Lost Pines Chapter

Texas Master Naturalist

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Of Coyotes & Cartoons

by Larry Gfeller

Perhaps you were around between 1966 and 1968 and tuned in to *The Road Runner Show* on CBS on Saturday mornings. I nursed many a college hangover that way . . . and it was a splendid escape from academic tyranny. Almost everyone has, at one time or another, delighted in watching the antics of Wile E. Coyote in his many failed attempts to capture the lightning-fast roadrunner, whose only vocalization was a staccato "meep-meep." The brainchild of Warner Brothers, these two iconic cartoon characters have a special place in my heart. For many, this fictional long-tailed, top-knotted bird with the perky personality was the only roadrunner they'd ever seen. It certainly was for me. For years I carried in my head that whimsical image. My first sighting of an actual roadrunner—which occurred long after the cartoon series—caused an instinctive, head-jerking double-take. Was it a mongoose with a beak, a darting feather duster on a string . . . what the hell was *that*!?!

The Road Runner and Wile E. Coyote were created in 1948. Their pseudo-Latin names were *Acceleratii incredibus* and *Carnivorous vulgaris*.

Taxonomists identify two separate species of roadrunner (lesser and greater), both of which are considered ground cuckoos. If you haven't already guessed, the American southwest is home to the *Greater* Roadrunner. The smaller relative, the *Lesser* Roadrunner, haunts Mexico and Central America. There are some 15 species of ground cuckoos—divided between Old World and New World clans. Roadrunners are in the New World group.

In This Issue

The cuckoo family is significantly larger (140 overall) than just ground cuckoos and very diverse—they're spread all over the globe. While most cuckoos fly like other birds, a sizeable minority are terrestrial, spending most of their time on the ground. It gets one to wondering what constitutes a true "family" vs. a coarse collection of similarities.

Your first ever glance at a Greater Roadrunner is a shock to the system from whichever angle you survey it. For starters, most birds don't run; they hop, walk or waddle. Roadrunners have

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been clocked up to 26 mph. This makes them, hands down, the fastest flying bird on the ground (ostriches are faster, but flightless). At top speed, they sort of crouch forward like Groucho Marx and flatten themselves out, transforming into what looks like an extremely long cigar with legs—head down, beak forward and tail parallel to the ground. Most of us are not accustomed to seeing bottle rockets streaking along a country road. Eyes can play frightening tricks on the mind when blinding speed is combined with shadows or indiscernible shapes, glimpsed out of the corner of the eye. You've got to hand it to Warner Brothers, they really captured the roadrunner's proportional sense of speed—but that's where the characterization begins to unravel.

The colorful adult Greater Roadrunner (*Geococcyx californianus*)

This bird is actually quite large. It stands about a foot tall. Big ones measure about two feet long (half of which is tail) with a two foot wingspan (not that they use them much). Feet are strange - there are four toes on each foot, two face forward, two face the rear. Add in the tall legs, raptor-like beak, a long tail for balance, braking and steering, and you have the anatomical makings of prehistoric predatory reptiles. This sense of grotesqueness is only exaggerated by a crest of brown feathers sticking up from the head, which can be raised or lowered at will, cobra-like.

Markings are deceiving. From a distance, the bird appears to have a metallic bronze gloss, like a giant coffee stain. Up close, it's a riot of color: neck and breast are pale brown with dark brown streaks (sometimes pink spots), white belly, both blue and red bare skin around the eyes, and gangly blue legs. To warm up after a frosty night, a roadrunner will turn its back to the sun, fluff its back feathers and expose skin along its back. The skin is black. A coat-of-many-colors.

Since the 2011 wildfires converted our property from pine forest into short grass prairie, roadrunner sightings have become quite common, as these are now happy hunting grounds. I recently watched a roadrunner zip through the bunchgrass like a whirling dervish, his long tail jerking at absurd angles to counterbalance seemingly reflexive right-angle turns (memories of a slot car race). Bizarre; the bird was possessed I tell you! The pursuit lasted only a few blurry seconds; the lizard lasted even less.

