

The Tracker

Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter October 2024

Miller Springs Nature Center Fall Guided Hike

The Vintage Christian Academy (VCA) in Harker Heights added the Outdoor Education Enrichment Program to their curriculum in the 2023/2024 school year. Since then, Central Texas Master Naturalist members have provided nature classes at the school for Pre-Kindergarten through 8th grade each month. The Bell County Master Gardeners, 4-H Club, and a Bell County Extension Agent teach other outdoor topics, such as vegetable gardening and animal husbandry.



On October 3rd, eight Master Naturalists led 65 students from VCA, divided into groups, on a nature hike at Miller Springs Nature Center (MSNC). Our chapter considers MSNC a perfect place to get people out in Nature due to the diversity of ecosystems within the park and the proximity within the city limits of Temple and Belton. The Master Naturalists guides were (L to R) May Ann Everett, Lynn Fleming, Kelly Taylor, PJ Hill, Ellen O'Neil, Carol Smith, Stan Simons and John

Brushaber (not pictured).

The children were excited and appreciative to be outdoors on such a beautiful day. My group found plenty of caterpillars, butterflies and other insects. When Stan asked the first graders in his group what their favorite bird was, most of them said Blue Jay. One little boy said his favorite bird was the falcon because it eats other birds. He spent much of the hike giving Stan falcon facts. One student spotted a camouflaged Texas Spiny Lizard clinging to the trunk of an oak tree, which was perfect considering our November class will be about reptiles.



Carol Smith, 2023



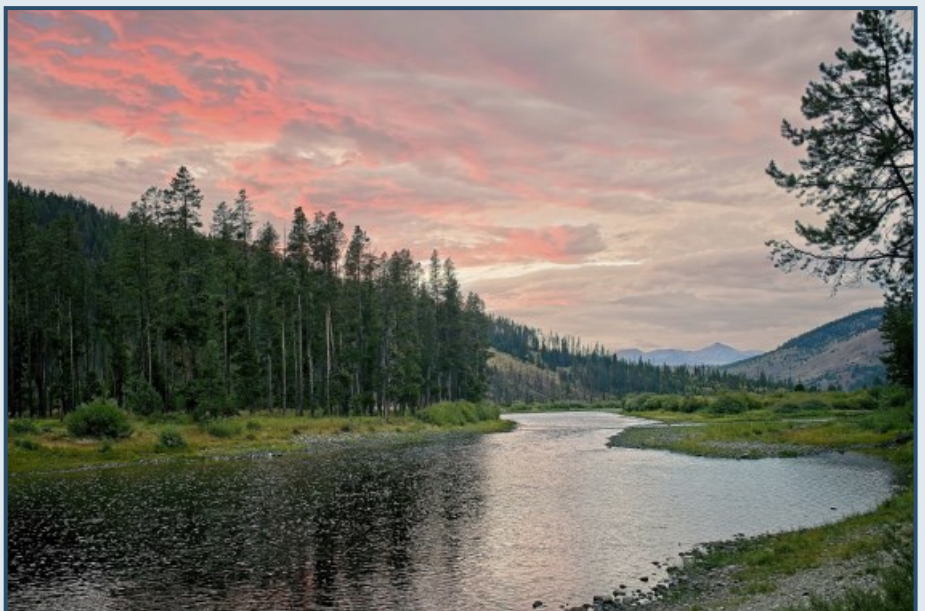
President's Pen

Carroll Adcock, 2020

Six Rivers and an Elk Hunt

The morning of August 9 dawned as my son and I pulled onto Highway 36 north of Temple. The long-awaited fishing trip to Colorado, Idaho and Montana had finally arrived, to be followed by a 5-day elk hunt in the Blackfoot Mountains of Idaho. We arrived in Trinidad, Colorado that evening and pulled the Sportsman van into the local Walmart "KOA" for a few hours' sleep. It was a restless night in anticipation of our first day of fly fishing, and the local thunderstorms didn't help. After a pretty much fruitless day of casting into the muddied waters of Cochetopa Creek (north of Saguache) the following day, and then discovering our secondary target of the Roaring Fork River was blown out from the overnight rains we decided to point the van on up into Montana.

After a stop at the local fly shop in Darby, MT and a less than promising fishing report, we stepped into the rippling waters of the freestone Bitterroot River. Unfortunately, due to the recent heat and somewhat low water levels, the fishing was not as we had experienced in years past. The slow fishing was also complicated by the local "Hoot Owl" regulations....no fishing after 2:00 PM to avoid stressing the fish. We fished



the West and East forks of the river with an occasional hook-up, mainly on nymphs. After two days we decided to move on over to the Big Hole River and hoped for better fishing. The setting of the BLM campground on the banks of the river was spectacular and we were treated to sightings of sandhill cranes, Western wood-pewees, pileated woodpecker, bald eagles and 2 spectacular sunsets. Two hard days of fishing resulted in a handful of trout, including a sizable brown trout caught by my son.

Cont.

Next stop, the Wise and Beaverhead Rivers with mixed results, scant fish for me and better results for my son who was able to ford the river where I was not and he found better fishing about a half mile downstream. Two days later, on down the road to near Ashton, Idaho and the pristine Warm River, where we told the fishing should be “fantastic”. It was not. The campground and river setting were beautiful, the Warm River was the coldest water we encountered; it is a short 35-mile-long spring-fed river that never ices up. We visited the nearby Upper and Lower Mesa falls on the storied Henry’s Fork of the Snake River and they were incredible to witness. The upper falls plummet about 114 feet, are 300 feet wide and average a flow of about a half million gallons per day.



