



# OBSERVATIONS



Master  
Naturalist



OF THE TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST  
TIERRA GRANDE CHAPTER

VOL.1, NO. 3

JULY 2011

## In This Issue

<i>Training 2011</i>	1
<i>Sandia Wetlands — Background</i>	1
<i>Calendar</i>	2
<i>El Solitario</i>	5
<i>Monsoon Season</i>	8
<i>Chihuahuan Love</i>	9
<i>Stealth Master</i>	11
<i>Big Bend Tourism</i>	13
<i>Birding with Carol</i>	14
<i>TG Projects</i>	15
<i>Observations of a Horned Lizard Named Bob</i>	17
<i>Fern Canyon</i>	18
<i>Photographs by Stephen Scharath</i>	19
<i>2011 Officers</i>	20

## 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.

## Spring Training Tierra Grande Style!

The Tierra Grande Class of 2011 kicked off training with a field trip to Balmorhea — specifically to the new Sandia Wetlands, a project being coordinated between the TMN Chapter and landowners Ellen and Don Weinacht.

The group of trainees and current members met on June 11th just north of the site for an orientation visit and

progress report. All agreed that the Tierra Grande Chapter would adopt this as a project towards which to put effort in its creation and ongoing maintenance and restoration.

The mission statement is to demonstrate through the regeneration of private resources the ability to create and enhance habitat for the benefit of wildlife.



Key areas of focus and participation include:

- Water Evaluation & Management
- Vegetation Management
- Project Maintenance
- Biological Monitoring
- Communications
- Legal & Oversight



## Sandia Wetlands — Background

The Sandia Wetlands project was inspired by the hundreds if not thousands of waterfowl and other birds including the greater Sandhill Crane that were visible at New Mexico's premier wildlife watching sites at Bosque del Apache and Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge. The project came to life after a group of Texas Master Naturalists traveled to these sites in November of 2010.

After seeing the spectacular wildlife and preserve, landowners Ellen and Don Weinacht decided that they had both water and land not currently being used for ranching that could provide a place for restoring a portion of the wetlands long lost from the original Sandia Springs.

*Continued on page 3*

## On the Trail with Tierra Grande

### UPCOMING EVENTS & VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

JULY 2011						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Jul 3	Jul 4	Jul 5	Jul 6	Jul 7	Jul 8	Jul 9 Sandia Wetlands Work Day CDRI Desert After Dark
Jul 10 2nd Qtr Vol Hrs Due	Jul 11	Jul 12	Jul 13	Jul 14 CDRI Lecture: Recent Taxonomic Changes	Jul 15	Jul 16 CDRI Desert After Dark
Jul 17	Jul 18 CDRI: Summer Day Camp for Kids	Jul 19 CDRI: Summer Day Camp for Kids	Jul 20 CDRI: Summer Day Camp for Kids Big Bend Astronomers	Jul 21 CDRI: Summer Day Camp for Kids	Jul 22 CDRI: Summer Day Camp for Kids Open Day – DMP	Jul 23 CDRI Desert After Dark Open Day – DMP
Jul 24 Open Day – DMP	Jul 25	Jul 26	Jul 27	Jul 28	Jul 29 Class of 2011 Training	Jul 30 Class of 2011 Training
AUGUST 2011						
Jul 31 Class of 2011 Training	Aug 1	Aug 2	Aug 3	Aug 4	Aug 5	Aug 6 CDRI Benefit & Auction Open Day – DMP
Aug 7	Aug 8	Aug 9	Aug 10	Aug 11	Aug 12	Aug 13
Aug 14	Aug 15	Aug 16	Aug 17	Aug 18	Aug 19	Aug 20 NPSOT Fifth Season
Aug 21	Aug 22	Aug 23	Aug 24	Aug 25	Aug 26	Aug 27 NPSOT Garden Tour
Aug 28	Aug 29	Aug 30	Aug 31	Sept 1	Sept 2	Sept 3 RAF Meyers Springs
SEPTEMBER 2011						
Sept 4	Sept 5	Sept 6	Sept 7	Sept 8	Sept 9	Sept 10 Mt. Livermore Hike
Sept 11	Sept 12	Sept 13	Sept 14	Sept 15	Sept 16	Sept 17 CDRI Butterfly Count NPSOT Hike
Sept 18	Sept 19	Sept 20	Sept 21	Sept 22	Sept 23	Sept 24 Class of 2011 Training Fall Bird Count
Sept 25	Sept 26	Sept 27	Sept 28	Sept 29	Sept 30	

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





### Background, cont. from page 1

Part of the original Sandia Springs is owned by the Nature Conservancy of Texas, and the remainder is mostly now in irrigated farmlands.

Dave Hedges, resident of Fort Davis, Madge Lindsay and Van Robinson supported the landowners in their decision by offering their help to launch the project. Hedges with his birding experience and knowledge of shorebirds set about to help the landowners proceed with the work. This included scheduling land surveys, dozer work, and procuring water structures to begin the process of filling the wetlands from the Reeves County Water District irrigation canals that run on Weinacht lands. Water for the project is coming from two sources: Sandia Springs and, when needed, Balmorhea Lake. The Weinachts own water rights at both locations. Though on private land, the project is intended to have public access.

