

LOST PINES CHAPTER

Texas Master Naturalist



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Life After Sesame Street by Larry Gfeller

The very last wild eastern mountain lion was killed in the Smokies in the 1920s. Comanche Springs, a prolific spring on the legendary Comanche Trail outside Ft. Stockton once gushed more than 60 million gallons of water a day. Sadly, the springs went dry in the 1950s due to excessive groundwater pumping for agriculture. The last two wild Mexican wolves in Texas were killed in 1970. Today, less than 1% of the tallgrass prairies of the Great Plains remain. It is the most endangered piece of large ecosystem in North America. Right here in the Lost Pines region, less than 200 Houston toads were counted last year. Their habitat has been chopped up for development, crisscrossed by roads and disturbed by devastating wildfires, made worse by our ignorance of what a healthy ecosystem is.



Life goes on with fragile normality, seemingly more fragile every day. Will we ever find the insight, the wisdom or the will to think beyond our own personal self-interest? All life on this planet is fundamentally derived from our natural resources. As society becomes more urbanized, vital connections with nature are failing. Fury demands a fire—we must set out to build a proper fire in our younger generation.

This is a story about vision, audacity and persistence. It started as a bubbling forth, one of those pesky ideas swirling around Julia Akin's head, tugging at her for attention. It was just a glimmer. After visiting a neighboring TMN chapter, the concept took form and the idea burned brighter and brighter. The Goodwater Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists enjoyed a special connection with area children through a Junior Master Naturalist (JMN) program. What a brilliant way to embrace our mission!

Today, nearly three years later, LPMN has executed its first Junior Master Naturalist program.

Unfortunately, the program had to compete with many other presidential initiatives: revamping the basic training program, expanding relations with area parks, establishing a chapter mentorship plan. Finding time to even think about Junior Master Naturalists was near impossible in the early days. Sometimes, as

an addendum to other agendas, in other places, when the right people seemed to be present, the value of a JMN effort could be discussed and examined. These were hit-and-miss affairs but they slowly added to the general body of understanding that this might actually be a good idea. The effort didn't have much momentum, but it was beginning to grow legs.

Eventually, a loose grouping of interested LPMNs began running down ideas.

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Sesame Street, cont.

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Julia was the catalyst, putting in untold personal hours to set the direction. They queried Goodwater Chapter, they talked with State Headquarters, and they exchanged ideas. Impromptu meetings were stuffed in between other meetings, or tagged onto either end of chapter meetings. We're talking three or four people only . . . but they painted in bold, broad strokes, filling in strategic objectives and conceptual structure where only blank space existed before. This was shortly after graduation of the 2015 training class and volunteer enthusiasm was high. Such graduates as Kathryn Hedges, Kim Iberg, Tom Viets and Ben Kanten built the skeleton of our program—along with Kelly Alecci and Julia Akin. Others helped out when they could. There was just no way around it . . . the JMN project needed a leader if it was to become reality—and Julia could not be that leader (she already had a job).



In the summer of 2015 a stroke of good fortune occurred.

Kelly Alecci agreed to lead the JMN effort and it was at that point that things began to happen in rapid order. Kelly is a kid magnet. A recently hired teacher with two boys of her own, Kelly understands kids. Meetings were now scheduled, agendas were prepared, and a practical array of problems was identified. A reliable place to meet, the basic curriculum, finding chapter presenters . . . all important decisions to make. Yet, an even more critical decision was to do a practical test of the concept before rolling out a full curriculum. We would run a pilot program first. The potential impact of a successful JMN program was huge . . . we had to do this right. The initial target date of a September kick-off would have to be slipped.

Throughout that summer and fall everyone worked hard to put meat on the bones of the program.

Julia was present for many of the meetings but happily realized this group was self-motivated and well led. Teaching kids was what this really was about, a science unto itself. "Some of us have a natural dispensation for teaching older or younger, so we teach each other," Kathryn Hedges explained. We needed a method, a process, a consistent approach to education for this age group. The philosophy of Engage, Explore, Explain and Evaluate was adopted. Kelly was able to partner with the 'Beyond the Bell' program through Bastrop ISD's Cedar Creek Intermediate School, which gave JMN a place to meet and a source of potential recruits.

