

Master Naturalist™



The Texas Master Naturalist program activities are coordinated by AgriLife Extension 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 Winter 2010-11

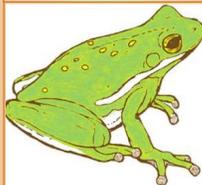
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Our Motto

- Look
- Learn
- Teach
- Conserve

Our Mascot
Green Tree Frog



Did You Know?

Ever heard of an animal that looks like a Pokémon card?
See Answer on the last page.

Prairie Tracks, by Katherine Bedrich

The **Endangered Species Preservation Act of 1966** authorized the Secretary of the Interior to list imperiled fish and wildlife. In 1967 the first list of endangered species was issued under the act. It included 14 mammals, 36 birds, 6 reptiles and amphibians and 22 fish.

The **Endangered Species Act of 1973** was designed to protect critically endangered species from extinction as a "consequence of economic growth and development untempered by adequate concern and conservation." The purpose of the Endangered Species Act is to protect species and also "the ecosystems upon which they depend."

The ESA's primary goal is to prevent the extinction of imperiled plant and animal life, and, to recover and maintain those populations by removing or lessening threats to their survival.

A **threatened** species is when that species becomes vulnerable to endangerment.

The Alligator snapping turtle, *Macrochelys temminckii*, is threatened.

A species is listed as **endangered** when the population is at risk of becoming

extinct because its numbers are very low. Usually this happens when its environment has changed or an unbalance in predators has come into their area.

In Milam County the Houston toad, *Bufo houstonensis*, is federally listed as endangered. The toad was given its name in 1953; it is endemic to Texas. It was extirpated from Houston by the



1960's and in 1970 it was listed as endangered. Probable cause of listing is habitat loss, predation, pesticide use, drought and human activity-mainly automobiles.

Extirpation happens through predation, competition, disease, or habitat loss. The red wolf is an example of this. The wolf roamed through Texas, but it

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is now extirpated. It became locally extinct in Texas but still survives in a few areas of the United States.

Extinction occurs when a species dies. An example of this is the passenger pigeon

A **threatened plant** is one that is likely to become endangered within the near future.

Endangered plants are species "in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range". Navasota Ladies'-tresses, *Spiranthes parksii*, was listed as endangered in 1982. This plant possibly still grows in Milam County.

In Texas, **endangered** species are those species named by the executive director of TPWD as being "threatened with statewide extinction". A **threatened** species is one the TPW Commission has determined to become endangered in the near future.

Check out this website for endangered animals and plants in Milam County:

<http://gis.tpwd.state.tx.us/TpwEndangeredSpecies/DesktopDefault.aspx>

Katherine Bedrich



On Being a Master Naturalist by our members

From Shawn Walton: Being a Master Naturalist makes me feel special. I'm part of a group of people that care about not only the environment in which they live, but also the history of the land, its people, animals, and habitat. I notice how the natural world changes from season to season, and when the warm season grasses sprout, and when the ants disappear into their burrows come winter. The appreciation for how much we affect the world around us is now a part of me. I can't buy a landscape plant without thinking whether or not it's a native, and if it's invasive. I even have trouble planting vegetables, because most of them aren't native! —Shawn.

From Dorothy Mayer: Being part of our local MN Chapter has enriched my life in so many ways. Living in the country, I have been close to nature for quite some

time & have always appreciated the outdoors & wildlife and the peacefulness of life in the country. But, becoming a Certified Master Naturalist has been so much more life-enhancing than I ever dreamed. My husband & I have always shared our observances of wildlife on a regular basis. But, taking these observances & sharing them with others makes me realize I am really contributing to the overall information that is known about wildlife. I suppose that I always assumed experts were 'out there' studying wildlife and documenting their findings with the world. And, I was correct. However, I now get to actually hear these experts speak and share their observations. But, what I did not realize is how much my input really does help add to the database of what is known & documented about wildlife. We all hear stories about nature related happenings. But, what

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I didn't realize is that these happenings are just considered good stories or tales unless they are documented. And, with my Master Naturalist training, I have been taught how to record my observations & sightings where they can be used in scientific study. Now, I ask, "Just how cool is that?"

And cooler still, I've met a group of like minded people who are actually turning out to be really good friends & I absolutely know that I am making a difference. And now when I notice anything unusual, I know that I will also need to document the exact location, or GPS, the surrounding environment, and what kind of weather it was when I saw the occurrence or from which I obtained my 'sample'. Now I am aware who I need to contact so that my information gets to the right place.

