Wood Duck Whistler

November 2026

East Texas Chapter TMN



A Message From President Carol Lanthrum

Don't you love Texas weather! On Thursday, October 15th, it was nearly 90 degrees. The next day, it was 67 in the morning – wind blowing like crazy - and 47 that night. As they say, if you don't like the weather in Texas, wait a few minutes; it will change! And I guess we should expect cooler weather – it is fall after all!

It's been a busy month. October always is!

- The Fire and Nature Festival at the Tyler Nature Center on October 10th was a great success. The weather was perfect - no rain or storms - a little warm in the afternoon, but we had plenty of visitors to our booth. Even though there was a bit of wind, that did not stop the prescribed burns, which is the main event that TPWD wanted to showcase.
- The Mineola Nature Fest at the Mineola Nature Preserve on October 17th was also successful. It was little brisk in the morning (47 degrees), but very pleasant in the afternoon. Again, many visitors to our booth.
- The TMN annual meeting was held in Waco from Thursday, October 22, through Sunday, October 25, with a premeeting field day on Wednesday, October 21. Twelve of our members attended all or part of the meeting. I hope you kept up with their adventures on FB.
- Jessica Coleman, our webmaster and Tyler Audubon Society VP, was our speaker and told us about the Christmas Bird Count at our chapter meeting on Thursday, October 29th at the TNC.

We are also getting ready for our new training class that begins in January. If you know someone who is interested, have them visit our website, read about the class schedule and requirements, and fill out the application.

We Need You

If you have been reading our newsletter, Facebook page, attending chapter meetings and seeing the eblasts, you know that we have a lot going on! Member participation in outreach events is lagging, however. Now I know 'Life Happens'. You or your loved ones may be sick or have had surgery; work or childcare can prevent your participation; transportation issues, night vision issues, bad knees, bad back - so many issues!

I know all of you have been well-trained. Our trainers over the last few years, Beverly Guthrie, Kay Jenkins and Wanda Rauscher are dedicated and thorough. A mentoring program was re-initiated for the 2025 class so that our new trainees felt engaged with the chapter and our seasoned MNs had a chance to give back and meet the new trainees. We will continue the mentoring program. Each of you can attend a training session when you feel you need to review a topic, and training field trips can be attended, though sometimes limited. You each have a curriculum book for study, and TMN Tuesday webinars are monthly and educational. Dawn Bahr, VP, has been providing interesting and informative advanced education at chapter meetings, and chapter meetings are a place you also socialize with your fellow MNs.

At every chapter meeting, we celebrate those MNs who receive initial and recertification pins, I thank those who facilitate and participate at events personally, at meetings, and in the newsletter.

I hope there are ways I and the chapter board can help you overcome some of the reasons preventing you from participating more fully in the chapter. I welcome your suggestions and input. Send me an email at clanthrum@gmail.com.

Remember, there is no chapter meeting in November due to the Thanksgiving holiday. Join us for our holiday party on Dec12th, a great time to socialize and re-engage with our chapter and members!

Our mission is vital to the conservation of our earth! Educating the public is key, because you only protect what you love.

Carol Lanthrum

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

November - no meeting

December 12 - Holiday Party at Tyler Nature Center

All meetings at Tyler Nature Center unless otherwise noted.

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 Club Update

by Dawn Bahr

The ETCMN Quarterly Book Club is small but mighty, and a great way to earn 1 hour of AT from the comfort of your own home. You earn AT for coming to the Zoom meeting on a chosen Sunday of the month from 5:45 pm to 7 pm. The Zoom link will be sent via Eblast and/or the newsletter. For November, we are reading *A Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold, and the discussion will take place on Sunday, November 8 at 5:45 PM. Here is the Zoom Link:

Topic: ETCMN Fourth Quarter Book Club: *Sand County Almanac*
Time: Nov 8, 2026 05:30 PM Central Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting
https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88334789432?pwd=f4sKKYiRrdObIObHZ8j2mxxu1Fo5qQ.1