We were on a roll!



Meanwhile, sticky issues were, one by one, wrestled to the ground. Parental release forms, volunteer background checks, proper handling of medical emergencies, securing parental media permission, who can and cannot pick up the kids at day's end, developing a standard equipment box for each young naturalist, funding the project—the list was daunting. The start date would be slipped one more time to April 2016.

Meanwhile, LPMN chapter buy-in was essential. Without it, no matter how well conceived and organized, there could be no viable program.

This happened in spades! The JMN program was introduced and explained at chapter and board meetings; enthusiasm ran high. Momentum was building. The newly created Resource Development Committee, headed by Bruce Siebert, managed to call on prospective donors inside and outside the chapter, raising over \$1,000 in short order. Two commercial contributors, Designed Security, Inc. of Bastrop and Cal-Maine Foods, Inc. of Flatonia were particularly enthusiastic. Chapter members were recruited to develop and

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What's Blooming?

by Liz Pullman & Judy Turner

Very showy blue and purple flowers are blooming and have been for some time now. Judging from the number of questions (i.e., Do you know what this flower is?) that have been received over the past couple of months about big purple wild flowers, it has been a good year for all of them. We are looking at a family of monocots (look it up) named *Iridaceae* and this is the iris family. Did you think that iris only grows in planted flowerbeds and thrives so well that the corms often need to be separated annually and replanted (before they take over the flowerbed!)? Not so, we have several species of iris growing wild here in this part of Texas. Most are large and blue or purple and evoke a "Whoa, there" when a bloom is spotted at a distance along a path or roadside or while walking through a grassy open field.

A word about the iris family. There are at least 25 separate genera within the iris family, one of which is *Iris*. Confused now? So, a particular species within the iris genus like the Dixie iris would be identified as *Iridaceae - Iris hexagona*. Now, why do you suppose it's called that? Would it be flower shape? Or not! Other genera members include *Alophia*, *Calydorea*, *Crocus*, *Gladiolus*, *Herbertia*, *Nemastylis*, *Olsynium*, and *Sisyrinchium*. Many of these are native to Texas. The Lady Bird Johnson Center Wildflower database lists 58 species. The two most common genres are the *Sisyrinchium* and the *Iris*.

In reading Geyata Ajilvsgi's *Wild Flowers of Texas*, an interesting piece of history about the family showed up. Iris is one of the oldest cultivated plants known, allegedly brought to Egypt from Syria sometime between 1501 and 1447 BC. The corm (orris root) was dried and pounded into a powder and used medicinally or as an ingredient in cosmetics. Orris Root is still available for use in concocting potpourri from various flower petals, so we are told. Or, just perhaps, botanically inclined Egyptians really wanted some of those large gorgeous purple blossoms. Has it been successful as an ornamental horticultural plant? You bet. As of 2010, 30,000 iris cultivars and species names have been defined with their registration number or botanical diagnosis by the American Iris Society.

A Botanical Quiz for Lost Pines Master Naturalists

Here are photos of several blue and/or purple blooms. All are in the iris family except one. Can you find the one that is NOT in the iris family? Find the answer* on page 6.



Meet Audrey Ambrose

by Larry Gfeller

Jump-starting a chainsaw, a universally verboten unsafe act, can also be a provocative expression of confidence or strength. A standing start, firmly grasping the front handle of the saw, the other grabbing the starter rope handle, the sawyer's entire body explodes in opposite directions simultaneously—one arm moves up, the other moves down—with the saw suspended in the middle. If the motor is warm, it starts instantly; if cold, the process is repeated until total, absolute and irrefutable dominance over the machine is achieved. Hoo-ah!!

