

T E X A S

Master
Naturalist™



HIGHLAND LAKES CHAPTER



Highland Lakes Steward

October 2014

Volume 5, Issue 10

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
Pat Campbell
pat.campbell
@dishmail.net
(512) 715-0176

Vice-President
Chris Faught
Crisfaught1
@hotmail.com
(512) 261-6583

Secretary
Barbara Booth
boothbarbara
@hotmail.com
(512) 470-5534

Treasurer
Blair Feller
blair.feller@gmail.com
(830) 385-2782

CHAPTER PRESIDENT'S LETTER

By Pat Campbell

We have had a busy month!

Many of us had a great trip to Big Bend. The weather was awesome, it was green and the flowers were beautiful. Several of us came home with sore leg muscles from the long hikes, but it was definitely worth it. The park staff could not have been more accommodating and were so appreciative of our volunteering. And George's pork and tomatillo stew was a big hit at the potluck! Thanks to the trip committee for a well planned trip!

The bird blind is now officially open. We celebrated the opening with refreshments compliments of FOIL. Thank you! It was a beautiful day and the butterflies were amazing. Of course, we chased most of the birds away, but it was still awesome! Thanks to all who worked on this wonderful project! More still to come.

The native plant tour was wet and chilly, but we had some hearty souls that came out. One couple was there at 8:30 to buy plants! Fred Zagst delivered their plants to the car, and they did not even have to get out!. The gardens were beautiful on the tour and we sold a lot of native plants.

I hope to see many of you at the state MN conference. Lori Greco is presenting the 2013 class project as a chapter project. Good luck Lori! Sheryl Smith Rogers is a presenter this year, talking about spiders of the Hill country.

I have been asked for the Master Naturalists to participate in the Children's Day Celebration next April in Marble Falls. They would like us to have some activities.

We will be looking for someone to chair this event, so if you are interested in doing so, please let me know. I think it is in keeping with GOP, so we already have a lot of ideas and supplies.

Have a good month and see you at the November meeting!

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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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.

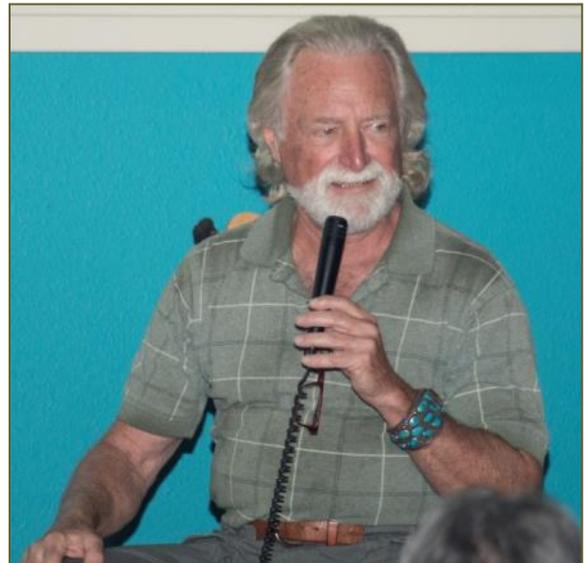
NOVEMBER PROGRAM

by Cris Faught

In **November**, Colleen Gardner, Executive Director of *Selah*, (the Bamberger Ranch) will discuss the bat issues in Texas and what the staff at the Bamberger Ranch have learned in their long term studies of these mammals.

OCTOBER PROGRAM

Billy Hutson provided an informative and entertaining program on Entomology issues concerning the decline of the Bee Population.

**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 is available on the TXMN Web Site.

Awards/Meeting and Christmas Party

December 3rd Wednesday 2014



5:00 pm

107 Twilight Lane, Quail Point, Horseshoe Bay

Come enjoy a fun evening in a festive atmosphere with many friends. Cocktail hour followed by a sit down dinner with our meeting to follow while sipping on your favorite adult beverage and bidding on our many silent auction items from trips to books to plants to eccentric items. Please bring an item for the auction, if you can, it is more fun to participate and all the money goes to our many projects.

