

Texas Master Naturalists ROLLING PLAINS CHAPTER

NEWSLETTER

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<http://txmn.org/rollingplains>

March 2017

President Report

by Terry McKee

There will be no regular chapter meeting March 7 due to the beginning of our 2017 training class. However, all members are invited to attend the first training class to meet and show support for the new trainees. *You may claim 1 hour of volunteer time for showing up at Bolin Science Hall room 213 at Midwestern State University Tuesday night.* Those of you that ordered the new curriculum may pick them up that night. Larry Snyder believes they may be in by then.

Many thanks to everyone that promoted our training class including Dian Hoehne for arranging the KFDX and KAUZ TV spots.

Thanks also to Jane McGough for organizing this year's Home and Garden Show booth and children activity area. Special thanks to Laura Gillis and Lynn Semen for the artistic side of the booth. The door looked great and the paper tube dragonflies were sooooo cute! Volunteers at the booth made sure the kids (and adults) enjoyed themselves.

We start our busy time of year, so keep an eye out for upcoming activities. Check out the chapter website- txmn.org/rollingplains where Tami will be sure to keep our calendar updated. And be sure to save your monthly newsletter. Paula lists all current information there as well.

It takes a well-oiled machine to keep an organization running at top speed and I couldn't do it without the board: vice-president Kay Murphy, secretary Lynn Seman, and the wise and all-powerful Oz- also known as Treasurer and hours guru, Larry Snyder. Thank you, thank you, thank you! Let's not forget Chapter Advisor Robert Mauk and all you members that give of your time and energy to keep the Rolling Plains Chapter productive and make nature fun! Thanks to all of you, there is never a dull moment.

Invasive Spotlight

Malta Star-thistle (*Centaurea melitensis*)

Malta star-thistle is an annual (rarely a biennial) that occurs in open, disturbed sites such as grasslands, rangeland, open woodlands, fields,

pastures, roadsides, waste places and fields. It is a native of southern Europe and northern Africa. It crowds out native plants, and its

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MARCH 7: *There will be no regular chapter meeting March 7 due to the beginning of our 2017 training class.* Location: Bolin Science Hall room 213 at Midwestern State University Tuesday night at 7:00PM

MARCH 9: We will have a booth at the Burkburnett Career STEM Fair Time: 6:00 to 8:00 PM Contact Lynn rlynnseman@gmail.com if you wish to help. *Count as volunteer hours.*

MARCH 11: Wild Bird Rescue Yard Clean-up. Location: Wild Bird Rescue on Lake Shore Drive Time: Noon until finished. *Count as volunteer hours.*

MARCH 11: Science Saturday about Weather Location: River Bend Nature Center Time: 1:00 to 2:30PM. *Helping out counts as volunteer time.*

MARCH 13-17: STEAM Camp Location: River Bend Nature Center Time: Mornings. Contact Leslie Cusick-Fernandes at River Bend for information. *Helping out counts as volunteer time.*

MARCH 18: Baby Bird Shower Location: Wild Bird Rescue on Lake Shore Drive Time: Noon to 3:00PM *Count as volunteer hours.*

spiny flower heads can make it painful to walk through. High infestations of star-thistle can cause water stress in native species even in years with normal rainfall.

Malta star-thistle grows as a rosette when young in winter and produces a spiny, yellow-flowered head that typically reaches 1 m tall. As a rosette, it can be distinguished from other similar species by its lobed simple leaves whose lobes are smoothly rounded and terminal lobe is usually simple, broad, and rounded or oval. Other rosettes with which the species might be confused usually have either more angular lobes, or the lobes are further toothed, serrated, or divided. The leaves start off quite small in mid-winter and subsequently grow to 3" to 5" (7.5 to 13 cm) as the rosettes enlarge. The rosette may also have a fuzzy whitish center. Rosette leaves typically wither by flowering time. The flower stems



are stiff and openly branched from near or above the base (sometimes unbranched in very small plants). Stem leaves are alternate, and mostly linear or narrowly oblong to oblanceolate. Margins are smooth, toothed, or wavy, and leaf bases extend down the

stems (decurent) and give stems a winged appearance. The yellow "flower" is actually many flowers (the plant is a composite or asteroceous) and it looks as though it is trying to squeeze out of the flower base: it never widens like a dandelion flower.

