



The Pine Cone Post

Longleaf Ridge Master Naturalists

T E X A S

1st Quarter, 2026



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President's Corner



Jerry Clark & Kim Wagner received their bronze dragonfly pins for earning 250 hours.



Keith Stephens, D'Ann and Daniel White received their gold dragonfly pins for earning 1000 hours.



25 members received their re-certification pins for 2025: Greater Roadrunner.



Mid-Winter Eagle Count

By Laura Clark

Two teams set out at 7 a.m. from Hemphill on January 17, 2026, to once again participate in the annual Mid-Winter Bald Eagle Count at Toledo Bend. January is considered the optimal time for spotting bald eagles on the reservoir. Following standard routes where we traveled to designated spots and spent 15 minutes in frigid wind chills searching the skies and trees, Keith Stephens, Lori Horne, and Richard Peters spotted 22 on their route, while Doug and Claire Boutté, and Jerry and Laura Clark reported 16 eagles on theirs.

After the Bald Eagle began to recover from near extinction following a ban on the use of DDT, the National Wildlife Federation began sponsoring these counts nationwide in 1984 to monitor their populations, and the program is now being coordinated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Volunteers from the Longleaf Ridge chapter of Texas Master Naturalists have conducted this survey for many years along the entire western side of the Toledo Bend Reservoir and reported their findings.

Since this monitoring project began, the conservation status of the Bald Eagle has changed from Endangered to Threatened, and then, it was finally removed from the Endangered Species list altogether in 2007. Surveys show that populations in the U.S. have quadrupled since 2009, but now they face a new danger from mercury and heavy metals like lead. Eagles are now dying from lead poisoning after ingesting game carcasses containing lead shots or fish containing lead sinkers. This is a real threat in East Texas where hunting and fishing are so popular. Lead-free ammunition and sinkers are available, but there is a lack of education to promote them.

Jerry Clark



Keith Stephens & Richard Peters



Doug Boutté



Claire Boutté

Laura Clark



Eagle's nest



Lori Horne

Acoustic Monitoring Bat Project

By Ferryn Martin

It's that time of year again! Time to listen for bats. Luckily, we do not have to stay up all night and strain to hear bat sounds. We couldn't if we tried! Like much of the citizen science work that is done, this project gives us an opportunity to gather data to help scientists evaluate the health of the nature around us. It bears repeating that bats are so important to our ecosystem. They are great pollinators, and, of course, they eat those pesky mosquitoes!

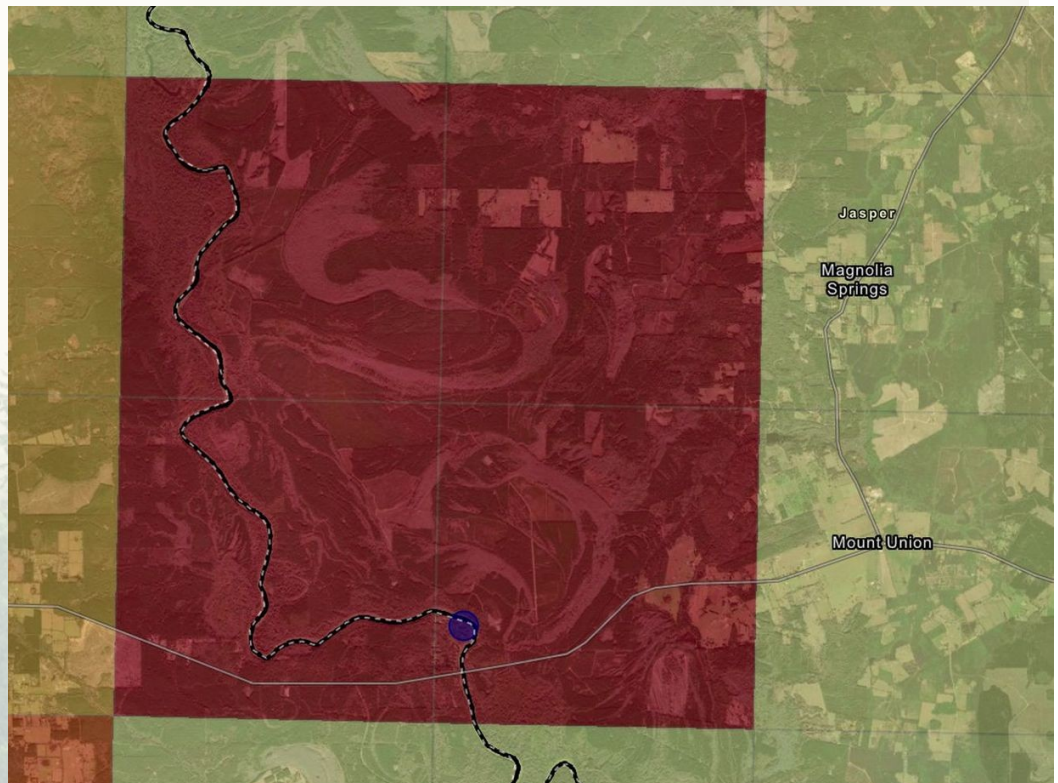
We are working hard to gear up for another year of gathering data for the Acoustic Bat Monitoring Project. At this point, we have 21 volunteers and will be placing two different monitors in 18 different places over a nine-week period. The first week of deployment will be May 11th, and the last week will end July 10th.

