

# The Tracker

The Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter

February 2016

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Above: the new Birding Theater at Mother Neff; right: Ranger Yvonne Eele tells the Indian history at the cave.

Photos by Zoe and Terry Rascoe.

## Calendar at a Glance

February 5, hours due

February 6, Adv. Stream Team Training

February 9, 6:00 p.m. General Meeting

February 19-20, Mother Earth Fair

February 26-28, Home & Garden

March 1, 3 p.m. BOD meeting, Extension Center

## Start a New Tradition: "First Day Hike" Fun!

- Zoe Rascoe

Surely you know, because we send out lots of announcements, that many State Parks host a "First Day Hike" on January 1<sup>st</sup> each year. Our closest options, Colorado Bend State Park and Mother Neff State Park, both hosted First Day Hikes for a chilly start to the new year. Many people arrived with children and/or dogs in tow bundled up against the cold wind. They were rewarded with a nice trail hike led by a Park Ranger who highlighted geological features, historical sites, plants and the beautiful Central Texas landscape. My husband and I have made a First Day Hike at Mother Neff part of our New Year's Day activities. It is good exercise (after a night of heavy snacking) in one of our favorite places - outdoors! - and



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*Chapter Motto*

**Earth Day,  
Every Day**



# From the President's Pen

At the State MN Conference this year, I signed up for a course called Indian Marker Trees given by Steve Houser, Director of the Texas Historic Tree Coalition. I had been reading a little about these trees and I hoped to learn more.

Indian Marker Trees were essentially road signs to the American Indian in their travels across the countryside. They pointed the way to significant areas such as salty areas, flint, a good water source or river crossing or other important natural features. The trees are also known as thong trees or trail trees. A

So why are marker trees so important? Well, as many have stated, "Only the rocks live forever." They are antiquities and in areas that are prime for development. Several have been identified in the DFW metro mess, and how endangered are natural areas in that section of the woods! Steve Houser states that "Indian marker trees are living witnesses to the history of a past civilization and their incredible way of life. These trees are a significant part of our nation's cultural heritage and a gift to our current society..... their life expectancy is limited."



"Triplets" From the internet.

Indian marker trees have to be at least 145-200 years old, are always a native tree species known to be long lived. The trees often have sharp bends in the trunk, called a "hip", created where the tree was bent over and secured. The bends are normally no higher than a person could have created from standing on the ground. Many trees have a knob at the end of the trunk where the tree turns back to the sky. This is the "nose" of the tree and it points the way to whatever feature is being marked. According to Houser, the noses may have had certain shapes for different Indian Nations. To be able to manipulate trees in this manner, Native Americans had to have an amazing knowledge of trees and their vascular systems.

young sapling tree would be bent over and held down in that position most of its young life. The trees were thought to be tied with animal hide thongs (therefore the name thong tree) or rope made from natural materials such as grape vines.

If you've never heard of Indian marker trees, you are not alone. Native Americans were not fond of explaining the details of their way of life when white settlers started coming to their lands especially when all that they loved and lived on was being destroyed. Their way of life was to have great respect for the things that nature provided. They knew that they only inhabited the earth and did not own it.

In certain areas of the country, marker trees are found in sets of two or three. Perhaps the Indians wanted to make sure that at least one marker survived so they created a group instead of just one tree. These groupings make it difficult for skeptics to dismiss the Indians work and say that nature alone created these trees.

While listening to Steve Houser's presentation, I got to wondering about a tree on one of our ranches in Falls County that might fit some of the features of an Indian marker tree. It is a cedar elm located close to an intermittent creek with a diameter of seven feet and two inches. The arm of the tree extends six feet

Continued on next page...

## President's Pen...continued

out before turning to the sky and there is a bulbous portion on the end of the arm. Sounds promising right?

I took photos and submitted an Indian marker tree application to the Texas Historic Tree Coalition and they quickly responded back to me with the process steps. The research of Native American activity in the area was a given. Native Americans inhabited all of the area in Central Texas and arrowheads have been found on most every creek. Gault is even doing some digging on Big Elm Creek just about a mile from our house.

