

The Tracker

Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter December 2022

MOTH NIGHT AT MOTHER NEFF STATE PARK

We love it when moths show up for our Moth Night. Moth Night 2022 was a great success! The event was held at Mother Neff State Park on October 15th. Nearly 20 Central Texas Master Naturalists stepped up to volunteer for this fun-filled outreach event and we educated and engaged with almost 200 people.

At the Ranger Station, we had many booths set up. We had a moth collection displayed, blacklight face painting, a bat station, sphinx moth selfie station, a blacklight moth station to attract the moths, beetles, and even a walking stick insect that stopped by. The Bug Master pest control company joined us displaying all the ways they help our insect community.

This year we lit up balloons marking the trail and lighting the way between the Ranger Station and our scorpion hunt and night sky stations. Our chapter's wonderful Dick Starks led our night sky tour, enchanting visitors with his amazing knowledge of the heavens. The kiddos lined up to go on a nature walk to hunt for scorpions, and used blacklights to find them hiding amongst the rocks and grass.



Tersa Sphinx Moth

The weather was perfect, the skies clear and the people excited to be exploring nature at night. We hope the event encouraged people to get outdoors at night more often to explore nature.

We can't wait for next year's Moth Night!



- Jessica Dieter, 2019



This will be my last President's Pen article and it is very bittersweet. I have enjoyed serving our Chapter as President the past two years, even with the challenges of transitioning from COVID to our new "normal." However, one of the cornerstones of progress is change. It is time for new ideas and a new perspective.

Serving as President has been a lot of work, but there has been support all along the way. I appreciate that our Chapter has a strong foundation of people willing to put in the time and energy needed to keep things going. Jean Solana and Jamey Douglas have been our Vice Presidents during my tenure. They filled in for me when John and I went galivanting across the country in the summer and made sure there was always a good program for our Chapter Meetings. Bruce Polikoff has been our Treasurer and he brought us into the modern world of using credit cards. Jessica Dieter has been our Secretary and keeps us on track each week with our calendar and meeting minutes. She is a steady rock that we can depend on. John Atkins, our

Past President, has been a wonderful advisor and guide through the whole experience. Mary Ann Everett, my Mentor, has been a great source of information and encouragement for me, as has Lynn Fleming. Those two are the core of making training happen for our Chapter. Zoe Rascoe is the social "heart" of our Chapter and not only keeps the recruitment wheels turning but is the go-to person for any social event we have. I teased Dale Hughling about "knowing where all the bodies are buried" because he is the person to ask about rules, procedures, and where to find information related to TMN and VMS.



Cont.

President's Pen cont.

Andi Bowsher, Andrea Liles and Sharon Schmitz have worn the "Membership Director" hat during my tenure. I have done this job. I know how hard they work. Marilyn Whitworth, Juan Anaya, Carroll Adcock, John Fairlie, Ben Clement, John Burns, Kerry Phillip, LouAnn Hight, Gail Hughling, Sue Valdez, Andreas Wooten, Jenna Chappell, Guy Fowler, Sarah McCormick, Danny Welch, Jerry Lewis, and Mary Odom have been on the Board or have had regular monthly duties that they have performed admirably. These and more keep our Chapter moving forward. (The problem with naming names is that I am sure I have probably left someone out... and it is probably someone important... so my apologies to whoever it is!)

I am grateful that our members are active and do so many different jobs. So far this year we have volunteered over 6700 hours, an average of 84 hours per member. We have logged over 800 hours of Advanced Training. Forty of our members have certified for 2022 already. Twenty-two of our members have logged over 100 hours this year. This includes project work days, manning booths at events, cleanup projects, doing citizen science, education and outreach, administrative work, and so much more.

I am thankful that our Chapter is filled with caring people. When one of our members is going through a rough time, we tend to step up and offer help and support to them. We have given scholarships, sent cards, provided meals, made donations, made phone calls, and have just been there in person for those in need.

You will have the opportunity to vote for a new President at our next Chapter meeting. I will be taking over as Past President, and hope to keep serving in whatever capacity I am needed. When I was first elected, my husband bought me a tiara and started calling me the "Queen." For myself, I have tried to use my position as a way to serve our Chapter. Thank you all for giving me the opportunity to serve you these past two years.





Mother Neff State Park

1680 TX Hwy-236, Moody

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

ROAD CLOSURE: TxDOT has finished the bridge!! MNSP is now accessible from Hwy 236 and CR388!

Saturday, November 12th was Mother Neff’s big seasonal event... **Fall Fest!** We had a great turnout of **15** CTMN members including Daisy Klassy and John Ziegeler, MNSP Park Rangers.

Most of our activities were held at the back of the park by the CCC Cabin. Special thanks to Stephanie Preciado and Letti Lim for doing a fabulous job making festive newspaper hats and coffee filter butterflies in the Kid Zone. They also prepped coffee filters ahead of time, as did Cindy Fowler. We had various games set up – fishing, corn hole, and a bird migration game. Debbie Bridge and Colleen Smith did double duty at the CTMN booth as well as the Leave No Trace area “Camp Oh No” – where you learn how not to camp! Bill Novakoski led two hikes around the Prairie Loop with help from Guy Fowler. Paula Finley and Bill Abright taught skins, skulls and tracks at the CTMN table. Other educational pieces were about protecting birds from migration building collisions and a diorama about Leon River flooding. The Fowler family came – Guy, Cindy, Brook and a friend and helped all over. Tommy Reeder and Reid Lewis shared their birding/native plant expertise along with a crate of binoculars at the Tower Bird Blind. Thanks to Zoe Rascoe for being our photographer. Thanks to all of you wonderful CTMN volunteers!



Letti and Stephanie on crafts



Paula Finley, Colleen Smith-Fey, Ranger Ziegeler and Jean Solana



Bill Novakoski on the Prairie Trail

Mother Neff State Park *Cont.*



Smokey and Zoe

The Friends of Mother Neff group was there with their Dutch Ovens and made delicious tacos and Apple Cinnamon desserts. There were several presentations in the CCC Cabin, including Gil Eckrich's "Fall Birds". At other booths one could learn about the Civilian Conservation Corp, geocaching, and the Texas Forest Service. Smokey the Bear put in several appearances to the delight of the children (and Zoe)! In total, despite the chilly morning start we had **150 visitors** and **40 volunteers** in attendance.

