

# The Tracker

Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter August 2022

## CONGRATULATIONS CLASS OF 2022!

This year's training class was one of the largest we have had in several years. As always, I am amazed by the diversity of our trainees. Many backgrounds come together to learn about what surrounds us in nature. It didn't take long to see the passion of this class. Cassie Daley and her love of plants, especially those with medicinal uses or are edible. Kelli Barton related so many stories of her experiences and I know she is applying her new knowledge to her Bed & Breakfast Resort.

We were joined by three Heart of Texas trainees this year. Cooperation between our two chapters benefits us both. The Cameron Park Zoo trip was set up by HOTMN as well as the Weather and Climate class.

Our chapter puts a lot of effort into recruitment and training new members. The training planning begins in December and we go full speed ahead until graduation the following June. This year was our third consecutive class to have 100% on-time graduation! That in itself make the whole training process worthwhile!

I have enjoyed getting to know our new members and look forward to learning more about each of them as we work alongside each other.

To all our new Master Naturalists: don't be afraid to try new things, come up with new projects, and

may you love being a Texas Master Naturalist!

**- Lynn Fleming,  
Training Co-Director**



*Title photo at top is the Merz Ranch rangeland class, by Paul Parker*

Also graduating:  
Marie McDermott

# CLASS OF 2022 GRADUATION!!



Kelli Barton



Tommy Reeder



Cassie Castillo



Cindy Fowler



Colleen Smith-Fey



Brook Fowler



Catherine Schmitz



Danny Welch



Debby Bridge



Sally Jordan



Stan Simons



Cassie Daley



Letti Lim-Kosel



Paul Parker



Jeremy Ballard



Carolyn Williams



Charlie Langsdale



Kara Escajeda



Melissa Repasch



**“Is it hot enough for you?”** Of course it is. We are in the middle of the Dog Days of Summer. This period of time is actually named for the “Dog Star,” Sirius, which becomes brighter during this time period. This year seems particularly hot.

There are a lot of ways to “beat the heat” this summer. Some of the people I love choose to go north during the hottest part of the year, leaving Texas and hoping to find cooler temperatures. We do find cooler temperatures, but every summer we still find pockets of very hot weather, even in the north, no matter how far north we go.

In no particular order, these are my ideas for cooling off during the Dog Days of Summer:

Go swimming! As a child I spent big blocks of my summer in the swimming pool. There are splash pads, public pools, lakes, and streams all around. One of my favorite swimming holes is at Chalk Ridge Falls.

Watch movies about cold places. It may not actually cool you down but you may feel better.

Make or buy popsicles. You can even find the sugar-free ones that taste pretty good if you are watching calories. You may prefer ice cream to popsicles, which is good too. You might even visit the Blue Bell Creamery and have a fresh taste. Brenham is not that far.

Wear loose-fitting, light-colored clothing. Don’t forget a hat! I have my TMN pins on a wide brimmed hat with vents that I wear whenever I am outside. My dermatologist thanks me.

Find a shady, breezy location to sit and enjoy the fresh air... for a little while... then go inside and cool down. Unless that shady, breezy location is next to a body of water where you can catch fish. Then just fish.

Invest in a hand held electrical (or even old-fashioned hand operated) fan.

Use a cooling towel if you are working or playing outside.

Stay hydrated. I am not a big water drinker but I do carry water when I plan to be outside. Drink some drinks without caffeine. I love a good diet coke, but to stay hydrated, I have to drink water. Maybe that’s why lemonade is popular in the summer!

Time your outings for the cooler parts of the day. That means a pretty early walk for the dog! He/she won’t mind.

*Cont.*

# President's Pen cont.

Mall walk. I used to make fun of the old people who walk the mall until I became one of them. Then I saw the wisdom in it!

Buy a family supply of water guns and choose teams! Boys against girls, or kids against adults. Get the really big ones that you can shoot lots of water a long distance. Those are fun.

Go to the movie theater or some other air conditioned inside entertainment spot. I like the Mayborn museum in Waco.

Star gaze. It will be a few degrees cooler at night. Learn about the phases of the moon and the constellations.

Siesta! Who needs an excuse for a nap during the hottest part of the day?

Stay in your air-conditioned house. If you have to go somewhere, get in your air-conditioned car and go somewhere that has a/c. Just sayin'.

Paddle down a stream or river in a kayak or canoe. Maybe even catch a fish while you are at it.

Go skydiving. I have never been, but it seems to me that it would definitely be cooler as you fall toward the earth. I might be wrong about this one. Might be fun though.

Find a favorite watering hole to meet friends and family and just hang out.

Ride go-carts. Or horses. Or motorcycles. Or ride in a speed boat. If you are going very fast, you cool off!

Visit a cave. Most caves maintain a specific (cool) temperature.

Visit a penguin enclosure. You might have to pay a lot of money, but it's worth it to see them up close and personal. Plus, you cool off a lot!

Look at pictures of cooler places. Here are some of mine. These were taken this summer in Alaska and Canada.





# Mother Neff State Park

1680 TX Hwy-236, Moody

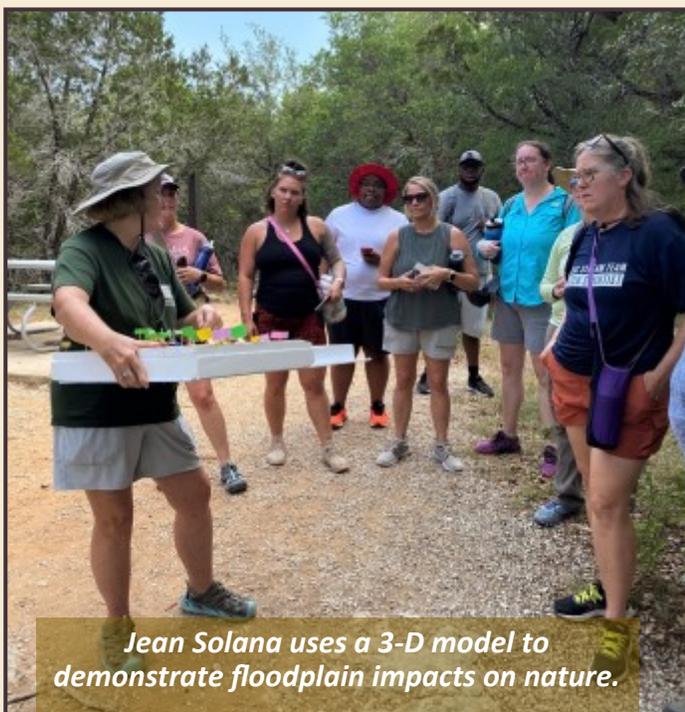
Jean Solana (2019), MNSP Liaison, can be reached at [jeansolana@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jeansolana@sbcglobal.net)

**ROAD CLOSURE:** TxDOT is replacing the Leon River bridge south of Mother Neff so Tx Hwy 236 from the south, Oglesby Neff Park Road and CR 338 are closed. **Please come to the main entrance of the park by accessing Hwy 236 from the north on FM 107 or FM 2671.**

On July 14<sup>th</sup> Mother Neff State Park hosted a group of 10 teachers from Waco and the surrounding counties for a workshop where they were invited to explore 6 area state parks. The purpose was to introduce the educators to possible educational opportunities for their students. Kelli Barton and Jean Solana represented the Central Texas Master Naturalists.

