

The Tracker

Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter April 2023

Texas Roadside Flowers by Zoe Rascoe

2023 VOLUNTEER TRAINING COURSE UNDERWAY

As a long-time recruiter for our Chapter, (though many of our members help bring in new people!) springtime is most fun for me. By mid-March I have visited with all the applicants and can visualize where they will connect with our projects and our members. They bring so much life experience and always a passion for nature. That is our common thread among many diverse interests. Lynn Fleming (on right) and Mary Ann Everett and their team work SO hard to put together a training course of 24 classes, many of which are in the field. Where else would Jason Wilson (below) learn how to use an atlatl to throw an arrow at a Columbian Mammoth? Since we all love learning outdoors, we are happy to be back at the Lake Waco Wetlands lab (below right). And new this year, Linda Fairlie has launched a Mentor program that we hope helps these naturalist trainees to be the very best they can be. See page 4 and following to meet our 2023 trainees.

- Zoe Rascoe, 2004



President's Pen

Carroll Adcock, 2020



You may want to call this month's article "Meanderings from the President's Pen" as I share a few recent observations and thoughts. The convergence of spring occurring right on top of a monumental birthday for myself, only to be followed by the start of a new class of Master Naturalist trainees for our chapter has resulted in my thinking a bit "deeper" than is typical of me. I also just had the opportunity to spend a few days with my two grandsons, and while observing the toddler on a short walk it made me realize how much I take for granted and how little I actually observe. He was fascinated with every little object, from the shimmering water droplets on the web of a tunnel spider, to the minute pink flowers of dwarf verbena. Observing his pure glee while dancing in a rain-puddle I became aware of my need to once again feel the excitement from life's simple pleasures.

Having grown up as a "town boy" with occasional forays into the outdoors with friends and some family, I soon learned that the outdoors was my happy place. Fast forward the clock a decade or so

and after college, and starting a family I was eventually in a place to increase the frequency of outdoor activities.



I discovered our state park system and we took up family camping, and as my sons became older and entered the scouting program we became very engaged in hiking and backpacking. *Cont.*

We continued to visit and support our State Parks and I spent hours studying TPWD magazines and publications. We are blessed in this state with this fabulous network of parks and I hope to see them grow in the years ahead, especially as the population of our state continues to grow. Texas Parks and Wildlife needs our support to maintain the current parks as well as to expand the park system. I fear that with the projected growth in our state over the next two to three decades that the loss of wild places will be unrecoverable if we don't recruit our youth to love the outdoors as we do. To quote John James Audubon, "A true conservationist is a man who knows that the world is not given by his father, but borrowed from his children." While I am not in a financial position to make much impact, it is my hope that people like us with our boots on the ground will make an impact on our young which will raise a clamor from them that won't be ignored.

With the arrival of another spring, I am excited to see a large group of new recruits ready to embark on the Texas Master Naturalist program. It is my hope that through efforts of their own and through education and encouragement, they will be inspired to make a difference. May they go out in nature and see through the wide-eyes of a curious toddler.

Happy trails!



Palo Duro State Park

Central Texas Master Naturalist

New Class Directory 2023



Alan Webster



April Hignojo



Carina Costa



Carol Smith



Charles Capen



Cristy Wade



David Vesely



Jake Wilson



Jason Carrico



Jim Wade



Joan Ingram



John Elwood

Central Texas Master Naturalist

New Class Directory 2023



Julie Tanada



Kecia Daughett



Kelly Thornborrow



Kim Tompkins



Lysa Liem



Mike Hermans



Molly Wilson



Randy King



Santi Duncan



Sasha Doss



Stephen Powell

WELCOME Class of 2023

We have an amazing group of talented and committed trainees who are eager to learn and to volunteer. We had 3 trainees step up in a pinch to head to a school event immediately after their first day of classes ended. And many others have already helped at all kinds of events since that day. We look forward to seeing where their passion for nature takes them.

Pardon the small print below— zoom in if you need to. This newsletter was already soooo long I didn't want to add another page! - Editor

