

The Steward

Spring/Summer 2022 Highland Lakes Master Naturalists Volume 13 Issue 2



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Message from our President

By Suzanne Adkinson

Happy Summer All,

As I write this I am reminded of all of our projects, all of your volunteer hours and how much you mean to each of your communities and to the larger Texas Master Naturalists organization. What you do is not replicated elsewhere. You have filled a critical niche. And this niche is only subject to your imagination. From setting up a new geocache site, to maintaining data on muskies, to fixing/maintaining pollinator gardens in public places, to designing a new bird blind/wildlife viewing stations, to teaching kids about the environment they live in....you guys do it all!

I find great pleasure in learning. When I find something I'm not well versed in, I start researching. I learn about that "thing" (usually a plant or insect) and am better able to pass on that knowledge to others. To me, it makes this work more fulfilling. I challenge each of you to find something you don't know very much about and learn more about it.

As we embark on Summer I ask that you enjoy what you do, continue to step up to the challenge, and be that change that others who are not like us are unable (or unwilling) to do.

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Congratulations



Class of 2022

Class off 2022: Barbara Adams , Deborah Andry , Keith Atwood , Pam Butler , Lynne Claire , Rachel Grotte , Linden Hickson , Ingrid Hoffmeister , Jeanne Kregel , Jamie Langham (Verzwyvelt) , Al Lillis , May Miler , Krista Paul , Robert Remlinger , Karen Stewart , Jennifer Struck , George Vavrek

“A New Way of Thinking About Gardens, Nature, and Ourselves” by James Golden

Talayote Vine (Climbing Milkweed)-*Cynanchum racemosum*

By Louise Suhey

‘A View From Federal Twist’ came out this year in March. Golden and his partner bought an older home with vast gardens in New Jersey. He follows the ‘Don’t Fight the Site’ mantra. When you create a formal garden, you are exerting control over the site. I did this with my last home in San Antonio. His concept is to accept the land and start with a clean slate. This is what I am attempting to do now with my new home. I have created Stone House Gardens with a high percentage of native plants.

I have taken the approach of letting the land speak to me. I see what plants pop up before digging and pitching unknown species, as well as noting what native plants survive deer grazing and cold temperatures in Horseshoe Bay. Golden suggests watching your dog (in my case deer) to see where they make a path walking the property, since they understand the terrain. In taking this approach, native plants have popped up everywhere. Then I make the decision to edit or not.

This is exactly what happened with the Talayote Vine. At least eight volunteered last year covering a small group of young Black Persimmon (*Diospyros texana*). The vine is in the Apocynaceae family (Dogbane). At some point in time milkweeds were used as dog poison. Apocynum means “dog away” in Greek. Many species in this family are poisonous if ingested due to the milky, latex sap in the leaves and stems. We all know about the orange warning color of the Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*) and the Queen Butterfly (*Danaus gilippus*) which their caterpillars get from ingesting the sap. There are many other plants that deploy this latex; Oleander, Periwinkle, Allamanda, Plumeria, Mandevilla, Desert-Rose, Amsonia, and Hoya. Stapelias and Pachypodiums also contain the sap and are considered stem succulents. This sap sequesters toxic cardiac glycosides. The flowers and nectar don’t contain the sap and are safe for bees, flies, and butterflies.



When I first noticed the vine, it was covered with Oleander Aphids (*Aphis nerii*). They have sucking mouth parts and you can’t miss

their bright yellow/orange color. They are not native to here, but we’re introduced into the USA on Oleander plants. Too much fertilizer will attract more. They will produce faster on plants that have a high nitrogen concentration. You can squish the aphids with your fingers, and then spray the mess with a blast of water from your hose. Lady Beetles eat them also.

