

# THE TRACKER

Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter June 2021

## Oakalla Old Home Day

- Lynn Fleming, 2004

I got kind of roped into this event via my brother, but I'm so glad I said yes.

On a Saturday in May, myself and 8 other Master Naturalists (and a couple of spouses) came out to the rural setting of Oakalla (about 12 miles southwest of Killeen airport if you haven't been there) to help their small library raise some funds and have some fun! We took our Bird and Mammal Discovery Trunks, plaster animal track cast making items, seed ball rolling station, book mark and rubbing activities, and a nice selection of bones, skin, fur and scat (replicas of course). Lynn Williams brought an amazing

selection of  
bird items

that she hand crafted. She and Mary Odom showed off our collection of bird nests, habitats, eggs, and all kinds of nature-y bird-related items for the kids and adults, too

Bill Bowsher manned the Mammal table with skulls and pelts that amazed all who stopped by. Among the reproductions was a real boar skull he found and cleaned until it sparkled. Story after story about bobcats, raccoons, opossums and even bears could be heard. Gail Wilson and I spent our time being the Plaster Masters and helping the kids crank out slab after slab of all kinds of animal track imprints.

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*Gail Wilson making tracks while Bill Bowsher shows  
skin and skull replicas*

# Oakalla Old Home Day cont.

Paula Finley and Andi Bowsher didn't mind getting dirty working the seed ball station. A little blackland soil never hurt anyone! Diane Cooney and Marilyn Whitworth had stamping and rubbing plates running hot and heavy. And if you didn't need a stamped bookmark, you could ooooo and ahhh over the replica scat (what regular people call poop). Some of that stuff looks pretty dang real.

I know we were a hit for the event with all of the make-and-take items we had for the kids. It was wonderful to get our Master Naturalist troops back out into the public for a hands-on event! We are all looking forward to doing more of that this summer.



# President's Pen

**Linda Fairlie, 2018**

We have some heavy lifters in our Chapter. They donate their time and energy every month to make some of our favorite places even better – places like Miller Springs Nature Center, Chalk Ridge Falls Nature area, Live Oak Ridge, Cedar Gap Park, and Mother Neff State Park.

John Atkins, our immediate Past President, is the contact person for work at Chalk Ridge Falls, Live Oak Ridge, and Cedar Gap Park. He goes out to the parks and checks out the trails ahead of time to see what can be done by our group, and always has a plan. Volunteers like John Burns, Ben Clement, Chris Nixon, Carroll Adcock and John Ziegeler arrive early in the morning and meet with John to communicate their plan. They are dressed for war – hard hats, eye and ear protection, long sleeved shirts, gloves, chaps and steel toed boots. They have chain saws, loppers, and cool tools called PullerBears.

War has been declared on invasive plants like chinaberry, Ligustrum, heavenly bamboo and Texas lilac. War has been declared on the “hippie huts” at Chalk Ridge falls. War has been declared on trail hazards like dead trees that could or have fallen, blocking trails. War has been declared on overgrown fire breaks.

This is not a job for the faint of heart. Invasive plants re-assert themselves and need constant attention. However, one cannot just go about cutting down trees! You have to know where they are going to fall with a pretty good degree of certainty. Sometimes vines grow up and across trees, tying them together and preventing them from falling the way they should, or even falling at all. Thank goodness for hard hats and the ninja like skills of our volunteers!



*John Atkins, John Burns, John Ziegeler, Ben Clement*

*Cont.*

# President's Pen cont.

I have helped with the hippie huts. Even when these intricate structures are torn down, the logs cut into small pieces and scattered far away, they are re-built - sometimes the next day. I assume those who build them want a place at the park where they can hide away and "party". It takes a lot of work to build them! However, they are a fire danger and cannot remain standing.

There are trails that storms have eroded or for other reasons are not safe. Usage of these trails by mountain bikers and day hikers causes further erosion. Our volunteers try to block these trails by hauling dead trees across the path to block them (in spite of the fact that visitors will move them out of the way rather than take a different path). They have lined the correct trails with rocks hauled from the entrance. Sometimes water drainage paths are created.

At Live Oak Ridge Park, the first 100 yards of the spillway was overgrown by sumac. This was a safety hazard as traffic couldn't see around it. Our volunteers took out the sumac and cut it into smaller pieces.

The war has not been won, but we fight the good fight over and over again, winning battles, thanks to the men and women who give of themselves!



*John Atkins with our new logo*



*Daisy Klassy on chainsaw*



*Carroll Adcock's custom workout*



*Kelly Ann Blanchard, Chris Nixon, John Burns, John Atkins, Ben Clement, Bill Novakoski*



# Mother Neff State Park

1680 TX Hwy-236, Moody

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

On March 31st, we started working in the Bottoms by the Leon River for the first time in years. Next to the historic CCC pavilion is a beautiful pecan grove that the rangers mow. We picked up pecan limbs and trimmed some chinaberries. After that we went to the bird blind and restacked the rocks around the water feature and added rocks and gravel into the water tank to make it more “shallow and bird friendly”. Two bog plants were added – pickerel and horsetail rush. Those in attendance were John Ziegeler, Carroll Adcock, Tina and John Atkins, Kelly Ann Blanchard, Bill Abright, Jaime Harmon, Jamey Douglas, Chris Nixon, Brent Blumenthal, Julie Sieh and Jean Solana.

April is the month for checking bird boxes and looking for Monarch caterpillar activity. We had several Bewicks wrens active with nests and fledglings – one Cowbird egg was removed. There were about 50 milkweed plants and the highest caterpillar count was 15. These numbers were down from the previous year, but there was still plenty of milkweed for the monarchs to feed on.

