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*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 '12-'13

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Our Motto

- Look
- Learn
- Teach
- Conserve

Our Mascot Green Tree Frog



Did You Know?

Do Bears Really Hibernate All Winter?

See last page for answer.

Prairie Tracks by Katherine Bedrich

The Queen — *Danaus gilippus*

In a few nations there are still Queens who rule their subjects. In the insect world, specifically the Lepidoptera order - the Queen is not the top ruler. The Monarch takes that title and role to the max. But let's find out about the Queens and how they live.

Texas is part of the Queen butterflies home range; supplying the queens with plenty of milkweed plants. Milkweed is the host plant for queens. By storing milkweed toxins in their body, queens have a means of self-defense from predators.

The Queen's life span is complete metamorphosis - egg- caterpillar - pupa (chrysalis) - winged adult. The wingspan is 3 - 3.5" / 76-86 mm. Wings are dark reddish brown with white spots and dark margins. The head and thorax are speckled with black and white; the abdomen is reddish brown. On the male, a black scent gland used to produce pheromones, is on the underside of the hind wing.

Queens roost during the night. When morning shines, they position their opened wings towards the sun to absorb heat and warm up their bodies. Finding food is the first priority. Flowers with liquid nectar call to the queens; these may include blue mist

flower, and lantana. The female queen's long tongue-*proboscis* - drinks in the nectar, filling her body with nutrition to continue her life cycle. After feasting, the important act of propagation may begin. Male queens use pheromones to attract females. If the female likes what she scents, the two mate.

She then finds a host plant to lay her eggs. Egg laying may take several days. After she has laid all her eggs, the female's life cycle will end. The host plant will provide the necessary food for the caterpillars to survive. Reaching maturity, the caterpillar finds a place, usually away from the host plant,

and enters into this stage of its life cycle - the *chrysalis*. A patch of silk is spun from the caterpillar, attaching it to an object. The caterpillar then sheds its skin and reveals a chrysalis. The chrysalis will dry and harden for protection from the elements. It may take weeks for the adult to emerge (some parts of this metamorphosis are not fully understood). The cycle of life continues with several generations of queens produced yearly.

References: The Life Cycles of Butterflies by Judy Burris & Wayne Richards

Butterflies of North America by Jim P. Brock & Kenn Kaufman



2012 Class Graduation— 23 September 2012

by Dorothy Mayer

On September 23rd, our 4th class became official Texas Master Naturalists and these 9 members received their Certificates.



Left to right: VP Donna Lewis, Class Leader Dorothy Mayer, 2012 class: Jeanette Patschke, Sherry Colley, Chuck Lindberg, Genie Lindberg, Chip Colley, Jan Wise, John Pruett, Jan Campbell, and Linda Jo Conn—a most talented and active group!

They completed 40 hours of class training and field trips during the Spring and Summer. Class topics and presenters included an introductory class to the Texas Master Naturalist (TXMN) program presented by Rich Cromwell, a Certified TXMN with our chapter, and by our Milam County Extension Agent and Texas Agrilife chapter advisor Jon Gersbach; Dr. D. L. Hamilton, was our Anthropology speaker from Texas A&M; Timothy Siegmund, Wildlife Biologist and our chapter advisor from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department spoke on Ornithology; Jon Gersbach spoke on forestry; Chris Harper, with US Fish & Game Services Biologist, taught Herpetology and Ichthyology; Barbara Cromwell, a Certified TXMN with our chapter presented Climatology; Jon Tomacek with Texas A&M presented Mammalogy; Flo Oxley from Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center presented on Botany; Dale Kruse, Curator from S.M. Tracy Herbarium & Texas Cooperative Wildlife Collection taught us about Ecological Concepts & Regions and took us on a field trip to search for Bryophytes and Lichens; Dr. Robert (Bob) Baldrige, Entomology Professor from Baylor University spoke on Entomology; and Mark Klym, Wildlife Biologist with TPWD presented on Urban Systems and Hummingbirds.

Field trips included going to Lake Waco Wetlands where we learned about wetland ecology from Nora Schell, Lake Waco Wetlands Coordinator and Dr. Robert Boyle, Professor of Biology at Baylor University. Lastly, we traveled to College Station to the Texas Cooperative

Wildlife Collection and the Tracy Herbarium where Betty Vermeire, TXMN with the Brazos Valley Chapter gave us a lecture and tour through the wildlife collection; and Dale Kruse, curator of Tracy Herbarium, gave a short lecture and tour of the herbarium.

Needless to say, the outstanding qualifications and experience of all our presenters was outstanding, and very much appreciated!

When I first got involved with our local El Camino Real Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalists here in Milam County, I knew that I would enjoy getting a group of people together to learn about nature sometime in the future. I knew that I would want to share my new found joy in meeting people with similar interests as well as become acquainted with the awesome speakers that help us learn more. So, 2012 was the year that I made up my mind to get a class formed and move ahead with my goal. Of course, as with most successful endeavors, I had lots of help.

My co-chair, Sandra Dworaczyk, was able to secure her church fellowship hall, United Methodist Church in Milano, TX



for the majority of our meetings. The Fellowship Hall was absolutely perfect for our needs. Ann Collins allowed us to come onto her property to search for bryophytes and lichens and Don & Cindy Travis let us come to their home for our Botany class. Unfortunately, our field trip on their wildlife management property there became an inside class due to rain. That's right, I said rain. Of course we are careful these days to never complain about rain. Cindy & Don may have not been too happy about mud, but rain was not a problem.

Our chapter president, Katherine Bedrich, was also there to help make sure all the 'i's

were dotted and the 't's were crossed, offering assistance everywhere, and thereby making me look good. She certainly had her work cut out for her and I certainly appreciated her help. Don Travis and Cindy Bolch were there to make sure the PC and audio/visual technology needs were covered. Cindy and Gary McDaniels worked hard to make sure nobody died of starvation. And, Cindy Bolch and Debbi Harris were there to keep us updated on our volunteer and training hours. Then, we had numerous existing members that came to learn more themselves as well as make sure that our new trainees felt welcome.