The first woman I ever saw do this was Audrey Ambrose, but then Audrey is no ordinary woman. In one role, she appreciates the subtle nuances of heirloom antiques and fine furniture; in another, she directs the sweaty, physical work of our Bridge Maniacs. She likes pretty things like lace and flowers, yet has a shop full of tools and machinery that is the envy of Bastrop County. Thoughtful to a fault, she never forgets a birthday and is always eager to help friends in need. While sentimental and quick to laugh, she will also fearlessly stand up to small-mindedness and demagoguery. A little shy on the surface but very competitive. Yes, Audrey is brimming with paradoxes. It's what makes her interesting.



Mom and daughters

After 30 years as a respected teacher and athletic coach, Audrey now lives on 18 acres of majestic loblolly pine forest outside of Bastrop. She was entranced: the property was purchased in 1997. "It reminded me of a state park, as beautiful as Colorado, but still in Texas!" she says. After retirement in 2011, she lived full-time on the property in a comfortable RV. Audrey built her dream home in 2014—the bond with her property has always been deep and personal, her refuge, her sanctuary. "Of all my life travels," she says, "it's still my favorite spot in the world." The quiet and seclusion allows getting lost in little pleasures, like wood working, tinkering, working around the property, and watching old movies. She also enjoys watching ducks on the pond, birds in the bird feeders, deer prancing by, pups chasing each other, and the last rays of evening sun fade behind the silhouetted pines.

Love of self, love of friends, love of life, and God . . . we depend on the hearts of others to learn the full measure of love. Audrey had the good fortune of doting parents; she was surrounded by affection. Born in Houston, Texas, Audrey and her sister were raised by adopted parents. The family lived in San Antonio and later moved to Worthington, Ohio, where Audrey spent her high school and college years. A loving family to this day, but missing her father who passed in 1996.

In Ohio she was exposed to a rich variety of experiences as a little girl, a well-rounded upbringing. "I had a great childhood," Audrey says. There were frequent family picnics, trips to parks, camping and hiking with the Girl Scouts, juxtaposed against museums, trips to the Indian mounds, the opera, and a house full of classical music. Audrey played violin in her high school orchestra and later with the local youth symphony. It is sincere appreciation for other people's art that enables paradox in each of us.

As a young girl, Audrey was drawn to sports and athletics. In high school, Audrey played field hockey, basketball and softball. Audrey also possessed an instinctive passion for the outdoors and all things natural (except snakes!). She enjoyed a progressive high school P. E. program which included canoeing, swimming, square dancing and archery. After graduation, she was accepted at The Ohio State University, the third

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Audrey, cont.

(Continued from page 4)

largest university campus in the United States. With one of the most storied sports programs in the nation, Audrey majored in physical education with an emphasis in coaching—it would define her working life.

At Ohio State she worked part time at the Recreation Center but found time to also play field hockey for her beloved Buckeyes! After teaching and coaching in Columbus, Ohio for two years, Audrey headed to Lubbock and Texas Tech where she earned a Masters in Sports Administration and Leisure Services, and a Masters in Business Administration. She then moved to San Antonio where she settled in for the next 28 years teaching and coaching. In her free time, she devoured continuing education courses in upholstery, quilting, welding, and wood working; thus was set the baseline for a lifetime of meaningful work and creative pursuits.

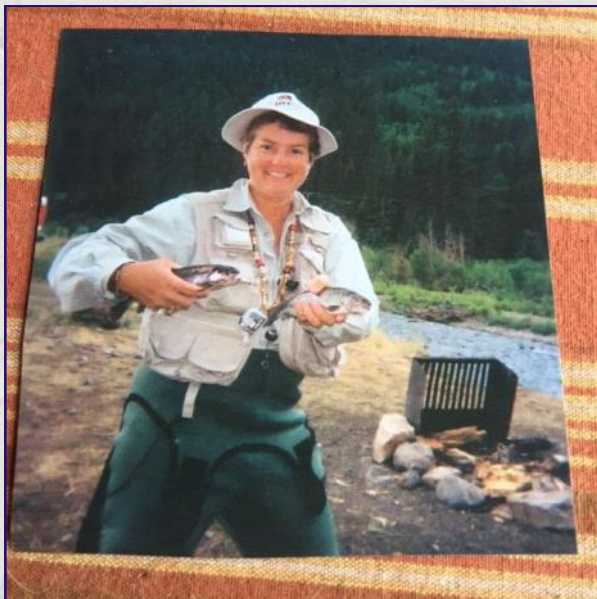
When you spend thirty years doing something, you get good at it . . . really good at it. During her tenure as teacher and coach, Audrey was consumed with developing young athletic talent. She coached tennis, basketball, softball and notched 28 years as girls' varsity High School soccer coach at two different schools.