Dates for the 2011  
TGMN Training are:

June 11 Balmorhea

July 29-31 DMP

August 21 CDRI

September 24 Balmorhea

October 28-30, BBRSP



# *Training Day* **Lunch is served!**



Photos by Anne Adkins





# A GEOLOGICAL WONDER AT BIG BEND RANCH STATE PARK

BY BARBARA NOVOVITCH

Geology affects us in every way, yet I'd never paid much attention to it before getting a better look at one of Texas' (even the world's!) geological wonders at Big Bend Ranch State Park, where the 2011 Class of Tierra Grande novitiates will spend a weekend in late October. Amazingly, that area illustrates the story of geology in our region over some 520 million years.

I'm speaking in particular of one of the park's premier attractions — El Solitario. Last February I took part in a trip to the park during which we visited this amazing spot and heard explanations of the geological formations surrounding us, when and how they happened.

The importance of it all was underlined shortly after that trip when a 9.0 earthquake struck Japan, killing thousands. Here in Far West Texas, we've also experienced a series of earthquakes this spring, but they've been quite mild by comparison. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of shifting plate tectonics reflects the kinds of events that created the geology we see in Big Bend Ranch State Park today, though this all transpired over millions of years.

Geology shapes the landscape, and the landscape affects industry, agriculture, our community cultures, and how we adapt our ways of life. As I drove into Big Bend Ranch State Park, "massive" was the one word that kept reverberating through my thoughts — massive vistas, massive mountains, massive canyons — the property had indeed been one of the 15 largest private holdings in the United States back in 1958, half the size of Rhode Island, and at that time home to 17,000 sheep, 4,500 angora goats, 147 mules and 35 horses. The area was purchased by Texas Parks and Wildlife in 1988.

Starting that February tour at the Saucedo bunkhouse, well-traveled geologist and BBRSP interpreter Blaine S. Hall showed us an aerial, pointing out that the Solitario

is an eroded dome, originally some 8,000 to 10,000 feet high, that was formed about 36 million years ago. Molten rock or magma from deep within the earth formed a bulge like a blister between layers of older, folded sedimentary rock that dates to 110 to 66 million years ago, when Texas was totally under water. Even before that, sedimentary rock from about 520 to 300 million years ago had formed the floor of an ocean basin to the south of North America; tectonic plate-shifting then "bulldozed" those rocks up



Source: [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/)

and placed them at the Solitario's future site during the Marathon-Ouachita Orogeny mountain-building process some 300 million years ago. The mountains were later eroded to a relatively flat surface across Texas.

Today, that dome is surrounded by alternating valleys, then lesser hills and rifts in a series of rough elongated circles that stretch nine miles across. Aerial photos give the big picture, but that's not the way a geologist studies geology. The way to do that is to examine the rocks.

In a pamphlet at the park describing the Solitario, Christopher D. Henry<sup>1</sup> describes it as one of the largest and most symmetrical molten rock domes in the world. In the Solitario it is possible to see rocks from the old Ouachita Range, dating from about 200 million years ago — consisting of limestone from the seaway that flooded the North American continent in the Lower Cretaceous period about 144 to 88 million years ago, and then later,

*Continued on page 6*





**Solitario, cont. from page 6**

Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/seanpaulkelley/5326456211/>

about 35.4 million years ago during the Tertiary-Miocene period when the Solitario itself began to form. Geologists sometimes call this amazing site a "Window in the Earth," since there are deposits from the Cambrian age when the oldest rocks were sediment on the floor of an ocean basin, seen as a result of erosion over time.

magma with a higher water content pushed upward and, according to Henry's article, "sent a slurry of hot, frothy volcanic ash into the atmosphere and down the sides of the dome." The four-mile-long-by-one-mile-wide blister collapsed into the magma chamber. The collapsed structures are called calderas and have steep vertical walls, some as high as 1,000 feet.

Compared to the eruption of Mt. St. Helens in Washington State in 1980, which expelled about 0.25 cubic miles of material, the Solitario spewed forth some 4 to 6 cubic miles of solid mass.

Entering the Solitario through the northern flank, we observed Cretaceous limestones deposited



Our first stop was at an overlook northeast of Saucedo. There we viewed the Fresno Canyon route traveled by Terlingua traders a century ago. In the region's first cinnabar-mining days, traders carried the Terlingua rocks through Fresno Canyon to Marfa where it was trans-shipped to mercury-extractors. To the east and south, the Bofecillos Mountains were visible, and to the southeast, the Solitario itself.

During El Solitario's formation, the magma spread out between layers of older sedimentary rock and produced a bulge. Following this, new



some 100 million years ago. We also saw the deformed white Caballos Novaculite which has been used for centuries as whetstones. The word *novaculite* is derived from the Latin for razor stone. The Novaculite was formed about 500 million years ago and then subjected to folding and faulting about 200 million years thereafter.

At the next stop, toward the Lower Shutup Trailhead, we looked at Tesnus shales, formed from remnants of material washed off the continental

*Continued on page 7*



Solitario, cont. from page 6

shelf when the ocean basin was closing toward the end of the Appalachian Trend. The shales take their name from the town of Tesnus, where they were first seen, a former railway-stop east of Marathon.

