

T E X A S

Master  
Naturalist™



HIGHLAND LAKES CHAPTER



# Highland Lakes Steward

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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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## SILENT AUCTION - 2015 TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST CONFERENCE

by Fredi Franki

Photos by Sue Kersey



Dear Silent Auction Volunteers,

You are a great bunch! The Silent Auction was a solid success because everyone helped by donating items, running the auction, and bidding/buying fabulous items. We had over 370 donations and sold all but 7 small items, a super achievement. We received many appreciative comments from other chapters and TXMN staff. The final dollar figure is not available as yet, but TXMN will let us know when the credit card totals are tabulated with checks and cash. Will let you know asap. A silent auction is hard work but you did it with style and a big smile.

Heartfelt thanks from Fredi and Beth.

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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

## NOVEMBER PROGRAM

The November 2015 meeting of the Highland Lakes Master Naturalist Chapter was at Turtle Rock Ranch and hosted by Allan and Vivian Wolfe. It was an opportunity to see an evolving laboratory and demonstration facility for sustainability and renewable energy projects.



### GET WELL!

Prayers and loving thoughts for a quick recovery to be back "on the trail"

- Karyn Parker
- Sondra Fox
- Gretchen Pachthofer
- Ellen Elly (Hibler)
- Anne Holly
- Ann Stevenson
- Blair Feller
- Fred Zagst
- Susan Bartoli
- Ed Myatt

## 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

## BALCONES CANYONLANDS FAMILY FUN DAY



Balcones Canyonlands NWR celebrated National Wildlife Refuge Week with a family fun day. Titled “Bee Helpful to Pollinators”, activities ranged from talks on the plight of the Monarch and gardening for pollinators to fun children’s activities based on environmental education.

Cindy Fronk, Balcones Environmental Education Specialist as well as HLMN members, with the help of Monarch Intern Dominique O’Conner and Goodwater MN Michael Brasel, designed the new curriculum on which the games and activities were based.

On “Bee Helpful” day Cindy was joined by Highland Lakes Master Naturalists Pat Campbell, Billy Hutson, Lynette Holtz, Marjorie Dearmont and Jane Brunclik among other volunteers.

No Monarchs fluttered by but the day was beautiful and both the kids and the volunteers had a great time.

Jane Brunclik



The above photo is of Melissa Duckworth and grandchildren at the solitary bee station making bee nests. Pat Campbell and Michael Brasel (Good Water Master Naturalist) taught about the role solitary bees have in pollination and how they are in decline. The bee nests are a way for the community to help solitary bees at their home.

Cindy Maldonado Fronk

## WHY NATIVE PLANTS ARE IMPORTANT

by Sammye Childers

Reprinted with permission from the Highlander Newspaper

Native plants are a vital part of the natural web of life and they are being lost at an alarming rate across the globe. Plants and animals in any given environment have evolved over time to sustain one another. Think of the web of life as a jigsaw puzzle of interlocking pieces. With each missing piece the picture becomes less clear. Eradicating a certain native plant from the landscape will likely remove the insects that feed on that plant, which in turn may eradicate birds or small animals that feed on that insect or plant and in turn the larger mammals that feed on them. Pollinators are disappearing at an alarming rate. 80% of our native plants are pollinated by native bees and native bees depend on native plants to survive. Native bees as well as honeybees, butterflies and insects are essential to any ecosystem. This is a very simplified example of a delicate and complicated balance. Another way to visualize the impact of removing native species from an ecosystem is to equate it to removing rivets from an airplane wing, one at a time; it is impossible to know which rivet removed will be the last one left that could hold the whole thing together.

There are real and practical pay-offs to developing a more biologically diverse native landscape. Healthy, balanced ecosystems clean our water and our air. Landscapes that use minimal pesticides and fertilizers are healthier places to live, not to mention saving the homeowner countless hours of labor and expense. Pollinators, vital to food production and ecosystem sustainability, are attracted to healthy environments.

There are also other profound reasons for using, or leaving undisturbed, native plants in our landscapes. Aesthetically and spiritually, native plants enhance our sense of place and time. Native plants are one of the most visible elements in any landscape; a huge part of what makes a region unique. Learning about and growing native



Photo by Mike Childers

plants promotes deeper understanding and respect for the land.

More and more nurseries are offering a greater inventory of native plants. Take advantage of these more varied offerings and be rewarded with a healthier landscape, that takes much less time to maintain, uses a minimal amount of our precious water resources and saves a great deal of time and expense for the homeowner.

Changing land use, the way farms, ranches and roadways are maintained, and the way we all utilize our individual pieces of the ecosystem have great impact on the decline of native plants. 90% of endangered species recorded for the U S are located in Texas. Our ecosystem supports native plants that grow no place else on earth; some are native no place else in Texas. Species disappear from areas on a daily basis. And, the decline is not likely to improve until we arm ourselves with information necessary for us to become the best stewards possible for our individual piece of the ecosystem. Texas was traditionally a rural populated state with 80% of the population rural and 20% urban. Today that statistic has flipped. Texas is now populated with approximately 80%

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## PLANTING MILKWEED SEEDS

by Sheryl Smith Rodgers

### How to germinate milkweed seeds

Earlier this month, I shared green milkweed vine seeds with my fellow Texas Master Naturalists/Highland Lakes chapter. Naturally, each one asked the same question: How do I germinate these?

Well, Randy Johnson with [Randy Johnson Organics](#) answered that question at the 2015 Texas Pollinator Powwow in Kerrville. Here are his instructions per his many years of germinating experience:

Separate the fluff from the seeds. Place the seeds in a paper sack with a pebble and shake it. The seeds will separate and fall out like black pepper flakes.

