

The Steward

End of the Year 2025

Highland Lakes Master Naturalists

Volume 16 Issue 7



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On the cover Sycamore trees next to a deep lake with autumn foliage; Red Sunset Maple and Bur Oak trees in the background. First dusting of snow in Hill Country.

Artist: Kim Jungkind

Got something exciting to share?

We want it all—event recaps, stunning photos (with captions and credits!), inspiring articles, juicy updates, heartfelt poems, insightful book reviews, captivating stories, and important announcements!

Send them over to

becky_breazeale@yahoo.com

Mark your calendars—our next deadline is

February 28th Let's make this edition one to remember!

Message from our President

By Cathy Houston

And that's a wrap....

What a challenging couple of years this has been! This all began after I had just talked with Ed about how nice it was to just be in an organization, do our volunteering, and come home. But, then a phone call from Jill Goff, one February, 2024, evening changed that. I agreed to become the Vice President of HLMN after only being a member of the organization for less than one year. I had just become certified in May of 2023. I really had a lot of catching up to do if this was going to work. I studied the Bylaws and Chapter Operating Handbook, but I didn't know that we also had a Chapter Management and Operating Protocols. I finally became familiar with all the operating documents, all while celebrating our 40th anniversary and missing the first meeting where I would be Vice President. I received a phone call from the outgoing Vice President on the side of a volcano in Hawaii. I guess I should have had my phone on silent.

Before we left on our celebratory 40th anniversary trip, my first business of being VP was to get our April and May speakers lined up. Thank goodness for Karen Stewart, she had already lined up our March speaker and would serve as the host for her in my absence. The rest of the year went by in a blur. My son got married in May and I got a smart, wonderful daughter-in-law. As the year went on, I made multiple trips to my parents' home in Deer Park as I watched my Dad get weaker and sicker, while my Mom was struggling to care for him.

The HLMN 2024 year progressed. Many hours were spent volunteering at my favorite places, building trunks, working with Jill to create agendas and PowerPoints for the business meetings and coordinating speakers. One of the nicest things was that I didn't have to do this alone. I had a small committee: Beth Lillis and Lyn Davis, who helped with organizing the meetings. This type of team work is what makes this organization a success. Beth and Lyn came up with the idea of having a "themed" snack at each of the meetings because they observed how much our members enjoyed the social time at the meetings. It was so nice to have help to decide who would be a great AT presenter, then get them scheduled, determine where the meeting would be held, and what, if any, snacks would be there.

As 2024 moved along, changes were in the works, Jill worked to consolidate the board to make it more efficient. The committees that she established at her board retreat created charters and worked together to continue to move the organization forward. In November, the board approved the use of Zeffy to accept payment by credit and debit cards. The board voted to consolidate some posi-

tions. The December Holiday party at Gem of the Hills was a rousing success and so was the silent auction. It was our first time using Zeffy and it took some patience from all the members, thanks for giving grace, but now Zeffy has become a great tool for our HLMN business.

In the first quarter of 2025, the board had a few tasks to complete. First, get the budget in place so that payments and reimbursements could be processed. Second, align the Chapter Operating Handbook to reflect how our organization actually works. Finally, explain and publish the changes in the COH in the appropriate document change timeline and get the changes passed by the membership. Thank you to each and every member who encouraged and assisted in this effort.

Also in the first quarter, my Dad passed away. Everything stopped for me, but Al, Dannialle, and Robin, as well all of the board and membership, pitched in to keep things moving. Some of the most important volunteering and healing for me was GOP. Thanks to every member who listened to and consoled me during that time. Who knew putting on butterfly wings could be so cathartic?

MJ and Rebecca—what a marvelous job you did with our awesome training class of 2025! So many generous, helpful, dedicated new members. What a wonderful addition to our membership. MJ and Rebecca, you planted a seed of inspiration in each of these trainees. Their contribution to our organization will be felt for years to come. Thank you for your dedication.

Many of you visited our house in May, after the Doeskin meeting. That was an extension of our training class's practice of visiting each other's homes as the class progressed. We had a fun group of trainees, too. Ed and I were lucky to host the members at a time when all of our wildflowers were blooming and we enjoyed having everyone at the house. It was fun to have those members who had visited as LMAP volunteers get to see the progress we have made since their visit. Thanks to everyone who came by and enjoyed the fellowship.

In July we had a terrible disaster with the flood. The feeling of helplessness was exacerbated by the TMN leadership's insensitivity to the widespread nature of the disaster. Kerr County was not the only county affected by the disaster. Many of our counties and neighboring counties needed volunteer assistance, but TMN leadership refused to allow volunteer hours except in very limited circumstances—principally only when volunteering at established partner locations. Our members did their part to contribute to the healing of our precious Hill Country and that effort is still continuing. Thank you for all of your efforts and support for our communities during this time of recovery.

Once the heat of the summer began to subside, the number of volunteer opportunities increased. Thanks to Roy for keeping us up-to-date on all the opportunities and to Mary Ann for helping us to keep it straight when entering hours into the VMS system.

At the October meeting, after a board discussion, I awkwardly tried to advise the membership that we have and have had an issue with our accounting. I didn't do a very good job at communicating the problem. I ruffled feathers and may have alarmed the membership. I apologize. I wanted to be transparent about our accounting procedures. I wanted the membership to understand that, although we are financially sound now, we need to do a better job of fund-raising for the future. We also need to do a better job categorizing our income and expenses so the membership has a clearer picture of these. Robin is working diligently to assist us in these efforts.

In October, I also welcomed a second daughter-in-love to my family. My youngest son got married in a sweet ceremony in Brenham. It was supposed to be an outdoor wedding, but, five days before the ceremony, they had to move it to an indoor venue. It was a miracle that they pulled it off.

Finally, as I hand off the responsibilities of being the President of HLMN, I want to thank the membership for their support. To those who have sent your criticism, you have helped me to become more resilient and I thank you for that growth. Thank you for the opportunity to serve this great organization. It has been a privilege. I look forward to this transition of leadership and will assist and support Al and his team.

