

The Tracker



The Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter February 2018

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Central Texas Fish Tales

-Vanisse Higginbotham

They say the best time to catch largemouth bass in Central Texas is in March.

Why March? Well, that's when the water starts to warm up, and the bass will naturally seek warm water so the eggs they are carrying will mature enough to spawn, and as they migrate to the shallows, they get into a zone where anglers can catch them. The move starts soon after the first of the year, but the bigger fish come to the shallows later, with the peak coming in March.

With that in mind what could be better than a timely fish story? I don't know if it's true but I believe my Grandpa was the best fishing teacher that ever lived... He took me fishing for the first time when I was just three years old out at Fuller's Pond. By the time I was five he told me I could fish better than any man he knew! (Postscript: he may or may not have been telling the truth)

He lived out on Stillhouse Lake and had a path cut down to a beach where we would spend just about every weekend.

I loved spending time with him. He used to say the more stink the bait had the bigger the catfish you would catch. (Boy could he make some stinky bait). In addition to making stinky bait, he taught how to attach my hook, and he taught me about what to use for bait and the best times to fish.



Calendar at a Glance

February 1, hours due.

February 13, 6-8 pm, General Membership Meeting (AT)

February 14, Cut-off Date for all Calendar Year 2017 volunteer hours in VMS

February 17-18, Mother Earth News Fair—Belton Expo Center

February 23-25, Temple Home and Garden Show —Belton Expo Center

Chapter Motto

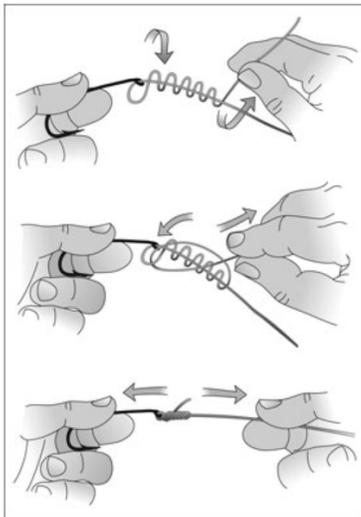
**Earth Day,
Every Day**





The largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*) is a freshwater gamefish in the sunfish family and is native to North America. It is also known by a variety of regional names, such as the widemouth bass and big-mouth bass. The juvenile largemouth bass consumes mostly small bait fish, scuds, small shrimp, and insects. Adult largemouth bass are formidable predators and consume smaller fish, snails, crayfish, frogs, salamanders and snakes. They have even been reported to take small water birds, mammals, and baby alligators. In larger reservoirs and lakes, adult bass occupy deeper water than younger fish, and shift to a diet consisting almost entirely of smaller fish like shad, yellow perch, ciscoes, shiners, and sunfish. It also consumes younger members of

larger fish species, such as pike, catfish, trout, walleye, white bass, striped bass, and even smaller largemouth bass. Prey items can be as large as 50% of the bass's body length or larger.

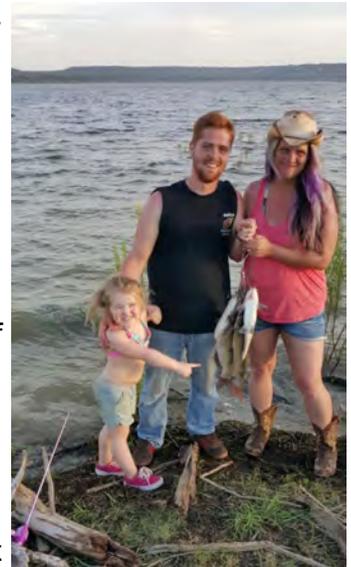


Over the last 40 years I still fish the way Grandpa taught me and I use all types of bait depending on what I want to catch (and eat). Bass naturally feed on minnows and insects making live baits irresistible, especially when hooked the correct way and at the right time.

My favorite bait for catching largemouth bass are live snails that are just crushed and minnows.

Grandpa also used to say the best times for fishing is right before the sun comes up and when the sun is going back down. The fish cannot see as well - and since they are hungry they go after anything. If you are like me and don't just go to put your rod in the water and watch the water ripple – this is prime time to catch your lunch or dinner. Now, if you are

fortunate enough to have some kind of floatation device (also known as a boat) you have more options. During the day, I fish with surface bobbers – but at night I set my bobbers set to about 6 feet deep, while floating on the surface. This is what I call Quality Family Time – no devices, no interruptions, just simple conversation and family fellowship, a tradition Grandpa would be proud of.



