

Master Naturalist™



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.



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 2013

Table of Contents

Prairie Tracks—Katherine Bedrich	1
Dragonfly Dance—Phyllis Shuffield	2
Christmas Bird Counts—Ann Collins	3
Why go fishing—Katherine Bedrich	5
Wonderful Whoopers—Ann Collins, Paula Engelhardt	6
Monarch Butterfly Garden—Debbi Harris	8
A Bird in the Hand—Paula Engelhardt	10
Frogging Fun—Katherine Bedrich	10
2013 Nature Festival—Don Travis	11
Random Pics—Don Travis	12
Certifications, Etc.- Debbi Harris	13

Prairie Tracks by Katherine Bedrich

The Striped and Spotted Skunk

Skunks belong to the order Carnivora and the family Mephitidae. Mephitis is translated into meaning smelly gas, foul odor, stink, noxious exhalation. Skunks are closely related to otters. There are five species of skunk in Texas.

Striped or spotted, skunks are recognized by their black and white hair. If the coloration does not tell you it is a skunk, you may find out by the spray (odor) from the **anal scent glands**. The skunk's greatest anti-predator device is their ability to accurately discharge a foul smelling musk up to 15 yards. Normally, the skunk sprays as a last resort;

Other attempts to warn off problems are tried before spraying, including stomping their feet. If you or your pet becomes the target of an angered skunk, taking a bath with tomato juice works; but it may take several washings. The foul smelling musk secretion is also used for communication.

Two skunks found in Milam County are the Striped Skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*) and the Eastern Spotted Skunk (*Spilogale putorius*).

The Striped Skunk is the most widespread and numerous large mammal in North America, weighing between 4 - 16 lbs. Up to 11 per acre have been found in some studies. Mostly nocturnal and usually solitary, this skunk does not hibernate and may emerge on warm winter days looking for food. Young have short hair, closed eyes and ear canals when born. Their eyes and ears open in about 30 days. At this time they are able to musk. The striped skunk lives in brushy fields, farmland, open woods, deserts and suburbs; usually staying close to a water source. Omnivorous defines this skunk which eats insects: including grasshoppers, beetles, and



Eastern Spotted Skunk

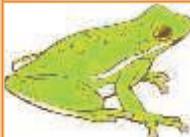
crickets; birds; small mammals and plants. The great horned owl and hawks are their main predators, with the open road taking many skunks yearly. The Spotted Skunk is more active and alert than other skunks. Small with stripes and spots, this skunks weighs 1-4 lbs. They are mostly nocturnal and seldom seen in the daytime. Young are born blind and helpless with fine hair. They live in rocky brushy habitat and around farmyards, dening under or in buildings. Spotted skunks eat insects, small mammals, fruit, and bird

(Continued on page 2)

Our Motto

- Look
- Learn
- Teach
- Conserve

Our Mascot
Green Tree Frog



Did You Know?

What is this?

See last page for answer.



eggs; and are excellent rat catchers. Humans, dogs, cats, foxes, coyotes, bobcats and owls are their enemy.

Small holes dug in the ground may be a sign of skunks being active around the area searching for grubs, beetles and other insects. To clear the soil from their nostrils after their digging, skunks sneeze. Skunks are live in towns, eating out of cat and dog bowls. The life span of a skunk is 2-3 years

Humans can benefit from having skunks around. These mammals help control rodent and insect populations. Habitat loss of natural areas may lead to declining population and an imbalance in the ecological system.

Resources: The Mammals of Texas - David Schmidly
Nature's Everyday Mysteries - Sy Montgomery

(Photos are from public domain)

Katherine Bedrich



The Dragonfly Dance

by Phyllis Shuffield

*I know you
We have met
I remember you
You were lost in my dragonfly dance
I mesmerized you as you sat and watched me
Letting the world go by
Now...
Let me take you with me
Close your eyes
Imagine
Your lithe body is jeweled
With glistening emeralds and sapphires
Your wings are prisms of glass
Yet soft and delicate
Now lift your heart
Dash, dart, flitter and flit
With effortless grace
Join me, come
Dance the Dragonfly dance*



Dragonfly on Sugarloaf Mountain, by Phyllis Shuffield

Xmas Bird Counts or Self Inflicted Pain? by Ann Collins

Christmas Bird Counts or self-inflicted punishment to my poor old body. For some mysterious reason I see these counts as a challenge, to all of my senses. As many of you know, it is really difficult to identify a bird that is four inches long at a distance equal to the length of a football field. One of my birding friends keeps threatening to write a field guide called "*Birding At Eighty Miles an Hour!*", to be used for car trips. A tiny bird flies by and someone says, "What was that?" So, there you have sight.

