



HILL COUNTRY CHAPTER

# THE TEXAS STAR

AUGUST 2003      vol. 1 No 8

## **AUGUST PROGRAM:**

### **ADVENTURES OF A LIFELONG NATURALIST**

Lee Haile will give a presentation on the uniqueness of the Hill Country from the perspective of a naturalist. He will share some of his adventures in the field, as well as some interesting things he has discovered or found. Lee will show us a video of birds, insects, and other creatures. He will also talk about the highlights of his thirteen year career as entomologist and agricultural consultant.

Lee received a BS in Entomology from Texas A&M in 1982, and then spent fourteen years as an ag consultant. He worked in the Pecos River valley near Roswell NM, the Brazos River bottom from College Station to Waco, the blackland prairie around Temple and Lockhardt, and the Winter Garden area around Hondo and Uvalde. Lee now has a sawmill and woodworking business using mostly native woods. He is the daddy of the Haile Family Storytellers who entertain all over the US. Lee is currently working on a video project on Lost Maples State Park. He also leads guided nature tours around the Hill Country.

Please join us on **Monday, August 25<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 p.m.** at Riverside Nature Center at 150 Francisco Lemos St. in Kerrville for a social hour, followed by our program at 7:00 p.m. We encourage interested members of the public to attend our meetings.

## **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

*BY SANDY PEÑA*

### **DIFFERENT ECOSYSTEMS...SAME CHALLENGES**

Raúl and I have just returned from a two-week visit to Michigan's Upper Peninsula, a land of shimmering lakes (both Great and small), dense evergreen forests, and hundreds of migratory bird species. As we visited nature preserves, national wildlife refuges, and state parks in the area, I was struck by the fact that although the characteristics of these northern ecosystems are vastly different from ours in the Hill Country, yet they present similar management challenges, including 1) invasion of exotic species; 2) loss of habitat; and 3) endangered species.

The problem of invasive species was literally brought home to me in the backyard of the friends we were visiting. Beneath the numerous evergreen trees that surround their cabin, the sandy soil supports not only the "good" grasses and shrubs, but also the ferociously invasive exotic, garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*). I spent one whole morning yanking it out, but only made a small dent in it. The local field biologists who identified it for our friends also told them that this exotic is extremely widespread throughout the Northeast, Midwest, and into Utah. Scientific research has so far not produced any biological control agents for it.

As for loss of habitat, the entire Upper Peninsula represents it on a grand scale. Over a century ago, virtually all the

forests were clear-cut: first the loggers took all of the evergreens, and then they turned to the hardwoods, and decimated those. Today, the UP is covered with second and third growth, and less than 0.9% of the old growth remains. Imagine what that wholesale clearing did to the plants, animals, and other life forms in those ecosystems! We were fortunate to visit a small preserve of old-growth forest and to walk among majestic trees of beech, maple, and hemlock (some estimated to be around 500 years old!) so dense that their 50'-75' high canopy shut out much of the sunlight. It reminded me of that wonderful Robert Frost line, "The woods are lovely, dark and deep...". It was a solemn, awesome reminder of what used to be.

On a happier note, our visit to Seney National Wildlife Refuge taught us about a real success story for an endangered species, the trumpeter swan. This refuge, created by Teddy Roosevelt in 1935, manages over 7,000 acres of wetlands, with an additional 25,000 acres of true wilderness. The elegant trumpeter swan was nearly extinct when, in 1991-2, captive-reared swans were released at Seney. The excellent habitat allowed the swans to flourish and brought them back from the brink. We saw nearly a dozen of them as we drove along the marshland wildlife drive. Other thrilling sights were osprey parents feeding their young, loons feeding in the lake, and lots of Canadian geese (so that's where they go!). At the Visitors' Center, we were so disappointed to find out that some eaglets had fledged the previous day, but we at least got to see their nest (it was almost as big as our cabin!).

We could have spent much more time in places like those I've mentioned, and other natural wonders that we didn't have time to visit. This trip was a reminder to me that one of the lasting benefits of our Master Naturalist training is that it has given me a much better perspective on the natural world wherever I go--I hope you feel the same way!

