

**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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CHAPTER PRESIDENT'S LETTER

By Pat Campbell

Merry Christmas everyone. Thanks to Lyn and all the folks who worked on the fantastic Christmas party. What a fun time we had! Also thanks to Fredi and her committee for the auction. All those things to bid on!

I want to take this opportunity to say what an honor it has been to be your president this past year. Also I want to thank everyone for all of their support and hard work. Made my job a lot easier. We have a great chapter! For those of you not at the party we have logged over 13,000 hours through October. We were definitely busy this past year. Thank you!

For those of you following my saga with the unknown mushroom, I got an email from Flo Oxley, saying it is an earthstar mushroom and not uncommon. So.....now what do I do????? Who is correct?

We learned about a new movement (for lack of a better term) at the state conference. It is called Teaming With Wildlife: True to Texas. The following is from the blog:

TWW: True To Texas is a statewide coalition of groups and businesses, within a much larger nationwide coalition, who feel that everyone in our state benefits from healthy wildlife populations and wildlife habitats. While coalition members have many different interests and motivations, all feel that it is important that we band together to show support for wise wildlife conservation in Texas.

What TWW: True To Texas hopes to accomplish is to make people realize that wildlife and wildlife habitats are important

to each and every one of us and not just hunters and birdwatchers. TWW: True To Texas strives to connect everyone to everyone else and provide a unified voice in support of healthy wildlife populations and habitats in the Lone Star State. We hope that your group or business will join us!

What TWW: True To Texas hopes to accomplish is to bring people who are connected in their belief that wise wildlife conservation is worthy of support together to show how important it is to our state. It doesn't matter if your particular wildlife interest is to improve game populations for hunting and fishing purposes, preserve endangered whooping cranes and Houston toads, or just to enjoy the birds on the feeder outside your kitchen window. What does matter is that you appreciate wildlife and are willing to show your support by encouraging your group or business to join the coalition to show that you are True To Texas!

They were quick to point out that we as master naturalists cannot belong to this group, however, we as master naturalists should encourage local business and civic organizations to join and participate in this endeavor.

Be watching for more about this in the future.

Thanks again for being such a great group of master naturalists! I know you all will support Cris as you have me. He will be a great president, and has lots of ideas for our future!

Happy New Year!

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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.

JANUARY PROGRAM by Lyn Davis

Weekend Morning Meteorologist David Yeomans of the **KXAN** weather department will be presenting pertinent weather related topics at our January meeting.

David's curiosity about how the atmosphere works began at an early age.

By the fourth grade, he was checking out stacks of meteorology books from the public library, gathering as much knowledge as he could. A year after that, he became a registered storm spotter and kept climate records for the National Weather Service office.

Unsurprisingly, he went on to study meteorology at the University of Miami. During the summer after

his first year at Miami, he came back home to Austin to intern in the KXAN weather department under Jim Spencer. During his college career, he also held internships at YNN Austin and CBS4 Miami.

After Hurricane Katrina ravaged New Orleans in 2005, David helped rebuild the upper-Ninth Ward neighborhood with Habitat for Humanity, serving as an assistant carpenter.

David was a published undergraduate researcher under world-renowned climate change expert, Dr. Brian Soden, studying the relationship between water vapor in the high levels of the atmosphere and global warming.

He returned to the University of Miami for graduate studies in meteorology in 2010. During his time in graduate school, he was involved in campus broadcasting programs giving a daily weather forecast on WVUM radio, ranked as the No. 1 college radio station by the MTV-U Woodie Awards.

He also served as the lead weather anchor for the campus TV station's award-winning half-hour news show, Newsvision. During his time on Newsvision, he was grateful to be chosen as the narrator for a 30-minute student-produced documentary on the Miami Ronald McDonald House Charity. The piece received an honorable mention at the 49th Annual Student Electronic Media Awards.

David researched hurricane formation for his Masters thesis and was a guest scientist aboard an NOAA Hurricane Hunter flight. He was invited to present his research at the American Meteorological Society's annual tropical convention in April 2012, then again at the general AMS meeting in January 2013.

David holds the Certified Broadcast Meteorologist seal from the American Meteorological Society. He can be seen as the Weekend Morning Meteorologist on Saturday and Sunday mornings from 7-9am, and also on KXAN News at Noon Mondays through Wednesdays. In addition to his duties as meteorologist, David can also be seen on the evening news doing environmental reporting.

