

Master Naturalist™



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The Texas Master Naturalist program activities are coordinated by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and Texas Parks and Wildlife. Texas Master Naturalist and Extension programs serve all people regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability or national origin.

# Los Caminos



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

Award Winning Newsletter of the El Camino Real Chapter  
Milam County **Texas Master Naturalist** Fall 2013

## Table of Contents

Prairie Tracks—Katherine Bedrich	1
Texas Plant Conservation—Debbi Harris	2
<b>What's the Best Birdseed for Fall?</b> - eNature.com, Don Travis	3
Horny Toads—Dorothy Mayer	4
New Class Signup—Dorothy Mayer	4
Junior Naturalist Summer Program—Katherine Bedrich	5
Texas Native Plant Week—Don Travis	6
The Nature of Milam County—Katherine Bedrich	7
Watching Hawks—eNature.com, Don Travis	8
Certifications, Etc.- Debbi Harris	9
Did You Know? - Don Travis	9

## Prairie Tracks by Katherine Bedrich

Do you wonder of the prairie in its **full grandeur...**

...the sea of grass;  
sprouting, growing, trampled, chewed,  
burning, seeding...

...do you wonder of the floral palate of blue,  
red and yellow;  
brushed in strokes of multicolored fragrance...

...do you wonder about the red wolf, the black footed ferret, the prairie chicken;  
supporters of the rich diverse landscape...

...do you wonder of the wind; strong, soft, cool...

...do you wonder of the warm sun, the living clouds, the lightless nights...

...do you wonder of the dry dust, the fresh rain, the morning dew,...

...do you wonder of the playas, the natural movement, the forever smoothness...

...do you ever wonder...of a prairie...



### Our Motto

- Look
- Learn
- Teach
- Conserve

### Our Mascot Green Tree Frog



### Did You Know?

Will a mouse fit through a keyhole?



See last page for answer.

## Texas Plant Conservation

by Debbi Harris

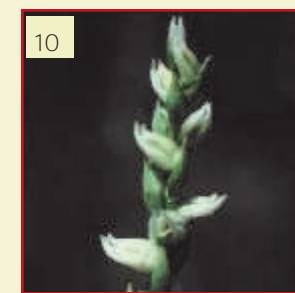
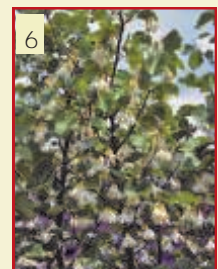
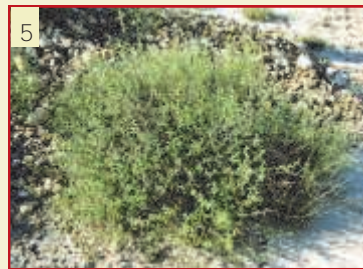
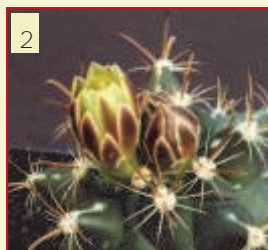
On August 30, 2013 Milam County had the privilege of hearing Dr. Flo Oxley present an advanced training program on Texas Plant Conservation which included endangered, threatened or rare species.

So what are endangered, threatened or rare species? Endangered species are those having 5 documented populations in the wild and they are categorized as S1 or G1 (S for state labeled and G for globally labeled). Threatened species are those having 5-10 populations in the wild and are categorized as S2 or G2. Rare species are those that we do not know enough about yet and are categorized as S3 or G3. Globally, there are between 10-29% of plant species are at risk of extinction.

In North America, 20,000 native species plants are among these listings! There are more than 730 that are considered endangered, threatened or rare and it is estimated that 20% (1 in every 5) native plant species that are declining and are at risk of extinction!

