

December 15 is our next scheduled workday from 9-12 for those of Class 2015.

I also want to mention Jan Frick Thompson, Class of 2003, who refurbished an old donated table for the Center while we were working. Thanks for your time and energy, Jan.

The following is an incomplete list of the seeds gathered on December 1 by the 2015 Class:

Aster, Basket Flower, Horsetail, Milkweed, Lichen Horsemint, Redbud, Maximilian Sunflower, Devils Claw

A dragonfly was discovered on the trail.



Class of 2015 Greenhouse Project Report – December 15

From Brenda Maston

Even though I was absent for this workday, a lot was accomplished. It seems there were about 11 tables built for seedling trays and the plastic sheeting was re-fitted for a snugger look. All the sideboards have been attached to the bottom of the plastic sheeting. Remaining to finish are the front and back doors. Good job class! Eleven classmates for this workday include, Bruce Babcock Toni Benjamin, Becky Bertoni, Sherri Bratton, Mary Cissell, Nellie Nelson, Cecily Pegues, Dan Prins, Denise Remfert, Sandy Stickane, Denise Thompson, Erin Tran



Jonathan Smith, Toni Benjamin



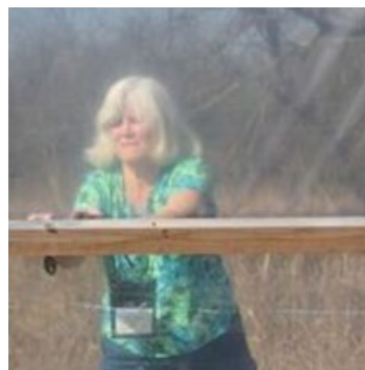
Dan Prins and Cecily Pegues



Dan Prins, Cecily Pegues, Denise Thompson, Bruce Babcock



Jonathan, Sheri, Nellie



Mary Cissell

The Health Benefits of Volunteering

From Dr. Larry Legg

Aristotle surmised the essence of life is “To serve others and do good.” Recent research indicates serving others might also be the essence of good health.

We are all familiar with “runners high,” some of us only from the literature or showoffs. A “helpers/givers high” is now recognized in a large number of studies. Comparisons of the health benefits of volunteering for different age groups have also shown that older volunteers are the most likely to receive greater benefits from volunteering.

One study found a positive relationship between volunteering activities and better health outcomes among adults over the age of 60, including higher levels of self-reported health and physical functioning, and lower levels of depression. A study on aging found that those individuals who volunteer have lower mortality rates than those who do not. Another study found states with higher volunteer rates are more likely to have lower mortality rates and less incidence of heart disease. Texas sits in the middle of volunteering and its health benefits.

A study found those individuals who volunteered at least 40 hours per year (sound familiar?), as well as those who volunteered with just one organization, or group, had the lowest risk of mortality. Another survey suggests two hours per week (100 hours per year), is necessary to reach the “threshold” but the hours could be divided among several groups.

How? Volunteer activities can strengthen the social ties that protect individuals from isolation during difficult times, while the experience of helping others leads to a sense of greater self-worth and trust. Older individuals who volunteer demonstrate greater health benefits than do younger volunteers, due in part to the fact that volunteer activities by older individuals are more likely to provide them with a purposeful social role. The analysis also found that while depression is a barrier to volunteer participation in mid-life adults, it serves as a catalyst for volunteering among older adults, who may seek to compensate for role losses and attenuated social relations that occur with aging. When individuals volunteer, they not only help their community but also experience better health in later years, whether in terms of greater longevity, higher functional ability, or lower rates of depression.

These findings are particularly relevant today as Baby Boomers—the generation born between 1946 and 1964—reach the age typically associated with retirement volunteers age 65 and older should increase 50 percent over the next few years as the youngest Baby Boomers will not reach age 65 until 2029. Organizations should prepare for this influx of viable “helpers.” If we engage Baby Boomers and others in substantial volunteer experiences, we may not only help solve community problems, but simultaneously enhance the health of the growing number of older adults.

