

Canyon Lake Outdoors

TEXAS MASTER NATURALISTS

By Michael J. Varhola
Assistant Editor

The more I learn about the outdoor environment of the Hill Country, the more I realize how little I know about it. That may sound like a truism, but it really is the case, and it made me all the more grateful to discover something specifically designed to fill the seemingly growing void in my knowledge.

That thing is the Texas Master Naturalist program, which is sponsored by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) and the AgriLife Extension of the Texas A&M System and which has the overall requirements, guidelines, and standards for its nearly three-dozen individual chapters set by a state-level office. The TPWD provides many of the experts who give presentations at class and chapter meetings.

"The mission of the Texas Master Naturalist Program ... is 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 for the State of Texas," reads the mission statement of the organization.

The Lindheimer Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists is the one active in our area and takes its name from Ferdinand Lindheimer, the "Father of Texas Botany," who lived in New Braunfels during the mid-19th century.

This chapter has three very interesting signature projects to which it devotes much of its efforts.

One of these projects is Canyon Lake Gorge, created during the flood of 2002, and for which "chapter members have served as guides, docents and administrative leaders ... [and] also provided trail maintenance and development, helped preserve natural features, as well as helping de-

sign educational and tour materials," according to the chapter's web site.

Another project is nearby Friesenhahn Cave, widely considered one of the most important paleontological sites in the

country and second only to the La Brea Tar Pits in its variety of significant Pleistocene vertebrate fossils. The University of Texas

has been excavating the site over the past 40 years and Lindheimer Chapter members help sift cave sediment and sort through fossils.

The third and newest of the Lindheimer Chapter's projects is the Mesquite Creek Wildlife Habitat Area, sponsored by company Waste Management and located adjacent to its Mesquite Creek Landfill.

Each November, the chapter

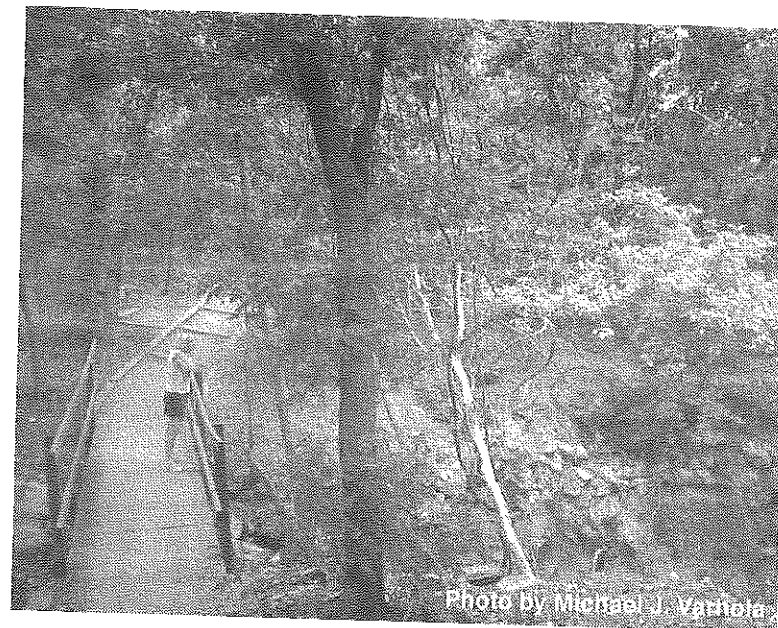


Photo by Michael J. Varhola

The Lindheimer Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists is active in many public service projects, including maintenance of the Guadalupe River South Trail near Canyon Lake.

begins an enjoyable but demanding year-long class for prospective new master naturalists and, not wanting to wait a long year before jumping into the program, I eagerly enrolled in it.

If there is one thing my three-and-a-half hour orientation at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers office at Overlook Park the evening of October 26 made clear, it is how much I will learn over the next 12 months and — in the spirit of ongoing education — the years that follow. In addition to administrative information like graduation requirement and the like, the 20 members of the new class who attended the meeting received an hour of in-

formation from subject matter experts in the Lindheimer Chapter on the nearby gorge, birding, native trees and grasses, and the Mesquite Creek preservation project.

As Lindheimer Chapter Vice President Art Williams made clear, however, the organization is as much about service as it is about learning.

"We take our mission statement seriously," Williams said in his introductory comments to the incoming class members. "The Master Naturalist organization is a volunteer corps. Our purpose is to go out into the community

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Lindheimer Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists holds its meetings the third Thursday of every month at the AgriLife Extension Service Office in New Braunfels and they are open to the public. For more information about the Lindheimer Chapter in particular, visit its web site at <http://grovesite.com>, and for information about the Texas Master Naturalist program in general, go to <http://masternaturalist.tamu.edu>.

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and complete worthwhile environmental projects. That's what we do." The importance of that service is underlined by the requirements for certification as a

master naturalist, which include a minimum of 40 hours of volunteer service on approved projects.

"If that's not what you're expecting to do that, you can cer-

tainly take the course," Williams emphasized. "But you won't get out of the organization anything like what you should get out of it. It's why I hope everybody is here."