

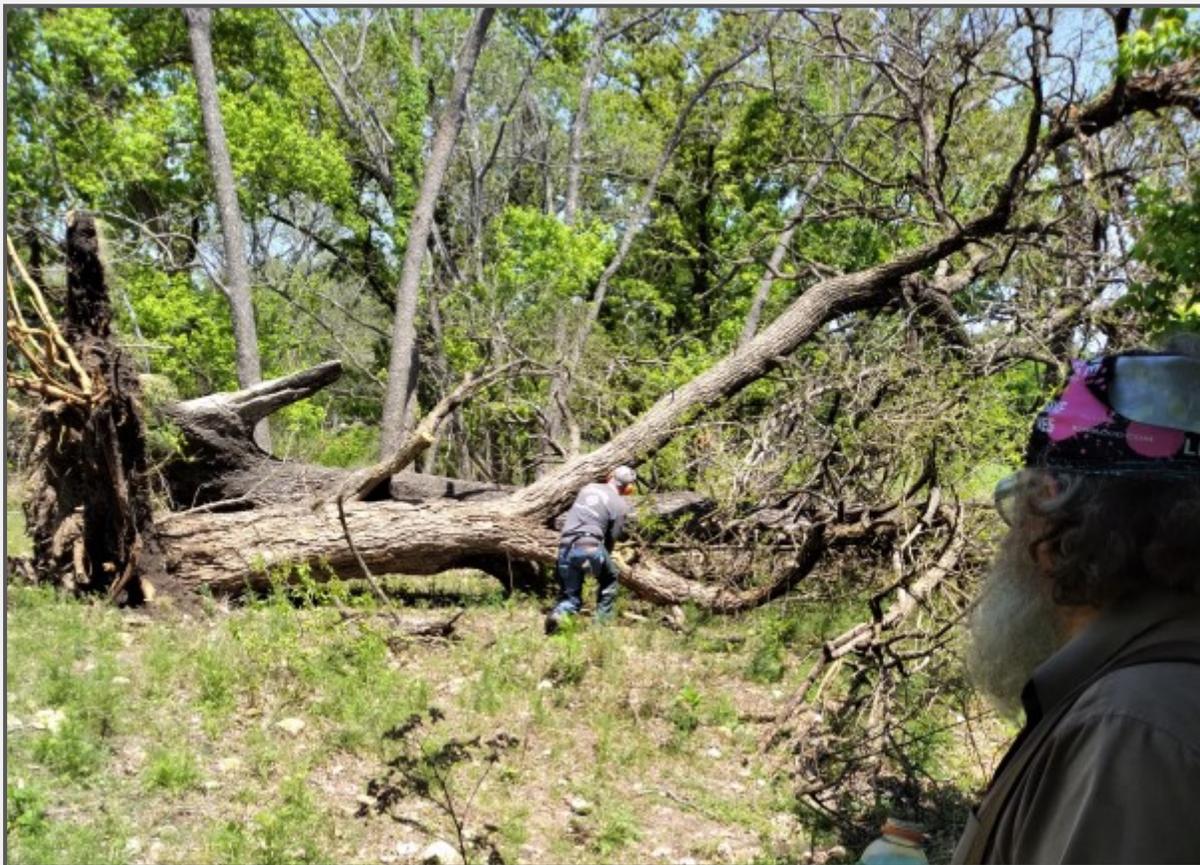
# The Tracker

Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter April 2022

## STORM AND HISTORY COLLIDE

- Keller Matthews, 2021

On Tuesday evening, April 12th, an F3 tornado with 165 mph winds destroyed the community of Cedar Valley on the west side of Salado and grazed the renowned archeological treasure Gault Site—which has the world’s largest Clovis-period excavation. The Gault School of Archeological Research (GSAR) is associated with the University of Texas and has managed the site for many years. As a result of the tornado, twenty large trees, some four feet in diameter, were uprooted or broken including oaks, pecans, box elders, and an ancient bois d'arc were lost throughout the area visited by those who tour the site. Fortunately, there was no structural damage to the Archeological Research building except disruption of the power lines, but there is much debris to be cleaned up.



The Executive Director of the GSAR, Dr. Clark Wernecke, who has hosted CTMN many times since our founding in 2010, reached out to Lynn Fleming and she mobilized the CTMN Gault Workday Crew made up of folks who regularly show up at monthly workdays at Mother Neff State Park, Miller Springs Nature Center and other US Army Corps of Engineers lake parks to remove invasive trees, repair trails and bridges and other maintenance activities.



A few days later, on a fortuitously cool April morning, nine members of CTMN joined GSAR volunteers, including Tim Brown from Salado with his invaluable skid steer, to begin clearing brush, trees, and scattered debris.

Much progress was made, but there is still work to be done. Once a year, GSAR asks for help with all the chores that are more easily accomplished with many hands. Luckily the annual workday will be on May 7th. Volunteers will work on projects from 8:30 until noon and then GSAR hosts a “Thank You” BBQ picnic. This year the help is more critical than ever and Dr. Wernecke asks that volunteers wear work clothes and work boots or shoes, bring gloves and water. And if you have a chainsaw, bow saw or limb loppers or a good hoe, more are needed for juniper and prickly pear removal. They also need pickup trucks to move downed limbs to burn piles. You do need to register for the workday and you can [REGISTER HERE](#) or on the GSAR website.



*(left to right)  
Lynn Fleming  
Tina Atkins  
John Atkins  
Jamey Douglass  
Carroll Adcock  
Ben Clement  
a Balcones  
Canyonlands  
volunteer,  
Steve Schmitz and  
Keller Matthews.  
Member Marian  
Riegel volunteered at  
a nearby Red Cross  
site.*



### **Spring. New growth. New members. I love this time of year.**

We have an exciting lineup of new members starting in March. They are Kelli Barton, Debby Bridge, Cassie Castillo, Cassie Daley, Kara Escajeda, Brook Fowler, Cindy Fowler, Sally Jordan, Charlie Langsdale, Letti Lim-Kosel, Q Matthey, Marie McDermott, Paul Parker, Tommy Reeder, Melissa Repasch, Catherine Schmitz, Stan Simons, Colleen Smith-Fey, Danny Welch, and Carolyn Williams. I am excited to get to know them and to help them find the opportunities where they would like to volunteer.

One thing I really like about our Chapter is that we have a great group of volunteers who have found where they like to serve and they are like Dory from "Finding Nemo" – they just keep swimming. I took a look at the Volunteer Management System to see what our members have been up to in January, February and part of March of this year. It's a lot.

We have a lot of members who do **administrative** tasks. In addition to our officers and board members who do their administrative jobs, we also have members who perform much needed tasks such as making items for sale at events like the Home and Garden Show, providing hospitality for meetings, and writing articles for The Tracker. Our Chapter members who have posted hours doing these jobs include John Atkins, Carroll Adcock, Sue Valdez, John Burns, Bill Cornelius, Mary Ann Everett, John and Linda Fairlie, Guy Fowler, Bill Novakoski, Mary Odom, Zoe Rascoe, Jean Solana, and Andreas Wooten.