The final fishing destination prior was on the Snake River near Swan Valley and Fall Creek. The Snake is a magnificent river, and the nearby falls are much smaller but magnificent, especially with the backdrop of the Snake River and its many braids. I finally found a bit of dry fly action and picked up a few Snake River fine-spotted cutthroats, a part of the Yellowstone Cutthroat subspecies. While our fishing was not all we had hoped for, it is my belief “that God does not deduct from man’s allotted span the hours spent fishing”, Anonymous.

Finally, after 10 days of fishing we checked in for our elk hunt in the Blackfoot mountain range in eastern Idaho where we each were successful in harvesting mature bull elk. We observed several beautiful bull elk as well as moose and bison and saw no bears but found bear scat! The Blackfoot range reminds me of portions of Yellowstone with its relatively contoured hills and mixed conifers and aspen groves. If you have never had



the privilege of visiting Montana and Idaho, I strongly recommend that you do if given the opportunity. Public access to so much forest and streams and the thousands of acres of ripening wheat fields were spectacular.

“Many go fishing all their lives without knowing that it is not fish they are after”. Henry David Thoreau



Upcoming Chapter Events

Central Texas Master Naturalists Presents Lights Out: Safer Skies for Migrating Birds

Dr. Tania Homayoun
TPWD Statewide Ornithologist

Tuesday, October 8, 2024 6:00pm
Belton Church of Christ
3003 N. Main ST



Our monthly chapter meetings are open to the public!



NATURE AT NIGHT

Join us to learn about some of the animals that creep in the night

6:30-9:00pm

Friday, October 25th 2024

@ Bird, Bee, Butterfly, & Bat Garden
1941 Rod & Gun Club Loop, Fort Cavazos 76544

nature themed crafts,
nocturnal animal costume
contest nature bingo, face
painting, and more!



“Nature at Night” with our AIM friends at Fort Cavazos will be similar to our past Moth Night events. **Master Naturalist volunteers are needed** to help with the moth sheet, facepainting, nature-themed crafts and games, including nature bingo. There will also be a nocturnal animal costume contest for attendees!

Contact Kelly Thornborrow if you can help!

kellyathornborrow@gmail.com

Upcoming Chapter Events



TPWD 2024 Pollinator BioBlitz—Planting for Pollinators

This statewide event is for everyone!!

Pollinators such as butterflies, native bees, moths, beetles, and other species are in decline and need our help. Planting pollinator gardens will help pollinators thrive, so we wanted to share some native plant resources before we kick off the [9th Annual Texas Pollinator BioBlitz](#) next week. That link will take you to events, registration and how to participate as an individual or as an organization.

Who doesn't have a bunch of moths in bushes and butterflies on their flowering plants right now?? The TPWD BioBlitz website offers Challenges such as looking for brightly colored pollinators one day and a red plant or red pollinator the next day.

Note that Oct 14-30, HEB Stores statewide will offer a variety of native plants during their Texas Native Plant Celebration!

Year-round Opportunities to Buy Native Plants

If you are wanting to buy native plants, here are two great resources to help you find local suppliers:

Native Plant Society of Texas' [NICE/Native Plant Partners](#) offers a list of local nurseries that offer native plants.

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center shares an updated [directory of businesses](#) around the state that sell native plants or seeds and provide professional landscape or consulting services.

Upcoming Chapter Events



Native Plant Sale—Leander
Saturday, November 2, 11am–2pm
Southwest Williamson County Regional Park

NPSOT-WILLIAMSON COUNTY CHAPTER
Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT-Wilco)

Save The Date!

**23RD ANNUAL
BELL COUNTY
WATER SYMPOSIUM**

NOVEMBER 13, 2024

8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

(Pre-registration Required)

Location:

Cadence Bank Center - Assembly Hall
301 W Loop 121
Belton, TX



Advanced Training opportunity for Master Naturalists on very important water topics. Attend all or some of the sessions.

Volunteer Service hours are also available to chapter members by helping staff the CTMN booth at the symposium.

Attendees, including volunteers, need to register for the FREE event with tsmith@cuwcd.org

If you would like to volunteer at our chapter booth, please email Zoe.Rascoe@gmail.com

CHAPTER MEETINGS

- **Kim Tompkins, 2023**

Birds Do It; Bees Do It: Animal Mating Behaviors

The lengths some species will go to ensure their genetic legacy can be... a bit extreme. Dr. Laura Weiser-Erlandson, professor of Biology at Texas A&M Central Texas, points this out in her August



presentation “Birds Do It; Bees Do It”. In a figurative war of the sexes that plays out in the animal kingdom, the female of the species generally comes out on top.

One of the primary reasons females get priority in genetic investment is

due to the amount of energy needed for eggs and generally, their pick of the males. Most of us are familiar with the female praying mantis consuming her male counterpart after mating. From an evolutionary standpoint, it’s one way to engage the female after mating to ensure other males don’t get a chance. In this case, the male also provides nutrients for the female to help support the development and survival of her offspring. The mantis example is gruesome, but there’s worse.

In a scenario you’d never think exists outside of a David Cronenberg film, the anglerfish male takes clinginess to a new level by attaching himself to the female after mating. Over time, the male permanently fuses himself with the female’s tissue, becoming absorbed. It brings new meaning to “attached at the hip”.