In varsity soccer her career record was 444 victories, 135 losses, and 50 ties! She was named San Antonio Express News Coach of the Year eight times, her team was selected to the National



Champions

Soccer Coaches Association of America's (NSCAA) Top Twenty in the Nation twice, produced two NSCAA High School All Americans, and brought home eight district championships, seven regional championships and two state championships! Audrey's leadership skills landed her two terms as regional director of the Texas Association of Soccer Coaches Organization (TASCO), one term as president and she was named to the TASCO Hall of Honor in 2010. Soccer anyone?



Audrey is busier than ever in retirement. She is devoted to the art of “the deal” and loves to dicker. She can spend days at antique malls, auctions and flea markets. Audrey revels in finding bargains (used machinery, furniture, gizmos and devices), taking them home and fixing them up, then reselling them to nostalgic buyers. She is an authentic American Picker. She spent a fair amount of time in high school woodworking and metal shops. “I watched them build and create gorgeous things,” Audrey says. This desire to transform and create has followed her ever since. Today she watches Home and Garden TV, all the DIY shows and picks up objets d’art from her many artist friends. Although not claiming to be an artist herself—she really is (glass art and stained glass is her new niche).

Pets hold a special place in Audrey's heart, the more downtrodden and disadvantaged the better. To wit: Pet #1 (dog, AKA Little Bit), purposely laid down in front of Audrey's car, starving, hairless and covered with mange—at death's

(Continued on page 6)

Audrey, cont.

(Continued from page 5)

doorstep; Pet #2 (bigger dog, AKA Molly), put over Audrey's fence by previous owner, hot and hungry—she's still hungry; Pet #3 (cats rule, AKA Nikki) selected from a shelter in San Antonio—therapy for pets 1 & 2. A fine family!

Friends are special to Audrey too. Friends help her relax. Friends help define who she is. An avid fly fisherman, Audrey makes frequent trips with a tight group of lifelong girlfriends to Oklahoma, New Mexico and Colorado to keep her skills sharp—has been for years. She also has found close bonds within the Bridge Maniacs. Originally drawn by the infectious charm of Jim Estes, Audrey enjoys the satisfaction of shared hard labor, the menagerie of personalities and the aberrant optimism of this wacky group. It took a while for her shyness to pass . . . but today she is the leader. Did I mention she can jump start a chainsaw?

Audrey has been an active leader within our chapter from the outset. Graduating with the class of 2012, Audrey immediately stepped up as our chapter Vice President. Currently she heads up our Membership Committee—she organized and took on the daunting new Volunteer Management System. This was a monumental task requiring many people sifting through written records and archives dating back to our chapter's original charter. Through Audrey's recruitment of talented and dedicated people, the VMS conversion was one of the most successful in the state. But the favorite part of the membership position to Audrey is recognition of member achievements. Seemingly impromptu, she jokes and quips her way through what could otherwise be a stuffy and overly serious ceremony. "Membership," she says, "allows me to meet new people and celebrate their accomplishments, and reward their achievements." Audrey has served on the board of directors for nearly three years and has proved herself a respected advisor and mentor.

While she presents some seeming inconsistencies and surprises—mixed with old-fashioned values—there is something more to Audrey, like the soft center of a Tootsie Roll Pop. She fully enjoys where her life has taken her, whether quietly relaxing at home reading about old-time actors, fiddling in her shop, or hanging out with friends. It's been a life dedicated to infecting others with hope. Regarding the future, Audrey is lifted up by "Seeing young people get excited about life and watching them get involved in helping others." It's a formula that certainly has worked for her.