There are quite a few changes this year as the scientists have refined their needs for data. One request is to place two monitors in each grid that has been determined by them as "high priority." Last year, we just put monitors in the yards of our members. The monitors also must be at least 5 km (3.1 miles) apart. So far, 14 of the 18 spots are in high priority grids. Of those 14, four are in a high priority grid by themselves. It would be great if we could get another monitor in those grids. Could all members that have not volunteered and that would be willing to have a monitor at your house, check the screenshots and see which red grids only have only one dot? If you think you are there, send me your address, and I'll check it out. (*Editor's Note: See Next Page*)

We are also looking for some Monitor Coordinators. This person/s would help transfer and set up monitors for those members that need help. If you can help in this way, please email me, text me or call me:
email:
ferrynmartin1979@gmail.com
phone: 713-397-8773.

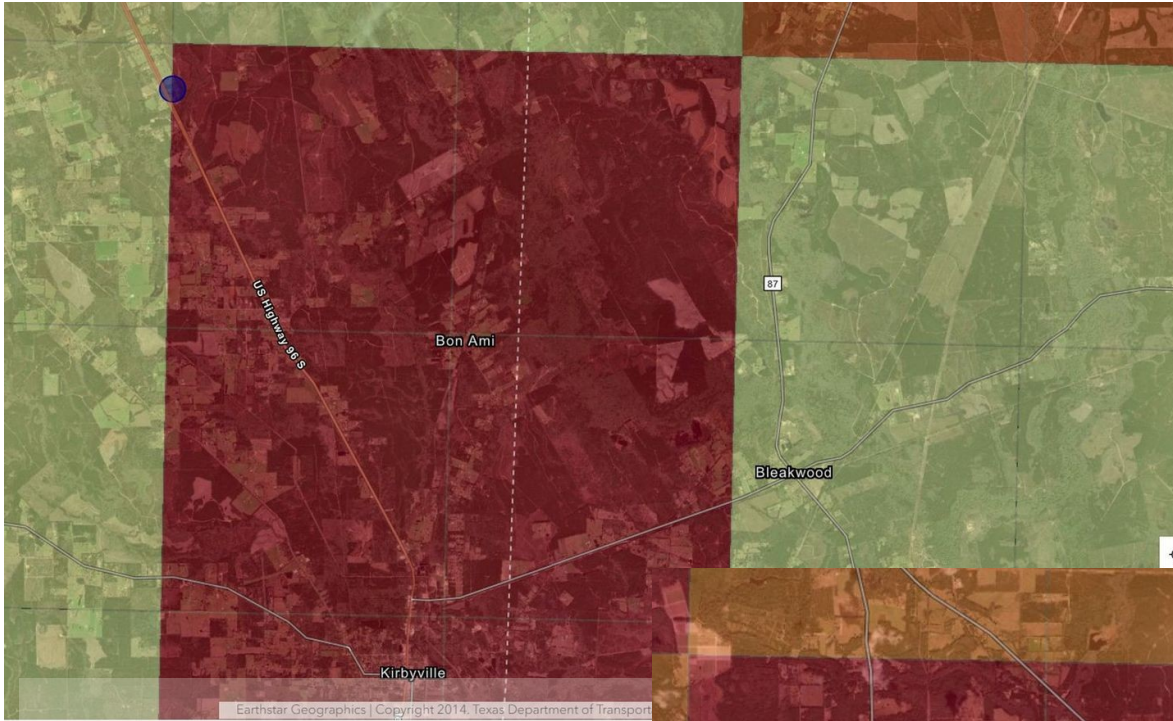
Thanks for all you do for the plants and critters!

