The Texas Star

Newsletter of the

Texas Master Naturalist

Hill Country Chapter

June 2014 Volume 12 Number 6

TEXAS

Master Naturalist™

June 23 Meeting: Native Plants

Bill Carr will speak on the need to conserve the native plants of the Hill Country. He'll discuss rare plants, endemic plants, small plants that we sometimes don't notice, and some that are just his favorites.

Everyone is welcome to join us on Monday, June 23, at 7 p.m. in the Upper Guadalupe River Authority's lecture hall, 125 N. Lehman Drive in Kerrville. Arrive at 6:30 to chat with members and guests.

President's Message . . . . Vern Crawford

The upcoming anniversary of moving into our little home on the Guadalupe River reminds me of just how fortunate it was that we attended the Earth Day activities at Riverside Nature Center, where we had the privilege of meeting Mary Frances Watson at our chapter's Texas Master Naturalist information table. She introduced us to Jim Stanley and Koy Coffer. Each of them answered our questions, explained the program, and encouraged us to consider enrolling in the upcoming class.

Thankfully, we followed their wise advice, and we found ourselves highly impressed by the breadth of topics covered and the quality of each of the instructors. What an introduction to the wonders of our unique ecosystem! I was elected Class Representative later that fall, which gave me the chance to see how much work goes into the preparations for presenting such a quality curriculum.

It has been a privilege to work with this year's Class Director, Liz Ross, and the Class Committee, which is now completing preparations for the new Class of 2014.

Our Membership Director, Becky Etzler, reports that applications for this year's class have been coming in at a steady pace and there is still opportunity to apply before the July 14th deadline.

Many of us have friends or neighbors who we know would be good Master Naturalists. Let me take this opportunity to encourage you to share your enthusiasm for our chapter and invite them to apply for this year's class. Please forward the application link (http://txmn.org/hillcountry/apply)link to them.

Thank you, Mary Frances!

Vern

This Month We Honor

Initial Certification

Lucy Griffith Andy Robinson

Special Recertification

Pat Hopf Paul Person

2014 Recertification

Norma Bruns Warren Ferguson Betty Gardner Louis Giusti Cynthia Jackson
Alexis McRoberts Sandra Meineke Martha Miesch Ward Miller Lars Nielsen
Tara Randle Linda Louise Ross John Sloan Ken Weber

Milestones

Pat Nelson, Ann Schneider - Bronze Dragonfly, 250 hours

Bob Hanson - Brushed Silver Dragonfly, 500 hours

Becky Etzler - Gold Dragonfly, 1000 hours

Congratulations to members who received awards at the April meeting.

From left to right: Floyd Trefny, Jim Stanley, Priscilla Stanley, Tom Riordan, Sandy Leyendecker, Becky Etzler, Tom Hynes, Fane Downs, Mike Foulds, Diane McMahon, Donna Oliver-Leep, Ann Dietert, Lenore Langsdorf, Cay Russ, Rod Boertje

Collecting Milkweed Seeds

By Cathy Downs

Texas Milkweed
(*Asclepias texana*)

Collecting and distributing milkweed seeds responsibly insures a healthy milkweed habitat population. There are also the additional benefits of opportunity for education and developing relationships with private landowners and communities.

Collect only your native or regional seedpods. Leave some pods in the area you are collecting to insure the that plants continue to propagate and thrive in that area. A good rule of thumb is to take 1/3 and leave 2/3. Positively identify the plant before collecting the pods. Milkweed seeds look alike in most species and are very difficult to identify by the seed alone. Mark the collecting container with your name, the date, species common name, species botanical name, and the location of the collection. For instance: Cathy Downs, 5/24/14, Antelope Horn (Asclepias asperula), Kendall County, Texas.

Collecting usually is done on private lands, public right of ways, and roadsides. When collecting milkweed seeds on public right of ways and roadsides remember safety first! Park in an area where there is no chance of disrupting traffic or putting yourself in harm's way. Do not collect in areas near or around development or private gate entrances without permission. Curious onlookers and officials may stop to discuss or inquire about this roadside activity. Take the opportunity and the time to explain politely what you are doing and why. You may even be joined by these curious folks in your efforts or directed to additional areas where they have spotted some of these treasures.

