

Good Water Ripples

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For information contact: <http://txmn.org/goodwater> or goodwatermn2@gmail.com

Lori Franz, Editor • Holly Zeiner, Layout/Design



Insects and the BIG FREEZE

By Wizzie Brown, Texas AgriLife

With most of Texas seeing freezing temperatures in February, I've been getting numerous questions on what it will do to the insect populations this year. Since we haven't experienced such cold temperatures along with ice and snow for a long time, the short answer is that we just don't know and will have to wait and see. I have a feeling that the majority of insects- and other arthropods-will be just fine because they have ways of surviving winter's cold temperatures.

Just like "snowbirds" that drive their RVs to Texas or Florida to spend the winter, there are certain groups of insects that migrate to new areas to spend the winter where temperatures are not as cold. A great example of this is the Monarch butterfly.

Another example that can be put into "human relation" terms would be insects that use cryoprotectants (anti-freeze compounds). The most commonly used compound that insects use for this purpose is ethylene glycol, which is the same compound that is in antifreeze that humans put into vehicles. Ethylene glycol allows the insect's body tissues to super-cool and remain above the freezing point.

Freeze tolerance is another modification that some insects use to survive winter temperatures. With this method, freezing causes water to be forced out of living cells and the fluid around the cells freeze.

These insects also empty their digestive tract to get rid of any food that contains water which could freeze and cause the digestive system to burst. Freeze tolerance is easier for smaller insects due to the fact that they have less fluid in their body because of their small size.

Some insects may gather together to create collective heat. Honey bees do this inside the hive during the winter to keep warm.

Other insects seek areas of shelter in areas where it is not so cold. An example is ladybugs that move indoors during colder months of the year. These insects move into homes through cracks and crevices or other areas that are not well sealed

when it gets cold. This can lead them indoors to become nuisance pests.

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at 512.854.9600. Check out Wizzie's blog at www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com

Other Winter Storm Resources:

<https://williamson.agrilife.org/winter-storm-recovery-for-lawns-and-landscape/>

<http://counties.agrilife.org/williamson/files/2021/03/Ice-Damage-and-Oak-Wilt.pdf>



Animal tracks in the February snow!

Photo by Mary Ann Melton



About

Members 15

Join Texas Parks and Wildlife, Texas Master Naturalists, the Nature Conservancy, the Audubon Society, and many others in a fun challenge to see which city can document the most species during April 30 - May 3. It is easy to participate by joining an event or making observations on your own using the iNaturalist

[Read More >](#)

[Project Journal](#)

Austin Metro Area 2021 City Nature Challenge

By Mike Farley

Hello Good Water Members!

It is that time of year again for the annual worldwide City Nature Challenge. Starting midnight April 30th running four days, to midnight May 3rd for observing. You will have the following five days to get photos uploaded and identified.

This usually counts for volunteer hours, however there are new TMN rules regarding your own property. You can still document wildlife on your property, and you should, but you cannot claim

volunteer hours for that portion.

Here is the link to join the project:

<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/city-nature-challenge-2021-austin>

And a link to last year's project:

<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/city-nature-challenge-2020-austin>

Time to dust off that camera lens and get outside and help document the Austin area biodiversity. Be sure to take a look at the map to see the large boundary

area for observing.

I hope to see a lot of Good Water members on the list like last year!

“All Texas Master Naturalist events, meetings, service projects must be compliant with all federal, state, county and local public health proclamations and ordinances. Safety is our guiding principle for operations.” (Texas Master Naturalist)



Mexican Plum Trees at Berry Springs

By Susan Blackledge

Every year the Mexican plums on the Nature Trail at Berry Springs open up the Spring season. You can smell them and hear the bees before you even see them. Don't wait too long to come and see them. The leaves quickly overcome the blooms. It's a sight I look forward to every year.

For further information:

https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=prme 🦋



Berry Springs Winter Storm Clean-Up

By Susan Blackledge

We had quality vs. quantity at this year's Annual Spring Clean Up. Covid pandemic and no delicious potluck lunch could be to blame, however we got a lot of work done despite the situation.

The ice storm really hit the succulents hard while some of the plants were insulated by the ice and snow and will be just fine. We look forward to seeing if the 25 acres of prairie that were seeded this last fall with native wildflowers and grasses

weathered the storm and will put on a show this spring.

There is always plenty of volunteering to be done at the park. Contact Susan Blackledge, Park Manager and fellow Master Naturalist @ susieblackledge@gmail.com to find out what you can help with.