While books say the vines can grow up to 15', mine are only about 8-10' wrapping around the tops of my Persimmons. The beautiful green, heart-shaped leaves are opposite each other on the stem nodes with spaces between each set. The flowers are 10 to a raceme, and are a greenish-white to cream colored. The stigma and anthers are fused together making them bisexual (hermaphrodite or androgynous). They are able to self or cross pollinate, which produces genetically identical offspring as their parent.



The fruits produce large, plump seed pods from September till the end of November.



The pods will turn brown and crack when dry. The flat seeds have long, white hairs that serve as parachutes to disperse in the wind.



Cont'd on next page

People put rubber bands around them when ripe, but before opening for easier containment. Other people have suggested placing tiny organza bags over the pods and tying the strings at the bottom. I keep the seeds in a paper bag so as to not get moldy until completely dry. Store them in your freezer for better germination.

Large Milkweed Bugs (*Onocephalus faciatius*) deposit eggs into the pods through small cracks. Their babies will eat holes in the seeds. These bugs have two black triangles at each end of their orange bodies with a black band running around their middle. This is called Aposematic Coloration. It is the concept of “warning coloration” to prevent attacks from predators, using high contrast patterns such as stripes and bands. Their cousins, Small Milkweed Bugs (*Lygaeus kalmii*), eat sap and nectar from the flowers.

Why do I keep this vine that has so many damaging insects? They attract many beneficial insects such as Lady Beetles, Lacewings, Bees, and Damselflies. The honeydew left behind by the aphids attracts ants, wasps, and other sugar loving insects. Maybe one day you’ll be lucky to have this native vine pop up in your garden!

Great Outdoor Program 2022

It was with joy and much anticipation that we were once more able to run our Great Outdoor Program at Inks Lake State Park this year. I am happy to report that teachers, students, volunteers, and park staff declared it a rousing success and lots of rewarding fun! As the current coordinator of this five day program which has been a HLMN tradition for many years I emphatically wish to say THANK YOU to everyone involved because it would not have been possible without you.



VOLUNTEERS



Left: Rick V. leading a group

Below: Terry S. leading a group

Our numbers included 390 first grade students and 150 adults from six area schools. We had a total of 46 volunteers including 5 members of the new training class.



At the Bird Station students learn how to use binoculars, learn about the Wood Duck nesting program in the park, and learn characteristics about other birds in the park via the use of large silhouettes hanging on the outer wall of the park store.





Next is the Monarch Butterfly Station where they learn the different stages of metamorphosis, the importance of milkweed, and then they “migrate” from Mexico to Canada with their butterfly leaders.

Left: Paula E and Susan M at Monarch Station

At the Vertebrate Station, after distinguishing between Invertebrates and Vertebrates students learn the characteristics and examples of the five classes: fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals.

Right: Sharon D Vertebrate Station



At the Tree Station we ask the students why they like trees and how they are useful to us and also what animals use them for food and shelter. We act out an acorn sprouting story. They are shown examples of various Texas native trees with emphasis on oaks and especially our State Tree the pecan. They also do leaf prints and finish with a nature lovers tree hug.

Left: Cathy H Tree Station



Last but certainly not least is the Fish Station. There they get lessons on the environment and on fish anatomy including how a fish uses its fins to swim. But the most fun is getting to see, touch and get splashed by real live fish in the tanks. George wanted me to mention the “great sacrifice” he and Phil made more than once to catch blue gill and catfish for those tanks....and yes they got VS for their efforts! I also wish to say that they and some park staff also put in considerable time and work in getting all the equipment needed and getting those tanks all set up beforehand.

Below: Mark S. and George B. make a splash!





Left: Hollis N. at Fish Station



Below: Phil W. demonstrating fin use

Although the Fish Station was the only one that had guaranteed live critters as part of their program, numerous park inhabitants insisted on being part of and sometimes stealing the show. This was especially true of squirrels and geese but various other birds, lizards, bugs, etc. provided some welcome nature moments.



