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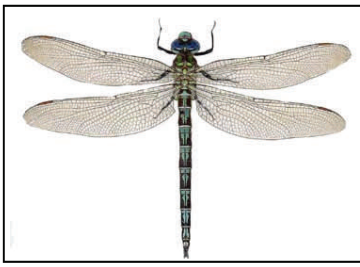


Texas Master Naturalist the Cyrano

The Newsletter of the Brazos Valley Chapter

President's Corner *by Jim Waldson*

Last October several members of our chapter, myself included, attended the Texas Master Naturalist Statewide Annual Meeting and Advanced Training in San Antonio. The weekend was time well spent all around. It was a good chance to get to know some of our chapter members better. There was a great variety of advanced training opportunities, all of which were very informative and interesting. We took a field trip to the Canyon Lake Gorge, where we stood face to face with a pristine cross section of the Balcones Fault uncovered in 2004 by flooding in the area. A session on birds of prey at Last Chance Raptor Rescue was also very educational and entertaining. After dinner on Friday night a rehabilitated red shouldered hawk was released.

The sharing of ideas and experiences with members of other chapters was invaluable. We got to enjoy some excellent photography through the photo contest, which is open to all members. This year's meeting will be held at Mo Ranch in Hunt, Texas from Oct. 24-26. Mo Ranch is a 475-acre ranch and conference center located on the banks of the Guadalupe River just southwest of Fredericksburg. Everything I've heard about this facility has been very positive. So mark the weekend on your calendar and join the fun and fellowship and learn something new in the process. Hope to see you there.

Grey Treefrog (*Hyla Versicolor*) *photos by Manuelita Ureta*

This tiny treefrog spent all day one Sunday comfortably perched above the front door to my house. It was very patient with me as I kept coming back to take more photos. Learn to identify them in your own backyard: listen to its call online at http://www.mister-toad.com/photos/frog/hyla_versicolor_05.html

Inside this issue:

Wet and Dry, Yin and Yang *by Jimmie Killingsworth and Jackie Palmer*

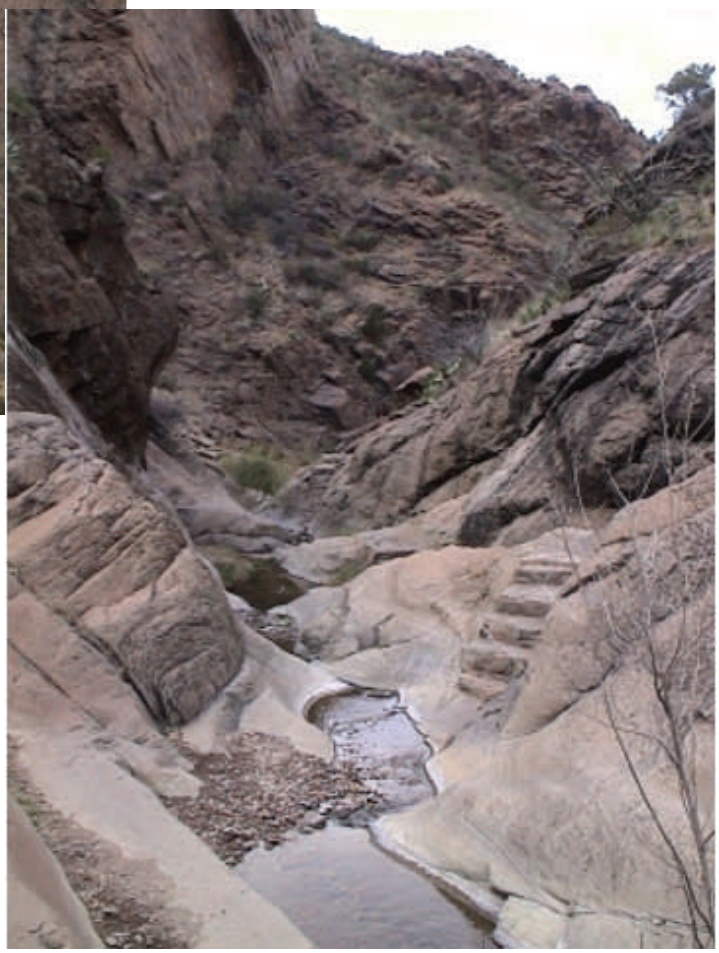
May is usually a wet month in the Brazos Valley, but like everything else about Texas weather, it's unpredictable. We live in the wet half of the state, but it can go dry, often for months at a time. In wet times, dryness beckons in the back of the mind like a warning or a hidden desire. Today in the wet spring, the mind drifts to dry winter where we spent some days in the Big Bend country. There, like the black dot in the white half of the yin-yang circle, a spring runs deep in the rocky core of the Chisos Mountain Basin.

