

# THE TRACKER

Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter August 2020

## The Perseid Meteor Shower Coming to the Sky Near You

- **Zoe Rascoe**

The Perseids are coming to the sky near you. I hope it's dark there. Comet watching goes back for millennia, but we know so much more now than back then. Not near as many people think we are all going to die when astronomical theatrics begin.

The Perseid meteor shower happens every August 12-13<sup>th</sup> when the earth passes through the trailing bits of debris from Comet Swift-Tuttle. That comet was discovered in 1892 and passes by the earth every 130 years or so. It is the largest object known to make repeated passes near Earth. You had a chance to see it in 1992. I did!! Sorry if you missed it. But that debris trail left by the comet gives us the annual Perseids show. They are called the Perseids because from our view here on Earth, they appear to emanate from the Perseus constellation in the northeastern sky this time of year.

My husband, Terry, and I developed our comet chasing habit in 1993. We had heard on the news that the Perseid meteor shower would be visible that night. We went out on our porch to take a look. Within only a few minutes we saw a big green fireball scream across the sky and then others in all sorts of colors. We didn't even say anything to each other – we ran in the house, grabbed the dog and some lawn chairs and drove to the edge of town to park and watch the light show. That year still holds the record for the best Perseids in the US. [This is a video](#) from that year - it's how they looked! We have been out many, many times since for all sorts of comets and associated meteor showers hoping to see a repeat performance.

Here's what I've learned about comet watching: you'll need to stay up late or get up really early. When viewed from here, the trajectory is best after midnight and before sunrise. It's worth it. Use a lounge chair so your neck doesn't get a crick.

### Inside This Issue

Mother Neff State Park	4
Miller Springs Nature Center	6
Chalk Ridge Falls	9
Field Notes	14
Monarch Monitoring	17
Cicada Killer Wasps	27
Out on a Limb	28
2020 Butterfly Count	31
Good to Know	33

*Continued*

## The Perseid Meteor Shower *cont.*

The Perseids are high in the sky. Find a dark place that's not trespassing. The more light pollution you have around you, the harder it will be to see the meteors because they ARE there. If there is much of a moon out, that will mess things up with too much light. It takes about 30 minutes of being out in the dark to get your "night eyes". One blinding flashlight or car headlight can start that process over. Red light doesn't do that (google up why). Have a night sky phone app to help find the Perseus constellation quickly so you aren't looking in the wrong place. We use Sky Guide (it has a nice music option). You won't need binoculars. Have a cool drink and some snacks and lean back and enjoy whatever show the conditions allow.

I got a telescope for Christmas when I was in first grade. It was small, but I was smaller and had to have a stool to look through the eyepiece. I thought looking at the night sky was fascinating. When Comet Hale-Bopp was in the sky for 18 months in 1997, we took my little telescope out in the yard on many nights to have a closer look. And of course, the full moon is always amazing – it's so big! When we moved to Temple in 1999, we met someone from the Central Texas Astronomical Society and we joined the group right away. We went to a monthly star party the group holds at Stillhouse Hollow Lake Dam and took my little telescope. With help from the pros, I could see Saturn and, I think, its rings! But the rings were much easier to see with the big telescopes that were on hand. We became active with the group and Terry and I eventually provided programming for those monthly public star parties for several years. If you have an interest in learning more about the night sky, check out the good folks at CTAS at one of their star parties.

I still have my telescope from first grade, but it's relegated to birdwatching now because we have a much bigger telescope for scanning the night sky. We love planning time outside at night. I hope you will give the Perseids a good try—you might get hooked, too.



*Me with my first grade telescope and phone app checking out Comet NEOWISE in July*

# President's Pen

- **John Atkins**



Howdy Folks! A couple of weeks ago, Zoe asked me what the theme of my article was going to be this month. Theme?!? Usually it is just random thoughts or something that someone says or does that triggers the urge to write. Recently most of my thoughts have been about things that do not belong in this newsletter, so I decided that I would go with a “Lessons Learned” theme instead.

To be honest, most of these are things that I already knew, but were reinforced by the extended staycation. Here are a few of those lessons:

**1. Do not make rules that you cannot enforce or unwilling to enforce.** You have seen this played out from the national level down to city government, but I would like to focus on our local parks and recreational areas. When the government issued stay-at-home orders, most of the local parks and associated headquarters were closed, the exception being boat ramps and wildlife management areas. This was relatively easy to enforce at State Parks, where the access is limited and easily patrolled. This was not so easy for the Corps of Engineers. With reduced manpower and numerous entry points, it was almost impossible to enforce. This led to numerous issues at places like Temple Lake Park, Dana Peak, and Chalk Ridge Falls, such as trespassing, vandalism, and illegal parking. This leads me to the next lesson.

**2. People selectively choose what rules they will obey based upon the level of personal risk they are willing to accept.** Whether it is speeding, wearing a mask, or trespassing, if there is little risk of punishment, do not be surprised when they ignore the rule. The people that entered the parks illegally have already shown little regard for the rules, so do not expect them to respect nature. They have no concern for anything other than themselves.

**3. When all other forms of entertainment are restricted, people flock to nature.** When the gyms and walking trails closed, people headed to the woods. I saw families hiking in the wildlife management areas where I normally only see some hunters and fishermen. All the local fishing spots seemed to be filled daily with folks and the lakes were covered with boats and kayaks. Since God turned the thermostat up last month, people can now be found swimming at every park on Lakes Belton and Stillhouse. Swimming near boat ramps might not be the smartest thing but see lesson two.

# President's Pen cont.



**4. I have been blessed to belong to a chapter that is full of innovative leaders.** Through the web meetings, I have been able to observe other chapters and it quickly becomes apparent that there are two types of chapters. Some can execute their mission with minimal guidance because they understand the intent of the leadership, and then there are others that seem paralyzed and require step-by-step instruction. Glad I belong to the former and not the latter.

**5. The last lesson is that my wife QuaranTina is incapable of staying motionless.** I knew that because I cannot take her hunting or fishing, but the solitary confinement really amplified it! When she was younger, her friends in Hawaii used to call her “Holo Holo”, which in Pidgin basically means “to drive or wander aimlessly about the island”. That is her in a nutshell. She finds excuses every day to drop something off at a friend’s house, go to Bed Bath & Beyond, or have a “social distance” gathering in the backyard. She cleans out her closets one day, packs everything up and moves it to the garage, only to unpack it the next day and return it to her closet. I had to hide the hedge clippers because no tree or shrub was safe from her. Besides, she likes to prune trees at her height and leave 2-inch sharpened spikes which I do not find until they stab me in the head as I pass by on the riding mower.

I am pleased to announce that we will complete our training for the 2020 class in August. It has definitely been a marathon! I am proud of the patience, persistence, and innovation shown by both students and cadre. Now we just need to figure out how to give them a proper graduation!

Well, that is about it for this month. I wish I could tell you when we could meet again as a group, but that depends on the decisions of several agencies. Until then, we will keep working as 10-man teams to execute our mission. Stay healthy and I will see you soon.



*Working outdoors is a natural social distancing technique.*



# Mother Neff State Park

1680 TX Hwy-236, Moody

Bill Abright (2016), MNSP liaison, can be reached at [b\\_abright@yahoo.com](mailto:b_abright@yahoo.com)

*Editor's note: Since events were cancelled and our chapter has only been able to work at MNSP on an individual basis, Melissa Chadwick kindly provided an update on what has been happening at the Park and how we can still help. This is also one in a series of interviews with MNSP staff. We enjoy the privilege of our partnership and want you to know more about those who work there.*

Meet Caraline Cowdrey: She is an intern with Americorps Summer VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) and has been serving at Mother Neff State Park. Caraline is from Decatur, Texas and about to finish a BS in Agricultural Services and Development at Tarleton State University. She has taken classes in a wide range of agriculture and environmental science topics, especially enjoying horticulture and wildlife management. As part of her training, she studied forest protection in the Czech Republic. She would love to work for TPWD or AgriLife Extension and continue to share her love for nature.

Caraline was excited to spend time at Mother Neff State Park where she could work outside and teach others about our natural resources. (Hm—sounds like a Master Naturalist!) She learned that there was a lot more to nature interpretation than she had realized and said “Interpretative work should not be taken lightly!” Initially, Caraline wanted to share everything she knew with Park visitors, but learned it was better to provide resources rather than BE the resource.



