

# The Tracker

Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter October 2019

Photo by Zoe Rascoe

## Inside This Issue

The President's Pen	3
Mother Neff State Park	5
Miller Springs Nature Cntr	7
ACOE Park Projects	9
That's Not Here!	14
Out on a Limb	17
Fish Tales	18
Chapter News	20
Good to Know	27
On The Horizon	28

## Calendar at a Glance

- Oct 7th— Board Meeting
- Oct 8th—Chapter Meeting
- Oct 10th—Miller Springs NC
- Oct 25th—Mother Neff Hike
- Oct 26th—Mother Neff Festival
- Oct 28th—Chalk Ridge Park
- Nov 12th—Chapter Meeting
- Nov 4th—Board Meeting
- Nov 14th— Miller Spring NC

## National Public Lands Day CTMN Family Picnic

- Zoe Rascoe

National Public Lands Day is the largest volunteer day on Public Lands in the US with 2500 events held nationwide on the 4th Saturday in September. Our family picnic to celebrate our Public Lands was held September 21st (yes, we started a week early!) at a local Public Lands location: the US Army Corps of Engineers Overlook Pavilion at Belton Lake. There are several federal parks in Central Texas. Look at our projects starting on page 5 to see where our members volunteer.

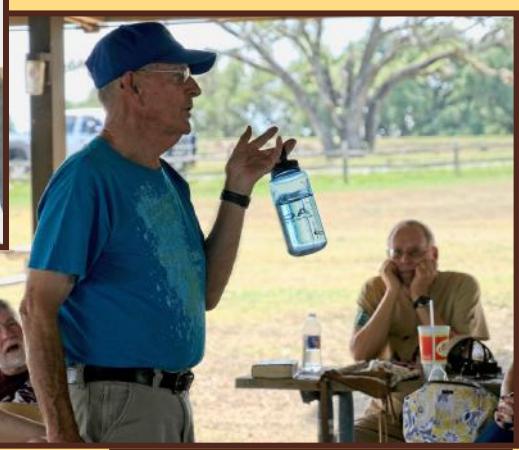


Christina Culp, Jenna Chappell and Mary Ann Everett hanging out at the family picnic celebrating NPLD.

*cont.*

# National Public Lands Day cont.

In addition to a scrumptious potluck lunch with hamburgers grilled by Lynn Fleming and John Ziegeler, attendees enjoyed 6 information-packed presentations on various survival skills. Things nature wanderers need to know! Thanks to Mary Ann Everett, Phil Everett, Bill Abricht, Ben Clement, Andreas Wooten and John Atkins for their demonstrations!



# President's Pen

- John Atkins



Howdy folks! I would like to kick this month's newsletter off wishing speedy recoveries to Sue Valdez and Shirley Watts. I'd also like to put to rest any rumors that their injuries were received during a tag-team wrestling match. Sometimes you have to take what Andreas tells you with a grain of salt!



*Lynn Fleming and John Ziegeler feed the masses!*

We got quite a bit of work done at Chalk Ridge Falls during this period. Ben made quick work of knocking down the gate pillar, and we got the stones cleaned up and ready for future use. The stones were re-utilized this month to reset the trail edge and build some waterbars to slow the erosion. It wasn't all work though, there was an interesting discussion about how the men in Bell County seem to prefer western and chainsaw chaps, but in Travis County they tend to like patent leather and vinyl varieties.

Thanks to everyone who had a hand putting together this year's family picnic. You folks did an outstanding job! Now we just need to deconflict it with college football season! A special thanks to Lynn Fleming for hauling the grill and manning it all day. First in-last out.

The last two months have kept me pretty busy with chapter work. Like everyone else, I can't wait for the temperatures to cool down a bit. Working in the woods this time of year is exhausting. Two hours is about the maximum time we can work. Anything longer than that and the civil disobedience begins (usually led by my wife!).

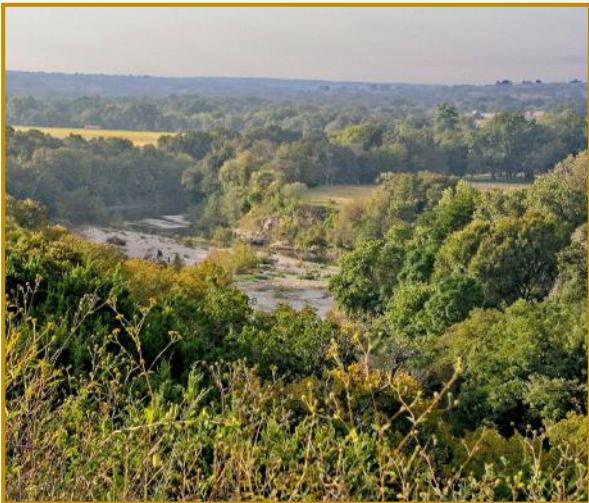


*John Atkins and John Burns are moving rocks from here to there at Chalk Ridge Falls*

# President's Pen cont.



This month also saw the Chapter working hard to line up future volunteer opportunities. We were approached by Peaceable Kingdom to give them a hand working and teaching the



*Parrie Haynes Ranch*

children there. We knocked out some plant identification with them this month and are looking forward to future work. Bert and Zoe have been in contact with City of Belton for the past month discussing two more possible worksites. Hopefully those will bear fruit. We also may have an opportunity to work at Parrie Haynes Ranch in the near future. The Ranch Manager has our contact information and he said he would be in touch. Speaking of Parrie Haynes, Whitney Grantham did a great job putting together the Bell County Conservation Expo at the Ranch on 19 September. Hope to see you at the Expo next year!

The invasive removal continues at Miller Springs. It was rather depressing to go back in where we cut hundreds of Ligustrum in May, only to find that almost all of them had re-sprouted. To add insult to injury, since we had opened the canopy, hundreds of seedlings were now coming up. We had to sit down and cry for a couple of minutes before we got to work. Sometimes you feel like Sisyphus rolling the stone up the hill...

