

The Tracker

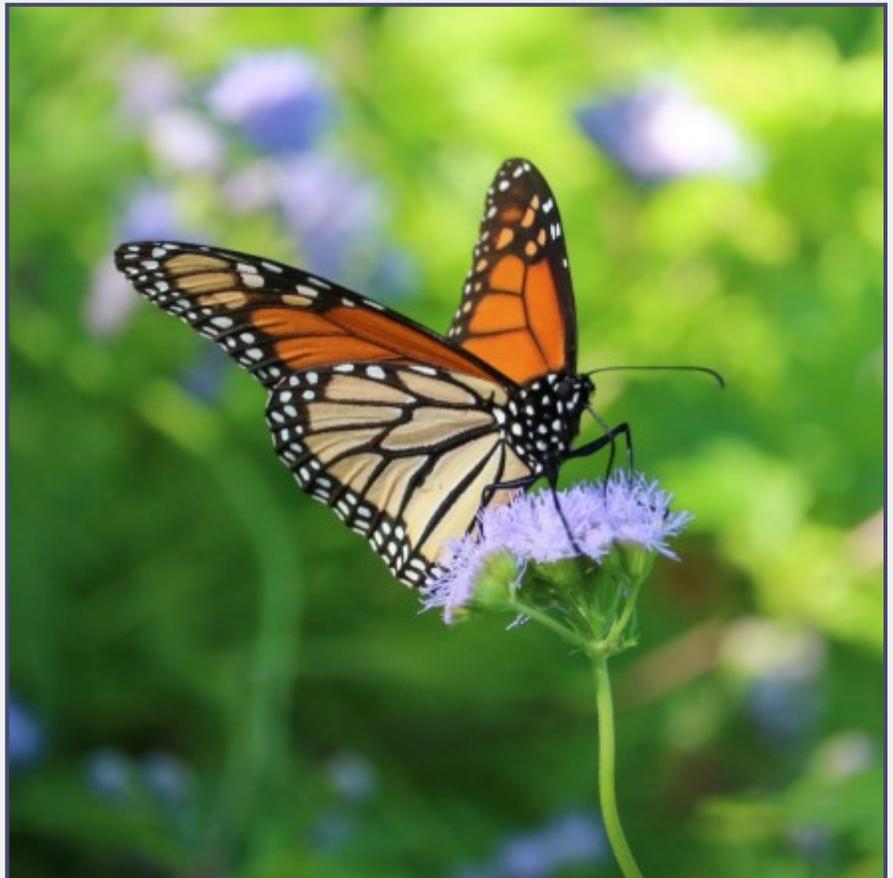
Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter December 2021

Photo: Rocky Mountain National Park by Terry Rascoe

FOLLOWING THE MONARCHS

Since the fall of 2018, I have been working with middle school students, helping to tag monarchs as they migrate to their winter grounds in Mexico. Others have come to help me with this endeavor. In 2018, I enlisted Ilse Meier to help me teach the students about the monarch, and so they learned about butterfly nets, how to capture a monarch, how to handle and tag them, sexing the butterfly, and recording the tagging data onto a spreadsheet. They have also submitted the spreadsheet information to the database and learned how important this Citizen Scientist project is.

At times, the students would be frustrated with not being able to net a butterfly, but they learned one has to be sneaky, and not only that, waving your net in the air does absolutely nothing in snatching a monarch in your net! A few times just practicing how to use the nets and catch any species of butterflies in the gardens went a long way to bolstering their confidence. Then they knew they could indeed net one of these beautiful critters.



Monarch on Mistflower

FOLLOWING THE MONARCHS *CONT*

And when they did have success in netting a monarch, sexing the insect, entering the tag number on the spread sheet, and then letting it float away, they knew they had experienced



St. Mary's 6th grader sexing and tagging a Monarch butterfly wing.

something really quite exciting. How many students this age have had this experience? This was not around when I was that age, but it is fulfilling just to watch the joy and excitement on these students' faces when catching and then releasing them to continue their journey to Mexico.

This year we were able to tag 109 monarchs, and some were already pretty battered. We wondered if those would make it very far on their journey, and if any of our tags would ever be found. It surely felt good just knowing that here in Temple,

Texas, we made a small

contribution to the big picture of information collected from many sites.

- Mary Ann Everett, 2003



I am really looking forward to 2022. We are approaching a new normal when it comes to the whole Covid situation. We are no longer depending exclusively on virtual meetings, but have found ways to meet together and enjoy being around other people who love nature. I know our membership is diverse in their opinions about vaccinations and masks, and my hope is that we can find enough ways to meet that everyone can find their level of comfort and still be able to gain from our Chapter meetings and our opportunities.

We have learned the value of virtual meetings and advanced training. It is easier to get speakers who can join us remotely and teach on a variety of topics. We no longer have to remain completely isolated and have found outdoor and inside activities that compliment these virtual meetings. For example, we were able to get an inside look at a bird rehabilitation facility with Pam Dieckert that we normally would not have been able to do by using technology.

As Master Naturalists, we love the outdoors, so it is not surprising that we enjoy outdoor meetings, such as the meeting on Native Grasses at the Messer Ranch and the Angler Education round robin we had at Heritage Park. I hope that in 2022 we can explore opportunities that include outdoor Advanced Training.



Cont.

President's Pen cont.

Our service opportunities still have large groups working outside. However, we also have opportunities that members can do in small groups or with just their families. The Virtual Volunteer Fair has added opportunities like butterfly monitoring and Adopt A Loop Wildlife Survey to our list of available service projects.

Some of our 2021 class members would not have been able to join us without the use of virtual classes. I believe the use of virtual training for new members will become part of our new normal. However, my hope is that the class of 2022 will have more opportunities to get together in person and get to know each other. I also hope that the classes of 2020 and 2021 will get to do some of the really great activities, such as birding on Ft. Hood in 2022.

Of course, we love the fellowship of meeting in person, inside, and I look forward to being able to do that more often. I hope that Covid numbers continue to decline in Bell County and everywhere. I know that we are resourceful enough to find ways to continue our work and training regardless of what happens with Covid.

I know Covid has been difficult for all of us. We see the light at the end of the tunnel, but along the way we have picked up a few new ideas that we can incorporate into how we function that will hopefully add to what we already enjoy. If there is something that is preventing you to come to some of our meetings that we can fix, please let me know your ideas. I look forward to seeing more of you in person in the coming year.

Sarah Dorn (red hat) has clearly just spotted the Golden Cheeked Warbler during a previous Fort Hood ornithology training class.





Mother Neff State Park

1680 TX Hwy-236, Moody

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

ROAD CLOSURE: TxDOT will be replacing the Leon River bridge south of Mother Neff so Tx Hwy 236 coming from the south, Oglesby Neff Park Road and CR 338 will be closed for at least a year. **Please come to the main entrance of the park by accessing Hwy 236 from the north by way of FM 107 or FM 2671.**

The end of September saw our regular workday well attended with 9 volunteers – Carroll Adcock, Kelly Ann Blanchard, Brent Blumenthal, Jamey Douglass, Tom Gerik, Bill Novakoski, Matt Ridley, Julie Sieh and Jean Solana. We trimmed limbs along the road and enjoyed a beautiful Fall day.



