

Texas Master Naturalists ROLLING PLAINS CHAPTER

NEWSLETTER

Vol. 8, No. 11

<http://txmn.org/rollingplains>

November 2016

Texas Horned Lizard Survey

report by Lynn Seman, photos by Paula Savage

On October 15, Pete Peterson, Paula Savage, and I headed outside of town on highway 79 to conduct an out-of-season Texas Horned Lizard (THL) Survey. Most Texas Horned Lizards will begin to hibernate in September/ October to March/April. The temperature on Saturday afternoon reached a warm 88°F which prompted this attempt to spot some of the little critters. The landowner had recently found hatchlings on her Archer county property that has a noted history of supporting horned lizards.

During our outing, we observed about several imported fire ant dens which are a detriment to horned lizard survival. Texas Horned Lizards almost primarily eat the native red harvester ants from the genus *Pogonomyrmex* which consequently compete with the invasive fire ants to survive. Fortunately, we found at three healthy red harvester ant (Pogos for short) dens on the property which were marked for location.

Although we did not find any THLs for this survey, we did find a plains leopard frog, a six-lined racerunner lizard, and a Texas spiny lizard. Being

this late in the season, we didn't really expect to find any horned lizards, but we enjoyed the survey and are looking forward to more next spring.

In the spring, we plan on starting a series of Texas Horned Lizard surveys at several locations in our area. The survey will consist of walking a transect at the locations and counting, GPS locating, and reporting the data to Texas Parks and Wildlife. The plan is to visit each location at least five times from March to September of 2017.

If you are interested in helping with the surveys, please contact me at the email address below:



rlynnseman@gmail.com



LOCALS

NOVEMBER 1: Rolling Plains Chapter monthly meeting is at River Bend Nature Center. **Location:** 2200 3rd Street, Wichita Falls, Texas. **Time:** 7:00 PM. **Program:** Sue King will speak on the Great Birding Classic adventure that she, and Warren King and Penny Miller conducted as the Wichita Wingmen.

NOVEMBER 2-4: Quail Dissection **Location:** Kirby Middle School **Time:** 8:00am to 11:00am. See Lynn Seman for more details. *This is a volunteer opportunity.*

NOVEMBER 5: Beavers Don't Eat Fish **Location:** RiverBend Nature Center **Time:** 9:30 - 11:30 a.m. Lynn Seman will conduct this workshop.

NOVEMBER 7: Rolling Plains Pecan Clinic **Location:** RiverBend Nature Center **Time:** 5:00 - 8:30 p.m. Cost is \$15, paid at the event. PLEASE RSVP BEFORE NOV. 4TH or call with questions at 940-716-8610. *This clinic has been approved for advance training.*

Congratulations!

The following members of the Rolling Plains Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist have received their recertification award: Penny Miller and Betty Bowles. Pete Peterson in attaining his initial certification requirement.

Late Whooping Crane Migration Expected in Texas

The iconic, endangered whooping crane has embarked on its annual fall migration and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) is reminding Texans to expect these impressive birds to be moving through the state in the weeks ahead as they travel to wintering

grounds along the Texas coast.

During their migration, whoopers often pause overnight in wetlands for roosting and agricultural fields for feeding, though it is rare for them to remain in the same place for more than one night.

“It appears it will be another late migration, so we are estimating the peak of migration in Texas likely won’t be until early to mid-November,” stated Wade Harrell, United States Fish and Wildlife Service’s whooping crane recovery coordinator.

Waco Mammoth National Monument

by Terry McKee



June McKee, Debra Halter and I were in Waco the other day when we saw a sign announcing Waco Mammoth National Monument. We were intrigued and decided to visit. The monument sits on 100 acres of woodlands along the Bosque River. It is a new member of the National Park System having been established in 2015.

When most of us hear the word mammoth, our thoughts turn toward the Woolly mammoth. Although Texas was also in the grip of the Ice Age, the mammoth found in our area was the Columbian mammoth (*Mammuthus columbi*). This animal inhabited North America during the Pleistocene Epoch and was found from Southern Canada to Costa Rica.

