

The Tracker

Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter August 2024

EXPERIENCING MILLER SPRINGS

Approximately 40 people, 1 - 80 years of age, attended the Miller Springs Experience 3-day event, July 9 - 11. This event was the idea of Bob Massey, a local resident, a Army Aviation Officer, and founder of Hybrid Leadership Group. Bob partnered with Belton Parks & Recreation, i9 Sports Bell County, several military colleagues for guides, local historians Murray McCarley (long-time USACOE Ranger at MSNC) and Tony Owen (a Tennessee Valley resident) as storytellers, and 15 members of the

Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter to bring together a fun-filled family experience to get kids out in nature and learn about navigation, trail safety, and local flora, fauna and fossils.

Lacey Shoemaker, new Recreation Coordinator for City of Belton, said *"I was excited to develop a program showcasing Miller Springs Nature Center. I was delighted by the Central Texas Master Naturalist volunteers' eagerness to dedicate their time and expertise, ensuring that people of all ages have the chance to learn, experience, and savor the beauty of nature. I am profoundly grateful for the support and commitment, which has truly enriched the program."*

Our thanks to the CTMN volunteers: Mary Ann Everett, Lysa Liem, PJ Hill, Liz Kehn, Colleen Smith-Fey, Jen Sugars, Kelly Taylor, Dr. Ray Kozusko, Danny Welch, John Burns, Jamey Douglass, Ellen O'Neil, Carroll Adcock, Zoe Rascoe, and Carol Smith, the Event Leader for CTMN.

Carol Smith, 2023



Photo: Miller Springs limestone rock outcrop





President's Pen

Carroll Adcock, 2020

The Balcones Canyonlands ecoregion forms the southeastern boundary of the Edwards Plateau, which was created during the Miocene epoch and separating central Texas from the coastal plain. The region is highly dissected by rivers, streams, springs and percolation through the porous limestone contributes

to the recharge of the Edwards Aquifer. This ecoregion supports several endemic plants and has a higher representation of deciduous woodland than elsewhere on the Edwards Plateau, with escarpment black cherry, Texas mountain-laurel, madrone, Lacey oak, bigtooth maple, rusty blackhaw, and Carolina basswood. Some relics of eastern swamp communities, such as baldcypress, American sycamore, and black willow, occur along major riparian areas. It is likely that these trees



have persisted as relics of moisture, cooler climates following the Pleistocene glacial epoch. Toward the west, the vegetation changes gradually as the climate becomes more arid. Plateau live oak woodland is eventually restricted to north and east facing slopes and floodplains, and dry slopes are covered with open shrublands of juniper, sumac, sotol, acacia, honey mesquite, and ceniza.

In 1992 The Balcones Canyonlands Wildlife Refuge was established to preserve the habitat of the now recovered black-capped vireo and the endangered golden-cheeked warbler. The black-capped vireo was removed from the endangered list in 2018. The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management and,

Cont.

where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans. Both the now de-listed black-capped vireo and the endangered golden-cheeked warbler depend on their unique habitat that has been and continues to be greatly diminished due to encroaching human activity.

Beneath the realm of some 245 avian species that call this area home you will discover underground rivers, sinkholes and caves called “karst”. This habitat is created over time by naturally acidic rainwater seeping through the porous limestone and is home to cliff chirping frogs and whitethroat slimy salamanders that squeeze into moist crevices. Cave crickets and daddy longlegs live in caves but leave to feed. Some spiders, beetles and pseudoscorpions never come out to the light, living all their lives in darkness. Raccoons and ring-tailed cats retreat to cave entrances for shelter. Deep below this area of karst exists a section of the Trinity aquifer which feeds many Hill country rivers and springs and eventually flows into the marshes and estuaries and rivers that flow into the coastal bays.

I recently had the opportunity to visit and do a bit of hiking at Shin Oak Observation area and at Doeskin Ranch Trails and was rewarded with an abundance of assorted seasonal wildflowers, songbirds and a gray fox. My hiking was limited this trip, but I was impressed with the flora and fauna. I was also pleased that I encountered only one other human in the 2 hours I was on the trails. I was able to identify 19 species of birds including a black-capped vireo that refused to pose for a photograph! The facility is somewhat of a checkerboard of properties with several access sites that offer a total of nearly 8 miles of trails. While the site is not exactly “in our backyard”, it is only about 90 minutes from the Belton area and worth consideration of scouting out with some fellow naturalists or on your own! Happy Trails!



This, and more information can be found at <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/balcones-canyonlands>.



Orb Weaver spider with 'hopper snack



Grey Fox

Upcoming Chapter Events



Birds Do It...Bees Do It Crazy Animal Mating Behaviors

By Dr. Laura Weiser Erlandson

Texas A&M University - Central Texas

Tuesday, August 13, 2024

6:00pm Belton Church of Christ
3033 N Main Street

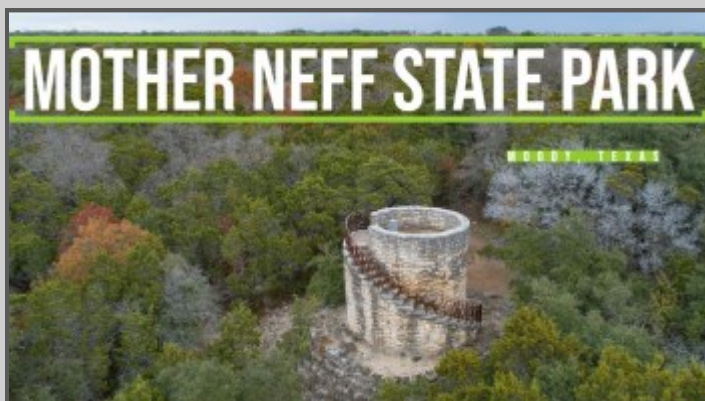
Presented by Central Texas
Master Naturalist Chapter

Public is welcome!

GIRL SCOUTS LOVE STATE PARKS

Sat. September 14, 2024

8:00am-10:00pm



Scouts are invited out for
guided hikes, nature activities,
camping and more!

**CTMN Volunteers Needed
for hikes and nature activities!!**

Class of 2024 Graduation June 11th



Congratulations!!



Brett Eldridge with Mentor Danny Welch



Mentor Jamey Douglass with Celeste Loska



David Salzman with Mentor Stan Simons



Mentor Susan Schneider with Diane Ready

Class of 2024 Graduation June 11th



Liz Kehn with Mentor April Hignojos



Elen O'Neil with Mentor Alan Webster



So many critters to find under wet rocks!



Lane Smith with Mentor Tom Gerik



Jen Sugars with Mentor Carol Smith



Mentor Zoe Rascoe with Kelly Taylor

Class of 2024 Graduation June 11th



Michael Elmore with Mentor Charles Capen



Amazing homemade bread by Brett E. Mmm



Larry Neal with Mentor John Fairlie



Lisa Clement with Mentor Cristy Wade



Golden—Cheeked Warbler siting—CHECK!

