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# Good Water RIPPLES

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

10/13	NPSOT
10/24	NPAT
<b>10/27</b>	<b>GWMN</b>
11/09	NPSOT
11/14	WAG
11/28	NPAT

**GWMN Good Water Master Naturalist**  
NPAT Native Prairies Association of Texas  
NPSOT Native Plant Society of Texas  
WAG Williamson Audobon Group

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!

## IN THIS EDITION

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## Amphibian Watch by Amy Finn



Seriously, doesn't the name sound like something you want to do? Doesn't it take you back to wading in the creek or drainage ditch to catch frogs, turtles, and other critters or sitting at the edge of a pond listening to night sounds - a symphony of croakers?

You might have been unaware that there are armies of volunteers across the country checking on the health of amphibians in creeks, rivers, ponds, and lakes. What do they do? They go out to

designated sites to listen and record calls, and to catch, measure, photograph, and release frogs (and other amphibians).

Mike and I joined that "army" of volunteers recently as we investigate opportunities for volunteer work for our Master Naturalist certification. Randy and Sandra Spurlock, also members of our MN class, had participated in a local amphibian watch last month and LOVED it. They shared photos and video (an enormous bullfrog and a tiny green tree frog).

We were in!

Kathy McCormack (whose energy and enthusiasm are infectious), a Texas Master Naturalist and project leader for Berry Springs Park, met us near the wildflower meadow. We joined the Spurlocks, Rusty Yarborough, Tonja Hamel (all from our class) and two others just before sundown and we walked along the marshy waterways in the park - looking and listening.

Continued on Page 2 and 3



## Amphibian Watch Continued by Amy Finn

There are guidelines for how to report: Did you see or hear (or both) the frog? What is the call index value (how much, how long, overlap)? And there are other rules - like if you are wearing insect repellent - you may not touch the frog.

We carried the tools of the amphibian watcher - nets, buckets, thermometers, microphones, clipboard with reporting form, flashlights (LOTS of flashlights), more than a few pairs of binoculars, and cell phones.

Many in our group were experienced birders, identifying what we saw - the Bluebirds and Yellow-crowned Night-herons - and discussing others. All have broad interests - scorpions (none tonight), spiders, insects, and plants. People were generous, pointing out the creatures they observed and holding the light "just so" for photographs.

Quote of the night? Addressing the bullfrog Kathy commented, "You're lucky we're not herons."

## Black-tailed Jackrabbits by Mary Ann Melton and Lisa Ward

A Black-tailed Jackrabbit listens with her long ears, wiggles her nose smelling the air, and scans a full 360 degrees with her sharp eyes. She is vigilant for hawks, coyotes, foxes, bobcats, badgers or weasels, her primary predators. She spots a coyote and flashes her white underside to warn her fellow hares. The coyote charges, and she dashes away with an evasive zigzag pattern, a 10ft jump and a 40 mph sprint.

Jackrabbits are one of five species of hares and are easily distinguished from rabbits like the cottontail also common in Williamson County. They are most recognized by their big long ears and elongated body shape. By increasing or decreasing the blood flow in their ears they can control their body heat. Jackrabbits have keen hearing and a strong sense of smell. Ears and nose are constantly moving to sense the sounds and smells of predators. Their eyes are high on their heads and to the side allowing them almost 360-degree vision to spot predators. Eyes are used to detect motion more than to focus on an object. Both the ears and tail are tipped with black fur. They have long slender front legs and the back feet may be as long as 5 inches. The soles are covered with fur to cushion their feet from hard ground surfaces and to insulate them from hot summer ground surfaces. Cottontails are more compact and smaller.



Black-tailed Jackrabbits, like this one found along the edge of a field between Taylor and Hutto, live in dry habitats such as meadows, prairies, desert scrubland, and farmland. Their extraordinary alertness, speed, and dexterity keep them safe while maintaining a relatively staid lifestyle. They are most active in the early evening and night when they are less likely to be seen rest in scratched out ground hollows during the day. They are herbivores eating grasses, leaves, and even cactus. During the summer they eat a variety of green plants and in the winter dried and woody plants. They obtain most of their water from their diet. Because they live in dry habitats they have a unique way to conserve water. After they poop, they eat it and digest it again getting more of the moisture out.

