

LOST PINES CHAPTER

Texas Master Naturalist



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Prometheus' Redemption, Part II by Larry Gfeller & Roxanne Hernandez

You arise with the morning and step outdoors to smell the new day. Each sunrise is a gift wrapped by nature, given generously to each living creature. You are greeted by the blown pink clouds of morning; a blue haze of humidity hangs everywhere. Where once stood a mighty pine forest, there now waves an ocean of teeming green foliage, mocking the scattered snags. Everything is remembered by its moment of greatest intensity. A pang of loss, amid the promise of remedy. Truth is, there are times when life gives you things and there are times when it takes them away. This is the aftermath of an incredibly destructive wildfire. You might say it was an un-prescribed burn of the highest order—one of those “taking away” moments. Could it have been prevented? I doubt it. Could it have been mitigated? Most certainly. Last time we were discussing prescribed burns. This is a fire that “gives” more than it takes. It is infinitely preferable to the un-prescribed kind.

Ever wonder what a prescribed burn looks like? Each firing plan is unique. The classic “ring fire” technique was developed in the 1970’s by Henry Wright, and it is commonly used in many environments. It begins with a backfire started along the downwind edge of the area to be burned. This backfire moves relatively slowly with low intensity because it is burning into the wind. Once the backfire area is safe, flank fires are initiated that burn parallel to the wind, starting where the backfire ends. Flank fires burn with more intensity and speed because they burn perpendicular to the wind. Once stability has been achieved with the backfire and flank fire areas, a head fire is lit (with the wind) to quickly consume the remaining fuel. Because head fires burn



Prescribed burn in the Lost Pines forest

intensely, they are not appropriate for every burn. In the ring fire technique, the head fire meets the back burn—and WHAM! It’s all over, instantly. Without fuel there can be no fire, so the finale is almost a disappointment. Total quiet. No theatrics. No histrionics. No trace of fire, save little ribbons of ascending smoke dotted around the burn zone. There is drama no more. . . a liquid wash of black empty space. Because head fires burn intensely, they are not—and this is important—appropriate for every burn. In the pine forest, for example, the intensity of a head fire may generate enough heat to kill trees or get out of

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Redemption Part II, cont.

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control. Different firing techniques are typically used in forests, including strips or spots. This is akin to “eating the elephant one leg at a time.” When done properly, these specialized fires are less intense and target the understory vegetation, leaving the majestic pines a bit scorched but intact.

As should be apparent, weather is a wildcard. Unforeseen changes in wind velocity, direction or relative humidity are some of many reasons why this is not an arena for amateurs. Even the experts cannot afford to take nature for granted. We are, after all, playing with fire. On March 22, 2012, the Colorado State Forest Service burned 50 acres southwest of Denver in an attempt to prevent future wildfires, a prescribed burn. Four days later, a rapidly escalating wind event combined with other factors to turn that prescribed burn into a wildfire. A 6-square mile blaze ensued, destroying dozens of homes and killing three.

Even as Texas paid a heavy price in 2011, California, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah and Wyoming seemed to have been cursed in 2012. We have lost hundreds of thousands of acres, too many homes and too many lives. What is the message here? If we don't keep our house clean, nature will do it for us. We need to update our thinking, change our old familiar ways and heed what nature is telling us. Old Smokey Bear ads brandishing a shovel and advocating more careful attention to campfires seem woefully inadequate to stem the onslaught of natural and made-made wildfires. Is it not apparent these fires are quickly becoming more intense and destructive for the lack of preventive measures to rid our land of the built-up of fuels?

Governmental agencies and local communities alike must recognize that more aggressive mitigation efforts, such as prescribed burns, are needed to protect our wild lands and those of us who choose to live there. Prescribed burning has its risks for sure, but allowing the unfettered clogging of our forestland and natural areas carries risks that are exponentially greater. There needs to be a more open willingness to accept the inconvenience of temporary smoke and the risks associated with prescribed burns.



Fireguards, flappers, rakes, water and other tools are essential for ensuring a safe prescribed burn.



Prescribed burn in Bastrop County's Lost Pines ecosystem—only smoke lingers after the fire has burned through.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been using prescribed fire safely, cost-effectively, and regularly on their historic and ecologically sensitive lands since the 1930's. In fact, the Service has conducted several at Yegua Knobs Preserve, a 302-acre property near McDade, owned by the Pines and Prairies Land Trust. I will admit that for private landowners, finding properly trained and qualified expertise for prescribed burns is not a quick process. With few exceptions, neither the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service nor Texas Parks and Wildlife, nor the Texas Forest Service will conduct burns on private properties.

