

The Tracker

The Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter

December, 2010

Volume 1, Issue 1

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Texas Master Naturalist 11th Annual Statewide Meeting & Advanced Training

T Bar M Conference
Center New Braunfels,
Texas

Was it worth attending?

Master Naturalist Mission



"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"

Calendar at a Glance

Monday, December 6th, Salado, Growing Up Wild volunteer hours, 9 am- 2:30 pm*

Tuesday, December 14th, MN Christmas Party/Meeting Zoe's house, 6:30 pm*

Saturday, January 22, Waco, Texas Invasive Workshop, 9 am - 4 pm*

Thursday, February 10, Georgetown, NPSOT talk on native orchids, 7 - 9 pm*

Tuesday, February 8, CTMN bi-monthly meeting

* more information inside.

This mission statement was on the program cover for the state meeting. As I read the statement I thought, "What a lofty mission and our newly formed Central Texas Chapter is part of that corps. We are becoming well-informed volunteers." As the first afternoon progressed I repeatedly came across members from our chapter. What a delight to see naturalist friends. Twelve of our members were able to attend. All were anxious to learn more and expand their areas of interest.

From the beginning it was evident the meeting had been well planned and organized. Friendly folks from the hosting chapters helped with registration, directions, and activities. Plenty of maps

Continued on page 2...

Chapter Motto

**Earth Day,
Every Day**



The Coming of Winter

by the President's Pen

I don't know about you, but I am looking forward to the coming of the cold front that will be here Wednesday. I long for those cooler days and even cooler nights. It is time for a change in scenery. I love to see the changing of the guard, the trees, with their leaves turned orange, yellow, red, burgundy. Some, like the pecan and fruitless mulberry, have almost lost all their leaves; others are on their way to losing theirs. With the swishing of the blustering winds all day today



many are the leaves that have been swirling and dancing on my walkway and porch.

Our wonderful native grasses have put out their seed heads and their stems also sway

to the winds of the last few days. The native plants are beginning to cut short their blooming, as they begin their winter sleep.

My box turtle has burrowed down, and has not been seen for the last week. I keep checking but she seems to know what lies ahead.

I have taken to journaling on my nature walks. You never know what you might find when out in the woods or grassy meadows. The other night, around midnight, I heard the coyotes howling off in the distance. Even when we don't think there is any activity, there is always something there.

With this first edition of our chapter's newsletter, we have taken off into the wild blue yonder. I encourage you to enjoy the cooler months ahead and take time to do things that seem to get put aside during the busy spring and summer months. Read that book, study, learn about the wonders of nature, and maybe try journaling. What better ways to start a conversation! Have a wonderful Thanksgiving and Christmas.

- Mary Ann Everett

State Conference...continued

and hand-outs were available. The registration packets came complete with name tags which had all my selected sessions printed on the back, how easy was this going to be.

Before heading off to my first session, "Citizen Scientist", I had to a peek at the silent auction items and the Master Naturalist Store. Among the dragonfly jewelry, nature books, butterfly pictures, moss green ornaments and camp chair was our chapter's naturalist basket for the auction. Someone had already started the bidding!!! Mary Ann had done a great job filling our basket with current and useful items. The basket ultimately netted the meeting \$40 and the recipient a grand assortment of interesting material. After looking at all the auction items I had to hurry to my first session. The store had to wait.

Ben Eldridge, Director of Citizen Science, Cibolo Nature Center, was an enthusiastic speaker. (If you have an opportunity to go to Cibolo Nature Center, take it!) I left the session realizing that as volunteers we actually can and do have a scientific impact on our environment. Volunteers taking part in watches, surveys and becoming specialists all contribute to the beneficial management of our natural resources as their reports are added to data collected and analyzed by scientists.

Next on the agenda was dinner. Everyone at the meeting gathered in a large outdoor pavilion for a buffet dinner. All the meals and snacks at the sessions were well-thought out. Natural, nutritious and tasty food was provided. For example whole fruit, coffee, tea, and water were available during the sessions instead of bags of chips and sodas. Multiple serving lines resulted in little wait time and our chapter members sat together and exchanged information and ideas.

