

T E X A S



GOOD WATER MASTER NATURALIST
WILLIAMSON COUNTY

RIPPLES

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Editor: MaryAnn Melton
Layout: Lisa Ward

UPCOMING EVENTS

- 1/8/15 NPSOT Meeting
- 1/12/15 GWMN Board Meeting
- 1/19/15 NPAT Meeting
- 1/22/15 GWMN Chapter Meeting
- 2/2/15 Williamson Audubon Group
- 2/9/15 GWMN Board Meeting
- 2/12/15 NPSOT Meeting
- 2/16/15 NPAT Meeting
- 2/26/15 GWMN Chapter Meeting

Check the website for additional events including volunteer and training opportunities. The many events are way too numerous to even think about posting all here!

NOW YOU KNOW

The *Tayshaneta* genus of cave spiders are endemic primarily to Central Texas. At least two species, *T. anopica* and *T. parraconcinna*, have been found only in Williamson county's karst faunal regions. This spider genus radiated relatively recently and continuing mutations illustrate troglobite adaptations. *Tayshaneta* species are sometimes unique to a single faunal region and provide evidence to identify boundaries for biologically discrete cave systems. Identifying these boundaries provides a guide in conservation and management efforts to preserve the *Tayshaneta* spiders and other fauna unique to the Edwards Plateau and Balcones Fault karst geology.

Ledford, et.al., *Zookeys* 2012 (167): 1-102
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3272638/>

Registration for GWMN Spring Class by Mary Ann Melton

Spring 2015 Good Water Master Naturalist Training Class
March 8 – May 28, 2015
<http://tinyurl.com/GWMNTraining>
40 Hours Classroom Training
40 Hours Community Service
8 Hours Advanced Training

Texas Master Naturalists are people who still like to play in the dirt and are willing to get their feet wet and their hands dirty. During 2014, Good Water Master Naturalists (GWMN) of Williamson County did many things throughout the county. In Cedar Park, invasive plants are being monitored and removed. In Hutto at the landfill is a beautiful pollinator garden, a joint project between the Native Plant Society and Good Water Master Naturalists. At Berry Springs Park & Preserve near Georgetown, amphibians are monitored each month, native plant seeds are collected, and the barn is being restored. At Lake Granger, there is work being done on the prairie restoration east of the dam in partnership with the Native Prairies Association of Texas. In both Georgetown and Hutto, several groups of children are learning more about the natural world that surrounds them. There are a number of Texas Stream Team monitors who check water quality at several locations in Williamson County each month.

To become a Master Naturalist, one takes a training class of over 40 hours of expert training about almost every aspect of the natural world – soils, backyard habitats, prairies, rangeland management, forest ecology, birds, mammals, fish, insects, botany, climate, geology and archaeology. To complete the certification process, each volunteer completes 40 hours of service and an additional 8 hours of training. To maintain their certification each year, volunteers are encouraged to take their knowledge and volunteer for 40 hours and take 8 hours of additional training.

The Texas Master Naturalist program is a joint venture between the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas AgriLife Extension service. The Good Water Chapter of Master Naturalists is the Williamson County chapter. Due to funding issues throughout all levels of government, volunteers are needed to bridge the gap and provided needed services. Master Naturalists are trained volunteers who can do interpretation about the history, ecology, and natural elements of state and local parks, help build and maintain trail systems, help local residents and landowners learn best practices in managing their land and create urban wildlife habitats, and help with improvements in our parks.

Check out the website link above to learn more about the Training Class and to register online.

From the President's Desk by Charlie Grimes

Welcome to the New Year!

I want to thank all of you for your time and energy spent working for our chapter in 2014! The list of things we are involved in keeps growing, as does our membership. Our two new-member classes for 2014 have produced an energetic and talented group of folks that should prove to take our efforts and influence to new heights! Please be sure to embrace our new members with your experiences and your friendship.

I see 2015 as the year we will take our chapter to the next level in community outreach. Your board members have been selected to support this effort, and we will kick off the New Year with enthusiasm and purpose! The board can't do it single handed though.... so...I need to ask each of you to get involved with the chapter in an even bigger way during this new year. Many of our members have already stepped up to take on roles within the chapter, but for our organization to reach its true potential we need for each and every member to share more of their talent and experience.

So here is the challenge... We need each of you to choose at least one of our committees that you can get behind, and offer your assistance to the 2015 committee chair. Each committee needs to grow its function and purpose, so if everyone can help out in even a small way the results will be fabulous.

Our committees are:

Membership: Lori Merlino
Volunteer Services: Glenn Kleinert
Outreach: Ray Wahrenbrock
Host: Betty Jo Phillips
Youth: Mary Ann Melton

Training: Wayne Rhoden
Advanced Education: Judith Currier
Historian: Christie Sanchez
Communications: Mary Ann Melton

Each of these committee chairs would welcome the opportunity to speak with you personally regarding how to use your particular talent within their committee!

