



Prairies & Pines

A Quarterly Newsletter

Vol. 6 Issue 1 - Winter/Spring 2014

Education Roundup

Create a backyard bird habitat.
Page 2

Learn about the Texas River Otter.
Page 2

Soldiers Against Texas Invasive Species!
Page 2

Heartwood Adventures

Humor in Nature.
Page 3

Taming the wild at Jones Forest.
Page 3



Reflecting on Nature

Connect with nature on a deeper level.
Page 4

RCW banding through the eyes of an intern.
Page 4

Living with Urban Wildlife.
Page 4

Calendar of Events

Keep up with volunteer opportunities, advanced training, and Heartwood Chapter meetings.
Page 5



Member Spotlights!

Get to know Heartwood Chapter member Anita Tiller.
Page 6

Find out what our interns think about the program.
Page 7

Assorted News



Find out the structure of the Heartwood Facebook page why we hope you follow.
Page 7

A Face Only a Mother Could Love

Jones State Forest is prime habitat for red-cockaded woodpeckers, an endangered species.

by John R. Warner, Urban District Forester
June 3, 2014

Red-cockaded woodpeckers (RCWs) are an endangered species due largely to the loss of habitat, which consists of mature southern pine forests.

Right in your own metropolitan backyard you can find prime RCW habitat at Texas A&M Forest Service's William Goodrich Jones State Forest, a 1,700-acre urban forest surrounded by development. W.G. Jones State Forest is listed in American Bird Conservancy and The



Two red-cockaded woodpeckers patiently waiting to be banded by Donna Work.

Photo courtesy of: Shane Long

Nature Conservancy's book, "The 500 most important birding areas in the United States.

RCWs nest only in live pines that are over 60 years old, in open forests with little undergrowth. Often the primary nesting pines are infected with red heart fungus. The fungus softens the heartwood of the pine tree, making it easier for the woodpecker to

excavate a nest cavity that can take up to two years to construct.

The live pine tree also provides protection for RCWs. The adult RCWs peck holes around the cavity so the tree will ooze a protective sticky sap area around the nest cavity entrance. This sap or resin, helps keep tree-climbing snakes away from the nest. It also acts as a "banner," announcing a group's territory.

Biologist Donna Work says the Red-cockaded woodpecker is a cooperative breeder that lives in a small family group, ideally composed of a breeding pair and one or more helpers. These helpers are usually male offspring from the previous breeding season that assist in raising the young and defending the territory. Jones State Forest has four RCW family groups.

Annually, during nesting season, April to July, thousands of people from all over the world visit the Jones State Forest near Conroe and The Woodlands and the Sam Houston National Forest near Willis to see a glimpse of the RCW.

Continued on Page 8



Backyard Bird Habitats

by Suzy Briseño, Heartwood TMN Intern

Offering food, nest boxes, nesting materials, water and natural habitat can draw birds to backyards and is a hobby the whole family can enjoy. Because native and migrating birds lose habitat on a daily basis from increasing urbanization of forests, fields and wetlands, offering assistance has become essential. Each year an average of 2.1 million acres of U. S. wildlife habitat is converted to residential use. A 2011 Conroe Courier article states that sales for commercial and multifamily building in Montgomery County rose 29 percent in 2010 year alone. Unfortunately, good news for the economy is not always best news for wildlife.



Nesting and Shelter Sites

It is important to provide a variety of dwelling spaces, from traditional bird houses for cavity-nesting birds to brush piles for ground-dwelling birds. Coniferous trees such as Eastern cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), shrubs and vines, including, yaupon holly (*Ilex vomitoria*), Carolina Jessamine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*) and wild grapes (*Vitis* sp.) offer birds dense thickets in which to perch, hide and take shelter from predators and inclement weather. Tiny berry-like cones from female Eastern cedars are eaten by birds, namely the cedar waxwing, for which this native tree is named.

Continued on Page 9



River Otter (*Lutra canadensis*). Photo by John L. Teslen.

The Elusive River Otter

by Joy Klumpp, Heartwood TMN Member

When one thinks of otters it is with the usual assumption of the sea, but there is a species of otters that call our Texas rivers home. The North American River Otter, *Lontra Canadensis*, can be found right here in our great state. On April 5, 2014 I attended a lecture on this phantom creature. Speaker, Gary Calkins, wildlife biologist with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department shared his expertise on river otters including the historical importance of this species in the fur trade industry.

Historically beavers dominated the fur trade business, but after the Civil war both coyotes and otters became more popular in the fashion of both men and women. During the Great Depression trapping became a way of life and a means of survival for many. As time progressed, mankind's introduction to contaminants in our waterways including the notorious DDT drastically affected the food sources of otters. In the 1970s federal laws played a huge role in changing peoples' outlook on protecting habitats and the animals that depend on them. These laws were influential in our waterways being restored.

