

GOOD WATER MASTER NATURALIST

RIPPLES

Williamson County



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CHAPTER HAPPENINGS

Fourteen members attended a whooping crane workshop by TPWD in January.

Seven naturalists were part of a group of 30 that worked on the new nature trail at Berry Springs Park on MLK Day of Giving.

On a warm late January day the sixteen-person team for the first wildflower survey at Berry Springs Park included four chapter members. A long list of flowers were identified and recorded.

Sterling, Nancy and MaryAnn presented programs on weather to a 4th grade class at Mountain Laurel School in late January and February.

Gail organized several chapter members to monitor whooping cranes at Granger Lake on several different days.

Pat, Betty and Bonnie have secured a grant from NPSOT to landscape the entrance to Taylor Middle School---way to go!

Four chapter members plus 3 Wilco birders were among attendees of the 2013 Laredo Bird Festival in early February.

Several members helped weed, mulch and prune the Pollinator Garden.

All of the Junior Master Naturalists gathered at Berry Springs Park to install two blue bird houses.

HEARD FROM:

An herbalist that a spoonful of vanilla in a small spray bottle makes a great mosquito spray. It's eco-friendly and won't irritate one's skin.

A forester that one should water an established tree at the drip line where the water absorbing roots are, not at the trunk of the tree

Judy Grimes our GWMN librarian: Library has books for check out. We plan to grow our small library to serve our membership with interesting, resourceful and educational literature. We accept books. Magazines will be for sale for 25 cents at meetings. Information on how to access our online library and request books will be coming.

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NOW YOU KNOW

Baby jackrabbits are called leverets. They thermoregulate through their ears.

Vultures are the only birds with a sense of smell.

Native plants fascinate me when they serve my goal of providing a food source for insects, birds, and small animals. Last fall, I became interested in the *Chasmanthium latifolium*, commonly known as Inland Sea Oats. Like all grasses, they are in the grass family Poaceae. They grow 2-4 feet tall, form clumps, and are a perennial grass bearing large, drooping, oat-bamboo-like leaves. The leaves turn a bright yellow-gold in late summer and fall.



Photograph by Sally and Andy Wasowski

I quickly read the low-maintenance shade grass description. The seeds are eaten by small animals and granivorous birds. The stems and leaves provide birds with nesting material. In addition, it is a larval host for several Skipper Butterflies as the Pepper & Salt, Bells Roadside, and Bronzed Roadside. Being considered deer resistance is a plus. Many consider the plant to be aggressive as it easily reseeds. Its rhizomatous clumps create good erosion control. Cattle are known to eat it, though it is not grown for fodder. It is often used in decorative floral arrangements. It definitely has a place in my garden for years to come.

For decades I've known that watermelon was nature's diuretic, but I only recently related wetlands as nature's kidneys. I was fortunate to visit the Waco Wetlands a few weeks ago. Although a bit out of our immediate naturalist area, I believe our newsletter is worthy of the information as these wetlands are the only one within 150 miles in Central Texas.

The Waco Wetlands are a mere 12 years old (2001) and came about after the city of Waco decided in 2000 to raise Lake Waco seven feet—that took three years, but provided an additional 20,000 acre-feet of water. The EPA requested the area surrounding the lake be restored to replace the destroyed habitats impacted by the lake rising, and thus started a cooperative effort between Baylor University, who owned the land, National Fish and Wildlife, and the Corps of Army Engineers.

The 180-acre Wetlands not only improves water quality but also provides habitat for animals, birds, amphibians and insects as well as protection from floods. Waco Wetlands naturally cleans and filters 11 million gallons of water a day from the Bosque River. No need for chemicals! A jug of water taken from the intake and another taken from the outflow showed a visible difference in clarity after working its way through the wetlands.

Our docent, Nora, a city water quality employee and also master naturalist, was most informative. We saw several of the 186 species of birds identified to date. Wetland habitats are home to 43% of federally listed threatened and endangered species. I was most intrigued by the many native uses of the cattail.

And no, we're not talking about baseball. The Mexican free-tail bats start returning to Round Rock's McNeil Bridge in late February. When people start to congregate at the NAPA store on the east frontage road, volunteers from the Good Water Chapter Master Naturalists will arrive on Friday evenings 30 or 40 minutes before sunset. We visit with folks, have information and provide bat fact sheets and a word search puzzle for young visitors.

