

LOST PINES CHAPTER

Texas Master Naturalist



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Can't We All Just Get Along?

by Larry Gfeller

Flashbacks spring up from the most unsuspecting sources. Our property is peppered with endless little mountains of sand that stand out like pimples on a prom queen. I thought to myself, “gopher” as I studied the landscape . . . and then it hit me: All of Bill Murray’s previous attempts to kill the gopher have failed, and he has now wired much of the course with plastic explosives in a final scorched earth tactic. The force of the explosions shake the entire course, yet, the gopher emerges unharmed and dances amid the smoldering ruins of the golf course. There it was: the final scene from the 1980 comedy film *Caddyshack*. It’s the only film I know where the antagonist is a gopher—a pocket gopher to be specific—and his name was Chuck Rodent. Cute name, I thought. Not very creative, but cute. And if I wanted, I could buy my very own replica of furry little Chuck today on the internet for \$149 . . . for the grandkids, you know.



Chuck Gopher, the nemesis of Bill Murray’s character in *Caddyshack*.

But I won’t be buying one . . . it would be inconsiderate—hell, it would be a *big* mistake. You see, my wife is ordinarily an amiable, gentle, loving person—especially when it comes to cute, furry little animals—but when they destroy her flower beds and lawn . . . well . . . there are no polite words I can use. This is clearly war. As I watched her spiral into a manic transmutation of Bill Murray, another graphic scene from *The Exorcist* haunted me—you know the one . . . Out of desperation, and in my most measured, rational voice, I said, “Let me find out more about Chuck Rodent on the internet, what makes him tick. Maybe I can discover a way we can all live together.” I can’t print her reaction to that one either—let’s just say she took my olive branch and stomped that sucker flat! So rather than waste the research, I thought perhaps it would make a good story . . . for naturalists and other objective, open-minded folks . . . like you, I hope. As I trace the sign of a cross on my chest, here goes.

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Turns out, pocket gophers aren’t so cute. Some of this is because of what they do for a living. Thriving underground, tunneling through raw earth and gorging on various roots, bulbs and the fleshy underground parts of plants, requires large strong forearms, serious claws and a great snapping set of choppers (incisors). To keep the dirt out of their mouths, their lips need to close around those large front incisors. Don’t need much in the way of eyes or ears, but they gotta have a powerful nose to sniff out where the goodies are. Fur is important. It needs to be protective and silky so they can slide through tight spaces. Fur also needs to be impervious to water, so they can stay warm and dry. Remember, it’s dark down there, so they need highly sensitive facial whiskers to find their way—eyes don’t count for much. The tail is

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Get Along, cont.

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basically bald with little hairs serving as “feelers.” Using their tail much as a sightless person uses a stick, gophers can run backwards in a tunnel almost as fast as they can run forward. To finish off the picture in your mind, imagine large cheek pouches (hence, pocket gopher) that open on the outside of the mouth and extend from the corners of the mouth well back to the shoulders. These pouches are used to store stuff and can be turned inside out (for emptying and cleaning), like little Trader Joe shopping bags.

Pocket gophers move the strange meter even more when it comes to behavioral quirks. Like a few other animals, they are known as “larder hoarders.” They store food in a single spot or location, often their underground nest. They are athletic, too. After biting off a chunk of earth with their big front teeth, gophers somersault in the tunnel to turn around and push the loose earth to the surface, bull-dozer style, using their head and front feet to create those unsightly mounds. The most bizarre trait of all—if you’re nonplussed by the proverbial turd in a punch bowl, you’re going to have trouble with this—is how they eat their own feces. They pull a pellet directly from the source, manipulate it with their forepaws, then thoroughly chew and swallow it. Captive gophers have been seen to interrupt a perfectly good meal of grass, then stop to enjoy a pellet or two of home cooking, then continue on with their meal. Oh, and would you pass the mashed potatoes, please?



Characteristic yellow teeth and long claws of the gopher
Photograph © Wayne Lynch



Kitty may soon regret playing with this critter.

There are thought to be some 37 species of gophers and they inhabit mostly North and Central America. They like soft, moist dirt or sand, which explains why they are viewed as pests by farmers, gardeners, homeowners and anal-retentive groundskeepers at golf courses. They do have predators (snakes, hawks, owls, skunks, cats, dogs, foxes, coyotes and bobcats), but catching a gopher in the open is a happenstance event; they seldom come out of their tunnel system. If you’re a hungry predator you sometimes take what you can get; however, snatching a gopher often ends badly, depending on the predator. These rodents are accomplished street fighters and have been known to do a job on attackers, inflicting serious bites with their long, sharp teeth. When angry, they emit a wheezy call at frequent intervals and gnash their teeth. Many a housecat, mistaking a gopher for a field mouse, has gained new appreciation for canned cat food.

