

Prairie Partner News

2020
Winter

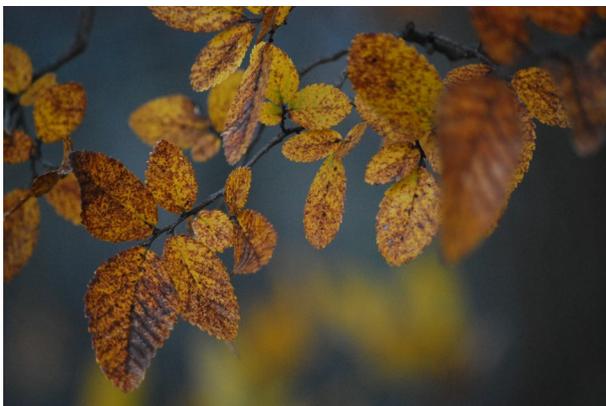
A publication for and about Blackland Prairie Texas Master Naturalists

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2020. This year, somehow, is poised to be profound. Will this be a year of “vision”, “focus”? Having just undergone cataract surgery, I can say, no matter what, it will be for me. But, will it be for you? This will be a year of choices that will have lasting consequences. Each day we read about another possible extinction, it seems. In just the last week, Chinese paddlefish in the Yangtze River and the Eastern Puma. Fires rage in Australia. Dates are thrown out about the climate crisis that do not seem very far away. As Texas Master Naturalists, we have the opportunity to keep fighting every day to stay engaged and involved in educating and learning, leading and following, serving and bringing others into a culture of caring for our planet, both here on the Blackland Prairie and beyond. We must continue to “focus” on the things we can do to make a difference, no matter how small. By Greg Tonian

Audubon’s 120th Christmas Bird Count by *Jean Suplick*
In 1900, Frank M. Chapman wrote in *Bird-Lore*, “It is not that many years ago that sportsmen were accustomed to meet on Christmas Day, ‘choose sides,’ and then, as representatives of the two bands resulting, hie them to the fields and woods on the cheerful mission of killing practically everything in fur or feathers that crossed their path—if they could.”
It was then that Mr. Chapman proposed a new Christmastide hunt in the form of a Christmas bird count. The original 27 counters tallied around 90 species on their combined counts. This year Audubon celebrates the 120th such hunt.
The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was the first citizen science project of its kind. The data collected by observers in the field lets researchers, conservation biologists, wildlife agencies and other researchers study the long-term health of avian populations, as well as advise on strategies for habitat conservation. This year participants will observe and count birds in several 15-mile diameter “count circles” in North Central Texas. These include Hagerman NWR, Lake Tawakoni, McKinney, Lewisville, Lake Ray Hubbard, Dallas County, Trinity Audubon Center, Cedar Hill, Village Creek Drying Beds, and Fort Worth. To find the coordinators for the count circles, to review past and present count results, or to learn more about the CBC, visit christmasbirdcount.org.



Bald Eagle by Laurie Shepard at Hagermann NWR; Other photos by Greg Tonian (Rick Travis at LLELA)

A Look Back at 2019 at Hagerman NWR

by Laurie Sheppard—

As 2020 begins, it's a good time to reflect on the year that has just passed. It began with the Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Visitors Center closed and government workers furloughed due to the latest government shut down over the federal budget. At the same time, much of the refuge was under several feet of water, as Lake Texoma was again the victim of flooding along the Red River. As soon as the waters receded and the government reopened, volunteers and staff got to work cleaning up the roads, fields, and trails.



Despite the early challenges, the weekly bird census continued throughout the year. When central areas of the refuge were not easily accessible, the birders drove to the fringes, never

missing a Tuesday bird count. After the winter flood receded, there was still plenty of winter left. In February, we got the sad news that the resident Bald Eagles' nest was lost in a storm. The tree had been weakened by previous floods and couldn't hold up against a strong winter storm. The eagles appear not to have abandoned the refuge though and have hopefully built a new nest in a healthy tree. Bald Eagle sightings have been common this fall.

