

T E X A S

Master Naturalist™



GOOD WATER MASTER NATURALIST
WILLIAMSON COUNTY

RIPPLES

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UPCOMING EVENTS

- 09/21 NPAT Meeting
- 09/23 GWMN Book Club
- 09/24 GWMN Chapter Meeting
- 10/08 NPSOT Meeting
- 10/19 NPAT Meeting
- 10/22 GWMN Chapter Meeting
- 11/09 WAG Meeting
- 11/12 NPSOT Meeting
- 11/16 NPAT 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

Brushy Creek and the San Gabriel River provided the foundation for colonization of Williamson County in the mid-1800's. Round Rock even takes its name from a large rock in the middle of Brushy Creek. These critical watershed also supported earlier attempts as well as Native American settlement. The 10,000+ year old skeleton of the "Leanderthal Lady" found near Brushy Creek is one of the oldest skeletal finds in North America. More recently, Native Americans relied on the rivers for game pathways. Earliest colonization attempts in the area were Spanish mission which called the waterways Arroyo de las Benditas Animas (Creek of the Blessed Souls) and the San Xavier River. Today these waterways are still the heart of Williamson County.

Williamson County Plant Diversity by Derrick Wolter

The number of plants in Williamson County alone is staggering. For an individual to know even half of the plants on a property is a feat. Sure, the number of tree species on a piece of property are usually fairly limited, the brush species may be a little more varied, but then we dive off into the forbs and grasses. There is always more to learn.

The recipe for healthy plant and animal communities must be diversity. A plant community high in diversity means that good things will happen. Scale is important for the animals that may call a place home, but a variety of plants in any area, large or small, equates to health for the plant community as well as for vertebrates and invertebrates.

A soil scientist will tell you that ground cover is a good thing. Without herbaceous vegetation soil gets mighty hot, too hot. Soil organisms that break down organic matter and release vital nutrients into the soil fail to thrive, maybe even disappear altogether. This results in fewer nutrients for all plants found in the area, a vicious cycle.

A diverse plant community, whether found on a 500 acre ranch, 20 acre ranchette, or your backyard is important. Plants, even those found within the same general group, often provide different types of structure. Sideoats grama looks different than buffalo grass, or little bluestem. An ash juniper looks quite different than a pecan tree. One is better for roosting birds during the summer; the other during the winter. A diverse plant community offers structural variety, which provides roosting sites for different species, at different times of the year. This extends into nesting, denning, loafing, screening and feeding cover in a variety of wildlife species.

A diverse forb community is a thing of beauty. Just visit your local garden center to see why. Numerous, locally-endemic forbs are commercially grown and provide homeowners with stunning flowers. Or better yet, check out a healthy prairie site. Wow! Numerous insects need those flowers and a myriad wildlife species require those seeds for survival. The same can be said of the forbs that are not so eloquently referred to as wild flowers, but more commonly referred to as weeds: Indian mallow, white prickly poppy, crotons, ragweeds and the like. They are all important. Keep Williamson County diverse!

