you know a lot of this of flora and fauna of this area. I'm curious, how you learn these things and—and if there are any other naturalists in the area that—that you might have learned from or heard of who are active here?

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BH: Well I learned a lot from my dad. I learned a lot from books, which I always loved to read so I found a lot from books. And one guy that, you know, I guess people always say all your heroes die—have to be old—they don't have to be old. There's a manager at Village Creek State Park, Jerry Rashall—he's 37 years old. Me and him got together and we would take a hike in the woods. He'd take half of it and he would teach me things and I'd take the other half and teach him things and you'd be surprised how much you can learn that way. And that—that's the way we learned a lot. He learned a lot about birds and I learned a lot about trees and we both learned a lot about flowers. That's—that—that's one way we did it. And then

00:44:24 - 2431

there was—I met a man named Howard Langridge—H.P. Langridge—who is a teacher from Florida and Tennessee and I guess you could say he was my mentor in birding. He was the best birder I have ever met and birded with and I met and bir—birded with some—some good ones. But h—he was kind of like that. He would walk along and look for birds and stop and he'd see a flower. He reached down and he'd—he would know something about the flower—best man on butterflies I have ever seen. And he got me interested into doing that. And when we go on—for—see I think we started in '86 and we ended in—right before he died in 2001—every year we went three or four weeks, went all over Texas, maybe to Arizona and we birded and were

00:45:17 - 2431

in nature and I learned so much from him. That's—and that's—he was the kind of man that you might know—might not know much about what he knows about, but you know something that he wants to know. He doesn't know what it is, but he'll find out.

DT: You mentioned that—that you've gone birding. I understand that you've—you've got over 700 bird species on your black list...

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BH: Been real lucky—I—birding with Howard Langridge.

DT: Well how did you get started birding and—and where is—has birding taken you in the world?

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BH: Well about—I guess about 25 miles north of here back that way down the woods on the Sabine River, there's a little lake called Wood Lake—you couldn't get into it. You couldn't get into it with a four-wheel drive even—you had to go across some slushy, mud holes. Well I managed to get in there. My dad and my uncle in a four-wheel drive truck with a winch on it—we spent most of the day winching in and out. We were in there fishing in that lake for some white perch and this little yellow bird flew up and set on the end of my pole started whistling. And I said, "I wonder what this bird is?" My dad looked at it and said, "That's a Wood's Canary." I don't know what a Wood's Canary is. So when I got back home, I went and bought a bird

00:46:34 - 2431

book. I found out it was a Prothonotary Warbler. It was the first bird on my list—Prothonotary Warbler. And then when I was married about—oh, probably about 7 or 8 years after that, my wife bought me a pair of binoculars and I said, "Bird book, binoculars—there's got to be some way this goes together." Well they did—all over North America. I have birded from the dry Tortugas off of Florida, up to the Labrador where the trees are about six inches high, to the Salton Sea, up to the islands off of Siberia in Alaska—you could see Siberia on a clear day. My luck was we were there for three—for four days and the first three days, I just gawked at Siberia over there and the next day I got my camcorder out and I was going to take my picture and I's looked and it was foggy. And so we were staying with an Eskimo

00:47:35 - 2431

whaler, so I said, "Hey Tim," I said—"Yeah?" I said, "How long does the fog—st—how—how—how long is it—how many days you get that are clear up here?" He says, "Oh about three." So—so that was it. I never got a picture of Siberia.

DT: Tell us about birding in Texas.

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BH: Birding in Texas. It's the best place there is. I have birded from the Rio Grande—I—I—from the mouth of the river, which I understand has trouble finding a little flow anymore, all the way up through Presidio, all over Central Texas. By the way, you've been from the Austin area, one of my—one of my favorite spots is that famous Hornsby Bend Sewage Treatment Plant there at Dell Valley. Surprisingly, some of the oddest birds in Texas have shown up there. And we use—we usually camp—tent camped and we would—Howard had a—lot of people when they go birding, they—they keep a list—well—I kept a list but his pursuit of it was not just to go out and find a bird you haven't seen, spend all your time looking for it. It was to

00:48:53 - 2431

get up in the morning, see how many different birds you can see that day—even if it was the same ones you seeing every day—and you would be surprised how many different birds you see that way. We usually ended up seeing more different birds than anybody else

because we went to every habitat looking for the common birds and if the other ones were there, we'd usually see them too. So we—we spent time down in Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, Benson Rio Grande State Park, Laguna Madre, Laguna Atascosa, all over. And surprisingly, with me being up here in the Big Thicket, the Big Thicket is probably the hardest place in Texas to bird because of the fact that there are so many trees out there, you generally hear them before you see

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them and it's hard to—hard to find a lot of the birds. In other places where you just have very few trees, you can see them moving around but you might have noticed up here, there's not a place with very few trees.

