



Highland Lakes Steward

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MISSION

The Texas Master Naturalist program is a natural resource-based volunteer training and development program sponsored statewide by Texas A&M 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

OFFICERS

President
Fredrick Franki
ffranki@nctv.com
(830) 637-7197

Vice-President
Linda O’Nan
bronan@ktc.com
(830) 693-6126

Secretary
Sondra Fox
msfox@nctv.com
(512) 695-5725

Treasurer
Phillip Mitchell
phillipmitchell@gmail.com
(830) 693-0184

THANKS FOR A GREAT YEAR!

What a fantabulous year it has been! I hope you feel very proud to be a member of the Highland Lakes Master Naturalists. You contributed 10,696 hours of volunteer service between January and October. Most of our hours go toward education projects and citizen scientist projects that directly benefit the people of Burnet, Llano, Blanco counties plus surrounding communities. In this season of giving it is gratifying to know that our chapter has given something of great value right in our own neighborhoods. And best of all is the great fun we have while working together.

I appreciate the privilege and honor of being President of such a dynamic organization. It has grown and changed in the three years since I joined, while remaining true to the goals and mission. Linda O’nan is very

creative and will find exciting projects for us next year as we celebrate the beginning of a second decade!

Thank you for all the kind words at the last meeting. I received gifts, hugs, and wonderful compliments from many of you. I’ve had an owl house before but none as fine as this one. If you don’t have one, you need a David Payton original. The owls of Highland Haven are soooo happy. David made a Leopold bench for me and shortened the legs so it is just right. Sue Kersey made a quilted dragonfly wall hanging, gorgeous colors and fine stitchery! So now, don’t some of you wish to be president, someday?

Best wishes and happy holidays!

Fredi



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JANUARY MEETING by Linda Onan

2013 is a real milestone for our chapter--our 10 year anniversary. We have invited members of the 2003 charter class to come to our meeting on Wednesday, January 2, 1 PM, 1st United Methodist Church of Marble Falls. Hopefully, some of the group, which includes your new president, will share stories of "the beginning" of Highland Lakes Master Naturalists. Wade Hibler, our chapter advisor and creator, will be our key speaker and add his always interesting take on the growing pains we have had. Join us before the meeting at Bella Sera's, 1125 N. Hwy 281, at 11:30 for lunch and conversation (let me know if you plan on joining us so I can give them an approximate head count for tables). We have lots to talk about for the new year, so come join in and get your year off to a "natural" start.

"The greatest adventure is what lies ahead.
Today and tomorrow are yet to be said.
The chances, the changes are all yours to make.
The mold of your life is in your hands to break."
J.R.R. Tolkien

See you in January! Linda O'Nan

FRIENDS OF THE UPPER HIGHLAND LAKES NATURE CENTER (UHLNC)

by Billy Hutson

Today (11/29), I met with Bonnie Baskin the founder and president of the developing Hill Country Science Mill in Johnson City. If you remember, she was the lady that was considering building the science center at RPR where we (UHLNC) could work together in developing science and nature programs for children.

I toured the very interesting and fun buildings and Bonnie discussed her plans for the buildings which she is already progressing with.

Here's where we can fit in. Part of her plans are to clean up the riparian area behind the buildings (about 100 yards in length) with plenty of room for a picnic area which we could help with and possibly develop a nature site to augment her science programs. It could be like an extension of the UHLNC site but for Blanco area MN's to get closer volunteer hours. We do so little for the Blanco county area that this seems like a no brainer. We could joint develop programs and give talks and classes when required and cover a larger audience than our RPR location. There is also an adjacent property owned by the Natl. Park Service where interpretive walks could be conducted. This should fit under volunteer hours for the MN's and help Bonnie in her efforts and spread the word about the more encompassing UHLNC nature program. It seems like a win/win/win situation to me.

In addition, she has several wooden buildings that are going to be demolished that we could have any part of for the taking. Time is important however as she plans to have the buildings removed in a the next couple of months. We've been slowly gathering construction material for the last year and this is an opportunity to get a lot in a couple of trips. I will be contacting those on the construction committee to help with the gathering of wood, doors, sheet metal, windows, etc.

