

Purple Martins, cont.

Starting in 2005 and every year after but one, we have logged onto the Purple Martin Conservation Association website and recorded the first sighting each year of our Purple Martins on the Scout Arrival Report. Amazingly, the dates of their return from year to year are separated by only two weeks, from February 15th to February 28th. We have been very fortunate the last two years to have been outside when the Scouts did their first fly-by. It takes a second to realize the vocalization, and then intense excitement sets in because you know your “babies” are back! Right around the first week in February we start watching and listening for the Scouts.

As a Texas Master Naturalist, Lindheimer Chapter member, the opportunity to do meaningful and interesting volunteer work is the reward. TMN are encouraged to design volunteer projects that are interesting to them and which capitalize on their individual talents. The volunteer service must be dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities and surrounding area.

With this in mind, we decided to do Project MartinWatch for the first time. This year we had ten nesting pairs and fledged 48 babies. During the nest building, we checked the gourds every two or three days and cleaned out the sparrow nests daily. Once the Martins started laying eggs, we kept an even closer eye out for sparrows trying to re-build their nests. The first eggs were laid around April 1st and all the babies except one gourd had fledged around mid-June. Because we had so many babies, we opened the four closed- up gourds to provide additional shelter for them in case the weather got bad. A week later all the babies had flown.

We were in the pool one afternoon around the 8th of July when we both saw in amazement an adult Purple Martin dive into a gourd with a dragonfly in his mouth. In checking our records, we discovered that the occupied gourd was one of those that had been closed up during the nesting season and was opened mid-June. Both parents were actively feeding their young and had managed to quickly build a nest without us noticing. Because our birds are not banded, we don't have any way of knowing if this was a first brood that failed to hatch and the parents laid a second clutch of eggs, or a second brood. They successfully hatched and fledged two chicks.

To be a successful Martin Landlord, you must check on the eggs and the young every few days. If a young bird fledges prematurely and you've checked the nests, you'll have a good idea which nest it came out of and be able to put it back. If a young bird does not survive, you don't want that in the nest with the other babies. Because I was doing nest checks for Project Martin Watch, I discovered a House Sparrow trying to build a nest on top of two not-quite fledged babies. As I reached in to pull out the grass, I discovered the two babies tangled in the partially built nest. A House Sparrow can just about fill up a gourd with an interwoven grass nest each day. Each day they would build the nest and each evening I would take it out. Next year, I will have a different solution for the House Sparrows.

In the mornings, the parents and young will gather on the gourds, preen their feathers and sing and chatter for about an hour. They all take off and go “bugging” until about noon, come back and regroup and chatter and sing and then are gone again. Close to dusk we generally have a group fly-in with twenty to thirty birds settling down for the night in the gourds. There always seems to be one loud-mouthed male who sings everybody home, especially the late stragglers that just have to get that one last bug! A couple of weeks before they go South, we have a large gathering of adults and babies every morning. We think they spend the night at one of the large roosts in Austin or Bracken. Then one day, it is dreadfully quiet and we know that nature has sent them winging South.

It amazes us that these birds can fly all the way to Brazil and return to the same part of the country every year. The sound of their chattering and singing is music to our ears. After they depart for Brazil, the backyard is unappreciably quiet.

The reward for being “parents” to these birds is knowing that you are helping increase Purple Martin populations throughout North America as these birds have become totally dependent upon humans to provide nesting sites east of the Rocky Mountains. By participating in the Scout Report and Project Martin Watch, as a citizen scientist, you are providing valuable data on nesting sites, head counts of adult birds, hatched young and fledged young.

Our thanks to Louise Chambers in Corpus Christi and Bob Aepli in Pennsylvania, both of PMCA, for their guidance and willingness to share information.

LMN Members Assist In Pine Tree Planting

The 2011 Bastrop wildfires were the worst in Texas history, destroying more than 35,000 acres and 1,600 homes. The fire was so severe that concrete foundations of buildings melted and trees did not just burn, but were vaporized above and below the soil, leaving nothing but holes in the sand. Capitol Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America lost over 2400 acres of loblolly pine forest in the fire, but has promised to replant the area with 1.25 million pine seedlings. Volunteers have been gathering for the past two years for 12 weekends to plant over 50,000 trees a year. Pine seedlings come from Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower center and Texas Forest Service and are planted by community and scout volunteers. Planting will begin again in December. Please email Jessica.snider@scouting.org for information.