Bring a side, vegetable, or dessert and your adult beverage of choice. Appetizers and main course will be provided.....

Sign-up sheets to help decorate and set up will be at our November HLMN meeting

If you have an item or several for our auction, please contact Fredi Franki at ffranki@nctv.com

See you then and there !

Any questions, please contact Lyn Davis at ldavis511@gmail.com

BIG BEND TRIP 2014.....

By Melissa Duckworth



Photo by Susan Downey

There are very few places I can remember where there is not only silence but no white noise, no background rumblings. Do plants correspond with the night insects? I think they must for I could almost hear

their whisperings.

There were 40 hardworking adventurers who travelled to Big Bend National Park on September 26.



Photos by Betty Cruikshank



From the Lost Mines Trail

Photos by Susan Downey

The trip began with eating and joviality... Bunches of it. Everyone brought food. It was so delicious and abundant that on night two we had a repeat. Good company, great food, unsurpassable scenery and anticipation by simply existing in the surroundings made for an unforgettable few hours. Ranger Jeanette Jurado next spoke with us at the Amphitheater on the top ten items that make the Park



Sotols along the road

unique. Historical narrative, mystery and a bit of folklore were delivered under a cool night sky. Walter Prescott Webb says of the Big Bend area: " *There it lies in its gorgeous splendor and geological confusion, almost as if it fell from the hands of its Creator. It fascinates every observer because it seems to be made of the scraps left over when the world was made, containing samples of rivers, deserts, blocks of sunken mountains, and tree-clad peaks, dried up lakes, canyons, cuevas, Vegas, playas, arroyos, volcanic refuse, and hot springs.*"

The group was very aware that this time of leisure would be followed by a round of hard work. The next day was National Public Lands Day and we worked in honor of the Park. Some cleared alive and dead brush to help create a firebreak around the Lodge. Others sanded and stained the benches at the Amphitheater to make them perfect for future audiences. After the hard work, many embarked on hikes nearby or drove outside the Park to soak up the ambience.

Sunday was a school day. We set out to learn. The

classrooms were huge, vast and breathtaking. One set of students went on the Lost Mines Hike. The instructor was Ranger David Elkowitz. Plants were identified that are indigenous to the craggy slopes. Large stands of Red sage were in full bloom. We saw Alligator and Weeping junipers. We gawked at grasshoppers the size of baby mice. I want them all..a camera

cannot capture their heady smell or texture. They are not fickle plants. They are loyal and call this majestic part of the Earth home. Level with the clouds we heard legends of the Lost Mine. Being a time traveler would be a nice diversion, if only to take a peek at the Spanish explorers as they attempted to conquer the untamed lands.

George Brugnoli led an interpretive hike of Boquillas Canyon at the same time with the other students. After a short but steep incline, hikers were provided with a panoramic view of Rio Bravo Del Norte and the agricultural community of Mexican Boquillas. The river was out of its banks on this visit, therefore the entrance to the canyon was blocked. These flood waters are a good thing in that they provide rock and silt from upstream. Multicolored rock was abundant, some studded with garnet. At one juncture, a black bear was spotted spying on these hikers. The unsuspecting bear was in no danger however. A Pygmy rattler was also seen slithering under a rock previously vacated by a group member using it as a resting place.

Even though it is a poisonous pit viper, an antivenin is available. I am certain this fact would be reassuring to the resting student of Nature.

We did not have a long recess. Next class-- Barton Warnock Interpretive Gardens and Exhibits. David Long was quite the storyteller. The gardens were a showcase for native cacti, creosote, sotol, agaves, mesquites, etc.

Native Americans utilized every plant available for food, clothing, shelter and medicine. It is fair to say that the Native Americans of Big Bend had a jump on medicinal cures.

Venturing on to Terlingua's Ghost Town, Cynta, a local Master Naturalist, told us of the mercury mines from the early 20th century, the indentured servitude policies imposed by wealthy industrialists on the Mexican laborers, and the eventual dissolution of the mines as new techniques were discovered for bomb detonation. The laborers left their ghosts behind lingering in the abandoned school, homes, mine shafts and church. The boom town went bust but history lessons remain as well as speculation into the lives of these hard working mercury miners.

