

THE TRACKER

Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter April 2021

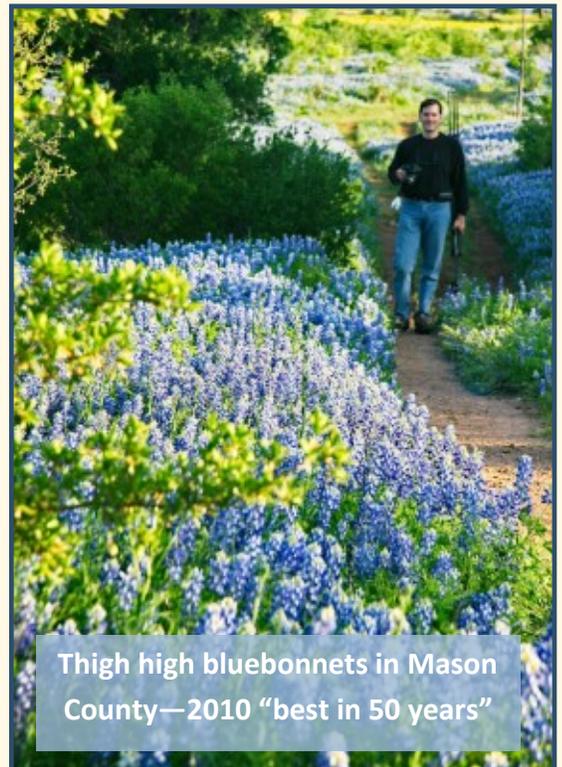
You Belong Among the Wildflowers

Springtime in Texas. It's squeezed in between winter-ness and a long summer, but still. Texans do love their wildflowers (all 5000 species), especially the bluebonnet, but also the extended wildflower season that lasts until the first frost. Like hummingbirds and Monarch butterflies, wildflowers are first seen in south Texas and make their way north (for different reasons!) Let's just get something out of the way here. You will NOT go to jail for picking wildflowers in Texas—even the bluebonnet. The trouble comes when blocking traffic, parking on medians, trespassing and other things that are already illegal. Don't do that, please.

If you are ready to get out for a wildflower drive but don't have time to drive all over Texas, here are some tips and resources to help you plan.

The best predictor of a good showing? Photos someone took yesterday. Next best may be October rainfall. Just know that bluebonnets are like some people. They'll show up to the party when they feel like it. Some wildflower seeds can lay dormant for many years waiting for the right conditions to bloom and make seeds.

There are many resources for tracking bluebonnets. Texas Dept of Transportation scatters wildflower seeds on 800,000 miles of right of ways and has been doing that for nearly 90 years. Check out the [TXDOT Wildflower Brochure](#) for identifying plants. The Lady Bird Wildflower Center has a [bloom chart for each month](#). [Texas Bluebonnets and Wildflower](#) Facebook page has daily photos posted. Avoid social media sites that post photos from epic years without dating the images. [Professional landscape photographers](#) can have detailed information on locations with good showings. There are Bluebonnet Festivals in Chappell Hill and in Burnet, both on the 2nd weekend in April and the Ennis Bluebonnet Trails Festival is the 3rd weekend in April. Grab a camera and head out in most any direction. As Tom Petty sang, *we belong among the wildflowers!*



Thigh high bluebonnets in Mason County—2010 “best in 50 years”

– ZOE RASCOE, 2004

President's Pen

Linda Fairlie, 2018



As a trainee I was very excited about what I learned, and hoped to volunteer in ways where I could contribute and make a difference. As a former teacher, spending time working with kids really appealed to me. I also like being outside, and love all manner of living things. It took me a while to figure out where I fit in. My physical limitations keep me from doing some of the more robust trail maintenance types of things, but I have found other things important to me.

I have volunteered in classrooms and at school field trips doing presentations on birds, bugs and other things in our discovery trunks. I didn't really know a lot about those topics, but I was able to get what I needed to know from the other Master Naturalists who were there, and from the discovery trunk materials. It was really exciting this year to teach students at St. Mary's how to catch and tag Monarch butterflies. Now I can tell you the difference between a Monarch butterfly and a Queen butterfly.

I knew about Chalk Ridge Falls long before I became a Master Naturalist. The falls themselves are a fun way to cool off, and I took my children there often when they were still living at home. I also now know there are invasive species that need to be removed, and "hippy huts" that need to be torn down. There is trail maintenance to be done, and trash to be picked up.



Cont.

President's Pen cont.

Mother Neff State Park is a fun place. It is small, but there are nice hiking trails. I have participated in the First Day Hikes there several times. I like getting out on the first day of a new year and joining others enjoying the outdoors. Once while helping with an exhibit from one of our discovery trunks, a young man asked me to identify different plants and flowers that were growing nearby. I am a Master Naturalist, so I should know, right? Wrong! So I said, "Let's find out!" then opened iNaturalist on my phone and explored the plants with him. Another year there was a group of scouts who were teaching an orienteering course, and I happily tried out their course for them.

I discovered citizen science and absolutely love it. I've done moth counts, several bird counts, and set up a trial bioblitz with iNaturalist. I have collected specific wildflower seeds, monitored rainfall at my house, and have signed up to monitor butterflies 8 or more times in the coming year at a specific location. I am learning by doing, and having a blast.



There are regular volunteer service opportunities at many of our local parks for us as Central Texas Master Naturalists. Most of them are during the week. I am hearing from new members that they are hoping to have more opportunities on the weekend. Do it! Can you commit one day a month to organize an opportunity on the weekend that meets our goals as a Master Naturalist Chapter? Maybe you have a one-time project that fits our charter and would like to work on it. If we don't already have that opportunity available in VMS, go to <https://txmn.org/centraltexas/advtvolpro/> and fill out the form, describing the service. I can tell you that it isn't difficult to be the contact point for a volunteer opportunity, and it would help our members find things they can do to help.

Welcome to all of our 2021 trainees. I hope you all find a lot of ways to volunteer!

Meet the CTMN Class of 2021



Steven Brown applied as soon as registration opened. He grew up in South Texas, but his travels have led to work in Antarctica, and the last ten years in Alaska where he gained an appreciation for nature. Recently back in Texas, he hopes to pursue work in nature conservation and thinks CTMN is a great start.



The 2021 CTMN Training Course kicked off on March 23rd with 17 new Trainees. A "Meet & Greet" was held at Miller Springs Nature Center 2 days earlier for trainees to pick up their class materials. Thanks to Daisy Klassy for capturing the excitement of the event!



The Trainees each have a volunteer sponsor to help them through the training process. Bruce Polikoff shares his thoughts on that program:

At our CTMN Spring 2021 Orientation/meet-and-greet, I got to meet a number of new trainees and current members alike. I struck up a conversation with Christopher Robinson (Class of 2021), and found we had similar backgrounds and interests. He has no lack of enthusiasm for the program. Our mentor/sponsor coordinator was kind enough to assign Christopher to me. I have already been able to answer several questions for him regarding volunteer opportunities, and hope I can be of service to him throughout his training.

