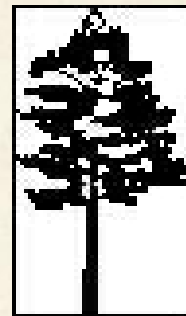


# Lost Pines Master Naturalist

Volume II, Issue 8

August 2011



## Incredible Edibles: The Chiltepin

By LPMN member Susan Smith

Texans are not the least bit intimidated when some outsider, obviously not a Texan, observes that "everything in Texas either bites, pokes, sticks or scratches." With that in mind, the 75<sup>th</sup> Legislature of the State of Texas named the chiltepin, *Capsicum annuum*, as the official State Native Pepper in 1997.

Exactly how hot are little chiltepins? In 1912, the Scoville Heat Unit Scale was created to rate the heat of peppers. On this scale, sweet bell peppers scored a 0; whereas, habaneros, the king of spice, scored 200,000-350,000 units. Chiltepins were measured and earned a very respectable, whopping score of 100,000-250,000 units. For its diminutive size, the fiery chiltepin delivers a punch. What's measured is capsaicin, a chemical compound that



[http://www.statesymbolsusa.org/Texas/Pepper\\_Chiltepin.html](http://www.statesymbolsusa.org/Texas/Pepper_Chiltepin.html)

stimulates chemical receptor nerve endings in the skin. The pepper may set its own standards for spiciness and heat by human measurements, but this diminutive morsel is also a favorite food for mockingbirds, finches and wild turkey. Passing deer nibble at it.

The chiltepin is a delicately branching shrub with alternate leaves of the Solanaceae family. It is not fussy and is easy to grow in either a container or in a garden. The fruit of this petite pepper is a berry and is tiny, colorful and roundish, about the size of a peppercorn. The color indicates the maturity of the berries, rather than its degree of heat. These chili peppers undergo color changes from green to yellow to red.

Here in Texas and South of the border, the pepper has the distinction of being the mother of all peppers as it is the oldest, wild progenitor of the *Capsicum* genus. Typically in the wild, chiltepins grow on moist ground often tucked under other shrubs. Historians believe that the word "chiltepin" derived from the Aztec combination words "chilli" and "tecintli." Other names include flea chile, bird pepper, chile mosquito and chile pequin. In Mexico, the chiltepin is called "arrebato," which is to say that the heat dissipates quickly though it is initially quite hot to the taste. This native pepper is known to have been cultivated in the New World as far back as 5,200 BC.

Medicinally, capsaicins contain vitamins C, A, and B, antioxidants, antibacterial properties which reduce blood cholesterol, and also aid digestion and are useful as a topical painkiller for arthritis as well.

Chiltepins can be eaten fresh or sun-dried, whole or crushed, and added to salsa and soups. The peppers can be boiled and then pickled in vinegar for a sauce that can be sprinkled lightly on cooked greens to add a distinctive touch of pungent flavor. A word of caution: The berries do bite. The leaves are toxic. Bon Appetit! . . . if you dare.



# Not Just Birdseed!

By LPMN member Liz Pullman



Plant-of-the-Month:  
*Helianthus annuus*  
Common Sunflower

Easy to explain this name!  
Helio = Sun and Anthus = Flower.  
That is your Greek lesson for today.

As you drive the highways this summer keep your eyes peeled for common sunflowers that have bouncing seed heads. Very likely a bird is clinging there and its weight is causing the bounce. Buntings, Finches and of course, Cardinals are especially likely but many birds relish these seed. Ask a chickadee! Thousands of pounds of sunflower seed fill bird tubes and trays all over the country.

This plant, as are most sunflowers, is drought resistant and the Common Sunflowers that started blooming recently along Texas highways are providing one of the few colorful displays during this dry, dusty and prolonged drought. They grow everywhere - roadsides, along railroad tracks and fence rows. They quickly colonize abandoned fields and unused roadbeds -

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often they are described as weedy. The Texas sub-species grows here but is difficult to separate unless you get out of your car and look at petioles.

Common sunflowers were widely used by native tribes for food, fiber and dyes as well as having many medicinal uses. For about 3000 years the non-maize eating tribes cultivated and selected sunflowers for seed size and productivity. The plant is unique in that it is one of very few agricultural crops to originate on this continent north of Mexico. Interestingly, the sunflowers which are commercially grown today are derived from the Russian Giants. By the early 19th century the plant had made its way into Russia and became a popular crop for mass cultivation and was, of course, selected for seed size since oil production was of primary interest. These strains of the sunflower- tall, single stalked and big-headed - made their way back to the U.S. and became a commercial crop as a source of oil (and birdseed). Sunflowers are a common crop in the mid-west and I assume that Kansas is not called the Sunflower State without a good reason. The oil finds its way into many products - vegetable oil, salad dressing, soaps and candles. The kernels, both raw and roasted, show up in breads, cereals, granola bars and trail mix. But don't forget all the birdseed!!!