I have kept the family tradition alive - my youngest daughter, has really got the bug - although her sister likes to fish too. You do need a certain amount of patience.

The ability to get lost in the wilderness around you while you are waiting on the fish to take your bait is a plus. This is where the Texas Master Naturalist courses have helped out. I enjoy bird watching now. On Thanksgiving my husband and I were



fishing near "the Gap" and saw a pair of Ospreys chase off a Bald eagle. It was a spectacular sight and one I am sure my Grandpa would appreciate.

President's Pen

- Rene Berkhoudt

We have two milestone events coming to the Bell County Expo Center in February, and I encourage you all to go out and volunteer to support the Chapter.

The Mother Earth News Fair is coming to the Bell County Expo Center February 17th-18th. The Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter will have a booth at the Mother Earth News Fair to talk to fair attendees about our Chapter and the Texas Master Naturalist program. The Mother Earth News Fair will feature over 150 workshops and brings visitors from near and far interested in sustainability. Volunteers are needed: contact Gail Hughling at gailhughling@aol.com for more information. Volunteering at the 2018 Mother Earth News Fair is a fun and easy way to collect TMM volunteer hours.



Temple Home & Garden Show 2018



Our premiere recruiting event every year is the Temple Home and Garden Show (Feb 23rd, 24th and 25th). This year the Home and Garden show will once again feature the Kid Zone which was so successful last year. We recruit the majority of our annual TMN training class trainees from the Temple Home and Garden Show. Zoe Rascoe continues to be instrumental every year in coordinating CTMN Chapter resources in support of the Temple Home and Garden Show. CTMN recruiting efforts at the Temple Home and Garden Show helps to ensure the future sustainability and vitality of our Chapter. Volunteers are needed to staff both our Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter event booth and the Kid Zone. Contact Zoe Rascoe at trascoe@hot.rr.com for more information.



Mother Earth News Fair—Feb 2017



Temple Home & Garden Show
Kid Zone —Feb 2017

First Day Hike—Mother Neff State Park

By Yvonne Eele

The New Year started with cold temperatures and icy roads. The morning first day hike at Mother Neff State Park was canceled but the 2:00 afternoon hike was a go. With two hikes to choose from, a hike through the prairie, or a hike through the canyon. 8 adults went on the prairie hike and 44 adults, 4 children, and 5 dogs went on the canyon hike split in two groups. That total included 4 CTMN members. Everyone one was dressed in layers to keep warm. The sun came out for the afternoon. Hiking through the canyon didn't feel too cold mostly because of all the layers and it was protected from the wind for the most part. We heard a Canyon Wren and saw several frost weed (*Verbesina virginica* L.).



Frost Weed

For several visitors it was the first time they had visited Mother Neff State Park. Along the trail with the second group we talked about the Juniper trees and the pollen season as well as the CCC and the construction of the park. We stopped for a short time at the wash pond and talked about its history as a spring fed pond and why now it is only an intermittent stream. We also talked about the dam that the CCC had built and the history of high school students swimming in the pond. We then walked the road down to the cave and talked about the history of it. We also talked about birds, Daddy Long Legs and felt how much warmer it was there, making it a great place to take shelter. Between the cave and the rock tower we saw several frost weed. At the rock tower we talked about the CCC some more and then they climbed up to look at the view. We talked about the cabin that used to be the Park Superintendents home. We then started the last part of the trail, talking about all the work that the Mother Neff Association helps with at the park, also talking about the Boy Scouts and CTMN building that part of the trail and other work that both the scouts and Master Naturalists do at the park. We made it back to the camp ground and shortly made our way to our vehicles, ready to be out of the cold.



FARM POND CAFÉ

February Menu

DOBSONFLY (Hellgrammite)

3 Pairs of Legs, No Wing Pads, 7-8 Pair Filament Gills, Chewing Mouth Parts—WILL BITE.



DOBSONFLY (Male & Female)

Male has long pincers to hold female. Not for defense or offense. Female smaller than male. One of the favored food of fish.



