

# The Steward

Spring 2024 Highland Lakes Master Naturalists Volume 15 Issue 1



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

[becky\\_breazeale@yahoo.com](mailto:becky_breazeale@yahoo.com)

Photos should have captions and appropriate credits. We will announce the deadline for submissions two weeks prior to the deadline. Or contact Becky and Martelle.

**Thank y’all for ALL!!**

## Message from our President

By Jill Goff

### Exploring Equals Adventure ...No Matter What

“Like winds and sunsets, wild things were taken for granted until progress began to do away with them” (Forward, A Sand County Almanac, Aldo Leopold). As Master Naturalists we are more aware than most of the changes occurring to the landscape around us as “progress” rears its head. Growing up in Brazoria County, my childhood home was on the banks of Oyster Creek in Lake Jackson. Hours were spent trying to hook an alligator gar or floating down the creek in a makeshift boat, bringing continuous hours of exploratory fun and excitement. Loud noises floating up to my house and occasional screams of excitement often brought my mom outside only to learn we found a new critter’s hole or saw a water moccasin making its slithery way across the creek.

“Across the creek” was another world just waiting for young explorers with the guts and grit to chop their way through poison ivy, thick underbrush, and the uncertainty of the “large and unusual “animals we might encounter. “Across the Creek” were parts unknown. No GPS maps or drones to reconnaissance the woods, just the tall tales of an older brother who convinced me and others to go. Taking my dad’s machete which was almost as long as I was tall, my creek explorers and I bravely crossed the creek and chopped our way up the thickly wooded hillside, taking the better part of a day. The large animals we found were cows calmly grazing and pastures on the horizon as far as we could see. But it was an adventure I never forgot, and I lament the passing of that thickly wooded hillside, the loss of habitat for the small critters and birds, as well as the wild berry bushes, grapevines, and other native flora.

Today the hillside is the backyard of someone’s home and part of a development with houses up and down the creek. The creek does not flow as

it once did, and there are no kids exploring, as the clearing along the creek has removed the natural beauty and thus, the beckoning call to explore.

Today as master naturalists we are explorers in our current world of Blanco, Llano, Burnet, and Lampasas counties. Our explorations include projects and partners understanding what they need and how best to meet those needs, all the while keeping our compasses set to “true north” protecting the environment. Discovering the Mission Statement became a central focus of mine as president of the chapter. Through a Board retreat in January, I created committees to explore specific areas of our Mission Statement. Inherent in this decision was wondering how to lead this incredible group of explorers into the wild environment of words ultimately impacting our deeds?

I quickly learned these experienced explorers knew how to find their way, whether it was through hours of service in the natural world or dissecting the world of words found in the Mission Statement. Once the paths were marked with the mission topics, including well-informed volunteers, educating the public, and service to the beneficial management of natural resources and areas, our HLMN explorers charged ahead. Giving their time, energy, and expertise they are dismantling the Mission Statement to clearly review its parts to determine where the chapter needs to change or readjust our focus. Once that process is complete the mission will be put back together, communicating needed adjustments if necessary. Stay tuned. I am learning that leading the chapter as president is not a one-person task, but one that requires the support of all chapter members. It is fun to picture every member as an explorer of sorts. It creates excitement to view our tasks ahead as an exploratory challenge—never knowing exactly how projects or ideas will develop. I still remember that fateful climb “across the creek” and wonder how that young girl would go about a similar exploration today. She probably would carry a can of Off for starters.



Board of Directors - 2024

# Jerry Stacy Receives 10,000 Volunteer Hours Service Award

By Becky Breazeale

Jerry Stacy's dedication to volunteer service is truly remarkable. His journey began in 2006 when he joined the Highland Lakes Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist Program. By 2014, he had already accumulated 4,000 volunteer service hours, a feat achieved by only four other members. His commitment didn't stop there. In 2016, he reached the 5,000-hour mark.

As of March 2024, Jerry has amassed an impressive **10,057 volunteer service hours** and **683 advanced training hours**. This achievement earned him an emerald-studded dragonfly pin, making him the first member of the Highland Lakes Chapter to reach the 10,000-hour volunteer milestone.

Jerry's path to this milestone was paved with diversity. He led interpretive hikes at Inks Dam National Fish Hatchery, emphasizing edible plants. He also contributed to outreach education and maintained trails and pollinator gardens at the hatchery. Jerry played a crucial role in building the Wildlife Viewing Stations at Inks Lake State Park and Granite Shoals, and his expertise has been sought by other organizations for similar projects.

Jerry's volunteer efforts extend to several other locations, including Balcones Canyonlands Wildlife Refuge, Blanco State Park, and Upper Highland Lakes Nature Center. His activities range from Wood Duck Box monitoring and LCRA water quality monitoring to conducting surveys of Quillwort, Quail, and Golden-cheeked Warblers. He also works with the Land Management Assistance Program team, providing landowners with assessments of their property's plant life and land management goals. Furthermore, Jerry leads and trains for Fishing Events and the Great Outdoor Project and Hatchery Outdoor Project for local school children.

If you find yourself at one of these events or parks, you'll likely see Jerry, hard at work. And who knows? He might just be working towards his next milestone: 15,000 volunteer service hours.





