

Texas Master Naturalists ROLLING PLAINS

NEWSLETTER

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Jackrabbit Country

Written by Terry McKee

While out near Charlie on a desolate county road in late June, Debra Halter and I were treated to the sightings of several Jackrabbits browsing in the fields. We watched as one dug in the dirt, found a root and proceeded to chew it up. I hadn't seen jackrabbits in several years, so it was really exciting to get a good look at one.

The Black-tailed Jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*) is not a rabbit, but a hare. Hares live in open area and rely on running in a zigzag pattern to escape their predators. Hares are also precocial, meaning they are born with hair and eyes open. Rabbits are born blind and helpless, and live in burrows. Unlike a rabbit, the jackrabbit makes no nest and the young can fend for themselves after two weeks. They reach sexual maturity in eight months

Their diet includes forage crops, sagebrush, mesquite and grasses. Because of a preference for sparsely vegetated areas, this species often concentrates in pastures overgrazed by livestock. An interesting fact I



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JULY 7: Rolling Plains Chapter monthly meeting is at River Bend Nature Center. **Location:** 2200 3rd Street, Wichita Falls, Texas. **Time:** 7:00 PM. **Program:** Paul Dowlearn will lead a nature walk. Be sure to bring your mosquito spray!!!

JULY 18: Butterfly count **Location:** Arrowhead State Park. **Time:** 7:00 AM. Meet at the park headquarters

JULY 25: Under Cover of Darkness **Location:** Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge **Time:** 8:00 PM. Participants will have an opportunity to learn about night-time activities of wildlife. Reservations required (580) 429-2197.

AUGUST 1: Deer Fest **Location:** MPEC **Time:** TBA We will have a booth that will need volunteers to man.

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER: Bugling Elk Tours **Location:** Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge **Time:** TBA The tours will take participants into the refuge's Special Use Area during the height of the elk mating season, a unique opportunity for wildlife viewing. At this time of year the bull elk compete for available females to form their harems. Members from the Association of Friends of the Wichitas serve as Interpretive guides for the tours. Reservations required (580) 429-2197.

found is that due to the tough vegetation jackrabbits eat, its appendix serves as a pre-digesting chamber to start breaking down these food sources before they reach the stomach. Once the food is expelled from the system they have two different kinds of scat. The first is a soft, moist, mucous-coated sphere. The jackrabbit eats these droppings which are high in protein and certain B vitamins that are formed by bacteria in the intestines. After passing through the digestive system again, the waste is deposited as a dry dropping.

A Black-tailed jackrabbit weighs between four and eight pounds, with the female being larger than the

male. Those large ears can be from 4 to 7 inches long. When alarmed a jackrabbit can hop 5 to 10 feet at a time with an extreme bound up to 20 feet. They can achieve speeds of up to 40 mph. Their quick reflexes are effective against predators of which they have many. Natural enemies of the hare include large birds of prey and coyotes, fox, mountain lion, bobcats and badgers.

Keep your eyes open for these denizens of the west as you travel down country roads in the morning and at twilight and perhaps you, too, will get a glimpse of this interesting critter.

Raising a Buzz for Bees and Butterflies

Wildlife advocates praise role of pollinators during National Pollinator Week, June 15 - 21

AUSTIN— The Lone Star State is celebrating birds, bees, butterflies and bats this week in celebration of National Pollinator Week, which signifies the importance of pollinators to not only the ecosystem, but to the economy.

“Now, more than ever, people are recognizing the importance of pollinators to the wellbeing of ecosystems and our economy; as well as, the easy steps we can all take to protect these important species,” said Ben Hutchins, TPWD Invertebrate Biologist. “Roughly one third of all the food we eat is because of pollination that happened in a farmer’s field

Annually, bee-pollinated crop are estimated to add more than \$15 billion to the U.S. economy. In North America, most plant pollination is carried out by bees, and the act of pollination itself is a service worth an estimated \$3 billion annually.

This cause is getting high profile support. Last month, Governor Abbott signed a proclamation marking June 15-21 at Pollinator Week in Texas.

“Pollinators come in all shapes and sizes,” said Gov. Abbott in his proclamation. “While the iconic honeybee is the most well-known, moths, wasps, beetles, butterflies and birds share the load of spreading the pollen that helps plants grow healthy and strong. These creatures help maintain a beautiful and healthy ecosystem.”

Unfortunately, bee populations around the country, both native and introduced have been suffering some worrisome declines related to competition with non-native species, loss of habitat, weather, and disease. Researchers and beekeepers across the United States have reported the loss of 30-40% of honey bee colonies, with some localized areas experiencing even more loss.

Wild, native bee populations are harder to monitor, but researchers continue to report widespread decline in native bee species, including the probable extinction of several species.

