



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.



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 Summer 2015

What's the BUZZ? by Barbara Cromwell

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New Class Coming in the New Year!!!

January of 2016 ECRMN will begin holding a "new student" class. Many people have been eagerly waiting for this class and we hope to get the word out to others who are unaware of this great opportunity in their county. The class will consist of a minimum of 40 hours of both classroom instruction and field trips. To become "certified" the student must complete 8 more hours of advanced education credit and 40 hours of chapter approved volunteer service by the end of the calendar year (2017) following the year of class completion (2016). The curriculum is statewide and consists of topics such as:

Ecological Regions of TX, Ecosystems, Weather and Climate, Plants, Ornithology, Entomology, Ichthyology, Herpetology, Mam-

mology, Citizen Science, and Land Stewardship. Most of these classes will be taught by experts in their field from Texas AgriLife Extension and Texas A&M University.

This curriculum is designed to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers who will then go out and provide educational services to others so that the natural resources and natural areas within our county will be managed for future generations.

Each new student will receive a binder with a vast amount of information that will provide reference material for a lifetime. The cost of the class is \$150.00. This helps pay for the speakers, fields trips, and binder. Please contact Dorothy Mayer at 254-482-3235 or Barbara Cromwell at 254-697-4482 if you are interested or have questions.

When the class is over the fun just keeps on going. You will make life-long friends as well as have life-long opportunities to learn and share information about our great state of Texas and Milam County. I hope all the ECRMN members will encourage their friends to join and get the word out about the new class.



Did You Know?
What is the largest known venomous snake?
See last page for the answer.

Animal Group Name Quiz

By Don Travis

A sounder of pigs, a litter of cats, a brood of chickens, and some animals have more than one "group name" or "collective noun". Let's see how smart you all are on those I've listed below. I tried to stick to ones with just one common group name, but not 100%. Write in your choices then check the correct answers at the bottom. NO CHEATING!

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Alligators ___ | 1. Army |
| 2. Bass ___ | 2. Band |
| 3. Bison ___ | 3. Bed |
| 4. Buzzards ___ | 4. Bloat |
| 5. Caterpillars ___ | 5. Cast |
| 6. Cheetahs ___ | 6. Charm |
| 7. Clams ___ | 7. Cloud |
| 8. Cockroaches ___ | 8. Coalition |
| 9. Cormorants ___ | 9. Congregation |
| 10. Coyotes ___ | 10. Convocation |
| 11. Dolphins ___ | 11. Fever |
| 12. Eagles ___ | 12. Fling |
| 13. Emus ___ | 13. Flock |
| 14. Falcons ___ | 14. Gaze |
| 15. Geese ___ | 15. Gulp |
| 16. Giraffes ___ | 16. Herd |
| 17. Grasshoppers ___ | 17. Host |
| 18. Hippopotamuses ___ | 18. Hover |
| 19. Hummingbirds ___ | 19. Intrusion |
| 20. Leopards ___ | 20. Leap |
| 21. Lizards ___ | 21. Lounge |
| 22. Mice ___ | 22. Mischief |
| 23. Mosquitos ___ | 23. Mob |
| 24. Nightingales ___ | 24. Pack |
| 25. Porcupines ___ | 25. Prickle |
| 26. Raccoons ___ | 26. Pod |
| 27. Rattlesnakes ___ | 27. Rhumba |
| 28. Salmon ___ | 28. Run |
| 29. Sandpipers ___ | 29. Scourge |
| 30. Sparrows ___ | 30. Shoal |
| 31. Stingrays ___ | 31. Spring |
| 32. Teal ___ | 32. Tower |
| 33. Trout ___ | 33. Wake |
| 34. Wolves ___ | 34. Watch |

So why so many different names anyway?

What an interesting question! According to Wikipedia, the tradition of using collective nouns, also called "terms of vengery" or "nouns of assemble", that are specific to certain kinds of animals stems from an English hunting tradition, dating back to at least the fifteenth century. The Wiki article refers to a 1486 publication entitled, "*The Compaynys of Beestys and Fowlys*", which has to be one of the all-time great titles.

The list in the *Book of Saint Albans* (1486) runs to 165 items, many of which, even though introduced by "*the Compaynys of beestys and fowlys*" do not relate to vengery but to human groups and professions and are clearly humorous. (*a Doctryne of doctoris, a Sentence of Juges, a Fightyng of beggers, an uncredibilite of Cocoldis, a Melody of harpers, a Gagle of women, a Disworship of Scottis* etc.). I never heard of some of those!

