



Wood Duck Whistler January 2023

President's Message by Wanda Rauscher



The year 2023 marks the 25th anniversary for the Texas Master Naturalist program. Mark your calendar for the 2023 annual meeting which will be held in McAllen, Texas, October 12-15 which just happens to be during an annular solar eclipse, October 14! [Annular solar eclipse: an eclipse in which a thin outer ring of the sun's disk is not covered by the smaller dark disk of the moon. The total eclipse that includes Tyler, Texas will be April 8, 2024.]

Those members recertifying in 2023 by volunteering 40 approved service hours and participating in 8 advanced training hours will earn the Texas Ecoregions pin.



Those who have not yet initially certified can work on a plan to earn both their initial certification dragonfly AND the Texas Ecoregions (course work + 80 service hours, 16 AT hours)! There are lots of projects and opportunities to serve.



And speaking of service we will need help for the City Nature Challenge 2023 and for the new ID Fairchild Forest projects in support of the red-cockaded woodpecker among other projects. There are administration needs as well in the chapter including the not glamorous but necessary putting-the-meeting-room-back-in-order per Tyler Nature Center guidelines after each event using the facility (managed by Hospitality Committee).

Watch for the updated VSH and AT lists coming to the e-Blast as attachments mid-month!

WELCOME AND CONGRATULATIONS TO THESE NEW BOARD MEMBERS!

- Cindy Smith – Vice President
- Carol Lanthrum – Secretary



BE A MENTOR FOR THE 2023 CLASS MEMBERS!

Denise Gary
Beverly Guthrie

Whatever you do in the new year, do make a New Year's resolution to be a part of the newly organized **Mentor Program!** The Training Class Chair will be pairing new class members with a veteran member who can guide them through the sometimes-confusing period of training. Rules for volunteering and posting hours can be overwhelming at times and having a friend



to ask questions of will make things easier and clearer.

Should you choose to help, time demands will be small. There will be a Zoom meeting or two before classes begin on January 17th, you will need to **put the evening of January 17th on your calendar for attending the orientation class with your mentee,** and you may want to plan a walk, coffee or some other opportunity to get together and become friends. Duties are flexible and you and your mentee can decide how much interaction needs to take place and how you want to make the new class member feel welcome.

If you have a small bit of time and want to make a big difference in welcoming in the new class, please contact the Training Class Chair to get further details. New class members are fun and interesting, and your involvement will make a big difference. Come help us make this first mentor effort a big success!

Thanks for your help!

RCWO Support Project Work for January and February

Mark Edmund

Our new chapter VSH projects to support habitat for the endangered Red-Cockaded Woodpecker (RCWO) habitat at the ID Fairchild State Forest will get under way in January 2023. We have a variety of ways to assist Donna Work who is with the Texas Forest Service and responsible for managing habitat for the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker at the ID Fairchild State Forest and the WG Jones State Forest. We are going to kick-off this project work in January and February by running transects across two areas of the Fairchild State Forest.

What is a transect? My Webster's Dictionary defines a transect as "a sample area (as of vegetation) usually in the form of a long continuous strip" which pretty well fits what we'll be doing. At the forest, there are several active 'clusters' where the RCWO families have set up home (see C2, C8 and C9 areas on the attached map). We will be walking transects (or straight lines) across the forest in these areas looking for cavity trees. Known cavity trees are marked with a green band of paint. We'll be focusing more on finding new cavity trees and noting the GPS coordinates so that Donna can check them later to verify use. In particular, it would be helpful if you have a compass (or compass app on your cellphone). A GPS unit (or GPS app on your cellphone) would also be handy although, at least for an iPhone, you can get the GPS coordinates by dropping a pin in the Maps app.

Our work dates for January will be Thursday January 12 and Saturday January 21 (these may shift depending on the weather forecast). On each day, we'll meet at the state forest entrance (south side of Hwy 84 at intersection with FM 767 – 'Parking' area on map) at 8:00 AM. We will plan to work until early afternoon so bring a lunch, snacks, water, and a folding chair. Please contact Mark Edmund if you plan to attend either day or if have any questions. I

do have additional information that covers how to walk transects and how to identify cavity trees that I can share with you. Thanks!