An important part of the state meeting includes displays from local chapters, photography, mixed media, scrapbook and newsletter contests. Getting to see what other chapters and individuals were doing and voting on works in each category made me feel included in the state meeting.



Continued on page 3...

State Conference continued...

Saturday's session for me was Texas Stream Team – Certified Water Quality Monitor Training. It was a fantastic all day experience. Becky Denton was my partner. After receiving testing kits we donned our safety goggles and gloves to begin training. All day we performed tests on water in the classroom and in the Comal River at Landa Park. By the end of the day with wrinkled hands from being in the gloves and red ridges on our noses from the goggles Becky and I had completed the training. We are now certified Texas Stream Team members. Richard McCarthy also attended this session and is certified.

Recognitions of local chapters and individuals were acknowledged as the evening meal was ending on Saturday. Our own Sidney VanLoh was recognized for earning his dragonfly pin in 2010. New chapters like ours were also recognized. Individuals earning pins for the various amounts of volunteer hours were commended and much admired. When will you get your 1000 hour pin? Throughout the meal pictures submitted by the chapters were shown on their jumbo-tron like screen. Sidney had submitted several pictures from our chapter, so we felt semi-famous at least for the evening.

Was the Annual Meeting and Advanced Training worth attending?

Absolutely!

- Gail Hughling

Carbon Cycle and Global Climate Change

Dr. Tom Boutton presented Carbon Cycle and Global Climate Change at the 2010 State MN Conference. According to Dr. Boutton, only 8% of Americans understand why climate change is real based on an 81 question exam.

Carbon is continuously cycled between the soil and the atmosphere. The stored atmospheric carbon is increasing while the stored soil carbon is decreasing. Oceans act as a carbonate buffer system. The rise in atmospheric carbon causes an overall warmer climate change. The major sources of carbon to the air are: ocean releases, respiration, decomposition, fossil fuel, and deforestation. Sinks take carbon out

of the air and direct it to the soil. The major sinks are photosynthesis and ocean uptakes.

The United States is the second highest contributor of CO2 emissions. China is the highest. Harris County, TX is the top CO2 emitting county.

Deforestation is the major source of carbon to the atmosphere. It converts carbon stored in plants to CO2. Soil tillage associated with agriculture accelerates and promotes the decay of soil organic matter transferring soil carbon to the atmosphere as CO2. Possible Solutions: 1. Reduce Fossil Fuel combustion through increased efficiency of use, other sources of energy and use of biofuels. 2. Carbon Sequestration in Ecosystems by reducing deforestation, modify agriculture practices (no-till versus soil tillage), restore degraded ecosystems, improve management of range and forest lands and fertilize the oceans. 3. Geological Formations captured CO2 from industry and inject into the earth.

I received a CD from Dr Boutton which I gave to Zoe which contains a lot of information about this topic.

-Marilyn Whitworth

River Critter Workshop

I attended the River Critter Workshop at the TMN State Meeting. It was fun and informative. We spent the morning and part of the afternoon learning about freshwater mussels, basking turtles and macro-invertebrates. They are all important indicators of water quality. The rest of the afternoon was spent looking for them in the river. I received a Scientific Permit for Mussel Watching from TPWD and a Texas Turtle Watch Certificate from the Fort Worth Zoo. I plan to contribute sightings to both.

- Linda Mahaffey

Texas Turtle Watch Logo and photo of Sliders from the Texas Turtle Watch Brochure of the Fort Worth, Texas Zoo.

State Conference continued on page 4...



State Conference continued...

Texacology: Texas' Extreme Environmental Makeover

- Presented by Wallace Stapp

Not sure what I was in for but intrigued by the title, I got my orange and walked into my first session at the State Conference. But to my surprise, there was no slide show, no movie, not even an overhead projector, just my iPhone on vibrate! The presenter was going to talk to us for three hours, but I stayed. I'm so glad I did! The presentation was like seventh grade Texas History class (which I enjoyed) on fast forward describing a Texas that I had not known existed.