The workshop began in the CCC Cabin with an introduction from park superintendent Melissa Chadwick. Then we traveled to the picnic tables by the playscape where Jean Solana reviewed information about prairies and pollinators. We walked over to the campground where Sebastian Whelan, summer intern from Texas State University, demonstrated Camp Oh No! –

the opposite of “Leave No Trace” principles. Then we hiked to the Wash Pond where Park Ambassador Samantha Pentico gave an animated talk about amphibians. Upon arriving at the Tonkawa Cave, Sebastian talked about the history and geology of the cliff overhang. Next we went to the Watch Tower where Jean Solana demonstrated the Leon River floodplain diorama. Then Carol Martin shared about birds at the bird blind. A lunch break was taken and the afternoon was spent at Headquarters reviewing trunks and exhibits. The teachers were very engaged and we look forward to seeing them return with their students!



*Jean Solana uses a 3-D model to demonstrate floodplain impacts on nature.*



The last time I wrote I told everyone that John Atkins would be leading the June workday. I didn't tell everyone I was going to wimp out for 2 of the summer months. I had a couple of unexpected conflicts for June and July. John Atkins led the team in June and sent me their accomplishments for the day:

Everything went well today. Tina and Marilyn cleaned up the upper part of the park while me, Ben, and Stan went down to the new section to work on the swampy section. We carried 3 buckets of mulch with us from the parking lot, but the first thing we had to do was clear out all of the logs and sticks that people had drug in there to fill the mud hole. Next we started to collect buckets of rocks to build the "armored swale" (actually it's more of an elevated walk than a swale...). After building this, we spread the mulch on the approaches to the crossing. Once completed, we started to remove Ligustrum and harvest the sticks for walking stick production. Unfortunately, the chainsaw didn't want to start, so we only used handsaws and loppers. After two hours, we ran out of water and energy at the same time. It was HOT!

Thank you John, for leading the crew and thank you to everyone who came to help.



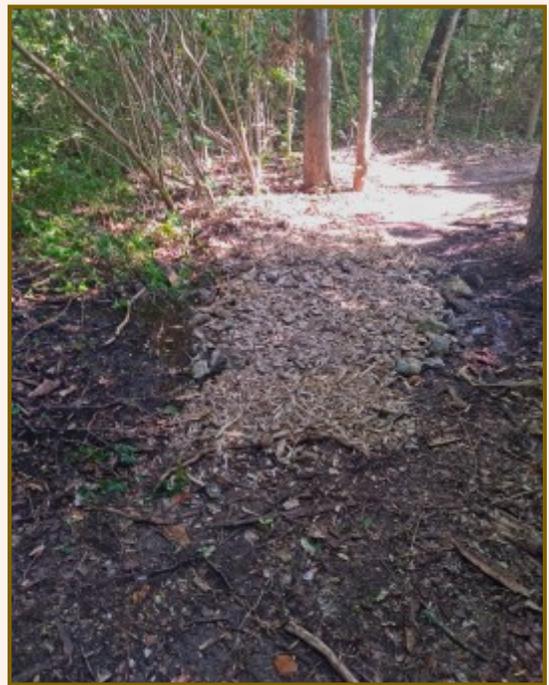
*Work crew (L to R): Ben Clement, Stan Simons, John Atkins, Marilyn Whitworth, Tina Atkins. Above: There is usually something blooming on the prairie at Miller Springs Nature Center!*

# Miller Springs Nature Center *cont.*

In July I was again out of town, but the weather was so hot I decided it would be better to cancel the workday instead of asking someone else to take the lead. I was really glad I canceled as it was very hot that day.

I do plan for us to work on August 11th. It will not be a hard work day. I plan for group to go out as a team and scout out future work as well as picking up litter as we go. Hopefully, we will come away with a good plan for work if the weather ever cools off. It doesn't seem like it will, but we all know seasons change and we will be ready to hit it.

It will be good to see everyone again!



*Above left: Stan Simons and Ben Clement dismantle a pile of limbs that were being used to cross an area with poor drainage.*

*Above right: The trail after rock and mulch is used to stabilize the low, wet area.*

*Left: We know this is Marilyn Whitworth by her blue sun hat and orange work gloves. There are many beautiful vistas to stop and enjoy at Miller Springs Nature Center!*



# Funnel Weaver Spiders

**- Carroll Adcock, 2020**

On a recent hike at Mother Neff State Park, I noted what seemed to be an unusual number of spider webs. Carrying my camera as usual, and having a dearth of birds, flowers or pollinator “subjects” available this particular morning, I paid more attention to the webs than usual. I was amazed at the sheer volume of the “funnel webs” and became curious.

Funnel weavers are so named because of the funnel shape of their webs. In Australia, there's a totally different group of spiders that also make funnel-shaped webs; ours are araneomorphs (modern or true spiders), while the Australian ones are mygalomorphs (primitive spiders). There are over 100 species and 13 genera of these spiders in North America north of Mexico. These spiders are typically nocturnal and will lay in wait in the funnel, and when an insect flies into, or lands on the web, the spider will rush out, very quickly to see if it is prey, and if it is prey, bite it. The venom is fast-acting on the prey, so once the prey is subdued (quite quickly) the spider will drag the prey back into the funnel to enjoy its meal and to prevent alarming potential spider-eaters of its location.



# Funnel Weavers Spiders *cont.*

There are multiple genera found but the most common seem to be *Agelenopsis* (“grass spiders”), *Tegeneria* and *Eratigena*, primarily native to Europe but through commerce and travel have made their way to the U.S. and Canada. Other genera include but are not limited to: *Baronopsis*, *Calilena*, *Callidalena*, *Coras*, *Hololena*, *Eratigena*, *Novolena* and *Rualena*. *Agelenopsis*, the “grass spiders” are the most common and their webs litter the grass after a heavy morning dew (something we have not seen much of). They are identified as a small brown spider with longitudinal striping and their 8 eyes arranged in 2 rows.

For this family of spiders, the web is a horizontal sheet-like web with a funnel off to one side (or central in some species). The webs can be expansive, covering several square feet or just small webs in the grass. Web locations are typically on bushes and grass and the spider lies in wait just beneath the funnel. I found one of these feasting on a recently captured green katydid!

Next time you are out hiking take note, and keep in mind that the spiders are quite bashful and the bites, in the unlikely event you get bitten, are rarely any more severe than a bee sting, unlike their Aussie counterparts whose bites can be lethal..... Happy trails!



# Great Texas Wildlife Trails

**- John Fairlie, 2021**

## **GTWT Adopt-A-Loop Coordinator**



One of our chapter's ongoing volunteer projects is our quarterly wildlife surveys for the Great Texas Wildlife Trails (GTWT) Adopt-A-Loop program. Our chapter has adopted the Chisolm Trail Loop, which includes eight sites -- Chalk Ridge Falls and Dana Peak Park on Stillhouse Hollow Lake, Belton Lakeview Park, the Miller Springs Nature Center, Mother Neff State Park, Lake Waco Wetlands, Cameron Park, and the Cameron Park Zoo.

We did our sixth round of site evaluations in June. The drought has continued to have a negative impact on wildlife viewing, especially insects such as butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies. We did get to see some green treefrogs at the zoo, and were impressed by the proclivity of painted buntings along the trails.



*John Fairlie, photographer. Front (L to R) Cassie Castillo, Sue Valdez, Jean Solana, Letti Lim-Kosel, Charlie Langsdale. Back: Kelli Barton, Danny Welch, Debby Bridge (her eyes & hat), and Linda Fairlie.*

Our pool of volunteers continues to grow, with many of our new members joining us for this round.

