



HIGHLAND LAKES CHAPTER

MISSION

The Texas Master Naturalist program is a natural resource-based volunteer training and development program sponsored statewide by Texas AgriLife Extension and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

The mission of the program is to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers who provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the state of Texas

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FALLING OUT!

by Billy Hutson

Well I suppose that got your attention. What I want to discuss here is the falling of autumn leaves which should be excellent this year because of the dry hot weather. Of course we will need some rather cool fall temperatures close to 40 degrees at night in Oct. and Nov. to finalize it, but we are off to a good start for some pretty colors this fall/winter.

Deciduous trees sense the shortening of the days as fall approaches and realize that their photosynthesizing capabilities are coming to a halt because of the lesser amount of sun they will have to work with. When this happens a layer of cells at the base of the leaves begins to close off the transfer of water to the leaf and the process shuts down and the leaves go dormant for the winter. In most deciduous leaves the leaves fall off after a short show of color with the exception of oak leaves that remain on for the winter.

Evergreens are the exception to this rule as their leaves have a tough waxy coating and an antifreeze liquid that enables them to survive the winter freezes, loose little water and slowly photosynthesize all winter with less sunlight if they get enough water intake to make up for the small water losses. They can each survive several years before they die and are replaced.

The roots, branches and twigs of the deciduous trees can withstand the freezes but the soft leaves cannot so they go dormant. And when they do the chlorophyll begins to dissipate unmasking the colors already there and some new ones that are formed.

The yellows (xanthophyll) and oranges

(carotene) in our Ashes and Sycamores has always been there and is merely uncovered. The same thing happens in bananas as the



green chlorophyll dissipates the yellow shows up and the starches are changed to sugar. The reds and purples (anthocyanin pigments) which are potent antioxidants found in beets, grapes, apples and our oaks and persimmons are produced in the fall because of the sun's action on the now trapped and unveiled glucose in the leaves.



The browns come from the wastes left over in the oak leaves and are tannins. The

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Indians used the tannin in acorns, bark and leaves to tan hides of buffalo, deer and other small mammals.

So if there is a good side to our drought, it would be that we may be able to experience an exceptional fall foliage in our hill country this year.

Here's hoping to see everyone soon after I return and maybe it will be to a brightly colorful fall.

OCTOBER MEETING

by Fredi Franki

Our next chapter meeting is Wednesday, October 5, 1:00pm, at the Kingsland Library.

The program speaker is Bill Lindemann and his topic is geology of the Big Bend area. Many of you know Bill, but here are just some of his accomplishments.

- University of Texas Graduate (BS-60, MA-63) in geology
- Worked for 32 years with Exxon as Exploration

Geologist, retired to Fredericksburg in 1994

- Wrote a weekly birding column in the Fredericksburg Standard Radio-Post and the Kerrville Daily Times since 1997; currently only writing for the Kerrville Daily Times

- Former President of the Native Plant Society of Texas (2001 and 2006)

- President of the Board of Directors for the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center (FFNC currently operating nature trails in Lady Bird Johnson City Park, Fredericksburg)

- President of the Hill Country Land Trust

- Frequent speaker in the Hill Country on natural history subjects to schools, garden clubs, professional and service organizations

- Teaches classes on birding and nature at nature centers and adult education schools

- Current interest: Promoting historical and natural preservation in the Texas Hill Country through education, outreach and example.



Save the Date

Wednesday, December 7th

in the evening

Our December Meeting

and Celebration

CONGRATULATIONS!

Photos by Jerry Stone



Carol Kowing (r) received her 250 hour pin and 2011 Horned Toad pin. Ben Kowing (np) also received his 2011 Horned Toad pin. Also Pictured (l - r) are Vice-President Fredi Franki and Awards Chairperson Sue Kersey.

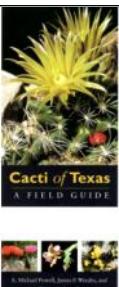
Linda Fleming received her 2010 wood duck pin.



Stewardship

An ethic that embodies cooperative planning and management of environmental resources with organizations, communities and others to actively engage in the prevention of loss of habitat and facilitate its recovery in the interest of long-term sustainability

MORE INTERESTING READING ON BIG BEND!



Cacti of Texas, A Field Guide, with Emphasis on the Trans-Pecos Species, A. Michael Powell, James F. Weedin, and Shirley A. Powell (2008), Texas Tech University Press Reviewed by Margy Butler

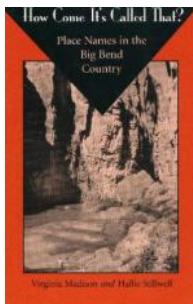
This comprehensive field guide for cacti is based on the definitive work *Cacti of the Trans-Pecos and Adjacent Areas* (Powell and Weedin), 2004, and was published with the expressed purpose of providing simpler, less technically detailed treatments of the State's species for use by "educated general readers". The book is an important reference work – detailed, clear identification language, excellent photo plates, and range maps large enough to give a very good idea where you might actually find each species. And with all those important technical qualities comes text that doesn't want to let you go. It would be easy just to sit down in the middle of a cactus field and READ because the text is just so remarkably interesting.