In the wild, the average lifespan of an otter can range anywhere between 8 to 10 years with the average female weighing 20-24 lbs. They can breed within the first year of life and gestation is anywhere between 2-8 months, so it provides a means to producing plenty of viable offspring. Much of their food source is comprised of meat including mussels and crawfish. Mussels and crawfish are *indicator species* and help us know when a habitat is being contaminated which could jeopardize other species' well-being such as the otter.

Otters are extremely intelligent with a natural sense of curiosity always interested in the

Continued on Page 9



Want to Fight Against Texas Invaders?

by Kerry Spencer, Heartwood TMN Member

Not all non-native species become invasive, so what makes a non-native species and invasive species? Invasive species establish themselves and succeed due to a lack of predators, competitors and diseases that normally act as a natural control for the species. The most important part of determining if the species is invasive is if it causes or is likely to cause economic harm, environmental harm, or harm to human health.

It is important to identify and control invasive species since they are a form of biological pollution. They threaten the survival of native plants and animals, which decreases biodiversity. According to Colorado State University, the estimated annual cost of invasive species is \$138 billion in damages.

A few things you can do to fight invasive species is to plant native plants, learn how to prevent carrying invasive species, educate yourself and others about the dangers of invasive species, learn how to identify them, and volunteer with the Invaders of Texas Program.

If you would like more information on becoming a citizen scientist and volunteering, you can attend a training in another area or you can take advantage of online training. If you have questions or want to register for online training, you can visit the Texas Invaders website at www.texasinvasives.org.

Source: <http://lib.colostate.edu/research/agnic/impacts.html>



Humor in Nature

Funnel Weaver Spider

— Susan Beckemeier



When the Call of the Wild Needs a Little Taming

by John Warner, Urban District Forester

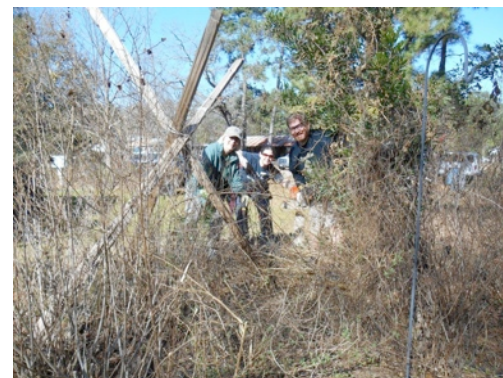
Texas Master Gardener (TMG) Kim Warner and Texas Master Naturalists (TMN) Debbie Layer, Joy Klumpp and John Warner recently spent several hours at the Certified Wildscape and Pollinator Gardens at the W.G. Jones State Forest located at 1328 FM 1488. Both programs, TMG and TMN, require their members to volunteer back into communities about 40 hours per year to maintain their certification.



Pictured left to right: John Warner, Debbie Layer, Joy Klumpp, and Kim Warner

On this day, volunteers trimmed and cut back the plants within the five different habitat gardens. Each garden demonstrates habitat properties: food, shelter and water. According to certified TMG, Kim Warner, "the gardens here at the Texas A&M Forest Service location

provide habitat year around especially during the winter months when in short supply." To learn more about the programs and how to become a master gardener and naturalist, visit www.txmg.org or www.txmn.org to learn more.



Pictured left to right: Debbie Layer, Joy Klumpp, and John Warner



Walk with Nature, Talk with Art

Musings from the field and how they can connect you to the web and inspire creativity.

by Elissa K Fletcher, Heartwood TMN Member

As a Master Naturalist, I am committed to the organization's goals of providing environmental education, outreach and service. As an artist, in companionship with nature, I am compelled to find creative ways to capture a moment, document an idea, or use my lens, pen or brush to express that which inspires me ~ hence my mantra ~ Walk with Nature, Talk with Art.

With every step we take (with nature), be it a quick stroll through your own well know garden, or a longer, new adventure hike or trip, we *are* connecting. With boots on the ground and all five senses fully engaged, we explore, discover, and invite curiosity. By adding some form of "hands on" record keeping to that, we further extend and enhance each experience. Perhaps you already snap some pictures, jot a few field notes, or take time to ponder on site – which is good!

I now encourage you to take it further, to become more expressive during and after those times with Nature.

Start by keeping a dedicated journal or sketchbook using both words and images and you will quickly find that you are more involved with and rewarded by what you have experienced. Your words should be a mix of scientific observation (i.e. detailed field notes) and expressive of feelings. The images can be from a camera, but even better if you add your own lines – a simple sketch and maybe some color.