So anyway, when I decided to get involved in this program, I had no idea that I would also get GPS training, photography training, training on using an almanac and on & on. I really can hardly summarize in a short article how much becoming a Master Naturalist has meant to me. But, I can tell you, that I will remain a Master Naturalist as long as I am part of this world. — Dorothy.

From Joy Graham: Master Naturalists training was one of the BEST educational experiences I have had! There is so much educational material covered in the training, and the opportunity to be with others who are interested in learning makes Master Naturalists an experience never to be forgotten! —Joy.

From Donna Lewis: I love nature...I love the tree's, the animals, and everything I see outside. I want all of it to go on forever. If I can help in anyway, then I feel that my life has meant something to the earth...something I can be proud of.

I love this quote from -AYN RAND- that goes like this: "The difference between animals and humans, is that animals change themselves for the environment, but humans change the environment for themselves."

So as a Master Naturalist, I hope to open the eyes of those who do not see all the beauty that is around them. To teach others to respect and protect all the things that I hold dear. There are ways for us to co-

exist with nature. We do not have to destroy the forests to build houses. We can build our homes while letting wildlife also have theirs.

I now have the opportunity to be with others who I can learn from, and perhaps I can share the knowledge I brought to the table.

My love of birds, butterflies, and gardening for them. I have also been rescuing animals since I was a little girl. My Mother would take me outside and say to me ... listen, what do you hear, look, what do you see? I have things to share, and much more to learn as time goes on. —Donna

From Katherine Bedrich: Being a Master Naturalist is a completion of the metamorphosis cycle. I have always loved the outdoors. I have met so many in this Chapter and other Chapters with whom I have shared nature experiences, and adventures. My love for nature and my connection with nature is now complete. — Katherine.

From Cindy Bolch: If not for the Master Naturalist Program, I would not have known: The wonder of bats and all the things they do to make our lives more pleasant; How little effort on our part it takes to preserve plant seeds for future generations; The pleasure that comes with being able to identify the plants and animals that surround us each and every day; And the joy of working with other people who share my excitement of nature. —Cindy.

From Lucy Coward: What I have gotten out of being with this wonderful group is noticing nature more such as the birds that live out in the front yard, seeing a tree frog for the first time resting on a mister I had out for the hummers, being a part of the monarch migration program, and just being around all the people that love nature. —Lucy .

From Don Travis: I remember our 1st class night expressing my interest mostly in things related to our Wildlife Management activity on our property—grasses, trees, habitats, etc. Never did I realize how broad and deep every class would be, and that my interest in all things natural would be elevated to a lifelong fascination. The classes and advanced training by knowledgeable and motivated speakers really just scratch the surface—there is so much more to learn and share. —Don

Our 2010 Class Graduates!

Let's hear a big round of applause for our newest members, the 13 graduates of our 2010 Class!



Vickie Braswell



Sandy Braswell



Barbara Cromwell



Rich Cromwell



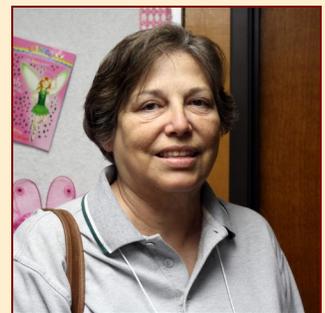
Michelle Fletcher



Kathy Lester



Donna Lewis



Eunice Stigall



Zane Stigall



Melanie Reed



Traci Scarpinato



Sue Taylor



Jackie Thornton

Now is that a good looking bunch of "naturalists" or what? And they even have their clothes on! [See all our members pictures on our website.]

November 11, 2010 marked the day of graduation, with outstanding BBQ provided by fellow member Connie Roddy, a beautiful rendition of "Colors of the Wind" was sung by Traci Scarpinato, and an original poem was recited by her Mom and fellow member Dorothy Mayer, along with congratulatory remarks by President Katherine Bedrich and Texas State Coordinator and guest speaker

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Sonny Arnold. Here are the song and poem lyrics.

"Colors of the Wind" with lyrics by Stephen Schwartz and composed by Alan Menken won the Best Original Song Oscar for the 1995 Disney film "Pocahontas", as well as a Golden Globe and Grammy. It represents the Native American viewpoint that the earth is a living entity where humankind is connected to everything in nature.