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March Speakers

Tara Humphreys—Lost Pines Ecosystem & Management

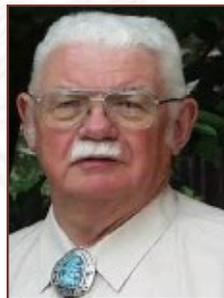
Tara Humphreys has been the Regional Interpretive Specialist for Texas State Parks for



over five years. She provides interpretive support to the 18 parks in Region 3 through training, mentoring, programming, exhibit development and more. Before working for Texas State Parks, Tara worked in Missouri State Parks, Rocky Mountain National Park and at the Houston Zoo. She earned an M.S. degree in Environmental Interpretation from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

Christopher C. Mathewson—Geology & Soils of Texas

Chris Mathewson is a Regents Professor Emeritus specializing in Engineering Geology



at Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas. He received a B.S. degree in Civil Engineering from Case Institute of Technology in

Cleveland, Ohio and his M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in Geological Engineering from the University of Arizona. Chris served as a commissioned officer in the National Ocean Survey from 1965 to 1970, working on ocean charting and marine geophysical surveys in the Pacific and on coastal hazards in Hawaii. He joined the faculty in the Department of Geology in September 1971 where he taught Geology for Engineers, Engineering Geology, Mineral Resources and other courses until his retirement in 2011. His research included coastal and river processes, expansive soils, urban planning, surficial processes, groundwater resources and protection, natural hazard analyses and mitigation, archaeological site preservation and engineering geology of surface lignite mines.

Mark Klym—Texas Naturalists Prior to World War II

Mark Klym is coordinator of the Texas Hummingbird Roundup and Texas Wildscapes



programs at Texas Parks and Wildlife. He grew up just across the international border in Canada where he de-

veloped a love for the outdoors – spending time fishing, birding and hiking. His special interest in hummingbirds developed early, when he found a male Ruby-throated Hummingbird exploring the plants in his grandfather's greenhouse. Mark received B.S. degrees in Biological Science and in Fisheries & Wildlife Management from Lake Superior State University in Sault Ste. Marie, Mississippi. He followed the hummingbirds to Texas in 1999 to work with Texas Parks and Wildlife.

Carroll Moore—Ornithology

Carroll Moore is a passionate and long-time birder. A retired community college



mathematics instructor, he had the opportunity to participate in his life-long passion of birding alongside some of the best field biologists in the world, traveling over much of the U.S. as well as more than a dozen countries around the world. He has participated in many Audubon Christmas Counts through the years as well as a number of birding surveys for various agencies and organizations.

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Speakers, cont.

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Gordon Linam— Ichthyology



Gordon Linam is an Aquatic Biologist in the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

River Studies Program stationed in San Marcos. Over the last 25 years, he has conducted studies in nearly every river basin in the state working on water quality and water quantity issues. Gordon holds a B.S. degree in Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences from Texas A&M University and an M.S. degree from New Mexico State University, where his thesis research was on zooplankton productivity in reservoirs.

Minnette Marr—Nature of Naming & Plants



Minnette Marr holds an M.S. in Science Education from Texas Woman's University

and an M.S. in Biology from Texas State University – San Marcos. Before joining the Conservation Department of Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, she managed the Wetlands Restoration Nursery in the headwaters of the San Marcos River and monitored invasive plant species in East Texas forests. As a plant conservationist, she collaborates with land managers and citizen scientists to collect seeds of native species for regional *in situ* restoration projects and national and international *ex situ* conservation programs.

WHO'S WHO

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LOST PINES MASTER NATURALIST CHAPTER MEETING SCHEDULE

The monthly business meeting is an opportunity to hear first hand about volunteer and advanced training opportunities. The chapter's project leaders update members on their work and recruit volunteers if needed. In addition, chapter administration issues are discussed: brief committee reports, financial decisions, and news from our state organizers. *One hour volunteer time is awarded for attendance at qualifying business meetings.*

UPCOMING CHAPTER MEETINGS:

March 17, 2014—*Texas Naturalists Prior to World War II*—
Red Rock Community Center

April 21, 2014—Location TBD

Meet Rick Gast

by Larry Gfeller

It's 8:45 am on a blustery, chilly morning. Nearby the Colorado River does what it has been doing since before Spanish explorers . . . it slides lazily on its journey to Matagorda Bay, among the leafless cottonwoods and the grey, cloudless sky. It's the early morning gathering before a Maniac workday when we come together, steaming coffee in hand, to greet each other, tell stories and review the week's events. I finesse the rutted road, pull in and park. Rick Gast is the first one there.

