



# Prairie Partner Update

*A publication for and about Blackland Prairie Texas Master Naturalists*



**Editor's Note:** *The BPTMN board of directors voted to have a quarterly publication beginning with this issue. So, we'll publish during each of the four seasons and continue to give you news that will help and educate you in your journey as a master naturalist. Several master naturalists have contributed to this issue, including a junior naturalist. Any comments about this issue or suggestions about articles for future issues can be sent to the editor at [eastbluff@verizon.net](mailto:eastbluff@verizon.net).*

## Flowers and Insects Capture Photographer's Eye by Sophy Sam

Every photographer has a favorite subject. Some choose people, some inanimate objects, some grand landscapes. For me, it's flowers and insects. The gravitation towards a subject, a shape, or a color is a mystery in itself, and there are as many explanations as shoulder shrugs when it comes to deciphering why. At the end of a day, however, a person behind a lens obtains a satisfaction of intimate connectedness with their subject, and the audience is rewarded with intangible beauty and the ability to touch a moment that was.

My beloved subject – nature – grants accessibility, an innate sense of belonging and freedom from expectations. It also throws in challenges that require patience and deep understanding to overcome.

A quote by Lao Tzu summarizes best my relationship with bugs: *"I think I am a man dreaming, I am a butterfly, Or a butterfly dreaming I am a man."* I often recite this quote when I'm out in the field as it always brings a smile to my face.

For the most part, I think it is the bugs who are calling all the shots. They decide whether or not I will have the opportunity to photograph them.



*During photography expeditions, Sophy Sam's dog, Spring Roll, likes to jump on his back as if overseeing Sophy's work.*

It often requires tremendous patience and luck on my part. Since I am limited to using macro lenses, I have to be up close and personal with any of my subjects. As a bug, one can only imagine how terrifying it might feel to have a giant looming over you, moving about in an un-bug-like manner, poking you in an attempt to snap a photo.

Each bug has its own unique personality. Some bugs are mellower and more accepting than others – although this is a rare situation. In most cases, I have to hang out for a long period of time until they decide that I am no longer a threat. Once this happens, I have to work very quickly to compose and take the shot. Very rarely do bugs give me a second chance. They are way more capricious than models!

*(Continued on page 2)*

## Photographer (Continued from Page 1)

I try to bring K.I.S.S. with me – “Keep It Simple Silly.” For one, I don’t carry a lot of equipment and accessories. When you work on your feet, every pound counts. On my trips, I often work primarily with one macro lens attached to my camera. No room to bring backup equipment, either. This way I don’t get tired fast. However, a special tool I use often is not related to camera or photography equipment.

My trusted walking stick is indispensable. It also serves as a mono-pod, balance stick, defense stick and, lastly, a massage stick. Whenever possible while walking, I place the walking stick laterally on my shoulders so it sticks out like the letter “T” and use my hands to roll it back and forth in order to release muscle tension. I had quite a few tree-climbing and mountain-biking accidents in the past, and my back is not as good as it used to be.

As much as I enjoy photographing bugs and flowers, they are not very reliable as photographic subjects. I never know what will happen on each excursion. A change in weather, rain, strong wind, or bright sunlight can mean no photographing at all. I depend heavily on a combination of luck and ideal weather and temperature to take photos. To make every trip worthwhile, I rely on gastronomic pleasures. When everything else fails, I simply find a good spot and enjoy a picnic with nature.

Spring and early summer are my prime times for photo shoots. Everything comes to life, the colors of flowers are the most intense (at least here in Texas) and the insects are too preoccupied with their own lives to notice me.

I have to get to a spot usually right before the sunrise. Nature preserves and state parks are my sanctuaries. Depending on the place, I either pick a spot and wait, or I walk until I see something intriguing. There are no strict protocols to follow, and this, in part, is what is so appealing to me. I never know what to expect. I may be having a very uneventful day and then, in a flash of a moment, everything changes, and I shoot the best pictures of a season. I like this challenge and unpredictability. That is part of what makes my work so exciting.

