

Good Water Ripples



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Fall Color in the Native Plant Garden

By Betty Saenz

Some of the extraordinary Native Texas plants this time of year are the fall aster, American beautyberry and shrubby boneset. *Ageratina havanensis* is also called Havana snakeroot and white mistflower in addition to shrubby boneset.

Some days I walk out in my backyard and wonder what wonderful fragrance permeates my entire yard. I see the fuzzy white sprays of blooms and immediately remember. Just today I saw a wonderful black native bee enjoying the flowers. The nectar and pollen is so important for the insect population.

My fragrant mist flower is intertwined with tall sage *Leucophyllum frutescens* bushes. Neither get quite the amount of sun that would make them grow real dense so they intertwine and support each other.

We all remember the chorus of the song by Bill Withers "Lean on me, when you're not strong. And I'll be your friend. I'll help you carry on." Yep, that is

how it goes in my backyard!

Fall aster is another great plant for the fall. It does not look like a whole lot the rest of the year but in the fall, it really puts on quite a show! *Symphotrichum oblongifolium* grows both in the black soil east of IH 35 but

also west of IH 35 in the Hill Country's thin soil.

I saw some growing in what people have come to call the "hell strip," the area between the street and the front yard, and they looked stunning!

Another fall favorite of mine is the American beautyberry or *Callicarpa americana*. Its bright fuchsia purple berries are spectacular. Our Texas State bird, the Mockingbird loves them! I have tasted

them myself but they just do not have much flavor. I do try to water mine a bit in periods of dryness but they do survive once established in the wild with little water. This plant is one of the earliest I identified at our family ranch back in the 1970s. This was back in the day

when cameras used film that had to be developed. Next, a photo was mailed, yes "snail" mailed to the garden editor for ID. My iNaturalist app on my iPhone sure gives me much more instant gratification!

Editor's Note: Central Texas Gardener is showing Betty's yard on PBS (KLRU) Jan 11, 2020. It was taped in early June.



Mark your Calendar

- | | |
|---------|-------------------------------------|
| Dec. 6 | GWMN Potluck |
| Dec. 10 | Master Gardeners Series: Weed Mgmt. |
| Dec. 12 | NPSOT* |
| Dec. 17 | NPSOT: Garey Park Plant Survey, #11 |
| Jan. 9 | NPSOT* |
| Jan. 13 | Master Gardeners* |
| Jan. 20 | Berry Springs Day of Service |
| Jan. 23 | GWMN* |

*Indicates Chapter Meeting

Eastern Screech Owls, My Backyard Buddies

By Joel Chamberlain

I've been adopted by Eastern Screech Owls. It's true. In late 2015, I purchased a 1976 built, "fixer upper" in the Brushy Creek area. My "new" house hadn't been occupied by humans for four years. "He" came with the house.

I first noticed him roosting in a hole at the peak of my roof that squirrels were kind enough to create. He was gone the next day. I chalked up chance encounter as another serendipitous reward from nature for me "paying attention."

Build it and they will come. In April 2016 I spotted a black bellied whistling duck probing my old live oak, presumably looking for a "hole" to nest in. After some quick research, I threw together nesting box version 1.0 and placed it on a cedar elm.

The black bellied whistling ducks checked the box out, but never moved in. Eventually the cold fronts of late 2016 motivated my first tenant to move in...

In May 2017, my new tenants introduced three owlets to the world for the first time. Words cannot describe how enjoyable it was to observe my new neighbors and their offspring! Everything about the screech owls was novel



to me and I "binged watched" them daily, totally engrossed in learning their habits and routines.

Want a screech owl in your back yard? Now is the time of year to place a nesting box!

Site selection is literally happening as you read this. Early next year, male screech owls will "show off" potential nesting sites to their mates. The female screech owl ultimately makes the final decision about where to nest.

Here is a quick summary and resource

list for placing a screech box in your backyard. My primary advice is a blend of personal experience and a comprehensive book by Baylor University Professor, Fred Gehlbach, PhD and "The Eastern Screech Owl," written in 1994, summarizes 20+ years of research (conducted in Waco, TX) and provides enough data to drown the average grad. student.

First thing to do: Make sure you don't have any neighbors with established screech owls. You might unintentionally steal them.

The male screech owl will defend 2-3 nesting cavities within a given territory. The territory can be 10 acres or more, and the average distance between cavities

noted in Dr. Gehlbach's research was 358 feet. 🌿



Box plan: Audubon Society <https://www.audubon.org/news/how-build-screech-owl-nest-box>

Height: Place box under tree canopy at a height of 9-11 feet.

