



Los Caminos

Celebrating and sharing our experiences along "the roads" we take through nature.

A Quarterly Newsletter of the El Camino Real Chapter
Milam County **Texas Master Naturalist** Fall 2008

Fall 2008 Issue

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View from the top of Sugarloaf, by Paul Unger



When our first class of trainees visited Sugarloaf Mountain, I wondered to my self how many times over the last 140 centuries fellow travelers gazed over the vista below us trying to see how far they had come. Looking back with its certainty is always easier than looking forward. Like

the bands of people before us, our future as a chapter was uncertain. Now I can stand again on Sugarloaf and see our past with clarity. Our journey then had just begun. We were 24 individuals learning to appreciate each others' curiosity for the things of nature. One person's love in nature was as compelling as our own special interest. Now, specialists are forming groups such as birders, amphibians,

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Wildlife all around the County, by Mike Mitchell

Fall is a fantastic time of year for wildlife in our area. With the changing of the seasons comes a flurry of activity for conservationists, hunters, birdwatchers, and outdoor recreationalists. Whatever your preference, hopefully you can see some of it here.

Hunters are already in dove season and have white tailed deer season just around the corner. See the area newspapers for my specific forecasts of each common game animal.

Conservationists can look forward to cooler temperatures and hopefully an end to terribly dry conditions. Perhaps this is a great time to layout food plots or add bluegill to that pond.

Birdwatchers see an entire new collection of birds, including those migrating through our area. Look for different varieties of egret, heron, teal, ruddy duck, kestrel, sandpiper, shrike,



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Our Motto

- Look
- Learn
- Teach
- Conserve

Our Mascot Green Tree Frog



Did you know?

What animal's sense of smell is 10,000 times more sensitive than a human? Answer p.10

(View from Sugarloaf, Continued from page 1)

green thumbs, and educators to name a few. These groups as well as others will be the future backbone of our chapter.

Election of officers paved the way to chapter status. We all dove into establishing our operating procedures and quickly adopted our bylaws. With those tasks behind us, we applied for full chapter status, fully a good 6 months before any one had forecasted.

The Chairs were appointed and formed their committees. In little over a month they determined how they were going to assist and cooperate with the other committees. Again, due to the hard work and dedication, this task was accomplished in record time.

And graduation marked our "coming out" as a public organization. We were thrilled at the support of Milam County governmental organizations and the press. Not only had all trainees completed the course to become Master Naturalists, 10 of our members received full Certification.

Then there was the surprise by the State granting us full chapter status. TPWD had to scramble as it was not normal for a chapter to organize and complete the tasks required for chapter status as quickly as we had done.

(Wildlife, Continued from page 1)

warbler, and bunting to arrive.

Recreationalists look forward to cooler evening temperatures, which can lead, for example, to much more comfortable river visits and fishing.

Fall takes on a beautiful new time in our ecologic region, and I sincerely hope that you seize the opportunity to enjoy it!

Mike Mitchell, Chapter Advisor, Texas Parks and Wildlife Game Warden.



Apache Pass furnished us with a grandiose location and meal for our coming out party. Springing off graduation and the new contacts we made then led to the first of its kind event: a coalition between the City of Rockdale, TPWD, and our Chapter. We promoted and held a Horned Lizard training program for public employees, Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists, as well as an overview program for the public in general.

We drew local TMN and TMG chapters, the public, and interested individuals from as far away as Dallas, setting another first for the chapter and the state. **And that won't be the last as the City of Rockdale is looking** for more joint efforts.

Now the far off hills seen from Sugarloaf don't seem so far away, and the trip to them so uncertain. Our past journey gives us pride in what we have accomplished and the confidence that our future journey will be successful. We have accomplished much in a very short time and see only a bright future in Milam County.

Paul Unger, Chapter President



What's in a name?

