



Los Caminos

The Texas Master Naturalist program activities are coordinated by AgriLife Extension 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.

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** Spring 2012

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Prairie Tracks by Katherine Bedrich

The Masked Bandit

The Carnivora Order of mammals in Texas has a long list of familiar wildlife. One of those animals we see often in Milam County is the Northern or Common Raccoon. This raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) is in the Family **Procyonidae, from procyonid meaning "walking on the whole sole of the foot"**.



Pbjingsthings.blogspot.com

The raccoon is a medium size mammal weighting 6-15 lbs. Body length is 2 -3 feet. A dark mask with whitish outline covers the face giving them the appearance of a masked bandit. Hair color is gray with orange, brown, and black spots or stripes. The tail has dark rings.

rodents, birds, frogs, crawdads, and other small aquatic animals. Raccoons do not necessarily wash their food before eating. This "washing" motion may be more of a need to experience the object than to actually clean it.

Adults are solitary except for the time spent rearing young. The young are born blind and helpless in the spring, 3-6 to a litter. The family will stay together through the first winter; most young leave after the first year. Raccoons in the wild live an average of less than five years.

The main predator of the raccoon is humans. Hunting and trapping for their fur, take the majority of raccoons. **Bobcats, foxes, and coyotes are the raccoon's natural**



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Our Motto

Our Mascot
Green Tree Frog

- Look
- Learn
- Teach
- Conserve



Did You Know?

What animal can stick its tongue in its ear?

See the last page for the answer.

The ring-tailed masked bandit lives on open woodland, prairie grasslands, farm land where corn is planted. Wherever a raccoon makes a den, it will be near a water source. Dens are hollow trees, rock ledges, barns, attics, under the porch or other available living areas. They may share dens with skunks and opossums; but not at the same time. Raccoons are nocturnal, sleeping during the day and hunting for food at night. They have excellent night vision.

Raccoons diet consist of plants and animals. Large insects, including grasshoppers, fruits, berries and seeds are a major food source. They also consume cottontails, small

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enemies. Disease, parasites and food shortages are other reasons for raccoon deaths.

The raccoon is a new world animal. Benefiting from humans, it has become a regular resident of suburban and urban areas. As habit loss creates problems for many animals, the raccoon has adjusted to moving in with the species responsible for the change, and change themselves to co-exist in another new world environment.

Resources:

Wild Neighbors - the Humane Society of the United States

American Wildlife and Plants - Martin, Zim, and Nelson

The Mammals of Texas - David Schmidly

Handbook of Nature Study - Anna B. Comstock

By Katherine Bedrich



[Editor: Who says deer feeders are just for deer? Not these bandits! From my game camera. Don Travis]

Can't See the Forest for the Trees, by Sue Taylor

When you're born and raised in the country, sometimes you take the nature around you for granted. I'm sixty two

years old and I was born at home in the country, in Oklahoma. Being raised in the country, where your friends are literally the animals you have around you, you do tend to take them for granted. Kinda like we all think everyone has a best girl friend next door that we play with all the time or everyone has a dog or cat.

Well my friends were the deer we raised each year, the rabbits, the raccoons, the crow that ate tons of hamburger meat, the squirrel that bit that city dude that grabbed him, the calves, baby pigs, the chickens. We ate fish, squirrel, turtle, chickens, rabbits, beef, pork, wild turkeys, and yes even a rattlesnake or two. We had these things to eat, like kids today eat a hot dog, or a taco, and without much **thought as it being different to anyone else's diet.**

Then I moved to the city, OMG, what a culture shock. I had to buy eggs, milk, butter, meat and vegetables. I still **won't buy fish, not as long as I have a rod and reel. City kids** have culture shock in having to buy electricity and gas bills, **they have always had to buy food, so that wasn't anything new. But we didn't, we raised it. Sometimes it was hard playing with an animal for weeks, then daddy coming in and saying it's time.** Betty Lou weighs 300 pounds and is too heavy to be sitting on our feet anymore. Time to make bacon out of her. Those were the hard times.



But as my granddaughter told me, when I was trying to get her to dislike eating at McDonalds by telling her that those chicken nuggets were baby chicken and those hamburgers, were made from baby calves, she stated that **"that was the cycle of life and besides, they were mighty tasty"**. An eight year old telling me about the cycle of life — I would have been crying my eyes out about those baby chickens, but I regress again. At my age, I do that a lot. What I wanted to point out was the fact I took so much of my childhood for granted. It was my **everyday life. And it is a fact you don't miss** the water until the well runs dry.

