

The Tracker

Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter December 2018

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Mary Ann Everett Recognized

Founding the Central Texas Chapter was a dream of Mary Ann's and as a founder, she has worked tirelessly in both administration and work projects. She was awarded a 4000 Hour Milestone Pin and the prestigious Presidential Volunteer Service Award at the State Conference. Congratulations Mary Ann! Well deserved.



Calendar at a Glance

- Dec 8th Mother Neff Event
- Dec 11 CTMN Holiday Dinner
- Dec 12 Training Committee Mtg
- Jan 1st Mother Neff Hikes
- Jan 8 Chapter Meeting—Belton
- Feb 12 Chapter Meeting—Belton
- Feb 16-17 Mother Earth News
- Feb 22-24 Home & Garden Show



Photos by Zoe Rascoe

President's Pen

- Rene Berkhoudt

In closing out my tenure as President of the Central Texas Master Naturalists, I cannot help but say how grateful I am to have had this opportunity. This is a remarkable Chapter in a remarkable program with remarkable people.

I am happy to have had the opportunity to serve as Vice President to Lynn Fleming, and although she was not our inaugural President; I cannot help but feel a little like John Adams contrasted against George Washington in the measure of our respective breadth of service and accomplishments.



I had the great fortune to have had my tenure parallel our Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Community Outdoor Outreach Program grant program which had yielded great benefits to our Chapter in terms of community outreach, university partnerships, youth engagement and environmental education.



I have no doubt that John Atkins will lead the Chapter forward in an exemplary manner to meet the challenges of the future and wish him all the best.

Best wishes for the future - > Rene



CENTRAL TEXAS MASTER
NATURALIST CHAPTER

9th Annual Holiday Dinner

December 11th | 6:30 pm
Home of Zoe Rascoe
1900 N. 13th Street, Temple

**Please RSVP by Monday,
Dec 10th to Zoe at 254-913-1013
or trascoe@hotmail.com**

Bring your favorite dish to share. Spouse or special guest is invited to join you for an evening of food, fun and fellowship. Bring nature items you may have for the project fundraising raffle.

This gathering will also serve as the annual meeting of our nonprofit organization. A slate of officers has been presented to the membership by email and an election will be held. But that's pretty much it for the serious part of the evening.

Rumor has it that Sue and Bud are bringing jambalaya. Think of it as an unknown mushroom. Bud uses Insanity Sauce in the recipe... just sayin'.

2018 Texas Master Naturalist State Conference

October 26-28, 2018 Georgetown, Texas

- Zoe Rascoe

There were about 20 Central Texas Master Naturalists who attended the State Conference in Georgetown. There could have been more—we were never all at the same place at the same time, so this number is based on sittings. And there were over 640 Master Naturalists from all over the state packed into 150 concurrent sessions and 20+ field trips. It was heaven for a nature-lover. If you are not a Master Naturalist, check out the conference agenda [here](#) for a great look at the wide variety of topics we cover. Fair warning: it's 46 pages. Yep, nature is a pretty big topic!



2019

RE-CERTIFICATION PIN

GOLDEN-CHEEKED WARBLER

FIRST ANNOUNCED AT THE 2018 ANNUAL MEETING



This video, which premiered at the state conference, tells the story of how Master Naturalists play an important role in the natural resources conservation of our state.

[Watch the Video](#)



Two much-anticipated announcements at the end of each annual conference: the re-certification pin for the following year and the location of the next conference. Central Texas scored with the selection of the Golden Cheeked Warbler as the pin for 2019. You are going to want that. Next year's conference will somehow fit us into Rockwall.

Mother Neff State Park Fall

- **Yvonne Eele**

Photos courtesy of Melissa Chadwick

The Mother Neff Fall Festival was the same weekend as the Texas Master Naturalist State Conference, so we are especially thankful for the six volunteers that gave their time and energy for this event. John Atkins, with the help of honorary member Maybelline, manned a table with the Mammal trunk. He interacted with both young and old showing them scat, tracks, fur and talking to them about the mammals found in our area.

Maybelline was a bird watching CTMN scarecrow that helped at the mammal table and won first prize in the scarecrow contest.

Yvonne Eele and Tina Atkins served as Hike Leaders, answering questions and explaining the nature and history of the park. Daisy was our photographer for the event and assisted with crafts along with Charles Sorenson and Christa Venette.



Spending a day at Mother Neff is always refreshing. The Fort Worth CCC Legacy group had a booth explaining the importance of the Civilian Conservation Corp to our national and state parks. Baylor Engineering students who are working on a project to bring solar power to the pump and water tank at the bird blind, assisted children in making a bird feeder. There were other booths including wildlife rescue, the Leon River Dutch Oven Gang and of course, the Mother Neff Association. This is one of their big annual events at the park.