# President's Pen cont.

There are a lot of **citizen science** projects we participate in. So far this year, these projects include Butterfly field research, Adopt A Loop Wildlife survey, CoCoRaHS (daily rain, snow and hail observations), Christmas Bird Count, Great Backyard Bird Count, Bloomwatch monitoring, and Fort Hood zebra mussel and environmental monitoring. Our members who do these jobs are Carroll Adcock, Juan Anaya, John Atkins, Mike Belcher, Sue Valdez, Brent Blumenthal, Andi Bowsher, Steven Brown, John Burns, Sue Critz, Joe Dorn, Jamie Douglass, Mary Ann Everett, John and Linda Fairlie, Guy Fowler, Tom Gerik, Andrea Liles, Sarah McCormick, Wade Matthews, Chris Nixon, Bill Novakoski, Mary Odom, Bert Peeples, Bruce Polikoff, Sharon and Steve Schmitz, Jean Solana, Robb Startzman, Lynn Williams, Gail Wilson, Andreas Wooten, and Don Wyatt.

We have monthly projects that include landscaping and trail maintenance and cleanup type of work. So far this year we have worked at the Bell County Museum, Harker Heights Parks and Rec, Keep Texas Beautiful, Miller Springs Nature Center workdays, Monarch Waystation Creation, Mother Neff State Park workdays and bird blind maintenance, St. Francis Wildscape Maintenance, St. Mary's School workdays, Texas Waterway cleanup, and US Army Corps of Engineers projects (Pond Project and Chalk Ridge Falls). John and Tina Adkins, Cindy Allen, Juan Anaya, Carroll Adcock, Steve Brown, John Burns, Ben Clement, James Critz, Bill Cornelius, Jessica Dieter, Jamie Douglass, Mary Ann Everett, Lynn Fleming, Guy Fowler, Tom Gerik, Louann Hight, Jerry Lewis, Andrea Liles, Keller Matthews, Bill Novakoski, Bert Peeples, Matt Ridley, Thomas Salmi, Steve and Sharon Schmitz, Robb Startzman, and Marilyn Whitworth.

We have participated in **public outreach** activities such as the Home and Garden Show and Mother Earth News Fair. Our members involved who logged VMS hours include Carroll Adcock, John and Tina Adkins, Sue Valdez, Andi Bowsher, John Burns, Ben Clement, Bill Cornelius, Jessica Dieter, Joe and Sarah Dorn, Jamie Douglass, John and Linda Fairlie, Lynn Fleming, Guy Fowler, Tom Gerik, Dale Hughling, Jerry Lewis, Wade Matthews, Zoe Rascoe, Steve and Sharon Schmitz, Jean Solana, Marilyn Whitworth, Lynn Williams and Andreas Wooten.

Mother Neff State Park hosts regular events, and up to now we have participated in the First Day Hike and Nature Run, with the TPWD Birding Classic coming up in late April. Participants include Steven Brown, Yvonne Eele, John and Linda Fairlie, Mary Ann Everett, Andrea Liles, Tom Gerik, Bill Novakoski, Jean Solana, and Larry Turner.

If I left your name off anything, check to see if you logged your hours in VMS. If you did, my apologies!

This is just the tip of the iceberg in what we do as a Chapter. I am very proud of all of you and grateful for all the time and energy you put in to making our Chapter such a successful one!

# Meet the CTMN Class of 2022



**Kelli Barton** owns and manages Blue Eagle Retreat and is a retired Realtor. She owned a brokerage in Colorado, sold real estate in the US Virgin Islands and most recently sold farms and ranches in Texas. Now retired to caregive for elderly parents with dementia. Kelli enjoys organic vegetables, garlic, herb, wildflower, lavender gardens and permaculture on her five acres. Experimenting with chickens now, and adding milk goats to her native feral honeybees. She values nature, peaceful people and enjoys a simple lifestyle.



**Debby Bridge** grew up in historical Virginia and the Texas Gulf Coast, in a small town near Houston. She spent 28 years in public education. Debby loves to travel. She has joined the Texas Master Naturalists to have an organized way to learn about nature and get outside.



**CASSIE CASTILLO** grew up in a southern California desert and spent her childhood playing among the citrus trees. She worked in the fashion industry for 8 years, and now spends time designing sewing patterns and quilting with friends. After moving to Texas, she became interested in native plants and is looking forward to learning more about Texas ecology.



**CASSIE DALEY** is a recent Minnesota transplant passionate about connecting with Mother Earth, her energy, and the elements, especially through cultivation, hiking, camping, medicinal plants, grounding, and observing. Animals, meditation, holistic health, fitness, and creating art are all dear to my heart. Looking forward to meeting you all!

# Meet the CTMN Class of 2022



**KARA ESCAJEDA** retired from the Army in 2015 as an Environmental Science & Engineering Officer, then moved into the role of Nolanville City Manager. Her favorite part of the job is initiating projects in support of Keep Nolanville Beautiful and thinks Texas Master Naturalist involvement enhances environmental awareness for the Community. She credits her Grandpa for instilling a love for the environment in her. He also watched countless hours of National Geographic with her.



**BROOK FOWLER** is a Texas Realtor and owner of The Fowler Legacy Group. She is a 4<sup>th</sup> generation Temple Historic District resident. She volunteers on the board of Feed My Sheep, The Main Street Advisory Temple City Board, and the Temple Belton Board of Realtors. Graduating from Austin College in Sherman with an Asian Studies and 3D Art degrees, Brook continues to study healing through herbology. She grew to love the outdoors as a child following her grandpa., Butch Fowler.



**CINDY FOWLER** was born and raised in Temple. She married her high school sweetheart, Guy, and raised 2 children, Jason and Brook, and has 2 grandchildren, Afton and Jonas. She graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with a BS in Physical Education and taught / coached in Temple for 30 years. After retiring, she received her Texas Realtor license, as well as a Texas Broker's license. She currently is the broker of The Fowler Legacy Group along with Guy and their daughter, Brook. Loving to be outside, she likes to garden and go barefoot as much as possible.



**SALLY JORDAN** grew up in a small town in west Texas. Her father ranched and farmed so she spent time outside watching cotton grow and helping with the cattle. She & her husband live on 11 acres between Temple and Belton where they enjoy God's creation by observing and feeding birds, gardening, growing wildflowers, and counting butterflies.

# Meet the CTMN Class of 2022



**LETTI LIM-KOSEL** grew up in South Texas where she spent most of her childhood outdoors, fishing, hiking and hunting with her father. After 33 years in the dental hygiene profession, she finally retired and took up RV'ing so she could continue to enjoy and explore nature!



**CHARLES LANGSDALE** grew up in Central Texas. He served 10 years in the Navy and when he got out, he became a firefighter/paramedic. He then retired from that and now works as an Emergency Service Dispatcher. He likes to go RV'ing and enjoy the outdoors.

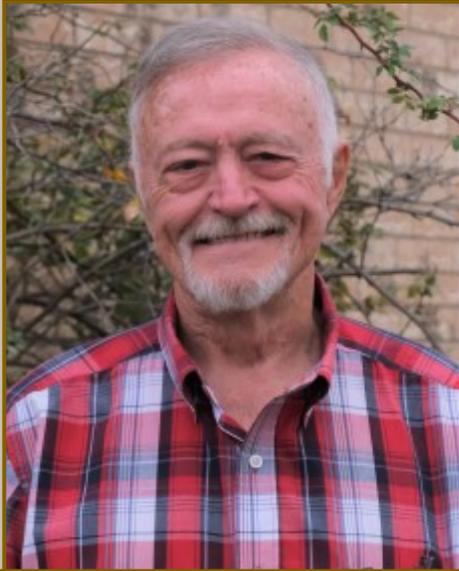


**Q MATTHEY** grew up as a Baylor Bear in Waco. Q is passionate about nature and is currently working as an environmental Field Engineer in the solar industry. In his free time he loves to hike and mountain bike with his dog Baloo.