Photo by Sue Kersey



Jerry receiving the quilt Sue Kersey made for him



## Recertification & Volunteer Service Hours Awardees



**1,000 TMN Hours** - Louise Suey

**500 TMN Hours** - Chris Landherr, Mary Lott, Bill McCartney, and Mike Riley

**250 TMN Hours** - George Barr, Christine McCartney, George Vavrek

Initial Certification:

Barbara Adams (20,22), Keith Atwood (22), Peggy Schatz, (23) Rick Schatz (23)

2024 Recertification

Suzanne Adkinson, Kaye Barr, George Brugnoli, Jill Goff, Ingrid Hoffmeister, Mary Holt, Al Lillis, Mary Lott, Linda O'Nan, Louise Suhey, Cris Wolff-Northup, Fred Zagst, Kaye Zagst

2023 Recertification

Catherine Houston, Suze Jernigan, Susan Morgan, Susan Neans, Lisa Stripay

## Introducing the HLMN Class of 2024

By Dee Hardiman

The HLMN Class of 2024 is twenty-four members strong and just past halfway through our initial training. Many of us have been able to engage in volunteer work as well. As of the last week of March our class had logged over 110 hours of service.

The Class of 2024 comes from a variety of backgrounds and includes several that made their living in wildlife management or environmental adjacent areas. We are teachers, engineers, and medical professionals. Some of us are still working full-time and trying to balance the class and volunteer commitment with a full-time job. Most of us have been hunting, fishing, hiking, birding, and boating for much of our lives. Many of us were encouraged to pursue the training because we have friends who are master naturalists or encountered a master naturalist while visiting a local park or event.

When asked about our favorite speaker, every speaker was mentioned. I think that speaks to the hard work of our class coordinators Bill and Christine McCartney. Carlos Dengo who spoke to us about geology was singled out most often. For someone who has a hard time wrapping my head around geology and why I should study geology, I wholeheartedly agree.

We all have been told by the more senior master naturalists that we will find “our place” in the Highland Lakes region. Most of us are still on that journey. One classmate seems to have found her place for now in Blanco State Park and is filling bird feeders there on a weekly basis. Several other classmates mentioned being drawn to Candlelight Ranch because of their mission to customize their programs to so very many different needs.

When asked about the challenges we have found going through the class, three major themes emerged. The first is trying to absorb, maintain, and integrate the material that we have been given. The second is balancing the requirements of the HLMN class and volunteer work with lives that are already full of family, work, and civic commitments. The third, of course, is the large volumes of emails that we suddenly began receiving.

We are all grateful for the passion, knowledge, kindness, enthusiasm, and generosity of our speakers and the master naturalists we have met while in class and while volunteering. Thank you for welcoming us into your fascinating and wonderful world.

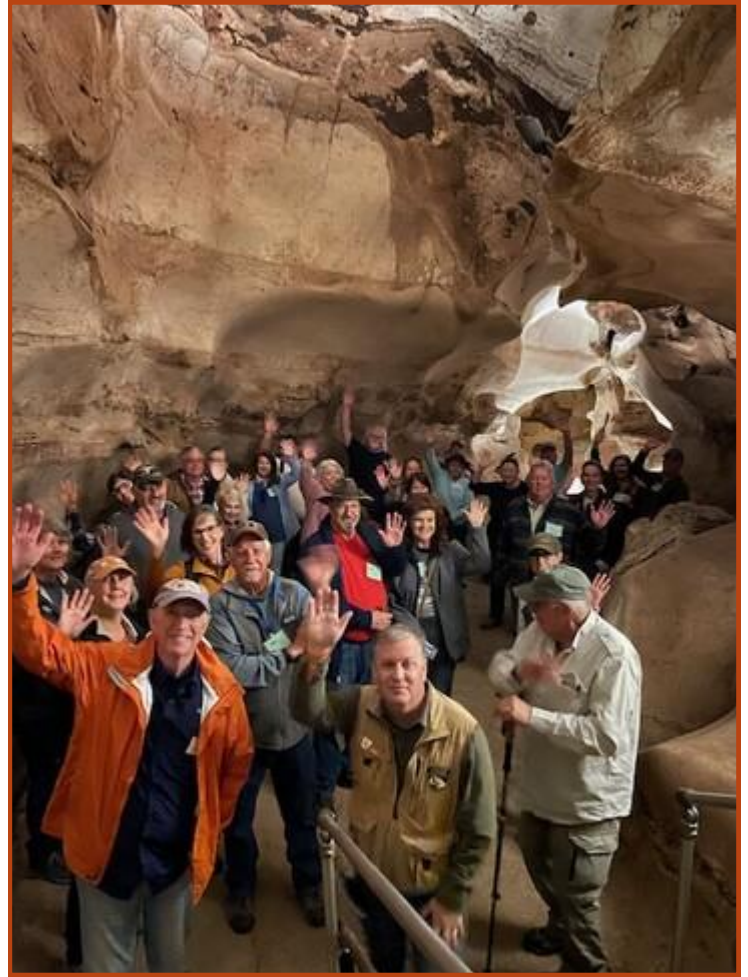


Photo by Al Lillis

For more photos go to [Highland Lakes Chapter website](#)



Gary titled this one Jerry the Ringtail Cat. Turn the page for more...

