



Highland Lakes Steward

December 2015

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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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HLMN 2015 YEAR IN REVIEW

by Cris Faught

- We moved to a new meeting place to accommodate our growing membership.
- We approved and operated with a new budget format for reporting our financial status.
- We operated most of the year with our volunteer and retired Chapter Advisor, and then introduced our new Chapter Advisor in August.
- We graduated nine new Master Naturalist in our 2015 Class.
- We became aware that we were to be the host chapter for the State Annual Meeting.
- We hosted Michelle Haggerty, TMN State Coordinator, as our speaker.
- We approved new Bylaws and new Chapter Operating Handbook.
- We witnessed the total destruction of the Nature Activity Center at Blanco State Park, and then generated matching funds which totaled over \$2,000.00 from our members.
- We celebrated the awarding of the \$25,000.00 Budweiser Grant to Blanco State Park as the most voted-for Park in the State.
- We witnessed the completion of the Nature Viewing Structure at Inks Lake State Park which later received a second place award at the State Annual Meeting for all Chapters.
- We partnered with the Upper Highland Lakes Nature Center to help in the dissemination of information about the Center with an open house for the community. We provided approximately 1000 hours of volunteer service in creating a Hill Country calendar, a rain water collection station and many other demonstration projects.
- Somehow, we navigated a double booking of the HOP and the GOP with enough volunteers to staff successful programs for both.
- We held six Board of Directors meetings in addition to membership meetings.
- We saw six of our members graduate as team members in the Land Management Assistance Program who then conducted five site visits, all on property owned by HLMN members.
- We participated in the 16th Annual Statewide Meeting with over 40 of our members in attendance. This was the largest Statewide Meetings to date, with members of all 44 Chapters in attendance.
- We received over \$1,500.00 as volunteer custodians for the silent auction at the Statewide Meeting and received second place and \$750 for the Wildlife Viewing Station project
- We conducted a successful field trip to Port Aransas with 37 members participating in over 10 training venues.
- We accrued over 16,000 volunteer hours and over 2000 advanced training hours this year alone.
- We published multiple articles in local newspapers, magazines and one radio

(Continued on page 2)

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

2015 in Review Cris Faught	1
Great News from Wade and Ellen	2
Get Well!	2
January Program Melissa Duckworth	2
ILSP January 1st, 2015 Celebration George Brugnoli	3
Milestone Pins Sue Kersey	3
Awards Banquet	4
Memoirs of a Garden Spider Ray Buchanan	8
The "Not So" Common Loon Joanne Fischer	9
Gallery	11

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

GET WELL!

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

- Karyn Parker
- Sondra Fox
- Gretchen Pachthofer
- Anne Holly
- Ann Stevenson
- Blair Feller
- Fred Zagst
- Susan Bartoli
- Ed Myatt

2015 IN REVIEW *(Continued from page 1)*

show all to advance the cause of HLMN.

- We also started a series of articles called "Nature Matters" appearing monthly in the Highlander, Burnet Bulletin, and Llano newspapers.
- We celebrated one of our members, Jerry Stacy, who received a Presidential Citation for achievement of over 4,000 hours of service.
- We celebrated another one of our members, Ray Buchanan, who received the Master Gardener of the Year designation for 2015.
- We held two of our general membership meetings at member's ranches. Both were outstanding and memorable meetings.
- We planned a fun and successful Annual Meeting/Christmas Party to celebrate our 13th year as a Chapter of Texas Master Naturalist Program.

It has been a high honor and special privilege to serve as your president this year. I am humbled by the works done by our members as there seems to be no boundaries to the number of tasks or the time spent out of your lives to accomplish the achievements listed above.

Thank you for a GREAT YEAR!

Cris Faught - President 2015

Great news
from Wade and Ellen!

Ellen's scans came back and everything is good. She has been released to be on maintenance drugs that can be administered in Lakeway. According to Wade, the doctor said she could throw the mask and everything else out! They both asked me to thank you for your prayers and they cannot wait to thank all of you in person.