Notice that some of the matches in the quiz are quite fitting to the species. But lets not talk about a "nag" of wives, or a "jerk" of husbands, ok?

Sources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collective_noun and other Wiki articles.

<http://www.thealmightyguru.com/Pointless/AnimalGroups.html> has the list I used for the quiz along with maybe a 100 more at least, including those with multiple names.



Answers: 1-9, 2-30, 3-16, 4-33, 5-1, 6-8, 7-3, 8-19, 9-15, 10-2, 11-26, 12-10, 13-23, 14-5, 15-13, 16-32, 17-7, 18-4, 19-6, 20-20, 21-21, 22-22, 23-29, 24-34, 25-25, 26-14, 27-27, 28-28, 29-12, 30-17, 31-11, 32-31, 33-18, 34-24.

Getting to Know You—Prof. Baldrige

By Dorothy Mayer

[Editor note: Welcome to the first of what I hope may be a continuing series of "Getting to Know You" on our friends and members, using an interview template of basic questions.]

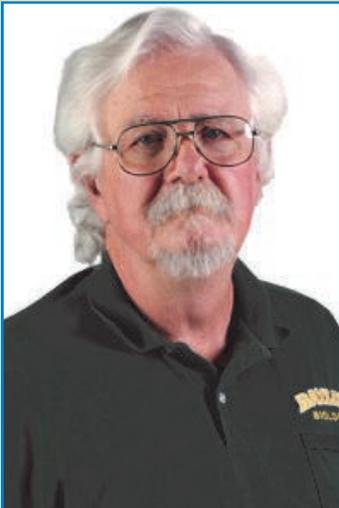
One of my favorite parts of the Master Naturalist program is getting to know knowledgeable and interesting people on topics that are truly of interest to me. And, to me, most anything in nature fits that bill. One of my favorite speakers to our chapter is Professor Robert Baldrige from Baylor University. He comes regularly, to help train our new members, and has also provided a couple of advanced training presentations for our chapter. Professor Baldrige is on staff at Baylor University in Waco as a full time instructor in the Biology Department.

Baldrige regularly does the Entomology, aka 'bug', portion of our training program. As naturalists, we are all interested in hearing how our trainers began their own personal journey studying nature and were smart enough in their formative years to figure out a way to make a career out of subjects that we find extremely fascinating.

Professor Baldrige said that at age 12 or so, when Sputnik was launched, he decided to become a nuclear physicist. But, later, he realized that M-A-T-H was involved. So he decided to become a Medical Technologist. Then, he realized that he would be stuck inside windowless sterile environments. So, he claims a similarity to Darwin, who also nixed some obvious and reasonable career choices. He also has remembrances of having a fascination of insects as a child

Additionally, Baldrige says he was majorly influenced by Dr. Anne Penney Newton at Temple College and Dr. Julian Watkins at Baylor University, who both helped him realize that his niche was definitely in the field of science. His 'bug' career started with his first insect collection for Dr. Penny Newton's freshman biology class and when he volunteered to do a National Science Foundation summer research project as a Baylor University undergraduate with Dr. Watkins, who was an ant specialist. The rest of Bob's career is almost circular since he took over Dr. Watkins' courses when Dr. Watkins advanced to the position of interim Biology chair for Baylor University many years ago.

Professor Baldrige has greatly enhanced The El Camino Real Master Naturalist Chapter's understanding and appreciation of the insect world. I invite anyone to join us next time he is kind enough to further enlighten us with his humor and the



Professor Baldrige, aka "The Bug Man" or "The Great White Buffalo"

'bug' world. Watch our chapter calendar for future presentations: <http://txmn.org/elcamino>

- Where were you born and spent your childhood? Born in Waco, TX and spent childhood (to date) mainly in Texas with sojourns into Mexico and Panama.
- What do you remember as your first encounter or a special encounter with nature growing up, and what was special about it? (Several are fine) Mother tells story of my lying on sidewalk as a 4 or 5 year old and rolling up pillbugs and thumping them...teaching me that one does not have to have two-legged friends to have fun. Spent much of my time as a youngster exploring the 'fields' around the places I lived...which were open and abundant in the 'good old days'. Spent/spend time fishing, hunting and observ-

ing.