I can tell you this cannot *all* be accomplished "in the field," but by spending time afterward

Continued on Page 8



Bird Banding Adventure

by Susan Beckemeier, Heartwood TMN Intern

For many of you, Heartwood Master Naturalists, the annual banding of the baby woodpeckers is old news. You don't have to read any farther. However, the first time this new intern heard John Warner describe the process that was involved in snaring and banding the baby RCW's I thought, "I have to see that!"

The first two treks Donna Work made into Jones Forest to monitor the birds I was unable to go. Fortunately for me, the Monday she actually banded there was one nest in which the birds were too small to band. She scheduled a follow-up trip for Friday. My husband, Mark, and I were there bright and early and were joined by Heartwood MN Debbie Layer and her friend Joann Raine.



Continued on Page 7



Urban Wildlife Workshop

by Susan Beckemeier, Heartwood TMN Intern

On May 8 my husband, Mark, and I attended a workshop in San Antonio that dealt with wildlife that has learned to survive in urban settings. It was held at the wonderful Urban Ecology Center at Phil Hardberger Park and sponsored by the Alamo chapter of Master Naturalists. Ever since we moved to our five acre property in Indigo Lake Estates, we have been trying to figure out how to coexist with the animals we were displacing. The talk given by Diana Foss to the Heartwood chapter interns hinted at the research being done on this issue. We hoped this workshop might offer us further insight. It did. Understandably a lot more material can be covered in seven hours than can be done in two.

For starters I want to say if you ever get a chance to attend a workshop conducted by Jessica Alderson of Texas Parks and Wildlife, do it. Not only were the speakers well informed and the topics interesting, it all ran like clockwork. The only glitches seemed to have been when the doughnut order wasn't ready and the first speaker was caught in traffic. Unfazed, Jessica gave her talk first and the doughnuts were there by the first break.

We heard experts talk about white-tail deer, bats, coyotes, bobcats, and problem bird colonies. Lee Marlowe Of the San Antonio River Authority showed the efforts being made to reclaim parts of the river where the banks have been torn up by feral hogs and nutria (which she called nutria-rats) and colonized by non-native invasive plants. There was a talk about zoonotic diseases, those spread by animal and insect vectors, and another on how to deal with the media so as to be informative and not smug or confrontational.

Continued on Page 8

JULY

2 – Heartwood Chapter meeting. **Jones State Forest in Conroe, 6pm.** Bring some popcorn and join us to watch the TPWD video on Texas, a State of Water, with discussion following.

12 – Outdoor and Nature First Aid training AND Sustainability Issues in a Forested Environment. Heartwood MN Intern class. **Jones State Forest in Conroe, 9am to 2pm.**

19 – **Tentative** planning is underway for regional MN meeting in Livingston. More details soon.

26 – Learn more about freshwater ecology and the aquatic wildlife in our creeks and rivers. Marty Kelly, with TCEQ, will present in the nature center, and demonstrate monitoring using electro-shock in the creek to count fish. **Jones Park in Humble, 9am to noon.** Dress to get wet or muddy. Reservations REQUIRED, beginning July 16 by calling 281.446.8588.

26 -- Intern Presentations and Graduation of Heartwood Interns, **Jones State Forest in Conroe, 8:30am**

AUGUST

6 – Heartwood Chapter meeting. **Jones State Forest in Conroe, 6pm.** Bring a friend. Topic/ speaker TBA.

9 – Hummingbird migration and monitoring by Mark Klym, TPWD. **Jones Park in Humble, 10am to 1pm.** Habitat, migration and monitoring. With information about gardening for hummers.

16 – All about BATS! With Diana Foss, TPWD. **Jones Park in Humble, 9am to noon.** Learn about these interesting mammals and how you can participate in monitoring them.

**RCW Translocation Project 2014
(now through August 15)**

The Jones State Forest is up on rotation to receive red-cockaded woodpeckers (RCW) breeding groups (2) this August.

Our rotation turn only comes around every 4-8 years and as you know our RCW need the new genetics in order to stay viable and healthy. This will be our only chance for the next several years to get this done if we miss this opportunity.

We have an Eagle Scout that is raising funds for 1 nest box and we need 8 total at \$150 each which includes installation.

Could the chapters Heartwood and Gulf Coast make a challenge among their members to fund some of these boxes and provide a work day or days to clear around four cavity trees that will be receiving the artificial nest box?

Scope:

We have two areas on the Jones State Forest that are possible areas to receive new genetic breeding stock of red-cockaded woodpeckers (RCW). These are endangered birds that are found on the state forest but due to the fragmentation of the forest from other forested areas that have RCW our birds need new genetic breeding stock. These birds live exclusively in old growth living pine trees.