## TWO MORE MEMBERS CERTIFIED IN OUR CHAPTER

**Karen Johnson and Wilma Teague will receive their Certified Master Naturalist certificates and dragonfly pins at our August meeting. Thus, eight months into our first year of Chapter meetings, we will have 61% of our members 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.**

## OUR ADVENTURES AT LOVE CREEK PRESERVE

On May 31st, our Chapter had a field trip to The Nature Conservancy's new Love Creek Preserve near Medina (see our May 2003 newsletter for more information). For those of you unable to attend the trip to this pristine Preserve, Chapter member Patrick Klein has provided the following photos to let you see some of what you missed.



Native clematis plants, such as the scarlet leatherflower, scrambled over shrubs in the dappled light along the cool, damp banks of Love Creek. These

are the ripening seeds of the native clematis.



A breeding pair of zone-tailed hawks circled above us with their shrill cries as we walked under their nest (high in the center tree) on our way up Love Creek's limestone canyon.

## Brush Management Field Day Well-Attended

Our Chapter was well-represented with five members and two spouses (Patrick Klein, Myrna and David Langford, Jim and Priscilla Stanley and Betty and Neil Thomas) at the Brush Management seminars given by the Texas Cooperative Extension Service and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department on July 19<sup>th</sup> on a private ranch in Waring. This event was approved as Advanced Training for our Chapter. The first speaker discussed brush management using herbicides and mechanical methods. He explained that while basal pruning (cutting the trunk below all green needles) of our blueberry cedar (aka *Ashe juniper*) would kill the plant, many other Hill Country species (such as Willow baccharis [aka poverty weed or *Baccharis neglecta*]) will readily root-sprout and return.

The second speaker, a Wildlife Biologist from TPWD, addressed the impact of brush management on wildlife. For optimal wildlife habitat, he recommends that one remove only most of the cedar, and leave all the other native understory species, as well as about 10% of the cedar as shelter and travel corridors for white-tail deer and other wildlife.

The third speaker from the Uvalde Research Station described his ongoing studies to determine the evaporation and interception water loss from cedar trees on the Edwards Aquifer recharge area. Patrick Klein has captured part of the research equipment on one large cedar tree in the photo below. The funnels under the cedar canopy allow the study to calculate the amount of each rainfall that penetrates the canopy and would reach the ground under a large cedar vs. a very precise measurement of the total rainfall in a nearby open area. The difference in these two measurements represents the evaporation and interception loss caused by cedar trees. These studies are underway at ten sites across the Hill Country. The data are monitored by a computer at each site which automatically reports the data to Uvalde every two days. These data are available to the public online at <http://uvalde.tamu.edu/intercept>



Several funnels under the canopy of a large cedar tree collect rain water that passes through the cedar canopy. These funnels are connected to a collection tank that automatically measures and reports this amount of water vs. the total rainfall in each rain event.

## CALENDAR

"APPROVED AT" INDICATES THAT AN EVENT HAS BEEN APPROVED AS ADVANCED TRAINING FOR OUR CHAPTER. We receive little advance notice on some training opportunities. **Please watch your e-mail!**

**Monday, August 25 Texas Master Naturalist - Hill Country Chapter meeting** at 6:30 PM for our social hour and 7:00 PM for a presentation entitled "**Adventures of a Lifelong Naturalist**" by Lee Haile. (See additional information on page 1). The public is invited to attend.

**Tuesday, September 2<sup>nd</sup> "How to Identify Shady Characters"** by Susan Sander at Native Plant Society of Texas – Kerrville Chapter to be held at Riverside Nature Center, Kerrville at **2 PM**. This talk could also be entitled "Native Tree Identification 101". Susan will discuss how to look at a tree for clues to identify its tree family. **Bring leaves from your own mystery trees for Susan to identify.**

**September 26 – 28<sup>th</sup> "Rendezvous 2003: A Celebration of Holistic Management"**, by Holistic Resource Management of Texas Event will be held on a private ranch 60 miles north of Fort Worth. More info at [http://www.hrm-texas.org/main\\_pages/calendar.html](http://www.hrm-texas.org/main_pages/calendar.html)

