

Prairie Partner Update

A publication for and about Blackland Prairie Texas Master Naturalists



Master Naturalists Reconnect with Nature and Revitalize at the 2017 Regional Master Naturalist Conference *by Gwen Thomas and Laura Simpson*

On a beautiful April weekend, tucked into the 70 acres of Briarwood Retreat Center in Argyle, one would never guess there was a concern about the rapid development of North Texas creating our “new normal.” Just down the road however, the Lantana Development, the biggest residential development in Texas, was a constant reminder that, yes, North Texas faces some major challenges in protecting and conserving our valuable and dwindling natural resources. Over the weekend of April 8-9, nearly 200 master naturalists from eight North Texas Chapters (including the newly formed chapter in Stephenville) gathered to learn about, and discuss, what it means to be a master naturalist in an area that is growing and developing at an astonishing pace.

The event kicked into gear on Saturday evening with Rob Denkhaus leading the group in an energetic session of Master Naturalist Jeopardy. Sam Kieschnick led an evening moth bioblitz complete with sheets and blacklights that had folks “ooh’ing” and “aaah’ing” over the tiny winged creatures. Three astronomers also joined us, bringing with them six telescopes for day time (solar) and night time star gazing. A campfire with s’mores and several musicians, kept folks wandering back and forth between activities until the wee hours.



Charlie Amos leads an early morning bird walk at the conference.

Sunday morning kicked off early with an amazing number of folks arriving bright-eyed and bushy-tailed for a 7a.m. bird walk with Charlie Amos. The bird walk was followed by a special gathering at the Briarwood pond to celebrate the life and accomplishments of our friend and fellow naturalist, Jim Varnum.

The remainder of Sunday offered indoor and outdoor opportunities for folks to choose from. The morning indoor sessions began with Eugene Hargrove for a look at how we came to appreciate the beauty of our natural environment. David Todd brought things home to Texas discussing changes in the North Texas prairie landscape as well as ways we can protect, restore and conserve our remaining natural areas. After a leisurely lunch and time to go outside and explore on our own, Michelle Bertelsen talked about the use of native plants in the design and restoration of sub/urban properties. Sharlene Leurig drove the concepts home by bringing the discussion right into urban areas focusing on water use and need in cities and suburbs, and possible options.

The day culminated with a “How-To” panel session focusing on specific actions and efforts that master naturalists can be involved in. The panel
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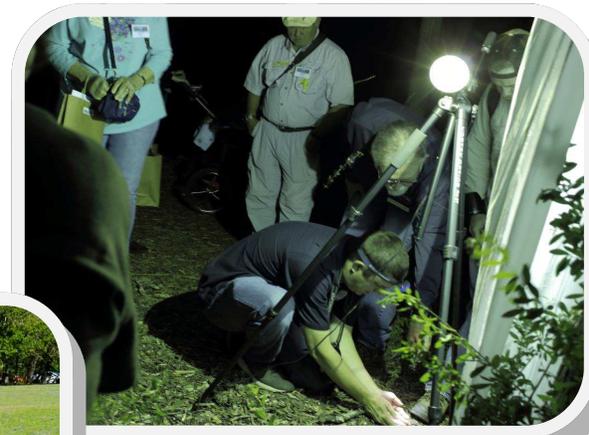
was made up of Donna Cole, with a discussion of wildscaping and working with local HOAs and local government; Sam Kieschnick of TPWD, discussing iNaturalist as a tool for documenting biodiversity; and Lauren Barker with Keep Denton Beautiful, talking about Urban Forestry Initiatives.

All the while, a variety of outdoor sessions tempted master naturalists to explore our surroundings with a local expert. Randy Johnson led a pollinator walk; Omar Bocanegra led a pond walk; David Powell led a very large group through the woods to talk about trees; and Suzanne Tuttle led a wildflower identification walk.

It couldn't have been a more impactful two days. Attendees walked away refreshed from reconnecting with nature and revitalized by new and positive ways we can make an impact within our communities.

We are grateful for the volunteer assistance of so many of our Blackland Prairie friends and to the 58 strong BPMN Chapter members who joined us for this fun and interesting weekend. An extra thanks to: Sally Evans - jumped in and organized the smooth registration process; David Powell - enthusiastically led a large tree walk group.; Donna Cole - assembled 200 beautifully decorated sulfur bags as gifts from our chapter and gave a dynamic panel presentation which tied the conference theme "Navigating the New Normal" to the work we do on the ground.

Want to know more? Materials provided by the presenters as well as photos are posted on the conference Facebook Page - Prairies, Lakes & Timbers, 2017 MN Reg Conf.



Sam Kieschnick leads moth Bio-blitz



Master naturalists had the opportunity to Solargaze through telescopes.



The four conference co-chairs Laura Simpson, Mary Morrow, Jan Deatherage and Gwen Thomas ready to kick-off the conference.

All photos in this article by David Rogers

Saturday, May 6, All Chapter Event at Erwin Park Prairie Restoration Area, McKinney

We will be discovering and inventorying plants, grasses, trees, insects, reptiles and water quality—and just have some fun together. Walk with knowledgeable leaders to hone your skills of identifying, recording and researching in the field. Start time is 9 a.m. until around 12:30.

DIRECTIONS: 4300 Co Rd 1006, McKinney: From Hwy 380 take Lake Forest North to Bloomdale where construction has been completed and there is a right turn lane. Turn right there, then turn left at Rd 1006 (look for small Erwin Park sign and turn right). Stay left on road inside park. At the dead end into circle road past creek you will see Hilltop Pavilion at the rise in the park. Go left, and we will meet at the pavilion near the restrooms.