I approach and ask, "Morning Rick, how's it going?"

With a wry sense of humor, Rick smiles and gently says, "Everything is just as it should be."

While this exchange has become something of a tongue-in-cheek routine between us, it nevertheless belies a fundamental truth that Rick has discovered on his personal journey through life, which he describes as richly endowed with friggin' growth opportunities (FGOs). Translation: Life *is*. Any effort to manipulate the controls is not only unnecessary, it's futile. The rest of the Maniacs arrive, we discuss the tasks ahead and forge on, enjoying our morning.

Born in Laredo, Texas, Rick Gast moved from this legendary Texas border town to Galveston at the age of six. His parents viewed Laredo as "just Mexico on this side of the Rio Grande." Galveston was more like the Texas they wanted. Rick would stay in Galveston 16 years, until graduation from college. Growing up in Galveston not only presented a rich backdrop for a growing boy but it probably inspired his grounded view of life. Surfing the Gulf can teach you much if you pay attention. Mysterious, seemingly infinite, and notoriously moody, the big water contains many lessons. One of Rick's major FGOs occurred while surfing on one of those days the waves were calling for someone else—someone more experienced, more skilled, more circumspect. Rick foolishly answered the call and quickly found himself in *WAY* over his head.

Having lost his board to the last crashing wave, he began to swim for shore amidst the swirling vortex of water, knowing full well he was in trouble. He screamed for help. Fortunately, he was picked up by another surfer. The next day he got back on the surfboard, but with a new reverence for Mother Nature and a revised view of his own limited abilities. From this experience, Rick taught himself to become a much stronger swimmer. He went on to become a better surfer and even a lifeguard. He mastered needed skills, which only enhanced his enjoyment of the water. Among the turbulence of young adulthood, the Gulf was a place where Rick often went to find solace. It was a microcosm of all nature. By paying attention, he had learned respect. Not a bad start.

Today, after a varied career, Rick Gast has retired to the solitude of Smithville, Texas. This was not a carefully scripted event. It can only be termed a fortunate accident. He quickly learned that affordable housing in Austin was a cardboard box under the Congress Avenue Bridge, so he expanded his search zone. The winds of fate blew him to Small Town America. Rick found a home in Smithville that met all his requirements, plus two major selling points: wooden floors . . . and a sedate community where he could sleep with the doors unlocked and glimpse the fingernail of a moon through open windows at night. So it seems the search ended well. Is this his final resting place? "If you want to make God laugh, just tell him your plans."



Rick Gast on one of his many Maniac workdays.

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Rick, cont.

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In deciding what college major to pursue, Rick opined that studying business was just the ticket—neat, plausible, and wrong as hell! It took only one business course to understand he was right-brained. Earning a B.S. in Photography from Sam Houston State University in 1972, it took only seven years for the pull of this passion to draw him back to Western Michigan University to finish his masters. “I found magic; it’s just magic,” he says. “I know all the chemistry and physics behind it, but seeing the print come up in the amber safelight of a darkroom . . . it’s still magic.”

Rick spent time as a free-lance photographer—it paid well, but unlike elementary school, Rick believes good photography generally isn’t about being given assignments. There was, however, one assignment he’ll never forget: a close-up of a snake handler kissing the hood of a live cobra. In this case, close-up meant *too close*. It was one of those FGOs in which the sphincter muscle is set somewhere around (*f*/0.002) while aperture size is at (*f*/16)! In most art forms, becoming comfortable with the implements of the craft plays a critical role. In fact, there’s a certain amount of snobbishness surrounding photography equipment. At the risk of depriving all amateur photographers their tendency to worship at the feet of Nikon, Canon or Olympus, Rick contends he has never heard an expert carpenter talk about his hammer . . . “Hell, in graduate school,” he says, “my classmates and I chose to start shooting with *toy* cameras.”

So how does a right-brained artsy type who refuses to be bitten by the corporate worm make a living? Over the years Rick has notched experience in hotel management, worked as a skills trainer in a shelter for mental health clients, managed records in a major teaching hospital and taught photography at a junior college. As a final occupation, Microsoft Corporation changed his course completely when Rick secured his computer credentials through a satellite extension of Southern Methodist University in Houston. This landed a job for him with the Texas Workforce Commission. He notes with a touch of satire that his first day of appointed duty was April Fool’s Day. He was responsible for providing computer support to over 50 attorneys and 10 support staff in the Office of Commission Appeals. He retired from TWC as a System Support Specialist in early 2012, after 12 years.