The science mill web site is:

<http://www.sciencemill.org/>

if you want to learn more.

THE GHOST SHIP

by Becky Breazeale

On our recent trip to Galveston, some of us embarked on the Galveston Harbor Tour. As we pushed away from the dock, our Guide informed us that we would be motoring our way to the "The Ghost Ship". As we approached the S. S. Selma, it was hard to tell what we were seeing. The S.S. Selma is a concrete ship built during World War I when steel was in short supply. She was completed after the war and launched on June 28, 1919. Less than a year later, she ran into a jetty in Florida and was brought to Galveston to be repaired. The dry dock crew in Galveston had no experience repairing concrete ships, so the decision to scrap the Selma was made. A channel 25 ft. deep and 1,500 ft. long was dredged off of Pelican Island and the Selma was towed there for her final resting place. Over the years there have been efforts to turn the Selma into a fishing pier, pleasure resort, and even an oyster farm. The Selma has been recognized with a Texas Historical Commission's Official Texas Historical Marker and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Today the ghostly Selma is home to frigate birds, American white pelicans, various gulls and terns, and waterfowl as well as excellent sport fishing.



Construction of the Selma

(Source: MareUD)



S. S. Selma Today (Source: Galveston.com)



The view on our tour.

By Becky Breazeale

Resources:

<http://www.concreteships.org/ships/ww1/selma/>

<http://www.crystalbeach.com/selma.htm>

<http://www.uh.edu/engines/epi2679.htm>

ANNUAL AWARDS BANQUET

by Linda O’Nan and Fredi Franki

Photos by Jerry Stone





2013 Officers (L to R) - Vice President Pat Campbell, President Linda O'Nan, and Treasurer Phillip Mitchell. Not pictured is Secretary Barbara Booth.



2012 Board Members (L to R) - 1st row: Member-at-large Terri Whaley, President Fredi Franki, 2013 Class Coordinator Betty Cruikshank, TMN State Representative Sue Kersey - 2nd Row: 2012 Class Coordinator Sammye Childers, Agrilife Sponsor Wade Hibler, Electronic Communications Coordinator Marvin Bloomquist, and VS/AT Coordinator Terry Bartoli. Not Pictured : Vice President Linda O'Nan, Treasurer Phillip Mitchell, Secretary Sondra Fox, and past-president Billy Hutson.



500 hr pin awardees! (L to R) - Lynn Davis and David Payton. Not pictured: Betsy Bouchard and Ben Kowing



250 hr pin awardees! (L to R) - Ed Lilley, Melanie Huff, Marilynn Lageman, Sue Lilley, and Ray Zender.



2012 Certification Awardees! (L to R) - Back row: Blair Feller, Ed Lilley, Sue Lilley, Romelia Favrot, Marilynn Lageman, Harris Greenwood, and Ed Myatt - 2nd row: Lynn Davis, Suze Jernigan, Pat Campbell, Celia Escamilla, Melanie Huff, and Penny Nichols; - 1st row: Phillip Mitchell, Cindy Sterling, Joan Stone, John McClintock, and Deb McClintock. Not Pictured: Charles Beierle, Barbara Booth, Maggie Booth, Margy Butler, Jennifer Daniels, Wayne Moldovan, Debora Moroney, Earlene Thorne, and Pam Walt.



Initial Certification awardees! (L to R) - Fred Zagst, Janis Koby, and Dan Nutter. Not Pictured: Becky Breazeale, Judy Caramanica, and Wayne Moldovan

What a great end of the year we had at our December awards meeting! The Blanco County Court-house was the perfect venue for a holiday treat. Many thanks to the Blanco committee for a job well done. Our out-going president, Fredi Franki, expressed her gratitude for all the hours everyone has contributed to the success of our chapter this year. Fredi's leadership has been the key, and she will still be involved in the ongoing activities of our group.