Little Bit and Molly



Audrey's dream house in the woods

Botanical Quiz Answers:

6. Prairie celestials (*Nemastylis geminiflora*)
5. Texas bluebell (*Eustoma exaltatum*)*
4. Prairie nymph (*Herbertia lahue*)

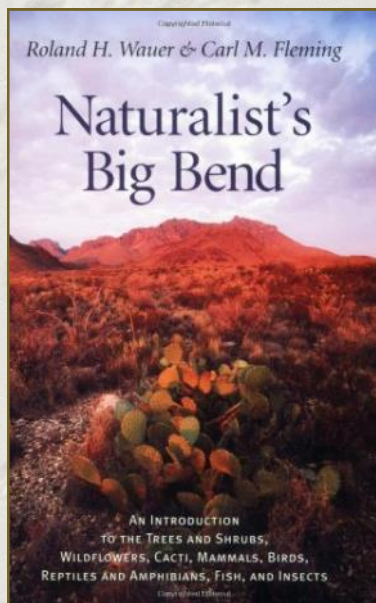
3. Prairie iris (*Alophia drummondii*)
2. Great blue flag (*Iris virginica*)
1. Blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium lanolaisii*)

Brooks on Books - A Vacation in Big Bend

by Bill Brooks

Summertime is the time of year many of us turn our thoughts to vacation getaways. A premiere desert escape is to the Big Bend region of West Texas.

I have been traveling to Big Bend since the early 1970s. Every time I go I plan to do something I haven't done before and I still haven't run out of things to do. Since 1991 when Texas opened up the Big Bend Ranch State Park there is a whole new 300,000 acres to explore. (There are over 800,000 acres in Big Bend National Park.)



Now a summer vacation in the desert seems a bit dubious. We have already missed the lovely spring time and the wonderful wildflower bloom in Big Bend with their 3-4 foot tall Big Bend bluebonnets. Fall is a great time to explore the area. Sometimes winter ice closes the road to the Basin campground and this is a not to be missed area. A secret time to visit Big Bend is in August. "August?" I can hear you say. Yes, August. It's the rainy season in West Texas. Afternoon showers cool off and green up the desert.

You can also regulate temperatures by where you are in the park. I spend cool mornings and evenings in the desert and during the heat of the day I retreat to the higher elevations of the Basin and the Chisos Mountains.

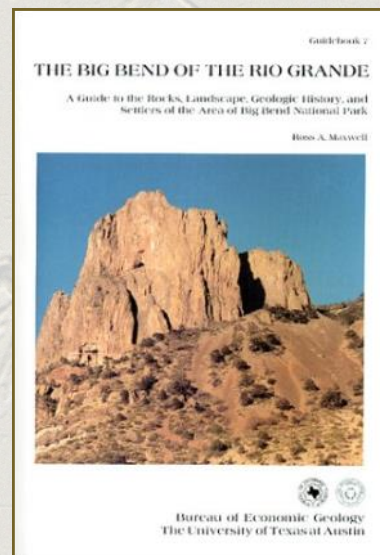
While in the park plan to spend some time at Panther Junction, the headquarters of Big Bend National Park. Stop by the numerous roadside exhibits, and drive to the Burton Warnock Museum on the east side of Big Bend Ranch State Park.

There are so many books on the Big Bend region. You can read these before or during your trip. I have over 28 volumes on the area. Here are some of my favorites.

My go to book on Big Bend always seems to be the old standard, "The Big Bend of the Rio Grande, A Guide to the Rocks, Geologic History, and Settlers of the Area of Big Bend National Park" by Ross Maxwell. It was originally published in 1968 but it has been reprinted many times. My copy was printed in 1979. This is a publication of the Bureau of Economic Geology, Guidebook #7. If you buy a used copy, try to find one with the geologic maps and the panoramic view of the Basin still in a pocket in the back of the book.