Class of 2024 Graduation June 11th



John Brushaber with Mentor Sue Valdez



Rick Erickson with Mentor Guy Fowler



PJ Hill with Mentor Mary Ann Everett



Dr. Wolfe ramps up interest in aquatic biology



Training Directors Lynn Fleming & Mary Ann Everett



Nicole Stanteen with Mentor Lysa Liem

Class of 2024 Graduation June 11



Native Plant training with NRCS



Alex Salazar with Mentor Linda Fairlie



Mentor Juan Anaya with Luzette Berry



Mark Berry with Mentor Juan Anaya



Calculating critter diversity after sampling



Patty Donaldson (unable to attend)

We were happy to include the four graduates on this page in our training classes who are members of the Heart of Texas Chapter.

Master Naturalists at Work

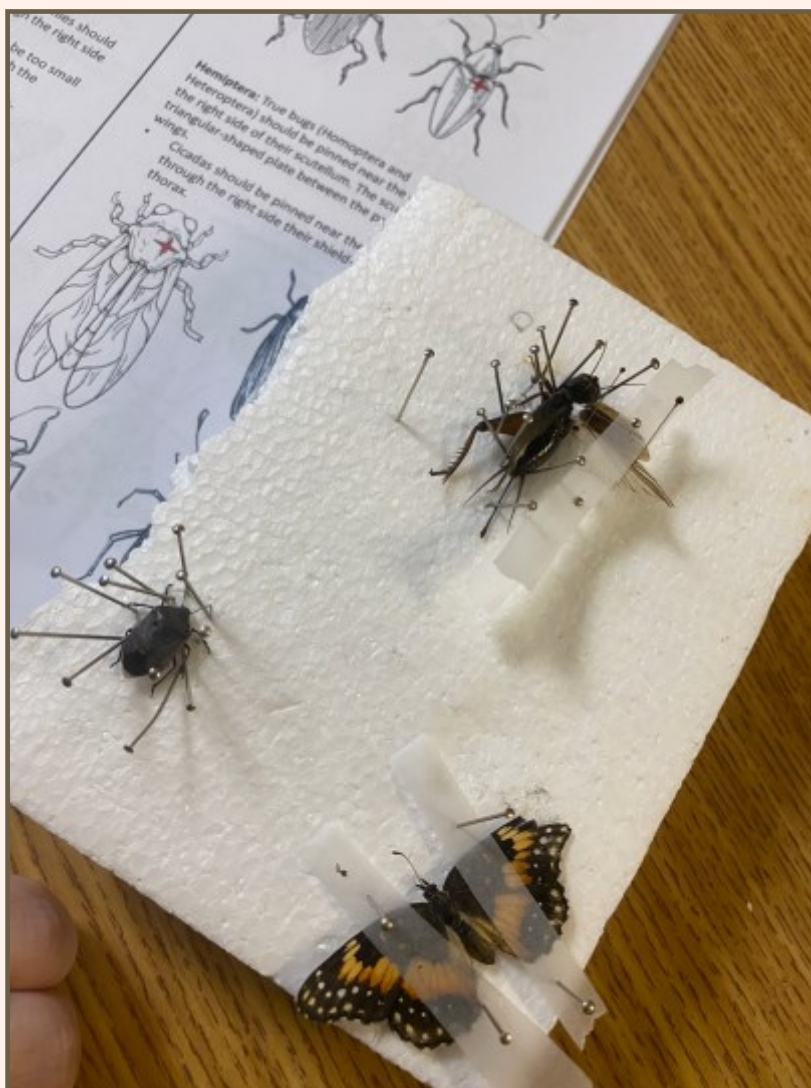
Fort Cavazos Project

- Kelly Thornborrow, 2023

On July 22nd Master Naturalists Kelly Thornborrow and Cassie Daley attended an insect pinning activity with the Fort Cavazos AIM Team and pinned insect specimens for the Fort Cavazos Bird, Bee, and Bat Garden's Education Center. Event attendees were instructed to bring their own insects to pin but insects were also available, rehydrated and ready to pin. A short educational refresher was taught at the beginning of the event, reviewing best practices for pinning hard-bodied insects based on their order. Attendees were able to try pinning a variety of different bugs to see how pinning may be different with each variety.

My favorites were pinning crickets and grasshoppers. I brought in a cricket that my dog killed, which was mostly intact. I kept it in a bag in my freezer

until the day of the class so that it stayed malleable. This method was much easier for me than to try to rehydrate the insect at a later date. When I pinned the cricket I carefully spread the wings on the right side of the specimen. It was my first time trying to pin an insect other than a moth or butterfly, so there was a bit of a learning curve, particularly with the fragile cricket wings. It was much easier to pin the grasshopper wings, since they felt much more durable. Thankfully a bit of acid-free glue helps to strengthen any fragile joints. All insects pinned during this event were labeled and will be added to the Ft. Cavazos AIM collection.



Master Naturalists at Work

North American Butterfly Association Count

- Kelly Thornborrow, 2023

The North American Butterfly Association (NABA) has coordinated over 450+ annual butterfly surveys across North America since 1993. Our chapter often participates in these counts in the late spring/early summer and the Fall. On June 8th, Central Texas Master Naturalists recorded butterfly sightings and species in a 15-mile radius from Stillhouse Lake as part of the July 4th NABA Butterfly Count. Volunteers worked in multiple groups and locations.



Cristy Wade, Jim Wade, Lisa Clements and Kelly Thornborrow surveyed the Wade's Property. Andrea Liles, David Salzman, Liz Kehn, Ellen O'Neil, and Colleen Smith-Fey recorded sightings on Andrea's property. John Fairlie, Sue Valdez, Marilyn Whitworth, Diane Ready, and Danny Welch were at Belton Lakeview Park. Lastly, the largest group with Jerry Lewis, Jamey Douglass, Jen Sugars, John Brushaber, Kelly Taylor, Charles Capen, and Mary Ann Everett surveyed butterflies on Charles' property. Each group recorded the species and the frequencies of the butterflies seen and submitted them to Mary Ann. This data is later submitted to the North American Butterfly Association (NABA) and is compiled with other citizen science data for future use.

While at the Wade's property we saw 82 butterflies over a 2 ½ hour period. The butterfly we saw most frequently was the Common Buckeye (N=18). These numbers are slightly down from last June

when we surveyed the same area and saw 110 butterflies in the same timeframe. It is possible this is due to the different stages of the area's foliage. Most of this year's plants had already gone to seed, compared to last June when they all had open blooms. I look forward to next year to compare how our sightings may differ again. This is a great activity for those looking to learn more about butterflies or even just get out and walk on a nice day. You don't need to be able to identify everything instantly and



can take photos of the butterflies for comparison to guides and identify later. Keep a lookout for potential Fall NABA dates!

Master Naturalists at Work

Harker Heights Vintage Christian School

- Carol Smith, 2022

The Vintage Christian School in Harker Heights added the Outdoor Education Enrichment Program to their curriculum this past 2023/2024 school year. They asked the Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter if we would provide environmental education to the program. CTMN members Carol Smith and Art Siebert met with the staff in August 2023 to plan the school year.

Throughout the school year, Master Naturalists taught at the Vintage Christian School at least once a month on a Thursday. On other Thursdays of each month the Master Gardeners, 4-H Club, and a County Extension Agent would teach other outdoor topics, like vegetable gardening and animal husbandry. Three classes were scheduled in the mornings for 1st and 2nd grade, 3rd – 6th grade, and then Pre-Kindergarten – Kindergarten.

