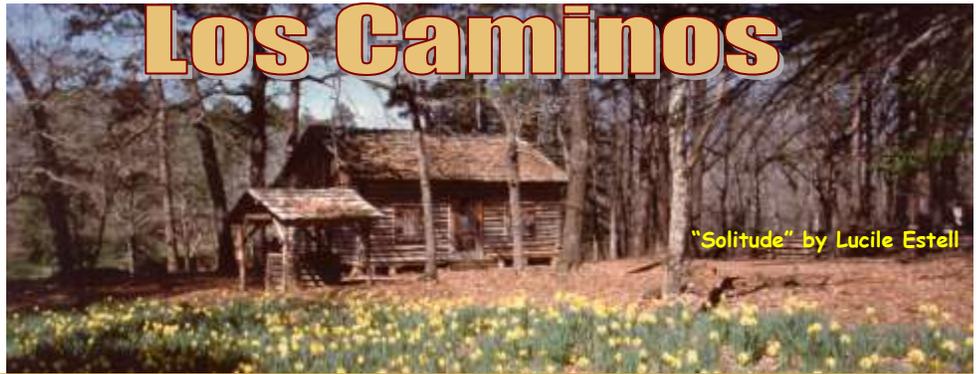


Master Naturalist™



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.



"Solitude" by Lucile Estell

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

Winter '09-'10

Prairie Tracks, by Katherine Bedrich

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A new year has arrived. It is in the middle of winter and we may feel like being by the fire place keeping warm. You can do this and work on volunteer hours. Remember each year you need 40 volunteer hours for re-certification. Here are a few projects you can start in the comfort of your warm house.

You can become a Citizen Scientist for the National Phenology Network by participating in Project BudBurst. Do you **know what Phenology is?** "Phenology" is the study of the timing of life cycle events in plants and animals. In other words, studying the environment to figure out how animals know when it is time to hibernate, and **what 'calendar' or 'clock' plants use to begin flowering, leafing or reproducing**".

Project BudBurst was presented at the Annual Meeting this year. You pick a plant from the list and follow the in-

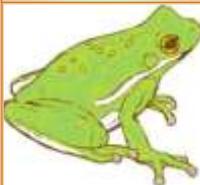
structions on what data is collected. This information will be used on how climate change is affecting plants and nature. Go to this link: http://www.windows.ucar.edu/citizen_science/budburst/participate.php or just search on "Project BudBurst".

The Great Backyard Bird Count will be February 12-15, 2010. All you do is count the birds in your area for 15 minutes or more and then report what you saw. You can do this for any or all four days. Observation can be from the warmth of your living room, or you can go outside and be with nature. You pick.

Our Motto

- Look
- Learn
- Teach
- Conserve

Our Mascot Green Tree Frog



Did You Know?

What is the largest mammal on earth, currently or ever?
See Answer on the last page.



I have been doing this for several years. One year there were so many cardinals; Charlie and I counted over 100 each day for weeks. They knew when feeding time was, you could see them gathering in the trees across the road. One time I felt like I was in Alfred

(Continued on page 2)

(Prairie Tracks, Continued from page 1)

Hitchcock's movie "BIRDS"; I almost ran inside. It has been interesting to see how the birds are doing each year. If you participate in this activity, send Cindy your total hours when you finish. Here is the link: <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/howto.html>

For this next volunteer activity, you will have to leave the warmth of your home. On March 6, 2010 at TAMU campus the Northern Regional Texas Contest of **"Dolphin Challenge" will be held.** Dolphin Challenge involves high school student teams answering ocean related questions. This is one of 25 regional competitions held across the United States. It is coordinated by Texas Sea Grant College Program and supported by Texas A & M. Master naturalist are asked to volunteer in helping with this project. I have contacted Julie Massey, who is a Master Naturalist working with the program and she will send information to us. You can go to this website also: <http://dolphinschallenge.tamu.edu/>

This New Year will also have many volunteer opportunities with the *Nature Festival* shifting into high gear. Each one of you has an important role in the success of the Festival.