School was dismissed and the dinner bell rang at the eclectic Starlight Theater next to the Ghost Town. The food was excellent and the conversation was garnished with laughter and perhaps some exaggeration thrown in making for good memories... My friend, photographic chronicler and fellow adventurer Susan Downey points out that souvenir is French for memory. If so, we all took home a few.

I have recently been reading about Forest Bathing. It does not mean I want to commence taking outdoor showers. Rather it is a concept sanctioned by the Japanese Society of Forest Medicine. The practice was introduced in 1982- but was certainly utilized without a name decades for centuries earlier. It involves taking walks in the forest, breathing in the surrounding air which is rich in phytoncides, a word meaning "exterminated by the plant". These are wood essential oils; antimicrobial volatile chemical compounds. Two of these are α -pinene and limonene. These oils protect wood from rotting and insect destruction. Breathing in this air for several days at a time increases human natural killer cells (NK) cells, thus having a positive effect on the immune system, decreasing stress levels and the risk of psychosocial diseases.....Really, yes really. Read about it.

Regardless, I loved the majesty of this 800,000 acre (more or less) piece of the Earth. I daydream about what the Texas Hill Country would look like with vast untouched areas, with knee high grass and buffalo roaming.....where the deer and the antelope play. All we can do now is take care of what is left; nurture and preserve.

As for me, I plan to go Forest Bathing in Big Bend National Park, same date, 2015. The reservation is made - Roosevelt cottage number 101.

*" There is that in the glance of a flower which may at times control the greatest of creation's braggart lords."-----
John Muir*

INKS LAKE STATE PARK BIRD BLIND OFFICIAL OPENING

BY LINDA O'NAN

PHOTOS BY JUDY PARKER

Official opening date for the HLMN Birdblind project at Inks Lake State Park was Tuesday, October 7. A large number of chapter members turned out for this event. Ed Myatt, project architect and builder, and Vicki Myatt, were present for the ceremony. Project chairman, Jerry Stacy, thanked all the volunteers that helped in the construction and maintenance of this valuable addition to ILSP. Terry Young and Chris Hall represented the park and thanked the master naturalists for their efforts. Additional recognition was given to TXDOT officials for the paved parking areas. Clint Crossover was also in attendance to accept our appreciation for his generous donation of bird feed. Friends of Inks Lake provided refreshments and Starbucks provided complimentary coffee for this festive day. Future educational opportunities with the addition of this wildlife viewing station will be possible to fulfill our mission statement as Master Naturalists. We are all looking forward to great bird watching at the blind!



Architect, Landscape Designer, Construction Foreman



View from inside blind through photo port



Attendees



Wildlife attendees

BALCONES HIGHLIGHTS. OCTOBER 2014

by Joan Mukherjee

You all that missed Refuge Day missed a beautiful day, beautiful weather and a lot of fun things to do. We had nearly 300 visitors, tagged 21 monarchs and found 12 species of dragonflies. Sharon Drake and Jo Ellen Cashion were there demonstrating how pollution affects a watershed. Beth Wesley led a walk looking at "Ancient Seabeds". Lynette Holtz organized games for the children and helped them dissect owl pellets. She also hosted Trish Corvidae and her beautiful owl who were very popular with the kids. Bill Hutson presented a program on bees and Sondra Fox a program on monarch butterflies. Fred Zagst did a herculean stint at the pond and Kay Zagst worked her bunions off helping with parking, running and fetching wherever she was needed. HLMN really contributed! Thank you to all!

The biggest attraction for the kids was catching butterflies. We began with just 6 very cold butterflies but by the end of the day the tent was teeming with fluttering insects. Such excitement! Everyone seemed to enjoy the landscaping, snake, bee and butterfly talks. The photographers asked to have a longer photography program next year. Dr. Abbott and his wife, Kendra, did insect walks. The landscape walk with Diane Sherrill, the grass walk with Bill Reiner and "Useful Plants" with Jean Nance were also well attended.