Our 2012 classes culminated with a graduation ceremony organized by Paul Unger, with the help of Jan Campbell, Jan Wise, Sandra Dworaczyk, Donna Lewis and Debbi Harris at Edward and Sandra Dworaczyk's home with US Fish and Game Biologist Chris Harper helping with presentations. Our chapter song, Colors of the Wind, was sung by Traci Scarpinato, Certified TXMN with ECRC. Milam County Judge Dave Barkemeyer gave a short presentation on the possible future of Sugar Loaf Mountain in the Gause area. A special song written by Jan Campbell and sung to the classic Beatles tune "With a Little Help From Our Friends" was performed by the graduates.

Members and guests then enjoyed an afternoon of fun, food and sharing. In summary, the 2012 class was 'The Bomb.' And, the training class has blended into the El Camino Real Chapter seamlessly.

Congratulations go out to our 2012 Master Naturalists, I hope you enjoy being a part of our chapter as much as we enjoy having you.

Here are the lyrics to the class song:

What would you do if we sang out of tune
Would you stand up and walk out on us?
Lend us your ears and we'll sing you a song
And please try not to make a big fuss!
Oh, we get HOURS with a little help from our friends,
VOLunteer HOURS with a little help from our friends,
Mm lots of HOURS with the help of our friends.

We took the TEXas Master NATralist class
We're so PROUD we've acCOMplished that FEAT!
We LEARNed all about the George Be-ard stone house,
And some HIST'ry of Milam CountEE!
Oh, we get HOURS with the HELP of our friends,
TRAI-aining hours with the HELP of our friends,
Mm lots of HOURS with the HELP of our friends.

Are you FEELing kinda HUNgry?
Just talk to Cindy 'bout that.
Are you YEARNin' for LEARNin'?
See DOR'thy, 'cause THAT'S where it's AT.

We STUDied the MOTH, butterFLY and the SLOTH
We set up BLACK lights and STAYed out at night,
SOME of us mixed up a HUMmingbird broth
And counted HUMmers who CAME into SIGHT.
Oh, we get HOURS with the HELP of our FRIENDS,
A-a T HOURS with the HELP of our friends,
Mm lots of HOURS with the HELP of our friends.

Are you FEELing kinda HUNgry?
Just talk to Cindy 'bout that.
Are you YEARNin' for LEARNin'?
See DOR'thy, 'cause THAT'S where it's AT.

THEY call us CITizen SCientists now
And we're REAdy to TEACH and to LEARN
WE'VE learned our 'OLOGies -, ICHthy- and HERP-
CLImat-, MAMmal-, aBOUT bees and BIRDS.
Oh, we get HOURS with the HELP of our FRIENDS,
VOLunteer HOURS with the HELP of our friends,
Mm lots of HOURS with the HELP of our friends.

[Article contributors included Katherine Bedrich, Dorothy Mayer, Linda Jo Conn and Jan Campbell]



Birding with Tim Siegmund



Examining grasses at S. M. Tracy Herbarium, with Curator Dale Kruse

There's an Owl with Sue's Name on it

by Ann Collins

There's a Great Horned Owl in the Texas Cooperative Wildlife Collection (TCWC) with Sue Taylor's name on it. How did it get there? On September 8, 2012 about ten o'clock in the morning Sue was going to a Master Naturalist meeting in Rockdale when she spotted a large bird that appeared to have been hit on the side of the road. She turned around and sure enough, a beautiful Great Horned Owl had just been hit and probably broke its neck in the process. There were no obvious injuries to mar the specimen.

Being a good naturalist, Sue picked it up and brought it to the meeting. Just the day before the new class had paid a visit to TCWC and had been awed by all of the thousands of specimens in the collection. I said I would be glad to take the owl to someone who could present it to the curator.

So, I took the magnificent creature home and put it in my freezer where I kept it until I went to a meeting of the Rio Brazos Audubon Society. I had planned to give it to one of the volunteers at TCWC but Dr. Keith Arnold was at the meeting and he readily agreed to take it immediately to TCWC. Dr. Arnold teaches ornithology at A&M and is very involved with processing the birds for the wildlife collection. He was delighted to have the specimen.

TCWC would like to have more specimens from Milam County as we are very under reported. I think the only specimen from Milam County in the collection is an American Eagle from 1939. Not positive about the date. They need more of our stuff! If you find a dead animal that is not too damaged I would be glad to take it to TCWC and submit the information they need for verification. They have plenty of Grackles so use some discretion in what you would like to submit.

They need a date, a GPS, time of day, weather information such as snow, or flood. They don't need a weather report. If GPS is not available they need mileage to nearest intersection, building, or closest address. They need highway number, nearest city, and county.

This is the information Sue submitted:

N30'44.592' W096'46.837'

Elevation: 405'

US Highway 79 50 feet from County Road 375

Nearest address: 11518 E. US Hwy 79, Gause, Milam Co., Texas 77857

Time picked up: 9:50 am on Sept. 8, 2012

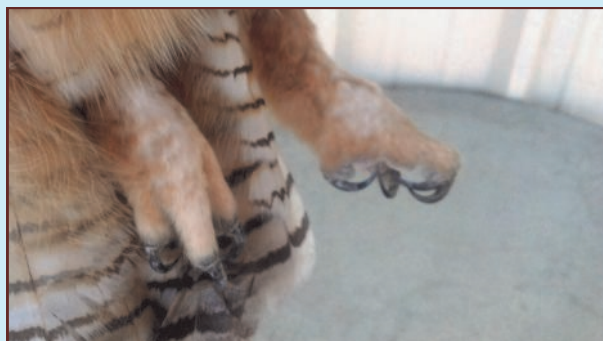
Ambient temp: 84*

Physical location is 1.25 miles North of Seven Cedars Roadside Park on US Hwy 79

Picked up by: Sue Taylor

They were delighted with all of Sue's information. Many specimens simply come in with just the county where they were found.

Be alert and don't hesitate to retrieve any good specimen. We will be covered by the permit for TCWC or from Mark Klym with Texas Parks and Wildlife.