- Tell us a little about your family today, and your adult life - formal education, career, places lived, countries visited. My wife is a retired junior high Texas history teacher and my son and daughter are educated, grown and doing well. I have degrees from Temple College, Baylor University and Kansas State University. Spent first 5 years of teaching career at Schreiner University (before it was a 'university') and began Baylor career in 1978. I have lived mainly in Texas except for graduate school years in Manhattan, Kansas. I have done research in Mexico and Panama.

- What areas of nature most interest you today, and why? My main interests are in arthropod (mainly insect) behavior and ecology. Much of my time has been spent working with ants and their associates. I have broad research interests as to species studied and kinds of questions asked. I consider my research to be 'basic'...and do not expect to get 'monetarily rich from it, if you get my drift.

- If you could come back after this mortal human life is over as some other kind of life form, what would that be and why? Unlike 'Arnold'...I intend NOT to return under any circumstance or as any life form. Fini!

- How about any funny, embarrassing or stupid things you've done - and are willing to share. Too many to enumerate...but...I do remember (1) dropping my pants in a very 'dangerous' place while studying army ant biology, (2) beginning to give a research presentation and suddenly being told I had 2 minutes (and 15 slides left), (3) diving into some dense brush in Mexico after army ants...without noticing the wasp nests ahead of me...and the list, typical of that for a field biologist, goes on.

(Continued from page 3)

- Any favorite books, songs, poems, movies, people, places, pets, etc.? 'Desiderata', Robinson Crusoe, 'Them', 'Tweety' and 'Queenie', no 'favorite' places, and I have met few people that I did not find something positive about... 'tho some stretched my 'finder'...

- What are some typical daily activities that you love to do? I do not LOVE to do any daily activities...but I do ENJOY working with students...and my TMN friends. Most other things I do are not done 'daily'...but I do enjoy visiting with family.

- Any neat photos you can share to help tell your story? Nope



- How did you first hear about Texas Master Naturalist? I do not remember exactly but I think it was during my early days working with Nora Schell... but do not hold me to that.

- What has the program meant to you? The program has provided me opportunities to talk about the things that I enjoy in nature with folks who share that interest (or, at least, will listen patiently to what I have to say...☺), are able

and willing to teach me new things...and feed me VERY well...☺

Bob's bio on the Baylor University web site can be found here: <https://www.baylor.edu/biology/index.php?id=68687>. Photos courtesy of that web page.

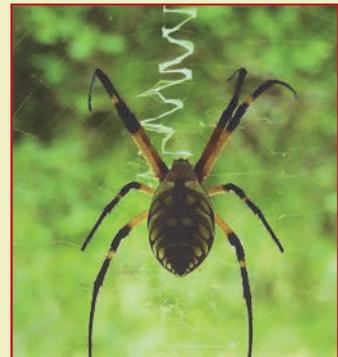
Here are a few "bug" photos I selected from our past Nature Festival Photo Contests...Editor.



"It's a small world" - Paula Engelhardt



"Damsel in blue" - Lisa Davenport



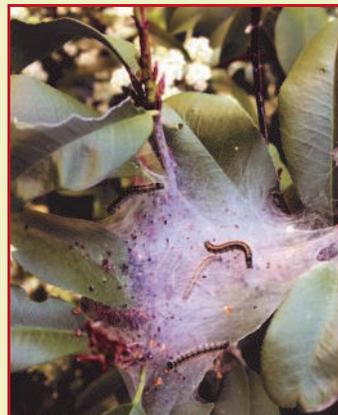
"Watchful waiting" - Dorothy Mayer



"Let's march" - Julianna Byrd, age 15



"Yum Yum" - Ann Collins



"Yummy Spring day" - Amy Miller, age 9

Sweet's Nature Shenanigans

By Sheri Sweet

Ever since I was a child in Laredo and I saw a bird on the cover of a book, I've been wanting to see one, up close and personal. I'd heard they were around here, but I'd never seen one. I opened the blinds one fine morning and there, to my shock, stood THE BIRD on our deck railing! I couldn't move, transfixed on this gorgeous bird. Wes walked into the room and asked, "What are you looking at?" All I could do was point and say, "A puh! A puh! A puh!" I'd lost my speech! He got to see it, too, before it took off.