I'll close out this month by reminding you to be safe out there. The rattlesnake I caught earlier this month was only about a foot long, but it will mess you up quicker than a big one. It was coiled up tightly on the mulch in my neighbor's flowerbed. The only way you could tell it was a rattler was by the diagonal band across its eyes and the vertical pupil. No rattle, no warning, and my neighbor almost stuck her hand on it. Now she mows her lawn every other day! I also had a run-in with a large scorpion at Chalk Ridge this month. As Ranger Denitra Neall and I were unloading stones from her truck, this scorpion scurries out and runs to hide in a crack in the truck bed. Funny thing is that we had kicked all those stones over before picking them up to load. Somehow it managed to avoid detection. Ranger Neall didn't seem real excited about getting back in that truck with a scorpion wandering around in it. Wonder if she swapped her truck out with Andreas' truck later that day?

Stay safe, and I'll see you at the next meeting!





# Mother Neff State Park

1680 TX Hwy-236, Moody

- Bill Abright

Bill can be reached at [b\\_abright@yahoo.com](mailto:b_abright@yahoo.com)

## Upcoming Opportunities at MNSP:

Hopefully it will cool off by October because there are a number of activities at MNSP that need our help. They are also listed in our weekly calendar of events email.

1. **Saturday, October 5th, 9a-10:30a:** *Wandering Wing Walk*—a birding adventure with Melissa Chadwick, Park Superintendent (Advanced Training for CTMN members)
2. **Monday, October 14th, 9a-3p:** *Prairie Restoration grant project* with Williamson County volunteers. We have been asked to help with the prairie restoration work and also to lead guided hikes for the Williamson County folks.
3. **Saturday, October 19th, 9a-3p:** *Baylor Adventure Program* with students who will be doing prairie restoration work. They would like our help with the prairie restoration work and to lead guided hikes for the Baylor students.
4. **Friday, October 25th, 9a-3p:** *Field trip with Buffalo Soldiers* and the MNSP staff would like our help with activities and guiding hikes. I imagine there will be a lot of students coming to that event and it will be a wonderful way for them to learn more about an important aspect of history.
5. **Saturday, October 26th, 9a- 4p:** *Annual Fall Fest* and a lot of people are expected to attend. They need our help with activities, guiding hikes and helping with parking.

## Ongoing Maintenance Opportunities

- Bird blinds – Cleaning blinds, putting out bird feed
- Garden Maintenance – Bi-weekly. Trimming dead limbs, pruning, basic gardening for our native garden
- Trail maintenance – Walking the trails. Trimming back growth, notifying rangers of downed trees, cleaning signage.
- Making new signs for trails – ensure all signage is uniform for all trails
- Painting projects – Road signs, Kiosks, Gates and other pieces of equipment as needed.
- Debris removal at the river bottom area – picking up small limbs, possible mowing to help get the river bottom ready to open for day use again.
- Chinaberry Tree Removal – need a large group when project is setup
- Carpentry projects – as needed (bird blind brochure project, Bird blind repair – replacing the glass windows with slats like at the prairie pond)

Check the weekly calendar of events email for November opportunities. Thanks so much for your continued help with Mother Neff State Park activities! - Bill A.

# Mother Neff State Park

*Cont.*

## Sideoats Grama Harvest

James McDowell, Park Ranger at MNSP, is looking for volunteers to help harvest Sideoats Grama seeds along the Park Road through mid-October. That's our State Grass! The seed will be respreads later this fall in the park. This is a great opportunity for members to get some volunteer service hours. Contact James at 254-853-2389 or email at [james.mcdowell@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:james.mcdowell@tpwd.texas.gov) for instructions and a safety vest. Look to volunteer about two hours.



*CTMN worker bees Jenna Chappell and Jessica Dieter have already been out on a seed collection run.*



## Invasive Species Control

- JOHN BURNS

[jaburns@utexas.edu](mailto:jaburns@utexas.edu)

Well finally the summer is over! Now hopefully we will be getting some cooler temperatures soon! Even with the heat this summer we have continued to get work done. We made some adjustments to our work by staying close and working on the areas near the trails by the nature center's parking area. We were still able make good impacts by removing chinaberry, nandina, and waxleaf ligustrum.

During our September workday we returned to the area near Green Pond trail where we first worked back in March. John Atkins, Bert Peeples, Marilyn Whitworth, Richard McCarthy and myself were the crew that day. We found regrowth was beginning to come back fairly heavy. It was obvious we had missed treating quite a few of our cuts the first time around. On the positive side, it was obvious that where we treated our cuts with the Tordon herbicide the plants were dead. This time we pulled what we could with the new Puller Bear tool and the others we cut and applied Tordon herbicide as we went. It was a very hot day, but we still made some good progress. We worked for a couple of hours and we were really dragging but it feels good to make the kind of impact we are making for the environment.

By returning to this area we helped support the hard work we had done last spring. I believe the regrowth would have taken over within a few more months without our return. Our goal moving forward will be to keep cutting in new areas and at the same time revisit areas we have addressed previously to prevent the invasive plants from reclaiming our work.



*Bert Peeples surveys the enormity of the project while John Burns keeps chopping ligustrum.*

Next CTMN Workday will be Thursday, October 10th at 9:00am.

# Miller Springs Nature Center *cont.*

On Saturday, September 28th Matt Bates, Parks & Recreation Director for the City of Belton hosted a workday for the public. It was called a “1 Hour Challenge” - to come out and work for just one hour and see how much could get done. With the help of 3 Parks and Rec employees, volunteers split into groups with the gloves, tools and cold drinks provided and traipsed off through the woods to designated areas for tree and vine trimming along trails and litter pickup. It WAS amazing what was accomplished in just one hour of planned work!



*Jason Deckman, a regular volunteer at MNSC with his wife Melinda, tests out one of the benches installed by our 2019 class members.*



The next chapter workday will be Thursday, October 10<sup>th</sup>. The start time will be back to 9:00 am. We'll work as long as we have energy to work. It sure would help to see more volunteers as the weather cools off.

*Wildflowers are still in bloom at MSNC!*

The City of Belton Parks and Recreation Department will be hosting another public volunteer day on Saturday, November 16th.

