



Permission to Burn

Denton. After teaching at the University of North Texas for a year, he moved to Wiley College in Marshall, Texas. He worked his way up from associate professor in the biology department to chairman of the biology department. Baccus stayed at Wiley College for four years.

Baccus started at Texas State University in 1975 as an assistant professor in the department of biology. After being at Texas State for a short period of time, Baccus realized the students possessed a strong interest for wildlife biology.

Since Baccus was intrigued by wildlife studies, he took it upon himself to come up with the wildlife biology curriculum. He lined out the entire degree plan determining what classes students would need to take each semester to complete the four-year undergraduate program. Baccus then took it before the board at Texas State. The board approved the program and put Baccus in charge.

"It was pretty much a one man show," Baccus said. "I had to teach all of the classes. I was over wildlife management, field biology and id of species."

Baccus said at first the wildlife biology program was strictly for undergraduate students, but because students were still showing an interest it was made into a graduate program as well. Throughout his years at Texas State, he graduated over 100 masters' students with published research.

He said although he enjoyed all of the studies he conducted with his students, his favorite was over the influence of controlled burning and its effects on wildlife's habitats. He went back and forth with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to convince them to let him conduct a controlled burn, but as they said it was against their policy. They eventually allowed Baccus to conduct the study.

Through the study, Baccus determined if you do a controlled burn on an area with a low population of animals they would come back in a larger quantity. They were able to measure their results because before

the burn there were a total of 13 Black-capped Vireos and after there were 450 counted.

"Studying controlled burns was my favorite study because it changed the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services entire policy," Baccus said. "I like doing studies that make a difference."

Retiring from Texas State after 36 years, Baccus and his wife decided to move to Lubbock. He called his old friend that he had previously worked with, Warren Ballard, professor in Texas Tech University's Department of Natural Resources Management, to see if they might have a position open for him in the department. Baccus had decided he wasn't quite ready to retire.

Ballard said they would be more than happy to have him as part of the department. So, Baccus started at Texas Tech January 1, 2012.

Mark Wallace, Texas Tech University interim chairman of Natural Resources Management, said Baccus was hired as an adjunct professor.

"He brings over 30 years of field and natural history experience about wildlife in the state of Texas to his department and is definitely a positive influence to Texas Tech," Wallace said.

This February, Baccus received the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Texas Chapter of The Wildlife Society. He said this is the peak of his career and is very humbled to receive such an honor.

Baccus has already made a huge impact on wildlife policies. With his continued passion for the industry, it is likely he will remain invaluable to the industry. **T**

Mackenzie May | Bells, Texas



Controlled burns were thought of as too dangerous to be beneficial until this man proved they were good for animals' habitats and their vegetation. Because of his determination, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service changed their policy on controlled burns.

John Baccus grew up in a small town in Baylor County, Seymour, Texas. He was raised with a background in agriculture. After graduating from Seymour High School, he attended Midwestern State University where he received a Bachelor of Science in education. During college, he would travel back home to earn some extra money working on cotton farms.

After graduating with his bachelor's degree, he continued at Midwestern State University to get his Master of Science degree with a major in vertebrate zoology. He decided to further his education by getting his Doctorate of Philosophy from the University of North Texas. Baccus' major was vertebrate ecology and he did his dissertation over the influence of a return of native grasslands upon the ecology and distribution of small rodents in Big Bend National Park.

Once Baccus graduated, he made the transition from student to teacher. His first job was a zoology instructor at the University of North Texas in

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