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Save the Date!

- 02/14/17**—Chapter Meeting at Concordia
- 03/14/17**—Chapter Meeting at Concordia
- 03/18/17**—TX Dark Sky Festival, Dripping Springs Ranch Park, 2-10PM
- 03/31-04/1/17**—Nature Fest at Concordia
- 04/09/17**—Graduation & Volunteer Recognition

## The Student Chapter Vision



What is the value of conservation? It's crucial that we who are engaged in conservation have

a ready answer for that. There are countless studies that quantify the dollar-value of “ecological services,” or those things nature does for humans. There is a growing body of study that attempts to quantify the impacts of nature on human well-being, and the results are what you’d hope for: we *need* nature in order to be happy and healthy. When I began this chapter, my goals were to

1) better prepare my students for the job market and 2) help them forge a meaningful connection with the work of conservation. That second goal is at the heart of the Texas Master Naturalist organization. We are a connection-building group and our work is valuable. We know it, but how do we convey this message to others, especially when they are uninterested or antagonistic (conditions that are becoming more prevalent)? The thing I love most about the Texas Master Naturalist program is the passion and enthusiasm exhibited by its members. The thing I love most about higher

education is its dedication to preparing students to solve the big problems of the world. Together, these two entities will have an enormous positive impact on conservation via the Student Chapter model. What is the value of conservation? We feel it, we know it in our souls, but how do we translate our passion to converting the skeptics? There is our challenge and opportunity: how to put our collective talents to use crafting the most effective response to turn the tide of apathy and opposition. Never stop thinking about that (and let me know if you figure it out)!

—**Sam Whitehead**

## From the President

Welcome back, Master Naturalists and trainees! I hope everyone’s new year is off to a great start.

We’ve got lots of exciting things in the works for the upcoming year. Don’t forget that NatureFest is March 31st and April 1st, and we need volunteers. If you’re interested in getting some service hours and being a tour guide for this important event, please send an email to Theresa. Look for more information on NatureFest coming up soon!

At our January meeting we also made some important awards. I would like to congratulate **John Laisy** for attaining his re-certification pin (the bass), and **Ginny Weldon** for earning her initial certification pin (the dragonfly).

Stay tuned for more, and I hope to see you all at the next meeting.

— **Walker Watts**



Kaitlyn Rodriguez, our past chapter president, welcomes Walker Watts, our new president, at the January meeting. Thanks for your service, Kaitlyn!

## Whiteflies on Indoor Plants

Source: Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension



Whiteflies are small, soft-bodied insects with piercing-sucking mouthparts. They are creamy white and adults have a mealy wax coating their body and wings. Immatures, also called nymphs, are small, oval, flattened and wingless.

Whitefly populations can become a problem on indoor plants due to the temperature being regulated inside structures. They like to be on the underside of leaves, often in clusters. Common species of whiteflies have a wide host range and are able to switch host plants.

Whiteflies use their straw-like mouthparts to pierce plant tissue and suck out juices. Large populations can cause foliage to turn yellow, appear to be dry or even fall off the plant. Some whiteflies cause

plant distortion or foliage to turn silver in color. Others are capable of transmitting plant viruses.

Whiteflies exude honeydew, a sticky substance secreted by some plant-feeding insects. Honey dew causes foliage to become shiny in appearance and can attract a fungus called sooty mold. Some insects, such as ants, like to tend insects that create honeydew and protect honeydew producers from predators and parasites.

To reduce the chance of whitefly infestations, inspect all plants thoroughly for insects before bringing them indoors. If a plant is found with whiteflies, then isolate it while you take care of the problem. While plants remain indoors, they should be inspected for problems weekly. Yellow sticky cards (you can either buy these or make your own with yellow cardstock and adhesive) can be used to capture whiteflies as well as help you easily locate problem areas.

Depending upon the plant that is infested with whiteflies, you may be able to vacuum the insects from the leaves. Choose a vacuum that has low-power suction to pull the insects into the vacuum but not the plant.