Alan Webster	Alan is a retired military police and corrections officer. He enjoys hiking, camping, hunting, canoe and kayaking, and watching wildlife.
April Hignojo	I am a retired teacher. I am a Master Gardener. I quilt and scrapbook.
Carina Costa	Carina Costa is a Christian wife and mother who lives in Bell County. She grew up in nature, where she learned to love and preserve the land. Carina enjoys gardening, hiking, photography, and watching nature through the eyes of her children. She volunteered with Free Forest School and now volunteers at school gardens.
Carol Smith	My name is Carol Smith. I am a sixth generation Texan and a Texas A&M Aggie. I am a retired wildlife biologist after working for the US Fish & Wildlife Service for 38 years. I moved back to Texas 3 years ago. I love to teach about wildlife and their habitats and my other interests are photography, art, history, and family genealogy.
Charles Capen	I have recently retired after 38 years at BSW as a gyn oncologist. We live on 65 acres on the Leon River and have a wildlife valuation so this program is ideal. I also want to mix with people out side of the medical field
Cristy Wade	Former biological lab tech, clinical research coordinator, and home educator. Studied biology at Angelo State University. Currently working on restoring property from ag use to wildlife habitat with help from a Pastures for Upland Birds grant, and maintaining 1d1 wildlife tax valuation.
David Vesely	I graduated from Creighton U. and have a doctorate from U of Houston. am a retired Army officer and retired Federal Service employee. I served as a combat arms officer and healthcare provider in the Army. I continued as a Federal Service healthcare provider until 2022. I enjoy all outdoor activities and working on home repair and landscaping projects.
Jake Wilson	My name is Jacob Wilson and I'm currently a student at Temple College pursuing an associates in Biology and I hope to eventually transfer to Texas State University to achieve an undergraduate in Aquatic Biology. I have always enjoyed the outdoors and I am thrilled to be a part of the Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter to learn more about the ecological and biological diversity here in the great state of Texas.
Jason Carrico	I'm Jason Carrico. Lifetime outdoorsman, horseman and farm hand. US Army retired. Enjoy learning about protecting, conserving, and ethically enjoying our natural world. Lifetime practitioner of primitive crafts and skills.
Jim Wade	Retired from software development at PDI Software in 2019 and transitioned, along with my wife Cristy, to working on conversion of 50 acres east of Belton on the Leon River from ag to wildlife management tax valuation. Our latest project is working with TPWD on a Prairies for Upland Birds project to convert 21 of those acres from relatively monoculture grazing land to more diverse native prairie habitat.
Joan Ingram	Hello, my name is Joan Ingram. I am a family physician with a special interest in healthcare quality and safety. I will retire from the Defense Health Agency this summer. I addition to nature, I enjoy reading, volunteering at the library, hiking, cycling (road, gravel, MTB), painting (oil and watercolor) and spending time with my husband, two children and their spouses, and three grandchildren.
John Elwood	I retired at the end of 2021. For years I talked about this program and am happy to be in this class. My leisure activities always centered on outdoor activities-hiking, canoeing, skiing. On the way I'm the guy collecting trash and taking it out.
Julie Tanada	I am third generation Japanese American citizen born in Illinois. I attended Wilson College, Chambersburg, PA, and University of Maryland, College Park. I received my professional degree from Ohio State University graduating with dual degrees - masters and doctorate in Optometry Prior to my twenty-seven year service in the US Army, I was a tenured assistant professor at UC Berkeley. "Science" has always interested me as my father was a plant physiologist nominated for the Nobel Prize in Science. My uncle was an entomologist who taught at UC Berkeley.
Kecia Daughett	I have a life long interest in nature that was passed on by my father. I have continued that interest by passing it on to my two boys. I work at Wild Birds Unlimited, which has enhanced that interest.
Kelly Thornborrow	I currently work as an illustrator and recently moved to Texas. I have previously volunteered caring for native terrestrial and aquatic turtles on the Chesapeake Bay. I am also very interested in Mycology and grow oyster mushrooms in my free time.
Kim Tompkins	I'm Kim Tompkins, I'm excited to join the Master Naturalists and discover new areas of Texas ecological interest —especially projects involving our waterways! I've worked in the museum field and art nonprofits in both Houston and Austin. Now I'm enjoying the quieter life with my husband and very spoiled dog, surrounded by nature, on Lake Belton.
Lysa Liem	My name is Lysa Liem and I'm a nature loving, holistic living, homeschool mama to two wild and wonderful kids. My free time is spent working in my garden, educating young minds on various subjects at our homeschool co-op, and passing on skills and knowledge to my family and friends. My favorite pastime is spent adventuring with my husband and children.
Mike Hermans	My name is Michael Hermans. I am a retired urologist. I grew up in New England but have lived in Texas since 1978 in El Paso, San Antonio, College Station, and Temple. I wish to learn more about birds and bees, flowers and trees, the moon up above and a thing called love.
Molly Wilson	I got to Texas with "those people" from the North in 1983, but since I married a Texan, lived more than half my life in Texas, and contributed two sons to the Texas fauna, I consider myself passably native. I worked in the administrative areas of architecture and land planning before I made the commitment to local government and public service. I am retired, but currently work part time at the Falls County Appraisal District.
Randy King	My name is Randy King, I'm an illustrator, wildlife photographer and birder. I've been involved with the Wetlands ever since I moved back to Waco from Oklahoma two years ago.
Santi Duncan	My name is Santi "Puma" Duncan and I moved here to Texas from Germany about 17 months ago. I am currently a Master Gardener and love teaching kids at surrounding elementary schools how to garden. I secretly have a love for Desert Roses and am currently growing over 70 of them from seedling!
Sasha Doss	Originally from southern Virginia, I grew up in the Blue Ridge mountains snapping landscapes with my polaroid and grubbing for crawdads. As an adult, I've turned my outdoor interests into a living as a fish and wildlife biologist. In addition to honing my naturalist skills, I enjoy spending time with my family, hiking, baking, and watching old movies.
Stephen Powell	My name is Stephen Powell and I have lived in central TX all my life and I love it! I have a bachelors in entomology and am also self taught in native plants. I'm currently a legal drug dealer aka pharmacy tech at Baylor S&W and I enjoy serving in the community through my local church, reading, singing, and gardening.

- JEAN SOLANA, 2019

Thirteen Central Texas Master Naturalists took turns sharing their favorite things about CTMN in our nature education booth at the Mother Earth News Fair on February 11th and 12th. Visitors who were recruited as New trainees learned about nature and the volunteer work we do. Super volunteers were Lynn Williams (22 hrs) and Bill Cornelius (20 hrs). Also volunteering were Zoe Rascoe, Stan Simons, Cindy Fowler,



Dickie Stark and Jack Rabbit



Bill Cornelius helps a visitor with information

Guy Fowler, Brook Fowler, Lynn Fleming, Susan Schneider, Dickie Stark, Tina Atkins, and Andi Klein. Many contacts were made as 335 people came through our booth. Thanks for sharing your smiling faces and great information!



Lynn Fleming (left), Susan Schneider and Jean Solana



What size is YOUR wingspan?



– ZOE RASCOE, 2004

leave the booth, disassembled, packed up again and hauled back out. And are willing to do it again next year! We ran a large Chapter booth and filled a big area in the Kids Zone with games by Lynn Williams—our Game Meister. It took 35 of our members across 16 shifts to cover kids games, answering questions about urban wildlife and “why don’t I have humming birds”, handling homemade nature item sales, and providing information on our active Chapter. In the end, we interacted with 847 people that weekend. Well Done!

These photos will show you how hard our folks worked to share our love for nature!



John Burns shows off our nature finds



Stan Simons & many others talk up CTMN



Susan Schneider, Mary Ann Everett, Cindy Fowler, Bruce Polikoff, Zoe Rascoe, Jamey Douglass, Brook Fowler, Wade Matthews, Carroll Adcock

Home & Garden

Temple Area Builders Assoc. SHOW

Top right, then clockwise: Catherine Schmitz helps a little one with a fishing game; John Atkins sets up walking stick display; packing it all up with lots of help; Joe Dorn is bird watching in authentic Lederhosen; CMTN members engage visitors about nature topics and about our chapter's projects; Zoe Rascoe tries for a smile with her shy Screech Owl puppet.





