Lost Pines Chapter

Texas Master Naturalist

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Listening to the Land

by Larry Gfeller

Texas once was open and wild, home to mountains, sprawling desert, clean rivers, rich and abundant prairies, canyonlands and mesas, coastal wetlands and vast towering stands of timber—the land was treasured for its beauty and bounty. There's something liberating about wildness and natural beauty, something that frees the spirit to rise up and soar—something that sets men on quests for adventure and risk-taking. Texas history is storied and famous, almost quixotic, replete with grand struggles, epic events and mythic personalities. Pride is written in bold strokes across our land; visitors sense it, residents manifest it.

The Hernandezes front yard in springtime

Yet, time has changed the land. The prairies have been plowed under, the rivers over-used, the timber cut several times over and our coastline tainted. What was once free and open has now been partitioned into subdivisions, shopping malls, super highways and agricultural checkerboards. The wheels of progress have rolled over our wild spaces and strained our ecology. It's time to give up the outdated notion that humans are here and nature is someplace else. That's why Texas Parks and Wildlife created the Texas Lone Star Land Steward Award Program. The program is designed to educate folks and to encourage habitat conservation.

Each year, a handful of citizens or organizations are recognized for excellence in habitat management and wildlife conservation. That's right, only a few in the entire state of Texas—and this year one of our own clinched that honor. Roxanne and Elvis Hernandez were recognized in May, the only representatives from the Lost Pines ecotone. Typically, awardees have been large landowners whose conservation impact on the land was substantial. But this year is different; the Hernandez's work only 53 acres in Bastrop County, near McDade, Texas. It's an important testimonial to the reality that over 94 percent of our state is privately owned and small landowners make up the lion's share.

As you approach from the road, the property stands out as a mix of Pineywoods and Post Oak Savannah with waving grasses amidst groves of hardwoods and loblolly pines, neatly outlined by a pristine fence line. Once past the entrance gate, a sprawling ranch style home lies at the

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Firewise landscape at Rancho Zunzun

end of a gravel road, fenced separately and very private. Charlie (the dog) greets you at the inner gate as cats and chickens—insulted by their sudden loss of privacy—scurry for cover. The entire living area inside the residence fence is landscaped for fire, with an island of pebbles and xeriscape close in, native pollinator/fire-resistant plants within its boundaries. With an abundance of busy and well-tended bird feeders, you can easily see why it's been dubbed Rancho Zunzun (Hummingbird Ranch). Behind the house is a full size swimming pool, the mechanics masterfully hidden behind a gently curved adobe wall, festooned with planters in full bloom, sculpted into its convex surface.

A Georgia O'Keeffe refuge? Not hardly. A quick glance over the fence reveals a working chicken coop, a garden, a cavernous barn, a pole barn converted into a hog trap and a manmade pond nestled under stately loblolly pines. Bat boxes can be seen in a selected tree or atop a 12-foot pole. A John Deere tractor with front loader is parked just outside the barn. A mud-spattered ATV sits nearby. This is a working ranch alright, but the Hernandezes don't raise cattle or horses . . . they restore and rehabilitate the land.

What does it take to be one of a smattering of landowners recognized in the entire state? First, you've got to have specific goals. Then, you need the discipline to work for ten long years with partners to achieve those goals—partners like U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas Forest Service, the South Central Texas Prescribed Burn Association, and the local wildlife management association. Helping to mend habitat fracture is critical and that's what this award speaks to. Zunzun Ranch is in close proximity to Griffith League Ranch and Welsh Tract, two expanses that serve as research and recovery centers for the endangered Houston toad. The Hernandezes have a goal to plant 500 new loblolly pine seedlings each year, after their initial pre-drought attempt with 3,500 back in 2009. Through pond maintenance, reforestation, brush management, prescribed burning and native grass restoration, the Hernandezes have expanded natural habitat for the toad to disperse, breed and expand its population. While this encourages the imperiled amphibian, it also increases the diversity of other wildlife.