WATER MITES

Green, blue, orange, red, yellow.
1 to 7 MM round. Four pairs of legs.
Eat small insect larva.



LEECH

34 Actual segments. Two suckers, one front one aft. Preys on small invertebrates. Body- Red, yellow, orange; striped, spots or blotchy. VERY FEW ARE BLOOD SUCKERS!!



Open 24 Hours... Seven Days Per Week

Menu Changes Monthly!

Chef: Richard G. McCarthy

4th Quarter TPWD CO-OP Grant Activities

By Rene Berkhoudt

The Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter completed their Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) Community Outdoor Outreach Program (CO-OP) grant activities for the 4th Quarter (Oct-Nov-Dec) of 2017. I would like to thank all the CTMN volunteers who came out to support the Ralph Wilson Youth Club Hike in October. In addition, Rehanon Pampell hosted a pre-school Halloween Spider activity at Timber Ridge Elementary School in support of the grant as well. We had several volunteers come out in November to help with our discovery trunk presentation to the Un-Included in Temple. In total 143 CTMN Chapter volunteers, TPWD staff, activity coordinators, teachers and students participated in TPWD CO-OP activities this quarter of whom 117 were children. Of the 117 participating children, 82 were diversity students and 60 were economically disadvantaged. The Chapter has now made contact with over 1,000 students during the life cycle of the grant.



Outdoor Hike—Mother Neff State Park



Track Casting—Mother Neff State Park



Spiders and Arachnids—Discovery Trunks



Butterfly Display—Timber Ridge Elementary School



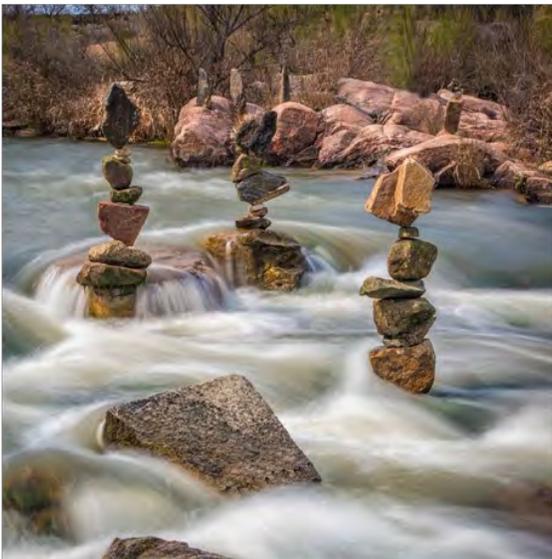
By Zoe Rascoe

It may surprise you to know that the WORLD Rock Stacking Championship is held just west of us on the banks of the Llano River in the City of Llano. Rock stacking is actually a thing. The Llano Earth Art Fest has much more to offer than the amazing rock stacking – there are musicians, art installations, sand castle building, belly dancing, face painting that is a work of art, a variety of food offerings and more.

My husband and I make an annual visit to Llano and Mason Counties during bluebonnet season – I highly recommend that little Texas adventure. Lovely downtowns, iconic places to eat (be sure to try German food at Eve’s Café and Cooper’s BBQ in Llano and Square Plate Restaurant in Mason), and

beautiful Texas rivers and landscapes there and back. There used to be a nesting pair of bald eagles visible from Hwy 29 about 8 miles east of Llano, but they returned to find their nest collapsed a few years ago and now nest across the river and are more difficult to spot. They have been nesting in the area since 2004. There is a well worn parking area just off the road and the eagles generated a lot of public interest in the species over the years. That’s a good thing!

Although it will likely be too early for a good bluebonnet trip, I definitely recommend visiting the Earth Art Fest. The atmosphere is fun, even funky, and the rock stacking looks pretty doable (at least on dry ground) until you give it a go with rocks from the many rock piles available for you to use. The event is totally run with volunteer help and entry for the whole weekend is just \$10. If you want to try before you buy, there are three interesting videos on the website that will tour you through the 2017 event.



Upper right: Michael Grab, Boulder CO. Bottom right: Michael working in the river and Bottom left: His finished rock art.

