Wood Duck Whistler

September 2026

East Texas Chapter TMN



A Message From President Carol Lanthrum

Well, August was hot! Hope September will bring cooler days and some rain, but early September looks like high 90s and dry per CBS19TV. The weather forecaster does expect the Super El Nino developing in the Pacific to favor a wetter and cooler late fall and winter. One can only hope.

We have not had many VS opportunities in July and August – a few birding events with Tyler Audubon, our chapter mothing event, Wildscape work, and a mycology event, so I recall. But we have had a whole bunch of AT opportunities that I have been sending you information about every few days. There is no reason you can't get all your AT hours for certification and recertification. Don't forget that TMN Tuesday, live or recorded, can count for 12 AT hours and chapter meetings count for 11 more. And if you go to the state meeting, you can get even more. That's many more than the 16 you need for certification and recertification! But come to meetings anyway – there is always something else to learn, and you can find out about all the activities happening this fall and ways you can participate.

Thanks to Karen Rueb-Hall and her committee in evaluating these webinars and seminars! Before you contact Karen, go to the website to see if the seminar/webinar is already in the Generally Approved AT Opportunities document, and that you are really interested in attending. The committee willingly works hard but doesn't need extra unnecessary work. The committee will review all the opportunities they approved this year and update the Generally Approved document next year.

If you need your VS for certification or recertification hours, there are the upcoming events I know about now: Yantis Prairie Days, Fire and Nature Festival at TNC, and NatureFest at the Mineola Nature Preserve. I'm sure other birding (like CBC) and other opportunities will be announced as fall continues.

On a personal note, a Mississippi Kite family has been nesting in my neighborhood. Once the juvenile fledged, it has been practicing its vocalizations (endlessly) and flight skills right over my house! I've tried to take photos, and either I don't have a camera at the right time, or more often than not, I miss - I'm not a very good photographer. The juvenile and parent sometimes fly together and I've been able to watch them circle and use their tails as a rudder. So entertaining!

Hope to see each of you at our meetings and events to support our mission of education, outreach, and service. And to have fun!!

Happy Volunteering!

Partridge Pea: A Sunny Native with a Big Ecological Role

by Ann Reynolds

Partridge pea, Sleeping Plant or Sensitive Plant (*Chamaecrista fasciculata*) is a beautiful native wildflower found throughout much of Texas. It produces bright yellow flowers with red interiors on slender stems in summer and early fall, often adding a splash of color to prairies, roadsides, and open woodland areas. It grows 1-3' tall and has finely textured, pinnately-compound leaves that fold when touched and at night. This hardy annual plant grows well in sunny locations and tolerates dry, sandy, or poor soils. It is a self-seeding legume and acts as a natural nitrogen fixer to improve local soil health through a partnership with specialized soil microbes called **rhizobia bacteria**, which form small bumps (nodules) on the plant's roots and turn gas from the air into usable plant food.

Partridge pea is also valuable to wildlife. Its seeds provide food for birds (quails, doves, songbirds), while its flowers attract bees (especially bumblebees, honeybees, long-tongued bees), butterflies, and other pollinators. The plants serve as a primary larval host for butterflies like the Cloudless Sulphur, Little Yellow, and Sleepy Orange.

As a native Texas plant, it can be an excellent choice for naturalized landscapes, pollinator gardens, and wildlife-friendly yards. With its cheerful yellow blooms and importance to native wildlife, partridge pea is an excellent choice for naturalized landscapes, pollinator gardens, and wildlife-friendly yards.















Image credited to Gloria Arnold
Image submitted by Ann Reynolds

Project Wild Workshop

by Carol Lanthrum

On Saturday, August 22nd, Wanda Rauscher, Maci Ferguson and I attended the Project Wild workshop in Nacogdoches. Kay Jenkins was one of our instructors.

Project Wild is an interactive conservation and environmental curriculum for children to learn about wildlife. It is primarily meant for K-12 educators and is coordinated with TEKS, Texas Knowledge and Skills. Through TEKS, the state sets grade-level standards for what students should know and be able to do, and the children are assessed with the STARR test. I explain this because I am not an educator, so I thought some others of you who are non-educators don't know your TEKS from your STARRs either!