Conclusion: Those who engage in volunteer activities are less likely to suffer from ill health later in life and may be introduced into a positive reinforcing cycle of good health and future happiness.

YOO-HOO: IT'S TIME TO CLEAN OLD BLUEBIRD NESTING BOXES



Bluebird box mounted on T-post, hub-cap holds water, rabbit-wire deters jumping predators, PVC pipe deters climbing predators and snakes. (This is a Thetford creation; not on eBay!)



Bluebird nesting box with neat, signature nest inside.



Bluebird nest with eggs.

Now's the perfect time to grab a warm January afternoon and check your bluebird real estate. Some home owners prefer to leave last year's nests in the boxes to provide warmth to bluebirds during the cold winter and, yet, others suggest cleaning out old nests to rid the box of parasites, spiders, and trash deposited by other birds. And then there is yet another opinion that can't be denied, and that's the question of: Who cleans out the nests that birds make in tree cavities?

If your choice is 'to clean', now's the time. Once you remove the debris, this would be the appropriate time to spray with a 10% chlorine-water solution and, in the process, it's also the perfect time to check for splitting wood, broken lids, dangling floor plates, and defunct hinges and latches.

It's also prime time to scrape off old wasp nests that are still clinging to underside of the lid, to bottom of the box, or even inside the baffling below the box. Once you've removed wasp nest wicks with a knife, you can paint the underside of lid with a liquid soap, or apply a heavy coating of paraffin or bar soap to deter future clingers.

Hindsight reminds me of the experiment that MN members, Bill and (the late) Katy Jo Hammon worked through while trying to solve the wasp problem under the cabin eaves at Whispering Cedars Girl Scout Camp in south Dallas several years ago. They painted the eaves with various colors of paint and discovered that the pale blue color was most effective in deterring wasps, even though Bill decided that some of those wasps were color-blind and that the experiment didn't totally solve the problem...but helped. If you want to duplicate that experiment with your bluebird wasp problem, now's the time to paint so that the smell of paint is long-gone before bluebirds begin house-shopping.

If you have more than one bluebird nesting box, you may want to consider numbering each box or attaching a sign of identification for monitoring and documenting your boxes.

And lastly, to preserve the wood of your bluebird box, applying a coat or two of Thompson's Water Seal to the exterior might extend the life of the box. If you have problems with the doors swelling after a rain, the Water Seal helps prevent that problem, too.

There are no set rules for preparing your boxes for a new season, but it's recommended that you make your improvements now because the Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) normally begin inspecting our Denton County bluebird boxes by late January-February.

Did I mention now's the time? Bluebirds are comin'! YIPPEEEEE.....

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Dorothy Thetford, MN Class 2001



Bluebird chicks almost ready to fledge.

We Continue To Be Members of Elm Fork Chapter

By Bob Ross

In the April, 2014 issue of this newsletter I wrote an article titled, "Becoming a Master Naturalist." I first asked the readers and members to think about what it was that attracted them to become a Master Naturalist. I then listed a series of possible answers to such a question: was it the title, being with friends, making new friends, the love of nature, learning about plants and animals, serving the community or simply a redirection of your life. As the author of the article, I received many varying comments once the article was published.

As we all are beginning a new year and are in the process of paying our annual dues, I wondered what it is that continually make us return to the Elm Fork Chapter each year. Why is it we all don't often hear the phrase, "*Been There, Done That*" when talking about membership in the same organization each year? Year in and year out, Elm Fork Chapter does basically the same projects, has monthly board meetings and general meetings, and everyone loves attending holiday parties, especially when meals are included!

Our projects may appear to be the same on the surface, however, the day-in-day-out process is not static but very dynamic. When our members are working at their selected project(s), oftentimes they are amazed as to how different each day can be.