*You think you own whatever land you land on
The Earth is just a dead thing you can claim
But I know every rock and tree and creature
Has a life, has a spirit, has a name*

*You think the only people who are people
Are the people who look and think like you
But if you walk the footsteps of a stranger
You'll learn things you never knew you never knew*

*Have you ever heard the wolf cry to the blue corn moon
Or asked the grinning bobcat why he grinned?
Can you sing with all the voices of the mountains?
Can you paint with all the colors of the wind?
Can you paint with all the colors of the wind?*

*Come run the hidden pine trails of the forest
Come taste the sunsweet berries of the Earth
Come roll in all the riches all around you
And for once, never wonder what they're worth*

*The rainstorm and the river are my brothers
The heron and the otter are my friends
And we are all connected to each other
In a circle, in a hoop that never ends*

*How high will the sycamore grow?
If you cut it down, then you'll never know
And you'll never hear the wolf cry to the blue corn moon*

*For whether we are white or copper skinned
We need to sing with all the voices of the mountains
We need to paint with all the colors of the wind*

*You can own the Earth and still
All you'll own is Earth until
You can paint with all the colors of the wind*

And Dorothy Mayer's original poem, "ECRMN":

We ponder the stars

*We are interested in Mars.
We study all about plants
Invasive species, bryophytes, mosses, lichens, and ants.*

*We research the bees
And study about trees
We're not all that into money
We're more interested in honey.*

*We collect lots of seeds
For plants some think of as weeds.
We like watching mammals, insects and birds,
While keeping records with pictures and words.*

*We've been known to put our heads together
while we contemplate the weather.
We learn as we go
how we affect the way that things grow.*

*We attempt to come up with a clue
About what else we might do
To make others aware
About Mother earth they should care.*

*We don't really like haste
As it adds to the waste
And, we want a solution
To all the pollution.*

*We always stay on alert
about the composition of dirt.
And, there's really no mystery
That we're into Earth's history*

*Even a bone
We cannot leave alone
Until we are able to give a name
to the species from which it came.*

*We're anxious to share all that we've learned
For knowledge is the prize we've earned.
And, did somebody say, there's a new pin?
That's awesome, you can count me in.*

*This by no means covers it all.
My goodness, we do have a ball.
And, since everyone already knows-
I'm ready to go home & shed these clothes.*

And if anyone wishes to hear Traci's song as recorded live on video, and/or hear Dorothy recite her poem, please go to our website page: <http://txmn.org/elcamino/photos/class/>, and scroll down to 2010.

Do you think like a Worm? Discover Magazine

This article is actually a reprint from one of my very favorite magazines, Discover. The January / February issue features the top 100 stories of 2010, and this is # 12 by Michael Abrams.

"Biologists have taken another whack at the human ego, showing that our brain's cerebral cortex—the seat of higher thought—is eerily similar to a clump of neurons inside the head of the lowly marine ragworm. The ragworm's brain, which evolved some 600 million years ago, is so similar to the cortex that humans and worms must share a common ancestor.

Scientists knew that fruit flies, cockroaches, and other simple organisms have sensory processors that resemble a cortex, but these were "always interpreted as a striking example of unrelated structures", says molecular biologist Raju Tomer, who led the study at the European Molecular Biology Laboratory in Germany.

To test that idea in the ragworm, Tomer used a technique he had developed to examine the complex

brains of small creatures with unprecedented clarity: He created a high-resolution map of the worm's brain cells according to the genes they express, not just their shape and location. When Tomer compared the worm's cells with those in a vertebrate cerebral cortex, he found they were too similar to be of independent origin.

That result, published in an article in the September issue of "Cell", challenges the standard notion that ability to think evolved from complex vertebrate behaviors like predation, Tomer says. Thought now appears to spring from something far more basic, he argues, like the ability "to distinguish between food and nonfood" - a feat the ragworm accomplishes with aplomb."

[And in my opinion, so do most humans! Do you know anyone who doesn't? Don't answer that! — Editor]



Aquasquare.com

Bowerbirds Seduce Mates With Illusion Discover Magazine

This is #86, also by Michael Abrams, about the bowers made by bowerbirds.

"Male bowerbirds, like the males of so many species, lure mates with displays of wealth. The male collects up to 5,000 stones, bones, shells, and man-made objects to build a elaborate court where he awaits potential partners. And also like so many other males, bowerbirds exaggerate what they've got. [No males I know of do that!—editor]

Last September John Endler, an evolutionary ecologist at Deakin University in Australia, reported that bowerbirds seem to use their trinkets to create a carefully plotted optical illusion. The birds arrange objects by size from largest to smallest along an avenue leading to the court. This may make the court seem smaller—and the male larger—to females looking up the avenue. Using this trick, called forced perspective, males may woo passing females with their deceptively large stature.

