

The Tracker

The Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter June 2018

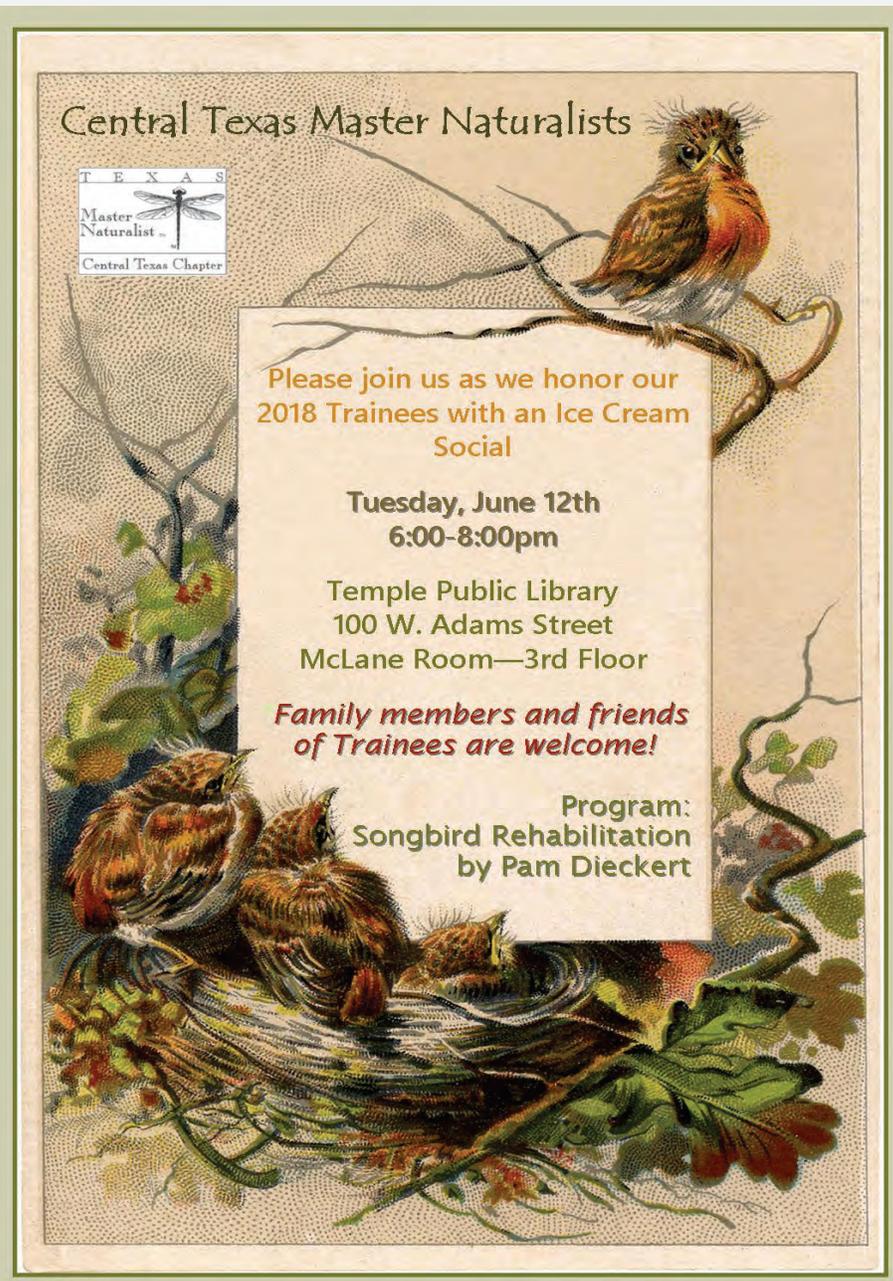
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Calendar at a Glance

June 12: **GRADUATION!**
June 21: Angle Ed Training
June 26: Discovery Trunks
June 27: MNSP Hike & Trunks
July 5: VMS entries due
July 10: Chapter PACE meeting
Aug 11: Meteor Night at MNSP
More details on page 22...

2018 Master Naturalist Graduation



Central Texas Master Naturalists

T E X A S
Master Naturalist
Central Texas Chapter

Please join us as we honor our
2018 Trainees with an Ice Cream
Social

Tuesday, June 12th
6:00-8:00pm

Temple Public Library
100 W. Adams Street
McLane Room—3rd Floor

*Family members and friends
of Trainees are welcome!*

Program:
Songbird Rehabilitation
by Pam Dieckert

President's Pen

- Rene Berkhoudt

As some of you may know, I have been a little under the weather this Spring and am sorry to have missed so much of our 2018 CTMN Training Course as a result. I would like to thank all our Chapter members for their warm wishes and am recovering well. I am feeling chipper enough to go out on a short trip to visit Palo Duro Canyon for the very first time at the end of May and also feeling well enough to jot a few notes for the *June Tracker*.

