

# The Tracker



Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter June 2022

## Behind the Gates of Fort Hood

- Jean Solana, 2019

Fort Hood, with its 335 square miles of beautiful Central Texas rolling hills, is a nature magnet disguised as a military base. Behind the gates are nearly 900 plant species, 371 bird species, 49 kinds of mammals, 71 different reptiles and amphibians and 60 species of fish. The base sits on the ecosystems edges of the Edwards Plateau, Crosstimbers & Prairies and just west of the Blackland Prairie. There is a lot of nature to see, but it is easy to never experience it as the guarded gates may intimidate you.

Never fear - I have discovered two opportunities for you to venture onto Fort Hood.



I first learned about access from CTMN member Bruce Polikoff in an email. Charlie Plimpton, the lead Avian/Pollinator biologist at Fort Hood, needed volunteers to assist with his bird and plant surveys. There is also a beautiful native garden that needs gardeners. The base has a whole building full of biologists behind the Sportsmen's Center at Fort Hood. They are part of Fort Hood's *Adaptive and Integrative Management* program that focuses on proactively managing at-risk species such as the

golden-cheeked warbler, black-capped vireo, northern bobwhite quail, and [monarch butterfly](#). I got my pass at the Visitor's Center and started helping with 6 am -12 noon bird surveys. We hop in Charlie's truck and survey 10 points starting at dawn, listening for 5 minutes at each point. Charlie hears, sees, and identifies the birds - I write them down on the clipboard. We may hear northern bobwhite, black-capped vireo, or summer tanager. We always hear painted bunting. Then we do 1 -3 plant surveys, evaluating the prairie as native, hybrid, or encroached depending on what native, non-native or encroaching trees we find.

*Cont.*

## Behind the Gates of Fort Hood cont.

Once a month, with the full moon, we start at 3:30am and do owl and nightjar surveys. We hear mainly Chuck-will's-widow, some common nighthawks and a screech owl. Hanging out with Charlie is like having a free bird/plant professor.

If you want to go it on your own, you can get a Sportsmen's pass. You go to the Visitor's Center and get a pass, go to the Sportsmen's Center and fill out some more papers (I paid \$14 for a general pass, Pete paid \$19 for a fishing pass – you still need a Texas fishing license), then go back to the Visitor's Center and receive a one year pass to the base. (They have a great cheeseburger bar there, by the way.) Then you can access most of the base except for "Live Fire" areas. No reason to be in those areas!



Charlie Plimpton

There are many lakes for fishing, and birds and pollinators to see. So far, we have checked out Engineer Lake, Larned Lake, and Nolan Lake. We even saw TPWD Inks Lake Hatchery folks pouring Channel Catfish into Larned Lake. The military uses a website, accessed by cell phone, called Huntrac to let them know where you will be on the property but it is not necessary with the lakes we visited.

Our chapter has taken many of our Texas Master Naturalist trainees to Fort Hood for ornithology and archeology field classes with the Cultural and Natural Resources experts. The 2022 trainees were there in April—there are so many bird species to see! If this all sounds amazing, then I challenge you to boldly go and explore beautiful Fort Hood!



# President's Pen

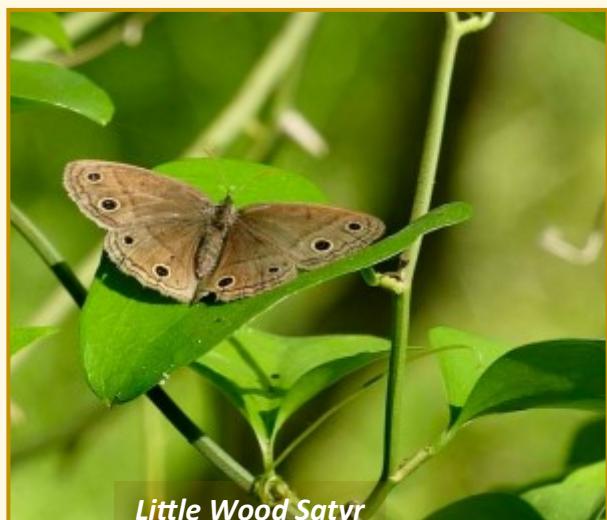
Linda Fairlie, 2018

**Do you love to be outside interacting with nature?** Wherever I go, I am always looking for wildlife. Since I became a Texas Master Naturalist, I have learned so much about a variety of flora and fauna. I know a lot more bird names and songs. I can distinguish several more butterflies. I have learned about pollinators and what plants attract them. Beauty is in the details, and I am able to focus on details much more than ever before. This knowledge has been obtained through Advanced Training, setting up and participating in bioblitzes, doing bird counts, monitoring butterflies, participating in Odolympics (looking for dancers and dragonflies), and using iNaturalist, eBird, and Merlin phone apps.

I learn a lot by just doing activities with other Master Naturalists who know more than I do. One of my favorite yearly activities is doing the Christmas Bird Count with Mary Ann Everett because I may be able to spot the bird, but she can name it! I wanted to share some of my wildlife observations with you – mostly birds and “bugs.”



*Widow Skimmer*



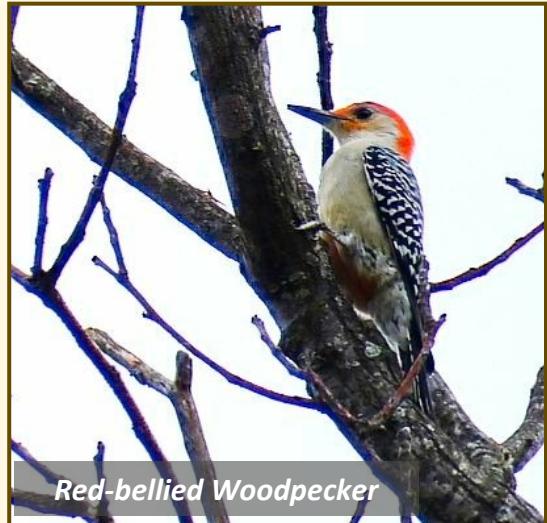
*Little Wood Satyr*

Not only have I learned about wildlife, but I have been able to pass along my knowledge to others. My husband is now a Master Naturalist, and together we look for birds and butterflies. I have taught birding to a group of 9- to 11-year-old girls in American Heritage Girls. I have participated in many educational outreach projects, teaching topics like bugs, birds, and mammals. I take my grandchildren out looking for bugs to identify.

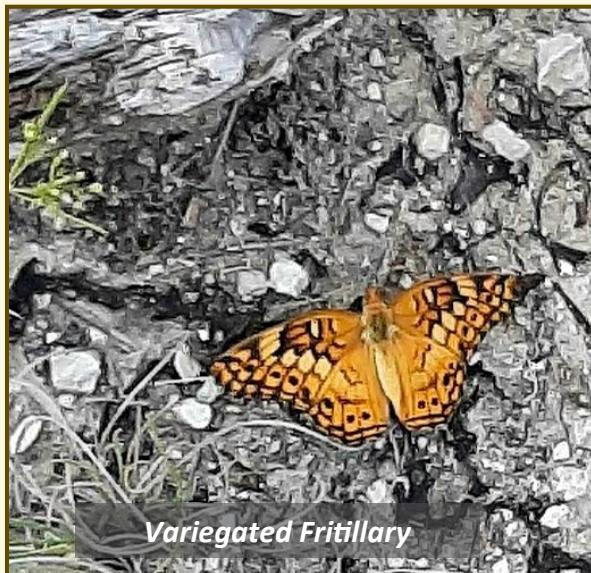
*Cont.*

# President's Pen cont.

Did you know that with the Merlin app you can record a bird song and identify that bird without even being able to see it? Merlin also helps identify birds you do see but don't know. Put in the location, date, relative size of the bird (sparrow to goose), main colors, and what the bird was doing, and Merlin will give you pictures of different birds that meet the criteria. Then you can scroll through and identify your bird. You can even listen to the various bird calls to narrow down your choice, see samples of male and female birds and other information. Once you find it, you can save that bird to your eBird account.