This monitor is in the southeast quadrant.

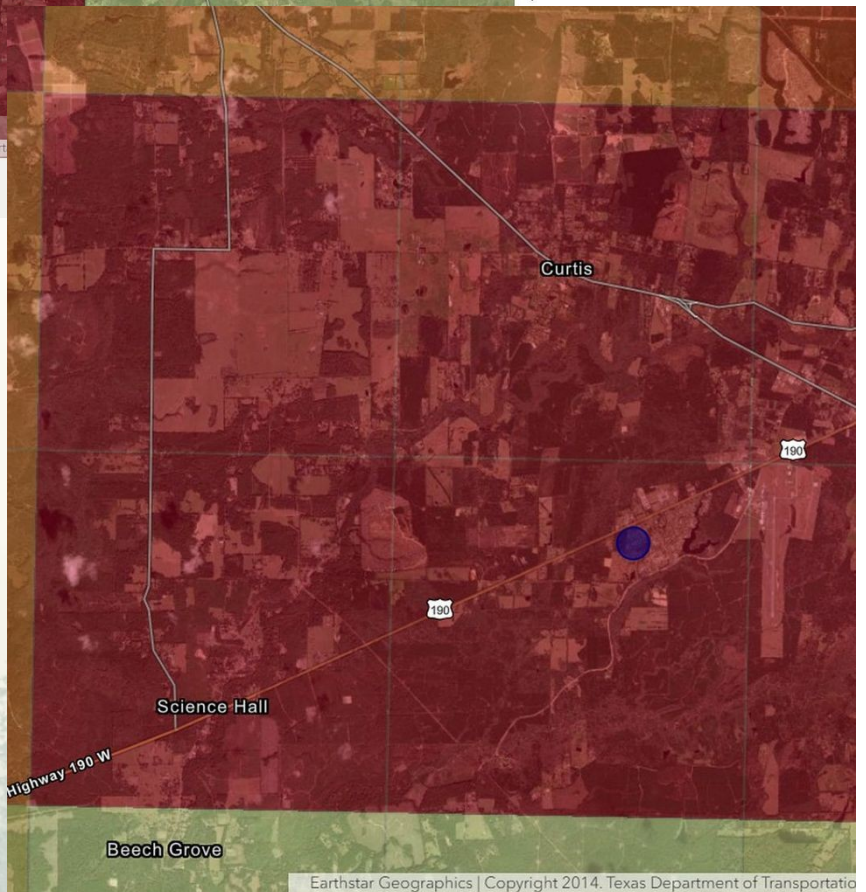


Acoustic Monitoring Bat Project

By Ferryn Martin



We have a monitor in the Northwest quadrant so pretty much anyone that is in this grid but a different quadrant would work.



This monitor is in the southeast quadrant.



Turkey Vultures

By Skip Davis

Why We (Should) Love our Turkey Vultures

Vultures – nature's “clean-up crew”

Not everyone loves vultures. Do you?

Although mostly unloved and unappreciated, the impact of removing vultures from an ecosystem is stark! When vultures aren't around to consume carrion, decomposition takes longer as the job falls to insects and microbes. This gives flies a greater opportunity to eat and reproduce and to spread infections of anthrax, botulism, salmonella, and E. coli to humans and domesticated animals.