Linda O'Nan



A special thank you to the Christmas Party Committee!

**L to R - Sheryl Smith-Rodgers, Joanne Fischer, Marcy Westcott, Ann Cook,
Connie Barron, and Marilyn Lageman
Not Pictured are: Susan Evans, Suze Jernigan, John & Deb McClintock,
Linda O'Nan, and Shirley Winslow**

And Many Thanks to all who contributed items to the Silent Auction!

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

BAFFLEHEADS AND ECLIPSE PLUMAGE

by Sherry Bixler



Small and compact, black and white buffleheads are among the easiest of ducks to identify. They are 13 inches long but have large heads and small bills; the black on their heads is actually very dark green or purple but appears black most of the time. They are winter residents in the hill country and have begun to arrive on local lakes and ponds.

They are diving ducks and, like wood ducks and hooded mergansers, they are cavity nesters. If tree cavities are scarce, they will also nest in burrows dug into earthen banks. They will occasionally use nest boxes. They nest near water so the infant ducks can get to water quickly. They have one brood a year and lay 6 to 12 eggs.

Their diet is mostly aquatic insects, seeds from aquatic vegetation, crustaceans, snails and other mollusks. In salt water they also consume vegetable matter and in winter they supplement their diet with small fish.

Although there is a small year-round population of buffleheads in the northwestern part of the United States and southwestern Canada, most buffleheads breed only in Canada and Alaska. At some part of the year they can be found in every state except Hawaii but in winter they are found from Mexico north thru

about half of the United States and also along the west coast all the way to Alaska.

All bird species molt in order to replace worn feathers and in ducks the duller winter plumage after a molt is called eclipse plumage. Some birds remain in winter plumage for shorter periods of time and some are more drab all winter. Fresh plumage and brighter colors are worn for breeding season.

While some birds show little difference between breeding plumage and winter plumage, others fade so much that they are hard to identify. Blue-winged and cinnamon teal lose so much color that biologists must lump them together when doing winter bird counts. Warblers also lose many identifying marks in the winter. Buffleheads do not seem to change while in our area although their molt may occur before they fly south.

Other duck species also show some white, but watch for very bright flashes of white as male buffleheads move. Females and juveniles can be identified by their small size and the smaller patch of white on their heads. Also remember that most ducks do not like fast-moving water and will seek out ponds, lakes and marshes over rivers.

WHAT IS A “BUCKEYE?”

by Phil Wyde

I spend a lot of time weeding. I enjoy it and find it cathartic. As I weed my mind wanders and a host of different thoughts enter, meander and leave it. Well, one day I was weeding around the Mexican buckeye tree that is in my front yard and a thought struck me, “What is a buckeye?” Almost immediately after this, I remembered that for decades I have wondered why the Ohio State University football team is nicknamed the “Buckeyes.” Then I wondered why the tree I was weeding around was a Mexican buckeye. After all, I was deep in the heart of Texas. The next thought jolted me; maybe my Mexican buckeye was a dreaded INVASIVE! Then I remembered that I heard that there is a Texas buckeye tree. Why did I not have one of these? I had a lot more thoughts in this series, but I won’t torture you with them. I will just tell you that I figured that I had one of 3 options: 1) run and ask Jerry Stacy for the answers to my questions; 2) do some research to get the answers to them; or 3) forget about the questions and answers and just go fishing. I ended up compromising. I went fishing and only much later did I do some research about buckeyes. I would like to tell you about what I learned.

First, the scientific name for the Mexican buckeye tree is *Ungnadia speciosa* and it is a member of the plant family, *Sapindaceae* (i.e., soapberry family).¹ Interestingly the genus *Ungnadia* is monotypic (a fairly rare thing). This means that there is no other plant species



Figure 2. Mexican Buckeye blossoms (image taken from WEB site given in ref. 2)



Figure 1. Mexican Buckeye leaves (image taken from WEB site given in ref. 2)

in the genus, *Ungnadia*, only *Ungnadia speciosa*. Some of you, I suspect, are cringing and wondering why I bore you with scientific names. I think that you are thinking, “Isn’t it much easier to use the tree’s common name (i.e., Mexican buckeye)?” As you will soon find out, although common names are easier to remember, they can lead to a lot of confusion. However, before expanding on this, I would like to tell you more about the Mexican buckeye tree.