The next question was perplexing though. What exactly was the tree pointing to if it really was a marker tree? We looked at aerial maps over and over and plotted the compass settings to see if there was some significance to the direction. The general direction of the tree points toward the Leon River approximately in the Mother Neff State Park area, but nothing that jumped out as a significant natural feature.

After scratching our heads, we went back and looked at the tree and surrounding trees. There are several



very large oaks close by and some other cedar elms. The tree in question had other knobs and stubby limbs further up the trunk, a wound from many years ago was apparent on one side of the trunk and the limb grew out of the main trunk instead of being the main trunk. Other cedar elms close by had knobs and stumpy



My son, Augustus, is 6' 2" for scale.

limbs as well. So the evidence was leading to nature and not man's intervention on the unique growth of this tree.

I have given up on the idea that this is an Indian Marker Tree. It was kind of like wanting to win the lottery. You certainly hope that it will happen, but the odds are not very high. Whether this tree is a marker or not, there is no doubt that it has seen Indian activity pass by and it will probably still be alive long after I am gone too. - Lynn

This tree looks similar. Maybe it is.... From the internet.

**CHECK US OUT ON FACEBOOK!**

<https://www.facebook.com/Central-Texas-Chapter-Texas-Master-Naturalists-116648718373317/timeline/>

# Our New Microscope

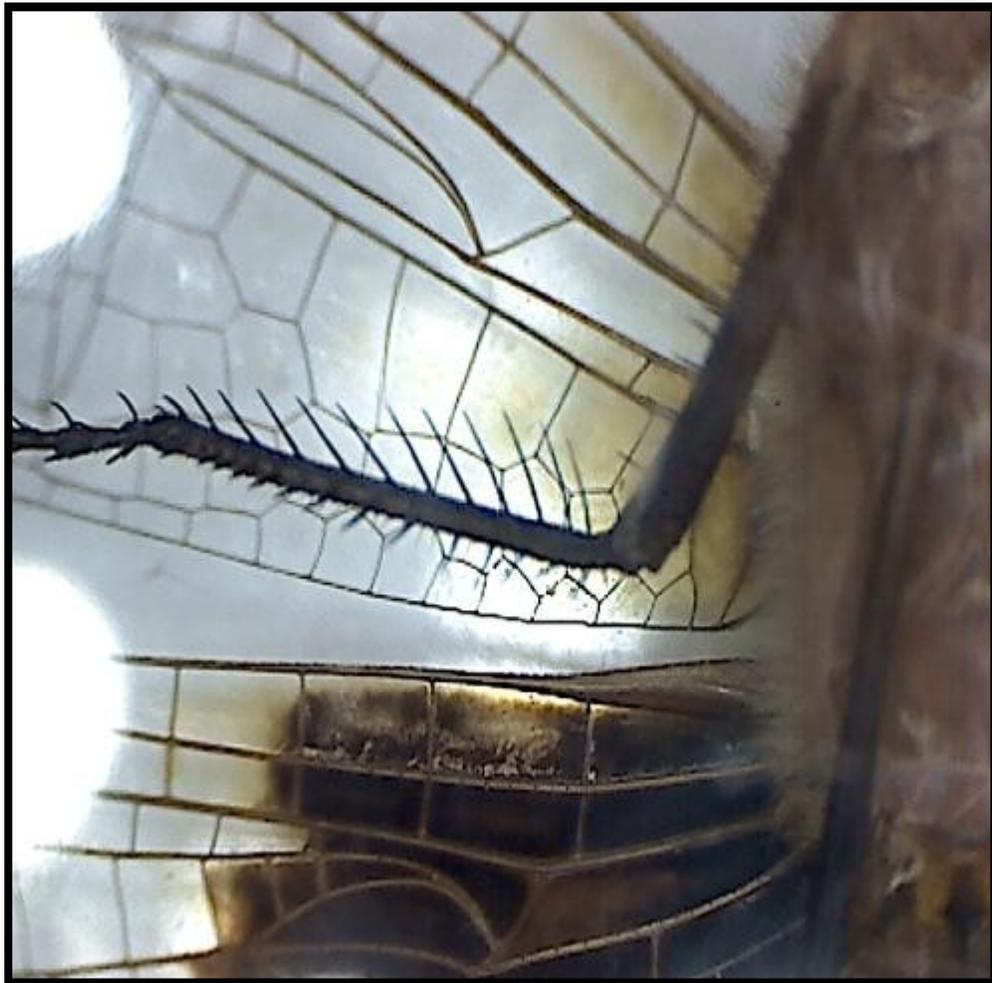
- Richard McCarthy

At the Texas Master Naturalist State Conference, all chapters received a digital microscope for use in our projects and programs. The microscope plugs into a computer by USB and puts the image on the screen. Magnification is up to 200x. It is kept in Lynn's office. If you are interested in using the microscope, please let Lynn know.

The new microscope is very helpful for working with macroinvertebrates.

These photos show samples of the fine detail acquired. The top photo is a Dragonfly wing and foreleg; The bottom photo is the head of a Walking Stick.

Anyone studying the macro world will enjoy using this equipment to have a closer view of the mysteries in the macro world.



Photos by Richard McCarthy

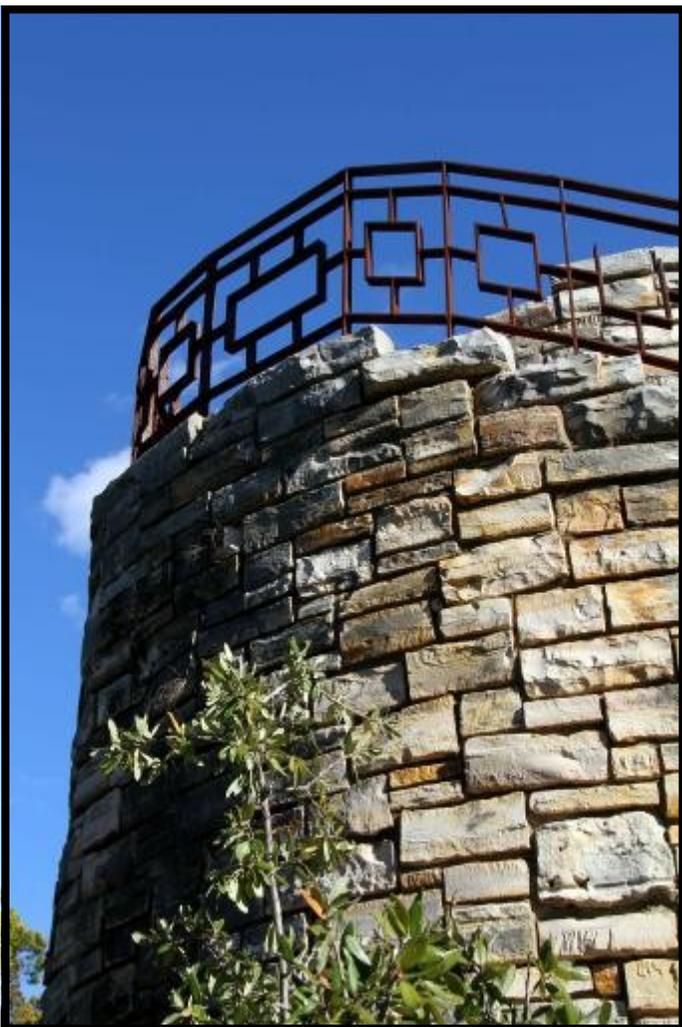
# First Day Hike

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each year we find friends among the participants so get to walk and talk as the long line of people and pets wind through the woodland and prairie trails. A treat for me was the newly constructed bird watching blind - no need to hide in a bush! This year



Yvonne Eele was the tour guide for our group (the Long Hike option). It's fun to hear the oo's and ah's from first time visitors when they see and hear about the Wash Pond, the view from the Rock Tower and imagine Indians taking shelter in the cave. If you haven't been to Mother Neff State Park, put it on your To Do List. Pack a picnic lunch, grab your binoculars and get outdoors. It will be time well-spent.



