

# Good Water RIPPLES

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## Junior Master Naturalists by 2015-2016 Junior Master Naturalists

Junior Master Naturalists are 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> graders who are truly passionate about nature, every living thing. You learn a lot from water and stones to animals and birds. You get to go on field trips to McNeil Bridge to see bats and go to Berry Springs Park. So, if you like nature, this is the thing for you. *(Marek Kania)*

### UPCOMING EVENTS

06/09	NPSOT
06/23	GWMN Chapter Meeting
06/27	NPAT
06/27	Austin Butterfly Forum
07/14	NPSOT
07/25	NPAT
07/25	Austin Butterfly Forum
07/28	GWMN Chapter Meeting



Check the website for additional events including volunteer and training opportunities. The many events are way too numerous to even think about posting all here!

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There are so many things I like about this class but one of my favorites was all the interactive and creative crafts that we got to do. I also liked journaling because there were so many things that I got to write about and so many things that I got to draw. Before I took the classes I never really thought of journaling. The classes were the first time that I ever got to do this. It was so fun and I'm really glad I took it. *(Xenia Vega)*

I liked Junior Master Naturalists because of the bat field trip. I enjoyed watching all of them fly out. I also liked learning about how many of them were under the McNeil bridge. It was cool watching the hawks snatch a few of them, as sad as it was. It was cool to see all those bats and see them fly over our heads. *(Isaac Darr and Aurora Nassir)*

I like JMN a lot. So I can learn new things like how to identify snakes and birds and I get to meet new people. Some of the fun activities are dissecting owl pellets, field trips to Berry Springs, and getting to play educational games. My favorite activity was a trip to Berry Springs where I saw a water moccasin. I like Junior Master Naturalist and hope to continue. *(Kadin Ward)*

## Goodwater and Balcones Chapters Earth Day by Charles Grimes

On Earth Day 2016, the Goodwater and Balcones MN chapters joined together for an Earth Day outreach event at the Concordia University campus. Information tables were set up and manned for Agrilife, Goodwater MN and Balcones MN as well as many others. Seminars were held throughout the day in an Arboretum area shaded by enormous oak trees and covered a range of topics pertaining to the natural environment. The "bonus" of the day were scheduled guided tours of the Balcones Canyonland Preserve which is adjacent to the Concordia University campus. The preserve has within it 4 distinct eco-levels as you descend into the canyon and has unique flora and fauna not easily seen outside of this environment. Our guides were well versed in the features of the preserve and made the walks very enjoyable. Even seasoned naturalists came away learning something new!! All in all a great first showing of our two chapters in a joint outreach effort!



## Gecko Toes by Chuck Sexton

Mediterranean Geckos have become a fairly common sight around houses and garages in Central Texas. Although some folks might be creeped out a little by these critters running over the walls or scurrying out of sight near a porch light at night, rest assured--they are completely harmless.

As well, they are very beneficial and very efficient at gleaning insects that are attracted to your porch light. In fact, at my home in NW Austin, if I turn on a porch light and hope to photograph any moths that might arrive, I have to be "quicker than a gecko" to get my pics before the moths become a gecko's late night snack (...or is it breakfast for them?).



Geckos are fun to watch, but frankly, after seeing dozens at my house and seeing them regularly on buildings at the Refuge (e.g. right outside my office), I get rather ho-hum about them. Just another gecko. However, our new biologist Jim Mueller (more about him later) brought a gecko to the office in a small critter cage today and it offered us an unusual opportunity to view and photograph a very important but rarely observed part of a gecko: It's toes! Like most lizards, geckos are very adept at running up and down walls and even running around "upside down" on an overhang or eve. Surprisingly, they can even walk on smooth glass or plastic. How do they do that? With uniquely adapted toe pads. This involves minute bristles called "setae" and some interesting physics known as "van der Waals forces".

## Leaf Cutter Ants by Wizzie Broan

Leaf cutting ants are reddish-brown with three pairs of spines on the thorax and one pair of spines on the back of the head. Workers come in various sizes, and some can be up to ½ an inch long. Mounds can become large and are sometimes clustered together with other mounds giving this ant a nickname of “town ant”. Leaf cutter ant mounds have a central opening and often a crater shape at the top.

Cut ants typically forage when temperatures are cooler, and often become active in cooler periods of the year. During the summer, they may forage at night or in the morning. They can sometimes cause complete defoliation of plants or small trees overnight. Leaf cutting ants remove leaves and buds from plants in the landscape. The ants do not eat the plant pieces, but instead, take it back to the colony and feed the vegetation to a fungus garden. They tend a species of particular fungus and weed out any other fungus from the garden. The fungus is the food source of the ants and mated females carry a piece of the fungus with them when they leave to start a new colony.



Colonies exist for years and can exceed over two million ants. It is not unusual for a single colony to cover an acre of land. Colonies are usually found in well drained, sandy or loamy soils.