Our goal for 2015 is for every Good Water chapter member to have their name on at least one committee. Once we have that kind of involvement from our members, we will all be amazed at what we can accomplish!!

Harris Sparrow by Jim Hailey

This particular winter I have been greatly impressed by the unusual numbers of Harris's sparrows. This species is a regular winter visitor to our region. They breed solely in Canada from the Mackenzie River Delta in the Northwest Territories south and east to Hudson Bay and Northern Ontario. The arctic fronts that sweep across the Great Plains push these birds into Williamson County in search of milder weather and available food. Not all make it this far south. This past year, while we didn't have abundant rain, it seemed to rain at the appropriate time to produce a bumper crop of seed bearing grasses and plants. Harris's sparrows prefer dense deciduous woodlands along riparian corridors and adjacent to open prairies, pastures or farmland. They will often be found lurking in brush piles or bramble which serves as shelter from weather and predators. In winter, they are often associated with other sparrow species-- primarily white-crowned, white-throated and fox. Harris's is the largest of our sparrow species, featuring large, often peaked head, large conical pink bill, and long tail and pink legs. They are one of my favorite sparrows, beautifully marked and have a pleasing song. In adults, and to a lesser degree in first year birds, the black on the crown spreads down over the forehead to the throat and upper breast forming a necklace, with additional dark streaking along the flanks. This is in sharp contrast to ochre-tinged or buffy cheeks and contrasting white underparts. Harris's are ground feeding sparrows, but when flushed, they tend to head to the taller level of nearby shrubs or trees, before seeking cover below in adjacent thick brush or weeds. In our recent Good Water Chapter field trip to Tejas Camp I am certain that this was the most abundant species we observed and that is very unusual. I will offer more of these field trips in the coming months.



Eryngium leavenworthii: A Fall Training Story by Mike Farley

I decided to enter into the Master Naturalist program because of my strong interest in the natural world, and especially plants, insects, and a love of photographing nature. In my youth I was never far from being knee deep in the local creek or investigating what secrets the woods had to offer, or trying to get the best artistic shot possible in Southwest Missouri. It seems as though all my life, my hobbies and interests revolved around some sort of Earth science in one way or another.

The Master Naturalist class was certainly an alarming eye opener in regard to being a good land steward! For me some memorable moments were being in awe of **Dr. Oxley's** key's and her blatant style delivery discussion on the promiscuity of Oak trees! Being introduced to **Aldo Leopold** by **Wayne Rhoden**, the grave concern of water shortage in our near future from **Gene Chisolm**, and the final sermon from **Dr. Barron Rector** on the failures of society in regard to the land which brought back childhood church memories of feeling like the preacher was singling me out for my role in the catastrophe, my sins against the land.

At the fall class graduation potluck dinner I had a chance to speak with **Susan Blackledge** of Berry Springs Park and Preserve, regarding any seed collecting that might be available for volunteers. She said she had some **Eryngo**, *Eryngium leavenworthii* that she would love to have but warned me that they were "**kind of thorny**"! I gladly accepted the challenge and that weekend with my daughter in tow, donned some leather gloves and filled three 5 gallon buckets with seed heads. This only took an hour and was certainly the easy part! Over the course of the next week I ended each workday with a cold drink and what I found to be very relaxing on my back porch as our cats looked on from the comfort offered by the large pots of overwintered plants.



I used the cut bottom of a square container to collect the seeds as they exited their home. Holding on to at least 1/2 inch of stem in one hand while using two or three fingers to twist and push against the grain, (think brushing a cat's hair backwards). A wider flat container would catch more of the errant seeds that would litter my lap each day. The other thing that slows down your progress is frequently having to pick out larger pieces of the dried brittle leaves and spikes that fall in seeds with each head that is worked. A mesh screen (1/4 to 3/8 opening) over the container would minimize a great deal of this but would also have to be dumped on occasion. The spent seed heads went into an empty bucket and later my compost. I might have some volunteers come spring! I should also mention that along with the seeds come a fair amount of micro bugs too numerous to mention. I do not recommend indoor harvesting for this reason along with some dust.



After the first bucket (2 1/2 hours), I realized that there were going to be an alarming number of seeds. Curiosity got the better of me and I counted out 50 seeds and weighed them on my micro scale that I use when making sauces from ferments. They were all of .2 grams. So, 20 grams of weight, made approximately 2000 seeds. The first bucket yielded just over 25,000 seeds by weight! I suppose to some this may seem like a lot of work and painful on occasion. I also took some magnified images of the seeds which further promotes the overall spiky nature of the plant. The spikes all go in one direction which, once on the ground favors working itself into the soil and not backing out to be carried off by the wind. (Continued on Page 4)

Eryngo: Fall Training (Continued from Page 3)

I found it to be very fascinating and gained a fair amount of respect not only for its striking beauty, but for a plant that defends its bounty and future survival. Good parenting so to speak! In all of my 8 ½ hours I only had two or three pokes that made for less than memorable moments! That seems like a minor sacrifice compared to the gain to me!