Even a baby jackrabbit is born ready to run. The precocial young are fully furred with eyes open. The babies nurse for only 3 or 4 days and are independent within a month. Jackrabbits can have as many as four litters with 1 to 6 young leverets per year. The leverets are born in a fur filled depression. They are moved to separate locations to protect them from predators.



## Amphibian Watch - Hearings and Sightings by Amy Finn

### We saw:

Bluebirds

2 bats

2 Yellow-crowned Night-herons

3 Rio Grande leopard frogs

1 Bullfrog

3 Gulf Coast toads ("Who knew that's what they are called?" says the girl from the gulf coast)

2 spiders

A few turtles

2 snakes

Many squirrels

Hundreds of fireflies, dragonflies and damselflies

A critical mass of Boy Scouts camping in the park



### We heard:

Rio Grande leopard frogs

Cricket frogs

bats (really-there is piece of equipment that picks-up and amplifies the sounds of bats!)

Yellow-crowned Night-heron (THAT is a scary cry)

One squirrel making short-work of a pecan (we were attracted by the "crunching")





## Small Sandpipers by Jim Hailey

Small sandpipers, often referred to as peeps, pose identification difficulties for most new birders. These birds are found in our area during migration and often spend winter months with us. They can be found around small ponds and lakes such as Granger and at other location like Hornsby Bend. Key characteristics which you can use to separate the three (Western, Semipalmated, and Least) focus on leg color, bill length and bill shape, as well as other less evident field marks. So let's explore these three species and point out some important field marks to look for in your quest to separate them.

All three range from 6 to 7 inches in overall length and are generally gray to gray-brown making size or coloration hard to provide clues. This is especially true when they return from their breeding grounds in basic plumage during the fall migration. In Spring migration, color can provide valuable clues to determine the identification to a greater degree. So, for the most part, neither of these attributes is of much help.



First let's examine the Western Sandpiper. The two most important field marks to check are the bill length, shape and color. Note that this species has a rather long (relative to head size) bill that is slightly down turned near the tip. Its legs are black as well, although you must be careful here as sometimes the bird legs are covered with mud that obscure their true color. The yellow line indicating the brown ear coverts is characteristic in spring migration but not present in their fall return, nor the dark brown cap. Underparts are gray-to-white in basic plumage, but they display dark-chevroned marks on their underparts in spring breeding plumage. So to summarize the best field marks to focus on are the bill and legs.

Next let's examine the other black legged, black billed peep, the Semipalmated Sandpiper. While this species does have black legs like the Western, the bill size and shape is different. Semipalmated Sandpiper's bills are blunt at the end and are usually shorter in relation to head size than their Western counterpart. In addition, in both basic and breeding plumage, their underparts are white and they have a pale to slightly streaked breast band in contrast to the heavier one of the Western. So here we center our efforts on the bill length and shape.



Now we move on to the third of these peeps, Least Sandpiper. Here we note the very different leg color. Their legs are yellow. Again, we must be careful here because these birds feed along the muddy edges of ponds, often obscuring the true color. Now to the bill. Like the other two they have black bills but note that their bills are much shorter slightly de-curved overall. However, the leg color is diagnostic and the quickest way to separate this species from the other two. So now you have the tools to make the somewhat challenging identifications make a trip out and put this information to use.



## Paper Wasps by Wizzie Brown

Paper wasps are reddish brown wasps, and may sometimes have yellow markings. They are about  $\frac{3}{4}$ - 1 inch in length with smoky wings.

Paper wasps make a paper nest out of chewed wood fiber. The nest is open and hangs from single filament. The nest is typically constructed in protected areas such as under the eaves of homes, in shrubbery, mailboxes or on fences.

