

The Tracker

Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter February 2022

Photo: Wahoo at Mother Neff State Park by Zoe Rascoe

GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

Friday, February 18 through Monday, 21, 2022. Those days are your chance to celebrate 25 years of people coming together for a point-in-time count of birds so that scientists around the world can better understand global populations.

Here's how it works: During those four days, whatever time works for you, observe birds in your backyard for 15 minutes or longer. Then submit your findings to www.birdcount.org.

The results help researchers from the National Audubon Society, Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Birds Canada learn about how backyard birds are doing during the largest snapshot of global bird populations ever recorded. You can see the results from 2021 in a live map of eBird sightings.

You can join experts in a free webinar on Wednesday, February 16th at 1:00pm CST to help make birdwatching easier and more fun just in time for the Great Backyard Bird Count. They will provide tips to brush up on bird identification, unlock the mystery of bird songs and practice counting birds no matter how large the flock or busy the feeder. The webinar is designed for birdwatchers of all ages and experience. [REGISTER FOR WEBINAR HERE.](#)

The Great Backyard Bird Count was the first online community science project to collect data on wild birds and to display results in real time. In 2013 it became a global project using eBird, the world's largest biodiversity-related community science project. Put the Great Backyard Bird County on your family's calendar and enjoy nature from your back porch, neighborhood park or other favorite outdoor location and contribute to a better understanding of birds worldwide.

Compiled from www.birdcount.org



Carolina Wren by Gary Mueller

We are working hard to welcome a new group of trainees this spring—the only way to grow our chapter *and* for you to be a Texas Master Naturalist! Please help us spread the word to those who love nature and would like to volunteer along with other like-minded conservationists. If you have questions, check our “Volunteer Training Course” webpage, give one of us a call, or visit our booth at Mother Earth News Fair and the TABA Home and Garden Show.



Become a
**TEXAS
MASTER
NATURALIST**

Volunteer Training Course

March 22nd – June 4th

Tuesdays and Saturdays

Classroom, Field Trips & Webinars



**Applications
Now Online**



**For information on the
Central Texas Master
Naturalist Program contact:**

Zoe Rascoe 254-913-1013
Lynn Fleming 254-760-4739
Mary Ann Everett 254-721-0931

txmn.org/centraltexas





As we start a new year, my thoughts have gone to our accomplishments and our growth. I am so proud of our Chapter! As new opportunities arise, we always have members step up and get involved.

Bruce Polikoff is heading up a new opportunity for community science at Fort Hood. There are several projects that need volunteers and he will be coordinating between them and us.

Mary Ann Everett will be directing a new opportunity fielding invasives phone calls. Those who work with her will help identify invasives and work with the homeowner to give them information on what they have and what they can do.

Sarah McCormick is taking over heading up Nestwatch for the bluebird boxes at Miller Springs Nature Center from Kelly Ann Blanchard. She and Guy Fowler have already started cleaning up and repairing the boxes that are there.

Jean Solana is heading up Mother Earth News Fair this year which will be held February 19th and 20th. She will need plenty of help as she will not be able to be there the first day. Happily, we will be able to set up the Friday before. You can get a lot of hours in manning our booth at this event.

Speaking of a lot of hours – you can get another big chunk of hours by volunteering at the TABA Home and Garden Show February 25 through 27. Zoe Rascoe is once again going to be coordinating this event and we will need roughly 30 volunteers. This event has the biggest impact



on our recruitment. Covid prevented us from participating last year, and we are so happy to be able to get out there this year.

Cont.

President's Pen cont.

We have regular monthly, quarterly and annual events that our members help with. There are work days at the ACOE parks headed up by John Atkins, work days at Miller Springs Nature Center headed up by John Burns, Salado Gardening led by Marilyn Whitworth, Bell County Museum work days directed by Lynn Fleming, and work days at St. Mary's sponsored by Mary Ann Everett. Mary Ann also leads the Nolan Creek Hike and Bike Trail cleanup. The Pond Project is led by Kerry Phillip. Quarterly there are the Adopt-A-Loop Wildlife Surveys that use iNaturalist and eBird at 8 parks, coordinated by John Fairlie.

We participated in Moth Night, Fall Festival and First Day Hike at Mother Neff State Park. Keep Nolanville Beautiful has invited us to help with several projects, including their Monarch Festival. We do the Christmas Bird Count, Bioblitzes, Great Backyard Bird Count, butterfly monitoring, zebra mussel monitoring, dove banding, and so many other projects.

Our chapter is growing slowly but surely. We have 8 more members who logged hours in 2021 than we had in 2020. We volunteered over 6,600 hours, which is an increase of almost



Linda Fairlie and MNSP volunteer



Jean Solana at Mother Neff State Park

2000 hours over 2020. We had 8 members volunteer over 200 hours each in 2021 alone. There were 14 Initial Certifications, 44 Recertifications and 2 double certifications. We had 16 new members graduate last year, and most are busy volunteering, heading up opportunities, and working with the Board. Already in January of 2022 we have had 40 members post almost 300 volunteer hours and 56 advanced training hours.

Covid did not keep us down. Covid will not keep us down.

Speaking of Covid... we will be receiving another "Against All Odds" pin this year for anyone who had 8 hours of AT and volunteered at least 1 hour in 2021. Our Chapter had 67 members accomplish this.

I want to thank all of our members for the hours of work and training you have devoted this past year. You are making an impact. You are important. You are appreciated.

Thank you.



