



Rolling Plains Chapter NEWSLETTER

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<http://txmn.org/rollingplains>

March 2024

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.

MARCH 5: 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: Michael Fiori will present a presentation on Backyard Ponds.

FR MARCH 8: Texas Stream Team water testing 9:00-10:00am Because of low water levels at Lake Wichita, water testing will only be conducted at the Wichita River. Meet in Lucy Park, just inside the park near River Bend Nature Center. This event will be held the second Friday of each month, unless noted otherwise.

PO MARCH 9: Plum Lake Kid's Fishing



Well, another Home & Garden Festival is behind us and a new Spring Training Class is coming up soon. The deadline for registration is March 13 so if you know of anyone who might be interested, please let them know now! Registration forms are on the website and if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask.

Our training will begin with a "Trail Mixer" orientation on March 21 at 7:00 pm at River Bend Nature Center. We hope you will come and bring your family, make some trail mix and help us welcome the new trainees. This will be a social event to help us get to know our new trainees and to show them what the program is all about. You may make a new friend or two and want to sign up to be a mentor!

Speaking of mentors, please consider being a mentor for one or more of our new trainees. Just a few emails or phone calls now and then through their training could make a world of difference for our new folks (and for YOU!). If you are interested in being a mentor, please let one of the Board members know.

Thanks to everyone who helped with the Home & Garden booth. We passed out a lot of information and learned all about balloon twisting along the way. Ha! (That guy was pretty amazing.)

Our March meeting will be Tuesday, March 5 at 7:00 pm. That's also Election Day, so don't forget to vote before you come to the meeting. We will salute Carl Brown, who has reached the 3500 hours milestone and our program will be a presentation by Michael Fiori on Backyard Ponds. Please remember to enter Bolin Hall through the front doors facing Taft Boulevard.

We have so many opportunities to share with you and I hope to see you in person or on Zoom at the meeting! —Laura



Photo by Terry McKee

Rodeo 10:00am-12:00pm Help out with the Wichita Falls Recreation Department as they host this year's Plum Lake Kid's Fishing Rodeo. Help with sign-up, handing out bait, recording fish measurements. Meet at Plum Creek on the north side (by the ball field)..

PO MARCH 9: MONTHLY BIRD OUTING 8:00-10:00am Join Penny Miller, other members and guests at Lake Arrowhead State Park for a bird outing. Meet at Lake Arrowhead State Park at the building by the boat slips and fishing pier. Look for and identify birds found at the park. This is a leisurely hike on level ground (handicap accessible).

AT MARCH 12: TMN Tuesday 12:00-1:00pm TMNTuesdays webinar series are on the second Tuesday of the month, through the 2024 year. TMNTuesdays are a way to learn about top conservation issues of the state, earn advanced training hours and interact with wildlife professionals from across the state! Only TMNTuesdays and Texas Nature Tracker mini-series webinar recordings can count as AT.

Prickly Paddy Melon Weed: Invasive Weed or Economic Crop?

Prickly paddy melon weed (*Cucumis myriocarpus*) is an invasive climbing herb commonly found in Australia that has become highly damaging to the economically important crops and farmland. These weeds are known to cause loss in grain yields, cattle deaths, and control measures that cost the agricultural industry \$100 million annually.

Despite the weed's evident shortcomings, a recent study has found that prickly paddy melon has the potential to be grown as a bulk source of urease enzyme (a cytosolic enzyme catalyzing the hydrolysis of urea to ammonia and carbon dioxide). This enzyme can be used to create bio-cement and prevent soil erosion, turning the invasive nuisance into an economically valuable crop.

Plant-based urease enzymes are a popular alternative to cement, lime, or artificial



soil binders. Paddy melon enzymes were found to be cheaper, more sustainable, and more efficient than the alternative options at stabilizing soil. A recent study also found that using prickly paddy melon resulted in up to 75% savings compared to lab-grade enzyme production costs.

These melons are also a great choice for agricultural production because one vine can produce up to 50 melons, with each containing up to 200 seeds. The seeds are removed from each melon and crushed so the enzymes can be extracted in a liquid form. They are then freeze-dried to create a powdered, high-concentration cementation agent." Lab grade cementation production can take up to a week, while this technique only takes 6 hours. Cementation agents can be beneficial for the construction, mining and forestry industries.