# Army Corps of Engineers Parks

## CHALK RIDGE FALLS

- John Atkins

*A shout out to the following folks who endured the Texas summer heat: John Atkins, Tina Atkins, Richard McCarthy, Marilyn Whitworth, Ben Clement, Bill Abright, John Burns, Melissa Ju (and little Clive!), and Eleni Nasiotis (a friend of CTMN).*

Big thanks to Denitra, an AOCE Ranger, for loading and hauling the rocks for us. We worked on resetting the trail edge (aka as busting and moving rocks) and building a couple of trail nicks and water bars to help with the erosion on that section of trail. There was also the necessary trash collection. Next time we go out there, we plan to remove the mature chinaberries (invasives!) along that section trail and use the timber to help block a couple of social trails.

Poor Ranger Denny ended up having a scorpion scramble out from underneath one of the rocks and hiding in the body of her truck! It was a hot day, but not nearly as bad Miller Springs last week. Our presence is a positive influence on the folks out there. People always ask us what group we are with and they tend to pitch in helping pick up trash.



Photos by Tina Atkins

# Army Corps of Engineers Parks

## Free Forest School Project at CHALK RIDGE FALLS

- John Atkins

Melissa Ju and Clive along with John Atkins, showed up to help out the folks from the Free Forest School on a cleanup of the Park. The Army Corps sent a ranger down to set up a table full of handouts and kiddy stuff and they provided gloves, bags, and water to the volunteers. The table worked out great because it served as a focal point for everyone entering the park. This encouraged (guilted?) visitors into grabbing a trash bag and involuntarily volunteering to joining the party. I'll add that one to my kitbag. I put a pile of business cards and Zoe's "Do you like nature?" cards out for people. Several folks showed interest and grabbed materials. I had a good talk with a Belton Scout Mom



about places to do Eagle Scout projects and opportunities to gain volunteer hours with us as well as merit badge work.

As you can see from the pictures, we picked up a ton of trash. I collected 3 different sandals and a cowboy boot, but I think the grill took first prize. Luckily the dirty diapers didn't show up until the end, because they got real ripe, real quick in the 90+ degree heat.



Photos by John Atkins

Routine outdoor maintenance at the Bell County Museum organized by Lynn Fleming!



Bert Peebles

Eleni Nasiotis and Tina Atkins



Marilyn Whitworth

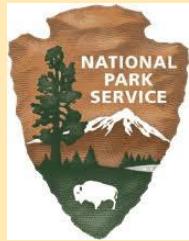


Elizabeth Moses



# WHITE SANDS NATIONAL MONUMENT

## New Mexico



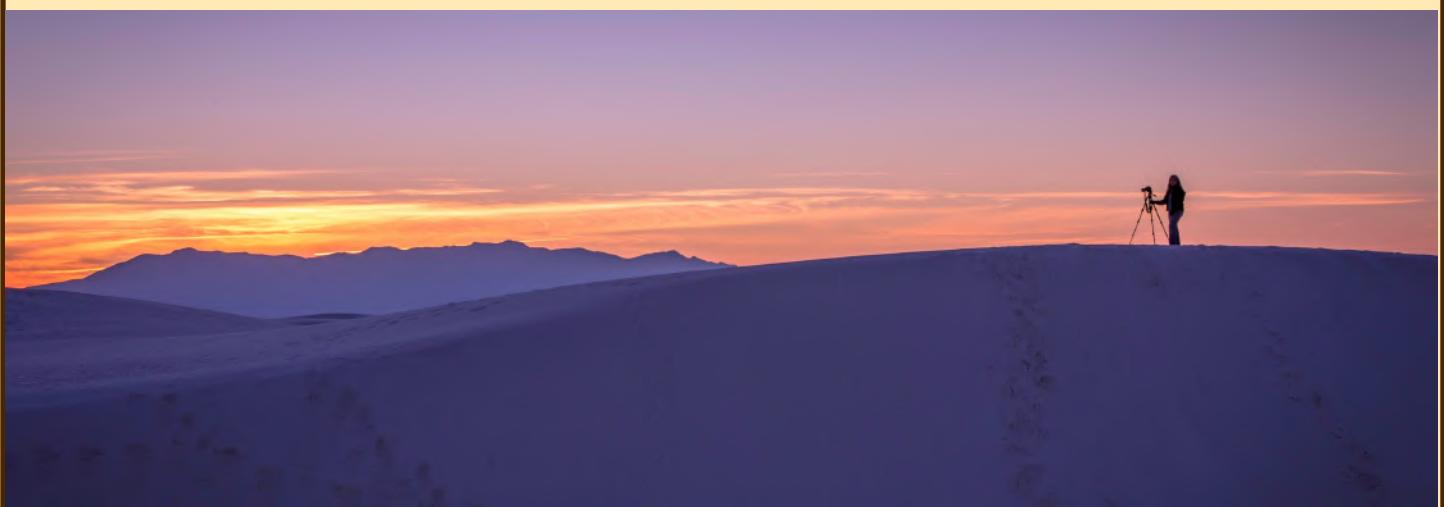
- Zoe Rascoe

Most all of our annual vacations are to National Parks, long weekends to State Parks and on the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversaries, some amazing natural area in another part of the world. This plays well to a shared hobby of outdoor photography. There are currently 61 National Parks and over 400 National Park sites (Monuments, National Seashore, and others). I am very grateful for the vision of US leaders and conservationists over a century ago to set aside remarkable natural and historic features in our country. Yellowstone came in first in 1872. With so many to visit, one of our rules is to not repeat a location, no matter how stunning, until we've seen them all. We have made exceptions and White Sands National Monument is one of those.



The beautiful white sand dunes in the Tularosa Basin in southern New Mexico cover 275 square miles of the Chihuahuan Desert and is the largest gypsum dunefield in the world. Interestingly, gypsum sand is water soluble- dissolving like sugar in tea. Happily the sand grains are large and didn't cling to shoes or clothes or camera bags.

We first went in January – it was jacket cold, but clear and we didn't see hardly a soul while in the Park. The immensity of the white dunes that rolled as far as you could see was breathtaking. The sand was white as could be and the shadows blue. As the sun began to set, the sand turned to many shades of lavender then purple. We stayed out in the dunes for sunset and were not disappointed with a show of pinks and oranges to accompany the purples.