With graduation just around the corner, I would like to extend my best wishes to all of our 2018 Central Texas Master Naturalist trainees as you enter the home stretch of your training orientation program. Thank you for taking the necessary time out of your busy schedules to attend our classes and go out on the site visits to learn more about our local environs here in Central Texas these last three months. I hope you have found this training experience to be insightful, educational and rewarding. As you continue on your journey towards your Texas Master Naturalist certification, I believe you will find that the time you have invested in this program will be well worth it.

A heartfelt thank you is also in order for all of our Chapter members who make our training program work so well each year. Mary Ann Everett, Lynn Fleming and Zoe Rascoe are key players for us every year, but so are a host of others and if I start to name names, I will invariably miss some of them; (Joe and Sarah Dorn, Gail and Dale Hughling, Sue Valdez, Mary Odom, et al); but we value so much what you do—from scheduling classes, arranging guest speakers, aligning student mentors and providing administrative and logistical support, to rank and file Chapter members just coming out to sit in on a class to meet our new trainees—thank you all so very much.

I am greatly looking forward to being out about again soon. Congratulations and Best Wishes to the Class of 2018!



2018 Class



Our Class Directory



Alyssa Parsons



Christina Culp



Daisy Klassy



Danae Allison



Francis McCauley



Frank Sodek



Hannah McGinnis



John Burns



Juan Anaya



Linda Fairlie



Melissa Jue



Nina Smith



Sue Critz



Tim Hairston



Ward Critz

Congratulations to the 2018 Graduating Master Naturalists! You have persevered through 24 classes in the training course, both indoors and outdoors. If you can't remember everything you learned, that's normal! It was a LOT. This class has jumped in feet first and have been volunteering shoulder to shoulder with other Master Naturalists since arriving. We are looking forward to welcoming each of you as a Texas Master Naturalist on June 12th! Check out some class photos on [Page 8](#).

STEAM Event at Venable Village Elementary

- Lynn Williams

Master Naturalists showed up in force at the annual Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math event for students and their families at Venable Village Elementary on Fort Hood. Laurie Sigafoose, our school contact, requested our return after the many positive comments received from student families and teachers last year, and gave us more space to play. With another year under our belt, we raised the bar on the number and kinds of activities we offered for both kids and adults. Our energetic Screech Owl wandered the school halls engaging children and encouraging them to head to the Science Lab where Master Naturalists were set up with games, puppets and touch-and-feel items from our Discovery Trunks funded by our CO-OP grant ([read about that on page X](#))



Screech the Owl helps a student with the Bird Airplane Game

Marilyn Whitworth manned the Beaks &

Eats table where participants tried different tools to mimic types of beaks (or bills, if you prefer that term) various birds need to have to eat in their environment. Guess which bird beak is like a fish net, a spoon, tweezers or a pair of pliers? The traveling “What’s Your Wing Span” banner helps kids and adults relate to birds they may see flying overhead and reminds us we are totally not equipped to lift our bodies into the air!



Marilyn lays out a buffet for Beaks & Eats activity

STEAM Event at Venable Village Elementary (con't)

Mary Odom gave tours of the Backyard Zoo which had all sorts of common birds (like a zoo!) to emphasize their different characteristics that aid in their survival. Mary also helped students use stamps to make bookmarks to take home as a reminder of their visit to our activity center.

Mary Ann Everett demonstrated new Plinko game where participants matched birds with the type of organisms they eat. It looks like a slot machine, but no gambling is involved. Mary Ann also worked the Bird Airplane Game where students answered questions about birds to earn a bird plane to fly into a target. She upped the challenge when she stood with her face in the tree hole as a target for the children!



Melissa Jue and Danae Allison, both Master Naturalist trainees, helped visitors play "Golf for Endangered Species" where putters are used to roll a ball into cups representing things animals need like food, water and shelter. Humans need those too! These ladies had good suggestions on making this activity event better and I appreciate constructive critiques.

It was a busy night and the Master Naturalists went home tired!



National moth Week

July 21-29, 2018

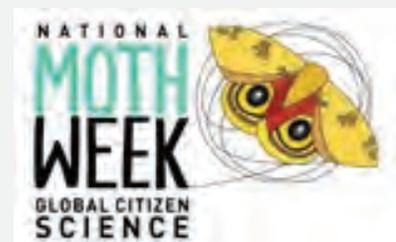
You too can be a Citizen Scientist and help contribute to our knowledge of moths, their biodiversity and geographical distribution. It's a world-wide event! Vocational scientists who study moths will use the data that you collect and submit. Learn more at NationalMothWeek.org

Why study moths?

- Moths are among the most diverse and successful organisms on Earth.
- Scientists estimate there are 150,000-500,000 moth species.
- Moth colors and patterns are either dazzling or so cryptic that they define camouflage. Moths can be as small as a pin head or as large as an adult's hand.
- Most moths are nocturnal, but some fly in daylight like butterflies
- Finding moths is as easy as leaving on a porch light after dark. Serious moth aficionados use special lights and baits to attract moths.



Visitors to previous CTMN Moth Night and a sugary bait station (right).

