

THE BONSAI Wire

The Newsletter of The Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

February 2019

FROM THE President



If you were unable to catch David DeGroot's lecture/demo, you really screwed up! We have

guest masters in every year to conduct workshops and lecture/demos. They are all great bonsai artists and you can really appreciate what they do with a piece of raw material. But with David, while he is an excellent creative artist, he is also an excellent TEACHER. He takes the time to explain WHY his is making a cut where he is, what options he has and what is driving his decision-making process. You are impressed with his creative ability, but more importantly, you LEARN when you attend a David DeGroot



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MEETINGS & Events

Note: Study Groups are for signed up participants. Programs are open to ALL members.

Tuesday, February 12, 2019

Intermediate Study Group (for signed up participants) 6:00pm-7:15pm

Program: Silhouette Show and Lecture on How to Prepare Your Trees for a Show 7:30pm

The Silhouette Program is a study of branch ramification and evaluation of plans for further development of our deciduous bonsai. Bring in a deciduous tree for display and discussion. There will also be a lecture on preparing your bonsai for showing in advance of our Spring Garden Show participation.

Bonus: Dues are due! All DUES PAID Members will receive a free ticket for a door prize raffle of a very nice tree from Brussel's Bonsai. (Only dues paid members are eligible for the raffle)

Azalea Study Groups

February 21, March 28, May 16 - all at 7:00pm

Jefferson Parish East Bank Regional Library, 4747 West Napoleon Ave., Metairie, LA 70001

Free species based study group. Sign up at the regular meeting or contact Randy Bennett for more information.

Friday, March 15, 2019

Intermediate Study Group (for signed up participants) 6:00pm-7:15pm

Program: Brussel Martin 7:30pm

Brussel Martin, bonsai artist and owner of Brussel's Bonsai will be visiting to do a lecture/demo on black pine in the bunjin style.

Saturday, March 16th, 2019

Brussel Martin Black Pine Bunjin Workshop 8:00am

Brussel Martin will conduct a workshop on Black Pine in the Bunjin style. Sign up sheets will be available at the meetings. Cost of the workshop (which includes tree) is \$140. Several spots are still available.

Meetings cont. pg 7

Meetings take place at the Marine Corps League Hall, 2708 Delaware St., Kenner, LA. For more information, articles and everything bonsai, check us out on our website at www.gnobs.org

Collecting on Catahoula Lake

by Randy Bennett

About Catahoula Lake

Catahoula Lake is a very unique and fascinating place. It is a shallow lake, located southeast of Pineville, Louisiana and is fed by the Ouachita, Red, and Little Rivers making it the largest freshwater lake in Louisiana. It is a low-lying, swampy area that receives annual flooding by the rivers named above and so does not function as a usable lake year round.



In 1958 it was designated as a National Wildlife Refuge. It seems that the lake is on the Southern Flyway and is the best duck hunting site in the state. As many as 75,000 ducks have been recorded there. Because of periodic and unpredictable flooding by the rivers that feed it, along with variable rainfall in the spring and summer months, the depth and size of the lake varied greatly from year to year. As a result, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S Army Corps of Engineers decided to build a series of dams with flood control gates in 1979.



In the early spring, the flood gates are opened and the lake is drained of water. By the time summer arrives, the bed is, for the most part, relatively dry. This allows desirable vegetation to

grow and provides food for the ducks later in the year. In early September, they close the flood gates and the lake begins to fill again. The flood gates help provide a more consistent water level and thus a sustained successful hunting season for duck hunters is maintained.

There are a number of hardwoods that grow around the perimeter of the lake. However, the lake bed itself is primarily home to bald cypress, swamp privet and water elm. The bald cypress and swamp privet are not invasive species. However, water elm began taking over the lake bed and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S Army Corps of Engineers have been trying to eradicate water elm from the lake bed since the 1950's. However, water elm has proved to be a very prolific species in that ideal environment and, despite efforts to eradicate it, water elm continues to maintain its foothold on the lake bed, making it more difficult for the ducks to easily feed on the grasses and seeds they are trying to cultivate.

