

The Tracker

Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter February 2024

FAMILY ADVENTURE CAMP AT TAHUAYA: ALL WILL BE WELCOME

In December 2022, Boy Scouts of America (BSA), Longhorn Council contacted Mary Ann Everett and asked about collaboration with our chapter on a vision to convert their camp from a private, primitive Boy Scout camping facility to a public-accessible Family Adventure camp. Their goal was to develop a community resource for multi-generational outdoor experiences that can engage guests regardless of their previous camping experience, with a variety of lodging options (including glamping units), dining hall, meeting space and outdoor nature activities. Mary Ann's long



experience with Scouting, with Camp Tahuaya, and with the Master Naturalists led her to immediately recognize the opportunities for synergy. She suggested Keller Matthews meet with the camp leadership and plans rapidly evolved for enhanced hike and bike trails and Keller saw the opportunity for a successful TPWD Recreational Trails Grant application to enhance trailside amenities and educational opportunities for community engagement with help from the Master Naturalists.

With our chapter leadership, plans have developed for collaborations with BSA, Longhorn Council, Baylor University hydrogeologists, Texas A&M Forest Service faculty, and Clearwater Underground Water Conservation District experts to rehabilitate the spring area and create educational opportunities for camp guests. Our chapter has already provided over 200 volunteer hours to clear and map more than 3 miles of new hiking trails and to identify striking natural features that will be highlighted on maps and web-based curriculum. Baylor faculty have begun stream monitoring and BSA has contracted for major facility improvements and new construction, and is well underway with an opening planned for this fall. Master Naturalists will have many opportunities for involvement with trail building (currently meeting most Friday mornings in February), installation of bird nesting boxes, monarch waystations, developing content for kiosks and signs, hosting nature hikes, scavenger hunts and conducting field data collection on bird and butterfly counts. We can't wait!

Camp Tahuaya spring photo by Zoe Rascoe in 2010

Lake photo by Lyssa Liem 2023

President's Pen

Carroll Adcock, 2020



I suspect we will all be glad to see the days lengthen and the herald of spring arrive in the not-too-distant future. While I enjoyed the late presence of several of my native blooming pollinator plants this winter, they have all finally succumbed to our recent frigid weather. I always welcome our early native blooms and look forward to the emergence and arrival of our many pollinators each spring. The presence of the multiple colors of the blooms and the variety of pollinators has always intrigued me, and as a photographer they are one of my favorite subjects.

No doubt, most of you are aware that our pollinators are threatened. In particular, the plight of the European honeybees that are responsible for the pollination of something like 15 billion dollars' worth annually of food crops in the US. Sadly, it is not only the honeybees that are in decline, but so many native bees, insects, butterflies, and vertebrate pollinators that are also struggling. With over 4,000

species of native bees in the US, wild bees have characteristic fuzzy hairs on their bodies, which snag pollen and help transport it and are 2-3 times more effective at pollinating than honeybees. In contrast to the crowded colonies of honeybees, wild bees tend to be solitary, though some form smaller and less hierarchical societies and many have become "specialized" and need specific plants and nesting sites. Like bees, butterflies also float from flower to flower to feed — though few plants are entirely dependent on butterflies. As previously inferred, not all pollinators are insects. Small birds and bats visit flowering plants as well. In fact, hummingbirds are the sole pollinator for many plants; those with long trumpet-like flowers.

Cont.



Pebble bee on Texas Thistle

How big is the problem? Decline in butterfly populations over the past 15 years has been reported between 40-60%, with some areas and studies reporting declines up to 80%. Honeybee declines have averaged nearly a 10% annual decline in the past decades, thankfully in recent years that number has decreased to about 4% annually in part due to commercial beekeeping. Sadly, there are no commercial operations working to maintain the numbers of non-honeybee pollinators.

Threats to pollinator survival include:

✗ *pesticides* ✗ *habitat destruction* ✗ *climate change*

✗ *mites* ✗ *land use change* ✗ *invasive species*

You may wonder what you can do to impact the pollinator populations? 1) Become a Wildlife Gardener and plant a diversity of pollen and nectar sources native to your area that bloom at various times during the year. 2) Avoid or minimize usage of pesticides, provide a clean source of pesticide-free water. 3) Provide bee nesting places.

