



HILL COUNTRY CHAPTER

THE TEXAS STAR

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NOVEMBER PROGRAM

Our November meeting will be a presentation on *Conservation Roles of the US Fish and Wildlife Service* by **Christina Williams**.

Ms. Williams is a Fish and Wildlife Biologist with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Austin Ecological Services Field Office. She graduated from Texas A&M–Corpus Christi with a BS in Biology. She has been with FWS in Austin for nine years. During her first few years with the FWS, she worked with developers to configure their projects so they would have the least impact on species. Ms. Williams then moved to the Listing and Recovery Branch, where she works on a variety of projects including the listing of nine Bexar County cave invertebrates as endangered, coordinating recovery for birds such as the golden-cheeked warbler, and coordinating the FWS’s Section 6 research and land grants programs. These grant programs support research and land acquisition to benefit rare, threatened, and endangered species.

Ms. Williams’ talk will cover background information on the Endangered Species Act as well as the basic roles of the FWS, and then focus on the biology of the golden-cheeked warbler and black-capped vireo. She will bring lots of handouts with information on creating backyard habitat for birds and butterflies, the dangers of plate glass on birds, benefits of shade coffee, and more.

This meeting will be held on **Monday, November 27** at 7:00pm at Riverside Nature Center, 150 Francisco Lemos Street in Kerrville. We hope that you can join us.

President’s Message

by Jim Stanley

Reflections on 4 years as a Master Naturalist: Part II

Last month I discussed various types of activities I have been involved with as a Master Naturalist, and how I thought those activities that involved teaching others about the ecology of the Hill Country were the most rewarding. Now I would like to explain why. To my mind, the biggest problem with the Hill Country landscape is the loss of, and continued destruction of what, for want of a better term, I will call the “natural” habitat: that is, the habitat that was here before Europeans arrived and would be here still except for modern man’s management practices. Modern man’s management practices are responsible for or have significantly contributed to: cedar encroachment, deer overpopulation, reduced stream flows and aquifer levels, reduced amounts of grazing and browsing forage, introduction of exotic species and oak wilt.

Since 95% of all land in Texas is privately owned, the solutions to all of the above problems rest with those private landowners. And in the Hill Country, that increasingly means new, small landowners, most of whom have little experience managing land and are not looking to make a living off of the land. Educating these folks about the ecology of the Hill Country and about relevant management practices they can put in place to improve their little piece of it can go a long way toward alleviating many of the above-mentioned problems. I think that is the most important thing we can do.

The good news is a lot of people that are in the above category are also eager to learn and welcome any help they can get. Many of them have asked us for Land Management Assistance Program visits, and some of these new owners have also become Master Naturalists. As we grow in numbers, the number of other residents we can reach and educate also increases, and hopefully in the future our efforts will have truly made a difference in the Hill Country.

I can't expect everyone to share the same goals and priorities, but I do hope that all MNs will think seriously about where they can make the biggest difference in an important area, to educate themselves in those areas and to then take it upon themselves to share this knowledge with others. My experience has been very rewarding and fulfilling, and I think you will find it to be so too. Never stop learning.

Class of 2006 Project and Graduation

The Class of 2006 will meet to work on their class project at Kerrville-Schreiner Park on Wednesday morning, November 15. Their chosen project will involve building exclosures around new trees, finding and caging hardwood saplings, clearing cedar, planning and maintaining trails, and enclosing a meadow habitat for restoration and study. This year's class has shown a lot of enthusiasm and dedication, so we are all anxious to see the results of their combined efforts! Following a hard morning's work, the class will enjoy lunch together and—at last!—graduation.

Holiday Party

Our chapter's holiday party will be held on **Saturday, December 16** at First United Methodist Church (321 Thompson Drive in Kerrville) from noon to 2:00pm. Our menu will include:

- Salad bar
- Rosemary lemon chicken
- Rice pilaf
- Green beans
- Parmesan bread stick
- Cheese cake with strawberry mousse topping
- Iced tea.

All this for only \$7 per person! We'll need to submit our head count ahead of time, so please RSVP to Jim Stanley at 830 257 2094 or jstmn@ktc.com by December 7.

In celebration of the graduation of our 5th class of Master Naturalists, and all of the wonderful things we have accomplished since our inception, the Board has voted to contribute \$5 to the cost of the meal for every Master Naturalist and spouse/guest. That means that the cost to you will be only \$2 per person.

This get-together is always a great opportunity to enjoy a delicious meal and celebrate the season with our chapter members, and there will be no other meeting in December. In addition to the good eats and camaraderie, this occasion is also our year-end recognition of members' achievements, and a chance to welcome the new board. Plan to be there!

