

# *Lost Pines Master Naturalists*



## *Bastrop-Caldwell County Area*

[www.lostpinesmasternaturalist.org](http://www.lostpinesmasternaturalist.org)

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*"There are some who can live without wild things, and some who cannot."*

*Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac*



# The Naturalist Next Door

*Submitted by Larry Gfeller*

James “Nick” Nichols moved to Austin from Houston in 2009, seeking retirement from a long and varied servitude to ‘the man’. In this case, ‘the man’ included Sterling Chemical, Union Carbide and Dow Chemical — you know, the kind of life affirming, humanizing, small businesses that can wear you down with time. “Shakin’ the bush here, boss.” Actually, Nick admits it was an interesting and fulfilling career. But what does a former process analyzer technician do for an encore? **He indulges his passions!** For Nick, this meant getting involved with the singles group in his church (dancing anyone? Two or three times a week!), lobbying to baby sit his first grandchild, Jimmy, at every possible opening, and becoming a Texas Master Naturalist. Finding the Austin chapter with a waiting list, Nick came to the Lost Pines Chapter — a fortuitous bit of good fortune, he says. As a member of the 2010 graduating class, Nick teamed up with a couple other nefarious characters to form the melting pot that was later to become our **Bridge Maniacs**. The founding fathers of this eclectic team quickly discovered that it helps to be a little crazy. Adopting the Colorado River Refuge as their ward, this group attacked the overgrown, underdeveloped former dump site relentlessly. For Nick this meant a 98-mile round trip from Austin . . . each week.

So what kind of a person does this . . . for fun? **A naturalist, of course.** Like an iceberg, all of us display only part of who we are for everyone to see. I got an opportunity to sneak a peek under the water recently, and made an amazing discovery.

There’s a genuine naturalist down there too — one that is hidden from the public. Nick makes his home in a modern housing development on the South side of Austin. Comfortable, clean, ordered — like a craftsman’s toolbox. Off the main road, safe and protected. Neighbors are nestled shoulder-to-shoulder in intricately designed streets created by