Camp Tahuaya Projects

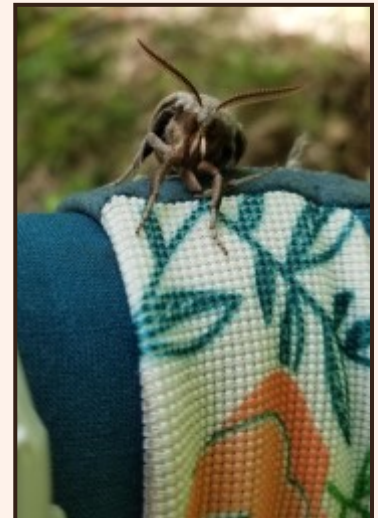
Photo by Lysa Liem

- Keller Matthews, 2021

A record number of volunteers showed up for the fifth Tahuaya Trail Workday. With many experienced workers, the teams were able to divide up and work in three separate areas. Two chainsaw teams cleared ice storm damage that left fallen trees on the section cleared on the first workday. Another team groomed the trail overlooking the waterfall below the lake and yet another team completed the riverside trail at the east end of the camp. The morning concluded with the team working to complete a west loop overlooking the Lampasas River.

The morning was cool and the spring colors abounded. The creek and waterfalls were flowing well and (when power tools weren't running) lots of birdsongs were heard, including canyon wrens. About half of the volunteers were from the current training class, many seeing the beautiful property for the first time. The final workday for this spring is scheduled for 9:00am Friday April 21.

Contact Keller Matthews, 878tkm@gmail.com



Stan Simons, Jake Wilson and Joan Ingram on the whacker



Master Naturalists at Work

Harker Heights Parks & Rec Events

– KELLY THORNBORROW, 2023

On April 1st Master Naturalists and Master Naturalist Trainees supported the Harker Heights Parks and Recreation Department with their 2023 Spring Family Campout at Dana Peak. This activity allowed families to get out in nature and explore, while spending quality time together. At the event the Master Naturalists provided a nature hike, a geocaching activity, and fishing activities. Families had a chance to take a short walk on the trails near the boat ramp to briefly experience some of the surrounding nature while still remaining accessible to families with small children.

Another activity supported was geocaching, where people navigate to designated locations in order to find hidden caches or containers. This activity can be traditionally completed using a popular [app](#) called 'Geocaching' but instead containers for this activity were hidden only temporarily and families were provided with written coordinates to navigate to. The geocaching activity allowed families to get out and hunt for the 'treasure' across the natural landscape to help teach the children and their families about the surrounding area, how to use coordinates, and navigation systems.

Down by the shore, families were able to relax and go fishing to see what fish live in Stillhouse Hollow Lake. At the pavilion, families were then able to learn about the native fish, as well as try their hands at learning and tying knots.

At the end of the day Master Naturalists said goodbye to the families who were preparing their campsites and a cookout while they spent an additional day with the Harker Heights Parks and Recreation office staff. Our members providing activities were Mary Ann Everett, John Atkins, Tina Atkins, Jamey Douglass, Jason Carrico, Carol Smith and Kelly Thornborrow.

A geocache box waiting to be found



Mary Ann prepares a group for a hike

Master Naturalists at Work

Harker Heights Parks & Rec Science and Outdoor Expo

Saturday, Feb. 18th started out with a light frost, but that did not keep families from attending the event. Mary Ann Everett lined up a great topic – Insects! Other Master Naturalists on hand to assist with the activities were: Sue Valdez, Cassie Castillo, Tina Atkins, Marilyn Whitworth, Stephen Schmitz, Catherine Schmitz, Colleen Smith-Fey, Jerry Lewis and Jamey Douglass.

Mary Ann brought her trays of bugs, butterflies, and moths pointing out characteristics of the critters she collected. Colleen and Cassie helped children make pipe stem and coffee filter dragonflies and butterflies. Catherine showed stages of bug growth while Stephen and Jerry assisted where needed. Tina and Marilyn answered questions about the Texas Master Naturalist Program and the upcoming 2023 Training Course. Jamey kept a tally of adults and children with whom we interacted, as the TMN state program asks us to do at all our public events. We were happy to have 245 visitors to our booth.



Sue Valdez (left) and Marilyn Whitworth engaging visitors at our booth stations.

Bell County Master Gardeners Spring Plant Sale

CTMN was invited to have a booth at the BCMG Plant Sale on March 28th and members arrived in the dark to set up. Once the canopy arrived, our crew setup tables, tablecloths, walking sticks, sun hats, marketing information, and a children's table. This year's CTMN volunteers included Carroll Adcock, Jamey Douglass, Lynn Fleming, Susan Schneider, Jason Carrico, Charles Capen, and Mike Hermans.

Our booth attracted families, couples and others. We sold about half-dozen walking sticks, and sun hats for adults made by Cassie Castillo are now gone. Around 10:45am, Lynn instructed the group to start taking down our booth. Why so soon? The plant sale was sold out. With the help of the CTMN volunteers, the booth was loaded into vehicles, and at 11:15 am, we all left the site.

CTMN made contact with about 130 people, children and one dog at our booth. We answered questions, talked to the public, and had giveaways for the children. This event was very successful for all involved. Thanks go out to Jason, Charles, and Mike for working the booth during their first week as Class of 2023 trainees.

– JAMEY DOUGLASS, 2021



Charles Capen (left) and Jason Carrico spread the word about Master Naturalists

Master Naturalists at Work

National Archery in Schools State Tournament

– MARIE McDERMOTT

March 21st–23rd gave CTMN members an opportunity to earn a lot of volunteer service hours in just a few days. The National Archery in Schools Program (NASP) [Texas State Tournament](#) at the Bell County Expo Center featured about 3000 students from elementary through high school levels. Over 200 volunteers, including Master Naturalists, were able to help with lane judging (wearing a fluorescent vest), checking in students and set-up and tear down.