A shout out from this column to the CTMN members who helped host Moth Night at MNSP in October. Read all about that on the Front Page.



Colleen describes Leave No Trace



Tom Reeder and Reid Lewis at the bird blind

Upcoming Events:

Saturday, **December 3rd 10am to 2pm** will be **Christmas at Mother Neff**, with lots of Christmas Crafts to be made inside at Mother Neff Headquarters. CTMN volunteers are encouraged to come help! There will be guided hikes to lead as well at **11am**.

Sunday, **January 1, 2023** – [First Day Hike!](#) Start the year on a good foot!

Ongoing Volunteer Opportunities for CTMN members—Contact Jean Solana and she will connect you with appropriate park staff to schedule your visit.

- Native Garden Maintenance
- Social media content development
- Painting signs, kiosks, fences, benches
- Invasive species removal and control
- Thistle and grass identification
- Facebook Live interpretive programs
- Trail maintenance
- Bird blind maintenance



- *John Burns, 2018*
jaburnscgm@gmail.com

Fall finally arrived and we had a couple of good workdays in October and November. Or maybe I should say we had three good workdays. There was a mistake on the weekly CTMN email which showed the 2nd Thursday workday as being on the 17th of November instead of the 10th. So we just worked both days.

In October we had a great workday. We had four volunteers: Matt Ridley, Bill Cornelius, Keller Matthews, and John Burns. We had a special request to produce about 50 sticks which could be made into walking sticks during the Family Campout event being put on by the City of Belton in November. It turned out the event has been postponed until April due to weather, but not a problem—the sticks will actually be dried out better by April. It was fun to have a different mission than normal. Well, it was really just an added mission since we were cutting the invasive Waxleaf Ligustrum to produce the sticks.



Keller Matthews & Bill Cornelius

We worked an area on the Green Pond trail that we had not touched in the past three years. The Ligustrum is very prominent in the area and we started making a dent the number of plants. I don't



Work crew (L to R): John Burns, Matt Ridley, Bill Cornelius and Keller Matthews. Walking Stick Makers!

know how many we cut, but we produced 75 sticks to be used for walking sticks and cut a lot more plants. We had several young hikers come by and they saw the sticks we were making. Of course they wanted their own walking sticks and we very happy to share and then see the big smiles on their faces as they continued down the trail. I have to say it was one of my favorite work days yet for this very reason.

Miller Springs Nature Center *cont.*

In November we had two workdays. The first workday on November 10th we had three volunteers John Burns, Bill Novakoski, and Matt Ridley. Matt had come to hike the trails and didn't realize we were working because of the weekly email confusion. We decided to look for a route for a new trail to the New Canyon area. We started from Green Pond trail and worked our way north. All the routes we took kept hitting roadblocks- as in drop off areas that were not safe to continue. So we at least picked up a good bit of litter. Note the CTMN-built bench in the photo!



Bill Novakoski, Matt Ridley & John Burns

The second November workday on the 17th was downright chilly at 39 degrees. Keller Matthews kindly took the lead for that day which had a light turnout with heavy work. Keller

and Matt Ridley were the only Naturalists available that day, but they made a significant contribution to the park. Matt knew of a large elm that recently fell and blocked a highly trafficked trail, the Tennessee Valley Trail. He and Keller teamed up to clear a path for hikers, then unloaded branches from the trunk to minimize risk of the tree collapsing. Keller notified the City of Temple Forestry Office to complete the removal. I don't know if the city has been able to remove the tree yet, but the previous week we noticed a cedar tree that was splitting and appeared it might fall into the parking area. I called the City of Temple when we first arrived and when we came back from our work, the tree was already removed and cleaned up. I have found the City of Temple to be very responsive regarding tree issues.



Keller Matthews and Matt Ridley (back) dismantle a giant fallen elm tree.

I won't be able to attend the December 8th workday. My wife and I will be helping in Lake Charles, Louisiana. We will be working with, 8 Days of Hope, a group that is dedicated to disaster relief. On this trip we will be helping repair damages from past hurricanes. Bill Novakoski has agreed to lead the team, so the workday is in great hands.

Thank you to everyone who has come out and supported our efforts at the Miller Springs Nature Center! *Merry Christmas!*

FORT HOOD PROJECTS

- Jamey Douglass, 2021

AIMS Team and Monarch Joint Venture

Fort Hood's Adaptive and Integrative Management (AIM) program is currently inventorying monarch butterflies across the grassy areas of Fort Hood. Cassie Castillo wrote about this opportunity for Master Naturalists in the October newsletter.

Chelsea and Charlie Plimpton, and Brad Burden make up the AIMS Team, part of the Department of Natural Resources, Department of Public Works at Fort Hood. Chelsea and Charlie are tagging monarchs across the post. Brad is Point of Contact. On the days we collect information, we travel to AIMS office, pick up our data sheets, clipboards, and safety vests. We chat with Brad to keep him informed where we are going. After data collection is complete, we travel back to AIMS to drop off our data sheets and equipment.

The Master Naturalists assisting with this Monarch Joint Venture are Ward and Sue Critz, Jean Solana, Cassie Castillo, Danny Welch, Debby Bridge, and me. Each of us have from four to many points to observe one day per week. The observations end about November 15th. Reports from our crew have ranged from no monarchs observed, to four. Jean found larvae and caterpillars in her study area.



A monarch caterpillar found by Jean Solana during her monitoring route. Can you tell the head from the tail? Long antennae are at the head.

I have four sets of points located about 12 miles north of the main post at Fort Hood. This week will be my fourth week to collect data on monarchs. We use a free app on our cell phones called Avenza which is a GIS program for cell phones.

FORT HOOD PROJECTS *CONT*



Queen caterpillar with extra set of antennae on back found by Jean Solana. Monarch on gayfeather below right.

