



# Rolling Plains Chapter NEWSLETTER

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<http://txmn.org/rollingplains>

July 2022

*The Rolling Plains Chapter partners with River Bend Nature Center and Wild Bird Rescue, Inc. in Wichita Falls; Lake Arrowhead State Park in Clay County; Copper Breaks State Park in Hardeman Count, Whiteside Museum of Natural History in Seymour; and Comanche Springs Astronomy Campus in Crowell. Our Chapter covers Archer, Baylor, Clay, Foard, Hardeman, Jack, Montague, Wichita, Wilbarger, and Young Counties.*

**JUNE 7: Rolling Plains Chapter Meeting** - 7:00pm at MSU's Bolin Science Hall, room 209. If you would prefer to attend via Zoom, watch for the link to the meeting in your email. Either way, I hope you will join us.

**The program:** Lynn seman will present a program on the Texas Horn Lizard.

**VT JULY 9:** The people who upkeep the Wichita Valley Rail Trail have asked for help if any of our members are available to help with a bridge repair project on the Wichita Valley Rail Trail to take place on July 9, 6:30am. If interested in helping, you can show up that morning.

**VT JULY 9: BIRD OUTING at LASP** 8:00-10:00 Join Penny Miller, other members



Congratulations to our new class of trainees! The training classes are all over and we are very excited to welcome you the Rolling Plains Chapter. We look forward to many happy hours on trail with you. After we get the paperwork done and the hours recorded, we will have a Graduation Celebration at the September meeting. To make things a little more special, we will have a Pinning Ceremony at next year's first training class. 2022 class member, Lisa Winkles, has volunteered to be the New Class Representative and we are happy to have her joining the Board.

In other exciting news, the t-shirts are here! The t-shirts are here! And they are pretty!!!! DeAnna will be at the meeting room at 6:15 pm if you want to come early and get your shirts. If you haven't paid, please see Lynn to take care of that. Many thanks to DeAnna for getting these done.

You won't want to miss the **Chapter Meeting on July 5th** with a program on our favorite summertime reptile, the **Texas Horned Lizard** presented by our own **Lynn Seman**. Come in person and enjoy the air conditioning! The meeting will begin at 7:00 PM in Bolin Science Hall, Room 209 at Midwestern State University and also on Zoom at the same time. (Watch for a link in your email.)



I hope everyone is enjoying their summer and taking care in this heat. Drink lots of water and I hope to see you soon. —Laura

## I Think You Will Like This Virus

*reprinted from iwire June 2022 issue*

I think it's safe to say that everyone in Texas is familiar with fire ants. This is not the first time this newsletter has mentioned them and it is likely not the last. But in case you need a refresher, *Solenopsis invicta*, or the red imported fire ant (RIFA) is a very

invasive, hard to eradicate, annoying pest ant, that is making its way across the U.S. and especially Texas. Texas does have native species of fire ant, however, they are often displaced by *Solenopsis invicta*, so it is likely that this is the species that you have in your

and guests at Lake Arrowhead State Park for a bird outing. Look for and identify birds found at the park. This is a leisurely hike on level ground (handicap accessible). Binoculars helpful, but not required. You can borrow a birding pack (bird book/binoculars) from the State Park headquarters. This outing happens on the 2nd Saturday of each month. Meet at the dump station at 8 am.

**VT JULY 11 & 16:** The Boys and Girls Club is looking for member(s) from TMN to present a program to a group of kids between July 11 and July 16. The program can be about any nature related topic. Terry McKee has the contact information if you are interested. Sounds like a great opportunity to share our love of nature!

**AT JULY 12: TMNTuesday 12:00-1:00** Dr. Kenneth Anderson Taylor will join TMN this July to define authentic leadership and discuss how nonprofit leaders can transmit leadership to other members of the team. The webinar will explore research data and provide findings and insights on leaders rated by employees on the constructs of self-awareness, trans-

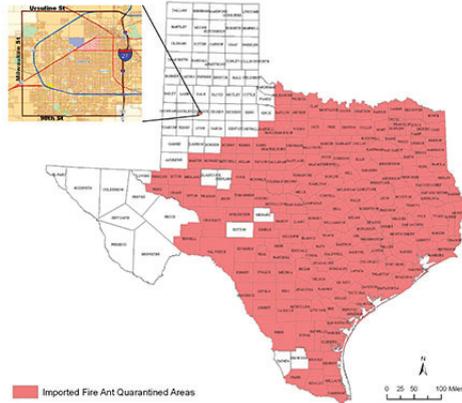
yard. But there is some good news and some bad news. A few recent studies have been tinkering with viruses that may rid us of our fire ant problems, or they may not.