Bodily pain: Well, if you have ever done a count you know for sure that the body does suffer in many ways. If you are hiking and are in the same shape that I am, I need say no more. I walked six miles on the College Station count, drove sixty-four miles in eleven hours on the Gibbons Creek count, and hiked less than five miles in nine and a half hours. I tried to follow a nimble 43 year old guy who probably does this three days a week. Wow! Now that really is a day's work.

On the Granger Lake count the first rattle out of the box was to trek down those enormous boulders the Corps of Engineers dumps around the edge of lakes to halt erosion. I'm really not a mountain goat! But I think Eric Carpenter just might have a little of the surefootedness of one. The person in front of me, who shall remain nameless, had a little fall. Then, I stepped on a rock that was not secured and took a tumble. Do you think this will qualify as sense of touch? Nothing to worry about, just a broken finger and a couple of cracked ribs! My hands were so cold I hardly even noticed. And....it is only seven o'clock in the morning. Nine hours to go! But, we did see an American Pipit, a Solitary sandpiper, gulls, and terns as a reward. Then.....we had to climb back up!

Eric is probably one of the best birders in Texas and it is really a treat to get to bird with him. He probably could have done the hike in a couple of hours if he hadn't had Genie Lindberg and me following on his every move. Eric doesn't even have to see the bird to identify it. Thus, the sense of hearing comes in. I can recognize a few birds by sound but Eric knows them all! Thankfully, this is a count, so count we did, which gave Genie and me a chance to rest and actually see some birds.

Birds also respond to the sense of hearing. Eric had a great tape of an Eastern Screech Owl that he played and flocks of birds would come to try to drive the owl away. We met an "Old Guy" who told us that it was against the law to play such tapes so Eric politely put the tape away. At least until the Old Guy was out of range. I had made a similar tape for the Gibbons Creek count but Cindy Bolch and I didn't have much luck attracting any birds. Got to get a better

tape! There really isn't any law against it. Use your brain and don't play one during mating or nesting time as this could cause the birds to think someone is invading their territory. Some Federal lands do ask that you not use them but that is rare.

Smell: Don't think that plays much of a role in the counts unless you are really into vultures. We did see a Coot that was belly up on the beach but it was so cold the poor thing was probably frozen.

Taste: Not much here either. Lunch is always good and hot tea is fantastic. You get a chance to get out of the weather or just sit back and relax. Of course you can always nibble on goodies all day long if you like. After the College Station count they always have a huge pot luck dinner, soup or chili or something like that and lots of desserts. Yum!

If you are interested in the birds we saw I will be glad to share the list with you, but it is pretty long so I will just tell you about some of the highlights. Cindy Bolch and I had the wonderful experience of seeing a Bald Eagle being mobbed by a Crested Caracara. What a sight! I think Caracaras are big, but compared to the eagle he actually looked small. Sweet!

Cindy and I saw 49 species. It was a good day! Cindy got to see Hooded Mergansers for the first time, twelve of



(Continued on page 4)

(Continued From page 3)

them! They are really magnificent birds. We saw lots of different species of sparrow which was good exercise for me. I still have a hard time with them. The piney woods of Grimes County were full of Eastern Bluebirds which is always a treat, such intensely colored birds.

Please be kind in your evaluation of me as a birder, I am really baring my soul to you now. Eric, Genie, and I saw sixty-eight species! That's right, 68!!!! We saw nine species of sparrow. Wow! 650 Ring Billed Gulls! Eric counted them - every one. There was one Blue headed vireo. I sometimes see them in my yard and they are always a treat.

Just the short distance to Granger Lake we have hybrid Titmouses. The Tufted, which we have here in Milam County, interbreeds with the Black Crested of the Edwards Plateau which produces a very different kind of bird. Just above the beak the feathers are a pretty cinnamon color. So, when you are watching the birds at your feeders

Black Crested, Hybrid, and Tufted Titmouses; by Claire Currey



keep an eye out for this one. Try to get a picture if you can. You just might be the first person to document the bird in Milam County! You won't win any prizes but you will have the satisfaction of being first. [Editor note. See <http://nestwatch.org/community/news/nestwatch-data-in-action-studying-hybridization-in-titmice/> for more information.]

