

A PRAIRIE IN PROGRESS

The Kirchoff Family Farm

By Don Kirchoff

THE KIRCHOFF Family Farm, like a Monarch butterfly, has morphed from more than a century of row cropping and cattle grazing to a beautiful example of South Texas blackland prairie.

The Kirchoff siblings, whose parents purchased the 200-acre property in 1954, grew up on the farm picking cotton, pulling corn, hauling hay, and raising pigs and cattle. They inherited the property in 2008 after their parents had died.

Having long ago left the farm for professional careers, the Kirchoff siblings [Don, Scott, Susan and Brenda] decided to return the property, as much as possible, to its original prairie conditions in honor of their parents' conservation ethic. They decided to preserve the prairie in perpetuity under a conservation easement with Native Prairies Association of Texas.

Today the recovering prairie is host to many native plant and wildlife species that have returned following a long period of monoculture farming.

The "Kirchoff Prairie" is host each year to several prairie restoration and wildlife workshops. In 2018 four workshops were conducted on the prairie: San Antonio River Authority (SARA) Tour and Workshop in March, a spring meeting of the NPAT Board of Directors, Special Tour for Agencies (TPWD, USFWS, NRCS, Oaks & Prairies JV, NPAT) in October, and an NPAT Prairies and Migratory/Neotropical Birds Workshop in November.

The workshops are day-long events that feature a half day of presentations by specialists and a half day tour of the prairie led by native plant, wildlife, and operations specialists.

New discoveries are frequently made during the workshops, and the November workshop was no exception. Among the 30 prairie enthusiasts who attended were experts on bird identification who helped identify 41 species of birds inhabiting the prairie that morning.

Of additional interest was the variety of



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The Kirchoff Prairie Restoration offers many opportunities to learn and explore.

butterflies and an unusual number of Monarchs. The 2018 Monarch migration through the central flyway was one of the heaviest in many years, and attendees were treated to excellent photo opportunities.

The Kirchoff Prairie hosts special tours throughout the year for landowners and

other parties interested in possible native prairie restoration projects of their own.

Visit this restoration project by participating in the monthly prairie volunteer days held on the third Saturday of each month. For more information, contact pat_rinn@texasprairie.org.