Habitat: Place box facing open yard, void of any shrubs or branches below the hole that would impede a "U" shaped flight path.

Direction: Place box in best habitat. Avoiding exposures like "north facing" is a myth Dr. Gehlbach dispels in his book.

Predators: Definitely a consideration to ponder. Guards, sheet metal around tree trunk, box on a pole are different strategies I have seen. My newest box is on a

metal pole to keep squirrels from taking it over.

Finally, educate your neighbors on the perils of using rodenticides. Secondary poisoning of raptors and other predators in the food chain is real.

I hope you enjoyed this short summary of my experiences with eastern screech owls. I enjoy helping others attract screech owls to their backyard. If you have any questions, or simply like screech owls don't hesitate to reach out. 🌿



Riya Mohan: Presenter on Microplastics

By April Rohlich



Riya Mohan is working on her long-term project to determine the extent to which plastic waste permeates through Texas' waterways.

She gave a special presentation at the TMN annual meeting during lunch and a more extensive classroom presentation that afternoon.

Riya is a senior at Grapevine High School with an avid interest in environmental science. She wanted to answer the questions that a 60 Minutes program about the plastic plague brought about for her. How could we let this massive issue become so systemic? How is it that,

as a society, are we so unaware of such a global issue?

If it is affecting people and the ecology so far away, what could it be doing to us and our ecology so close to home? "I didn't want to wait around until someone else found the answer, so I went out on my own," she said to much approval from the TMN lunch crowd.

With the help of TPWD and other important resources, she was able to test her hypothesis that microplastics would be found in local species gastrointestinal tracts. For a time, she considered testing roadkill, but quickly shot that idea down. Her eventual source was a variety of fish species from Lake Ray Hubbard near Rockwall, Texas.

Through dissection, acid filtration and microscopic analysis, she found some quantity of microplastics in almost every specimen. The determination is that our society's plastic use has become so extensive that it has spread to affect animals essentially in our own backyard.

The mitigation efforts we can make include cutting down our plastic use and recycling properly. "Each and every one of us can make an active and conscious effort to save our planet. It is easy to think I'm just one person; what effect can I possibly make? The answer is - "A Big One." Riya concludes. 🌿

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/trevornace/2019/07/30/irish-teen-wins-2019-google-science-fair-for-removing-microplastics-from-water/>

Texas Master Naturalist Program 2018 Impact Report

- 390,000 People Reached
- 483,485 Volunteer Hours Reported
- 111 New Trail Miles Developed
- 2,476 Acres Impacted
- \$11.2 Million Financial Contribution to Texas

2019 Annual Meeting Recap

By Lori Franz, with input from Mary Ann Melton and April Rohlich

Over 600 people attended the Texas Master Naturalist 2019 Annual Meeting in Rockwall in October. Knowing what we now know about putting an annual meeting together, our colleagues in North Texas had a nice slate of offerings. And arriving at a waterfront hotel is always a plus. The Hilton Lakefront Hotel, our home for the weekend, sits on Lake Ray Hubbard, just east of Dallas, one of the largest lakes in North Texas. It spans 22,000 acres, with a maximum depth of only 40 feet since created as a reservoir to serve the Dallas area.



Health Center in Conroe where immersion in nature is part of their health care. While our meeting place was not in a forest, our group went and immersed ourselves in nature along the lake shore.”

Topic: Geology of North Texas

Mary Ann’s Saturday was spent on an all day field trip with geologist Christopher Mathewson learning about the geology of the area north-east of Dallas. Especially interesting was the natural

formation rock wall that gives the city of Rockwall its name.

Topic: Late Night Mothing

Saturday evening TPWD Sam Kiseschnick and GWMN Mike Farley had their moth lights out for us to see the night insects.



Topic: Snakes of North Texas

This was a great co-presentation, complete with ambassador species who helped with the lecture. Check out this online site: whatsnakeisthat.com

Topic: Crayfish

They are also known as crawfish, crawdads, freshwater lobsters, mountain lobsters, mudbugs, or yabbies, to name a few. Taxonomically, they are members of



the superfamilies Astacoidea and Parastacoidea. They breathe through feather-like gills and the oldest known Astacoidea is 340 million years. Burrows can be four to six feet deep, and over 200 animals eat them, including us!

Topic: Bumble Bees

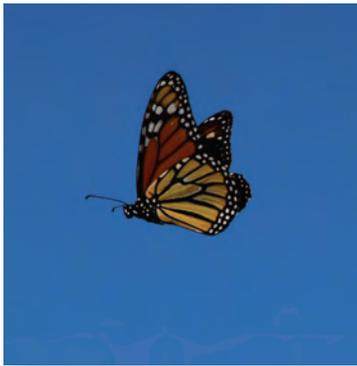
Besides serving as the 2020 recertification pin, did you know that colonies only last one season?