Bring your lunch (drinks provided), sun screen, bug spray, cameras, binoculars, and wear long pants, a hat, close-toed shoes and socks.

From President Deborah Canterbury



Hey Folks,

I don't know about each of you, but I feel like we have been extremely busy since March 1 through April 24. I checked VMS and yep, we are definitely busy. About 145 of our 160 members have put in

more than 4,400 hours in increments of 1 to 190 hours. That is amazing!

Our chapter has supported outreach booths, plant sales, partner projects, new projects, regional conferences, field trips, in-training classes and the administrative operations at the state and local level. Send the webteam photos from the opportunities you have supported, and we will get them up on Facebook and the website. I know many of you have those pics buried in your phones and cameras. Download them and send them to us. That is webteam@bptmn.org.

Take a look at our website as you post those photos. Notice that there is a tab Member Resources. In the list is the Vol Hrs./AT Info and Forms. If you have an opportunity that you want to participate in but isn't on the list (which is there too) there is an online request form. Fill it out and it will go to Yvette – our VHAT Director. Take a look at the other tabs while wandering

through the website. And remember that things that are reserved for access by active chapter members only are under the Members Area which requires a password. Scroll down the right side of the home page to see links to partners and our newsletters. Soon the topic Go, See, Learn will join the list.

Our Immediate Past President, Clyde Camp, will begin the search for the elected board po-

sitions of president and treasurer soon.

Each of these positions are two-year terms and begin in 2018. Elections will be held in November to provide a smooth transition into the year. The elections being in December allows for only two weeks to prepare reports

and develop a smooth transition. I encourage you to look at the handbook and review duties and terms of positions. President, vice president, secretary and treasurer are elected positions and directors are appointed.

Okay, enough "administrivia." Again, congratulations on the number of hours you have donated to Texas Master Naturalists. I read that more than a million hours were compiled.

This is equal to 485 full time employees and has an estimated value of almost \$24 million.



Us at the Regional Conference! Sorry we didn't get everyone in the photo.

She sings! Can you hear her? Shhh ...do not listen for a rock song, or a pop song or a rap song or an operatic aria. Do not expect a symphonic movement, a jazz riff, or a poet's lyric. In fact, do not listen at all. Just hear!

For she knows no audience; she does not sign herself like a free-throw shooter, she does not point to the heavens self-aggrandizingly, she feels no compulsion to high 5 or chest bump, she hears no applause. She simply sings. I ask you again; can you hear her?

Her song is not one of loss, anger, fear, hatred, grief, or triumph. She shelters and she feeds; yet even of this, she does not sing. She does not vaingloriously puff out her chest; she just sings. Can you hear her?

Quiet your thoughts, and you may hear her refrain. She ripples in the breeze as her stems reach for the sun's golden rays and down below her roots crackle through clay as she quenches her thirst in cool, subterranean waters. Perhaps, she belches contentedly. She offers no excuse, and none is needed.

Her song is of industry: she reaches, and she quenches, and she feeds, and she shelters. She adorns herself with flowers, never preening. Outcomes, never imagined, unfold as she sings. No "forethought of grief" occurs to her and still she sings. Hear her!

Life is the only intended consequence of her song, but do you hear her? I beg you to listen!

(With thanks to Wendell Berry whose lyric, "forethought of grief," I borrowed from his poem, The Peace of Wild Things)

I dedicate this paean to Commander Michael Mitchell of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department who eloquently reminded our Class of 2017 in their first meeting that they have voices, some quiet, some loud, all of which can be raised in defense of Nature ... and to game wardens everywhere.

To our Class of 2017: I look forward to hearing your songs.

Don't Encourage Mosquitos!

- Mosquitos carry and spread diseases such as Zika, West Nile and Chikungunya.
- They lay their eggs on surfaces of containers that fill with water and on standing water itself.
- Female mosquitoes rest on walls and in vegetation. Trim bushes, trees and grass.
- Dump standing water.
- Keep screens on doors and windows intact to keep mosquitos out.
- They can breed in tree rot holes, so fill them with sand or cement.
- A tablespoon of mineral oil can kill mosquitoes in small containers.
- Pesticides with Bacillus thurengensis israelensis (Bti) or (s) methoprene may be used to combat mosquitoes.
- Wear insect repellents with DEET, picaradin, IR353 or lemon-eucalyptus oil and follow instructions.
- Wear light-colored long-sleeves and pants.



May, 2017 marks two years since heavy rains caused damaging flooding at Hagerman National Wildlife refuge and other parts of north Texas. By May 10, 2015, many roads on the refuge were impassable and public access was curtailed. Ultimately, 9,000 of the refuge's 11,320 acres were under water. It was August before the main roads were fully exposed and repairs could begin. At its worst, parts of the refuge were under as much as 24 feet of water, displacing wildlife and causing permanent changes to some habitats.



The deer population at Hagerman NWR appeared to move to higher ground in the summer of 2015 and then return as the waters receded. The refuge performs a deer census each fall, following the same route over multiple days, so they have decades of data with which to compare. The deer count in 2015 did not vary greatly from previous

years, which was very encouraging. However, in 2016, the flooding occurred at birthing time and the number of surviving fawns identified was much lower.

Rainfall totals along the Red River can vary greatly, and periods of flood often follow seasons of drought. Such was the case starting in 2015. Three years of markedly reduced rainfall had left Lake Texoma's conservation pool several feet below normal, but spring rains filled the lake and kept on coming. The water receded in the fall, but a second closure of the refuge occurred in December, 2015, and a third in May and June, 2016.