The Mexican buckeye is a small, perennial, deciduous tree (it loses its leaves in winter) that can reach 30 feet in height, but usually only grows to about 12 feet tall. It has light gray to brown bark and has alternate, pinnate leaves up to 12 inches long. (Pinnate leaves resemble feathers.) These leaves are compound; that is they have a central stem which support 2 to 6 paired leaflets and terminates with a single leaflet at the end of the stem (see Fig. 1).¹ The leaflets are ovate, with serrated margins, and can grow up to 5 inches long. In the spring before any leaves develop, the tree puts out clusters of pink, fragrant flowers (see Fig. 2). Many of these flowers develop into a distinctive fruit, or capsule (see Fig. 3), that contain two to three Mexican buckeye seeds, each about ½ inch in diameter when ripe (see Fig. 4). (I purposely say “many” in the previous sentence since there are hundreds of pink blossoms, but only a limited number of them seem to form fruit.) The tree is native to Texas, New Mexico and northeast Mexico.

Now that you know something about Mexican buckeye trees, I would like to give you a number of reasons why you should consider having one of these trees in your yard. As already mentioned the tree is native and thus requires minimal care. Indeed, except to admire it, I pay mine absolutely no heed. In the wild, it is most often found growing in limestone-based soils, usually in moist canyons or along rocky bluffs bordering stream beds.³ However, it can grow well in other soil types and under other conditions.¹ Other pluses are that it can flourish in sun or part shade and is cold tolerant. The tree produces abundant blooms in the spring, its leaves turn bright yellow in the fall and unlike several other native trees that I own (e.g., native dogwood and sumac) it does not have a propensity to colonize. And there is more. This tree grows rapidly and is drought-, deer- and disease-resistant.¹ There is still another benefit. It not only attracts bees when in blossom, but it also hosts the larval stage of Henry's Elfin butterfly (see Fig. 5.)¹

Let's get back to common versus scientific names. Other names for the Mexican buckeye include: Texas buckeye, Spanish buckeye, New Mexican buckeye, false buckeye, canyon buckeye, monilla.^{1,3} AAAAUUUUGGGGHHHHH!!!!!!!. I make this exclamation because there is another tree that is also known as a Texas buckeye. How confusing! How can



Fig. 4. Mexican buckeye fruit opened exposing seeds. (Picture taken by PW)



Figure 3. Mexican buckeye fruit or capsule (picture taken in PW's yard)

different people know that they are talking about the same tree if each is calling it a different name!

Now that we have brought up the Texas buckeye tree, let's talk about it. The scientific name for the Texas buckeye is *Aesculus glabra* and it belongs to the plant family, *hippocastanaceae*, which includes the horse chestnut and "true" buckeye trees. As shown in Fig. 6 (taken from ref. 4), the blossoms and leaves of *A. glabra* are quite different from those of the Mexican buckeye. (Just in case you cannot readily recognize these differences, note that the flowers of *A. glabra* are yellow and its leaves, although pinnate, are not alternate.) *A. glabra* is found in eastern deciduous forests of Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas. It is closely related to the Ohio buckeye tree.⁴

So why are Mexican buckeye, Texas buckeye, Ohio buckeye, and other buckeye trees called buckeyes? As seen in Fig. 4, the seeds of Mexican buckeye trees are relatively large and dark brown in color. Without too much effort, one can imagine that they resemble the large brown eyes of deer, including male deer (or bucks). The seeds of the "true" buckeyes (e.g., *A. glabra*, horse chestnut and Ohio buckeye) are somewhat similar in that their fruit are "large" and brown, and thus they are also called buckeye trees.^{1,3,10} However, use of the common name, "buckeye" has now created a category of trees that are not necessarily related.