Last year the College Station Count had the distinction of having the highest count of Scissor tailed Flycatchers in the nation, thirteen. This year we are certain to have the highest count again. Mary Dabney Wilson and I counted forty-nine this year. They seem to flock late in the evening so we arrived at the site and started counting. I got fourteen the first time around but they just kept coming. They were everywhere! The trees were covered, the utility wires were lined and they just kept coming. What fun! Little old me....with the highest count of a bird in the whole nation. Y'all should be proud!

Christmas Bird Counts are held all over the Nation and some in other parts of the world. They are conducted from the middle of December to the first week or so in January. I have done the Gibbons Creek count for seven years, the College Station count for three years, and the Granger Lake count for three years. Need I say that "I just love it!" I wish more of you would plan to do one next year. I hope to add a couple more myself.

Ring Billed Gull, by Christopher Taylor



No need to be an expert birder. I'm not, but I'm not quite as bad as someone I went birding with one time who asked me to see if I could adjust their binoculars. I happily complied and fiddled with the binocs for a second or two and handed them back. They were most grateful and continued on. They had been holding the binoculars upside down! Now that's a rank amateur.

Happy Birding!



George H. Harrison



Scissor tailed Flycatcher by Texas Eagle

So Now I Know Why People Go Fishing...

by Katherine Bedrich

On Monday morning, March 4th, several Master Naturalist and one spouse went Fishing at Lake Somerville State Park - Birch Creek Unit. One member had never been fishing and wanted to learn. We packed our gear - rods, reels, and equipment and headed out. Worm bait was on board, and stopping to get some minnows was on the list. A neat bait shop was spotted and Cindy Bolch (the one who never went fishing) had to go in and experience the shop. Minnows were purchased and to the park we headed.



Lucy said it was a little windy but she had a blast, and would do it again maybe when it's not so windy! Oh, and she said she had a little problem when she went to throw her line. The pole slipped out of her hand and went flying into the water. She was thankful Charlie had a pole handy to fish it out. She was quoted as saying "If it's going to happen to anyone, it will happen to Lucy."

At one point while we were fishing on the pier, Cindy commented..."Now I know why people like to go fishing... it is so relaxing and peaceful."

The north wind had decided to be blowing that day, but it did not deter the group. Everyone grabbed their gear and headed to the pier. Crappie fishing was on the agenda for the day. Making sure Cindy experienced real fishing, Lucy Coward showed her how to bait her hook; no squirming here. Charlie and Katherine Bedrich assisted in directing the right way to throw the line. We all gave Cindy an A+ on line throwing.



We watched our bobbers bob along the wavy water. Not much fish biting action. Being master naturalists, we (including the spouse) all had our binoculars. Gulls, terns, pelicans, cormorants and other lake loving birds were around. A flotilla of mainly pelicans and cormorants were on the lake seemingly having a better time at fishing than we were. Our novice fishing person said "They know where the fish are, I want to go out there with them."



Another fisherman came to the dock. He was using a jig with artificial bait. He caught a nice crappie. He actually let Cindy hold it so a picture could be taken...the photographer was a little concerned, hoping the fish would not end up back in the lake. Cindy

then wanted to fish like he was, so Charlie rigged a jig line for her.

It was time for lunch, so the group moved to a picnic area, built a fire in a container, roasted wieners and marshmallows and discussed fishing. We all had a great time, enjoyed the adventure and are planning our next fishing trip.



Above 3 pics by Lucy Coward, others by Katherine Bedrich

Wonderful Whoopers!

by Ann Collins, Paula Engelhardt

Whooper "fan" = "Fanatic", by Ann Collins

I saw my first whooping crane in the spring of 1979. I had the great good fortune to be able to go on a trip to Aransas Wildlife Refuge with noted ornithologist Warren Pulich. It was the first of many such trips. We took a boat out with Capt. Brownie manning the wheel. Back in the day, Capt. Brownie would play a very loud recording of the Whooper's mating call. Of course, this is quite illegal in this enlightened age. But back then Brownie just wanted to be sure you got a good look at these magnificent birds. I did get a good look and was forever after a Whooper fan. You do know that "fan" is short for "fanatic!" don't you?

That was my very first birding trip! I had never even held a pair of binoculars to my eyes to locate a bird. As many of you have experienced yourselves, I spent most of my time trying to locate the bird and driving everyone crazy asking "Where?", "Which tree?" Fortunately, the whoopers are quite easy to spot since they are five feet tall and have a wingspan of seven feet. Most of them were mere white dots and seemingly miles away.

