

# The Tracker

Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter February 2026

## One Year In

— Doug and Jan Kelley, 2025

On the first day, members of the 2025 Central Texas Master Naturalist training class, from diverse backgrounds and ages, gathered at Miller Springs Nature Center to meet and greet each other. It was a pleasantly cool morning, and we all quickly engaged in the “hello” and “how are you” small talk of new acquaintances. We also met the Fearless Leaders of our training, Mary Ann Everett and Lynn Fleming, and our assigned mentors. I got John Fairlie and Jan got Christy Wade. Zoe Rascoe took our pictures, and it was official. We were all becoming Naturalists.



Trainees in class at the Lake Waco Wetlands

Photo by Lynn Fleming

In truth, we were all naturalists, or we wouldn't have been there — wouldn't have signed up for the class. We all have an interest in things outdoors, and I am sure I can speak for all of us in saying that we looked forward to putting our interests into concrete actions. Each class was terrifically informative, led by smart people with true passions in what they were sharing with us, and each class left us with more awareness of the world. Wildflowers are now more interesting; dragonflies have more variety; birds have more songs. Things we have been seeing all our lives now have more textures, more colors, more meanings. Every walk outside reveals new things.

Fifteen of us completed the course and went to work, maintaining public gardens and trails, or monitoring stream waters, helping educate others, counting birds and butterflies, and by the end of the year most of us had completed the required hours for certification, and at least eight of us reached double certification, with twice the required hours. The class of 2025 is off to a good start. We hope to do good work. It all started with good training.

The first session of our first class was on urban ecosystems, led by Sam Kieschnick, and anyone who has heard him speak understands when I say we could hardly have had a better start. Let no one ever say Sam is low energy. If I remember nothing else from those 47 hours of training, I will remember something Sam said about how to do our part to keep our natural world safe. “Do what you can,” he said. “Just do what you can.”

And, as Master Naturalists, that is exactly what we all intend to do.



Crew clearing storm damage at Chalk Ridge Falls

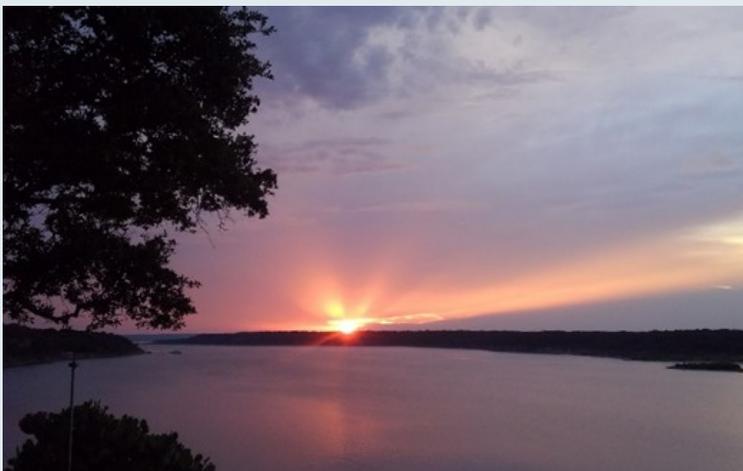
Photo by Doug Kelley

Photo by Linda Fairlie



Happy New Year Master Naturalists. January is a busy time for our Chapter, with all the preparations going on for the New Training Class, Home and Garden Show, recruitment of new members, setting up speakers for upcoming Chapter meetings, and scheduling 2026 projects. It is also a busy time for Nature. With changing Temperatures and weather patterns, we must prepare to protect our homes, plants, and ourselves. It can also be a very beautiful time, with snow covered fields, hanging icicles, and winter sights such as clouds and sunsets.

Let's talk about nature! I live in a spot where I do not have to go very far to see nature. I live on one of our lakes, Lake Belton. This puts me close to Miller Springs, Mother Neff, Fort Cavazos, and many other spots where I can observe birds, animals, forests, lakes, and many other Texas gifts. One of my favorite gifts of nature that I get to see on a regular basis are sunsets. I have taken hundreds of pictures of sunsets over the 11 years I have lived in Central Texas. Here are a couple of pictures I want to share with you.



*Cont.*

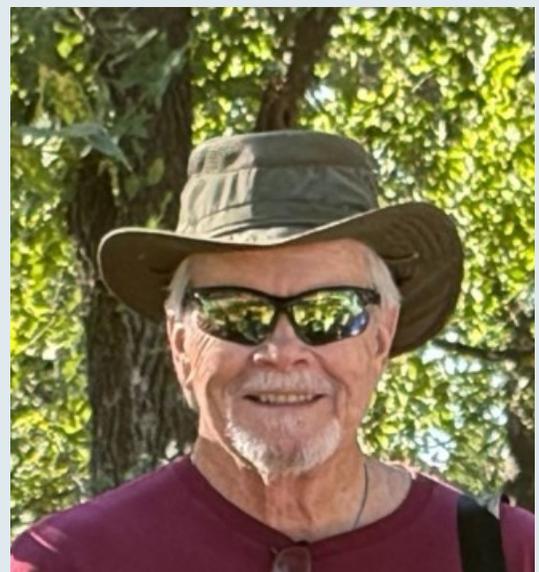
Your first reaction may be that those are beautiful sunsets. Now look closer. My back porch faces northwest, which is a good spot for sunsets. There is a tree in one picture, so you might be thinking the second picture is after the Tornado. If you attended my presentation on Xeriscaping, you remember that my favorite tree is gone, so that's the difference. But look even closer at the pictures on the previous page. Why are there stars in the second picture? It must be a sunrise. This is facing northwest; it can't be sunrise. What the heck is it? I love wide open spaces where you can see nature at its finest. Some of you have figured it out, especially the astronomers in our Chapter. This is not a sunset at all; it is the setting of the Wolf Moon that happened a few weeks ago.

