

T E X A S

Master  
Naturalist™



HIGHLAND LAKES CHAPTER



# Highland Lakes Steward

April 2015

Volume 6, Issue 4

## 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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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Cris Faught

If you attended the March Membership Meeting, you couldn't miss the challenge and excitement of hearing all the incredible opportunities we have to volunteer your time and energy to make our Hill Country neighborhood a better place to live, play and work.

From *Going Buggy* at Doeskin Ranch to *The Great Outdoor Program* at Inks State Park, then the *Hatchery Outdoor Program* at Inks Dam National Fish Hatchery then *Clean Up for Spring* at Blanco and Inks State Parks. These opportunities also include involvement at the Science Mill in Johnson City, the Bamberger Ranch in Blanco Co., volunteering in our booth at the 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Hill Country Lawn and Garden Show in Burnet and many ongoing opportunities to monitor, observe and teach about the natural world around us.

In addition to our volunteering, we have several trips planned for the coming months: Five days studying coastal wildlife at Port Aransas; the Gault Lab and Aquarena Springs tour in April, then, the Bat Cave in Mason in July. You may still have an opportunity to sign up by calling the Trip

Committee Chairman, George Brugnoli to check availability.

Please remember the change in our May 6th venue from the Marble Falls Church of Christ to George Brugnoli's ranch beginning at 1:30pm. We will have a short business meeting followed by a guided tour of the natural features of his ranch.

During the chapter board meeting on May 7, the new Bylaws were approved to be sent to you for your vote. These Bylaws were written and sent to our chapter by the Texas Master Naturalist program and they include many updates and needed changes to bring all chapters under a single set of working documents. Our committee made up of Linda O'Nan, Melanie Huff, Barbara Booth and Betty Cruikshank has worked many hours to get these changes to you, so, we will send instructions asking for your vote in the near future.

It is an honor and privilege to serve as your president this year. Thanks for always saying "yes" when presented with an opportunity to serve. You make this chapter outstanding.

## 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



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

[chili865@gmail.com](mailto: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.

## APRIL PROGRAM



Our Speaker for the April meeting was Ricky Linex, NRCS Wildlife Biologist and author of "Range Plants of North Central Texas". He provided a great overview of the range plants of Central Texas including grazing value, wildlife value and management tips.

### GET WELL!

The chapter has sent get well wishes to the following fellow Master Naturalists.

- Lori Greco – recovery from shoulder surgery
  - Janis Koby – rotator cuff surgery
  - Billy Hutson – bad back pain
  - Charlie Beierle – wife, Judy, hip replacement
  - Bob Glover - diagnosed with lung cancer and surgery
  - Wade Hibler – wife, Ellen, breast cancer
  - Ann Stevenson – treatments for breast cancer
- Keep them in your thoughts and prayers.

## MAY 6<sup>TH</sup> PROGRAM

by Melissa Duckworth

We are having a different sort of meeting on May 6. It will be held on the property of George Brugnoli at 1:30 p.m. Instead of 1:00 p.m.. The business meeting will be held first.

The morning of May 6 is a GOP activity day, therefore having the meeting one-half hour later will allow volunteers to arrive.

After the business meeting, we will divide into two or three groups and discuss different features on the property that are of interest such as grasses and trees, wildflowers and perhaps geology.

There is a bathroom but it will be a walk from the

meeting area. It would be prudent to stop and use public facilities before the meeting. Please bring a sack lunch to eat during the business meeting and a chair.

In the event of inclement weather, a business meeting only will be held at 1:30 at the Marble Falls Church of Christ and an email will be sent out to the membership to that effect on the morning of May 6.

An email with directions and more specifics will be sent out in the next couple of weeks.

This is a unique and beautiful piece of land. I feel this will be a nice diversion and respite and hope all of you plan to attend.

## WHY DID THE ROADRUNNERS CROSS THE ROAD?

by Becky Breazeale

Last week when I was driving back from the Post Office around 2:00, I saw a roadrunner (*Geococcyx californianus*), a member of the Cuckoo family, crossing the road heading for a grassy pasture. As I pulled over to observe the bird, it raised its distinctive head crest in "high alert". The grass was about ten inches tall and I could barely see the top of the roadrunner's head as it moved across the field towards a mesquite tree. I am going to assume it was a male, but I really couldn't tell since both males and females look alike. He climbed to the top of the tree using his strong feet which have two toes in front and two in back and sat in the tree for a while - very well camouflaged. I rolled down the car window and could hear his dove-like call, coo, coo, coo, coo, coooooo.