*Caraline Cowdrey in the Bavarian Alps, Germany*

During her time at Mother Neff State Park, Caraline worked on Fun Fact Fridays and Trail Tuesdays which were video hikes along the beautiful trails in the park that were shared on the MNSP Facebook page. Caraline also helped out with bird blind and trail maintenance. Thank you Caraline for helping out at Mother Neff State Park!

# Mother Neff State Park *Cont.*

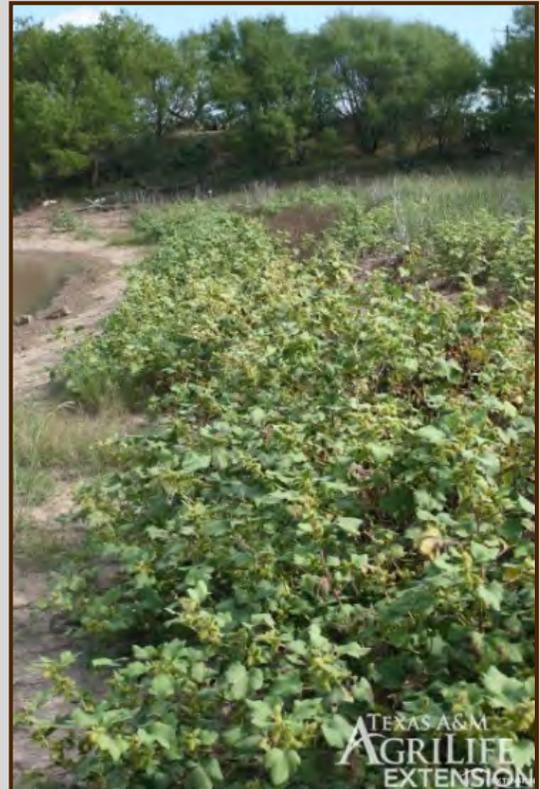
**- Melissa Chadwick, MNSP Superintendent**

## Ongoing Volunteer Opportunities

We are certainly welcoming volunteers. Currently, we are able to have groups no larger than 10. Face coverings are strongly encouraged but not required and of course it's easy to social distance at the Park. Master Naturalist Jean Solana is an early morning regular on cocklebur removal from around the prairie pond. Carroll Adcock and Gail Wilson have pitched in as well. That has been a huge help and looks like their hard work is paying off.



No programs or events are planned at this time until fall, although that is something that is changing regularly, so please contact me if you have any questions.



*Example of cocklebur around a pond*

**Contact Melissa Chadwick, Superintendent at [melissa.chadwick@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:melissa.chadwick@tpwd.texas.gov)**

1. Headquarters native garden maintenance
2. Thistle and/or grass identification help is needed
3. Facebook and social media content
4. Facebook Live interpretive programs

**Contact James McDowell, Lead Ranger at [james.mcdowell@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:james.mcdowell@tpwd.texas.gov)**

1. Painting signs, kiosks, barriers, fences and benches
2. Trail maintenance
3. Johnson grass and other invasive species control
4. Bird Blind maintenance



Hello everyone!

Two days before our June workday, we hit 102 degrees. I was concerned about the temperatures. It appeared we would not be getting much done this month with the high temperatures probably cutting our work time short. Then, to my surprise, a cool front came through and the daytime highs were lowered to the mid 90's. The best thing about the cool front was the low humidity and the morning temperatures were in the low 60's. With the lower temperatures and lower humidity, we were able to put in a good 2 ½ hours of hard work. We had 8 people: Kelly Ann Blanchard, Marilyn Whitworth, Bill Novakoski, Carroll Adcock, Ben Clement, John Atkins, Tina Atkins and me – John Burns. Last month, we started working the upper portion of the Green Pond trail and decided to again work in this area.



*Kelly Ann Blanchard dives in!*

With COVID 19 still very active, we did a little more social distancing by splitting the team up. Some of the team headed down the trail and picked up where we left off last month. John A., Tina, and Kelly Ann worked up hill from this location, more on the West Access trail. This was just up the hillside from the area where the other group was working. So, we had two teams- one working down the trail and up the hill while the other team was working on the top of the hill. One area of concern was between the two teams where we had a rock cliff type formation that appears to be a very good home for snakes. With this concern, I thought it might be best if we leave the area between the two teams on the hillside until next winter when the snakes are not active. Marilyn was doing her usual job of picking up litter. It seems there is never a shortage of litter and Marilyn does her best to clean upper trails that leave the main parking lot.

With COVID 19 still very active, we did a little more social distancing by splitting the team up. Some of the team headed down the trail and picked up where we left off last month. John A., Tina, and Kelly Ann worked up hill from this location, more on the West Access trail. This was just up the hillside from the area where the other group was working. So, we had two teams- one working down the trail and up the hill while the other team was working on the top of the hill. One area of concern was between the two teams where we had a rock cliff type formation that appears to be a very good home for snakes. With this concern, I thought it might be best if we leave the area between the two teams on the hillside until next winter when the snakes are not active. Marilyn was doing her usual job of picking up litter. It seems there is never a shortage of litter and Marilyn does her best to clean upper trails that leave the main parking lot.



*Tina Atkins—ligustrum killer*

# Miller Springs Nature Center *cont.*

OK, it's now July and it is definitely HOT. On July 9<sup>th</sup>, we had our monthly workday. We had 8 workers: John Atkins, Carroll Adcock, Kelly Ann Blanchard, Bill Novakoski, Ben Clement, Andrea Liles, Marilyn Whitworth and myself. Even with the heat, we put in a couple of hours of good work. I think everyone was pretty done in by the end of our work. I know I was DONE!



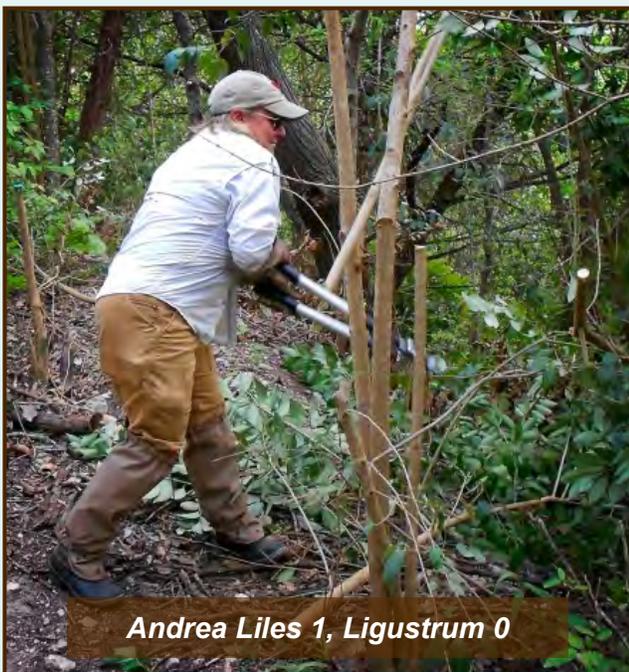
*Carroll Adcock on chainsaw duty*

John Atkins asked me to pass along to the Parks and Rec folks that he had heard on the police scanner that they were looking for a lost hiker for two hours and John felt there should be some trail makers or signage to help prevent this type situation. I passed this along to Chuck Ramm with Temple Parks and Rec. He responded back and told me they were meeting on this very topic and should have some directional signage in place by the end of the summer. This is good news and should really help a lot of people get around more safely.

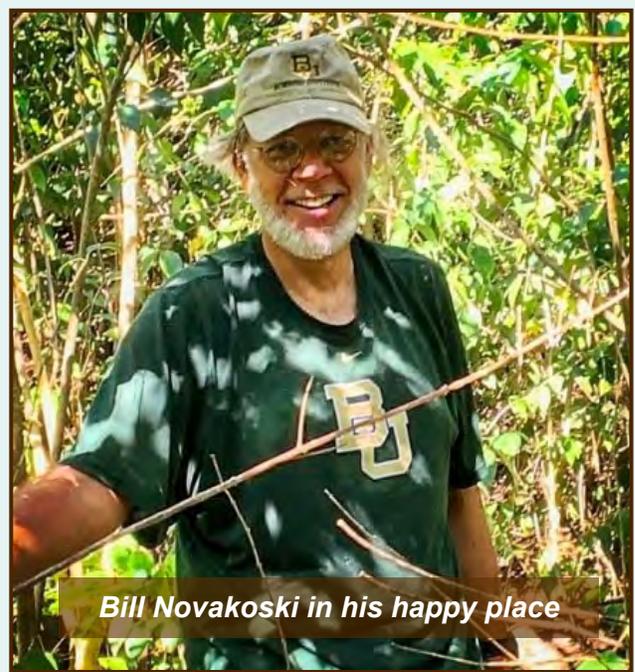
There has been another new addition in the nature center. Belton Parks installed new signs with QR codes which take you to information and historical videos about different areas of the nature center. I tested a couple of the QR codes, and they are very

interesting. I'm planning on checking the others out, but I think I'll wait for the temperatures to cool at least a little.