JANUARY PROGRAM

by Melissa Duckworth

The January speaker is Kevin Deiters with Trail Tamers. Their volunteer group has created many trails all over the State including Blanco State Park. He will be speaking on trail building.

INKS LAKE STATE PARK JANUARY 1ST 2016 CELEBRATION

by George Brugnoli

Hi folks. As you' read in the flyers emailed to you Dec 3, we've completed construction of the Devil's Backbone Nature Trail and the Park will be officially opening it in conjunction with the First Day Hike (New Years Day, 12 noon). This is an invitation to the many of you who have worked on this trail to join us for the event. The flyers provided details about the opening.

This trail would not be complete without the hard work and dedication of HLMN volunteers...and I mean a whole bunch of us. You'll recall that the work started way back in March when we preempted our annual Park "Clean Sweep" event to begin work on the trail. Actually, we held three Clean Sweeps during the spring with thirty or more HLMN participants in each one. Our "many skilled hands" approach helped me appreciate how our predecessors built the trans-continental railroad system with pick and shovel. WOW! There were a few FOIL-oriented work days (hard to distinguish because almost all FOIL members are HLMN members) and then three more Dog Days events in August with 12 to 15 of us blazing trail with the literal sweat of our brows (did you know that salty sweat is a pretty good herbicide;>)? After the National Public Lands (work) Day the final push took place in November.

As a small token of appreciation for our contribution, Cory is waiving Park admission fees for HLMN members wishing to participate in this event. I hope a bunch of us can be there to celebrate! FOIL will think of ways to make this a party (regrettably without the champagne).

Please let me know sometime before the event if you wish to participate. If we have a good idea of how many are coming, when you arrive at the Park entrance and identify as an HLMN member the office staff will have a complimentary pass waiting for you. We're hoping for a good crowd, so carpool if possible.

I know there will be other First Day Hike offerings in our general area but I hope you will be able join us for this event. You already know it's a special trail but, unless you've seen it lately, you may be surprised by how amazing it really is

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards.....George

P.S. The round trip is about 4 miles, but for those of you with knees like mine there will be return transportation from the Wildlife Viewing Site side.

MILESTONE PINS

by Sue Kersey

I have milestone pins to be picked up at our next meeting.

Bluebonnet 2015 pins-Charles Beierle, Maggie Booth, Becky Breazeale, Margy Butler, Judy Caramonica, Dennis & Nancy Ellison, Kathy Griffis-Bailey, Ed & Sue Lilley, Joan Mukherjee, Mary Musselman, Helen Smith, Shirley Winslow & Joanne Fischer.

500 Hour pins-Becky Breazeale, Paula D'Osorgna, Sue Lilley, Charles Beierle, Ed Lilley and Debora Moroney.

Additional pins I have for Andrea Roach, Harris Greenwood, Romelia Favrot & Beth Wesley.

If you have any question about picking up your milestone pins just email or call me. And if you need a pin replaced at any time let me know.

Have a wonderful holiday season, Sue Kersey

ANNUAL AWARDS BANQUET



Another Great Auction!



Jo Ellen Cashion provided great Christmas music



The centerpiece creation party!



DECEMBER AWARDS

1000 HOURS

L to R: Betty Cruikshank, Judy Parker



500 HOURS



L to R: Billie Gunther, Melissa Duckworth, Karen Lundquist, Celia Escamilla, Marjorie Dearthmont, Cris Faight, Minnie Eaton, Susan Downy, Cathy Hill. Not Pictured: Sue Lilley.

DECEMBER AWARDS - 250 HOURS

L to R:
Jane Brunclik
And
Kay Zagst
Not Pictured:
Susan Adkinson



DECEMBER AWARDS - RECERTIFICATION



L to R: Sue Kersey, Judy Parker, Karyn Parker, Jean Schar, Kay Zagst, Blair Feller, Suze Jernigan, Suzanne Adkinson, Connie Barron, Marilyn Lageman, Sharon Drake, Dan Nutter, Eva Hobbs, Fred Zagst, Jan Belz, Anne Holly, Beth Mortenson, Joy Ellen Collins, Gretchen Pachlhofer. Not pictured: Charles Beierle, Maggie Booth, Becky Brezeale, Margy Butler, Judy Caramonica, Dennis Ellison, Nancy Ellison, Kathy Griffis-Bailey, Ed Lilley, Sue Lilley, Joan Mukherjee, Mary Musselman, Helen Smith, Earlene Thorne, Mike Kersey.

