

The Tracker

Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter April 2019

Photo by Terry Rascoe

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Calendar at a Glance

April 9th—Chapter Meeting
April 11th—Miller Springs
April 19th—Chalk Ridge
April 27th—Mother Neff SP
May 6th—CTMN Board Mtg
May 9th—Miller Springs
May 16th—Union Grove WMA
May 30th Nolan Creek Cleanup

2019 Training Class Kicks Off

Welcome to the incoming 2019 class of Texas Master Naturalist trainees. When all the dust settled, we have 12 people attending our spring training course. This is our chapter's 10th training course! Our course includes more than 20 required classes (field trips and classroom) along with time spent on our own special ecosystem: Blackland prairies. All members are encouraged to attend the classes so you can get to know our newest members.



Andi Bowsher plays along during a game of 2 Truths and a Fib. Turns out we have members who have dated a Playboy Playmate, met the Shah of Iran and worked for the Rolling Stones. Who knew? Which, of course, was the point!



President's Pen



- John Atkins

Howdy folks! Seems like just yesterday that the last newsletter was published, everything in the Chapter has been moving very quickly. We have had some members that have been having health issues and I would like them to know that they and their families are always in our thoughts and prayers. It's also good to have Zoe back safe and sound from Antarctica; it's a little-known fact, but Zoe is actually the same height as an emperor penguin. [Editor's Note: This is true!]



As I stated earlier, we have been very busy. So busy in fact, that we have had to decline working at several events. I hate to do that, but it's better to decline than have no volunteers show up to work an event. Spring is always bad, because everyone wants to hold an Earth Day event, and every teacher wants to get their kids outside to learn about nature. On top of all of that, we always have a new class to train and our own yard/ranch/farm work to do this time of year.

The Home and Garden Show in February was a big success again this year! Zoe's General Store pulled in over \$1000 this year! Big thanks to everyone that donated time and effort into putting together all the bird and bat houses, walking sticks, and assorted other items. A special thanks to everyone at USDA-ARS for all the effort that went into preparing the safflower packets. The sales of these products not only generate income for the Chapter, but it draws in potential students for recruiting. Again, a success story. Lynn Williams retained her crown as Queen of the Kids Zone for another year! The KZ would be a sad place if not for her efforts and all the great members that assist there.

Bill Abright and Ranger McDowell kept many of us busy this past month with work at Mother Neff State Park. Lots of trail mulching, weeding, and blocking of social trails. Marian also gave us a quick West Texas lesson on how to use a rock to repair a pump (if you hit it hard enough, it will submit to your will). Remember, we have Earth Day at MNSP on 27 April, so contact Bill to volunteer.

Cont...

President's Pen cont.



John Burns has done an outstanding effort in re-energizing our work at Miller Springs this year! I think he has identified enough invasive work to keep us perpetually employed there. For the first workday he found a giant patch of Ligustrum, where even after 2 hours of work, we had hardly made a dent. Since it was located on a main trail, it also gave us an opportunity to explain what we were doing to numerous hikers; I think most of them thought we were carving out marijuana patches (the helicopter circling overhead may have reinforced this idea!).

Thanks to the hard work and dedication of Andreas Wooten, we are finally doing something we haven't done in years: working projects at Stillhouse and Belton Lakes. Ben has already taken the lead and photographed and geotagged numerous repair items at Chalk Ridge Falls. March 21 was the first official workday at CRF. We spent several hours pointing out the work needed there and collecting trash. CRF gets a huge amount of traffic, since it is one of the few places in the area that is free and contains a decent trail system. There is also a lot of vandalism and criminal behavior that occurs there. Hopefully our increased presence will help deter some of that.



It was great to see many of our new students jumping in and helping at the three park workdays! You are starting off on the right foot and setting a great example!

We have also had several great Advanced Training opportunities recently. I think everyone found the presentation by Michael Mayes to be one of the most interesting talks we have had in a long time. Who knew that one of the most informed people on the "Black Cat" phenomena lived up the road in Temple? Several of our members were able to attend the Nolan Creek Watershed Training in Harker Heights last month. I would highly encourage everyone to attend a watershed workshop if you haven't in the past. I was very happy to see numerous members at the Bell County Museum for the Gault Site movie and presentation. I was literally standing room only and the questions would have continued all night if they would have been allowed.

We have a lot more work to do the next couple months, so everyone please keep plugging away. Before you know it, we will have a new batch of recruits raring to go and cut invasives!

Photo: Trainee Jessica Dieter gets a hand (well, a stick) from John up a river bank at Chalk Ridge Park—photo courtesy of Tina A.

COUNTING BIRDS BECAUSE BIRDS COUNT

- Kathy Cantu

Bird lovers of all skill levels have the opportunity to participate in four annual bird counts.