Our volunteers keep busy. On Tuesday, Oct 7, we had our first children's program, Goin' Buggy, hosting Bertram 4th graders. When I found I was short of volunteers, HLMN came through!! Special thanks to Melanie Huff, Phil Wyde, Betty Cruikshank, Phillip Mitchell, Billy Hutson and Karen Ponder Parker. The presentations went very well and kids had fun. The day got hot and some of we volunteers were dragging but the kids were all up for the hike



Fred Zagst and Gary Cayler with children at the pond



Children with Tish Corvidae and owl, Lara at right

after the program. The hike was a bit disorganized but the kids enjoyed it and it served as a great dry run for planning future hikes.

Volunteer Appreciation Day and the Friends Annual Meeting will be on November 1st this year. Friends members and volunteers are all invited. Please join us at Doeskin. I will be sending out an invitation to those volunteers whose names I have. If I miss anyone or if someone is dying to volunteer, please bring them too.

“LIVING PLANET REPORT – 2014”

Review by Ray Buchanan

If you took a survey of the earth’s population of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish, in 1970 and then repeated the survey 40 years later, in 2010, you would find that the combined population of all those vertebrates would have declined by more than half (52%). But the significance of this decline extends well beyond these staggering percentage points. According to the World Wildlife Fund International’s recently published “Living Planet Report- 2014” (<http://www.panda.org>), these global inhabitants “are the living forms that constitute the fabric of the ecosystems which sustain life on Earth – and the barometer of what we are doing to our own planet.” In other words our canaries are falling dead, and we are the cause of it. The connection between a disastrous disappearance of vertebrates and the decline of those ecosystems and natural processes that sustain our human well-being, our economy, our food security, and our social stability is clearly revealed in the Report.

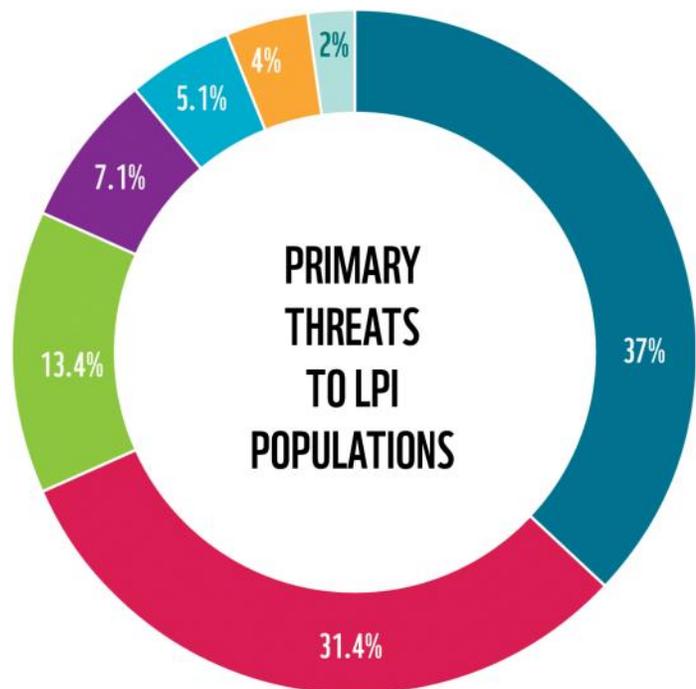
The decline of vertebrates in the tropics is calculated at 56%, temperate regions at 36% with Latin America registering a staggering 83%. Terrestrial species and marine species have declined by 39% each and freshwater species by 76%. But identifying the causes of these declines reveals the true extent of human contributions to a deeper global catastrophe.

For example, the 39% loss of terrestrial species can be directly attributed to the loss of habitat to make way for human land use, particularly for agriculture, urban development, and energy production. Likewise, the 76% loss of freshwater species reflected human-related loss of habitat and fragmentation as well as pollution and invasive species. And the 39% disappearance of marine species (marine turtles, sharks, and migratory sea birds) shows human resource exploitation. (See Infographic Chart below: “Primary Threats to LPI Populations”) Thus, these losses in biodiversity and natural ecosystems demonstrate a level of human resource exploitation that threatens “our very survival,” according to the Report.