From the February 2024 issue of iWire

Dogs Train to Detect Invasive Species

Five dogs—Tempe, June, Hopper, Woody and Cami—are taking part in a nationwide study organized by *Texas Tech* and *Virginia Tech* researchers to see if dogs have the ability to help combat the spread of invasive pests. The dogs, alongside their owners and AWS trainer Melissa McCue-McGrath, train to

detect the invasive spotted lanternfly.



McCue-McGrath is in charge of hiding dead insect eggs around the room in a box or hanging pouch

for the dogs to sniff out. Once successful, the dogs must signal to their owners, whether it's by biting the box or sitting still in front of a pouch, to tell them they've identified the scent, and they'll be rewarded with a treat.

The dogs will complete an odor test at the end of

RM MARCH 16: Lake Wichita Park Cleanup 2:00-4s:00pm Help with picking up trash in Lake Wichita Park. Meet at the Chat Trail parking lot. The City will provide grabbers and trash bags. Bring gloves and any other items you might need to pick up trash.

AT MARCH 28: In the Life of the Bumble Bee Queen (and the Cuckoo too!) 12:00-1:00pm Join Rich Hatfield, Xerces Senior Endangered Species Conservation Biologist, to take a deep dive into the reproductive females of bumble bees, including cuckoo bumble bees. We'll primarily look at the solitary phase of the lifecycle, including what is known about where and how they hibernate, and what we know about what it takes to establish a nest and how they select a site. Please join us for an exploration into the lesser known aspects of bumble bee ecology.

March where they'll need to pass with an 80-percent to continue in the study. Out of six boxes, the dogs must detect a box with the spotted lanternfly scent. If they pass, the dogs and owners

will train for a field test where they'll need to search the woods to find hidden eggs placed by McCue-McGrath and her team.

“What these dogs can do,

they can smell 40 feet under your feet. That is four basketball nets straight into the earth,” she said. “Their sense of smell is so powerful, we can't even begin to comprehend that.”

Training Class Schedule for 2024

Classes begin March 21 to July 25 at MSU Bolin Hall room 213
Time: 7:00 to 9:00 pm, Thursdays with 4 Saturday field trips between 9am and noon

March

March 13: Deadline for class registration
Registration limited to 25 trainees
March 2: Orientation at River Bend, volunteer opportunities: *Chapter Partners*

April

April 4: Introduction to Rolling Plains Chapter: *Laura Gillis president, RPC*
April 1: Ornithology: *Dr. Marcy Brown Marsden*
April 18: Fish Biology: *Wes Duttor, Inland fisheries TPWD*
April 20: FIELD TRIP to Lake Arrowhead, electro-fishing, with TPWD
April 25: Geology: *Dr Jonathan Price*

May

May 2: Botany, Invasive Species: *Dr Timothy Pegg*
May 4: FIELD TRIP to Lake Arrowhead, history, natural resources, with Ranger L
May 9: Ecological concepts: *Dr Kashif Mahmud*
May 16: Paleontology: *Dr Steven Rosscoe*
May 18: FIELD TRIP to Mineral Wells, fossil dig with Dr Rosscoe
May 23: Insects: *Dr Roy Vogstberger*
May 30: Mammals: *Dr Ray Willis*

June

June 6: Waterways: *Daniel Nix, Executive Director Texas American Water Works Association*
June 13: Mycology: *Dr James Masuoka*
June 15: FIELD TRIP to Lucy Park, water testing, Lynn Seman
June 20: Forest Ecology: *Kimberlee Peterson, Texas A&M Forest Service*
June 27: Pollinators: *Cedar Sanderson, Master Naturalist*

July

July 11: Weather: *Michael Bohling, KFDX Chief Meteorologist*
July 18: Rangeland Ecology: *Ricky Linnex*
July 25: Final Review

Chapter Contacts:

Laura Gillis, President, 733-4467, gillis.laura5319@gmail.com; Alex Nelson, Vice President 882-0936, alenelson96@gmail.com; DeAnna Bullock, Secretary, (972)523-8108, deanna@dfwnetworking.com; Kevin Seager, Treasurer, (505) 715-7324, Kevindseager@gmail.com

Committees Chairperson:

Paula Savage, Newsletter Editor and Designer, 940-s691-0231, pasavage15@gmail.com; Debra Halter, Website Manager 632-8557, chickadeekes@aol.com; Debra Halter, Communication Chair 632-8557, chickadeekes@aol.com

Advisor: Laura Clepper