In the 1980's and 90's, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries ramped up their campaign to try and eliminate water elm from the bed of Catahoula Lake. They sprayed them with herbicide, but that proved to be cost prohibitive. They tried cutting them down, but they just sprouted back from the stumps. They even tried burning all the water elm. But nothing has proved to be successful.

It seems nothing can kill the all-powerful water elm, (except perhaps the overzealous bonsai enthusiast).

For bonsai enthusiasts, the situation is ideal. Between the time the lake is drained in late spring and once again filled in the fall, the growing season for the water elm is a short 4 months. This creates a very dense, twiggy canopy and naturally stunted growth. The water elm are submerged for about 8 months out of the year.

In addition to water elm, a number of excellent bald cypress have been collected from the area. Of benefit to the bonsai enthusiast in Catahoula Lake is the resident beaver population, which has an affinity for bald cypress growing near the shore of the lake. They will harvest cypress trunks about 3-5 inches in diameter, leaving stumps that explode with new growth and often form naturally hollow trunks. Below are 2 old black and white photos of bald cypress collected from the lake bed in July of 1984. The photos were taken in the spring of 1985.



My First Catahoula Lake Collecting Trip

I was struck with amazement the first time I was taken on a collecting trip to Catahoula Lake. It was in the early 1980's and a number of GNOBS members took a trip to collect water elm and bald cypress at Catahoula Lake. Vaughn Banting had organized it and there was no way I was going to be left out.

When we first walked out onto the lake bed to begin scouting for potential bonsai, I was truly astonished at the sheer number of water elm. There were thousands upon thousands as far as the eye could see; globes of dense foliage from one to five feet in height on flared bases – single trunks, double trunks, triple trunks and clumps. I wandered for over two hours, tagging tree after tree, finding excellent potential bonsai, but always looking for one that might be just a little bit better than the last one I tagged.

I collected four trees on that trip and learned a lot about collecting in this unique environment. I made a number of subsequent trips over the next few years and collected trees that developed into magnificent specimens.

The optimum time for collecting specimens from Catahoula Lake is in July and August. At this time, the lake bed is pretty dry, unless there have been recent rains, and you can drive your vehicle out onto the lake bed to save yourself some considerable walking. Unfortunately, it is incredibly hot and not the best time to dig trees out of the ground. So, we use a little different procedure when collecting at that time of year.

When a specimen is found that you wish to collect, you must first prune it back, eliminating all foliage that you are certain will not be needed for the design of the tree. The second is to spray the tops and underside of all the remaining foliage with a product called Wilt-Pruf. Wilt-Pruf dries quickly and is designed to seal the leaves to prevent transpiration. Once the remaining foliage has been treated, the tree can be dug from the soil – even in July and August. Once out of the ground, we wrap the rootball in burlap and spray with water from a pressurized sprayer to saturate the burlap and dampen the root ball to prevent the roots from drying out. The Wilt-Pruf remains effective for about 4-5 weeks. By that time, the tree will have overcome transplant shock, roots will have once again begun to grow and the tree will begin putting out new growth with no ill effects.

Below are a couple of water elm that were part of an annual exhibit we held at Perrino's Nursery in the 80's. The clump



planting was one of my trees that I had collected about 3 years prior. The single trunk specimen was one of Vaughn Banting's. I do not remember how many years it had been in training when I took this photo.

Water Elm As Bonsai

Water elm respond very well to pruning. They

typically grow in a multi-trunk form, similar to crepe myrtles, but you can also find them growing with a single trunk if you look hard enough. Water elm (*Planera aquatica*) is not really an elm – that is, it is not an 'Ulmus'. But the leaves and growth habit are similar to the elm. The leaves are simple and alternate along the shoots. The size of the leaves is similar to Chinese elm, but the leaves on the water elm are asymmetrical. The leaves are smooth, dark green and have serrated margins. The shoots and leaves are a reddish color as they emerge.