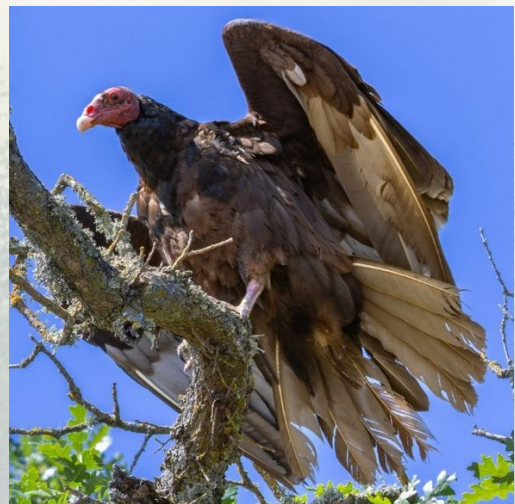
Vultures are keystone species: without them an ecosystem is headed for collapse. In addition, they provide unique services that other scavengers cannot compensate for. Vultures evolved as obligate (1) scavengers. To survive the enormous number of pathogens multiplying on carcasses, vultures developed an extremely acidic stomach. It kills most of the pathogens, not only allowing them to safely consume carrion, but also removing them from the environment entirely making it safer for other species.

Vulture decline in India linked to death of 500,000 people, study suggests

According to a recent study (2), the decline of vulture population in India may have led to the death of around half a million people and an economic loss of near \$70 billion a year between 2000 to 2005. In a country with over 307.5 million cattle, scavengers like vultures have a crucial role both in the ecosystem and economy. In a not-so-far past, their population counted around fifty million birds in India, making them common across the country. By consuming one cow in less than forty minutes, they helped control the spread of disease. The rise in use of diclofenac as an anti-inflammatory drug for cattle in the early 1990's caused a decline in the vulture population by more than 95%, taking them from common to critically endangered.

When the vultures disappeared, the carcasses abandoned in the so called “animal landfills” on the outskirts of India's population centers started to pile up. The build-up of rotting flesh attracted other scavengers, including feral dogs and rats. Feral dogs in India commonly attack people, especially small children, with deadly results. Moreover, India is a global epicenter of rabies; therefore, any animal bite can result in death.

Vultures and feral dogs compete for the same food source, so when the vulture population is healthy, it limits the feral dog one. With the disappearance of vultures, feral dogs multiplied uncontrollably, becoming a threat to public safety. In addition, since dog and rat stomachs are not as acidic as Vultures' stomachs, infectious diseases have increased.



Turkey Vulture at Lake Lagunita. | Maya Xu/Stanford Univ.

Turkey Vultures

By Skip Davis

Could the loss of vultures have the same impact in the Americas?

Recent research suggests it could. To gauge just how important vultures are in ecosystems, researchers went to Costa Rica and conducted fieldwork using domestic pig carcasses. The researchers placed pig carcasses within 500 m. (approx. 1640 ft.) of each other, covering both forest and grassland areas. While half of the carcasses were available to all scavengers, the other half were put in a cage with netting, preventing larger animals (including vultures) from eating them. The researchers also set up cameras to record animal presence, as well as insect traps to keep track of flies and dung beetles. Over the course of 10 months, they watched as Black Vultures, Turkey Vultures, and King Vultures visited 15 of the 16 sites. Other scavengers — pumas, ocelots, caiman, and coyotes — were rarely spotted. When the researchers measured the rates of decomposition at the sites, they found that carcasses reachable by vultures lost an average of 9.5 kg. (nearly 21 lbs.) of mass each day. Meanwhile, the carcasses in cages lost an average of just 4.8 kg. (around 10 lbs.) each day. In addition, the number of flies at the caged sites nearly doubled.

