



# Los Caminos

*Celebrating and sharing our experiences along "the roads" we take through nature.*

Award Winning Newsletter of the El Camino Real Chapter  
Milam County Texas Master Naturalist Spring 2016

The Texas Master Naturalist program activities are coordinated by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and Texas Parks and Wildlife. Texas Master Naturalist and Extension programs serve all people regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability or national origin.

## Sweet Shenanigans by Sheri Sweet

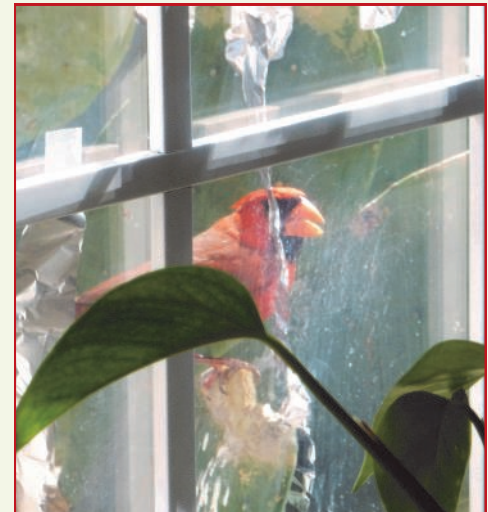
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### How to Foil a Cardinal!

For months now, we've had this crazy male Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) whamming himself against our windows and the mirror on Wes' truck. And, of course, every time he whams the window or mirror, he proceeds to knock the poop out of himself! And it, too, goes all over the windows, mirror, and truck! And THAT infuriates Wes!

You have seen male Cardinals - beautiful, bright, red feathers, a red crest, a black chin and a little black across above its beak, and a few darker red feathers in its wings. The female is a very pretty bird, also. She also has a reddish crest, but is more buff-colored with a lighter tummy. Both have red-orange conical beaks and are about 7  $\frac{3}{4}$ " long.



Cardinals are most often seen in pairs - male with a female. However, each Spring, we have 7 to 10 pairs of them for a while. They feed on seeds, fruit, and insect larvae. They will also frequent seed feeders.

A pair built a nest in one of our rose bushes close to the house a couple of years ago. It was fun to watch them sneak into and out of the nest, feeding the babies. Alas, I think something got the babies. They didn't have enough feathers to have fledged and they disappeared.

Cardinals have a slightly undulating flight and their habitats are woods edges, shrubs, hedgerows and gardens. They have several



### Did You Know?

What animal can change sex from male to female?  
See last page for the answer.

*(Continued on page 2)*

calls; however, the most common one sounds to me like, "Cierito, cierto, chip, chip, chip, chip". Sometimes it is just "chip, chip, chip, chip."

But now back to this one crazy, annoying creature! We have waved our arms at him - he leaves, but pretty soon he's back again, whamming himself into the window and pooping. (I know, he's fighting the other bird in the reflection!) Any movement inside the house that he sees, scares him away. The dog barks at him sometimes and he leaves, but he ALWAYS comes back! Wes will rattle the blinds on the window behind him to scare him off - but, you know? That gets old after a while!

I finally found a solution - sort of. I cut some narrow strips of aluminum foil and then taped them to the window this bird frequents the most. It worked! Peace and quiet

reigned - for a while - while the wind was blowing gently! Then came the gale-force winds - the strips blew off or tore. So I replaced them. Everything was fine until the winds stopped completely and the bird started attacking again! So THIS is how you foil a bird! But for it to really work, there has to be gentle winds 5 - 10 mph. Gale-force winds will tear off the strips! And no wind, they might as well not be there! (Probably putting up the sun-shade mesh on the windows outside would stop the Cardinal's activities, but we haven't gotten any of that yet.)

Various sources for my information include Sibley's Field Guide to Birds, Eastern North America; A Guide to Field Identification Birds of North America; and The Stokes Field Guide to the Birds of North America + our own experiences.

