**A revealing virtual trek during quarantine**

June 6, 2010

The wondrous symphonic crescendo of calls and songs from the season’s bird population provided background on our porch during a telephone visit with our grandson, John Roland.

He consented to a “virtual walk” around the ranch where we are privileged to have a small perch in an oak motte surrounded by pastures.

This grandson is a young teen naturalist and convinced conservationist with an enthusiasm for all life forms on the rugged land of the Hill Country rise as well as in the tanks (ponds).

I find John Roland astonishingly observant and informed about our wildlife and pasture life. One can only wonder and admire what the future may bring to fruition!

That admiringly said by way of introduction, when prompted John immediately lurched to tell me he could hear in my background the birds in chorus.

He pointed out that the birds love the trees and cover provided around the ranch and in our yard.

Some of those great oaks in their grandeur and gnarliness provided him and his siblings their natural playscapes.

Noting that the ranch has numerous “heritage oaks” to admire and celebrate he mused that one of his greatest griefs is watching anywhere the cutting of such great natural wonders to make way for insensitive growth.

When I asked him to say more he said, “ you can only imagine the history, habitats and future disappearing and being erased!”

And, that says nothing about potential replacements and the waits entailed for their grand spreads. With new impervious covers and inevitable changes to drainage patterns that future remains uncertain.

John then led the conversation toward watershed. He recalled how he and his sister on an adventure walk some years earlier with me looked carefully at a flattened area of tall grasses.

We went to look and discovered the grasses — especially high that year due to frequent rainfall — made a swirled pattern. The ground also was concaved at the surface. I explained that we were on the edge of the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone. We walked to two other pronounced karst features which John recalled to be impressive evidence that the water when it comes rapidly “pours downward” through many layers into the great aquifers.

He went on to ask, “Who would take a chance on interrupting, impeding or fouling that flow?”

I smiled from afar! Then he asked about the water levels in the tanks and whether the creeks had been up in recent rains.

He pointed out that the best “pond ecology” needs fresh infusions now and then and wondered if I knew if Geronimo Creek was having healthy vigorous flow.

He reminded me that the watershed he’s referencing is ultimately part of the Guadalupe River’s contribution to waters of the estuary’s coastal fishes and the whooping cranes’ nesting grounds at Aransas.

He couldn’t see me proudly nodding, of course.

He then remembered some of the creek beds where he and his siblings and cousins find “cool naturally carved rocks large and small and fossils galore.”

He didn’t forget to mention the occasional found artifacts, too.

In sum, John Roland reiterated a truth we all share. There are parcels larger and smaller in our beloved Hill Country that merit attention for preservation and protection so that future folks “like my children and grandchildren” have space and spread for wonder and adventure.

Indeed, these are the oases that will nourish and replenish our souls. We are pressed with the high expectation for good stewardship in the natural world so wondrous.

If you are interested in joining a discussion about lands to protect and set aside, check out the Comal County Conservation Alliance at [*www.comalconservation.org*](http://www.comalconservation.org/) or @ComalCCAlliance.