After that I made several annual pilgrimages in the eighties to the coast specifically to see these endangered birds. Every year we wanted to know how many had made it to Aransas. The counts now are estimated, much to the dismay of some of the diehard census takers. The counts used to be done by flying over their territory and since these guys are also able to fly, there was some overlap. It is estimated that this year there are around 300 in the wild flock and about 500 overall.

A couple of years ago (it is debatable as to when exactly) during the worst drought in years with some damage to the coastal food source of blue crabs, Whooping Cranes began to be seen at Granger Lake. Last fall TPWD began a new program called Whooper Watch so that citizen scientists could monitor them at Granger and hopefully get some information on their migration patterns as they fly from Wood Buffalo Refuge in far northern Canada to their wintering grounds on the Texas Coast. Of course, as a long time admirer of these extraordinary birds I signed on to do my part.

Paula Englehardt and I began going out a couple of times a week to see if we could spot them. We have had some great adventures and a few misadventures chasing around Granger Lake trying to find them. We pretty much have them on the

radar now and usually can locate them quickly. There was a possible sighting of ten a couple of weeks ago so we geared up and got out there. Sure enough, ten were sighted in a flock of about a zillion Sandhill Cranes. Since that day we have not seen more than seven. I drive and Paula takes the pictures since she is a wildlife photographer. We both nearly swoon when she gets a really good shot. We also get really excited when we are able to document, or confirm some new data.

One day we were able to get a good look at some family groups feeding in a corn field. As we watched I noted some movement in the tall grass near them and in a few minutes a coyote pops up and begins to stalk them. He worked his way around to an advantageous position and then charged. We heard alarm calls, or it might have been whooper laughter, and they flew away about a hundred yards distant. Wiley Coyote gave up and the cranes ambled back to the feeding area. This coyote isn't really very wily. A few days previously we had observed him casing out a dead cow that was covered in Turkey and Black Vultures. He cautiously approached and decided not to disturb the big black birds and slunk away hoping for something better over the hill.

Paula, Don and Cindy Travis, and I were able to document a new sighting of a feeding ground far from where they have previously been seen. Can't tell you where it is but we were very excited to add more valid data to the bank.

Most of the young are banded and some have radio transmitters attached to their legs. In a matter of days the legs of the babies are as big as they will ever get so it is quite safe to band them while they are still on the nests. Banding adult birds is a bit risky. They could even die from the stress of being caught. US Fish and Wildlife monitors the radio transmissions and manages to keep up with them for years. Paula and I try to locate the bands, but they are difficult to see and we are not supposed to get closer than 2,000 feet or a quarter of a mile from the birds. Paula does have pictures that show the bands and one with a transmitter. Once you actually get a good look at the bands your brain is then programmed to spot them again.



(Continued on page 7)

The Whooping Cranes are considered Critically Endangered. With so few in the wild they are continually susceptible to all sorts of dangers. In April of 2012 a Whooper was "murdered" by a 26 year old hunter in North Dakota. Just a few days ago he was sentenced to a fine of \$85,000 and two years of probation. His hunting, trapping days are over for the next two years. A whooping crane was also shot on the Texas coast this year by a hunter who mistook it for a sandhill



crane. He turned himself in to a game warden and the case was turned over to USFW. Who knows what the outcome will be. Around Granger Lake there is a lot of duck hunting. TPWD has posted signs advising the hunters to be on the lookout for Whooping Cranes. So far, so good.

We are looking at a couple more months to monitor the cranes. The other day it was raining when we went out and the cranes were not where we expected to see them. I was walking my dog who comes with us, and two cranes flew overhead, then three flew over, and finally two more came in for a landing. All seven began to forage in the corn field. Our mission now is to find where they are roosting. We drove back roads all the way into the next county with no success. Ever hopeful and supremely optimistic, we will continue our quest to discover where they go at night.

Vivian Dixon wanted to do the training so I went with her to Cleburne, Texas so she could get certified. We had a great serendipity.....Kathleen Kaska was there to be part of the program. I wrote a report of her book about the Whoopers great champion, Robert Porter Allen, in the last newsletter. Check back to Fall 2012 to see it. It was great to get to meet someone so much a part of the whole Whooping Crane mystique. I have copies of the book if you are interested in adding wonderful whooper info to your ever growing wildlife store of knowledge.

Wish us good birding and hope we can discover the roosting ground.