An updated guide is "Naturalist's Big Bend, An Introduction to the Trees, Shrubs, Wildflowers, Cacti, Mammals, Birds, and Reptiles and Amphibians" by Roland Wauer. Any book by ranger/author Roland Wauer is worth the price.

"A Road Guide to the Geology of Big Bend National Park" by Kerri Nelson (1992) is a helpful classic.



There are numerous other good Big Bend guides and biographies of the people who settled the area. My favorites are the ones authored and co-authored by long time west Texas rancher, Hallie Stillwell. She wrote "I'll Gather My Geese" in 1991 and "My Goose is Cooked" in 2004. In 1997 she co-authored with Virginia Madison an enlightening book, "How Come It's Called That? Place Names in the Big Bend Country." Although Hallie is long gone, you can still visit the Stillwell Ranch northeast of Big Bend National Park on FM 2627.

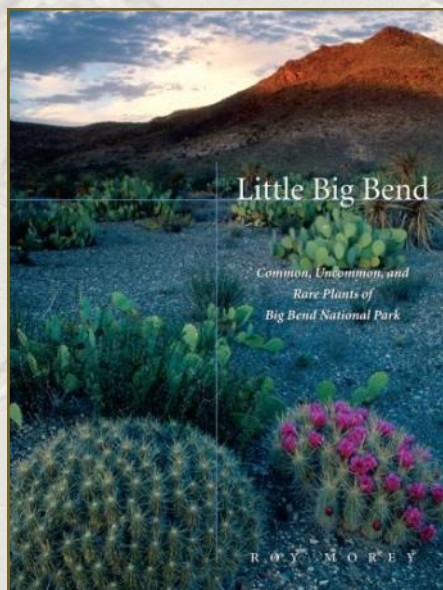
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Brooks, cont.

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When traveling along Hwy 90 to Big Bend, you should always stop at the travel center in Langtry. Here you can see the saloon (and court house) of Judge Roy Bean. The best book about him is "Vinegarroon, The Saga of Judge Roy Bean Law West of the Pecos" (1936) by Ruel McDaniel. If you can't find this original text, "Judge Roy Bean Country" by Jack Skiles is very good.

While you are in the area you may want to visit the Marfa Lights at the view park off Hwy 90 east of Marfa. James Bunnell has written several guides to the lights. I have "Seeing Marfa Lights, A Viewer's Guide" (2001) and "Strange Lights in West Texas" (2015).



You may also want to tour the McDonald Observatory. "Big and Bright, A History of the McDonald Observatory" (1986) by David Evans and Derral Mulholland gives you a good background on the place.

Depending on your interests you may want to take along some plant and animal guides. I suggest "Birds of Big Bend National Park and Vicinity" (1973) by Roland Wauer or "Birds of the Trans Pecos" (1998) by Jim Peterson and Berry Zimmer. However, I don't care for the illustrations in either book. The "Frogs and Toads of Big Bend National Park" (2007) by Gage Dayton, R. Skiles, and L. Dayton covers the topic well. "Ecology of the 18 Species of Chiroptera at Big Bend National Park, Texas" by David Easterla, Ph.D. is a scholarly paper on bats published by the Northwest Missouri State University Studies (1973). "Butterflies of West Texas Parks and Preserves" (2002), another book by Roland Wauer, is very good.

For plants you may want to take along "Cactuses of Big Bend National Park" (1998)

by Douglas Evans. This book has great photographs. "Ferns and Fern Allies of the Trans-Pecos and Adjacent Areas" (2002) by S. Yarborough and A. M. Powell has good range maps. My latest book, which I bought early this summer at the Warnock Center, is "Little Big Bend, Common, Uncommon, and Rare Plants of Big Bend National Park" (2008) by Roy Morey. This lovely put together book covered most of the plants I saw.