Wrapping up

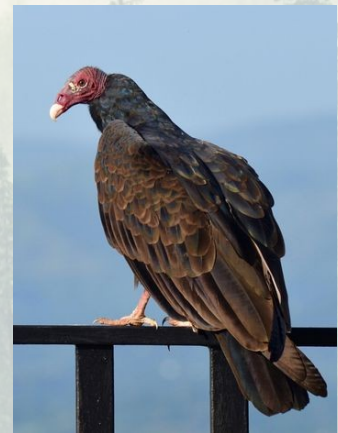
Vultures circling in the sky may actually be a sign of good ecosystem health. Unfortunately, a Stanford study (3) has found that their populations are declining worldwide. Researchers analyzed data on more than 1,300 vertebrate scavenger populations, finding that 36% were threatened or declining. That drop was disproportionately higher among apex scavengers, the large-bodied animals that primarily eat carrion. “The evidence we found is very clear,” said senior author Rodolfo Dirzo, the Bing Professor in Environmental Science and professor of biology at Stanford’s School of Humanities and Sciences. “Scavengers are in decline, but it’s not homogeneous. It is particularly the large and specialized ones. At the same time, this allows space for the smaller scavengers, which are problematic because they are themselves sources of zoonotic diseases. They are also not capable of compensating as they cannot consume as much carrion.”

What can we do?

- **Switch to Non-Lead Alternatives:** Lead poisoning from feeding on carcasses shot with lead ammunition is a major threat. Using copper or other non-lead ammunition for hunting and fishing prevents toxic ingestion.
- **Protect Habitat and Roosts:** Avoid destroying nesting sites, particularly in large hollow trees or abandoned buildings. Leaving dead trees (snags) standing provides critical roosting spots.
- **Reduce Roadkill Collisions:** Drive carefully as vultures are often killed while feeding on roadkill.
- **Educate the Public:** Spread awareness about the ecological importance of vultures as nature’s cleanup crew, breaking negative myths about them.
- **Support Conservation Organizations:** Support organizations involved in vulture research, habitat protection, and rehabilitation.

Notes:

1. obligate refers to an organism, behavior, or process that is restricted to a specific set of conditions or a particular mode of life. It implies that the organism is "obliged" by necessity to function in a certain way to survive or reproduce, having no alternative strategy
2. “The Social Costs of Keystone Species Collapse: Evidence from the Decline of Vultures in India” by Eyal G. Frank and Anant Sudarshan
3. Global decline of apex scavengers threatens human health, PNAS, Vol. 122 | No. 25



Pollinator Garden



Joan Kochanek, Laura Clark, & Fred Lyons

Over the winter, tarps and mulch were laid to ready the beds for spring planting.



Sharon Lamoreaux, Anne Davis, Ferryn Martin & Claire Boutte



Birdbath installed by Jerry Clark, Ferryn Martin & Steve Russell

March was Spring planting month and the time to edge the pathways..



a partnership with



Pollinator Education

By Sharon Lamoreaux

With our grant from HEB/TP&W came lots of opportunities for growth. With the site and soil prep, the path and waterline installation and the planting of plants, a garden is being born. With any plant or seed, there is always education in the form of how deep, how far apart, how much sun, how much water, etc. There's also an anticipation to see results in the form of growth and bloom.

Along with these botanical opportunities for growth, we have had opportunities to share education and growth at the Kingdom Roots Academy of Harvest Church, which is located at our Pollinator Garden site.

Thus far, four presentations have been shared with the 14 students of the Academy. The presentations are being designed to teach all aspects of our pollinator garden.

The first class was about seeds. The students were taught the parts of a seed, the different kinds of seeds, and the importance of seeds to our survival. Afterwards, the students used the different kinds of seeds to make mosaics in clay.



The next class was on plants. A chart with the different types of plants, including grasses, herbs, trees, climbers, and creepers was discussed. With cards featuring a picture of a plant and a fun fact about the plant, each student presented their plant photo and read its information to the others, then placed the card in the correct place on the chart according to its type. The class

concluded with a scavenger hunt. The students were divided into teams and were then given a paper sack with a list of things to find... a pine cone, a nut, an oak leaf, a vine, etc. A bag of trail mix that included all kinds of nuts and dried fruit that came from plants was presented to the team that found the most items on the list.



Our Vice President, Richard Peters presented a class on bats and how that they can be considered as pollinators and are beneficial in spreading seeds. The students then colored a bat face mask as an art project.



Pollinator Education

By Sharon Lamoreaux

His second class was on snakes. With life-like rubber replicas, he was able to show safe ways to behave when encountering a snake and how they play an important part in our ecosystems.



