



# OBSERVATIONS



Master  
Naturalist



OF THE TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST  
TIERRA GRANDE CHAPTER

VOL.1, NO. 2

APRIL 2011

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## Tierra Grande Master Naturalist 2011 Training Announced

By Carol Edwards

Neither sleet nor rain nor snow can keep the Tierra Grande Master Naturalist (TGMN) training committee from working to improve training. Six hearty members braved the February blizzard to discuss training, and we met again in March to fine-tune the 2011 program.



TGMN training is an ever-changing thing, much like our West Texas weather. Unlike the weather, we believe the training is improving. During the 2010 training season,

participants were sent evaluation forms asking for their input. This year's sessions incorporate their suggestions and some new instructors.

Dates for the 2011 TGMN Training are:

June 11 Balmorhea  
July 16 Alpine  
July 29-31 DMP,  
August 21 CDRI  
September 24 Balmorhea  
October 28-30, BBRSP

An interpretive hike up Mount Livermore with some of the top biologists and botanists in the state is part of the training as are interpretive hikes around BBRSP.

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## Why Be A Texas Master Naturalist?

By Barbara Novovitch, Class of 2011

Forty hours of classroom and field instruction for something you believe in and want to know more about? Days and nights in the parks nearby? And for only \$150? With all those goodies, and budget restraints of the current recession, I'd need to have my head (and pocketbook) examined if I didn't try to sign up immediately. Which is exactly what I did. And I expect others will too.

I had a foretaste of the interesting people one meets when I was able to join a group of women hikers at Big Bend Ranch

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## President's Letter

2010 was a landmark year – the fifth anniversary of the founding of the Tierra Grande Chapter. Since inception, we have trained 91 members and accumulated a total of 18,999 volunteer hours, equal to \$370,000 VVE (Volunteer Value Equivalent). Tierra Grande Rocks!

Our chapter serves Presidio, Jeff Davis, and Brewster counties. With member dues and a continuing new member enrollment fee which covers the cost of training, we have just enough revenue to stay in business.

Annual dues are \$20. Please remit by April 1st to:

Randy Ersch, Treasurer  
Tierra Grande Chapter  
PO Box 133  
Alpine, TX 79831-0133

Even if you are an inactive member, please consider staying current with your dues. Tierra Grande is doing good work; all members can be proud of their affiliation.

– Ellen Weinacht  
President

### Our Mission is...

To develop a corps of well-informed volunteers who provide education, outreach and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within our community.

## On the Trail with Tierra Grande

### UPCOMING EVENTS & VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

APRIL 2011						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Apr 3	Apr 4	Apr 5	Apr 6	Apr 7	Apr 8	Apr 9 All Day – DMP Open Day All Day – Relay for Life Fundraiser 3:30pm NPSOT Social 6:00pm CDRI Green Fire Fundraiser
Apr 10	Apr 11	Apr 12	Apr 13 Monarch Monitoring Workshop - Boerne	Apr 14 Monarch Monitoring Workshop - Boerne	Apr 15 Monarch Monitoring Workshop - Boerne	Apr 16
Apr 17	Apr 18 11:30am-1:30pm – Volunteer Big Bend Luncheon/SRSU Espino Conference	Apr 19 7 PM Gardens Through the Ages CDRI Lecture Lawrence Hall Rm. 309	Apr 20	Apr 21 7pm – Sierra Club Mtg in Lawrence Hall	Apr 22 CDRI Native Plant Sale for Members	Apr 23 CDRI Native Plant Sale for Public Alpine's Earth Day at Kokernot Lodge
Apr 24	Apr 25	Apr 26	Apr 27	Apr 28	Apr 29 CDRI 3-Day Field Trip: Birding the Devils River	Apr 30 CDRI 3-Day Field Trip: Birding the Devils River
MAY 2011						
May 1 CDRI 3-Day Field Trip: Birding the Devils River	May 2	May 3	May 4	May 5	May 6 National Public Gardens Day	May 7 CDRI Mission Possible Nature Challenge CDRI Guided Garden Walks RAF Lewis Canyon Petroglyph Field Trip 10am-1pm – Sierra Club Fern Canyon Hike
May 8	May 9	May 10	May 11	May 12 CDRI Lecture: Migratory Cave Swallows	May 13 All Day – DMP Open Day	May 14 All Day – DMP Open Day CDRI Field Trip: Alamito Creek 8:30-11am – CDRI Hummingbird Banding 9:30-11am – CDRI Build a Bird House

Please check online for the most up to date calendar of upcoming events. Just visit: <http://txmn.org/tierra/calendar/>

MAY 2011 (continued)						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
May 15 All Day – DMP Open Day	May 16	May 17	May 18	May 19	May 20	May 21 NPSOT Garden Tour
May 22	May 23	May 24	May 25	May 26	May 27	May 28 RAF Meyers Springs Tour
JUNE 2011						
May 29	May 30	May 31	Jun 1	Jun 2	Jun 3	Jun 4 RAF Cedar Springs & Mystic Shelter
Jun 5	Jun 6	Jun 7	Jun 8	Jun 9	Jun 10	Jun 11
Jun 12	Jun 13	Jun 14	Jun 15	Jun 16	Jun 17	Jun 18 All Day – DMP Open Day
Jun 19	Jun 20 CDRI Critter Club Summer Camp National Pollinator Week	Jun 21 CDRI Critter Club Summer Camp National Pollinator Week	Jun 22 CDRI Critter Club Summer Camp National Pollinator Week	Jun 23 CDRI Critter Club Summer Camp National Pollinator Week 7pm – CDRI Lecture: Native Plants & Bees	Jun 24 CDRI Critter Club Summer Camp National Pollinator Week	Jun 25 CDRI Pollinator Palooza Family Field Day
Jun 26	Jun 27	Jun 28	Jun 29	Jun 30	Jul 1 CDRI Butterfly Count	Jul 2

For more details on these and other events, please visit our website at <http://txmn.org/tierra/calendar/>.  
You'll find listings for July through December with additional description and contacts.