2014 AWARDS BANQUET



2014 AWARDS BANQUET

MANY THANKS
TO
PAT CAMPBELL
PRESIDENT 2014



2014 AWARDS BANQUET



2015 Officers: Cris Faught - President, Mellissa Duckworth - Vice President, Blair Feller - Treasurer, Marylyn McCain - Secretary

Stewardship

An ethic that embodies cooperative planning and management of environmental resources with organizations, communities and others to actively engage in the prevention of loss of habitat and facilitate its recovery in the interest of long-term sustainability

2014 AWARDS BANQUET - OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTORS

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AMAZING! Jerry Stacy achieved his 4,000 hour pin!
Presenting Jerry's award were Awards Chair Sue Kersey and Advisor Wade Hibler.

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WOW! Sammye Childers and Phil Wyde have achieved their 2,500 hour pins!

2014 AWARDS BANQUET



1000

Terri Whaley, Judy Bloomquist, Marcy Westcott, and Lyn Davis achieved their 1000 hour pins!

500

Pat Campbell, Blair Fellar, and Elaine Barnhill (not pictured) achieved their 500 hour pins!



250

Susan Downey, Melissa Duckworth, Minnie Eaton, Karyn Parker, Jean Schar and Wayne Moldovan (not pictured) achieved their 250 hour pins!



2014 AWARDS BANQUET

INITIAL CERTIFICATION



Suzanne Adkinson and Beth Mortenson receive their initial certification and badges for 2014, presented by Pat Campbell and Sue Kersey.

RECERTIFICATION



Susan Atkinson, Kim Bacon, Morgan Beck, Linda Brown, Bob Caruthers, Paula D'Orsogna, Cris Faught, Blair Fellar, Wayne Holly, Janis Koby, Ed Lilley, Karen Lindquist, Beth Mortenson, Joan Mukherjee, Hollis Neier, Judy Parker, Fred Zagst, Kay Zagst, Ray Zender; and not pictured, Elaine Barnhill, Connie Baron, Maggie Booth, Becky Breazeale, Kay Herring, Suze Jernigan, Wayne Moldovan, and Allan Wolfe all recertified and received their Armadillo certification pins.

HIGHLAND LAKES MASTER NATURALISTS 2015 BOARD MEMBERS AND CRITICAL TASK LEADERS

By Cris Faight

President	Cris Faight
Vice President	Melissa Duckworth
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VS / AT Hours Coordinator	Terry Bartoli
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Chapter Advisor	Wade Hibler
Awards Coordinator	Sue Kersey
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Funding Committee	Blair Feller, Steve Sheffe, Joanne Fischer ...
Newsletter	Mike Childers
Publicity	Kay Herring
Publicity (Blanco)	
Sunshine	Lyn Davis
Trip Committee	George Brugnoli
Web Master	Becky Breazeale

