

Texas Master Naturalists ROLLING PLAINS CHAPTER

NEWSLETTER

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<http://txmn.org/rollingplains>

December 2019

President Report

The holiday season is upon us. It is a time for reflection and thankfulness.

We have been blessed to have a great slot of officers to keep our chapter active and growing. Our new officers are *Kay Murphy as president, Lisa Taylor as vice-president, Lynn Seman, secretary and Larry Snyder, treasurer and hours guru. Paula Savage will continue to serve as our newsletter editor and Tami Davis has passed the reins of webmaster to Debra Halter.* I encourage you to assist our 2020 officers by continuing to be active and encouraging others to be nature-wise. We are a small chapter doing big things- thanks to you!

Our chapter meeting, December 3 will begin at 6 pm Tuesday at 5310 Southwest Parkway in the letter carrier union hall. It is our annual Christmas party. Our menu includes lasagna and salad from Luigi's. The meal is \$5 and payable to Larry Snyder at the door. Members are encouraged to bring a dessert to share. For those that wish to participate in the Bad Santa gift exchange, you are invited to bring a recycled gift around \$10 or so. Just remember the thrill is not in the amount of the gift, but the fun members have in stealing said gift and having it stolen from them. This makes for a fun evening, so make plans to join us Tuesday, December 3.

A volunteer opportunity for the chapter is the Audubon Christmas Bird Count, Saturday, December 21. This is an all day bird count with members trying to spot as many birds in a given area of Wichita County as they are able. CBC leaders include Penny Miller doing Lake Wichita and Holiday, Sue King heading out to parts of Iowa Park and Terry McKee counting Lucy Park and other parts of the city. If you are interested in helping out, contact the leaders at the meeting.

And don't forget the First Day Hike at Lake Arrowhead State Park on January 1. The Dragonfly Trail hike begins at 2 pm. It is a great way to start out the new year and introduce visitors to the state park.

It has been a pleasure to serve as your president in the past. I will continue to be active in the chapter in the future. And for now, I wish each and every one of you a joyous Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Terry McKee

E LOCALS

DECEMBER 3: Chapter Christmas Party at Letter Carrier Hall, 5310 Southwest Parkway at 6 pm. Cost for the meal will be \$5 a head. There will be the Bad Santa gift exchange.

DECEMBER 5: 5:30pm meeting of Monthly Nature Hike Committee at Letter Carrier's Hall.

DECEMBER 7: Christmas in the Park at Lake Arrowhead State Park from sunset to 9 pm.

DECEMBER 6: Water Program for middle school kids at River Bend Nature Center.

DECEMBER 14: Venomous Snake presentation at Hagerman NWR on Dec. 14th at 10AM. It's open to the public.

DECEMBER 21: Audubon Christmas Bird Count. CBC leaders include Penny Miller, Sue King and Terry McKee. If you are interested, contact the leaders

JANUARY 1, 2020: First Day Hike at Lake Arrowhead State Park. Dragonfly Trail, .5 mi at 2PM. Onion Creek Trail "Half Loop". Meet at The Horn Tunnel. 1.5 miles at 4PM. *This is a volunteer opportunity.*

My Bullsnake Encounter!

By Debra Halter

On Nov 10, 2019, June and Terry McKee and I went to Lake Arrowhead State Park. Very little wildlife

rattlesnake killer is the King Snake. The Bullsnake is diurnal, active during the day. They can climb,



was apparent during our visit. But as we were leaving, we noticed that all of the park personnel were gathered along the road's edge at the headquarters building. Martha Elms waved us over. Beside a metal trash can, was a large Bullsnake. It was very agitated and did its best rattlesnake impersonation for us.

The Bullsnake is a large non-venomous snake and is currently considered a subspecies of the Gopher Snake. They average 2-3 pounds, with the largest reaching 10 pounds, and lengths up to 8 feet. This makes them among the largest snakes in the US and Canada. They are usually yellow with brown, white and black (sometimes red) blotching. The blotches are arranged with large blotches on top, three sets of spots on the side, and bands of black on the tail. Albino and white varieties have been found.

Mating occurs in March and April. They lay an average clutch of 20-30 eggs. Baby snakes are usually not very docile, nor are the adults. A constrictor, they eat mice, rats, and other small mammals, as well as birds. They are frequently associated with prairie dog towns. The idea that Bullsnakes eat rattlesnakes may have been deduced from the fact that some Bullsnakes have had rattlesnakes in their guts, but it may just be a rare or occasional menu item for the snakes. They do not eat enough to affect rattlesnake populations. The real

but prefer to spend their time foraging in grasslands and brushlands and resting in rodent burrows. They can be found basking on warm sand, rocks or roadways.