Not all of the unusual animal mating behaviors that Dr. Weiser-Erlandson Shared are so gloomy. Within the animal kingdom is a phenomenon known as *nuptial gift-giving*. A male Japanese puffer fish may sculpt in sand a beautifully patterned display on the seabed floor for his potential mate. Bowerbirds create elaborate structures, aptly named bowers, that include colored bits of plastic, feathers, shells, leaves, glass, and anything to add visual appeal to their nests. Some species engage in sabotage and mimicry to fool other males and snatch the female's attention, distracting from their carefully crafted displays.



All of these are to prove the skill, prowess, and fitness of the male suitor. Birds Do It; Bees Do It talk was one of the most fascinating (and entertaining, too) presentations to shed light on these unusual behaviors. Look for Dr. Weiser-Erlandson in the Central Texas Master Naturalist class of 2025!

MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

6000 Hours!



Zoe Rascoe (2004) reached her lifetime milestone of 6000 volunteer service hours!



Ellen O'Neil (2024) receives her Initial Certification



Liz Kehn (2024) reaches her goal of Double Certification!



Jen Sugars (2024) reaches Double Certification!

MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



April Hignojos (2023), Bill Abright (2016), Cassie Castillo (2022) and Guy Fowler (2021) recertify for 2024



Sharon Schmitz (2020), Jessica Dieter (2019), and Juan Anaya (2018) recertify for 2024.

MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



**John Burns (2018) and Larry Turner (2021)
receive their 2024 recertification.
(don't they look happy!?)**



**Tina Atkins and John Atkins, both class of 2016,
receive their 2024 recertification.**



**Lynn Williams (2014), Wade Matthews (2015),
and Zoe Rascoe (2004) receive their 2024 recertification**

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.



Mother Neff State Park

1680 TX Hwy-236, Moody

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

Soil Solarization Project at HQ

Message from headquarters: Melissa (code name Ranger) ...Juan, your assignment, if you choose to accept it, assemble a team that can achieve total annihilation of a given target with no quarter given. OK ,a little dramatic or, as an adopted grandkid would say, “you being vewwy amatic!” OK back to reality.

In early August, a team consisting of Mary Ann Everett, Mark and Luzette Berry, Lane Smith, Diane Ready, Jenn Sugars, Kelly Taylor, Danny Welch and myself started a project at the MNSP office. The process is called soil solarization. This is a non-chemical method that uses the sun’s heat to kill weeds and pests and improve soil health. A clear plastic tarp is placed over a plot to trap heat and moisture, basically cooking everything underneath. It usually takes four to six weeks in the heat of summer, longer as the days get shorter. After the process is complete, more desirable grasses and plants can be sown such as a pollinator garden. Be looking for a call for volunteers when it is planting time!



Luzette Berry, Mark Berry and a person with a hat secure plastic for the big kill project.

Girl Scouts Love State Parks Program

On September 14th, local Girl Scouts paid a visit to Mother Neff State Park as part of an initiative to get scouts out in our amazing State Parks. Once they arrived, they were greeted by MNSP staff, the Leon River Dutch Oven Gang and our Central Texas Master Naturalists. The girls were

Cont.

Mother Neff State Park *Cont.*



treated to several activities including geocaching by Ron Willis, with Master Naturalist guided hikes by Danny Welch, bird talks at the bird blind by yours truly, and building bird feeders with Carol Smith and her granddaughter Naomi. The Girl Scouts, parents, and scout masters were excited for this to become an annual event as it was in the past. We can make that happen!

UPCOMING EVENTS

NEXT MOTHER NEFF WORKDAY: Wednesday, October 23rd, 8:30-10:30am

MNSP needs our help at these upcoming events! Please contact Juan to volunteer.

Dean Holland Field Trip 10/18 8:30am-1:00pm

Stations to be covered plus hiking guide assistants.



Mother Neff SP Fall Fest 11/02 10am-2pm (set-up 8:30-9:30am)

Help with guided hikes, office help, Leave No Trace, parking assistance & table activities.

Usually the largest event of the year!

A Mother Neff Christmas 12/07 10am-2pm (set-up 8:30-9:30am)

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



Ellen O'Neil here with an update on Millers Springs. A robust group turned out for the cool-ish Thursday morning work group and enjoyed a Trash Tour of the Trails.

Attendees included (below, L to R) Lysa Liem, Bae Liem, Diane Ready, Celeste Loska, Myles Liem, John Burns, Keller Matthews and me and Jenn Sugars out of the photo. We walked over four miles from the Nature Center parking lot, along the North Trail, across the spillway to Green Pond, and across the prairie to the historic bridge at the south end of the park. Along the way, trash was gathered, tales were told, and limbs were trimmed. There were numerous casualties (invasive ligustrums). The return trip via the old-growth forests along the South River Loop was shady and awe-inspiring.

Notes were taken and goals were set for future workdays. Tasks identified were continued removal of invasive species (ligustrum, nandina, vitex), removal of a few trees that are precariously hanging over the trails



due to storm damage, improving one trail area through a muddy spot by adding some stepping stones, and repair and re-installing a wooden bench place by our chapter in 2019.

We look forward to cooler days and bigger groups for workdays this fall. Our next workday is planned for Thursday, October 10th and we will focus on invasives removal. We can't let the last several years of work slip away! The November workday is tentatively scheduled for Thursday, November 14.

We hope to see you there!



Miller Springs Nature Center *cont.*

Miller Springs Community Volunteer Day

As they have done for several years, Belton Parks and Recreation Department organized a Community Volunteer Day at Miller Springs Nature Center on Saturday, August 24th. I attended as a representative from our chapter.

