



# Rolling Plains Chapter NEWSLETTER

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*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.*

**AUGUST 1: Rolling Plains Chapter Meeting - 7:00-9:00pm** 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.

**AT The program:** Dr. Steven Roscoe will present a program on paleontology.

**AT AUGUST 8: Ecosystem Goods & Services: What Lies Behind the Curtain? 12:00-1:00pm**

It's all the rage in discussions of carbon, water, biodiversity and so much more... what is this "new" benefit that everyone is talking about? Well, it is as "old" as planet Earth, just in a new package. The benefits that our natural resources provide to landowners and society as a whole have been around since the dawn



Hello August and goodbye July... you have been hotter than a fire-cracker!

If you missed the Trail Mixer in early July, you missed a fun outing. Lisa Winkles did such a great job getting things together, we decided to do it again next year at the beginning of our Spring Training. Planning has already begun

for our training classes so if you have any ideas on new classes or field trips that you would like to see or that you might like to TEACH, please let us know! New classes could count as AT for everybody if we get some new subjects.

As we move into August, registration for the Annual Meeting will be opening in just a few days. If you are planning to go to the meeting in McAllen, get your seminar choices lined up and be ready to register. The Annual Meeting can be pretty pricey so if you are planning to go, please let me or one of the Board members know. The Chapter has allocated some money to help offset some of the expenses. It might not be much, but every little bit helps!



We will kick off the month of August on Tuesday the first with our Monthly Meeting at MSU at 7:00 pm. We will have a very short business meeting so we can give more time to Dr Roscoe and his class on Paleontology. Don't forget to bring your Summer Scavenger Hunt cards to turn in. Anyone earning 50 points or more will have their name put in a drawing for their very own Monarch Tagging Kit (25 tags).

Speaking of Monarch Tags, the order has been placed and tags should be here by the September meeting where we will have a program on tagging so we will be ready for the migration.

Stay cool and I hope to see you soon!

—Laura

of time; but now, we have markets that are beginning to emerge that could potentially capture and share those benefits financially for landowners/managers and extend them to all of society. Join us for a journey into the space behind the curtain as we explore how nature's benefits become a new opportunity for natural resources management in Texas and beyond. **\$35.00 fee required.**

**AT AUGUST 8: TMN Tuesday 12:00-1:00pm**  
This TMN Tuesdays webinar will be about the upcoming solar eclipse. This is the only webinar that you can count watching the recording.

**AT AUGUST 9: One Water & Water Conservation 6:30-7:30pm**  
More information to come.

**FR AUGUST 11: Texas Stream Team Water Testing 9:00-11am**  
Water testing will be conducted at Lake Wichita and the Wichita River. Meet at the Lake Wichita boat ramp at 9 am.

**PO August 12: Monthly Bird Outing 8:00-10am** Join Penny Miller, other members and guests at Lake Arrowhead State Park for a bird outing. Meet

## Here's Why People are Ditching Their Grass Lawns for Clover

*Perfectly manicured turf grass takes a toll on the environment, leading some to embrace unconventional lawn alternatives.*

by ALLY HIRSCHLAG • Published July 20, 2023 • National Geographic

If you search #cloverlawns on TikTok, you'll be flooded with photos and videos of fleecy, ethereal-looking lawns.

They're often accompanied by explanations of how easy they are to plant and cultivate, and all the benefits their owners now enjoy: using less water, doing less maintenance—all of which cuts down on energy usage and can lower a homeowner's carbon footprint.

Angelina Murphy, a Los Angeles native who runs a popular home DIY account on TikTok, posted a few of these videos and garnered over 41 million views.

*"Our grass lawn was dying and we did not want to use the water and resources required to keep it alive, especially because we are in a drought and we care about making sustainable choices,"* explains Murphy.

Murphy isn't alone in rejecting traditional lawns; she's part of a growing trend of homeowners and landscapers looking for drought tolerant and low maintenance alternatives to turf grass. And these new, sustainable lawns aren't limited to clover. Backyards full of wispy sedge grass, verdant moss, and wildflower meadows are helping bring gardens and green spaces back to life.

### The scientific case against grass lawns

The 250-year-old Back Lawn at Kings Col-



Flowering white clover, *Trifolium repens*, covers a pasture in Berkshire, UK. As drought becomes more prevalent, landscapers are looking to water-saving alternatives such as clover.

PHOTOGRAPH BY NIGEL CATTLIN, NATURE PICTURE LIBRARY

lege, like most other lawns at Cambridge University, used to be pristine, well-kept green turf grass. Today, swaths of it are overgrown with weeds and wildflowers and buzzing with insects. This is not due to a shortage of groundskeepers, but rather an experiment college researchers began

in 2019 to see what benefits an unkept lawn could yield.

Researchers sowed over 50 species of plants to encourage about 40 percent (1.55 acres) of the Back Lawn to grow wild. After four years, the research team found their meadow was teeming with life, supporting 3.6 times more plants and insects than the parts of the lawn that remained manicured. What's more, it now cultivates four times more endangered plant species than it had before the experiment.

*"I think that's quite exciting, quite powerful that you can do this relatively modest sowing of seeds, and then you see changes all through the ecosystem,"* says Cicely Marshall, a research fellow at Kings College whose lawn experiment was published in the journal *Ecological Solutions and Evidence* in May 2023.

Marshall's research put data behind what's become a rising trend. The "No Mow May" movement has steadily grown in popularity since it began in the U.K. back in 2019 as a way to help save pollinators. Since then,

at Lake Arrowhead State Park at the building by the boat slips and fishing pier. Look for and identify birds found at the park.

