



# THE TRACKER

Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter June 2020

## President's Pen

- John Atkins

Howdy Folks! I have not been looking forward to writing this article this month. If it were 30 years ago, there would be a wastebasket full of crumpled up attempts to put a silver lining on the last two months. I was ready to chalk it up as a total dumpster fire until I vented to some good friends the other day. Then it dawned on me, it is the people that make this chapter special. Yes, there are bigger, richer, and more technically advanced chapters, but they have a lot of issues that we do not suffer from. It is not the rules and regulations heaped upon us by State that make us functional, it is our members. It is not the chapter meetings and board meetings that are important, it is you.



It may not be readily apparent to our rank and file members, but there is a small cadre of folks that have kept the wheels on this buggy. While other chapters closed shop, cancelled classes, and hid in their cellars counting on their beads, our chapter kept working. Lynn Fleming, Mary Ann Everett, Linda Fairlie and Jean Solana have done yeoman's work in putting together traditional and non-traditional classes for not only the new students, but also for the rest of our members. Dale Hughling and Ben Clement had to learn an entirely new skillset which enabled us to shift our entire operation online. They seamlessly shifted operations back and forth between Zoom and WebEx. Then we had Zoe Rascoe. Zoe has served as the Mother Hen for everything. She has coaxed, coerced, and cajoled everyone to make sure they made it to class on time. She worked extremely hard to come up with ideas to keep everyone engaged. Zoe has gone above and beyond to ensure every student knew they were part of a family.

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# President's Pen cont.



As you can imagine, our volunteer hours are down significantly from last year. We have lost 676 hours of service to COVID-19 as of 27 May. That may sound bad, but we are doing better than some chapters. Those chapters are still locked out of their parks. Some chapters are doing their work undercover by not displaying any Master Naturalist apparel and by sneaking in through back gates. We are lucky that everywhere we work is now open and we can get back to doing what we do best. Even when some of those places were closed to the public, we were still able (by ones and twos) to get some work done legally. You may have been slowed down a bit, but you never stopped.

I have been proud of this chapter's response once we were again turned loose. At both Miller Springs and Cedar Gap Park, we had full work parties. Everyone was eager to work, and we had no problems staying spread out at either place. After removing invasives and cleaning up trash at Cedar Gap, we received a thank you from Ranger Johnson at USACE: "We appreciate all your group does at our project. Our project simply does not have the staff to do all that you do. Y'all make it a much better place for people to come out and enjoy the outdoors." Cedar Gap was the first time that I can remember coming across a Chinese Tallow Tree. It was one of our newest members, Carroll Adcock, who found it. I walked right past it; I was focused on chinaberry that was begging to die. I will be watching for it from this day forward. Chinaberry, Ligustrum, Nandina, and Chinese Tallow Tree, what do they all have in common? They come from China: don't they give us the most thoughtful gifts?



*Chinese Tallow Tree— a Texas invasive*

Based on the latest guidance from State, I do not expect to have a face-to-face meeting with everyone for some time yet. Big deal. I do not think any of you joined to watch PowerPoint slideshows and have milk and cookies once a month anyway. You joined because you wanted to be good stewards of the environment, so get out there and do it. You lead by example and let the rest follow.

# IN FOND MEMORY OF RICHARD MCCARTHY

*On the evening of April 5, 2020, the Central Texas Chapter lost one of their most steadfast and loyal members, Richard G. McCarthy. Richard passed in his home in Killeen, Texas at the age of 83. His fellow Master Naturalist and loving wife of over 34 years, Marilyn Whitworth, was by his side.*

*Included here are memories and photos from some of our founding members, as Richard and Marilyn were in the charter class.*



**Diane Cooney** (left): One of my favorite activities was working with Richard on Bug Days at the Lake Waco Wetlands. He was always so much fun and so knowledgeable.

**Lou Ann Hight:** Richard was always positive and never hesitated to take on any project.

**Mary Ann Everett:** When I first met Richard, I didn't know quite what to make of him. The better I got to know him, the more I enjoyed his jokes and his discussions on different topics. He was all about educating. Both he and Marilyn taught Environmental Science at the Baylor Boy Scout Merit Badge College where 700 scouts attended.



# IN FOND MEMORY OF RICHARD MCCARTHY



(continued from Mary Ann) Another funny incident was when our chapter was planting sedges at River Bend. There was a group of us, and after sweltering in the heat that morning, we were walking along the marshy, sandy area, and I took a long step, and sank down into the sand up to my upper leg. Just like quicksand I thought! And there was Richard, laughing, but helping me at the same time. There was one other person who had the same thing happen (can't remember who it was), but Richard, in his merriment, made us each a necklace award, and presented them at one of our monthly meetings.

**Zoe Rascoe:** Richard and Marilyn were in our charter cohort in 2010. It was clear from the beginning that they were going to stick. One of my favorite stories to tell is about their work at the Lake Waco Wetlands. At the first class, part of my introduction is to suggest that trainees look for one or two of the training 25 topics on that might be something they would want to learn more about. To have a specialty. They could get more training in that area and choose more volunteer projects on the topic, too. Richard and Marilyn took that suggestion to heart. When we had our Wetlands Ecology training day at the amazing Lake Waco Wetlands, they never looked back. They loved learning about water critters and working with children which goes on A LOT at the Waco Wetlands. They were hardly out of our training course when we were informed that the Waco Wetlands Director had given each of them an award for reaching 250 hours of volunteer service. Wow! And that was not Richard's only award. He never lost his love for sharing the interesting critters who make their home in a creek or wetland. I once asked if he could be available to lead the Bug Picking (scoop net ID) part of training at the Wetlands. He said "We will be there if the Good Lord is willing and the creeks don't... dry up."



# IN FOND MEMORY OF RICHARD MCCARTHY

(continued from Zoe Rascoe) Richard's view of a volunteer was to help – whatever was needed. I was looking for volunteers to work an evening STEM event at an elementary school on Fort Hood that would be open to the student's whole family. Richard's response was "Marilyn and I would like to volunteer. What do you need for us to do?" He had just turned 80.

Richard was funny, usually in a clever but sometimes silly way (note photo of Breadstick Walrus Richard at the TMN State Conference, no less). He was always (always!) upbeat and could find the best in any situation, and he could tell when someone needed a word of encouragement. He really did have a twinkle in his eye and mischievous smile in front of a heart of gold. Richard will be greatly missed in the Master Naturalist community. I suspect, if there is such a place, Richard's heavenly home is along a flowing creek and he is there with a dip net and a plastic bucket seeing what critters are hanging out along the bank.