With brothers, nieces, nephews and grandnieces scattered from Alabama, Colorado and Louisiana to Dallas, family gatherings are rare. Like many of us, some of Rick’s best friends are animals. The matriarch of the household is ten-year-old Mable the cat, who lords over her domain with a characteristic sense of entitlement. Last September, Rick adopted a young but gentle Lab/Golden mix by the name of Jake (but only after first clearing it with Mable). Every queen needs a king—even if he is a genetically inferior . . . um . . . *dog*. Yep, it’s true! Despite the incongruity of this combination, it works. The three happily enjoy a nightly 10:00 pm walk together. One evening Mable just decided she wanted to come along; no leash, it was just her decision.



Rick and other Maniacs take a break while Miriam Vaughn identifies a plant.

As a graduate of the LPMN class of 2012, Rick began his volunteer work while still in training by showing up at occasional Wednesday Bridge Maniac workdays. This sounded to him like a good opportunity to serve. It proved to be not unlike joining a herd of wild range horses. There were the old battle-scarred stallions, a couple pacers, a sawhorse or two, and several fillies to maintain a certain sense of civility and focus. It didn’t take him long to become a regular. Rick enjoys nearby Buescher State Park, and can be found

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VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

New Activities

TPWD Go Fish Clinics.

Volunteers are needed to assist with Go Fish clinics at Bastrop and Buescher state parks. Clinics are designed for children ages 6 to 13, but all ages are welcome. This is a very basic clinic, and you don't need to be a fisher-person to help out. Everyone should bring water, insect repellent, sun block, a hat and wear closed-toe shoes. Park entrance is free for volunteers, and necessary training will be provided on site. At least 7 volunteers are needed for each clinic.

Mar. 8—Bastrop State Park

Mar. 15—Buescher State Park

Contact Bill Brooks at bgbrooks@mail.utexas.edu.

Ongoing Activities

Bastrop State Park Nature Surveys. Surveys can be done ad hoc on your own schedule. Please make sure to use the proper reporting form for your results. Contact Louise Ridlon at fridlon@hotmail.com for details and information on reporting your findings.

Erosion Control in Bastrop State Park. Erosion remains an issue in the park following the 2011 wildfire. Some of the effects of erosion can be mitigated by installing straw logs, or wattles, on steep and eroding hillsides. This work is difficult and involves walking up and down steep, rocky hills,

carrying bulky straw logs, bending and using hand tools. It is appropriate for ages 14 and up only. Contact Resource Specialist Robert Trudeau at Robert.Trudeau@tpwd.texas.gov for information.

Bastrop State Park Trail Work with the Friends of the Lost Pines. This work, which occurs in spring and fall, is moderately difficult and involves hiking long distances, bending, and carrying and using hand tools. Contact the Friends of the Lost Pines at volunteer.flpsp@gmail.com for more details and to sign up. Contact Robert.Trudeau@tpwd.texas.gov to be notified of work dates.

Trail work at Bastrop and Buescher State Parks. If you are interested in being notified about trail work days at either park, please contact Robert Trudeau at Robert.Trudeau@tpwd.texas.gov.

Interpretive Programming, Invasive Species Management, Research & More at Bastrop and Buescher State Parks. The parks don't just need your help on the trails. Contact Interpretive Specialist Mick Haven at Mick.Haven@tpwd.texas.gov to discuss other volunteer opportunities.

Bridge Maniacs. The Maniacs meet every Wednesday, location TBD. Contact LarryDGfeller@yahoo.com for details or stay tuned to Meetup.

Colorado River Watch Network. Colorado River Watch Network monitors complete an 8-hour training provided by LCRA (eligible for LPMN Advanced Training credit), then regularly provide data to the LCRA. Visit the [LCRA volunteer web page](#) for more information.

Hornsby Bend Monthly Bird Count. Usually held the 2nd Saturday of each month. Meet at [Hornsby Bend, Center for Environmental Research](#) at 7am for the morning survey or 4pm for the afternoon survey.

McKinney Roughs Biosurvey. This is a regular series of plant, bird and other wildlife monitoring at LCRA's McKinney Roughs Nature Park. Kathy McAleese coordinates these. There are usually two outings (one during the week; one on the weekend) each month. Contact Kathy McAleese at kmcaleese@austin.rr.com or Louise Ridlon at fridlon@hotmail.com for more information.