Data collection involves walking a rectangle. The south to north side is about 200 meters, and each west to east or east to west side is 50 meters. We end up walking about 500 meters. We start out walking from the southwest corner looking for monarchs in two zones, from ourselves to 2.5 meters, and from 2.5 to 5 meters, plus 5 meters over our heads.

My areas have none to major disturbances from military trucks such as the L-ATVs, Bradley IFV's, M1A2 Abrams tanks, M109A6 Paladin self-propelled howitzers and M99A2 (FAAVS) loaders. Some of the ruts made when the soil is wet are challenging to walk across. Other areas have very little disturbances.

The areas are mostly KR bluestem, gayfeather, mesquite bushes, sideoats grama, broomweed, snow-on-the-prairie, and antelopes horn milkweed. Due to lack of normal precipitation, the forbs that normally flower are almost nonexistent. The one plant that is flowering is gayfeather (*Liatris* sp. seen to the right). Considering how dry this summer has been, its amazing to me to see the gayfeather blooming. Native plants are amazing to me.



Cassie Castillo's most exciting critter find so far.



Jamey provided 14 photos of his monitoring areas. Every photo pretty much looked like this one..

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.

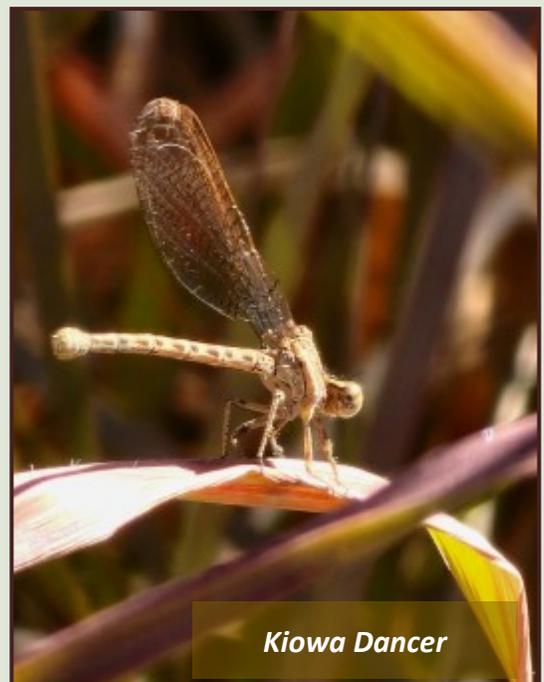
We did our eighth round of site evaluations in June. The drought has continued to have a



negative impact on wildlife viewing, but we certainly enjoyed each other's company! Our pool of volunteers in October included Sue Valdez, Jean Solana, John & Linda Fairlie, Debby Bridge, Danny Welch, Larry Turner, Cassie Castillo, Bill Novakoski, Jeremy Ballard, Letti Lim-Kosel, Charlie Langsdale, Bill Cornelius, Stephen Schmitz, and Matt Ridley. Thank you all for your help!

John Fairlie, Sue Valdez and Bill Novakoski at Mother Neff SP

We got in our shipment of tee shirts from the state, which were distributed to volunteers at our site evaluations and at the November Chapter meeting. We still have a few shirts left, so if you have served as an AAL volunteer in the past and have not yet received a tee shirt please let me know. We also received a shipment of maps of all the statewide GTWT sectors, including ours – *Prairies and Pineywoods West*. Maps were distributed at the November Chapter meeting as well (for a nominal fee).



Kiowa Dancer

GTWT ADOPT-A-LOOP PROJECT *cont.*

Our next round of AAL Wildlife Surveys will go from January 23 to February 3. All of the site visits will be listed in our chapter's weekly emails, as *AAL Wildlife Survey @ Chalk Ridge Falls* (or whatever site we are visiting that day). Feel free to join us whenever you wish! We have a lot of fun, enjoying the company and nature, while accumulating volunteer hours. We walk as much or as little as we want at each visit, using either iNaturalist or eBird to record observations. If using iNaturalist, we simply take pictures of wildlife



Sue Valdez takes a photo of a bird in the tree, but John Fairlie isn't so sure it's not of him.



of all sizes and shapes (all fauna) and enter them into the project. You are welcome to identify your observations, but it is not necessary. The TPWD have paid experts that evaluate all observations. If using eBird, we work together to get an accurate tally what we see. 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!



Twelve-spotted skimmer



American Dagger

TEXAS STREAM TEAM

- Danny Welch, 2022

Central Texas Master Naturalists are on notice that Stream Team has made a reappearance in our chapter. My name is Danny Welch and I am lucky to be able to represent Stream Team. I moved here from the coast and I love being around water. Our house was on Padre Island with the Laguna Madre to the west and the Gulf of Mexico to the east. I discovered that Bell County has a treasure of lakes, rivers, and streams. I really enjoyed the Aquatic Ecology training class with Dr. June Wolfe and began looking for something to do with water. I poked around and stumbled across Texas Stream Team. Several CTMN members have attended Standard Core Monitor Training at the Meadows Center in San Marcos. Stream Team monitors four different TCEQ sites in Bell County every month at 9:00 am on the following schedule:

First Saturday: Leon River @ Heritage Park

Second Saturday: Nolan Creek @ Harris Center

Third Saturday: Lake Belton @ Temple Lake Park

Fourth Saturday: Lampasas River @ FM 1123



(L to R) Danny Welch, Bill Cornelius, Tom Gerik, Larry Turner, Debby Bridge and Letti Lim-Kosel (front).



Charlie Langsdale (left) and Danny Welch collect a water sample

When you come out and stream with us you can use an electronic probe to measure the conductivity of the water that we sample. You can use chemicals to determine the amount of dissolved oxygen in the water, and you can determine the water's pH level.

Cont.

TEXAS STREAM TEAM *CONT.*



(L to R) Larry Turner, Danny Welch, Debby Bridge behind Charlie Langsdale's peace sign—sampling at Nolan Creek .

Anybody and everybody are welcome to join us on a Saturday morning. No prior training is necessary. The only requirement is participants must be in the sixth grade or higher. Please come check us out and bring a friend. We do a little bit of real science and have a whole lot of fun!



Leon River near Heritage Park, Belton.



Charlie Langsdale learning testing procedures.