The session focused on the period 1821-1900. This period saw the Anglo-European population in Texas mushroom from under 20 thousand to over 3 million. This same period saw tremendous changes in and destruction of the plant and animal communities of Texas. The early 1800's saw a Texas that some early visitors described as "the most beautiful place I had ever seen". They found game in abundance and variety, herds of Bison that would take days to ride past, prairie grasses so tall a man could get lost in them and extended from horizon to horizon, forests, and springs in virtually every part of the State.

Most of us are aware of the almost complete annihilation of the Bison during this period and have heard a great deal about the plowing under of the prairie grasses. At the beginning of the 1800's, Bison are estimated to have numbered near 60 million in North America, but by 1885 fewer than 1000 remained. But during this period, the same thing was happening to many other species that once ranged over most of Texas. What was happening in Texas had also occurred in the eastern states; the difference being that it had taken 200 years to do there what it took only 70 years to do in Texas. There

were several scenarios that urged our ancestors to plunder the natural resources as they did. In some cases, as with the White-Tailed Deer, it was to provide food for the family, but in many cases, such as that of the Passenger Pigeon, Peccary, Mountain Lion, or Black Bear, the destruction was for entertainment or to eliminate a threat to man or livestock. There are reports of there being so many Passenger Pigeons they would "blacken the sky"; one man boasted that he had killed five Black Bears in the span of two days, all in the same den. If the plant or animal was a threat, it was eliminated or driven from the area (sound like some of today's practices?). The beaver was trapped to near extinction in Texas for their pelts, and both saltwater and freshwater fishes and turtles were harvested to near extinction to ship back to the East Coast for the markets there.

Our forests and grasses were not immune to the destruction either. Central Texas and the Hill Country were well forested in old growth Cedar, Post Oaks, and Cypress trees. The demise of these trees was a



Photo by Liz Noffsinger of www.freedigitalphotos.net

result of the need for logs for cabins (from the old growth cedar), and shingles (from the Cypress) and fence posts (from the Post Oaks). It was said that the prairie grasses extended as far as the eye could see

Continued on page 5...

Texacology continued...

and that "there was so much grass it could never be grazed down". By the 1870's the grasses had already been overgrazed to the point where native grasses could not recover, the nomadic Bison having been replaced by pastured cattle, sheep and goats and the prairie grasses replaced with crops.

The environmental changes being wrought upon Texas during this period were partly necessity, partly avarice, and partly ignorance. We saw the same kind of destruction repeated in the Great Plains during the 1930's and the domino effect of our not understanding the balance nature seeks. Hopefully, we can avoid such environmental catastrophes in the future by better understanding this balance of nature and by being better stewards. Master Naturalist's can help in the education necessary to avoid these kinds of mistakes in the future. Just as the encroachment of civilization and ignorance pushed the Bison to near extinction, the foresight and management practices of individuals such as Texas rancher, Charles Goodnight, helped the Bison to start a recovery and they now number near 450,000 (American Bison web site) in North America.

"As we felled and burned the forests, so we burned, plowed and overgrazed the prairies. We came with vision but not with sight. We did not see nor understand where we were or what was there, but destroyed what was there for the sake of desire. And the desire was always native to the place we left behind." -Native Grasses and What They Mean

- Dale Hughling

Texas Stream Team Training

I participated in the Texas Stream Team training all day session. The Texas Stream Team training provides Certification for volunteers to enable them to conduct monitoring of water sources in the state. The data collected provides an overall picture of the water quality and changes over time. The following tests are conducted: PH, Dissolved Oxygen, Dissolved solids, Conductivity, salinity, water clarity and E. Coli

Bacteriological monitoring. All training was hands on and the afternoon was spent on the banks of the Comal River conducting an actual sample of the river water.

All data is provided to Texas State University at San Marcos.

- Richard McCarthy

A Perfect Red

Have you ever heard of the book "A Perfect Red"? I had not before attending a session on ethnobotany at the state meeting. Ethnobotany is the study of the relationship between people and plants. I was amazed to find that the small cochineal scale insect was responsible for the dye used to create the British Red Coats of colonial fame.

The insect, from Mexico and South America, uses carminic acid as protection from other insect predators. The acid appears on a favorite food, the cactus, as a white substance, but when touched you will find behind the white cover a brilliant red. Carminic acid was used by the Aztec and Maya to produce a natural brilliant red dye. During the colonial period cochineal became Mexico's second most valued export after silver, hence the red coats. I think I'll read the book.