Control is easiest when the plant is in its rosette stage and before flowers open. Small infestations can be controlled by hand. Larger infestations may require herbicide application. The same methods used to control yellow star-thistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*) can be used to control Malta star-thistle.

Blue Buttons on Galveston Beach

by Debra Halter



While on vacation last July in Galveston, June McKee and I spotted several small object on the beach. It was about an inch in diameter and had a blue-green halo to it. Upon investigation, we discovered that we had seen Blue Buttons.

The Blue Button is found in tropical waters worldwide. While they are similar in appearance to jellyfish, they are really a colony of individual hydrozoan polyps. Living on the sea surface, they consist of a float and the colony. The float is brown, hardened, and almost flat, about 1" in diameter. The colony, ranging from bright turquoise blue to yellow, hang from the bottom of the float, similar to jellyfish tentacles. Each strand of the colony has many branches, each ending in nematocysts. The Blue Button's sting is irritating to humans, not as powerful as that of jellyfish species.

A passive drifter, it is preyed upon by other predators of the sea, but is a predator in its own right. It competes with other drifters for copepods and crustacean larvae. It has a single mouth located on the under the float, which it uses for food intake and expulsion of wastes.

Despite several trips to the beach in the past, I had never encountered this creature before. Next time you visit a seashore, keep an eye out for this small organism.

Long-eared Owls Spotted at Lake Arrowhead State Park



On February 11, Rolling Plains Master Naturalist Debra Halter, spotted a Long-eared Owl in the live oak near the entrance to Lake Arrowhead State Park. As many as five of these slender, crow-sized owls with long ear tufts have been seen in the park according to Ed Wetzel. These are the first Long-eared owls to be documented on iNaturalist for Clay county.

Photo by Paula Savage

Penitentiary Hollow Hike Mineral Wells State Park and Trailway

by Lynn Seman

Recently in our organization's newsletter, I noticed an announcement for a "strenuous" hike at Penitentiary Hollow area of Mineral Wells State Park and Trailway. Just the mention of the word "strenuous" made me curious. My daughter and I decided to accept the challenge and met the "Wild Walk" guide, Park Ranger David Owens, at the hike's trailhead. After introductions, we started down the hill. I almost fell on my backside while sliding on the trail which was covered with a thick carpet of fallen oak leaves. Ranger Owens showed us how to tell the difference between the post oak and the black-jack oak trees. He said to look at the central vein of the leaf. If it comes to the



Texas Master Naturalist, Lynn Seman, walking through a sandstone formation at Penitentiary Hollow, Mineral Wells State Park and Trailway – Photo by Stephanie Seman

with its top branches spreading wide to collect life-giving energy. What an amazing feeling!

Owens explained how the park must be maintained and preserved. Of course, the park must "draw in" visitors to keep it properly funded. Rock climbing and recreational activities are important to our state parks, but visitors can take a toll on the natural areas of the park, as noted by the white chalk marks and "hand holds" on some of the climbing walls left by climbers. The dedicated park personnel go to great lengths to keep special areas of the park undisturbed. Ranger Owens made sure that we left no changes as we entered the



end of the leaf and extends beyond to make a "point", it is a black-jack oak. Post oak leaves have veins that stop before the end of the leaf.



Top: Old tree in Ancient Cross Timber forest – photo by Stephanie Seman

Above: Sandstone formations – photo by Stephanie Seman

When we reached the bottom of the drop-off, Ranger Owens explained some of the park's history. Penitentiary Hollow is part of what is called the "Ancient Cross Timbers", an area that has remained basically the same for around 300 years. "The sandstone areas," he explained, "were formed from sediments deposited and then cemented into rock. Later as Rock Creek trickled through the region, large sandstone formations cracked and gravitated downhill to form many of the crevasses and caves that make the hike so interesting," said Owens. We could actually see the way the pieces would fit back together like a puzzle! Some of the rocks contained evidence of wood bark that been fossilized in the stone.