Need:

- clearing around four cavity trees about 50' by hand,
- funding of eight artificial nest boxes (\$150 each), assistance on box cost may come from other Friends of the Forest.
- USFW permitted biologist will install nest boxes
- TFS will be herbiciding the area (cluster area) to remove underbrush within clusters. Since prescribed burning did not take place due to rain fall this spring, herbiciding the underbrush is our next best solution.
- Hand clearing needs to be down around the selected 4 trees the boxes will be installed at about 50 feet each. (Work days?)

Time Frame:

- **Everything completed by August 15, 2014**

Please help spread the word.

John Warner
936 546-3169 cell

**SAVE THE DATE, and watch for
more information about these
upcoming trainings:**

October 4 – Estuaries 101, designed for MNs by John O’Connell, County Extension Agent for Coastal and Marine Resources in Brazoria County. **Jones Park in Humble, 9am to 4pm.** Learn about the effects of human activities on water quality from upstream creeks and rivers all the way to the Gulf. Estuaries 101 is a comprehensive course on estuaries, the nurseries of marine life. The objective of this course is to familiarize the learner with the physical, chemical, and biological components of Texas estuaries. Students will receive approximately 6 hours of classroom instruction, including hands-on demonstrations. An optional field trip will be planned. The field trip will allow students to exam first-hand the concepts presented during the classroom portion.

Note: For Master Naturalist this course meets basic or advanced training upon approval of the chapter’s training chair.

October 18 – All about Composting, with Bob Dailey and Linda Crum, Master Composters with Heartwood Chapter. **Jones Park in Humble, 10am to noon.** Composting is a time-honored tradition. Good, nutrient-rich compost has no bad orders, does not attract varmints and works wonders on your plants. Make your own simply and easily by recycling your leaves, grass and other green waste. Learn how to make compost tea and apply it. Worm composting is a great activity for children, and worms also make great compost for your plants.

November 1 – Art from Nature, with Elissa Fletcher, Art Instructor and Heartwood member. **Jones Park in Humble, 10am to 2pm.** *explore, discover, imagine, and express* the magic of our natural surroundings. Discover nature’s secrets in a new way of "seeing." Be inspired to play in creative ways to express and record your experiences. Reservations REQUIRED. Details for reservations will follow.

Meet Anita Tiller

by Kerry Spencer, Heartwood TMN Member

Anita was certified as a Texas Master Naturalist in 2006 as one of the founding members of the Heartwood Chapter. As secretary of the chapter, she keeps track of correspondence relating to board business. She has also served on the chapter meeting speaker committee for many years. Anita's role as botanist at Mercer Arboretum is varied.

Tell us about what you are in charge of at Mercer. Please describe your role as botanist.

Curator for living plant collections and the dried plant reference collection, the herbarium. Identify plants for the public. Develop and maintain partnerships with local, national and international experts for documentation of garden collections, invasive plant management and plant conservation goals. Train and manage interns and volunteer assistants for the garden and herbarium collections, database and signage. Instructor for botany and plant conservation classes for local and state Master Gardener, Master Naturalist and Gulf Coast Gardener programs and the Center for Plant Conservation's National Plant Conservation Training Workshops. Prepare articles for Precinct 4 magazines, *Update* and Mercer's *Volunteer Leaflet* and website. Manage garden displays and organic pond maintenance for the Endangered Species and Native Plant Garden, a popular outdoor teaching classroom. Initiated and coordinated the certification of the Endangered Species Garden by the North American Butterfly Association and as a Best of Texas Demonstration Habitat Garden for Texas Parks and Wildlife and the National Wildlife Federation. Manage seed banking and restoration efforts for rare native plants in Harris County, east Texas and the Upper Gulf Coast as conservation officer for the Center for Plant Conservation, Missouri Botanical Garden. Serve as Harris County botanist for east Texas rare plant recovery teams. Grant writer and grant manager. Manager and/or advisor for Harris County's rare native plant preserves. Designed retrofit of and manage Mercer's research building. (These are only a few of the roles Anita has a hand in at Mercer.)

What are some volunteer opportunities for chapter members at Mercer?

Heartwood members are part of the native plant propagation team that meets every Wednesday morning at Mercer; help maintain the Endangered Species and Native Garden; seed cleaning; assist with restoration of a native pocket prairie preserve for rare local plant species; assist with field surveys and

seed collections for rare plants in Harris County and throughout East Texas; invasive plant removal and trail maintenance for Heartwood's adopt a trail at Mercer.

Do you have opportunities that are in need of volunteers right now?