When I moved here from Oklahoma, I realized there were no rocks in the ground around Conroe. Every time I went home, I brought rocks back. Here you could put in a whole fence with just a shovel, no rocks to break up. You would have to grab a board if you needed to chock a tire, or pound a pecan shell. I told my mom, these people actually live without rocks and I missed my rocks. I guess the comparison would be like someone from here, loading up a bunch of mesquite trees and taking them to Ohio or something. Yes, they thought I was nuts. Daddy cursed our rocks all the time, always breaking his equipment or starting fires when he baled hay by sparking the mower blade. I could go on and on, but to get to my point.

I am now a Master Naturalist. I now take time to realize what I grew up with and took for granted and how much I miss

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it. Most of all I realize just how lucky I was. Last summer I went home to help my dad with his hay and took one of the oldest grandsons, Matt, with me. I went out on the front porch and was looking at my dad's truck and I could see little eyes peering over the steering wheel of the truck. I called Matt and told him to go check Papa's truck. He went out and hollered, "Nonna, (that's me) there are coons in the truck." They had slid his back window open and had crawled in and were eating daddy's fish food. I told him to open the door and shoo them out. He did and four raccoons crawled out. I told him to check the floorboard to see how much they had pooped and he hollered, "Nonna, there's more". They had eaten so much; they were stuck under the seat. I had to take a stick and poke four more raccoons out of the truck. Matt was so excited and I was just thinking how long it was gonna take me to wash the poop out.

Then that night it sounded like momma's john boat was being stolen. I got Matt, went outside and looked at the boat move slightly up and down by the house. Two large armadillo's were coming out for a night of hunting. Again Matt couldn't believe his eyes. Then the next evening we sat on the porch and a large skunk walks across the yard like we were not even there. Daddy said he's headed to the pond. He goes across the yard every evening about this time. Then we watched four deer walk by the house and head to the pond. Daddy said, they got twins back behind the barn. Matt is ecstatic. He told everyone we met when we got home about his nature experience. He himself had counted twenty-four deer in one day, while we worked the hay field.

My light had come on. I had this for twenty years, day in and day out. And this was a first for him in many ways. He also captured a five foot rattler in the fence line. Sorry to say, we did kill it, he kept the skin and the head, and we cut the rest up to eat. But I had forgotten the beauty that I had been so privileged to see all my life in my youth.

Seeing the eye lashes of a new born calve. Watching the wobbly legs of new born colt. Shooing chickens off my knee or out of my "Little People" village as I played. Squirting milk at kittens or baby pigs when I milked the cows. Seeing baby rabbits in their soft downy nest in the ground. Having a baby deer sucking my ear or rubbing on me for more milk from their bottle. Feeding that stupid crow hamburger meat, or my pet raccoon pooping down my back when I brought it in the house and the bright light scared it. Didn't do that again. Momma liked to have killed me over that.

I had such wonderful memories. Last time I went home, I counted sixty one deer going to daddy's pond. There were even two bucks standing on their hind feet fighting like on TV. Daddy said they do that all the time, but I had not seen them.

I had forgotten to see the beauty of the forest for all the trees.

I take time now, I stop, I listen, and I even save a life or two when I can. I devour nature now, but most of all I appreciate it more than I have ever done so in my life. I was truly blessed to have my forest around me and truly blessed to find the El Camino Real Master Naturalist to help me realize what I had been taking for granted and what I have been missing all these years.

I am taking time now with my grandchildren to let them have a taste of this wonderful world and helping them experience what I can make available for them of nature.

We all need to do this.....

By Sue Taylor



The Cricket and the Turtle by Dorothy Mayer

[Editor note: These are actually two independent stories, I just thought the above title was quite interesting!]

MYSTERY

At a recent yard sale, I happened upon a mystery object. Being curious by nature and a naturalist, I am drawn to wooden trinkets. However, this particular object was bamboo, not your regular wooden carving. So, for 4 bits, I decided that I absolutely, without a doubt in my mind, had to purchase the thing.

