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By LARRY PHILLIPS

- Leader & Times

Most people have heard about tagging fish or ducks and other migrating birds, even grizzly bears, but who has ever heard of tagging a butterfly?

Well don't feel alone, it was only last year that a couple of people at the K-State Extension Office mentioned to staff members at Liberal Parks and Recreation about how folks in some places tagged migrating Monarch butterflies.

After further discussions with staff from Big Brothers Big Sisters and Natural Resource Conservation Service, the next great family event was born – butterfly wrangling – well not exactly.

It's formally called Arkalon Butterfly Count Day.

Those four groups will be hosting the 2013 Arkalon Butterfly Count Day from 9 to 11 a.m. on Saturday at Arkalon Park northeast of Liberal.

Parks and Rec's Ronna Stump laughed when asked, "How do you tag a butterfly?"

"Very, very carefully," she giggled.

"We actually have these little stickers (decal-like), and you have to put them on their wings," she said. "They're tiny – like a quarter-inch or so."

Last year's count day wasn't as successful as hoped for, as cold weather north of Kansas had sent a majority of the Monarchs through the area earlier than the event.

"That's why this year, we've moved the date up – hoping to see more of the Monarchs in early September," Stump said. "It's a learning process."

One of the morning's events, naturally, includes net construction.

"We help the kids build butterfly nets," she said. "And if kids have their own, that would be great for them to bring their own if they have them."

Once Monarchs are captured, they will be processed and recorded at the tagging station that will be set up at the park

"And remember, this is actually for the entire family to participate in," Stump added.

“The Natural Resources Conservation Services group helps us, and they give educational talks about butterflies and they have posters and show the process how butterflies are born,” she said.

There will also be people available to lead families along the nature trails at the park, and there are options for those who don't want to go traipsing through the woods.

“We'll have our hay wagon – the one we use at Christmas time – giving tours around Arkalon,” she said. “We'll take them up to the ponds and other areas. It's really nice.”

Everybody is encouraged to wear bright, bright colors, as butterflies are attracted to loud colors, and it should help lure some near enough to net, according to Stump.

Families who want to make a complete day out of the excursion can bring their own picnic lunches and eat anywhere in the park, including the covered dining pavilion in the camping area. Or, they can also bring rod and reels and enjoy one of several fishing ponds in the afternoon. Adult fishermen are reminded they must have a Kansas fishing license in their possession while fishing.

For those who are not familiar just where Arkalon Park is, Stump said she will be leaving the Recreation Office at Blue Bonnet Park in Liberal at 8:15 a.m. Saturday.

“They can follow me out there,” she said. “We'll have a caravan.”

Arkalon is about 12 miles northeast of Liberal off U.S. Highway 54 in the Cimarron River Valley.

“Just come out and enjoy it – it's free,” Stump said. “It doesn't cost anything, and that's a big plus. And it's gorgeous out there – everything is so green.”

“It’s a great family-time activity,” she added.

For more information, contact the Recreation Office at 626-0133.

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