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.**



Dr. John Dieter—a Santa with a real beard—and Mrs. Santa was a popular stop at Headquarters.

of our Jessica, was a wonderful Santa Claus – very wise and patient. Jessica Dieter organized the Bur Oak Elf craft table. Larry Turner, Carroll Adcock and Bill Abright were outside assisting visitors on their Christmas scavenger hunt. There were lots of nature-themed Christmas crafts and it was fun watching the children interact with Santa and Mrs. Claus.

Cont.

December and January were fun months because we got to celebrate the **holidays!** We began with a well-attended **Mother Neff Christmas** on Sunday afternoon, December 5th. Many were there to visit with Santa and Mrs. Claus. John Dieter, husband

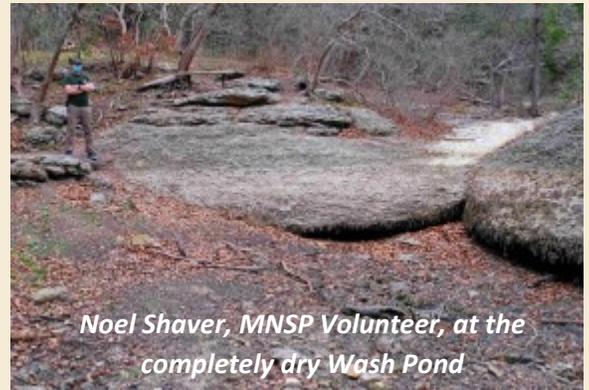


Jessica Dieter helped kids make a craft with big burr oak acorns.

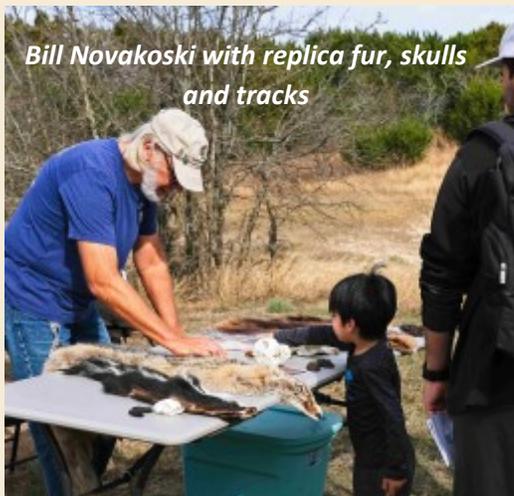
Mother Neff State Park *Cont.*

Our **workday** followed quickly on December 8th. We got to work in a beautiful new spot – the Ranger Road that winds through the Weiss property recently acquired by Mother Neff. This land is located close to the Leon River. Hopefully someday it will be open to the public. Volunteers clearing brush that day were Jamey Douglass, Carroll Adcock, Sharon and Stephen Schmitz, Janice Gibbs, Bill Novakoski, and Jean Solana.

On January 1st we brought in the New Year 2022 with the **First Day Hike**. The Leon River Dutch Oven Gang provided lucky blackeyed peas and soup for all hikers! Our folks talked about the watershed around MNSP, offered hands-on opportunities to identify local mammals with replica fur, skulls and tracks, and passed along information on the amazing cultural history, geology, critters and vegetation of the park. CTMN volunteers included Jean Solana, Zoe Rascoe, Linda Fairlie, John Fairlie, Yvonne Eele, Larry Turner, Mary Ann Everett, and Bill Novakoski who all worked alongside other MNSP volunteers and staff. There were 370 hikers who strolled the trails and enjoyed the not-too-cold weather. Put this event on your calendar for 2023—it's a great way to start the year outdoors!



Noel Shaver, MNSP Volunteer, at the completely dry Wash Pond



Bill Novakoski with replica fur, skulls and tracks



Hiker LouEllen Davis, recently relocated from Oregon, is amazed at the natural beauty at Mother Neff State Park



Leave No Trace practices by Mary Ann Everett

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



The December workday was a ton of fun and of course work, too. We had a record number of 14 volunteers for our 2nd Thursday Miller Springs workday. Wow, what a turnout. The volunteers were (L-R) Keller Matthews, Robb Startzman, Ben Clement, Sharon Schmitz, Catherine Schmitz, John Atkins, Marilyn Whitworth, Bill Novakoski, Matt Ridley, Bert Peeples, Stephen Brown, (and kneeling) Steve Schmitz and John Burns. Oh yes, and Zoe Rascoe came out too. Thanks for the photos Zoe! I guess the idea of working on a new trail at Miller Springs and maybe the wonderful weather brought everyone out. It was a great day.



Keller Matthews had already done a ton of work on the trail near Green Pond and gave us a good head start. We began with a little problem, though. While trying to cut down a large Chinaberry tree



it got caught up in the surrounding trees. With a little thought, teamwork, strong backs, and a *long* rope the tree came crashing down right on target. To me, it sort of felt like it was the ceremonial opening of the new trail. The team then went to work building the trail. Moving logs, rocks, and dirt to level out the trail. We accomplished a lot in 3 hours. It was exciting to see. Great work, team!

Miller Springs Nature Center *cont.*

The new year is here and we had our first workday of 2022 on January 13th. We had a great day to kick off the new year of work. It was a bit chilly to start, but that is sometimes a good thing when you are doing hard work. This was the case for this day we had 8 volunteers. The volunteers were (L-R)



Bill Novakoski, Ben Clement, John Atkins, Tom Gerik, Bill Cornelius, Robb Startzman, Matt Ridley and John Burns took the photo.