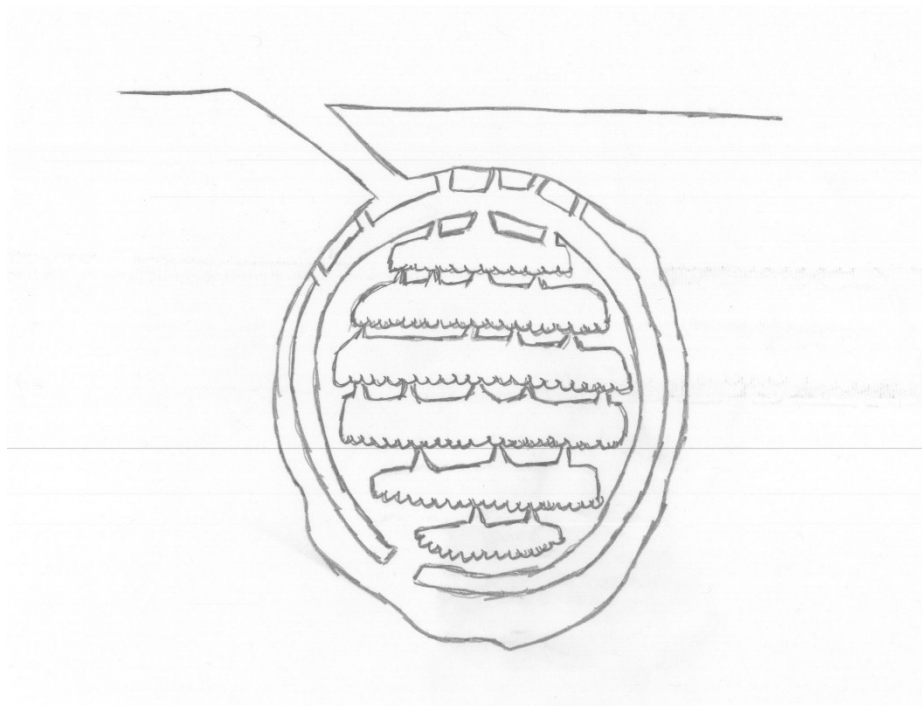


Yellowjackets by Wizzie Brown

Yellowjacket is a term that refers to several types of wasps in the family Vespidae. They are social wasps and are often thought as beneficial. Problems may arise when nests are in populated areas and the chance of being stung by the insect increases.

Yellowjackets are about ½” long with alternating bands of yellow and black on the abdomen. They are often mistaken for honey bees or paper wasps. Honey bees are a bit smaller and have hairy bodies, while paper wasps are reddish-brown with some having yellow markings.

Yellowjackets often build their nest in old rodent burrows, but some will make aerial nests in trees or on eaves of structures. Subterranean nests can often be found in flower beds, pastures, gardens as well as other locations. Aerial nests are often made in trees, under eaves, in storage sheds, garages or wall voids. These wasps construct their nest from a paper-like material using chewed wood fibers mixed with their saliva. Yellowjacket nests are enclosed with a single entry hole and may contain up to 20,000 adult workers in a mature nest, which can be up to 6 feet in size.



Cut-away of ground-dwelling yellowjacket nest showing internal layout.

Yellowjacket nests are abandoned each year and soon after abandonment begin to deteriorate. Occasionally, during mild winters, nests in sheltered spots may not be abandoned. In October and November, queens and males emerge from the nest to mate. After mating, males die while the newly mated queens seek sheltered areas to overwinter. The following spring, these queens emerge to build a small paper nest and begin to lay eggs. Maximum colony size is usually reached by August or September.

If wasps are in an area that can be left undisturbed, then they can be beneficial and help manage pests in the landscape. If there is a chance of a stinging incidence, then wasps should be managed. It is best to hire a pest management professional who has safety equipment needed to treat these wasps.

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at 512.854.9600.

River Ranch County Park by Dave Armstrong



RRCP is a new park under development in western Williamson County just outside Liberty Hill, Texas. The Goodwater Chapter's limited involvement with the park at this time is photographic documentation. Dave Armstrong, Dave Gage, and Jim Haley make up the photographic team, and Nancy Philips has graciously agreed to produce the oral history. The team will research other historical events involving the 1,011-acre ranch which makes up the park's territory. The property was a traditional working ranch and has set fallow for the last 20 years. Dave Armstrong is the coordinator between our chapter and the park manager, Jeff North.