*Red-bellied Woodpecker*



The Seek app is for children of all ages as a step before iNaturalist. It allows you to scan flora or fauna and will tell you what it is most of the time. You can use it with pictures on your device or by simply using your camera within the app. This app will let you put your observations into iNaturalist. However, it is a better choice for those casual observations that you don't necessarily want to put into iNaturalist but just want to know what you are seeing. That way, your 7-year-old won't flood iNaturalist with pictures of your cat.

iNaturalist not only confirms many of my observations, but they can be used for research by others and I can

go back and remember what I saw. I picked up a Giant Walkingstick (right) in the yard at my sister's house and added it in iNaturalist.



I've seen many birds, butterflies and dragonflies while doing CTMN activities. I have seen cool and unusual creatures around my house and the park where I like to walk. I love seeing creatures in their natural habitat!





# 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 is replacing the Leon River bridge south of Mother Neff so Tx Hwy 236 from the south, Oglesby Neff Park Road and CR 338 are closed. Please come to the main entrance of the park by accessing Hwy 236 from the north on FM 107 or FM 2671.*

We had a busy Spring at Mother Neff. In March (L to R) Bill Novakoski, Tom Gerik, Paula Finley, Cassie Daley (yay - new trainee!), Bill Abright and Jean Solana (photographer) transplanted switchgrass around the prairie parking lot and found Indian Grass and Little Bluestem in the Prairie. A native grasses garden has been started at the Headquarters Garden and identification labels will be added. New bird house sites were located at the Prairie Loop and we lopped small cedars to prevent further encroachment on the Prairie.



On the April workday Jamie Douglass, Bill Abright, Matt Ridley, and Jean Solana welcomed Carolyn Williams (a 2022 Trainee) to the group. To make her feel welcome, we talked dirty - clearing Bastard Cabbage near Headquarters and Bastard Oak and other brush along Park Road 14. We loved having Master Naturalist-turned Park Ranger John Ziegeler as our work leader and trailer driver. Matt Ridley had a mega-workout shoveling dirt off the road.

*Cont.*

# Mother Neff State Park

*Cont.*

Our bird boxes are staying occupied with Carolina Chickadees, Tufted Titmice, and Bewick's Wrens - we are finished with 5 fledgling groups - about 26 new birds! We moved one bird box from the woods behind the playscape to the Prairie Loop - hopeful for Bluebirds.

The milkweed survey has been a disappointment this spring. We had 60 healthy milkweed plants but very few eggs or caterpillars. Over 5 weeks



I found 11 eggs and 8 caterpillars. A successful milkweed patch will have a lot of "chewed-up" plants but that was rare this spring. I saw the most Monarch butterflies in late March and the milkweed didn't appear until mid-April. Poor timing.

On April 30th we observed the annual TPWD Great Birding Classic by participating in a "Big Sit" by the intern cabin near the Leon River. CTMN members Guy Fowler and Jean Solana were there - Guy was thrilled because he saw a big coral snake, and we had Gil Eckrich for our bird guide. About 15 folks participated and 50 species of

birds were identified from this one spot! A pair of summer tanagers sat right over our heads.

*First Sunday Talk with a Naturalist* (by Jean!) continued at the Headquarters area. On April 3<sup>rd</sup> common Birds of Mother Neff were highlighted and on May 1<sup>st</sup> Pollinators at Mother Neff was the topic. It was good to host both children and adult visitors at the Park.



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**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



*Jean Solana*



- John Burns, 2018

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

In March we met with James Grant, Assistant Director of City of Belton Parks Department, to discuss a possible short reroute of the trail just above the Green Pond area. The existing trail was eroding and

becoming a hazard. We were able to identify a good work-around area to locate the new trail. The reroute was the task for the April workday. I was not able to attend so John Atkins took the reins and guided the effort. There were five volunteers (L to R): Ben Clement, Stan Simons, Bill Novakoski, Keller Matthews, and John Atkins behind the camera. The team cut the new trail and moved the existing bridge upstream that had been previously constructed by an Eagle Scout. The team also did an excellent job of filling in the old trail so visitors would not continue to use it. When the team finished the trail work, they noticed an adjacent area had recently had a grass fire and it had done some damage to some Ashe Junipers. John decided to take advantage of the fire and remove some of the damaged

trees. These trees were then used to help disguise the old trail. See before and after photos below.

In May after we did our work for the day, we took the opportunity to run by to see the work that was done in April. I was amazed at how much five people had done and how well they had disguised and blocked off the old trail. If I had not known it was there, I would not have thought it was ever a trail. GREAT JOB and a big thank you to John Atkins for leading the efforts!



# Miller Springs Nature Center *cont.*

In May we were back to the normal work of removing invasive plants—chinaberry and ligustrum trees. We had eight volunteers (L to R below): John Burns (photographer), Bert Peeples, Ben Clement, Stan Simons, John Atkins and Bill Novakoski. Diane Cooney from the Hearth of Texas Chapter worked on litter pickup. She is a founder and friend of CTMN! Keller knew of a tree that was blocking the River trail and decided to go take care of that problem and missed the group photo. The rest of us worked along the Armadillo trail where there were, and still are, quite a few large Chinaberry trees and some good-sized Waxleaf Ligustrum. John A worked on some really hard to access Chinaberry trees. We knew where John A was but the foliage was so dense all we could only hear his chainsaw. This is pretty typical of John A's work locations. That's why is it so hard to get a picture of him working. (I think that is his plan.) It was a hot day so we only worked a couple of hours. It was a good, productive two hours that felt like six or eight. We also did a quick job to put up two new signs on the native bee houses located in the green area south of the Miller Springs parking area. The signs talk about the life and work of native mason bees and were kindly provided by CTMN member Kerry Fillip.



Mason Bee Boxes near parking lot.



# Chalk Ridge Falls Park

- John Atkins, 2016

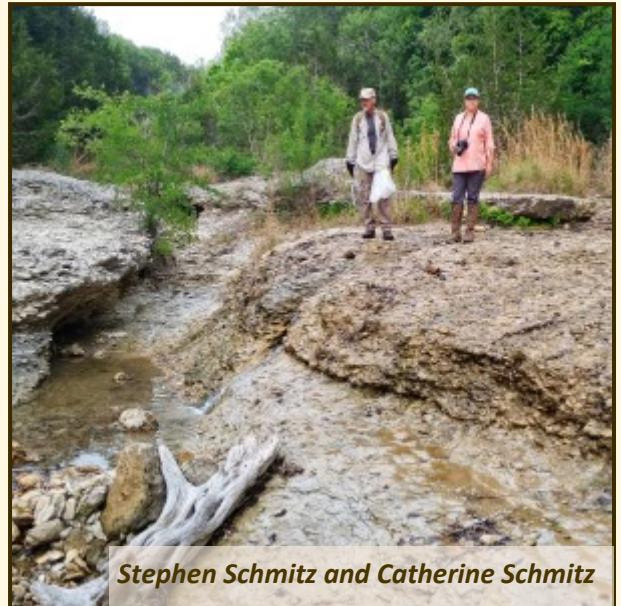
We kicked April off at Chalk Ridge Falls by leading a troop of Copperas Cove Webelos on a hike. Their leader, Anna Larson, had contacted me about helping them meet their three-mile hike requirement.



