



NATURALIST NOTES

November 2024

“I must say as to what I have seen of Texas it is the garden spot of the world.”

Davy Crockett



Voting with my Hands

No matter what you think about the current or future government, you can vote with your time, talents and treasure any day. November 15th, I voted with my hands, planting *A. zizotes* in the roadside ditches at Nelson Farm. I didn't sign up to “dig holes in a ditch” (fellow planter) but rather to support the next generation of monarchs.

Dogs and Bumblebees

German Short-haired Pointers are sniffing out bumble bee nests. This helps researchers find the nests and discover the needs of bumble bees and how to plan conservation efforts. The biggest threats to bumble bees appear to be habitat loss and pesticide use.

Source: msn.com

Check out our website

<https://txmn.org/gulfcoast/>



Artist Boat Awarded Grant

Exploring Environmental Health Hazards with STYLE (Sustained Training for Youth Leadership in the Environment)

Project Director: Amy Neblett, Artist Boat
Award: \$499,785

Summary: This place-based experiential program will focus on the use of science and art to understand climate change, sea-level rise, and extreme storm flooding and the pollution left behind after these events, along with addressing the stress and anxiety of living in a place where these environmental hazards are a present concern. Engaging 800 students and eight teachers from four high schools, participants will examine environmental hazards in their local communities through a series of classroom-based workshops and eco art kayak adventures. Additionally, 100 students of those 800 will participate in a paid field mentorship program where they will work with art educators and environmental health researchers to investigate and understand the effects of environmental hazards on the health and resiliency of their local communities.

Artist Boat

New Trails at Willow Waterhole

We're thrilled to announce the opening of two new trails at the Willow Waterhole Greenway, including the Donald Perkins Neighborhood Trail, honoring our former District K Chief of Staff. Donald dedicated so much to our community, and this trail, running from the Chimney Rock/West Bellfort intersection to Heron Lake's Audubon Trail, is a fitting tribute that he would have truly loved.

A big thanks to Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy for making this possible! The second addition, the Menninger Trail, was made possible by an easement from The Menninger Clinic and connects Scout Lake's O'Quinn and Bayou Trails to Heron Lake.

With eight miles of scenic trails ready to explore, it's the perfect time to enjoy the cooler weather! Look out for maps at key trailheads to help guide you.

District K Newsletter



Organism of the Month

Portuguese man o' war (*Physalia physalis*)

While walking on the beach at Galveston Island State Park, I came across several Portuguese man o' war. This siphonophore is comprised of a colony of genetically identical zooids, specializing in four different functions: floating, catching prey, eating prey, and reproduction. The tentacles used for catching prey are studded with cells containing a venom. Mature colonies are either right- or left-handed.

Their prey is mostly small fish, and they are preyed upon by sea turtles as well as nudibranchs. The nudibranchs put the venomous cells into their skin for self-defense.

Each Portuguese man o' war has a single sex, male or female. Reproduction begins with the release of a gonodendron, a complex structure without a sail. These contain either eggs or sperm. However, further details are unclear.

Most of the information about Portuguese man o' war comes from those close to shore or washed up on the beach. Their life on the open ocean remains a mystery.

Source: Munro, C., Vue, Z., Behringer, R.R. *et al.* Morphology and development of the Portuguese man of war, *Physalia physalis*. *Sci Rep* 9, 15522 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-019-51842-1>

Musings

Since becoming a master naturalist, I have enjoyed a wider perspective on so much in my daily existence, whether I am on the road, on holiday or at home. I have also learned a lot by simply stepping into my garden and observing. It is incredible how much I notice after a few minutes just standing, watching and waiting.

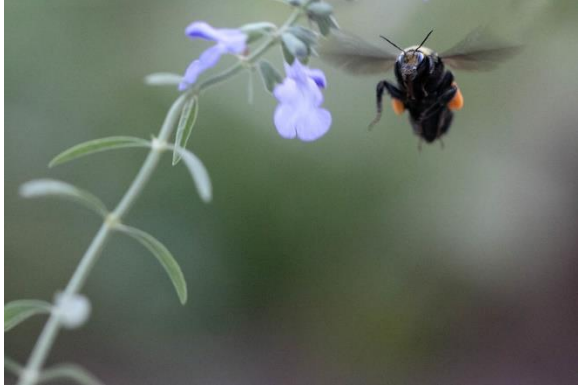
Over the past few years, I have learned how to identify an American Bumble Bee (*Bombus pensylvanicus*) and other native bee visitors to my garden such as carpenter and leafcutter bees and a variety of wasps. From my iNaturalist observations (ajmatthews) of my visiting American Bumble Bees, I learned that this bee's conservation status is "vulnerable" (it is a threatened species of bumble bee) so I feel a heightened sense of responsibility and awe when I spot one visiting. It makes me realize that my efforts devoted to improving / enhancing my garden as a habitat are paying off: every new visitor shows me that I am doing something right and if my visitors come back year after year, then I assume that perhaps some of them are residents. This is what many of us spend our time on: creating habitats and contributing to an ecosystem.

I now watch and wait every year for the American Bumble Bee to visit my Missouri Ironweed (*Veronia missurica*) and Blue sage (*Salvia azurea*) when it is finally in flower. I have had the American Bumble bee visiting these plants for the past few years, so now I wait with anticipation or perhaps trepidation, then sigh in relief and delight when it finally appears.

This year, as the weeks have flown by, as the blooms on the Missouri Ironweed and *Salvia azurea* are almost over, I have seen the American Bumble Bee visit other flowers. The American Bumble Bee appears to prefer blues and purples, and I noticed one at least has found the Mealy Blue Sage (*Salvia farinacea*) I recently planted (from Mountain Home near Kerrville, not a local native) and in bloom. The Bumble Bee has also finally resorted to visiting the non-native zinnias in my garden and I spotted one on a yellow zinnia last week – the first deviance from its usual flower color preference that I have seen.

Naturally, not much else gets accomplished when one starts looking as, treated right, the outdoors is a gift that never stops giving. When one stops to observe for long enough, one is rewarded by an inkling into the way some of our visitors behave.

Andrea Matthews



Left - American Bumblebee (*Bombus pensylvanicus*) approaching Blue Sage (*Salvia azurea*). Note the orange-yellow pollen. Right - feeding on Missouri Ironweed (*Veronia missurica*). She has a fuzzy heinie! Pictures by Andrea Matthews

Dues are Due!

Annual Gulf Coast chapter dues are due in January. Everyone who wants to remain active in the program needs to pay \$21/year.

On our website <https://txmn.org/gulfcoast/> select the Current Members tab, and "Pay Dues" button and follow the prompts. You do not need to have a PayPal account to pay online.

For help with paying dues, please contact Rebecca Lloyd

Last Chapter Meeting of Year – Thursday December 5th

We'll have a party for our last monthly chapter meeting on Thursday, December 5th starting 6:30 pm. Please stay tuned for further details.

“But of all the months when earth is greener
Not one has clean skies that are cleaner.
Clean and clear and sweet and cold,
They shine above the earth so old,
While the after-tempest cloud
Sails over in silence though winds are loud,
Till the full moon in the east
Looks at the planet in the west
And earth is silent as it is black,
Yet not unhappy for its lack. “

Excerpt from “November” by Edward Thomas
In the public domain

YOUR Chapter Needs YOU

Our chapter cannot function without dedicated board members and the volunteers who support them. Please consider joining one of the committees.