

The Tracker

The Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter February 2012

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Salado Elementary and Intermediate Schools' Monarch Waystation Underway

- Debbie Blair

On November 21 of last year, after months of planning and researching, dodging weeks of rain and cold, a group of CTMN volunteers gathered to "break-ground" on Salado Elementary & Intermediate Schools' Monarch Waystation project. The Waystation was chosen to be the inaugural section of the newly proposed Educational Sustainability Center of Salado. In the near future, the area behind the schools

will be set up to educate the public about conservation from composting (vegetable gardens), return of the prairie grasses and flowers, recycling and providing a shelter and nesting/food station for the migratory Monarch butterflies.

A kindergarten and fourth grade class participated in the garden construction and planting. Thanks to the energy of landscape



Calendar at a Glance

SKYWARN Training, February 4
Salado Sculpture Garden workday, February 6, 9 am
MN General Meeting, February 14, 6 pm
Pay Membership Dues by February 14
Salado Library Series, February 17, 1 pm
Orientation for New Class, March 20
New Class runs March 27 - May 7

Chapter Motto

**Earth Day,
Every Day**



Continued on page 3...

From the President's Pen

Wasn't the rain a welcome delight Wednesday? The sky was lit up at times by some striking bolts of lightning. All in all it was quite a show. We Texans will take rain whenever the good Lord will send some our way. While we have been having such a mild winter, my husband and I have been trying to do some bird watching.

Now I know some of you have a lot more species where you live, but here in urban Temple, we don't get a wide variety. However, one day we had a whole flock of robins taking in the bird feeders and taking baths in the little creek flowing into our pond. It was such a joy just to stand at the window and watch them hop into the water and splash, splash, splash, and hop out and go about their business.

Then yesterday, while watching the finch feeder, lo and behold, an American goldfinch showed up. Now I know there are some of you who have been seeing them for weeks, but for us, this was our first. How exciting it was to watch it feed and then fly into the rose bush by the fence.

Birds haven't been the only visitors this winter. We observed a Red Admiral butterfly while working on butterfly houses at the Hughlings' yard. Who would have thought we would see a butterfly in the middle of January! It is a delight to see evidences of nature, even in the colder months. Just seeing them makes me yearn for a return of the warmer weather once again, although I hope this year won't be quite so brutally hot.

With all this said, we as a chapter are coming on another class, and thus far we have seven applicants. Please encourage those who might be interested to

fill out the application, which is on our web site and mail it to the Extension Office along with the fee.

Take the time to enjoy nature. Looking forward to seeing everyone at the February 14th meeting.

- Mary Ann

Photo by Mary Ann Everett



**The new TXMN class will begin on
March 27th
and run through May 7th.
(The end date may be changed.)
Orientation is March 20th.
*Please tell anyone you know who may
be interested in joining!***

Monarch Station Underway...continued

consultant, Tracy McCloud, LLC, Terra Living; the soil, compost, rock border, plants and mulch were all local and natural. Master Naturalists Kathy Cantu and Debbie Blair worked with the Principal, Lisa Nix, teachers and PTO members in planning and executing the planting event. The small garden was completed in one day. The tilling and heavy job of prepping the soil was made easier with the help of CTMaster Naturalists Shirley Watts, Elizabeth Pool, Ursula Nanna, and Lori Land. Several kindergarten and fourth grade classes came out and helped move pea gravel onto the walkway and carry the beautiful flint/crystal rocks (donated from a PTO parent's ranch) to make the border of the garden.

Everyone was very pleased with the final results. We knew that the winter freezes would cause some damage to the plants, but the event kicked-off what will



for watering the garden. Students and volunteers will be in charge of watering and weeding. We Master Naturalists will continue to be involved in the Monarch Waystation development and maintenance. We hope to be able to use the area as an outdoor teaching center, also. The next step will be to finalize the planting in the spring and then apply for certification to the Monarch Waystation program. This was a very enjoyable project that will be ongoing for some time.

Photos by Debbie Blair



soon be an ongoing outdoor educational area at the school. The school is partnering with Keep Salado Beautiful and other entities to get this program going. Several grant requests are in the works. Patrick Kern, with Paramount Wastewater, was a big help in making

the existing galvanized water retention tank functional



Advanced Training: “MICROBE MAYHEM”

- Marilyn Whitworth

Richard McCarthy and Marilyn Whitworth attended a training workshop at the Waco Wetlands January 21, 2012. The purpose of the training was to demonstrate the field trip exercises that senior students of the Waco Independent School District will perform at the Waco Wetlands regarding microbes.

The earth is a microbial planet. The students will investigate microbes at the Waco Wetlands to learn about the importance of microbes to processes essential to life on earth. Microbes include bacteria, viruses, some protists and fungi. They were the earliest life forms on earth and changed the earth's early atmosphere in ways to allow other life forms to develop. There are more microbes than any other organism on earth. They can grow in any environment. A small portion are disease-causing; the rest function in everything from climate regulation, to helping you digest your food, to making new drugs, to allowing crops to grow, to cleaning up the environment.