(L to R) Larry Turner, Debby Bridge, Letti Lim-Kosel, Danny Welch.



- Keller Matthews, 2021

A dozen intrepid master naturalists converged in Waco in November for an expert-led expedition through local and archaeological history. Wintry conditions did not prevent even long-distance traveler Bill Novakoski, from driving 80 miles in from Ding Dong. The drizzle subsided as the tour began with the story of local schoolboys discovering artifacts in a creek bed 44 years ago and Zoe Rascoe vouched for the arrival of numerous plaster-encased specimens in Baylor's Strecker (now Mayborn) museum/warehouse in the early days of discovery and elucidation, while she worked at the museum as a Baylor engineering student.

Remains of twenty-three mammoths, a giant sloth, a saber-toothed cat, a Western camel, and giant



tortoises have been found in three distinct layers, and age-dated to periods from 50,000 to 65,000 years ago. History's secrets about these local residents as long as 65,000 years ago are being revealed and preserved by local and visiting archaeologists and aspiring scholars.

The site is the only known location in the world of a "nursery herd" of Columbian mammoths. Current theories

about the unusual accumulation of the ancient species over tens of thousands of years were reviewed, including "bloat and float", where flood waters carried dead animals into an eddy of an ancient waterway, or that a flash flood trapped and drowned numerous victims.

Waco Mammoth Site *cont.*

Many of our group will remember Dr. Clark Wernecke's Gault Site demonstration of how an atlatl would have been used to slay a massive mammoth. We learned that these Columbian mammoths, one of the largest of about nine mammoth species, were found to have ranged from Costa Rica to northern North America, and would have co-existed with Paleoamericans 11,500 years ago in Central Texas, before becoming extinct about 10,000 years ago.

For some in the group, the trip concluded with a stop for burgers at the Twisted Root on the way home. As with all great learning experiences, we came home with more and better questions than we had when we began.

The National Park Service's website has photos and additional information about the mammoth discovery at the [Waco Mammoth Site National Monument](#).

The City of Waco's [Self-Guided Tour brochure](#), detailing ongoing excavation and finds, is a very good resource and visually walks you through the site.



TRINCHERA RANCH COLORADO

- Bill Cornelius, 2020

Photos by Chris Johnson except where noted.

I first visited [Trinchera Ranch](#) in summer 2021 and returned this past summer. I went both times as a fly-fishing adventure organized by [Living Waters Fly Fishing in Round Rock](#). The proprietor, Chris Johnson, is involved in conservation in several areas. Check out his website and take a look at *Unspoken* – a 15 minute video he produced on what it means to pursue and conserve the Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout.

Trinchera is a 172,000-acre ranch in the southern Sangre de Cristo range in Costilla County held in conservation easements with USFWS. And from the old maps of Texas, it appears that it was actually a part of Texas that stretched all the way up to Wyoming. It was most recently owned by Malcom Forbes who did a lot of restoration work on the ranch until he sold it to the current owner Louis Bacon who is a conservationist with multiple holdings in the U.S. and abroad.



Chris showing Bill's big Rio Grande Cutthroat trout.

Chris has brought small groups of fly fishers to Trinchera for the past few years minus the Covid suspension. Groups stay just short of a week and are taken on guided outings to various locations around the ranch. While there is human habitation of the land, much of it is virtually untouched. The streams, especially those at high elevations rarely see a human.

This year we went up above the falls, which is above 10,000 feet. This is where I was able to catch a [Rio Grande Cutthroat trout](#) which was the largest Chris had ever seen on that water. It was a thrill to say the least! On that trek up to that area we saw two wolves, species that the ranch people said had not been seen in over 80 years. Unfortunately, we were not able to get any pics of them because they quickly disappeared after looking us straight in the eye.

Cont.

TRINCHERA RANCH *cont.*

On the way up to the high creek we ran across an elk wallow where the bulls soak themselves during the rut to make themselves more attractive to the females.

The whole experience was amazing. The grandeur of the scenery and the efforts to preserve nature as much as possible by the owner and the buy-in from the staff made you want more. Their conservation program says they are “motivated by a strong conservation ethic, staff actively manage their forests, grasslands and streams. They partner with universities, conservation organizations, state and federal agencies to determine the right cutting-edge and sustainable treatments for the land, water and wildlife they work to protect.”



Colorado Blue Columbine blooms Jun-Aug

Potential activities abound, hunting during the season for a particular species is confined to bows only – no firearms. Mountain climbing, nature hikes, biking, and they do have a spa that I have not partaken of . . . yet. And did I mention the food – remarkable.



CPW staff conducting surveys, by Bill C.



Elk herd at the Trinchera Ranch

Bring in the Birds



- Sally Jordan, 2022

Attracting Birds to Your Yard in Winter

We have many beautiful birds that come to our yards in the winter in Central Texas. I especially enjoy watching the goldfinches. We are also seeing more and more lesser goldfinches which are even more colorful than their cousins, the goldfinches. They are also a bit smaller.

To attract lots of birds, I put out a finch feeder filled with fresh, thistle seed (the birds will not

eat old thistle!), a suet feeder, and a regular bird feeder with a mixture of half sunflower seeds and half songbird seed. Be sure and position your feeders in a place where you can see them easily. Birds need water and are attracted to it, so we have two bird baths and a disappearing fountain in our yard. The birdbaths have large, black river rocks in them so the birds can stand on them while drinking, and the dark rocks help keep the water from freezing on a cold night. Our disappearing fountain runs all

the time, so the birds hear it and are attracted to running water. Also, the moving water does not freeze as quickly. We have an automatic drip sprinkler on our bird baths so there is always water in them. It requires some maintenance to keep the bird baths clean and our disappearing fountain filled with water.



Attracting Birds to Your Yard in Winter, *cont.*

It is best to leave your shrubs and perennials unkempt and not cut them back until early March. The birds can enjoy the seed heads and roost in their branches. It is recommended that you have a brush pile in the corner of your yard for the birds to enjoy.

Birds enjoy eating berries in the winter; therefore, yaupon hollies, Burford hollies, and possum haw hollies are great shrubs to add to your landscape. The beautyberry shrub with its purple berries is a nice addition to any garden, and the birds enjoy feeding on the berries.