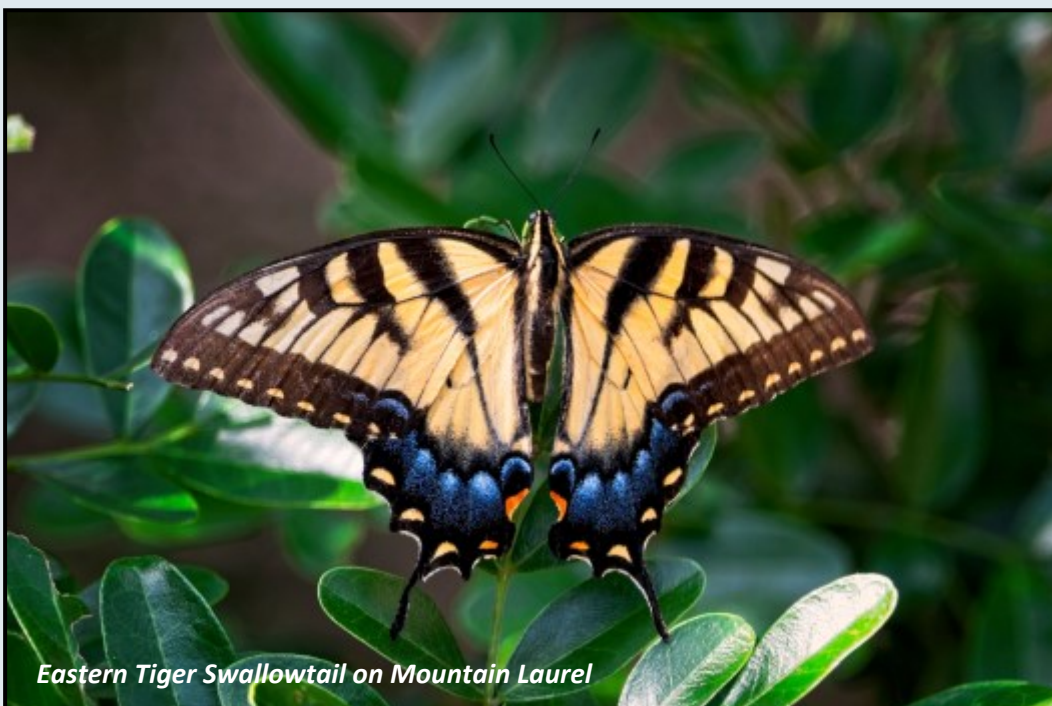
4) Plant native milkweed. 5) Protect grasslands. 6) Spread the word on social media. 7) Become a beekeeper (a responsible beekeeper) 8) Consider supporting one of the many nonprofit organizations in Texas or the US that are addressing natural resource conservation issues that are important to you.

Happy Trails...

Photos by Carroll Adcock



Common Buckeye on Mealy Blue Sage



Eastern Tiger Swallowtail on Mountain Laurel



JOIN US!

CENTRAL TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST

2024 CLASS APPLICATIONS NOW OPEN

[HTTPS://TXMN.ORG/CENTRALTEXAS/](https://txmn.org/centraltexas/)



A magnifying glass is focused on a dragonfly illustration, with the text 'TEXAS Master Naturalist Central Texas Chapter' visible. To the right is a QR code.



Upcoming Events

The Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter presents:

Medicinal Use of Native Plants by Native Americans

By Ricky Linex,
President, Native Plant Society of Texas

Tuesday, February 13, 2024 6:00pm

Belton Church of Christ 3003 N Main ST

The public is welcome to attend our chapter meetings!
txmn.org/centraltexas



City of Harker Heights Event

OUTDOOR & SCIENCE



EXPO



February 10, 2024
9AM-1PM | HH Recreation Center



If you are interested in helping at the Harker Heights Outdoor & Science Expo, contact Kelly Thornborrow at kellyathornborrow@gmail.com soon!

Upcoming Events



Home and Garden Show



Feb 23-25, 2024

30 Volunteers Needed

Work a shift or the whole event!

*Volunteer hours for providing
handmade items to sell.*

zoe.rascoe@gmail.com

254-913-1013



Master Naturalists at Work

What's in the Garden at St. Mary's Catholic School?

- **Mary Ann Everett, 2003**

After having to cancel at least 4 workdays in the fall and winter months, the weeds are having a heyday! Quite literally. The henbit decided to go on a rampage, knowing no one was going to pull weeds and prune during those rainy and cold days. What is not to love about henbit? After all, it is a member of the mint family, loved by chickens, and has lots of vitamins and minerals. It can be eaten by humans, in soups and salads, and can be used medicinally as a tea for inflammation or externally as a poultice for cuts, stings, and the like. I should have put out a bulletin saying 'come and get it' about this wonderful bed of henbit. I know people would have been standing in line! Thanks to Stephen Powell, we both made inroads in that huge bed of henbit. You can't see all the natives, but they are there!

Seriously, getting the weeds under control now, replacing some of the mulch, and pruning back some of the salvias is what is left to do. That will be for our next workday in March. Work has also begun on our pocket prairie, just barely, but right now, Jean Solana was gracious to rescue some little blue stem and they were planted Wednesday. Now we have cowpen daisy, mealy blue salvia, liatris, anacua and an almond verbena which is a magnet for the monarchs.