- Becky Denton

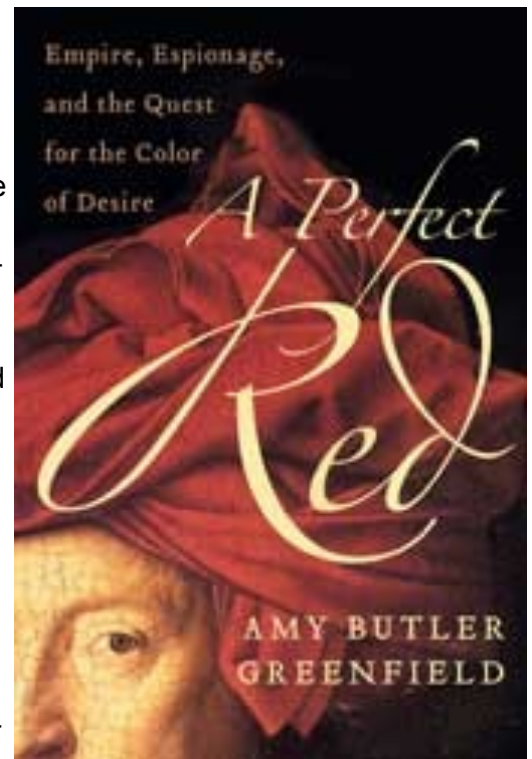


Photo by www.amybutlergreenfield.com



CTMN participants at the State Conference.

Spotlight on Natives

Each newsletter, we will have an article focusing on a specific Texas native species, either plant or animal. As Master Naturalists, we strive to be knowledgeable on topics applicable to our community and knowing our natives better will add to our knowledge base, not to mention our expertise. We also hope it is enjoyable reading as well.

If there is a specific native you would like to know more about, feel free to do the research and write it up, or just send your suggestions to a newsletter staffer and we'll be glad to work on that for you.

Just a few quick facts to share with you... according to Wild Texas Community there are over 165 native Texas mammals and 213 native reptiles and amphibians. The count for native birds is up to 590. A great webpage that not only lists Texas natives but gives specifics such as status, distribution, species number, and species names is ASM/Mammals of Texas.mht.

This first spotlight is on the Ringtail (*Bassariscus astutus*). The reason I picked it is somewhat personal. My son came home telling me he saw what he thought was a lemur. Dale Hughling told me about the ringtail and my son soon confirmed it was just that. He was camping at Enchanted Rock when he heard something in the dark. His flashlight landed on this handsome mammal.

About the size of a cat, it is a nocturnal, carnivore with a bushy, ringed tail which can be as long as its body. Many call it a ringtail cat, bandtail cat, cat squirrel, coon cat, coon fox, civet cat, and miner's cat; however it is a part of the raccoon family. Ringtail coloring will vary from gray shades to yellow. The bands on the tail are black and white while its face is masked.

Its diet consists of many different animals, such as birds, rodents, reptiles, insects, and even some native persimmons and juniper berries.

Depending on its location, it will den in small crevices. It likes rocky areas (like Enchanted Rock), and can climb canyon walls. Rarely, they will den in logs in wooded areas. They are uncommon in the lower Rio Grande and Coastal Plains regions (Davis & Schmidly, 1994).

Ringtails have a short breeding season, usually from February to May, and have 2 to 4 in a litter.

Uniquely, the ringtail has a wide range of vocalizations that have been observed.

These include "metallic chirps, squeaks, whimpers, chitters, chucking, barks, and various growls" (Willey and Richards, 1981).

Other facts include- there is no record of them hibernating, in the mid-1940s they were valued for their fur, and to date there are no conservation needs due to its success even in humanized areas.

My references are: www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/species/rtail/ and www.wtamu.edu/~rmatlack/

- Darla Menking

Photo courtesy of TPWD©



Upcoming Events and Opportunities

Opportunity for Volunteer Service Hours in Salado

Monday, December 6 from 9:00am-2:30pm
Salado ISD

Becky Denton has made arrangements with Salado ISD to teach 1st graders in small groups of four to six students on **December 6th**. Volunteers will teach a concept from Growing Up Wild curriculum: Aqua Charades. Volunteers should have training with Growing Up Wild or experience with children ages six and seven. There is a possibility of other similar opportunities in the future.