Our CTMN volunteers in June included Sue Valdez, Jean Solana, John and Linda Fairlie, Debby Bridge, Danny Welch, Catherine Schmitz, Sharon and Stephen Schmitz, Larry Turner, Cassie Castillo, Kelli Barton, Lettie Lim-Kosel, Charlie Langsdale, and Carolyn Williams. Thank you all for your help!

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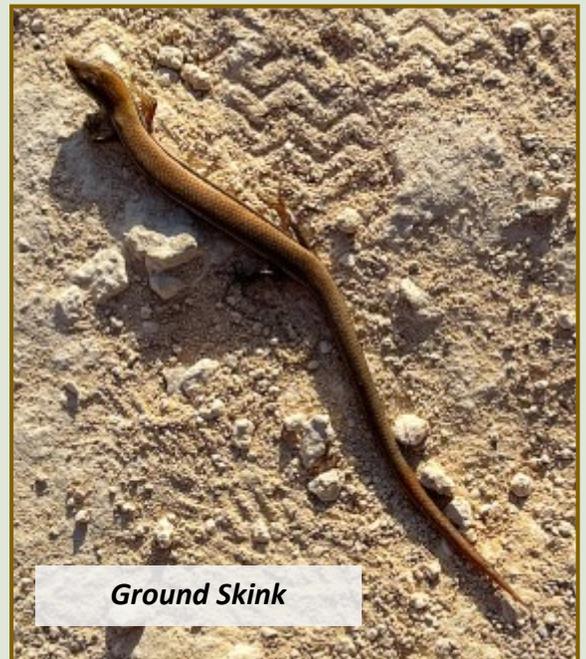
*(L to R) Sue Valdez, Debby Bridge, Cassie Castillo, Larry Turner, Jean Solana, Danny Welch.*

## GTWT ADOPT-A-LOOP PROJECT *cont.*

There has been a change in leadership of the program at the state level, with Shelly Plante now leading Adopt-A-Loop. She was the person who originally started the program, and she is receptive and appreciative of the work that we are doing. We will soon be getting a shipment of shirts and hats for our volunteers on the project that will have the insignia of our section of the GTWT – Prairies and Pineywoods West. I have also ordered maps of the trails from the state, which we will be able to offer to our members at cost – fifty cents apiece.

Our next round of AAL Wildlife Surveys will be in October. All of the site visits will be listed in our chapter's weekly emails, as AAL Wildlife Survey at Chalk Ridge Falls (or whatever site we are visiting that day). Feel free to join us whenever you wish! We walk as much or as little as we want at each visit, using either iNaturalist or eBird to record observations. You are welcome to identify your observations, but it is not necessary. The TPWD have experts who evaluate all observations. We can split up and cover several trails or all stay together.

This is a low impact, easy way to earn hours of volunteer time while hiking and taking pictures in a beautiful area – something most of us Master Naturalists love to do for fun anyway. We look forward to seeing many of you on the next round!



# NORTH AMERICAN BUTTERFLY ASSOCIATION

- Mary Ann Everett, 2003

## BUTTERFLY COUNT 2022

What made 2022 butterfly count different? Was it the drought? Was it lack of rain, lack of native plants in bloom? It was not due to lack of not trying, for sure. *Twenty-one CTMN members* with field guides in hand, and perhaps a butterfly net, went out on a mission to find as many species of butterflies as they could on one day, for the July 4 NABA Butterfly Count.

Among the species counted were the following: Black Swallowtail, Giant Swallowtail, Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, Sleepy Orange, Dainty Sulphur, Gray Hairstreak, Dusky-blue Groundstreak, American Snout, Mallow Scrub-Hairstreak, Silvery Checkerspot, Phaon Crescent, American Lady, Common Buckeye, Viceroy, Hackberry Emperor, Tawny Emperor, Little Wood-Satyr, Queens, Horace's Duskywing, Funereal Duskywing, White Checkered-Skipper, Clouded Skipper, Orange Skipperling, Fiery Skipper, Sachem. There were more than 25 species submitted.

The results were a fairly good count during a drought year. Stay tuned for information on another count which occurs from August 1<sup>st</sup> through December 31<sup>st</sup>. Thank you one and all for helping, and hopefully you will return next year, June 10, for the July 4<sup>th</sup> NABA Butterfly Count!

### Butterfly Count 2022

- 2 Tiger Swallowtails
- 1 Giant Swallowtail
- 1 Black Swallowtail
- 6 Queens
- 1 Dainty Sulphur
- 2 Sachem Skipper
- 2 Funeral Duskywings
- 1 American Lady
- 1 Gray Hair-streak
- 1 Silvery Checkerspot

Jean and Pete Solana



**Sachem Skipper**



**- Sally Jordan, 2022**

*I love to garden, and my favorite plant is my passion vine (passiflora incarnata).*

The vine is a native plant that the Spanish Conquistadores saw when they came to explore this part of the New World in the 16th century. They named it the passion vine because it reminded them of Christ's suffering on the cross. There are tendrils that look like the ropes they used to bind him. The vine's lance-shaped leaves resemble the spearhead that pierced his side. The fringed corona looks like his crown of thorns. The stamens and pistils appear like the nails and the cross. Five petals and five sepals represent 10 faithful apostles. The beautiful passion flower is the living symbol of the crucifixion of Christ.

It is such an unusual flower that it almost appears to be plastic. Ours covers a beautiful arbor, and grows on our fence. The aroma is heavenly, and it produces small, round fruit. Mine is a lovely magenta-colored flowering vine, and there is also a pale blue-colored vine. They are fairly easy to grow, and they can be invasive. Some people put them in pots, but the pots need protection in the winter. The roots do better in the shade, but the plant needs lots of sunlight to bloom. My plants survived "Snowmageddon" and this past winter. In a dry year like this, I give them extra water.



Another reason I enjoy this vine so much is that it is the host plant for the Gulf Fritillary butterfly, which looks very much like a Monarch butterfly. Sometimes, the caterpillars strip the vine to almost nothing, but it comes back with time. It is fun to watch the pupae hatch and become butterflies. I have mailed the pupae to my grandchildren in North Carolina, and they have loved watching them turn into beautiful butterflies.

You can purchase these vines in nurseries or you can dig one up in my yard. ***Happy gardening!***

# My Sub-Urban Backyard

- Andreas Wooten, 2015

## THE TARANTULA HAWK WASP

So, you have probably seen one, just didn't know what to call it, and probably did not want to get close because these guys are HUGE compared to other wasps and stinging things here in Central Texas. The first time I took notice of them was last summer. We had one flying around the yard, and the glossy black body and orange wings were absolutely beautiful BUT, it was also exceptionally intimidating—just the size and the shape said “don't mess with me!” This summer I have had a great many more than I usually do (and I had learned to pin insects... thanks Jenna!) and I wanted to add it to the collection.

So, with insect net, 1 gallon plastic zip-lock bag and gloves (and my wife close at hand as the spotter) we went “hawk” hunting. This was easier said than done, they are fast when they want to be, very maneuverable and seem to know exactly when your are after them so they vanish. But we managed to bag one and get it in the freezer.

Then I started doing my research so I could properly mount and label him for my collection. In hindsight, I should have researched FIRST and I would have used welding gloves, a face shield, probably some football-pads and hockey pants, instead of just garden gloves!

[Tarantula hawk - Wikipedia](#) “The Tarantula Hawk is one of the largest parasitoid wasps, using



their sting to paralyze their prey before dragging it to a brood nest as living food; a single egg is laid on the prey, hatching to a larva which eats the still-living prey. They are found on all continents except Antarctica.