2012 Texas Master Naturalist State Conference by Several Attendees

[This article contains submissions by several members who attended the conference. Some have been edited to reduce redundancy, but they all are worth your reading time.]

1. From Linda Jo Conn—

Fourteen members of the El Camino Real Texas Master Naturalist Chapter attended the three day 2012 Annual Texas Master Naturalist Statewide Meeting and Advanced Training held October 26-28 at the scenic Camp Allen Conference and Retreat Center near Navasota. This was the thirteenth annual meeting of the state organization. The group learned new information and skills and also shared knowledge with fellow attendees acquired from local training activities and chapter experiences as master naturalists.

A wide variety of training classes and activities was offered to participants. A few of the session titles were: It Ain't Easy Being Green; Bird Feather I.D.; Winter Whooping Crane Watch; Native Bee Management Practices; Using Photography as a TMN Tool; Intro to Grasses, Sedges, and Rushes of Texas; Tracking Hummingbirds Across TX; Amphibians and Reptiles; Smart Phone Apps for the Naturalist; and Wildlife Tracking Training. Katherine Bedrich, local chapter president, also gave a presentation, "El Camino Real Chapter's Junior Master Naturalist Project: Nature Observation", to a group of conference attendees.

During the awards ceremony held on Sunday morning, the El Camino Real Chapter Newsletter was voted "Best Newsletter" by attendees in the chapter newsletter competition. This is the third year that the chapter has submitted an entry, and it has received this honor each time. Don Travis, editor of the outstanding publication and webmaster for the local organization, accepted the honor announced by Michelle Haggerty, State Master Naturalist organization president. [photo above] First place photo in the judge's competition for the photo category "Master Naturalists at Work or Play", depicting our Chapter President Katherine Bedrich examining some lichen, was awarded to Linda Jo Conn, recent 2012 graduate of the ECRTMN training program. [photos at right]

Members of the El Camino Real Chapter attending the conference were Katherine Bedrich, Cindy Bolch, Chip Colley, Sherry Colley, Ann Collins, Linda Jo Conn, Sandra Dworaczyk,

Paula Engelhardt, Debbi Harris, Jeanette Patschke, John Pruett, Phyllis Shuffield, Sue Taylor, and Don Travis.

My first "Lesson Learned" proved invaluable. Imagine this.... nine women sharing two bathrooms in a cabin in the woods. Awakening Saturday morning, I was in dire need of a toilet and both bathrooms were occupied. After climbing down from the top bunk, I really began to feel pressure.

Thank goodness, the first Advanced Training Class I attended on Friday afternoon proved invaluable to my comfort and sanity. "Techniques for Teaching Leave No Trace Principles to Urban and Suburban Audiences" was the official class title, although a more descriptive sub-title given by the instructor was "How to Teach Soccer Moms to Pooh in the Woods".

Many urban and suburban people have trouble relieving themselves in the outdoors when recognizable restroom facilities are not available. Showing them simple ways to be prepared to fully enjoy the experience of being in the "back country" can be part of our enablement and education process.

Necessary supplies listed by the instructor were: a small Zip lock bag, a wet wipe, and on occasion, a hand trowel.

Saturday morning, I was a Master Naturalist needing relief! I knew there were no plastic bags in the cabin cabinets, so I pulled an empty Kraft Shredded Cheese bag from the trash can. A couple of squares of Kleenex from the box on a side table in the living area sufficed for wet wipes. A six to eight inch deep hole to bury solid waste was not

necessary at the moment for what I needed to do, so the trowel was not required.

Quickly donning jacket and shoes, I ventured out into the chill and walked into the darkness. The encroachment of the woods and my internal pressure precluded taking the prescribed 100 steps away from the cabin. Thirty steps did just fine. Blessed relief! The evidence was deposited in the cabin trash can.

I was fortunate my first training class gave me the information and permission to be able to make myself comfortable. I also became

aware of the difficulty many would-be nature enthusiasts may



have enjoying the outdoors because of the apparent lack of restroom facilities.

2. From Katherine Bedrich—

At the 2012 State Meeting a group presentation was given on developing a State Junior Master Naturalist Program. Mary Ann Melton from the Good Water Chapter provided a presentation on Developing & Planning a Youth Education Committee and Program. Katherine Bedrich of El Camino Real Chapter presented Junior Master Naturalist Observing Nature project. Stephanie Stone Perry from the Hill Country Chapter led a JMN roundtable discussion and planning.

Good Water Chapter presented a Youth Education Committee Chronology. Included in this presentation were training, meeting, class, proposal dates and description. Field Trip Emergency Procedures, First Aid List, Field Trip Protocols and Notes to Parent were presented in a handout. Good Water Chapter was chartered in July 2010.

The Observing Nature project included attendees participating in the outdoor activity used at the Apple Tree Afterschool youth program this past summer. The groups learned how to record their observations with the PVC square, compass, ruler, thermometers, GPS, and magnifying glass. Awareness of texture, scent, sight, and listening were also demonstrated.

Stephanie Stone Perry led a JMN roundtable discussion on How to Create a Texas Junior Naturalist / Junior Master Naturalist Program. Establishing curriculum and reading material, computer and graphics teams, outreach and training are some of the areas being set up to develop the program.

The Texas Junior Naturalist Team is working on creating a program that would allow education leaders a place to find and share resources unique to their natural region.

3. From Ann Collins—

Just got back from the best Texas Master Naturalist state conference ever. This was my fifth one. Every year on the evaluation sheet I always say: Need more birding training and

field trips. Finally the powers that be listened and took the time to find some really great classes.