# WHITE SANDS *CONT*

You might think that out in a sand dune desert there isn't much wildlife or plants, but if you know deserts, you know they usually have a lot of well-adapted species. This is true at White Sands where there are soaptree yuccas that can grow up to 30 feet tall trying to stay above the dunes. There is Indian ricegrass and little bluestem where they "live fast and die young" as advancing dunes can't be held back. There are small scrappy shrubs like Skunkbush Sumac and Hoary Rosemary Mint that concentrates their roots below until they form a dense pedestal as the dunes blow away. And some cacti, of course.

There are critters, too! Over 600 species of invertebrates live in the monument area where they aerate soil, decompose organic matter and disperse seeds. There are some scary ones like the tarantula hawk wasp—one of the largest in the world! But I only recall seeing a big beetle stumbling along the waves in the sand. But then I don't tend to go looking for spiders. There are also pocket mice and rabbits and bats living in the vast dune land.



We enjoyed the sunset so much, we got up extra early to drive back to the dunes for sunrise. It was a lovely day. Until we got just a few miles from White Sands when it turned very foggy. We never saw the sun and the fog was so dense, I was afraid to get more than the 20 feet from the car when it would disappear into the whiteness. It was a whole different kind of beautiful, but sure did limit exploring to a very tiny area around the car parked on the sand road.

In case you've already thought of it, yes, you can slide down the dunes on those round snow sleds. That was part of the reason we made a second trip—due to the fog, I didn't get to sled! I rented a round purple disc and climbed to the top of the highest dune I could see and mostly slid all the way to the bottom. It wasn't like snow, really. I had to sort of skootch most of the way down. But hey, I sledded at White Sands!

You should make a trip— stay in nearby Alamogordo, visit the dunes, drive south to the town of Hatch (as in chili), then up past Elephant Butte to Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge.

*Credit to the National Park Service website for much of this ecology information!*

*Photos by Zoe Rascoe, except for photo OF Zoe*



# That's Not Here!

I haven't been  
everywhere, but  
it's on my list.

-Susan Sontag

## Adventures in Scotland

- Mary Odom

*Editor's Note: As people who care deeply about nature — the land on which we live, the plants and animals that help feed, clothe and entertain us, the air we breathe and water we drink, the planets and stars above — we often want to explore this earth beyond our home.*

My husband John and I went to Scotland with my cousin, my sister, and their husbands! My mother's maiden name was Darrah from Clan Darroch which is part of Clan MacDonald. Our clan was from the Isle of Jura. Darrah means "oak tree" in ancient Gaelic.



Our adventure was an Outlander Tour with eight participants plus two tour guides. We traveled in a van from Edinburgh east to Lothain, and then north and west to the Isle of Skye and north to Inverness on some regular roads (driving on the left side), but mostly on the small one lane country roads with pull-outs periodically for oncoming cars. We stayed primarily in country inns and one castle, ate in small restaurants or pubs, and saw the most magnificent back country of Scotland... forests, mountains, rolling hills, heather, bracken, and sheep...a wonderful wild country!

The tour focused on the Outlander Series and the places where filming took place, but since the books are historical fiction, we saw many of

the  
significant  
historical

places of the Jacobite Rebellions when the Scottish Clans, some of who were Catholic, wanted to replace the English King with "Bonnie Prince Charlie". The Clans were defeated on April 16, 1746 at Culloden and the victorious British confiscated Clan lands, banned the wearing of tartans, and banished the bagpipes.



European Black Slug (photo by Trees for Life)

# Adventures in Scotland *cont.*

We visited many castles, some in ruins and some still lived in. All had steep, narrow spiral staircases going up and down. Most castles had hidden nooks around every corner with no rhyme nor reason to the placement of rooms. One could easily get lost. They were all magnificent works of rock made by manual labor.

The Highland Folk Museum in Cairngorms has a village of turf roofed cottages. This is a reenactment of the way the Scottish people lived in the 1700s. Dirt floors, peat fires, rock walls, and a large roof with wooden beams covered with turf placed grass down and then covered with bracken and heather. I loved the roofs! There is a whole ecosystem with moss and mushrooms and who knows what else.



*Doune Castle. Outlander fans will know this place and surrounding grounds. Scenes from many early episodes were filmed here. Game of Thrones fans will recognize this as Winterfell.*



At the village we watched a weaver making a tartan plaid from spun sheep's wool. At another venue we also participated in waulking the wool which is the shrinking of the cloth to make it stronger. (ed note: Google that word!)



*All three couples dressed as Highland Scots for dinner one evening. John Odom has the big gun!*

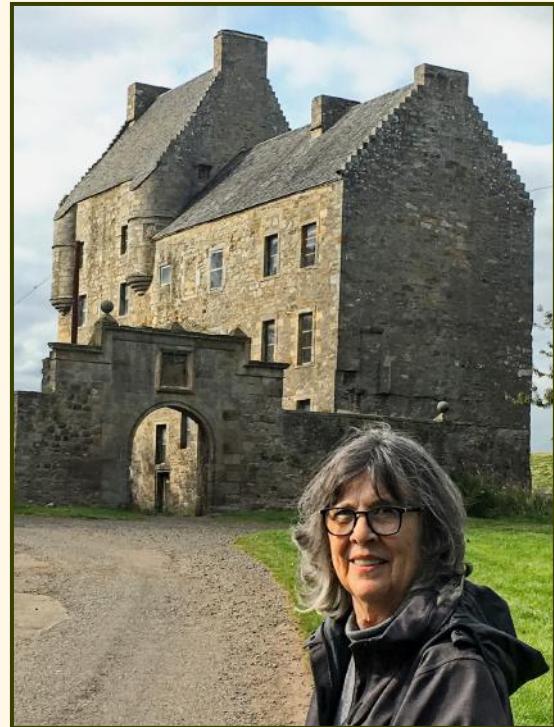
# Adventures in Scotland *cont.*

Without binoculars, but with the help of a BK bird book and the knowledge of our tour guides, I identified several very common birds: crows, jackdaws, rooks, wood pigeons, magpies, pheasants, gulls, swallows...but I also saw a “buzzard” which is a hawk, a pied wagtail, several hen harriers, and a robin which isn't like our robin.