Another interesting sight is when a layer of thick fog settles on the lake at night during a full moon and it looks like you are sitting on a cloud.



I love Texas nature. If you feel the way I do, you are in the right place. CTMN, let's work together to take care of our nature and to teach others how to help.

*stanb4simons@gmail.com*

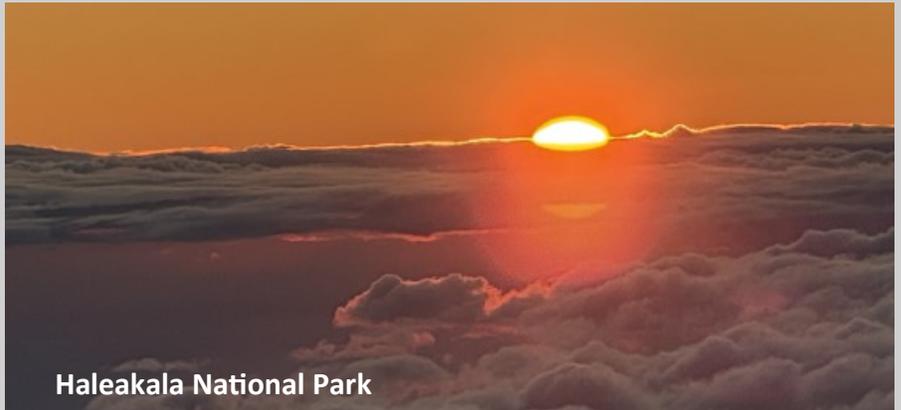


*Photos by Stan Simons*

# Upcoming Chapter Events



Saffron Finch



Haleakala National Park

## Home & Garden Show

**Friday through Sunday, February 20-22**, will be this annual event at the Cadence Bank Center (formerly the Expo Center). We will have a children's booth and a separate large booth with information and items for sale that have been crafted by our members. This is our biggest annual opportunity to recruit new members for our chapter, and is a great public event for us to highlight the impact that we have in our community. Contact Carol Smith at [casmith2013@yahoo.com](mailto:casmith2013@yahoo.com) for more info.



Virginia Opossum

## Meet & Greet

**Saturday, March 21** will be a busy for the chapter. We start off with the new member **Meet & Greet** at Miller Springs Nature Center from 10-12. This is a great opportunity to get to meet and spend a little time with our new trainees.

## Petals & Pints

Also on the 21<sup>st</sup> is Temple Parks & Recreation's **Petals & Pints** event from 2-8 pm at Santa Fe Plaza. The free event will have gourmet foods, unique craft beers, live music, local arts and wildflowers. The chapter will have a booth here as well, to provide education and info about CTMN. Contact [everett.maryann4@gmail.com](mailto:everett.maryann4@gmail.com) for more info.



Common Dwarf Mongoose

## Chapter Meetings

Monthly chapter meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month, from 6-8 pm at Belton Church of Christ, 3003 N. Mail St. in Belton. Our chapter meetings are free and open to the public.

*Photos by John Fairlie*

ARE YOU  
CURIOUS ABOUT  
NATURE?

DO YOU WANT  
TO HELP  
CONSERVATION  
EFFORTS IN  
OUR  
COMMUNITY?

DO YOU LIKE TO  
VOLUNTEER?

Join us! Scan the code below to  
learn more.

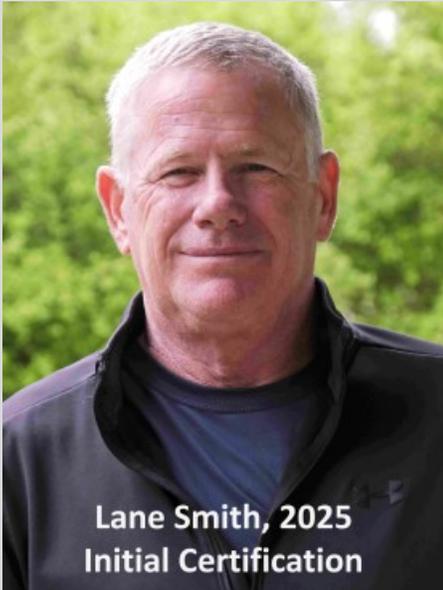


CENTRAL TEXAS  
MASTER  
NATURALISTS



[HTTPS://TXMN.ORG/CENTRALTEXAS/](https://txmn.org/centraltexas/)

# MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Lane Smith, 2025  
Initial Certification



Larry Neal, 2024  
Initial Certification



Kim Walker, 2025  
Double Certification



Debby Bridge, 2022  
Recertification

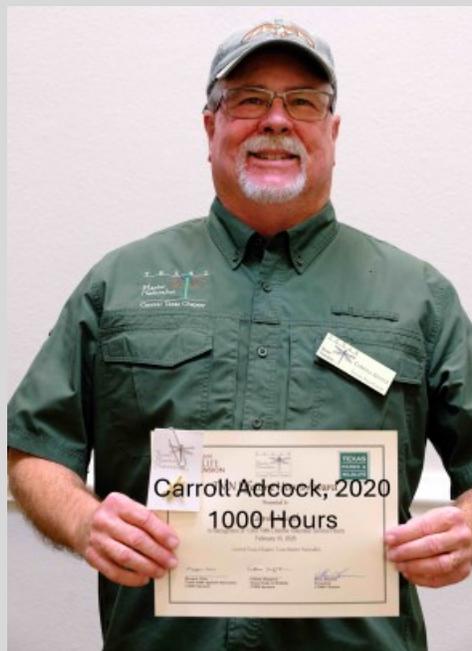


Gail Wilson, 2019  
Recertification

# MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



# MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



# MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



5 Years: Bill Cornelius, Andrea Liles, Carroll Adcock, Susan Schneider. Not pictured – Sharon Schmitz, Stephen Schmitz



10 Years: Bruce Polikoff  
Not pictured: Wade Matthews and  
Thomas Salmi



11 Years: Lynn Williams



12 Years: Sue Valdez

# MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



15 Years: Marilyn Whitworth and Louann Hight. Not pictured – Jerry Lewis



21 Years: Zoe Rascoe



21 Years: Lynn Fleming



22 Years: Mary Ann Everett

# Mother Neff First Day Hike

John Fairlie, 2021



What a great way to start off a new year! We had at least ten of our CTMN members joining hundreds of locals and travelers in welcoming in 2026 at the First Day Hike at Mother Neff State Park. Led by Juan Anaya, our volunteers did everything from providing general directions to leading hikes. Several of us manned two tables outside the Visitors' Center. Mary Ann Everett brought her displays of beautiful insects and used them as



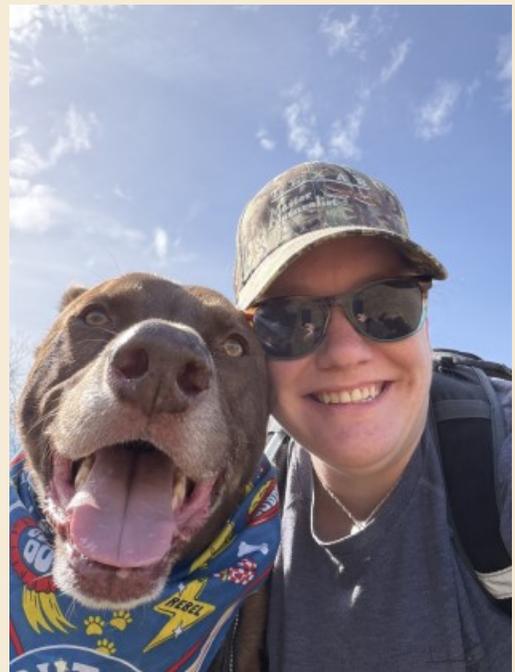
a tool to keep a steady stream of children and adults captive as she talked about the collections. A few of our members handed out CTMN info and talked about what we do as a chapter. Several people were very interested in us, and a few have already signed up to begin our next round of training that begins in March!



# Mother Neff First Day Hike *cont.*



The weather for New Year's started out brisk, but it warmed up nicely as the day went on. The park set records for attendance for the second year in a row, again, increasing the number to



880! We also received local news coverage from Channel 10 KWTX News. Statewide, 86 sites held First Day Hike; 12,875 people participated, and over 28,000 miles were travelled!



# Stream Team

Danny Welsh, 2022

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



Charles Capen, David Vesely, John Fairlie, Molly Wilson

## Stream Team Water Monitoring

For me, the most surprising benefit of attending Stream Team is the number of fascinating things we see. Last year, we saw an osprey dive and catch a fish from Lake Belton. This year we saw two ospreys successfully fishing in tandem, one right after the other. We've seen blue herons, snowy egrets, great egrets, green herons, and belted kingfishers.

My favorite part of the Stream Team is our people. We get off the couch and gather data

as we sample water. We are an eclectic group of nature focused individuals that meet regularly and enjoy fellowship with one another. All of our friends are welcome, both old and new. Get out of the house, bring a chair, and come hang out.



Charles Capen, Debby Bridge, Bill Cornelius, Molly Wilson, Mike Belcher

# Stream Team

*cont.*

CTMN Stream Team tests water six times a month on the following schedule:

First Monday Leon River at Heritage Park

First Tuesday Salado Creek at Sirena Park

Second Monday Nolan Creek at Harris Community Center

Second Tuesday South Nolan Creek at Old Nolanville Road

Third Monday Lampasas River at Chalk Ridge Falls Park

Fourth Monday Lake Belton at Temple Lake Park



First row: Art Siebert  
Second Row: Bill Cornelius,  
David Vesely, Charles Capen



John Fairlie getting water



First row: Valencia Ramirez, Luna, Cassie Castillo,  
Carletta Coleman, Linda Fairlie, Sofi, Danny Welch, Mike Belcher  
2nd row: Jan Kelley, Tad Elliott, Doug Kelley, McKayla McKown, John Fairlie,  
Mike Elmore, Bill Cornelius, Art Siebert, Molly Wilson, Charles Capen

*Photos by Danny Welch*



## Miller Springs Nature Center Projects Review

Our January workday saw six of us variously armed with chain saw, puller bears, clippers, and trash bags, ready to attack trash and invasive plant species at Miller Springs Nature Center. We cleared a small tree that had fallen over one of the trails and worked on removing invasive plant species along that trail. Trash was picked up along the upper section of the trail. Thanks to Diane Ready, John Burns, Dawn Peschel, Larry Neal, and Marilyn Whitworth for all your hard work.