This winter, I plan to put out some sliced apples and oranges for the birds to eat. I hope to find some bargains from my grocer by using damaged or discolored fruit. Birds that enjoy fruit include cardinals, cedar waxwings, Carolina wrens, Baltimore orioles, mockingbirds, red-bellied woodpeckers, and downy woodpeckers. I plan to put the sliced fruit on a cookie sheet that will be on a table on our furthest deck. The coyotes have taken care of all our cats so I believe the birds will be safe.

It will be fun to see what birds come to visit us!



Red-bellied Woodpecker (male) in snow.



A "museum" of Cedar waxwings.



Carolina wren

What's in YOUR backyard?



WHEN DO I TAKE HUMMINGBIRD FEEDERS DOWN?

- **Juan Anaya, 2018**

When I'm doing a program at a garden club or school, this question almost always comes up.

My answer: Never.

Ask yourself, is it that much trouble considering the reward? With the cold fronts building in the north we should anticipate the arrival of our winter migrants. In central Texas the rufous hummingbird is a common



winter visitor. Two years ago I had an Anna's hummingbird that played in the snow like she was having a good time. Something that I have witnessed many times in Washington State.

Today November 2nd, I was rewarded with this beautiful hummingbird on my Turk's cap. Some area experts identified it as a Broad-tailed hummer, but eBird folks are thinking differently. Let



me just say that it's not always easy to spot the species, gender and age of a hummer whizzing by, so don't be discouraged if you are just getting started.

So back to the question about leaving feeders up. Yes, I will always have at least one hummingbird feeder hanging in the back yard. Keep their options open.

Editor's Note: Juan will be our speaker at the January Chapter meeting: Attracting Winter Birds



Musings of the Contemplative Naturalist

Holy Rest

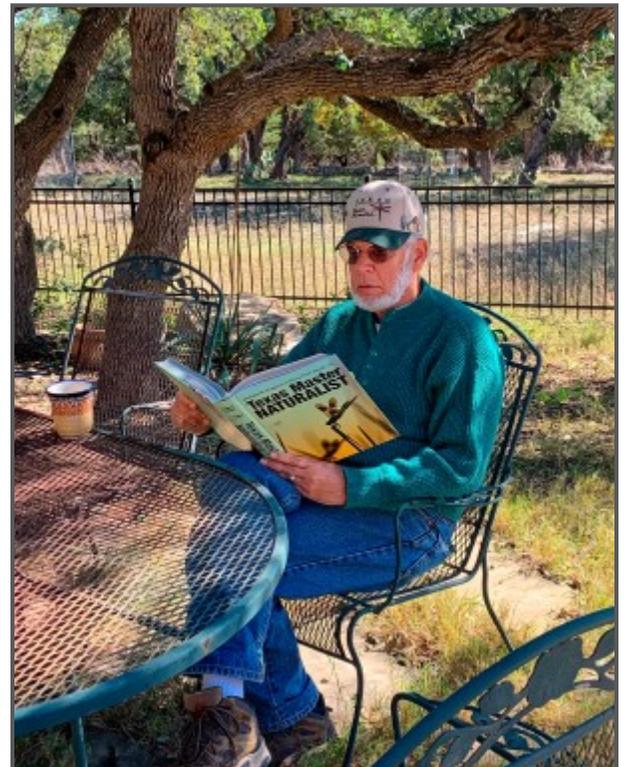
- **Bill Novakoski, 2020**

After laboring on our twelve acres of rocky hilltop most of the day, I felt weary. Sitting down in a rusty metal lawn chair under a motte of live oak trees, I recalled the ancient naturalist wrote of the Creator taking a day off. So I felt justified to rest the next day too. But first, I decided to read again what the wise man had written.

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. -*Genesis 2:2-3, New International Version Bible.*

This reading reminded me the work of creating the natural world occurred over six repetitious cycles of evening, morning and day. Each successive day, the handiwork was proclaimed to be good. But it eluded me why a Creator so powerful would need to rest. Was hanging the sun, moon and stars in space tiring? Did it fatigue him to form the sky, mountains and seas, plant the grasses and trees, or give the breath of life to the animals and man? Why was a seventh day set aside to rest?

Perhaps these six daily cycles of work ending with a review of what had been accomplished followed by a new day of work and its review was to establish a pattern for the good of the creatures, not one needed by a tired Creator. Maybe the created beings, plants and animals benefited from a natural process that regulated sleep, wake and work rhythm. This circular rhythm ensured they had the energy necessary to accomplish work each day. Yet even with these circadian cycles, something more was needed, a special rest day in every seven days to pause from work to feel and express gratitude for all that is good and to the Creator of all that is good.





Musings of the Contemplative Naturalist *cont.*

Beyond these daily and weekly cycles, a careful naturalist can observe longer cycles of seasonal variations: the new life and birth of the warming and increasing daylight of springtime, followed by the rapid growth of plants and animals during the longer summer days of warmth and sunlight; then the slower pace and shorter days of fall as living beings prepare for inactivity and dormancy during the colder temperatures and less sunlit days of winter. Yet winter is not an end as it too is followed by another springtime.

There is a fourth cycle each living being experiences. In addition to the daily, weekly and annual cycles, each individual experiences its species unique lifecycle. Often naturalists begin discussion of this cycle with the plant seed or animal egg provided by a female organism being fertilized by male organism of its species. From this sharing, a new creature of the same kind is created. The new individual, depending on its species, may live hours, days, weeks or many years. During its lifespan, it grows from its seed or egg form to a rapidly growing youth, to a mature adult form capable of reproducing to an aged adult which ceases to live. It is a lifecycle not because the individual repeats this cycle but because the species survives and thrives.

It is my hope that you have enjoyed reading my musings of this passing year as much as I have enjoyed thinking them. Having our thoughts, however, is not enough. To be good naturalists we must advocate and act for the benefit of the natural world we are so blessed to be a part of.



PICTURE THIS

Adjustments are needed when cold and snow enter the picture.