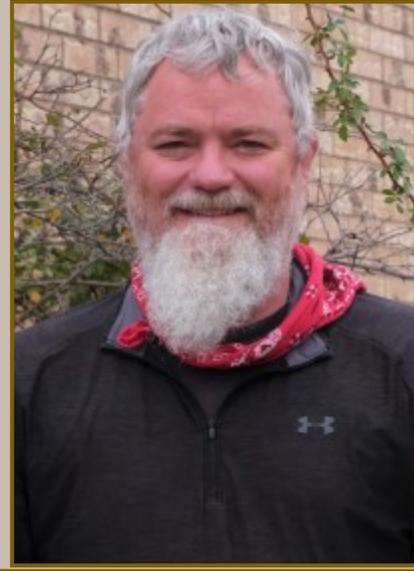


**MARIE McDERMOTT** is a recent Texas transplant. She comes here from Arizona, where she was a Master Gardener, by way of Denver. It seemed a better place to endure COVID! She is a former teacher and administrator. Having dabbled in woodworking, pottery, and stained glass, she's looking forward to moving outdoors for activities.

# Meet the CTMN Class of 2022



**PAUL PARKER** retired from teaching after 17 years and from Christian Ministries after 29 years. He has loved science since high school, when a science teacher showed special interest in him. He volunteers at his church and a Christian camp, where he does numerous things, such as cooking and helping to maintain the campgrounds. He hopes to continue his love of science and outdoors through Texas Master Naturalist.



**TOMMY REEDER** moved to Central Texas in 2017 with his wife Darla to be closer to family after an engineering career in the oil business. Tommy enjoys fly fishing, camping, kayaking, long walks with his dog Lucy and others reasons to be outdoors. Tommy and Darla own the newly-opened Wildbirds Unlimited store in Temple.

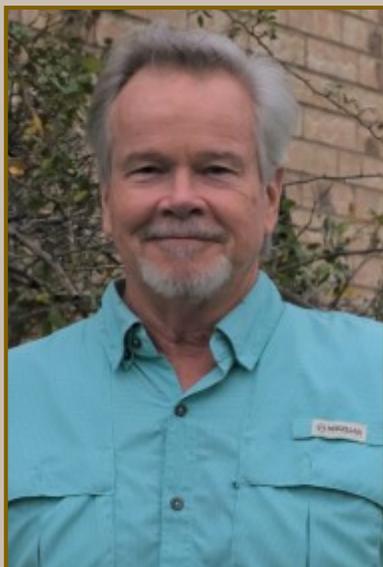


**MELISSA REPASCH** is Central Texas born and raised. She married her high school sweetheart and has two boys 4 and 5 years old. The family started hiking when they were 1 and 2 yrs old with the Free Forest School group at Chalk Ridge Falls and have been interested in everything in nature since. I am very excited to learn everything I can and help my community.



**CATHERINE SCHMITZ** was born in Georgia but moved to Central Texas in 1986. She grew up watching a lot of animal shows and volunteering at their vets office. She hand-raised a few cockatiels and a love bird as well as some kittens, one of which she still has and is 17 years old. She is a respiratory therapist at Baylor Scott and White and has an 11 year old son who is the other half life right now. I love nature and animals and hiking and hope to learn more.

# Meet the CTMN Class of 2022



**STAN SIMONS** is a native Texan who retired in December after 47 years in the Petrochemical Industry. He spent many years with his four sons in the Boy Scout Program. As an Assistant Scoutmaster he has camped and hiked in many of the State Parks and Nature destinations of Texas. He believes in the Scout Rule "Leave it better than you found it". He is very interested in continuing that philosophy with TMN and learning more about Texas Ecology.



**COLLEEN SMITH-FEY** is from Ohio but the military deposited her in Texas. She has a BS in Aviation Management and is a retired Quality Control Manager for aviation maintenance. She enjoys hiking, weight training, biking and volunteering and was recognized as a public servant for the City of Nolanville. Colleen served as the EDC President for Nolanville and assisted in the application process for Nolanville to be a member in the Keep Texas Beautiful program. Colleen feels most at home outdoors!



**DANNY WELCH** is a retired high school counselor. He spends his time playing golf and working in the yard. He chases any of his ten grandchildren every chance he gets. Danny loves being outdoors and having the time to enjoy the wonders of nature.



**CAROLYN WILLIAMS** recently retired after 35 years as a dental hygienist. Carolyn grew up very involved in 4H and livestock showing. She's an Austin native but now lives in The Grove. Carolyn has always loved the country, and lived on a white tail deer ranch for 13 years.



# Mother Neff State Park

1680 TX Hwy-236, Moody

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

**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.*



*Jean Solana*

Spring is about to spring so on February 18th I met with Melissa Chadwick, Park Superintendent, to see what she needed our assistance with. We talked about our usual spring projects – checking our 7 bird boxes in the park and getting our game cameras remounted in some new places. She also needed some playscape woodworking done. We talked about having a native grass display in the Headquarters garden. We made plans for 3 Sunday afternoon programs – Building Birdhouses on March 6th, Birds of Mother Neff April 3<sup>rd</sup>, and May 1<sup>st</sup> will be Butterflies and their Plants. They would be held from 1:30-3:30 pm at Headquarters – come and go format.

Our workday was moved to Monday February 21<sup>st</sup> because of bad weather on Wednesday. Carroll Adcock, Susan Schneider, and I started off the day placing game cameras at the Prairie Pond, Wash Pond, and Tower Bird Blind. Carroll has agreed to take over the game cameras



*Wash Pond at previous First Day Hike*

for now. He does a great job of positioning them (not easy) and will take out the memory cards to see what interesting creatures come to these places. Melissa has seen ring-tailed cats at the Wash Pond – hope we can get them on the camera.

*Cont.*

# Mother Neff State Park *Cont.*

We checked all the bird boxes for nesting activity and replaced the signs in front of each box. Then we measured the teepee poles at the playscape. They are moveable so children can build their own teepee. We also looked at the broken tic tac toe pieces and planned to replace them.

Over the next 2 weeks I cut cedar poles at my place and trimmed and sanded them. Carroll cut the tic tac toe pieces and I painted them. Here are the results:

On Sunday afternoon, March 6<sup>th</sup> I set up a table in Headquarters and talked to park visitors about making Bird Nest boxes. There were coloring sheets about cavity nesting birds. We had 19



adults and 15 children come by and discuss their birds on their property and ours at Mother Neff.



On March 7<sup>th</sup> I transplanted 8 little bluestem grass bunches and 2 Indiangrass to the Headquarters garden. The native grasses look glorious at Mother Neff – we will have identification signs so folks can learn Texas native grasses.

