

T E X A S

Master
Naturalist™



HIGHLAND LAKES CHAPTER



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

Hope you all survived the storms on Saturday night. It was quite a show and pretty scary when I was driving in it. The tornado that touched down was only about 5 miles from my house. Too close for me!!

Congratulations again to the class of 2014. I am looking forward to working with all of you in the coming months. I have already had the pleasure of working with some of you. A big thanks to Ralph Herter and Melanie Huff for a job well done.

Be sure to check your emails from the trip committee this and next month. They

are planning a couple of day trips that sound amazing. You will want to follow to get all of the details that Melissa will be putting out.

Our summer schedule will be reduced because of the heat and people being gone. However, there will be opportunities for volunteer service at Blanco State Park, Inks Lake State Park and the Inks Dam Fish Hatchery. So please volunteer when they call for help. With so many being gone, it is sometimes harder to get enough people.

Hope you have a great summer. Looking forward to seeing everyone in August.

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

NO MEETING IN JULY!

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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.

FRIENDS OF THE UPPER HIGHLAND LAKES NATURE CENTER (UHLNC)

by Billy Hutson

Just a note for all readers to visit our website when you have a chance at www.uhln.org. Paula Richards has done a great job in making it very dynamic and several MN's/uhln members have contributed articles that make it a fun and educational read. Thanks to all that have contributed.

LAST MONTH'S PROGRAM

by Chris Faught

Photo by Mike Childers

Judy Bloomquist did a wonderful job talking to us about Hummingbirds and their behavior.



15TH ANNUAL TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST CONFERENCE

October 24 - October 26

The site of the 15th Annual (2014) Texas Master Naturalist State Conference will be Mo Ranch in the heart of the Texas Hill Country on the Guadalupe River near Hunt, Texas. Dates for the Conference are October 24-26, 2014. Registration and accommodations information will be available in the late July – early August time frame.

TPWD BIRD BANDING

by Linda O'nan

HLMN Jerry Stacy banding white wing dove for TPWD the month of June. Detailed logs are maintained showing molt & age, location, & other information for tracking purposes.



CONGRATULATIONS GRADUATION CLASS 2014!



Twenty-one classmates of the 2014 Class of Master Naturalists graduated May 26th in a dinner/ceremony at The Trails Clubhouse. They are shown above with the Certified Master Naturalist coordinators of their 12-week course of study, Ralph Herter, Course Coordinator, back left, and Melanie Huff, assistant, standing in front of Herter. Shown are, front row, from left, are Katherine Romans, Linda Brown, Wayne Holly, Marilyn McClain, Lynn Wolheim. Second row: Melanie Huff, assistant Class Coordinator; Judy Haralson, Alice Rheaume, Sandra Landis, Beth Mortenson, Lou Ann Holland, Hanna Drago. Back row: Ralph Herter, Class Coordinator; Jan Belz, Anne Holly, Mary Musselman, Suzanne Adkinson, Donald Cruver, Steve Scheffe, Ann Stevenson, Tracy Salmi, Kay Herring. Not shown is John De La Garza. (Courtesy Photo by Jeffie Herter)

HATCHERY OUTDOOR PROGRAM (HOP) 2014

by Phil Wyde

HOP 2014 is over – and I think that it was a success! There were 5 sessions, 4 participating schools and 382 very happy and satisfied children. I know the latter because I asked each of them if they would rather be in school than at the hatchery and they emphatically said NO!!!! I asked as many as I could if they liked visiting the hatchery and each child that I asked this question unequivocally yelled, YES!!!! To my surprise, the teachers and parents accompanying each class had similar responses as the children. Each one that I asked said that they would much rather be at the hatchery than at school or at home, and they too very much liked visiting the hatchery.

For those of you that like facts, we had 70 2nd graders from Lampasas visit on May 16th, 88 5th graders from Richey Elementary came on May 19th, 88 more 5th graders from Richey Elementary visited on May 20th, 80 4th graders from Packsaddle Mountain Elementary School participated on May 21st and finally, 66 5th graders from Llano Elementary came to the hatchery on May 27th. The last session was tense since we were not sure until the very last minute if we would have the session or have to cancel it due to heavy rain. It was also doubtful if we would have enough volunteers to man the event. Happily many of you respond to sniveling, whining and frantic pleas.

We had 7 stations this year: 1) Solar Prints, 2) Fish Morphology and Biology, 3) Bird Watching, 4) Fish Production and Fish Reproduction at the Hatchery, 5) an interpretive hike along our Ashe Juniper Trail, 6) an interpretive hike up our Hill Top Trail and 7) our ever popular Master Caster Station. If you had volunteered you would have seen enchanting images almost magically appear on paper, learned that cat fish have more than 200,000 taste and smell buds on their barbels and skin, hear that daddy cat fish are dedicated to their offspring, learned that you can eat stone crop in a pinch and would have seen painted buntings, gold finches, cotton rats and Lincoln sparrows. You would also have learned to cast with deadly accuracy.

