

T E X A S

Master  
Naturalist™



Brush y Canyons Chapter



TEXAS A&M  
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# The Canyon Echo



*Photo by Kathy Rice*

**Class of 2025 graduates are (front row) D.D. Currie, Amanda Griffin, Rosanne Fohn, Marcella Fly, Tammy Wooldridge and Sarah Horvath. In the back row are Dell Little, John Griffin, Terry Carson, Joe Fohn and Sid Fly. Kathryn Bendele is also a member of the class.**

## From the President's Desk—Tree Stump

Welcome to the inaugural edition of the Canyon Echo! What an exciting milestone!

We greatly appreciate Rosanne and Joe Fohn, our editorial staff, taking on this project. I also want to thank the many members who have contributed to this first issue and want to challenge each member to participate and contribute to this communication in the future. And, thank you to all of the folks that participated

in the fun and “democratic” process of picking a name for our newsletter.

*The Canyon Echo* is a wonderful and inspired name – epitomizing the impact that we want the Brush y Canyons Chapter to have in our communities, region and state. May our efforts and accomplishments continue to reverberate long after they are initiated!

For this first issue, I thought it might be fitting to

recount our chapter’s inception and history, so here goes:

In the fall of 2019, a group of interested individuals met at the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Center in Uvalde to discuss the possibility of starting a new chapter of Texas Master Naturalists in the Uvalde County area. In that meeting was an enthusiastic group made up of the state TMN

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# From the President

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coordinator, employees of both Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and Texas Parks and Wildlife, members of existing TMN chapters from as far away as the Piney Woods of East Texas, and local nature and conservation-minded individuals. After several planning meetings and assembling a prospective slate of officers to get things off the ground, COVID-19 struck. Things immediately came to a screeching halt and an extended hiatus ensued.

In late 2022, with the blessing of the Texas Master Naturalist State Office, planning resumed, or more accurately — started over — as several of the original people involved in the planning and some who were slated to occupy officer positions on the Local Coordinating Committee were no longer available. And so, the process of establishing a new chapter began in earnest.

On Feb. 13, 2023, we filed our new chapter petition with the state. The original core group that constituted the LCC dug in and completed the necessary forms and paperwork AND served as the first New Class Committee, developing schedules, securing training and field trip locations, lining up instructors, recruiting new members, and organizing and conducting the training classes.

On July 29, 2023, 21 individuals, connected only by their common interest in the great Texas outdoors, attended the first Initial Training class session of the newly chartered Brushy Canyons Chapter. Twelve weeks later, a family of committed, conservation-minded naturalists completed their final class.

On Nov. 9 of that year, we held our first monthly chapter meeting and recognized our first two newly certified Texas Master Naturalists — Rose Cooper and Jack Ort. We would close out 2023 with five certified members, including three already certified folks who transferred into our chapter.

We have since held new member classes every year and have gradually added to our number with each class.

At the time of this writing, we have 25 certified Texas Master Naturalists in our chapter and have an active membership of 40 folks.

To date we have accomplished:

- \* Over 1,900 hours of initial training
- \* More than 1,700 hours of advanced training
- \* In excess of 8,000 hours of volunteer service, valued at over \$200,000!

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## 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 Brushy 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 Cavern State Park, El Progreso Memorial Library, Uvalde National Fish Hatchery, Nueces River Authority and Fort Clark Springs.

## CONTACT US

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# Hard-to-spot wood stork visits Uvalde

By Dell Little

Back at the end of July this year, someone found a wood stork at Cook's Slough Sanctuary in Uvalde. D.D. Currie and I happened to learn of it through eBird's nifty alert system for birds we hadn't seen in Uvalde County as of yet.

Wood storks are on a short list of special birds for us. Sometimes that list is for rare birds and sometimes it's for unique birds. The wood stork kind of fits both of those criteria, especially for our area.

They are not seen often in Uvalde County. In fact, it's the first sighting reported on eBird in two years. The last occurred on Sept. 22, 2023, when five were spotted southeast of Knippa. Before that, they were seen two summers in a row — 2021 and 2020 — at Cook's Slough by Tripp Davenport, who also happened to find the first wood stork for Uvalde County for eBird in August 2009. Another was seen in August 2018, a little farther down the Leona River. That's just six instances in the last 16 years. That's why it was such a "big deal" to us.