The goal for the day was to work on the new trail we had started in December to make it a bit more defined for trail users and to remove as many invasive Wax Leaf Ligustrum in this general area for a pleasant and natural walk. We were very successful on both fronts. Three of the group worked on the invasive ligustrums and

made a huge difference in the area cutting down many large ligustrum trees. The other five volunteers worked hard on the trail itself. The work we had done last month was good, but the trail was still sloping quite a bit downhill. They were able to greatly improve the trail by leveling it out and also lowering the grade of the hill by digging out some larger stones. (See the photo of Matt Ridley proudly posed on the rock he dug out to improve the trail.) Overall, it was great day with very good progress. It is always satisfying to see the difference we make during workdays as Master Naturalists. It is why I wanted to be a Texas Master Naturalist and it makes me proud to put that title by my name.

In November I said, "I'm looking forward to big changes and great work in the next few months". Well I was right, as we have made some major changes to the nature center. The new trail is already being use by many people walking the Miller Springs Nature Center.

I am also excited to let everyone know there is a new effort to guide the future of the Miller Springs Nature Center. Zoe Rascoe and I will be working on a Miller Springs Nature Center Master Plan Committee. The first official meeting of the master plan committee will be on February 9th. It is my hope this committee will be able to provide a road map for the future of the nature center. I will be able to provide more information in future articles.



Miller Springs Nature Center Volunteer Clean-Up Day! New Year's Eve Eve—Dec. 30th



Belton Parks and Recreation held it's final Public Volunteer Clean-Up Day for 2021 at Miller Springs on Friday, December 30th. Volunteer Days are scheduled several times a year and include light trail maintenance, litter pickup, wildflower seed scattering and other tasks as needed. The events are well-attended by communities across the area who appreciate the beautiful natural area available for hiking, biking, bird watching, photography, geocaching, and other ways to enjoy nature. Central Texas Master Naturalists support these work days as well and appreciate the public events planned by City of Belton Parks and Recreation!



Chalk Ridge Falls Park

- John Atkins, 2016

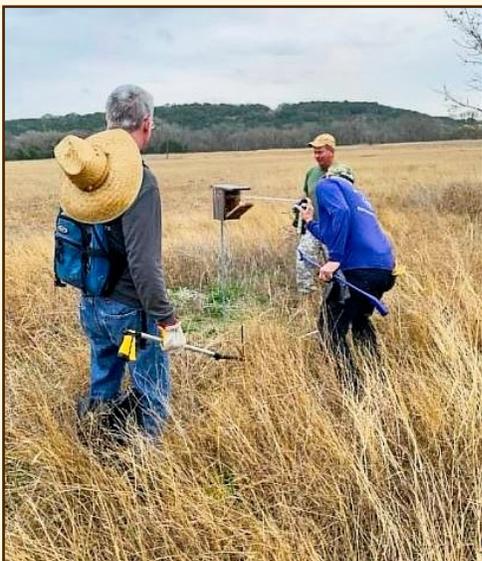


I had planned a relatively light workday for December to give everyone a bit of a break for the holidays. Tina and I were joined that day by Ben Clement, Robb Startzman, Marilyn Whitworth, and Bill Cornelius. We also had the additional pleasure of being joined by Ranger Elizabeth Knapp.

Our primary task for the day was cleaning out the bluebird boxes to get

them ready for another nesting season. Since it was still early in the morning, we had the advantage over the red wasps that always reside in the boxes. They were still angry, but they had not warmed up enough to pursue us with any vigor, besides we had perfected our “Knock-out a Wasp Nest” battle drill last year. We found no evidence of bluebird use,

but we did find two that had been used by Carolina wrens the previous year. They had made beautiful moss nests and it seemed a shame to remove them. After this, we finished out the morning scouting future projects and cleaning trash from the trails.



Chalk Ridge Falls Park *cont.*

The plan for January was to build a bypass for a badly eroded and dangerous section of trail. As the day approached, I began to hear a moaning and whining sound in the distance. Was it the approaching winds of the inbound norther? Nope, it was my wife watching the weather reports and trying to convince me to cancel the work. Folks, I'm not going to lie, it was cold. The only other Chapter members that were crazy enough to join us were John Burns and Ben Clement. Before we hit the trail that morning, we were lucky enough to be serenaded by a pack of coyotes that were set off by a passing ambulance.

The windchill was 18 degrees, but we warmed up quickly once we got in the woods and embraced the suck. We moved quickly by working in an assembly line fashion. First, we cut and cleared brush while John B. followed behind with a weed eater clearing a path through the inland sea oats. Tina brought up the rear with a rake to clear the path. Next, we removed the steps from the old section of trail and re-utilized them on the new section. Two hours later, we had a nice, safe, section of trail completed. To celebrate, Tina broke out a thermos of hot coffee and treats for us. They really hit the spot!

In the future we will continue to improve the existing trails and look to expand some other trail networks. There will also be invasive removal and clearing the area around the observation platform. Hope to see you there.



Bell County Museum



- Mary Ann Everett, 2003

I led the work crew on this cool morning. Five other dedicated members of the Central Texas Master Naturalists braved the chilly January morning with me to trim and haul during the monthly landscape cleanup. Those helping besides myself were Robb Startzman, Andrea Liles, Bill Cornelius, Bert Peoples, and Jamey Douglass.

As the volunteers filled up their bags or buckets, Jamey hauled the contents to his pickup truck. Another full load of debris was headed to his home. The debris will be added to a backyard of red oak leaves to be ground up to make compost.

