



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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MESSAGE FROM MELISSA

by Melissa Duckworth

RECOLLECTIONS

Growing up in the late 1950's and early 1960's conjures the vividness of night noises, starlight bright enough to give your skin moon glow, and of course freedom; the freedom to be outdoors without being fearful.

The children of today, in my opinion, are not as fortunate as the children of my formative years. There are exceptions of course. The medical achievements are numerous. New vaccines and new treatments are on the exponential fast track. What else? I would argue, not too much. I will let you as readers agree or disagree with me. Meanwhile, I have listed a few personal memories that are on the endangered, if not extinct list of possible experiences a child of today is likely to revisit in his or her later years. Some have a Naturalist bent and some do not. Regardless, my feeling is that the connection with Nature as an integral part of development has been replaced by an overexposure to technology, peer pressure, parental distraction and just plain danger in our communities.

Getting lost in a cornfield, yet knowing someone would find you. East Texas corn grew to about 10 feet in height. Acres of tall corn made for an exhilarating maze. An adult could track you down if you yelled loud enough.

Running barefoot in red dirt. Red soil is composed of large amounts of iron oxide. It can dye your feet red for hours until tub time. It was a truism to be called

redskin if your feet were red- not a slur. By the way-- see number 3 re: barefoot.

No shoes all day. Until age 30, the padding on the bottoms of our feet are strong and thick. After that, that padding starts to degrade. The human foot has 26 bones, 33 joints and more than 120 muscles, ligaments and tendons. By age 65, 1 in 3 adults has a foot problem. Muscles become weaker and less resilient. Arches flatten out. Not wearing shoes all day outside as a youngster was taken for granted.

Running over rocks? Through that cornfield? With red feet? Not an issue. Now, most kids are shod when outside for fear of stepping on questionable trash, burning hot concrete, or maybe a needle. And to conform to the norm. Foot danger and bullying are distinct possibilities if a child goes barefoot in public suburbia today. See next re: outside for most of the day.

Outside for most of the day was a given unless it was freezing or raining frogs. Imagination was the brain stimulant. So was constant play and movement. Oh, and if there was a stranger wandering around during the outside play day, chances are he truly was lost, not looking for an opportunity to abduct.

Well water from a bucket, rope and pulley. Never was there sweeter tasting, cooler water. No need to have the well tested for chemicals; no permits required.. Walking around the raised rock perimeter above the well was a clear and

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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.

MESSAGE FROM MELISSA

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present danger but did instill perfect balance and agility skills.

Getting smoked. Nope, not that kind. I mean really smoked. Many old timers had smoke houses where hams from the "hog stash" were hung to cure over constantly smoking wood chips or logs. No surer way ever was there to have your dog play chase with you than when you smelled like a piece of bacon.

Chewing on sourweed or sugarcane. Rumex hastatulus (heartwing sorrel) grows wild in East Texas and Alabama. Some called it Indian cane. Its stem was thick and fibrous and sour and a child felt really bold and illicit when chewing on the stem. On the other hand, sugar cane was grown as a cash crop in East

Texas and was not native. Sugar is eventually extracted from the juicy stems. But before that process? A true treat was sucking on the sweet juice. Now that is a straw. Well, now you can read the PDF entitled "Residual biomass potential of commercial and pre-commercial sugarcane." Useful if you are an adult in today's world. Maybe very useful. Bagasse is the the remnant from the stalks after the sweet juice is extracted. The bagasse is often used as fuel in a sugar mill. I did not know what bagasse was back then and there were no PDF's either. I simply knew that when the old Case pocket knife was opened, it was time for me to have a chew of sweet stuff with a facial muscle workout as accompaniment.

OCTOBER PROGRAM

by Cathy Hill

Our speaker for October will be Romney Swanson, Conservation Project Manager for Hill Country Conservancy. Romney works with private landowners and stakeholders throughout the Hill County discussing private land conservation and conservation easements. He also helps with documentation of the wildlife and natural features on conservation easement properties and with annual monitoring and landowner services.

Prayers and/or get well wishes:

George Brugnoli
 Penny Nichols
 Sue Lilley
 Judy Parker
 Judy Parker's husband, Bob
 Marjorie Dearmont's husband,
 Dean
 Bob Glover
 Wade Hibler's wife, Ellen Ely

Thank you and please let me know if there are others.