We chose Chalk Ridge Falls since springtime is normally a great time to observe the caves and natural springs. Unfortunately, because of the dry weather, the springs were mere trickles, but the cave was still a big hit. About halfway back down the canyon, we stopped for snack time (another big hit!). After we

arrived back at the bridge, Tina informed me that a rattlesnake had made its presence known from inside cactus patch to the back half of the troop. He was never visible, he just sat in there rattling away. The next challenge was the suspension bridge, which they all managed to cross, with some encouragement. Next it was pictures at the waterfall and a hike to a nice sandbar for a riverside lunch. After this we hiked back up the river to the parking lot and loaded a bunch of happy and tired kids in the vehicles for a trip back to Copperas Cove.

Our regular April workday was planned to be primarily an orientation to Chalk Ridge Falls. We had a small turnout consisting of Ben Clement and Stephen and Catherine Schmitz but we drove on with the plan anyway. We had a good time checking out the reptiles, wildlife signs, and caves before moving back downstream collecting trash. We continued down to the Scout benches, then back to the falls. Here we split up, with the Schmitz's continuing to explore, Ben taking one route back to the parking lot, and I another. Of course, we all had full bags of trash.



Stephen Schmitz and Catherine Schmitz

# Chalk Ridge Falls Park *cont.*

For the May workday, the objectives were to remove two large metal trash cans from the river and cut back vegetation that was encroaching on the trails. I have no idea what the original purpose for the cans was, but they had been there for as long as I have been going to the nature area. Tina and I were joined by Ben Clement, Marilyn Whitworth, and Marie McDermott. While Ben and I wrestled the cans from the muck and took them back to the park, the women started cleaning up the vegetation along the trails.

Eventually we all met again at the falls. I crossed the stream and started cleaning up the far side when I heard a commotion from the near side. When I linked up a few minutes later, I was informed that Marilyn had taken a spill and almost slid into the stream. Marilyn was banged and bruised, so Marie volunteered to escort her back to her vehicle and make sure she didn't try anymore bellyflops into the river that morning. Luckily, she only ended up with a good bruise, sore backside, and a story.

Unfortunately, we know that the focus for the next two months will be cleaning the trails since school is out and there are two major holidays to contend with. Don't be surprised if Chalk Ridge gets closed again this summer for blue-green algae. I'm also thinking about getting a bicycle helmet for Marilyn to wear next time! = )



*Ben Clement and John Atkins  
conquered the cans*



*Marie McDermott finds Chic-fil-A in all  
the wrong places.*



*Ben Clement tackles another Hippie Hut.*

# Great Texas Wildlife Trails

- John Fairlie, 2021

## GTWT Adopt-A-Loop Coordinator

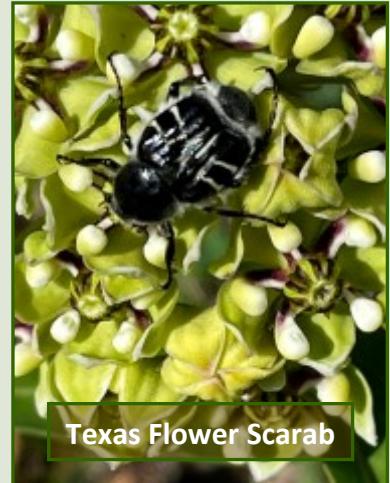
One of our chapter's ongoing volunteer projects is our quarterly wildlife surveys for Adopt-a-Loop. Adopt-a-Loop (AAL) is a project of Texas Parks and Wildlife, as part of their Great Texas Wildlife Trails (GTWT) program. The purpose of the GTWT program is to promote birding and wildlife viewing in the state, and the purpose of the AAL project is to provide periodic site evaluations to better understand the distribution of Texas' wildlife along the GTWT. The trails of the GTWT have been divided into loops, which are adopted by TMN chapters. Our chapter has adopted the Chisolm Trail Loop, which includes eight sites -- Chalk Ridge Falls and Dana Peak Park on Stillhouse Hollow Lake, Belton Lakeview Park, the Miller Springs Nature Center, Mother Neff State Park, Lake Waco Wetlands, Cameron Park, and the Cameron Park Zoo.

We did our fifth round of site evaluations in March. One of the fascinating things for me as we



continue this project is how the variable weather conditions effect both the flora and fauna that we observe on trails. The drought has significantly affected some of our sites, especially Dana Peak Park and the Lake Waco Wetlands (or should we start calling them the "drylands"...). We were still able to spot birds, but not nearly as many or as varied as last year. The quantity and variety of insects and other wildlife was diminished as well, but we did get to see snakes! Our pool of volunteers continues to grow, with the following CTMN members joining us for this round: Sue Valdez, Jean Solana, John Fairlie, Linda Fairlie, Catherine Schmitz, Sharon Schmitz, Stephen Schmitz, Jamey Douglass, Matt Ridley, Bill Novakoski, and Daisy Klassy. Thank you all for your help!

*(Group photo L-R) Jamey Douglass, Sue Valdez, Linda Fairlie, Jean Solana, Daisy Klassy, and John Fairlie at Cameron Park in Waco.*



## GTWT ADOPT-A-LOOP PROJECT cont.

Our next round of AAL Wildlife Surveys starts June 3<sup>rd</sup> at Mother Neff State Park and completes on June 21<sup>st</sup> at the Lake Waco Wetlands. All of the site visits are listed in our chapter's weekly emails, as AAL Wildlife Survey at Chalk Ridge Falls (or whatever site we are visiting that day). Feel free to join us whenever you wish! We have a lot of fun, enjoying the company and nature, while accumulating volunteer hours. We basically 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 identify 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 what we see. We can split up and cover several trails or all stay together.

*Jean Solana, Jamey Douglass, Sue Valdez and Linda Fairlie.*



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!



# REDWOOD NATIONAL PARK,



- Zoe Rascoe, 2004

We took a trip to visit friends who lived in Bend, Oregon. Let me just say—we covered the central and western 2/3 of the state and every bit of that area was very beautiful. We spent several days traveling down the rocky coastline, always on the beach with our cameras for sunrises and sunsets each day. As we got to the southern end of the Oregon coast, we realized how close we were to Redwood National Park. Really close—about 30 minutes away. We had long-before visited the Sequoias in California and added Redwood National Park to our Go To list. So we took a morning to run down to Redwood NP before getting back on our schedule to head to Crater Lake NP in central Oregon. The extra excursion was well-worth the trip.