- Ann Collins

A Kinship Recognized, by Paula Engelhardt

I was introduced to the whooping crane back in 1993 when I read a book for the oral report I had to give for my professors in order to graduate with my Bachelor's degree in Biology. This was the beginning of a love af-



fair. The whoopers intrigued me back then and were always in the back of my mind but I didn't think the chances were very good that, as a Missouri girl, I would ever see any. In fact, I

wasn't sure any of us would get to see any in the not-so-distant future. So you can imagine how thrilled I am today to be able to take a short trip to the Texas coast to view them up close on a boat tour, let alone to have 10 of them literally almost in my back yard!!

When I arrived in central Texas and learned how close Aransas NWR was, I began planning my trip to see these rare and magnificent creatures. When the time came and I finally made it to the coast, my first sighting brought me to tears. After years of feeling a connection to and a spiritual kinship with these birds, I was finally in their presence and it was nothing short of miraculous for me. Their stature, beauty and grace amaze me but what touches me deeply is their plight -- the pressures these birds have endured and the comeback they have made that has been so painfully slow and precarious in the past 60 years. It is great news to see them in areas other than Aransas as this could help to ensure their survival in the case of a catastrophic event on the coast that would have the potential to wipe out the population. This emphasizes the point that we need to be good stewards of our environment, and for the sake of the whoopers, our coastal marshes and estuaries.

Becoming a "Whooper Watcher" has been a thrill for me and the hours spent documenting these beauties through photography and report forms filled out in detail and sent to TPWD has been a labor of love. I hope to be doing it for a long time to come and it is my greatest hope to witness a future in which the whooping crane thrives and is no longer considered an endangered species.

- Paula Engelhardt [All photos by Paula]

Monarch Butterfly Garden Project

by Debbi Harris

In December 2012, I was given the opportunity to prepare a grant application for our area for "Bring Back the Monarchs to Texas". This grant is being co-funded by the Native Plant Society of Texas and Monarch Watch. If the grant is awarded, it is to be used to develop a Monarch Waystation and Monarch demonstration garden. The grant decision will be announced about the end of March. The overall purpose is to educate members and the public about Monarch conservation, to produce and distribute milkweed that supports Monarch reproduction and to restore their habitat throughout the Texas migration flyway.

As part of the grant process, several questions needed to be addressed/defined, such as: the selected garden site has to be a public location; community organizations involvement; and detailed plans with a diagram. Then, if the grant is awarded, there are follow-ups and lessons learned expectation requirements.

To begin the process, I did some fact-finding and asked a lot of questions: venue; involvement; and what could be various **plans and possibilities ... so my journey began.**

Venue: for the public site, I had heard of a vacant lot in Milano that sounded as though it would work. I contacted Martha Newman who is the Chair for the Bailey Bank Building Committee about this possible grant/project. Martha shared the overall plan for the 100 year old Bank restoration project that has been in the works since 2008 or so, and the vacant lot next to the bank that was to become a community garden/park one day. The Milano Junction Memorial Garden (MJMG) was a dream site and it was available with open arms--and we could have one section of it for our Monarch Garden!

Involvement: I began speaking with local organizations such as the girl scouts, Milano ISD, Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners and the three local garden clubs. El Camino Real Master Naturalist president Katherine Bedrich conducted a training at one of the local garden club meetings and received support from them with funds to be used for supplies. Our grant hasn't been submitted yet and we are seeing support--what an amazing feeling--sounds like it is meant to be.



Just hearing from each organization that was in support of this project, I felt confident that this project could be successful, so off I go and the project is A-GO!

Plans: The first plan was to have a primary support committee; Sandra Dworaczyk, Martha Newman, Katherine Bedrich and Donna Lewis agreed to be the task team since we represented, had knowledge, and/or could attend various organizations meetings to keep everyone informed. The

next plan was to layout just exactly what we needed to do, including a shopping list, as well as how we need to educate each organization and the public.

The Milano Junction Memorial Garden Dedication/Kick-off held on February 28, 2013 was a success. After the ceremony, many Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists and a few people in the public began "gettin' busy" preparing the site by digging up grass, shoveling mushroom compost, tilling the soil, marking off the garden and making a first attempt at leveling the ground for water drainage. In our efforts of digging up the soil we found some rather interesting items, however, our grand-prize find was a Superball which was popular in the 1960's and was in excellent shape!

On March 6th, volunteers continued their work efforts by tilling the soil more, removing more grass and laying the border pavers on 3 of the 4 sides of the garden plot. We are awaiting notification if we can have additional garden space dedicated before we add the remaining side to our project. The border pavers used were donated by another garden clubs funds.