The Christmas Bird Count by National Audubon Society began at the turn of the century to replace the holiday tradition of shooting birds. The first year there were 25 circles finding 90 species. Each count circle has a 15 mile diameter. Our count circle is centered at the



*Male Red-winged Blackbird near Salado
Blackbird photos by Kathy Cantu*

Armstrong Community Center. Birds can be seen or heard. This year in 24 hours we found 115 species including a rare American Bittern.

The Great Backyard Bird Count by Cornell Lab is held worldwide one weekend in February. 224,781 participants



Difficult to identify female Red-winged blackbird.

found 6699 species. Colombia had the highest number. Texas was second in submitting the most

checklists. The Northern Cardinal was the top bird reported. Highest number of birds was Red-winged Black Bird. Birds are reported on the e-bird app or website.

Global Big Day is May 4 for birders around the world to find as many species as possible. Last year 30,000 birders found 7025 species.

The Great Texas Birding Classic by TPWD is April 15-May 15. Teams of 3-5 compete in various categories including youth and visually impaired or a Big Sit with any number in a 17' circle. There will be one at Mother Neff State Park on May 4th.

Data from bird counts provides a gauge of long term bird health and population status and helps develop strategies to protect them.

Come join the count. Happy birding!



Northern Cardinal by Terry Rascoe, Temple backyard

FOLLOWING THE DATA TRAIL

- **Nicole Norelli**

With all the new technology available, citizen science has become a staple of the research community. Armed with nothing but a smartphone, just about anyone can identify species, capture photos, and record data without breaking a sweat.

There are numerous ways to collect citizen science data, and just as numerous is the number of studies and opportunities you can contribute to. So, where does all this data go and how is it used?

Few citizen science initiatives are more well known than bird counts. The National Audubon Society (NAS) hosts the Christmas Bird Count, founded in 1900 as the longest-running community science bird project in U.S. history, as well as the Great Backyard Bird Count and the Breeding Bird Surveys.

“The data collected by observers over the past century allow Audubon researchers, conservation biologists, wildlife agencies and other interested individuals to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across North America. When combined with other surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey, it provides a picture of how the continent's bird populations have changed in time and space over the past hundred years.” - NAS, Christmas Bird Count

If birds aren't your thing, there are still countless ways you can contribute! The data collected for whatever project you are interested in is used to better understand a chosen region or species and identify patterns over time. Identifying these patterns requires data covering a huge scale, both in time and in geography, something that most scientists can't do alone.

So pull on your boots and get hiking, you never know what is left to be discovered!

Resources

<https://www.audubon.org/conservation/history-christmas-bird-count>

<http://gbbc.birdcount.org/>

<https://www.nationalgeographic.org/idea/citizen-science-projects/>

SUPER BLOOM

Nicole Norelli

2019 is a year for flowers. After record winter rainfalls in both Texas and California, this spring has arrived in a burst of color and the hum of bees. Super Blooms are usually quite rare but with changing climates this process has become less predictable. Ideal spring bloom conditions in the deserts of the southwest occur when we experience unusually rainy fall and winters seasons, bringing a dormant landscape out of drought and back to life. However, these weather patterns are becoming more difficult to predict and with increased foot traffic to these beautiful places, the viable seed bank could be compromised in future years.

Despite California Poppies painting the hillsides a sunset orange for miles and miles, this is still a very delicate ecosystem. Most wildflowers, poppies especially, thrive best in undisturbed soils and are usually perennial, which means they must be allowed to go to seed in order to see flowers in following years.

Here in Texas, our beloved bluebonnets and paintbrush, primrose, daisies, and more are also having a good year. We even have a super bloom of our own down in Big Bend!

Wildflowers are one of our most important natural resources. Not because we can mine them for energy or harvest them for market, but because every couple of years it reconnects an increasingly urbanized state with its wild heart.



Photo: Cathy Alba



Photo: James H. Evans



Photo: Kara Gerbert

As the southwest region of Texas weaves in and out of drought and extreme weather conditions, super blooms are still a rare and special sight. The steady, moderate rain through this fall and winter soaked the landscape and gently brought waiting seeds to life. The warm temperatures (but not too hot!) we are getting this springs means the flowers came out in full force quite early and will hopefully stay with us a little longer than usual.

However, our Texas wildflowers are suffering the same fate as those in California. Adults, children, pets, cars, (even a helicopter!) and more going off trail to get the perfect photo, smashing flowers along the way and disturbing the soil. The Texas Bluebell has all but disappeared due to over-picking. Picking the flowers or damaging them in any way means less seed available for the next year!

So, What Are The Rules?

Laws and legalities aside, **Leave No Trace** applies to anything you do in public lands, including enjoying wildflowers. Obey all posted signs and traffic laws. Only use **official** trails and make sure you are aware of where you park your car, place your feet, and let your children and pets run! If you still enjoy social media (it's okay, it can be a learning tool too!) try using [#nowildflowerswereharmed](#) and include information in your post about the wildflowers and why it is important to work together to protect our public spaces!