One thing we can all do is promote the event. Tell everyone you know and meet - MILAM COUNTY NATURE FESTIVAL - June 12-13, 2010 - Wilson-Ledbetter Park - El Camino Real Chapter Master Naturalist.

Two other projects for the Chapter to concentrate on are the *Nature of Milam County* project and the *Millennium Seed Bank* project. These are important to our County and Chapter. Presenting them to the community is part of Texas Master Naturalist Mission Statement:

"To develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities."

Katherine Bedrich, President

Seeds for the Millennium By Debbi Harris and Don Travis

What is the "Millennium Seed Bank"?

The Millennium Seed Bank project is an international conservation project coordinated by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, located just outside London. Launched in the year 2000 and housed in the Wellcome Trust Millennium Building situated in the grounds of Wakehurst Place, West Sussex, its purpose is to provide an "insurance policy" against the extinction of plants in the wild by storing seeds for future use. The storage facilities consist of large underground frozen vaults preserving the world's largest collection of seeds.

Why does Kew save seeds? Today, between 60,000 and 100,000 species of plant are faced with the threat of extinction - roughly a quarter of all plant species.

Plants are dying out largely due to the activities of people.



Clearing of primary vegetation, over-exploitation and climate change are all causing species losses.

We need plants, because plants are useful. Plants provide the air we breathe, they provide clean water, fuel, building materials, fibers, resins and we all rely on plants for food.

Plants also play a vital role in combating climate change. Plants maintain the atmosphere and counteract climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide, turning it into plant material. **Kew's projects are supporting plants in mitigating and adapting to our changing climate.**

How does it work?

People like us become organized and trained by experts in plant identification, seed collection and preservation - especially

(Continued on page 3)

(Seeds for the Millennium, Continued from page 2)

the assistance of Flo Oxley and the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center - and we become the volunteers to help make it happen by locating unique plant species in **our county, and collecting seeds for the "millennium"**.

When the seeds arrive at Kew, they are cleaned, identification confirmed, dried, repackaged and stored in sub-zero conditions. Because seeds required for research get used up, and to check the viability and storage conditions, seeds are germinated on a periodic basis. Plants from stored seeds are also grown where viability in the wild has fallen to low levels, and the resultant seeds are distributed where needed. All seeds provided to institutions are on a non-profit mutual benefit basis.

What's been done so far, and what lies ahead?

By the end of 2009, Kew, together with partners in 50 countries worldwide, will have successfully saved seeds from 10% of the world's wild plant species. In total so far, over 1.6 Billion seeds for over 27,000 species have been saved, including 12 species that are now globally extinct in the world.

By 2020, the aim is to secure the safe storage of seed **from 25% of the world's plants. Targeted plants and regions** are those most at risk from climate change and the ever-increasing impact of human activities. Seeds also targeted are those of the world's plant life faced with the threat of extinction, and those that could be of most use in the future.

In 2009, we launched our Milam County MSB program. Seventeen volunteers were trained by Flo Oxley from the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, and we already have two documented plant species registered in the U.K. seed vaults for Central Texas: Maroon Blanket Flower (*Gaillardia amblyodon*) and Texas Ragwort (*Senecio ampullaceus*). That alone is an outstanding effort. Plus we are the very first Texas volunteer group that has been trained. And, per Flo Oxley, we are seen as the ones setting the standards!!

Another training session is targeted for March 2010, and anyone is eligible to participate! Let Debbie know soon if you are interested.

So, take a look at the three species being targeted next, and see if you have any of these on your property. There are additional photos in downloadable PowerPoint files on our website to help you identify these species. Go to <http://grovesite.com/tmn/ecrmn/msb>.

Chickasaw Plum (*Prunus angustifolia*), blooms Feb-May. Five petals, white to cream white flower that is **less than 1" long**, shrub that grows **up to 13' tall with red or yellow 1"**



fruit that is found in sandy, open woods, roadsides and fence rows.