## *Gary Hampton Picking Up Where He Left Off...*

“I was so inspired by the documentary at the Chapter Meeting that I came away really wanting to paint that beautiful creature. I was especially drawn to the eyes.” Gary Hampton





# Candle Plant, Yerba, or Wax Plant

By Louise Suhey

In 1941, John Whitaker wrote in Nature Magazine that 'Candelilla has more uses than any other product originating from an uncultivated plant on this continent.' I had no idea that this unassuming succulent had such a long and interesting history. After doing a very deep dive into this plant, I was hooked. There is a fabulous web site full of fantastic information and history on 'Little Candle' at [www.texasbeyondhistory.net/wax](http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/wax) camps.



Photos by Louise Suhey

In 1829 the botanist J.G. Zuccarini first mentioned this plant that was sold as a medicinal tea. (*Euphorbia antisyphilitica*) received its species name due to the white sap used historically in Mexico to treat sexually-transmitted diseases. Being in the genus *Euphorbia*, the latex sap can cause discomfort if touched. We here in Texas are familiar with many *Euphorbias* used in pots and cacti/succulent gardens:

- E. tirucalli-'Pencil Cactus' or 'Milk Brush'
- E. rigida-'Gopher Plant'
- E. pulcherrima-'Poinsettia'
- E. milii-'Crown of Thorns'
- E. marginata-'Snow-On-The-Mountain'
- E. lomelii-'Slipper Plant'

The world wide uses of this high quality wax, extracted by boiling, is astounding. In early days the wax was used for soap, religious statues, artificial flowers, candles, and cloth in Spanish Missions. In the early 1900's it's uses became more commercial; water proofing compounds, paint varnish, floor varnish, lipsticks and balms, a food additive, car wax, ointments, binders for carbon paper, inks, crayons, hair conditioner, and coating thread. During World War 1 in the early 1920's there was a 'Great Wax Rush' to waterproof tents and ammunition. Also used by General Pershing in 1916 while pursuing Pancho Villa. In the 1970's the Candelilla Wax King, J.E. Caster, developed Wrigley's Gum. David Adam's from Marathon, TX was harvesting 60,000lbs. a month to make Beechnut Gum.

The Candle Plant is rhizomatous and can spread into 6' wide clumps in the desert. When it gets that large, the center will die out, so it takes on a donut shape. Rabbits tend to make their nests in the donut hole. It is very grassy looking and multi stemmed with a grey/green color. As with all succulents, the wax gets thicker in times of drought to protect the plant from drying out. When the rains finally come, it plumps up, and creamy white flowers appear with red centers. The tiny leaves appear only on new growth and soon fall off. It is dioecious meaning having two distinct sexes, and it has many male flowers surrounding one single female. It should be divided every 3-5 years and can also spread with seeds. It is mostly found growing freely in the Trans-Pecos area of Texas, Mexico, New Mexico and along the Rio Grande River. Candelilla is very heat resistant and the hardest wax available. It rarely dies in the desert and will last a long time after being dug up, like most succulents. It usually takes 2-5 years to produce significant wax to harvest.

Itinerant workers have found it is best to pull it up by hand or with pitch forks, not using a large backhoe. Native stands produce the most wax, not wholesale growers. Much of it was harvested illegally and hauled away on donkeys or mules. Many thousands of pounds were taken out of Big Bend National Park which is now illegal. There is even a small town called Candelaria in West Texas near Alpine and Lajitas. The whole process of producing the wax is very labor intense and an involved process. The plant is dug up by hand and laid in large piles to await processing. Large vats are dug into the ground with room for a fire to be lit underneath. The plant stems are loaded into the vat and immersed in sulphuric acid. There is a heavy grate laid on top to keep the stems from rising up out of the vat. As it heats up to a boil, the wax foam floats to the top where it is skimmed off by an espumador. The leftover plant stems are then laid out to dry in the sun and used as fodder to heat the next patch. The foam dries into yellow cerote, much like heavy cream. Then it is loaded into barrels with another long process of refining. It is boiled again to let the dirty sediment float to the bottom and the remaining wax is said to smell like beeswax.

When we built our current house five years ago, a waste dumpster was placed on the far side of our lot. Once removed, we were left with TX red dirt, sand, small chips of limestone, and decomposed granite. What would grow well in that spot I wondered? A cactus and succulent garden! It's 20'-26' and filled with Agaves, Cacti, Aloes, Bear Grass, Hechtias, Dyckias, Pride of Barbados, a Golden Barrel Cactus, and of course, Candelillia.

Photos by Louise Suhey



It is best to place it towards the front of the bed since it never gets much over 26" tall. It is cold tolerant to about 25 degrees and then I cover it with towels. It is listed for Zones 8-11 and has no real pests. It likes alkaline, rocky soils and can survive with reflected sunlight. Mine happens to be under a large Mesquite Tree. Great for a hell strip\* and needs little water once established. And it is visited by butterflies when in bloom. One of it's best qualities is that the deer don't like it! I recently saw on Etsy that a one gallon can be purchased for \$29.99. The Nectar Bar in San Antonio sells it for \$45 in a 3 gallon container. The Natural Gardener also has it for sale with a great selection of succulents and cacti. Try it out- makes a wonderful addition to any desert garden. For an added treat, my Corn and Opium Poppies love to grow amongst the rocks in my cactus garden and make a colorful spring addition to all the greenery.