Private property collection always requires permission. As milkweed ambassadors we can not afford to alienate the private stewards of these habitats with any property infringement or trespassing issues on our part.

All milkweeds will put out a pod of some sort. The shape and surface texture may vary but the pods will all look similar. The top three species of concern in Texas are listed below.

Antelope Horns
(*Asclepias asperula)*

Green Milkweed
(Asclepias viridis)

Hierbe de Zizotes
(Asclepias oenetheroides)

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When collecting pods be sure and have a dry cardboard box or paper bag to put the pods in. The milky sap is very sticky and fresh milkweed pods can mold very quickly. You can line the box with newspaper.

Do not pick a pod before its time. The seeds will not ripen in the pod when taken from the stem of the plant too soon. The seeds should be dark in color. Green or pale seeds are not ripe and will not propagate. You can remove the pod with a scissor or snips. Be very careful not to get any of the milky sap in your eyes or on your skin. Wash your hands thoroughly and often when handling milkweed.

Never harvest a pod until you see the seam of the pod straining or beginning to split. Be sure the pod is free of all flies, milkweed beetles and other seed eating pests. The pod will usually darken with maturity turning to a dark bark or mahogany color. Watch the seam on the milkweed pod which will start out thin and difficult to see eventually widening and turning pale. On maturity the pod will begin to split.

Not Ready

Not Ready

Perfect Picking

Easy Pickings

continued on next page

If you have a surplus of seed in your collecting region you have several choices. You can share the seed with your local or regional communities and schools, distributing out of your home, or you can ship the seed out for redistribution to other areas of need. I get many requests from Texas gardeners, individuals, schools and first-time Monarch habitats for regional seed. There are also non-profit and for-profit growers and nurseries looking for native milkweed seed. Monarch Watch accepts seed from all over the nation to propagate with their partner nursery and then offers the plugs for sale at cost. (www.monarchwatch.org).

We are beginning to see a market develop in the commercial nursery industry for native milkweeds. If distributing seed to a commercial enterprise it is imperative we distribute only to those growers who have a reputation for non-systemic pesticide use. If distributing seed to a commercial enterprise it is imperative we distribute only to those growers who have a reputation for non-systemic pesticide use. Native American Seed in Junction, TX (www.seedsource.com) now includes a variety of milkweeds in their catalogs and conservation packets which include milkweed seeds.

Milkweed seed collection is by its nature a relaxing and enjoyable past time. If we take care to show responsible collecting, storage and distribution practices we are insuring at least a stability if not an increase in healthy Monarch, insect, and pollinator habitats.

If you have any questions, additional suggestions, or surplus seeds for distribution, please feel free to contact me.

Cathy Downs, Chair
Bring Back the Monarchs to Texas
105 Feather Hill Road
Comfort, TX 78013
mzdowns@hctc.net
830-377-1632

Recent Hill Country Naturalist Columns by Jim Stanley

4/11/2014 "Random Observations on a Sunny Early Spring Day"
4/18/2014 "Humans Make Life Tough for Wildlife"
4/25/2014 "Of Bees and Butterflies and Other Sad Tales"
5/2/2014 "March and April Walks Along the Nature Trail"
5/9/2014 "Have You Ever Seen A Biological Soil Crust?"
5/16/2014 "The Chemistry of Photosynthesis and the Carbon Cycle"
5/23/2014 "Coyotes: Rural and Urban"

These and all other previous Kerrville Daily Times columns can be found at www.hillcountrynaturalist.org

