

Wild Attraction

Story and Photos By Carly Meins

A natural habitat for your own backyard

▲ This pond creates a focal point from the viewing window inside the nature center where visitors can observe the daily activities of wildlife.

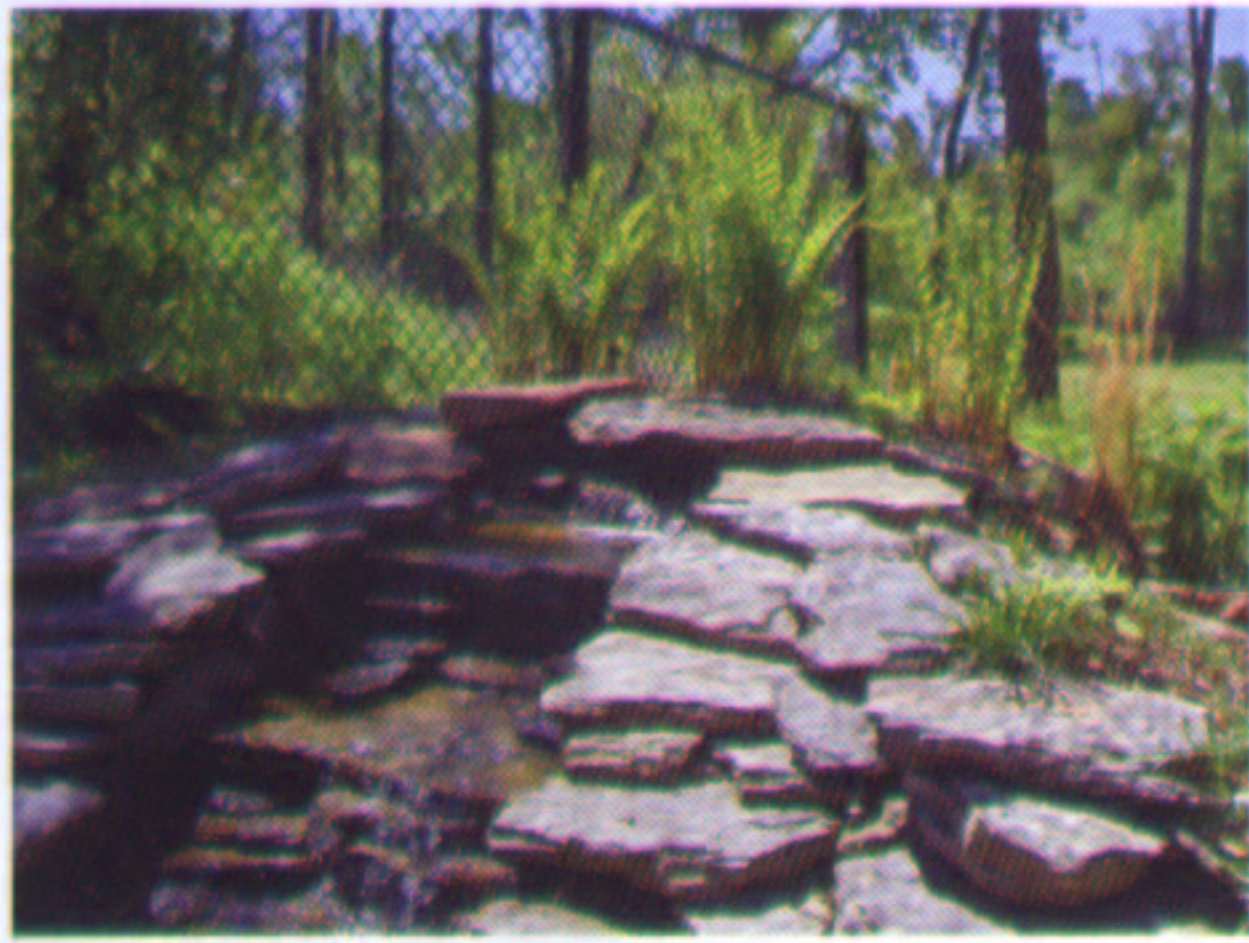
Tucked away

down in the heart of the Delta, is the Governor Mike Huckabee Delta Rivers Nature Center, a quiet sanctuary I was very surprised to find out about. Located in Pine Bluff, Ark., the nature center was completed July 2001. The center is dedicated to education about life and nature in the Delta region. I had never visited