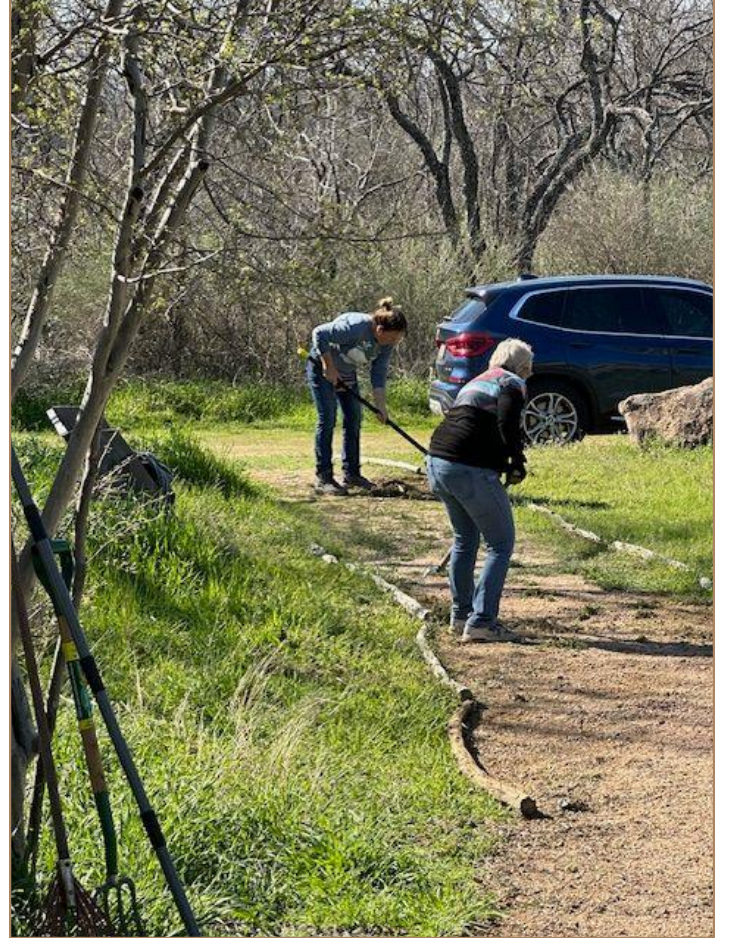
\*Editor's note: For people who have sidewalks, it is that strip of dirt between the sidewalk and the street. Very hard to grow things there. Gets very little water and high traffic. In my case, I have no sidewalks but have large river rocks between my flower bed and the street. Always a problem area for gardeners.

## Inks Lake State Park

**Clean Sweep** Where did all this trash come from? That is the question that Volunteers were asking recently as they cleaned up Inks Lake State Park during Clean Sweep. This event is held in early spring and is an annual project for the Highland Lakes Master Naturalist Chapter (HLMN) and Friends of Inks Lake State Park (FOIL). This opportunity helps to prepare the park for the arrival of Spring Breakers and Summertime Campers and has taken place since 2004.

Karen Stewart reported, “ We had a cold start on Wednesday, but Friday was glorious and we had a great crew helping us make some headway on the jobs needed at Inks Lake State Park. Members spent two days maintaining park trails, picking up trash around the lake, and weeding the Wildlife Viewing Station (WVS). One windy cold day and one gorgeous day ! **Thanks everyone!**”

Photos by Karen Stewart

















“ . . . my bird painting is a European Merlin. I found a copy of the lithograph in the archive of European birds. While similar to kestrel, it has different beak and shorter tail. Learn something new every day.” Gary Hampton

# Friends of Inks Lake State Park Fundraiser -

By Lori Greco  
Photos by Lori Greco

We truly all had a wonderful time painting with Marla Ripperda on 24 March. She donated her precious time and talent to FOIL during the first fundraiser of the year at Inks Lake State Park. Marla is a well-known artist in Texas and abroad. She is well versed in central Texas landscapes and in sculptural art.

Nineteen people were able to follow her through steps in painting our Texas Bluebonnets and everyone's painting was unique. Light refreshments were served as well as a beautiful and quiet place reserved against a cove just for them.

Marla was so gracious in donating everything needed. (She is also a FOIL member)

We'll do this again as we are raising money specifically to purchase adaptive equipment for the Park and in this event, we raised over \$650.

We couldn't have done it without several Master Naturalist volunteers like Christine McCartney, Karen Stewart, Jamie Langham and Lori. Marla donated one of her prints of Bluebonnets for the entrance of our new HQs building.

We have a great friends group at the Park and are proud of our leadership recently winning: Outstanding volunteer (Karen Stewart), Superintendent (Nate Noury) and Friends Group of the Year for Texas State Parks, Region III.

Our next hurdle and fundraiser will be held on 27 April 10-3 during our 2nd Annual "Fun for All" Day, which highlights and enables campers with various physical challenges to utilize our adaptive equipment.

