TEXAS Master Naturalist

GOOD WATER MASTER NATURALIST
WILLIAMSON COUNTY

RIPPLES

Volume 3 Number 3
May/June 2014

UPCOMING EVENTS

5/8/14 NPSOT Meeting
5/12/14 GWMN Board Meeting
5/19/14 Williamson Audubon Group
5/21/14 GWMN Chapter Meeting
6/9/14 GWMN Board Meeting
6/12/14 NPSOT Meeting
6/26/14 GWMN Chapter Meeting

Check the website for the many opportunities coming up---way too numerous to even think about posting here!

NOW YOU KNOW

The coyote (*Canis latrans)*, great in number, is the most destructive Texas predator of livestock. On the other hand, it is probably the most valuable predator in the balance of nature. It is a protection to crops and range lands by its control of rodents and rabbits.

From Texas Almanac

Eastern Bluebirds at Berry Springs by Pam Goolsby

With spring all kinds of colorful wonderful things appear and the Eastern Bluebird (EABL) is no exception. Bluebirds are only partially migratory, meaning they withdraw from their northern portions of their ranges in winter. Some bluebirds remain close to their breeding site year-round. Actually, mid-March is the usual time for the EABL's to begin building their nests at Berry Springs Park. As the season progresses, we will be careful to avoid bothering the nest during the time when the babies are ready to fledge (when they are 17 to 20 days old). For the past 2 years we have had an average of 5 eggs per nest box. Yes, we call them nest boxes rather than "bird houses" because they are primarily for nesting and take the place of the originally preferred nesting site of a tree cavity. This year we are seeing several clutches of 6 eggs. They remain through July and seem to leave when the temperature remains above 100 degrees (F) for too long.

We began with 8 nest boxes and were pleased to have the Junior Master Naturalist class install 2 new boxes in the back near the primitive camping sites.

Our Blue Bird Team is currently monitoring the 10 nest boxes. We are completing a bi-weekly nest check for The Cornell Lab of Ornithology Nest Watch. After downloading the exact location of each nest box, we record the date when the eggs are laid, how many eggs, the nest status and as time passes the number of live young and the adults' behavior when we visit. Equally important, we are watching for the dreaded Brown-headed cowbird, which likes to lay its eggs in with that of the Bluebirds, thus leaving the tiny pair to raise its much bigger baby. The European Starling and the House Sparrow are two additional species that can take over a Bluebird Nest box. Of course, snakes, raccoons, cats are predators, as well as Sharp-shinned or Cooper's Hawks.

At Berry Springs, we usually have 2 broods of young each year. Incubation begins only after the last egg has been laid and will last 12 to 18 days (average 13). The female incubates the eggs and is fed by the male. Since incubation begins on the same day, eggs generally hatch at about the same time. Baby bluebirds are called

Continued on Page 3

Carpenter Ants by Wizzie Brown

Carpenter ants nest outdoors in dead wood (tree stumps or dead limbs, fences, firewood, etc.). They can also be found in wood siding, beams, joists, fascia boards or trim on structures. Damage is usually limited since carpenter ants tunnel and nest within wood; they do not eat wood. However, wood can become weakened by carpenter ant excavation.

Carpenter ants are large ants that can vary in color from all black to reddish to yellowish or a combination of colors. These ants have one node, no stinger and a circle of hairs at the tip of their abdomen.

Galleries in the nest are excavated following the grain of the wood and have clean, smooth walls. Nest locations may be discovered by searching for piles of sawdust-looking material under exit holes. Sawdust is coarse and may also contain soil or sand, uneaten insects as well as dead ants from the colony.

Carpenter ants have mating flights, or swarms, to begin new colonies. After mating, males die while females find a suitable nesting site. Females then lay 15-20 eggs that develop into worker ants in about two months. The queen cares for the first batch of brood and feeds them secretions from her body. Once brood has emerged as adult workers, they take over care of the colony and expand the nest as well as providing food for the queen and caring for new brood.

Carpenter ants are able to enter homes from tree branches or utility lines touching the home, through cracks and crevices around windows and doors, cracks in foundation walls, ventilation openings or heating and air conditioning ducts.

Here are some tips for a carpenter ant infestation:

- Remove dead trees and/ or limbs and remove tree stumps from the landscape. Many times you can remove the (possible) nesting sites and get rid of the ants without using pesticides.
- Prune trees and shrubs that touch the home. Carpenter ants will often use these areas as a bridge to enter the home.
- Replace wood that is water damaged. Carpenter ants are drawn to moisture-damaged wood, so make sure to repair any water leaks and replace damaged wood.
- Remove wood debris and firewood that is near the home. Carpenter ants may nest in firewood and when it is stacked right next to the home, it allows the ants to enter more easily.