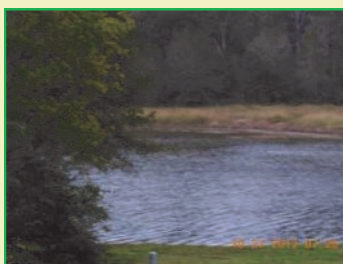
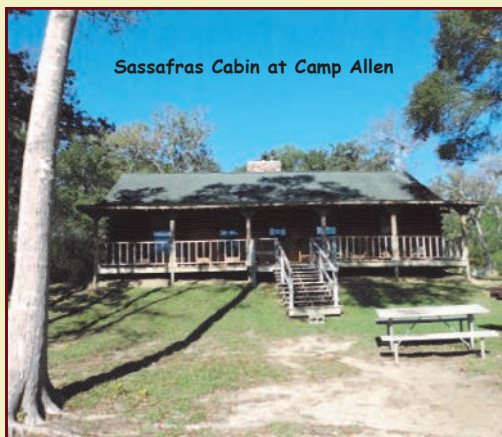
There were a couple that were quite mediocre. No passion from the speaker who stood about half way down the middle isle of the room addressing one side of the class. Yuck! I'm sure he had lots of good things to say but certainly didn't deliver it in a manner that was at all beneficial. Enough said!

The other classes more than made up for it! Bird Feather ID was positively fascinating!!! Yeah, I know.....too many exclamation marks, but it was really, really good. David Scott has spent an incredible number of hours photographing, researching, and putting together a very valuable field guide. He is a professional tracker and has a school where he teaches how to become a tracker. Tracking is more than just being able to identify animal tracks left in the mud. I never thought of bird feathers as being of any benefit to tracking.

Groups of six were given a baggie of bird feathers and told to identify what bird they came from and on what part of the bird they were located. Never in a million years did I think I would be able to do that, but with David's guide book it was actually doable if not exactly easy. Lots of fun, too! Yeah!! More exclamation marks.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Nature Trackers has put together another great Citizen Science program to observe and report what's going on with our most famous Texas bird.....The magnificent Whooping Crane.

Since we had a group of nine cranes that wintered in our area at Granger Lake it seemed like a match made in Heaven for me. I have done the Granger Lake Christmas Bird Count the last two years and will do it again this year. Several of us went to see the cranes last year, some of us many trips. I just can't get enough of these super birds that all on their own have established a new wintering site without any help or interference from us miserable humans. I hope several more of you will join Paula Engelhardt and me and take the training and become certified observers. Great training class!



Lucked in to a super class called "Wildlife Tracking Training". Not anywhere near "trained", more like introduced. Jonah Evans, the facilitator, has been a tracker most of his tiny, thirty-four year life. He lives and breathes this stuff and his passion and enthusiasm are really contagious. He was assisted by David Scott, the Feather ID guy. Together they were quite a team. Loved every minute, hung on every word. Super!

Another great class was Planning and Conducting Night Hikes. So much fun. We were in a totally dark room with a few flashlights wrapped in red cellophane. Too cold to go outside. I wasn't looking forward to that at all, even with my coat that supposedly keeps you warm down to 45 below 0! Probably means you won't actually freeze to death! The four corners of the room were set up as sensory stations. The first was "Hearing" where we learned to cup our ears to better hear the gentle sounds of the night. Next we used our sense of smell to identify things around us. Moving on to the next station we learned about rods and cones in our eyes and how humans pretty much can't identify color in the dark. We were told how animals use night vision for survival. Finally we had bags of different objects which we were told to describe and identify just by using our sense of touch. Really great class.

Camp Allen is a wonderful facility. I shared a beautiful cabin on the edge of a lake with eight lovely women and numerous bottles of juice....I'll leave the kind of juice up to your imagination. Don't think you will have much trouble with that. These women are so generous with their hospitality so they invited any and all to come for a visit after hours to our cabin in the woods. Lots of laughing and story telling and very little sleep. Late to bed and early to rise, nine women sharing two bathrooms, all of us accustomed to private baths at home and not having to share anything with anybody. All in all, we fared pretty well.

Lovely weekend with 380 like-minded folks. Can't get much better than that.

4. From Cindy Bolch—

Great training sessions - The last 2 years of training at the conferences have been extremely poor but this year they made up for it. They provided us with plenty of varied and interesting topics - enough to satisfy the most discriminating naturalist. The speakers were up on top of their subjects, engaging and easy on the ears, and just down right fun to be around. Even the 4 hour sessions zipped right on by making you wish for more. Maybe the very comfortable chairs in the meeting rooms helped as well. After last year I had pretty much decided that the training offered at the conferences was not worth the time and money. But if they can keep this ball rolling, I believe I will save my money and plan to attend again next year.

Down side: Food - The food offered was a disappointment. I don't think I had a hot meal the whole time, very little if any variety, and long lines. Lodging - 9 women in a 3 bedroom, 2 bath cabin was a bit tight.

Up side: Camaraderie - Having 9 women in the cabin also gave us a great opportunity to socialize in the evenings, relax and drink some wine, talk about the sessions we had attended that day, sit on the porch overlooking the pond and feed the ducks. Invitations to others at the conference were extended and on Saturday we had a full house filled with lively conversation.

All in all I do believe it was a great time had by all. I came away satisfied with the training I had received and wanting more.



The "ladies" of Sassafras Cabin in their version of Victoria's Secret pajamas. Front row left to right: Sue Taylor, Cindy Bolch, Paula Engelhardt, Linda Jo Conn, Ann Collins, Phyllis Shuffield, Sandra Dworaczky; Back row: Katherine Bedrich, Debbi Harris.

5. Don Travis—

Well, I don't know how to top that! John Pruett and I shared a nice quiet motel-like room, but did attend the Friday and Saturday night shenanigans at Sassafras Cabin—and it was a great time that's for sure. We are still wondering how several women can all be talking at once and still claim they understand everything being said. Please notice the photo below. We had normal clothes on, and I swear we never even entered a bedroom.

As for the conference, this was my first time attending and I was duly impressed by all the speakers, the facility and the overall organization.

And for some more photos of interest:





Chain saw carved cross sculpture from eastern red cedar taken after Bastrop 2011 fire, in the auction with many other beautiful nature items.



Some of the grounds and a conference building.



