



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

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CHAPTER PRESIDENT'S LETTER

By Pat Campbell

Happy spring! We finally got ,4" of rain. Most we have had in several months!

There seems to be many exciting things going on this spring. Hope everyone is gearing up to help Terry Bartoli with GOP at the end of the month. This is always such a fun event. Hopefully the weather will cooperate this year. I remember the cold, rainy morning of last year.

Many of our group went on the hike to Common Ford Prairie Restoration Park in west Austin. What a great place. It is sort of a hidden park off of Bee Cave. Two flying swans greeted us as we approached Lake Austin. What a treat that was! Native plants have been planted and are coming up. We did not make the hiking trails, but it is a gorgeous area. You might want to check it out.

The photo above is one I took at our local Lowes store. I imagine folks got a chuckle out of my chasing this hummingbird moth around to get a good picture. It was a surprise to see it feeding on the petunias there. You just never know what you are going to see where, so keep your eyes open!

We are having a buffet of volunteer



White lined Sphinx (*Hyles lineata*). Common names for the large moths (there are many kinds) are Hummingbird Moth,

opportunities with the ongoing projects at Inks Lake State Park, the new bird blind, the naturescape at Blanco State Park, GOP, HOP. Hope we are all supporting the coordinators for these events.

I wanted to let you know that Wade Hibler, Burnet County extension agent, will be retiring this summer in August. I think a lot of us were aware of it, but just in case you had not heard, I wanted you to know. As our Chapter Advisor, Wade enabled the founding of our chapter and has always provided great guidance and support.. He will be greatly missed. More coming on this in the future.

Have a good month and I am sure I will be seeing you around.

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Please submit pictures, articles, reports, stories, announcements, 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.

LAST MONTH'S PROGRAM

by Chris Faught

Photo by Jerry Stone

Chad Norris, a Aquatic Biologist from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department presented an interesting program on water right permits and other water development projects as it effects private land owners.

**MAY PROGRAM**

by Chris Faught

Mr Bill Lindeman will be presenting "The Nature of the Texas Hill Country" at our 07 May 2014 Chapter meeting.

This presentation will explore the evolution of the Texas Hill Country region beginning over a billion and one-half years ago to the present. What is so special about this region? In addition to the geological history, the talk will cover the past and present inhabitants, the changes that have occurred since settlement, and what the future might hold. The Edwards Plateau, which includes the Hill Country, is one of the most diverse biological regions on the planet. Although it covers only 17 per cent of the state, more than 40 per cent of the flora and 60 per cent of the birds are found here. Over 100 million bats call the Hill Country home during the summer months. Very colorful insects, including butterflies and dragonflies also call this region home. The presentation will conclude with a brief discussion regarding stewardship of our land and natural resources.

Mr Lindemann earned a BS Degree and then a Masters Degree from UT in Geology. He worked for Exxon as a Exploration Gologist for 32 years which caused him to live in many foreign places including: Australia, Thailand, China and other Far East countries. He and his wife of more than 50 years live in Fredericksburg were he currently wirtes a nature article for the Kerrville Daily Times. He has earned many awards and recognitions including the "Star of Texas" award from Gillespie County Historical Society for his work in creating the Fredericksburg Nature Center.

Lunch will be at the River City Grille at 11:00am and the meeting will start at 12:30pm. in the gym classroom at the Marble Falls First Methodist Church.

Future programs are planned as follows: June we will hear from our member Judy Bloomquist on Humming Birds and their behavior, then in August our member Karen Ponder Parker will inform us about Edible Plants and how to find them in the field.

FRIENDS OF THE UPPER HIGHLAND LAKES NATURE CENTER (UHLNC)

by Billy Hutson

On the crisp morning of March 30th a Llano Uplift Archeology Society (LUAS) team of experienced archaeologists, and some neophyte members of the Friends of UHLNC, excavated a one meter square hole. This was no ordinary place, it was at the top of nature hill at RPR where some test holes had been dug a few months before. The previous test holes revealed the presence of prehistoric occupation and so the quest was on.