In 1978, two young men searching for arrowheads and fossils near the Bosque River stumbled upon a large bone eroding out of a ravine. Recognizing the unusual nature of the find, they removed the bone and took it to Baylor University’s Strecker Museum (predecessor to the Mayborn Museum Complex) for examination.

Strecker Museum staff quickly organized a team of volunteers and excavation began at the site. Between 1978 and 1990, the fossil remains of 16 Columbian mammoths were discovered. Their efforts uncovered a nursery herd that appears to have died together in a single natural event. Between 1990 and 1997, six additional mammoths were excavated, including a large male (bull). Crews also uncovered the remains of a Western camel (*Camelops hesternus*), dwarf antelope, American alligator, giant tortoise, and the tooth of a juvenile saber-toothed cat (*Smilodon* sp.), which was found next to an unidentified animal.

Scientists from Baylor University and many other institutions have conducted research on such topics as

the age of the fossils, what plants the animals ate, and the circumstances under which they were trapped and buried. How the mammoths died is still a mystery. No evidence of human involvement has been found, and many of the remains were not disturbed by scavengers. One of the first hypotheses was that the animals all perished in a flash flood. However, recent research has indicated that between 65,000 and 72,000 years ago, a nursery herd of at least 19 mammoths were trapped and drowned by rapidly rising flood waters from the Bosque River. A camel also appears to have been trapped by this flood. Subsequent floods buried the remains. Some years later, an unidentified animal associated with a juvenile saber-toothed cat died and was buried. And, finally, another flood event occurred which trapped and killed the bull, juvenile and female mammoths.

The current excavation site is protected by a state-of-the-art climate-controlled building. A life-size painting of the bull mammoth makes it easy for kids



and adults to compare size. The bull mammoth in the excavation site is laid out below with the 16 foot tusks very prominent.

This would make a good family outing. The park staff are very knowledgeable. The walk to the building was very easy. Admission was only \$5. Overall, we were glad we saw the sign and made a quick stop to check it out. Little gems of nature are scattered throughout our state just waiting to be discovered.

Report on the 2016 Annual Texas Master Naturalist Meeting

by Larry Snyder

Judy and I just returned from the 2016 Annual Meeting held at La Torretta Resort on Lake Conroe. It was a really fine venue for the conference and was very well attended. Michelle reported it was the largest attended conference to date. I attribute that to the location. Some of the larger chapters are, of course, very close to this location.

I won't bore you with all of our activity but will give you some of the highlights. First, we were boarded in a Golf Cottage. We had a nice view from our patio albeit some very uncomfortable patio seating. The first night we were entertained by an Osprey and blue birds ... lots of blue birds. The second night we had a bald eagle perch in a nearby pine tree and consume its meal of fish. The last day Amanda, our quail study leader, pointed out a peregrine falcon perched on a hotel tower ledge. While in the area we visited Brazos Bend State Park and Washington on the Brazos. Both very interesting places.

Friday morning Judy and I attended a four-hour course called Texas Waters Day. This class was outside the conference classes. This is the first step in becoming a certified Texas Waters Specialist. We were given 8 books for the chapter and I'm going to give them to Terry for her to pass out to those interested. The book will soon be available in PDF format. As soon as we get more information on this program and volunteer opportunities the information will be passed along to everyone.

The more interesting conference classes we attended were the field trips. On Friday afternoon we travelled to Cook's Branch Conservancy. What a beautiful place and the work they are doing there is fantastic. We saw hundreds of acres of prairie that's been restored to beautiful little blue stem grassland, just gorgeous! The entire conservancy covers 6,500 acres.

Don't bother to try and get in. It's very, very private. They track a lot of critters there, especially the red-cockaded woodpecker. An unusual woodpecker species that, unfortunately, we didn't see. But we did visit a nesting area. Here's a link to an article about the conservancy: <http://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/article/Mitchells-restore-land-to-pre-settlement-condition-3604887.php>

On Saturday afternoon we trekked out to Sam Houston National Forest and walked the trail with a couple of TPWD biologists. While there we did a lot of iNaturalist observations as well as learn a lot about the local grasses and trees.