December Award Presentations

By Zoe Rascoe



Lynn Fleming Recertification Award 2017

Yvonne Eele Recertification Award 2016



Dale Hughling Recertification Award 2017

Gail Hughling Recertification Award 2017



Thank You to all our Chapter members who recertified or attained a Service Milestone this Month!

December Award Presentations

By Zoe Rascoe



Jerry Lewis Recertification Award 2017

Lyna Pitts Recertification Award 2017



Mary Ann Everett and John Atkins—Waiting for their Lucky Number to be drawn—CTMN Christmas Party 2017



Seda and Rehanon Pampell—Grand Prize Winners —CTMN Christmas Party 2017



EDITOR'S NOTE: A Special Thank You to Zoe and Terry Rascoe for Hosting our 2017 Annual CTMN Chapter Christmas Party!

2018 TMN Statewide Meeting—February Update

- Rene Berkhoudt

As most of you may have heard, the 19th Annual Texas Master Naturalist State Conference Meeting this year will be held in Georgetown. Those who attended the last two TMN Annual Conference Meetings at Lake Conroe and Corpus Christi respectively (and those of you who wished to), can readily appreciate that this year's meeting is much closer to home.

The Goodwater Master Naturalist Chapter (GWMN) out of Georgetown will host this year's event. The Goodwater Chapter has in turn asked its neighboring TMN Chapters for help in planning and conducting this year's conference. The Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter, along with the Capital Area Master Naturalist Chapter, the Balcones Canyonlands Master Naturalist Chapter, the El Camino Real Master Naturalist Chapter and the Highland Lakes Master Naturalist Chapter are all pitching in to help coordinate this year's events.

I have attend several coordination meetings this year to identify potential field trip opportunities for the 2018 Texas Master Naturalist State Conference Meeting. Future team meetings will focus on other planning and coordination components.

Some of this year's proposed 2018 Conference Field Trips include:



1. Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge—This is a great opportunity to visit a portion of the Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge on the Edwards Plateau that is normally closed to the public and the hike will be led by the Zone Biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

2. Bats of McNeil Bridge—Conference participants will drive to McNeil Bridge in Round Rock to watch Mexican Free Tail bats emerge from the bridge at dusk. GWMN will give a talk about the bats and the benefits of these amazing flying mammals.



3. Burleson Prairie Walk—CTMN goes out each spring to participate in this prairie walk. We feel this trip represents a unique opportunity to visit a tallgrass prairie remnant and restoration by Mickey and Bob Burleson in the Blackland Prairie. Bring a sack lunch and be ready to hike!



4. Canyon of the Eagles Nature Park & Resort— Located on the northern part of Lake Buchanan, this 940-acre nature preserve in the Texas Hill Country takes its name from the American Bald Eagles that winter in the area. A cruise on Lake Buchanan and the Colorado River offers an opportunity to see Bald Eagles building their nests and fishing in their natural habitat.



5. Gault Site Tour—CTMN participated in a field trip to the site in April 2017 to explore Clovis culture. Our Chapter thoroughly enjoyed this trip and it should be a great field trip opportunity for the 2018 State Conference. The gault site continues to draw a great deal of both national and international archaeological interest because of the wealth of information on Clovis culture which flourished in area 13,000 years ago. The tour is generally about 3 hours long and will traverse a walking route of about a mile and a half.

6. Indian Grass Prairie Reserve—GWMN Field Trip visit to the Indian Grass Prairie Reserve in Austin. The City of Austin has worked for 30 years to restore an enclosed section of land that accommodates rolling hills and riparian areas. It is closed to the general public and constantly fights against being used for economic development projects on this restored Blackland Prairie site.



7. Inner Space Cavern—Because of its proximity to the 2018 TMN Conference Site this field trip seems like a natural fit. Inner Space Cavern is a karst cave located in Georgetown. The cave is a popular tourist destination, and several skeletons of prehistoric Pleistocene age animals have been found in the caverns.

8. Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center—Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center is a public botanic garden that is dedicated to creating a more sustainable earth through research and education. The Center's 279-acres are filled with gardens, meadows, and hiking trails, which includes 80 acres of research plots. Over 150,000 annual visitors experience a slice of the Hill Country and learn about the sustainable use and conservation of native wildflowers, plants, and landscapes.