Pocket gophers are ferocious isolationists. Each gopher lords over its own tunnel system and aggressively maintains that territory. Gophers are not romantics. They are solitary outside of breeding season. Males and females do shack up together, but they tend to get down to business, get it over with, and get on with their lives (they only live one to three years). Babies, usually between two and five, are born blind and helpless, and stay with their mother for 40 days—which is generally 39½ days longer than daddy does. Pocket gophers don’t hibernate; they are active all year long and during all hours of the day. Although I couldn’t document it, they probably share common DNA with 20-something’s in the financial district of New York City. Nah, it’s probably just coincidence they are both called “gophers.”

Gopher tunnels are an engineering marvel. People often confuse mole tunnels for gophers. Moles burrow just beneath the surface, leaving a raised ridge to mark their path. The gopher’s system is more complex; usually covering from 200-2,000 sq. ft., with the nest and food storage chamber 6 ft. below the surface.

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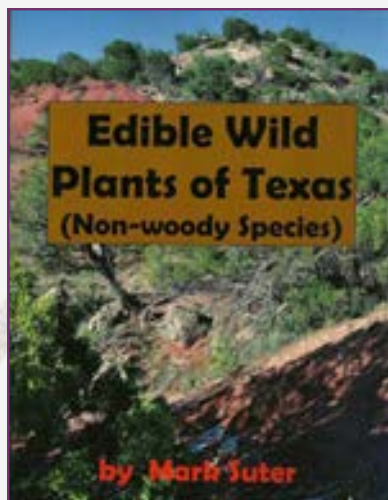
A Walk on the Wild Side

by Susan J. Smith

Mark Suter's reputation as a teacher of primitive living goes before him. When I heard that he was arriving in Austin to lead a tour on a wild eating binge, I was hooked. I was not disappointed.

Mark drives to Austin twice a year from East Texas. He offers an edible wild plant walk through the grounds of the Austin Science and Nature Center and Zilker Park. What looks like weeds to the untrained eye are plants that can be either eaten, used medicinally, or have other utilitarian uses, such as the leaves of the sparkleberry, which can be rubbed on the skin as an insect repellant, or the yucca's roots that can be harvested as a soap. Mark explains, "The roots can be pounded to separate the fibers and squeezed with water to make soap to wash skin and hair, whereas leaves can be used to make baskets and cordage."

However, the main focus of the walk was to point out those plants that were edible and to encourage us to sample them. Some of the twenty plants we ate in their entirety were pretty, purple spiderworts, spicy pepper grass, lemony wood sorrel, wild onions, and violets. Mark did warn that even though the leaves of the violet are tasty, the roots are used medicinally for constipation, and should not be sampled without good reason!



carrot (*Daucus carota*) which looks very much like its poisonous cousin, water hemlock (*Cicuta maculata*).

As Mark advised, "When harvesting shoots or leaves of a plant, harvest a little from many different individual plants, so as not to overwhelm and kill a single one by stripping it bare. Also, never take all of the fruit in a single area, as wild animals depend on many of these for nutrition." In essence, Mark Suter imparts earth wisdom to us: We can increase our awareness of what nature provides for us if we walk and talk and eat in a respectful manner. ✂



Bur clover (*Medicago polymorpha*)
© Larry Allain, hosted by the USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database

Mark recently published a new book titled "Edible Wild Plants of Texas." It gives the description, habitat, range, uses and seasons of common plants that can be found everywhere in and around this area. For instance, bur clover (*Medicago polymorpha*), a drought-loving plant, has sprung up in many people's landscapes. Its young shoots and flowers can be boiled for ten minutes and then eaten as a green vegetable. Native Americans made vegetable and game stews every day. What is apparent is that the vegetables were here in abundance if game could not be found for those stews.

The book is a useful field guide for anyone interested in native foraging. It offers 300 color photographs of edible plants that are common and plentiful out in nature. Equally important to all foragers are the pictures and descriptions of poisonous look-alike plants. One good example is the wild



Wild carrot, on left, and its poisonous cousin water hemlock on the right.

Meet Rick Johnson

by Larry Gfeller

One of the pleasures of doing these newsletter bios is the occasional discovery—the unearthing of a deep personal commitment, an unusual talent or something unexpected. Oh, there are the well-known aspects of each member's involvement in the chapter, but often more obscure facets of a personality are uncovered quite by accident. It's a process not unlike archaeology—while digging, scraping and sifting for a known or suspected artifact, you stub your toe on a hidden treasure.

There are those among us who habitually carry themselves with an affability, a sense of humor—"amiables," I call them. Outgoing and entertaining, their demeanor can be so frisky you hardly know when they're being serious. Rick Johnson is one of those people—but it's not difficult knowing when the atmosphere changes, like snow dissolving in water. When he believes deeply in something, his manner and voice change, his eyes narrow and it's clear he's speaking with conviction. Just ask the class of 2014 (and others present) who received an emotionally charged oration at orientation to give it their all, to strive for excellence, to stand tall on the shoulders of all who came before them.