Hugs, Lori





# Inks Dam National Fish Hatchery

## Historical Signs

By Diane Mitchell  
Photos by Jerry Stacy

Jerry Stacy researched the history of Inks Dam National Fish Hatchery several years ago and discovered that it had originally been the property of the LCRA, deeded to the government in 1938 for a National Youth Administration Camp, returned to the LCRA in 1941 when the camp was disbanded (all the boys went off to war), became a recreational facility for LCRA employees (totally remodeled by volunteer labor), then deeded to the government as solely a fish hatchery. The dates for the above are available if you need them.

The Friends of Inks Dam National Fish Hatchery (FOIDH) have worked with Project Director Jeff Conway to make the property open and accessible to the public, per the U.S. Fish and Wildlife mission statement. Displaying the history of the property became a priority so Phillip (Mitchell) and I pursued funding for signage through grants from local entities. The Highland Lakes Service League awarded us a generous grant in 2023 so we were able to have Signs2Go create 4 historic displays, including vintage photos Jerry had found in his research as well as some from the Hatchery's collection. Jerry and we worked together on the text and Jerry installed the signs.

The three signs are as follows:

The **Flag Pole** sign includes 2 photos, one of the dedication of the flagpole and one of the entrance gate, along with history of the camp and its second incarnation as an LCRA recreational facility.



The **Meadow Trail** sign is a map of the trail indicating the location of various ruins from both the NYA and the LCRA facilities, something we were particularly interested in because it's hard not to wonder about the relics as you hike the area.



The **Overlook** sign is another vintage photo of what the area looked like in about 1939. The Hatchery ponds have been dug and the NYA buildings are visible. Jerry has numbered and labeled the latter. (See below)



The **Holding House** (not pictured) sign is in front of the Holding House and explains what goes on in that facility during the year. The two vintage photos are of circa 1950 fish harvest and transport and indicate the evolving "business" of the Hatchery

In the course of all this process (which actually lasted more than 4 years!) Phillip was able to locate an article in the Burnet Bulletin from November 1939 which reported on the installation and dedication of the flagpole that was at that time located in front of the NYA Administration Building. It is currently in front of the Pollinator Garden. Jerry's photo of that day's event LOOKS to include Lyndon Johnson who was the first State Director of the Texas NYA. Phillip and I went to great lengths to verify his presence, ultimately deciding he was NOT in the photo. By 1939 he had moved on to other public office aspirations! But the research at the Burnet Bulletin led us to a weekly column from a youth at the camp. We have now downloaded and transcribed the column from its inception Feb. 2, 1939, through the end of that year. We assume it will continue until the disbanding of the camp, but haven't yet made it through (possibly) 104 more issues of the Bulletin! The information from the camp reporter is fascinating, and we hope to ultimately make the information widely available. From both Jerry's and Phillip's and my research, we learned that there is very little information on the NYA in general, and the Inks Dam Camp in specific.



Photos by Linda O'Nan



Many thanks to Friend's members Jerry & Bill for installing a rustic cedar arbor in the Pollinator garden. We'll have it finished off & growing vines this spring!

Photos by Linda O'Nan



Great crew turned out this morning to prune & mulch around the Hatchery Ed Bldg—makes overwhelming tasks doable with Friends like this! (Sherry weeding & didn't stop for pic, Kaye got a headstart Sunday) some were staying to help George paint archery stands later. Many thanks to our volunteers—voted best in county!!

Photo by Linda O'Nan





Photos by Linda O’Nan

Great day to feed the catfish! The water was warming up, and the catfish put on a show for homeschool group touring IDNFH this afternoon. Around 15 kids and 9 adults enjoyed a fish production talk and master casting, in addition to the ever-popular feeding time! Many thanks to Hatchery staff member, Phyllis, for accommodating these youngsters—always impressive to young and old. FOIDFH members, Phillip, Diane, Bill, Jerry, Pam, Gary, DeeJay, Krista, Eric, Mary, Ingrid all outdid themselves making sure the group enjoyed themselves. We definitely have the A-team volunteers at IDNFH! Thanks go to project leader Jeff Conway for keeping an eye on all and making sure IDNFH is “the” place.

## Tours



7 students and 4 adults from an Austin home school enjoyed a fun and educational visit to IDNFH today, March 20. 9 FOIDFH volunteers showed them how to use binoculars at the birdblind—the hummingbirds put on a good show! Master casting and a fish production demonstration were also activities presented by our members. An abundance of wildflowers right now made Inks Dam National Fish Hatchery a standout! Many thanks to staff and volunteers for a special day for these youngsters.

## Cleaning a Pond

By James Reimer  
Photos by James Reimer

Jeff Conway, Project Leader at IDNFH and crew transferring fish from one pond to another in order to repair damage to a pond. The ponds were drained to get the fish into a manageable low spot and then scooped them up with nets, put them in the bucket and winched them up into the transfer trailer to take to another pond.







Photos by James Reimer



## Attracting Hummingbirds: Plan B

By Patty Harrell

Like many people, I enjoy watching hummingbirds. The industrious part of me says “Have the camera at the ready so you can capture a top-notch image.” However, the lazy side of me says “Just chill out.” Similarly, that industrious streak tells me to put out feeders and clean them regularly. Then again, my inclination towards laziness says just plant some lovely natives to attract them to my personal viewing station. Are you beginning to see a pattern here?