9. River Ranch County Park—The River Ranch County Park presents an opportunity to visit a restored prairie and engage in seed gathering to support prairie restoration. The ranch has several easy access areas to gather a variety of grass seeds. Other activities include touring the River Ranch Park to view trail building for public enjoyment and view restoration work currently being conducted to transform the area from a cedar and mesquite landscape to a native prairie.

10. UT Pickle Campus and Brackenridge Field Laboratory - The Brackenridge Field Laboratory is part of the University of Texas Biodiversity Center. AN 82-acre biological research site, it is part of an almost 400-acre tract of land originally donated to the university in 1910 by George W. Brackenridge. The property is comprised of areas of rich biodiversity that support numerous long term studies on biology, ecology, and ecosystem function. The UT Pickle Research Campus hosts multiple collections, laboratories, and other resources for research.



11. The Vireo Preserve—The Vireo Preserve is a 212 acre tract of land, just north of Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve that is part of the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve that is managed to protect sensitive and endangered species including the Black-capped Vireo.

12. Westcave Preserve and Hamilton Pool Preserve —The Westcave and Hamilton Pool Preserve field trips will focus on geology and archeology, environmental education, preservation and restoration

13. Zilker Park—Zilker Park is considered 'Austin's most-loved park.' The park covers 351-acres and contains multiple historical, educational, and ecological sites of interest. This field trip includes visits to the Austin Nature and Science Center, the 76 acre Zilker Nature Preserve, Barton Springs Pool and Elizabeth Springs.

Obviously Central Texas has a lot to offer in resources and activities unique to our area that could properly be showcased at the 2018 Texas Master Naturalist Conference in Georgetown October 27th, 28th, and 29th.

I will keep you posted on the progress of our planning committee moving forward and hope to see you all at the Statewide Meeting in Georgetown in October!

Interesting Tidbits

The Rough Green Snake

- Rene Berkhoudt

Lynn Fleming shared some photographs in July of some snakes she had seen in her backyard. I featured the picture of her hog-nosed snake in the August Tracker but was uncertain as to the

identification of the second snake which I initially thought was an Eastern yellow-bellied racer. We have a beautiful snake in Utah, that is very similar in appearance—the Western yellow bellied racer (*Coluber constrictor mormon*) that I am very familiar with.



Rough Green Snake



Western Yellow-Bellied Racer

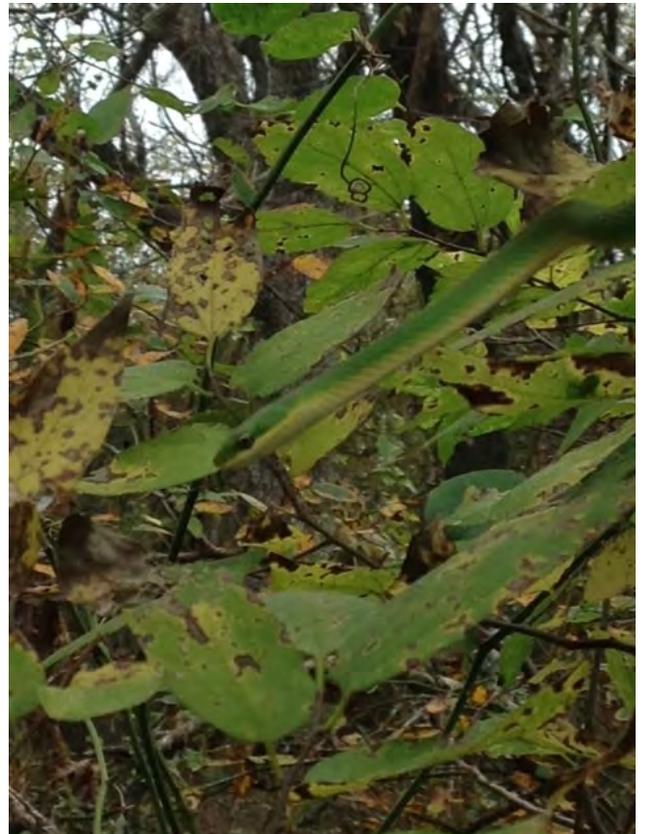
Lynn told me that this was in fact a rough green snake. Having spent most of my time outdoors in the West, I had never seen one before. I was somewhat intrigued and did some background research on the species. The rough green snake (*Opheodrys aestivus*) is a highly arboreal snake, but they are also often found on the ground. They are active diurnal hunters and are often seen foraging in the day-time. During the night they can often be observed sleeping coiled in thick vegetation, shrubs, bushes or vine tangles.

