

Prairie Partner News

2019
Fall

A publication for and about Blackland Prairie Texas Master Naturalists

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Summer 2019 is officially over, though it is not apparent from the lingering heat and humidity. As we anticipate cooler temperatures and a flurry of increased outreach by our chapter members I want to congratulate you all for the important work that you have done and will continue to do in the months ahead. Recently, a young lady named Greta travelled to our shores to make an impassioned plea to all nations to join together in addressing the climate crisis. I was impressed by her spunk and passion. I was shocked at the criticism. Of course, she has people who are her mentors! People like her teachers, parents, scientists and even Jane Goodall. Now that is something to brag about! The point is, our children are the hope for the future of this planet and we are mucking up the mothership we call planet earth for them, their children and their grandchildren. That is why I hope we all will continue to reach out to children and of course their parents in all that we do. I must admit some frustration in getting in front of that young audience which I so want to reach. But together, we can all touch more lives, young and old, and enkindle the passion for the natural world and a desire to understand it and protect it that we all share. Greg Tonian, Editor



Ode to a Texas Master Naturalist

"Aha," said the leader, "What have you found?"

A tiny strange bug crawling on the ground;
Something white and fuzzy surrounding a twig;
Something green or black, something little or big!

The children explore and ask many a question
As they learn about nature in their outdoor session.

The leader has told them to use all their senses;
Today they were scientists using compasses or lenses.

No 'Yucks' or shrieks would she allow,
Only "Aha, Neat! Look!" or an occasional "Wow!"

Today they would talk about streams and lakes,
About plants and trees, and the time it takes
For soil to form and what is erosion.

They will look at plants and learn what is poison.
They'll look at a hedgehog and touch a snake's skin;
They'll see the beehive as bees go out and in.

Each leader has a lesson to share
Loads of experience and knowledge presented with
flare.

Thanks Texas Master Naturalist, for your time.

You are the reason for this little rhyme.

You give the children something they need;
The beginning of understanding, a tiny seed
To start their growth of knowledge and pleasure
Of our planet's environmental treasure.

Sally Evans (around 2015 with recent adaptations)



Our Very Talented Bunch of Master Naturalists!

Several chapter members and others associated with our chapter will be leading field or in-class sessions at the the **20th Texas Master Naturalist Program Annual Meeting**, where we'll gather, learn and celebrate another year of the Texas Master Naturalist program. This year's event, taking place in Rockwall, Texas, will run from **Friday, October 18th through Sunday, October 20th**. The event will be hosted at the **Hilton Dallas/Rockwall Lakefront Hotel** on the shores of Lake Ray Hubbard just east of Dallas. For more information go to www.txmn.org and click on Annual Meeting tab.

Presenting are:

Alex Dubovsky

A tour of Trinity River Elm Forks Paddling Trail
Trinity River Paddling

Chris Ebling

Fundamentals of Forest Ecology
Dendrology and Tree Identification Techniques
Entomology: The Study of Insects and Their
Influence on Ecosystems and Agriculture

Clyde Camp

Various sessions related to VMS

Carol Clark

Native Bees in Your Landscape
Monarch Waystations for Texas
Monarch Butterflies—Beyond the Basics

Dave Powell

Restoring Native Prairie Habitats on Public Land
Interpretive Trail guiding and Getting Adults and
Children to Enjoy Being Outdoors

Melanie Schuchart

Secrets of Survival—Butterfly Strategies

Rodney Thomas

Birding at Connemara Meadow

Donna Cole

Suburban Challenges: Nature and Your Neighbors

Rick Travis

The Native Trees of North Texas

Bob Mione

Large and Small Plot Restoration at the Connemara
Meadow Nature Preserve

Jean Suplick

Chirp, Chirp. Who's there? Making Sense of the
Sounds Birds Make

Water, Water Everywhere by Greg Tonian

My mind keeps wandering back to the Ouachita Forest
and the Little Missouri River watershed.

