



THE TRACKER

Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter February 2021

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Are you curious about nature?

Do you enjoy being outdoors?

Are you willing to share what you have learned?

The Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter is a volunteer organization with members in Bell and surrounding counties. We strive to understand nature so we can better conserve our natural resources and pass that knowledge along to our communities through volunteer service. The only route to become a Certified Master Naturalist begins with participating in the Volunteer Training Course—which starts in March for our Chapter. If you think this might be a service organization for you, head to our website to learn more.



Become a
**TEXAS
MASTER
NATURALIST**

Volunteer Training Course

March 23rd – June 30th

Various Tuesdays and Saturdays

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Applications

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For information on the
Central Texas Master Naturalist Program:

Zoe Rascoe 254-913-1013

Lynn Fleming 254-760-4739

Mary Ann Everett 254-721-0931





This is my first entry as President of the Central Texas Master Naturalists. I am very humbled and honored to be asked to serve as President of our chapter, and will do the best I can. I thought I would talk a little bit about who I am and how I got here.

Several years ago, I began experiencing some debilitating symptoms that took over a year to diagnose. During this time, I was put on administrative leave from my job as Band Director and eventually took early retirement. I needed something to do with my new physical restrictions. A counselor suggested I look into gardening, or quilting, which didn't appeal to me, and then he suggested looking into Master Naturalists. Bingo. I looked on the web for information, talked to Zoe, and the rest is history.



Mary Ann Everett became my mentor, and we became partners in crime!

I have a service dog, Sofi, who goes everywhere with me. She especially loves to go to work days where we pick up trash or pull down hippie huts, and she is used to going into classrooms with me. She has "helped" catch Monarch butterflies, gather wildflower seeds, talk to students about birds, etc. If she is wearing her service vest she is "working" and should not be petted, but if her vest is off, she is fair game, and loves to be scratched behind the ears.

Cont.

President's Pen cont.

I have always enjoyed learning new things. I got my teaching certificate at the age of 35. I didn't ski or kayak or do 8-mile hikes until I was in my 50's. I recently started fly fishing. This is not to brag. It has not all gone easily. My first ski trip was spent entirely on the bunny slope with the magic carpet, after I crashed into the orange mesh fence. My nickname on the Texas Kayak Fisherman group was Yaktipper (yes, I earned it). I broke my elbow on a hike in Yellowstone, tripping over a rock. But I also got to spend a week with my grandchildren skiing. I got to spend a spring break paddling down the river and fishing/camping with friends. I climbed Half Dome in Yosemite.



John and Linda hiking and fishing in Rocky Mountain National Park. [Click here](#) (then scroll to page 6) for another of Linda's misadventures with a happy ending.

My friends and family tease me about knowing everything about nature now that I have been trained as a Master Naturalist. I don't know everything about anything! I can't identify all the birds at the Christmas Bird Count, but I can spot them, and write down what other people tell me they are, and I have learned to identify a lot of birds since I started. I don't know everything about butterflies, but I can wrangle kids and help keep them on task and delight in nature with them. I don't know about invasive plants, but I am learning about them, and working on my own pollinator-friendly garden in my own yard, with the help of other chapter members. I can't do chainsaw work, or do heavy lifting, but I can approve member hours on the computer or sew finger puppets for sale as a fundraiser.

Central Texas Master Naturalists gave me an outlet when a door was closed on a chapter in my life, and there is a place and job for everyone. Even Covid-19 can't keep us from finding ways to be of service volunteering and learning.

Stay safe everyone. I look forward to a time when we can meet in person again!



Mother Neff State Park

1680 TX Hwy-236, Moody

Jean Solana (2019), MNSP liaison, can be reached at jeansolana@sbcglobal.net

A workday is scheduled for Monday, February 22nd from 9-12. Contact Jean Solana at jeansolana@sbcglobal.net if you need to volunteer on a different day and we will find a day to meet and discuss the many volunteer opportunities at the park.

Winter activities for volunteers at Mother Neff State Park focus on the cleanup of invasive and overabundant plant species. There are plenty of small cedars, ligustrum, and chinaberries that need to be lopped. At headquarters there are weeds to be hoed and native plants to be trimmed. Other projects needing volunteers include educational opportunities, sign/bench/fence painting, plant trimming, trail maintenance and cleaning old nests out of bluebird houses (like the Bewick's wren who borrowed this box) to get them ready for new nests in the spring.



Bewick's:— pronounced "Buick"



Angie Fontenot

To begin the New Year there is a **new ranger** at Mother Neff! Her name is Angelina Fontenot – and she goes by **Angie**. She started out in Taylor, Texas and ended up in Bastrop for 15 years caring for the chimpanzees from the old medical lab there. She married, moved to Houston, and earned her B.S. in Human Resource Management, Emergency Management and a minor in Psychology. While in Houston she ran a shelter for flood victims during Hurricane Harvey. Her husband is now the new Belton Fire Chief, so we get to have her at Mother Neff!

She will be responsible for scheduling, budget, and ordering supplies. She loves sharing education about nature, especially "Creating Memorable Moments!" We look forward to spending time with her at Mother Neff.

Cont.