For the first time in over a year Jean Solana gave some posterboard programs to Mother Neff visitors – 2 hour sessions on the weekends. The first was about the Birds of Mother Neff and the second was on Pollinators of Mother Neff. They were well attended by both adults and children.



Jean Solana –Birds of the park

# Mother Neff State Park

*Cont.*

On our Wednesday, April 28<sup>th</sup> workday, we divided into 2 groups. Carroll Atkins and Jamey Douglas got the hard job of helping the rangers run the chipper/spreader down at the Bottoms while the rest of us pulled invasive Bastard Cabbage around the Park (Jaime Harmon, Julie Sieh, Bill Abricht, and Jean Solana). Then we joined the mulch group at the Bottoms for some more clean up and Bio-Blitzing.



*Jean Solana—ready to roll!*

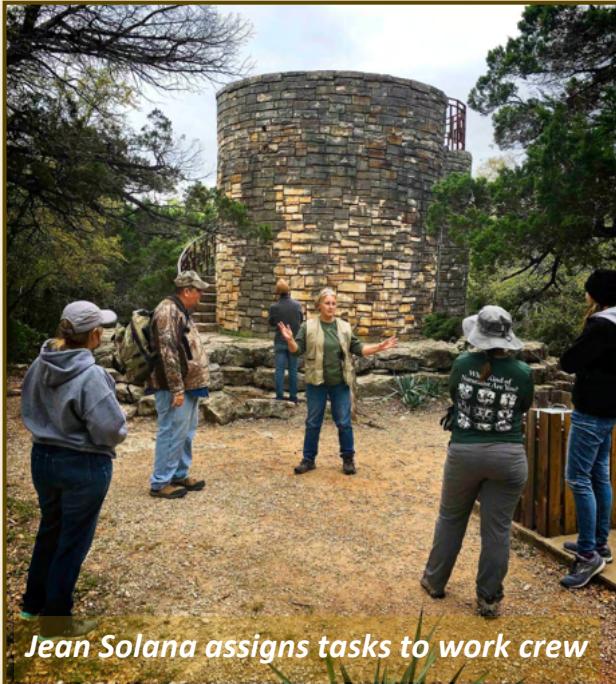
Our first Mother Neff Bio-Blitz ran from Saturday, April 24<sup>th</sup> to Sunday May 2<sup>nd</sup>. We used the App iNaturalist to take pictures, make observations, and identify as many species as we could. So far we have 569 observations, 235 species, and 22 observers. Top species identifiers are as follows:

Daisy Klassy-60 Carroll Adcock-44 John Fairlie-37 Andi Bowsher-23 Kelly Ann Blanchard-21

Special thanks to Jenna Chappell and Jessica Dieter for observing 44 insects – we learned they were the hardest to identify to species because no one else was around to confirm what they found. Jamey Douglas, with all his great NRCS plant experience provided 43 observations. Kelly Ann Blanchard managed her 21 species with 2 wiggly boys with her!!!



*Julie Sieh – brush hauler!*



*Jean Solana assigns tasks to work crew*

# Mother Neff State Park

- Linda Fairlie, 2019

## BIOBLITZ 2021

The Central Texas Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalists planned and participated in a Bioblitz at Mother Neff State Park from April 25 through May 2. What is a bioblitz you ask? During a specified time and place, participants identify as many different species as they can to help understand the biodiversity at that location. We used iNaturalist as our tool for doing this research.

iNaturalist is a cool app that will allow citizen scientists to take pictures or sound files of living organisms and share the evidence of that organism, and when and where it was observed. You can use your smart phone or a regular camera for this. Many science-based projects use this data for many purposes.

For example, we shared our data with the Great Texas Wildlife Trails project. Their purpose is to “better understand the distribution of Texas’ wildlife, collect data on our Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and wildlife in general, and use that data as a guide for informing visitors on what species to look for when they are at a particular site.” Birds of Texas project and Herps of Texas project use our data, and their purpose is “to enhance our understanding of the distribution of birds/herps in Texas. Our highest priority is to collect information on Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN).” Our data was also shared with the City Nature Challenge 2021: Heart of Texas and Mother Neff State Park TPWD.



*A closer look by the Blanchard family*



*Painted Bunting by Carroll Adcock*



*Jean and Jamey helping with plant ID*



*Sensitive Briar by John Fairlie*

# Mother Neff State Park

## BIOBLITZ 2021 *CONT.*

Our first Bioblitz at Mother Neff State Park was a success! Twenty-one people participated in the event, and only about 2/3 of them were Texas Master Naturalists. The other third were visitors to the park who wanted to participate as well. Jean Solana set up a table at the entrance on the two weekends to help visitors install the iNaturalist app on their phones and learn to make observations.

Within these 8 days, 568 observations were made, including photos and sound files. Observations are still being identified, but as of May 17, there were 236 different species, and more than 59% of observations are research grade. Most observations were, not surprisingly, plants and insects, but also included birds, arachnids, reptiles, amphibians, mammals, other animals, and fungi. 109 iNaturalist users have helped identify observations.

The top most observed species, in order, were 9 observations of Indian Blanket, Engelmann Daisy, and Seven-spotted Lady Beetle; 8 observations of Western Honey Bee, and Monarch; 7 observations of Painted Bunting, Texas Paintbrush, and Texas Yellow Star.