At this point, we were at the southern end of the



caldera and could view Fresno Peak to the east, on the west-southwest flank of the Solitario. Fresno Peak is the highest point in the Solitario — measuring 5,120 feet and just 15 feet lower than Oso Mountain, the highest point in Big Bend Ranch State Park. We also saw the southern end of the caldera, that crater-like basin of the volcanic depression.

After lunch we backtracked by car and truck to a



parking area at the Burnt Camp Trailhead for a brief exploration of the Right-Hand Shutup which cuts across the western flank of the Solitario. As we hiked I could see the rocks in the hills ranging from

old Cretaceous rock into younger Cretaceous limestone – geologically young, that is, as in 100 million years old.

That hike to the top of a ridge was the tip-top experience of the weekend for me — clean air, bright sunshine, beauty all around — and now I knew a little bit more about the geological history of our area!

<sup>1</sup> For an indepth geological discussion by Christopher Henry, see <http://www.nbmj.unr.edu/staff/henry/HenryEtSolitarioGSAB97.pdf>

Photos by Anne Adkins & Madge Lindsay, unless otherwise indicated. Group photo by Ellen Weinacht.

# MONSOON SEASON

BY PATT SIMS

High winds, incredibly low humidity, and fear of wildfire have created a tension throughout the Big Bend that will only be relieved by summer rains. In an ideal world they would be spring rains, falling tomorrow (or even tonight) but the probability of that happening in the Big Bend is almost nonexistent. We have entered the driest season of our desert year. The seasons and months are not the same as those we learned about in grade school with April showers bringing May flowers. Our year has winter and spring rolled into a long dry period with gradually increasing temperatures. This dry period will end with the beginning of the monsoon, a weather pattern that brings over two-thirds of the yearly rainfall to the deserts of the Southwest, beginning, with any luck, in early July.

The word *monsoon* is derived from the Arabic word *mausim*, meaning season. We use it to refer to the weather pattern that brings our rainy season. These rains result from a large-scale atmospheric change in wind direction as a result of intense summer heating in the tropics. As the air over land becomes hotter it becomes less dense and rises, creating an area of low pressure that then pulls moist tropical ocean air over the land. This causes changes in wind direction, moving this moisture-rich air toward the deserts of North America. As the humid air rises with the heat of summer, it condenses into clouds that bring us rain. Prior to this change, the Big Bend suffers from low humidity and very high temperatures from late April on into July. Occasional thunderstorms can break through the heat of this time, but the rainfall they deliver is generally too little to do much good. The temperatures continue to rise as the days increase in length and life in the desert retreats to the shade.

Our monsoon rains are actually Mexican in origin with

most of the moisture-rich air being drawn up from either the tropical Pacific or the subtropical Gulf of Mexico. Such rains can come from the southeast, the southwest or the south, sometimes simultaneously! As the rains move further north from Mexico they lose strength and deliver less rainfall: a hundred-mile difference in distance north can cut rainfall by one half. By watching rainfall patterns in Mexico it is possible to predict the arrival of rainfall to the Big Bend. However, it is also important to remember that predicting weather is considered by some a fool's folly! Sometimes

the monsoon season is not as productive as we would like. In 1994 Shafter had one of its driest years with 2.85 inches of rain: nothing fell until May and then nothing after July until 0.88 inches fell that December. Our wettest year was 2004 with over 20 inches of rain, most falling as monsoonal rains. The monsoon begins shortly after the summer solstice, but the rains that fall are scattered. While some places receive large amounts of rain, others receive very little. When Shafter had its wet year of 20+ inches, El Paso had 2.42 inches for the entire year. True, we are a little further south than El Paso, but that is a significant difference in rainfall.

Although rains do sometimes fall in late autumn, winter, and early

spring these, technically, are not monsoonal in nature. They are usually the result of weather fronts moving into the area from the north and/or the west. These fronts gather moisture over cool Pacific waters and must be carried by powerful upper level winds to make it this far inland. Although any rainfall is welcomed by desert people, these storms do not usually provide much rainfall. The plants and animals of the desert southwest, however, have adapted to the moisture-rich monsoons of summer and for now are just waiting out the heat.





# CHIHUAHUA LOVE

BY GARY NORED

This week I celebrated my first anniversary as a volunteer at the Big Bend Ranch State Park. I've never done anything more satisfying or lived anywhere I liked better. I've found everything I expected to find here and have harvested more than I could ever have imagined.



I've loved this park since the first time I saw it over 20 years ago. I came to hike the Rancheria Trail. I left determined to come back and spend some serious time here. In my naiveté I believed that I could see most of the park in a year. Now I know that even a casual viewing will take much longer than that.

People sometimes ask me, "Why here?" In West Texas we have nothing like a Grand Canyon, no forests of giant cacti like the Saguaros, no massive snow-capped mountains, no limitless dunes, no vast areas of red rock, or wind-carved canyons – none of the icons that form the average American's mental images of deserts.