After I grabbed my treasure, the lady having the sale **admitted she hasn't a clue as to what it is, either.** We discussed the fact that a cigar or possibly some incense would fit in there, yet there was no smell to support these speculations.

Anyway, I took my newest treasure home and asked for help in the identification

from my better half. As is usually the case, he was able to look at my mystery object for about 30 seconds and basically put an end to the mystery. He offered a pretty reliable guess to the identity of the intricate case. His answer was short and to

the point: "It's a cricket keeper. In some parts of the world, crickets are considered lucky and kept as pets." Needless to say, my research proved him to be correct, as usual. I'm not complaining though, as he saved me quite a bit of time I'm quite certain. Even applying my recently acquired identification, I still spent some time learning more about why the cricket, an insect from the family Gryllidae, is so well thought of in China & Japan.

Here are some interesting things I learned about what I had once considered an annoying insect.

Crickets are cold-blooded insects w/exceptional hearing and sight. This is the reason that you have a really hard time in locating that lone chirping cricket in your house. You can even get a fairly accurate idea of the outdoor temperature by counting the number of times a cricket chirps in a 15 second period. Count the number of chirps in fifteen seconds and add 40 and you have the approximate temperature in Fahrenheit. This is known as Dolbear's Law. Only the male cricket chirps and they do so by rubbing their back legs together. But one important thing to note is that crickets typically stop chirping when the temp drops between 45 & 55 degrees F.



Crickets have several different songs or chirps. They chirp loudest and longest to attract a female and to announce his location and his chosen territory to other males. Once a female approaches, his song becomes softer and somewhat relaxing; and after successful copulation, the song becomes a very soft whirring chirp.

Crickets are arthropods and belong to the family Gryllidae and there are approximately 500 species worldwide. Crickets are a good source of food and contain many nutrients w/those nutrients being closely related to the quality of food eaten. Crickets are eaten by people in some cultures and are a great food source for reptiles, fish, birds and other animals.

In some cultures, crickets are considered so lucky that they are carried as pets w/their owners wherever they go. I believe this is the type cricket keeper that I purchased.

Some cricket homes are built to look like castles and made of gold and would be too elaborate and cumbersome to carry along **in a pocket.** Crickets' usual lifespan is about a year and some have been known to have been purchased for about \$1200.

In other cultures, crickets are considered bad luck and foretell death. And, in some cultures, crickets are used for fighting with bets being placed on the potential winners. Sometimes crickets are fed fresh chilies to make them chirp more and they will also become hotter and more aggressive. After creating aggression by feeding chilies, this aggressiveness can be slowed by using water to calm the crickets down after feeding them chilies. Success has also been achieved in **chilling the cricket's aggressions with cucumbers, corn on the cob, or banana peels.**

Crickets can be put together in a home, but dividers should be provided because they may become hostile to each other. Something as simple as dried leaves can work as dividers. But care should be taken that the food stuffs and leaves do not rot because that could cause the captive crickets to become sick.

I also read that crickets chirping will repel rats and mice, but verifying this information will require more research on my part. But, of course, if my research bears this information out to be fact, there will be a follow up on this article.

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Also, by looking at a cricket I believe I can now differentiate a mature male cricket from a mature female, even if I do not hear a chirp. From what I could ascertain by looking at photos, the female cricket will appear to have what looks like 3 tails while the male will have only two.

So, crickets have definitely managed to add to my interest of nature, in general. And, this is just enough information to make me more aware of how much I still have to learn, and not just about crickets, either. Nature is quite an interesting topic, to say the least.

I am almost finding myself anxious to see if I can tell when baby crickets are on the way. After all, there are lots and lots of things that make this old world go round.

BE WATCHFUL OF OUR TURTLE FRIENDS

I've already seen many red-eared sliders that have been hit on the roads since the rain has begun blessing our area again. I have stopped and helped about a dozen make their way to the other side of the road and that always gives me a good feeling, for sure.



I've learned that the turtles know where they want to go, so I just put on my flashers and move the turtle to the other side of the road pointing them in the same direction they were headed. And, I've notice that they do continue on their way without getting back onto the pavement.

I used to think that if a turtle had been hit, that they were dead or there wasn't much of a chance for them to live much longer in this world. After doing quite a lot of research and paying closer attention, I notice that lots of the turtles I help along, do already have a few healed battle scars. Sometimes, the turtle may need to be cleaned up and doctored until it heals. There are reptile rescues that will help with this sort of thing, too.