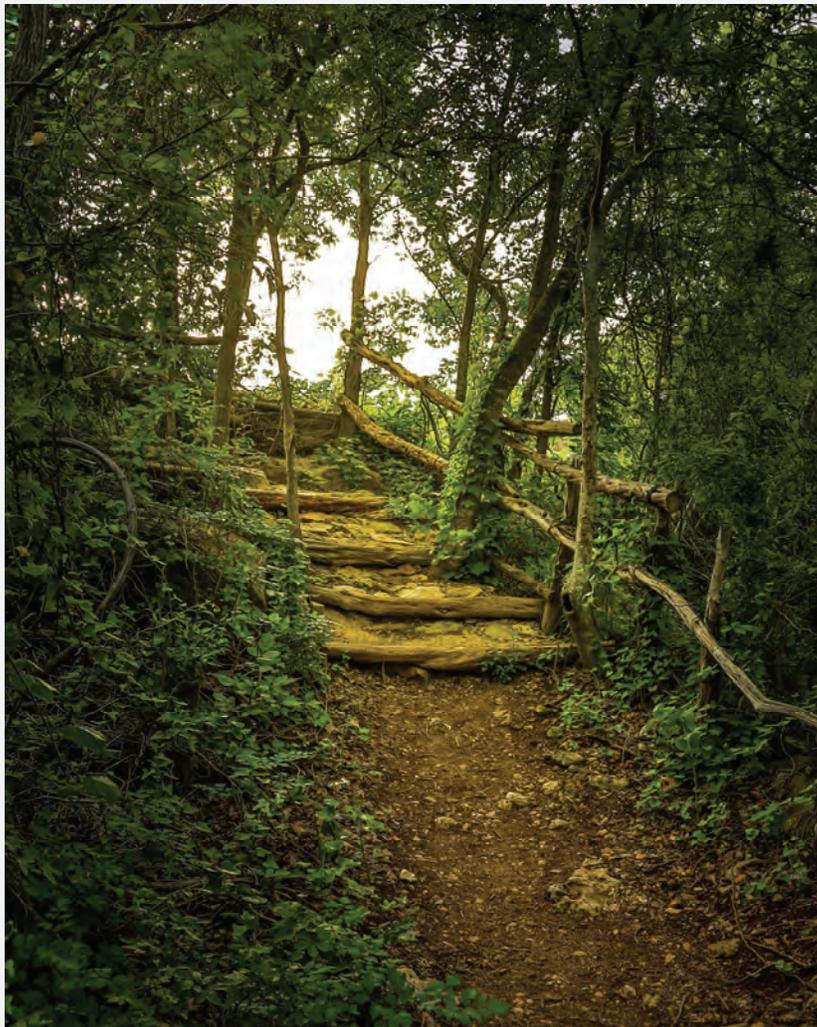


Miller Spring Nature Center Re-opens

- Zoe Rascoe

Central Texas Master Naturalists continue to play a role in preserving over 250 acres of nature on Corps of Engineers land at the Lake Belton dam. For many years, the Miller Springs Alliance, a group of local volunteers, kept the Nature Center open for the public to enjoy. More recently, the Cities of Temple and Belton have partnered with the Corps to manage the federal land.

The City of Temple is currently providing two staff members working full time at the Nature Center and the City of Belton is organizing volunteer workdays. If you would like to be on the volunteer list, contact Matt Bates at mbates@beltontexas.gov or call 254-933-5860. Volunteer opportunities could include invasive



Visit Miller Springs Nature Center and look for quiet spots such as this. Photo by Terry Rascoe



Chapter members Sue Valdez, Shirley Watts and Yvonne Eele show up with gloves and boots for a volunteer work day.

plant removal, trail maintenance, painting, and litter pickup (hope that isn't needed!)

The site includes bluffs, canyons, waterfalls, ponds, wildlife, many plant species and miles of trails to wander. Tread lightly and leave nature where you find it.

Miller Springs Nature Center is open from 8am until dusk. Take a new map of the trails, water and be ready for an immersion in nature! Well, and maybe expect other folks like you to be out doing the same thing, too.

2018 Training Class Photos

Geology, Rangeland Mgt, Aquatic Biology, Taxonomy, Herpetology, Weather



Annual Burleson Prairie Walk

- Linda Fairlie

I thoroughly enjoyed the Burleson Prairie Walk in May. There were several groups there, including Native Plant Society of Texas members and the Prairie Grasses group from Austin. It was good to meet new people who have similar interests. Mickey Burleson, owner of the reconstructed prairie and founding member, along with her husband Bob, of the Native Prairie Association of Texas. She was so sweet and humble, but very willing to share her "hobby" with us. Lynn Fleming and Mickey Burleson each took a smaller group and we set out finding and identifying native plants and grasses. I personally was able to learn 25 new plant names. The dewberries were a big hit with the children as they learned which were ripe. My personal favorite were the Barbara's Buttons and the foxglove. It was really helpful to see Eastern Gama grass right next to Johnson grass to note the differences.

Thank you to Lynn and Mickey for making this expedition possible!



