

Christopher Bishop decided to become a park ranger after enjoying Hawaii's lush natural environment during a tour of duty with the U.S. Army

# I'm a Park Ranger at Brazos Bend State Park



Visitors to Brazos Bend can see a variety of wildlife species roaming the park



Photo by Steve Killian

Brazos Bend is home to thousands of alligators, which are native to the area



Photo by Steve Killian

# Helping Visitors Enjoy the Great Outdoors

Written by Tonya Ellis & Select  
Photography by Suzi Issa

It's a career that requires so much more than a love for nature. Park rangers are known as 'jacks of all trades' who do it all - interacting with the public, maintaining the grounds, operating heavy machinery, conducting tours, and anything else that needs doing. But one of the most important aspects of a Park Ranger's job is safety - enforcing park rules so that man, beasts, and nature can coexist in harmony and the park can be preserved for generations to come.

The Nature Center at Brazos Bend is a wildlife education complex



The Texas Outdoor Family program teaches families visiting Brazos Bend about getting along with wildlife

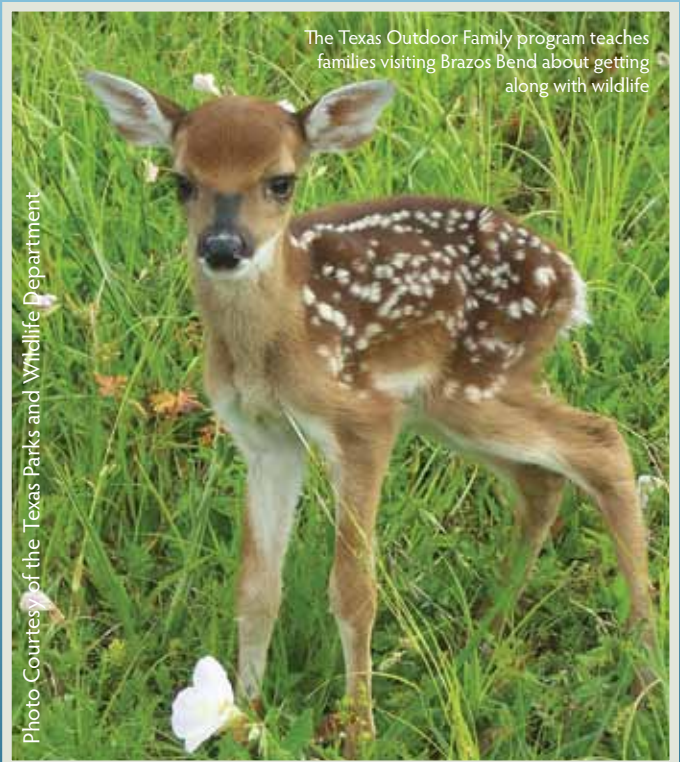


Photo Courtesy of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department



Visitors should maintain a safe distance from park wildlife



Park rangers, Steve Killian and Chris Bishop teach visitors about alligator etiquette



The park's Nature Center features a live snake species area

## A Jack of All Trades

A park ranger's job is more than just a walk in the park. Their goal is to help guests enjoy recreational areas to the fullest. To make this happen, they must be jacks of all trades. Rangers maintain park grounds and facilities, provide tours and information about the park, and assist those who need help. "Versatility is the key for a park ranger," explains Steve Killian, a park ranger at Brazos Bend State Park, which is about 23 miles from Sugar Land on the southeastern border of Fort Bend County. "You need to be a plumber, an electrician, a carpenter, a public relations person - the list goes on and on."

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- Steve Killian

Since the work can be very labor-intensive and sometimes requires operation of heavy equipment, most park rangers are male, says Chris Bishop, who enjoys his work as a ranger at Brazos Bend. Both Killian and Bishop live at the park with their families. Brazos Bend is open to the public seven days a week, all year round. "We're always open, we're never closed," says Killian. "We take our holidays when other people work, and we work when they are on holiday."

Educational requirements for park rangers vary as much as their job duties. A ranger can hold anything from a high school diploma to a Ph.D. Bishop and Killian are both college graduates who have worked their way up from field to administrative positions. No matter how much formal education they attain, the rangers are proud to do their job. "We're known as park rangers to the public, and we gladly accept that title," says Killian, whose formal rank is superintendent.

## Helping Keep Texas Green

So, what attracted Killian to the career? "It's just the knowledge that you're serving the public," he says. "It's protecting this vanishing natural resource for present and future generations of Texans and providing quality outdoor recreation to folks in urban environments. As Texas urbanizes, we have to maintain these outdoor green spaces for the health of society in general. There's something special about just going outside with family and friends." Killian says he's loved to fish and be

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## Brazos Bend Fast Facts

-  The park is open seven days a week, year round, and spans approximately 28 miles or roughly 5,000 acres.
-  Visitors are cautioned to pay due respect to alligators, which are numerous in some areas of the park. Alligator viewing is best from the 40-Acre and Elm Lake Trail.
-  The park offers camping, picnicking, hiking, biking, equestrian trails, and six lakes for fishing.
-  There is a Nature Center with a Habitats and Niches display offering a hands-on alligator discovery area, a freshwater aquarium, live snake species, a touch table, and more.
-  The George Observatory is located in the park and is open Saturdays from 3 to 10 p.m. For more information, visit [brazosbend.org](http://brazosbend.org).

outdoors since he was a boy. He worked as a biologist for many years before becoming a park ranger.

Bishop decided on becoming a park ranger after serving in the army in Oahu, HI and enjoying the island's lush natural environment. When he finished his tour of duty, he earned a degree in parks, recreation, and tourism and became a park ranger.

### The Call of the Wild

Wildlife is a large attraction at Brazos Bend State Park, and the rangers enjoy sharing it with the public. Armadillos, raccoons, possums, and native birds are some of the many animals that make the park their home. In addition, thousands of adult and young alligators live in Brazos Bend. What if you see one? No cause for fear, say the rangers. "In the 26-year history of Brazos Bend State Park, we've never had an incident with an alligator attacking visitors," asserts Bishop. "We've got a system of alligator etiquette, with flyers around the park. One rule is to maintain a safe distance from the animals."

The rangers teach families about camping and getting along with the wildlife through a program called Texas Outdoor Family. Killian calls this one of his favorite parts of the job. "They are really apprehensive about spending the night, because of all the wild animals," he says. "It's not dangerous. It's a lot of fun. It's more dangerous driving through Sugar Land than camping in Brazos Bend Park."

Killian would recommend his job to anyone who has technical and people skills and loves the great outdoors. "If I could do it all over again, as soon as I got out of college, this is what I would have done," he shares. "It's an awesome responsibility, and it's a great job to have." SLM

*TONYA ELLIS enjoys fishing and relaxing at area parks with her husband and three children, Sophia, Byron, and Justin.*




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