Topics that were taught by Master Naturalists during the 2023/2024 school year were:

September 7 – **Bird 101** – Carol Smith

September 14 – The Tonkawa Chapter of the Native Plant Society partnered with the CTMN in providing a **pollinator garden at the school**. The NPSOT paid for all the materials, plants, and construction labor of the beds. Miguel Gutierrez Landscaping prepared the beds.

September 21 – The children **planted the donated plants** and learned which pollinators use them. There is a bed for each season. Carol Smith weeded the garden during the year.

October 19 – **Bird Migration** – Lynn Williams, Mary Ann Everett, Linda Fairlie, and Carol Smith

November 11 – **Bird ID** - Carol Smith

November 30 – **Bugs** – Art Siebert and Carol Smith

January 25 - **Winter Bird Feeding** –Carol Smith with David Broyles

February 15 – **Butterflies/ Monarchs** – Kelly Thornborrow, Art Siebert, and Carol Smith

April 18 – **Earth Day Talk** & children planted milkweeds -Carol Smith

May 4 – **Chalk Ridge Falls Park Hike** – Jen Sugars and Carol Smith

Thank you to all the members who helped with this project!



Master Naturalists at Work

Harker Heights Science Fair and Expo

- Kelly Thornborrow, 2023

On Wednesday, June 24th Harker Heights Parks and Recreation hosted an Open House event from 5pm to 8pm. This event gave members of the community an opportunity to learn more about various volunteer organizations. Tina Atkins, Carol Smith, and Kelly Thornborrow represented our chapter. A small group of people visited the Master Naturalist Table and discussed future opportunities to partner our organization with theirs. Here is to future collaboration in our community!



Kelly Thornborrow, Carol Smith and Tina Atkins

The following Wednesday was the Harker Heights Library's Science Fair and Expo from 2pm to 4pm. Organizations like the Tri-City Gem and Mineral Society, and local Girl Scouts, STEM Club, TPWD, and the Native Plant Society, were also in attendance. Our table hosted a variety of live butterflies, live isopods, a local park coloring page and bookmark making activities, bug displays, and animal fur, tracks, and skulls. Many children made bookmarks with our animal track stamps to take with them into the library after the event. Tina Atkins, John Brushaber, Liz Kehn, Mary Ann Everett, and Kelly Thornborrow volunteered, reaching 175 community members!



Tina Atkins keeps an eye on the butterflies



MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

500 Hours!



Tom Gerik (2021) reached his milestone of 500 volunteer service hours!

500 Hours!



Stephen Schmitz (2020) receives his 500 Hour Milestone Award.

250 Hours!



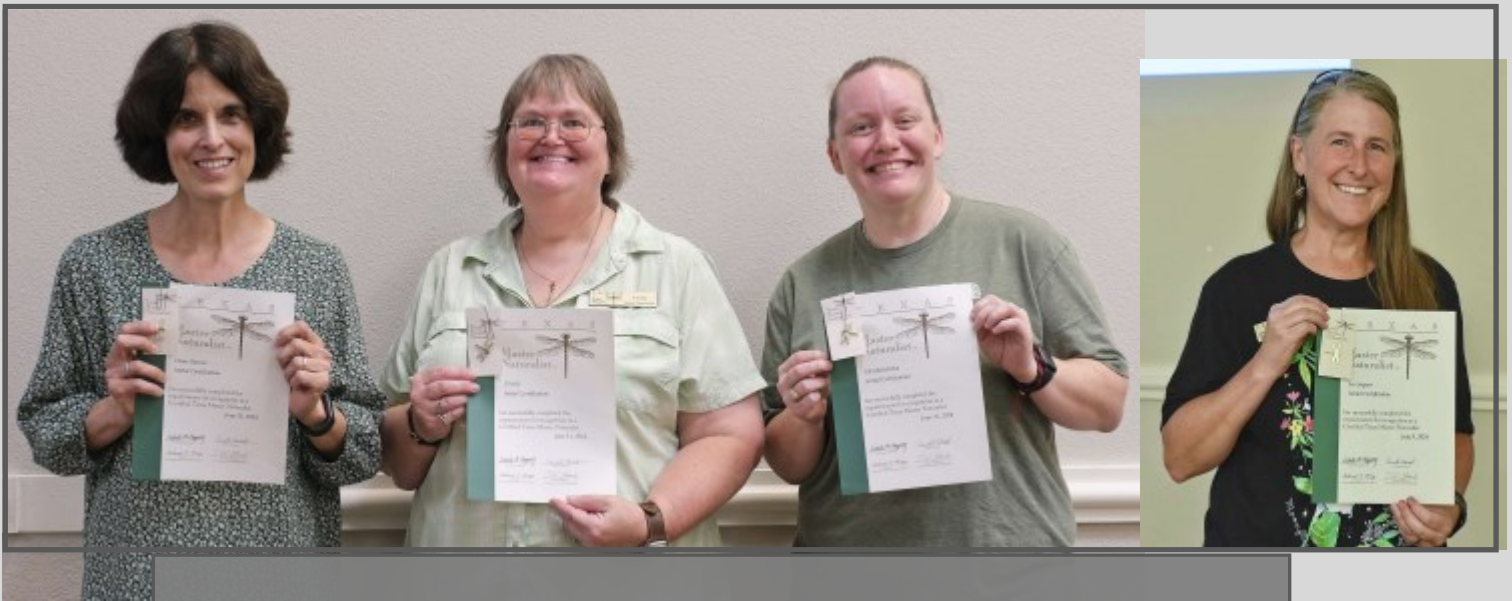
Michael Belcher (2021) reached his 250 Hour Milestone Award.