So, that is the Milano Junction Memorial Garden progress to date, in a readers digest version, that is! As we patiently await a decision for the grant that started this all, we shall continue to be patient YET, keep moving forward....



Dedication Ceremony officials



Marked out garden area



Here are a few more things that are in the works!!

On April 3rd, we will have our first advanced training event on, *Attracting Pollinators using Native Plants*. This event will be conducted at the Milano Community Room which is located right across the road from the MJMG.

In the works is an *Intro to Monarchs* advanced training course. This course will also have live footage clips of some Milam Co. Monarchs! This event is projected to be available in April, after the 2013 Nature Festival and Plant Sale. There will also be other trainings such as *Milam Co. Milkweed*, *Advanced Monarch Training* and *Monarch Waystation and Monitoring* courses.

Also, upcoming very soon, we will have our Milkweed & Flower planting and mulching workday!

Just watch for e-mail announcements to be sent and join in the fun!

It's a great way to earn volunteer or advanced training credit, while building your knowledge

and most importantly, helping bring back the Monarchs to Texas by building a Monarch nursery & restaurant for butterflies for all of us to enjoy, as we meet new folks in our community!

For more information, feel free to contact Debbi Harris @ milanojunctionmemorialgarden@yahoo.com or call Sandra Dworaczyk @ 512-455-6281 as we'd love to hear your thoughts.

I am believing... *We Shall Build It and They Shall Come!*

- Debbi Harris, photos by Linda Jo Conn and others.

A Bird in the Hand

By Paula Engelhardt

A red-winged black bird hit our patio door the other day and knocked itself silly - he ended up on the ground, feet up, mouth hanging open. After hearing the "bang," I went outside and picked him up and held him and talked to him and stroked his head for a bit, hoping he would recover. He was calm and did not fight to get free, even as I loosened my grip in him.



After a while, I set him on the patio chair cushion and kept an eye out for the kittens. A bit later, I approached him to see how he was doing and he flew off.

A couple of days later I had a male red-winged black bird at my feeder again and I am hoping it is the same one, fully

recovered. I never realized, until holding one, how intricately-marked they are, although I've always loved the red and yellow wing bars! I couldn't resist snapping a few photos of this gorgeous fellow.

How blessed I was to hold him for a while!!



Frogging Fun

by Katherine Bedrich

Here are some activities to help you recognize the frogs in your yard by the sounds they make.

- **Bull frog...deep blow horn;** blow across the opening of a glass soda bottle.
- **Leopard frog...they cackle;** rub your finger over a balloon.
- **Green tree frog... honk, and quack,** quack, quack
- **Cricket frog... click, click, click;** hit two marbles together.
- **Houston toad... they sound like a mole cricket;** a short trill.
- **Gulf Coast toad...** a low trill.

Photos were taken in my yard.

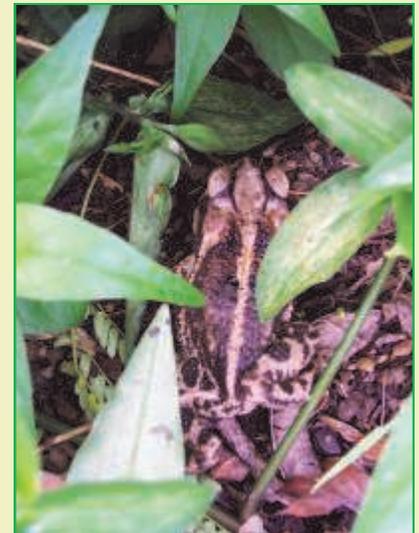
- Katherine Bedrich



Southern Leopard Frog



Green Tree Frog



Gulf Coast Frog

2013 Nature Festival

By Don Travis

The theme of the 2013 Milam County Nature Festival is "The Snakes of Milam County, Texas". The keynote speaker is Andrew Gluesenkemp, with the Texas Department of Parks and Wildlife. Dr. Gluesenkemp is speaking specifically on



those snakes found in Milam County. Tim Cole of the Austin Reptile Service will speak on snake safety and have on display a wide variety of Texas snakes. In addition, the festival will feature several

other professionals speaking on interesting nature topics to include: urban wildlife; feral hogs; wildlife habitat improvement through prescribed fire and vegetation management; wildflowers and plant identification; and the bryophytes, mosses and liverworts.

