

The Tracker

The Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter April 2018

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Calendar at a Glance

April 5: Hours due in VMS

April 10: Chapter Meeting—Texas Mountain Lions

April 14: Mother Neff State Park 4-H Group Hike

April 19: Angler Education Fly Fishing Training

April 20: Discovery Trunks at Cavazos Elementary

Details on page 14...

Bird Banding Training at Fort Hood

-Lyna Pitts

Master Naturalists from the Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter and from the Twin Lakes Audubon Society were invited as special observers to a special treat on the Fort Hood Military Base on March 24th. Scott Summers, Ornithologist on Fort Hood, knew his subjects well and knew that we would be justifiably impressed with the activity at hand on the base! He was assisted by Gil Eckrich, another professional ornithologist.

Dr. David Cimprich, Fort Hood's lead biologist and one of only two certified trainers for bird banding in Texas, was on hand to train a group of student scientists. This small group formed a dedicated group of people who are studying the Black-Capped Vireo. The banding helps scientists understand the living habits of this allusive but beautiful little bird that spends a part of its year in Texas and is specially protected and able to coexist on this army training facility in Central Texas. The reserve is protected from development and in turn protects and offers habitat that is preferred by this bird population. The ash juniper of our area offers cover and food and a protected spot to spend the summer and then ...



Yvonne Eele releases a White-Eyed Vireo

Chapter Motto

**Earth Day,
Every Day**



(Bird Banding Continued) range south to the western slopes of the Sierra Occidentals of Mexico for the winter months. They enjoy much of the same habitat of the Monarch butterfly flyway. The Black-Capped Vireo is endangered and the Army at one time adjusted their training schedule to the timing of this bird and the Golden Cheeked Warbler but has found that the training and the birds can coexist without impacting the birds nesting habits, so the Army no longer changes their schedule for the birds. Both birds now have a place to go about their business of existing in cooperation with friendly neighbors and welcoming environment. They are a success story and provide a nice nature study for the citizen scientists present that day. It was both fun and illuminating, especially as the group was invited to hold a very small creature in the palm of their hand and then release it back into the wild for many more seasons to come!



Black-Capped Vireo by Gil Eckrich

Andreas' Supply Wish List

Andreas uses his woodworking skills to create birdhouses, beautiful walking sticks and unusual license plate dust pans that we sell at events as a fundraiser for projects. Do you have some unneeded materials Andreas could up-cycle into something CTMN can sell?



Do not leave your camera unattended—this is what can happen!



Supplies Needed

- License Plates
- Fence Boards or old wood—no more than 3/4" thick
- Yucca stalks—Cut when green and after seeds drop
- Scrap copper pipe—any size
- Bamboo, small diameter—inside hole no more than 3/8"
- Old wood broom handles, tool handles or dowels 1/2" diameter or greater

President's Pen

- Rene Berkhoudt

This column space is where Rene, our President, shares happenings from the previous months, events coming up, and other interesting nature-y tidbits of knowledge from his vast experience as a federal land manager in Utah.

In March Rene had a health setback and has scaled back his busy schedule of planning and working events for a while. We want our new trainees to know we are fortunate to have a talented leader for our chapter who we are anxious for you to meet. In the meantime, our Past Presidents are making sure things keep running until Rene is back in the saddle.



Bluebonnet season is upon us! With recent rains, grasses and other plants are shooting up and hiding our beautiful state flower and other wildflowers so get out for a drive to enjoy them while you can. Here are some of our favorite resources for finding the best locations;

<https://www.facebook.com/texasbluebonnetsightings/>

A nice online brochure of [common wildflowers](#).

(Zoe Rascoc)

Even if it's just around town—*Get Out* before they're gone!

Nature Day at St. Mary's School

- Mary Ann Everett

On January 30th, seven of our Central Texas Master Naturalists braved working with grades 3 through 8 at St. Mary's School from 9:00 to 11:30am. The classes rotated through various stations while our able time keeper kept us all on track. That person was my husband, Phil Everett. What a guy!

Here was the lineup: Richard McCarthy and Marilyn Whitworth—"Molecules in Motion"; Ronna Olivarez—"iNaturalist App"; Rene Berkhoudt—"Herps"; Mary Odom—"Birds"; Lynn Williams—"Insects"; John and Tina Atkins—"Mammals"; and Mary Ann Everett—"Prairies".

I think the students had a great time. They loved doing some of the hands-on things. For prairies, they

were able to see the tiny hooks on cockleburrs; Even several teachers were in awe!

In the afternoon, another group worked with Pre-K, 1st and 2nd graders. This included Ronna, Lynn, Mary and Lois Reiter, with Phil as the time keeper.