One day we descended the 500 vertical feet from the lodge to "the Window," a V-shaped opening in the cliffs that surround the basin, offering a spectacular view of the desert below and the mountains beyond, a land-and-sky-scape that transforms before the eyes in the shifting conditions of daylight. At the top of the hike, we see the cactus wren, whose scrotal nest we noticed earlier hanging between the limbs of a ten-foot yucca palm. Deeper into the canyon, western towhees scold as they skirt the trail. Deeper still, the canyon towhee greets me in a cool nook of juniper.

"It's wet here," our daughter says. Then we see a green path coming down the hillside—water's own right-of-way—into the canyon bottom lined with smooth rocks. Suddenly we're walking creekside and have to maneuver to keep from walking in water the rest of the way to the Window. Over the centuries, the great notch in the sheer rock was cut by the spring that sent the water whose path we now traverse.

Such springs are the reason the Apaches never understood the white man's fear of traveling across this predominantly dry land. If you know where the springs are—and how could you fail with landmarks like The Window?—you can span the distance between. If you know the springs, you can call this land home. If you don't, you call it a wasteland.

Our last day in the park, we hike the Upper Burro Mesa Pour-Off Trail, a short path from one of the main roads that leads into a wondrous little network of canyons. In a completely dry terrain, you get the feel of the water's flow. You follow the flow yourself, first down a small gravelly creek bed lined by big broken boulders



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that narrows here and there to "scramblage," as our daughter calls it. That means you have to use hands as well as feet, and sometimes your butt. Water would have an easier time of the flow, but would have to move fast to keep from being absorbed into this thirsty ground. In the narrow, steeper spots, the sides of the canyon are higher, where faster water cut deeper.

Eventually you empty into a wider stream bed, where there is more gravel and it's a different color, which reminds you of how at the confluence of rivers, the water from one will look different from the other's. The water from the Navasota near our home is greener where it empties into the red-brown Brazos, and keeps its color for several hundred yards along the eastern bank of the big south-running river before losing its tributary identity.

As you flow down the wider bed of the Upper Burro Mesa Pour-off, the rocks are more varied, the strata on each side deeper. The wind blows at your back, an insistent reminder of the flow and rush of the living world. Each turn brings something new, different shapes and colors.

At one point there's a shaky-looking arch, almost a perfect round window of red rock, smaller but of the same genre of those at Arches National Monument in Utah or the granddaddy of rock arches, Natural Bridge in Virginia. Now you flow in slow curves, the new scenes appearing, the gravel floor revealing its variety.

The whole desert floor in this part of the world looks something like a river bed. Gravel

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is everywhere, transported from afar by regular flash flooding. The stream bed we walk today combines the variety of the desert floor with the smoothness and depth of river-bed gravel on its way to becoming sand. Our feet leave clear tracks as we crunch along. It's almost like walking on a beach where the grains of sand have been enlarged by some photographic trick of the gods.

The flow leads finally to the pour-off—down a smooth face of gray rock with just enough hand- and foot-holds to make human movement down to the next level easily negotiable. It is a dry waterfall about fifteen feet high and five feet wide that falls into a rounded chamber where we can swirl around and collect ourselves before looking over the last ledge where, fifty feet below or more, if we were really water, we would fall and help to break up the boulders strewn over the desert floor down there.

But for now, we are solid again, and reversing our steps, we move back up the stream bed, climb over the dry falls, crunch the multi-colored gravel, trudge over the fallen boulders, enjoying the feel of muscles we did not use on the way down.

