



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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MESSAGE FROM MELISSA

by Melissa Duckworth

FALL

Fall is a term that originated in the 17th century referring to "fall of the leaf". The British call this season Autumn and the Canadians get to choose either. Either way, we can begin to enjoy the spectacular colors of the season with the sunlight casting a slightly different hue over the land.

Although we as Texans do not have all of the brilliant reds, oranges and yellows displayed often at once, there are some breathtaking scenes to behold if you look around in the Hill Country.

The Flame sumacs are turning red and orange and the yellow sunflowers and goldeneye dazzle us with their beauty. The small native pecan nuts are falling, landing upon crunchier leaves to provide food for deer and other wildlife.

I hope you find time to enjoy this change of seasons. Relish the cooler mornings and pause before the rush of the Holiday season is upon us. Marvel at how a landscape changes because of changing temperatures; causing the chlorophyll to



break down in the leaves producing reds, yellows and oranges. Soon enough the landscape will be more stark with a sharp poignancy making us long for blues and pinks popping from the soil as we enjoy the same blues and pinks of the sunsets we now see. Seasons change. Enjoy the view.

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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.

NOVEMBER PROGRAM by Cathy Hill

Our speaker for the November 2 HLMN meeting is Melinda Herbert, DVM, PhD. She is the Region 7 Zoonosis Control Veterinarian with the Texas Department of State Health Services. Her topic will be "Rabies in Nature."

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
 Jan Belz and husband
 Linda Brown and husband
 Claire Harrah and husband

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

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.

DAVIS MOUNTAINS FIELD TRIP

by Linda O'Nan Photos by Jerry Stacy



HLMN chapter members weathered a rainy car trip out to the Davis Mountains, but were rewarded with clearing skies at the end of the day! DMSP interpreter welcomed us with an informative overview of this unique now greened-up Chihuahua Desert region. Trip attendees enjoyed a pot luck dinner before settling into their accommodations at the Indian Lodge, park campground, and the Limpia Hotel. Birding and interpretive hikes got off to a good start the following morning, with aoudad, mule deer & acorn woodpeckers spotted. A fab tour of the McDonald Observatory concluded the day with a very "happy" McDonald meal and big clear skies for the star party. After a hearty communal breakfast, volunteers headed to Balmorhea SP, where we pruned, weedeated, swept, lopped, picked up trash (on foot & leaky boats), weeded, window washed, and other various unsung chores. What a group! Off then for an afternoon tour at Ft. Davis Historical Park with a super behind the scenes look at life of a frontier soldier. The day wound down with cocktails at the Paisano Hotel in Marfa. Up and out the final day for hikes and botanical garden tour at Chihuahua Desert Research Station. A tarantula sighting and a phainopepla were highlights. Many thanks to the trip committee for showing us such a good time--Morgan, Pat, Karen L., Melissa, Susan, Karen P. Besides our volunteer work, our gratitude in the way of generous donations were made to DMSP, BSP, McDonald Obs., Ft. Davis Historical Park, & CDRI. George, MIA, did join the group in form of a cardboard cutout, staying notably quiet. We also missed our friends who had an early departure, and regrettably those who were not able to join us. Happy trails y'all.



CLEANING THE CIENEGA

by Joan Mukherjee



Our HLMN group found the Davis Mountains burgeoning with lush vegetation and stunning rocky landscapes on our recent visit. But that wasn't all. We also visited nearby Balmorhea Springs, a watery oasis in the Chihuahua Desert. We were there to help make the pool and its surroundings sparkle. Sherry Bixler, Kay Zagst and myself volunteered to clean the cienega using a kayak. The cienega is a pond in the wetland with spring water flowing through it, see photo above. And so our adventure began.

Eric led us off to get the kayak---kayak? Where was the kayak? Well, we did see a beat up johnboat out in the weeds. You know, one of those square ended tubs? Okay, we will try it. So we hauled it to the cienega and put it in the water. Then Eric noticed that it did not have a plug so off he went and returned with one he stole from the game warden's boat. All was good. "Get in Joan." I did and water poured in from a hole in the center of the boat, the livebox. No more plugs but Eric fashioned a plug out of a marker

and duct tape. Now we are ready, or are we? Where are the paddles? No paddles. But that didn't stop us! We were determined to get on with it. We found a broken retrieval pole, a 2x4 board, a piece of vinyl pipe, a grabber that didn't close and Kay's working grabber and we were off.

Fortunately for us we retrieved an intact plastic cup early, that we could use for bailing. Sherry poled with the retrieval pole, I steered some by pushing the prow off from shore or by grabbing cattails to bring us closer, and bailed and bailed. Kay assisted by poling with the 2x4 when we got stuck and grabbing trash. We all picked trash and more trash, mostly plastic. We were quite a sight but we collected a boat full of trash, saw two young yellow-crowned night herons close up and found a coot nest with 4 eggs on a little island. And had a lot of good laughs devising ways to use our equipment to get the job done. So what if we got wet and muddy! We did it and we had fun!

FALL MIGRATION IN TEXAS

by Becky Breazeale

Jim Stevenson is a birding aficionado who has written several books, has an official newsletter and organizes and leads birding field trips. In his latest newsletter, *Gulls and Herons*, he discussed fall migration. I found it very interesting that living in Texas, we get three different groups of migrants.