Desert Chicory or Texas Dandelion (*Pyrrhopappus pauciflorus*), blooms Feb-June. Flower head has many petals



that are 1 5/8-2 wide, lemon-yellow flower that grows **8-20" tall** with black to purplish anthers and is found on dry clay, sandy loams, abandoned areas, lawns, pastures, cultivated

fields and prairies.

Mouse's Ear or Shade Betony (*Stachys crenata*), blooms Feb-May. Delicate looking petal that has a 'mick jagger lip', light lavender to pink flower, sepals are **less than 1" long that grows up to 12" tall and is** found in ditches, damp woods, abandoned lots, pastures and weedy areas.



By Debbie Harris and Don Travis

Our 1st Annual Photo Contest! by Paula Engelhardt

The First Annual ECR Chapter Photo Contest was held on November 19, 2009. The competition was open to all chapter members and 67 photos taken in the state of Texas were submitted for judging.

There were 5 categories including: Plants, Wildlife, Landscape or Scenery, People in Nature and Funny Nature Photo. First, second and third place winners in each category earned a ribbon. First place winners in each category competed for the Best of Show Award. Wal-Mart donated gift cards for the first place winners **in each category and Elaine's Emporium donated a gift certificate for the Best of Show Award.** Thank you to these Rockdale businesses!

Our judges were: Ken Cooke, of the Rockdale Reporter, Shirley Williams, of the Temple Daily Telegram and Gary Griesbach, a local photographer. They were wonderful! They took their time, carefully deliberated over the photographs and explained why they chose the winning photos, in other words, what was so appealing about them. They reported that it was a very difficult contest to judge with so many great photos!

Gary and Ken have agreed to speak to our chapter in 2010 about photography and have offered to critique any photographs we bring to them as well offer tips and strategies for obtaining the perfect nature photo. We are looking forward to their program - stay tuned for details!

Several people helped make the contest a success. Thank you to Joyce Dalley for helping to procure the gift certificates, Janice Pelzel and Ann Collins for helping the day of the contest, and Lucy Coward for collecting the photos. Thanks Bob, Paul and Katherine for enlisting our judges and everyone in the photography group for their help with ideas and feedback regarding the contest.

The winners were announced and ribbons and prizes were awarded at the chapter holiday party on December 10. Thank you to Anne Barr for providing a nice area to

display all of the photo entries for everyone to enjoy at the party.

Janice Pelzel is planning a display of all of the entries in the Rockdale Library window for the month of January. Be sure to stop by and take a look at the photos.

The results of the judging, including the photographer and the photo title, are listed below. Thank you to everyone who submitted photos and congratulations to all of the winners!

Wildlife Category:

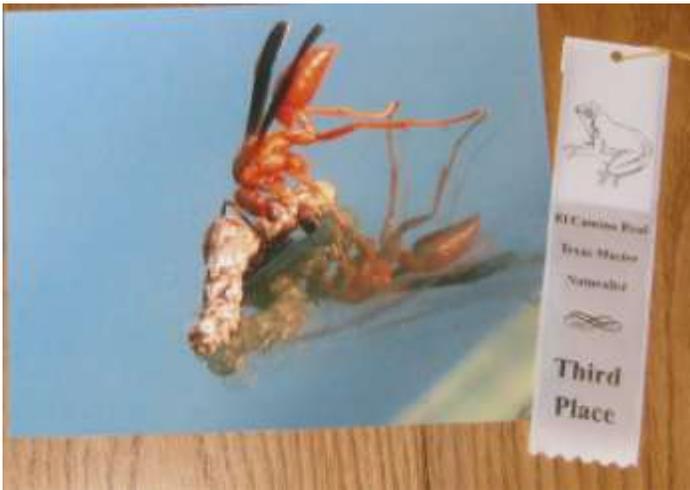
1st Place: **"It's a Small World", Paula Engelhardt**



