

# September 2011 Newsletter

## From Your President

Hi All,

How are you doing on your summer assignment? I hope you all have water and are able to get cool. The radio weatherman is reporting “Record heat, again; “For the third day in a row, temperatures above 100...”. I heard a report, yesterday, we are nearing, and close to surpassing, the 2<sup>nd</sup> worst drought level recorded in Texas history. The heat has caused me to limit my outdoor activity, but has allowed me to observe my few drought tolerant plants.



*Blue Bells Blooming  
During the Drought*

I had more Texas Blue Bells blooming this past June than in the past 3 years.

As July got hotter, my birdbath became a very active spot. Almost every evening for the past 6 weeks, a pair of Painted Buntings dropped in to get wet. They have to share their oasis with a pair of cardinals, an occasional black capped Vireo, a pair of doves, and a squirrel. My barn swallows are more active in the morning, occasionally observing the social activity. I’ve not seen the red headed woodpecker at the birdbath, but, I’ve seen him hard at work on the burr oaks to the west of the house.

In early August, my husband was able to get a picture of a Bobcat strolling along the north border of our property.

This morning, the doe that frequents the giant cane on the dam of my tank, was feeding to the south of the house under our stand of live oaks—too far for my camera. The beautyberry under the oaks is looking very droopy.



*Can you find the bobcat  
in this photo?*

Elisa Henderson has arranged for a meeting with Henry Flowers of the Festival Hill Institute at Round Top in August to discuss how TMN-GLC volunteers might assist in the removal of invasive plants on their campus. Any potential opportunity will be discussed at the September 17 chapter meeting. At this same meeting, I've asked Aaron Weishuhn, our TSSRM Youth Range Workshop Scholarship recipient to give us a report on his experience in Junction this past June.

I'd like to thank Mark Lincecum for allowing our chapter to post his contact information on our website. After visiting our website, a great-great-great-great grandson of Gideon Lincecum, who now resides in Goliad, Tx, asked about the cabin and wants to share it with his grandmother, who remembered some family history about Gideon.

Are you planning to attend the annual TMN meeting in October? It's time to think about applying for our GLC scholarships.

I'll continue to pray for rain and your good health till we meet again.

*Cindy Rodibaugh*

## **Native Prairie Remnants -- May 2011 Program**

Did you know that on one acre of native prairie there are over 300 plant species? This is one of several interesting facts presented by Pat Merkord, President of the Native Prairies Association of Texas, at our May program.



*Pat Merkord explaining  
Prairie Features*

Texas are to protect native plants and their pollinators which directly benefit native bird and mammal species. The 2-10 acres is the average size of most of the areas that have been identified as native rather than restored. Contours on the land are a sure sign that the land was farmed and therefore is no longer a native prairie remnant. However, it can be more difficult to judge on land that was never farmed. One indicator that a tract of land could be a native prairie remnant is the presence of decreaser grasses. Decreaser grasses refers to grasses that tend to "disappear" because they are favored by cattle. If most of the grasses on a tract are decreaser grasses, then the land may be a native prairie

remnant. Some examples of decreaser grasses are Little Bluestem, Big Bluestem, Eastern Gamagrass, Indian Grass, Switchgrass and Side Oats Grama. However, in addition to looking for coverage by decreaser grasses, you must also look for the absence of exotics or non-native grasses.

These include Johnsongrass, Bahia grass, Dallisgrass and Bermuda grass. When investigating a site, the surveyor will record the two most dominant grasses and determine the percentage of cover by decreaser grasses. However, this is just the beginning of the process. A full investigation can take months as the history of the land is explored and more in-depth assessment of the tract is completed. If you think you have a native prairie remnant, please visit their website for more information -- [www.texasprairie.org](http://www.texasprairie.org).



*TMN Members Inspect Native Grasses*

## **Meet Debbie Copeland Luhn**

Debbie, Class of 2007, is the textbook biologist who decided that being in the field was more fun. Debbie had 38 years of teaching high school biology behind her when she decided it was time to practice what she had been preaching. She and her husband, Gene, purchased property near Monument Hill Park on the bluff in LaGrange. Always passionate about biology, she now had a chance to really experience nature. The Texas Master Naturalist program provided the classes that would get her started on her new adventure in wildscaping. Their backyard descends rapidly toward the Colorado River, so going native was natural. One of the first steps was the identification of species as native or non-native. This resulted in the removal of chinaberry trees and other non-native species.

Debbie continued to experience biology in action with the installation of a butterfly garden. This began with the removal of a magnolia tree which although native to Texas is not native to the LaGrange area. Filling the butterfly garden with native species that will survive and thrive has been challenging.

Deer find many of the same plant species very attractive for food, and armadillos root them up looking for insects. The garden now contains lantana, butterfly weed, verbena and turk's cap and is a certified wildscape by TPWD and the National Wildlife Federation.



*Debbie explains that it's worth the effort!*

As a master naturalist, Debbie enjoys taking her biology into the field to perform species counts. She participates in the Houston Toad Survey, the Bio Blitz and the Swift count to name a few. She starts the year with the amphibian count in which she and other master naturalists cruise the back roads and listen for the distinctive call of the Houston Toad. This past spring yielded little activity, but she did hear cricket frogs, tree frogs and leopard frogs. In August she turned her attention to the Swift count. Hundreds of Chimney swifts gather to roost in the chimney at the Middle school in downtown LaGrange before migrating in September. This fall, she will participate in the Katy Prairie Bio Blitz. The Bio Blitz involves a host of scientists descending on the Katy Prairie to count all kinds of species from plants to insects to birds to mammals. Debbie will be counting insects again this October. In 2009, she and the other 5 insect census takers, counted 217 insects and 86 species in about 2 hours.