Walker Canyon California, 2 weeks apart



Photo: @worldsokayesthiker



Photo: @annanevaresimages

You don't have to be an Instagram influencer with thousands of followers to make an impact. If even a single person sees you leave the official trail, they'll follow, and then someone will follow them, and so the cycle goes on.

As Master Naturalists, we set an example for the people around us, including children. We must always remember that our impact overcomes our intent.

We all interact with our environment with care, knowledge, and good intentions but, even when we know the environment and move carefully through it, other people may not be so cautious following in our footsteps. If you absolutely must move off trail, perhaps for maintenance or collecting data, try to educate those people who pass by!

You are never alone. You will never be the first or the last person to move through a place.

Though we should respect these spaces with or without laws, please note it is illegal to pick California poppy in California with fines up to \$1,000 per flower! It also is illegal to pick, cut, or destroy wildflowers or plant life in any state or national park.

It is also illegal to block roadways or damage public lands, which means no illegal parking or driving off road. Drive safely and respectfully of other people and state or park employees!

Though it's not illegal to pick bluebonnets on public land in the state of Texas, it is still illegal to pick them from private property or state parks, so the best rule of thumb is to leave them be no matter where you are!

Class Notes

Meet the Class of 2019!

2019 Class



Our Class Directory

				
Andi Bowsher	Bert Peeples	Bob Shepherd	Dick Stark	Elizabeth Moses
				
Gail Wilson	Jean Solana	Jenna Chappell	Jessica Dieter	John Ziegeler
				
Paula Finely	Sven Bowsher			

Invasive Species Control

- John Burns



We had our first workday at the Miller Springs Nature Center on March 14th. It was a very successful day with 9 people showing up to work. We even had two members of our new class attend the workday. The day began with a little training from the Temple Parks and Recreation folks so we would be able to apply herbicide. This training and the herbicide provided by the Temple Parks provides a necessary tool to help with the control of invasive species.



Following the training we all headed out to the Green Pond trail. This area has been overtaken by Waxleaf Ligustrum (*Ligustrum chinensis*). The team was eager to begin this much needed work and wow did they ever get to work! The group cut down and treated with herbicide approximately 350 Waxleaf Ligustrum. We also pulled up roots and approximately 800 smaller Waxleaf Ligustrum. This is important as we don't need to apply herbicide when we are able to pull up the plant versus cutting it down.

All of this work was done in about 3½ hours. I don't mind telling you, I was impressed with the efforts of these awesome men and women. **Great Job!**

The next opportunity to help with this effort will be **April 11th, 9:00am.**

Come out and join us!

L to R: John Atkins, Ben Clements, Sue Valdez, Wade Matthews, Melissa Jue, Joan Stanley, Bert Peebles, Tina Atkins.



Chalk Ridge Falls Park

If you aren't familiar with this park, it is definitely worth exploring. Chalk Ridge Falls Park is located on US Army Corps of Engineers land at Stillhouse Hollow Lake, accessible off FM 1670. Our Master Naturalist Chapter has officially partnered with USACE (thanks to member and Ranger Andreas Wooten for facilitating) to help keep public areas accessible and maintained. The first work day under the new agreement was on March 21st at Chalk Ridge Falls. Showing up to assess needs and pick up litter along trails were John Burns, Ben Clement, Jessica Dieter (one of our new trainees!), Ward and Sue Critz, and John and Tina Atkins.

If you haven't discovered this jewel of a nature escape, we recommend a visit! The park is open for free every day. The trail is about 3 miles out and back, but there are loops to extend your hike. Here is a [map](#) if you aren't a wanderer. If you missed this opportunity to volunteer, mark your calendar for April 19th at 9:00am and May 16th at Union Grove Wildlife Management Area. We are pleased to partner with



@Elizylinz Photography

Photo by Elizy Linz

USACE - Master Naturalists are well-equipped to assist in these kinds of outdoor spaces. A fun fact: the first volunteer project for our newly-chartered chapter in 2010 was to plant 5000 sedges in a wetlands area at Union Grove. USACE had the plants, but not the manpower to get them planted. We had manpower but needed a project. Perfect.



Photos by John Atkins unless otherwise noted

Chalk Ridge Falls Park



Above: gate repairs along with downed fences, trail erosion and bridge maintenance are on the project list.



Sue Critz, Ward Critz, Ben Clement and John Burns pick up litter left behind by others. Please take out whatever you brought in. That gives us more time to work on trail maintenance projects.