## *The Face of Success...*



*Ladies Who Hike* at Big Bend Ranch State Park in February 2011, with their guide, from left to right, Madge Lindsay, Blaine Hall (park interpretive specialist), Paige Delaney, Linda Hedges, Kathy Bork, Mary Fenton, Anne Adkins, Lou Weinacht; front row, left, Barbara Novovitch, and right, Jill Goodwin. Not pictured, Ellen Weinacht (taking photograph), Charlotte Carter, Carol Edwards, Clare Freeman.

## *Monarch Migration*

Journey North is requesting first spring sightings of monarchs and milkweed. Your help would be greatly appreciated.

Here's the link to report sightings:

<http://www.learner.org/cgi-bin/jnorth/jn-sightings>

Here are the maps:

<http://www.learner.org/jnorth/maps/Maps.html#monarch>

## **Project: Rainwater Garden in Marfa**

*By Laura Belkin*

Water, its abundance or scarcity, and who controls it are hot topics right now even beyond droughty Texas. We have had several presentations by AgriLife Extension specialists on the subject of rainwater catchment and water law.

Here in Marfa there are two rainwater catchment installations. The one at the Marfa Activity Center, known as the MAC building, was established in 2008 with the enthusiastic support of City Councilman David Beebe. This narrow strip garden on the east side of the building was adopted in 2010 by the Tierra Grande Chapter



of Texas Master Naturalists. At this moment, part of it has been removed to make way for a new ADA compliant entrance.

As luck would have it, a rainwater catchment tank had been installed at the city gas company building a few blocks away with the idea of using some of that property as a demonstration garden using water caught off the building and street, so the two tall mesquites and desert willow were moved to that site. Smaller plants such as autumn sages, Mexican blue sage, a large agave and several cacti are waiting for permanent places either in the new garden or back at the MAC building garden.

TG-TMN members Bob Martin, Jill Goodwin, Randy Ersh, Robert Flanders, Pollyanne Melton and Laura Belkin removed the small plants and planted

the larger ones which were moved by Mayor Dan Dunlap. Planting holes were machine-dug by a city worker, so this has been an effort supported by the City as well as AgriLife and TG-TMN.

The next step is to design the shape of the new garden and get the site work done. The goal of this garden is three-fold. Catching the rainwater off the building and what runs down the street will relieve flooding of the neighboring homes, the tank will hold water to supplement rain and the plantings will show that native plants can make an attractive low maintenance garden.

There will be opportunities for volunteer work of various kinds. Those who do not like shoveling dirt and arranging rocks may enjoy planting and weeding and checking the drip system. Once established, the gardens will want occasional checking to remove weeds and trash. This can be done at any time that is convenient. Watch for the next volunteer call and get in on the fun!



From left, Bob Martin (Fort Davis); Jill Goodwin (San Antonio & Alpine); and Robert Flanders (Alpine); not pictured, Laura Belkin (Marfa) [taking the photo] and Donna Greene. This team of Tierra Grande volunteers successfully moved plants from the construction zone at the MAC building over to the Gas Company where there is an about-to-be garden.



## **Project: Horned Lizard Surveys**

*By Jill Goodwin*

The Tierra Grande Master Naturalists have adopted as a project participation in the TPW Reptile and Amphibian Watch program. At least three groups have committed to specific Horned Lizard Transect measurements, one group in the Balmorhea area led by Ellen Weinacht; another outside of Marfa led by Clare Freeman; and the third at the Davis Mountains Preserve led by Jill Goodwin. Anyone can sign up to help out by contacting any of us. We are committed to hiking a three-mile transect once a month from April through October, recording horned



lizards with photos, physical measurements, habitat records and Harvester ant populations. In addition, individuals are invited to do horned lizard observation and recording at any time, even in your backyard! We can fill you in on that too. Jesse Kelsch is conducting a desert tortoise watch, so contact her if you are interested in that.

Next year, if all goes well, we'd like to add a Frog Watch at area riparian sites. Keep that on your calendar and look for more details in future newsletters.



# SANDHILL CRANES: A SPECTACLE OF NATURE

BY MADGE LINDSAY



*A few sandhill cranes.*

In mid-November of 2010, five birders (among them four members of Tierra Grande Master Naturalists) left Fort Davis, TX on a pilgrimage to Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) near Socorro, NM. The birding group planned their trip for some time and had the goal of witnessing one of America's best-



*Great morning light.*

known wildlife events. Bosque del Apache is known as one of the most spectacular refuges in North America, where each autumn, tens of thousands of birds—including huge flocks of Sandhill cranes, Arctic geese and ducks—make the refuge their winter home.

*The best of Bosque del Apache, photo by Carol Edwards.*



During the late fall, the refuge offers a spectacular wildlife experience like none other, where the sights

and sounds of nature truly denote the onset of winter and migration at its fullest. The cool air is filled with the honking of geese and the guttural call of cranes. Flocks of snow geese lift off from their feeding grounds when frightened by an eagle or stalking coyote. At dusk, huge flights of geese and cranes return to roost in the marshes or along the Rio Grande.

In the summer, Bosque del Apache, though quiet, remains an oasis in the surrounding arid lands and mountain grandeur.

"Made up of 57,331 acres the refuge is located along the Rio Grande at the northern edge of the Chihuahuan desert. It



*Van Robinson (photographer) – One lucky guy, or what? Pictured, Top Row, from left to right, Ellen Weinacht, Madge Lindsay, Carol Edwards; bottom row, Charlotte Carter.*

*Cottonwoods.*



*Continued on page 12*

# ROCK ART FOUNDATION: HIKE TO HALO SHELTER

BY JILL GOODWIN

THE ROCK ART FOUNDATION offers excellent Continuing Education opportunities for Master Naturalists. Headquartered just west of Seminole Canyon State Park, the organization works closely with Park staff and local landowners to promote public education, research and preservation.