Most obviously, at places like the Upper Burro Mesa Pour-off and The Window, where the trails of the national park merge with ancient waterways, the memory of water is recorded in the shape of the rock—the deep memory of the old inland seas, the shallow memory of flash floods, and the daily reminder of living springs and seepages. The wind whistles through places where water has departed.

Copperhead (*Agkistrodon contortrix*), Lick Creek Park, June 2008

The Perfect Day *by Madge Luquette and Jo Anne Bates*

On a lovely spring day in March, eight intrepid Brazos Valley Master Naturalists set out for a canoe adventure on Village Creek in the Big Thicket National Preserve. The preserve is a diverse national forest where Eastern hardwood forests, Southern coastal marshes, the central prairie and Southwestern deserts enjoy a brief, fragile rendezvous. Village Creek meanders through towering pines, magnolias, beech, and willows, almost as pristine as if it had been forgotten by the rest of the world.

With a minimal amount of advice from our outfitter about trees across the creek, hidden logs, and portages, we set off into the slow-moving, hip-deep water. Some of

us had been in a canoe many years ago, and a few had recent experience; but there were a few on their maiden voyage. All of us agreed that the weather was perfect, slightly overcast and cool, and the creek was running at just the right speed.

Madge and Dwight were in the lead canoe when we approached our first tree across the creek. A command decision was made by Madge and Dwight to lie down in the canoe and limbo under rather than go to the effort to portage. As everyone following watched the grace and style of the Limbo Duo, they decided to join the limbo line, too. Of course, no one laughed at eight adults wallowing around in the bottoms of their canoes. This little dance was to be repeated several more times as we floated and paddled down the creek.

We were entranced by the birds we heard and saw as we went along. Paul and David were able to identify quite a few of them, and the rest of us just enjoyed them.

Above us on rising banks we could see wild azaleas, dogwood, and fringe trees blooming in the understory of pine, cypress, magnolias, and beech reaching up into the sky. We stopped to admire the wild azaleas up close. Their fragrance, like honeysuckle, permeated the air. At almost every bend in the creek, there would be a pure white sand bar just asking us to stop a while and explore.

We had the creek to ourselves for most of the time.

Although Manuelita had never been in a canoe, Kate gave her high marks for her launching skills. She would push the canoe off and quickly jump in with grace and calm. The two of them meandered as much as the creek, checking out everything on each side of our watery

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highway. Meanwhile, Kerry and Paul had a working plan, as only a couple could devise; he steered and she paddled. And from her position at the back of this parade, Jo Anne commanded the whole fleet.

We ate our lunch on a small sand bar while discussing the flora and fauna we had seen, how perfect the trip had

been, and that we would do this again in the fall when, hopefully, more of our group would join us to share the beauty of the Big Thicket. We reluctantly left our sand bar, but knew there would be something new for us to see around the next bend.

Jo Anne presented awards to our hardy paddlers at the next Naturalist meeting. Dwight received the " Reptile Expert" award for identifying the snake who came in second to Madge and an unnamed frog who tied for first in a race to the creek. Kate received the "Miles Most Traveled" award for her zigzag course on the creek. Madge received the "Limbo Queen" award for her unparalleled backward bends under fallen trees. Manuelita received the "Best Launcher" award for floating so gracefully into the canoe after launching it on its way. Kerry, of course, was "Best Dressed" in her matching hat and earrings ("It's all about the hat"). Paul was "The Captain, But NOT the Boss." David, whose humming skills were unequaled, clearly deserved the "Dueling Banjos" award. And Jo Anne's "Admiral of the Fleet" award was only a poor substitute for the "Sopping Wet" award, which unfortunately fell overboard.

Save the day: our fall canoe trip is scheduled for Saturday, October 11th (weather and creek height permitting).

Men Plot, Nature Laughs

A member of our group, avid bird watcher and conservationist, installed a nest box for screech owls on a friend's backyard tree. Two breeding seasons later, the friend was discouraged that no owl had taken up residence in such a well-crafted, expertly situated owl bungalow. Then, about a month ago, another member of our group went over to help with a backyard project and, avid naturalist that he is, immediately noticed something was up with the bungalow. A wild bee colony had taken over the box! Moral of the story: if you put a nest box high enough, you get bees instead of wasps.