Everyone knows Rick is our current Chapter Historian, but fewer know that in 2001 he was elected as our chapter's very first president. For anyone who has tried to organize anything from ground zero, and then lead members through all the hoops and hurdles to fulfill the requirements for a functioning TMN chapter—



Rick Johnson looking over his hayfield, a far cry from their first 4 acres



Catch of the day from his fishing hole

well, it's like trying to put contact lenses on a chicken! First order of business: Write up a successful application to the Internal Revenue Service for federal tax-exempt status. How's that for a homework assignment? Rick relied on now inactive member Bill Watson, a retired attorney. Establishing and executing the first ever basic training program for chapter members was equally daunting. Rick credits our chapter advisor Rachel Bauer of Texas AgriLife Extension for helping thread this needle. Getting everyone successfully through the curriculum was a lot of hard work, but that was just the beginning. The next obstacle was scheduling and delivering a meaningful program of advanced training and volunteer opportunities to all the new graduates. Again, with Rachel Bauer's contacts and the cooperative efforts of a neophyte chapter, things began to happen. In these early days it was not unusual for TMN's to travel 50 to 100 miles for field trips and approved volunteer opportunities outside the two-county area, as there was no established network. Beginnings can be difficult, painful and messy. Yet, from all of these collaborative efforts a real, live, functioning chapter began to emerge.

Of course, these elemental functions all created follow-on work. Someone had to record and track each individual's advanced training and volunteer hours. Someone had to make a written record of every chapter meeting; there were dues to be collected and credited; bank accounts to be established and administered; and chapter communications to be set up. Andy Butler and Sue Fischer were tireless kingpins, according to Rick. These are all chapter tasks some take for granted today. Please don't. Being organized and staying

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Rick, cont.

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organized takes a lot of time and a lot of work. “It took most of my waking hours after my business and my family to help get this chapter up and running,” Rick says. We all wouldn’t be here today without that time and work. Truth is, we all won’t be here tomorrow without it . . . through indifference and neglect, it’s possible to forsake years of hard work and struggle.



Among a few of his prized cattle

Richard Johnson was born in Pasadena, California. While attending the University of North Carolina, he met and married his wife, Cindy. Next came an active duty stint in the US Navy. After finishing his active duty obligation in 1972 (but remaining active in the US Naval Reserves), Rick and Cindy moved to Central Texas, where he earned his Associates Degree from San Antonio College in 1974. Why Texas? Fact: The King Ranch is larger than the state of Rhode Island (because everything’s bigger and better in Texas) and the couple’s dream was to own “a spread,” to raise cows and ranch. Rick started small with four acres in Canyon Lake while earning a living as a criminal investigator for the IRS. He and Cindy cleared the land and had many picnics on the property, but never got a house built. In 1976, Rick finished his BBA degree from the University

of Texas, and still working toward his vision, he took the plunge and opened his own business with State Farm Insurance in Lockhart in 1979. He retired from the USN and USNR in 1986. 1994 saw the realization of their goal, when the Johnsons bought a ranch in McMahan, Texas, which is still their home today. Rick sold his business in 2011 to ranch full-time. He and Cindy raised two children and share four grandkids.

Since his days as founding president, Rick has served on our Board of Directors and busted his hump volunteering. Today he has amassed over 1,100 volunteer hours, one of only four LPMNs to accomplish this feat. Much of that time was spent at two favorite places: Luling Foundation Farm and Lockhart State Park. You see, Rick is addicted to agriculture and ranching, and the wide range of happenings and events at Luling Farm have been a natural draw for him since early on. He also can’t deny the adventure and excitement of the Lockhart ISD school children—so innocent, so impressionable, so anxious to discover. When he visits with the children at Lockhart State Park, it’s like seeing the world through new eyes . . . the wonders of nature dazzle and amaze. The children take nothing for granted, there is no sense of entitlement, there is no cynicism; there is simply the sheer joy of being there, making connections and glimpsing the grand order of the ecosystem and their place in it.

It’s important to Rick to help others find themselves—who they are and where they fit. One of his greatest joys is ministering to kids who struggle to find identity in this life. For the last 13 years, Rick has volunteered with the Pegasus School/Home for Boys in Lockhart, helping bring a Sunday morning service and Friday evening bible study to over 150 boys who live in residence . . . you see, Rick Johnson is a certified Christian chaplain. These are troubled kids with difficult histories—often violent—