I hope to see everyone soon. Stay safe and God Bless!



*Andrea Liles 1, Ligustrum 0*



*Bill Novakoski in his happy place*

# Miller Springs Nature Center *cont.*

You may have seen some new amenities recently: City of Belton has added some signage with QR codes. There are seven signs scattered about the Miller Springs Nature Center over 3+ miles of hiking trails. Use your smart phone camera to scan the QR code

and access informational videos on the interesting history of Miller Springs, Belton Lake and the Belton Lake Dam. Below is a list of the sign locations, each with a different historical topic to share. Take a fun family hike through the prairies, ponds and canyons to locate all seven signs! #IFoundTheMarkersAtMSNC



- ⇒ Entrance to Miller Springs
- ⇒ The Spillway Ramp
- ⇒ Belton Dam Mural
- ⇒ Tennessee Valley Overlook
- ⇒ The River Channel (near the Stone Bridge)
- ⇒ The Old Pony Bridge (in Cox Hollow)
- ⇒ Bee Suck Hollow (at the northern end of East Pond Trail)

A shout out to Manuel Zapata, Recreation Coordinator for Belton Parks and Recreation, who had the idea for this simple sign that is just another way to learn while hiking at Miller Springs!



*Left: Painted Bunting spotted at MSNC by Carroll Adcock, Class of 2020.*

*Right: The Blanchard Littles get to spend a lot of time on the trails at Miller Springs and they are excited every time the family heads out for a hike. See the "Future Bugologist" t-shirt?! Big brother looks jealous...*



# Chalk Ridge Falls Park

## - John Atkins, 2016

We were finally able to get back into Chalk Ridge Falls in June after a two-month hiatus. The Nature Area had been closed in response to COVID-19. This was probably the right decision because of the sheer number of people that overwhelm the area every weekend. Unfortunately, the Corps of Engineers did little to enforce the closure. This resulted in lots of graffiti, trash, and damage to the vegetation due to lack of supervision.



*Marilyn Whitworth*

In June, Tina Atkins, Marilyn Whitworth, Stephen and Sharon Schmitz focused largely on litter removal from the Nature Area. The amount of clothing and shoes that they always return with never fails to amaze me. It seems like every person must come out of the park barefoot and half naked.



*Tina Atkins*



*Unfortunately, there is no photo of John here*

Kelly Ann Blanchard started the morning off by clearing a man-made obstruction from a weir dam and moved on to assist with the trash clean-up. I had to help Kelly Ann clear a large log that someone had lodged in the dam. I was stomping on one end while Kelly Ann worked to push from the other end. When it broke free, so did I! Luckily, there is a pole located in the gap to help keep it free from debris. I grabbed the pole as I swung around like a pole dancer, doing my best not to land on my butt in the creek. Poor Kelly Ann had to grab me to keep me from a dunking! I think it is safe to say that my days as a pole dancer are long past.

# Chalk Ridge Falls Park *cont.*

While I was busy dancing on the dam, Ben Clement and Bill Novakoski were hard at work re-purposing old wooden stringers to build water diversion devices on a highly erodible section of land below the flood gauge. They also cleared debris from the boardwalk and made a viewing area functional again.



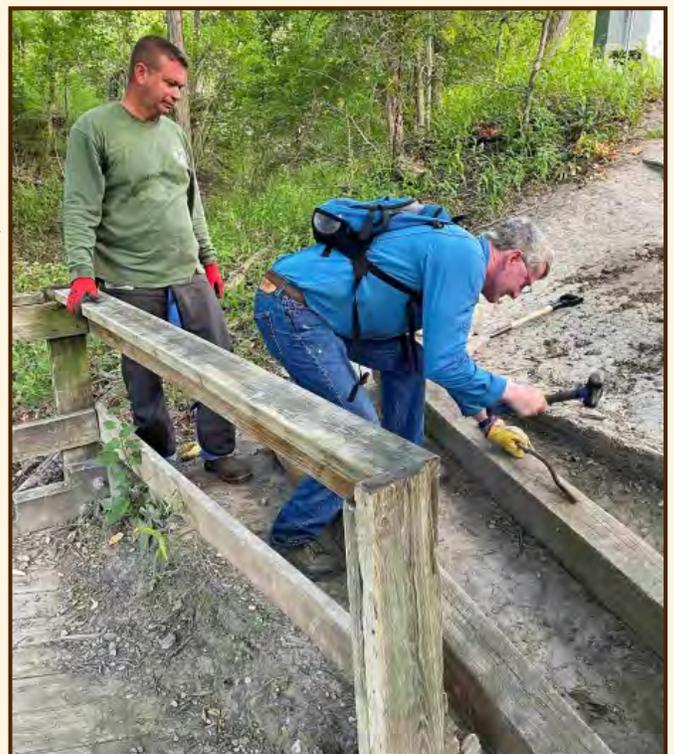
*Steve and Sharon Schmitz*

became entangled in a briar and unfurled, releasing its toxic payload. Poor Ben looked like a protester that had just caught a canister of tear gas! He had the last laugh though, because he dropped off the bag of trash for me to carry out after we finished painting. I had to hold that 30 lbs. of fetid trash at arm's length for the ¼ mile back to the parking lot. I definitely felt it in my neck and shoulders the next day!

In the upcoming months we will continue cleaning the nature area, removing invasives, re-routing some sections of trail, and getting into some of the areas that we normally do not get to. We may also try to work in some Wildlife Management Areas before dove season starts. Thanks to everyone who came out to work!

*John Atkins and Ben Clement*

In July, Kelly Ann, Tina, and I focused on painting two benches that had been covered with graffiti during the lock-out. Hopefully, they will stay clean for a few months. Ben, Marilyn, Carroll Adcock, and Chris Nixon focused on cleaning up the trails this month. There was so much trash after Independence Day that they had to drop off full bags before continuing. The funniest thing that happened was when we heard Ben yelling excitedly about some discovery. I dropped my paintbrush and came running, thinking he had found some cool snake. Imagine my disappointment when I discovered that he was yelling because while retrieving a dirty diaper — it



# ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK

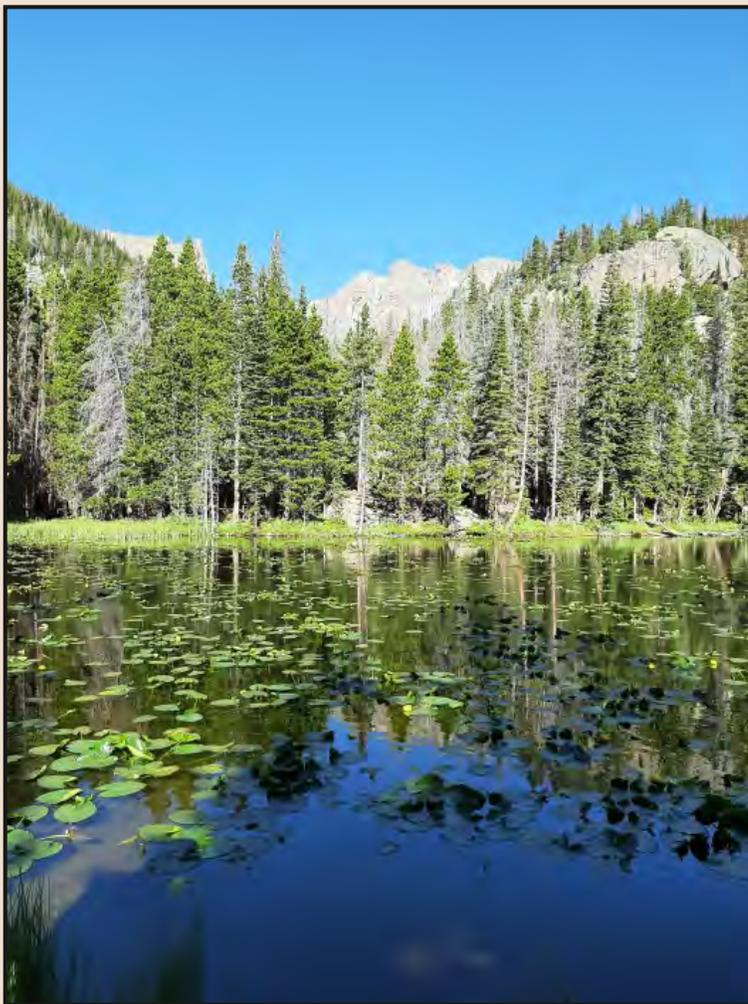
Colorado

- **Linda Fairlie, 2018**



Every summer, my husband, my dog and I get out of the Texas heat by going to the mountains of Colorado. This year, we spent a week in Rocky Mountain National Park.