I've pretty much been a lone wolf where my projects are concerned, whether it's volunteering with the wildlife biologists on Fort Hood, or reporting observations in eBird and iNaturalist. Mentoring is allowing me to give back to the chapter, and new Master Naturalists, what was freely given to me. I appreciate the opportunity.

- BRUCE POLIKOFF, 2015

Meet the CTMN Class of 2021



Jamey Douglass recently retired from 39 years as a soil scientist with the Natural Resource Conservation Service, where he mapped, sampled and described soil samples and plants from many parts of Texas. He is a member of the Devil Dog Squadron of the Commemorative Air Force in Georgetown and is an officer in a TX Soil Scientist group.



John Fairlie teaches Orchestra in Belton but will be retiring soon. He was raised in Ohio in a large family that vacationed in National Parks. He had been to most of them by age 16. As a musician and teacher he has had summers off to continue those NPS visits. He came to Texas from Colorado and met and married our current CTMN President, Linda.



Janice Gibbs has been a friend of the CTMN Chapter for many years in her role as journalist for the Temple Daily Telegram. Already an active volunteer, she retired in 2020 to pursue new interests, and although she considered the ukulele, she chose to become a Texas Master Naturalist.



David Jennings grew up in Austin, married his college sweetheart and has enjoyed being a State Farm Insurance agent in Temple for 36 years. He is active in church and Lions Club and enjoys hiking at Miller Springs NC, playing disc golf, working in his yard, and trips to National Parks.

Meet the CTMN Class of 2021



Sarah McCormick spent her childhood outdoors in the Arizona Sonoran Desert, the Pacific Northwest and South Texas. At age 7 she saved coins to join the World Wildlife Fund and now enjoys making space for critters in her yard. She is Medical Director at McLane's Children's Hospital.



Tony Cellini is from Alabama spending his childhood outdoors. He was a Boy Scout, a Marine helicopter mechanic, has a graduate degree in the design & fabrication of artificial limbs and now works as a Prosthetist/Orthotist at the Temple VA. Tony found us working on trails at Miller Springs when he ran there.



Keller Matthews is a Texan who has spent years climbing Colorado mountains, hiking National Parks, the Appalachian Trail and the John Muir Trail. He is an avid cyclist (road and trails) and served on the Miller Springs Alliance Board. He studied zoology in college and is an anesthesiologist. He's interested in new skills where nature & community intersect.



Robb Startzman grew up in the Florida everglades. He studied lake, estuarine & wetlands science in college and originally conducted research. He then spent 38 years as a scientist with the South FL Water Mgt District. He retired in 2015 and moved to Texas to be near grandchildren and is interested in Texas ecology.

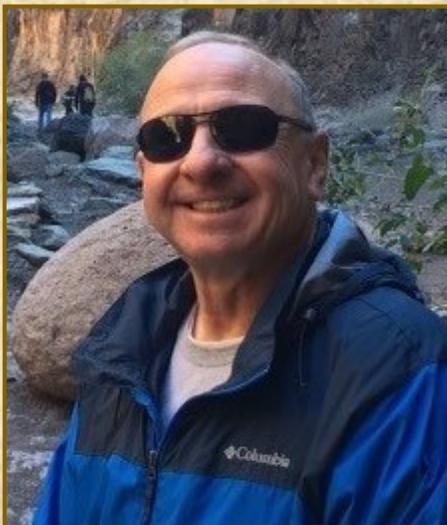
Meet the CTMN Class of 2021



Kerry Phillip is Economic Development Coordinator for City of Nolanville and for Keep Nolanville Beautiful. She has previously had Master Naturalist training in Brazos County before moving to Central Texas. She has built & monitored bluebird houses and enjoys gardening and the outdoors.



Tom Gerik grew up on a family farm north of Waco and gained an appreciation for nature and science. He has degrees from Texas Tech and a PhD in Agronomy from University of Nebraska-Lincoln. That was followed by a 40 year career at Blackland Research Center where he retired as Research Center Director.



Larry Turner grew up in west Texas and was part of an active Boy Scout troop that spent a great deal of time outdoors. He had a grandfather who worked for the US Forest Service in New Mexico and Larry got to tag along in the summers. He is an attorney and bank trust officer and volunteers with several charitable organizations. He was a board member during the creation of the San Angelo Nature Center.



Tait Blanchard (with Daphne) grew up in Georgia and spent much of his childhood outdoors (including hitting things with sticks to make noise). He was in Scouts from Webelo to Eagle Scout where he learned to not hit things with sticks. While at the University of Georgia, Tait met and later married Kelly Ann (Class of 2020) . He joined the Army in 2013 and is currently stationed at Ft. Hood.

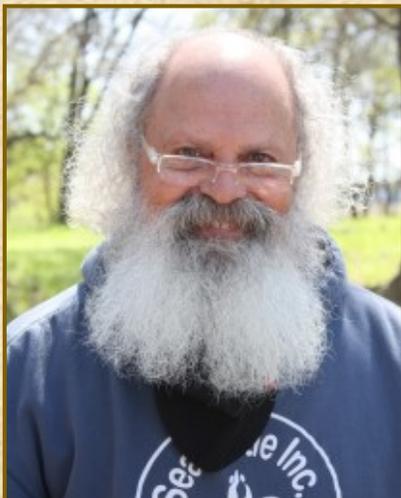
Meet the CTMN Class of 2021



Mike Belcher, once school age, grew up in the Sierra Nevada foothills of California. He received a BA from Univ of Arizona and a graduate degree in Archaeology, while serving in the National Guard, and eventually retired from the Army at Ft. Hood. He began a business in genealogy research before retiring in 2019. He has been a part of the Boy Scouting program for 50 years.



Chris Robinson moved to Texas at a young age and has always loved being outdoors. He spent many years in Boy Scouts camping, backpacking and hiking. He developed a love for National Parks on family vacations. He has an environmental science degree from Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and has volunteered at hurricane/flood disaster relief events a number of times.



Guy Fowler was born and raised in Temple (3rd generation!) having a 200 acre wooded family farm to explore. He now has 10 acres of his own that he is converting to bird and animal friendly spaces with plenty of trails. Guy has an affinity for reptiles and puts that to use relocating snakes his friends and neighbors want out of their house. He and his wife own a realty company.



Edwina Brown was Texas-born, but grew up in New Mexico. She married a soldier and lived all over the world, but he is now retired and they are settled here.. Edwina has always had a heart for animals, recycling, community gardens and other connections to nature. She awakened her inner environmentalist in a college environmental science class and looks forward to learning more about Central Texas.



Mother Neff State Park

1680 TX Hwy-236, Moody

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

What a difference a month can make! Our regularly scheduled work day in February followed on the heels of “Snow-pocalypse” – but luckily our weather was good.



John Ziegeler & Wally from WI

John Ziegeler, Julie Sieh, Brent Blumenthal, Bill Abright, Daisy Klassy, and Jean Solana weeded bastard cabbage, walked the trails looking for downed limbs, and checked the bird boxes for recent activity.