The plan was to scientifically excavate a one meter square hole at 10 centimeter intervals down to 40 cm if we didn't hit rock, while recording any debitage possibly found at each layer.

The surface was cleared of the Tasajillo by the trails committee a few days before in preparation for the excavation.

The initial scraping of the surface by the LUAS team to level the dig site revealed 42 chert (flint) pieces indicative of a tool making site. After the first 10 cm was excavated very carefully with small trowels and brushes we collected 303 more pieces including a drill point and we saw burnt rocks which would be indicative of a hearth. At this point we decided instead of continuing at 10 centimeter intervals, we would very carefully continue only 5 more centimeters to not destroy what might be a hearth. So at 25 cm's we stopped the excavation and hailed it a success since we had proof that it was indeed a hearth used by prehistoric Native Americans. Actually more of a success than we had hoped since we were hoping for just some debitage. These ancient hearths were used to cook food and heat chert so it would fracture more easily. Pot lid evidence on some found chert was proof that they were heating it in the fire pit and a diagnostic drill bit which looked like a Travis point originally, would indicate that the site was used at least 4500 years ago. A freshwater mussel was also found at this level. Clear creek is just 100 yards away and this is the highest elevation on nature hill, all of which are the normal criteria for an occupation site.

Dating can be difficult but can be done by diagnostic tools which appear at proven intervals from other sites in Texas. The drill point that was found appeared to have a Travis point base (the diagnostic part) which would indicated a use of this fire pit approximately 2500bc (4500bp). Dating is a combination of clues and since there was no large charcoal or carbon staining of the soil present, the site had to be at least 2000 years old. This is now a permanent display at the nature center.

The pictures below are of the group discussing the find (notice George just sittin on his butt), the finished dig pit and two worked chert bifaces.



BALCONES CANYONLANDS NEWS

by Joan Mukherjee

Everyone at the Refuge is busy preparing for Songbird Fest, spiffing the place up, assigning volunteers and readying the children's games. The recent rain has made all green and pretty.

Rob Iski, coordinator of the children's programs, refuge week, volunteers, the hunting program and miscellaneous activities is retiring and cannot be replaced due to sequestration. Many of us feel that dropping the children's programs would be a tragedy; it would be hard to redevelop the program and find new school contacts. Our need is for an overall coordinator who can stay with the program throughout the season. We are fortunate to have two candidates. With the help of teaching volunteers from area master naturalist groups and a coordinator, we hope to continue the program until Rob is replaced.

Lynette Holz and I will try to organize Refuge Week. If anyone would like to offer a naturalist program at Refuge Week, let either Lynette or me, Joan Mukherjee, know. Many people have developed children's activities for other events which would work well for Refuge Week. The date is not yet set, but will probably be Oct. 4th or 11th.

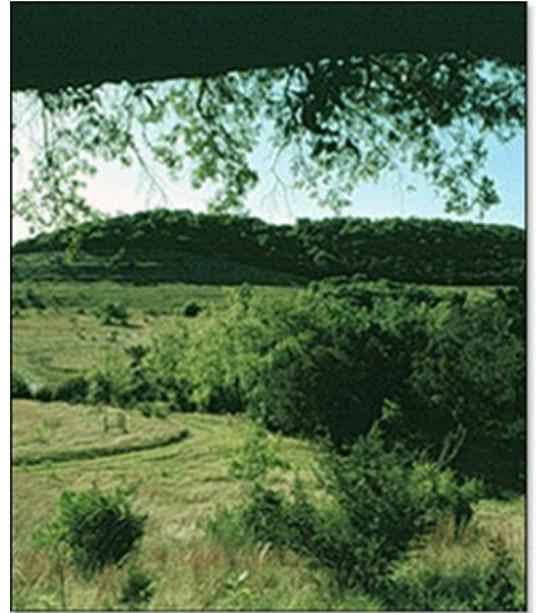


Photo courtesy of Rob Iski USFWS

AMPHIBIAN WATCH

by Joan Mukherjee

Finally! The frogs have begun croaking again. Even without rain, humid days have gotten them started. I hope you, too, have been hearing a loud chorus of cricket frogs. They are especially loud at dusk. I have also been hearing southern leopard frogs (shown in photo), a full chorus of gulf coast toads and a few cliff chirping frogs. What have you been hearing?