# Mother Neff State Park

1680 TX Hwy-236, Moody

Bill Abright, 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 the those who work there. I start here with Melissa.*

Melissa Chadwick, Superintendent since 2015, grew up in the DFW area. She received a BS in Wildlife, Fish & Wildlands Science & Management from Texas A&M University in 1999. (WHOOPI!) After college, she was a Store Manager for Wildbirds Unlimited, then spent time in the finance industry. In 2009 she moved to South Texas to work at Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park, eventually becoming a Natural Resource Specialist/Lead Biologist. In March 2015 she was tagged to fill the MNSP Superintendent position when Leah Huth retired.

We love that Melissa trained as a Texas Master Naturalist while in the Valley. She understands what our members can do for the Park and we have enjoyed helping host events, clear trails, remove invasive species, plant, build, label and lead hikes. Melissa's outside interests are, well, outside: birding and hiking, especially with her young daughter, husband and 9-year old Alaskan Malamute rescue dog. A perk for her is having a home inside the Park. It's really easy to fit in lots of family hikes and exploring in their BIG backyard. It's pretty clear Melissa is raising a naturalist there!



Some of the projects Melissa has overseen include making full use of the beautiful new Park Headquarters complex on the hill. She inherited the unenviable, massive 1/2-mile log jam, but a complex partnership between several state agencies, adjacent neighbors and a Watershed Protection Plan were in the works, and that big clog was finally cleared. However the bottleneck at the bridge will have to be dealt with when funding is available. Melissa has been shepherding a Prairie Restoration Project after acquiring a grant to fund seeding and juniper mitigation. A high priority is controlling the Johnsongrass and Bermuda grass on 80 acres of the prairie. Melissa's greatest challenge at Mother Neff is balancing conservation with recreation goals at the Park. She invites you out—moths are going to be everywhere and fireflies are more abundant than usual. Stop by and say hello to Melissa!

# Mother Neff State Park *Cont.*

## **- Melissa Chadwick, MNSP Superintendent**

I hope everyone is doing well and staying safe. We are slowly re-opening and expect to open for overnight campers the first week of June. Overall, the park has been extremely busy with day use and has seen a lot of first-time visitors enjoy the park. The moths and late spring wildflowers have been amazing in the park. The late rains have left the Wash Pond full and we have enjoyed having water flowing through the canyons again.

We were closed to the public from April 8-April 19 and during that time we played a lot of catch-up. Several group projects had to be cancelled due to social distancing requirements and that definitely had an impact on prairie and trail work. Staff that has been able to continue to work has stayed on top of a lot of items, but as we re-open more, their normal duties are taking priority again. We hope to have our full team back on duty by June.

I would also like to know if anyone has had experience with heat-based weeding devices. We would like to explore more organic approaches to weed control along our granite trails and campsite areas.

### **Ongoing Volunteer Opportunities**

We are certainly welcoming volunteers. To date we are able to have groups no larger than 5 and face coverings are strongly encouraged but not required. No programs or events are planned at this time until fall. This is something that is changing regularly so please contact me if you have any questions.

**Contact Melissa Chadwick, Park Superintendent for opportunities below:**

[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 for opportunities below:**

[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!

The April workday was cancelled as we all know because of the Corona virus. Well, this would be a pretty short update, but I decided to do some work by myself. My plan was to pull some bastard cabbage and pick up trash. I changed my mind when I arrived because the Temple maintenance guys were mowing the area around the parking lots where there was a lot of bastard cabbage. I didn't want to get in their way so I grabbed a hand saw and loppers and headed down the main trail (orange trail) toward the Green Pond trail. I have been eyeing some Waxleaf Ligustrum along that trail every time we went down so since I was by myself, I thought it was a good time cut these down. I cut about a dozen trees and then I saw a small patch of bastard cabbage and pulled it.



*John Burns engages the Ligustrum enemy*



With this done, I thought I wanted to do a little more work and decided to work on the upper part of the trail. I was surprised by the number of Ligustrum in the area since we have been walking past these plants for months on our way to our work area at the bottom of the trail. I cut for a couple of hours and made good progress, even if it was just a short distance down the trail. I had expected to cut probably several hundred feet. Instead, I only made it about fifty feet on one side of the trail.

*Marilyn Whitworth: Corona Buster!*

# Miller Springs Nature Center *cont.*

Fast forward to May and, *YES* we are back to work. Of course, we practiced safe social distancing during our work. We had nine volunteers with four from the new class (Carroll Adcock, Kelly Ann Blanchard, Pat Porubsky, Stephanie Preciado), four other CTMNs (John Atkins, Ben Clement, Marilyn Whitworth, John Burns), and we had a volunteer from



*Stephanie Preciado rips up Ligustrum with a PullerBear*

outside of our group, Michael Holly, who had contacted Zoe about helping at MSNC. We almost had a full group of ten but someone “bugged out” due to concerns about chiggers, ticks, and probably most importantly poison ivy. The magic number of ten would have been nice. You know I am just kidding, Zoe! I think it is important to say here that if anyone ever has these types of concerns, it is OK to stay away and not participate. Safety is number one!

Zoe may not have been with us in person, but she still had an impact on the day. She had talked with Carroll and Kelly Ann about taking

photos of the activities. I saw Stephanie taking pictures and videos as well. Note: Zoe knows I do a terrible job of documenting the work in photos. John Atkins usually takes some photos and I try, however I usually fail miserably. So, the two Johns decided to let the new class take on the task of photography. It was nice to not even think about it.



*Beauty in the brush*



*Kelly Ann Blanchard and Pat Porubsky and tools of the trade*

# Miller Springs Nature Center *cont.*

I seem to be rambling today, so back to our work—the real reason for this article. We all gathered near the tool shed to introduce ourselves and talk about the job and safety concerns. After our talk, we all collected tools and headed down to the Green Pond trail. I decided we should continue the work I started last month on the upper portion of the trail. It worked out well as the group was able to spread out along the trail within sight of each other while still having some good distance between us. John A. and Michael got into the weeds (poison ivy) quickly and did some great work clearing the incline to the west of the trail. I hope neither of them broke out with poison ivy.