The female tarantula hawk wasp stings a tarantula between the legs, paralyzes it, then drags the prey to a specially prepared burrow, where a single egg is laid on the spider's abdomen, and the burrow entrance is covered. When the wasp larva hatches, it makes a small hole in the spider's abdomen, then enters and feeds voraciously, avoiding vital organs for as long as possible to keep the spider alive.

# My Sub-Urban Backyard *cont.*

(*Tarantula Hawk—Wikipedia cont*) After several weeks, the larva pupates. Finally, the wasp becomes an adult and emerges from the spider's abdomen to continue the life cycle.

While the wasps tend to be most active in the daytime in summer, they tend to avoid high temperatures. The male tarantula hawk does not hunt. Both males and females feed on the flowers of milkweeds, western soapberry trees, or mesquite trees. Females are not very aggressive, in that they are hesitant to sting, but the sting is extraordinarily painful.

Tarantula hawk wasps are relatively docile and rarely sting without provocation. However, the sting—particularly that of *P. grossa*—is among the most painful of all insects, though the intense pain only lasts about five minutes. One researcher described the pain as "...immediate, excruciating, unrelenting pain that simply shuts down one's ability to do anything, except scream. Mental discipline simply does not work in these situations." In terms of scale, the wasp's sting is rated near the top of the Schmidt sting pain index, second only to that of the bullet ant, and is described by Schmidt as "blinding, fierce[, and] shockingly electric". Because of their extremely large stingers, very few animals are able to eat them; one of the few that can is the roadrunner."



Bottom line, we have tarantulas all over the yard, (comes from having transitioned to native plants) so these guys have a good hunting area. Additionally, they are pollinators and nectar users so the flowers also draw them in. If you just let them do their thing and hunt/nectar, they won't bother you. In my mind, this only means that as I

continue to develop my back yard with native plants and continue to provide shelter, water and food sources, my sub-urban backyard will only continue to attract more and more interesting things. Even if they have a sting that ".....simply shuts down one's ability to do anything, except scream." But hey, it wont kill ya!!!

# What's in YOUR backyard?



- Juan Anaya, 2018

When returning home from out of state I discovered that my wife had forgotten to buy more oranges for the orioles. Not wanting to go to the store I decided to cut a cold watermelon. Seems like the backyard gang approved. The black chinned hummingbirds, Baltimore Orioles and Buggy Malone the cotton tail enjoyed the treat. I think Bugs still favored the fallen plums.



# Why is Bird ID So Hard??

Birding can be hard. You can hear them, but can't see them. Then you see them and they don't match any bird in your stack of guide books and none of the 4 bird apps on your phone. Why is it that a bird species can have so many different "looks" that they are very difficult to identify? Wait. Humans have some pretty different "looks" amongst us, too. Way more than birds! I mean, lets just start with hairstyles... CMTN birder/photographer Carroll Adcock was stumped on this (likely) Oriole he spotted in the Hill Country. A bird team powwow settled on a juvenile Orchard Oriole.

What do you think??





## - Mary Ann Everett, 2003

On July 11<sup>th</sup> Phil and I traveled to Junction to participate in Purple Martin Day 2022 with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and its partnership with Texas Tech University at the Llano River Field Station. I never even knew there was such a field station located close to the state park. The site was quite a layout of buildings and amenities. It is the largest inland field station in Texas, and we were impressed.



What did we learn? Sadly, due to the area already having over 43 days of over 100-degree heat as of July 11, there were no purple martins in the gourd houses. The chicks could not survive that heat. So where did they go? They went down to the Llano River and hung out, with enough water and insects to keep alive. Even though we did not get to see any banding of the purple martins, Dr. Blake Grisham (left) and his staff netted several other species for some of us to handle, band, and release—including this yellow breasted chat. Dr. Grisham is currently doing research on which type of martin house does best in the heat and in

cold weather. He has a 'button' which is put in the houses and records temperatures and dates. The study will end next year. Dr. Grisham, along with James Ray, a certified wildlife biologist living in Canyon, Texas, are two scientists who are banding purple martins in our state.

After wintering in South America, these birds return to the United States, and on northward toward Canada, between Dec 23rd until late in April and May. They arrive in Amarillo and Canyon around March 15th. In Central Texas we see them late January into February.

# PURPLE MARTIN DAY *cont.*

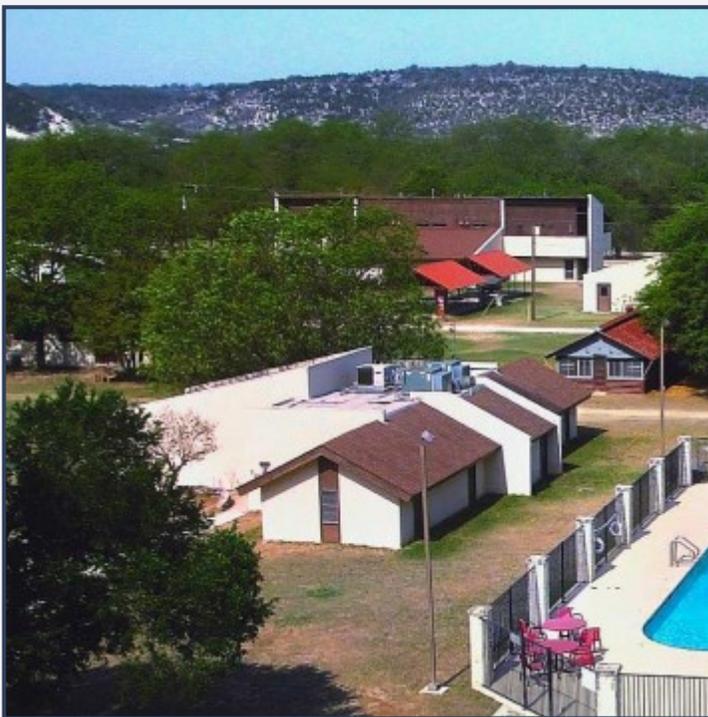
What do they eat? They are tremendous insectivores, catching their prey on the fly. They fly high, so they are eating the larger insects.

The young are in the nest for 26-32 days. One of the projects Dr. Grisham is working on is GPS and Geolocators with these birds. He said that purple martins don't necessarily come back to the house from which they were born, and he is collecting more data on this.



Two of the major predators of the purple martin are the house sparrows and starlings. These birds will build their nests right on top of the purple martin nest, which is not much of a nest, only bits of leaf material and small twigs. They will peck on the purple martin eggs and on the newborn chicks. These two predators are not native birds and can be trapped.

Along with the information shared about the purple martins, we learned about research projects going on as you are headed westward.



One such project is on the Montezuma Quail where they are trying to get an idea on how large a group lives in west Texas. Another student working on her master's degree is doing research on Nature Conservancy land on wetlands and the impact those wetlands have birds and other wildlife. I never knew Texas has 38 nature preserves, and each one is a treasure. Some of that land surely looks to be challenging, as to hiking and terrain.

All in all, the 5-hour day I spent at this facility was very interesting and only continued with my fascination with the purple martin.