In Texas, there are about 5-6,000 species of native plants on the listings and one-quarter of them are native Texas flora, making 204 that are of concern, 23 are endangered species and 5 are threatened species. Here are 11 of the endangered species:

1. *Callirhoe scabriuscula* (Texas Poppy mallow),
2. *Ancistrocactus tobuschii* (Tobusch fishhook cactus),
3. *Echinocereus reichenbachii* (Black lace cactus),
4. *Coryphantha minima* (Nellie cory cactus),
5. ***Frankenia johnstonii* (Johnson's frankenia),**
6. *Styrax plantanifolius* (Texas snowbells),
7. ***Manihot walkerae* (Walker's manioc),**
8. *Thymophylla tephroleuca* (Ashy dogweed, Ashy pricklyleaf),
9. *Abronia macrocarpa* (Large-fruited sand verbena),
10. ***Spiranthes parksii* (Navasota ladies' tresses) and**
11. *Zizania texana* (Texas wild rice).



In closing, Dr. Flo emphasized we still have time to make a difference and that is through conservation. We can make an impact by saving our endangered species - if we do not, extinction is forever!

[Editor: Above photos from Wildflower.org, TPWD, Wikipedia, and other public internet sources]

The next day, Dr. Flo led us on a walk-about, where we learned about plant identification techniques, and how to document our findings for future reference and research purposes. Here are a few pictures of the class in action:

Submitted by Debbi Harris



## What's the Best Birdseed for Fall? by eNature.com, Don Travis

[Originally posted online at eNature.com. Reprinted here under Fair Use Law]

This is about the time of the year when most people think **about feeding birds in their backyards. We're not sure why** this happens only in autumn, because feeding birds throughout the year has many rewards. Yet, autumn is the time when bird seed sales are held, and bird feeders are promoted most widely.

**Perhaps, it's the notion that birds need more help in cold** weather, and therefore, bird feeding is more popular in winter. Whatever the reason, the bird feeding season is on, and people are buying lots of bird seeds.

The kind of seeds you offer backyard birds makes a difference, **because all birds don't eat the same foods.**

If there is one kind of seed that is most attractive to the greatest number of backyard birds, it would be sunflower in any form. Sunflower seeds are relished by finches, grosbeaks, cardinals, jays, and even some species of woodpeckers.

The two most popular forms of sunflower seeds for birds are the black oil sunflower seed, which is in the shell, and the hulled (medium cracked) sunflower seed, which is out of the **shell. eNature's bird expert, George Harrison, tells us that if** he could feed only one kind of bird food in his backyard, it would be hulled sunflower seeds.

Other popular seeds for finches, include niger (thistle), also spelled nyjer, a tiny black seed that is offered in a tube feeder with tiny port holes. Safflower seeds are a favorite among cardinals, doves, and house finches. And the various wild bird seed mixes are eaten by sparrows, doves, juncos, and blackbirds.

**So don't miss out on having a busy backyard this fall. If you leave bird seed out, it's almost certain to get found.**

And have fun with the birds this fall!

[Photos from public domain. Another good article is by [Bob Vila](http://www.bobvila.com/articles/how-to-care-for-winter-birds/) at [www.bobvila.com/articles/how-to-care-for-winter-birds/](http://www.bobvila.com/articles/how-to-care-for-winter-birds/) and also discusses suet feeders.]



birds.deansfamily.com



Backyardchirper.com

## P. Cornutum, aka Horny Toad

by Dorothy Mayer

For some unknown reason, Milam County, TX has a small pocket of known surviving Horned Lizards. Since I joined the local Master Naturalist Chapter, El Camino Real Chapter of Milam County, I have been watching these lizards a bit closer, as well as doing research on them. Although many specialists are researching the reason for their survival here, I have postulated some of my own theories.



lots of them are surviving are in residential neighborhoods. So something must be 'right' for them right wherever you may happen to see them. Leave them alone and maybe your children and grandchildren will get the opportunity to see Horned Lizards in their native environments.