This was Spider Day. I did not know until one of the teachers mentioned they had been studying spiders the previous week. The students made paper plate spiders, spider webs and listened to two stories about spiders—one a humorous book and the other showing the different species of spiders and their nests. We were going to go outside to find spider webs, but we ran out of time. A good time was had by all!



Lynn has a "clutter" of paper plate spiders



Mary has a table-full of bird resources



John Atkins shows off our skull collection



Richard and Marilyn and their busy molecules

Mother Earth News Fair

- Wade Matthews and Yvonne Eele

On February 17th and 18th more than 20 of our members manned our booth at the Mother Earth News Fair. The Fair is an event for those interested in sustainability and self-reliance. With over 300 vendors and 150 workshops, this event is a premier opportunity for us to get exposure to many people. This event isn't just for locals but we can be ambassadors for our state program as well as Master Naturalist programs throughout the country.



Our members took turns roaming the event and were able to talk to many people. There were workshops and booths for everything from beekeeping and raising chickens or goats, to making homemade soap. Mother Earth News Fair is held in several places through the country and Belton, Texas is usually one of the largest. Attendance at the Fair this year was around 12,000 people which gave us plenty of opportunities to talk with people from all over the country, and from all parts of Texas. When we had interest from those out of state we would direct

them to their local Master Naturalist program—nearly every state has one. Did you know that Texas had the first Master Naturalist program? We used a map resource from the Texas Master Naturalist website to show people from other parts of Texas how to contact their nearest chapter.

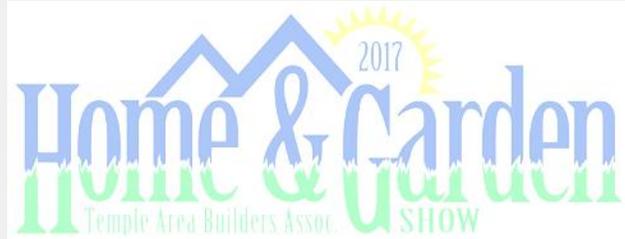
Thanks to Screech, our Owl (aka Lynn Williams), one of our highlights was birds on a stick, called Bird Kabobs which was a game for young people to identify birds. Many recognized more bird species than they first thought. We also had a big snapping turtle shell where kids looked through from front to back (“where did he go?”) and animated puppets manned by our members. Children and adults stopped to talk about the animal skulls, feathers and the wing span banner we had on display. It gave us the opportunity to explain what the Master Naturalist program is, talk to them about our upcoming classes and about the natural environment right out our doors. The interactions also gave us ideas about improving our presence at future events.



We spread the word about the joys of being a Master Naturalist and especially a Central Texas Master Naturalist. Special thanks goes to Gail Hughling for organizing our booth and volunteers, as well as Wade Matthews and Lynn Williams who volunteered throughout the entire weekend.

2018 Home and Garden Show

- Zoe Rascoe



This was our 9th year to have a booth (or two or three!) at the Home and Garden Show in Belton. Thousands of area people come through and many are there because they like being outdoors. Just our kind of peeps. This event has been important to our recruiting efforts to reach out to the right kinds of folks about our Spring Training Course which starts shortly after the Home Show. This was our 3rd year to do a live radio interview from the booth (trainee Tim Hairston heard us and came by) and we had a 10 minute Live Feed Facebook video as well (that was probably too much information.)

As usual, our favorite owl “Screech” (Lynn Williams) was a huge hit in the Kids Zone with all sorts of active games that drew kids and parents alike—fishing for spiders?? We had 3 booth spaces plus a large area in the Kids Zone and 30 of our members helped man those areas for 9 shifts over 2½ days. I believe it was time well-spent! We sold Andreas’ walking sticks, bird houses and unusual dust pans, had Discovery Trunk items and Lynn’s biobox out, and Mary Ann’s amazing bug collection. Thank you to all!!



Choosing Apps for Birding

- Kathy Cantu

Using apps on your digital devices can increase your birding success. Choose apps compatible with your device and operating system. Determine how much data space you have available.

Several electronic field guides are available. Examples are Sibley eGuide, Audubon Bird Guide, Peterson Field Guide and iBird Pro Guide to Birds. If available, first download free version to find the format and features you like. See if you prefer bird drawings or photos. Some have both. I prefer iBird Pro. In additions to drawings it has photos submitted by photographers including Gil Eckrich, an experienced Central Texas ornithologist. Information includes range, nest and eggs, similar birds, behavior and sounds. Most features are available offline. However, it occupies about 1.2 Gb of your data space.

I also use Audubon Owls. It includes quiz and owl games.