But news isn’t all bad. Big things are happening at local, state, national, and multi-national levels, giving pollinator conservationists a cause for optimism.

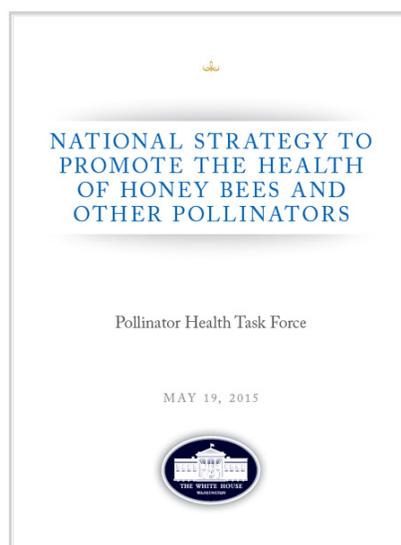
Last February, President Obama met with his Mexican and Ca-

nadian counterparts at a North American Leaders Summit. The three leaders agreed to form a tri-national working group to identify conservation needs for an iconic pollinator that is close to the hearts of Texans: the monarch butterfly.

TPWD Executive Director Carter Smith is serving as the state wildlife agency representative on a high-level

working group comprised of representatives from multiple federal agencies and non-government organizations tasked with creating a national monarch conservation plan. Similarly, TPWD is creating a state monarch conservation plan to identify current conservation needs and efforts that entities throughout the state can join in to conserve habitat much needed for the monarch butterfly migration.

“Though the threats facing pollinating insects are substantial, I’ve never seen so much public interest in the protection of invertebrate species,” said Hutchins. “If our pollinators are to recover from the declines that we’ve been witnessing, it will be thanks to the efforts of not only federal and state agencies, but individual Texans doing their part to make Texas a more pollinator-friendly environment.”





The last time a new type of cloud was officially recognized by the UN's World Meteorological Organization was in 1951, but these choppy seas in the sky called Asperatus clouds could be next. They are believed to form under the same conditions as mammatus clouds but then strong winds shear the undersides of the mammatus clouds to form undulating waves instead of pouches.



A honey badger's skin is thick and tough enough to resist dog bites, and porcupine quills; loose and flexible to allow the badger to turn and attack any animal that grasps it.

Trees live forever-sort of. Many plants grow from seed and then die back in a single year. But trees and shrubs don't have a fixed life span. One bristlecone pine in Nevada is over 5000 years old.



New Invasive Species Discovered in Texas

In May, the observant eyes of landowners led to the discovery of a new non-native and potentially invasive species in Texas. Dennis and Denise Johnston came across a wildflower they hadn't seen before on their ranch in Burnet County. Curious, the couple enlisted the help of Bill Carr, a Texas botanist at Acme Botanical Services. Mr. Carr identified the plant as blue hound's tongue, *Cynoglossum creticum*. This plant has been identified in the U.S. only once before, in southwestern Missouri. It is native to the Mediterranean area, and has the potential to be invasive, having caused problems in pastures in some parts of the world. While a quickly organized pulling party spent three hours removing enough to fill two pick-up truck beds, there is still much remaining on not only the Johnston's property but neighboring ones as well. Plans are being formulated to attack the plant next Spring.

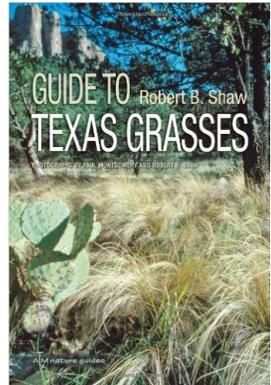


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RESOURCE CORNER

Guide to Texas Grasses
 by Robert B. Shaw, Paul M Montgomery (Photographer)
 Paperback: 1096 pages
 ISBN-10: 1603441867
 Price:\$40.50

In this new, complete *Guide to Texas Grasses*, Robert B. Shaw and the team at the Texas A&M University Institute of Renewable Natural Resources provide an indispensable reference to the world's most economically important plant family. After discussing the impact of grass on our everyday lives as food, bio-fuels, land restoration, erosion control, and water become ever more urgent issues worldwide—the book then provides: a description of the structure of the grass plant; details of the classification and distribution of Texas grasses; brief species accounts; distributional maps; color photographs; plus black-and-white drawings of 670 grass species—native, introduced, and ornamental. Scientific keys help identify the grasses to group, genera, and species, and an alphabetized checklist includes information on: origin (native or introduced); longevity (annual or perennial); growth season (cool or warm season); endangered status; and occurrence (by ecological zone).



Guide to Texas Grasses is a comprehensive treatment of Texas grasses meant to assist students, botanists, ecologists, agronomists, range scientists, naturalists, researchers, extension agents, and others who work with or are interested in these important plants.

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