DT: Have you birded much on the Bolivar Peninsula or...

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BH: Oh yes.

DT: ...or on High Island?

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BH: Yes. Bird—birded a lot down there. And I have seen big changes down there, especially on High Island. When the birds come across and they hit a norther, they stop at the first place they can without getting wet, which is usually—High Island made it perfect. I've seen—years ago at High Island, four or five hours when you could not move your car because the birds were so thick on the ground you would run over some of them. What we used to call a good day in those days, I understand nowadays, they call a fallout and they get real excited over it. That's how few birds there are still there.

DT: What—what do you attribute the change to?

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BH: The change is to habitat. Probably in their case, extremely lot of the habitat change is Central and South America where they winter.

DT: I guess you could consider the—the book learning and the binocular learning something that—that you've in turn, given back to other people through your nature guiding. And I was wondering if you could talk about the guide services that you have and also the interpreting that you provide at some of the local parks.

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BH: Well the guide service I had, I guess you'd have to call a flop, because I'm mister nice guy. Somebody would call me up and say can you tell me where to find a Swainson's Warbler. Now a good guide said, "Well it'd be kind of hard to get there, for me to tell you how to get there—but if you want to pay thirty-five dollars, I'll take you." Not Buddy. You go to such and such a place, take a left, look for this post, look for a certain tree, and look right behind that tree down there in that wet spot, you'll probably find it. And I had people call me back all the time. You're right—that's where they were. So I kind of good-guyed myself out of business. As far as training, there is—training people—there is nothing as enjoyable as to show

00:52:12 - 2431

somebody nature and have them really see it. So many people look at nature but don't see it. But especially kids—they—they don't get the chance anymore. Their parents don't take them out. They don't get—one thing that, to me, is I guess you could say symptomatic of the whole problem is is something I once heard about hunting and I can see it happening now not just hunting, but kids in general in nature—it was said that a lot of kids don't hunt

anymore, not because they don't have a spot to hunt, because their parents have broken up and they don't have a father to take them hunting. And the mother—well, let's face it, she does—she's working all the time, she doesn't know anything about hunting. She can't take the

00:53:09 - 2431

kids hunting. So you take one generation like that and you've broken the chain. Well the t—I see the same thing a lot of time in kids in the outdoors too. It's not just the one parent or anything. It's the other things that are pulling and tugging at them like computers, like television and stuff like—like that. All of this is taking away from them. They don't get outside. And I love to take kids out in the woods and show them. Fact I tell them—like I tell them about—ask them how many people in Texas they think got killed by snakes last year. Now that is really a good way to

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tell roughly what the kids (?). You'd be surprised. One million? Two million? 750,000? That's what they say—wasn't anybody. And you tell them that and tell them all those ambulances running up and down the hospital are not taking snake bite victims in the hospital. And you can almost see—almost like a shroud falling off of—off—scales off their eyes. Hey, I don't—I'm not going to get snake-bit. The teachers—a lot of the teachers are afraid they're going to get bit by a mosquito carrying West Nile Virus. There is more things that they are taught to be afraid of in the woods than they are to enjoy. And it's—it's—it's getting real bad. That and the

00:54:40 - 2431

fact that we're getting a culture of people that think that they don't care what the rules say, they should be allowed to do what they want to. They want to drive through the woods, they should be able to drive through the woods and we don't have many people that are examples for their own kids anymore.

DT: Perhaps you can tell us about some of the places that you do guide and interpret and—I think you take people to Village Creek and to the Big Thicket National Preserve.