The male and female build a cup-shaped nest made of grass and lined with animal hair. It is usually in a heavy tangled mass of vines and are found across Texas. They raise 1 or 2 broods a year. The female lays 3 - 5 pale blue with brown markings eggs. The female incubates the eggs for 11 - 12 days. The babies fledge in 12 - 14 days with both the male and female feeding them. Their diet consists of seeds and insects. Of note is the fact that they are a common cow-bird host, which results in

the baby Painted Buntings being slighted. Many of the Painted Buntings remain year-round in Texas; others migrate south as far as Central America.

Passerina ciris, or the **Painted Bunting**! I'd FINALLY gotten my wish to see this male, psychedelic bird! It has a yellowish-green back with a couple of rusty spots, dark blue-violet head, orangey-red chest and belly. God must have shaken several paintbrushes on this little bird! The female, which I haven't yet seen, is a pale limey green. The juveniles are brownish all over with sometimes a greenish coloring on the rump. It is about 5 ½" long, has a short, conical beak, and a loud, clear, and varied song. It visits gardens, woodland edges, and along brushy roads. Mine was visiting the seed feeder we had.

I've included a picture of my Painted Bunting which has been returning occasionally. This picture was taken at our place outside of Fredericksburg; however, we had one in our drive to the house one day and a friend a couple of miles down the road reported that she has several of them around her place.

My sources for this article were Birds of Texas by Stan Tekiela and The Stokes Field Guide to the Birds of North America, by Donald and Lillian Stokes.

While this article originated in Sebring, Florida, a couple of months ago, these creatures are found all over Texas and they migrate here. As we were driving through Sebring, I noticed this bird in the ditch beside the road. It was searching for food, which I thought was rather odd for this kind of bird. Later, I needed to go to the mall. As we drove through the parking lot, I saw this bird again, strolling amongst the cars in the parking lot! I scrambled for my camera and Wes stopped the pickup. (He knows when I'm squealing he'd better stop!) I jumped out and went after this bird. The bird knew I



was behind it, but it wasn't at all bothered by me! It went on about its business of pecking in the grass and eating.

The whole incident was totally amazing to me! Here was this bird, about 45" tall, light gray, bustly tail, long dark gray bill, long light gray neck, and this beautiful bright red cap! *Grus Canadensis* or a **Sandhill Crane** was close enough that I could have reached out and TOUCHED it! I didn't try because I didn't want to scare it away. It kept its eye on me

and continued to stroll around in the grass next to a restaurant and kept on pecking in the grass. My research reveals that they eat insects, fruit, worms, plants, and amphibians. So

that explains why it was pecking in the grass! It posed for me and I took a ton of pictures of it! It was really amazing!

These birds stand anywhere from 40" to 48" tall. They are graceful, heron-like birds with long legs and necks, and a long slender body. They are some of the tallest birds in the world. They have a wing-spread of 6 to 7 feet. When taking off flying, they run first. In flight, their necks are outstretched straight; the feet and legs extend behind them. They nest on platforms or on the ground. Both the male and female, who look alike, build their nest. They have one brood a year from 2 olive eggs with brown markings. The male and female take turns incubating the eggs for 28 to 32 days. The babies fledge in about 65 days and both parents feed the young.

A few days later, when we were leaving Sebring, we stopped at a restaurant in another shopping center. This time there were TWO of the Sandhill Cranes in this parking lot! Oh, boy! Again, neither of them were afraid of me - I could have reached out and touched one! Suddenly, the two cranes rushed over to the other side of the grass where we were and started looking off to the east. And then they really startled me. Out came this awful, loud, bugling, rattling, caterwauling, honking sound interspersed with snorts and squeaks. It was almost like a donkey braying! I finally looked to see what they were squawking about and two more Sandhill Cranes were flying towards us! I guess my two were warning the others to stay away! The two in the air flew over us and wheeled to the north. And then my two started running across the parking lot and then were airborne and left! What an amazing, tremen-



dous experience it was! And the pictures are outstanding! I'll never forget this encounter!

My research sources are as follow: [The Sibley Field Guild to Birds of Eastern North America](#) by David Allen Sibley; [Birds of Texas](#) by Stan Tekiela; [A Field Guide to the Birds East of the Rockies](#) by Roger Tory Peterson; and [The Stokes](#)

[Field Guide to the Birds of North America](#) by Donald & Lillian Stokes



Fireflies

by Donna Lewis

June 24th I was taking my dogs out for their last potty break just before dark. It was 9 P.M., but the sky still held a hint of vague light. I looked out toward the woods, which line the back half of our property, and where the edge of the tree line meets the open pasture.