I am seeing and hearing the seeps, creeklets, streams and
the River itself, tinkling and gurgling.

I am feeling the rain soak through to my skin,

I am again bracing myself for a chilly, cooling , exhilarating
soak in a stream ,

before another steep ridge climb on a hot afternoon,
letting it run all over me, and

yes, it is thrilling me to my soul.

Memories of **water, water everywhere.**

We drove up early Saturday morning,

the anticipated Labor Day adventure finally underway.

Passed through a solitary storm cell on I-30,

Trying to block our path.

Black dawn, black clouds,

back lit by static electricity,

And semis spraying,

Water, water everywhere.

Stepped out from our air-conditioned cocoon,

heavy and moist Ouachita Forest air enveloping us,
as if the trees themselves were exhaling.

Sunrays exciting the molecules of air and water,
and bouncing off them,

Hot, glaring light reflecting off foliage, rock and bark.

We descended to a feeder creek,

and listened to the music of water flowing over pebbles
and stones,

a traffic-like din,

yet soothing.

We passed through shaded grottoes,

rocky streamlets seeking the Little Missouri somewhere
below us,

forested ridges and hollows.

Sweat pouring from our brows, blood pumping through
our veins,

Breaths becoming deeper,

Comingling humidity with the

Water, water everywhere. (Continued on page 9.....

Summer Fun with Two-Spotted Longhorn Bees

by Rick Travis—Class of 2018

Lisa and I had established a small native pollinator area under our Oak tree in our back yard, and we really enjoyed the wildlife our little shade-tolerant meadow attracted this summer, from rabbits hiding in the plants, to bees, butterflies, dragonflies, and the occasional hummingbird visiting our little meadow to feed on the Cone Flowers, Coreopsis, Winecup, Turk's Cap, Black Eyed Susan, and Lemon Beebalm.

Our favorites were some Two-Spotted Longhorn Bees that decided to establish a nest there. We had noticed, like clockwork, a few of the bees would latch on to a specific flower stem at sundown, and stay there as a group, still as can be, all night.

Taking a close-up photo of them was easy...they were very docile once they latched on to the flower stem. I sent our resident pollinator expert Carol Clark one of my photos of these bees asking her what was going on with this behavior. She informed me these were all male bees, and they don't sleep in the nest. Apparently around sunset the male bees find a happy spot, as a group, and bunk down for the evening. They seem to be creatures of habit, because they tended to gravitate to the same stem, or a nearby stem, each evening. These "boys' club" sleepovers went on all summer. This was fascinating behavior by these little pollinators; they've really bolstered our appreciation for the way bees go about their business.

Here's a photo of the fellas gathered for sleepy time. The background is white because I used an index card as a backdrop to help the phone camera focus on the bees. These guys were asleep, they didn't even move when I accidentally bumped them with the card.



'Tis Fall According to the Calendar by Sally Evans, Member Emeritus

**'Tis fall according to the calendar's rendition
But cooler weather and rain seem to be an apparition!
Our minds are assailed by life's commotion,
Leaving small time for Nature's devotion.
Iran-Saudi situation; Cowboy Elliott's capitalization;
Deaths by vaporation; Killer mosquito eradication;
Political comment agitation; Candidates in contention;**

**School days preparation; Bus driver intoxication;
South East Texas precipitation; Climate change demonstrations;
Let's leave this world of desperation; take a mental separation;
Step into a prairie or a mountain elevation;
Do some kayak navigation; or some bird identification;
Give your mind a vacation; receive Nature's inspiration.**

Vacationing with Wasps

By Jean Suplick— Class of 2017

Distant and exotic destinations this summer? Nope. It just wasn't in the cards for us this year. We simply hunkered down in the heat and tended our garden. As most TMNs know, there seems always to be something in nature to awe you, even in the backyard. And that was true for us this summer.

In the Spring, full of anticipation, we decided to increase the number of rent-free units in the “bee condos” on our property. At the original location, three houses went to five, and in the new uptown location, I mean out front, four new structures went up.