Christmas from July to October

Ruth Adame

Christmas is over, New Year is past. It's out with the old, in with the new. Trim those fading Christmas poinsettias, tuck them away in a cool dry spot (don't forget to keep them slightly damp so they'll bloom next year), and move on.

It's cold. It's rainy. You don't get out much. What are you doing? You're planning your garden, of course, perusing the flower catalogs, haunting the garden section at Lowe's, wishing the rain would stop and the sun would come out. That soil is calling! The big question: which flowers and plants will flourish in this Texas heat? Which ones will glow with color after several broiling Texas days? (What will make your gardening friends turn green with envy?)

The poinsettia, of course. Now don't go hauling those Christmas poinsettias out of hibernation—there's a new kid in town: the Texas native poinsettia, and you have your choice of four.

Do you want to cover a field? Two related plants, the *Euphorbia marginata*, commonly known as Snow-on-the-mountain, and the *Euphorbia bicolor*, Snow-on-the-prairie, both bloom in late summer through October, wielding wispy white bracts and cup-flowers, creating what many describe as a "blanket of snow." These plants grow up to 4 feet and do well in poor soil where other plants won't grow. While this plant does provide a source of nectar for bees and butterflies and mourning doves eat the seeds, the milky sap is an irritant to humans and cattle and other grazing creatures.

If you are looking for a living backdrop of foliage in a small garden, the Poinsettia

cyathophora, aka Mexican Fireplant, Desert Poinsettia, and the Wild Poinsettia, might fit right in. This plant grows to about 3 feet, so should possibly be placed close to a wall or fence to provide support. The green leaves have been described as fiddle-shaped, while deep red-reddish orange bracts surround small white flower clusters dusted with bright yellow pollen. This annual plant re-seeds when the capsules dry and burst open and can spread quickly. Too much sun and not enough water? Not a big problem. The painted poinsettia is one tough plant. (Too much water weakens it so that the plant will lean over or even flatten out.) While you're enjoying the colors and shapes, small insects, butterflies, Sphinx moths, and Sphinx moth caterpillars will be enjoying these plants as well.

The *Euphorbia dentata*, the smallest poinsettia plant, will fill those gaps in a garden and provide the silver lining. This little plant only grows to about a foot tall, with tooth-edged leaves, pale green or white flower clusters, and bracts that turn to a silver-white color, like fairy dust. Don't be fooled by the unassuming appearance, however, as this plant is as tenacious as the bigger, showier counterparts, able to withstand the heat as well as poor, dry soil.

One last comment: Texas' native poinsettias have been called weeds by some and invasives by others. They are annuals and will show up next year (like it or not). Again, the



Photo courtesy Texas A&M Horticulture

milky sap is an irritant to humans and creatures. To enjoy these to the fullest, some careful planning is needed.

Who's Destroying My Garden? Moles, Pocket Gophers, or Voles?

Gordon Betts

Almost daily, I read someone in a gardening group accusing the poor mole of eating their plants and destroying their garden. The poor things are accused of an evil act of which they are completely innocent.

Plants do disappear, sucked into the ground and consumed as a nutritious fodder. But, if it's not the mole, then who is the guilty party?

There are two other good candidates for this dastardly deed. So, let's look at moles, voles and gophers to see who is most likely to be our garden foe.

Moles

The furry little critters we find in East Texas are the Eastern Mole (*Scalopus aquaticus*). They are about 4-7 inches (10-17 cm) long weighing 1.4 to 1.8 oz (40-51 g). They have a pointed face, absent ears and eyes that are hard to see under their fur.



Figure 1. Common Mole . (2022, December 12). In Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mole_\(animal\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mole_(animal))

Their paddle-like feet are well adapted to burrowing underground. These industrious little animals can burrow up to 18 feet per hour and 150 or more feet per day. Their tunnels are mostly 8-12 inches deep but they also raise furrows at the surface as they hunt for food.

This tunneling can have a long-term beneficial effect on the environment since they contribute to turning the soil and bringing minerals to the surface. But, for most of us, they are a serious nuisance. Their mounds, several inches around and a few inches tall and their surface tunnels are unsightly and increase wear and tear on our lawn equipment.