McKinney Roughs Volunteer Activities. McKinney Roughs has a variety of other activities available to volunteers. Contact Jana Hellbusch, 512-303-5073.

Friends of the Yegua Knobs. Volunteers are needed to survey plant and animal life, identify and clear camping areas and trails, plus other fun and rewarding tasks. Contact Jeremiah Jarvis at jjfrog@flash.net to volunteer.

Bridge Maniacs Honor Obligation

by Cat May

On Saturday, February 1st, the Bridge Maniacs finally worked off their debt to Susie Ward. The debt was incurred at last summer's Chapter Picnic when the group pledged a half day of their labor as an item in the silent auction. Susie submitted the winning bid and a date was set, reset, and reset again until the weather finally cooperated.

Thirteen members gathered at Susie's home outside Lockhart around 9:00 a.m. The project was felling dead trees and dead fall "organizing." Cutting down dead trees is self-explanatory, but "organizing" needs a little explaining. Trees and branches already downed by nature's forces were cut into manageable pieces, hauled, and stacked in linear piles to act as erosion control. Many wood piles already existed throughout the pasture. Some were left as habitat for critters, and some were rearranged into erosion control barriers.

Of the many tools used by the Maniacs in their weekly trail maintenance, chainsaws seemed to be the favorite. Five chainsaws were slicing their way through Susie's enormous amount of wood creating an angry bee chorus, while the non-chainsaw wielding members carried off the chunks and sticks. Larry Gfeller compared the activity to that of Leafcutter ants. The ex-military members of the group thought it was more like the Army where you pick up this pile and move it over there, then pick up that pile and move it over here.

If it sounds like a lot of hard work, it was, but in true Maniac fashion the levity flowed, which lightened the load. They got off to a good start when Larry stepped in a cow patty and Cat tripped over a chunk of wood, falling flat on her posterior. Ronnie Lanier, the Chapter's comic relief, was up to his usual antics, inspiring outbursts of humorous banter among the group who never miss an opportunity to poke fun at each other. One of several victims was Audrey who was tortured concerning her new house construction with its six foot two-holer. Ronnie also regaled the group with some of his high school adventures—enough said.



Julia and Audrey hard at work while Frank waits to get in to pick up the sticks.



Maniacs at work include Larry Gfeller, Dave Hill, Rob Sutherland, Jim Estes, Jim Sherrill, Rick Gast, Audrey Ambrose, and Julia Akin. Not pictured are Rick Johnson, Ronny Lanier, Cat May, Frank May, and Nick Nichols,

Noon signaled the end of labors and Susie rewarded the Maniacs with a lunch of chicken stew, Waldorf salad, sandwiches, German chocolate cake and a cooler of assorted drinks.

Two January birthdays were acknowledged—Frank May and Rick Gast. An off-key version of the traditional birthday song (It was obvious no one in the group had frivolously squandered money on singing lessons!) was followed by a sponge cake topped with fruit.

A lot was accomplished and Susie was satisfied that she got her money's worth. Will the Maniacs auction off their labor again this year? No decision has been made. They're waiting for the soreness in their muscles to subside and then they'll decide!

ADVANCED TRAINING

Texas Wildlife Association L.A.N.D.S. Outreach Videoconference Series

To view videoconferencing programs, visit connect2texas.net, click Calendar of Programs and Register, select Texas Wildlife Association as the Provider, select a program date and time and register.

Sign into the programs about 15 minutes before the start time.

March 4, 7am—*Urban Animal Encounters: Awesome Opossums*

March 27, 7am—*Porcupines*

This program will clear up some common misconceptions about porcupines and discuss their amazing adaptations. The different structures, functions, and habitats between new world and old world porcupines will be discussed.

April 16, 7am—*The Magic of Monarchs*

During spring and fall, millions of Monarchs will travel through Texas on their way to or from their overwintering sites in Mexico. The basic needs, life cycle, adaptations, and migration patterns of the

Monarch butterfly will be discussed.

May 2, 7am—*Urban Bobcats*

The adaptations and basic needs of the bobcat, which allow them to live in urban environments, will be discussed.

May 20, 7am—*BATS: LIVE on the BIG Screen!*

This interactive presentation investigates the relationship between anatomy and ecology, including the dietary habits of different species of bats. The unique structures and functions that allow them to fly, other special adaptations, and their basic needs and diverse habitats will be discussed.