Our next workday will be Wednesday, April 23<sup>rd</sup> from 9-12 am. We meet at Mother Neff Headquarters. Remember to come by Hwy 317 since the bridge south of the park is closed.

**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

# Miller Springs Nature Center Public Workday

Saturday, April 30, 2022

9:00-11:00am (free pizza at 11:00!)

Trail Maintenance & Litter Pickup  
with Belton Parks & Rec

Central Texas Master Naturalists will have Discovery Trunks for hands-on learning; an iNaturalist app Stroll for identifying plants and critters (download app to your smart phone before you arrive); and a Bird Nestbox Trail Walk & Talk on common cavity nesting birds, how to ID a nest and how to properly set up nest boxes at home.

All ages welcome.

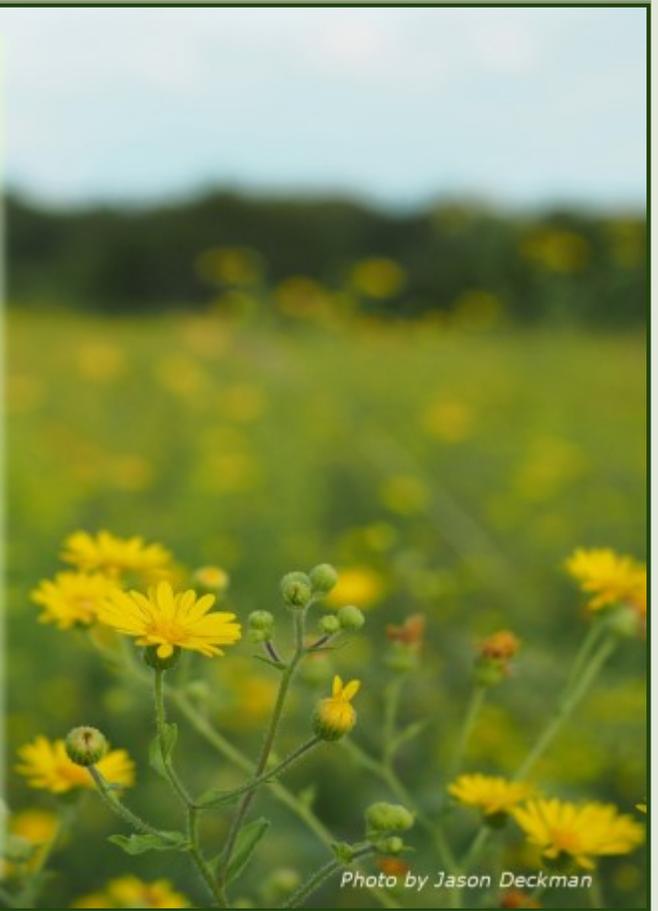


Photo by Jason Deckman

## NestWatch Training at MSNC



Sarah McCormick along with veteran nestwatchers Guy Fowler and Jaime Harmon are training a new team of CTMN nestwatchers. (l to r) Melissa Repasch, Carolyn Williams, a visitor with Kara, Debby Bridge, Kara Escajeda. To the right is Sarah, Jaime and Guy.



Chickadees hatching



This one counts as a nest, too!



*- John Burns, 2018*

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

February and March were both great months. The weather has been perfect for our volunteer work—cool and dry. We really need more rain, but for volunteer work I sure can't complain.

On the February work day we had 10 volunteers. John Atkins, Ben Clement, John Burns, Carrol Adcock, Matt Ridley, Robb Startzman, Marilyn Whitworth, Steve Schmitz, Sharon Schmitz, and Keller Matthews. We focused on three different jobs: litter removal, trail work, and invasive plant removal. It sure was nice to have a good turn out to allow us to diversify to three different tasks. Marilyn Whitworth and Sharon Schmitz focused on litter and wow were they successful. They picked up three large bags of trash!



John Atkins, John Burns, Carroll Adcock, and Rob Startzman worked on removing invasive plants (Waxleaf Ligustrum). This group made great progress in removing many plants downhill from the new trail we have developed off of the Green Pond Trail. Keller Matthews, Steve Schmitz, Ben Clement, Matt Ridley all worked on that. The trail group did a great job of further improving the trail to make it a safe and well used trail. To say the least this trail has been a great success. I have talked to several people using the nature center and they have all been very complimentary of the new trail. It's always nice to hear good feedback from nature center users.



# Miller Springs Nature Center *cont.*

The March workday was great with absolutely perfect weather. We had 7 volunteers. John Atkins, Bill Novakoski, Robb Startzman, Matt Ridley, Carrol Adcock, Marilyn Whitworth, and John Burns. I decided it would be good to go back to some areas we had addressed previously. We had missed a few plants and of course there are always new plants coming up. It can get discouraging to see

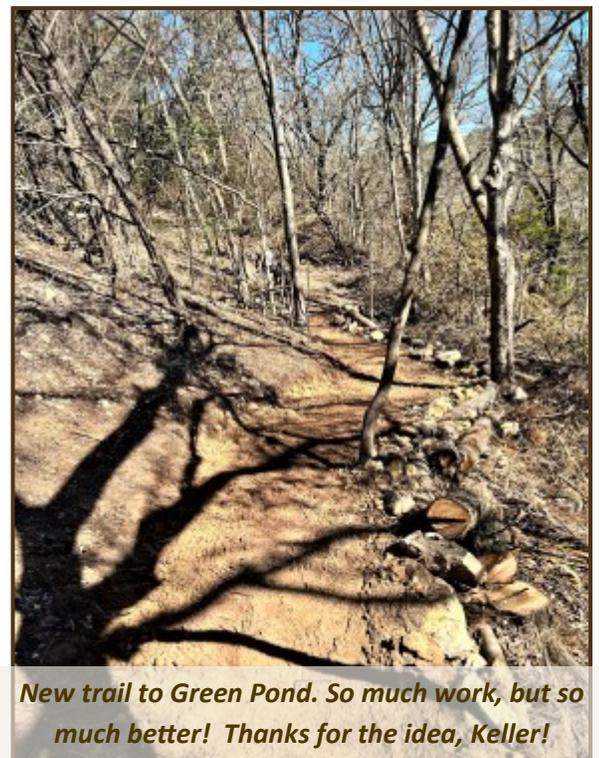


young plants coming up in areas we have worked previously, but we just have to keep plugging away and do our best to keep up. We split into three teams. Marilyn Whitworth worked on litter. John Atkins with Carrol Adcock went down the Armadillo trail to remove invasive plants. I went with Robb Startzman, Bill Novakoski, and Matt Ridley down the Green Pond trail. As usual we made good impacts even though we were in areas we had worked previously.

*Carroll Adcock, Robb Starzman, Marilyn Whitworth, Bill Novakoski, John Atkins, Matt Ridley with our PullerBear and John Burns on the camera.*

During the time we were working, James Grant (Assistant Director of the City of Belton Parks Department) came by so we could scout out a short trail to correct a safety concern. The problem right now is the trail goes over a spring that falls off into the green pond. There is a small wooden bridge that was made by a Boy Scout to cross the spring, but the ground is eroding and the concern is the bridge and trail could drop off at anytime. We located a short work around trail which will solve the problem. The plan at this point is to create the new trail and hopefully block off the old trail during the April workday. I expect there will be some work left to do in May as well.