Mother Neff State Park *Cont.*

January Workday - by Zoe Rascoe

January 25th was a CTMN chapter workday slated for removing the abundant, resource-sucking shoots growing up under the ashe junipers (locally called Mountain Cedars, though not actually a cedar) along the trails in the Prairie. Daisy Klassy led the team of Zoe Rascoe, Carroll Adcock, (Daisy in TPWD uniform), John Ziegeler, Jean Solana, and Julie Sieh. Joined by Bill Abright at the Prairie Trail, we split up to dive under cedars. Some of the seedlings were tiny and could be pulled by hand from the rich soil under the trees.



Work Crew with Daisy Klassy



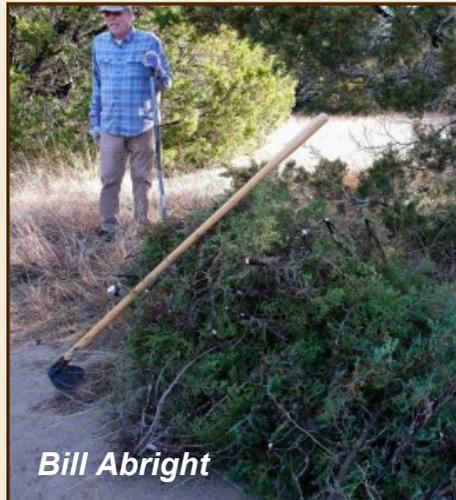
John Ziegeler

Other shoots had been there long enough that the absence of our Pullerbear tree removal tool was palpable. Big John Ziegeler got after the big shoots



Hairy Grama Grass

with his loppers, but eventually his loppers, well, were no longer in working order. Jean pointed out a large area of hairy grama grass (maybe tall grama variety). Not much to see from a distance in the winter, but amazing intricacy up close.



Bill Abright



Jean Solana & Julie Sieh



- JOHN BURNS, 2018

jaburnscgm@gmail.com

The December workday was a beautiful day to be out in nature at the Miller Springs Nature Center. If you have read these articles in the past, you know we usually work on invasive plant removal. We were a little low on man power with six volunteers present and honestly I think we all needed a break from the normal MSNC workday so we decided to take a detour from our normal activities. Well, Marilyn Whitworth and Sue Valdez did their usual task of picking up litter.



Sue Valdez & Marilyn Whitworth

John Atkins advised that bluebirds would be coming back soon so four of us, John Atkins, Tina Atkins, Kelly Ann Blanchard, and myself decided to clean out the bluebird boxes. It was a fun and interesting day. The



John Atkins and John Burns

boxes closest to the parking lot seemed to all have nests in them. We were not sure what kind of birds had made the nests. They did not appear to be bluebird nests. When we cleaned out the boxes further into the nature center on the Armadillo trail we didn't find any bird nests. We did find several paper wasp nests. It was a fairly cool day so the wasps were not very active so we all escaped without any wasp stings. Following the box clean out we continued our walk around the trail to scout out invasive plants and of course we found a lot of invasive plants. More work to be done!

Our timing was perfect as less than a month later I was seeing bluebirds in Chisholm Trail Park which is probably less than a mile away from the nature center. Hopefully with the bluebird boxes cleaned out some bluebirds will find their way to them to make their nests.



Two nests, *not* bluebirds

Miller Springs Nature Center *cont.*

In January we had a great group of eight volunteers. Three volunteers, Marilyn Whitworth, Sue Valdez, and Bert Peeples all worked on litter pickup while the others, John Atkins, John Ziegeler,

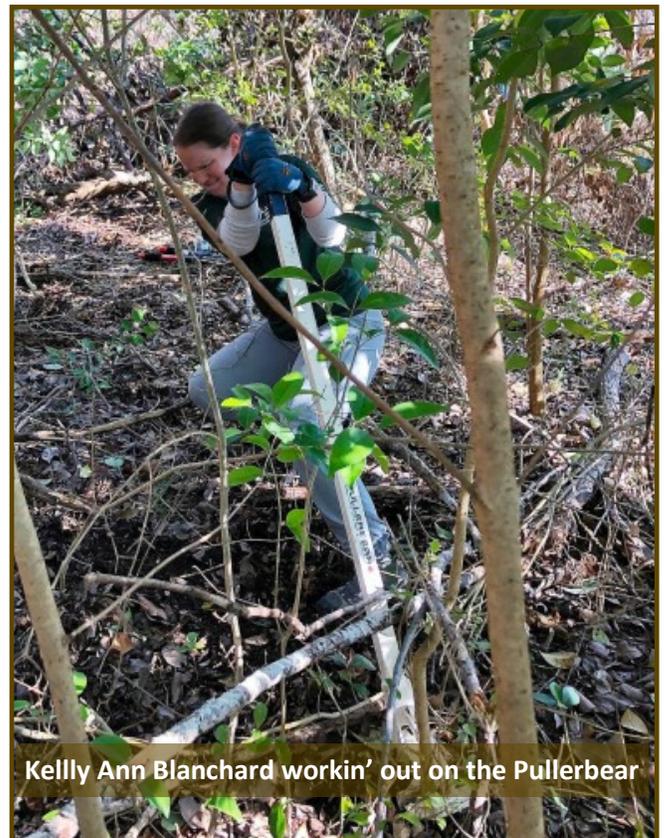


John Burns, Ben Clement, Kelly Ann Blanchard, and Carroll Adcock worked on invasive plant control. We continued on down the Green Pond trail where we had worked in previous months. We had two chainsaws going, one pullerbear, and several loppers working. It was hard work as usual and we

made another big impact. Everyone worked very hard and as usual we were all done in, (POOPED) at the end of the morning. The best part of the day was helping Kelly Ann get acquainted with the pullerbear. For those who don't know, the pullerbear is a tool we use to hook onto the base of invasive trees to actually pull them out of the ground roots and all. We are usually successful pulling trees up to 1 ½" or 2" diameter. It is a very tiring job. Kelly Ann was a champ at pulling trees and she really seemed to enjoy it. I think I can speak for Ben in saying we were both very happy to have Kelly Ann using the pullerbear. Ben and I have had our fair share of time using the pullerbear and we don't mind sharing at all!