Birders noticed a reduction in raptors in the winter of 2015-16. Barred Owls that had previously nested in known areas were no longer seen or heard but seem to be gradually returning. The Friends of Hagerman NWR organization has tracked Bluebird nesting for several years. Volunteers check nest boxes weekly throughout the refuge. In 2014, 272 Eastern Bluebirds fledged. Nest box monitoring was halted mid-season in 2015 when the nesting areas flooded. Some nest boxes spent weeks underwater, but when access was restored, volunteers saw others with new nests built on top of old nests. Only 103 fledglings were counted in 2015, and with a smaller flood in 2016, 152 bluebirds fledged.

Flooding can have a positive impact on fisheries by bringing water to areas of woody or herbaceous habitat for fish to feed and spawn. The spring floods of 2015 may have been too late for spawning, but observations by anglers seem to indicate an increase in survival by some valued species. On the other hand, some of the larger sport fish were released downstream when the Denison Dam floodgates were open for several weeks. Flooding also brings with it a large influx of sediment, filling in portions of the lake creating shallows where Carp and Gar species flourish, but also adding nutrients that fuel

The largest impact identified in these past two years is to hardwoods, especially oak trees, which notoriously don't do well with prolonged "wet feet". Many trees have died, changing the landscape, which will affect the mix of wildlife in the long term. The public responded to a plea for acorns in the fall of 2015 and thousands were planted by volunteers, but then more floods occurred. It will be a few more years before it is well known what the long term impacts will be. Change is constant but nature will prevail.

the microscopic plants and animals at the base of the aquatic food chain.

Prior to (left) and after the flood (right.) at Hagerman.





Melanie Schuchart and Elly Tittle staff the iNaturalist table at the Heard Museum

From April 14-18, people in 16 cities across the nation were challenged to find as many plants or animals that they could and document them on iNaturalist. In the Dallas area, there were nine counties that were participating. Two other metropolitan areas, Houston and Austin, were also in the running with San Antonio disappointed they did not get to play. This challenge was a repeat of the one last year that was just between Los Angeles and San Francisco where the iNaturalist app was born.

Over the four days across the nation, more than 125,000 observations and 8,600 species identification were made with the DFW easing out San Francisco on the last day to take the win for most observations coming in at just over 24,000 observations from 504 people of which more than 2,300 species were identified. Included in the DFW challenge area were two of our partners, The Heard Museum and Connemara Meadows and many people individually doing observations in parks and areas around town.

At the Heard, we had about eight master naturalists participate, either assisting with teaching others how to use the app to find observations or going out on trails to document the biodiversity of the area. We ended up having a total of 20 people that added 412 observations of which 166 were identified to the species level. The top six species identified were Diamondback Watersnake with 18 observations and the Pond Slider, Common Buckeye, thistles, spittle bugs and antelope horns tied with five each. Some interesting finds were the Least Skipper, Prothonotary Warber with leg tag, Luna Moth, Unicorn Prominent

Moth, Big-eyed Toad Bug, Little Brown Skink, Sping-water Dancer and Green Dragon.

At Connemara, there was a smaller gathering where several people picked up iNaturalist for the first time, and others helped in the hunt. Overall, there were 137 observations with 79 species and four people recording them. Top observations included the migrating monarch with seven observations, closely followed by the coyote with six. Coyote scat and tracks were recorded, but we also saw the coyote from a distance when the mowing tractor spooked it out of hiding. Interesting finds were a garter snake, a walking stick (diapheromera), Lincoln Sparrow, Tweedy Trefoil, Anisota, Bird Dropping Moth and a Southern Plains Bumblebee.

In all of Collin County during the five-day contest, there were 1,852 observations covering 520 species from 91 people. Top observations were the Mallard (22), Diamondback Watersnake (21), Prairie Verbena (19), Cardinal (16) and Common Buckeye (16). Different sightings were the American Rubyspot, Lark Sparrow, Black Necked Stilt, Bewick's Wren and Western Kingbird.

You might be asking 'Why do this?', but the reality is that citizen scientist programs are growing quickly and can be an inexpensive way for a researcher to collect a variety of data worldwide. There are many programs already providing valuable data that rely on citizen scientists including Journey North and Monarch Watch for tracking Monarch butterflies. Ebird and Project Feeder watch for birds and even smaller programs just as the Lost Ladybug Project. On Wikipedia, there are over 1,000 projects listed that can be joined.

Leaderboard: <https://nhm.org/nature/citizen-science/city-nature-challenge-2017-leaderboard>

Collin County Observations: https://www.inaturalist.org/observations?d1=2017-04-14&d2=2017-04-18&place_id=3024&subview=grid&verifiable=any&view=species

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How Was the Grand Canyon Really Formed? *By Jerri Lipple*

Most of us know that the Grand Canyon was carved by the Colorado River; but, have you ever wondered how the Colorado River was able to



as they decipher geological clues as to how the canyon was formed. The theory works well in models and fits geological clues. The Spill-Over Theory proposes a large ancient lake that eventually spilled over, creating a waterfall that cut into the land as it flowed; but, that is only part of the story. Water can run across rock for a long time and barely make a dent.

To learn what made the Colorado River uniquely able to carve the Grand Canyon, watch the full video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GMLPbRKdvSw>.

carve a massive canyon but the Mississippi could not? Many canyons carved by rivers are narrow, such as Hells Canyon in Idaho which is deeper than the Grand Canyon. It is the sheer size and width of the Grand Canyon which makes it so grand. At its widest point, the Grand Canyon is 18 miles wide, 277 miles long, and more than a mile deep. The Grand Canyon could hold all the river water on earth and still be less than half full. The Colorado River is one tenth the size of the Mississippi and yet it has carved almost a billion tons of rock out of the ground while the Mississippi meanders on a delta.