# Musings of the Contemplative Naturalist

## *Fishes and Birds*

- **Bill Novakoski, 2020**

During the long and hot summer days of July, my wife and I enjoyed a visit of our out-of-state adult children. As a short respite from the heat and Central Texas drought, we drove to the Gulf coast to experience the cool coastal waters and breezes. This change in scenery from our usual perch on the edge of the Edwards Plateau to the Gulf Coast Marshes ecoregion provided an opportunity to observe different species of fishes and birds and to awaken fresh contemplations. To seed my contemplations, I read two passages of ancient naturalists. This first:

And God created great whales and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind; and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply on the earth.”—*Genesis 1:21-22, 21<sup>st</sup> Century King James Version Bible.*

Pondering the first reading was delightful. With the assistance of our guide, from his boat, the fishers among us easily caught our limits of Speckled Trout and Black Drum. These saltwater species were obviously abundant as we observed another nearby fishing party pull fish after fish from the waving water in rapid succession. It was not only the human fishers having success, but numerous Brown Pelicans amused us as we watched them fly along the water’s surface and use their dive-bomb technique to make their catch. When we stepped back onto the sandy shore, we were met by numerous black-headed Laughing Gulls swirling overhead or racing each other to get scraps as fishers cleaned their catches.



Our son Joe with a catch



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## Musings of the Contemplative Naturalist *cont.*

And the second passage:

Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than the food, and the body than the raiment? Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye of much more value than they? –*Matthew 6:25-26, American Standard Version Bible*

The second passage was more challenging to ponder. In it the naturalist is admonishing his listeners not to worry about life, food, drink and clothes but encouraging them to hope and trust their life necessities would be provided. He was not saying the birds stop doing their natural behaviors to gather food or make their nests. Likewise, despite the challenges of the heat, drought and monetary inflation, I surmise we should continue our daily work while resisting worry and embracing hope.

Taken together, I believe these two naturalists' quotations teach that diversity in kind and abundance in number allows the nature's beings to thrive together and this diversity and abundance gives hope. Perhaps diversity and interdependence should be celebrated and not feared.



# PICTURE THIS

Tracker Editor's Note: This article is shared here for those who are interested in submitting photographs in the TMN 2022 Annual Meeting Photo Contest in October. Contest rules can be found [here](#).

*The keys to a prize-winning photograph lie in these 12 competition standards.*

## Elements of Excellence

**BY EARL NOTTINGHAM**

What does it take to create that elusive prize-winning photograph? Helpful answers come from the Professional Photographers of America, the premier photo organization that knows a thing or two (more like 12) about the elements of a great photograph.

Each year, PPA holds national competitions for photographers hoping to earn a "merit" for each high-scoring image. Various professional degrees and certifications are earned as merits accumulate.

According to PPA, "The Photographic Exhibitions Committee of PPA uses the 12 elements below as the 'gold standard' to define a merit image. The use of these 12 elements connects the modern practice of photography and its photographers to the historical practice of photography begun nearly two centuries ago."



**1. Impact** is the sense one gets upon viewing an image for the first time. Compelling images evoke laughter, sadness, anger, pride, wonder or another intense emotion. There can be impact in any of these 12 elements.

**2. Technical excellence** is the print quality of the image itself as it is presented for viewing. Retouching, manipulation, sharpness, exposure, printing, mounting and correct color are some items that speak to the qualities of the physical print.

**3. Creativity** is the original, fresh and external expression of the imagination of the maker by using the medium to convey an idea, message or thought.

**4. Presentation** affects an image by giving it a finished look. The mats and borders used, either physical or digital, should support and enhance the image, not distract from it.

# PICTURE THIS

**5. Style** is defined in a number of ways as it applies to a creative image. It might be defined by a specific genre or simply be the recognizable characteristics of how a specific artist applies light to a subject. Style can affect an image in a positive manner when the subject matter and the style are appropriate for each other, or it can have a negative effect when they are at odds.

**6. Composition** is important to the design of an image, bringing all of the visual elements together in concert to express the purpose of the image. Proper composition holds the viewer in the image and prompts the viewer to look where the creator intends. Effective composition can be pleasing or disturbing, depending on the intent of the image maker.

**7. Color balance** supplies harmony to an image. An image in which the tones work together, effectively supporting the image, can enhance its emotional appeal. Color balance is not always harmonious and can be used to evoke diverse feelings for effect.

**8. Center of interest** is the point or points on the image where the maker wants viewers to stop as they look at the image. There can be primary and secondary centers of interest. Occasionally there will be no specific center of interest, when the entire scene collectively serves as the center of interest.

**9. Lighting** refers to how dimension, shape and roundness are defined in an image by the use of light. Whether the light applied to an image is artificial or natural, proper use of it should enhance an image.

**10. Subject matter** should always be appropriate to the story being told in an image.

**11. Technique** is the approach used to create the image. Printing, lighting, posing, capture, presentation media and more are part of the technique applied to an image.

**12. Storytelling** refers to the image's ability to evoke imagination. One beautiful thing about art is that viewers can create their own story upon looking at an image.

Keep these 12 elements from professionals in mind for your own photographic work. In time, they will become second nature as you shoot and process your images. Strive to make every photograph a "merit" print!



*Editor's Note: Earl's book, [Wild Focus – 25 years of Texas Parks & Wildlife Photography](#), covering his TPWD career is now available from Texas A&M University Press.*

*We are grateful to Russell Roe, Managing Editor of the Texas Parks & Wildlife Magazine we all love, for allowing us to share Earl Nottingham's "Picture This" articles on photography tips. If you can't wait, many of Earl's articles are archived at [tpwmagazine.com/photography](http://tpwmagazine.com/photography).*



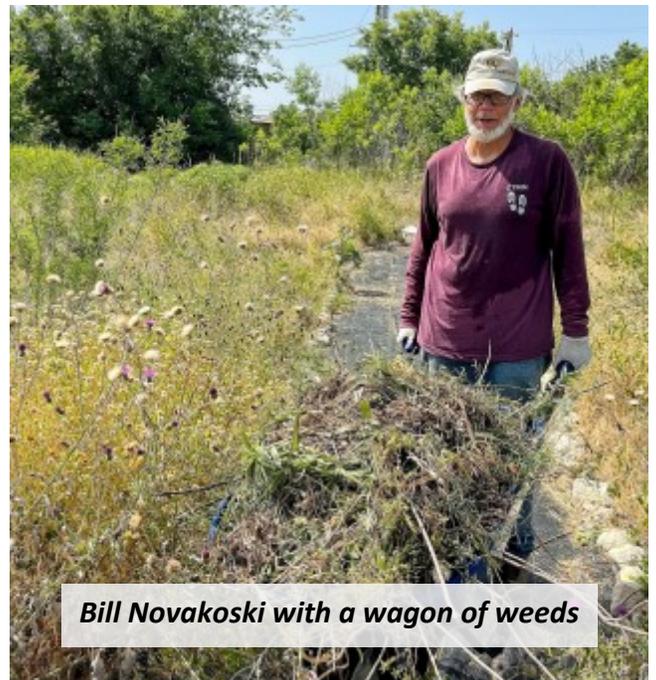
# FORT HOOD PROJECTS

- Jean Solana, 2019

## Fort Hood Pollinator Garden Cleanup Day – June 16, 2022

On Thursday, June 16<sup>th</sup> a group of Central Texas Master Naturalists and other volunteers took part in a native garden clean up morning led by biologists Chelsea and Charlie Plimpton and Brad Burden. The Pollinator Garden at Fort Hood consists of an Education Building and Greenhouse surrounded by several acres of pollinator gardens and nature trails full of native wildflowers and grasses.

CTMN members included Tommy Reeder, Cassie Castillo, Jamey Douglass, Bill Abright, Bill Cornelius, Bill Novakoski, Jean Solana and Marilyn Whitworth. Activities included weed-eating and weeding out invasives such as Johnson Grass, trimming and weeding flower beds, and clearing trails. The gardens were a new space to many and we enjoyed a morning in the flowers!