February 11, 2021 at 9:00am is the next Miller Springs Workday. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to email or call. My email address is jaburnscgm@gmail.com and phone number is 254-613-1003. Sign up to work using either one.

Everyone is welcome to join us for the fun!



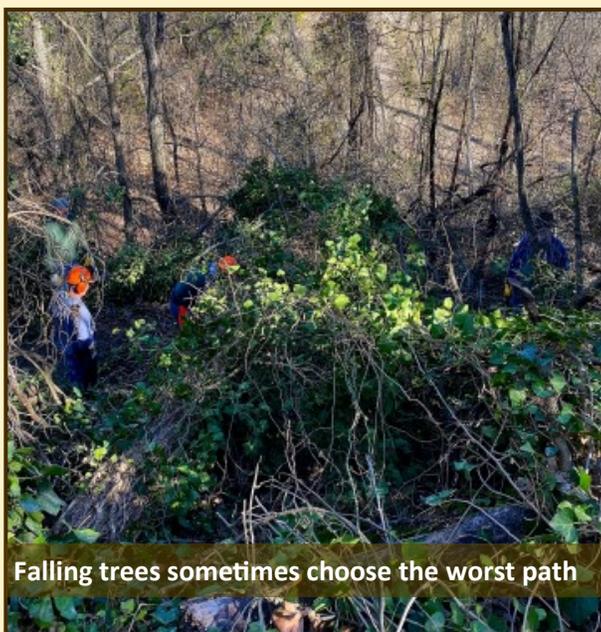
Kelly Ann Blanchard workin' out on the Pullerbear

Chalk Ridge Falls Park

- John Atkins, 2016

The Central Texas Master Naturalists have been busy this autumn in the parks along Stillhouse Lake. Our volunteers have contributed a total of 78 hours of labor to Chalk Ridge Falls Nature Area and Cedar Gap Park over the past two months.

In December we held a workday at Chalk Ridge Falls Nature Area. The Chalk Ridge Falls team (below)



Falling trees sometimes choose the worst path



Kelly Ann thought it was a dead thing, but it was just fake fur. What?

consisted of John Ziegeler, myself, Tina Atkins, Sharon Schmitz, Marilyn Whitworth, Linda Fairlie, Steve Schmitz, Sue Valdez, John Burns and Ben Clement. Our focus was tackling a patch of English ivy that is killing trees near the falls. We spent half of the morning cutting down a large, dead, ivy-covered tree that was full of embedded wire. Of course, when the tree finally fell, it landed directly across a trail. The second half of the morning was spent clearing that mess from the trail. By the time we finished, we had expended two tanks of chainsaw gas, John Ziegler's Sawzall battery, and all of our motivation.



Workin' on the chain(saw) gang

Cedar Gap Park

- John Atkins, 2016

At Cedar Gap Park, we have been helping the Belton Boy Scouts earn environmental volunteer hours as they continue their journey towards Eagle Scout. The January team consisted of myself, Tina Atkins, Mary Ann Everett, Kelly Ann Blanchard, Ben Clement, Bill Novakoski, Marilyn Whitworth, and Matt Ridley. The Scouts were: Joshua Clark, Cynthia Clark, Bryce Allen, Ollie Allen, Arun Rajendra, Benjamin M., and Jason Francis. One of the main missions for the day was



Kelly Ann Blanchard is spotter for Matt Ridley



You can't touch this!

clearing a large debris pile that was blocking a firebreak trail below the Herrington Family Cemetery. We needed to ensure the trail was wide enough to get a brush truck through.

A large Texas red-headed centipede made an appearance to remind everyone that we always must remain vigilant and not pick up logs without first turning them over. After clearing the trail, we focused our efforts on the never-ending forest of chinaberries. With Matt on a second chainsaw, we were making good progress, but

rocks quickly dulled our chains and before we knew it, we ran out of fuel. We finished the morning collecting trash, cleaning up a homeless camp and collecting enough tires and rims to open our own tire shop on the hike back to the parking lot.

Before everyone was released for the morning, Mary Ann Everett, on behalf of the Chapter, surprised me by presenting me with an amazing wildlife themed quilt that she and her daughter had made. I would like to thank the Chapter for this wonderful gift that will be cherished for years to come.



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!

The Ultimate Social Distancing Community Science Project!

If you're looking for an excuse (as if you needed one) to sit on your back porch and watch birds, look no further than the [Great Backyard Bird Count \(GBBC\)](#). Master Naturalists earn volunteer service hours while you count birds and submit your results during this 4-day event coming up on February 12-15, 2021. As a bonus, you can count from the comfort of your own backyard (a great opportunity for virtual volunteer service hours) or travel to your favorite birdwatching locations – or both!