INFOGRAPHIC

PRIMARY THREATS TO LPI POPULATIONS

Information on threats has been identified for 3430 populations in the LPI assigned to seven categories. Other populations are either not threatened or lack threat information (WWF, ZSL, 2014).



A measure of humanity’s demands on nature, that have been exceeding our planet’s ability to replenish those resources, constitutes, according to the

(Continued on page 11)

THE RED WINGED BLACKBIRD

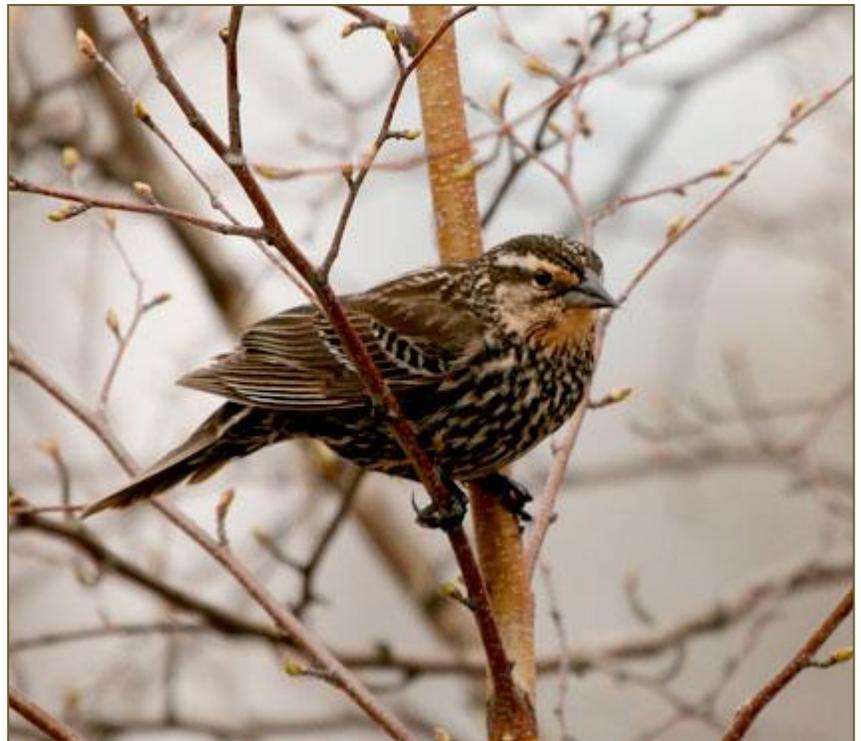
by Joanne Fischer

The Red-winged Blackbird is considered one of the most abundant birds in North America – a fact that I did not know. It is a member of the subfamily Icterinae of the Emberizidae family – which includes blackbirds, grackles, cowbirds, orioles, meadowlarks and bobolinks. This bird is found across the entire North American continent and in many parts of the country is non-migratory. It will withdraw in the winter from the northern climes but typically only travels a relatively short distance (800 miles at most). Texas often has more Red-winged Blackbirds during winter months however there are some that are year-round residents and they do breed throughout the state.

The male Red-winged Blackbird is, for most people, very identifiable. It is glossy black with scarlet-and-yellow shoulder epaulets. The female, on the other hand, tends to stump me each spring when it visits my backyard feeders because she is first of all, smaller than the male and secondly, very different in appearance. She is dark brown above and heavily streaked below often showing a whitish eyebrow, somewhat like a large, dark sparrow. My first reaction to seeing her is to say “what’s THAT bird” and then I realize what it is!

During breeding season, Red-winged Blackbirds are found most commonly in fresh and saltwater marshes, along waterways and wet roadsides. In winter they frequent crop fields, feedlots and pastures. They eat mainly insects in spring and summer and seeds (including corn and wheat) in the winter months.