I was about to leave when I saw another roadrunner about to cross the road. It was evident that the second roadrunner was looking for the first. As the second roadrunner reached the grassy area (they can run up to 17 miles an hour), the first roadrunner flew from the tree to a bushy area, displaying its rounded wing with a white crescent and wingspan of about twenty inches. Roadrunners are known to fly when they sense danger or are going downhill but can only stay in the air a few seconds because of their heavy body. The second roadrunner, which I assume was a female, did not see her friend flying into the brush. She also climbed a tree perhaps to get a better point of view. After a few seconds she flew from the tree to a different scrub area - maybe she had spotted him. I left at that point because I couldn't see them any longer.

Because roadrunners have a life span of seven to eight years and reside in their breeding area all year long, I expect to have future encounters with these roadrunners. Maybe I can figure out why they are crossing the road.



### More fun facts

- Quick enough to catch a rattlesnake and swallow it whole.
- Sunbathes to warm up and fluffs up its feathers so the sun can reach its black skin
- Male lures the female with morsels of food during breeding season
- Platform saucer-like nest with 2-6 white eggs. Incubation takes 18 to 23 days and both parents participate, but preferably the male due to his higher temperature.

<http://beautyofbirds.com/roadrunners.html>

<http://www.birdingininformation.com/birds/cuckoos-roadrunners>

<http://www.desertusa.com/birds/roadrunner-bird.html>

<http://www.nature.org/newsfeatures/specialfeatures/animals/birds/roadrunner.xml>

## AND ON THE EIGHT DAY, GOD CREATED THE BLUEBONNET!

by Lori Greco

This name is given to any number of species of the genus *Lupinus* predominantly found in southwestern United States and is collectively the state flower of Texas. The shape of the petals on the flower resembles the bonnet worn by pioneer women to shield them from the sun. Species often called bluebonnets include:

- *Lupinus Texensis*, Texas bluebonnet or Texas lupine
- *Lupinus Havardii* Big Bend bluebonnet or Chisos bluebonnet
- *Lupinus Argenteus* silvery lupine
- *Lupinus Concinnus*, Bajada lupine
- *Lupinus plattensis*, Nebraska lupine
- *Lupinus subcarnosus*, sandyland bluebonnet or buffalo clover

On March 7, 1901, *Lupinus subcarnosus* became the only species of bluebonnet recognized as the state flower of Texas,<sup>[2]</sup> however *Lupinus texensis* emerged as the favorite of most Texans. So, in 1971, the Texas Legislature made any similar species of *Lupinus* that could be found in Texas the state flower. Their deep-blue blossoms can be seen from March through May in most areas of Texas, as they are heavily planted on roadsides and highway rights of way. On average, a single Texas Bluebonnet plant has the reproductive potential to produce a little over 1,100 seeds yet in actuality produces only 30 seeds. Yes, that's what I said. T-H-I-R-T-Y. It's not the fault of the bluebonnet plant. In fact when most plants are pollinated they have a pretty good track record for producing seeds. It's not a fertility problem. The problem? It is a lack of bees. We've all heard about the problems bees have been having in recent years. **Bees are the only pollinators of Texas Bluebonnets.** If there are not enough bees to go around, then bluebonnets can't be pollinated and seeds can't be produced for future Texans to enjoy. Think about that the next time you consider killing a bee.

Bluebonnets have NO medicinal value. Bluebonnet seeds have such a tough seed coat that makes germination difficult for the first 1-2 years after sowing. The seed coat needs to be worn down a bit to germinate. The Texas Department of Transportation is pleased



Photo by Sue Kersey

with the attention wildflowers attract; however, they discourage picture-taking that damages the flowers. If too many wildflowers are trampled, they will die and not go to seed. Since these flowers are winter annuals, this means they have to go to seed to come back the next year. Naturally, we discourage picking the flowers for the same reason though it is not illegal. The wildflower program is part of good stewardship. Today, TxDOT not only plants and enhances wildflower areas, but more importantly protects and maintains the investment made in years past.

A Wildflower Show is held each year during the Burnet Bluebonnet Festival. It is hosted by the Highland Lakes Birding and Wildflower Society. The Society always has more than 100 species of native wildflowers on display, we may even have a couple of our local artists' prints for display and a childrens' corner for lessons on drawing flowers. If you didn't attend the Wildflower show during the Bluebonnet festival this year, come see us next year! Better than that, come be a part of the Highland Lakes Birding and Wildflower Society. There are no requirements annually except for a membership fee, so you can sit back each month and listen to an exceptional speaker, have tantalizing snacks, socialize with other nature lovers and maybe even take a tour with us to a local habitat for native birds and wildflowers. See Lori Greco if you want to know more!