I would like others to enjoy their lives to the fullest, to spend as much time as they possibly can with nature to recharge, rejuvenate and de-stress. And I hope that my work is the next best thing for when they cannot be out.

*One day I was organizing my photo collection – and at that time I had several thousands of images in it – and I started seeing letters. All those Os and Hs and As. So, next time I was out in the field, I started looking for them. And you know how it goes – once you set your mind to something, you start seeing those shapes everywhere.*

— Sophy Sam



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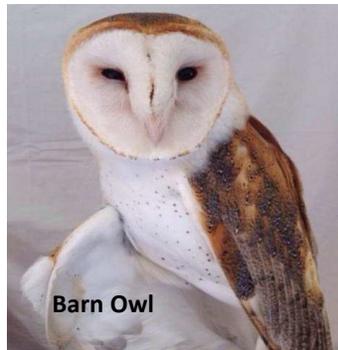
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Make the NOW the primary focus of your life. ~Eckhart Tolle

# How Owls Live in the Wintertime *by Amri Carrasco*



My favorite type of owl is a barn owl. This owl lives right here in the Blackland Prairie! These owls have a very hard time in the winter. They have to find food, shelter and be able to fly properly in the freezing cold. How on earth do they stay alive during the winter? Because trust me, they don't eat Cheetos and stay inside a heated home. In fact, owls don't even eat Cheetos. They eat something else entirely.

Barn owls eat rodents, mainly mice, rats and voles. During the winter these animals mostly hibernate — so what are our little friends eating? The Barn Owl Trust says that barn owls resort to eating frogs and small birds during the winter. Here in Plano, I don't see frogs in the winter. It must be really tough being a barn owl. Where do owls go to eat their "appetizing" meals?

Barn owls live in forests, grasslands and prairies. They enjoy cave-like areas to build their homes and don't really like making nests. They mostly just look for abandoned nests or things with nooks and crannies — like a barn.

How do the owls get up there without you noticing?

With their incredible wings of course!

An owl's feathers are very different than non-predatory birds. For instance, the primary feathers are very long, and when the owl flaps its wings it makes no sound AT ALL! Imagine that! If you were a lagomorph (rabbit) or a rodent (mouse) and you were just minding your own business when suddenly, out of nowhere, an owl swoops down and snatches you right up and swallows you whole! That's terrible table manners, that owl didn't even use a knife!

The reason an owl's feathers make no sound is because owls have fringes on the ridge of their feathers. Owls also have larger wings and bigger wings mean they can glide for longer without stopping to flap. Less flapping means less noise!

Owls have a tough time in the winter. They have to hunt a lot to stay alive, find a safe shelter for their families and they have to be able to fly! Before you try to find something to save these poor helpless creatures, let me tell you this, owls are perfectly adapted for their life style. They have sharp talons, a strong beak and they have amazing hearing. So instead of throwing your bag of chips out the window for the barn owls, build an owl box instead. I'm sure the owls would appreciate it.

*Amri is a 12-year old junior naturalist*

## Fun Facts about Owls

- Barn owls will NEVER eat earthworms. Kind of like kids and their broccoli...
- Barn owls are also called the monkey faced owl! Ha-ha isn't that cute?
- Owls make owl pellets which look like (ahem) scat. If you were to break open one of these owl pellets you would be greeted with fur, bones, and sometimes caterpillar scat as well. Owls can't digest these materials so they form an owl pellet and they hack it up.

Now if you'll excuse me, I think I need to lie down.

## Junior Naturalist Program at Wilson Middle School *by Nancy Furth*

We are thrilled that our attendance this semester has increased to approximately 20 students, including a few junior naturalist siblings!



*Mary Brown gives hands-on training to our junior naturalists.*

Without a doubt, the success of the Junior Naturalist program is due to a dedicated team of a dozen or more volunteers who have come together and created an outstanding list of topics which they lead and assist with during our meetings. Bonding with the students has become a major highlight for all of us during these sessions!