© Earl Nottingham / TPWD

Summers Mill near Belton, Texas

Shooting in Winter

BY EARL NOTTINGHAM

Unlike the idyllic and predictable winter snowscapes you can find gracing postcards or calendars from the northern states, Texas winter scenes can be a hit-or-miss proposition. When they do occur, they don't hang around very long. However, for the photographer who is ready at a moment's notice, the rugged Texas landscape can become a delicate beauty while cloaked ever so briefly in a blanket of white.

In contrast to the moderate weather conditions we usually experience, cold weather photography comes with its own set of concerns. Here are some tips to help make your winter photography easier.

1. Metering. Without a doubt, the No. 1 problem most folks have with snow scene images is an overall gray cast instead of beautiful white snow. Most camera meters don't know that a scene or

object is supposed to be rendered white. Instead, it assumes that most objects in a scene have varying tonal values ranging from black to white but average out to a middle gray. It thus sets the exposure accordingly. The trick is to override (fool) the meter by manually opening up the aperture by one to two f-stops or by using the exposure compensation dial found on most newer cameras to compensate anywhere between +1 and +2 stops. Some cameras actually include a "snow" setting, which accomplishes the same result — turning gray snow to white.

2. Pastel light. While daylight snow scenes are the easiest to shoot, don't miss the opportunities for pre-sunrise and post-sunset lighting. The soft pastels produced by these low-light periods produce a delicate feel. Just

PICTURE THIS

Remember to use a tripod or other brace because of the inherent slow shutter speeds required for this type of light.

3. Gloves. It sounds like such a no-brainer, but trust me, you will find yourself shooting in cold weather one day without gloves. Numb fingers cannot turn dials on a camera, and trying to adjust a frozen tripod with bare hands is torture. Invest in the thinnest yet warmest gloves you can find that allow your fingers to remain dexterous and comfortable. I find that gloves with little “knobbies” help grip the controls better.

4. Camera grip/strap. Somewhat related to the previous tip is the use of a camera grip or strap. Trying to hold a cold camera with bulky gloves or clothing is difficult and can easily (and predictably) result in a dropped camera. Using a camera body or neck strap will prevent a very expensive accident.

5. Warm batteries. Cold batteries lose their charge very quickly. Make sure that your camera battery is fully charged before heading out, and consider keeping it in a warm pocket until ready



Snow provides a contrast to a thorny agave in the Guadalupe Mountains.

to shoot. The last thing you want is for a battery to die just as you are ready to take that award-winning shot. It also doesn't hurt to have a spare battery available, just in case.

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.



Protected by their thick coats, bison graze at Caprock Canyons.



CHAPTER MEETINGS

- ZOE RASCOE, 2004

Our October Chapter meeting celebrated the changing season (it did finally change!) We had a Family Fall Fun Fest at Liberty Park in Belton near Nolan Creek. It was a potluck meal (isn't that the best??) and we spent time visiting with friends and getting to know our newer members. Some yard games were available and I was all set for a cornhole tournament—I'm trying to get really good at that and have played twice already! Alas, the cornhole set someone kindly brought had an injured leg. It was really nice to visit with others, though. And eat. President Linda made some announcements and TMN pins were presented. As we are nearing the end of the year, so many folks are reaching their recertifications and new volunteer hour milestones. Thanks to all who came early to help set up and those who brought yummy food. Wish I could fit all my photos here!



Sue and Bud Valdez



Aaron and Cassie Castillo



Cottonwood decorations



Guy Fowler, Lynn Fleming and Cindy Fowler



Andrea and Wayne Liles



Stan & Cathi Simons

CHAPTER MEETINGS *CONT.*

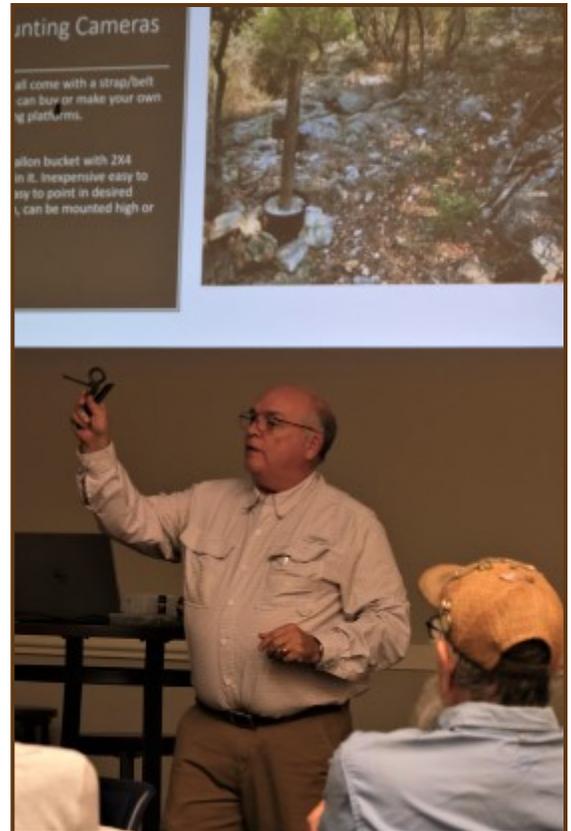
Our November program topic was “*Trail Cameras—Bringing Animals Inside*” presented by Grant Critchfield. Although we haven’t crossed paths again until recently, I’ve known Grant a long time. But not nearly as long as Ben Clement who met in him 2nd grade. I’m glad Ben has connected Grant with CTMN—he is not a Texas Master Naturalist (yet!), but he is a great Naturalist here in Texas. He taught science classes for children and adults for many years (and would get himself in trouble for taking kids outside for classes), he was the resident Education Specialist for nature at Peaceable Kingdom (which is where we met) and he works seasonally with US Army Corps of Engineers and at Inner Space Caverns. Grant has property near the Williamson County line, not far from the Gault Site, where he has caves—and sometimes bats, sink holes, lots of ringtail cats and many other critters, native flora and interesting geology. He has offered a field trip for our chapter members. I bet we take him up on that!