Identification aids are numerous for each species – beautiful color plates of the plants in bloom, and also in fruit. There are identification keys (just ask a member of the Taxonomy Class for further information – they'll explain how to read 'em, and also how to write

'em!) The distribution maps are excellent. The descriptive text of vegetative characteristics, flowers and fruits is clear and comprehensible. Ecology and conservation are addressed, as well as overharvesting. The opening Morphology section is very clearly written, addressing common misidentification issues as well as the biology of cacti. This text is a superb cacti field guide.

The book is available online from the Big Bend Natural History Association or you will also be able to find it, along with other of his published works, when we stop in at Front Street Books in Alpine on Monday morning. Dr. Powell has agreed to meet with us at Front Street as well, and will be available for questions and conversation about Trans-Pecos flora.

On Sunday morning, those who travel to Alpine on the added early day, Saturday, will be meeting with Dr. Powell in The Herbarium at Sul Ross, for an overview of the work done there and a tour of the Herbarium, of which he is the Director.



How Come It's Called That? Place Names in the Big Bend Country, Virginia Madison and Hallie Stillwell (1997), Iron Mountain Press, originally published 1958, New Mexico University Press
Reviewed by Margy Butler

Hallie Crawford Stillwell was a legend in her own time. Born in Waco, she was an icon for the pioneer western woman. She and her folks moved to the Big Bend when she was 12, and when she was 16 "armed with a high school diploma, a teacher's certificate, and a six-shooter – (she) moved to Presidio, Texas to teach school, just across the Rio Grande from Ojinaga, Mexico, where Pancho Villa and his raiders were on the rampage." (Iron Mountain Press background and review.) In 1918 she married Roy Stillwell and for 30 years rode beside him taking care of cattle business on their ranch just north of the Rio del Norte, just east of what is now Big Bend National Park. She learned the country, and the people, and when Roy Stillwell died in 1948 she remained on the land and ran the ranch. Hard years. You'll remember Kim Bacon's review of Kelton's book about the drought of record for Texas

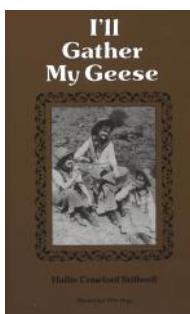
in the early 50's. That's when Hallie started writing down her experiences in the Trans-Pecos, to earn some extra money to keep the ranch running. She was a reporter, a lecturer, and even served for 20 years as a JP in Alpine.

In the mid 50's, when her friend Virginia Madison and she began to wonder who would carry forward the authentic stories of the place names of the Big Bend, and who would even be around in later years to authenticate the stories, they decided to set down on paper these place naming legends. In the Introduction of their book they state: "If there are several versions to the story of how a place was named we have given all the versions, but if you find something you don't believe, remember that this is how we heard it, for all the stories come from the people. And you will miss the most important commodity the Big Bend has to offer if you don't get to know the people."

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This book is mesmerizing. It is full of topography and geography along with stories of early man sites. It is a guide book for the very road that we will be travelling along between Alpine and Lajitas, naming features along the route and their naming stories (albeit in reverse of the way that we will be travelling.) The book is available from Iron Mountain Press http://www.ironmtnpress.com/book_how-come.asp or you

can pick it up at Front Street Books when we get to Alpine. It is also available in several of our local libraries. No matter where you find it, those of you going on the Trans-Pecos trip ought to read it before we venture out. Its 120 pages make for a fast read, and it surely sets the stage for a better understanding of the compelling country in which we'll be travelling.



I'll Gather my Geese, Hallie Stillwell (1991), Texas A&M Press

Reviewed by Sharon Drake

The Stillwell Ranch runs along the northern border of Big Bend National Park. There is a gravel road off to the east just before the entrance to the park that cuts through the Stillwell property. It continues for twenty-eight miles past an RV park and convenience store through expanses of nothing but yucca, prickly pear, and a wild horse or burro now and then to the Texas border. It was down this road thirty years ago that my husband, our little daughter, and I headed toward La Linda Crossing in a 1953 Studebaker pickup with no air conditioner on a 115 degree summer day.

La Linda Crossing was only a group of about three vacant buildings and a small bridge across the Rio Grande into Mexico. It had been a way to transport fluorspar from a mine in Mexico into the U.S., but it had been abandoned a few years earlier.