The GBBC is a joint venture by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon Society, and Birds Canada. Launched in 1998, it was the first online community science project to collect data about wild birds and post results in near-real time. In 2013, GBBC became a global project when it started using eBird (the world's largest biodiversity community science project) to observe and record results. Now, almost 200 countries participate in the GBBC each year with over 27 million birds counted in 2020! This provides scientists with extensive and valuable data to better understand bird species around the world as they prepare for yearly migrations.



FIELD NOTES

Cont.



Compared to other bird counts, the GBBC makes [participation](#) a snap. Simply use one of three birding options (download the Merlin Bird ID app or eBird app on your phone or use eBird's website) and sign up for a free Cornell Lab account to begin recording your observations. That's all! Any entries made in these three programs over the 4-day period count toward the GBBC. Photos of birds are not required but can be helpful if you are reporting a rare bird observation. Instructions and walk-throughs are available on the GBBC's website, including [tips for more accurate counting](#).

Featured Community Science Project:

[The Great Backyard Bird Count](#)

Where: Anywhere in the world, especially your backyard!

When: February 12-15, 2021

How: Choose one of three programs to submit your data:

Merlin Bird ID app
eBird app
eBird website



Mr. and Mrs. House Finch, by Terry Rascoe

- ◆ Sign up for a free Cornell Lab account. This will enable your results to be shared with the GBBC.
- ◆ Observe birds for at least 15 minutes in your location and record the counts in either Merlin or eBird. If there are many birds of a certain species and they are hard to count, just offer your best guess – it is still valuable!
- ◆ Use a new checklist for each new day that you observe, each different location you visit, or if you observe the same location at a different time of day.
- ◆ You are now a community scientist!

Texas Master Naturalists, remember to record any time spent participating in the GBBC so you can enter your Volunteer Service hours into VMS under "Data Collection Activities: TMN Field Research Hours".



A Conversation with the Friendly Oaks: *In Sickness and In Health*

- Bill Novakoski, 2020

“Hey, Bill, Happy New Year,” the large oak Old Patriarch called to me as I trailed our dogs down the gravel drive for their morning walk.

“Happy New Year, Old Patriarch. Happy New Year, The Survivor,” I replied to the twisted oak. “But I have to ask, how did you know it is the day we humans consider a new year?”

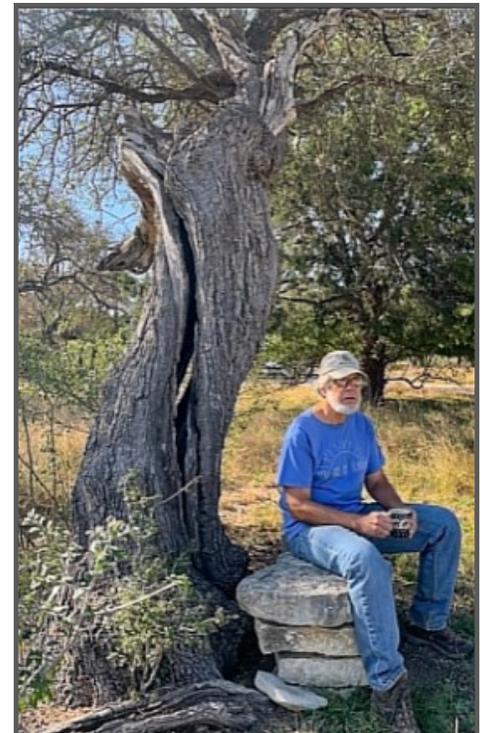
“Good question, Bill. Yes, trees don’t observe years; we observe seasons. Over the seasons, we have observed that during the colder times—when the days are shorter and the wildflowers are gone—humans set off firelights with loud noises in the middle of the night. We heard humans greet each other joyfully with the words, Happy New Year. Later today, why don’t you come sit under our branches and talk with The Survivor and me if you have time.”

That afternoon, I returned and sat under branches of The Survivor on a limestone bench. Old Patriarch, opened the conversation. “Bill, let’s talk about sickness and health, especially for The Survivor. As a Live Oak, he should have a full canopy of leaves, even during these cold months, but he is not well. I want you to hear about sickness and health from him since he may not be with us long.”

I looked at The Survivor and saw his twisted and cracked trunk and how few leaves he had. The Survivor must have seen sadness on my face, for he said. “Bill, don’t be sad. If I survive no longer, I have had a good life and so much to feel thankful for. I have lived here on this corner for many years and have many plant and animal and now even two human friends. My twisted and cracked body is evidence of some great trauma in a past season, probably a strong windstorm. But I lived through it and have no memory of what occurred. I do know, however, that Old Patriarch nurtured me through our intertwined roots which enabled me to survive this great trauma. I have heard some humans have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder after traumatic events, but not me. I have Post Traumatic Gratitude. How could I not have gratitude as my recovery allowed me many more seasons with my friends?

“Bill, you also have noticed that I have few leaves. Thank you for bringing the observant man who determined it was oak wilt and for paying another man to inject medicine into my roots for this illness. Despite the medicine, it appears I will not survive. I know Old Patriarch may have this illness spread to him through the same intertwined roots by which he nurtured me back to health after my trauma. I tried to tell Old Patriarch I was sorry, but he said, ‘Shhhhhh, friends take care of friends. I’d do it all over again.’”