John Pruett talking with Michelle Haggerty, TMN Program Coordinator



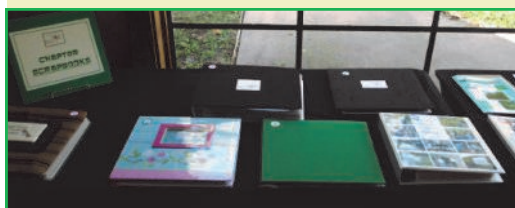
Unique décor in the hallways, lots of nice little details.



Sherry Colley and Jeannette Patschke discussing an article on Hummers.



A partial view of the Newsletters entered in the Contest. Can you spot ours?



Partial display of Chapter Scrapbooks entered in the scrapbook contest. Ours is the green one done by Chapter Historian Barbara Cromwell.



1000 Hour Milestone Recognitions for 2012: Sue Taylor, Debbi Harris, and Don Travis (belated 2010)



2500 Hour Milestone Recognitions for 2012: Cindy Bolch and Katherine Bedrich



500 Hour Milestone Recognition for 2012: Sandra Dworaczyk, 4th from left.



250 Milestone Recognition for 2012: John Pruett, 5th from left.

A Giant Leap Into The Unknown

by Linda Jo Conn

That is how the new special interest group of the El Camino Real TMN chapter might describe its initial venture into the study of humans inhabiting Texas before Columbus "discovered the Americas". Paul Unger and Linda Jo Conn met with group leader Michelle Fletcher to discuss member progress with finding relevant books and websites for research as well as speakers and field trip destinations for future Paleo Nature group meetings.

1491: The Americas before Columbus by Charles O. Mann was highly recommended as a starting point for study by Master Naturalists. The website www.texasbeyondhistory.net was suggested as a useful tool for information finding. Proposed group field trip destinations included the Gault Site at Florence and McKinney Roughs Nature Park near Bastrop. TAMU anthropologist Dr. Alston Thoms, TPWD archeologist Chris Lintz, and local archaeology enthusiast William Parker were listed as possible speakers.

Until the next meeting, the group will be individually researching native and cultivated Indian foods, early methods of food gathering, meal preparation and food preservation. Perhaps someone might investigate heating liquids using hot stones from a fire pit or try baking bread from maize freshly ground on a stone metate. It will be interesting to hear the personal reports of initial attempts at Paleo cuisine.

A desire to learn and experience new things is the only prerequisite to join the Paleo Nature group. A desire to learn and experience new things will also be the driving force of this new interest group. All Master Naturalists and friends are encouraged to join the discussion and sharing of information at the next Paleo Nature meeting. Meetings will be scheduled every other month. Stay tuned to "ECRC This Week" for updates and future events.

My Confession: I Am Ignorant but Learning. This is taken from my Paleo Nature Diary:

09-28-12 Friday

12:39 pm - Just came in from outside where I was gathering up fallen acorns from the live oak trees north of my house. There seems to be a large amount of small acorns this year. They steadily bounce off the metal patio roof, off the deck, or onto the ground. Those that fall into the nearby livestock pen get gobbled up as soon as the sheep find them. It is a wonder that I have not been hit by a falling missile.

As I toiled, picking up acorns one by one, I doubted that this was the way an Early American woman would have done it.

Perhaps she laid animal skins or woven nets on the ground to facilitate the collection. Perhaps she shook tree branches to hasten the acorn fall.

Anyway, I doubt if she would have been as lonely a figure as I was. I imagined being surrounded by fellow female acorn gatherers of all ages in a hubbub of conversation and laughter. I visualized patient grandmothers instructing giggling girls while young mothers periodically paused to tend to their infants.

It took 20+ minutes of stooping and kneeling to gather about a quart of acorns.

10-13-12 Saturday

9:30 pm - My son and his family just left. We had a good visit and each grandchild caught a fish from the tank before the wonderful rain and tornado scare!

Travis asked about the pan of acorns I had drying on the counter. I told him my plans to remove the shells, grind the nuts to a coarse meal, leach the meal with hot water heated with stones taken from a campfire, and concoct either a porridge or flatbread from the resulting "flour".



"But Mama," he said, "Those acorns are not any good. Every one of them has an insect hole in the shell." Note: My son has investigated tree propagation and is actually responsible for several bur oak and live oak trees growing around my home. "Commercial growers of oak trees using acorns harvest acorns from the trees, not off the ground because of the insect problem," he informed me.

A few minutes later, he brought me some fresh acorns, harvested directly from the trees. They were much larger and lacked holes. OK, I learned something.

10-14-12 Sunday

9:00 am - I dumped the doomed "hole-y" acorns into the trash after finding a dozen plump white grubs crawling in the bottom of the drying pan. I do not want to facilitate the repetition of the worm cycle in my trees.

Will try to harvest more acorns from a ladder or by using an old sheet and a threshing pole. I have not given up. (Anyway, I agree with A&M anthropologist Dr. Alston Thoms. Given a choice, local Indians would have eaten native pecans before bothering with acorns, but then, pecans do not grow everywhere.)

In other words, I am going to try another "A GIANT LEAP INTO THE UNKNOWN".

Thorndale Wilderness Club

by Katherine Bedrich

When was the last time you were stranded in the wilderness? Do you have the skills to protect yourself from the elements? At Apache Pass on October 30th, El Camino Real Chapter of Texas Master Naturalist and Thorndale Wilderness Club High School students learned two basic survival skills. Chip Colley, Sherry Colley, Ann Collins, Paula Engelhardt, Katherine Bedrich, Jeanette Patschke and John Pruett instructed students in building a shelter out of found material and starting a fire without matches.

John and Chip discussed the elements of survival in the wilderness. A protective shelter can be built using objects found in your area. Students gathered limbs, vines, rocks, cardboard, rope, metal objects, etc. and separated the material into nature object and manmade material. Materials from the two stacks were discussed as to how they can be used. Natural material such as limbs and sticks could be used for making a shelter; for fueling a fire or as an instrument to capture food. A piece of cardboard could be used for a splint, as a plate, or to build a fire. A nail could make direction marks if you left the site, as a hook to catch fish or as a digging tool.

Students divided into groups, picked material from the two stacks and began building shelters. Shelters were built for protection from wind, rain and sun. Students and Master Naturalist evaluated each shelter for sturdiness, covering, wind and rain protection, how many people could it occupy, and how the material was used.