We were in this desolate area because my brother-in-law and a couple of his friends had been spending several days canoeing the river. My husband's brother needed to return to work and so planned to leave his friends at La Linda and return home. We were to meet them at the crossing to take him back home.

There was no shade except under the bridge. So we piled out of the Studebaker to wait, not knowing how long it would be. Our companions under the bridge were a group of goats. Amazingly, it was less than half an hour when we saw the canoe coming around the bend in the river, and soon the four of us were crowded into the pickup seat and headed back up the road. When the Stillwell store came into view, we decided to stop for a drink. Inside the little store was an elderly woman behind the counter who greeted us heartily. We had a very interesting conversation with her about the area and the life she had had. I didn't know at the time that this was Hallie Stillwell, the well-known ranch woman who, since 1918, had lived and ranned one of the roughest areas in the

country. I did know that she served up the coldest, best coke I ever drank.

Hallie Stillwell wrote three books about her life in the remote Big Bend area where she taught school, managed a restaurant, raised children, herded cattle, ran a store, and served as justice of the peace. Her first book was *I'LL GATHER MY GEESE* which is a fascinating view of life in the Texas desert.

The book jacket gives a good overview of Hallie's writing that I'm sure I can't better. Therefore, I'll quote from that work.

"In 1916, Hallie Crawford went to teach school in Presidio, just across the Rio Grande for Ojinaga, Mexico, which had been recently captured by Pancho Villa. Hallie's father, considering this a dangerous place for a young woman of nineteen to live alone, told her he thought she was going on a wild goose chase. 'Then I'll gather my geese', she told him, with determination and independence. These traits stayed with Hallie all her life, and were indispensable in her role as a ranch wife.

Raised as a "proper" Southern woman, Hallie was not prepared for the difficulties she faced when she moved to her new home, the Stillwell Ranch, in 1918. But she quickly became an invaluable part of the workings on the ranch. She watched and learned from her husband, Roy Stillwell, and she adjusted to the new life-style that she grew to love. The ranch hands, who thought she would only last six months, came to respect her and her abilities to do as much work as any man on the ranch. They became a family. Then Roy and Hallie started a family of their own. Three children were a handful and the Stillwell family split its time between the ranch and a home in town. The ranch and its inhabitants survived two world wars, the depression, droughts, an influenza epidemic, as well as the every day troubles of ranching in the big bend country. Hallie's story, told in personal and engaging way, is fascinating reading for anyone interested in the history of pioneering ranching in Texas."

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKES AND FOOD CACHES

By Sherry Bixler

Loggerhead Shrikes *Lanius ludovicianus* are found year-round in the southern half of the United States to northern states and south central Canada to breed. The similar Northern Shrike does not appear in Texas but winters in northern states and breeds in Alaska and northern Canada.

Shrikes are loners and are never found in large numbers. These numbers are declining as more open land is lost to development. One study showed that each pair of shrikes needs about 25 acres of territory. Shrikes also prefer an absolute minimum of human presence, making them seem even rarer.

The Loggerhead Shrike is about 9 inches long and clearly patterned in black, gray and white. It could be confused with the Northern Mockingbird except for its distinctive black mask, sharper color delineations and heavier bill.

Shrikes produce 4 to 7 eggs which are hatched in about two weeks and fledged three weeks later. Adults continue to feed their young for a few weeks after fledging. The entire shrike family may migrate north after this, or migrate higher in the mountains if that higher elevation provides more food. Their diet includes mostly insects, especially grasshoppers, but they also take mice, lizards, small snakes and small birds.

Shrikes hunt from conspicuous perches on trees, wires and fences and often sit quietly until they spot their prey. They have excellent vision and attack the prey with their strong bills instead of their talons. They are able to hover while hunting but generally dive quickly for something on the ground.

Shrikes have a musical song but can also make harsh sounds when alarmed. Their practice of impaling their prey on thorns or wire barbs and their unusual status of predatory songbird have earned them the nickname of Butcher Bird.

Impaling grasshoppers and other prey can be a way of storing food during times of plenty and shrikes often use their cached prey as food for both nesting



Photo by Greg Lavaty from Seattle Audubon Society

www.birdweb.org

females and young. In one Texas survey, a shrike returned to a cache 8 months after leaving it.

Birds like Clark's Nutcrackers, titmice, chickadees, woodpeckers, jays and nuthatches as well as shrikes have clearly shown the ability to remember the location of stored food or seed. Storing food when it is plentiful is one of several methods birds use to insure a steady food supply. Some birds migrate based on food availability while others work harder during lean times, but storing food would seem to be the least energy-demanding system.