We have been coming to this park since my husband and I met, and he visited for many years before he met me. He has climbed Long's Peak (a 14-er with a climb and scramble at the top) and knows almost every hike to be had in the park. This year, we took two memorable hikes together. I am not able to do difficult or even some moderate hikes anymore, but these two hikes were pleasant and very do-able for me.



The first was to Nymph Lake and Dream Lake. This hike starts at Bear Lake. It is a round trip hike of a little over two miles, but because we went around Dream Lake once we were there, it was actually closer to three.

The first was to Nymph Lake and Dream Lake. This hike starts at Bear Lake. It is a round trip hike of a little over two miles, but because we went around Dream Lake once we were there, it was actually closer to three.

Nymph Lake is beautiful with lots of water lilies. You can almost imagine little nymphs and sprites playing in the lake... or maybe they mean the mayfly nymphs, who knows?

The water was so clear, and I watched two fish chase each other near the bank. The trail goes on to Emerald Lake, which we did not do. I have to

confess, when we met others on the trail, I very happily thanked anyone wearing a face covering even if it was only one person in a group. One man said, "you're welcome!" and his wife said, "she's talking to me, you aren't even wearing a mask!" Not sure if we shamed anyone into wearing a mask as they approached others or not, but it was worth a try.

# ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK *cont.*

## Colorado

The other hike we enjoyed was the Ute Trail up above the timberline. You can take Fall River Road one-way up to the visitor's center, then take Trail Ridge Road, which crests at 12,183 feet, to the Ute Trail. These drives are beautiful, and you can often see moose, bighorn sheep, elk and deer. We saw Chasm Falls and other waterfalls created by melting snow drifts. We did see a very large herd of elk hanging out on a huge snow drift.



The tundra is so unique. It is like a miniature world, and the ground is warmer than the surface air because the plants hold warmth in. Plants you would see in other places grow smaller, and they are very delicate, although often the flower blooms are regular sized. We saw marmots, and they whistled a warning to us, and we heard pika.

Our hike took us to breath-taking views of the mountains around us. During our hike, it began to sleet. The tallest peak, flat on top, is Long's Peak. We were above the timberline, but you can

see how much taller Long's is above the tree line.

If you like watching animals in their natural habitat, we saw a female moose and herd of elk. We also saw a mother black bear and her two cubs who were trying to cross the road we were driving on. The cubs were so adorable! We also saw chipmunks and ground squirrels.



# ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK *cont.*

## Colorado



In a COVID world, RMNP is a wonderful place to go. There is so much to do there, and you can stay socially distant pretty easily. Sure, not everyone wears their masks, but you can hike early or choose hikes that are less popular. You can fish, watch wildlife, see amazing stars (we were able to see the NEOWISE comet every evening).

During COVID, you do have to have a reservation to get into the park as there is a limit enforced. I am really glad we were able to be in such a beautiful place this summer.



# FIELD NOTES

## - Kelly Ann Blanchard, 2020

Looking for a way to contribute to scientific research in a field you love plus earn volunteer hours at the same time? Community science, also known as citizen science, is an increasingly popular field of knowledge scientists rely on to provide data for important research projects around the world. As Texas Master Naturalists, our contributions to local projects are especially vital to conserving and protecting our state's biodiversity. These

projects range from common observations to specific interests – there is something for everyone!

In this issue, I want to shed some light (pun intended) on an astronomy project with significant local impacts and an opportunity to collect important data simply by observing the night sky.

### Light Pollution

In July, the comet NEOWISE flew by Earth on its return journey toward the outer solar system. If you had the incredible opportunity to view it with your own eyes, consider yourself lucky! Perhaps some of you struggled with finding a good spot to view the comet? In your backyard, maybe your neighbor's porch light was shining in your eyes while you were trying to scan the night sky. If you drove to a better location, perhaps the neighboring cities' brightness made it difficult to pinpoint a small comet near the horizon. The culprit here, of course, is light pollution, and it is more than just a nuisance to viewing the beauty of the night sky.

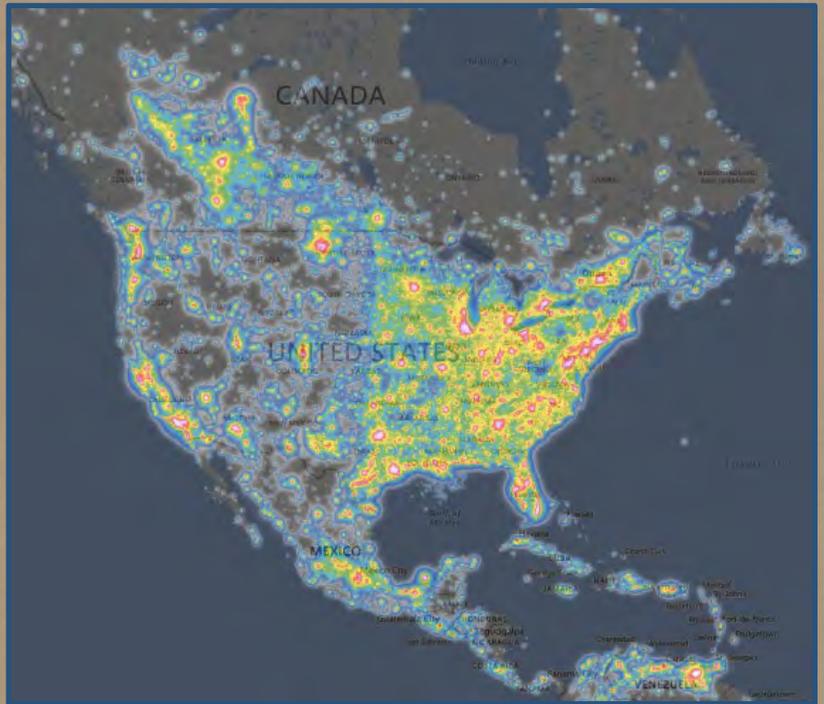


*Comet NEOWISE over Lake Belton July 17th. Note the bright lights along the shore almost 3 miles from where this image was taken. The sky glow is from cities to the west of Belton.*

# FIELD NOTES

*Cont.*

Light pollution is excessive, misdirected, or obtrusive artificial light that can be broken down into three main types: glare (from unshielded lighting, glare worsens as our eyes age), light trespass (unwanted light on your property, such as a neighbor's porch or security light), and sky glow (the glow effect over populated areas, a combination of all reflected and unshielded light escaping up into the night sky). This unwanted light not only interferes with astronomical research, it also disrupts ecosystems by posing serious threat to nocturnal wildlife and confusing migratory patterns. Many species, including humans, rely on circadian rhythms (regulated by light and dark) to produce melatonin, and disruptions to this cycle can lead to sleep disorders, increased anxiety, and stress. Energy waste due to unnecessary, upward-directed illumination also concerns us, financially and ecologically.



[lightpollutionmap.info](http://lightpollutionmap.info) will show light pollution from any source around the world. Images are based on data from observatories and other submissions. Note the bright spots in southwestern Canada? That is registering the light of the aurora borealis..

Enter the *Globe at Night* project – an international citizen science campaign to raise public awareness of the impact of light pollution in our communities. With over 200,000 measurements from people in 180 countries, *Globe at Night* has become a vast database of information for scientists to utilize for various research purposes, including projects like determining how light pollution affects foraging habits of bats.