*Bill Novakoski with a wagon of weeds*



*Cassie Castillo and Marilyn Whitworth*

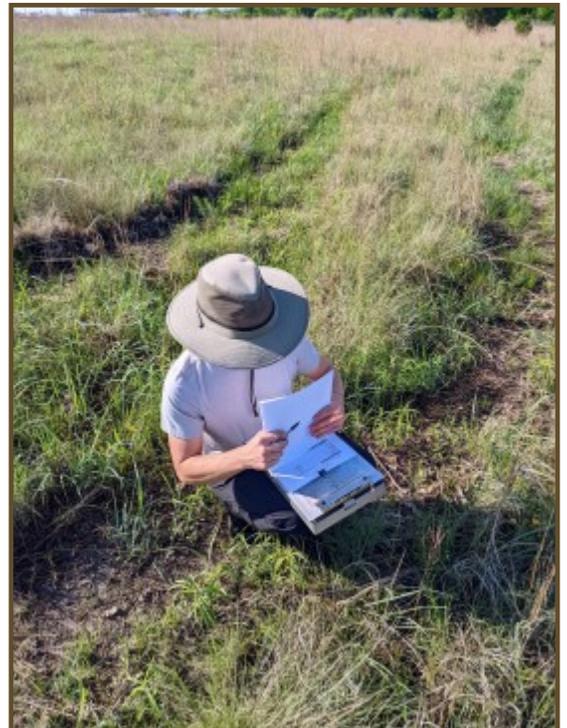


- **Bruce Polikoff, 2016**

## Fort Hood Bird and Vegetation Surveys

Jean Solana, Jamey Douglass and I are doing bird and vegetation surveys for a Northern Bobwhite research project sponsored by the University of Illinois through AIM.

I'm glad Fort Hood is open to us for citizen science projects. We basically have 214,000 acres/340 square miles of protected land in our backyards. Adaptive and Integrative Management team (AIM), the Directorate of Public Works, Natural Resources Management Branch and the commanding general have recognized our volunteer efforts. CTMN volunteers are definitely known on Fort Hood!



# BAMBOO FOR YOU

- Bill Cornelius, 2020

## More Bamboo For Central Texas

We will look at some more bamboos for our area that have unusual features to enjoy. As we did last time, let's look at some more runners. Black bamboo (*Phyllostachys nigra*) is a native of China and Taiwan. It is a beautiful bamboo that grows to around 30 feet with maximum diameters of about 2 inches and, while a runner, it does tend to spread somewhat slowly. Once established, a good stand of *nigra* is striking in appearance with its ebony-colored culms and deep green leaves. It is cold tolerant down to around 5 °F and while it does tolerate cold it does not like dry winds. Like other bamboos it reaches its full height within the first year and the initial color of the culm is green, turning to a true ebony color within another year or two depending on the cultivar. It prefers full sun, but does well in partial shade and when shaded its growth tends to be a little weepy – still very pretty though. It likes moderate



watering and well-draining soil. *Nigra* is also very good for crafting and can be used for a variety of building projects.



Another type of runner suitable for Central Texas is *Phyllostachys aureosulcata f. spectabilis*. It is another bamboo that has a unique appearance. Deep yellow culms with green stripes in the sulci. This pattern is opposite of the species. Also originating in China, it grows to around 26 feet with 1.25+-inch diameters. It is highly cold tolerant (-10 °F). Ideal growth attained with rich, well drained soil and adequate water. It likes full sun to partial shade. If possible, it is best grown protected from strong winds.

*Cont.*

# BAMBOO <CONT.>

One more runner that I think is interesting – *Phyllostachys atrovaginata* common name: Incense Bamboo. The culms have a waxy surface and when rubbed a pleasant sandalwood incense odor can be detected. Cold tolerant to -10 °F, it tolerates wet soils well and grows rapidly to around 30+ feet in height and has larger diameters relative to height (2.5+) inches. The wood is also of good quality for crafting.

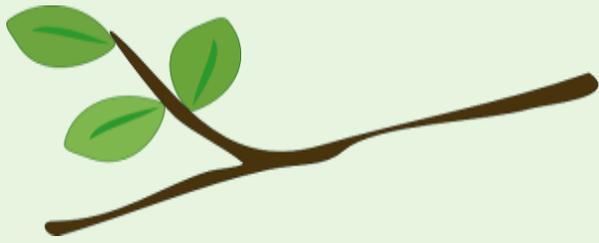
A popular clumping bamboo in the south is *Bambusa multiplex* 'Alphonse Karr.' It forms tall upright culms to 30 feet with 2-inch diameters. The canes are a bright yellow with random



vertical green stripes. It is a dense clumper that grows in full sun to partial shade. In full sun the culms often develop a magenta coloration. It likes rich, fertile soil and does well in moist soils and once established can withstand windy conditions.

These are a few more of the bamboos that do well in Central Texas. We introduce more in later articles.

If you are interested in growing bamboo and have questions, or have bamboo and want to know more about its care, you are welcome to contact me, Bill Cornelius, at [texbamboo64@gmail.com](mailto:texbamboo64@gmail.com).



- Mary Ann Everett, 2003

# Out on a Limb

**Tree Description:** This tree can make a massive, picturesque statement in the landscape, with its wide spreading branches and rounded canopy. Picture this tree draped with Spanish moss as you drive down a tree-lined road to somewhere.

**Blooms:** March to May, with the bloom color being yellow. The fruit is dark brown little acorns.

**Leaves:** Although this tree appears to be evergreen, it actually drops its leaves in late winter, just in time for the new ones to emerge. The leaves are dark green, waxy, and unlobed, not the usual pattern for this species of trees.

**Location:** It is usually not found in forests, as it is slow growing and cannot compete with faster growing pines and other hardwoods. It was found to be able to withstand storms, and people planted them around their houses. They are also found in and around the courthouses in our state.

**Heat & Drought Tolerance:** Fairly drought tolerant once established. It does perform in dry to moist soils but does best in neutral or slightly acidic clay loams. It grows to 50 feet in height, but its crown can spread twice that wide, making it a wonderful shade tree. The tree can live a long life, as the oldest one is reputed to be growing in Fulton - estimated it to be 1,000 years old. Wonder how many hurricanes it has survived!?

**Interesting facts:** In drought years the tree puts on thousands of acorns, its way to surviving into the future. The disease that has decimated this grand tree is oak wilt. Many skeletons dot the landscape, and it breaks the heart to see such a majestic tree brought to its knees in such a manner.

Another interesting item is this species may send up dense shoots near or far from the trunk from rhizomes, which become so thick that when mowed it looks like a groundcover. This species is also a great attractor of wildlife, birds, squirrels, and others. It is also the host plant for these butterfly species: Horace's Duskywing, White M Hairstreak, and Northern Hairstreak.

[Click here for name of tree](#)



# MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

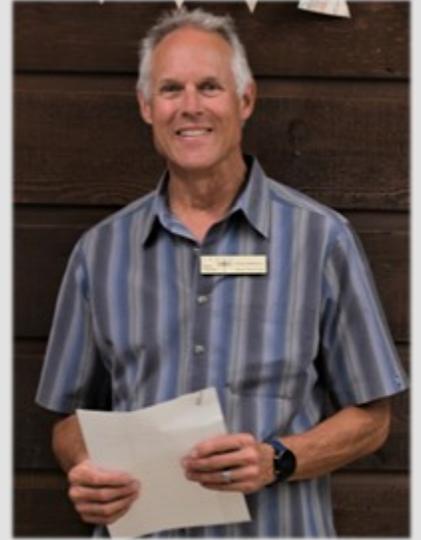
500 Hours!