This colony that roosts in the many crevices under the McNeil Bridge is a maternal/nursery type, growing to about 1.8 million bats after the pups are born. It appears that this might be the maximum capacity of this bridge, as bats are now being found in much smaller numbers at bridges along I-35 south of Round Rock. Each female has one pup in early June, giving birth while clinging to the roost by both thumbs and one or both feet. Pups are born naked, but often with eyes open. They remain attached to mother for up to an hour to prevent falls, and for mother to clean them and learn their scent and voice. Each mother nurses only her own pup--- multiple times a day. Pups fly at 4-5 weeks, and are weaned at 5 to 6 weeks.



The bats fly up to 50 miles at up to 60 mph. They usually fly east from Round Rock where there is more agricultural land and can reach altitudes of 10,000 feet. They fly dusk to dawn, eating moths, flying ants, beetles, mosquitoes and other farm pests. Nursing mothers consume their body weight in food nightly, and each one million bats consume approximately 10 tons of insects each night!

Major predators include red-tailed hawks and owls. Bat life-span is thought to be 12-15 years, but there is up to a 50% mortality rate during the first year from falls, collisions and predators.

The bats leave McNeil Bridge with the first big cold front in October/November. They do not hibernate but, winter in Mexican caves.

A BATTY STORY

Winnie Bowen

One evening when Pam and I were at the McNeil Bridge a visitor from the East started talking to us and told us about the Bacardi bats. Her story seemed rather wild to us, so of course when I got home I went straight to Google and this is what I learned:

Facundo Bacardí Massó, a Spanish merchant, born in Sitges, Catalonia in 1814, emigrated to Cuba in 1830. At that time Cuban rum was cheaply made, not considered a refined drink, and was rarely sold in upscale taverns. Don Facundo, who liked his drink, began attempting to *tame* rum by isolating a proprietary strain of yeast, still used in Bacardi production today, giving Bacardi rum its unique flavor. After experimenting he hit upon filtering the rum through charcoal to remove impurities. To *mellow* the drink, he aged the rum in white oak barrels, resulting in the world's first clear or white rum.



Moving from the experimental stage to a more commercial endeavor, he and his brother, José, set up shop in Santiago de Cuba. Their distillery housed a copper and cast iron still, but they did not know that fruit bats lived in the rafters of the building. The bats were left alone to do their thing, as Cuban legend said *bats were good luck*. When the first year of the white rum was more successful than anticipated, Bacardi adapted bats as their logo. As shown, the bat symbol has changed five times since 1862, the most recent change in 2012. I never noticed them on the label, but a trip to the liquor store confirmed the bat is on every label/bottle. Bacardi Limited remains the largest privately held, family-owned spirits company in the world.

NATURE ENCOUNTERS HERE AND THERE

OK, Master Naturalists, this is YOUR special little space, BUT I can only print what you're willing to tell or email to me. This is a start. If you like this idea, let me know, and KEEP me informed!

- ❖ Sterlin reported that every January he has up to a dozen pelicans in his lake that fly over from Alcoa Lake. He related that after a few days and after the birds have eaten all the fish out of his lake they return to Alcoa.
- ❖ In mid January MaryAnn was surprised when getting out of her car at Hutto Lake to be confronted by a white pelican.
- ❖ Judy and Charles were excited to see an American Kestrel and Savannah Sparrows at Camp Tejas.
- ❖ Winnie was stunned when she saw the sparkling diamond in the center of the rosette-shape thistle growing in her yard. After admiring the single drop of water, she pulled the thistle and then wished she'd gone in the house and grabbed the camera.
- ❖ Several chapter members, at different days and times, have spotted whooping cranes at Granger Lake.
- ❖ Pam and hubby just returned from a 10-day birding trip in south Texas where they saw numerous birds of many species. (GWMN see special attachment for an account of that trip)

MEMBER PROFILES

JUDITH CURRIER



Judith, the new chapter secretary, completed her MN training in 2012. She has lived in Georgetown three years. A retired teacher and school librarian, she is interested in all things outdoors, but especially gardening and native plants. She and hubby travel as much as possible with an emphasis on history.

NANCY PHILLIPS



Nancy, the chapter treasurer, has been a MN since completing training in San Antonio in 2007. She transferred into GWMN in June last year. A former school teacher she has a great interest in birds, children, sewing, quilting, scrapbooking and reading.

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