I recently had a chance to hike with a group organized and led by the Foundation to a wonderful rock art site, Halo Shelter, located on ranch land. This Lower Pecos site, like most such sites, is accessed via high-clearance vehicle. From our "jumping-off place" it was a short but exciting hike down a rope ladder and along a shallow talus slope to our destination. Named for the unusual spiky "haloes" painted around the heads of many figures, the site is a long sheltered rock ledge whose occupancy has been dated back 3000-plus years. A proliferation of images of animals and shaman-type figures in red, black and yellow decorate the entire back of the shelter, many superimposed over earlier work. It is a breathtaking sight, and our

guide was kind enough to give us plenty of time to inspect the paintings, take photos and discuss the art and the peoples who created it.

For more information on hikes and events offered by the Foundation, I recommend that you visit: <http://www.rockart.org>. There is a small participant fee for some hikes



and events; some are free to Foundation members. Yearly membership forms are available at the website also. A Rock Art

Rendezvous held on a weekend in mid-October is open to all members. The event offers hikes to almost all available rock art sites in the Lower Pecos and features researchers speaking on the latest findings. There are camping facilities at the Foundation's preserve for the weekend.



Camping is also available at Seminole Canyon State Park, less than three hours from Alpine. Motels are available in Sanderson, Comstock and Del Rio. Seminole Canyon is about 30 miles west of Del Rio. This is such a fun way to accumulate your education hours!

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*EDITOR'S NOTES: Photographs courtesy of Greg Williams, Executive Director of Rock Art Foundation. To get on the RAF email list, go to <http://www.fellowpages.org/rockart/news.cfm> and sign up. The list is confidential – addresses are not for sale and are not used by anyone except the RAF.*





# THE RIVER ROAD

BY PATT SIMS

It has taken me a little time to get back to the blog but I have been on the River Road (Ranch Road 170 east from Presidio) each week to monitor the progress of wildflowers. As already written, the blue bonnets, the desert marigolds, the tree tobacco, and many other plants seemed to be obliterated by the extreme cold (extreme by Big Bend standards, that is). I am monitoring two spots: the top of the Big Hill (Santana Mesa) and the Colorado Canyon put-in, both of which suffered from the extreme cold.

Two weeks after the extreme weather, there were no plants blooming at either location. The blue bonnets I had photographed before the freeze looked dead. The desert marigolds looked like they had a chance to come back to life but were definitely hurt by the cold. Tree tobacco varied in degree of damage: if the tree was close to the river, the blooms were gone and some of the leaves were brown but the plants looked like they would survive. The further from the river the "tree" was, the more severe the damage, to the point that many looked dead down to ground level.



Three weeks after the extreme weather new plants were beginning to bloom, including new blue bonnets, new desert marigolds, and bicolored mustards. Although there was color these plants were not blooming on top of the Big Hill. It appears that those blue bonnets that bloomed early were killed by the cold, as were the desert marigolds. But those



plants that had not yet bloomed are now blooming, not many but some. Most of the bluebonnets appear to be much smaller than normal for this area. In this part of Texas we have a larger bluebonnet with a deeper blue color: *Lupinus havardii*. These are a different species from those in central Texas that are smaller and a lighter blue (*Lupinus texensis*).

There is yet another sad thing to report about this area. It seems the cactus were badly hurt by the cold. Many had turned a much paler color and had collapsed to the ground. The cold weather combined with the extreme aridity (no rain since October) probably acted together to do the damage. As for the exotic cactus that people had planted around their buildings, many of them have been destroyed by the cold, too.

As for other organisms at these sites: the Big Bend sliders appear unhurt by the cold, they were out sunning on all the rocks. The Bewick's wrens that I heard before the freeze were active at both sites and there were insects to chase, catch, and eat. In the river ring-necked ducks and American coots were paddling around.

The warmth of the last two weekends makes me think that winter is gone and we can celebrate an early spring but then I remember something I heard when I first came to Texas many, many decades ago: only fools and Yankees predict the weather. Point taken.

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*EDITOR'S NOTES: More great writing from Patt Sims. Patt and her husband Ken live in Shafter and are both Tierra Grande Chapter "Charter Members". Patt recently retired and is a statewide honored teacher from the Presidio Independent School District. Ken is a retired U.S. Customs & Border Protection officer. Patt and Ken have an "Adopt A Highway" section on highway 67 right there at Shafter. So, if you put any litter out your car window, Ken requests that you attach a dollar bill to it first!*

## Cornell Lab eNews Cornell Lab eNews

Check out some of the latest articles from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology – *The Sights and Sounds of Arctic Birds*; *Funky Nests in Funky Places*; and *NestWatch – Build a Bond with Birds*. Just visit their website at <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/>

# TURKEY VULTURES

BY PATT SIMS

They are another one of those signs of spring, the turkey vultures (or buzzards, as most of us call them). Their arrival in the Big Bend is not based upon any uncanny knowledge of weather patterns; they seem to be more controlled by the calendar...their own, not ours. At my house the first buzzards usually appear during the second week of March. Just a few of them come in and settle on the hills or in the trees along the creek for a night or two and then they are gone. My older neighbors used to tell me these were the scouts, checking to see if the weather was okay for the rest of group. I have my doubts about that but the larger group of buzzards (called a kettle by some), usually appears the next week. This year, right on time, scouts were followed a week later by about 50 buzzards.

Seen from a distance, as it soars through the deep blue skies of the Big Bend country, the buzzard is beautiful, a master of air currents and crosswinds. The bird banks and circles, dives and climbs seemingly without effort. The long-evolved highly efficient flight utilizes rising hot air (thermals) to soar over this vast region.