The first virus is *Solenopsis invicta virus-1* or *SINV-1*. It is a natural agent and is a virus in the Dicistroviridae family, which is related to the well-known picorna-like viruses. It is a natural agent that appears and spreads naturally in the environment. The virus has been put through extensive analyses to ensure that it only infects the target

species. The goal here is to use natural organisms to reduce RIFA numbers without using pesticides. During *SINV-1* trials, they found when exposed, 23% RIFA nest were infected. All castes and stages of development are affected. Infected broods died within three months during laboratory studies, but effects of the virus in the field still needs to be evaluated. Surprisingly enough however, they found at the end of the study, there was a significantly higher survival rate in ants



*Solenopsis invicta*, Lateral view. Credit: April Noble, Antweb.org, Bugwood.org



RIFA Texas Quarantine Map. Credit: The Texas Department of Agriculture.

treated with the virus than those not treated with the virus. So, back to the drawing board.

The second virus is *Solenopsis invicta virus-3* or *SINV-3*. Like *SINV-1*, it is also a natural agent and only targets RIFA.

Neither of these viruses have been introduced into the environment because they already exist naturally at low levels. The difference here is that when tested, this virus was found to cause a sevenfold decrease in the number of nests and nest size over the course of evaluation once exposed to the virus.

Additionally, the virus appears to persist and spread naturally in the environment once it is introduced because it is already present in small quantities. Researcher's emphasize that there is still a lot of work to be done and the virus is not a cure all. Currently, it will need to be used in conjunction with parasitic flies, microsporidia, or pesticides to see notable effects in RIFA populations, but it the first step in the right direction.

## 10 Fun Facts About the Northern Mockingbird

*There's more to this flying copycat than meets the eye . . . or ear.*

*By Natalie Wallington, Reporter, Audubon Magazine*

The Northern Mockingbird is one of North America's most beloved mimics. The skilled singer has also become inextricable from American popular culture, providing inspiration for the fictional "Mockingjay" of the Hunger Games franchise to

being a central theme in the iconic novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. John James Audubon was a fan of the mocker as well. Here are some facts you might not have known about this American classic.

1. There are a total of 16 avi-

an species in the world with the name "mockingbird," but the Northern Mockingbird is the only one native to the United States. Other nearby species include the elusive Blue Mockingbird of Mexico and the island-dwelling Bahama Mockingbird, both of

parency, morals, and balanced processing. The discussion will provide recommendations for the next steps participants can take to heighten their development as leaders. **You may watch this webinar live or its recording at a later date (as long as it is watched within the calendar year it was recorded).**

**AT JULY 12: Texas Waters Webinar-Forestry Best Management Practices —6:30-7:30** Forestry Best Management Practices help to protect soil and water quality during forestry operations. A 4-year study was conducted to determine if these practices, when implemented property, were actually effective in protecting the quality of nearby streams. This study was done using water sampling and biological sampling techniques. Report your time under AT: Texas Waters Certification. Include a description of the presentation. **Must be watched live.**

**VT JULY 30: Monthly Nature Hike 6:30-4:00** Scurrying the path of the Texas Horned Lizard. Join member for our Monthly Nature Hike. The hike will be at Comanche Springs Astronomy Campus, west of Crowell, TX.

which can occasionally appear in the U.S.

2. The Northern Mockingbird is a year-round resident across much of the U.S., but an expansion into the northeast has been successful due in part to the multiflora rose, or rambler rose. Native to Asia, this invasive rosebush was introduced to the United States in the late 1700s as a root stock for ornamental roses. It makes an ideal nest site for mockingbirds because of its tasty berries and thick tangle of branches. (Editor's note: If you want to provide food and shelter for the Northern Mockingbird and other backyard favorites with native plants, try our handy native plants database.)