Volunteers have been conducting the Hagerman NWR bird census every week for decades. As always, spring brought migrants like Northern Parula Warblers and Lazuli Buntings. Shortly after the Bobolinks arrived in early May, spring storms caused more flooding and the roads were again closed – this time for ten weeks. The birders persevered and found summer rarities like Bell's Vireo, Whimbrel, and an Anhinga. Perhaps because of the reduced activity caused by the flooding, Cattle Egrets chose Dead Woman's Pond as a nesting site. Summer heat lingered through September as shorebirds began their migration, but with little mud available, most did not stay long. The year continued with the familiar arrival of thousands of white geese and many different waterfowl species.

Although a few butterflies may be seen on any warm winter day, the season for the Butterfly Garden behind the Hagerman NWR Visitors Center typically extends from the beginning of April to the middle of November. Volunteers worked in the garden every Wednesday and several times during the year, visitors were invited to speak to garden docents about the butterflies on the wing and the native plants in the garden. Many visitors were interested in creating a butterfly habitat of their own. Every week, a list of the butterflies identified in the garden and the plants in bloom that week was compiled and posted on the Friends of Hagerman website. In all, 51 species of butterflies,

including one county record of Northern Sicklewing, were seen this year in the garden.

On the second Saturday of each month, the Friends of Hagerman offer an educational program for visitors. It is often a topic that is applicable to both Grayson County and Collin County and with prior approval, may be eligible for AT. Topics in 2019 included Feral Hogs, Venomous snakes, Painted Buntings, and Prairie Restoration. The speakers are often recruited from Grayson College or Austin College.

Volunteers contributed hundreds of hours to support and maintain the resources at Hagerman NWR as well as to provide public outreach and education. Among those volunteers were master naturalists from the North Texas, Blackland Prairie, and Bluestem Chapters, as well as members of the Friends of Hagerman and temporary work campers. They conducted bird walks and tram tours; built, monitored, and maintained nest boxes for Eastern Bluebirds; provided trail maintenance and trash removal; supported school programs; created special events for children featuring topics in earth science and nature; monitored endangered or threatened species such as Frosted Elfin butterflies and Interior Least Tern nesting sites; conducted a Christmas Bird Count centered at the refuge; planted wheat to feed the wintering geese; gave nature presentations at local meetings; assisted visitors in finding their best way to enjoy the refuge on trails or by car; created and compiled a monthly newsletter and outreach to local media to educate the public and invite them to participate in refuge programs; as well as providing labor for mowing, fence removal, cleanup after storms and floods, controlling invasive species, and more.

Hagerman NWR is a special place where nature is allowed to take its course (for the most part) and people are allowed to get a glimpse into the natural world.



Birders often enjoy seeing hard-to-find species such as Red-necked Phalarope, Piping Plover, Anhinga, Marbled Godwit, Eared Grebes, Bobolinks, and Harris's Sparrows. Ninety-one species of butterflies have been seen and documented on the refuge, as well as 624 plant species and 36 different mammals. More of each are found every year. The sight of ten thousand squawking geese rising from a green field is something to behold, but so too is the privilege of watching a Pileated Woodpecker picking ants from beneath a log or seeing a mother Bobcat shepherding her young. I wonder what we'll see in 2020.

Frisco PGA Site Native Plants and Seed Rescue, Part 2

By Rick Travis— Class of 2018

Recap:

In late 2018, the PGA of America announced they were moving their headquarters from Palm Beach County, FL to Frisco, TX.

Within the 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 of redistributing them to native prairie restoration efforts in Frisco parks.

During a 3-week period beginning in late July, chapter members harvested about 20 lbs. of native flora and grass seed and plants during numerous hastily scheduled work sessions. The seeds were dried, organized, and bagged.

Update: Now for what happened with all those harvested seeds.