**AT AUGUST 17: *The Paradox of Fire: A Threat to Pollinators Yet A Key Process They Need* Webinar 12:00-1:00 pm** Learn about prescribed fire and its effects on plants and wildlife and evidence of the negative effects of fire on pollinators, but follow that with examples of the benefits of fire. Examples from throughout the lower 48 U.S. states, with a slight bias toward the Central Grasslands. Learn recommend best management practices for fire and suggested sources of technical and financial assistance for prescribed burning.

**RM AUGUST 19: *Wild Bird Rescue Grounds Maintenance* 7:00-11:00 am**

**RM SEPT. 9: *Sikes Lake Cleanup* 9:00-11:00 am** Meet at Sikes Lake on the MSU campus. MSU will supply drinks and snacks for all volunteers. Bags, grabbers and gloves will be supplied by the chapter. Come join the crowd and help out at the cleanup.

more eco-friendly lawn trends have sprung up, the most recent being clover lawns.

### **What makes clover so different?**

Murphy believes her videos about her clover lawn took off because younger generations like to make more environmentally-friendly choices and learn new things. However, Sharon Jae Hall, professor in the School of Life Sciences at Arizona State University, thinks there's a more sweeping shift at play.

*"As extreme weather events continue, people are beginning to realize that we need to do something different to protect our ways of life,"* she explains.

Individuals and communities are taking more significant steps to battle flooding, droughts, and heat waves.

*"This trend is likely to continue and accelerate with a new generation of people who can influence social norms through media,"* says Hall.

Clover lawns in particular are more visually interesting than your average manicured lawn but remain relatively low to the ground, so they won't garner complaints from neighbors or communities with lawn ordinances. But there's more to clover lawns than low-maintenance and aesthetics.

The hardy white clover—the species predominantly used for clover lawns today—is a primary nectar source for pollinators. According to a 2016 historic assessment of floral resources in the U.K. over several decades, one-third of all nectar provided to pollinators came from white clover. In cities, it jumped up to 66 percent.

Marc Johnson, professor of biology at the University of Toronto, Mississauga, has done white clover studies in urban and suburban areas all over the world. Considering how prolific the species is, he believes those percentages are similarly high everywhere it grows.

*"This is the main source of nectar to pollinators in our cities,"* he says.

It also has a uniquely beneficial relationship with soil, infusing it with rhizobia, bacteria that helps keep soil healthy. Rhizobia have evolved to help plants like clover take nitrogen from the air and secrete it into the soil, meaning it essentially makes its own fertilizer.

Sedge and moss lawns are emerging lawn alternatives for similar eco-friendly reasons to clover lawns; they require less mowing and watering. They're also highly adaptable species of plants that act like sponges during heavy rainfall, so they're particularly useful in climates that are prone to flooding.

### **How you can support a more biodiverse lawn**

Just planting white clover doesn't encourage anything close to the level of biodiversity that Kings College achieved, and that diversity is key to generating the most positive impacts on a local environment. If that is your aim, experts say you should diversify the plant species in your lawn. That's what Johnson did to his yard in his Toronto suburb, and the outcome has made it a neighborhood attraction.

He calls it his own version of a national park and treats it with similar reverence. Everything from the primrose to the milkweed to the Echinacea purpurea, is allowed to flourish. As a result, it's frequented by hummingbirds, endangered monarchs, and lots of bumblebees for which he's built a bee hotel.

To support your local environment, you don't have to plant a full wildflower meadow like Johnson. Adding some variety, especially native plant species, to your lawn will help support nearby wildlife. That said, some insects are particular about what they'll feed on, so it's important to consider what grows naturally in your region. If you're not sure how to do that, ask a horticulturist at your local plant nursery.





Texas Master Naturalist 2023 Annual Meeting – to be held this year at the southernmost point of the South Texas Plains ecoregion, in McAllen, Texas.

The Lower Rio Grande Valley is famous for its diversity of birds, butterflies, and endangered species like Ocelots, Texas Tortoises, Sabal Palms, and Piping Plovers that call the region home. McAllen offers some of the best birding and nature exploration opportunities in Texas, with its sunny subtropical climate and prime location along the Central Flyway. For our 24th Annual Meeting, we are excited to gather at the McAllen Convention Center, which sits between multiple nature centers and wildlife refuges along the Rio Grande Valley. McAllen also offers a unique opportunity this year as a close location to view an annular solar eclipse!

### Taking sustainable lawns to the streets

While the trend toward wilder lawns is promising, Johnson believes municipalities need to lead by example for more impactful environmental changes to take effect.

When a significant portion of a city is converted from turf grass to non-turf green space like clover lawns and meadows, more CO<sub>2</sub> is absorbed, which can help clear the air of pollution. Taller lawns also hold more moisture and deflect more radiation from the sun, which can reduce the urban heat island effect. One study found that if cities added 10 percent more green cover, they

could reduce their average temperature by 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit (one degree Celsius).

But encouraging biodiversity isn't just about more green space, it's about restoring and connecting what already exists.

*“Even smaller patches that are well connected to one another can be good homes for even sensitive native wildlife,”* says Hall.

*“That really does amplify the positive effect of them. You get a lot of connections, connectivity in the landscape, and a lot of new habitats,”* says Marshall.



We are gatherers,  
 the ones who pick up sticks and stones  
 and old wasp's nests fallen by the door of the barn,  
 walnuts with holes that look like eyes of owls,  
 bits of shells not whole but lovely in their brokenness,  
 we are the ones who bring home empty eggs of birds and place them on a small  
 glass shelf to keep for what? How long?  
 It matters not.  
 What matters is the gathering, the pockets filled with remnants  
 of a day evaporated, the traces of certain memory, a lingering smell,  
 a smile that came with the shell.  
 ~ Nina Bagley

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