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BH: Yes, haven't done too much since the hurricane. The hurricane pretty well—Hurricane Rita two years ago—pretty well stopped everything in this area—just tore everything down. I—I have over the years, I had—last five or six years, I've discovered eight state champion trees in this area down on Harden—down in Harden County. And I think the hurricane knocked six of the five of them down. And that's just the way it is with everything. The schools, with the gas prices—they can't afford the gas to bring their kids—we've had to stop forest awareness. That was a program we had where we would take a class from school, we'd divide them up into five or six sections, there would be five or six classes that would make a circle—go through

00:56:05 - 2431

a circle in the woods and we'd train them five or six different stations. I usually taught the wildlife station and we don't have that anymore. And that—that was—that's one thing that's sorely missed. The schools can't afford it anymore. We had what was called—Robert Ballard had the Jason Project. I don't know if you've heard of that. That was a project that w—h—did—now—dealt with natural history. He would be somewhere in the world and he would beam his message to the different schools at different times—not different schools, but different locations—which in our case was Lamar University and the kids would go in

there for an hour. They would

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see him and what all he was doing. He usually had a bunch of kids and they were doing research on something to do with nature, then they would come through and we would take the—we would have them go around different areas and we would show them what was available in the area and how it tied in. I noticed last year we didn't do that. I think he got out of that. So a lot—a lot of things we've—we've got a lot of things that need to be done but we can't do it. And a lot of it of course is money and n—this is probably where I get crossways with a lot of conservationists—it's not all—people try to blame it on the government. The government has enough to do. But I know for one, especially birders so I can talk. That's the cheapest

00:57:39 - 2431

bunch of people. Some of them will donate—the biggest part of them try to talk their way into a state park rather than giving some money for it. But conservationists in my mind don't—they—they—they talk good but the—I won't say the real dedicated conservationists because real dedicated conservationists, a lot of times, are just about hungry with what they do, but a lot—a lot of the—I guess I'd call them—I'm getting deep into it now—the pseudo-conservationists—they like to see their name with some organization but they don't like to contribute to the overall thing.

DT: Well, given the problems and trying to get kids out to a park and—and the problems once they get to the park after the damage from Rita, maybe you could tell us what it used to be when it was easier to get out to the park and the park's in better condition. What sort of impression would you give to some of these kids? What kind of reaction would you get from them when you showed them something at your station on one of these field trips?

00:58:44 - 2431

BH: You get some great reactions when—especially when the park manager would be standing there next to you—he would be giving the program—he'd—he'd—he'd give part of the program, I'd give the other part of the program. He'd say, "Take over just a minute," and he'd walk off. And I'd be talking, next thing I know, a hand would come over my shoulder with a snake in it. A coachwhip or something and he'd just walk behind us and call it. And the—the kids—you—you would be surprised how—how many of them they would clear out when a sn—the snake would show—a snake would show up like that, but we would hold the snake and have them touch the snake, tell us what they thought it would feel a—l—like when they touched it and not tell anybody else after they touched it. And they would slimy st—and they

00:59:30 - 2431

would feel the sn—the snake and it would be cool and it would kind of rough and you'd be surprised. we had trouble getting away from petting the snake then. And that was real good and then you would...

DT: Let's stop there.

[End of Reel 2431]

DT: When we left off earlier, we were talking about some of the interpretation that you provided for visitors to natural areas and let's hope that you might be able to fill us in a little bit more about the—the guiding and interpreting that you might do in these parks and preserves.

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BH: Well, you—you—you take—you take people around and you can—you got two choices: you can kind of work with them or try to spoon feed it all to them. By spoon feeding it all to them, I mean you can stop and say this is a so and so, blah, blah, blah and whatever, or you can try to get them to interact with you. One of the things that I like to do is I like to get—interact—especially—usually when you take a bunch of—cub scouts or something on a hike, their mothers and fathers are with them. And there's always some lady back there that "I don't know anything about the woods—I don't know anything about the woods—all I do is cook—cook for these guys" or blah, blah and then you come up on a little tree down in the woods called