On Saturday March 22, chapter members Gloria Glass, Antoinette Allison, Katie McLean and Nancy Fitzpatrick went to assist in planting seedlings as part of the Lost Pines Forest Recovery Campaign. Using native loblolly pine seeds that the Texas A&M Forest Service had stashed in an East Texas grocery cooler, TreeFolks, Bastrop State Park, the Forest Service and others plan to plant 4 million seedlings in Bastrop County over five years — half of them in the park. Private foundations have pledged to pay nurseries to grow the trees, which are being given to the park and landowners at no cost.

The newly planted loblolly pine trees will serve a critical role in the history and environmental sustainability of the state and region. This effort will replant more than 4 million new loblolly pine trees on public and private lands in Bastrop, Texas.

Information submitted by Nancy Fitzpatrick and Jessica Snider



Gloria Glass planting seedlings.

Barbados Cherry N.I.C.E. Plant



The Barbados Cherry (*Malpighia Glabra*), or Manzanita is a flowering shrub normally growing 3-4 feet, but can reach 9 feet tall. Its white to pale pink 1/2" blooms are present March to December with red 3/4" berries appearing May to December. This ever-green shrub can be pruned and shaped to your desire. It grows well in moist, well drained soil in dappled shade, part shade or full sun.

New Braunfels Folkfest April 12-13

Submitted by Jim Teeling

The Annual Spring Folkfest in New Braunfels is coming soon! Master Naturalists, we need volunteers on Saturday and Sunday, April 12 and 13. You will be busy with the many attendees who ask questions and participate in the interactive exhibits.

Tables include Archeology Collections and Artifact Replicas, Wildlife Management Concepts, Native Plants and a Rainwater Catchment Display, plus trunks from the Traveling Trunk show that TMN Lindheimer Chapter owns. Trunk stations will include Birding, Skins & Skulls, Fossils, Bugs & Butterflies. All the information you need is provided in the trunks. Volunteers just have to show up and have FUN!

As part of the Native Plant Station, children and adults enjoy making Native American/Pioneer Dolls from cornhusks. Other interactive children's activities include fossil digging, bird walks and animal and bird puppets. The families always have lots of questions about the skins and skulls exhibit and are delighted when they can match a pelt with its skull.

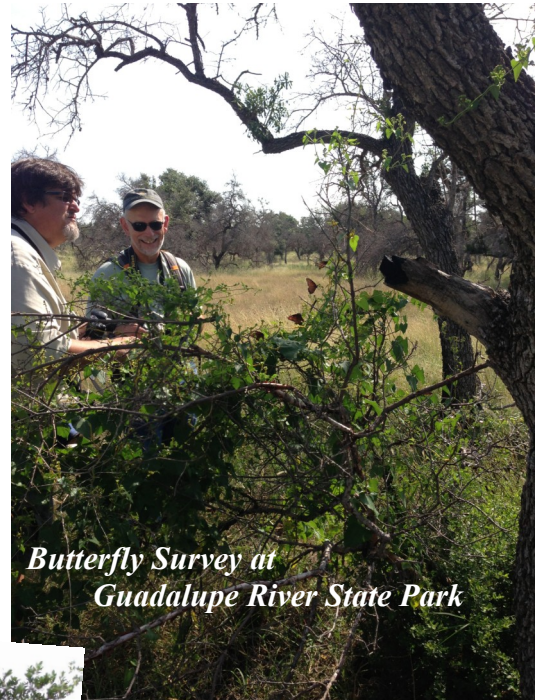
We are looking for lots of volunteers to work at the different stations. We will have experienced Master Naturalists supervising everything. This is a GREAT OUTREACH OPPORTUNITY for our chapter to let the local community know what we are all about. Please contact Jim Teeling at jim.teeling@yahoo.com to volunteer for a time to participate! Great way to get those volunteer hours for April!

Volunteer Opportunities Abound...

Pictures submitted by Coco Brennan



Prescribed burn at Mesquite Creek Wildlife Habitat Area



Butterfly Survey at Guadalupe River State Park



Invasives Control at Mesquite Creek



Nature Trail at Tye Preston Library



Camden St. Bridge BCI Bat Talks



Bracken Bat Cave



Comal Birders at Guadalupe River Trail