

The Tracker



Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter February 2023

Eastern Bluebird by Carroll Adcock

2023 Volunteer Training Course Starts March 21st

Are you curious about nature? Do you enjoy the outdoors? Are you willing to share what you learn?

If you are not a Master Naturalist already, this spring may be your opportunity to take that step. The Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter is a volunteer service organization with members in Bell and surrounding counties. Our mission is to understand nature so we can better conserve our natural resources and pass that knowledge along to our communities through our volunteer service. The only way to become a Certified Texas Master Naturalist begins by participating in the Volunteer Training Course—which starts March 21st for our Chapter. If this sounds like a service organization in which you would enjoy volunteering, you can learn more about our training and our projects on our website at txmn.org/centraltexas. If you would like to check us out first, come to our 2nd Tuesday evening February and March chapter meetings to meet our members, hear a speaker on winter birds and native prairies, and learn about our work. You may just find your people! - Zoe Rascoe, 2004



Become a
**TEXAS
MASTER
NATURALIST**

Applications
Now Open Online

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



Volunteer Training Course

March 21st – June 6th

Most Tuesdays and a Saturday

Classroom and Field Training





President's Pen

Carroll Adcock, 2020

Volunteer Opportunities Abound at Camp Tahuaya

New Volunteering opportunities abound at a beautiful little gem of a property near the banks of the Lampasas River and just minutes west of I-35. Our chapter was recently contacted by the Boy Scouts of America Longhorn Council to assist them in implementing several goals for property improvements. Four areas have been identified as projects for this year. Those include:

- 1) New trails to support new activities like a self-guided nature walk and geocaching
- 2) Development of a Monarch Waystation
- 3) Grant writing, to support their application for a TPWD Recreational Trails grant
- 4) Educational activities for families new to camping and outdoor activities, and nature-related merit badges for scouts



Our own Keller Matthews has agreed to take “point” for these endeavors and on January 20th the initial trail building project took place. You will see more about that day in the *Master Naturalists At Work* page in this issue of The Tracker.

Left: Stan Simons, in the red hard hat, and Carroll Adcock clear trees to construct a nature trail.

Cont.

I first had the privilege of becoming acquainted with Camp Tahuaya as the Dad of a couple of Scouts back in the 1980's and later as a Scouter with a local Boy Scout troop and Explorer Post. This property is steeped in history, blessed with natural resources and legends galore. The site of this camp is a heavily wooded property of approximately 250 acres and has one of the largest natural springs in Texas. The lake formed by the natural spring is seasonally stocked with rainbow trout and the scouts have periodic Trout Tournaments. The old Chisholm trail came nearby, the Old Military Road came through the property and there was a mill race that was heavily trafficked dating back to the 1840's. There



are scars on the limestone rock of those old trails where wagons and ox carts once traveled. It is rumored that the Spanish Conquistadores once buried gold in the area after an Indian attack on their gold-laden 20 burro pack train. Archaeological findings on the site in the past indicated an ancient people that left stone tools and other evidence dating back thousands of years. At one time in the early days of Texas, there was a blacksmith shop on the site. It is rumored that when Sam Houston first came to Texas in 1832 he stopped off there and spend the night and had his horse shod.

The Camp was established in 1932 and over the ensuing 90 years the laughter of thousands of boys has been heard in the Lampasas River valley as the boys hiked, swam, paddled and worked on merit badges. Finally, no accounting of this camp would be complete without mention of The Goatman of Camp Tahuaya rumored to live in a cave on the property!

This article is my first "President's Pen" since taking office this month and I felt obligated to write this article as the opportunities at this property provide our chapter the chance to showcase the capabilities of our organization. The expanding of Camp Tahuaya as a Family Adventure Camp in addition to a Scout Camp will open this gem of a property to even more members of our community. Hopefully, after seeing such a signature project, it will result in giving our chapter more opportunities from local organizations and ultimately get more people outdoors!

Upcoming Chapter Events

Volunteers Needed!



MOTHER EARTH NEWS FAIR
FEB. 18-19

JEAN SOLANA jmsolana76@gmail.com



HARKER HEIGHTS OUTDOOR
& SCIENCE EXPO
FEB. 18TH 9AM-1PM

MARY ANN EVERETT
everett.maryann4@gmail.com



Upcoming Chapter Events

Volunteers Needed!



HOME AND GARDEN SHOW
FEB. 24-26 (FRI-SUN)

ZOE RASCOE trascoe@hot.rr.com



MOTHER NEFF STATE PARK 5K RUN
FEB. 25TH 8:30AM-3:00PM

JEAN SOLANA jmsolana76@gmail.com



Upcoming Chapter Events

Volunteers Needed!

Using Monarch Larva Monitoring Project to Collect Long-Term Data on Monarch Butterflies

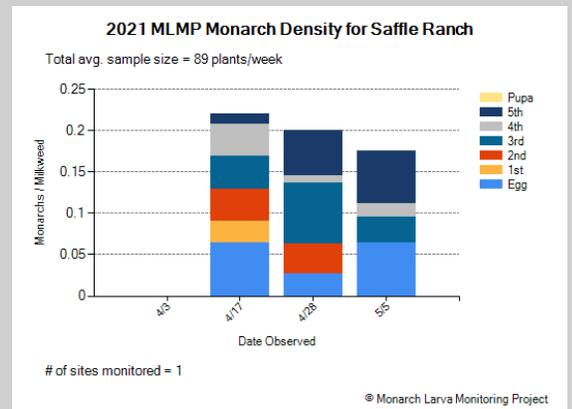


- **JEAN SOLANA, 2019**

The Monarch Larva Monitoring Project was developed by researchers from the University of Minnesota in 1996. The goal of the project is to better understand how and why populations of breeding monarchs change over time. Citizen scientists gather data all over the U.S. and submit to an online data base. Currently there are @1200 registered sites of milkweeds for monitoring. Volunteers count Monarch eggs and caterpillars on the milkweeds on a weekly basis and submit their data. Last spring a group of Central Texas Master Naturalists performed an Antelope Horn Milkweed count at the Lake Belton floodplain in the Miller Springs Nature Center and were amazed to find **over 4000 plants**. This presents an awesome opportunity for some great Citizen Science for our chapter. More than 10 people signed up at our last meeting. Below are the steps to perform this survey.

February/March Educate yourself at www.mlmp.org – their online training is about 10 short videos on where to find eggs and caterpillars, how to tell the five stages of caterpillars (instars) apart, and everything else you need to know. Explore the map of all the monitoring sites over the years – see if you can find Saffle Ranch (south of Waco) and Mother Neff State Park.

