

# Good Water Ripples

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## In Search of Swamp Rabbit and other Species of Greatest Conservation Need

By Mike Farley

*Sylvilagus aquaticus* was observed in Williamson County early this year and throughout the year before at Berry Springs Park and Preserve, as well as North San Gabriel River - captured or observed by trail camera and digital camera. The county is on the westernmost edge of its range, with swamp rabbits being more common in east Texas and southeastern U.S.

Swamp Rabbit is a real animal and not some fearsome beast from an old Monty Python movie. However, since the start of our new Nature Tracking Project it has most certainly become our holy grail, and no less difficult to find either!

Of the two species of greatest conservation need, I knew that Swamp Rabbit was more under-reported than North American River Otter, both of which were observed prior to the project's inception. During the project's first six weeks, only trace evidence of Swamp Rabbit was found, in the form of a latrine log. This unique elevated platform apparently serves as a message board, as well as a

more efficient lookout during a vulnerable moment.

In those six weeks there have been seven observations of Bobcat all over the 35-acre south plot where we began our search. Another recent observation was the Gray Fox on the North San Gabriel with a rabbit clutched in its mouth and making its way back to a nearby den. All of this predator activity combined with last



year's severe flooding is probably making our search that much more difficult.

In addition to these predators, an overwhelming abundance of common mammals, such as Common Raccoon, Nine-banded

Armadillo, and Virginia Opossum was observed. We began using scents for attracting mammals to an ideal location within camera view. We experimented with food, vegetables and seeds, but quickly abandoned this since it always drew numerous raccoons and fighting. The scents now used are pure vanilla extract, imitation vanilla, and apple cider spray.

Favorable camera locations include grasses, such as Inland Sea Oats, Virginia Wild Rye, greenbriers, and dewberry. Dense thicket near water is the rabbit's preferred cover habitat, with a fast zig-zagging escape from predators. The ultimate choice for evading capture involves this running pattern, then fol-



lowed by jumping into water and swimming to the opposite bank covered with vegetation, staying submerged all but its nose. It can be seen in the daytime but it prefers to forage at

# In Search of Swamp Rabbit...continued

night. A recent addition to the watch list, Swamp Rabbit is rated (S5) in Texas.

While we have been short on Swamp Rabbit sightings, we have had four River Otter observations during the same time period. The otters' conservation status was previously listed as vulnerable (S3) in Texas, but recently has been brought back to (S5) per NatureServe (an organi-

zation of biodiversity scientists dedicated to providing information on imperiled species and ecosystems that is effective for conservation action).

We are helping (TPWD) Texas Nature Trackers by documenting Species of Greatest Conservation Need. They are constantly updating their statewide county map with biodiversity changes.

## Cornell Lab of Ornithology finds Decline in Breeding Population

By John W. Fitzpatrick, Executive Director Cornell Lab of Ornithology

A new study - led by Cornell Lab of Ornithology scientists - has found that the breeding population of birds in the U.S. and Canada has dropped nearly 30% since 1970.

The study, published in the journal *Science Today* by Cornell Lab scientists Ken Rosenberg, Adriaan Dokter, and Laura Helft, and collaborators at six other institutions - found that nearly three billion birds have vanished in our lifetime. These staggering losses have occurred across all habitats, from grasslands to the Arctic, shorelines to forests - and have taken a massive toll on even common species, such as sparrows, warblers, blackbirds.

If you have ever contributed citizen-science data or know someone who has, consider this: the findings emerged from new techniques to detect the volume of migratory birds aloft using weather radar, as well as nearly 50 years of bird-monitoring data, including citizen-science records. They show what we might not have perceived otherwise - a rapid loss of more than a quarter of our nations' bird populations.

This new knowledge is a wake-up call - a signal that our natural systems are losing the ability to support the richness and diversity of life that they once did just decades ago. Because you are part of

our choir of people who love birds and nature, we need you more than ever to join us in lifting collective voices and influencing change.

Birds are resilient when we give them a chance - the data show that too. Waterfowl are up by 56%, and raptors have increased by 200% thanks to focused conservation funding and protections.

I urge you to share today's news with your friends and communities. Consider how you can influence change - whether social, civic, or personal - to raise awareness and help bring birds back.