The wood stork, also known in some regions as "Ironhead" or "Flinthead," is the only stork species native to the United States. Most sightings in Texas are of birds that

have wandered here after their breeding season. The birds we find in Texas are generally from populations in Mexico, Central America or the southeastern United States, and they visit during the late summer and fall. You'll notice that all the Uvalde sightings mentioned were from late July through September. They are most common along the coast and in the eastern third of the state.

With that said, the photo you see here isn't ours. My brother who lives in Corpus Christi took it. We weren't able to get a shot of our bird as it flew off fairly quickly. Wood storks are known to wander far inland in Texas after their breeding season. We used to see them every summer at Richland Creek Wildlife Management Area near Corsicana, and in Navarro and Freestone counties. They also would often end up in the DFW area where we used to live.

This species was federally listed as endangered in 1984, but thanks to decades of conservation efforts, their numbers



*Courtesy photo*

**The wood stork Dell and D.D. saw flew away before they could snap a picture. This wood stork was seen along the Texas coast.**

have recovered. Their status was changed to threatened in 2014, marking a significant conservation success story.

Seen feeding in the photo above, wood storks wade through the water with their heads down, their heavy, downturned bills partially open. When their bill makes contact with a fish or other aquatic prey, they snap it shut with incredible speed — a reflex that is one of the fastest of any vertebrate. Their unique bill and specialized tactile feeding method set them apart from their long-legged, wading cousins. They also have an impressive wingspan of over five feet.

Seeing a flock of them catching thermals and circling

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# Q&A with a founding member: Noel Troxclair



*Courtesy photo*

**Dr. Noel Troxclair is a Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service County Agent in Uvalde County.**

Q. How did you learn that a new TMN chapter was being planned for the Uvalde, Kinney and Medina County area?

A. Since I am an AgriLife Extension Service employee, I received an email regarding the informational/organizational planning meeting and attended that first meeting. Mickey Redus was the catalyst to restart efforts to form what became the Texas Master Naturalist Brushy Canyons Chapter. There had been an earlier effort to organize a chapter just prior to the onset of COVID-19, but everyone knows how everything was put on hold during that period. That first meeting was the first step to revive the effort to form a new TMN chapter for the three counties.

Q. How did you become a founding sponsor/member and

what did this involve?

A. Although I was only vaguely familiar with TMN, I was intrigued with the Master Naturalist organization and its tenets, and jumped at the opportunity to become a member. Out of that I decided that I would like to be a sponsor if the new chapter became a reality. Basically, when it was mentioned that the chapter needed to be sponsored, I decided I would offer to be a sponsor.

Q. Please explain your certifications -- CEA-ANR -- and your roles at Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. How do these roles translate into your work with our chapter?

A. CEA-ANR stands for County Extension Agent for Agriculture and Natural Resources. Basically, in my role as a county agent I work with agricultural producers, do some research, run some result demonstrations and teach/confer the latest science-based information to the agricultural community. Through my training, which has been a lifetime process, I have gained some knowledge about a wide variety of subjects, most of which I can apply to my work as a county agent and as a Master Naturalist to assist the people of Uvalde County, the State of Texas, the U.S., and our world. The things I learn through

TMN make me a better county agent, a better citizen and a better steward of our amazing resources and world.

Q. You provided two lectures for our Initial Training -- Soils and Entomology. Are these two related because so many insects live in the soil?

A. I taught the modules on Soils and Entomology because I have some expertise in both, having taken a couple of soils and fertility classes in college, as well as having done research for two degrees with insects that spend at least a portion of their life cycles in soil. Many insects live in the soil, and I have some knowledge regarding life cycles of quite a few, but that is one broad area of entomology about which my knowledge is limited in comparison to other aspects of entomology. Actually, the fact that soil-borne insects spend most of their lives in the soil, hidden from view, makes them particularly difficult to study. I covered the entomology module because that is the discipline in which I am most educated and experienced.