October was a very exciting month at Mother Neff State Park as we got to have events in the park for the first time in two years. First we had **Moth Night** on Saturday night, October 16th – we were split between two locations: Headquarters and the Prairie

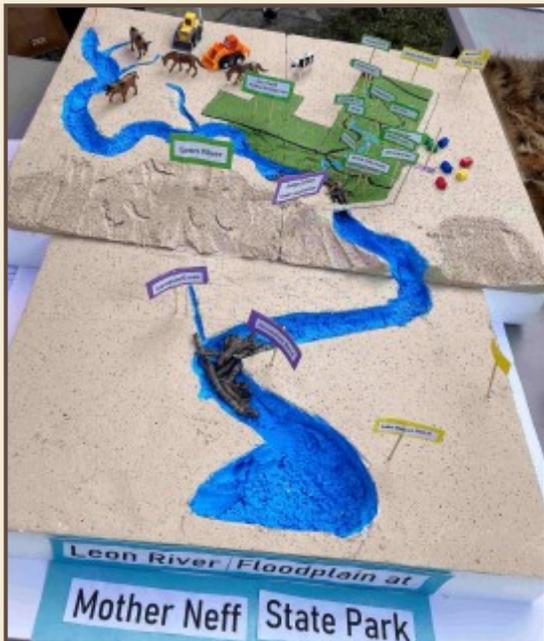
Parking lot. Crafts and moth hunting were performed at Headquarters and Scorpion flashlight hunts and Astronomy were shared in the prairie. The event was well-attended by volunteers, families and scorpions. (See more on Moth Night in the next article.)



Cont.

Mother Neff State Park *Cont.*

The next Saturday, October 23rd, was **Fall Fest** from 10 am to 2 pm. We were located in the back of the park at the CCC Cabin. It was fun having access to this beautiful building. We had a good group of volunteers at 12 – Bill Abright, Jessica Dieter, Paula and Cody Finley, Juan and Traci Anaya, Larry Turner, Carroll Adcock, Jamey Douglass, Bill Novakoski, and Jean Solana. Diane



Cooney joined us from Heart of Texas Master

Naturalists. Larry Turner and the Anayas did an awesome job of leading children in the Bird Migration game. We shared our Mammal Discovery Trunk with the Fur IDs and hand puppets. We also had a diorama of the Leon River Floodplain and a poster with pictures connected by yarn demonstrating the Mother Neff food web.

Start your year off on the right step: First Day Hike at Mother Neff State Park, January 1, 2022

Ongoing Volunteer Opportunities for CTMN members—Contact Jean Solana and she will connect you with appropriate park staff to schedule your visit.

- Native Garden Maintenance
- Social media content development
- Painting signs, kiosks, fences, benches
- Invasive species removal and control
- Thistle and grass identification
- Facebook Live interpretive programs
- Trail maintenance
- Bird blind maintenance

Moth Night

- Jessica Dieter, 2019

The Moth Night directors decided to switch things up this year and move the event to the month of October when Central Texas is more likely to have moths out and about. A more beautiful night couldn't have been asked for! This was the first large event Mother Neff has hosted since the Covid shutdowns and everyone was very excited to enjoy nature with the community. We had adults and children of all ages come out with flashlights at the ready! There was black-light Scorpion hunting for our adventurous visitors and Night Sky guides for those admiring the beautifully clear night sky. At the Visitor's Center we had glow face painting, crafts, and an amazing life-sized Lunar Moth photo booth. Down the hill, away from the lights we had two moth stations set up for visitors to see our fuzzy little friends up close. There were smiles all around as our nature loving community was able to enjoy the company of one another and explore the outdoors at night... when things are so quiet and peaceful.



Moth Night



Paula Finley with a craft on the life cycle of a moth



Mary Ann Everett with her moth collection



Too many for the frame!



Tina Atkins and Jenna Chappell help with a color craft



Andi Bowsher and Jessica Dieter at face paint station



Glow-in-the-dark face paint was popular!



Wow, what a relief that Fall is here!

The October workday was canceled due to rain. It was much-needed rain so there were no complaints from me although I always hate to miss the benefits we provide to the nature center. We were able to work in November and it was a very good workday. The weather was excellent and we had eight volunteers. We had a couple of first timers: Julie Sieh and Guy Fowler. I'm glad they made it out and I hope they will be up for returning in the future. Our returning workers were myself (John Burns), John Atkins, Ben Clement, Bill Novakoski, Robb Startzman, and Bert Peeples. I thank you, and the native plants in the nature center thank you for helping them by giving them more space to grow with fewer invasive plants in their space!



Miller Springs Nature Center *cont.*

We really did make a difference with John Atkins working with a chainsaw and cutting a lot of larger Waxleaf Ligustrum and Guy Fowler and Robb Startzman were working with the larger Puller Bears to take out quite a few good-sized Waxleaf Ligustrum. The rest of us worked in areas where we had previously removed ligustrum. The seedlings were coming back strong and we were able to pull hundreds of smaller seedlings out that would have become large trees in no time. We noted there are quite a few native trees trying to establish in the area. Hopefully they will succeed and help reduce the regrowth of the invasive plants.



Central Texas Trail Tamers instructor Kevin Deiters discusses improvement options for the trail to Green Pond during a training class in August.

Earlier in November Keller Matthews, John Atkins, and myself visited the nature center to review some options for new trails that might provide some alternatives to some of the existing trails that are in poor shape and continue to deteriorate. Keller had previously walked the area and was proposing these alternate trails. John and I were both on board with these new trails and now we are hoping to have the Central Texas Trail Tamers come back. Zoe Rascoe reached out to Trail Tamers and they had indicated they are interested in their group coming back for a work project with help from our trained chapter members. The Trail Tamers have several projects lined up so we don't have a specific date at this time, but we hope it can be in early 2022. So keep your eyes open for this great opportunity to make a huge impact at the nature center. We might even be able to begin some clearing on the new trail during our next workday. No promises on this, but I hope to make this happen.

I'm looking forward to big changes and great work in the next few months. Thanks to everyone for all the good work and support for the Miller Springs Nature Center.

Come out and join in the fun!

Cedar Gap Park

- John Atkins, 2016

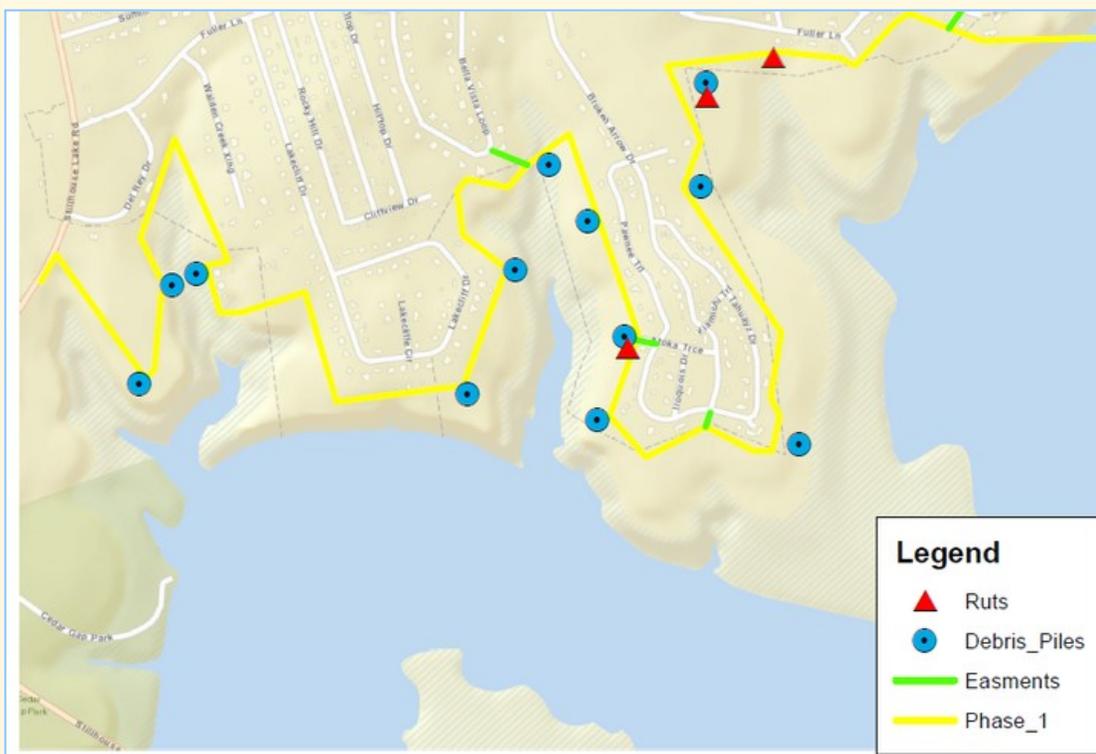
In October, we again worked at Cedar Gap Park south of Harker Heights, since Chalk Ridge Falls was still closed. Our team that day consisted of Sharon and Stephen Schmitz, Ben Clement, Tina Atkins, and me. Since we had such a small crew, we focused on the area immediately adjacent to the parking lot and boat ramp. We started by targeting chinaberry saplings that had sprung up since we first cleared the area in 2019. I was happy to see that most of the saplings were new plants and not resprouts from previous cuttings.