Sharing our love of nature with children is very rewarding of course, but is also frequently entertaining and amusing. I tried to make an effort this year to remember and collect some of their cute and funny comments. The wind played havoc with the artificial birds hanging at the Bird Station and they were sometimes hanging upside down. This prompted one observer to remark "Oh, they're dead!" One boy told me so seriously "boy birds sing to girls birds so they fall in love." At the Vertebrate Station one boy was overheard to say "my dad is not a mammal!" Hmm? Makes you wonder. One girl at the Tree Station didn't want to hug the tree due to allergy concerns so I suggested she blow it a kiss instead ... so she did. Every year when I ask what tree do acorns grow on I get the answer "acorn tree." So my goal this year was that they all left knowing that acorns grow on oaks trees.

Finally the BEST comment ever was from the child who stated

"This is the best day of my life so far!"

Enough said!! So please come join us next year.

Cathy Hill



Park Superintendent Barrett Durst

Note all photos by Ed and Tao
Park Hosts

Water Colors from Gary Hampton



Monarch Migration Monarch Migration from Port Alta, Texas



Kestrel and red shouldered hawk
from presentation by Ed Sones,
Travis County Bird Rehab

Field Trip to Mitchell Lake Audubon Center

Binos, field guides, spotting scopes all dusted off--Highland Lakes Master Naturalists were ready for our first day trip in 2 years! Mitchell Lake Audubon Center was the perfect destination for 21 of us to visit. Birds were the main attraction at this unique sanctuary, with 58 species identified, but the south Texas flora was pretty spectacular for those of us with wandering eyes...the pink anacacho orchid tree was brilliant!



Tom & Patsy Inglet were our Audubon guides through the wetland, providing expertise and entertaining us with birdy humor. Along with our own chapter birding experts, we were in great company, learning a lot and having fun. My favorite spot, the yellow-headed blackbirds--attention getters, especially seeing them through the scope. I'm a bird-watcher, not a birder, and finally realize the ID importance of beaks, breasts, and rumps--wouldn't ya know.

Pink anacacho orchid Photos by Linda O'Nan



“Many thanks to the efforts of the Trip Committee, & George Brugnoli, Chair, for skillful organizing and communication with members. This is just a warm up for the big FALL trip. If you haven't gone on a group trip, you will find that nobody does it better--we know how to play well with others! Come join us. “
Linda O'Nan

“Even though many waterfowl and waders have already flown north, our group saw hundreds of White-faced Ibis and Long-billed Dowitchers along with some rarities like Brown-crested Flycatcher, Least Grebe, Little Blue Heron and Cinnamon Teal (birds that usually do not occur further north). There were several sandpiper species along with whistling ducks, wrens, sparrows, warblers and raptors. A complete list of the 58 species is posted in Ebird under Bexar County.”
Sherry Bixler

A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

By Patty Harrell

Visualize this... The sun is shining, the birds are singing, and you have all the time in the world to explore the Bamberger Ranch Preserve. The most difficult decision of the day is where to start. And so it was on May 8th when the ranch hosted its annual Family Day, Picnic, & Spring Saunter.



Some folks decided to begin by taking in the serenity of Madrone Lake. It was all peace and quiet in the morning and another story altogether when the kids tried their hand at fishing in the afternoon.



The butterfly garden next to the patio on Madrone Lake was showing some blooms. This drought-tolerant Texas Lantana usually stays in bloom through October with very little water.

After a nice rest by the lake, visitors began to branch out and explore more of the ranch. With 6.5 miles of nature trails, there is plenty to see. Some folks took advantage of guided bird walks with the staff ornithologist. Others got up close with various birds of prey that were on hand for special demonstrations. Of course, the kids found time to draw, color, and make kites.

Photos for this article taken by Beth Lillis

Both volunteers and guests grabbed a ride on the Bluebonnet Trailer to see sites such as the Chiroptorium – the world’s first and largest artificial bat cave. The phrase Chiroptorium was coined by J. David Bamberger. “Chirop” comes from the Greek name for the biological order for bats, Chiroptera, which means hand wing. “Torium” is used to denote a place. The Chiroptium provides 8,000 square feet of roosting surface for 400,000 Mexican free-tailed bats in the summer. When evening emergences are particularly dense, these bats can be seen on radar.