In my case, lazy trumps industrious with little or no encouragement. Thus, the development of my Plan B for attracting hummingbirds. Instead of cutting down the 5-foot flower stalks on my twisted leaf yuccas at the end of the season, I leave them in place for at least a year or two. Based upon my experience, leaving the stalks in place does not inhibit the return of flower stalks the next year. This effortless approach accomplishes two objectives. It makes the stalks much easier to remove when the time comes but more importantly it provides a wonderful perch for hummingbirds. The tiny stems from the flowers/seed pods are right-sized for tiny hummingbird feet. Since there is very little else left on these stalks to get in their way, these little birds can zip in and out very quickly and I get a totally unobstructed view of these gorgeous guys/gals.

I urge everyone to give my Plan B a try. The worst that can happen is that you end up cutting down the dead flower stalks a little later than you used to do so.



## Two Peas in a Pod

By Meghan James

In honor of Mother's Day coming up, I thought I would take the opportunity to share a very special experience that I have within our chapter. This is that both my mom and I are both active Texas Master Naturalists!

My mom has always been one of the coolest people I know. Growing up she was always up for taking me and my three younger sisters on an adventure. We homeschooled and were able to go on "field trips" all the time. She also is an animal lover and never really bat an eye with all the cool "pets" we would find and bring inside. She received the Gold Award when she was in the Girl Scouts growing up and also passed along her love for the outdoors and nature. I would say that's where my love for the outdoors and nature came from! Both of us are raging extroverts and love being outside and talking with people of all backgrounds and sharing our love and knowledge of our beautiful state.

She completed the training to be a Texas Master Naturalist in 2019 and how jealous I was that I wasn't able to do it with her! It sounded so fascinating and I looked forward to hearing her talk about the classes each week! We started volunteering together at Inks Lake State Park in early 2020 as a way to be outside and involved during the pandemic. Now we often volunteer doing programs together such as the guided hikes, skins and skulls or other activities. We enjoy exploring all the state parks (may or may not be a friendly competition about who sees all first), and wild places together. We are also working on photographing and cataloging/documenting all of the various plants and wild-life on our property.



By writing this I wanted to say thank you to my mom for being the best adventure buddy and role model. Thank you for having the biggest sense of wanderlust and awe, loving animals, natural resources and people, and for passing along the info for this fun group of people.

## Come Visit a Hidden Gem in Lampasas!

By Meghan James  
Photos by Meghan James

As we incorporate Lampasas County into our chapter, I want to share information about the “hidden gem” right in the middle of the city! As a photographer, I go there almost weekly (sometimes multiple times when the weather is nice)! It surprises me how many people in Lampasas don’t even know we have it!



“Named for the natural spring on the property, Cooper Spring Nature Park is a series of trails on approximately 23-acres dedicated to the preservation and encouragement of wildlife. Volunteers have cleared invasive plants and sowed native varieties to create a space of welcoming to birds and butterflies as well as humans. Free of charge, this park is a labor of love that offers a beautiful slice of unspoiled nature in downtown Lampasas. Located on Hackberry Street between Avenue A and 2nd Street.” (City of Lampasas Website)



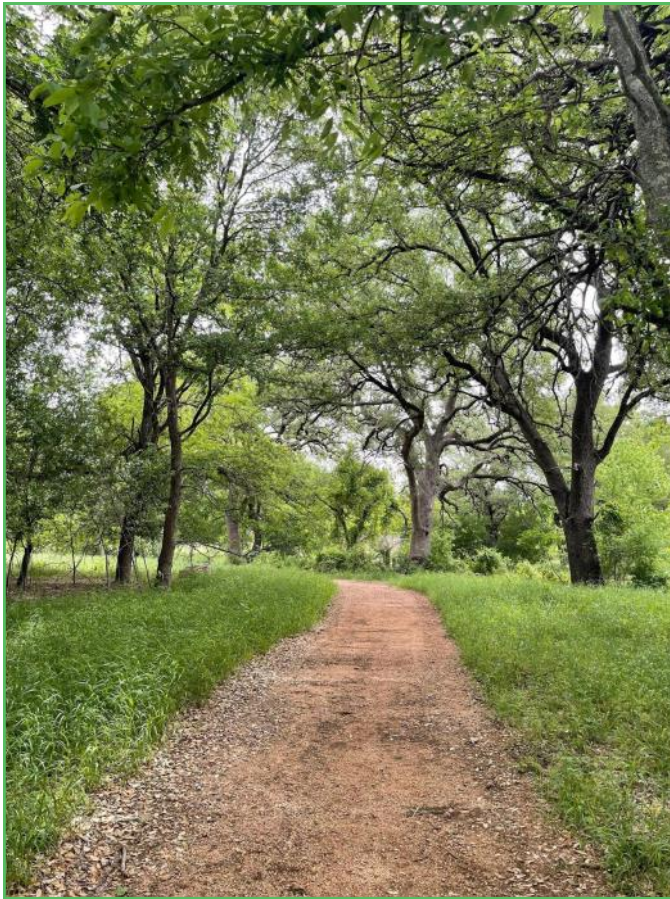
The volunteers and board members have worked very hard to make this park accessible and inclusive for all to enjoy (most of the trails are ADA accessible)! The front gardens are full of all native plants/flowers and maintained regularly. A new rainwater collection tank was just installed at the end of February as well.