Spring Migration on the Upper Texas Coast *by Jim Anding*

They were coming. We knew they were. They always have. So we went.

Spring migration on the upper Texas coast, in fact all of the Texas coast for that matter, is a spectacle to behold. About 55 species of songbirds use the trans-gulf route to begin their U.S. trek to their breeding grounds. Many have traveled thousands of miles north from several South American countries to prepare for the Gulf phase. After some period of feeding and increasing body fat reserves, they are ready for the next phase of their journey north.

At some seemingly magic signal each species, from hummingbirds to the larger orioles and cuckoos, realizes it is time and takes flight. Most leave just after sunset (to avoid predators) and the fastest arrive, if the weather is good and winds are right, about noon the next day with energy to spare. If they are lucky enough to be pushed along by a strong south wind they may fly past the coastal marshes and end up miles inland. If the weather is unsettled, and especially if the wind is from the north, they pile up on the coast in great numbers. This is often referred to as a "fall out" because they seem to literally fall out of the sky. They take advantage of the first area they see that can provide shelter, food, and water. Thinking of themselves, birders hope that this happens because it provides them the opportunity to see large numbers of beautifully colored birds in a short amount of time. From the bird's point of view, this is not a good thing. If the weather is really bad during the trip across the Gulf, they often perish in great numbers. They can't look at a weather report and schedule their trip for favorable conditions. It is truly a roll of the dice. Those that make it are exhausted and just want rest, to drink, eat, and sit. After a period of rest and eating and gaining their strength they begin the land phase of their trip to Alaska or Canada or places in between.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak in College Station, Spring 2008. Photo by Mike Hoelscher.

So there we were, awaiting what was to be. Kitty and I usually go to the area just west of Port Arthur in and around Sea Rim State Park. There, with a number of friends we meet only each spring, we visit our favorite birding places, Sabine Woods and the Willows. At the end of most days we gather at a small man-made fresh water pond at the end of the Sabine Woods boardwalk and watch birds come for a bath and drink. It is usually as colorful as a Christmas tree as birds of all species come and go. Then it's dinner with friends or a retreat back to Terry, our little motel room on wheels.

One year after a long day of birding we went for a walk on the beach. (Holding hands, of course, an important part of birding.) There, on an incoming wave, washed a Rose-breasted Grosbeak. A truly beautiful bird. I lamented that after almost 500 miles of flying, and avoiding aerial predators, he almost made it. If he had perished much farther offshore something would have eaten him. It's tough to be a bird.

This year we tallied 126 species during our visit, of which 27 were warblers, the jewels of the migrants. Usually when talking to people, it's "What have you seen today, or How many so far?" Warblers, of course. Some we missed this year but saw last year or vice versa.

But, will they always come? Places for them to stop and rest, eat and drink, both while on the coast and between the coast and their breeding locations are being reduced each year.

It is up to us.

BioBlitz: How'd You Catch That? *by Jackie Palmer*

My first visit to Lick Creek Park (perhaps a decade ago) did not impress me. Having spent many summers chainsawing firewood, hunting squirrels, and picking apples, peaches, and sand plums on family farmland in Kansas, the Texas woodland looked nearly the same (although the ubiquitous hedge apples were absent). Nevertheless, with very few local options for public hiking, my family has logged many hours in the park. One really nice thing about Lick Creek is its proximity to town; if the weather cooperates, you can get a good hike in after work.

Lick Creek Park was the site for the April 5 BioBlitz, a collaborative effort of government agencies and educational institutions to both tally the diversity of species at the park and educate the public about this local natural resource. As part of the "invert" team (short for invertebrates), I volunteered to bring and talk about my insect collection, which I'd started at the age of eleven and expanded during a college entomology class. While working *Continued on page* Plexiglas display case thathas s home. (See Figure 1.) Over the years, I've shared the collection with kids of all ages. (Since each insect is pinned to a label indicating the county, state, and date caught, as well as the collector's last name, it's also become a historical record of my personal relationships and travels.)