250 Hours!

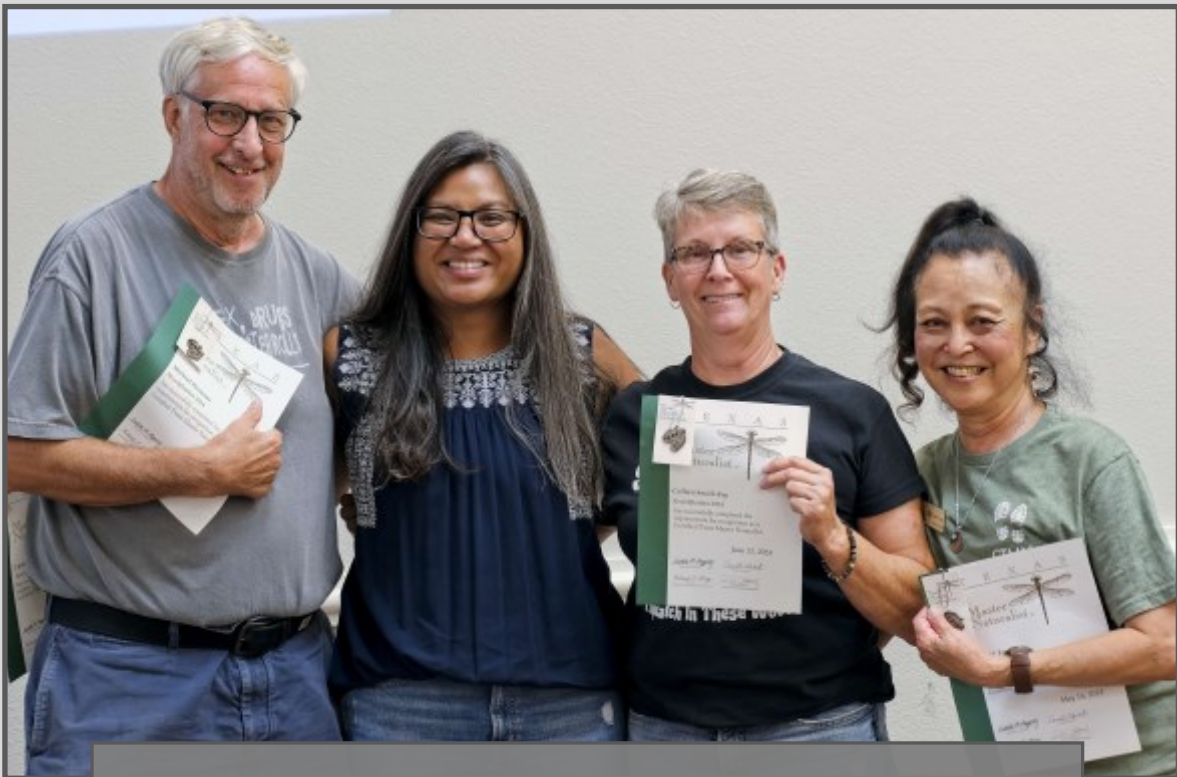


Ward Critz (2018) reached his 250 Hour Milestone Award.

MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



2024 Graduates Diane Barnes, PJ Hill, Liz Kehn, and Jen Sugars all graduated AND completed the requirements for Initial Certification! Well done!



Michael Hermans. (2023), Lysa Liem (2023), Colleen Smith-Fey (2022), and Juliet Tanada (2023) recertify for 2024.

MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Alan Webster (2023) , Kelly Thornborrow (2023),
Jim Wade (2023) and Cristy Wade (2023) receive their 2024 recertification



Debby Bridge (2022), Michael Belcher (2021), Bill
Cornelius (2020), Larry Turner (2021) and Danny
Welch (2022) are certified Advanced Water Quality
Citizen Scientists by The Meadows Center for Water
& the Environment. They are part of our busy Texas
Stream Team!

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.



Bill Cornelius (2020) is now a TPWD
certified Angler Education Instructor
Go Fish!



Mother Neff State Park

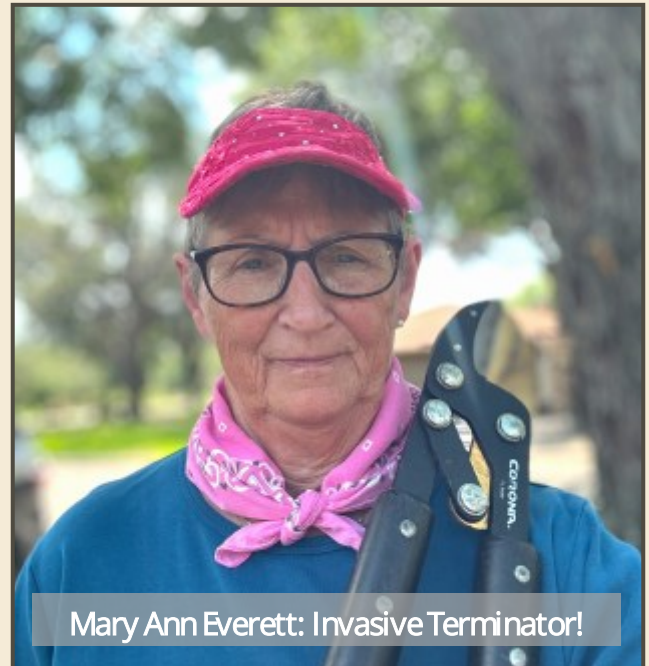
1680 TX Hwy-236, Moody

Juan Anaya (2019), MNSP Liaison, can be reached at juanana@swbell.net

NEXT MOTHER NEFF WORKDAY: Thursday, August 28th at 8:30-10:30am

A workday was scheduled on Thursday June 13th at Mother Neff State Park. I am always pleased with any work crew that shows up but today I knew that I had hit the jackpot!

We were assigned the task of clearing the park road from the cave parking to the back entrance. As we worked our way down the hill I would hear, "I love this plant" and very few limbs would be removed. Then I would hear, "This is a horrible invasive plant" and it would be total destruction. We made it to the end of the road and decided it was too dang hot to keep going! After a short cool down we collected some milkweed seeds. Great work day with a great crew. Many thanks to the crew consisting of Mary Ann Everett and well, Mary Ann Everett.



Mary Ann Everett: Invasive Terminator!

MNSP needs our help at these upcoming events! Please contact Juan if you can help.

Girls Scouts Love State Parks 09/14 9am-12pm (set-up/teardown 8am-1pm) See more on page 4

- Help with guided hikes and table activities for scouts.

Mother Neff SP Fall Fest 11/02 10am-2pm (set-up/teardown 8am-5pm)

- Help with guided hikes and table activities for scouts. *Usually the largest event of the year!*

A Mother Neff Christmas 12/07 10am-2pm (set-up/teardown 8am-5pm)

- Help with guided hikes, table activities, and Christmas crafts for families.



- John Burns, 2018
jaburnscgm@gmail.com

June was a busy month for Miller Springs work. We had the normal 2nd Thursday workday on June 13th. Of course it was the beginning of summer so the weather was hot. We have been short on volunteers in the previous months, but on this day we had a team of seven, which is a pretty good number of volunteers. The volunteers present were (L to R) Diane Ready, Ellen O'Neil, Carol Smith, John Burns (front), Ben Clement, Larry Neal, and Lisa Clement.



We had a different task on this day since there was a special event happening in July called Experience Miller Springs. Our task on this day was to help decide which trail would be best to use for the event and then to walk the trail to make sure it was clear of trees and tree limbs. We decided the Armadillo

trail would be the best trail since it is fairly level and the event was for children (some might be young) and families. So our group headed down the trail with tools in hand. The team began cutting back foliage that was intruding on the trail. We continued on the trail and cut several limbs and trees that had fallen due to the May tornado. We also cleared an area to be used for a Master Naturalist education/demonstration tables at the event.

Upon returning to the parking and pavilion area we talked about all the trees that were down and laying on the pavilion. Carol advised me the pavilion would be needed during the Experience Miller Springs event. I quickly realized this would take quite a bit of work and we would need to have an extra workday. We scheduled a "Bonus" workday for the following Thursday.



Marilyn Burns tackles the tree on the pavilion

Miller Springs Nature Center *cont.*



It was great to have 6 volunteers for the Bonus workday. The volunteers were (L to R) Ellen O'Neil, Diane Ready, Ben Clement, Zoe Rascoe, John Burns, and an extra special volunteer Marilyn Burns.

I was surprised by the amount of work we accomplished that day. About the time we were all done physically, we had finished and there were several mountains of brush. The facility was now safe for the upcoming event. The only thing left was all the brush, so I called Donald LaPoint with the City of Temple Parks and Recreation Department to ask if they could get the brush removed. They jumped on it and had the brush removed very quickly. A big thank you goes out to Donald and his team for doing such a huge job so quickly and providing a nice area to kick off the upcoming event.



