

April/May upcoming highlights

■ April 24-25 over-night trip to Cathy Hoak's ranch near Iraan.

■ May 8 MN class at Santa Rosa Spring, leave Sibley at 8 a.m. and meet Schuyler Wight at 10 a.m. on Cuyanosa Road. Class will study the alkali and shallow soils habitat.

■ May 21-23 Sibley Center re-dedication events.



Please send your stories and jpeg photos to cherrytree@sbcglobal.net for the next newsletter.

The newsletter is edited by Barbara Cherry.



Monahans Sandhills see effort *Members plant butterfly garden*

Master Naturalists stepped lightly to keep out of the way of vigorously applied shovels and trowels as we planted flowers in the butterfly garden at the Monahans Sandhills State Park. Other volunteers were there, too, and so many of us were helping that the job was complete in about 15 minutes.

Superintendent David Donner, Theresa Burnett of the Chamber of Commerce, and others welcomed us.

Burr Williams explained about the plants put in around the end of the Interpretive Center Garden.

"We have a pretty tough enemy here by the name of the feral hog," Burr said while explaining why he chose certain plants. He wanted ones that the hogs and deer wouldn't think were tasty. There was beebrush which blooms anytime it rains in summer and smells sweet. With a west wind, he hoped that

the people in the parking lot could smell it.

There was kidney wood for a windbreak, lantana which sometimes outlasted the old homes it was planted near, hummingbird sage (or salvia gregii or autumn sage) for the hummingbirds, blue mist for the queens and other butterflies especially in the fall,

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Ross Blumentritt gets ready to plant lantana

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eucatoria varieta which blooms in late October (“Every butterfly still around in October and November will be on that plant.”), frogfruit which will attract the blue butterflies, and flame acanthus as a windbreak.



Carol Mangan and Tori Baca with children helpers

“All these plants have strong chemicals that attract butterflies and also there is less grazing,” Burr said. He said there was a variety because we didn’t know what would take well.

After the planting, the group separated, with some going with Burr,

“...and we’ll have a conversation about what we’re

going to see,” while the rest went with Jonah Evans with Diversity Biologists for Trans Pecos Tracking .

After a lunch of sandwiches provided by the Monahans Chamber of Commerce in the station house, the group sat under the shade of the picnic area and heard Burr tell about the history of the area. It was getting hot and windy, so some went home while others searched around looking at more area plants.

Check This Out!

Chris Cherry suggested the following website -- debicates.blogspot.com --. Being a good wife, I looked at it a couple of months later, and, well, he was right!

The photography is bright, clear, and full of local plants and images. It made me say, “Wow!” and then feel bad because mine pales in comparison. If you are looking for inspiration, there is plenty.

But be ready to spend at least 15 minutes or longer if you go there, because the photos are fascinating, and the archives are full.

Project Feederwatch

Backyard birding helps Lucy Thames

By Lucy Thames

For years I have wanted to be a better birder. I’ve gone birding with the Mid-Nats, went through Master Naturalist training, read books, and still, the names of those birds just wouldn’t stick. I would have them pointed out to me and swear to myself this time I would remember, but once again those names would slip through my brain.

A year ago I began homeschooling my then-8-year-old son, and wanted him to know the Llano Estacado and its inhabitants. First we tackled the reptiles with the help of the Sibley website and learned about the native herpetiles of our area. But this year, I decided it was time for him, and me, to learn the birds.

Narrowing down the list of resident birds of the area to something we could handle was not easy. Their names and pictures all ran together for me. In researching for curriculum, I stumbled across Project Feederwatch, and that is where my plans began to come together.

Project Feederwatch, organized and operated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, is a citizen science effort.

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People all over North America identify and record birds that they attract in some way in an area of their choice. Data is entered on the Internet, and in this way researchers are able to track birds and learn what is happening to populations of birds.

Signing up got me everything I needed for my purposes: a resource guide to bird feeding, a bird identification poster, and a newsletter. I also ordered some other books on Texas birds to supplement our studies.