Upon arriving at the park, I found the invert booth set up near the far parking lot, a good distance from the main tent where the talks were scheduled. At the booth, there were *live* wasps, beetles, butterflies, and spiders (two with egg sacs!). There were several cases of pinned specimens in perfect condition, each with computer-generated uniform labels. There were several trays of insect carcasses recovered from traps the night before. And there was even a plastic scorpion dangling from a string in an adolescent's successful attempt to attract passing children and adults.

I began having second thoughts about revealing my own collection—with its aged, hand-written labels, discolored insects (from the now-illegal use of cyanide as a preservative), and wing-tattered specimens. The man who appeared to be in charge (and seemed to know a heck of a lot about insects) told me he'd just sent someone over to the main tent to announce that the insect talk was going to be at the booth instead of the tent. I thought about the 15-20 minute hike between the booth and main tent and the slow-moving families with children eagerly exploring each booth along the way and wondered what I could offer those families that the scientist couldn't.

The answer was stories. Unlike the pristine specimens in generic cases displayed at the booth, I knew how and where each and every insect in my collection was captured. My offer to give the talk at the tent and to guide folks back for the insect walk was gratefully accepted.

Here are some of the stories I shared:

A. Giant Grasshopper (Panama, 1961)

We spent one summer with my Dad who helped build an oil refinery in Panama. This brightly colored creature with a 6-7-inch wingspan flew to the road directly in front of our rental car (a Studebaker) while we were driving along the jungle-lined King's Highway connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. My dad slammed on the brakes, thinking it was a bird, but when we all got out to see, we discovered that grasshoppers have wings—big ones! This was the first addition to my collection, which we kept in a cigar box. Alas, a few years later, I noticed that its eyes had been hollowed out. Though I never saw what ate the organs, I later placed naphthalene (moth balls) inside the Plexiglas container to keep other insects from being eaten.

B. Rhinocerous Beetle (Panama, 1961)

While atop one of the locks of the Panama Canal, we saw a huge beetle with a horn lumbering along the walkway. The only container handy was a pint-size wax-coated paper milk carton. So we grabbed it, opened the top, stuck the beetle in, then taped it shut. Back home, it ended up on the closet shelf in my parents' room (so we wouldn't play with it before buying cyanide at the local drugstore the next day). But when we pulled the carton down the next morning, we found the huge beetle had chewed through the carton. Although we searched diligently throughout the house, it was (of course) my mother who later that day indicated with a blood-curdling scream that she had inadvertently found it.

C. Cowkiller Ant (Kansas, 1974)

Also called a velvet ant (see black label C in Figure 1), this half-inch-long beautiful orange or red-colored insect is actually a wasp—not an ant. Caught on my family's farm in Kansas on the sandy beach of the Arkansas River, the insect's bite is *not* strong enough to kill a cow.

D. Blue Morph (Belize, 1976)

I caught this large butterfly with metallic blue wings in a rural area while in the Peace Corps. In fact, I ran nearly half a mile with my butterfly net as it swooped up and down the dirt road, dipping now and then into the dense