Grant had a great presentation about using trail cameras to help understand what animals are on your property. He talked about the different kinds of trail cameras, important camera features, ways to rig up things yourselves and passed along what he learned NOT to do as well. Note the 2x4 in a bucket of concrete where cameras are mounted in

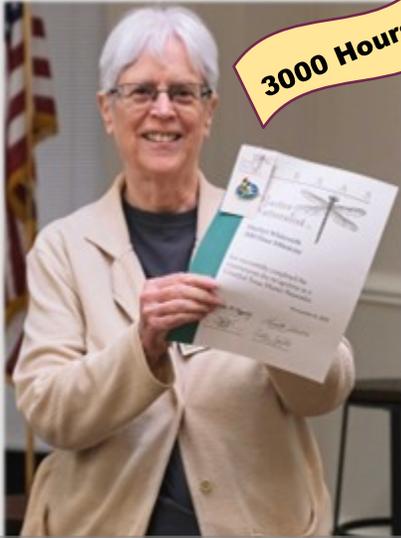
several directions on his slide in the photo below. He is holding up a mounting bracket that is inexpensive and easy to install. He showed us a number of his trail cam videos—oh my, SO many critters coming and going like interstate traffic in Houston. And if there’s a coyote in the image, you’re going to see him pee. Every time. Grant has a YouTube channel where you can see just



how busy it is out in the country at night. He told us that going out to collect the SD cards from his trail cameras is like opening presents at Christmas. He’s always delighted at what he gets to see. I look forward to learning more from Grant on other nature topics. You can find his camera videos at [Grant Critchfield’s Texas Trail Cams](#).



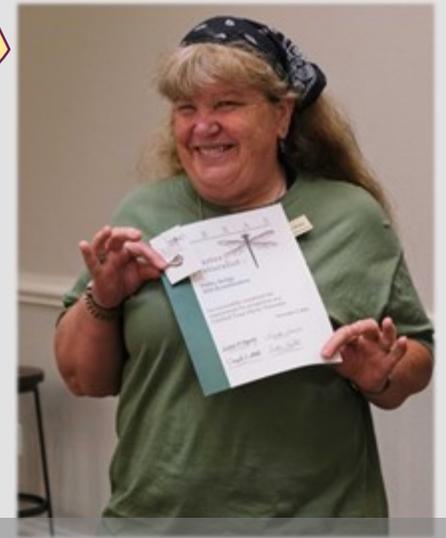
MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Marilyn Whitworth (2010) awarded 3000 Hour Milestone! **Congratulations!**



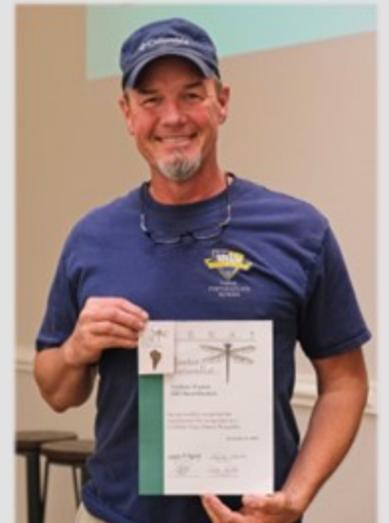
Bill Abright awarded 500 Hour Milestone! **Congratulations!** He also recertified for 2022



Debby Bridge recertifies for 2022—that's a **Double Certification!**



Letti Lim-Kosel and Bill Cornelius complete their Initial Certification!



Ben Clement and Andreas Wooten recertify for 2022



Far Left—Lynn Fleming (2004) recertifies with a silly face and adds another pin to her pile of pins
Middle—Andi Bowsher recertifies for 2022
On right—President Linda smiles because she's given SO many pins and certificates out the last two years!

Master Naturalists at Work

Bell County Museum Workday



(L to R) Bill Cornelius, Stan Simons, Mary Ann Everett and Andrea Liles (front) were Lynn Fleming's crew at



Colleen Smith-Fey gave a few cicadas a ride out of town. Well, it was just their old exoskeletons, but still...



Kids will be kids when it comes to glow in the dark face tattoos at Moth Night. Am I right, Danny Welch??

Master Naturalists at Work

Eco-Harvest Copperas Cove ISD

- Jamey Douglass, 2021

Under the leadership of Mary Ann Everett and Lynn Williams, Debby Bridges and Jamey Douglass took part in the Copperas Cove ISD Third Grade Eco Harvest. This year, the CTMN booth was part of the purple area. Each of us received a purple, "Keep Copperas Cove Beautiful" t-shirt. They even had my size.

We set up our informational booth under some live oak trees, adjacent to a dry creek bed. Mary Ann and Lynn showed kids posters of flowers, talked about pollinators and had the children look at pollen using a loupe (magnifier). Lynn ran some games with each student holding a bee, and picking up pollen from buckets, running to two more buckets.

At the end of each session, Mary Ann showed the students her butterfly collection under glass. Lots of enthusiasm was shown by the students. In each group, as the students were looking at seeds or pollen, one student would yell, Wow!

The morning session consisted of five groups with 15 to 16 students. The after-lunch sessions had about the same amount. We hosted nine



groups, with about 11 adults and 137 students. At 12:45pm, we were finished with the third graders and headed to lunch.

Mary Ann had her butterfly net out, but the butterflies were either too fast, or flying 20 feet above our heads. We did see monarchs, queens, an Eastern Swallowtail, and a Peppervine Swallowtail. Also, Admirals and Sulphur's were observed. The weather was exceptional, and all enjoyed their time at the Eco Harvest.

Master Naturalists at Work

CLEANING OUT THE CLOSET

It's bad enough cleaning out closets at home. These CTMN leaders spent time cleaning out OUR closet. We are grateful we finally have a place to store our skulls, skins, scat and other stuff!

Friday, October 7th, Lynn Fleming, John Atkins, and Jamey Douglass worked together to place two shelving units and attempt to eliminate duplicate items from our TPWD Traveling Trunks.

Trunk items were sorted, repacked in plastic containers, and placed on the shelves by categories. We ended up emptying the contents of four trunks. Now we have about eight empty trunks that could go to adjacent MN Chapters. The closet is now a bit roomier.

The future challenge will be to keep the closet organized. The smaller containers are much easier to load into vehicles and allow the user to see what is inside.