DECEMBER AWARDS - CHANGING OF OFFICERS FOR 2016



2015 HLMN Board l to r
(with staffs from Cris):
Chis Faight, Ann Cook, Marcy
Wescott, Blair Feller, Melissa
Duckworth, Betty Cruikshank,
Marilyn McClain, Sammye Chil-
ders, Pat Campbell



2016 HLMN Executive Board
l to r:
Cathy Hill - Vide President,
Melissa Duckworth - President
Marilyn McClain - Secretary
Susan Downey - Treasurer

“MY BEST DAY HANGING UPSIDE DOWN” FROM THE MEMOIRS OF A GARDEN SPIDER

By Ray Buchanan

Reprinted with permission from the Highlander Newspaper

My best day as a garden spider hanging upside down started the night before. My tummy was swollen; it was so tight; I could hardly stand it! My yellow stripes on each side stood out; and the yellow splotches on each side of the black stripe running up the middle of my abdomen spread up and out.. It was all those eggs, ready to emerge.

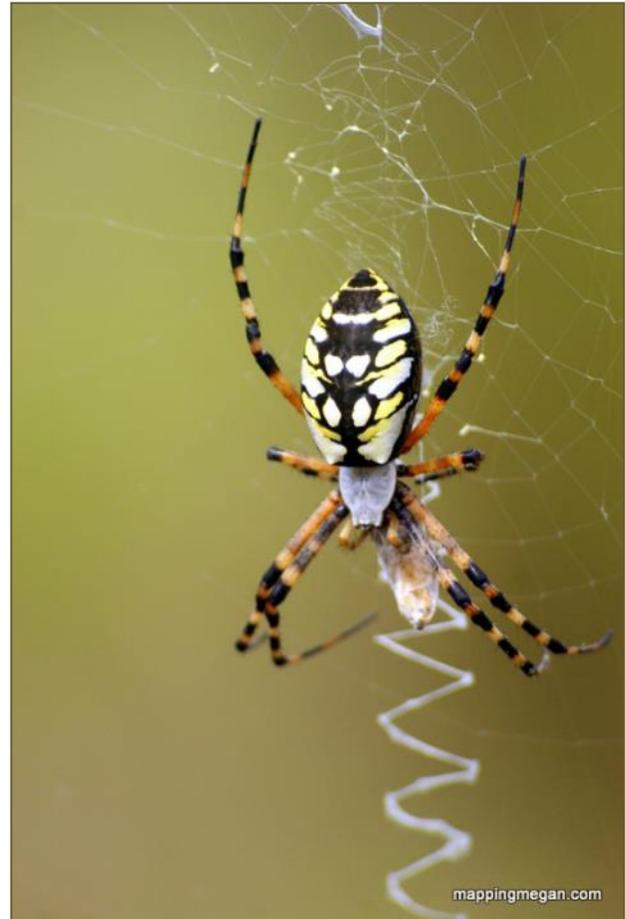
So, I wove the first cloth-like layer of silk fiber; and they poured forth onto it – stopped counting at 1,238. After two more layers, I shaped it into a sac tapered at the top and attached it in a kind of hidden part of the web. The father was, of course, long gone. He had tapped lightly on my web to let me know he had arrived. But with my poor eyesight and with him being about a third smaller than me, the vibrations indicated no romance, just an “I’m here!”.. And when his deed was done, his heart promptly stopped beating. The real fun part of that experience was when I got to eat him later.

Now the eggs will remain safe until they hatch in the fall. But each is so tiny that when they appear outside the sac, after hibernating all winter, they will look like dust particles. By then I will be long gone.