Moles are relatively slow to reproduce and increase their population since they only produce a single litter of 3-5 each year.

Their industrious nature in search of food is energy intensive. They eat an impressive 70-100% of their body weight in a typical day.

This brings us to our initial accusation: "Moles are eating my garden."

Moles are insectivores. They don't eat vegetation. They prefer things like insects, grubs, earthworms and larvae. Although annoying, they are not deserving of the scorn we have heaped upon them.

Pocket Gophers

Pocket gophers (*Geomys personatus*) are our next suspect. They belong to the rodent



Figure 2. Gopher. (2022, November 28). In Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gopher>

family. Gophers get their name for the fur lined pockets on either side of their mouth where they can store food.

Males are about 12.6 inches (32 cm) long including a 4.3-inch (11 cm) tail. Females are

slightly smaller and both weigh about 14.1 oz. (400 g).

Pocket gophers dig burrows up to 800 feet long between 4-15 inches under the ground. They form mounds 8-24 inches in diameter and about 5 inches high, similar to moles. Like moles, long term they can be beneficial to soil moving as much as two and a half tons per year. But like moles, their mounds and tunnels can cause damage and wear to our lawn equipment.

Pocket gophers breed once per year in their northern ranges but twice in their southern ranges. They average 3-4 offspring per litter.

Are gophers our guilty party? Their diet consists of fleshy roots of plants including trees. They like potatoes and peanuts and almost any other plant they can pull down from above.

Voles

Our final suspects are voles. There are 61 species of this small rodent worldwide, but the types we find in Texas are Mexican voles, prairie voles and woodland voles. Because they look so similar to mice they are often referred to as field mice.



Figure 3. Vole. (2022, December 23). In Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vole>

Voles range in size between 3-9 inches (8-23 cm) and weigh about 1.5 oz (42 g). they have an unusually short lifespan between three and six months, rarely reaching 12 months. But they are prolific producing up to ten litters of 4-6 pups during their lifespan.

Voles tunnel very little. They usually clear narrow trails in a grassy environment. They are active year around.

Their diet consists of tree bark, bulbs, tubers, seedlings and stems. They are sometimes guilty of girdling and killing small trees. They are also guilty of consuming almost any plant grown in a garden.

Who is guilty?

Who is the guilty party when you find damage in your garden? Moles are carnivorous, not eating plants. They are innocent victims of false accusations.

Pocket gophers are herbivorous, eating tree roots, potatoes, peanuts and almost any plant they can attack.

Voles attack almost any plant grown in the garden. They seem to consume a wider variety of garden vegetables than do gophers.

If you find tunnels in your garden and plants are disappearing, the guilty party is most likely to be pocket gophers. If you don't find tunnels, but find small trails, the guilty party is most likely voles.

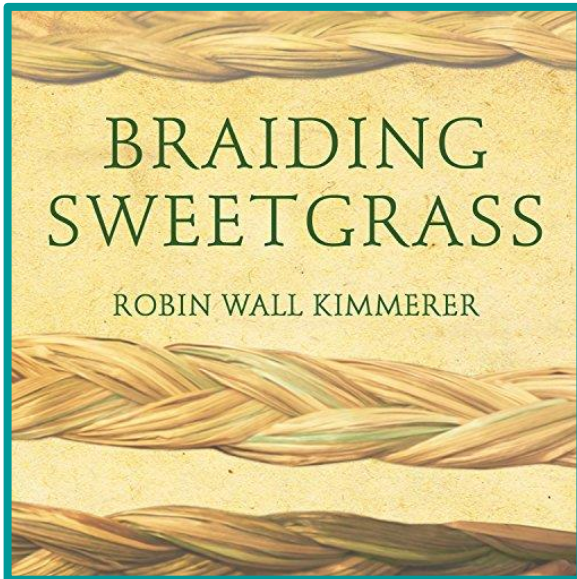
Now you know moles to be innocent victims. And you now know how to determine who is the evil spirit destroying your garden. Paperback, 390 pages.

December Book Reviews

Lance Homeniuk

Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer. Published 2013 by Milkweed Editions, Canada. Paperback, 390 pages.