That doesn't convey the sense of excitement that the students have for this sport. Many had team shirts, rode busses for hours to be there and had family members cheering them on. Some said they like the sport because it was indoors and some said they liked it because – except for some whistles to indicate movement – it's a quiet sport.

Students stand at a 15-meter line and shoot five arrows, three times (a total of 15 arrows.) There was also a 3-D target area. The ability levels varied as some students were new to the sport and some were old pros. Equipment checks and safety procedures were done quickly and efficiently thanks to volunteer assistance. Trophies were awarded.



Members should think about volunteering next year...the online sign up is easy and the volunteer time spent is vital for students to continue to have this opportunity.



Master Naturalists at Work

Miller Springs Nature Center Volunteer Workday

- John Atkins, 2004

On 4 MAR 2023, the Belton Parks and Recreation Department held its quarterly Miller Springs Volunteer Day at the Miller Springs Nature Center. The event was planned and executed by Recreation Coordinator, Manuel Zapata. Planned activities included trail clean-up, trimming encroaching vegetation, and spreading wildflower seeds. The seeds were donated by the Claypool family in remembrance of their son Casey, who enjoyed spending time at the Nature Center.

The day was a success by all measures. Nearly 90 people showed up to participate, so many that people had to park across the street at Live Oak Ridge Park. Several Master Naturalists were on hand to participate and assist Parks and Rec. The plan was to break up into two groups, one to cover a shorter route around Armadillo Trail and spillway, and the other to go on a longer route, down around the pond and prairie towards Joplin Hollow.

Well, that was the plan, but after the initial split, it became an exercise in herding cats across the 260 acres of the Nature Center. Everyone was enjoying themselves, and no one was at risk of getting lost, so we let them go. I was bringing up the rear of the formation to make sure everyone that went into the woods came out.

At the end of the day, Manuel weighed the collected trash and announced that we had broken all previous records at 140 pounds! It was a great day any way you cut it. Beautiful weather, record participation, record trash collection, no twisted ankles, and only one snake and scorpion.

The next Miller Springs Volunteer Day will be Sat, April 29th. Guaranteed good time and a chance to see the Nature Center through the eyes of a child. Hope to see you there!



CHAPTER MEETINGS *CONT.*

- Zoe Rascoe, 2004

Our February Chapter meeting drew nearly 50 eager attendees, including some fans of our speaker: Tommy Reeder, co-owner with his wife Darla, of Wild Birds Unlimited Temple. Tommy spoke on Beds, Baths and Buffets for Backyard Birds. He suggested first deciding on your goal for attracting birds— do you want a pollinator, bug eater, or just want to enjoy watching birds? Then let local pros help you provide the best habitat, food and well, all critters need water, for the birds you hope to attract.

Tommy drilled in that water is the most important element in your toolbox. Birds need it to condition feathers and for hydration. There are bird baths, misters, drippers, agitators and fountains. And if you were about to ask about types of bird food, we don't have enough space on this page! There are great resources online— in addition to Wild Birds Unlimited, try Audubon, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Texas Parks & Wildlife, and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. Stick to those kind of sites, because there's a lot of bad information out there, too.



Jessica Dieter and Tilly. Jess is the one in pink. Oh wait!?

Dr. Carly Aulicky from the Native Prairie Association of Texas spoke to a full room at our March Chapter meeting. Our members have heard the numbers she started with: less than 4% of tall grass prairies remain from Canada to Texas and less than 1% of historic tall grass prairies are left in Texas. She said “People need to be emotionally connected to what needs to be protected.” That rings true with Master Naturalists. And Dr. Aulicky called for more urban prairies such as Pocket Prairies (City of Temple has plans for one of these!) because every little prairie piece helps wildlife and prairie plants and is an opportunity to teach people about the continuing loss of Texas prairies. NPAT has a “Prairie Seekers Toolbox Series” that includes a field training day on at various places in Texas. This program trains citizen scientists to assess prairie condition and helps NPAT identify conservation priorities. [Their website](#) has many resources available.

MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Lynn Fleming (2004) reached the 2500 Hour Milestone. We know she has volunteered many more, but this is what she put in VMS!
Congratulations, Lynn!



Andrea Liles (2020) receives her 250 Hour Milestone award. VMS mgt. will do that for you!
Congratulations, Andrea!



Lynn Williams (2014) and Joe Dorn (2014) receive their 2022 recertification. Mary Ann Everett (2003) , center, recertifies for 2023.



Letti Lem-Kosel (2022) receives a
Double Certification!

MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Cassie Castillo (2022), receives her Initial Certification



Colleen Smith-Fey (2022), receives her Initial Certification



Cindy Fowler (2022), receives her Initial Certification



Charlie Langsdale (2022), receives his Initial Certification, too

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.

Upcoming Chapter Events

Upcoming Chapter Meeting – bring a notepad!



Mother Neff State Park

Texas State Parks: The First 100 Years
By Montse Canedo, TPWD Interpretive Specialist

Presented by
Central Texas Master Naturalists

Tuesday, May 9, 2023 6:00pm
Belton Church of Christ -3003 N. Main St.

Our Chapter meetings are open to the public!



SOILS FIELD DAY

Advanced Training Opportunity for Master Naturalists

May 9, 2023 9:30-12:30

Falls County

Save the Date!



Mother Neff State Park

1680 TX Hwy-236, Moody

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

BACK TO NATURE 5K RUN

– BILL NOVAKOSKI, 2020

For our CMTN 2023 Members-in-Training, if you are looking at volunteer opportunities, consider assisting with special events at Mother Neff State Park. On the brisk morning of February 25th some of our CTMN members helped at the MNSP Nature 5K Run. The park superintendent asked for CTMNs help to ensure a fun and safe nature experience for participants. There were two courses; 1-mile fun run/walk targeting especially young children with their parents and a 2-mile run for those desiring a greater challenge.



TPWD Rangers Daisy Klassy (a Master Naturalist) & Angie Fontenot stretch for a silly finish line pose.