All photos were taken from the South Kaibab Trail.



There are several theories on how the Grand Canyon was formed: ancient rivers may have merged and combined their cutting power, another assumes the river cut into the plateau as the land lifted around it; but a third, Spill-Over Theory, is gaining traction. The documentary "How the Earth Was Made: The Grand Canyon" examines the Spill-Over Theory in fascinating detail. The documentary follows several geologists





**Dick Zartler,
Class of 2007-8**

Range: Grew up in Deerfield, Illinois, a northern suburb of Chicago, migrated to DFW area and spent most of life here

Childhood hero?

I loved the Lone Ranger and Flash Gordon, but was never a big fan of human heroes.

Naturalist mentor/hero?

My mother was very instrumental in introducing me to nature: tree, plant and bird identification and outdoor life with the Scouts. Recently Sally Evans, a chapter founder, gave me encouragement.

Vocation: Retired service contractor, oil and gas sector

What led you to the love of nature and when?

We lived in on the edge of suburbia, and I could walk five miles west of my house before crossing a road. I was outside most of the time and spent six summers living in a tent, as a scout and counselor.

When did you become a master naturalist and why?

I was in the class of 2007, but did not certify until the end of 2008 because of work projects. By 2007 I had been trail guiding at the Holifield Science Center and the Heard for over 11 years. Sally Evans suggested that I might have an interest in the TMN program as a way of accelerated learning.

What kind of volunteering are you doing and prefer most as a master naturalist?

Trail guiding, but I also enjoy prairie restoration activities.

Married to Frances Shearer for almost 54 years.

Children: Three; five grandchildren.

Do any of your family members share your love of nature as well?

No, although my only daughter leans that way.

Hobbies?

Play tennis 2-3 times a week, love flower gardening and lawn work

Musical style preference?

Country

Favorite song : *On the Road Again*, by Willie Nelson

Favorite work of literature?

Not a favorite as in “enjoyable,” but as in “profound,” *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

What book is on your nightstand now?

Just finished “*Thomas Jefferson and the Tripoli Pirates*.”

Go to naturalist references?

My top 10 “Go To” references: Sibley’s *Guide to Birds*, Gould’s *Common Texas Grasses*, Noble Foundation’s *Grasses of Southern Oklahoma and North Texas*, Ajilvsgi’s *Wildflowers of Texas*, Loughmiller’s *Texas Wildflowers*, Leslie’s *Texas Trees*, Tekiela’s *Trees of Texas*, Peterson’s *Field Guide to Southwestern and Texas Wildflowers*, and Texas Forest Service *Forest Trees of Texas*, and “*Roadside Geology of Texas*.”

Goal: “I try to learn one new grass, plant, tree or bird on every walk. “

Naturalist gear of choice?

REI backpack with first-aid stuff, Stokes Binoculars, poncho, Cliff Bars, DEET, matches, all-in-one tool and water

Favorite food:

Pizza, nothing is second.

What words of wisdom do you live by?

Learn something every day; everything and everybody has a role in the world; and try to do no harm.

Other than the Blackland Prairie, what other ecological region would you choose to live in?

South Florida or California. Why not????

Naturalist experience highlight?

Since retiring, I’ve climbed the tallest peaks in the Ozarks, Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas and Nebraska.

What Environmental concern do you feel most strongly about sharing with others?

The importance of native plants in our ecosystem.

Any crazy thing that you have done that you are most proud of or that we should know?

I don’t do crazy!



**Melanie Schuchart,
Class 2014**

Where did you grow up? My elementary years were spent in Borger, Texas, exploring the red canyons behind my house, catching crawdads and wandering the trails. Moved to the Dallas area

in 4th grade and lived in Richardson, Plano and now Allen.

Childhood hero? My dad, who taught me gardening, camping, fishing and how to get along with everyone.

Naturalist mentor/hero? – Dale Clark who runs Butterflies Unlimited and the Dallas Society of Lepidopterist as a teacher and mentor.

Vocation: Computer software, currently with Watson Software Division of IBM

Who/What led you to the love of Nature and when?

I've always loved nature, but probably my grandmother whose garden I explored, in whose yard we played and caught fireflies. Also, Girl Scouting which included campouts.

Why did you become a Master Naturalist ? I wanted to learn more about nature and meet other people with my same interests. Right now, butterflies and insects are my focus.

Husband: Lonnie Schuchart – Class of 2016

Kids? Ryen , Trey and Macy (Class of 2016) My kids love the outdoors, know better than to kill bugs and even discourage their friends from doing so. I guess I did something right, and I even taught them the names of all the butterflies in our backyard!

What kind of volunteering are you doing and prefer most as a master naturalist? I love teaching people and working in the Heard butterfly garden, taking photos and networking through iNaturalist.

Other hobbies: Concerts, short nature trips, and Bio-blitz's with others to record the flora and fauna. One memorable three-day trip was to the Big Thicket last year with 30 other iNaturalists.

Musical style preference? Classic Rock 'n Roll and seeing it performed live.

Favorite song and would you be more likely to sing it in shower, karaoke, or perform it or just listen to it! Styx —Come Sail away—probably sing in the shower or along with a group at a concert.

Favorite work of literature? The Dan Brown Books as they got me reading for fun. The first book was "The Da Vinci Code," and I could not put it down.

What book is on your nightstand now? Good Bug, Bad Bug.

Go-to Naturalist references? The internet of course – Bugguide, iNaturalist, Dale's Dallasbutterflies.com website, Valerie's Austin bug site and Googling for insects and the Collin County Nature survey for plants.

Naturalist gear of choice? Cabela pants or shorts if hot and my hat with my master naturalist vest of course.