*Do you recognize these Burleson Prairie plants? Do you know what that greenbriar-covered contraption is used for? ***

**Wildflower seed stripper

Fly-Fishing Angler Education Certification Class

- Danae Allison

On April 19th the CTMN chapter, together with the Angler Education Program had a beginner and intermediate fly fishing course which also counted as TMN advanced training. Andreas Wooten, a CTMN member and avid fisherman, did a wonderful job teaching the class.

We started out by learning the different parts of the fly rod and the fly lines, as well as the equipment you'll need. We then moved on to the four parts of the cast: the pickup, back cast, forward cast, and the lay down. We moved outside to practice our new casting knowledge, which was my favorite part. It turns out that the casting is not as difficult as it seems. We learned and practiced how to tie a few different knots including the improved clinch knot. It is an old standby knot also known as a fisherman's knot, and the palomar knot which is the easiest and the strongest knot to hold terminal tackle. We went down to Nolan Creek to search for the kinds of insects the fish were eating in that area. Doing this before you go out to fish can help you decide what type of fly to use. Wet flies sink just slightly underwater while dry flies float on the water's surface. Learning about the aquatic insects in the area you are going to fish and what the fish like to eat can greatly benefit your fishing success.

After lunch we began the intermediate portion of the course and had a guest speaker who taught us all about how to make our own flies. We even got to make a grasshopper and a San Juan worm of our own which was an awesome experience. It was very helpful to learn that fly making can be quite affordable with supplies from your local grocery store or craft store. Making the flies were hard to get the hang of at first but with the right tools and a little practice anyone can conquer making their own flies. Contrary to what many people believe, you can catch all kinds of fish on a fly rod such as largemouth bass, catfish, carp, and sunfish which all reside here in Nolan creek. We even learned ways to cast to avoid getting tangled up in the trees around you.

We learned how to handle the fish once caught and the proper ways of holding each different kind of fish. To wrap up the day, we learned the correct way to clean, scale, skin, and cut the fish into delicious fillets. The Angler Ed Fly Fishing courses were wonderfully taught and had so much information to help anyone at any level of experience start their fly fishing career with knowledge and confidence.



Andreas Wooten explains that you need to know what fish are eating to throw a fly they want.

TPWD CO-OP Grant

- Rene Berkhoudt

In the summer of 2016, the Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter (CTMN) received a Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) Community Outdoor Outreach Program (CO-OP) grant. Work was to focus on the Miller Springs Nature Center, a 260-acre scenic natural area located east of the Lake Belton Dam in Bell County, Texas. The nature center contains notable riparian terrain, including limestone bluffs and estuarial wetlands, as well as mountain cedar hilltops and riverside cottonwood and sycamore stands. The area boasts a diverse and vibrant wildlife population including more than 90 species of birds.

The TPWD CO-OP grant proposal was written by CTMN member Rene Berkhoudt with help from Zoe Rascoe. The grant's reporting requirements and focus guided many of our Chapter efforts over the subsequent two years.

There were originally three facets to the Miller Springs Nature Center CO-OP grant proposal. The first facet of the grant proposal was trails maintenance to support the nearly 11 miles of trails on the nature center which facilitate the TPWD Activities of (1) backpacking /hiking (2) bird and wildlife viewing (3) orienteering and geo-caching and (4) nature photography. The second element of the CO-OP grant proposal was habitat restoration to support Texas Wildscapes with a specific goal of aggressively combating invasive plant communities and focusing native plant revegetation strategies to create an ecosystem habitat favorable to native flora and fauna. The third facet of the Miller Springs Nature Center CO-OP grant proposal was focused on environmental education.

The grant sought to facilitate numerous community partnerships including formal partnerships with local Texas Parks and Wildlife Department staff from Mother Neff State Park, the Twin Lakes Audubon Society, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Army Corps of Engineers, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Texas A&M University AgriLife Extension program and the military community of Ft Hood. Some of these partnerships proved to work well over time while others did not.

The end goal of the Miller Springs Nature Center CO-OP grant proposal was focused to bring students, mentors, and natural resource specialists from partner agencies together to manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources. The nature center should be used as an outdoor classroom to mentor the next generation of conservationists in Bell County.

Challenges began to surface almost immediately. The center flooded in June 2016. Four of the five Independent School Districts that would benefit from this project decided not to participate. And lastly, the Army Corps of Engineers chose to close the nature center in August 2017.



TPWD CO-OP Grant (con't)

If it had ended there, it would indeed be a sad legacy for a grant proposal whose initial strength was its strong emphasis on the strategic engagement of under-served youth populations, and shared project investment through viable community partnerships.

But over the course of the last two years a lot went right too. We got strong support for the grant from the Belton Independent School District, including Principal Jill Ross of Belton New Tech @ Waskow High School, Dr. David Dubois, Principal of Belton High School, and Dr. Susan Kilpatrick, the Superintendent of Belton Independent School District. Strong support was also lent to our initiative by Dr. Byron Weathersbee, Vice President for Student Life at the University of Mary Hardin Baylor, and Katy Hartt, Assistant Director of Student Organizations at the University of Mary Hardin Baylor. Support for our CO-OP grant from Belton ISD and University of Mary Hardin Baylor was outstanding throughout the life cycle of the grant at the nature center.