Acorn Woodpeckers can store up to 50,000 acorns in a single dead tree. Other birds store food in soil or loose litter or in cracked limbs. These food caches are an important part of seed dispersal for trees and other plants, since many seeds are dropped or never used.

A few birds store animal prey; these include titmice, chickadees, some raptors and owls, woodpeckers and shrikes. Most animal prey is retrieved within days since the food may decay. Shrikes, however, may let grasshoppers and other prey dry out and retrieve them much later.

Shrikes should be appreciated not only for their striking appearance but also for the adaptive behavior that helps them survive in the face of shrinking territories and shortages of food.

MONARCHS AND THE DROUGHT

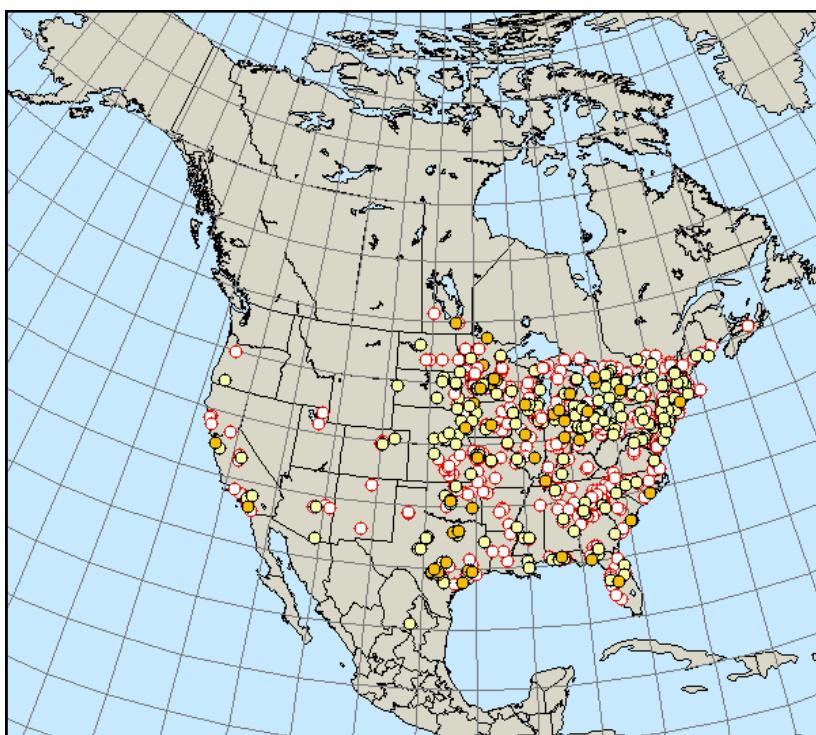
As we here in central Texas are enjoying our first cool mornings in a long time, we still suffer from the extreme drought. What affect will this drought have on the Monarch butterflies that funnel through our state this fall?

Journey North is one of the on-line citizen science projects that is a resource for teachers and students for following several migrating animals. I will be summarizing their reports in the next few issues of the *The Steward* as the Monarch fall migration progresses.

The first strong cold front of the season sent monarchs sailing from the northern regions of the country and some have already reached Texas. A report near Abilene stated, "The monarchs arrived on the wings of a blue norther and were looking for nectar sources along Deadman Creek." Sharon Drake reported seeing three Monarchs the first week in September and I saw one. A surprisingly early roost was reported in Nebraska on September 3rd. A citizen scientist there reported that she and her grandson observed about



Monarch scientist Dr. Lincoln Brower has studied monarchs for over 50 years. He probably knows more about monarch butterflies than anyone else in the world. In just a few weeks, the entire migration will travel through Texas where drought conditions are severe. Dr. Brower was asked how the drought might



1,000 Monarchs roosting in their trees. Others reported that the migration was late in their area. A Canadian Monarch expert said, "I wonder if the late, cool, wet spring slowed monarch development and caused the migration to be later. Certainly numbers are way down from last year."

affect the butterflies: "As monarchs migrate through Texas and northern Mexico on their way to the overwintering sites, they spend considerable time building up their fat reserves by drinking the sugar-laden nectar

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MY BACKYARD VISITOR

By Jerry Stacey

For three or four days during the second week of August, I was entertained by a five foot coachwhip just going about his business of trying to catch something to eat. All the action took place about 20 feet from my back window. He staked out a gopher hole as his ambush point and would be there most of the day watching for lizards.

Check out the bubble. I'm pretty sure that's what he was thinking. I have not seen him around the house since, so I hope he has found a more productive place to hunt.



When a spotted whiptail was getting close, he would lift his head to get a better view.