Snakes . . . A Slightly Different Perspective

Karen Millikan

In our efforts to identify and understand life forms whose virtues may have escaped us, consider our legless friend the SNAKE. Can we learn anything from snakes? What beliefs or feelings might be altered with just a little education from a positive perspective? There is plenty of scientific information about snakes available to us, but what good is it if the knowledge we gain does not transform our beliefs and our actions?

Let's consider the concepts of respect, responsibility and reverence and see what new points of view we might adopt.

Respect

Snakes are the single most efficient means of natural rodent control. A snake almost never misses its intended prey. In .04 seconds, faster than you can blink your eye, a snake can capture its prey. Rats and mice multiply so quickly that in 18 months two of these rodents can produce over a million offspring. What if there were no snake predators? Many other animals prey on rodents but none as efficiently as the snake. Snakes were created for a purpose. They know what that purpose is and they never lose their focus. We can respect that.

Responsibility

Many people fear snakes. The majority of snake fears stem from misinformation or an incident blown out of proportion. As educators, our responsible attitude and knowledgeable approach will go a long way to dispel unfounded fears as we encounter them.

There are over 2800 kinds of snakes if we include subspecies. Several new species are discovered each year. Worldwide, only 19% of snake species are dangerous, but the Hill Country is home to several venomous species: the rattlesnake, the Copperhead, and the coral snake.

Understanding the habits of snakes will help people to avoid them as well as prepare them for a chance encounter.

In October snakes begin to look for a rodent burrow or a deep crevice in a rock for protection from the elements as winter approaches. They may use the same den year after year. During warmer periods, they may come out to sun, then go back to their hibernacula. We are not likely to encounter snakes again until late March, when they begin to emerge from hibernation, unless our winter is unseasonably warm.

When a habitat is ideal and food is abundant, it is not unusual to find rattlesnakes living in groups. These snakes have a summer feeding area, a winter hibernation site and a migration corridor between the two, and they are highly territorial. If a house is built on their migration route, the homeowner may see rattlesnakes in the yard each year as the snakes move through. Take safety precautions while allowing the snakes to traverse properties unharmed. Occasionally a migrating snake may choose to hang out in an unacceptable spot – like a sunny porch – in which case the homeowner should take responsibility to relocate the snake.

There are landowners in our area that will allow these animals to be transferred to their property. Never try to catch a venomous snake on your own. Contact the Kerr County Rabies & Animal Control Supervisor, currently Janie Roman. Trained personnel from that office will be dispatched to secure the animal and make the relocation. In Kerr County, call 830 257 3100. Good information to keep handy!

Relocation does present a challenge for the snake, as it introduces the animal to an unfamiliar environment where it must establish its own new territory.

Responsible homeowners will also keep their immediate home sites clear of rock piles and stacked wood, and repair holes around the perimeter of the home that might invite undesirable inhabitants. Keep garbage receptacles covered at all times. No rats means fewer snakes. Never be complacent, watch where you step or sit, and never put your hands anywhere you have not carefully checked. Oh, and don't forget to check your boots!

Reverence

To revere the snake means to understand its role in the natural world and to place value on its existence. In our

intricately designed world, all living things are interconnected and dependent on one another. If we appreciate this, we may then be able to make allowances for those individuals we don't quite relate to, and realize that without their existence something of our own existence would be incomplete.

I have learned a lot about life from snakes, such as:

- Don't get in a hurry. Look beyond the obvious. When a young snake hatches it does not leave the safety of its incubation chamber (its egg) immediately. It takes several days to assess the outside world and build its strength. Its future is somewhat uncertain, and it will be faced with new challenges and choices every day. Advance preparation helps us go forward from a fully prepared position.
- Don't waste your energy on cold trails. Act on your opportunities. Snakes use their sense of smell – their tongues – to pick up the freshest scent trails left by their prey. Once they have done their homework, they will wait patiently until the unsuspecting prey comes to them. Practice patience, use your time wisely, and don't let opportunities pass you by.
- Let being different work for you. Each life has great value. Snakes are feared mostly because they are very different, and because people just don't know very much about them, and what they do know is frequently wrong. Being different can be an asset. Be the best you can be with what you have to work with. Discover your best assets and let those assets work for you as you move through life. It's the journey, not the destination, that's important.

So, practice respect, responsibility and reverence, and honor the fact that we are all connected.

Karen Millikan is in the Texas Master Naturalist Class of 2006.