If you were not able to make the Fall Festival, you have another opportunity to hike the park and assist with another event on January 1st for First Day Hike. First Day Hikes are held at our State Parks to help Texans start the year on the right foot, well both feet, by getting outdoors. The event has become a bit of a competition between state parks for the most hikers. For several years, Mother Neff has had the most visitors for First Day Hike and you can help make them a winner again in 2019!

Dalton Merz Receives NPSOT Award



Dalton Merz, our chapter's long-time instructor for Rangeland Management, recently received the Charles Leonard Weddle Memorial Award for Lifetime Achievement in the field of Texas plants at the Native Plant Society of Texas' annual convention in San Antonio. Cecil Carter, right, President of the Society, presented the award. Dalton is actively involved in ranching, consulting and teaching after his retirement from Soil Conservation Service and its successor, the National Resources Conservation Service. For 35 years he served as Range Conservationist at various levels including Texas State Range Conservationist. He is well known for his special skills of communication with landowners and his practical knowledge of livestock and range practices. See our June 2018 newsletter for trainee Frank Sodek's article on Dalton's day-long Rangeland class. Congratulations Dalton!!

2018 November Awards

- Zoe Rascoe



Bill Abright—2018 Re-certification



Bruce Polikoff—2018 Re-certification



Kathy Cantu—2018 Re-certification



Mary Odom—2018 Re-certification

2018 August Awards



Shirley Watts—2018 CTMN Recertification



**Tina Atkins
2018 CTMN Recertification**



**John Burns— Certificate of completion
and Certification**



**Andreas Wooten finds the
Bobber Costume for Angler Ed**



**Member Cindy
Bolch provides
an informative
presentation on
bats.**

My Sub-Urban Backyard

(aka—all those slimy critters mom hates)

- Andreas Wooten

Editor's Note: First in a series

So here we are again, taking a tour through my sub-urban back yard. Its been a while, but the critters just keep coming. My mom calls them those slimy things (she's not an outdoors person). I suppose what makes my yard interesting to me is that it is in a subdivision, near a busy road and not all that different from most neighborhoods. With a few exceptions.

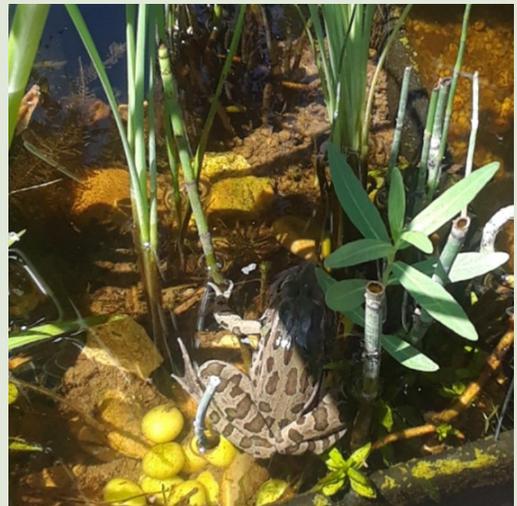
I have a lot of trees for one, I added some bird baths, raised garden beds and a 350 gallon pond that we call the "big pond" (made of old railroad ties). There is a smaller 88 gallon tank on the back porch.

Between the hiding spots in the wood, constant water supply, a wide variety of native plants, some non-natives (we have them!) and all the vegetables, I have a fair amount of visitors of the non-human type.



This is the nest of a Texas Brown Tarantula back by the fence behind the big pond. My dogs actually found it. Luckily I got to it before they started digging. I put up a small fence around it and a few weeks later we had 20 or 30 little "rantulas" all over the garden. These guys are great to have around, pretty docile and they don't seem to bother the dogs.

This Leopard Frog was hiding out among the plants in the pot inside our "big pond". Pretty good sized for this type. About five inches long and had a jump of about 2 feet. I don't know if you have ever tried to catch one of these, but if you do, put on your track shoes - they are darn fast, and slimy. Right Mom?!!



My Sub-Urban Backyard *cont*

These little guys were nesting in what was supposed to be a hanging plant basket on our back porch. If you look close you can actually see five little ones in there. They are a common little Wren that I have yet to identify for sure. But this is the second year we have not had any plants in our planter because of nesting birds.