Next, we shifted to picking up trash, which is never in short supply at Cedar Gap. We finished the morning by cleaning up numerous illegal campsites above the parking lot in an area we now call "Hobo Hill". I was also happy to see the following press release in mid-November concerning the fuel load reduction in the Cedar Gap area:

USACE Press Release Regarding Phase 1 Fuel Mitigation Project:

"Working in conjunction with Texas A&M Forest Service and Harker Heights Fire Department, the US Army Corps of Engineers on Stillhouse Hollow Lake will be conducting brush pile burn operations in the Broken Arrow subdivision of Harker Heights this month. Phase One of the multi-phase Fuel Load Mitigation Project was started in the winter of 2018-19 with nearly 4 miles of fire

break put in and in order to move on to Phase Two any leftover brush piles and equipment ruts need to be dealt with. Over the next month crews from the 3 agencies will be working to fix the ruts caused by the heavy equipment as well as prepare one to two brush piles to be burned by the end of November. This planned time frame is contingent on weather and availability of staff.

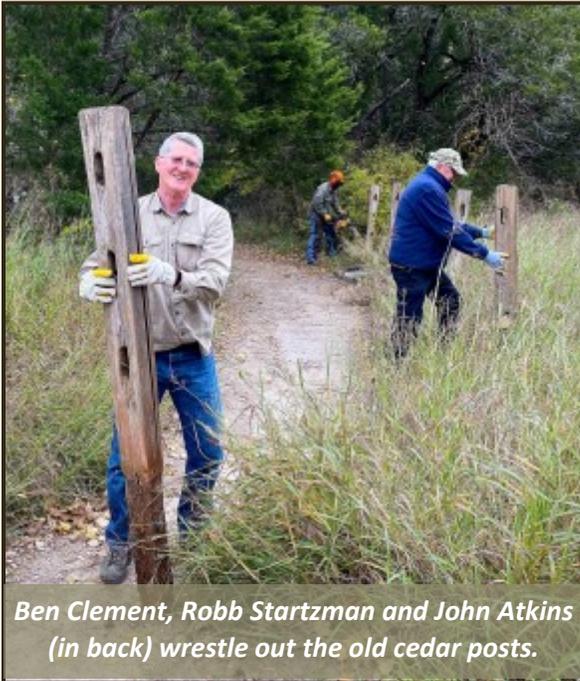


Any questions or concerns can be directed to the Stillhouse Hollow Lake Project Office at 254-939-2461." Sean Jones, Natural Resources Specialist (Ranger)

Chalk Ridge Falls Park

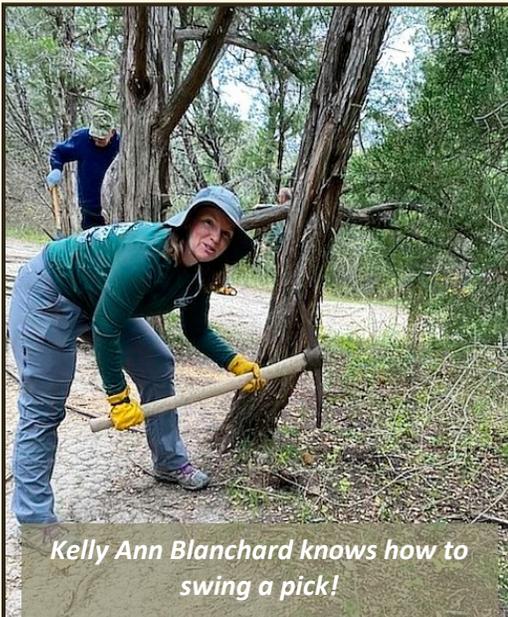
- John Atkins, 2016

In late October I was put in contact with Elizabeth Knapp, one of the new Rangers at the Stillhouse USACE Office. We arranged for a meeting to discuss upcoming projects and opportunities to work together. Ranger Knapp was anxious to remove the remaining sections of split rail fence at Chalk Ridge because it had become an eyesore. I planned a special workday to do this on 3 November, but we were rained out. We rescheduled the work for our regularly scheduled workday.



Ben Clement, Robb Startzman and John Atkins (in back) wrestle out the old cedar posts.

The team on 18 November consisted of myself, Ben Clement, Robb Startzman, Tina Atkins, and Kelly Ann Blanchard. We were joined by Ranger Todd Spivey and his trailer that morning. It was a breezy, crisp autumn morning, and everyone was eager to get to work. We used pickaxes, a chainsaw, a Hi-lift jack, and Ben's karate skills to remove the rotting fencing along the trail. It was a good workday and the companionship and manpower provided by Ranger Spivey was much appreciated. We look forward to working with the Rangers in future.



Kelly Ann Blanchard knows how to swing a pick!



Tina Atkins conquers a post.



Sharon Schmitz & Stephen Schmitz remove chinaberry trees in October.