A popular stop on the Bluebonnet Trailer tour is to see the dinosaur tracks. Long-time volunteer Sandy Blakeway decided to sit in one of the dinosaur footprints as a demonstration of its size. Unfortunately, the diminutive size of Sandy’s posterior fails to drive home the point.

Photo provided by Sandy Blakeway



As folks were leaving for the day, there was one last surprise for visitors. J. David Bamberger and Joanna Rees had set up a free lemonade stand at Hes' Country Store. The store is named after Mr. Bamberger's mother and contains a variety of items from his childhood in Ohio.



Some Highland Lakes Master Naturalists volunteers, Eva Hobbs and Karen Lundquist, said they couldn't help but take some selfies with the Bambergers.



Joanna Rees and J. David Bamberger

Photos by Eva Hobbs

Joanna Rees and J. David Bamberger doing one of the things they do best – taking the time to chat with visitors. Hearing his stories is always fun!

After looking around the ranch, it is hard to believe that when Mr. Bamberger purchased this land in 1969 it was overgrown with Ashe Juniper and lacked running water except during rainstorms. In contrast, today it is home to 27 ponds and lakes as well as countless springs. These springs provide water for ranch use and the excess ultimately provides some of the surface water for the City of Austin. But don't take my word for it... come and see for yourself someday.

The HLMN Booth at the Hill Country Lawn and Garden Show

By Hollis Neier

The 22nd Annual Hill Country Lawn and Garden Show was held on March 26, 2022 at Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service – Burnet County. This was the first year the Garden Show was held at the Texas AgriLife Extension Office site. The HLMN booth was located outside in a breezeway adjacent to the NPSOT Native Plant Sale booth.

Vickie Adcock, Ray Buchanan, Lori Greco, Hollis Neier, and Louise Suhey worked the booth. Before the 10:00 start of the Garden Show and before Vickie could get behind the table to set down her materials, she was fielding questions! The typical customer was interested in the optimal plants to attract pollinators and butterflies especially, *Texas Tree Growing Guide* and *Oak Wilt*.

As you can see in the photo, (on the next page) the HLMN banner was displayed behind our table with the Texas Master Naturalist tablecloth on table. Guests were attracted to our booth by the displays such as the framed collage of Jerry Stacy's pollinator photographs, large framed raised topological color map of Texas, bee box, bird house, HLMN textbook, Leopold's Sand County Almanac, Texas Insects Book, and Texas Butterflies & Pollinators pocket naturalist guide.



(left) Vicki Adcock and Louise Suhey at the booth.

(below) Ray Buchanan
Photo by Hollis Neier.

HLMN Brochures with mission Statement and web address were available, as well as, *Texas AgriLife Extension: Benefits of Using Native Plants, Creating and Insect & Pollinator Garden*, and *HLMN's Land Management Assistance Program (LMAP)* brochure. Vickie

and Louis provided *Native Tree Growing Guide for Central Texas*, *Texas Trees List of Helpful Links*, *Texas A&M Forest Service "How Do I Care for My Tree?"*, *How to Identify and manage Oak Wilt in Texas*, *Introduction to Oak Wilt in Texas*, Handouts for Children, and Phil Wyde's flower photo prints. Overall, print materials were preferred over using one's phone to photograph the information.

Nineteen individuals expressed interest in knowing more about HLMN and provided their names and email addresses to be notified about the next HLMN class. Most individuals wanted information in the present --- not wanting to be referred to other sources. The Hill Country Lawn and Garden Show was a success and the HLMN Booth was first and foremost the best table at the event.



