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T E X A S



Hill Country Chapter

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NOVEMBER PROGRAM: TEXAS WILDSCAPE PROGRAMS FOR SCHOOL CHILDREN

On Monday, November 24th, Judit Green, an Urban Wildlife Biologist with the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department in San Antonio, will give a program on bringing Wildscapes into the schools, or even into your backyard for your own children. Being outside amidst nature is always a special treat, especially for children. Taking the classroom outdoors to teach students is especially exciting when there are a lot of key features that invite wildlife and nature up close.

Whether you want to create an outdoor classroom at a local school, or just want to improve your backyard for your own children, you will learn the basics of how to landscape to attract wildlife. The schools offer an avenue to present programs on native plants and animals and the habitats they need to survive. This information takes on a new dimension in the children's lives when the school actually establishes a Wildscape on its grounds. The projects can often be planned, installed and maintained by the children, with some adult assistance. These Wildscape projects can often demonstrate a practical application for the topics the children are learning in science and mathematics, which enhances their academic interest.

The Wildscape programs can be as simple or elaborate as the children, and the parents or school, wish. The basic requirements for a Wildscape are food, water, and cover. Children can plant landscapes of native plants that provide both food and cover for birds and small mammals. Come learn how Wildscape programs might offer a new learning opportunity at a school in your neighborhood, or even in your backyard.

Judit Green graduated from Texas A&M University with a degree in Wildlife Biology. She has worked for the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department for 15 years and is currently an Urban Wildlife Biologist stationed in San Antonio.

This "Texas Wildscape Programs for Children" meeting will be held at Riverside Nature Center, 150 Francisco Lemos St, in Kerrville, beginning with a social time at 6:30 PM. The meeting and program begin at 7:00 PM. This meeting is free and the public is invited to attend. We hope that you can join us to learn about this most worthwhile topic. The future fate of our fauna and flora are in the hands of today's children. Perhaps we can help make a difference.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BY SANDY PEÑA

This year's fourth annual state Master Naturalist meeting in Navasota (October 24-26) was a treasure trove of advanced training topics and roundtable discussions—which made it really hard to choose just a few! Fortunately, there was no competition for the keynote speaker, Gary Clark. Gary's talk, "Connecting People with Nature—the Rest of the Story", was truly inspirational, and I'd like to share with you some of his remarks.

First, his background: Gary Clark is the author of "Wonders of Nature," a weekly column in the Houston Chronicle and Chair of the Business & Economics Division at North Harris College in Houston. He is also the founder of the Piney Woods Wildlife Society and is past president and current Board Advisor of the Houston Audubon Society.

Gary's theme is that we must share our **joy** of nature with others, or we will lose it. For many people today, their view of the natural world is actually artificial (TV, zoos, Discovery Channel, etc.) What are they missing? It's their own up-close and **personal** connection with the natural world around them.

Using birds as an example of how to help people connect with nature, Gary urged us to first get people involved in the joy of birdwatching (or butterflies, or any kind of flora/fauna). Currently, there is a whopping 60% turnover in birdwatchers! Most of these folks give up because they think they'll "never get good at it" or "never learn to ID birds," etc. So we have to get folks hooked on the **pleasure** of it first, make it fun, enriching, a new way of looking at birds, rather than intimidating them with scientific terminology and "lists". Not that these two things aren't very important to many birders, but that these advanced interests aren't the primary reason for attracting people to birds, plants, animals, etc. In other words, we need to learn to see things from other people's point of view before we can change it. The main point he emphasized is that people will save things they think are **beautiful**, or **precious** to their lives. If we as naturalists want to save and preserve the natural world, we must reinvent ourselves as **enthusiasts**, not experts to other folks. As Gary said, "Brag about what you love, not what you know!"

This is a powerful take-home message for all of us. Our Chapter has embarked on just such a mission, and our obvious enthusiasm for our own connections with nature is having, and will continue to have, a direct and positive influence on those with whom we work. Congratulations to every one of you for an outstanding first Chapter year!!

CALENDAR

Monday, November 24: Texas Master Naturalist - Hill Country Chapter, "Texas Wildscape Programs for School Children" (see article above).

Monday, December 8: Texas Master Naturalist - Hill Country Chapter Year-End Pot Luck Dinner

Who: Master Naturalist and Spouse/Guest

What: End-of-Year Pot Luck Dinner.

When: **6:00 PM** Social time: **6:30 PM** Dinner

Where: Gillespie County Historical Society, 312 West San Antonio St., Fredericksburg
(see article below)

Monday, December 22: No regular meeting this month. Have a wonderful holiday!

Your editor is unaware of any **Advanced Training** opportunities scheduled for December. This is due to the difficulty in competing with the hectic holidays, and the weather that might be sub-optimal for outdoor studies. Fortunately, there are many excellent classes available in most other months.

HISTORICAL YEAR-END POT LUCK DINNER!

Our Chapter will hold its annual Pot Luck Dinner on **Monday, December 8 with the social time beginning at 6:00 PM, and dinner at 6:30 PM**. The purpose of this event is to celebrate all that we have collectively accomplished over the past year with our learning about the natural world around us, the service we have provided to our communities, and the graduation of our Class of 2003. It will also be a wonderful time for socializing with members and their spouses or guests, and catching up on everyone's news. You can call Jane Crone at 830-669-2639 or e-mail her at jjcrone@hctc.net) to sign up to bring a dish, or to volunteer your talent to help with the entertainment.