Thank you for your ongoing support - it made this research possible. To read more about the findings and how you can help, please visit [Birds.Cornell.edu/Bring-BirdsBack](https://birds.cornell.edu/bring-birds-back).



## Mark your Calendar

### October:

- 5 - Berry Springs Fall Work Day/Pot Luck Luncheon
- 10 - NPSOT\*
- 14 - Master Gardeners\*
- 18 - Fall Native Plant Sale (Lady Bird Wildflower Center)
- 18-20 Texas Master Naturalist Program Annual Meeting
- 24 - GWMN\*
- 26 - GWMN Workday at the Pollinator Garden in the Hutto Landfill
- 28 - Austin Butterfly Forum\*

### November:

- 11 - Master Gardeners\*
- 14 - NPSOT\*
- 25 - Austin Butterfly Forum\*
- 28 - GWMN\*

\* Indicated Chapter Meeting

### Beauty and Wildlife in Your Yard and Garden (Senior University)

<https://senioruniv.org/classes/beauty-and-wildlife-in-your-yard-and-garden/>

Presenter: Martin Byhower  
Mondays, 10:30 am - 11:30 am  
Sun City Activities Center Atrium

- Week 3, 10/7 - Attracting birds
- Week 4, 10/14 - Attracting pollinators
- Week 5, 10/21 - Oh deer me!
- Week 6, 10/28 - Planning your native garden

# Luna Moth

By Winnie Bowen

The first Luna moth we saw in New Brunswick was in a sea cave. Far into the cave, it was too dark to photograph. The next one we saw was hanging on the under edge of a stairway outside our cabin. Never having seen one before and being totally unfamiliar with it I was quite fascinated with the beautiful unusual green insect. On a rainy afternoon my granddaughter was flipping through her pictures.

“Grandma, this is really beautiful, what do you know about it?” she asked as she showed me the picture. I responded, “ I don't know anything about it as I'd never seen one. Why don't you see what you can find out about it and then you can share it with others at dinner.”

I marvel every day at how quick these kids are using their phones and tech devices. In no time she is reading to me: The Luna moth is a Nearctic moth in the family Saturniidae, subfamily Saturniinae, a group commonly known as giant silk moths. In 1758 when Linnaeus created his binomial naming system he

named the moth. They are the largest moth in North America. Sometimes they are called Giant Silkworm Moths or Moon Moths.

Adult Luna moths live only 7-10 days, long enough to breed and lay eggs. The female can lay 400 to 600 eggs, four to six eggs at a time, on the underside of leaves. The large beautiful exotic moth ranges from 3 to 4.5 inches across. The broad wings are lime-green, each with a transparent eye-spot and a narrow reddish-rust colored band along the edges of both the forewings. The hindwings have delicate tail streamers whose eye-spots are thought to confuse predators. The larvae are green.

The Luna moth is seldom seen due to their brief adult life and nocturnal flying time. Like all giant silk moths, adults do not eat, and thus are not seen visiting flowers. Like many moths and butterflies, the beautiful moth has a docile personality. It has the normal four stages of development: egg, caterpillar, pupa (cocoon), and adult as other moths

and butterflies. Eggs hatch in about two weeks into a lime green caterpillar with small orange spots along the sides. The caterpillar eats hickory, sycamore and walnut leaves.

Luna moths represent rebirth, renewal of body and spirit, regeneration and may even symbolize the soul itself.



**The campground field at Berry Springs is mowed once or twice a year by an individual to harvest hay. In exchange for the mowing, hay is given to Berry Springs for the donkeys. The gentleman also fertilizes the field to get rid of invasives.**

## **The Peace of Wild Things by Wendell Berry**

*When despair for the world grows  
in me and I wake in the night at the  
least sound in fear of what my life  
and my children's lives may be,*

*I go and lie down where the wood  
drake rests in his beauty on the wa-  
ter, and the great heron feeds.*

*I come into the peace of wild  
things who do not tax their lives  
with forethought of grief.*

*I come into the presence of still  
water. And I feel above me the day-  
blind stars waiting with their light.  
For a time I rest in the grace of the  
world, and am free.*

Natural and Cultural Resource Management staff from Fort Hood invited Good Water Chapter to a bird banding on September 6. It was a scorcher of a day so we were through by 10:00 a.m. when both birds and people needed to get out of the heat. Here are some views of the event:



Black-capped Vireo - The BCV will be vacating their range at Fort Hood by mid-September. (photo by Hunter Yarbrough)



Jim Hailey shares his birding experience with a Junior Master Naturalist (note the open "bird log")



The group attending the bird banding (photo by Scott Summers).

