



The Canyon Echo

Volume 2, Number 1

January 2026

From the President's Desk Tree Stump

A look in the rearview mirror

Well, here we are in January. Christmas came and went and the New Year managed to arrive without my help, as I slept right through it. It seems like just the other day we were out doing 2024 Christmas Bird Counts and now, here we are having finished three local 2025 counts which managed to spill over into 2026. And I don't know about you, but I find myself already looking toward spring and the wonders that season brings as nature seems to awaken from her winter nap (a short one this year.)

But winter's not gone yet...

As some of our avian visitors who fled the cold of the northern climes are perching on the feeders and the wind chimes on the back porch are loudly announcing that a blustery wind is blowing out of the north, I'm sitting here in my house shoes with a hot cup of coffee in hand and thinking about another year that's crossed over into the history books.

2025 has been quite a year. There have certainly been some challenges, but there've also been plenty of accomplishments. I haven't kept too accurate of a score, but it seems like the tally sheet has ended up on the plus side.

As I look back over what the year has meant for our chapter, I'm encouraged. We've grown in many ways.

We held our third New Member Class in as many years. Out of 12 folks who completed the class, nine of them have earned the appellation Certified Texas Master Naturalist. For those mathematically minded readers out there, that's 75%! That should serve as an encouragement for all who are still working toward completion of their certification! It can be done and you can do it!

Here are some of our chapter accomplishments for 2025:

- We had three new members step into positions on our Board of Directors
- We had 11 of our folks become Certified Texas Master Naturalists
- We had 21 individuals complete their 2025 recertification
- Nine of our members were recognized for completing service-hour milestones
 - o 5 - 250 hours
 - o 3 - 500 hours
 - o 1 - 1,000 hours
- Our chapter logged:
 - o 5,078 hours of volunteer service as of Jan. 3.
 - o 693 hours of advanced training
- We also increased our outreach emphasis, resulting in personal contact with 949 individuals, some of whom expressed a



Photo by Mickey Redus

Our chapter has contributed more than 5,078.65 hours of volunteer service in 2025, as of Jan. 3. One project was cleaning out martin houses at Castroville Regional Park.

strong interest in becoming Texas Master Naturalists.

While we can be proud of these accomplishments, there are many things that can't be measured in facts and figures. We have established many relationships, both professional and personal. We have partnered with several organizations and entities that share our love and commitment

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Rearview mirror

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for the Texas outdoors and its well-being. Many of our members have discovered new sources of training and developing their expertise in conservation and outdoor stewardship. Our folks are constantly finding new ways to get involved and making the effort and commitment to prepare themselves to serve in new and creative ways. Several Brush y Canyons Master Naturalists have taken on leadership positions and some have become teachers and trainers.

It has also been a blessing and pleasure watching our members develop relationships with each other and become friends and a family.

As I spend a few moments reflecting warmly and nostalgically on 2025, I also find myself looking ahead with excitement and anticipation. When I look at the growth our chapter has experienced, I'm filled with confidence that we are ready to take on the challenges and opportunities ahead of us in 2026!

I'm proud of you all and look forward to learning, working and serving alongside you in the new year!

So, the coffee's about gone and my hiking boots are calling. It's time to get back to work!

My prayer is that we will have a safe, prosperous, productive and nature-filled 2026.

Sincerely and humbly,

Mickey



Photo by Joe Fohn

New friends are one of the big benefits of becoming a Texas Master Naturalist. At the December chapter meeting, Sid Fly surprised us with a quick Christmas serenade.

OUR MISSION

The Texas Master Naturalist mission 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.

ABOUT US

The Brush y Canyons Chapter encompasses Medina, Uvalde and Kinney Counties. With the Hill Country in the north, the South Texas Plains in the south and six different rivers in the combined three counties, our service area is very diverse in both flora and fauna. We are a relatively new chapter, having just finished our third certification class in May 2025. Our list of partner organizations to date is: Garner State Park, Kickapoo Caverns State Park, El Progreso Memorial Library, Uvalde National Fish Hatchery and Lost Maples State Natural Area.