And after communicating with reptile rescuers, I have learned that the turtle you assume is dead, may actually suffer for 24 to 36 hours before he actually expires.

So, please be watchful and consider helping out our turtle friends if at all possible. I know that if you search online, a reptile rescuer can be found.



Stories and photos by Dorothy Mayer

You Gotta Look Close

By Donna Lewis

This past week I was looking out at my pasture from my office window. I looked across the field and thought to myself, how untidy and messy with all those little strange clumps of plants sticking here and there. So I went outside to look to see if I needed to mow before anything good came up. I always think I have to be neat...a throw back from living in the city most of my life.



Boy was I surprised and happy to see thousands of teeny tiny wild-flowers in every color popping up. They were only about 3 to 4 inches tall and were everywhere in little bunch's among the clover.

And to think I almost started mowing! It pays to look first.

I tried to look up some of their names in my field guide. I was able to find a few of them like Hen-bit, Chickweed (photo), Yellow Star-Grass (photo), and Little Blue-eyes.

These of course are not their real names in Latin, just the names I could pronounce and remember.

I am afraid our friend, Flo Oxley, would be disappointed in me, as she could name every plant that ever lived by their real name. I don't know how she does it. She must have a gene that I didn't get from my parents.

It was nice to know that the few bees and butterflies that were out this early would have something to drink. I do worry about them as I worry about every wild thing that lives in the country.

So, if you look close there is always something wonderful to see in nature.

By Donna Lewis

Photos from Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center database.



Ah! Costa Rica

By Ann Collins, Photos by Paula Engelhardt

What a wonderful country. It is tailor made for Naturalists, so it was a perfect fit for Paula Engelhardt and me. There is no hunting, not even any guns. You can fish and lots of people do go there for the deep sea fishing. Of course both sides of the country are bordered by oceans with high mountains in between. It is volcanic in origin with many dormant volcanoes and even some not so dormant.

The flora is lush and verdant with rainforests, cloud forests, and one of the few remaining dry forests with cactus and succulents. It is a botanical paradise. I like plants and was truly impressed with all of the green. There were tree ferns as tall as some of my scrubby trees. Giant bamboo that I could not put my hands around, clinked in the wind sounding like enormous wind chimes. The national flower is one of the many colorful native orchids.

But, of course my favorite part was the birds. There are more species of birds in Costa Rica than in all of North America and the land mass is only about the size of West Virginia! Everyone there is a birder. Our guide and our bus driver both have experience leading birding tours. How lucky can you get!



Violet Sabrewing Hummingbird

With almost 900 species of birds we were very lucky to have identified around a hundred and twenty-five of them. There are many different kinds of hummingbirds. We saw green ones, brown ones, even dark violet ones. Some had long beaks, some curved beaks, and some short beaks. Some had long tails and some had almost no tails.

At Tortuguero just outside the front door of our little cabin there was a mother three-toed sloth and her baby. Everyone took hundreds of pictures. Even the cleaning ladies were pointing her out to anyone who passed by. We saw several other sloths at other places. They are widespread and represent the largest mammal mass in the country. Because they blend in so well and move so slowly, they are rarely seen.

Tortuguero is also home to the sea turtles who come there to lay their eggs. The primary nesting season is in Au-



View from hotel in Arenal Region

gust, so we didn't see any of them, but we did visit the conservancy located near the beach.

The only way to get to Tortuguero is by boat, a trip that takes an hour and a half provided you don't get stuck in the mud and your boat has enough fuel to get you there. We did get stuck in the mud at low tide and the crew jumped into the water and poled and pulled us out. On the way out, our boat just stopped mid-river. Fortunately, another boat had room for the passengers and our luggage so we climbed aboard, boat to boat, mid-river.

The river is home to caimans, toucans, parrots, jacanas, collared aricaris, and three species of monkeys: Howlers, Spider, and White-faced capuchins. The locals call them Cappuccinos." Every morning and often in the afternoon the Howlers set up a din that reverberates all through the forests. They are widespread so you



Keel-billed (rainbow) Toucan

hear and see them near the beach as well as high up in the cloud forests.



