

T E X A S

Master Naturalist™



HIGHLAND LAKES CHAPTER



Highland Lakes Steward

August 2014

Volume 5, Issue 8

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

Hi there! Summer has definitely come to the Hill Country! Hope you are staying cool!

Congrats to everyone who got hard-earned awards at last month's meeting. I couldn't believe almost everyone was on the stage! I would like to give a shout-out to Sandra Landis who will have her own ceremony next month! Hope everyone enjoyed the new venue. We will probably be moving permanently in January to this new location. I am sure Cris will keep us updated.

I hope everyone is thinking about participating in the conference this fall. Registration will be starting soon. It is going to be at Mo Ranch in Hunt this October. It is always a fun and educational time. Our own Lori Greco will be presenting the 2013 class project as our Chapter's project. We want to support her! Also be thinking about what you can take for the auction. So **think Mo Ranch Oct 24-26th!**

Hope to see many of you at Wade's retirement party August 21. **THANK YOU WADE** for all you have done over the years. We look forward to now working along side you as a Master Naturalist! No more advising, now you get to participate! Don't forget your sheets for the scrapbook!

Things will be picking up this fall. Don't forget Kids Day Out September 10. The Native Plant Garden Tour is in need of volunteers on October 11. There are also the various Friends groups for the Hatchery, Upper Highland Lakes Nature Center,

and the state parks that will be meeting monthly now with projects and activities to keep us busy. Blanco State Park and Inks State Park add to the volunteer opportunities. The Science Mill in Johnson City is coming along, and will be calling for volunteers. Also the bird blind will be having its grand opening soon. If you have something you would like to see us do in the future, let either this board or the new board in January know. **Remember, it takes volunteers to make all these programs work! Go Team!!**

Hope to see everyone at the September meeting. Hopefully everyone will be back from their vacations by then.

Save the Date

Wednesday, December 3th
in the early evening
HLMN December Meeting,
Celebration, Dinner and Awards



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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.

AUGUST PROGRAM

by Cris Faught

The August program was 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 was a discussion of *Texas Wildscapes* and the impact this program has on the wild bird populations.



SEPTEMBER PROGRAM

by Cris Faught

In September our new member, Wayne Holly, will present a practical course on Field First aid and the things we all need to know and to have on hand to respond to medical emergencies while on the trail.

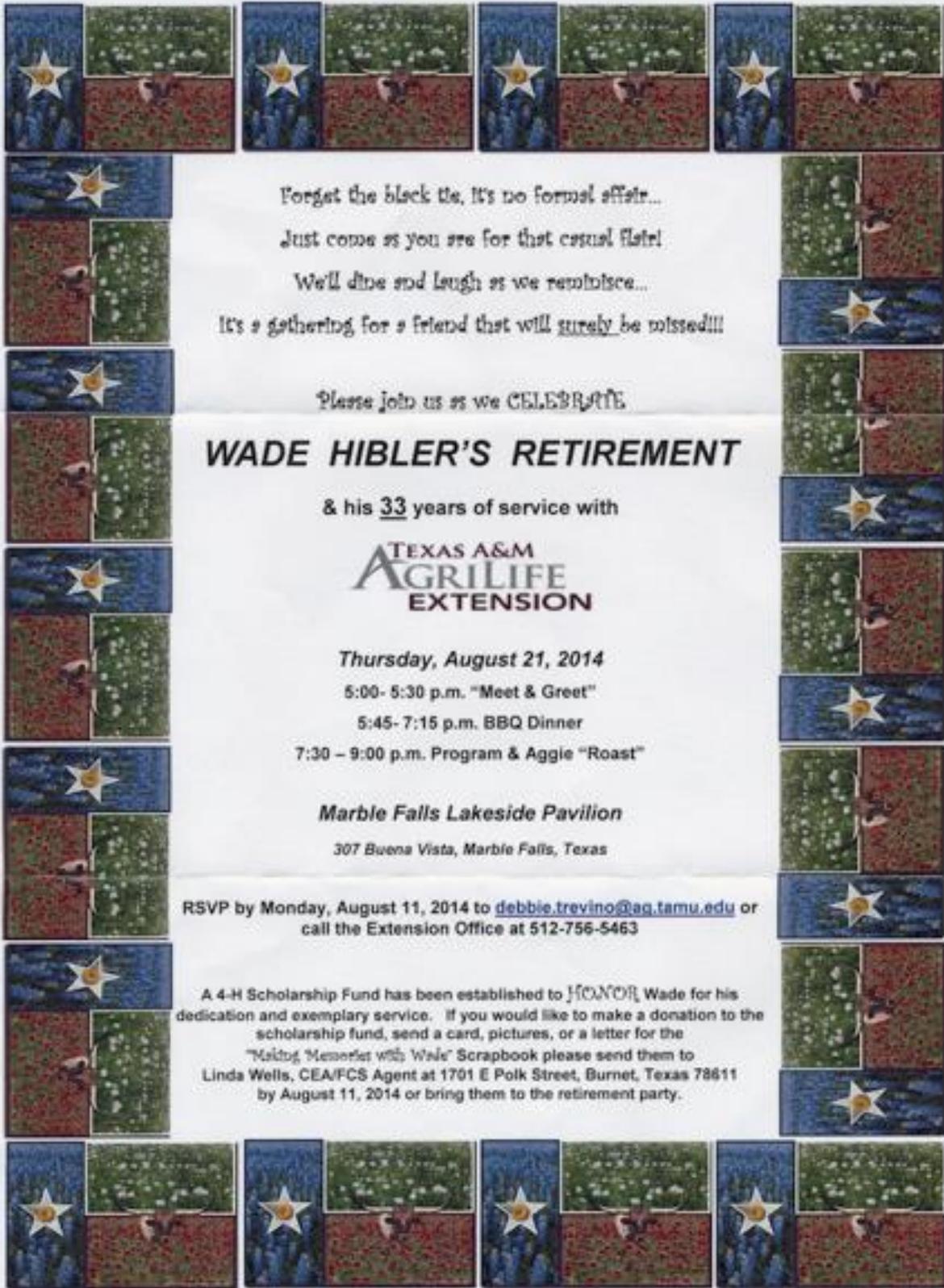
15TH ANNUAL TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST CONFERENCE