Pins and Awards



Ray Buchanan and his wife, Carole accepting the Lifetime Achievement Award
Photo by Reed Armstrong



Krista Paul receiving **1,000 Hour** Volunteer Service Award



500 Hour Volunteer Service Award - Karen Brents, Charles Powell, and George Vavrek
Photo by Reed Armstrong

250 Hour Volunteer Service Award - Reed Armstrong, Matthew Jary, Jennifer Struck, and Becky Vavrek



2025 TMN Initial Certification - Lora Calhoun, Derek Ross, Dana Ross, Randy Frombers, Karen Fromberg, and Kristen Baranowsk. Not pictured - Gary Monroe

2025 TMN Recertification - Vicki Adcock, George Barr ,Terry Bartoli, Marvin Bloomquist, Ray Buchanan, Lyn Davis, *Cynthis Dietz*, Melissa Duckworth, Sondra Fox, Kathy Griffis-Bailey, Dianna Hodges, Kimberly Jungkind, Jeanne Kregel, Becky Larkin, Bill McCartney, Holly Morris, Eric Norman, Marylynn Norman, *Blinda McClelland*, *Janet McCreless*, *Claudia Machell*, *Samantha Melvin*, Cheryl Oberhause, Jack Ort, Kim Ort, Kristin Rodgers, Sheryl Smith-Rodgers, *Connie Thompson*, *David Tusa *, Richard Vance, Janie Watson, Terri Whaley, Courtney Williams

***Double certification from class of 2025**



Cathy Houston, Jill Goff, Al Lillis, Dannialle Clayton, and Robin Miskimins
Photo by Reed Armstrong



Kelly Tarla and 2025 board members Mary Ann Holt, Jill Goff, Roy Appleton and Sue Davis.
Photo by Reed Armstrong

What it Means to be a Steward

By Randy Fromberg

Legacy is more than what you leave behind—it's what you tend to while you're here. That's what I've come to understand about stewardship. It isn't about ownership. It isn't about pride or posterity. It's about care. Quiet, sustained, often unglamorous care.

When Karen and I came to Desfiladero, the land wasn't waiting for us like a blank slate. It had already lived through fire, flood, livestock, drought, and neglect. It bore the scars of a hundred decisions made before we ever set foot here. Some were wise. Some were shortsighted. The land doesn't pass judgment. It just reflects the choices made in its name.

Being a steward means learning to listen before you act. You learn where water wants to go, not where you wish it would. You pay attention to the shade line at different times of day, to the plants that emerge first after a rain, to which grasses cattle will always return to when given the choice. You stop forcing your will on the place and instead begin to collaborate with it.

It also means making peace with limits. I can't undo every mistake. I can't outwork time or fight every cedar. There's a humility to this work that doesn't always come naturally. In architecture, I was trained to design systems, fix problems, and move on to the next project. But here, nothing is ever really finished. The work continues, slowly, in cycles. And that's the point. You don't control the outcome—you shape conditions for life to thrive.

Stewardship means accepting that some of the things you plant, you'll never see grow to maturity. It means trusting that your efforts, if made in good faith and with good science, will ripple outward into a future you'll never visit. It means building soil you'll never walk on, feeding bees you'll never see, and rehydrating a water table for someone else's grandchildren.

That may sound poetic, but I don't mean it to be. This is practical work. It's sweat and repetition and planning ahead. It's turning off the tap when you don't need it. It's dragging out a fallen limb so new grass gets sunlight. It's leaving a patch of native brush alone because a covey of quail has claimed it. It's seeing your role not as owner, but as participant—one link in a longer chain.

Sometimes I ask myself: if the land could vote, would it have kept me here? Have I made more good decisions than bad ones? Have I slowed erosion, planted wisely, kept the animals in balance, kept the machines from pushing too hard? I can't answer those questions fully, but I try to act as if they matter. Because they do.

Stewardship means you leave the place better than you found it. Not because you had to, or because someone was watching, but because you could.

That's enough.

Free Veterans Family Fishing Day at Inks Dam National Fish Hatchery

By Martelle Luedecke
Photos by Krista Paul

Nestled between Inks Lake State Park and Longhorn Cavern State Park, Inks Dam National Fish Hatchery hosted its annual Free Fishing Event for Veterans on November 14. The event was organized and staffed by volunteers from the Friends of the Inks Dam National Fish Hatchery and Highland Lakes Master Naturalists whose efforts helped welcome 158 veterans and their families for a morning filled with camaraderie, gratitude, and steady fishing along the main Derby Pond. Veterans and their families were invited to keep as many fish as they could catch, with the exception of white catfish, which were to be released back into the pond.

Volunteers arrived before sunrise, some as early as 6 a.m., to begin the extensive setup for the day. Pop-ups, tables, chairs, signage, tackle stations, scales, and coolers packed with ice were arranged across the grounds, while Parking crews prepared for an early influx brought on by the warm weather. Registration opened at 8 a.m., guiding families through wristbands, forms, and instructions before directing them to Tackle Check and the pond.

Once fishing was underway, the volunteer teams spread out and got to work. Fishing Support lined the pond banks to assist participants with landing and unhooking fish, keeping an eye on steep areas, and ensuring quick, humane icing of catches. Tackle Check volunteers stayed busy inspecting hooks, replacing tackle, distributing bait, and operating an additional station at the pond for smooth flow. Ice/Transport teams kept coolers replenished, delivered gear, and offered rides to anyone needing help reaching the best fishing spots. Veterans and their families welcomed the assistance along with the relaxed rules that allowed them to keep as many fish as their coolers could hold.

By midday, families began heading home with coolers full of fish and even fuller smiles.

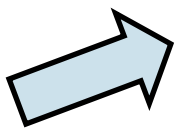
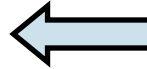
Most importantly, the day offered veterans and their families a chance to relax, reconnect, and simply enjoy time together outdoors. The steady fishing, warm weather, and welcoming atmosphere created a setting where stories were shared, new memories were made, and appreciation for their service was felt throughout the pond. It was a meaningful morning devoted entirely to honoring those who have given so much, and the joy reflected on the faces of the veterans made the event's purpose unmistakably clear.