End of March I will keep an eye on Miller Springs to see when the milkweeds come up, and will email everyone when we can meet to plan our survey. Every surveyor will have their own plot to survey weekly on the day of their choice. Data will be email to me weekly so I can total it and put it in the data base. Here is an example of what it looks like – I have surveyed milkweeds and monarch for several years at Mother Neff State Park and my place near Bruceville-Eddy – 2 patches around 100 each. This will go on for about 6 weeks including the month of April.



Great Backyard Bird Count

Global Bird Count in February

Join the world in connecting to birds – February 17-20.
Watch the video to learn more about the count.



February 17-20, 2023

Hairy Woodpecker by Brad Imhoff/Macaulay Library

EYE ON THE SKY

- Marie McDermott, 2022

On February 17-20 you can count, shoot (cameras only, please!), and submit a list of birds you see in the sky, in trees, in bodies of water and on the ground. You choose your favorite place and time and you can report through the Merlin Bird ID app or the eBird website. This is a Community Science opportunity sponsored by the Audubon Society, Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Birds Canada. These organizations will use the observations submitted from around the world to better understand global bird populations before one of their annual migrations.

When making your observations, you are asked to spend 15 minutes or more, at least once over the four days (Feb 17-20, 2023).

On February 15th, 1:00-2:00pm EST (2 days before the Bird Count starts), organizers will host a live Tips Session, including Q&A time. Much more information and how to sign up to help count birds can be found at birdcount.org.

Editor's Note: The Great Backyard Bird Count is a global event that was first launched in 1998, and was the first online Community Science project to collect data on wild birds and display results in near real time. As a Master Naturalist, that should really be intriguing! This is a great opportunity to involve your whole family in an important and fun nature event. Lots of questions answered at the website [Help Page](#).





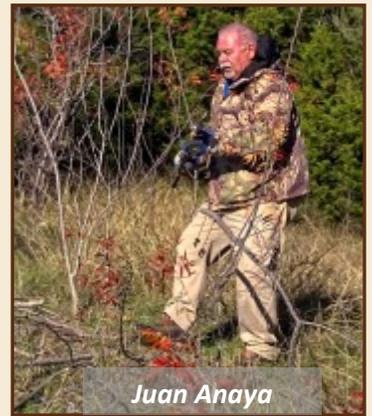
Mother Neff State Park

1680 TX Hwy-236, Moody

Jean Solana (2019), MNSP Liaison, can be reached at jmsolana76@gmail.com

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

Monthly Workday: On our 4th Wednesday workday in November, we started a new project of clearing small trees encroaching on the Mother Neff Prairie. Juan Anaya, Bill Novakoski, and Jean Solana were directed by Park Ranger Mike Swearingen to clear Flameleaf Sumac along Park Road 14. We also transplanted more Indiangrass and Little Bluestem in the Headquarters garden. The rangers have been clearing cedar in the prairie as well – yay, finally!



Juan Anaya



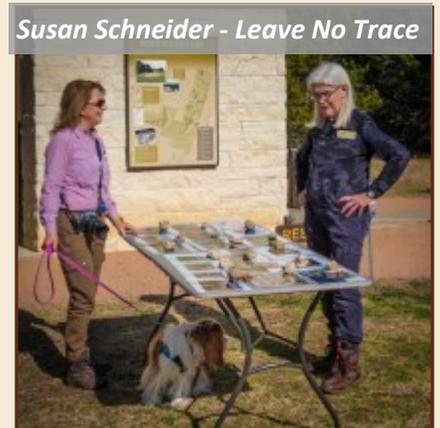
Debby Bridge & Larry Turner—replica furs

Christmas At Mother Neff: On December the 3rd we celebrated Christmas at Mother Neff. We had a Christmas tree, Santa and lots of crafts at Headquarters. A group of Central Texas Master Naturalists manned the mammal furs table by the RV loop. Thanks to Larry Turner, Debby Bridge, Lettie Lim, and Charlie Langsdale for coming out to help.



Jean Solana has a bio box to show hikers

First Day Hike: On New Year’s Day, we started off with a bang with 10 CTMN volunteers to help with the hikes at Mother Neff. This year we guided the hikers from stations around the park such as Prairie and Wash Ponds, Tower Bird Blind, Leave No Trace “Camp Oh No” near the Camper Loop and Headquarters. Much appreciation to Carroll Adcock, Bill Novakoski, Lynn Fleming, Tom Gerik, Colleen



Susan Schneider - Leave No Trace

Smith, Juan Anaya, Mary Ann Everett, Zoe Rascoe and Susan Schneider.

Mother Neff State Park *Cont.*

Buffalo Soldier History Walk:

On Saturday, January 14th, Lieutenant Dolifka came out to Mother Neff and led two hikes as he shared with us the history of the Buffalo Soldiers. Volunteers Jean Solana and Susan Schneider helped with the hikes by pointing out interesting native plants and park features to the visiting hikers. *Photos: (Right, Lt. Dolifka and Jean Solana; below right, Lt. Dolifka leads a group of hikers along historic trails; below, look what we found! Bluebonnet rosettes!!)*



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

I was not able to attend the December workday so Bill Novakoski agreed to lead the team. I was off to Louisiana to work with 8 Days of Hope to help families that had been hit hard by five different natural disasters over an 18-month period in Lake Charles. I hated to miss the workday at Miller Springs, but felt the work to help families get back in their homes before Christmas was more needed. I won't elaborate any more other than to say with over 1,000 volunteers we helped 107 families with free home repair. What a wonderful time of year to serve others.

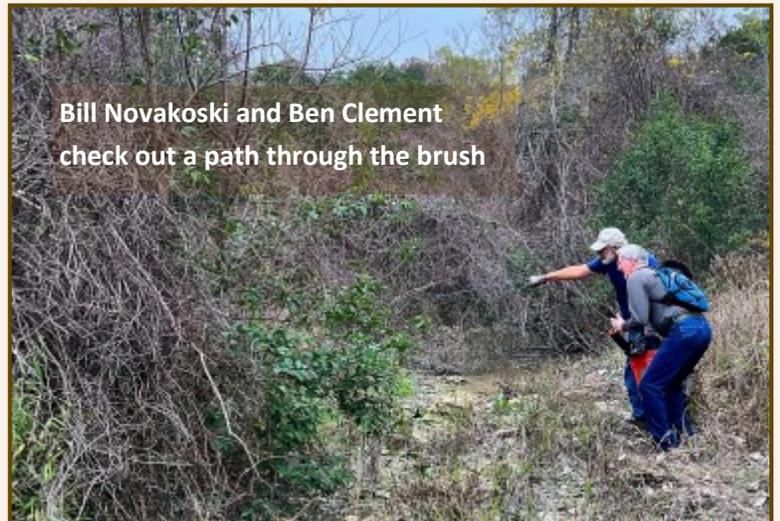


Now back to the work at Miller Springs. Bill led a team of three including himself, Ben Clement, and Keller Matthews. The work for the day included litter pickup and cutting invasive plants. The team also continued in searching for a possible trail to some caves in the New Canyon area. I wrote about the caves in previous articles. The team identified a possible trail that will require some thought, planning, and much work to develop. I am very appreciative of Bill taking on the lead for the day and

for the team's efforts to continue our work in the nature center. In the coming months I am planning to continue the process of developing a new trail. The next step will be to meet with the Cities of Belton and Temple to be sure the trail is approved before we get underway.