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.

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



Forget the black tie, it's no formal affair...
 Just come as you see for that casual fest!
 We'll dine and laugh as we reminisce...
 It's a gathering for a friend that will surely be missed!!!

Please join us as we **CELEBRATE**

WADE HIBLER'S RETIREMENT

& his 33 years of service with

**TEXAS A&M
 AGRILIFE
 EXTENSION**

Thursday, August 21, 2014
 5:00- 5:30 p.m. "Meet & Greet"
 5:45- 7:15 p.m. BBQ Dinner
 7:30 – 9:00 p.m. Program & Aggie "Roast"

Marble Falls Lakeside Pavilion
 307 Buena Vista, Marble Falls, Texas

RSVP by Monday, August 11, 2014 to debbie.trevino@ag.tamu.edu or
 call the Extension Office at 512-756-5463

A 4-H Scholarship Fund has been established to **HONOR** Wade for his
 dedication and exemplary service. If you would like to make a donation to the
 scholarship fund, send a card, pictures, or a letter for the
 "Making Memories with Wade" Scrapbook please send them to
 Linda Wells, CEA/FCS Agent at 1701 E Polk Street, Burnet, Texas 78611
 by August 11, 2014 or bring them to the retirement party.

2014 NATIVE PLANT GARDEN TOUR CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

By Fred Zagst

Members of the Highland Lakes Master Naturalists are always busy volunteering and doing some type of project. It could be working with school kids at Inks Lake State Park or the Inks Dam National Fish Hatchery, helping at Reveille Peak Ranch or Balcones Canyonlands NWR, or maybe building a bird blind or doing field work like a bird count.

I love the idea that we can be in the outdoors interacting with the public and sharing our passion of the natural world. We get a quick reward when a little child says "OH WOW this is neat" or maybe an adult says "Thank you for your time and effort."

This still leaves with me one big question, "Are we getting the word out?" By getting the word out, I mean are people catching on to the message that if you want birds, butterflies, dragonflies, pollinator insects, lizards, etc., in your yard, you need to plant native plants and not use pesticides or herbicides. In addition to those benefits, has the public caught on to the idea that native plants take minimum water once they are established.

And the really big question is: do they understand that all of this is interconnected?

Which leads me into the next thought: I'd like to say a great big THANK YOU and ask you to SAVE THE DATE!!

The Highland Lakes Master Naturalists have been great supporters of and are a major reason for the success of the Highland Lakes Native Plant tour over the past four years. We can all thank Marvin Bloomquist, first for the idea of opening up a tour of the home gardens of some of our members to the public and also for suggesting that the Master Naturalists would be a perfect fit when we needed more volunteers

THANK YOU!! Thank you!!! Thank you so much for all each of you Master Naturalists have done to help us in the past.