First time ever and she absolutely loved it

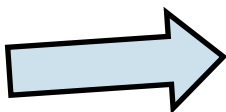


Left: Carol Guthrie and Ray Buchanan support the anglers

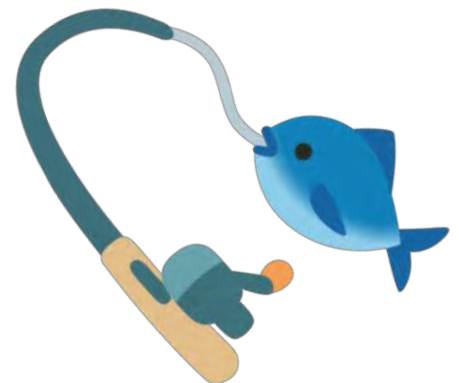


Above: Dad helps bring in the big one

Right: This dad needed more hands (3 kids)



Right ~ Al Lillis, Ingrid Hoffmeister and Ray Buchanan help a visitor with tackle



Left ~ Community support in action—Janie Watson assists a family of four at the Veteran and Family



She caught a leucistic Catfish!



Little fisherman – Big haul



Nice turnout

Ribbon Cutting at Inks Lake State Park

By Karen Stewart

Photo by Karen Stewart

After several years of anticipating the new Inks Lake State Park headquarters, the ribbon-cutting occurred on October 17, 2025. The new headquarters offers visitors and staff a more welcoming area, landscaping, spacious offices and meeting space.



Left to right - Daniel Stauffer, Inks Lake State Park Superintendent, Katherine Kirkpatrick, Operations Trainee, Joe Don Dockery - Burnet County Commissioner Precinct 4, Bryan Wilson - Burnet County Judge, Ron Cunningham - Llano County Judge, Pete Flores' aide Harold Stone with scissors, Stacy Smith - representing Ellen Troxclai, Jim Luther Jr. - Burnet County Commissioner Precinct I, Jamie Creacy - TPWD Regional Director, Dr. David Yoskowitz, Executive Director TPWD, Nathaniel Nouri, Assistant Superintendent Inks Lake State Park, and Rodney Franklin, State Parks Director TPWD

Inks Lake State Park is 75 Years Old

By Reed Armstrong
Photos by Reed Armstrong



Enthusiasm ran high under warm overcast skies for dozens of Friends of Inks Lake State Park and Texas Master Naturalists, Highland Lakes at the Semi-Sesquicentennial Saturday (75th anniversary) of Inks Lake Park celebration on October 18th. Your fellow HLMN members turned out strong support as hundreds of visitors enjoyed an impressive slate of public engagement offerings ranging from live fishing and backyard bass to archery, bee keeping, environmental conservation, and ladybug stations. Adding to the excitement were Texas Game Wardens, historical reenactors from the Sauer-Beckmann Living History Farm at LBJ State Park, a select set of Inks Lake Park historical items from the TPWD collections, as well as the bloodmobile.

This year's park anniversary celebration is built on the timely theme of **Origin, Status & Destination**. After extensive renovations and significant reinvestment over the past few years, Inks Lake State Park will continue to be a top venue for our volunteer efforts many years from now. A special thanks is due for Steph Beardsley and the FOIL leadership for their extra efforts in making this event a big success.



Karen Brents, Beth Lillis and Bill Blevins describing the art of Bee Keeping



Left to right: Krista Paul, Christine McCartney, Maria Rippedra (seated), Betty Secrest, Margaret Schelde, Charlotte Willis, and Karen Stewart sharing conservation tips at the Environmental Conservation station.



Taking aim! Texas Parks and Wildlife staff check out the Archery Range



Jim Howell joins three anglers at the Live Fishing Tank for an exciting hands-on demo.



Cathy Houston gets up close with ladybugs and other insects!



Katy Tiedemann, Park Interpreter at Blanco State Park, helps three young anglers try their hand at Backyard Bass — a fun way to learn fishing skills!

Inks Lake State Park 75th Anniversary

Photos by Karen Stewart

Girl Scouts from Marble Falls Troop 307 teaching edible fires**



Building an Edible Campfire

Supplies Needed:

Small paper plates and napkins;
 Candy corn or red hot candies (for flames);
 Large and small pretzel sticks — *logs (fuel) and tinder*;
 Shoestring potatoes (if available) — *kindling*;
 Small marshmallows and/or Cheerios (for fire ring);
 Brown M&M's or mini marshmallows (as fire starters);
 Gloves for handing out food;
 Optional: Small bathroom cups for water or juice



Goal

Teach participants the **three basic fire-building styles**:

1. **Log Cabin.**
2. **Teepee.**
- A-Frame/Lean-To.**

Start by demonstrating with **real logs**, if possible. Keep **logs, tinder, and kindling in separate piles** by the fire pit to reinforce terminology.

Review **Leave No Trace (LNT) fire principles** and **fire safety rules**, including:

Always have a **bucket of water** (or paper cups filled with water) and **shovels** nearby.
 Only a **few people in the fire circle at a time**—why there are rocks around the fire.
Hair and clothing should be secured.

Edible Campfire Instructions

1. Give each participant a **napkin or paper plate**.

Have them sort their snacks into **three piles**:

Logs (large pretzels);
 Tinder (small pretzels);
 Kindling (shoestring potatoes).

Create a **fire ring** by placing **Cheerios or mini marshmallows** in a circle.

Explain: These represent *rocks*, which contain the fire and mark the *safety zone*.

Ask: “*Why do we put rocks around a campfire?*” — Encourage answers!

4. **Build the fire base** — make a triangle (or structure of choice) with the “logs.”
5. Add a **fire starter** — use a **brown M&M or mini marshmallow** in the center.
6. Place **kindling (shoestring potatoes)** gently over the starter — *not too much!* Explain
7. Arrange the **tinder (small pretzels)** in a **teepee shape** over the kindling.
8. Add **candy corn or red hots** on top as the **flames**.