City of Belton's Spring Public Workday at Miller Springs will be April 30th (9:00-11:00am). Should be lots of activities that morning for nature-lovers. Trail work seems to bring more people out so come out and join the fun!



*New trail to Green Pond. So much work, but so much better! Thanks for the idea, Keller!*

# Chalk Ridge Falls Park

## - John Atkins, 2016

I'd like to thank everyone who showed up to work in February- it was a much larger group than usual. It was good to see some fresh faces out there! Having a large group allowed us to divide and conquer several projects.



*Bill Novakoski, Jamey Douglass, John Atkins, John Burns, Ben Clement and Tina Atkins behind the camera.*

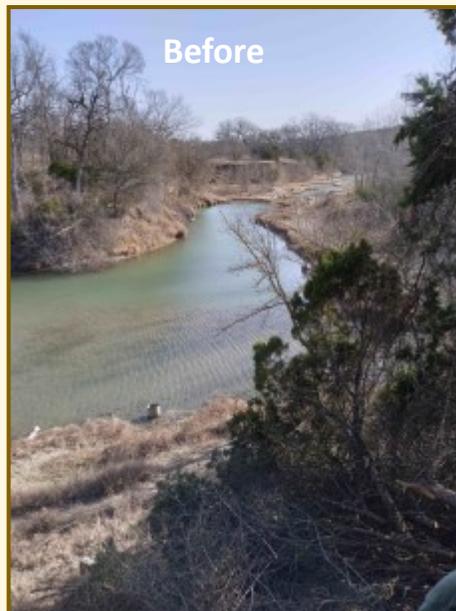


*Andrea Liles and Lynn Fleming seem to have wardrobe issues?*

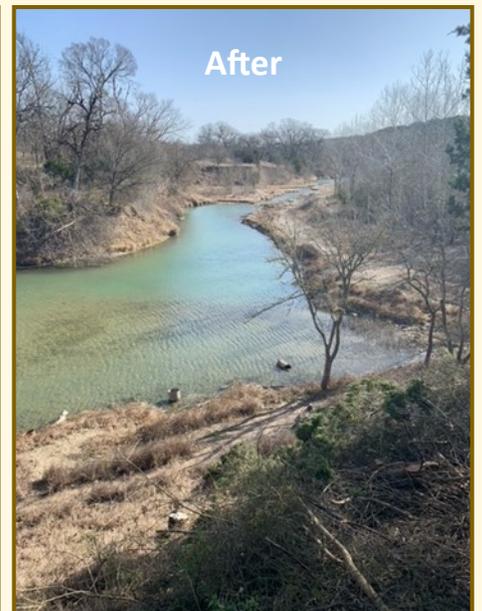
The number one task was to clear the brush from around an observation platform overlooking the Lampasas River. It should have been a relatively quick and easy job, but it proved to be a bit of a challenge. The grapevines and briars made it a tangled mess and required some gymnastics on our part to bring the trees to the ground.

Once cleared, we were all surprised at the great view of the

river it provided and almost every hiker now stops to admire the view. While this was going on, other team members moved down the trails to collect trash. We wrapped up the day by doing some further improvements on the new section of trail we had built in January.



Before



After

# Chalk Ridge Falls Park *cont.*

In March, Tina (photographer) and I (orange hardhat) were joined by Bill Cornelius, Marian Riegel, Ben Clement, Jamey Douglass, and Robb Startzman. It was great having Marian join us after her annual migration to the coast. Seeing Marian is a sure sign that spring has arrived, and the Ashe Juniper pollen season has ended. We spent the morning clearing brush and removing rocks from the trails.



***Ben Clement chews away at the ornery log.***

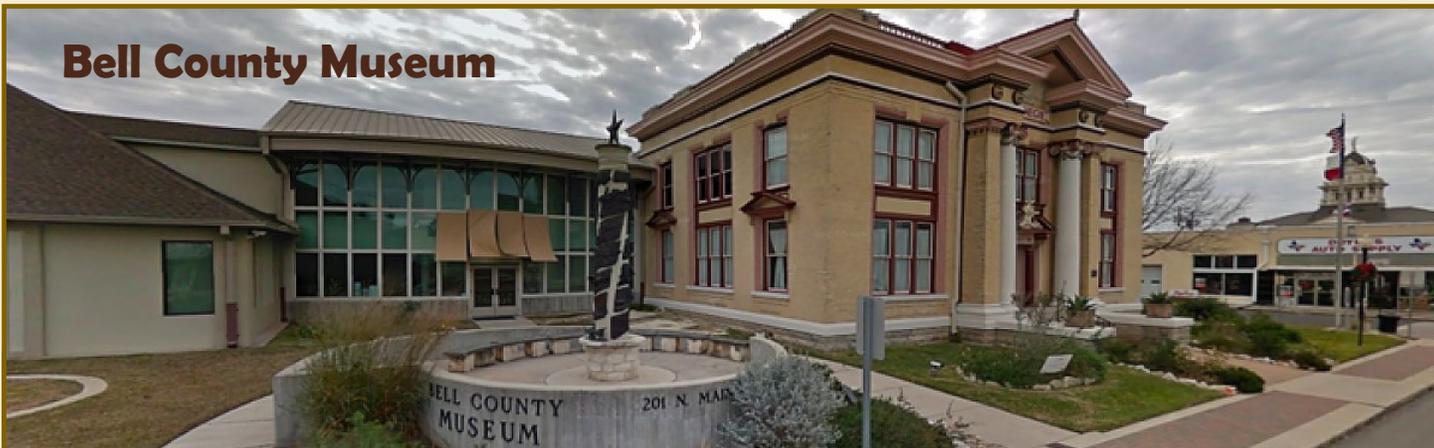
In April, the plan is to conduct an orientation and trash pick-up at Chalk Ridge Falls for the new students. Since we will be going up the creek to the springs and cave, this hike is not recommended for anyone who has mobility issues. Hope to see you there!

Our biggest challenge came in the form of a large cottonwood log that blocked the river trail. Due to the size of the log and the angle that it was laying, we had to take it out by chunks. We eventually cut a path through it using a combination of chainsaw, mattock, and Pulaski (those are tools, not people).



***John Atkins takes a moment to savor the victory over the log.***

# Bell County Museum



- Lynn Fleming, 2003

## BELL COUNTY MUSEUM NATIVE LANDSCAPE

At the last museum workday, Marilyn Whitworth, Jamey Douglass and I were joined by two of our newest members! Thanks to Colleen Smith-Fey and Stan Simons for coming out and lending a hand to spruce up the museum grounds. The landscape still has its winter clothes on, but will soon be popping out in spring time glory! We were so busy, we forgot to get many working pictures of our progress, but the final results of our efforts looked great.