In addition to being superb hunters, they are also known for their curiosity. One day I was working in the flower beds adjacent to our driveway when I sensed I was not alone. Glancing up, there he stood; not 30 feet away—gawking at me, head cocked to one side in wonderment. He flexed his top knot once or twice and approached even closer, moving deliberately, to get a better look. I didn't move a muscle. I'll never forget . . . his eyes were black and strange and emotionless. We must've stared at each other for a good half-minute. I don't know who was in greater disbelief. Apparently satisfied, he disappeared into the grass. Truthfully, I felt violated.

Since that encounter, I now pay close attention. I can see out our double windows onto a dense patch of wildflowers encircled by our gravel driveway—a perfect hunting spot—there is no escape. One hot summer day, I watched two roadrunners, on opposite sides, sneaking around the perimeter, beaks open to cool themselves—scanning for prey. I believe they were actually hunting together, a cooperative behavior observed by others.. That beak is all business. The roadrunner will sometimes kill with a blow to the base of a small mammal's skull—or by holding it in its beak and beating it against a rock. They may also

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What's Blooming?
by Liz Pullman

Answer: Just about everything! Since I assume everyone already recognizes such plants as Texas bluebonnets (*Lupinus texana*), Indian paintbrush (*Castilleja incisa*), firewheels (*Gaillardia pulchella*) and yellow Texas star (*Lindheimera texana*), we can look at a few not so well known flowers, some of which are on our Bastrop **Be On the Look Out (BOLO)** list (noted with an asterisk*). Family names in red are those being changed to Modern Family Names by the Biota of North America Program—BONAP. Want pics? Search by scientific name. You'll also learn which flower is pictured to the right.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Traditional Family Names
Venus' looking glass	*Triodanis perfoliata*	bellflower (Campanulaceae)
Virginia phlox *	*Phlox virginica*	phlox (Polemoniaceae)
Prairie brazoria	*Warnockia scutellarioides*	mint (Lamiaceae)
Antelope horns	*Asclepias asperula*	milkweed (Asclepidaceae)
Bull nettle	*Cnidosculus texana*	spurge (Euphorbiaceae)
Yarrow	*Achillea millefolium*	aster (Asteraceae)
Net-vein (pearl) milkweed*	*Matalea reticulata*	milkweed (Asclepidaceae)
Plains wild indigo	*Baptisia bracteata*	pea (Fabaceae)
Wild hydrangea*	*Hydrangea arborescens*	hydrangea (Hydrangeaceae)
Goat's rue	*Tephrosia virginiana*	pea (Fabaceae)
Bee blossom, Gaura	*Gaura lindheimeri*	evening primrose (Onagraceae)
Ladies' tresses	*Spiranthes vernalis*	orchid (Orchidaceae)
Prairie larkspur	*Delphinium carolinianum*	buttercup (Ranunculaceae)
Squarebud day primrose	*Calylophus berlandieri*	evening primrose (Onagraceae)
Missouri primrose	*Oenothera macrocarpa*	evening primrose (Onagraceae)
Meadow pink	*Sabatia campestre*	gentian (Gentianaceae)
Beard tongue	*Penstemon spp.*	figwort (Scrophulariaceae)
Bachelor's button	*Centaurea cyanus*	aster (Asteraceae)
Texas thistle	*Cirsium texana*	aster (Asteraceae)
Skeleton plant	*Lygodesmia texana*	aster (Asteraceae)
Baby blue eyes	*Nemophila phacelioides*	waterleaf (Hydrophyllaceae)
Herbertia	*Herbertia lahue*	iris (Iridaceae)
Celestials	*Nemastylis geminiflora*	iris (Iridaceae)
Mealy sage	*Salvia farinosa*	mint (Lamiaceae)
Lyre-leaf sage	*Salvia lyrata*	mint (Lamiaceae)
Skullcap	*Scutellaria drummondii*	mint (Lamiaceae)
Pickerelweed	*Pontederia cordata*	pickerelweed (Pontederiaceae)
Winecup	*Callirhoe involucrata*	mallow (Malvaceae)
Lindheimer's milkvetch*	*Astralagus lindheimeri*	pea (Fabaceae)
Texas groundsel	*Senecio ampullus*	aster (Asteraceae)
Corn salad	*Valerianella radiata*	valerian (Valerianaceae)
Dakota vervain	*Glandularia bipinnata*	vervain (Verbenaceae)
Texas vervain	*Verbena halei*	vervain (Verbenaceae)
Blue curls	*Phacelia congesta*	waterleaf (Hydrophyllaceae)
Hoary pea	*Tephrosia lindheimeri*	pea (Fabaceae)
Texas parsnip	*Polytaenia nuttalli*	carrot (Apiaceae)