Mother Neff State Park

1680 TX Hwy-236, Moody

- **Bill Abright**

Bill can be reached at b_abright@yahoo.com

First-Ever MNSP Earth Day Festival Saturday, April 27th

CTMN will be participating at the Earth Day Festival by hosting a booth of nature-related activities for all ages (Hello Discovery Trunks!). The event runs from 10am-3pm. Jean Solana, one of our new trainees, but a regular at Mother Neff, will be heading up our crew at the festival. If you are interested in helping share what we know about conserving our natural resources and fostering curiosity about nature, please contact Bill at the email address above.



Mother Neff State Park

Cont

Now that our chapter is back on a regular schedule volunteering at Mother Neff State Park, projects are starting to roll in. February Work Days entailed some old fashioned manual labor, but there was a great crew that showed up to help. Matter fact, the crew was so hard working and efficient that they were able to



finish a trail project in 45 minutes that James, the Head Ranger, thought would take at least a day. He was quick to come up with additional work for us (spreading mulch on trails).

James has assured us that there are many additional projects that we can help him with such as identifying plants, and addition signs for park visitors, and more trail maintenance. Another task is one we are working to train even more members to do: removal of invasive plants. That job will never run out! James will also be offering chemical handling training on use of Tordon—the sauce of choice for the tough invasive plant battle. Thanks to Tina for providing photos of our latest efforts.

MOTHER NEFF EARTH DAY CELEBRATION

COME OUT TO MOTHER NEFF STATE PARK TO HELP US CELEBRATE EARTH DAY. THIS EVENT WILL BE HOSTING EDUCATIONAL TABLES WITH ACTIVITIES FOR ALL AGES. COME OUT AND ENJOY A DAY OF FUN IN THE SUN!



APRIL 27TH 10 AM - 3 PM

1680 TX-236, Moody, TX 76557

THE PROGRAM IS FREE; HOWEVER, PARK ENTRANCE FEES DO APPLY. \$2 PER PERSON 13 & OLDER. CHILDREN 12 & UNDER ARE FREE.





- Zoe Rascoe

Maybe you are a numbers person. Maybe you are a people watcher. Maybe you had a career in sales. Maybe you like to dress up. Any of those interests could have been met at the annual Home & Garden Show. This was our 10th year to have a booth for our chapter (well, we're 10 years old, too!) It is our best opportunity each year to reach a lot of nature-minded people in one location to tell them about the Texas Master Naturalist program. Our efforts there pay off in new recruits—our only way to grow our chapter! The Homebuilders Association has been very good to us with no rental fees and a good booth location. We even get an adjacent booth on occasion if it hasn't been sold by showtime. This year, we were extra lucky. The night before we opened, we were offered a 300 sq ft booth (larger than my first apartment) on a busy aisle. SCORE! We needed to have a nice booth and we delivered. The extra open space allowed us to visit with many more people at once.



We were also able to display our items for sale where they could be seen more easily. Triple play! The Home Show organizer was so impressed with our booth and the traffic it attracted (yikes, traffic jam at time), she said we will likely have that prime location every year. We also have a large presence in the Kids Zone in the same building. Lynn Williams (aka Screech) brings such fun games and activities that it has gained us more space as well.

The Chapter Booth and our Kids Zone area

had to be fully staffed for the whole weekend event. So here are the numbers: 31 of our members worked 16 shifts over 2½ days. Some worked the entire event. We made direct contact with 607 people in the booth and 304 in the Kids Zone. The large space required a new position: People Counter. That sort of data



is extremely important as it is a metric for the grant that funds our state program. We sold over \$1000 in nature items made and donated by our members (especially Andreas). Several ladies stitched up the very cute felt finger puppets from kits Lynn Williams put together and we sold several hundred pounds of safflower seed donated by Dr. Hal Collins at USDA-ARS at Blackland (see story in the February newsletter). That money goes toward our chapter projects. who helped in many ways!



Bill Abright and Mary Ann Everett



A young visitor uses her crafted binoculars to search for the hiding screech owl.



Mollie made the run for free plungers while the rest of us manned the fort.



Ummmm?

FUN FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY!

JOIN US AT THE ASSEMBLY HALL

Saturday & Sunday
2/23 2/24

Parental Supervision Required



A biggo **THANK YOU** to all who built, sewed, packed up, hauled, setup, purchased our goods at full price, stood for hours and talked, tallied, made change, played games, dressed in costumes, ran for free plungers so we didn't have to leave the booth, disassembled, packed again and hauled back. And are willing to do it again next year.



Marilyn Whitworth brought a Lizard Race T-shirt to show Screech (Lynn Williams) who had rigged up lizard races for this year.



Top: Screech's Gameland. Below: Melissa Jue, Linda Fairlie, Sarah Dorn and Screech take a breather.



Dale Hughling patiently instructs a Kids Zone visitor in proper casting technique. Although Dale is patient in any situation.

Yosemite National Park *California*

- Linda Fairlie

We. Hiked. Half Dome!!

Oh man, what an amazing day!