## THE VERMILION FLYCATCHER

by Joanne Fischer

Let me begin by stating that the Vermilion Flycatcher is a member of the family Tyrannidae (Order Passeriformes). This family of birds is known by the name “Tyrant Flycatchers” and includes over 400 species worldwide. Over 35 tyrant flycatchers have been reported in Texas although a few of those occur only as rare vagrants. This family of birds includes not only those with “flycatcher” as a part of their name but also such species as Kingbirds, Phoebes, Kiskadees and Wood-Pewees (not an all inclusive list). Some say that the name “tyrant” flycatcher is very appropriate for these birds because they are known to aggressively defend their territories, often darting and diving at other birds that unwittingly invade their space!

Many species of flycatchers are challenging for bird watchers to properly identify. They are for the most part somewhat drab in coloration and many species are quite similar in appearance. However, the Vermilion Flycatcher is an exception to the rule. Anyone who has been fortunate enough to see this bird will most likely remember the day and place it occurred. It is a wonderful experience and thankfully for those of us living in the Hill Country of Texas – a distinct possibility!

In the United States, the Vermilion Flycatcher occurs only in the southwestern states. Its range does extend however further southward into Mexico, Central America, Argentina, Ecuador and Peru. It nests in western Texas and ranges eastward through the Edwards Plateau to Austin and San Antonio and southward to the Rio Grande Valley. It is found all year in most parts of its range but some withdraw in winter from the more northern areas, including the Hill Country.

The Vermilion Flycatcher is a dimorphic species



and therefore can be a challenge when spotting the female alone. The male is easily identifiable with a brilliant red (or vermilion) crest, lower face and underparts and a black mask and back. It's wings and tail are a dark blackish brown. The outer tail feathers may be edged with white and it has a narrow white tip on its tail. The female, on the other hand, is a dull

*(Continued on page 7)*

## BALCONES HIGHLIGHTS APRIL 2015

by Joan Mukherjee and Cindy Fronk



The wildflowers are blooming. The goldencheek warblers are trilling as they actively stake out breeding territories after arriving about two weeks late. At last report no one has yet spotted a black-capped vireo, but they should arrive soon. Finally the milkweed is coming up, also late, but ready for the delayed monarchs who usually arrive in late March. And, yes, in the first week of April migrating monarchs have been seen in Texas. This week huge flocks of cedar waxwings have been swooping up and down from the creek to the top of the tallest trees and back again, testing and strengthening their wings for a long journey north. Nostalgia overcomes me every morning when a remaining white-throated sparrow heralds me with “Old Sam Peabody, Peabody, Peabody.....” bringing memories of our family cabin in Canada where at the crack of dawn there is a huge course of that song. Spring is full of ‘Hellos’ and ‘Goodbys’ as time moves on.

These spring arrivals and the encouragement of

Cindy Fronk have sparked a whirlwind of activity at Balcones. Upcoming events that many members are involved with are:

- Apr. 8 at 8:30 a.m. Guided hike to see birds and wildflowers sponsored by the Bird and Wildflower Society
- Apr. 11 The taxonomy class sponsored by Bird and Wildflower Society will have a field trip led by Flo Oxley
- Apr 12 is “Mission Flyaway”, a Balcones Friends program open to the public to introduce monarchs and how to attract them, followed by a walk to the milkweed patch to search for eggs and caterpillars.
- Apr. 13 is the monarch watch class with Sondra Fox that some HLMN members are taking. Children’s Programs are scheduled throughout April and May.
- Apr. 24-27 Balcones Songbird Festival

*(Continued on page 7)*

## FLYCATCHER (Continued from page 5)

grayish brown above with a streaked whitish chest. She has a dull white eyebrow stripe and gray line through her eyes. The only red on the female is a pale red (almost salmon) or orangish patch under the tail.

Although a relatively small bird (about 6 inches long), the Vermilion Flycatcher is considered among the most spectacular of flycatchers not only for its coloration but also for its courtship display (a display that I have never witnessed personally). It is reported that during the breeding season the male Vermilion Flycatcher engages in a unique aerial performance that includes song as well as flight. He fluffs out his body and head feathers, rises up to 50 feet in the air in a peculiar fluttering manner while singing rapidly and repeatedly before swooping back down to the initial perching spot. He caps his performance by offering the female a butterfly or other showy insect! (I really need to find a breeding pair!)

Vermilion Flycatchers are found most frequently in riparian habitats – in short trees along streams, or edges of ponds. But it can be found in dry grassland areas with scattered trees as well. Its diet is not known in detail but it is believed to feed almost entirely on insects including beetles, flies, wasps, and grasshoppers. Like flycatchers you are familiar with, it

forages by watching for prey from an exposed branch and then darts out to capture the flying insect in the air and returns to the original perching spot to consume its catch.

Vermilion Flycatchers are monogamous. Nests are loosely knit cups constructed from twigs, grasses and fibers often held together with spider webs. This cup is then lined with finer plant materials, feathers and hair. It is typically placed in the horizontal fork of a tree (often mesquite or cottonwood trees) somewhere between eight and twenty feet off the ground. The female incubates the eggs but both parents participate in feeding the young. They typically produce two broods per year.

