

The Tracker

The Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter

April 2015

Inside This Issue

From the President's Pen	2
Whooping Crane Festival	3
Whoopers/Citizen Scientists	6
Mother Neff hosts students	6
Spotlight on Natives	7
Don't Prune Your Moths	8
Home and Garden Show	9
February/March Meetings	10
Meet Our New Class	11
Class Directory	13
Upcoming Events	14

Calendar at a Glance

- April 5, Hours due
- April 6, Salado workday
- April 9, Miller Spring workday
- April 14, General Meeting
- April 16, Mother Neff Workday
- April 30, Nolan Creek clean up
- May 1, Mother Neff and 4th graders. See Page 6
- See page 14 for more information.

Spring at Mother Neff

- Yvonne Eele

It's a new year at Mother Neff State Park and spring is popping out all over. There is a lot of New going on here though. The park just opened a new CCC campground with 20 sites that all have sewage, water and both 20 and 30 amp electrical hook ups. The campground has a brand new comfort station with showers, and an outdoor sink for doing dishes. The prairie trails run right through the campsite and when we are finished with it, the trail that CTMN is building will start right across from the comfort station. It is nice to see the prairie trails reopened after all the construction and to find that the plant and wildlife have come back after the upheaval.

In December, long time Superintendent Leah Huth retired and went back home to Bandera so she could help raise her Twin grand sons that were born Friday March 27. We enjoyed our time working with Leah but understand that family calls.



Continued on page 5...

Chapter Motto
**Earth Day,
Every Day**



From the President's Pen



Spring is Here!

The calendar finally rolled around to March 21st, the first full day of spring, and boy was I glad to see it come. This winter was a cold and wet one just like the Farmer's Almanac predicted. So now it's time to get outside and enjoy the beauty and renewal that spring brings—always an exciting time!

Spring brings with it a bushel basket full of opportunities to get outside and into nature with Master Naturalist projects. Our 2015 training class is just getting started and WOW! what an amazing and diverse group we have this year! I can't wait to get out on field trips and get down to learning about the world around us. Don't forget members-- if you come to a training session as a volunteer, you not only get volunteer hours, but you get a refresher on the topics being presented.

Now if you want to get your hands dirty...we can fix you up! Mother Neff trail work, Miller Springs workdays, Hike and Bike trail cleanups, water testing, and Bell County Museum workdays are all waiting for more volunteers to join in. If you like going west, we've got you covered there too at Colorado Bend State Park where Jackie Bakker and Lynn Williams work on several different projects. Let's don't forget Angler Education that is such a great program to take to schools and other events. Who doesn't love to fish? If you are a night owl, we even have the moth count where we set up lights to draw in moths. It's a little different perspective seeing nocturnal nature.

So if you can't find enough to do in your own yard or little corner of the world, check the opportunities calendar, line up some dates, grab your gloves and get out there! - Lynn



Having fun at Miller Springs



Tying knots with Kathy Cantu at an Angler Ed Dock.

Whooping Crane Festival

Speakers and Topics

By Marilyn Whitworth

The 20th annual Whooping Crane Festival was held February 20-22 in Port Aransas. All of the speakers and topics were related to conservation efforts to preserve natural resources and habitats for a wide variety of birds with an emphasis on Whooping Cranes. I am only going to comment on three of the speakers at this time.

The first topic was "Conservation: Because Life Is Better With Birds" by Cecilia Riley Executive Director of Gulf Coast Bird Observatory (GCBO), Lake Jackson, Texas.