The bark is very smooth and grayish in color until the trees mature. After about 30 years, the bark begins to thicken and becomes quite dark and will partially exfoliate with each new season of growth. They are a vigorous grower and, like bald cypress, prefer a soil that remains moist. I know a lot of bonsai enthusiasts who lost their water elms by growing them in bonsai soil that dried out too quickly. Remember, they survive being totally submerged 7 to 8 months out of the year and grow in the bottom of a lake. You often collect them with dried moss (the type that grows underwater) covering the trunk and branches.

They respond well to pinching and pruning. They will tolerate being cut back severely and will throw out many new shoots below the cut area. The smaller shoots and branches can be wired and bent easily. However, once branches thicken and harden, the tissue becomes very stiff, making directional changes through wiring very difficult.

Below is a picture of a GNOBS "bring-your-own-tree" workshop with John Naka. The tree he is helping to design is a collected water elm from Catahoula Lake. The size, structure and root base are typical of water elm in that area.



Catahoula Lake Collecting Trip 2018

I had not been to Catahoula Lake since before Hurricane Katrina. Most of the members currently in the GNOBS have never been, but a number of people had heard me talking about collecting there and wanted to go. Since it had been so long since I had been there, my wife suggested that we scope it out before bringing anybody up there collecting. So, this past August, the two of us got up early one morning and drove to Alexandria. From there it is about a 30 minute drive to the lake. There are four different roads that lead to the lake. We went down the first one and drove for a ways out onto the lake bed. I was shocked! The thousands of trees, as far as the eye could see, were no longer there. There were some, but nothing like there used to be.

We drove down the second access road to the lake as far as we could. The road got very muddy and not wanting to get stuck, we left the truck and walked for quite a distance before getting to the lake bed. Again, pickings were slim. I was getting very discouraged about what I was seeing.

We did see some interesting sights along the way. The photo below is a water elm growing in the forest around the lake. It is

the largest one I have ever seen at Catahoula Lake.

The photo below shows my wife, Teresa, standing next to a bald cypress. There are some magnificent old specimens at Catahoula Lake, if you take the time to look for them.

Having no luck at the second site, we went back to the truck and drove to the



third, with the same outcome. Frustrated and disappointed, we drove back to Alexandria and got a room for the night.

The next morning, we had a good breakfast, loaded up the truck and headed back to New Orleans. On the way out of town, I called Jim



Osborne and Dennis Burke and gave them the bad news. We had planned on coming up the following weekend to go collecting. They had never been there. After I hung up with Jim, Teresa said, "Look, we drove up here to check it out, but we didn't check out the last road. Let's go take a look. Besides, I've never seen the flood control dam and I'd like to see it." So I turned around to make her happy with no hope of seeing any decent collecting areas and drove to the fourth road that leads to one of the flood control gates.

We drove out to the dam, took a few pictures and found the dirt road that led to the lake. We drove through a gate and were able to drive out onto the lake bed and to my surprise, there were patches of water elm here and there – nothing like I had seen years ago, but there were still areas with hundreds of trees and good collecting potential. It would seem that the Wildlife and Fisheries people had been vigilant in their efforts to eradicate the water elm. But they still haven't gotten them all!



Teresa and I scouted around. We found a number of water elm with really nice bases and structure. When we once again reached an area with cell phone service, I called Jim and Dennis to let them know that the dig was back on.

We came up the following weekend. Luckily it was cloudy all day and so the heat was not too bad. We each found a few trees with some potential and went to pruning, spraying, digging and burlapping.

Below are the trees that we dug; a few cypress and water elm. Our intent is to share the development of them in the years to come.



The next day, I took the one tree that I collected, bare-rooted it and repotted it in a cedar grow box with Miracle-Grow Potting Mix. My reasons for using the Miracle-Grow stemmed from a desire to ensure that the rootball would stay moist.