We came down our street one day and saw the local vultures having a snack of a cottontail rabbit that was hit by a car. Didn't think much of it until we were in the garden and one of the dogs just wouldn't leave this spot in the grass, just kept sniffing. I was thinking "oh another snake" but when I got over there I didn't see anything at first. Upon closer inspection I found the fur and the little depression in which three babies were hiding. We then headed to the feed store to purchase some mother's milk supplement (actually for lambs but it was all I could get.) We used a syringe to hand feed them for about ten days then put them in a big tub for a week on milk, grass and greens from the garden and another four days in a larger bin on more grass and greens. We released all three after that on the big lot down the street. We see them from time to time munching the grass in the neighbor's yard.



TPWD First Day Hike

January 1, 2019

Mother Neff State Park has some tips for your First Day Hike:

Begin the New Year outdoors! Come hike through the limestone gullies to Tonkawa Cave, walk up the steps to the Rock Tower, and view wildlife at the Wash Pond.

- Hike is approximately 1.5 miles and the difficulty will be moderate. This winding trail has several stone steps And some steep areas and is considered primitive.
- Be sure to wear proper attire, comfortable hiking shoes and bring a bottle of water.
- Pets are welcomed but must be on a leash no longer than six feet.
- Due to terrain, strollers and other wheeled devices are not recommended.
- The hike is free however park entrance fees apply: \$2 per person 13 & older. Children 12 & under are FREE.

Where: Register early at the park headquarters. Hike will begin at the multi-use prairie campground.

Make sure to arrive in plenty of time to get checked in at the headquarters and then make your way to the trailhead by start time.

For a long list of First Day Hikes at Texas State Parks check [here](#). **GET OUT!!**



BOSQUE DEL APACHE

National Wildlife Refuge | New Mexico

- Zoe Rascoe



The Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1939 and is made up of nearly 60,000 acres, half of it in wilderness, that is carefully managed for migratory birds to rest and refuel. It is well-known to many birders for its tens of thousands of sandhill cranes, geese and ducks who winter there each year.

Having some interest (and equipment) in bird photography, my husband and I added Bosque del Apache as a stop between a visit to White Sands National Monument (more on that unique ecosystem another time) and Colorado. We would be there in the winter when large numbers of migratory waterfowl would be hanging out in the fields by day and ponds by night. We had read about the Festival of the Cranes that occurs in late November. We were there in January but were still rewarded with MANY sandhill cranes and snow geese, bald eagles, hawks, ducks, blackbirds and more. Visitors fell into two camps: birders and photographers. There are viewing platforms reaching out into the large water areas and as I approached the first one I saw a pretty big bird sitting out in the middle of the pond. Was it a swan? As I quietly slipped up on to the deck with my camera gear and tripod, I noticed several birders seated, staring through their binoculars at the large bird. I know better than to say "HOWDY!" in this situation. One of the binocular-holding folks whispered "Tundra Swan." I wasn't sure if that was a statement or a question. Seeing as I was carrying a camera, it was probably a good guess that I wouldn't know what we were all looking at.



BOSQUE DEL APACHE *CONT*

The most wonderful views were at sunset and sunrise, which incidentally is very often true for photographs. That even has a name: the Golder Hour. It's not to be missed, just in case there is a burst of pink or orange glory. At the end of our first day, we chose a pond and sat to wait and see if birds would choose it as well for their night's resting place. The birds stand out in the middle of the water to reduce the chance of predator attacks. We were not disappointed as Sandhill Cranes and Snow Geese came in by droves. It's difficult to predict, even for Refuge staff, where large numbers of waterfowl will land each night, but it's easy to know where they will be at sunrise—wherever they were at sunset!



There is really only one place nearby the refuge to stay (for humans, not waterfowl) and that is in the small community of Socorro. We found a decent motel room and had supper items covered in hatch green chili sauce. Pretty much all food comes with green chili sauce in this part of New Mexico. We left well before sunrise to get to the place we left the birds the evening before. We silently got our gear out and set up along a berm at the

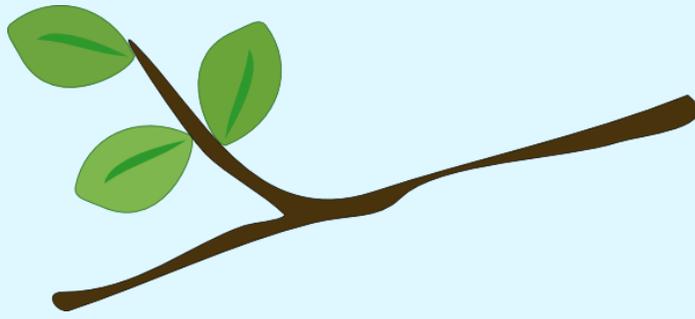
water's edge. By sunrise, we were basically shoulder to shoulder with 20 or more photographers with HUGE lenses and cameras capable of rattling off a barrage of 16 frames per second and 200 frames per burst. Who has time to process that many images? We had been so quiet but now it was like artillery firing.