“Thank you, Survivor.” I said. “On this New Year’s Day as I remember the past and think about the year before me, you have taught me about friendship and gratitude even in the face of sickness and trauma. I will face the future with this lesson, with your courage.”

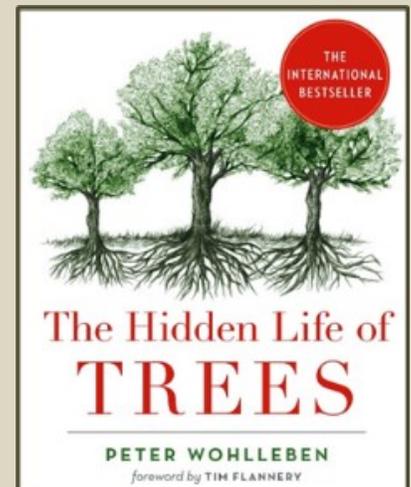


THE HIDDEN LIFE OF TREES

- Review by Matt Ridley

Did you know that trees communicate with one another? They do that and many other truly incredible things that author and long-time German forester Peter Wohlleben reveals in his 2015 *New York Times* and international bestselling book, *The Hidden Life of Trees*.

Drawing on his vast experience as a veteran forester, Wohlleben weaves forestry research into a framework of interesting anecdotes about the awe-inspiring ways in which trees communicate, interact, adapt, nourish, nurture, and even defend each other. Wohlleben writes that “forests are superorganisms with interconnections much like ant colonies” that communicate and interact in a surprising number of hidden ways. Throughout the book, Wohlleben skillfully illustrates how trees mitigate the wicked whims of weather and nature itself (including the often devastating intervention of one pesky organism in particular—humans) to survive and thrive as vibrant and *vital* communities. He does so by sharing many intriguing stories from his years as a forester, which really engage the reader and make learning about “the hidden life of trees” a fun and flowing narrative, as opposed to a dull and dry experience. Although Wohlleben can be a bit random at times, he rarely disappoints in telling a compelling and easily readable tale of trees. I was left with a profoundly enhanced respect for trees and the truly remarkable organisms they are, and have since read Wohlleben’s follow up bestsellers, “*The Inner Life of Animals*” (2016) and “*The Secret Wisdom of Nature*” (2017), both of which I also immensely enjoyed and recommend.



Treasures Beneath Our Feet: Sea Beans and Other Beach Finds

- Zoe Rascoe, 2004

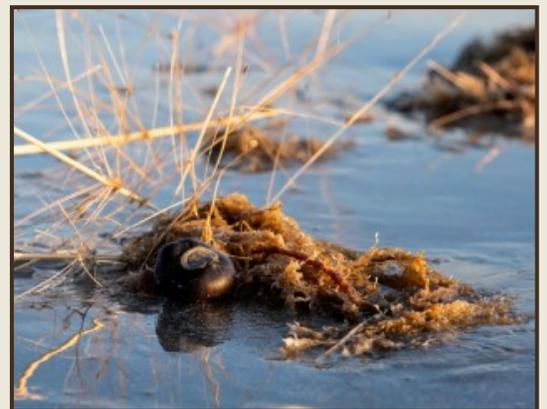
My daddy was a collector. He dove headlong into whatever was his latest interest. And as a daddy's girl, I tagged along and learned about many things over the course of my life. We started together before I even remember. There is a photo of me sitting on the side of the bed with him when I was about one year old – he was going through a bag of pennies he picked up at the bank to see if by chance there was a penny in the batch that was more valuable than one cent. I still check change that I am given. I was handed a 1941 wheat back penny at the grocery store. That's worth \$6, y'all. Over time, daddy went from coins to stamps, then on to rose bush varieties, old tools (my favorite!), cast iron implement seats, and restoring rare antique tractors. There were many, many other collections, too.



My mom grew up near the beach in south Texas and daddy was a Central Texas farmland boy. He didn't really care for the beach but mom had us in Galveston A LOT growing up and she eventually bought a lot and built a house there. Although as a kid I loved beachcombing – there's so much to find– Daddy took us to a new level when he discovered sharks' teeth. Finding fossilized shark's teeth is a thing. You need to know what you are looking for or you won't see them. On my first attempt, I couldn't find a single one until Daddy tossed one down in the shallow water where I was standing to show me what it would look like tumbling in the surf. I spotted a fairly large shark's tooth right where I was standing before I could even bend over and pick up

the small one he planted for me. The secret? They look like a shark's tooth – I was making it too hard. We were hooked on that for *years* and I have many jars full of fossilized shark's teeth large and small.

Then Daddy discovered sea beans. Those were harder to find and could be anywhere from the shallow water's edge, the wrack line and up into the dunes, and they came in all shapes and sizes. A few years in, we bought a book *Sea-Beans from the Tropics* by Ed Perry IV. That really upped our game. Now we knew what we were finding and just how far (or not) they had traveled. Thankfully, environmental laws and, occasionally a sense of personal responsibility, have reduced the flotsam and jetsam of all things plastic so "bean hunting" is more enjoyable with less litter. Like plastic, sea beans float so tend to stay on top of seaweed so can be fairly visible if you look.