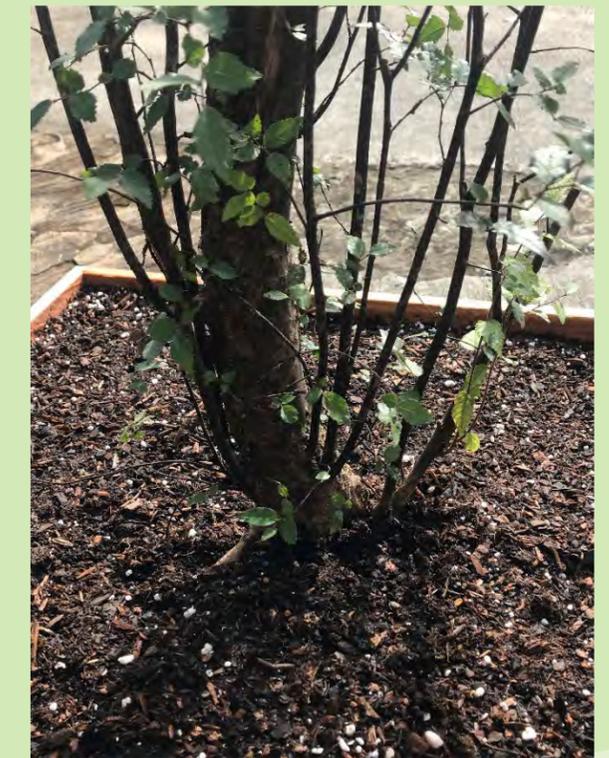
I left the trunk quite high due to the fact that the shoots emanating from down low were quite long with very little foliage on them until much higher up on the shoots. I was not sure if I might suffer die-back on the shoots and so left substantial trunk length to allow for other shoots to pop – should they be needed.

The trunk measures just over two inches above the root base. The nebari, or root base, measures just over five inches. The trunk suffered some sort of trauma on one side while growing in the wild and has an area of dead-wood about an inch and a half wide on one side and extends from the cut I made at the top to about four inches up from the base of the tree. My intent is to make the dead area of the trunk a design feature in the finished tree by hollowing out the trunk in the dead area. The current height of the main trunk is just over 24 inches.

Below is a picture of the tree immediately after bare-rooting and potting in a grow-box. Since collecting the tree in August, it has sprouted a considerable amount of new growth and is doing very well.

The plan for developing it into a bonsai is as follows: It will be developed as a clump-style bonsai.

Stage 1: (Growth for Size) [This stage will be a two-year period for this tree.]



In January of 2019, I will eliminate some of the existing shoots emanating from the base, leaving 5 future "trunks" in the clump, including the large, main trunk. Next, I will wire the 4 shoots

selected at the base of the main trunk, to remain as future trunks, to create movement. However, I will do very little pruning, if any, on the 4 small trunks that will remain part of the design. The tree must be allowed to grow freely to increase its strength and vigor.

The only pruning I will do will be to shoots that I wish to keep small. Right now, most of the shoots are about the same size. So some will be allowed to grow freely while others will be restrained to develop varying diameters among the shoots. I will fertilize it throughout the 2019 growing season using a chemical fertilizer such as Osmocote. I will monitor the growth,

remove and reapply wire as needed until the fall of 2019. In that the bark is thin, diligence will be required to avoid any scarring of the trunks.

In January of 2020, I will cut back the main trunk to a height of about 10-12 inches. I will hollow out the dead wood of the trunk at this time. In addition, I will severely cut back the other "trunks" growing from the base, each according to their diameter at that time. This will encourage back-budding and begin the development of secondary and tertiary branching.

During the growing season, I will continue to fertilize with a chemical fertilizer. I will prune new growth back only twice: once in early June and again in September. This is to ensure that the tree will be at optimum strength and vigor in preparation for repotting the following winter.

Stage 2: (Growth for Design) [This stage will be a 2-3 year period for this tree]

In January 2021, I will prune the tree back again and repot it into an oversize bonsai container to begin reducing the size of the rootball and begin to restrict growth. At this time, I will bare-root the tree and change over to a 50/50 bonsai soil mix. I normally do not use a soil mixture so heavy in organic matter. But the water elm requires constant moisture and must not be allowed to dry out between watering. For the first year, I will mulch the top of the soil with sheet moss to ensure that the soil stays moist while the tree recovers.