Then once I had finished that once-in-a-lifetime laying and storing of eggs, a big fly became caught in my web. The vibrations were furious. So, I rushed over (I have been timed at 1.6 feet per second) and injected my venom into the fly, which stunned it. Then I wrapped it up in a silk bag for eating later. My venom also liquefies the body of my prey; and I don’t want anything dripping out of the web before mealtime!

I have no worries about my web holding three or four insects, and my egg sac, and me all at the same time because my silk threads are five times stronger than the same weight of steel wire. My orb-weaving design process starts with one line attached to a leaf or a stem. Then I let out a string of silk which floats in the wind until it becomes attached to something else. Then I begin to make bridges and anchor lines that radiate out from a center point.

It’s then that I bring out a sticky silk line to make the concentric circles attached to the anchor lines. Usually about two feet in diameter, the web spans a



flyway in order to insure catching flies, bees, and other flying insects. The lighter colored zig-zag pattern in the middle of the web is for camouflage. Each night I eat this center part in order to maintain its strength and my maneuverability.

Oh, yes, and why do I hang upside down all the time? Well, I cannot use my front four legs and bring food to my mouth and hold on to the web at the same time. So, I hang upside down by my four long hind legs. The four front legs are free to roll up my prey and hold it to eat.

All in all, this was one of my best days: laid my eggs, caught and ate four insects, and renewed the center part of my web late that same evening. With no more skinny males to worry about, I might just stick around for the remainder of the summer.

THE “NOT SO” COMMON LOON (AT LEAST NOT IN THE HILL COUNTRY)

by Joanne Fischer

Let's begin with the definition of the word “common”. As an adjective, “common” means “having no special distinction or quality; widely known or commonly encountered; average or ordinary or usual”. Well, in my opinion, this word should not be associated with the species I am profiling this month – the Common Loon.

I was fortunate to spend some time this summer on a lake in northern Wisconsin (yes, I escaped some of the hot, dry time here in the Hill Country). This lake had a breeding pair of Common Loons and the experience watching them hatch and raise their young made me want to learn more about this very “uncommon” bird.

The Common Loon (Order: Gaviiformes, Family: Gaviidae) is a large diving waterbird with a long body (can be up to three feet in length), short tail and dagger-like bill. Loons are famous for their eerie, beautiful calls during the summer breeding season. They can be very vocally active during this time with nocturnal choruses as well. After sundown, many North Woods lakes reverberate with the echoes of loon wails, yodels and tremolos (which writer John McPhee called “the laugh of the deeply insane”). Anyone who has seen the movie “On Golden Pond” can most likely recall the unusual song of the Common Loon.

In the summer the adults (both male and female) have a glossy black head and bill, a black-and-white spotted back, a black-and-white patterned collar and a white breast (some have referred to them as “tuxedoed birds”). From September to March, however, the time that we would encounter Loons in Texas, adults fade to a plain gray on the back and head with a white throat and underparts. The bill even fades to a drab gray. The change from breeding to non-breeding plumage is quite significant in this species. Juveniles are similar in appearance to the adult in non-breeding plumage.

The Common Loon breeds on quiet and sometimes remote freshwater lakes in the northern United States and Canada. They are migratory and spend winters in coastal ocean waters and the Gulf of Mexico. In their winter range along ocean coasts, they occur fairly close to shore and in bays and estuaries. Some Common Loons winter inland, on large reser-



Common Loon Breeding Plumage



Common Loon Winter Plumage

voirs and slow-moving rivers. Common Loons that migrate across interior North America find large lakes and rivers on their way north and south. Common Loons have been found on Inks Lake in the Hill Country during migration and winter months.

Here are some facts that I found quite interesting when I researched the Common Loon (because I really didn't know much of anything about them before my experience this summer).

I knew that Common Loons are considered a classic bird of North Woods lakes but what I didn't know is that they are actually excellent indicators of water quality as they require crystal-clear lakes (which makes it easier for them to see prey underwater) with abundant populations of small fish. Lakes with coves and islands are preferred as they provide cover from predators while resting and nesting. They also require lakes with enough surface area for their flapping-and-running takeoffs across the water.