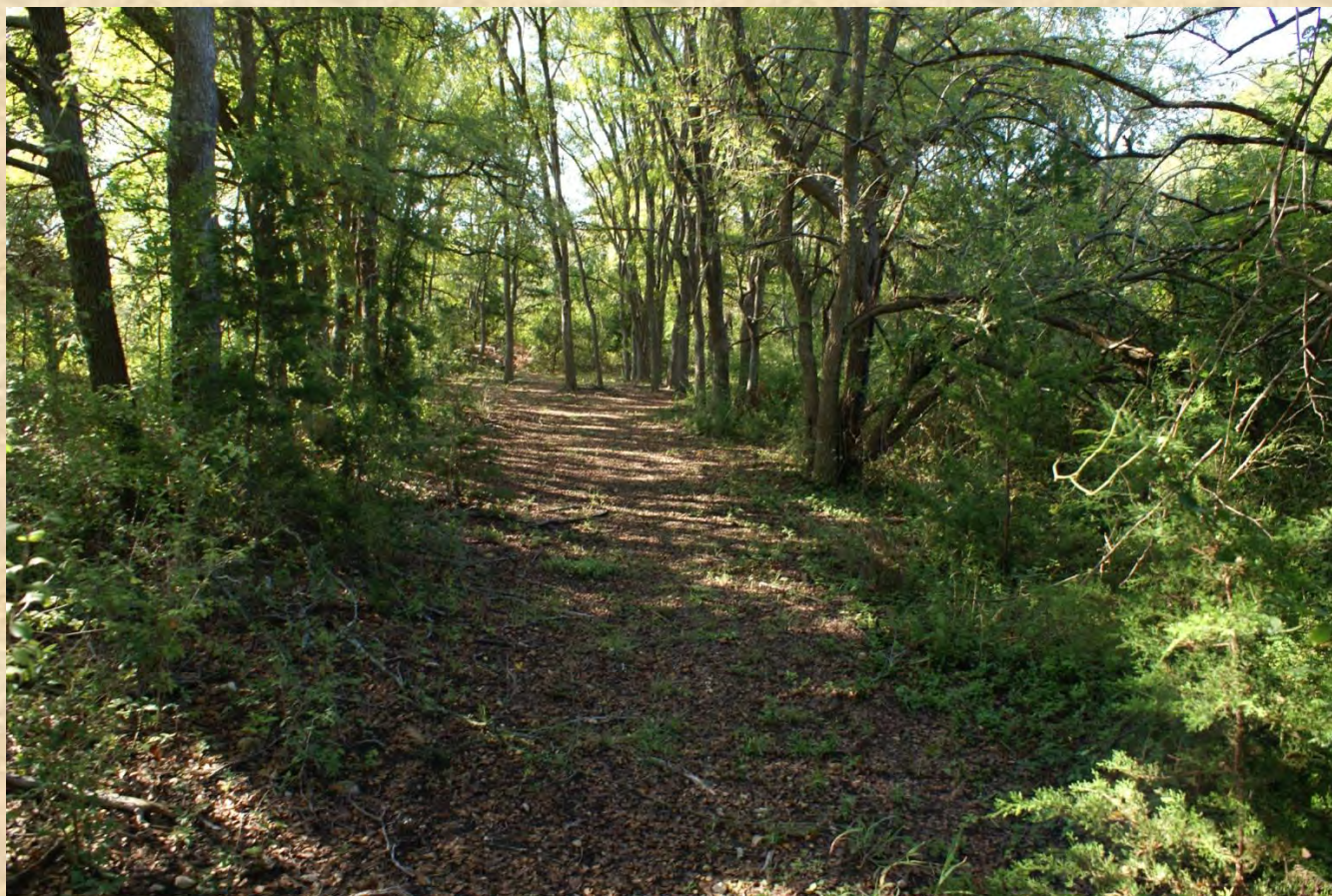
some cloistered community planner. The trees are all young and innocent, struggling to grow amidst guy-wires and trusses, disguising the grandeur and individuality that lies within. Geometric plots of manicured grass, precisely apportioned, divide one from the other. The streets are clean and unworn, like the bottom of a baby’s foot. Cars are washed, lawns are obediently tended. Children frolic loudly. One gets the sense of benevolent collectivism. If a homeowner’s association was flesh and blood, this is what it would look like. **Urban tranquility is palpable**

While this may not sound like the homestead of a Texas Master Naturalist, it most assuredly is. Appearances can deceive. Our protagonist showcases his love of nature by transforming his piece of domestic serenity into an urban wildscape. The front looks customary enough, except that the sound of a bubbling brook greets approaching visitors from a carefully





placed waterfall. But the real treasure is hidden behind. In the back is a natural sanctuary of thriving blooms and fragrance. It's like accidentally discovering a place of contemplation — the grounds of some temple; almost a Zen garden. A multitude of cacti, wildflowers, herbaceous plants and feeders constantly excite a throng of hummingbirds and butterflies. Water gurgles out of what appears to be an ancient piece of pottery and disappears silently into the pea gravel some fifteen feet downstream. This private refuge attracts all manner of critters that crawl, hop and fly — the way one finds a tree in a hailstorm.



But there's more — something greater that calls this quiet man — just a few hundred yards outside his doorstep. While it's not exactly a 'secret garden', some of us Bridge Maniacs were recently astounded to be introduced to an authentic 2.6 mile nature trail tracing a manmade pipeline, then crossing a 100-year flood plain. The area was electric and alive — decked out with snow-on-the mountain, verbena, gay feather and wild petunias. **The astounding part?** Nick built this trail entirely by himself, on his own time, over roughly two years! Winding down alongside C.L. Renard Creek, the path was framed in walnut, willow and kidneywood trees. At this lower elevation we even discovered a blooming river primrose along the bank. Continuing on, the trail climbs the bluffs bordering either side of a gorge which reveals a panoramic view of rolling Central Texas hills. It then loops through an expanse of upland grasses amid scattered bois d'arc and elms before . . . surprise! surprise! . . . circling around to within 100 yards of Nick's doorstep. A complete circuit. A convenient and accessible escape. The neighborhood now enjoys a magnificent gift. You can view it by satellite at: [http://www.everytrail.com/view\\_trip.php?trip\\_id=1738248](http://www.everytrail.com/view_trip.php?trip_id=1738248).