The rock fences and walls were fascinating. They're everywhere, in towns, along roadways, around castles or crofts, in villages and even the cities. The cool, wet climate of the highlands results in an abundance of mosses, ferns, lichens, algae, and fungi growing on the many rocks used in building. There are so many colors and different textures.

This was by far the best tour we have ever participated in. Traveling with family and friends to beautiful places with knowledgeable guides, is just the best.

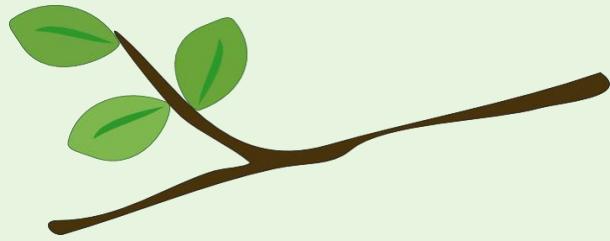
Can't wait for the next travel adventure.



*Outlander Mary Odom*

*Photos provided by Mary Odom except as noted.*





# Out on a Limb

- Mary Ann Everett

**Tree Description:** Small tree, to 40' with short trunk and shallow roots. Native to the Great Blackland Prairies, likes rich clay soils, high in limestone, but adaptable.

**Blooms:** Flowers in spring to early summer. Sexes are on separate plants. Both male and female flowers are small and greenish.

**Fruit:** Very distinctive, round, about 5" across. Bright green turning yellowish when ripe. Surface is covered in bumps and convolutions, resembling a brain. Juice is milky with many seeds. Inedible to humans although squirrels and bobwhites eat the seeds.

**Location:** Native in Central to East Texas, but now found throughout Texas along creeks, streams and fence lines.

**Leaves:** Alternate, simple, deciduous, 3-6" in length. Bright green and shiny, turning clear yellow in the fall.

**Bark:** Light orange brown, thin when young becoming thicker with broad longitudinal ridges. Twigs are slender with stout 1" thorn at the leaf base. Milky saps turns black when dry.

**Heat & Drought Tolerance:** Very high. Tough as nails!

**Interesting Facts:** A favorite among Indians for bow wood. It was traded among Indians in Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas. The wood has been found in archaeological sites as far away as New York. The hard, heavy wood is very resistant to decay, and so it is durable, so much so that in some areas of Central Texas loans were refused unless the wooden structure rested on piers of this tree. Makes excellent fence posts, but not recommended for firewood, as it sends sparks flying.

The root bark is the source of a yellow or tan dye used for dying wool, while the trunk bark was employed in tanning leather. The trees were also planted as hedges before the advent of barbed wire.



[Click here for name of tree](#)

# FISH TALES



## ***It's Not All About the Fish***

**- Andreas Wooten**

I have been a fisherman as long as I can remember and I have heard many schools of thought on fishing, such as “only big fish matter” or “catch lots of fish” or “the more difficult and rare the better” and my favorite “big lures equal big fish!” I have to tell you that personally it is NOT always about the fish. My grandfather taught me when I was probably only 3 or 4 years old. We would go to Lake Balmorhea or Elephant Butte and park the little travel trailer next to the lake and catch catfish and blue gills all day and Grandma would cook them up right then and there for dinner.

I have had some of my best days fishing and never even had a bite let alone one that I could keep. I think that fishing is more about getting out there, on the bank, or a pier, a kayak, wading in a creek and watching the people and all the creatures around you. With me it is spending time with my wife (who often catches more and bigger fish than I do) and just watching her enjoy the catch or the critters in and around the water.



The first Rainbow Trout I ever brought in was in Colorado. It wasn't very big, but it was the first one, beautiful day, sunny, ice cold, clear, fast moving stream that was rocky and had thick brush and trees all along it. I walked for 45 minutes through the woods to get to the stream, fished for about 20 minutes and landed that rainbow. I was so excited, I took the photo, packed up and walked the 45 minutes back to the truck and drove 30 minutes back to the cabin just to show my wife the picture (no cell service, which was great).

## FISH TALES



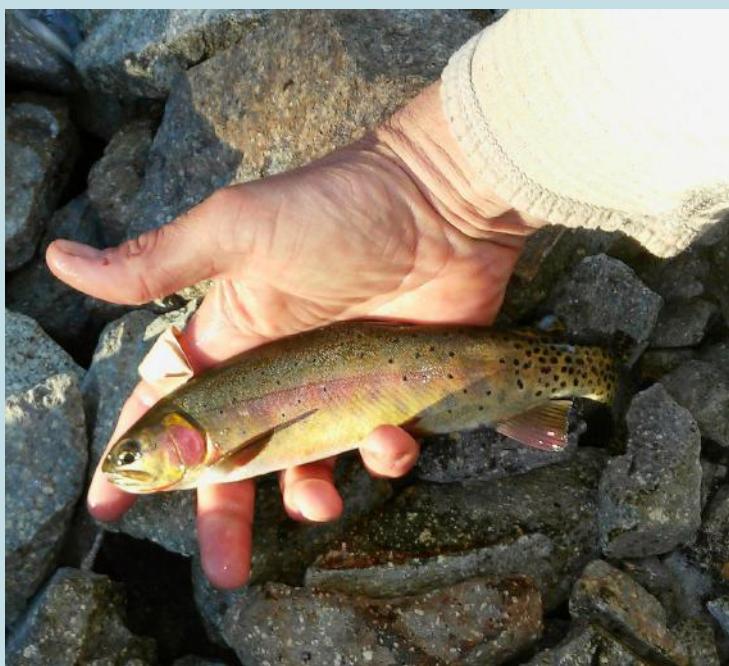
*cont.*

I got my first Brook Trout in New Mexico, an hour and a half drive up a one lane mountain road to the top of an old volcano that had been dammed up and had a 100-acre round, deep, cold lake at the top. Best view ever. I had never seen a Brook Trout before, but it is by far one of the most beautiful fish I have ever seen. Only about the size of a hot dog, but I just can't get over how cool it looked and what an awe-inspiring view it was at the top of that mountain with the birds all over the place and no one else around.