There was a good turnout with thirty-eight people from the community, and people of all ages including a 4 year old on his bicycle who was very focused on picking up trash.

In only one and one-half hours, ten pounds of trash and over 600 pounds of brush, old pallets, and old T-posts was collected. The brush was continued clean up from storm damage in May this year. Isn't it amazing what can be accomplished when many people are working together!?

I was with a group that spotted a beautiful coral snake in the woods which some people recognized, and others did not. I also helped with plant identifications as we hiked. Some of the comments I heard during the morning included "This place is great!", "Let's come back here and bring Daddy!" and "What a beautiful view of the canyon!". Miller Springs Nature Center is a fantastic resource available for public use, and as Master Naturalists, we should be proud to be able to contribute.



Lark Sparrow near parking lot by Ellen O'Neil



WILDLIFE SURVEYS

TPWD ADOPT-A-LOOP



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

We just finished up our last round of wildlife surveys on September 18, covering our eight sites in ten 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 Diane Barnes, Mark Berry, Sue Bertoleit-Valdez, Charles Capen, Cassie Castillo, John and Linda Fairlie, Ellen O'Neil, Kelly Taylor, Butch (David) Vesely, and Danny Walsh.

To give you an idea of what variety of birds we are able to identify, here is what we found present at Belton Lakeview Park (the smallest of our eight sites) on September 16: there were 25 species in total, including 9 Mallard (domestic type), 6 White-winged Dove, one Mourning Dove, 4 Black Vulture, 6 Turkey Vulture, 3 Red-shouldered Hawk, 2 Red-bellied



Hackberry Emperor by Ellen O'Neil

Woodpecker, one Downy Woodpecker, 2 Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, numerous White-eyed Vireo, one Yellow-throated Vireo, 4 Blue Jay, 2 American Crow, at least 10 Carolina Chickadee, one House Wren, 4 Carolina Wren, 3 Bewick's Wren, 8 Northern Mockingbird, 4 Eastern Bluebird, 2 American Robin, one House Sparrow, 7 House Finch, 1 Lesser Goldfinch, one Red-winged Blackbird and 9 Northern Cardinal.

Cont.



Danny Welch, Kelly Taylor, Cassie Castillo, Sue Valdez, Linda Fairlie, Ellen O'Neil, John Fairlie

GTWT ADOPT-A-LOOP PROJECT *cont.*

Our next round of wildlife surveys will be in January. They 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 are able. 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. See you in January!



Garden Spider by Ellen O'Neil



Ellen O'Neil, Danny Welch, Diane Ready, Cassie Castillo, Sue Valdez



Walnut Sphinx Moth Caterpillar



Diane Ready, Kelly Taylor, Danny Welch, Sue Valdez

SPOTLIGHT

CENTRAL TEXAS STREAM TEAM

I credit my grandfather with gifting to me at an early age a deep appreciation and love for wilderness and pristine mountain waters. In my earliest memories, my grandfather worked for the US Forest Service on the Gila National Forest and the Gila Wilderness near Silver City, NM. Later during my teen years, he worked at the Santa Fe National Forest and the Pecos Wilderness near Pecos, NM.

The headwaters of the Gila River arise in the rugged mountains of the Gila Wilderness. Likewise, the headwaters of the Pecos River arise in the pristine mountains of the Pecos Wilderness. I spent many wondrous summers hiking, fishing and horseback riding up and down the headwaters of both rivers. These extraordinary adventures gave me an early and deep appreciation for the beauty and value of pristine mountain waters.



Also growing up in Brownwood TX, I was able to achieve the rank of Eagle Scout in a very active scout troop. After several summer camp terms with my troop, I worked one summer as the canoe instructor for the full camp. Water activities at the camp were conducted on a

remote stretch of Brady Creek. (No fancy concrete ponds here!) Brady Creek arises near Eden, TX in west Texas and meanders east for 90 miles across central Texas joining the San Saba River near San Saba, TX before it pours into the Colorado River. This was a treasured introduction for me to magical and historic Texas waters.

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All these idyllic river adventures from childhood led naturally to my delight today in monitoring and helping to protect local waters for the benefit of future generations. I am forever grateful to CTMN for these volunteer opportunities and the special bonds enjoyed with fellow Stream Teamers.

My training and recognition for citizen science water monitoring include Standard Core training, Advanced Water Testing training, Riparian Evaluation training, Texas Waters Specialist designation, and my most treasured Central Texas Stream Team Silver Otter and Gold Otter medals.



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 water information we gather for the state. *No experience required.*