Area youth clubs also provided support for the grant, both by attending hikes and facilitating visits to include the Boy Scouts, the Military 4H Club, the Ralph Wilson Youth Club, the Un-Included Club, the Belton Christian Youth Center, the CENTEX Christian Home School and St. Mary's Catholic School.

Special thanks go to Cappy Smith, TPWD CO-OP Grant Manager for allowing us to shift our operations to Mother Neff State Park in Moody to close out the grant period after the Army Corps of Engineers closed the nature center.

What went right? Well for starters, our Chapter members made face-to-face contact with over 1,500 area youth at dozens of events during the life cycle of our grant to promote environmental education and responsible natural resource management. The primary catalysts in the success of these efforts have been Mary Ann Everett and Lynn Fleming, along with the dozens of Chapter volunteers who made it all happen.

Based on our ability to purchase an incredible array of environmental education objects using grant funds, the Chapter was able to collate and assemble a significant number of Discovery Trunks based on several far ranging topical themes to include entomology, mammology, herpetology, ornithology, geology, prairies, and wetlands.

As a result of this grant, our Chapter members have had the opportunity to go out and interact with hundreds of students and members of the recreating public over the last two years. We have gone out to see them at nature centers, state parks, school classrooms, student assemblies, elementary school science fairs, and community nature fests. We have spread our message to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities.



Thank you all.

Ft Hood Ornithology and Archaeology Classes

- Alyssa Parsons

On April 4th, the Ornithology and Archaeology training session for Texas Master Naturalist certification was at Fort Hood Training Area and Belton Lake Outdoor Recreation Area. The morning started with Scott Summers and Gil Eckrich for our Ornithology lesson. It was sunny and chilly, but the chill was soon forgotten as we started spotting songbirds. We went to several different locations and Gil set up wireless speakers and played bird calls to help bring them in. One of the calls he used was the Screech Owl. Interesting that the birds will react and come in to a predator call. Our target birds were the Golden Cheeked Warbler and the Black Capped Vireo, we also lured in some Blue-gray Gnatcatchers and a Northern Cardinal as well as many more. After moving to the lake shore Gil was able to locate some waterfowl including a kingfisher, coots and gulls. Through his telescopic lens we saw a pair of Neotropical Cormorants, a Swainson's Hawk and my favorite part, a pair of second year Bald Eagles soaring over the water. Overall, it was really a neat experience.



The second (and my favorite) part of the day was Archaeology with Sunny Woods. He started his lesson while we ate our lunch and gave us a brief yet very knowledgeable breakdown of the areas human history. Sunny brought along with him dozens of artifacts that we all got to pass around for closer observation, some dating back thousands of years, my favorite being the mammoth bones. It was really humbling to be able to touch them! Sunny also took us on a little walk through the woods to show us some of the burnt mounds, explained how they were built and used to cook food. I imagine that they also kept the people in the settlements warm! We then wrapped up the day at an old school site from the early 1900s where Sunny showed us the bell



-shaped cistern that the Phoenix School and the surrounding area used. All these treasures are right in our backyard and the majority of the people living here have no clue. I love what this organization and its leaders are teaching me and thrilled to be able to grow with them. A big THANK YOU to Scott Summers, Gil Eckrich and Sunny Woods for conducting these classes and to our CTMN leaders for organizing them! I sincerely look forward to the rest of my training and to becoming a part of this organization.

Bird photo by Linda Fairlie, Archaeology session from Facebook contributor

Foraging Edible Plants in the Wild

- Linda Fairlie

I went to the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower center in Austin on Saturday, May 15 for a class on foraging edible native plants. The presenter was Eric Knight who was raised a naturalist in Austin and is co-founder and owner of Local Leaf where he wild-harvests yaupon for tea.

First, we learned what NOT to eat:

- Mountain laurel - hard red seed. All parts are very poisonous.
- Poison Ivy / Poison Oak
- Poison Hemlock - looks similar to carrot, so don't risk it.
- Datura, also called moon flower, gypsum weed or devil's trumpet (as opposed to angel's trumpet)
- Oleander - a common landscape plant.

There are other plants that are toxic, but those above can be life threatening, while others might just make you sick. We learned that even though you can eat them it doesn't mean you should. Avoid eating rare or endangered plants. Eat all you want of invasives or weedy plants!