Come enjoy the Spring by taking a hike on the trails. Things are blooming! 🌸



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Wintering Pine Siskins

By Martin Byhower

Anyone with birdfeeders noticed huge numbers of Cedar Waxwings, American Robins, and especially Pine Siskins visited us this winter. Responsible factors may be wildfires in the West combined with failed production of conifer seeds further North, causing them to migrate South in huge numbers. This is happening in much of the nation, but what folks in Texas may not know is that in Washington state, an outbreak of salmonellosis among Pine Siskins is proving lethal to them. Washington authorities are asking everyone to discontinue feeding seeds to songbirds for now. Salmonella is spread by fecal contamination, and large concentrations of birds at feeders is suspected to exacerbate the problem. The idea is to encourage birds to disperse and feed on wild natural foods until the problem subsides.

In Central Texas, we are observing what may be the beginning of a similar problem. Birds around feeders are slow and lethargic. Their feathers are puffed up and they are perhaps showing crusty material on their beaks. We have noticed an increase of dead birds around feeders.

There is no conclusive evidence, yet that salmonella is here, but the conditions seem right. I've been corresponding with Kelly Simon, wildlife biologist with Texas Parks and Wildlife, and she has shared the following with me:

"I would absolutely encourage people to take down feeders, clean them thoroughly with a 10% bleach solution, and leave them down for a week to let birds disperse and recirculate. Salmonella is almost always in the soil, but it becomes a problem when there is a high concentration of animals in one area. There are other viral, fungal, and bacterial potential causes too. We're sometimes able to take samples of birds into the Texas Veterinary Medical Diagnosis Lab at Texas A&M to try to learn more about what sickened them. So far, the few tests we've been able to run have been negative for salmonellosis, so we'll do a wider battery of tests in the future if we continue to see these mortalities."

I believe it is OK to continue to feed birds with suet and mealworms, and to use hummingbird feeders, since the Siskins are primarily seed eaters. Many of

our resident and wintering species that eat seed may also eat these other foods. I recommend cleaning bird baths and water features daily and replacing water regularly if it is recirculating. There are many non-birdbath water sources for our birds. Feeding suet and sugar water for hummingbirds, which are now showing up, can probably be done safely if done well.

Regarding hummingbirds, my own philosophy is to avoid feeding them anything except nectar from native plants. Native plants also provide shelter, nesting material, and the fruits, seeds and insects that all of our birds would normally eat. Additionally, dead leaves support huge numbers of insects in order to support just one set of nestlings, chickadees for example.

The following link provides helpful information on feeding birds and discussions and illustrations of native plants that support them:

<https://www.martinbyhower.com/attracting-birds-to-your-garden.html> 🐦



Waiting for Spring!

Photos by: Top Left, Mike Farley's game camera; Middle, Mary Ann Melton; Far Right, Lori Franz.

Beavers in My Backyard

By Mary Ann Melton

My first experience with beavers occurred when I was a young child. My family visited Rocky Mountain National Park and I got to see a beaver lodge where the pond had been drained. I wondered at the time if I would ever see a beaver in person. In my early married years, we camped in the mountains in Colorado and drove the backroads. While there were lots of beaver dams and beaver lodges, the beavers themselves remained elusive. But later, we began to be in the right place at the right time to truly see the beavers working and get some decent photographs of beavers. Even though I knew that there were beavers in Texas they seemed far away and remote.

Some years back I DID see a swimming mammal in my pond, but I did not see it well enough to determine if it was beaver or nutria. It was a one-time sighting.

I saw nutria at Hornsby Bend. I had even seen beaver at Hutto Lake and at the lake in Murphy Park. But in the last couple of years with the Good Water Trail Cameras, beavers were documented at Berry Springs Park. I was with another naturalist when I saw a roadkill beaver just north of Hutto near a drainage ditch. I had heard from other neighbors that river otters had been seen nearby, so I began putting up my own game cameras near my pond.

A couple of months ago, I was rewarded with photos of not one, not two, but THREE beavers. One of them is obviously young. I now have video of the mom and young beaver eating together, grooming each other, and swimming away together. Last week, I was down at the pond near the end of the day and I was rewarded by seeing the beaver actually swimming on the far side of the pond. I never ever dreamed that I would get to have a beaver family living in my backyard!

I have asked permission and received it

to do some exploring on my neighbor's property hoping to find the lodge. So far, I have not found it. I have set up some cameras over there hoping to record more beaver activity as the activity at my spot seems to have slowed down. After moving a newer better camera to the beaver spot, a low battery may have prevented some possible observations. Currently raccoons are the primary visitor.

iNaturalist is an amazing resource. While it has only been in existence since about 2013, people have been adding historical observations as well. The first beaver observations in Williamson County are from 2010, reported in 2013. The observations picked up in 2018 as we got the Nature Tracker project going at Berry Springs. But when you look at the iNaturalist map of observations, beavers have been seen all over Williamson County. As of March 27, 2021, there have been 153 observations by 29 observers.