As Jamey was hauling debris, a lady on Main Street rolled down her window, and said, "You folks are doing a great job!" The public *does* appreciate our hard work... or at least one person noticed the CTMN Chapter members at work!

The job was completed in about an hour. The crew was delighted to leave the site, with the car heaters on high. *Photos by Jamey Douglass.*



Bert Peoples and
Mary Ann Everett



Mary Ann Everett, Andrea Liles,
Bill Cornelius

- 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 Cameron Park Zoo.



We did our fourth round of site evaluations in January. It was quite different to do the trails this time around, since we were in the dead of winter. There was not nearly as much wildlife to be seen (other than birds), and we were braving less than ideal weather, but we still had a good turnout of volunteers. The following CTMN members

joined us for this round: Sue Valdez, Jean Solana, John & Linda Fairlie, Guy Fowler, Sharon and Stephen Schmitz, Robb Startzman, and Jamey Douglass. Family members Pete Solana,



Catherine Schmitz and Bud Valdez also joined our walks. Thank you all for your help!

(Top photo L-R) Linda Fairlie, Robb Startzman, Guy Fowler, Sharon Schmitz, Sue Valdez, Stephen Schmitz, Catherine Schmitz at Miller Springs Nature Center.

(Bottom photo L-R) Bud Valdez, Sue Valdez, Pete Solana, Jean Solana, Jamey Douglass and John Fairlie at Cameron Park Zoo.

GTWT ADOPT-A-LOOP PROJECT *cont.*

We will start our next round of AAL Wildlife Surveys in late March, and will complete it in April. All of the site visits will be listed in our chapter's weekly emails, as AAL Wildlife Survey @ Chalk Ridge Falls (for example). Feel free to join us whenever you wish! We have a lot of fun, enjoying the company and nature, while accumulating volunteer hours. We walk as much or as little as we want at each visit, using either iNaturalist or eBird to record observations. 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 ID your observations, but it is not necessary. The TPWD have paid experts that evaluate all observations. If using eBird, we work together to get an accurate tally of what we see. We can split up and cover several trails or all stay together.

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!



An example of what might be seen on an Adopt A Loop Trail are the birds at Lake Waco Wetlands in January. We began at the Bird Feeders behind the main building where we saw Northern Cardinals, Chipping Sparrows, and Carolina Chickadees. We walked down the hill to the wetland boardwalks and saw Great Blue Herons, Soras, American White Pelicans, Red-winged Blackbirds, a Belted Kingfisher and an American Kestrel. Next was a woodland walk past the wetlands, spying Downy and Red-Bellied Woodpeckers and an Eastern Phoebe. It was a cold morning, so we didn't see butterflies and dragonflies as we usually do. Below is my Red-bellied Woodpecker entry into the iNaturalist Adopt A Loop Project.

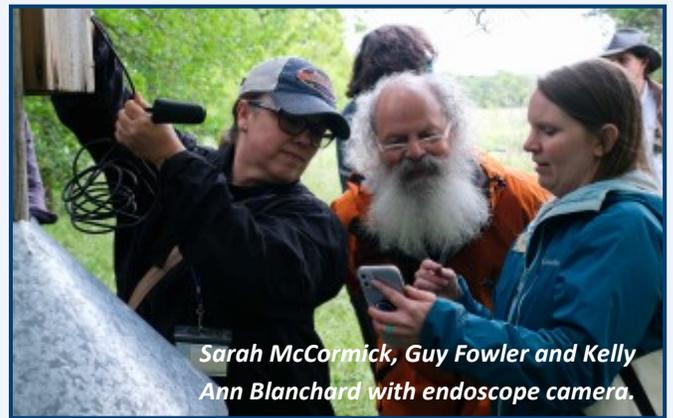
Jean Solana

A screenshot of a web browser showing an iNaturalist observation page. The URL is inaturalist.org/observations/104894596. The page title is "Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*)" with a "Research Grade" badge. There is a photo of a woodpecker on a tree trunk. The user profile is "jsolana" with 1,521 observations. The observation was made on Jan 12, 2022 at 10:24 AM CST and submitted on Jan 13, 2022 at 7:36 PM CST. A map shows the location near Waco, Texas. The browser's taskbar at the bottom shows the date as 2/6/2022 and the time as 8:52 PM.



- Guy Fowler, 2021

LOCATION! LOCATION! LOCATION! Very important in my realty business, BUT also very important with our feathered friends. After Snowmageddon 2021, our Bluebirds are coming back and looking for suitable quarters. Our CTMN Chapter has 14 nesting boxes at Miller Springs Nature Center on the Leon River. That's right...14! Six of the boxes are on the entrance side (North) of the spillway, and the others are on the mural side (South). Each nesting box is numbered to help us clarify which ones have eggs and nestlings, so we can keep track and report our findings to NestWatch. Great program, and NestWatch has great resources. Check it out at <https://nestwatch.org>.



This website has tons of information on building nesting boxes and egg identification! You can compare egg colors and nest material of different native birds and see which one fits the best. Check out this page specifically: <https://nestwatch.org/learn/how-to-nestwatch/identifying-nests-and-eggs/>. Several of us have endoscopes (cameras on cables) to be able to see what's happening in the boxes with minimal disruption to the tenants.

Kelly Ann Blanchard had been leading our NestWatch program and did a GREAT job, but has moved away, so Sarah McCormick has now taken the lead role. I will also be helping out and will do my best to be her "right hand Guy." If you are thinking about becoming a bird box watcher, Sarah will be offering training in early March and early April. It's a lot of fun and is a great way to accumulate your volunteer hours. Look forward to seeing you at Miller Springs Nature Center.