The wingspan of a four pound buzzard is about six feet. The long, wide wings allow slow flight. The long flight feathers (called primaries) are attached to the arm bone in front and extend back. Unusually large muscles control the primaries, spreading them to increase wing surface to catch updrafts, contracting them to glide down. The adjustments are constant. The bones of the

wings have been modified for this effortless form of flight. The shoulder girdle is more rigid, allowing greater wing support which makes it less tiring for long-term gliding. The joints in the wings rotate freely for subtle twists and turns.

Although it is the lone buzzard seen soaring in the afternoon skies, nights and mornings are usually spent at a common roost, either in trees, microwave towers or on cliffs. Nor are they very cordial to one another. Regularly, landing birds will crash into roosting buzzards, toppling them from their roosts. This is usually accompanied by some hissing and flapping of the wings of the disturbed bird.

One group of buzzards I have watched for 3 decades numbered more than 120 when I first started watching them

in the summer of 1977. Their numbers have dropped to about 50 now. I just counted the latest flock to move in at about 60 birds. But that number will decrease over the next couple of weeks as some of them will move farther north. One of my neighbors, now departed, said that today's numbers are significantly less than when the screw worm fly caused massive death and dying of wildlife throughout the border country in the early 1950s.

When the sun rises the buzzard seeks a sunny spot, usually with others from the roost. This spot may be the top of a tree or the top of a cliff. It could be a fence post or a roof line. Much of the morning is spent standing with wings extended to get the full benefit of the sun's rays. The exact function



*Continued page 12*



# FOOLS AND YANKEES

BY PATT SIMS

I mentioned fools and Yankees trying to predict the weather in the Chihuahuan Desert in an earlier blog but the more I think about it the less I believe it is a Yankee or a fool's mission. I think it is human to try to predict and prepare for what is coming as far as weather is concerned. There is another saying in this part of Texas: "if you don't like the weather, wait a few minutes and it will change". Nobody ever seems to remember that in those few minutes, the weather can ruin you, destroy your crops, kill your stock and wreck your house. Oh, yes, it can...I've seen it done. But mostly we just try to get through the bad weather, particularly the weather that is too cold.

If you look into local lore you will find there are lots of sayings that try to describe when freezing weather ends.

As for spring with its warm, almost hot days, clear skies, high winds, does that mean spring in the Big Bend of the Chihuahuan Desert? I was preparing for a camping trip with students from Presidio High School. We would be doing water quality tests over a 24-hour period during the weekend. As I thought about spring-like temperatures, I didn't even look at my down sleeping bag. I mean, the warm weather is certainly a harbinger of spring. As I left the house I noticed the signs of spring. Cactus wrens, cardinals, canyon wrens and doves were all calling. Yes, that is a sign of spring. As I drove along the river, I saw a few wildflowers, recovering as they were from the hard winter. A few mustards dotted the road side, along with a few bluebonnets and even fewer desert marigolds. These plants do not indicate seasons, merely conditions. Considered ephemerals by botanists, these plants germinate after summer rains but don't bloom until late fall and into winter. Their blossoms have more to do with the length of day and summer rainfall than with seasons of the year.

One plant, the mesquite, is used throughout the Big Bend

country as an indicator of spring. "When the mesquite leafs out," the saying goes, "no more freezing weather." As we stopped at the Colorado Put-In along the river to do water-quality testing, I searched for new leaves on the mesquites. Yes! There they were. Almost lime-green in color, these leaves were definitely brand new to the plant. A closer look showed that flower buds were also emerging from the tree. Great, no more

cold weather! That is, if you believe in folktales.

Buzzards know when the danger of frost is over, according to other folktales. They never come back to the Big Bend before the last freeze according to my neighbors. I watched the sky as I drove along the river. Ravens, lots of ravens, were visible. They live here in the winter, filling in for the buzzards



as carrion eaters. Lots of hawks were visible, too. Possibly many of them were migrating north. I saw pyrrhuloxias and wrens, one kingfisher and lots of sparrows, but no turkey vultures. A few people had reported seeing buzzards during the backyard bird count in Presidio but they didn't know that we have black vultures as residents throughout the year. Only the turkey vulture, noted for its red head, counts as an indicator of spring. But turkey vultures seem to be more keyed to the calendar. For years the first turkey vultures would arrive in Shafter on March 10th, long before the dangers of freezing weather have passed.

Friday night we had dinner around the campfire and, as the students talked, I looked around at the different plants. Bees were busy gathering pollen from an ash tree while birds were busy gathering bees. However, ash trees are not mentioned in folktales; neither are the bees. As darkness fell, so did the temperature. I snuggled down into my bedroll, hoping it wouldn't get too cold.

*Continued page 12*

# GRAPEVINE HILLS HIKE

BY PETEI GUTH

We hiked Grapevine Hills in Big Bend National Park on a glorious sunny day — February 12th. There were six of us including myself, Allen and Clemencia Bakker, Roy and Amy Amick. This group brought along a German foreign exchange student, Carolin Noth. The weather was sunny and bright with just enough breeze for comfort. We saw nothing blooming since it has been so dry, and we didn't see much animal life except birds, pyrrhuloxia, mockingbirds, sparrows and a red tailed hawk just as we were leaving. We took it leasurily while I talked a little about the plants along the way, and we discussed other interesting



*Photograph of Grapevine Hills Hikers, by Petei Guth*

observations. Carolin took lots of photos to show her family and friends back home. She seemed to enjoy the Chihuahuan Desert experience. We had brought along our lunch so we could enjoy it while taking in the wonderful desert views and visiting. After our hike we decided to head for the Hot Springs for a soak before dinner. About five, we left the Hot Springs

and decided to visit the Starlight Theater for dinner; we had worked up appetites and none of us had been there since it had re-opened. Since everyone had to head back to Alpine, we just left as the music was starting. A great time was had by all, and we hope to do this again, maybe after we've had rain.