HONORARY MASTER NATURALISTS

by Linda O’Nan

Congratulations to Marvin Bloomquist & Bill Luedecke, for their outstanding contributions in the growth of our chapter. Along with Wade Hibler, our former advisor, these gentlemen provided leadership and developed our chapter structure and charter. They helped start new class training to further build our HLMN membership, sought out volunteer activities for a fledgling chapter, and found opportunities for advanced training. Their enthusiasm for HLMN has been a constant for the last 13-14 years. They literally put the HL in the MN! Thanks from all HLMN members!

2016 ANNUAL MEETING

by Cris Faught



Registration is now open thru Sept 30, 2016 and can be accessed at: <http://txmn.org/2016-annual-meeting/> .

This year's program offers field trips to Sam Houston National Forest as well as two other neighboring forests. Something new is the Texas Waters Day curriculum which will train you to be a well informed, volunteer specialist to provide education, outreach and service to others concerning the aquatic resources of Texas.

There will be vendors, scholarships and AT hours available in abundance.

Register early and make room reservations early to ensure your place at the conference.

PORCUPINE

by Pat Campbell



Last summer we had to remove porcupine quills from 2 of our dogs. I didn't even know there were porcupines around here. I still have never seen one. It had to be fairly close to the house and in researching where it might live, I discovered some interesting facts about them. They are interesting little creatures!

They are described as fat, pigeon-toed, bow-legged and slow. TPWD reports that they mutter to themselves as they amble along. Mumbles, moans, grunts, whines are commonly heard. They appear to be peace loving, but don't hesitate to defend themselves with quills. It is reported they have over 30,000 quills (really modified hairs) over their body. Only the nose, legs and underside are unprotected. The length and size of the quills depends on where on the body they are located. The longest and stiffest are on the back and the softer, more flexible ones on the sides. They are shed like hair and grow back, resulting in quills of various sizes and stages of growth. They are covered with a layer of long guard hairs. If

the porcupine is relaxed, the quills remain under the hair but can instantly be brought to an erect, upright position if the animal feels nervous or threatened.

When the porcupine feels threatened it begins thrashing its tail around and the teeth chatter. If the threat continues, it will whip around and present its backside to the threat. Sometimes, the older quills will dislodge, making people think it is throwing them, which is not true.

The quills are white with a brown or dark tip about 1/2 inch long. This tip is actually made up of overlapping, diamond shaped, backward facing scales which are layered like shingles on a roof. It is these scales that make the quills stick to the enemy. Once imbedded the scales flare out, making backward movement difficult at best. On the other hand, forward motion can still occur in the arm, leg or wherever. This can cause an infection. It is recommended that they be removed by a quick jerk as soon as possible. The longer they remain in the flesh the

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PORCUPINE (Continued from page 4)

deeper they go.

Porcupines are members of the rodent family. They can live to be ten years of age. They begin eating vegetation shortly after birth. They eat young saplings of trees and shrubs during the summer. For some reason, they are attracted to anything with salt on it and if they can smell it, will go after items with human perspiration salt. This can include canoe paddles, backpack straps, clothing. In the fall, they eat mistletoe, pine needles and wood bark.

Winter finds the porcupine in trees, sometimes several weeks in a single tree. They eat twigs, buds and can eat a page-size piece of bark a day. Because of this, they can be damaging to trees. In one case a porcupine managed to eat its way down 20 feet in a pine tree by the end of its 3 month domicile. The porcupine is an excellent tree climber. It generally goes up head first but backs down. They have a great sense of balance and can support themselves on branches only a fraction of an inch thick. Although at home in a tree, it can adapt to other areas. It prefers rocky ridges, slopes and rocky areas with big rocks and crevices and caves to provide shelter for dens and resting. They have generally domiciled in the western part of the state, but in recent years have been seen more in the hill country.

A thick underfur grows in the winter to keep the animal warm. This can be as thick as sheep's wool. This is shed in the summer months.

The porcupine is a solitary creature and mating takes place only during breeding season. The male "whines" to attract the female. This can be high pitched or low tone. This can be disagreeable if close to your sleeping quarters. Sometimes there is a dance where they stand on their hind legs and waddle around. Once the male has picked his mate, he follows her around with his high pitched whine until she accepts his invitation.

Communication between mother and baby is described as low sobbing wails and grunts.

The porcupine is truly an interesting creature. The scientific name is *Erethizon dorsatum*, which means irritable back. It is almost indescribable, having teeth like a beaver, claws like a badger, feet like a bear, fur like a sheep's wool and spines like a pincushion.