Stephen Powell pulls the unwanted plants (we won't call them a weed) from around the planted native species that will be bursting on the scene this spring.

Master Naturalists at Work

Keller Matthews joined other local volunteers to plant a new map kiosk at the Stillhouse Hollow swim area-end of the Dana Peak trail. The kiosk will feature a Corps-approved “You Are Here” map of the complex trail network. Similar kiosks will be installed with Corps assistance at the east end of the trail in Dana Peak Park and at the “Oak Tree” midpoint.



Excitement builds at the reimagined Boy Scout Camp Tahuaya where Keller Matthews has been leading crews of Master Naturalists in building several miles of new trails in anticipation of the area as a Family Adventure Camp—for Boy Scouts and for the general public. Left: Keller, Michael Hermans and Ben Clement. Right: Stan Simons, Jake Wilson and Joan Ingram. Need a workout? Join this crew!!

Master Naturalists at Work

Central Texas Master Naturalists joined other volunteers at the Fort Cavazos annual Christmas Bird Count where just shy of 12, 000 individual birds were recorded. And that's why we have our ornithology classes at Fort Cavazos! We are delighted to work with the AIM group on many data collection projects.



Fort Cavazos Adaptive and Integrative Management Team - AIM

December 22, 2023 · 🌐

...

Here are the results for the 8th annual Fort Cavazos Christmas Bird Count!

36 participants, divided into 17 groups, spent the day recording birds seen and heard within the 15-mile count circle. A total of 11,996 individual birds were counted and 129 species reported. There were first time reports for 4 bird species: Greater-white Fronted Goose, Clay-colored Sparrow, Green-tailed Towhee, and Yellow-headed Blackbird. How exciting is that?!



CHAPTER MEETING

- Zoe Rascoe, 2004

When asked what season of the year is my favorite, I always say “the Christmas season!” Our Holiday Dinner Meeting is one of the fun highlights for me. There are always plenty of volunteers, nearly 30, ready to help set up. Sue Critz is a saint to put lights on my trees and then take them off again every year. The potluck dinner is loaded with thoughtful dishes of smoked brisket, jambalaya (with insanity sauce), tamales, and time consuming decorative desserts like a yule log cake.



And that Tub and Ticket thing with a hundred nature-y items to go home with if you are lucky. I did get home with a sweet little book called the “Joshua Trees and Me” written and illustrated by one of our members. And other people got home with everything else I wanted. It was a fun evening shared with co-laborers for nature. Here’s a few photos in case you missed it.



Lynn F., Dale H. and Sarah D



Juan Anaya



Stephen & Sharon Schmitz



Brook Fowler - Park Passes



Set up crew



IYKYK



Marilyn Whitworth

CHAPTER MEETING

- Zoe Rascoe, 2004

I'm guessing you know that there's a Total Solar Eclipse coming our way in Central Texas on Monday, April 8th. The eclipse from first "bite" of the sun until the last "bite" takes several hours. Totality will be about 1:30pm for Central Texas. Unlike the Great American Eclipse of August 2017 which ran from the coast of South Carolina to the coast of Oregon, the



upcoming eclipse will come out of Mexico and head straight up to Maine. Much of the country will have to travel a great distance to observe the total eclipse. And it seems much of the country plans to do so, with Texas being the closest destination and preparing to welcome over a million people along the eclipse centerline.

At our December meeting, Terry Rascoe who is a long-time amateur astronomer, photographer and lover of Nature, walked our members and guests through the mechanics and science of a total solar eclipse and how that drastically differs from the annual eclipse many of us watched last October. Terry also provided tips on observing the total eclipse safely and how to photograph an eclipse. Anytime during the eclipse, except those 3-4 minutes of totality, you will need serious protection on your eyes, your camera lens and even your phone. Get your solar glasses purchased online from reputable sources soon! There are so many ways that nature reacts to a total solar eclipse. Get out in nature on April 8th and find out for yourself! Keep up with the weather (no clouds, please!) and traffic predictions in your area. Don't let either of those spoil your chance to see the eclipse. Next total solar eclipse in the US is in 2045!

The Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter presents:

... **COUNTDOWN TO THE TOTAL ECLIPSE** ...

By Terry Rascoe

[Click here for Presentation
Resource Information on Eclipse](#)



© Terry Rascoe

MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



6500 Hours!

Mary Ann Everett (2003) reached **6500** Volunteer Service Hours!! Mary Ann serves on the project review committee and is a Co-Director for our Annual Training Course. She also champions butterfly counts & school projects. Well Done!



5500 Hours!

Zoe Rascoe(2004) reached **5500** Volunteer Service Hours. She is Chapter Registrar, editor of the Tracker newsletter (this is her 35th issue) and helps with our website and Facebook page. She also is our party planner.