CONTACT US

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Register for new TMN training class by Feb. 1

The Brush y Canyons chapter of Texas Master Naturalists will be offering a new-member class beginning Feb. 7 through May 16. The chapter welcomes anyone from Uvalde, Kinney, Medina and surrounding counties to join the class.

The class will cover many topics including land stewardship, archeology, geology, weather, water resources and plants, to name a few. The class consists of classroom instruction as well as field trips to local points of interest related to class topics. Classes will meet every other Saturday morning and every other Thursday evening and will be held at various locations in the Uvalde County area.

Cost of the class is \$160. This includes a TMN textbook, polo shirt, name tag, annual dues for the first year, a magnifying loupe, copy of "A Sand County Almanac" and all associated fees.

At the end of the class, members will be well-informed volunteers who can provide education, outreach and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within the community.

Visit us at our next chapter meeting to learn more about becoming a TMN. The meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 8, at the Texas A&M AgriLife Center, 1619 Garner Field Road, in Uvalde.

The deadline to apply for the class is Feb. 1 at this link: <https://tpwd.samaritan.com/recruiter/1450/OppDetails/225128/Brush-Y-Canyons-Master-Naturalist-Application>

How to ID birds using apps

By Joe Fohn

When it comes to getting serious about birding, Dell Little is what you might call the "early bird".

Dell, who spoke at the December meeting of the Brush y Canyons Chapter, said he was keeping a birding list when he was 8 years old, first near Dallas-Fort Worth Airport, and then around Houston after his family moved there.

Trying to explain his interest, Dell said, "We have an innate instinct to name things, to collect things."

What began as a family activity has since grown to a life list in the hundreds of bird species, organized into county, state and national lists, and it also has become a shared recreational activity with his wife, who also is a birder. Together, the two not only have traveled to numerous exotic locales, but they also enjoy driving down lonely rural South Texas roads in search of an interesting specimen.

Dell described his early days with the hobby: sighting a bird, remembering its appearance and then having to check its description against a hard-bound reference book. Now, like most other birders, he's gone digital, with iPhone apps like eBird and Merlin.

And he's not the only one. Dell said that today, "E-birding is the largest citizen science project in the world. That's why I love what we're doing now, with these apps.

"Merlin and eBird have databases where you can add your list to everybody else's. You can use it to spot trends in population, movement, etc. You can



Photo by Rosanne Fohn

Dell Little explained that he started identifying birds as a youngster using field guides. Now, Merlin Bird ID and eBird makes it much easier.

do it casually, or you can do it seriously," he said.

Merlin also features a database of bird sounds. Even when your phone is offline, you can still record a bird's song and it will store it, along with a GPS location. Or, you can take a photo of a bird, logging the time and location.

He said, "You can cross-reference Merlin and eBird simultaneously." But whenever the sighting is of a very rare bird, the app may request additional sightings.

Dell was involved in the Christmas Bird Count, conducted in December, over a 15-mile-diameter circle centered on Old Baldy Peak at Garner State Park.

The seasonal count by volunteers is repeated at numerous locations, and the results are gathered and sorted to reveal trends that might inspire new insights, which in turn could result in new programs to protect and promote bird populations.

TMNs lead kindergarteners on tour of Garner State Park

By Amanda Griffin

Back when my kids were cartoon-watching age there was a show called “Recess.” The action of the show all took place on a school playground. The various groups of kids interacted with each other through different diplomatic strategies and the fifth graders solved the occasional mystery.

In this series, the kindergarteners were wild men with crazy hair, wearing loin cloths and carrying spears like prehistoric hunters. They spoke a language no other grade could understand and always traveled as a pack in a cloud of dust. These kids were avoided by all other grades and were only brought in when all other resources had failed or if a demolition job was needed.

Many adults see kindergarteners in this light. Because of that, some Texas Master Naturalists may hesitate to participate in a young kids’ nature event. I get it. When I was in the classroom years ago, kindergarten teachers were revered. Even the most seasoned middle school teachers often regarded them as something between saints and esteemed anthropologists.