To build this database, *Globe at Night* relies on citizen scientists like you and me to measure and submit your night sky brightness observations with your smart phone or computer during a 10 day period each month. For amateur astronomers, this project is a great way to stargaze for a cause, and Master Naturalists earn volunteer credit at the same time! You can also participate from your own backyard, making it a perfect social distancing activity.

# FIELD NOTES

*Cont.*



## Featured Community Science Project

### *Globe at Night Project*

<https://www.globeatnight.org/>

Upcoming Project Dates and Constellation Options:

August 10-19, 2020 – Cygnus or Hercules

September 9-18 – Cygnus

There are six simple steps to follow to start contributing to *Globe at Night*:

- ◆ During the specified project dates, go outside at least an hour after sunset
- ◆ Find the specified constellation for the month (you can use a night sky app like “Star Guide” if needed)
- ◆ Use the [Globe at Night Report Page](#) on their website to start entering your data
- ◆ Be sure to include the date, time, and location of your data collection
- ◆ Select a star chart that most closely matches the magnitude (brightness) at which you can view the stars in the constellation from your location
- ◆ Choose the amount of cloud cover at the time, and then submit your data

For Master Naturalists, remember to keep track of the time you spend observing and recording your data – it will count toward your Volunteer Service hours!\*

Visit the *Globe at Night* website to read more about the project and get started. You can also find interactive maps, data, and educational materials, including ways to decrease light pollution in your communities as well as your own home. Have fun stargazing!

\* In each newsletter, I will highlight a different citizen science project currently available for participation. Depending on the project and whether there is additional training required, Advanced Training (AT) or Volunteer Service (VS) hours are available to Master Naturalists. If you are interested in a particular project that is not already listed in the Volunteer Management System, feel free to submit your project idea in an online AT-VS form on the CTMN website and someone will reach out to you regarding how to proceed.

Light pollution statistics were retrieved from the *Globe at Night* project’s [website](#).

# MONARCH MONITORING

**- Jean Solana, 2019**

The adventure began in February when the Master Naturalists email network told about a large-scale milkweed habitat restoration grant that awarded free milkweed from Monarch Watch in Kansas. I applied and waited anxiously to see if I qualified. Monarch Watch was begun at the University of Kansas in 1992 as a conservation program for the Monarch butterfly.

In the meantime, a group of us Central Texas Master Naturalists attended a Monarch Citizen Scientist Workshop in Austin in March. We learned about the Monarch butterfly life cycle and migration, as well as how to perform several Citizen Scientist monitoring programs:

*Tagging Program* - Attaching stickers on Monarch butterfly wings in order to trace migration

*Monarch Larva Monitoring Project* – counting monarch eggs, caterpillars, and adults in milkweed patches

*Project Health* - Hatching Monarchs in captivity in order to assess for parasites/disease



The workshop organizers encouraged us to choose a program and get involved.

I chose to participate in the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project. They have a great user-friendly website (found under Monarch Watch) that has tutorials about the 5 stages of monarch larva, how to find them, and how to enter the weekly data. They already have 18 years of data on their site.

# MONARCH MONITORING *CONT*

You can click on any state - there are 400 monitoring sites in Texas alone – and look at graphs on how many milkweed eggs/caterpillars are found at each site. You monitor for about 6 weeks in the spring because that is how long it takes for the Monarchs to pass through an area.

I monitored 2 milkweed patches, one at Mother Neff State Park and one at my 5 acres on Saffle Ranch in Bruceville, right on IH35. I was amazed to find about 100 plants at my place, and about 80 in the patch at Mother Neff. Below are the numbers of eggs and caterpillars I found through the project period. Stage one caterpillars are tiny and just hatched, where stage 5 are the last ones, about 2 inches long and ready to pupate. It was a joyful experience during the stressful first weeks of the coronavirus pandemic to know that Nature carries on its amazing reproductive process, despite humanity being in crisis mode. By the first week of May, I was finding very few eggs so knew the project was done. I am glad to share my monitoring data for those who are interested.



*Stage 2 Monarch Caterpillar—4mm long*



*Stage 5 Monarch Caterpillar—3 cm long*

In the meantime, I found out I had qualified for the free milkweed! I would receive 200 plants – 100 each of *Asclepias asperula* (antelope horn) and *A. viridis* (green). *Asperula* is most common in our area, I found one *viridis* at Mother Neff, and 3 at my place. Notice the difference in leaves below– *viridis* is more upright.

# MONARCH MONITORING *CONT*



*Asclepias asperula* (Antelope Horn)



*Asclepias viridis* (Green) with caterpillar

I selected 20 areas in the sunny parts of my land and dug 200 little holes. I picked up the milkweed at a wholesale grower in Georgetown. I planted them, and we had a rainy spring. After a month of being in the ground, a lot of them are no longer visible, and many are just not growing very much. They have a long tap root, so I hope more is going on underground than above. Milkweed are not easy to transplant and grow. I have my eyes on the pods on my existing milkweed plants, and I will plant them in the fall and see what happens.

*The adventure continues!*





# Do dryer sheets repel squirrels?

- Zoe Rascoe, 2004

Squirrels. You love 'em or hate 'em. Am I right? So cute, and yet such a nuisance. You may have squirrels visit your yard. Or even raid your squirrel-proof bird feeders. If you don't think they are a nuisance, you probably don't have as many as I do.

We bought our house for the beautiful old live oak trees, which I now know has been a squirrel fiefdom for decades. If you google "squirrels", the top search hits (in order): "What do squirrels hate most?", "Are squirrels dangerous?", "Is it safe to touch a squirrel?", and "Do dryer sheets repel squirrels?" What?? No! Nope. Uh uh.

If you have tried various equipment and techniques to thwart a bird feeder-raiding squirrel, you've probably been disappointed with the results. Unless, I guess, if the squirrel met some kind of demise. Mark Rober, a former NASA engineer, decided to take up birdwatching in his backyard, but it ended up being more about squirrel thwarting. Mark took that task to a whole new level. If you enjoy contraption building, instrumentation, calculating trajectories, or other engineering disciplines, videography, animal psychology or birds, you may enjoy Mark's journey and his surprises along the way. My engineer brain loves this, and I represent a fair number of the of the 35 million views on YouTube. Here is Mark's story: [Don't eat my bird feed!](#)



In preparing for the 2021 Summer Olympics, Nutzo the Squirrel has just smashed the World Record with his original gymnastic hand-hold to foot-hold move prior to his astonishing dismount. Watch him here:

[Nutzo the Squirrel](#)

*Nutzo video by Charlie Oliver*



# My Sub-Urban Backyard

- **Carroll Adcock, 2020**

I live on only about 2/3 of an acre yet am fortunate to have vacant lots on either side of me and US Army Corps lake easement behind resulting in a sizable tract of “wild space”. We have always enjoyed observing the native critters, including deer, foxes, a variety of birds and a fair number of pollinators.

I have recently become interested in birding as well as rekindling an old interest in photography. I wish to make it clear that I am a novice in both of these pursuits. In the past, I have placed bird feeders and houses with mixed results and lots of frustration from varmints. This spring I built a couple of additional feeders with varmint deterrents and managed to keep feed available most of this spring and summer. The feeders have had a steady stream of traffic and thus far have not been unduly pilfered by the usual raiders.

It was unclear whether the feeding had made a real impact on the volumes of birds, but they have certainly been more apparent. I also attempt to maintain some plants that are attractive to pollinators and have been blessed with numerous butterflies and hummingbirds.



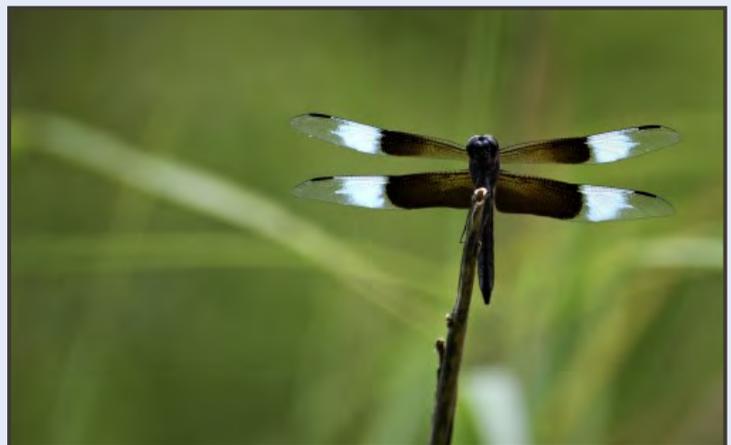
## My Sub-Urban Backyard *cont.*

I noted in May that there seemed to be more Painted Buntings this spring than I had noted in past years. In order to accommodate my desire to obtain some quality photographs I created some “hides” in proximity to feeders. Through the utilization of camouflage, perseverance and supplemented with some



judicious “calling,” I was blessed with several opportunities to capture images of these magnificent birds. I wish to point out that the utilization of indiscriminate “calling” is a practice that is generally discouraged (and some birders suggest it should be taboo) as the practice may be disturbing/stressful to the birds.