John Burns (2018) reached 500 Hour Milestone! Congratulations!



Kerry Fillip completes Initial Certification!



Keller Matthews completes Initial Certification!



Danny Welch and Stan Simons complete their Initial Certification!



Guy Fowler, Marilyn Whitworth & Andrea Liles recertify



Stephen and Sharon Schmitz recertify



Jessica Dieter, Sue Valdez and Carroll Adcock recertify

# CHAPTER MEETINGS

## - ZOE RASCOE, 2004

Our June Chapter meeting celebrated our 2022 Class with their Graduation—one of our most fun events of the year! The program for the evening was “What Tree is That?” where Mary Ann Everett and Lynn Fleming rounded up branches from about 30 different Central Texas trees. Can you even name 30 local trees? Attendees had a checklist to walk through the tables and write down the correct name of each tree represented. Who can do that with just a limb? Well, some people can. Mary Ann provided all sorts of tips and tricks to sort through look-alikes and invasives vs natives. I have so much to learn about trees...



Reid Lewis, Horticulturist, presented “Native Plants and the Critters They Attract” at our July Chapter meeting. Reid is legendary at his knowledge of native plants that do well in Central Texas. He busted through about 60 plants and the benefits each one brings to your landscape for wildlife, pollination, erosion control, soil health, beauty and other good things. There was no way to write it all down so we just got his powerpoint and hopefully you caught enough snippets in your notes to match up with the plant he was highlighting! Reid is available for advice a few days a week at Wild Birds Unlimited in Temple. I suggest you make use of what’s in his head!



# NEXT CHAPTER MEETING

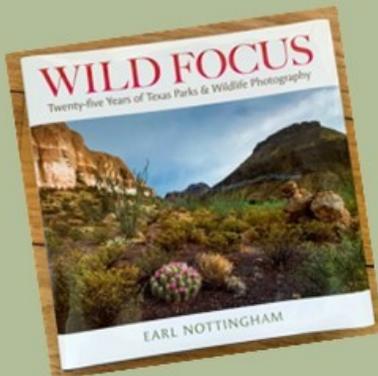
Central Texas Master Naturalists present

**Earl Nottingham**

**Former Chief Photographer—TPWD**



***“Wild Focus: Twenty-five Years of Texas  
Parks & Wildlife Photography”***



Tuesday, August 9, 2022 6:00pm  
Belton Church of Christ—3003 N. Main

***Chapter meetings are open to the public!***

Earl Nottingham grew up in Temple, Texas and served as chief photographer for Texas Parks & Wildlife Department for twenty-five years. His stunning photographs of Texas landscapes, nature, wildlife, and people tell the story of the state and its untamed natural habitats. “Wild Focus” was recently published by Texas A&M University Press as a compilation of Nottingham’s work as Texas’s preeminent nature photographer.

*“Earl Nottingham has served the people of Bell County and the state of Texas for decades. His photography opens our eyes to the natural wonders, historic places, and people that make our state unique and wonderful.”* Coleman Hampton, Bell County Museum Executive Director.

As a TPWD employee, Earl has worked with Texas Master Naturalists and will show some of his amazing photographs and speak to the role Master Naturalists can play in conserving and enjoying our wild state.

# Master Naturalists at Work

- **Melissa Repasch, 2022**

## Fishing Story Time Event at the Copperas Cove Library

On July 19<sup>th</sup> Lynn Williams, Mary Ann Everett, Marilyn Whitworth and myself met at the Copperas Cove library for a story time event on fishing. We had approximately 20 participants between the ages of about 2 and 7 years old. They all seemed to enjoy themselves.

Lynn started the program by singing the song titled “A sailor went to Sea” and it went like this (see below). While teaching the clap game that went along with it. This was fun to see the older kids and parents helping the smaller ones with the clapping game.

A sailor went to sea, sea, sea.

To see what he could see, see, see.

But all that he could see, see, see.

Was the bottom of the deep blue sea, sea, sea?



*Lynn Williams is dressed head to toe for fishing as she reads a fishing book.*

After the song Lynn read the story “A Mouthful of Minnows” by John Hare. The children loved the story and were very reactive during the story time. She then demonstrated how to cast the fishing pole to catch the hard plastic fish that were scattered on the floor in the room with the species of fish the children would be “catching” labeled on the back.

While Lynn was reading, we set out the hard plastic fishes that had different species of fishes and their sizes on the bottom for the children to decide if they could keep the fish as well as see and learn different types of fish that can be caught with the fishing poles. There was also a game set up for the smaller children that was a magnetic fishing game that required less coordination but still had them included the fishing fun.

Half way through the fishing fun Lynn had everyone stop and we all did the clap game song to “A Sailor went to the Sea” again and Lynn showed everyone the very cool game that she made for all the participants to take home with them where the plastic cup fish could eat the minnow on the string. It was very cute and all the children got very excited about this. We then let the kids continue to practice their casting skills.

This was a very successful event as a parent and a volunteer. I loved it. It was very nice to see all the children getting very excited when they would catch a fish either magnetic or with the fishing pole.

# Master Naturalists at Work

## The Mission

The Texas Master Naturalist Program's mission is to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the State of Texas.

Many communities and organizations rely on such citizen volunteers for implementing youth education programs; for operating parks, nature centers, and natural areas; and for providing leadership in local natural resource conservation efforts. In fact, a short supply of dedicated and well-informed volunteers is often cited as a limiting factor for community-based conservation efforts.

Having a nature-oriented educational booth at the area Home & Garden Show and the Mother Earth News Fair are important opportunities to connect with over a thousand children and adults to talk about the Texas Master Naturalist Program and teach them about our natural environment here in Central Texas. Here's Sue Valdez on the state TMN Program website home page doing her thing with the kiddos who stopped by our booth.

Each year a member of the training class is selected to serve as the New Class Representative on the Board of Directors. We are pleased Stan Simons agreed to this role for the Class of 2022. We look forward to having Stan on the Board! Stan will also be a member of the training committee for 2023. He will serve as a link between the 2022 Class and the Board, as well as helping bring information from the Board to our newest members. At his first board meeting this month, he mentioned that he was involved in training for many years in his career. Well, there you go, Stan!



*Stan chopping down ligustrum at a Miller Springs workday*

# Good to Know...

Identifying raptors can seem difficult when only a glimpse of a silhouette is seen. This is a nice 2-page guide to raptors that can help narrow down what you saw. It was developed by Paul Carrier for the Hawk Migration Association of North America, a member-based, non-profit organization committed to the conservation of raptors through scientific study, enjoyment and appreciation of raptor migration.

<https://www.hmana.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/HMANA-Hawk-Guide.pdf>

### A GUIDE TO HAWKS SEEN IN NORTH AMERICA

These are migrants seen in most of North America. Because many species differ in appearance due to age and various light and dark morphs, especially in the west, only the adult of the most common form is illustrated.

#### KNOW YOUR SILHOUETTES

**FALCONS**  
Streamlined - long, pointed wings; long, tapered tail; strong rowing wing beats; wings look less pointed and tail less tapered when not in direct flight.