Commander Ben (Ben Shrader) will be a special attraction at the festival this year. Commander Ben, the Invasive Species Hunter, will bring his Invasive Hunter Academy Program for the educational enjoyment of children and adults alike. Come hear what this amazing home schooled 14 year old has to day. See his [web page: Commanderben.com](http://www.commanderben.com).

Numerous additional nature venues and exhibits will be ongoing throughout the day. This would include subject areas such as: animal tracks; archaeological dig; butterflies; the horned lizard; pollinators; native grasses; the Houston toad; angling education; feral hogs; prescribed burns; bee keeping and backyard fish. There will also be a special outdoor nature activity on Friday evening followed by an outstanding top rated Nature Film on a large screen, complete with popcorn.

Got any great nature photos? Were they taken somewhere in Texas? Do you want to share them with others and have a chance to be recognized among your family, friends and possibly thousands of Festival visitors? Are you between the ages of zero and infinity? If so, you are eligible to submit your favorites in our Nature Festival Photo Contest!

There will be three divisions based on your age as of March 29, 2013: Adult age 18 and over, Teen age 12 through 17, and Child under age 12. There are also five different categories for you to enter one photo in each one, for your age division. There will be 1st, 2nd and 3rd place winners for each category in each age division, and one Best of Show for each age division across all categories.

1. People in Nature - a person or persons interacting in a natural setting or with nature in some way.
2. Wildlife - wild animal life where mammals, insects,

aquatic life, birds or reptiles are the focus of the photo.

3. Landscape/Scenery - where natural landscapes, wildscapes, seascapes, skyscapes or underwater scenes are the focus of the photo.
4. Plants/Flora - any photo that focuses on plants or flower/plant structure, and not on a scene or landscape.
5. Funny Nature Photo - depict any nature oriented object or scene (people, plants, animals, etc.) that has a humorous aspect.

The submission deadline is Friday March 29, 2013. Judging will be completed prior to the Festival on April 13, 2012, and all winners will be announced and awarded ribbons in a brief ceremony at 2:00 pm April 13 at the Festival. All submissions will be on display as well.

For details on contest rules, and the forms to submit, etc., please download the Contest Rules document from our website Txmn.org/elcamino/naturefest/, or pick up a copy from either the AgriLife Extension Office in Cameron, or the Rockdale Chamber Office in Rockdale. Chapter members are not eligible.



2012 Adult, People in Nature Winner, "Simple Joy" by Jerry Norris

This free event has something for adults and children of all ages. Spend the night in Rockdale to see what our town has to offer. For hotel information call the Chamber of Commerce at 512-446-2030, or visit www.rockdalechamber.com or www.rockdalecityhall.com.

Friday April 12th at 7pm, and Saturday April 13 9am-2pm. Rain or shine. Rockdale Fair Park, 200 Walnut St, Rockdale Tx.

Random Pics

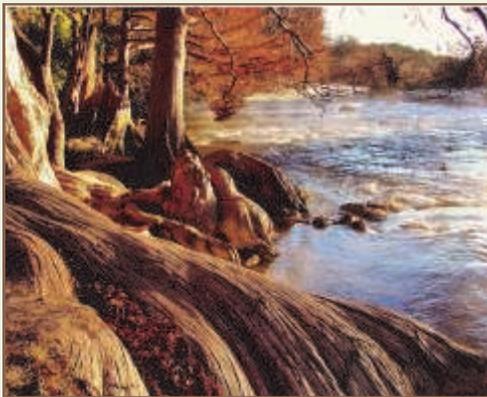
by Don Travis

A group of members went on a nature walk at The Middle Age Spread, finding muscles, wildflowers, native grasses, numerous birds, bryophytes, mosses, lichens, a large sounder of feral hogs, and much more, including this portion of a bovine skeleton which made for a nice mask. Who is that guy?

Those in the picture at right are Dorothy Mayer, Katherine Bedrich, Cindy Travis, Paula Engehardt, Linda Jo Conn and the masked man, yours truly. Photos by Debbi Harris.