A shout out to the current NestWatch Team including the following Master Naturalists: Sarah McCormick, Janice Gibbs, Jaime Harmon, Guy Fowler, Chris Nixon, Matt Ridley and Chris Robinson.





Musings of the Contemplative Naturalist

- Bill Novakoski, 2020

Last year I wrote about my conversations with friendly oak trees on a plot of land we share near Ding Dong, Texas. Now, I intend we experience the natural world through contemplation enriched by the writings of ancient or historic naturalists. My hope is we experience the wonder of the amazing world which we are so fortunate to inhabit.

An ancient Hebrew sage wrote,

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars that you set in place—what are mere mortals, that you concern yourself with them: humans, that you watch over them with such care? - Psalm 8:3-4
Complete Jewish Bible

This evening, I stepped outside in the cold, quiet darkness to observe the wolf moon, the first full moon of 2022. Looking into the northeastern night sky, my view of the moon was blocked by cedar elm and ashe juniper branches. Walking about fifty yards down our gravel driveway, I found an unobstructed view and immediately stopped in delight at the beautiful disk glowing in the blackness above me. It seemed as if all of nature cooperated to give the moon center stage in its fabulous display. The sun hid from sight so the sky would be darkened. The clouds parted broadly so the moon's complete disk would be visible. The wind ceased blowing, the trees and grasses stood still, and the deer laid in the grass without moving or making a sound. All nature seemed to pause with me to observe this natural wonder.

Because of the vast expanse between the moon and me, only my sense of sight provided any information about this celestial body. I felt no heat, heard no sounds, smells or tastes from the moon. Even with limited sensory input, I was in awe. As I stayed quietly observing this moon, I noticed the glow was not consistent across the disk; some irregular areas were slightly grayed. Over time, I tilted my head further back as the moon continued to climb higher above the horizon where it first appeared. After some time, I grew tired so went inside to the warmth to sleep.

After a restful night, I awoke and went outdoors again. It was still dark and the moon shined as brightly, but now the moon was approaching the western horizon. Too soon, I could no longer see the moon as a yellow-orange hue at the eastern horizon signaled the dawn of a new day.

So, what did I gain from this experience? I learned the value of being still and attentive to nature. I appreciated human life and all life on earth, realizing our dependency on the atmosphere, moon, stars and sun for survival. The heavens could exist without humans or other life on this planet, so we are truly blessed to have conditions in which we can live and flourish.



Cedar Fever

Myths, realities of one of Texas' least favorite allergens

Cedar fever season is almost upon us, and at a time when having a fever – or even catching a slight cold – is concerning, it's more important than ever to understand the symptoms and source of this common Central Texas allergy.

For starters, cedar fever isn't a flu or a virus – it's an allergic reaction to the pollen released by mountain cedar trees. In Texas, the predominant species of mountain cedar is the Ashe juniper. Juniper distribution throughout Texas. View the [distribution map](#) for more details. (Texas A&M Forest Service photo)

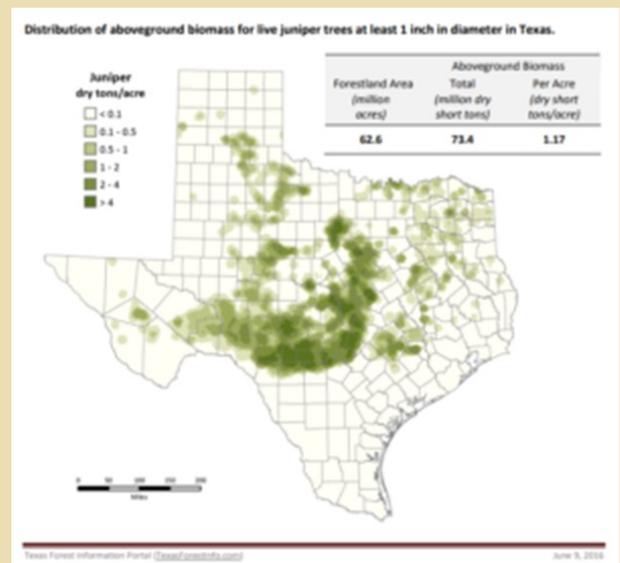
"Cedar fever is the worst west of I-35, where you have primarily juniper mixed in with oaks and some other species," said Jonathan Motsinger, the Central Texas Operations department head for the [Texas A&M Forest Service](#). "And because all of those junipers are producing pollen at the same time, you're going to get a higher concentration of pollen in the air."

This is one of the primary factors contributing to cedar fever – the sheer quantity and density of Ashe junipers in Central Texas. According to Robert Edmonson, a biologist for the Texas A&M Forest Service, the pollen from Ashe junipers isn't particularly allergenic or harmful – it's just so concentrated that, even if you aren't generally susceptible to allergies, it could still affect you.

"There's just so much pollen in the air," said Edmonson, "it absolutely overwhelms the immune system. It's like trying to breathe in a dust storm."

Cedar or juniper, the response is the same

Since that pollen is wind disseminated, cedar fever can affect individuals far removed from areas with a high-concentration of juniper trees. And the source isn't limited to Ashe junipers. In more eastern parts of the state, there are also eastern red cedars that pollinate around the same time—between December and January—and they can induce a similar response from people's immune systems.