One of Rick’s favorite places, the Luling Foundation Farm

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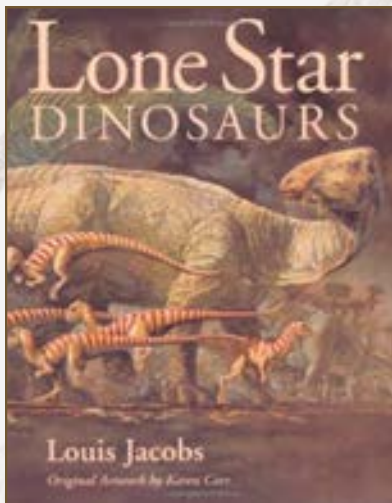
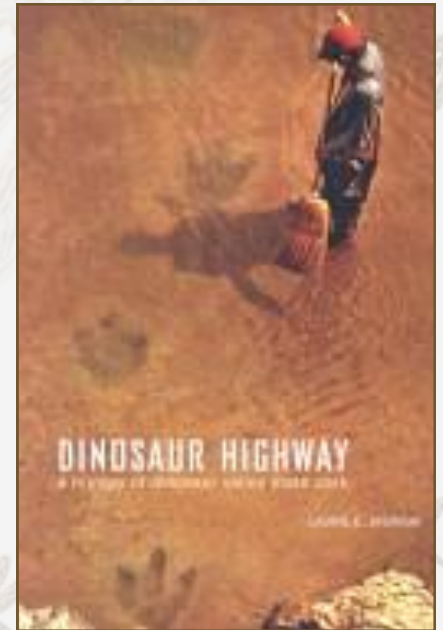
Brooks on Books—Texas Dinosaurs

by Bill Brooks

I just finished reading a delightful book called “Dinosaur Highway” by Laurie E. Janiski. Ms. Janiski is also the author of a book of poetry, “Hill Country Backroads: Showing the Way in Comal County” and “A History of Martin Dies Jr. State Park.” She is also co-author of “The Handbook of Texas Music.” “Dinosaur Highway” is the history of Dinosaur Valley State Park near Glen Rose, Texas, on the Paluxy River. The author interviewed the variety of people who helped to bring this park into being and collected an interesting group of historical photographs. I, personally, have a couple of links with this park.

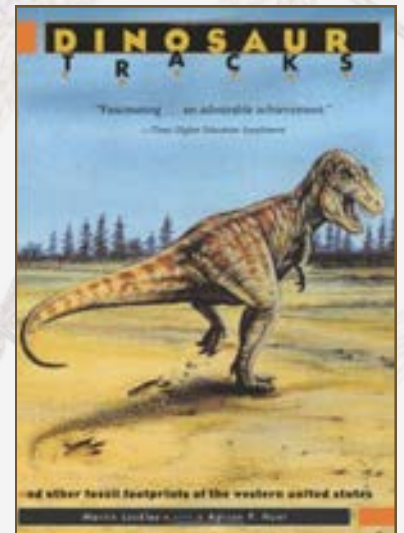
Two trackways were excavated from the Pauty Riverbed. The larger of the two went to the American Museum of Natural History. The smaller one resides in a small building just outside the Texas Natural History Museum (once called the Texas Memorial Museum) on the UT campus. I have visited both of these trackways; the one on the UT campus I’ve visited quite often. These days, molds are made of tracks for exhibit. You can see a trackway mold inspired by the Paluxy tracks at the Luci and Ian Family Garden in the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. I even have a plaster cast I made of a theropod track on the South San Gabriel River.

In Dinosaur Valley State Park there is a life-sized model of a dinosaur once called the brontosaurus, (now called the apatosaurus) and a model of tyrannosaurus rex. The brontosaurus was the logo of the Sinclair Refining Company. Sinclair made those models for the 1964 New York World’s Fair, and that’s where I first saw them. If you want to learn more about the history of this park read “Bones for Barnum Brown: Adventures of a Dinosaur Hunter” by Roland Bird. Also, “Dinosaurs of the Dinosaur Valley State Park” by James Farlow goes into depth on the dinos who made the tracks found here. Carnivore theropod tracks were recognized around the world, but this was one of the first locations where round sauropod tracks were recognized right along side the theropods.



For more on Texas dinosaurs read “Lone Star Dinosaurs” by Louis Jacobs. It’s all about the fossils found in Texas and the people who found them. A little book titled “Discover Texas Dinosaurs: Where They Lived, How They Lived, and the Scientists Who Study Them” by Charles E. Finsley is also worth your time. Not only does Finsley talk about Texas dinosaur fossils but also he tells us about the paleontologists who excavated them and reviews some of the better dinosaur fossil exhibits around Texas. Speaking of exhibits, the Waco Mammoth Site is worth the drive. For something a little closer to home, if you can ever volunteer or arrange a tour of the Pickle Center Paleontology Lab, do it. It’s hard to imagine the vast size of the fossil collections stored there.

There are lots of general dinosaur books, but the one I’d like to bring to your attention combines a little mathematics with paleontology. The book, “Dinosaur Tracks” by Martin Lockley and Adrian Hunt, explains how to figure the pace and body length of the animal by his tracks. The authors describe track sites all over the western US.