If you see a Horned Lizard, please get in contact with a Master Naturalist

Here are some of my thoughts on the matter, which are definitely unproven and may or may not be true:

- 1) Cats may actually benefit the survival of the Horned Lizard by keeping down the number of snakes and road-runners.
- 2) While Horned Lizards are known to need Harvester Ants to be healthy, they may be eating Leaf Cutter ants and other ants in the area
- 3) They may be using the steady run off from air conditioners in yards to be a constant, dependable source of water, as they need to soak about 20 minutes a day in order to stay hydrated.
- 4) It is probably not coincidental that the areas they are known to be in, are not in yards that have planted non-native grasses and plants, or where people consistently apply insecticides.

One of the biggest threats in the past has been people taking the lizards home to make pets of them. For this reason, Horned Lizards have been designated a protected species. They do not survive well in captivity, even with very experienced reptile rescue specialists. The species we have in Milam County are some of the hardest to keep alive in captivity. So, please do not try to move them to a better location. For some unknown reason, they are surviving where they are. And, where

ist in Milam County so that we can make certain the scientists get the information they need to help this species survive.

They are trained in the handling and documenting activities.



## New Class! Signup Now!

by Dorothy Mayer

We are currently signing up students for a new training class that will begin on October 4, 2013 and take place, mostly on Friday mornings/afternoons from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. during October and November and the first Friday in December. After that we will break for the holidays and come back Fridays in January and the first Friday in February to complete the training program.

We really do have a great lineup of presenters so, we are getting really excited. If you are even remotely thinking this is something you might want to do, please go online and sign up at [HTTP://txmn.org/elcamino/how-to-join/](http://txmn.org/elcamino/how-to-join/) or give Dorothy Mayer a call at 254-482-3235 for more information or, if you have further questions. If you even think you might enjoy this class, do not wait, sign up today. I know you will be glad you did. You have no idea what you are missing.

### Junior Naturalist Summer Program

by Katherine Bedrich

Chapter members participated in several youth education programs this summer.

At Rockdale Elementary, programs on Monarchs, Frogs and Birds were presented. Debbi taught Monarch migration and their life stage. Katherine used balloons and bottles to teach about different frog calling. Ann had singing plush birds to teach calls; and bird seed peanut butter pine cones were made. Sue gave a quiz daily reinforcing the subject taught the day before. Sherry and Jeanette supported the group.



and recording your dig was part of the presentation. Youth had the opportunity to "dig" for artifacts.

Chapter members involved in these programs included: Sue Taylor, John Pruett, Jeanette Patschke, Dorothy Mayer, Kathy Lester, Debbi Harris, Michele Fletcher, Lucy Coward, Ann Collins, Sherry Colley, Chip Colley, Cindy Bolch, and Katherine Bedrich.

By Katherine Bedrich

During the months of July and August; Wetland education, and Monarchs and Butterflies were presented to the youth at The Apple Tree.



Mussels, crawdads, dragonflies, fish, reptiles and amphibians were part of the wetland project. The youth learned about the mussels of Milam County. A game of Mussel-O was enjoyed by



all. Live crawfish were brought. The water from the containers was changed by the youth; and they fed the crawfish. Turtle shells were examined. The butterfly life cycle was explained along with Monarch migration. Lucy and Cindy showed



everyone how to cast a rod and reel.

In August a presentation on Archeology was given at the Cameron Library in conjunction with the Summer Reading Program. Michele introduced the group to archeology digging. How to dig, what may be found,



# Texas Native Plant Week

by Don Travis

[This article used excerpts from the Texas Native Plant Week web site, [txnativeplantweek.org](http://txnativeplantweek.org).]

Texas Native Plant Week is the third week of October, and celebrates its fifth anniversary this year - October 20-26.

The "Texas Native Plant Week" declaration became official with HB 1739 in 2009. Both houses passed HB 1739 with a unanimous vote. On June 19, 2009, Governor Perry signed it into law with the bill taking effect on September 1, 2009. Faye Tessnow and Barbara Anderson, both members of the Highland Lakes Chapter of the Texas Native Plant Society, are credited with making this happen.