Sea Beans cont.

Our new-to-us book said that information on sea beans was mostly based on a 1976 World Guide book that went out of print a short time later, and yet the interest in sea bean collecting was growing quickly. By 2003 when the book we have was published, the author said there was a great deal of new information to be found in a number of well-illustrated books from countries around the world reached by currents connected to the Tropics. Now bean collecting was so much more fun!

One of our favorite beans to find is large, heart-shaped and the most common on our Galveston beach (it's what I'm holding in the photo at the top of this article). The book says that these beans were found by Columbus in Europe and thought to have been a clue to him of the existence of land to the west. Islanders in the Azores call them Fava de Colum: Columbus bean. Most know them as sea hearts (*Entada gigas*). They have a tough outer shell that keeps water out and an air pocket inside that will keep them afloat on the seas for years.



Here was an extraordinary day of collecting: sea hearts, hamburger beans, star palm seed, sea purse, lotus seed and the prize: Mary's-Bean.

Besides sea hearts, other sea beans in our collection include hamburger beans (you can figure that out), nickernuts, star palm seeds, sea purse and the elusive Mary's-Bean with a cross in the middle. It has been interesting to observe over several decades under what conditions (usually weather) sea beans are rarely found vs in abundance. There's also the factor that it has become more widely known

and there are more people hunting beans. We used to amaze beach-goers with our finds. Now we unceremoniously toss them in our little sand bucket lest we draw attention to the location!

Sea beans are tucked in places all over our home. My daddy has passed on, but bean hunting is something my husband Terry and I still enjoy doing together. If you get to a beach, really most anywhere, take time to look (really look) for sea beans. They are likely right there under your feet.



What's in YOUR backyard?



- Zoe Rascoe, 2004



While not really her backyard, Daisy Klassy saw this pair of Mountain Bluebirds—unusual for our area—at Mother Neff State Park (her other backyard). Kelly Ann Blanchard's son Patrick, makes use of the bench at Miller Springs provided by our 2019 Class (his other backyard). Juan Anaya, the Hummer Whisperer, attracts an Anna's Hummingbird—also rare. Cedar waxwings have been abundant. This arguing pair is in the Rascoes' backyard.



- Mary Ann Everett, 2003

Out on a Limb

Tree Description: This dainty specimen can be a shrub or a tree, obtaining 15-30 feet, found growing on limestone slopes, in valley bottoms, in soils underlain with limestone. It should be grown singly, as it tends to get spindly if grown amongst other trees. Needs good drainage as it can become chlorotic with too much water. It is a member of the legume family.

Blooms: Produces blooms in March, April, and May, and are white and a soft pink. The flowers are very fragrant.

Fruit: After blooming, a pod is formed, turning black, while constricting between the seeds, often with only one or a few seeds, giving it the appearance of a necklace. The pods will often remain on the tree during winter months.

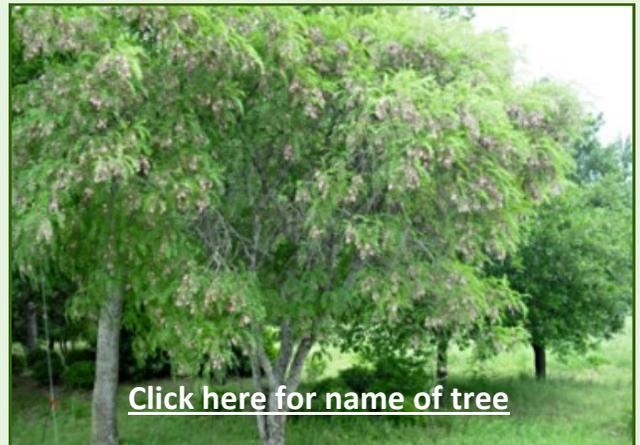
Location: Can be grown in full sun and also as an understory tree. Likes a variety of soils: sand, clay, limestone, as long as it has good drainage.

Leaves: Deciduous leaves, up to 8" long, with 13-17 leaflets. These give the tree a delicate appearance.

Bark: Brown to gray, scaly with age. The wood is light red or dark brownish with a bright yellow sapwood. It yields a yellow dye.

Growing in Texas: This little tree is a great addition to any garden. Just remember to water it in the first year, and after getting established, it is very heat and drought tolerant. The seeds contain poisonous alkaloids, so wildlife normally leave it alone. However ring-tailed cats are known to eat the fruits, and the foliage is often browsed by deer and livestock.

Interesting Facts: The national champion grows in San Antonio, standing at 50 feet tall with an 80" circumference and has a crown spread of 50 feet. I have this tree in my backyard and can't wait until March to enjoy its sweet fragrance.



[Click here for name of tree](#)

CHAPTER MEETINGS

– KELLY ANN BLANCHARD, 2020

As we once again embrace virtual chapter meetings, we were lucky to have Gil Eckrich back to present the training portion of our December meeting. A lifelong wildlife biologist and our local bird expert, Gil's vast knowledge and enthusiasm about birds and their habitats made his presentation, *Birds in Agriculture Through the Ages*, both fascinating and entertaining. While birds and agriculture have a somewhat symbiotic relationship at times, the most important takeaway from Gil's presentation was, in his own



words, "habitat, habitat, habitat." Contrary to popular belief, according to Gil, "we have more birds nesting on the ground than in trees," so providing adequate ground nesting habitats for birds is of utmost importance. These birds need tall grasses, shrubs, and weeds plus adequate water supply – all things that agricultural land is well suited to provide if managed properly. I especially enjoyed his "Can you find the bird?" photo quiz, which I almost failed despite an arrow pointing straight to the bird in question!