POND PROJECT NEAR STILLHOUSE LAKE DAM

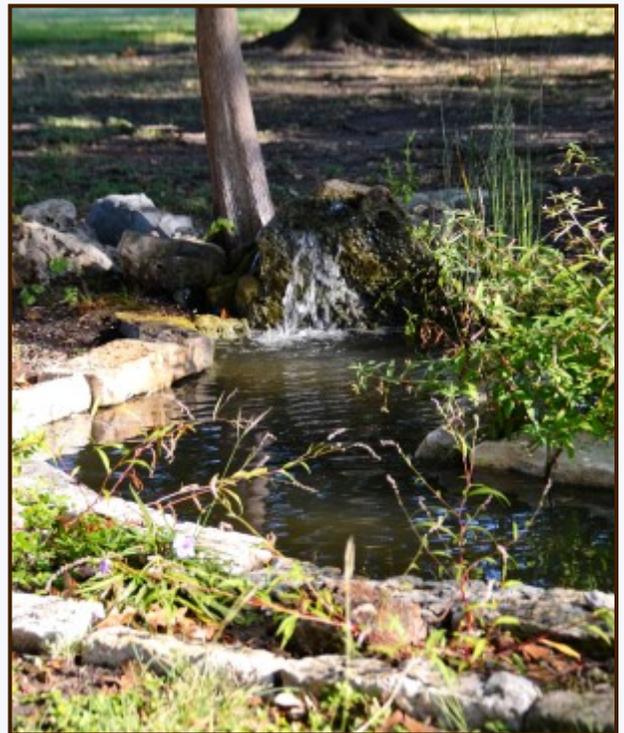
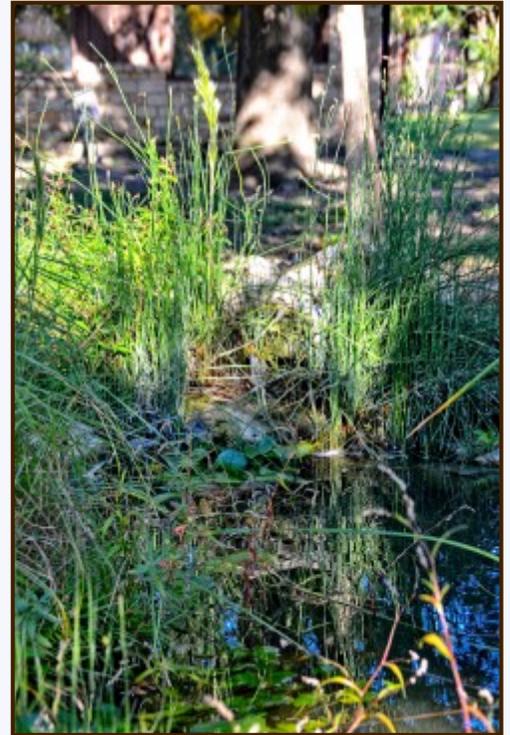
- Kerry Phillip, 2021

Prepare to be amazed...okay, just quietly impressed. If you are looking for super easy volunteer project that does not take a great deal of time, sign up for the Texas Master Naturalists Pond Project located at the US Army Corps of Engineers, Belton Dam Office. Okay, okay, not everybody is a pond person... but allow me to try and convert you.

Let's tackle the "why" we need ponds. Worldwide, all of our aquatic ecosystems are in danger. More than 50% of our natural pond and lake habitats have been lost to human population expansion and development construction. This is dangerous in that our amphibians are the best indicators of our environmental health. Many studies have shown that when frogs and toads start showing up with "abnormalities", that ecosystem is damaged.

Now, let's tackle how super easy this project is.

1. All of the heavy lifting has already been done (thank you Andreas Wooten!) and now we basically just "maintain" the pond. That means someone shows up occasionally to clean the leaf filter, skim leaves from the bottom, remove any surface algae, flush the filter and add water if needed. Of the many times I have been to the pond, I have never spent more than two hours.
2. Additionally, even though this project is listed as a workday twice a month on Saturdays, you can really just go whenever you have the time. There are several of us on the team and we just email each other about when we may drop by and, if we did, we just send a few sentences about what was done.



USACE POND PROJECT *CONT.*

4. So easy, anyone could do this. Can you make swirling motions with a net? Can you wield a scrub brush around the top edge of the water? Can you flip switches on and off? Then this project is in your wheelhouse! The pond is not deep (about 18" at the deepest point) and not very big. If I can do this, believe me.... *ANYONE* can! The nets and brushes are already provided onsite. All you need to do is dress appropriately and bring a trash bag in case you remove any leafy material.
5. Need to work out some aggression? Okay, you can divide the plants each fall as needed. This takes a bit of physical ability to lift the pots from the water and then hack the roots in half using a machete. Then pop the half plant back into the pot and the pot into the water. Easy-peasy, mac and cheesy! (You will have to bring your own machete. We don't leave that lying around!)

Now that you are eager to see the pond and sign up for the project, here are the plants you will find: Bushy Blue Stem, Lily Turf, Mexican Primrose Willow, Rock Rose, Rough Horsetail, Southern Cattail and Water Lily.

We hope you will join us!

Tony Cellini, Kerry Phillip, Guy Fowler, Michael Holly, Steve Schmitz and Sharon Schmitz



- John Fairlie, 2021

GTWT Adopt-A-Loop Coordinator

Adopt-a-Loop (AAL) is a Texas Parks and Wildlife project, a part of their Great Texas Wildlife Trails (GTWT) program. The purpose of the program is to promote birding and wildlife viewing in the state, and the purpose of the AAL project is to provide quarterly site evaluation to better understand the distribution of Texas' wildlife along the GTWT. The loop that our chapter has adopted is the Chisolm Trail Loop. There are eight sites on our loop -- Chalk Ridge Falls Park and Dana Peak Park on Stillhouse Hollow Lake, Belton Lakeview Park, Miller Springs Nature Center, Mother Neff State Park, Lake Waco Wetlands, Cameron Park, and the Cameron Park Zoo.

We completed our second round of site evaluations in early November, and will start our next round in January. You will find our site visits listed in our weekly emails, as "AAL Wildlife Survey at Chalk Ridge Falls" (or whatever site we are visiting that day). We take a few weeks to complete our Loop, typically doing two or three sites each week. The days of the week vary, and include weekends. You can do as many or as few site visits as you wish. We basically walk as much or as little as we want at each visit, using either iNaturalist or eBird to record observations. We can split up and cover several trails or all stay together.



Daisy Klassy photographs observations for electronic submittal.

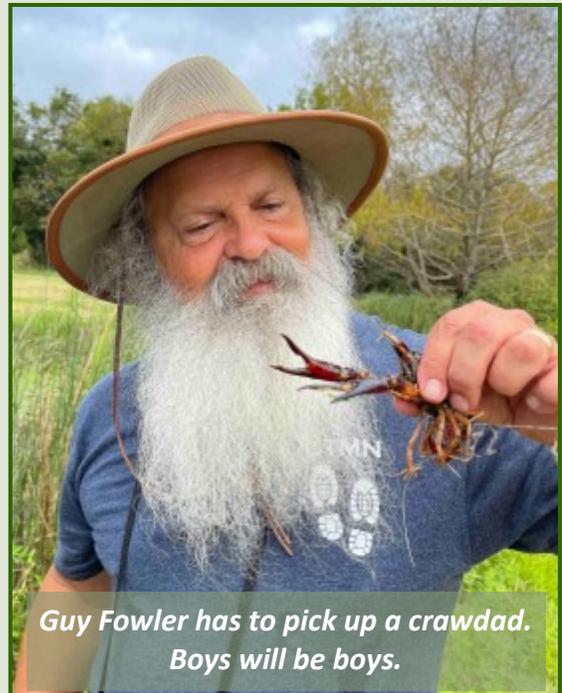


Monarch caterpillar goes on the "found!" list.

GTWT ADOPT-A-LOOP PROJECT *cont.*

We walk trails like we would for fun. If using iNaturalist, we simply take pictures of wildlife of all sizes and shapes (all fauna) 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 all observations. If using eBird, we work to get an accurate tally of what we see.

During this last cycle we had the following volunteers enjoying our time together as we observed wildlife and strolled through the parks: Sue Valdez, Jean Solana, John and Linda Fairlie, Guy Fowler, Matt Ridley, Robb Startzman, and Daisy Klassy. Thank you all for your help! Our next round of site visits will be in January. This is a low impact, easy way to earn hours of volunteer time while hiking and taking pictures in a beautiful area – something most of us Master Naturalists love to do for fun anyway. We look forward to seeing many of you on the next round!



ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK



- **Zoe Rascoe, 2004**

“The mountains are calling and I must go” - one of many famous quotes of naturalist John Muir. That was my thought exactly this fall. We had not gone skiing early in the year as we have for over three decades. No summer trip either. And what has become an annual fall leaf-peeping trip also didn’t materialize. I *needed* to get to the mountains. The Rockies in Colorado are our favorite, and closest. We are working our way through the long list of National Parks and somehow, we had not been to Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP). We loaded the FJ Cruiser with hiking and camera gear and enough food in coolers to not need to eat out. The week in October we had available to go would be too late for fall color and too early for snow, but still, we would be in the mountains. I found a cabin to rent just on the outskirts of Estes Park and very close to one of the RMNP entrances.



Bear Lake rest stop

So it’s never too early for snow in the mountains—though none was predicted for our entire trip, we arrived in almost blizzardy conditions. Only a short hike part way around Bear Lake (near the parking lot!) was manageable. We loved the rustic “NPS” benches.

RMNP Fun Facts: the park covers 266,000 acres across both sides of the Continental Divide, it is one of the highest national parks and the Alpine Visitor Center is the highest elevation of all National Park Service sites. There are several Visitor Centers and all are worth a stop. Trail Ridge Road that connects the east and west sides of the park is the highest continuous paved highway in the nation. That road closes for the winter in mid-October so we’ll have to experience the western side of the park another time. One other thing you need to know—Llamas are the only livestock allowed on the trails. Glad there was a sign!



Say YES to Llamas!

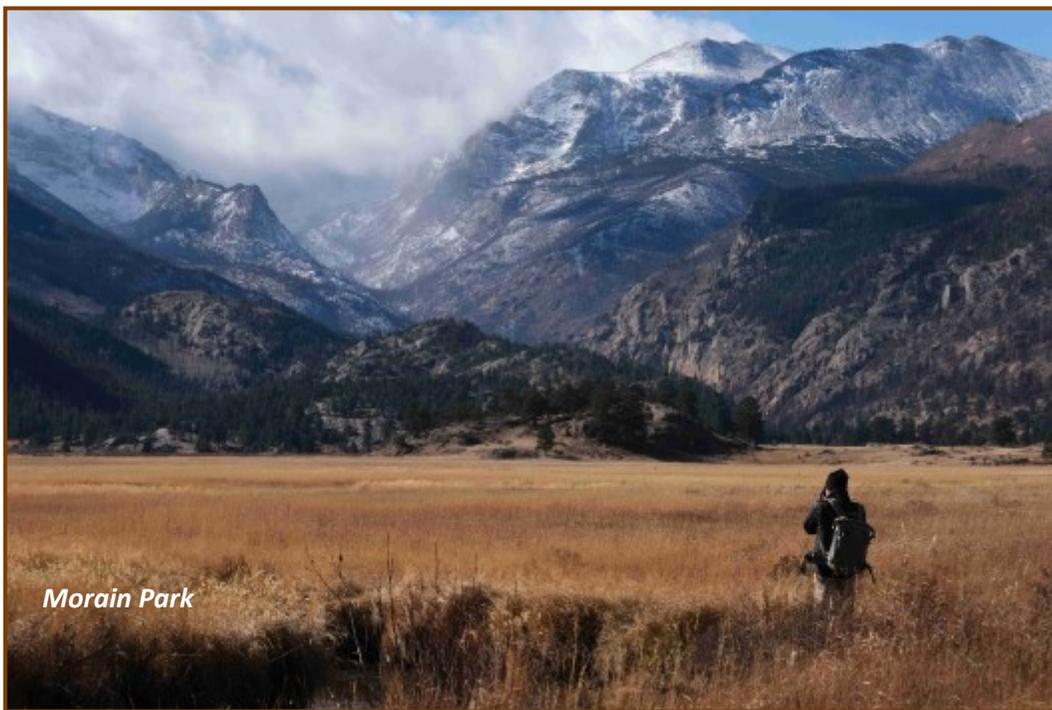
ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK *cont.*

Colorado

Like we usually do, we started our first day at a Visitor Center—the one at Beaver Meadows. There were well-done displays on wildlife, plants and cultural history of the area and helpful volunteers and rangers with the latest news on trail conditions. Beaver Meadows waterways had evidence of beavers (their dams), but none were to be seen. A little further, at Moraine Park, the surrounding mountains were majestic and the unexpected wintry



weather made for a beautiful backdrop. The large expanse of meadows led to Sprague Lake, an easy walk from a parking area. The drop in temperatures the afternoon before had left a layer of ice over the lake and we headed back the next morning to catch the [alpenglow](#) on the nearby peaks. We did not allow enough time to get to the spot across the lake with tripods set up before the sun rose so we enjoyed the brief rosey peaks through our eyes but did catch a nice reflection in the melting lake.



We drove to the far southern end of the park to Wild Basin Trailhead and hiked up to Calypso Cascades and then further up to Ouzel Falls. The snow from the day before made the rocks and pines magical. I clocked 179 "flights of stairs" on my walking app.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK *cont.*

Colorado

Our next day of adventure was hiking to a series of mountain lakes from the Bear Lake Trailhead. Nymph Lake, Dream Lake and on higher to Emerald Lake. It was a very, very icy climb. Since no snow had been predicted, we did not have icy gear so it was slowwww going but we were



Dream(sicle) Lake

determined! We also made a note to always bring our slip-on spikes to the mountains no matter the weather predictions. Our last adventure was from Glacier Gorge Trailhead to Alberta Falls, which were beautifully frozen and on to the mostly frozen Loch.

On our departure day we drove back in the park to area an where elk were reported the evening before. Sure enough, there were about 140 in a herd that were moving

from Moraine Park up a hill to a higher elevation. It was an amazing sight to see so many making their way uphill. It was a lovely finish to a great week in the Rocky Mountains!



Christmas Bird Count

A Tradition Worth Saving

- **Carroll Adcock, 2020**



Canyon Towhee

Christmas Day 1900 Ornithologist Frank Chapman and 26 other conservationists initiated the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) as a way of promoting conservation by counting birds, rather than hunting them. Some counts have occurred every year since then and have spread to over 20 countries in the western hemisphere. Now a long-standing program of the National Audubon Society, it is an early-winter bird census where thousands of volunteers across the U.S., Canada and other western hemisphere

countries go out over a 24-hour period on one calendar day to count birds.

Christmas Bird Counts occur between December 14 and January 5, inclusive dates, every year. Each circle compiler will choose a single calendar day within those dates and your CBC birding is done on only one calendar day for each circle.

Each count takes place within a 15-mile diameter circle, and is organized by a count compiler. Count volunteers follow specified routes through designated 15-mile diameter circle, counting every bird they see or hear all day. It is not only a species tally—all birds are counted all day, giving an indication of the total number of birds in the circle that day. This year's date is planned for December 18 for Bell County.



Rufous-Crowned Sparrow

Christmas Bird Count *cont.*

Roadrunner



Birders of all skill sets are involved in the CBC. If you are a beginning birder, your compiler will pair you with an expert initially.

If your home is within the boundaries of a CBC circle it is feasible you could participate in the count from home as long as you have made prior arrangements with the compiler.

As a relative newcomer to birding, I am excited at the prospect of participating in this annual event that provides vital data about the state of our feathered friends.

Click here for a [Map of the Circles](#)— you must preregister for the event. Our own Mary Ann Everett is a compiler for Bell County.

Click here for the [Christmas Bird Count Homepage](#). This site has tips, history, and the step by step process.

Grab your binoculars, your field guide and maybe your camera, and let's go!

Painted Bunting



Bird photos by Carroll Adcock



“The only place success comes before work is in the dictionary.”