*It's a naturalist's paradise. The creek lingers still and lazy in the mid-morning swelter. The water is so clear you can see suspended fish—stationary like underwater buoys—from an outcropping 50 feet above the surface. At the creek level near the water, a picnic spot has been carved from the adjoining woods. There stands a solitary hand-made bench. Shade from overhanging canopy combines with a gentle breeze to beckon even the most resolute traveler to stop and refresh. On the opposite bank upstream, an old pumphouse squats over a natural spring like a scene out of some Old West novel. The water tank is still connected to an abandoned ranch house just over the hill. These lowlands are part of a natural drainage system for the surrounding area, collecting runoff from RM 1327 to Old Lockhart Road. As little as two-to-four inches of rain is all it takes to flood the area. An old jam of logs and brush on the creek gives credence to the force and violence of fast-moving water. Ducks and egrets visit often. This land was part of the original purchase by Lennar Corporation, and was to include a total of 857 homes in the subdivision, complete with greenbelt. Then the recession hit, leaving this stretch of undeveloped savannah to nature—and Nick.*



*Actually, Nick assumed squatters' rights and decided to make this forgotten remnant into something residents could enjoy. After completing the initial trail system, Nick invited a somewhat nervous company VP on a walking tour of his work. Skeptical at first, fears of liability lawsuits quickly turned into respect and appreciation for a resident who created a place for others to come and enjoy nature—right in their back yard. There would be no waiting for the greenbelt! Nick knows that if and when the housing project is ever completed some of his work will be lost.*



But it's not about then . . . it's about now. With that wry little smile, Nick shares the winning strategy, "sometimes it's easier to ask for forgiveness than permission." Today, Nick promotes the trail system through the neighborhood website. People use it regularly.



In 2012 the Bridge Maniacs began setting aside a Saturday each month to visit the private property of a team member, culminating in a shared feast. This was Nick's day. Nick likes things neat, organized, on time, and in their place. If you've ever tried to supervise a timely hike . . . well, managing an assemblage of naturalists on terrain like this is like trying to sculpt with jelly! Schedules mean nothing. Every plant, every track, every sign of wildlife, every discovery teases the curiosity and sparks conversation. Field guides, cameras and binoculars get pulled out, and interests quickly diverge into countless sidebars—like cracks in a glass. Some were birders, some were serious botanists, while butterflyers were enthralled with identifying larvae on the underside of a leaf. Then there were hackers like me, who just love to be outdoors. It was like turning a group of toddlers loose in a room full of puppies. This playscape enveloped lowland riparian habitat, upland woods and a stretch of tall grass prairie. Teeming with life, the diversity provides the three essential elements of food, water and shelter. Hours later, our motley herd emerged sweaty and exhausted from the tall grass to an exit point opposite Nick's house. It was time for burgers and beer! Behind us lay a sanctuary for bobcat, jack rabbit, ducks, deer and fish—neatly disguised as wasteland. In front of us: a refuge for urban middle class families. Nick's trail system connects the two. Isn't that what a true naturalist does? And to think, this is the "under water" part of the man.