Cedar Fever *cont.*

Besides the sheer quantity of pollen released, cedar fever is mostly problematic because of when that pollen is released. Most trees pollinate in the spring, when we're expecting to have allergies. Ragweed pollen and mold spores can contribute to allergies in the fall, but very few plants pollinate during the winter. Cedar trees are the exception—they are triggered by colder weather—and in Texas, their favorite time to release pollen is right after a cold front.

"Following a cold front," said Edmonson, "the air dries out, we get some wind, and the pressure is different. Under those conditions, every single pollen cone on a juniper tree will open at one time, and it looks like the trees are on fire. It looks like there's smoke coming off of them."

While this creates for some fascinating imagery, it can also lead to some serious misery. And for people new to the Central Texas region, or unfamiliar with cedar fever as a whole, it can lead to confusion since the pollination period of mountain cedar trees is also in the middle of flu season.

Symptoms in an already 'watchful' environment

It's not uncommon for people experiencing cedar fever to mistake their symptoms as a cold or the seasonal flu, especially given the variety of symptoms triggered by cedar fever. According to [Healthline's article on cedar fever](#), these may include fatigue, sore throat, runny nose, partial loss of smell, and – believe it or not – some people actually do run a fever.

This year could be particularly problematic, since many symptoms align with the novel [coronavirus](#). But there are a few tell-tales to look out for. First of all, cedar pollen will rarely cause your body temperature to surpass 101.5. If your fever is that high, then pollen likely isn't the cause.

There are also a few symptoms of cedar fever that aren't linked to the coronavirus, like itchy, watery eyes, blocked nasal passages and sneezing. But there is one "dead giveaway" that, according to Edmonson, should always clear things up. "If your mucus is running clear," he said, "then it's an allergy. If it's got color, then it's probably a cold or the flu." You can treat cedar fever by taking allergy medications and antihistamines, but you should consult with your physician or health care professional before taking new medications. It's smart to keep windows and doors closed, to limit the amount of time you spend outdoors, and to change air conditioning filters in your car and in your home.

Removing cedar trees from your property isn't recommended primarily because the pollen is airborne and—since they often wait to release their pollen until it's cold, dry and windy—that pollen can blow for miles. It's also important to note that only male juniper trees release pollen.

Stephen O'Shea, Texas A&M Forest Service December 28, 2020



- Julie Sieh, 2020

Last fall my daughter-in-law in the Houston area said she pulled a peculiar worm off our 3 year old granddaughter's leg. She had looked it up and it was an invasive species called the "Hammerhead Flatworm". I hoped that would be the end of the story. Only a couple months later we had a hammerhead flatworm crawling across our driveway in Bell County. Of course, it's an invasive so I immediately chopped it into several pieces to kill it. Wrong decision.

The hammerhead flatworm has a head shaped like the rounded hammerhead shark head. When I saw it, it raised up like a cobra off the pavement. The body is snake like with 1-5 dark dorsal stripes on a brownish body. It can be up to 15 inches long and narrow.

It is a predator of earthworms. The flathead worm secretes a chemical that makes them noxious to predators and also digests the earthworm. These same chemicals can be a skin irritant to humans as well as domestic animals. The flatworm also carries parasitic nematodes within them.

Therefore we definitely want to kill them but "NOT" by cutting them up. This is because their reproduction is mainly through fragmentation. As the worm crawls along, a rear piece will pinch off and in 10 days develop a head on this fragment.

This species is originally from Vietnam. It is now found in US in hot humid areas. It was noted first in Beaumont in 1980's. They like to be in leaf litter, logs and rocks. They spread as they are carried in with mulch and landscape materials.

The proper disposal is spraying them with 1) orange essence (citrus oil) and salt. 2) citrus oil and vinegar or 3) just vinegar. Place them in a Ziploc bag with salt or vinegar so they can't crawl away. Then dispose of sealed bag. Wash your hands with soapy water and rinsed with alcohol/hand disinfectant after any skin contact. Use gloves, a stick or towel if available.

DO NOT CHOP THEM UP!!

Source: Texas Invasive Species, www.tsusinvasives.org

PICTURE THIS



Scouting for Shots

Exploring an area before a shoot can give your photography an edge.

BY EARL NOTTINGHAM

As outdoor photographers in search of prize-winning photos, we often come back disappointed in the lackluster images we've obtained, whether shooting landscapes, portraits, nature close-ups or wildlife. For some reason, the final photos often don't live up to the expectations of the images we saw in the viewfinder, and it's difficult to put a finger on what could have made the scene better. It all seems like a gamble — win some, lose some! However, you can put the odds in your favor and turn a ho-hum shot into one with “wow” by employing the practice of scouting. While scouting does take time and effort, the payoff is well worth it.

Regardless of your desired photo subject, the primary reason for scouting is to find the optimal location and time in which the subject will show

its best “face” and can be best composed in context with its surroundings and in the best light. For instance, scouting for wildlife would involve finding promising locations such as water holes, feeders or natural trails with the best chances of encountering animals, and then determining the times of day when the animals typically show up and ways to obtain the best lighting. Scouting for landscapes might involve exploring trails or climbing hills to find the best viewpoints, and determining sun direction and optimal times for shooting.

In practice, a good time to scout is during the midday hours when the light is generally too harsh for good photography. This allows you plenty of time to explore all the options and then come back later when the light is best.

PICTURE THIS

When scouting any locations, try to visualize how various types of light and various directions will best show off the subject, whether it is an overcast day or bright morning or evening sunlight. Try to imagine the subject in all creative variations of light, including golden evening light, blue post-sunset light and foggy, diffused light. You might arrive at your shooting location expecting a brilliant sunrise or sunset only to find the sun hidden behind a cloud bank. Many times, these serendipitous lighting situations can lead to better shots than we had visualized.