Front Row (L to R): Wendy Deptula's Mom (I didn't get her name), Mary-Gail Hamilton, Emily West, Carole Minnix, Junior Master Naturalist, Sandra Spurlock

Back Row (L to R): Wendy Deptula (seasonal crew), Nick Glover (biologist), Dr. David Cimprich (field biologist), Jim Hailey, Mike Finn, Kate Knight, Ryan West, some guy with a camera - Oh, Hunter Yarbrough, Randy Spurlock, Amy Flinn, April Rohlich, Brad James

## Regal Darner: Welcome to the Neighborhood!

By Mike Farley

Williamson County's newest resident is *Coryphaseschma ingens* or Regal Darner. A member of the Aeschnidae family, this species is typically found in eastern or southern coastal Texas. Williamson County is on the western edge of its known range and according to one expert, "not seen in central Texas!". It makes the 90th Williamson county species observed and reported to Odonata Central, a national database. Texas has 243 total species, with the U.S. having 462.



October GWMN Meeting

October 24, 2019

"Good Bugs, Bad Bugs"

Presented by:

Wayne Rhoden, President,  
GWMN Chapter and former  
President, Williamson County  
Master Gardeners

# Berry Springs Pecan Trees

By Susan Blackledge

Berry Springs Pecan Orchard was planted in the 1920's by Admiral Mann, the fourth land owner of Berry Springs. This makes the majority of the trees in the grove approximately 100 years old. He planted the trees 45' apart and used a rifle scope to plant them straight and a chain to measure the length. He planted them in rows north, east, west and south of each other. Myself, and fellow crew member, the late Dan Wooten

counted the trees in the grove and adjacent areas in order to get a contract to spray zinc and pesticide to protect the trees. We stopped counting at 1,100. The trees suffered greatly during the drought of 2011. That year we had to cut down 36 large trees because they did not survive and or were severely damaged.

This summer, Arborist, Dennis Schey and I assessed the current status of the trees to decide if they needed trimming and/or removal. It was determined that 21 trees had to be removed due to damage, age, or the disease of hypoxlyn. Hypoxlyn canker causes a dark brown discoloration of the sapwood. With age the infected wood is lighter in color and has black zones or patterns in the wood. The core wood of the tree weakens and becomes cork-like, making the trunk or limb weak. It primarily occurs in trees that have had stress conditions. Control is achieved by maintaining the trees in healthy conditions. Chemical treatments are not effective because the fungus is located within the tree.



The trees we looked at closely were those that are at or near highly trafficked areas, ie. trails, pavilions, playground, and campground.



Due to safety, some of the trees had to be removed. Other trees

were trimmed back to prevent the spread of the disease. For more information on hypoxlyn go to <https://austin.org/gardening-landscaping/hypoxylon-canker-in-trees/>. One thing Dennis Schey did say was as an arborist he had never seen a grove of trees with so many heritage trees. Heritage trees are 24" or larger in girth. We have learned to protect what we have and plan for the future by nurturing those trees and planting more for the future.



# Old Man's Beard: Fence line blooms

By Mary Ann Melton

Old Man's Beard, *Clematis drummondii*, are very conspicuous all around Central Texas right now. The beautiful white, bushy seed plumes cover vines

growing along the rural fences. It is also called Drummond's clematis, Texas virgins' bower, or Goat's beard. This time of year white plumes from the seedpods catch the sunlight drawing our attention. It grows in dry soils

along roadsides, thickets, and canyons. The vines twine over weeds, shrubs and fences. It grows in central, south, and west Texas and westward to California.

It is clematis in the Ranunculaceae (Buttercup) family. During the bloom stage, the blooms are actually sepals rather than petals. Old Man's Beard flowers do not have petals. Sepals are the outer structure of flowers, surrounding petals and are usually green. Old Man's Beard sepals are creamy and scented. The flowers are small. The stems are grooved. The fruit are achene-type fruits, one-seeded dry fruits that don't split open when mature.