This book was recommended to me by a fellow chapter member and since it was in my TBR pile (down about the Triassic era) I dug it out and read it ahead of schedule. I have already reviewed Kimmerer's book "Gathering Moss" and this shares all the good features of the former. But it is longer, delves more into



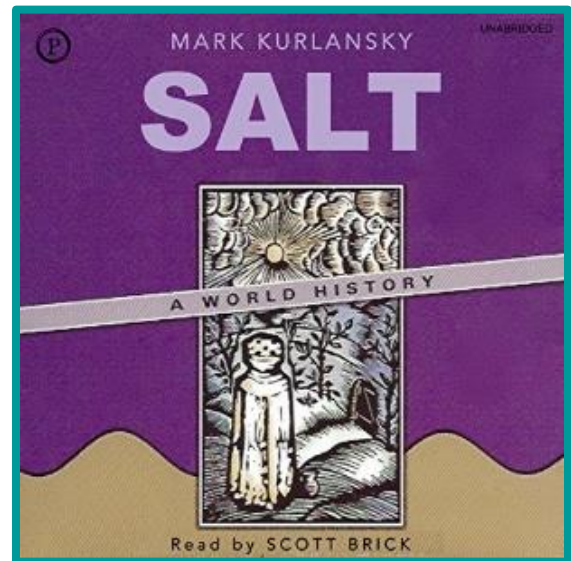
indigenous wisdom, which she draws from a number of traditions, and makes a strong effort to weld scientific knowledge, empirical, data-driven, statistical, to the anecdotal, practical, subjective thinking of long traditions and stories of the continent's first naturalists. She promotes learning from the plants themselves, learning reciprocity (more than mere sustainability), gratitude and valuing the life forms with which we share the environment. Speaking of a field trip, she lead her students into the Smokey Mountains and she describes that when she learned the dichotomy of western and indigenous knowledge "I'd told them all about how it works and nothing of what it meant." Yet the "voices of the waterfalls and silence of the mosses" drown out the worst and best teachers.

I was most enthralled by the chapter structured around a lowly lichen, "*Umbilicaria*: The Belly Button of The World". It has changed my perception of these most intriguing of organisms: symbiotes – a fungus and an alga essential for each other's survival, bridging the edge of living organisms and the mineral earth. The symbiote has its own scientific name, each species incorporating its own unique partners. Some are hardier, others more sensitive to environmental factors. But they must cooperate, in Kimmerer's words – gift, reciprocity, thankfulness.

There is much, much more in here – native stories, maples, wild rice, strawberries, pond weeds, cedars, frogs, ducks, and the ever-threatening Windigo within us. This is definitely a must read, and read again.

Salt: A World History by Mark Kurlansky. Published 2002 by Vintage Canada, Toronto, ON. Paperback, 484 pages.

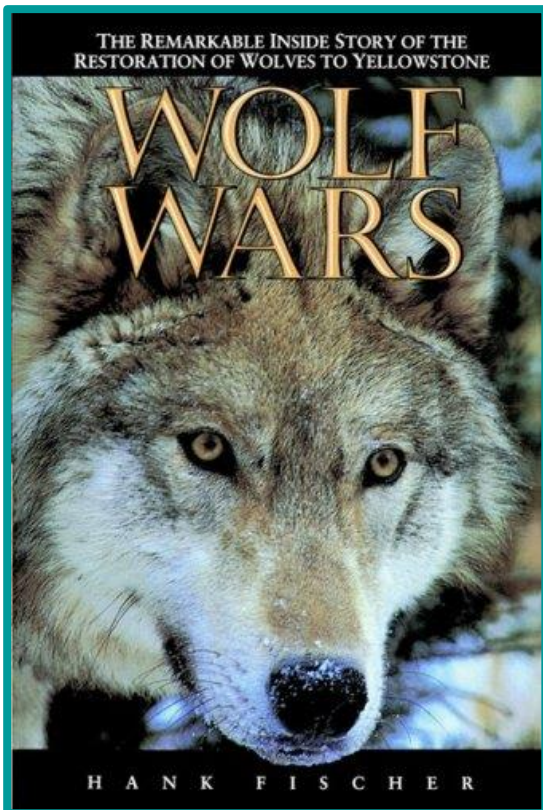
Like a well-seasoned meal in three parts of 27 chapters, with a dessert of bibliography and index, this book even includes recipes! And like a good smorgasbord, it has something for everyone: the chemist, the cook, the historian, the geographer, the geologist, the anthropologist, and the literate reader. How about a combination platter as appetizer? Ch 2 "Fish, Fowl, and Pharaohs", Ch12 "American Salt wars", Ch 18 "The Odium o Sodium". The author is, by turns, pedantic, enlightening, funny, eloquent, and makes a four-letter subject fascinating. I reckon I should not be surprised at all, for the subject is at once