We hope that you will keep the upcoming tour in mind as you plan your October calendar: Save the date of Saturday, October 11 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

This year we have five private gardens and three public gardens on the tour in the Marble Falls and Horseshoe Bay areas. Maps and wrist bands will be

available on the day of the tour and will only be available to purchase at the Falls on the Colorado Museum, 2001 Broadway, Marble Falls, TX. There will also be a native plant sale, a tree give away and general information for the public at the Falls on the Colorado Museum.

The steering committee for this year's garden tour is busy at work. The following Master Naturalists are working on the committee: Kay Herring, Mike Childers, Sammy Childers, Sue Kersey, Linda O'Nan, Marjorie Dearmont, Pat Campbell and Fred Zagst.

I would estimate that we have had contact with somewhere between 800 and 1,000 people during the past four tours including some attendees at the very first tour who are new graduates of the 2014 class, Wayne and Ann Holly!!

So, yes, we do make an impact with each and every event in which we participate as Master Naturalists. Yes we can and do get the word out about native plants and their benefit to our native birds, butterflies and other fauna. And yes, we are fulfilling our Master Naturalists mission: 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.

Please mark Oct. 11 on your calendar and think about helping us by volunteering for at least part of the day. Please contact Linda O'Nan (830-822-1834) if you could help us out.

With kind regards,

Fred Zagst

HLMN Class of 2012

And Highland Lakes Chapter NPSOT President

1000 HOURS



Congratulations to Sondra Fox and Joanne Fischer on attaining 1000 volunteer hours!

**500
HOURS**



Congratulations to George Brugnoli, Melanie Huff, Susan Morgan, Ralph Herter, and Bonnie Mikels on attaining 500 volunteer hours!

**250
HOURS**



Congratulations to Cris Faight, Paula D'Orsogna, Charles Beierle, Becky Breazeale, Karen Lundquist, Sheryl Smith-Rodgers, Celia Escamilla, Jan Warren (not pictured), and Dennis Ellison (not pictured) on attaining 250 volunteer hours!

2014 RECERTIFICATION



Congratulations to Charles Beierle, Sherry Bixler (np), Judy Bloomquist, Marvin Bloomquist, Barbara Booth, Betsy Bouchard (np), George Brugnoli, Ray Buchanan (np), Pat Campbell, Judy Caramanica, Mike Childers (np), Sammie Childers (np), Joy Ellen Collins, Ann Cook, Betty Cruikshank, Lyn Davis, Marjorie Dearmont, Susan Downey, Sharon Drake, Melissa Duckworth, Minnie Eaton (np), Dennis Ellison (np), Nancy Ellison (np), Celia Escamilla, Joanne Fischer, Sondra Fox, Fredi Franki, Lori Greco, M J Hansen, Ralph Herter, Cathy Hill, Eva Hobbs, Melanie Huff, Billy Hutson (np), Mike Kersey (np), Sue Kersey, Marilyn Lageman, Bonnie Mikels, Susan Morgan, Debora Moroney, Vicki Myatt (np), Penny Nichols (np), Linda O'nan, Karyn Parker, David Payton, Alice Rheume, Jean Schar, Helen Smith, Sheryl Smith-Rodgers, Jerry Stacy, Cindy Sterling, Elaine Thorne (np), Pam Walt, Jan Warren (np), Marcy Westcott, Terri Whaley (np), Shirley Winslow (np), and Phil Wyde (np—Not Pictured)

INITIAL CERTIFICATION



Congratulations to this year's class members Linda Brown, Donald Cruver, Hanna Drago, Judy Haralson, Kay Herring (np), Lou Ann Holland, Anne Holly, Wayne Holly, Sandra Landis (np), Marilyn McClain (np), Mary Musselman (np), Alice Rheaume, Rhonda Spray, Tracy Salmi (np), Steve Scheffe (np), Ann Stevenson, and Lynn Wolheim (np) for attaining the necessary hours to initially certify. Also pictured are Ralph Herter - 2014 Class Coordinator and Melanie Huff - 2014 Assistant Coordinator and 2015 Coordinator.

ANOTHER L.B.J. (OR MORE PROPERLY THE FIELD SPARROW)

by Joanne Fischer

In the world of birding most sparrows are often fondly (or not so fondly) referred to as another “little brown job” - because they are often-times hard to identify. I believe that the Field Sparrow is one of the more easily identifiable sparrows – not only due to its appearance but more so because of its beautiful song. In fact for many years I have wanted to call it a Song Sparrow!

The song is described as “a clear, bouncing-ball trill” and is heard in brushy fields and roadsides throughout the east, midwest and south. It is heard most frequently during breeding season when the males sing from exposed perches. The male Field Sparrow starts singing as soon as he returns to his breeding grounds in the spring. He sings vigorously until he finds a mate, but after that he sings only occasionally.