Prescribed burn, 2012

It's not been easy. When they first arrived, the property had been overgrazed and was covered in Eastern red cedar and mesquite. "Our first efforts, which took several years and are still ongoing, focused entirely on mesquite and cedar removal," Roxanne says. In their current management plan, chinaberry, yaupon and Johnsongrass are also targeted. Fire ant control is another objective. The plan calls for continual prescribed burning until the habitat is restored to a more natural state, then scheduled 5-year maintenance burns are intended. Brush management is important. Not only does it reduce fuel load, but also produces brush piles for wildlife and stimulates new growth. The Hernandezes keep close tabs on wildlife diversity through the use of a remote camera, frequent nocturnal toad chorusing census and visual observation. A list of species is maintained with careful attention. To date, no Houston toads have

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What's Blooming?
by Liz Pullman

Puccoon (*Lithospermum incisa*) - photo by Judy Turner

Both Bastrop and Lockhart state parks have initiated "wildflower" hikes, which are more on the order of perambulatory botanical searches rather than more aerobic hikes that get you from point A to point B in X number of minutes. Judy Turner and I do a fair amount of off-trail scanning and backtracking. The Gotier Trace area of Bastrop State Park (not the public area) is a target area this spring. On our hikes there we have discovered not only the incredible display of flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*) among the loblollies (*Pinus taeda*) but are finding large populations of plants such as wild indigo (*Baptisia bracteata*), both along the park roads and along Gotier Trace. One surprise on the first hike came when we located a colony of puccoon (*Lithospermum incisa*). This discovery led to trading ideas about why this plant is showing up regularly this year in many places where we have not found it previously. Rain?

Yellow thistle (*Cirsium horridulum*) - Notice the thick lavender hairiness around the large bud.

Two interesting thistles were found on the Easter hike. One was our Texas thistle (*Cirsium texana*) and the other was yellow thistle—a humongous plant with a name that fits—*Cirsium horridulum*. We erroneously assumed this was an unwelcome invasive only to learn that it is a native North American thistle and is present in many of the lower 48.

Along Park Roads A and C many young yaupon trees (*Ilex vomitoria*) were in full bloom and the branches were so crowded with flowers that they were almost unrecognizable—chubby, even obese—and worth a stop for a close-up. Judy spotted a young tree in the early stages of leafing out in the same area. We declared it "Mystery Tree" since we were clueless as to its identify. We discovered antelope horns (*Asclepias asperula*) almost in bloom as we hopped out to look at the tree.

Alum Creek is at times a mere trickle, but this spring it's flowing strong enough to create an obstacle if one is wearing low-cut running shoes. With the "big pine" gone there was less reason to wade over, so we simply turned around.

Susan Barrie in our group spotted a violet on the orientation hike, which we were able to find again on the second hike. I know, violets sound like a common plant to some of you, but in central Texas they are somewhat unusual in any number. I am calling it the common blue violet (*Viola sororia*) instead of the Missouri violet (*Viola missouriensis*) mainly, and possibly erroneously, because the Missouri violet blooms earlier.

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Blooming, cont.

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Dewberry (*Rubus trivialis*)

One of the more spectacular arrays of conspicuous blossoms this year is due to dewberries (*Rubus trivialis*). With the white clouds of dogwood plus the dewberries, distant views down the trail resemble snow banks. (Hope the dewberries are plentiful—hmm, dewberry cobblers.)

As we left the area we stopped to visit our bug -eating plants. This sundew colony (*Drosera sp.*) seems to really like conditions near the parking area gate, as they have been there for years.

Texas hickory sapling (Carya texana) - photo by Judy Turner

As for the mystery tree? Thanks to Judy's identification, we now know it's Texas hickory (*Carya texana*).

Latin Studies 101.2
by Judy Turner

The most unusual of the translations is for the *Aslepias asperula*. Asclepius was the Greek god of healing and asperula refers to roughish leaves. I find the roughish leaves a little hard to accept, but then again, I almost never get past the wonderful flower heads! Most of the species names that seem to identify a state actually refer to a state—like texanum for Texas or missouriensis for Missouri. But *Cornus florida* (flowering dogwood) actually refers to floriferous or "Flowery Easter," not the state of Florida. What an appropriate find since all were in bloom and it was Easter! Another unusual translation—*Lithospermum incisum* is stone seed for Lithospermum and cut for incisum. Here's one all should recognize (and it's not *ilex vomitoria*), *Rubus trivialis* translates as brambles widespread. And they are!

Flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*) - photo by Judy Turner

Newsletter Deadline

Submission deadline for the next issue is June 19, 2015. 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.

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle . . . and Build a Greenhouse

By Jessica Snider and Steven Molloy

On a cool January morning, 29 Cub Scouts and 31 adult leaders from Pack 304 arrived at Neidig Elementary in Elgin, TX with over 5700 water bottles in tow. For months the group had been collecting single use 16 oz water bottles from their friends, families and schools. At an event in the fall, they prepared the water bottles by picking out the clean, similar sized ones, removing the lids and labels and cutting the bottoms off. This allows the bottles to be stacked one on top of the other on a string, wire or pole.

LPMN Debbie Gaston helps Scouts string plastic water bottles on wire to make greenhouses.

As the day warmed up, the adults from Pack 304, Capitol Area Council, BSA and volunteers from the Lost Pines Texas Master Naturalist started to build the frames of the greenhouses while the youth started to string the water bottles onto old telephone or electric wire. Because so many water bottles were collected, the scouts had enough water bottles to build two greenhouses. The greenhouses are 6 feet high, 8 feet long and wide enough so 10 to 12 students could work on tables inside of the structure.

Cub Scouts from Pack 304 help make a water bottle door.

The walls were each constructed as single units so that the greenhouses can be taken apart and moved if needed without losing all the water bottles. The youth and volunteers would string the wire through a predrilled hole at the bottom of wall, string the water bottles (about 15) on the wire and then string the wire through another predrilled hole at the top of the wall. Here the wire was secured taunt and tied off. Each row took 50 to 100 of these lines to create a semi-solid sheet of water bottles. This enables the greenhouse to retain heat but also breathe a bit in the hot Texas summers. Master Naturalists helped add extra cross bars on the windward sides to keep the walls on that side from becoming loose and sagging.

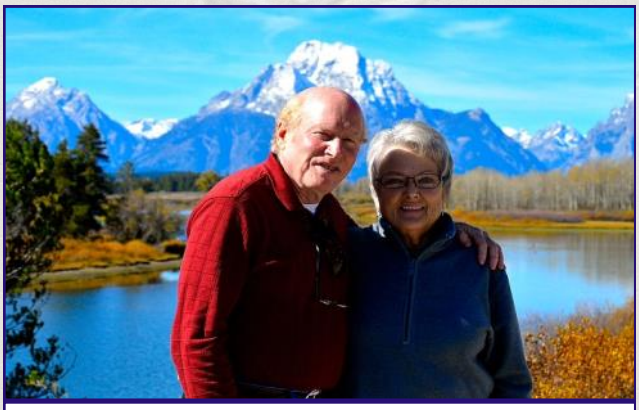
As the greenhouse walls were put together, the Cub Scouts began to understand why they had spent months collecting bottles. They tested the doors and walls by going in and out of the greenhouses and making faces at each other through the walls of plastic water bottles. The pizza lunch helped give time for everyone to admire their work before heading home.

The greenhouses are currently being equipped with benches by the school and will soon get the last part, the roofs. By reducing and reusing water bottles, the group was able divert the water bottles from the trash stream, reduce greenhouse gases produced in the recycling process and save over $200 in materials needed for the greenhouses. The buildings also helped the youth start to think about the different things that can be done with used water bottles, which include making buildings, flower pots and hanging gardens and decorations. Thank you to all Master Naturalist and Cub Scouts who helped with this project.

Cub Scout Pack 304 and LPMN volunteers pose in front of the two greenhouses they help build at Neidig Elementary School in Elgin. The men pictured built the frames while other volunteers help string and attach water bottles.

Meet Larry Gfeller
by Roxanne Hernandez

It's time to turn the tables on one of our most prolific contributors to the LPMN newsletter. Some of you may only know Larry Gfeller through reading his articles in this newsletter. Others of you know him as a contributing member of the LPMN board and/or as a fellow Bridge Maniac.



Larry and Kathleen Gfeller at Glacier National Park

Larry became an LPMN alumnus in 2011, the same year that his property, but not his home, was devastated by the Bastrop County Complex wildfire. How did that experience affect him? Larry said, "It was what it was. I felt disoriented and cheated at first, then remembered that life contains no guarantees and that beauty and loss run together." After brief consideration of moving away, he stayed, and now hopes to live long enough to see the pine forest regain its original beauty.