Q. What do you enjoy most about your involvement with TMN?

It would be hard for me to

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## Chapter officers

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



**Wildlife photographer and author Terry Hibbitts was our Advanced Training presenter Sept. 4. In addition to a slide show on “Observing, Identifying and Photographing Moths,” Hibbitts set up “black light” platforms outside after dark so that chapter members could observe moths that are attracted to ultraviolet light.**

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## Wood storks

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overhead is a spectacular sight. They can appear like a flock of American white pelicans, which also engage in a circling behavior known as “kettling.” Birders at hawk watches along the Texas Coast often spot many of these flocks as the storks begin their journey back south.

While loosely related to other large waders like herons and egrets, wood storks belong to a different taxonomic group. They are in the order Ciconiiformes, which contains one family, Ciconiidae, the group that includes all 19 species of storks. Spotting one may take you back to an imagined prehistoric time.

### **New bird species discovered in Universal City**

Bird enthusiasts were atwitter earlier this month when information was published about a new bird species found in Universal City. San Antonio news outlets reported the

discovery following publication in the the journal [Ecology and Evolution](#).

Learn more about the new species in the [UT Austin news release](#), [KSAT 12](#) or the journal.

## President

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\* More than 8,000 hours of volunteer service, valued at over \$200,000!

I am so proud of our chapter and our many dedicated members and the difference they are making in our communities, our ecoregion and our state. Looking back on all we have accomplished in the three short years of our existence, I can't wait to see what lies ahead! I count it a distinct privilege to serve alongside this family of Texas Master Naturalists.

Sincerely and humbly,  
Mickey Redus

# Honors and achievements



**Mickey Redus presents initial certification awards to Sarah Horvath, (D'nese Fly next) and Kathryn Bendele in July.**



**Also in July, Mickey Redus presents D'nese Fly with a certificate for achieving 250 volunteer hours.**



**In July, President Mickey Redus presents recertification awards to Jeff Carter and Rose Cooper; 1,000 volunteer-hour honors to Valerie Redus, initial certification to D.D. Currie and Dell Little, while Membership Director D'nese Fly looks on.**



**In April, D'nese Fly, (center) presents recertification awards to Chip Fly, Kathy Rice and Valerie Redus. James Kennedy earned initial certification.**

## Q&A with Noel Troxclair

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pinpoint one thing about my involvement with TMN that is most enjoyable. I particularly enjoy interacting with so many really wonderful and extremely knowledgeable people in TMN, which challenges me to become better. I especially like learning about so many different species of fauna and flora, which makes me a better naturalist and gives me a greater appreciation of our world and its interconnectedness.

**Q.** What would you say to someone who is considering the possibility of becoming a TMN?

**A.** I would tell someone considering becoming a TMN to try it, that it's something that you will truly appreciate as you become more knowledgeable and grows as a naturalist. It will open a whole new world to enjoy and appreciate.

*Raised on a rice and sugar cane farm in South Louisiana, Noel Troxclair earned his B.S. and M.S. degrees in entomology with an emphasis on integrated pest management from Louisiana State University. After earning his doctorate in entomology at Purdue University in 1997, he moved to Uvalde where he has served as the District 10 entomologist, and now as county extension agent for the Texas A&M Agricultural Extension Service.*





**At the August meeting, Rose Cooper was recognized for 500 volunteer hours by D'nese Fly, while Jan Prather and P.J. Garza were recertified.**



**Christi White receives her 2025 recertification award from D'nese Fly in August.**



*Photo by Kathy Rice*

**Membership Director D'nese Fly presents Nancy Thornton with her initial certification, Noel Troxclair with recertification, Julie Bartosh with initial certification and Judy Wood with her recertification certificate at the May chapter meeting.**

## **Brush y Canyons chapter wins \$3,000 grant to conserve native pollinators**

The Texas Master Naturalist Brush y Canyons Chapter, with members from Kinney, Medina and Uvalde counties, received a \$3,000 award this spring from the Pollinators for Texas project. The award will support native pollinators with the Visitor Center Native Garden Restoration Project at

Garner State Park.

Native pollinators — bees, butterflies, moths, bats and birds — play a critical role in sustaining ecosystems and provide essential services to American agriculture.