Our main target has been *Ligustrum* species, of which there are over 50 varieties, commonly called Wax-leaf *Ligustrum*, Japanese Privet, Glossy Privet, or Chinese Privet. Some of those pieces of *Ligustrum* that we remove are destined to become walking sticks, fashioned by our talented members. One of the species (*L. lucidum*) is native to the southern half of China and is an evergreen shrub or tree up to 35 feet tall. Its seeds have been used in traditional Chinese medicine, but here in the U.S., when birds eat the seeds they help spread them outside of their landscape settings and into our creeks and streams where they flourish and crowd out our native species.

If you have *Ligustrum* in your home landscape, consider removing it and replacing it with native species such as Cherry Laurel, Wax Myrtle, Mountain Laurel, Yaupon or Possumhaw Holly, or Rusty Blackhaw *Viburnum*.

In February seven of us set our sights on invasive species at Miller Springs. We successfully removed some *Ligustrum* and *Nandina* along the Old Forest Trail, and identified more targets for a future visit. These species really stand out this time of year because they are the almost the only things that are green. There are some old Cottonwood trees in this part of the park that are truly majestic. Thank you Ben and Lisa Clement, Tad Elliott, Jen Sugars, Kelly Taylor and Diane Ready for all your hard work.



*Nandina* is also known as Heavenly Bamboo. It was introduced from Asia and India in the 1800s. It has become naturalized in the southern U.S. and will crowd out the other native species in the area. There is a dwarf variety available that does not produce seeds so it does not invade our wild places so readily.

If you have a berrying variety of *Nandina* in your home landscape, consider removing it and replacing it with native species such as Texas Sage, Barbados Cherry, or Bush Germander.

*Photos and Article by Ellen O'Neil*

# Wildlife Surveys

## TPWD Adopt-A-Loop



Fork-tailed Bush Katydid vs. Great Golden Wasp

**John Fairlie, 2021 GTWT Adopt-A-Loop Coordinator ([j.fairl@yahoo.com](mailto:j.fairl@yahoo.com))**

My father was a master naturalist. He grew up in Atlanta, and other than being an Eagle Scout he had no formal training as a naturalist. However, he taught himself how to imitate the songs of every bird he encountered and learned the name of every plant as well. He read, and remembered, everything that he could about these things. I thought of him as a walking encyclopedia.



Carroll Adcock, Ellen O'Neil, Tad Elliott, Danny Welch, Charles Capen, Jen Sugars, Cassie Castillo, Diane Ready, Sue Valdez



Naturalists, and Sofi at work including Linda Fairlie, Charles Capen, Sue Valdez

Growing up, and even as an adult, I couldn't understand why he devoted his mind to such details. I was only interested in the wild animals that we encountered as we explored 48 states and our country's National Parks and Monuments as a family. But going through our Texas Master Naturalists training and getting involved in our chapter has changed me.



Ellen O'Neil, Tad Elliott, David Vesely, Mike Hermans



Ellen O'Neil, Danny Welch, Larry Turner, Jen Sugars, Tad Elliott, Larry Neal



American Bird Grasshopper

# Wildlife Surveys

*cont.*



Linda Fairlie, Cassie Castillo, Sue Valdez, Ellen O'Neil, Charles Capen, David Vesely, Mike Hermans

I wish that I had started this at a young age when my mind worked better, but I am still enjoying the challenge. I especially enjoy what I am (ever so slowly) learning as we explore this region's fauna through our Wildlife Surveys. We have eight sites that we survey quarterly, with a round coming up soon. Here are the dates and locations – all start at 9:00 am. Please reach out to me if you have any questions. We'd love to have you join us!

Tuesday, February 24: Miller Springs Nature Center

Wednesday, March 4: Cameron Park & the Cameron Park Zoo

Friday, March 5: Dana Peak Park

Tuesday, March 17: Mother Neff State Park

Thursday, March 19: Belton Lakeview Park

Friday, March 20: Lake Waco Wetlands

Friday, March 27: Chalk Ridge Falls



Cassie Castillo, Alana Williamson, Larry Turner, Ellen O'Neil, Larry Neal, Danny Welch, Tad Elliott



Master Naturalists and friends at work including David Vesely, Sue Valdez, Linda Fairlie, Cassie Castillo, Larry Turner, Danny Welch, Tad Elliott, Ellen O'Neil, Jen Sugars, Larry Neal

*Photos by John Fairlie*

# SPOTLIGHT

## Bat Acoustic Monitoring

**Jim Wade, 2023**

We are happy to announce that the Acoustic Bat Monitoring project has been renewed for 2026! The Central Texas Chapter has been a part of the project since 2024 when Texas engaged in the North American Bat Monitoring Program (NABAT – [nabatmonitoring.org](http://nabatmonitoring.org)). Texas Nature Trackers runs the program under the umbrella of Texas Parks and Wildlife. The overall goal is to gather data over several years, allowing researchers to assess the status and trends of bat species in as many geographical areas of Texas and the North American continent as possible.

The project uses acoustic monitors to detect and record potential bat calls. The recordings are analyzed by software and humans to correlate these calls to a specific bat species. Texas Master Naturalists have been engaged to find sites for monitoring in their chapter areas, deploy and retrieve the monitors, perform preliminary data analysis and reporting, and provide the data to the state for long-term storage.