## Sweet Shenanigans—Part 2

By Sheri Sweet

We have an extremely citified Schnauzer. Turning a citified dog into a country dog is VERY interesting! One evening, after dark, Porsche came into my office and started watching out through the glass door. Suddenly, she started whining, barking, snorting, and clawing at the door. I turned off the inside lights and turned the outside ones on. She had an o'possum looking in the door at her! Well! Unfortunately, I didn't have my camera on me to get a picture of it for a story. Maybe another time for it.

Before bedtime, I took Porsche out (on a leash - citified dogs don't have much sense in the country). I had a spotlight with me, just in case. We were walking along when suddenly Porsche stopped and started nosing something in the lane. I spotlighted it and walked up to see what it was. Since it was a cold evening and the critter was cold, it wasn't moving very fast, so Porsche lost interest.

It was a fairly large Bullfrog (*Lithobates catsbeiana*)! We do have a small tank on our place, but it was 100 - 150 feet from where we found this Bullfrog. I haven't figured out why it was so far from the water. Porsche was ready to go back to the house, so we went quickly back. I got my camera and Wes and we dashed back to the frog. It was gone! Oh, no! I looked around a little and it had hopped into the grass beside the lane. So I was able to get some pictures of it. Since a

Bullfrog is green and the grass was green, there wasn't a lot of contrast. I decided to pick up the frog and place it back in the lane to get more pictures of it.

I don't know if you have ever picked up a frog, namely a



Bullfrog, but it was NOT what I expected! Toads are fairly dry creatures; not Bullfrogs! This thing was damp and slimy - actually, pretty gross! Yuck! The saving grace was that I did get some more good pictures of it. I was careful not to touch my camera with my slimy hand!

The American Bullfrog is an amphibious frog. It is olive green to brown with a white or yellowish tummy. It can also have mottled gray splotches on its hind legs.

The upper lip is bright green with the lower one more pale. Males have bright yellow under their necks. They live in lakes, ponds and swamps and are usually found along the edge of the water. The frog is native to the southern and eastern parts of the US and Canada. They have been introduced in South America, Central America, and Western Europe and parts of Asia. In some places they are considered invasive. In the US, the Bullfrog is harvested for its meat - frogs' legs - uh, not around our place!

The American Bullfrog has a deep, baritone, resonating call of "jug-o-rum", which resembles a mooing cow and can be heard up to a quarter mile away. I was going to say that I've never heard a Bullfrog out in our pond; however, maybe some

of the sounds I attributed to being a cow WAS the Bullfrog! Only the male has the characteristic call. This frog is the largest of all American frogs and can reach 8" or more in length and can weigh up to 1-½ pounds. I don't think the Bullfrog I picked up weighed that much, but I knew I'd picked something up!

Bullfrogs have identifiable circular ear drums on either side of their heads. Since I didn't know what frogs normally eat, I found it interesting that they are nocturnal predators. They will sit quietly and wait for prey, including almost anything that will fit in their mouths - snakes, birds, fish, mice, and insects! Who knew? Once they have prey close by, they lunge at it with their very powerful hind legs and with their mouths wide open!

The American Bullfrog is not endangered. It's population is increasing both here in the US as well as abroad in various places. Males are very territorial and will guard their area

aggressively. Females are a little larger than the males. A female bullfrog can lay up to 20,000 eggs which float in a clump on the water. They will hatch into tadpoles which will grow 4" to 6" before turning into a frog. The tadpoles can live up to 2 years as such. When they live this long as tadpoles, the resulting frog is much larger. The average life span of a bullfrog is 7 to 9 years. If you come across a group of bullfrogs, they are an "army" or a "colony"!

Since it was pretty chilly that evening, I got my pictures of the Bullfrog and we left it to continue hunting or whatever it was doing. Personally, I think it was cold and not doing much!

