



CLARK HAVEN PRAIRIE TOUR OCTOBER 22, 2014

*Dorothy Thetford
Master Naturalist Class 2001*

When the weather's perfect and the group of hikers is cordial, how can one ever forget such an informative prairie tour as the one Carol Clark led on October 22, 2014? Yes, a cool, early morning, light-to-cloudy overcast with waist-high prairie grasses was the perfect recipe for the perfect outing.

Carol and Richard Clark bought his family's 36 acre hay meadow in 2006 and, with their ownership, they began the self-directed project of keeping an ecologically-minded mowing schedule, redistributing their own seeds, removing invasives and keeping woody sprouts in check. Yes, it naturally began to transform under their prairie stewardship, and continues to surprise them with newly-discovered native plants yearly. Non-ending excitement, indeed.



Fonda & Marshall Fox



As Carol led us 15 'natives' across her prairie, she graciously identified 99.9% of her foliage and then gave her visitors the opportunity of 'naming-that-plant' game. 'Twas a very congenial group with several well-informed minds offering guesses. However, Carol's Plant List includes close to 350 identified native plants, so how could any of us blame her for not being confident about one or two names??? With her eight-year compilation of her plants' common and scientific names, she graciously credited Shirley Lusk, Jeff Quail, and Jim Varnum for their valuable input during her ongoing prairie project.

Clark Haven Prairie is stashed among beautiful rolling hills, horse farms, heavily wooded hillsides and hayed farmland northwest of Whitesboro, in Cooke County. Their once-hayed property is slowly phasing out the coastal Bermuda as the native wildflowers and grasses continue to thrive in acidic sandy soil and red clay over sandstone. We witnessed a wonderful display of fall grasses, i.e., Little, Big, Bushy and Splitbeard bluestems in addition to Eastern gamma, Indiangrass, Switchgrass, Sideoats grama, Purpletop, and Long-spiked tridens. Her blue and white fall asters, Rough-leafed sunflowers and Ladies tresses also made a showing worth applause.

The fieldtrip was arranged by Fonda and Marshall Fox for the Trinity Forks Chapter of NPSOT, and was open to members and trainees of the North Texas and Elm Fork Master Naturalist chapters. We were grateful for a gorgeous day, a gracious and knowledgeable hostess, and a breathtaking native prairie tour. For what more could we ask except for a possible return trip in the spring to witness a totally different plant composition. Stay tuned.



Blue fall aster



Proper Pruning with Steve Houser

From Jan Hodson

Photos- Dorothy Thetford



Steve Houser

The **Proper Pruning** class was held on Nov 6th. We had 33 people (27 MN, 2 MG, and 4 guests) attend the class. Steve Houser did an excellent job teaching us how to maintain trees for the optimum health of the tree.

The best way of course is to select the right tree (ball and burlap) for the right location; avoid utility right of ways and keep a good distance from buildings and water/sewer lines; stop girdling roots and crossing branches; trim branches that need to be removed before they become a problem to raise them up right. Of course, there is a lot more to it than that... Sorry, if you couldn't make it to class as it was a great program.



watching intently

Steve shares these links:

Research is showing that more trees equals less stress: <http://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-10-d-videos-trees-people-recover.html>

American Society of Landscape Architects guide to planning green infrastructure which includes the benefits of forests, nature reserves and wildlife habitat corridors: <http://www.asla.org/greeninfrastructure.aspx>