Favorite food - Chinese & Japanese Stir Fry

Words to live by: "In the end we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand; and we will understand only what we are taught." (Baba Dioum, 1968.)

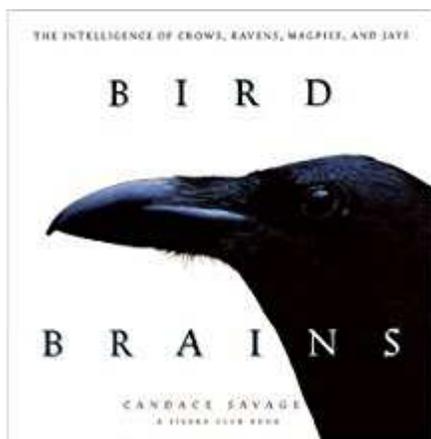
Other than the Blackland Prairie, what other ecological region would you choose to live in? Hill Country or East Texas. I would want land that I can nurture and observe.

Naturalist experience highlight? Three of the Monarch Butterflies I tagged in my backyard were recovered 1,000 miles south in the mountains of Mexico.

What environmental concerns do you feel most strongly about sharing with others? Habitat conservation, climate change and teaching children not to be afraid of nature.

Any crazy thing that you have done that you are most proud of or that we should know! I save all the bugs from the pool every morning.

Biggest personal challenges are over-committing, having enough time, and helping others take on teaching and mentoring roles to spread the load and touch more people.



This is not a book review of David Welky's *A Wretched and Precarious Situation: In search of the Last Arctic Frontier*. I carried that beast to my hotel room every night on my spring break trip through south Texas' World Birding Centers, ful-

ly intending to read and write a review for this newsletter. Instead, I lost my heart to an unexpected treasure I found in a gift shop in Harlingen's Arroyo Colorado World Birding Center.

The tall, stark white spine with the title *Bird Brains* caught my attention among the myriad of field guides. *Bird Brains?* Is that an insult? I pulled it out and was met with a striking cover featuring a close-up of a bird so black it was almost blue. It was then that the subtitle gave it away: *The Intelligence of Crows, Ravens, Magpies, and Jays*. Who among us has not had an encounter with these birds? Loud to the point of obnoxious, aggressive, beautiful, yet kind of scary thanks to Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*. I never thought of these birds as anything special, let alone intelligent. This book has changed my mind!

Beyond any field guide, *Bird Brains* by Candace Savage, is part coffee-table book with its stunning photographs and 10x10 format and part meta-analysis of scientific research with a dash of engaging sidebars recalling the influence of crows and ravens in literature throughout the ages. Classified as members of the genus *Corvus*, there are 113 species of crow-like birds in the world. This group, known as corvids, includes our local American Crow, Blue Jay, and Common Raven. A handy graphic included in the book illustrates typical corvids, provides a brief description of the bird and map of their territory. Go most anywhere in the world, and you will find a corvid who has adapted to that area. The author makes the point that in many parts of the world, corvophobia is a sad reality. Some folks

think that corvids are "vermin that need to be eradicated." However, keep reading, and I bet you will start to see corvids in a new light.

The main thrust of the book is building a case for the intelligence of the corvids. While lacking an elaborate cerebral cortex you'd find in mammals, these birds have a well-developed hyperstriatum within their brain, the largest among any birds. In fact, their brain-to-body ratio equals that of dolphins and almost our own! Ok, brain size is one thing, genetic programming is another, but do these birds make conscious decisions? Problem solve? Learn?

Ms. Savage, the author, explores the scientific evidence for corvid intelligence from studies involving nest-building, mating and communications, to name a few areas. She is careful to differentiate between instinct and demonstrations of higher intelligence. Yes, the data is convincing—corvids do exhibit higher intelligence! For example, consider the language of corvids, one of the most studied areas. Caws, croaks, screams, pants and chatter vary between species, regions and moods. Ravens, which "probably produce a greater variety of sounds than any other animal except ourselves," have up to 64 different sounds which convey a variety of meanings "subtly altered by the individual's emotions and its circumstances." While you may or may not be convinced by the scientific findings, you will be able to relate the facts to your own observations and think about the corvids in a different way.

So, the next time you are cawing to that crow and the crow sizes you up and caws back, think about it. Would you get the same response from a house sparrow? A dove? After reading *Bird Brains*, I understand what authors throughout history knew all along —there is something special about corvids worth writing about!



Ron gets his bearings on the trail.

I recently completed a backpacking trip on The Trail Between the Lakes, a 28-mile track that connects Lakes Sam Rayburn and Toledo Bend in deep east Texas. Toledo Bend straddles the Texas-Louisiana line and is formed on the Sabine River. Sam Rayburn, to the west, is formed by the Angelina River.

The trail lies entirely within the Sabine National Forest. A sign at the Sam Rayburn trailhead, where I ended the hike, identifies three distinct ecosystems through which the trail passes: Pine Savannah; Bottomland Hardwood Forest; and Beech-Magnolia Canyons, the latter being a new term to me. With relatively slight changes in elevation, these distinct environments tend to blend together, one passing almost seamlessly into the other. This was particularly true between the bottomland hardwood forests and the relatively less frequent beech-magnolia ones (which I saw during the first third of the trip but not thereafter).

One of the most pleasurable aspects of my backpacking trips is the opportunity to observe the natural environments through which the trail passes. This is especially true when there is a variety of terrain, flora and fauna, which was the case (well, not so much concerning fauna) on this trip.

This is in the Piney Woods ecoregion of Texas so one would expect pines to be the dominant tree species. While that would obviously be the case in the pine savannah ecosystem, there is no shortage of pines in the hardwood bottomlands. There are four species of pine: Longleaf, Shortleaf, Loblolly and Slash (sometimes called yellow pine), which is common in boggy ground.