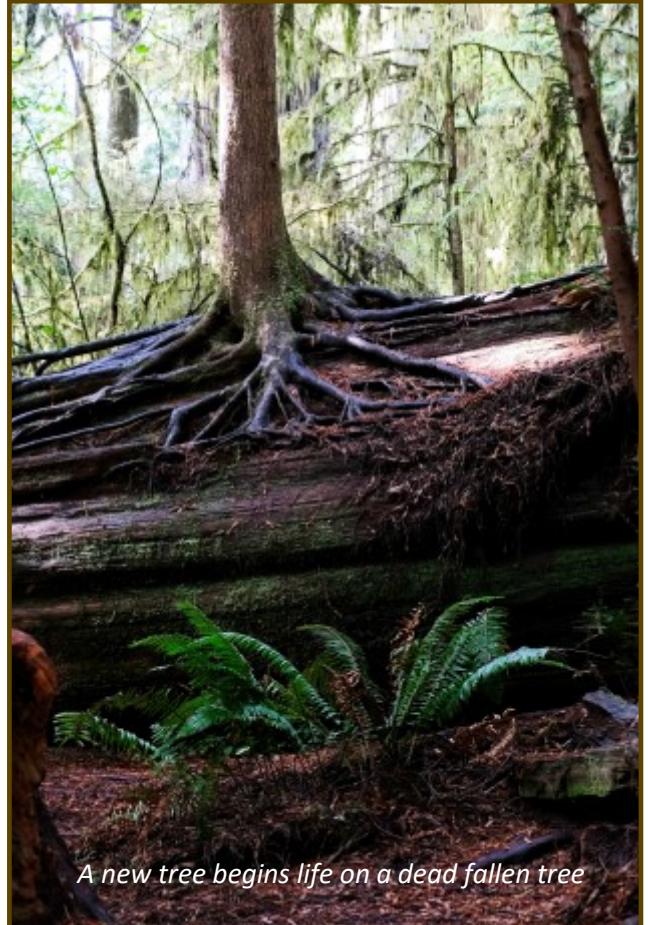
Redwood National Park is best known as the home of the tallest trees on earth, some clocking in at over 300' feet tall with a trunk circumference of nearly 100' around. California is one of the only places in the world to see these magnificent conifers. Another unusual fact is that the Redwood parks are managed by both the National Park Service and by the California State Parks Department. It was a quick trip but definitely worth the time. Enjoy a peak at the Redwood forest. Below, the roots of a toppled Redwood tree for perspective on size.



# REDWOOD NATIONAL PARK *CONT.*



*It was cool and moist for ferns under the trees*



*A new tree begins life on a dead fallen tree*



*Breathtaking!!*

# What's in YOUR backyard?



- Guy Fowler, 2021

Ok...I'm going to come clean. I've always wanted to own/work in a zoo. Financially, it just wasn't in the cards, so I did the next best thing - I bought some land and just started my own... sort of. We bought a 10-acre parcel that was a 5-minute walk from our house with lots of trees, a meadow of sorts, and 500+ feet of shore line on Lake Belton. LET THE GAMES BEGIN! It's taken over 10 years, but with lots of hard work, plenty of blood/sweat/tears and a plethora of injuries, I've got my zoo!

We've seen quite a list of critters over the years. Birds? You bet. A partial list includes Chickadees, Cardinals, Titmice (that's plural for more than one Titmouse), House Finches, Lesser Gold Finches, White Eyed Vireos, Carolina Wrens, Bewick's Wrens, Painted Buntings, Pine warblers, Summer Tanagers, Yellow Billed Cuckoos,

Roadrunners, Robins, Blue jays, Barn Swallows, Brown-Headed Cow birds, Cliff Swallows, Barn Swallows, Seagulls, black vultures, turkey vultures, Crows, wild turkeys, Caracaras, Ospreys, Screech Owls, Great Horned Owls, geese, Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets, Black-Throated Hummingbirds, Scissortailed Flycatchers, Grey Gnatcatchers, Red Tailed Hawks, Cooper's Hawks, Sharp-shinned Hawks, Kestrels, Red Bellied Woodpeckers, Ladderback Woodpeckers, Kites, and I'm sure I've left out others that migrate through. I've got several feeders with different types of food and provide them with nesting material, nesting boxes, and a good water source. As for food, I buy the "good stuff" from our fellow Master Naturalist, Tommy Reeder, at his Temple store, *Wildbirds Unlimited*.



Texas Brown Tarantula



Male and female painted buntings

# What's in YOUR backyard?

*cont.*

Four-legged critters? You know it. Tons of white-tailed deer, raccoons, opossums, armadillos, skunks, and coyotes. Haven't seen a bobcat or cougar yet, but they've been seen out here. As for some of my favorite cold-blooded neighbors, we have rattlesnakes, Rough Green snakes, Texas rat snakes, several water snakes, Texas Garter snakes, Ribbon snakes, Hognose snakes, Texas Spiny lizards, skinks, toads, frogs, and numerous 3 toed and ornate box turtles, as well as two Texas tortoises.



*Leopard Frog*



*Texas Red-headed Centipede*

For those who like the creepy-crawler stuff, we're loaded...Texas Red-Headed Centipedes, scorpions, walking sticks, praying mantis, a myriad of butterflies and moths, wasps, bees, tons of beetles, tarantulas, black widows, brown recluse, and so many other spiders and such. So, I may not have picked working at a zoo as my vocation, but I'm sure having fun living with my nature peeps. We are majorly blessed to share this piece of land with the real owners - all my feathered, furry, scaly, crawlly creatures that were here way before we were. I'm just doing my best to get along and maybe make it a little easier on them with plenty of food, water, cover and undisturbed places to hide and play. I must say my involvement with our CTMN group has really energized my love for the outdoors and my commitment to management and conservation of our natural resources while helping educate others about its importance.



*Western Diamondback Rattlesnake*

to  
management  
and  
conservation  
of our natural  
resources

LOVE MY ZOO!



*Polyphemus Moth*



# Musings of the Contemplative Naturalist

## *Grasses and Trees*

- Bill Novakoski, 2020

Intent on pondering the rich, diverse vegetation of the Edwards Plateau region in southwestern Bell County, I stroll a descending path constructed to access the back corners of our 12-acre Peaceable Corner which we share with the plants. It is a cool day in late May; the temperature is comfortable in the mid-70s. The sun's radiant heat is mitigated by a thin layer of clouds. I unfold my red canvas chair among the trees between the path and an intermittent but currently dry stream bed. To invoke my quiet pondering, I read an ancient naturalist's description of the origin of plants,

And the earth brought forth grass, herbs yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit, wherein is the seed thereof, after their kind...it was good.  
*Genesis 1:12, American Standard Version Bible.*

As I look around me, there are Red Oaks, Live Oaks, Shin Oaks, Lacey Oaks, Ashe Juniper (cedar), Cedar Elm and Persimmon trees. Blanketing the ground are several grass species, including Little Bluestem, King Ranch Bluestem, Silver Bluestem, Sideoats Grama, Switchgrass, and Johnsongrass, along with Bushy Bluestem and Muhly grasses along the intermittent stream bed. There are also occasional succulent plants: Pale Yucca and Prickly Pear Cacti.

There are numerous individuals of each tree species and countless individual grasses of each grass species. According to the ancient naturalist, each plant was propagated from its own kind and will continue to reproduce its own kind.



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## Musings of the Contemplative Naturalist *cont.*



What are the benefits of this diversity of plants in our environment? There are sundry environmental benefits, which include providing the oxygen animals need, improving air quality by storing carbon, conserving water by reducing rainwater runoff, preventing erosion and thus preserving soil, and providing protective shelter and food for animals. Economic benefits are seen in the reduction of heating and cooling costs and the addition of attractive landscaping to our business and residential properties. Human health is improved by nutritious foods and effective medications, stress reduction, as well as better recovery for hospital patients. Recreational areas, noise reduction, memorial tree plantings and ascetics are some of the community and social enjoyment we derive from plants.

In conclusion, I am aware these are the common, ordinary and expected grasses and trees of this ecoregion, but being common and ordinary does not mean these plants are not wonderful; it means they are plentiful and accessible for all to use and appreciate. By being diverse and abundant, these plants help sustain our ecosystem for the benefit of all plant and animal cohabitants. Because they sustain us and our ecosystem, please consider what actions you might take to ensure they thrive. For these plant contributions to our lives in community, I feel gratitude and joy.