Merlin Bird ID is an app where you input the size, color, location or photo and it will try to ID your bird. i-Naturalist will ID birds from your photo. With ChirpOMatic you can record and submit a bird song and it will try to identify the bird but so far I haven't found it to be successful.



eBird app from Cornell allows you to report your bird sightings from the field but I find it easier to report using their website.

I use Altimeter app to determine my GPS coordinates so I can report or remember the exact location where I find a bird. I use Google Maps to find locations provided in the TPWD Wildlife Trails maps. Then I use Texas State Parks app to find a place to stay.

Technology is my assistant but not a substitute for my favorite bird guides.

Happy birding!



Audubon Bird
Guide



eBird



iBird Pro



iNaturalist

Macroinvertebrates in Captivity

Final Chapter

By **Richard McCarthy**

This is a continuation of the story of my friend, Giant Water Bug, that appeared in the December edition of the "Tracker Newsletter".

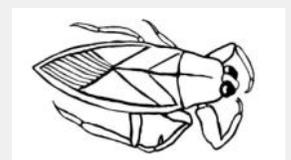
The Bug died on November 15th after being in captivity since September 16th. During this period, he ate only one fish on September 21st as I previously reported. He was provided with two different species of fresh water aquarium fish during his captivity. One of which was the same species that he had previously devoured.



The two front legs are extremely strong to hold prey including: fish, frogs and other large prey.

The probe is used to drill into the prey and insert an enzyme to turn the interior into liquid which is then sucked up as if using a straw. Both the legs and proboscis fold under the head of the bug and are not visible when bug is swimming. This truly an amazing beautiful bug.

Photo by Richard G. McCarthy



Fly Fishing Myths for Texas...

And a few facts for Central Texas

- Andreas Wooten

There is no fly fishing in Texas.

MYTH!!!! There is a great deal of fly fishing all across Texas and fly fishing is growing in popularity across the state and the south in general. Fly fishing gear manufacturers are expanding more and more into warm-water and saltwater fly fishing gear and components.

There are no trout to fly fish for!

MYTH and FACT! Most areas of Texas do not have water and lake temperatures consistently low enough to support healthy trout populations, however at certain times of the year, usually December, TPWD stocks many streams and lakes across Texas with rainbow trout (Nolan Creek in Belton being one of them). The Guadalupe river supports a small population of trout year-round, mostly rainbow.

Bass are too big and aggressive to catch fly fishing!

MYTH! The bass pictured below (15.25in and 1lb 9oz) was caught at Dangerfield State Park in N.E. Texas on a 6 weight fly-rod with a top-water fly (a deer hair bumblebee still in his lip). He dove into the weeds under the lily pads and was a good fighter.



Fly-Fishing Myths (continued)

Bass don't like flies, they are too small!

MYTH! Bass, Crappie, Carp, Bluegill, Trout, Pike and almost every other fish on the planet, when tempted with something that looks like food, no matter the size will eat when hungry. Bass prefer other fish but are known to eat frogs, snakes, mice, worms, and bugs of all kinds. Larger bass and catfish have been known to swallow ducklings and other birds as well. Flies come in literally tens of thousands of sizes and colors for all kinds of fish for all times of year.

Fly fishing is too hard and too expensive.

MYTH!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Fly fishing is just another way of putting a lure (a fly) into the water to catch a fish. Everyone who fishes at one time had to learn how to cast a lure and use a rod. Fly fishing is just another technique and another tool for catching fish. As for expense, yes it can be, but no more or less than any other type of fishing. I know people who have \$70,000 boats and \$500 rods and reels to catch bass with and have never touched a fly rod. I got into fly fishing with all the basic items needed (most of which I still use years later) for less than \$250.

So now that we all know fly fishing in Texas is not a myth, here are some fun facts about our own Nolan Creek in Belton.

The Nolan Creek supports a huge variety of fish. It has Shad (a common bait fish), Blue Gill of several species (commonly called bream or even perch but these name are not correct), Green Sunfish, Largemouth Bass, Long-Nose Gar, Catfish and Carp. All of these can be caught on a fly rod. The chances of catching a legal size bass in Nolan creek is slim, but possible!

The day of this year's training class orientation I fished for about three hours at four spots on Nolan Creek from the area near the splash pad in the park down to the W. 2nd Ave bridge before the jail. All told I pulled in about 15 Blue Gill (ill 5), four Green Sunfish and three Largemouth Bass (ill 1 and 4) between 6 and 11 inches long all on a 9 foot, 6 weight fly-rod using just one bottom fly (ill 3) and then one top water fly (ill 2).



Illustration 1: Largemouth Bass from Nolan Creek near The Gin Restaurant.



Illustration 2: Top water (or Dry Fly) common mosquito pattern. This fly catches almost any fish in Nolan Creek except Gar and Carp.