All of the above. The field survey and seed collection work is sporadic and seasonal but is rank as favorite activities.

Or any special projects you need help with?

I am about to move into Mercer's Research Building. We will likely need an additional assistant for our growing library collections. Once I move in, we will be able to identify other needs.

Please tell us a little about your daughter and what she does for the Heartwood Chapter.

Laura Densmore officially started taking classes when she was twelve, but often had tagged along with me and assisted me in the years prior. She was officially certified in 2008. Most of her volunteering has involved hosting education booths, seminars, trail cleanups for The Woodlands GREEN and volunteering as a counselor for her school's children's summer nature camp. Laura is now working as staff for the camp. She graduated this May from John Cooper School and will attend Emory University in Oxford and Atlanta, GA. Laura is a National Merit Finalist and was awarded Emory's National Merit Scholarship. Her environmental service earned her three local scholarships: The Woodlands GREEN Scholarship, Indian Springs Community Association Scholarship and The Woodlands Development Environmental Scholarship.

Name a current project you are working on and tell us what you hope to accomplish.

Currently the restoration of the Prairie Dawn Preserve at Cutten and W Greens Road is my favorite project. This restoration project is already expanding the populations of the rare prairie species at that site. Without the support of the volunteers and partners within Harris County and beyond, this project would not be possible.

What is your specialization in botany?

Native plant conservation; aquatic botany; anatomy, morphology and ecology.

What do you like most about what you do?

The variety of responsibilities provide a stimulating educational environment.

Conservation is my passion, and working with volunteers and partners who share the same passion is very rewarding and exciting.

What do you like least?

Synchronizing biological system's demands with that of accounting timelines.

Do you have any funny stories?

Mercer's visitors are often very entertaining, we have had folks carry couches in for photo shoots, a few have asked us what time we round up the snakes and pen them up.

What do you feel has been your biggest accomplishment so far?

Continuing Mercer's accomplishments as a respected botanical institution and respected conservation program. Also, continuing to promote Mercer as retreat for the public's soul and provide a wide scope of educational challenges, while nurturing the environment and wildlife.

If you were a plant, what plant would you be and why?

Purple coneflower because although they are sweet and pretty, they are also very productive

If you were a pollinator, which pollinator would you be and why?

I love bumblebees, the name and the creature.

What is the weirdest part of your job?

One of the weirdest is cayenne pepper-stripping garden signs to repel gnawing squirrels.

What is something you have to do for your job that you never expected?

The vast range of creative solutions required for achieving good public relations.

Please tell us about your gardens at home.

Mostly native trees and shrubs for shade. Container herbs, veggies, citrus, hummingbird, butterfly plants as sun allows.

What are your favorite native plants and why?

Purple coneflower, but I also have a long list of natives that I am happy to share anytime!

Meet the Interns!

The interns were asked various questions about the classes they have to take. Here were a few of their responses:

I am enjoying the classes. In my case I had to take some from Gulf Coast and some from Heartwood because of my travel schedule. That has worked out nicely for me. I am enjoying all the various topics and a light coverage of each of those. I feel like it gives me a good overview of many different areas. Then I can dig where I want to and where I have an interest. There has been lots of great intro information in many different wildlife related areas. For instance, we have covered fish, insects, birds, etc. Also, I found the topic of historical naturalists in Texas very interesting as well. Tom from Sheldon Lake talked to us on the topic of Interpretive Speaking when leading tours. I've already helped out at Jesse Jones Park by leading some nature tours for first and second graders at the park. Also, I'm very interested in doing Cornell and Audubon bird surveys. Also, I want to possibly get involved with wildlife rehabilitation. I think I would need more training on the wildlife rehabilitation side of things. Good program!
-*Claire Moore*

I am enjoying the classes, as much for the people I have met as for the things I have learned. I find it hard to say what I have enjoyed the most or intend to pursue in the future as what strikes me is how interconnected everything is. The animals present in an area depend on the plants. The plants depend on the soil and rainfall. The soil depends on the geologic history. The presence or absence of water depends on weather patterns which go back to the topography which goes back to the history. I feel as naturalists, our goal is like that of a doctor--first do no harm. It is so easy to try to change something for the better, and make conditions worse for something else.

