

# ...in the Arkansas Valley

Thomas Nuttall, a renowned British botanist, traveled up the Arkansas River and his notes on early Arkansas are highly regarded. His account of climbing Dardanelle Rock can be found in his book, "A Journal of Travels into the Arkansas Territory during the year 1819, with occasional Observations on the Manners of the Aborigines."

On June 2, 2011, Dardanelle Rock Natural Area was featured in two KATV Channel 7 live weather segments as part of an eight-week promotional campaign series sponsored by KATV and the Department of Arkansas Heritage. This year, the commission added central Arkansas radio stations to its media outreach, amplifying our "voice" to inspire support of our conservation endeavors. These segments aired 290 times in April and May, relating that Arkansas's rich and diverse natural heritage includes fireflies, frogs, and other amazing animals and plants, and the special places they live. The central theme of our message stressed that natural heritage is passed from one generation to the next.



Above: View of the Arkansas River from atop Dardanelle Rock Natural Area.



H.E. Flanagan Prairie Natural Area is one of the highest quality prairie remnants in the Arkansas Valley. Native prairies in the Arkansas Valley differ from other prairies in the state because their soils were formed from shale. With ten rare species supported by this natural area, much of its biota is representative of a once vast 135,000-acre tallgrass prairie ecosystem in western Arkansas. Using the 1/8 Cent Conservation Sales Tax funding increase for land acquisition authorized by Governor Beebe in 2009, a 74-acre addition in FY2011 brings the natural area to a total of 340 acres in state conservation ownership. There are known occurrences of the rare ornate box turtle on the new tract, and, during a recent bird survey, staff observed Sprague's Pipit, a rare and declining prairie songbird. ANHC commissioners visited this natural area after their May 10th meeting at Mt. Magazine State Park to see first-hand the positive results of our stewardship efforts.

Left: A yellow variant of Indian paintbrush at H.E. Flanagan Prairie Natural Area.

Field inventory work by the commission's botanists documents the locations of rare plants. Discoveries are made throughout the growing season and new locations are recorded. In FY2011, Nuttall's pleat-leaf was observed for the first time at Cherokee Prairie Natural Area in Franklin County. Sometimes these findings can extend the known range of a specific species. They also provide the basis for determining the current status for conservation concern as rare, threatened, or endangered species. This information is stored in our biodiversity database and is ultimately shared through environmental reviews.



Above: The rare Nuttall's pleat-leaf blooms around 6pm and lasts until just before dark. The flowers take less than one minute to fully open.



Cove Creek Natural Area (above) in Faulkner County protects almost a mile of the course of Cove Creek, near where it runs into Cadron Creek. This scenic natural area has glades, bluffs, gorges, and waterfalls. The commission's stewardship staff is constructing a 1.5 mile primitive loop trail here. "Green construction" methods include two foot bridges constructed from cedar trees cut during recent restoration work and lumber salvaged from old natural area entrance signs. The Cove Creek Loop Trail is easy to moderate in difficulty. Highlights include two scenic overlooks of the free-flowing Cove Creek.



Above: Habitat for the endangered speckled pocketbook mussel is protected by Big Creek Natural Area.

In FY2011, the commission instituted water quality and water quantity sampling regimes at both Cove Creek and Big Creek Natural Areas. Initial reports indicate that both streams remain healthy. To date, neither has been impacted by nearby development related to natural gas extraction activities.



Commission staff completed inventories of natural communities and rare species found on tallgrass prairies in the Arkansas Valley during the 2008 and 2009 field seasons. Funded in part by a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grant, the results of these biota surveys determined the focus of the commission's acquisition priorities leading to this year's 74-acre addition at H.E. Flanagan Prairie Natural Area. Based on demonstrated quality of our work and effective grants administration by our professional staff, the commission received an additional FY2011 federal fund allocation to enhance rare plant field inventory work throughout the state.