Our CTMN volunteers were posted at multiple points along both routes to ensure participants made the correct turns, could safely cross the park roads and were cheered with encouraging words. Participants ranged in age from babies on their mother's back to septuagenarians. Some ran the whole distance and some leisurely walked. Some, the first dozen or so, were competitive and wanted to complete the run first or in the shortest time. With over 100 participants, this year's run was the best attended run in the history of MNSP. Proceeds from the event went to the nonprofit Mother Neff State Park Association.

Mother Neff State Park *Cont.*

MIDWAY ELEMENTARY NATURE EDUCATION

– JEAN SOLANA, 2019

On February 28th ninety 5th graders from Midway Elementary School toured Mother Neff. Divided into 9 groups, they cycled through various stations. They went on hikes and learned about the creatures and areas of the park. Jean Solana taught the 5th graders about prairies and pollinators. They had already learned about the food cycles in class. They were amazingly attentive and asked good questions.



NEXT CTMN WORK DAY: APRIL 29TH 9:00 AM—NOON Contact Jean Solana

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



In February I had a conflict with our normal 2nd Thursday workday. I really didn't want to miss another workday in the cooler months so I moved the workday to the 3rd Thursday. I was so glad I moved the workday as we had an exceptional day. The weather was cold and it was windy, but when we go down into the lower trails the wind is nonexistent. It was a great day for hard work and the 7 volunteers—myself, Stan Simons, Ben Clement, Tom Gerik, Bill Novakoski, Bill Cornelius, and Jonathan Hager all worked hard and cut out hundreds of waxleaf ligustrum.

In case you didn't notice, Jonathan Hager is not part of our Chapter. He had contacted the City of Belton and asked about the invasive plants in the nature center. The City passed Jonathan's contact information to me so I reached out and he decided to join us to see the work we do. He was not



Bill Cornelius cutting his way through the brush.

able to stay with us for the whole morning, but he got a good introduction to our process.

It was really a great day adding a new volunteer who may be interested in becoming a Master Naturalist at some point, and we made another great impact on the landscape.



Tom Gerik, Stan Simons, Jonathan Hager, Ben Clement and Bill Novakoski are ready and armed. Not sure about that leak that Jonathan is watching.

Miller Springs Nature Center *cont.*

In March we had another good day. The weather was really much nicer than last month, however, honestly, I prefer cold weather for this kind of work. Of course, in June or July I'll be wishing for temperatures in the 70s. We had 8 volunteers this month, myself, Ben Clement, Matt Ridley, Bill Novakoski, Wade Matthews, Jonathan Hager, Carroll Adcock, and Rachael Adcock. Hooray for the second straight month we had a new volunteer. Carroll brought his granddaughter Rachael. It sure was nice to have Rachael join us and she worked hard the whole time. Jonathan Hager came back again this month and this time he was there to work the whole time with us.

We worked in a swampy area where there were a lot of smaller waxleaf ligustrum so we brought all the puller bears to see if we could pull as many plants up by the roots as possible. It's good to pull the plants up by the roots to guarantee the plant is not going to come back. It is also better for the environment since we don't have to spray any herbicides. Carroll and I both worked on chainsaws while the others either pulled brush, used the puller bears, or picked up litter. I hope we can continue the great work in the coming months. I have a goal to keep working the same area and eventually clearing the waxleaf ligustrums all the way back to the area where we started cutting 4 years ago. We may not make it for a few months, but we will get there eventually and the area will be so much better and the native plants will have a chance to thrive.



Rachael Adcock, Carroll Adcock, Ben Clement, Matt Ridley, Jonathan Hager, Wade Matthews and Bill Novakoski. Rachel and Ben are holding the baby and daddy Puller Bears.

MONARCH MONITORING

- JEAN SOLANA, 2019

Twenty CTMN volunteers attended orientation on March 18th at Miller Springs Nature Center. Our area to monitor milkweed plants would be on the spillway area near the Belton Lake Dam. We got low to the ground to peak under the newly sprouted antelope horn milkweeds to look for Monarch butterfly eggs. It took a while but was very exciting when an egg was found.



Jean Solana explained how the survey would work – each volunteer would walk their own strip of the monitoring area weekly, counting the milkweed plants and Monarch eggs, caterpillars, and butterflies observed. Then they will email their data to Jean Solana who will combine the numbers and enter them into the data portal for the [Monarch Larva Monitoring Project](#), now 40 years old. The survey will last about 6-8 weeks.



NESTWATCH 2023

- Guy Fowler, 2021

Our 2023 NestWatch Team is up and running! All 14 nest boxes at Miller Springs Nature Center have been cleaned and repaired and are open for business. So far 5 boxes are seeing nesting activity. For the first month or so the boxes will get checked on Wednesdays at 10:00am—please come out if you can. We'll check each box, then I'll upload the information to the NestWatch website so The Cornell Lab of Ornithology can do their thing.



Thanks to those who have volunteered for the team, including members of the 2023 Training Class! Jason Carrico, Brook Fowler, Cindy Fowler, Randy King, Santi Duncan and Darren Boyd.

For those who are interested in learning more about the NestWatch citizen science project, check it out at <https://nestwatch.org>. This website has tons of information on building nesting boxes and egg identification! You can compare egg colors and nest material of different native birds and see which one fits the best. Check out this page: <https://nestwatch.org/learn/how-to-nestwatch/identifying-nests-and-eggs/>.



Several of us have endoscopes (cameras on cables) to be able to see what's happening in the boxes with minimal disruption to the tenants. Especially when the tenants are wasps!