Keller Matthews, Ben Clement and Bill Novakoski had battled invasive trees.



Bill Novakoski and Ben Clement check out a path through the brush

Miller Springs Nature Center *cont.*

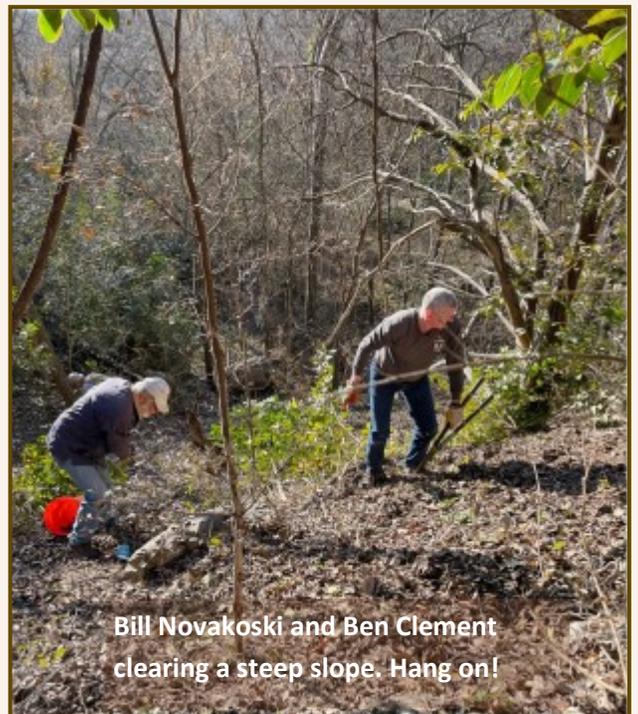
In January we had an exceptional day. The weather was perfect and we had five volunteers including myself, Stan Simons, Ben Clement, Tom Gerik, and Bill Novakoski. We worked at the



North end of Keller's trail in the area where it intersects with the West Access trail. It was a day that felt very good since we were able to actually clear the general area of ligustrum and chinaberry invasives. This is usually not possible because the areas are too heavily populated with ligustrum. I can't speak for the others, but I need to see this kind of progress sometimes. Without some successes like this day, the work of removing invasive plants can begin to feel overwhelming. We are making a difference every time we go out. The problem is, at times it is hard to see.

I have a conflict with next month's scheduled workday so I am planning to move it to the third Thursday which is February 16th. I don't want to cancel or miss a workday in the winter since these are our most productive workdays with the cooler temperatures. Come out and help while the weather is cool!

Thank you to all the Miller Springs Nature Center volunteers. You are making a difference!



Bill Novakoski and Ben Clement clearing a steep slope. Hang on!

FORT HOOD PROJECTS

Christmas Bird Count—December 15, 2022

- **Jean Solana, 2019**

CTMN members and associates Bruce Polikoff, Bill Novakoski, Tommy Reeder, Reid Lewis, Danny Welch, and Jean Solana participated in the Christmas Bird Count at Fort Hood under the direction of Charlie Plimpton, avian biologist with the Fort Hood Adaptive and Integrative Management Program.

Thirty volunteers spotted a total of 116 species and 7,075 individual birds. Special birds included bufflehead ducks, an osprey seen by Tommy and Reid on Pershing Lake, a Red-breasted Nuthatch heard by Jean at a hidden duck pond near Engineer Lake, and pileated

woodpeckers seen at Cowhouse Creek.

“Locally, we will be able to use the data collected to gain insights to our avian population trends and how they change from year to year,” Charlie Plimpton, avian biologist, said. “The Christmas Bird Count is also a great way to engage the public and encourage people to learn more about birding and the abundance of wildlife that is available for them to enjoy.”

[Quote provided by Christine Luciano, Fort Hood Directorate of Public Works Environmental.]

LIFE
TEMPLE DAILY TELEGRAM
FORT HOOD
Counting our feathered friends

INSIDE
■ Bridge Winners. 3B
■ Dear Annie. 3B
■ Heloise. 3B
■ Horoscopes. 3B

Charlie Plimpton, avian biologist, Fort Hood Adaptive and Integrative Management program, points to a songbird as volunteers and avian experts scan the sky on Dec. 13 during the Fort Hood Christmas Bird Count outreach event.

BELL COUNTY MUSEUM



- Lynn Fleming, 2004

There was some “Weird Science” going on at the Bell County Museum on January 14th. Eleven of our Master Naturalists buzzed into the museum to present education and crafts that centered around Insects! We rolled in two of our discovery trunks loaded with all things insect and Mary Ann brought her fabulous boxes of mounted insects. To add some fun to the mix, we had a craft set up so the kids (and parents) could make their own pipe cleaner and pony bead dragonflies.

It was a hectic 3 hours with over 150 folks making their way through our tables and the museum stations.



Thanks to the volunteers who helped pass along fun and some education to little learners. Hats off to Mary Ann Everett, Cindy Fowler, Brook Fowler, Marilyn Whitworth, Stan Simons Colleen Smith-Fey, Sally Jordan, Melissa Repasch (and her fun boys!), Jerry Lewis, and Catherine Schmitz—all of whom stayed very busy!

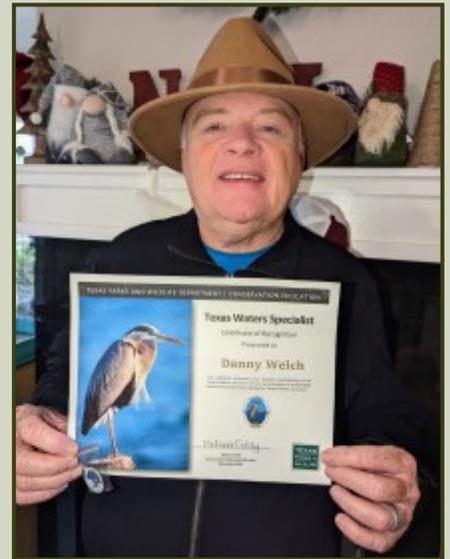


TEXAS STREAM TEAM

- 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. Three Central Texas Master Naturalists have recently earned the Texas Waters Specialist designation from Texas Parks and Wildlife. Charles Langsdale, Letti Lim, and myself, Danny Welch completed the Texas Waters Curriculum, eight hours of water related Advanced Training, and ten hours of water related service.

Right: Danny Welch and below left: Charlie Langsdale and Letti Lim-Kosel are now certified Texas Water Specialists.