Fly Fishing Myths (continued)

This time of year the water is fairly cold so I wear hip waders, but as it gets farther into spring and summer I will just wear shorts and a t-shirt with some old tennis shoes as the water and air temperature rise. Always watch the weather, Nolan Creek is prone to flash flooding. Never fish in the creek when it is raining or for at least two days after (it will be moving too fast to catch fish or to be safe).

If you are not going to eat the fish, release them as soon as possible. Never drop them; set them back in the water and let them swim out of your hand. If you keep fish make sure you know the TPWD rules on the legal limits for the type of fish you have.

So here are the **FACTS**:

- You can fish in Nolan Creek (just have a license)
- There ARE fish in Nolan Creek.
- Fly fishing in a small creek is possible and a lot of fun.
- With a little practice and time anyone can fly fish and catch fish!!!



Illustration 3: Wet fly (sinks or floats under the surface). This is a MOP fly and will catch anything in Nolan Creek except Gar.

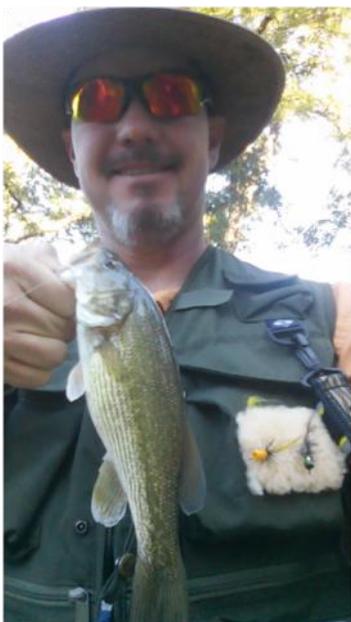


Illustration 4: Largemouth Bass caught in Nolan Creek near I-35.

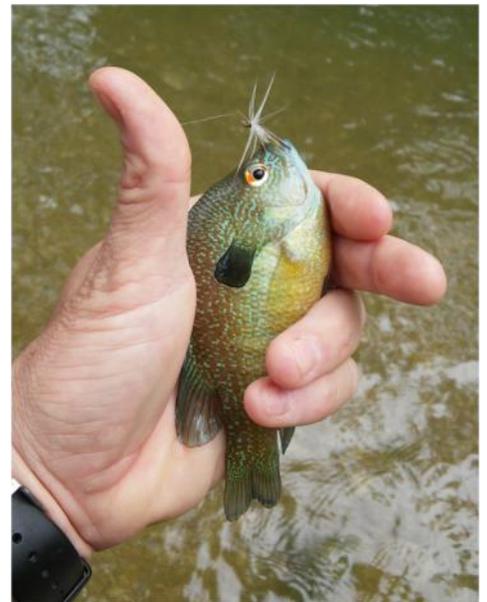


Illustration 5: Long Ear Sunfish—caught near W. 2nd St Bridge

Mother Neff State Park Activities

- Yvonne Eele

Master Naturalists were able to work on the Day Use Area at Mother Neff State Park at the end of February and we needed to hurry with our cutting so that we could be finished with any power tools before March 1st when the Golden Cheeked Warbler nesting season started. On February 20th, Ben Clement, Bill Abright, Yvonne Eele, and Ranger Mike Swearingen accomplished a lot. It was a warm day, so the drizzle didn't stop work and we got the area for picnic tables by the playground cleaned out pretty well, before it started thundering and raining harder and we had to stop for safety sake.

The next few days were wet and cold, so we postponed work for a week. We returned to work on February 26th, Ben, Bill, Marian Riegel, John and Tina Atkins, cut, chopped, dug, dragged brush out of the area and placed picnic tables. Mother

Neff State Park now has a wonderful day use area for picnics under the trees.



Mother Neff has two Spring Break weeks due to it landing on different weeks for Waco and Temple. March 8th was the first spring break hike and it was a great day to be out at the park. Lots of nature was seen and we had about 20 hikers. Hiking through the canyon at Mother Neff is always amazing to me. Listening to the birds and looking at the plants as they start to emerge from their winter rest fills me with joy.



Photos by Daisy Klassy and Yvonne Eele

I Finished the Course, Now What?

- Joe Dorn

A reprint from Joe's early years as a Master Naturalist

Becoming a Texas Master Naturalist takes a little time. The TXMN requires a minimum education, forty hours of 'payback time' and eight additional hours of 'Advance Training' (AT) before becoming a fully certified member. The question all new members have is 'how do I get that?' It is not hard.

Before Sarah and I had passed our first year anniversary of completing the course, we had over 100 hours of volunteer time and a bunch of AT time.

The real benefit of the program requirements is that first you establish a relationship with the members and mentors of your class and then you expand your friendship list as you participate in the various volunteer programs and work with other members.