I took the course to find ways to enrich public education at the various events that we Master Naturalists attend and facilitate. Project Wild activities are fun, not only for children but for the young-at-heart, and they fit right in with our mission "*to provide education… to the beneficial management of natural resources…"*

We played *Oh Deer!*, an activity that identifies the 4 components of habitat: food, water, shelter and space. Some participants are one of the resources; some are deer; some are predators. Deer try to capture the resources they need and avoid predators. Here is Wanda in a 'hat' we made to change our resource in the game and here are all the deer sharing too little space ((poor carrying capacity)!







Some of the other activities were *Seed Need*, a study in how seeds are spread through the environment, followed by a discussion about why dispersion is necessary. *Adaptation Artistry* is a quiet activity that allows participants to draw a known or imaginary animal to study how beak/mouth, wings/arms/legs/feet, and so on, help the animal get the resources it needs to survive. *First Impressions* allows participants to examine how they feel about a creature (Like, Neutral, Dislike) both before they knew much about the animal, and to change their mind after they learned more information about it. And *Animal Charades!*







After the class, we walked the Tucker Trail. The trail is marked with signposts which ask you to slow down, listen, observe, breathe. It is designed for college students to take a break from their hectic schedules. Ok, it was hot - but very shady. We experienced nature, walked off our lunch, and it was relaxing! Hope if you go to the fall or spring plant sale, or for any other reason you are in Nac, that you take 20 minutes to experience the trail.







There are many activities in the manual that can be adapted to outdoor programs that MNs participate in. Educators can collect data from the activities to teach math skills. We MNs can teach the information in more casual ways. I hope you will consider taking the course.

The Wood Duck Whistler is a monthly publication of ETCMN. News, essays, comments and ideas are always welcome! Please email them to Casey Boggs at caseylynnboggs@gmail.com

Would you like to be featured in the Wood Duck Whistler's "Get to Know Your Fellow Master Naturalists" spotlight? Email Casey Boggs at caseylynnboggs@gmail.com

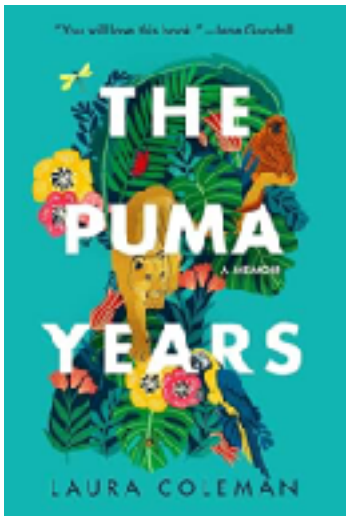
Book Reviews

by Lance Homeniuk



Wild Moments: Adventures with Animals of the North. Edited by Michael Engelhard. 2009 University of Alaska Press, Fairbanks. Paperback, 221 pages.

Bears and eagles and whales, oh my! This book comprises thirty one chapters authored by naturalists in the first person and features a wide variety of animals of the northern hemisphere. As well as the three creatures of my lead sentence, we meet fawns, caribou, lynx, terns, ravens, wolverines, beluga, and salmon; natural history of the animals: a few are almost memoria of dwindling, if not disappearing, denizens of the North. Each author has a unique voice and point of view, as different as their subjects. But the collection as a whole delivers a unified message – the fascinating, beautiful and valuable communities of our natural wilderness. I give this one two thumbs, two wings, and two fins up. It is even worth rereading,

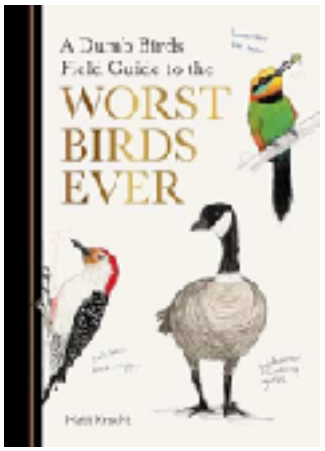


The Puma Years by Laura Coleman. 2021 by little A, New York, NY. Paperback, 290 pages.