Before continuing, I need to make a point of clarification regarding plant identification on this and other backpacking trips. Because on these hikes, I

have objectives for where I plan to camp, there is generally not much time to spend on identifying plants. I do not carry guidebooks to avoid a temptation to stop and spend too much time studying. I try to observe as closely as possible while walking or stopping to catch my breath. When I stop for rest every 45 minutes or so, I may make notes or spend time looking more closely at what is immediately around me. But, for the most part, identifications are done after the fact based on what I can remember or what I've written in notes.

Oaks are the dominant hardwoods in these forests and include White, Southern Red, Water, and Swamp Chestnut. Other trees that were common included Sweetgum, Holly, Elm, Dogwood (in bloom throughout the hike), Beech, Magnolia and Hickory.

Ferns were common in wet areas, and I passed through a number of small cane brakes. There was a small tree (or shrub) with a beautiful pink and white flower that I occasionally saw along creek banks in one section of the forest. I had no idea

what it was until I returned home and turned to Carol Clark, who promptly identified it as a wild azalea.

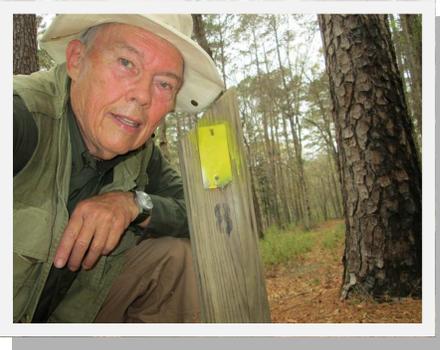
The only invasive plant I noticed was privet, of which there was a surprising proliferation given the somewhat remote area.

I was disappointed by the paucity of wildlife I saw. There were birds (though really not all that many), and I frequently saw small gray squirrels (what people in east Texas call cat squirrels) working on acorns and hickory nuts. I saw a lot of deer signs but no deer. This isn't surprising, however, given the thickness of the forest and ground littered with dry leaves that makes walking quietly very difficult without slowing down to an unacceptable pace. Any self-respecting deer in this environment would hear and/or see you a good five minutes before you were close enough to see it.

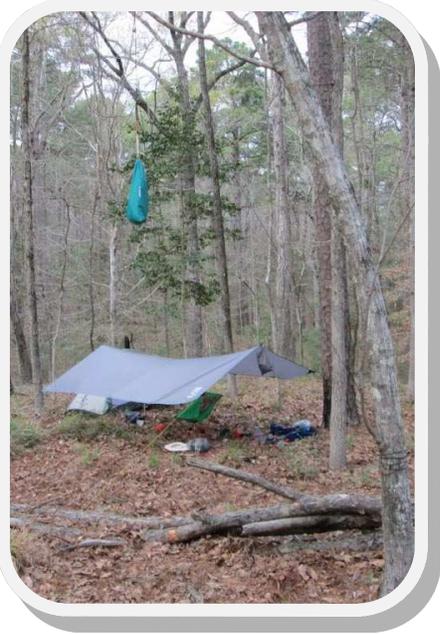
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Wild azaleas



At Mile Marker 8



The ever-importantly placed bear bag hanging from a tree.

Although black bears have apparently moved back into this country from Louisiana, I saw no sign of them. What I did see was extensive signs of wild pigs (either that or a bunch of runaway tractors).

While the terrain was generally flat throughout the trip, it was "slashed" repeatedly by small creeks. If I crossed one creek, I must have crossed a thousand. (An exaggeration but in my mind not much of one.) The creek crossings were in many cases pretty tricky. (It was the first time I had used trekking poles and they were invaluable in creek crossing, not to mention their benefits of balance and support while walking). The water in the creeks generally wasn't the problem; it was the steep banks, quite often cut-banks, that were challenging. The very last crossing I made (over Little Creek) was the most difficult of all. (I'm just glad Wanda wasn't there to see me going down over exposed tree roots with a jump to a log in the creek with an immediate required jump across the creek.) Maintaining one's balance on these little jumps or tricky steps with a 40-pound pack on your back isn't real easy.

The Forest Service cautioned against drinking any water along the trail even if filtered or otherwise treated, which meant a need to cache water at a couple of spots along the trail. I'm not sure why they give this warning, but I suspect it might relate to runoff from logging operations in the area. In any event, most of the water in the creeks was stagnant and scummy and far down the wrong end of the desirability scale.

I planned to cache water at two forest roads with trail crossings about a mile from the main road but found both were closed. Instead, I had to use crossings on open-paved roads, one further down the trail and the other nearer down the trail than I had planned. This

also meant an alteration to my travel plans. I got to the campground where I planned to spend the night on Wednesday, earlier than expected, so went ahead and hiked in almost two miles and set up camp. (An interesting consequence of this is reported later.) This effectively moved the location of the next two nights' campsites forward by about two miles. It also meant that after picking up my first cached gallon on Thursday, I had to carry it for about 4 miles. My hips and shoulders clearly felt the burden of that extra eight pounds.

The trail was generally well marked, which was important in areas where the trail itself was barely if at all visible. There was only one point where the trail completely disappeared. The marked trail had made a southward turn when reaching a large open field, following an old logging road. After a quarter-mile or so it was to turn SW and run into a forest road. My efforts to find either trail or trail marker were in vain. I knew, however, that if the old road continued on a generally-south track, it would end at the main FM road running east-west and that the marked trail crossed that road 1 to 1-1/2 miles to the west. It did continue south and did hit the FM road. I walked that road for about a mile to the trail crossing. My next water cache was not far south of that crossing.