This is the original speech presented by Faye Tessnow on March 24, 2009 to the representative committee which led to **the bill's submission:**

*We believe that native plants are valuable. Native plants are essential to the maintenance of a healthy ecosystem. This is to maintain life among different species from the birds and small creatures to mammals and other animals. Native plants are the food source for the pollinators, which are so important to perpetuate the existence for all. Birds spread the seed and pollinate flowers as they fly from plant to plant and on their ways north and south across our state.*

*Plants not only are a food source, they are home for creatures. From the tallest of trees to the lowest grasses, are nesting places. They are also resting places for the birds and butterflies during heavy rains and thunderstorms. Some native plants are host plants that are vital in the early development of butterflies. Examples: Milkweeds are host plants for the Monarch butterflies. Mexican Plum Tree is host for the Tiger Swallowtail; Passion Flowers are hosts for Gulf Fritillary and also Zebra Longwing. Common Wood Nymph need grasses and the water willows. The Snout Butterfly need Hackberries.*

*Native plants are essential for insect biodiversity. Forests remain healthy because the insects hold each other in check. An insect may eat the leaves of one plant, but not all. The surrounding plants and trees keep each other in check and balance. An experiment was done in South Texas on a ranch. One plot was planted with native*

*grasses and forbs. The other plot was planted with alien species of grasses and low growing plants. It was noted that the state bird, the Mockingbird, went to the native plants for food in a ratio of 3:1 over the non native species plot. They preferred the insects that were on the native plants because of the health of the insects. Douglas W. Tallamy, "Bringing Nature Home" on how native plants sustain wildlife noted this in his book. This has to do with leaf chemistry and the adaptation of insects to the plants.*

*Native plants are economical. They can easily be in a xeriscape landscape because they need so little water. When we plant native plants, care is taken to water some, sparingly, during the first six months; after that, only in extreme dry conditions. Native plants should be used more in lawns, because mowing is expensive. Every time we use the lawnmower it is a waste. Soil is healthier, too, when the organic matter is allowed to remain instead of being raked or swept away.*

*We want community involvement. We want to promote conservation, whether at home, or in the schoolroom. We want to educate people on the value of native plants. They are essential to our physical and mental health. We need to restore a vital habitat.*

For a list of activities during Native Plant Week see <http://txnativeplantweek.wordpress.com/fun-activities/>. **Here's one** to get you started on your way with native plants:

**October 4 and 5, 2013 - At the Wildflower Center's Fall Plant Sale and Gardening Festival** you can choose from nearly 300 species of Texas native plants. The event also features artists and authors signing their works in the store, guided walks and talks and tips for your garden from experts and kids activities. Saturday & Sunday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (Members Only Preview on Friday, October 3, 1 p.m. - 7 p.m.). Admission \$9 adults, \$7 seniors and students, \$4 UT faculty, staff or students with identification, \$3 children 5 through 12, members and children under 5 free. Held at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, 4801 La Crosse



Planting native trees, shrubs and flowers helps conserve water, provide wildlife habitat and shows your Texas pride!



Shelley Plantes

(Continued on page 7)

Avenue, Austin, Texas 78739. Call (512) 232-0100 or visit <http://www.wildflower.org/plantsale/>.

Recommendations from various native plant programs include:

- Keep cats indoors as they are known to be destructive to bird populations
- Monitor nest boxes intended for native birds and remove European starlings and House sparrows.
- Use black oil sunflower seeds to discourage House sparrows from your feeders
- Establish a rain garden which will serve as a buffer to filter storm water
- Xeriscape flower beds with native plants

- Eliminate chemical use
- Mulch
- Compost
- Reduce lawn areas and increase habitat areas
- Remove invasive exotics

The book mentioned earlier is *"Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants, Updated and Expanded"*, by Douglas W. Tallamy and Rick Darke. It's available on Amazon for under \$13.

By Don Travis, text and photos from txnativeplantweek.org.

## The Nature of Milam County

by Katherine Bedrich

El Camino Real Chapter has developed The Nature of Milam County Project for members and the community to participate in collecting data on the fauna and flora in the county.

Here are some observations from members taken the last few months...