In addition to multiple hours birding, I was also fortunate to capture some pollinator images. I must say that between my recent involvement in the Master Naturalist program, coupled with the birding and photography interests, it has been a fun summer thus far in spite of the COVID restrictions.



# Texas Milkvines

- Jean Solana, 2019

This summer I learned there are 38 species of *Asclepias* milkweeds in Texas – but there are also milkweeds called “milkvines” in the *Matalea* family. I have found 3 in the area:



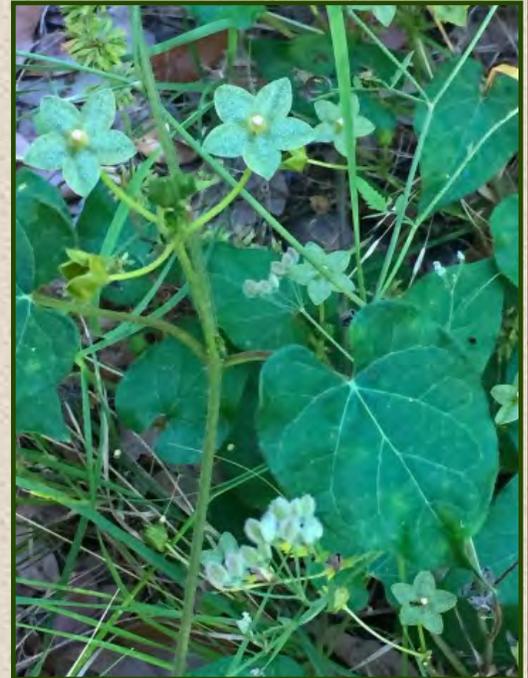
*Star Milkvine Pod*

First, I found Pearl Milkvine (*Matalea reticulata*) in Miller Springs and Mother Neff State Park. This long vine is a host plant for Monarch caterpillars.

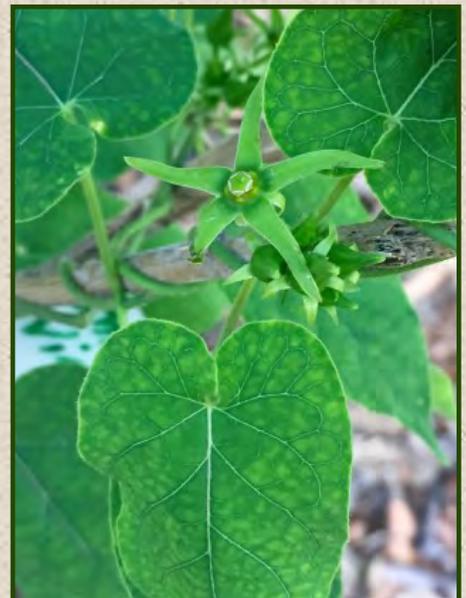
Then I found a huge 5 inch long pod attached to a small plant by the trail at Mother Neff. Star Milkvine (*Matelea biflora*) is listed as a host plant for Queen and Soldier caterpillars. The next week I saw that two Queen caterpillars were on the plant.

Most recently I found Anglepod (*Matalea gonocarpus*) on my property in Bruceville. It was a vine growing up a small tree. This plant is a host for Monarch caterpillars.

With 38 species of *Asclepias* milkweed in Texas and several more milkvines, our butterflies have more to eat – and that’s a good thing!



*Pearl Milkvine*



*Anglepod Milkvine*



*Queen caterpillar on Star Milkvine*

# What's in YOUR backyard?



- Zoe Rascoe, 2004

Everyone knows it gets hot enough in the Texas summer to change our behavior in a number of ways. Juan Anaya has black chinned hummers that have taken a likin' to his backyard spa amenities. Did you notice the hummingbird-friendly plants in the background?



Juan says, "Half of my little backyard bird garden is Turks Cap and flame acanthus. They are drought tolerant and the grasshoppers eat on them, they keep on blooming. Third year in a row the hoppers have invaded. Salvia is gone and Rose of Sharon has few leaves. But as the wildflower fields start drying up, bird activity in my backyard increases."

This is a pitiful photo for a photographer to put on the www—it was taken with my phone while I was teetering on the back of my couch through a dirtier-than-I-realized window. We were out comet-watching in the yard and had just come in. This cutie sauntered up our front walk, stopped to check out the teetering human through the window, then strolled into the darkness towards that place under the house where the darn 'possum has been living now that the coyote and skunk have moved on. All here in the Temple Historic District!



# What's in YOUR backyard?



Here's another reason to have a game camera: a beautiful Broad-winged Hawk (thanks for the ID confirmation, Gil Eckrich) hanging out on property backing up to Stillhouse Hollow Lake belonging to Andrea Liles and her husband. When she approached Gil with help

on the bird identification, turns out their property is so close to his that he recognized this very hawk as one he had photographed. Gil said that Broad-winged Hawks are common during spring and fall migrations, but a few are nesting in Central Texas.

For you "Princess Bride" movie fans, Juan went out and found there had been a great battle- on top of a 100' tall powerline tower. Juan said "A pair of crested caracaras landed too close to juvenile scissor tailed flycatchers. Mom and dad flycatcher attacked immediately. It looked like a scene from "Jurassic Park". The crest on the back of their head was raised and this screaming came from them. They were snapping their jaws trying to catch the scissor tales, but they were eventually chased from sight."



# Cicada killer wasps emerging in Central Texas

- **Wizzie Brown, TAMU AgriLife Extension Program Specialist, Entomologist**

Over the past week I've been getting questions on large wasps that people are seeing emerging from the ground. They want to know what they are and be reassured that they are not the Asian giant hornet. These wasps are known as cicada killers and are aptly named. Cicada killers are large wasps, reaching around 1.5 inches. They have a rusty colored head and thorax with a black and yellow patterned abdomen. The wings are also rusty in color, but transparent.

Cicada killer wasps are solitary, but multiple wasps may be seen in the same area at times. Males are known for aggressively defending their territory and patrolling burrows created underground. While males dive bomb someone who walks into their territory, they are incapable of stinging. Female cicada killers are capable of stinging, but generally reserve their stinger for paralyzing prey and tend to only sting in defense.

Adult wasps feed on nectar and tree sap while immatures feed on cicadas. Adult female wasps locate a cicada, sting it causing the cicada to become paralyzed and then carry it back to the tunnel created in the ground. She drags the cicada into the tunnel and to a nesting chamber. Each chamber is provisioned with 1-2 cicadas before the female lays an egg on the leg of the cicada and seals up the chamber. Once the egg hatches, the wasp larva eats the provided cicadas, overwintering in the ground as a mature larva, and pupating the following year to emerge again when cicadas are available.

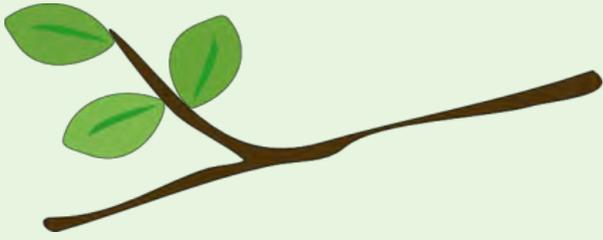
Tunnels are about a foot deep and about 2 feet long with 3-4 chambers off to the sides for provision cicadas for larvae.