Talk briefly about other fire-building shapes — then . . .

ENJOY YOUR SNACK!



Below: Betty Seacrest shares details about FOIL's efforts to protect our environment — including giving away reusable straws and raising awareness about the impact of plastic waste.



Above: Katy Tiedemann, Blanco SP Interpreter, in uniform, teaches Cub Scouts Dalton Jenschke, Avery Pohl, and Reed Smitt to cast at Backyard Bass station.



Cub Scouts test their casting skills at the Backyard Bass station — learning about fishing fun and outdoor safety!



Left: Ray Buchanan hands Nancy Popkes a ladybug.. Larrisa Popkes and. Andrew Berezin also pictured.

Right: Popping the tent



Bottom: Nancy Popkes and Larrisa Popkes from Richardson, Texas were winners of the Retro Campsite Contest





Left: **The Retro Campsite giveaway display attracted visitors with its nostalgic theme

More Photos of 75th Anniversary from Karen Parker

Right: Vintage Campsite



Left: Al Lillis teaching the art of casting

Mason Mountain Wildlife Management Day Trip

We visited Mason Mountain Wildlife Management Area for our second HLMN Day Trip of 2025. Wildlife biologist and manager of the WMA, Mark Mitchell, shared the history, purpose, and current research projects of the site with us; then we ventured out into the field for a closer look. We saw controlled burn research, a prairie dog town, and . . . BABY HORNED LIZARDS! In the past few months, nearly 1,000 captive-bred lizards have been released at the WMA. A PhD student researcher demonstrated the apparatus used to locate tagged lizards. He also found a previously untagged baby lizard and we were able to watch the process of weighing, photographing, and tagging it. So exciting! Afterwards, all 45 of us enjoyed a delicious lunch together at Willow Creek Cafe in Mason.

Thank you to all who joined us. Time to get to work on our next adventure!

Beth James, on behalf of your HLMN Trip Committee

October Field Trip and Texas Horned Lizards

By Reed Armstrong

Forty HLMN members and five plus-ones enjoyed 2.5 hours of quality time with TPWD biologist Mark Mitchell and TCU researcher & PhD candidate Kira Gangbin on October 23rd.

This lively group learned much about the TPWD Texas horned lizard research work at Mason Mountain Wildlife Management Area.

Mark and Kira are jointly responsible for the release, monitoring and follow-up studies of as many as 1000 juvenile Texas horned lizards annually.

TPWD is leading research into the reintroduction of this marquee species across its historic range. Successful management of fire ants, which prey on harvester ants' primary food sources, will be key to the success of these efforts.

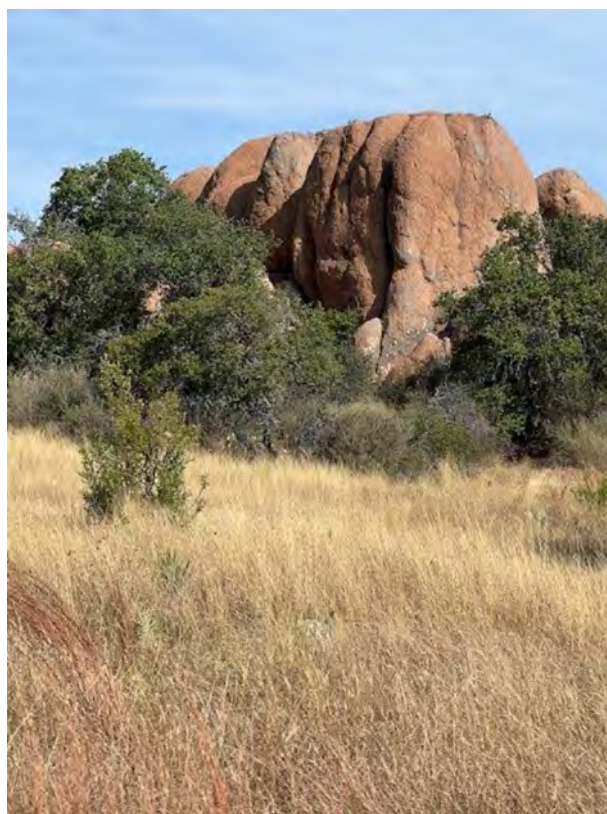
The group from HLMN also learned about a black tail prairie dog town restoration project at MMWMA, which should ultimately yield a stable population of interdependent species like burrowing owls, Texas horned lizards, rabbits, ferrets, and snakes.

This impressive WMA also hosts other long term programs studying controlled burns, exotic hay grazers like the oryx, as well as a variety of graduate and undergraduate study projects on its 5,300 acres of diverse landscapes, habitats, and soil types.

Many thanks to MMWMA and the HLMN trip committee!



Left to right, Linda O’Nan, Karyn Parker, Lyn Davis
Photo by Karyn Parker



Topography of the area is rough, with steep canyons, caliche hills, and granite outcrops
Photo by Karyn Parker



One of several small lakes or ponds in the WMA
Photo by Karyn Parker



A minimally invasive tag enables long-term tracking of this reptile's activity. Photo by Karyn Parker



Attaching a lightweight tracker to monitor this lizard's movements in the wild. Photo by Karyn Parker



Lizard doing a "weigh-in" Photo by Karyn Parker



Volunteers gather for a wrap-up talk along the trail
Photo by Meghan James



Volunteers preparing to board a trailer for a field work and tour
Photo by Meghan James



Tracker used for monitoring Horned Lizards
Photo by Meghan James



Kay Zagst holding a teeny tiny lizard
Photo by Meghan James



Forty + members enjoying quality time
Photo by Meghan James



Heading home at the end of a memorable trip
Photo by Meghan James

LCRA Colorado River Watch Network

By Karen Stewart

Dannialle Clayton, Larry and Betty Secrest, Jerry Stacy, Charlotte Willis, and Karen Stewart attended the LCRA Colorado River Watch Network water testing class back in March. Jerry has been an LCRA water tester for many years at Inks Lake SP.