Do you like birds/plants/insects? INaturalist shows 374 observations with 205 species identified, and eBird has over 159 species identified!! I can personally attest to finding all sorts of interesting finds there! The gardens at the front of the park are full of native plants and flowers that draw THOUSANDS of butterflies each time they migrate through and during the year. It's a photographer's paradise!

Please come visit and enjoy it—help spread the word about this beautiful place. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact me so we can coordinate. We need people who can help with the gardens, do trail maintenance, assess the property and keep any invasive plants at bay, and are also looking to bring some programs to the park as well.





# Bastard cabbage, a rambunctious and tasty invasive, is ousting our native Texas

Submitted by Lori Greco

<https://texasbutterflyranch.com/author/monika-maeckle/>

Texans may need to brace themselves for a change of scenery during wildflower season.

Bastard cabbage, an invasive annual, has taken up residence throughout the state. The plant is dominating our river bottoms and peppering trails. Some highway intersections look like Bastard Cabbage Central—masses of yellow, three-foot high flowers.

This feisty interloper is most content in cool temperatures and disturbed soils. Among the first plants to emerge in Spring, it gets a head start on consuming available sunshine, soil nutrients and moisture. It grows up to five feet in height, throwing shade on later seedlings.



And while several butterflies host on its mustardy foliage, pollinators nectar on its blossoms, and the plant is tasty to eat, the fact remains that Bastard cabbage is ousting native wildflowers.



Photo by Monika Maeckle

“Learn to love them,” Tom Kinsey, a former staff naturalist at the Witte Museum and nature educator at Learn Nature, wrote recently on Facebook, “because they’re just about eliminating our native Texas wildflowers.”

Is it possible that wildflower lovers will soon be snapping pictures of their pooches in fields of Bastard cabbage rather than bluebonnets?

“That is absolutely the concern,” said Peter Pierson, natural resource management specialist at the San Antonio River Authority (SARA). “That’s why it’s being noted so much—because it IS displacing our native wildflowers.”

Pierson said aptly named Bastard cabbage, *Rapistrum rugosum*, is ubiquitous throughout the state and that we all need to be concerned about it. The plant is creating monocultures of yellow flowers that look like broccoli—especially after wet winters.

Each stems holds multiple fruits which contain two or more seeds.



Photo by Monika Maeckle

A recent walk along San Antonio's Mission Reach and Eagleland extension of SARA's \$384 million riparian restoration along the San Antonio River revealed large stands of Bastard cabbage. The trails, which are more frequently mowed, had fewer of the surly mustards, but each plant carries hundreds of seeds and will replant itself if left intact.

Pierson blamed limited resources for the massive spread of Bastard cabbage along the Mission Reach.

"We can't get everywhere at once. We try to keep it mowed down and pulled out, but it grows so quickly and puts out such a big rosette so early....It's a challenge."

Kelly Lyons, a biology professor at Trinity University who has been studying invasive plants for more than two decades, has made the case that Bastard cabbage is being spread by climate change combined with profit driven seed companies that are promoting annual Mediterranean grasses like annual rye grass and wild oats.

Lyons contends that seeds for these invasive grasses from the Mediterranean are imported from the west coast and often contain contaminants such as Bastard cabbage and yellow star thistle. She said instead, we should be investing in native seed.

Chopped up Bastard cabbage ready for sauteeing with onions and bacon.

Bastard cabbage crowds out the bluebonnets at Mahncke Park in San Antonio

Bastard cabbage thrives on the Eagleland extension of the Mission Reach riparian restoration in San Antonio.

Field of Bastard cabbage along road in Converse.

Bastard cabbage dominates Highway 281 intersection at Basse Road in San Antonio.

Bastard cabbage stand at Olmos Basin Park in San Antonio.

We should all eat more Bastard cabbage!

Chopped up Bastard cabbage ready for sauteeing with onions and bacon.

Bastard cabbage crowds out the bluebonnets at Mahncke Park in San Antonio

"The more we buy Texas native seed, the faster we grow that potentially profitable industry locally," she said.

The banner Bastard cabbage crop this year reflects last summer's drought, which killed off many of our grasses and perennial plants, followed by a wet winter.

"Left unmitigated, each year we might be seeing more and more Bastard cabbage," said Sophie Lemkin, horticulturist for the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin.

Land managers suggest volunteers help by cutting the heads off Bastard cabbage and disposing of it, preferably in the trash. While the seeds inside the tiny fruits are generally not viable until they turn brown, better to play it safe and not return them to the earth.

"Anything that keeps them from reseeding helps," said Pierson. "Now is the time. The more we can mow it down, the better."

Lemkin, like Lyons, recommended sowing with native grasses and herbaceous ground covers as a good strategy for mitigating the spread of Bastard cabbage.

Another option: eat it.

Mushroom, arugula and Bastard cabbage flower salad.  
Yum.



Photo by Monika Maeckle

Foragers and adventurous eaters have been harvesting and consuming Bastard cabbage for years.