My answer is that our desert is unique and that loving it is not difficult. The traditionally compelling attractions of space, silence, and solitude are here in abundance. Wearied spirits and frazzled nerves are quickly healed in the silence of this place. I have spent days simply listening to the sounds of wind as it rushes through draws, ravines and canyons; the rumbles, howls and whistles of the wind intermingle in a constantly shifting

tapestry of desert music. If you sit very still on a hot windless day, the silence is absolute; soon the sounds of blood flowing through your veins, air traveling in and out of your lungs, and joints and bones shifting as your body maintains its balance become the loudest noises in your universe.

You can travel for weeks here and never see a contrail. The absence of this industrial graffiti makes the sky, once again, a



joy to photograph. Gentle pastel sunrises, blazing sunsets, or clear twilights still carry their full visual force in the Big Bend region, and our photographs are the better for it. Smoke and haze are often present, but even they can exhibit a strange beauty that somehow doesn't seem "civilized."

Sleeping in the open here is an incomparable joy – our clear air reveals the sky as a black velvet sphere thick with glittering stars. Though it is no longer possible to see the Milky Way in most parts of the country, here it is thick and creamy and spreads across the sky from horizon to horizon. As the heavens wheel about the North Star, outdoor sleepers become aware of the turning from brief glimpses seen during moments of wakefulness. The sky's changing composition becomes solidly linked with the seasons in the outdoor sleeper's experience.

During our cold clear winters and extended dry periods creosote draws nutrients and protective chemicals from its leaves and turns to a coppery orange color. Many bluestem grasses do the same. Other grasses assume a golden straw color; fluff grass grows in white balls that glow in the backlit



*Continued on page 10*

## Chihuahuan Love, continued from page 9

sun; the Chihuahuan Desert's dry-weather palette is the perfect complement for the warm light of sunrises and sunsets.



The Chihuahuan Desert has the most abundant plant life of any desert on the continent. The timing of our rains keeps the average soil temperature down and allows many species to survive here that otherwise could not. During the rainy season the Chihuahuan Desert gets greener than any other.

Shrubs cover themselves with flowers, ocotillos become wrapped in leaves, and wildflowers rush to grow, flower, and seed before



the moisture disappears. The transformation is all the more remarkable for the speed with which it is accomplished. An ocotillo can become fully leaved in a few days. In a week the world can be transformed.



The climate's harshness is legendary and the possibility of death is never far removed. Here you learn to watch where you put your feet and hands, observe the ground carefully when walking, and obey all the rules of heat and water. You learn to let other people know where you're going and when you're returning. You carry equipment for emergencies and you do all you can to make yourself visible and easy to find. And after awhile none of this is disturbing – it all becomes part of the pattern of desert living, like rising early to work in the morning's cool air, napping through hot afternoons, and returning to activity in the evenings.

When I came here I thought I was the luckiest man alive. I still do.



Photos by Gary Nored

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

### **Buprestids, aka Metallic Wood-boring Beetles**

One of the few groups of beetles that are large, showy and commonly encountered on flowers, particularly those in the genus *Acmaeodera*.

Check out the following link with many photos to facilitate their identification:

Buprestidae of Texas with Notes on Texas Types

<http://www.texasento.net/TXBuprestidae.htm>



# STEALTH MASTER NATURALISTS ON TWO WHEELS

BY GEORGE PITLIK

Right after my wife, Janet Stewart, and I moved from Houston to Alpine we noticed an announcement for Texas Master Naturalist Training. The ad said something like this: "Spend four weekends, read a ten pound notebook, dig up a bunch of stuff on hot days and traipse around the desert and mountains all for the reasonable sum of \$135.00." We did it and became graduates of the second Tierra Grande Master Naturalist class. Great fun and did we ever learn a bunch. Met some very cool people as well. For the life of me I could not understand what some of the people were doing in the course, as they seemed to know just about everything. Not Janet and me. We knew *nada*, so we learned the most.

All of the TMN activities and hikes are usually as part of a large group. That has its advantages, but with forty hiking boots kicking rocks and pebbles down the trail, the wildlife hid out until our passage. The happy chatting of the hikers added to the melee. That is just the nature of group nature hikes. I sometimes lead noisy group hikes at CDRI, and we rarely see wildlife that I know is there. As a retired teacher, I remember my ability to keep 25 students motionless and silent for an extended period of time, but I'm not sure how to do that with adults on a hike.

Even hiking together, Janet and I found it difficult to walk as quietly as necessary to sneak up on wildlife. Twigs cracked, pebbles slid and grasses crunched. Animals hear well.

Enter the two-wheel part of the story. Bicycles. We have ridden bikes for many years in many places and have found that a well-oiled bike is pretty quiet. We have also learned that wildlife likes to hang out near and on roads, often to their misfortune. Perfect for the Stealth Master Naturalists.

The best example of our Stealth approach to Master Naturalizing occurred over a five-day period when we started biking from our house in Alpine and five days later pulled back into our driveway. We visited Fort Davis, the McDonald Observatory, Fort Davis State Park, Balmorhea, Marfa and every inch of highway between. Did you know that once you get to the observatory it is possible to coast probably 80% of the distance to Balmorhea? Just sit back and sneak up on all those

little critters. Sometimes you coast pretty slowly, but you are still moving silently. One time I glided silently upon a flock of turkey vultures having a feast. They never knew I was coming. I could have taken a place at the carcass.