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**Join Petei for the Sierra Club Hike to Fern Canyon at Mitre Peak Girl Scout Camp on Saturday, May 7th, from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm.**

Experience this wonderful wet canyon with two perennial pools and 14 species of ferns. There are Madrones, black willow, Tracy hawthorn and choke cherry just to name a few of the trees. Occasionally one of our native orchids can be seen. It is one and one half miles at the most, easy to moderate with some rock scrambling and some elevation change. Enjoy great views of Mitre Peak and interesting rock formations.



Bring your lunch so we can enjoy it at Second Pool, where we might see hummingbirds and dragonflies.

Wear hiking boots and a hat; bring lunch, snacks and water. Binoculars might be good for some bird watching and don't forget your camera. A walking stick is also helpful if the water level is up.

Please bring a \$5.00 fee for the Girl Scout Camp. We will meet at the Girl Scout Camp fifteen miles north of Alpine, call if you need directions.

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**Call Petei at 432-837-1036**

# THE HIKE FROM HELL

BY GEORGE PITLIK

Call me a softie, but having been a decade-long resident of the Florida Keys, I learned to avoid cold weather and have not ever spent a full winter in Big Bend. Each January, my Mexico traveling amiga Janet Stewart and I go bicycling in Mexico for about a month. This year we settled on a trip of six weeks from mid-January to the end of February and no bikes allowed. Yes, we did miss the big freeze. Sorry about that; but I spent many years working outside on airplanes in Connecticut and Massachusetts and am very aware of brutally cold weather. That's why I depart for warmer climes when possible.

This year Janet and I spent time in Oaxaca City, which is south of Mexico City, and a few other smaller pueblos and towns. The place where we encountered the Hike from Hell was not far from Cuernavaca in the town of Tepoztlán, which is in the state of Morelos. The town is famous for the remains of a temple built on top of the nearby Tepozteco mountain. The temple, which is also called the pyramid, was built in the 12th or 13th century and is dedicated to Ometochtli-Tepoxtécatl, god of pulque (an alcoholic fermented maguey drink), fertility and abundance.

We did drink pulque while in the area, but the night before the hike, our beverage of choice was an expensive bottle of Mescal, complete with a worm waiting at the bottom of the jug. Big mistake!

We walked north out of town where the start of the trail to the pyramid becomes lined with vendors selling all sorts of food, drink and souvenirs. We had less than four liters of water between us. We were told that you could make the climb to the top in 45 minutes. There is no water along the trail, though at the top there are small bottles for sale. We brought no snacks as we believed the hike to be short. (The Boy Scout motto of "Be Prepared" was foolishly ignored.)

The path to the pyramid consists of a crude and steep "stairway". It's like ascending to the observation platform of the Empire State Building in the stairwell, except the Empire State Building isn't as high and the steps aren't as treacherous.

A sign at the bottom warns hikers to turn around if their cardiovascular system is not top notch. The sign was in Spanish so I *think* that is what it said. The trail starts at an elevation over a mile high. The elevation gain is 400 meters. Little math problem here for diversion.

The steps are not really steps but rubble. The height between steps varied considerably as well as the distance between steps. My estimate is that less than two percent of the trail was actually a trail. It was rubble.

The final approach to the summit was a series of steep and narrow switchbacks. If you fell at any point on the switchbacks you would immediately fall back down to the first switchback. At one point there were two narrow ladders. The trail is too narrow for mules, so the water vendors at the top had to backpack the water to the top.

Anyone who knows me is familiar with my caution while engaging in outdoor activities. If I were alone I would have turned back way before the top, but being in Mexico, machismo clouded my thinking — not the first time of course.

The trip back down was worse than the climb as I had no hiking sticks and was very tired. About halfway to the bottom, my quadriceps muscles began to quiver slightly and then to shake. I needed food and an energy drink. This physical activity taxed me more than any activity I have ever done. Two years ago, Janet and I bicycled 300 miles in the mountains of Mexico over two weeks, carrying all our gear. This hike was worse. Much worse. Janet did a little bit better than me, but she is younger and tougher.

Maybe it was just advancing age? But for four days after the hike it was painful to walk or even to move. It was embarrassing.

Did I learn anything? Yes. I now have one hiking pole in my suitcase ready for next time. ALWAYS take far more food and water than you think you will need. Now... how to remember all that?



### Fools & Yankees, continued from page 9

Usually cold fronts are heralded by a line of clouds in the north. As I looked out at the clear sky, I saw no bank of clouds from that direction. Every cold front this year has been preceded by an unseasonably warm spell, like we had just had. Why should this one be any different? By morning the temperature was at 32 degrees Fahrenheit. I was curled in a little ball, trying to stay warm until the sun appeared. As I emerged from my tent into the warmth giving sunlight, I saw that I was camped near a mesquite with new leaves. So much for folktales!

### Turkey Vultures, continued from page 8

of this activity is open to speculation. Some think it aids in thermoregulation, allowing the bird to absorb warmth after a cool night in the trees. They also spend some of this time preening (grooming) their feathers and removing lice and other parasites they may have picked up during the night.

Not all buzzards we see in the sky sleep with the flock at night. Some males and females have formed pairs and gone off to raise families. The male and female choose an isolated, fairly inaccessible cliff to lay their eggs. No nest is built and the eggs are laid on bare rock. The eggs will hatch into ungainly birds covered with cottony white down. When disturbed, the young will hiss loudly and clack their sharp bills. After ten weeks they get their juvenile plumage and start learning to fly and soar.

With its sharp eyesight, the buzzard can locate dead and dying animals from its vantage point high in the sky. However, the bird also has large nostrils with many smell receptors, enabling it to track down smelly, decomposing foods. While their dietary predilections may seem unsavory to us, it allows them to fill an important niche in the Big Bend country as a recycler, returning nutrients to the ecosystem.