AVOIDING THE FATE OF THE PASSENGER PIGEON

by Ray Buchanon

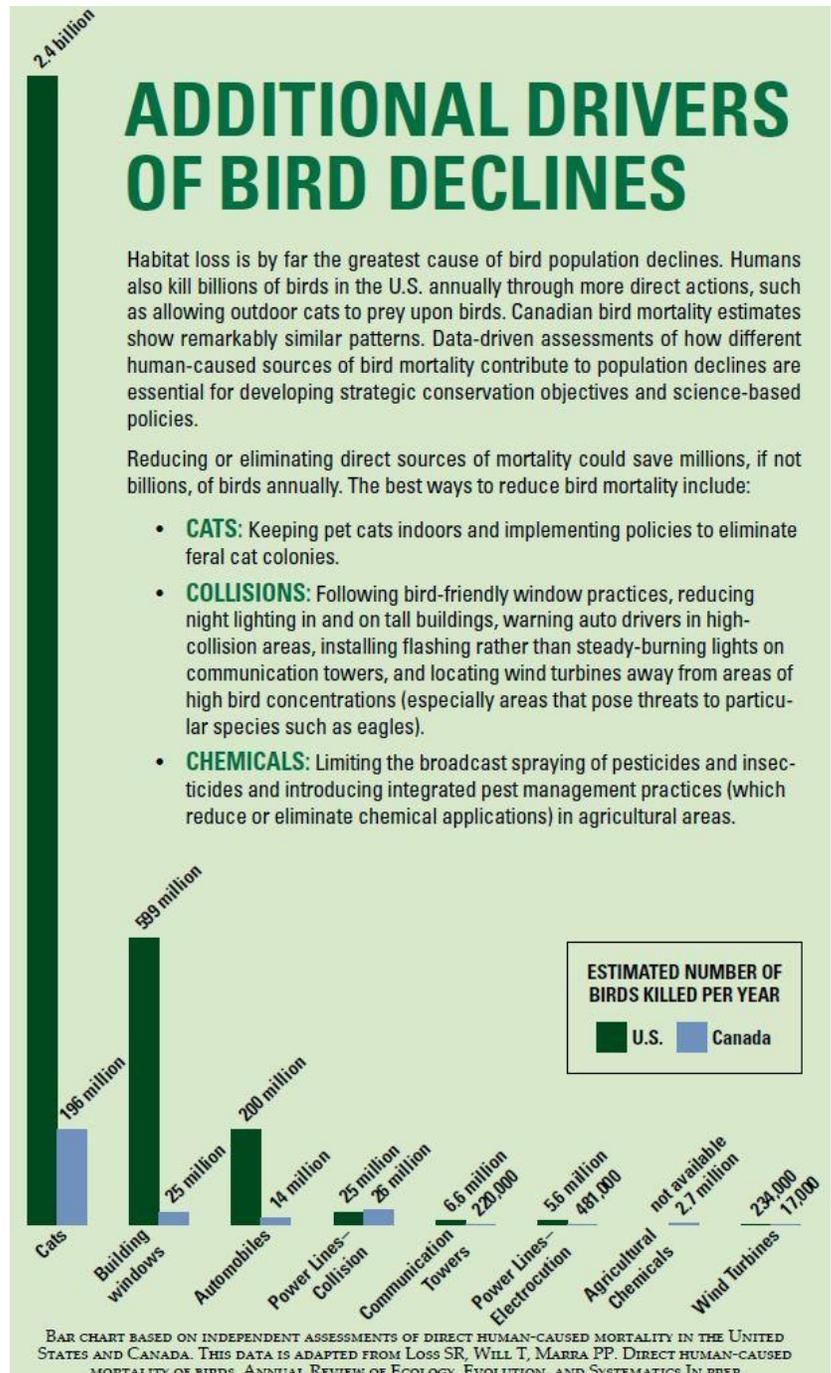
“The State of the Birds 2014” (the 5th such Report) appropriately responds to the imperatives generated by the 100th anniversary of the extinction of the Passenger Pigeon. Then: “the Passenger Pigeon was the most abundant bird America has ever known.” Then: one flock in 1860 was estimated to be over a billion strong, extending for 300 miles, and taking 14 hours to pass overhead. Then: only one pair survived after 40 years of “market hunting” and “forest clearing”, leading inevitably to the death of the last one on September 1, 1914 – “from billions of birds to none in half of a person’s lifetime.”

Now: does the 46% loss of species populations in aridlands habitats since 1968 (such as the Bendire’s and Le Conte’s threshers) indicate that it is happening again? Now: does the 50% decline among Atlantic Flyway shore-bird populations (such as the Red Knot, the Hudsonian Godwit, and the Ruddy Turnstone) or the fact that “many island birds [especially in Hawaii, “the bird extinction capital of the world”] are “making their last stand” show our inability to prevent a repeat of the extinction process that took the Passenger Pigeon, now, on a really massive scale? Now: do the 230 species of birds on the State of the Birds Watch List, declared to be in most need of conservation action (because they are in danger of heading in the direction of the Passenger Pigeon), tell us that we have already failed?

“The State of the Birds 2014” issues a resounding “No!” to these dire queries. Significant at the 100th anniversary of the end of the Passenger Pigeon: (1) the passing inspired the creation of the “best conservation and adaptive wildlife management system in the world”; (2) we are now at a point where we can emphasize “reinvestment” in order to build on the known and measurable successes of the past; so, we know that conservation does work; (3) “we have

the science, technology, and knowledge to prevent extinctions,” according to the authors of this Report.

First: we can know the situation: that is, the past, present, and future trends in population based on specific habitat studies of “obligate species” – some 230 species, correlating information from long-term,



consistent monitoring, such as by the Breeding Bird Survey, the Christmas Bird Count, and eBird.