Mountain Laurel with seeds



Datura or Moonflower



Poison Hemlock

Foraging Edible Plants in the Wild (con't)

We identified many plants and tasted these:

- Twist leaf yucca - eat flowers, use leaf for cordage
- Flat pad cactus - eat flower, young pads, fruit (prickly pear)
- Day flower - 2 blue petals - eat the flowers
- Thistle - eat the stems of the young ones but de-spine it first. Eat like celery.
- Pepper weed - peppery leaves, seeds sub for pepper and root is like horseradish
- Agarita - has thorny leaves but berries are tart and good. Put a sheet on the ground and hit the plant to shake off berries.
- Toothache tree / Prickly ash - numbing properties in leaf and berry. This one made my mouth tingle for several minutes!
- Turks Cap - use tiny leaves, fruit and flower
- Yaupon - leaves only; makes a caffeinated tea
- Cucumber plant aka Pennsylvania Pellitory - eat as much as you want
- Wild lettuce - only young leaves
- Horsetail - brush teeth with it or chew it
- Sumac (skunk bush), eat berries when red. Make sure you know your sumac, several are ok to eat but Poison Sumac is not one of those.
- Wood Sorrell - pod is best. Heart shaped leaf. Eat the whole thing. This was my favorite.
- Greenbriar - has spines, eat new growth.

Photos by Linda Fairlie



Ubiquitous Greenbriar,



Toothache tree



Horsetail

I learned of many more edible plants. Now when I hike, I know I will have a snack along the way!

Camping at Fort Parker State Park

- Mary Ann Everett

Recently our Boy Scout Troop traveled to Fort Parker State Park, for a weekend of fun, adventure, and cooking. My husband being the Scoutmaster made the reservations 9 months ago, asking for water only sites, but when we arrived we found differently.



Arriving around 8:00 p.m. we checked in, with our scouts “itching” to get camp set up. We traveled down the park road to the area assigned to us, a primitive area, with one water source (spigot) and latrine with no flushing toilet.

Ah, you say, but the adventure does not stop there. I would say this area could be called a low-lying area, right against the lake. The poison ivy was unbelievable. I have never seen this plant growing so prolifically, even at Miller Springs Nature Center. Some of those leaves were 6 inches long, and everywhere you went you had to be careful where you stepped, because it also crawled along the ground, in among the taller wildflowers and grasses. Now how does that grab you?

As if that were not bad enough, the insects were so bad while we were trying to put up our tents, we hung the lantern on the hooked pole in the camp site and tried to get our tent up in a timely manner, so we could retreat to the safety of our zipped enclosure! Millions of those insects. Did I say millions? But we didn’t let that bug us. Yes, swarming around our eyes, up our noses, into our mouths. Don’t know how much protein I ingested, but I coughed and sputtered, trying to get them out of my throat. I had to tie a bandana to cover mouth and nose and carried on. I had a lot at stake getting that tent up.

On Saturday, we went to Old Fort Parker, the historic site, where in 1836, Indians attacked and took five captives, the most famous being 9-year-old Cynthia Ann Parker. She was adopted by a Comanche family, grew up to marry Chief Peta Nocona and gave birth to the last great Warrior Chief of the Comanches, Quanah Parker.

Now at this fort, the poison ivy was so healthy that it had grown on one side of the small building, more like a huge shrub or tree. Yep, one had to be most careful. The folks there mentioned they had sprayed, and some of the leaves did look a little peaked, but it will take a ton of herbicide to get rid of these healthy plants.

Camping at Fort Parker State Park (con't)

So what do you do on a Saturday night? Get into your tents and go to sleep. Well, after taking our showers, and coming back to the camp site, we cautioned our scouts to get quiet, as 10:00 p.m. is just that, quiet. Into our tents we go, and just getting settled in, when, what was that? Talking, laughing, giggling..... Was that our scouts? No, couldn't be.....well, maybe, rats, it was definitely coming from the camp site two tents down the way. Out of the tent goes the Scoutmaster, and quiets the scouts, but where are two of the first year scouts? They hit the trail to the shower, but they hadn't told Mr. and Mrs. Everett, or Mr. Stall, another scouting adult. Into the pickup we go, on the look-out for our two errant scouts. I asked the scoutmaster, "What if we don't find them in this huge place?" "We keep searching until we do," he replied. Ever been on a search and rescue in the dark, with only the headlights of a vehicle lighting the road?

As we neared the lake on the other side of the state park, I spotted the two first, their flashlights shining in darkness. The Scoutmaster stopped the pickup, opened the door, and asked, "What do you think you are doing?" "We only came to take a shower." "Don't you know you never leave



camp without telling someone where you are going? Get in the car!" Needless to say you could hear a pin drop back to camp site.

Thankfully no further excitement for that night, except for the growl of the raccoon by my side of the tent, then the crash of the trash can lid, and then the call of the barred owl.

We broke camp the next morning, and returned home, with all scouts accounted for. Hopefully no one got the poison ivy, except me of course. You might be itching to get outdoors, but beware of that poison ivy!

Poison Ivy

- By Yvonne Eele



Over the last month or so I have heard of people getting into poison Ivy and, knowing what I have had to do to deal with it in my own yard, I thought it would be a good time for a few reminders about poison Ivy.

I think poison ivy is a beautiful plant, its red stems and sometimes leaves and its hairy vines are very pretty. If it wasn't for its other issues I would allow it to grow around my yard. It is very good for deer and other wildlife which unfortunately helps it to spread. Animals are not allergic to poison ivy but can help to spread it to us. If a pet gets into it and comes in the house, it could spread the oils onto you or your furniture. When wildlife or pets contact poison Ivy, they can break the plant surface and release the oil, then we come along and brush against it and we now have oil on us. Not good!