I saw unidentified flying objects flickering in zigzagged movement. The flickering rose. Hovered and descended at height ranging from two to fifteen feet during its flight.

At first the sight startled me, and my mind did not click as to what I was seeing. But after a moment, my mind raced back in time to when I was a little girl growing up in Houston and when me and my two younger sisters would arm ourselves with a Mason Jar and screw-on lid to capture several of the flickering lights into our jars, and then we would sit calmly as we studied the magnificent insects and their talent. We had visions of the jars being lanterns and the bugs the flames. At eight years old, we had "lightning bugs" in a jar.

As my Brittany tugged at the end of her leash and brought me back to the moment I realized what I was seeing were - Fireflies!

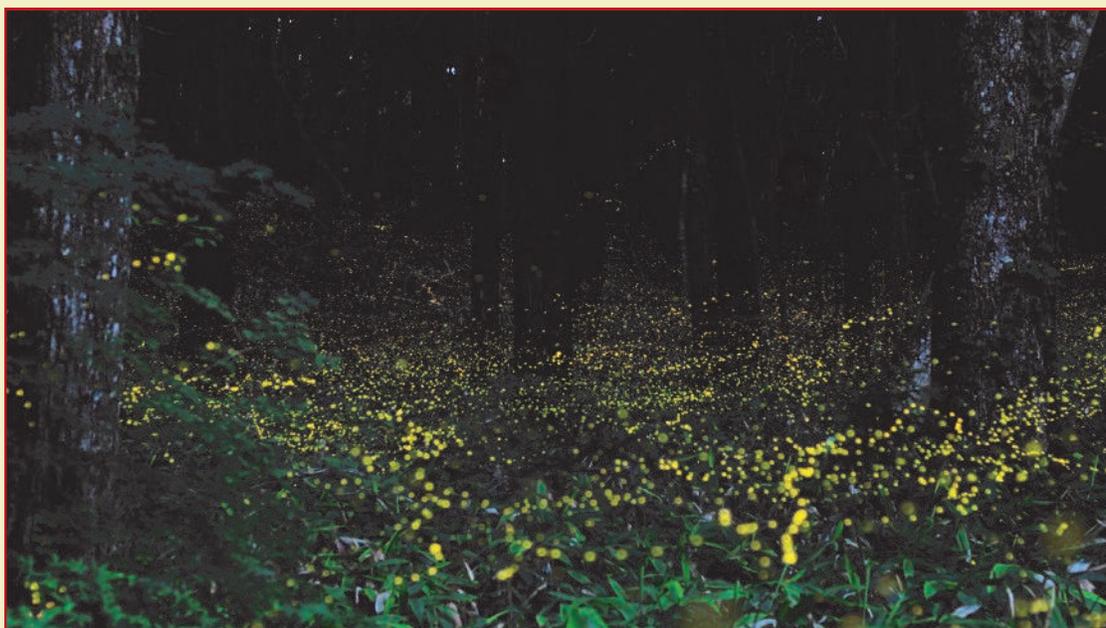
Oh, for the Joy! I was so excited and happy in having the opportunity to witness these magical little beetles once more, as an adult.

It is speculated that the recent heavy rains in the month of May, may have had some influence on their arrival. It apparently created the perfect damp environment in which they thrive.

The Firefly - (Lampyridae) is a type of beetle and a nocturnal luminescent insect. According to some reports, there are 2000 species of "Fireflies." The flashing light illuminating from his underbelly is thought to be used by the beetle as a signaling device in finding a mate. It is an organ under the abdomen which produces a light by absorbing oxygen and mixing it with a substance known as "LUCIFERIN," which produces the light with almost no heat.

Witnessing such a captivating insect that night, as the Firefly, is totally Amazing and Magical!

[Photos from free use public domain]



"Lucy's Wonderings"

by Lucy Coward

Yesterday when I went out to water my flowers I walked by the wooden bird house I had hanging on the post on the front porch and I noticed something moved.

So I came in the house and got my camera and went back out to see what was going to come out.