Meeting ID: 883 3478 9432
Passcode: 387471

One tap mobile
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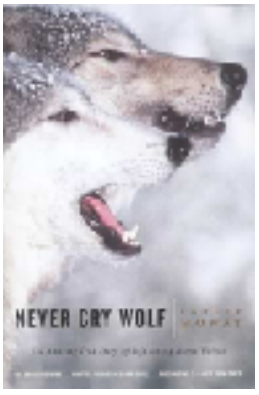
Join by SIP
• 88334789432@zoomcrc.com

Join instructions
https://us06web.zoom.us/meetings/88334789432/invitations?signature=kZAex7LF23XIbesrvptBIqyP9Js4A_iPnGENaRZX_SY

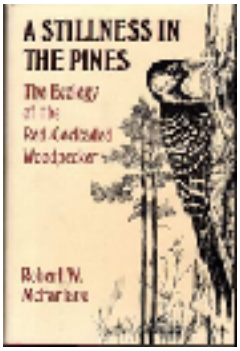
For 2027, the books and dates are as follows:



February 21 (note this is the 3rd Sunday, due to Valentine's Day)
Every Living Thing by Jason Roberts



June 13
Never Cry Wolf by Farley Mowat (this book is free on Kindle Unlimited)



September 12
A Stillness in the Pines: the Ecology of the Red - Cockaded Woodpecker by Robert McFarlane (this book is out of print but you can find it used on Amazon)

November 14 TBD (we are taking suggestions!)

Hope to see you soon at Book Club!

Podcast Recommendation

by Dawn Bahr

It is about that time to go over the river and through the woods for the holidays! What better way to pass the time than a podcast?

I enjoy listening to podcasts, which are the modern day version of radio shows. You do have the option of watching video podcasts on YouTube, but I prefer audio because I enjoy just listening to the words and letting my mind be entertained and educated.

A podcast you may love is ologies by Alie Ward. She has a weekly guest and interviews them on a variety of topics: beavers, pumpkins, mental health, quilts, gratitude, and ferns just to name a few. Be forewarned, the episodes can be long and have language that is not family inclusive.



Smologies is more family friendly, with similar topics. I prefer the shorter format because they are just more condensed, but the topics between the two episodes aren't always the same.

I hope you enjoy listening while you are out and about and enjoying the weather!

Congratulations!

The two pin recipients this month were Jennifer Holland (Double certification for 2026) and Joe Vorsas (2026 recertification)!



Mineola Nature Fest

by Lance Homeniuk

September and October have been busy months for ETCMN outreach and education events. Yantis Prairie Fest, National Night Out block parties, Fire and Nature Fest, and most recently, the Mineola Nature Fest at the Mineola Nature Preserve on Saturday, Oct 17th. Nine chapter members represented East Texas with another excellent display and four hands-on activities. We met over 200 people, about half of them youth and children. The theme was pollinators; bees and butterflies featured prominently. Kids chose between coloring wooden butterflies, making bee fans and tic tac toe games, and going on a scavenger hunt.



Ann Reynolds, Mark Edmunds, Bruce Williams, Lindsey Smith, Kris Homeniuk, Wanda Rauscher, Meme Thomas (not pictured Carol Lanthrum, Lance Homeniuk)

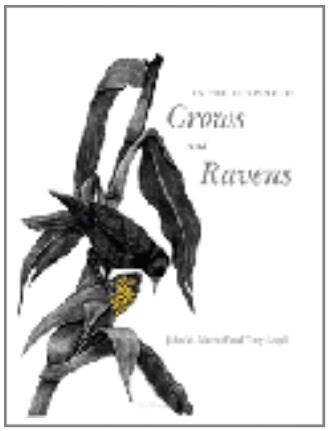
The day began cool and breezy but soon warmed and became fair. That brought out the public. Some of our contacts were introduced to iNaturalist, several picked up brochures and inquired about next year's classes; a few exchanged contact information for future speaker/presenter dates.







