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Local Students Gain College Skills Studying Local Bats

GRAPEVINE, TEXAS – March 20, 2019 – This March, Grapevine-Colleyville high school students started their second year monitoring bat populations at Parr Park in Grapevine. The students are participating in the Texas Christian University (TCU) Bat Monitoring Program thanks to an initiative led by Grapevine Parks and Recreation (GPARD).

“Protecting wildlife in our parks is part of our mission. We were thrilled when TCU Professor Dr. Victoria Bennet agreed to extend her research to Grapevine,” said GPARD Environmental Education Coordinator, Betsy Marsh. “It is very rewarding to involve our community in learning about and caring for natural habitats in our parks,” added Kevin Mitchell, GPARD Director.

Colleyville Heritage and Grapevine High School science teachers are equally excited. According to GHS teacher Laura Byno who coordinates the student team, “Students acquire experience with actual field research, in addition to the opportunity to interact with a college professor while still in high school. Some students have taken the research farther and done independent studies as well.”

In 2018, students met weekly in Parr Park at sunset to collect data. The team walked a designated route and recorded bat activity using ultrasonic detectors that allow for bat calls to be heard by the human ear. In the summer, students commonly documented well over 100 bats vocalizations each night.

According to Dr. Bennet, the 2018 data revealed that six of the seven species of Texas bats reside in or visit Parr Park during the year, with Evening Bats and Eastern Reds being the most abundant. Parr Park also appears to have a population of tri-colored and silver-haired bats who generally roost in trees with hollow cavities, indicating that the Park has the right habitat to support high bat diversity.

This is good news for Grapevine residents. “Bats are critical to our surrounding environment, providing numerous beneficial ecosystem services that help us out and save us money,” stated Dr. Bennet. “They are natural pest controllers and in urban environments they can control the mosquitoes that cause the West Nile and Zika viruses.”

“Unfortunately, the loss and degradation of their habitat, a new fungal disease, and wind farms seem to be hitting bats hard (pun intended),” added Dr. Bennet. “We need to show everyone bats aren’t bad as we are led to believe and get people involved in helping us monitor them.”

Grapevine Colleyville students intend to do just that. “I enjoyed the experience of collecting data and being a part of something larger than what I usually do. Participating in this project also gave me the opportunity to have a unique and impressive activity on my college applications,” said CHHS Senior, Santi Gaughan.

Grapevine Parks and Recreation and TCU are hosting a BatBlitz! on April 26 from 7:30 to 9:00 pm at Parr Park where participants can learn how to use bat detectors and see if researchers can net a live bat. For more information about the event and to register, visit GoGrapevine.com/GOWild.