My sources for this article, other than personal experience, include [www.animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/amphibians/american-bullfrog/](http://www.animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/amphibians/american-bullfrog/), [www.fcps.edu/islandcreeks/ecology/bullfrog.htm](http://www.fcps.edu/islandcreeks/ecology/bullfrog.htm), and Pond Life, A Folding Pocket Guide to Familiar Plants and Animals Living in or Near Ponds, Lakes and Wetlands.

## The Floridus Milamexa Project—Exploring Plants Near The El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail by Joyce Conner



Monique Reed, photo by Linda Jo Conn

It was Saint Patrick's Day, March 17, 2016. The weather was beautiful and the first spring flowers were already in full bloom in Milam County. Eleven Texas Master Naturalists (10 from the El Camino Real chapter) met with Monique Reed at Cedar Hill Ranch, Gause, to identify some of those early spring plants. This is their story...

Even if you have not seen Monique's 662 page thesis titled "Key to the Angiosperm Flora of Brazos and Surrounding Counties", within ten minutes of meeting her, you would agree that she not only knows plants, she lives them! Monique's bio states that she "currently serves as Technical Laboratory Coordinator for the Lower Division Biology classes at Texas A&M in College Station, Texas. She is also a research associate with the A&M's Tracy Herbarium, which houses quite an assortment of plant specimens. Monique grew up in El Paso where green was a novelty. When she was only 3 years old she told everyone, 'I want to be a tree when I grow up, because trees are nicer than people!' Thwarted in this ambition, she did the next best thing and became a botanist."

**As proof, Monique sent us a picture in which we see her (on the right) examining some of her first plants fifty-one years ago.**



The Dandelion Pickers, Courtesy of Monique

Monique's passion for plants has changed little, except that now she has become one of the most treasured and knowledgeable botanists in the area. Pictured below at Cedar Hill Ranch, she immediately began identifying the common plants in the side yard.

While Master Naturalists tried to help by pointing out different plants, Monique examined everything, confirmed names, and explained particulars of each.

The following pictures are some of the many taken on that plant identification day.

The first set depicts four spiderworts (*Tradescantia sub-*

*(Continued on page 4)*

acaulis) - all found in the same location. A range of colored blossoms were found - pink, blue, violet, purple and even one a more rare white. Spiderwort plants have alternate, often long and narrow leaves. The blossoms have three petals and six stamens, which are clearly discernible in these pictures.



Spiderwort (*Tradescantia subacaulis*) 17.2016 09.50



Spiderwort (*Tradescantia subacaulis*) 2 2016 09.50



Spiderwort (*Tradescantia subacaulis*) 3 05.17.2016 09.50



Spiderwort (*Tradescantia subacaulis*) 4 2016 09.48

This knee-high toadflax (*Nuttallanthus texanus*) has its flowers loosely arranged on the upper part of the stem. The blossoms are bluish and have 5 petals that join, forming two lips. This particular blossom stem arches downward with the weight of the blossoms.



Texas Toadflax (*Nuttallanthus texanus*)

The Indian breadroot (*Pediomelum hypogaeum*) has palmate compound leaves with 5 slightly curled leaflets with white-haired margins. The many leaves nearly hide the dense, pea-like, violet flowers. The common name "breadroot" refers to the use by natives and early settlers of its tuber as a potato or flour substitute. Because similar plants can be poisonous, it is not recommended for amateurs to harvest this as a food in the wild.



Indian breadroot (*Pediomelum hypogaeum*) 2016 09.50

Cedar Hill Ranch boasts many winged elm trees (*Ulmus alata*). Here we examine the tell-tale signs on its branches - the flattened corky projections that resemble "wings." Winged elms are medium trees, growing to about 40 feet tall. The leaves are slightly hairy on their bottoms and their margins are toothed (or jagged). Its fruit ripens in spring and is



Winged elm (*Ulmus alata*) 09.17.2016 11.09

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eaten by many birds and squirrels.