(Continued on page 10)

COMMON LOON

(Continued from page 9)

I knew that the Common Loon swims underwater to catch fish (its main diet staple) but what I didn't know is that they propel themselves with feet which are set far back on their bodies. I also didn't know that unlike most birds, loons have solid bones that make them less buoyant and better able to dive. They actually blow air out of their lungs and flatten their feathers to expel air caught in their plumage so they can dive more quickly and swim faster underwater. Also, once below the surface (and they are able to stay below the surface for long periods of time) the loon's heart rate slows to conserve oxygen. Though people on the surface only see loons disappear with a dive and reappear later, their fishing pursuits underwater are reported to be something to behold. Loons shoot through the water like a torpedo, propelled by powerful thrusts of their feet and if their quarry changes direction, loons can execute an abrupt flip-turn by extending one foot laterally as a pivot brake and kicking with the opposite foot to turn 180 degrees in a fraction of a second.

Another fact I discovered is that the backward positioning of the Loon's feet, although an asset for diving, is actually a liability for the bird on land. The loon is very clumsy on land and for the most part only goes ashore to mate and incubate eggs. I also discovered that Loons need a runway for takeoff. And the runway has to be water, not land. They need from 30 yards to up to a quarter of a mile for flapping their wings and running across the top of the water in order to gain enough speed for lift-off. And a sad fact is that migrating Common Loons occasionally land on wet highways or parking lots, mistaking them for rivers and lakes. They become stranded without a considerable amount of open water for a long takeoff and it has been reported that humans may need to intervene to save loons that have been stranded.

More facts: Loons are monogamous but apparently do not breed until they are at least 2 years of age and often do not breed until they are up to six years old. Loons nest in quiet, protected, somewhat hidden spots along the shoreline. Because Loons can't walk well on land, nests are built close to a bank, often with a steep drop-off that allows the bird to approach the nest from underwater. The male selects the nest site, but the nest is built by both the male and female. The nest is constructed from dead plant materials

such as sedges and marsh grasses that grow along the lake's edge. The finished nest is about 22 inches wide and looks like a clump of dead grasses by the edge of the water. Many times a breeding pair of loons will reuse the same site the following year, refurbishing their old nest instead of building a new one.

The female most often lays 2 eggs, rarely just one. Incubation is done by both the male and female and can take up to a month. More surprising facts: the young loons leave the nest within one or two days after hatching and can dive and swim underwater within 2 or 3 days. However they are incapable of flying for approximately 12 weeks. During this time they are tended to and fed by both parents. And as many of you probably know by pictures we have seen, the very young loons will often ride on their parents backs. Juvenile loons are left on their own after about 12 weeks when they are capable of flying and the adults begin their migration. Juveniles gather into flocks to make their own journey south a few weeks later. Once the juveniles reach coastal waters, they stay there for the next two years. In the third year, young loons return north, although they may not breed for several more years.

A final "creepy" fact I discovered in my study of and experience with loons. Predators of the Common Loon are diverse and can strike from all directions because they include birds (like gulls, ravens, crows, osprey and eagles), large fish (such as pike), and land mammals (raccoon, weasels, and skunks). I actually witnessed a pair of Bald Eagles (Mom or Dad with Junior) hunting the young loons on the lake this summer. It was an unsuccessful strike at the time I witnessed the event, but I have to sadly report that eventually one of the baby loons was lost to a predator (thank goodness I didn't see it happen). In spite of the wide range of predators, the Common Loon populations are considered stable and they are listed as Of Least Concern by Conservation Standards. However, since Common Loons require clear, unpolluted lakes, future populations may be impacted by pollution and increased lake disturbances.

Now, back to the name of this bird, the Common Loon. The "loon" part of the name is due to its clumsy, awkward appearance when walking on land, but in my opinion there is nothing "common" about this bird and I wish that the powers to be would consider renaming it the Great Northern Loon or the Great Northern Diver like the British have!

GALLERY



Mallard Pair

by Phil Wyde



Blue Heron

by Phil Wyde



Submitted by Linda O'nan



Wren

by Phil Wyde



Friends of UHLNC at their annual Fall clean-up at the Falls on the Colorado Museum
by Phil Wyde