By virtue of the fact that "you paid your money and took your course" means that you already have something in common with the other members and then it just becomes a tagging process of putting faces, names and specific interests together.



Two Fisted Nikon Swinger

Some of the activities are more physical in their requirements such as trail cleanups and brush removal but most of our events are "Old Folks" friendly and even the physically demanding events have less demanding jobs that need to be done.



My puppet is cuter than your puppet!

We have the opportunity to participate in several public relations events with the schools and parks. We are often asked to give programs at schools or judge their nature-related projects.

The planning, setup, cleanup and presentations take a lot of time also. Things don't just happen. Our meeting and classes are always in need of volunteers.

(Now What? continued) All organizations are in need of new members and name recognition. We do that by participating in events such as the 'Home and Garden Show' and 'The Mother Earth News Fair.' These events are the source of most of our new class members.

So what about the 'Advance Training' requirement? This makes falling off of a log look hard...

Sarah and I have been involved in various naturalists' type groups for over fifty years but Master Naturalists programs have given us more opportunities to attend training sessions and seminars that have a direct bearing on our wildlife conservation efforts than the previous years combined.

Do not miss the Clearwater Ground Water Conservation District annual seminar in November complete with a pretty good meal. We have all become much more aware of the value of our water resources after the past few years and this was an eye opener for me. Did you know that Williamson County gets some of their water from Bell County, depleting our resources?

We also work closely with other groups such as the Native Plant Society of Texas and The Texas Master Gardeners to create sanctuaries for our disappearing pollinators such as the Monarch butterflies. There are several "AT" events available for training on conservation activities such as this. Our CTMN meetings usually have a little 'AT' attached also.

Beware! You can claim volunteer time for work with other groups PROVIDED the time is not used for the other groups requirements. No double dipping.

And occasionally we take a break from the work and learning and just get together. We have a Christmas meeting that is "just for fun". Zoe and Terry Rascoe have made their home available for the last several years. By December, you feel right at home with friends after the activities and training sessions of the preceding months...

Jump in, there is plenty of water in the pool...And that's:

Why I am a Master Naturalist...



Buzzard Boy and his sidekick are on the prow!

Reflections from a Trainee

- Christina Culp

A year ago, I had the opportunity to begin working in the Monarch Waystation at the Temple College campus. When the Monarch butterflies returned to the garden this past Fall during their migration, I was amazed. It was magical to stand in a garden with over a hundred butterflies floating in it! A friend at the college told me about the Central Texas Master Naturalists, and I am excited to be in the 2018 class. A love of growing things, being outside, and learning about nature fostered my interest in becoming a Master Naturalist. Prairie restoration, native plants, soils, and Lepidoptera are a few areas of interest, so I am especially excited about the upcoming Native Prairie Grasses, Entomology and Soils classes. For me, becoming a Master Naturalist is the perfect opportunity to learn more, to be involved, and to make new friends along the way.



Christina knows what butterflies crave!



FARM POND CAFÉ

Open 24 Hours... Seven Days Per Week

MENU

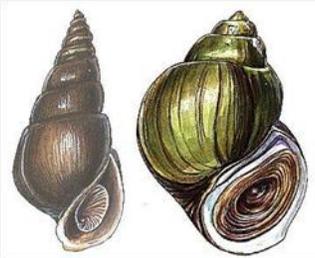


PLANORBID (ORB) SNAILS

Lunged—Oxygen obtained from water or air.

Life Cycle one year or less.

Eats scraped algae and fine detritus.



PLEUROCERID (Left): VIVIPARID (Right) SNAILS—Gilled Snails

Oxygen obtained from water.

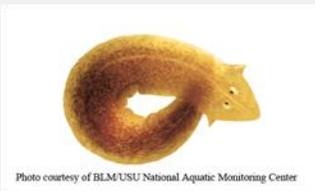
Live for 2-5 Years. Filter feed on algae and fine detritus.



CRAWFISH (also known as: Crawdad, Mud-puppy, Yummy)

Five pair of walking legs.

Hinged Claws on first three pair.



FLATWORM-PLANERIAN

10-20MM long elongated body, no segments.

Triangular head with two eye spots. Moves away from light. Eats soft body invertebrates.

Piercer engulfer.

Menu Changes Monthly!

*Images are from open stock on the internet—no copyrights involved.

Chef: Richard G. McCarthy

CTMN Volunteer and Training Overview

- Ben Clement

2018 is off to a great start for the Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter. Members have already contributed *over one thousand hours of volunteer work* and participated in more than one hundred hours of advanced training. Volunteer and training opportunities have been as varied as each member's interests.