*Carroll Adcock using PrunerBear instead of the PullerBear*



*Ben Clement and Michael Holly stack chopped Ligustrum*

The rest of the folks started working from the trail and working out on both sides of the trail. The impact was obvious and dramatic in opening up the canopy and making the trail feel much more open while still leaving a lot of native plant materials to grow into the open areas we created.

All in all, two and a half hours later, it was a fantastic work day. I heard several folks say it was great to get back outdoors to get some fresh air and get some work done. I agree with this 100%. It really felt good to see everyone in person for a change. It seemed everyone went away happy and very tired!

Y'all come back now! Ya hear?

See you on June 11<sup>th</sup>

# Miller Springs Nature Center

## My First CTMN Volunteer Project

**- Carroll Adcock, 2020**

*Miller Springs workday May 14, 2020*

I was provided the opportunity today to work as a volunteer with our Master Naturalist group at Miller Springs. As a newcomer and current student of the program, I was pleased to have the opportunity to meet (in person) some of my fellow students, something that had not previously been an option for our class due to the Covid-19 social distancing rule. After a brief introduction and summary of the plan for the morning, we grabbed our tools and proceeded down to the Green Pond trail. The plan for the morning was invasive species removal from a section of the trail, apparently an ongoing task. Today's primary target: Wax Leaf Ligustrum. Group leaders assured we were familiar with our target species as well as recognition of poison ivy for our own welfare. I was pleased to share this experience with new acquaintances and while the initial task appeared daunting, I was pleasantly surprised to see the work accomplished by this group of individuals. It was a pleasure to do some physical work with a group of like-minded lovers of the outdoors after a hiatus on my part from this type of volunteer work. Several members of my family, many friends and myself on occasion have enjoyed hiking and observing nature on the trails of this fine park. I found this experience to be very positive and look forward to future activities at this site as well as other sites in our region. I have always loved and enjoyed the outdoors and had a desire to be involved in the Master Naturalist program and am excited to now have the opportunity to increase my knowledge as well as to serve as a volunteer.

Happy Trails,

Carroll Adcock

Class of 2020



# Cedar Gap Park



*Marilyn Whitworth (in blue) patrols the roadside while Trainees Andrea Liles (left) and Sharon Schmitz ventured in to snake boot territory.*

*\*Also at the late May workday were John Atkins and John Burns.*



*Tina Atkins and Marilyn Whitworth are regulars on duty*



*Ben Clement & Trainees Carroll Adcock and Kelly Ann Blanchard demonstrate safe distancing*



*Trainees Steve and Sharon Schmitz team up for cleanup*



**- Kelly Ann Blanchard, 2020**

Do you consider yourself a scientist? For those of us lacking a degree in a scientific field, our first thought would likely be, “Nope, not me.” But we would be wrong! As lovers of nature, we are automatically citizen scientists, and the scientific community needs our expertise.

“Citizen science – or community science as the field is increasingly referred to – is critically important to advancing our knowledge and understanding of a vast array of complex real-world questions and challenges,” said Dr. Tania Homayoun, a Texas Nature Trackers biologist with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. “Scientists simply can’t tackle these types of questions alone, and given how they touch on so many aspects of all our lives, we all have a stake in being a part of the research, learning, and discourse around what we’re discovering about our world. In a state as large and ecologically diverse as Texas, contributions from naturalists, no matter where someone is in their learning journey, help build a more accurate and complete picture of our biodiversity, which is vital to the conservation and research work we as biologists do.”



*Shirley Watts sorts fossils for a research project at the Waco Mammoth Monument site in Waco.*

Citizen science is a relatively new term referring to the participation of amateur naturalists in scientific investigations. The word “amateur” comes from the Latin root word *amator*, or “lover.” Therefore, as amateur naturalists, we are not unskilled, but rather we are lovers of nature and passionate about conserving and protecting our natural environment. Perhaps the most famous amateur naturalist is Charles Darwin, who was not paid for his tremendous contributions to our understanding of biological sciences and had to send out thousands of letters to solicit data for his research.

# Community Science cont.

Thankfully, we no longer have to rely on snail mail to drum up community involvement in scientific investigations. Today, citizen scientists can collect and submit data online as images and audio recordings with digital tools like iNaturalist. With seemingly endless online projects that need help from informed community scientists, we have many opportunities to provide quality data and have fun while we're at it. Citizen science projects range from common observations, such as bird counts, butterfly migrations, and water quality, to more specific interests like monitoring weather, earthquakes, archaeology, and astronomy. There is something for everyone!

According to Dr. Homayoun, "learning and discovery touch on a core part of what it is to be human: no matter what we spend our days doing, science is part of our human birthright. We are hardwired to ask questions, to explore, to experiment, to draw conclusions from what we perceive around us, and the diverse array of community science projects out there gives everyone the opportunity to engage with science in ways that have meaning and relevance to us."

Depending on the project and whether there is additional training required, Advanced Training (AT) or Volunteer Service (VS) hours are available to Master Naturalists. Some projects are pre-approved in our chapter for participation. If you find a community science project that interests you but cannot find a matching opportunity in the VMS system, don't fret! In advance of your project, you can ask for permission to count the hours by submitting the AT-VS form on the CTMN website and someone will reach out to you regarding how to proceed. Find the form here: <https://txmn.org/centraltexas/advtrvolpro/>

In each newsletter, we will highlight a different citizen science project currently available for participation. You can also find a list of pre-approved citizen science projects on the CTMN website.



*Master Naturalists learn water quality sampling techniques.*

# Community Science Featured Project

## The Backyard Pollinator Citizen Science Project

<https://sixleggedaggie.com/research/pollinator-project/>

Looking for a way to continue to stay at home while contributing to a good cause? Sponsored by Texas A&M and other collaborators, The Pollinator Project seeks to determine the attractiveness of different commercially available flowering plants to different groups of pollinators. They need citizen scientists to view flowering plants in their yards and observe the types and numbers of pollinators who visit.

The project requires three steps to participate:

1. View two training videos that show you what you're looking for and how to submit your data – a combined 1 hour of viewing that qualifies as AT
2. Pass a short quiz (don't worry, you get unlimited tries to complete it)
3. Start observing! Log your data and keep track of your hours – they qualify for VS

The Pollinator Project is already accepting contributions for this year and will continue to collect information through October 2020. Additional information can be found on their website along with the training videos and submission form. Happy hunting!