This year’s meeting included day trips and training workshops to many local, state and even national refuges/parks, many of which focused on the diversity of geography, flora, fauna and history unique to this area of Texas. A few of the highlights and photos are shared here.

Topic: Forest Therapy Session

Mary Ann Melton said one of her favorite activities at the annual meeting was the Forest Therapy session. “A physician, a physical therapist and a forester talked about a program at the Lone Star Family

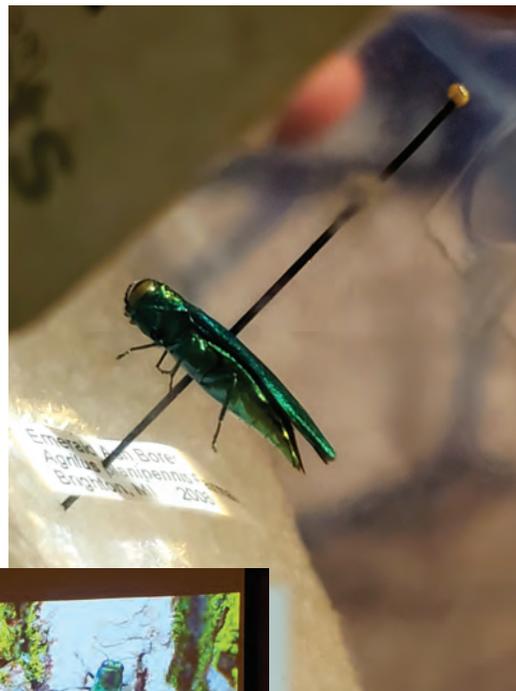


Topic: Monarchs

The Monarchs were passing through to Mexico in great numbers. With one sky count I saw 19 from my 5th floor balcony. Did you know the Monarch butterflies use the very same trees each and every year when they migrate? This seems odd because they aren't the same butterflies that were there last year. Monarch butterflies are the only insect that migrates each year to a warmer climate that is 2,500 miles away.

Topic: Emerald Ash Borer

April reported that if your ash trees are within 15 miles of a known infestation of Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), you must treat it in some form or kiss your ash goodbye. The treatments include emamectin benzoate injected into the tree and azasol derived from the neem tree.



tiveness as an EAB infestation deterrent. In conclusion, the weather was perfect for the planned day trips, late night mothing, and s'mores on the patio. Sunday we all departed, and the weather turned for the worse. That night a total of ten tornados ravaged North Texas. An EF-3 tornado with maximum winds of 140 mph and traveling for 15 miles in Northwest Dallas did considerable damage, and an EF-1 tore through Rockwall with winds at 90 mph. I saw a nighttime picture of a tornado ripping across the lake.

The Texas Master Naturalist Annual Meeting provides both opportunities for continuing education and the fellowship and energy of like-minded individuals. Thank you to our hardworking North Texas friends, and don't forget to dust off your boots for Houston 2020 - the site of next year's conference! 🦋



Eryngo Harvest at Berry Springs Park

By Susan Blackledge

Berry Springs had a great seed harvest of the wildflower Eryngo on the south 35 acres off County Road 152. This section of the park is not open to the public. It is the area where Mike Farley and Kathy McCormick have led volunteers to place trail cameras and document wildlife quite successfully.

Mulch was also spread at the entrance to the mowed path that parallels CR 152, Berry Creek and Dry Berry Creek. Future work days will be announced to work on invasive removal, prairie restoration and development of trails. United Way Day of Service (Martin Luther King holiday)

on January 20th, 8:30-noon, will be the next major work day. A Sign-up Genius will be forthcoming. 🍂



Good Water Chapter Picnic and Bonfire



Per August Wusterhausen, "Saturday's picnic had 49 members registered with five guests. (There were some that probably did not register.) It was a very good turn-out and everyone had a good time, plenty of food and a bonfire later that night."

How to Find the “Raries” (Notes from a bad birder)

By Amy Flinn

Every now and again I am lucky enough to observe a rare bird (or at least an “exciting” one). Sometimes I might even get a photo. How does this happen? Well, first you need to recognize the common birds, and remember - a “rare” bird is often a bird in the wrong place at the wrong time. So start - get outside and pay attention. Make birding a habit. Do you walk your dog? Walk the dog in a local park. Do you drive to work or appointments? Route your drive through a park or wild area. Do you have a yard? Provide food and water for the birds there.