By Dr. Lucile Estell, Ed Burleson, and Don Travis

We named our chapter "El Camino Real", which in Spanish means "the royal road" or "the King's highway", in honor of the great historical significance this famous highway has for Milam County. This road linked us in central Texas with our neighbors to the south and the north. To quote from Dr. Lucile Estell's article on our website at <http://grovesite.com/tmn/ecrmm> on why this trail is important to Milam County: (red underlines are clickable links, or go to www.tshaonline.org)

"To travel this Trail through Milam County means revisiting the history of this county. It means walking along the pathways blazed by our ancestors. The route of the Camino de los Tejas through Milam County is described in a book by Al McGraw and others, A Texas Legacy: The Old San Antonio Road and The Caminos Reales. In this book, McGraw notes that the trail entered Milam County north of Thrall at [Detmold](#).

It then went to Apache Pass, then northeast crossing Little River between its confluence with the San Gabriel and the FM 1600 Crossing. It goes on toward [Cameron](#), passing near the present day airport. The road forks in Milam County near Apache Pass with a portion of it going through [Rockdale](#) and [Gause](#).

Apache Pass was a major crossing on the Trail. It is a site where the wagon tracks across the [San Gabriel River](#) are still in evidence. Near Apache Pass are the mission sites, an area recognized by the National Register of Historic Places for its importance in the history of our nation. Much of this part of Milam County looks much as it did in 1691 as our ancestors traveled the Trail. As we study our county as naturalists, how appropriate that we also recognize the heritage which is a part of it as well!"

Ed Burleson won our Newsletter naming contest with "Los Caminos", meaning "the roads". The Spanish word "Camino" means a minor road, route or path. In this context, we want to celebrate and share all the various paths we take each day in our walk through nature. Whether in our own backyard, or driving along a beautiful highway, or while exploring a forest, wetland, stream

or prairie somewhere out there, we will see our bountiful land and precious wildlife, and we will make various decisions as to how we interact with what we see. It is the goal of master naturalists to Look, Learn, Teach and Conserve (our motto), and it is all our hopes that everyone's journey on their various paths through nature leads them to fulfillment and a lifelong commitment to conservation of our heritage.

We'll leave this article with a poem, "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost:

*"Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,*

*And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference."*

As you travel your own paths through nature, please share your experiences with us in our Newsletter, "Los Caminos"?

Dr. Lucile Estell, Ed Burleson, Don Travis



Snake Bite First Aid

By Don Travis

Of the 300,000 species of snakes, only around 1% or 3,000 are venomous. In the U.S., between 8 and 15 people die of snake bite every year. There are 15 venomous snake species native to the state of Texas. These include 1 coral snake, and three varieties of the pit viper



Rattlesnake

species: 1 cottonmouth (or water moccasin); 3 different copperheads; and 10 different rattlesnakes.

Obviously, preventing snake bites is better than treating them - by being careful where you step or reach, and by wearing proper clothing and hiking boots when taking excursions in the woods. But what if you do get bit?

Identification is key.

If you are bitten by a snake, try to memorize the identifying features of the snake - a must if you need anti-venom. Is the head triangular or round? Is the pupil of eye vertical or round? What about coloring and markings? Only Australia has approved venom detection kits to determine which venom is present from a blood or urine sample. Call 911 and/or the Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222 to get help in identifying the snake. Take a picture with your cell phone or digital camera if you can.

Pit vipers have triangular heads, and cat-eyes, as the copperhead close up photo at the right shows, the black pupil is shaped like the cross section of a vertically positioned convex lens. The pit, or hole, between the snake's eyes and its nostrils (thus the name pit viper) is heat-sensitive, enabling the snake to locate warm-blooded prey in total darkness. This is also clearly visible in the above picture, between the bottom of the eye and the bottom of the nostril.



A coral snake can be up to 3 ft long and has red, yellow, and black bands along the length of the body, with black

and yellow touching (remember, black and yellow - kill a fellow). They have round pupils and a black nose. While they have fangs, they tend to chew on their victims for a few seconds, and may leave tooth marks with or without fang marks.



Coral snake

© Chip Ruthven

Do not handle the snake. Even a dead snake can be dangerous since any venom remaining on the fangs could be injected if the skin is scratched. A snake may only inject part of its venom with each bite, so it is still dangerous after the first strike. A dead snake can have a bite reflex after death, even with its head severed.

Get help on the way immediately.