The Carrizo Springs kindergarteners that went on a field trip Nov. 19 to Garner State Park disproved this stereotype by being enthusiastic visitors, great listeners and active participants in the activities planned and led by Park Ranger Jacob Resendiz and a group of Brushy Canyons TMNs.

The 120 kindergarteners arrived by school bus in the morning, accompanied by a slew of enthusiastic parents and the intrepid teachers leading the way.

The children rotated through



Photo by Dell Little

The birdwatching station was a popular spot for the kindergarteners.

four different activities:

- “Skulls and Skins,” a program with TMNs Julie Bartosh and Judy Wood at the Cowboy Theatre;
- Jacob’s tour of the visitor center to learn about park history and features;
- A hike to the bird blind to observe with binoculars; and
- Free play on the Garner Park playground.

Manning the birding station, I tried to set expectations before we hiked to the blind to help the kids prepare for watching and listening. The amazingly silent youngsters were successful in identifying more birds than I expected — Northern cardinals, Tufted titmice, various sparrows, chickadees and even a woodpecker. Using binoculars was a big deal to this age group that is often told to “look but not touch.” I saw that the kids felt “big” getting to try their own pair of grown-up viewing tools.

Hiking was also fun as we identified flowers along the way and bugs that happened across our path. A funny moment happened when I pointed out a beetle crossing the trail and one lively kindergartener rushed up

and stepped on it, proud to be of “help.” That led to a great conversation about leaving wild things alone in their environment, especially in the park.

As soon as I saw interest waning for the birding exercise, we transitioned to an action activity: walking like a bird! This got their bodies moving and giggles going, and helped them get their wiggles out. Lastly, I taught them an old hiking song as we walked back to the trailhead. Once there, I asked them to trace the “B” for Bird Watching Blind on the sign with their fingers. They loved this kinesthetic connection with the letters and traced letters from their names, as well.

By TMN standards, the birds we saw were basic and no new species were discovered. One group saw a deer wandering through the brush and another watched a hawk soar up to the mountain and into the trees.

I would say the kids went away remembering not to kill things in nature, and thinking about signs in the park and what the signs mean. They probably giggled about the name “titmouse” on the bus ride home. More importantly, they had a fun time outdoors, got to practice with binoculars, listened to nature sounds and properly identified parts of nature. (Spoiler alert — it’s all nature!)

I encourage all TMNs to participate in a volunteer opportunity that involves kids. Younger generations are the naturalists and land stewards of the future. It is imperative that they learn early on that the outdoors is a place where they are welcome as they are, that they can feel a little bit free, see new sights, hear new sounds and

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Redus, White to continue as chapter officers

Two members were elected Dec. 4 to serve as Brushy Canyon chapter officers for 2026-2027. Mickey Redus will continue as president and Christi White will serve another term as treasurer.

The pair were recommended by the nominating committee composed of Noel Troxclair, Tina Bourgeois and Valerie Redus and were approved by the membership.

According to the chapter bylaws, in even-numbered years, the vice president and secretary are elected and in odd-numbered years, the membership elects the president and treasurer. The new terms take effect Jan. 1.

Chapter officers

President — Mickey Redus
Vice president — Rose Cooper
Secretary — P.J. Garza
Treasurer — Christi White
Advanced Training Director/Advisor (AgriLife) — Noel Troxclair
Communications Director — Rosanne Fohn
Membership Director — D'nese Fly
2026 New Class Director — D.D. Currie
Outreach Director — Kathy Rice
Volunteer Service Director — Chip Fly
Board member — Jan Prather
Advisor (TPWD) — Kelby Bridwell
Advisor (AgriLife) — Liz Tidwell
Advisor (TPWD) — David Rios

I like bugs, too!

By D.D. Currie

Most people know me for my love of birding, but I really like bugs, too. It's easy to make the cross over from birds to bugs as there is a lot of overlap. If the birding is slow, look for bugs. Birds feed on bugs, birds have bugs, wherever there are birds, there are bugs, etc, etc.

We (Dell Little and I) recently set up for a "moth night" at our house in Uvalde. This was inspired by Terry Hibbits' talk at our September chapter meeting and his setup after the meeting for mothing at Garner State Park.