Since I am leaving soon I will not be monitoring any place other than mine until June.



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

THE GREEN JAY

by Joanne Fischer

Okay, I must begin by stating that the bird I selected for this month is not seen in the Hill Country. It doesn't overwinter here, it doesn't migrate through, we just aren't lucky yet to see it in our "neck of the woods". However, it is such a spectacular "Texas" bird that by highlighting it, I am hoping to entice you into making a trip south to witness this colorful, absolutely stunning bird.

The Green Jay is known locally as the Rio Grande Jay and is a tropical species (Central and South America) whose range just happens to extend into southernmost Texas. It is like other Jays in that it has a very boisterous nature. But in the Green Jay, this characteristic is combined with a flashy green, yellow, black and blue plumage which makes it an outstanding bird to experience. The male and female look alike and the juveniles have the same pattern but are slightly drabber.

The Green Jays diet consists of insects, small vertebrates, fruits and seeds and unfortunately they are not above stealing eggs or small nestlings of other birds.

The Green Jay favors dense forest and thick scrub for a breeding habitat. It has also been found to inhabit mesquite and other upland habitats during the summer months. The nest is constructed of thorny twigs and small stems and is lined with moss, leaves and grasses. The nest is well-concealed within dense foliage and is actually quite high in the tree's canopy (17-25 feet off the ground). A typical clutch consists of 3 to 5 eggs.

An interesting observation of a Green Jay flock in Texas is that it may consist of a breeding pair, the current year's nestlings and one-year-old non-breeding jays from the previous year. The one-year-olds defend the territory while the nest is being built and eggs hatched, but are ejected from the family flock once the nestlings have fledged.

The status of the Green Jay in Texas seems to be improving and in fact it appears as though there is a definite northward trend to its range. Local checklists demonstrate a presence (although categorized as uncommon) in Corpus Christi and the "Birds of Bexar County" checklist considers the Green Jay an accidental species in San Antonio.

If you want to venture to South Texas to seek out



this species – be sure to stop at Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge. Several of us Highland Lakes Master Naturalists have fond memories of "lunching with the Green Jays". We arrived at the Refuge around lunchtime and had a picnic lunch at a table under the trees just off the main parking lot. And, we were simply thrilled to have a small contingent of Green Jays join us for lunch. They even landed right on the picnic table and our coolers to retrieve little bits of food. Given that the Green Jay is one of my favorite birds, I was just beside myself. What a delightful experience!

A follow up note to a monthly article I submitted on the "Uncommon Raven". I ran across an article in a Minnesota nature magazine (that's where I came from and I just can't resist continuing to read about nature in the state). Anyway, an outdoor enthusiast reported that last winter he saw a raven sliding down a snowbank. The snowbank was about 3 feet high and the raven would slide down, flap its wings a couple of times to get to the top and then slide down again. The raven was observed doing this for several minutes. A state DNR bird expert speculated that the raven was just "having fun". She further stated that Ravens, as one of the most intelligent birds species, are known for their antics and aerial acrobatics.

GALLERY

by Jerry Stone



Blue-Curls (*Phacelia congesta*)



Engelmann Daisy (*Engelmannia pinnatifida*)



Scurf-Pea (*Psoralea latestipulata*)



Giant Spiderwort (*Tradescantia gigantean*)



Square-Bud Primrose (*Calylophus Drummondianus*)



Texas Paintbrush (*Castilleja indivisa*)

GALLERY



Great Egret taken by Sondra Fox
in Horseshoe Bay 3/4/14.