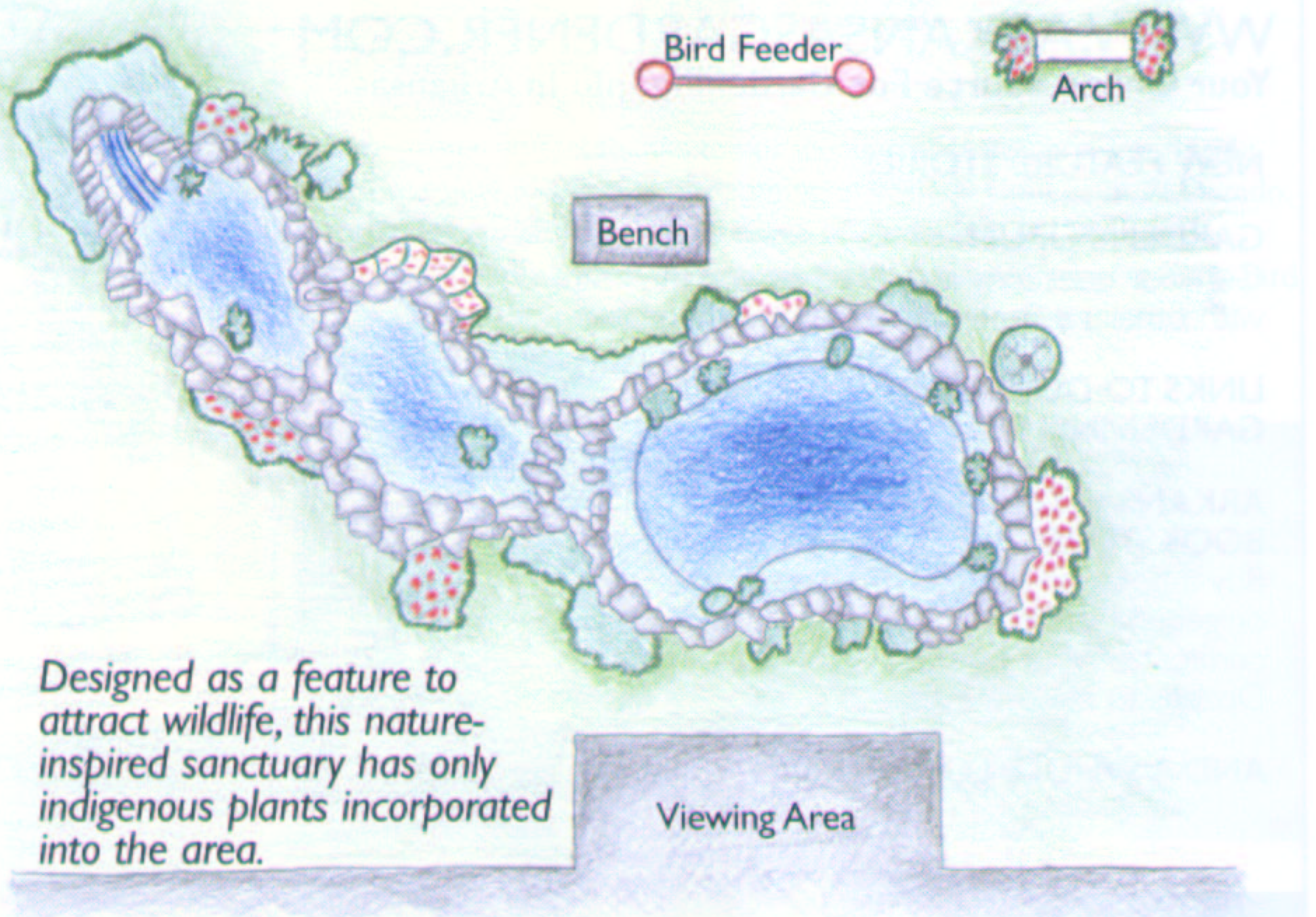
the nature center and did not realize the garden treasure I was about to discover.