From Martha Miesch

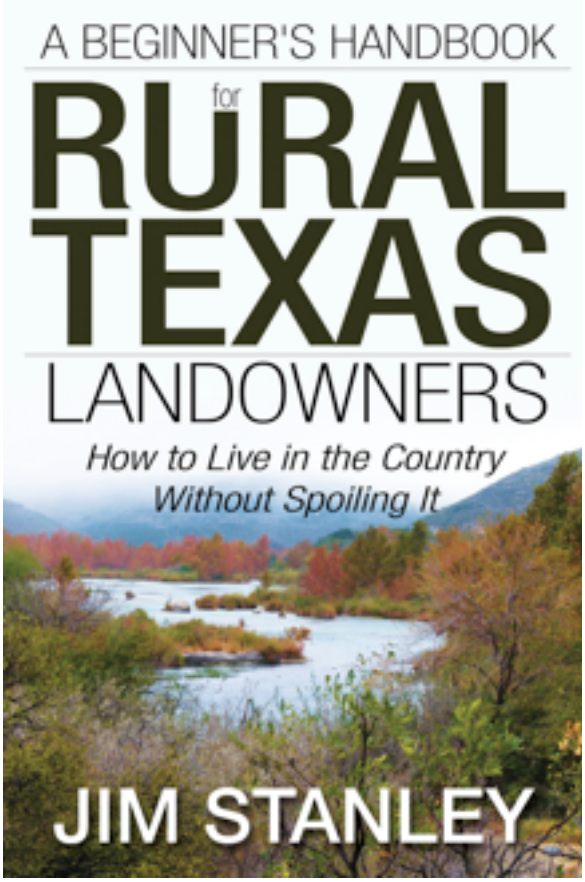
The Kroc Center Program in May: Water Conservation and the Effects of Drought

Tara Bushnoe and her assistant Travis Linscomb from the Upper Guadalupe River Authority (UGRA) delivered some graphic illustrations of how the lack of rain affects our present and future. They began the program by asking the 4th and 5th graders questions which illustrated basic facts relevant to life in the Hill Country. They used a tall clear tube to demonstrate gallons of water that many people assume will always flow from indoor plumbing. Tara pointed out that people in much of the world must haul water from wells and are very careful to not waste water. Comparisons were made with normal household uses such as bathroom plumbing and laundry in the course of a week, factoring in the number of people involved. Conservation should be practiced to protect a dwindling resource that is also affected by rising temperatures. The tube demonstration also illustrated inches of rainfall that have been recorded from January until the present and compared it to the rainfall recorded for the drought of 2011.

The visual demonstrations were followed by a walk on the grounds of the Kroc Center to examine the landscape, which is not irrigated and showed much evidence of current drought, such as the lack of vegetation, erosion from a recent rain, and the type of vegetation that dominated because it thrives and survives in drought conditions. The students were attentive and we hope will share what they learned with others.

The Master Naturalists who assisted Tara and Travis were Julie Clay, Sara Hilburn, Martha Miesch, Pat Nelson, John Sloan, and Mary Frances Watson. If you are interested in helping educate students to value and protect nature through this program, contact marthamiesch@msn.com. We present a nature study program for one hour on the third Thursday of the month during the school year for the KROC after school students. The program will resume in September and continue through May.

Jim Stanley, an original member and past president of the Hill Country Chapter, has announced the publication of his second book, entitled *A Beginner's Handbook for Rural Texas Landowners: How to Live in the Country Without Spoiling It*. The book is currently available in paperback, in the Kindle edition from Amazon.com, and in paperback from barnesandnoble.com.



About the Book:

Living in the country in Texas can be the most enjoyable experience of your life, but managing rural property is not the same as taking care of a half-acre suburban lot. Living in the country and taking care of the land involves issues many new landowners have not experienced before. This book discusses why it is so important that rural land in Texas be well-managed and the native flora and fauna be protected.

We are making more Texans every day, but we aren't making any more land or water, so every bit is precious. This point is emphasized using the philosophy and ethics of the great naturalist and conservationist, Aldo Leopold. The major problems encountered by small-acreage landowners include overgrazing, past or present, by livestock and exotic ungulates, overbrowsing by deer, goats and exotics, brush encroachment, invasive exotic plants and animals, erosion, and efficient water catchment and management.

Each of these issues is discussed in some detail explaining the source of the problem and how to avoid or minimize it. Numerous other issues encountered in living in the country are discussed as well as where landowners can find more detailed advice and information to help them with land management issues. My goal is to help small landowners enjoy their property and to also help them be good stewards of their land.

About the Author:

I grew up in the High Plains of West Texas and attended Texas Tech University. After a career in chemical research, my wife and I bought a small piece of the Hill Country and retired in 2000. I have devoted most of my life since that time to learning about land management, Nature, native habitat and related issues as a Master Naturalist and to helping small landowners better understand their land. My first book, *Hill Country Landowner's Guide* was published by Texas A & M Press in 2009 and received the Native Plant Society of Texas' Carroll Abbott Memorial Award in 2012.