**ACCIPITERS**  
Short, wide, rounded wings; long tail; flap-flap-flap-glide flight.

**BUTEOS**  
Broad wings and broad, rounded tail; often seen soaring in wide circles high in the air.

<p><b>PEREGRINE FALCON</b></p> <p>14 - 18" length</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Light breast and throat.</li> <li>Crow size.</li> <li>Quick, powerful wingbeats.</li> </ul>	<p><b>NORTHERN GOSHAWK</b></p> <p>18 - 24" length</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pale underbody; gray upperparts.</li> <li>Prominent white under tail coverts.</li> <li>Heavy body; larger than crow.</li> </ul>	<p><b>RED-TAILED HAWK</b></p> <p>17 - 22" length</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Linearized light-tipped tail; 9 morphs.</li> <li>Light breast; variably streaked belly band.</li> <li>Dark leading edge to wing; shallow dihedral.</li> </ul>
<p><b>MERLIN</b></p> <p>9 - 12" length</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Banded tail.</li> <li>Dark; heavily streaked underneath.</li> <li>Fast, direct flight.</li> </ul>	<p><b>COOPER'S HAWK</b></p> <p>14 - 19" length</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Buffy underparts.</li> <li>Square or notched tail tip.</li> <li>Round-tipped, long tail.</li> <li>Near size of crow; stiff wing beats.</li> </ul>	<p><b>RED-SHOULDERED HAWK</b></p> <p>15 - 18" length</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Black tail with narrow, white bands.</li> <li>Dark wing linings.</li> <li>"Crescent" windows near tip of wing.</li> </ul>
<p><b>AMERICAN KESTREL ♀</b></p> <p>8 - 11" length</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Light underneath; size of jay; buoyant flight.</li> <li>Tail red-buff - male; reddish, barred brown - female.</li> <li>Wings above: blue-male; barred brown-female.</li> </ul>	<p><b>SHARP-SHINNED HAWK</b></p> <p>9 - 13" length</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Buffy underparts.</li> <li>Square or notched tail tip.</li> <li>Near size of jay; floppy wing beats.</li> </ul>	<p><b>BROAD-WINGED HAWK</b></p> <p>13 - 17" length</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Smallest butes; crow size.</li> <li>Short tail with equal black and white bands.</li> <li>Whitish underwings with dark trailing edge.</li> </ul>
<p><b>GYRFALCON</b></p> <p>19 - 24" length</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Robust body; larger than Peregrine.</li> <li>3 color morphs.</li> <li>Rare Arctic visitor.</li> </ul>	<p><b>SHARP-SHINNED vs COOPER'S</b></p> <p>SMALLER EYES; MORE PROMINENT; DARKER CORNUS; LONGER UPR. EDGE; NOTICEABLE WING; MORE A TAIL LOOK.</p> <p>ADULT SHARP-SHINNED</p> <p>LARGER WING PROTRUDING HEAD; LITTLE OR NO WING BANDS.</p> <p>ADULT COOPER'S</p> <p>LONGER LOOKING TAIL; FEEL LARGER; SKEWER-LIKE.</p>	<p><b>ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK ♀</b></p> <p>18 - 23" length</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dark belly (most); dark wrists; strong dihedral.</li> <li>Tail white; 1 or more dark subterminal bands.</li> <li>Dark morph: dark body and wing linings.</li> </ul>
		<p><b>SWAINSON'S HAWK</b></p> <p>17 - 22" length</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dark breast and flight feathers.</li> <li>White belly and wing linings; 3 morphs.</li> <li>Soars with strong dihedral.</li> </ul>

NOTE: Some hawks soar and glide with their wings raised above the horizontal, called a dihedral.

Did you know we have a Facebook page? We have nearly 1200 people who follow our page! Jessica Dieter leads a group of members who search out fascinating, disturbing, amazing and sometimes silly nature-related information from reliable sources to pass along to our followers. We also announce our monthly Chapter meeting topics on our Facebook page, as well. We do monitor the "message" function if you have a question or want to pass along an interesting nature-y find. If you haven't already, check us out at the descriptive, but overly long name of *Central Texas Chapter Texas Master Naturalists*.

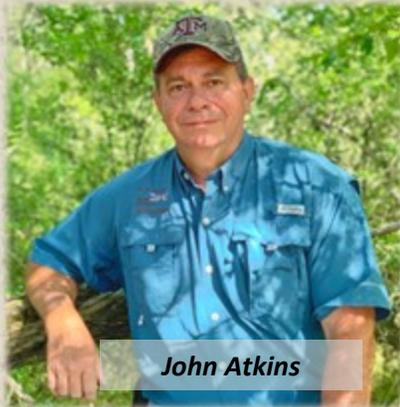
# Contributing Authors to this Newsletter



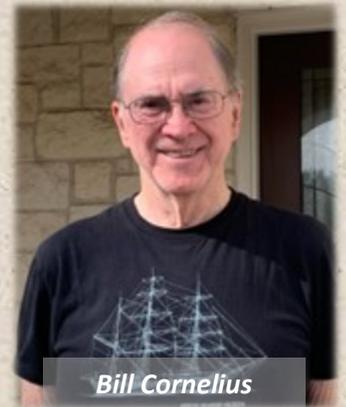
*Bill Novakoski*



*Linda Fairlie*



*John Atkins*



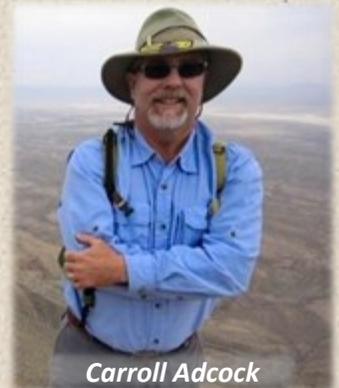
*Bill Cornelius*



*John Burns*



*Mary Ann Everett*



*Carroll Adcock*



*Melissa Repasch*



*Lynn Fleming*



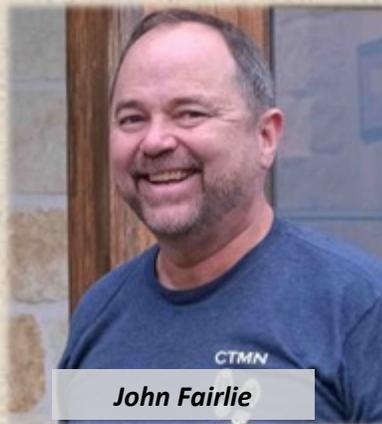
*Zoe Rascoe*



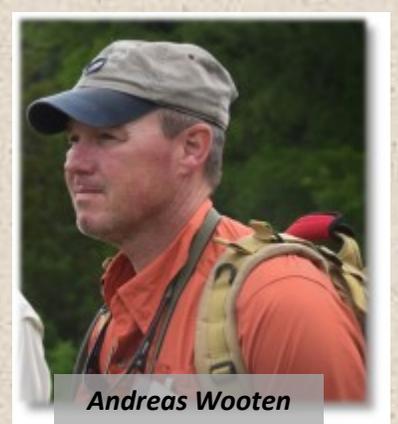
*Sally Jordan*



*Jean Solana*



*John Fairlie*



*Andreas Wooten*



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*Norwegian thistle —Zoe Rascoe*

**Editor:** Zoe Rascoe

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**Have you noticed the 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. Volunteer Service hours**

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

**Chapter Advisors**

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

Cullom Simpson,  
Wildlife Biologist, Texas Parks and Wildlife



**Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter Meetings**

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

The Board of Directors meets the 1st Monday of each month from 11:30am-12:30pm at the AgriLife Extension Building in Belton. Meeting notices will be sent to chapter members with location information and all members are welcome.