Unfortunately, the load of mulch we were supposed to spread arrived after we left. So, the next day John

Ziegeler, Pete and Jean Solana, plus two new Mother Neff volunteers, Lori and Wally from Wisconsin, stepped up and wheelbarrowed 30 yards of bark mulch onto the two playgrounds. We told Lori and Wally all about Central Texas Master Naturalists and our volunteer projects, and we all enjoyed two beautiful days to recover from the week before.

Cont.



John Ziegeler

Mother Neff State Park *Cont.*

Jean Solana did her regular checks of the game cameras which revealed a lot of deer activity down at the Bottoms Meadow in February. Nest box checks began weekly in March – as of March 18th there are nests in 3 of the 7 boxes – no eggs found yet.

On March 20th we scheduled our first nature education in about a year due to COVID restrictions. We shared a *Birds of Mother Neff* presentation on that Saturday afternoon and will repeat it on the March 27th. We had 10 adults and 5 children listen to the “Bird talk”.

Our March 24th our workday was rescheduled for March 31st due to rain. We plan to clear brush in the Bottoms Day Use Area – the closed part of the park down by the Leon River. We are excited to be some of the first to start restoring this historic part of the park!



No programs or events are planned at this time, although that is that will be updated regularly, so please contact Jean if you have any questions.

Contact Melissa Chadwick, Superintendent at 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 Bryan Crisman, Lead Ranger at bryan.crisman@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



- JOHN BURNS, 2018

jaburnscgm@gmail.com

Hello everyone!

On February 6th the City of Belton put on a volunteer workday at the nature center to get the public out. It was really an amazing day. The folks from the city said if they had 40 people come it would be a good day. I guess they need to dream bigger because there were 112 volunteers, *including 17 Master Naturalists*. Jean Solana set up the prairie discovery trunk (photo right) and several master naturalists helped with the table. Zoe Rascoe did a Facebook Live video with Jean encouraging folks to come out and join in the activities and Carroll Adcock talked about the work the Master Naturalists are doing at the nature center removing invasive plant species.



Jean Solana shows skull replicas to park visitors

The volunteers picked up litter, spread native



Prairie seed scattering in action—photo by Jason Deckman

seeds, and did some minor trail work. All in all, it was a great day. While the volunteer day was a great success, our February workday was cancelled. It was actually the first day of the Snowmagedon. I always hate to cancel workdays at the nature center, but I especially hate to do so during the cool months. Well, I have to say this time I was really glad I cancelled. By our normal cool season start time of 9:00am, the weather had started to turn really bad. The rain was coming down and it was starting to ice up on cars. By 10:00am it was snowing. It was a good day to stay home and inside!

Miller Springs Nature Center *cont.*

The March workday was a good cool day and we had nine people present with several tasks to work. Zoe Rascoe came to promote the passing of the torch for monitoring and maintaining the bluebird boxes at MSNC from Paula Finley to Kelly Ann Blanchard.



Ligustrum shoots

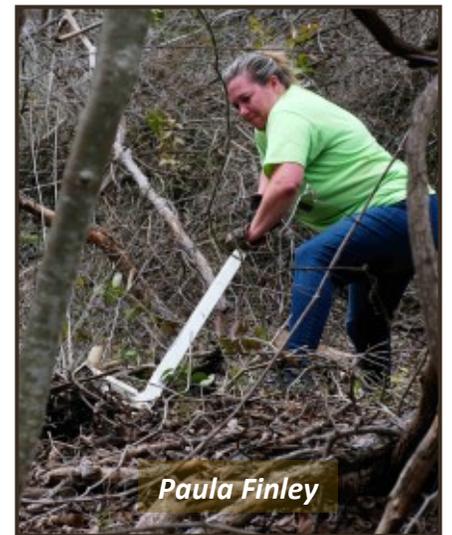
They did this with a Facebook Live video. After inspecting all the bird/wasp boxes, the ladies joined Ben Clement, John Atkins, Jamey Douglass, Jaime Harmon, and myself to work on invasive plant removal on Green Pond Trail. The good news is we have been working this area for two years and we've made a *big* difference. The bad news is it is a never-ending job. This



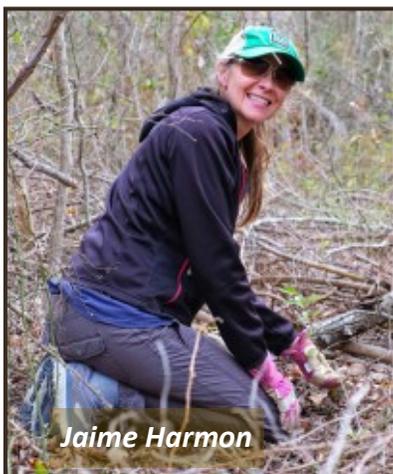
month we went back to the area where we removed Waxleaf Ligustrum two years ago. It is coming back, so we want to remove trees while they are still small and have not produced seed. Some of the team removed large older trees in while others worked on the seedlings and re-sprouting stumps. I didn't keep count of how many I pulled, but I would guess it was a thousand plants. No kidding.

Of course, Marilyn Whitworth was with us and worked on litter removal. There is never a shortage of litter either.

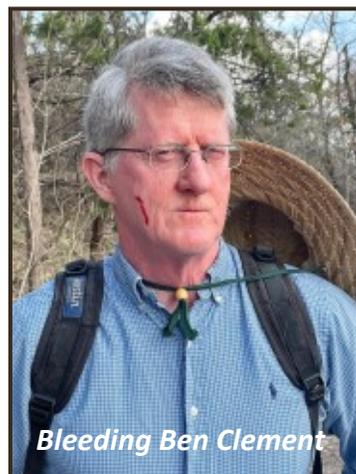
The next volunteer day with the City of Belton at the nature center will be *Saturday April 24, 2021 9:00am—11:00am*. I plan to be there. I hope to see you !