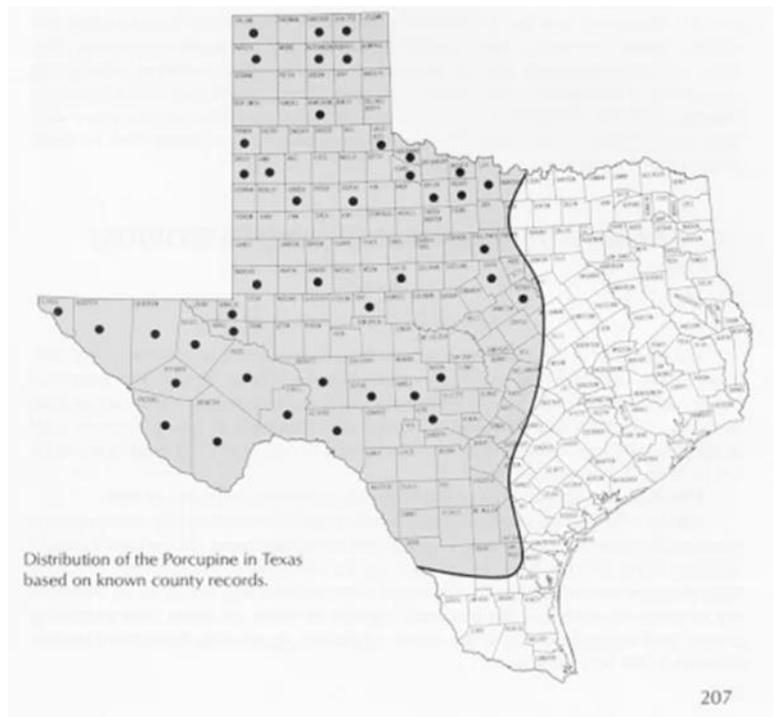
Porcupines

By Beck Breazeale

A friend of mine, who lives in the country near Doss, sent me a couple of pictures of some small trees whose bark had been eaten. She said that a couple of trees had been **“gnawed to death”**.



She was trying to figure out what was causing the trees to die, so I reached out to iNaturalist and HLMN Members for an ID. The general consensus was porcupine tree damage??? PORCUPINES – what, there are Porcupines in Texas? I thought states like Wisconsin and Michigan were hosts to these mammals. In my research, I was interested to

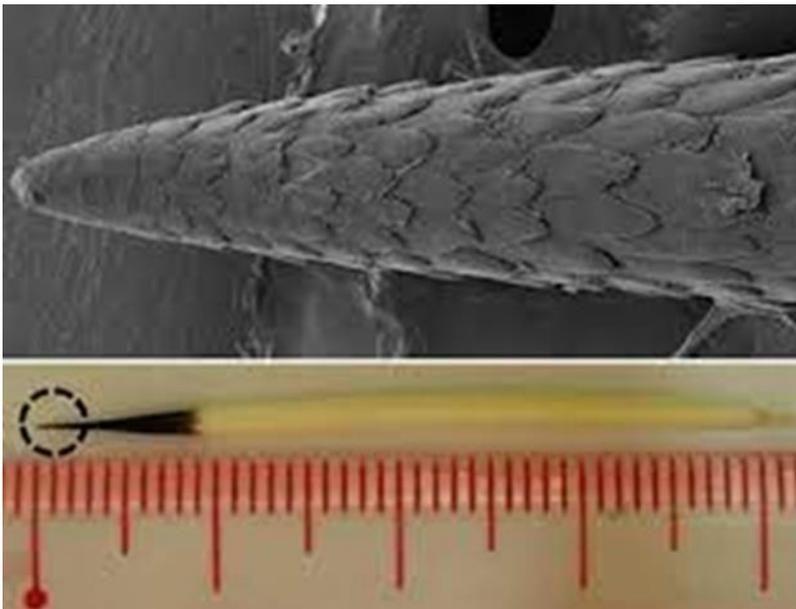


Courtesy of Texas Parks and Wildlife

find that Texas Parks and Wildlife has received numerous reports of porcupines in Central Texas and iNaturalist has seen an uptick of porcupine identifications since 2012.