Future classes for the Academy students include instruction of the parts of a plant, how pollination occurs, the kinds of pollinators and how each plays its part in a garden.

If you have a nature related presentation that you would like to share with the students, they would love to include you in their schedule. Every Tuesday is Enrichment Tuesday at the Academy. The schedule is planned a month at a time. Get on their schedule by contacting Kaylene Turnage at school@krajasper.com. The students range from Kindergarten to High School and are very polite and respectful. Class number is usually around 14 students currently. Be ready to be impressed with some very knowledgeable and curious kids. Conservation for the future is up to them. Help us sow some seeds of education. Let's watch them bloom.

a partnership with



2026 Training Class

By Laura Clark

Longleaf Ridge is moving some new student classes outdoors this year--- a natural move for naturalists! On March 28, Laura Clark taught about plants and then led the group around Sexton Pond near Boykin Springs. Students located plants they weren't familiar with, and we identified them. Then, we headed to the Old Aldridge Sawmill, where Sharon and Garry Lamoreaux filled us in on a little bit of the history about the place. Next, we visited a Red Cockaded Woodpecker nesting area for a little ornithology talk. Finally, we headed back to Sexton Pond where everyone enjoyed a picnic lunch, and Sharon Lamoreaux taught about land stewardship.

The change from the classroom setting to outdoors was awesome, stimulating participation and questions. By the end of class, students were exchanging phone numbers and setting up a group chat.

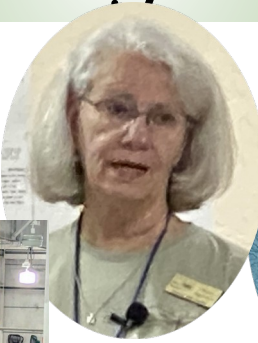


Training Class

Jolene Amburn, Entomology



Sharon Lamoreaux, Training Class Coordinator



Laura Clark, Nature of Naming & Plants



Kim Wagner, Texas Water Resources



Daniel & D'Ann White, Rangeland Ecology & VMS



Chase Shotland, Ichthyology & Aquatic Systems



A few of the trainers

2026 Training Class

Fish Hatchery Field Trip

By Lori Horne

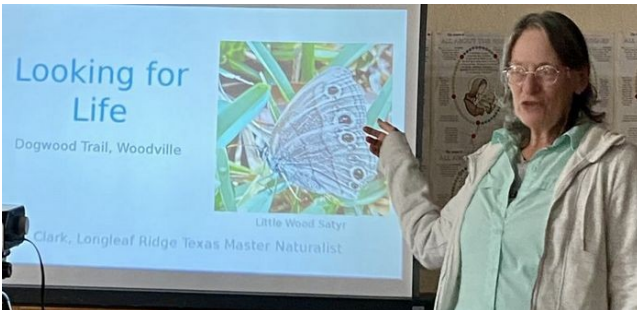
On Saturday, March 7th, the 2026 Longleaf Ridge Master Naturalist chapter training class visited the John D Parker fish hatchery. After a very informative and interesting class on Ichthyology and Aquatic Systems, taught by Chase Shotland, we were given the tour of the breeding and holding facility for largemouth bass, channel catfish, blue catfish, and sunfish. We even got to see the newest catfish breeding barrels.



Advanced Training Highlights

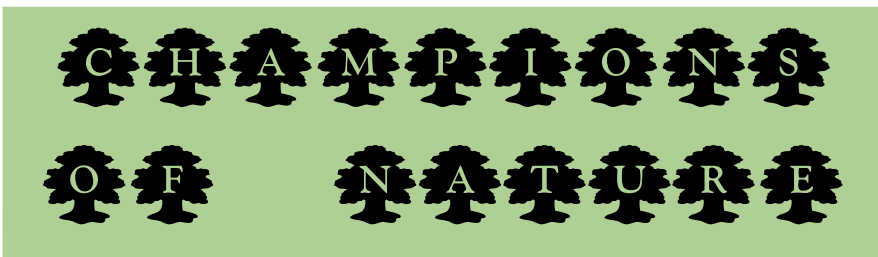
By D'Ann White

January 13, 2026



Laura Clark gave a presentation called "Looking for Life on the Dogwood Trail." The trail is located in Woodville, and the chapter has taken several Bioblitzes to the trail. She gave highlights of what one could find while on the trail.