D eveloping

P roject



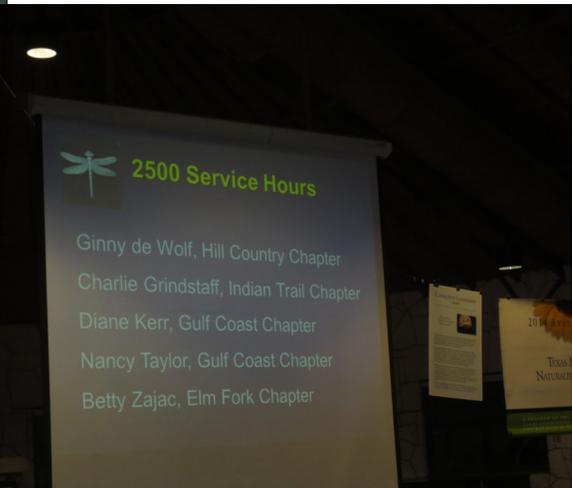
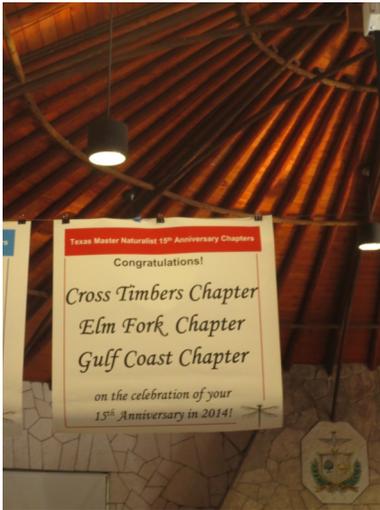
Photo and information comes from Van Elliott.

On October 29, 2014, **Levi McCollum, Julie Parker and Kate Lester** from the Gamma Theta Upsilon [Geographical Society at UNT] meet with Master Naturalists **Bill Coleman, (L) and Susan Myers (R)** along with **Chapter President Van Elliott**. Susan is lead on a project to develop a process for displaying our projects to new people coming into our chapter and the public. Susan is Elm Fork Chapter Project Manager and Bill is a local surveyor who is fluent in the GIS world and is helping with the coordination



Annual Conference 2014 at Mo Ranch

Photos courtesy Cheryl Ellis



Betty Zajack being recognized at Annual Conference for 2500 hours



Cheryl Ellis with group—500 hours



Deborah Estes explains display to unidentified attendees

**The 2014 TXMN Annual Conference:
A New State of Being**

by Heather Walker, trainee
class 2014

My friend and fellow Texas Master Naturalist in training Erin Piper and I decided we wanted to attend the 2014 Annual TXMN State Conference, somewhat on a whim. We planned for weeks, talked about our expectations, made too many lists, over-packed, and then finally set out on the open road on an October morning and headed south with enthusiasm. We were totally excited to jump in and have a new adventure. Yet, we were quiet as we drove into the Mo Ranch property in Hunt, Texas. The natural beauty was powerful and overwhelming. We quickly signed in and felt welcomed immediately. We rushed to dinner, which was delicious (they even had vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free options), and headed off to some lectures. When we ventured back to the dorm that evening, we were giddy and restless. We decided to explore the wilderness around us. After we wore ourselves out playing in nature, we found a quiet spot and were transfixed by the night sky as we lay on our backs by the Guadalupe River staring into the Milky Way and pointing out shooting stars.



The next two days are a blur. No one prepared us for how overwhelming it would be to be among 300-plus other nature nerds. It was like the summer camp of my dreams. We went to classes involving chapter management and improvement, native plants, insects, and animals, wildlife management, and (my favorite) an interpretive native plants walking tour. The lecturers/presenters were impressive, highly skilled and educated, and quite entertaining. There was never a dull moment. My only complaint was that it felt cruel to be inside a classroom when the weather and grounds were so inviting. Perhaps that is why several of us did the walking tour/hike more than once.

So, what did I learn? I learned that my experience at the state conference mirrors my experience with the TXMN program in general. I found this path because I wanted to be more educated as a citizen scientist and I wanted to be a positive force in my community. I have gotten that and so much more. The basic training provided by the Elm Fork Chapter has exceeded my expectations as an avid learner and has opened my mind to so many missed connections that I had not observed before in our natural world. The presenters at the state conference did the same — their ability to tie in their specific scientific knowledge to other ecological ideas made my head spin. It was like I was having an epiphany overdose. Luckily, the cure for that is easy: Take what you learn, relate it with what you know, and investigate all of it a lot more. Bam. Mind opened.

I have found that my involvement with the TXMN Elm Fork Chapter has been a transformative and life-changing experience for me. When I first committed to starting my training for TXMN, my mother-in-law, who is a TXMN with the Sabine-Neches chapter in Beaumont, told me that she was happy for me because the program would open me up to new special people and new special places. Wow. That was an understatement. Erin and I were nervous as TXMNs in training about what we could offer at the state conference. We were barely into our first month of instruction, after all. Total newbs. What we discovered is that we all have value in this program. We were treated as comrades in conservation by everyone we ran into. We were so honored to be included in a group of people we had so much respect for — people who wanted to talk about native plants, insects, birds, geology, etc. ... People who were not offended when you shifted your gaze mid sentence and pointed at a bird in the sky. It was natural. They looked. They listened. They understood.