# PICTURE THIS

*The season of heat & bright light brings special challenges and opportunities for photographers.*



© Earl Nottingham / TPWD

## Pictures of Summer

**BY EARL NOTTINGHAM**

The dog days of a hot Texas summer can be brutal for anyone who spends time in the outdoors. But let's face it, summertime is when lots of fun things really start to happen — things like trips to the lake, beach or mountains, or cross-country family vacations. These outdoor adventures bring opportunities for getting great photos and capturing the story and mood of the moment. In fact, if you think about it, many of our most memorable and iconic photographs in family albums have been taken in the good old summertime.

Along with the blazing heat, other predictable aspects (both pro and con) of summer can be of significant interest to a photographer when it comes to capturing the best possible image. Here are some considerations that may aid you in getting that album-worthy shot.

### Harsh Lighting

For several reasons, intense summer light can be extremely harsh for almost any type of outdoor photos, including portraits, landscapes, nature or wildlife. From a technical perspective, the ratio of light from highlights to shadows (dynamic range) is too wide for the typical digital sensor to record, resulting in loss of detail in bright areas or completely black shadows. While the human eye can see detail in deep shadows as well as bright areas at the same time, the camera cannot. For portraits, the glaring light invariably invites squinting subjects with harsh, unflattering shadows, especially when taken in noonday sun. Shooting early in the morning or late in the evening typically produces more aesthetically pleasing portrait lighting. Alternately, move your subject into the shade of a building or overhang of a tree. This not only softens the light but will alleviate most squinting.

# PICTURE THIS

If you must shoot portraits in the sun, consider using a diffuser between the subject and the sun. This can be something as simple as a translucent shower curtain held over the subject or a commercially available photo diffuser that folds up for storage. A slightly overcast day will produce much of the same result and works as a natural diffuser. A natural reflector like sand or water can also help by bouncing light and adding detail into the shadows that would normally go black.

## Bright Colors

One of the photographic upsides to summer is the abundance of bright colors, mainly primary colors. Unlike the more pastel color palettes of winter and autumn, summer goes wild with vivid reds, greens, blues and yellows that can be found in such things as a deep blue sky, blooming plants, beach toys, amusement parks, hot air balloons or even the clothing we wear. The bright seasonal colors are ideal for adding impact to any photograph, especially when using contrasting colors such as reds or yellows against blues. White, puffy cumulus clouds that are common during this time of year can also add contrast and interest to a solid blue sky, especially for landscape photos. Warm colors such as reds, oranges and yellows always add excitement and vibrancy to an image, while cool colors such as greens and blues convey a more relaxed feeling.

## Try New Things

Bright colors and strong light ratios provide the perfect opportunity to play with some of the new image enhancement apps available for smartphones or computers. It's the perfect time to explore those new photo apps you've

installed but haven't had time to play with yet. Many effects included with apps such as Snapseed, Hipstamatic and Instagram (as well as those included with your camera app) are ideal for exploring creative new possibilities. Those who are into HDR (high dynamic range) processing will see a carnival of colors explode from the monitor. HDR also has the advantage of being able to render a "natural" looking image by reining in the overly harsh and contrast-filled lighting from a blazing sun.

Summertime gives us more daylight to enjoy the outdoors and more opportunities for fun and creative photography. So head out, shoot away, hydrate and don't forget the sunscreen!



*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).*



# FISH TALES



## Backbone of the Rockies

- Carroll Adcock, 2020

In the shadow of the Spanish Peaks in southern Colorado lies a fascinating area. The “Dakota Wall” has a gap at Stonewall Colorado that has been utilized for centuries by early explorers and Native Americans. The Gap lies along Colorado State Highway 12 at a gap formed by the Middle Fork of the Purgatoire River, also known as the “Picket Wire”.

The Dakota Wall is a sandstone formation nicknamed the “Backbone of the Rockies,” and was formed when fault lines were broken and turned upright. These great sandstone walls stretch all along the Front Range of the Rockies and are visible in Spanish Peaks Country when traveling through the Cucharas River Valley, over La Veta Pass, and into northern Huerfano County. In many places along this journey, you can see where the ground was actually folded and broken by the pressures along the fault line.

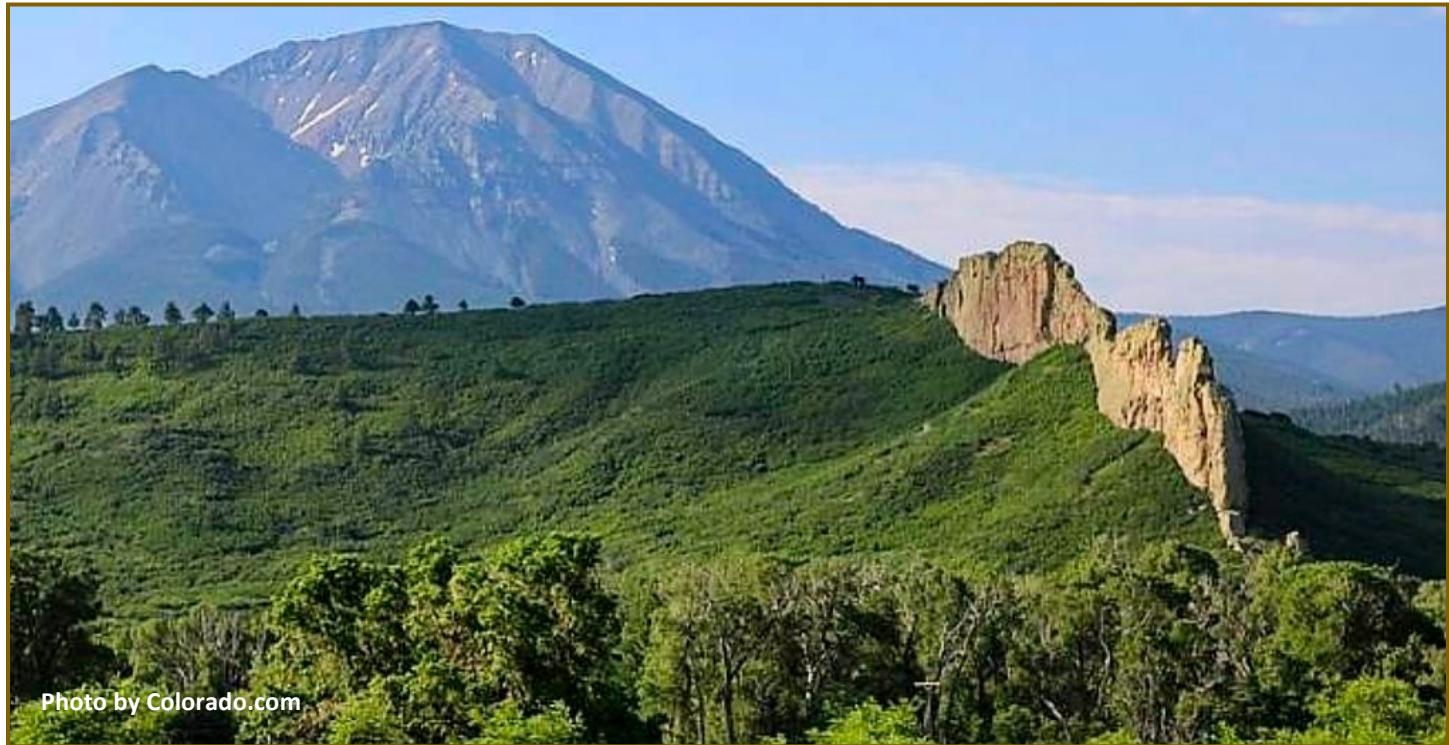


Photo by Colorado.com

# FISH TALES cont.

North Lake is a reservoir formed in 1907 as a water source for Trinidad, Colorado and surrounding area. There is a State Wildlife Area at the lake which is 7 miles south of Cucharas Pass. It is a cold-water lake at 8478 feet and generally experiences "ice out" in late March to early April. The lake is stocked periodically and contains a population of "hold-over" fish from prior stockings. Fish species include rainbow trout, brown trout, cutthroat trout and an occasional "Tiger" trout. Fishing is with artificial bait only.