Due to the training class, we have not had any other chapter meeting ATs during this quarter.



By Lori Horne

The weekend of March 28-29 was an exciting time for families visiting the YMBL South Texas State Fair. Champions of Nature's activity booth this year was Archaeology 101. An actual artifact sand pit was constructed by Richard Peters, and artifacts were donated by Keith Stephens. The visiting young archaeologists were able to dig and select a piece of artifact to take home. Hopefully, we inspired this younger generation to explore history further.



Lori Horne & Keith Stephens



Looking Back... 1st Quarter, 2026

Photos from LRMN
Facebook page



The CoCoRaHS Team

appreciates

Rae Montgomery

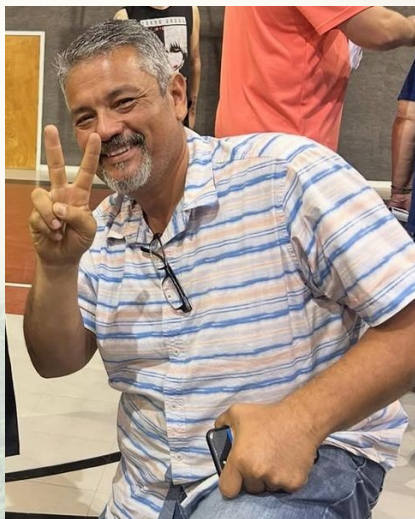
TX-TR-33

859 Observations



*New Year's Day Hike at
Boykin Springs*

In Memory



Ruben Jimenez

June 28, 1969 ~ February 23, 2026

Texas Master Naturalist Member
since 2024

Quarterly VMS Report

By D'Ann White

In the last quarter, members reported to the the following opportunities, totaling 883.75 volunteer hours:

• CB: Chapter Meeting & Admin Work.....	350.5 hours
• FR: Birding at MDJSP.....	10.0 hours
• FR: Birding Classic/Big Sit.....	4.0 hours
• FR: Citizen Scientist.....	15.75 hours
• FR: CoCoRaHS.....	29.0 hours
• FR: Eagle Survey.....	53.5 hours
• FR: Great Backyard Bird Count.....	10.25 hours
• FR: Nestwatch.....	4.0 hours
• FR: Feeder Watch.....	38.75 hours
• FR: Texas Nature Trackers.....	10.0 hours
• NPA: Pollinator Garden.....	27.75 hours
• NPA: MDJSP.....	5.0 hours
• NPA: SFA Plant Center.....	16.5 hours
• PO: Public Outreach Service.....	55.5 hours
• Pollinators for TX-NPA.....	27.5 hours
• Pollinators for TX-RM.....	47.5 hours
• Pollinators for TX-TR.....	15.25 hours
• RM: Forest Service.....	24.5 hours
• RM: Keep Texas Beautiful.....	19.0 hours
• TG: Grants.....	8.5 hours
• TG: Big Thicket Association.....	2.5 hours
• TG: Friends of MDJSP.....	27.25 hours
• TR: MDJSP Paddling Guide.....	0.25 hour
• TR: Big Thicket Volunteer.....	10.0 hours
• TR: Programs/Presentations.....	66.75 hours
• TR: Shangri-La Gardens.....	4.5 hours

A few things to remember:

When logging impact data and more than one volunteer worked the event, only ONE person may log the impact data, so coordinate among yourselves which one will record the data.

When logging hours for the Pollinator Garden grant, please use on of the “Pollinators for Texas” opportunities.