Starting with our required topics on famous naturalists and the regions of Texas, Mandy Carrasco next held a very educational program on the use of field guides using animals and plants of the Blackland Prairie as the subject matter.

Thanks to our monetary award from the City of Plano last year, we've been able to purchase a set of field guides specifically written for young adults along with journals which are an important part of our program.

In October, Sharon Russell led a session on soil, and the students had an opportunity to sort compostable and non-compostable materials and set up a compost pile which they will be monitoring throughout the semester.

In addition, we learned about the rocks and minerals of our area from Mary Brown, and were very excited to have Diane Brownlee as our guest speaker presenting a program on local geology and fossils.

Monarch tagging was an ongoing activity in October as was poppy seed and other wildflower seed planting.

In November, the students will plant take-home holiday salad gardens and visit the Heritage Farmstead Museum for our students' much-loved, double-session stream studies led by Gwen Thomas and LuAnne Ray.

Our Junior Naturalist certificate presentation and celebration will be held on December 3. With guidance from Cindy Vo, the talented art teacher at Wilson Middle School, each student will use their painting skills to decorate last year's dried and prepared birdhouse gourds to take home.



*Geologist Diane Brownlee explains plate tectonics and the geologic history of Texas.*

*Please [contact Nancy Furth](#) if you have questions about the program and/or would like to help out. A complete program history has been compiled for use by any of our members wishing to start a similar program. We would be glad to share what we have learned!*

## Newly Resigned SmugMug Is Up and Running *by Mike Roome*



What is SmugMug? It is our chapter's photo and video sharing website, and since the spring, it has been undergoing a facelift. Members can now access the newly revised site by clicking on the SmugMug icon (see above) located at the bottom of the chapter homepage at [www.bptmn.org](http://www.bptmn.org).

Chapter president, Clyde Camp, appointed me to be the chapter's new historian. Although the position of historian is identified in chapter by-laws and guidelines, there was almost no information about the position. In researching what historians did in other organizations, I came to believe that an important part of the job was collecting, organizing, and maintaining the chapter's vital ongoing history — what the organization as a whole and its individual members were under the banner of Texas Master Naturalists.

While considering ways to collect and maintain this ongoing history, I was introduced to our chapter's SmugMug website. At the time, only four collections of photos were being maintained on the site. There was little organization to the photos and limited information about them. Nevertheless, the website had potential to be a good way for storing and organizing photos and videos and documenting chapter and member activities for members' use, viewing and sharing.

Two things were obvious from the outset: the website needed to be upgraded to a newer version which offered more design options and organizing tools, and more photos were needed. Now redesigned, the site includes a new color scheme, information on how to submit photos and videos, guidelines addressing privacy issues, new folders and subfolders for organizing similar content, improved ability to add titles, captions, and keywords to pictures, and capability to browse

the archives or search for specific content using keywords. Ability to share photos via Facebook, Google, Twitter and e-mail remains.

Photos related to chapter activities are currently grouped according to content such as Advanced Training, Certification Classes, Field Trips, Monthly Meetings, Chapter Projects and Special Events. Activities related to individual or groups of members will be added to a folder titled "All About Our Members" — currently with only one subfolder. An addition to the revised SmugMug, "Our Natural World," contains galleries of photos taken by members which reflect their individual interests in various aspects of the natural world.

While members can share photos through social media sites and download photos for personal use, uploading of photos can only be done by the historian, as the designated site webmaster. This insures that photos appearing on the site are appropriate in terms of our chapter's objectives and mission and fall within chapter guidelines.

All photos which were on the site prior to its redesign are still there, and new photos taken by chapter members and me have been added or soon will be. Members are asked and encouraged to assist in the effort to document chapter activities and their own personal involvement by taking photos and submitting them for inclusion on SmugMug.

Based on the many efforts of this chapter's great leaders and members in the past and continuing on, we have a wonderful story to tell and a legacy on which to build as we move forward into the future. After all, our history not only documents where we have come from, but also defines who and what we are as a chapter.