2006 State Conference

by Donna Robinson

October , , , in Texas . . . a weekend at Mo Ranch – what could be better? My husband Don and I are “alumni” of the class of 2005. Last year's annual meeting at Mo Ranch was such fun that we decided to go again – and we're grateful for the scholarship that Donna won in the drawing this year.

It was a wonderful getaway for us – even though we live just a few miles from Mo Ranch, it was like a vacation. The accommodations were very comfortable, and the opportunity to meet with Master Naturalists from around the state was invaluable.

We each attended sessions that met our individual interests. Don now knows a lot more about Texas wildfires, their nature, and how to protect property. Donna was particularly impressed with the session on Service Learning in schools, and how we can present a TMN approach through the schools.

We enthusiastically encourage members to take advantage of the superb resources for training provided by Texas Cooperative Extension and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Donna Robinson graduated with the Texas Master Naturalist Class of 2005 and was certified in October.

Monarch, Milkweed and MLMP

by Kip Kiphart

The *Monarch, Milkweed and Monarch Larval Monitoring Project* presentation on October 9 attracted ten people, including a 10-year-old home-schooled young man who said, "I've always been interested in bugs." Julia Campbell, Ginny de Wolf, Bill Frodyma, Betty Gardner, and Barbara Lowenthal from our Hill Country Master Naturalist chapter participated. They plan to start MLMP at

the butterfly garden in Kerrville-Schreiner City Park. Mary Kennedy brought live organisms for a hands-on demonstration.

On Friday morning prior to the Incidental Butterfly Count, we were treated with a spectacular event: migrating Swainson's hawks and at a lower level, thousands of migrating monarchs. An account from Paul Miliotis:

I also wanted to give you an estimate of the Monarch migration that we saw at the Center. I estimate that there were about 500 Monarchs per minute passing the open patch of sky above us, and estimate conservatively about 20,000 monarchs during the short period they were passing over. I do not believe I have seen a Monarch migration like this in Texas or elsewhere. On October 14, fourteen individuals attended MLMP@CNC Back Porch Review, including monarch experts/educators/aficionados, Ba Rea, Carol Cullar, and Carole Jordan and Ron. The rain let up enough for us to monitor our milkweed patch. We found 77 plants with 13 eggs, a 5th instar monarch and a 2nd instar queen. For the second week in a row, we found monarch and queen instars. See the CNC data at <http://www.mlmp.org/results/states.asp?State=TX&SiteID=272>.

Many thanks to all who participated and made the events so successful.

A Page from the Herbarium

This month's plant:

Wild Four-o-Clock

Scientific Name – *Mirabilis nyctaginea*

Family – *nyctaginea*

by Julia Campbell

This plant is upright and blooms in the fall with 1/2 " flowers of bright pink petal-like sepals. The leaves are opposite and about 2-4" long. It grows on dry gravelly or calcareous soils. The flowers open in late afternoon and can be seen in the morning hours as well. Although the flowers are small, they are abundant and create a beautiful picture. It appears as a small bush but the stems are quite fragile. The plant is a perennial herb about 1-3' in height.



This plant was photographed in Julia Campbell's garden in Tierra Linda in Gillespie County, where it was apparently planted by the birds.

*Julia Campbell is a Master Naturalist, a member of the Virtual Herbarium Project,
Past President of the Native Plant Society, Kerrville Chapter,
and a member of the Landscape and Buildings Committee of the Riverside Nature Center.*

*The Texas Hill Country Virtual Herbarium is a project dedicated to creating a photographic database
to be used for identification of plants native to the Texas Hill Country area.*

*For more information, contact **Barbara Lowenthal**.*

Master Naturalist Milestones/Acknowledgments/Kudos

These members have earned awards that will be presented at our November 27 meeting:

Dorothy Akers, Jim Gardner, Susan Longacre and Lyda Slayton have completed all their training, forty hours of volunteer service in their communities and eight hours of advanced training (AT) to achieve certification as Texas Master Naturalists. They will receive their certificates and their dragonfly pins.

Sharon Corley and Wanda Mattarocci have recertified for 2006 by completing forty volunteer hours and eight hours of AT this year. They will receive the TMN pin of 2006, the Texas Prickly Pear.

Wanda Mattarocci has also earned her Bronze Milestone award recognizing 250 cumulative hours of Volunteer service since she became a TMN.

Please Report your 2006 Volunteer and AT Hours!

We greatly appreciate all our members who have reported their hours to our data manager, Nyta Hensley. We know that some members have not yet reported their good works.