Obviously call 911 as soon as possible. Hopefully, your woodland adventure was with a partner, and you can send them for help. Sit down and stay calm with the bitten area (usually an extremity) in a normal body position below the heart. If you have to move by yourself to seek first aid, do so slowly and calmly to the nearest place for help. A childhood friend of mine lost his entire calf muscle because he peddled his bike all the way home rather than go to the nearest house. What would your child or grandchild do?

What are First Aid "Do's" and "Do Not's"?

Now that help has been summoned, what can you do until you get professional medical attention? Many previous first aid remedies are now considered ineffective or **outright dangerous, so be careful doing "what you heard"**.

- Do stay calm, and breathe!
- Do move from the vicinity of the snake, to help prevent multiple bites.
- Do remove any rings, watches, bracelets or other restricting items.
- Do immobilize the extremity, generally below heart level.

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- Do carefully and lightly wash the site with mild soap and water, if available.
- Do Not run or do anything physically strenuous.
- Do Not have anything to eat or drink, especially alcohol.
- Do Not take any medications or prescription drugs until a Doctor says you can.
- Do Not take aspirin, napracin, or ibuprofen unless told to by medical personnel as they could increase internal or external bleeding.
- Do Not apply tourniquets or otherwise restrict blood flow.
- Do Not apply ice or immerse in ice water under any circumstances as this markedly increases the risk of sloughing and necrosis, and may be more dangerous than the bite itself.
- Do Not use a razor or make any incisions over the bite marks. Use of a suction cup over the fang marks can be beneficial, if you have one immediately available **and can do it in the first 15 seconds, otherwise don't waste your time trying to find one.** And do not attempt to suction using your mouth – for obvious reasons.
- Do not use a stun gun or apply electric shock.

Will I need an antivenin shot?



Antivenin is a medicine that is given to stop snake venom from binding to tissues and causing serious blood, tissue, or nervous system problems. Side effects from the antivenin itself can include rash, itching, wheezing, rapid heart rate, fever, and body aches. Primarily for cost reasons, American Medical Response (AMR) does not carry antivenin on their trucks, and neither Rockdale nor Cameron hospitals stock it either. Only St. Josephs in Bryan or Scott & White in Temple have it on hand. The cost of one treatment is several thousands of dollars, and must be given within the first 4 hours to be effective. It can remain effective for up to 2 weeks. Even though the antivenins are purified by multiple processes, it may contain other serum proteins and some individuals may have an extreme hypersensitive reaction to the injection, so it is only administered if necessary by medical professionals after careful pa-

tient examination.

First aid and symptomatic treatment is the standard **protocol unless it's a small child or a very large envenomation where the body's natural immune system would not be able to sustain life.** Most snake bites do not inject sufficient venom to cause such life threatening conditions, and bites on hands or feet where there is little muscle tissue to absorb the venom are seldom



life threatening. At least 25%, perhaps up to 50%, of bites are dry. When poison is injected, about 35% of bites are mild envenomation, 25% are moderate, and only 10% to 15% are severe. The primary health concerns are immediate treatment for possible infections and for symptoms of systemic poisoning; such as shock, nausea, difficulty breathing, and severe pain or swelling, and necrosis of tissue surrounding the injection site.

Where does snake antivenin come from?

After the snake venom is milked, it is injected in small amounts into mammals such as horses, sheep, pigs, or rabbits. These animals have an immune response whereby antibodies against the venom are generated naturally. The antivenin is then harvested from the blood of the animal, purified and stored in freeze-dried ampules or liquid cold storage containers. It is injected into muscular areas for absorption.

In Conclusion.

Explore and enjoy nature where ever you are. Be careful where you step or reach. And follow the above first aid protocols if you do happen to get bit.

The information for this article came from numerous publically available sources, and includes the following highly recommended web sites: <http://texas-venomous.com/index.html>, <http://www.zo.utexas.edu/research/txherps/>, and <http://health.yahoo.com> (search on "snake bite").

Don Travis

Wildlife Management Ag Valuation, by Don Travis

Are you tired of running cows on your property, or want to diversify your property management? Did you inherit or purchase land that currently has "Ag" valuation on it, and you don't want to lose it? Are you



interested in managing your land for Wildlife and still maintain your agricultural tax valuation? **Yes? Great! Let's** talk about what is involved to get started on a new and exciting adventure with Wildlife!