I still have not seen one, but would like to see one from a distance only and hopefully my dogs will not see another one or be smart enough to stay away. I am still not certain where it might live, but I am definitely keeping an eye out. Never thought to look in trees though.

Most of the info for this article came from the TPWD website about porcupines.

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.

KID'S DAY OUT

by Pat Campbell Photos by Alice Rheume

Kids Day Out was held on October 10, 2016. It started out with lots of wind and rain and we thought it was going to be canceled and we would have 200 trees to pot! But as luck would have it, the sun came out and it turned out to be a beautiful day. And very successful for our mission of giving away trees. We probably had over 400 people at our booth over the course of the day!

Backbone Valley Nursery came through again for us. We ordered our trees through them at their cost and they donated the potting soil and pots again. We had Texas Red Oak, Chinkapin Oak, Carolina Buckthorn, and Eve's Necklace trees to give away. Be sure to thank Backbone for their support when you are there.

This year the kids did their own potting (with our help) and they seemed very excited by this. It was fun to watch the concentration with which they potted their tree. We are hoping they will take more ownership of the trees and their care.

A big thank you to all who helped to make this outreach a success. It is always a fun event, and this year we had the added bonus of getting to watch the Bluebonnet Air Show!



IMAGES FROM A MINI-SAFARI AROUND MY YARD

By Phil Wyde

One of my favorite hobbies is photography. I take my cameras everywhere and take pictures almost every day of most anything (except posing people and selfies). Indeed, I have pictures taken in many exotic places. Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, Cambodia, Russia, Alaska, West Texas, Yellowstone and Hungary to name just a few. However I have found that you do not have to go to far flung places to take interesting pictures. Indeed, I spend a lot of time wandering our property or driving the back roads in this area (mostly the areas around Kingsland, Marble Falls, Burnet and Llano). You won't believe what I come across. However, this is August -- not the best time to take photographs in the Texas Hill Country in any year. Things were bad this year because of the extreme drought. Then it started to rain, rain, and rain some more. Because of the threat of flash floods I was not excited about riding the back roads in search of long horns, zebra and other exotic animals. Worse, because of the mud and muck I had to limit my daily walks to the back of our property which borders on the Llano River to see what nature had to offer there. I had a dilemma. One can only read and watch so much TV. Moreover, I really enjoy taking pictures!

The answer was to take mini-safaris right around my house during this rain soaked period. The images that follow were taken on ONE of these expeditions. (I actually got interesting images on every mini-safari, but am only showing the results from one.)



Image 1: Datura (jimsonweed) Early Morning Light

As image 1 indicates, if one looks, even in August there are still beautiful flowers in bloom. This one is Jimsonweed, a wild Datura species that is very tough on bovines. I don't mind it being around. We have no cows and who can fault a plant for trying to protect itself.

Only feet from the datura plant I managed to take the images shown in Images 2 and 3. I find dragon flies fascinating. They are scourges of the insect world, but both very colorful and alien. The captions shown in these two images indicate my ignorance of the names of different species of dragon flies. I keep planning on rectifying this particular deficiency of mine, but somehow keep putting off studying the individual dragon fly species. Right now I am happy just to be in awe of them. To me they are truly exotic. I imagine them to be miniature equivalents of prehistoric flying and ferocious dinosaurs – but in brilliant colors and just the right size.

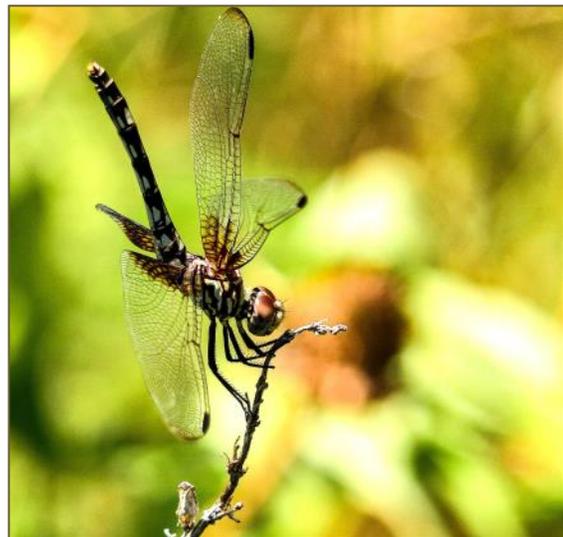


Image 2: Pink Dragon Fly



Image 3: Green Dragon Fly

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MINI-SAFARI (Continued from page 7)

Just a few more feet down our drive is female hummingbird sitting on a branch. Actually there are hummingbirds all around, but not sitting still. Hummingbirds are among my favorite birds. Such showmen! I am all the time trying to get their picture. However, as I just said, they zip and dive with such fervor that seldom get a good shot of them. I got lucky with this one.

