

## If You Build Them They Will Come: Earth Team Efforts Help Provide Homes for Bluebirds

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service South Central Region Earth Team recently completed its Eastern Bluebird Trail Project.

From the Arkansas state line to the Gulf of Mexico—from the Mississippi River to the Texas state line—22 parishes opened their homes and hearts to bluebirds by installing 342 nesting boxes. The boxes installed in Louisiana are part of a larger Bluebird Trail that covers four states of the NRCS South Central Region including Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas.

The project has been so successful that there were not enough nesting boxes to fill all the requests that were received.

Nearly 800 nesting boxes were installed in this region as part of the Earth Team volunteer program. The program was developed in conjunction with local soil and water conservation districts. Caddo Parish, Louisiana; McCurtain County, Oklahoma; Miller County, Arkansas; and Bowie County, Texas represent the largest concentration of boxes in the program. Some 400 boxes are clustered to form the

heart of the South Central Bluebird Trail with other trails joining the original planned trail.

Over the years, land has been cleared for various uses and many old trees have been cut down. With modernization, the supply for natural nesting cavities for bluebirds and other native cavity nesters has been greatly reduced. The most important step to take in helping bring back the bluebird is to provide nesting sites. The nesting boxes were placed in backyards, parks, pastures, and churches, around homes and other areas. The success of the project is due to the dedicated volunteers from all four states who donated their time, labor and materials.

*For more information, to get plans for a bluebird box or to participate in future trails, contact any of the USDA NRCS offices in Miller County, Arkansas; Caddo Parish, Louisiana; McCurtain County, Oklahoma or Bowie County, Texas.*



ET volunteer displays a completed birdhouse.



Bluebird eggs

## Program Takes Root in Oklahoma

Throughout the state of Oklahoma, plants and students are "growing together," thanks to a program from the Great Plains RC&D and the National Tree Trust. Through their efforts, volunteers with Natural Resources Conservation Service's Earth Team help make this program possible.

Through the program, teachers complete applications to receive tree seed growing kits. Then participating students in grades K-6 receive pint containers, tree

seeds, and soil to grow the trees. The children can take the trees home or plant them on the school grounds.

This year 279 teachers received activity guides to help implement this project into their curriculum. In all, some 7,600 students from 57 schools and 18 conservation districts participated.

The seedling and the student are able to "grow together" as the student charts the germination and growth of the seedling.

## National Earth Team Update

By Michele Eginoire, National Volunteer Coordinator

The National Earth Team Volunteer Coordinator's Training Conference will be held August 4-8, 2003, in New Orleans, LA. We will be sharing resources and welcome the National Public Affairs Conference attendees to join us in New Orleans August 6-8, 2003. Some meeting highlights include:

- Volunteer Coordinator Welcome and Recognition
- Volunteer Coordinator Training Session (revised General Manual, Marketing Material, etc.)
- Volunteer Database Training
- Volunteer Project Tour (Bring your shorts and dress cool)
- Farm Bill and Earth Team Volunteers
- Luncheon with the Public Affairs Specialists (presentation from Chief Knight)
- Communication Plans
- Measuring Success
- Gaining media coverage

If you are not on our list and would like to receive information on the conference, please e-mail Tina Morris at [tina.morris@swcs.org](mailto:tina.morris@swcs.org) and we will add your name. I look forward to seeing everyone in New Orleans!

## CT Volunteer Reaches Thousands

*Article submitted by Carol Donzella – CT Earth Team Coordinator*

Connecticut Earth Team Volunteer, Jen Werle, is a very special Earth Team Volunteer. Since joining the NRCS family in 2001, Jen has folded, stuffed, labeled and stamped over 3,200 pieces of mail to help inform our customers of new programs, workshops and special events.

Besides her great organizational skills, she is using her creative talents to build a robot out of recyclable items to teach children to recycle and reuse. In addition, she is developing a bi-yearly Earth Team newsletter to keep all informed.

And besides doing all that . . . she works full time, goes to school and is raising a family! She is definitely one of our Shining Stars!

## Volunteers Instruct 4-H Members

Biotechnology has reached Washita County and it comes by the way of our youth. Five Washita County 4-H members were selected earlier this year to be trained in biotechnology and then share what they learned with students in western Oklahoma. The five selected are: Breanna Barnett, Desirae Sarver, Whitney Gray, Allie Smith and Tyler Peck, all from Sentinel.