This woody vine is an aggressive plant, growing up to 100 feet long. The vines



can completely cover (and kill) trees and plants.

Wildlife use the plant for cover, birds eat the seeds and use the vines for nesting sites. It will attract bees and butterflies as well. It is the larval host plant for the Fatal metalmark butterfly.

It can be brewed as teas that are useful for headaches and migraines. The leaves can be used as a poultice to treat skin irritations in people and animals.

The plant is named for Thomas Drummond, a Scottish naturalist. He came to the United States in 1830 to collect specimens from the western and southern United States.

He arrived in Texas in 1833 and spent 21 months working between Galveston and the Edwards Plateau along the Brazos, Colorado, and Guadalupe rivers. He collected 750 species of plants and 150

specimens of birds that were distributed among the museums and scientific institutions of the world. He died in Cuba before completing his survey of Texas.

Old Man's Beard can be planted as a perennial ornamental because of its delicate foliage, long blooming attractive flowers, and beautiful feathery seed clusters. It should be grown along a fence or trellis. It can be grown from seeds, propagated by rooting from node cuttings, or transplanted while it is dormant in the winter. One can collect seeds from vines along county roads; by allowing the seed heads to dry on the plants, then remove and save the seeds for fall planting. The vine is drought resistant and tolerates shade. It is available from native plant nurseries. When grown as an ornamental, it is wise to deadhead it to avoid numerous seedlings. It should not be planted outside its native range because it can be invasive and damage other native plants.

A related species, *Clematis vitalba* is not native. It is also called traveller's joy or wild clematis. It came from Europe and South West Asia. This species should NOT be planted in Central Texas because it IS invasive.



The 20th Texas Master Naturalist Program Annual Meeting, will gather, learn and celebrate another year of the Texas Master Naturalist program. This year's event, in Rockwall, Texas, is Friday, October 18th through Sunday, October 20th. It will be at the Hilton Dallas/Rockwall Lakefront Hotel on the shores of Lake Ray Hubbard just east of Dallas.

Keynote Speaker: Nathan Van Vranken is a vertebrate paleontologist based out of the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex. When he isn't doing paleontology he works as a professor for the Tarrant and Dallas Community College School Districts teaching undergraduate geology courses. His research specialization ranges from understanding the Cretaceous geology of Texas, incorporating three dimensional visualizations into paleontology, fossil fish, coastal dinosaurs, marine reptiles, such as ichthyosaurs, and mosasaurs, along with the early evolution of tetrapods in the Appalachian basin.

# Monarch Migration

By Wizzie Brown



Many people want to know how they can help the monarch population as there are numerous news reports on how populations are declining. One way that most likely will NOT work is by rearing monarch butterflies to release into the wild. Researchers have found that monarchs raised in captivity are unable to orient for migratory purposes. Some monarch researchers are against the practice of releasing captive bred

I'm sure that many of you know about the migration of monarch butterflies. For those of you who do not or anyone who needs a refresher.....monarchs spend the winter in roosting spots. Monarchs west of the Rocky Mountains fly to areas along the California coast while monarchs east of the Rocky Mountains fly south to forests in the mountains of Mexico. This is a two way migration that happens in spring and fall, but monarch butterflies that fly north in spring are not the same butterflies that return in the fall. The butterflies that fly south in the fall, are the spring butterflies' children's grandchildren.

Not only are there two major migratory populations of monarchs in the U.S., but there may also be a population that overwinters in south Florida. A biologist at the University of Florida discovered recently that a non-migratory population of monarchs in south Florida also contained monarch butterflies from the Midwest and Texas. She discovered this using a technique called stable isotope analysis which looks at chemicals that are fixed in the monarch's wings as the wings developed and can therefore be tracked to plants fed upon as caterpillars. This paper suggests that monarchs may be overwintering in other locations than Mexico and California.

monarchs into wild populations for fear of disease transmission and the possibility of genetic effects when captive-bred butterflies mate with wild populations. You can read their statement here:

[https://monarchlab.org/images/uploads/attachments/Captive\\_Breeding\\_and\\_Releasing\\_Monarchs\\_oct2015.pdf](https://monarchlab.org/images/uploads/attachments/Captive_Breeding_and_Releasing_Monarchs_oct2015.pdf)

What can we do to help wild monarch populations?