The rough green snake is long slender snake species, reaching up to 46 inches in length, although the average length is around 20 to 32 inches. Their upper body is a uniform bright green while the belly, chin, and labial scales are yellow, cream or whitish.

Rough green snakes are native to the South Eastern United States. Since they spend much of their life moving through vegetation, this coloration forms a highly effective camouflage against a leafy green background. Females are slightly larger than males and juvenile rough green snake resembles adult specimens except for their paler appearance. Like their common name suggests they have keeled dorsal scales. They also have rather large eyes by comparison with to their overall size.

Like the yellow-bellied racer, the rough green snake is a colubrid that do not constrict it's prey. Both snakes are built for speed. Both are active snakes, and they use their excellent vision and speed to hunt during the day. While yellow-bellied racers are good hunters on the ground, they are also good climbers, and like the rough green snake, can often be found hunting in foliage.

In January, Lynn sent me two more photographs of rough green snakes taken last fall, and I thought 'Gosh, I wish I could see a snake like that in my backyard'. But wishful thinking aside, I did the next best thing which is to write a short article about this beautiful snake which is common in Central Texas; and it would appear, in certain parts of eastern Bell County specifically.



Lynn Fleming's Wild Back Yard

On the Horizon

MARCH

March 1 Enter your volunteer and training hours into VMS.

March 6 (V) CTMN Board Meeting, 3pm-5pm. Agrilife Extension Building, Belton—Contact Rene: rene.berkhoudt@gmail.com

March 13 (V) CTMN Chapter Meeting (AT), 6pm-8pm. Belton Church of Christ—Contact Mary Ann: everett.maryann4@gmail.com

March 20 (V) CTMN 2018 Training Class Orientation—Contact Mary Ann: everett.maryann4@gmail.com

March 22 (V) Bell County Museum Garden Work Day—Contact Lynn: lynn.fleming99@gmail.com

March 29 (V) Nolan Creek Hike & Bike Trail Cleanup—Contact Mary Ann: everett.maryann4@gmail.com

March 30 (V) US Army Corp of Engineers Pond Project—Contact Andreas: awwooten101@gmail.com

MORE IDEAS TO KEEP YOU BUSY:

A. (AT) Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Wildlife & Fisheries Specialist Academy, Tues & Wed Feb 13 & 14, College Station. Registration \$30 for 1 day, \$50 for both days, includes handouts, reference materials, lunch, and instruction. Contact Kathrine: kathrine.bradshaw@exchange.tamu.edu

B. Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies' Wildlife Viewing and Nature Tourism Academy Feb 19-23 McAllen. Agenda covers a wide variety of nature tourism. Info:(512) 389-4500 or www.wvntacademy.com.

C. 22nd Annual Whooping Crane Festival, Thurs-Sun Feb 22-25. Port Aransas. Info: See Facebook or call (361)749-5919

D. Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo's Rancho & Wildlife Expo & Seminars. Tues-Thurs Feb 27 - March 1. Questions, contact Mary Pearl (979)845-7294. Info & pre-registration <https://hlsrrwexposeminars.eventbrite.com>.

E. Llano Earth Art Fest & World Rock Stacking Championship 2018. Fri-Mon, Mar 9-12. Info: llanoearthartfest.org.

F. Hill Country Spring Wild Edibles. Sat Mar 10, 9am-1pm, Burnet. Hosted by SPEAR Survival. Registration required \$75.00 per person, no children. Learn historical medicinal & food uses for select plants as well as methods of cultivation and processing.

Be Sure to Check Out the CTMN Weekly E-Mail for a Full Listing of Upcoming Events!



CHECK US OUT ON FACEBOOK!

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

(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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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:



Rough Green Snake (*Opheodrys aestivus*) —
Photograph by Lynn Fleming

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.