Left: Rock Tower; above: Wash Pond was full.

Photos by Zoe and Terry Rascoe

# Nolan Creek Watershed Partnership Meeting

- Marilyn Whitworth

On Wednesday, January 20, 2016 there was a Nolan Creek Stakeholders Meeting held in Harker Heights. The meeting was conducted by Anne McFarland and Leah Taylor representatives of the Texas Institute for Applied Environmental Research (TIAER). It was also sponsored by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ).

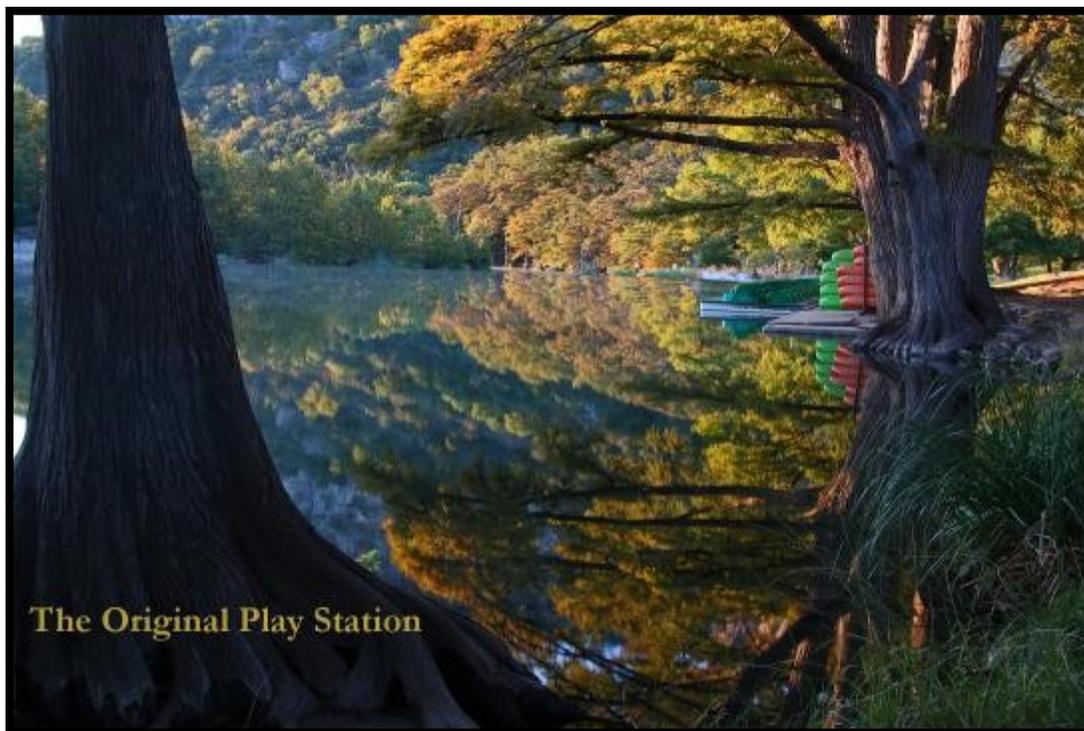
The meeting was divided into three main parts. The first part covered the characterization plan project that studied Nolan Creek impairment areas from September 2012 to February 2016. Areas of the creek identified as impaired included South Nolan Creek, from Liberty Ditch in the Killeen area to the creek's confluence of North Nolan Creek, and the overall creek, and Little Nolan Creek. The areas were designated impaired due to elevated bacteria concentrations. The bacteria levels exceeded the state's standards for "primary contact" which are recreational activities with a risk of ingesting the water such as swimming. Currently the creek is rated for "secondary contact" recreational activities such as boating and fish-

ing. Potential sources of bacteria include "point" source from sanitary sewer overflow or "non-point" sources from septic tanks, storm water and rainfall run-off, pets, residential and industrial waste, livestock and wildlife. The bacteria contribution is mostly a "non-point" source problem.