I'm not sure all the ways I will use my training or where I will concentrate, but I do think I'll become part of the "Stream Team" after I take the training. I had to miss the first one. My main goal is educating my neighbors. I recently agreed to become president of the Indigo Lake Estates garden club. People in our subdivision have properties of a least an acre. Many moved here looking forward to having lots of room to garden, not realizing they were going to have to share that space with the wildlife. They spray every bug and kill every snake and predator they see. Many people have dug water wells and feel it is their right to pump out as much water from them as they want. So far I have scheduled

three of the naturalists I have met through classes to speak to the garden club. I hope to get more. I can't change the world, but I might be able to change the attitudes of a few people in my corner of it.-*Susan Beckemeier*

I am really enjoying the TMN training! I did not appreciate the breadth of the opportunities available to TMN's before taking the training. I almost did not take the classes this time because my schedule interferes with some of the Heartwood training a but the wonderful Teri MacArthur helped me realize that I can take my missed classes with other chapters. I am particularly interested in the mission of the Texas Stream Team and hope to "specialize" with them when I am done. My classmates are inspirational - so many accomplished people! -*Eileen Walton*

I greatly enjoy the class for not only its content, but also being with like-minded people. Because we are new to the Houston area, this class helps us understand the local environment which in turn helps us feel more like we belong. Some important knowledge and skills are learning what is being done by local park employees and opportunities for citizens. I enjoy all the subjects, but am especially interested in the Piney Woods info because I live in the Piney Woods. I want to know how to observe it, how to prevent problems, how to encourage nature. The new knowledge learned is a stepping stone to learning more through personal research and attending local information sources. I will share the information in my neighborhood and community and encourage others who have the time available to become a TMN. Applying the knowledge to both my own property and TMN Projects will help my thirst for continuous learning.

John Warner's hayride class was interesting and gave us a greater understanding of the goals at Jones Forest. He said he did not want to bore us with a formal presentation. I would like to attend his formal presentation for a more academic approach to have facts I can use to further understand and apply to other forests and wooded environments as they become fragmented within and beyond major cities. -*Kim Andrews*

The classes are very enjoyable and a good learning experience. Good information to evaluate what we are doing on our own personal property. My favorite topics are geology and land related topics. We plans to use our knowledge for developing and improving our own property and helping our neighbors understand what they are doing and how it impacts the overall environment.
-*Don Begley*

Banding Continued from Page 4

After loading three, ten-foot ladders into Donna's truck we bounced along the back roads until we reached the occupied tree. Donna propped one of the ladders against the tree then strapped herself to the tree using her safety harness. Up she went, and chained the ladder to the tree at the top. I'm not especially afraid of heights so I figured I could do that. Next she hauled the second ladder up and attached it to the top of the first one. In my youth, on a good day, I might have been able to do that. Up she climbed then threw down a rope to have us attach the third ladder. After pulling that one up and affixing it to the tree she climbed the last ten feet to the nesting hole. No way I'd ever be able to do that. Donna was wearing a vest with lots of pockets holding the materials she needed to snag the birds from the bottom of the hole. With the parents scolding her from neighboring trees, she managed to fish out the two baby woodpeckers and put them in a little drawstring bag which she lowered to us observers on the ground. Now I finally got to be of some use.

The tiny, naked little birds reminded me of Gollum in *The Hobbit*. They could only be called cute by somebody with a vivid imagination. Using the tailgate of her truck as a work table, Donna put tiny, identifying bands on their legs. She said the legs won't grow much bigger in diameter, so it is okay to band them that small. The birds thrashed around at the indignity of it all. Their heads whipped back and forth as if to say, "Oh, no you don't!" I was afraid they would snap their necks, so I attempted to corral them while Donna did her thing. She took a DNA sample from the mouth of one bird to send to The Department of Fisheries and Wildlife at Oregon State University where they are doing a study on the genetic variability of RCW's. Finally, adorned with five rings each, the birds went back into the bag.

The process was then reversed. Donna went up the tree. We attached the bag to her rope. She pulled it up and dumped the birds back into their hole, then came back down the ladders, lowering the sections as she descended. Now came the moment of truth. It is a myth that bird parents will reject their offspring if they smell humans on them. However it seemed like the parents who were so perturbed when Donna had raided their nest had gone off on a date. Minutes passed while we wondered if the baby birds with their new bling had been abandoned by their parents. Finally, one of the adults showed up. I heaved a sigh of relief. Now we just have to hope that is the biggest trauma they encounter in their lives and they live long enough to raise the next generation of woodpeckers.

Join the Heartwood Facebook Page!

by Kerry Spencer, Heartwood TMN Member

Heartwood's Facebook page is posting lots of interesting articles, videos, pictures, and other items that are of interest to Master Naturalists. This includes posts from local parks and organizations, state and national Parks, non-profit organizations, other TMN chapters from across the state, and our own members. The possibilities are endless.

The Facebook page is meant to be a resource for chapter members which includes a calendar of events. The page is also meant to be informative about different topics in the Houston area, Texas, the US, and the world. Most importantly, feel free to share any posts on your own Facebook page so your friends can also be well informed.

