

What Should a Texas Master Naturalist Know About Re-Certification Pins?

The State of Texas has many symbols celebrating its unique natural history - the state flower is the bluebonnet, state large mammal is the Texas longhorn, and state grass is sideoats grama, etc. - all codified and ratified by the Legislature.



Texas Master Naturalists have their **own** symbols, beginning with the dragonfly certification pin, the **Cyrano darner** (*Nasiaeschna pentacantha*). The Cyrano darner is a monotypic genus, widespread in the eastern United States and Canada to Texas. It lives in sheltered forest ponds, streams, and lake coves, and perches on vegetation over water. It has a pronounced **frons** - essentially face - and blue eyes, and is named for the Cyrano de Bergerac of literature, referring to the prodigious proboscis! Of course, Cyrano was also very well educated and enlightened, as are Texas Master Naturalists.

Each year a Master Naturalist receives a re-certification pin - after a few years, you might have a pretty good collection. These pins have symbolism beyond hours accrued for service; they represent inhabitants and habitats from around the ecological regions of Texas. Should someone ask you about your master naturalist "bling", it might be wise to be prepared with a couple quick facts.

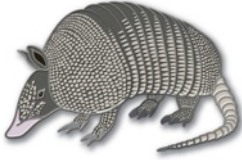


The Guadalupe Bass was named official Texas state fish in 1989 and is the Texas Master Naturalist 2016 re-certification pin. Often also called Black Bass or Guadalupe Spotted Bass, it is found only in Texas, favored by sport fishermen, and adapted to life in small streams with fast flowing water, endemic to rivers of the Edwards Plateau - San Antonio River, Guadalupe River, Colorado River, and Brazos River. Populations found in the Nueces River have been introduced. Guadalupe bass numbers have seriously declined due to hybridization, plus habitat loss, threatening the long-term survival of this species, so a Guadalupe bass restoration initiative is underway to re-stock the streams with genetically "pure" young fish.



The symbol on the 2015 recertification pin is our state flower, the bluebonnet (*Lupinus texensis*). It was chosen for its iconic Texas symbolism and what it means to people of Texas, said Michelle Haggerty, TMN state program coordinator. In 1901 the National Society of Colonial Dames of America in Texas persuaded the Texas Legislature to designate the bluebonnet as the state flower. Alas, the Dames and the lawmakers chose *Lupinus subcarnosus*, which planted the seeds for a showdown because most bluebonnet fans wanted the state flower to be *L. texensis*, which is showier than *L. subcarnosus*. Seventy years later the Legislature ended the bluebonnet war by lumping both species of Lupines together and naming them the state flower. The politicians also said "any other variety of bluebonnet not heretofore

recorded” would also be considered the state flower. So *L. havardii*, *L. concinnus*, *L. plattensis* and *L. perennis* won't feel left out. Our new pin celebrates the bluebonnet that provides the spring carpet of blue in Central Texas.



The Nine-banded armadillo, *Dasypus novemcinctus*, is the 2014 master naturalist pin. Tied with the Longhorn for State Mammal of Texas in 1995, the compromise was to name the armadillo the state small mammal and the Longhorn the state large mammal. The Nine-banded armadillo is a relative newcomer to Texas, since the late 1800's, but expanding its range rapidly. Nocturnal and mostly solitary, armadillos dig burrows, have poor eyesight, share a susceptibility to leprosy with humans, and have the habit of jumping into the air when startled, bringing them into frequent collisions with car undercarriages. They can swim and "walk" on the bottom of a river. Armadillos will eat about anything they can find on the ground or by digging, but most of their diet consists of insects and other invertebrates, including fire ants! We should wear our pins with great pride, just for that.



Probably the best-known butterfly in North America, or maybe the world, for its multi-generational migration, is the Monarch butterfly, *Danaus plexippus*, named Texas state insect in 1995 and the TMN re-cert pin for 2013. Monarchs and related species - Southern, Queen and Soldier butterflies - eat milkweed plants and nothing else in their larval stage. Females lay eggs on the undersides of milkweed leaves; the young caterpillars hatch and spend about two weeks munching on milkweeds, ingesting cardiac glycosides from the plants before the chrysalis stage, becoming toxic or at least distasteful to predators. Monarchs are a species of great concern at this time.



The Mexican free-tailed bat, *Tadarida brasiliensis*, is a medium-sized bat native to the Americas, the commonest species in the southwest, and probably the most numerous non-human mammal on Earth. It is the Texas “state flying mammal” and the 2012 re-certification pin. Nine million Mexican free-tailed bats live in Texas. They roost in colonies near water and prefer caves; Bracken Cave near San Antonio has the largest colony in the world. But, they also famously roost under bridges - the Congress Street bridge in Austin and the Waugh Street bridge over Buffalo Bayou. Leaving their roosts at sunset each night and foraging for flying insects, which they catch in flight, bats eat moths, beetles, dragonflies (!), flies, true bugs, wasps, and ants. Also great pollinators, Mexican free-tailed bats pollinate sugarcane and consume insect pests of sugarcane; therefore, they are the featured icon on the Bacardi rum label.