A memoir of and by a twenty-something English woman, in flight from a conventional life and in a wildlife sanctuary in the Amazonian jungle that needs volunteers. The opposite of glamping, of tropical resorts, or modern conveniences, it is a shoestring operation with almost no budget or support and a miniscule staff. But it homes about a hundred animals of all types with a major feature in common – they have been abused and abandoned by people after being captured from the wild. One of the most emotionally damaged is a young female puma named Wayra. Coleman and Wayra struggle through their own internal dark places and acting out as they gradually help each other heal. Surrounded by other volunteers from around the world, other animal inmates, including a bra-stealing javelina, a pair of howler monkeys, a blind macaw, various big cats (including an African lion (!?) And a main character is the jungle itself, passing through the rhythms of dry and wet seasons, suffering from human encroachment and resulting clear cutting, wildfires, and poaching.

Coleman immerses the reader in the milieu in multisensory descriptions: the heat, the humidity, the mud, multitudes of multicolored mozzies* and bot flies, rare sunlight and blue skies, the wide range of greens and brightly colored flowers, smells both fragrant and repulsive; aches, itches, cramps, blisters, numbing fatigue, progress of parasitic infections and hunger, despair and joy. Spoiler alert! She obviously leaves (she wrote the book, right?) Though her heart is now in two places she has been able to contribute to the mission by getting the word out, collecting support and funding for the sanctuary and the animals and people she loves.

- Mozzies = mosquitoes, but you figured that out already.



The Dumb Birds Field Guide to the Worst Birds Ever. By Matt Kracht. 2025 by Chronicle Books, San Francisco, CA. paperback 199 pages.

I cannot in good conscience recommend this little, surprisingly heavy book to anybody who lacks a twisted sense of humor. If you've already been warped by the likes of Monty Python, Gary Larson, Saturday Night Live, or Mel Brooks, you might find this up your alley. While many of the names of birds are in poor taste and the text is almost all satire, the illustrations are pretty good. Not Roger Tory Peterson or Audubon good, but they do look like the sort you would expect in a real nature journal. And the facts about each one are, well, factual, just delivered in a snarky 13-year old or college sophomore tone. Funny how that wheel turns, eh? I will keep my copy so that if I ever allow guests into my library they will see proof that I am not a sobersides old fuddy-duddy. Maybe I should look for an issue of Mad magazine that is devoted to physics or philosophy. My favorite? Why, *Mimus polyglottos,* of course, aka the Northern Dorkingbird.

The following article was originally featured in The Advocate and is reprinted here with their permission and the permission of the author.
Article submitted by Ginger Sawyer

Ready for their CLOSE-UP

Grab the magnifying glass and get to bug watching. Here's tips for the hobby in La.

BY **COLETTE DEAN** Contributing writer

Put down that flyswatter and grab the magnifying glass. Bug watching is the latest craze and is surging in popularity. All it takes is a white sheet, a light, a magnifier and some patience.

Insects make up roughly half of the animal kingdom. Life would be impossible without them, and many nature lovers are learning that they're fascinating to observe. One recent muggy night, members of the Louisiana Master Naturalists of Greater Baton Rouge invited the public to join them on the grounds of LSU Hilltop Arboretum for a sheeting event celebrating "Moth Week," a national celebration of the nighttime pollinators held every July.

White sheets draped on clotheslines were tied to trees and illuminated with UV lights. The sheets were stationed far apart to attract moths and other arthropods. Observers used headlamps, cellphones and cameras to see the creatures up close and, when spied, were added to the iNaturalist community-science project.

Insects are visible during the day, but the real show begins after dark and lasts until daylight, where there's a better chance of seeing the jewels of the night — moths — but also thousands of other insects with a wide array of colors and patterns, including beetles or flies, like the orange and white *Eratoneura comoides*, or the black, green and white striped *Tylozygus bifidus*. Participants Tyne and Christian Bankester said they enjoyed seeing the specimens up close.