I could not look down inside to see anything and I was a little scared that it might be a snake or bees. Anyway, I stood there a few moments and when this little fellow put his head in the hole, he was so sweet, and I got his picture.

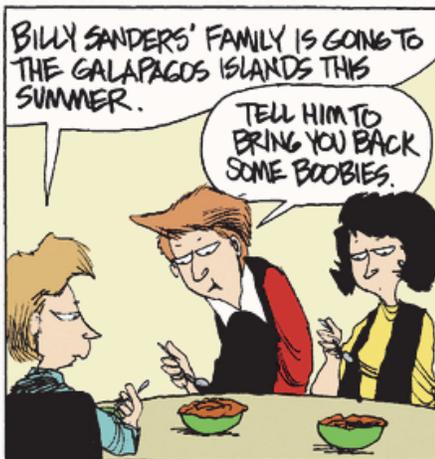
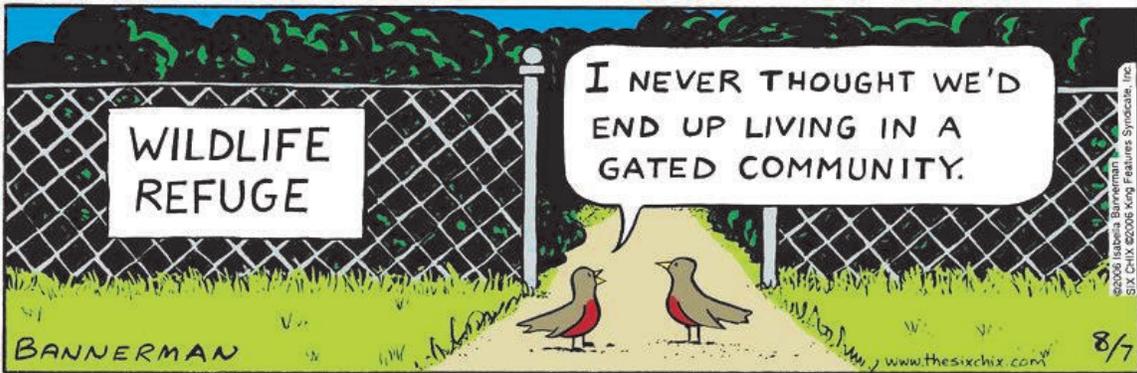
He was still there the next morning.

My question is how did he get in there to begin with? It's like 5ft off the ground!! So anyway, enjoy!



Fun With Nature

By Don Travis



Janice's Snake Skin

by Janice Johnson

The shedded skin of this Rat / Chicken snake, formally known as (Flaphe obsoleta lindheimeri), was found on the property of Richard and Janice Johnson, just outside Cameron, Texas on Monday, June 8, 2015 at about 1:00 pm.

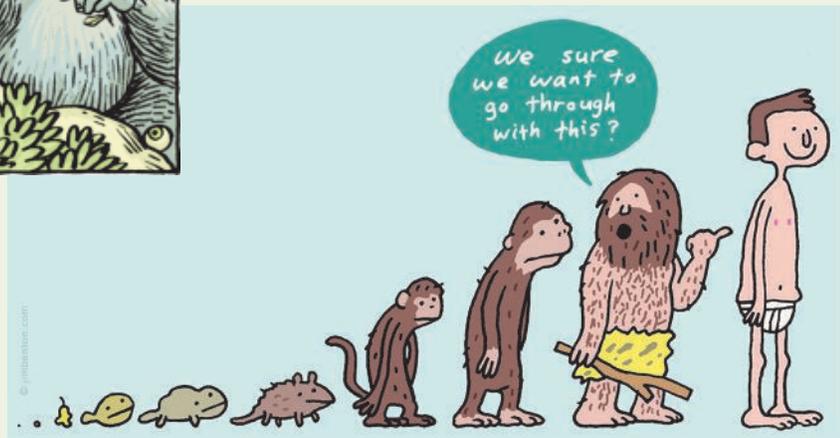
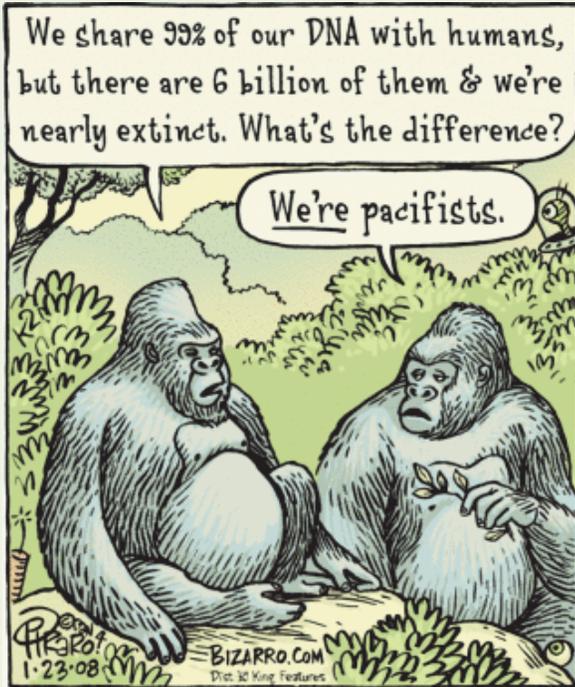
Richard had just mowed the grass the day before.