Flickering sunlight slipped through the openings along the rock edges to find a lonely fern clinging to a small ledge. Towering trees above the rock cliff walls began their lives before our founding fathers walked on American soil! I stood in awe under a majestic cedar elm tree that seemed to be reaching miles into the sky

protected areas. Passionately, he explained that we must take extra care not to break branches, pull up or move rocks and plants, or clear a trail. We were to "keep it wild" for future generations to view.



Park Ranger David Owens and "The Squeeze" rock formation – photo by Lynn Seman

We survived the "Guillotine" tunnel with its sharp edged rock hanging precariously over our heads. More petite hikers, like my daughter, were able to shimmy through "The Squeeze" which was a skinny gap between massive boulders. We sifted through the "Funnel", and explored "Patrick's House" under the big rock. As promised in the descrip-

tion of the hike, we definitely did get dirty. The variety of naturally formed cracks, tunnels, caves, and formations in the beautiful sandstone rock of the park provide a unique experience in hiking.

We ended our adventure by climbing a fascinating stone stairway, an artifact of the park, which was built in the 1930's by the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps). The CCC, part of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal, built over 800 parks and planted nearly 3 billion trees nationwide.

I highly recommend this hike to anyone wanted a new adventure! Ranger Owens also conducts bird walks on certain Saturday mornings. It is worth checking out if you get a chance. I would have never known about this hike if it wasn't for Paula Savage listing it in our newsletter!

Most of us are used to seeing spiders trapping insects in their webs, not chasing after fish. 18 species of fish-eating spiders have been observed hunting for small fish. These arachnids live near freshwater and will sit on the water's surface to feel for vibrations before pouncing.



over to provide a host of nutrients so other plant species can thrive.

Geysers like Yellowstone's Old Faithful are heated by the super volcano which lies beneath it.



Update on Dragonfly Specialty License Plate

There continues to be a statewide effort to raise donations in order to fund the first ever Texas Master Naturalists' specialty license plate. To date, \$2,822 out of \$9,000 has been raised by over 60 individuals and 5 TMN chapters: Alamo Area Chapter, Blackland Prairie Chapter, Heartwood Chapter, Rolling Plains Chapter and Tierra Grande Chapter.



have dragonflies flying across the backs of cars across the state! And if more than \$9,000 is raised, the extra funds would be donated to the TMN Endowment.

Imagine, at this time next year, each TMN would have the option of purchasing their own specialty plate and we would

RESOURCE CORNER

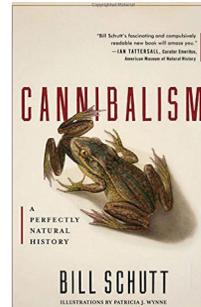
Cannibalism: A Perfectly Natural History

by Bill Schutt

Paperback: 352 pages

ISBN-13: 978-1616204624

Price: \$14.14 on Amazon



For centuries scientists have written off cannibalism as a bizarre phenomenon with little biological significance. Its presence in nature was dismissed as a desperate response to starvation or other life-threatening circumstances, and few spent time studying it. But the true nature of cannibalism--the role it plays in evolution as well as human history--is even more intriguing (and more normal) than the misconceptions we've come to accept as fact.

In *Cannibalism: A Perfectly Natural History*, zoologist Bill Schutt sets the record straight, debunking common myths and investigating our new understanding of cannibalism's role in biology, anthropology, and history in the most fascinating account yet written on this complex topic. Schutt takes readers from Arizona's Chiricahua Mountains, where he wades through ponds full of tadpoles devouring their siblings, to the Sierra Nevadas, where he joins researchers who are shedding new light on what happened to the Donner Party--the most infamous episode of cannibalism in American history.

Bringing together the latest cutting-edge science, Schutt answers questions such as why some amphibians consume their mother's skin; why certain insects bite the heads off their partners after sex; why, up until the end of the twentieth century, Europeans regularly ate human body parts as medical curatives; and how cannibalism might be linked to the extinction of the Neanderthals. He takes us into the future as well, investigating whether, as climate change causes famine, disease, and overcrowding, we may see more outbreaks of cannibalism in many more species--including our own.

Cannibalism places a perfectly natural occurrence into a vital new context and invites us to explore why it both entralls and repels us.

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