If you can help, please call Becky soon at 254-947-5626 (Salado) or email to

beckydenton@embarqmail.com **V**

Texas Invasive Workshop

Saturday, January 22, 2011 – 9:00am-4:00pm
TSTC Campus in Waco

Our chapter is partnering with the Heart of Texas and El Comino Real (Milam County) chapters to host a Texas Invasive Species Workshop. You have heard us talk about this before: you will get intensive training by Texas Forest Service staff on plant species which are invading Texas. In return, you are asked to periodically collect data on invasive species you see while enjoying the great outdoors and enter the information into a statewide database. You will receive training on data entry at the workshop and we will spend some time that day in the field collecting data for your first entry into the database. You will also receive a binder with lots of resource material. There will be a small fee (\$20 or less) for the class to pay for classroom access. Any data you collect and submit in the future will count towards volunteer service hours. You can find more information at <http://www.texasinvasives.org/>

Right now I need to know who would like to participate in the workshop to ensure we have enough students to fill the class. If you are interested in signing up for the Texas Invasives Workshop to be held in Waco on **January 22nd**, please let me know as soon as you can, but no later than Wed, December 1st. I have had the training and would be glad to answer any questions you might have. - Zoe Rascoe **AT**

NPSOT/Williamson seminar

February Chapter Meeting: Jason R. Singhurst on Native Orchids-Thursday, February 10, 2011, 7:00 pm — 9:00 pm at the Georgetown Public Library

Jason R. Singhurst -Botanist/Plant Ecologist, Wildlife Diversity Program, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department and co-author of Rare Plants of Texas. He will speak on **Native Orchids and some rarely-seen and restricted flora in “Herbaceous Seepage Slopes and Bogs of the West Gulf Coastal Plain.”** Jason’s talk will include many rare flora, including carnivorous plants and orchids, that inhabit the regions just to the east of Austin. **MA**

V Approved for Volunteer Hours
AT Approved for Advanced Training
MA Must Apply for approval of hours



*Central Texas Master Naturalist
Chapter First Annual
Christmas Party*

Tuesday, December 14th
6:30pm
Potluck Dinner
Home of Zoe Rascoe
1900 N. 13th Street
Temple

Please RSVP by Monday, Dec. 13th to Zoe at
254-913-1013 or trascoe@hotmail.com

Bring your favorite dish to share. Spouse or
significant other is welcome to join you for
an evening of food, fun and fellowship.

CTMN CHAPTER PROVIDES SPEAKERS AND BOOK REVIEW AT SALADO LIBRARY

CTMN Chapter member, Becky Denton, with support from Debbie Blair, provided three “nature themed” programs for the Salado Public Library’ Texas Naturalist Series. On October 2, (Becky) Denton gathered several Salado homeowners to speak about how they prepared their property to qualify for the Texas (and National) Wildscape recognition program. The homeowners provided handouts and their input on how to submit and qualify for recognition. Each specified that the size of the lot was not important, but the provision of food, water and cover (protection) were vital to draw in and sustain wildlife. A power-point presentation of the local wildlife found in one backyard was a big hit. (Debbie) Blair explained what a Master Naturalist is. Jeannie Lively, Salado’s Librarian for Adult Services, displayed books on nature topics.

On October 8, Denton and Blair presented a book review of Texas native, Roy Bedichek’s first book, Adventures With a Texas Naturalist. (Debbie) Blair gave a short introduction about what a Master Naturalist is. She then gave a brief history of Roy Bedichek’s life and accomplishments, including some photos. (Becky) Denton, then went into more detail with excerpts from Bedichek’s writings and read some of her favorite quotes from the book. Both presenters recommended the book as an entertaining and educational



Above: Debbie and Becky with Claude and Barbara Payne and Margaret Williamson, speakers at their Wildscaping program in Salado.

read. Lively discussion followed. Once again, Jeannie Lively, provided a display of Salado Public Library’s books on similar topics.