Better Lights *for* Better Nights Conference

Dripping Springs Ranch Park Event Center

August 15, 2014

The City of Dripping Springs, in partnership with the International Dark Sky Association Texas (IDA Texas), will host the Better Lights for Better Nights Conference on Friday, August 15, 2014 at the Dripping Springs Ranch Park Events Center.

The day-long conference is designed to address many issues surrounding light pollution and provide tools to implement new lighting regulations and solutions in your community. Vendors and exhibitors will share displays and demonstrations, and organized sessions led by industry professionals and educators will take place throughout the day.

Early Bird Ticket Price: $50

After July 15, 2014, Ticket Price: $60

Register Now

The registration fee includes admission to all seminars, a box lunch, afternoon snack, reception, a mouth-watering barbecue dinner by The Salt Lick and a bus tour of outdoor lighting in Dripping Springs.

Registration and check-in will begin at 10:00am – the first session will begin at 11:00am. Vendor displays and exhibits will be available for viewing beginning at 10:00am; we invite you to come early and peruse the items and information that will be on display.

Dripping Springs is the first Dark Sky Community in Texas, and is among the first to host such an event.

We hope you will join us in August to learn how to reduce glare & light trespass, improve visibility and protect our night skies. Keep Texas stars shining brightly!

The registration form and more information can be found on our website: TexasNightSkyFestival.org.

City of Dripping Springs, attn: BLBN, P.O. Box 384, Dripping Springs, Texas 78620

betterlights@texasnightskyfestival.org (512) 858-4725

Texas A&M AgriLife Provides Leadership in Statewide Projects and Education

by Paul Schattenberg

COLLEGE STATION — After a long dry period, many parts of the state have finally received some badly needed rain, and those with rainwater harvesting systems have been reaping the rewards of this belated gift from Mother Nature, said Texas A&M AgriLife water resources experts.

The rainwater harvesting system at the Menard Public Library irrigates many plots of native plants and includes a rain garden area. A 2,500 gallon galvanized tank collects water from the library's roof. (Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service photo by Justin Mechell)

"Rainwater harvesting is a time-tested and effective means of water conservation and irrigation," said Billy Kniffen, retired Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service statewide water resource specialist and past director of the American Rainwater Catchment Association. "And with drought affecting much of Texas, interest in rainwater harvesting from industry, various levels of government and homeowners is increasing. People in general are becoming more receptive to implementing these practices."

As a long-time AgriLife Extension agent and water resource specialist, Kniffen has been involved in the planning, design and/or implementation of dozens of large- and small-scale rainwater catchment systems for offices, schools, community centers, libraries, hospitals and other facilities throughout Texas. Several of his many projects have been in his home county of Menard, with one notable example being the Menard Public Library.

Kniffen, along with Texas Master Gardener and Texas Master Naturalist volunteers, helped install a 2,500-gallon galvanized tank, along with drip irrigation and a rain garden to capture water runoff.

"One inch of rainwater dripping from a 1,500-square-foot roof can easily catch 600 gallons of water," Kniffen noted. "At the library, the metal rainwater harvesting tank collects rainwater from two downspouts, and the water is used to irrigate more than 50 plots of native plants common to the region. Runoff goes into a shallow, flat bottom pond that would catch a two-inch rainfall event and have it infiltrated into the soil within 24 hours. Rainfall over that amount would overflow into an irrigation ditch." Another section of the library captured water using a "storm chamber" that stores and gradually releases water into the surrounding landscape.

This 5,000-gallon rainwater harvesting tank at the education building of the World Birding Center in Edinburg provides irrigation for flowering plants and shrubs that attract a variety of birds, dragonflies, butterflies and more. (Photo courtesy of Marisa Rodriguez)

"For years, AgriLife Extension and Texas A&M AgriLife Research personnel have been involved with rainwater harvesting projects, demonstrations and education throughout the state," said John Smith, AgriLife Extension program specialist, College Station.