Members of the Class of 2006 have 15 months (until December 31, 2007) to achieve their certification. Class of 2005 members have until December 31, 2006 to complete their certification. To date, 18 members of the Class of 2005 have

achieved their first certification.

We encourage all members to report their 2006 hours before the end of the year. In early January, our Chapter submits our annual report to the State TMN Office, including the total hours earned by all of our members in 2006. These hours have a value of \$18.04/hour to the State TMN Office when applying for matching grants.

If you are working toward recertification for 2006, you cannot carry over your 2006 hours toward 2007 certification. It is desirable to reach the recertification requirements discussed above by the end of 2006, if at all possible.

If you have questions on the current totals of your Volunteer and AT hours or on the requirements for the various TMN awards available, please contact **Priscilla Stanley** or 830 257 2094.

Diane McMahon was elected to the Headwaters Groundwater Conservation District, Precinct 3. Diane has been attending lots of water-related events in the Hill Country in anticipation of her run for this position, so now she'll have plenty of opportunities to put all that knowledge to good use!

Congratulations to all our chapter's achievers this month!

Calendar

November 15: Texas Recycles Day – Statewide public awareness campaign that aims to educate Texans on the environmental and economic benefits of waste reduction and recycling. Coordinated through the Recycling Alliance of Texas and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. See <http://www.texasrecyclesday.org/> for details.

November 18: Land and Water Conference – 8:30am-4:00pm, Cibolo Nature Center, Boerne. Numerous presentations focusing on water conservation, deer management and native plants. \$20/person includes box lunch. Pre-registration is required. Contact Georgia at 830 249 4616 or e-mail nature@cibolo.org.

November 18: Hill Country Archeological Association – 12:30pm, Riverside Nature Center, 150 Francisco Lemos, Kerrville. **Patricia A. Mercado-Allinger**, State Archeologist from the Texas Historical Commission, will speak on the Texas Historical Commission's Stewards Program.

November 20: Texas Master Naturalist – Hill Country Chapter monthly board meeting – 2:00pm, Riverside Nature Center, 150 Francisco Lemos, Kerrville.

November 27: Texas Master Naturalist – Hill Country Chapter monthly meeting – 7:00pm, Riverside Nature Center, 150 Francisco Lemos, Kerrville. *See above for details.*

December 5: Native Plant Society of Texas, Kerrville Chapter – 2:00pm, Riverside Nature Center, 150 Francisco Lemos, Kerrville. Presentation by **Flo Oxley** with the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin.

December 16: Texas Master Naturalist – Hill Country Chapter Holiday Party – Noon–2:00pm. Get together with your fellow chapter members at First United Methodist Church in Kerrville. *See above for details.*

January 13 and 20: Riverside Nature Center Adult Learning for Living Series – *The Ecology of the Hill Country, and How to Take Care of Your Little Piece of It*, a 2-part lecture by **Jim Stanley**, Texas Master Naturalist. Part 1 on Saturday, January 13 from 9:00am to noon; Part 2 on Saturday, January 20 from 9:00am to noon. Riverside Nature Center, 150 Francisco Lemos, Kerrville.

January 13, 20 and 27: Wildlife Tax Valuation Seminar – 9:00am–12:30pm, Cibolo Nature Center, Boerne. **Jan Wrede** will moderate discussion and presentations by **Rufus Stephens**, **Mark Peterson**, **Gary Eldridge**, and **David Langford** on topics such as Wildlife Management Overview and Property Inventory (January 13),

Management Practices and Application Procedures (January 20), and WTV history with updates on laws and regulations (January 27). Many participants complete the seminar with a concrete plan and are ready to apply. Limit: 35. Members \$70/person and \$90/couple; non-members \$90/person and \$110/couple. Call 830 249 4616 or e-mail nature@cibolo.org to register.

January 16: ARC EXPLORER for Land Managers – 4:00–6:00pm, Cibolo Nature Center, Boerne. **Rufus Stephens**, TPWD wildlife biologist for Kendall and Comal Counties, presents a workshop on the best technology for mapping land and land management planning. The software is free. Bring your laptop and learn by doing under the supervision of an experienced mapmaker. You will create a dynamic and attractive map using aerial photographs currently available on the Internet. Although this workshop is designed with land manager needs in mind, it is open to anyone with an interest in digital mapping technology. Members \$15/person and \$20/couple; non-members \$20/person and \$30/couple. Limited to 20. To register, call 830 249 4616.

Note: There will be no newsletter published in December.

Please send newsletter contributions and comments to [Phyllis Muska](#).

