

## COLUMNISTS

# Never a better time to be a master naturalist

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The first class of trainees for the fledgling Texas Master Naturalist program met in San Antonio in 1997. Chapters have since multiplied to 44 across Texas, and spread to 25 states.

This remarkable expansion testifies to our society's felt needs for a closer connection to nature, a more practical understanding of nature's resources and real connections with other people along the way. What better time than now to become a TMN?

I hope you'll consider signing up for the basic TMN training in the Big Country that begins Aug. 26. Here's why:

The training and public outreach activities in which I participate through TMN have broadened and deepened my understanding of regional natural history in ways I could not have imagined before I joined. I'm glad to say that the delight I've always experienced from nature has grown by leaps and bounds!

As a master naturalist, I regularly do specific tasks toward protecting, stewarding and restoring nature's gifts. These are ways of neighbor- and nature-loving that I take seriously and find deeply rewarding.

Getting to know and build strong friendships with others who share my passion for such things has enriched my life permanently. Talk about value – it's been priceless!

“For such a time as this” from the ancient story of Esther (Esther 4:14), also describes the “fit” between the work of master naturalists and some of the environmental and social challenges we all face right now.

Consider how important it is for human beings to have a broad, functional knowledge of both the individual pieces of the natural world and also its complex ecosystems. Long-term human flourishing – some would argue survival – relates directly to the geological and biological health of the planet.

It is a conviction that shapes the mission of Texas Master Naturalists: “To develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the State of Texas.”

In practice, this means that beyond at least 40 hours of basic training, master naturalists participate annually in at least eight hours of advanced training and at least 40 hours of approved community service, to maintain their certified status.

The Big Country 2021 Master Naturalist training will be conducted in 13 sessions from Aug. 26 to Nov. 18. Most of these are on Thursday evenings from 6 to 9 p.m. There will be one Saturday session.

The plan is for most of the classes to be both in-person and virtual in format, but a few will be in-person only because of the absence of wireless network at the planned locations.

The training fee is \$125 (covering cost of curriculum and training-related expenses). The deadline is Aug. 1, so be sure to complete and submit your application this month.

So, whether you've been thinking for a while about becoming a master naturalist, or you're just now finding out about us, we'd love to have you share this adventure with us!

Questions? Call the AgriLife Extension office at 325-672-6048. Online links for more information are available at [txmn.org/bc/2021-training](http://txmn.org/bc/2021-training) or [txmn.org/bc/files/2021/06/Master-Naturalist-Training-Flyer.png](http://txmn.org/bc/files/2021/06/Master-Naturalist-Training-Flyer.png).

## **Public event updates**

Our local Big Country Master Naturalist chapter is resuming our local events at Abilene State Park.

► Our Big and Bright Star Party will be 9-11 p.m. July 31. Telescopes will be set up near the CCC building by the swimming pool. Feel free to bring your own telescopes, binoculars, blankets, lawn chairs and flashlights (red lights only; no white lights, please).

► Our hike around Lake Abilene will be 9-11 a.m. Aug. 7. Check in at the Abilene State Park Main Gate by 8:45 a.m. so you can be at the lake gate by 9 a.m.. Adult cost is \$5 per person unless you have an annual state park pass. Bring drinking water, dress appropriately and wear closed-toe shoes.

For latest event updates, check our posts on Facebook BCTXMN. We hope to see you there!