Once you start “hanging out” with the birds the common ones will become easy for you to identify. You may be surprised at how many you already know - Northern Cardinal, Blue Jay, Northern Mockingbird, Flamingo, Penguin, - just kidding. Trust me - you DO KNOW many birds and will begin to add others fairly quickly. Before long you will know when you see a bird you do not recognize. (I take photos because I have trouble with binoculars. It limits what I see and identify, but works for me and I can look them up later).

Try reporting a short birding trip on eBird*. It is a great tool for

getting to know which birds are common in your area at different times and which might be rare, as you will have lists to refer to. And try out the alert function that will let you know the day after a rare bird is sighted in your target area.

Three years ago I started receiving “alerts” from eBird when a rare bird was sighted in Williamson County or Bell County. With those alerts I started to map out birding “hot spots” and learn-

ing the names of local birders (who are almost always a generous group of people willing to share their expertise with you). Now I regularly monitor a hot spot five minutes from my house. Both photos illustrating this article were taken at that location.

Below is MY list (in no particular order) of the things that have made birding easier and more enjoyable for me. It has helped me learn and celebrate the “common” birds and recognize when a “rare” one comes along. It is not an exhaustive list - just what I have tried with some success.

Don't give up.

The List

Use online databases and resources – eBird*, iNaturalist**, All About Birds***

Join your local Audubon**** and take the field trips.

Develop a net-

work of birding friends

Use the “Birds of Texas” group on Facebook

Keep your eyes and ears open

Use a good pair of binoculars and/or camera and/or recording app

Get some training (Did you know there is a sparrow class?)

Go on a Christmas Bird Count***** with an experienced birder. Better yet, go on a couple of them.

Research birding opportunities when

you travel.

Hang out in a bird blind (it's even better if you go with an expert)

Feed the birds in your yard

Invest in a good bird book***** (check them out from the library first and see which one makes sense to you).

NOTES:

*eBird.org

**iNaturalist.org

***All About Birds.

org

****William-

sonaudubon.org,

Travisaudubon.org,

Twinlakesaudubon.org

*****Christmas Bird Count – <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/join-christmas-bird-count>

*****Everyone has a favorite. I use Peterson's and Sibley's. 🌿

Top Threats to Birds

Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Nov. 2019

If you were alive in 1970, 29% of breeding birds in the U.S. and Canada have disappeared within your lifetime.

These data signal an urgent need to repair the very fabric of our ecosystems - and bring birds back.

Habitat loss and degradation are the biggest reasons for the rapid and staggering loss of birds across the continent.

What are other leading causes of bird deaths because of humans? Every year, more than 2.6 billion birds are estimated to be killed by cats, and up to 1 billion birds are killed by window strikes in the U.S. and Canada alone.

Collisions with vehicles and structures such as power lines and communications towers are additionally estimated to kill more than 300 million. 🌿



Michael Brasel: 1947 - 2019

Michael David Brasel died peacefully on October 12, 2019, in the arms of his loving wife, Kathleen. Michael devoted much of his 72 years to service to his country, to bettering the lives of others, and to preserving and protecting the natural world.

At 20 he enlisted in the army to serve his country in Viet Nam. He came home with a determination to end the war and devoted five years of his life to that end. He committed to working to make the world a better place through preparing inmates to earn their GED, and for improving work programs for the unemployed.

Michael was a great asset to our chapter. Randy Spurlock noted Michael graduated with the 2014 GWMN class, receiving his initial certification that year. He earned both his 250 and 500 hour milestones in 2015 and received his 1000

hour milestone in 2017, accumulating a total of 1500 hours. Michael volunteered over 800 hours at Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge (his passion the last several years).

He re-certified in April 2019 and I'm sure he was looking forward to this year's Golden-Cheeked Warbler pin. It will be sent to his wife.

The last ten years of his life, Michael devoted his time and energy as Project Leader at the Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge.

He developed and taught environmental education classes for children, worked



at headquarters to welcome and inform visitors to the refuge, and helped blaze and maintain trails. If you have walked a trail on the Refuge, Michael helped make that possible. 🌿

For more information about the Good Water Chapter contact us at:
<http://txmn.org/goodwater>
or
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The Aldabra white-throated rail first went extinct around 136,000 years ago — but now, it's back.
CHARLES J SHARP

An Extinct Bird Species has Evolved Back Into Existence, study says
By Sophie Lewis, CBS News and
Found Online, by GWMN Gail McAdoo
<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/an-extinct-bird-species-has-evolved-back-into-existence-study-says/>