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Parsley Hawthorne. And I love—I know right where it is and it's out of the way and I go over and pick it up and I pick it up—I pick a leaf and I say, "Anybody know what this looks like?" One of those women say, "Well that looks like parsley." I said, "See, you do know more about the woods than these people do." And you'd be surprised how automatically they're the ones that are inching up close to the front to listen to you next time because they see that it's not all just completely strange. A birdcall—if you make a birdcall and you hear th—you hear a bird call for instance and you say, "What kind of bird is that?" "Well that—that's an owl." "What kind of owl?" "I don't know." "Well what's he saying?" "I don't know." So you say, "Okay, let's

00:03:14 - 2432

see. Now that might be a Barred Owl"—you know, Barred Owl always asks a question—he's real nosy—and they'll say, "Well, what'd he—what's he asking—what's he asking?" "He asks, 'who cooks for you—who cooks for you all?'" They listen (mimics sound) and boy, I mean from then on, you got to wait about 15 minutes before the kids will shut up trying to do it. And then, but if—if you can get them involved, it real—it—it really helps. And then you've got the problem always got one little kid that's real shy. He doesn't want to get involved. He tries to hide—hang back and then you find something that he's looking at real good and then you get him to talk a little about—about that—say something—you can usually get pretty well

00:04:05 - 2432

get them all in it. And oddly enough, I have found out of all of the kids, the ones that are more fun to take in the woods are little Girl Scouts. They are the ones that really are the most interested. They team to work with you—tend to work with you better and they're polite. But it—it—it's a lot—a lot of fun. With adults, you tend to get, usually you—you—you try to get somebody that thinks they know more than anybody else and they start taking—telling stuff. Well as long as they're telling stuff that's right, that's all right, but when they start telling stuff that's wrong, you've kind of got to correct them. And that usually does not help out too much. Yeah, I remember at a Girl Scout camp over at Woodville—had some little Girl Scouts and we were looking at some trees and this little girl, she must have been about eight years old, nine years old—and I said, "This is a Dogwood tree." And sh—I started to walk off and I felt somebody pulling on my pants leg. Little girl reached over and

00:05:17 - 2432

she just, "Sir, I don't think that's a Dogwood tree." I said, "Why don't you think it's a Dogwood tree?" She said, "It's just too darn big!" And that very same trip, we had a—a snake zip across in front of us. It was a Hognose Snake—what we call a Puff Adder. And it

was six people—six kids went after him—four of them were little girls. I had more fun that trip trying to—trying to corral them and keep them going. They were going to catch that snake and it's—it's still opportunity out there if you can educate the parents enough to bring the kids. That—that's the problem. They don't want to bring the kids. One thing that's lucky—at Village Creek though is Village Creek is on one of the best waterways for canoeing in Texas. So a lot of

00:06:10 - 2432

people come down there to canoe Village Creek and end up staying in Village Creek State Park. And that way they get—well I—they get to be around some of the other stuff and they get a chance to see some of the other things that go on. But we are—like I say, we definitely, definitely need a lot more to do—work with—with these kids because some of these kids are unbelievably smarter than I was at that age. I remember we had a kid—there was a spider in the woods called Golden Orb Weaver or a Banana Spider and it makes a big spider web. And it's got sort of a zigzag spoke on it. And we were walking down looking at some of that stuff and we were looking at the Orb Weaver and had a little seven year old boy and was real odd—only—only him and his daddy showed up for the hike that day and Jerry Rashall and I were—

00:07:18 - 2432

boy, they had—they had two of us leading them and little boy says, "You know why that's got that zigzag on it?" We said, "No, we don't." He said, "Well I tell you I saw it on nature last night." We said, "Okay, tell us." He said, "That's because the sun shines through and bounces off of that and it's like a light—it attracts the bugs." Real reasonable. So you can learn from the kids too. We found that out. But it's—it's just wonderful seeing them out in the woods, but they just—they don't get to do it as much as they should.

DT: I guess you take groups into the woods—around—year around—is that correct?

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BH: When they want to go.

DT: Are there things that you can typically see in the winter and some in the spring and some in the summer and some in the fall? Are there sort of characteristic things you look for at different times?

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BH: Well, we try to—we try to tell people, "Okay, you—you're in the park"—we use the park for an example—"You're in the park now. It's April. Come back in two months, it'll be a different program," because things do change like that. The—you might have different orchids in bloom. We have lots of orchids up in this area especially. Different birds come through at different times. We've actually got winter birds, we've got summer birds, we've got migrating birds that just migrate through. We have nesting birds which just come this far north and nest in—in the—in the spring. So we've got four just different casts of birds plus the ones that—the fifth one that stays here year around. So there's always something different in the woods.