I met with Diana Neal, a Botanical Education Specialist for the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, and David Heikes, Extension Aquaculture Specialist at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB). Neal first began work at the nature center in May of 2004, and at that time, a small garden was already in

place to attract native wildlife, specifically birds and butterflies. But she had an idea to improve the area by adding a water feature. By adding water, she hoped the area would draw in even more creatures. Neal saw a project that David Heikes was in the process of doing restoration work on and was impressed. Plans were soon in the works to create a nature inspired pond at the nature center.



▲ A rocky waterfall was built to resemble a natural occurrence and attract birds by the movement of the water.



Designed as a feature to attract wildlife, this nature-inspired sanctuary has only indigenous plants incorporated into the area.

CONSTRUCTION & DESIGN

The pond was built by 16 volunteers, including UAPB faculty members, graduate students, and two local boy scouts. The pond took two days to finish, cost only \$2,000 and produced an impressive, yet very practical, water feature that would fit into any Arkansas landscape.

Built with essentially three feature areas, the pond contributes greatly to the landscape. A waterfall flows down into the next feature, designed to resemble a meandering stream. The stream contains a few rocky areas, which were built with the native wildlife in mind. Birds frequently sit on the rocks and bathe, while butterflies come in for a drink. There is even one resident raccoon that will sit and wash his hands from the rock area. The stream is 12 inches deep with a length of about 20 feet and a width of 5 feet at the widest point.

The stream then flows down into the pool. Ten feet in length, 6 feet across, and 24 inches deep in the center, there is a ledge built for native aquatics around the outer edge of the pool that sits 12 inches below the water surface. Cleverly disguised with a clump of native grass, the pump is located in the pool area where water is pulled into the skimmer and up to a

biological filter located behind the waterfall. The skimmer was included in the design to solve one potential problem—maintenance. The upkeep of the pond is very simple; the skimmer is cleaned out once a week, and the pond filter is cleaned once a month. The result is sparkling water that is perfectly clear and debris free.

PURPOSEFULLY ATTRACTING WILDLIFE

Neal told me the main purpose of the project was to attract wildlife. She also wanted something that would be easy to maintain. The area around the pond contains only native plants, each serving a different purpose in attracting wildlife. Plants in the area include *Coreopsis*, various *Rudbeckia* species, coneflower (*Echinacea*), milkweed (*Asclepias*), obedient plant (*Physostegia*), *Yucca*, and *Hibiscus*. Some of the aquatics in the pond include cattail (*Typha*), American lotus (*Nelumbo lutea*), and spider lilies (*Hymenocallis*).

When I asked about the challenges of the project, Heikes said that digging the hole was the hardest challenge physically, and fighting the mosquitoes was just about as difficult. Heikes said the overall most difficult aspect of the project was keeping the

feature as close to natural looking as possible. Waterfalls are not a natural occurrence in the Delta, Neal told me, but the movement of water was needed to attract birds.

SERVING ITS PURPOSE

In the months since the pond was finished there has been a steady increase of wildlife in the garden area. Within a few days, the pond was attracting many new birds, a few rabbits, frogs, squirrels, and the raccoon. The pond was not intended to be a fish pond, so the Aquaculture/Fisheries Center at UAPB only added fathead minnows to aide in mosquito control. Besides attracting nature to the area, the pond also created a focal point from the viewing window inside the nature center where visitors can observe the daily activities of the wildlife. If you would like more information about the activities at the nature center, call 870-534-0011 or logon to www.deltarivers.com. Admission is free. 🐾

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