2014 Basic Training

*Counts as Advanced Training for members already certified

March 1 — 9am-1pm, *Lost Pines Ecosystem & Management, Volunteers as Teachers Field Trip*, Tara Humphreys — Bastrop State Park

March 3 — *Geology & Soils of Texas*, Chris Mathewson — Bluebonnet Electric

March 17 — *Texas Naturalists Prior to World War II*, Mark Klym — Red Rock Community Center

March 24 — *Ornithology*, Carroll Moore; *Ichthyology*, Gordon Linam — Red Rock Community Center

March 29 — 9am-1pm, *Birds & Habitat Relationships Field Trip*, LPMN Members — Hornsby Bend

March 31 — *Nature of Naming & Plants*, Minette Marr — Lockhart State Park

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Stay connected!

The Lost Pines Master Naturalists use Meetup.com to stay current on volunteer and advanced training activities. You'll find more opportunities on Meetup than you'll find in the newsletter, so take a few minutes to sign up and set your notifications to receive alerts (under Account, then Email and Notifications).

Visit <http://www.meetup.com/>, sign up, and you'll be on your way to knowing all that the Lost Pines Chapter has to offer.

ADVANCED TRAINING, cont.

Texas Bluebird Society 2014 Season Kickoff & FUNdraising Auction, Bastrop

Sat., March 1, 9am-3pm,
Bastrop Convention
Center

- Dr. Patricia A. Gowaty,
UCLA (via *Skype*) –
bluebirds
- Robyn Bailey, Cornell Lab
of Ornithology –
NestWatch
- Bill Lindemann – planting
for bluebirds
- Sara Harrod, Texas State
– bluebird research project
- David Pruitt, BSA –
nestbox trail at Mitchell
Lake Audubon
- Linda Crum – House
Sparrow Control

Sun., March 2, Chatura Canyon

Morning field trip to see
Chimney Swift towers and
more—Limited to 12

***Presentations, Lunch,
and FUNdraising
Auction still only \$15.***

If you haven't pre-
registered, you may register
at the door.

For more information visit
[http://
texasbluebirdsociety.org/](http://texasbluebirdsociety.org/)

Prescribed Burning Training

March 1, 8:30am, Luling

M.O. Neasloney WMA,
20700 SH 80 North
Gonzales

This workshop is designed
to give landowners and
managers a basic
understanding of the use
and application of
prescribed burning for
quail, other ground nesting
birds, other wildlife species
and livestock management.

RSVP by Jan. 31 to
Brendan Witt at 830-424-
3407 or
Brendan.witt@tpwd.texas.gov

Bring: Lunch/drinks,
leather gloves, leather
boots, cotton outerwear.

Participants will conduct a
burn if conditions permit.

March 6-8, full days,
Sonora—\$395, plus \$45
facilities use fee due upon
arrival

Edwards Plateau, Region 2,
Texas Prescribed Burn
Manager Certification
Advanced Training

This workshop builds on the
previous school providing
more information on fire
behavior, fire effects, and
planning and conducting a
prescribed burn.

Visit [http://
www.ranchmanagement.org](http://www.ranchmanagement.org)

What's Blooming?

by Liz Pullman

In spite of some real winter-
type temperatures, a walk in
almost any sunny spot (such
as roadsides, lawns, trail
sides, storm water contain-
ment areas) will produce a
dozen or so plants in full riot-
ous bloom. Truly! You just
need to think small (a magni-
fying glass is helpful) and look
DOWN.



A list of blooming
spring plants
that I found
February 17th
follows. If you
want to see pic-
tures of these

plants, simply open your com-
puter's Internet search engine
and type in the scientific
name. At least one or two sites
will include images.

- Common Chickweed
(*Stellaria media*)
- Henbit or Dead-nettle
(*Lamium amplexicaule*)
- Dandelion (*Taraxacum
officinale*)
- Shepherd's Purse (*Capsella
bursa-pastoris*)
- Whitlow Grass (*Draba
platycarpa*)
- Corn Gromwell (*Buglossoides
arvensis*)
- Field Madder (*Sherardia
arvensis*)
- Stork's Bill (*Erodium
cicutarium*)
- Speedwell (*Veronica
persica*)
- Bur Clover (*Medicago
polymorpha*)

Most of these plants are gener-
ally called Lawn Weeds, but
even so they are flowers that
bloom in the spring
(Tra La).

Rick, cont.