1st Monday: Leon River @ Heritage Park

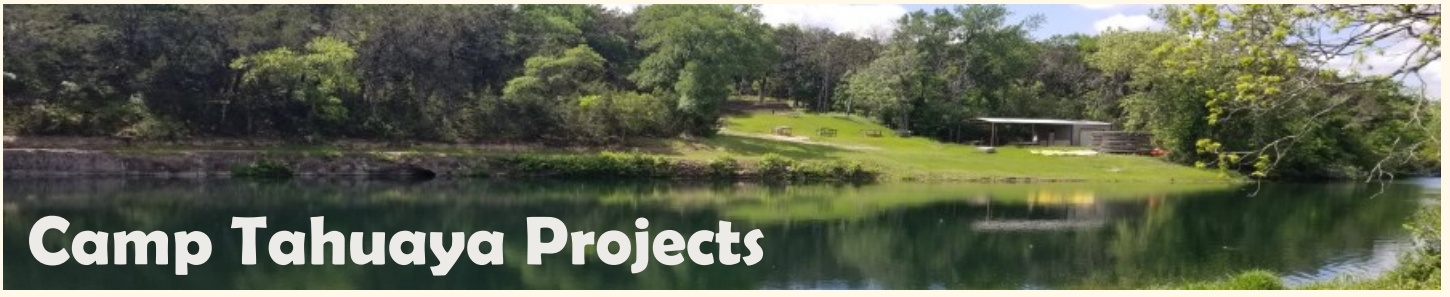
1st Tuesday: Salado Creek @ Sirena Park

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



Camp Tahuaya Projects

Photo by Lysa Liem

- Keller Matthews, 2021

Camp Tahuaya is a beehive of activity as Emerson Construction hustles to help Scouting achieve their grand opening before the end of the month; it's going to be close.

Finishing touches are being applied to a new gated entrance, to resurfacing the main road, to erecting several more Australian Outback-style glamping tents, and the pavilion overlooking the lake.



The lead engineer reports that renovation of the spring area is slow due to a TPWD-required

environmental study of the sensitive habitat. The \$300,000 grant has been approved; I will meet with him soon for a status report.

Efforts for this fall will resume when the mornings are reliably cooler, and will include grooming the trails we have started on. Treefall from high winds undid some of our clearing efforts, and the newest section still needs leveling and rock removal. Kelly Taylor and I are making slow progress

on a pilot project demonstrating the utility of QR codes for nature education. Anyone interested in helping us with that computer-based project, please contact me. Soon!

kellbiker@gmail.com

or 254-718-8910



Grown by Thorns

- Kelly Thornborrow, 2023

How to Make an Anthotype

Have you ever heard of the process called anthotyping or sometimes also referred to as nature printing or ecoprinting? Anthotypes are made by exposing a light sensitive material like paper or fabric to create a positive image. One way to do this is placing plants on light sensitive material, exposing them to the sun, and then treating the material to further develop the image. My favorite pigment to use is turmeric. Here's what you need to try anthotyping yourself:

Tumeric	Jar or cup	Piece of glass or acrylic sheet
70% isopropyl alcohol	Paint brush	Watercolor paper or cardstock
Coffee filter	Borax	Leaves or flowers

The first step of making your own anthotype is to create an emulsion to make your material light sensitive. This is done by mixing rubbing alcohol with your pigment, in this case turmeric. I use a coffee filter to keep the spice grains from getting into the solution. If you mix your rubbing alcohol and turmeric together directly, it will make your print dusty and it can be both a mess and frustrating to clean up. To avoid this, set



up your coffee filter in a jar or cup and pour a few tablespoons of turmeric inside of your filter. Then pour your rubbing alcohol directly over the turmeric into the coffee filter, so the liquid filters through the turmeric and drips into your container. The ratio of rubbing alcohol to turmeric isn't important but more rubbing alcohol will make more of the photosensitive solution.

After filtering the turmeric and rubbing alcohol solution it will be a very bright, canary yellow color. This solution can be applied to the material on which you would like to print your anthotype. I recommend using watercolor or mixed media art paper as these materials will be easier to saturate with your solution without the paper falling apart. However, cardstock will work better than standard printer paper if you do not have any art paper. Using a paint brush with the solution, evenly cover the area you would like for your print and set aside to dry out of direct sunlight.

Cont.

Grown by Thorns *cont.*

When your material has dried, you can prepare the anotype print using leaves and flowers. Both pressed plants and fresher plants will work. Create a design with your plants placed over the solution-treated area on your material, then you are ready to expose it to the sun. To protect your design from being disturbed by wind, place your piece of glass directly over the design. For larger designs I use a big piece of clear acrylic instead of a glass. Once your design is secure, place it outside in an area of direct sunlight. Depending on how sunny it is, this process may take an hour or so. You know that your print is ready for the last step when the areas not covered by your leaves/flowers have lightened from the canary yellow color to a near white shade.



At this point, remove glass and plants from the material.

You should see the original bright yellow color remains. The last step in this process will further develop the details of your print. To make the developer you will need another cup, borax, and water. In your cup, add two to three tablespoons of borax and mix it until it has dissolved a bit. The water solution will look milky. Pour this solution over your print, ensuring any bright yellow parts are rinsed with the borax solution. The process is working when the yellow parts turn to a darker brown. This will typically happen as soon as the borax water makes contact. Once the material of your print has been fully treated with borax water, set your print to dry out of direct light.

Once dried, you will have your very own anotype! Note that the image is not permanently fixed and will still have some light sensitivity. It is best to keep them out of direct light.

Other pigments besides turmeric I have tried are spirulina (algae powder), carrot juice, coffee, other spices, and more. This process can also make anotypes with materials other than plants like old film, bugs, and transparencies.



You can watch a short form video of my anotype process [here](#). I share my experiments with eco-dye and other projects on Instagram as @grownbythorns.

FIELD CRICKETS

By Wizzie Brown, Senior Extension Program Specialist, Texas A&M AgriLife

Field crickets seem to be popping up in large numbers in Central Texas lately and the big question that I receive is WHY? Adults are out and about in the fall because it's mating season, and they need to mate and lay eggs before they die from old age or cold winter temperatures. Crickets overwinter as eggs in the soil.