Photos by Jamey Douglass



Marilyn Whitworth



Lynn Fleming and Colleen Smith-Fey





# McKinney Roughs Nature Park

*Ironclad Beetle - photos by Zoe*

**- Zoe Rascoe, 2004**

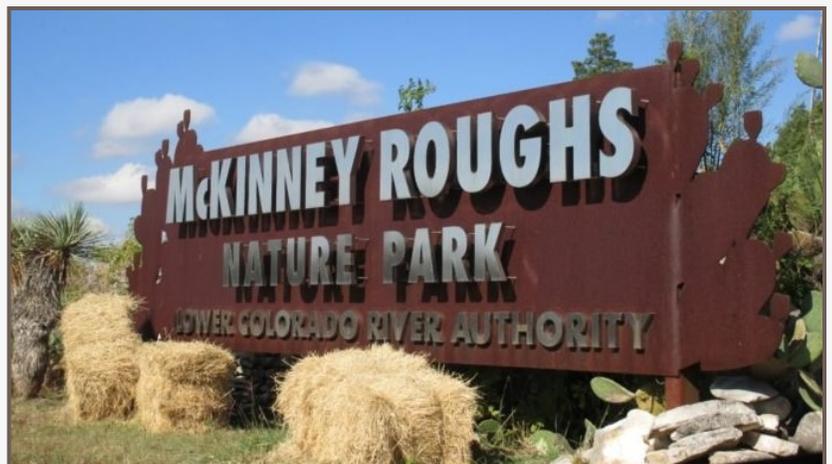
If you are looking for a daytrip to sink into nature, I would put McKinney Roughs Nature Park on your list. It is an 1110 acre nature preserve along the Colorado River run by the Lower Colorado River Authority that is located 13 miles east of the Austin airport on Hwy 71. There are 20 interconnecting trails totaling nearly 20 miles for hikers, bikers and horse riders.



Of interest to Master Naturalists, the Park includes 4 ecosystem: Blackland Prairie, Post Oak Savannah, East Texas Piney Woods and a riparian zone along the river. Trails are open sunrise to sunset, pets are welcome, kayaking is handy and fishing is allowed. There are bluffs for lovely long views over the river and to put a little huff in your hike, and spots to sit quietly and watch birds in all their busyness. There is a nice Visitor Center (8am-5pm) where bikes can be

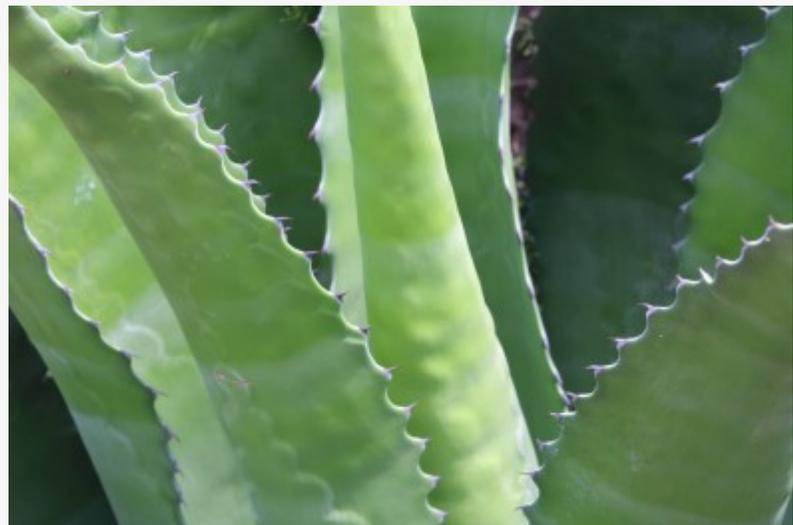
rented. We were there in a hot September (aren't they all?) - be sure to pack plenty of drinking water.

There is an outfitted bunkhouse for rent that sleeps 10 people, and a dormitory that sleeps 112 (with AC!) There's a pavilion to rent that is definitely set up as a wedding venue. Grab your hiking boots and plan to spend a day there. *Cont.*





# McKinney Roughs Nature Park *cont.*



*Clockwise from above:*  
*American Beautyberry—with berries; river view; one of nearly a dozen agave species native to Texas; beautiful seeds of the Coral Bean plant; the McKinney Roughs Visitor Center with picnic area, restrooms, and room rentals.*





# Musings of the Contemplative Naturalist *Water, Soil, Air & Sunlight*

- Bill Novakoski, 2020

Today, consider with me the water, soil, air and sunlight as we appreciate this amazing natural world, we are so fortunate to have within our environment.

An ancient naturalist wrote,

In the beginning...the earth was barren, with no form of life; it was under a roaring ocean covered in darkness.—*Genesis 1:1-2, Common English Version Bible.*

A time of contemplation sprang up within me as I walked the half mile to the Lampasas River on a sunny, cool and breezy spring morning in late March. The chirping of robins and chickadees along with



the call of crows delighted my ears. I noticed a few spectacular splashes of purple on spring's blooming redbuds and tiny embryonic leaves on the cedar elm twigs. I paused for a time on the banks of the Lampasas River which forms a northeastern boundary of our River Ridge Ranch community near Ding Dong, Texas.

From this river bank vantage point, the water and its earthen bed over which it flows could be seen. Soil erosion made the roots of trees visible along the opposite river bank. These roots had grown down into the earth to absorb minerals and to drink of the water below. The

exposed skin of my face and arms made me aware of the warmth of the sunlight and the presence of the cool breezes.



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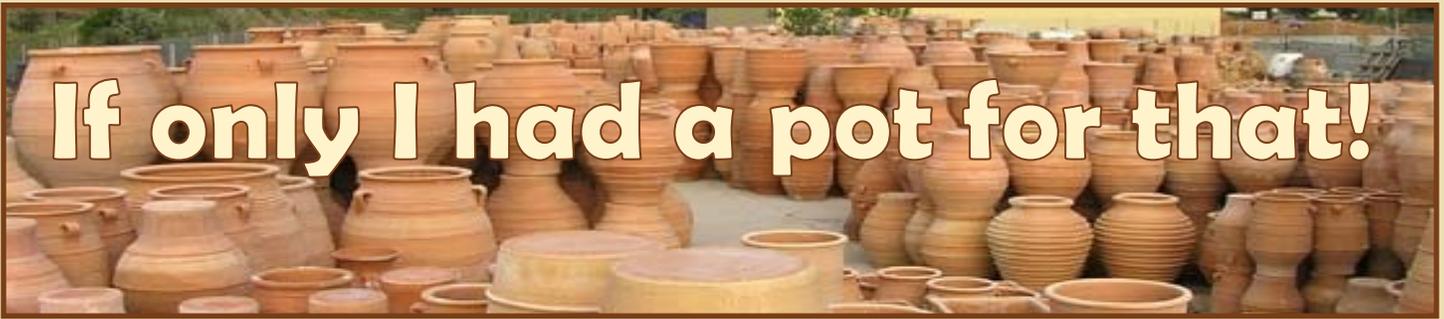
## Musings of the Contemplative Naturalist *cont.*

Recalling ecology courses and Master Naturalist lectures, I remembered soil and air provide minerals and carbon vital for plants to grow and reproduce. I also recalled that water, soil and air together are not sufficient for plant life; sunlight must be present for plants to synthesize these into a nutritious sugar recipe. The interaction of these three ingredients--water, soil and air—with sunlight are vital to sustain plant, insect, animal and human life. How wonderfully Nature has provided everything necessary!

I became sad when thinking how humankind can interfere with these necessary cycles. While flooding, drought, wind storms and lightning-sparked fires sometimes upset this balance, Nature can prevail over these forces and restore its balance. Human behavior, however, can devastate this balance by sparking wildfires, introducing invasive plants or animals, and poisoning the air, ground and water with toxic chemicals. Nature may be unable to recover from these assaults.