*Chika Somura participating in an annual butterfly count.*

# Nature Quest

## - Linda Fairlie, 2018

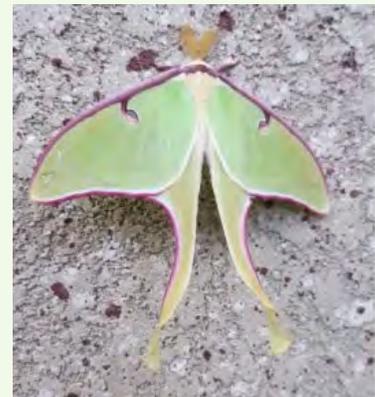
I love taking pictures of nature. I am not a professional by any means, but by simply taking a lot of pictures, I have come up with a few that are pretty good. Once, in Colorado, I took a picture of a creature in the woods that was unique. I had to take it to the ranger station and ask what it was. The first ranger I asked didn't know, but the second told me it was a pine marten, and that they were very shy and that I was lucky to get a picture of one.



A few years later (2018) I went through my Texas Master Naturalist training. I still remember the day I learned about iNaturalist from Tania Homayoun. My brain said loudly, "What?! I can take a picture of something and find out what it is?!" Needless to say, this opened a door for me. I installed iNaturalist on my phone that afternoon, and my Nature Quest journey began. In just two years, I have identified 126 species. I'm learning a lot.

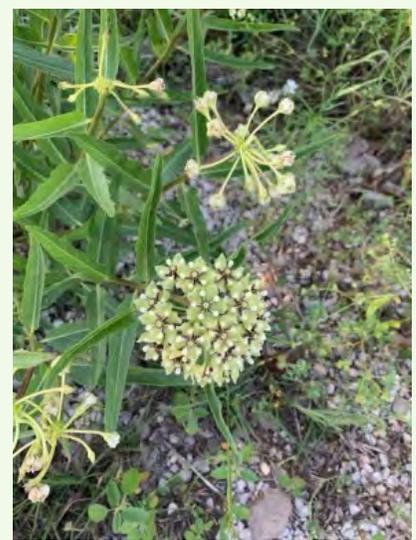
I was honored to be included in this year's training by sharing what I have done with iNaturalist and collecting pictures that our trainees submitted so that they could share their findings. We had fun looking at their pictures together and each person talked about their own Nature Quest.

As each photo came in, it reminded me of my own excitement at using iNaturalist. It didn't matter what the picture was. Carroll Adcock's pictures of a dragonfly and Admiral butterfly reminded me of chasing butterflies in fields, trying to capture them. It is not easy to get a picture of a flying creature with its wings open! Kelly Ann Blanchard was successful at getting a beautiful picture of an Admiral! Brent Blumenthal also sent a picture of a wings-open Luna moth which is breathtaking.



# Nature Quest

It's funny, but I don't worry about getting stung when I take pictures of bees. Samantha Ernzen sent a picture of a honeybee. She knew it was a honeybee because of the class on bees she had recently taken. The picture of cardinal eggs she sent helped me identify eggs in a nest for my daughter! Jamie Harmon got a picture of two baby cardinals in a nest, so I was able to tell my daughter what to expect when they hatched. Andrea Liles submitted a picture of wood sorrel, which she identified through the Plant of the Day that Lynn Fleming is sending out each day. I learned about wood sorrel through an Edible Plants seminar at the Wildflower Center. Bill Novakoski submitted some great wildflower pictures. I remembered learning about Antelope horns at Burleson ranch. iNaturalist is not the only way to learn about and identify nature!



Jennifer Chalmers sent a picture of an owl in an owl box. Wow. I love owls. I still remember the barn owl that flew over our heads when we were at Burleson ranch learning about native prairie plants. Bill Cornelius submitted a pic of a powdered dancer, which was close to where he likes to fly fish. It made me smile and remember my own adventures in learning to fly fish.



# Nature Quest

Chris Nixon reminded us that nature can be very close to home! After spending several hours out in nature looking for something to submit, he discovered a seven spotted lady beetle larva on his garage. What a cool looking bug!

Patsy Porubsky sent me some “bug” pictures. When it comes to bugs, there is a lot I don’t know, but they are pretty interesting looking. One was a click beetle and the other was a cocoon. I remember posting my first Indian Paintbrush like Stephanie Preciado. I was trying out iNaturalist and knew the plant was a paintbrush, but wanted to see if iNaturalist knew it was a paintbrush. She also sent a really cool picture of a snail, which was very artistic.



Matt Ridley’s Western Rat snake reminded me of the diamondback watersnake I found this month. I don’t know about Matt, but when I come across a snake, my first thought is not to get away, but to get a picture. My family does not like that about me.

Steve and Sharon Schmitz sent several pictures of an Emperor butterfly caterpillar on a hackberry leaf, which told the story of its change to chrysalis. Julie Sieh sent pictures of a blue flower and a spittle bug. Lynn Fleming taught me about spittle bugs.

Taking pictures of nature and identifying each subject is a lot of fun. I do it when I take walks and hikes, even in my own neighborhood or yard. Most of us have a camera with us all the time – our cell phones. For me, this has opened a whole new world in nature.



