



# Gideon Lincecum Chapter Texas Master Naturalist™ *NEWS*

*February/March 2013*

*From the President:*



On January 19, 2013 the Gideon Lincecum Chapter TMN held our first chapter meeting and program, the topic of which was Bastrop Recovery. Both the meeting and the program were well attended. Thank you.

Monday, January 28, the training committee and several members introduced our Chapter and the TMN program to 20 new recruits. I met a very interesting group of new people and hope each class member will find a niche to apply the knowledge they will gain from our training program.

On January 31, 2013, at 6:30 am, I left my house anticipating a great day for a prescribed burn. After an hour plus several minutes of driving, I finally arrived at the address of the prescribed burn. There were several familiar faces already looking forward to executing our mission. A test burn the previous day went very well and the weatherman

said conditions today would be favorable to conduct the burn. However, we had an extremely slow start! The fuel in the designated burn area was still damp, especially in the shaded areas. We were unsuccessful in getting a back line burn going and couldn't even get a "3 year old pile of brush to stay lit". It wasn't until 12:30 that conditions were favorable to get the fire going and 4 acres were burned. By 2:30 pm most of the fire was

out. The landowner found this "tree chimney" after all the help had gone home. (See picture page 1)



Friday, February 1, I was among a group of volunteers at Stephen F. Austin State Park observing Liza Reznicek, Interpreter, demonstrate the techniques of successfully guiding a nature walk. As we followed a trail that led toward the Brazos River, we stopped to note several items of interest, like a colony of leafcutter ants carrying their treasures to their lair. I learned the ants don't actually eat the leaves they carry. They are foragers who carry the leaves back to the nest and "turn them over to smaller worker ants that clean the leaf fragments and chew them into a pulpy mulch. Leafcutters cultivate a fungus that breaks down the toxins in the leaves and swells with proteins and sugars. The fungus is the ant's food. A mature colony of leafcutter ants can be as many as 8 million individual ants.

Saturday, Feb 2, I visited Warren Lake, near Katy, which has a phenomenal observation platform. Several experienced birders had set up cameras with telescoping lenses on tripods and shared their view of the birds on and around the lake. I saw a white pelican, snow geese, several kinds of herons and ducks and learned about "divers" and "dabblers". I was privileged to observe two "divers" fighting over their catch. As a hawk arrived, all the birds on the water lifted off. After watching the birds on or near the water for a short time, the group was invited to follow a guide down to the shoreline. Two very young members joining the group were instrumental in pointing out many evidences of wildlife along the way, like gopher and fire ant mounds. Having kids to ask questions often helps adults realize what they might miss. We even talked about the recent discovery that dung beetles navigate by the stars. We turned over a few "cow pies" but did not find any dung beetles.

A beautiful Eastern Meadowlark presented itself ahead of the group for a "photo op". It is just a week after Ground Hogs day and I saw a redbud tree beginning to bloom. I've had a great start to 2013! How about you? What's new in your neck of the woods?

Cindy Rodibaugh



## *Burning Safely*

Contributed by Dave Redden, TMN GLC Master Naturalist and  
President, South Central Texas Prescribed Burn Association  
[www.sctpba.org](http://www.sctpba.org)

Burn bans are common in Washington County. When a ban is in effect, it impacts nearly all of us who own land. Fire is a valuable tool for managing the land. Usually burn bans are put into effect due to prolonged drought and an increased occurrence of accidental fires. However, since burn bans last for weeks and even months, the weather during a ban can be suitable for burning at times, and unsuitable at others.

The major cause of accidental or escaped fires is unwise use of fire when weather conditions are unfavorable, regardless of whether a burn ban is in effect. However, not all escaped fires are the result of things that are affected by a burn ban. Lightning strikes, electrical shorts, equipment failures or malfunctions causing sparks, outdoor grills used incorrectly, careless disposal of cigarettes, or just accidental fires can all be causes that likely would not be affected by a burn ban.