Wintering Butterflies
by Judy Santerre

After being inspired by advanced training last year, I built a small butterfly garden and was thrilled by the numbers and varieties of butterflies that sought refuge and refueling in that small space. On my property between the two State Parks, there is the rarely noticed Swanflower (*Aristolochia erecta*), a species of pipevine. I started bringing in Pipevine swallowtail (*Battus philenor*) caterpillars and feeding them to chrysalis stage, releasing them when they emerged. In late November, I brought in three Pipevine swallowtail caterpillars and all three went into chrysalis, but none emerged. Thinking this might just be a wintering thing, I put them into a cool room and left them alone. On March 1, 2014, I brought the critter cage out and put it in the kitchen where I could keep a closer eye on it. Sure enough, all three emerged over the last two weeks of March and have successfully flown away. That's four months in chrysalis—Nature is just amazing!

More Bastrop County butterflies and their wintering habits:

Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*): Overwinters as an adult stage butterfly or migrates further south

Giant Swallowtail (*Papilio cresphontes*): Overwinters as a pupa stage chrysalis

Black Swallowtail (*Papilio polyxenes*): Overwinters as a chrysalis

Question Mark (*Polygonia interrogationis*): Overwinters as a butterfly

Dainty Sulphur (*Nathalis iole*): Migrates south

American Snout (*Libytheana carinenta*): Migrates south

Queen (*Danaus gilippus*): Migrates south

Gray Hairstreak (*Strymon melinus*): Overwinters as a chrysalis

Common/White Checkered Skipper (*Pyrgus communis/albescens*): Overwinters as a fully grown caterpillar (larva)

Pearl Crescent (*Phyciodes tharos*): Overwinters as a third stage caterpillar

Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*): Migrates south

Gulf Fritillary (*Agraulis vanillae*): Migrates south

You can learn more about these and other species' life history, caterpillar host plants, conservation needs, identification tips, management concerns, and more at http://www.butterfliesandmoths.org/learn. Check it out—You can generate a butterfly and moth list by county.

Pipevine swallowtail caterpillar

Pipevine swallowtail (empty) chrysalis

Pipevine swallowtail adult

Meet Walt Elson
by Larry Gfeller

In the cool light of a summer dawn, on the back forty, a brawny man climbs aboard his dozer. Dewy and cool, but with the kind of sunshine and sluggish air that promises a lot of heat later on, a puff of diesel smoke opens another day in central Texas. This scene is a long way from Iran, Kenya or the straining peaks of Bogota, Colombia, yet all these places color the personality of this landowner as he works the earth with his machine. He remembers the thrill of a Russian helicopter ride from Bombay, India to an offshore platform nestled in the warm waters of the Arabian Sea. These are the exotic experiences of a man well-traveled, but somehow none of them match being back where he belongs. This is home. It can be unnerving to love a single place so much.

Walt Elson stepping aboard his dozer

The possibilities in life are endless. How much is learned and how much is environment . . . well, behavioral scientists will argue that one till the end of time. So here's the question: What do you get when you mix a Texas childhood of Boy Scouts, hunting, fishing and camping with a well-deserved retirement? Answer: You get a native Texan who respects his homeland; an outdoorsman; an active member of the community—and you get a Texas Master Naturalist with a passion.

Walt Elson is hard to miss in a crowd. With a shock of white hair, eyes black as gunpowder, an impish grin—this bear of a man towers over most ordinary mortals. Walt is a big man with big responsibilities. And they keep his whereabouts in question. Walt may not show up at all chapter meetings these days, but that doesn't mean he's not involved. He has amassed over 1,000 hours of volunteer time, an achievement few attain.

You're more likely to run into Walt on a rainy Maniac workday in Lockhart State Park, an unheralded visit to the Luling Foundation Butterfly Garden, or organizing a posse of naturalists to capture the emerald ash borer beetle. Or he may be several counties away, involved with other conservation efforts—you can never be sure where he might turn up, but you can be sure he's out there somewhere doing his part. Walt is a product of the class of 2007, served two years as our chapter vice-president, and is best known for his leadership and design of the LPMN rainfall simulator, his ardor for tracking area rainfall amounts and active involvement in local nature-related community activities. Walt is also known for his unique and deliberate style of oral delivery, a faint burr lodged in his accent; let's call it South Texas iambic pentameter.