- Debby Bridge, 2022

I always arrive right about 9:00, if I'm lucky. When I arrived, Danny Welch and Larry Turner's vehicles were there and one chair. I knew they were down the steep path to the river. Sure enough, they arrived back up in a minute or two. Danny thinks 8:30 is 9:00. Which is good, because I have yet to go down that incline. When they were on top again, we got out the table and testing kit. We test for dissolved oxygen and pH. The amount of dissolved oxygen in the water is a test to tell how healthy the water is in relation to aquatic plants and animals. Again, pH is an indicator of healthy aquatic plants and animals. (So far, our testing shows that the 4 places we test are healthy; but this is NOT an indicator it is safe for humans to drink without proper filtration. It does indicate the fish are good to eat). We slowly and methodically (there is a cheat sheet we use from training) go through the mixing procedures. It takes about an hour. Today we were a few crew members short: I usually pick up Letti Lim (she had a minor emergency that she had to take care of) and Charlie Langsdale (he works every other weekend) and Bill Cornelius was traveling.





Currently, two of our sites are closed due to road repair. Scheduled to reopen this Spring, sometime.

There is nothing so satisfying than sitting out in 32-degree weather, warm and snug in long underwear and good socks, gazing at the sky, watching it move from 9 to 10 o'clock. Nothing so satisfying as listening to the birds in the morning. Nothing so satisfying as being with a like-minded group of people. Our group has an easy camaraderie. But don't take that as meaning a closed group. No, we welcome new people and will enlist you in the actual testing. Someone, usually Letti, reads each step and we take it slow. If you enjoy this and want to continue, it's your choice to sign up for the first training, Standard Core, down in San Marcos; usually one Saturday a month. In February, 4 of us went to San Marcos for Riparian Training. Next month, four of us are going to *E.coli* training.

I want to echo something Bill Novakoski said last Saturday at the 2023 Meet and Greet: During your first year, try to do as many different things as you have time to do to get a sense of what's out there and narrow down your interests, or discover new interests. Most don't need any training, or the training is very short and convenient (on the spot). Enjoy!

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!

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 **Third Saturday:** Lake Belton @ Temple Lake Park

Second Saturday: Nolan Creek @ Harris Center **Fourth Saturday:** Lampasas River @ FM 1123

DAVIS MOUNTAIN PRESERVE



- Keller Matthews, 2021

I recently returned from a recommendable trip to [Davis Mountain Preserve](#). The 32,000 acre sky island refuge is a Nature Conservancy property surrounded by vast West Texas desert landscape. Located about an 8-hour drive west. One trail, the 2.1 mile [Madera Canyon Trail](#), is open year-round, but our group went for the hike to the Baldy Peak summit of Mt Livermore, the fifth highest peak in Texas. That trail is only open about [four weekends each year](#) (the next days are June 2-4, August 25-27, and October 20-22). Birders might be interested in the [reservation-only](#) World Migratory Bird Day Event, May 6th.



[Livermore Summit trail](#)

Our group drove an hour from Marfa to be first in line for the 8:00am gate opening. We checked in at the staffed Visitor Center and received directions to drive up a rugged dirt road about four miles, where we parked and embarked. We hiked three miles up (1,800 foot ascent) to the Baldy Peak Summit (elevation 8,378 feet) and three miles down. We had a cold start to the day with barely freezing conditions, and the frosted trees and cacti were a winter

wonderland. The hike was remarkable for a start under overcast skies that gave way to clear blue skies only when we rose above 7,000 feet. The views from the top underscored the nature of the ecosystem, known as “sky islands”; surrounding mountain tops emerged through the cloud layer below, all around us.

DAVIS MOUNTAIN PRESERVE *cont.*

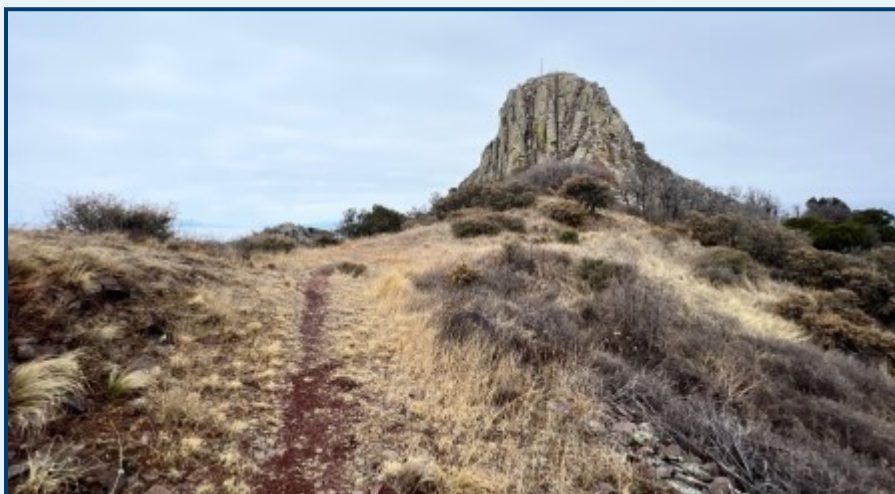
We were lightly snowed on when we were under the cloud. The hike was also remarkable for a scramble on the last fifty-foot approach that had a feeling of exposure without being death-defying. The last bit was not for the faint-of-heart. We took an alternate loop route down [Limpia Chute Trail](#) for better views of the area. The evening after our hike, Marfa got 3" of snow and Big Bend got 5". I have never been disappointed by a trip to Texas' Big Sky Country and this trip was memorable for the uncommon snow, above-the-clouds wintry beauty, and a spectacular summit.

More from the Texas Nature Conservancy [website](#):

"Formed by volcanoes and sculpted by wind and water, the Davis Mountains rise more than 8,300 feet above sea level out of the expansive Chihuahuan Desert. While the Trans-Pecos, the area west of the Pecos River, is true desert habitat, the Davis Mountains are temperate and forested—an anomaly in an arid land.



Keller in foreground



The Davis Mountains Preserve is home to canyon watersheds that feed water sources that support diverse wildlife and are crucial habitat for rare aquatic species. The sky island also contains plants and animals unable to survive in the harsh desert conditions below, offering refuge for sensitive species like the Rivoli's hummingbird. The

also preserve provides important wildlife corridors with minimal human presence, a requirement for large mammals such as black bears. Keep your eye out for black bears, bobcats, elk, mountain lions.