Most of the escaped fires when there is not a burn ban in Washington County are the result of so called “controlled burns,” which is a term used for reporting fires and means any fire that was purposefully set with the intent that it would stay in a confined area. The usual examples are brush piles, trash barrels, or trash pits. A controlled burn is not the same as a “prescribed burn,” which has the extra requirements that such burns have written plans and are continuously monitored and executed according to the plan under specific weather conditions by a coordinated crew.

If you live outside the city limits and have more than an acre of land, you will likely need to have “controlled burns” to dispose of brush or other material at some time to maintain your property. There are common guidelines for how to do this safely, but they are seldom used completely, and that is how many grass fires get started. Here are some of the things you can do to minimize the chance that you will have to call 911 to have the local VFD come and put out your escaped fire.

- **Prepare the burn area.** Clear all grass and other combustible material away from the brush pile or trash container for as large an area as you can. The area of bare ground required depends on the size of the pile you are going to burn. A trash barrel may be good with 10 ft clear all the way around. A large brush pile will likely need a larger cleared area. The idea is to not let any sparks or embers land on combustible material. Disking or scraping the area is usual for burn piles. Another way to address this is to pre-burn the area around the pile when the wind is low, the humidity high, and you have helpers and water available to control the fire.
- **Check the weather forecast.** It is not uncommon to leave a fire unattended for some period of time, during which the wind changed. This is a major problem with controlled burns.

The wind can and often does change speed and direction during the day. Further, the

relative humidity is almost always higher in the morning (80 – 100%) shortly after sunrise, but will decrease during the day as the temperature rises. Relative humidity will reach a minimum around 3-4 PM each day when the temperature reaches its maximum. Things that will not burn at 80% RH will be very easily ignited when the RH is below 30%.

There are very good weather forecasts available now from the National Weather Service that give hourly predictions of temperature, relative humidity, wind speed and direction and other important measurements for the next five days for any spot you choose.

**There is no excuse anymore for not being aware of likely wind or weather changes that may occur during your burn.**

- **Manage your burn.** Large brush piles can burn for days. This increases the chance that wind will change considerably and cause an escape. The sooner you can get the pile burned, the better for everyone. This requires an effort to keep the fire burning vigorously. One way is to frequently push unburned material into the fire from the outer edges. Use a tractor with a front end loader or a dozer. This lets air in and provides new fuel to keep the fire going. Another way for smaller piles is to use a gasoline powered leaf blower to give the fire a boost of oxygen and get it burning hot again. If not managed, a large pile can smolder for days or even weeks and then rekindle when a high wind and low humidity hit it. Usually there is no one there when this happens, and the fire can escape.



Trash barrels can be helped to burn better with vent holes near the bottom and by clearing out non-combustible material that may collect in the bottom of the barrel. To reduce sparks and embers, a wire mesh screen that is no larger than around 5/8-in is helpful. A section of cattle panel over a barrel or pit is not an adequate fire screen.

- **Prepare for an escape.** Even if you have a clear area around the fire and you think the weather will be okay, it is good to have fire suppression equipment on site in case something goes wrong. ATVs with 15-25 gal water tanks and 12-volt sprayers mounted on them are very effective at putting out small grass fires caused by sparks if they are caught immediately. Backpack sprayers or even handheld pump-up sprayers will also work. There are other tools such as fire swatters that are available, but they are only slightly more effective than a wet broom or mop to smother spot fires. The key is that for these to work, there has to be someone there to use them. That person should also have a cell phone so that he or she can call 911 if things get beyond his or her capability. Do not waste time trying to fight a fire yourself that is already out of hand. Call 911 and keep trying to get it out.

Trash barrels normally should have a water hose nearby, connected and adequate in length to reach beyond the barrel. The barrel should not be adjacent to a building or anything else combustible.

Burn bans affect many people in the county who need to burn for valid agricultural, environmental, or business reasons. Imposing a burn ban on the entire county because a

few individuals will not take adequate precautions is unfortunate. If we all learn how to burn safely and take responsibility for our own actions, burn bans will likely become even more rarely required.