A bit of history, both legal and personal.

In 1995, Texas voters approved Proposition 11, which amended the Texas Constitution to permit agricultural appraisal for land that is used to manage wildlife. House Bill 1358 implemented the constitutional amendment. In 2001, the Legislature passed H.B. 3123 requiring the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to develop, and the Comptroller to adopt, rules for the qualification of **agricultural land in wildlife management use.** "Why did they do this?" you ask.

Well, I haven't found any documented statements on this, but was told in a training session that serious concerns were being raised over the deteriorating conditions of wildlife habitat on the 95% of land in Texas that is privately owned. Some of this would be due to



ranch and farm land being passed to children who had little interest in ranching or farming, who then leased the land out to maintain tax advantaged status and the land would be over grazed and

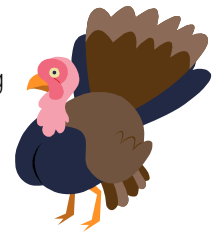
under managed leading to loss of native habitats and soil erosion, or it would be sold to developers. By allowing land to be valued under a Wildlife Management plan, it would help mitigate these circumstances, as well as encourage much improved habitat management and wildlife **conservation all over the state.** While I'm sure there are other very valid reasons for this new plan, the above logic made sense to me, and this program also fit my circumstances quite nicely.

We bought our property in two contiguous tracts in



1997 and 1999, totaling 265 acres. The **land had been pretty much "let go"** over the past 10 years, after many previous years of cattle grazing, and had lost its Ag valuation. I filed to reinstate it, by creating a combination of farming activities that involved clearing land for coastal hay production, clearing out a totally overgrown native pecan orchard for nut harvesting, and dedicating pastures and corrals for our horse breeding and training operation. However, much of the property is riparian (borders Sandy Creek) and had forests, thick native brush, and pastures overgrown with Mesquite, Yaupon and various native grasses, all of which just ached to be **managed for wildlife, so that's what I started doing.**

When I later heard about the Wildlife Management valuation option, and investigated it, I realized I was already doing many of the required activities. So beginning in 2005 I converted over to it, while continuing all my other farm related activities. At some point, as we get older, our horse breeding and hay activity may **dwindle down but the wildlife management will continue "till death do us part"** - and my only contribution to cattle ranching will remain eating good beef (along with venison and wild hog!).



Ok, so just what is a "Wildlife Valuation"?

Land that qualifies for an agricultural valuation is appraised on its productivity value rather than on its market value. While many people refer to such land as **having an "ag exemption", in fact there is no such exemption—it is just a different method of calculating the land's** value for ad valorem tax purposes. Under Texas law, wildlife management is legally nothing more than an additional qualifying agricultural practice people may choose from in order to maintain the agricul-



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tural valuation on their land. Just as there is no real ag "exemption", there also is no wildlife "exemption". Wildlife management is not an additional or separate land appraisal. For ad valorem tax purposes, wildlife management is still agriculture, and there is no change in the ad valorem tax valuation rate used for agriculture.

To qualify, you have to implement a minimum of three wildlife management Activities from the following seven:

- Habitat Control
- Erosion Control
- Predator Control
- Providing supplemental water
- Providing supplemental food
- Providing shelter
- Making census counts to determine population

How many of these are you already doing?

There are numerous Practices described under each Activity, and you would pick at least one for each Activity selected. That is the minimum.

However, any reasonable wildlife management plan will include much more than the minimum to be effective and realistic. My 2005 plan encompassed a total of 10 Practices in 5 of the 7 Activities above. The law does not require TPWD to approve your plan, or certify your land, or even to consult or advise you in the preparation of your plans. And it does not require you to be successful in wildlife management (or any agricultural management), but it does require the landowner to demonstrate good faith efforts.