Marsha Elrod, Marcy Youngman, Walt Elson and Pamela Hohman with the LPMN rainfall simulator.

Walt has a special place in his heart for Lockhart State Park. He loves participating in the twice annual visit of the Lockhart ISD 5th grade class. In 2008, he spearheaded a project for identifying, cat-

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Walt, cont.

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aloging and marking native plants along a significant loop of existing hiking trails, effectively converting them into a stretch of true nature trails. He convinced the chapter to fund the project and provide the volunteers to make it happen. Over 70 different plants were identified and most of the native species were marked with permanent engraved signs. Today the data is carried on the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center Native Plant Database, under Lost Pines Master Naturalist. As of 2013, LPMN hike leaders use this route for weekly guided nature hikes in the park.

Leslie Walton Elson, Jr. is a native Houstonian. Educated at Texas A&M and the University of Houston, Walt embarked on a busy career in the design, construction and management of offshore oil and gas production facilities worldwide. His travels have taken him to 49 states and an equal number of foreign countries. With several one or two-year exceptions, he was able to do this while maintaining a home in the Houston area. For the past 25 years, Walt and his current wife Ginny have made their home in Pecan Grove Plantation, an unincorporated residential community in Fort Bend County, some 30 miles southwest of Houston. You see, Texas is his home; he enjoys a special bond with the land. Walt successfully raised a daughter and four sons, who have favored him with nine grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. In the Gulf Coast Prairie region, this is what you call a good hatch.

In addition to maintaining his primary home outside Richmond, Texas, Walt is crazy busy with other stuff, like serving as the third-year president of the Tri-Community Wildlife Management Association and an officer in the Bastrop-Caldwell County Wildlife Management Association. He also baby sits his very own citrus garden (six varieties of grapefruit and oranges) and raises figs. Each year brings a bounty of strawberries, rhubarb, figs and peaches—many of which get converted into jams and a variety of fruit butters. Spare time is a rarity.

The weekend getaway and Elson hunting property in Caldwell County

It's no accident that Walt isn't easy to find. He's a nomad. You see, he also owns 140 acres in Caldwell County, just north of Harwood, Texas. This is where he built a small house that he and Ginny use as a weekend getaway and hunting property. "I was the architect, engineer, general contractor, electrician, and, with family help, finish carpenter," Walt explains. "We manage the land to improve habitat for wildlife and are active participants in the TPWD Managed Deer Lands Program."

The walls of the cabin reflect Walt's love of hunting.

Through this program, the Elsons are issued several doe permits each season. This is no passing fancy. It's serious business. They even process their own meat and keep it in a cold storage/processing facility on the property.

There are only two seasons on Elsons' calendar: Deer and Fishing season. Fall is solely dedicated to deer hunting. Warmer months are about notching as many fishing trips as possible—salt water is the preferred setting, but he's not adverse to dropping a line over a creek bank. During his working years, Walt actually had hobbies: he fashioned hand-made furniture and wooden decorative clocks, was an avid golfer, and lorded over a sprawling vegetable

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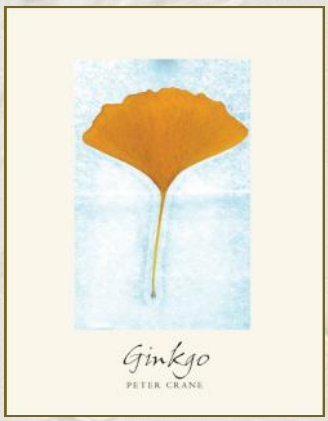
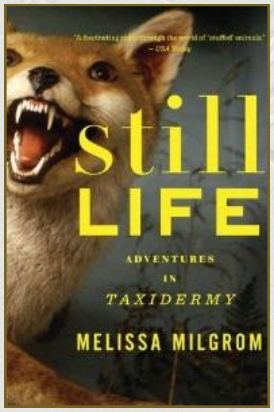
Brooks on Books
by Bill Brooks

It seemed to be an especially rough winter this year. When it's cold I have been accused of mimicking my reptiles. I don't often go outside. I sleep too much. When I do eat, I eat a lot. Another thing I do during bad weather that I don't feel a need to apologize for is to read. I've found some especially great reads this winter. Some may interest you . . . or not.