Mark "Merriweather" Vorderbruggen, author of several books on foraging as well as caretaker/founder of the popular Foraging Texas website, suggests the following:

"How do I eat this invasive species? The flowers and green seedpods I like raw straight off the plant or added to salads. The broccoli-like flower buds are also eaten raw or cooked like broccoli florets (drizzled with cheese!). The younger, tender leaves are cooked like turnip/collard greens, sautéing them with some garlic and bacon. The younger, tender parts of the stem do well when cooked/steamed like asparagus. I have yet to experiment with the roots but suspect a low-grade 'horseradish' sauce could be made from them."

Lemkin said she likes to eat the flowers as a snack along the trail. "I've also taken the buds home and sautéed them with a little olive, salt and pepper as a good broccoli replacement, and the leaves go great in a sandwich."

I've been experimenting with Bastard cabbage in my own kitchen. The fresh flowers make a lovely addition to salads, fresh off the stem. You can also sauté the stems, leaves, flowers and fruits with oil, butter or bacon. Add some onions and cheese and you have an excellent side dish.

Elizabeth Johnson at Pharm Table in San Antonio suggests treating Bastard cabbage like collard greens.

"Sauté the leaves in avocado oil with a handful of blueberries. Garnish with maple syrup, avocado, pepitas and toasted coconut," said Johnson, adding she calls this "Blueberry collard bowl."

Johnson said she also uses the flowers as a garnish on soups.

## A Prescribed Burn

By James Reimer  
Photos by James Reimer

I was privileged to attend a controlled burn on January 12 2024. Master Naturalists from HLMN and Travis County chapters, a group of diversity/ecology students, and burn managers gathered to participate at the Spicewood Ranch for one of their annual burns. This burn concentrated on several former pastures and fields overgrown with mesquite and KR Bluestem. The burn was considered a success due to the right amount of fuel, wind, and fire management.

The ranch is a study in conservation and they use some of the tools postulated by Aldo Leopold (axe, plow, cow, and gun) to restore environments degraded by overgrazing and invasive species to a more natural habitat for wildlife and native plants. A YouTube video describes the ranch owners goals and the future plans for the ranch. [2018 Lone Star Land Steward: Spicewood Ranch](#)







Prescribed Burn  
Photo by James Reimer



## Gallery

Christmas Decorating Committee and Decorations  
Photos by Karen Stewart







# Art in the Park at Inks Lake State Park A fundraiser for Friends of Inks Lake State Park

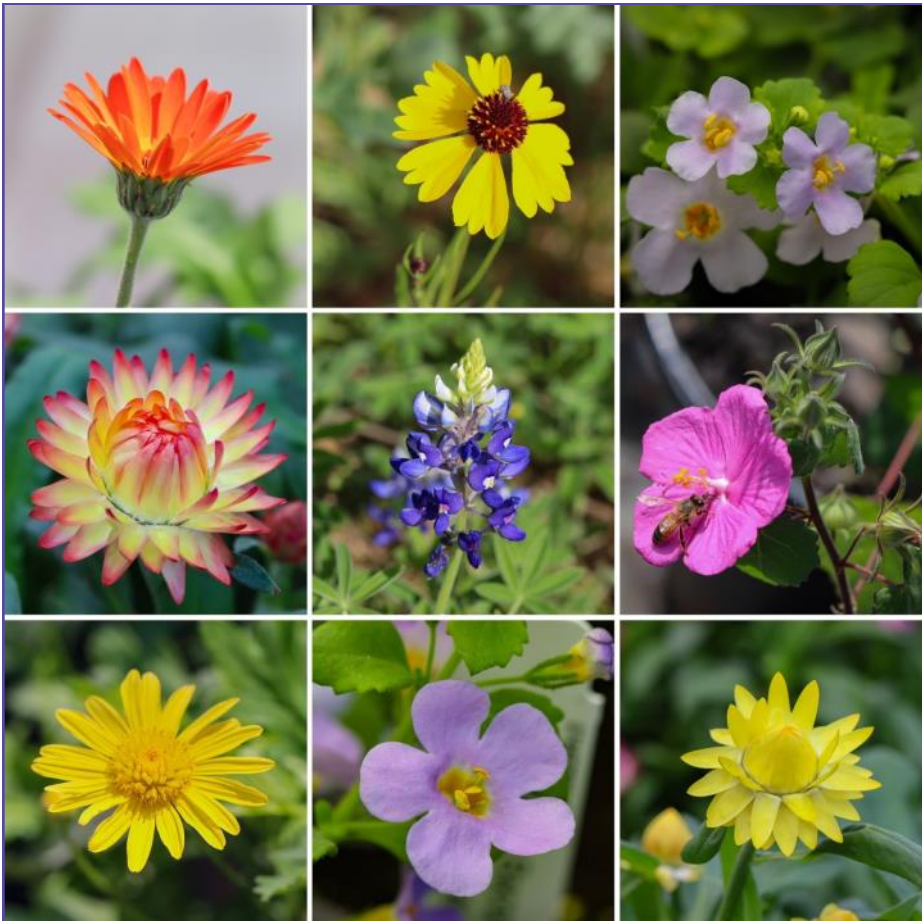
Photo by Karen Stewart



Photos by Meghan James ~ Grid photos of flowers which I took at Backbone Valley Nursery in Marble Falls









Very first hummingbird scout we had at our property (male black chinned



Endangered whooping cranes I got to see when I visited Goose Island State Park in Rockport.



T E X A S 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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