Finally, while I'm traveling I like reading something quick and funny. Blare Pittman's "Tales from the Terlingua Porch" (2005) fills this bill. This fellow can write a comic yarn. On my last trip I bought "More! Tales from the Terlingua Porch" (2009) and I'm looking forward to this volume, too.

Read on and enjoy!



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.

Volunteer of the Year

by Larry Gfeller

"The activist is not the man who says the river is dirty. The activist is the man who cleans up the river." ~Ross Perot

It happened on June 22nd, one of those typical steamy afternoons in the Houston suburbs. Inside the Marriott Sugarland Town Square Hotel in Sugarland, Texas, Frank May sat amongst a packed audience nervously calculating his survival chances, like a dog facing a rolled up newspaper. Public appearance is not Frank's favorite recreation. It was the 49th Annual Keep Texas Beautiful Conference awards ceremony. His stomach was in knots, his palms sweaty. In just a few short minutes, he knew he would be standing in the spotlight before a sea of strangers as Volunteer of the Year for the state of Texas, 2016. That's right. The WHOLE damned state!

The local non-profit, Keep Bastrop County Beautiful (KBCB), is an affiliate of the statewide organization dedicated to inspiring individuals and businesses to improve their community and the natural environment. As the principal driving force behind restoration of the Lost Pines Nature Trails, Frank May had been on the radar of KBCB leadership since long before the Bastrop River Rally in 2015.

Each year, local affiliates all over Texas make nominations for state recognition in three broad categories. When it came time for KBCB to select their nominee for Volunteer of the Year, Frank was their man.

The mission of Keep Texas Beautiful is to educate and engage Texans to take responsibility for improving their community environment. The organization emphasizes litter prevention, beautification and waste reduction. Frank May as Volunteer of the Year was a perfect fit, like lock and key. "It was Frank's passion for the preservation of these areas that inspired the community to advance the cause and improve their neighborhoods," read the award citation.

Awkwardness sometimes cannot be escaped; the time had arrived. Public ceremony is oftentimes more enjoyed by the public than by those being recognized. With the self-possession of a Buddha, Frank stepped up on stage along with a handful of other statewide award recipients and smiled broadly. Camera flashes exploded and the crowd applauded loudly . . . it was like a shot of scotch – warm, sudden and over with. He had survived! Frank was now free to go on about the rest of his life.

How did he go from ordinary Lost Pines Nature Trails volunteer to Volunteer of the Year for all of Texas? He did it by stepping up to lead, by caring, by demonstrating success, by educating others, by engaging others. He also did it by working hard to build coalitions from neighborhood organizations, county government and law enforcement. It didn't hurt that he was present at government meetings to ensure the fledgling effort had a voice—and a persuasive one at that. Through sheer force of personality Frank transformed people from disinterested observers into committed team players—one person at a time. Go on about the rest of his life—indeed!

LPMN is very proud of you, Frank May. Congratulations!



Frank and Cat May

Sesame Street, cont.

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deliver JMN presentations on plants, birds, mammals and rocks—with a field trip featuring aquatic ecology and fishing. Distinctive T-shirts boasting “Junior Master Naturalist (# in training)” were procured, along with individual journals, hand lenses, field guides and clipboards—the program was ready for prime time!

By March of 2016, applications were taken and final plans for a pilot launch of the program held firm.

Eleven 5th & 6th graders made up our first training class. Everyone was curious how the kids would react . . . they were as serious as hogs on ice! Nature fanatics, these kids! Heads buried in journals, elbows and pencils flying, they couldn't get enough. These young minds, like a good bonfire, burned hot and completely. Whether it be searching for tracks in the sand, stroking a raccoon pelt in awe or pulling tiny critters from the turbid waters of the Colorado River, there is no question the JMN Committee nailed it. Now the task is to find ways to integrate these young initiates into our chapter. We are considering using some of them as assistant hike leaders in our public interpretative hike program. You have ideas—we'd love to hear 'em!

Through all the starts and stops, the obstacles to be overcome, from initial conception to successful conclusion—this infant program cries out for your help. The grand scheme calls for evolving it into a full-blown two-year curriculum, feathering into the traditional September-to-May school year.