Last year, most of the tubes in the houses were eventually plugged with a light gray matter. Since we had seen what we believed to be mason bees in the garden, we figured they were the new tenants. But while trying to pin down exactly who was going in and out of the condos, we often saw small wasps energetically and very closely inspecting the tubes. Which wasps were these exactly? iNaturalist to the rescue! Photographing flying insects is tough, especially when it's sunny and hot out, but I eventually got a few good snaps and uploaded them.

The creatures turned out to be of the genus *Euodynerus* which belongs to the subfamily Eumeninae, commonly called mason or potter wasps. That much was easy to

determine. Getting to the species level took some back-and-forth among the wasp experts on iNaturalist, but one finally declared my insect to be *Euodynerus pratensis*. These solitary wasps are noticeably smaller than paper wasps, and a little larger than honeybees.



Mason wasps like ours nest in pre-existing cavities, for instance old wood borings or hollow stems, where they build several individual brood chambers. Being “mass provisioners,” they paralyze beetle larvae, spiders or caterpillars which they then stock in the chamber before the female lays a single egg. She walls the cell shut with a concoction of dry soil mixed with her saliva. Each cavity, in our case a cardboard or bamboo tube, might have a succession of brood chambers. The adults feed on flower nectar and their vigorous activity among the blossoms in our garden makes them excellent pollinators.

This summer we watched much more closely and sure enough, the *Euodynerus* population exploded. They happily use all the styles of insect houses we have, and they don't seem to mind the wide diameter bamboo tubes in the teardrop houses.

Now, here in mid-September, with our mighty Maximilian Sunflowers in full glory, I look out my kitchen window in late afternoon and see dozens and dozens of mason wasps zipping and swooping among the blooms. It's a sight to behold.

2019 at the Connemara

By Bob Mione—Class of 2012

Native grass and wildflower expansion are two of the biggest initiatives at the Meadow. We began getting ready for 2019 in March of 2018 as we began preparing the plots for both wildflowers and native grasses. This preparation continued through into 2019, and in April and May we began to sow wildflower and native grass seeds. We sowed the last grass seeds into one of our plots on 6 July.



In Jan of '19, we began growing native grasses in the Allen High School greenhouse. We moved these grasses, Buffalo, Blue Gramma, Side Oats Gramma, Curly Mesquite, Big Blue Stem, Indian and Switch grass to the nurseries in the Meadow in May. Our guess is that we moved approx 2748 "pieces" of native grass from the greenhouse into the Meadow, finally completing this work at the end of May.

As the weather would permit, in Jan, Feb, March and April, we moved Little Bluestem and Side Oats from Beck's Prairie in Richardson to the Meadow. These grasses were to be plowed under due to commercialization of Beck's Prairie. We felt good that we had "rescued" them and were able to move them to a forever home. My guess is that some of the clumps of grass were hundreds of years old. Of the 300 plus clumps of grass we moved, over 95% of them survived the Summer and our experience has been that if they survive the first Summer, they will continue to live.

Beginning in Jan and continuing through March, we moved the native grasses that had been moved from the green-

house into our nursery in 2018, to their new homes in the plots we had started preparing in 2018. We moved a great many short grass (Side Oats, Blue Gramma and Buffalo) to a "test" plot in the Upper Meadow. This plot had been burned by a vandal in July of 2018 and we had taken steps to eliminate the Johnson Grass (JG) in the plot, but knew we had not eliminated our goal of 90%. We called this plot a "test plot" as we had plans to use Plateau herbicide to eliminate the JG when it began to grow. Plateau is JG selective, meaning that it kills JG but not the native grasses. We seeded between the clumps, set up an irrigation system and planned to also test our mobile irrigation capability at this plot and another plot in the Upper Meadow we had prepared for seeding. We seeded the second plot with the two types of native grasses, Side Oats and Blue Gramma.