Time to make the seed balls! Molly Kinson (BPTMN member and Frisco Parks staff) arranged a couple of seed ball making parties in October, which were attended by Frisco Parks staff, Blackland Prairie Master Naturalists, Frisco Garden Club, and Frisco citizens. Jessica Waldrup (Also a BPTMN member and Frisco Parks staff) collected and prepped a big batch of native, gummy Blackland Prairie soil for the parties. Hundreds of seed balls were made in the 2 work sessions!

The Frisco Parks Department then scheduled a special “Buffalo Stomp and Seed Ball Throw” event on October 26 at Cottonwood Creek Park, where a prairie restoration effort is [in progress](#) on several acres in the linear park. Several [Frisco](#) families and kids joined the fun for the event, as did members of our chapter.

In addition to the seed balls, Frisco Parks provided a large quantity of Blackland Prairie Mix seeds purchased from Native American Seed Co. for dispersal into the prairie project. The kids had a blast traipsing and stomping their way through the slightly muddy land, chunking seed balls and slinging the loose seed.

Now we wait for spring rains and the warming sun to awaken our rescued seed and begin their earnest work toward reestablishing themselves in a new home, protected from future disturbance and disruption

If all goes well, we'll see at the Cottonwood Creek Prairie project new populations of Lemon Beebalm, Basket Flower, Indian Blanket, Prairie Parsley, Western Ironweed, Prairie Clover, Green Antelope Horns Milkweed, Indian-grass, Cupgrass, White Tridens, Texas Grama, Sideoats Grama, Late Boneset, and Carolina Jointgrass, that were made possible by the efforts of our Chapter members in partnership with the Frisco Parks Department.



My Tribe

By Tony Manasseri— Class of

Most of us, so often, think about the “work” we are doing as it relates to BPTMN. This is so important and I am so glad to have been a participant for the past 12 years. The combined environmental impact of the BPTMN's and MN's everywhere is almost immeasurable. The word pride seems to have a new meaning when I think of this. But there is more.

When I joined the educational committee one of my tasks was to facilitate an ice breaker, helping the students to get to know each other. Something I always said was, “you will not only make friends in this class, but lifelong relationships”. “This is your tribe”. Reflect on that for a moment.

In 2017, I had a heart attack. It was devastating to me and my family in so many ways. I so enjoyed helping other people and that was taken away. Repeated trips to the hospital, countless Dr. appointments and many hours on the couch were my new normal. But even though I couldn't do the “work” any longer, the other side of being a Master Naturalist came to light...the relationships, the tribe. So many people came forward with visits, e-mails, notes, gifts, humorous cards, phone calls and even something we rarely see these days, a hand written letter.

You couldn't help me physically but you were my rock emotionally. I can't thank you all enough. The best part of this story is that I am not alone. So many of you are helping other tribe members in the same way. And I want to thank you all for that.

We are just one of 40+ MN chapters but I will hold the people in this chapter up against anybody!

Sally, Naturally!

By Stephanie Jennings—Class of

I've lost track of just how many years Sally Evans has been leading Nature Story Times at the Heard now, but she has been doing it nearly weekly for several years now. The kids absolutely love it and her. Even in a day when so many kids are glued to electronics, she keeps even the shortest attention spans engaged. She even has what I'd call "groupies." She spends a lot of time picking out materials and themes to make sure it's special and engaging (she gives a lot of credit to the librarians she works with, but ultimately the execution is hers). She never simply reads one book. She provides her own insights into the books and always has enrichment items, animals or something else to make the experience extra special for the kids.



Last week, a mom who attends weekly with her children invited her friends who are in a wonderful, interactive quartet to come as well. It was a special time and enjoyed by all.

If anyone would be interested in working with her on this project, I'm sure it would be a big help to her!



Left: Sally engaging the kids. Above: Quartet "The Brown-Eyed Girls".

Welcome to our 2020-2021 president. Get to know him a bit better and be sure to thank him for accepting the Board member mantle.