Shortly after that, there was an article in *The Picayune Magazine*, Don't Pet the Porcupine, warning people not to let their dogs go “head to tail” with a porcupine. One reader said her dog, which is a hunting dog, was attacked four times. The last attack on her pet, which was during the late summer/early fall mating season of porcupines, was much more severe than the previous ones. I realized my friend in Doss wasn't the only one being affected by porcupines.

During my research, I found the North American porcupine (*Erethizon dorsatum*), meaning “irritable back” is a blackish-brown large furry rodent that lives in forest and scrubby areas. They are herbivores and in winter they eat bark. Its hairless soles make tree climbing easy. These slow, bowlegged, pigeon-toed mammals only have one defense – quills. A porcupine can have as many as 30,000 quills, which are hairs with barbed tips. Imagine how difficult it is to remove a quill. The porcupines do not actually shoot their quills. When approached by a predator, the porcupine lifts its quills, wags its tail, and chatters its teeth. If the aggressor persists, the porcupine whirls around and backs into the aggressor. This action lodges the quills that are loose into the aggressor's face.



During mating season, porcupines are very vocal and males fight over females. Seven months after mating, a single baby is born. The baby's quills are soft, but harden within an hour after birth. The baby will stay with its mother for six months, while she teaches it to forage for food.

Porcupine Barbed Quill, Photo
Courtesy of science.org



Porcupine baby, Photo Courtesy of bbc.com

Back to my friend and her trees... In the winter, the average daily consumption of bark by porcupines is the size of a sheet of paper. Not only do they eat limbs, bark and buds, but they also devour inner bark. You can see how much damage can be done when a porcupine lives in a tree for three months munching daily. The good news is, in the spring they return to ground and continue foraging for food. And fortunately for my friend, her trees were small and she was able to put fencing around them.

I have found the porcupine is a very interesting animal and to my surprise a Texas resident. To find out more interesting characteristics of these mammals, follow the Texas Parks and Wildlife and Public Broadcasting Corp. links below.

Greenwell, Jennifer, The Picayune, "Don't Pet the Porcupine, February 2022, page 20.
<https://www.101highlandlakes.com/porcupines-in-texas> (link to Picayune article)

<https://nhpbs.org/natureworks/porcupine.htm>

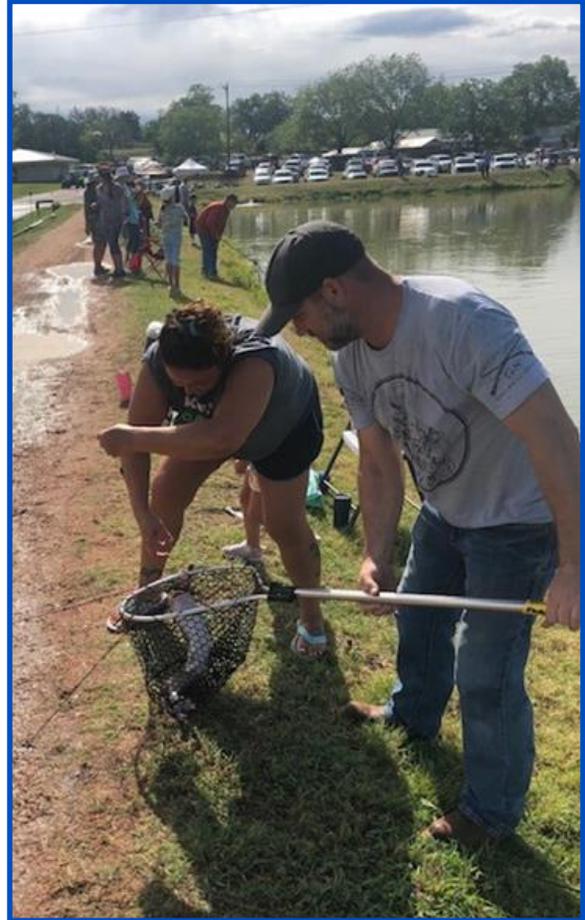
[Porcupines in Texas are Moving East \(wordpress.com\)](#)

