

T E X A S

Master
Naturalist™



HIGHLAND LAKES CHAPTER



Highland Lakes Steward

Sept 2013

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MISSION

The Texas Master Naturalist program is a natural resource-based volunteer training and development program sponsored statewide by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

The mission of the program is to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers who provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the state of Texas

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JUST ONE LITTLE THING

By Linda O'Nan

It was great to see so many master naturalist friends at this month's meeting! Time now to get geared up for some great volunteer programs. It has been a long, hot summer, and it is hard to have much enthusiasm for our typical master naturalist activities outdoors—many tough native flowering plants are past their prime. But in the brutal punishing heat, there can be small thrills of discovery. While cleaning out my garage, tiny baby gecko eggs were abundant in forgotten tool boxes, with cute newly hatched geckos that would make a great Geico commercial. It's just those little things sometimes... What has been your discovery this summer? Did you have a special nature sighting on a road trip, or while visiting friends or family, or just in your own backyard? My naturalist friend, you know who, enjoyed the almost daily sightings of 2 blotched water snakes in the fish pond. Their unique camouflage makes them undeniably interesting. Share your observations with all of us in the *Steward*.

It is that time of year for all of us to step up to the plate—the NOMINATING COMMITTEE will be on the prowl! We need YOU....our chapter must have some guiding lights, some chiefs to keep the process rolling. It is amazing how many areas everyone can contribute in some way. Please consider how you can help in our organizational positions. TEAMWORK is one of our chapter's best qualities. Let's continue to raise the bar, which can only be done by getting involved.

There are still spots open for our chap-

ter road trip to Caddo Lake. There will be great educational opportunities, a volunteer project, and plenty of time for doing your own thing, or swamp thing, that is. This is one of the perks we have to keep us coming back for more! Come on, learn one new bird, one new plant, one new amphibian... join in the adventure!

TMN state meet is also just around the corner. Make your reservation before registration rates go up on October 1. This is always an enjoyable event with much to learn. There are some great speakers and programs that will entice you. We also will do a little "team building" during happy hour to round out your experience! It is just what you need. If you attend, don't forget to bring an item for the state meet silent auction benefiting the scholarship fund.

Speaking of Silent Auctions....the Christmas awards party is on the horizon, and the auction is a big part of the activities for the evening. Be thinking about what you want to contribute. If you don't have a nature oriented item, think of a service you could provide. This is a multi-talented crowd with eclectic interests:

A guided hunt, a fishing lesson, a cooking class, a belly dance session, a kayak trip, a quilting bee, spotting birds, any skill has a fee.

September & October are the primo months for naturalists. Aren't we lucky to have so many activities to choose from? This is what we do, what we like to do. Pick one, pick many. See you soon. Can't wait.



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Please submit pictures, articles, reports, stories, announcements, etc. to

chili865@gmail.com.

Photos should have captions and appropriate credits. The deadline for submissions to each month's newsletter is the 10th of the month and publication will be by the 15th.

AUGUST MEETING

by Linda O'Nan

Richard Lewis, Safety Director for Huber Mining Co., presented an informative and interesting program on the highlights of the mining operation in Marble Falls. Our members were enthusiastic about the possibility of partnering with the mine for development of the onsite bat colony as a protected resource.



Linda O'Nan and Richard Lewis

Photo by Jerry Stone

SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER PROGRAMS

by Pat Campbell



Pat Campbell with Jo Karr Tedder and her staff Photo by Jerry Stone

The speaker for the Sept meeting was Jo Karr Tedder from the Central Texas Water Coalition,. She and her staff brought us up to date on some of the water issues facing us with the ongoing drought in Central Texas.

Our next meeting will be on October 2 at 1:00 p.m. at the Marble Falls Methodist Church. Our speaker is going to be Sheryl Smith Rodgers from our own chapter. She is going to talk to us about spiders - which seems apropos for the month of Halloween! She has a way with words and I am sure she will be entertaining as well as informative. The lunch for October will be at Francescas at 11:30 a.m. Please try to order when you arrive rather than waiting for all of the group. I hope to see you at lunch and at the meeting.



**Highland Lakes Native Plant Society of Texas
September 21, 2013
Marble Falls Library
1:00 pm**

Texas Native Seeds Project

Mia McCraw, a research associate with Central Texas Native Seeds, will be speaking to the Highland Lakes Native Plant Society regarding her work on the Texas Native Seeds Project. The project is a collaborative effort that is meeting the demand for regionally tested and adapted native seed materials that has greatly increased with the shift towards wildlife habitat management and native prairie restoration. The Texas Native Seeds project has established 6 common garden studies evaluating 60 native seed varieties in South, Central, and West Texas.