DT: You had mentioned just briefly that sometimes you learn from kids. And—and I was wondering if—if you could sort of elaborate on that. Clearly you teach the visitors a lot. But what do you get back from these visitors? What do you—what do you in turn learn from them?

00:09:21 - 2432

BH: Well one thing I learned that maybe—maybe I'm not the smartest guy in the world. But

I feel like I've done something when some little kid comes and grabs you by the leg and hugs you and says, "Thank you sir." I learned that I've done a—my good deed for the day. But really you—a lot of these kids have questions. They are questions that I wouldn't think of. They are questions that they probably had no idea they were going to ask, it just all of a sudden pops into their mind. And it's not necessarily about the animals or the birds in the woods. It can be about something about the habitat or conservation that it just—you know, they seem to—we are in a position where we have heard almost all of this—all the way before—all the times

00:10:17 - 2432

before—so we tend to just gloss it over. They haven't heard it before. They're looking at it from a completely different view. So they've got some questions that they might ask about something or—or why—why doesn't this fish swim all the way up the river to the—to Alaska or something. And then you get to thinking, wait a minute, the kids don't realize about a dam, what a dam does or anything and you find out that the two-hour nature hike, which is how long they usually are—usually we will go a little longer because that's just not long enough. The—these are little sponges here. You sprinkle a little water on them and boy they fill up and grow.

DT: We've been talking about education and—and interpreting and guiding. I think one of the other ways you—you've done this education is through festivals and—and I was hoping that you could talk about the program that you got started, I think it was back in the late '80's called Wild Azalea Days.

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BH: Well we have a place north of town on highway 1414 called Wild Azalea King and it was a Temple set-aside site because it was so unusual. It's in a Longleaf Pine habitat and it is wild azaleas of which are actually Rhododendrons or a Rhododendron canescens to be exact—Piedmont Azaleas—this area here is part of a area that kind of stretches over from as far away as the Appalachians. In fact, a lot of the Big Thicket is that way. The—we're at the western end of the Big Eastern—Great Eastern Forest is basically what it is. So we get a lot of things that are actually—a lot of them skip through the Mississippi Valley, but are the same as the Appalachians. And this is a beautiful flower and it's left down in the—some—a fair amount of them are left down in the bottom of the valley now. A lot of them—I remember I had a—Dr. Trotti, who was my grandmother's first cousin about four or five years ago, not—not long before he died he was going to tell me about Wild

00:12:44 - 2432

Azalea Canyon. He says, "Buddy," he said, "When I was a kid," he says, "I'm lying," he said, "I wasn't a kid, it was only 71 years ago," he said that they—they were growing all way up on a hill, which means they were about three or four hundred yards from where they were—are now—and he was telling me about how the people used to come out there back in the '20s and such and would camp up there and have picnics and things and then got back to trying to let people see it, but it's a lot like everything else, people will come in there and with no thought for preservation. Lot of times they will go in there and they will cut an arm full of them and take them out. And they're going fast too. And we don't know for sure what the—is going end

00:13:35 - 2432

up now that Campbell Industries has taken over from Temple. Temple was going in and cleaning out the areas around them trying to get them to expand. But we—our wild azalea

sort of festivals—you say what we call Wild Azalea Days is a little—is a s—weekend here in town where the local flower club—the Newton Flower Garden Club has their flower show and we have that in conjunction with—their annual flower show in conjunction with Wild Azalea Days and a fair amount of people come in. More and more people though come and go see the wild azaleas and leave and we never know they're there because there's nobody out there all of the time. So we don't know exactly how many people we have that come to see them.

DT: I guess about ten years later, there's another chapter in this effort to kind of promote a local ecosystem and that was when you learned about the Texas Parks and Wildlife's plan to have a—a birding trail and I was wondering how you tried to get Newton County involved in that?