Identify the violet by its 5 petaled flower - the upper 2 (usually erect) petals and side 2 petals usually all have stripes of a bright color to lead insects to the nectar inside. The fifth petal has a spur. This violet has heart-shaped leaves and its flowers are solitary on long stems. I wonder if the flowers have a violet aroma? We may have to go a-hunting again to find out.



Common blue violet (*Viola sororia*)

Down in the meadow in the bottom land, we found some remaining stands of bushy bluestem (*Andropogon glomeratus*). This native bunchgrass provides cover for many wild birds and animals. It is used for nesting material and as host plant by several butterflies. As you can see, in the fall, it becomes a beautiful copper color, so it is easily identifiable.

Monique's sharp eyes focused in on these tiny bones left by a predator. What was this little animal doing and who was it who had a good

Bushy bluestem  
(*Andropogon glomeratus*)



meal? The woods could tell us so many interesting stories if we were here all day and all night!

A Master Naturalist noticed this remarkable fungus. It is likely a cinnabar-red polypore mushroom (*Pycnoporus cinnabarinus*). This shelf-looking specimen is usually found on dead deciduous wood year round, as it is helping with its decomposition. Its upper surface can be wrinkled, warted, or smooth and is an orange to reddish-orange color that fades with age. It is inedible, so it is best to leave it to its valuable work in the woods!



Fungi (*Pycnoporus cinnabarinus*)

Finally, after a day of hiking, examining, and capturing (with camera) many of the plants identified, the group returned to the ranchhouse to eat bag lunches, discuss the finds, and share stories. Since several specimens deserved further investigation, Monique borrowed her invaluable key (see bibliography) and proceeded to ferret out the correct nomenclature.

By the end of the field day, Monique had compiled a list of 100 species noted. She says that it could possibly take years to see and name ALL of the plants in this location. That means more fun plant identification days ahead!

Our very special thanks to Monique for taking the time to join us in this adventure and to compile a plant list for the chapter. Take a few minutes to enjoy the humorous storytelling of our adventures as seen through the eyes of her frequent field companions at <https://lokispeaks.wordpress.com> (see the March 24 entry for our plant id day). A picture and notation from the site is below. Monique's humor is only surpassed by her expertise and generous nature!



Bones of prey



Picture of Loki and Sigyn Examining *Rubus argutus*, Sawtooth Blackberry, Courtesy of Monique

Loki says, "This is not the usual local  
(Continued on page 5)

dewberry. No, this one is more upright. **Ow!** But no less prickly! **Ow!** Anyone who aspires to **pie** is going to have to offer a blood sacrifice. Blast it! My only consolation is that the human female is getting similarly **shredded.**"

Article written by Joyce Conner and thankfully reviewed by Katherine Bedrich, Cindy Bolch, Mike Conner, Cheryl Lewis, and Monique Reed. All remaining errors are entirely due to the author. All photos not attributed are courtesy of Joyce Conner.

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## Class of 2016 Graduation

By Dorothy Mayer

On Saturday, April 2, we celebrated our newly trained Texas Master Naturalists with a short program and a barbecue dinner at the Hagan Ranch on 22 Hills Road just outside of Gause, Texas. Don and Lynn Hagan, members of our graduating class, furnished the facilities and the place could not have been any more perfect. I might also add that the weather was also extremely cooperative.

Buck Burchett, our Milam County game warden was our guest speaker. Traci Rose Talafuse, a former member, sang our unofficial chapter song, 'Colors of the Wind' from Pocahontus. Certificates were presented by current chapter president, Lucy Coward and Membership Director, Cindy Bolch. Class Presenters in attendance were: Johnnie Smith and wife Cappy, both from TPWD, Mike Conner, Cindy Bolch, and Rich and Barbara Cromwell; plus several ECRC chapter members and certified Texas Master Naturalists.