Mia's responsibilities include open communications with area landowners and collecting native plant seed for propagation and evaluation. Mia is a graduate from Texas A&M University with a Bachelor's degree in Rangeland Ecology and Management and Ecological Restoration.

The meeting is free and the public is welcomed. This presentation has been approved for Advanced Training for Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists.

KID'S DAY OUT

By Mellissa Duckworth Photos by Sue Kersey

The Kid's Day Out program held on Saturday, September 14th at the Galloway Hammond Recreation Center was a great success.

We had twenty-seven volunteers from HLMN donate their time and service, having fun in the process. The HLMN Board purchased 200 beautiful young Mexican Buckeye trees at a very generous discounted rate from Backbone Valley nursery. The trees were then picked up from the nursery and delivered to the Center by Phil Wyde and David Peyton. Volunteers formed a bucket brigade and the trees were unloaded in record time.

Our purpose was not only to give away these trees, but to instill a sense of responsibility for their care on the part of the child. They were given information about the tree, instructed to read and sign a pledge to nurture said tree and then sent on their way with a smile to enjoy the many other attractions centered around the appreciation of the outdoors. All of the trees were given away by around 11:30 in the morning.

Nature tattoos were given to children and Sheryl-Smith Rodgers had an educational spider display that was popular to both children and adults.

Thank you so much for your time and service. The human seeking mini-flies were an added bonus! Programs such as this one would not be possible without dedicated volunteers such as yourselves.



2013 NATIVE PLANT FESTIVAL

By Terry Whaley

Please join us on October 5th for the 4th annual Native Plant Festival and Garden Tour, featuring Cathy Downs. Cathy was born and raised in New England and retired to Comfort, TX in 2004 after a 30 year career owning and operating her own retail businesses from coast to coast. She currently chairs the "Bring Back the Monarchs to Texas" (BBMT) program. The BBMT is a developing monarch habitat project in cooperation with Native Plant Society of Texas and Monarch Watch. Cathy is also a certified Monarch Larval Monitoring Project educator and teaches Monarch biology, habitat and migration at various locations throughout Texas.

Since certifying as a Master Naturalist in the Hill Country chapter in 2005, she has been teaching children and adults about native Texas butterflies and their host plants with an emphasis on Monarch biology and migration. Cathy raises Monarch caterpillars for education and also propagates native milkweeds. She hosts live Butterfly Pavilions at Nature Centers and State Parks throughout the Hill Country area. Cathy has served as the Volunteer Coordinator for the Butterfly Theater at Kerrville Schreiner Park for 6 years. The 11,000 sq. ft. garden is a certified Monarch Waystation and Monarch Larval Monitoring Project site. She is the compiler for the North American Butterfly Association July 4th count - Boerne Circle. She participates in the Nature Box Program with Cibolo Nature Center bringing Natural Science topics to elementary schools in the Boerne area. Cathy recently participated in the Texas Wildlife Association Distance Learning Program. She presented her program,

The Magic of Monarchs, which was simulcast to 179 schools in 12 states. 6,300 children in 1st through 5th grades tuned in bringing her Monarch education client totals to over 14,000 children and adults.

Of particular interest to our group, Cathy was recently recognized as one of only 28 other Texas Master Naturalists in our program's fifteen year history who have attained 5,000 volunteer hours. The 5,000 hour milestone is the second highest honor available in the Texas Master Naturalist Program. With this achievement, the members will receive a specially designed TMN dragonfly pin that is polished gold with a diamond in the center. They also will receive recognition with a U.S. Presidential Lifetime Volunteer Service Award from the White House. This award will include a lapel pin, a certificate and a personal letter from the President of the United States.

The free festival will be held from 9 - 1 at Inks Dam National Fish Hatchery off of Park Road 4 near Burnet. Cathy Downs will give her presentation at 10:30. Other activities include a native plant sale, native tree adoptions, information booths about butterflies, plants, and other nature-related topics, a bird blind, nature walks and hikes, a watershed demonstration, activities for the kids, and much more. Come early for guided bird walks. The tours of 3 lovely native plant gardens in the region will be from 12 - 4 and will cost \$5 for adults. Wristbands and maps to the gardens are available during the Festival at the Hatchery. For more information, go to

<http://www.yantislakesidegardens.com/npsot>.