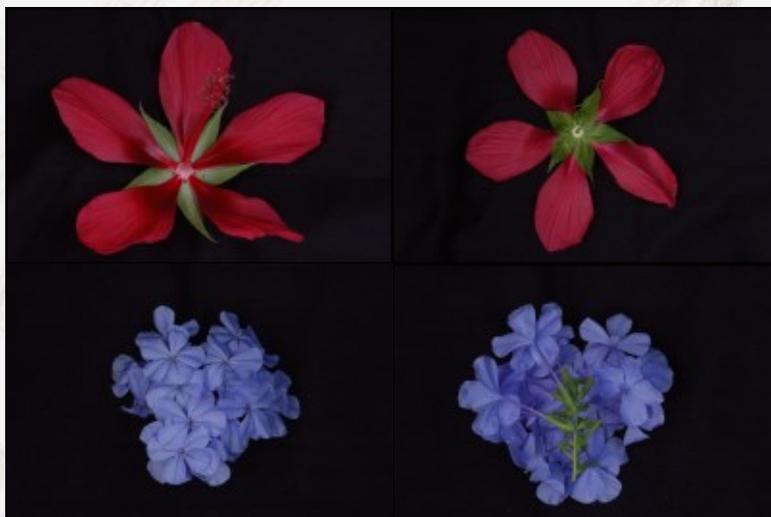
(Continued from page 6)

there on most free Saturdays, exploring and learning about the surrounding ecosystem. Not surprisingly, he has unofficially become (for there is no formal hierarchy within the herd) the coordinator for most Maniac activities in the park. He accepted, on behalf of the Maniacs, an award bestowed by park staff for appreciation of trail and bridge work done throughout 2013. Always unassuming, he admits to having been taught the value of service to community, but he doesn't like to talk about it much. It's part of his conscious effort to suppress the ego, a necessary element in approaching life openly, without expectation.

We all follow many paths through life, be they planned or not. Rick Gast, like many of us, has explored his share, often being drawn down this rabbit trail or that, but the central tendency involves not worrying about the small stuff. How does one know what really matters? It doesn't come from deep thought, Rick says, it comes from experiencing, from simply doing *the next right thing*. It requires viewing a problem for what it really is . . . a neatly disguised opportunity to grow and learn—an FGO. Rick describes a valued mentor in his life, who pasted a saying on his bathroom mirror so it could be read every morning. It went like this: “Good morning, Joe!! Thank you, but I won't need your help today. Love, God”

Rick can be found at almost every Bridge Maniac workday, which is to say weekly and sometimes more often. He's grateful for opportunities to work and contribute. It's part of his life. But there's an innate curiosity, like the wind, that blows him in other directions too. He enjoys the quiet joys of gardening, for example, partnering with the elements of sun, temperature, humidity, water and nutrients to bring about the simple miracles of nature most of us take for granted. Rick takes little for granted. He's often swept away by wonders that ignite his inquisitiveness. Take beekeeping. Intrigued by the possibilities of this most ancient association between man and nature, Rick took a formal course. He became absorbed in how a hive comes into being and what these incredible insects could do. Out of compassion for his neighbors, though—one of whom was a child allergic to bee stings—the project was tabled. And then there's that seed of creativity, long ago sewn, that still grows within—photography.

Returning to a first love can be intimidating, but Rick has boldly launched himself into a new photographic series, which he calls “Two Sides.” This is a sequence in which he photographs one side of a flower, then flips the reference point to the opposite side. Rick explains, “By doing this, it forces me to try to look at the totality of the flower. The flower is not just petals, stamens, pistils, etc. The flower is the sun, the water, the dirt, the wind, the organisms in the ground, and much more.” You might say it's a larger view of life.



Photographs from Rick's “Two Sides” series

All of us belong to our LPMN chapter for different reasons. Some enjoy the fellowship and camaraderie, others plan and lead our activities, while still others just enjoy playing outdoors—an escape from our day-to-day concerns. And why not? It takes variety to make most endeavors interesting. For new members, it can be difficult finding a “place.” Asking Rick Gast for advice to trainees is somewhat like waking up in the morning—it's obvious and natural. Rick's advice, “Just enjoy the classes and have no expectations.” And why not?

Redemption Part II, cont.

[\(Continued from page 2\)](#)

So what's a private landowner to do? Sign up for prescribed burn training whenever and wherever it is available. Contact agencies and organizations that regularly do prescribed burns and take time off to go watch one in progress. Type "prescribed burns" in your Internet browser and see what comes up. There are a variety of governmental and non-governmental organizations that advocate for prescribed burning to reduce hazardous fuels, improve wildlife habitat, and accomplish other objectives. Some provide training and observation opportunities, Burn Manager Certification courses, and assistance with both planning and executing a burn. There is an over-arching Prescribed Burn Alliance of Texas that is composed of a number of local burn associations, which are essentially volunteer-based landowner cooperatives that are user owned, controlled and operated. Bastrop County's local cooperative is the South Central Texas Prescribed Burn Association (visit their website at www.sctba.org or contact its President, Dave Redden, at dredden00@gmail.com).