(Edited by Jeannie to add - As a native Kansan, commercial sunflowers are not very commonly grown as a crop in that state. I've seen them once in the western part but for the most part, it is all wheat, corn, oil wells and the occasional ruby slipper.)



# Volunteer Opportunities

## New Volunteer Activities

Publicity liaison needed to advertise our chapter meetings and activities to the local public. If you have a knack for writing, and/or have a connection to local newspapers in Bastrop and Caldwell Counties, this is the job for you! We'd like our activities to be listed in the community calendars, plus have articles about our meetings and featured speakers. These meetings are always open to the public, and this would be a great way to generate more interest in the chapter. If you're interested, please contact Louise at [flridlon@hotmail.com](mailto:flridlon@hotmail.com) or Walt at [walt.elson@gmail.com](mailto:walt.elson@gmail.com) for schedules and specifics.

## Ongoing Volunteer Activities

**Colorado River Refuge Work Group.** If you like making a direct impact on improving the environment for boating, picnicking, fishing, hiking and enjoyment of the great outdoors, this will be for you. Pines and Prairies Land Trust (PPLT) owns a beautiful stretch of land along the Colorado River with contiguous property and depends on LPMN volunteers to help improve/maintain it. This is where the Home School Nature Studies sponsored by PPLT are conducted, and there is no terrain like it in Texas available to the public for free. Usage and popularity are growing as the area develops and word spreads of the breathtaking natural beauty found there. We are looking for LPMN volunteers who have interests in identification of flora and fauna; trail layout, building & maintenance; sign-making & illustration; land-

scaping with native plants; wetlands ecology; or just simply helping cement the relationship between man and nature. This is gratifying work, as there are no government restrictions and results are immediate and obvious. We work every Wednesday morning (except during July & August) from 9:00 o'clock till noon, so if you need volunteer hours, this can fix you up in no time. Other dates/times may be arranged, depending on the project. If interested, contact Dale Morrison

([angie.morrison@studiosdallas.com](mailto:angie.morrison@studiosdallas.com), 512-629-3345), Jim Estes ([jestes@ionet.net](mailto:jestes@ionet.net), 512-620-0322) or Robert Vaughn ([vaughnrobertj@gmail.com](mailto:vaughnrobertj@gmail.com), 512-237-1148) for details.

**Colorado River Monitoring Project.** First Saturday of every month. 8 am. [cgmorris@flash.net](mailto:cgmorris@flash.net) Contact Claude Morris to participate or for more information call Kevin at 972-1960. You must have your own canoe! For more information about the project, go to:

<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/water/downloads/coloradofinal2.pdf>

**Outreach Booth Volunteer.** Motivated individuals have a wonderful opportunity to meet people, discuss the Master Naturalist program, and the personal satisfaction gained by being a member. Explain the many and varied volunteer projects and the ways they support conservation, education, and recreation in our communities. Demonstrate the chapter's rainfall absorption simulator and discuss the importance of proper land cover in water conservation. Discuss the CoCoRaHS program and its benefits to science, the public, and to the individual volunteer. No previous experience is necessary. Training is available. For more information and to volunteer contact Jim Estes at [jestes@ionet.net](mailto:jestes@ionet.net)

**McKinney Roughs Nature Survey** – Kathy McAleese is coordinating a long-term project to survey



# Advanced Training

trails through the burned-out areas of McKinney Roughs. Plans call for at least two surveys per month, one during the week and one on a weekend. Actual days and times will vary based on the weather and Kathy's schedule. Please contact her at (512) 718-1313 or [kmcaleese@austin.rr.com](mailto:kmcaleese@austin.rr.com) if you are interested in leading or participating in either weekday or weekend surveys, or both.

**Hornsby Bend – Ecological Literacy Days –** Last Saturday of every month, 9 am - 1 pm. Combining volunteer work with learning about local ecology, the Ecological Literacy Day at Hornsby Bend begins with several hours of outdoor work - ranging from trail maintenance to habitat restoration to work in the native plant nursery - and ends with at least an hour of learning about local ecology – birds, bugs and more! Wear boots and work clothing and bring your binoculars. For more information, contact Kevin Anderson at [coordinator@hornsbybend.org](mailto:coordinator@hornsbybend.org) or 512-972-1960.