Karen Stewart has been eagerly waiting for LCRA to offer a water testing class and it finally happened! We all waited for our assignments . . . and waited . . . Larry finally got his assignment at Colorado Bend SP. Karen took over Jerry's assignment at Inks Lake SP, even though she really wanted Lake Buchanan. Charlotte Willis will be testing on Lake LBJ at McNeil Park. Dannialle is still waiting for her assignment. Testing is monthly at the same place every month. Tests include dissolved oxygen, nitrates, and pH.

Since Inks Lake's water level is down, Karen went with Charlotte to McNeil Park in Sunrise Beach to test Lake LBJ's water (pictured left). Water testing counts towards our hours for field research and Texas Water Specialist.



Highland Lakes Native Plant Society of Texas Project

By Julia McComas

Highland Lakes Native Plant Society of Texas (LNPSOT), along with HLMN and Burnet County, have worked together to create a native garden at the Burnet County Public Defender's office. On September 23rd, a team of HLNPSOT and HLMN members got together with the lead Public Defender attorney to plan the garden.

Many thanks to Ingrid Hoffmeister, Carleen Edgar, Betty Saenz, and Julia McComas. Phase one of the project was to install planters in front of the PD's office. Once the plan was finalized, the PD lead had the team build troughs to fit the space and had mulch delivered. The planning team, along with other members, donated the plants. HLNPSOT purchased the soil for the beds and blocks to raise the beds for drainage. HLMN purchased a trellis for the coral honeysuckle. On October 15th, the garden was created with the help of Marylynne Norman, Claude Harding, Ed Houston, Julia McComas, Scott, from the Public Defender's office, and landscaping crew. Plant ID signs were placed and the plants were planted by the team.

If you would like to drop by and see the garden it is located at 110 CR 250. Let us know what you think.

The next step in this project is to place a sign stating the partners involved. We also want to post a QR code that goes to a NPSOT website explaining why natives are the best choice for gardens and information about specific plants.

Phase 2 and 3 are still in the planning. More information will be coming later.



Claude Harding, Ed Houston, Marylynne Norman, and Julia McComas
Photo by the Burnet County Public Defender's Team Lead



Left: Build Team working
Photo by Julia McComas



New beds
Photo by Marylynne Norman



Birds of a Feather?

By Karen Stewart

This little family suddenly appeared on Lake Buchanan. Their arrival is somewhat of a mystery; but, obviously, they were someone's pets. At first glance they all look alike—five little white ducks, maybe? But a closer look reveals two white geese and three white ducks. Ducks and geese tend to get along well, even in the wild. The geese act as protectors, towering over the ducks and often standing guard while the ducks nap.

It's obvious this group was raised together. All of them are white, a sign of domestication rather than a wild lineage since selective breeding typically produces white plumage. This is a beautiful place for them and I've enjoyed watching them settle in. I hope they stay safe and thrive here.



Water Part 2 Rainwater Harvesting

By Karen Stewart

In some areas of the country, rainwater harvesting is against the law, but not in Texas. Many cities, including Austin and San Antonio, have rebates for rainwater systems, and rainwater harvesting is actually encouraged. In the past, many homeowner associations (HOA's) deemed them unsightly, but are now restricted from prohibiting rainwater harvesting in their communities in Texas.

A few things to know about rainwater harvesting:

*Unless it is your sole source of water, most likely, you will never recoup your money on what you pay for it. Collecting rainwater and installing tanks, pipes, and filtration equipment, especially if you are going to drink it, is very expensive. Drinking water from a utility is still much cheaper. It used to be estimated that the cost of putting in a rainwater system was about \$1 per gallon. I am sure that has gone up in recent years.

*All rainwater equipment must be maintained. Most rainwater tanks installed in commercial properties, or fire stations in Austin, only worked for a few years and failed after that because they were not properly maintained. Very few people understand the systems and fail to contract with those that do. Even small barrels must be cleaned out. They fill up with gravel from the roof and mosquitos are a common complaint. “Mosquito Dunks” are a non-toxic remedy. Rain collected in small rain barrels needs to be used and not sit there indefinitely.

*Potable water, in most cases, is too cheap. Let’s do the math. A gallon of potable water, in say, Austin, at the homeowner’s rate is \$3-5 per 1000 gallons, \$.003 per gallon. The average water use per person in Texas is 90-120 gallons per day or 3000 gallons per person per month. This does not typically include the summer outdoor watering. If a rainwater harvesting system costs \$10,000 for an 8000 gallon tank—a 90-day supply for one person—that would equal \$24 -40 versus \$9-15 per month in City of Austin water. It would take 55 years to equal the water cost of the rain water system.

As discussed in the last article, “Where does the water go?” the problem is most people are dumping high quality, potable drinking water on their yards, especially in the summer. By using rainwater harvesting, even though it may cost more initially, it is better for your plants and the environment. If the system is large enough, and enough people do it, then it will take a small load off the public water supply in the summer, keep water on your land, and, sometimes, prevent or mitigate flooding. When people pour drinking water on their yards, they are making potable water less available to the population at large, which lead to water restrictions. Water restrictions occur when the water purification plants cannot keep up with demand or, more common in the Hill Country, drought and development reduce the available water supply and rationing follows.

*If rainwater is the only source of water you have, then obviously its priceless! For people who want to live in more remote areas, rain water harvesting for all the home’s needs may be the only option. This leads us to step 3. Water conservation. Stay tuned.



Owl Presentation at Inks Lake State Park

By Karen Stewart

Photos by Karen Stewart

December 21st Highland Lakes Master Naturalists presented Texas owls at Inks Lake State Park. In addition Cris Northrup shared information about snowy owls and the campers did a snowy owl pine cone craft. Local artist, Marla Ripperda, and Friends of Inks Lake State Park members, helped kids with painting Burr Oak acorns for a tree ornament.



Cris Northrup sharing fascinating insights about Snowy Owls



Ingrid Hoffmeier sharing the hidden world of Texas owls—where to find them, how they live, and why they matter



Arts & Crafts with the owl theme.