**Jean Solana was the top observer and had the most species.** She took herself out of the contest as she is one of the administrators of the project. The contest winners were:

**Three top observers – Daisy Klassy, John Fairlie, and Carroll Adcock**

**Three top species observers – Daisy Klassy, Carroll Adcock and John Fairlie**

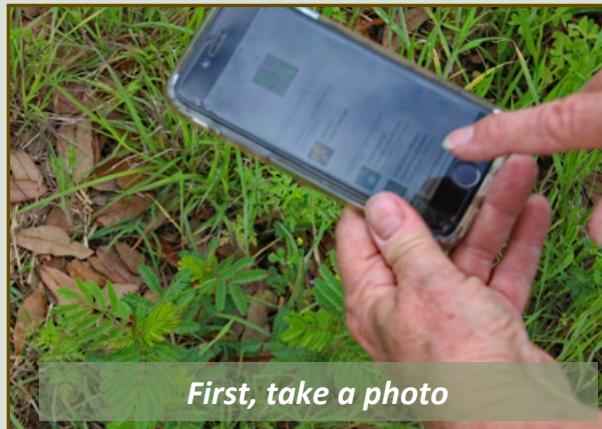
**Most Amphibians and Reptiles – Guy Fowler**

**Most Other Animals – Jessica Dieter**

**Most Insects and Arachnids – Jenna Chappell**

**Most Birds – Carroll Adcock**

**Most Fungi – Daisy Klassy**



*First, take a photo*



*Tawny Emperor by Daisy Klassy*



*Juniper Hairstreak by Kelly Ann Blanchard*



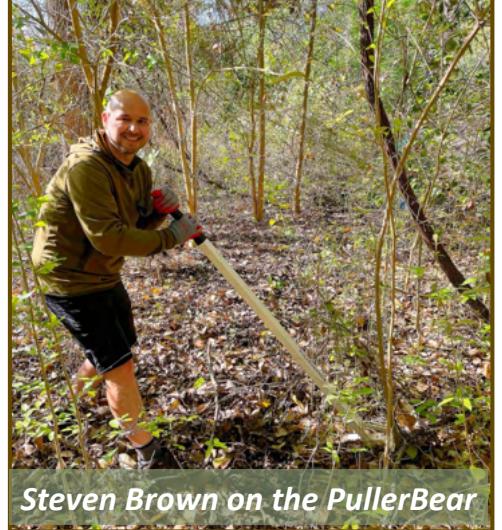
*Demonstrating the iNaturalist app*



- JOHN BURNS, 2018

[jaburnscgm@gmail.com](mailto:jaburnscgm@gmail.com)

Hello everyone! The 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday workday in April was a beautiful day. We had 9 volunteers with 2 folks from the 2021 class, John Fairlie and Steven Brown. Marilyn Whitworth headed up the litter patrol with Linda and John Fairlie joining her. The others including myself, John Atkins, Ben Clement, Steven Brown, Bill Novakoski, and Bert Peeples all headed down the Green Pond Trail. With all the invasive waxleaf ligustrums, it seemed dark and maybe even a bit scary. This makes me think of the scene in the Wizard of Oz where Dorothy and her sidekicks are walking in the forest and get scared of lions, tigers, and bears Oh My! Hopefully we will make the trail a bit more inviting than the forest from the Wizard of Oz. I had planned to work on pulling smaller seedlings like we had done the previous month. That plan went out the window when we realized with everything else greening up it was much more difficult to get to the smaller seedlings. We changed the plan and all worked on pulling and cutting larger trees. It makes a much quicker impact anyway. Steven jumped right in with the PullerBear and stayed on it the whole time we worked. Great job Steven!



Steven Brown on the PullerBear



John Atkins, John Fairlie, Linda Atkins, Marilyn Whitworth, Bert Peeples, Ben Clement,  
Steven Brown, Bill Novakoski

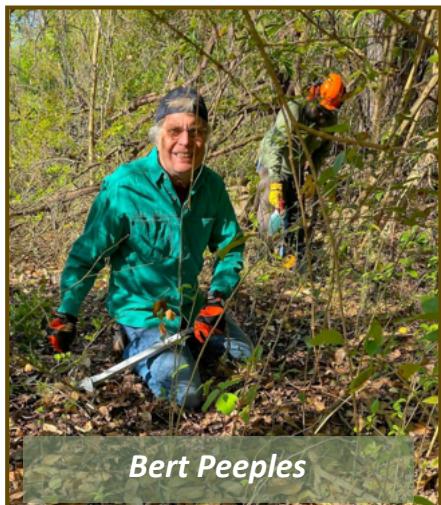
There was a public volunteer workday with the City of Belton at Miller Springs on Saturday April 24, 2021. I don't know the official number of volunteers, but I would guess close to 100 including a good turnout of Master Naturalists. During the event I walked, talked and picked up trash with Wade Matthews and Larry Turner. Larry is in the 2021 class and it was a lot of fun getting to know him.

# Miller Springs Nature Center *cont.*

On the workday in May we had 6 volunteers out to enjoy the weather and get some work done. We had rain earlier in the week so we worked on the Armadillo Trail to avoid muddy areas. Five of the volunteers John Burns, Ben Clement, Jaime Harmon, Bill Novakoski, and Edwina Brown head down the trail to remove invasive plants. This month the 2021 class was represented by Edwina Brown. The work was a little different on the Armadillo trail as there is not as much waxleaf ligustrum so our focus was on invasive Chinaberry. We didn't cut down as many trees in this area, but they were larger so our impact was very obvious. Speaking of impact, Wade Matthews was on litter patrol this month and this always provides an obvious impact.