Ann discussed different ways to start a fire without matches. Chip demonstrated the bow and string method. Time was running out on this method, we will try this again; but the wood was getting warm. John used a 9 volt battery and steel wool to get a fire started. He also used a magnesium stick to start another fire. We plan on continuing to learn different methods of fire starting without matches.

The students dismantled the shelters and cleaned the area. Other techniques for future training may include tool making, campfire cooking and land navigation. Both groups are looking to learning more about survival in the wilderness.

The Thorndale Wilderness Club had 10 students at Apache Pass. Jeanne Townsend, a science teacher at Thorndale High

School is their sponsor. The Club meets on Tuesdays after school.



It Ought To Be A Law

By Ann Collins

It ought to be a law! It should be a requirement that all dwellings must have a porch, deck, or balcony, preferably all three. Nothing could be more pleasurable than sitting out on your porch in a comfortable chair early in the morning before the heat of the day sets in. You will probably need a nice cup of tea, binoculars, a journal of some sort and maybe a sweet furry cat or a nice calm dog for company. You can spend hours thus occupied. This I know for certain!

In late summer you can watch the antics of hummingbirds as they migrate through this area of Texas. Texas Parks and Wildlife has a citizen science project called Hummingbird Round-Up where you can contribute valuable information about your own hummers. Mostly, I have Ruby throated but Black chinned are also fairly common here. Last fall I had one late Rufous. That was a real treat.

There is no limit to the number of feeders that you can put up. I have five that I keep filled from March to December. Sometimes I put out a couple more during the height of migration. This year I have had to mix eight cups of nectar every day. Some might think that a bit high on the sugar volume but I have used just a bit over ten pounds in the last six weeks. Cheap entertainment if you ask me.

Of course, sitting on your porch you can see all kinds of birds. I wouldn't begin to list them here but I do keep a journal of what I see on a daily basis. The bats have been non-existent this year but last year I recorded eight to ten almost every night around dusk. Don't have any idea what kind they are or where they come from. They might live around here or they could travel as much as fifty miles just to check out my yard.

Sometimes I will see a turtle creeping across the lawn. This prompts me to run inside and grab my camera to record what I see. Sadly, I'm not good at turning in my Turtle Watch reports to LeeAnn Linam who is with TPWD. I used to see many more turtles that I have recently. Maybe I'm spending too much time on the porch and not enough time wandering around the property.

Probably the most fun animal I see is the little Gray Fox. I had a family who were nuts over my pears. So many fall on the ground that it is a veritable banquet for the little foxes. I once saw a Coyote slink, tail down, head down past my Lab and snatch a pear and submissively return to the dense woods. Can you just imagine what was going on in the mind of that creature. "Gotta get me one of those juicy mor-

sels...don't care what that dumb dog says.." I'm sure they come often, when the dog is not on duty, because I find half eaten pears all over the place.

On rarer and rarer occasions I see Fireflies or Lightening bugs. As a kid we packed them in jars just to see how many we could catch. Of course, good little kid that I was,,I always released them. Really, I did! Here we go again...pesticides indiscriminately used. We lose so much through blind ignorance. How much more do we lose to those who know better and just don't give a rip?



Not too many this year but I usually see lots of green tree frogs and gray ones, too. There was even a Gulf Coast Toad that took up residence in one of my flower pots. Nice cool place to rest during the heat of the day. Then there are the green anoles, some barely two inches long. This tells me they are alive and doing well somewhere close by. They come to the porch to catch the tiny bugs attracted to the light inside the house.

It is hard to tolerate some who seem to like my porch, like all of the many different kinds of wasps, bees, yellow jackets, and mosquitos. I just realized that I haven't seen any Bumble bees recently. Wonder where they went? Last year I put out sugar water in a shallow dish with a little floating plastic thing for the honey bees. Talk about gluttony! I couldn't keep it full enough for them. My grandfather had an apiary on this property and I couldn't help wondering if maybe some of these bees were some of his that had gone native. I like to think so.

Two tiny Spotted Skunks liked to come up on the porch last year. I think the cats thought they were some of the weird cousins we all have. What? You don't have weird cousins? Yeah, right! Anyway, as long as they kept their perfume to themselves we really did enjoy them. I think they might be relatively rare in Milam County. Most of the road kills are of the Striped variety.

Another of the unwelcome visitors to the porch were two copperheads that would climb up in the shrubs at the edge of the porch. I just couldn't tolerate them for any length of time so they got to go live with their ancestors. Any of their cousins show up and they can go to the same place. Sorry! Just too close for any sort of comfort.

So, what do you think? Should we ask our representatives to draw up a proposal to pass a bill stating that all dwelling places must have a porch at least big enough to sit on? I think so, definitely!

A Book Review

By Ann Collins

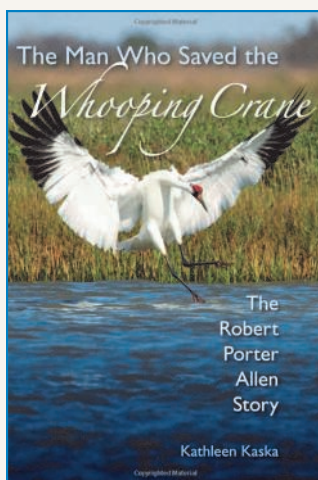
While roaming around the book store the other day I came across an interesting looking book about Whooping Cranes. Since I'm rather fond of these marvelous, brave, intelligent creatures I bought the book. The title of the book is *The Man Who Saved the Whooping Crane, the Robert Porter Allen Story*.

Allen spent nine years of his life trying to locate the elusive nesting grounds of the whoopers in far northwestern Canada. The book chronicles his adventures and misadventures from Texas to the Wood Buffalo National Park where he battled cold, wet, savage mosquitos and biting black flies with nothing but a tarp for protection. He ate a lot of canned beans and drank gallons of campfire coffee sometimes fortified with a bit of rum. He even took his family with him on one occasion. Only one, so I guess it was far too rigorous for kids and wives.