Two events that are very popular with our group are the Mother Earth News Fair and the Home and Garden show. These are yearly events that serve as platforms for us to promote the Master Naturalist program and recruit new members to our chapter. This year we enrolled sixteen inductees into our training program. After completing their course work and fulfilling the required volunteer hours and advanced training, they will become Certified Master Naturalists.

For members who enjoy sharing their knowledge of the outdoors, we have already hosted or participated in several events at Mother Neff State Park. From "First Hike" on the coldest day of the year, to teaching children about animal tracks, herpetology and native plants, Central Texas Master Naturalists have been eager to share their knowledge with members of our community. Our group has also taken its expertise into the classroom with the aid of "Discovery Trunks." These trunks have really excited kids and encouraged them to learn about nature through hands-on activities.

Our chapter has also dedicated many service hours to projects that continue throughout the year. These opportunities include:

Mother Neff State Park: Our members are involved in trail work, brush clearing and other activities to make the outdoor experience even more enjoyable for all.

Nolan Creek Cleanup: This is a service we provide to the city of Belton to keep the creek and hike and bike trail free of litter.

Bell County Museum: Members maintain grounds and landscape with native Texas plants.

Salado Workdays: We have many activities to beautify the Salado area.

Zebra Mussel Monitoring: Members monitor various lakes on Fort Hood to detect first contact with the invasive Zebra Mussel.



In addition to all of this work, members have invested many hours in advanced training to further their knowledge in areas that interest them.

A few of the advanced trainings chosen include:

Army Corps of Engineers Pond Project: Members have refurbished and now maintain the artificial pond at Corps headquarters in Belton.

Bird Banding Demo: Attendees observed how birds are extracted from mist nets, and essential measurements are taken.

Flying Wild: This program is focused on migratory birds and is designed to inspire young people to discover more about the natural world.

<http://www.flyingwild.org/>

SkyWarn Training: Weather spotters are trained to report severe or hazardous weather to meteorologists who can then make life-saving decisions about severe weather.

<https://www.skywarn.org/local-classes/texas/>

Texas Waters Specialist Certification: This program develops a corps of well-informed specialists who provide education and service dedicated to management of aquatic resources.

<https://tpwd.texas.gov/education/water-education/texaswatersprogram/texaswatersspecialist>

Cornell Ornithology Lab: Trains citizen scientists to understand birds and other wildlife, to involve the public in scientific discovery, and to use our knowledge to protect our planet.

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/Page.aspx?pid=1478>

This is but a sampling of what Central Texas Master Naturalists are accomplishing this year. With a new class of volunteers, we can expect our chapter to give even greater service to our community.



CTMN Advanced Training Meeting—October 10, 2017—Belton, Texas

Camping at Inks Lake State Park

- Mary Ann Everett

Our scouts love this state park. Maybe it's the rocks they can climb and do all sorts of things.

It is funny, as I watched them, using their camp stools as stun guns, as one team tried to take prisoners from the other team. Yes, no cell phones, no electronic games, just being outdoors and having lots of fun.

What you may not know is that this park sits on the eastern edge of the Llano Uplift. You can see pre-Cambrian geology, some of the best views in the state.

The pink rock islands jutting through the limestone in the park are metamorphic rock, which is really gneiss (nice). This gneiss is often mistaken for Town Mountain granite, due to the similar color and texture. There is a little granite in the park which appears only as veins cutting through the gneiss. There is a sign on the hiking trail that mentions the outcrops as being made of gneiss, and being among the oldest geological forms in Texas, billions of years. That will get you to thinking, that is a very long time.

What caused the formation of gneiss? Intense heat and pressure applied to the original rocks over millions of years. The original rocks were sedimentary (formed from sand, silt and mud and igneous (granite). The park gives geology hikes throughout the year. That would indeed be interesting. There are gneiss islands that support microhabitats, where wildflowers, grasses, forbs, mosses, lichens, and ferns growing on the rock outcrops. Over hundreds of years, larger rocks are broken down into gravels and soil by the plants that grow in the crevices and at the base of the outcrops.

The other interesting item about this park is what greeted us as we were setting up our tents and our campsite. One of the dads said, "Look at those white skunks!" Yea, right, but low and behold, there were two of them. Not albinos. Beautiful tails, with black streaks running through the fur. They had a black face. They did not seem bothered to have us in the campsite, and they went about their business.

When we checked in on Saturday morning, we asked at headquarters about them, and they said, yes, they were aware of them, and they probably had a family to feed, that is why we saw them. Seems they have adopted the park as their habitat. We never saw them again during our campout. Perhaps others will get a glimpse of these elegant creatures.