Field crickets are about 1" long when fully grown and dark brown to black in color with large hind legs used for jumping. They also have two cerci, or appendages that come off the tip of the abdomen. Female crickets have a large sword-like structure, the ovipositor, protruding from the tip of the abdomen (see image below). The ovipositor is used to deposit eggs into soil.

Crickets feed on plant material as well as other insects. They can cause damage to seedlings and sometimes large populations can be destructive. Large masses of dead crickets around doorways or other areas can be distasteful to view and cause a foul odor.

Field crickets are primarily outdoor insects but may occasionally venture indoors. When crickets do come indoors, they may bother residents with their chirping. Males chirp to attract a mate creating the sound by rubbing their forewings together.

Cricket management is more easily accomplished in the summer when nymphs, who cannot fly, are present. Unfortunately, this usually isn't when large populations of crickets are discovered.

Before turning to pesticides to manage your cricket problems, try these ideas:

- ⇒ Turn off outside lights at night or use bulbs that are less attractive to insects
- ⇒ Seal cracks & crevices where insects can enter structures with sealant
- ⇒ Remove debris stacked near the structure
- ⇒ Keep lawn & surrounding areas mowed
- ⇒ Stuff weep holes with copper mesh

Fortunately, "cricket season" usually lasts around 4-6 weeks so they won't be here forever....until next year.

For more information or help with cricket identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at ebrown@ag.tamu.edu.



FORT PARKER STATE PARK



- Zoe Rascoe, 2004

When we got our little Casita camper from a friend in 2021 (his dog had out grown it, but ours is smaller!) we planned to take it on our continuing quest to visit all of the Texas State Parks. We have been working on the list for a number of years, as well as making it to the 63 National Parks —but not in the little Casita! We recently headed to Fort Parker State Park near Mexia, about 70 minutes NW of Temple. The park sits on a lake filled by the Navasota River and as river



bottom, there are beautiful big trees as well as wetlands in the park.



This area is a natural crossroads of Blackland Prairie and Post Oak Savannah. John Parker thought it was a great place to start a community in 1833. Turns out the Comanche and other Indian tribes thought it was a good place, too. In 1836, Fort Parker was raided by Indians and several settlers died and others were captured, including 12-year old Cynthia Ann Parker who would be the mother of the great Comanche Chief Quanah Parker. A couple of years later, the town of Springfield was established and by 1860, it was twice the population of Dallas! But it was not to last. Eventually the railroad bypassed the town as often happened in Texas, and the community fell into ruin. All that remains is a preserved cemetery with gravestones from the 1800's.

FORT PARKER STATE PARK *CONT.*

On the brighter side, there is fishing, mountain biking, hiking, canoeing, kayaking, bird-watching, swimming and cornhole, if you bring it. There are camping areas including hike-in primitive sites, to small cabins that sit on a hill above the lake. There is a recreation hall and a pavilion, both adjacent to the lakeshore. My husband's dad and aunt used



School to attend

dances at the pavilion. Pretty rough bunch in those days, I guess! Our RV spot was just a few yards from the lake and we had a gorgeous sunset over the lake both nights we were there. We also got to enjoy the September partial lunar eclipse with dark skies. We hiked the beautiful Bur Oak Trail, enjoyed the heron rookery and pelican nighttime lodging on

an island just out from our campsite.

There are kayaks and canoes that are self-dispensing with your credit card—no attendant needed. There are lots of Civilian Conservation Corps facilities at the park which we enjoyed exploring. We had a relaxing stay in nature and definitely recommend a visit to [Fort Parker!](#)



WHY DO BIRDS MIGRATE?

- Liz Kehn, 2024

Why do birds migrate?

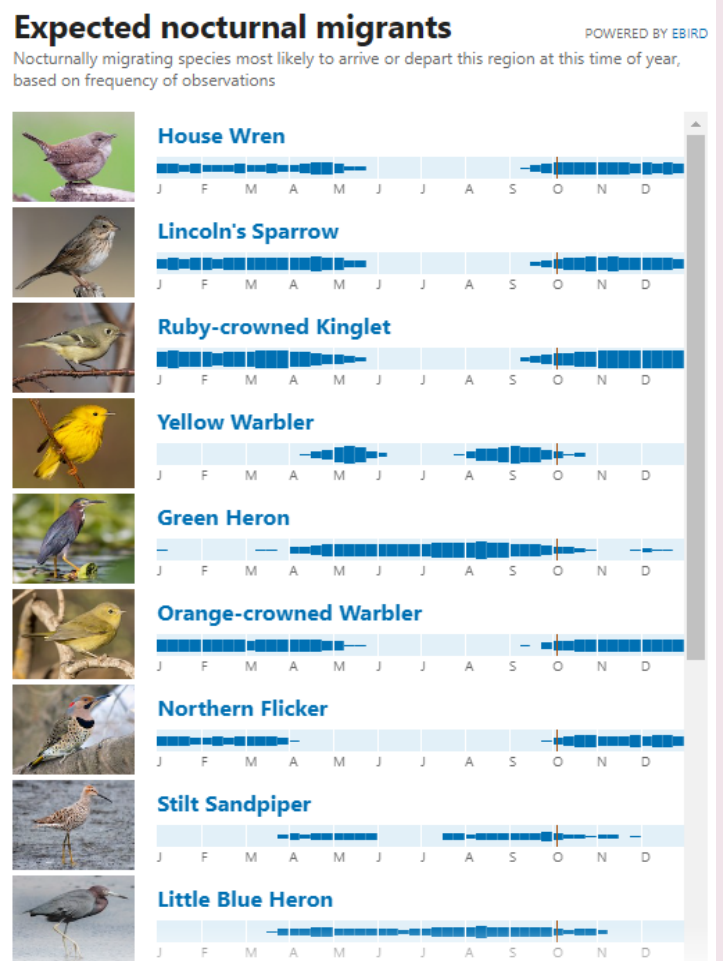
People should know that not all birds migrate. Some birds just stay in the same place all year long. A lot of birds feed on flying insects or moving insects, so they go somewhere else to find food. Migration is almost always about finding food. It's not to get out of the cold because birds can survive cold. But there are certain inhospitable places that they need to leave.