Make wise pesticide choices and choose pesticides to target specific pests and/ or specific areas. For chemical treatment you can use insecticidal soap, azadirachtin, d-limonene, horticultural oils, botanicals, or a synthetic product.

Target your treatment to the underside of the leaves to get to where the whiteflies like to hide. Multiple treatments will most likely be necessary due to eggs and pupae not being susceptible to pesticide treatments.

For more information or help with identification, contact me at 512.854.9600 or check out my [blog](#).

—Wizzie Brown



Reference and Photo:  
Mike Merchant, Texas A&M  
[AgriLife](#)

## Fun Facts About: Wolf Spiders

- Wolf spiders are very common around homes—even well-manicured lawns
- There are at least 238 different species of wolf spiders in America
- Most wolf spiders are nocturnal, coming out at night primarily to hunt
- Wolf spiders are hunting spiders but they don't actually chase down food like their namesake. Instead, they go to a likely location and wait for a tasty insect or arthropod to come along
- Wolf spiders lay down silk draglines to keep in touch with other wolf spiders
- The main pair of eyes on wolf spiders face forward and are large enough to reflect light that can be seen by human eyes at night, especially if you have a flashlight

## Changes Coming to the Bull Creek Foundation

In recent years, the all-volunteer Bull Creek Foundation (BCF) has been the “one man show” of president and head cheerleader Richard (“Rick”) Brimer. Since its inception in 1994, the goal of the foundation has been to protect the riparian area along the full length of Bull Creek and keep Spicewood Springs Road west of 360 a “country in a city” corridor.

With the onslaught of new Austinites discovering this beautiful hill country paradise in North Austin, we have seen all the hallmarks of increased use; including all the drawbacks. There has been a huge uptick in trash, habitat destruction, alcohol consumption, ground fires and dogs off

leash. Keeping both the district park and the greenbelt healthy while supporting community use is a job that keeps getting bigger, so the BCF has cause to grow its reach.

In 2017, members of the community, including the Lakewood neighborhood and the Northwest Austin Civic Association, have been organizing to assist BCF in achieving its stated goal of promoting the balance between nature, recreation and development in our 32-square mile watershed. In January, officers were elected, with Rick still the fearless leader and President; Rachel McGill, Vice president; Clark Gardner, Treasurer; Rebecca Breneman, Secretary; and Caroline Alexander,

Communications Officer.

Over the course of the next year, we will formalize the organization by incorporating and registering as a non-profit in Texas and adopting by-laws. This work includes clarifying BCF’s mission, organizational structure, and strategic plan. We welcome any dedicated community members to join us, especially if you have relevant experience!

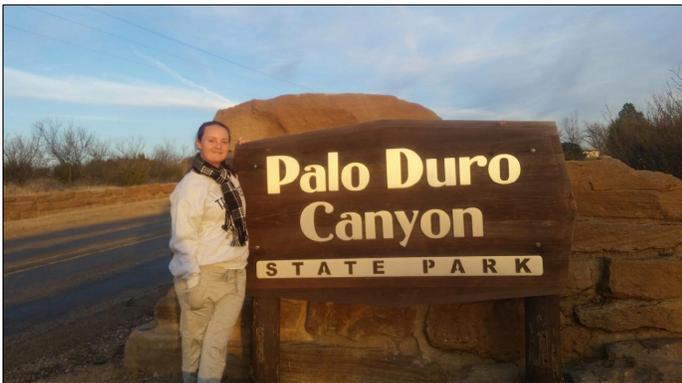
Our meetings will be held the last Monday of each month. At that time, we will meet to discuss issues and initiatives relating to the Bull Creek Watershed and to the establishment of the BCF. Please email [Rachel McGill](mailto:Rachel.McGill@bullcreekfoundation.org) for location information.

—*Rachel McGill*



*Lower Bull Creek Falls*

## The State Park Ambassadors Program



I was privileged recently to receive a 4-month appointment as a State Park Ambassador. I serve at Palo Duro Canyon State Park with 5 other young adults. Currently, we are doing work on a new trail at the park as well as planning a “Humans of Palo Duro Canyon” piece for our website.