Owl Arts & Crafts = SMILES



Hill Country Alliance Leadership Summit

By Karen Stewart

Sept 29, 2025. Camp Lucy

Cathy Houston and I attended the Hill Country Alliance Summit at the Camp Lucy in Dripping Springs. The keynote speaker, Angela Blanchard, was awesome on several different levels and funny as well. She is the former Chief Resilience Officer for the City of Houston. She has worked with leaders on six continents and received numerous awards and recognitions for her Hurricane Katrina work in 2005 and flood recovery efforts in North Carolina in 2024. She has done some amazing work in crises all over the world . . . and with humor.

She posted a “stages of grief” chart, similar to Elizabeth Kubler-Ross’s stages of grief, but more focused on loss from “place.” When your place--your home, your town, is ravaged, homeowners and residents grieve. She also urged people to simply listen--don’t try to impose solutions reflecting your specifications or desires. You need to listen to the community to see what they want. The stages of Place” grief are Survival/Sanctuary, Chaos/Collisions, Limbo, Resignation/Acceptance, Reckoning, Build Anew, and Home Again.

Several panels presented about their efforts in saving the land, water conservation efforts, and the future of the Hill Country region. I wish some of the panelists had been able to make individual presentations, but the panels provided short glimpses of efforts that are being made in many of our communities.

The other speaker I enjoyed very much was Cody Cly, a PhD candidate at the University of Texas-San Antonio, where he studies star dust. He is of Navajo descent and presented some Navajo interpretations of the star constellations. Having read all of the works authored by Tony Hillerman and Anne Hillerman, I am very interested in indigenous history and current culture. A member of the audience asked if, in the past, humans saw more stars in the constellations that gave shape to their interpretations than we currently do. I thought that was a good question, having looked at the four stars of Aries recently, and thought, “How in the heck?” I had hoped to speak to him at the happy hour, but somehow missed him.

In 1997, I started with the City of Austin Water Conservation. I went to numerous seminars and meetings about how to save water with a growing population, how to save native plants and habitats, and how to construct appropriate regulations to preserve water and native habitats. The Lady Bird Wildflower Center in Austin was established around that time. The Woodlands outside Houston attempted to maintain the existing landscape in the midst of development, but to me, it’s disappointing that, today, we are still talking about the same things. We are still beating our heads against developers and homeowners that move to the Hill Country and want to make it a suburb with green lawns. We are still fighting corporations and industries that come here and indiscriminately pump water. The question was asked, “Why do people move here, presumably because of the beauty of the Hill Country, and then decimate it and turn it into a green lawn?” That was certainly the question of the day.

By Cathy Houston

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To begin with, I had never been to Camp Lucy in Dripping Springs. It is a jewel of a venue—beautiful rock buildings surrounded by lovely, huge oaks, gorgeous patio areas, and plenty of space. There were about 150 participants. The topic of the Summit was *Rooted in Resilience*. The day began with a talk from Dr. John Nielsen-Gammon on The Challenges of Hill Country Climate. Dr. Nielsen is from Texas A&M and he described and analyzed the climate of our area using lots of charts and graphs. It was a great way to begin our day. What followed were several panel discussions involving county and city elected officials, developers, and River Authority Managers, Leaders and Engineers. The panel discussions were a great way for those with hands-on experience to share the conservation challenges and solutions that they have faced and implemented. I was very impressed with Judge Bella Rubio from Real County, who has worked tirelessly to find water conservation-friendly solutions to development in her county. It was encouraging to hear her interaction with Burnet County Commissioner Damon Beierle and Drew Paxton from Kerrville, because they are on the same page with controlling development while attempting to preserve our precious Hill Country. Other panel topics included: Water-wise Development in the Hill Country and Land Stewardship Lessons for Droughts and Floods. All participants were taking novel approaches to these challenges and making them work in their areas.

The keynote speaker, Angela Blanchard, retired Chief Resilience Officer for the City of Houston, was amazing. She coordinated relief efforts in Houston during the Katrina disaster and has now helped over 200 communities world-wide to recover from disasters. She spoke about the stages of disaster recovery and how they are very similar to the steps for processing grief. In some ways she reminded me of Ann Richards with her sly humor and confident speech. Her message was resilience and it was well-received. Another interesting presenter was there to highlight the dark sky initiative, Cody Cly, a doctoral candidate from the University of Texas at San Antonio. He spoke about the various constellations and the stories that they connect to in Navajo cosmology. To understand the constellations is to understand the calendar for the Navajo, when to plant, when to harvest, and when to celebrate! As the day wound down, we heard from Sara Schlessinger from the Texas Water Foundation and the progress that was made during this legislative session towards water conservation. She spoke about the importance of Proposition 4, it was on the ballot in November and the implications of its passage (it did). Finally, there were a few lightning round participants that presented short talks on the night sky, harmful quarrying, and native plant rescue. We ended the day with a look ahead for our Hill Country from Katherine Romans, Executive Director of Hill Country Alliance. Happy Hour under the beautiful oaks was a lovely end to a day filled with learning and networking with members of other like-minded organizations. Thanks, Karen for the great opportunity.

2025 HILL COUNTRY LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

Rooted in Resilience

Thursday, September 25
Camp Lucy • Dripping Springs, Texas



Trail Maintenance Guidelines

from Karen Stewart

Tools needed: Loppers for bigger limbs, hand pruners, battery-powered or manual hedge trimmers/shears, battery or gas-powered weed eater, or pruning saw.

Unfortunately, volunteers are not allowed to use a chainsaw in State Parks.

Walk Trails: move large or loose rocks and any other trip hazards off the trails.

Watch for limbs, brush, cacti that are at adult/kid/dog height. Trim them back to at least one foot off the trail, if possible. Any cut material should be thrown farther off the trail.

Use hedge trimmer/weed eater to trim dead wildflowers, etc.

Make sure limbs aren't poking out onto the trail; if trimming limbs, cut them at or below a junction, not leaving a stub, so trimming will last longer even with a growth spurt.

If able, use a weed eater to cut foliage back a foot on each side of the trail.