Our 2016 graduating class had 10 members: Barbara Paschall, Billy Moore, Mike McCravey, Don Hagan, Lynn Hagan, Carol Harris Williams, Lisa Milewski, Kathie Hitt, Henry Luna, and Scott Berger. We are excited about having them join our chapter. My only regret is that the classes moved so fast, I hardly feel like I got to know them. Hopefully, they will continue to be active members. So, we should all be able to get better acquainted as they become more involved in our chapter activities. I know I can count on this chapter's members to include them and make them feel welcome.

And, 8 year old Kambria Talafuse was there eager to share her big eggs, aka tree galls. The galls do not really hurt the trees and each had a live bug in there if you cracked it open. As always, nature is full of fun learning experiences for those who take the time to get outdoors.

See our complete collection of all class photos and videos via our chapter page [txmn.org/elcamino/photos/class/](http://txmn.org/elcamino/photos/class/), or this direct link [goo.gl/photos/yUuJieeZznWANR3H9](http://goo.gl/photos/yUuJieeZznWANR3H9) to the 2016 set on our Google Photos site.



# Community Volunteering

By Lisa Milewski

My sister, Carol, and I had a great time volunteering to work in the Peterson Community garden which provides fresh produce to the Hutto Lutheran Church food pantry and the culinary arts class at the high school. They also have a wildflower area in that garden. Currently, the garden is in its early prep phase so all we did this past Saturday was ground preparation. It was such a wonderful experience that Carol and I asked to continue to volunteer to both serve the community and gain additional experience in both gardening and wildflowers. It was great seeing the community come together to work in the garden, clean the park, and collect city wide waste such as tires, batteries, paint and other harmful things that must be properly disposed of appropriately.

The City of Hutto's "Keep Hutto Beautiful" is a partnership with the Hutto Independent School District to prep and build garden beds with fresh fruit and produce for the Hutto Lutheran Church food bank, Culinary Arts Center at Hutto High School, and elementary base learning garden projects. In 2011, Keep Hutto Beautiful started Hutto's first community garden, the Peterson Community Garden to serve both the community and schools. There is also a wildflower garden and the City of Hutto has plans to include a garden with a native plant area for citizens to use as an example of what could grow best in their own back yards.

Carol and I are excited to help out and see what all they are going to plant and learn from even this first step to the end result of fresh fruit and produce.



*Maxine on Nature*

By Don Travis



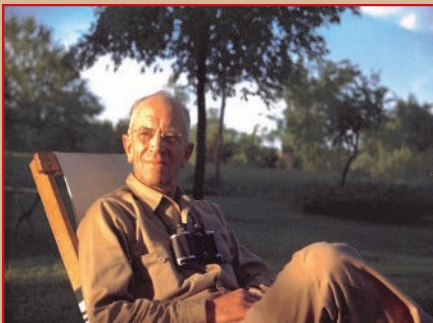
*Free Nature Photos on the Web*

By Don Travis

Pixabay.com is a great photography source, and ALL 600,000+ photos are marked as Creative Commons cc0, public domain for free use for any purpose without attribution. Space permitting in each issue I'll pick a few seasonally appropriate ones that I like, and share with you. There are also millions of photos available using Google Image search, and set usage rights filter to "Labeled for reuse". Attribution is usually expected here however.



Aldo Leopold Says:



"We shall never achieve harmony with land, any more than we shall achieve absolute justice or liberty for people. In these higher aspirations the important thing is not to achieve, but to strive."



El Camino Real Master Naturalist  
C/O Texas AandM AgriLife Extension Service  
100 E. First Street  
Cameron TX 76520-0790

Texas AandM AgriLife Ext. Svc. Phone: 254-697-7045  
E-mail: Milam-tx@tamu.edu or our chapter at

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Floyd Ingram, Texas AandM AgriLife Extension Svc.