3. The mockingbird's latin name is *Mimus polyglottos*, which literally translates to "many-tongued mimic." A polyglot is a person who speaks many languages, referencing the bird's ability to imitate sounds from its environment. While mockingbirds are known to sing several hundred different songs, some research suggests that they might not learn to copy new sounds in adulthood, as previously thought.

4. A study released in October 2019 found that, in addition to mimicking the calls of other birds and manmade noises like music and machinery, Northern Mockingbirds have been



known to imitate at least 12 different species of North American frogs and toads. In fact, John James Audubon was so in awe of this bird's singing ability, he wrote of the Northern Mockingbird in *Birds of America*, "There is probably no bird in the world that possesses all the musical qualifications of this king of song, who has derived all from Nature's self."

5. Because of the Northern Mockingbird's impressive vocal talents, the illegal pet trade depleted their populations by poaching wild birds across the east coast in the 19th century. The best singers were worth up to \$50 in 1828—that's more than \$1,300 in today's dollars.

6. Northern Mockingbirds have easily adapted to human development, taking up residence across suburban towns and cities. Wide-open lawns and parks are perfect for hunting their insect prey, and males often sing from perches like the tops of houses and telephone poles, where their performance can involve leaping into the air and fluttering back down.

7. Mockers are prolific breeders. They have been known to make as many as seven nesting attempts during a breeding season, and one female even set an astonishing record of laying 27 eggs in a single season.

8. The white patches on a Northern Mockingbird's wings and outer tail feathers serve dual purposes: The birds often show off these plumes during mating rituals, and they also flash them when defending their territory from potential predators like hawks and snakes.

9. Mockingbirds can be extraordinarily territorial. They've been known to swoop and dive at pretty much anything, including people, that gets close to their nests, which are usually placed between 3 and 10 feet off the ground. They will also regularly chase other birds away from their preferred food sources, like fruit-bearing trees, in the winter.

10. The Northern Mockingbird is the state bird of Arkansas, Florida, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Texas. In true Texas fashion, the 1927 legislation declaring the Northern Mockingbird the state's official bird reasoned that the species is "a fighter for the protection of his home, falling, if need be, in its defense, like any true Texan."

Meet at 6:30 am in the Atwood's parking lot in Wichita Falls. Carpool to the site takes about 1-1/2 hours (Alternate site will be Copper Breaks State Park). This will be a moderate hike of about 2-3 miles and will take approximately 2 hours on slightly rough, hilly terrain. Bring: outdoor clothing, closed-toed shoes, water, sunscreen, hat, etc.

## Did You Know?



Arachnids do not have teeth and jaws to chew their food, and most can not digest food. This is why they suck fluids from their prey's body.

## Good News for Monarch Butterflies



The monarch population was counted while the butterflies overwintered in Mexico, and their numbers are up from last year.

There were 10 colonies located during this past winter. They occupied an area of about 2.84 hectares, or 7 acres. This is 35% larger than the area they occupied last winter. Good news, but still a dangerously low number of monarchs.

Biologists estimate the monarch population needs to cover at least 6 hectares, or 15 acres, for a stable population. You can help support monarchs by continuing to avoid pesticide use and grow milkweed, mistflower and other native, pollinator-friendly plants that flower in spring and fall.

## Tree for Wildlife: The Desert Willow

If you'd enjoy a small tree in your landscape that's drought, heat and freeze resistant, as well as a wildlife favorite, consider the desert willow.

This low-maintenance tree has fragrant flowers that bloom all summer, attracting butterflies, hummingbirds and other wildlife. Flower color ranges from pale pink to



deep purple. It's native to Central and West Texas, and an excellent choice for areas that don't get a lot of rain; otherwise it needs a well-drained bed. It can grow 2-3 feet a year and reach heights of 30 feet. It has a life span of between 40 and 150 years. **Pro tip:** Desert willow blooms on new wood, so prune it regularly for more flowers. A good time to prune is the end of February or you can cut back desert willows in March.



## RUNNING YOUR WAY THIS SUMMER.

Purchase a Greater Roadrunner license plate for \$30 and help fund nature tourism, wildlife viewing programs and conservation projects. Best of all, \$22 of the \$30 goes directly to help fund conservation efforts right here in Texas. BEEP-BEEP!

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