Check rock baskets and signage.

Report any problems to staff.



Loppers



Hand pruners



Pruning saw



Hedge trimmers/shears

Pruning saws are different from regular saws as the “pull” is the cut, not the “push.”

Party Time



Top left: One happy Elf, Cathy Hill
Photo by Becky Breazeale

Top right: And then there was the "line"
Photo by Becky Breazeale



Left: Another Happy Elf - Pam Sullivan
Photo by Becky Breazeale



Karen Fromberg signing in with Stephanie Beardsley and Robin Miskimins attending Silent Auction bids and handing out pins.

Photo by Becky Breazeale



Robin Miskimins and Kelly Tarla with Jim Howell and Pam Butler in the background

Photo by Becky Breazeale



Paula Richards and Al Lewis planning a new project

Photo by Becky Breazeale



Decisions, decisions - Roy Appleton and Chuck Powell

Photo by Becky Breazeale



Linda O'nan and Jerry Stacy enjoying their meal with Paula, Ed Houston and Cathy Houston in the background

Photo by Becky Breazeale



Karyn Parker and guest, Carol Henle

Photo by Becky Breazeale



Silent Auction

Photo by Karen Stewart



Diners Photo by Karen Stewart



Above: Enjoying THE meal
Photo by Karen Stewart



Left: Lyn Davis and Linda O’nan
Photo by Jerry Stacy



Science Mill, Photos by Sue Davis







Photo Gallery

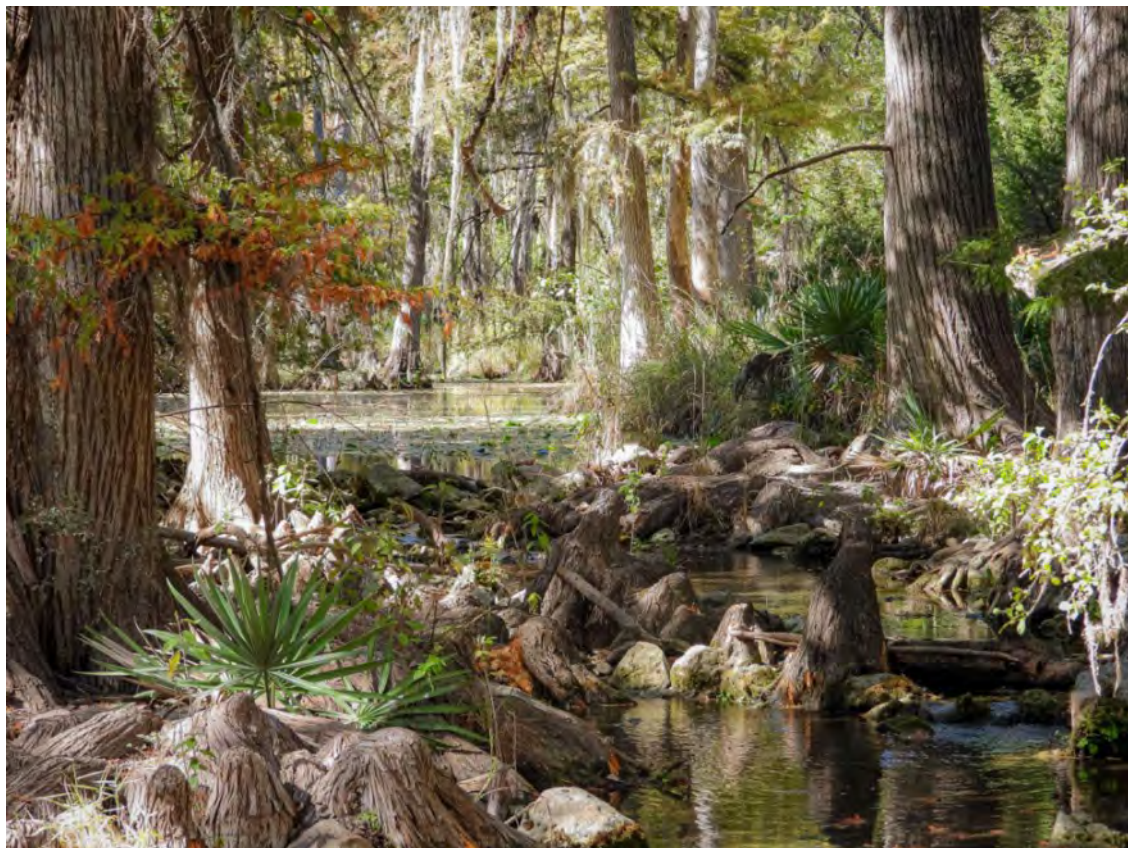
Photos by Meghan James



Common Buckeye, September 7, 2025



Green Heron, August 24, 2025



Honey Creek State Natural Area, October 19, 2025



Inca Dove, February 14, 2025



Lincoln's Sparrow, February 9, 2025

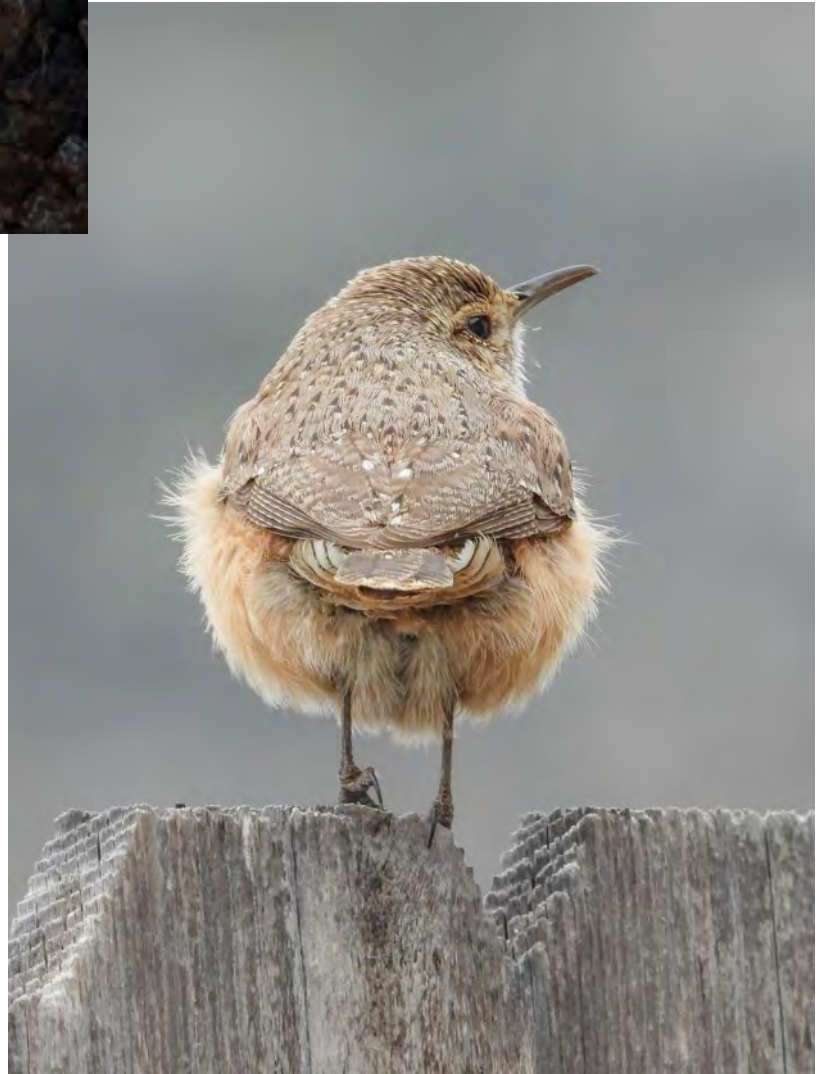


Male Vermilion Flycatcher, October 25, 2025



Raccoon, November 7, 2025

Rock Wren, February 13, 2025





Sharp-shinned Hawk, November 3, 2025



Texas Map turtle, October 3, 2025

Correction to Inks Dam National Fish Hatchery Bird Survey, Late Summer Edition:

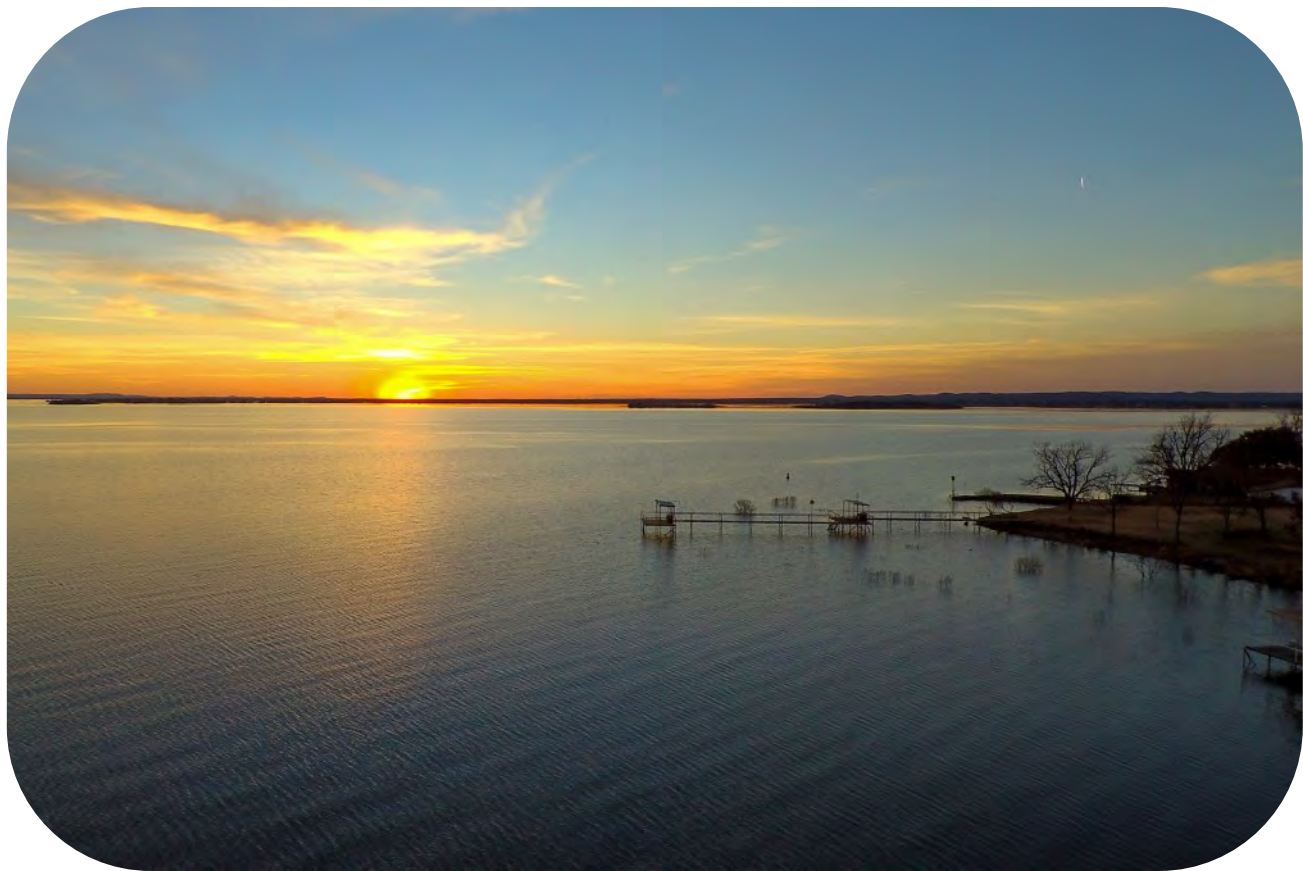
Sherry Bixler hosts the bird survey the **second** Monday of each month. The birder on the far left is Sharon Richardson.



“What you do makes a difference, you just have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.”

~Jane Goodall, 1934-2025





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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