[TPWD: Porcupines – Introducing Mammals to Young Naturalists \(texas.gov\)](#)

National Family Fishing Day at Inks Dam National Fish Hatchery



Each year, during National Fishing and Boating Week which is the first week of June, Family Free Fishing Day takes place. The last two years have been the exception due to COVID. This year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service brought back the Family Free Fishing Day back to Inks Dam National Fish Hatchery on June 4th.





All Photos fishing Day Courtesy of Krista Paul

Bulldog Homeschool Group Tour of Inks Dam National Fish Hatchery 04/29/2022

By Phil Wyde

On Friday, April 29, at 9 a.m., the Bulldog Homeschool Group visited Inks Dam National Fish Hatchery. This group had 16 children and 14 adults.

The tour started at the hatchery's Visitors Center where this group was welcomed. They then heard about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the main purposes of the hatchery. The group was then split up into 2 subgroups. Subgroup 1 went with Friend of the Inks Dam National Fish Hatchery Volunteers to take an interpretive hike up the hatchery's Overlook Trail. On this hike they saw Cowbirds, numerous native plants, lichen, Texas Red Harvester Ants; had a discussion of the local geology, vernal pools; and saw vistas of the hatchery, Packsaddle Mountain and more.

The second subgroup went with P. Wyde to hear about Catfish Production at the hatchery and Catfish Reproduction in nature. That group would also: 1) Hear about endangered Clearcreek Gambusia fish and threatened Fresh Water Mussels; 2) Go into the hatchery's Holding House where they saw the facilities for maintaining live catfish eggs and catfish fry; and 3) Walk to the nearby Outdoor Raceway where they saw mutant white catfish, large black channel catfish, and other fish.

After 35 minutes, Group 1 came down the hill to see and hear the presentation that Group 2 just saw and heard, and Group 2 went up the hill to meet with Jerry Stacy and take the same interpretive hike that Group 1 just finished.

A little before 11 a.m. both groups merged to fish in the hatchery's Derby Pond for channel catfish. Before fishing the members of the group were given rules of safety and tips on how to fish for large catfish. All of the visitors were then given rods and reels and hot dog bait. Friends of the Inks Dam National Fish Hatchery were there to help all to fish, be safe and have fun. Almost every person caught at least 1 fish. Some several.

At 11:45 a.m. the fishing stopped and all of the guests went to a point on the Derby Pond to feed the fish. The resulting "feeding frenzy" was spectacular and really impressed the visitors.

After feeding the catfish the visitors retired to the benches at the Visitors Center to eat a picnic lunch. After that they departed – voicing their delight with the tour.



It should be noted that Friends of Inks Dam National Fish Hatchery members Nadiné Cowey, Stephen Cowey, Bill Nabors, Ingrid Hoffmeister, Kaye Barr, Lori Greco, Jerry Stacey and new member, May, all provided first rate help in setting up, running and cleaning up after this event. Indeed, they were invaluable in making the tour a success. Hatchery personnel,

Above and right photo:

Phil giving rules of safety and tips on how to fish for large catfish.

Photo by Ingrid Hoffmeister





Viewing mutant white catfish, large black channel catfish, and other fish.