Paula Finley



Jaime Harmon



Bleeding Ben Clement



Jamey Douglass

Chalk Ridge Falls Park

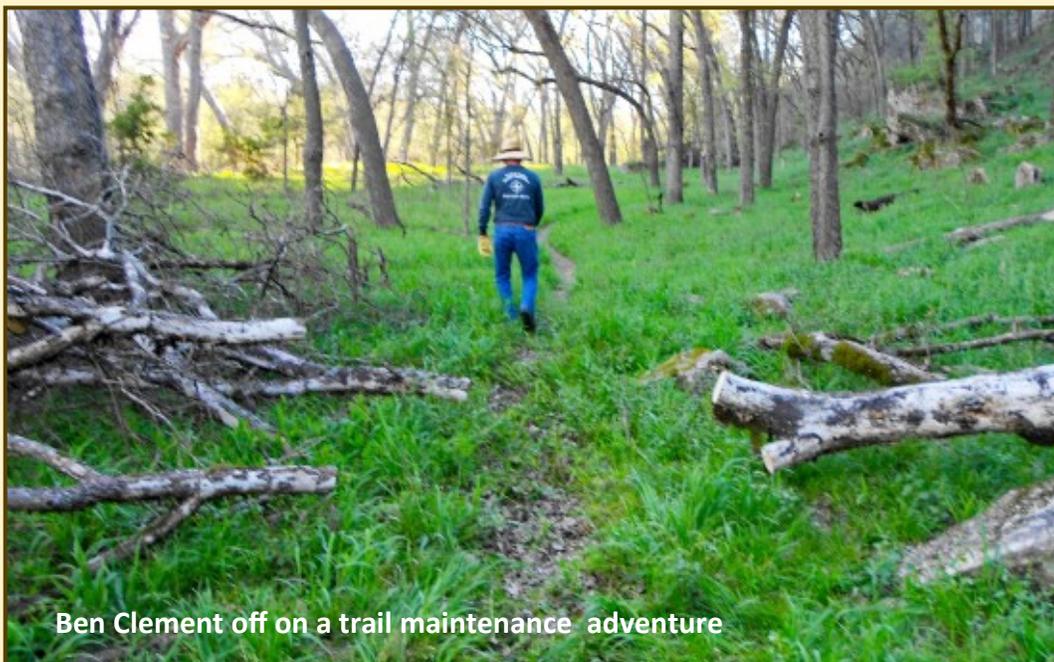
- John Atkins, 2016

The storms of February kept our members from doing much of anything around the lakes in February. I was able to spend a couple of hours hiking around Stillhouse looking for storm casualties to record for the State iNaturalist project, but fortunately, I did not find any dead animals. In March we were able to hold our workday on schedule and our volunteers contributed a total of 10 hours of labor to Chalk Ridge Falls Nature Area.

The Chalk Ridge Falls work party consisted of myself, Tina Atkins, Marilyn Whitworth, Ben Clement, and Kelly Ann Blanchard. The ladies composed Team Clean and focused on picking up two months' worth of trash and debris from the trails. Ben and I focused on cutting fallen timber from the river trail. We also discussed how best to reroute a section of trail that was badly eroded.



Kelly Ann Blanchard, Marilyn Whitworth, Tina Atkins and the Blanchard Naturalist Littles



Ben Clement off on a trail maintenance adventure

Cont.

Chalk Ridge Falls Park *cont.*

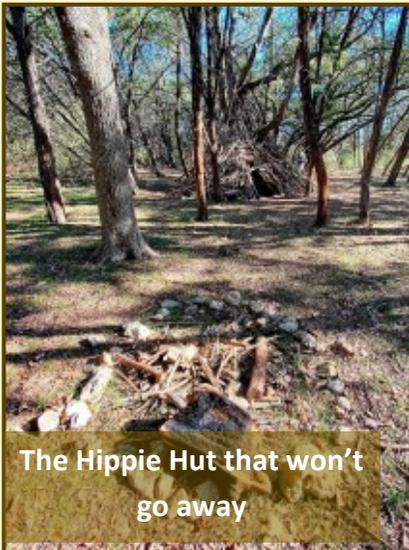
It was a fairly standard workday, but we did get a quick glimpse of a pair of Summer Tanagers, which was surprising, since the books say they don't show up until early April.



Orange slime mold!!

We also came across a large patch of orange slime mold along the river. Slime molds are interesting, and I would encourage you to learn more about them. It is not an animal, fungus, or a plant. It is not even entirely solid or liquid. It has the ability to move and figure out mazes in search of food.

Slime molds belong to a 'primitive' class of fungi called Myxomycetes. It is a small group of organisms with only 700 species known worldwide. They come in a variety of colors and have equally colorful common names such as "Dog Vomit" and "SpongeBob SquarePants" molds. They obtain their nutrients from dead or decaying matter and are most prevalent in Texas



The Hippie Hut that won't go away

during wet conditions such as in Spring.

Next month we will once again attack the hippie hut, which has grown to approximately 20

feet tall. We will need a second person to operate the Chapter's chainsaw, and lots of helping hands to dispose of the wood. If enough time remains, we will start working on the English ivy patch.

See you out there.



Tina Atkins workin' out with a giant limb

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!

NestWatch

Spring is finally here, and our feathered friends have been busy! If you and your family enjoy watching birds during their nesting season, then we have the perfect community science project for you. Texas Master Naturalists can monitor bird nests and help scientists track valuable breeding data while earning volunteer hours at the same time!

NestWatch, a nationwide bird nest monitoring program run by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, uses information submitted by volunteers online at NestWatch.org or through the [NestWatch Mobile App](#). The data is then used by scientists to study breeding bird populations and how they may be changing over time due to climate variability, habitat loss, and other factors.

The screenshot shows the NestWatch website homepage. At the top, the logo "NestWatch" is displayed with the tagline "Where Birds Come to Life". Navigation links include HOME, ABOUT, YOUR DATA, CONNECT, LEARN, and EXPLORE DATA. The main content area features a large image of a Western Bluebird. To the left of the bird, a text box explains that NestWatch is a nationwide nest-monitoring program designed to track status and trends in the reproductive biology of birds. Below this, a "HOW TO PARTICIPATE" section lists four steps: 1. Take the online quiz to get certified, 2. Find nests, 3. Record data, and 4. Submit online or with the mobile app. A button says "Let's start monitoring nests!". To the right of the bird, a "FEATURED CONTENT" section lists: "All About Birdhouses" (Construction plans, tips and more!), "Nest and Egg ID" (Identification made easy!), "NestWatch Blog" (Read about the latest research and other happenings), "Download the App" (Find it on Google Play or the App Store), and "Scientific Impact" (Research requests, publications and more!). At the bottom, a section titled "Build a nest box or nest structure for one of these birds" displays a row of 14 small bird icons with their names: Eastern Bluebird, Tree Swallow, House Wren, Black-capped, Vireo-green Swallow, Western Bluebird, American Robin, Eastern Phoebe, Barn Swallow, Mourning Dove, Prothonotary Warbler, Carolina Chickadee, and Tufted Titmouse.

FIELD NOTES

Cont.

There is no need to have a fancy camera or even a bird box to submit data to NestWatch. If you notice a bird nesting in a potted plant on your porch or in a tree outside your window, observing the nesting process would be a great activity for the whole family to do together. You also do not have to be an avid birder to participate, so don't worry if your knowledge of birds is limited. NestWatch provides tools to help you identify birds based on the color of their eggs, nesting material, and photos of common species. Pretty soon, you will become an expert yourself at backyard bird identification!

To get started, go to NestWatch.org. You will need to read some tutorial information, take a quick and easy quiz to certify, and then you can start watching your nest! It is a wonderful way for people of all ages to connect to nature and make observations of the world around us, all while contributing valuable information to science.

Featured Community Science Project:

[NestWatch by Cornell Lab of Ornithology](http://NestWatch.org)

Where: Your backyard, a local park, anywhere you find a nest!

When: During breeding season

How to get involved:

- ◆ Visit NestWatch.org and sign up for a free account.
- ◆ Read some informational material and then take a brief online quiz to get certified.
- ◆ Find nests to monitor – look for ones that are easy to monitor consistently.
- ◆ Record information about the nests and then submit it online or through the mobile app.
- ◆ You are now a community scientist!

