

New Books About the Natural World in Texas and the Hill Country

I assume that folks who read these columns are at least somewhat interested in Nature and our native habitat. If this describes you, then there are two brand-new books out that that will interest you.

The first book is “Seasons at Selah: The Legacy of Bamberger Ranch Preserve.” This book was so much anticipated that I put my name on a list to buy a copy even before the actual publication. Why was it so anticipated? Because of the subject involved and the people who made it happen.

The subject is J. David Bamberger and his legendary work to restore a worn-out ranch in Blanco County into the showcase Bamberger Ranch Preserve we see today, and to educate thousands of Texans on how to manage their land.

The author is Andrew Sansom, long-time friend of Bamberger, past head of The Nature Conservancy in Texas, and subsequently the Executive Director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

The photographers are David Langford and Rusty Yates, both well-known professional photographers of wildlife and nature in Texas. Langford is a past executive vice-president of the Texas Wildlife Association

The Forward is written by Carter Smith, current Executive Director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, having succeeded Sansom, in turn at the Nature Conservancy and then at Parks and Wildlife.

It is hard to imagine a more outstanding collection of talent, knowledge, experience, passion, and accomplishment in the fields of nature, wildlife and conservation in Texas than the gentlemen just mentioned.

I have had the good fortune to have known both J. David Bamberger and David Langford for over 15 years, and have always had the greatest admiration for their accomplishments and contributions toward the conservation of our native habitat. I have also had the pleasure of meeting both Andrew Sansom and Carter Smith on several occasions and have come to appreciate how much better off Texas is for their leadership.

This is a large, high quality book filled with many hundreds of outstanding, spectacular photographs taken from around the Bamberger Ranch Preserve. But this is much more than a coffee-table book with exceptional photographs.

Andrew Sansom brings the story to life of how J. David Bamberger, with little prior experience or “expert” advice, managed to convert a worn-out, waterless, cedar-covered ranch into today’s rich grass-covered hills and savannas, diverse woodlands and spring-fed creeks and a lake. Sansom’s story amounts to a history of conservation and land management in central Texas over the past 40 years. And it is a great story.

Another brand-new book is, “The Natural History of Texas,” by Brian Chapman and Eric Bolen. Some might ask, “What is a Natural History?” There is probably an ‘official’ definition somewhere, but I would define a natural history of an area as a description of the area’s geology, landscape, topography, plants, animals, water, and the interactions of the people living there with all of those from pre-historic times to the present.

Different authors chose to divide the state into slightly different numbers of ecosystems. These authors have chosen 11 different such areas and these include: Piney Woods, Post Oak Savana, Blackland Prairies, Cross Timbers and Prairies, Rolling Plains, Edwards Plateau, High Plains, Trans-Pecos, South Texas Brushland, Coastal Prairies and the Texas Gulf Coast.

Each of these regions is described in terms of the obvious physical and biological characteristics, the human history of the region, unique features and “highlights” of each region as well as the current condition of conservation and management of each regions’ natural resources.

Most natural history books are written with two different types of reader in mind—professionals in various related fields and, for want of a better term, “amateur naturalists.” I can’t speak for the former group, but from my standpoint as one of the latter, I think they hit just the right amount of detail and description. I have read three of the ecoregions sections, two I am fairly familiar with (High Plains and Edwards Plateau) and one that I was not (Piney Woods), and I learned things about all three I didn’t know.

Interestingly, Andrew Sansom wrote the Forward for this book.

So I highly recommend this book to anyone who really wants to understand all the different regions of the state and how they evolved to be as they are today.

Both books were published by Texas A & M Press and can also be obtained on Amazon.com,

Until next time...

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