Book Reviews
by Lance Homeniuk



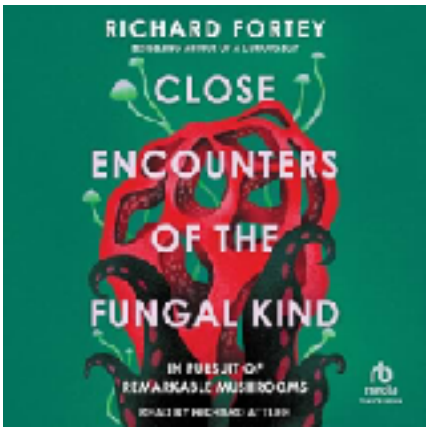
In the Company of Crows and Ravens. By John M. Marzluff and Tony Angell. Published in 2007 by Yale University press. Paperback, 384 pages.

This is probably the most thorough study of corvids and their historical relationships with humans I could hope to read. In nine chapters we see crows in their multiple manifestations, as species, family groups, societies, totems and symbols. The text by Marzluff relates his (and his students') years of research into corvid biology, language, and culture. Throughout, the reader is treated to black and white illustrations: prints, line drawings, engravings by Angell. And one is exposed to the very real and profound impact these birds have made on human societies in the past as well as their likely progress to come.

As the author writes, " …crows really affect us where it counts - in our culture. And we affect crows where it counts for most nonhuman species – in their ecology, culture, and even genetic composition."

But wait! There's more!

Two appendices. The first to motivate a kind of citizen science study of corvidology. This will be of much interest to amateur naturalists and hobby ornithologists. Yes, I'm looking at you! The second appendix is a four page bibliography of children's books featuring our subject birds. Get to them while young, eh? Of course, there are the academic essentials: Notes (lengthy): References (lengthier): finally, a helpful index.



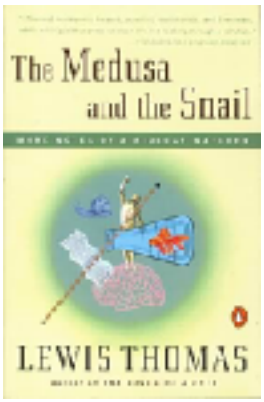
Close Encounters of the Fungal Kind: In Search of Remarkable Mushrooms. By Richard Fortey. Published in 2024 by William Collins, Hardcover , 353 pages.

By day, a mild mannered professional paleontologist, but with a not-so-secret identity as an amateur mushroom lover. But I repeat myself (see etymology of amateur). The author has since passed away but he left us with a rare treat to remember him by, bless him. In twenty three chapters he makes introductions to macro-fungi, edible and toxic (and hallucinogenic), pretty and gross, common and rare, helpful and parasitic. His field of view is primarily of British 'shrooms but we begin with a festival and feast in Italy where we meet the wonderful porcini.

"The fascination of the difficult" – "How typical of fungi to leave behind two questions for every one answer." Why are oaks in relationships with up to 32 species of ectomycorrhizal fungi? How can some mushrooms prefer to live in sand, even in deserts? How does natural selection explain the myriad of ways to present and disperse spores when they are all used in the same environment, the identical location? "The caps of brittlegills and Amanitas and webcaps can be almost any color and it is mystery why." Most of the larger fungi are listed in the guidebooks as rare, yet may pop up almost anywhere but not show up again for years – are the mycelia underground and just not putting up fruiting bodies?

Fittingly, he ends with a chapter relating the perfect mushroom foray. I wish he, Fortey, or his twin could write such an enthralling book about *our* mushrooms, and follow it with the micro-mycology as well. I saw this title in a B&N when it came out but thought the price too dear. I am glad I parted with the cash after all. It was well worth it.

<u>The Medusa and the Snail: More Notes of a Biology Watcher by Lewis Thomas.</u> Published in 1979 by Viking Press, New York. Hardcover, 174 pages.