**Hornsby Bend – Monthly Bird Survey –** Second Saturday of each month. Meet at the Center for Environmental Research at 7 am for the morning survey (coffee and donuts at 6:30 am) and 4 pm for the afternoon survey. All levels of birders are welcome – the survey is a great way to improve your skills since we form teams matching experienced and novice birders. For more information, contact Eric Carpenter at [ecarpe@gmail.com](mailto:ecarpe@gmail.com).



## Natural Bridge Caverns and Bracken Cave Field Trip.

**September 24:** Learn of nature's solution mining techniques and amazing decoration work in Natural Bridge Caverns. Following our cool (70-degree) 80-minute tour of the cavern we will cross the road to Bracken Cave. Here we will have a presentation on the life and times of bats and then watch as thousands of Mexican Freetail bats take to the sky to maintain the balance of the world's flying insect population. The entrance fees are \$15 per person at each of the tours with a minimum of 20 and maximum of 50 people. We must make reservations for the caverns soon, so contact Walt Elson at [walt.elson@gmail.com](mailto:walt.elson@gmail.com) as soon as possible to reserve your spot(s). Both locations are north of Schertz. Our tour of the cavern starts at 3pm and ends around 4:15. You should plan to arrive by 2pm to enjoy the other attractions on the grounds. We should be at the gate to Bracken at 6pm and will depart around 8:30.

**Jacob's Well Field Trip.** Jacob's Well is a highly significant artesian spring that surges up at the rate of thousands of gallons per minute from one of the longest caves in Texas. The spring, located near Wimberly, Texas, is the headwater of Cypress Creek that flows through Wimberly, the Blanco River, recharges the Edwards Aquifer and finally replenishes Aransas Bay estuaries. We will hear the history of the spring as a sacred place to many people for 10,000 years and home to a rich and diverse ecosystem. We will also learn how that ecosystem is being restored from overdevelopment and the efforts to keep the springs flowing in the face of draw-down of the aquifer. Videos taken by divers show some of the 5500-ft. long underwater cave. The tour will take us on a discovery trek through the fragile and highly diverse hill country terrain and to the well. Our group tour will be on



Saturday October 29 at 10am. The tour is free but donations are always welcome. Directions to follow. Sign-up at the next meeting or email Walt at [walt.elson@gmail.com](mailto:walt.elson@gmail.com).

**Washington County Wildlife Workshop. September 9.** Blinn College Ag Building, Brenham, TX. Topics to include: White-tailed deer, dove and quail necropsy, The Integrated Management Approach - Kerr WMA, Aging on the Hoof, Determining the Rut, Jaw Bone Aging, Nutrition and Rumen Content, Boone and Crocket Scoring, Turkey Management, Dove and Quail Management, Ecosystems Management. Registration is \$20. Please register by September 1, check payable to Washington County Wildlife Society. For more information, contact Stephanie Damron at [979-277-6297](tel:979-277-6297) or [Stephanie.damron@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:Stephanie.damron@tpwd.state.tx.us).

**True Flies - Masters of the Air - August 22.** Vectors of disease, pests of livestock and humans, "worms" that damage fruits and vegetables: these are all typical associations that we have for flies. However, this group of insects also includes predators, pollinators, waste recyclers, and a key component of all terrestrial and freshwater habitats. Through vibrant photographic images, we will explore the diversity, physiology, life cycle, and survival strategies of this important order of insects. Monthly meeting of the Austin Butterfly Forums.  
<http://www.austinbutterflies.org/>

**South Texas Wildlife Conference. September 28 - September 30.** Spring Creek Place Event Center, 12116 Nursery Dr., Victoria, TX. Texas Wildlife Association, Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department are once again hosting the South Texas Wildlife Conference. The event will focus on Energy Development and the Future of Wildlife Habitat. This is a rare opportunity to hear from a wide range of practitioners, land managers, policy makers, wildlife biologists, and wildlife researchers, about the future of energy development in our region and what it means for landowners. Sessions will inform attendees

about the latest studies concerning water, invasive grasses and restoration strategies, as well as updates on issues that impact our precious natural resources. Registration fees: \$50 before 9/14, \$65 late registration after 9/14, and \$20 guest ticket for Social and Dinner (9/28 & 9/29). See attachment for more details and registration form. For more information, please contact Courtney Brittain at [210-826-2904](tel:210-826-2904) or by email at [cbrittain@texas-wildlife.org](mailto:cbrittain@texas-wildlife.org).