So, what are we to do?

After a lot of research and having to put my research to the test, this is some of the best practices that I have used.

- Stay away unless necessary.
- If you even think that you have touched or brushed against poison ivy even a little, wash with COLD water within 15 minutes of contact. The point is to get the oil off but not to open pores with hot water.
- If available, use Dawn dish soap. Plain Dawn, not anything to smooth your hands,
- If you know you will be getting into poison ivy, dress for it even on really hot days. Long sleeve shirt, long pants, close-toed shoes (preferably washable), washable or disposable gloves, and pull back long hair so it isn't getting into plants.
- Make sure to wash all tools well with soap and water. The oil can last on the tools and other objects for up to five years and still cause a reaction .
- As soon as I am done, I take off my long sleeve outer shirt and wash with a hose and dawn. I do this before trying to go in the house, so I don't spread it anywhere, then once inside make sure to strip and put all clothes in washer. Wash with hot water and soap twice before drying.
- Run empty washer twice with hot water and soap.

There are a lot of myths about poison ivy. Poison Ivy does not get into the bloodstream. The allergic reaction is just that, an allergic reaction to the oil in the plant.

The liquid in the blisters will not spread the poison ivy rash, it only is spread through the oils. Different parts of our bodies react at different rates and that is why it seems we are spreading from the blisters. You are not contagious, as long as you have washed off all the oils.

Be safe, be careful and wash with cold water!

Merz Ranch Rangeland Management Class

- Frank Sodek

On Tuesday, April 24th, the 2018 Central Texas Master Naturalist Training Class visited the Merz Ranch located near Holland, Texas. Dalton Merz worked for the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) for 37 years before retiring. He purchased his ranch on Darrs Creek in 1986 and has used his vast knowledge and experience gained at the NRCS to transform what once were cultivated cotton fields into an unbelievable array of native plants and well-managed pastures for grazing livestock.

Dalton began the morning session by outlining the early progression of ranching in Texas, beginning with the introduction of cattle by the Spaniards in 1690 and detailed how German immigrants brought their farming and livestock practices to Texas in the late 1800's. He also routinely slipped in interesting (and unexpected) snippets of information such as "The chuckwagon is the official vehicle of Texas" and that most cowboys were 16 to 19 years old, which is why they were called cowBOYS and not cowMEN.

Dalton is also a master at using props. He had five trainees hold up lettered cards that spelled "WATER", which he explained stood for the five items required for successful photosynthesis in plants: W is for water; A is for air (CO₂); T is for temperature (soil temperature is optimally 55-65 degrees for cool season plants, 72-78 degrees for warm season plants); E is for energy (sunlight) and R is for raw materials (NPK and trace minerals). Dalton also stressed the importance of never taking off more than the top half of a growing plant, because overgrazing or overcutting will harm and possibly even kill the plant over time.

The training session became even more interesting and informative as Dalton led us outside for the tour of his ranch. He first showed us how he manages his pastures using rotational grazing through small plots that are separated using electric fencing. A most interesting discussion then followed regarding the desired consistency of cow manure! Dalton explained that cow patties should be the consistency of pancake batter if the cow is getting the proper ratio of crude protein. If they squirt, they are getting too much protein.



Dalton Merz, in vest, spends a lot of time looking at the many plants he nurtures under his boots.

Before our arrival, Dalton had tagged an unbelievable range of grasses, legumes, vines and trees on his property – over 50 different species! He provided us a numbered list of the plants to help in their identification, and he also used a red/yellow/green color coding scheme to express the desirability of each. Green (for Go) were the most desirable plants and red was No Go, or not desirable. Green-colored plants included Indiangrass, big bluestem, switchgrass, pecan, honeysuckle and a few that were surprising (to me): Greenbriar and Hackberry! One of the highlights of the outdoor session was Dalton urging us to eat the young growing tips of Greenbriar – they were delicious!

Merz Ranch Rangeland Management Class (con't)

Most of the red plants were no surprise, they included mesquite, eastern red juniper (cedar), poison ivy and prickly pear, but he did have several grasses shown as red. As we stopped and looked at each tagged plant, Dalton provided the important characteristics and qualities of each, and of course his additional informative tidbits such as sideoats grama being the state grass of Texas.

During the visit to an ungrazed section of pasture, Dalton resorted to a most interesting prop to demonstrate the amount of grass that a mature 1,000-pound cow requires each day (which is 25 pounds dry weight) – he tied a rope around one of our fellow trainees and tied the other end to a stake. In order for the trainee acting as a cow to consume the required 25 pounds of grass but only remove 25% of the forage in the circle (to prevent overgrazing the pasture), the rope had to be 32 feet long! Therefore a 64-foot circle of forage is required for each day of grazing, plus 15-20 gallons of water.

We returned to the barn for a quick lunch and additional instruction. He provided details and the timeframe for preparing a minimum tillage seedbed for native grasses. He also showed us a graph of how cool and warm season plants overlap throughout their growing cycles, discussed the impact of weather cycles and wind erosion and briefly discussed the various soil types we have in our area.