Read on for my conversation with Larry. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

You grew up in the farm country of the Midwest near Junction City, Kansas. Describe your early life in that rural environment.

My father was a farmer and my favorite childhood experiences all turned on farm life. As a small child I had the freedom to roam the creeks, woods and hillsides surrounding our farm with my dog. We left the farm before I was old enough to really experience the hard physical work it entailed because my father had heart trouble. As a teenager, though, I went back to the farm during summers to work on a former neighbor's farm.

My mother was a dime store clerk and a true pioneer woman. I remember watching her, as a little boy, cut a fish hook out of a tomcat's tongue with a paring knife while I held it down with a gunny sack. She taught me the value of mental toughness.

You earned a B.S. in Industrial Technology from Kansas State College and an MBA from DePaul University. You're also a Certified Financial Planner and Chartered Financial Analyst. How has your education shaped you?

The formal education you mention opened the doors to what was possible; informal education provided the confidence to walk through those doors. For example, the U.S. Army Airborne and Ranger School both showed me that the mind is infinitely more powerful than the body and, if it can be conceived, it can be done. Vietnam service taught me the difference between true valor and selfishness, the fragility of life and the venality of our political system.

Son Marc, daughter-in-law Laura and the three grandchildren

I remember the first time that I met you. You were dressed in a denim shirt and jeans. A short while into our visit Kathleen, who was dressed to the nines, entered. I was struck by the rather stark contrast between the two of you . . . denim and, well, definitely not denim. It reminded me of my parents, actually. Tell us a little about the two of you.

I met Kathleen at a fraternity/sorority dance. We married in 1969, the same year we graduated from college. She has singlehandedly moved our family many times, independently managed the family

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Larry, cont.

(Continued from page 6)

unit through all sorts of upheaval, and selflessly supported and advanced my career. She never gets the credit and she has endured much. She is a modern pioneer woman, tough and resilient. She is, and has been, my most effective therapist and best friend. She understands me better than I do!

We have one son, Marc, who was born in 1971 while I was in Vietnam. The Red Cross tracked me down in the mountainous jungle and I got a radio message in the middle of the night announcing his arrival. Marc has given us three grandchildren - two boys and a girl.

Tell us about your pets, past and present. From personal experience, I know Andy is a ham for the camera!

We have two male rescued Papillions, Andy and Jackpot. Andy is animated, creative, emotional and needy. He's my best friend, after Kathleen, but a little tyrant. Jackpot is easy going, laid back and enjoys every minute of his life, no matter the circumstances - a balance wheel.

Most of our married life Kathleen and I have had cats. Insolent, arrogant, smart—and they travel well. We both love animals and have an animal trust set up in our will because we expect to always have pets of some sort.

Andy (front) and Jackpot (rear)

How did you come to settle in Bastrop?

After 20 years in the U.S. Army, the only place we'd been Kathleen and I could agree on to live after seeing much of the nation was Texas. We picked Bastrop as a retirement location to get away from city life and return to a simpler lifestyle. Loblolly pines and the seclusion they provided were the main draws.

Several years ago you became my go-to man when I needed articles for various newsletters. I don't remember how I discovered your creative writing talent, but I do remember that once I discovered it I was going to capitalize on it to the extent you'd allow me. How did you get into creative writing?

I've always been more comfortable writing than speaking. One of my serious flaws is an inoperable brain/mouth interface - I speak first and think later. I started writing in earnest in 1991 in the form of a monthly newsletter for private investment clients. I continued writing it until 2013, just before selling my part of the practice and retiring. I found that I enjoyed when people read my stuff and said they looked forward to each monthly edition. I also enjoyed discussing typically tight-assed financial concepts in folksy, down home terms. It wasn't until you came along and introduced me to the Tahitian Village Pine Post and others looking for articles that I began writing about nature subjects. Hardly a day goes by now that I don't spend time at the keyboard.

I've noticed that you're a leader in a quiet way. You often give credit to others when the original idea was yours. You also prefer to work behind the scenes to help make things happen. Why is that?