In addition to testing the water quality of our area streams and rivers, we clean up the trash left behind by others. *Left: Debby Bridge and below, Larry Turner pick up litter at their sampling sites.*

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



Attracting Bluebirds



Photo above by Carroll Adcock

- Sally Jordan, 2022

Birdwatching has become a very popular pastime for Americans. Birdwatching is free and is fun for all ages. I am a grandmother, and I love to help my grandchildren observe and learn about birds. We can all enjoy and appreciate the beauty of God's creation.

One of my favorite birds is the bluebird and, yes, we have them in Central Texas. Our species is the Eastern Bluebird, and we live right on the edge of their western zone. For me, the best way to attract bluebirds has been by providing them with custom built bird boxes for nesting and raising their young. The specifications for building these bluebird houses is fairly exact. One inch cedar planks are the best material for the boxes. The cedar helps repel insects and provides a safe environment for the babies. The entrance to the box should be a round hole that is exactly 1 ½ inches in diameter. The rectangular box should be 7¼ inches tall at the front, 6¼ inches wide, and 11¼ inches high at the back. The front panel should open for cleaning the house when the birds leave. It is alright to lift it up and peek at the nest, but not too often. A simple latch is necessary to keep it closed. It is best to mount the box on a metal pole that is 5 to 7 feet off the ground.

We place a mesh petticoat under the box to catch snakes who like to eat baby birds, or you can use a baffle (Guy Fowler is available to take the snakes off your hands!) Do not mount the birdhouse on a tree or a building because predators can get to it easily. The house should face east and be in an open area so the birds can fly to it and feed their young without brush and trees being in the way.



Attracting Bluebirds *cont.*

We began to see bluebirds around our boxes in December, and they have already built a nest in one of our three boxes. It is still a little early for the eggs. They lay 4 to 6 small, blue eggs which take 13 to 20 days to hatch. Then the babies will fledge or fly from the nest in about 17 days. It is good to have high lines or perching areas for the fledglings as they learn to fly. It is not unusual to have up to three sets of eggs in the same box. When they finish raising their young in the late spring, I clean the nest material out of the box. The same pairs of adult bluebirds will return to your boxes for several years.

You may not identify them as bluebirds until they fly, and the sun catches their blue wings. It is a beautiful sight, indeed. We have a birdbath for them to drink from and play in. I hose it out regularly to clean it. It gets water added twice a week automatically. We have lots of mistletoe in our trees, and the bluebirds eat those white berries. Their favorite food is mealworms, and you can buy those and the bluebird boxes at our Wild Birds Unlimited store near HEB on 31st Street in Temple.

Happy Birding!

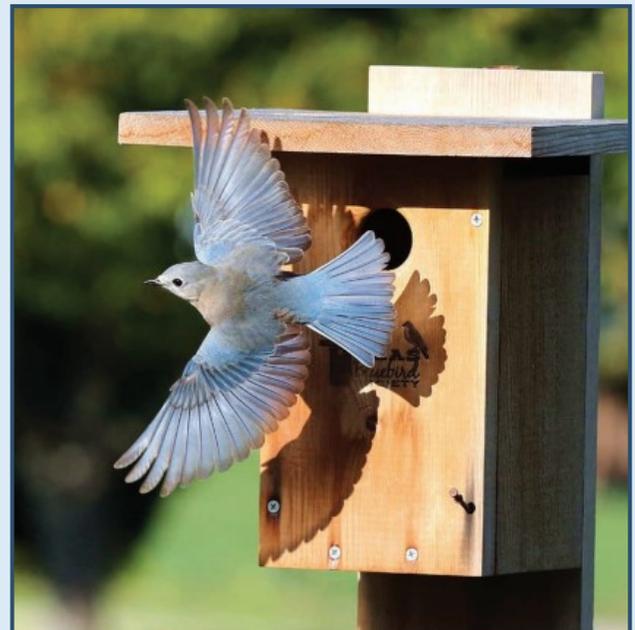
TEXAS NESTBOX PLANS

Well-ventilated for Texas heat

Available through Texas Bluebird Society

Editor's Note: Click on the image to the right to access a 44 page TPWD document, on everything you need to know about being a landlord for Bluebirds, including plans for building the nestbox that Sally described above. Other topics are Tips for Nestbox Placement; Competitors, Predators and Other Hazards; Other Nestbox Inhabitants; Feeding Bluebirds; NestWatch Citizen Science Project; Texas Native Plants for Bluebirds; and Bluebird Ranges. Most of Texas is breeding grounds for the Eastern Bluebird!

To provide a cooling effect, add a second roof with 1/2 inch spacers. Or, add heat shields, or paint or stain outside of box white or other light color.



Bluebirds
IN TEXAS





Gone Hog Wild in Texas

– ZOE RASCOE, 2004

I'm not sure how it happened, but some people think I know more than the average bear about feral hogs. I get asked questions about them pretty often. I did have an uncle in Milam County who designed and built a trap that could catch 20 hogs at a time (when that was a lot). And I have another relative who was an expert on the Wild Pig Team for AgriLife Extension. I have been out in the woods when a herd was moving through the trees and it can be terrifying. AgriLife Extension and the Lampasas River Watershed Protection Partnership recently hosted a "Wild Pig Management Workshop" with Texas Natural Resource Institute's Josh Helcel. I went to learn what those hogs are up to now. Some are up to 400 pounds!

Hogs are responsible for \$500M in ag damages annually—up from \$52M in 2012 and \$100M in 2019. Hogs range up into Canada, now. 99% of Texas counties have feral hogs. Wild hogs have a home range of 19 square miles in west Texas, three square miles in east Texas, and about a 60 square mile range in most other states. It's thought the #1 reason Texas has more wild pigs than all other states combined is because we have so many deer feeders throwing corn year-round.

Wild hogs are the 2nd most successful reproductive animals in the world. Yep. A six month old pig will reproduce every 114 days, and when grown will have up to a dozen piglets every cycle. Now you can see why they are such a problem. Their numbers are growing faster than Texans can "dispatch" them. Wild hogs are highly intelligent and easily educated to avoid traps, they have one of the most acute senses of smell of all game animals, they go nocturnal when needed and are difficult to pattern. They can't sweat so look for them near water sources. Wild hogs respond quickly to new pressures—just like an arms race, said our instructor.

Many, many experts (and a few uncles) are trying to find the key to the demise of wild hogs. There are traps (I saw a demo on the new "[Pig Brig](#)" trap), toxicants, aerial hunting and more. There is too much to share for this space, so I'll provide some good places to go for information.

Dispatch as many as you can.

TPWD: [The Ecology and Mgt of Wild Pigs](#)

Texas Natural Resource Institute: [An Overview of Wild Pigs](#)

FUZZ:

When Nature Breaks the Law

- Marie McDermott, 2022

Have you ever heard of crow bombing? If not, you need to read this book.