I found the training session at the Merz Ranch to be extremely informative. Mr. Merz has an unbelievable wealth of knowledge and he's most capable of expressing it to unknowing trainees in an interesting and entertaining manner. It was obvious to me that Dalton has spent a lot of effort and time to enhance his property to its current level, and that he cares deeply about preserving native species while using proper grazing techniques for his livestock.



Lynn Fleming's Apricot tree: hope you got to enjoy these tasty treats at one of the training classes.



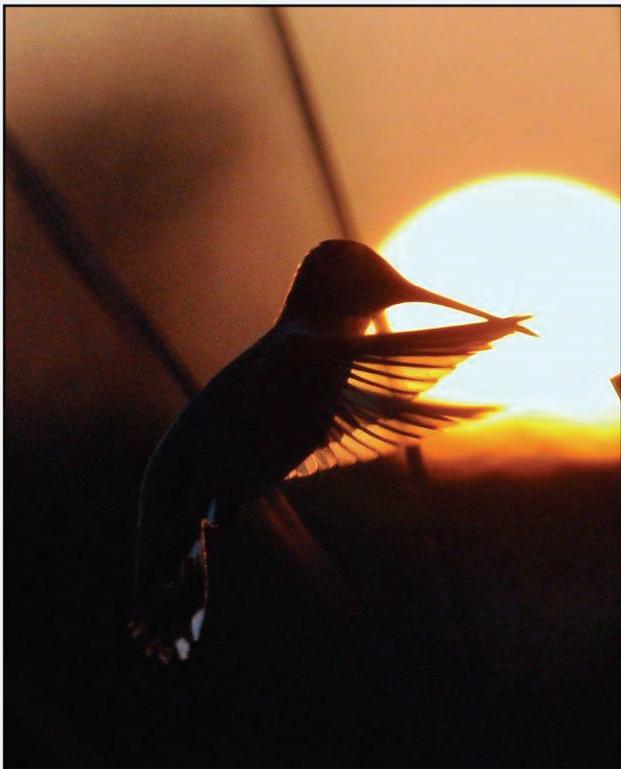
Someone else enjoying a tasty treat.

Morning Musings

- Yvonne Eele

My favorite time of day is early mornings. I sit on the back porch listening to the night life settle down and the early risers starting up. While I enjoy my cup of coffee; I hear the hooting of an owl on its last hunt before bed. The roosters and song birds began to wake before the sun even peaks over the horizon. In the quiet morning, you can hear a lot more birds than you can see and soon all the trees are full of birds talking and singing. Cardinals and Titmouse start coming to the feeder. We are trying to put in stuff to entice more butterflies, insects, birds and other wildlife, and so far, we have been getting a nice variety. Doves, mockingbirds, and flycatchers are routine. A beautiful sound is the knocking of the woodpeckers, sometimes a solid sound but sometimes you can hear how hollow the branch is he is getting his meal from.

We all love nature, that is why we are Master Naturalists; it is no surprise how much joy and relaxation we get out of just sitting outside listening and watching. I think it was Dennis the Menace that said, "If the bottom of heaven is this beautiful, can you imagine how beautiful the top is?"



*Black-chinned hummer silhouette —
photo by Juan Anaya*

On the Horizon

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

June 12 (AT): 2018 Graduation and Songbird Rehabilitator presentation, Temple Public Library 6:00pm

June 21 (AT): Angler Education Instructor Course, 10:00am-3:00pm, contact Yvonne Eele

June 26 (V): Discovery Trunks at Ralph Wilson Youth Club, 1:00-4:00pm. Contact Mary Ann Everett

June 27 (V): Mother Neff State Park Hike, Tracks and Discovery Trunks, 9:00-11:30am, contact Mary Ann

June 28 (V): Bell County Museum Native Garden Work Day, Belton 8:00am, contact Lynn Fleming

June 29 (V): Pond Project at US Army Corps of Engineers Belton Dam Office, 9:00am, contact Andreas W.

July 3 (V): Salado First Monday Gardening, meet at Salado Museum, 7:30-9:30am, 254-947-5040

July 5: Enter your volunteer and advanced training hours into VMS

July 10 (V): Chapter PACE meeting, 6:00-8:00pm, Belton Church of Christ

Aug 11 (V & Fun): Meteor Night at Mother Neff State Park—more details to come!

Aug 30 (V): Trail Cleanup at Nolan Creek Hike & Bike Trail, 8:00-11:00am, Meet at Confederate Park.



(V) Approved for Volunteer Hours

(AT) Approved for Advanced Training

CHECK US OUT ON FACEBOOK!

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



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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Contributed Photos: Daisy Klassy, Juan Anaya, Linda Fairlie, , Terry Rascoe, Yvonne Eele, Zoe Rascoe (apologies for anyone missed this edition.)

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

Zoe Rascoe at trascoe@hot.rr.com

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County Extension Agent, Natural Resources

Derrick Wolter,
Wildlife Biologist, Texas Parks and Wildlife



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 meets 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 North Main in Belton.