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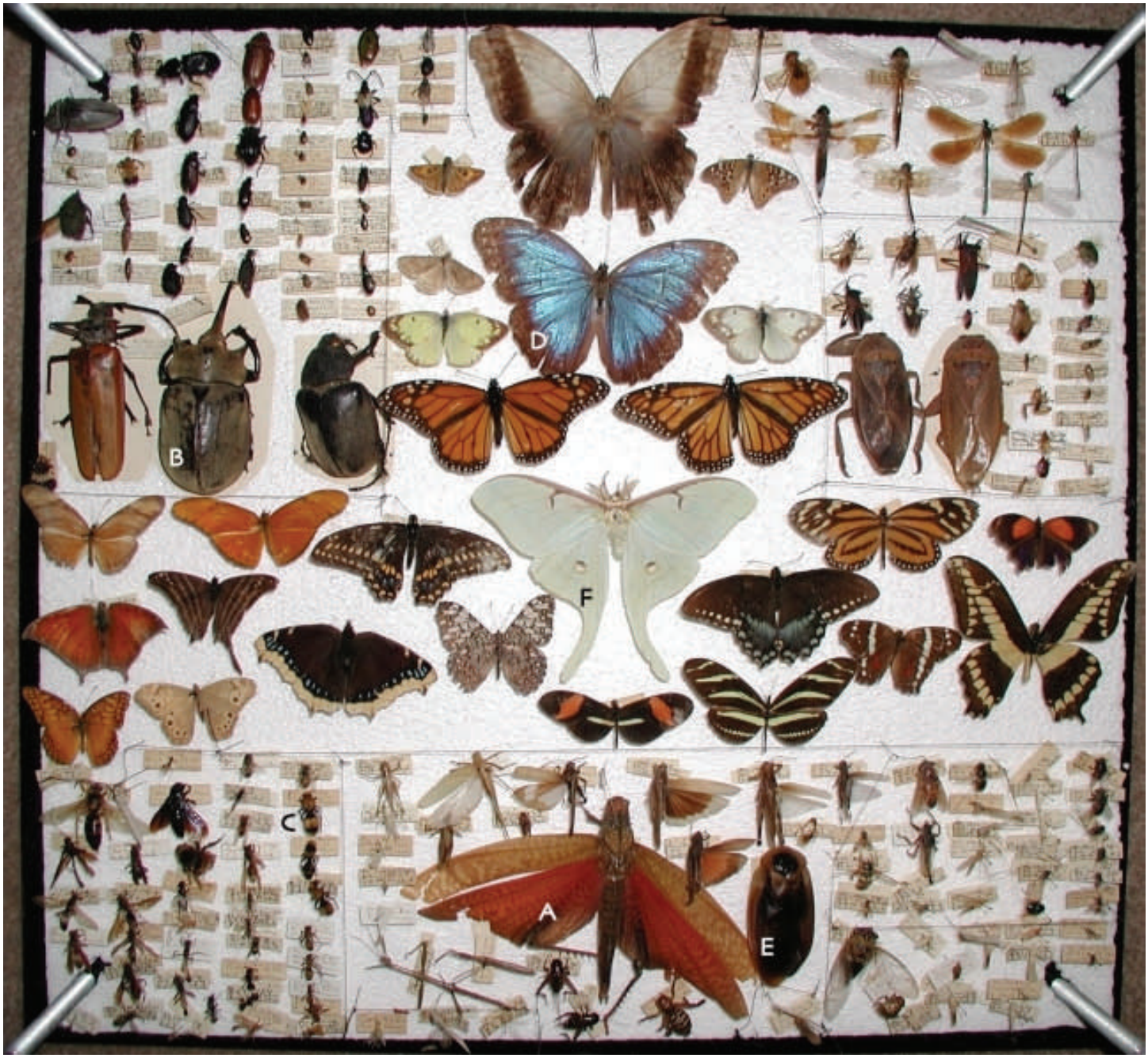

Figure 1. My Collection With Labels Corresponding to Descriptions that Follow. Photo by the author.

jungle foliage. I would never have caught it at all except that it got caught in a spider web, an action that damaged its wings.

E. Giant Cockroach (Belize, 1979)

My mother and I later traveled back to Belize, where we drove to the top of Mountain Pine Ridge in a four-wheel drive Land Rover jeep, up roads that were more mud than gravel. It was the rainy season and very slow going. By the time we reached the top, we were grateful to see an outhouse. But as I opened the little-used creaky door, I spied a huge cockroach crawling across the seat. Back to the jeep in a jiffy for my trusty net (I never left home without it!)—as I caught the roach, half a dozen more quickly crawled out of the hole. (We decided *not* to make

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use of the facilities!)

F. Luna Moth (Fredericksburg, TX, 1996) Although the large, light-green specimen in my case was caught in Fredericksburg, I had seen a different one the previous week in Lick Creek Park. Perched low to the ground on a twig bearing a few buds, it was almost perfectly camouflaged. The gray strips and two gray knobs lining the top of its bright green wings made it look like a single leaf hanging onto a budding branch.

I told a few more stories and recommended that kids give their parents insect nets for friendly removal of unwanted household insects like wasps. Then I led the small group (four or five families) back to the insect booth while the kids ran through the fields and (mostly unsuccessfully) battered the tops of grasses and scooped up debris from mud puddles with the "toy" nets Jane Packard had thoughtfully provided.