What prompts birds to start migrating?

The thing that starts bird migration usually is a change in daylight, and what that does is starts this sort of proximate mechanism that gets the birds brains changing, different hormones being produced, and the birds can sense even very small changes in daylight length. There's this cool term that's in German called Zugunruhe and that means migratory restlessness.

Do adult and juvenile birds migrate together?

An interesting thing about migration is we tend to think, they just go—But they don't. The sexes do different things. And the juveniles do different things. And typically, what you see going first are the males, the breeding males of a lot of different birds leave the breeding grounds before the females or the juveniles do. And then, as a rule the adults leave first and then the juveniles leave later. And it may be they just need a longer time to fatten up to migrate.



BirdCast About Migration tools Science-to-action

Migration Dashboard Bell County, Texas Tonight, Oct 4

813,900
Birds have crossed Bell County so far tonight (est.)

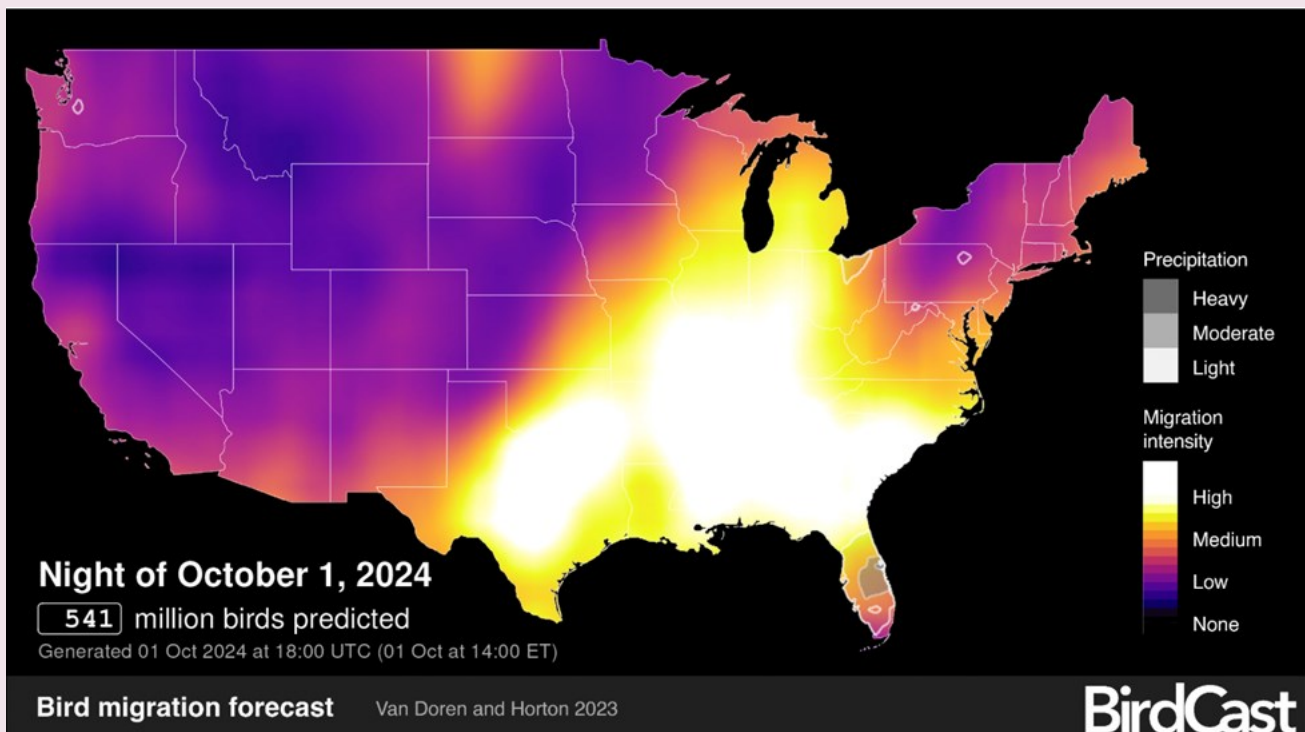
Starting: Fri, Oct 4, 2024, 7:10 PM CDT

[Learn more](#)

WHY DO BIRDS MIGRATE? CONT.

What's the best time of day to migrate

Different birds do migrate at different times of the day. A lot of people are surprised to know that the bulk of migration happens at night. One reason for this is that there are fewer predators being able to catch you at night. You can't really forage that much, so you might as well fly. A second reason, is when there's not enough light to see very well, birds can actually turn on a different sense and see the magnetic fields of the earth. And so, they can tell north and south, because they can see the magnetic fields which allows them to use their magnetic sense to detect north and south.



How can people help migrating birds?