#### Newsletter Staff

Editor / Composer: Don Travis, contact via E-mail at [ElCaminoRealMasterNaturalist@gmail.com](mailto:ElCaminoRealMasterNaturalist@gmail.com)  
Staff Writers: Katherine Bedrich, Linda Jo Conn, John Pruet, Sheri Sweet, Genie Lindburg

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## *Certifications, Etc.* By Cindy Bolch

New since the Winter 2016 newsletter are in this color.

2015 Re-Certifications (Bluebonnet pin). Lucy Coward, Cindy Bolch, Don Travis, Dorothy Mayer, Katherine Bedrich, Linda Jo Conn, Debbie Harris, Donna Lewis, Ann Collins, Sheri Sweet, Wesley Sweet, Minnie Pesl, Darlene Anglen, Barbara Cromwell, John Pruet, Sandra Dworaczyk, Joyce Conner, **Janice Johnson, Pam Neeley and Phyllis Shuffield.**

2016 Re-Certifications (Guadalupe Bass pin). **Lucy Coward, Don Travis, Cindy Bolch, Donna Lewis, Cindy Travis, Katherine Bedrich, Ann Collins, Linda Jo Conn, and Joyce Conner.**



Highest Level of Lifetime-to-date Milestone Achievement Levels earned by current members as of March 2016 include:

**5000 Hours**—Katherine Bedrich, Cindy Bolch

**4000 Hour Presidential Award**—Katherine Bedrich, Cindy Bolch

**2500 Hours**—Don Travis, Ann Collins, Donna Lewis, and Debbi Harris.

**1000 Hours**—Paula Engelhardt, Sue Taylor, Lucy Coward, Dorothy Mayer, Phyllis Shuffield, Sandra Dworaczyk, Linda Jo Conn.

**500 Hours**—Anne Barr, Barbara Cromwell, John Pruet, Sheri Sweet and **Wesley Sweet**

**250 Hours**—Lucile Estell, Shawn Walton, Vivian Dixon, Cindy McDaniels, Janice Johnson, Gary McDaniels, Kim Summers, Rusty Thomas, Cindy Travis, Sherry Colley, Kathy Lester, Wesley Sweet, Pam Neeley and Darlene Anglen.

Our March 2016 Year-to-Date and Total Accumulated hours for Advanced Training are: **681 and 7,025** respectively. Our March 2016 Year-to-Date and Total Accumulated hours for Volunteer Events are: **1,434 and 55,499** respectively.

*Congratulations to All*

## Did You Know?

## What animal can change from male to female?



Oysters can produce either sperm or eggs. At one year of age males release sperm, but as they grow over the next two or three years and develop greater energy reserves, they spawn as females by releasing eggs. Spawning starts with a few males and soon there are clouds of sperm and eggs from other males and females. A single female oyster can produce up to 100 million eggs annually. The eggs become fertilized in the water and develop into larvae, which eventually find suitable sites, such as another oyster's shell, on which to settle and grow. Oysters are filter feeders, drawing water in over their gills trapping plankton and other particles. An oyster can filter up to 5 liters of water per hour. Common predators include crabs, seabirds, starfish, and humans. The prehistoric importance of oysters as food dates back 10,000 years in Australia. They have been cultivated in Japan from at least 2000 BC. Oysters are an excellent source of zinc, iron, calcium, selenium, vitamin A and B<sub>12</sub>, and are rich in protein and low in food energy (one dozen raw oysters contains 110 calories). Oysters must be eaten alive, or cooked alive. The shells of live oysters are normally tightly closed or snap shut given a slight tap. If the shell is open, the oyster is dead, and cannot be eaten safely. Cooking oysters in the shell kills the oysters and causes them to open by themselves. Traditionally, oysters that do not open have been assumed to be dead before cooking and therefore unsafe. Oysters can contain harmful bacteria since they are filter feeders, so will naturally concentrate anything present in the water. [Of course we all know a little hot sauce kills bacteria, right?] Source: Wikipedia.