Large, intact landscapes also promote dark skies, critical to ongoing astronomical research at the nearby University of Texas McDonald Observatory. To further preserve this cherished natural feature, TNC and a number of partners worked together to establish the Greater Big Bend International Dark Sky Reserve in 2022—the world's largest International Dark Sky Reserve—which includes the Davis Mountains Preserve." Here is a short video from [The Daytripper](#).

What's in YOUR backyard?



- Guy Fowler, 2021

Springtime is in full swing at the Fowler nature preserve in Morgan's Point. Here's what we've been seeing recently...



Black Swallowtail & Yellow Swallowtail



Mockingbird nest and eggs



Sphinx Moth—a great pollinator!



Texas Redheaded Centipede was in the house!!



Out on a Limb

- **Mary Ann Everett, 2003**

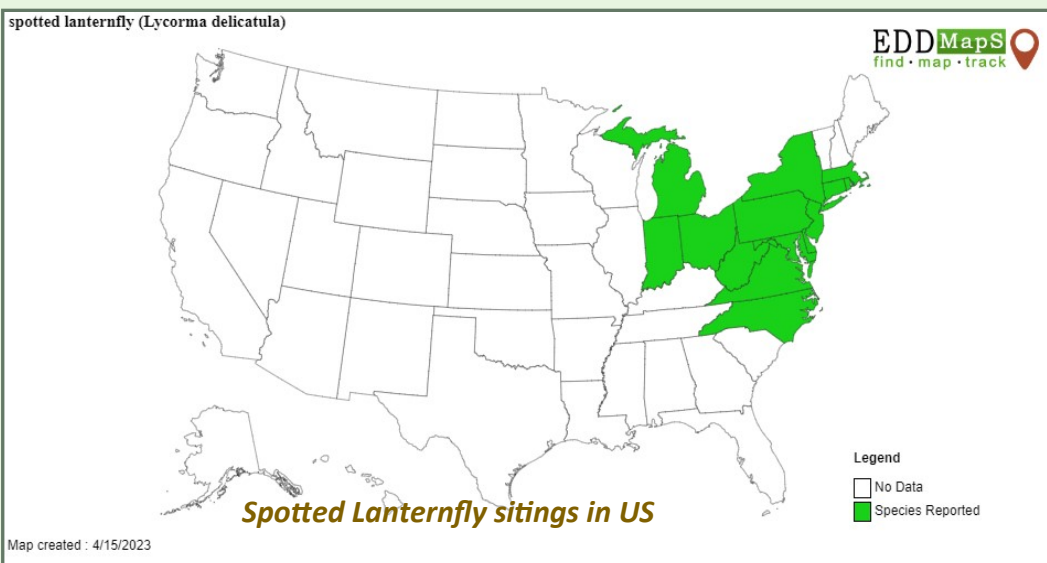
An invasive to be on the lookout for is the spotted lanternfly (*Lycorma delicatula*). I received my Jan/Feb issue of Texas Gardener, and there was the article on this invasive by TAMU Dr. Kevin Ong and Dr. Pedro Uribe. Dr. Ong is head of the Plant Pathology Lab. They recently received an unsubstantiated citizen's report of spotted lanternfly in Southeast Texas. The writers go on to state the lab did not receive a physical sample, but that this insect can cause damage in our state. It was first spotted in Pennsylvania in 2014.

This insect was found on over 70 known host plants, some are economically important, particularly common grape vine, apples, other grapes, cherry, poplar, stone fruits, and especially the non-native tree of heaven, which is native to Asia. The spotted lanternfly is also a native to China, India and Vietnam.

Since the Texas report of this pest has not been confirmed, TAMU and the Texas Department of Agriculture are asking for assistance to submit a sample for confirmation.



*Adult spotted lanternfly on a rock.
Photo by Dalton Ludwick.*

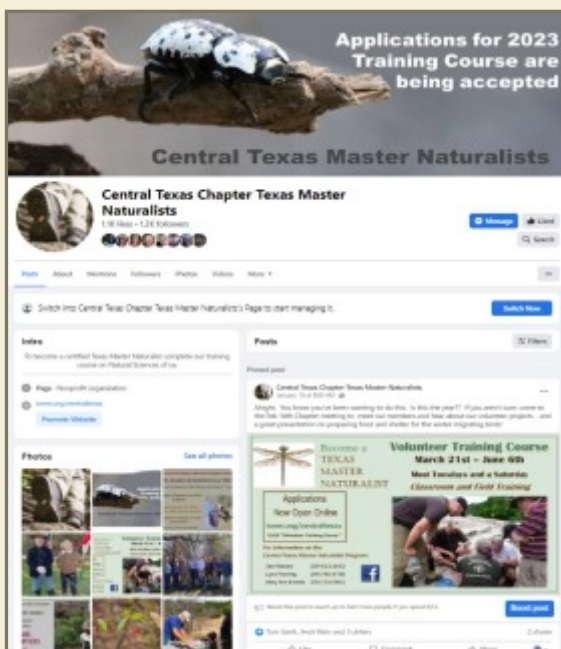


There is still a lot not known about how this insect will be affected by our weather, but vigilance by our citizens will help to learn more about this invasive.

For more information go to [TAMUwebsite](https://www.tamu.edu).

Good to Know...

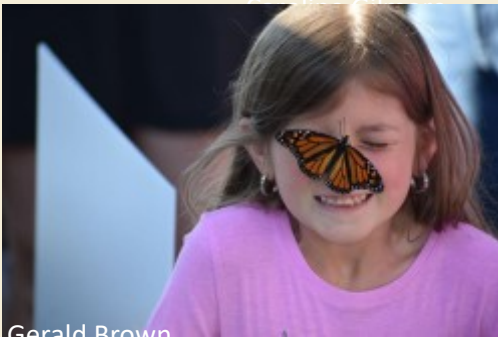
We have learned our members are walking billboards for our Chapter. From CTMN Volunteer t-shirts in line at HEB, to people stopping to ask why our crew is chopping down trees at Miller Springs Nature Center (they are invasives!) We want our members to know we have information cards you can keep in your vehicle or backpack, and 2 kinds of calling cards (we're not a business) with room to add your name and contact information. Please pick some up at our next chapter meeting to share!