As a member of the 2013 training class I have had the pleasure of working with several different Elm Fork Chapter projects. I have volunteered as a guide at the Elm Fork Education Center on the UNT campus. I have volunteered at Keep Trophy Club Wild (KTCW) and have helped man booths at their annual Arbor Day festivities. I have been a member of the Wildlife Habitat Evaluation team. I have written both item and feature articles for the Naturalist News. And, I was selected by then Chapter President, Van Elliott, to work with the City Parks Department of Flower Mound, Texas. A Flower Mound citizen had entered a Pantene essay contest and she won the contest receiving \$5,000. She gave the money to the City of Flower Mound and wanted it to be used to erect both a mammal and bird signage with audio in Heritage Park. We provided detailed information about mammals and birds that can be seen and heard in Heritage Park. It is completed and the Parks Department was kind enough to include our MN logo on the signage.

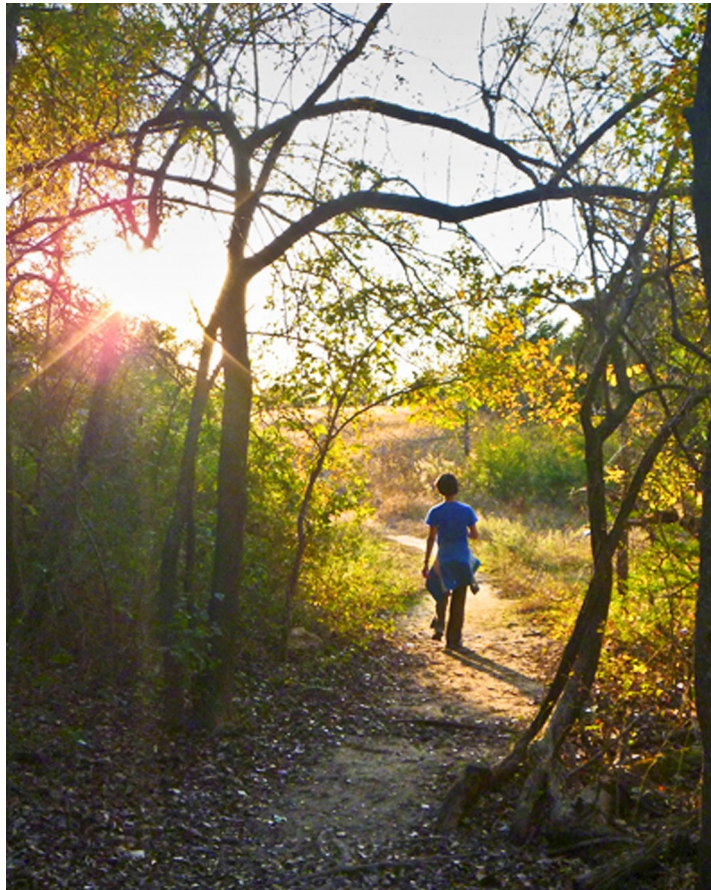
My efforts may be minimal compared to some of our members who provide more time to projects or have been members for many years in the Chapter and have accrued years of volunteering time. Each of us have our experiences serving in the Chapter and continue to pursue these efforts each year. Happily, we continue to be Master Naturalists.

This past year, 2015, several of our members encountered medical issues, yours truly included. I was amazed at all the cards, emails, phone calls, and nice letters I received from Elm Fork Chapter members telling me to persevere and get back on my feet. I received thoughtful comments from members I did not know that well. I got wonderful comments from members I have known since joining. I received humorous comments from some that made me hurt when I was laughing so hard. With all that in my favor, why would I not want to continue as a Master Naturalist? I could hardly wait to return to my first general meeting after being indisposed for a while. It was fun to see and talk with everyone. It was wonderful, healing therapy for me.

I love being a Master Naturalist. I love the ideas and concepts exhibited by our organization. I love being around my fellow members. I enjoy seeing what other chapters in the state are doing. I love working with projects that exhibit and teach non-Master Naturalists about nature, plants and animals. I particularly enjoy watching the eyes of youngsters light up when they are learning something for the first time

Here we are in the beginning of a new year. Ask yourself why you continue to be a Master Naturalist. Think of where you have been and where you want to go in the Chapter. While you are paying your 2016 dues, I ask you to reflect on what I wrote in the 2014 article mentioned above: Belong to the Chapter with your heart and not just by paying your annual dues.

On the trail at Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center



— *photo from Jonathan Reynolds*