While beavers are considered keystone species because of their ability to create habitat with their dam building skills, my pond is long established. Thus far I have seen no evidence of them cutting down trees or saplings. They seem to be eating the bark off the willow trees that grow by the edge of the water.

In some of the videos you can hear them gnawing away. My pond area has four owners. I have concern that not all of them will appreciate the beavers. Occasionally I hear gunshots. I believe them to be target practice, but when I hear them, I fear for the wildlife that is being concentrated in my little neighborhood because of all the new houses coming in around me. For now, I will try to spend more time by the pond at the end of the day hoping for beaver sightings. I never expected to have beavers in my backyard. I will enjoy them all I can while they are here.

To see the beaver observations in Wil-

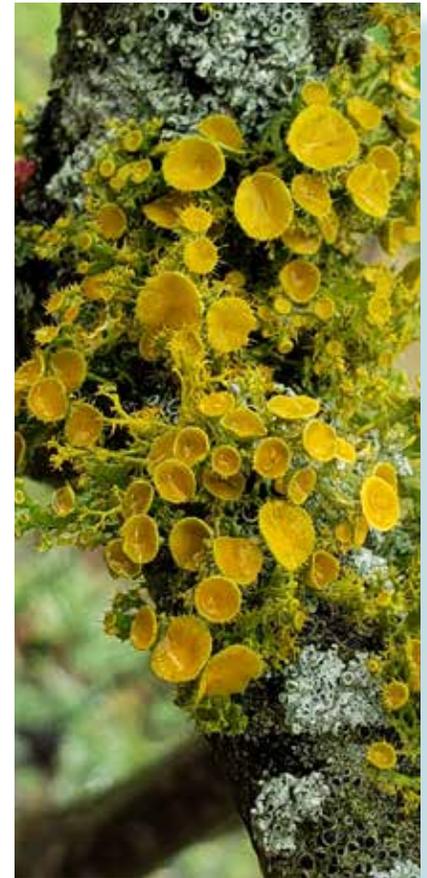
liamson County on iNaturalist:

<https://tinyurl.com/382pdu4d>

You can check out the map and all the individual observations.

To see my beaver videos: Playlist Beavers in My Backyard:

tinyurl.com/4bsr3s5e 🍀



Tree lichen.

Photo by April Roblich

Pine Siskins and Icicles

Story and Photos by Jack Cochran

In mid-February, Winter Storm Uri walloped Central Texas with stunning cold and almost every type of freezing precipitation. For about five days, I wondered if somehow, I'd been teleported back to Pennsylvania during some amnesic episode. While the weather was hard on humans, it was perhaps even tougher on birds.

"My birds" were tearing through the food I provided. I restocked the station five times a day and went through a typical winter months' worth of food in a week. Ruby-Crowned Kinglets would land on me, or the feeder in my hand,



especially first thing in the morning as I slathered out the peanut butter mix.

During Uri, I had birds feeding I haven't regularly seen in my Williamson County suburban backyard including: Fox Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Vesper Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Western Meadowlark,

Brewer's Blackbird, and Audubon's Yellow-rumped Warbler. Eastern Towhee and Spotted Towhee spent the season with me, and were more easily viewed during the cold blast, some-



times feeding only a few inches apart.

While finding food was paramount for bird survival during the winter storm, getting fresh water was also a challenge. I did my best to keep the bird bath thawed and filled.

Perhaps they got tired of waiting on me, but the Pine Siskins found a unique way to get drinking water; they sipped it from melting icicles! Fortunately, I had my camera at hand and snapped a few behavioral photos, which I dropped

into iNaturalist. To my surprise, *it was selected as their Observation of the Day on February 27!* While I won't vote for additional interesting sightings that involve sub-freezing weather in Central Texas, I'm glad I was here for this one. 🌿

Boxelder Bugs

By Wizzie Brown

Boxelder bugs are dark brownish-black insects with reddish-orange markings around the edges of the thorax and wings. These bugs are about ½ an inch long as an adult. Nymphs, or immatures, look like adults but are smaller and do not have fully developed wings which allows you to see their bright red abdomen.



While boxelder bugs typically do not cause damage to the landscape or structure, they may become a nuisance in and around homes beginning in the fall and continuing until spring. In fall, adults and large nymphs gather in large numbers and move to overwintering

areas. Boxelder bugs spend winter in cracks and crevices in walls, around door and window casings, in tree holes and in debris on the ground. Sometimes boxelder bugs try to move indoors for overwintering. On warm days from fall until spring, adult boxelder bugs emerge from their overwintering location to warm themselves in the sun.