GCBO protects birds and habitats around the Gulf of Mexico. Two thirds of all birds migrate from temperate breeding grounds to tropical grounds. Most North American coniferous forest birds are declining. Hazards to these birds are agriculture and industrial developments, urbanization and community sprawl, collisions with man-made structures, and exotic species introduction. The most hazardous condition is free ranging roaming cats. About two billion birds are killed annually by these cats. GCBO's focus area for protecting these birds are the coastal habitats in the US, Mexico and Cuba. GCBO has established a Site Partner Network and the Site Partners assist with purchasing vital migration habitat and setting up Hawk Watches in Texas and Cuba. GCBO's partnership

with TPWD and US Forest Wildlife Service work together to protect Gulf Coast prairies and for-

ests, remove invasive species and along with ten different countries try to acquire and preserve acres of cloud forests and rainforests for various species of birds. Some of the birds they are trying to protect are the Golden Cheeked Warbler that winters in Guatemala, the Cerulean Warbler that winters in the Peruvian highlands and the Frilled Croquette (a type of hummingbird) that winters in Brazil.

The second topic was "Tracking Whooping Cranes Across Texas-Citizen Science Contributions to a Recovery Project" by Mark Klym, TPWD.

Mark presented the Texas Whooper Watch Report containing data from 2012-2014 that was collected by Lee Ann Linam's Texas Whooper Watch Program. The report monitors sightings off the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. The

Whooping Cranes were using habitats much more accessible to land based observers. Many of the locations were close to homes especially around deer feeders. There were 85 individual sightings reported by trained volunteers or birders in 2012-2013 at Lake Granger on at least eleven birds. The data greatly enhanced the understanding of arrivals, movements, habitat use and departures.

Since 2014, Louisiana Department of Fish and Wildlife has been working to reintroduce one non-migratory flock of Whooping Cranes. They were introduced as juvenile birds. Seven juvenile birds were spotted near Lake Ray Hubbard in Dallas around April 8 and by early fall they had all returned to Louisiana.



Continued on next page...

Whooping Crane Festival...continued

Whooping Cranes were reported from eighteen counties by 5 means: formal reports, email communications, text bird reports, telephone and personal communication. Most adult bird sightings occurred in November and most juvenile bird sightings occurred in March. In October most birds were observed in a field or in flight. In November most birds were ob-

grow about an inch a day. They are kept close by an adult bird and also some person dressed in a whooping crane costume. Normally in the wild, two eggs are laid and one almost always dies. In captivity one chick at a time is raised by separating the two chicks from each other after hatching. The chicks are trained twenty minutes at a time. Work is also done to imprint the Ultralight plane on the birds. The people work on socializing the birds with each other. The chick leaves the nest at birth. If it grows too fast its legs will give out, so the birds are put in ponds to let them swim. When the birds are fifty days old they are transported to the White River Wildlife Area in Wisconsin. They spend three months in the summer there. High speed taxiing with the plane is done to teach the birds to use their wings and get used to the taxiing planes. The Ultralight plane guides the birds 1200 miles from

Wisconsin to St Marks National Wildlife Refuge in Florida. It is done at 50 mile intervals. The pilots try to keep the plane 100 yards in front of the birds which fly in a V pattern. There are three planes in the formation.

served in flight. In December all birds were observed in water and in January all were observed in fields. In February they were observed in fields and water. In March they were in fields and in April they were in water. There were nineteen Whooping Cranes observed at Lake Waco flying toward Ft. Hood in 2014. The birds return to Canada from April through October.

The third topic was "Operation Migration: "Ultralight Guided Migration of the Whooping Crane" by Joe Duff. The purpose of Operation Migration is to promote the conservation of migratory species through innovative research and education. The birds are hatched at the Patuxent National Wildlife Center in Maryland. When the chicks are first hatched they



Photos from: www.gcbo.org

www.TPWD.Texas.gov

www.OperationMigration.org

Mother Neff...continued

On January 23 the fancy new headquarters held it's grand opening. The new headquarters offers interpretive displays on the History of Mother Neff State Park and the Civilian Conservation Corp, as well as wildlife and plants you might find at the park. The new headquarters is a huge upgrade from the temporary metal building the staff had been using and it will help the staff to



be more efficient in fulfilling their mission: To manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources of Texas and to provide hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

On March 1 the new Superintendent started at Mother Neff. Melissa Chadwick has been with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department since 2009. She started her career with the department at Bentsen Rio Grande State Park World Birding Center and served there as a store manager, naturalist, and a biologist. While in the Rio Grande Valley she became a Texas Master Naturalist with the Rio Grande Valley Chapter. So she is familiar and supportive of our program.