As projected, the JG came up in our test plot and we were able to successfully eliminate it with the Plateau. The results we achieved have set the stage for us to greatly expand the use of Plateau in 2019 and 2020, with the goal of eliminating over 50% of the JG in the Upper Meadow.

Beginning in June, after the rains stopped, we began testing/using our mobile irrigation system on these two plots. Our mobile system consists of two, 275-gallon containers mounted on a trailer. We fill the containers, drive



to the plots, hook up the containers to the irrigation system, start the pump and irrigate the plots with approx 550 gals of water. We did this twice a week throughout the Summer and had very good results.

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Connemara from Page 3

In March of '19, we began preparing the plots we would be expanding into in 2020. We continued to work on these plots throughout the Summer.

Beginning in Jan and through March, we continued to cut down "trash trees" (it is "the Meadow", not "the Forest"), in low lying areas of the Meadow. We estimate that we cut down over 1162 of these small trash trees. We had the Boy Scouts working on their Eagle projects use these trees as a central piece of their erosion mitigation projects on Rowlett Creek.



The middle of May we released over 125 Bob White quail into the Meadow as part of our continuing effort (begun in 2017) to restore Bob Whites to the Meadow. In a "big" success for us, on Sep 16th, we were able to get a photo of a rooster and hen Bob White with two of their own chicks, a first for our efforts.

In early March, several of the Meadow volunteers journeyed to Rockdale, TX to provide advice and guidance to a group of MN volunteers from the Camino Real Chapter on how best to construct/develop a large pollinator garden. They implemented many of our suggestions and have made great progress with their pollinator garden.

Thanks to our Blackland Prairie MN volunteers and our new equipment, we were able to achieve another of our big objectives for 2019, no JG allowed to go to full seed in over half of the Meadow.



We also achieved a long term objective of eliminating fire ants from the Meadow. As of September 2019, there are not 10 active mounds in the Meadow.

None of these accomplishments would have been possible without the many hours put in by our MN volunteers, the majority of whom belong to the Blackland Prairie chapter.

A Naturalist's Vacation to Georgia and South Carolina

By Greg Tonian — Class of 2017

On the last Thursday in June, Laurie and I drove eastward on that long I-20 corridor, accompanied by our two dogs, stopping first in the Cobb County area North of Atlanta Georgia, the home of her parents, and then continuing, a few days later, to the annual 4th of July family gathering at their home away from home on Fripp Island SC, a small barrier island 25 miles out of Beaufort. The trip was a delightful opportunity for family bonding as always, but it also provided some amazing opportunities to look at Nature with my ever-roving Naturalist's eye. My binoculars and camera accompanied me on runs and walks with the ever-present goal to observe and document the interesting flora and fauna in two wonderful ecosystems: the heavily wooded hills and hollows along the Chattahoochee River and the inlets, marshes, palmetto and pine forests, sloughs and dunes of a South Carolina Low Country Barrier Island. Raptors figured heavily in some of my most memorable summer vacation observations as did, not unexpectedly, wading birds. I also sighted and photographed a female painted bunting, one of my bird bucket list goals. I saw and heard the painted bunting both along the Chattahoochee and at Fripp Island. In fact, my first experience with painted buntings was at Fripp Island, before discovering them to be regular visitors in my North Texas stomping grounds.

While in the woodlands of Cobb county I frequently heard the calls and observed red-shouldered hawks and got a glimpse into their daily wanderings. I also paid a visit to the Chattahoochee Nature Center a few miles from the home of my in-laws. There I photographed the rescued raptors on their campus and hiked the wooded paths overlooking their sizable bass and turtle-filled pond. I visited their butterfly house and museum and observed some of the pitcher plants that they have planted.

While walking the 2-mile boardwalk built by the City of Roswell beside the Chattahoochee river about 3:30 on a hazy, cloudy, muggy afternoon, I noticed a large oblong bird about 60 yards away, high up in a tree. I zoomed in on it with my telephoto lens and was rewarded with my first clear Barred Owl sighting ever! We eyed each other with curiosity for quite some time and I managed to get a few good shots through the foliage.

