



A brief history of the Joan and Scott Holt Paradise Pond: Scott and I have a special interest in and love for this valuable oasis. It has long been an important resting and feeding site for migratory birds because it is a rare freshwater wetland, surrounded by large Black Willow trees and a diversity of understory plants in an area otherwise lacking in woodlands.

We began birding there in the mid to late 1980's before there were many houses on Channel Vista Drive. We entered under the powerline right of way through willows that surrounded the pond. Scott, Cecilia Riley and I went there often during spring migration and one year found a Glossy Ibis which is unusual for our area. We shared the finding with a few birding colleagues and thus the Pond was discovered. Several birders began coming to what we called Paradise Pond (because it was behind the Paradise Motel). After the houses were built on Channel Vista behind Paradise Pond we no longer had access there and began entering through the Aransas Harbors side. Many birders used this entrance, especially Joe Frandolig who lived in Aransas Harbors. He became the birder in residence and kept careful watch over Paradise Pond. Annual bird counts there during the late 1990's reached 130 species.

The popularity of the pond drew the attention of Ann Vaughan CEO of the Chamber of Commerce-Tourist Bureau. During a Great Texas Birding Classic event sponsored by the Chamber we showed the "magic spot" to Mayor Glenn Martin and the city became interested. A proposal was submitted by the Gulf Coast Birding Observatory, Audubon Outdoor Club, and the City of Port Aransas, to the Great Texas Birding Classic for a Conservation Grant and was chosen to receive the grant in 1999. The grant money was used to secure challenge funds through the Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program. Local landowners donated land, and the City of Port Aransas donated many in-kind services. Paradise Pond was dedicated in 2002 as a community effort supported by private donations of land, foundation funds and teamwork.

As a wooded oasis in the middle of development, Paradise Pond is a natural attraction for migrating birds. It was originally surrounded by Black Willows and a variety of native understory plants. Over the past 10 years or so the woodlands surrounding the pond have become dominated more and more by Brazilian Peppertrees. These trees are not only non-native to the US they are highly invasive. The trees that were recently removed on the west side of Paradise Pond, first by AEP (under their power line right of way immediately adjacent to the water) and

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beyond that, by the developer of the housing project, were invasive Brazilian Peppertrees that have taken over and killed most of the native willow trees that once surrounded that side of the Pond.

We are trying to turn this devastation into an opportunity to bring back the Paradise Pond that we first knew. Scott is working on a plan with the City of Port Aransas, the Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program and the developer Nick Lorette, to plant willows and other South Texas native vegetation to recover the back side of Paradise Pond. It will be a long and expensive process to grow the trees (without the peppertrees taking over) and will require substantial community support and involvement. We hope you will join us in this effort.

Additional information: Brazilian Peppertrees are native to South America and were introduced as a landscape ornamental plant – they become invasive in subtropical areas in Texas, Florida, and Coastal California– they do not tolerate hard freezes. Freezes regularly occurred in our area in the past, but changing climate has led to much warmer winters over the last 30 years thus the pepper trees have persisted and taken over more and more habitat including the native prairie. The red pepper fruits are eaten by birds, mammals, and ants, who are primarily responsible for their dispersal and spread. Once established, Brazilian peppertrees quickly displace the native vegetation, often forming dense monocultures that reduce the biological diversity of plants and animals in the invaded area. Most of the Texas coast from Galveston to Brownsville, coastal California, and Southern Florida are fighting these invasive peppertrees that have taken over the native vegetation- they just won't share. Native vegetation is most valuable because it is highly diverse and supports large numbers of animals and plants.

10/22/15 Joan Holt