White-faced Capuchin monkeys

We took several boat trips down rivers and canals to view the wildlife. One of the rivers was virtually

infested with Crocodiles. Paula has some great pictures of them. We saw a number of Basilisk lizards. These little wonders are able to walk on water, or I should say run on water. They are locally called "Jesus Christ" lizards because of their ability to keep from sinking as they escape danger by running across the water.



Proboscis Bats

For Paula's sake I must include her sighting of some Spotted bats. These little guys stretch out head to foot on tree trunks and look like a giant cater-

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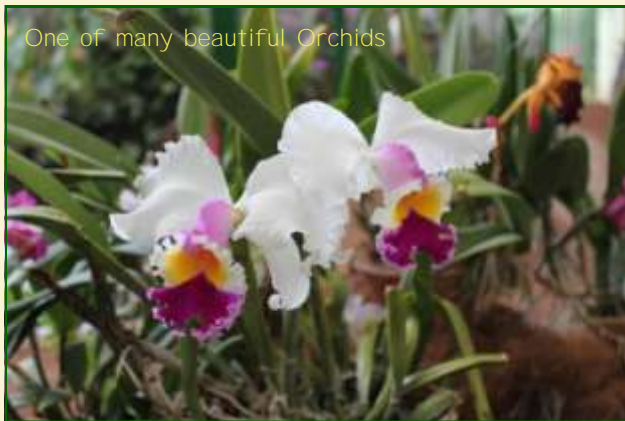
pillar. There are many species of bats in Costa Rica but these were the only ones we saw in the wild.



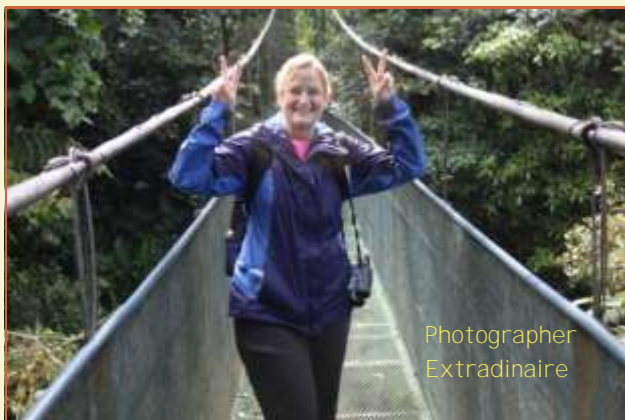
Jabiru with 4 young

When we got off the boat our bus driver showed me a picture he had just taken of a Jabiru. This is a huge, white stork-like bird with a wing span of seven to nine feet. He has a black head and a bald, red area at the base of his neck. As we were leaving one flew over the bus and we all jumped out and followed it into a field that in the wet season is flooded. We were able to get within yards of a huge nest that had four young still in it, guarded by the female. Even the non-birders were impressed!

As you all know, I could go on forever about the wonders of this marvelous little country. You will have to ask about our



One of many beautiful Orchids



Photographer Extradinaire

Zip line adventure, the Tarzan swing, the volcanoes, the night hike, the food, and the intense beauty of the gardens. Feel free to ask, we will be glad to talk your ears off.

Story by Ann Collins, photos by Paula Engelhardt

[To see all these great photos, and more, in a full screen slideshow, please visit <http://picasaweb.google.com/EICaminoRealMasterNaturalist/CostaRica2012#.>—Editor]



Mmmmm good



The "Croc"



Kinkajou

"Nature Time" at Apple Tree Day Care by Debbi Harris



Four chapter members, Katherine Bedrich, Sue Taylor, Cindy Bolch and I, held a class at The Apple Tree Child Care Center about "Trees & Nature". We were assisted by 3 of Sue's grand-

daughters who helped us in all the activities and are now call "Master Naturalists in training" - Drew Shaw age 12, Danni Shaw age 10, and Aolani Roth age 10.

The students learned about how a tree begins to grow, looking at acorns to saplings; learned all the parts of a tree; discussed what trees bring to us and the various animals that live in trees; and learned how to determine the age of the tree by viewing a tree cookie, and so much more!



The students got to use a loop to examine a tree cookie, and they also created their own tree cookie using crayons which showed a ring for each year of their age. They learned about using a compass, keeping a nature journal, and all students even got to become live compasses!

During story time, they enjoyed yummy homemade cookies, compliments of Sue's granddaughters.