Melissa graduated from Texas A & M University with a B.S. in Wildlife & Fisheries Sciences, Ecology. She is also a Project Wild instructor, Certified Interpretive Guide and a Texas Master Interpretive Guide. Her hobbies include birding, hiking with her husband and dog, fishing, gardening, and being a new mom. We are excited to start working with Melissa.

With all the new springing up, we don't want to forget about the natural spring that is also in the air. During the rains this spring, right at the new entrance to the park, Chorus frogs could be heard at all times of the day. Whenever our irrigation came on for the fragile new plants they would start singing as well. Between the birds and frogs, I have been able to listen to a symphony any time I wanted one.

And Wildflowers!!! At Mother Neff we might not have a whole pasture full of nothing but bluebonnets but we have a huge variety of flowers blooming right now. Bluebonnets, Paintbrush, and Wild Plum are scattered throughout the park with a lot of purples, yellows and whites mixed in. I don't know all the names but I love the little belly buster flowers coming up that make you stop and enjoy. Hiking any of the trails at Mother Neff is a great chance to relax and unwind. Just let your troubles float away with the breeze. Despite the much-needed rain, our trails are not too muddy and the rain has filled the Wash pond and allowed the canyon creek to flow.



The one-mile road that runs from the river bottom up to the newly developed part of the park, up on the prairie, is the most relaxing and beautiful parts of the state, in my opinion. Even many of us who are on it several times every day, slow down to enjoy it longer. The loop at the top, where the turn is to the new areas, is in full bloom right now, with a variety of wild-flowers.

It would be great if everyone took an opportunity to come out and visit the first State Park in Texas. You will have an opportunity to get to know, or reconnect, with three ecosystems that fill me with wonder daily. Come on out and help us finish the CTMN trail, or just take a hike, volunteer to pull up cabbage mustard for a few hours, or just bring a lunch and enjoy. Finish, or start your visit with a stop at the new Headquarters building and Isabella's store. Trust me, it will be a good day.

Photos by Yvonne Eele



Whoopers and Citizen Scientists

- Zoe Rascoe

Do you know? What is the tallest bird in North America; winters in Texas and flies 2400 miles to its summer home in Canada; began with a flock of 16 birds and through careful conservation efforts now numbers in the hundreds? The Whooping Crane! Affectionately known as Whoopers. CTMN members recently received training from TPWD's Mark Klym on how to recognize and report Whooper sightings to help scientists learn more about their whereabouts and behaviors.

Citizen Scientists - that's us!

Mark Klym taught a group how to identify Whooping

Cranes and enter information collected on the sighting into a TPWD database. Bell County is in the flyway for Whoopers and there is a group that hangs out at Granger Lake that is getting a lot of attention.



Mother Neff to Host 75 4th Graders

- Yvonne Eele

On **May 1** we are having about 75 fourth graders come out to Mother Neff as a reward for working so hard and doing so well on the tests. We are going to do three Safety stations. Camp Safety, Trail Safety and Water Safety. After the kids go through each of these stations they will eat lunch and have an opportunity to play a bit. We will be offering Backyard Bass and an Incredible Journey. I am open for more ideas of activities to go with these and I would appreciate any and all help our chapter can give. This is a Thursday morning, we would want to be set up by about 8:30 and the kids will be leaving around 1:00. The teacher has told me that these youngsters do not have the opportunity to do things like go to a state park much and that for many of them it will be their first such trip. I am interested in them having a lot of fun and bringing home so many good memories that it isn't their last trip. Please help out any way you can. Let me know if your interested.