**To submit photos, attach to an e-mail addressed to [historian@bptmn.org](mailto:historian@bptmn.org).**

## Winter Outings and Opportunities *by Mandy Carrasco*

**There's a world of wintery fun awaiting local naturalists in the coming months! Here's a sampling of fun outdoorsy activities to get you through this chilly season.**

The [Trinity River Audobon Society](#) is looking for volunteers. The second Saturday of each month they remove Johnson grass, work in the gardens, and maintain trails. If the weather is too cool for you, apply as a front desk volunteer, where you will do light administrative work and engage with guests. They are also seeking Eco-Educators to lead school programs. Interested? Visit [trinityriveraudubon.org](http://trinityriveraudubon.org) or contact Casey Cutler, volunteer coordinator at 214.309.5832

[The Heard Museum](#) will be hosting some neat activities, including Fish of North Texas on Nov. 15 (Mike Petrick will discuss Fly-Casting); Bird Walks on Nov. 8, Dec. 13, and Jan. 10; a Fossil Collecting Field Trip to the Sulphur River on Nov. 15; and a night hike on Jan. 24. Don't miss the aptly titled "The Woods in Winter" walking tour, led by Dave Powell on December 20 at 9:30 a.m.

The Heard is also having a three night fund-raising event called **Holiday Trail of Lights**, the evenings of Dec. 13, 19, and 20. The Dinosaurs Live! outdoor exhibit — featuring nine life-size animatronic dinosaurs along a nature trail — is on display now, thru mid February. For more information, visit [heardmuseum.org](http://heardmuseum.org) or to volunteer, contact Volunteer Coordinator Darlene Sumerfelt at [dsumerfelt@heardmuseum.org](mailto:dsumerfelt@heardmuseum.org)

Dec. 6-7 Mark Suter of Primitive Texas will be holding a **Mini Wilderness Survival Trip at LLELA**. Bringing only basic gear, campers will learn to build shelter from natural materials. You will also learn fire building, water purification, animal tracking, and edible/medicinal plants, among other awesome outdoor skills. Cost: \$200.00  
Visit [www.primitivetexas.com](http://www.primitivetexas.com) or call 979.777.3902

The winter months are an exciting time at the [Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge](#), as thousands of Snow geese, Ross's geese, and numerous duck species migrate to the area. The cooler weather also brings an increase of Harris, White-Crowned, and White-Throated sparrows. The second Saturday general nature series meets Nov. 8 (What About the Bobcat), December 13 (Bobwhite Quail), and January 10 (Crows).

Nov. 15 will be the **High on the Hawg BBQ wild hog fundraiser dinner**. The Hagerman's annual Christmas Bird Count is Dec. 20. Open-air tram tours are offered on Wednesday, Saturdays and Sunday, weather permitting. The refuge also offers fishing and boating. Registration is required for events, and volunteers are needed for the Christmas Bird Count and youth programs. Visit [friendsofhagerman.com/Activities](http://friendsofhagerman.com/Activities) or call the refuge at 903.786.2826.

The 115<sup>th</sup> national [Christmas Bird Count](#) will be taking place from Dec. 14 - Jan. 5. Every year, teams of citizen scientists collect data which is used to guide conservation and record the health of bird populations. To participate, visit <http://birds.audobon.org/get-involved-christmas-bird-count-find-count-near-you> during the month of November. Participation is open to anyone, but you must make arrangements with the local count compiler ahead of time. It is sometimes possible to do your count from the comforts of home, or – if you are new to birding - join an experienced group. Participation is free, but donations (specifically for the Christmas Bird Count) are suggested. Visit [Audobon.org](http://Audobon.org) for more information.

Winter can make things unpredictable for local wildlife. Plano-based rehabilitator Tammy Welch says she never knows what is going to walk in her door during any given season. If you happen upon any animal friends in need while enjoying your brisk North Texas outings, you can call Tammy at 469.752.1193

Just like our glorious Texas weather, dates and activities are subject to change. Please remember to call ahead, and have fun with your Winter Outings and Opportunities.