# *Lost Pines Master Naturalists Volunteering*

## **Fall Interpretative Hikes at**

### ➤ **Bastrop State Park**

*10/16/12 Email from Larry Gfeller ([larrydgfeller@yahoo.com](mailto:larrydgfeller@yahoo.com))*

*Bastrop State Park (BSP) Hike Leaders,*

*FYI, our first hike of the month saw 13 adults and 14 kids; our second hike produced 12 adults and 10 kids. . . .so you need to be thinking "KIDS" as you organize your programs. Consider such things as passing along responsibilities to look after maps, binoculars, carry field guides, act as wildlife spotters, etc. This might also suggest a little lighter on the "adult" topics with more emphasis on "kid" topics, such as snakes, Indian lore, the fire, the Houston Toad, searching for pine seeds (seedlings) and other forms of active involvement. My experience has shown the kids to be very engageable, curious and well-behaved. Be prepared for many penetrating questions from a child's perspective. Most of all, enjoy your hikes!*

*Larry*

*To All,*

*Spread the word: Hikes are planned for each Saturday beginning at 10:00 AM from October 6<sup>th</sup> thru December 15<sup>th</sup>.*

## **Emerald Ash Borer ("EAB")**

### **Environmental Service Project Conclusion Update from Ronnie Lanier:**

*Lost Pines Texas Master Naturalists supported the Texas Forest Service Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) survey for 2012. The Caldwell County EAB team set up and monitored 12 traps and the Bastrop County team set up 19 but could only find 18 of the 19 for the final evaluation. No EAB specimens were found although there were many other insect specimens noted. Monetary reimbursements are pending. The state of Texas will not conduct an overall state-wide survey in 2013.*





## *The Bridge Maniacs*

*Some of our Bridge Maniacs working at Bill's property;  
replacing a shed he lost in the 2011 Bastrop Labor Day Fire:*



Julie & Julia



Mike, Rob & Ronnie



Ronnie & Mike



Rob & Ronnie adding a skylight



Larry clearing logs & brush



Redmond keeping guard



# Volunteer Reminders & Opportunities

## Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (TPWD):



- **Lockhart State Park**  
**Outdoor Field Trips**

*Lockhart State Park will host four 5<sup>th</sup> grade outdoor field trips on (October 12 & 18,) **November 2 and December 7**. **Volunteers are needed** from 8:30 am to 12:30 pm and will help with leading the students through simple lessons on ecology and the environment. Please e-mail Josh Oyer at [josh.oyer@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:josh.oyer@tpwd.state.tx.us) or call the park at **512-398-3479** if interested in helping with these fun activities that are beneficial to the youth of Caldwell County.*

*I appreciate it!*

*Josh Oyer  
Park Interpreter/Pool Manager  
Lockhart State Park*

- **Email from: Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission:**

*Appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Texas Senate, the commission adopts policies and rules to carry out all programs of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Every year the Commission conducts an annual public hearing to receive input from our partners, stakeholders and constituents concerning any issues relating to Department policies, goals, programs, and responsibilities. Anyone who is interested in speaking to the Commission is encouraged to attend. Additional information on the public hearing is available at the link below.*

### **Next Regular Meeting:**

- **Work Session:** 9 a.m. Wednesday, November 7, 2012
- **Commission Meeting:** 9 a.m. Thursday, November 8, 2012
- **Location:** TPWD Headquarters, Austin — [Directions](#)
- The agenda will be linked here as soon as it is posted on the Web site.
- Live streaming audio will be available.
- [Commission Meeting Dates, Agendas, Archived Audio, and Transcripts](#)

### **Proposed Regulations:**

Comment online through 5 p.m. November 8, 2012.

- [Boater Education Rules and Fee — Mandatory Boater Education Deferral Program](#)
- [Design and Construction Contracts for Public Works](#)
- [Disease Detection and Response Rules](#)
- [Legislative Rules Review](#)
- [Official Corporate Partners Rule Amendment](#)
- [Zebra Mussel Rules](#)



## TPWD (Continued):



### • Whooping Crane Migration Watch Gets Under Way

AUSTIN — Endangered whooping cranes have begun their annual 2,400-mile fall migration from Canada to Texas. As the rare birds approach Texas, a new citizen science initiative is inviting Texas residents and visitors to help collect sightings of whoopers.