Of all places that are a slice of heaven in the middle of nowhere, Southeast Oklahoma!! Wide shallow streams, a huge lake and more big Rainbow Trout than you can shake a stick at (not that I caught any) but the unexpected terrain and these wide shallow streams were a sight to behold. I caught my one and only Cutthroat Trout there. But the quiet, perfectly clear waters and deer following you along the creek-side, who cares if there are fish.



*Andreas Wooten at a New Mexico lake catching Brook Trout*



*Oklahoma Rainbow Trout.*

Sometimes just being on the water gives you unexpected treats like osprey that swoop down from the cliff over your head and snatches a bass out of the water 20 yards in front of you and takes off without missing a beat (that was my fish by the way!) or just a perfect sun setting and you get that once in a while great photo on the water of you and your significant other on the lake just lazily trolling along for a fish that if it bites great, but if not, no big deal.

***It's NOT all about the fish.***

# MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Don Wyatt (2010) recertifies for this year.



Lynn Williams (2014) hit her 1000 hour milestone pin. Way to go, Screech!



Dale Hughling (2010) recertifies.



Ben Clement (2016) recertifies too.



Daisy Klassy (2018) recertifies.



Ward Critz (2018) recertifies.

# CHAPTER MEETINGS



At the August Chapter Meeting Richard McCarthy presented his favorite water topic: Macro Invertebrates. That included a discussion about equipment, and yes, he did have a pasta strainer—use what you have! He also talked about the “waterbugs” that indicate water quality and how to identify the many that can be found in our waterways. Marilyn Whitworth showcased various waterbugs with pictures and written descriptions as well as the real thing preserved in jars. Water is very important resource in Central Texas and understanding the critters that live in our waterways provides a good indicator of the health of our water ecosystem. Thanks to Richard and Marilyn for a great program!



In September, Brittany Chesson, Texas A&M AgriLife Program Specialist, presented a 2 hour lecture on “Aquatic Plant Identification”. The first thing she got straight was to let us know she’s not from Texas and she doesn’t call ponds “tanks” like we do. Afterwards, she stayed to show attendees how to use what they learned on a couple of buckets of swamp weeds donated by Robert Fleming.

# PARRIE HAYNES RANCH

## - John Atkins

On September 19th, I attended the 2019 Bell County Conservation Expo at the historic Parrie Haynes Ranch near Maxdale. If you don't know where Maxdale is, you go south from Killeen until you get to Ding Dong, TX, then turn west until you come to the haunted bridge (just ask a high school kid, they know where it is). From there you take the North Maxdale Rd to Gann Branch. After that it's dirt roads until you reach the ranch.

The Parrie Haynes Ranch is settled along the Lampasas River on about 4500 acres of Hill Country terrain. At one time it was the largest cattle operation in this part of Texas.

Whitney Grantham, Bell County Extension Agent – Natural Resources, did a great job pulling all the agencies and organizations together for the event. There were approximately 70 attendees at the event, and they were treated an outstanding lunch from Big Hoss's BBQ. Lunch and the view across the Lampasas River valley from the Hilltop Facility were well worth the cover charge to attend. The agenda for the day consisted of a Parrie Haynes Ranch introduction, guided tour of the ranch, property planning & fire wise landscaping, oak wilt in central Texas, watershed planning in Bell County, essential equipment for new and small acreage landowners, and conservation easements.



Parrie Haynes and her husband Allen



Oldest oak tree at Parrie Haynes Ranch

attendance from other chapters, and I would strongly encourage our members to support the Bell County Conservation Expo next year. It's a great way to knock out most of your annual Advanced Training required hours.

My job at the event was to run an information table containing literature from the various agencies to include Master Naturalists. Next to me was the Native Plant Society of Texas, and we stayed busy answering questions between the lectures. It was a long day but sitting in an air-conditioned building is a pretty easy way to earn volunteer hours! There were some Master Naturalists in



Overlook of Lampasas River

# An Adventure to the Davis Mountains

## Hummingbird Festival

- Mary Ann Everett

Last March, Juan Anaya told me that, when registration for the Davis Mountains Hummingbird Celebration on August 22-25 opened, I had better get registered without delay. He and his wife Tracie were planning on going. Fort Davis is in the heart of Texas' Chihuahuan Desert Sky Islands and is known as the Hummingbird Capital of Texas.



Rufous Humming bird

in Texas, albeit maybe only once, but hey, we are one up on Arizona on the number of species recorded in our state. The fact that we are close to the Mexican border may also aid in this number, as those species sometimes come across into our neck of the woods.

Another seminar we attended with speaker Carolyn Ohl, Living with Lucifer's: Christmas Mountains' Famous Hummingbird. This amazing woman bought Christmas Mountain, along with land, in 1979, sight unseen, out in the boonies. It is outside Big Bend National Park, and about 60 miles south of Alpine. To get to her place, the road is mainly rocky and sandy, and can be difficult. She turned this place into an amazing oasis, with water tanks and native plants.

Lots of field trips with seminars interspersed throughout were held, and it was a little difficult to choose which ones to participate in. Juan and Tracie were 'old' hats at this, as they had been there before, and they invited Phil and I to tag along on some of the outings. Both of us couples stayed at Indian Lodge at the state park, and if you have not stayed there, I would highly recommend it.

One of first seminars we attended was West Texas Hummingbird Identification session, with Kelly Bryan, a big name in the hummingbird world, who is very knowledgeable on that topic. I was amazed at all the hummers which have been seen



Carolyn Ohl—photo by Kathy Adams Clark

## A Hummer Adventure *cont.*

Most importantly, it is one of the best sites in the United States to see the elusive Lucifer hummingbird. Along with this bird, you might also catch a glimpse of the varied bunting, with purple and red feathers, and the scaled quail.

Carolyn Ohl is an amazing person, building this oasis by herself, until she married in 1995. There is no charge in visiting her oasis, but she does take donations. I was intrigued with her and all the work she has done to make this an oasis for birds and wildlife, turning this land around that had at one time been overgrazed. This is a testament to this woman's dedication to share and pass on this beautiful spot. This will definitely be on our next trip to the Davis Mountain Hummingbird Festival.