The next day, the students went to Wilson-Ledbetter

Park to do a nature walk and complete their nature journal. The students learned about Bluebirds and saw a real nest, then went on a walk around the park to see live bluebirds and checkout some of the park's bluebird houses. They also learned about lichens and examined them up close using a loop, and learned how to



use binoculars. Then they had a 'show-n-tell' of their nature findings, which included finding eggs and a turtle in the grass. Today, animal crackers were their snack, provided by Drew, Danni and Aolani.

We ended our class with feeding the ducks...what a f-u-n day in nature!

Debbi Harris



Whooping Cranes and Alligators—Oh My! By Paula Engelhardt

"When we hear this call we hear no mere bird. He is the symbol of our untamable past. - Aldo Leopold on Whooping Cranes.

This time of year brings excitement and anticipation for me as I know the Whooping Cranes will now be in Texas - close enough for me to personally witness their awesome grace and beauty. They travel from Canada with their youngsters to hang out in the area of the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge for the summer, feasting on their favorite meal, the blue crab - if they can get it. This year blue crab is scarce due to recent drought conditions



Young Roseate Spoonbill

but these wonderful giants of the avian world are survivors and will feed on other crustaceans as well as plant matter.

The first week of March, ECRC members Ann Collins, Vivian Dixon and I traveled to the coast, along with our spouses and 2 other friends, to behold their splendor from land and sea. We hopped aboard the Skimmer on Saturday morning, despite rough winds and choppy waters and headed for the much calmer intra-coastal water-

ways of the refuge. We enjoyed the company of many bird species including gulls, pelicans, herons, terns, oyster catchers, other shore birds and raptors. But the ultimate prize was the sight of whooping crane families.

The birds were a bit more spread out this year, although **we're told their numbers are holding (at approximately 300), so we weren't able to get as close to them as in the past.** However, our patience was rewarded finally with a nice viewing of an adult pair with a juvenile offspring. The offspring are nearly as large as their parents by now but their feathers are mottled brown and white in contrast to the solid white plumage (except for black wing tips) of their parents. It was difficult to tear ourselves away from these three happily feasting on creatures they plucked from the shallow waters but we returned to land and continued our



Adults and younger Whooper

birding from there, adding a few more species to our list.

On our way home the next day, Dan and I drove to Aransas



Great Blue Heron

Wildlife Refuge to tour it by car. We decided to hike one of the trails to get a better view of four whoopers that we could see from an observation platform. Signs along the trail warned us to stay on the path as some 600 alligators make this region their home. **We didn't** see any gators and as we neared the cranes we saw a small observation tower across the way. We decided to follow a

narrow path in the knee-high grass to reach the tower for a better look at the birds. We climbed onto the tower and realized that the whoopers were not viewable from there but what we did see made my heart race! A HUGE, FAT, prehistoric looking beast we guessed to be 14 plus feet long was basking in the grass a few yards below us and to the south. This was by far the largest reptile I have ever seen in person. I snapped a few photos but they came out a bit blurry - guess my hands were shaking. Yikes! Now we knew why they say stay on the trail.

We needed to get back to the car, so we climbed down and with newly aroused senses and keen awareness of our surroundings, started the trek back. We cautiously approached the section of path adjacent to the beast and spied his gigantic gnarly head poking out of the grass - I high-tailed it on down the trail with Dan not far behind! As we continued on our way, we became aware of



A "smaller" non blurry one.

just how many alligators we had been oblivious to on the way out. Several were lurking along the edges of a shallow pond we had passed earlier. We noticed flattened grass and mud **"slides" where they had entered and left the water.**

It's curious (and wonderful) how an event can suddenly awaken your senses to a whole new world around you. We left Aransas that day exhilarated and thankful for the experience - and thankful we made it to the car!

Story and pictures by Paula Engelhardt



Our 3rd Annual Nature Festival

By Don Travis

Excitement is in the air again as we finalize plans for this year's 3rd Annual Milam County Nature Festival planned for Saturday April 14 from 9am—3pm at Rockdale Fair Park in Rockdale, Texas. Following two very successful years at Wilson-Ledbetter Park in Cameron, this year looks to be even bigger and better than ever!