Did you know we have a Facebook page? We have over 1,300 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](https://www.facebook.com/CentralTexasChapterTexasMasterNaturalists).

Good to Know...

Central Texas Master Naturalists love working with City of Nolanville on nature projects and events. We will be at the Monarch Fest with all sorts of pollinator activities for kids. Come to the Monarch Fest and find us!



Gerald Brown

A poster for the 2023 Monarch Festival. At the top left is the City of Nolanville logo: a star above the text "THE CITY OF NOLANVILLE" and "A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE". The poster features several illustrations of monarch butterflies in flight. The text "2023 MONARCH FESTIVAL" is prominently displayed in large, stylized letters. Below this, the location "100 Gold Star Ave. Nolanville," and the date "April 22nd 2022" are listed, followed by the time "9 AM-12 PM". A list of activities includes "DJ, PETTING ZOO, FACE PAINTING, KITES, VENDORS, GAMES, INTERACTIVE DISPLAYS AND MORE!". A silhouette of a child holding a kite string is visible on the right side.

THE CITY OF
NOLANVILLE
A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE

**2023
MONARCH
FESTIVAL**

100 Gold Star Ave. Nolanville,
April 22nd 2022
9 AM-12 PM

**DJ, PETTING ZOO, FACE
PAINTING, KITES, VENDORS,
GAMES, INTERACTIVE DISPLAYS
AND MORE!**



Wildflower Bingo and Hike

Saturday, April 29th

Sponsored by Belton Parks & Recreation

Master Naturalists will be there!

More Good to Know...



Galveston has the [FeatherFest](#) event down! It actually runs a full week starting April 18th. There are birding field trips and workshops, photography field trips and workshops, “fledglingfest” events for kiddos, and more. \$25 for the event, trips & workshops are extra.

A MODEST PROPOSAL: CAN eBIRD HELP CHOOSE BETTER STATE BIRDS?

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology got to thinking about all that data on bird sightings that pours in from nature lovers around the globe. They wondered what eBird data would suggest should be the state birds in the US. With only 3 common birds serving as the state bird in 18 states, surely there was room for more diversity. Did eBird data back them up?

From The Cornell Lab: The [eBird Status and Trends](#) project provides a great, scientifically-grounded basis for finding unique connections between states and the birds that live there. Based on hundreds of millions of citizen-science records, as well as sophisticated computer models that use land-cover data from satellites, the eBird Status and Trends project can estimate how much of a bird species’ global population occurs in each state or province at a given time of year.

Spoiler Alert! Yes, eBird had a different state bird for many states, including Texas. If you live in Central Texas, you might guess what the data selected.



It's hard to argue with Golden-cheeked Warbler's claim on Texas—fully 100% of the global population breeds there. Photo by [Jesse Huth/Macaulay Library](#).

More Good to Know...



Conservation of Insects

Speaker: Wizzie Brown

Texas AgriLife Extension
Entomologist



April 11th, 12pm



Our members all know Wizzie Brown. She has been our Entomology instructor for many years and she does a great job with a LOT of information. For TXMNTuesday, she will share what we can do to promote the conservation of insects and other arthropods in our own backyards. (The May speaker has not yet been announced)



**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 available to the public* and count for Advanced Training for our CTMN members. Click to [REGISTER](#) for the upcoming webinar, or to [watch recorded webinars](#).

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension is hosting **Water Wednesdays**—online webinars on important water topics.

The webinars are free, but you must [register](#).

April 19– Aquaponics: An introduction to the symbiotic relationship where plants and fish are grown in the same production system.

May 17—Water Wells: An overview of critical considerations in maintaining a water well, including disinfections, well water testing and water quality.

June 21—Weather: A look at the 2023 Hurricane Season forecast.



More Good to Know...

Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge provides critical habitat for wildlife and offers some of the best birding in Texas. More than 290 species of birds have been recorded in or near the Refuge. For visiting birders, the most interesting species are two songbirds: the Black-capped vireo and the endangered Golden-cheeked Warbler.

The Annual Balcones Songbird Festival is a celebration of nature through a collection of interpretive events to experience both birds and their habitat. The Festival, hosted by the Friends of Balcones Canyonlands in partnership with the Refuge and its staff, is committed to providing small group tours, led by Guides of distinction, ensuring a quality and fun-filled experience. Each tour will be capped at 12 attendees and will be led by 2 Guides.

Editor's Note: And there's more! You'll be close to famous pie from the Bluebonnet Café!



With birds in the air and fungi in the earth, you may think that the two don't interact much. However, there are several documented ways that fungi and birds play roles in each other's lives. In this talk, we will explore some of the known interactions and observations that have been studied or documented. From collecting food, to nest building, or even to impress mates, birds have proven to utilize fungi in several interesting ways. Join us to learn about these and the other ways that birds and

fungi interact. Online or in Austin May 18th 7-9pm. Free! Click image to Register.

Even More Good to Know...

A Field Guide to Roadside Wildflowers *At Full Speed*



Chris Helzer

The Prairie Ecologist
Prairieecologist.com

From the author: This book is written for the silent majority of people who have important places to go, but want to enjoy and learn about nature as they travel. What good is a field guide that relies upon the characteristics of tiny hairs or even minute differences in leaf or petal shape when a flower is seen from a car traveling 70 miles per hour? The world desperately needs a guide that illustrates and identifies characteristics of wildflowers as most people actually experience them. This is that guide.

The guide is organized by color. Almost half of the 27 varieties are yellow. Let's just go with "Oh, look at those nice yellow wildflowers!"

[Click image to view Field Guide!](#)

You are going to be seeing this line up at meetings now. It's the Clipboard Gauntlet. We are doing more and more projects and events and doing them at the same time in different places. Yay for all our volunteers! But that means we've got to make sure everything is covered, so we need you to sign up when an activity sounds fun to you. If it doesn't sound fun, leave the spaces for our members who love doing what you don't love. It's great how that works out! But do please sign up when there is a need. There are things to do and places to go...



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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



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.