"I think it's cool. It's a great date night activity," Tyne Bankester said. For the record, Christian Bankester documented the sharp-headed Sharpshooter and the Afflicted Dagger moths.
LMNGBR member Brandon Johnson and his wife, Yipin, helped others log in 57 species of arthropods, which included 17 species of moths and one butterfly. Johnson has been participating in the club's past sheeting events at Hilltop, LSU Burden and BREC parks, particularly during the City Nature Challenge held each spring. Observers have helped the Hilltop Arboretum iNaturalist project site accrue a robust species count.

To date, the site has 21,458 observations; 15,193 of these are insects, accounting for 2,081 different species.

Last year's National Moth Week drew more than 150,000 participants across 80 countries. Their observations help researchers track how different moth species react to climate change. Johnson explained that Moth Week is held in July due to the peak time in North America when most are likely to see the greatest number of species. The week selected depends on the lunar calendar when there is the least amount of moonlight.

In Louisiana, it's easy to bug watch all year long, although counts may be lower in cooler months, Johnson said. Some species in Louisiana only emerge in winter. Teri Rome, a LMNGBR member and self-described butterfly and moth enthusiast, said she enjoys bug watching in her backyard.

"You don't always need a sheet," she said. "I turn out the lights, wear white, and put on a white shower cap with my headlamp. The moths think I'm a giant flower."
Rome said she makes a bait mixture of bananas, beer and vanilla to sit out in a bowl or paint on nearby trees or fence posts.

"You can throw a sheet over a fence or drape over a shrub and place a flashlight behind it to attract them," said Rome, who enjoys moth sheeting with her granddaughters.

Most members of the Louisiana Master Naturalists program throughout the state were introduced to bug watching by Charles Allen, a retired botany professor and author from Pitkin. Allen hosts the nocturnal naturalists and arthropod classes as well as native plant identification classes on his nature preserve, Allen Acres. He's been an official bug watcher since 2001.

Allen initially started with two sheets tied between trees and a mercury vapor light on his 26 acres. Now, he houses 20 permanent moth sheets hung on treated poles and has installed electrical boxes to plug in lights. Allen checks his sheets twice daily: two hours after dark and just before daylight.
"I find that there are a lot more moths and other insects just before daylight and after the lights have been on all night," Allen said.

His moth count for Allen Acres is 1,450, and other insects is over 1,200. About 200 of his moth counts are the only record for Louisiana, and one moth from Allen Acres, the Bean Pod Borer, is the only one for the United States.

"I think we are the only place in the world with 20 moth sheets and lights," he said.

For more information, email Allen at Native@camtel.net.
This article was supplied by the Louisiana Master Naturalists of Greater Baton Rouge, which seeks to advance awareness, understanding and stewardship of the natural environment. For more information, email info@ lmngbr.org.

ETCMN 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 at 6:45 PM; meeting at 7:00 PM.

Everyone is welcome!

If you are interested in learning more about the business side of the chapter, all ETCMN Members are invited to attend the quarterly chapter Board Meetings.

Upcoming ETCMN Meeting Topics

September 24 - Trivia Night

October 29 -Jessica Coleman - Christmas Bird Count** *meeting date changed due to State Meeting on 10/22*

November - no meeting

December 12 - Holiday Party at Tyler Nature Center

All meetings at Tyler Nature Center unless otherwise noted.

Space Web Weavers

by Robert Boggs

This is part 6 in a series on the informal guild classification system for spiders. This classification system categorizes spiders into eight "guilds" based on the way they catch their prey. The guilds can be further divided into four that rely on webs to catch their prey (Sensing Web Weavers, Sheet Web Weavers, Orb Web Weavers and Space Web Weavers) and four that do not (Ambush Hunters, Ground Active Hunters, Other Active Hunters and Spider Hunters). Using this system can help narrow down the type of spider you've discovered and make it easier to find in a guidebook.