Interest in conservation of native pollinators has grown rapidly over the past few years as several species have experienced dramatic population declines. The Pollinators for Texas project is a collaborative effort with H-E-B and the Texas Master Naturalist Program, focused on enhancing native pollinator conservation across the state by promoting awareness, conservation efforts, and creating sustainable pollinator environments. The initiative aims to engage communities in



**Terry Carson and Rosanne Fohn received their initial certification in October.**

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# Adopt-A-Loop project brings the soul of nature to TMNs along the Frio River



**A breathtaking view of Concan at sunrise.**



**Participants included (left to right) Mickey Redus, Rose Cooper, Valarie Redus, Nancy Thornton, Tina and Bryan Bourgeois and Jeff Carter. (Kim Carter and Judy Wood also participated but are not pictured.)**



**Tina Bourgeois checks out water life.**

While participating in a recent Adopt-a-Loop activity organized by Nancy Thornton, Brush y Canyons members began their trail exploration at Frio Country Resort along the Frio River.

The group reported 28 species of birds, including White-Eyed Vireos, Yellow-Throated Warblers and an Indigo Bunting.

They also identified 19 species of native plants, including Sweet Acacia, Mealy Blue Sage and American Water-Willow, plus five introduced plants including the Marvel of Peru and the Mexican Fan Palm.

Also identified were one fungus, the Goldenhaired Inkcap, and an amphibian, the Gulf Coast Toad.



**Jeff Carter, Bryan Bourgeois and Judy Wood conduct a bioblitz of the area.**



# Establishing ‘pocket prairies’ gives endangered pollinators food, shelter



*Photo by Rosanne Fohn*

**Speaker Liz Tidwell receives a gift from President Mickey Redus after her presentation at the October Chapter Meeting at Garner State Park.**

“Pocket Prairies” was the topic of Liz Tidwell’s presentation at the Oct. 2 Chapter Meeting.

Tidwell, a Small Acreage Landowner Extension Program Specialist at the A&M Research and Extension Center in Uvalde, holds a B.S. degree in zoology and an M.S. in range and wildlife management.

Tidwell’s topic dealt with how homeowners can turn a portion of their yard into a “pocket prairie” that provides food and shelter for

pollinators. Pollinators can be birds such as hummingbirds, insects such as honeybees and Monarch butterflies, and even mammals such as bats.

Pollinators contribute some \$235 billion worth of service to the world’s food production by helping to pollinate crops. However, habitat loss, diseases and climate change pose a threat to pollinators and, by extension, to humans.

Prairies, open areas with a large diversity of grasses

and flowers, are essential to the survival of pollinator species. Tidwell outlined a series of steps homeowners can take to create a miniature prairie, literally in their own backyard. Growing varieties of flowering plants that are known to benefit native pollinator species, providing other nutrients such as sources of water and even salt, and building shelters for species whose survival depends on burrowing in soil or hiding in brush or leaf piles. All of these can aid the survival of pollinators, even if the dedicated area is less than an acre in size.

The Extension Service can provide plans and advice for a proper layout, superior plant selection and maintenance of a pocket prairie.

## **Interested in becoming a Master Naturalist?**

Visitors are welcome to attend chapter meetings to learn about the program. The Brushy Canyons Chapter meets at 6:30 p.m. the first Thursday of the month in the Shady Meadows Shelter at Garner State Park.

## Movie review

# ‘Listers!’ A glimpse into extreme birdwatching

By D. D. Currie

LISTERS is hilarious. I’ve also heard it called “profound” and “profane.” I’ll get to the “profane” part later....

LISTERS is a free film that can be viewed on YouTube. It is about two brothers, Quentin Reiser and Owen Reiser, who are non-birders but who decide to do a birding “Big Year” after stumbling upon a family copy of the Birds of North America field guide. After discovering the field guide, they describe themselves as being diagnosed with a case of “early onset bird watcher.” The brothers are the stars, but also directed, shot and edited the film.

In January 2024, the brothers set off in a used, \$3,500 2010 Kia Sedona to do what is called a “Lower 48 Big Year.” A Lower 48 Big Year consists of documenting all bird species seen or heard in the lower 48 states and any birds seen/heard within 200 miles offshore. The bird species must be countable per the American Birding Association and must be alive, wild and unrestrained. They spent the entire year on the road, eating and sleeping in their Kia Sedona, often camping in parking lots of various businesses that are friendly to overnight

campers.