While at Fripp Island, I was able to get quite a few shots of egrets, herons and even wood storks. I encountered several rookeries on the island and one morning, there were numerous wading birds congregated in a marshy area at low tide along one of my walking routes and that turned out to be the best and only day to experience wood stork activity up close. The other key species that I was able to see regularly was the Osprey. There were multiple nest platforms on the island, all with a large nest made out of stout branches and occupied by multiple eaglets and their doting parents either with them or soaring nearby, scouting out the tidal creeks or the Ocean inlet to catch fish for their growing and hungry progeny. The fledglings appeared to be fully grown, but I did not witness any "first" flight moments or

evidence that the fledglings were actually flying yet. They certainly looked capable of doing so. What was gratifying, was the sheer number of Ospreys which appeared to be thriving at Fripp and likely elsewhere in the South Carolina low country marshes.

I also observed sea turtle nests that had been staked out on the dunes along the beach, though I never saw a sea turtle or it's tell tale flipper tracks. Atlantic coast barrier islands, including Fripp, I read later, had a had a banner year of sea turtle nesting activity and multiple species were involved. The key species is the Atlantic Loggerhead which can be up to 3 feet across.

My most poignant nature observation, also involved a raptor and occurred on an early morning bike ride. I had biked past a small pond when I stopped and photographed a little blue heron that I had spotted. I then continued on and visited a few other areas, but then retraced my route, returning to the same pond, perhaps 20 minutes later. This time I noticed a Cooper's Hawk feeding on the ground a few yards away from pond. It was then I realized that it was eating a bird of some kind, a large egret like bird, Blue-gray feathers were fluttering nearby, some sticking to the hawk. I got a sick feeling as I sensed that the beautiful, graceful little blue heron that was the subject of my photograph, moments earlier, was now being ripped to shreds before my very eyes.

Needless to say, this and many other first hand experiences with nature will stay with me for ever and helped make my summer vacation most memorable.



Frisco PGA Site Native Plants and Seed Rescue

By Rick Travis

In the fall of 2018, the PGA of America announced they were moving their headquarters from Palm Beach County, FL to Frisco TX. The PGA purchased approximately 600 acres in north Frisco, which will contain two championship golf courses, a short course, practice areas, a clubhouse, an office building, and a hotel. The golf courses and buildings are expected to be completed and opened the 2nd half of 2022.

Within those 600 acres purchased by the PGA were several acres of undeveloped Frisco city park land, which contained a rich array of native flora and grasses. The Frisco Parks department gave the BPTMN Chapter permission to harvest native seed and plants from this land, with the intention to redistribute them to the Stewart Creek Wetlands Preserve, and native prairie restoration efforts at other Frisco parks. This effort would help preserve in the Frisco area some of the local genetics for these native plants, which will have an opportunity to grow and thrive in a similar habitat.

This summer, working with the city of Frisco Parks Department, a group of intrepid Blackland Prairie Master Naturalists began the rescue mission, harvesting native plant seed and actual plants before the excavators moved in.

Time was short, as we had been advised by the city that grading work would commence in August and would begin in the undeveloped park site. During a 3-week period beginning in late July, chapter members harvested seeds and plants during numerous hastily scheduled work sessions. Many times, working in over 100-degree temperatures, members hauled their harvest long distances along dirt trails to a makeshift parking area adjacent to the remaining park acreage. The seeds were dried, organized, and bagged, and along with the salvaged plants, are currently stored at the Frisco Parks service area.

The excavators moved into the area mid-August and didn't waste any time scraping and grading the entire area. Within 2 weeks, almost all the native vegetation where the harvest was conducted was gone.