Removing female boxelder trees from the area may solve problems with large, repeated infestations of boxelder bugs. Hiding places can be reduced or eliminated by removing debris such as boards, leaves and rocks from the area as well as sealing any cracks and crevices around the home

with caulk or expanding foam. If chemical treatment is desired, treat overwintering areas with chemicals containing active ingredients such as pyrethrins, cyfluthrin, bifenthrin, carbaryl or acephate.

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at 512.854.9600. Check out my blog at www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com

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Regulations 101: The Clean Water Act

Story by Valorie Michna, Photos by Mary Ann Melton

The very name of our chapter (“Goodwater”) describes one of the resources that made Williamson County a welcoming place for the people who settled here. So, why do we now have a web of regulations surrounding it?

Where have we been?

Prior to the Clean Water Act (CWA) of 1972, Texas’ efforts to address water quality dealt with drinking water standards and

the establishment of freshwater supply, water control, and water improvement districts. It was not until 1953 that the Texas Water Pollution Control Advisory Council in the Department of Health was charged with dealing with pollution-related issues. In 1967 the Texas Water Quality Act established the Texas Water Quality Board.

By the early 1970s American waterways were in trouble. Most were unsafe for fishing and swimming. In June 1969 the Cuyahoga River in Ohio caught

on fire for the 10th time because of unchecked pollution from local industry. Lake Erie was dying from all of the waste dumped into it. Major cities took their drinking water from inferior sources because other sources were far worse. Then, in 1972 the CWA was passed.

How does the CWA work?

In a nutshell, the CWA states that discharges into the nation’s waters are unlawful unless authorized by a permit.

It also set controls for municipalities and industry.

The CWA requires permits for point sources (such as pipes and man-made ditches) that are discharged into surface waters. Permits may come from the EPA or an agency or town that has been del-

egated such authority. For example, the EPA has delegated authority to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) which in turn requires municipalities to enforce CWA requirements in their local communities. Therefore, a business may have environmental compliance requirements from their local municipality, the State of Texas, and the EPA.

What about now?

On December 28, 1977 an EPA press release stated, “The day is past when our rivers and streams are the dumping place of unwanted

chemicals, and the Act leaves little room for dischargers to avoid their obligation to protect public health.” Since then there have been some improvements, but many of our waterways are still impaired.

Editor’s Note: The Goodwater Master Naturalist Chapter has been involved in stream monitoring since 2014.

Texas Stream Team is a statewide network of citizen scientists and supportive partners working together to gather information about water quality in our streams. Texas Stream Team is administered through a cooperative partnership between The Meadows Center for Water and the Environment, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Texas Stream Team trains Texans on how to collect water quality data, such as pH, dissolved oxygen, and conductivity in nearby rivers and lakes. Contact Joe Ross for more information about the Good Water Texas Stream Monitoring Project Team.

LINK to JOE ROSS ABOVE: <https://txmn.org/goodwater/contact-stream-team/>

Photos: Effluent-driven streams – Brushy Creek, San Gabriel

The Master Naturalists Program does not advocate or support political direction. This article is for information only.



Got Food? Raccoons are always looking for food!

Photo from Mike Farley’s game camera.

In Memorium - Greg Lasley

By Austin American-Statesman Staff Reporter

Greg Lasley passed into eternity on January 30, 2021. Raised in a military family, he served in the US Air Force as a loadmaster from 1969 to 1973. After he left the Air Force, he became an Austin police officer, rising through the ranks to become a lieutenant. He retired from APD in 1997.

As a teenager, Greg began serious study of nature, beginning with venomous snakes. He worked in the snake exhibit at the Atlanta Zoo, milking snakes for their venom, and kept snakes in aquariums in the family basement. After his service in the Air Force, he became fascinated with birds after seeing Painted Buntings on his bird feeder in Austin. He began photographing birds because older birders sometimes challenged his claims that he had seen a bird that was rarely found in Austin. With photos in hand, he could prove that he had seen the rarities. He became well known as the expert on Texas rarities. Photography became a passion and a talent that he continued to develop. Many hundreds of his photographs have been published in magazines, reference books, and field guides, as well as in a

book devoted to his photos. Later, Greg became interested in dragonflies and, as with birds, made himself a recognized expert on North American odonates.

For over two decades, Greg led bird-watching tours for Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, traveling the western hemisphere and Antarctica to show others the wonders of the natural world. One of

his greatest talents was as a gentle teacher and patient guide for nature lovers learning about birds and insects. Through his tireless efforts for the citizen-scientist database, iNaturalist, Greg influenced nature lovers around the world, many of whom will miss his presence on that site, despite never having met him except online. 🍃



Beautiful spring trees showing off at Berry Springs!

Photo by Susan Blackledge.



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

<http://txmn.org/goodwater>

or

goodwatermn2@gmail.com