I enjoyed Peter Crane's book, "Ginkgo." Peter Crane is a former director of The Royal Botanical Gardens in Kew, UK and the gingko tree is a real "living fossil." Gingko relatives were found throughout the old and new worlds some 100 million years ago. About fifty thousand years ago its range had shrunk to southeast China and it looked like it was on its way to extinction. Suddenly it was somehow selected for planting around Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines. Later the tree was planted all over the United States from Manhattan to San Francisco. The nuts were eaten and gingko biloba is now a popular herb that supposedly helps with brain function. This is one of the very few examples where, because of man's intervention, a species is now much less likely to go extinct.



I also read "Still Life Adventures in Taxidermy" by Melissa Milgrom. It is a very interesting story about the history of taxidermy—from the time when mounted specimens were the only way people could see exotic animals from far away lands to taxidermy conventions and competitions that are still going on today. It covers Dr. Akley's elephant mounts in the Museum of Natural History and the skin preps of animal type specimens and study skins that stuff museum drawers. For me, it offered some enjoyable insight into a world I didn't know much about.

Lastly I found a delightful little book, "Stone-Tree Houses of Texas" by Charles Garrett. It is a guide to buildings made using pieces of petrified wood. Some of these homes are beautiful works of art and the directions to these places will be used in my future road trips.

In recent popular magazines, I found two articles that are worth looking up. In the April edition of *Texas Highways* magazine (page 52-57) Elaine Robbins wrote "A State of Great Migration, Find Your Spot to Witness the Extraordinary Voyagers of Texas." She writes about monarchs, several species of birds, and bats and where to see them on their journeys.

On the cover of the spring edition of *Wildflower*, the magazine of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, there is a wonderful photograph of a rain lily taken by my friend Steve Schwartzman. More of Steve's photographs grace Marie Bassett's article "What's in a Name" (pages 12-19). Marie had researched some seldom read facts on the early naturalists: Thomas Drummond, Ferdinand Lindheimer, Josiah Gregg, and George Engelmann. For anyone interested in naturalists who explored early Texas and the plants that bear their names, this article and its wonderful photographs is well worth your time.

Read on, and enjoy!

A Walk in the Park
by Liz Pullman

At 9:00 a.m. on March 1st, Bastrop State Park was shrouded in a damp heavy fog; it didn't stop us. Tara Humphreys of Texas Parks and Wildlife thus kicked off a two-hour exploration of the Lost Pines ecosystem for our training class . . . and I tagged along. This also was a subliminal introduction to the art of interpretation for our students. We headed down the deeply rutted Black Trail. Burned pine trees as far as the eye could see. Still, regeneration in the park was evident this early in the season. As a plant-a-phile I was paying attention.

The fruit of this plant makes a delicious jelly. Can you name it?

Dry brown stalks left over from last summer and fall—Texas Broomweed (*Guttierrezia texana*)—first caught the eye, but soon lush patches of green foliage appeared around the base of other dried stems. These emerging perennials were Pokeweed (*Phytotolacca Americana*) and Pinweed (*Lechea sp.*) Lower down on the trail, closer to the rivulet that meanders from Lake Bastrop, I spied the fresh green leaves of a member of the Aster Family known for populating disturbed areas. It was *Baccharis neglecta* a.k.a. Roosevelt Weed, New Deal Weed or Poverty Weed. The Civilian Conservation Corps probably coined these common names.

Of course there were many examples of young native trees: Yaupon (*Ilex vomitoria*), Wax Myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*), Post Oaks (*Quercus stellate*) and Loblollies (*Pinus taeda*). There also were a few in-bloom February plants: Tiny Bluets (*Houstonia pusilla*), Violets (*Viola sororia/missouriensis*) and Dewberries (*Rubus trovialis*). Greenbriar vines were frequent, but the one with narrow shiny leaves was difficult to nail; oh hell, at least I'm sure it was in the Smilax Family. But the real prize awaited at the top of the hill.