In Edinburg, Smith and the AgriLife Extension horticulturist for Hidalgo County, Barbara Storz, worked with World Birding Center manager Marisa Rodriguez on a rainwater harvesting system at the facility's education center. "I designed the catchment system and the center employees installed it," Smith said. "It has a 5,000 gallon tank and a 3,000 gallon tank to capture water from the center's roof surface." Smith said the rainwater harvested at the center is used for irrigating a large variety of native flowering plants and shrubs that help attract and support birds, butterflies, dragonflies and other creatures of interest to nature fanciers. Storz said in addition to providing water for the plants, the rainwater harvesting system is used as an educational tool to teach about the need to preserve and conserve water resources. "Furthermore, here in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, nature tourism is a major economic sector and facilities like this create interest and attract more people to the area, which helps our economy," she said.

Another Texas A&M AgriLife effort geared toward educating people about water conservation is the WaterSense home at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center in Dallas. The home, completed in March of last year in partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 6 and the City of Dallas Water Utilities, received a 2013 Texas Rain Catcher Award from the Texas Water Development Board. "The Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center is to be commended for implementing new technology that promotes rainwater harvesting and the benefits of water conservation," said board member Kathleen Jackson.

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This facility is the first of its kind in North Texas to receive certification as a renovation project and the first WaterSense home to have a rainwater harvesting system as one of its water-saving features, said Clint Wolfe, AgriLife Research urban water programs manager for the center. The system provides an efficient alternative source of irrigation by using captured rainwater for landscaping. The rainwater harvesting system for the WaterSense home consists of a 1,000-gallon polyethylene tank with a first flush diverter and fill tube. The tank provides water to seven drip irrigation zones and two spray zones outfitted with a one-horsepower self-priming pump.

Dotty Woodson, AgriLife Extension program specialist in water resources in Dallas, explains the rainwater harvesting system at the WaterSense Home to professionals at the recent Turfgrass, Landscaping and Irrigation event. (Texas A&M AgriLife photo)

"The home's garden area consists of low-water-use native and adaptive plants, so the landscape has been designed to be sustained solely by supplemental irrigation from captured rainwater," Wolfe said. "The WaterSense Labeled Home has provided an exceptional opportunity for people who visit the center to learn about rainwater harvesting and many other indoor and outdoor methods of conserving water."

An example multi-family dwelling on the Dallas center grounds next to the home is equipped with a 1,500-gallon tank for landscape irrigation, along with individual 35-gallon rainwater barrels in small, enclosed backyard patio areas. Lawn irrigation accounts for a major part of water use in urban areas, so the center is also investigating rainwater harvesting efficiency related to this specific application.

The center has four free-standing rainwater harvesting test sheds each with a roof surface area of 150 square feet and an associated turfgrass area of 225 square feet. Three of the sheds collect rainwater into three 55-gallon barrels, which provide irrigation for the lawn. A fourth shed is also equipped with three barrels, but these are filled with city water, not rainwater, for test control purposes. "The purpose of these sheds is to provide a scaled-down version of the surface area of the roof of a typical urban home in Dallas and other metropolitan areas and the typical area of lawn," said Dr. Fouad Jaber, a specialist at the center with a joint AgriLife Extension and AgriLife Research appointment. We are investigating the efficacy of rainwater harvesting in conjunction with storm water runoff and pollution."

The water from the barrels is used to irrigate the turfgrass lawn by different irrigation scheduling methods, including soil moisture-based, evapotranspiration-based, and timed irrigation of the type used by the typical homeowner. "This provides us with important data on how much water is needed, as well as the runoff reduction and water quality benefits of rainwater harvesting systems," Jaber said.

In severely drought-stricken Wichita Falls, AgriLife Extension water resource specialist Drew Gholson took the lead in planning, designing and installing a startup rainwater harvesting project at an area high school. "I was approached last year by the agricultural science teacher at Iowa Park High School to design and install a rainwater harvesting system to help them with their horticulture class and their greenhouse water needs during this time of drought," Gholson said. He took measurements and "did the math," calculating that the building the system would be affixed to was 200 feet by 120 feet and even if rainfall was collected from only one side of the building it would amount to 7,200 gallons collected for every inch of rainfall.

"That got their attention," he said. "This part of Texas has been especially hard hit by drought and the idea of being able to collect and use that much water when needed was very appealing to them. We worked through how much they could collect and store, and the Iowa Park ISD school board approved an amount to install the system – PVC pipe, tanks, a pump and other components. They already had gutters in place, so we worked with those."