With the initial almost-two-mile "headstart," my last day was the shortest (you ALWAYS want it to be): 8 miles. The first three miles were all in hardwood bottomlands where there had been some controlled burns. There were numerous fallen trees, and the ground had a deep layer of dried leaves. The upshot: There were a number of places where there was no visible trail and no immediately-visible trail markers. (Some, no doubt, were on fallen trees.) That meant a widening search to try to spot a marker. Fortunately, I eventually did in every case although in none of them did I find a visible trail; I had to rely strictly on spotting a marker. That stretch culminated with the most-difficult creek crossing at Little Creek. After that, it was generally smooth sailing.

I arrived at the Sam Rayburn Trailhead at about 12:30 p.m., on Saturday, about 2-1/2 hours earlier than my initial target, which had some contingencies built in. I was met there by two cousins who then drove me to the Toledo Bend campground where I began the hike. There was one RV in the campground on Wednesday

(contd. on page 13)

Trail Between the Lakes (contd.)

when I arrived. Shortly after they had driven away in their car, leaving their RV, I started up the trail. On Friday night Wanda got a call from the Sabine County Sheriff's Dept. They asked if she knew me, and if she knew where I was. Those campers had seen me arrive on Wednesday and hadn't seen me at all as of Friday afternoon, so they called the Sheriff's Dept. Wanda told them I had called her earlier saying that I was camped eight miles from the end of the trail and was just fine. She said she told them, "He's old, but he knows what he's doing." I guess they tracked her down based on my license plate number.

A confession: I might say this was more work than fun. It was a challenge. Twenty-eight miles is a ways to go with 40 pounds (give or take) on your back. There were times when I asked, "Why in the world am I doing this . . . on purpose?" There is no simple answer to the question, and I guess I probably couldn't come up with a suitable or satisfactory one if I tried. I probably won't do another solo trek (or at least one of this distance). There were a number of times on creek crossings when I thought, "Oops, I could have easily twisted an ankle there." (And, I don't Wanda to worry if she's going to get a call from some Sheriff's Dept.) But, it's done, I'm glad I did it, I'm not that sore, and I don't have any noticeable injuries. There's nothing heroic about it, just a way to test yourself a bit in an environment that you love.



Ron reaches the end of the trail.

Do you have a story to tell about a hike or nature trip you have taken? Email us at newsletter@bptmn.org.

The Sounds of Nature...written after a frustrating experience at Tyler State Park

by Jerri Lipple

Lying on my SUP, in the middle of the cove, I feel a gentle breeze across my skin as gentle waves loll me back and forth. I hear the waves softly lapping against the shore. I close my eyes and listen to the rustle of the leaves... suddenly a country song disrupts the peace, "A holey pair of jeans, She looks great in cheap sunglasses ..."

Arrgh, a couple in a canoe paddle in my direction to fish. Their radio which is on low but still quite audible breaks the calm serenity of nature. I sit up and paddle farther away from them, to a cove on another part of the lake.

Awww, the tranquil sounds of nature return. The unnatural sound of the radio is ablated. I lie back down on my paddleboard, inhale deeply, close my eyes, and slowly exhale, a calming yoga breath intertwined with the serenity of nature. Suddenly, another song, "With her brown hair a-blowing, She's a soft place to land, And a good feeling knowing ..."

Arrgh, a different couple paddles toward my new location. They are perched atop what appears to be boxes sitting on a flat canoe. A radio sitting on the floor of their boat erodes the serenity of nature.

While music is uplifting in the right environments, in nature, that same music can be harsh and irritating. It brings the hustle and bustle of the city to the calm, tranquility of the outdoors.

Here's to hoping your summer excursions are full of the sounds of nature!

See if this thought sounds familiar: All kids do is sit on their phones. The kids today don't go outside like they used to. They don't care about anything that isn't an electronic.....

Disclaimer: I have had all these thoughts. I'm 28 and a teacher of all grades. I grew up with three unfenced acres back when Prosper was nothing but country. I played outside whenever I wanted and had access to nature everyday. It was heaven! I understand the concern when older adults cringe because they see kids now doing nothing but playing on their phones. I also work with high schoolers everyday and was able to interview four of them who are currently taking an outdoor education class.

These students range in background of being from Brazil, (Julia), New Jersey (Liam), and two native Texan's (Julianna and Nathaniel).

I first asked them how they interact with nature and balance technology at the same time. Julia said she grew up in and around nature and the forest. Her town would grow gardens to eat their vegetables from, and she missed being so connected. The kids there, in Brazil, grew up knowing all things were interconnected. Nathaniel brought up the point that while this younger generation may not have a vast amount of the people caring, those who do care REALLY care. He used the example of 19-year old, Boyan Slat, who designed, got funded and then built the Ocean Clean Up Aray (www.oceancleanup.com). He proved a point that no other generation had ever been driven enough or knew how to use technology well enough before Boyan. I then asked how would they like to see the divide between generations lessened. Liam said he would like for the issues to actually be explained to him. He said he



The younger generation observing nature during the iNaturalist event at Connemara.

keeps being told his generation doesn't appreciate nature/the outdoors, but that no one has ever asked him to be involved.

That prompted me to ask if anyone ever did give them opportunities to help plant, restore habitat or just be apart of a project would they even care about it? Every single one said they would love to get their hands dirty and learn why conservation matters. That was amazing to hear! We just have to let them know what's happening, when and where.

Finally, these students want to learn, they want to be informed, none of them had ever been

asked their viewpoints concerning nature/the outdoors before. I explained to them about the iNaturalist app and how to use it. They all thought it was the coolest concept! One of my freshman's eyes still lit up when I asked her about bugs. Score for nature!