I recently had the opportunity to fish this lake with a good friend and fly fisherman that is gradually turning me into a fly fisherman. In addition to catching some beautiful fish we were blessed to see



scores of mule deer and elk in and around Stonewall and North Lake. If you like fishing and the mountains, I can recommend this destination as a fun and accessible fishery. For information and map: [North Lake State Wildlife Area](#).

*Photos by Carroll Adcock*

**Tight lines!!**

Here is a link to more information on [Colorado Fishing](#).

# BAMBOO FOR YOU

- Bill Cornelius, 2020

## What Bamboo Will Grow In Central Texas?

After some introductory articles on bamboo, we will now wander off into various species of bamboo.

The first and most common bamboo found in Texas is golden bamboo (*phylostachys aurea*—right). It is ubiquitous in Texas and much of the U.S., especially the south and west coast. It is a running bamboo you might have already dealt with at some time as it invaded your yard from a neighbor's yard. It, like most other runners, grows and spreads quickly in the south. It is hardy down to about 0°C and can get up to around 10-20 feet in height with 1–2-inch diameters. It is green, prefers full sun and is somewhat attractive if you like bamboo. Structurally it is not quite as strong as some other species so is not the best for applications needing great strength. It can grow into a decent privacy screen/noise barrier and can be made into a variety of handicraft-items like beads. Its shoots are edible. It prefers the ideal soil type and moisture as described in earlier articles, but will grow in marginal conditions.



A favorite among those cultivating bamboos in Central Texas is *Phyllostachys viridis* (left) along with several cultivars. It is a green leafed running bamboo that can attain heights in the 30-40' range with up to 3-inch diameter culms. It is also called "pigskin bamboo" because of

the rough nature of the culms. It spreads more slowly than *aurea* and is better for building things (walls are thicker). Interestingly, it has two cultivars that are popular. One is Robert Young (right) which has golden culms with green stripes and Houzeau which has green culms with yellow stripes. Both are striking in appearance.



*Cont.*

# BAMBOO <ONT.

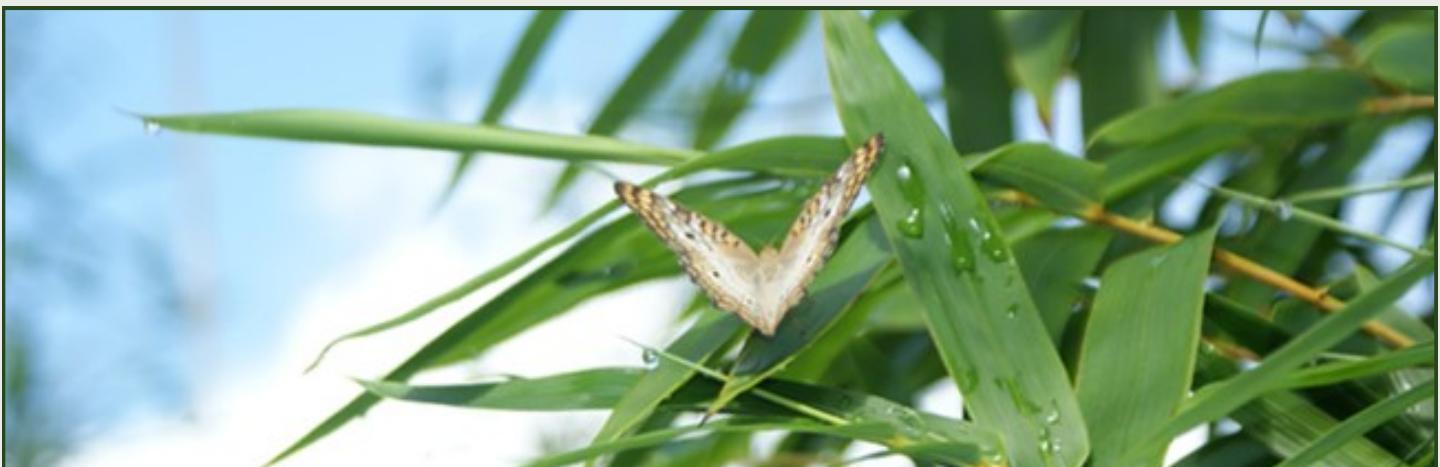
For clumping bamboos one of the most popular in Texas is *Bambusa multiplex* and its cultivars. The multiplexes are wind resistant and as with most clumpers the culms tend to grow close together

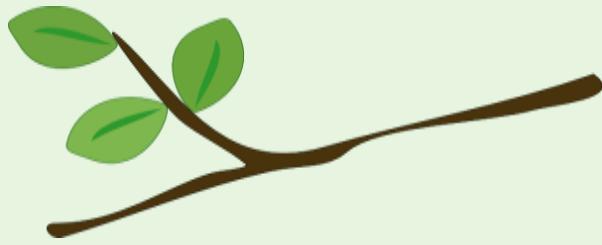
and not spread and so make very good privacy hedges. They range from around 10 to 40 feet tall depending on the cultivar and desired height.



Another popular and larger clumper for our area is *Bambusa oldhamii* (left) which can grow up to 55 feet in height. It is considered a timber bamboo. The problem with it in Central Texas is that is cold sensitive with minimum temperatures of around 21° F. At Zilker Gardens in Austin their planting of *oldhamii* sometimes do kill back to ground level during a hard winter, but does come back in the spring.

These are just a few of the bamboos that do well in Central Texas. We will touch on more in later articles. If you are interested in growing bamboo and have questions, or have bamboo and want to know more about its care, you are welcome to contact me, Bill Cornelius, at [texbamboo64@gmail.com](mailto:texbamboo64@gmail.com).





- Mary Ann Everett, 2003

# Out on a Limb

**Tree Description:** This tree is a much-branched shrub, 6-12 ft. tall, with an open airy structure. It has aromatic, resinous leaves and flowers, with 3-4" spikes of white flowers that are fragrant. Member of Fabaceae family and native to Central & South Texas to Central Mexico.

**Blooms:** Flowers are white, small with a delicate fragrance, arranged in spikes up to 4 ½ inches long at the ends of branchlets, and appearing intermittently from May to October.

**Fruit:** A pod about 3/8 inches long, often with a threadlike tip. The seed pods are somewhat persistent.

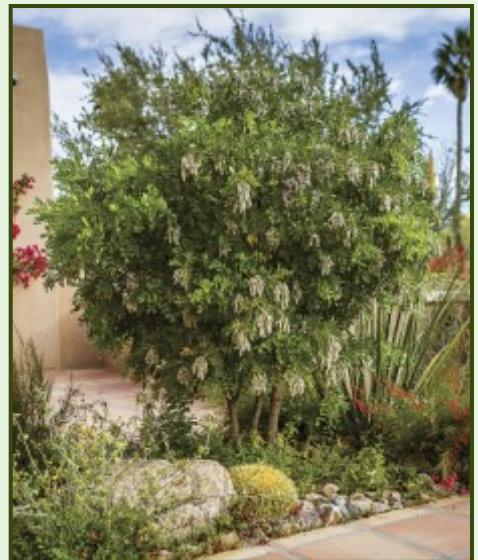
**Leaves:** Leaves are finely divided, up to 3 ½ inches long, with as many as 40 small leaflets, each about ¼ inch long. These have a tangerine scent when crushed.