The skin was found fully stretched out in the grass about ten feet from the southwest corner of the shop building. The skin was fully intact when found, from head to tail.

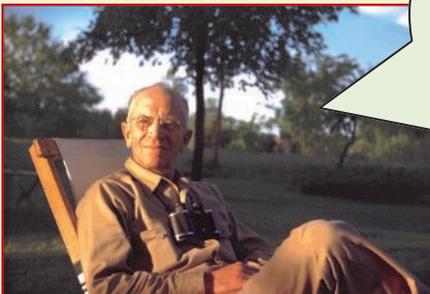


On Natural Selection

By Don Travis



Aldo Leopold Says:



Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land. By land is meant all of the things on, over or in the earth.

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Los Caminos is a quarterly publication of the "El Camino Real Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists", a 501(c)(3) nonprofit volunteer educational organization.

Certifications, Etc. By Cindy Bolch

New since the Spring 2015 newsletter **are in this color.**

New Member 2014/15 Class Certifications: Darlene Anglen, Sheri Sweet, Wesley Sweet, Nancy Adcock, Clyde Adcock, Mini Pesl, Debbie Rolan and Kimberly Westbook

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, Mini Pesl, **Darlene Anglen, Barbara Cromwell, John Pruet and Sandra Dworaczyk**



Highest Lifetime-to-date Milestone Achievement Levels earned by current members as of July 2015 include:

5000 Hours—Katherine Bedrich

4000 Hour Presidential Award—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 and Linda Jo Conn.**

500 Hours—Anne Barr, Barbara Cromwell, and John Pruet.

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

Our July 2015 Year-to-Date and Total Accumulated hours for Advanced Training are: **555 and 6,210** respectively. Our July 2015 Year-to-Date and Total Accumulated hours for Volunteer Events are: **4,243 and 50,431** respectively.

Congratulations to All

Did You Know?

What is the largest venomous snake?



The **King Cobra** averages 10-13 feet long and typically weighs about 13 lb. The longest known specimen grew to over 18 ft. The heaviest wild specimen weighed 26 lb. Despite their large sizes, typical king cobras are fast and agile. The average lifespan of a wild king cobra is about 20 years. *Ophiophagus hannah* is the sole member of the monotypic genus *Ophiophagus*, family Elapidae. The king cobra is distributed across the Indian Subcontinent, Southeast Asia, and the southern areas of East Asia. A king cobra smells via its forked tongue. It flicks its tongue to gauge the prey's direction. It also uses its keen eyesight to detect moving prey over 300' away and its sensitivity to earth-borne vibration to track its prey. Its diet consists primarily of other snakes, but may also feed on lizards, birds, and rodents. When confronted, this species will quickly attempt to escape and avoid any sort of confrontation. If a king cobra encounters a natural predator, such as the mongoose, which has resistance to the neurotoxins, the snake generally tries to flee. If unable to do so, it forms the distinctive cobra hood and emits a hiss, sometimes with feigned closed-mouth strikes. These efforts usually prove to be very effective, especially since it is much more dangerous than other mongoose prey, as well as being much too large for the small mammal to kill with ease. A good defense against a cobra for anyone who accidentally encounters this snake is to slowly remove a shirt or hat and toss it to the ground while backing away. Snakebites from this species are rare and most victims are snake handlers. Reference https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/king_cobra.