- J. David Bamberger, Founder and Chairman Emeritus

- Jean Solana, 2019

Selah, Bamberger Ranch Preserve



Bamberger Ranch, near Johnson City, is a 5500 acre ranch in Blanco County. J. David Bamberger, who made his fortune developing the Church’s Chicken Franchise, bought the ranch in 1969. It was so overgrown with cedars that nothing grew underneath them and there was no visible water on the property. Bamberger removed most of the cedars, planted native grasses, and something wonderful happened: long absent springs returned. He named the ranch Selah, which means “to pause and reflect”, a reference to its usage in the Psalms.

Bamberger became a land steward champion for the

area, as well as a conservationist. He was instrumental in securing Bracken Cave for Bat Conservation International. He even built his own “bat cave” that currently houses a maternity colony of Mexican Free-tail bats. Approximately 60,000 bats use this cave annually.



Cont...

Bamberger Ranch Preserve *cont.*



Bamberger also has a herd of endangered Scimitar-horned Oryx on the ranch. He educated many people about native grasses with his rainwater collection demonstration. It demonstrates how native grasses and their long roots hold water in the landscape.

Fifty years after its inception, Bamberger Ranch Preserve serves as an example of ethical land



stewardship. They offer field trips for children, native grass seminars and many other offerings for birdwatchers, photographers, and nature enthusiasts. Check out their website for specific field trips. <https://www.bambergerranch.org/>

The ranch tour I went on drove us around in the “Bluebonnet” open air tour trailer. The sunny, windy day showed off the gorgeous native grasses. We also saw dinosaur tracks, the Mexican Free-tailed

bat cave, the herd of Scimitar-Horned Oryxes, and of course, we received the rainwater collection demonstration. The message from the tour was clear: Given the chance, Nature can heal itself.

The ranch has many opportunities for volunteers. All hours worked are eligible for Texas Master Naturalist hours. Every fourth Monday is their regular volunteer day from 8 am to noon. Hopefully, Central Texas Master Naturalists will make a trip there soon!





A Conversation with the Friendly Oaks: *Gratitude & Gifts*

- Bill Novakoski, 2020

I approach my oak tree friends, The Survivor and Old Patriarch, this late fall, cool evening as the sun sets and paints the sky with beautiful hues of yellow, orange, blue and purple. Trees are shy by nature, but these oaks agreed I could write down our conversations to share with Master Naturalists for a full cycle of the seasons. Beyond that, we will continue our private conversations.

Bill: “Good evening, Old Patriarch and The Survivor. Did you enjoy the show the moon put on today in the early morning’s darkness? We call that a lunar eclipse.”

The Survivor: “Yes, Bill, it was amazing. I wanted Old Patriarch to see it, too. Since we trees do not have audible voices and since my limbs are too short to shake him awake, I used my roots to tickle him until he awoke from his slumbers.”

Old Patriarch: “Hello, Bill, and yes, thank you, The Survivor, for waking me. With our long lives, we oaks see more of these rare celestial events, but I would not miss even one.”

Bill: “Friends, through the seasons we have spoken about health, spring’s new life, friendships, families and time. Since this is our final written conversation for our Master Naturalist friends, what final thoughts do you want to share with them?”

The Survivor: “Old Patriarch and I discussed this. We want to talk about gratitude and gifts.”

Bill: “Interesting! Did you know that this is the time of year many humans set aside a special day to feel and express gratitude and another day to give gifts to others?”

Old Patriarch: “We understand why humans have special days for this. You are so busy going to your work and other places and often moving your families to new locations. If you did not take a break from your busyness, you might not feel thankful and give gifts to those you care for. Our slower pace allows us to feel grateful daily and our nonmobile life is a gift of time our Creator gave us, one we continually enjoy. So, our parting comment to our Master Naturalist friends is this: make feeling and expressing gratitude a daily habit and give gifts to others as often as you can. By doing so, you will enjoy lasting friendships and greater happiness.”

Bill: “Wow! Thank you for imparting so much wisdom to my friends and me. I am thrilled we will continue our conversations; I have so much yet to learn.”

The Survivor: “And one more message, Bill. Encourage the Master Naturalists to make friends and have conversations with the trees who cohabitate the land where they live.”



PICTURE THIS



The Power of Photos

Images have become effective tools for conservation.

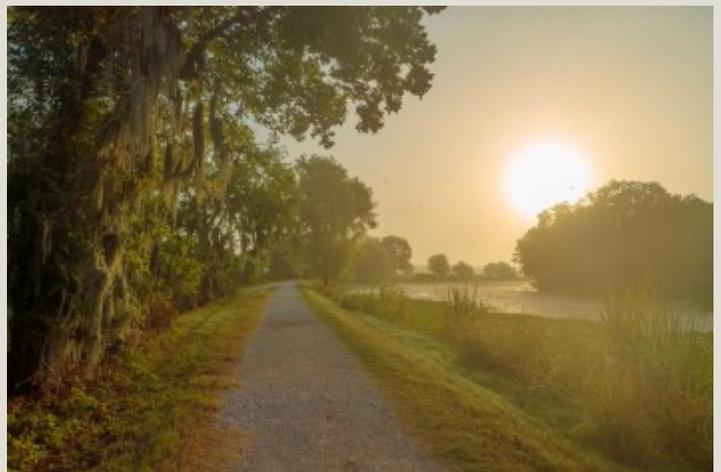
BY EARL NOTTINGHAM

Twenty-five years ago, I walked through the front door of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department headquarters in Austin as a staff photographer — a welcome relief after eking out a living as a freelancer for the preceding 15 years. The new position gave me the opportunity to travel to every corner of Texas, photographing the people, places and things that define the state’s great outdoors.

Walking out that same door for the last time at the end of March 2021 was bittersweet, to say the least. I was flooded with memories of the adventures and friendships I had during my time at TPWD. On my drive back home, I began to ponder the many experiences garnered from a quarter-century of visually documenting the agency’s multifaceted mission, as well as the various ways photography has played a part in the public’s perception of and appreciation for natural conservation and the outdoors.

Personally, I was looking for some bottom-line takeaway that could concisely define what, if any, effect my work had contributed to the agency and, ultimately, to the people of Texas. I needed a bookend.

Now, a few weeks into retirement, and after some reflection, the takeaway is clear. It wasn’t about my photographic work at all but about photography itself and the power it has had, and continues to have, as a powerful advocate and ambassador for conservation.



Brazos Bend State Park

PICTURE THIS

Over time, the camera has become not only a device to take a pretty picture but also a viable tool for outreach. The predominant factor that has made it such a valuable tool is the evolution of digital technology. Gone are the days of shooting traditional film and waiting for it to be processed and scanned and laid out for publication. The digital image is instantaneous and easily shareable, and can be used not only in printed media but also on websites and social media, thereby greatly extending its reach.

From a conservation perspective, images can connect with current outdoor lovers and with new and underserved constituents as well. The power of the photograph to influence is evidenced by the almost 350 million photos uploaded on Facebook each day, not to mention the plethora of other social media platforms.



The camera has also gradually gained its place as required outdoor gear, regardless of the activity. Whether hunting, camping, hiking or just walking in the park, a camera is there — usually in the form of a smartphone camera that can capture not only a scene but its nuances, such as a

flower petal or insect closeup, adding to the enjoyment of the experience on a more intimate level.

Additionally, the amazing new sensors of digital cameras and smartphone cameras allow us to capture more “wow” scenes such as the low light of early morning, the softness of late evening or the glow of a campfire — scenes that were difficult to get with less-advanced cameras. A beautiful and memorable photograph has become the new “trophy” for many outdoor adventures.