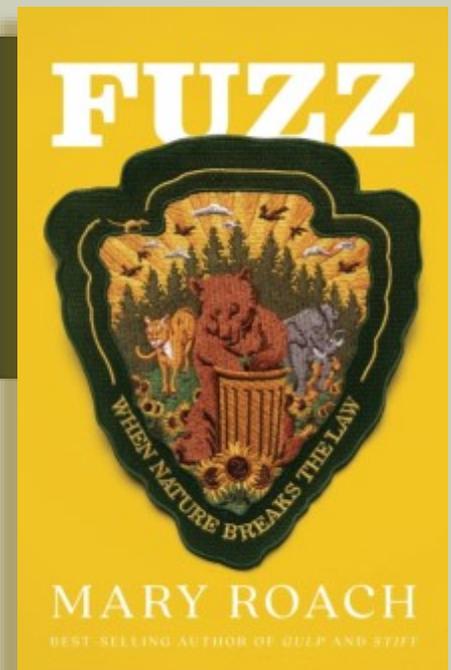
While Mary Roach doesn't focus on Texas naturalist interactions exclusively, many of the concepts and experiences will be of interest to us Texans. Turkey vultures, cougars, and deer are woven into her discussions.

She is thorough as she relates her personal experiences and supports her observations with experts as personal guides and references. Her travels reach far and wide. She attends professional conferences in Canada for forensic investigators (called Maul Cops) who specialize in animal-human interactions and sometimes help exonerate the accused mammal criminal. We get up close and personal with a cougar tracker in California examining tracks and scat as tools for estimating cougar (also known by many other names) populations. We follow wandering elephants and sexy macaques in India, and deer and the humans that hit them with their cars ("Can't the deer read the signs and know not to cross the road?," one woman asks.) Her guides exhibit both debilitating fear and nonchalance at the possibly we are being stalked by a leopard as we wander through the countryside. Her discussion about bears in the Aspen area include facts and speculation about known deterrent techniques and the social and political pressures that prevent them from being effectively used.

Not limiting herself to mammal interactions she clarifies the rationale behind mitigating the damage from "Danger Trees". Poisonous legumes and their benign counterparts are exposed. She looks at gulls, and at how stoats (do you know what they are? I didn't) decimate penguin populations.

Mary Roach has an easy-to-read style. Her book titles reflect a sometimes dry and sometimes slightly wicked sense of humor that raises them from simple academic recitations. Roach's interests are broad. She has written well-received books on subjects as varied as *Packing for Mars* (and a companion title *Packing for Mars for Kids*), human cadavers (*Stiff*), the science of the afterlife (*Spook*), the alimentary canal (*Gulp*), the curious science of war (*Grunt*) and not to be forgotten-an exploration of sex (*Bonk*.)

Roach has also compiled a series of essays called *The Best Science and Nature Writing*. Reading Roach could keep one busy for the long, cold (! in Texas??) winter.



The Gault Archaeological Site

- Michael Belcher, 2021

One of the most spectacular field trips that I have been on in recent years was to the Gault Archaeological Site located near Florence, Texas on the edge of the Hill Country. It's a beautiful site, not far from the Lampasas River, with all of the basic needs of humanity: food, water and shelter nearby. The site includes a never-dry springs, limestone outcroppings and huge amounts of chert, the flinty material used for projectile points and other stone tools. It was something of a semi-permanent settlement with what might be called a manufacturing center for chert objects. It also contains extinct mammoth, horse and bison remains.

I was asked to prepare this article because of my college training and previous experience in Archaeology. The tour is required training for certification in the Texas Master Naturalist Course. That being said, if you live in central Texas, and have not been there, you need to go on one of these tours, you will not be disappointed.

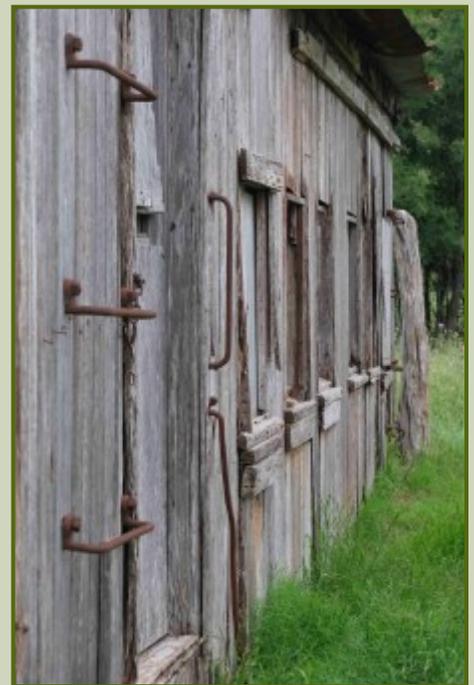
Dr. D. Clark Wernecke, Executive Director of the Gault School of Archaeological Research (GSAR), and Project Director of the Prehistory Research Project at the University of Texas at Austin, served as our tour guide on a pleasant Saturday morning in May. He told us many fascinating stories, along with a few groan-worthy puns, and happily answered many half-informed questions from our visiting CTMN group. He also makes a great use of mixing local history with archaeology on his tours of the Gault Site.

I had not met Clark before, although due to our training and experiences, we knew many of the same people in the field of North American Archaeology, primarily those involved in researching the Peopling of the Americas. I enjoyed reminiscing and laughing with him about a few of the more notorious characters among them.

The three-hour tour began with a brief stop at an old railroad boxcar built from cypress, circa 1908, that once ran along the Bartlett-Florence Railway and was later home to farm workers.



At one point during the tour, we paused for a discussion of the spear-throwing lever or Atlatl used by the Clovis people for hunting large game animals. Clark showed us a large spear point used on an Atlatl spear, and then used an Atlatl to demonstrate how the leverage worked to increase the throwing distance and velocity of the weapon. He also allowed a volunteer to use the device.



Cont.

The Gault Archaeological Site *cont.*

The tour took us across the property to various previously excavated locations with Clark discussing the particulars of when, how long and what was discovered there. Some of the topics that the tour discussed were various hypotheses regarding the peopling of the Americas, the geology and history of this area of Central Texas, cultural history of Central Texas, primitive technologies, important finds from the Gault site, and archaeological excavation practices.

“Archaeologists are interested in human behavior—think of us as CSI Prehistoric. We look at clues (artifacts) in context to figure out what happened,” Clark said. He added, “The ground itself is a big book. Archaeologists, paleontologists, and geologists can turn the pages back to help us learn from the past, so we know where we’re going in the future. Studying who we are and where we came from is an exercise in looking to the future,” Clark said. He

also said, “Our job as archaeologists is not to fill in museum cases — we’re after usable information about human behavior. For every day in the field, we have to spend about 40 days in the lab.”