So what did I conclude from my reflections? Water, earth, and air are vital to life and can be polluted or depleted and thereby place all living creatures at risk of harm or extinction. Humankind must act in ways to protect these elements for the benefit of all living beings. If humankind does not act wisely, we risk returning to the barren lifelessness of the beginning which the ancient naturalist wrote about.





- Lynn Fleming, 2004

Have you been wanting to add native plants to your landscape, but don't know where to start? An easy way to introduce natives is in containers. Container gardens are also a plus for apartment dwellers, those with limited yard space and folks with strict HOA rules.

Planting in containers also lets you arrange natives at will without having to uproot their sometimes-delicate root systems. You can also mix and match them with more common plants for lovely displays during different times of the year. Little bluestem makes a beautiful vertical backdrop for lower growing winecups, blackfoot daisies or chocolate daisies.

There are a few things to consider for container gardening. Number one on the list is container size. Make sure that you choose one that is large enough and won't tip over if the plant is tall like a prairie grass. Since we live in Texas, don't forget that you will have to water – even the natives get thirsty!

Plant choice is next. You may have heard of the “*Thrillers, Fillers, and Spillers*” formula for containers. It applies to natives as well. Choices of “thrillers” can include gaillardia (fire wheel), bee balm, bluebonnets, milkweed, mealy sage, and many others. Mountain laurel with its grape Kool-Aid bloom fragrance can be a show stopper as well. “Fillers” can include many grass species such as little bluestem, bushy bluestem, sideoats grama (the State Grass of Texas), inland sea oats, and lower forbs such as chile pequin. Believe it or not, grasses are quite showy with their blooms. They are small, but pack a punch for color. “Spillers” that work well are frog fruit, maidenhair or wood ferns, and evening primrose.

Here's an added bonus for natives: they attract pollinators! Butterflies, bees, and hummingbirds will love you for planting what they need. Butterfly weed and mealy sage are irresistible and are often covered with various fliers looking for nectar and pollen.

So this spring and summer, give natives a try in your containers. They won't let you down.



**Blackfoot Daisy**

# PICTURE THIS



## Birds in Focus

**BY EARL NOTTINGHAM**

A familiarity with the behavior and nuances of birds and other wildlife is apparent the moment you see the elegant photography of Beeville-based photographer Cissy Beasley. Through the artful combination of lighting, composition and animal form, she consistently produces extraordinary images of ordinary objects.

Cissy, who entered her first Wildlife in Focus competition in 2013, is a relative newcomer to the photographic profession, but a lifetime spent in the field at the family ranch near Laredo taught her well about wildlife behavior.

“With my father and brothers as guides and teachers, I learned how to be a respectful guest in nature’s house,” Cissy says. “This comfort level has served me well as I’ve traversed the path of nature photography.”

*Photographer Cissy Beasley offers tips for better bird photos.*

She is well on her “path” as she continues to rack up contest wins with her artistic eye and shares her talents with others via workshops and social media. She also uses photography as a tool for conservation to visually tell the stories of threatened bird species like the black skimmer and the perils faced by ground-nesting birds like the royal tern.

“Doing what I believe I am meant to do — fulfilling my purpose — gives me great joy and satisfaction as I use photography as a means of education,” she says.

Here are Cissy’s top 10 tips for creating better bird photographs.

- Spend time watching and learning bird behavior. This will allow you to anticipate what the bird will do next and keep you ready to shoot at the right moment.

# PICTURE THIS

- For birds in flight, keep moving the lens with the subject. It takes only a second for the subject to get out of frame and then it's gone. Go outside and practice moving your lens with things that move, especially with longer lenses.



- Heads beats tails every time. For photos of birds in flight, strive to take images of the bird approaching or directly in front of you, but not going away from you.

- Check the background. Try to position your subject, whether in flight or static, against a nondistracting background. This may mean waiting a moment to fire the shutter or moving the camera slightly in a different direction.

- Maintain focus on the eyes of the bird, even if it means letting other parts of the body be slightly out of focus. This is true when photographing other species also.

- Set up and use your camera's "back-button" autofocus feature. This allows you to control the autofocus separate from the shutter button.

- Use your camera's focus tracking feature. Most newer cameras offer the option to acquire and hold focus on a fast-moving subject as it moves across the frame. Consult your owner's manual for specific tracking modes.

- For close-up beauty shots of individual birds, try to get the light behind you. This will fully illuminate the subject and display its distinct avian features.

- Think Fast. To freeze wing movement, use a fast shutter speed such as 1 /2500th of a second or faster for larger birds and at least 1/3200th of a second for smaller birds like hummingbirds.

- Don't rule out camera phones for taking great bird photos. On newer phones, you can touch your screen and the phone will make adjustments for exposure. Take advantage of the zoom feature to bring the bird up closer. Several third-party camera apps offer even more custom camera features.

To see Cissy's work and workshop schedule go to [www.coastandcactus.com](http://www.coastandcactus.com).

*Texas Parks & Wildlife (November 2018).*

*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, Managing 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](http://tpwmagazine.com/photography).*



# BAMBOO FOR YOU

- Bill Cornelius, 2020

## Bamboo—Maintenance and Control

In the first articles of this column 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 how best to grow and control the two major types.

Most bamboos prefer well drained sandy loam with sufficient organic content and a neutral pH of 7.0. Do not plant in areas where water tends to stand after rain/irrigation. Bamboo will grow in less ideal conditions, but for maximum growth try to get as close to the ideal environment as possible. Another consideration is sunlight. Most bamboos require at least 4 hours of full sun. There are some of the smaller wide leafed bamboos that do well in shady conditions as would occur as an understory plant in the wild.

As we you may have observed, bamboo grows quickly and predictably and therefore is fairly easy to control, but like any growing plant it does need attention. So, how do we control bamboo?



The clumpers are the easiest to work with as they spread very slowly (2-12 inches/year) and tend to do so in an ever-widening circle. They do, however become rather dense. Their canes need thinning at some point, but because they are so dense, they make excellent screening if you plant them in a row.

*Cont.*

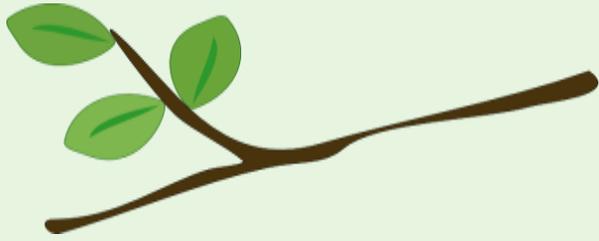
# BAMBOO <CONT.>

As described in earlier columns, the running bamboo rhizomes will try to spread if given the chance, but since we know their growth habit, we can limit their expansion. An established grove of leptomorphic bamboo sends up new culms in the spring. If wanted, the new culms can be left alone to grow, and if not, they are easily cut and some of the varieties can be eaten as bamboo shoots. If they have spread to the lawn then just run over them with a lawn mower and over time they will be suppressed and cease to spread in that direction. If you are trying to eradicate a grove then cut the mature canes and mow the new culms that try to come up the next year and eventually it will die out.