**Native Plant Propagation Workshop. Sept. 17, 9 am to noon - Lockhart.** Learn proven techniques for propagating plants from seed, cuttings and by layering. This is a hands-on, learn by doing workshop. Seeds will be available for you to raise your own plants. Bring some of your favorites to share. Limited to first 12 applicants. Overflow date is Sept. 18. Contact Jim Estes at [jestes@ionet.net](mailto:jestes@ionet.net).

**Bamberger Ranch Public Tour. Sept. 17 and Oct. 1. 9:00 am - 12:30 pm. \$15 fee.** Reservations required - slots fill up quickly. On this tour, you will see the results of 37 years of habitat restoration. We will show you projects which demonstrate principles of good stewardship. You may also see dinosaur tracks, fossil beds and walk on a nature trail. Transportation on the ranch provided. Contact at:  
<http://www.bambergerranch.org/tours/#tour>





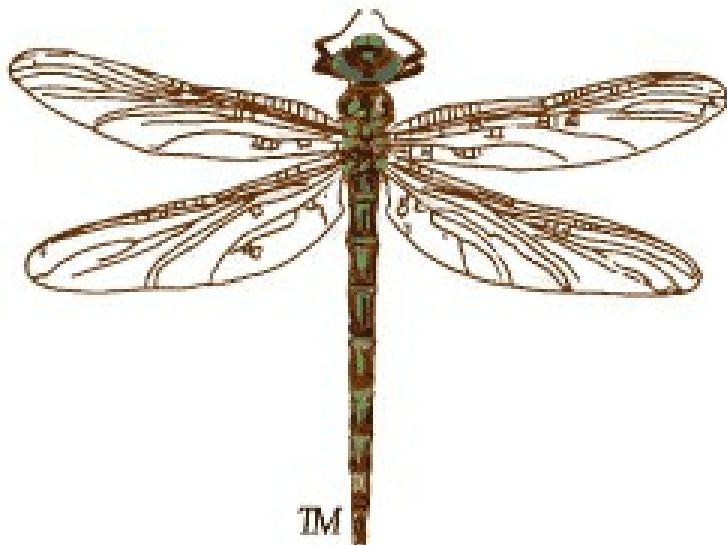
# Just For Fun

**Rockport Hummerbird Celebration. September 15-18, 2011.** Part conference part festival, this is a jam packed event full of birding, kayaking, photography and other fun stuff for birders. Registration fees vary, the all speaker pass fee is \$40. Other classes and events are additional. Go to their website for more information and early registration:  
<http://www.rockporthummingbird.com>

**Caldwell County Land Stewardship Expo - August 26, 1-6 pm.** Lockhart American Legion, 1501 Colorado St., Lockhart, TX 78644. Central Texas Conservation Partnership ([texasconservation.org](http://texasconservation.org)) is a unique collaboration between resource agencies and NGOs including Agri-Life Extension, Texas Parks and Wildlife, Plateau Land and Wildlife Management, Texas Master Naturalists, Pines and Prairies Land Trust, NRSC, USDA, and Texas Forest Service. This workshop is intended for landowners interested in learning more about land stewardship practices. Topics will include water rights vs. landowner rights, feral hog control, property tax options, and brush management. Attendance is **free**, however please RSVP by contacting Daniel Lewis at [979-968-5555](tel:979-968-5555) or [dlewis@tfs.tamu.edu](mailto:dlewis@tfs.tamu.edu) by the Monday prior to the workshop date.

**Wildlife Tracking Program.** Learn everything you didn't know you didn't know about tracking critters at this new program in Austin.

<http://earthnativeschool.com/9-month-wildlife-tracking-i.html>



**Sonny Arnold**, the Texas Master Naturalist program's Assistant Program Coordinator, will retire August 31st, 2011. A celebration of Sonny's service and retirement will take place at the Statewide Annual Meeting and Advanced Training October 21 through the 23rd. At MO Ranch. For anyone wishing to contribute to a gift for Sonny please send a check payable to Michelle Haggerty at 309 Sidney Baker South, Kerrville, TX 78028. For anyone wishing to write a note/letter of congratulations, thank you, etc. Please send to Michelle at the address above. The letters will be compiled into a scrapbook for Sonny. Please forward the above items by October 5th, 2011. Contact Michelle Haggerty with any questions at 830-896-2504.