FRIENDS OF THE UPPER HIGHLAND LAKES NATURE CENTER (UHLNC)

by Billy Hutson

Things have started up with our first meeting of the fall and a great talk by Charles Watkins. Charles is the man that gave the HLMN a talk about the nature trails in Cottonwood shores a year or two ago and he was most informative about the many programs out there for grants. One of which is offered by TPWD and one of which has been granted to the local school districts for after school outdoor education.

We will start in October to refurbish the two water tanks we have for storage and the Geology and water education stations. If time and weather permits

we will also try to build our first bird blind.

Celia will be working on getting some school classes in for the fall starting in October for our trails stations and we will be having a second attempt for a grand opening the weekend of Oct 19th with from 300 to 500 participants expected. Firm plans will be made in the next couple of weeks.

I'm lining up speakers for the monthly meetings all fall and winter and our lineup, although far from complete has several good speakers with interesting nature subjects.

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Fredi Franki, Mike Kersey, and Joan Mukherjee received their 1000 hour pins!

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Connie Barron, Betty Cruikshank, Sharon Drake, Joanne Fischer, and Marcy Westcott received their 500 hour pins!

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Marjorie Dearthmont, Ralph Herter, Cathy Hill, Lee Kinard, and Susan Morgan received their 250 hour pins!

INITIAL CERTIFICATION & DRAGONFLY PIN



Morgan Beck, George Brugnoli, Bob Caruthers, Jo Ellen Cashion, Paula D'Orsogna, Susan Downey, Melisa Duckworth, Minnie Eaton, Cris Faight, Teri Garrett-Benge, Lori Greco, Karen Lundquist, Sunny Mazzan, Rebecca Nunnally, Karyn Parker, Pete Smith, Allan Wolfe

2013 CERTIFICATION!

The people in the photo account (those present to receive their 2013 pin) for 4710 volunteer hours for 2013 thru 7/31 and a total of 31579.5 volunteer hours since they became members. For 2013 the complete membership has accumulated a total 8382.5 volunteer hours thru 7/31.



Tom Ashcroft, Kim Bacon, Charles Beierle, Edward Bergin, Sherry Bixler, Judy Bloomquist, Marvin Bloomquist, Barbara Booth, Becky Breazeale, George A. Brugnoli, Pat Campbell, Jo Ellen Cashion, Mike Childers, Sammye Childers, Ann Cook, Betty Cruikshank, Lyn Davis, Marjorie Dearmont, Helen Dillon, Paula D'Orsogna, Sharon Drake, Celia Escamilla, Cris Faught, Blair Feller, Joanne Fischer, Linda Fleming, Sondra Fox, Fredi Franki, Debbie Gallagher, Arlene Garey, Cathy Hill, Eva Hobbs, Billy Hutson, Mike Kersey, Sue Kersey, Bill Luedecke, Karen Lundquist, Sunny Mazzan, Bonnie Mikels, Susan Morgan, Debora Moroney, Joan Mukherjee, Penny Nichols, Linda O'Nan, David Payton, Jean Schar, Helen Smith, Jerry Stacy, Jerry Stone, Joan Stone, Earlene Thorne, Pam Walt, Marcy Westcott, Terri Whaley, Shirley Winslow, Philip Wyde, Ray Zender

2012 CERTIFICATION!

Receiving their 2012 Certification: Tom Ashcroft, Kim Bacon, Debbie Gallagher, Ralph Herter, Andrea Roach, Sheryl Smith-Rodgers, Beth Wesley



THE APLOMADO FALCON

by Joanne Fischer

The Aplomado Falcon is a long-legged, long-tailed falcon that uses its speed and maneuverability in flight and its ability to move rapidly on the ground to capture its prey – typically birds, such as pigeons and doves, reptiles and larger insects.

Aplomado Falcons are a medium-sized falcon, approximately 14 to 18 inches in length with a wingspan of 31 to 40 inches. Sexes are similar in appearance, but females tend to be larger than males. Adults have a steel-gray back with a dark belly band or “cummerbund” separating a white to buffy upper breast and a cinnamon to rufous belly. “Aplomado” is Spanish for “gray” or “lead-colored”. Adult field marks include bold face markings (striking black markings on the top of its head, around its eyes and extending down its face with a white streak over the eye and a long, narrow banded tail). Adult females often retain dark streaks on the breast. Juveniles are similar to adults, except for browner upper parts and dark streaking on a buff-colored breast.