By the way, I cannot tell if this bird is a black chinned or ruby throat female. (The black chinned hummingbirds stay here all summer while the ruby throats migrate through in the spring and fall.) To me the females of both species look the same. However, apparently the male black chin and male ruby throat humming birds can tell them apart.

This day I was particularly fortunate. I was lucky enough -- with persistence and a fast shutter -- to get a decent shot of a hummingbird in flight. The image shown in Image 5 was taken just another few feet from where the bird in Image 4 was taken.

Just to show you that I do know what a male hummingbird looks like, I have included Image 6 taken a little



Image 4: Hummingbird Female At Rest



Image 5: Hummingbird In Flight



Image 6: Male Ruby Throat Hummingbird

later in my excursion. Normally I hate taking and showing such photos since I want my photos to be more natural. You know, with the hummingbird in among the plants, preferably hovering in front or above colorful, tubular flowers. However, this upstart really caught my eye and was the first male ruby throat that I have seen since very early summer.

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MINI-SAFARI (Continued from page 8)

Of course we have a lot of birds around the house – both because we have feeders and scores of flowering plants. The image in Image 7 is of a female lesser goldfinch. (I hope that I have the ID right.) The red in the back ground is of our front door. However, because of the picture crop you cannot tell that it is a door. I think that the red makes a good contrasting background. Regardless, I bet that the male gold finches find this female bewitching and exquisitely beautiful. I know that I do.

Before considering the next image, I want to make evident one of my pet peeves with birders. They often include in a name the term, “lesser.” I know that “lesser” refers to size. However, I find the lesser goldfinch to much grander than the American goldfinch. Thus I think the name “lesser goldfinch” is somewhat scurrilous. Moreover, what good is relative size in identification unless one of each of the bird species in question (1 lesser and 1 grander) happen to be sitting next to each other?

Other creatures were about on this day including numerous pipe vine swallowtail butterflies (Image 8). Most, although probably only days out their cocoons, were already worn and faded. However, the one shown in Image 8, was an exception. I guess that he must have very recently completed his metamorphosis. Even better, he decided to land on one of my Pride of Barbados flowers.



Image 9: Gulf Fritillary Butterfly
On A Salvia Blossom

Images 9 and 10 show two more butterflies that were about this morning. In Image 9 you see a Gulf Fritillary Butterfly feeding from one of my pink salvia flowers. In Image 10 a Queen Butterfly is happily taking nectar from a flower on a Greg Mist plant. Note the truly unique orange eyes on the Fritillary. Do you think that the Queen Butterfly in Image 10 is a male or a female? (It is a devastatingly handsome male.)

From spring to autumn I have scores of butterflies in my yard. I truly love them, although I keep thinking that each one was once a caterpillar.



Image 7: Female Lesser Goldfinch



Image 8: Pipe Vine Swallow Tail Butterfly
on A Pride of Barbados Flower



Image 10: Queen Butterfly On A Greg Mist Flower

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MINI-SAFARI (Continued from page 9)

My last image from this mini-safari is not so much a thing of beauty. However, she is wondrous. This little red ear slider turtle was walking up along the side of the house (taking its time). With the exception of the *Datura* flower, it was the easiest thing all morning to take a picture of. There was no need to worry about using a fast shutter speed.

You may wonder why I call this turtle “wondrous.” She certainly was not beautiful or exotic. However, she is certainly a survivor and goes about life at a pace that I certainly envy and admire.

I am not sure what she was doing so far from the water (several hundred feet and up a steep hill). I assumed that she was going to lay eggs, but I thought that occurred in the spring?



Image 11: Red Ear Slider Turtle Wondering What I Am Looking At

I don't want you to get the wrong idea. I did not take these images just strolling down and around our driveway in minutes. I went back and forth many multiple times over the course of about an hour and half taking many shots. Indeed, it may have been longer as I tend to forget time when I am photographing. Be assured that many scores of images that I took were worthless. However, I consider the time very well spent – and extremely enjoyable. Now that the rains are about to let up I will again take my normally longer excursions around the property and the area. However, I will also remember to search the immediate area around the house.

GALLERY



This little grey fox was watching me in the woods.
Photo by Jerry Stacy