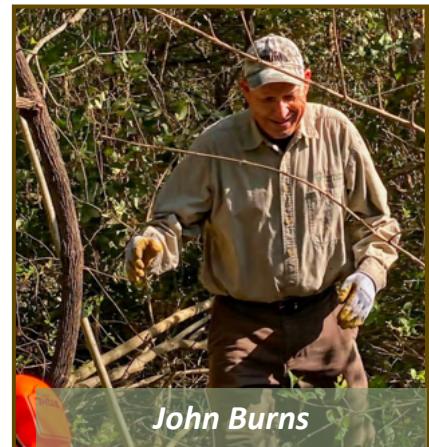


*Jaime Harmon, Ben Clement, Bill Novakoski,  
Wade Matthews, Edwina Brown*



*Bert Peeples*

Did anyone notice the link between the three events? We had 2021 class members for every event at Miller Springs during April and May. We would love to have anyone from the new class join us. It can be challenging work, but it is rewarding to see the impact we have on the area. We also can provide less strenuous work if you prefer with litter pickup or weed pulling. If you would like to join us, just contact me at the number or email address at the top of the article.



*John Burns*



*City of Belton Public Workday—great volunteer showing!*

# Chalk Ridge Falls Park

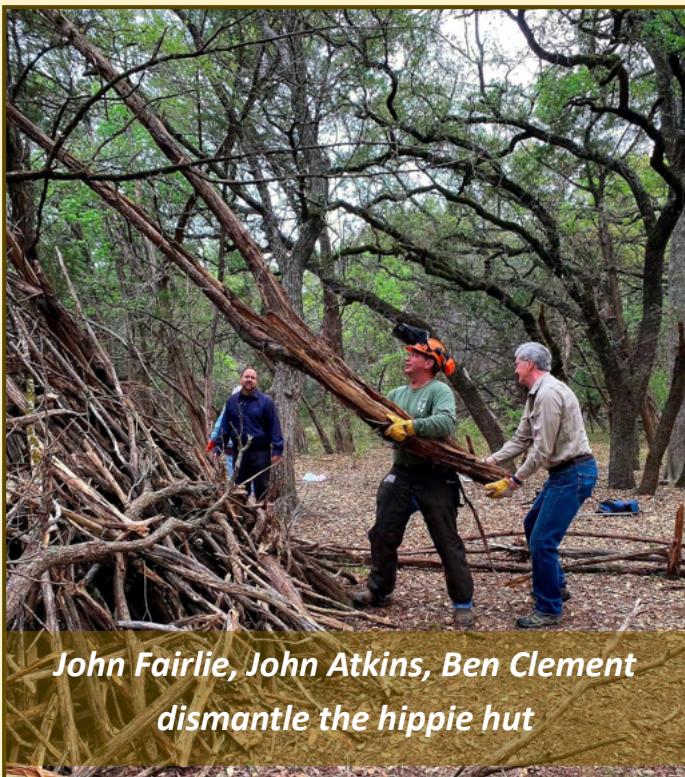
## - John Atkins, 2016

The April Chalk Ridge Falls work party consisted of myself, John Burns, Ben Clement, Jamey Douglass, Tina Atkins, Marilyn Whitworth, and the Fairlies. The entire morning was dedicated to removal of the hippie hut which had grown to over 20 feet tall and 20

feet in diameter. We kept two chainsaws busy cutting the wood into 18-inch pieces while everyone else worked hard hauling the wood offsite and throwing it in a ravine. Just when it seemed that we were never going to finish, Ben ran home and came back with a wheelbarrow to save the day! One month later, I am happy to report that no one has attempted to rebuild the hut.



*John Atkins, John Burns, Marilyn Whitworth, Jamie Douglass*



*John Fairlie, John Atkins, Ben Clement  
dismantle the hippie hut*



*Tina Atkins doesn't need no stinkin'  
gym membership*

# Chalk Ridge Falls Park *cont.*

In May, most of the members were scared off by the rain. Tina and Carroll Adcock were



*Carroll and Ben refill steps with rocks by the bucket load*

the only other members to brave the elements and come out to work. The trails had dried out considerably overnight and we were spared any further rain that morning. Mother Nature had another plan for us; with 90% humidity, it was miserable. Our task for the day consisted of loading 5 gal buckets with sand and gravel from the river and carrying them 100 yards uphill to repair the badly eroded treads on a set of steps. To make things more interesting, we also had to negotiate the suspension bridge across the creek. The suck factor was high, but it got even worse when one of the buckets broke, slowing our progress even further. It was at this time that Ben Clement (who forgot we had an 8 a.m. start) swooped in and saved the day with a new bucket and a fresh back. We finished that morning completely exhausted, but happy with the work we had accomplished. We wrapped up the morning by trimming back the vegetation that was encroaching on the bridge.

Next month we will continue trail work to repair some drainage issues. See you out there.



*Tina Atkins, John Atkins, Carroll Adcock, Ben Clement*

# FIELD NOTES

- Kelly Ann Blanchard, 2020

Are you 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!

## Hummingbirds at Home

Many of us enjoy putting up hummingbird feeders in our yards and delight in watching our little feathered friends flit and fight with each other. But did you know that you can contribute to community science by recording these sightings?

Due to warming temperatures, hummingbirds are experiencing difficulties adjusting to earlier flowering of nectar plants as well as harsh weather conditions, which we heartbreakingly experienced firsthand earlier this year during the Big Freeze. Scientists are collecting data to stay abreast of hummingbirds' migration patterns and potential threats to hummingbird species. You can help by providing data for these scientists to analyze.

Created by Audubon in 2013, *Hummingbirds at Home* is a great tool to track hummingbird activity in your area. You can create and monitor your own "Patch," like your backyard, by holding pre-scheduled Patch Surveys or you can monitor single sightings. You can choose from a variety of different hummingbird species listed on the identifier dropdown menu. Nectar sources can include flowering plants in your yard or a hummingbird feeder on your porch. The free mobile app makes reporting sightings convenient and easy.