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BH: Well you met the—the lady that was here that opened the place up for us—Susan Karpel—she is our volunteer spark plug for the town. And I mentioned that to her and is the—her and a l—lady—Pam Wright—they and their husbands own Whispering Creek Motel—and Pam's just the same way as Susan is. I talked to them and they jumped right on it. So we wanted to see what we could do. So we got in touch with Ted Eubanks and he was going to have a meeting and we invited him to come to Newton and then we invited the little towns around us to come. And that's when we decided we would have a ev—every other place evidently—I don't know exactly how they pick the sites but we figured the people that lived in the area know the birding sites better than the people from somewhere else. So we formed

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a—last I h—heard during the—the operation of the birding trail committee back then, we were the only area that had a committee for it. Well we designed a birding trail, we picked the spots. Jerry Rashall from Village Creek and I drove around and—and measured the distance between all the spots and then we had the opening. They had the first year of—the Upper Texas Coastal Birding Trail had the birding—oh I forget what they called it now—the—the contest over at Martin Dies S—State Park is where they started and then we managed to even get the American Birding Association s—a couple of years later came down and had their national convention in Beaumont. And we set up a station down there and we had—handed out all of our literature and stuff. And then we got together with Jasper and Woodville and got

00:16:53 - 2432

together and got with Ted Eubanks and we paid for a ecotourism survey to be done in the area. And that's where I met his son-in-law—not son-in-law—his step son, Seth Davidson—I don't know if you're familiar with him. He has a ecotourism business like Ted's. Last I heard he was up out of—oh, somewhere up Sunray or somewhere up in the panhandle and he was doing that kind of work. And I took him—we went around to every spot in the Big Thicket and looked at different things and when he was getting the information for it. Now unfortunately in my opinion—most everybody else's too—we even had—got—through Seth—we got a website for the Deep East Texas Nature dot com, which was up here. We're just a little too far off the beaten path for a lot of tourists and everybody that seems—most people

00:17:52 - 2432

seem to be birding; put birding is their number one thing, not birding and fishing or birding

and something else. And when they come to Texas, they tend to want to go to the more exotic places, not come from New Orleans to East Texas and see wh—just the birds from across the river with a Texas accent. They—it's—we didn't—we didn't do too good and like I told you earlier about it being hard to bird in this part of the state, that's another place that—and then places like Koontz—they had a East Texas—they've got the Big Thicket Birding Festival, but they, to my opinion, they do it all wrong, they put people on a bus and take them to High Island when they're setting right in the middle of the Big Thicket. They take them to High Island. People go to High Island and they might want to come up here, but they—they don't do very good either.

DT: We're talking about efforts to try to bring attention to the local environment. I think that one other effort that you had besides the ecotourism venture is your role with the Big Thicket Association where you served on the—the board. Can you tell us about your tenure there and what the Association has been working on?

00:19:19 - 2432

BH: Well the Association is trying to preserve as much of the habitat as they can. Unfortunately for our area up here, a lot of people say hey, we don't want anything to do with that. They don't even have any part of the Big Thicket in Newton County. And basically if you notice they don't have any in Jasper County either except for a little part of the corridor of the Neches River. But the word is that there was a—back when they picked the Big Thicket, they had sort of agreement—hey, we won't pick anything east of the—if ya'll agree to it, we won't pick anything east of the Neches River. So some of the places like Newton County, which have a lot of stuff up—we've got an unbelievable amount of 'specially mushrooms—they're the only place

00:20:12 - 2432

they're found are right here in Newton County. Like I said, Geraldine Watson said that this is the treasure trove of the Big Thicket. There are a lot of plants up and down Newton County that there's only one or two places they're known in Texas right here. The Sessile-leaf Bellwort, for instance, a lot of the orchids are gone now because once again, people don't think. They say well that they're going to be here—they're going to be gone so I'll dig them up and take them with me. And they—we lose them.

00:20:48 - 2432

The Big—the Big—the Big Thicket r—really—now there they have a better chance to educate the kids than most of the others—others of us do because they are more present in the schools and Leslie Dubey who is the—I guess she's the head interpretive ranger—that might be where Ty lives—she does real good at that and Dave Baker that they used to head did real good at that. And I don't know that—how many people they have that—just regular schedule interpretive tours—I know that Merle King, before he had to retire from—for physical reasons, he was giving programs like that. So that's one good thing about the conservation people in this

00:21:52 - 2432

area. They tend to work together. Big Thicket needs something, they call around. Village Creek needs something, they call around. Newton needs something, we call around. If people have got it, it's—it's there for the other one to use and it—it works out real well.