essential for life (and the enjoyment of such) and so common and taken for granted.

In the front papers are listed his other books. Having enjoyed this one so, I am tempted to look for "The Basque History of the World". I know less about Basques than I did about salt (wonder if they are common but underappreciated too?)

Wolf Wars by Hank Fischer. Published 1995 by Falcon Press Publishing Co., Inc, Helena and Billings, MT. Paperback 182 pages.



Americans fought for centuries with bullets, traps and poison to exterminate wolves from their native habitat. By 1923 breeding wolves had been eliminated from Yellowstone National Park. The author posits it was not hatred or fear that motivated the slaughter, but self-interest. "Witnessing this animal's demise was a society that placed no value on the wolf. End of story.

No, not quite."

Slowly the tide of opinion shifted, pushed by research of wildlife biologists, pulled by the environmental movement, and fought in town hall meetings, congressmen's aide's offices, newspapers, local, state, and national bureaucracies (ebbing and flowing with every new appointment and transfer) year after year. Written by one of the frontline fighters this is the behind-the-scenes story of how

Canadian wolves – and at least one native wolf- were finally restored to Yellowstone. Unless you thrill to reports of meetings, debates, arguments, and deals it may be slow going. But I for one had my eyes open to how those hard-won victories that merit a sound bite and 30 second video montage actually come to be. And I would rather fight mosquitoes, briars, mud and sleet out in the woods than those battles in the "smoke-filled rooms".

(Photos courtesy of Amazon)

Thoughts for the New Year

The fact is that no species has ever had such wholesale control over everything on earth, living or dead, as we now have. That lays upon us, whether we like it or not, an awesome responsibility. In our hands now lies not only our own future but that of all other living creatures with whom we share the earth."

David Attenborough

Through winter we call on spring,
And through the spring on summer call,
And when abounding hedges ring
Declare that winter's best of all

William Butler Yeats

BE A MASTER NATURALIST



More than 40 hours of classroom study & field trips enrich & prepare you to volunteer and sustain our natural world.

\$150 tuition covers materials, instruction, books and more.

Class space is limited.
Applications accepted in order received.

FOR MORE INFO AND APPLICATION CONTACT:

BEVERLY- finwren@sbcglobal.net
Website URL = <http://txmn.org/etwd/>

Non-profit Sponsored by:
TPWD and AgriLife Extension
Approved in most school districts
for CTE Credit

TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION



Give yourself the best gift of all—knowledge! Learn about our rich E. TX ecosystem from experts in their fields and volunteer with like-minded friends. Whether you are into bugs, birds, bats or botany, you will love these classes! Master Naturalists find fun ways to enjoy the outdoors together while helping to preserve the Earth's treasures for our children and grandchildren. Join us!



2023 CLASSES BEGIN JAN. 17th

6-9 PM Tuesdays thru April.

**In person classes held at
Tyler Nature Center,
11942 FM 848, Tyler, TX 75707**



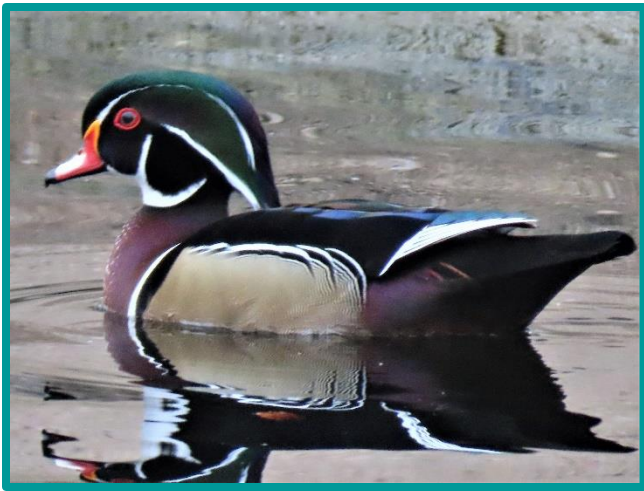


Photo courtesy Ann Reynolds

The Texas Master Naturalist Program's mission is to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the State of Texas.