4500 Hours!

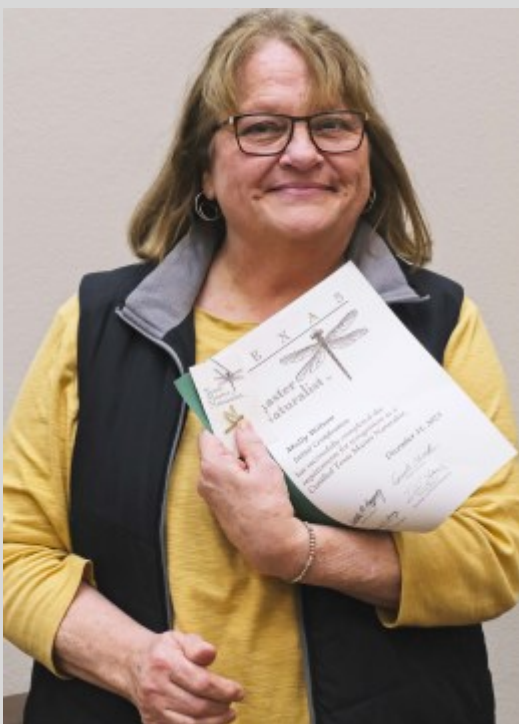
Art Siebert (2017) hit **4500** Volunteer Service Hours! He transferred to CTMN with many hours of coastal work and now is an interpreter at the Mayborn Museum, & helps the Stream Team. Well Done!!



2000 Hours!

Lynn Fleming (2004) hit **2000** Volunteer Service Hours!! She is a Training Course Co-Director, runs the Bell Co Museum grounds project and is a big draw at public events with her bio box. Well Done!!

MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Molly Wilson (2023) reached Double Certification in her first year!! Lot of hours there.



Lysa Liem (2023) reached double certification in her first year! Probably a triple if there was one.



Jim Wade (2023) receives his Initial Certification!



Julie Tanada (2023) receive her Double Certification in her first year!

MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



2023 Recertifications go to Robb Startzman (2021), Keller Matthews (2021), Sue Critz (2018), and Matt Ridley (2020).

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



In January, Terry Rascoe went through the science behind a total solar eclipse and what all must align for that to happen at some spot on the earth. Next US Total Solar Eclipse: 2045!!



Mother Neff State Park

1680 TX Hwy-236, Moody

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

Mother Neff Christmas, December 2nd

We celebrated Christmas in an special way this year by recognizing Mother Neff State Park being added to the National Register of Historic Places. Several VIPs attended the dedication of the plaque. Rodney Franklin, Texas Parks & Wildlife Director, Gretchen Neff Watson (Pat Neff's Granddaughter), long-time Friends of Mother Neff

Charlotte and Larry Weiss, and Park Superintendent Melissa Chadwick all shared about the historic significance of Mother Neff State Park.

After the ceremony we warmed up inside with apple cider and hot chocolate. Santa and Mrs. Claus took Christmas wish requests and families made Christmas crafts and went on a scavenger hunt.



Dad and daughter share an activity



First Day Hike, January 1st

Central Texas Master Naturalists spread out all over Mother Neff State Park to facilitate visitors' outdoor celebration of New Year's Day. Art Siebert provided Civilian Conservation Corps History at the Rock Tower. Juan Anaya hosted the bird blind. Carol Smith, Bill Novakoski, and John and Linda Fairlie shared Mammal education at the Prairie Pond. Danny Welch, Stephen Powell, and Mary Ann Everett helped at Headquarters and taught "Camp Oh No". Always near the top, this year Mother Neff State Park had the most First Day Hikers (597!) AND the most miles hiked of any State Park!! Thank you to all who visited to make that happen.

Mother Neff State Park *Cont.*

Bridge Repair, January 11th

The Mother Neff Work Day Group replaced some rotting wood on one of the bridges by the CCC Table in the back of the park. Rangers John Ziegeler and Mike Swearingin and CTMN members Bill Novakoski, Juan Anaya and Jean Solana removed the old 4x4s and 2x6s and placed new ones with hex screws provided by Friends of Mother Neff. Another bridge will be repaired in February.



Ranger Mike say's "Hands up Juan !"



Bill Novakoski and Juan Anaya tear out old bridge

Winter 2023 Volunteer Opportunities

Workdays: Most 4th Wednesdays from 9am-12pm. Tools will be provided. Activities may include trail clearing, transplanting native grass or clearing invasive plant species. Contact Jean Solana at jmsolana76@gmail.com. Need more volunteer hours? There will be a brush clean up project on December 3rd from 10-12 and from 1-3. Check in at Headquarters.