### Sandhill Cranes, continued from page 5

straddles the Rio Grande, approximately 20 miles south of Socorro, New Mexico. The heart of the Refuge is about 12,900 acres of moist bottomlands—3,800 acres are active floodplain of the Rio Grande and 9,100 acres are areas where water is diverted to create extensive wetlands, farmlands, and riparian forests. The rest of Bosque del Apache NWR is made up of arid foothills and mesas flanked by the Chupadera Mountains and the San Pascual Mountains. Most of these desert lands are preserved as wilderness areas. However, local farmers work with the refuge growing crops on designated land for wintering waterfowl and cranes. They plant alfalfa and corn, harvesting the alfalfa and leaving the corn for wildlife. Refuge staff grow additional food such as winter wheat, clover, native plants and other crops needed to sustain the wildlife over the winter.

### **New! – From TMN State**

The February edition of the TMN podcast is available on iTunes. The March edition will be added soon.

Special thanks to Texas Master Naturalist Volunteer Lester Harlow and his team in the Piney Wood Lakes Chapter for their hard work developing the podcasts and making them available for us!



Just log on to the TMN website at [www.txmn.org](http://www.txmn.org) and see the new link to PODCAST (circled above). Click on the word PODCAST to hear more about what other chapters are up to!

### **Save the Date!**

#### **2011 Statewide Annual Meeting & Advanced Training**

**October 21–23, 2011  
MO Ranch, Hunt TX**



**2011 Annual Re-Certification Pin**  
Artwork by Jan Redden, Gideon Lincecum Chapter

Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1939 to provide "a refuge and breeding grounds for migratory birds and other wildlife and to develop wintering grounds for greater sandhill cranes, which were then endangered. The refuge and its management serve as a model for conservation, exhibiting cooperative planning and management at its best."



*"I saw them first many Novembers ago and heard their triumphant trumpet calls, a hundred or more sandhill cranes riding south on a thermal above the Rio Grande Valley, and that day their effortless flight and their brassy music got into my soul."*

AUTHOR'S NOTES: Parts of this article are from the NWR brochure for Bosque del Apache. Trip Participants included: Charlotte Carter, Carol Edwards, Madge Lindsay, Van Robinson & Ellen Weinacht. Photos by Madge Lindsay unless otherwise specified.

The \$150 training covers the cost of the training manual, most meals, snacks and coffee breaks, and lodging at Big Bend Ranch State Park in the Saucedo Bunkhouse. Likewise, most meals, camping or bunks at the Nature Conservancy's McIvor Center at the Davis Mountain Preserve are included.



The June 11 meeting is a half-day of training followed by lunch and a social for all TGMN members. The July 16 meeting in Alpine is another part-day meeting to look at the impact of urban change.



In 2010, training time was cut from four 3-day weekends to two 3-day weekends and two 1-day sessions. All other chapters meet every Saturday for eight to ten weeks, so TGMN felt we needed additional sessions to adequately cover the required topics and get enough hours.

The statewide program requires a minimum of 40 hours of instruction covering 20-plus topics. Additionally members must attend 8 hours of advanced education and complete 40 hours of approved volunteer work annually. Volunteer activities may include trail maintenance; organizing or addressing flyers for events; monitoring horned



lizards, toads or birds; helping maintain community gardens; and conducting interpretive hikes for area parks, preserves, and nature centers. And, here's a no-brainer: TGMN officers get plenty of volunteer hours running the chapter, so some of you might consider running for a TGMN office or heading a committee. Your help would be welcome!

We are delighted that we already have six eager applicants and one make-up participant ready to complete the application for 2011 training.

A maximum of sixteen participants will be accepted, so get your application in early. Spread the word to any interested parties.



Application forms will be sent by email beginning March 15th, and the application period will end May 1st, 2011. Acceptance or rejection notices will be sent by June 1st, 2011.

If you have questions about the training, you may contact Carol Edwards at 432-426-2314 or bbbirder at sbcgobal dot net or, to get an application, contact Steve Elfring at 432-364-2673 or email selfring at bigbend dot net.



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*EDITOR'S NOTES: Carol Edwards is Tierra Grande Vice President and Education Chair.*

State Park in late February. Ellen Weinacht invited me — we had hiked together, and baked bread together, before my husband Luc and I moved from Marathon to Tennessee for two years for family reasons and then returned in December. Several in that group, like Ellen, were Master Naturalists.

While in Tennessee, I had become interested in birding — but I haven't yet devoted the hours of listening to CDs and checking my bird books to learning all the birds here, although they wake me with their songs every morning. And I was delighted to see the turkey vultures on their return to Marathon this spring — they were overnighing in the tall pines, and hummingbirds will likely soon be nesting in the live oaks outside our bedroom window, as they did before we left. Note: Dallas Baxter's Nature Notes on Marfa Public Radio, 93.5 on your FM dial, had a recent delightful piece on the vulture "harbingers of spring" that is worth a listen.

I can do my studying on birds and receive more instruction on the year-round and visiting species during the Master Naturalist training — as well as learn more about desert plants and ecology, geology, entomology, ichthyology, mammology and archeology. The Big Bend of Texas offers so much in all these "ologies." My photographer/videographer husband frequently remarked while we were in Tennessee, where I had grown up, that he shared artist Georgia O'Keeffe's complaints about the Eastern Appalachian area of the U.S. — "there's no color there, everything's green" and then Luc would add, "and you can't see for any distance, there's always a mountain in the way."

We were delighted to return to Marathon and the Big Bend, and now I look forward to learning more about this vast, colorful area and all aspects of its nature. After my instruction is complete, I'll try to help pass along this knowledge to others through volunteer service in parks, the Nature Conservancy, the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute and schools — an end focus of the Master Naturalist program. Won't you join me?

## Gala Feedback

Remember that wonderful party we had earlier this year? If not, Mimi Smith's testimonial about the gala will bring back memories of this special evening:

"Oh, I had so much fun! I intentionally sat at a table where I knew no one, and had a fabulous time with them all. I really loved the movie, and I learned about a whole new dimension of the Texas Master Naturalist training, one that I had not previously been aware of — interpreting, as its own specialized skill. I can see now that there is a lot to learn about helping people relate to a concept, besides just the subject matter. It's the pedagogy of the trail, I imagine.