When a Bullsnake encounters an animal too large to be prey, the snake perceives it as a predator. They first try to remain still. When they feel that are able to do so, they will move away as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, they are slow movers, and since they feel threatened, the snake will take defensive action. Bullsnakes are sometimes confused with rattlesnakes because of their coloring and size, and they take full advantage of their similarities. Bullsnakes perform an impressive rattlesnake impersonation. It will coil up, hiss loudly by forcibly exhaling through an extension of the windpipe, which sounds like a rattlesnake's rattle. They will make themselves as large as possible, rearing up and vibrating is tail rapidly. It can also flatten its head to make it look more triangular. It will lunge repeatedly and retreat at the same time. Though not venomous, they can deliver a painful bite. Rattlesnakes usually keep their tails elevated when rattling, while the Bullsnake keeps its tail low to the ground.

The best thing to do if you come across a Bullsnake is enjoy its beauty from a distance and allow it space to escape. Bullsnakes will not chase or follow you. They just want to be left alone.

Invasive Spotlight: Elephant Ears

While this plant can live in a well-watered landscape, it is typically found in moist soils along wetland fringes as well as stream, ditch, canal, and lake banks. It forms dense stands, outcompeting native species and thus altering natural habitat and ecosystem processes and reducing biodiversity.

Elephant ears, also called taro, is a perennial herb the leaves of which grow from a thick underground root (corn). The leaves are large: up to 2 m (6.5 ft) tall, with thick petioles making up most of that height and arrowhead-shaped blades to 60 cm (24 in) long and 50 cm (20 in) wide. Leaf margins are wavy, and the upper surface is dark green and velvety.



The inflorescence of elephant ears is on a fleshy stalk shorter than the leaf petioles. The tiny flowers are densely crowded on the upper part of the stalk and

enveloped by a long yellow bract (spathe). The female flowers are below the male flowers. The fruit is a small berry, in clusters on the fleshy stalk.



Taro was introduced to the United States from tropical Asia in 1910 as a substitute crop for potatoes. It was later cultivated as an ornamental, and numerous varieties continue to be sold.

For more information on elephant ears, see its [Texasinvasives.org species profile](http://Texasinvasives.org/species/profile).

FACTS FUN

The giant armadillo of South America has the most teeth of any land mammal with 74. That number may not seem wildly impressive, but it's high for mammals, who are actually some of the least toothy creatures on Earth.



Bristlecone trees are one of the longest-lived trees on the planet. The oldest known one is 5,062 years old. During dry periods, the tree goes dormant until conditions turn more favorable. After living for thousands of years, bristlecone pines record centuries of climate change in their rings, and provide calibration for radiocarbon dating.

Tardigrades are probably the most paradoxical animals on the planet. These microscopic organisms enjoy a legendary reputation as the toughest, most indestructible creatures on Earth.



The Recovering America's Wildlife Act Can Help Us Protect Our Bats



We live in the battiest state in the U.S., home to 32 of the nation's 47 bat species, and visitors from around the world flock here to do some bat-watching.

Yet bats, like more than 1,300 other species of concern in Texas, need our help. Their karst cave habitats are threatened, some bat populations are in decline, and white-nose syndrome, a bat disease, was recently discovered here.

The Recovering America's Wildlife Act would provide new funding to help boost bat conservation, education and related eco-tourism. But it won't pass unless people who care, people like you, take action. Help by contacting your U.S. Representatives to let them know you expect their support of RAWA. #RecoverWildlife

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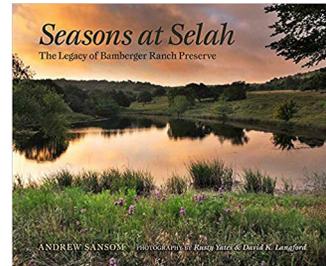
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RESOURCE CORNER

Seasons at Selah: The Legacy of Bamberger Ranch
by Andrew Sansom
Hardback: 264 pages
ISBN- 978-1623496340
Price: \$36.01 on Amazon



In 1969, J. David Bamberger bought what he described as “the

sooriest piece of land” in the Texas Hill Country for the specific purpose of restoring the degraded landscape. Today, Selah, Bamberger Ranch Preserve is one of the largest habitat restoration projects in the state—5,500 acres—and serves as a model for land conservation and environmental education. The ranch has earned numerous awards, including the coveted Leopold Conservation Award, the Texas Environmental Excellence Award in Education, and most recently, the Botanical Research Institute of Texas International Award of Excellence in Conservation, just to name a few.

Seasons at Selah: The Legacy of Bamberger Ranch Preserve chronicles Bamberger's dedication to ethical land stewardship and conservation education through stunning photographs of the land, plants, and wildlife he has devoted his time and resources to protect. Photographers Rusty Yates and David K. Langford capture each season at Selah and offer an intimate glimpse into the day-to-day management and operations of the ranch as well as some of the challenges it faces. In the accompanying text, Andrew Sansom shares his own stories from his decades-long friendship with Bamberger.

Readers will gain a deeper appreciation for what conservation means for Texas: clean and abundant water, wildlife, healthy land, and an inspiring place to learn about and enjoy nature.