The second part covered an information and education outreach strategy for the stakeholders of the Nolan Creek Watershed. A stakeholder is a landowner, citizen group, local representative, local government agencies, or anybody that has a real investment or involvement with Nolan Creek.

The third part covered the Next Step which is to develop a Watershed Protection Plan (WPP). Development of the WPP would start in March 2016 and be funded for completion until November 2018. During development of the plan, there would be a continuation of educational outreaches with stakeholders and evaluations of regional, agricultural, and urban programs. The desire is to assemble committees to assist in the WPP which would be approved by stakeholders, TCEQ and EPA. There was discussion of the elements of a WPP.

Past reports are available electronically at <http://www.killeentexas.gov/nolancreekwatershed> and hard copies of the reports are available upon request from [mcfarla@tiaer.tarleton.edu](mailto:mcfarla@tiaer.tarleton.edu) or [ltaylor@tiaer.tarleton.edu](mailto:ltaylor@tiaer.tarleton.edu)



The Original Play Station

## The Original Play Station

Photo by Zoe Rascoe

# Grants Offered for Monarch Habitat Gardens

- Cathy Downs of NPSOT

*This article is reprinted with permission, from the NPSOT website.*

The Native Plant Society of Texas is kicking off its fourth year of the Bring Back the Monarchs to Texas Small Grants Program. Over 112 Monarch demonstration gardens or Monarch Waystations have received funding from the program since the spring of 2013.

Along with Monarch Watch, the US Fish and Wildlife Service has joined us as a partner this year!

their wintering grounds in Mexico. The availability of native milkweed host plants and associated nectar plants, essential for maintaining Monarch populations, have declined throughout Texas. Herbicides, herbicide resistant crops, frequent mowing of roadsides, parks and open areas, pesticides and continued drought have all affected monarchs and the plants they depend on for successful journeys to and from Mexico.

The purpose of this program is to raise public awareness for Monarch conservation, to produce and distribute native milkweeds and nectar plants that are essential to reproduction by Monarch butterflies, and to restore Monarch habitats through the Texas migration flyway.

For more information contact Cathy Downs at [mzdowns@hctc.net](mailto:mzdowns@hctc.net).



Photo from NPSOT website.

Small financial awards in the amounts of \$50.00 to \$400.00 will be made available to public sites including schools, nature centers, and other organizations for native plants to create demonstration gardens or "Monarch Waystations" with habitat for migrating Monarchs and other native pollinator species. Applications to the Grant Committee must be made by Feb 15 and successful grant proposals will be awarded by March 1. The grant application process and eligibility criteria is described on the Native Plant Society of Texas website at <http://npsot.org/wp/monarchs/>.

Texas provides important breeding habitat as well as migratory habitat as the Monarchs travel to and from

# Harker Heights Seed Swap

- Zoe Rascoe

A sunny winter day is a good time for a community Seed Swap. It's when people are anticipating warmer weather and planning their spring gardens. The City of Harker Heights



hosted their annual Winter Seed Swap in January and CTMN

was once again invited to participate. Gail Hughling, Dale Hughling, Marilyn Whitworth, Richard McCarthy, Jacki Bakker, Lynn Williams, Zoe Rascoe and Ben Clement (a new 2016 MN Trainee!) set up a booth full of goodies that was hard for visitors to pass by. The Hughlings brought a big basket of winter vegetables (with a scary gynomorous grasshopper to explain the holes in the cabbage leaves) and we had Nature Guides for sale, biofacts for teaching - a skull (animal variety, if you were wondering), bones, tortoise shell,



and fossils - Marilyn and Richard provided a kids activity about water (of course!), we had past issues of nature magazines and brochures free to a good home, we offered packets of native prairie grasses for the seed swap part of the Seed Swap and Zoe tried to snag recruits for the upcoming Spring Training Class. A reporter from the Harker Heights Evening Star kindly covered Master Naturalists in her article and mentioned the only way to become a Master Naturalist: to take the Training Class. She helped spread the news about the 2016 Class - won't you help do that too?!