One little quirky fact to know about the page is if you post something to the page, it is difficult for others in the chapter to see. Therefore, if you do post something, an admin will repost it for you so it is easier for everyone to view.

Have you ever accidentally deleted an email? Do you spend a lot of time searching for a particular email because you need the information? Well, check out the events calendar on the Facebook Page. All emails that are sent out for volunteer opportunities, meetings, and advanced training are put on the events calendar. Just click the events tab under the cover photo.

There are two ways to find the Heartwood Facebook page. If you have a Facebook page you can search for "Heartwood Chapter, Texas Master Naturalist" and click "Like." The second is to type <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Heartwood-Chapter-Texas-Master-Naturalist/269691493552> into the search bar. Once you like the page, you will get updates.

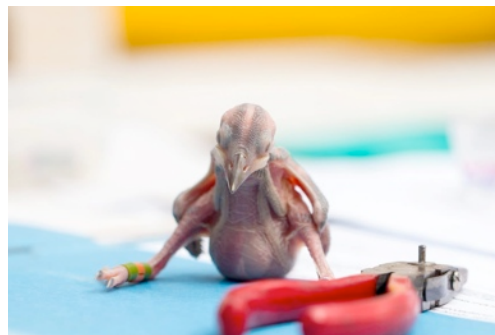
To take it a step further, you can get notifications on your own newsfeed for every post put on the Heartwood page. Once you like the page, you can hover your mouse over the "Like" button and a drop down menu will appear. Once the drop down menu appears, click "Get Notifications" and you will not miss anything posted to the page.

****A special note about political posts.****

Sometimes it is difficult to separate politics from environmental and conservation topics. Any post that seems political is not meant to persuade or alienate anyone. This might be the intention of the original post, but it is not my intention. I debate over whether to post them or not. Sometimes I do not, but most of the time I do. This is just so you are informed. The motive behind every post is so our chapter is well informed and hopefully entertained.

For questions, contact Kerry Spencer at Heartwoodtmn_FB@yahoo.com.

Face continued from Page 1



Work reminds visitors that RCWs are federally protected and it is illegal to cause harm or harass any endangered species. When viewing nesting birds; remain at a distance and keep your visits short.

"Friends of Jones State Forest" are volunteers, mostly Texas Master Naturalists from the Heartwood Chapter, who offer walking and conservation education tours for youth and adults. They also assist in fundraising to support Texas A&M Forest Service's mission to maintain a healthy habitat for RCWs.

To learn more about Red-cockaded woodpeckers, conservation education classes and lectures, email jonesstateforest@tfs.tamu.edu or contact Urban District Forester John R. Warner at the Texas A&M Forest Service office, W.G. Jones State Forest, 1328 FM 1488, Conroe, Texas 77384.



Art Continued from Page 4

with this, you extend and enrich each experience by reliving and researching in order to record. This record is then available to you permanently to go back to or build on.

I offer you my little frog painting (Titled ~ *You Lookin' At Me?*) as an example of how this works for me. I love amphibians, both scientifically and artistically. After all, they *are* pretty fascinating as a valuable indicator species that claim land and water as habitat, and who does not like the color green? Think of Kermit and his lament – "it's not easy being green!"

Over the years I have amassed many field notes, sketches and photos of my encounters with frogs. Then one day, I was struck with one of my "Ever Wonder?" thoughts – Who's looking at who? I wondered what an animal (in this case frogs) might think as I boldly enter their turf to explore, ever leaning closer to study (peer at) them while probably clicking away or making notes or sketches. This notion easily put in motion the desire to create this little painting, which brings to full circle how, while walking with nature, being observant and allowing curiosity can lead to a desire for creativity.

I hope you will give it a try!

In the next issue, I will begin to share some tips and techniques ~ first up ~ how to conquer THE BLANK PAGE of your journal or sketchbook as you, too, begin.

Urban Continued from Page 4

What we came away with was the understanding that wild animals visit our yards because we are providing them with something they need. It might be water, it might be shelter, but most often it is food. It is necessary to figure out what that need is and eliminate it from our yards. Without putting a high fence around our entire yard we will never keep the deer out. There is just too much tasty stuff growing there. The best we can do is plant things they don't like and fence off the rest. Raccoons are going to kill and eat our chickens every chance they get. We have to be able to secure the birds--no easy feat. Raccoons are very smart. Skunks are going to shelter in our culverts. We have to block them out or decide they can stay there and keep our pets away. We moved to the country to better enjoy nature so it is silly to expect nature to bend to our will. We will just have to adjust our priorities and be good neighbors.