# FISH TALES

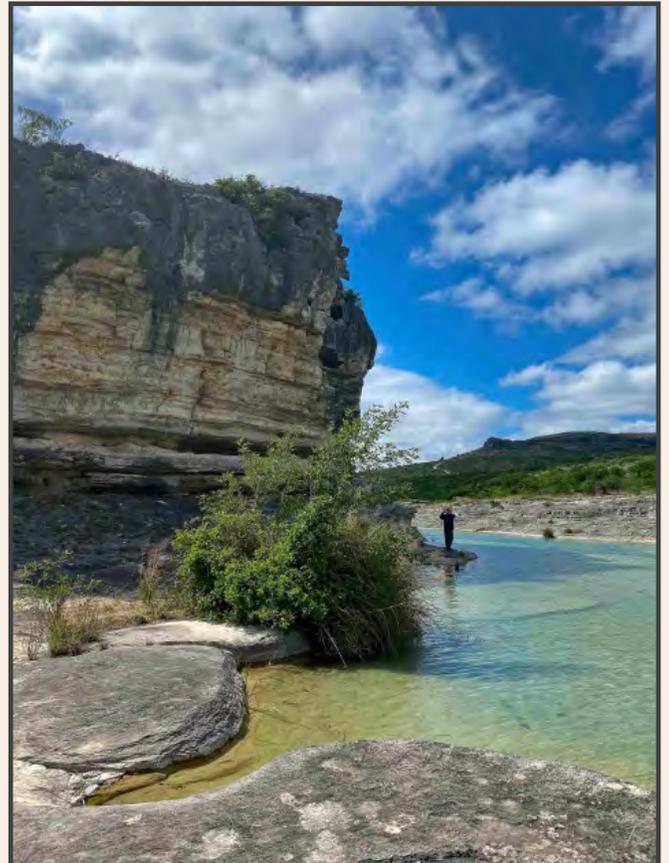


## Social Distancing with the Devils (River)

- **Carroll Adcock, 2020**

I believe we all shared a hint of trepidation as we pulled into Del Rio the evening prior to our 5-day kayak trip. We had been warned that Del Rio was now requiring masks to be worn and we were all well prepared to continue appropriate social distancing practices as we had been at home since the COVID-19 onset. We were thankful that our guide had the attitude of “where else can you social distance more effectively than on a wild and remote river where you may go days without any human contact?” After a few hours of restless sleep at a local motel, we drove to meet our guide and shuttle driver to embark on this “extreme social distancing” trip down the fabled Devils River.

The Devils River is part of the Rio Grande drainage basin and is located in southwestern Texas. The river has a length of just under 100 miles before its confluence with the Rio Grande at what is now part of Lake Amistad. The Devils flows through sparsely populated and arid hill country and appears like an oasis. The area has been home to humans for at least 13,000 years and evidence of their presence is visible on the walls of some of the “rock shelters” visible from the river. It has been on my “bucket list” for probably 40 years, and I had done an abbreviated trip of the lower river a few years ago that only piqued my desire to float the entire course (all that is navigable and accessible).



# FISH TALES *cont.*

The river has its origin in Sutton county where it flows a short distance prior to going underground for 20-plus miles before returning above ground. I had always been reticent to tackle the river on my own, as the Texas Parks and Wildlife web page states: “Do not attempt to paddle the Devils River unless you are an experienced paddler in good physical condition with wilderness paddling experience”.



The river is a pool-and-drop river with several class II-III rapids and has some of the best smallmouth and largemouth bass fishing in Texas.

Our first day on the river didn't disappoint. My son and his girlfriend and myself were in awe around every turn of the river. The distant hills were all verdant after recent rainfalls, the cactus and ocotillo were in full bloom and many appeared to sprout right out of the rocks. The varying shades of turquoise blue/green

waters and the splash from the chilly waters off the paddles kept us refreshed, as did the dunking I took on our second set of rapids! After logging about 7 river miles and a few

smallmouths landed, we arrived at our campsite for the first night. The night sky was disappointing that first night due to overcast skies. I had been looking forward to some sky watching in this remote Dark Sky country. Fortunately we had better weather the next 2 nights and opportunity to enjoy the Milky Way as it can only be observed in this type of setting.



# FISH TALES cont.

Subsequent days all involved covering 8-11 miles of river marked by lots of paddling, some “lining” of kayaks down shallow rapids, a portage around obstacles on a couple of occasions and several hours of fishing. The scenery in and around the river was breathtaking, and our third and fourth day consisted of phenomenal fishing with each of us catching (and releasing) personal bests as well as fish that qualified for the [Texas Big Fish Award](#). Along the waterway, we observed many songbirds, butterflies, turtles, egrets, hawks, owls, crested caracaras and an occasional osprey. One cliff that we kayaked and fished below had a red tail hawk nest with very vocal eyases. We paddled below an area where a rock shelter on a distant cliff could be seen and were fortunate enough to have sunshine that illuminated the pictograph of a shaman and an antelope or deer like animal.



In a nutshell, this was one of the best adventures I have ever participated in, and the fishing was excellent as well. The Devils River is not for the faint of heart, or the faint of body for that matter. The rewards of the trip more than compensate for the embarrassment of frequent kayak spills and body fatigue, in my opinion. You may ask about the result of our social distancing? Our party of 4 all had their own kayak, the option of individual tents (the couple opted to share one) and it was day 3 of our trip before we saw any other humans outside of our own group. I hope to return to see this spectacular jewel of Texas again in the future!

*iNaturalist says Pitcher's Leatherflower*

# Southern Yellowjacket

- JOHN ATKINS, 2016

Southern yellowjackets construct both aerial and terrestrial nests. The ground nests can be huge and extend for several meters into the ground or hollow tree. They may contain over 4000 workers. The picture shows the entrance to a nest I recently located in the canyon wall of a stream flowing through Chalk Ridge Falls.



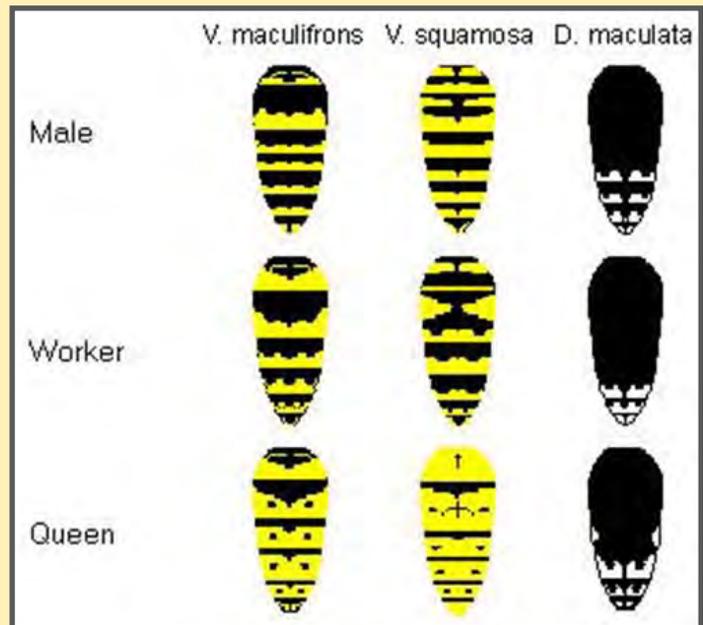
There were literally hundreds of yellowjackets protecting the entrance and flying back and forth to forage. My son and his friend did not notice the nest as they walked past it because they were more interested in reaching the cave and springs. They were lucky. Its reputation for being ill tempered is well earned. When injured or sensing danger to the nest, they release an alarm pheromone which quickly results in an aggressive, defensive behavior from other members of the colony. I made sure everyone stayed quiet (not an easy task with Tina) and gave the nest wide berth on the return trip!