The film chronicles their travels, including interviews with birders they encounter along the way. We get to experience their approaches to finding birds, including a major epiphany when they discover the existence of and how to use “eBird” and “Merlin.” eBird is a free, global citizen, science platform and database for bird observations, allowing birders to record their sightings using



*Photo by Dell Little*

### Green-tailed towhee

the website or mobile app. It collects real-time data on bird presence, distribution and abundance. Merlin is a free, global, bird guide with photos, sounds and maps.

Use of eBird and Merlin is a game changer for the brothers. With eBird, they can track where birds are being seen, get rare bird alerts, and also use it to record their observations and track their progress.

Merlin can help ID birds by their calls with its sound ID feature, which listens to the birds around you and shows real-time suggestions for what’s singing.

Some of the more humorous scenes from the film are when eBird and Merlin go down for several days and the brothers, who at this point have become very dependent on eBird and Merlin, must muddle through days of trying to find and identify birds through word of mouth and calling dozens of Rare Bird Hotlines that are no longer in service. Although use of eBird is a huge windfall for the Big Year brothers’ team, their frustration abounds when an eBird reviewer refutes what would have been their 500th bird species -- three weeks after they reported it.

The brothers make good-hearted fun of birders and eBird reviewers, but equally make fun of themselves and are very self-effacing. They touch on the fact that listing relies entirely on the honor system and birding ethics, including subjects such as trespassing to see a bird, “spook and shoot” where one makes a loud

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# Movie review: 'Listers'

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noise to spook birds into flying just to get a photo of the birds, playback of a bird's call in order to attract a bird and the use of "pishing" which is making a kind of hissing noise with one's mouth to attract birds. Another interesting point made in the film is the amount of money birders spend annually. According to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in 2022, birders spent in excess of \$107 billion dollars split between \$14 billion spent on trip-related costs (such as food, lodging and transportation) and \$93 billion on equipment like birdhouses, binoculars, cameras and even land purchases.

So why is the film considered profound? It is realistic and accurately depicts the obsessive nature of birding listers and the extremes to which they will go to get bird species for their lists. True listers make up a compulsive subset of the birding community that will go to great lengths and expense to add bird species to their various lists. Just to put it in context, I personally keep a total life list, a world life list, an ABA life list, a list by Texas counties, a list by year and a list by county/by year. (Remember what I said about it being an obsession?)

The cinematography in the film is also profound. Owen, one of the brothers, shot and edited the film. Amazing video of birds and bird behaviors is a highlight of the film. It makes you feel like you are right there! As a bonus, Quentin Reiser also published a book in September 2025, "Field Guide of All the Birds We Found One Year in the United States." One review of the book describes it: "As advertised, not the best book for bird identification. Great book for bird humor and an inside look at a couple beginner birdwatcher's adventures. The QR codes definitely add to the experience. There's a good balance of stats, illustrations and antics. Highly recommend!"

Now, the profane part of the film. This film is for mature audiences only, due to language and references and images related to drug use. I hope this will not deter you from watching the film. It is absolutely hilarious!

## Pollinator garden grant

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supporting pollinator-friendly practices through funding TMN chapter-led projects and programs.

"The Garner State Park Native and Pollinator Garden provides a hands-on outdoor classroom for educational workshops and showcases our Native Pollinators, encourages a sense of shared responsibility for protecting our environment, and provides a gathering



*Photo by Dell Little*

## Cactus wren

spot for learning about pollinators. Our chapter is excited about the opportunity to restore and expand the existing garden so all park visitors can learn how to bring pollinators to their yards," said Brushy Canyons treasurer Christi White.

Pollination is essential for maintaining the ecological integrity of native plant communities and supporting agriculture.

# Initial training activities through the years



**The trailblazing Class of 2023 celebrates the founding of the Brushy Canyons Chapter at Garner State Park.**



**Master Naturalists learn about all sorts of natural environments during initial training. Above**

**left, the 2024 class discusses mammals before hiking to the Frio Bat Cave. Above, the group learns about riparian areas during the Frio Trash Bash. At left, the group studies endangered species at the Uvalde National Fish Hatchery.**