These wasps are considered to be beneficial, so no control is recommended. *Blog post June 15, 2020.*

[Want to know more about the Asian Giant Murder Hornets?—click here for a blog post by Wizzie Brown](#)



*Cicada Killer Wasp. Don't be impressed, it was dead when we found it. We have a fair number roaming our yard each summer. Photo by Zoe Rascoe, hand model is Terry Rascoe.*



# Out on a Limb

- Mary Ann Everett, 2003

**Tree Description:** Thick, shrubby form or small tree, up to 20 feet in height.

**Blooms:** Small white blossoms in clusters about 3 inches across. Blooms April thru June.

**Fruit:** Bunches of hard, white berries about a 1/4 inch in diameter on reddish brown branchlets. At least 40 species of birds are attracted to these berries!

**Location:** Occupies a wide range in Texas, growing in eastern, central and southern Texas. Found in swamps, marshes, wet to dry woods and thickets, lake and stream banks, and limestone hills.

**Leaves:** Deciduous, opposite, roughly ovate with smooth margins.

**Bark:** Reddish brown or gray.

**Heat & Drought Tolerance:** Dry to moist alkaline soils, limestone, sandy, sandy-loam, clay, acid-based, and calcareous soils. Here the sky is the limit to where it can grow.

**Interesting Facts:** This plant is named for Thomas Drummond, a Scottish naturalist who, after landing in Weslaco in 1833, spent 21 months working between Galveston Island and the Edwards Plateau, especially along the Brazos, Colorado, and Guadalupe Rivers. His collections were the first made in Texas that were distributed among the museums and scientific institutions of the world. He collected 750 species of plants and 150 species of birds. He had hoped to return to Texas to complete his botanical survey, but he died in Havana, Cuba, in 1835 while on a botanical survey there. The Bells Vireo nests in this shrubby tree.

[Click here for name of tree](#)



# CHAPTER MEETINGS

## - KELLY ANN BLANCHARD, 2020

With in-person chapter meetings still on hold for the foreseeable future, we logged two more successful webinar meetings this summer. On both evenings, we had a good mix of chapter members and trainees participating in the webinars and some interesting topics to cover.



*Kari Hines, Texas Forest Service*

June's chapter meeting webinar centered on "Fire Ecology and the Wildland Urban Interface" and was presented by Kari Hines, Firewise coordinator for the Texas A&M Forest Service. She began by explaining that wildfires are a natural process and vital to healthy forests. However, as our cities continue to expand into previously forested areas, this natural process becomes dangerous and costly. In Texas, over 90% of wildfires are caused by humans. The most common heat sources are burn piles and dragging chains on the highway - even railroads can start fires!

A result of the "fire triangle" combination of fuel, oxygen, and a heat source, wildfire outbreaks have contributed to immense losses of land and lives over the years. From the Big Burn in 1906 to the Yellowstone Fires in 1988, wildfires have claimed hundreds of lives and millions of acres. Programs like Firewise have been established to educate people about the risk of wildland urban interface (WUI), which is the mingling of developed and undeveloped areas and the frontline for wildfire damage prevention. Kari offered ways to protect your home and decrease your wildfire risk by creating a defensible space around your home, using fire resistant landscaping, and hardening your home against flying embers.

For more information about WUI and programs like Firewise, visit the Texas A&M Forest Service's wildfire prevention [website](#).

### Fire Suppression Policy

<b>1910 The Big Burn</b> Idaho and Montana 3 Million acres 85 Lives Lost		<b>1944 Smokey Bear</b> created to be the symbol of fire prevention		<b>2001 Smokey Bear's catch phrase</b> changed from "Only YOU Can Prevent Forest Fires" to "Only YOU Can Prevent Wildfires"
<b>1935 10 A.M. Policy</b> All fires will be contained by 10 A.M. the day after the fire is reported		<b>1988 Yellowstone Fires</b> Idaho and Montana 1,585,000 Acres U.S. Congress funded a study on the long-term ecological effect		

A TEXAS A&M

# CHAPTER MEETINGS

We had a special treat for our July chapter meeting webinar: Manda Butler, the General Curator for the Cameron Park Zoo, took some time to chat with us about the importance of global conservation and the integral role that zoos play in the survival and conservation of species. Manda mentioned that zoos contribute to global conservation through education and outreach programs, Species Survival Plan (SSP) participation, research (in-situ and ex-situ), and the SAFE program (Saving Animals from Extinction).



*Manda Butler, Cameron Park Zoo*

Manda showcased the many exciting and engaging educational programs that Cameron Park Zoo offers, including zoo camp, education days, story time, and the zoo mobile! My personal favorite was her segment about the animal ambassadors – animals specifically chosen to walk with zookeepers around the grounds and interact with visitors for a unique, hands-on learning experience. Manda also spent a lot of time explaining and showing us the research aspect of animal care through monitoring animals in ways such as determining blood pressure range of orangutans and placing pedometers on elephants to measure where and how far they travel. The zoo also works with other Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) facilities to protect and conserve threatened animals such as tortoises, lions, giraffes, and orangutans as part of the SAFE program.

Manda shared many behind-the-scenes photos of animals at the zoo and referred to each of them lovingly by name. Her passion for the care and conservation of these animals came

across loud and clear, and it was a pleasure to have her share the wonderful opportunities that Cameron Park Zoo has to offer. The zoo is always in need of volunteers, so if you are interested in joining the global conservation effort, visit the Cameron Park Zoo's [website](#) for more information about how to get involved.



# 2020 Stillhouse Hollow Butterfly Count

- **Mary Ann Everett, 2003**

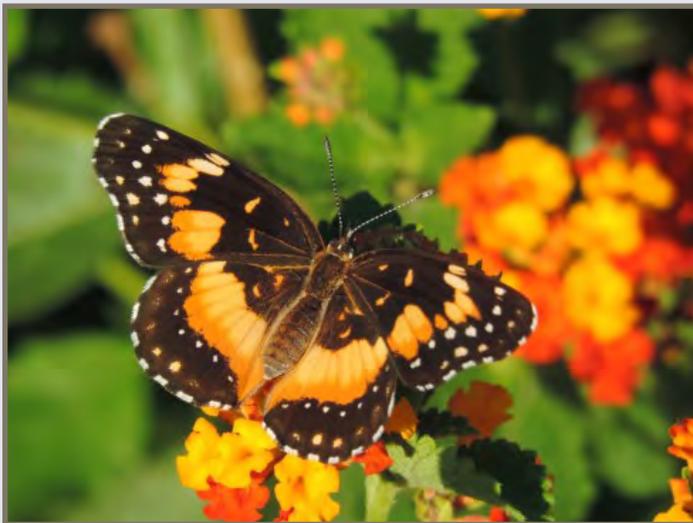
This Citizen Science Project occurred on June 13, and this is our **16<sup>th</sup> year** of participating in this great adventure. Our count began at 8:00 a.m. and continued until 3:30 p.m., with 18 observers, 25 party hours, and 15 miles covered on foot!

How about them apples, er, I mean butterflies? The weather was mainly sunshine, with the temperature range of 62 – 92 degrees F.

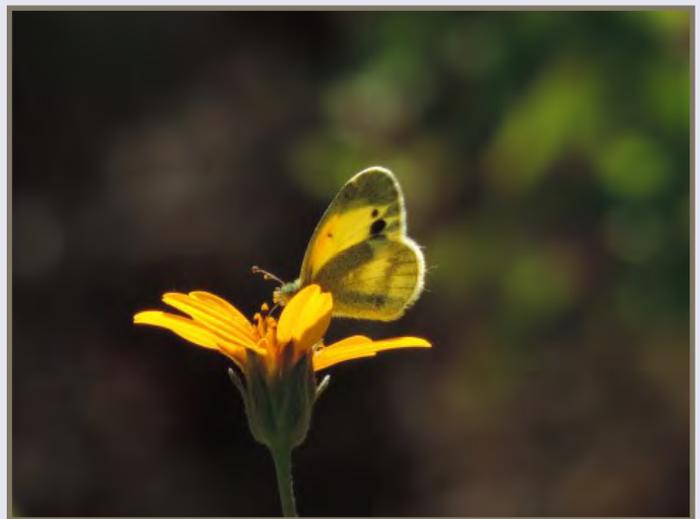
What area did we cover, you ask? Since this is known as the Stillhouse Hollow Count name, let me name some of the places we covered: Downtown Salado, along Salado Creek; Chalk Ridge Falls Park; Gravel Crossing WMA; Stillhouse Hollow Park; Union Grove WMA; Rivers Bend Park; Miller Springs Nature Center; Nolan Creek Hike/Bike Trail; UMHB; Dana Peak Park.