The Field Sparrow is a small, slender warm-brown sparrow with a rufous cap, a short conical, distinctive pink bill (their legs and feet are also pink), a white eye ring, an unstreaked buff breast with soft orangey highlights and two subtle white wing bars. Their backs are brown with gray streaks.

Field Sparrows are called an “old field” species in that they prefer patches of tall grasses and brush in areas with small trees and shrubs. They breed from northern North Dakota, central Minnesota, northern Wisconsin and central New England south to Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana, central Texas, and western Colorado. They winter south to the Gulf of Mexico and northeastern Mexico. In the Hill Country the Field Sparrow can be a year round resident.

Field sparrows eat mainly grass seeds in winter, then switch to a blend of seeds and insects in summer months. Like other small sparrows, they have a distinctive style of feeding on grass seed heads: flying to the top of a tall grass stem, then using their weight to “ride” the stem to the ground, where they pin the seed head and pluck individual seeds. Field Sparrows also pounce on insect prey from low perches. Their



small bills limit them to small seeds so at backyard feeders they do not visit sunflower seed feeders but seek out mixed seed feeders that contain smaller seeds.

Female Field Sparrows arriving on the breeding grounds may experience a rude welcome from males seeking a mate. An unmated male will often fly at and strike a female on his territory, sometimes driving her to the ground. Such an approach however, seems to seal the deal! Most often by the following day the male is following his mate closely as she searches for a nest site. The female builds the nest alone although the male may help by bringing nesting materials to the nest site.

Field Sparrows often breed more than once a season. They build a new nest each time, building them higher and higher off the ground as the season progresses. Early spring nests are often on the ground, where they're less visible. As leaves and ground cover

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grow, the birds build their nests in bushes and trees, where they're safer from snakes and other predators. Parents feed nestlings a diet of spiders and insects, including caterpillars, grasshoppers, flies, bees, and beetles.

Field Sparrows are vulnerable to parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds. In some Iowa and Illinois studies of cowbird parasitism, 50 to 80 percent of all Field Sparrow nests contained cowbird eggs. An experiment that was part of these studies found that in areas with high rates of parasitism, Field Sparrows physically attacked models of cowbirds placed near their nests.

In winter Field Sparrows may form mixed feeding flocks with other species, including White-throated and Song Sparrows. Smaller and less aggressive than other sparrows, Field Sparrows are usually at the bottom of the dominance hierarchy in these mixed flocks. Their subordinate role means that they may have to take extra risks to gain access to food, such as returning to a feeding site first after a predator has flushed the flock.

Though still common, the population of Field Sparrows has declined quite sharply in the last fifty years due mainly to habitat loss.

Listen and watch for these softly colored, small sparrows in your neck of the woods!

BALCONES VOLUNTEER STATUS REPORT

by Joan Mukherjee

I bet most of you thought nothing was going on at the Refuge! Not quite true. We are missing Rob Iski who has retired and outdoor activities have slowed with the hot weather. But super-volunteer Dub has been out every day keeping things working -especially ACs and wells. Ruth has been watering and caring for the headquarters gardens. Margie Butler and her gardeners have been keeping the gardens at the Flying X from becoming a jungle. Some of us have been sitting at the front desk to greet visitors and answer phones. Greeters are especially needed on Mondays and Fridays this fall. Call Deborah Holle if you would like to work on the desk. deborah_holle@fws.gov, ph 512-267-6530, ext 10.

Some of the upcoming activities needing help are:

- Swift Fest is August 23 starting at 2pm in Jonestown. We need volunteers to conduct environmental learning games with children. If you can help, contact Deborah Holle.
- October 4, 9am to 4pm, is the Refuge Week Program. We are needing helpers for all the following planned activities:
 - Butterfly Tent
 - Pond Activities
 - Useful Plant Walk
 - Landscaping Talk and Walk
 - Snake Presentation
 - Bee Presentation
 - Grass Walk
 - Watershed Display
 - Children's games



We will also be tagging Monarchs (if there are any) and watching for hawks. We also would like naturalists to conduct geology, dragonfly and spider activities. Please let me know if you can do one of these programs or can recommend someone who can.

We need volunteers to do programs or walks on geology, insects and dragonflies.

The children's programs - we are going to run them. Hooray!! Ida Castillo will be coordinating and I will be seeking volunteers. Environmental Education Day will be Feb. 19, 2015. Mark your calendars and wait for future information.