# Southern Yellowjacket *cont.*

There are two species of yellowjackets that call Texas home: the eastern yellowjacket (*Vespula maculifrons*) which calls east Texas home, and its meaner cousin the southern yellowjacket (*Vespula squamosa*) that lives here in central Texas.

The yellowjacket is about ½ inch long and has characteristic black and yellow markings on head, thorax and abdomen. Look for that perpendicular black line to distinguish southern from eastern yellowjackets.

The colony is initiated by the queen, who survives the winter, while the other colony members die. Queens are large, opportunistic, social parasites who often overtake the nests of other yellowjacket species. They do this by killing the host queen and adopting the host workers who raise her young until they die. When establishing her own nest, she constructs a nest of 20 to 45 cells and produces eggs that hatch into larvae. The queen feeds these larvae nectar and arthropod prey, and in about 30 days, the first worker wasps emerge from the pupal stage. After the number of worker wasps increase, the queen no longer leaves the nest.



*Editor's Note: If you need a personal reminder of how owie a yellowjacket sting can be, here's a friend recently stung on the hand. He's touting the buggers as an anti-wrinkle treatment.*

# POISON IVY

## - Yvonne Eele, 2012

I'm strange, I know, but I like poison ivy. It is a beautiful, colorful plant that is great for wildlife. I don't want it in the fenced part of my yard but will let it grow outside of the area we use.

The quick and dirty is that no one wants to get the rash from the plant's urushiol oil. Animals are not affected by it but can bring it in to us after they play outside. Any tools or clothes we use when trying to eradicate, or even unknowingly trim it, could have the oil on it and when we touch it, we are then exposed and potentially in for an itchy rash. The oil is viable for at least 5 years. That means that the trimmers we used last year could still spread oil to us. Cleaning tools, clothing, and pets is a good way to keep from being exposed to the urushiol oil.

Since I have pets and enjoy the wildlife in my yard, I don't use chemicals to eradicate poison ivy. I have found the best way to control it in my yard is to dress appropriately and just go pull it out. I am not a masochist, so I take every precaution I can. Long pants, and long-sleeved shirt should be worn. I wear a short-sleeved shirt or tank top under long sleeves and will explain that in a minute. I



I wear a hat with my hair in a ponytail so it doesn't get into anything, and I wear gloves that can pull over the cuffs of sleeves. Also boots. I go through and pull up the poison ivy that I need to remove. As soon as I am finished, I go to a water hose. I take off the long-sleeved shirt and wash any bare skin with the cold water from faucet and Dawn dish soap.

# POISON IVY *cont.*

The urushiol oil can bind to your skin in about 20 minutes, so if it is a bigger job than 20 minutes, I suggest stopping often and washing with soap and cold water. When the job is complete for the day, make sure to strip and wash clothing, including footwear, and clean all tools. Make sure to shower in cool water, and do not use moisturizing soap or lotion because hot water and moisturizing soaps are made to open your pores, which is what you are trying to avoid.

Poison ivy rash is not contagious as you must contact the oil in order to have a reaction. The rash blisters are filled with water, not oil. Different areas of our skin vary in thickness and in how fast the oil can bind, so our bodies react at different times making the rash seem to be spreading. Poison ivy makes me think of the difference between aggressive and invasive plants. Poison ivy is a very aggressive plant that spreads quickly, but it is not considered an invasive plant. It falls into the NRCS definition of opportunistic native plant. Invasive refers to non-native species able to establish on many sites, grows quickly, and spreads to the point of disrupting plant communities or ecosystems. China Berry and Ligustrum are good examples of aggressive invasive species.

As you are out in nature look for the beauty of poison ivy. It is a very beautiful plant that attracts a variety of wildlife.



# What's in YOUR backyard?



Texas State Parks  
@TPWDparks

When the work week sneaks in after a holiday...

No one will ask for more social distance than a copperhead on the trail. If you encounter a snake, give it plenty of space and find a way to go around.  
[@DinoValleySP](#)

[#TXStateParks](#)



*Turkeys visit Wade Matthew's place near Owl Creek at Lake Belton March 2020.*



*Freshly molted giant mayfly seen by Carroll Adcock which was promptly eaten by a nearby jumping spider.*



*Blue Curls & bee at Mother Neff State Park in April by Zoe Rascoe*

# What's in YOUR backyard?



*Carroll Adcock hosts a nesting pair of Red-Tailed Hawks on cliffs near his home.*

*Top and bottom of an underwing caterpillar found by Andrea Liles on their Bell County property.*



*One in a pair of Mississippi Kites in the Rascoe backyard. Normally stately raptors. I think Terry has taken one too many photos of the courtship and this guy was saying "Leave us alone or I'll peck your eyes out!"*

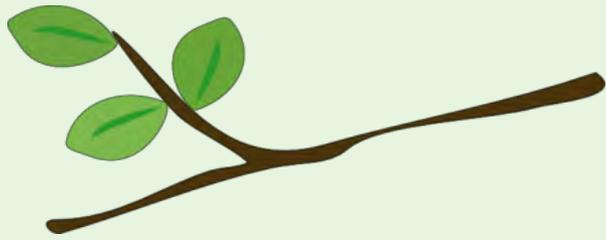
# What's in YOUR backyard?

Juan Anaya decided to throw a social distancing backyard party.



He set up a hidden camera  
All the important folks flew in  
The blackchin hummers  
The yellow-throated warblers  
The scissor-tailed flycatcher  
The orchard oriole

The Cardinal gave the blessing  
The painted bunting served as emcee  
There were hors d'oeuvre  
Swimming  
Eating  
A large time was had by all! (THE END)



# Out on a Limb

- Mary Ann Everett, 2003

**Tree Description:** Small tree/large shrub, multi-trunked, evergreen 6-12 ft. but can reach 20-30ft in height.

**Blooms:** Bloom color is green, blooming during March and April. Fragrant.

**Fruit:** Bluish white. The female trees produce fruit, the male plant should be close to the female for pollination. More than 40 species of birds relish these berries.

**Location:** Wetlands, landscaping, habitat restoration, makes an excellent screen. Native from New Jersey to eastern Oklahoma and east Texas, proceeding south through Mexico/Central America.

**Leaves:** Evergreen. The bushy branches make good nesting sites. The leaves have small oil dots which can be seen when held to the light and exude a subtle aroma.