Another classic from Thomas (*Lives of a Cell*), the 1970's era science popularizer. Not all of the essays herein may interest a naturalist, but they are all interesting. The title piece refers to a strange relationship between marine invertebrates. "They are bizarre, that's it, unique. And like a vaguely remembered dream, they remind me of the whole earth at once." How can you not love his voice? Even when he echoes Aldo Leopold with "Everything here is alive thanks to the living of every thing else. All the forms of life are connected."

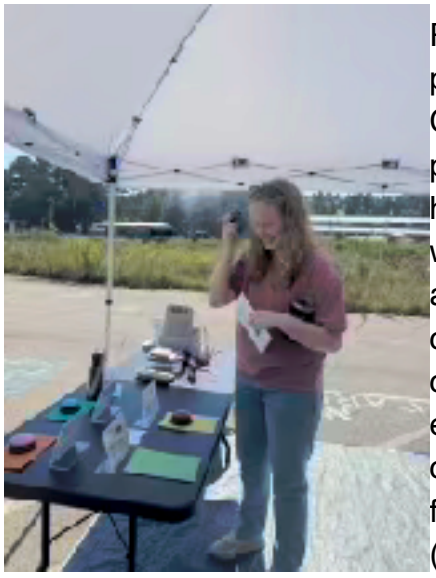
Several of his articles are eerily prescient, more in tune with the 2020's than when they were written. In 'The Hazards of Science,' he argues against limiting potentially dangerous research with a scenario of a created disease escaping the lab to wreak havoc on society! In "Medical Lessons from History' he gives sage word of advice to us: "We pass the word around; we ponder how the case is put by different people; we read the poetry; we meditate over the literature; we play the music; we change our minds; we reach an understanding. Society evolves this way, not by shouting each other down but by the unique capacity of unique, individual human beings to comprehend each other."





East Texas Fire & Nature Festival - October 10, 2026

Submitted by Wanda Rauscher

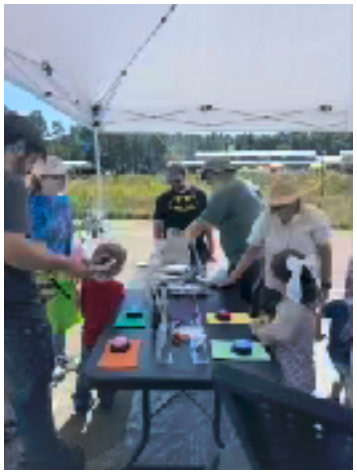


Putting together a festival for the public, especially one to demonstrate prescribed fire, is a huge undertaking. Toni Aguilar, TPWD Fire Management Coordinator, had the vision, organizational skills, connections, and drive to pull this off successfully! We owe her our huge thanks for making the event happen! This was the third festival, and with each iteration, improvements were incorporated. Close to 100 folks were involved in planning for this event and even more in execution. The Incident Action Plan developed for this event covered everything for how we would keep our public safe. The big out-of-our-control factor was, of course, the weather. We were blessed *this time* with enough rain to lift the burn bans in the days before and a fair-weather day with cooperating winds. Master Naturalists, we all understand succession and how fire is a tool to help us keep grasslands and savannas, and that without action (fire, mowing, grazing) grassland becomes shrubby and eventually forested. We also recognize that reducing fuel loads in a forested area with small burns can reduce the risk for unplanned catastrophic wildfire initiated from lightning strikes. Prescribed fire is a critical tool in our toolbox for ecosystem management. A primary purpose of the festival was to educate the public about prescribed fire.



The Tyler Nature Center is our home base, and I wanted this event to be a special celebration. Thanks to Kay Jenkins and all the master naturalists (with special note of Marsha Lucas who shoveled and brought others to shovel), who replaced the weedy gravel path in the weeks prior. It was hard, hot work. Thanks also to those who weeded and watered our beautiful Wildscape so it would be at its best. As Kay has reminded me, our Wildscape is meant to be a more formal garden demonstrating how to use native plants in the landscape in a way other than a wild-looking prairie. Thanks to our HEB Pollinator grant, we will soon have signs to let folks know what's blooming even when we aren't around to tell them!