Second: we can identify more specifically and directly the sources of threats to birds and bird habitats: from the decline in pasturelands due to changes in dairy farm practices, to development and suburban sprawl, to overgrazing on wintering grounds, to rising sea levels, to fishing operations and offshore energy exploration (and oil spills), to plastic pollution, and to predation by cats (see chart, “Additional Drivers of Bird Declines” in this article).

Third: we can identify major conservation successes through “proactive, partner-driven conservation efforts” at both public and private levels. For example, The Farm Bill “has had the largest conservation footprint on private lands” – some 30 million acres affected. Also, the Endangered Species Act has brought about major proscriptions protecting certain species. Habitat preservation aid has come through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act and

the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act. As a result public agencies protect more than 850 million acres of land and 3.5 million square miles of ocean. Private conservation groups and land trusts protect another 24 million acres.

Fourth: we can correlate on an extensive basis the health of the bird species on a particular habitat with the overall environmental health of those areas, whether it be oceans, coasts, inland wetlands, forests, aridlands, or grasslands.

Fifth: we can implement action plans based on the tracking of bird species listed in the 2014 State of the Birds Watch List, created (as was the Report) by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative U.S. Committee. To find out whether your favorite bird requires immediate conservation attention, or is on or near the brink of being threatened, or is part of the group “showing signs of improvement” visit www.stateofthebirds.org.

A WINTER VISITOR - THE HERMIT THRUSH

by Joanne Fischer

Those of us living in the Hill Country are both privileged and at the same time, short-changed when it comes to the Hermit Thrush. We are privileged because our area is graced by the presence of this beautiful bird in the wintertime. However we are short-changed because the Hermit Thrush does not breed in the Hill Country and because it seldom sings outside of its breeding/nesting territory, we miss out on one of its most lauded attributes – its song.

The Hermit Thrush is one of five thrushes in the genus *Catharus* in North America. The other thrushes in the genus are: the Gray-cheeked Thrush, Bicknell's Thrush, the Veery, and Swainson's Thrush. The Hermit Thrush however, is the only one of these species that is a short distance migrant and will remain in the United States (the southern states) during winter. The others migrate further south into Mexico and South America.



The Hermit Thrush has a stocky shape, similar to a Robin (which is also a thrush) but is smaller. They stand upright with their slender, straight bill slightly raised. Like other thrushes their head is rounded and their tail is fairly long. They have a rich brown upper

body with underparts that are pale with dense black spotting on the throat and upper breast. A distinguishing characteristic from similar thrushes is that their tail is more reddish than the rest of their body. They also have a complete pale white eye-ring.

In spring and summer, the Hermit Thrush eats mainly insects such as beetles, caterpillars, bees, ants, wasps, and flies. And even though they are a relatively small thrush they also occasionally eat small amphibians and reptiles. In the winter, they change their diet to eat more fruit, including wild berries. Hermit Thrushes hop and scrape in leaf litter while foraging for insects. Their foraging behavior is described by some as “foot quivering” because they will shake grasses with their feet to uncover their prey.

Named for its shy, reclusive manner, the Hermit Thrush can be found in the brushy understory of forests and woods. Although they live in a variety of habitats they seem to prefer secluded, dense spaces that contain berry bushes and scrubby thickets. They are often spotted when they move into open areas to search for food or water in forest clearings, along trails or at pond edges.

They breed in the northern states and into Canada – the very southernmost edge of its breeding territory actually is in Texas, in the high Guadalupe Mountains. Hermit Thrushes nest on the ground under fir trees or low in trees and shrubs. The female builds the nest of grasses, leaves, pine needles and bits of wood. It is then lined with softer, finer materials. It

can take a female Hermit Thrush a week to ten days to build a nest. She then lays her clutch which consists of three to six light blue eggs (similar to “Robin’s egg blue”). An interesting fact is that the male thrush is the “food gatherer” for the nestlings, but the female does the actual feeding.

Hermit Thrushes rarely visit backyards and generally do not visit feeders. However, during migration, they often forage on the ground or eat berries in yards with berry bushes (a good reason to plan some pigeonberry or yaupon hollies!). It is also common to find them in winter months foraging with mixed flocks of small forest songbirds such as Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Brown Creepers, Carolina Chickadees and Black-crested Titmice.

The Hermit Thrush population, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey, has been rising steadily since the 1960s and they are not considered to be at risk from a conservation standpoint.