## *Favorite Moments as a Master Naturalist*

By Cheryl Karr

### Rockport Hummer Celebration September 2012



Last September I attended the Hummer Celebration in Rockport Texas. The place was “humming” with bird activities. I set out early on Saturday morning with binoculars in hand to watch the bird banding at one house on the hummer trail. I arrived to see at least 30 hummingbird feeders and hundreds of hummers whizzing about. All of the feeders were enclosed in cages with trap doors. As a hummer flew into the feeder a volunteer would, from a distance, release the door and trap the hummer in the cage. The cages were open at the bottom (apparently the hummers only

fly up not down) and a volunteer would reach in and gently grab the hummer and put him or her in a very small white mesh bag. The hummers were then taken to the banding table where they were weighed and measured. The older gentleman doing the banding was a licensed professional bander, and was amazingly gentle and extremely knowledgeable. He had what looked like a large paper clip with approximately 300 hummingbird leg bands on it. All of which had numbers on them. Now we are talking tiny here!!! (I could barely make out the bands let alone see the numbers on them!). He would then pull one of the little hummer’s legs out of the small mesh bag and with a needle nose pliers he would attach the band to the bird’s leg. A volunteer would then release the bird on a nearby feeder. I was totally in awe of the bander and his wife, at their knowledge and ability to be able to accomplish this task with such gentleness and with no harm to the birds. Watching the banding procedure was, in itself, well worth the trip to Rockport.

While there, I also attended 3 seminars: “Hummingbird Facts and Folklore”, “How to Identify Hawks” and “Hummingbird Migration”. I was especially impressed with Mr. Glenn Olsen, a professor from Rice, who did the presentation on “How to Identify Hawks”. His method of identification used the process of elimination. He would first determine wing shape and body size to identify the order of bird, i.e. buteo, falcon, accipiter. He would then look for other

identification factors such as tail bars or wing marking. He also conducted a Hawk Identification field trip early on Sunday morning.

Dr. Juan Bahanon, a Neurosurgeon and premier hummingbird photographer, gave the presentation on “Hummingbird Migration”. He told a very amusing, but factual story of one little female hummer and her travels. This little girl was banded in Florida in January 2010 and weighed 6 grams. Six months later, in June, she caught again in Juneau Alaska and weighed 2.5 grams. This little bird traveled over 3500 miles with no cash, no credit card, no airline ticket, and no cell phone and lost over half of her body weight. She also flew through Canada without a passport. Amazing little creatures!

Mrs. Jeanette Larson, an author and retired librarian, gave the presentation on “Hummingbird Facts and Folklore”. She explained the hummingbird’s various roles in North and South American folklore and tied this information to facts about the hummers.



All in all, I was very impressed with the caliber of speakers and information I learned about these amazing little birds. It was well worth the trip, and I highly recommend attending the next “HummerBird Celebration” held each September in Rockport Texas.

## [A Master Naturalist Looks at Nature’s Remedies](#)

Contributed by Kathy Cihlar

### *Spring Cleaning*

Some of the first and most ubiquitous weeds to pop up in warm weather are the most beneficial health wise. These plants also tend to be the most reviled by true lawn lovers. The rule at our house is that they won’t be mowed, sprayed or otherwise contaminated until I have harvested as much as we have room for or we find copperheads in them.

These famous plants are Dandelions, Chickweed (*Stellaria media*) and Cleavers (*Gallium aparine*). Each of these has a cleansing effect on the body, which is appropriate as we come out of our winter hibernation—less activity, heavy foods, less sunshine, etc.

Dandelion uses:

Leaves:

- consumed in salads, smoothies, and cooked greens.
- natural diuretic, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant

- high calcium and iron, vitamins, minerals
- may reduce risk of cancer, multiple sclerosis, cataracts, macular degeneration, and stroke

Root:

- digestive aid, bitter, appetite stimulant, mild laxative
- may help regulate blood sugar and lower cholesterol
- removal of toxins that cause skin breakouts
- liver and gall bladder health
- roasted for coffee

Flowers:

- making dandelion wine
- pain relief for Cats (make strong tea and give with dropper)

Juice:

- milky juice from stem---put on warts. Repeat until falls off.