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

Winter at Miller Springs Nature Center

We were able to start the day with jackets on the December workday. It is great to be able to work in cooler weather. We had only 4 volunteers since the bird count was the same day. Matt Ridley even came with a shoulder injury, so he was on light duty. He joined Marilyn Whitworth on litter patrol. On

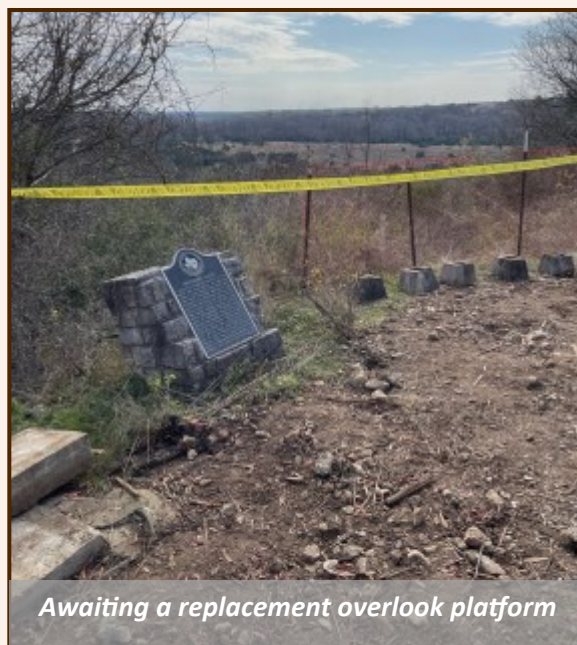


Marilyn Whitworth, Matt Ridley, John Burns, Ben Clement

the way down to the area we were going to work we noticed the Tennessee Valley overlook platform had been removed. I hated to see it missing, but it was becoming a safety concern and better to remove the safety issue than cause someone to be injured. Hopefully, it will be replaced at some point in the near future.

We then headed down to the area where we started back in 2019 and

worked on pulling smaller seedling ligustrum that have grown back since we first worked the area. It is discouraging but not unexpected to see seedlings coming back to the areas we have worked in the past. At the same time, it is encouraging when we pull out many more plants than we could even dream of taking out after they have grown to larger sizes. So with some positive thinking we went about pulling out seedlings. Check out the photo of Ben holding some of our victims with roots still attached. Oh yeah, and this is another positive to pulling small plants. We don't have to use any herbicide. Matt came by the area where Ben and I were working, and he could not resist pulling some small plants. Of course, being careful not to use his injured arm. Thank you, Matt, for working with us even while injured. It was a good productive workday with litter picked up and many smaller plants removed.



Awaiting a replacement overlook platform

Cont.

Miller Springs Nature Center *cont.*

We welcomed the first Miller Springs workday in 2024 with another somewhat small work group. We had 5 volunteers. (L to R) Myself, Ben Clement, Bill Novakoski, John Atkins and Stephen Powell. This was Stephen's first time volunteering at Miller Springs. We all returned to the area we worked in December to continue pulling smaller plants. Well, John Atkins brought his chainsaw and worked on some larger trees. He



worked in an area we had worked previously cutting down trees we had missed on our first time through. It was great to clean up the area to make it invasive plant free. (At least for now.) As I

said, the rest of us worked the area we worked in November. It was cool beautiful weather again. We had received some rain earlier in the week which made it easier to pull seedlings. I said at one point during the morning that we were pulling hundreds of plants and if we had allowed them to grow to larger trees it would have taken many workdays to remove this many trees. When we thought about it that way it made it a very productive day.



Ben Clement pulls up young ligustrums by the roots

If we have a good number of volunteers in the coming months my plan is to devote some people to pulling smaller plants while we also continue to have some people cut down larger trees. Both tasks are important. If we don't remove the larger trees which are producing seeds, we won't be able to reduce the number of seedlings that are coming back. At the same time if we don't try to remove seedlings, they will eventually grow up to seed producing trees. We also have some other projects in mind that we will hopefully be able to address this year as well.



- Danny Welch, 2022

KEEP ON STREAMING

The newest iteration of the Central Texas Master Naturalists Stream Team completed its first full year of testing the characteristics of the water in the rivers and streams of Bell County. Each month we test the following five locations at 9 :00am:

First Monday: Leon River @ Heritage Park

First Tuesday: Salado Creek @ Sirena Park

Second Monday: Nolan Creek @ Harris Community Center

Third Monday: Lampasas River @ Chalk Ridge Falls

Fourth Monday: Lake Belton @ Temple Lake Park

We have a solid group of dedicated streamers that have tons of experience testing water. Many are Texas Waters Specialists and most have attended training at the Meadows Center in San Marcos. We have fun and we gather data for TCEQ.

CTMN Stream Team moved on from the FM 1123 crossing of the Lampasas River due to safety reasons. The bank was too steep and the rocks were too slick. We now test the Lampasas River at Chalk Ridge Falls Park and enjoy much safer access to the water. We also added a new site on Salado Creek near Sirena Park in Salado. It is a joy to be outdoors near such a treasure.