Yvonne Eele, 254-247-7256, yeele@ymail.com

Spotlight on Natives



Add Natives - In Containers

- Lynn Fleming

Have you been wanting to add native plants to your landscape, but don't know where to start? An easy way to introduce natives is in containers. Container gardens are also a plus for apartment dwellers, those with limited yard space and folks with strict HOA rules.

Planting in containers also lets you arrange natives at will without having to uproot their sometimes delicate root systems. You can also mix and match them with more common plants for lovely displays during different times of the year. Little bluestem makes a beautiful vertical backdrop for lower growing winecups, blackfoot daisies or chocolate daisies.

There are a few things to consider for container gardening. Number one on the list is container size. Make sure that you choose one that is large enough and won't tip over if the plant is tall like a prairie grass. Since we live in Texas, don't forget that you will have to water – even the natives get thirsty!



Plant choice is next. You may have heard of the “Thrillers, Fillers, and Spillers” formula for

containers. It applies to natives as well. Choices of “thrillers” can include gaillardia (fire wheel), bee balm, bluebonnets, milkweed, mealy sage and many others. Mountain laurel with its grape Kool-Aid bloom fragrance can be a show stopper as well. “Fillers” can include many grass species such as little bluestem, bushy bluestem, sideoats grama (the State Grass of Texas), inland sea oats, and lower forbs such as chile pequin. Believe it or not, grasses are quite showy

with their blooms. They are small, but pack a punch for color. “Spillers” that work well are frog fruit, maid-



enhair or wood ferns, and evening primrose.

Here's an added bonus for natives: they attract pollinators! Butterflies, bees, hummingbirds will love you for planting what they need. Butterfly weed and mealy sage are irresistible and are often covered with various fliers looking for nectar and pollen.

So this spring and summer, give natives a try in your containers. They won't let you down.

Above, Winecups; right, Sideoats grama in bloom; left, Mealy blue sage.



Don't Prune Your Moths!

- Terrie Hahn

A couple of weeks ago, I was pruning my Salvia greggii and Lantana when I heard something moving around. After jumping back three feet, I carefully looked, expecting to see a snake or bird -something a bit bigger and heavier, but instead I saw this critter! I gently covered him up with brush to protect him from the birds while I got my camera. I got a shot off just before he took off into the trees.

This was a male Polyphemus Moth, *Antheraea polyphemus*. They have prominent, owl-like eye spots and about a 5 1/2 inch wingspan. They protect themselves using mimicry. "Besides looking like dead leaves or bark when their wings are folded, these moths will open their wings suddenly, revealing the large eyespots, (which is exactly what this guy did and why I jumped back 3 feet!) These eyespots mimic an owl's eyes, and can surprise a predator, such as a squirrel or bird. You can tell a male adult moth from a female by its antennae. The male has large, feathery antennae which help it detect the female's scent (pheromones)," according to www.fcps.edu

After mating, the female lays 3 to 5 eggs on the underside of a leaf that the caterpillars will be able to munch on when they hatch from their eggs. According to www.texasbutterflyranch.com, "Polyphemus change dramatically during the caterpillar cycle and in their final instar become a fantastic three or four inch green caterpillar with silver and/or red spots on the side. Like many moths, these members of the Saturnid, or silk moth family, spend most of their life as caterpillars, eating up to 86,000 times their body weight at emergence in just two months. Once they become a moth, however, their vestigial mouth parts make eating impossible. Basically, their mouths don't work anymore. Their sole focus as a moth is to reproduce."

Host plants include many trees and shrubs nationwide. The caterpillar and adult moth are vulnerable to predators,

including birds, small mammals, and predatory insects.

If it is late Summer or early Fall, the pupa inside the cocoon will overwinter and emerge the following spring. Some cocoons stay stuck to a tree branch all winter. Others fall to the ground when the leaves fall.

So, let's be careful out there with our clippers!