Last month we dedicated most of the article about Ambush Hunters to discussing the brown recluse, one of the two medically significant spiders in our area. This month we'll cover the Space Web Weavers guild, which includes the other one: the black widows.

As with the other web-using guilds, Space Web Weavers get their name from the architecture of the webs they create. They construct webs with a messy, disorganized appearance that occupy a three-dimensional area (unlike orb webs, which are essentially flat). Some of their constructions are more commonly called cobwebs or tangle webs.



Black widows

There are three species of black widow found in East Texas: *Latrodectus mactans*, the southern black widow; *Latrodectus hesperus*, the western black widow; and *Latrodectus variolus*, the northern black widow. While there are a few differences in their appearance, they are close enough to discuss them as a group.

Adult female black widows are quickly recognizable to most people. They are glossy black with a large, round abdomen and the familiar red hourglass marking on the underside. The exact shape and appearance of the marking can vary between species, however, and immature black widows look surprisingly different from the adults. Young widows usually have red, orange and/or white markings on the top of their abdomens, which can mislead people expecting only the hourglass pattern on the underside.

Black widows typically build their webs close to the ground in sheltered areas. When disturbed, they are far more likely to run or play dead than bite. However, the bite of adult female widows is considered medically significant. Their venom contains a neurotoxin that can cause severe muscle pain, abdominal cramps, sweating, tachycardia and muscle spasms for several days, or longer in rare cases.

Also of note in genus *Latrodectus* is the brown widow, *Latrodectus geometricus*. This spider has the same red hourglass markings as the black widows, but has a lighter, often patterned abdomen and banded legs. Its bite is considered less potent than the black widow's.

Common House Spider

The common house spider, *Parasteatoda tepidariorum*, is one of our most frequent harmless houseguests. While its cobwebs can be unsightly and leave a pile of dead insects beneath them, they can be useful for pointing out where unwelcome bugs are entering your home.



The coloration of this spider's abdomen is highly variable. Combined with how tiny the spider is (about 3.5 to 7.5 mm), this makes identifying a common house spider surprisingly tricky. Some are pale tan with brown and white markings, while others are nearly black with lighter speckles. Nearly all have bands of coloration on the legs, however, and females have a bulbous abdomen similar in shape to their black widow cousins.

Steatoda triangulosa



Another spider commonly found around the house is *Steatoda triangulosa*, known by a few names including the triangulate combfoot spider and checkered cobweb weaver. This species gets its common name from a distinctive row of triangular markings along the top of its abdomen. The markings are often obvious enough to make this one of the easier Space Web Weavers to recognize.

Steatoda triangulosa belongs to the genus *Steatoda*, whose members are commonly known as the "false widows" for their resemblance to the true black widows. Several — particularly *Steatoda grossa*, whose common name is the false black widow — have rounded abdomens and dark coloration that can cause them to be mistaken for black widows, although they lack the familiar red hourglass.

ETCMN Book Club

You are invited to join us on Sunday, September 20th, at 6pm for our second ETCMN Book Club. The book will be *The Comfort of Crows* by Margaret Renkl. You may read a physical or electronic copy, or you may listen to the audiobook. You do not receive AT credit for reading the book, but you do for participating in the discussion. Each participant must provide one thoughtful question for the group to discuss beyond, "Did you like the book?"



We will meet on Zoom at 6pm. Bring a snack and a drink and be ready for a hearty discussion! You will receive one hour AT for your active participation! Please RSVP to etcmnprograms@gmail.com to receive the link.