DT: Well we've been talking about things that the Big Thicket Association's been involved with, I guess sometimes singly and sometimes in partnership with other groups. But I believe that one of the projects that the Association's been working on is—is this blitzkrieg

to go through the preserve and try to identify as many different species as possible. I was curious if you've been involved in that.

00:22:39 - 2432

BH: No, I haven't been involved in that. That started probably what was it—a year or so ago, two years ago. Well I had a stroke two years ago so I—kind of took me out—out of the picture for a while. But I have some friends right down below me here in the county—Dave and Pat Lewis who are experts on mushrooms and different fungi's and they are heavily involved in it. But that—see that's the way we just about got to do things nowadays because if you don't do it in a hurry, it's probably not going to be there or there's a good chance it won't be there. We're (?) finding in South America and places there are no telling how many thousands of species are getting lost just because nobody had a chance to look for them—or look at them before they cut the forest.

DT: Speaking of things getting lost, what—what do you think the big pressures are on the—the local ecosystems—whether it's this Big Thicket National Preserve or—or the area closer up here in Newton County?

00:23:44 - 2432

BH: Money and taxes. That's the big thing. People have got to make a living. This is a poor, poor area. So they're going to make a living doing what they can. If it's cutting the last of the trees, a lot of them are going to sell the last of the trees. Taxes—taxes are just way too high. I—a lot of this stuff that I've been talking about about people not being able to teach their kids, broken homes, parents—I attribute basically to our government and our lifestyle because I see that when the family home broke up and the mother had to go to work and the kids were just left on their own, it just—the fabric came apart at the seams. I know I was very blessed when I

00:24:35 - 2432

grew up. My mother stayed at home with the kids, raised the kids until we were both out of school, then she went to work. Not because she had to, because she wanted to. Nowadays, both parents have got to work just to try to pay the taxes.

DT: What do you think about some of the other factors that I—I sometimes hear mentioned of—I guess one would be the expansion of some of these metropolitan areas—Beaumont and Orange sort of seeping out into southeast Texas. Do you see that as being a very big factor in fragmentation of the habitat?

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BH: Yes, I do. Not so much for them just spreading out as them jumping out because there's so many areas you'll look around Orange, you look around Beaumont, you will see whole cities that were not there 20 or 30 years ago, that are really booming because everybody decided we want to get out of Beaumont. This—this little place looks good—I'm going to build a house here. Then 10,000 other people decide they're going to build a house there and now you've got another big section of the woods gone. My mother was born—I don't know if you're familiar with the Lumberton area but the Big Thicket, right there where Pine Island Bayou comes into the Big Thicket—my mother was born on—in a little cut and run sawmill town there. And now, of course, there's no sign of that sawmill town but I mean there is a

00:26:13 - 2432

huge city there and they're putting a strain on everything down there, not only pollution but people wanting to get out and run in the woods and do what they want to with their

ATV's and other vehicles and they're just carving up the woods. It doesn't—doesn't take but one ATV to go through a sensitive habitat and ruin it.

DT: How does it do that?

00:26:39 - 2432

BH: They just get off in there and do it. It's not legal, but they—we caught several of them in Village Creek Park down there. They—people just don't pay attention. And furthermore, don't care. There have been several times that people have actually destroyed (?) destroyed bird nests' down there with four-wheelers just running back and forth across bird nests.

DT: What is this connection between the ATV's and the Canebrake Rattlesnakes?

00:27:14 - 2432

BH: Oh well I was said—the b—the interesting thing is Big Thicket Association, every two or three years has a Big Thicket science—I forget what you call it—it in Beaumont and at one of them I was listening to a biologist that worked with the Canebrake Rattlesnake talking about how the ATV's, how they—Canebrake Rattlesnake needed large areas to hunt. And the—how the—in the area where he was h—hunting that or was studying them that the ATV's had been running through there for a couple of weeks and said it just ruined it for rattlesnakes because rattlesnakes just—you know, they're not going to stay around if they—came—of course a lot of people that would be a good—good thing but Canebrake Rattlesnake's a beautiful animal.