I bought a portable, fabric wardrobe from Ikea. It required some assembly. We hung a black light inside the wardrobe, set it up around dusk and waited for the moths to show up. In about three hours, I photographed an amazing 63 different species of moths. There were many other tiny moths that I was not able to photograph.

Now, to the connection between moths and birds. There is a family of "bird dropping" moths called Noctuidae. What I learned from AI about these moths: "This mimicry is a form of Batesian mimicry, where a harmless species (the moth) evolves to look like a dangerous or unappetizing one (bird poop) to avoid being eaten by predators. Birds, which rely on sight to hunt, often overlook these moths, mistaking them for something inedible."

During the three hours of mothing, I photographed four different species of bird dropping moths including: Polished bird-dropping moth, Four-spotted bird-dropping moth, Chalky bird-dropping moth and Ponometia cuta (no weird name for this

one). These moths do indeed look like bird droppings, thereby eluding predation by birds.

We had an evening of cheap entertainment and learned a lot in the process! Thanks to Terry Hibbits for the inspiration!



Photos by D.D. Currie and Dell Little
Polished bird-dropping moth (above) and Chalky bird-dropping moth below.



Kindergarteners

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enjoy themselves. This is the first step in falling in love with nature as we "plant seeds" that may grow these kids into future conservationists.

Seeing a relatively common titmouse through the eyes of a young person also reminds seasoned naturalists that all of nature is a miracle and that discovery is in the eye of the beholder.

TMNs can influence rural development

By Joe Fohn

Texas Master Naturalists can do a lot to improve the natural environment in rural subdivisions by working with developers and Homeowner Associations (HOAs), according to Amanda Griffin, a professional landscape irrigation auditor and Texas Master Naturalist.

Griffin addressed the Brushy Canyons Chapter at its November meeting about “Model HOA Landscape Guidelines for the Hill Country.”

She owned a water management business in the Dallas area for more than 20 years, during which she said she “recognized a gaping hole in water knowledge and education.” At that time, homeowners were not familiar with where their water came from or the importance of using it wisely. Working with a large HOA in Dallas, she helped save more than \$350,000 per year in water costs, then started working with other HOAs on water savings.

Today, she is involved in the Hill Country Alliance, a non-profit coalition to preserve open spaces, night skies, and clean and abundant water as part of the unique character of the Hill Country.

Water is the limiting factor in developing the Hill Country. Its population has more than doubled since 1990 in unincorporated areas. Such areas have no city government to regulate subdivisions, and counties have only limited authority to do so. Meanwhile, 60-70% of home



Photo by Joe Fohn

Brushy Canyons chapter Vice President Rose Cooper presents a homemade walking stick to member Amanda Griffin, who gave a presentation on her work with the Hill Country Alliance.

water use goes to outdoor irrigation in the summer — and much of that water is lost to sewers and storm drains.

“Our goal is to cut outdoor water use in half,” Griffin said. One solution is to encourage native-plant landscapes instead of thirsty non-native plants and turfgrass. She said the city of San Marcos is approaching this by requiring two water meters per lot — one for home use, the other for landscapes — and to limit turfgrass to 50% of the property. Meanwhile, Austin allows lawn watering only once a week.

For developments outside the reach of city ordinances, however, enforcement is a problem, and many existing HOAs tend to have poor water manage-

ment policy, Griffin said.

The Alliance’s twofold goal is to make it easier for an HOA to adopt better landscape requirements, and to give HOAs a template for “water-wise” landscaping.

Because it is hard to change existing restrictive covenants, it’s best to introduce the idea of best practices for water use to developers from the beginning, said Griffin. These can include non-negotiable covenants and restrictions on lots, and having the HOA create a committee on landscape improvement. Regionally specific guidelines also can be encouraged, such as native or drought-tolerant landscapes, rainwater harvesting systems and restricting lawn mowing to grass higher than three inches, while discouraging automatic irrigation systems.

Other guidelines can address light pollution by requiring outdoor lights to be pointed downward, which is good for wildlife.