E. Coli on hand

The students will perform three different exercises:
1) Test Waco Wetland water and tap water for *E. coli*
2) Collect and examine microbial mat samples from the wetlands using digital compound and dissecting microscopes
3) Construct Winogradsky columns using Lake Waco Wetland sediment that the students will take with them for observation over time as microbial colonies develop.

As volunteers we will help the students perform the
www.txmn.org/centraltexas

exercises which will enhance the students' science knowledge and skills.



Microbes in Water

Illustrations from www.fotosearch.com

FYI

The National Weather Service has announced that next year's SKYWARN training for McLennan County will take place on Saturday, February 4 at the Emergency Services Education Center out by the airport. There will be two sessions: 9:00 a.m. -12:00 p.m. for the basic training, and 1:15 p.m.– 3:30 p.m. for the advanced. These classes have been approved for AT or as makeup if a Master Naturalist weather class was missed. SKYWARN training is free and open to the public; no pre-registration required.

SKYWARN is generally held in advance of the tornado season to educate the public on how to identify potentially severe weather. The National Weather Service also recruits people to become “spotters”, a valuable service that helps detect tornados from the ground and provide early warning to protect lives.

Growing Up Wild in Salado

- Becky Denton

January 16 was a wild day for first grade students at Salado's Thomas Arnold Elementary School. Nine CTMN members along with a Keep Salado Beautiful board member, a Salado mentor, and one parent presented "Aqua Charades" from the "Growing Up Wild" curriculum to 100 students in the school's multipurpose room. Our goal was to guide the students in activities that would help them learn the importance of water for all living things.

Lyna and Louann read the children "The Watering Hole" aptly illustrating the situation for wildlife in central Texas this past summer. In the story the rain finally falls. Rain sticks created a

that as well as the difference in a grape and a raisin – water!



With Linda, Kathy, Miriam Jordan and our volunteer dad the children used watercolors to paint a water scene telling us how they experience water in their daily lives. We saw everything from bathtubs to sea creatures.

Joanne and Liz turned the youngsters into scientists as they experimented with a variety of objects in a "float or sink" activity. They were the noisy group as they hypothesized with shouts of "float, float, float or "sink, sink, sink."



wonderful surprise sound effect.

Marilyn and Richard, with magnifying glasses in hand, guided the kids in observing how plants use water. How did those celery leaves turn blue? The first graders know

As Master Naturalists we all found it a fun and worthwhile day. The teachers enjoyed watching the children learn important concepts in a concrete and enjoyable way. I do believe the students had fun too!



Photos by Becky Denton

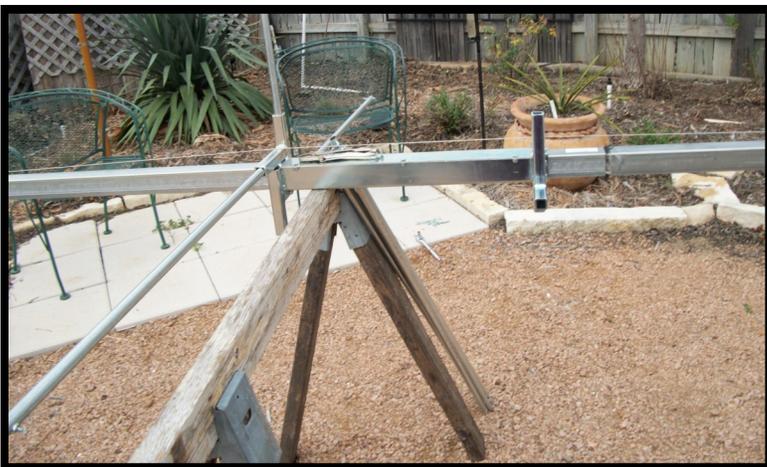
What Was I Thinking???

By: Ursula Nanna

After sailing in the Bahamas and then in the Florida Keys this winter, it was easy to plan for spring. Ya, right!!!! So, guess who ordered not 1, but 2, DIY Purple Martin Poles, racks, and houses????

They arrived, in 7 boxes, each weighing about 1000 pounds, it seemed. I opened them randomly because no one in shipping labeled the boxes 1, 2, 3 and so on. How inconsiderate, especially after all the money I spent on them!!!!

Out spilled some directions *from the very last box*, you know, the divorce-maker kind of directions that tell you to put post 1 into angle post 2 and so on, and somehow nothing fits right. I sat for hours, stunned that something like a pole and a rack could pose such a terrible problem; who knew??!! Bravely, I called a friend and asked him if he wanted to experience the wonders of constructing Purple Martin poles, racks, and houses. Man that he is, he was at my house before I hung up the phone. He was all excited about constructing his first Martin domains.