There is a roadrunner family living on County Road 241. If you drive down the road, you will most likely see one of them. Horned Lizards are running wild in parts of the county. Volunteers have been collecting data for TPWD since 2008. Several babies have been seen this summer. Monarchs have been sited; hummingbirds are migrating and sucking dry any free sugar station they find. And the doodlebugs keep doodling.

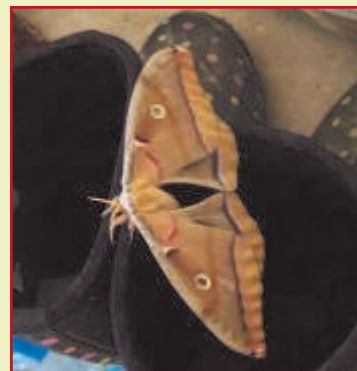


**Some member sightings...** Cindy B. saw her first cerulean warbler; Janice had a killdeer nest on the road and was rewarded with babies. Donna found a hummingbird nest; Dorothy photographed an Imperial Moth at Don and Cindy's. **Jeanette's ox blood lilies are blooming.** The frog fruit at **Katherine's keeps hopping.** Sherry has a great horned owl near the swimming pool. Pamela and Lucy have Orioles eating all the fruit they can find. Kim saw a robin



and John has too many copperheads. Phyllis' red shouldered hawks are a permanent fixture and Kathy has seen a fox. Linda Jo has mussels and Sandra's red bellied woodpecker keeps her entertained at the bathroom window.

Our observations are helping us to learn about the environment and habitat each species is adapted to. We are helping each other with identification by learning the common names and genus species.



## Watching Hawks

Enature.com reprint, Don Travis

[This is a text reprint of an eNature.com article, photos from Wikipedia]

Every fall, millions of birds fly south to spend the winter in sunny places with mild climates and plentiful food.

Most smaller birds migrate under the cover of darkness, stopping to fuel up on insects or seeds by day and using the stars to guide them at night.

Hawks, by contrast, are diurnal migrants: they depend on currents of rising warm air to lift them to high altitudes where they glide on their broad wings without flapping, thereby conserving energy.

During these flights, hawks use their keen eyesight to recognize landmarks, follow landforms that provide rising thermals, and steer a course to their ancestral wintering grounds. In some places these migrating hawks gather in huge numbers, and people gather to watch them with binoculars and data sheets in the phenomenon known as the hawkwatch.

Counting hawks during migration is more than a competitive pursuit for list-oriented birders. The data collected at hawk-watches helps experts monitor the health of various ecosystems. Because hawks are top predators—that is, they occupy the top of the food chain—they're very sensitive to changes

that affect prey species. Comparing hawk numbers from year to year reveals trends that offer insight into the well-being of the environment in both the breeding and wintering areas.

But more than simply counting hawks, **there's the spectacle** of it all. Standing atop a ridge on a crisp autumn day while hundreds of hawks circle and stream past is an unforgettable experience, which helps ex-

plain why people return to these sites day after day and hawk-watch programs across the country attract volunteers by the dozens.

Visit the hawkwatch site at <http://enature.com/outdoors/hawkwatch/> to see locations around the US, and find a local **site where you'll meet people who came one day out of curiosity and soon became regulars.**

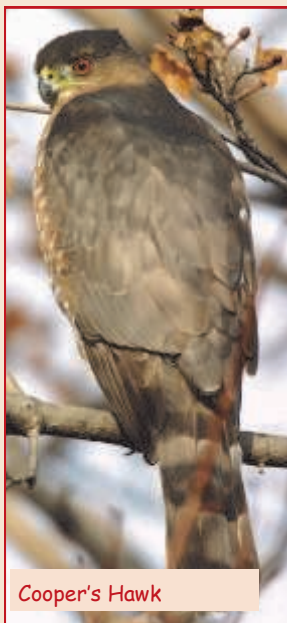
Also visit Hawkwatch International's homepage, <http://www.hawkwatch.org/> if you'd like to learn more or get involved. Their mission is to conserve the environment through education, long-term monitoring, and scientific research on raptors as indicators of ecosystem health.