I admire quiet competence and I dislike ostentatiousness or grandstanding. I like things that work. My most admired people are talented at accomplishing things through other folks. We all end up bones bleaching in the sun somewhere anyway; it's never really about us. I get great fulfillment when I can encourage others, especially when they have the pluck to push their own boundaries.

You grew up exploring a patch of rural Kansas and now spend most of your nature exploration time in Bastrop and Caldwell counties as a hike leader and Bridge Maniac with the LPMN. What attracted you to this particular educational and volunteer opportunity?

I joined the LPMN because I wanted to learn more about the Texas countryside. After the fire, I committed to doing what I could to interpret the fire for interested city folks. My business partner, employees and clients at

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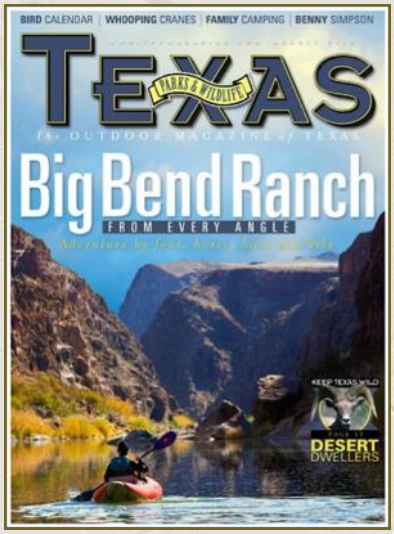
Brooks on Books The Magazines Issue

by Bill Brooks

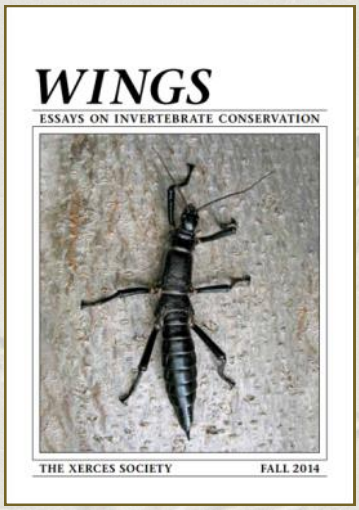
I subscribe to a number of magazines. Keeping up with all these publications is a lot of work but this is often the best way to stay current on any given subject. I don't take many academic journals; I'll leave them to the scientists. The ones I enjoy walk the line between science and popularism.



"Texas Parks & Wildlife" and "Texas Highways" are two of the most popular. They aren't totally natural history publications, but they usually include articles about our local flora and fauna. "Texas Parks and Wildlife" has more hunting articles and "Texas Highways" has more about tourist stops. Both are fun to read. (I've been taking "Texas Parks and Wildlife" since it was called "Game and Fish.") True Texans probably already subscribe to one or both of these magazines.

Two great publications that emanate from Austin are "Bats," a publication from Bat Conservation International, and "Wildflower," a publication of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. Both cover their respective subjects from a much larger perspective than just central Texas, but our home turf is well represented.

My invertebrate interests are mostly covered by "American Butterflies" and "Wings." "American Butterflies" is a beautiful magazine published by the North American Butterfly Association. The Xerces Society, which is dedicated to invertebrate conservation, publishes the little magazine "Wings." The topics are as varied as you might expect. It is so interesting that I usually read this one the day it arrives.



One of my newest subscriptions is to "American Currents," the publication of the North American Native Fishes Association. Every issue has several articles that really catch my eye. I hope to attend one of their conventions some day.

I take "Texas Books in Review," which is full of good writing and gives me heads -up reviews on new Texana (a term used to describe the history and culture of Texas) books.

To round out my list of publications, here are some recommended magazines that, though not directly related to natural history, sometimes have great surprises inside. Our local "Texas Co-op Power" is wonderful. I also love "Texas Monthly," "Texas Observer," and "Texas Caver." (Notice a trend here?)

I am especially looking forward to a couple of soon to be published articles. Michael Smith's article on venomous Texas snakes will be in the May edition of "Texas Parks and Wildlife." (Michael wants me to tell you that the article's title, "Venomous Vipers," was the magazine's idea, not his.) The June edition of "Texas Monthly" is publishing a major article on horned lizards. I have been consulting with UT graduate journalism student Alexander Dropkin for almost two and a half years on his article.