Ellen O'Neil and Diane Ready dragging limbs

On another note, I would like to let everyone know I am stepping away from coordinating and leading the Miller Springs workdays. Ellen O'Neil and Diane Ready will be co-leaders going forward. I am happy they agreed to take on this responsibility. I plan to continue to work with them on the workdays and I hope those who can will come out and support their efforts. We really do make a big difference for nature, if we have a good number of volunteers. We will be

canceling our August workday as we work on transitioning to new leadership. Honestly, it's usually too hot to work in August anyway.

Finally, I want to thank so many who have supported our Miller Springs efforts for the last 5½ years. I am not going to try and name everyone who has worked, but I do want to say a huge thank you to my two all-stars. Ben Clement and John Atkins who have put in so many hard volunteer hours using the puller bears and chainsaws in the Nature Center. Thank you, Ben and John, for being there and for always being willing to take the lead when I was not able to attend. Your support has been greatly appreciated!



THANK YOU FOR YOUR LEADERSHIP, JOHN!

WILDLIFE SURVEYS

TPWD ADOPT A LOOP



- John Fairlie, 2021 GTWT Adopt-A-Loop Coordinator (j.fairl@yahoo.com)

One of our Chapter's ongoing volunteer projects is our quarterly wildlife surveys. As citizen scientists, we go birding and looking for other fauna at eight sites, with some of us using the Merlin, e-Bird, and iNaturalist apps to help identify and collect data for the Great Texas Wildlife Trails, part of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). Our sites, collectively called the Chisolm Trail Loop, includes Chalk Ridge Falls and Dana Peak Park on Stillhouse Hollow Lake, Belton Lakeview



Common Checkered Skipper

Park, Miller Springs Nature Center, Mother Neff State Park, Lake Waco Wetlands, Cameron Park in Waco, and the Cameron Park Zoo.

We finished up our last round of wildlife surveys in early June, visiting Miller Springs, Mother Neff, and Belton Lakeview Park in three successive days. We had great crews show up at each site to search out birds and other fauna together, and as usual we had fun while we did our citizen science for TPWD.

Our chapter members participating included new members Diane Ready, Liz Kehn, Ellen O'Neil, and Jen Sugars, along with Lysa Liem, Colleen Smith-Fey, Sue Bertoleit-Valdez, Cassie Castillo, John Fairlie, Larry Turner, and Danny Welsh.



Yep! It's a bird!!

Cont.

GTWT ADOPT-A-LOOP PROJECT *cont.*

We will do our last round of wildlife surveys for this year in September. All of the opportunities will be listed in our Chapter's weekly email as Wildlife Survey-AAL @ Chalk Ridge Falls (or whatever site we are visiting that day). Feel free to join us whenever you wish! We have a lot of fun, enjoying the company and nature, while accumulating volunteer hours and engaging in citizen science. If you are unfamiliar with using Merlin or iNaturalist we will assist you, or you can just act as a spotter for the group. You can walk as much or as little as you want at each opportunity, and can split off from the group and go on your own or stay with the pack!



Gulf Fritillary on Lantana

This is a wonderful opportunity to earn hours of volunteer time while strolling and observing the



amazing creatures we see in a beautiful setting. I look forward to seeing many of you on our loop!

(L to R) Bae, Myles, Lisa Liem, Colleen Smith-Fey, Sue Valdez, Cassie Castillo, Danny Welch, and Ellen O'Neil at Miller Springs Nature Center.

Below, at Rock Tower at Mother Neff State Park.



Larry Turner, Sue Valdez, Danny Welch, Ellen O'Neil, Colleen Smith-Fey, Jen Sugars, Diane Ready

SPOTLIGHT

TEXAS STREAM TEAM

Texas Stream Team at *The Meadows Center for Water and the Environment* is a statewide environmental education and volunteer-based water quality monitoring program. Team members can receive training in several areas and commit to monitoring local waterways on a regular basis. Our chapter's volunteers have spent many early mornings in all kinds of weather making their rounds. We will be spotlighting these dedicated citizen scientists.

Mike Belcher was born at Fort Bragg, California. His father was a Pearl Harbor survivor who became an itinerant logger after World War II. The family followed the logging industry from



California, to Oregon, to Washington, to Alaska. Mike's love of nature flourished, as did his appreciation for its beauty and ferocity.

Mike ran cross country at both the high school and collegiate levels. He was an avid backpacker. He learned rock climbing at the Yosemite Mountaineering School. He mastered snow and ice climbing at Rainier Mountaineering Inc. Mike has climbed every peak in the Cascades, and many Sierra Nevada Mountain range peaks. He graduated with an AA degree in Architectural Construction Technology and Surveying from Diablo Valley College in

Pleasant Hill California, a BA in History and Geography, and a MA in Archaeology from the University of Arizona in Tucson.

Mike was registered with the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) for over 50 years. He started as a wee Cub Scout, earned the rank of Eagle Scout, and served as a volunteer for most of his adult life. Mike has been Cubmaster, Scoutmaster, Sea Scout Skipper, and Venturing Advisor. Mike is a Wood Badge graduate, and a recipient of the Silver Beaver, the highest award granted by a local Boy Scout Council.

Cont.

Mike is a certified rock-climbing instructor with BSA, a Red Cross Instructor in First Aid, CPR, and Wilderness First Aid, Canoeing and Kayaking. He is a level 2 archery instructor with USA Archery; and a Leave No Trace Master Educator (National Outdoor Leadership School, NOLS) trained and certified. Mike has professional certifications in both surveying and archaeology. He is a member of the National Society of Professional Surveyors (PLS), and he holds membership in the Registry of Professional Archaeologists (RPA).

Lieutenant Colonel Belcher began his military career as a member of the Arizona National Guard. He spent five years in the Guard as an enlisted man, achieving the rank of Sergeant E-5. He received his commission as a second lieutenant in the United States Army, and faithfully served our country until he retired from active duty. Mike is a combat veteran having served in Cold War Germany, the Gulf War, Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti, and the Global War on Terrorism. Mike spent the next 20 years as a professional genealogist.

Mike's wife Vicki is a retired Lieutenant Colonel. She spent her career as a physical therapist helping soldiers regain strength and mobility after being injured. They have two sons and one daughter and are blessed with three very spoiled granddaughters.

Mike is a proud member of the CTMN class of 2021. His lifelong love of nature compelled him to join our ranks. He is a vital member of our Central Texas Master Naturalists Stream Team. Mike is a certified Texas Waters Specialist and was awarded the Chapter Silver Otter and the exclusive Golden Otter. Mike has been certified by the Meadows Center in Standard Core Testing, Riparian Evaluation, E. coli Testing, and Advanced Water Testing. He has tested the streams, rivers, and lakes of Bell County on over 50 different occasions.

Everyone involved with our Stream Team smiles when Mike shows up.

The Central Texas Master Naturalist Stream Team conducts water quality tests at the following bodies of water on this schedule beginning at 9:00am. Any CTMN Chapter member is welcome to join us and learn about the information we gather for the state. No experience required.