For the festival, our chapter went all out with a three-canopy booth. The main canopy had information about the chapter and our upcoming training class and featured Lindsey Smith's outstanding photography of the wildlife of our catchment. We introduced iNaturalist as a tool to document flora, fungi, and fauna. The canopy adjacent to Tyler Audubon's booth had the kids' activity, Bird Beak Appreciation. We had simulated bird foods (gummy worms, sunflower seeds, plastic lilies, crickets, minnows, and frogs as well as beans and rice acting as insect larvae and beetles) and tools such as pipets, long tweezers, short tweezers, nutcrackers, and strainers to serve as beak analogs. Kami Rutherford did a masterful job as docent for this activity! I also had the Bone Clone bird skull comparison kit with American Robin, Northern Cardinal, Ruby-throated Hummingbird and Red-tailed Hawk for the older kids. One visitor successfully went through the backyard bird flashcards missing only a couple of species that don't visit our area. I also had a list of grassland birds that can be found in our area in winter but will have to use that another time!





The canopy adjacent to the path to archery had our pollinator and grassland appreciation area. We had a display talking about succession showing one area of a controlled burn at the TNC immediately after a burn, a few weeks after and then 2 months after, showing how the grasses and forbs come back. We included four of our popular sound buttons for orthopterans. We had our pollination overview posters describing the critical role played by pollinating bees, flies, lepidoptera, wasps, beetles, and birds (as you know, we mention bats, but in East Texas our species are insectivores rather than pollinators). Our hands-on activity was the Bumble Bee fan sponsored through our HEB Pollinators for Texas grant. The day was warm, and we had many visitors wanting to make the fans. We have photos of fall bee species in our area on one side and details for how to help them on the other. To make a fan the visitor cuts out both sides and then glues them together with a wooden popsicle stick in the middle.



We had 117 adult visitors to our booth and 127 kids, making our total 244 visitors.

You know that planning the hands-on educational materials is one of the activities I enjoy most as a master naturalist, but without others engaging with the public and making use of the materials on the day of the event, there would be NO impact.

It takes a chapter to make it work! Special thanks to the following for delivering that impact for the East Texas Fire and Nature Festival October 2026: Dale Wade, Paul Wick, Ginger Wick, Marsha Lucas, Dawn Bahr, Lindsey Smith, Vicki Hoppis, Kami Rutherford, Carol Lanthrum, and Bruce Williams.



More Photos from Fire & Nature Fest!
submitted by Ann Reynolds









Sensing Web Weavers

by Robert Boggs

This is part 8 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: Sensing Web Weavers, Sheet Web Weavers, Orb Web Weavers, Space Web Weavers, 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.

In this series, I've wanted to introduce others to the diverse array of spider species we have right here in our area by highlighting the ones I see most often. But as we reach the final two spider guilds, I have a confession: I've never knowingly encountered any of the spiders in these two guilds in East Texas, so I don't have my own photos or experiences to share and will rely on guidebooks and iNaturalist.

This month's guild is the Sensing Web Weavers. These spiders set up lines of webbing that detect prey around their hiding spot, which is often a burrow. These lines are more like tripwires on an alarm system; they aren't sticky and aren't used to ensnare prey. When alerted that the prey is near, the spider quickly emerges from its concealment and attacks.

Texas Brown Tarantula



Aphonopelma hentzi, the Texas brown tarantula, is the only tarantula that I've found listed for our chapter's area — and even then there are only seven observations on iNaturalist linked to the East Texas Chapter Master Naturalists Biodiversity project. The most likely time to spot one of these large but elusive spiders would be when males are out searching for a mate in spring and fall.

Females can reach sizes of 44 to 58mm; for comparison, most of our wolf spider species are under 20mm. Males are a bit smaller, around 38 to 52mm. Their bodies are tan to brown, with darker brown legs. Like other tarantulas, they are hairy and possess an adaptation called urticating hairs: These hairs have a barbed shape that causes irritation to humans and other animals, and the spiders can kick off hairs to defend themselves.