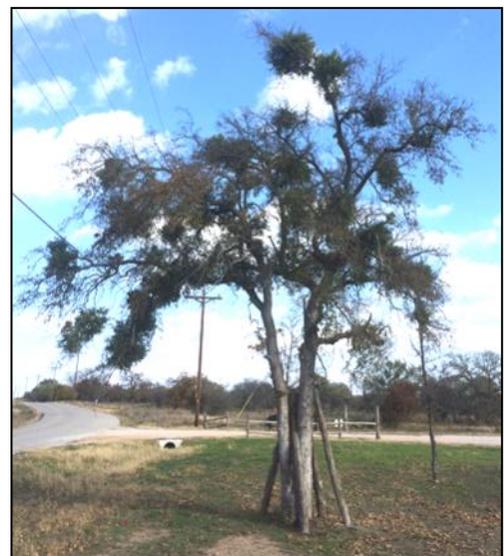
Now back to the song of the Hermit Thrush. Many feel that the song of the Hermit Thrush (which, by the way, is the state bird of Vermont), is the most beautiful of any North American bird. It is described by some as a “melancholy” song. Others have called it a “mournful, flute-like song”. Regardless, if you have a bird app on your smart phone you owe it to yourself to listen to the song of the Hermit Thrush. It will make you want to make a trip north in the springtime to experience the song in person when these beautiful thrushes are in their breeding territories.

MISTLETOE

by Cathy Hill

There are many plants which we associate with the Christmas season. One of the strangest, I think is the mistletoe. The custom of kissing our sweetie underneath a sprig of it is fun but doesn't seem to have much to do with the season. It actually predates Christianity in Europe and can be traced back to many pagan rituals. But enough about that, what about the plant itself.

Worldwide there are 1300 species of plants called mistletoe. Most mistletoe in America belong to the genus *Phoradendron*, with a range extending from the northern United States to central Argentina. The name *Phoradendron* derives from the Greek “phor” meaning thief and “dendron” meaning tree and refers to its parasitic nature. Various sources I read list our common Eastern mistletoe as *P. leucarpus*, *P. seroti-*



num, or *P. tomentosum*. These are either closely related or synonyms for the same plant. There is also a Pacific mistletoe, *P. californicum*, and a dwarf mistletoe *Arceuthobium* sp. a leafless variety which is parasitic on ponderosa and loblolly pines in Colorado.

Here in the Texas Hill country, our evergreen mistletoe, is most visible on deciduous trees in the winter and seems to prefer certain oaks, hackberry, and mesquite trees although most any tree or shrub with relatively thin bark will do. It has small, simple, leathery leaves with smooth edges. It blooms with either male or female blooms on separate plants from October to February. Its fruit, a drupe, is translucent white, small and sticky.



Most mistletoe seeds are spread by birds that eat the fruit. They are then either regurgitated from the crop, excreted in their droppings, or if stuck on their bill, simply wiped off on a branch. The sticky residue on the seeds called viscin soon hardens and thus firmly attaches the seed to its host branch. There it germinates and produces an embryonic structure called the hypocotyl which penetrates the bark. This process may take a year or more during which time the green visible part of the plant is dependent on its own photosynthesis. Eventually the hypocotyl reaches the tree's xylem and forms haustoria, modified suckerlike



roots, which can then take water and nutrients from the host tree. Mistletoe is classified as a semiparasite because its leaves do contain chlorophyll and it can photosynthesize its own food. Nevertheless, by removing nutrients from its host, it often deforms or kills the branch it is on and with a heavy infestation will eventually weaken or even kill the entire tree.

Although this would seem to make it an undesirable pest, mistletoe is recognized as an ecologically important species. A broad array of animals depend on its nectar, fruit, or stems and leaves for food. In our area to name just two, cedar waxwings and eastern bluebirds love the fruit. It is the host food for the great purple hairstreak butterfly. In addition its growth habit of forming dense clumps also provides nesting and roosting sites, most notably the spotted owl and marbled murrelet in western North America.

Although relished by many birds and other wildlife it is important to remember that mistletoe is poisonous to humans and can cause severe gastroenteritis or even heart failure. It is also toxic to our pets. So enjoy stealing a kiss or two while underneath it, but please don't ingest any as that would surely put a damper and any further romantic pursuits.