Read on and enjoy! ✨

What's Blooming?

by Liz Pullman

Fall colors in Texas? Without the forests and hillsides of vibrant yellows, oranges, reds and maroons found in the eastern deciduous forests composed of oaks, hickories, maples, tulip poplars and sweetgums, *etc.*, we folks of Bastrop and Caldwell counties must continue to look downward for our fall colors. On a positive note, however, our perennials tend to keep right on blooming into very late fall since our killing frosts and freezes frequently don't happen until after Christmas.

With this in mind, let's look at some colorful species we have. Purple? There will be several species of blazing star or gayfeather (*Liatris spp.*) turning our roadsides and fields into purple as they go into blooming season. The Monarch Meadow at the Colorado River Refuge is a prime example of this phenomenon. Nearby, in the meadow area of Dragonfly Trail are sizable areas of the lighter pinkish-purple of *Gerardia* (*Agalinis heterophylla*). Both *Liatris* and *Agalinis* are rather common in both counties. Blue mistflower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*) and Texas verbena (*Verbena halei*) with their blue and purple flowers have been blooming and will continue to bloom for quite a while.



Blue mistflower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*)



Bracted sida (*Sida ciliaris*)

Moving on to the pinks and reds, we have three species of *Palafoxia*, ranging from pale to bright pink. Fall is their time, and one is very showy and bright (*Palafoxia hookeriana*). Then there is the smelly pinkish camphor weed (*Pluchea camphorata*) about which I generally comment, "It smells like dirty socks." Red? We have tropical (Texas) sage (*Salvia coccinea*) that keeps going until November. A little plant from the mallow family with pale red blooms shows up in summer and keeps on blooming until late fall—bracted sida (*Sida ciliaris*). You can find it along road edges, near or in lawns or almost anywhere. More red? Locate some flame sumac (*Rhus copallinum*) and watch it turn bright red before the leaves fall.

At times it seems as though most of our blooming plants are yellow! Not a bad observation in any season. Some very showy ones from the aster family seem to dominate in autumn. First there are "leftovers" from the summer—gumweed (*Grindelia sp.*), broomweed (*Gutierrezia sp.*) and cowpen daisy (*Verbesina encelioides*). Goldenrods (*Solidago spp.*) appear in the fall and are frequently blamed for hay fever, although they are innocents. The real culprits are ragweeds (*Ambrosia spp.*), which bloom concurrently. Ambrosia flowers are very inconspicuous, so the goldenrods with large clusters of bright yellow have taken the rap for the allergic reactions. My most favorite sunflower is a late blooming one—Maximilian's sunflower (*Helianthus maximiliani*). This plant seems partial to the right-of-way along roadsides, making it a shoo-in for showing off and identifying flowers at 70 mph. Ending the yellow discussion are two well-armed plants—buffalo burr (*Solanum rostratum*) and warty caltrop (*Kallstroemia parviflora*). Two ouchies for certain!



Buffalo burr (*Solanum rostratum*)

For white, snow-on-the-prairie (*Euphorbia marginata*) from the spurge family comes to mind. It is almost a shrub and very visible in fields and pastures as pure white, although two-toned green and bright white leaves are the eye-catchers. One more fall white flower is worth a sentence. Frostweed, iceplant or wingstem (*Verbesina virginica*) is common and the story about this plant is that if there is freezing weather, this plant's sap will form frozen icicles along the stem. I have yet to witness this condition.

Texas *does* have colorful autumns . . . just different. ✨

A Bridge is Built

by Roxanne Hernandez with photos by Andy Wier

On Sunday, August 3rd, a diverse group of twenty men and women—both veteran Maniacs and newbies to the Maniac scene—arrived at the home of Brian Ridlon, fellow Master Naturalist Louise Ridlon's son. The objective? Build a bridge to connect their two properties so Brian's wife, who uses a wheelchair, can more safely and easily move between the two homes.

This was my first outing with the Maniacs, and I can understand why they keep on doing what they do. Quite simply, it's fun and rewarding! There are no assigned tasks. You simply observe and listen, and before you know it you identify a need and step in to fill it. Throughout the day I played driller, cutter, gopher, and general laborer, and each of these roles was equally fulfilling.

Jim Estes and Nick Nichols are the "master" chefs in the Maniacs' kitchen, according to Frank May. "Without their laidback leadership, in-depth knowledge and amazing toolkits, the Bridge Maniacs would not be nearly as effective. There are also Julia and Audrey . . . they know how to keep everyone focused, including the master chefs," said Frank.

Here's what some of the participants had to say about that day. Oh, and for a witty and humorous take on that day check out [Andy Wier's slideshow on YouTube](#).



The bridge building on Sunday reminded me of an old fashioned barn raising – everyone coming together, toting their tools, to help a neighbor. Sharing time, skills, and food like the pioneers – but thank goodness, unlike the pioneers, we had power tools! But, the feelings each of us took home from that awesome bridge were an old fashioned sense of accomplishment and satisfaction that doesn't come packaged in plastic and can't be bought with anything but sweat and friendship. To me, that is the essence of the Maniacs.

