

## Learning from the Master: J. David Bamberger

A few days ago I attended a much anticipated book signing and presentation of the book, "Seasons at Selah: The legacy of the Bamberger Ranch Preserve." Some of you may remember my writing about that book a few months ago and what an absolute jewel it is—certainly one of the very best Hill Country books I know of.

The book signing and presentation at Riverside Nature Center was presented by one of the photographers for the book, David K. Langford and the subject of the book itself, J. David Bamberger.

I first met J. David in late 2001 when my wife and I began attending most all of the day-long classes they were offering at the ranch on various topics pertaining to land management and native habitat in the Hill Country. We also began volunteering at Riverside Nature Center, the founder of whom, Susan Sander, was also heavily involved with education at the Bamberger Ranch. Susan was also one of the organizers for the Hill Country Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist (HCMN) in 2002, which is when my wife and I took the class to become Master Naturalists.

The combination of J. David Bamberger and the Bamberger Ranch and the HCMN changed my life forever—learning everything I could about nature and the Hill Country and then gradually also teaching others in any way that I could because it became my full-time "job."

Because of both the knowledge learned but especially the enthusiasm obtained from Bamberger and HCMN, I have managed to organize the Land Management Assistance Program of HCMN in 2004 which has now helped over 450 landowners better manage their collective 38,000 acres, published "Hill Country Landowner's Guide" in 2009, began writing the Hill Country Naturalist column for the Kerrville Daily Times in 2010 (which is now published by three other Hill Country papers), published "A Beginner's Handbook for Rural Texas Landowners" in 2014 and "Hill Country Ecology: Essays on Plants, Animals, Water, and Land Management" in 2017.

The HCMN has now trained 475 Hill Country residents to be better land stewards and more knowledgeable about nature.

When I look at that list and I think this is one man's accomplishments after being inspired by Bamberger I think of how many of the thousands of people Bamberger trains every year and that if only one percent of them are doing things to preserve and protect Hill Country habitat and pass on the teachings to others, that is quite an army.

And it is not just individuals. There are a lot of organizations whose main goal is to protect our Hill Country habitat and educate our children about nature, and most of them

are populated by people trained by Bamberger and or HCMN. Here is a partial list: Riverside Nature Center in Kerrville, Cibolo Nature Center in Boerne, Fredericksburg Nature Center in Fredericksburg, Native Plant Society of Texas chapters in Kerrville, Boerne, and Fredericksburg, The Hill Country Alliance, Hill Country Land Trust, several Friends of “XXXX” National Park. And in addition, there are knowledgeable and helpful agents of government agencies such as AgriLife Extension, Texas Parks and Wildlife, Texas Forest Service and USDA/NRCS.

Lots of people involved in lots of activities trying to take care of Texas. But I also learned something important early that evening—There is hope! And the hope came in the form of a young man I was introduced to who was just graduating from college and volunteering at Riverside Nature Center before beginning his first “job” which is volunteering overseas.

He knew something about some of the things I am involved with and he had lots of questions—how did you do that? How did you solve that problem? How long did that take? Etc. What was interesting was it was not so much the questions he was asking, but the fact they were not just polite social interactions but a real desire to know how I did this or that, etc. because he was interesting in doing similar things.

What was really interesting was the interest, urgency, sincerity and earnestness obvious in his voice which was then juxtaposed with a little later by the excitement and joy in the 90-year old voice of J. David as he described the discovery of the first returning sp[JS1]ring coming back on the Bamberger Ranch after a few years of habitat restoration.

I hope there are a lot more like that young man. They may have very difficult problems to solve in the future, but I have hope they will be up to the task. The thought certainly brightens my day.

Until next time.

Jim Stanley is a Texas Master Naturalist and the author of the books “Hill Country Ecology,” “Hill Country Landowner’s Guide” and “A Beginner’s Handbook for Rural Texas Landowners.” He can be reached at [jstmn@ktc.com](mailto:jstmn@ktc.com). Previous columns can be seen at [www.hillcountrynaturalist.org](http://www.hillcountrynaturalist.org) .