When Endler rearranged the objects, the male quickly returned them to their original position. Endler is now making videos of bowerbird flirtations to see if a greater gradient results in increased mating success."

[Moral of the story—don't mess with a man's bower! He needs the illusion of grandeur.—Editor]



John A. Endler

2nd Annual Nature Festival By Don Travis

Nature at its Best!



Ideas are flowing, planning is in high gear, excitement is in the air, and fellow naturalists are having loads of fun. Work on the 2nd Annual Milam County Nature Festival planned for Saturday April 9 is well under way! Under the capable leadership of Sue Taylor and Donna Lewis, co-coordinators for this year's festival, a lot of last year's great activities are being enhanced and repeated, and a lot of new ones are being introduced.

The Horned Lizard has been selected as this year's Festival Mascot, and we'll have a little extra attention given to these neat creatures and their habitats. In support of this, see the next article in this newsletter, "Horny Toads", written by Shawn Walton.

An excellent planning team has been at it since last August, and you can view the minutes and details of all these meetings under the Members section of our Website. If you forgot the password for this secure page, email Don. Our external website "Nature Festival" page will continue to evolve to contain increasing details.

So, here are some highlights of activities, exhibits and presentations through-out the day that are planned so far:

- Welcome Tent—sign up, backpacks, goodies.
- Photography Contest
- Inside presentations on "Snakes alive, the reptiles of Central Texas", "El Camino Real de las Tejas National Historic Trail", and "Horned Lizards in Texas, our state reptile".
- Bees and Pollination

- Bats
- Birds
- Snakes
- Native Grasses
- Wildflowers, with Flo Oxley discussing "Wildflower Treasures"
- Horned Lizards
- Harvester Ants
- Knapping
- Archaeological Dig
- Animal Track Molds
- Face Painting
- Wildlife Control—TPWD
- Fire Prevention, Smokey the Bear—TFS
- Food vendors
- Wildlife product vendors
- And there are several other very exciting possibilities that are still being pursued.

There is still lots to do and more volunteers are needed to help. Pick an activity that you enjoy and get in on the fun.

You won't want to miss telling all your friends, neighbors and anyone else that will listen about this fun and educational event for family members of all ages.

The photography contest has a submission deadline of March 31, 2011 and will be formally kicked off soon via the newspapers and other means, but any reader is welcome to get started right away by visiting our website and downloading the entry form and instructions. See <http://txmn.org/elcamino/naturefest/photocontest/>.

Take a look at last year's "Nature Festival 2010" photo album to see all the fun we had last year, and the "Nature Festival Photo Contest 2010" album for those submissions and winners—all at our photo site: <http://picasaweb.google.com/ECRCMasternaturalist/>.

"Horny Toads" By Shawn Walton

[Ed. Note: This is a reprint of Shawn's article that appeared in her weekly newspaper column back in May 2009. It is being included here in support of the Horned Lizard being our "Festival Mascot" this year.]



"We call them 'horny toads' and we have a curiously strong attraction to them. So strong, in fact, that the Texas Horned Lizard is the Texas State Reptile.

It lives in Oklahoma, Kansas, New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, and Mexico, but it's still 'ours'.

A total of eight species of horned lizard live in the United States. Texas is home to three - the Greater Short-horned Lizard, Round-tailed Horned Lizard, and the Texas Horned Lizard, which makes the entire state of Texas its habitat, except for the far reaches of East Texas.

Their wide, flat bodies, usually the same color as the soil on which they live, are perfect for burrowing, and are what causes people to confuse them for frogs, but they are lizards. They have sharp side horns, sometimes with a short horn in the middle. As adults, they are between 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches to 4 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches long. The females are usually larger than the males. They breed in late spring and the hatchlings emerge in mid-summer. They burrow into the ground and hibernate over winter.

Their spiny bodies and horns allow them to hide from predators, as well as make them unsavory to the taste. They can inflate themselves like a balloon, and if all else fails, they have this cool trick of shooting a stream of blood from their eyelids. [see link at end]

Horned lizards can be spotted on summer mornings basking in the sun on rocks or open ground before the heat drives them to burrow under the soil. Their main food source is the Harvester ant. These are the big, red ants that clear away all growth from their mound, leaving a wide, circular flat space with a single hole in the middle.

All horned lizards are listed as protected species, but the Texas Horned Lizard has seen a marked decline in population, particularly east of IH-35. Scientists site

obvious reasons, such as habitat loss due to urbanization, the pet trade, and becoming food for cats and dogs. However, a peculiar relationship has been found between the introduction of the red imported fire ant and the decline of the Texas Horned lizard.