The Stream Team invites anybody interested in testing water quality to join us. As long as you have a fifth grade education, you are qualified and eligible to join the party. Just this past Monday, we witnessed an osprey snagging a fish from Lake Belton. Time spent by moving water is magical.



L to R: Bill Cornelius, Michael Belcher, Danny Welch & the tall guy is Art Siebert—measuring turbidity

Fall Butterfly Count

- Mary Ann Everett, 2003

On October 21, 2023, nineteen of our members searched for butterflies within the circle that had been drawn for us long before I took over as compiler. The name of our National American Butterfly Association count is Stillhouse Hollow because the center is right around Chalk Ridge Park and its radius is 15 miles. That is a lot of territory. Last year was our 19th year to do this count which started before our chapter was formed.

The great thing about these Citizen Science Projects is that one does not have to be pro. The first year I helped I barely knew a handful of butterflies. I have certainly gained a lot of knowledge as the years have rolled along, and I have had such fun.

With this fall count, I was wondering what sort of butterflies we would see? Would we even see any butterflies, given we had been suffering through a drought all summer, and there was not a proliferation of blooms out there. But wait! You know, native plants came through for us. They were blooming out there in the parched prairie areas, in our yards, parks, schools! That is a great reason to plant natives, because they are survivors in our Texas climate.

With this fall count, we counted 32 different species. The July 4th count had 41 species. More species of the sulphur butterflies and less hairstreaks were reported than in the July 4th count. All in all, I think this says something about the resiliency of butterflies even with the drought.

Keep those calendars handy because I want to include 3 counts this year. Here are the counts and their tentative dates for 2024:

Spring Seasonal Count: Saturday, April 13

July 4th Count: Saturday June 8

Fall Seasonal Count: October 12



Gulf Fritillary on Turk's Cap by Carroll Adcock



Where Do Bugs Go in the Winter?

- Colleen Smith-Fey, 2023

Winter months are a time to sit by a fire and sip hot coca. For me, I need to wrap up, stay warm and sleep! But what about the hustling bustling insects of the spring and summer, where do they go? Insects have a variety of methods for surviving the coldness of winter, and some are just like me, go dormant!

So where do they go? It just depends. Different insects rely on different strategies, but for many insects, their life cycle plays an important role. Some insects pass the winter as immature larvae. They simply burrow beneath leaf litter like a wooly bear caterpillar or dig deeper into the soil such as grubs. Since water freezes rather quickly in cold temperatures, some insects convert the water in their bodies to glycerol, a type of antifreeze! Absolutely amazing!

Some insects overwinter as Nymphs. The nymphs of my beloved dragonflies, mayflies and stoneflies can survive living in waters of ponds and streams, of course beneath ice. They feed and grow all winter! Then in spring, they emerge as adults.

A select few insects lay eggs which survive the winter. Praying Mantids are a prime example for this category as well as destructive Corn Rootworms.

Additionally, other insects can actually overwinter in the pupal stage emerging as adults in the spring.

Some moths may be attached to food plant branches as pupae in the winter or burrow into the soil through the winter such as the Imperial Moth.

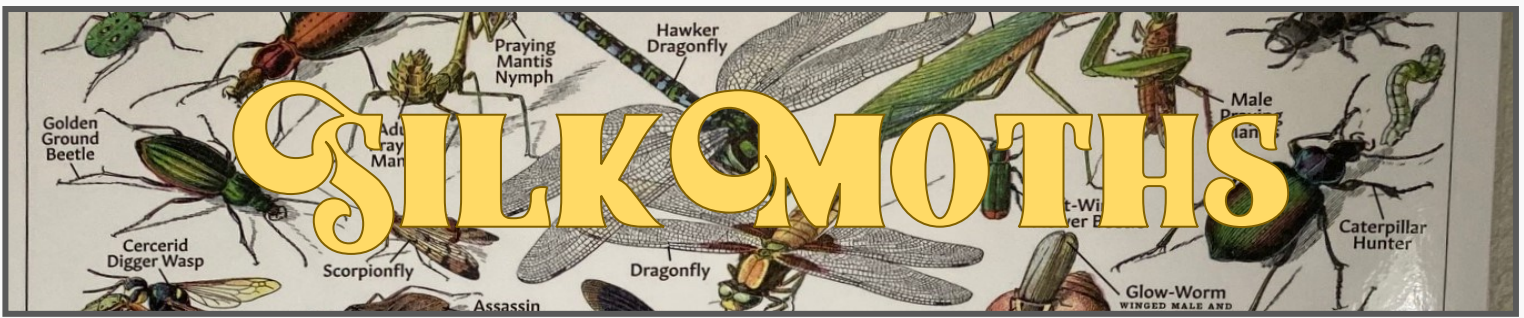
Many other insects grab a blanket and hibernate as adults. Ladybird beetles, commonly known as Lady Bugs, are a well-known example, and can be seen in the fall congregating at higher elevations to hibernate.