© Al Schneider

Woolly Mullein (*Verbascum Thapsus*)

As we exited the trail near the camper's loop, there they were: dozens of Woolly Mullein plants (*Verbascum Thapsus*), many with a distinctive bloom spike—very unseasonable! This handsome plant is burdened with some crazy common names (Cowboy's-Toilet-Paper, Jupiter's Staff, et al.). To view the plant online, stick to the scientific name or you can end up at some strange websites! Not that I would know...

News About the Newsletter

by Roxanne Hernandez

You won't find the April issue of the LPMN newsletter in your email spam folder or archived online. Nope, we hopped right over April straight into May/June after the Board decided to publish the newsletter bi-monthly.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines "bi-monthly" as

1: occurring every two months

2: occurring twice a month

Yes, there are two mutually exclusive definitions. It's no wonder some people are challenged when learning the English language. With regard to the newsletter, we are using the first definition.

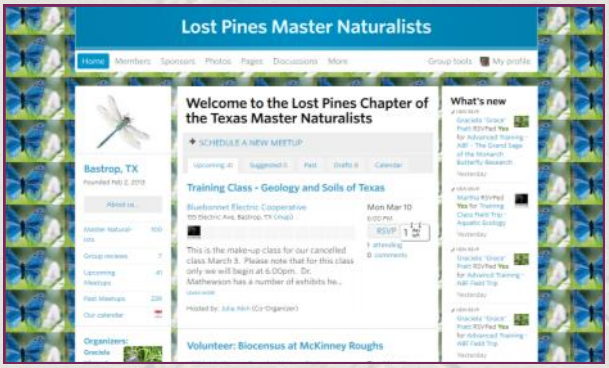
Publishing bi-monthly allows for more feature articles, the ability to cover a wider variety of topics, and provides more time for authors to develop their contributions. You'll no longer find volunteer and advanced training opportunities in the newsletter—you'll find them on Meetup (see companion article on this page). Unlike the newsletter, which captures only a snapshot at one point in time, Meetup is dynamic and captures upcoming opportunities as they develop.

Liz Pullman's What's Blooming?, Larry Gfeller's feature articles and member biographies, and Snippets are now regular features. I invite other LPMN members to contribute to the newsletter so it's genuinely a publication by the members for the members. I hope you enjoy the new content!

Meetup.com: Your Source of Information for LPMN Opportunities

by Roxanne Hernandez

For the most part, I haven't hopped onto the various social media bandwagons out there. You won't find me on Facebook or Twitter. I do, however, subscribe to the Lost Pines Master Naturalists Meetup.com account. It's the only way I can stay up to date on all that the LPMN has to offer. And it's the only way you can know all that's going on, too. You won't receive emails from us about the wide variety of educational and service opportunities offered—you'll only learn of them when you join Meetup.



Since January 1 of this year, the Lost Pines Master Naturalists have posted over 100 advanced training and volunteer opportunities on Meetup.com. What is Meetup? It's a tool that we use to organize and publicize all of our events. It's free, it's easy, and it's how we communicate with you about advanced training and volunteer service opportunities. So, if you want to be informed you need to join. Here's how:

1. Open your Internet browser and type in Meetup.com.
2. Click on "Sign up" in the upper right corner.
3. Choose to sign up using Facebook or your email address.
4. The next screens will ask some questions about you. You can choose whether to respond to these data requests.
5. Now you can search for "Lost Pines Master Naturalists" and once found, click "Join Us" in the right corner.
6. You'll again be asked some questions, most of which are optional, but you *will* need to enter a short bio to progress to the next screens.
7. Now that your account is set up, you can select the settings that will work best for you under "Account," and then "General" and "Email and Notifications."

If you're like me, your inbox is often inundated with the electronic equivalent of junk mail. I've found Meetup messages easy to manage, however. I can easily scan the subject line and either hit "delete" or open the full message to read more. Yes, it's one more email thing to review, but it's not uncommon for me to find a gem of an LPMN opportunity as a result. We do hope you'll join us!

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jump in the air to catch passing insects. Roadrunners swallow their food whole; it's not unheard of to find part of an animal hanging out of a roadrunner's mouth while it's being digested. Hash tag: onenastyhombre.