Let me start by saying I had a lot of fear before I started this hike, but once we got started, the fear was gone. Also, I really never expected to make it up the cables, and even John had his doubts for me, but I did it. Rated extremely strenuous, it's a 16-mile hike with a 5000-foot elevation change.



Up and out the door of the tent cabin by 4:20 a.m., we hiked for about 40 minutes with just a flashlight to the trail head and up a ways. By 5:00 a.m., the light was off.

The beginning of the hike was relatively easy. It was a wide, paved path with a bit of an incline. We could see the river to our right, and there was some amazing white water as we ascended. We could hear the roar of a freight train as we hiked. Finally, after about 2 miles, we made it to the bridge at the bottom of Vernal Falls. That's the first waterfall.

Suddenly we got to the steep stairs. According to the website, there are 600 of these, with switch backs. There were places I had to use my walking stick to just get up the step. John insisted that I go in front of him. He wanted to stay with me and watch out for me.

Eventually we got to the top of Vernal Falls. It was so powerful! The water was churning and bouncing as it fell off the cliff. Onward we hiked. We hiked another steep part and an hour or so later made it to Nevada Falls. This waterfall sounds like a jet engine. There is a dip behind the water and it just gleams in the sunlight. Steep steps took us to the top of Nevada Falls.

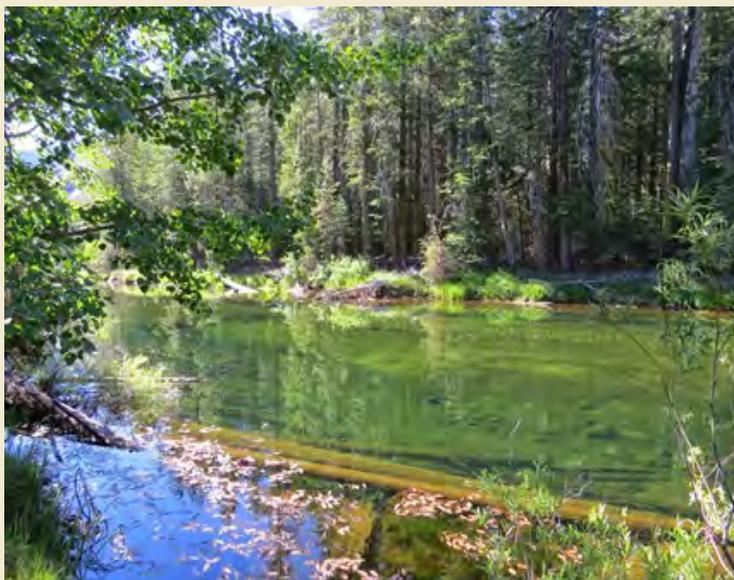
We were only about a third of the way to the top. The next part of the trail takes you up the Little Yosemite Valley, through trees, next to the Merced river which forms the waterfalls. John and I each took two liters of water with us and a water filter.



Yosemite *cont*

There are 4 miles of this part of the trail. It went up steadily but it was less strenuous. We stopped at a fork in the path at the last place to get water, and refilled our bottles. I was almost empty. The water in the river is so clear you can see the bottom at any point. I watched a fish swim around where John was working, but every time I pulled up my camera it ducked behind some weeds. Camera shy, I guess.

We saw a deer beside the path, and we saw 3 little turkey chicks. What are turkey babies called anyway? Chicks? They were following momma, who was out of view. John caught a glimpse of the momma. Most of our hike had been in the shade. We thought we saw Half Dome nearby and it gave us hope, but we kept hiking for a long time.



Eventually we made it to the steep stairs again, and after struggling up those, we arrived at a shady spot with a lot of people resting, and one announced to me, "Welcome to Sub Dome!" Okay! I didn't know there would be a Sub Dome but it sounded important! John showed the Ranger there our permit and his ID. I hadn't brought my ID but she let us go anyway.

There was a group gathering there who all seemed to be together. One man who I was sitting next to, had yellow feathers sticking out of the top of his backpack. He was feeling very nervous, and was thinking he was not going to be able to make it any further. I told him, my plan is to just go until I can't, then stop. He continued on.



Now the hard part. Steep stairs, yes more of them, but no shade, and it's already 11:30. We had hiked about 8 miles already, and it was hot. I was taking a break about every 50 steps. Suddenly from out of nowhere we were at the cables. Holy cow! The people looked like little ants and I was right there! John bribed me with M&M's to continue.