Just like in nature, we all had our place. It was truly overwhelming to feel so intrinsically connected to my fellow humans. For the first time, I felt like I had found my tribe. And there were a lot of us! I've never felt so open and free to be my dorky nature-loving self. We were all there to share and we were all there to learn. What a powerful combination for transformation.



At Moe Ranch—Photo from Heather Walker

I could probably sum up my state conference experience with what happened the very first night there. After our bunkmates settled in early for the night, I became antsy. How could I be out in this beautiful part of Texas and not explore? Erin and I got our backpacks together, grabbed our headlamps and cameras, and ventured out to hike on a moonless night in the heart of the Hill Country. After exploring for hours, we sat by the Guadalupe River to stargaze. All of a sudden we heard a rustling and saw a flash of light. A young man appeared at the bend of the river, walking through the shallow water with a huge camera. He smiled when he saw us and introduced himself as a presenter and biologist from Austin. And then he asked, "What are y'all doing out here? Looking for critters, too?" We nodded enthusiastically. And the next thing I knew we were traipsing around the river showing each other pictures of the fish and spiders and plants we were finding. We searched long and hard for a frog we could hear clearly in the brush. We never found it, but we did find each other. And, at that moment, nothing else mattered.

Erin and I took a chance when we went to the State Conference as TXMN trainees and we did not know what to expect. Because of our willingness to be "in the now," and our openness to new people and ideas, we were given a deeper appreciation of our connection with nature and our connection with humanity. We both left feeling like we were transformed and uplifted by the respect, love, and appreciation we were shown by our community. Our people. Our tribe.

On the last night, I stayed up too late listening to the insects buzz and the owls hunt and I wrote a poem about a flower I had discovered that day on an interpretive nature hike. Perhaps the last line of the poem is the truth I walked away with:

**"The present I give myself is
the mystery of my future past."**

*Heather is a new member and a new contributor—
Welcome and thank you, Heather!*



Ocean Plastic Collection

From Bob Ross

This month's issue of Coastal Living magazine has an interesting article about a young man from The Netherlands, named Boyan Slat. As a final thesis at his high school in Delft, Holland, the youngster had to spend six months researching any topic of his choice. Since Slat had just returned from a diving vacation in Greece where he claimed he had seen more plastic than fish in the waters, he opted for his project to be about ocean plastic cleanup.

"He has developed and erected a solar powered tower in the ocean that is 30 feet tall, that allows the ocean currents to bring the floating garbage to the tower which is a plastic sorter."

After giving a lecture about his idea, which went viral, the young man began receiving over 1,500 emails per day. With the volunteer help of over 100 major scientists, engineers, and maritime lawyers, Slat also began to receive monetary donations from over 38,000 donors giving in excess of \$2 million to his cause.

For more information about the project go to the web site:

www.theoceancleanup.com. This web site has two excellent videos (times are 3:51 for one and 16:42 for the other). The short video is an overall view of the project. The longer video is of Boyan Slat giving a lecture this past June, 3rd in New York City. Viewing is well worth the time and effort. By the way, Slat just turned 20 years of age this past July.

The article explains how Slat researched what was being done in plastic collection and whether or not it was successful. He quickly learned that what was being done in ocean collections revolved around using a vessel to drag nets through the sea. He thought such a process was costly, caused more environmental harm than good, and could possibly take thousands of years to make an impact. Slat came up with the philosophy of, "Why move through the ocean when the ocean can move through you." He has developed and erected a solar powered tower in the ocean that is 30 feet tall, that allows the ocean currents to bring the floating garbage to the tower which is a plastic sorter. It is an ingenious idea. Some projections are that this sorter will be able to remove over 7 million tons of plastic, removing half the plastic in the North Pacific Garbage Patch within 10 years. He and his group are also working on a smaller-scale sorter that can be placed in river deltas and bays leading to the ocean, intercepting new plastic before it reaches the sea.



www.whoi.edu/science/B/people/kamaral/plasticsarticle.