On Friday, we got up super early and traveled many miles to the TNC Davis Mountains Preserve (DMP). The Nature Conservancy established the 33,075 acre DMP to help protect this unique ecosystem, which supports rare plants and species which occur nowhere else in Texas. Other land acquisitions combined with conservation easements on adjoining property, the Conservancy is protecting over 100,000 acres of the Davis Mountains. Pretty impressive!



Bird banding station



Acorn Woodpecker

And who should greet us at the site but an old friend, Rich Kosteke, who used to be at Fort Hood, before moving to Austin. Hummingbird banding was underway at the Preserve and while we were there a white eared hummingbird was sited, but it was just too fast and we did not visually see it. Maybe next time. Rich had us consolidate into vehicles, and we moved slowly up the gullied, dirt road through a lovely valley with madrone, pine, and oak trees and lots of diverse plant and wildflowers dotting the landscape.

We stopped the vehicles and took a slow hike into one of the canyons and saw blue grosbeaks, acorn woodpeckers, western tanager, white-breasted nuthatch, western bluebird, lesser goldfinch, several species of sparrows, spotted towhee, just to name a few. Some of these were lifers for us, so yes, it was special and exciting.

## A Hummer Adventure *cont.*

After an exciting morning of hiking, birding, watching the banding, we headed back to Fort Davis to eat lunch and later to Chihuahuan Desert Nature Center and Botanical Gardens. Yes, you can have a botanical garden in the desert! There were trails to be explored, but we were being tugged in the direction of a wonderful bird blind, and oh, the hummingbirds and other species which came to the feeders. Also, there was an afternoon shower which formed, and weather turned a little cooler. These showers popped up daily while we were there.

Our last stop of the day was the McDonald Observatory, where we sat on our lawn chairs, very close observers of the hummingbird feeders, and watched with delight as those little birds came and went, dive bombing each other at the feeders then landing on the branches of evergreens growing in close proximity to the feeders, to hide until another hummer came to sip at their feeder!

One last thing, I noticed that quite a few birders were in the parking area of the hotel, looking for something. Then I learned it was a phainopepla they were searching for. On the morning we left, what should come flying through the courtyard outside our room, and landing on the yucca outside our door, but that bird! No one else was around to catch sight of it, but I did.



*Phainopepla*



Ruby Throated Hummingbird

We look forward to another year, when we will venture to places not seen by us, to view wildlife in close proximity, and enjoy great company! The pictures were taken by Juan Anaya. I shudder to think what a pitiful photographer I am, but for him, it is a snap!

*Photos by Juan Anaya except where noted.*

# PARK VISITOR'S WILD PIG TALE

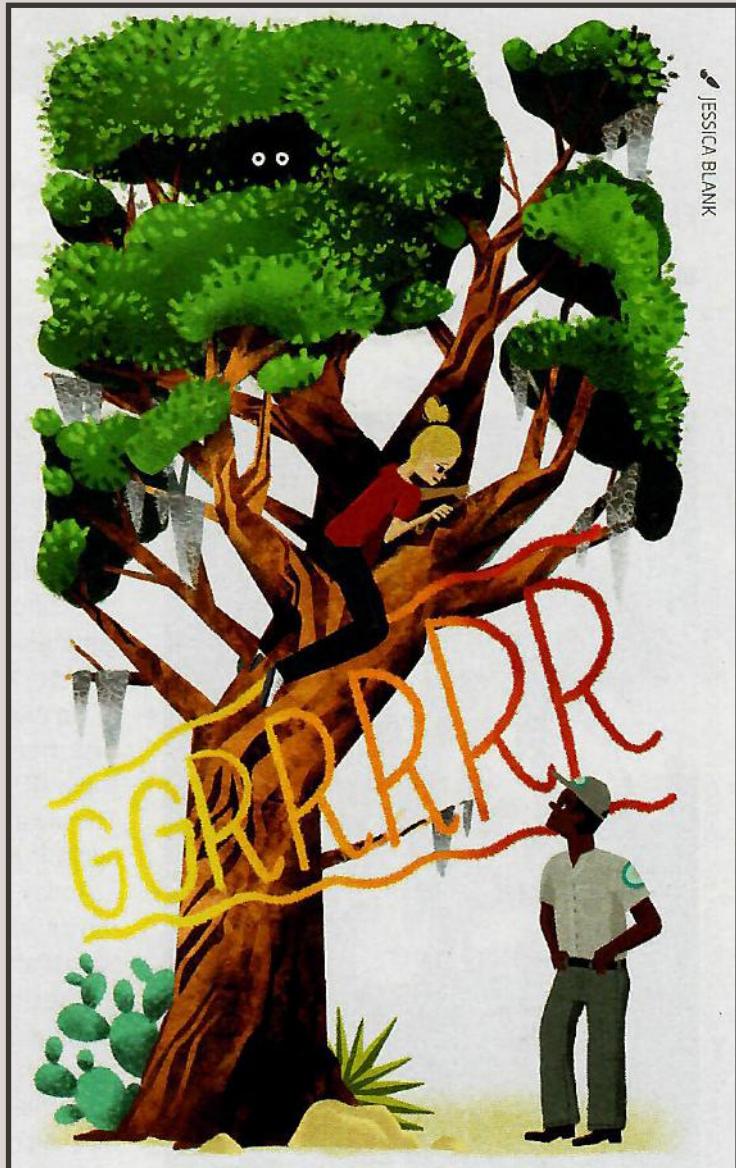
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Magazine Oct 2019

*Editors Note: When you are new at nature, there is so much to learn! Plants and critters and snakes and rocks and snakes and wasps and snakes and those dangerous wild pigs. It's good to be careful. It's good to carry a cell phone when you go out.*

At about 11:30am on June 21st, a Government Canyon State Natural Area police officer received a missing-persons call from the San Antonio Police Department. A woman called 911 from somewhere in the park, reporting that an animal had been following her menacingly, and she climbed a tree to escape.