Confessions of a Plant Junkie

- May Foreman

I must start this article with a confession. I like plants. I really like plants. When I moved here in 2015, I had to take my daughter-in-law house hunting with me because I tended to look at the yards, not the house. Thanks to her, I found a house that works for me. It also had a yard that no one had done anything to. I had a sunny blank slate. My previous home had several large trees, so all my plants were shade plants. Here I could have all those native sun-loving plants I have always wanted. I couldn't wait to get started. This was August.

My first project was to dig a flower bed around the only plant in the yard; a Crepe Myrtle tree. I planted the bed with Blackfoot and Four-nerve Daisies. Next I dug a flower bed across the front of the house. Here I used a few native but not all because I fell in love with Pride of Barbados.



In September, the Master Gardeners had their fall plant sale. I was the third person in line when they opened the gates and I went a little crazy. I could hardly get all the plants I bought into my car. I had trees, shrubs and perennials. They really had a good selection of native plants that fall. It's not that I just grabbed plants. I had spent days going through my plant books, designing gardens for the back yard, and making a plant list. I couldn't help it that they had everything on my list.

My problem when I got home, was I had a design for the backyard, that at the moment was just wild grass, and a car load of plants that needed to be planted. I knew where I wanted each plant, so I planted all my plants where I wanted them. Then I dug the flower beds around them. I know that's not the way you're supposed to do it, but then I never have followed the rules when gardening. I got some of the beds dug that fall, but the rest I did the following spring. That winter I got my grandson to dig me an asparagus bed and I planted the roots in January. I also put my vegetable garden in.

My previous yard was certified as a Back-Yard Habitat. I wanted to use the same principles in designing this yard. I chose my plants to attract as many birds, bees, butterflies, and other critters as I could. The summer of 2016 was very successful. I had all kinds of bees, butterflies, hummingbirds and other birds. There were also anoles, geckos and an occasional snake.



That fall, however, I realized I missed having a fish pond. I hadn't planned on having one, but it just wasn't the same without a pond. I found a man who used to install ponds. He agreed to install one for me, if I could get it dug. He couldn't do that anymore. My grandson and I dug the pond and he put it in that fall. The next spring when it began to warm up, a Gulf Coast Toad took up residency. I named him Lonesome George because he spent every night for a couple of weeks calling. Soon, two were in my back yard. Then one morning I went outside and there was a toad floating in the pond. When I fished it out, I found it was a female because she had been in the process of laying eggs. I had just planted the pond and there were no floating plants yet. I think she had nothing to hang on to during mating and drowned. I wrapped the string of eggs around some upright plants. Some of them must have been fertilized because I soon had tadpoles.

That was the end of my time in the garden. By the time I got back home, it was August. I missed the end of spring and most of the summer. I was so thankful I had planted native plants because they pretty much took care of themselves. The yard was full of flowers, butterflies, birds, hummingbirds, bees and toads. I still have plenty of toads. They are very vocal right now. It's great.



Cindy Bolch

Cindy Bolch recently transferred to Central Texas Master Naturalists from Cameron, Texas. She trained and certified as a Master Naturalist in 2008 with the El Camino Real Chapter in Milam County. This energetic, nature-wise lady, also known as the bat lady, hit the ground running and in less than 9 years earned *over 5000 volunteer hours*.

Recertification pins and milestone pins adorn Cindy's TMN lanyard. While avidly learning new things about our natural resources, Cindy served as membership chair and treasurer of her chapter.

When asked about her interests in nature, Cindy replied saying she likes 'most things that fly'. Backyard birds hold a special place in her heart as do bats.

As Cindy completed her training she selected bats as her area of interest. Others in her chapter joined her to form a committee to learn everything they could about bats. Research, field trips, bat conferences, books and more research have qualified Cindy to be a sought after speaker on the subject of bats. She has been a presenter at a Texas Master Naturalist State Meeting, participated in Nature Fests (including one of our Nature Fests) and spoken to numerous audiences.

Her interest in backyard birds led Cindy and her fellow Master Naturalist, Lucy Coward, to begin 'The Bird Tales Project'. These two intrepid Master Naturalists armed themselves with knowledge about backyard birds, gathered tons of scrapbook materials and marched into a local nursing home to brighten the day for many individuals.

Lucy Coward is our most recent transfer member. She also comes from Cameron and trained to be a Master Naturalist in 2009 with the El Camino Real Chapter in Milam County.

A virtual whirl-wind, Lucy loves anything about nature. She relishes learning about specific areas such as monarchs and horned lizards. Lucy earned the title Queen Lizard while doing research on horned lizards in the field. How many people do you know who have taken horned lizard DNA for the purpose of determining where the lizard originated? Meet Lucy and you will know one. She is the 'go to' girl for horned lizard information.