Such guidelines are only a starting point, but they offer clear policies, lower utility bills and more survivable landscapes, said Griffin.

The Alliance’s goals are to familiarize county governments and developers with the guidelines, inform the public and get HOAs on board with landscape guidelines. And, Griffin added, citizen scientists like the Texas Master Naturalists can be part of the solution by promoting these policies.

For more information, contact Griffin, one of three authors for the guidelines, at agriffinin-realcounty@gmail.com. To see the guidelines, visit <https://hillcountryalliance.org/resources/hoaguide/>.

Your input “makes” our newsletter! Please submit your articles and photos for the next Canyon Echo by March 31 to rosannefohn@yahoo.com.

Book review

Bretz's Flood: How a geologist's persistence explained the scouring of northwestern U.S.

By Joe Fohn

This book's subject matter got me and Rosanne to take a long trip to the Northwest last summer. We visited beautiful, tourist-friendly places like Spokane and Seattle, Missoula and Cour d'Alene, Glacier Park and the Grand Coulee Dam.

But we weren't there just to see the cities or the parks or the landmarks. We also saw house-size boulders sitting in the middle of wheat fields, miles of eroded and un-vegetated "scablands," and sand hills that high-altitude photography reveals as gigantic flood ripples. We saw a scoured valley with a lazy river at its bottom that just a few thousand – not million – years ago was the world's biggest waterfall.

Those features were what geologist J. Harlan Bretz, a Michigan native and Seattle school teacher, saw when he visited the area in the 1920s. They were already well-known as geological curiosities back then, but they weren't

believed to have appeared suddenly, much less recently.

Earth science then was firmly focused on gradualism: Whatever natural features one observes, no matter how massive, must be the product of slow, continuous, "natural" processes.

On the other hand, catastrophists, as they were called – those who attribute any oddity to a sudden, massive event – were held in low regard in academic circles.

Bretz was neither of those. But as a University of Chicago graduate student studying the "scablands" country in Washington and Oregon, he dared to present a geology paper that held that only flooding on a stupendous scale could have deposited boulders atop mountains, scoured out whole river valleys and left signs of Ice Age glacial melting in the Northwest. Predictably, his peers' review was tepid at best. Among the questions was: Where on Earth would water — enough to do such things — come from?



Huge granite boulders today stand in otherwise smooth wheat fields in Montana, remnants of a flood that washed them miles from their original location.

For years, Bretz kept returning to the Northwest to survey the scablands, plot the highest flood elevations, identify the massive flow lines, and then calculate the cubic-feet-per-minute of water it would take to produce them. He brought his college students along for summer field seminars to see the odd formations and help with the measuring. And as each year's field work was done, he continued to publish papers bolstering his thesis, eventually making an overwhelming case that something geologically recent, sudden and huge (short-term flooding from glacial lakes due to collapses of ice dams) had been responsible for the wholesale re-sculpting of large swaths of Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana.

The studies themselves slowly eroded the academic skepticism until the 1970s when, in his own 90s, Bretz was finally acknowledged and his views accepted by mainstream geologists. This book isn't targeted to the Master Naturalist, but neither should it only interest the geologist. In it, all of us are reminded that discovery isn't seeing something new; sometimes it's seeing something in a new way.

*Bretz's Flood by John Soennichsen
Copyright 2008, Sasquatch Books, Seattle*



Dry Falls today consists of a modest flow of water over massive exposed rock formations. The falls were created by a gigantic Ice Age flood that carved out several cubic miles of stone and made this the largest waterfall in the world.

Honors and achievements



Christi White (left) presents 2025 recertification awards at the November chapter meeting to D.D. Currie, Dell Little (standing behind) and Tina Bourgeois. Judy Wood (right) was recognized for 250 hours of vounteer service.



Photo by Joel Troxclair

Receiving recognition at the December chapter meeting are (left to right) Jeff Carter, 250 hours; Marcella Fly, Certified Master Naturalist; Rosanne Fohn, 2025 recertification; Joe Fohn, Certified Master Naturalist; Kathryn Bendele and Sid Fly, both receiving 2025 recertification.