The Vermilion Flycatcher from a conservation standpoint is currently classified as “least concern”, however increases in human water usage and land development have caused declines in its population especially in the lower Colorado River Valley. Continued habitat destruction poses an ongoing threat to this species in several parts of its range.

The scientific name of the Vermilion Flycatcher is *Pryocephalus rubinus*. *Pryocephalus* is Greek and means “fire-headed”, while *rubinus* is Latin and means “ruby-red”. The bird has several Spanish names and the most descriptive of these is “brasita de fuego” or “little coal of fire”. Whatever you want to call it – it is a gorgeous bird to spot!

## BALCONES (Continued from page 6)

Apr. 30 the HLMN new class meets at the Flying X to learn about proscribed burning.

Cowbird trapping is in full swing. Already several hundred birds have been disposed of and 100 female birds saved for an A&M research program.

Cindy needs volunteers for:

Apr. 23, 28, 29, 30 for school environmental education programs 9 am-2 pm

Apr. 26 volunteers for Songbird Festival's family day Fledgling Fest 11 am-5:30 pm

Cindy's wish list includes:

Photographer for events

Artist to offer wildlife/plant drawing classes during the summer

Receptionist to meet visitors and answer phone, M-F, 8-4, your choice of days or hours but check with Cindy first.

Public Use Maintenance (check out trails, pick up litter, clean and restock restrooms)

Facility Maintenance (routinely cut grass and light maintenance)

Volunteer Coordinator (recruit volunteers by attending area meetings, update job descriptions as needed, assign work)

Knapweed removal—May-July, two days a week, select your own hours.

Tend cowbird traps—two volunteers needed, 3 days a week, to feed, water and count birds. Takes 4-5 hours to travel to all the traps on the refuge.

Milkweed inventory—find milkweed on the Refuge and collect seed.

I know we compete with HOP and GOP but please consider helping with environmental education if you can. Any task you would like to try, just contact Cindy Fronk at [cindy\\_fronk@fws.gov](mailto:cindy_fronk@fws.gov) or 830-265-7443 or 512-339-9432x70.

# LAWN & GARDEN SHOW 2015

Photos by Kay Herring and Sue Kersey



At our booth, Phil Wyde talked about birds and other natural features of our Hill Country. He interacted with a good many of the 1200 adults and kids attending. In the photo at right, attendee Cindy Ocker from Burnet County and Linda Brown HLMN (center) learn about bird camouflage.



Also assisting at the HLMN Booth were (l to r): Tom Ashcroft, Judy Haralson, Karyn Parker, Lyn Davis. Nancy Ellison, Judy Haralson, Sue Kersey and Eva Hobbs,



Master Naturalists also assisted at the Native Plant Society Booth. Fred Zagst (President HLNPSOT), Kay Zagst, and Pat Campbell behind Kay are showing the benefits of Native Plants and educating on the care of these plants in the garden.



# GAULT FIELD TRIP

by Kay Herring Photos by Phil Wyde

Some 60 Highland Lakes Master Naturalists recently toured the impressive and near-by Gault Archaeological Site, which is attracting national and international attention because of the wealth of new information on older-than-Clovis and Clovis cultures emerging right here in the heart of Central Texas. Dr. Clark Wernecke, executive director of the Gault School of Archaeological Research (GSAR) led the three-and-one-half hour guided tour to 10 sites at the Gault location and, standing in a major excavation, explained what life was like some 14,000 years ago here in Central Texas. The site, located between Georgetown and Fort Hood, has yielded over 2.6 million archaeologically excavated artifacts in the last decade (mostly stone tools and the debris from making them). Dr. Wernecke's lecture reinforced our understanding of the Texas Hill Country's colorful, historical value as a site of pre-historical habitation," said Cris Faught, HLMN president. The trip was arranged by Blair Feller, Master Naturalist from Meadowlakes, on behalf of the HLMN Trip Committee. The GSAR supports the Prehistory Research Project laboratory at Texas State University, San Marcos, where the artifacts are studied. For more information, visit:

<http://www.gaultschool.org/Home.aspx> .



Dr. Clark Wernecke showing the Mastadon Site (left) and the Gault Dig Site (below) then talking from the Demonstration Pit (above).



Pictograph from site

# GALLERY



Cedar Waxwing (above), House Finch pair (above right) and hummer below.  
By Lori Greco



Above right - Female Black-chinned hummingbird, pregnant  
Opossum below and flowers below right by Sue Kersey



### HLMN MEETINGS SCHEDULE 2015

Chapter Meetings 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 Meetings 10:30am

Board Meeting  
Board Meeting  
Board Meeting  
Board Meeting  
Board Meeting  
Joint Board Meeting