Mated queens overwinter and emerge in spring to start a small, new nest in which to lay eggs. The colony, if left alone, grows in size throughout spring and summer. During this time workers forage mainly for protein, usually other insects, so they are great at helping to manage pests. Colonies reach their peak size in late summer to early fall. Starting in late summer, paper wasps forage on sugars and may be drawn to human inhabited areas that may contain a food source, such as garbage cans, outdoor patio areas or hummingbird feeders.

Paper wasps tend to be unaggressive, so if the nest is in an area where a stinging incidence is unlikely, it is best to leave it alone. If the nest is built in an area where someone may get stung- in a mailbox, on playground equipment, etc.- then it is recommended to manage wasps and then remove the nest.

Early in the season, when nests are just being started by founding females, it may be possible to discourage paper wasps to nest in a certain area by knocking down the nest repeatedly. This is not recommended when the nest is larger and contains multiple wasps.



Aerosol formulations- both synthetic and naturally derived- are available for paper wasp management. The nest should be treated either in the early morning or late evening to ensure that wasps are not out foraging for food. Use caution when treating paper wasps nests. Not only are you using a pesticide, but you are dealing with insects that can sting repeatedly. After all wasps are gone, knock down the nest and throw it away. You may want to clean the area where the nest was hanging to rid the area of any pheromones that could quickly attract new wasps to the area.

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)



## Meet Good Water Members

*Jessica Woods*



To the best of my recollection, I attended the Master Naturalist class in the fall of 2011! It took me a full year to get those 40 initial certification hours with thanks to the constant nudging by my class mentor, Sterlin.

I love everything that the Master Naturalists are

involved with, but unfortunately, I don't have the time to volunteer with it all. My current areas of interest are the youth committee, bat watching and education, stream team monitoring, and working at Berry Springs park. I'm not extremely consistent with volunteering, I do what I can, when able.

I currently work full-time in the world of water conservation with 16 years on the job, so I have an obvious interest in water topics as well!

My family and I moved from Round Rock to Georgetown last year and are still settling in. You wouldn't think it would be that different, but it surprisingly is. I have 3 kids and 2 dogs. My husband is an avid hunter and fisherman, and outdoorsman. We try to force the kids outside as much as possible!

I'm a native Texan and love being outdoors and visiting our parks, hiking, kayaking, and just looking and appreciating nature. I can't get outside enough, especially when the temperatures are this balmy 70 and 80 degrees!

*Jim Abreu*



I was born in San Francisco, lived there for 5 months and then moved to Indiana where my brother and I raised dairy goats for 4-H projects. After about twelve years, our family moved to Galveston. After graduating from high school, I moved to Austin to attend UT.

After about three years, I bailed from UT and joined my brother in a business venture, Triumph of Austin. We were the British motorcycle dealer for Austin starting in '71. After about three years, I left the motorcycle business to start an auto restoration business which quickly turned into an auto collision repair business, Rebreu Body and Frame. My business partner and I finally sold the business in late 2012, 37 years later.

My focus now is to learn how to properly manage the small piece of land west of Georgetown where my wife and I have lived since '94. I participated in the Master Gardner program which helped with our vegetable garden project. The Master Naturalist program has now given me a much better understanding on how to manage our place for wildlife. I strongly feel the need to encourage others around me to take a similar approach and protect as much land as possible. Sustainability is a concept which I feel should have everyone's focus. I enjoy participating in many of the projects which both the Master Naturalist and Master Gardener groups foster.

### Junior Master Naturalists and Round Rock Library Youth Update by Lisa Ward

The Junior Master Naturalists kicked off the new school year on September 8 with fossil making and paleontology taught by Carole Minnix and then had edible soil with Lisa Ward. In October, the 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> graders will enjoy hands-on lessons on archaeology and geology. GWMN also provides lessons for early elementary at the Round Rock Library. Round Rock Library hosts events October 17<sup>th</sup> and December 19<sup>th</sup> at 4:30pm. Learning fun for all!

For information about the Good Water Chapter  
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