## Monthly Applause

In July, the following awards were given out:

Gene Moulden	250 hours
Kathryn McAleese	500 hours
Nick Nichols	2011
	re-certification

Congrats to you all!



# President's Column

By Louise Ridlon

With the arrival of August, we're reminded that we're entering the hottest few weeks of the year, with another two months of summer yet to go. Austin's heat was even featured on a local Los Angeles newscast while I was in Southern California. Despite the heat, there are a few activities that are weather-proof: we can indulge in them any time of year. An obvious one is reading. Many of us go for light fare during the summer, but many books dealing with historical or scientific topics are highly entertaining. Bill Brooks loaned me a copy of A Perfect Red, which details the history of the cochineal dye trade, a product of Texas and Mexico's prickly pear cactus. This insect product was highly lucrative, involving treachery, piracy, and subterfuge. For a giggle, look up British author Gerald Durrell. His memoirs feature his experiences collecting threatened species for a private zoo; they contain a strong conservation message, heavily laced with wit. Durrell is responsible for preserving a number of species in Madagascar which undoubtedly would have gone extinct without protection.

Another great summer activity is planning: outlining ideas for action when the time is right. Our Vice-President and Advanced Training chair, Walt Elson, has been busy planning chapter activities for the fall, including a few field trips. These will involve some AT hours as well as provide a social activity for members and guests. I hope many members will take advantage of the chance to visit the Natural Bridge Caverns and Bracken Bat Cave in September. Both of these natural phenomena occur due to the unique geology and topography of the region. See the article in this newsletter for details. Walt has a few other ideas he's researching—stay tuned! He's also lined up some very timely topics for upcoming chapter meetings. Just in time for migration, Mark Klym of Texas Parks and Wildlife will bring us a program on Hummingbirds at our August meeting. These living jewels are favorites in nearly everyone's garden. Bring your friends to Bastrop State Park on August 15 to hear about the ecology of these uniquely New Word avian acrobats. In September we'll hear a presentation on the FireCAP program, particularly relevant in these extreme drought conditions.

At our July meeting, we discussed the possibility of devoting a chapter meeting to work on chapter business; members would all participate in committees and teams to organize and discuss plans for the coming year. Members agreed that we'd designate the January 2012 meeting as a working meeting, which would qualify as volunteer hours. That will give next year's officers an opportunity to set an agenda for the new year. Please plan to be a part of that meeting.

Continue to share your experiences in this newsletter! Jeannie welcomes your submissions telling of your volunteer activities. All members benefit from learning about projects others are involved with. It inspires us to explore other areas where we can use our talents to benefit the community and the environment!



# Lost Pines Master Naturalist Monthly Meeting Schedule

August 15, 2011. 6:30 - 9:00 pm. Bastrop State Park Refectory. Mark Klym, Information Specialist with TPWD, will talk on hummingbirds.

September 19, 2011. 6:30 - 9:00 pm. Lockhart State Park. Lexi Maxwell with the Texas Forest Service will talk on fire wise landscaping and fire safety.

## Newsletter Deadline

Deadline for the next issue is **August. 30, 2011**. We welcome relevant contributions, photos, announcements, or other material relating to the mission of the Texas Master Naturalist program, particularly those pertaining to our local area. Please send information to Jeannie Jessup: [magicgenie@gmail.com](mailto:magicgenie@gmail.com). **PLEASE send text either in an email or in doc format. I cannot open any other form! Pictures should be sent as attachments of jpgs as big as you can send them. Please do not imbed images in the email. Doing so greatly helps in the newsletter creation! Thank you!**

## STATE PROGRAM CONTACTS

Website: <http://txmn.org/>

**State Coordinator: Michelle Haggerty,**  
[mhaggerty@wfscgate.tamu.edu](mailto:mhaggerty@wfscgate.tamu.edu); (979) 458-2034.

The Texas Master Naturalist program is sponsored by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

## SPONSOR CONTACTS

**Caldwell Co. Extension Office:** Position vacant;  
[Caldwell-tx@tamu.edu](mailto:Caldwell-tx@tamu.edu); (512) 398-3122.

**Bastrop Co. Extension Office:** Rachel Bauer, CEA-AG/NR; [Bastroptx@tamu.edu](mailto:Bastroptx@tamu.edu); (512) 581-7186.

**Bastrop/Caldwell Co. TPWD Wildlife Biologist:** Meredith Longoria, 804 Pecan, Bastrop,  
[Meredith.Longoria@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:Meredith.Longoria@tpwd.state.tx.us); (512) 332-7280.



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