Other opportunities: Join an ongoing NestWatch project team managed by the Central Texas Chapter at one of the locations below

Miller Springs Nature Center
Mother Neff State Park
Chalk Ridge Falls Park (coming soon)



CTMN member can get involved with one of our chapter NestWatch projects by contacting [Kelly Ann Blanchard](mailto:kellyann@ctmn.org) for more information.

Note to Texas Master Naturalists— remember to keep track of time spent participating in the NestWatch project so you can enter your Volunteer Service hours into VMS under “Cornell University: Citizen Scientist Activities: TMN Field Research Hours”.

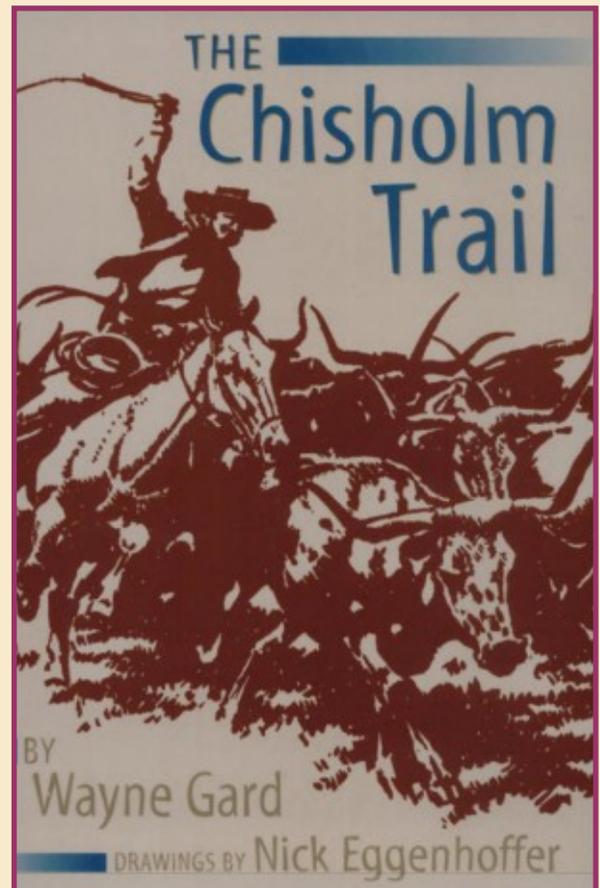


- Joe Dorn, 2014

I had to deliver a rain gauge to one of our Chapter members assisting Lynn with the Bell County Museum clean up this morning and it occurred to me that I have never related my part in the Museum's Chisholm Trail emphasis.

When Sarah and I purchased the last 40 acres of 250 that has been in her family since 1848, we received a very large abstract for the land. I started reading it and developed a strong interest in Bell County History that led to me wanting to know more about the Chisholm Trail (I will not get into the proper name of the trail nor its extent but rather use the popular concept of it.) I purchased "**The Chisholm Trail**," by Wayne Gard, and as I read it I tabbed the pages Bell County was mentioned. After I retired from IBM and started my photography business, I started visiting the sites as possible locations for photo shoots. (I never used the sites since I much preferred Chalk Ridge Falls trail.) I also spent a lot of time at the Bell County Museum reading and browsing.

Bell County hired a new director, Stephanie Turnham, in 1994 She and I had a conversation about Bell County history and I mentioned that the Chisholm Trail came through the county. She was not aware of this and I lent her the Wayne Gard book. I offered to take her on a tour of the sites, she deferred to her assistant and curator, Jodi Wright.



Cont.



Jodi and I spent a day following the trail, from the Lampasas crossing at Camp Tahuaya, site of the Shanklin/Childer's Mill, to the Girl Scout Camp on Lake Belton and then a slight diversion to Fort Gates. I just mentioned that Shallow Ford just east of Belton was a favorite crossing. We talked briefly about Stampede Creek, just across the county line, near Moody named that because of a little excitement along the trail. On July 4, 1876, 2700 Long Horn's and 1 cowboy died, one of the most destructive stampedes in "Western" history.



After the tour, Stephanie and Jodi took the ball and started running. Today we have the Chisholm Trail monument and all sorts of signs about town, Yep, I get a big smile every time I think about what I started.

The Wayne Gard book is available at the museum bookstore. There is also a new highly acclaimed book on the trail, "The Chisholm Trail" by Sam Ridings available on Amazon. I am reading it now.

I have a photograph, "The Eyes of the Past", on permanent loan at the Bell County Museum. It is in a hidden corner on the second floor. They made a post card from it.

Editor's Note: Joe's photograph is actually now featured as part of the main exhibit on the 1st floor of the Carnegie building—the subject in his image.



INKS LAKE STATE PARK

- **Christopher Nixon, 2020**



During the spring and fall seasons, when the weather is milder, one of my favorite hobbies is to spend time in one of the many primitive camping areas that Texas Parks and Wildlife offers. I take several days exploring as much of the hiking trails as I can, visiting some of the more remote locations.

This March, I took a three-day trip to Inks Lake State Park located west of Burnet, Texas.



While Inks Lake is not a large park, it does offer several miles of hiking trails along the eastern bank of Inks Lake and south, into rocky Hill Country covered in gneiss and beautiful deposits of granite and quartz.

My first day at the park was spent hiking into the camping spot I had reserved. Many of the parks in Texas offer primitive, or “walk-in” tent sites, and a quick internet search will take you to a complete list of parks on the TPWD web page. Unlike other campsites,

primitive sites offer very little in the way of amenities, usually consisting of a small clearing with no electricity or access to drinking water.

While these sites are missing many creature comforts, they do have several advantages. My favorite perk is that they are usually secluded from other campers, and offer more privacy during the day and are quieter during the evening hours. This not only makes for a peaceful camping experience, but also gives you a better chance to observe more of the local wildlife.



INKS LAKE STATE PARK *cont.*

My remaining time at the park was spent exploring its trails. I dedicated most of my miles to exploring the southern regions of the park, an area known for its geology. This area of the park sits on the edge of what is referred to as the Llano Uplift. Rising over 1,000 feet above Inks Lake, it makes for some amazing views.

As I continued to make my way to the most southwestern edge of the park, I noticed a large structure on a hill several miles in the distance that had the appearance of a medieval castle. I later found out that I was seeing Falkenstein Castle, based on a design by King Ludwig II of Bavaria, Germany. The castle is mainly used as an event and wedding destination, but it makes for a fun surprise on the horizon.

The northern area of the park, while smaller and more crowded, still offers some worthwhile hiking. The main attraction being the Devil's Watering Hole, a deep swimming hole where a series of waterfalls from Spring Creek run into Inks Lake.



There is nothing quite like the experience of waking up at dawn at a primitive campsite, and starting off on a day full of hiking. If you plan a trip to a primitive site, here are some tips:

Do a "practice" trip before the real trip. Hiking into one of these campsites means that you will have minimal supplies. It's a good idea to simulate a night of camping somewhere safe, even if it is your backyard, to make sure you have everything you need.