The Washita County 4-H Biotechnology Team participated in two outdoor classrooms where they presented the lesson, "This Island Earth." The lesson emphasized the concept of sustainability and the environment. The first outdoor classroom was the Deer Creek Conservation District's, held near Weatherford, Oklahoma. The second outdoor classroom the team taught was the Washita County Conservation District Outdoor Classroom in Cordell, Oklahoma. Over 390 students were reached in the two outdoor classrooms during April 2003.

## 9th Annual Outdoor Classroom Event Caney Valley Conservation District and Washington County Oklahoma

The Ninth Annual Outdoor Classroom was held April 16 and 17, 2003. This is the main event of Earth Team Volunteers for the Washington County NRCS Office and Conservation District Office.

Many Earth Team volunteers work the two-day event: and serve as group leaders to escort the groups of fourth grade students through 10 learning stations. More volunteers assist during the lunch period

The outdoor classroom was started several years ago, while Kirk Schreiner (current State Earth Team Co-Coordinator) was District Conservationist

at the Dewey Field Office. The outdoor classroom is provided for all fourth grade students in Washington County. Attendance usually runs from 650 to 700 for the two-day event.

There were ten instructors from various groups and organizations including the NRCS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Corps of Engineers, Rogers County Conservation District, and Oklahoma State University (OSU).

The volunteers always play a huge part in the success of this outdoor classroom and we are appreciative of everything they do for conservation in Oklahoma.

### Helpful Hint:

Submit articles for the *Volunteer Voice* in Microsoft Word and photos in jpg format.

Thank you!

# Military restores more than just Iraq

April 2003 – (Fort Dix, NJ) While many members of the U.S. Army were busy rebuilding Iraq, reservists, military dependents, and other civilians were working at home restoring the Laurel Pond recreation area on Fort Dix, New Jersey. This group of over 170 volunteers, including several Earth Team Volunteers, planted hundreds of flowers; shrubs and trees; stabilized the eroding shoreline of Laurel Pond with natural materials; picked up trash; washed existing picnic benches; installed new signs; built a 1/4 mile interpretive trail with a bridge.

To celebrate Arbor Day, 32 trees were planted at Laurel Pond. These included arborvitae to serve as a visual buffer, plus dogwoods and flowering cherries for show. In addition, a hundred flowering shrubs were planted.

A number of other volunteers worked on stabilizing the eroding shoreline of Laurel Pond. They staked a coconut fiber filled "Biolog" to stop erosion on the pond's edge. Once the biolog was in place wetland plants, including flowers were planted in and around the biolog. In time the biolog will decompose and the plant roots will hold the bank in place.

Volunteers performed other impor-

tant task at Laurel Pond. Groups of cub scouts, girl scouts, and children of all ages helped with trash pick up. This included scouring the woods for trash. About forty acres of woods, the pond and its shoreline were cleaned of trash.

According to many observers, this project was the best ever in comparison to other activities at Fort Dix, due to the scope of the project and the number of individuals involved. "As far as scope and number of people, this was three or four times the amount of involvement" according to Roger Smith, the Natural Resources Manager. The restoration coordinators, Melissa Pawlowski and Terry Smith consider their efforts an enormous success. "We're already seeing increased use of the recreation area, after just one week," Melissa said.

"Children are already asking us what are we doing next year," Terry said.



Lieutenant Colonel Victor Stephenson Deputy Commander of Fort Dix, New Jersey and his sons, James and Brian planting a tree.

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## National Earth Team Office Staff & Pheasants Forever Participate in 2003 Earth Day Event

On April 24, 2003, Michele Eginoire, Bonnie Weller, Tina Morris and Ed Szczutkowski, assisted the local Pheasants Forever Chapter by providing conservation education to 400 fourth grade students.

The "Giant Earth Ball" was loaned to us from Jeanine May, Mississippi State Public Affairs Specialist. The students were divided into six groups and

educated on the importance of soil and water conservation.

Of course, the major highlight was when the kids tried to lift the Earth Ball by themselves. The theme for the day was that 'we can't do it alone. But as a group, we can all make conservation work!'



Ray Herman, retired state resource conservationist for NRCS in Illinois can't seem to get enough of conservation. Ray is a stellar Earth Team volunteer who has racked up hundreds of hours of volunteer time during the past few years as he continues his never-ending quest to put more conservation on the ground in Champaign and other counties in Illinois.

# World Water Monitoring Day & Earth Team: October 18, 2003

(Monitoring from September 18 – October 18)

[www.worldwatermonitoringday.org](http://www.worldwatermonitoringday.org)

Recently, the National Earth Team Office has been working with America's Clean Water Foundation to take advantage of much of the work already being performed by our dedicated Earth Team volunteers.