So what does a roadrunner eat? They feed on insects, prickly pear fruit, seeds, small reptiles, rodents, spiders, scorpions, centipedes, millipedes, small birds (and their eggs) and road kill. Not exactly a discriminating diet, but—except for small birds and road kill—it endears them to my wife. As a desert-dweller, roadrunners will drink water if readily available, but they can go a very long time without it, provided they eat food with high enough water content. Like some ocean-going birds that drink seawater, roadrunners use glands in the front of their eyes to excrete excess salt from their blood . . . as if they aren't strange enough already.

When it comes to parenting roadrunners are actually pretty good at it, despite a few idiosyncrasies. They typically nest low in a bush or cactus on a platform of thorny sticks, softened with whatever is at hand: grass, leaves, feathers, etc. Even manure has been used as building material. The male collects the necessary components, but the female asserts her superior sense of décor and constructs the nest. Roadrunners often mate for life, but not always—just like people. Sharing a perverted trait with some members of the cuckoo family, roadrunners have been known to run an illicit baby-sitting ring. This phenomenon, known as brood parasitism, is when fertile roadrunner eggs mysteriously show up in the nests of the Common Raven or the Northern Mockingbird. As if modern parenting isn't difficult enough, the targeted family might as well be sitting on Tyrannosaurus eggs, for a classic horror show is about to unfold.

What's for lunch?

You see, roadrunner babies are built to *survive*. The egg hatches earlier than the host's, and the chick grows faster (they can run and catch prey as early as 3 weeks old). If they don't eat their adopted brothers and sisters, in most cases the chick evicts the eggs or young of the host species. Kicks them out of the nest like a Wall Street mortgage banker! The chick has no way to learn this behavior, so it must be an instinct passed on genetically.

The complement of form and function in the Greater Roadrunner is uncanny. Warner Brothers chose to make the roadrunner "adorable." With a few embellishments, I could easily imagine the roadrunner as antagonist in a Stephen King novel: a rural county is terrorized by a giant, aberrant roadrunner with teeth and talons that runs down motorists, pulls them kicking and screaming out of their pickups and . . . and . . . beats them to death on a rock! Okay, I have my standards. They're low, but I have them. It's probably best if I just stick to what I see before me . . . nature has a way of astounding me when I watch really closely the comings and goings of her creatures. Some are rather ordinary and pedestrian, while a few stand out as deliciously unusual. When I run into one of these remarkable ones, only then can I better appreciate the fine line between biology and spirit. In that regard, the Greater Roadrunner is definitely a piece of work!

Walt, cont.

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garden—that is, until he realized he was harvesting mostly weeds because of the frequent travel. Today, these have all gone by the wayside. "When you have two homes and 140 acres, you don't have hobbies."

Cheyenne and Walt. No, Walt, she's not listening...

Ordinarily, a retired couple would be free of the responsibilities of children living with them, but the Elsons have an adopted eleven-year-old who still depends on them. Cheyenne is a yellow eighty-pound Labrador/cougar mix, paws like baseball gloves, and a wagging tail that can knock down a fence in a fit of ecstasy. Puppyhood was a difficult time, according to Walt. "Her first year she had several names, including 'no-no, bad dog, you little bitch,' and, well . . . it was a difficult childhood. Seems she had some wires crossed at birth.

As Cheyenne matured, it became quickly apparent she wasn't satisfied with little doggie games like catch-the-ball and fetch—she preferred chasing live critters. Starting with squirrels, passing to rabbits and raccoons, completing her undergraduate work in free-range deer, she now has her doctorate in cattle. This focused canine will stalk a cow for a full fifteen minutes before bursting from the grass like a rampaging lioness. This is how you produce lean beef? Nothing, however, matches the penultimate thrill of stampeding a neighbor's entire cattle herd. Flaring nostrils, flailing hooves and a cloud of range dust on the horizon . . . well, when it comes to having a good time, it just doesn't get any better than that! Although she has mellowed some with age, Cheyenne continues to enforce a 100-yard safety perimeter around the Elson hearth and home.

Life has been good to Walt Elson. There has been plenty of adventure, travel, excitement, struggle and achievement. It seems society today prefers material food to spiritual food. Wild spaces increasingly shrink to the Age of Concrete. In America, alas, beauty has become something you drive to. Probably no area in the developed world has undergone a more profound change in just a century or so. Walt knows that if we enjoy the beauty of creation and want it to continue, we must first realize it's completely up to us. "We must engage young people in the outdoors. Be it camping, hunting, fishing or bird watching—only through them will resource conservation and wildlife appreciation be continued." Amen.