Always have a plan B, because sometimes things go wrong. Forgetting to bring a rain jacket, not having enough water, or breaking a tent stake are just a few examples of minor things that can ruin a trip. I like to bring more than I need, and keep extra items in my vehicle for emergencies.

Study your park's trail map, and have an extra available. Most parks will have trail maps on hand at headquarters and online. I like to hike with a paper map, but I always keep a backup file of the map saved on my phone for emergencies.



A Conversation with the Friendly Oaks: *Spring Giddiness*

- Bill Novakoski, 2020

Bill: “Happy spring, Old Patriarch and The Survivor. After our somber talk about sickness and health last winter, I was thrilled to walk nearby these last few days and see your baby leaves.”

Old Patriarch: “Hey Bill, top of the morning to you, too! I, for one, get downright giddy in spring. Fortunately, our emotions are not particularly apparent in our outward expressions because our giddiness would detract from our usually very dignified demeanor. But first, I must confess, I awoke from the winter sleep one morning and saw you walking your dogs during the Big Freeze. When the white ice covered the gravel road, you slipped and fell. I nearly laughed a limb off at the memory of you bouncing back up, looking around to see that no human observed the spectacle and continuing to slip and slide! It’s unfortunate you humans can’t stay in one place as we trees can!”

The Survivor: “Winter holds risks for us as well. At our ages and health, we have learned to enjoy each season of our cherished lives. During our spring awakening, when the baby leaves tickle the tips of our branches as they bud, we experience a bit of our youthfulness all over again. Then, before our vision clears in the morning sunlight, our migrating, winged friends are excitedly and loudly chirping in our ears. The Ruby-throated Hummingbirds and Yellow-throated Warblers want to tell us about their adventures in the southern lands before they start the next stretch of their northern flights. When the fog lifts, we see the vibrant colors of the Bluebonnet, the yellow of the Stemless Evening Primrose, the white of the Nuttall’s Deathcamas and the purple of the Moss Verbenas.”

Old Patriarch: “If that isn’t enough color to delight us, we look yonder towards your gate and see the Redbud tree. You know, we trees who are more modest tease the Redbuds for their flashy, attention grabbing display for a few weeks until their leaves turn green and blend with their neighbors. And look there by the split rail fence at the Cedar tree! Each spring, we lose track as we try to count how many new baby seedlings Ms. Big Family has. Cedar families are prolific, but they are excellent mothers. Well Bill, I told you I get giddy; we haven’t let you say anything.”

Bill: “No worries Old Patriarch and The Survivor, I learn so much from you. And your excitement makes me smile! Thank you for sharing your experiences of spring with me.”

Old Patriarch: “One more thing, Bill. Congratulations to you and Nancy on your new granddaughter. We hear your excitement when you speak of her on your walks with the dogs. Old Survivor and I are so happy for you!”



My Sub-Urban Backyard

- **Andreas Wooten, 2015**

I recorded 21 species of birds over the 4 days of the February Great Backyard Bird Count hosted by Audubon and The Cornell Ornithology Lab. Four were new for me in the backyard: canyon wren, red-winged blackbird, yellow-bellied sapsucker, and cedar waxwing—there were 40-50 of those.

The pine warbler to the right arrived on a cold, but sunny day.

He is sitting directly above a water trough which is likely the only unfrozen water nearby, other than the lake. He seems to be saying “Don’t eat me, I’m too small!”

The crowded photo on the following page, if you look closely tallies an American Robin (the big guy), 10 Cedar Waxwings and 5 Eastern Bluebirds all mingling and getting water. Each bird turned its head to the side to get their tongue closer to the puddles on the flat patio surface. The next photo shows a Yellow Rump Warbler and a Black Crested Titmouse in a battle over peanut butter suet. The last is a Red Bellied Woodpecker who ran all the other birds off the porch, ate his fill and then flew to the suet feeder. It seemed more birds were on the porch for water more than for food.

The worldwide 4-day Great Backyard Bird Count recorded 6,436 species in 190 countries submitted by over 300,000 volunteers. I not only saw new species in my yard, it also gave me a chance to practice with my new camera.

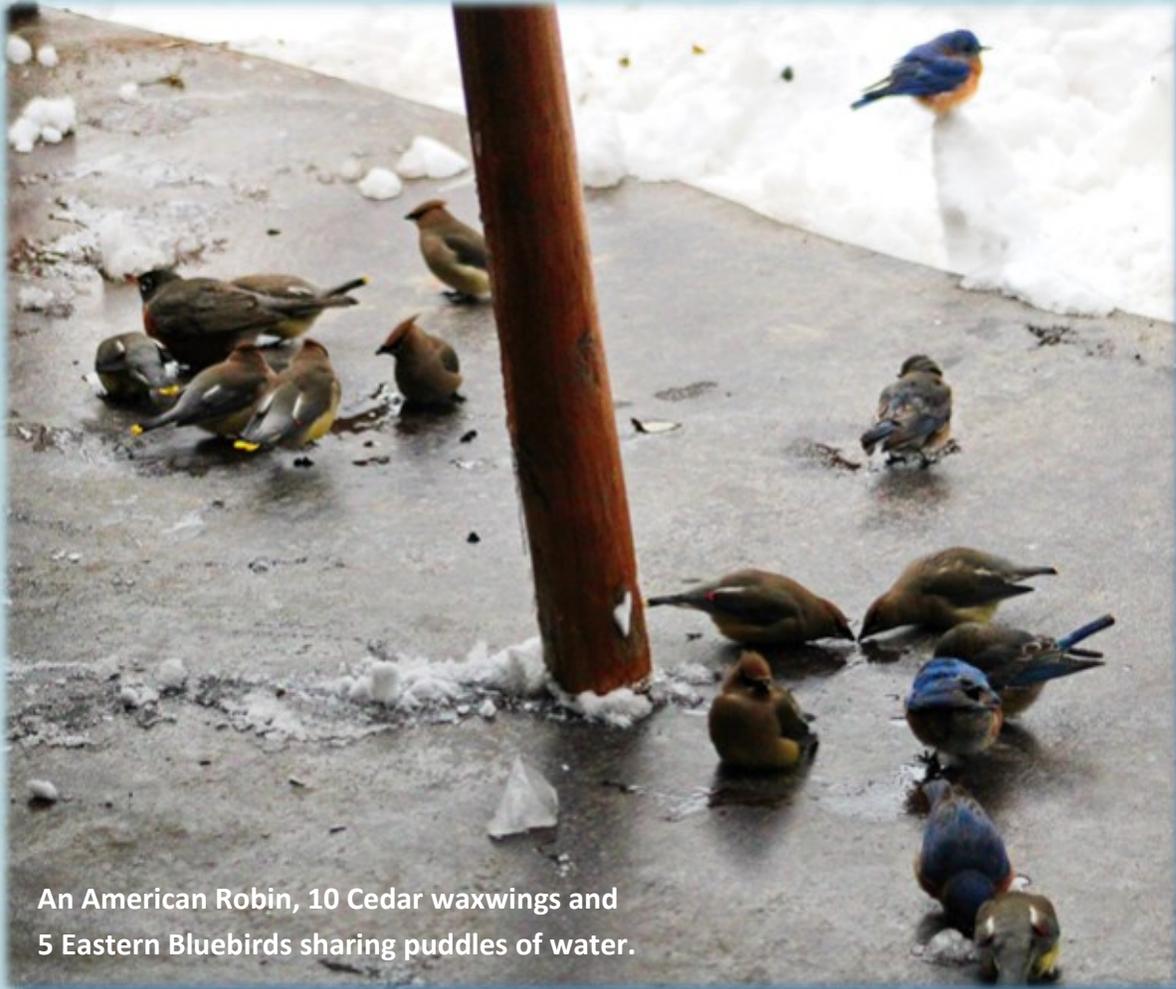


Pine Warbler



The set up

My Sub-Urban Backyard *cont.*



An American Robin, 10 Cedar waxwings and 5 Eastern Bluebirds sharing puddles of water.