*2024 Bat Acoustic Monitoring Project team members with a Mini Bat acoustic monitor mounted on a T-post.*



*Danny Welch, Jim Wade, Tom Gerik, Mike Belcher, Louann Hight, John Fairlie, David Vesely, Julie Tanada, Cristy Wade, Charles Capen*

# Bat Acoustic Monitoring

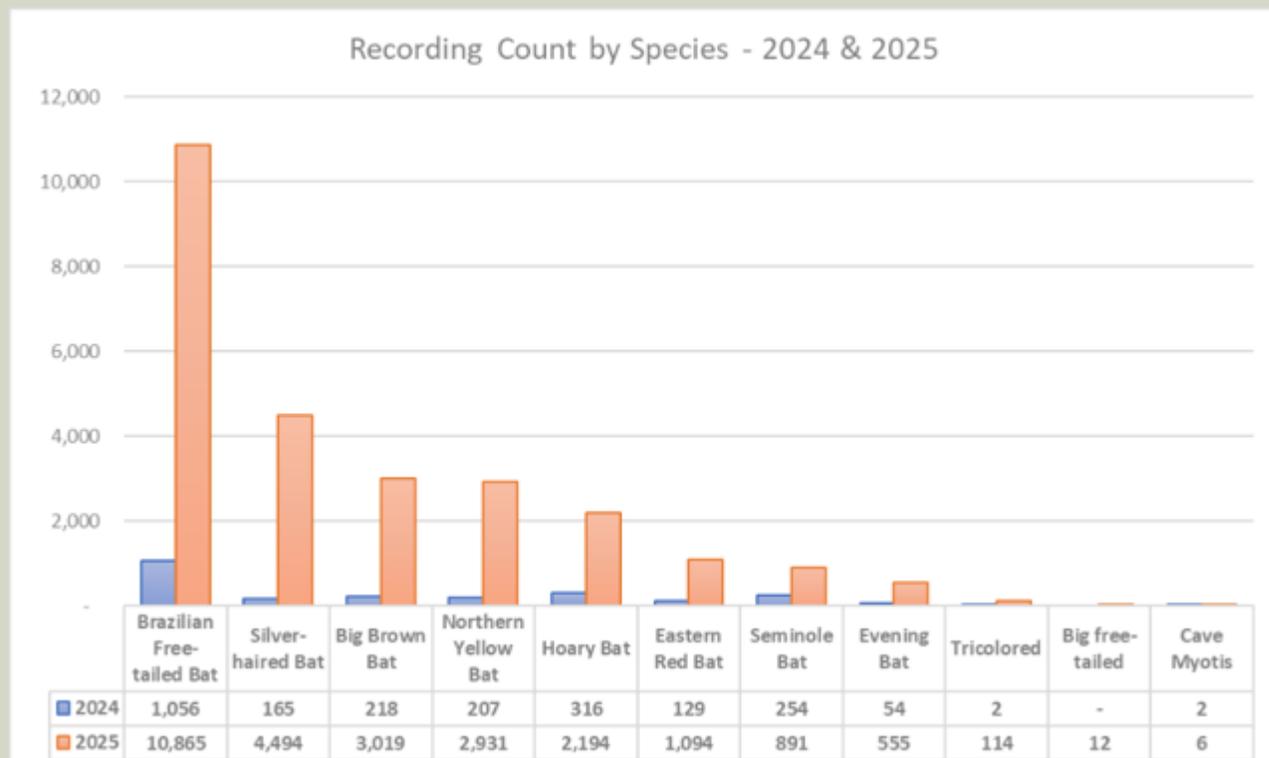
*cont.*

In 2024, we monitored 11 sites and collected over 2,000 quality recordings. While we were happy with the results, our team and the Texas Nature Trackers team learned a great deal and had far greater success with more consistent results in 2025. We received a major monitoring equipment upgrade - three high quality monitors to use in 2025. We also added 8 sites for a total of 19. The results of all this were a 10-fold increase in identifiable recordings.

We monitor for 9 weeks starting in late April. A different set of sites are monitored each week for a minimum of 4 nights. Recordings are processed through software from Wildlife Acoustics called Kaleidoscope Pro. The software does an acoustic analysis to identify specific species based on call signatures. The results are categorized as Highly Likely, Likely, or Possible.

There are 11 species of bats that are presumed to be found in Bell County. We are thrilled to report that in 2025 we had “Highly Likely” recordings matching all 11 species. In 2024 we were only able to confirm 6 species as “Highly Likely” and 3 others as “Likely”.

The graph below shows the number of recordings by species based on the software’s automatic identification process. The Recordings Count is not a population count, but simply the number of recordings where the specific species is identified. The numbers are the totals from across all sites and all 9 weeks of monitoring in 2024 and 2025. These results are from CTMN’s processing of the data and are not official findings from the state or NABAT.



# Bat Acoustic Monitoring

*cont.*

As you can see, the Brazilian (Mexican) Free-tail bat is the most active bat in our area. One species of note is the Tricolored bat, which is under consideration for listing as endangered, primarily due to White-Nose Syndrome. Long-term monitoring through this project provides critical information about the activity level of all our species.

We are extremely grateful to our landowners and chapter members for their participation and enthusiasm! In fact, almost all of our monitoring site landowners are CTMN members. Our 2026 season will kick off again by meeting with project leaders at Texas Nature Trackers in February. In March and April, we will make sure our 2025 sites can be used again, perform technical training, and firm up our deployment schedule. We may also look for new sites in zones we have not monitored yet.

If you are interested in participating as a volunteer, possible monitoring site or just to learn more, reach out to Jim Wade ([jwade99@gmail.com](mailto:jwade99@gmail.com)) or Tom Gerik ([tjgerik@gmail.com](mailto:tjgerik@gmail.com)).