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at 512.854.9600. Check out my blog at www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com

Bluebirds (Continued from page 1)

nestlings and are fed by both parents as soon as the feathers begin to develop. By the twelfth day, they weigh almost as much as their parents. Babies fledge between 17 to 20 days old. We have to be careful not to disturb the nest at this time. If the young fledge prematurely, there is a risk of them not surviving. The parents will slowly feed less and less with food rewards offered for the brave youngster who will fly to a nearby perch. They can fly from 75 to 100 yards on their first flight. Once out of the nestbox they do not return and are dependent on the parents for food for several days.

One of the most amazing behaviors we observe is when we give several warnings and knock to alert the bird that we are there to inspect, she remains on the nest. We use a "mechanics inspection mirror" to observe the nests, and as soon as we determine she is there, we slink away feeling a bit like an intruder. Generally, the pair is nearby and watches from a branch. We do our best to be in and away as quickly as possible and ask that only those who have been Certified to be a Nest Watch participant to take a peak. While we all love the experience of watching the life cycle progress, we don't want to be responsible for too much attention to be drawn to the nest or disruption of the care of the young.

Berkman Science Camp by Larry Swift

Twelve Good Water Master Naturalists contributed more than 106 contact hours to 66 fifth grade students in science camp at Claude Berkman Elementary School in Round Rock.

In 2010, 81% of Berkman's 575 students came from economically disadvantaged homes and nearly 2/3 of the students were considered "at risk".

Each spring students in Texas take the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). Fifth grade is the first time students are tested in science and are tested over all the science topics taught in from third through fifth grade. The Berkman fifth grade faculty asked the Good Water Master Naturalists to help them prepare their 66 fifth grade students for the upcoming science test by helping with the school science camp.

The Berkman Science Camp was held from 9 to 11 every weekday for two weeks from April 7th to 17th. We Good Water "coaches" were on three teams, each led by a Berkman fifth grade teacher. Each day each team focused on a specific set of test objectives (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills or TEKS). Berkman has administered a couple of benchmark tests and, based on the needs of the students, has determined to focus on the nine TEKS with which the students had the most difficulty.

Each team worked with 20 to 25 students on a given day to master the TEKS for that team. The students rotated to a different team each day so by the end of the third day, all 66 students had had all the lessons taught by the three teams for the first three days. The fourth day we started with the next set of lessons, and so on through the two weeks. By the end of the two weeks, all the fifth graders had received intensive instruction on the nine TEKS.

The capstone of the science camp was a field trip taken Monday, April 21st. The campers hiked to Memorial Park on Brushy Creek, a couple blocks from the school. The students undertook a scavenger hunt. They had to find the correct answer to science question, use a compass and measure distances in specified directions in order to find a clue. When all clues were found, the students had to arrange the words to find the "sentence" solution.

Science camp was a wonderful experience for us naturalists and for the students. The teachers were most grateful for the contributions of the Good Water Master Naturalists. At least some of the students are likely to better appreciate the natural world of which they are a part.

WHO'S WHO---CHAPTER PROFILES

Randy Cook

Randy Cooke is a member of the Good Water Master Naturalist's class of 2014. After 35 years of working as a regulatory affairs consultant for various medical device corporations in N.J., he recently retired and returned to Texas with his wife, Janice, to live in Georgetown. His interests include archeology, botany and ecology. He enjoys playing piano, reading, hiking, camping, kayaking and being out in the wilderness of west Texas. The Good Water Master Naturalist classes significantly enhance his enjoyment of these interests through the in-depth instruction they provide.

Janice Cook

Janice is a native Texan who recently returned to Texas after living and working in New Jersey for the past 35 years. She and her husband, Randy, love to travel and explore nature through hiking, camping, and kayaking. Retirement now allows them more time for these interests, and enrolling in the 2014 Master Naturalist program has been a long-anticipated opportunity to enrich their range of knowledge. As a retired middle school teacher, Janice looks forward to working with students as a GWMN volunteer. Her hobbies include reading, quilting and playing an Irish concertina. She and her husband, Randy, have two married sons; one in NJ and the other in Thailand.

For information about the Good Water Chapter
http://txmn.org/goodwater or goodwatermn2@gmail.com