While this type of physical activity (i.e. hiking and climbing) can be an enjoyable part of outdoor photography, there is another method of scouting that can supplement (or, in some cases, replace) traditional scouting.

Virtual scouting is a way (actually many ways) of researching a location without actually being there. Use online applications such as Google Earth, Maps or other geospatial products to “see” a location in 3D space from any angle and at any time of day or season — from the comfort of home.

Additionally, social media platforms and photo hosting sites such as Instagram and Flickr now contain enough images to be considered a searchable database of just about any location in the world, and allow you to gain insight and inspiration from the work of other outdoor photographers. A search of photographer websites in the area you want to visit can also turn up a wealth of creative images for all types of outdoor photography.

Finally, scouting apps such as Photographer’s Ephemeris and Sun Seeker for smartphones make it a breeze to see the times and directions

of sunrises, sunsets and moon phases. They are invaluable in determining camera placement that will result in the moon or sun rising or setting in the perfect spot. For night sky photography, celestial object movement such as the Milky Way can also be previewed.



The Sun Seeker app uses augmented reality to show the path that the sun will take throughout the day, allowing the photographer to determine the best locations and times for sunrises and sunsets.

Texas Parks & Wildlife (July 2019).

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—Going Deeper

In the first article we went over a brief description of the two major types of bamboo and the differences in how they grow. This time we'll go into more details about other aspects of bamboos – their value to humankind, etc. In Asia bamboo was and is a vital part of their cultures. As with our own southeastern indigenous people.

Bamboo is renewable and grows quickly, completing its growth cycle within a year of sprouting. Some of the large timber bamboos can grow over 3 feet in one day and is usable within about 3-5 years once their walls have hardened.

Bamboo is a carbon sink and oxygen producing dynamo. Depending on the source bamboo is said to produce 30-35% more O₂ than an equivalent stand of trees and sequester between 5 to 29 tons of CO₂ per acre. There are many variables to consider in the O₂ production and CO₂ sequestration processes for bamboo since it varies widely depending on species and growing conditions. When it is harvested the root/rhizome system remains intact and will shoot the next year keeping much of the CO₂ sequestered. Some research shows that *Guadua angustifolia* (South American) can produce over 5 times the biomass of a typical forest.



BAMBOO <CONT.>

It is highly adaptable to a wide variety of temperature ranges, soils, drainage, and elevations. It can be grown in marginal soils, under low or high precipitation conditions. Because of the “green” nature of bamboo it is touted as a potential major contributor in the mitigation of climate change. When trees are cut down it takes many years, sometimes several decades to replace those trees; whereas bamboo will be replaced the year following a harvest with a whole new culm with branches, and leaves and while doing that, the root/rhizome system will have expanded. The harvested culms can be used as fuel in the form of charcoal, gas or burned as a cane making sure the internode section is open – don’t want the internode to burst when it is burned. It can also be made into various products from simple to complex.

There are a variety of economic development benefits to bamboo with sustainable products like textiles (including clothing), cabinetry, flooring, paper, food for humans and animals

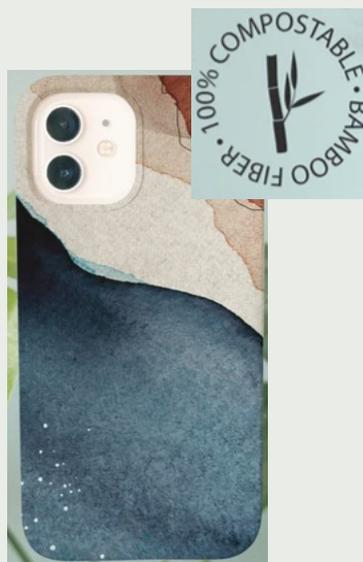
It is used as medicine for various conditions in the far east. It has a high tensile strength and was used as rebar in Thomas Edison’s swimming pool (still functioning). Edison also successfully used a carbonized bamboo filament in his experiment with the first light bulb. This light bulb still burns today in the Smithsonian Museum in Washington DC. Alexander Graham Bell used it for the needles in his gramophones. Vintage Victrolas still do.



Edison’s 1879 bamboo filament lightbulb

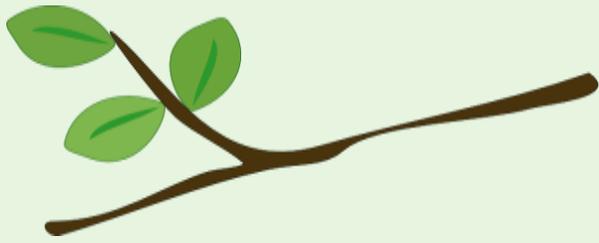


Gramophone needles



Biodegradable phone case





- Mary Ann Everett, 2003

Out on a Limb

Tree Description: It can grow as a tree if it is trimmed up high, showing off its twisting multiple trunks, but if you let it grow down to the ground the foliage provides a wonderful screen. Under its shade buffalo grass and flower gardens grow quite well. It can be ideal for a small yard, or it has been seen growing in masses in front of corporate offices.

Blooms: March to September, with greenish flowers which are not conspicuous, but the twisted seed pods change from red-green to maroon-brown as they mature. These pods persist into winter.

Fruit: Brown seeds, consumed by livestock and wildlife, as the pulp of the pods is sweet.