1st Monday: Leon River @ Heritage Park

1st Tuesday: Salado Creek @ Sirena Park

2nd Monday: Nolan Creek @ Harris Community Center

3rd Monday: Lampasas River @ Chalk Ridge Falls Park

4th Monday: Lake Belton @ Temple Lake Park

Contact Danny Welch at dwelchster@gmail.com



Mike with some of the Stream Team folks

Bat Acoustic Monitoring Project



- Jim Wade, 2023

Wrapping Up Monitoring

The Bat Acoustic Monitoring project has wrapped up the data capture portion of the 2024 season and we are moving on to the data analysis phase using specialized acoustic identification software. For those not familiar with the project, Texas Nature Trackers, in partnership with North American Bat Monitoring Program (NABat), is participating in a large-scale project to improve our understanding of bat species distribution throughout Texas and nationwide. Central Texas Master Naturalist volunteers deployed acoustic recording monitors at 11 sites over 9 weeks from late April into July. Preliminary and unverified analysis of thousands of recordings indicates we have several species of bats in our area. Bat species that we have high to medium confidence in their presence account for over 90% of the recordings. Bat species in order of occurrence: Brazilian/Mexican free-tailed (over 40% of calls identified), Hoary Bat, Silver-haired, Seminole, Northern yellow, Big brown, and Evening Bat.



There are a few other species tentatively identified, but confidence is lower and requires more verification. If you're interested in learning more about this project, contact Tom Gerik at tjgerik@gmail.com.

To learn more about the North American Bat Monitoring Project, visit the Texas Nature Trackers Mini Series on Acoustic Monitoring of Texas Bats (January 23, 2024) at [#TMNTuesdays](https://www.facebook.com/TMNTuesdays).



Some of the Batters on the Bat Team (L to R): Tom Gerik, Lou Hight, Jim Wade, David Vesely, Michael Belcher, Juliet Tanada, John Fairlie, Cristy Wade, Charles Capen, Danny Welch. There are others Batter volunteers not pictured!

Grown by Thorns

- **Kelly Thornborrow, 2023**

Making a Flower Press

Pressing flowers and other plants is a great way to preserve plant materials. Whether you use it to make your own herbarium or save for use with craft projects there are many ways to try to press flowers. One of my favorite ways is to use a designated flower press. Here is a simple guide to making your own flower press. My boards are about 1/4in thick and both cut to 9.5" x 8.5" but you can pick your own size.

You will need:

2 pieces of wood

4- 1/4 inch bolts

4- 1/4 inch washers

4- 1/4 inch wingnuts

Cardboard sheets

Parchment paper

Sandpaper

To customize your press, you also need:

Wood Stain

Cut vinyl design

Gloss clear coat spray paint



To make the covers of your press, take your boards and drill a hole in each of the corners, making sure that both covers align. I opted to just clamp my two boards on top of each other and drill through both at the same time to ensure they were aligned. Check that your bolt can easily move through the holes, if it doesn't, size up to the next drill bit and enlarge the hole.

Cont.

Grown by Thorns *cont.*

Sand the front and back of both boards, especially around the screw holes. Next up is the cover design, you can either leave it blank or finish it. I recommend you at least seal each side. I customized mine by placing a vinyl design over the sanded wood and carefully applied stain over it. I applied the stain in light dabbing coats with a cloth to reduce the chance of bleed through under the vinyl design. When the wood is dry I remove the vinyl and am left with the design in the untreated wood. I continued staining all other sides and later sealing each side with a clear coat.

To make the boards that your plants will be pressed between you need to make multiple 'sandwich' layers of cardboard and parchment paper. I use old amazon boxes for my cardboard layers. Using one piece of cardboard, cut the shape of your press covers out, then mark off the corners in front of your bolts. Cut those corners off so your rectangle/square will fit inside your press covers but do not touch your screw threads. Use this as a template to cut your cardboard layers and parchment paper. For every layer of cardboard, you want two pieces of parchment between it. My press has 5 cardboard layers and 8 parchment sheets. When your papers and cardboard sheets are cut you are ready to put your press together.



Start with a washer, and thread a screw through each of the 4 holes in your back cover, placing another washer over the top of the cover. Then add your cardboard layer followed by two sheets of parchment and covered by another sheet of cardboard. If you have flowers ready to press you can put them between the sheets of parchment paper. When you have filled your layers then add your top cover with the bolts through your drilled holes, followed by a washer, then a wingnut. Use the wingnut to tighten your press until all four wingnuts are as tight as possible. You will notice the covers pressing your layers. Leave for a week or two depending on the thickness of your flowers or plants and then you will have pressed flowers in your own custom press.

You can view a short video of this process [here](#). I share my experiments with eco-dye and other projects on Instagram as @grownbythorns <https://www.instagram.com/grownbythorns/> Follow along for videos of projects like this, developing photography with plants, and raising moths and butterflies.

SHELDON LAKE STATE PARK



- Liz Kehn, 2024

Liz here with another Texas State Park Adventure. I recently took a trip to Houston to visit family and ventured out to Sheldon Lake State Park. It's roughly 20 miles from downtown Houston and became a State Park in 1984. It is a former Fish Hatchery that TPWD is letting revert back to forest, ponds and marshes. They are looking for volunteers to help with restoration. The park has no entry fee and has ADA accessible trails and facilities. With any activity in the Houston area make sure you bring your mosquito repellent or they'll carry you away!



The trails are just over 2 miles long and mostly go around the Hatchery Ponds that are stocked with Sunfish, Catfish, and Large Mouth Bass so make sure to bring your fishing gear. I fished for a little bit but I was easily distracted by a small alligator that was after everyone's fishing lines. He made fishing quite the challenge. I took the

rest of the trail and made it to the John Jacob Observation Tower. There is a elevator if needed, or you can take a nice climb up the beautiful 82-foot high lookout tower that gives you the perfect view of the Wetlands and Prairies and the Skyline of Downtown Houston.



Happy Exploring!

THROWBACK TRACKER - AUG 2018

A Day On the Fleming Farm

- By Lynn Fleming

I'll tell you a story about what went on in my backyard the other day.

My husband, Robert, and I went on a weekend trip to the Southeast Texas Bigfoot Conference in Huntsville in April. He is very interested in Bigfoot and the sightings and reports from all over the world that seem to indicate that there is another species yet undiscovered. And I must admit, there is some pretty compelling evidence.

We left the conference a little after 3 p.m. and started the drive back to our reality, but I'm getting a little ahead of myself here. Let me backup a bit.

My daughter, Dakota has a dog named Margaret. When she first moved into her new place, she was lonely, so I went to the animal shelter and picked out a little terrier type dog as a companion. Dakota loves Margaret to the moon and back. Unfortunately, Margaret likes to run off and there are coyotes and people with shotguns who don't appreciate roaming canines. When Dakota travels with her job, Margaret comes to stay with us. Here's the rub though, Margaret is a convicted, multiple offense chicken killer. When she visits she is normally put in the dog pen or on a chain. She was visiting this weekend, but I hated to leave her on the chain while we were gone. As we drove away Friday headed to Huntsville, I waved to Margaret and told her she better leave my chickens alone and hoped for the best.



As we pulled in the driveway Saturday afternoon, we were greeted by Margaret, and our dogs; two Pyrenees, Laverne and Shirley, and Reba the black lab. Getting out of the car, I noticed white feathers in the yard. Dang it Margaret. But there weren't very many feathers and Margaret's mode of operation usually had feathers all over the yard. I followed the feather trail to the former above ground swimming pool deck. Then I saw it. A cat. We don't have cats so my first thought was house cat, but then I saw the whole thing. Bobcat, young one too.



It took off around the side of the house and I guess it saw the dogs in the front yard because it climbed into the big mountain laurel in front of the house. I didn't want to kill it, but I did want to teach it that it was not welcome here.