Looking forward, there is every reason to believe that new methods and opportunities to photograph and share our love and concern for the outdoors will always be just over the next horizon. I’ve made a career of driving toward those horizons, and now I finally get to enjoy the scenery in the rear-view mirror.

This was Earl’s last column for Texas Parks & Wildlife (June 2021).

Editor’s Note: Earl’s book, [Wild Focus – 25 years of Texas Parks & Wildlife Photography](#), covering his TPWD career is now available from Texas A&M University Press.

We are grateful to Russell Roe, Editor of the Texas Parks & Wildlife Magazine we all love, for allowing us to share Earl Nottingham’s “Picture This” articles on photography tips. If you can’t wait, many of Earl’s articles are archived at tpwmagazine.com/photography.



BAMBOO FOR YOU

- **Bill Cornelius, 2020**

Bamboo—The Louisiana Connection

The Louisiana Gulf Coast Chapter (LGCC) of the American Bamboo Society has their annual meeting on the last weekend of February except for the Covid interruption. The hope is that the tradition can continue next year. ABS members from all over the country attend the weekend for work, Cajun food, learning, and sharing about bamboo.

The Texas delegation from the Texas Bamboo Society is one of the largest and longest serving groups that make the trip. My first time was in 2016. There were a number of us first-timers that year. The activities start with a welcome dinner Friday evening and after a wonderful meal each guest is required to stand and explain how they became interested in bamboo; i.e., how did you get here?



Marsh House

island. After my first year and in subsequent years most of the Texas delegation stays at Marsh House. If one is a guest on the island, you are presented with a traditional southern all-you-can-eat breakfast.

The workday starts after assignments and safety protocols are explained. Work, most of the time, is in the two main timber bamboos on Avery; *Phyllostachys edulis* (Moso) and *Phyllostachys bambusoides* (Madake). Each consisting of about 10 acre plots. Both are over 100 years old.

In the morning, depending on one's accommodations, you have breakfast at the hotel or at Marsh House on the

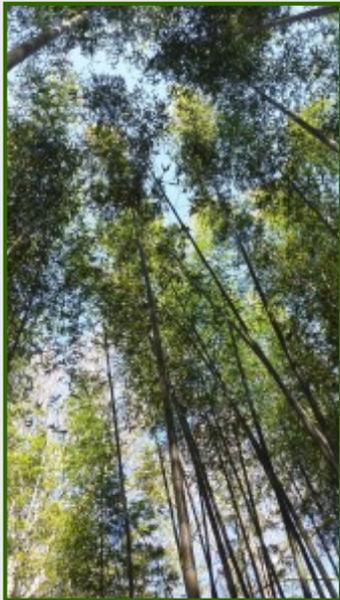


Bill Cornelius at Avery Island

BAMBOO <CONT.>



The day proceeds until noon. Then a break for lunch. After the meal many go back into the grove for some peace and quiet. It's nice to lay down and look up into the upper reaches and watch the and listen to the culms as they brush against each other in the breeze. After a rest it's back at it again until some time in the afternoon. Then trimming and loading for those who wish to take some home.



Later in the evening a social hour begins which precedes the catered Cajun dinner. An auction follows, (most items have a bamboo theme) the proceeds of which go to the LGCC. It's a great time.

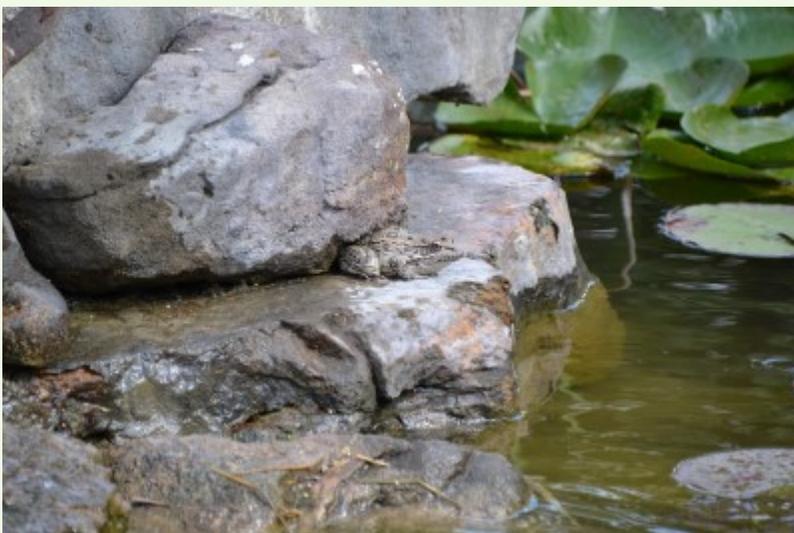
On Sunday, depending on what is scheduled, lectures at the Museum (they have a curator helped by interns from LSU), Tabasco Gift Shop - the jalapeno or Tabasco ice cream is surprisingly good. I've tried them both. At noon a farewell meal is served and people say their goodbyes.

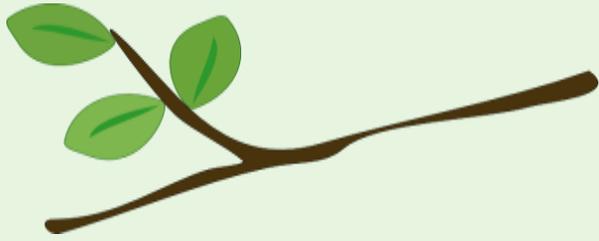


What's in YOUR backyard?



Two flowers and two
frogs from Kerry
Fillip's backyard
pond.





- Mary Ann Everett, 2003

Out on a Limb

Tree Description: It is an evergreen, small tree shrub, rarely over 25 feet.

Blooms: Nearly 3-inch wide trumpet shaped flowers, brilliant white with yellow throats. Blooms spring and summer.

Fruit: White to pale yellow drupe, turning yellow-brown. Three fruits grow to about 1" long and are edible, although eating more than one or two may cause dizziness. In Mexico, a jelly is made from the fruit as a remedy for coughs. The leaves are an old home cure for rheumatism and bronchial disorders. The fruit is also quite palatable to birds and other wildlife.

Location: This tree is native to the southernmost tip of the Rio Grande Plains of south Texas. It is often planted as an ornamental in the lower Rio Grande Valley.

Leaves: are velvety soft, 4-5 inches long, 3-4 inches wide, light to dark green often with light brown fuzz on the underside.

Bark: is gray often tinged with red, broken into irregular flat ridges.

Heat & Drought Tolerance: Because it can endure heat and drought, it makes an excellent landscape object in a protected patio or against a south-facing wall. It is occasionally planted as far north as San Antonio, but will freeze back.

Interesting story: I only learned about this plant when Bert, one of our CTMN members, asked me to identify a tree in his aunt's yard. It was growing in an older area of Belton, in a somewhat protected area, along the curb. It was a shrubby tree. He remembered this tree from his youth and was interested in perhaps planting it in his yard. I had never seen this plant before, and I searched, and with the help of Linda Fairlie, discovered something new to me in our area. It seems to have weathered many winters.