The United Nations declared 2011-2012 **"The Year of the Bat"**, and we are proud to have these wonderful flying mammals as our featured mascot for the festival. As part of that we will have special bat activities for the kids, educational exhibits for all ages, as well as an expert speaker, John Byrd, tell us all about his experiences in attracting tens of thousands of these bug eaters to his pecan orchard, saving lots of money and unnecessary insecticides. **Besides that, they're just fun to watch!**

There will be educational booths and hands on activities on lots of our local flora and fauna:

- Bats, of course—come and be **"batty"** with us
- Bees and honey combs,
- Pollinators and the pollination cycle,
- Bryophytes and lichens,
- Birds, with bird houses for sale,
- Texas crawdads,
- Prairie dogs,
- Houston toads and a toad maze,
- Knapping (no, not sleeping!),
- Making animal track molds,
- Learning archaeology by digging for artifacts,
- Participate in fly casting and angler education,
- Examining pelts and skeletons of typical backyard wildlife,
- **Hear all about the "El Camino Real National Historic Trail", where it went through Milam County and perhaps right through your backyard,**



- Various nature crafts
- **What do "Master Naturalists" do and why do they have so much fun, and learn how you can too,**
- And of course the ever popular face painting artists will return again.



Featured presentations will be held in the New Salem Building by experts in their field:

- 9:15am—Bats and Bat houses, by John Byrd, hear from the person who has almost as many bats as various famous bridges.
- 10:30am—Lasagna for Hummingbirds and Butterflies, by Mark Klym, Information Specialist on Wildlife Diversity at Texas Parks and Wildlife. Learn how to **setup your own "buffet table" to attract these beautiful and useful creatures.**
- 11:45am—Wildflower Legends and Folklore, by Flo Oxley, recently retired Director of Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. Hear fascinating tales from Indian, Greek and other mythological origins regarding **the naming and use of many wildflowers. Don't miss this! Funny and educational.**
- 1:00pm—Impacts of Drought on Fish and Wildlife Resources, by Clayton Wolf, Wildlife Division Director, Texas Parks and Wildlife. Clayton grew up in our area, and graduated from Rockdale H.S. and now heads the Wildlife Division at TPWD. Come hear his insight and wisdom on this important topic.

And don't forget to enter our Nature Photo Contest before the deadline—MARCH 30! There are 3 age divisions: under 12, 12 through 17, and over 18; and five categories: People in Nature, Wildlife, Landscape / Scenery, Plants and Flora, and Funny Nature Photo. Pick up an entry package at the AgriLife Office in Cameron, the Rockdale Chamber of Commerce Office, or from our website (see Nature Festival page on TXMN.ORG/ELCAMINO).

Food and drinks will be available, including breakfast items and lunch items, so you won't leave hungry or thirsty!

See you all there!

By Don Travis

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Certifications, Etc.

By Cindy Bolch

New for 2012 are in this color.

Our 2012 Re-Certification pin is the Bat. Those achieving their 2012 Annual Re-Certifications to date include: **Cindy Bolch, Donna Lewis, Katherine Bedrich, and Don Travis.**

Lifetime to date Milestone Achievement Levels Awarded include:

250 Hours—Paul Unger, Ann Collins, Katherine Bedrich, Cindy Bolch, Paula Engelhardt, Don Travis, Debbie 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 and Cindy McDaniels**

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 and Paula Engelhardt

2500 Hours—Paul Unger, **Katherine Bedrich**

Congratulations to All!

Did You Know? What animal can stick its tongue in its ear?

It's the Giraffe! I couldn't find a picture of one actually doing this, but I did find one with its tongue up its nose! Gross huh?



Their black tongues can be 18 and as much as 21 inches long, great for grabbing those tasty leaves from high limbs of course. I found numerous sources that they can actually stick their tongue in their ear, but I think the jury is out as to just why that may be. Some suggest it's just a form of scratching an itch, some say it's getting at some bugs, and some say it likes the taste of ear wax—like salty dried fish. Now how does one know what that tastes like? I'm guessing the picture at left is based on the "nose bug extraction protocol", but who knows.

As you all may know, giraffes are the tallest mammals on earth today. Did you also know they are the only mammals born with horns? Actually both male and females are born with bony knobs protruding from their heads at birth. They also have the longest tail of any land animal. Despite their long neck, they cannot reach the ground with it and have to spread their very long front legs in order to drink. These long legs (up to 6 feet) allow them to gallop up to 35 miles an hour. They have a four chambered stomach and regurgitate food to chew it as cud like cows. Neat creatures!