A Black-crested Titmouse and a Yellow-rumped Warbler face off.



Red-bellied Woodpecker bully



- Mary Ann Everett, 2003

Out on a Limb

Tree Description: Grows 15 to 25 feet, deciduous.

Blooms: White, growing in clusters up to 4 inches wide, appearing in March and April. Bees and butterflies love to visit when in bloom.

Fruit: Bluish black, appearing waxy, and are 1/2 inch long and slightly longer than wide. Wildlife such as birds, fox and deer love to eat the fruit.

Location: This native can grow in thickets, open woodlands, streams, and rocky woods from East to Central Texas. It can also grow in well-drained sand, loam, or clay: most any soil that is well-drained.

Leaves: Paired and opposite with petioles covered in rust-colored branched hairs. Margins are finely serrated and glossy, dark green. In autumn they turn to hues of red, lavender, pink and orange.

Bark: Separates into dark, rectangular plates. Twigs are reddish brown with a thin, gray coating.

Heat & Drought Tolerance: Drought and cold tolerant, requiring little water.

Interesting Facts: *The Manual of the Vascular Plants of Texas*, Correll and Johnson, notes that the fruit tastes similar to raisins. Records show the bark was used medicinally for female problems and as an anti-spasmodic, but its value in this regard is now in doubt. The species name *Viburnum rufidulum* refers to the reddish hairs on the petioles. It is a member of the honeysuckle family and can be seen along a spring-fed creek at Boy Scout Camp Tahuaya. Wood has an unpleasant odor when cut. Designated as Firewise.



[Click here for name of tree](#)



What's in YOUR backyard?



- **Carroll Adcock, 2020**

The week of the “snowpocalypse” I was discouraged. The weather had resulted in the last-minute cancellation of an all-day hiking tour of Seminole Canyon State Park to view the rock art (after driving the 350 miles for the tour). This was then compounded by the rescheduling of a Whooping Crane photo tour on Aransas Bay for which I had rented a super-telephoto lens to try out. Rather than resorting to draining my liquor cabinet, I bundled up and set out to photograph what I could find in my backyard. I was pleased to discover numerous birds foraging in the winter wonderland as well as a visit from a Grey Fox displaying his winter coat.



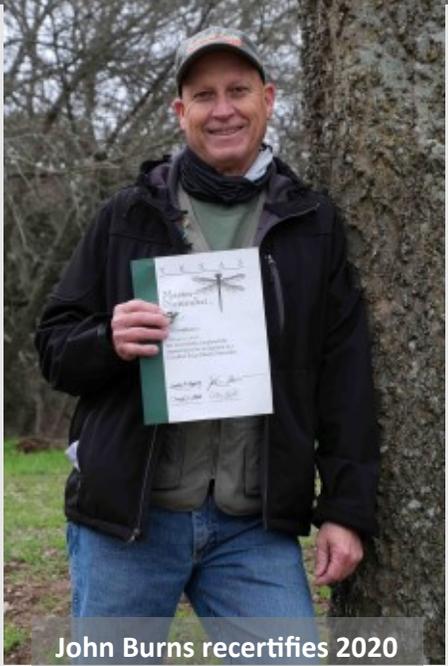
What's in YOUR backyard?



*(clockwise) Great Horned Owl,
Cedar Waxwing, American
Robin, Cedar Waxwing, Hermit
thrush.*



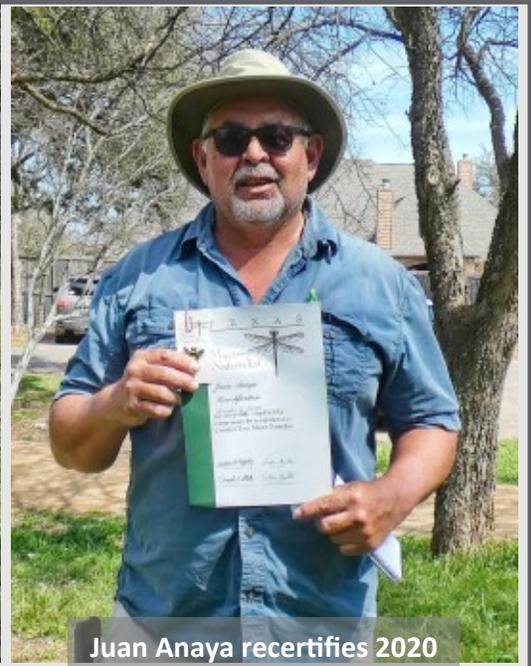
MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



John Burns recertifies 2020



Jaime Harmon—training certificate



Juan Anaya recertifies 2020



Marilyn receives framed pins awarded to her husband Richard McCarthy since 2010



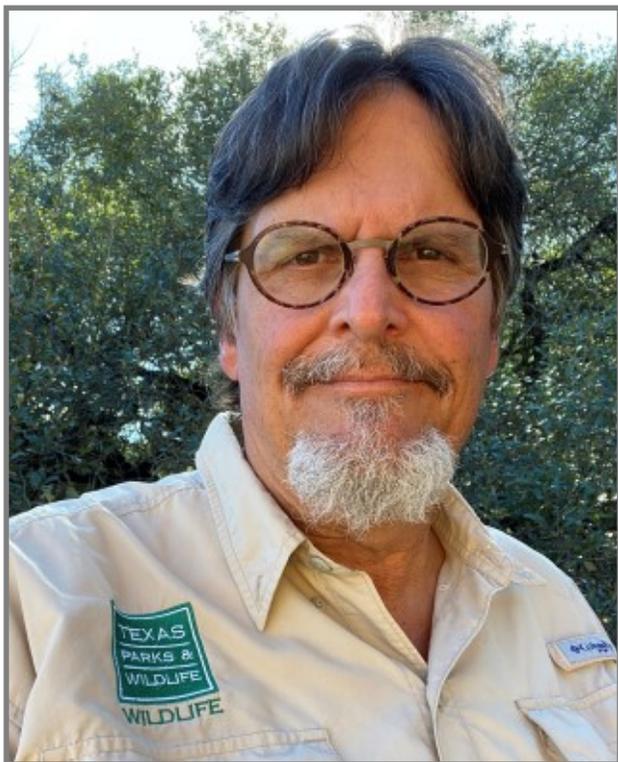
Ward Critz and Sue Critz recertify for 2020

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 one Saturday of each month. We want to celebrate each accomplishment you have earned!