~ Cat May

Cat is right on the mark! I like the concept of "modern day barn raisers" arriving with power tools. But I saw some old fashioned things employed, which I loved - I should have spoken up and asked what the driver was that Steve was using. It's good to know there are things to use that make life easier and still don't run outta battery . . . and I saw lots of ingenuity everywhere. It's amazing: you guys work as a team in a way that would make corporate entities jealous.

~ Julie Erlon



My impression of Sunday? I cannot remember ever building a bridge in a day. This was even more rare because of some very knowledgeable extra help who added spice to the maniacal brew. We don't need no stinkin' plans! It's always like you find this fairy in the woods somewhere, and somehow she sprinkles fairy dust on the work site . . . and poof . . . in the end, there stands this bridge. It's magic, I tell you!

~ Larry Gfeller



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A Bridge is Built, cont.

(Continued from page 8)



What a good time . . . 15 cooks in one kitchen. The meal was a success AND nobody got burned!!

~ Frank May

Ya! And did you see what came out of the oven, one hell of a bridge in just a few hours. Let's keep cooking.

~ Dave Hill



The recipe is from our Ancestors, just mix us up and see what turns out. We turn out some remarkable things. Sometimes it even surprises The Maniacs.

~ Jim Estes



"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." — Mahatma Gandhi

~ Rick Gast



It was a great teamwork environment. Lots of fun.

~ Elvis Hernandez

It was what an old fashioned barn raising must have been like. It was chaotic at times, but it all came together in the end, and a good time was had by all.

~ Mike Barrett



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A Bridge is Built, cont.

(Continued from page 9)



What a group; they operate pretty much like a bunch of ants. Suddenly they appear at a location, with no apparent leader, plan or communication. They scurry all about the location and some wonderful change is wrought. Then they move on, with little fanfare, until some secret signal causes them to assemble somewhere else.

~ Gary Buckwalter

Pulling together with this group to do something meaningful for Louise, who has done so much for the chapter, was a wonderful experience. I am so proud to be a part of this group and blessed to have them as friends.

~ Julia Akin



What a pleasant day. Cooler weather, the gathering of friends and good fellowship, and successfully designing and building a bridge for two families to join together. What a great day for some great people.

~ Audrey Ambrose



This was only my second meeting with y'all and I wasn't sure what to expect. What I found was best summarized by Yeats, I believe: "There are no strangers here; only friends you haven't yet met." Everyone was really friendly and I had a great time! Many thanks!

~ Amy Doman



When I asked Jim several months ago if the Maniacs ever did projects for members on private property, I had no idea that it would result in such a wonderful creation! The response from the LPMN group as a whole and especially the Bridge Maniacs was amazing and so heartwarming to us all. We can't thank the group enough for your generosity in energy, time, and spirit!!

That evening Brian came over on his riding lawn mower . . . he had driven it over the bridge! Yeah, it's sturdy! Later he called Frank and asked him to meet him on the bridge and have a beer. The girls asked if they were going to spit off the bridge! So any time you're in the area, come spit off the beautiful bridge!

~ Louise Ridlon



LBJ Wildflower Center Needs Your Photos

by Liz Pullman

Joe Marcus, who manages the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's Image Gallery, is constantly searching for good images of native plants. You, too, can contribute to the myriad of pics found there as you search for images. There are three requirements for photo submission: First, they must be high-quality, sharply-focused images; second, there must be a completed and signed Image Contributor Form (a legal thing); and finally, you must include all the data associated with each image. There is an Image Data Spreadsheet that can be used to record information about the pictures—you know, all the stuff embedded in most cameras. Both the Contributor Form and Image Data Spreadsheet are available from the [Center's website](#), and there's also a link on the [Resources page](#) of the LPMN website.



Huisache (*Acacia farnesiana*) photographed by Joe Marcus, using a background wall to lend scale to the tree.

I know that some of you get all upset if you only know a common name, but there are people at the Center who can usually figure out the Latin! When in doubt, the [USDAPLANTS](#) database is the authority and that is the common name to use.

You do not have to stick with Texas plants, nor plants in the wild. Acceptable are pics of leaves, bark, thorns, roots and buds, as well as the blossoms. They do not particularly like pics with people, pets or human-made objects, nor do they like to have coins and rulers shown for scale. (My personal opinion is that I need all the help I can get, so I promote something for scale.) Try to avoid the image dates that are burned onto pictures, as they'll crop those out when possible.

The usual way to send pics is by email or you can even burn a CD and send it. Please note that your images continue to belong to you—they are simply being loaned to the Center's database.