Most perennial milkweed seeds require cold moist stratification, which prevents seeds from germinating too soon. In the wild, milkweed seeds absorb moisture during the winter and sprout in the spring.

To germinate your own seeds, moisten a half baggie full of sand and add seeds. Blow up the baggie like a balloon and shake the seed/sand mixture in order to make sure the seeds make good contact with the moist sand. Roll up the baggie and place in refrigerator.

Check the baggie in three weeks. Remove if the seeds have germinated. Timing of stratification is important because once you get the seeds wet, they can sprout in 30 days.

If you stratify around March 30, pull out the seeds from frig April 30 and plant in the ground.

If you stratify later, place the seedlings in 4-inch pots, hold until fall, and plant around November 1.



In a recent email to me, Randy adds: "I would begin stratification mid March north of Waco and March first down where you are. Best strategy is to direct sow after stratification. Remember: The best plant results from a seed directly sown. If you can't do that, then you should plant the seedling in the deepest container available. Six inches would be good. The problem long term with a 4-inch pot is the tap-root curling. I would go to a one-gallon after about two months or so if I had to wait until fall for installation."

### THANK YOU, RANDY!

From Sheryl Simth-Rodgers Blog - Window on a Texas Wildscape

[sherylsmithrodgers.blogspot.com/](http://sherylsmithrodgers.blogspot.com/)

## NATIVE PLANTS

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urban dwellers and 20% living in rural areas. In addition, land use has changed from large land holdings to plots of 100 acres or less. As populations grow and spread, there will be less and less space available for our essential native plants and we move ever closer to the desertification that

threatens with each tract of land that is clear cut. We must work together to change the mindset of the population living and moving here. Native plant biodiversity is vital for sustainability of our beautiful and unique ecosystem. Take pride in becoming a leader in the trend to use more natives in your individual landscape. It is vital step forward to our future.

## A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY – THE YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER

by Joanne Fischer

The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker is a winter visitor to the Hill Country. It is a member of the Woodpecker family (Family Picidae) and is a fairly small, stocky bird (5 inches in length) with a stout, straight bill. It is mainly a barred black and white with a boldly patterned face. Both the male and female have a red crown or forehead, but the male also has a red throat. Both have a black bib and a pale yellow wash on their breasts (which is very faint and hard to see). A distinguishing characteristic is a long white stripe along the front edge of its folded wing.

The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker flies in a woodpecker's typical up-and-down, bouncing or swooping manner. Unfortunately it is typically quiet in the winter when it visits our area, but in spring it is quite noisy with cat-like calls and staccato drumming. In fact the sapsucker will often use "man-made" items such as street signs and metal chimney flashing to amplify their territorial drumming during breeding season.

The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker's breeding range includes most of Canada and the northern and eastern United States, but it is almost completely migratory in winter. Although a few individuals will remain throughout much of the winter in the southernmost part of the breeding range, most head south, coming to Texas, or going as far as Mexico, the West Indies, and Central America. Females tend to migrate further south than males.

Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers live primarily and breed in hardwood forests and spend winters in open woodlands. They will occasionally visit bird feeders for suet in the winter. They perch upright on trees, leaning on their tails like other woodpeckers, but unlike most woodpeckers that drill for bugs concealed within the bark of trees, sapsuckers (as their name implies) feed at "sapwells" which are rather neat rows of shallow holes they drill to get at the sugary sap within the trunk of live trees. Because of this eating difference from other woodpeckers, the sapsuckers have brushlike, bristle-tipped tongues versus the barbed spear of others in the woodpecker family. They will drill wells for sap throughout the year, on both their breeding and wintering grounds. Sapsuckers will supplement their diet with insects which they find in the vicinity of the sapwells and they will also feed on berries.



Male Ladderback Woodpecker



Female Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

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## SAPSUCKER

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Sapsuckers actually make two types of holes in trees in order to harvest sap. They make round, deep holes that extend deep into the tree but they also make shallower, rectangular holes that must be maintained over time to keep the sap flowing. Both types of holes are usually made in a distinct lined pattern around the tree trunk and new holes are often drilled above or below, but in line with old holes. The Sapsucker has been known to drill sapwells in more than a 1,000 different species of trees but they have a preference for tree species with high sugar concentrations in their sap, such as paper birch, yellow birch, sugar maple, red maple, and hickory. Also because they are after sap instead of insects, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers prefer young forests and edge habitat because they are looking for live, fast-growing trees bearing sap versus most other woodpecker species which rely on dead trees (non-sap flowing) for insects and for nesting sites. An interesting fact is that sapwells made by the Sapsuckers attract other birds and mammals including hummingbirds, bats and porcupines.

Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers are cavity nesters. The male typically does most of the nest excavation. They will often choose live, but fungally infested trees be-

cause the fungal infestation causes some decay and makes the excavation easier. The nest hole is small (about an inch and a half in diameter) but may be as deep as 10 inches. They do not line the nest and the eggs are laid directly on wood chips left over from the excavation. They may lay between 3 and 7 eggs and incubation is by both parents. Both parents feed the young, bringing them insects, sap, and fruit. Young leave the nest 25-29 days after hatching at which time the parents teach them the sapsucking behavior.

The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker's Conservation status is of Least Concern according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey and numbers are reported to have increased slightly between 1966 and 2010.

And now why "the case of mistaken identity" in the title of this article. In the past I have made mention of Kenn Kaufman's caution to birders about making snap decisions about bird identification based on general shape, size and coloration as well as it being common within a certain territory. In the case of a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker you may inadvertently think you are looking at a Ladderback Woodpecker. Take a look at the accompanying pictures and you will see why. So this winter, keep an eye out for distinctive, neatly organized rows of holes ringing a tree trunk and maybe you will have the fortune of finding a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker tending to it's sapwells.