Yosemite *cont*

Now, realize that I'm on Atkins, so an M&M is a big deal. I had brought my kayaking gloves with the fingers cut out, but John hadn't brought any. Luckily there was a pile of discarded gloves that he could choose from and he grabbed a mis-matched set of ratty old gloves. It is a good thing he did. By this time, it was about noon. We went for it. Now imagine a set of movie theater ropes that cordon off an area - not the soft squishy kind but made of metal cable. Not chain. There were two sets of these about three feet apart, and at almost every set of poles there is a 2X4 across the bottom of the poles. The incline of the rock is between 45 and 60 degrees. You have to pull yourself up with hands and feet from pole to pole. I was doing okay, but the strain in my arms started to get to me. That is also the part that was the steepest. I started feeling nauseous, dizzy and thought I might pass out. I turned and sat down on the rock and held on for dear life. I drank some water, fully aware that I was holding up the whole line. See, there is only one way up and one way down that mountain. You can't go any faster than the person ahead of you and if someone is coming down, you have to move to the right at a pole and hang on while they pass you in this narrow space.



At the top we felt like we were at the top of the world! There was a 360 degree view of the entire Yosemite area. We took pictures, we ate our cheese, nuts and M&M's, explored the top a bit. I have learned that John is a lot like my daughter Becky, in that they both never met a stranger. He can talk easily to anyone. Me, I just offer to take people's pictures as a group for them. It was a real celebration at the top. The guy with the feathers in his backpack made it up to the top. He took the feathers out and it was an Indian headdress!! He put it on, and I took his picture for him sitting at the end of the peak. Awesome!



Photos by Linda Fairlie

My Sub-Urban Backyard

(aka—all those slimy critters mom hates)

- Andreas Wooten

Editor's Note: Third in a series (Here, birds moving in).

So here we are yet again, taking a tour through my sub-urban back yard. Its been a short spring but the critters are out in big numbers.

I suppose what makes my yard interesting to me is that it's in a sub-division, near a good size road and not all that different from most neighborhoods that average people reside in. The difference is my wife and I make a fair amount of effort to bring in those chance encounter critters and keep the regulars coming back.

I have a lot of trees, we have two bird baths, raised garden beds and a 350 gallon pond, we call it the "big pond" (made of old railroad ties). There is a smaller 88 gallon tank on the back porch.

Between the hiding spots in the wood, constant water supply, a wide variety of native plants, some non-natives (yes we have them, but on a short leash!) and all the vegetables, I have a fair amount of visitors of the non-human type.

This is the nest of a little wren on the back porch (the living room window is just to the left of the photo). I have not been able to get photo of mom and dad, but they have built in this "planter" for the past four years. We tried plants the first two years but they just tore them out and built a nest every time. So now we just store fish food and mosquito repellent in it.



My Sub-Urban Backyard *cont*



Check out my six-pack!! No not beer and most certainly not my abs. These are the wren eggs on the back porch. This is the most we have ever seen. Usually 3 or four but six is a first.

What a nice shade of blue! Very CTMN! This nesting spot is just outside the dining room window and just a few feet above the dog's watering bucket.

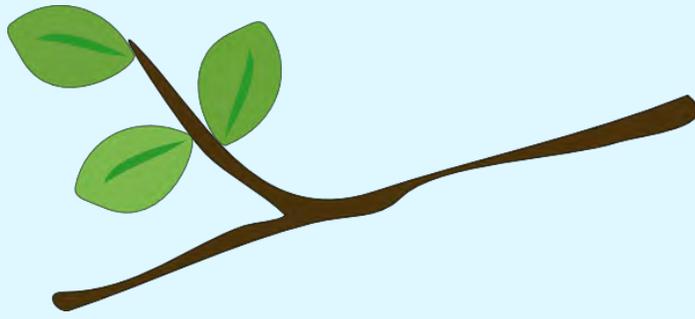
This is daddy House Finch outside the bedroom window on our only feeder. This is about 15 feet from the nest just around the corner of the house. We only fill it up about once a week. I am sure that the squirrels get half of it. But the birds get enough in the end.

There is a morning dove just below the feeder. Doves are really sweet but dang if they are not as dumb as box of rocks. We have just built a dove nesting box near the feeder. We will see if they can figure it out. Its



funny to watch them try and use the feeder. They are too big but keep trying but eventually give up and go to the ground.

Texas Parks and Wildlife partners with the [National Wildlife Federation](#) to certify backyards in Texas as "[Wildscapes: Backyard Habitats](#)". The website provides ideas on the "big three" necessities to sustain wildlife in your backyard that Andreas mentions. TPWD is not able to process applications right now (funding!), but NWF has an online application at the link above. -Editor



Out on a Limb

- Mary Ann Everett

Tree Description: Up to 30 ft tall—multi-trunked large shrub or small tree.

Blooms: Profuse golden yellow, small, spiky, ball-shaped blooms in Feb– April. Intensely fragrant.

Fruit: Rounded cylinder pods less than 3” long that don’t shatter on ripening.