During the growing season, I will shift over to all organic fertilizers. The object is to keep the tree healthy but to begin to reduce intermodal spacing and develop fine twigging and branch structure.

I will continue pruning and wiring for structure and branching for at least two year before repotting the tree into its' final container.

Below is a sketch of my vision for the tree in the future. The sketch is based on the location and size of existing rootage. The smaller trunks are drawn using existing locations. The size difference will be developed during the next two years but they will be wired into position with movement this winter. The ramification of branches will be developed over a period of years. This is Stage 3: (Growth for Refinement) [This stage will be from year 5-6 onward] The location of the hollowed out trunk is based on the location and size of existing dead wood. I will share the development of this tree in the years to come.



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lecture/demo or workshop. And he certainly did not disappoint at last months' meeting. I am grateful that David was able to come to New Orleans and I know that those who attended the meeting and perhaps

saw him for the first time, learned a lot.

The material was a multi-trunk Hollywood Juniper, obtained from a local nursery. After finding the front, David began thinning out branches he knew could not serve in the design. Once he could see into the tree and examine the structure, he determined the height of each of the three trunks.

David gave a lot of information about junipers and their requirements for good health. He explained his options for selecting branches and ultimately shared why he make the choices he did. His lecture/demo was mixed with stories and experiences studying in Japan.

The tree will be cared for during the upcoming growing season and will be included in this years' annual GNOBS Auction in August.

As far as tips and tasks to be done in February, there's not too much to add from January: Preparing soil mixes in preparation for potting and repotting

1. Cleaning and sharpening your tools
2. Making sure you have the correct pot(s) for those little gems you plan on moving into a container



3. Ordering a full complement of wire sizes
4. Be sure and check your trees daily. Don't think that because it's winter and you don't have to water as often, that your trees don't need any. Wind is your enemy during the winter months. A stiff wind can literally suck the moisture out of foliage and damage your trees. Continue to mist foliage, especially on windy days. Check soils with your finger to check the amount of moisture in the soil.

But for me, this is prime repotting time. Today is February 8th and my cypress and elms are already leafing out. The optimum time to repot deciduous trees is just as buds begin to push out. My Japanese maples and Crepe Myrtles have not begun to pop, but I expect them to do so very shortly.

That being said, if you plan on doing any collecting from the wild, you better make plans to do so as soon as possible. I will be going to collect a cypress or two during the next few days. I hope I haven't waited too late! Also, this is the time of year I like to go digging around in the nurseries for stock. This is the time of year that nurseries start building up their stock of trees and shrubs in preparation for spring, when everyone starts working in their yards and landscaping. So I like to get a jump on the spring rush.

February's program will be the Silhouette Show. We are asking that everyone bring their best bonsai. We will display them around the hall and critique some of the trees. We will give each of you suggestions on what to do between now and the Spring Garden Show in April. The main goal of the program is to help members move towards preparing their tree(s) for show. Hope to see everyone with a tree!

Randy Bennett
GNOBS President

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April 6 & 7, 2019

Mark your calendars for our club participation in the Spring Garden Show at City Park.

Tuesday, April 9, 2019

Intermediate Study Group (for signed up participants)
6:00pm-7:15pm

Program: How to Select Material for Bonsai 7:30pm

GNOBS President Randy Bennett will lecture (with examples) on how to evaluate and select the best raw material for bonsai.

Bonus: Nursery stock material used as examples will be raffled off at the end of the meeting



AUCTION News

The annual GNOBS auction is scheduled for **August 17**. As members, your participation and donations determine the success of the auction, which as our main funding, determines the programs that we can provide.

As you are doing your spring repotting and pruning, please keep the auction in mind.

- If there are trees you would like to donate, put them in a bonsai pot if possible.

- As you trim back trees, try to root some of the cuttings for our bargain table.

-Tree too tall? Consider air layering the top and donating that to the auction.

- Check your bonsai pot inventory. If you have larger trees now, consider donating some of your small pots etc.

As always, we appreciate your generosity and anything you can donate.



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