Prairie photo by Jason Deckman, Miller Springs Nature Center

CHAPTER MEETINGS

- KELLY ANN BLANCHARD, 2020

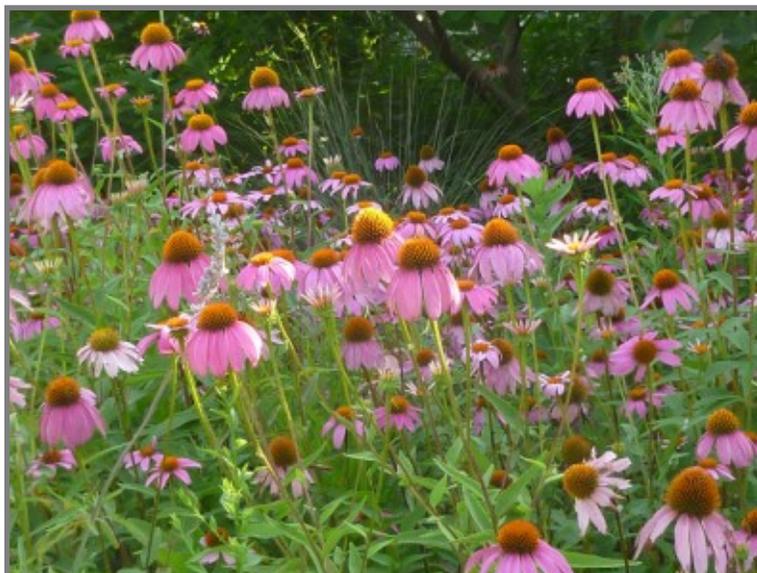


For our February virtual chapter meeting, our chapter was fortunate to host Craig Hensley, Texas Parks and Wildlife Specialist and Texas Nature Trackers Biologist, Wildlife Diversity Program. He is a well-known naturalist, educator and birder whose workshops at the Texas Master Naturalist State Conferences fill quickly.

His presentation, “Native Plants & Pollinators: Making Connections,” covered a vast swath of native plants that we can grow in our gardens, yards and open spaces to boost support for our pollinator friends.

The way he described the relationship of pollinators to their flowers was fascinating!

For example, lines on flowers can act like “landing pads” to guide pollinators into the flower, and bluebonnets have purple centers to signal to pollinators that they have already been pollinated – white centers signal they are ready to be pollinated, helping pollinators become more efficient. And apparently the tall Maximilian Sunflower smells like chocolate if you squeeze it?! Craig’s knowledge of the natural world around us was so inspiring. He encouraged us to continue to use iNaturalist and SEEK in order to maximize our backyards as pollinator havens and fodder for our curiosity.



CHAPTER MEETINGS

- KELLY ANN BLANCHARD, 2020

Bats galore! Our speaker for our March virtual chapter meeting, Erin Cord of Bat Conservation International, presented “Bats of Central Texas” – a collection of helpful information and tips to support our flying mammal friends here in Bell County. “Texas is a great state for bats,” said Erin. “There’s a lot of bats and a lot of diversity.” Texas hosts 33 bat species, more than any other state. The Mexican free-tailed bats living under the Congress Avenue bridge in Austin is the largest urban bat colony in the world at 1.5 million.



Erin touched on why bats are important, threats to bats, common local species, and how we can help them. While providing bat houses is important, I found it fascinating that, since bats are pollinators, we can also help bats by planting a garden for them as a “bug buffet” of fragrant flowers and night bloomers. Bats are also primary pollinators for agave plants and thus tequila, which is made from agave. Erin’s informative presentation inspired us all to become bat advocates and celebrate their importance in our lives.



Congress Ave Bridge, Austin by Terry Rascoe

Good to Know...



MILLER SPRINGS NATURE CENTER CLEANUP EVENT

Saturday, April 24th 9:00am—11:00am

TEMPLE ENTRANCE PARKING AREA

City of Belton Parks & Rec are hosting a trail and cleanup event on Saturday, April 24th from 9:00-11:00am. Volunteers will pick up litter and help with minor trail maintenance. *Central Texas Master Naturalists* will be there with our Discovery Trunks. Stop by to talk nature!

Tools and supplies will be provided, but 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 is needed. If you have questions, contact Belton Parks and Rec at [this email](#). This is the last planned Public Workday until October.



This armed motley crew is heading home after felling a large ivy-covered tree during a Chapter Workday at Chalk Ridge Falls Park. (l to r) John Atkins, John Burns, John Ziegeler & Ben Clement

More Good to Know...

TEMPLE DAILY TELEGRAM
tdtnews.com

Finding a nesting place: Naturalists program keeps tabs on area bird

BY JOEL VALLEY | TELEGRAM STAFF Mar 21, 2021



Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter members Kelly Ann Blanchard, right, and Tina Atkins check bluebird boxes recently at Miller Springs Nature Center near Lake Belton.

Courtesy of Zoe Rascoe

Out thanks to Joel Valley at the Temple Daily Telegram for providing an article on our 2021 Training Course and another highlighting our NestWatch projects at Mother Neff State Park run by Jean Solana and at Miller Spring Nature Center (above) with Kelly Ann Blanchard and Tina Atkins .

Contributing Authors to this Newsletter



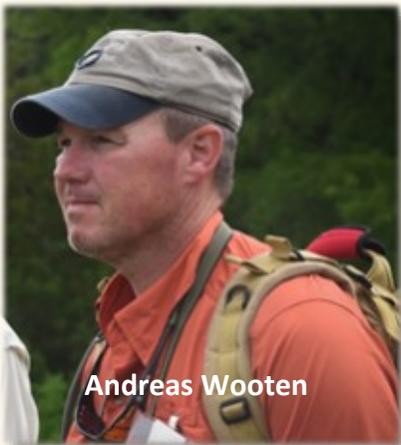
Joe Dorn



John Atkins



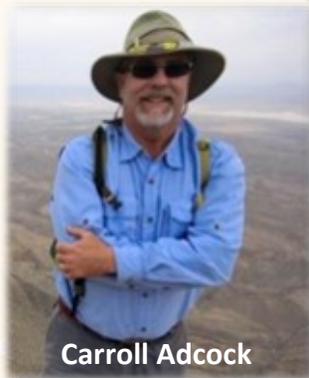
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Andreas Wooten



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Bruce Polikoff



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Linda Fairlie



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Kelly Ann Blanchard



Bill Novakoski



Zoe Rascoe



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Contributed Images: Daisy Klassy, John Atkins, Tina Atkins, John Burns, Jean Solana, Andreas Wooten, Carroll Adcock, Kelly Ann Blanchard, Terry Rascoe, Zoe Rascoe.

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

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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. Watch our webpage for updates.

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.