Some wasps will find shelter in eaves and attics of your home or barn. Tree crevasse, leaf litter, logs and rocks are common shelters for overwintering adult insects. Honey bees form clusters and stay in hives. They also can raise the temperature by vibrating wing muscles.

It is much easier for insects to survive the cold of winter when temperatures remain stable, not fluctuating through thaws and freezes. So in the stillness of winter, life is still very active in a quiet kind of way. So, just as the saying goes about letting sleeping dogs lie, leave your leaf debris, sticks, and logs then let the “sleeping” insects lie!



Praying Mantis egg case



– KELLY THORNBORROW, 2023

Hello! Kelly here to talk to you about moths again. This time I'd like to tell y'all about a hobby that combines an interest in moths but has agricultural value that you can enjoy year-round, even when the moths outdoors are in diapause. It's raising silkworms (*Bombyx mori*). Silkworms produce cocoons which are used to produce silk and are sometimes used as a feeder insect for people who keep amphibians and reptiles.

Silkworm eggs can be purchased from multiple sellers around the country or as caterpillars, often packaged as feeder insects. If raising from eggs, you can keep them at room temperature or in an incubator set to 80-84 degrees. Viable eggs will be a dark blackish blue that will lighten in color shortly before hatching. Once the silkworm has hatched it is very tiny, about 2-3 millimeters long. When they have hatched it is easiest to use a soft paintbrush to move the caterpillars to the food. They can eat either fresh mulberry leaves or a paste created from mulberry leaves. Silkworms will spend around a month in their larval stage and have 5 instars. As they grow, caterpillars will change from looking fully black to white/grey. If you have zebra silkworms they will be white/grey with black stripes. As the silkworm gets ready to form its cocoon, add toilet paper rolls or egg cartons bits to help give them a place to attach their silk.



After starting their cocoon they will need a few days to spin their cocoon and actually form the pupae inside, so it is best not to move them for the first few days. Their pupal stage will last for 8-14 days. This is the time silk collection and processing occurs, however traditional silk collection will kill the pupae. I prefer the method called Ahimsa or 'Peace Silk' which allows for the moth to complete its cycle, the downside being that it produces less silk because the cocoon has been slightly dissolved to allow the moth to get out of it. When moths have emerged, they move to breed within the first few days. Adults do not have mouths and have a short life cycle. However, a reminder that these moths are domesticated and cannot be released or survive outside here in Central Texas.

My current group of silkworms will be joining me at the Outdoor and Science Expo in Harker Heights on February 10, 2024. I will be letting children handle some of the larger caterpillars, talking more about the life cycle of moths, and comparing them to some of the silkmoth species found in Central Texas.



From Travis County Balcones Canyonlands February 2024 Newsletter

Itchy watery eyes, sneezing, congestion? You just may be suffering from what is commonly called “cedar fever”. While the trees we see around here are commonly called cedar, they aren’t true cedars. The culprit of your cedar fever could be the pollen from Ashe juniper trees (*Juniperus ashei*), and unlike most trees, they pollinate during winter. Ashe juniper trees are dioecious, meaning they have separate male and female plants. Female junipers have big, bright, blue berries that have health benefits as well as serve as a food source for birds in the winter, while the male junipers contain pollen cones, which typically release pollen from December through February.



Ashe juniper releasing pollen—not smoke!

Photo by Andy Heatwole

Ashe junipers tend to get a bad reputation, but they offer numerous benefits, such as reducing erosion and improving air quality, and as the juniper needles fall, they build up a rich and well-draining soil. Because of this, Ashe junipers act as nursery plants or pioneer species. Species such as cedar sage (*Salvia roemeriana*), cedar rosette grass (*Dichanthelium pedicellatum*), evergreen sumac (*Rhus virens*), and Texas madrone (*Arbutus xalapensis*) can be seen germinating and growing underneath junipers in the rich soil.

The Balcones Canyonlands Preserve helps to protect over 33,000 acres of Ashe juniper woodlands, as these are essential to the endangered golden-cheeked warblers’ survival. The golden-cheeked warbler makes its nest from the bark of mature Ashe juniper trees, binding strips of it together with spiderwebs.

While established and mature Ashe junipers and other trees may not need as much attention, newly planted saplings and young trees need specific care and attention as we continue through the winter. Watering, mulching, wrapping and pruning are all methods you can take to help protect your younger trees.

[Texas A&M Forest Service: Recommendations on Caring for Trees in the Cold](#)

Good to Know...