It appeared that he would wait until the lizard was out of sight behind a clump of grass and then he would dart out of the hole before stopping on his side of the clump. He would then ease through the grass to catch his prey. Actually, I should say "try" to catch his prey, because the times I was watching, he was never successful. After a miss, he would return to the gopher hole and start the process again.

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BUTTERFLIES

from wildflowers. By the time they reach the Mexico overwintering sites, this sugar is converted to fat and the bodies of the butterflies are practically butterballs. To fuel winter survival and the migration back into the US the following spring,

g, the butterflies gradually draw down these fat reserves. I am extremely concerned that the terrible drought this year in Texas and northern Mexico will have such a negative impact on the wildflowers that the butterflies will have a rough time building up their fat reserves and many more than usual will die of starvation." Of course, we here in Central Texas know that to say that the drought has had a negative impact on the wildflowers is a huge understatement!

We may not have much in the way of flowers to offer the Monarchs, but we can at least keep our hummingbird feeders filled for the butterflies as well as the hummingbirds and put out a plant saucer of mud for them. They like to drink from puddles because that also gives them minerals that they need.

Keep your eyes skyward over the next month and hope to see Monarchs.

FREE TREES AT THE BURNET KIDS DAY OUT

by Phillip Mitchell Photos by Sue Kersey

Highland Lakes Master Naturalist volunteers distributed over two hundred native trees to smiling kids at the Burnet Kids Day Out on Saturday, Sept. 10. Located between the karaoke loud speakers and the paddle splashing of kayak lessons, the Master Naturalists were greeted by hundreds of eager future tree huggers at the annual Tree Give-Away.

Children selected their very own, personal tree, from a wide array of native trees offered this year. Along with Certificates of Ownership and Planting Instructions, each family received an Anaqua, a Bur Oak, a Cedar Elm, a Chinquapin Oak, a Live Oak, a Monterrey White Oak, or a Texas Mountain Laurel tree. A very interesting and informative Dragon Fly Exhibit was added to the booth. Kids of all ages (and yes, a few adults, also!) got tattooed! Each could select a butterfly, dragonfly, cicada, frog, or lizard, washable tattoo. Depending on age, it was hard to determine the source of more pride, the tree or the tattoo!

Highland Lakes Master Naturalist volunteers for the Tree Give-Away included: Terry Bartoli, Kim Ba-



Ami Andujo & Ashley Deyna enjoyed getting run on tattoos at the HLMN booth after picking out their free tree.



Sitting, Sondra Fox. Standing L-R Phil Wyde, Phillip Mitchell, Sherry Bixler, Kim Bacon, Linda O'nan, Ralph Herter, Ray Buchanan & Pam Walt

con, Sherry Bixler, Ray Buchanan, Dennis and Nancy Ellison, Sondra Fox, Fredi Franki, Debbie Gallagher, Ralph Herter, Cathy Hill, Sue Kersey, Phillip Mitchell, Linda O'nan, Jean Schar, Pam Walt, Robert West, Terry Whaley, Phil Wyde. The reward for Master Naturalists was the opportunity to achieve one of the their primary goals: Passing on the joy of and responsibility for conserving the natural beauty



David & Erica Robertson with their 4 children; Luke, Grace, Dean and baby Jack after picking out their free Mountain Laurel tree.

and native plants of the Texas Hill Country.

Special thanks for this successful event go to chief organizer Dale Hill of the Burnet County Kids Day Out as well as to Mike Christy of the LCRA, to April Thomas Rose of Tree Folks, Austin, and to their respective organizations for support and donations of trees.

TEXAS PERSIMMON

(*DIOSPYROS TEXANA* AND *DIOSPYROS VIRGINIANA*)

By Phil Wyde



Diospyros texana (<http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/st-plains/nature/images/persimmon.html>)

My mind is always asking questions and frequently this occurs during public events such as classes, talks, meetings and especially on Master Naturalist interpretive hikes. When this occurs I sometimes have a mental battle whether to ask the question in front of everyone and publicly display my ignorance about something that surely every other person in the group should know or keep quiet and remain in ignorance. For example, I cannot count the number of times that native persimmon trees have been pointed out to me on Master Naturalist-lead interpretive hikes. Over and over again I learned that this tree is a tough native that can readily be identified by the downward curl of its relatively small, coarse leaves; that the tree is dioecious (a plant that has male and female reproductive organs borne on separate individuals of the same species; if you need further explanation, we can arrange to meet discretely and I can explain this in more detail) and that the persimmon fruit is only borne on female trees. Indeed, I was so impressed on my early naturalist hikes that I bought a native persimmon and planted it on our property. Every spring and fall thereafter I scrutinized the tree in hope of seeing flowers or fruit on it to tell me if it was a female tree and that I would eventually get a harvest. I must admit that I did not know what the fruit would look like and I was sorry that I had never asked. I also must confess that I expected them to look something like the persimmons that you see in the grocery store. Well last fall, after 4