## Wylie Prairie Restoration Project

by Dave Powell

In the Spring of 2012 we began working to restore land north of the municipal complex in Wylie, to native prairie. With the help of many chapter members, we have put out seed, built a half-mile trail and gathered seed from other locations to expand the diversity on the land.



Left: before the project began; and Right: a field full of Indian Blanket flowers

We have seen a lot of change and are looking for more as we continue to relocate seed, maintain the trail and monitor the environment. There is always trash to be picked up or weeds and woody plants that need to be controlled. Thanks to Rodney Thomas, we have set up an E-Bird site with Cornell. I am always working on surveys of plants, animals and insects and like to hear what others find on the prairie. We have planted 12 sample plots of individual grasses as a learning and teaching tool.

The Wylie Parks and Recreation folks have put signs at both ends of the trail telling about the project. We are looking forward to using the prairie to educate Wylie residents about the Blackland Prairie. There will always be a need for members to help at the prairie. It is exciting to watch the change and the new things which are starting to show up on the prairie.

I would love to introduce you to the prairie. Contact me at [powell1217@yahoo.com](mailto:powell1217@yahoo.com).

## November 8 Workday at Wylie Prairie

Mark your calendars now for a workday at the Wylie Prairie on November 8, at 9 a.m. til noon. The projects we will be working on are:

Planting 100 tubes with Little Blue Stem and Indian Grass in them, which I have been nurturing.

Spreading 10 lbs. of grass seed provided by Wylie Parks and Rec.

Spreading 1 lb. of Inland Sea Oats provided by Dick Zartler.

Spreading several different seeds for flowers gathered from the YMCA Adventure Camp by Clyde Camp.

Putting T-posts at the corners of our sample grass plots (48 posts) provided by Wylie Parks and Rec. We will have a manual driver to use for setting the post.

There might still be some mulch to spread on the trail depending on how much Sgets spread between now and then.

I hope to see you at the prairie which is located in Wylie, north of the Municipal Complex, at 300 Country Club Road. — Dave Powell

## Of Interest...

**Blackland Prairie Texas Master Naturalist calendar** (and past issues of *Prairie Partner Update*) [Click to view](#)

### Texas Aggi Horticulture Website

Learn everything about Texas Horticulture [Click to view](#)

### Dwindling Monarch Butterfly Population

A recent *National Geographic* article about the loss of Monarch Butterflies.

[Click to view](#)



## Volunteer Opportunities



*Frankie the pig greets volunteer Al Baume at Holifield Learning Center and receives a treat. Frankie had come out to greet children getting off the school buses.*

### [Blackland Prairie Raptor Center](#)

Brockdale Park, Lucas, TX  
([www.bpraptorcenter.org](http://www.bpraptorcenter.org))

#### **Contact Erich Neupert**

[erich.neupert@bpraptorcenter.org](mailto:erich.neupert@bpraptorcenter.org),  
469-964-9696 or

**Dick Zartler**, [zartler@verizon.net](mailto:zartler@verizon.net)

Most projects are ongoing including animal care and construction, prairie rehab, trail guiding, gardening and public interaction.

### [Collin County Adventure Camp](#)

1180 W. Houston, Anna, TX  
([www.collincountyadventurecamp.org](http://www.collincountyadventurecamp.org))

**Contact Ron Bamberg**, [rbamberg@gmail.com](mailto:rbamberg@gmail.com),  
972-832-4791.

The camp has an ongoing need for trail guides to lead nature walks for children and adults.

### [Connemara Meadow](#)

300 Tatum (Alma & Bethany), Allen, TX  
([Connemaraconservancy.org](http://Connemaraconservancy.org))

**Contact Bob Mione**, 214-534-1900, [meadow-manager@connemaraconservancy.org](mailto:meadow-manager@connemaraconservancy.org)

Projects include invasive removal and helping at the monthly open house.