Texas Whooper Watch (<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/whoopingcranes/>) is a new volunteer monitoring program that is a part of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Texas Nature Trackers program. According to Lee Ann Linam, biologist in the Wildlife Diversity Program, Texas Whooper Watch is being developed to keep track of an ever-expanding population of whooping cranes.



Since beginning their slow recovery from a low of 16 birds in the 1940s, whoopers have, with few exceptions, always wintered on the Texas coast on and near Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. However, in the winter of 2011-12, several groups of whooping cranes expanded their wintering areas to include more coastal areas and even some inland sites in Central Texas—patterns that surprised crane biologists. “Texas Whooper Watch is a program that asks the public to help us discover more about where whooping cranes stop in migration and to be ready to learn more about these potential new wintering areas,” according to Linam.

This year biologists expect about 300 whooping cranes to **start arriving in Texas in late October or early November**. According to surveys on the nesting grounds in Wood Buffalo Park in northwestern Canada, the flock may contain as many as 34 chicks. Linam notes that Texas Whooper Watch will also help improve the accuracy of surveys on the wintering grounds, as the growth of the flock has made traditional census methods more difficult.

Whoopers usually follow a migratory path through North and Central Texas that includes cities such as Wichita Falls, Fort Worth, Waco, Austin, and Victoria. During migration they often pause overnight to use wetlands for roosting and agricultural fields for feeding, but seldom remain more than one night. They nearly always migrate in small groups of less than 6-8 birds, but they may be seen roosting and feeding with large flocks of the smaller sandhill crane. They are the tallest birds in North America, standing nearly five feet tall. They are solid white in color except for black wing-tips that are visible only in flight. They fly with necks and legs outstretched.

Citizens can help by reporting sightings of whooping cranes and by preventing disturbance of cranes when they remain overnight at roosting and feeding locations. **Sightings can be reported to [whoopingcranes@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:whoopingcranes@tpwd.state.tx.us) or 512-389-TXWW (8999)**. Observers are asked especially to note whether the cranes have colored leg bands on their legs. **Volunteers interested in attending training sessions to become “Whooper Watchers” in order to collect more detailed data may also contact the TPWD at [whoopingcranes@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:whoopingcranes@tpwd.state.tx.us) or 512-389-TXWW (8999).**

Additional information, including photos of whooping crane look-alike species, can be found at <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/whoopingcranes/> and at <http://www.whoopingcrane.com/report-a-sighting/>.





# *Trainings / Workshops / Conferences / Webinars / Etc.*

## *Updates*

\* Denotes Advanced Training (AT) Approved

- To request approval for a new advanced training opportunity, not denoted below or which has not previously been approved by the Chapter, submit a Request for Advanced Training Approval form found on our website: ([Fillable Word doc](#)) or ([PDF format](#)). For a list of activities and sponsors pre-approved for advanced training events not explicitly announced as approved by the Chapter reference: [Generally approved Advanced Training](#) also found on our webpage.

*The below are Updates / New Trainings;  
reference the September & October Newsletters for previous listed Trainings/etc.*

- \* **Austin Butterfly Forum, Inc.** (<http://austinbutterflies.org/>):  
[Zilker Botanical Garden Center](#) 2220 Barton Springs Rd. , **7:00 pm**, Free  
For details on events and upcoming meetings and field trips, see:  
<http://www.austinbutterflies.org/Calendar>



- **Monday, Nov 26:** Show and Tell meeting:  
Club members have 5-10 minutes to show photos or to tell about memorable butterfly (and other insect) encounters from the year. This is always one of the best meetings of the year. We have a laptop and projector, so just bring your flash drive.
- **No regular meeting in December; date for Holiday dinner TBA.** Our next regular meeting will be in January 2013. Details upcoming.