Back at the booth, the little ones (with very short attention spans) abandoned their nets and moved on to the "herps" booth. The older kids exchanged their toys for professional canvas nets and joined the college students and professor for the insect walk. I stayed with them long enough to hear an explanation of the different types of nets and what each is used for—time enough to realize that the presentation would not have captured the attention of those little ones who earlier had had their noses and elbows pressed against my Plexiglas case full of very old insects—young children who may very well someday collect their own insects and explore academic questions like why some insects are bugs and others aren't (true bugs have wings that cross, forming an "x"), how to tell the difference between a male and female monarch butterfly (look for the enlarged black scent gland on the bottom sections of the male's wings), or whether or not cockroaches really bite people (but that's another story!).

Master Naturalist Attacks Invasive Species *by Manuelita Ureta*

I spent the better part of spring break having fun gardening. One morning Jo Anne, Madge and I visited Arborgate, in Tomball, an excellent nursery that stocks myriad native Texas plants. For years I had wanted to buy a Rusty Blackhaw Viburnum (*Viburnum rufidulum*), a beautiful, slow-growing native shrub or small tree. It is unsurpassed in its heat and drought tolerance, likes it under post oaks, has bright white flowers and shiny leaves in spring, and lovely, pale rose and yellow autumn leaves. To top it all, many bird species feed on the dark blue berries that follow the flowers. I was delighted to have finally found one.

The Asian jasmine carpet *in situ*

Eager to plant Rusty in a perfect spot, I put common sense aside and embarked on a project of clearing a large swath of Asian jasmine from my front yard. As a friend once put it, my front yard is an ocean of Asian jasmine under many tall post oaks. You are right to wonder why on earth I bought a house engulfed in an invasive species. My only

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excuse is I that bought it for the trees, they are beautiful, and at the time I didn't know how invasive Asian jasmine is.

It had rained earlier that week. I figured the cement that passes itself off for soil around here would let go of the jasmine rather easily. At first I tried pulling it off by hand. It would not budge—not an inch. Next I tried the fork. By inserting the fork at a 45-degree angle and rocking it back and forth with my entire body weight on each swing the jasmine came lose in one continuous, very thick mass. Three hours and several breaks later, I had cleared an 11'x15' area by the driveway. I was ecstatic.

Then it dawned on me that I had to dispose of this giant rolled up carpet. I know what you are thinking. But, no, I did kick the daylights out of

Almost to the driveway

Ready for collection

the carpet as I was going along to release every last bit of soil! The driveway is steep, downhill from the street, and the carpet was about 60 feet from the curb. I was crushed. After many hours of hard work there I was, with not an ounce of energy left, stuck with an immovable mass of jasmine. Then the light came on: the last step in the project required brains, not brawn. I pulled up the pickup truck, secured the carpet to the towing ball, and proudly sped up the driveway. I couldn't resist the temptation to drive around the cul-de-sac once while towing the big jasmine carpet.

A note on the photographs in this issue:
Kate Kelly contributed some of the photographs appearing in The Perfect Day. The remaining photographs, except where otherwise noted, were contributed by Manuelita Ureta. We would like to feature your photographs in future issues. Please send them to any of the editors.

TMN Members' Spotlight

Betty Vermiere

I've always loved nature. Growing up in western Pennsylvania, my parents advocated reading, and encouraged me to "look it up" whenever I did not know what something was. I smile every time I visit there and see the set of little Herbert S. Zim Golden Nature Guides on the bookshelves in my room. Each is well-thumbed. I inevitably page through "Birds" and remember that as I child, I always wanted to see a Belted Kingfisher. I also remember the excitement of watching a Baltimore Oriole feeding in one of our elm trees, and the wonderment in picking up an Indigo Bunting that had flown into a window. How beautiful! How soft!

After receiving a B.S. from Allegheny College in Meadville, PA with a double major in Psychology and Biology, I went west to pursue my fascination with neuroscience at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena. I earned my Ph.D. in Psychobiology in the lab of Dr. Roger W. Sperry, Nobel Laureate, of split-brain research fame. While at Caltech, I first did research on left-right confusion, then joined Dr. Charles Hamilton's research on hemispheric differences in macaque monkeys, aka, left-brain, right-brain stuff. We found that monkeys, like people, process information differently with the two sides of their brain. That is important because it shows that hemispheric differences are not unique to people just because of their language capabilities.