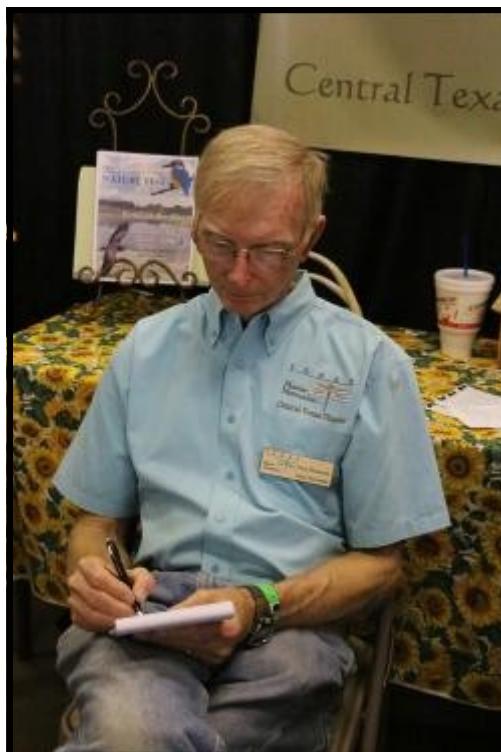
Photos by Mona Miller, Lacy L. Hyche, Auburn University and Terrie Hahn

Thanks to Texas Butterfly Ranch and Study of Northern Virginia Ecology for Fairfax County Public Schools.



CTMN's Busy at Home and Garden Show

- Zoe Rascoe



Left: Dale prepares talking points for Zoe's live radio interview; Above: Lynn, Yvonne,

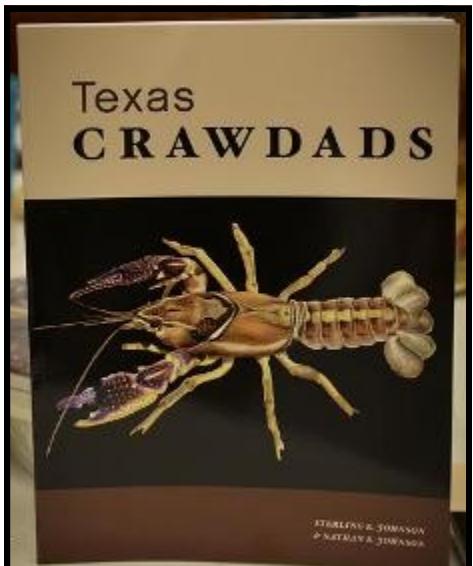
Zoe, Dale and Don are ready for the doors to open; Right: Business was brisk! Very Brisk! Laminated Nature Guides are always a hot seller; Below: Yvonne, Mary Ann, Carolyn, Lynn and Shirley man the booth.



February and March CTMN Meetings

- Photos by Joe Dorn

Crawdads came to the February CTMN meeting! Crawdad man, Ken Johnson spoke with us and brought some friends for us to look at. Sue Valdez, below, is caught dancing the crawdad shuffle!



Zoe Rascoe and Rehanon Pampell received their recertification pins and Rehanon received her 250 hour milestone dragonfly pin. Right: Dale Hughling and Rehanon work on the new sign in system.



Meet Our New Class of Interns

- Yvonne Ele

We would like to offer a big welcome to the 2015 class of Central Texas Master Naturalists and to help introduce them here is a little about each one.

Nina Archambeault was born in England and raised in Brazil. She is a Master Gardener and has done a lot outdoors. She joined us because she wants to learn more about nature.

Rene' Berkhoudt recently retired as the Manager of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in Utah. He also worked at the New Mexico Museum of Natural History. He has done a lot of computer work and is set to assist Dale. Rene' is interested in wildlife, herpetology, paleontology, and archeology of the southwest.

Sarah Byrd is a registered Horticultural therapist. She has educational experience with special needs children and adults. Sarah has a truck and is interested in habitat restoration. She has also been a facilitator in teambuilding and given seminars. Sarah has been an editor for a newsletter.