On the Fleming Farm (cont)



So I called the dogs to have them chase it off. Reba and Margaret came running and the Pyrenees just looked at me. If you have ever been around Pyrenees, you know that they do exactly what they want when they want to. Reba is a duck hunting dog and she didn't have a clue what I wanted her to do. Since the Pyrenees wouldn't come to the cat, we brought them to the cat in the back of a UTV. They love to ride.

Robert parked the UTV where the dogs would have a good vantage point. We shook the tree and down jumped the bobcat headed for the corn field. Shirley sees it first and takes out after it. Laverne is right behind, but so excited that she forgot there was a fence and slams into it, makes a quick recovery and is off. Reba and Margaret join the chase.

After about 50 yards in high gear, Shirley catches up with the bobcat, grabs it by the leg and tosses it in the air. With all claws engaged the cat lays into Shirley and they both take a roll. That's about the time Reba decided--that thing has claws not feathers--I'm going back to the

house. Laverne is on the scene seconds later and they both take turns charging and barking. The bobcat is no fool though and has the bluff on them. Margaret joins the team and gives the cat an earful. This is extremely unusual because I have only heard Margaret bark one time, barely. She found her voice with the bobcat though.

Three dogs and a bobcat continue to torment each other until they all are getting worn out. The dogs tongues are hanging out and they decide just to sit and bark for a while. The cat gets tired too and sits, but keeps growling. This goes on for what seems like an eternity. I try to call off the dogs because I don't want the bobcat to get hurt. They pay absolutely no attention to me. I give up and go to the barn to feed the cows and collect eggs.

My chickens have decided that they only like to sleep in their coop and lay eggs in the barn in an old water trough that has hay in it. Ok, fine. I pull open the door and get a little start. There among the eggs is a rat snake about five feet long. I must have scared him when I opened the door because one of the eggs was wet like he had started swallowing it. Look snake, you can eat all the mice you want, but leave the eggs alone. I poke him with a stick and make him leave, gather the eggs and shake my head. First a bobcat chicken killer then a snake egg eater. The chickens are under attack.



I finally got the dogs called off the bobcat. He climbed up a fence post for a little rest then disappeared into the corn patch. Hopefully, he/she won't come back again anytime soon. He had made a cache for the chicken right there under the deck. The snake will more than likely try again. The joys of being a chicken rancher.

That's what's been going on in my back yard.

Photos by Lynn Fleming



Leaf and flower Printing

Hapa Zome

Nature Craft

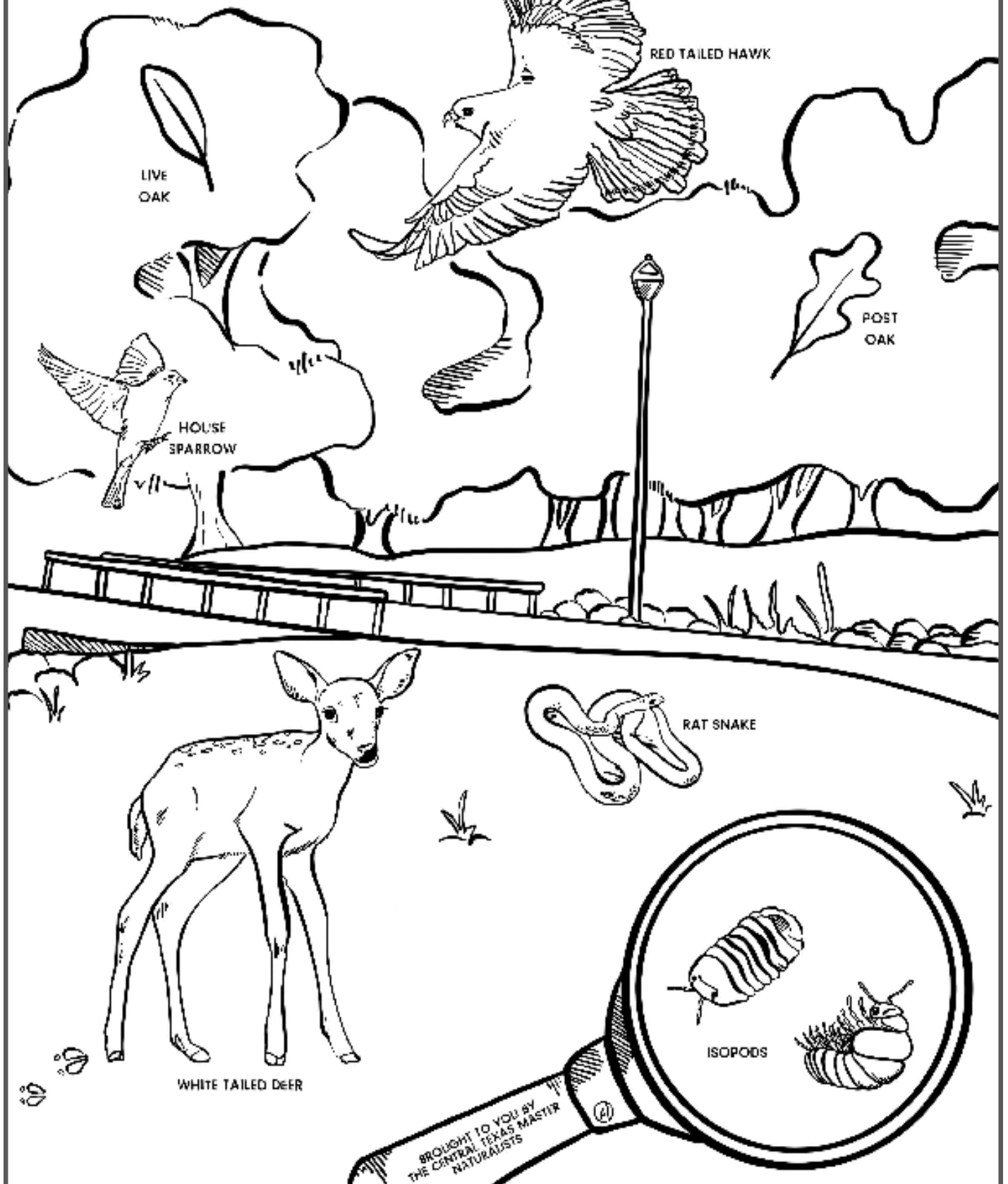


Grab some summer wildflowers (or yard flowers) and green leaves for a fabric dyeing craft using a smooth stone to transfer the natural pigments from plants to fabric or paper.

[Click here for the How To Do It!](#)

Hapa Zome is pronounced “hah-pah zoh-may” and is the Japanese art of leaf dyeing.

LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT WHO IS LIVING IN PURSER PARK



Good to Know...



August 2024
Speaker Series

#TMNTuesdays

Texas Master Naturalist
Galveston Bay Area Chapter
&
John O'Connell,
Brazoria County Extension Agent

presents

**"Plastic Free July:
A Project Highlight"**

August 13, 12pm CT



Tuesday, Aug 13 -Noon

John will share how the **Texas Monofilament Recovery & Recycling Program** got started, what the coastal TMN chapter is doing and how others can get involved in their local waterways with collecting monofilament fishing lines. Used line can be harmful to marine wildlife and boat motors. Birds and animals cannot see discarded monofilament fishing line, so it is easy for them to become tangled in it and starve, drown or lose a limb. There will also be info on Beach Cleanup Events.