Feb 16-19, 2024

Global Bird Count in February

Join the world in connecting to birds – February 16–19, 2024. Watch the video to learn more about the count.



Click the image above for the global bird count website and all the information and tips you need to know. In as little as 15 minutes of observing and counting the birds around you, use apps or online tools to identify them, and submit the info to help scientists better understand and protect birds around the world.

Beyond the Backyard: All about the Great Backyard Bird Count **Webinar on Tuesday, Feb 13th, 12:00-1:00pm CST**



February 2024
Speaker Series

#TMNTuesdays

**Chip Ruthven,
Natural Resource
Specialist and Project
Leader**

presents

"Rattlesnakes"

February 13, 12pm



txmn.org hosts expert speakers on important topics the 2nd Tuesday of each month at noon. These are open to the public, but all of us must [Register in Advance](#).

Chip has been the project leader for the Panhandle Wildlife Management Area since 2004. He is stationed at the Matador Wildlife Management Area and has special interest and knowledge in rattlesnakes.

More Good to Know...

We are fielding more and more questions on this topic in urban areas. Maybe this will help!

is it a Fox or Coyote?

Gray Fox

THE GRAY FOX IS THE MOST COMMON FOX IN TEXAS. SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF GRAY FOXES INCLUDE:

- ✕ grizzled grey back
- ✕ long, fluffy tail
- ✕ black stripe that runs length of tail
- ✕ more of a cat-like build
- ✕ arboreal (lives in and climbs trees)

Coyote

COYOTES HAVE AN EXTENSIVE RANGE ACROSS THE UNITED STATES AND ARE FOUND THROUGHOUT THE STATE OF TEXAS. SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF COYOTES INCLUDE:

- ✕ adults are 2x size of a gray fox
- ✕ cinnamon to gray coat
- ✕ short, dark tail
- ✕ long legs
- ✕ similar size to a small german shepherd (25-40lbs)

SOURCES: TPWD, 2024; TEXAS WILDLIFE ASSOCIATION, 2018; MASS AUDUBAN, 2024. ©

Even More Good to Know...

Trash-Off Event

at Fort Cavazos

Friday, 23 February 2024
10AM-1PM
Cantonment E Pond
(near Pershing Lake)
Access via Clear Creek and Johnson Dr.

Participants will join the AIM team to pick up trash. No access pass needed.

See you there!

Questions? Email
AIM.FortCavazos@gmail.com

[Facebook.com/Fort.Cavazos.AIM.Team](https://www.facebook.com/Fort.Cavazos.AIM.Team)



Get your nest boxes cleaned out—bluebirds go house hunting in February!

Mourning Doves by Douglas DeFelice

Happy Valentines Day!



Seriously...

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!

Members are our best recruiters!

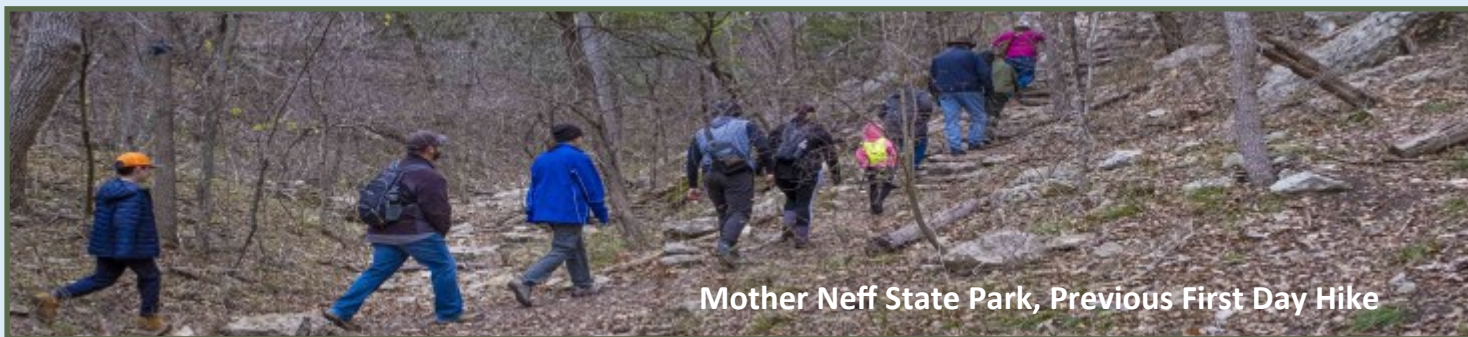


You are going to be seeing this line up at meetings now. It's the Clipboard Gauntlet. We are doing more and more projects and events and doing them at the same time in different places. Yay for all our volunteers! But that means we've got to make sure everything is covered, so please sign up when an 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

zoe.rascoe@gmail.com



[Angry bee image from The Bee Conservancy](#)

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 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.