years of watching, my wish was granted and I saw several very small, green fruit on the tree. Although I patiently waited, the fruits remained very small and instead of turning orange as I expected them to, they turned dark purple (almost black). In no way did they look like the persimmons that you see in grocery stores. I immediately thought that Texas persimmons were just another Texas exaggeration (you know, Texas hills are called mountains; Texas streams, rivers; Texas rivers, lakes, etc.). However, better late than never, I decided to do some research and find out what I was supposed to get. I found out that Texas persimmons are supposed to be small and that the genus name for the American persimmon (i.e., *Diospyros*) means "Fruit of the Gods." Whoa! That has to be an exaggeration! But as I continued my research, I decided that maybe what is said about Texas persimmons may not be so exaggerated.

One of the first things that I learned was that there



Diospyros virginiana (<http://www.treetrail.net/diospyros.html>)

are different species and varieties of persimmon trees. Two species are native to the United States, *Diospyros texana* and *Diospyros virginiana* (see pictures), and both are indigenous to Texas, the only state in the United States that can make this claim. *D. texana* grows in

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central and southern Texas, as well as northern Mexico. *D. virginiana* grows in the eastern portion of our state and in states to the east of Texas. The fruits of both species are generally small with those of *D. texana* being purplish-black and only about ONE INCH in diameter when ripe. The fruit of *D. virginiana* is a little larger and has an orange appearance (again see pictures). Nurseries sell cultivars of the latter species which produce larger fruits than the true native, but the large persimmons found in grocery stores come from persimmon trees that grow primarily in the Orient. As I was taught on my Master Naturalist hikes, most American persimmon trees are either male or female. However, there are some varieties that are self-fertile (how boring). Neither of the native persimmon trees gets large. The current National Champion Texas persimmon (i.e., the largest known Texas persimmon tree) is only 26 feet high. (This tree is in Uvalde County.) I have crepe myrtles taller than that.

I have already indicated my initial disdain of the small fruit that appeared on my native persimmon tree and my utter disbelief that it could be the “fruit of the gods.” However, EVERY reference I looked at said that the fruit of *D. texana* (and *D. virginiana*) is very sweet – WHEN RIPE! I emphasize the latter not from personal experience, because I have yet to dare eat a wild persimmon, but because EVERY reference that I read on persimmons emphasized this. Apparently unripe persimmons are unusually high in tannic acid making them very bitter and virtually impossible to eat UNTIL THEY ARE RIPE. Now of course you want to know how to tell when *D. texana* and *D. virginiana* fruit are ripe. It is when the fruit of the former is very purplish-black and that of the latter is quite orange and a little wrinkled. Despite knowing this, I am going to wait until the next time that I am out hiking with Billy and watch him eat the fruit, before I take a bite.

There is historical evidence that the ripe fruit of our native persimmon trees is very good. It is recorded that Texas Indians and early European and American settlers found the fruit of the native persimmons to be highly desirable and a special treat. They ate the fruit as is or used it to make preserves, bread, pies and pudding. They also dried the fruit for winter eating, and even used it to make beer and brandy. I do not know how common it is for contemporary Texans do any of this, especially since you can buy large persimmons in grocery stores. Regardless, it is clear that native persimmons are an important source of

food for deer, raccoons, coyotes, javelina, ringtail cats, foxes, squirrels, rabbits, wild turkey, bobwhite quail, mockingbirds and other wildlife. (I am sitting here wondering how they know when the fruit is ripe. I know that you are going to tell me that they learn by trial and error or from their mothers. But if they ate unripe fruit and it is so distasteful, you would think that they would never try eating another one again.)

Among those that favor native persimmons, it is known that the fruit has a great capacity to stain things, including your hands, mouth and teeth, while handling and eating the fruit. This property has a practical aspect (attention Debbie McClintock); the stain has been used by Mexican and Texan Hispanics to dye leather, sheep and goat skins, and even their hair. The resulting colors vary from tan to reddish brown. Ink can also be made from the persimmon fruit (Turner, 2009).

Here is a surprise. Persimmon species belong to the tree family, *Ebenaceae*, indicating that they are related to ebony trees. Thus, it is not surprising that like the wood of ebony trees, the wood of persimmon trees is very strong, smooth, hard and even-grained. It also takes a high polish and consequently is suitable for turning and for making tool handles, engraving blocks, curtain rings, furniture, picture frames, digging sticks and walking canes. The black wood used in piano keys and some cabinetry comes from a tropical relative, *D. ebenum*.