Backyard Continued from Page 2

Wild grapes offer superb fruit to robins, bluebirds, cardinals and mockingbirds, and the thick vines provide excellent cover and nest sites. Food and shelter sources include coral berry (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*) for songbirds and ground birds; Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), for bluebirds, cardinals, robins and woodpeckers; female yaupon for songbirds and woodpeckers; dogwood (*Cornus florida* and other species), for bluebirds, cardinals, catbirds, juncos, robins, thrushes and warblers, and Southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*) for the pileated woodpecker and songbirds, including the eponymous Magnolia warbler.



Planting ornamental grasses, including bluestem (*Andropogon* sp.), sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*), pampas grass (*Cortaderia selloana*), and maidenhair grass (*Miscanthus sinensis*) will offer cover and nesting material for a variety of birds, including meadowlarks, quails, sparrows and finches. A suet cage filled with small strands of yarn, straw or animal hair can also be a big help to expectant parents find building materials. Better yet, an open compost bin offers nest builders a wealth of small and large plant materials.

Berries for Birds

To stock the pantry, supply a wide variety of vegetation, preferably locally native trees, bushes and plants. Those bearing fruit or berries are especially enticing to birds. Make sure plants are free of insecticides. Plant American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) to nourish bluebirds, cardinals, mockingbirds, sparrows, thrushes and woodpeckers and blackberry (*Rubus* sp.) for Baltimore orioles, cedar waxwings, tanagers and woodpeckers. When few other food sources are available, bluebirds, cardinals and Carolina wrens dine on wax myrtle (*Myrica* or *Morella cerifera*) berries. Yellow-rumped warblers, also called myrtle warblers, devour the berries during their annual migration.

Deciduous trees, including Mexican buckeyes (*Ungnadia speciosa*), various oaks (*Quercus*

sp.) and sweetgums (*Liquidamber styraciflua*) will sustain small to large, from titmouse to turkey, while maples (*Acer* sp.) and dogwoods (*Malus* sp.) cater to American goldfinches, cedar waxwings, finches and robins. Hackberries (*Celtis* sp.) and hawthorns (*Crataegus* sp.) nourish cedar waxwings, orioles, robins and thrushes, among others.

Produce Your Own Birdseed with Annuals and Perennials

Instead of buying it, try growing birdseed, as many pounds of seeds may be harvested from a small plot. Best are plants with composite flowers that yield multiple seeds, including, black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), blanket flower (*Gaillardia pulchella*), coreopsis (*Coreopsis tinctoria*), cosmos (*C. bipinnatus*, *C. sulphureus*), purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), marigold (*Tagetes erecta*), safflower (*Carthamus tinctorius*), sunflowers (*Helianthus* sp.), yarrow (*Achillea* sp.) and zinnia (*Z. anustifolia*, *Z. elegans*). Plant in large clumps to help shelter birds.



Place a few different feeders, such as tray / platform, tube, hopper and suet in various locations. It's important to keep the feeders clean, because mold and bacteria that can grow in old or wet seed can cause diseases that may be fatal to the diners.

Water

Water, especially moving water, which deters mosquitoes, is a sure way to attract birds. Whether installing a fountain, pond or pedestal bath, keep it clean and try to add a few different levels so large and small birds can use the water for drinking and bathing.

For more information, visit the [All About Birds, Birds and Blooms](#) and [Houston Audubon Society](#) Web sites.

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Otter Continued from Page 2

world around them. Because of the efforts of environmentalists and federal laws their numbers are growing. It is still very difficult to survey populations. Biologists with the help of the development of mathematical equations, CITES (tags that must be used on any harvested animals) and occupancy modeling, can speculate population numbers.

With the insurgence of growing numbers come the views of those that find them a nuisance. Some of the biggest complaints include a concern for otters depleting fish from lakes, ponds or rivers and jeopardizing the fishing opportunities. Otters possess an innate way of knowing not to over hunt a food source. They will stay in an area to feed for a short period of time and then move on. Others have blamed otters' curiosity as the sole purpose for the destruction of their boats, but many times it has been found that the owners had recently been fishing, using stink bait or other such fishing paraphilia that attracted the otter to a "food source".

Otters have a growing range of habitat. They can be elusive only leaving signs through tracks or scat. It may become more common for people to catch a glimpse of them in the future.

If you would like to learn more about this unique species you can visit: <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/species/otter/>

Or listen to: <http://passporttotexas.org/texas-river-otters/>

The Texas Master Naturalist Program is a natural resource-based volunteer training and development program jointly sponsored statewide by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service and the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (TPWD). These agencies have come together in partnership to make this educational volunteer program available to you. Our ultimate goal is to help improve your natural resource understanding and management activities in Texas.



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