John Atkins in the Hall of Trunks

- Jamey Douglass



Lynn Fleming carrying a tiny bag

Good to Know...



#TMNTuesdays 2022

January	February	March	April	May	June
<p>The State of the Program</p>  <p>MICHELLE HAGGERTY & MARY PEARL MEUTH State of the Program, January 2022</p>	<p>Seed Collections for Conservation</p>  <p>ANNA STRONG, MINNETTE MARR, ANDREW MCNEIL-MARSHALL Seed Collections for Conservation</p>	<p>Historical Women Naturalists: Remembering Forgotten Pioneers</p> 	<p>Health and Nature with Sarah Coles</p> 	<p>Crossing the Finish Line: Recovering America's Wildlife Act with Richard Heilbrun</p> 	<p>A Master Naturalist in Space!</p>  <p>KJELL LINDGREN Downlink from the ISS!</p>
July	August	September	October	November	December
<p>Kenneth Anderson Taylor</p>  <p>KENNETH ANDERSON TAYLOR Authentic Leadership in Public Service</p>	<p>Craig Hensley</p>  <p>Craig Hensley Connecting All Texans to Conservation Through Meaningful, Engaging Interpretation</p>	<p>John Nielsen-Gammon</p>  <p>JOHN NIELSEN-GAMMON Summer 2022: What Happened and Why</p>	<p>Chapter Project Fair</p> 	<p>Ricky Linex</p>  <p>Ricky Linex Land Stewardship and Reading the Land: Tools for Developing a Land Stewardship Ethic</p>	<p>Kenneth Taylor</p>  <p>Kenneth Taylor On leadership transitions during transitioning times</p>

On the second Tuesday of each month 12:00pm, the TMN State Office offers an hour-long virtual advanced training event—with fantastic new and returning guest speakers. These *are open to the public* and count for Advanced Training for our CTMN members. Click to [REGISTER](#) for the December webinar, or to watch recorded webinars.

NeXt Chapter Meeting Program – bring a notepad!

Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter

Tuesday, January 10, 2023 6:00pm

Belton Church of Christ
3003 N. Main, Belton

**IN MY BACKYARD...
HOW I BRING IN CRITTERS**

By Juan Anaya

Our chapter meetings are open to the public!



More Good to Know...



Become a
**TEXAS
MASTER
NATURALIST**

Volunteer Training Course

Mid March – Early June

Various Tuesdays and Saturdays

Classroom, Field Trips & Webinars

Applications
Opening January

txmn.org/centraltexas

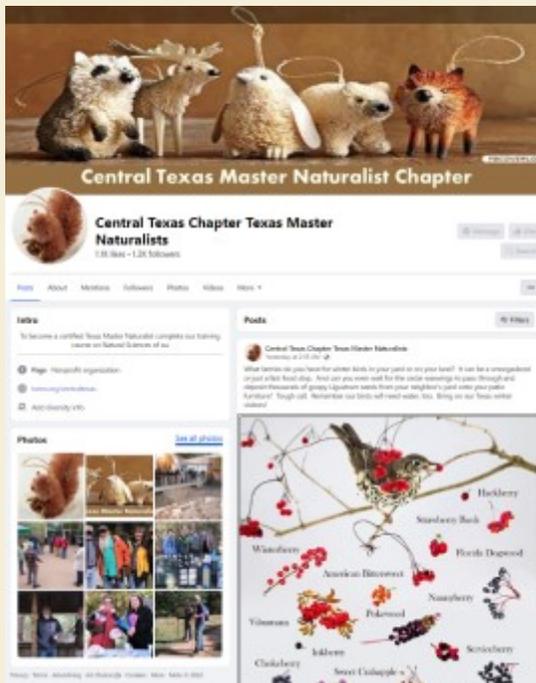
CLICK "Volunteer Training Course"

For information on the
Central Texas Master Naturalist Program:

Zoe Rascoe 254-913-1013
Lynn Fleming 254-760-4739
Mary Ann Everett 254-721-0931



It's almost that time of year!! We are working on the 2023 Training Class schedule. Watch our website and Facebook page for updates. If you think you may be interested in the class, you can reach us on our "Contact Us" tab of the website. We'll call you back!



Did you know we have a Facebook page? We have nearly 1300 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



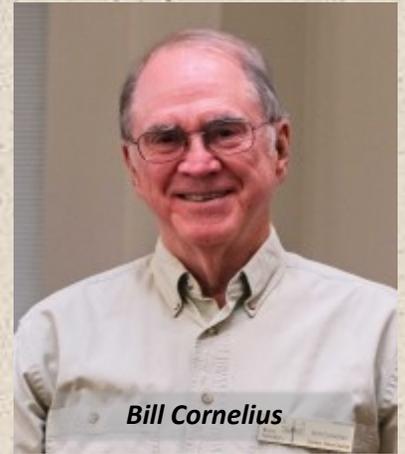
Linda Fairlie



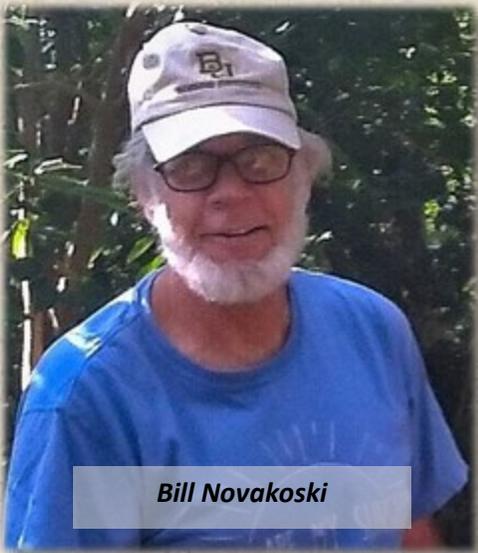
John Burns



Zoe Rascoe



Bill Cornelius



Bill Novakoski



Danny Welch



Jamey Douglass



Sally Jordan



Jean Solana



John Fairlie



Keller Matthews



Old Baldy, Wimberly — Terry 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



Who is ready for a break from the wind & rain? Meeee!!

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.