Ways You Can Help Monarch Butterflies

Several organizations have action plans to save the monarch butterfly.

Two of them are:

Monarch Watch-

www.monarchwatch.org and

Save Our Monarchs,

www.saveourmonarchs.org.

Read and act on what you can do to help stave off

extinction of this beautiful butterfly.



DFW iNaturalist Event Is Tops in Observations *(contd.)*

While the challenge might be over the quest is not. I would like to encourage everyone to participate in this project as someone who adds observations or someone that helps others with Identifications. There is a lot of great information in this tool, and we are building a history of what once existed in areas that may be paved over someday.

Here are links to the specific projects to see the top ID's. Note that this can change over time as more is identified down to species.

Heard Project on April 15th only: https://www.inaturalist.org/observations?on=2017-04-15&place_id=any&project_id=heard-natural-science-museum-wildlife-sanctuary&subview=grid&verifiable=any&view=species

Connemara Project on April 16th only: https://www.inaturalist.org/observations?captive=any&on=2017-04-16&place_id=any&project_id=6068&subview=grid&verifiable=any&view=species

DFW City Challenge Observations: April 14-18 https://www.inaturalist.org/observations?captive=any&d1=2017-04-14&d2=2017-04-18&place_id=any&project_id=10752&subview=grid&verifiable=any&view=species

2017 16 City Challenge Observations: April 14-18 https://www.inaturalist.org/observations?captive=any&d1=2017-04-14&d2=2017-04-18&place_id=any&project_id=city-nature-challenge-2017&subview=grid&verifiable=any&view=species

Interesting Finds with clickable links at the Heard: [Least skipper](#), [Prothonotary Warber with leg tag](#), [viceroxy](#), [unicorn prominent moth](#), [big eyed toad bug](#), [little brown skink](#), [Spingwater dancer](#) and [green dragon](#).

Interesting Finds with clickable links at Connemara: [Coyote](#), [garter snake](#), [a walking stick \(diapheromera\)](#), [Lincoln sparrow](#), [Tweedy trefoil](#), [Anisota](#), [bird dropping moth](#) and a [southern plains bumblebee](#).

City	Observations	City	Species	City	People
Dallas/Fort Worth	23957	Houston	2419	Los Angeles	1,034
San Francisco Bay Area	23024	Austin	2401	San Francisco Bay Area	651
Los Angeles	18152	San Francisco Bay Area	2313	Dallas/Fort Worth	495
Austin	15807	Dallas/Fort Worth	2299	Houston	417
Houston	15276	Los Angeles	2017	Austin	373
Raleigh (Triangle Area)	7441	Raleigh (Triangle Area)	1310	Boston (and surrounding areas)	250
DC	4843	DC	901	Raleigh (Triangle Area)	186
Boston (and surrounding areas)	3909	Boston (and surrounding areas)	743	Salt Lake City (Wasatch Front)	178
New York (5 boroughs)	3792	New York (5 boroughs)	657	DC	167
Chicago (Cook County)	2511	Chicago (Cook County)	527	New York (5 boroughs)	146
Salt Lake City (Wasatch Front)	2373	Miami (Miami-Dade County)	496	Chicago (Cook County)	142
Seattle	1542	Salt Lake City (Wasatch Front)	428	Seattle	64
Miami (Miami-Dade County)	1437	Seattle	415	Miami (Miami-Dade County)	52
Nashville	970	Nashville	319	Nashville	48
Minneapolis/St. Paul	955	Minneapolis/St. Paul	257	Minneapolis/St. Paul	48
Duluth (Twin Ports)	236	Duluth (Twin Ports)	85	Duluth (Twin Ports)	46
ALL 16 CITIES	124092	ALL 16 CITIES	8557	ALL 16 CITIES	4051

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Smugmug - <http://bptmn.smugmug.com/>
Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/bptmnforum.bptmn.org>

The Mission of the Texas Master Naturalist program is to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the State of Texas.

The Texas Master Naturalist program is a partnership between the Texas AgriLife Extension Service, Texas Parks & Wildlife and other local partners.



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Upcoming BPTMN Meetings
2nd Tuesday, 7 p.m.,
Heard Museum Science Center

- **May 9:** *"Dead Zones in Rivers and the Gulf of Mexico and Their Causes"* – Donald Harper, Professor Emeritus, Texas A&M Galveston
- **June 13:** *"Frogs!"* – Scott Kiester, Texas Master Naturalist, Elm Fork Chapter
- **July 11:** *"13 Things You Need to Know About the Poison Oak and Ivy Rash"* – Amy Martin, Author of *Itchy Business: How to Treat the Poison Ivy and Poison Oak Rash*

Websites of Interest...

All About Birds:

<https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/features/birdanatomy/>

Blackland Prairie Texas Master Naturalist Calendar <http://bptmn.org/calendar/>

Cornell Lab of Ornithology –

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/Page.aspx?pid=1478>

Earthkind Landscaping

<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/earthkind/>

Green Source DFW

<http://www.greensourcedfw.org/>

Insects in the City - <http://citybugs.tamu.edu/>

Ladybird Johnson Wildlife Center

<https://www.wildflower.org/>

Prairie Partner Update past issues

http://bptmn.org/_BOARD_FTP/newsletter/

Texas Aggi Horticulture

<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/>

Texas Parks & Wildlife Updates

<https://tpwd.texas.gov/>

Texas Smartscape <http://www.txsmartscape.com/>

Texas Superstar Plants <http://www.texasuperstar.com/plants/>

Texas Tree Planting

<http://texastreeplanting.tamu.edu/>