Now, two months into our backyard bird watching, the names and appearances of the birds are finally beginning to stick. I knew the English sparrows already, because for several years I have managed a purple martin house every summer, and those sparrows are continual pests. But by hanging out a finch feeder directly by my back window, I have drawn the finches in close enough to see them clearly and finally can distinguish at a glance the female finches from the female English sparrows.

Once, we had a spotted towhee come close, although he was after the seeds in my turk's cap, not my feeder. As has been my

problem, I couldn't find him in my bird book, but after a quick photograph posted on Facebook, he was identified by the helpful birders among the Master Naturalists. Same for the ruby crowned kinglet. Both of those were



Ruby-crowned kinglet -- Photo by Chris Cherry

discovered by my son who has been an avid helper in this project. He watches and lets me know as soon as he sees any uncommon birds for our yard.

Another time we were visited by a dark-eyed junco, and while I had to get it confirmed by a fellow Master Naturalist, again on Facebook, I actually found him in my bird book and figured out who he was myself – a first for me!

One day someone posted the pine siskins at their own feeder on Facebook, and I recognized them as the visitors I had that same day. So there's another bird I can identify

and recognize in my own backyard.

I don't have a wide repertoire of birds yet, but finally I am able to recognize, identify, and remember who is who in my own backyard. I think it's that because, with Project Feederwatch, and also with the Master Naturalist Facebook page, I slow down and find those different birds who come to my feeder, and I have a way to find the answer when I don't already know it. And somehow having them in my own backyard makes their identities stay with me better.

This year's Project Feederwatch is almost at an end since it only goes through April. Signing up now will have you ready to start the second Saturday of November. You only record birds for two consecutive days of each week and can observe and record as many or as few as you want. I probably spend about an hour a week altogether on it, although it may be a little more if I have an unusual visitor and need some extra time to find his identity.

It's been worthwhile for me, helping my son learn how he can contribute to science, while we learn the names of our local birds together.

Wildscaping talk shows how to welcome birds, butterflies to your neighborhood

Hoping to get some applications from the Midland area for the Texas Wildscapes Backyard Habitat Program, Mark Klym spoke Sunday afternoon, March 21, to about 30 people at the Sibley Center. Master Naturalists earned two hours of advanced training credit from the afternoon spent with the Coordinator of Texas Wildscapes for Texas Parks and Wildlife.

His talk was titled *Introducing Texas Wildscapes – What Are They & How Do I Create One?* For specific information, you can go to the website

www.tpwd.state.tx.us/wildscapes.

In his speech and his PowerPoint show, Klym said that if you have a Texas wildscape, it is designed to provide the basic needs of wildlife in your backyard, that it allows you to become more familiar with Texas wildlife, and it replaces some of the habitat lost daily to urbanization.

“You can do what you can in that ½-acre to bring in a little bit of a refuge,” he said.

He told an anecdote to illustrate why Texans need wildscapes. He said that years ago he was working at the butterfly tent at an expo show and a young girl, about 6- or 7-years old, was watching. He handed a butterfly to her that was walking on him. She screeched! She was scared of a butterfly. He said that children need this information.

He said a well-developed wildscape will “enhance both the numbers and the variety of wildlife you see in your garden,” and he talked about how to create one without its becoming a nuisance for your neighbors.

He had plenty of specific information, but one piece of general advice was to check out what professionals have said recently about plants when you are deciding on what kinds to put in your yard. He said that Donald and Lillian Stokes had recommended *pyrocantha* 20 years ago as a wonderful plant for birds.

“Now they’d say, ‘Run, run away,’ “ about it.

He also said that the monarch butterfly

population has been devastated while wintering in Mexico. Some experts estimated that 20 to 40 percent of the butterflies had died.

“This year you’ll want to put in anything you can to improve the monarch



Mark Klym -- courtesy of TDPW

population.”

A surprise story was his account of how a dragonfly attacked a hummingbird. This website has an account of the event, although no photos — <http://nmbirdwing.blogspot.com/2009/09/dragonfly-takes-down-ruby-throated.html> and <http://www.valleymorningstar.com/news/unexpected-62255-socks-isolated.html>. Steve Shafersman submitted the links.