And then there was the food! I think I was the only person to unashamedly go back for seconds. I even cut in for cookies!

Once again, I really had a blast. The Tierra Grande people are definitely my kind of people. I'm so happy to finally put faces to some of the names. I was also quite impressed with the dedication and long time service of many of the charter members."

Mimi Smith is one of our applicants for the Class of 2011.



## Marshall Lecture Wrap-Up

Richardson Gill recently delivered the 23rd annual Mary Thomas Marshall Lecture at Sul Ross State University. Gill, general manager of Cibolo Creek Ranch near Marfa, renowned anthropologist and author of the book, *The Great Maya Droughts: Water, Life and*

*Death*, delivered a data-backed presentation on how climatic factors led to the downfall of the Maya civilization. For more information, check out the recent article on the *Alpine Daily Planet* and pick up a copy of Gill's book for an indepth look at how climate has affected history.

## Scudday Scholarship Fund

The CDRI Board of Directors invites you to honor Dr. James F. Scudday, a dedicated teacher, biologist, & co-founder of the CDRI. As a dedicated teacher of biology at Sul Ross State University, Dr. Scudday emphasized integrated and relevant information that was consistently interesting to students both in the classroom and in the field. Despite his heavy teaching load, Jim regularly conducted significant research for scientific journal publication, as well as for the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department and National Park Service.



The Dr. James Scudday Scholarship Fund was established in 2010 in honor of Jim's memory and his many contributions to the field. Donations to the Fund will be used to support graduate student research in the natural sciences of the Chihuahuan Desert region. To

make a contribution to the Fund, please contact Dr. Cathryn Hoyt at [choyt@cdri.org](mailto:choyt@cdri.org) or call 432-364-2499.



# Naturalist-Inspired Smart Phone Apps

*By Michelle Haggerty*

For those of you who utilize Smart Phones, a couple of Master Naturalists from the Capital Area and Elm Fork Chapters have contributed the following list of naturalist and naturalist-inspired smart phone apps. Thanks to Patricia McGee, Ron Fellows and Vernon Berger for sharing. Some of the apps have even been developed by Texas master Naturalist, Ron Fellows!

Name of App	Topic	What it Does	Platform	Date posted
Trailhead: The North Face	Location-based Services	GPS for hiking and locates trails near you based on your location	iPhone	1/25/2011
Compass	Location	Newest version allows you to select true or magnetic north and moves in real time with your movement	iPhone	1/25/2011
Lapetus	History	An Interactive globe image that allows you to view geographical images of earth over historical time	iPhone	1/25/2011
WhoWhatWhen	Images	Allows you to label and annotate image in an alphabetical database	iPhone	
iBird South	Birds	Interactive field guide to birds of Southern North America: identification and sounds	iPhone	1/26/2011
iPlant	Plants	Plant identification and description	iPhone	1/26/2011
Wildflowers of Texas-Audubon	Plants	Audubon Guides – Wildflowers of Texas: photos and information	iPhone	1/26/2011
Motion GPS 8.1	Location	The swiss army knife of doing everything. GPS: search, go to, navigation, compass, position	iPhone	1/26/2011
Geography Texas	Geology	Incredible map layers that visualize both physical and manmade features of TX	iPhone	1/28/2011
Planets	Astronomy	Visualizes night sky, 3-D sky, visibility, and globe views of the heavens	iPhone	1/28/2011
TASA Geology	Geology	Basic geologic timeline with ages	iPhone	1/28/2011
EveryTrail PRO	Location-based Services	GPS enabled Self-Guided Tours. Create your own or search EveryTrail.com for over 350,000 worldwide. Internet access not needed on trail, Stores Maps, Guides, and Trips locally on smartphone. Trips and Guides are available on EveryTrail.com. Search for “Master Naturalist” created Tours. Your Trail Guides can be stored and shared on EveryTrail.com for Free.	iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch, and Android Smartphones - \$3.99	1/29/2011
EveryTrail	Location-based Services	GPS enabled Self-Guided Tours, create your own or search EveryTrail.com for over 350,000 worldwide. Internet access not needed on trail, Stores Maps, Guides, and Trips locally on smartphone. Trips and Guides are available on EveryTrail.com. Search for “Master Naturalist” created Tours. Your Trail Guides can be stored and shared on EveryTrail.com for Free.	iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch, and Android Smartphones - Free version has advertising	1/29/2011
EasyTrail GPS 4	Location-based Services	GPS enabled Self-Guided Tours. Internet access not needed on trail. Trails can be saved on EveryTrail.com.	iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch - \$3.99	1/29/2011
Cartographer	Maps	Travel Maps with GPS Make Google “My Maps” with beautiful vintage map interface	iPhone, iPad - \$1.99	1/29/2011
Flashlight	Utility	Flashlight app for those times when you need a flashlight	iPhone - Free	1/29/2011
iBird Pro	Birds	Interactive field guide to birds of North America: identification and sounds	iPhone, iPad - \$14.99	1/29/2011
Office2 (iPhone) & Office2HD (iPad)	Productivity	Supports Excel, PowerPoint and Word on iPhone and iPad. We use spreadsheet for recording AT and Volunteer Hours on PC, Mac.	iPhone, iPad, and Android Smartphone - \$5.99	1/29/2011

Dragon Dictation	Voice to Text	Dragon Dictation is an easy-to-use voice recognition application that allows you to easily speak and instantly see your text or email messages. In fact, it's up to five (5) times faster than typing on the keyboard. Just tap the record button and start talking. The app will create the text as you speak. When your done, just copy the text to any app. Works great for trail notes!	iPhone, iPad - Free	1/29/2011
Word Lens	Translation	Instantly translate printed words from one language to another with built in iPhone camera in real time. Great app if you don't speak or read Spanish. Use anytime you see a sign in Spanish and wonder what it says! You won't believe this app. App is free, but translators are \$9.99 for Spanish to English and \$9.99 English to Spanish. Best used for printed signs, menus, etc. No network connection required.	iPhone - Free	1/29/2011

BirdsEye is a new iPhone app that harnesses the power of eBird to help users find the birds they want to see. It's not a traditional field guide for identification. It does what a traditional field guide cannot do: guides users to the places where birders are seeing birds, using fresh eBird data that are frequently updated. For more info, visit the Cornell Lab of Ornithology website.



