

Blucher Park is CVB's first Nature Tourism Enhancement Project

Blucher Park is going to the birds.

The well-known park, popular with birders, underwent a transformation receiving about \$86,000 worth of improvements, which will benefit both the birds and birders.

A defined trail system was added while protecting the bird's habitat, a Chimney Swift Kiosk with two towers will serve as a nesting site for the endangered Chimney Swift birds, visitor signage and individual seating units were put in as part of the improvements, which were announced Sept. 17, 2009 in time for the fall migration when birds of all types descend on the park.

Just a little less than four acres in size, Blucher Park was donated to the city by the Blucher family in 1914. The improvements include a defined trail system mulched with native wood chips, pedestrian bridge, eight individual seating units, 12 way-finding markers, removal of invasive plants and two chimney swift towers within an interpretive kiosk. Funding was secured by in-kind services, grants and sponsorships from: Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program, American Birding Association, AEP Texas and the City of Corpus Christi Parks & Recreation Department.

The goal of the project was to work with the City of Corpus Christi's Parks and Recreation Department, community leaders, businesses and conservationists to enhance the visitor experience in the park. The Blucher Park Enhancement Project was generated from the Coastal Bend Nature Tourism Initiative, a project of the CVB.

"Growing and marketing nature tourism in the Coastal Bend is the answer to gaining new business from leisure travelers," said Keith Arnold, President and CEO of the CVB. "Blucher Park was selected as a model project for enhancement of an existing site that draws international nature tourists, but with meaningful, thoughtful improvements can migrate from a good attraction to a great attraction."

Blucher Park is one of the major "Fall Out" or resting stops along the way. The park provides a green space in the heart of downtown Corpus Christi. Several footpaths were created throughout the park to allow visitors a chance to explore the natural surroundings of the park. Known worldwide, the park attracts birders year round in search of flycatchers, thrushes, vireos, warblers, chimney swifts and dozens more species. This densely wooded park with a small creek flowing through its center contributes to the coveted title, "America's Birdiest City" claimed by our city seven years in a row.

The Coastal Bend Nature Tourism Initiative fund-raising effort allows stakeholders the ability to improve several sites throughout the area that can draw significantly more visitors when improved, interpreted and packaged for marketing. Blucher Park is the first of three planned park improvements which have been initiated and organized by the Corpus Christi CVB.

The Coastal Bend Nature Tourism Initiative is currently in Phase II of the planning stages for an interactive website, informational kiosks and marketing collateral. The Coastal Bend alone has an impressive 153 nature & birding sites in the area available to birders and nature lovers year round. It is

our goal to be a nationally recognized Nature Tourism Destination within five years and internationally renowned in 10 years.

Environmental Impacts

The chimney swift (a cigar shaped bird with slender wings) is believed to be declining in numbers, partly due to the disappearance of many old chimneys. To help conserve the chimney swift, the Corpus Christi CVB designed and constructed two chimney swift towers surrounding an interpretive kiosk to provide the much needed habitat for the birds to roost and nest in Blucher Park.

Large flocks of chimney swifts will roost in a single chimney or tower during migration, however only one nesting pair will nest in a chimney at a time. This is the reason for the two chimneys built into this kiosk structure.