## Featured Community Science Project:

### Audubon's Hummingbirds at Home

**Where:** Your yard, a park, anywhere you see hummingbirds in action

**When:** Year-round

#### How to get involved:

1. Go to [HummingbirdsAtHome.org](https://HummingbirdsAtHome.org) and sign up for an account. I highly recommend setting up your account and location information on the website from a computer before using the phone app. The app is not as intuitive as other Audubon apps and still needs some tweaking – it works great for monitoring purposes but struggles a bit with profile/location editing.
2. Create a “Patch” that you will be observing for most of your hummingbird monitoring, most likely your front or back yard.
3. Download the app on your phone and log in to start monitoring!

Texas Master Naturalists, remember to keep track of time spent participating in the *Hummingbirds at Home* so you can enter your Volunteer Service hours into VMS under “Data Collection Activities: TMN Field Research Hours” then list as Hummingbirds At Home.

To track hummingbird arrival and departure in your part of the state, follow sightings at on one of several websites, such as [Journey North](https://JourneyNorth.org), where migration maps are updated as often as hourly.



# NESTWATCH TEAM

- By Christopher Nixon, 2020

As Master Naturalists, we love our birds and also recognize that they serve as important environmental indicators for habitat loss, climate change, and even diseases.

One of the many ways the Central Texas Master Naturalists do our part is by participating in NestWatch, a community science program designed to help track the health of bird nests and breeding cycles. This year we have expanded our efforts by having a dedicated group of volunteers from our chapter to help monitor more than a dozen nest boxes installed at Miller Springs Nature Center.



*Kelly Ann Blanchard trains Matt Ridley on the nest camera*

This collaboration allows us to be more flexible, while sharing knowledge, observations, and tools throughout the group. Volunteers venture out to the bird boxes in pairs on a weekly basis, and follow special protocols established by the NestWatch program designed to ensure that the health and safety of the nests is not compromised during any of the observations.

Participating in NestWatch doesn't require any special equipment, but our volunteers do utilize a few tools to

make sure we can safely gather the best information possible. One of these is the endoscopic camera, a small illuminated lens at the end of a long cable that provides us with a unique view inside the nests.

Photos are taken along with notes, and entered into the NestWatch website to be used by researchers.

So keep an eye out for us during your next hike at Miller Springs, and if you are interested, consider visiting the [NestWatch website](#) to learn more. It is an incredible way to be more aware of the environment around you while making important contributions to community science.



*Jaime Harmon partners with Chris Nixon on nest box visits*



# A Conversation with the Friendly Oaks:

## *Ownership or Friendship?*

- Bill Novakoski, 2020

Old Patriarch: "Bill, I have been anxious to talk with you. I see something in your life has changed—each morning now you are walking your domesticated dogs."

Bill: "Yes, I have retired, a term humans use when we no longer leave home each day to work to earn money to buy food, clothes and other things we need."

Old Patriarch: "What strange ways you humans have. We plants have what we need within reach of our limbs and our roots. Bill, despite our hopes in the early spring, you have noticed The Survivor lost all his leaves. He is too weak to join in our conversation today. Before this weakness, he wanted to hear what more of what you have learned from the scientists in your Master Naturalist classes. Could you please share what you learned?"

Bill: "I am sorry to see The Survivor's health decline. I do want to hear your thoughts on what I have learned. Last week, an archeologist—scientists who dig into the earth to learn about humans and how they lived thousands of years ago—spoke to us. Also, a Native American talked about how his people lived hundreds of years ago, and we heard a lecture on Urban Ecology, how city peoples' actions today impact nature. These lessons have caused me to think about humans' relationship with the natural world. Modern humans often think in terms of property rights, meaning the "owner" of the land can do whatever they want to their property, including the plants, animals, soil, and water on that land."

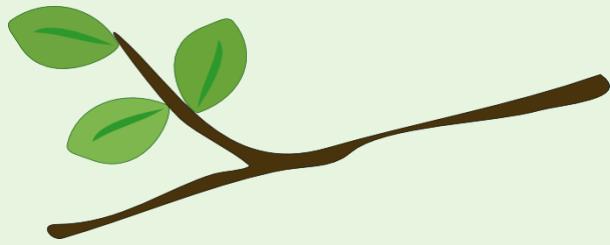


Old Patriarch: "Bill, I have lived on this land many, many seasons and there have been several owners during my lifetime—some kind and some unkind to us. Since none built a dwelling close by as you have, I have not known them well. We rarely saw most of them. In my youthful days, the people you call Native Americans hunted birds and deer on this land. Some later settlers grazed cows, and some tried to cultivate crops. The farmers failed on this rocky hilltop."

Yes, I am aware of this strange attitude about the land. The "owner" attitude can underlie exploitation or can result in kind, responsible actions. We, the other creatures, realize we cohabit the land—it does not belong to any of us. The land, water, soil nutrients and sunlight we use do affect the lives of other plants, animals and humans. All who cohabit the land will thrive together or else we will compete ourselves into extinction."

Bill: "Many conservationists feel and think like that also. We use terms like Land Management and Land Stewardship. These terms imply a responsibility and privilege to manage the land for the welfare of all its inhabitants."

Old Patriarch: "Thank you for telling me about your lessons. I am delighted Master Naturalists are being taught this peaceful cohabitation. Hopefully they will continue to practice and teach this to other humans. Land Management and Land Stewardship are pretty sophisticated terms, though. I would simply say that nature's creatures should strive to be friends."



# Out on a Limb

- Mary Ann Everett, 2003

**Tree Description:** A rapid growing tree usually 40 feet tall, often multi-trunked, irregular crown. It can grow up to 4 feet a year, but growing fast makes for a weak tree, and relatively short life span.