Adult Red Tailed Hawk



Juvenile Red Tailed Hawk Eating Prey



Cooper's Hawk



Goshawk



Common Kestrel



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Los Caminos is a quarterly publication of the "El Camino Real Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists", a 501(c)(3) nonprofit volunteer educational organization.

## Certifications, Etc. By Debbi Harris

New since the Summer 2013 newsletter **are in this color.**



Our 2013 Re-Certification pin is the Monarch Butterfly. Those achieving their 2013 pins include: Katherine Bedrich, Cindy Bolch, Ann Collins, Lucy Coward, Dorothy Mayer, Don Travis, Sherry Collie, Linda Jo Conn, Debbi Harris, Donna Lewis, John Pruet, Jeannette Patschke, Cindy Travis and **Sandra Dworaczyk.**

Lifetime to date Milestone Achievement Levels Awarded include:

250 Hours—Paul Unger, Ann Collins, Katherine Bedrich, Cindy Bolch, Paula Engelhardt, Don Travis, Debbi Harris, Joy Graham, Lucile Estell, Shawn Walton, Anne Barr, Ed Bureson, Connie Roddy, Dorothy Mayer, Lucy Coward, **Donna Lewis, Sue Taylor, Phyllis Shuffield, Sandra O'Donnell, Jim O'Donnell, Vivian Dixon, Sandra Dworaczyk, Cindy McDaniels, Sandra Dworaczyk, Janice Johnson, Gary McDaniels, Kim Summers, Rusty Thomas, and Cindy Travis.**

500 Hours—Paul Unger, Ann Collins, Katherine Bedrich, Cindy Bolch, Paula Engelhardt, Don Travis, Anne Barr, Donna Lewis, Phyllis Shuffield, Lucy Coward, Debbi Harris, Dorothy Mayer, Sue Taylor and Connie Roddy

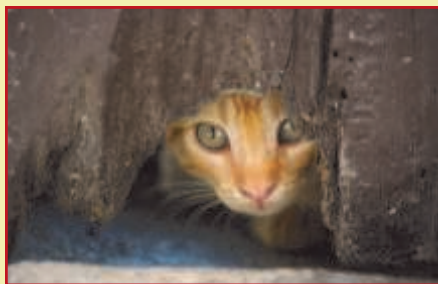
1000 Hours—Paul Unger, Ann Collins, Katherine Bedrich, Cindy Bolch, Don Travis, Paula Engelhardt, Debbi Harris, Donna Lewis, Connie Roddy, Sue Taylor, Lucy Coward, **Dorothy Mayer.**

2500 Hours—Paul Unger, Katherine Bedrich, Cindy Bolch and **Don Travis.**

Our Year-to-Date and Total Accumulated hours for Advanced Training are: 550 and 3809 respectively. Our Year-to-Date and Total Accumulated hours for Volunteer Events are: 3547 and 27,381 respectively.

**Congratulations to All.**

## Did You Know?



## Will a mouse fit through a keyhole?

During the summer months, mice will generally live outside and remain contented there. But as soon as the weather begins to cool, they seek the warmth of our homes.

Because of their soft skulls and gnawing ability, a 1/4 inch hole the size of a ballpoint pen or pencil or even a keyhole is large enough for smaller younger mice to enter en masse. Weep holes in brick exteriors are favorite spots of entry to interior walls.

Once inside, they will constantly gnaw at virtually anything - including concrete, lead, and plastic. This is to keep their ever-growing teeth at a convenient length.

Mice can jump up to 18 inches, swim, and travel vertically or upside-down. To mouse proof your house, check all small openings with a ballpoint pen - if it fits the hole, it just might let mice in.

**Contrary to popular belief, mice don't generally prefer cheese for food, but will go for peanut butter, fresh bacon (yum!), any smelly pet food, and grains, seeds and nuts. Add a few drops of vanilla, maple syrup or chocolate—anything with some aroma. And a good killer cat will help!**