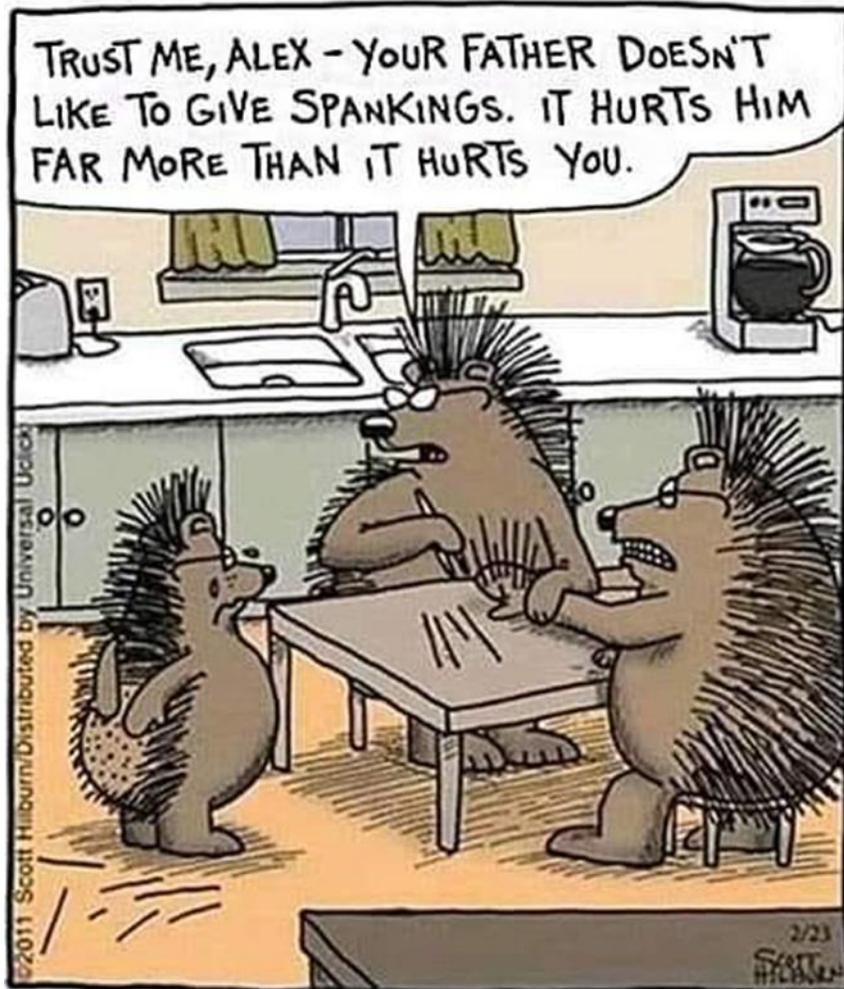
Photo sby Ingrid Hoffmeister



Hike the Overlook Trail



Bulldog Homeschool Group, Photo by Phil Wyde



Falls on the Colorado River Clean Up Day

HLMN volunteers gave the Falls on the Colorado Museum gardens a supreme makeover! Weeding, pruning, raking, planting & fence repair all came together for a good look. Many thanks to these folks for hot, hard work: Ann & Bill Edwards, Roy Appleton, Kaye Barr, Karen McCurley, Pat Campbell, James Reimer, Jerry Stacy—Linda O’Nan



Photo by James Reimer



Photo by Linda O’Nan

Thank you Linda, for your expert guidance on where and what to cut, weed, and dig! Smiles and team work - James Reimer

Window on the Highland Lakes



'Falls' cleaning

Members of the Highland Lakes Master Naturalists did some spring cleaning on the grounds of [The Falls on the Colorado Museum](#), 2001 Broadway in Marble Falls, on Wednesday. The work received rave reviews from visitors, including a city official and maintenance workers from the Marble Falls Independent School District, said Darlene Oostermeyer, secretary of the museum board. "The finished product makes the Old Granite School building just pop," she said, adding that she looks forward to a return visit from the group sometime in the fall. She also expressed appreciation for the group, which made time for the museum despite its backlog of projects. Several members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also showed up to help lift and spread 30 bags of mulch. *Courtesy photo*

From The Daily Trib



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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- Secretary** Kristen Rodgers (512) 695-6087 cell
- Treasurer** Jerry Stacy (325) 248-4524 cell