Tom Shackelford

Where did you grow up? Near Larned, Kansas, a centrally located rural farm and ranch region in

Where have you spent most of your life? Dallas, Texas

Childhood hero? My Dad & Mickey Mantle

Naturalist mentor / heroes Dave Powell / Sam Kieschnick

What is/Was your vocation? Tom Thumb 31 yrs / Restaurant Depot 11 yrs Retail / Wholesale Food and Restaurant supply sales - Operations Director, Management Leadership and Development instructor, Specialty foods development and procurement.

Who/What led you to the love of Nature and when? I received a copy of The Golden Treasury of Natural History when I was 12. This jumpstarted an interest in Natural History and all inhabitants on the Earth that remains to this day.

When did you become a Master Naturalist and why? 2018 when I was a Trail Guide at the Heard in 2017. Dave Powell and later Greg Hayden would encourage me to consider joining the Master Naturalists. I met others who were active Master Naturalists and everyone I came in contact with said positive things about the organization and its mission. I did my due diligence and decided it might be a good fit. I was accepted and am grateful to everyone who encouraged me and for the opportunity to be a part of the Blackland Prairie Chapter.

What kind of volunteering are you doing and prefer most as a Master Naturalist? Heard Trail Guide, Heard Trail Steward training / mentor, Heard Prairie Sanctuary maintenance, Annual Plant sale committee, Erwin Prairie restoration / preservation, Heritage Farmstead, Education committee/class mentor, VH/AT director, Clymer Meadow Projects, some Outreach.

I prefer to be with individuals who are passionate and engaged in whatever area interests them. I am always looking to further my understanding of Naturals resources and wilderness areas. I try to not limit my potential areas of interest.

If married, spouse's name? Beverly **Any Kids? Grandkids?** 1 son / 2 grandchildren

Do any of your family members share your love of Nature as well? My older sister and possibly my granddaughter – currently 9

Any other hobbies? Photography, Travel, Hunting, Woodworking, Gardening – ongoing attempts to outsmart squirrels

Favorite work of literature? “The Americans: The Democratic Experience” Daniel Boorstin, “The Giving Tree”, Shel Silverstein
“The Pillars of the Earth” Ken Follet

What book is on your nightstand now? “Interpreting our Heritage “ Freeman Tilden “How to Read Nature” Tristan Gooley,
“Hero of the Empire” Candice Millard, “The Cabin at the End of the World” Paul Tremblay

Go to Naturalist reference(s)? “Trees of Texas” “Wildflowers of Texas”

Naturalist gear of choice? Water bottle, iNaturalist app, pocket knife

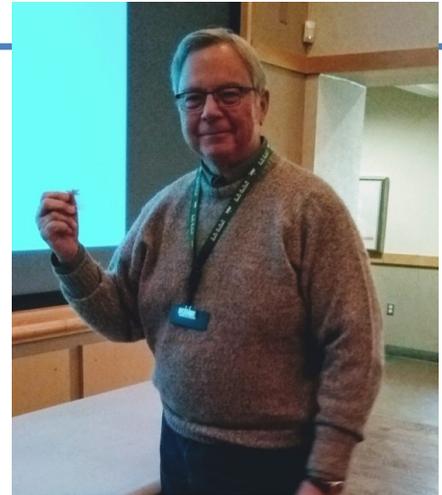
Favorite foods? BLT with fresh home grown tomatoes, Chicken Tikka Masala, Wild caught Cod or Halibut, Peanut butter and tomato preserves on toasted Rye, Grilled Chicken Caesar salad, or a Hamburger – grilled

What words of wisdom do you live by? “ I want to be better than yesterday, and better tomorrow than I am today”

If you were to live in another ecological region other than the Blackland Prairie for the remainder of your life, where would it be and why? Tofino, Canada. This area contains forests, ancient rainforests, mountains, lakes, fresh water streams, wildlife, shore birds, migratory birds, mud flats, rocky beaches, sandy beaches, oceans, whale watching, Pacific Rim National Park, Spectacular storm watching. I have vacationed there, but always think it would be fascinating to totally immerse yourself in this area.