### **Texas AgriLife Extension Service:**

- **Fall Ag. Conference**

**Nov. 1, 8am – 3:30pm**

Smithville American Legion Hall (145 American Legion Rd., Smithville)

**\$25 registration if paid by Oct. 29** (mail to or drop off at Bastrop County Extension Office at 901 Pecan Street, Bastrop, TX 78602 or to Fayette County Extension Office at 255 Svoboda Lane, La Grange, TX 78945; **Late registration onsite \$35**. Make checks payable to 'Bastrop Ag Fund' (no cash will be accepted). Registration includes refreshments and handouts. 6 hours of CEU credits (2 in laws & regulations, 2 in general, and 2 in IPM) will be available for commercial, non-commercial and private pesticide applicators pending approval from TDA.



#### Agenda

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| 8:00-8:30   | Registration  |
| 8:30-9:30   | Pesticide Laws & Regulations for Cattle Producers – Donnie Dippel |
| 9:30-10:30  | Managing Vulture Predation in Livestock – Jacob Hetzel            |
| 10:45-11:45 | Pesticide Laws & Regulations: Back to Basics – Vick Alexander     |
| 11:45-12:30 | Lunch   |
| 12:30-1:30  | Feral Hog Management – Jacob Hetzel                               |
| 1:30-2:30   | New Chemicals in the War Against Brush – Dr. Bob Lyons            |
| 2:30-3:30   | Gopher Control in Pastures & Hayfields – Jerry Falke              |



# Chapter Business / Reminders:

## October Meeting Awards:

*Congratulations to the following Chapter Members for August & September certifications and milestone achievements:*

### Initial Certification

Mike Barrett

### Milestone 250 Hrs

Larry Gfeller

Robert Vaughn

### Milestone 500 Hrs

Nick Nichols

### 2012 Certification:

Robert Vaughn

Marcy Youngman

Louise Ridlon

Caroline Easley

Nick Nichols

Susan Whitton

Miriam Hall

*Remember to report your volunteer and advanced training hours **each month**, using the [Activity Report](#) form. This is how Scott knows who is to get awards/recognition.*

*Thanks,*

*Scott Moore*

*LPMN Timekeeper*

## Next Month's Chapter Meeting:

**November 19, 6:30 PM**

Buescher State Park Rec Hall

Speaker: *Wildlife Tracking* by Dave Scott



## 2013 LPMN Training Class:

### *Next Year's Training Class in the Works*

*Plans for the 2013 training class are underway. A cadre of very talented and hard-working committee members has embarked on the task of contacting speakers, setting dates, arranging for meeting locations, and preparing the application procedures. Classes will **begin on February 4, 2013**, and will culminate with a **graduation on May 20**. Special thanks to our sponsors, Meredith Longoria of TPWD, and Rachel Bauer and Michael Haynes of AgriLife Extension, for their invaluable expertise and assistance. Other committee members include Susan Crone, Bonnie Shimek, Roxanne Hernandez, Lori Baumann, Ralph Smoot, and Walt Elson.*

*We'll have some new speakers and meeting places this year. Current members are always welcome at our training classes, to make up or review the presentations, or to mingle with the interns.*

*Registration materials will be available in December. **So please spread the word to anyone you know who might want to join us as Master Naturalists and learn more about the marvelous natural treasures of Central Texas!***

*Louise Ridlon*



# Friendly Reminders

## **From Texas Parks & Wildlife: Deer Forecast Improved by Rain**



*“Despite one of the worst droughts on record last year, the deer population came through with minimal population impacts. Timely rainfall has helped. Most areas experienced a low fawn crop last year, but there were very few reports of any significant adult mortality related to the drought, according to Alan Cain, who heads up TPWD’s white-tailed deer program. Read more of his assessment in the ["2012-2013 Hunting Forecast"](#) in the October issue of Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine.*

*Be a happier hunter. Avoid some common deer hunting violations — tagging and logging, antler restrictions and no proof of hunter education certification — with these [video tips](#) from Game Warden Andrew Alexander.*

*Check out the deer regulations and season dates in the [Outdoor Annual](#).*”

## **National Wildlife Federation: Which Bird Seeds Are Best?**



As the weather turns cooler, experts provide [tips for choosing foods](#) that attract the most birds and keep them healthy. Click on the above link to read some conclusions so far:

- 1. Birds require foods with high nutritional content, especially protein and fat.*
- 2. Birds must have high-quality food.*
- 3. Birds choose seeds that are easily handled and digested.*



Learn more about bird feeding:  
[NWF’s Certified Wildlife Habitat™ program](#) provides homeowners with all the information they need to create quality outdoor spaces for birds using native plants as well as bird feeders.