As a result the national office will be purchasing a supply of test kits that will be available to Earth Team Volunteers. Additional information will be sent via the Earth Team E-list regarding this project.

Below are some facts about World Water Monitoring Day:

**Purpose:** To expand National Water Monitoring Day beyond the United States and to institutionalize this youth education and citizen involvement activity as an annual cooperative international watershed monitoring event.

**Background:** National Water Monitoring Day was created in the US as part of the Year of Clean Water activities celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Clean Water Act. With the success of the inaugural event held October 18, 2002, America's Clean Water Foundation, the national Year of Clean Water Coordinator, reached out to the International Water Association resulting in an international partnership designed to launch World Water Monitoring Day.

The need for clean water knows no boundaries. World Water Monitoring Day will connect the global community to a global resource by bringing together citizens and young people throughout the world to monitor four indicators for water quality. These parameters were chosen because they are relatively simple and safe and provide an initial screening for quality that anyone can perform. The parameters are: dissolved oxygen (DO), acidity (pH), temperature and turbidity.

America's Clean Water Foundation has also engaged other partners, such as Project WET and Earth Force, and Federal partners USEPA, USDA, USDO, NASA, USACE and USGS, to provide educational materials and support within a national and international scope.

**Impacts:** Results from World Water

Monitoring Day will be recorded in a database that will establish a baseline of information over future years. The opportunities to increase knowledge and awareness of watershed health will be greatly enhanced through sharing information on a global scale.

## Students and NRCS: A Win-Win Situation

Emma O'Brien approached NRCS looking for a mentor--someone to job-shadow as she considered a career in graphic design and advertising. When asked if she could be "shadowed," Illinois NRCS State PAS Paige Buck said, "Sure!"

It wasn't long before they had devised a way to meet Emma's needs and provide a way to meet the needs of NRCS at the same time. Emma was quickly signed up as an Earth Team volunteer and put in a total of 31 hours her last high school semester.

Emma worked with the PAS Team to redesign the Field Notebook used by 270 seventh and eighth grade students who attend the annual Earth Day outdoor farm tour. Emma helped design logo ideas for a newly-formed RC&D Council and she created a Powerpoint presentation as well.

Emma graduated last week. In a presentation, she confirmed that her experience working with NRCS assured her that her career of choice is the correct one for her. According to Emma, her mentor class was a great experience



Emma O'Brien

in itself, "but I am very glad I was placed with you. You all care so much about your work and the dedication and the team effort I saw in the office and at Earth Day was amazing." she said.

Emma will attend the University of Illinois this fall and has indicated her continued interest in NRCS and the Earth Team and her commitment to help out whenever she can.

The National Earth Team Volunteer Coordinator's  
Training Conference will be held  
August 4-8, 2003, in New Orleans, LA.

## Earth Team Volunteers Hooked on Challenge

The Many Field Office is located in rural northwest Louisiana and is the heart of Toledo Bend Reservoir. Toledo Bend Reservoir, piney woods, and poultry operations are the major resources of Sabine Parish. The office staff consists of one NRCS district conservationist and the soil and water conservation district secretary. The field office has a heavy EQIP workload, due in part to the area's concentration of confined feeding animal unit operations. The office also has an outstanding information program.

But without the Earth Team volunteers the information program would be greatly reduced.

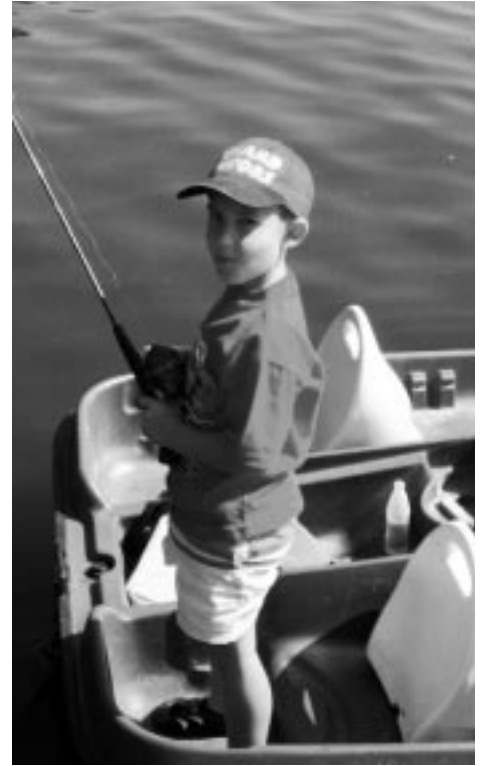
One of the major events of the Sabine Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is the annual educational Big Bream Challenge for youth. The Challenge spotlights the effectiveness and usefulness of Earth Team volunteers.