*Jim Wade and Tom Gerik - Deployment of new monitors for 2025*



*SM4 monitoring unit from Wildlife Acoustics*



# New Year Trail Outlook



Photo by Lysa Liem

## - Keller Matthews, 2021

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

Our chapter is currently supporting five trails in Bell County.

**Chalk Ridge Falls** was a major new task in 2025 and will continue into 2026. We reopened a densely overgrown 2-mile loop on the north side of the river near the Stillhouse Dam. Tentatively called Chalk Ridge North, this hike is a laudable birding location. Most recently, we cleared an overlook above the original river course. The next task will be creating a similar overlook on the opposite side of the pond.



Stan Simons, Jim Wade, Keller Matthews, Ben Clement



Lane Smith and Ben Clement



Jim Wade



Photos on this page  
by Stan Simons

# New Year Trail Outlook cont.

**Miller Springs** has been largely cleared of treefall following the late spring storm. Ligustrum eradication continues. The new sidewalk along the spillway has been completed and offers spectacular views from the new overlook pavilion.



**Tahuaya Family Adventure Camp** has had a slow start but has plans for several public events, fishing days on the lake, and most recently discussions of archeological tours. TPWD has been tardy completing a site assessment required before the wetland restoration project begins. Trail maintenance is now routine clearing.



*Photos on this page  
by Keller Matthews*

# New Year Trail Outlook cont.

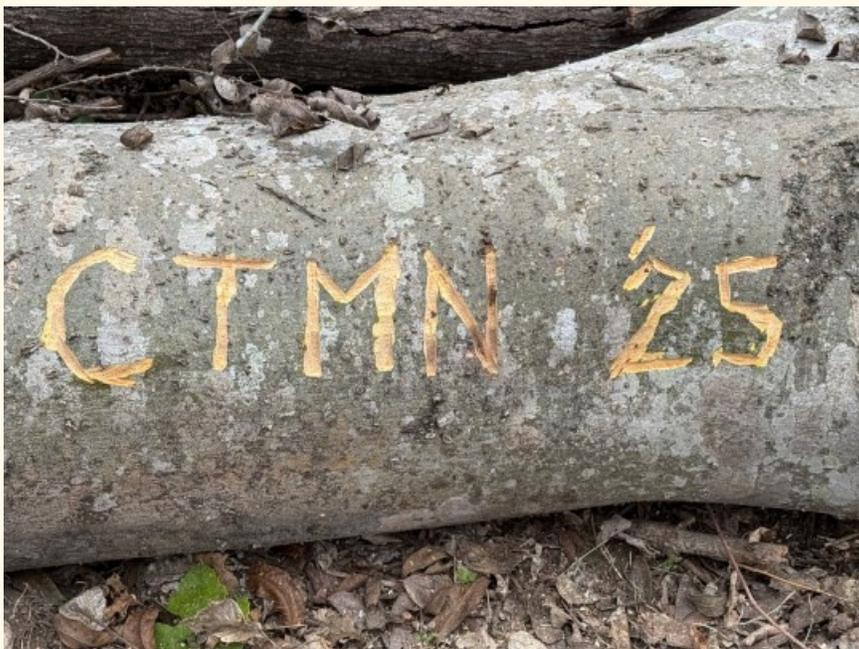


**Smith Park at Morgans Point Resort** is a new venture this year. Our chapter marked a new trail for the City, cleared some brush, and walked it with City representatives. The next step is the City's pledge to complete trail construction and use a mulcher to remove deadwood from the trail edges to soften the walking surface.

**Tablerock Trails** in Salado were a challenge for the chainsaw crew in the late spring after the storms blew down an especially large cottonwood tree. The trails are actively being used for Halloween and Christmas events, as well as being used by daily walkers since they are located so close to downtown.



Each of the sites has requested help with signage and offered various partnering efforts such as sign materials and willingness to dig post holes. Goals for the coming year include sign maps for each site and sign installation when possible.



*Photos on this page  
by Keller Matthews*

# Nolan Creek Hike & Bike Trail



## Nolan Creek Hike & Bike Trail

— Mary Ann Everett, 2003

Our Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter has been picking up trash along Nolan Creek Hike and Bike Trail since January 30, 2012. That is a long time, and we have encountered some unusual items - a shopping cart hidden in some shrubbery, a laptop (didn't work), a large tote, and a cell phone (didn't work). It used to be that some areas around picnic benches and parking lot areas across from the restaurants held thousands of cigarette butts. Richard McCarthy, one of our deceased members, used to bring his little broom and dustpan, and he would get almost every single one of those nasty things. We figured that the homeless would go down there to this one spot and smoke and throw their cigarette butts down. Then we didn't see many anymore, which might have something to do with no loitering along the trail.

Our time to pick up the trash is normally in the months that have a fifth Thursday. We usually begin at 8:00 a.m., and we split into two groups, one starting at Harris Community Center and the other at Liberty Park on Veterans Way, then meet in the middle. Come join us any time!



*Photo by Mary Ann Everett*

Louann Hight, Danny Welch, David Vesely, Marilyn Whitworth,  
Dawn Pechal, Alana Williamson

# Mornings with the Monarchs

— Jen Sugars, 2024



Not many Monarchs were migrating through our area in Spring of 2025, as the bulk of the migration shifted to the West (likely due to drought and storms in the central US); but we still were able to gather valuable data for the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project (MLMP.org) and witness the amazing and beautiful Monarch life cycle.