While horned lizards eat other insects, their main prey is the Harvester ant. You don't see this ant much anymore. This is due to the spread of the imported fire ant westward, and our war against it. The elimination of the Harvester ant by the imported fire ant has sharply decreased food for the horned lizard.

Evidence points to these various reasons for the decline of the Texas Horned Lizard, but scientists are still trying to understand what management actions can be taken to restore the lizard to its full range. You can help by becoming a horned lizard spotter or adopting a habitat to watch.

Your efforts do matter. It is through the work of volunteers in the Texas Horned Lizard Watch that the connection between the fire ant and the horned lizard was made. And, recently, horned lizards were sighted in Rockdale by Watch participants!



Some things you can do: treat fire ant mounds directly instead of broadcasting the pesticide, use native plants in your landscape, especially bunch grasses, leave some open space for horned lizards to bask, and if you have Harvester ants, leave the mounds alone, when possible.

If you spot a horned lizard, don't pick it up. Take pictures of it and note the place and time that you saw it. Also note if you see Harvester ants in the area. Please contact our local Horned Lizard Watcher, Master Naturalist Lucy Coward: lucy_coward@yahoo.com, or 254.697.6868.

Better yet, become part of the Texas Horned Lizard Watch yourself. For more info: www.tpwd.state.tx.us/learning/texas_nature_trackers/horned_lizard/ [Note: see a live video of a lizard squirting blood at <http://onlinemathlearning.com/animalfacts-hornedlizards.html/>. It's amazing! —Editor.]

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Los Caminos is a quarterly publication of the El
 Camino Real Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists.

Certifications, Etc. By Cindy Bolch

2010 was a big year for member certifications!

Achieving initial Certifications: Cindy McDaniels, Gary MdDaniels, Derrellene Zbikowski, Kenneth Zbikowski, Donna Lewis, Jackie Thornton, Lolly Lewis, Melanie Reed, Pam Neeley, Sue Taylor, and Toni Lafferty.

Achieving 2009 Annual Re-Certifications include: Carolyn Burford, Joy Graham, Sandra Dworzaczyk, Sandra O'Donnell, Lisa Davenport, and Dorothy Mayer

Achieving 2010 Annual Re-Certifications include: Ann Collins, Anne Barr, Katherine Bedrich, Cindy Bolch, Don Travis, Bruce Merryman, Cindy McDaniels, Cindy Travis, Connie Roddy, Dorothy Mayer, Ed Burleson, Janice Johnson, Jim and Sandra O'Donnell, Kim Summers, Lisa Davenport, Lucy Coward, Paul Unger, Paula Engelhardt, Phyllis Shuffield, Rusty Thomas, Jackie Thornton, Lolly Lewis, Sandra Dworzaczyk, and Sue Taylor

Lifetime to date Milestone Achievement Levels Awarded include:

250 Hours—Paul Unger, Ann Collins, Katherine Bedrich, Cindy Bolch, Paula Engelhardt, Don Travis, Debbie Harris, Joy Graham, Lucile Estell, Shawn Walton, Anne Barr, Ed Burleson, Connie Roddy, Dorothy Mayer, Lucy Coward, Donna Lewis, and Sue Taylor

500 Hours—Paul Unger, Ann Collins, Katherine Bedrich, Cindy Bolch, Paula Engelhardt, Don Travis and Anne Barr

1000 Hours—Paul Unger, Ann Collins, Katherine Bedrich, Cindy Bolch, and Don Travis

2500 Hours—Paul Unger

Congratulations to All!

Did You Know?

An animal that looks like a Pokémon card?



It's called an Axolotls (*Ambystoma mexicanum*), one of the best known of the Mexican neotenic mole salamanders, found in only one remaining lake in Mexico. They're like the cute anime pet you never had but always wanted, because you saw it on a deck of Pokémon cards. Tack onto that the ability to completely regenerate any dangling limb, and you've got yourself a real live Tamigachi! Another cool thing about axolotls is that they stay in their larval state even into adulthood, when they start becoming sexually mature—talk about babies having babies! Maury Povitch would have a field day with these weird sea creatures. Which of course,

only makes them weirder. Unfortunately, wild axolotls are near extinction due to urbanization in Mexico City and polluted waters, as well as the introduction of nonnative fish such as African tilapia and Asian carp which like to eat them. Yuk! [sources: science.discovery.com/top-ten/2009/sea-creatures/, and Wikipedia.]