Debbie is a lifelong learner who is concerned about the effect of the changing climate on the species of plants and wildlife in our region. She has observed significant changes in her backyard wildscape since acquiring the property in 2004. She is experiencing ecology in her own backyard and is delighted that the Texas Master Naturalist program is there to support her quest for learning more. Debbie is also a member of the Austin Butterfly Forum, the Native Plant Society of Houston, The Native Prairie Association, The Coastal Prairie Conservancy, the Houston Audubon Society, and Butterfly Enthusiasts of Southeast Texas.

## **Drought - the Summer of 2011**

We are now 11 months into the worst drought to hit Texas in decades. What's happening ecologically to our local environment is a great concern for all of us in the Gideon Lincecum Chapter. A few reflections and observations on the drought are presented here.

## **Drought Tales by Judy Deaton**

While out walking our Aussie-dogs a couple of weeks ago, the dancing duo began whining and jumping on the leash and the hullabaloo flushed out two small, speckled “unaccompanied minors” [fawns] just barely old enough to fend for themselves. We had spotted them once before frisking about with a doe, but another sighting later, it seems that they have lost their mamma to this searing drought and are just barely old enough to look after themselves.

The Texas-sized dry spell has caused so many more people to be aware of the needs of our precious wildlife and plant life and to become proactive in alleviating suffering in any way that they can. Our resolute hummingbirds are getting extra rations and we are replacing the water daily in three birdbaths. Purloining two plastic tubs from the garden, we filled them with water and dragged them down to the dry creek for the wildlife along with a trail camera to find out if the small animals were faring well. The pigs have found the water, but only after a raccoon, a myriad of birds and an armadillo had splashed about.

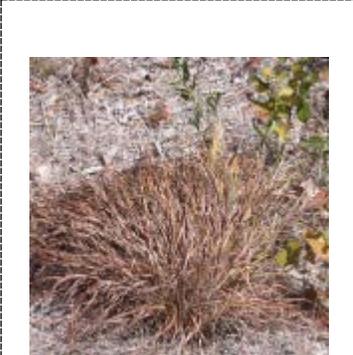
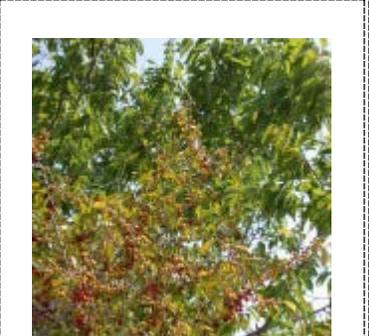
There isn't a spider to be seen lately and the grasshoppers are holed up in the rosemary. A flock of tiny, skittish birds that are probably vireos (hard to center in the binoculars) have taken to roosting in the crepe myrtle at our front door. They whoosh off every time we go out in the evening. Mockingbirds are congregating noisily around our vegetable patch in great numbers; the pickings in our scantily watered garden must be manna as they are usually solitary. A Mississippi kite perched in a snag early one morning eyeing the unusual activity.

While crunching through the dead thatch that passes for a lawn to retrieve a Frisbee, I was stopped in my tracks by a most magnificent sight: the flight of a wood stork. A modern-day black and white pterodactyl, it was so stunning that I forgot to get the camera and I didn't want to miss this! I wondered why the enormous bird would be hunting water here, where there are so few marshes.

**Photo Documentation from Monterey White**

			
<p>A dying tree -- a too common scene</p>	<p>My grandchildren created this oasis for the deer, raccoons, armadillos, opossums, rabbits, pigs, and snakes. Water evaporated to half its volume in less than 2 hours.</p>	<p>A Barren Food Plot -- Without Rain Nothing Sprouts</p>	<p>Deer survive by eating along the edges of our lawn.</p>

**Photo Documentation from Charlotte VonRosenberg**

			
<p>Dormant Big and Little Bluestem. Bunchgrasses can still be identified by their shapes and roots. None of the grasses on Quebe Prairie showed any sign of producing any floescence.</p>	<p>Individual bluestem naturally toasted by the drought and heat.</p>	<p>I water this pocket prairie in my yard. I will gather precious seeds.</p>	<p>Snail seed, possumhall holly and hackberry have enough energy to produce some food this year.</p>

**Photo Documentation from Madeline Johnson**



The normal water level for this pond is less than a foot below the rock outcropping. By August this pond had dropped 6 feet.



In this copse, the escarpment oaks are still showing life. The hercules club has dropped all its leaves and the cedar elm are brown.



This 5-acre lake continues to recede. The short moss grasses along the edge illustrate the gradual fall of the water level. Killdeer have been enjoying the new beach.

**Advanced Training Opportunities**

**Sept. 9, Wildlife Workshop, Blinn College, Ranking Agricultural Complex, Brenham, Texas**

**Sept. 16, Multi-County, New Landowners Educational Series, Austin County Vineyards, Cat Springs, Texas**

**Sept. 24, Lone Star Water Forum, Rainwater Harvesting from the Inside Out, Washington County Fairgrounds, Brenham, Texas.**

**Next Chapter Meeting**

**Saturday, Sept. 17, 9-11am**

**Pot Luck Lunch**

(bring a dish to share)

**Top 10 Presentations at Noon!**

**Jerry King on Bees and Wildflowers**

**and more Top Tens!**

**Bring a friend!**