If you had volunteered you would have gotten to work with some really fantastic and wonderful volunteers. Some of these worked every minute of every session, some walked up and down the hill over and over, and many came to the sessions despite limps, back pain and many other assorted ailments. Several volunteers came almost every day despite living 60 to 100



Getting ready to hike the Hill Top Trail



George waxing eloquently



Solar station in action.

miles away. Four of our newest members (i.e., members of the 2014 HLMN Class) proved to be very enthusiastic and valuable volunteers. Best of all, with only one or two exceptions, I only saw smiles on the faces of our volunteers. In short, this year's HOP volunteers were absolutely awesome! (This is an instance where the word "awesome" is totally appropriate.) I sincerely very much thank each of you that came and helped at this year's HOP!!!!

The accompanying images (taken by Kay Herring and Jean Schar) give you a better idea of HOP 2014.

F



Would Be Master Casters



Lots of interest at the Birding Station



Looking in Vernal Pools



Master Caster casualties

THE “LARGE BEAKS” A.K.A. GROSBEAKS

by Joanne Fischer

There are seven types of grosbeaks. But when studying them, what's odd (and somewhat confusing) is that although they all bear the name “grosbeak” they are very dissimilar in many respects including the fact that they are from different families. Five of the grosbeaks (the Black-headed, the Blue, the Crimson-collared, the Yellow and the Rose-breasted) represent a small part of the Cardinalidae family (which also includes cardinals, buntings, the Pyrrhuloxia and the Dickcissel) while the Evening and Pine are members of the finch family (Fringillidae). All grosbeaks, do however, have large beaks - thereby their name - which comes from the French “gros bec” or “large beak”.

Only five grosbeaks are regular residents of the United States (the Black-headed, the Blue, the Rose-breasted, the Evening and the Pine) while the Crimson-collared and the Yellow are Mexican species that are occasional vagrants to south Texas and South Arizona, respectively. Most grosbeaks winter in Mexico and Central America.

The grosbeaks are some of the most colorful birds in North America. They are however, highly sexually



Blue grosbeak - male

dimorphic (the male plumage looks very different from the female's). The males are the more colorful of the species (typical) while the females are mainly shades of brown and have been described as “dowdy” in comparison to the male.

In the Hill Country you may see three of the grosbeaks - the Rose-breasted and Black-headed can be spotted during migration periods while the Blue can be a migrant or a summer, breeding resident.

Even though the Rose-breasted, the Black-headed and the Blue are all in the Cardinalidae family - the Rose-breasted and Black-headed are east/west ecological equivalents, while the blue is more closely related to buntings (especially the Indigo and Lazuli Buntings). This is even demonstrated in their songs - the Rose-breasted and Black-headed have a robin like song, while the Blue Grosbeak's song is similar to the Painted Bunting and House Finch.

The Black-headed Grosbeak lives throughout the forests in the western



Blue grosbeak - female

(Continued on page 8)

part of the country, while the Red-breasted resides in states east of the Rockies. To further confound things, in the central part of the country, the Rose-breasted Grosbeak may hybridize with the Black-headed Grosbeak in areas where both species are scarce. The resultant hybrids can look like either parent species or be intermediate in pattern, with various combinations of pink, orange, and black.

Blue grosbeaks occur across the southern two-thirds of the U.S. all the way to Arizona and parts of California. And although they are widespread geographically, they are not considered abundant. Males are a beautiful deep blue with black face and throat and two chestnut wing bars and a black-and-silver beak. Females are primarily a rich cinnamon-brown with chestnut wing bars and a tail that is bluish. Immatures resemble the female.

The Blue Grosbeak's diet consists primarily of insects supplemented by seeds and some fruits. They will occasionally visit bird feeders but even then are more likely to search for seeds on the ground than at the feeder. They breed in areas covered in a mix of grass,



Red-breasted grosbeak

forbs, and shrubs, with usually a few taller trees. They prefer thickets, forest edges, hedgerows and riparian zones.

Blue Grosbeaks build their nests low in small trees, shrubs, tangles of vines, or briars. The nest, built primarily by the female, is a compact cup made of twigs, bark strips, fiber, snakeskin and other soft materials. It

is lined with roots, hair and fine grasses. The female lays between three and five pale bluish white eggs which hatch after about 2 weeks. Both parents feed the young. In the southern part of the Blue Grosbeak's breeding range, each mated pair may raise two broods of nestlings per year. Although, Blue Grosbeaks are heavily parasitized by cowbirds the population is considered stable and their breeding range has expanded northward. Blue Grosbeaks live at greatest densities in mature long leaf pine forests in Florida and mixed lob lolly-short leaf pine forests in east Texas.

All grosbeaks are known to be unobtrusive - despite their bright colors. But fortunately, for us, the males will often sing while perched at high points in the shrubs and trees enabling us to spot them. And oh, what a beautiful sight!



Black headed grosbeak

GALLERY

by Jerry Stacy



Good use for a giant centipede