The Aplomado Falcon inhabits open grasslands and savannas and coastal prairies and ranges throughout most of South America and was once considered common within the northern limits of its range in the United States which included southeastern Arizona, southern New Mexico and western and southern Texas. However, by the 1930s the U.S. population had declined radically and by the late 1950s no Aplomado Falcons were found within the U.S. range. Finally in 1986 the Aplomado Falcon was designated an endangered species in Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Mexico and Guatemala by the U.S. Federal Government. It is believed that habitat loss (severe overgrazing by domestic livestock and resultant brush encroachment) as well as the use of persistent pesticides were the major causes of the species decline in the U.S.

Efforts have been made in recent years to help the recovery of this species. Populations are being monitored in Mexico and more than 1,000 captive-bred birds (based on wild-captured Aplomado breeding stock from southeastern Mexico) have been released



in Texas. The initial release of captive-reared young was made on the King Ranch in Kleberg County in 1985. Additional release sites on the Texas Gulf Coast were evaluated between 1985 and 1987, and the release program was then refocused to Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge and Matagorda Island. In 1995 the first Aplomado Falcon pair in 43 years successfully raised a chick in Texas and since then the reintroduced falcons have successfully raised more than 250 fledglings. Reintroduction efforts have continued with releases in the trans-Pecos region of west Texas starting in 2002 and in the state of New Mexico in 2007.

Aplomado Falcons are most often seen in pairs and hunt cooperatively. Aplomado Falcons do not build their own nests, but take over old or even freshly constructed nests of other raptors. Nesting occurs from March to June. Egg incubation lasts slightly more than 30 days and both sexes participate in incubation. Young birds fledge about 4 to 5 weeks after hatching.

Although the Hill Country is not included in the Aplomado Falcon's range, it is a spectacular bird and well worth the drive to South Texas to try to see one. Visit the Laguna Atascosa Wildlife Area near Brownsville for the best chance of spotting this magnificent

PEST OF THE MONTH—GIANT RAGWEED (*Ambrosia trifida*)

by Phil Wyde



Figure 1. Giant ragweed growing along a river bank (from ref. 3).

When I was first asked to do the “Pest of the Month” I said sure. However, when pressed to pick a pest, I began to panic; WHICH OF ALL THE PESTS THAT I HAVE COME IN CONTACT WITH SINCE COMING TO CENTAL TEXAS SHOULD I PICK! After a while, I calmed down and made my choice, giant ragweed (*Ambrosia trifida*). Actually that choice should have been easy since for me ragweed was not my pest of the month, but my pest of the **decade!**

Before telling you why ragweed is eminently worthy of being selected pest of the month, there are some interesting things about ragweed species that I found in my research on this group of plants that I would like to share with you. First there are 41 different species of ragweed, and most ironically, they belong to the plant family, *Asteraceae*, the same family that sunflowers belong to, and the



Figure 2. Closeup giant ragweed leaves (from ref. 3)

plant genus, *Ambrosia*.¹ It is very hard to believe that sunflowers and ragweed are closely related, or that such an obnoxious plant would be in a genus with the name “ambrosia” (which means food of the gods). Regardless, they can be found in both the northern and southern hemispheres where temperatures are temperate. They seem to prefer sandy soils, river banks, road sides, vacant lots, abandoned fields, disturbed soils, crop lands and dry grassy plains. I can vouch for the first two because I live along a river and have very sandy soil – and giant ragweed LOVES to



Figure 3. Giant ragweed seed (from ref. 3)

grow there! Some common names for giant ragweed include bitter weed, blood weed, buffalo weed, horse cane and tall ambrosia.

All plants in the genus *Ambrosia* are monoecious. In simple English this means that these plants produce separate male and female flower heads on the same plant. The male flowers on giant ragweed grow on terminal spikes at the apex of the plant, and are profuse, yellow-green and about 3 mm in diameter (see Figure 1). The female flowers are much less numerous, single, whitish-green and grow below the male flowers in the axils of the leaves. Wind is the primary mechanism of pollination. If successfully pollinated, the female flower develops into a prickly burr that contains a single arrowhead-shaped seed smaller than a wheat grain (see Figure 2).¹⁻³ Giant ragweed literally stands out among the 41 species of ragweed; it is the tallest growing species typically growing 13 feet or more (21 feet is the record).¹

You are probably more familiar with a cousin of the giant ragweed, common ragweed (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*). Unlike its giant relative, common ragweed typi-

cally only grows to a height of 3 feet. However, don't let its small size fool you. Common ragweed is the most common ragweed species found in North America and is the primary cause of “hay fever” allergies. This said, giant ragweed is no slouch when it comes to causing allergies. A single giant ragweed plant can produce an estimated 10 million pollen grains DAILY and more than a billion pollen grains during its life cycle.³ This extreme pollen production leads to a great degree of cross-pollination and much genetic diversity – which in turn leads to significant potential for ragweed species to develop herbicide resistance.