Brush Piles are Good for the Ecosystem

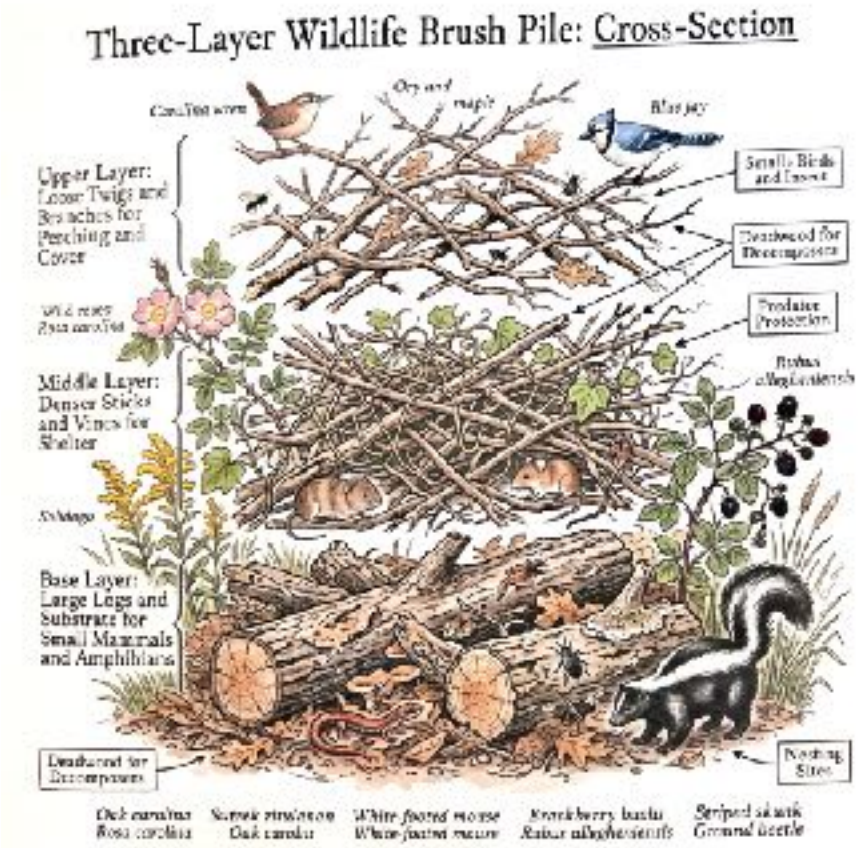
by Dale Wade

By the time you get through all that pruning, sawing, pulling, and trimming those herbaceous plants, shrubs, and trees, you probably have a good size pile of brush. That is exactly what you need for your new brush pile.

Simply put, that large pile of woody and vegetative debris becomes a wildlife habitat to conceal critters from predators, to serve as a nesting site, and to protect them from the weather. The critters may include small mammals, birds, lizards, amphibians, insects, fungus, and even plant seeds. For example, eastern cottontails may use it for protection and nesting. If placed near feeding sites, songbirds use it as a safe place to forage and perch. When placed adjacent to a water source, amphibians and reptiles use it for feeding, breeding, and nesting.

Building a brush pile is free using your debris, and as easy as stacking it in a manner useful as a habitat. Locate your brush pile at the far edge of your property (a corner edge is ideal), but away from buildings. Depending on your landscape, a brush pile can be as high as 8 feet and as wide as 20 feet.

It consists of three layers: a foundation, a middle, and a roof. Build the foundation with logs (6 to 12-inch diameter) spaced parallel to one another about a foot apart. Place a row of logs on top and perpendicular to these, making a hatch shape. Make the middle layer with smaller branches overlapping and perpendicular to the logs. Continue alternating these until the desired height is reached (3 to 6-feet). The roof consists of a mixture of loose brush, leaves, and evergreen branches woven together for "weather-resistance". You might even put in a basement by randomly hoeing a few depressions in between the foundation logs.



Add shade vine as an interesting option for eye appeal. This will cover the roof, adding a lot more protection and some food. Try yellow passionflower or trumpet honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens)*. Both do well in full to part sun, wet or dry soil.

After a couple of years, the pile will slowly disintegrate, turning that spot into a well-composted site for a flowerbed. Alternately, try a little hugelkultur. Dig a trough in your existing beds, throw in a couple of logs, and toss in a few branches. Water well, cover it up, and forget about it. The rotting wood holds moisture. The slow decaying process adds nutrients.

And don't forget to start that next brush pile!

Check out more great articles at wadevillage.com!