[Tell me a little more about these Activities and Practices.](#)

Under *Habitat Control*, you can work on a) grazing management to minimize impact of agricultural animals, b) prescribed burning to enhance plant diversity and increase native food sources, c) range reseeding for improved food, cover and erosion control, d) brush management for the selective removal of targeted woody plants and encouragement of beneficial ones, e) riparian

management and enhancement of streams and other wetlands via fencing or vegetation establishment, f) prescribed control of native, exotic or feral species harmful to targeted wildlife, and there is more in the documentation referenced later.

Erosion Control includes practices such as: a) pond construction and repairs, b) gully shaping, c) dike or levee construction for water diversion, and more.

Predator Control incorporates practices to remove or reduce coyotes, bobcats, rat snakes, feral cats and dogs, feral hogs, imported fire ants, cow birds, and crackle/starling/house sparrows to name a few.

Providing Supplemental Water can entail: a) wetland and pond/stream restoration or development, b) use of wells, troughs, and windmill overflows for wildlife watering, and c) spring development or enhancement.

Providing Supplemental Food can include previous activities mentioned such as grazing management, prescribed burning, and range re-seeding, as well as planting food plots or using feeders.

Providing Supplemental Shelter by building nesting boxes (birds, bats, ducks, etc.), making brush piles and retention of slash, pasture management by mowing after peak of nesting/rearing season and mowing in swaths or mosaics to create edges and structural diversity, and half cutting trees and shrubs for additional ground cover.

Census Counts includes spotlight surveys, incidental counts, detailed harvest records, browse utilization, and counts of endangered, protected or nongame wildlife.

The specific actions involved for all these, and more, are described along with many pictures in the referenced Guidelines and Appendixes mentioned below.



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You will choose what wildlife species to manage, and you **will choose what techniques you want to use. I'd suggest you don't overdo it in your initial plans, but focus your efforts, and do it well. Then add to it over time.**

So what's required to get started?

First, your land must already have a 1-D-1 Agricultural Valuation. You cannot convert residential or industrial valued property.

Second, there are no minimum acreage requirements, UNLESS the property in question was just partitioned out of a larger tract that had 1-D-1 and there was a change in ownership. In that situation, consult with the County Tax Appraisal Office.



Third, you've got lots of reading to do. **Learn all about** the seven Activities, and the Practices within each, contained in the Comprehensive Wildlife Management Planning Guidelines and Appendixes. There is a specific set for our eco-region, the Post Oak Savannah and Black Land Prairie. See http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/private/agricultural_land/ and read the **main document, and those Appendixes of interest. I'd recommend you send an email to the "wildlife" email address posted there and request a CD be mailed.** These are very large pdf files.

Fourth, after thinking through what Activities and Practices make sense for you and your property, contact the Wildlife Biologist for Milam County, Mr. Billy Lambert, at 979-690-3527 or lambert69@verizon.net, and ask him to conduct a review of your property and your ideas.

He will provide you with a written report **characterizing your property's wildlife** management features, with suggestions for areas of focus. You can then incorporate this into your plan as you see fit.



Fifth, complete the Wildlife Mgmt. Plan document, covering the period of years appropriate to your objectives, along with any supporting maps, pictures, or attachments and mail it to your County Tax Appraisal Office. You will be notified of the accepted change in valuation, or denial.

Sixth, begin working on implementing your plans, and documenting what you do as you go. You will be expected to complete an Annual Report, describing your actions for the year against your plan. The template for this is also at the above link. The Milam Tax office will notify you each year if a report is to be sent to them. They may not ask for it every year, but do one anyway is my advice.

Finally, congratulate yourself on contributing to the enhancement of native wildlife on your very own Texas property. Put in practice many of the things you learn from the Texas Master Naturalist program right in your own backyard. And if you or future landowners ever decide to revert back to the original basis for 1-D-1 **agricultural evaluation, that's not a problem.**

And of course, you can even do all the Wildlife Management activities without ever filing for a Wildlife Ag valuation - just go do it!



Don Travis

2009 Class Schedule—Enroll Now!!

By Paula Engelhardt

On January 13, 2009, we will begin our second class for Master Naturalists in Milam County. Our first class was held from January to May 2008 and graduated 24 volunteers, and we are looking to have at least that many again.