DT: One—one other development that I've heard people question and—and—and worry about frankly, is that—is that source of damage to the habitat is these proposals for reservoirs that come up Fastrill and Rockland. Do you have any opinions or thoughts you can pass on about those?

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BH: My opinion is we've got probably about 80 or 90 percent too many reservoirs now. Seems like every time somebody wants some more water, they want to put in a reservoir. If they want less water, they want to put in a reservoir to hold the water to keep it from going downstream. If they need more, they build a reservoir. It's just—everything we seem to do, we need to keep the corps of engineers employed and build a new reservoir. And it's—ev—people—once again it—not thinking. The prime habitat—how many millions of acres of the best river bottom habitat in the world is underneath these reservoirs and we st—steadily building more. I understand they've had problems over with Martin Dies. They want to raise the lake

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from—for water for Houston. Houston says they don't need any water. They don't want any water, but they want it for Houston—they want to raise the water. I understand we—I don't know if—how far it's gone but if it's a big project that take a lot of water out of Toledo Bend to send to Dallas. But it seems like instead of conser—conserving water, seems like our big problem is people—they think that it's unlimited and we need to just keep providing water.

DT: We've—we've talked about a whole variety of things from the habitat to the wildlife, to education about it and—and to some of the threats that—that concerns that—that might be harming this areas. I was wondering in retrospect and as you look back over the last 15 years where you've been actively doing this and I guess earlier as more of a hobby. What is it that—that drives you to—to teach people about nature and to guide them to—to see these special spots in nature?

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BH: I guess it's—I guess I can trace it back to my dad. He always taught me that—he taught—now we were hunters and we were fishermen. He taught me you don't kill anything unless it's really bothering you or you—you going to eat it. You care for it. Just like every time I had a dog, he says I don't care—he said, you—you've—got that dog—he said, I don't care if that dog turns out to be the meanest or the sickest dog in the world, he's yours. You take care of him. He is your responsibility. The whole world's our responsibility. And I guess that's what it's grounded in and I thank him for it.

DT: And how would you explain this to some of the kids that go on your field trips? What this means to you and maybe what it should mean to—to them?

00:31:37 - 2432

BH: Well basically I try to show them that it's not out there to harm you. It's out there to help you in sometime—try—try to explain a little bit about, you know—even—even the bug that's boring in the tree how it helps you and how that rotting tree there, if it wasn't for some of these bugs and things it wouldn't rot and the other trees wouldn't have a fertilizer for it and that snake wouldn't have a place to hide and get the mice that you don't like and things like that. And it—and it is all a chain—it's all connected. And you break one link of that chain and you're in trouble.

DT: You've taken kids and adults to—to many beautiful spots in East Texas and—and probably elsewhere. Is there oth—a place in nature that—that you can recall that—that means a great deal to you just as a place to seek out to—for that kind of feeling of solace or rest or trying to reconnect with—with—with nature?

00:32:42 - 2432

BH: Yeah, I would if I could get there. You can't get there anymore. It was over in Bartonville. It was down the hill behind my grandmother's house. Little big—big “U” shaped bend in little Cow Creek. It was always cool down there and the birds were singing and you could sit—I remember when I was a kid, I used to sit there and fish and sometimes I'd pick up my line, wouldn't have any bait on it. No telling how long the bait had been gone. I was sitting there—sitting there with a empty hook in the water, but I—I—I just can't ever forget that and was a deep cold creek and now they've cut logs and thrown the tops in and it's silted in. Can't get through the timber company properties to get in there and from—from other directions. It's just the lost world.

DT: Well I think we've sort of drawn to a close here. Is—is there anything you'd like to add?

00:33:41 - 2432

BH: I can't think of anything.

DT: Well thank you very much for your time. I appreciate it.

00:33:48 - 2432

BH: I appreciate you coming up here and seeing our little niche of the world.

DT: Yeah, the—what we call it—the ark of North America. Thanks for being out—our guide. I appreciate it.

00:33:59 - 2432

BH: Well, you're welcome and come back and see us sometime when you walk down Wild Azalea Canyon and see the flowers blooming.

DT: I would like to see that.

[End of Reel 2432]

[End of Buddy Hollis Interview]