Hoping to hear from you to help us out. If you can, call me at 512-267-5085 or call Deborah Holle at 512-267-9432 ext 10.

THE MEXICAN FREE-TAILED BAT

by Suzanne Adkinson

Are you one who receives unsolicited e-mails trying to get you to buy something? I am. I received an e-mail last week inviting me to buy tickets to watch the colony of bats emerge from the Bracken Bat Cave emergence. Thinking that would be a cool thing to see, and knowing my kids would enjoy it, I bought tickets for my entire family.

As I began thinking about the Bat Cave trip I realized I know absolutely nothing about bats; other than they're kind of scary looking and they come out at night to eat. So, I thought I'd do a little research. There is a ton of information on line about bats, their habitats, lifecycle and flight patterns. With my new knowledge, I thought I would put together a small article about the Mexican Free-tailed Bat.

The Mexican Free-tailed Bat was designated by the State of Texas as the official state flying mammal in 1995. The Free-tailed name describes its tail which more than one third of it hangs freely underneath its tail membrane. This bat is considered medium sized and weighs about 0.4-0.5 oz (11-14 grams). Its wingspan is between 12-14 inches. Their color ranges from dark brown to gray, with some taking on a reddish color thought to occur with a high ammonia concentration in their habitat. They have been known to live up to 18 years. They prefer to live in caves but will also live in attics, under bridges, in tunnels, and in urban areas. These guys are considered the fastest of all bats, they have been clocked at 60 miles per hour (with a tail wind) at an altitude of more than 10,000



Figure 2 Bracken Bat Cave Emergence (stock images, google)

feet. This bat species forms colonies bigger than any other bat; some colonies exist in the 10s of millions.



Figure 1 Mexican Free-Tailed in flight (stock images, google)

The largest colonies occur in Central Texas and Mexico. The largest known colony exists just outside San Antonio and numbers 20 million members.

The Mexican Free-tailed bat is a migratory mammal. They usually arrive in Central Texas in late February after breeding in their wintering country of Mexico. All mothers give birth within the first three weeks of June to one baby, called a pup. The mother gives birth while clinging to the cave ceiling. She cleans and nurses this pup for about an hour until the newborn can hold on to the roost with their own feet, thumbs or tiny incisor teeth. Nursery colonies have been known to average 400-500 pups per square foot. It is thought that mothers recognize their pup by smell and sound. Pups begin flying at age four-five weeks and are weaned between five and six weeks.

Free-tails typically feed from dusk to dawn and eat flying insects. A mother Free-tailed can eat her body weight in a single night. A typical night of feeding can take these bats up to 100 miles round trip. If you consider each of the 20 million bats that live in the Bracken Cave colony; an average daily consumption can equal 250 tons of flying insects. The Free-tailed bats return to Mexico in the month of October.

The Mexican Free-tailed bat provides huge benefits to surrounding farm and ranch land. Their nightly consumption of insects, including the cotton bollworm moth and army cut-worm moths, is estimated to save farmers hundreds of thousands of dollars in pesticides each year.

In my research I found several informational websites. Bat Conservation International (batcon.org) site provided much information about the Bracken Cave and about how an individual can get involved in preserving bats. One such way is to put up a bat house to

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Figure 3 How the Free-Tailed moves through the air
(stock images, google)

try to help a small colony find alternative housing. Several of these bat houses exist in the Blanco State Park. As you can imagine, there are many types of bat houses for purchase, or bat house plans for those of you

who prefer to do-it-yourself.

I purchased a bat house from the Organization for Bat Conservation. It is an extra-large house with five chambers with a capacity of 600 bats. It arrived three days ago. It will be put on a pole at about 20 feet in height this week. Most literature will tell you the house should be higher than 10 feet (12 to 20 feet is better), face east to southeast, and be 20 feet from power lines or tree lines. It should also have chambers 3/4" apart and an adequate landing space so the bats can land, grab on, and climb up. A general rule for your backyard house is be patient for occupants. Your house should gain inhabitants within two to three years. If not, you may need to move it to a different location.

My follow up article will discuss the new bat house and hopefully a small colony of Blanco County Mexican Free-tailed bats.



Figure 4 The Bat House I purchased (DROID Smart Phone)



Figure 5 The Bat House showing the 5 Chambers (DROID Smart Phone)

GALLERY



Giant Swallowtail butterfly on tropical milkweed
Photo by Sue Kersey



Columbine - Westcave Preserve this Spring
Photo by Mike Childers



Look what showed up at the Zagst's Aug 17 - a Rufus Hummingbird!
Photo by Mike Childers