As daylight broke through, the birds aroused for the morning and began taking off from the water in large groups—all making their distinct calls until it was almost deafening—then they circled for a while before heading off for their breakfast and us for ours.

There is wildlife at the wildlife refuge year-round. We have been twice now and I would definitely recommend a trip, especially if you can be there in December.



Photos by Zoe Rascoe



Out on a Limb

- Zoe Rascoe

Tree Description: At 15-30' tall, it can be a large, coarse multi-trunk shrub or trained into a small tree.

Blooms: Pink flowers put on a beautiful display bloom in early spring when the tree leafs out with light bronze colored leaflets that turn pale green during the growing season. Can resemble eastern redbuds.

Fruit: 3-celled, 3-valved capsule with up to 3 hard, shiny round black seeds. Resembles a buckeye, but not related.

Location: West of the Brazos River on well-drained limestone soils along stream banks. Common in rocky areas, canyons and on slopes of South, Central and West Texas.

Leaves: Up to 12" long and serrated, central axis with 2-6 paired leaflets and a terminal one. The tree is deciduous and foliage turns golden yellow in the fall.

Food Source: Larval host for Henrys Elfin Butterfly

Interesting Facts: Also called False Buckeye; seeds are poisonous.

[Click here for name of the tree!](#)



What's in YOUR backyard?

- Juan Anaya



Photo by Juan Anaya

For several years we have caught just a glimpse of a little yellow bird. Never long enough to identify. This year about mid August there were six and they stayed for 3 weeks. I finally identified them as yellow warblers. They bathed every morning at daybreak and then spent the rest of the day in the tops of a hackberry tree. With binoculars I discovered that they were feeding on a small caterpillar living in the trees. Hopefully next year we have the caterpillars and the warblers again. The start of the fall migration is my favorite time of year.

Editor note: I recall from my first Butterfly Count that Hackberry Emperor Butterflies are very common in our area and are likely the food source of the warblers. The caterpillar feeds on the leaves and new shoots of hackberry trees but usually doesn't cause extensive damage. The butterfly feeds on tree sap, dung, fermenting fruit, carrion and occasionally flower nectar. (Source: Texas A&M AgriLife Extension)



On the Horizon

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

Photo by Zoe Rascoe—Smoky Mountain National Park

December 2018

Wed 5th Enter your volunteer & advanced training hours into VMS

Sat 8th (V) 4th Annual Mother Neff Christmas, 10am—3pm b_abright@yahoo.com

Tue 11th 9th Annual CTMN Christmas Potluck & Meeting—Zoe Rascoe's House trascoe@hot.rr.com

Wed 12th CTMN Training Committee Meeting—Agrilife Extension Office, Belton TX

January 2019

Tue 1st (V) First Day Hikes—Mother Neff State Park b_abright@yahoo.com

Sat 5th Enter your volunteer & advanced training hours into VMS

Tue 8th CTMN Board of Director's Meeting, Belton Church of Christ. 4pm-6pm.

Tue 8th CTMN Chapter Meeting. Belton Church of Christ, 6pm-8pm. rene.berkhoudt@gmail.com

February 2019

Tue 12th CTMN Chapter Meeting. Belton Church of Christ, 6pm-8pm

Mother Earth News Fair—February 16-17, 2019 Belton Expo Center

Temple Home and Garden Show—February 22-24, 2019 Belton Expo Center trascoe@hot.rr.com

(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/>



Emetic Russula (mildly poisonous)
- Photo by Zoe Rascoe

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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Interim Editor: Zoe Rascoe

Contributing Writers: Rene Berkhoudt, Andreas Wooten, Yvonne Eele, Juan Anaya, Zoe Rascoe,

Contributed Photos: Juan Anaya, Rene Berkhoudt, Melissa Chadwick, Andreas Wooten, Zoe Rascoe

We now have options for recurring columns on member visits to National Parks and Texas State Parks, along with “Fish Tales” (of any kind!) If you have a story to share, just send me your idea.

Zoe Rascoe
trascoe@hotmail.com

Chapter Advisors

Whitney Grantham,
County Extension Agent, Natural Resources
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

Derrick Wolter,
Wildlife Biologist, Texas Parks and Wildlife



The Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter

Chapter meetings are held 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 2nd Tuesday of January, March, May, July, September and November at 4 p.m. in the Board Room at the AgriLife Extension Center at 1605 North Main in Belton.