Becky already has more plans in the works for Salado. Watch for volunteer hours as she helps develop environmentally educational projects around the new Sustainability Center.

See the next issue of The Tracker for pictures and article on Becky and Debbie’s 3rd program, Beginning Bird Watching with Dr. Randy Pinkston which took place on November 6th.

Chapter Charter Presented

Sonny Arnold presented the Chapter with our MN banner and charter certificate at the August meeting.



Progress on the River's Bend Mitigation Project

The Corps of Engineers and the US Army worked together on the River's Bend Mitigation Project on Stillhouse Hollow Reservoir this past year. The Army had used a wetlands area on Ft. Hood for training and they were replacing that area by creating a new wetlands area on Stillhouse Hollow.

Planting grasses and sedges is the last phase of the project. An incredible



amount of dirt work has been done to create this new beautiful area. There are 3 new creeks feeding the wetlands. Trees border both sides of each creek. Our Chapter planted hundreds of grasses and sedges in the last phase of this project. Master Naturalist, Richard McCarthy took a couple of photos of the area in early November to show us how it looks now. He said there is a contractor planting 7,000 bushes and large varieties of trees. Richard says the area is slowly improving.

Committee Reports

Historian Committee - We reviewed the year-books for other chapters at the annual convention and got ideas. Now we need some input. Zoe has made some wonderful photos of training, awards, etc. But, if any members have photos, newspaper clippings, or other information pertaining to a project they've been working on, we'd love to consider them for inclusion in the book. You may send to Joanne Millican <<millican3@aol.com>>, or mail to me at PO Box 1002, Temple, TX 76503, or bring a copy to the next MN meeting. If questions, please phone 254-984-2495. Thanks. Joanne Millican and Becky Denton, Co-chairs.

Central Texas Master Naturalist Class of 2010



Patty Barton



Debbie Blair



Barry Culwell



Louis Deiterman



Becky Denton



Terrie Hahn



Werner Hahn



*Lou Ann Hight



Janis Holmes



Sandy Horn



Dale Hughling



Charles Jones



Ray Kozusko



Jerry Lewis



Karen Lisowski



Linda Mahaffey



Richard McCarthy



Glenda McDorman



Darla Menking



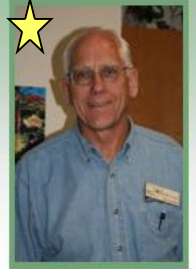
Joanne Millican



Glenda Turck



Ron Turck



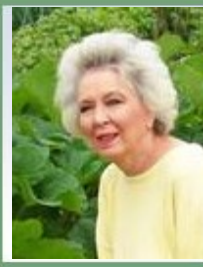
*Sidney VanLoh



Christa Venette



Marilyn Whitworth



Beverly Wickersham



Paula Wickham



Linda Young
Membership



Lou Ann Hight, the first to receive her certification.



Sidney VanLoh receives his certification.



*Diane Cooney



*Mary Ann Everett



*Gail Hughling



*Zoe Rascoe

- *Steering Comm
- Diane Cooney
- Mary Ann Everett
- Lou Ann Hight
- Gail Hughling
- Zoe Rascoe
- Sidney VanLoh

*** CERTIFIED**

Newsletter Mission Statement

"Our mission is to inform and educate Master Naturalist members and the general public about our local environment and resources, and what we, as caretakers, can do to protect them."

Board of Directors:

President, Mary Ann Everett

Vice President, Zoe Rascoe

Secretary, Lou Ann Hight

Treasurer, Gail Hughling

Web Master, Dale Hughling

Membership, Linda Young

Historian, Becky Denton

Historian, Joanne Milican

Host, Marilyn Whitworth

Newsletter, Gail Hughling

Newsletter Staff:

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Contributing Photographers, Zoe Rascoe, Becky Denton, Gail Hughling, Richard McCarthy, Liz Noffsinger of www.freedigitalphotos.net, TPWD, Fort Worth Texas Zoo-Turtle Watch Program, AmyButler-Greenfield.com, Maple of www.freedigitalphotos.net - Christmas design

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Wildlife Biologist, Texas Parks and Wildlife

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