**Blooms:** Yellow catkins about 1-3" long in spring. Male and female flowers on separate plants.

**Fruit:** Light brown capsule  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch or less in length, maturing in late spring, early summer, containing many minute seeds covered with silky hairs.

**Location:** Found in wet soil along streams and at the margins of ponds and lakes, near drainage ditches and swamps.

**Leaves:** Simple, alternate blades 3-6" long, with finely-toothed margins. Turn yellow in the fall.

**Bark:** Brown to black, deeply fissured, flat ridges with thick scales, becoming shaggy with age.

**Heat & Drought Tolerance:** Water use is high, heat tolerance high.

**Interesting Facts:** Because the tree is prone to break, this allows the roots to aid in erosion control with a dense network of roots helping stabilize the soil. Its wood was used to manufacture artificial limbs, polo balls, and a special charcoal used to make gunpowder. When nails are driven into the bark, the wood will not split. Native Americans used the roots for red, orange, and yellow dyes, and young branches were used in basketry and mat weaving.

This tree has been used medicinally from prehistoric times to relieve headaches, reduce fevers, and heal wounds. In the 1880s scientists synthesized the compound derived from the bark, acetylsalicylic acid (aspirin). This tree is wildlife friendly supporting small mammals, birds and insects. It is the host tree for the Mourning Cloak, Viceroy, red-spotted Purple and Tiger Swallowtail.

[Click here for name of tree](#)



©2009 Will Cook

# What's in YOUR backyard?

- Zoe Rascoe, 2004



CTMN member Juan Anaya, also known as the Hummingbird Whisperer, spotted what he believed was an Anna's Hummingbird in his backyard hummer heaven during our mid-February Snow-Mageddon. He submitted the sighting to e-Bird and the reviewers were pretty excited and asked for photos. Once photos were sent, his Anna was deemed the first reported Anna's Hummingbird in McLennan County. Congratulations, Juan!!

6 Messages  
your Anna's Hummingbird

bert2@bafrenz.co... 4/3/21

To: juanana@swbell.net [Details](#)

Juan,  
I am collecting material to include in my winter season North American Birds article and saw your submission for 13 Feb 2021. It has not been approved by the eBird editor because of lack of response.  
However, you indicate you have photos. Anna's Hummingbird is an unusual and exciting discovery for McLennan and I'd like to pursue information on your sighting.  
Can you e-mail me your photos? Also, can you tell me the arrival date and last sighting date?  
Bert Frenz, Ph.D.  
North America Birds subregional editor, Central Oaks & Prairies of Texas  
eBird reviewer, Belize and Central Prairie of Texas  
Author, A Birder's Guide to Belize, published by American Birding Association  
Mission, Texas  
[bert2@bafrenz.com](mailto:bert2@bafrenz.com)  
[www.bafrenz.com](http://www.bafrenz.com)



2 Messages

hummingbird ID

bert2@bafrenz.... Thursday

To: juanana@swbell.net [Details](#)

Juan,  
Here is the response from Kelly Bryan. Your Anna's Hummingbird sighting is a first record for McLennan County.  
If you have additional photos of the Anna's and the Rufous hummingbirds, I can pass them on to Kelly.  
I suggest you add your photos of the Anna's to eBird as they represent an important record.  
Bert Frenz  
Oaks & Prairies of Texas  
eBird reviewer, Central Prairie of Texas  
eBird reviewer, Belize  
NAB subregional editor, Central Oaks & Prairies of Texas  
[bert2@bafrenz.com](mailto:bert2@bafrenz.com)  
[www.bafrenz.com](http://www.bafrenz.com)

- John Fairlie, 2021

GTWT Adopt-A-Loop Coordinator

One of the first things that I did when I began this journey with CTMN in late March was to search for things to do that would interest me. I saw the TMN Virtual Volunteer Fair on our opportunities list, and sat down to watch six hours of presentations. I will confess that my eyes glazed over on much of this series of 15 minute presentations, but a few of them piqued my interest (as well as that of my wife, Linda). I sent emails inquiring as to whether the opportunities were still available, and got one response – the Great Texas Wildlife Trails Adopt-a-Loop Program.

This program requires some explaining. According to the job description provided at the Virtual Fair, “Adopt-a-Loop is a project by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to provide regular site evaluation and to better understand the distribution of Texas’ wildlife along the Great Texas Wildlife Trails (GTWT).” Started in 2000 by the TPWD as the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail, the GTWT has expanded to include all of Texas. The GTWT website, <https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wildlife/wildlife-trails/> offers nine regional interactive maps that encompass the whole state. These nine maps each have several driving trails called “loops” that include detailed directions to a series of sites, and descriptions of the diverse wildlife to be found at each site.



*Guy Fowler spots a wooden bird*

## Great Texas Wildlife Trails



GTWT Adopt-A-Loop

The loop that goes through our chapter’s area is called the Chisolm Trail Loop. It contains four sites in Bell County -- Chalk Ridge Falls Park and Dana Peak Park on Stillhouse Hollow Lake, Belton Lakeview Park, and the Miller Springs Nature Center. It also contains four sites in McClellan County – Mother Neff State Park, Lake Waco Wetlands, Cameron Park, and the Cameron Park Zoo. Heart of Texas Chapter did not show interest in the project, so the volunteers that helped with the

first site visit voted unanimously (with the support of the TPWD supervisor) to adopt the whole loop. While much of the project can be a one-person job (verifying the accuracy of the directions, signage, descriptions in the website and interviewing key personnel at all sites regularly to keep all information at TPWD current and accurate), the portion of the project that we require a group of volunteers for is easy and fun.

