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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 everyone is having a good summer. I have enjoyed the green brought on by our June rains. However, that will be changing soon I think as the temperatures rise.

Thanks to everyone who helped at the fair for Kids day. The turn out was slim, but it was fun. Ever try to kayak in a slanted pool? Also thanks to those who turned out for the Angler Ed day at the Kingsland Library. Only one little boy showed up, but it was good to see everyone.

There is going to be a board meeting on July 29 at 1:00 p.m. If you have an item to put on the agenda for this, please let me know.

Also want to remind everyone to save the date of August 21 at 5 for Wade Hibler's retirement party. It will be at the Pavilion in Marble Falls. Plans are under way, and it should be a fun time.

We are trying a new venue for the August meeting. The meeting will be at the Crossview Baptist Church in Marble Falls. It is located behind the Hardware store and across from the Helping Center. In fact, you might want to check out the Helping Center Garden before or after the meeting. It is always a treat to see what is growing!

The Friends of Inks Lake (FOIL) has been meeting and busy getting organized. A new slate of officers has been elected. Membership is only \$5 and your continued support will be welcome. Not sure of the next meeting at this point, but will probably be early August. The park staff seems ready to jump in with assistance as well. Stay tuned for further information.

Thanks to Linda O'Nan for pushing the bird blind project along with the new park superintendent, Cory. He has promised to get the necessary projects completed for public use by September 1.

I was looking at some of the other chapter newsletters on line. The definition of a Master Naturalist by the Heart of Texas Chapter I thought was noteworthy. "Someone who is not afraid of digging in the dirt and slogging through the mud while giving back to the community." I would add being in the freezing cold rain and wind and blazing hot sun to that.

Hope to see you all at the August meeting. This is always a special one! Stay cool!



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

[chili865@gmail.com](mailto: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.

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### 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

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## AUGUST PROGRAM

by Chris Faught

In August we will meet in the Crossview Baptist Church at 1401 Broadway (between Ave n & O south of ACE Hardware) and the program will be delivered by Mr. Blake Hendon of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. He is a Private Lands Biologist who offers help to land owners and managers with issues relating to game and non-game species. His specific topic will be a discussion of *Texas Wildscapes* and the impact this program has on the wild bird populations. Also, it is the meeting we use to award certificates and pins for our members.

## 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.

## THE RECORD 2014 WOOD DUCK NESTING SEASON

by Jerry Stacy

First Wood Duck eggs appeared on March 13.

By April 10, a Screech Owl had laid 4 eggs in one of the nest boxes. She was on the nest on April 18, but by April 24, she had abandoned her nest. In the same box, by May 23, a Wood Duck had laid four eggs, and by May 31 there were nine eggs. They all hatched sometime between June 27 and July 2, making it the latest successful nest I have seen in the years I have been monitoring. The picture on the left shows the four owl eggs on April 10. Picture on right is hatched Wood Duck eggs on July 2.



We had one Wood Duck nest with 5 eggs that was abandoned and one nest with 14 eggs that was depredated, most likely by a large rat snake, since not a sign of an egg shell was left.

We also had one successful Carolina Wren nest with four new birdies.

Our 2014 Wood Duck nesting season ended with 97 new baby ducklings!

## THE “NO HOPE” BIRD (A.K.A. THE INCA DOVE)

by Joanne Fischer



There are almost 300 species of doves worldwide (members of the Columbidae Family), with seven or eight residing in or migrating through Texas. The Hill Country is home to five types of doves – the Rock Dove, the Mourning Dove, the White-winged Dove, the Common Ground-Dove and the diminutive, friendly Inca Dove.

The Inca Dove is a small gray bird (only about 8 inches in length) with dark brown feather edging, giving it a scaled appearance. In flight it shows chestnut coloring on the upper and underside of its wings, similar to a Common Ground-dove. However it also displays prominent white edges on its long, square tail which distinguishes it from the Ground-dove - which is an even smaller dove (at a mere 6 inches) and has a short dark tail. Inca Doves are typically seen in pairs or small flocks.

The Inca Dove is a common resident in south-

central Texas, Arizona and New Mexico south to Mexico and Costa Rica. It lives primarily around human habitation and in city parks as well as at woodland edges, savannahs, and thickets in and around cultivated fields. The Inca Dove is a permanent resident and there is no evidence of it migrating. Its range in recent years has been expanding northward to cover all of Texas and it has been spotted as far north as Kansas and Arkansas.

Inca Doves are ground foraging seed eaters, are fairly used to human presence and therefore are common visitors to backyard bird feeders. They are usually quite easy to see (I typically hear them before I see them). It has been speculated that because the Inca Dove and Common Ground-dove are too small to be considered game, that they have become accustomed to be-

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ing around humans and show little fear of them. Inca Doves spend much of their time resting and they are often seen sunning or preening either on the ground or low in trees and shrubs.

During courtship the male Inca Dove bows, coos, fans his tail and struts for the female. Adults are fairly aggressive during courtship fighting for their preferred mate. Once the mating bond is established the male and female jointly build a nest (the male collects the nesting material and brings it to the female, and the female arranges it). The nest is a small rather flimsy floor of twigs which is placed in a low bush or shrub. The female lays two white eggs for each brood (not 1-3 or 2-4 – exactly 2) and may produce two or three broods a year. They have been observed breeding as early as March and as late as September. Both parents incubate the eggs and the nestlings are fed what is called "pigeon milk" which is a high protein milky substance produced and regurgitated by the parents.

Things I didn't know about Inca Doves:

Despite being named after the Inca Empire, the Inca Dove does not occur in any of the lands that constituted that region.