Gholson and his father installed the initial system on a Saturday, ensuring correct placement of conveyance pipes and splitting rainfall collection distribution into two downspouts so the gutters didn't have to support too much weight. "Since that day, they have doubled the storage and collection area to 12,000 gallons and there is a line connecting the rainwater storage system to greenhouse. Now the students will be able to use rainwater for their plants when they come back in the fall." Gholson said while every system is different, he hopes more people throughout the state will see such systems and they will spark ideas for designing and installing their own.

"Of course, we practice what we preach,Smith said. "In addition to some large rainwater capture systems on the Texas A&M campus in College Station, we have them at several of our AgriLife Extension county offices and at other system facilities." He said AgriLife Extension facilities with rainwater harvesting systems include agency county offices in Atascosa, Brazos, Colorado, Comal, Culberson, Denton, Fort Bend, Fayette, Grandbury, Hays, Hidalgo, Menard, Montgomery and Taylor counties.

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"One of our biggest statewide efforts is educating people on the use of rainwater systems and giving them hands-on demonstrations of how to construct their own basic home rainwater harvesting system. Of course, we also have more advanced programs for those who wish to take on larger rainwater harvesting projects" Smith said. AgriLife Extension personnel, as well as trained Master Gardeners and Master Naturalist volunteers, provide instruction in rainwater harvesting education and hands-on demonstrations. "We have rainwater harvesting demonstration programs in various counties throughout the year," he said. "Over the years, we estimate that tens of thousands of people statewide have attended one or more of these programs, receiving instruction on how to build and maintain rainwater harvesting systems. While most of these are smaller workshops of 50 or less, we also participate in water conservation-oriented events that draw upwards of a thousand people." Smith said publications on rainwater harvesting by Texas A&M System experts are available for a cost at the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Bookstore website, http://agrilifebookstore.org. Enter the word "rainwater" into the search field on the home page. One of the most popular publications, "Rainwater Harvesting: System Planning," has recently been translated and is now also available in Spanish," Smith said.

Additional information on rainwater harvesting, events and training can be found at http://rainwaterharvesting.tamu.edu. Texas residents wanting to know about a rainwater harvesting program in their area may also contact the AgriLife Extension office in their county.

Other rainwater harvesting projects in which Texas A&M AgriLife has been involved include these locations**:**
8th Avenue Post Office, Fort Worth; Alpine Public Library, Alpine; Aspermont USDA Service Center, Aspermont; Brazoria Environmental Education Station, Angleton; City of Denton Clear Creek Nature Center, Denton; Culberson County Courthouse, Van Horn; Kaufman County Xeric Garden, Forney; Kemp City Park, Kemp; Kerr Wildlife Management Area, Hunt; Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, Austin; Los Indios Family Learning Center, Los Indios; Luling Foundation, Luling; McDonald Observatory, Fort Davis; Myers Park Rain Garden, McKinney; Ozona Chamber of Commerce Visitor's Center, Ozona; Prairie Paws Adoption Center, Grand Prairie; River Bend Nature Center, Wichita Falls; Samaritan House, Fort Worth; San Juan Park, San Juan; Scurry-Russer High School, Scurry Texas; South Campus Garden Learning Center Rain Garden, Kaufman; Texas 4-H Conference Center, Brownwood; Tolar Elementary School, Tolar; Tom Green County 4-H Building, San Angelo; Victoria County Master Gardener Association, Victoria; Wall Elementary School, Wall; Ward County 4-H Building, Monahans

Contacts:
Billy Kniffen, bkniffen49@wcc.net, John Smith, 979-845-2761, jwsmith@ag.tamu.edu, Clint Wolfe, 972-231-5362, c-wolfe@tamu.edu, Dr. Fouad Jaber, 972-231-5362, f-jaber@tamu.edu, Drew Gholson, 979-845-1461, drew.gholson@ag.tamu.edu, Galen Roberts, groberts@ag.tamu.edu, Paul Schattenberg, 210-467-6575, paschattenberg@ag.tamu.edu

Educational outreach and hands-on demonstrations on how to construct rainwater harvesting systems, such as this basic home rainwater system do-it-yourself workshop, are a large part of Texas A&M AgriLife efforts toward greater statewide water conservation. (Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service photo)

The AgriLife Extension office in Kaufman County office has plastic containment tanks covered by wooden slats. The large unit holds 3,000 gallons and the two small barrels each hold 55 gallons. (Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service photo by Justin Mechell)

From Lucy Griffith

The View from Rusty Bend

Image by Lucy Griffith

Sometimes, when a bird cries out,
Or the wind sweeps through a tree,
Or a dog howls in a far off farm,
I hold still and listen a long time.