# Christmas Party and Awards!

- Zoe Rascoe

Lyna Pitts receives her 500 hour milestone pin; Shirley Watts, Mary Odom and Jerry Lewis receive their recertification pins. Below: Getting ready to elect a new vice-president (Rene Berkhoudt) and secretary (Sarah Byrd) and see what we may have won in the auction!



# Applications Now Being Accepted

- Mary Ann Everett

The time has arrived for the 2016 Spring Master Naturalist training, and applications are being accepted. If you know of anyone who may be interested, be sure to let them know about the spring classes. Our training occurs during the spring, so if



they miss this opportunity, it will be another year before it happens again. If you need flyers to put in special places, please let us know. We want to spread the word. Orientation is on the evening of Tuesday, March 22, with classes starting the following Tuesday, March 29. The classes are running on Tuesday evenings with some Saturday field trips, ending on Saturday, June 18.

Please mark your calendars and join us for orientation to meet and encourage prospective members that evening. Also think about coming to any of the training classes, as this encourages those attending while lending a helpful hand. Think back when you were attending, and how nice it was to meet and learn to know new people.





**Become a  
TEXAS  
MASTER  
NATURALIST**

**2016 Training Class**  
**March 22nd – June 18th**  
**Tues Evenings & Sat Field Trips**



Applications  
Now  
Available

For information on the  
Central Texas Master  
Naturalist Program contact:

Zoe Rascoe	254-913-1013
Mary Ann Everett	254-721-0931
Lynn Fleming	254-760-4739



 [txmn.org/centraltexas](http://txmn.org/centraltexas)

That encourages them to volunteer if there is someone they know to work with. In addition, you could become a mentor for a trainee. Please let Yvonne Eele know you are interested and she will get you matched up with just the right trainee.

The complete schedule with dates and locations is on our website under 'New Class'.

Now your job is to spread the word. Let's get going!

Ornithology class photo by Joe Dorn; Wetlands photo by Zoe Rascoe.

# On the Horizon

## 2016 SPRING Wetland Field Trip Dates

This is a list of Field Trips scheduled to Waco Wetlands from February to the beginning of April. There is always a need for volunteers to help keep things running smoothly. If you are interested in volunteering at the Wetlands, please contact Nora Schel at [noras@wacotx.gov](mailto:noras@wacotx.gov). **V**

Feb. 27 Saturday El Camino Real Master Naturalist Training 9:30 a – 1:30 p ?

March 12 Saturday Dinosaur Valley State Park-Spring Wingding Event 8 a – 5 p ?

March 15 Tuesday Waco ISD 9:30 a – 12 noon, 1st. – 3rd graders

March 16 Wednesday Waco ISD 9:30 a – 12 noon ?

March 17 Thursday Waco ISD 9:30 a – 12 noon ?

March 18 Friday Waco ISD 9:30 a – 12 noon ?

March 23 Wednesday Bell's Hill Elem. 9 a – 12 noon, 40 5th graders

March 24 Thursday Bell's Hill Elem. 9 a – 12 noon, 40 5th graders

March 30 Wednesday St. Mary's Catholic School 9 a – 12 noon, 13 7th graders

April 1 Friday Montessori School of Waco 12:30 – 2 p, 45 kindergarteners

April 5 Tuesday Cedar Ridge Elem. 9 a- 12:30 p, 95 4th graders

April 5 Tuesday McLennan Community College 1:30 – 3:30 p, 20 -30

April 7 Thursday Lake Air Montessori 9 a – 12:30 p, 54 5th graders

## Home and Garden Show

- Zoe Rascoe

This is our 7th Home Show to recruit for our Spring Training Class and give thousands of Central Texans a chance to learn just what it is that Master Naturalists do. This is a 2 ½ day event and we often are given extra booth space so it takes about 25 volunteers to cover all the shifts. If you are available to help, we could really use you! We need help setting up, smiling faces, people to hand out brochures, restock and sell our nature guides and coasters and animal houses and just tell inquiring minds what you enjoy about being a Master Naturalist. We will have 2 hour

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

shifts from  
Friday evening

until Sunday afternoon. If you can help for even one shift, please email Zoe at [trascoc@hot.rr.com](mailto:trascoc@hot.rr.com) Great chance to bank up volunteer hours! **V**



# On the Horizon

## Advanced Stream Team Training

Advanced Stream Team Training will be conducted **February 6, 2016**, at the Waco Wetlands, 1752 Eichelberger Crossing, starting at 9:00 and ending around 3:30. This training is open to anyone who has completed the Basic Stream Team Training. The training will prepare students to conduct tests and report findings for:

Turbidity, Orthophosphates, Nitrate-Nitrogen, E-Coli, and Stream Flow.