The officer searched her last reported location to no avail but called her cell phone to reassure her that help was on the way. She urged him to please hurry because the animal (which she believed to be a wild pig) was nearby and growling. He turned on his truck siren and asked her to listen. When she couldn't hear it, the officer told her to use her iPhone to send him her location by text message, which she did. The officer then hiked to that location and found her and a male subject in a tree.

She warned the officer that the pig was still close by—she'd heard it just before he arrived. Soon, the officer heard a car drive by over the rumble strips nearby on the Galm Road and asked if they believed the noise that they just heard was a pig, both nodded. He explained the source of the noise. The officer reassured the embarrassed hikers that the unknown can be scary and their reaction wasn't uncommon.



# Good to know...

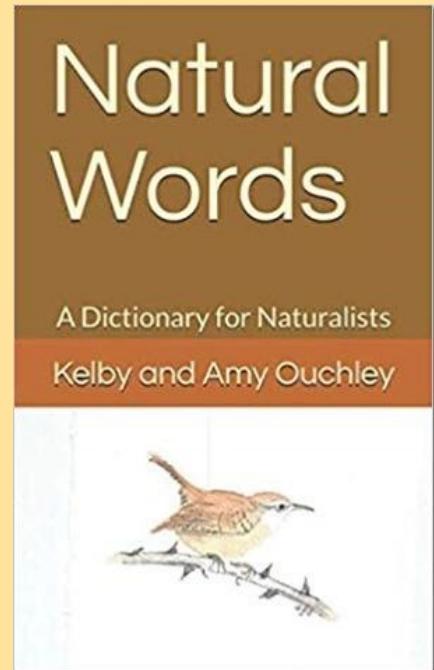
## NATURAL WORDS - A DICTIONARY FOR NATURALISTS

As biologists and environmental educators, we recognize the terminology of our trade is often foreign to those who seek to learn more about the natural world. [*That would be us Master Naturalists!*] This book contains those unique words that one might hear in a ranger's campfire talk, or read in a conservation magazine or scientific article. They express the physical description, behavior, classification, and life history of living organisms and their habitats. This small dictionary is for all nature lovers with an interest in learning the terminology used to relate to the natural world.

It is available from Amazon in paperback and e-book for less than \$7. [Amazon order link](#)



Looking for a pumpkin patch trip for the family? In addition to pumpkins, **Barton Hill Farms** has trains, an enormous corn maze, giant jumping pillow and other family activities. Admission is \$16. They are located on FM 969 between Austin and Bastrop and open Saturdays and Sundays September 28 until November 3.



How convenient for comparison: A Queen butterfly caterpillar below a Monarch butterfly caterpillar. Hard to tell which direction either of them are going. Perfect!



# On the Horizon

Check out the CTMN Weekly e-mail for a full listing of upcoming events

*Photo by Terry Rascoe—Mesa Arch, Canyonlands NP*

## October 2019

**Note: These items can be found on our website calendar for more details**

First 2 week: Mother Neff SP Sideoats Grama seed collection james.mcdowell@tpwd.texas.gov

Mon 7th: CTMN Board Meeting, AgriLife Extension Office 11:30-12:30 Members welcome

Tues 8th: CTMN Chapter Meeting. Belton Church of Christ. 6-8pm. "Pollinators Beyond the Roadside" - John Young, TXDOT

Thurs 10th: Miller Springs Nature Center Workday 9:00-11:00am jaburns@utexas.edu

Mon 14th **and** Sat 19th: Mother Neff State Park 9am-3pm Prairie Restoration project

Thurs 24th: Bell County Museum Workday. 8:00-10:00am lynn.fleming99@gmail.com

Fri 25th: Mother Neff State Park 9am-3pm Hike guides needed with Buffalo Soldiers

Mon 28th: Chalk Ridge Falls Park Workday 9:00am jfahhtx@gmail.com

## November 2019

Mon 4th: First Monday Gardening at Salado Museum 8:00-9:00am

Mon 4th: CTMN Board Meeting. AgriLife Extension Office. 11:30am Members welcome

Tue 12th: CTMN Chapter Meeting. Belton Church of Christ. 6pm-8pm Native Prairies

Thurs 14th: Miller Springs Nature Center Workday 9:00am. jaburns@utexas.edu

Fri 21st: Live Oak Ridge Park Workday 9am-11am jfahhtx@gmail.com

Fri 22nd: Pond Project USACE, Belton Dam Office. 9:30 am awwooten101@gmail.com

## **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**

**President:** John Atkins

**Past President:** Lynn Fleming

**Vice President:** Mary Ann Everett

**Secretary:** Melissa Jue

**Treasurer:** Don Wyatt

**Technology:** Dale Hughling

**Web Master:** Nicole Norelli

**Membership:** Linda Fairlie

**Communications:** Gail Hughling

**Hospitality:** Mary Odom

**Training:** Lynn Fleming/Mary Ann Everett

### **Chapter Advisors**

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

Derrick Wolter,  
Wildlife Biologist, Texas Parks and Wildlife

### **Newsletter Staff**

**Editor:** Zoe Rascoe

**Contributing Writers:** John Atkins, John Burns, Bill Abright, Mary Odom, Andreas Wooten, Mary Ann Everett, Zoe Rascoe.

**Contributed Images:** John Atkins, Tina Atkins, John Burns, Jessica Dieter, Andreas Wooten, Terry Rascoe, Zoe Rascoe. Please note I receive photos of sweaty people in big hats—sincere apologies for those missed or misidentified!

**We now have options for recurring feature articles on member visits to National Parks and Texas State Parks, “Fish Tales” (of any kind!), backyard nature, travel to places unlike Texas and more. If you have a story to share, just send me your idea.**

**Zoe Rascoe** [trascoe@hot.rr.com](mailto:trascoe@hot.rr.com)



*There's a LOT going on with these people!*

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

Chapter meetings are held the 2nd Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m. at the Belton Church of Christ at 3003 N. Main. Location exceptions are in December (Holiday party!) and June (trainee graduation!) Meetings include a nature-related program and the public is welcome to attend. Find topic information on our website and Facebook page.

The Board of Directors meets the 1st Monday of each month from 11:30am-12:30pm in the Board Room at the AgriLife Extension Center at 1605 North Main in Belton. All members are welcome at attend.