Eventually, we figured out the poles and screws, posts and racks, pulleys and winches. The garage was a haven from the wind so we assembled in there. Finally, we brought out the first completed pole, donning proudly large racks, to the yard and guess what? We couldn't get the racks through the gate because they were 6' too long and the whole



assembly weighed 500 pounds!!! But, industrious as we were, we managed to lift and shove until we successfully got everything in the yard without disassembling a thing. Getting that assembly into the yard was a bigger accomplishment than putting the darn thing together. Oh, we almost got a divorce and we were not even married!!!

Here are some photos, taken by me, to show you the complete pole and rack assembly. Once I recover from this event, I'll put on the houses....They are like 16 pound bowling balls....no kidding.



Editor's note: Tune in next issue of The Tracker to see if Ursula attracts any of these guys!!!

Construction photos by Ursula Nanna

Martin Photo © Joe Dellinger

Nolan Creek Trout Drop

- Ursula Nanna

On December 16, 2011, Central Texas Master Naturalists attended their FIRST TROUT DROP at the City of Belton's Nolan Creek Trout drop. This was the city's first drop also.

There were 2 booths, one being the City of Belton hosting fish artistry for the youth and the other booth being CTMN Angler Instructors. Belton Rotary had the much-needed hot chocolate table.



There was a "How Many Trout" were dropped in the creek contest too.

TPWD waived the required licensing for the event and Park Rangers and Belton Police visited as well.

Angler Instructors Jerry Lewis and Kathy Cantu helped youth and adults with tackle and related questions; Liz Pool answered many questions on Marine Debris; Don Wyatt showed off the 2 trout he managed to commandeer from the Hatchery personnel; Lyna Pitts and Ursula Nanna answered questions about fish habitat and gave out the Outdoor Booklets and the fresh water fish pocket guides. We all filled in as needed answering questions from youth and adults. We had 69 people visit the booth in 2 hours, none just browsed; all had at least one question.



It was a great day and the rain gave us a reprieve. Now we know more about what

to expect from attending a trout drop. Hopefully, we will be invited to participate at Belton's trout drop again.



Photos by Ursula Nanna

Building Bird and Butterfly Abodes

- Darla Horner Menking

The Central Texas Master Naturalists held two workdays, Jan. 18th & 20th, at the beautiful home of Dale and Gail Hughling, in Killeen. The goal was to put together and decorate some bird and butterfly houses as fund-raising items for future shows and festivals. They had a great time working together, the drills were buzzing, the crafty and the not-so-crafty decorated up a storm, and there was snacking as well!

All together, ten butterfly houses and nine blue bird houses were constructed. There are plans to make a few more in the next week or so. Also, Ron Turck stopped by and donated three beautiful cedar stumps, sealed, shiny and ready for someone to purchase. Other items that may be considered to sell are field guides and possibly some items for kiddos.

There was a discussion among the group as to where the MN might set up a booth to vend these items. Places discussed were the Home and



Garden Show, the Turtle Festival, the Bell County Museum garage sale, and the El Camino Real Nature Festival. It was also noted that the MN would need to get more items in the inventory to have a good supply of items to sell. So if anyone has any ideas or is willing to hold a workday, please let someone know.

Continued on next page...

Building...continued

Those in attendance one or both of the workdays were: LouAnn Hight, Linda Young, Sidney VanLoh, Linda Mahaffey, MaryAnn Everett & her hubby Phil, Kathy Cantu, Ursula Nanna, Darla Menking, and of course, Gail and Dale Hughling.



Photos by Darla Horner Menking

Announcements

Bi-Monthly CTMN meeting February 14, 2012, 6:00 p.m. James Alderson will do a presentation on **Native Prairie Grasses**. The public is invited. One hour of AT will be granted for attending members. **AT**

Membership Dues Please be reminded that dues (\$24.00 per year) should be paid by the February 14, 2012 meeting to our Treasurer (Gail Hughling); **please verify your address and email address** to Linda Young.

Salado Sculpture Garden, Monthly workday, 1st Monday

Monday, Feb 6th, we will begin at 9 am. Tasks for the morning - planting understory trees and shrubs,

V Approved for Volunteer Hours
AT Approved for Advanced Training
MA Must Apply for approval of hours

covering soaker hoses with mulch and of course weeding. Come if you enjoy getting your hands in the dirt! **AT**

Salado Public Library Texas Naturalists Series

Here's our lineup for this Spring. You can receive advanced training credit for the speaker programs unless you have already had the training.

February 17th, 1pm Jim Giocomo, American Bird Conservancy "Citizen Science and Bird Conservation: How you can contribute to large scale bird conservation efforts by watching birds in your own backyard".

April 6th, 1pm Dirk Aaron, Clearwater Underground Water Conservation District "Understanding Groundwater Issues in Bell County"

May 5th Ursula Nanna, CTMN Angler Education Team. Bring the kids and grandkids out to learn casting, knot tying and fishing safety. **AT**

Newsletter Mission Statement

"Our mission is to inform and educate Master Naturalist members and the general public about our local environment and resources, and what we, as caretakers, can do to protect them."

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