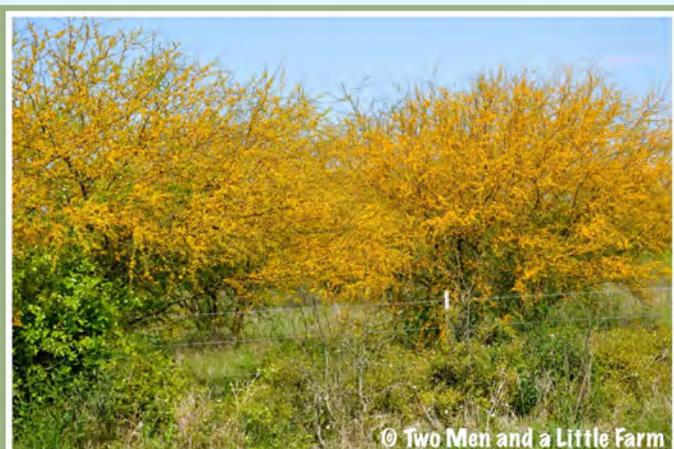
Location: Full sun, grows on heavy, wet clays and clay loams but adapts to most soils if well-drained, including alkaline. Common on rangeland and pasture from South Central to South Texas.

Leaves: Feather-like, 1-4” long with tiny leaflets just 0.1” long and too numerous to count. Branches armed with paired spines up to 2” long. Ouch. Semi-evergreen.

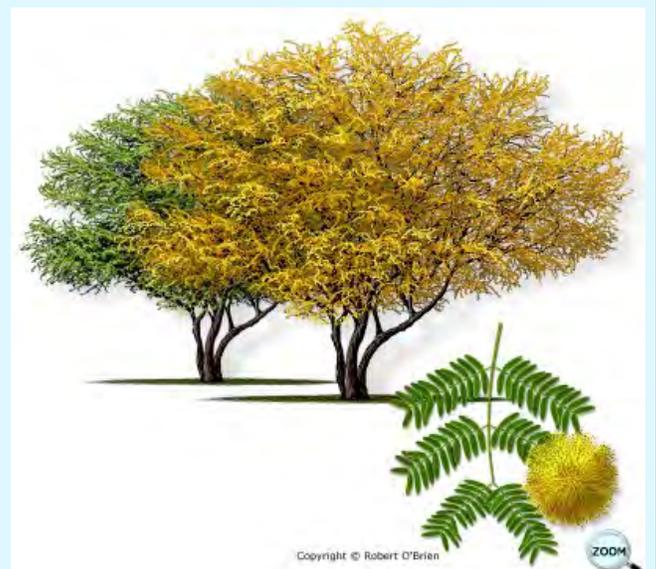
Heat & Drought Tolerance: Very high. Extremely durable plant and aggressive.

Interesting Fact: Flowers were collected to manufacture French perfume in the 19th century. Designated a Firewise native.

[Click here for name of the tree!](#)



© Two Men and a Little Farm



Copyright © Robert O'Brien

ZOOM

Information TAMU Aggie Horticulture & TX Forest Service

Our First Canine Master Naturalist?

- Linda Fairlie

Last year I retired for medical reasons, and ended up getting, and began training a service dog so that I can still go out and about in public. Her name is Sofi, and she has begun to go everywhere I do. She is my Junior Master Naturalist, and has only been on a few of my adventures so far, but she will be on many more.



This past fall, my husband and I went to Lost Maples state park. This park has a large number of Uvalde Bigtooth Maple trees, which are a riot of color, *in Texas*, in the Fall. The park is northwest of San Antonio, and north of Uvalde. There are limestone cliffs, including Monkey Rock, and we crossed back and forth over a creek. We had to carry Sofi over some of the water as it would have been over her head and was fast moving.

The weekend we went, you could tell we just missed the color on the trees

because there was colorful leaf litter on the ground everywhere. The hiking was good. There are 10 miles of hiking trails, all levels of difficulty, including one that follows a 2,200 foot cliff. John went down to the edge of the cliff, and called Sofi, who leapt down a 3 foot rock to join him at the edge. My heart went into my stomach when she did that!



Our First Canine Master Naturalist?

Con't



We saw a lot a variety of butterflies. There is good birding there, and in the spring lots of wildflowers. We went specifically to see the fall colors, and enjoyed it. It is closer than McKittrick canyon at Guadalupe National Park and we were able to see the red, yellow, orange, and gold leaves that these trees provide in the fall.

Editor's Note: You may have seen Sofi accompanying Linda at our meetings or when Linda volunteers at our nature projects. I thought it would be good to let Linda introduce Sofi to everyone. You may know that service dogs are working and it's not appropriate to pet them on the job. If you are someone who just has to pet a doggie (me!), ask Linda—Sofi gets time off and appreciates a scratch behind the ears when she's off duty.