## Monthly Meeting Schedule:

Chapter meetings generally alternate between the Bastrop State Park Refectory, Buescher State Park, Lockhart State Park, and Red Rock Community Center are at **6:30 PM on the third Monday of each month**. Most meetings feature an educational program (**Advanced Training** unless otherwise noted), and are open to members, prospective members, and the general public.

- **November 19**, 6:30 pm, Buescher State Park Rec Hall, Speaker: Dave Scott

## Newsletter Deadline:

Next Issue **Monday, November 26<sup>th</sup>**  
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 **Bonnie Shimek**, prefer email to: [jbshimek@cs.com](mailto:jbshimek@cs.com), if not possible mail to: 2233 FM 20, Red Rock, TX 78662

## 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 & Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

### Sponsor Contacts:

Bastrop Cty. Extension Office

Rachel Bauer

[Bastroptx@tamu.edu](mailto:Bastroptx@tamu.edu), (512) 581-7186

Caldwell Cty. Extension Office

Michael Haynes

[Caldwell-tx@tamu.edu](mailto:Caldwell-tx@tamu.edu), (512) 398-3122

Bastrop/Caldwell Cty's TPWD Wildlife Biologist

Meredith Longoria, 804 Pecan, Bastrop

[Meredith.Longoria@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:Meredith.Longoria@tpwd.state.tx.us)

(512) 332-7280

### Our Mission:

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 our communities.

## Officers

**President - Grace Pratt**

512-633-0164

[graciela@moonandback.org](mailto:graciela@moonandback.org) or  
[graciela@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:graciela@austin.utexas.edu)

**Vice President - Ronnie Lanier**

512-581-8117

[nxplgr@wildblue.net](mailto:nxplgr@wildblue.net)

**Secretary - Joan Estes**

512-620-0322

[joan.estes@earthlink.net](mailto:joan.estes@earthlink.net)

**Treasurer - Rik Martinez**

979-236-0994

[martinez\\_rik@hotmail.com](mailto:martinez_rik@hotmail.com)

**State Representative - Marsha Elrod**

512-284-7400

[melrod1@earthlink.net](mailto:melrod1@earthlink.net)

## Committees:

Hospitality	Caroline Easley <a href="mailto:carilb708@hotmail.com">carilb708@hotmail.com</a>	512-988-1708
Volunteer	Scott Moore <a href="mailto:lpmnhours@gmail.com">lpmnhours@gmail.com</a>	512-589-3098
Newsletter	Bonnie Shimek <a href="mailto:jbshimek@cs.com">jbshimek@cs.com</a>	512-581-2625
Web Page Communications	Andy Butler <a href="mailto:abutler@mac.com">abutler@mac.com</a>	512-321-1308 512-581-1470
Basic Training	Louise Ridlon <a href="mailto:flridlon@hotmail.com">flridlon@hotmail.com</a>	512-985-5064
Advanced Training	Ronnie Lanier <a href="mailto:nxplgr@wildblue.net">nxplgr@wildblue.net</a>	512-581-8117
Membership	Gene Moulden <a href="mailto:GeneorMarie@austin.rr.com">GeneorMarie@austin.rr.com</a>	512-985-5823
Outreach	Jim Estes <a href="mailto:jestes@ionet.net">jestes@ionet.net</a>	512-620-0322
Chapter History	William (Bill) Brooks <a href="mailto:b.brooks@utexas.edu">b.brooks@utexas.edu</a>	512-581-0377

## Lost Pines Chapter



[www.lostpinesmasternaturalist.org](http://www.lostpinesmasternaturalist.org)