The Monarch Watch has also captured Lucy's interests. She has presented monarch programs in schools, has made talks and has been a presenter at a Texas Master Naturalist State Meeting. In August Lucy is scheduled to present a Monarch Program to our chapter.

Lucy served as president and historian in her previous chapter. She partnered with Cindy Bolch in the Bird Tales Project. While working on many nature projects Lucy has found that the way she sees things has changed. The *2400+ volunteer hours* Lucy has accumulated have made a positive difference in her life.



Lucy Coward

On the Horizon

Be Sure to Check Out the CTMN Weekly E-Mail for a Full Listing of Upcoming Events!

April

April 5: Enter your Volunteer and Advanced Training Hours into VMS

April 10 (AT): CTMN Chapter Meeting: Texas Mountain Lions, Belton Church of Christ 6:00pm

April 13 (V): Discovery Trunks Workday 8:00am-3:00pm, AgriLife Extension Belton

April 13 (V): Discovery Trunks: Tarver Elementary Spring Carnival 5:00pm-7:00pm Contact Mary Ann

April 14 (V): CTMN Mother Neff State Park 4H Group Hike, Contact Mary Ann

April 17: CTMN Training Class Harris Community Center 8:30-3:00pm

April 17-19 (V): Growing up Wild: Thomas Arnold Elementary School, Salado—all day

April 19 (AT): Angler Education Fly Fishing Beginner & Intermediate, Harris Center Andreas W. or Yvonne E.

April 20 (V): Discovery Trunks at Cavazos Career Day, Nolanville 8:00am-1:00pm ,Contact Mary Ann Everett

April 24: CTMN Training Class at Merz Ranch 8:30a-3:00pm

April 27 (V): US Corp of Engineers Pond Project: Belton 11am, Contact Andreas Wooten

April 28 (AT): Angler Ed event at Harris Park, Belton, Contact Andreas Wooten or Yvonne Eele

May

May 3 (V): Bird Discovery Trunks at Venable Village Elementary School Science Night, 4:30p-6:30p, Mary Ann

May 17 (V): Growing Up Wild: Thomas Arnold Elementary School, Salado 8:30am—3:15pm

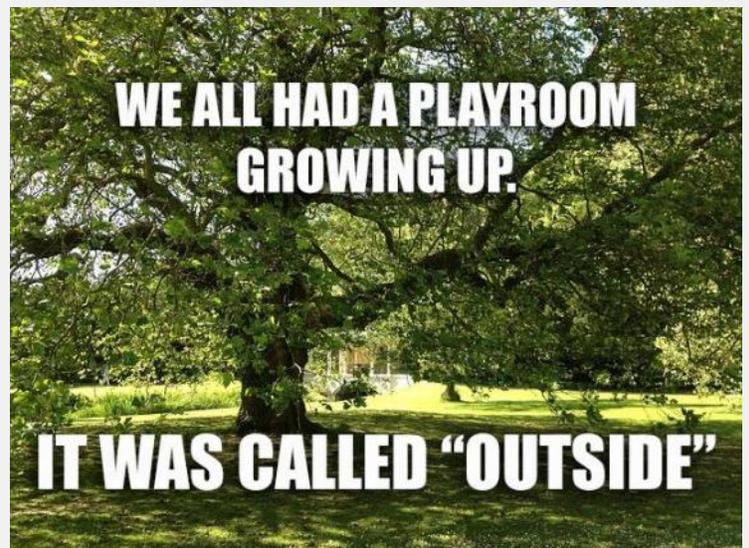


(V) Approved for Volunteer Hours

(AT) Approved for Advanced Training

CHECK US OUT ON FACEBOOK!

<https://www.facebook.com/Central-Texas-Chapter-Texas-Master-Naturalists-116648718373317/timeline/>



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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Please send any news of events, articles or photos of what you're doing or what's going on in your yard or places you visit to:

Zoe Rascoe at trascoe@hot.rr.com

Chapter Advisors

Whitney Grantham,
County Extension Agent, Natural Resources

Derrick Wolter,
Wildlife Biologist, Texas Parks and Wildlife



Falcon resting in a tree!

The Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter

Holds member meetings the 2nd Tuesday of February, April, June, August, October and December at 6 p.m. at the Belton Church of Christ at 3003 N. Main. Location exceptions are in December and June.

PACE meetings are at the Church location at 6 p.m. the 2nd Tuesday of January, March, May, July, September and November. **THE PUBLIC IS WELCOME AT ALL OF OUR MEETINGS.**

***Programs Activities Committees Everything else**

The Board of Directors meets the 1st Tuesday of January, March, May, July, September and November at 3 p.m. in the Board Room at the AgriLife Extension Center at 1605 North Main in Belton.