Plants can be temporarily protected by using spray adhesives around the base of the plant. Adhesives should be refreshed often when dirt or debris accumulates. Temporary protection can also be provided with contact insecticidal spray or dusts. If mounds are located in an area, the bait product labeled for leaf cutter ants, Amdro Ant Block, can be broadcast with a hand-held spreader around the mound area. If no mounds are seen, then residual sprays and dusts can be used along foraging trails and around openings.



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](http://www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com)

## Indian Blankets by MaryAnn Melton



As bluebonnet season winds down, Indian Blanket (*Gaillardia pulchella*) becomes one of the dominant flowers on the landscape in Central Texas. It is named from its resemblance to the bright red, gold and bronze shades of traditional colors of Native American blankets in the Southwest. They begin blooming in May and with plentiful rain or supplemental watering, plants can bloom through August. Also known as firewheel or blanketflower, the flowers are pinwheel shaped with petals red at the base and the yellow tips have three teeth at the end. Colors may vary from plant to plant, some with more red others with more yellow. The stems are hairy and branched. Indian blanket plants fill pastures and

roadsides with a beautiful red color. The plants grow from one to two feet tall and the flowers are one to two inches in diameter. They make beautiful landscape plants. During the blooming season, one plant can have as many as 185 simultaneous blooming flowers. Removing the dead flowers will extend the blooming time.

Indian blanket is an annual plant, reseeding itself each year and easy to grow. To encourage seed production for the following year, it is best to wait three weeks after the peak flowering season before mowing. Seeds are readily available. When planting the seeds, barely cover them, as they need light to germinate. As a cut flower, it has a vase life of six to ten days. The plant is drought tolerant growing well in a dry, hot climate in full sun. While it grows in many soil types, sandy and well drained soils are best. Planting Indian blanket seeds in the fall may help reduce the amount of the invasive species, bastard cabbage.

The common buckeye and checkerspot butterflies use the Indian blanket flower as a host plant for their larvae. The blooms provide nectar for other butterfly species.



From the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center: The legend tells of an old Indian blanket maker whose talent for weaving produced such beautiful blankets that other Indians would travel many miles to trade for one. The old blanket maker had never taken an apprentice and when he realized that he had only a short time left, he began weaving his own burial blanket. It blended his favorite browns, reds and yellows into the beautiful patterns for which he was so famous. In time, the old man died and his family dutifully wrapped him in this blanket, which was to be his gift to the Great Spirit when they met. The Great Spirit was very pleased because of the beauty of the gift, but also saddened, because He realized that only those in the Happy Hunting Ground would be able to appreciate the old blanket maker's beautiful creation. So, He decided that He would give this gift back to those that the old Indian had left behind. The spring following the old man's death, wildflowers of the colors and design of the old Indian's blanket appeared in profusion upon his grave ... to bloom and spread forever.

Native Americans used the roots as tea for gastroenteritis. The tea was also used to increase fertility and as a blood tonic and diuretic. Poultices made from the entire plant were used to treat sinus headaches when applied to the forehead. Inhaling powdered flowers relieved other headaches.

## Red-Bellied Woodpecker by AJ Senchak

Bird names are often funny and sometimes silly looking. Prior efforts to bring some consistency or logic to birds' common names have been for naught. Just look at any birding field guide, and you will be left wondering how in the world such misleading names ever came about. For example, ever wonder how our familiar resident bird, the Red-bellied woodpecker (*Centurus carolinus*), got its name? It normally doesn't appear to have red feathers on its belly. In fact, my neighbor insists on incorrectly, but perhaps more accurately, calling it a "red-headed woodpecker." (And, yes indeed, there is a Red-headed woodpecker, but it only infrequently visits Williamson County.)

So, where did the Red-bellied woodpecker's name come from? Actually, the Red-bellied woodpecker does have red feathers protruding from its belly. Fair enough, but it takes a careful birder or photographer, using his/her good eye, to see them. Most folks have never seen them, because you either have to get the woodpecker to stop and show its belly to you (most indiscreet in the bird world!) or study a museum specimen closely. That is, its red belly feathers aren't usually the first thing you see and, therefore, is not a particularly good diagnostic for this bird. Another contributing factor may be that in the late 1700s and early 1800s, the standard practice in naming a bird was from studying a specimen lying on its back.

Now just for fun, figure out why birds have monikers like:

"Yellow-bellied sapsucker" (*Sphyrapicus varius*) – Is it a cartoon character or does it really have a yellow belly? Does it really suck sap?

Northern mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottus*) and Northern cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis* – a wee bit of overkill on the cardinal's name) – So, are there mockingbirds and cardinals in South(ern) America?



*Next Issue:* How intelligent are birds and, more importantly, are humans smart enough to recognize bird smarts when they see it?

## Junior Master Naturalists – Wild for Wild Things



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