The Texas horned lizard, *Phrynosoma cornutum*, endangered species and Texas legend, is the most common and familiar horned lizard, formerly common in all parts of Texas except the piney woods. It is called a “horny toad” or “horned frog”, although neither a toad nor a frog. (*Phryno* = toad, *soma* = body) It has been the official Texas state reptile since 1993 and is the TMN 2011 re-certification pin. Texas horned lizards eat harvester ants, and have many predators. They are endangered throughout their normal range due to habitat loss, the pet trade, and the arrival of the imported fire ant. The most famous “horny toad” was Old Rip, entombed in a time capsule in the Eastland, TX courthouse in 1897 and found still alive when the capsule was opened 31 years later in 1929! Old Rip is still on display in a velvet-lined casket at the courthouse. So they say.



The 2010 pin is the Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*). A colorful duck of forested wetlands, many people consider it the most beautiful of all waterfowl. The Wood Duck is one of only a few North American ducks that nest in trees. Nests are often over water, but may be up to a mile away. Ducklings must jump out of the nest to the ground, up to 290 feet, and do so without injury, when it is time to fledge. Wood Ducks eat seeds, acorns and fruits, aquatic and terrestrial invertebrates. Wood Ducks reside throughout Texas all year. Populations are stable or increasing, following declines in the 20th century.



The Texas Salamander is an entirely aquatic, lungless salamander native to the United States and endemic to central Texas. It is the TMN 2009 pin. This is a species of concern, considered vulnerable, as it is known only from the immediate vicinity of spring outflows, under rocks and leaves and in gravel substrate in certain springs in Bexar and Kendall counties. The Texas Salamander receives no protection by either the State of Texas or the Federal Government.



In 2005, the Texas State Legislature designated Texas purple sage (*Leucophyllum frutescens*) the Texas native shrub. A member of the Scrophulariaceae (Figwort Family), Texas purple sage is native to central and west Texas southward. Also called Cenizo and Texas barometer bush, its purple blooms may flower any time of the year, noticeably after rain showers. Texas purple sage is our recertification pin for 2008.



The grass shrimp (*Palaemonetes vulgaris*), pin 2007, resides in the inshore shallow waters of the Gulf Coast and its bayous and is a vital decomposer and detritivore and a primary prey for fish and other carnivores. Among the most widely distributed, abundant, and conspicuous shallow water invertebrates, grass shrimp depend on marshes with dense growth of underwater vegetation for food and protection from predators. Loss of marsh habitat due to dredging, bulkheading, and subsidence caused noticeable decrease in grass shrimp abundance, affecting animals higher up in the food chain.



The Texas prickly pear cactus (*Opuntia engelmanni* var *lindheimeri*) is the official Texas state plant and the 2006 recertification pin. Common in the drier area of South and Central Texas, Texas prickly pear is a thicket-forming and heavy-bodied cactus with a cylindrical trunk and yellow to red flowers blooming in June. Used extensively for food, the fruits - tunas - are eaten raw or preserved by humans and also favored by many birds and animals. Legend has it that the coyote brushes the spines off the fruits with his tail before eating them!



The 2005 pin is a Belted Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*), a common waterside bird throughout Texas and North America. It announces its presence with a loud, rattling cry and is often seen perching or hovering over water, before plunging headfirst to catch a fish. It is sometimes mistaken for a Blue Jay, *Cyanocitta cristata*, but a Texas Master Naturalist will quickly learn the difference! Belted Kingfishers are frequently seen along Armand Bayou and other waterways.



The Green Treefrog (*Hyla cinera*) is considered one of the most beautiful treefrogs in North America. It lives throughout the South, in wet and damp habitats, such as swamps, borders of lakes and bayous, clinging to the undersides of green vegetation by day and hunting insects by night, often on house windows. It climbs rather than jumps and has a distinctive call "Duck! Duck!" or "Quank! Quank!" The Green Treefrog is the Louisiana (not Texas!) state amphibian, the model for Kermit the Frog, and the recertification pin for 2004.



The Lindheimer daisy pin in 2003 honors the Father of Texas Botany, Ferdinand Jacob Lindheimer. Lindheimer collected plants in Texas from 1843-1852 and discovered several hundred new plant species. He is buried in New Braunfels; his house and grounds on Comal Street are a museum and garden showcasing his plants. The Lindheimer daisy (*Lindheimera texana*), also known as Texas Yellow Star, is a pretty little member of the Asteraceae from the Hill Country and is easily cultivated in garden settings. The entire genus is named for the first Texas botanist.



Beginning in 2002, the very first pin represents a Post Oak leaf. The Post Oak (*Quercus stellata*) is a large, abundant tree, forming large stands in the prairie transition zones of the Cross Timbers region of Texas. It was used for fence posts - hence, the name. With especially thick taproots, Post Oaks grow best in sandy, rocky soils and tolerate extreme drought. Trees sprout prolifically when cut or burned and encroach rapidly into grasslands if prairie fires are suppressed. Acorns provide high-energy food for wildlife. Tough like Texans, Post Oaks survive and thrive in extreme environments. If you own this pin and all the others, we salute you!

(Further information may be found in Midden Archives: 2/2010, 4/2011, 6/2011, 2/2012, 2/2014, 2/2015, 2/2016)