[REGISTER HERE](#)

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](#).

MYCOLOGY
101 ALL MUSHROOMS ARE MAGIC

CENTRAL TEXAS MYCOLOGICAL SOCIETY
with Angel Schatz

9.18 ♦ 12 pm ♦ Dripping Springs
Register at CentralTexasMycology.org

Join Angel Schatz for a **FREE** class to learn the basics of mycology and how fungi is entangled in all parts of our life. She will cover some basics on mushroom identification, how fungi benefits our entire ecosystem, our health and more. You will also see lots of photos of beautiful mushrooms that grow in Central Texas: our wood-wide-web.

We will be bringing mushroom grow blocks to upcycle for everyone in attendance. [Learn about them here](#)

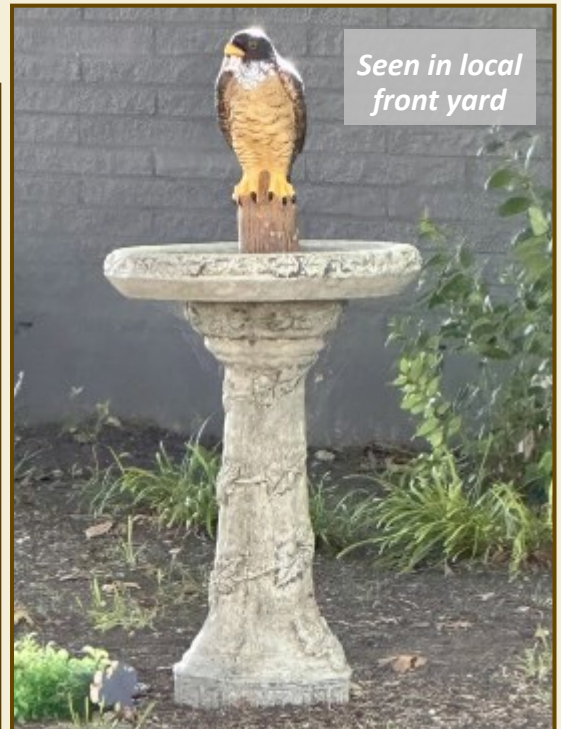
RSVP online First come first serve

More Good to Know...

How to attract backyard birds

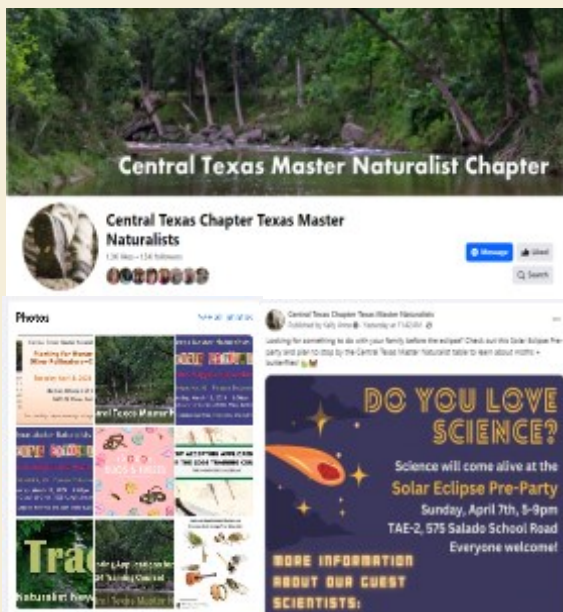
- **Provide water year-round:** Start with a birdbath. Change water every 2-3 days in the summer and winter.
- **Use native plants:** use a [variety of plants](#) for year-round food as seeds, berries, nuts and nectar.
- **Eliminate insecticides:** insects are the primary food for many birds, especially juveniles.
- **Keep dead trees and limbs:** these provide cavity-dwelling homes for nests and a source for insect food.
- **Remove invasive plants:** invasives can out-compete the native plants needed by birds, insects & wildlife.
- **Build a brush pile:** larger logs on the bottom and smaller branches on top. Birds will hunt, roost & nest in the protective space in a corner of your yard.
- **Nesting boxes and bird houses:** [click for help](#) sorting through the many options and how to care for them.

www.Austin.com



How NOT to attract backyard birds

A bird of prey sitting in your birdbath will likely be a deterrent for a LOT of wildlife!



Did you know we have a Facebook page? We have over 1,500 people who follow our page! A team of members 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](#).

Contributing Authors to this Newsletter



Carroll Adcock



John Burns



Zoe Rascoe



Juan Anaya



Kelly Thornborrow



Danny Welch



Jim Wade



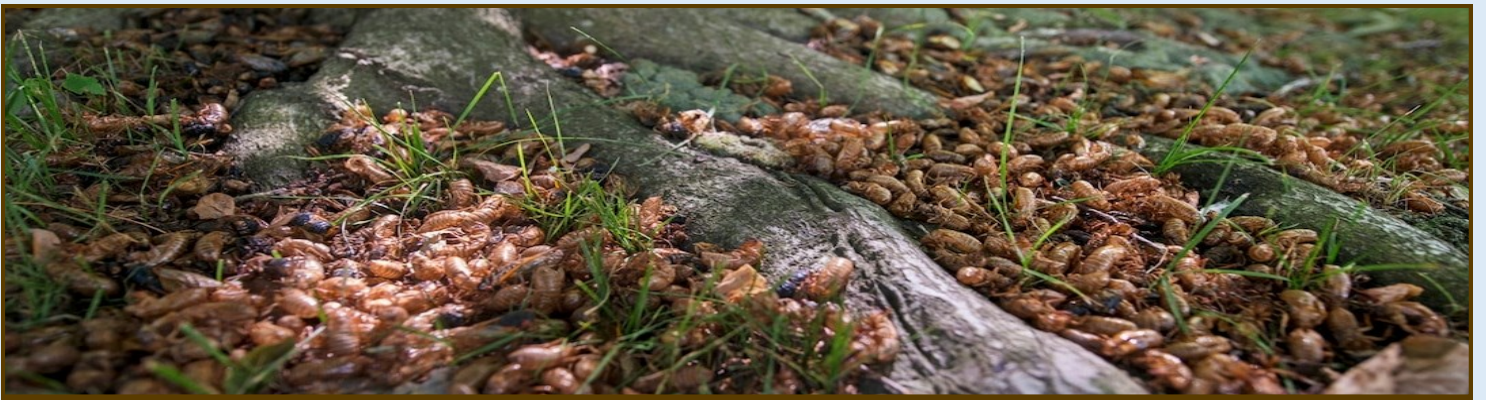
John Fairlie



Liz Kehn



Lynn Fleming and friend



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2024 Cicada swarm—Nat Geo

Editor: Zoe Rascoe

Contributing Writers: Carroll Adcock, Juan Anaya, John Burns, Danny Welch, Kelly Thornborrow, Jim Wade, Liz Kehn, John Fairlie, Lynn Fleming, Zoe Rascoe.

Contributed Images: Carroll Adcock, John Burns, Kelly Thornborrow, Carol Smith, Liz Kehn, Juan Anaya, John Fairlie, Zoe Rascoe. Apologies if I didn't know I had your photo.

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

Zoe Rascoe

zoe.rascoe@gmail.com

STAY COOL!!



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.