Unless otherwise noted, all photos belong to the author of the article.

Upcoming Events

January 10 – TMN Tuesday noon – Michelle Haggerty – TMN Program

Tentative January 14 Officers & Directors Retreat- Tyler Nature Center, 1-5 pm

January 20 articles for the chapter newsletter due to Ann Reynolds

January 26 – Chapter Meeting, Eric I Taylor, Silviculturist, Texas A&M Forest Service, Tyler Nature Center

IN THE COMMUNITY

January 11 – NETFO – NOTE DATE CHANGE
6:30 pm, Alethea SS Classroom at Greggton UMC (1101 Pine Tree Road) in Longview.

January 10 – Tyler Audubon Society, 6:30 pm, St. Francis Episcopal Church, Education Room, 3232 Jan Avenue, Tyler. Santa who will be giving CBC Tips

Christmas Bird Counts

January 2 – NETFO CBC Tenaha Timpson – Lake Murval

January 2 – Tyler Audubon CBC – Location TBD

NPSOT-Longview – 3rd Thursday, 2:30 pm, Longview Arboretum

NPSOT – Linden – 4th Tuesday 6:30 pm, Senior Citizen Center, 507 S. Kaufman St., Linden



WHERE YOU CAN FIND US



Chapter dues of \$20 per individual or \$35 per couple are due **by January 31, 2023**. Please remit to: ETCMN, Attn. Treasurer, P. O. Box 131184, Tyler, TX 75713-1184



<https://tpwd.texas.gov/>

You can find East Texas Chapter Master Naturalists here:
<https://txmn.org/etwd/>
<https://www.facebook.com/EastTexasMasterNaturalist/>

Texas Master Naturalist – East Texas Chapter Monthly Chapter meetings are held the **fourth Thursday of the month at the Tyler Nature Center, 11942 FM 848, Tyler, TX 75707**. Meet and greet 6:45 pm; meeting at 7:00 pm.

Everyone is welcome.

Safety Guidelines from TMN: Safety is our guiding principle. Follow all federal, state and county guidelines for TMN activities. Virtual platforms are useful and should remain an important consideration for planning meetings and events. Masks and social distancing considerations are encouraged. (July 2021)

ETCMN CHAPTER ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

****President:** Wanda Rauscher

****Vice President:** Cindy Smith

Hospitality Co-Chairs: Caryn Vorsas and Joe Vorsas

****Secretary:** Carol Lanthrum

Historian/Archivist: Bob Lumpkins

****Treasurer:** Phil Guthrie

Immediate Past President: Paul Wick

DIRECTORS:

Advanced Training (AT): Lead - Beverly Guthrie with Amy Cumbie and Cindy Smith

Volunteer Service Projects (VSH): Lead - Lance Homeniuk with Dawn Bahr and Greg Marshall

Community Education/Outreach: Lance Homeniuk

Speakers Bureau: Greg Marshall

Diversity and Inclusion: Holly Boyd

Training Class: Beverly Guthrie

Acting Membership: Wanda Rauscher

Volunteer Management System Director: Lindsey Smith

Communications Support:

E-Blast: Wanda Rauscher

Newsletter: Ann Reynolds

Photography: Lindsey Smith

Public Relations: Carol Lanthrum

Social Media: Lead - Greg Marshall, Julie Davis

Website: Dale Wade

State Representative: Wanda Rauscher or appointed alternative

2022 Class Representatives: Denise Gary and Michelle Seaton

Chapter Advisors:

Clint Perkins – A&M Agrilife Extension Agent-Smith County

Boyd Sanders – TPWD Advisor

**** = Officers & Executive Board Members**

All ETCMN members listed are voting Board members.

Revised 12/31/22