You can talk with Joe via email if you have questions (jmarcus@wildflower.org) or with me or Judy Turner. ✂

A Message from Julia Akin, LPMN President

If you weren't at the chapter picnic on July 27th, you are one of the very few who did not attend. It was a real stretch for the Bastrop State Park refectory to house more than 90 people, but a good time was had by all. We enjoyed enough food to accommodate a much larger crowd, but we managed to put a respectable dent in it. Very special *thank you* to Grace and Wally Pratt for the delicious brisket and pulled pork they smoked for us. What a generous contribution of time and talent!



Grace and Wally Pratt prep the main dish of the afternoon.

Over \$1,350 was raised in the picnic's silent auction. Dave Hill generously donated a half-day guided fishing trip on Lake Bastrop. Other auction items were home-grown plants donated by Jim Sherrill, three hours of work provided by the Bridge Maniacs, all manner of bird feeding paraphernalia, and the ever popular flying pig. Thank you to everyone who donated items for the auction! We will hold another silent auction at this year's holiday party in December so start setting aside donations.

Chapter photographer Andy Wier was busy at work during the picnic. All of his pictures from the day can be viewed on the [chapter's website](#). Thank you, Andy!

Our next chapter "event" will be our kayak trip on October 5th, putting in at Fisherman's Park in Bastrop and taking out at the Colorado River Refuge where we will enjoy a picnic. Stay tuned to [Meetup](#) for details as the date approaches.

Thank you all for your hard work and for giving me the opportunity to serve as chapter president. ✂

Member Milestones

by Julia Akin

1,000 Volunteer Hours

Walt Elson
Rick Johnson

A big part of the festivities at the July chapter picnic was the celebration of members' certifications and milestones, including particularly the achievements by Rick Johnson and Walt Elson, each of whom received their 1,000 hour milestone awards. Both of these gentlemen epitomize the core values of Texas Master Naturalists.

500 Volunteer Hours

Julia Akin
Roxanne Hernandez
Ronnie Lanier

Rick Johnson was the founding president of our chapter in 2001 and is currently chair of its Historical Committee. You can read more about Rick in this issue.

250 Volunteer Hours

Lori Baumann
Rick Gast

Through Walt Elson's creativity and hard work our rainwater simulator was created, and to this day it attracts a crowd and sets our chapter apart. Walt also proposed and oversaw the implementation of a system for identifying and marking native plants along hiking trails in Lockhart State Park, a system that is still used today by hike leaders.

These two gentlemen continue to offer sound counsel and inspiration as active chapter members.

Thank you, Rick and Walt!



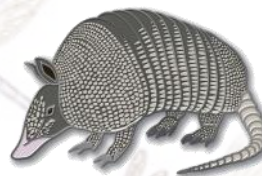
Chapter President Julia Akin thanks Rick Johnson and Walt Elson for their service to the LPMN before presenting them with their 1,000 hour milestone pins.

Congratulations to those of you who earned new and renewed certifications!

Julia Akin
Audrey Ambrose
Lori Baumann
Gary Buckwalter
Walt Elson
Jim Estes
Rick Gast
Larry Gfeller
Miriam Hall

Roxanne Hernandez
Al Hoerig
Rick Johnson
Patricia Kavanaugh
Kathy Kirk
Cat May
Carroll Moore
Nick Nichols
Liz Pullman

Louise Ridlon
Jim Sherrill
Anna Stalcup
Judy Turner
Robert Vaughn
Kelly Ward
Susie Ward
Andy Wier
Mary Wier



Snippets

ANOTHER REASON TO LOVE BEAUTY BERRY

Contributed by Bill Brooks

A little scared of DEET? Science has finally caught up with another folk remedy. Researchers have found that the chemicals (callicarpenal and intermedeol) found in the leaves of the American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) repel fire ants, ticks, and mosquitoes. To be on the safe side, rub a leaf on the inside of your arm to see if you have a reaction before you rub the leaves all over your body. Stay safe, y'all.

From Mother Earth News, April/May 2009 and available [online](#).



THE LONGNOSE GAR

Contributed by Bill Brooks

In our Colorado River you can occasionally come across the Longnose Gar (*Lepisosteus osseus*). These fish usually swim up small creeks to spawn and lay their eggs. When the fry hatch in 3 to 9 days, they attach themselves to submerged objects by an adhesive organ on their snouts. They hang in a vertical position about 9 days until their egg sac has been absorbed. They then release themselves and start feeding in a typical horizontal fish position.



Illustration © TPWD

From the North American Native Fish Association website (www.nanfa.org).

WHOOPING CRANES TO BEGIN THEIR FALL JOURNEY TO THE TEXAS COAST

Contributed by Bonnie Shimek

The tallest bird in North America, the whooping crane breeds in the wetlands of Wood Buffalo National Park in northern Canada and spends the winter on the Texas coast at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. As many as 1,400 whooping cranes migrated across North America in the mid-1800s, but by the late 1930s, the Aransas population was down to just 18 birds. Because of well-coordinated efforts to protect habitat and the birds themselves, the population is slowly increasing. Today, three populations exist, including the only migratory population at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. This population will begin its fall migration south to Texas in mid-September.