It's an ambitious undertaking and will require more dedicated LPMN participants, a formal budget, more funding and more targeted publicity to execute well. We need planners, educators, assistants, logisticians, community relationship people, public speakers, writers and photographers. Like any start-up, there's a lot of sweat equity involved, but the payoff has already been shown valuable beyond measure. These are lifetime connections that are being forged. These kids will end up being parents who pass along a love of the outdoors. By devising ways to keep them exposed to nature throughout their development, we not only strengthen our chapter, we strengthen our communities. That there is a real demand for this type of community outreach is no longer in question. It's there, baby.



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, caldwell-tx@tamu.edu

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

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



Bill's Snippets

RHINOCEROSES

There are five species of rhinoceros. Three of those species — the Java, Sumatran and black rhino — are categorized as critically endangered by the [International Union for Conservation of Nature \(IUCN\) Red List of Threatened Species](#).



KEMP'S RIDLEY

The Kemp's Ridley sea turtle is the state sea turtle of Texas. It's the smallest of the sea turtles and nests almost exclusively in the Gulf of Mexico.

["Scientists estimate that as many as 167,000 sea turtles" \[of various species and\] "of all ages were killed during the" \[Deepwater Horizon Oil Rig\] "disaster."](#)

SMALL BRAINS, BIG PUNCH

Birds' brains may be small, but they pack more neurons related to intelligence than many mammals with larger brains, a new study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences suggests. Researchers used an isotropic fractionator to measure the number of neurons in regions of birds' brains and found that many songbirds and parrots packed more neurons in their brains than did primates. ([Washington Post](#))



OUR STATE SHELL

The Lightning Whelk became the state shell in 1987. It is found only on the western coast of the Gulf of Mexico. This cone spirals counter-clockwise unlike most shells. ("Symbols of Texas" by Eric Pohl, "Texas Highways" magazine, March 2016, pg. 55)

[Find a full list of legislature designated state symbols.](#)

THAT TAIL

In warm weather a rattlesnake can vibrate its rattle eighty-six cycles per second. It is capable of vibrating for up to 3 hours. The shaker muscle uses the oxygen it receives from its blood so efficiently that if the human leg muscles were as efficient we could complete a twenty-six mile marathon in less than nine minutes. ("America's Snake, the Rise and Fall of the Timber Rattlesnake" by Ted Levin, pg. 7)

THAT'S SOME PECAN TREE

The champion Pecan Tree in Texas is just north of Weatherford. The diameter is 8', crown spread 159', and the height is 118'. The Finch family allows visits. ([dirtdoctor.com](#))



MICROBES

[According to a new estimate](#), there are about one trillion species of microbes on Earth, and 99.999 percent of them have yet to be discovered.

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Snippets, cont.

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ANCIENT BEER

Barley might have been the "secret ingredient" in a 5,000-year-old beer recipe that has been reconstructed from residues on prehistoric pots from China, [according to new archaeological research](#).

SPITTING FISH CAN LEARN

Fish can recognize human faces, according to a [new study published in Scientific Reports](#). Scientists worked with archerfish because they spit at specific targets, making their choices clear. The researchers showed the animals images of human faces and trained them to spit at a specific picture. The fish were able to pick specific faces from up to 44 others with a high degree of accuracy.



THE STATE OF THE MONARCH

Mexico has seen an increase in the number of overwintering Monarch butterflies in 2015, according to the World Wildlife Fund Mexico. "The estimate of 150 million



butterflies is an increase from the last two years (the two lowest years on record) but still far below the number that scientists consider sustainable. Four hectares (10 acres) were occupied this year; researchers estimate that there are approximately 37.5 million monarchs per hectare. The numbers of butterflies is still well below the target of 225 million monarchs overwintering in Mexico set by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service." ("Signs of Hope for the Monarch Butterfly?" pgs. 28-29 in ["Wings" Spring 2016](#))



Newsletter Deadline

Submission deadline for the next issue is August 19, 2016. 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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