Sprague's Pipit



Gil's second presentation, *Birds in Winter*, highlighted some of the species we can hope to spot this season – some are old friends, but there are quite a few new and rare species vacationing in Bell County this year. At least three new species of hummingbird have been spotted, including Anna's Hummingbirds, which like many other bird species have been displaced from their California habitat due to wildfires and have been seen here in Central Texas for the very first time this year. It will be exciting to see what other bird refugees and newcomers decide to scope out Bell County for a rest stop this winter!

Whooping Cranes in Bell County



CHAPTER MEETINGS

- KELLY ANN BLANCHARD, 2020

Our January meeting was a special treat! Four of our fellow members hosted “Texas Waters,” a program emphasizing the extensive options for water recreation that the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department offers all over the state. Fishing, kayaking, boating, swimming - Texas parks are excellent places for water adventures of all kinds! Carroll Adcock highlighted the challenging but rewarding experiences available at [Devils River State Natural Area](#). Brent Blumenthal and Julie Sieh presented the beauty of their favorite “Texas treasure,” [South Llano River State Park](#), home of the Texas State fish—the Guadalupe Bass. Andreas Wooten wrapped up the adventures with unique saltwater fishing opportunities at [Galveston Island State Park](#).

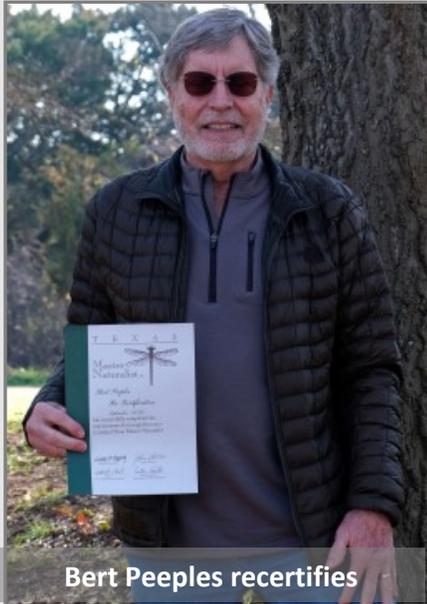
For those of us interested in water adventures of our own, Jean Solana highlighted resources on the [TPWD website](#) for buying fishing licenses and permits for “Texas’ best kept secret”—Wildlife Management Areas—without the hassle of doing so in person. After listening to the speakers’ inspiring stories and seeing their beautiful photos, I immediately added all three state parks to my Texas To-Do list!



Andreas Wooten with a Gaspergoo at Belton Lake (right); Carroll Adcock shared beautiful scenery from Devil’s River in south Texas; Brent highlights Julie Sieh’s Guadalupe Bass.



MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Bert Peoples recertifies



Matt Ridley - training certificate



Gail Wilson—initial certification



Kelly Ann Blanchard recertifies



Zoe Rascoe—4000 Hours



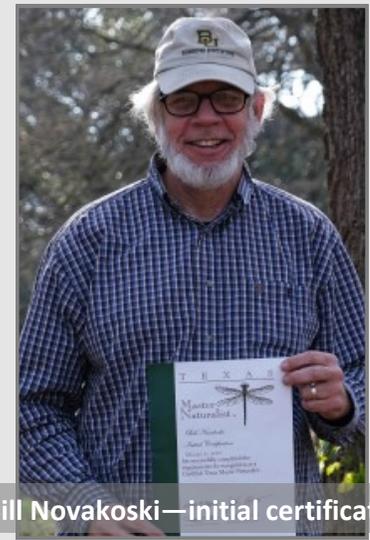
Kathy Cantu recertifies



Shirley Watts recertifies

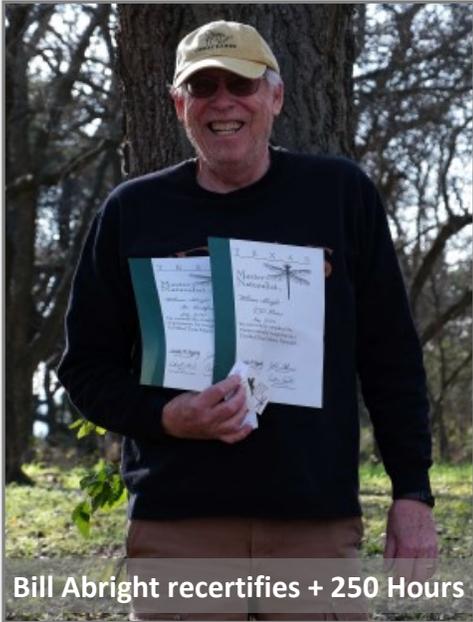


Ben Clement recertifies



Bill Novakoski—initial certification

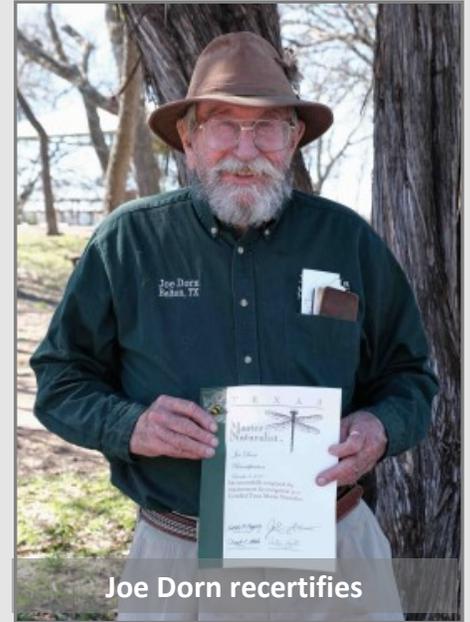
MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Bill Abright recertifies + 250 Hours



John Ziegeler recertifies



Joe Dorn recertifies



Sue Valdez recertifies



Susan Schneider –training certificate



Daisy Klassy recertifies

For our members: Since we are not holding Chapter meetings in person right now, we are hosting outdoor Award ceremonies at local nature centers (most of these are at Miller Springs) and parks the first Saturday of each month. We want to celebrate each accomplishment you have earned!

Photo by Jason Deckman, Miller Springs Nature Center

Good to Know...



Miller Springs Nature Center (Temple Entrance). City of Belton Parks & Rec are hosting a cleanup and wildflower seed scatter event on Saturday, Feb. 6th . Volunteers will be spreading seeds in the prairie, picking up litter and helping with minor trail maintenance. Master Naturalists will be there with our Discovery Trunks. Stop by our spaced out tables to talk nature!

Tools and supplies will be provided, but you may want to bring your own work gloves. All ages will have jobs! Please bring a mask for times when you can't distance from others. No registration in advanced needed. If you have questions, contact Belton Parks and Rec at [this email](#).

More Good to Know...



Co-Directors Mary Ann Everett
and Lynn Fleming



Zoe Rascoe captures the action



The 2021 Training Committee finalizes plans!!

2021 Training Committee

Lynn Fleming: Co-Director

Mary Ann Everett: Co-Dir.

Linda Fairlie

John Atkins

Jean Solana

Bruce Polikoff

Jessica Dieter

Dale Hughling

Ben Clement

Joe Dorn

Sarah Dorn

Louann Hight

Andi Bowsher

Carroll Adcock

Zoe Rascoe

Paula Finley

Jenna Chappell

Stephanie Preciado

Sue Valdez

Andreas Wooten

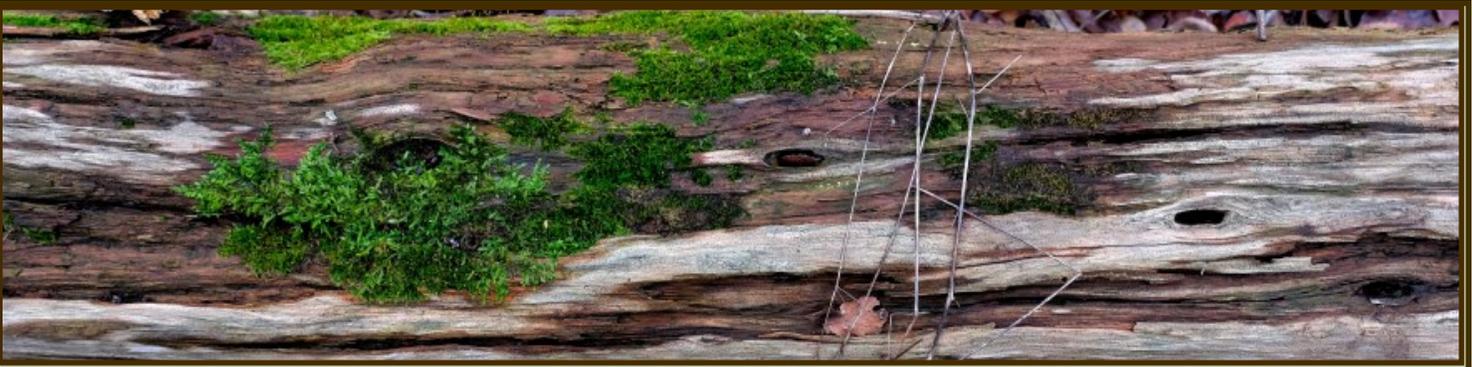
Marilyn Whitworth

Contributing Authors to this Newsletter



Clockwise from top left:
Bill Novakoski, Jean Solana, John
Burns, Linda Fairlie, Matt Ridley,
Zoe Rascoe, John Atkins, Kelly Ann
Blanchard, Mary Ann Everett,
Andreas Wooten.





Board of Directors

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Vice President: Jean Solana

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Training: Lynn Fleming/Mary Ann Everett

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Contributed Images: John Atkins, Tina Atkins, John Burns, Linda Fairlie, Jean Solana, Juan Anaya, Daisy Klassy, Andreas Wooten, 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



Frosty Chinese tallow leaf at Chalk Ridge Falls, by Kelly Ann Blanchard

Chapter Advisors

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

Derrick Wolter,
Wildlife Biologist, Texas Parks and Wildlife

CHAPTER 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 each month 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. Meeting notices will be sent to chapter members and all members are welcome to participate.