You can help monitor whooping crane populations by contacting the [Wildlife Diversity Program at Texas Parks and Wildlife](#) and/or the [US Fish and Wildlife Service](#) to report your sightings.



INTENSIVE 9-MONTH WILDLIFE TRACKING COURSE ANNOUNCED

Most wild animals are secretive, nocturnal, or simply difficult to observe in the wild. Wildlife tracking skills can provide an incredible window into the secret lives of Texas' animal species. A skilled observer cannot only determine what animals are inhabiting an area through the tracks that they are leaving behind but can also establish track and sign pattern interpretations that give us a much greater understanding of animal behavior.



The course takes you through the Chisos Mountains, along the Rio Grande and banks of the Colorado River, and across the Monahans Sandhills, to track black bear, mountain lion, river otters, birds and alligators, coyotes, and more. The program includes instructor-led field time, lectures, and out of class tracking and journaling assignments. Visit the [Earth Native Wilderness School's website](#) for more information.

Rick, cont.

(Continued from page 5)

without the love and guidance needed to develop into successful functioning men. Rick provides a godly role model—a life-line really—for these young boys to look up to; someone who cannot only teach, mentor and show, but who can also return acceptance, respect and love. In this particular endeavor, Rick works quietly, persistently and unconditionally. There's a difference between recognizing a need for change, and being an agent for change . . . it's called commitment, and Rick exemplifies it in his service. 🦋



Another of Rick's favorite places, Lockhart State Park

Newsletter Deadline

Submission deadline for the next issue is October 24, 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.

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.*

Stay connected!

The Lost Pines Master Naturalists use Meetup.com to stay current on volunteer and advanced training activities. 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.

WHO'S WHO

OFFICERS

President, Julia Akin
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Vice-President, Mike Barrett
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Secretary, Joan Estes
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Treasurer, Holly Sutherland
holly_rob1999@yahoo.com

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Volunteer Services, Mike Barrett
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Communications, Roxanne Hernandez
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Basic Training, Julia Akin
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Advanced Training & Programs, Mike Barrett
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Membership, Audrey Ambrose
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Outreach, Jim Estes
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Chapter History, Rick Johnson
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Get Along, cont.

(Continued from page 2)

Feeding tunnels are 6-12 inches underground and they are usually sealed below the surface with earthen plugs. Short, lateral, sloping tunnels (the ones that create the mounds) connect the main burrow system with the surface; gophers create these while pushing dirt to the surface to construct the main tunnel. They use these tunnels for locating food, nesting, rearing young, waste disposal and escaping predators. Burrows are a closely regulated microenvironment and gophers will plug any opening in the system within 24 hours. Unlike people, gophers never die in mining accidents.

Gophers, in fact, play a beneficial part in the great wheel of nature. Their dried, vegetation-lined borrows eventually collapse, trapping valuable fertilizer and organic matter deep within the ground. Their aeration effect loosens hard-packed earth, and abandoned burrows make cool, moist, ready-made homes for toads, lizards, salamanders and other critters that seek refuge underground. Surface mounds created by gophers also bury vegetation deeper and deeper, increasing soil quality over time (a single gopher can move approximately a ton of earth from underground to topside in a normal lifespan). Fresh soil in mounds provides a ready seedbed for new plants, which may help to increase the variety of plants on site. See dear, you can plant cowpen daisies in the mounds! Alas, all of this only brought on the “Linda Blair” effect within a certain lady I live with!



Structure of the underground gopher habitat as illustrated on AmeriGuard Pest Defense's website

So we have arrived at the moment of truth. How do you get rid of gophers? Some have tried a search light and a .22 rifle. Rotsa ruck with that! My wife is currently using little electronic vibrating stakes. My research did list them as one of the alternatives . . . right up there with fumigation, underground fencing, use of plastic predators (owls), predator urine, flooding, gas explosive devices, garlic, castor beans, ultrasonic devices and wind-powered pinwheels (to frighten them). Conclusion: These solutions generally don't work for crap! What does work (sometimes) is a burrow probe—used for locating main burrows, followed by trapping and poison baiting. In other words, hire a professional. We've had some success with an overpopulation of field mice using pest control services, so my wife hurried to the phone. They turned her down! “Nothing like pouring money down a gopher hole . . . not good for business.” Do they carry plastic explosives at Lowe's? 🦋

STATE PROGRAM CONTACTS

Website: <http://txmn.org>

State Coordinator: Michelle Haggerty, 979-845-5777, mhaggerty@ag.tamu.edu

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

SPONSOR CONTACTS

Caldwell County Extension Office: Michael Haynes, 512-398-3122,

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

Bastrop/Caldwell County TPWD Wildlife Biologist: Vacant