Interested in becoming a Master Naturalist?

Visitors are welcome to attend chapter meetings to learn about the program. The Brush y Canyons Chapter

meets at 6:30 p.m. the first Thursday of the month in the Shady Meadows Shelter at Garner State Park.



Tina Bourgeois presents Joe Fohn (above) and Marcella Fly (below) with their Certified Master Naturalist certificates at the December chapter meeting.



Meanwhile, Judy Wood gets a hug for completing 250 volunteer hours.

Uvalde Christmas bird count totals 113 species

By Rose Cooper

This year's Uvalde-based Christmas Bird Count began with a cool, foggy morning that gave way to a warm, clear afternoon. Seventeen volunteers, divided into five teams, surveyed birds from 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. on Dec. 27, with a few participants heading out earlier to listen for owls.

Nine of the 17 volunteers were members of the Brushy Canyons Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalists, highlighting the chapter's active involvement in citizen science and community conservation efforts. The count covered a 15-mile-wide circle, requiring teams to spend much of the day driving and stopping along rural back roads to document birds across a variety of habitats.

Survey areas included Cook's Slough Nature Center, Uvalde National Fish Hatchery, Fort Inge and Uvalde Memorial Park. At Uvalde Memorial Park, participants documented Clay-colored Thrushes for the second consecutive year, a notable repeat observation.

A total of 113 species were recorded — above the 33-year average of 107 species. Historically, species totals have ranged from a low of 92 in 1993 to a high of 128 in both 1997 and 1998.

Several unusual and noteworthy observations were made this year. American Coot, typically present on the count, was not observed, while Lesser Scaup was absent for the third consecutive year. Rare species included Palm Warbler (not recorded locally since 1996), Sora (last seen in 2007), Cassin's Sparrow (last seen in 2003), and

Green-tailed Towhee, which was first recorded on the count last year and observed again this year. A Barred Owl was also recorded, only the second time the species has been documented during the count, with the previous sighting occurring in 2020.

Higher-than-usual numbers of Hermit Thrush, Green Jay, and Rock Pigeon were noted, and participants were fortunate to observe Eastern Bluebirds as well as a single Cedar Waxwing.

As the organizer, I would like to extend my appreciation to all the volunteers whose time and dedication made this year's count a success and contributed valuable data to this long-running citizen science effort.

Brushy Canyons chapter members participated in two other Christmas Bird Count groups over the holidays. Information about those bird counts will be reported in the next edition of *The Canyon Echo*.

Total chapter volunteer hours reach 5,078

Vice President Rose Cooper provided the following information about the total number of volunteer hours, 5,078, as of January 3.

Administrative Work - Brushy Canyons - 1749.20 hrs (32 individuals)

FR: Adopt-A-Loop - 155.25 hrs (9 individuals)

FR: Bird Populations - 477.45 hrs (22 individuals)

FR:CoCoRaHS - 402.25 hrs (13 individuals)

FR: iNaturalist - 325 hrs (11 individuals)

FR: iNaturalist TNT Project Curation/Identification - 8.25 hrs (2 individuals)

FR: NPN (National Phenology Network) - 7.25 hrs (2 individuals)

FR: Other Partners - Field Research - 22 hrs (3 individuals)

FR: TPWD - 153.50 hrs (4 individuals)

NPA: Brush Busters Trail Maintenance - 9 hrs (1 individual)

NPA: Other Locations - Nature/Public Access - 105 hrs (6 individuals)

NPA: Pollinators for Texas - 50.25 hrs (8 individuals)

OT: Partner Organizations - 484.75 hrs (16 individuals)

PO - Pollinators for Texas - 17 hrs (4 individuals)

PO: Public Outreach TMN - 150 hrs (10 individuals)

PO: Public Outreach Events - 206 hrs (12 individuals)

RM: Other Locations - 156.75 hrs (15 individuals)

RM: Pollinators for Texas - 187 hrs (10 individuals)

TG: Other Organizations - Technical Guidance - 3 hrs (1 individual)

TR: Community Presentations - 19.25 hrs (2 individuals)