Neotropic Cormorant

'Ducky Pond' attracts birds, shutterbugs with its busy atmosphere

Photos and story by Annette Moellering

As soon as the weather in Midland, Texas, turns cool, you will find me, with my camera hung round about my neck, and carrying my butterfly stool, at the

Ducky Pond anxiously awaiting the arrival of my friends -- Mallards, Buffle-heads,

Lesser Scaups, Canadian Geese, Northern Shovelers, American Coots and American Widgeons.

Last year, around the end of October, as I arrived at the pond, I got the biggest thrill, sitting in front of me was a Great Egret;



Great Egret

what was he doing in Midland? It was the first time I've seen one here. I quickly retrieved my camera and snap, snap, snap, I got some wonderful pictures of him.

As I was walking around the pond, to my amazement there was a Cormorant sitting on a rock. WOW! What a day I was having. All my friends hadn't arrived as yet, but I was able to get some spectacular pictures of the Great Egret and Cormorant to add to my collection.

Every day I would drive by anticipating the arrival of the Canadian Geese. I was so thrilled when they finally arrived from their long trek from the north. I have had



Canada Goose

so many great experiences at the pond. It seems that many times I am in the right place at the right time.

One day as I was walking around the pond, a Mallard flew by and I snapped a wonderful picture of him. Another time, I was sitting on my stool, taking pictures of two Canadian Geese swimming by when all of a sudden, the one lifted his wings right in front of me. I called him my 'show off'. I didn't realize what a wonderful picture I snapped of him until I downloaded it on my computer.

There is a pair of Mallard ducks that come back every year. I call them 'the ol' married couple'. He is so attentive to her. They are so cute, always swimming together, waddling around, or snuggled together sunning themselves.

You can avoid the

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crowds by visiting the pond in the early afternoon.

At that time, you will be able to slip up on the turtles that are

sunning themselves along the northeast corner. Also, there are some cattails on the southwest corner of the



A friendly turtle

pond, and if you frame your picture with just the geese or ducks with the cattails, nobody would believe you took that picture in Midland, Texas.

As spring approaches, I know I will have to say good bye to all my feathered friends. They have made drab winter days pass by quickly for me and I am

anticipating my next venture. BUTTERFLIES!!!

I have included some of the pictures that I have talked to you about today. I pray that you enjoy them as much as the day I snapped them. Get out and



take some pictures!

Gone

to the Ducky Pond!

The Duck Pond is also known as Wadley Barron Park at 1001 North A St.

Advanced training

Cielo sites spark intrigue at Archeological Society

It was April Fool's Day, but no fools seemed to be present at the talk by Jim Collett at the Midland Archeological Society. Master Naturalists were invited to earn advanced training hours, and the Archeological Society members graciously welcomed us. Their after-meeting snacks were good, too!

Collett titled his talk "A Circular Mystery" and gave information and showed photos about a possible cielo site near Iraan. He approached the area asking questions that a detective might, to determine facts, or at least strong theories, about the rock cairns found in the area.

He would flash a photo

on the screen, and at first it just looked like a pile of



Mr. Jim Collette -- by Annette Moellering

white rocks. Then the next photo would have a circle or square overlapping the original one, and this showed how they were stacked in a logical order – usually a circle, or how a doorway was evident, if an observer knew what to look for.

The cielo complex was up on a butte so people could see it from far away,

and those in the cielo site could see out. The Indians who lived there were nomadic, hunter/gatherers. The cielo site was near the Pecos River as well as a spring, and there were 3-10 structures. He explored several reasons why the site was built – military, religious, political, defensive, social stratification, and ceremonial.

"Why did they do it?"

"Well, we're not so sure," he concluded. He admitted that he had brought many questions about the place.

"In mystery terms, I've been more Watson than Holmes," he said. He explained they are now searching for the "why" behind the "what."



Monahans Sandhills State Park in April

Group shot in the morning -- *by Kent Ivey*
Kent Ivey making hay (?) while the sun
shines at Monahans. -- *by Chris Cherry*

Skip Baca, Jay Caldwell, Carol Mangan, and
Tori Baca track.

Listening to Burr Williams at Monahans
Sandhills State Park after lunch.