## GTWT ADOPT-A-LOOP PROJECT cont.

The project requests that we make site visits at each of the sites on our loop four times a year to observe wildlife. Volunteers have a choice to use either iNaturalist or eBird in their observations. We do not have to do all the trails in a park. You can walk as much (or as little) as you wish. We can split up and cover several trails, or all stay together. We are supposed to simply walk trails like we would for fun, staying on trails, and if you are using iNaturalist, simply take pictures of wildlife (including birds) and enter them into the project. You are welcome to identify your observations, but it is not necessary. The TPWD have paid experts that will evaluate the observations. If you are using eBird, then we use field checklists to help determine what we are seeing and we tally what we see. Site visits are posted on our website and in our weekly newsletters. Since we have eight sites, we will have a flurry of visits during each cycle.



*Sue Valdez, Jean Solana, John Fairlie, Ben Clement, Guy Fowler*



*Mother Neff Team: Jean Solana, Sue Valdez, Juan Anaya, Guy Fowler, John Fairlie, Jamey Douglass*

something most of us Master Naturalists love to do for fun anyway. We had a good core group that did the last set of site visits, and would love to have more people join us for the next round!

# MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Zoe Rascoe



Jaime Harmon

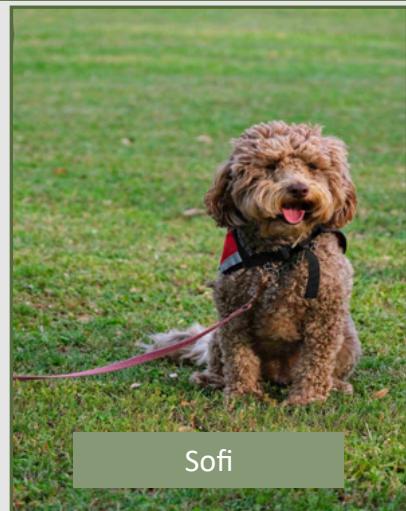


Mary Ann Everett



Linda Fairlie

Top left then clockwise:  
Zoe Rascoe (2021 Recertification);  
Jaime Harmon (Initial Certification);  
Mary Ann Everette (2021  
Recertification); Sofi—our Junior  
Master Naturalist from the Fairlie  
family; Sarah Dorn ( 500 hours of  
Volunteer Service!, presented by  
Linda); Mary Odom (2020  
Recertification); Linda Fairlie (2021  
Recertification). Well Done Y'all!!!



Sofi



Mary Odom



Sarah Dorn

# MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



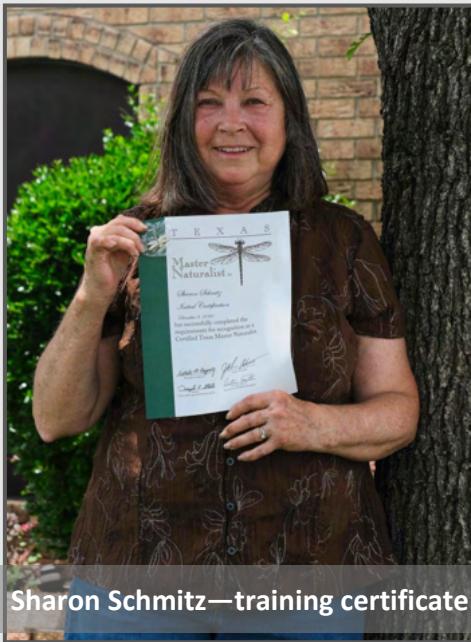
Lynn Williams recertifies for 2020



Mary Sharp recertifies for 2020



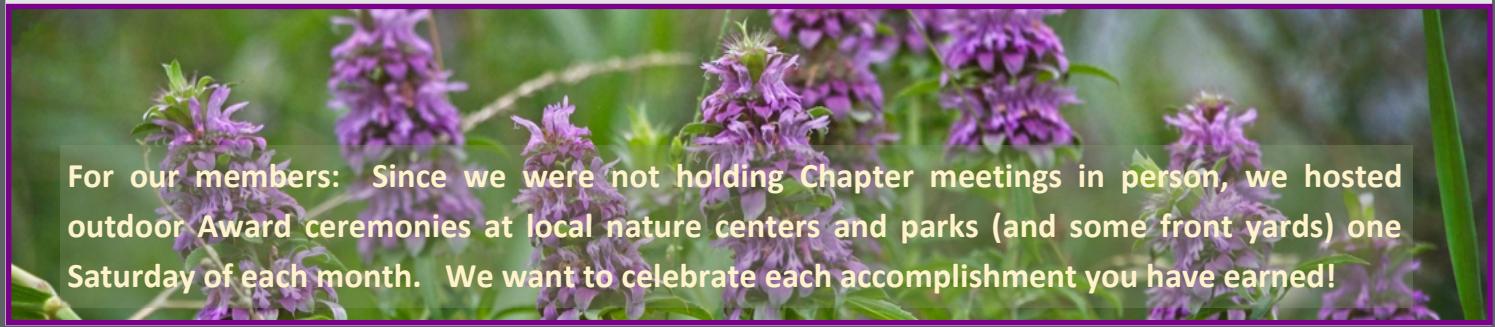
Linda Fairlie recertifies for 2021



Sharon Schmitz—training certificate



Dale and Gail Hughling recertify for 2020



For our members: Since we were not holding Chapter meetings in person, we hosted outdoor Award ceremonies at local nature centers and parks (and some front yards) one Saturday of each month. We want to celebrate each accomplishment you have earned!