The site which covers about 33 acres, was named for the original owner, Henry Gault, a farmer whose land attracted unwanted collectors, as well as professional avocational archaeologists for over a century. Over the years the land changed hands several times but was the focus for a great deal of collecting and looting. Some of these collectors worked on a grand scale with large crews and even heavy machinery. Eventually a commercial pay-to-dig operation allowed collectors the opportunity to dig at the now-famous Gault Site for a mere \$2 a day (later \$25).

Finally, science and education prevailed to stop the damage for pay to dig operations by the late 1990s. In 1998 a group from the University of Texas at Austin, led by paleontologist Dr. Ernie Lundelius and archaeologist Dr. Michael Collins, were asked by the new owners to look at something they’d exposed at the



site. It turned out to be the lower jaw of a juvenile mammoth and some ancient horse bones surrounded by a large number of Clovis artifacts. Archaeologist Dr. Michael Collins, the now Chairman of the GSAR, conducted a three-year excavation from 1999 to 2002. The excavations revealed a prolific, multi-component, well-stratified site representing almost every stone-age culture known in Central Texas, and a stone floor of what might be the oldest excavated building in North America.

Cont.





The Gault Archaeological Site *cont.*

Additionally, when studying the incised stones, there was difficulty in seeing worn lines thousands of years old on soft limestone, so researchers used polynomial texture mapping (PTM), which is also known as reflectance transformation imaging (RTI), a computational photographic method of recording the texture and color of an object by combining 64 different images. The resulting image can be manipulated to make things like faint lines clearly visible. Those etched stones, which may have been gaming pieces or a type of amulet, are the earliest dated examples of human art. The people who came here cooked food in rock-lined ovens dug into the ground. They made tools for chores like cutting grass, which wanderers would not have done. They lived in small foraging groups that periodically gathered at the Gault site, attractive for its springs, available food and supply of chert to make stone tools.

“People were in Central Texas much earlier than we previously thought, 20,000 years ago vs. 13,500,” Clark said, “which means that people arrived in the Americas even earlier than that. The old story we have been told about the peopling of the Americas is now dead, and we do not yet have enough information to form a new one.” Thus, the artifacts are challenging the notion that early humans walked here from Asia at the end of the last ice age as big-game hunters, following mammoths over the Bering Strait and down through an ice-free corridor as they slowly spread across the Americas. Instead, Collins, Wernecke and other experts believe humans arrived by boat, spreading down the Atlantic, Pacific or both coastlines — starting at least 17,000 years ago.

“None of that story we’ve been taught makes any sense,” Clark said. “There’s no archaeological or geological proof that people came from Asia any more than they came from Europe. We have to change everything we thought we knew.” The site is filling in knowledge of the people who used Clovis technology, painting them as more domestic and less nomadic than previously thought.

Clark related a new discovery, “We have a stone tool technology that, in part, resembles the Clovis tool technology that follows it. We also have some parts of that lithic record, like the projectile points, that look nothing like later cultures in Texas. While this is to be expected of an older technology, we do not yet have enough data from other sites to look at a larger pre-Clovis culture.” The Gault School tests multiple sites here in Texas each year, utilizing volunteers to look for similar dates, geology and technology. The collection is constantly looked at and re-looked at by researchers from several associated fields of study. The excavations at Gault are over now; however, as Clark said, “People are going to be looking at this collection forever.”

You can donate to the Gault School on its website ([gaultschool.org](https://www.gaultschool.org)) or by mail. “We always have several larger projects that need large donations,” Clark said. “Some even having naming opportunities. You can join the Gault School as a member, and information is on our website. You also can volunteer in the lab or field to help us find data on the oldest Texans.” We finished with a nice tour of the gift shop, where purchases and donations were purely optional. Cash or checks, no credit cards please. Cheers!

Gault School of Archaeological Research (<https://www.gaultschool.org>)

Texas Archaeological Society (<https://www.txarch.org>)

Texas Beyond History (<https://www.texasbeyondhistory.net>)

Texas Archaeological Research Laboratory (UT) (<https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/tarl/>)



- **Mary Ann Everett, 2003**

Out on a Limb

I receive a monthly newsletter from Texasinvasives.org that is full of information on the fight against invasive plants and critters. Today, my focus will be on an insect - the emerald ash borer (EAB, *Agrilus planipennis*).

In July, 2022, two new counties have confirmed the presence of this insect, bringing the total to 13 Texas counties: Morris, Rusk, Bowie, Cass, Dallas, Denton, Harrison, Marion, Morris, Rush, Wise, Parker, and Tarrant. Wherever EAB has been confirmed, the county is added to the list of Texas jurisdictions under quarantine by the Texas Department of Agriculture. These quarantines are designed to restrict the movement of any woody ash tree material leaving the quarantine area in order to limit or slow the spread of the invasive pest insect.

The emerald ash borer is a metallic emerald-green beetle with an iridescence coppery or reddish reflection. The adult beetle is bullet shaped and has a characteristically bright red to purple coloration on its abdominal surface under its wings. One external sign of EAB infestation is the distinctive D-shaped hole the adult EABs leave in the trees upon emergence. The larvae are white and slightly flattened, with a pair of brown pincher-like appendages on the last abdominal segment. These larvae feed on the phloem and outer sapwood of ash trees, leaving S-shaped galleries that cut off the circulation of phloem to the tree, resulting in tree death.

The concern going forward is how does this affect you, and what are the costs. Texas has seven species of native ash trees. This insect has no known predators here because it is native to Asia where it is kept in check by birds and wasps. The insect can hitch rides from infected areas by way of firewood and lumber so it is difficult to predict where it will pop up next. The ash tree is popular due to its height, shade, and abundant foliage cover. The ash replaced elm trees as the elms were decimated with Dutch elm disease.

TEXASINVASIVES.ORG HELLO INVASIVE SPECIES. GOODBYE TEXAS. ABOUT | HOME | SPOTLIGHT | CONTACT | EAB

INVASIVES 101 TAKE ACTION CITIZEN SCIENTISTS PROFESSIONALS RESOURCES INVASIVES DATABASE GO

HELLO EMERALD ASH BORER. GOODBYE ASH TREES IN TEXAS.

DON'T MOVE FIREWOOD.

WHAT IS THE EMERALD ASH BORER?

The emerald ash borer is an invasive, boring beetle from northeast Asia that has killed millions of ash trees since its introduction to the United States in the early 2000s. They are roughly 1/2 inch long and 1/8 inch wide and metallic emerald-green with a cylindrical body. Females can lay up to 100 eggs. Emerald ash borer causes severe environmental damage, including destroying habitat by changing forest and riparian zone diversity, increasing fire risk from dead trees, and results in high economic costs related to insecticide treatments and the removal/replacement of dead trees.

WHERE ARE EMERALD ASH BORERS?