A portion of the training will be conducted outside so dress for the weather. Students should bring their lunches. There will be a 30 minute lunch break, however the remoteness of the Wetlands preclude leaving for lunch.

Lite snacks, water and coffee will be provided.

Space is limited to 20 students, please pre-register to ensure your space.

Thanks for your interest in water quality. **AT**

**Richard G. McCarthy**, Coordinator

[RGM3372010@live.com](mailto:RGM3372010@live.com)

## Mother Earth News Fair

- **Gail Hughling**

Check out the MOTHER EARTH NEWS FAIR ON THE WEB - <http://www.motherearthnewsfair.com/texas/schedule/>.

Mother Earth News Fair is coming to the Expo Center in Belton, **February 19 and 20**. This is the first time the fair has been in Texas. They only hold 7 fairs each year. The event will have over 150 workshops plus booths and numerous on-stage speakers. Our Master Naturalist Chapter is honored to have a booth at the fair.

At our booth we will be helping children play the Incredible Journey Game about the water cycle. We will

also have a tasteful collection of local natural wonders such as rocks, bones and plants. Our new proof curriculum will be on display. Brochures and applications for the 2016 class will also be available. We will not be selling anything at our booth. If you are interested in volunteering during the event, contact Gail Hughling at [gailhughling@aol.com](mailto:gailhughling@aol.com) or call 254-702-0980. **V**

## Llano Earth Art Fest

The Llano Earth Art Fest is **March 11-13**. Come join us at Texas' most unique event- featuring art, music, food, crafts, and lots of rocks. Held on the banks of the Llano River- one block from Llano's historic downtown- the Llano Earth Art Fest (LEAF) is an interactive experience for young and old alike. Watch internationally renowned rock-artists defy gravity with amazingly balanced sculptures. Listen to great musicians fill the park with song. Try your hand at rock balancing or see if you've got what it takes to compete in the 2016 World Rock Stacking Competition. For kids there are plenty of activities, including a climbing wall, face painting, and more. Adults can enjoy a cold beer while taking part in workshops or just viewing the art.

## New Class Mentors Needed

- **Yvonne Eele**

We are again approaching the exciting time when we are about to start a new training class. We are looking for folks that would be willing to mentor one of the new trainees. Please let me know as soon as you can if you would be willing to be a mentor to help one of the new trainees or reach out to me if you have any questions. We are hoping to have a good class and mentors help keep things working well for the trainees and help them along with information and support.

Please contact me as soon as you can. **V**

**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."*

### **Board of Directors**

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**Proofreader:** Werner Hahn

**Contributing Writers and Photographers:** Zoe Rascoe, Terry Rascoe, Lynn Fleming, Marilyn Whitworth, Richard McCarthy, Gail Hughling, Mary Ann Everett, Yvonne Eele, Cathy Downs, Joe Dorn

**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](mailto:moompie45@hotmail.com)**

### **The Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter:**

Holds member meetings the 2nd Tuesday of February, April, June, August, October and December at 6 p.m. at the Belton Church of Christ at 3003 N. Main. Location exceptions are in December and June.

**PACE** meetings are at the Church location at 6 p.m. the 2nd Tuesday of January, March, May, July, September and November. **THE PUBLIC IS WELCOME AT ALL OF OUR MEETINGS.**

**Programs      Activities      Committees      Everything else**

The Board of Directors meet the 1st Tuesday of January, March, May, July, September and November at 3 p.m. in the Board Room at the Agrilife Extension Center at 1605 Main in Belton.