State Park Ambassadors are young adult volunteers aged

18 to 30 who collaborate with a nearby state park for 3 projects: service, social media, and outreach. Our goal is to raise awareness of opportunities in our state parks and to help people experience that life is #betteroutside.

About half of state park ambassadors are undergraduate students. The rest are recent grads like me, and folks from all

backgrounds. The trainings are held 3 times a year around college breaks: Gulf Coast and South Texas at Spring Break, Central Texas July 4<sup>th</sup>, and North Texas right before Thanksgiving. The training is an outdoor immersion experience including 5 nights of camping, backpacking, hiking, service, and high adventure fun.

As Texas Master Naturalists, we understand the importance of volunteer service. If you meet the age requirements, take a look at this program and consider applying. The training is tough but rewarding, and most importantly gives you valuable contacts within Texas Parks and Wildlife. This program can be a valuable boost to your future career in many ways. Just click [here](#) and get out there!

—*Maire Cox*



*Explore Texas state parks and use your interests, skills and creativity to help those special places while gaining valuable volunteer experience.*

## Project Update: Hamilton Pool Preserve Photography



I've been continuing my project with the Travis County BCCP, photographing their preserves for their use in newsletters, social media and additional promotional material. Last newsletter I shared some photos of the Wild Basin preserve. My second assignment was Hamilton Pool Preserve, which I think should probably qualify now as Austin's "worst kept secret" given how popular it is! But it is popular for a reason. It is hands down one of the prettiest natural pools I've ever seen.

Hamilton Pool was created when the dome of an underground river collapsed due to thousands of years of erosion. It is surrounded by giant limestone slabs and huge stalactites hanging from the cave ceiling.

Within the collapsed dome you will also find gorgeous maidenhair fern grottos and dripping emerald green moss. The falls connects to a crystal clear Hamilton Creek which spills out into the Pedernales River. Tall cypress trees stand at attention along the creek. It truly feels like a place out of a story book.

The uplands of the preserve are Golden Cheeked Warbler habitat, with Ashe Juniper and various oak.

Hamilton Pool Preserve was designated as a nature preserve by Travis County in 1990. Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century this land was used by the Tonkawa & Lipan Apaches. In the 1860's the property was owned by Morgan C. Hamilton. In the 1880s the Reimers' family purchased the land to raise livestock. One of their son's discovered the collapsed grotto. The grotto was considered a hazard to the livestock, but the Reimers recognized the recreational potential of the swimming hole. Visitors have been coming to it ever since. Visitor numbers were modest at first,



but by 1980 the swimming hole was suffering from the overwhelming number of visitors and the lack of restrictions and protections on the land.

Aside from over visitation of the pool, the land also suffered from years of overgrazing from livestock. In 1985, after being cited as the most significant natural area in rural Travis County, Travis County purchased 232 acres from the Reimers and began to implement a management plan to restore the area. As a result of this, the area has made strides toward recovery.

This is a gorgeous place, but visiting Hamilton Pool can be challenging in the summer. The park has a limit to the number of visitors that can be inside the park at once. On summer days, this limit is reached quickly. To try to alleviate the frustration, Texas Parks has put in a reservation policy from May 15 to September 30. You need to have a reservation within this window to visit the park. However, I have found that if you can get to the preserve after swimming season and on a weekday, the place is not packed and no reservations are required. The hike down to the Pedernales river was almost void of people the day I went.

For more information on how to visit the park, click [here](#).

—Heather Valey

*Hamilton Pool Preserve  
photos by Heather Valey*

## Project Update: Walnut Creek Park

Hello Balcones Chapter!

For my service project I have been working on a remediation project at Walnut Creek metro-Park in north Austin.

Over the summer we closed down some well-established trails and some rogue trails that were being created in sensitive areas. Right now we are working with the Ridge Riders creating a biking trail to improve the park for mountain bikers so that the park works for as many people as possible.