The Big Bream Challenge was created to use the available resources of Toledo Bend Reservoir while providing children with an educational opportunity to learn of the various sunfish species living in the lake. The

Challenge started eight years ago with one volunteer and few fishermen. Today the event is limited to 100 fishermen and uses the talents of 10 Many Field Office volunteers. In 2002, Tommy Baker and Carolyn Sepulvado were the recipients of the first Many Field Office Earth Team Volunteer awards for their tireless promotion of the Big Bream Challenge.

The Challenge was conceived as an event for national Soil and Water Stewardship Week. Annually, the Challenge is celebrated on the last Saturday in April at North Toledo Bend State Park. The Sabine SWCD partners with the Louisiana Office of State Parks. North Toledo Bend State Park provides free park entry for the youth fishermen and the use of a covered pavilion.

Natural Resources Conservation Service Earth Team volunteers, Annaka Garcie, Deborah Garcie, Patrick Garcie, Chastity Kreger, Cheryl Lopez, Eric Lowring, Randle Manshack, Clint Paddie, Carolyn Sepulvado, and Alan Williams provided assistance with registration, cricket distribution, lunch, weighing, scoring and awards presentation during the 2003 Challenge.



One of the many youth fishermen enjoying the competitive fishing on April 26, 2003.



Earth Team volunteers prepare a delicious meal for youth fishermen at the 8th annual Sabine SWCD Big Bream Challenge.

### Helpful Hint:

Submit articles for the  
*Volunteer Voice*  
in  
Microsoft Word  
and  
photos in jpg format.

Thank you!

# College Biology Students Striving to Make a Difference as Earth Team Volunteers

Article submitted by  
Eastern Arizona College Biology Instructor:  
Dave Henson

Thirty-one biology students from Eastern Arizona College participated in a recent Service Learning Project as Earth Team Volunteers for the local Natural Resources Conservation Service in Safford, Arizona. The students learned about the Sweet Resin Bush Eradication Project on Frye Mesa and the Mesa's drainage area of Spring Canyon. As part of the project the history of the plant's introduction to southern Arizona was discussed along with identification of characteristics and appropriate methods for eradication.

Sweet Resin Bush (*Euryops subcarinus*, var. *vulgaris*) is considered a noxious and invasive weed that has the potential to threaten farm and rangeland regions of southern Arizona—if it were to migrate from its 3,000-acre habitat on Frye Mesa, near the community of Thatcher, at the base of the Graham Mountains. Sweet Resin Bush out-competes native plants and grasses for moisture and nutrients. This, in turn, weakens rangeland browse for animals that won't eat Sweet Resin Bush. It also increases the potential for soil erosion.

Students spent more than 100 hours in the field extracting and bagging the weed from the Spring Canyon area in hopes of slowing its movement off the Mesa. Global positioning coordinates were established so maps can be made to assist in monitoring the density and location of the Sweet Resin Bushes' migration. EAC student Ian Taggart describes the opportunity as "a chance to apply our understanding of the consequences of this project from a biological standpoint."

Instructor Dave Henson said that "this isn't the first time humans have

introduced non-native species to the state in hopes of supplementing Mother Nature," referring to the Salt Cedar (*Tamrix*) infestation of many of Arizona's Riparian waterways. "The service these students provide is invaluable and it empowers them to approach an ecological problem with an educated purpose."

The students expressed their thanks to Chuck Duncan of the Safford office of the U.S. Forest Service for supplying the tools and to Dave Fisher of the Safford NRCS office for providing technical support.



**EARTH TEAM VOLUNTEERS AND STUDENTS**

## *Submissions to "VolunteerVoice"*

Articles and photographs for publication should be mailed, preferably via state volunteer coordinators, to Tina Morris, Soil and Water Conservation Society, 945 SW Ankeny, Road, Ankeny, Iowa 50021 or [tina.morris@swcs.org](mailto:tina.morris@swcs.org). For fax transmissions, dial (515) 289-1227.

Articles should be fewer than 350 words. Please remember to send photographs to illustrate your article. Slides are accepted. If you are using a digital camera, set the camera to the highest quality setting and save the image as a tiff.

For information about the Earth Team and the VolunteerVoice, go to [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov), call 1-888-LANDCARE, or call your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office listed in the telephone directory under "U.S. Government, U.S. Department of Agriculture."

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