I do not detest giant ragweed because its pollen is a potent allergen. I do not suffer from hay fever. I totally disdain giant ragweed because it has caused me hours, days, weeks, months and years of hard work. After Joan and I bought the property that we now own on the Llano River in Kingsland I had visions of walking to the end of the property (about 1/8 mile) and fishing. Low and behold from the time that we first saw the property the year before and the first time that I wanted to go fishing, a forest, a very dense, impenetrable forest of giant plants had grown. I tried to walk to the river and could not make it. Once in the middle of this forest I could see nothing. I mean, I could not see the sun the plant stalks towered so tall and dense. The tall plants turned out to be giant ragweed and they were not easy to remove. Their roots were solidly in the soil and their stalks were stout, unbendable and not easily cut – at least not even with the ground. For those of you that think that I am exaggerating I include the following quotation, “One of the things that make giant ragweed such a problem is that when mature, it can reach 17 feet tall. Thus it can block sunlight from reaching the plants that it is competing with.”³

I spent seasons removing the giant ragweed. I could only do it piecemeal, by pulling and digging up small sections of the “forest” at a time. I would pile the removed stalks in a pile and eventually when I made a sufficient clearing and the stalks that I had pulled up had dried out, I would burn the piles. It took a long time. Ordinary gas powered tools and lawn tractors were of little use. Those of you that know that giant ragweed is an annual, might wonder why I did not wait for the plants to die at the end of the growing season. Unfortunately the old stalks did not just disappear. They remained solidly in place, upright, leaning over or falling flat on the ground --

where they thoroughly impeded passage.

I have now cleared almost all of the giant ragweed from the property. However, from time to time I see new plants emerging from the ground. I want you to know that I will walk 100 feet out of my way to go over and pull up any new plant that I see. I never, ever want to see another forest of giant ragweed on our property again!

It turns out that giant ragweed is not just my problem. According to the Purdue University Extension Agency (and others), giant ragweed is one of the most common and problematic weeds in corn and soybean fields in the eastern Corn Belt.^{2,3} “According to reference 2, giant ragweed is one of the most competitive weeds found in North America. At average distribution it can reduce corn crop yields by 55% and soybean yields by 52%.”

There are probably some of you that are wondering if I was crazy attacking my giant ragweed by hand. Quoting from reference 2, “It is very difficult to control Giant Ragweed through mechanical means or herbicides.....” Of course I could have paid someone to come and bull doze the land. But I would not have the feeling of satisfaction that I now have.

Some of the things that make giant ragweed difficult to control include:

- The weed’s emergence throughout the growing season;
- The giant ragweed’s adaption to a host of different environments;

- The fact that many giant ragweed populations quickly develop herbicide resistance;
- The need to apply multiple applications of pre and post herbicides, and to use multiple herbicides with different modes of action.”³

Of course the first step in control is identification. As shown in Figures 1 and 2 the leaves and flower heads of giant ragweed are readily recognizable.

I did read that giant ragweed does not tolerate mowing, so if you are a farmer planting small grains in succession is an effective way to suppress infestations. However, keep in mind this applies to farmers that have large equipment or that will be mowing regularly before the giant ragweed has reached substantial height and thickness.

I will end this note with the question, “Does ragweed have any worth?” According to what I read the seeds are an important winter food for many bird species and for the larvae of a number of *Lepidoptera* (butterflies and moths).³ I also found it stated that “Giant Ragweed shows promise as a mulch plant, breaking down remarkably quickly and cleanly in compost and sheet mulching conditions and encouraging healthy soil life.”³ To be very honest, I am very dubious about the latter unless the composting is done using shredded giant ragweed stalks or some kind of composting accelerant or condition. I found the stalks that lay on my property, or put in piles before burning, quite enduring.

References

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ragweed>.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambrosia_trifida

<https://www.extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/BP/GWC-12.pdf>



Save the Date

Wednesday, December 4th
in the early evening
HLMN December Meeting
and Celebration



Red Harvester Ants....

are coming with more information

From Lyn Davis

GALLERY

By Jerry Stone



Yellow-billed Cuckoo taken in Horseshoe Bay on 7/11/13



Common Wild Petunia (*Ruellia nudiflora*) taken 8/18/13 at Inks Lake State Park



Pigeon Berry



Hedgehog Cactus



Molting Robin



Devil's Waterhole—Inks Lake State Park