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Snippets

WATER HYACINTH TO THE RESCUE?

Contributed by Bill Brooks

In Texas I've always thought of the Water Hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) as a destructive invasive aquatic plant from the Amazon River basin of tropical South America. It can out reproduce other aquatic plants, block the sunlight to native water plants, provide breeding grounds for mosquitoes and obstruct navigable water ways. In short, it's a species to deter however possible.

That's why I was surprised to read about scientists moving thousands of water hyacinths into Florida's Crystal River National Refuge. The refuge is a wintertime gathering spot for many of Florida's manatees and visited by tens of thousands of tourists.

The Crystal River has become a highly degraded habitat and this has led to this highly controversial experiment. Development has reduced the freshwater inflow to the river. This has led to more seawater entering the river, raising its salinity. This higher salinity has led to the death of the native eelgrass (food for the manatees) and other native aquatic plants and promoted algae growth. This algae has turned the once crystal clear waters into a green soup. Manatees don't like eating this algae and occasionally algae toxins actually kill manatees. Enter the water hyacinth. The water hyacinth can thrive in this brackish water. It does pull some toxins out of the environment and it is hoped it will block the light to the algae, clearing the once pristine waters. Manatees readily eat water hyacinths. It will be interesting to see how this radical plan works out.

For more information see "Striking a Deal with the Weed from Hell" by Garry Hamilton in the Spring 2014 edition of *Conservation Magazine*.

LOBLOLLY PINE GENETICS

Geneticists have found the largest genome sequence to date in the loblolly pine tree. Their genome consists of 23 billion base pairs. The human body, in comparison, has 3 billion base pairs. These base pairs form sequences called genes that tell the cells how to make proteins. For more information see: http://www.livescience.com/44286-pine-tree-longest-genome-sequenced.html

MACRO PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOPS

Want to learn more about macro photography, i.e., the art of taking extremely close-up images of subjects, in some spectacular settings? Several workshops are being offered this year by Abbott Nature Photography. Visit their website for details and registration.

Macro Photography Workshop—Chihuahuan Desert Nature Center, May 3-4

Bugshot 2014—Sapelo Island, Georgia, May 22-25

Macro Photography Workshop—Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge, June 21-22

Bugshot 2014—Belize, September 7-14

A Message from Julia Akin, LPMN President

Jim Sherrill, wearing his characteristic hat and smile

It's hard to believe that we are approaching graduation for the 2014 LPMN training class. Wasn't it just yesterday that the training committee convened for the first time to plan for this year's class? I prefer to think that time flies when you're having fun, as opposed to anything having to do with age. I have thoroughly enjoyed getting to know the 23 students who make up the current class and look forward to working with them as Chapter members.

You can apply the saying, "It takes a village" to many things. One of them is a project that is executed well. I want to thank and acknowledge the work and dedication of training committee members Audrey Ambrose, Lori Baumann, Walt Elson, Joan Estes, Larry Gfeller, Roxanne Hernandez and Louise Ridlon. There is one member, however, who deserves special recognition—Jim Sherrill. Jim graduated from our training program just last year. He has generously given his time, energy and imagination to the current training program. During a conversation I had with current class member Diego Aragon about the importance of continuity and consistency in training Diego said, "Jim is always there and has a friendly smile." At the same time, Jim has contributed creative ideas and suggestions for next year's class. I personally have appreciated Jim's contribution in leading the students with a positive, constructive attitude and approach.

Please plan to join us May 19th at McKinney Roughs for our combined monthly Chapter meeting and training class graduation as we celebrate the students' accomplishments and welcome them to our Chapter.

Lost Pines Master Naturalist Monthly Business Meetings

The monthly business meeting, which occurs on the third Monday of each month, 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. Stay tuned to Meetup.com to learn more about upcoming meetings.

One hour volunteer time is awarded for attendance at qualifying business meetings.

Newsletter Deadline

Submission deadline for the next issue is June 27, 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. Submissions may be edited for clarity, grammar, spelling, and space requirements. Please send information to the editor at Roxanne.M.Hernandez@gmail.com.

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

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