THE HOGNOSE SNAKE: HETERODON NASICUS (EASTERN) OR HETERODON PLATIRHINO (WESTERN)

by Suzanne Adkinson

Last fall the kids and I were out loading up brush piles to take to the burn pile. Under one of these piles we found a mostly gray snake curled up who looked irritated when we disturbed him. Of course I started poking at him to see if he would move. Well he started hissing at me. He also shook his tail, which I noticed had no rattles. I had never seen anything like it. The snake flattened out the last six inches of his head - kind of like a cobra - raised his head and neck off the ground and started hissing. I thought that was pretty strange. Of course the kids wanted to know if I was going to kill it.

I like snakes - the non-poisonous kind.....they have a place in our ecosystem. They keep the rodent population under control. However, I have no issue killing a poisonous one....especially when they are close to the house (where the kids and the family pets reside) or around the livestock. Since I had no idea what kind of snake hissed at you as a defense mechanism, I told the kids to watch it (from a safe distance) while I went in to consult "google".

I plugged in hissing snake central Texas. My search returned the Hognose Snake....Eastern or Western....it's pretty hard to tell. My guy was dark gray with darker markings. He was kind of scary. His flattened neck, hissing, and striking (when I poked him with a stick) was enough to make me want to leave him alone. These defense mechanisms were outlined in my research. These tactics try and get the would be predator to leave this snake alone. He will even play dead by rolling over on his back and sticking his tongue out.....showing the intruder he really is dead. In some instances he will excrete a really smelly (like it's been dead for a while smelly) liquid to make the intruder believe he is, in fact, dead. This snake is an actor, but, harmless.

There have been discussions about whether he's mildly venomous or non-venomous with toxic saliva. Most agree that the hognose is venomous but harmless to humans. On rare occasions, a person who is bitten by this snake may experience localized swelling or itching. However, as long as there is no allergic



Both photos from Google Web: Images (Stock Photos)

reaction, you should have no problem. This is a docile snake that rarely bites. Even when he struck at his would be predator (me), his mouth was closed. These snakes have rear fangs (not common) which assist him in eating amphibians.



The Hognose is known for its turned up snout. It looks like a hog's nose. There are many color variations; from grays (light and dark) to browns (with or without mottling) to reddish/orange. They are found throughout much of the US. In many locations they resemble the rattlesnake, especially to the untrained eye. This causes them to be killed by mistake. They are mainly amphibious eaters; toads are their diet of preference. They will also eat frogs, small lizards, and an occasional rodent.

The hognose is a heavy bodied snake (sometimes considered stout bodied) that ranges in length from

15 to 20 inches. The females are larger than the males. Females lay their eggs in the summer months between June and August. The eggs take about 60 days to hatch. Babies are 5-9 inches long at birth and reach sexual maturity at about two years.

On three occasions I have encountered a Hognose snake on our property. All three times were in different locations and all three times they were the same gray with darker markings. The same snake moving around? Maybe. Or maybe our property is home for the hognose with the right environment for them to thrive.

They do like wet or moist conditions where the toad and frog populations thrive. My last experience was near the pool this past summer. It was a wetter time of year - the time of year where you keep pulling frogs out of the pool filter baskets. I walked out one evening to check the pool and the dog alerted me to something that was not quite right. There he was, next to the propane tank cover....hanging out in the

rocks. The dog, once told it was okay - and to leave it alone - actually listened.

For those of you who read my bat article and are wondering whether or not I have had any visiting bats at the Adkinson's newly installed bat house, I do! The bat house went up the first week of August. Several weeks later I noticed a bat just before dawn. The second morning I saw him I headed out towards the bat house and watched. Sure enough, in he went! So, this was the third week of August. Tonight (26 October) I watched him leave for the evening. My bat house is 20 feet in the air. When the bat drops from the house, he drops quickly (about 15 feet) and begins his flight. If you look away for only an instant, you will miss it. Tonight he left at 7:13 pm. I am still hoping, once he returns from his migration to Mexico for the winter (typically October but it's been warm and my guy is still here), he tells 599 of his friends the lodging is pretty good at the Adkinsons, and he fills up all 600 spaces!

HLMN MEETINGS SCHEDULE 2015

By Cris Faught

Chapter Meeting 1:00pm

07 January 2015

04 February 2015

04 March 2015

01 April 2015

06 May 2015

03 June 2015

July No Meeting

05 August 2015

02 September 2015

07 October 2015

04 November 2015

02 December 2015 Christmas Party

11 December 2015

Board Meeting 10:30am

Board Meeting

Board Meeting

Board Meeting

Board Meeting

Joint Board Meeting