On a totally different subject, I'd like to point you toward my newest favorite art gallery in Austin. I recently discovered the Art Science Gallery, 916 Springdale Road, the Canopy Building 2, #103, Austin, TX. If you need science based art, John Abbott prints, or cross stitch bacteria kits this is your kind of a place.

Listening, cont.

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been heard or seen on the property. Roxanne laments, "My highest hope is that someday Houston toads will find our place desirable habitat and I can add them to the list, too." You can't always dictate which animals come on the property though, as feral hogs have recently made an appearance. It's all about providing supplemental food, water and shelter for the native critters and doing what you can to control the bad actors.

It's one thing to selfishly improve your own land, but quite another to be active in outreach and education for others, demonstrating how reclaiming the natural health and vigor of the land can improve everyone's quality of life. The Hernandezes frequently open their property as a confirmation site for best practices and research. A TPWD trial habitat assessment for development of the Houston Toad Programmatic Houston Toad Safe Harbor Agreement was conducted on their property. Our own chapter members were invited to participate in their first prescribed burn in 2012, and for most of us, it was the first one we'd ever seen. Both Elvis and Roxanne remain active in wildlife organizations, helping spread the word about the conservation value of reforestation and reestablishment of native grasses and plants.

Visitor to Rancho Zunzun

TPWD holds a gala awards banquet in Austin each year to recognize recipients of the Texas Lone Star Land Steward Award. Hundreds of people are invited to celebrate the best-of-the-best land stewards across the state. In addition, a professional video documentary is featured for each awardee, which is aired before the assembled group as each winner is presented. If you would like to view Elvis and Roxanne's video, just log onto YouTube and search for 'Hernandez' and 'Texas Lone Star Land Steward Award 2015.' While you're at it, take a look at Roxanne's video from 2013! Yep, she has won this award before—that time it was for her service as the Lost Pines Habitat Conservation Plan Administrator during the horrific Bastrop County Complex fires of 2011. It was the first (and only time since) that a government employee received the award for individual service. Pretty cool, huh?

Most of us want to be mindful stewards of our land, but it demands more than good intentions. It's a complex undertaking that requires careful thought and observation . . . not to mention a hell'uva lot of hard work. Roxanne related this vignette on one of their early experiences: "After we'd been on the property a year or perhaps less, we hired someone with a bulldozer to clear cedar from under the post oaks in the northernmost quadrant of the property. We now understand that we were very fortunate to not have killed those oaks through soil compaction and changes to the contour. Needless to say, we didn't hire a dozer after learning that, but instead went the gentler route of mulching. Perhaps the most important advice, though, is to keep plugging away. Land management isn't a sprint or even a marathon. It's a lifelong endeavor." Another takeaway: true long-term change takes a plan. Use the resources that are readily available. U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and extension services—they are all there for you, the property owner. Take advantage of them.

If there's a moral to this story, it's this: *You don't have to be a large property owner to help restore the resilient abundance that once was Texas.* Become native to *your* place. Touch the earth and quietly listen. Read the land. Make a plan. Do no harm. Sometimes we forget about the smaller things in life that really do make a difference. Don't have acreage? Plant a "pocket prairie" in your back yard!

Larry, cont.

(Continued from page 7)

the time couldn't fathom what had happened here, so I committed to doing what I could to interpret the fire for interested city folks. I enjoy exposing people to the power of nature through guided hikes. I also enjoy being a Bridge Maniac. I haven't experienced that special bond of comradery since Army days . . . they are very special folks and the only group of people I feel close to.

Surveying the post-wildfire landscape on the homestead

How would you describe yourself?

I am introverted but opinionated, meticulous about some things, indifferent about others, patient, stubborn and have a perverse sense of humor. I am a spiritual being, but not in the conventional way. I am a fatalist. I try to conserve my emotional energy by picking battles carefully, believing that man is largely incapable of controlling outcomes of nature. Despite this philosophy, in the face of failure I become driven, if not obsessive - contradicting my own creed. It's an enigma I still don't understand. When something matters, I am willing to go to uncommon lengths to do things others are often not. I appreciate and admire most all forms of art—another way of connecting—yet have no innate artistic talent myself.

I enjoy exploring, adventure, the smell of earth, forests, streams and rivers and all forms of wildlife. I love mountains and primitive wilderness. I appreciate even the smallest, most insignificant creatures. I consider animals to be mortals, just like me, with feelings, joys, sorrows and all the rest.