Plant NATIVE milkweed and a pollinator garden. While spring monarch populations rely on milkweed to lay eggs and rear young, fall populations rely on nectar plants to provide energy for the journey south. Use an IPM approach for managing pests in your environment. Become a citizen scientist. There are numerous organizations that track monarch butterflies such as Monarch Watch and Journey North.

Go to this site to find out more about Texas monarchs and milkweed.

<http://texasento.net/dplex.htm>

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at 512.854.9600. Check out my blog at [www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com](http://www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com)

**In Review:**  
**Twelve Lessons of the Desert**  
By Judy Grimes

*Twelve Lessons of the Desert is a collection of nature notes and essays written by river guide, storyteller and artist Sam Richardson. He lives the Big Bend lifestyle in a little cabin on Rough Run Creek. With 17 years of journals filled with notes and observations, Richardson has provided the reader with astute insider views of what it is truly like to be immersed in Big Bend with all of its diversity and extremes.*

*Richardson provides a seasonal journey through Big Bend, beginning each month with lessons and insights he's learned and ends with a relevant drawing. In between the beginning and end of a lesson, the reader is privy to the seasonal rhythm of the land, weather and inhabitants. Through his narrative it is as if you are there, experiencing the desert as Richardson has and you begin to understand what gift each month bestows on those lucky enough to have experienced Big Bend.*

*I think Richardson says it best, "Twelve months, twelve lessons, each lesson tied to a month of the year, each month its own season. My spiritual connection to the land and to nature and to the changing seasons of Big Bend of Texas has been one of my greatest teachers. It has been said that there are no mistakes, only lessons, and that the universe will keep providing you with lessons, one at a time, until you learn them. It's true."*

# Thoughts On Volunteering

By Amy Flinn

As we drove home from our second round of bird banding at Fort Hood I looked at my terrible cell phone photos and felt a “failure to organize” the event (on my part). We slowly cooled-off in the car air-conditioning and recognized I was not made for September heat and humidity.

What am I getting at? Thank you for asking.

This is your pep talk about volunteering. What you new members, you members in training, and you long-time naturalists might need to be reminded of is this – NO ONE IS ASKING YOU TO BE PERFECT. Things will work out! Your skills will improve, or they will not. In either case you will learn something and can make future decisions accordingly.

I may never have Mary Ann Melton’s organizational skills, but I will continue to throw a party or two (and I can do Sign Up Genius now – so anything is possible).

I may never have Hunter Yarbrough’s skills in photography, but I will keep working and learning and borrow his photos when mine are bad.

I may never know the sparrows like Jim Hailey, but I know them better every year.

I will never tolerate the heat any better than I do now, but I can do most of my work in the cooler months and prepare for the odd day I am out in the summer heat (sunscreen, hat, water, shade, more water!).

The important thing is to find your niche. Try something new. Mike (Finn) and I are committed to Amphibian Watch. We are determined to be better birders and so we volunteer for Christmas

Bird Counts.

COMMERCIAL BREAK FOR CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS – Check the Audubon pages. There are bunches of counts in our area. They start as early as December 14 (Bell County).

Tell them you are a new (or bad) birder and you will be paired with an experienced one. They are fun, a great way to see and learn about birds – those familiar and unfamiliar, and an excellent way to earn volunteer hours.

And, while I am still a bad birder I know things now I did not know three years ago. I know where the hummingbirds feed at the ponds I monitor. I know where the Red-shouldered Hawks nest in the park where I walk Zelda each morning. And I know the rattling call of the Ringed Kingfisher (that is not supposed to be here, but is).

Find your park, your interest, your niche. Recruit your friends! Maybe they will go to the sparrow class with you or loan you a photograph or take you to hear the Spotted Chorus Frog calling from the flooded fields.



Left: Male Widow Skimmer, Inks Lake. Holly Zeiner photo.

Right: Northern Cloudywing, Berry Springs Park & Preserve. Susan Blackledge photo.



For more information about the Good Water Chapter contact us at:

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