Attention Billy and Cynthia Castleberry; persimmons have been used as medicines by some Indian groups. The Cherokees apparently used the fruit as an astringent (a substance that draws tissue together) for treating sores in the mouth and throat, for the treatment of heartburn and to treat hemorrhoids (Hamel and Chiltoskey, 1975). There is also evidence that the Comanches used persimmon fruits to treat some ailments (Carlson, G.G. and Volney, H.J. 1940).

Although I have now had my persimmon tree nearly 5 years, I cannot say that it is my favorite tree. It is very slow growing and does not stand out at all. On the other hand – it is absolutely no trouble. It does not seem to be bothered much, if at all, by our current extreme drought, or by any diseases or insect pests. I guess that these are strong points for having it. However, I have never seen more than a few fruit on my tree. Maybe that is because there are no or few male trees around. Or it may be because as one of my sources said, “... when persimmons are ready

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WHOOOO KNEW?

Since recently completing my master naturalist classes, I am enthralled with everything about nature & a desire to know what is what. I love that I have a new yearning to learn. I am buggy about insects, but even more than that I find owls fascinating & have collected some interesting facts I'd like to share.

There are over 200 species of owls in the world and they live on every continent except Antarctica. Of that number, only 18 species live in North America. Many share like characteristics as feathered legs, strong talons, stealth flight with keen senses of hearing & sight. A group of owls is called a "parliament".

Most owls are nocturnal or are active from dusk to dawn. However, the great grey & northern hawk owls are diurnal, which means they are awake & hunt in the day. All owls will hunt around the clock when food is scarce.

They do not make their own nests but make homes in a variety of places such as other large bird nests, forests, buildings (barn owls), underground (burrowing owls), & cacti (elf owls). They will move if their food source becomes scarce. Only a few owls are migratory.

Their large eyes are stationary so in fact they can rotate their heads three quarters of the way around very quickly which seems as though they are turning it completely around. With extra rods cells within their



Screech Owl

Photo by Carol Adams

higher ear taking in sounds from above and the lower ear, sounds from below. This makes hearing their most effective sense when hunting.

As with some other raptors, female owls are larger than their mates & it's believed that this offers better nest protection and larger egg production. Most clutches contain 2-7 eggs with an incubation period of 3-4 weeks. Owlets leave the nest between 27-70 days with the larger owlets staying the longest time.

Due to birds having hollow bones, even the larger owls such as the great horned weigh only 3.5 lbs. Wingspans vary from 10" as with a pygmy owl to a whopping 60" of the great horned owl. Because their wings have finely feathered tips, which are comparable to split ends, air flows through their feathers to cushion the sound, thus it's said they are stealthy.

Their eating habits would amaze anyone. I was surprised to learn of the vast variety of prey they will hunt. Their diets are generally insects, rodents, fish, reptiles with larger owls eating smaller owls & skunks. (I believe a few of my cats were on their menu years ago. Now that's nature in reverse!) After a tasty meal, which is swallowed whole, they regurgitate the bones, fur & feathers into a clump called a "pellet" which can be found under a nesting site. It's not unusual to be able put an entire skeleton of the prey together from



Great Horned Owl

Photo by Sue Kersey

eyes, vision is excellent in low lights. However, sight is secondary to hearing. Their facial disks act like a satellite dish to help funnel sound. Their ears are asymmetrically placed on the sides of their head. Because of this unusual placement, sound is triangulated with the

By Elaine Barnhill

this. Many children have had the educational experience in school science classes to reconstruct these pellets. (I got to dissect a frog in school - yuk!)

Like anything in nature, owls are also very protective of their nests & will defend them using their talons & beaks. Scientists have stumbled onto large nesting owls & have had to make a quick exit. They are amazing & beautiful but they are to be admired from afar.

There are myths associated with owls. Some tribes of North American Indians thought owls to be an omen of death while others thought owls to be soul-bearers that transported spirits of the dead to the afterlife. One Dakota tribe called owls "keeper of game spirit" that watched over bison herds. And Europeans of long ago thought a dead owl would ward off lightning, hail and disease.

I always enjoy helping educate people at the owl prowls that we have by the full moon at Inks Lake and in the process have gained knowledge and respect for these incredible raptors. Please feel free to join us for one of these incredible walks by checking our TPWD calendar or ask me. It's an amazing experience.

(Continued from page 11)

to harvest, it is not uncommon to see a barren tree standing next to a tree laden with fruit (<http://www.treetrail.net/diospyros.html>).” But although it is not my favorite tree, I am glad that I have it, especially now that I know more about the species and its importance to wildlife. Indeed, I now look at it with much more regard and think of it as a quiet and strong tree that has no need to be showy. In addition I am optimistic that someday it will be 26 foot tall and full of wonderful fruit. (When that happens I will ask one of you if you want to make persimmon brandy; not for me, but for the chapter.) I also think that on my next interpretive hike, I can add something to the discussion about the native persimmon tree including the fact that the north entrance to Big Bend National Park, Persimmon Gap, is so named because of an abundance of this shrub in the area.