**Bark:** Lovely gray bark on some, fading to almost white on others.

**Heat & Drought Tolerance:** Needs extra moisture to get established. It is drought *and* flood tolerant, and heat tolerant too. Prefers slightly acidic soil and sun.

**Interesting Facts:** The berries have a waxy coating, and colonists boiled the fruits separating the waxy covering to make fragrant-burning candles. The tree has the ability to fix atmospheric nitrogen through root nodules containing the nitrogen-fixing bacterium Actinomyces. It's the larval host for Red-Banded Hairstreak butterflies.

[Click here for name of tree](#)



# April CHAPTER MEETING

- **ANDI BOWSER, 2019**

## “Native Bees in Your Landscape” by Carol Clark

On April 14, 2020, at our monthly chapter meeting (online this time) I had the pleasure, along with a bunch of other Central Texas Master Naturalists and the trainees for this year’s class, to hear the wonderful presentation on Native Bees by Carol Clark. Even though current conditions do not allow for a face to face meeting, this comprehensive webinar was both informative and enjoyable! I took a few notes so I would not forget the information but also to use as a tool when Bill and I go out there to find insects and especially bees to photograph!



Carol is a Master Naturalist and longtime member of the Native Plant Society of Texas. She is a conservation specialist with Monarch Watch and a co-administrator of the Texas Native Bee Co-Op for Texas Parks and Wildlife.

There’s no way I could recite all of the info but here are some points that I jotted down:

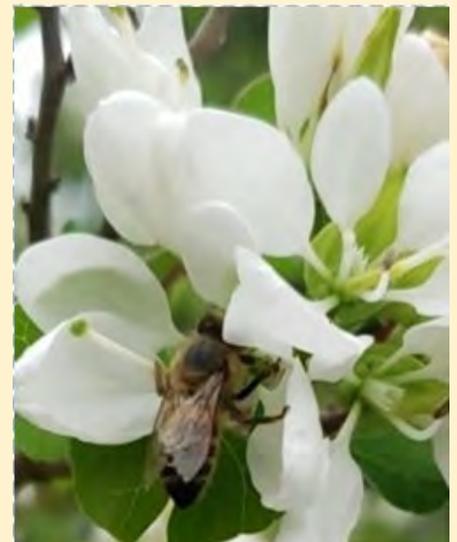
- \* There are 1500 species of bees in Texas and only a few are imported from other countries.
- \* Bee ID tips: size, pattern, color, shape, habitat, nest type and odd features.
- \* Bees are fuzzy, have thicker waists and are not so boldly colored as wasps.
- \* Wasps are carnivores, bees are vegetarians (nectar, pollen, fungus & microbes).
- \* 90% of Texas native bees are solitary and do not defend their nest. 70% nest in the ground.
- \* The bumblebee is the largest at 2 inches but there are tiny bees smaller than a grain of rice.
- \* Our native bees are actually 200 times more effective than honeybees at pollination.
- \* Social bees like ready-made homes like those we can purchase or make. Honey bees and bumblebees like colonies.
- \* And we learned about several different species like the



*Wine cup bee home*



longhorn (all black), digger (blue eyes), cactus (inside the flower), sunflower (big leg warmers), and my personal favorite, only because the name sounds so cool: the kleptoparasitic bee (like cowbirds it hides its eggs in other nests and is easily identified with a smiley face on its back).



*Local bee in Andi’s Anacacho tree*

# May CHAPTER MEETING

## - ZOE RASCOE, 2004

In May, we held our second Chapter Meeting by webinar. Although I miss being with my nature buddies, this one was just as interesting and engaging as the one in April. Danny Shaw, a 33-year career Texas Game Warden, became the first Executive Director of Operation Game Thief last year. His charge is to engage people and communities to prevent theft and destruction of Texas natural resources through outreach, education and reporting violators. The similarity in our own mission was not lost on him—OGT considers Master Naturalists as important partners. Texas Game Wardens risk their lives to protect our natural resources and their water patrol capabilities have them fully engaged in emergency water rescues as well.

Operation Game Thief works closely with over 400 Texas Game Wardens who monitor 265,000 square miles, 1.7M surface acres of fresh water, 367 miles of coastline, 4 million acres of saltwater marsh, 191,000 miles of rivers and streams. OGT receives tips on violations, offers rewards for information, provides technology grants to TPWD, Game Warden death benefits (19 have lost their lives), and provides outreach and education. They are supported by donations and memberships (information at [www.ogttx.org](http://www.ogttx.org)).

A success story of protecting Texas natural flora was a tip regarding a small endangered succulent plant (*Ariocarpus Fissuratus*) for sale on e-bay, generally headed to Europe. Here is [very interesting article](#) on the immense black market on just one Texas species. We are fortunate to have our state and federal agencies cooperating to protect the nature we love.



# NWF Monarch Stewardship Workshop

- Jenna Chappell, 2019

On March 7, 2020, The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center hosted the second in a series of workshops pertaining to Monarch decline in North America and was conducted by The National Wildlife Federation. Although there are many factors contributing to the decline of Monarch butterflies, the one I found particularly fascinating is the spread of the protozoan parasite *Ophryocystis elektroscirrha* (OE).



L to R front :Jessica Dieter and Jenna Chappell  
L to R back: Jean Solana and Paula Finley

Now you may be asking yourself “What is OE?” and ‘How does it contribute to Monarch decline?’ The following quote, from The Monarch Joint Venture, sums up the problem well:

*“...Infected adult monarchs harbor thousands or millions of microscopic OE spores on the outside of their bodies. When dormant spores are scattered onto eggs or milkweed leaves by infected adults, monarch larvae consume the spores, and these parasites then replicate inside the [gut of] larvae and pupae.*

*Monarchs with severe OE infections can fail to emerge successfully from their pupal stage, either because they become stuck or they are too weak to fully expand their wings. Monarchs with mild OE infections can appear normal but live shorter lives and cannot fly as well as healthy monarchs...”*

In addition to the above, our instructor told us that there are currently three hotspots that have been hit hard. Southern California, where the Western Monarch migrants overwinter, Central Florida where the Monarchs do not migrate, and The Texas Gulf coast, where the Eastern Monarchs stop on their journey to Mexico. In each of these hotspots, over 70% of Monarchs tested have carried the infection.