An additional value of bicycling is that you smell the aromas, feel the changes in temperature as you descend into a low spot on the road, get to experience firsthand why sometimes the birds just say, "To 'H' with it!" and give up trying to fly into that blasting West Texas wind that ruffles our feathers. Heat and cold force us to adjust our coverings. Are we shedding our winter coat of fur? We experience the personal energy expended as we pedal. Perhaps we are migrating? Food and water must be found just like the wildlife needs to on a daily basis. Rain and lightning can bring hypothermia or instant death. Shelter is not readily available on our highways. Traveling by bicycle, we are more attuned to what wildlife experiences.

And there are the magnificent Big Bend views we see as we cruise at 12 miles per hour. When I hike I need to watch my footing, as I am a pretty clumsy guy. On my bike on a wide road with no traffic, it's "circle vision." Quite magnificent.

At this point I have exceeded the 600-word limit, which is about the maximum readers will tolerate. Over 700 words and I would have to put a warning message on the article.

So.... Try an early Sunday bike ride in the area. You will be amazed.



*Camouflage clothing? Maybe for a mixed-up western tanager!*

**Photos Next Page ➡**



*George at rest – can you imagine?*



*Janet ready to go.*



*Hitchhiker!*



*Stealth riding.*



*Stealth coasting.*



*Who dunnit?*

Photos by George Pitlik and Janet Stewart



# BIRDERS, WILDLIFE ENTHUSIASTS BOOST BIG BEND TOURISM

BY BARBARA NOVOVITCH

Texas Parks and Wildlife, which inaugurated the nation's first wildlife trail 15 years ago, celebrated that Great Texas Trail plus the opening of the Far West Texas Wildlife Trail — the state's ninth and last wildlife trail — on June 2 with Tierra Grande Master Naturalist Madge Lindsay cutting the red ribbon at Davis Mountains State Park outside Fort Davis.

During a morning birdwalk, Tierra Grande Master Naturalist Carol Edwards alerted the crowd of some 30 experienced and novice birders to Cassin's Kingbird, Northern Mockingbird, Northern Cardinal, Pyrrhuloxia, Summer Tanager, Western Tanager, Turkey Vulture, phoebes, doves, jays, swallows, wrens, and woodpeckers — more than 20 bird species in all.



money from gas taxes, and that the trails "have helped tourism all along the Texas coast."

Plante mentioned that Texas' success with wildlife trails also spurred the creation of wildlife trails in more than 40 states, all of them attracted by the fact that nature tourism can be big business.

Wildlife viewing in Texas attracts more than 4 million participants, generates \$2.9 billion in expenditures and has an economic impact of \$5.1 billion, according to a 2006 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey.

The new 27 x 36 inch color map of the Far West Texas trail points out sites in the Franklin and Guadalupe Mountains, Big Bend National Park, Indian Lodge, McDonald Observatory, Hueco Tanks State Park, and Chinati Hot



---

***To volunteer to assist with birding activities and care in the Davis Mountains State Park, contact Carol Edwards at [bbbirder at sbcglobal dot net](mailto:bbbirder@sbcglobal.net) or call 432-426-2314.***

---

On the patio of the park's Indian Lodge, where the colorful new Far West Texas Wildlife Trail maps were displayed, Shelly Plante, TPWD Nature Tourism manager, told the crowd that Lindsay's attendance at the event was "really special" because she had launched the idea of wildlife trails 15 years ago.

"She's really a mover and shaker for nature tourism in Texas," said Plante. "She is the person, along with Ted Eubanks (formerly of TPWD and now head of his nature consulting firm, Fermata, Inc.), who thought of wildlife trails."

Lindsay later explained that the first two segments of the Great Texas Coastal Birding trail were funded with



Springs, among others. Similar inaugural activities for the trail were held later that day at Monahans' Sandhills State Park and the following day at Keystone Heritage Park in El Paso.

*Continued on page 16*

# BIRDING WITH CAROL

BY CAROL EDWARDS

There are lots of clues and techniques that may be used to find a large variety of birds. First, "habitat is where it's at." Birds need the same things humans need to survive: food, water and shelter where they can hide from predators, take shelter from storms and safely build a nest to raise their young. (Keep these things in mind, if you want to build a bird-friendly yard.)

And, similar to humans, some birds prefer to live in the desert, some species prefer to live near water; some like high montane areas; some are found in heavily wooded landscapes while other birds like grasslands or even dry

the most heavily wooded areas, look around campsites or feeding stations for species that learn where they can get a free meal, check the grasslands, brush piles, low shrubs and areas of sparse vegetation for species that feed or nest on the ground or in low bushes. And of course, always visit water sources such as birdbaths, a faucet drip, a pond, lake or riparian area. Obviously, few bird species are found on baseball diamonds or tennis courts, unless they are attracted by insects coming to the lighted areas at dusk. However, in the eastern US, Canada Geese are very fond of golf courses.



barren land. Birds may pass through a variety of habitats migrating or looking for food, but typically a bird's species dictates the type of habitat where it may be found consistently.