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

Urbanization – It is inevitable . We may be able to influence/increase awareness: Reduction of impervious surfaces ; Tall grass prairie restoration and remnant preservation . Carbon sequestration importance as a reliable carbon sink.



Welcome to our 2020-2021 treasurer. Get to know her a bit better and be sure to thank her for accepting the Board member mantle.



Page Schreck

Where did you grow up? Houston

Where have you spent most of your life? In Lucas for 26 years

Naturalist mentor/hero? My Mother

What is/Was your vocation? Retired reservoir engineer with a degree in Chemical Engineering from University of Texas

Who/What led you to the love of Nature and when? My grandmother and mother growing up

When did you become a Master Naturalist and why? Class of 2016. Heard about program from an acquaintance and upon researching it, realized it involved the study of lots of things that I enjoyed

What kind of volunteering are you doing and prefer most as a Master Naturalist? Mostly at the Heard. I have done several stints as docent and have helped with some of the camps. I have also been a docent at the Texas Discovery Garden and I participate in Project Feeder Watch.

If married, spouse's name: John

Any Kids? Grandkids? 3 daughters, 2 sons-in-law and two granddaughters ages 4 and 6 1/2

Do any of your family members share your love of Nature as well? One of my favorite things is sharing nature with my family, especially my granddaughters. My Mom was always sharing things in nature with my daughters and that has motivated me to do the same with my granddaughters

Any other hobbies? I play tennis and ride my bike and I am involved with several musical groups at my church, playing flute, piano and handbells. I also enjoy watching sports.

Favorite work of literature? I enjoy historical fiction, especially mysteries.

What book is on your nightstand now? "A Better Man" by Louise Penny

Go to Naturalist reference(s)? Birds Eye Texas OS birding App

Naturalist gear of choice? Binoculars

Favorite foods: Burgers

What words of wisdom do you live by? If something needs to be done, be willing to do it if you are able

If you were to live in another ecological region other than the Blackland Prairie for the remainder of your life, where would it be and why? Edward's Plateau as we spend a lot of time outside the Austin area enjoying the hills, wildflowers, rivers and nature that we encounter

Naturalist experience highlight? Seeing a golden-cheeked warbler. Love adding birds to my life list

Update on One of Our Partners

By Greg Smith—Class of 2017

NOTE: One of our BPTMN partners is the McKinney Greens Nature Preserve project through the city of McKinney and the McKinney Parks Foundation. In short, the area is a reclaimed golf course which runs along Hwy. 5 and encompasses some good riparian area and has the potential to contain pocket prairies as well. Greg Smith, class of 2017 is on the foundation board.

The McKinney Parks Foundation, a 501c(3), volunteer based-organization, was formed in 2017 to partner with PROS to enhance the beautification and maintenance of the parks and open spaces, promote community involvement and provide education about the natural spaces. Board leaders are: Rick Moreno, PhD — President; Rich Szecsy, PhD, PE — Vice President; and Greg Smith, Col., USAF (Ret), Master Naturalist — Secretary.

MPF Functions include:

- Organizes volunteers to help with projects in conjunction with the McKinney PROS Department
- Encourages engagement by residents in park activities and programs

- Provides a structure for organizing educational opportunities about the natural environment
- Plan stewardship projects monthly at Community Center Trail and McKinney Greens Nature Preserve

MPF Future Plans:

- Continue restoration and reclamation of McKinney Greens (Present to 2022)
- Continue stewardship of Community Center Trail
- Proposed Bench Sponsorship program
- Increase grant funding opportunities



Projects geared toward VH hours for chapter members will be posted on calendar which is accessible through the home page of our website. For more information about foundation: www.mckinneyparksfoundation.org Facebook: mckinneyparksfoundation Fall colors on The Tribute Shoreline Trail in The Colony, Greg Tonian



“Pins and Grins!”