In the end, I returned more than 70,000 seeds to Susan and a willingness to collect more from another part of the park when they are accessible. On my first day collecting there was one plant that was home to a **Green Lynx Spider** (*Peucetia viridans*). It was very interesting looking. My daughter's phone was most uncooperative at capturing a worthy photo so I went back a week later and she, (much larger than a male) was still there. She did not spit venom on me acquiring photos as is within her capacity to do inside one foot range! I did not see an egg sac so possibly I was not a threat. They are considered to be beneficial since they prey on farm moths and caterpillar pests as well as stinkbugs, but do not dissuade from taking butterfly's and bees, and other pollinators. I suppose in a system of balances in nature, one has to put trust into Mother Nature's plan.



Thanks to the Goodwater Master Naturalist program and all affiliated. I'm glad I joined up!

Berry Springs Barn Restoration by John Clifford

If you plan on restoring an old, historic barn – think carefully!

The “historic compound” at Berry Springs Park and Preserve (BSPP) included an old dairy barn, the shelter for Little Boy and Amigo the donkeys, and storage for park materials. Years of exposure and a large chinaberry tree resting on part of the roof left a gaping hole in the metal roof. Leaking nail holes had rotted the trusses. And wind had lifted some of the roof panels. Minor repairs had been done, but some of them seemed to be failing. It was time to act!

Enter Ed Myett, Master Naturalist, with skills as a builder and experience in restoration. Ed lives in Georgetown and the Good Water Master Naturalists asked him to coordinate an effort to at least make the structure sturdy and sound. That project started in mid-November with a week of work making the building more useable and solid.



The first step was making the roof structures sturdy enough to work on, so Friday and Saturday were mainly strengthening the support beams. Trusses that had been pieced together were doubled. Where long spans went unsupported, beams were installed and bracing added. Rotten sills were removed and replaced.

By Monday, work on the roof itself could begin. One challenge here was matching the roof styles, as two patterns of the metal panels had been used over the years. To keep the historic integrity, the proper style had to be found to patch the hole left by the tree. Fortunately, there was enough around to make the repairs needed. So it was time to fit the “new” panels in place and secure them. Oops, they were not quite long enough, so we needed to fit short “lips” into the spans. And years of wind and neglect had twisted the panels enough so that the grooves did not always fit well.

Finally, all the pieces were in place and we began screwing them down to secure them. This presented new problems, as not all of the wood beneath the panels was sound enough to hold screws, and hitting the newly repaired sections of framing did not always occur where old nails had been. Still, after two days of securing the roof, and another of caulking around all the nails and screws on the roof, the job was done, and the roof solid and secure enough for at least a few more years.

(Additional barn pictures on Page 5)

Good Water Master Naturalist Volunteering Around Williamson County



Listening for amphibians requires some quiet, but there is still time to chat a bit as well. Ribbit!



Getting trained as a stream monitor helps collect water quality information from every creek and stream.



Bats are critical to our ecosystem and a popular attraction at Austin and Round Rock bridges. Educating others is one of Good Water's most important activities.



Berry Springs Park and Preserve provides space for hiking, bird watching, camping, and many other activities. Good Water members volunteer at the park in a variety of ways. Fall efforts have focused on restoring the barn, and this effort is still underway. Visit the GWMN web site for volunteering opportunities.

GOOD WATER MASTER NATURALISTS IN THE NEWS

Scientist of the Month for Invaders of Texas



Jon Rothlander and his father, Greg, became interested in conservation when they learned their community is a registered Texas historical site. The Block House Municipal Utility District, near Cedar Park is the site of Fort Tumlinson, a Texas Revolutionary War fort that was built by men that later left to fight at the Alamo. This and other culturally sensitive areas containing evidence of past Native American occupation are now in a protected area in the community, which is being threatened by invasive species.

Jon, with the support of his father Greg, is working to identify, map and remove invasive plants from his community as part of a Boy Scout conservation project that he hopes will qualify for the Hornaday Award, the highest scouting award for conservation. Through this effort, Jon has documented invasive plant observations since he took the Invaders of Texas online training in August, followed by an in-person workshop in October at the Texas Master Naturalist Annual Conference.

In addition to the invasive species work, Jon and Greg will also be working with the MUD leadership to develop a master plan for the community that includes management of invasive species, promotion of native plants and for conserving water.

Keep up the great work, Jon and Greg. We applaud your work!

Bat Conservation International Volunteer Recognition



Good Water Member, Christi Gardner was recognized by Bat Conservation International at the Congress Avenue Bridge Night at Bracken Cave in October. Diane Odegard from BCI said, “Christi was recognized for having the most volunteer hours at the bridge of any of their volunteers and for being generally wonderful. Christi also stepped up at other occasions when they needed her for events such as BatFest and as a speaker.

Christi was also a regular volunteer at the McNeil Bridge Bat Interpretation in Round Rock last summer.

Well done, Christi!

For information about the Good Water Chapter
<http://txmn.org/goodwater> or goodwatermn2@gmail.com