Thus, if we want to find a large variety of birds, we must visit a wide variety of habitats. Amazingly, with warblers and some other species, certain birds always forage high in the canopy while other species prefer to seek dinner at mid-story elevations or low in the trees. Each species has its own niche and its preferred habitat, and when we learn those, we know where to find the species we are seeking.

Within most parks or preserves, a birder can usually visit different habitats by going to different areas. Visit

Some birds migrate and some birds are permanent residents year round. Most, but not all warblers, vireos, hummingbirds and flycatchers migrate to México, the Caribbean or Central or South America during our winter. Many species of ducks, geese, shorebirds, and sparrows migrate south after nesting on tundra or in the Northern US, Great Plains and Canada, but they do not leave the US. Instead they spend the winter in Texas and the southern states, as it is not necessary for them to go further south. So, the bird populations and species in your local parks and preserves are likely to change with the seasons, just as our human "snowbird" populations fluctuate with the weather.

## 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**



## **Project: TG Chapter Lends Hand to Texas Forest Service**

**M**embers of Tierra Grande Master Naturalists worked with the Texas Forest Service (TFS) to package tree seedlings for the Fort Davis community which has been impacted greatly by the Rock House Fire. Master Naturalist volunteers Laura Belkin, Clare and Gary Freeman, Jill Goodwin, Madge Lindsay, Mary Malmgren, Robert Steele, Ellen and Lou Weinacht, Scott Wasserman, and Whitney (last name unknown) assisted the Texas Forest Service staff members Oscar Mastes, Patrick Allen, Charles Stair and others who are continuing to help the town recover from this devastating event.



The tree-replanting event is part of the TFS Urban Forestry Regional outreach program. Volunteers wrapped and packaged tree seedlings of four species grown at TFS nurseries. One each of chinkapin oak,

black cherry, flame sumac and pinyon pine were given to residents after a Fire Wise meeting held Thursday evening, May 12th, at the Jeff Davis County Courthouse. The Texas Master Naturalist program includes ongoing training for its members about the ecology of the region; additionally trainees are asked

to give back to the community with volunteer hours toward the conservation of Texas natural resources. Over 2,000 trees were package by the volunteers for county residents.

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

**S**aturday, June 18, with high temperatures expected and in anticipation of rain, a hardy (and hearty) group of volunteers gathered at the Marfa Gas Co. building rainwater garden. The project was requested by the city to alleviate flooding of neighboring properties by runoff from the new building and its pad. AgriLife Extension agent Jesse Lea Schneider and rainwater harvesting specialist Billy Kniffen have placed a 4,000 gallon tank to hold runoff from the roof of

the building. The water will be used to water the garden. It is a demonstration project.



and he proved to be an enthusiastic and talented rock worker. Sandy, Laura, Bob and Mike filled and emptied the wheelbarrow and moved cobbles by hand to construct two low walls to slow and hold the coming floods!

In the end, a structure is taking shape and the group felt satisfaction in a good start. The next step will be to ask the city to move considerable dirt by machine before we return to the project.



On this day, Randy Ersch, Mike McCollum and Sandy Watson came from Alpine, and Bob Martin came from Fort Davis. They and Laura Belkin, Marfa, put in a good two hours rock and dirt work before it got too hot. Randy's laser level kept things in order



## Project: Horned Lizard Survey



Dana Milani, Amy Slater, and Anne Adkins. We didn't have high expectations for the hunt, as the most recent fire — the Tejano Canyon Fire — had just whipped through this area.

Upon arrival, we discovered — not a horned lizard — but

smoke! All four TMN's sprang into action, one to alert the Preserve and the others with tools at hand, to address the fire. It turned out to be what remained of a burning tree in the aftermath of a controlled burn to head off the wild fire. While we weren't equipped to put out the fire, we did make efforts to contain it.

As a result of this event, it was suggested that an aspect of future training might include a workshop on wildfires as a part of the natural cycle

of grasslands and forests in our region and the use of controlled burns to manage the land and this eventuality.

Following our extracurricular activity, we continued with the task at hand. Nary a horned lizard nor harvester ant was to be seen, though we did ID five birds. It will be interesting to track the changes on this land as it gets rain and recovers from the fire.



*We did find an ant bed, lacking any sign of life, and, for the record, it can be found at N 30 deg 40.055'; w 104 deg 08.586'.*

The Tierra Grande Master Naturalists continue efforts on the TPW Reptile and Amphibian Watch program. If you are interested in getting involved, contact Ellen Weinacht, Clare Freeman, or Jill Goodwin. And, you can download all the information and the monitoring forms by clicking [here](#).

In June, Jill's group returned to the Davis Mountain Preserve to hike its designated three-mile transect. Our group consisted of four: Jill Goodwin,

### Tourism, continued from page 13

The new trail, which passes through the vast arid and mountainous reaches of West Texas' Chihuahuan Desert and Permian Basin, features 57 wildlife-watching sites on 10 driving loops. Sites along the route highlight the region's tallest mountains, grandest rivers, starriest skies, vast sand dunes, sprawling desert and some of Texas' most iconic wildlife.

"West Texas is a huge area still somewhat unfamiliar to many travelers who don't know where to go to see the best of what the region offers," said Plante. "The trail map puts all of West Texas' cultural and natural resources at your fingertips."