Sunday morning, I attended a three-hour class on the volunteer management system. There are some changes that they hope to get implemented for us. Some will make your VMS experience much better and some will make the administrators work much easier. I'm for both ... I hate the log book view you get as a user. If they're able to get the changes they plan completed it'll be a lot, I mean a LOT better. They did say the Feds were happy with what they can get from the program, so if the Feds are happy, everybody is happy. They also asked everyone to remember we're working with a round-peg, square-hole scenario.



Next year's conference will take place from October 20, 21, and 22, 2017. It'll be held in Corpus Christie. The site went by so fast in the slide show I couldn't copy it down but it looked pretty nice. Judy says she's 99% certain it's the Omni in Corpus. Another long trek for us northern chapters but I hope you'll plan to attend. This year the only chapter attendees were Judy, Maryruth and myself. So plan ahead, take some time off and come on down. Being on the coast it should really be interesting and an opportunity to learn about the natural area that we don't often get to experience.

Next year's recertification pin was announced. It'll be the Kemp's Ridley Turtle. They also announce a new milestone award, a 15,000-hour pin. I'll never have to worry about that.

We entered our scrapbook and we had a few entries in the photo contest. We didn't win in any category. There were some really nice entries and I think each winner was well deserved.

I was asked to appear in a video about the conference. I hope I represented the chapter well, I tried. I told the videographer that she could always edit it out if she wanted to. She said it was "perfect." I doubt that ... we'll see.

Mount Olympus on Mars is the largest known volcano in the Solar System. It's almost three times as tall as earth's Mount Everest.



When it comes to evolution the surprise front-runner is the tuatara. This reptile, endemic to New Zealand, split off from the rest of the reptiles some 200 million years ago and is the only surviving member of the sphenodontia, ancient reptiles that lived alongside the dinosaurs.



The Caribbean reef squid can fly above the ocean surface for up to 33 feet. This predator-dodging behavior was observed for the first time as recently as 2010. It dies after reproducing.

TPW Television Series

Oct. 30 Nov. 5, 2016

Biking Tyler, Desert Skies & Charlie's Cannon

Bike between the tall trees at Tyler State Park. View the vast skies of the Trans-Pecos in black & white. Meet a man with a cannon, and a purpose.



November 13-19, 2016

Coastal Birds, Horned Lizards & Desert Plants

Travel with some dedicated birders along the Texas coast. Biologists work to restore the Texas Horned Lizard to its historic range. The plants in Big Bend may be prickly, but they serve many purposes.

November 6-12, 2016

Flying the Fanklins, Blue Mountain Peak & a Frog Pond

Fly high above the Franklin Mountains in a paraglider. Blue Mountain Peak Ranch owners are returning the land to its roots. Discover a homemade frog pond and see what animals it attracts.

RESOURCE CORNER

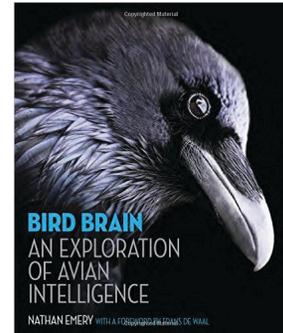
Bird Brain: An Exploration of Avian Intelligence

by by Nathan Emery

Hardback: 192 pages

ISBN-13: 978-0691165172

Price:\$23.32 on Amazon



Birds have not been known for their high IQs, which is why a person of questionable intelligence is sometimes called a

“birdbrain.” Yet in the past two decades, the study of avian intelligence has witnessed dramatic advances. From a time when birds were seen as simple instinct machines responding only to stimuli in their external worlds, we now know that some birds have complex internal worlds as well. This beautifully illustrated book provides an engaging exploration of the avian mind, revealing how science is exploding one of the most widespread myths about our feathered friends--and changing the way we think about intelligence in other animals as well.

Bird Brain looks at the structures and functions of the avian brain, and describes the extraordinary behaviors that different types of avian intelligence give rise to. It offers insights into crows, jays, magpies, and other corvids--the “masterminds” of the avian world--as well as parrots and some less-studied species from around the world. This lively and accessible book shows how birds have sophisticated brains with abilities previously thought to be uniquely human, such as mental time travel, self-recognition, empathy, problem solving, imagination, and insight.

Written by a leading expert and featuring a foreword by Frans de Waal, renowned for his work on animal intelligence, Bird Brain shines critical new light on the mental lives of birds.

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