## Pronghorn Relocation

On March 20, 2011, the *Amarillo Globe-News* reported that 200 pronghorn antelope were safely moved from the Texas Panhandle to the Trans Pecos. On the premise that "Deer Bounce, Antelope Break," this delicate morning operation sought to place the safety of the animal first. The animals were released in five locations near Marfa. To read more about this story, see <http://amarillo.com/news/local-news/2011-02-24/antelope-population-transferred>

## Save a Toad

Albert Bork sends us this interesting link that explores the ethical question of how far we can and should go to save an endangered species. See the article at [www.utne.com](http://www.utne.com).

## TexasInvasives.org

The Texas State University System (TSUS) and Texas Invasive Plant and Pest Council (TIPPC) are entering into a memorandum of understanding to promote awareness of invasive plant and pest impacts and management in Texas. For more information on this and other news about invasives in Texas, log onto their website at [texasinvasives.org](http://texasinvasives.org).

## Nature Notes Episodes

Want to revisit your favorite Nature Notes episode? Most recent issues have been made into Podcasts and you can play them to your heart's delight. Just visit the CDRI website for a complete listing of programs [HERE](#) and scroll down to the highlighted episodes to reread and/or listen to your selection.



## New Panels Installed at CDRI



**Check it out!**



## Geology Exhibit

**The Nature Conservancy**  
Protecting nature. Preserving life.™

### Davis Mountains Preserve 2011 Schedule of Open Events

Open Day: March 12  
Open Day: April 9  
Open Weekend: May 13-15  
Open Day: June 18  
Open Weekend: July 22-24  
Open Day: August 6  
Open Day or Weekend: September TBA  
Open Day or Weekend: October TBA  
Open Days/Christmas Tree Hunts: December 3 & 10

### ~Our Volunteer Partners~

- Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute: Help with events, visiting school groups, maintain trails and grounds, and other activities. [www.cdri.org](http://www.cdri.org)
- Nature Conservancy Davis Mountains Preserve: Participate in trail building and maintenance, fire line preparations, and other activities. [www.nature.org](http://www.nature.org)
- Texas Parks and Wildlife: Help with a variety of projects at Balmorhea State Park, Davis Mountains State Park, Big Bend Ranch State Park, Elephant Mountain WMA and other area parks. [www.tpwd.state.tx.us](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us)
- Big Bend National Park: Help with a variety of projects. [www.nps.gov/bibe/](http://www.nps.gov/bibe/)
- Sul Ross State University: Volunteers are currently working on the Hancock Mountain hike and bike trail and regularly help with other campus activities. [www.sulross.edu](http://www.sulross.edu)
- Native Plant Society of Texas – Big Bend Chapter: Help the society implement a native landscaping project at the Sunshine House, a senior community center in Alpine.



**SIBLEY NATURE CENTER**  
MIDLAND, TEXAS


Read the latest Sibley e-letter at:

[www.sibleynaturecenter.org/newsletter.html](http://www.sibleynaturecenter.org/newsletter.html)



## Report First-Quarter Hours

Avoid the year-end rush and report those hours now while you still remember them! To get a reporting form, email Albert Bork, Volunteer Coordinator, at albertgbork at sbcglobal dot net. Fill in the event date and information and indicate the hours worked. Note that the new form has a signature line. Just type in <<your name/s>> on the signature line, and this will indicate that you have signed the form electronically. That's all you have to do. Then email it back to **both** Becky at BeckyHart19 at gmail dot com and Albert at albertgbork at sbcglobal dot net. If you have any questions with the process, just email Albert!



**Texas Master Naturalist  
Tierra Grande Chapter  
Advanced Training/Volunteer Service**

All advanced training and volunteer service must be submitted in writing and receive approval before hours are accumulated. Programs and projects presented by chapter sponsors and partners are automatically approved provided they meet the criteria of the Tierra Grande Chapter. The annual hourly requirement is 40 hours for volunteer service and 8 hours for advanced training.

TMN name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Event Date	Event	Location	Sponsoring Organization	Advanced Training	Volunteer Service
<b>Total Hours</b>					

TG-TMN member signature: \_\_\_\_\_ /s/[if submitting electronically]

Submit monthly via e-mail to: Becky Hart, <BeckyHart19@gmail.com>, or mail to:  
Tierra Grande Chapter  
Texas Master Naturalist  
PO Box 133  
Alpine, Texas 79831-0133

*This is the form for reporting your volunteer and advanced training hours.*

### **It's As Easy as 1-2-3, and Just As Important!**

Texas Master Naturalists reminds you to report your volunteer hours. Just follow the simple steps above and help your Chapter thrive!

**This is YOUR Newsletter – Please Contribute!**  
**Email anne (at) hadkins (dot) com**

## Coming Soon!



### **An "Inside" Look at El Solitario!**

## Officers and Executive Committee

*Serving January 2011–December 2011*

Office Held	Officer	Contact Info
PRESIDENT	Ellen Weinacht	432.375.2325 Ellen (at) rionet (dot) coop
PAST PRESIDENT & CHAPTER ADVISOR	David Mainz	dmainz (at) sbcglobal (dot) net
VICE PRESIDENT & EDUCATION CHAIR	Carol Edwards	bbbird (at) sbcglobal (dot) net
SECRETARY	Steve Elfring	selfring (at) bigbend (dot) net
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The Texas Master Naturalist program is coordinated by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service and Texas Parks and Wildlife. Texas Master Naturalist programs serve all people without regard to socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.