Leaves: Feathery, yellow-green, pinnately compound leaves provide filtered shade. Fall color is spectacular, with vibrant yellow brightening up the countryside.

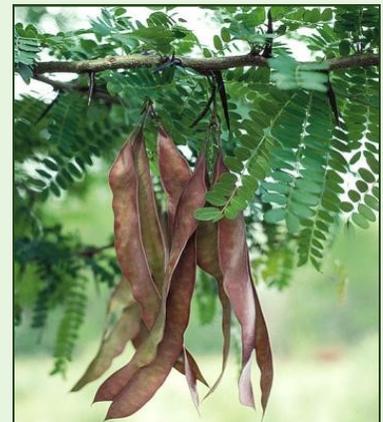
Bark: The trunk has large, branched spines, which makes it readily recognizable. They are long, needle-sharp thorns, extremely vicious, and not suitable for a domestic landscape.

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.

Heat & Drought Tolerance: The tree is heat and drought tolerant. Because of its filtered shade, it makes underplanting easy.

Interesting facts: It is a fast-growing and long-lived tree. It does suffer from mites, cankers, and other pests. It can spread quickly and can become a weed problem in some pasture areas. Mowing or cutting increases sprouts. It is attractive as a shade tree. It gives cover and nesting sites to mammals and birds and is a nectar plant for bees and butterflies. It is the larval host for the silver-spotted skipper.

[Click here for name of tree](#)



MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Matt Ridley receives initial certification



Janice Gibbs receives initial certification



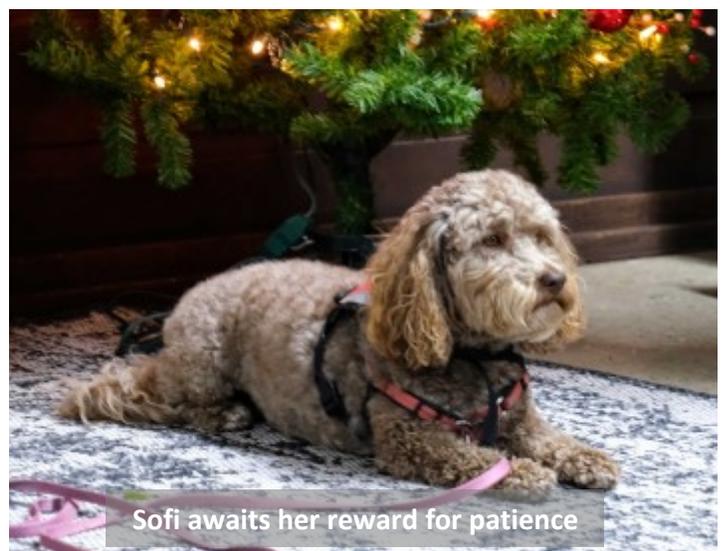
Julie Sieh receives initial certification



Tom Gerik receives initial certification



Daisy Klassy recertifies for 2021



Sofi awaits her reward for patience

MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Stephen Schmitz recertifies for 2021



Juan Anaya recertifies for 2021

2500 Hours!



Dale Hughling receives 2500 hour milestone award. Most of it on the computer, y'all!

250 Hours!



Jenna Chappell receives 250 hour milestone award!

CHAPTER MEETINGS

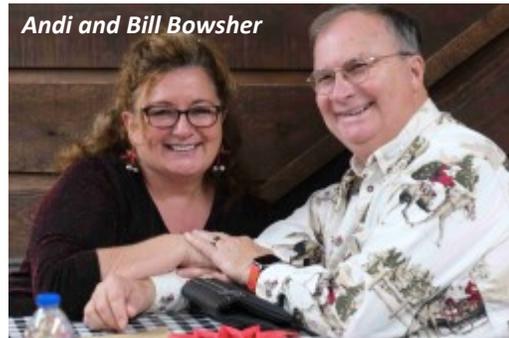
The annual December holiday gathering was held at the Nolanville Community Center where good food, fellowship and fundraising were all celebrated. Many members contributed handmade, new and needs a new home nature-y items to our auction and to raise money for projects.



Linda Fairlie and Sofi



Fabulous set-up crew!



Andi and Bill Bowsher



Larry Turner wins a nest box



Looks like trouble



Zoe shows off Daisy's baking skills.



All Master Naturalists...



Good to Know...



Feeding Birds Safely

More than a hundred bird species supplement their natural diets with foods offered at feeders. They often rely most heavily on feeders in winter, when food is scarce. Additionally, some species will take advantage of backyard refueling stations during spring and fall migrations; others will stop by while nesting during the summer.

Disease spreads easier when animals come together at one common point – like bird feeders and bird baths. For example, during the 2021 summer a mysterious avian ailment killed many East Coast and Midwest backyard birds prompting a call from experts to take down bird feeders and bird baths to prevent birds from congregating and spreading the illness.

Here are tips on keeping your bird feeders and baths clean. Dispose of uneaten food instead of dumping it on the ground – this attracts pests. Scrub your feeders with soap and water (for hummingbird feeders skip the soap), followed by a 15 minute soak in a 50-50 vinegar and water solution. Remove any residue with a thorough water rinse. For bird baths replace water frequently – daily or every other day. A scrub with vinegar and water will help birdbaths, too. *From Audubon Guide to Winter Bird-Feeding*

Feeding the right food for the birds you want to attract in the winter will reduce waste on the ground. A good guide for what common backyard birds want to eat can be found at [Winter Bird Feeding](#) by The Cornell Lab of Ornithology BirdNotes.

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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!



Hitchin’ a ride

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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.