This will be our Chapter's second Pot Luck Dinner. The major historical component of this event, however, is its location at the **Gillespie County Historical Society Social Hall at 312 West San Antonio St. in Fredericksburg**. West San Antonio St begins west of Route 16 and is one block south of West Main St (Routes 87/290). Folks coming from the south on Route 16 can turn left one block before reaching Main St in Fredericksburg (behind the Court House), which is West San Antonio St. Unless it is snowing, we can enjoy strolling on the Historical Society grounds among buildings built by the early settlers.

*****Good Food & Good Friends ***Y'ALL COME*****

OUR CHAPTER CERTIFICATION STATUS

Eleven months into our first year of Chapter meetings, 19 of the 28 members of the Class of 2002 have achieved certification. Thus, **68%** of our first Class is now certified.

For the information of our prospective members, a Master Naturalist achieves certification by completing the 40 hours of required training, a minimum of 40 hours of approved volunteer service, and the minimum of 8 hours of approved Advanced Training within approximately one year.

VOLUNTEER PROJECT OF THE MONTH: HANGING OUT WITH BATS AT THE OLD TUNNEL

by Maggie Tatum

It's coming to an end. Soon they will be leaving the Old Tunnel flying back to their winter home in Mexico. One of the richest, most interesting experiences in my life will be coming to an end – at least for this year.

In the Spring I volunteered to attend classes in order to learn about bats, specifically the Mexican Freetail specie, so that I could work at the Old Tunnel Wildlife Management Area. Volunteers help educate people as to the value and nature of these small mammals, help with research, control traffic at the tunnel and take care of the computer running the cash register. There are some wonderful bat materials, including a “glows in the dark” bat shirt which is great for Halloween.

The rewards of volunteering are having someone say to me, “Oh, thank you so much, my children will never forget this,” or having the woman who said that she didn't even want to look at a bat picture and was there under protest, go away after stroking the soft back fur of one small creature thinking how much value bats contribute to the environment. I will miss visiting with my friends each Friday night, but will remember hearing a visitor walk away muttering, “This is the most awesome experience I've ever had.” Extra “perks” for volunteers were to have field trips to Devil's Sinkhole Wildlife Management Area and to Bat Conservation International's property at Bracken Cave. My daughter Kathryn accompanied us to Bracken and was positively awestruck. I know I use that word often, but that's the way it is with bats.

Tonight will be my last night, for this year, at the Old Tunnel as I'm leaving for a trip to Australia next week. However, I will still have bats on my mind, as the more I learn about them, the more I want to continue along that path. I will visit a moderate temperature rainforest, a tropical rain forest and the wonderful Botanical Gardens in Sydney (where I've already seen the large flying foxes hanging out) so I should have opportunities to make contact with relatives of my small friends of the Tunnel.

Hasta Luego, my small, flying, furry friends! (*Editor's note: Maggie wrote this article on September 12th*)

If you are interested in volunteering at the Old Tunnel, you can contact our members Maggie Tatum, Myrna Langford or Wilma Teague, who volunteered at the Old Tunnel this year, for information about volunteering next year.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS AT NOVEMBER MEETING

The Nominating Committee of Chairman Mike Johnson, Priscilla Stanley and Maggie Tatum offer the following nominations for our Chapter officers in 2004 :

President	Sandy Pena
VP of Communications & Public Relations	John Rogers
VP of Training	Jane Crone
VP of Programs & Projects	George Tinsley
Secretary and VP of Membership	Myrna Langford
Treasurer	Mike Johnson

This slate includes three candidates from Bandera County, and one each from Gillespie, Kendall and Kerr Counties.

Additional nominations will be accepted by the Nominating Committee, or at our November 24th meeting. Elections will be held at our November 24th meeting.

STOP EROSION..... DAM IT!

David Bamberger, owner of the Selah Bamberger Ranch, renowned for 34 years of environmental restoration and land stewardship, spoke on “Native Grass Restoration” at the Native Plant Society of Texas State Symposium on October 18th in Fredericksburg. A prerequisite to growing grass is having soil. Much of the land in the Hill Country, as the name suggests, has more or less of a slope, which can result in significant erosion from water runoff during rains. Land management classes encourage us to minimize erosion on moderate slopes by placing cedar boughs or cedar trunks across the slope to slow the water and allow the suspended soil to deposit against these barriers. Steeper slopes can easily erode deep gullies. I had never considered the potential magnitude of the benefits of such simple steps until Bamberger told the following story.

Bamberger has long involved children in his educational programs, including piling rocks in gullies to form simple stone walls across the gully. He described how one former student came back to the ranch asking to show his son the stone walls that he had built years before. The father and son went out to find these stone walls but returned dismayed that they had been unable to do so. Bamberger then explained that the students’ work had been so successful in creating terraces of soil behind each stone wall that the walls were no longer visible. With pockets of soil in the gully, grass had grown on the terraces, and no trace of the gully or stone walls remained.

Bamberger also had a photograph of a 32 inch high fence on his ranch. He noted that it had been a 52 inch high fence, but thanks to some stone walls and the neighboring landowner’s major erosion, Bamberger had **captured 20 inches of soil** over the years. Given our relatively dry, hot climate, **soil typically forms in the Hill Country at a rate of one-half inch every 1,000 years** (according to Bill Armstrong, Wildlife Biologist at the Kerr Wildlife Management Area). Thus, in the Hill Country, it is possible to either lose soil that could take **more than 30 generations** to re-form, or harvest substantial amounts of soil from rain runoff using the simplest, least expensive materials. Fortunately, rocks, cedar boughs and cedar trunks are readily available throughout the Hill Country. The choice is yours.

Refreshments: Thanks to Julia Campbell and John Rogers for our great refreshments in October.



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Please send comments on the newsletter, suggestions, or member contributions to the Editor, Priscilla Stanley at jpbstan@ktc.com .