Len Cilliers gets the award for coming the furthest to join us. He was born in South Africa and raised in Australia. His training is in IT and currently trades on the stock market. He is interested in photography and nature walks. Len has 10 acres off 195 that he could offer for training or nature walks.

Traci Fritz is a Hospice nurse that is very excited about the course and getting outside. She has her own chainsaw and knows how to use it. Traci's family owns about 100 acres by Kempner with deer, wild hog, owls and Juniper, on the edge of hill country. She is interested in native trees and wild hog containment.

Anita Hardin is a Master Gardener and child care provider. She enjoys reading and gardening.

Kelly Kemp is a mom of 2 boys and 2 girls. She is a Girl Scout Leader and a bookkeeper. Kelly is interested in photography and has worked a lot of fund-raisers. She has a couple of Kayaks and loves to camp. She is interested in learning more about birds, insects and native plants.

Wade Matthews is a retired CPA. He is interested in birds, plants and deer. I believe he has a bird sanctuary that he is willing to share for training opportunities. Wade is very interested in birds.

Nicole Norelli worked with us on Nature Fest last year. She is also a co-chair of the Air element this year. She comes to us by way of the Audubon Society and the American Bird Conservancy. Nicole is a Field Biologist that specializes in shore bird research. She now works at Blackland Research Center. She is interested in kayaking, hiking, and rock climbing. Nicole is also interested in entomology, water, and doing outreach for all ages.

Violet Okeson grew up on a farm and appreciates the outdoors. She likes teaching others and camping. Violet is a Master Gardener and a rainwater harvesting specialist. She is interested in learning more about geology, archeology, and forestry.

Shawn Perry has done computer networking and wildlife conservation. He is a former Park ranger for the Corps of Engineers, and a Boy Scout Trainer. He is interested in geology, hydrology and archeology.

Tom Salmi comes to us from Euless. He wants to be a part of our chapter because he is very interested in this area and especially the blackland prairie. Tom is a certified interpretive guide and a toastmaster. He is interested in Stream Team. He wants to learn more about dendrology and riparian areas.

Mary Settle is a neo-natal nurse practitioner. She likes birding, biking, and star gazing. Mary would like to learn more about ecology.

Torry Smith works at the Garden Center in Lowe's. She owned a nursery in upstate New York and South

Continued on next page...

Meet Our New Class...continued

Carolina. Torry does public speaking, photography, camping and fishing. She is interested in water programs and wildflowers.

Lorra Tindell-Gongora is a former plant manager and operations manager. She is interested in natural landscapes.

Jeannie Wilson has been trained in wetlands, barrier islands, and marine meteorology. Jeannie is a member of the Southern Association of Marine Education and the next president of the Nan Brown Garden Club.

Ed Winder is the husband of CTMN member Marlene Maciborski. He was an MP for 18 years. Ed likes archaeology and motorcycles. He is very mechanically inclined and grew up in a farming community. He spent 10 years as a Central American Jungle expert.

Andreas Wooten is currently active military but is retiring soon. He is a composter and has a rocket bat house in his yard. He is also a fly fisherman and also a bass fisherman. He likes woodworking. Andreas is interested in Angler Ed and Woodland Safety.

It looks like a great class once again. We can always use a few helpers at the sessions, and remember that it counts toward your volunteer time. Come join the class for one or more sessions and get to know the new class.



And the Fun Begins!!!

The first day of classes on March 31st included Entomology taught by Wizzie Brown - entomologist with AgriLife Extension.