Now let's be clear. I'm not advocating prescribed burns in Tahitian Village or other densely populated urban wildland interfaces to prevent future wildfires—the margin for error is too small to be safe. So residents are left with do-it-yourself activities to make their property safe: keeping a protective barrier cleared 30ft-50ft around the house and outbuildings, limbing trees 6ft or more up from the ground to deny "ladder fuel" from grass fires, using hose splitters to increase the availability of water, keeping leaves and fuels from accumulating on roofs and eaves and generally eliminating brush and flammable trees/shrubs from around your home—common sense things all of us can do. The best course is to contact Michal Hubbard (a LPMN member) at the local FireCAP office (512-237-2160 or email her at michal_firecap@yahoo.com) and invite her out to your property to do a professional wildfire risk assessment. It's a free service, you'll get a written report of things to improve, learn about firewise landscaping, meet a delightful lady in the process, and significantly tilt the odds of wildfire survival in your favor.



A firewise landscape uses drought-tolerant, low-flammability plants.

Perhaps recent experiences will help jolt us out of the dark ages for our lost understanding of how fire works and what its benefits are. These are problems we have created for ourselves. Here in Texas, it's estimated that less than .05% of the original prairie land remains, and we can't save that which remains by "preserving" it. Tall grass prairies evolved through both frequent fires and intense grazing by bison. We will lose our remaining prairies to succession by invasive/scrub trees if we fail to accomplish prescribed burns and/or fail to include a mowing/grazing regime. We desperately need to get back to the fire culture created by those Americans who were here first.

Newsletter Deadline

Deadline for the next issue is March 21, 2014. 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 the editor at Roxanne.M.Hernandez@gmail.com.

SNIPPETS

2014 FAMILY WATER FESTIVAL

On Sunday, April 13 the Colorado River Alliance will host the 2014 Family Water Festival at Fiesta Gardens on the shores of Ladybird Johnson Lake. The Family Water Festival will be filled with music, engaging activities, free workshops, and exhibitors about water-related resources and the outdoors here in Austin, Texas. Visit <http://coloradoriver.org/newsite/our-programs/environmental-outreach-action/#Festival> for more information.

MACRO PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOP

Abbott Nature Photography is holding a Macro Photography Workshop May 3 & 4 at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Center in Fort Davis. Different macro photographic techniques will be explored so you can create the best images of insects, spiders, flowers, leaves, lizards, frogs, snakes and more. Full details

and registration available online at <http://abbottnaturephotography.ticketleap.com/macro-photography-workshop/>

2014 TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST ANNUAL MEETING AND ADVANCED TRAINING

Mark your calendars now for the 2014 Texas Master Naturalist Annual meeting and Advanced Training to be held October 24-26 at Mo Ranch in Hunt. More details will be available once registration opens around late July/early August.

TEXAS STREAM TEAM PADDLERS

If you canoe or kayak—or would like to—you can become a founding member of the Texas Stream Team Paddlers. You'll be trained and equipped to monitor the quality of your favorite lakes, streams, or estuaries, and you'll become part of a citizen-based early warning system. Your data will support important water research,

management, and conservation efforts. Visit MeadowsCenter.TXState.edu/ for more information.

CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES WEBINARS

A Webinar Portal for Conservation of Natural Resources is provided through a partnership between several land-grant universities and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The portal serves as a launching point for current and archived forestry, conservation, bioenergy and natural resource webinars. Visit <http://conservationwebinars.net/>.

NEW BIOTA OF NORTH AMERICA PLANT LISTS FOR BASTROP COUNTY NOW ONLINE

LPMN's Liz Pullman and Judy Turner have been busy updating Bastrop County's plant lists. See the results of their effort at <http://txmn.org/lostpines/resources/bastrop-caldwell-counties-plant-lists/>.

STATE PROGRAM CONTACTS

Website: <http://txmn.org>

State Coordinator: Michelle Haggerty, 979-458-2034, mhaggerty@wfscgate.tamu.edu

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

SPONSOR CONTACTS

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Bastrop County Extension Office: Rachel Bauer, 512-581-7186, bastroptx@tamu.edu

Bastrop/Caldwell County TPWD Wildlife Biologist: Meredith Longoria, 512-332-7280, Meredith.Longoria@tpwd.texas.gov