[Click here for name of tree](#)



MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Belated delivery of John Fairlie's certificate of completion and initial certification



Ward Critz recertifies for 2021



Jerry Lewis recertifies for 2021



Jamey Douglass recertifies for 2021



Andrea Liles recertifies for 2021

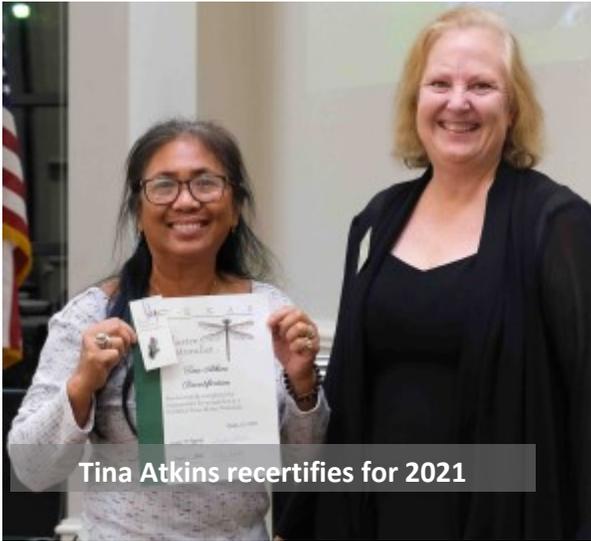


Lynn Fleming recertifies for 2021



Bert Peoples recertifies for 2021

MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Tina Atkins recertifies for 2021



Bruce Polikoff recertifies for 2021



Big John Ziegeler recertifies and receives 250 hour milestone award!



Robb Startzman recertifies for 2021



John Burns recertifies and receives 500 hour milestone award!



Mary Odom received 500 hour milestone award!

CHAPTER MEETINGS

- ZOE RASCOE, 2004

Jean Solana organized a fun and informative outdoor training session on Identification of Native Grasses and Fall Wildflowers for our October meeting. Bill Messer generously allowed us to wander his Nolanville family ranch that has benefited from intensive conservation practices for the land, plants and wildlife. Jean, Lynn Fleming and Jeff Brister, NRCS District Conservationist had buckets of plant samples that were passed around to point out tips on identifying natives, especially when there are other look-alikes. After the instruction, we all headed out in small groups to practice what we had learned, using iNaturalist to record and verify our discoveries.

Our November chapter training was provided by Lori Hazel, Water Resource Specialist for the Texas Forest Service on “Dams: Necessity or Hinderance?” Lori led us through group discussions related to dams in our area. We decided the answer to her question was “Yes!”



Jean Solana kicks off the presentations on native prairie plants



Lynn Fleming has show and tell plant identification tips



Marilyn Whitworth pairs up with Jeff Brister, NRCS District Conservationist. Good call, Marilyn!

CHAPTER MEETINGS

President Linda!



Headed back from the field



Brent and Julie check out a plant sample



Jamey Douglass, former NRCS, leads a group



The Gangs all here!!

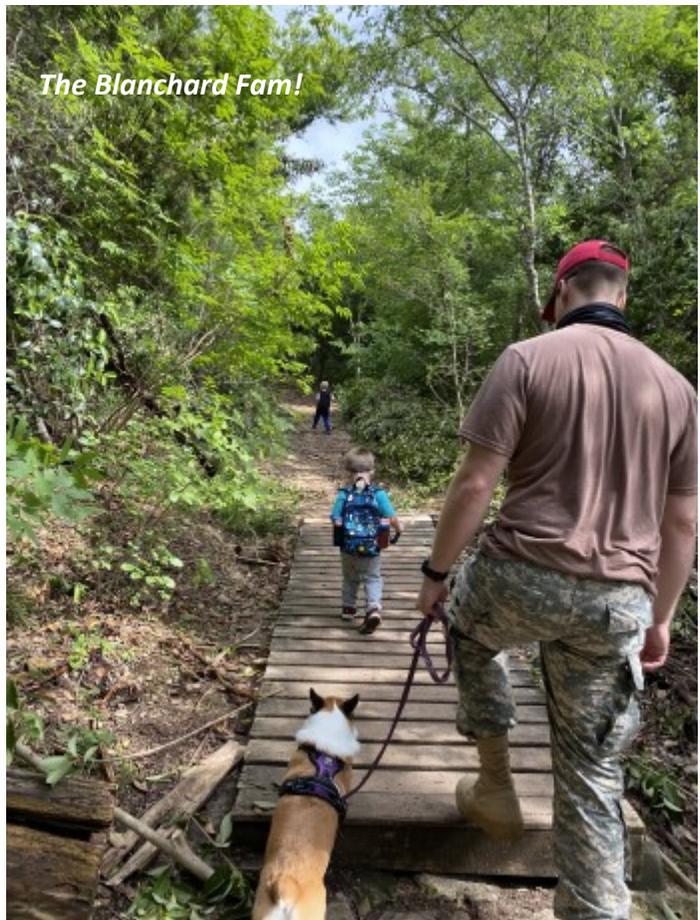
Fond Farewell to Kelly Ann Blanchard

A few years ago, a young lady from Free Forest School came to attend one of our regular meetings and she was hooked. Kelly Ann graduated with the 2019 Master Naturalist class. Since then, Kelly Ann was in charge of checking and cleaning the birdhouses at Miller Springs. She has also been instrumental in helping the Keep Nolanville Beautiful organization. She was always ready to help out. She wrote articles for The Tracker. Kelly Ann chopped invasive trees, removed debris that blocked the water flow at Chalk Ridge Falls. She did whatever task was at hand even if she got muddy or wet. We will miss that kind of dedication. Kelly Ann juggled her volunteer work with CTMN chapter and cared for her family. She home schooled her 2 sons, Patrick and Finn (7 and 5) during the Covid-19 lockdown. During this time period her husband Tait, who is on active duty with the Army, was also deployed. Kelly Ann continued to volunteer. Now Tait is being sent to Fort Carson, Colorado for his next duty station, so off the Blanchards go. Kelly Ann, thank you for your amazing contribution to the CTMN chapter. We will be here with open arms to welcome you back, should you return to Central Texas. Kelly Ann, Tait, Patrick, and Finn, we will miss you all. We know that adventure awaits you in Colorado so we are happy for your family.

- Tina Atkins, 2016



Tina and Kelly Ann



The Blanchard Fam!



It only looks like a dead thing

Contributing Authors to this Newsletter



Bill Novakoski



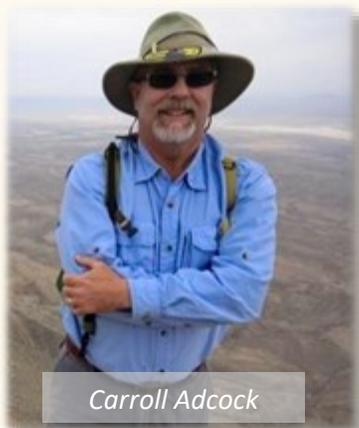
Linda Fairlie



John Atkins



John Burns



Carroll Adcock



Jean Solana



John Fairlie



Kerry Phillip



Bill Cornelius



Jessica Dieter



Tina Atkins



Mary Ann Everett



Zoe Rascoe

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Bark Frog seen on sidewalk—ZR

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Contributed Images: John Atkins, Tina Atkins, John Burns, John Fairlie, Jean Solana, Jessica Dieter, Kerry Phillip, Bill Cornelius, Carroll Adcock, 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

Chapter Advisors

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

Cullom Simpson,
Wildlife Biologist, Texas Parks and Wildlife

Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter Meetings

Chapter meetings are held on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m. at the Belton Church of Christ at 3003 N. Main. Location exceptions are in June (graduation) and December (holiday party!) and occasional outdoor demonstrations. Meetings include a nature-related program and the public is welcome to attend. Find topic information and locations on our website and Facebook page.

The Board of Directors meets the 1st Monday of each month from 11:30am-12:30pm in Nolanville. Meeting notices will be sent to chapter members with location information and all members are welcome.