

# Texas Master Naturalists ROLLING PLAINS CHAPTER

## NEWSLETTER

Vol. 11, No. 9

<http://txmn.org/rollingplains>

September 2019

### President Report



Lynn Semen doing her part at the 2018 Sikes Lake cleanup.

Autumn is finally approaching. Thank goodness! I, for one, will be happy once we are out of the triple digits and get some cooler temperatures.

The Saturday after Labor Day, September 7 will be our annual Sikes Lake Cleanup. For 12 years we have teamed up with Midwestern State University and American National Bank and Trust to clean the

area around Sikes Lake. This is our way of promoting a cleaner environment and improving the natural area on the MSU campus. We need a lot of volunteers to pull this off. Members are needed to pass out grabbers, gloves and bags and to direct groups to certain areas of cleanup. Special appreciation to Kyle Owens and his crew at MSU for erecting the tent and supplying tables and chairs, as well as drinks, hot dogs and chips. Our cooks for Saturday will be Larry Snyder and Norman Mason. We need people to serve the hot dogs also. The cleanup is open to the public and we have several kid size grabbers for those that wish to participate.

Bring your church and school groups plus family members to do your part in beautifying Sikes Lake.

See you Saturday, September 7 at 8:30 am. The event begins at 9 and will end by 11 am. Meet on the east side of the lake- just look for the tent!

Looking forward to seeing all our members then!

Terry

### Invasive Spotlight: Nutria

Nutria, also called coypu, damage sugarcane and rice crops. They also dig into the banks of ditches, canals, and other waterways, causing erosion and other infrastructure damage. They feed on native aquatic plants that hold wetland soils together. Worse, nutria can quickly convert wetlands into open water.

### LOCALS

**SEPTEMBER 3:** Rolling Plains Chapter training meets *in Bolin Science Hall room 209 at Midwestern State University* Time: 7:00 PM. **The program:** Dr. Katumwehe

**SEPT. 7:** Sikes Lake Clean-up. The event begins at 9a.m. and will end by 11a.m. Meet on the east side of the lake- just look for the tent.

**SEPT. 14:** Bird Walk with Penny Miller at Lake Arrowhead State Park. Time: 8a.m.

**SEPT. 14:** Full Comanche Moon Star Party at Caprock Canyons State Park & Trailway from 815p.m. to 9:15p.m. Astronomy volunteer Arthur Schneider will provide us an amazing view of the full moon with his large telescope as we celebrate newly established Quanah Parker Day and discuss the history of the Comanche and their influence here in the Caprock Canyonlands!

**SEPT. 21:** Seed Collecting Workshop at Comanche Springs Astronomy Campus - sign up in advance. Cost is \$50 (includes lunch). Time: 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. **Note** that the registration fee is **NOT** refundable. Space is limited to 30 people. This will count as *Advance Training*.



The nutria is a large, semiaquatic rodent that is dark- to yellowish-brown. It has short legs and a robust, highly arched body that is approximately 2 feet (0.6 m) long. Its round tail is 13-16 inches (33-41 cm) long and scantily haired, like a rat tail. Males are around 20 pounds (9.1 kg) compared to 18 pounds (8.2 kg) for females. The forepaws have four well developed and clawed toes and one vestigial toe. Four of the

five clawed toes on the hind foot are webbed; the fifth outer toe is free. The hind legs are much larger than the forelegs. Like beavers, nutria have large yellow-orange to orange-red incisors.

Nutria may be confused with muskrat. Muskrats are smaller and their tail undulates as they swim, unlike a nutria's tail, which stays still.

From around 1900 to the 1940s nutria were imported from South America to be raised for fur. Many escaped or were released. In addition, state and federal agencies and individuals translocated nutria into other states, including Texas, to control undesirable vegetation and enhance trapping opportunities. In the United States, all significant nutria populations are in coastal areas. However, freshwater marshes are the preferred habitat.

## Flamingo Spotted in Texas, 13 Years After Escaping Kansas Zoo

by Kimberly Hickok

It's incredibly rare to catch a glimpse of an African flamingo on the Texas coast, but if you do, it's definitely Flamingo No. 492. The conspicuous pink bird has been on the run from the Sedgwick County Zoo in Wichita, Kansas, since escaping 13 years ago. Sightings of No. 492 have been rare, but the fugitive flamingo was spotted last month in Lavaca Bay, Texas, about halfway between Houston and Corpus Christi, The New York Times reported.

No. 492, along with 39 other flamingos, was sent to the Sedgwick County Zoo from Tanzania in 2003. Typically, zoos prevent flamingos from flying by amputating a part of their wing when they are newborns — a part that hasn't yet developed sensation. But the flamingos from Tanzania arrived at the zoo as adults, so curators there decided to clip the birds' feathers instead, as a more humane solution to keep the animals grounded, the Times reported.