My soul turns and goes back to the place
Where, a thousand forgotten years ago,
The bird and the blowing wind
Were like me, and were my brothers.
My soul turns into a tree,
And an animal, and a cloud bank.
Then changed and odd it comes home
And asks me questions. What should I reply?
-Hermann Hesse'

In the Texas hill country there's a saying: "There is nothing more welcome than a warm rain and a baby calf." And so the rains have come at last. As if the earth is sighing with relief, she releases a intricate fragrance, herbal and flinty.

The Yellow-billed Cuckoos' hollow "kuk, kuk, kuk, kuk…..cow, cow, cow" sounds from the cypress trees, earning their nickname,"Rain Crow." On a dead branch toward the river, a Western Kingbird sallies for newly abundant bugs with a fancy loop de loop. A Blue Grosbeak hangs like a piece of sky at the top of a liveoak. A grace note at the end of day, lightning bugs waltz the edges of the woods.

Texas Grama, Side-oats Grama, and Hairy Tridens have pushed up their seed heads in the pasture. Goldfinches grab those seeds and slide down the stalks; a tiny bird poledance. The drought-hardy Dutchman's Breeches, Old Plainsman, Navajo Tea and Two-leaf Senna have all made their appearance. Will the rain bring long-missed treasures? Already, the Twist-leaf yuccas have pushed up their stalks and blowsy blossoms, like ivory candlesticks. Indian Blankets have popped up in the "butterfly retreat" seeded carefully by beloved granddaughters last fall. Young naturalists in training. Start 'em early.

Each morning at breakfast, bird books at the ready, we have Sparrow Class. Parsing the differences between little grey birds and little brown birds takes all my patience. Persistence required. The showiest young bird is the male Summer Tanager. Be-robed in two colors of saffron, we call him First Spring. As if in competition, reds and yellows are pushing through the green iridescence of the young male Painted Buntings.

'Tis the time of nestlings at Rusty Bend. Near the feeders, the "feed-me-flutter-dance" is curious to watch. Will Mama bird give in, will she turn her back and ignore the begging, or get exasperated and tear off? One day, while creating a racket in the yard, Andy shares a moment with a young, fearless roadrunner. Freshly colored black and white, he strides proudly at Andy's feet, stalking lizards. Not much later, we witness the same Paisano dashing toward home with a wriggling lizard suspended from his notable beak. A successful hunt.

Our reptiles seem more abundant, though heavily policed by raptors. On one cool morning, I find a very chilled Eastern Rat Snake on the porch, searching for warmth. He beat a very…slow…motion… retreat to the woodpile.

Jackrabbits are now hanging near the house. Apparently the buttery Navajo Tea flowers are a favored treat too delectable to resist. At sunset, you can see the veins backlit in those comical black-tipped ears. Hoping for baby big ears soon.

Axis bucks are also near and bugling again. If one sounds off close by, the hairs stand up on your neck. Those big boys have distinctive features. One, we call "Sling-shot" for the enormous forks on his antlers. Another, only shows himself with a single doe and fawn instead of the usual harem. Him, we call "El Monogamo".

Lots of little families at Rusty Bend. Our souls have changed. The circle widens.

Lucy Griffith, PhD co-manages the Rusty Bend Ranch with her husband, Andy Robinson. When she is not on her tractor, she practices Clinical Psychology. When the tractor is broken, Andy is fixing it. Both Lucy and Andy are members of the Master Naturalist Class of 2013. Comments welcome at oodie1950@gmail.com.