Native Plant Society of Texas

Lakes and Pines Chapter

(Wood & surrounding counties)

Wednesday, September 2nd, 1:30-3:30pm
Bob Wells Nursery at Sorelle Farms
975 County Road 2220 in Mineola

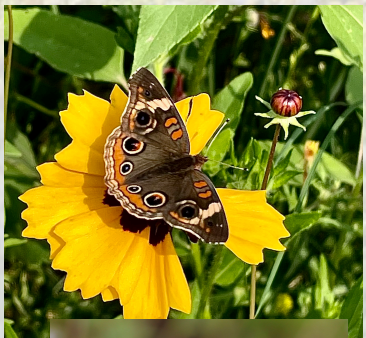
***Social from 1:30-2:00pm: See old friends, make new ones**
2:00pm: Presentation begins

Email us: Lakes-and-Pines-Chapter@npsot.org
Chapter Website: npsot.org/chapters/lakes-and-pines/email

"Native Plants to Attract Pollinators"

Presented by Lin Grado, Wood County Arboretum

Butterflies, bees, and hummingbirds - we all love to see them in our gardens. Learn to attract pollinators to visit and raise their families, through the use of Texas native plants. Join us and bring a friend!





Lin has had a life-long passion for gardening, learning from her grandmother in Pennsylvania. When she moved to Texas in the 90s, she saw the beauty and ease of care of native plants and incorporated them into her gardens.

Lin continues her love of natives at the Wood County Arboretum in Quitman, which has a Monarch Demonstration Garden dedicated to Texas native plants. The gardens are maintained by volunteers each Wednesday from 9 till noon – **All are welcome to help!**

NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY OF TEXAS MISSION STATEMENT: Promote conservation , research and utilization of native plants and plant habitats of Texas through education, outreach, and example.



WHERE YOU CAN FIND US

Find East Texas Chapter Master Naturaliss at the following locations:

https://txmn.org/etwd/

https://www.facebook.com/EastTexasMaster Naturalist/

https://www.instagram.com/easttexasmasternaturalist/

https://agrilifeextension.tamu.edu/

https://tpwd.texas.gov/

Organization

Officers

Title	Term	Name	Email
President**	2026-2027	Carol Lanthrum	clanthrum@gmail.com
Vice President**	2026	Dawn Bahr	dmebahr@yahoo.com
Secretary**	2025-2026	Ann Reynolds	reynolds.ann1@gmail.com
Treasurer**	2026-2027	David Shafer	davidrshafer@gmail.com
Immediate Past President	2026-2027	Wanda Rauscher	wwrauscher@gmail.com

** indicates Officers and Executive Board Members

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	Bonnie Edwards	edwardsbonnie2020@gmail.com
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Historian / Archivist	TBD	
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	TBD	
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Speakers Bureau	Greg Marshall	Marshall7707@gmail.com
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Asst VMS Director	Dawn Bahr	dmebahr@yahoo.com
State Representative	Carol Lanthrum	clanthrum@gmail.com
2026 Class Representative	Kami Rutherford	

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Social Media	Greg Marshall	Marshall7707@gmail.com
	Dawn Bahr	dmebahr@yahoo.com
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Website	Jessica Coleman	jcoleman@uttyler.edu

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Boyd Sanders	Texas Parks and Wildlife Department	boyd.sanders@tpwd.texas.gov

Vacant roles:
Historian
Publicity
Outreach

If you have interest in filling one of these roles, please contact clanthrum@gmail.com

To view the chapter website:

- www.txmn.tamu.edu
- Scroll down past the “green blocks” to the State of Texas map.
- Click on our chapter location.
- Select any tab to see the upcoming events on the right. Select the top event, and you can scroll through the event by selecting the back and forward tabs at the bottom of each event. Or go straight to the one you are interested in by selecting it.
  - You can also see coming months’ events in calendar format by selecting ‘View Calendar’ below the event listings.
  - **NOTE**: It looks different on your phone.
- Select ‘Chapter Info’ to see pictures and information about current chapter activities.
- Select ‘Newsletter’ to see current and past Wood Duck Whistlers