Upcoming Events

April

- Apr 2--- Board Meeting
- Apr 8--- Bird Watching (Shangri-La, 5:30-7pm)
- Apr 11---Birding at MDJSP
IT makeup class
Stream Team Training
- Apr 14--- TMN Tuesday
Ornithology Class
- Apr 18--- Citizen Science class (2 locations:
pollinator garden or High Island)
- Apr 21-22---Lyrid Meteor Shower
- Apr 22--- Bird Watching (Shangri-La, 5:30-7pm)
- Apr 25--- Forest/Wetland Ecology class
(E.O. Siecke)
- Apr 28--- Laws/Reg & Vols as Teachers
class (MDJSP)
- Apr 29--- Bird Watching (Shangri-La,
5:30-7pm)

May

- May 7--- Board Meeting
- May 9--- Birding at MDJSP
- May 11--- Bat Monitoring Begins
- May 12---TMN Tuesday
Chapter Meeting
- May 16--- Tree Farm Tour
- May 30---Neches River Rendezvous

June

- Jun 4--- Board Meeting
- Jun 9---TMN Tuesday
Chapter Meeting
- Jun 13---Birding at MDJSP

BIRD
Watching Wednesdays

March 18 & 25
April 1, 8, 15, 22 & 29
5:30p.m. - 7p.m.

Registration required
shangrilagardens.org

Shangri La Botanical Gardens & Nature Center

26TH ANNUAL
NECHES RIVER
RENDEZVOUS

AN ANGELINA & NECHES RIVER AUTHORITY EVENT

CELEBRATING 26 YEARS OF COMMUNITY & CONSERVATION

SAVE THE DATE!
SATURDAY
MAY 30TH
2026

Contact us at:
recreation@anra.org
936-633-7507

anratx
nechesriverrendezvous

SCAN THE QR CODE FOR MORE INFORMATION!

2026 Texas Outstanding
Tree Farm Tour

Saturday, May 16th
Gill Tree Farm, Shelby County

Join the Texas Forestry Association in celebrating the 2026 Outstanding Tree Farmers, the Gill family, during the Outstanding Tree Farm Tour from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. May 16 at Gill Tree Farm in Shelby County.

7th Annual
STREAM TEAMUP & CLEANUP

At Buckner Park

Saturday, April 17th

Keep Jacksonville Beautiful
Waterway Cleanup
9:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

Texas Stream Team Water
Quality Monitoring Training
11:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

two events - one mission

Scan the QR code to sign up!

Keep Jacksonville Beautiful

ANRA
ANGELINA & NECHES RIVER AUTHORITY

CHAPTER INFORMATION

WEBSITES OF INTEREST

Longleaf Ridge Master Naturalists website.....<https://txmn.org/llr/>
Longleaf Ridge Master Naturalist Facebook.....<https://www.facebook.com/groups/196451348395608>
Martin Dies Jr. State Park events.....https://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/martin-dies-jr/park_events
Watson Preserve Facebook.....<https://www.facebook.com/groups/564425933696669/>
Big Thicket National Preserve.....<https://www.nps.gov/bith/index.htm>
Keep Texas Beautiful.....<https://ktb.org>

CHAPTER OFFICERS

President

Keith Stephens

Vice-President

Richard Peters

Secretary

Sharon Lamoreaux

Treasurer

Fred Lyons

Past President

Tammy Jimenez

Coordinators

Birding Trips

Fred Lyons

Bioblitzes

Laura Clark

Field Trips

Keith Stephens

VMS / Newsletter

D'Ann White

Website

Daniel White



Article Submissions Due: June 15, 2026

- Email me any pictures or articles you would like to see in our next quarterly newsletter! My email address is danielwhitefamily@gmail.com.
- You can also upload to the Google Drive, and just email me to let me know that you have done so.



Our Chapter has a Google Drive! Do you have any pictures, videos, or files you would like to share with the rest of the chapter? You can scan the QR code to access the drive & upload.

Meetings:

2nd Tues of each month, 6 pm
At St. Michaels Catholic Church
2898 US Hwy 190 W, Jasper, TX 75951

Board Meetings

1st Thurs of each month, 9:30 am
At the Jasper County Agrilife office
271 East Lamar, Suite 101 Jasper, TX 75951

Partners

Martin Dies, Jr State Park
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers---Sam Rayburn

Advisors

Texas Agrilife: Caitlin Gallegos
TPWD: Chuck Hubbard