**Location:** Grows in rocky limestone soils in full sun to light shade.

**Heat & Drought Tolerance:** This shrubby tree is drought, heat, and disease tolerant. Likes any kind of soil, and dry conditions. Because it can survive in drought conditions, it is suggested that seeds be collected during wet years for the best viability of seeds.

**Interesting facts:** Grows quickly. Flowers attract bees and butterflies. It is the larval host for the Dogface butterfly. Deer and goats find it very palatable. The wood has been used as dye and is fluorescent in water. Tree historically used in remedies for kidney and bladder ailments.

[Click here for name of tree](#)



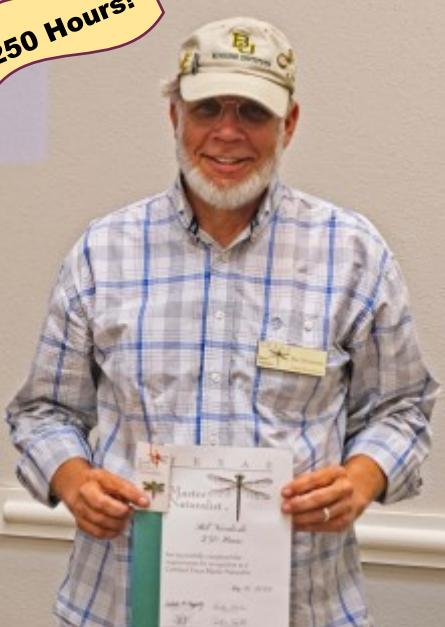
# MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

250 Hours!



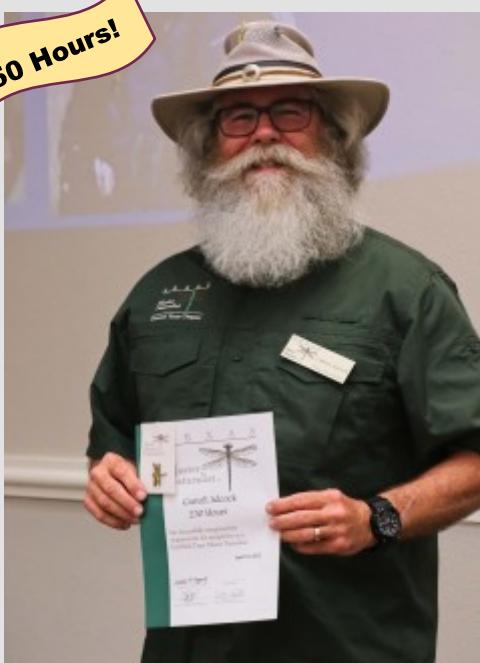
John Fairlie reaches 250 Hour Milestone! Congratulations!

250 Hours!



Bill Novakoski reaches his 250 Hour Milestone! Way to Go!

250 Hours!



Carroll Adcock reaches 250 Hour Milestone! Workin' hard!



Sarah McCormick earns her Initial Certification

# MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Juan Anaya, Bill Novakoski, Jamey Douglass and Bruce Polikoff  
recertify for 2022



Robb Starzman, Mary Ann Everett and Linda Fairlie recertify for 2022

# CHAPTER MEETINGS

## - ZOE RASCOE, 2004

Our April meeting was a wash—a real one! Tornados seemed to come out of nowhere and struck the Central Texas area as we would have been gathering. Good call by our leadership to cancel the meeting.

In May, we had our local TPWD Chapter Advisor, Cullom Simpson, speak to us on two very different wildlife topics: Dove banding and Chronic Wasting Disease in deer. Some of our members are trained to band doves for TPWD counts and Cullom went through the banding historical information, protocol and reporting for the rest of us. He is available to train any of our members who would like to participate in the annual dove banding project. Some of the data from banding reports include annual survival rate, recovery rates, harvest (hunting) rates, fidelity, movement and population size. White-winged Doves are banded June 1-August 15 and Mourning Doves are banded July 1—August 15. If you are a Master Naturalist and would like to assist with the dove banding project, contact Cullom at [cullom.simpson@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:cullom.simpson@tpwd.texas.gov). His office is in Salado. The Chronic Wasting Disease was pretty yucky... you'll have to just google that up.



*Mayhem as members sign up for all sorts of training and volunteer projects.*

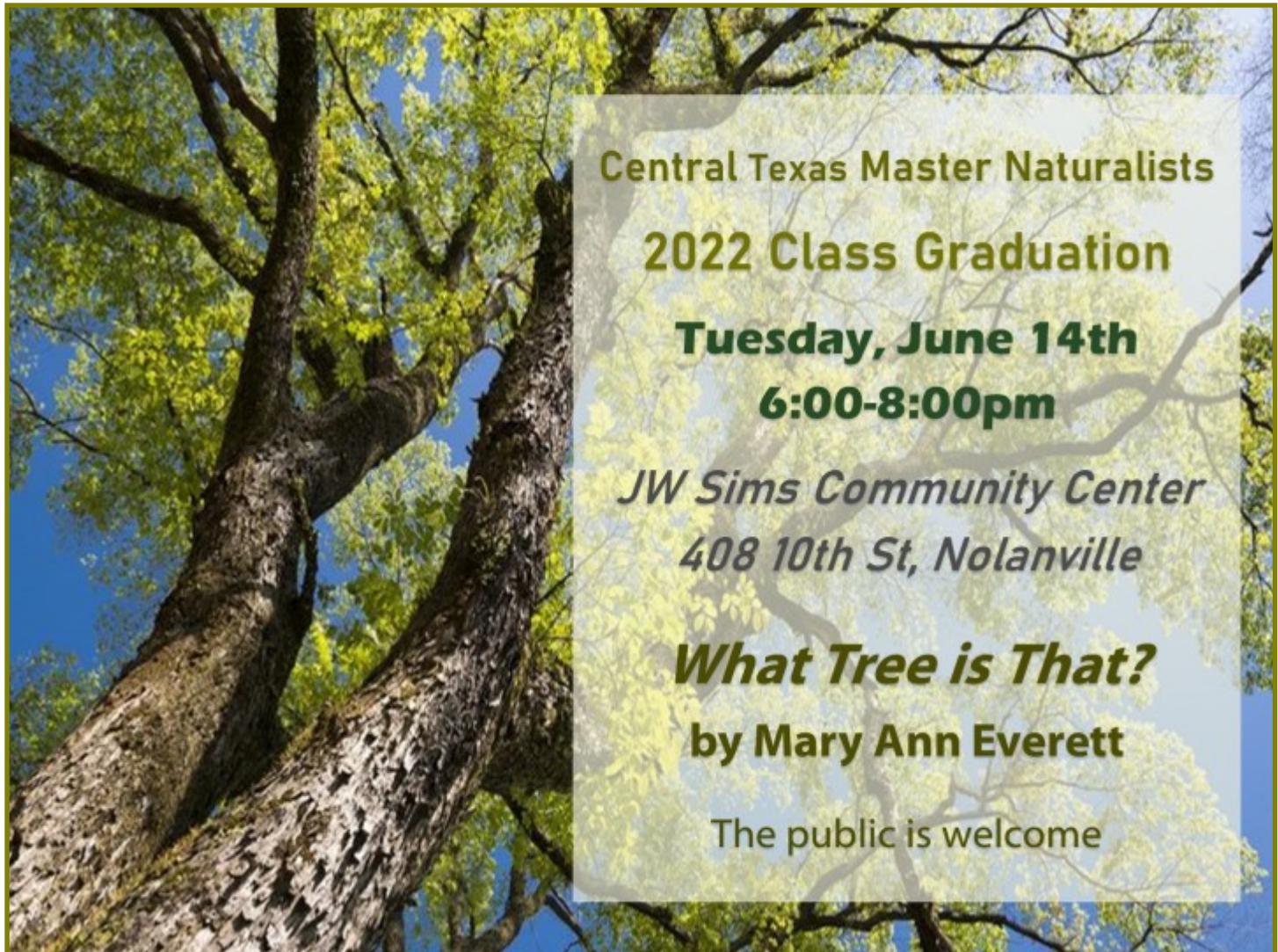


*Diane Cooney enjoys playtime with Andreas Wooten's Rhino beetle from his compost pile.*