Wasp vs. Monarch  
Photo by Dawn Pechal

Even though our findings were few, they sparked much curiosity and questions that resulted in increasing our knowledge of Monarchs! A couple of mornings we came across an instar hanging out in a tuft of grass instead of on milkweed. Was it taking a break? Going through its teenage rebel phase? Turns out, Monarch caterpillars will leave their milkweed for a variety of reasons. They may be trying to escape a predator or might have eaten all the leaves on their original plant. If there are several instars on one plant, a caterpillar may move so it can have a plant to itself. Sometimes they simply hang out in the shade, because it's hot in Texas!

Often, we spotted 5th instars trekking across the rocks on their way to pupate. None of us had spotted a chrysalis yet and were curious about where they were going. We speculated whether or not they were headed for the cliffs and brush along the edge of the spillway. One morning, after finding no eggs or larvae in my section, I was trying to photograph a tiny butterfly. I followed it with my camera to the surface of the mural... and much to my surprise and delight, it had perched near a Monarch caterpillar, hanging in a groove on the mural preparing to pupate!



Left to Right: Monarch Chrysalis, Swallowtail and Monarch Chrysalises, Monarch Chrysalis with ants predation

# Mornings with the Monarchs

*cont.*

I alerted my fellow volunteers, and we discovered chrysalises in varying stages of development all along the mural, including remnants of empty ones from which the Monarchs had already emerged. One chrysalis was hanging right next to a Swallowtail pupa!

Sadly, not all of the monarchs survived. We witnessed predation on the pupating monarchs by ants and noted instances of predation on the caterpillars by both red wasps and fire ants out on the spillway. Predation is rampant - only around 6% of Monarch larvae survive to adulthood.



Ready to Pupate

On a happier note, we did get to see a couple of Monarchs immediately after they emerged from their chrysalis, drying their wings in the sunshine. It feels like our own victory to see them live on to continue their migration North.

In Spring of 2026 we will be flipping the grid, so monitoring rows run perpendicular to the mural instead of parallel. Historically, monarch activity has been heaviest near the mural, so it makes sense to have each row begin there and extend out into the spillway. I think we may only need to extend out about 30 yards to get a good solid count, though hearty volunteers with good backs are welcome to go farther out!

We'll begin again around the last week of March in 2026 - Come join us and experience the wonder of the Monarchs!



*Photos by Jen Sugars  
(except as noted)*

# Bell County Schools

## Nature Masks

— Mary Ann Everett, 2003

St. Mary's School has allowed me to teach Junior Master Gardener classes during the school day. I have been supplementing the curriculum with Junior Master Naturalist. These past weeks, the fifth-



grade class has been learning about ecology and environmental horticulture. They learned about composting, recycling, food chains, habitats, and tried their hands at some eco-art. One of the activities was making nature masks and learning about the art of camouflage -- how animals and insects use this to remain hidden from others. I picked up baby's breath in several colors at the florist shop at HEB and all kinds of seeds and beans in different colors. The students' creativity amazed me and my volunteer helper. Check it out! Students love doing hands-on activities while coming to better understand nature and how things work together.

*Photos by Mary Ann Everett*



# Caddo Lake

Carroll Adcock, 2020

## Caddo Lake and Caddo Lake State Park

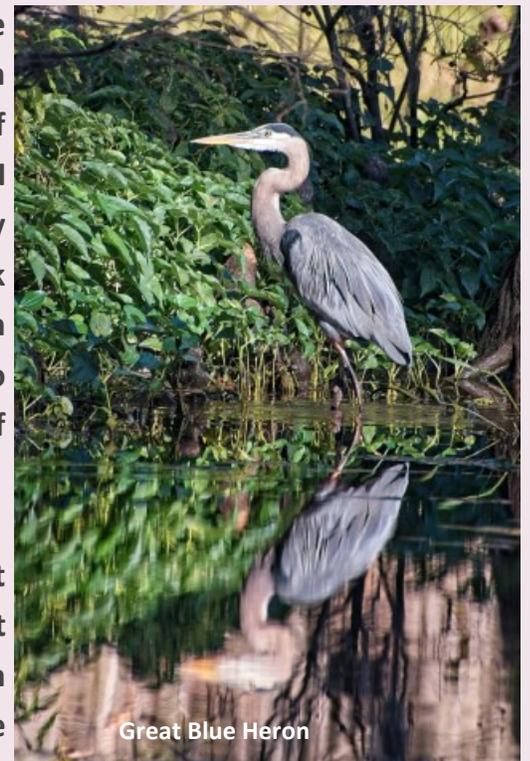
As far back as I can recall, I have wanted to visit Caddo Lake and State Park after reading about the only natural lake in Texas back in elementary school. Finally, in my 7th decade of life I made it there this past November. I must admit that I was a bit disappointed to learn that the park is not actually on Caddo Lake, and relieved to find that the park does about Big Cypress Bayou and Sawmill Pond which connect to the lake. We chose the trip dates in an attempt to catch peak colors of the local foliage for our group of shutterbugs.

Caddo Lake State Park, like our local Mother Neff, was built in the 1930's by the Civilian Conservation Corps. It is located near the community of Karnack, Tx in Harrison County on Big Cedar Bayou upstream from Caddo Lake. The park is a typical east Texas forest and offers campgrounds as

well as a picturesque horseshoe of original (but updated) cabins. Potential activities include hiking, paddling, fishing, Ranger programs, and sightseeing/shopping in nearby



Great Egret



Great Blue Heron

communities. Plan ahead for meals while there as eating establishments are quite limited in the area. Jefferson, Texas is a most interesting historic small town only about 20 minutes away, offers limited restaurants (opportunities are more numerous on weekends) and was once a bustling port city on the Red River. Once known as the Queen of The Bayou, this quaint town with its antebellum architecture is a destination in its own right.