2nd Place: **"Giant Swallowtail on Penta", Stella Booker**



3rd Place: "Yum! Yum!", Ann Collins



3rd Place: "Only the Shadow Knows" Paula Engelhardt



Landscape or Scenery Category:

1st Place: "Solitude" Lucile Estell



Plants Category:

1st Place: "Acorns and Jeweled Web" Paula Engelhardt



2nd Place: "Drought" Katherine Bedrich



2nd Place: "Joy" Shawn Walton



3rd Place: "Cati Trees" Lucy Coward



2nd Place: "Fishing on Little River During Drought Summer '09" Dorothy Mayer



3rd Place: "Hard at Work" Ann Collins



People In Nature Category:

1st Place: "Feeding Horse in Primrose Patch" Janice Johnson



Funny Nature Photo Category:

1st Place: "Share? Are you nuts?" Paula Engelhardt



2nd Place: "Only the Nose Knows" Ann Collins



3rd Place: "What Would You Do for High-Speed Internet?" Lisa Davenport



Best In Show: "It's a Small World" Paula Engelhardt



I'm sure you'll agree, these photos were really GREAT!
Thanks again to all the contributors and our judges.

Our next big photography event is a countywide nature photo contest to be held in conjunction with the Milam County Nature Festival in June of 2010. Don't miss it!

By Paula Engelhardt

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Los Caminos is a quarterly publication of the El Camino Real Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists.

Upcoming Major Events:

- 1/9 Nature Festival Planning meeting, 9am
- 1/13 Landscaping Advanced Training, 9am
- 1/14 Chapter Member meeting, 6pm
- 1/16 Adopt a Highway cleanup
- 1/30 Bluebird Trail Kickoff

See our website "Calendar" and "Current Events" for all the details.

Certifications, Etc. By Cindy Bolch

New Certifications year to date include: Lucy Coward, Joyce Dalley, Rusty Thomas, Connie Roddy, Lisa Davenport, Shawn Walton, Tense Tumlinson. Cindy Travis, Larry Reynolds, Janice Pelzel, Dorothy Mayer, Janice Johnson, Pat Holley, Bob Burnett, Stella Booker, Bruce Merryman, Carolyn Burford and Kim Summers.

Achieving 2009 Annual Re-Certifications year to date include: Cindy Bolch, Katherine Bedrich, Don Travis, Ann Collins, Anne Barr, Connie Roddy, Ed Burleson, Nancy Soechting, Paul Unger, Paula Engelhardt, Vivian Dixon, Lucille Estell, Rusty Thomas, Janice Pelzel, **Jim O'Donnell, Phyllis Shuffield, Shawn Walton, Debbie Harris and Lucy Coward**

Lifetime to date Milestone Achievement Levels Awarded include:
 250 Hours—Paul Unger, Ann Collins, Cindy Bolch, Katherine Bedrich, Paula Engelhardt, and Don Travis
 500 Hours—Paul Unger, Ann Collins, Cindy Bolch, Katherine Bedrich, Paula Engelhardt and Don Travis
 1000 Hours—Paul Unger [Congratulations to All!](#)

Did You Know?

What is the largest mammal on earth, currently or ever?



The Blue Whale, *Balaenoptera musculus*

Larger than the biggest known dinosaur, and still the heavy weight champion of the world, weighing in up to 200 tons and 110 feet long, consuming 8000 lbs of mostly krill a day, with a tongue as big as an elephant, a heart as big as a car, and some blood vessels big enough for you to swim in. A new born calf can weigh 6,000 lbs and consume 100 gallons of milk a day. With the buoyancy offered by the ocean, and their almost perfectly streamlined body, adults can cruise up to 20 knots making them also one of the fastest animals alive. Blue Whales

are still an endangered species due to being hunted almost to extinction by whalers during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. From well over 300,000, their numbers now are around 5,000-12,000 worldwide.