As of December, 2020, over 30 states have detected emerald ash borer infestations. It was discovered in traps deployed in northeastern Texas in early 2018. In addition to Harrison County, adults have since been found in Marion and Cass Counties, and **detected and listed since found in Texas for the first time in Tarrant County in 2018.** [Click here](#) for the current distribution map.

CHAPTER MEETINGS

- Zoe Rascoe, 2004

Our December our Chapter celebrated the holidays together with a potluck meal and our annual Bucket Auction to raise funds for projects. We want to thank the Harker Heights Parks & Rec for supporting our event and especially to Adam Trujillo, Special Events Manager, for his kind words for our Chapter's help at Harker Heights public events. Linda Fairlie, our President for the last two years, received a handmade quilt provided by Mary Ann Everett as a thank you for her service to our chapter. Now on to Immediate Past President for her and welcome to Carroll Adcock as our new President! *(cont.)*



Andi Klein's beautiful Yule Log



Outgoing President Linda Fairlie



A keepsake quilt for Linda



What a 5000 hour pin looks like!



Jeremy Ballard's gourmet Christmas cookies

CHAPTER MEETINGS *CONT.*

(cont.) In Carroll's first few minutes as President, he presided over our Bucket Auction which is always great fun. Our members donate amazing nature-y items they have made, found or are re-homing. There is both jubilation and disappointment, but all to raise funds for our chapter.



(Top) Tina Atkins, Mary Ann Everett, Lynn Fleming and Carroll Adcock pull tickets for dozens of donated items.

(Lower left) Jamey Douglass checks his ticket numbers, but no winner this time. Jeremy Ballard looks for the lucky new owner.



(Lower right) Carroll Adcock accepts the election results as our new President and sets the festive tone for the evening with his Santa Crown!

Thanks to the many members who helped make this event fun and successful!!

Our January Chapter Meeting speaker was member Juan Anaya, the Hummingbird Whisperer! He provided advice on attracting all kinds of birds (including a first recorded sighting of an Anna's Hummingbird in Central Texas) and butterflies using native plants (mostly), various seed feed and fruits (watermelon and oranges are a good start), sources of water and nesting material, and ideas for hiding places (like a large A-frame covered in vines).



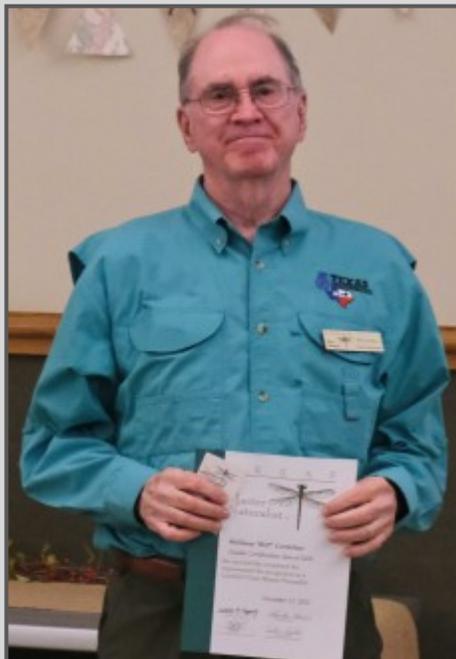
MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Zoe Rascoe (2004) awarded 5000 Hour Milestone by Mary Ann Everett (2003) who was our first member to receive that golden dragonfly pin!
Congratulations!



Susan Schneider (2020) receives her Initial Certification. Jeremy Ballard (2022) receives his **Double Certifies** for 2022.



Bill Cornelius (2020) receives a **Double Certification!**



Sue Critz (2017) receives her 2022 Recertification. Ward Critz (2017) receives his Recertification, too.

MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



John Burns (2018), recertifies for 2022



Matt Ridley (2020), recertifies for 2022



Larry Turner (2021), receives his Initial Certification



Jerry Lewis (2010), recertifies for 2022

The first Central Texas Chapter Training Course was held in the spring of 2010. Congratulations to all those who continue to volunteer and train to remain Certified.

Master Naturalists at Work



Our 2023-2024 Board of Directors: (back, left to rt) Carroll Adcock, President; Bill Novakoski, Director-At-Large; Tom Fairlie, Director-At-Large; (middle row, l to r) Mary Ann Everett, Training Director; Sue Valdez, Training Committee; Marilyn Whitworth, Hospitality; Bruce Polikoff, Treasurer; Stan Simons, Class Representative; LouAnn Hight, Communications; Jessica Dieter, Secretary; Jamey Douglass, Vice President; Sharon Schmitz, Membership; (front, l to r) Zoe Rascoe, Recruiter; Linda Fairlie, Immediate Past President (with our mascot Sofi); Lynn Fleming, Training Director. Not pictured: Andrea Liles, Membership and Dale Hughling, Technology.

THANK YOU FOR SERVING OUR CHAPTER

Master Naturalists at Work

New Camp Tahuaya Projects

- Keller Matthews,

There was ideally cool weather and a strong turnout of strong workers for the inaugural Tahuaya Trails work day, January 20. Keller Matthews flagged the intended trail the day before, and the Friday morning group divided into three teams, with a sawyer and a hauler in each. In three hours, a mile of trail was cut through sometimes dense cedar on a blufftop overlooking the historic swimming pool.

The next workday is tentatively planned for Friday, Feb 10, and will be confirmed when the weather forecast looks good. Contact Keller Matthews, 878tkm@gmail.com, for details.

Contact Keller Matthews, 878tkm@gmail.com, for details.

Above left: Keller Matthews, Tom Gerik, Carroll Adcock, Ben Clement. Above right: Stan Simons, and Matt Ridley. Look at those smiles after 3 hours—there's a trail!!



Editor's Note: Left is a photo of Master Naturalist Smarty Pants. They are on an quarterly Adopt-A-Loop location to log into iNaturalist all sorts of critters that they see—from ants to porcupines. Texas Parks and Wildlife uses this information in a number of ways. I was getting a group shot at each location but I wanted a photo of one of them locating a critter. This is their fun response to a reasonable request.

Master Naturalists at Work

Miller Springs Nature Center New Year's Eve Volunteer Workday

- Zoe Rascoe, 2004

New Year's Eve morning is a great time to get outdoors and do something good for nature - and people, too. The Day Before New Year's Eve is good if it falls on a better day of the week. This year it was actually Dec 30th that City of Belton Parks and Recreation hosted one of their routinely scheduled Volunteer Workdays at Miller Springs Nature Center. Sign up for their [email list](#) to be notified of future events! (Hint, there's another one March 4th.)



Master Naturalists Keller Matthews (left) and Tom Gerik head out with trash grabbers. If you read this newsletter, you probably don't litter. Tell others!!



City of Belton Parks & Rec staff host volunteers and Master Naturalists, too!

Good to Know...