I am delighted that I now know what a buckeye and

an Ohio buckeye are. However, now that I know I am nonplussed because I do not understand why we should call *A. glabra*, Ohio buckeye and other members of the *hippocastanaceae* plant family “true” buckeyes and Mexican buckeye a “false” buckeye. (I would like to read a Mexican botanist’s view). Even worse, why does the Ohio State University football team want to be called “Buckeyes” anyway? Are Ohio buckeye trees particularly brave, stalwart, determined, stealthy, mighty, brawny, fierce, robust, rugged or strong?

This brings us to an interesting conundrum that exists about the seeds of the Mexican buckeye tree. Relatively large quantities of Mexican buckeye seeds were found at several archaeological digging sites set up to study the culture of archaic Native American Indians of the southwest.³ Why did they store them? It is unlikely that these Native Americans ate these seeds given that they are known to contain “high” quantities of cyanogenetic lipids - and thus are generally thought to be quite toxic.³⁻⁸ (I say “generally thought” since there is some conflicting evidence.^{1,3-9}) Could it be that the seeds are not toxic at all times during their development? Or, is it possible to reduce or remove their toxicity by cooking or leaching them?^{3,9}

There is also some thought that the buckeye seeds because of their toxicity may have been used by the



Fig. 6. Picture of *A. glabra* (“Texas buckeye”) leaves and blooms (taken from ref. 4)



Figure 5. Henry's Elfin Butterfly (from ref. 1)

prehistoric Indians to make poison to kill fish, mammals and/or birds.³ It is also possible that they used Mexican buckeye seeds to make psychedelic drugs since at some sites relatively large quantities of buckeye seeds were found either near, or mixed, with mescal beans (apparently another source of psychedelic drugs). It should be noted that deer rarely browse the seeds and that there is no record of the seeds being eaten by Apaches or Comanche. Less contentious, it is known that children have used Mexican buckeye seeds to play marbles or to string them to make necklaces.^{1,3}

It seems to me that we can resolve some of the questions about Mexican buckeye seeds. For example, are they toxic or not? Are they very, little or intermittently toxic? Can you make a psychedelic concoction from them? Can one use Mexican buckeye seed extracts to poison the tips of arrows to kill birds or mammals, or make up batches to add to water to kill or stun fish? The minute I thought about these potential studies, Billy came to mind. I thought that if I designed the controlled experiments Billy could be used to get the answers. Billy, are you interested? (We can start with the psychedelic studies first and leave the toxicity studies for last.)

I would like to end by telling you that I have a number of Mexican buckeye seeds if anyone would like to try and grow some trees using these seeds. If you just want to admire a Mexican buckeye tree but not grow one, I would be glad for you to come by and visit and view my tree. You can either look at it sitting in a rocker on my front porch – or for those of you that crave more action; you can gaze at the tree while pulling weeds around it.

References

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<http://www.google.com/>

searchq=mexican+buckeye&hl=en&tbo=u&rlz=IT4ADBR_enUS273US275&tbm=isch&source=univ&sa=X&ei=cl62UObKLOKC2AXOooCoDw&ved=0CC4QsAQ&biw=1280&bih=821

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<http://www.ohio-nature.com/buckeye-tree.html>



THE EAGLE LADY

DORIS MAGER AND HER BIRDS OF PREY

Doris Mager and her raptors (owls, hawks, vultures and other birds of prey) will be at the Inks Dam National Fish Hatchery and Inks Lake State Park on Saturday January 5th. Her program at the hatchery will start at 10am and it is free, and at the state park (entrance fee required) at 2pm.

All are invited to attend.

In addition, please invite your family, especially grandchildren, friends and neighbors to join you. Doris puts on a very good show.

Better yet, you will hear a lot about raptors and after seeing her birds up close (maybe even hold them), you will appreciate them as never before!

You and the kids will love the experience!! Photographers, there could be some great shots for you.