Clipped feathers grow back, however, and if they're not kept short, the bird will regain its ability to fly.

So, in June 2005, flamingos No. 492 and No. 347 took advantage of their unclipped wings and flew out of their enclosure, the Times reported. The pair settled in a drainage canal where they evaded capture until a large thunderstorm forced them to separate. No. 347 went north to Michigan and hasn't been seen since.

But No. 492 moved south to Texas,



## Congratulations Rolling Plains Chapter Members

Congratulations to Kim Mason on having reached the 250 hour milestone.

Congratulations to Jane McGough, Carl Brown, and Judy Snyder on achieving recertification as Master Naturalist for 2019.

where the bird found a great place to settle down. "As long as they have these shallow, salty types of wetlands, they can be pretty resilient," Felicity Arengo, a flamingo expert at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, told the Times. No. 492 found not only a great habitat, but also a companion: a Caribbean flamingo that was likely displaced during a tropical storm, the Times reported.

Ben Shepard, an intern with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, spotted No. 492 on May 23 while on a bird survey in Lavaca Bay. He didn't see No. 492's Caribbean companion, but experts told the Times this doesn't mean the companion is gone.

"It's possible they're separated and will show up back together again," Arengo told the Times. Experts also told the Times that No. 492 could live another 10 to 20 years, as flamingos can live well into their 40s.



The Brazilian Grape Tree (AKA Jaboticaba) does not use branches to grow fruits. It grows fruits and flowers directly on the trunk. The fruits of the jaboticaba tree can be eaten raw or used to make jellies, juice or wine.

**B**leeding Tooth Fungus, even when called “the strawberries and cream” is inedible, but it is not considered toxic to humans. This unique mushroom obtains its “inedible” status due to the taste of its flesh and juice which are described as “acid” or extremely bitter and “peppery.” The aroma of this fungus is often described as being “unpleasant”. It can be found in North America where it is more common in the Pacific Northwest and resides mostly in coniferous forests near pine trees.



**M**ost butterflies lack the ability to bite or chew, so they taste by using their feet. When a butterfly lands on a plant, they use sensors on their feet to determine whether or not what they’re standing on is edible.

## How to Build an Insect Home

The best time to make an insect home is early autumn, so that the bugs have somewhere to hibernate for the winter.

You can get creative with these insect homes, as there are no rules. Here are a few things you might like to use: wooden pallets, plastic bottles, broken bricks and tiles, stone chippings, broken plant pots, corrugated cardboard, drainpipes, logs and twigs, rotting wood, spare rolls of turf, dry leaves, bark, hollow plant stems, straw and hay, bamboo canes.



Choose a good spot for your insect home. Firstly, because most insects like cool, moist conditions, so a shady area next to a hedge or under the tree works well. Secondly, make sure the home has a firm base, because it will end up quite heavy. Thirdly, choose a spot where the insect home can remain for at least this winter. Create a structure with pallets. Layer old pallets on top of each other as tall as you’d like the insect home to be. Place any larger pallets at the bottom. Fill in the gaps with other materials. There are no rules as to how you fill the empty pallets.

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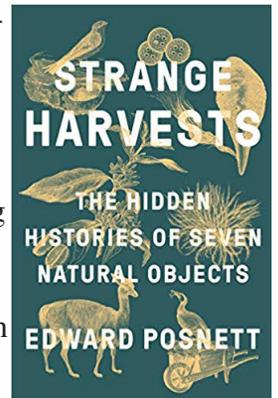
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## RESOURCE CORNER

### *Strange Harvests: The Hidden Histories of Seven Natural Objects*

by Edward Posnett  
 Hardback: 336 pages  
 ISBN- 978-0399562792  
 Price: \$17.00 on Amazon

In this beguiling book, Edward Posnett journeys to some of the most far-flung locales on the planet to bring us seven wonders of the natural



world--eiderdown, vicuña fiber, sea silk, vegetable ivory, civet coffee, guano, and edible birds’ nests--that promise ways of using nature without damaging it. To the rest of the world these materials are mere commodities, but to their harvesters they are imbued with myth, tradition, folklore, and ritual, and form part of a shared identity and history.

*Strange Harvests* follows the journeys of these uncommon products from some of the most remote areas of the world to its most populated urban centers, drawing on the voices of the people and little-known communities who harvest, process, and trade them. Blending history, travel writing, and interviews, Posnett sets these human stories against our changing economic and ecological landscape. What do they tell us about capitalism, global market forces, and overharvesting? How do local microeconomies survive in a hyperconnected world? Is it possible for us to live together with different species? *Strange Harvests* makes us see the world with wonder, curiosity, and new concern.