Hummingbirds really like hummingbird feeders but you won't make them stop migrating. The hummers will use it as a source of cheap energy that they can put on and help them along their way. Suet for some of the other birds is good. The other thing to do to help birds along during their migration is to turn off your lights at night. That's a big one. Of course, this really plays out in the cities. There are programs that are trying to encourage big cities to cut down on their light usage during peak migration time because birds get confused. And so, turn off your lights at night, plant native plants, and put up a hummingbird feeder. These are just a few tangible things that people can do for birds during migration.

T E X A S



let's learn about **LUNA MOTHS**

DID YOU KNOW...
ADULT LUNA MOTHS DO
NOT HAVE A MOUTH!
they only eat as caterpillars.



CATERPILLARS SPIN THEIR
COCOONS WITH LEAVES
the leaves add protection to the
cocoon while they are in
metamorphosis



LUNA MOTHS SPIN
THEIR WING TAILS TO
CONFUSE PREDATORS
the confusion helps them escape
from being a snack for other
animals like bats.



these are one day old
caterpillars that are
smaller than a grain of
rice.

By Kelly Thornborrow, 2023

Good to Know...



October 2024
Speaker Series

#TMNTuesdays

**TMN State
Program Office**

presents

“Chapter Project Fair”

**October 8,
11:30am - 1:30pm CT**



Tuesday, Oct 8th

Chapters who have a project entry for the Annual Meeting contest will be presenting details on their work. Master Naturalists will get AT hours for any portion they watch. [Click here for a list](#) of the projects that will be covered in the webinar (scroll to October). CTMN hopes to have a project entry for 2025!

REGISTER HERE

On the second Tuesday of each month usually 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](#).

ONLINE

From the Field, To the Lab

Grow the skills necessary for wild mushroom foraging and cultivation.

with Jacob DeVecchio from OK Fungi

10.8.24 ♦ 7 PM CST ♦ Online
Register at CentralTexasMycology.org

The fundamentals of mushroom foraging, including essential gear and safety precautions for collecting mushrooms. Students will also learn professional identification techniques, and use of field guides. For edible mushrooms, the course will further explore tissue sampling techniques for cultivation. Participants will have acquired practical and hands-on professional knowledge to safely forage and cultivate the same genetics they collect in the field.

Register Free! (donations accepted)

More Good to Know...



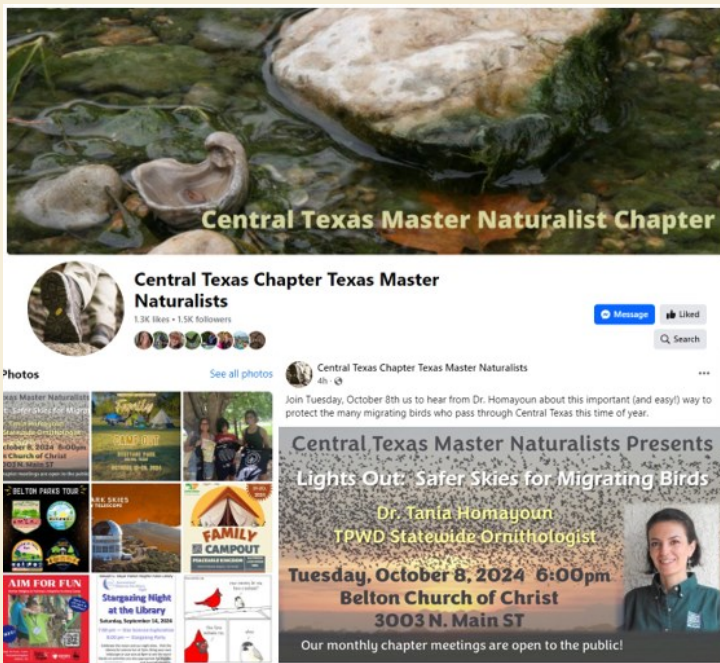
MARK YOUR CALENDAR! Volunteer Service hours for Master Naturalists and contributing to scientific understanding for everyone!

October Big Day is an opportunity to unite around our shared love of birds. It's also a chance to celebrate [Global Bird Weekend](#) and [World Migratory Bird Day](#). It's important to contribute to participatory science, enjoy nature, and connect with a global community of bird lovers.

Participating is easy with these steps:

- 1. Get an eBird account:** eBird is a worldwide bird checklist program used by millions of birders. It's what allows us to compile everyone's contributions into a single massive October Big Day list—while at the same time gathering data to help scientists better understand birds. [Sign up here](#). It's 100% free from start to finish.
- 2. Watch birds on 12 Oct:** It's that simple. You don't need to be a bird expert or go out all day long, even 10 minutes of birding from home counts. October Big Day runs from midnight to midnight in your local time zone. You can report what you find from anywhere in the world.
- 3. Enter what you see and hear in eBird:** You can enter your observations [via our website](#) or download the [free eBird Mobile app](#) to make submitting lists even easier. Please enter your checklists no later than 15 Oct to be included in the results announcement.
- 4. Watch the results roll in:** During the day, follow along with bird reports from more than 180 countries in real-time on the [October Big Day page](#).

Even More Good to Know...



Did you know we have a Facebook page? We have over 1,500 folks and groups 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 very descriptive, but overly long, name of [Central Texas Chapter Texas Master Naturalists.](#)

Members are going to be seeing this line up at meetings. It’s the Clipboard Gauntlet. (better known as the Sign-up Table in the Back). We are doing 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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Go Find Fall Color!



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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



Creede, CO Sept 24, 2024 by Terry Rascoe

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.