Chickweed uses:

- cooling inflammation and speeds healing as a poultice or ointment for skin irritations, abscesses, beauty creams, etc.

Cleavers uses:

All above ground parts can be used:

- lymphatic cleanser, tonic, and diuretic
- helps in conditions that benefit from purifying the blood---most things
- Cats, safe to treat lower urinary tract infections
- Each of these can be taken in capsule, tincture, teas, etc.



Cleavers drink: Grab a bunch (don't use the roots) and wad it up. It sticks to itself and you. Put in a 2 qt pitcher, pour boiling water over, cover with a lid for 20 minutes or more. Strain and you have a green drink. It tastes mild, you could add lemon or mint and stevia. I drink a batch daily. Can also freeze as ice cubes. *Good for what ails ya.*

On another note, those suffering from allergies may find that certain foods may provoke allergic reaction and cause flare ups. These foods include: dairy products, wheat, sugars, orange, red, and purple fruits, and food color and additives

The digestive system and the immune system each help the body cope with allergies. Sooooo, eat your dandelions for digestive health. Ragweed tincture is also a great antihistamine---yeah, I know---sort of the hair of the dog approach. Ragweed has another name – Ambrosia - which is far more romantic sounding than ragweed.

Self Help for Allergies: A reflexology technique using a golf ball:

1. on the palm of hand
2. midpoint of first metacarpal below the thumb
3. sensitive area will be adrenal reflex
4. rub with fingertip 8-10 times
5. hold golf ball between both hands clasped together

6. roll golf ball over your palms below the thumbs
7. try 15-30 sec. pressure then rest 15-30 sec. for 5 minutes
8. try this exercise 4 times a day

Hope you get out and check out your weeds. Make sure they are properly identified and never sprayed or contaminated before harvesting. You can even move some into their own bed so that next year, your medicinal weeds will be contained. I've done this with wild violets---also good in salads and as lymphatic cleansers and beautiful to look at.

KC----out

## ***Why Do I Have To Report My Hours? – It's Soooo Much Work!***

Contributed by Carol Daniels

All of us Master Naturalists like to get out into nature, and we especially like to share our passion for nature with others. We like to restore prairies or wetlands and we like to work with young people, helping them to learn about nature. We like to watch feeders and nests and share our Citizen Science information with University scientists. And we especially like to earn our dragonflies and horned lizards and Monarch butterfly pins.

If only we didn't have to fill out those (expletive deleted) papers and send them in quarterly (or annually, for a few of us who can't seem to do them on time). I mean, what good is it, really? [*Pinch nose and change to whiny voice*] It just gives lots of volunteer hours to our Membership Chairman, doesn't it? After all, I'm doing my part by volunteering. I forget to enter them on my spreadsheet when I get home, and then it takes hours to go back through the calendar and write everything down when "glcmembershipcommittee" sends us the reminder that hours are due. And I'm just so busy doing good works! And I hate paperwork. And poor me...



“Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus.” At least as far as Texas Parks and Wildlife is concerned, Santa comes in the form of Texas Master Naturalists who give their time to the many projects that Master Naturalists support. Because each hour that our members report (and properly document with a dated and signed form) earns money for Texas Parks and Wildlife. A couple of years ago, some smart TPW folks applied for a grant from the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Now TPW gets \$19.50 for each hour we report. That is money that can be used for programs like Texas Master Naturalists, Urban Wildlife and Nature Trackers. We all know that money is tight right now, and that no program is safe with the Legislature in session, but at least with the grant funds that can be used for programs, any appropriations from the Legislature can be used for salaries and park maintenance. Maybe that will help to keep our parks open.

And even the small efforts by Gideon Lincecum members add up. We reported 4480 hours in 2012. At \$19.50 each, that means that our chapter earned \$87,360 for Texas Parks and Wildlife last year. That's a sizeable chunk of change. Imagine what good we could do if we volunteered and reported 5,000 hours (\$97,500) or 7,500 hours (\$146,250), or even [*gasp*] 10,000 hours (\$195,000).