**More approved activities for volunteering and advanced training, listed by both type and by partner, can be found at <http://bptmn.org/info/project-opportunities/>.**

### [Heard Museum and Wildlife Sanctuary](#)

1 Nature Place, McKinney, TX  
([www.Heardmuseum.org](http://www.Heardmuseum.org))

**Contact Wes Morrow**, [Wesmorrow39@yahoo.com](mailto:Wesmorrow39@yahoo.com),  
832-332-9099,

Volunteer for native reptile and mammal care, bird banding, outreach and at the sanctuary.

**Contact Dave Powell**, [powell1217@yahoo.com](mailto:powell1217@yahoo.com) to help maintain the Heard gardens or to become a trail guide.

### [Junior Master Naturalists](#)

#### **Contact: Gwen Thomas**

[gmthomas29@fastmail.com](mailto:gmthomas29@fastmail.com)

During the school year, the group meets every Wednesday from 3:30-5 p.m. at Wilson Middle School on Custer Road, Plano. The class is for 6th-8th graders.

### [Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area](#)

**(LLELA)** 201 E. Jones, Street, Lewisville, TX  
[www.ias.unt.edu/llela](http://www.ias.unt.edu/llela)

**Contact Director Lisa Cole** at [lisacole@unt.edu](mailto:lisacole@unt.edu) or **Mike Petrick** at [mike.petrick@verizon.net](mailto:mike.petrick@verizon.net)  
Trail guides are especially needed for Saturday, weekdays, or night hikes. LLELA has many outdoor activities and opportunities for both advanced training and volunteer hours for master naturalists. To find out what we have to offer, click on the link above.

### [Plano Environmental Education Center](#)

4116 West Plano Parkway, Plano, TX

**Contact Nancy Casillas** at [nancyca@plano.gov](mailto:nancyca@plano.gov) or  
972-769-4313

To volunteer, go online and create a volunteer profile then sign up at [eeoc@plano.gov](http://eeoc@plano.gov) for volunteer activities. Volunteers must submit a waiver three days prior to volunteering.

## Advanced Training

### Advanced Training Classes in November and December

Here is a wonderful opportunity to learn about different nature topics and earn advanced training hours, too. All classes will be held at the Heard at 9:30 a.m. unless otherwise noted.

**November 15** – Fishes of the area, also learning to cast, Laughlin Hall, Heard Museum

Presenter – Mike Petrick

**December 20** – The woods in winter (a walking tour and tree identification), Heard Museum,

Presenter – David Powell

### Upcoming BPTMN Meetings

**November 11** - George Diggs, Ph.D., Austin College: *Where Do We Go Now? Implications of current human behaviors on the future of our species*

**December 9** - Rick Maxwell, Ph.D.: *Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, What is This State Agency?*

**January 13, 2015** - Open House & Elections (no speaker)

### [Blackland Prairie Texas Master Naturalist Monthly Meeting](#), 7 p.m.,

Heard Museum Science Resource Center

### [Connemara Meadow](#)

(Connemaraconservancy.org)

300 Tatum (Alma & Bethany), Allen, TX

Contact Bob Mione, 214-534-1900, [meadowmanager@connemaraconservancy.org](mailto:meadowmanager@connemaraconservancy.org)

### [Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area](#)

201 E. Jones, Street, Lewisville, TX

Contact **Lisa Cole** at [lisacole@unt.edu](mailto:lisacole@unt.edu) or 972-219-3930.

### [Native Plant Society of Collin County](#)

Meets the first Tuesday at 7 p.m. in Laughlin Hall at the Heard Museum

### [Plano Environmental Education Center and Gardens](#)

4116 West Plano Parkway, Plano, TX

For information and to register for classes, click the link above.

### [Prairie and Timbers Audubon Society](#)

Meets the 4th Tuesday, 7 p.m. Heard Museum

### [Texas A&M AGRILIFE Research Extension](#)

<http://dallas.tamu.edu>,

Texas A&M Agrilife

17360 Coit Road, Dallas

Phone: (972) 231-5362

Agrilife [offers a variety of classes](#), some which qualify for advanced training. For times and information about the classes, click on the link above.