Upcoming Chapter Meeting – bring a notepad!

Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter Presents

Beds, Baths & Buffets for Birds

By Tommy Reeder, Wild Birds Unlimited – Temple

Tuesday, February 14, 2023
6:00pm

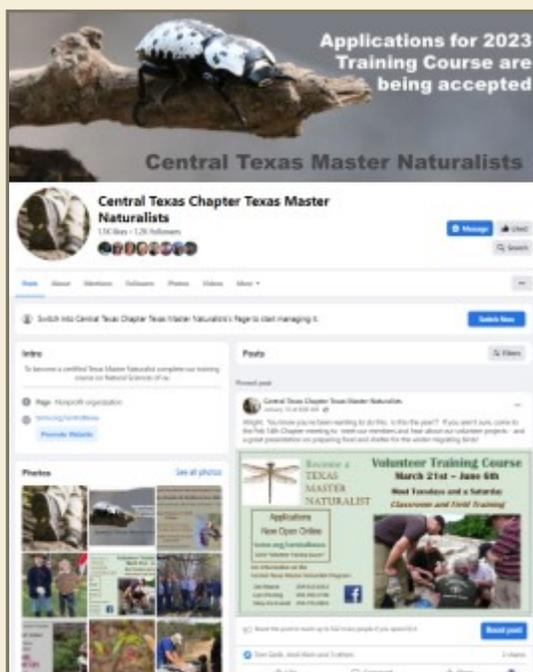
Belton Church of Christ
3003 N. Main Street, Belton

*Our Chapter meetings are open
to the public!*

www.txmn.org/centraltexas



Ferry Pascoe ©



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. 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*.

More Good to Know...

#TMNTuesday



Laura Miksch

Landscape Diversity is
Bigger in Texas:
Exploring the Ecoregions
of Texas and How They
Are Mapped

February 14, 12pm



From the coast to the desert, we will take a look at the 11 ecoregions of Texas and their associated plant communities and abiotic characteristics. Additionally, we will explore the Ecological Mapping Systems (EMS) of Texas which have allowed TPWD to map even more refined habitat types within the ecoregions.



**The 25th Anniversary
Recertification Pin!
Representing the
variety of Texas
Ecosystems.**

On the second Tuesday of each month at 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 upcoming webinar, or to watch recorded webinars.



What the Nature?

I took this photo on February 5, 2022. Weather situation look familiar? These are GILGAI in a neighbor's yard that are very pronounced with the ice and water. They occur in clay (vertisol) soils that shrink and swell with water, or the lack of. Blackland soils are notorious for gilgai. Many times they will have a different group of flora and fauna in them if left undisturbed. Imagine the lawnmower ride in this yard!

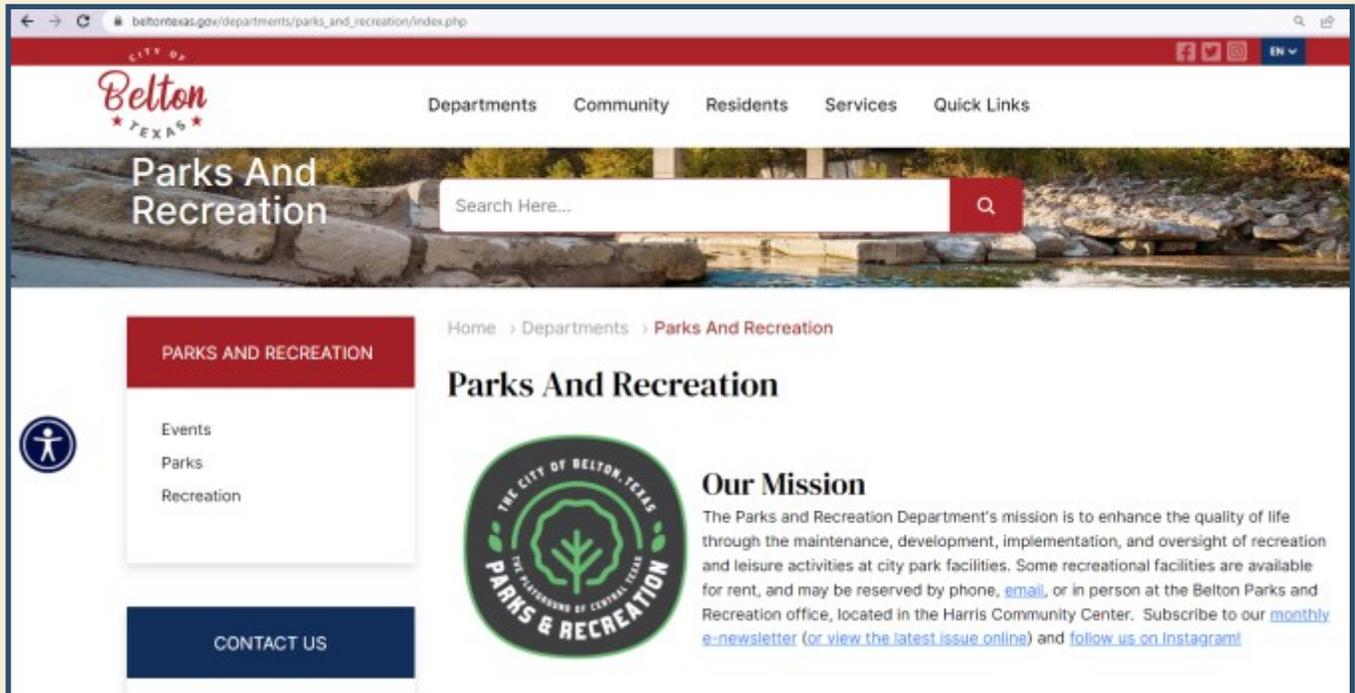
Lynn Fleming, 2004

More Good to Know...

From Belton Parks & Recreation:

The first Miller Springs Nature Center Volunteer Day of 2023 will be Saturday, March 4th! Wildflower seeds will be scattered in the memory of Casey Claypool. This is a great time to get outside after the colder winter months (even if it's still wintry). Look for more details on the Belton Parks & Rec facebook page and Instagram in early March.

Sign up for [Belton Parks & Recreation e-newsletters](#) to catch all their upcoming events. You may see Master Naturalists there!



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Keller Matthews



Big Bend State Park —Terry Rascoe

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President: Carroll Adcock

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Contributed Images: Jean Solana, Keller Matthews, Lynn Fleming, Sally Jordan, Sue Valdez, Terry Rascoe, Zoe Rascoe.

If you have photos or a story to share, just send me your idea. Newsletter contributions count for Volunteer Service hours. Just sayin’.

Zoe Rascoe trascoe@hot.rr.com



Tell me and I forget.

Teach me and I may remember.

Involve me and I learn.

Benjamin Franklin

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 (unless it's a holiday) 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.