Chuck not only taught me about brains, he taught me about birds and birding, and nature in general. And so it began. Upon returning to Caltech after my post-doc at the University of Washington, we connected with other birders at Caltech. We chased rarities; we started lists; trips to scientific meetings always included "extensions" to birding places: National Wildlife Refuges, state and national parks, the Dry Tortugas, Cumberland Island National Seashore, Big Bend, Southeast Arizona. The wild places of our country are so beautiful! And you never know what you'll find next.

In 1991 we moved the lab to Texas, but in 2001, due to an academic regime change, we were forced to euthanize our monkeys and abandon the lab. But we've stayed in Texas, because it is otherwise a nice place to live!

I got into TMN because Kitty and Jim Anding said I'd like it. And I do! Not only have I learned many things, but also I've met a great bunch of interesting people. A great deal of TMN information was useful in helping Chuck make his backyard more hummingbird- and butterfly-friendly.

Besides nature, I enjoy classical music, mystery novels, crocheting, and baking. I "share custody" of a plethora of cage birds, currently two Goffin Cockatoos, one Mitred Conure, five Cockatiels, and 18 parakeets. Besides TMN, I'm Field Trip Coordinator for Rio Brazos Audubon, compiler of the College Station Christmas Bird Count, and just last month was appointed Director of Region 6 of the Texas Ornithological Society.

Jackie Palmer

As a child, I spent summers on my family's Kansas farm on the Arkansas River. We learned *not* to burn poison ivy, drank water fresh from a ground spring, and fought the river's appetite—even dumping old car bodies in the riverbed to reinforce the bank that still kept slipping away. We followed my dad's oil career from Texas to Oklahoma, spending the summer of 1961 in Panama. Family camping and canoe trips spurred my interest in science, eventually leading to a degree in biology from the University of Missouri, Kansas City. After graduation, the Peace Corps took me to Belize, where I taught urban junior-high science and spent weekends exploring the jungles of Tikal (Guatemala), the Mayan ruins of the Yucatan (Mexico), and the clear blue waters of the Caribbean. As I swam along the coral reef, collected fresh conch for lunch, watched the dawn dance of fiddler crabs, paddled a dugout log down a vine-laden river, and mapped caves with speleologists, my love of the outdoor world increased.

Back in the states, I taught high-school science in Mis-

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souri, then New Mexico, where I learned the difference between Audubon and Sierra Club hikes (birders meander; Sierra Clubbers trek relentlessly). At New Mexico Tech, I met Jimmie Killingsworth and earned a masters degree in science teaching. We married and merged our separate boxes of research on environmental education and environmental rhetoric. While following his academic career to Texas, Tennessee, and back to Texas, I birthed a daughter, co-authored books on environmental rhetoric and technical writing, earned a doctorate in education, and held several jobs promoting environmental and science education. We finally settled in College Station, where I teach technical and web writing and editing for the Texas A&M English Department and usually manage to weave environmental themes into my courses. (For instance, a summer course will develop instructions, a feasibility study, and proposals for the TMN Cottonwood Branch project.) Being a TMN member allows me to share environmental concerns, actions, and outdoor experiences with folks whose backgrounds are as varied as mine while giving back to our local community.

Our Final Images

The peak butterfly season is fast approaching. Brave the heat, go outside, and enjoy these beautiful insects. If you have black-eyed susan growing nearby look for the Silvery Checkerspot (*Charidryas nycteis*) pictured above. They feed on sunflowers, asters, crownbeard, and black-eyed susan. If you are growing carrots, parsley, dill, celery or fennel, look for Black Swallowtail (*Papilio* polyxenes)caterpillars, pictured on the left. They are pale green to whitish, with every other band of black dotted with yellow. They are unmistakable!

Help Encourage Fun Contributions to *The Cyrano* by Voting!

Texas Master Naturalists are invited to vote for the best article in this issue of *The Cyrano*. The author getting the most votes will receive a heart-felt round of applause at our next meeting. Also, we will feature a flattering picture of the winner on our next issue. Please send your vote by August 15 to Kate Kelly at kate-kelly@tamu.edu.

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