This 16 week class will be held on Tuesdays, from 6pm -

9pm in various Rockdale locations, and on some Saturday mornings for field trips. During the class and after graduation, volunteers will be working towards Certification as a Texas Master Naturalist by completing 40 hours of volunteer work on various exciting and educational projects. Believe me, the 40 hours goes by real

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easy, and many will achieve more hours than that.

Further information and enrollment forms are available from: our website at <http://grovesite.com/tmn/ecrmn>; the AgriLife Extension Office by calling 254-697-7045; or Paula Engelhardt at 512-922-4150. Enrollment fee is \$150 (primarily to cover class expenses), and must be included when you mail in your application. Application deadline is December 1, 2008.

A basic background check will be conducted, as many volunteers will be working with youth in our county, and for the safety of all in the program.

So, get ready to learn all about nature, wildlife and conservation from experts around the state -- so you can apply that knowledge on your own property, participate in volunteer projects in Milam County, and share your knowledge and experiences with others.

The current but still somewhat tentative class schedule is as follows: **Blue Lettering = not yet confirmed**

- 1) Tuesday, January 13, Introduction; TX Naturalists prior to WWII; Volunteers as teachers, by Mr. Sonny Arnold; Mr. Mike Mitchell
- 2) Tuesday, January 20, Ecological Concepts and Regions of TX; Ecosystem Management, by Dr. Jane M. Packard
- 3) Tuesday, January 27, Texas Wildscapes, by Mr. Mark Klym
- 4) Tuesday, February 3, Wildlife and Fauna of TX, TCWC FIELD TRIP (6-9pm), by Mrs. Heather Prestridge, Mr. Dale A. Kruse, curator
- 5) Tuesday, February 10, Nature of Naming: Plants, by Florence M. Oxley
- 6) Tuesday, February 17, Entomology, by Dr. John A. **"Jack" Jackman**
- 7) Tuesday, February 24, Geology and Soils of TX, by Dr. Sam Feagley
- 8) Tuesday, March 3, Ornithology, by Dr. Craig Farquhar
- 9) Tuesday, March 10, Herpetology, by Dr. Toby J. Hib-

bits

Tuesday, March 17, NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK

10) Saturday, March 28, Grasslands and Range Management, **LOCATION TBA**, by Dr. Barron Rector

11) and 12) Saturday, April 4, Wetlands; Aquatic Ecology; Ichthyology, WACO WETLANDS LECTURE AND FIELD TRIP (6 hours = 2 classes), by Ms. Melissa L. Mullins, Ms. Nora Schell

13) Tuesday, April 7, Mammalogy, **Speaker TBA**

14) Tuesday, April 14, Weather (6:00-7:30) by Dr. Steven M. Quiring, and Blackland Prairie (7:30-9:00), **Speaker TBA**

Tuesday, April 21, NO CLASS

15) Saturday, April 25, SUGARLOAF MTN FIELD TRIP, **Indian's Role, by Dr. Alston Thoms; Plant Composition, Speaker TBA**

Tuesday, April 28, NO CLASS

16) Tuesday, May 5, Archeology and Forestry = possibilities, **Speakers TBA**, Graduation Planning and Wrap up Class

Tuesday, May 12, GRADUATION DAY!!

Pass along the information to anyone you know, and help us grow the number of Certified Master Naturalists in Milam County!



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Upcoming Major Events:

- 9/23 Plant and Grass Field trip to Ed Voss property.
- 10/4-5 **Texas Parks & Wildlife's "Wildlife Expo"**
- 10/8-9 Plant ID Workshop, with Flo Oxley
- 10/14 ECRC chapter meeting
- 10/17 Rockdale Fair—Master Naturalist booth
- 10/24-26 MO Ranch State Mtg. and Advanced Workshops
- 11/11 **ECRC chapter meeting, at Katherine Bedrich's**
- 11/19 Spring Training applications and dates due to State
- 12/1 Class of 2009 Enrollments final due date
- 12/9 ECRC chapter meeting

El Camino Real



TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST



Did you know?

Q. What animal's sense of smell is 10,000 times more sensitive than a human?

A. It's a snake. Their tongues can actually sense smells down to the molecular level.