Born in 1905, Allen spent his childhood roaming the woods of Pennsylvania with his younger brother, Johnny. He didn't have much patience with classrooms so he dropped out of college and went to work for Audubon where he persuaded the head of the organization to allow him to do field research on the rapidly dwindling population of Roseate spoonbills in the Florida Keys. This field work took him all over the Caribbean. He spent many months and a span of years in the Bahamas and Cuba, with a home base in Tavernier, Florida. It seems the natives had a taste for the delicate "Pink Curlew" flesh and would set up nets and capture hundreds of them at a time. Bob would then be just in time to see abandoned nests and rafts of pink feathers, heads, and feet of these magnificent birds.

Being a prolific writer and journalist, Bob wrote many monographs and articles for ornithological publications. He also wrote several books in the 1940's and '50's: *The Flame Birds* (1947), *The Flamingos: Their Life History and Survival* (1956), and *On the Trail of Vanishing Birds* (1957), as well as numerous others.

His life almost sounds like the adventures of Indiana Jones, except his quest was for birds. He was caught in hail storms, blizzards, abandoned in the wilds of the Arctic Circle, and even survived an unseasonal hurricane in a flimsy boat. He managed this at a time when there was very little air travel, no computers, no cell phones, no GPS. In the Arctic you must even recalculate your position with your compass because you are so near the North Pole or you can end up miles from where you think you are.



Opposed to captive breeding of Whooping Cranes to be released into the wild, I think he would be amused at the results of the program to establish a population in Florida. Operation Migration began removing fertile eggs from captive cranes and incubating them at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. The chicks are then sent to a facility in Wisconsin where they are trained to follow ultralights with pilots dressed up as "big birds" supposedly resembling parent cranes. This has been a somewhat successful endeavor.

There have been 12 Classes of cranes being taught to migrate to Florida. Each Class is given radio transmitters and banded with numbers indicating their order of hatching and the year: number 1-01 being the first hatchling of 2001. You can follow their progress on the website for Operation Migration at www.operationmigration.org where you can search under "In the Field" and "Site Map" for current data. Every class has its challenges and challengers, Whoopers are definitely independent birds.

When number 10-08 pecked out of his egg at Patuxent, he was a force to be reckoned with. His parents were from the Class of 2003 and due to their inexperience as nesting adults, they abandoned their nest with two fertile eggs which were collected and incubated at the facility in Maryland. He was sent to Wisconsin with "Good Luck" written on his box. Within hours of being released into the pen with other chicks he had fatally wounded one and had injured two others so badly they had to be sent to live with captive birds. He was simply too aggressive to be allowed to train with the other chicks and too valuable genetically to be removed from the flock. Finally, there was no choice but to release him to the older adult cranes and hope for the best. A few days later he was observed hanging out with two older cranes, numbers 18-03 and 13-03. Blood must surely be thicker than water because these two were his biological parents!

This is a book about successes and proof positive you can follow your dream wherever it might take you. Bob Allen's successes are numerous and outstanding: the Spoonbills are now all over the place from Florida to Texas. I even saw one here in Milam County this year. His work with the Flamingos is a testimony to his drive and endurance. Of course we all know about the wonderful work with the Whooping Cranes. Six of them have wintered at Granger Lake for the past two years. Education is the key, as always.

So, borrow this book from me and curl up on a dreary day this winter and prepare to be enthralled. On the nice days ... get out there and look at the birds!

Houston Toad Educator Workshop

by Linda Jo Conn



Dorothy Meyer, El Camino Real Texas Master Naturalist, surveys a Houston Toad breeding pond at Bastrop State Park following an Educator Workshop held at the LCRA McKinney Roughs Nature Park.

El Camino Real Master Naturalists took advantage of a Houston toad workshop for educators held on September 29 at the LCRA McKinney Roughs Nature Park. Presentations and activities included an overview of amphibians and why frogs are beneficial to the environment, information on the ecology, status, current research and conservation efforts for the Houston toad, and an update from the Bastrop State Park on recovery efforts following the damages suffered in the severe drought and destructive wildfires of 2011. Participants also learned some hands-on and interactive activities for teaching about frogs and toads.

The Houston toad, unique to Texas, is one of the most endangered amphibians in North America. While Houston toads have not been seen in Houston since the late 60's, Milam County is one of the counties in which they are still found. The male toad can be recognized by its distinctive long, high musical trill in late winter and early spring.

A highlight of the workshop was seeing two live Houston toads from the Houston Zoo, part of the effort to raise Houston toads to re-populate suitable habitats.

Following the morning workshop, El Camino Real Master Naturalists Katherine Bedrich, Dorothy Meyer, Traci Scarpinato, and Linda Jo Conn, joined the guided field trip to



a Houston Toad breeding pond at Bastrop State Park. After observing the pond, the group was delighted by a spontaneous chorus of frogs and

toads during a brief light rain shower.

Participating organizations and sponsors for the workshop included the Houston Zoo, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, LCRA, and Amphibian Ark. Formal teachers and environmental educators from Bastrop, Austin, Colorado, Lee, Milam, Burleson, Robertson, and Leon counties were invited.

To learn more about this neat creature, visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/species/htoad/.

Persimmon Weather Prediction

by Debbi Harris

According to folklore, you can predict the weather with a **persimmon seed**. Here's how to do it:

Cut open a persimmon seed. Find persimmon fruit in your supermarket. It should be locally-grown to reflect your weather. Look at the shape of the kernel inside.

If the kernel is **spoon-shaped**, lots of heavy, wet snow will fall. Spoon = shovel!

If it is **fork-shaped**, you can expect powdery, light snow and a mild winter.

If the kernel is **knife-shaped**, expect to be "cut" by icy, cutting winds.

It's best to use ripe seeds.

That's it! Now, what did you see?