*Ben Clement describes tornado damage to large trees at the Gault Site. He and other members helped on several workdays.*

# NEXT CHAPTER MEETING



**Central Texas Master Naturalists**

**2022 Class Graduation**

**Tuesday, June 14th**

**6:00-8:00pm**

*JW Sims Community Center  
408 10th St, Nolanville*

***What Tree is That?***

**by Mary Ann Everett**

The public is welcome



*Class of 2022 at Miller Springs Nature Center*

# Master Naturalists at Work



## CTMN member wins Volunteer Award at Fort Hood

Dr. Bill Abright (Class of 2016), is presented the 2022 Fort Hood Senior Volunteer of the Year for his volunteer activities, including Zebra Mussel Watch, with the Fort Hood Natural Resources Branch through the Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter and with his work with the American Red Cross. Presenting the award is (left) Lt. General Pat White and Command Sgt, Maj. Cliff Burgoyne, III Corps and Fort Hood command team. On the right is Kate Burgoyne. Bill is joined by his wife Stephanie.

Bill is quoted in the Fort Hood Sentinel: *"Abright said he specializes in searching for zebra mussels, an invasive, fingernail-sized mollusk that is native to fresh waters. He also looks at wildlife and plant coverage to make sure things are growing properly".* Congratulations to Bill on this great honor—we are so proud of the work you do and are happy to have you in our midst!

# Master Naturalists at Work



Jean Solana

## Milkweed Survey at Miller Spring Nature Center

The Lake Belton floodplain had been noted to have numerous antelope horn milkweeds along the trail. A milkweed count was organized for Saturday May 14th. An awesome group of CTMN volunteers showed up, including 3 new trainees - Cassie Daley, Debby Bridge, and Letti Lim. Members included Jaime Harmon and husband Bill, Tom Gerik, Carroll Adcock, Sue Valdez, John Fairlie, and Jean Solana. Jean Solana talked briefly about how to find eggs and caterpillars. The floodplain was divided into 35 different 25 foot wide sections and the count began. Incredibly some of the grids

produced counts from 100-300 plants. When the 35 sections were totaled it added up to **4200** Antelope Horn Milkweeds!

Unfortunately no eggs or caterpillars were found. It was late in the monarch caterpillar season which starts in April. Also Monarchs were seen in the area in late March and milkweeds appeared later in April due to the dry weather. Hopefully next year the Monarchs and Milkweed timing will coincide and we will find an abundance of eggs and caterpillars in this very promising site.



**American Heritage Girls** On April 2<sup>nd</sup> Kerry Fillip, Tom Salmi, Jessica Dieter, Jenna Chappell, and Jean Solana assisted 20 elementary-aged American Heritage Girls in the completion of their Aquatic Science badge. We discussed freshwater and saltwater environments and the animals and plants in them. Various crafts were done to complete the 5 steps for their badge. To understand how large sea creatures are Jessica Dieter took a measuring tape out into the parking lot and demonstrated how huge whales are compared to sharks and dolphins. Kerri Fillip taught about shells with her shell collection. The girls colored and pasted marine and freshwater animals onto collages of both environments. Each girl brought homework to share - pictures or drawings of animals that lived in water. Jenna taught the girls about aquatic invertebrates and algae.



Jenna Chappell, Kerry Fillip and Jessica Dieter with AH girls.

# Master Naturalists at Work

## Miller Springs Nature Center Public Workday Belton

Parks and Rec hosted a public workday at MSNC on April 30th and CTMN was asked to provide some nature activities for guests. We had 17 CTMN members (and some of their families!) on hand to host a Discovery Trunk booth organized by Mary Ann Everett, a NestWatch Bird Box Walk & Talk by project leader Sarah McCormick and her team, and a training session and iNaturalist Stroll offered by Linda Fairlie. Thanks to all who came out to help!!



Sarah & Jaime Harmon



Carolyn, Mary Ann, Catherine, Susan, Danny, Marilyn & Sharon



## Copperas Cove Webelos John Atkins led a hike with a lunch stop at Chalk Ridge Falls Park.



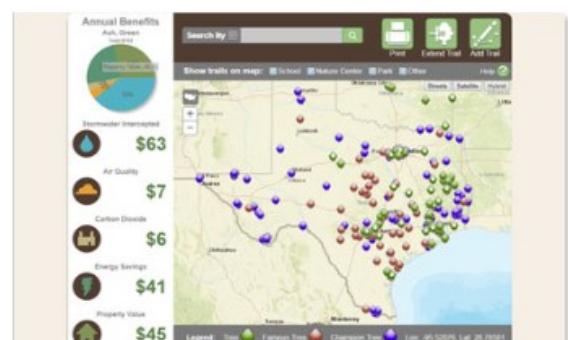
# Good to Know...

**In the war against chiggers, most of us lose.** A recent pilgrimage to Dalton Merz's ranch in Salado for Rangeland Management training was a reminder that chigger exposure comes with battle wounds. The shoulder high grass was apparently seething with the little buggers. One of the attendees even ended up at an Urgent Care clinic. If there is anything to be done, try the advice of AgriLife Extension. [How to Battle Chiggers](#)



**Tree Trails in Texas**—this link will lead you to SO much information on trees in Texas! Including Tree ID Mobile App, Tree MD, Plan My Land, Texas' Big Tree Registry, a list of Texas State Forests and Arboreta, Famous Trees of Texas and Tree Trails—a conservation education project to enhance outdoor classrooms at schools, nature centers and public parks. The Tree Trails project creates an education trail focused on trees.

<https://texasforestinfo.tamu.edu/treetrails/>



## Tree Trails

Tree Trails is a conservation education project to enhance outdoor classrooms at schools, nature centers and public parks. The project creates an education trail focused on trees.

Community Forestry, Special Trees



# Good to Know...

But there's nothing to doooo...

There are lots of reasons to get the kids outside during the summer. A Nature Hunt Bingo in the backyard or at a local park will show the family just how easy it is to find all sorts of nature-y critters and objects when you slow down and look closely. Look online for free printable bingo cards, scavenger hunt lists or games to play. #GETOUTSIDE



## Summer Fun in Texas State Parks

When the weather gets warm, we need places to cool off. See where you can go to enjoy paddling, fishing and more this [summer in Texas State Parks!](#)

[Make reservations](#) for day passes up to 30 days before you visit or for overnight stays up to 5 months in advance.

### BOATING



### FISHING



### CAMPING



# Contributing Authors to this Newsletter





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### **Newsletter Staff**

*Galveston beach wrack—Zoe Rascoe*

**Editor:** Zoe Rascoe

**Proofreader:** Bill Cornelius

**Contributing Writers:** Linda Fairlie, Jean Solana, John Burns, John Atkins, Bill Novakoski, Bill Cornelius, John Fairlie, Carroll Adcock, Guy Fowler, Mary Ann Everett, Zoe Rascoe.

**Contributed Images:** Linda Fairlie, John Atkins, John Burns, Jean Solana, John Fairlie, Keller Matthews, Bill Novakoski, Carroll Adcock, Guy Fowler, 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.