**SAVE
THE DATE!**

Farm and Field Day 2019

Learn about innovative agricultural techniques and technology

May 23, 2019

8:30 AM — 1:00 PM

Join us for our annual farm and field day to learn about the latest research of special interest to:

- ◆ Farmers
- ◆ Ranchers
- ◆ Pollinators
- ◆ Extension Specialists
- ◆ Malters
- ◆ Conservationists
- ◆ Future Farmers



This event is FREE and open to the public!

Presenting the latest research on:

- ◆ Precision Agriculture
- ◆ Precision Conservation
- ◆ Alternative Crops (Safflower, Buckwheat, Teff)
- ◆ Malting Barely Crop Production
- ◆ Bats, Birds, Bees and other pollinators
- ◆ Rangeland and Watershed Efficiency

Contact Us

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Good to Know...

Bring Back The Monarchs



Click [here](#) for info on Free Milkweed Plants for Restoration Projects

Jean Solana, a 2019 trainee, captured this great view of a Golden Cheeked Warbler during our outdoor Ornithology class at Ft. Hood. The day spent on base is always a class favorite.



This combination of well-worn cap and well-worn camera can often be seen at our gatherings. If you don't know the owner, you should meet him!



Enter your volunteer hours on time—you're going to want a 2019 golden cheeeked pin!

Coming in our next newsletter: a new recurring feature article called "That's Not Here". We will kick off with Antarctica, because that's REALLY not here. Been someplace with an ecosystem that is not like Central Texas? Let me know and we'll share what you learned with the rest of us.



On the Horizon

Check out the CTMN Weekly e-mail for a full listing of upcoming events!

Photo by Zoe Rascoe—Galveston Ferry Dock

April 2019

Note: standing mtgs and projects

Tues, April 9th: Chapter Meeting—Dr. Hans Lindel, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, “Battling Invasives”
Belton Church of Christ (3003 N Main) 6:00-8:00pm (AT)

Thurs, April 11th: Miller Springs Nature Center Work-Day. 9:00am. jaburns@utexas.edu (V)

Tues, April 16th: 2019 CTMN Training Class, Harris Community Center 8:30am-3:00pm

Fri, April 19th: Chalk Ridge Falls Park Work Day. 9:00am John at jfahhtx@gmail.com (V)

Tues, April 23rd: 2019 CTMN Training Class, Merz Ranch. 8:30am-3:00pm

Thurs, April 25th: Bell County Museum Workday. 8:00am lynn.fleming99@gmail.com (V)

Fri, April 26th: Pond Project at US Army Corp of Engineers Belton Dam Office 9:30am. awwooten101@gmail.com

Sat, April 27th: Mother Neff State Park Earth Day Event. 10:00am-3:00pm Bill Abright b_abright@yahoo.com (V)

Tues, April 30th: 2019 CTMN Training Class. Harris Community Center/Nolan Creek 8:30am-3:00pm

May 2019

Mon, May 6th: First Monday Gardening. Salado Museum. 7:30am-9:30am. (V)

Mon, May 6th: CTMN Board Meeting, AgriLife Extension Office 11:30am-12:30pm All members welcome

Tues, May 7th: 2019 CTMN Training Class, Blackland Research Center 9:00am-3:00pm

Tues, May 9th: Miller Spring Nature Center Work Day. 9:00am jaburns@utexas.edu (V)

Tue, May 14th: CTMN Chapter Meeting. Belton Church of Christ. 6pm-8pm. (AT)

Thurs, May 16th: Union Grove WMA Work Day. 9:00am John Atkins jfahhtx@gmail.com (V)

Tues, May 21st: 2019 CTMN Training Class, AgriLife Extension Building/Miller Spring Nature Center 8:30am-3:30pm

Thurs, May 23rd: Bell County Museum Work Day 8:00am lynn.fleming99@gmail.com (V)

Thurs, May 30th: Nolan Creek Trail Clean up 8:00-9:00am Confederate Park, Belton (V)

Fri, May 31: Pond Project. USACE, Belton Dam Office. 9:30am. awwooten101@gmail.com (V)

(V) Volunteer Hours

(AT) Advanced Training

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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Contributed Photos: John Atkins, Tina Atkins, Kathy Cantu, Linda Fairlie, Andreas Wooten, Jean Solana, Terry Rascoe, Zoe Rascoe

We now have options for recurring feature articles on member visits to National Parks and Texas State Parks, “Fish Tales” (of any kind!), backyard nature, and more. If you have a story to share, just send me your idea.

Zoe Rascoe
trascoe@hotmail.com

Country living in the city, by Kathy Cantu (Temple)



The Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter

Chapter meetings are held the 2nd Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m. at the Belton Church of Christ at 3003 N. Main. Location exceptions are in December (Holiday party!) and June (trainee graduation!) Most meetings include a nature-related program and the public is welcome to attend. Find topic information on our website and Facebook page.

The Board of Directors now meets the 1st Monday of each month from 11:30am-12:30pm in the Board Room at the AgriLife Extension Center at 1605 North Main in Belton.