He describes the first group as “circum-Gulf Travelers”. These birds hug the Gulf coastline rather than crossing the Gulf when migrating. “By late summer, you’ll see streams of swallows flying southwest from Bolivar Peninsula to Galveston, across Follett’s Island and onward down the Brazoria County Coastline toward Mexico”. Other birds following the swallows are hummingbirds, buntings, some warblers, gnatcatchers, swifts, nighthawks, and martins. Stevenson calls this the safe route. This type of migration was first described by his father, Henry Stevenson in 1953.



circum-Gulf Route



Swamp swallow

The second group to migrate will begin to move as the nights start to get cooler. This group is called “trans-Gulf” migration. Around this time, tons of songbirds and others come to Texas from the North. They refresh themselves by eating, drinking and sleeping a bit waiting for a cold front to help push them straight south. Among these birds are flycatchers, wrens, tanagers, orioles, grosbeaks, and kingfishers. Imagine flying 700 miles without stopping for food, water, or rest – wheew. Leaving at dusk, heading straight south, they quite often use the stars to help navigate.



Trans-Gulf route



Scissor-tailed Flycatcher

The third group, our winter residents, arrive around mid to late October. The non wintering birds have pretty much all gone. These winter residents stay until March and leave before the returning circum-Gulf and trans-Gulf migrants return in April. Some winter residents are Cedar Waxwing, Sandhill Crane, American goldfinch, and Lark bunting. You can learn more about circum-Gulf and trans-Gulf migration, at the Texas Parks and Wildlife website:

<http://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/birding/migration>

http://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/birding/migration/circumgulf_migrants/

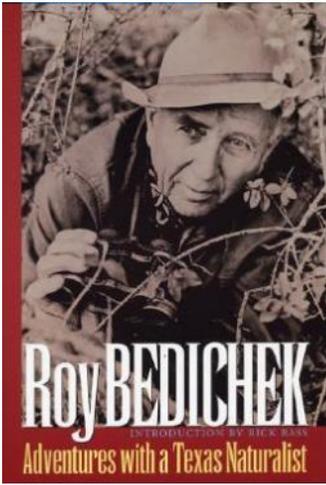
http://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/birding/migration/transgulf_migrants/



Cedar waxwing

IN PRAISE OF NATURALISTS

by Betsy Bouchard



For the past ten years I have been shuttling back and forth between Illinois and our family ranch out on Highway 71. I came for the winter and spring, of course, when the Evanston sidewalks are salty canyons in the snow and the alleys are slick with ice. Walking in winter with my dogs, Lola and Lucky, was complicated by the need to avoid the salt that burned their feet or to stay upright (me) in the rutted, slippery alleys. City friends who watched my migration southward would ask me how in the world I would keep entertained out in the country (i.e. nowhere), and the simplest answer was, “I’m a Master Naturalist.”

That explanation satisfied them, everyone having some notion of what a naturalist is and does. Through my own involvement with HLMN and reading classics like Leopold’s *Sand County Almanac* and our newsletter, I was pretty sure I knew and...was one. Then I had a reason to pull out of my bookshelf another classic, Roy Bedichek’s *Adventures with a Texas Naturalist*. The book had languished there for some time, and because I had volunteered to lead a book discussion on it, I sat down with it again and started with the chapter, “The Mockingbird: Character and Disposition.” Most of us can identify a mockingbird, in spite of the truth that “it has no color, no peculiarity of form, is of conventional size for the passerine order to which he belongs, never appears in great numbers, can’t be eaten, and is not a pest unless there is ripe fruit about the place.” In the fall in winter his famous song is silent, or he is “simply murmuring a memory of some springtime ecstasy—shadow-singing, it might be called.”

The writing is exquisite—it hooked me— but the very commonness of the bird leads Bedichek to explore beyond the famous song, even beyond behavior (a scientific term) to its “character,” a term we apply to the indelible parts of an individual human, a personality. The mocker is “pugnacious,” he is

“indomitable,” he has a “pioneer spirit,” he is “frugal” and “gets out of temper” with other birds. For each of the characteristics he has a vivid description, either from his own observation or from acquaintances. It is the passion and poetry of his observation that makes him most appealing to me and different from the dry detailers of useful, but uninspiring, handbooks.

Take, for instance, the closure of his two chapters on the golden eagle, observed on a camping trip to the Davis Mountains:

Some birds sing; others soar...Their art is pictorial rather than musical. If art is essentially play, and a manifestation for exuberance of life over and above the amount required, soaring is as much an art as singing. It, too, is a working-off of excess energy, inspired by the sheer joy of living. Thus the eagle, his brood fed and safe from attack, his own hunger appeased, an adequate food surplus cached...thus conditioned, he elects to soar for soaring’s sake, pleased to the great hollows in his bones with the very inutility of action,

As I read Bedichek’s adventures with birds, his love/hate relationship with fences, his scholarly research of folk names for plants, his patient observations of the natural world, I follow the mind and activity of a naturalist. I wonder, from the comfort of my porch, if I am really a naturalist, small n. But... he makes me want to get intimate with the life outdoors, personal with that phoebe who is often just outside the screen door, and most of all, joyous to be part of it all.

If you are inspired to read Bedichek and share your thoughts, please join us in the Birding and Wildflower Society book discussion group.