AgriLife Extension also reports our hours to the legislature and our various County Commissioners. Although we generate no money for AgriLife, our outreach efforts enable the agency to fulfill its mission with fewer staff.

So, Virginia, the bottom line is that your volunteer service is valuable in many ways, and properly documenting and submitting those volunteer hours is just as important as performing them. Your Membership Chair's inbox is open anytime for you to whine about how awful it is to have to do that paperwork—as long as you do the paperwork!



*Volunteer Hours are Gifts*

## **Bird Watch**

Contributed by Jan Redden

I've participated in Project Feeder Watch for Cornell Lab of Ornithology for several years and I've come to know which birdie friends to expect at the feeders during the winter months. This year everything is different: The goldfinches that usually show up in great numbers in late November barely made a showing in January. But the pine siskins are too many to count. The usually numerous sparrows were just a handful of chipping sparrows and white-throated sparrows in December. I've never noticed warblers in our area before, but we have pine, orange-crowned and yellow-rumped warblers now. I wonder if you are noticing variations this winter as well.



## *News from the Prairie:*

From the Native Prairie Committee:



Indiangrass

Many of you adopted grass seedlings last spring at Winedale. How are those plants doing now? Where did you plant them? The objective of a pocket prairie is to develop your own seed source. I had to remove a lot of early greenery from my pocket prairie so these youngsters could get good light and air. For naturalists who want to learn to identify native grasses, it is helpful to observe them throughout the year in all stages of growth. In the photo LBS vs EGG observe the difference in color and growth habit. We are planning to plant seeds in the greenhouse at Brenham High School on Thursday February

28 at 10AM and 2PM. We will plant seeds collected and contributed by chapter members including eastern gamma grass, little bluestem, indiagrass, switchgrass, big bluestem, inland sea oats, side oats gramma. Also forbs; ironweed, frost weed, Illinois bundle, and American Beauty Berry. We will be following Tom Solomon's instructions as shown on this video. Please watch the video before Thursday Feb. 28.

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/28390230/Coastal-Prairie-Plant-Growers-Handbook-March-2010>

The committee plans to schedule a Seed Collection workshop with Texas A&M Kingsville here this summer. We want to time the workshop for seed harvest time on Quebe Prairie. Prairie people will be most active in late summer when grass plants bloom and put on seed heads. We will continue to explore the countryside this summer looking for native prairie remnants to recognize.

Little Bluestem



Eastern Gamagrass



## **CALENDAR FOR THE NEXT MONTH OR 2?**

Make sure you mark all of these on your calendar. Each opportunity here will increase your knowledge as a Master Naturalist. (The camaraderie is a big bonus too!) These are in date order:

### **Thursday, February 28 – Workday at Brenham High Greenhouse**

You must sign-up for this by contacting [Lhyarnold@aol.com](mailto:Lhyarnold@aol.com). Hours to volunteer are the morning session (10AM) or the afternoon session (2PM). See the above Greenhouse Committee article for the name of a video to pre-watch.

### **Saturday, March 16, 2013 – GLC TMN Business Meeting**

9 a.m. -11 a.m. Winedale Center. All Chapter Master Naturalists are encouraged to attend.

### **Saturday, March 16, 2013 – Dr. Mike Morrow of the Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR:**

12 PM-2PM Winedale Center – Dr. Morrow will share his dedication to and observations of the prairie chickens' habits, their prairie habitat and what they represent to our past and future

### **Festival Hill Workday - TBA**

### **Adopt-a-Highway Clean-up – May 7, Details to follow**



# Meetings, Meetings, Meetings

Edited by Carol Paulson

Jan. 19 – Cindy Rodibaugh with our speakers on the “Lost Pines, Bastrop Restoration



New student, Debra Kolber brought her own grasses for I.D. on Orientation night on Jan. 28

Officers and Committee Leaders met on Jan. 8 and Feb. 5 for a Board Meeting and to “hammer out” the 2013 GLC TMN Budget