But due to the efforts of several of our chapter members, we can disperse the progeny of many of these plants into new homes in Frisco. The plan is to build seed bombs from local soil in October and conduct one or more “Buffalo Stomps” at prairie restoration sites within Frisco Parks this fall. Over 20lbs. in local Lemon Beebalm, Basket Flower, Indian Blanket, Prairie Parsley, Western Ironweed, Prairie Clover, Green Antelope Horns Milkweed, Indian-grass, Cupgrass, White Tridens, Texas Grama, Side-oats Grama, Late Boneset, and Carolina Jointgrass seed were collected. In addition, Green Comet Milkweed, Green Antelope Horns Milkweed and Little Bluestem plants were dug up for transplanting into new locations.

I'd like to thank all the BPTMN members that worked on this seed and plant rescue, in hot and difficult conditions: John Garbutt, Brent Blackwell, Melissa Mateer-Green, Lisa Travis, Cynthia Alexander, Trent Schulze, and Kristen Welty. In addition, a special call-out to Jessica Waldrup for providing a communication and resource pipeline between Frisco Parks and our Chapter and creating the needed sense of urgency to the rescue operation, as startup of the site grading occurred much sooner than originally anticipated.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Hazy midafternoon sky,
Grey clouds gathering, rumbles of thunder getting louder and nearer.

Unexpected.

Yet are we not ready for anything? (I think, cockiness tempered by concern.)

Is that pitter patter what I think it is?

Cool drops begin to strike the leaf-littered floor,
mostly blocked by the dense canopy overhead.

Yet we sense a threat.

Soon thunder, like artillery reports booms all around,
and lightning sends crackles through nearby trees.

Where else can we go,

under which tree are we safe to hide?

Soon,

there could be **water, water everywhere!**

Startled and beginning to get wet, we cover our packs,
too warm for a raincoat or poncho,
we scurry on, our shirts and shorts getting drenched.

We come to a boulder strewn wet crossing,

Vibram sole skids off the greasy algal film,

I tumble,

shin strikes stone.

Falling backward,

into the stream,

My backpack,

absorbs the blow and instantly,

plans for a dry change of clothes at tonight's camp,

are all wet.

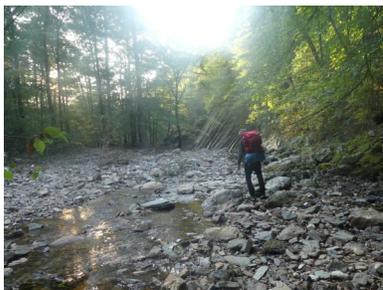
Sleeping bag and trail map soggy, boots squishy.

We cross another jumble of wet rocks and ascend the next ridge.

Now the rocky hiking path becomes a swollen rivulet of water, funneling runoff from the slopes above.

The vegetation on each side
of the path brushes across our
legs and arms,

Water, water everywhere!



Smooth stones of many hues,

Brought here from surrounding ridges,

Speaking silent stories of an epic journey of time and tumult.

Formed by heat, deposition, and pressure and, over the millennia,

transported across the watershed.

I pick up a flat, smooth disc,

it fits well across my finger tips

I cock my wrist and arm,

Only to bring it quickly forward,

Side-arm,

releasing the stone with a clockwise spin of my fingers,

It rotates and hydroplanes,

Skittering multiple times across a still pool between two low falls,

Clattering against a stony bank

20 yards away.

The spinning missile has sprayed water droplets,

Now I am seeing them rise into the air,

Joining others dripping and transpiring from the trees above,

Striking and licking away the surface of nearby stones,

Dislodging particles of sand, soil and loam,

Percolating through moss and deer fur,

Pulsing through the networks of hyphae and root hairs,

Pinballing down the back of a toad,

Coalescing at the tip of a fern frond,

Filling lichen and mushroom cups to the brim with a clear, life giving elixir.

Here, on a stream bend in the Ouachitas,

the forest is pulsing and alive

and

there is water, water everywhere!





Chapter Meeting Recognitions Spring and Summer 2019