# CHAPTER MEETINGS

## - ZOE RASCOE, 2004

We gathered in April as a chapter in-person for the first time in several months. Andreas Wooten, a certified TPWD Angler Education Instructor, had planned a fun evening, dubbed FISHING LIVE!, for attendees to learn about Texas fish, their habitats and our opportunities to intersect (fishing, right?). He recruited members to set up docks (stations) on popular TPWD Angle Ed training topics including *Rods & Reels, Baits, Knot Tying, Water Safety, Fish Identification & Habitats, Regulations and Aquatic Invertebrates*. Fishing can be a “gateway drug” to the outdoors and is well-suited for Master Naturalists to teach. Perhaps some of our members will want to help in our Angler Ed program! If so, just let Andreas know and he can fix you up. Many thanks go to Andreas for organizing a great outdoor educational event for our members.



**Andreas Wooten**



**Members check out Jenna Chappell's Aquatic Bugs**



**Finn Blanchard is studying the water critter display**



**Andreas Wooten wraps up our Fishing Live! event**

# CHAPTER MEETINGS

## - KELLY ANN BLANCHARD, 2020

Until May's chapter meeting, "Edible Plants in Your Landscapes," I had never thought about eating plants from my backyard, but it turns out I could have been feasting all along! We were fortunate to host Dr. Mark "Merriwether" Vorderbruggen, a renowned expert on foraging and creator of [ForagingTexas](#), a website devoted to the types and use of edible and medicinal plants in Texas. He is a fabulous presenter who does a wonderful job extolling the science behind the benefits of foraging in a way that makes you want to go outside and grab a nasturtium for your sandwich. His knowledge is vast and also extremely entertaining, so rather than listing highlights from his presentation, I will let some of his humorous quotes speak for themselves:

**On Turk's Cap: "I don't like the mouthfeel, tastes like mice. I thought that part of my life was behind me."**

**On why you should learn your edible plants before sharing with friends: "So you don't poison everyone and die."**

**On competing with hummingbirds for edible plants: "Put on your hummer protection suit and go collect some flowers!"**

**On canna lilies: "The tubers are like potatoes. Boil 'em, mash 'em, stick 'em in a stew."**

**On cacti: "All cactus fruit is edible, but a lot of them don't taste good."**

**On sweet potato vine leaves: "Don't eat them raw, cook them out. They've got just a small amount of cyanide. Generally, you don't want to eat cyanide."**

**On yucca: "If it tastes soapy, don't eat it."**

**On prickly pear cactus: "Think of prickly pear pads as giant green beans."**

**In general: "Eat more invasive plants!"**

Watch the [recorded video](#) for the rest of the story behind these quotes and for more Merriwether-isms!

# Good to Know...

## Trail Improvements at Miller Springs

### - Keller Matthews, 2021

John Burns and I met with Matt Bates, the Director of Parks and Recreation in Belton, and discussed priorities and resources available, for trail improvements at Miller Springs. Mr. Bates has been delighted with the recent, unprecedently strong volunteer response for publicized workdays at Miller Springs. The park has been well used, and has increased in popularity during the pandemic. Mr. Bates is optimistic about prospects for future grant opportunities to fund trail improvements, though no specific grant is currently pending. Federal Infrastructure Funding is potentially a boon for projects such as improvements in the park.

There was agreement on areas of priority, such as bridging the creek downstream from Green Pond, and re-routing the eroded corner of Bee Suck Hollow trail.

In a synergistic direction, Zoe Rascoe and I recovered field notes from a Miller Springs site visit by the Central Texas Trail Tamers, five years ago, and corresponded with them about re-initiating plans discussed before the pandemic. The group, based in Austin, has considerable experience with trail work in Central Texas, as well as State Parks and several National Parks. They offered to present their "Trail College" for our chapter, which entails about three hours of classroom time focusing on techniques and tools for trail construction and repair, followed by a half-day field workshop. Whether we prefer an afternoon class followed by a morning work session, or a morning session and afternoon of trail work will depend on the time of year the Trail College can be scheduled.

The classroom time will satisfy Advanced Training requirements, and the workday will count as Volunteer Service hours. Dates are yet to be proposed. Interested individuals should contact Zoe ([trascoe@hot.rr.com](mailto:trascoe@hot.rr.com)) or Keller ([kellbiker@gmail.com](mailto:kellbiker@gmail.com)).



*Keller Matthews at a previous  
MSNC trail work day*

# Contributing Authors to this Newsletter



Clockwise from top left:  
Bill Novakoski, John Atkins, John  
Fairlie, Jean Solana, John Burns,  
Lynn Fleming, Zoe Rascoe, Keller  
Matthews, Kelly Ann Blanchard,  
Mary Ann Everett, Chris Nixon and  
below—Linda Fairlie





### **Board of Directors**

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**Contributed Images:** John Atkins, Tina Atkins, John Burns, Linda Fairlie, John Fairlie, Jean Solana, Juan Anaya, Carroll Adcock, Daisy Klassy, Kelly Ann Blanchard, Zoe Rascoe.

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

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

### **Chapter Advisors**

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

Derrick Wolter,  
Wildlife Biologist, Texas Parks and Wildlife

## **The Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter**

Chapter meetings are open to the public and held on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m. Meetings may be by webinar or in-person at the Belton Church of Christ at 3003 N. Main. Meetings include a nature-related program. If interested in a webinar meeting, submit a request to join using the "Contact Us" button on our website Home Page to reach the WebEx Request link. Program details and locations can be found on our website and Facebook page.

For CTMN members, the Board of Directors meet the 1st Monday of each month from 11:30am-12:30pm. Meeting notices and locations will be sent to chapter members and all members are welcome to participate.