# Caddo Lake & Caddo Lake St. Park

Caddo Lake is a 25,000-acre lake and bayou that straddles the Texas/Louisiana border. The lake is named after the Caddoans or Caddo, Native Americans who lived in the region prior to their expulsion in the 19th century. It is the largest natural freshwater lake in Texas and the South and



home to one of the largest flooded cypress forests in the United States. The origin stories of the lake vary, with Caddo legend stating it was formed by an earthquake in 1811-1812 (New Madrid earthquakes). This legend has some credibility. It has been documented that a lake in Tennessee was formed by that earthquake. Most geologists believe that the origin was a result of the Great Raft - a 100-mile log jam on the Red River that resulted in the flooding of this basin. During the 19th century Captain Henry Shreve, and then later, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers removed the log jams which resulted in a significant drop in water level and the footprint of the lake.

Caddo Lake, with its shoreline of roughly 220 miles other worldly appearing bayous, is a naturalist's paradise. In addition to the Spanish-moss draped and

buttressed based cypress trees (*Taxodium distichum*), along with their multiple "knees," the area is home to a multitude of flora and fauna. Over 220 bird species, 47 mammal species and 90 plus reptiles and amphibians call this area home.



# Caddo Lake & Caddo Lake St. Park



We wanted a bird's-eye view of the lake, so several of us ventured out with a guide on his specially equipped swamp boat. It was an other-worldly experience as we left the dock in the pre-dawn darkness and zipped through the dark waters of the tunnel-like trail illuminated by a spotlight. We were blessed to make it with only a single collision with a submerged stump we thought would capsize us, but our guide assured

us the boat hull was designed to prevent such mishaps. I was pleased to not have any further demonstrations! We arrived at the somewhat more open waters after about twenty minutes and were pleased to have the Beaver Supermoon setting off the port side of the boat and the sun rising off the starboard of the boat. I do not have the words to describe the scene of the gradually changing light



shining through the trees draped with moss that gave the appearance of druids of old and the shimmering reflections of light on the dark waters of the lake.



Zoe Rascoe, the elusive Caddo Cypress Gnome

Should you have the opportunity to visit this area, I would strongly encourage you to do so. The park offers lodging, canoe and kayak rentals, and there are various lake tour opportunities nearby as well...and they do not all involve nocturnal boat racing experiences. Stay curious, stay wild.

**All Photos by Carroll Adcock**

ARE YOU  
CURIOUS ABOUT  
NATURE?

DO YOU WANT  
TO HELP  
CONSERVATION  
EFFORTS IN  
OUR  
COMMUNITY?

DO YOU LIKE TO  
VOLUNTEER?

Join us! Scan the code below to  
learn more.



CENTRAL TEXAS  
MASTER  
NATURALISTS



[HTTPS://TXMN.ORG/CENTRALTEXAS/](https://txmn.org/centraltexas/)

### *Editors' Note*

*Thank you again for your grace and patience. We are getting better and learning more as we go. Thank you to all who have contributed articles, pictures, help with names of people in pictures (how did Zoe do it!?) and your support and encouragement. We will continue to get better and more consistent.*

*We unfortunately lost the email with the names of the photographers for the First Day Hike – our most sincere apologies to those who did not receive credit.*

*John & Linda Fairlie*

### **Board of Directors**

President: Stan Simons

Past President: Carroll Adcock

Vice President: Carol Smith

Secretary: Jessica Dieter

Treasurer: Bruce Polikoff

Membership: Linda Fairlie/Sharon Schmitz

Communications: Louann Hight

Hospitality: Marilyn Whitworth

Training: Lynn Fleming/Mary Ann Everett

Registrar: Zoe Rascoe

Members-at-Large: John Fairlie, Ellen O'Neil, John Brushaber

2025 Class Representative: Dawn Pechal

Chapter Advisor: Cullom Simpson, Wildlife Biologist, Texas Parks and Wildlife

AgriLife Representative – Meagan Cline

### **Newsletter Staff**

**Editors: John & Linda Fairlie**

**Contributing Writers:** Carroll Adcock, Mary Ann Everett, John Fairlie, Doug Kelley, Jan Kelley, Keller Matthews, Ellen O'Neil, Stan Simons, Jen Sugars, Jim Wade, Danny Welch

**Contributed Images:** Carroll Adcock, Mary Ann Everett, John Fairlie, Linda Fairlie, Lynn Fleming, Doug Kelley, Lisa Liem, Keller Matthews, Ellen O'Neil, Dawn Pechal, Zoe Rascoe, Stan Simons, Jen Sugars, Kelly Thornborrow, Jim Wade, Danny Welch

*Thanks to Kelly Thornborrow for helping with the proofing of the newsletter.*

If you have photos or a story to share, please send us your ideas. Newsletter contributions count for Volunteer Service hours. Send to [j.fairl@yahoo.com](mailto:j.fairl@yahoo.com) or [fairlielinda@gmail.com](mailto:fairlielinda@gmail.com).

## **Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter Meetings**

Central Texas Master Naturalist 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. 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. Topic information and locations are on our [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page.

The Board of Directors meets on the 1st Monday of each month (unless it's a holiday) from 11:30am-12:30pm at the AgriLife Extension Building in Belton and all members are welcome.