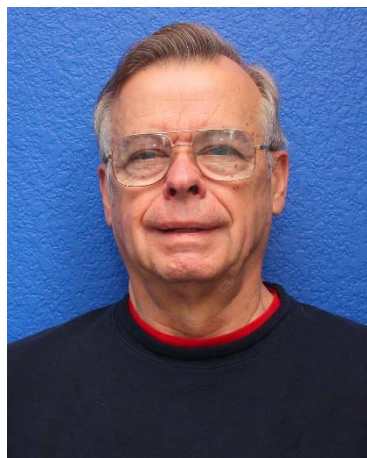
Jeff provided a brief synopsis of recent and ongoing activities at RRCP, i.e., (1) the design firm is finally on board and visited the property a few weeks ago; (2) RRCP will have deer hunting at the Park, Fridays to Sundays from Oct 9 to December 20; (3) Jeff did a river survey of the property from the San Gabriel last week, and it looks like the park will have navigable water to Bagdad Road. This will be good information for the long-term park planning; (4) Jeff has proposed a community clean up/work day January 30, 2016, and is awaiting approval; (5) Jeff plans to involve the Master Naturalists, Scouts, and other stakeholders.

Also, I will be scheduling chapter tours of the park later in the fall when the weather is cooler. I am anxious for all chapter members to visit the park and to marvel at the park's pristine landscape, its historical ranch facilities, and to explore the low water crossing on the San Gabriel. RRCP is truly a wondrous place to enjoy, provided the temperature is well above freezing and below 90 ° F. If you have questions about the park, please contact me at dba1940@att.net.



MEET GOOD WATER MEMBERS

Dave Armstrong



Dave was graduated in 1962 from Texas Technological College (now, Texas Tech University) with a degree in Banking and Finance. He entered the U.S. Army as a Finance Officer. During his 23 years in the service, he graduated from the U. S. Army Command and General Staff College and from Syracuse

University with an MBA in Financial Management.

Dave has a background of banking, finance, and financial management. After military service, he worked in several hospitals and medical care institutions. He also served on the board of the Houston Hospice and the Board of Mental Health America of Fort Bend County.

Dave volunteered at Brazos Bend State Park managing the nature center on Wednesdays, conducting nature hikes for students, giving hands-on programs on alligators and snakes to residents in assisted living centers and an Alzheimer's facility. He believes that the very hand of the Creator is profoundly manifested in all of nature from the microscopic to most distant galaxy. He also served as Treasurer. As a volunteer, he received recognition for education, teamwork, and leadership.

Dave is a certified Texas Master Naturalist transfer from the Coastal Prairie Chapter and has devoted many hours to the prairie restoration project at Seaborne Creek Park in Rosenberg. A native grass prairie in the spring is beautiful beyond human description.

Dave has been married to his wife and best friend, Gay, for over 48 years, and none of the above would have been possible without her. They have two grown daughters and seven grandchildren

Maggie Bond



I came to USA from England 9 years ago to be near my son and his family in Cedar Park.

In England I was brought up on a small farm and had an idyllic childhood catching mice in the barn, birds nesting and pressing wild flowers. Later I had a pony and weaned calves and kept chicken. I consider myself very

lucky to have had that wonderful experience, before all the modern technology took over our lives.

My friend Diane and I did the Master Gardener classes last year. We were thrilled when we discovered the Master Naturalist spring course. I loved the classes and was awed by the speakers and great field trips.

My personal niche has been making my urban yard into a certified wildlife habitat which is now teeming with birds, bugs, frogs, toads, lizards & mammals, since the addition of a pond last year. The magic occurred when my greenfly infested roses suddenly became the dinner table for lady bugs. I just love the interaction of all these creatures, I use no pesticides at all and it seems to work very well.

I have volunteered for the Amphibian Watch at Divine Lake learning how to identify frogs and toads merely by their calls! Guided by very knowledgeable leaders and fellow froggers. Help pass out literature at the McNeil Bridge Bats, and cutting and assembling Swift kits for the children to make up at the Jonestown Chimney Swift Festival. But my favorite has been helping at the Summer camp in Hutto, seeing groups of children absorbed by the speakers, who have captured the imagination of these children on a variety of subjects including mammals, fish, storm water & rain harvesting, plant identification, and The Sounds of the Night. It was such fun and it wasn't only the children who learnt a lot!

I really appreciate the friendship and knowledge I have gained by belonging to this Chapter.

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