A Trip up Sugarloaf Mountain

by Linda Jo Conn

Members of El Camino Real Master Naturalists, Michelle Fletcher, Jan Campbell, and Linda Jo Conn, joined the 2012 Brazos Valley Texas Master Naturalist Trainees on a field trip to Sugarloaf Mountain near Gause in Milam County TX on Saturday, September 22. We parked near the Sugarloaf Bridge. The bridge was restored as a Texas Historic Bridge when a new bridge was built for vehicle traffic over Little River on CR 264.

After preliminary introductions and introductory information by our tour guide Dave Cunningham, a local historian and a Brazos County Master Naturalist, we walked up the county road to the Sugarloaf trailhead access point.



We climbed the challenging, rocky, steep slope up the mountain. Some of us took short rest breaks to catch our breath. The view was worth the effort. The clear, calm weather was perfect for the outing.

Near the summit, Dr. Tom Yancy, Geology Professor at TAMU, talked about the formation, subsequent erosion, and geologic features of the red sandstone mountain.

The two close ups on the right show balls of mud that were encased in sandstone cement and the former housing of a mud ball, now eroded to a hollow cylinder. Next to it are shrimp burrow castings deposited during the alluvial period.

Dr. Alston Thoms, Anthropology Professor at TAMU, enlightened the group on the origin, diet, cooking methods, population density, and early recorded Spanish history of the Indians that lived around Sugarloaf Mountain.

Dave Cunningham talked about the possible but uncertain future status of Sugarloaf Mountain as a public historic site and described several past damaging events and depredations Sugarloaf has endured over the years, including a bulldozing

razing to find "fabled Spanish Gold". He emphasized the ongoing Tonkawa Indian interest in the sacred location.



The Plant That Ate The Lump

by Genie Lindburg

News from "The Big Lump"... Country Home of the Wise Man and the Strong Woman



This is a story about the Camphor Daisy-----AKA, the flower that ate The Big Lump. Although I didn't know what it was at the time, Rayjacksonia phyllocephala began to make its appearance at the Big Lump early last Spring. It is a small, pretty, nondescript little flower.

We didn't think much about it. It was just another yellow daisy. Another golden yellow flower that was unidentified. I really wasn't much interested in the plant because it wasn't one I considered pretty. The leaves and stems were succulent and stiff and hairy. Not pleasant to touch. The edges of the leaves were saw-toothed making them easy to differentiate from other yellow flowers and I soon discovered that when the plant was disturbed it emitted a strong camphor smell that I liked. Rather refreshing.



May 2012



Sept 2012

Master Naturalist training classes brought us to our property twice a month and each time we arrived the foliage of this yellow flower was taller but flowers were scarce, just one flower here and another over there. Still the plant was not very pretty but beginning to be a concern since it was spreading and overwhelming everything. Most of the plants were taller than me. The average height was 6 feet but in the back of the house near my dish washing station the plants were nearly 10 feet tall. It obviously was hardy and drought resistant as there had been no rain for weeks and still the plant grew, taller, wider and stronger. Since it was now blocking the entrance to the house and overlapping the driveway some of it had to be removed. This was no easy task. It has a large stem and a long tap root. It could not be pulled up. It could not be cut with clippers. Loppers could cut it but that was too much work and highly unpleasant because of the sticky, fuzzy nature of the plant. Finally, the chain saw was brought out and a path to the door cleared. The mule did a good job of beating it down on the drive. Now we wanted to know the name of this plant that was devouring the Big Lump.

In August several members of the training class visited our property to view our land clearing project and the plant was identified by Katherine and Dorothy as Camphor Daisy. Golden Aster and the official Rayjacksonia phyllocephala are other names for Camphor Daisy. Actually, it is not a Daisy. It is a member of the Aster family, Asternaceae.

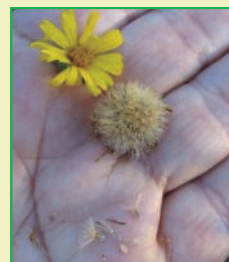


Front Porch View—August



October 2012

Finally, in October the plant began to produce flowers. Finally, there was beauty as there were small yellow flowers everywhere and along with the flowers came masses of butterflies, bees and birds. The beauty was worth the wait of an entire summer.



Camphor Daisy is an annual plant that self-sows. The tiny seeds are easily airborne so we know that next year we will again have plants to contend with. Unfortunately, the invasive nature of Camphor Daisy is going to keep us from allowing it to grow around the house and along the driveway ... and ...

We learned that a tractor is the best tool to use to remove Rayjacksonia phyllocephala.



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Certifications, Etc.

By Debbi Harris

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: 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 and Paul Unger. There's still time to get those 2012 hours in. Contact Debbi and she'll "swoop" in like a bat to help you with the forms or any questions. It is a "cool" pin.

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 and Rusty Thomas.

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 and Sue Taylor

2500 Hours—Paul Unger, Katherine Bedrich and Cindy Bolch

Congratulations to All!



Did You Know? Do Bears Really Hibernate All Winter?

Bears aren't true hibernators; their long nap is actually winter lethargy. A true hibernator, like a chipmunk, can reduce its body temperature to near freezing during hibernation and change its heart rate from 350 beats per minute to as low as 4 beats per minute within hours of retiring to its den.

During early dormancy, a bear's heart rate averages 50 beats per minute. After several months, the rate may drop to as low as 8 beats per minute. But a bear's body temperature remains nearly normal during this period. That's the reason a bear can wake relatively quickly—resulting in more than one hasty exit from a bear den by researchers. Pregnant females wake in mid-winter to give birth, then go back to sleep while their newborn cubs nurse. Rodents that exercise true hibernation, by contrast, wake every few weeks to eat small amounts of stored food and pass wastes. These brief periods of activity are extremely costly: up to 90 percent of the stored energy reserves (mostly fats) allotted for the entire winter are consumed during these bouts of arousal. Thus the animals that truly hibernate don't actually sleep all winter, while "winter lethargic" species often do. The difference between these two strategies—true hibernation and winter lethargy—is related to the animal's size. Bears are too large to dissipate the heat necessary to enter hibernation, whereas smaller mammals, with their high surface-to-volume ratio, can achieve this temperature drop quickly and evenly. [Excerpted from eNature.com]