There is also an Owl Prowl with Doris at 4:30 pm on Friday the 4th for a \$3 fee at the state park (entrance fee required).

If you have any questions, for the hatchery, please email pwyde@dishmail.net and for the state park, call Carol Adams at 512-793-4689.

GALLERY

by Jerry Stone



Julia Heliconian (*Dryas julia*) on Smooth Bidens (*Bidens laevis*) taken on 11/11/12 at Brazos Bend



White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*) & Black-Bellied Whistling Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) taken on 11/11/12 at Brazos Bend State Park.



Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*) taken on 11/11/12 at Brazos Bend State Park.



Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) taken on 11/15/12 at Bolivar Peninsula.



Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*) taken on 11/15/12 at Bolivar Peninsula



Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*) taken on 11/15/12 at Bolivar Peninsula.

GALLERY

by Jerry Stone



Great Egret (*Ardea alba*) taken on 11/15/12 at Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge.



Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) taken on 11/16/12 at San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge



Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferous*) taken on 11/15/12 at Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge



Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*) taken on 11/15/12 at Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge



Immature Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*) taken on 11/15/12 at Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge

GALLERY

by Jerry Stone



American Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) taken on 11/16/12 at San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge.



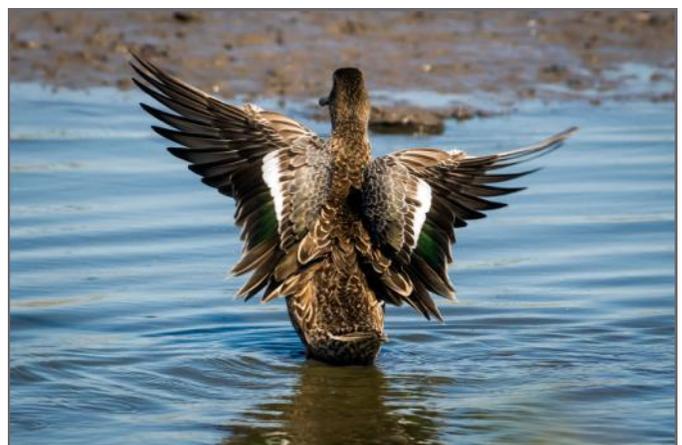
Lesser Yellowlegs (*tringa flavipes*) taken on 11/16/12 at San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge.



American Avocet (*Recurvirostrata Americana*) taken on 11/16/12 at San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge.



Roseate Spoonbill (*platalea ajaja*) taken on 11/16/12 in Freeport, Tx.



Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) taken on 11/16/12 at San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge

DECEMBER - JANUARY EVENTS & VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

HLMN January Monthly Meeting - 10th Anniversary First Methodist Church Junior Building, Marble Falls, TX	Jan 2 1 pm
Burnet County Christmas Bird Count	Jan 3
Doris Mager - The Eagle Lady - Owl Prowl Inks Lake State Park	Jan 4 4:30-6pm
Doris Mager - The Eagle Lady - Birds of Prey Inks Dam National Fish Hatchery (10am) and Inks Lake State Park (2pm)	Jan 5 10am, 2pm
Highland Lakes NPSOT Monthly Meeting - Westcave Preserve Plants and Animals Marble Falls Library	Jan 19th 1 pm

FUTURE EVENTS & VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Sparrowfest Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge - Flying X Ranch	Feb 2 7am
TPWD Becoming an Outdoors Woman (BOW) Brownwood, TX http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/learning/bow/schedule.phtml	Mar 22-24
Wings over the Hills Nature Festival Fredericksburg, Texas	Apr 26-28
13th Annual Songbird Festival Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge	Apr 26-29
13th Annual Songbird Festival Fledgling Fest Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge	Apr 28

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

<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/state-parks/inks-lake>

<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/state-parks/blanco>

<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/state-parks/inks-lake><http://www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/texas/balcones/>

<http://friendsofbalcones.org/>

<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/water/wildland/onlineregistration/ecowebevents.cfm>

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 month's newsletter is the 10th of the month and publication will be by the 15th.