2015 Class

Our Class Directory



Central Texas Chapter



Anita Hardin



Andreas Wooten



Ed Winder



Jeannie Wilson



Kelly Kemp



Len Cilliers



Lorra Tindell-Gongora



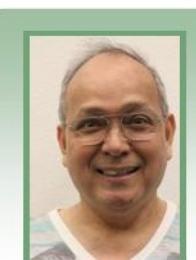
Mary Settle



Nicole Norelli



Nina Archambeault



Rene Berkhoudt



Sarah Byrd



Shawn Perry



Tom Salmi



Torry Smith



Tracy Fritz



Violet Okeson



Wade Matthews



Upcoming Events

- Yvonne Eele

April 5, Hours are due. Please send them to ctmn.bell@gmail.com

April 6, 8:00 -12:00 (**V**) Salado Work Day meet at the Salado Sculpture Garden and go from there.
Contact Lyna Pitts lyna.pitts@gmail.com

April 7, 8:00-3:00 (**V**) Week 2 of CTMN Certification Training at Fort Hood
Contact MaryAnn Everett at everett.maryann4@gmail.com

April 9, 8:00-12:00 (**V**) Miller Springs Workday at Miller Springs Nature Preserve
Contact MaryAnn Everett at everett.maryann4@gmail.com

April 13, 9:00-12:00 (**AT**) Entomology and Hydrology at Clearwater underground water district. Please contact Yvonne if you plan on attending at yeele@ymail.com

April 14, 6:00-8:00 (AT) General Membership meeting Shore birds with Nicole Norelli
Contact Jerry Lewis lewis1@hot.rr.com

April 16, 9:00-1:00 (**V**) Mother Neff Workday. Come on out and help us finish our trail. Plenty of work for all.
Contact Yvonne Eele at yeele@ymail.com

April 21, 8:30-3:30 (**V**) Week 3 of CTMN Certification Training at Blackland Research Center.
Contact MaryAnn Everett at everett.maryann4@gmail.com

April 28, 8:30-3:30 (**V**) Week 4 of CTMN Certification Training at Dalton Merz Ranch
Contact MaryAnn Everett at everett.maryann4@gmail.com

April 30, 8:00-11:00 (**V**) Nolan Creek Hike and Bike Trail Clean Up. Meet at Confederate Park.
Contact MaryAnn Everett at everett.maryann4@gmail.com

October 10, 11:00-5:00 (**V**) Nature Fest 2015. Lots of opportunities. lynn.fleming99@gmail.com

October 23-25 (**AT**) & (**V**) State Conference at Horse shoe bay. More information as it is released or check the chapter website

TPWD ANGLER ED CERTIFICATION WORKSHOP

Are you interested in sharing the joy of fishing with youth and adults in your community?

Workshop taught by Angler Education Instructor Keira Quam. **April 11th 2015**, 9 am to 2 pm. Event is FREE but pre-registration is REQUIRED. To sign up, email Melissa Mullins melissa_mullins@baylor.edu or call (254) 710-2382

EVENT DETAILS WILL BE PROVIDED TO REGISTRANTS

Entomology Specialist Course

Registration for the 2015 Master Volunteer Entomology Specialist (MVES) training (**September 28 – October 2, 2015**) is now open for those who are presently Master Gardeners or Master Naturalists. It will be held at the Tom Leroy Education Center located at the Montgomery County Texas A&M AgriLife Extension office, Conroe, TX. Go to: <http://agrilife.org/insectspecialist/>?p=285

V Approved for Volunteer Hours

AT Approved for Advanced Training

MA Must Apply for approval of hours

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."

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Newsletter Staff

Editor: Terrie Hahn

Proofreader: Werner Hahn

Contributing Writers: Lynn Fleming, Zoe Rascoe, Marilyn Whitworth, Yvonne Eele, Terrie Hahn

Contributing Photographers: Joe Dorn, Zoe Rascoe, Joe Dorn, Terrie Hahn

Please send any news of events, articles or photos of what you're doing or what's going on in your yard or area to:

Terrie Hahn at moompie45@hotmail.com

Chapter Advisors:

Lyle Zoeller,
County Extension Agent, Natural Resources

Derrick Wolter,
Wildlife Biologist, Texas Parks and Wildlife