We have just begun digging up plants that are in the future trails, especially the nectar producing ones, and re-planting them in other sec-

tions of the park. By using the full grown plants we are saving on cost of new plants and using what naturally grows at the park. However, we are always accepting donations of plants as there is plenty of space at the park.

For future projects we will continue working on planting and installing various erosion controls.

If you are interested in volunteering, please contact me at [Stephanie Putnam](#) or look for [Keep Walnut Creek Wild](#) on [Meetup](#).

—**Stephanie Putnam**



*Blackfoot daisy at Walnut Creek Park*

## Birding Trip Highlight: Loggerhead Shrike

I was out birding at the coast recently and came across a Loggerhead Shrike sitting on a wire. At first I thought it was a mockingbird and nearly didn't lift up my binoculars.

After realizing that it was indeed a Shrike, I watched it for nearly 10 minutes; what a beautiful bird. The loggerhead shrike is a medium-sized bird measuring approximately 9 inches from bill to tail. It has a distinctive black mask that extends across the eyes to its bill.

"Loggerhead" refers to the relatively large size of the head as compared to the rest of the body.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology calls it a "songbird with a raptor's habits." In fact, it is nicknamed the butcher bird due to its carnivorous tendencies. It consumes prey including amphibians, insects, lizards, and small mammals.

I spotted a second one at another coastal location; as I moved closer, it moved a little farther away. It was not intimidated by my presence as it did not move very far each time I came closer.

I hope to someday see it eating its prey. Due to its small size and weak talons, this bird relies on impaling its kill on

thorns or barbed wire, or wedges them into tight places for easy consumption. I find this fascinating.

Unfortunately, Loggerhead Shrike numbers have dropped sharply in the last half-century.

Other great birds I saw on this trip were: a pair of Kiskadees, an American Bittern, a Sora, and a Ladderback woodpecker.



Loggerhead Shrike Photo: Wikipedia

—**Mary Ann Robalino**

## Member Spotlights

**Name:** Karen McGraw  
(2015)



**Occupation:** President and Principal Consultant of organizational improvement and change at Silver Bear Group. I also teach and certify performance consultants for a global non-profit.

**Natural Interests:** Native plants (particularly herbs), clean water, wildlife conservation, and dark skies. In 2015, I completed an intensive training program on the science and art of herbalism, and I am currently volunteering with the Texas Dark Skies Association.

**Favorite Master Naturalist Memory:** I enjoyed the stream team training and last year's Earth Day celebration at Concordia. But I think my highlight has to be attending the last two Texas Master Naturalist annual meetings and representing our chapter. I loved seeing what other chapters around the state are doing, and it's a great place to meet people with a common interest.



**Name:** Amanda Sullivan  
(2016)



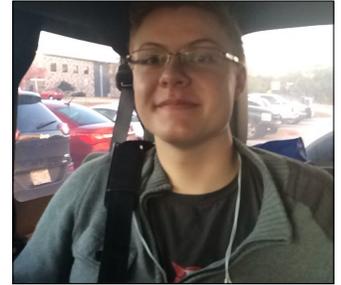
**Occupation:** Concordia student (senior), studying environmental science, and a current Concordia Ranger.

**Natural Interests:** Fungi—I find they have a lot of character and there is still so much to discover about them. I've recently participated in an American bald eagle count and now understand the hype about birding. They are beautiful and it's so much fun to look at them through binoculars. I got to see them from a different lens, and loved it. Other interests are trail maintenance to make it easier for people to enjoy nature without having to look at their feet as much, and climbing the massive live oaks on Lot 4 of the Concordia campus.

**Favorite Master Naturalist Memory:** Probably the cricket count with Ruthann. We had a great time sitting in the cold talking about how we discovered our passion for nature and laughing at the crickets. Those were my first Master Naturalist volunteer hours. That's when I really felt confident that I'm in the right major and type of volunteer work.