If you are planting a runner bamboo and want to contain its spread then dig a shallow trench around the planting about a foot wide and when new rhizomes try to cross just cut them back. If you want total control, dig a much deeper trench around the whole planting of about 20-36 inches deep and put in a barrier of 30-100 mil polyethylene plastic, and make sure there is a couple inches of plastic above the soil line. There are commercially available barriers designed for bamboo, most come in rolls of various lengths.

The [American Bamboo Society](#) is a good resource for information on planting and care of both clumping and running bamboo. Membership in ABS includes a helpful online magazine.



- Mary Ann Everett, 2003

# Out on a Limb

**Tree Description:** Small tree, 30—45 ft. tall in limestone hills and canyons.

**Blooms:** Male and female flowers are borne on separate trees. Blooms are red, green, and purple in March and April.

**Fruit:** Small woody winged samara in 6-8 inch long panicles.

**Leaves:** Pinnate leaves. Opposite leaf arrangement. Leaflets usually 5, rounded. In the fall, these small trees turn pastel hues of red, gold, orange, and purple that compete with the reds of the Red Oak and Flameleaf Sumac.

**Bark:** Smooth and light brown when young, becomes patterned like basket weave of interlacing diamond shapes as it ages. The ridges are light gray to somewhat silvery, and background furrows almost black on older trees.

**Location:** Canyon bluffs, rocky slopes in open woods, and along lakes. Grows in thin-soiled hills. Usually confined to Texas, except for a northern extension into the Arbuckle Mountains of Oklahoma.

**Heat & Drought Tolerance:** Due to its low usage of water, that makes it an excellent choice for the landscape. It is very drought tolerant.

**Interesting facts:** Its conspicuous fall colors make it a good ornamental tree. It is long living. Birds eat the fruit, and it makes a good cover and nesting site. It is the larval host of the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail.

[Click here for name of tree](#)



# MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

500 Hours!



Jessica Dieter reaches 500 Hour Milestone! Congratulations!

250 Hours!



Juan Anaya reaches his 250 Hour Milestone! Way to Go!



John Fairlie and Mary Ann Everett recertify for 2022



Sharon Schmitz and Sue Critz recertify for 2021



Travis Jez reviews TXDOT's Roadside Wildflower Planting Project at Feb Chapter Meeting.

Slide shows a TXDOT leadership goal in 1937:  
*"Don't mow until the wildflowers have gone to seed"*



In March, Mary Ann Everett presented the basics of Wildscaping home properties with CTMN members Sue Valdez, Andreas Wooten and the Quisenberry Master Gardeners

# Good to Know...

In March and early April, these little beetles were *everywhere!* Facebook was full of wonderment of why baby June Bugs would be out in March. Wait? Baby June Bugs are grubs, not tiny beetles. We tapped our friend Wizzie Brown, AgriLife Extension's Integrated Pest Management Specialist (and our very fun entomology instructor!), to get to the bottom of the buzz. Here's is the real answer:

They're still "June" bugs, but a different species.

June bugs is a large category name for the beetles that have that same general body shape/appearance and show up in spring-early summer. Depending upon species, they will emerge at various times and look slightly different from other species (different colors, different sizes, etc).

*Good to know!!*



# Good to Know...

## SHOREBIRD ID TIPS



- Pick **ONE** bird from the crowd to ID.
- Narrow it down to a category from the silhouettes at right.
- Find **THREE** clues to its ID. Focus first on **SHAPE, SIZE,** and **BEHAVIOR,** THEN on color pattern, markings, habitat, range, and calls.

### SHAPE

- **Bill:** Length, curvature, tip pointing (up/down), shape (pointy/blunt)
- **Leg length**
- **Neck length**
- **Body shape:** Compact vs. elongated

### SIZE

- Size is important only in comparison with another bird.
- Killdeer is right in the middle on the size scale.
- "Small shorebirds" are smaller than a Killdeer.
- "Large shorebirds" are larger than a Killdeer.

### FORAGING BEHAVIORS

- **Peeps:** Head down, walk, pick, probe
- **Plover:** Run and stop, occasional "hiccup" (similar to Solitary Sandpiper's "bob up")
- **Lesser Yellowlegs:** Stroll and pick
- **Stilt Sandpiper:** "Oil derrick" up-and-down probe (like dowitcher but rear end tips up)
- **Dowitcher:** "Sewing machine" bill but body stays horizontal
- **White-rumped Sandpiper:** "Tip up"—tail goes up
- **Red-necked Phalarope:** Swim and run (moves all the time), also swim and spin



Peeps



Plovers



Curlews & Godwits



"Tringines" (genus Tringa, Stilt & Solitary Sandpipers, Willet)



Snipes



Phalaropes



Others (Upland and Buff-breasted Sandpipers, Stilts, Avocets, Turnstones, Oystercatchers)

## SHOREBIRD QUICK GUIDE

Least Sandpiper 6"  
Semipalmated Sandpiper  
Western Sandpiper  
Snowy Plover



Baird's Sandpiper  
White-rumped Sandpiper  
Piping Plover  
Semipalmated Plover 7.5"  
Red-necked Phalarope  
Spotted Sandpiper



Wilson's Plover 8"  
Sanderling

Buff-breasted Sandpiper  
Dunlin  
Solitary Sandpiper 8.5"  
Purple/Rock Sandpipers  
Stilt Sandpiper

Pectoral Sandpiper  
Wilson's Phalarope 9.5"  
Black Turnstone  
Ruddy Turnstone



Lesser Yellowlegs  
Red Knot  
Killdeer 10.5"  
Surfbird  
Golden-Plovers

Dowitchers  
Wandering Tattler 11"  
Wilson's Snipe  
Black-bellied Plover



Greater Yellowlegs 14"

Black-necked Stilt  
Willet 15"  
Hudsonian Godwit

Whimbrel  
Marbled Godwit  
American Avocet  
American Oystercatcher 18"  
Black Oystercatcher



Long-billed Curlew 23"

Purchase our video-based, online Shorebird ID course hosted by Dr. Kevin McGowan. Learn all 47 shorebird species from across the U.S. and Canada:

Academy.AllAboutBirds.org

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology  
**Bird Academy**  
Academy.AllAboutBirds.org

All photos © Kevin J. McGowan

Good advice! Start with **ONE** bird from the bunch to ID.

More help at <https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/>

# Contributing Authors to this Newsletter



Bill Novakoski



Linda Fairlie



John Atkins



Bill Cornelius



John Burns



Jean Solana



Lynn Fleming



Mary Ann Everett



Zoe Rascoe



Keller Matthews



Guy Fowler



*Photo: Miller Springs Nature Center*

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**Newsletter Staff**

- Editor:** Zoe Rascoe
- Proofreader:** Bill Cornelius

**Contributing Writers:** Linda Fairlie, Jean Solana, John Burns, John Atkins, Bill Novakoski, Bill Cornelius, Lynn Fleming, Keller Matthews, Guy Fowler, Mary Ann Everett, Zoe Rascoe.

**Contributed Images:** John Atkins, Tina Atkins, John Burns, Juan Anaya, Jean Solana, Jamey Douglass, Bill Cornelius, Keller Matthews, Bill Novakoski, 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](mailto: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 at the AgriLife Extension Building in Belton. Meeting notices will be sent to chapter members with location information and all members are welcome.