I draw energy from the beauty of nature and appreciating its interconnectedness. Energy flows also from being around singular individuals, and from writing.

What gives you the most . . . and least . . . hope for the future?

The most hope stems from my belief that evolution continues, regardless. My least hope stems from the belief that, as a species, man has the capability to make himself extinct. There was life before man and there can be life after. Our actions have consequences.

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A Message from Julia Akin, LPMN President

Seems I was just writing about the 2015 training class getting started, and now they're about to graduate! Past training classes have been given a year from graduation to attain their initial certification. We've challenged this class with achieving their initial certification by year-end, and they've risen to the occasion. In two months, class members reported over 200 volunteer hours and almost 10 hours of advanced training. They're making a difference: Trainee Kathryn Hedges drafted an application for approval of our training program as Continuing Professional Education for teachers through the Texas Education Agency; Bruce Siebert serves on the newly formed finance committee; Paula Weisskopf volunteered to seek out possible grant funding; Cate Radebaugh's beekeeping hobby has inspired chapter members to form a beekeeping interest group; and Carla Blakey is a weekly River Rat regular (just a few examples of class involvement). Bottom line—individually and collectively this is a formidable, motivated group that will help ensure our chapter's continued success and growth.

Another Chapter Award

As a result of our chapter's work at Lost Pines Nature Trails (LPNT), the LPMN won honorable mention among 370 Keep Texas Beautiful (KTB) affiliates in their 2015 Keep Texas Beautiful Awards. We were recognized in the Civic Organization Award category, which recognizes organizations across the state for their work to improve their community's environment and support the KTB mission. Lost Pines Chapter was the only Texas Master Naturalist chapter statewide to be recognized by KTB!

Please join me in congratulating and thanking Frank May and his crew of chapter River Rats—Cat May, Audrey Ambrose, Beverly Kithcart, Dave Hill, and Carla Blakey. Frank's personal work with Bastrop County officials, Keep Bastrop County Beautiful and BCWCID #2 (owner of LPNT) has brought significant community attention, support and resources to this wonderful natural area. The momentum and recent completion of improvements at the park are due to this group's unwillingness to allow the park to remain in the hands of drug dealers and vandals. Frank is working with area law enforcement to take back the LPNT and maintain it as the jewel that it is for Bastrop County's residents and visitors. Congratulations and thank you!!

We've moved our annual chapter picnic to coincide with the training class's graduation celebration (and hopefully take advantage of slightly "cooler" weather). The picnic is Saturday, May 23rd at the Buescher State Park Rec Hall at 11 am. Check postings on Meetup for details about the food and silent auction. I look forward to seeing you there!

Birding at Hornsby Bend from left to right are Madeline Hawley, Christian Hawley, Chrissy Wise, and Ann Callan. Anna Stalcup stands in front of Ann.

Frank May enjoying a walk amidst the fruits of his labor.

Snippets

FEEDING THE FAMILY
Contributed by Bill Brooks

Carolina chickadee (*Poecile carolinensis*)

Raising one clutch of Carolina chickadees requires 6,000 to 9,000 caterpillars ("Wildflower," the magazine of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, Spring 2015). The oldest known Carolina chickadee lived to 10 years and 11 months.

EYELASHES AREN'T JUST FOR MASCARA
Contributed by Bill Brooks

Dr. David Hu and some graduate students at the Georgia Institute of Technology measured the lashes of different mammals. They found that across a wide variety of mammals, eyelashes are always about one-third as long as the eye is wide, which, it turns out, is the ideal length for diverting airflow around the eye and reducing evaporation (nytimes.com, Feb. 24, 2015).

THE WORLD'S OLDEST BIRD?
Contributed by Bill Brooks

Sandhill crane (*Grus canadensis*)

Some evidence points to cranes as the oldest known bird species surviving on Earth. A crane fossil found in Nebraska, estimated to be about 10 million years old, is identical in structure to the modern sandhill crane. Though cranes and herons share some similarities in appearance, they're actually only distantly related. One of the easiest ways to distinguish the two is by their flight posture—herons fly with their necks curved and cranes fly with their necks straight.

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