**Name:** Josh Wheatly  
(2017)



**Occupation:** Concordia student (freshman) studying environmental science, and a part time Legislative Aid.

**Natural Interests:** Birds and water.

**Favorite Master Naturalist Memory:** I want to say stream team training, because I felt like such a scientist. But it is actually trail cleaning with Walker, Hannah, and Amanda.

One Friday morning on the trail, we heard a pig off in the bushes. So Walker, being Walker, went after it. The rest of us took a vote that we would only go after him if we heard him scream. He came back disappointed that he couldn't find it. The rest of us were more happy that he didn't find it!

—Kaitlyn Rodriguez



*Member Spotlights are brought to you by Kaitlyn Rodriguez, who captured responses from a member from each of our classes for this new featured piece.*

## It's Older than the Hills and You've Probably Never Noticed It

You will find these biological soil crusts all over the Hill Country, but you may not have ever noticed them.

There is a lifeform that lives in the hills and dry limestone outcrops that you have undoubtedly seen but thought was a piece of bark or a silver of wood. But this "thing" (neither plant nor animal) is one of the oldest living creatures on earth and may, in fact, be literally older than the hills which we and it call home.

The "it," sometimes unglamorously called "gorilla snot," or more elegantly, "star jelly," is a lichen, a biological soil crust, that is not a single living thing but its own micro-environment with alga (cyanobacteria) and fungi, each living off the other in an ancient symbiotic relationship, where the alga supply nutrients to the fungi and the fungi supply protection and



an anchor for the alga. The result is a self-contained life form that does not resemble its constituent parts.

You will find these biological soil crusts all over the Hill Country (and the globe, for that matter). There are at least 20,000 known species covering everything from your grandma's tombstone to toxic slag heaps. They have been on earth for billions of years.

Our version exists atop dry limestone, usually in bare areas where the grass is ab-

sent or short. When dry, it looks like flakes of black paint, but after a rain, the flakes grow, turn greenish and are moist, gelatin-like.

While they look insignificant, lichens in the Hill Country provide soil cover and create crevasses for seeds to germinate and channels for scarce water to migrate into the soil.

For additional information see the exceptionally detailed "[A Field Guide to Biological Soil Crusts of Western U.S. Drylands](#)" from the U.S. Geological Survey. You might also read some of Master Naturalist Jim Stanley's columns that appear in the [Kerrville Daily Times](#).

—**Bill Cryer**

## Chapter Officers & Committee Heads



A big "thank you" to our officers and committee heads!

### Officers:

Current officers for the **Balcones Canyonlands Chapter at Concordia University TX** are:

- ◆ [Walker Watts](#), *President*
- ◆ [Dorothy Martinez](#), *VP*
- ◆ [Stephanie Putnam](#), *Secretary*
- ◆ [Joshua Wheatley](#), *Treasurer*

**Our mascot:** Salamander  
**Newsletter masthead:** Jessie Zehr

### Committee Heads:

- ◆ *Training & Communications:* [Theresa Rooney](#)
- ◆ *Membership:* [Maire Cox](#)
- ◆ *Volunteer Service:* [John Laisy](#)
- ◆ *Advanced Training:* [Jessie Zehr](#)
- ◆ *Program:* [Dorothy Martinez](#)
- ◆ *Youth Services:* [Cindy Harding-Woodhull](#)
- ◆ *New Class Reps:* [Heather Valey](#) and [Frances Franklin](#)
- ◆ *Newsletter:* [Karen McGraw](#)
- ◆ *Webmaster:* [Heather Valey](#)
- ◆ *Historian:* [Pete Aranda](#)
- ◆ *Outreach:* [Theresa Rooney](#)
- ◆ *Hospitality:* [Ruthann Panipinto](#)
- ◆ *Nominating:* [Kaitlyn Rodriguez](#)
- ◆ *Trails:* [Amanda Sullivan](#)
- ◆ *Student Welfare:* [Sam Whitehead](#)

Chapter members are encouraged to [contribute](#) articles and photos to the newsletter. Let us showcase your recent activity, favorite native plant, tree, bird or book! Most stories are 125-250 words in length.