Audouin's Trapdoor Spider

Ummidia audouini, like other spiders in the family colloquially called the "corklid trapdoor spiders," creates a very well-camouflaged burrow with a lid made of silk, usually in forested areas. Their bodies are a very dark brown to black. Females reach about 28mm, while males are around 15mm.

Fun Fact!

One of the most interesting things about tarantulas and trapdoor spiders is how they demonstrate one of the earliest splits in the evolution of spiders. Spiders are divided into two suborders: Mesothelae (which are present only in Asia) and Opisthothelae, and the latter is further divided into two "infraorders" called Mygalomorphae and Araneomorphae. Mygalomorphae includes the tarantulas, trapdoor spiders and the infamous Sydney funnel-web spider. Araneomorphae is sometimes called the "true spiders," and every other spider covered so far in this series is from this group. The biggest difference between the two infraorders? The fangs of Mygalomorphs are vertical, and the spider must rear up to pounce down on its target, while the fangs of Araneomorphs face inward and bite with a pinching motion.



Southern House Spider



The southern house spider, *Kukulcania hibernalis*, seems a bit more common, with 19 research-grade observations on iNaturalist in our area. It is frequently misidentified as a brown recluse (especially the males), because of its similar coloration and a dark marking somewhat similar to the recluse's infamous violin pattern. They can be distinguished from a recluse by the presence of spines on their legs and by the arrangement of their eyes; they have eight eyes all clustered together rather than three pairs spread across the prosoma.



Wall Spiders

The spiders of genus *Oecobius* are known as "wall spiders." As the name implies, they are commonly found in and around human structures. While it's difficult to tell species of these spiders apart, the one featured in guidebooks is typically *Oecobius navus,* which has a gray body mottled with white, with a dark mark over its heart (at the center-front of the abdomen).

Photo credits from iNaturalist:

Texas Brown Tarantula:
© Brandon Nations

Southern House Spider:
© Amber Arseneaux

Wall Spider:
© brookesurlet

Audouin's Trapdoor Spider:
© Michael Ramsey





Chapter Holiday Party

Saturday, December 12, 2026, 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 pm
Tyler Nature Center - Tyler, TX

We look forward to the gathering at the Annual ETCMN Holiday Party and Celebration!
Please join us with your spouse or significant other.

The Chapter will provide the entree of smoked turkey and brisket. Soft drinks, coffee and water will be provided. As always, you can bring your own drinks.

Please prepare a side, your favorite salad, vegetable side dish, or dessert. We typically are heavy on the desserts so would like a variety of healthy sides. Please type up your recipe to post with your contribution. This allows everyone to photograph and make the recipe in the future, and it helps those with food allergies.

Bring a fun gift item ($15.00 range) related to nature for a crazy gift exchange, one for you and your guest. We want everyone to join in the gift exchange! This is always the highlight of the party. It could be a cool gadget for outdoors, a nice nature related book, yard art, knickknack made from natural ingredients…the possibilities are endless. Be creative! You want your contribution to be the gift that everyone steals!

Please RSVP right away to Caryn Vorsas at carynvorsas@gmail.com or text your information and name to 903-316-3709. The deadline is December 5, 2025. We need numbers for the food and drink count.

We look forward to seeing each and every one of you!

WHERE YOU CAN FIND US

Find East Texas Chapter Master Naturalists 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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	Joe Vorsas	jvorsas@utexas.edu
	Bonnie Edwards	edwardsbonnie2020@gmail.com
	Open for addition	
Historian / Archivist	TBD	
Advanced Training (AT)	Karen Rueb-Hall	karenruebhall@gmail.com
	Amy Cumbie	amycumbie83@gmail.com
	Kari Steph	kabaster@gmail.com
Volunteer Service Projects (VSH)	Lance Homeniuk	homeniuk@yahoo.com
	Greg Marshall	Marshall7707@gmail.com

	TBD	
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2026 Class Representative	Kami Rutherford	

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

VACANT
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