The map lists 10 loops — El Paso Uplands, El Paso Rio, Guadalupe Mountains/Van Horn, Davis Mountains, Marathon-Alpine, Upper Rio Grande, Big Bend, Sanderson-Sheffield, Permian Basin West and Permian Basin East. The largest, with 12 sites listed, is the Big Bend Loop.

The current class of 13 novice Tierra Grande Master Naturalists — with five committees already beginning their work on water supply, vegetation, maintenance, legal aspects and grant development — are taking part in development of the 1.41-acre Sandia Springs Wetlands project near Balmorhea on property belonging to

Don and Ellen Weinacht. Ellen is the current president of Tierra Grande.

The new project's aim is to provide an oasis for wildlife that is expected to attract migrating shorebirds. It could later be included as part of the Davis Mountains Loop, said Beth Nobles, also a budding Tierra Grande Master Naturalist and executive director of the Texas Mountain Trail Region.

Plante said the new maps are already being scooped up by wildlife enthusiasts with such speed, in just the two weeks after its introduction, that a reprinting may have to be scheduled sooner than anticipated.



# OBSERVATIONS OF A HORNED LIZARD NAMED BOB

BY SUSAN PENNEY

**Observations** – what an appropriate name for the Master Naturalist Newsletter. Since stepping up to become a Master Naturalist want-to-be, a mere few weeks ago, my ability to see critters has greatly increased. Don't ask me why or how, but for some reason it is true.



(Bob the Horned Lizard)

I have always had a fascination with horned lizards and, like so many of us older folks, have fond memories of playing with them as a child. Now that sightings of horned lizards are more rare, when I am fortunate enough to see one, I try to take the time to

watch what it is doing. So often they "freeze" and, like a stare contest, I am usually the first one to blink and/or move on with what I was doing while the horned lizard, winning the contest, remains frozen in place. Since becoming a Master Naturalist student, I have become acquainted with a horned lizard living in my yard whom I have named Bob (see photo left). However, I am now hopeful that I will discover that Bob is actually a female, interested in becoming a mama, at which time I will rename her Bobbie. I say this because Bob's peculiar

actions have made me think that perhaps Bob is preparing a nest. The first peculiar action was when Bob broke his freeze, ran over about 8" to grab a dried leaf, returned to his

earlier freeze spot where he flipped over on his side and re-froze as he continued to hold the leaf in his mouth over his now exposed belly. The next time I saw Bob, he was fully exposed and frozen in place. However, as I continued my watering, I soon noticed that Bob was now half-covered with compost, with only his head and tail exposed (see photo below). As per the rules of our game, the next time I saw Bob, he froze in place. Then during a period when I was looking away, Bob had placed and/or thrown a piece of bark onto his back. Last night, I saw



(Bob half covered with mulch)

Bob again next to an interestingly convoluted and newly constructed mound of small stones that appear to have been built and/or accumulated by Bob. The little stone structure is what made me think that Bob just might be preparing a nest and, consequently, might be a female. I am hoping that Bob's home is comfortable and safe, offering him enough protection from all the many predators out there and that maybe he'll even prove to me that I need to be calling him Bobbie.



## *Testimonial* by Ellen Weinacht



As a Texas Tracker I have had the best time capturing Texas Horned Lizards and reporting our findings to the state. Nature is always full of surprises. Check out the following YouTube video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KktDoYvYe6o>



# MITRE PEAK GIRL SCOUT CAMP HIKE TO FERN CANYON

BY PETEI GUTH

**May 7<sup>th</sup> 2011** – It was a comfortable morning that would soon turn hot. We all expected that everything would be dry and brown, but they were open to the possibility of being delightfully surprised by some new growth. It hasn't rained since early October 2010, and here it is May 2011. Hard to believe it's been that long, but then you look around you and see the landscape, and you accept what is.

We had a nice group of mostly friends. There were ten of us. More had originally signed up but, after the fires, several had to cancel.

The fires came very close to Fern Canyon. In fact, they were right on the other side of the cliff. We started our hike, and I was able to show everyone what the ferns look like when they are dormant. I explained that our ferns are xeric ferns. During a dry period, they will go dormant and wait for rain. When it finally does rain, they will absorb water through their roots and also through their cells. If enough water falls, they will turn green and literally unfurl overnight. If you take a fern frond and wet it, put it into a plastic bag and place it in the

refrigerator overnight, it will turn green and unfurl. Ferns are amazing plants. They can be survivors in a very inhospitable environment.

There was very little water in Fern Canyon, mostly in First Pool and Second Pool, nothing in between. There were no water falls or pools for wildlife to be swimming around in. I identified other plants that were dried up so that when we returned on a better day we could be on the look out for new growth. Some plants had no leaves at all, and some older trees had fallen. I've never seen the landscape in this condition before.

We spent time in the shade close to Second Pool having lunch and visiting under madrones, chokecherry, black willow and Tracy hawthorn trees. I pointed out where orchids bloom when the conditions are just right.

Everyone still loved Fern Canyon and could see beyond the dryness to what beauty lies there. We are all waiting for rain so that we can see the transformation of Fern Canyon when we return.