My final comments are primarily for our newer members (most of our older members do not have any problem about asking questions in front of others or suffering embarrassment). I hope that every one of you will ask questions at Master Naturalist events (and elsewhere) even if you think that it is a foolish question and might embarrass you. As my tale indicates most of the time it will save you from looking or feeling foolish later on (which is what I felt when I found out that I would wait a long, long time for a large orange persim-

I have to end this with an owl joke:
Why did the owl keep sneezing?



Screech Owl

Photo by Lyn Davis

mon fruit to appear on my native persimmon tree). In fact, I have found that no Master Naturalist has ever laughed at me – for asking questions. Even if they had, there are things worse than embarrassment. Just think if I had tried to eat the green fruit of my persimmon tree before learning the possible consequences (picture me with a most pucker mouth or something else).

Sources:

- Reiff, A.E. 1984. Native Texas: Some Medicinal, Social and Philosophic Contexts of the Plants of Texas and the Southwest. Phoenix: Newfoundland.
- Turner, Matt. 2009. Texas Persimmon, pp. 25-27 and Common Persimmon, pp. 28-31 in [Remarkable Plants of Texas, Uncommon Accounts of Our Common Natives](#), University of Texas Press, Austin, TX.
<http://www.treetrail.net/diospyros.html>
- <http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/st-plains/nature/images/persimmon.html>
- Hamel, P.B. and Chiltoskey, M.U. 1975. 1975. [Cherokee Plants and Their Uses – A 400 Year History](#). Herald Publ. Co. Sylva, N.C.
- Carlson, G.G. and Volney, H.J. 1940. [Some Notes on Uses of Plants by the Comanche Indians](#). Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters 25:517-542.

(Answer: Because he had “owlgeries”)

GALLERY



Black and White Warbler
Photo by Mike Childers



Nashville Warbler
Photo by Mike Childers



Black Throated Green Warbler
Photo by Sammye Childers



Yellow Warbler
Photo by Mike Childers

We have seen these warblers coming to our water fountain over the last few weeks.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES AND AT/EVENTS CALENDAR

Mike Childers

SEPTEMBER EVENTS & VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Junction Water Workshop	20th 5:30-8pm
Texas Wildlife Association - Women of the Land Warren Ranch, Santa Anna, TX	23rd-25th
NRCS Riparian Management Workshops Lampasas and Killeen	27th & 28th 8am
Bracken Bat Cave HLMN Field Trip San Antonio Area	27th 6-8:30pm

FUTURE EVENTS & VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

National Trail Work Day Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge	Oct 1
HLMN Monthly Meeting - Bill Lindemann - Geology of the Big Bend Area Kingsland Library	Oct 3 1-3pm
Tex-Mex Border Ecology - Ro Wauer Highland Lakes Bird and Wildflower Society - Marble Falls, Library	Oct 6 10am
Nueces River Authority - Remarkable Riparian Summit San Antonio, TX	Oct 6 9am-4pm
Rainwater Revival Roger Hanks Park, Dripping Springs, TX	Oct 8 10am-7pm
Refuge Week Festival Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge	Oct 8 8:30am-4pm
The Big Sit - International Bird Watching event Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge - Doeskin Ranch	Oct 9 7am (All Day)
Native Plant Society of Texas Symposium Houston, TX	Oct 14-16
Native Plant Garden Tour Burnet County	Oct 15 9am-4pm
Texas Master Naturalist State Conference Mo Ranch, Hunt TX	Oct 21-23
Friends of Balcones Canyon Nat'l Wildlife Reservere Nature Day & Annual Meeting Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge	Oct 23
Big Bend Ranch State Park Field Trip Big Bend Ranch State Park	Oct 30-Nov 4
Fall Outing at the Lilly's Ed and Sue Lilly's Ranch, Lampasas	Oct 27 or 30

For volunteer opportunities and events scheduled at Inks Lake State Park, Blanco State Park, and Balcones Canyonlands, check these websites for information:

http://beta-www.tpwd.state.tx.us/state-parks/parks/find-a-park/inks-lake-state-park/park_events/

http://beta-www.tpwd.state.tx.us/state-parks/parks/find-a-park/blanco-state-park/park_events/

<http://friendsofbalcones.org/>

Please submit pictures, articles, reports, stories, calendar and event entries, etc. to chili865@gmail.com. Photos should have captions and appropriate credits. The deadline for submissions to each months newsletter is the 10th of the month and publication will be by the 15th.