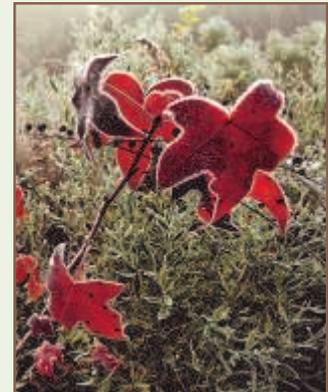
Here is a selection of winners from our 2012 Nature Festival Photo Contest:



Early Morning on Guadalupe River, Ronald Billings



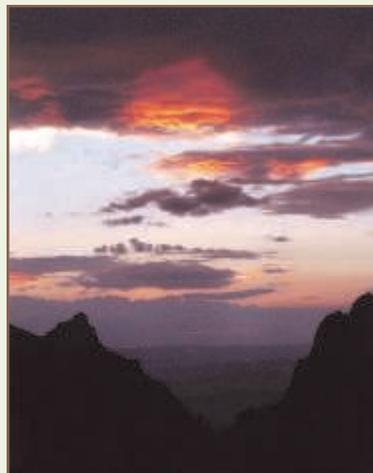
Lady Bug Convention, William Adkinson



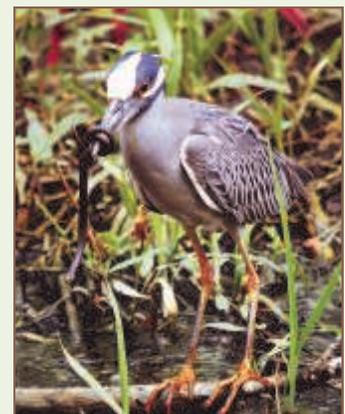
Frosty Sweetgum Leaves, Ronald Billings



Gabriel River Reflections, Eddie Hayden



Sunset at Gap in Chisos Mountains, William Adkinson



What Now? Roscoe Gore

El Camino Real Master Naturalist
C/O Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service
100 E. First Street
Cameron TX 76520-0790

Texas A&M AgriLife Ext. Svc. Phone: 254-697-7045
E-mail: Milam-tx@tamu.edu or our chapter at
ElCaminoRealMasterNaturalist@gmail.com

Officers

President: Katherine Bedrich
Vice President/Programs: Donna Lewis
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Operating Committee Chairs

Adv. Training & Vol. Projects: Phyllis Shuffield
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Host: Cindy McDaniels

Chapter Advisors

Tim Siegmund, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Jon Gersbach, Texas A&M AgriLife Ext. Service

Newsletter Staff

Editor / Composer: Don Travis, contact via E-mail at
ElCaminoRealMasterNaturalist@gmail.com

Staff Writers: Katherine Bedrich

Spring '13 Contributors: Ann Collins, Paula Engelhardt, Debbi Harris, Phyllis Shuffield

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Certifications, Etc. By Debbi Harris

New since the Winter 2012-13 newsletter **are in this color.**



Our 2012 Re-Certification pin was the Bat. Those achieving their 2012 Annual Re-Certifications include: Katherine Bedrich, Cindy Bolch, Jan Campbell, Ann Collins, Linda Jo Conn, Lucy Coward, Rich Cromwell, Joyce Dalley, Vivian Dixon, Paula Engelhardt, Michele Fletcher, Debbi Harris, Pat Holley, Donna Lewis, Dorothy Mayer, Cindy McDaniels, Gary McDaniels, Pamela Neely, Jeanette Patschke, John Pruett, Connie Roddy, Phyllis Shuffield, Kim Summers, Sue Taylor, Cindy Travis, Don Travis, Paul Unger, **Chip Colley, Sherry Colley, Barbara Cromwell, Sandra Dworaczyk, Janice Johnson, Kathy Lester, and Genie Lindburg.**

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 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, Debbi Harris, Joy Graham, Lucile Estell, Shawn Walton, Anne Barr, Ed Burleson, 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, **and Lucy Coward.**

2500 Hours—Paul Unger, Katherine Bedrich and Cindy Bolch

Our Annual Report of Memberships hours for the year 2012 showed 1,023 Advanced Training hours and 7,568 hours of Volunteer Event hours. Our total accumulated AT hours were 3,513, and total Vol. hours are 27,868.

Did You Know?



A natural volcanic formation, columnar basalt has a seemingly man-made appearance. The (mostly) hexagonal columns formed naturally about 100,000 years ago as thick lava rapidly cooled, contracting and creating cracks in the surface **of the new rock. Pictured here is the Devil's Posthole in California**, which used to be much taller than what we see today. Powerful erosive forces have been at work over the years, carving, shaping and demolishing remnants of the lava flow. Freeze-thaw cycles help break apart the columns, and glaciers and earthquakes helped knock the columns down. Photo: by [dWolfgra](http://www.flickr.com/photos/dwolfgra/). See <http://www.nps.gov/depo/naturescience/geology.htm> for more information.