*Fern Canyon hikers, from left to right: Ann; Sally Stump; Laura Belkin; Pam Cook; Amber Hockeborne; Allan Bakker; Kay Nowell; Gary & Clare Freeman. Photograph of Fern Canyon hikers by Petei Guth*



# Photographs

BY STEVEN SCHARATH



Sunrise of Chiso Mts. from Blair Pittman's porch.  
Get better, my friend!

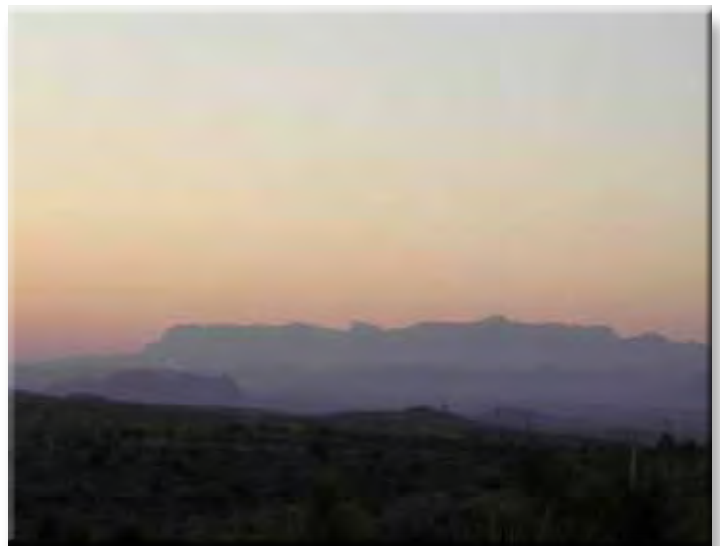


Sunrise with smoke between Lajitas and  
Terlingua with road sign 170.



Sunrise with  
strange blue  
light at Study  
Butte from  
my porch.

Sunset (finally!) in Big Bend Park not far from  
Grapevine Hills Road turnoff.



Just another sunrise in paradise...

### ~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.

## Report Second-Quarter Hours

It's time to report the volunteer and advanced training hours you have put in for the second quarter of 2011 (April, May & June). You may also report hours from 2010 or the first quarter of 2011 if you have not already done so. For those of you who attended the annual meeting at the Weinachts'

ranch in Balmorhea, you may count 5 hours volunteer time for the meeting and one hour advanced training time for the trip to the wetlands site as well as the time you spent driving to and from the meeting. Contact me at [beckyhart19 \(at\) gmail \(dot\) com](mailto:beckyhart19@gmail.com) for an email-able form, or you can download the form above by clicking on it, then print it out and mail it to: Tierra Grande Chapter, PO Box 133, Alpine, TX 79831.

Thanks very much and please let me know if you have any questions. —Your Membership Director, Becky Hart

Form to report volunteer and advanced training hours.

This is YOUR Newsletter – Please Contribute! Email [anne \(at\) hadkins \(dot\) com](mailto:anne (at) hadkins (dot) com)



### Davis Mountains Preserve 2011 Schedule of Open Events

Open Day: 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



Read the latest Sibley e-letter at:  
[www.sibleynaturecenter.org/newsletter.html](http://www.sibleynaturecenter.org/newsletter.html)

## Officers and Executive Committee Serving January 2011–December 2011

Office Held	Officer	Contact Info
PRESIDENT	Ellen Weinacht	432.375.2325 <a href="mailto:Ellen (at) rionet (dot) coop">Ellen (at) rionet (dot) coop</a>
PAST PRESIDENT & CHAPTER ADVISOR	David Mainz	<a href="mailto:dmainz (at) sbcglobal (dot) net">dmainz (at) sbcglobal (dot) net</a>
VICE PRESIDENT & EDUCATION CHAIR	Carol Edwards	<a href="mailto:bbbirdier (at) sbcglobal (dot) net">bbbirdier (at) sbcglobal (dot) net</a>
SECRETARY	Steve Elfiring	<a href="mailto:selfring (at) bigbend (dot) net">selfring (at) bigbend (dot) net</a>
TREASURER	Randy Ersch	432.837.0914 <a href="mailto:williamersch (at) sbcglobal (dot) net">williamersch (at) sbcglobal (dot) net</a>
MEMBERSHIP	Becky Hart	<a href="mailto:BeckyHart19 (at) gmail (dot) com">BeckyHart19 (at) gmail (dot) com</a>
HOST	Lou Weinacht	<a href="mailto:leweinacht (at) yahoo (dot) com">leweinacht (at) yahoo (dot) com</a>
VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR	Albert Bork	432.837.2882 <a href="mailto:borkalbert (at) gmail (dot) com">borkalbert (at) gmail (dot) com</a>
COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR	Anne Adkins	432.426.3961 <a href="mailto:anne (at) hadkins (dot) com">anne (at) hadkins (dot) com</a>

Tierra Grande Master Naturalist Chapter  
PO Box 133  
Alpine TX 79831  
Phone: 432.837.2882  
Fax: 432.837.5552

Email: [tierragrandemn \(at\) gmail \(dot\) com](mailto:tierragrandemn (at) gmail (dot) com)  
website: <http://txmn.org/tierra>

*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.*