Who were the observers? (Remember this for next year, we can always use the help!) They were the following: Jerry Lewis, Louann Hight, Jessica Dieter, Jenna Chappell, Jean Solana, Paula Finley, Kathy Cantu, Sue Valdez, Marilyn Whitworth, Joan Stanley, Shirley Watts, Sharon and Steve Schmitz, Mary and John Odom, Jaime Harmon, William Brown, and myself (Mary Ann).

***Report of observations: 29 species with a total of 115 individual butterflies.***



*Bordered Patch Butterfly by Joan Stanley*



*Dainty Sulphur by Joan Stanley*

*Editor's Note: Thanks go to Kathy Cantu and Joan Stanley for having a stash of recent butterfly photos. Turns out the participants on Count Day were too busy counting to take photos!*

## 2020 Stillhouse Hollow Butterfly Count *cont.*

Some new species for us are the following: Mallow Scrub-Hairstreak; Dusky-Blue Groundstreak, Reakirt's Blue, Little Wood-Satyr, Common Wood-Nymph.



*Reakirt's Blue by Kathy Cantu*



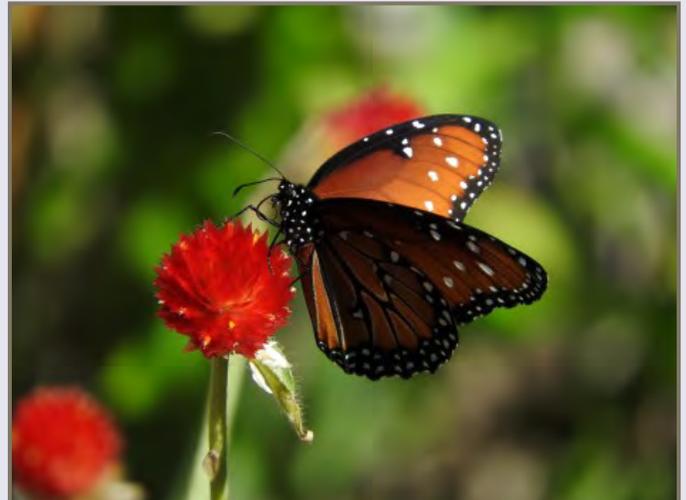
*Dusky Blue Groundstreak by Joan Stanley*

Comments on the data sheet about the uses of land within the count circle: Major construction of houses, roads, and business. The whole of Salado's Main street was devoid of vegetation. Major lack of any blooming wildflowers or natives. Several observers saw zero species.

Just thought I would share with you part of my compilation of the data that went to the North American Butterfly Association. Each year, our observers are seeing similar degradation of the use of the land. We are doing our part so [North American Butterfly Association](#) can keep tabs of what is going on throughout our country. Thank you, Citizen Scientists!!



*Orange Sulfur by Kathy Cantu*



*Queen Butterfly by Joan Stanley*

# Good to Know...

Did you know that tea made from willow bark naturally contains the same chemical make-up as aspirin and can be used to reduce fever and inflammation? Or that oak trees can sometimes provide a home for the oak gall wasp and material from their nests (gallic acid) is currently being studied as an effective treatment for Parkinson's' disease? Learn about these fascinating wild edibles and more with *Foraging Texas!*



Learn about these fascinating wild edibles and more with *Foraging Texas!*

[ForagingTexas.com](http://ForagingTexas.com), brainchild of Dr. Mark Merriwether Vorderbruggen, is your go-to source for all things foraging related in Texas. Learn about the ethics of foraging, find information about plants and fungi available for harvesting, and delve into the science behind these wild edibles' medicinal effects. You can also purchase his book "Idiot's Guides: Foraging" on [Amazon](http://Amazon) to begin your foraging journey.



There's an app for that! Take the blue book with you on-the-go with this handy app from the Texas A&M Forest Service. When you're out in the field and need to consult the Texas Forest Service's Best Management Practices handbook, you can simply pull up the app on your phone instead of keeping track of your physical copy. This convenient, native app covers all forest activities, including the actual BMP guidelines, recommended specifications, schematics, tables, glossary, soils identifier tool, slope tool, and tree height tool. To download the app for iPhone or Android, look for *Texas Forestry BMPs* in your app store, or go to the Texas Forest Service website (<https://texasforestinfo.tamu.edu/MobileApps/BMP/>) and use the QR codes or links to find the app.

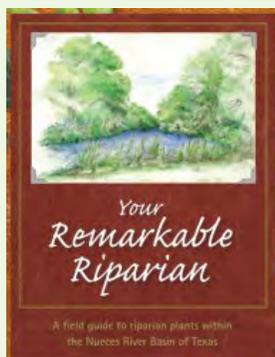
# More Good to Know...



Help the University of Kentucky find and document honeysuckle leaf blight here in Texas! Honeysuckle leaf blight is caused by a fungus that creates distorted, yellow to brown dead patches on the leaves. If you see a honeysuckle that might be affected by honeysuckle leaf blight, take photos and submit your observations to iNaturalist under

the Honeysuckle Leaf Blight Survey project. <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/honeysuckle-leaf-blight-survey> Community Science making a difference. Master Naturalists are approved for Volunteer Service hours when entering data into iNaturalist.

From *Disneynature*, the studio that brought you "Earth", "Oceans", "African Cats" and "Chimpanzee", comes "Wings of Life" – a stunning adventure full of intrigue, drama and mesmerizing beauty. Narrated by Meryl Streep, this intimate and unprecedented look at butterflies, hummingbirds, bees, bats and flowers is a celebration of life, as a third of the world's food supply depends on these incredible – and increasingly threatened – creatures.



This field guide to riparian plants found throughout most of Texas was recommended by Lori Hazel, our Riparian Ecology instructor for the 2020 trainees. The Texas Riparian Association has online self-learning resources that include many video lessons based on this field guide. They can be accessed at:

<http://texasriparian.org/riparian-education-program/264-2/>

# Contributing Authors to this Newsletter



Clockwise from top left:

Carroll Adcock

John Atkins

John Burns

Mary Ann Everett

Kelly Ann Blanchard

Jean Solana

Linda Fairlie

Zoe Rascoe

Thanks y'all!!!





*Photo by Zoe Rascoe*

**Board of Directors**

**President:** John Atkins

**Past President:** Lynn Fleming

**Vice President:** Jean Solana

**Secretary:** Jessica Dieter

**Treasurer:** Don Wyatt

**Technology:** Dale Hughling

**Web Master:** Nicole Norelli

**Membership:** Linda Fairlie

**Communications:** Gail Hughling

**Hospitality:** Mary Odom

**Training:** Lynn Fleming/Mary Ann Everett

**Newsletter Staff**

**Editor:** Zoe Rascoe

**Proofreader:** Kelly Ann Blanchard

**Contributing Writers:** John Atkins, Melissa Chadwick (guest writer), Jean Solana, John Burns, Carroll Adcock, Mary Ann Everett, Linda Fairlie, Kelly Ann Blanchard, Zoe Rascoe.

**Contributed Images:** John Atkins, Tina Atkins, John Burns, Linda Fairlie, Kathy Cantu, Joan Stanley, Jean Solana, Juan Anaya, Carroll Adcock, Kelly Ann Blanchard, Terry Rascoe, Zoe Rascoe.

**Have you noticed the recurring feature articles on member visits to National Parks and Texas State Parks, “Fish Tales” (of any kind!), backyard nature, travel to places unlike Texas and more? If you have a story to share, just send me your idea. Volunteer Service hours apply for members!**

Zoe Rascoe [trascoe@hot.rr.com](mailto:trascoe@hot.rr.com)

**Chapter Advisors**

Whitney Grantham,  
Bell County Extension Agent, Natural Resources  
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

Derrick Wolter,  
Wildlife Biologist, Texas Parks and Wildlife



*Sign seen and heeded high above the Deschutes River near Bend, Oregon*

**MEETINGS ARE BY WEBINAR UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE**

Chapter meetings are held by webinar on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m. Meetings include a nature-related program and the public is welcome to participate. If interested, submit a request to join the webinar using the “Contact Us” button on our website Home Page to reach the WebEx Request link. Program details can be found on our website and Facebook page.

The Board of Directors generally meets the 1st Monday of each month from 11:30am-12:30pm but these meetings are currently on an as-needed basis by webinar. Meeting notices will be sent to chapter members and all members are welcome to participate.