The Inca Dove as a plump bird, is able to survive both extreme hot and cold temperatures. They do however, engage in a somewhat odd behavior during periods of extreme cold. In order to keep warm groups of up to twelve birds will stand on each others' backs forming a pyramid (two or three tiers high). Every several minutes, the birds

will rotate positions with the bottom tier birds moving to the top. They may maintain this "pyramidal behavior" for an hour at a time. (I have never seen this behavior exhibited but would be interested to do so!)

The Inca Dove is also able to go four or five days without drinking and has been known to fly ten or more miles to reach water. It is reported that because Inca Doves are able to fly directly to a water source, without searching about, that early Texas settlers would often watch doves to locate water holes.

Doves also drink differently than most other species of birds. Instead of dipping their bills and then tipping their heads back to let the water run down their throats, doves immerse their bills and suck up the water.

The Inca Dove's song is a long series of melodious "hoo hoos" repeated many times in succession (some would say monotonously). One account I read regarding the Inca Dove song stated that it was Roger Tory Peterson who claimed that "sufferers of the Texas summer heat" might interpret the Inca Dove's song as sounding like "no hope".

And finally, many collective nouns describe a group of doves, including a "bevy", "cote", "dole", "dule", and "flight" of doves.

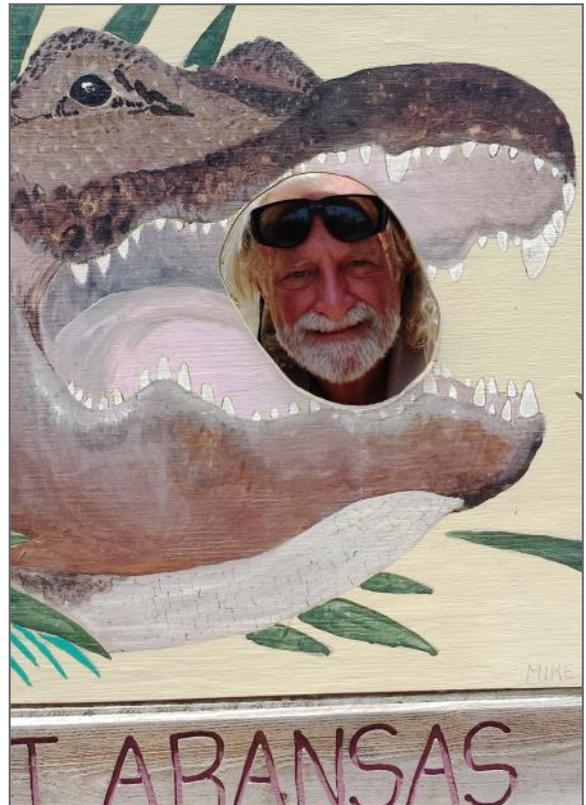
A challenge to all this winter: Be on the look out for a "Dule of Inca Doves, engaged in pyramidal roosting!"

## THE AMERICAN ALLIGATOR

by Billy Hutson

It brings back fond memories when I think about my first real encounter with *Alligator mississippiensis*. Many times I had seen them close-up in Florida when I was a child with my mom, fishing in the everglades. They would swim lazily by and I was advised to watch but not to pester. We always left each other alone. Actually we usually moved because the fishing was suddenly diminished with their presence.

Then one morning while coming back from a jog around the golf course where I lived outside of Houston in 1985, I got quite a surprise. I opened the gate for my dog and I to go into the yard and the dog took off in a flash around the house. There was quite a fuss with growling and yipping and when I ran around to see, my dog was in a heated battle with a 7 foot alligator, and he was losing. I managed to call him off and got him into the house without being involved in the



fight at all. His one ear was torn up but otherwise only flesh wounds that weren't serious.

I called TPWD and told them of the new resident in the one acre pond in my front yard. They advised me not to feed it or it would eat my cats. I said I don't have any cats and they said then it will eat your dog. I thanked them for the already learned advice and they sent me a very informative book of alligators in Texas which I still have. They are found in the SE corner of our wonderful state all the way up to the Balcones escarpment. Supposedly!

This last April I had the opportunity to observe them up close with Andrea's traveling master naturalist band of assorted enthusiasts at the outreach program for Lago Vista 5<sup>th</sup> graders in Port Aransas (pictures attached from my cell phone). They were huge, one at 12 feet. There is good reason for them to be where they were, as there were numerous nutria living in the same wet lands seemingly unbothered by their presence. An easy meal awaiting.

The American alligator is a strange ancient beast

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that survived the great dinosaur extirpation. The female builds a nest and lays her eggs which incubate by the heat of the rotting vegetation of the nest. Depending on the temperature, they will be either all male (higher temp.) or all female hatchlings. She guards them ferociously. The picture below of a young alligator was taken by our very brave nature center photographer Jim Baines.

While not wanting to have this article go on forever, I will mention just one more interesting fact that many may not know. The American alligator has sensing organs around the periphery of its mouth that are similar to the lateral line in fish. It can sense vibrations in the water as subtle as a snake slithering into the water from a good distance away. And even a small bird falling into the water in the rain, I have read.

Whatever the reason, able to hold their breath for a long time, being a tenacious predator, nearly topping



the food chain, able to go long periods without eating, having sensory glands in its outer jaw and being quite adaptable to global warming, I might add, they will most likely survive our destruction of the planet along with insects.

And finally, even though Dr.Phil would have you believe that I have eaten nutria, I regret that I have missed the boat and if I have to compete with Alligator mississippiensis, I never will.



# GALLERY



Summer Tanager

Photo by Sue Kersey



Spiny Lizard

Photo by Sue Kersey



Pair of Bobwhite quail in our yard

Photo by Mike Childers