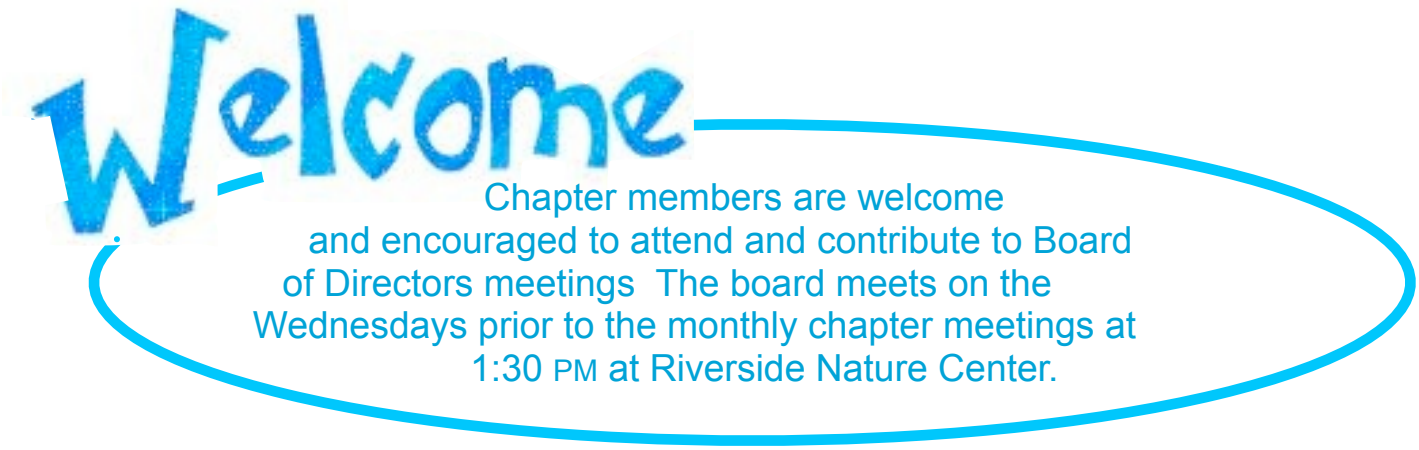
Advanced Training

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 25 2-3PM WEBINAR
AT 14-109 KEEPING RIVERS FLOWING #3
The third (and final) webinar in our series will take us across the globe to Australia to learn about the historic Murray-Darling Basin agreement. The M-D Basin Plan provides a coordinated approach to water use in the Basin and limits water use at environmentally sustainable levels. We will cover what research, policies and agreements had to be put in place to make this program work. Texas water policy expert Myron Hess will highlight why this issue is important and explore opportunities for application in Texas. To register in advance, go to http://www4.gotomeeting.com/register/614264855 .

SATURDAY, JUNE 28 9:30AM - 5:30 PM SAN ANTONIO ZOO
AT 14-105 BIRD FEATHER ID WORKSHOP
The presenter is Dave Scott from Earth Native Wilderness School in Austin. Cost is $35 per participant. To register. go to www.sazoo.org . Click on the "Education" tab and then on the "Teachers and Schools" link. Scroll down to the "Teacher Workshops" paragraph and click on the "Register Now" button. Enter as a New or Returning User. Choose "Programs – Adults Only" and then "Teacher Workshops." Choose the month of June and continue clicking through to register.

TUESDAY, JULY 8 1PM WEBINAR
AT 14-112 DATA VISUALIZATION TOOL
What came first, the flower or the bee? Learn to explore patterns in space and time with the Data Visualization Tool The USA-NPN Data Visualization Tool allows you to see where people are observing, map species, animate their phenology, and overlay climate data, as well as graph and share your findings. Learn how to use it and then take the next step with downloading custom datasets. To register go to https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/627485047745718273. Webinars are recorded; to access the recordings for these and all previous webinars on the Nature's Notebook page, go to https://www.usanpn.org/nn/Webinars2014 .

The newsletter's publication schedule does not allow listing all AT events in each issue. Check the chapter calendar on our website for additional AT.



T E X A S

Master Naturalist™

We meet on the fourth Monday of most months at 7:00 PM. in the Upper Guadalupe River Authority Lecture Hall at 125 North Lehmann Drive in Kerrville.

Join us at 6:30 for our social half-hour.

Everyone is welcome.

Texas Master Naturalist mission:

To develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities.

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Keeping the Hill Country Native

The Texas Star is a monthly publication of the Hill Country Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist Program. News, essays, comments, and ideas are welcome.

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