**Saturday, October 4 "Down By the Riverside" at Riverside Nature Center, Kerrville. Mostly Native Plant Sale and Nature Festival, with events for the entire family.**

**The following events are all sponsored by Cibolo Nature Center in Boerne.** There is a modest fee (\$10 for Cibolo members, \$12 for non-members, discounts for couples). **For more information, visit their website at <http://www.cibolo.org> at the "Learn" option.** Register by phone at 830-249-4616 or by e-mail at [nature@cibolo.org](mailto:nature@cibolo.org)

**Field Trip to Canyon Lake Spillway!** led by Judy Scott, Army Corps of Engineers

**Saturday, September 13: 8 AM to 2 PM**

The flood of July 2002 created an enormous new canyon at the Canyon Lake Spillway. Come and see the awesome sight for yourself! This program will be especially helpful to landowners, who have a tank or pond that is experiencing erosion on its spillway. Learn approaches to doing the necessary repairs to maintain your dam. This property is not open to the general public. Adults only. Limit: 25. **APPROVED AT**

**Fall Grass Workshop** led by Lee Knox, NRCS and Kim Haile, 4-H

**Saturday, September 13: 9 AM to noon**

No matter how much or how little you know about Texas Hill Country grasses, this workshop is for you. Bring your grasses for identification by the experts. Find out what is happening to our topsoil. Discover the nutritional benefits of our native plants. Learn the importance of proper stocking levels as you manage your land for wildlife. Have fun with our practical grass identification test, a great way to learn your native plants. **APPROVED AT**

**Dragonfly Details** led by Dr. John Abbott, University of Texas

**Saturday, September 20: 9 AM to 11 AM**

You have seen them darting and sewing through the air. Now is the time to learn more about the ecology and lifestyle of our pond dragons. Dr. Abbott is the central Texas expert on this fascinating flying insect. He will give a colorful PowerPoint show so we can see dragonflies up close and learn to identify some. After the talk, Dr. Abbott will take us on a dragonfly walk to the marsh, where we can catch a few and find out about the species that live right here in Boerne. **APPROVED AT**

**Fall Wildflowers and Prairie Restoration** led by Janis Merritt, San Antonio Natural Resource Department

**Saturday, September 27: 9 AM to noon**

Come and learn about how to start and maintain a wildflower meadow or a native grass and wildflower prairie on your

property. Janis Merritt is the Native Plant Specialist for San Antonio's Natural Resource Department and a resident of Kendall Country. She will present a slide show on local prairie restoration and we will take a leisurely walk to see some fine native plants that blossom in the fall. Bring your own wildflowers for identification. **APPROVED AT**

**Butterflies of the Texas Hill Country** led by Mike Quinn, TPWD

**Saturday, October 4 9 AM to noon**

The Texas Hill Country has a wealth of butterflies that you can attract to your property. See an extraordinary slide show of these delightful creatures. Learn about the native plants that are essential for their survival. We will take a walk, collect and release some species that are active in our area at this time of year. **APPROVED AT**

**Plant Communities of the Texas Hill Country** led by Bill Carr, Texas Nature Conservancy botanist

**Saturday, October 18: 9 AM to noon**

The Texas Hill Country is made up of many different plant communities. Bill Carr is a professional botanist, who has completed botanical surveys on thousands of acres in our area. He will present a slide show of our major natural communities and the components that make them unique. We will also walk the Nature Center property to see a sampling of native plants we have right here in Boerne. **APPROVED AT**

## NATURE TIPS TO PONDER

### FROM CIBOLO NATURE CENTER

A mix of native grasses, wildflowers, shrubs and trees can prevent erosion during major floods and survive severe droughts.

You can save thousands of dollars by protecting a single grove of small native trees from the bulldozer.

Immediate painting of all wounds (including pruning cuts) on live oaks is vital to prevent the spread of oak wilt disease.

A fence around the construction site will protect land (including valuable native grasses, shrubs and trees) while building a new home.

Cedar is habitat for bluebirds, scrub jays, cedar waxwings, robins and orioles, as well as shelter for deer.

It takes at least 25 acres of well-managed Hill Country land to support one cow and her calf for a year.



Texas Star

*Lindheimeria texana*