Photos provided by Jessica Dieter, 2019

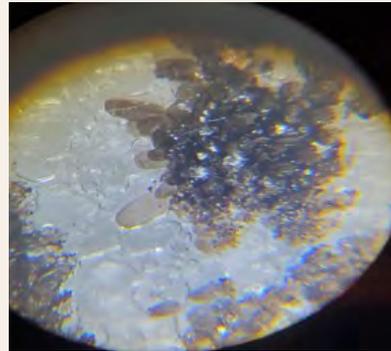
*cont.*

## NWF Monarch Stewardship Workshop *cont.*

Below is an example of a healthy Monarch wing versus an infected Monarch's wing.



*Healthy Monarch wing*



*Infected Monarch wing*

Only adults can spread the infection and only juveniles are harmed because spores are activated in the gut of the larvae. Imagine an infected mother Monarch is laying eggs. The spores reside on her abdomen that she uses to place her eggs on the underside of a milkweed leaf. These spores are now stuck to the egg and the surrounding leaf. The larva hatches and then eats the egg and the surrounding leaf. The spores now reside in the larva gut. The parasite begins to use the resources the larva consumes so the larva will not develop as strongly. Even infected adults that look normal to the naked eye have been tested and their wings are lighter and more brittle than uninfected adults on average. The larva expels its gut contents during pupation and the emerging adult will carry the spores away to infect others.

What should you take away from this? OE infection is a real danger to the health of our Monarch population. The migration comes through our state both in the spring and the fall. We have a unique opportunity to change the procedures we use when interacting with migrating Monarchs. The following are ways you can change how you interact with this majestic species:

- Use disposable gloves when handling monarchs and change them frequently to reduce the chance of spreading the microscopic spores.
- When using equipment (desks/tables, tools, net, etc.) to interact with a Monarch, the equipment needs to be sanitized in a 20% bleach and water solution between interacts with Adult Monarchs.
- If you see a chrysalis that is discolored (putrid yellow) and has spore-like spots visible through the membrane, use gloves and a Ziploc bag to contain and dispose of the chrysalis.
- Cut back Milkweed plants at the end of each migration season because spores can survive when warm.

The University of Georgia is currently the only lab testing for the OE infection. If you think you have an infected Monarch, guidelines for sample collection are at <https://www.monarchparasites.org/>  
For additional information go to <https://www.ecology.uga.edu/project-monarch-health/>.

# Good to Know...



**Wild Neighbors Series: *Bats of Central Texas*** (recorded 5-29-20). The first in a series now offered by webinar. Watch for a post to YouTube. ([Facebook link below](#))

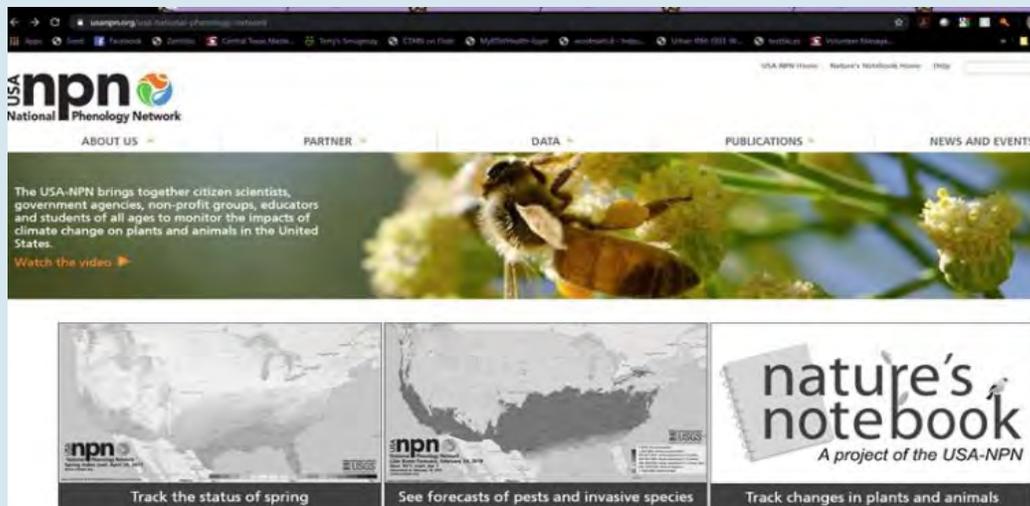
Go to [www.traviscountytx.gov/bcpmap](http://www.traviscountytx.gov/bcpmap) to see the entire Balcones Canyonlands Preserve. At 32,000 acres it is one of the nation's largest urban preserves. The National Wildlife Refuge was formed to preserve 8 endangered species, including Golden Cheek Warbler and Black Cap Vireo, and 6 cave karst arachnids, and 27 species of concern.

Thanks to members Sharon and Steve Schmitz for passing this info along! AT hours for our members. <https://www.facebook.com/austinwildlandconservation/videos/803788183361403/>

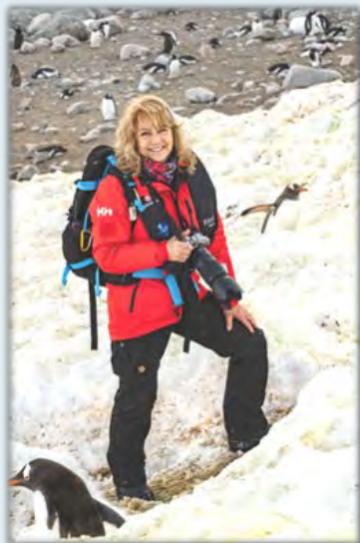
## The National Phenology Network at [www.usanpn.org](http://www.usanpn.org)

The USA-NPN brings together citizen scientists, government agencies, non-profit groups, educators and students of all ages to monitor the impacts of climate change on plants and animals in the United States.

**PHENOLOGY:** the study of cyclic and seasonal natural phenomena, especially in relations to climate and plants and animal life.



# Contributing Authors to this Newsletter



Clockwise from top left: Carroll Adcock, John Atkins, John Burns, Mary Ann Everett, Jenna Chappell, Yvonne Eele, Kelly Ann Blanchard, Jean Solana, Andi Bowsher, Zoe Rascoe and Linda Fairlie is below. Thanks y'all!!!





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**Contributed Images:** John Atkins, Tina Atkins, Juan Anaya, Carroll Adcock, Andrea Liles, Wade Matthews, Jessica Dieter, 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!**

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## **THESE IN-PERSON MEETINGS ARE ON HOLD UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE**

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!) 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 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. All members are welcome to attend.