Male Red-winged Blackbirds during breeding season will do everything possible to get noticed. They perch high on any suitable perching material and sing (some refer to as “belt out”) their



easy to distinguish song described as *konk-la-reeeee*. (It is a song that for me brings back memories of grow-

(Continued on page 11)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (Continued from page 10)

ing up in Wisconsin and is a delightful song in my estimation!) The female Red-winged Blackbird, on the other hand, stays lower and often hidden, skulking through vegetation either gathering food or nesting materials. She does not sing like the male.

An interesting breeding fact about this species is that the male is highly polygynous. He will allow multiple females – sometimes up to a dozen or more (his harem) into his territory. If his advances are accepted, the female will begin building a nest in the territory. If the female rejects his advances he drives her out of the territory. The male does not participate in either the nest building or the incubation of the eggs. His “sole responsibility” is defense of the territory. The coloration of each sex is suited to their function – the male is boldly colored for territorial defense while the female is drab for camouflage on the nest.

The female builds a nest near the ground or water surface, by winding stringy plant materials around several close, upright stems (often cattails) until a platform is formed. She adds more wet leaves and thin strips of bark around and over this and plasters the

inside with mud to form a cup. The cup is then lined with fine, dry grasses. When finished the nest is 4 to 7 inches across and 3 to 7 inches deep.

Red-winged Blackbirds roost in flocks throughout the year. However, in winter the flocks are much larger and often contain other blackbird species and starlings. It is stated that summer roosting flocks contain about 50 birds, while winter roosting flocks can contain hundreds of thousands of birds – a sight with which I am unfamiliar! However another anomaly regarding the Red-winged Blackbird is that males and females often remain segregated throughout the winter months which is an unusual behavior for birds.

The Red-winged Blackbird is plagued by numerous predators – namely raccoons, foxes, weasels, water snakes and other blackbirds like crows and grackles. They are also parasitized by the Brown-headed Cowbird. However, over the years this species has held its own in population stability.

The Red-winged Blackbird is considered to be the most widely distributed, abundant, well-known and well-named species in North America!!! Well – it could have been called the Red-and-yellow-winged Blackbird to make it “totally” accurate.

LIVING PLANET REPORT (Continued from page 9)

Report, an ecological footprint – calculated scientifically in terms of global hectares. This footprint includes all the ecological services people demand that compete for space – the biological productive areas needed for crops, grazing land, built up areas, fishing grounds, and forest products. And statistics have shown that the expansion of ecological footprints have been outstripped by the population explosion; therefore, we have more available globally, but less to go around. In these terms Kuwait ranks 1st and the U.S. 6th in natural resource consumption per capita.

And finally, what these statistics about vertebrate loss confront us with is the dire necessity to make better choices for managing, using, and sharing natural resources within the planet’s limits. And the Report suggests five ways to begin “to build a future

where people can live and prosper in harmony with nature.” (1) preserve natural capital by restoring damaged ecosystems, by halting loss of priority habitats, and by expanding protected areas; (2) produce better by reducing inputs and waste, by managing resources sustainably, and by increasing renewable energy production; (3) consume more wisely by adopting low-footprint lifestyles, by utilizing sustainable energy sources, and by choosing healthier food consumption patterns; (4) redirect global financial flows to value nature by accounting for environmental and social costs and by supporting and rewarding conservation and innovative resource management; (5) establish equitable resource governance by sharing available resources, by making fair and ecologically informed choices, and by measuring success other than by GDP. Twelve interesting examples of the current application of these principles are included in the Report. We need to follow some of those examples.

THE GREATER ROADRUNNER

by Suzanne Adkinson

Greater Roadrunners can be found in the southwestern parts of Louisiana, throughout Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Arizona and into the southern half of California. He can also be found in the southern parts of Nevada, Utah and Colorado. They also extend into the far southern reaches of Mexico. They prefer the hot, dry Southwest areas. Most know this bird from the old time cartoon where Wile E. Coyote was continuously outfoxed by the smarter, faster, more cunning Roadrunner.

The Roadrunner has adapted over time to its harsh habitat. The Roadrunner has a gland in front of each eye that allows them to secrete a solution of highly concentrated salt. This prevents them from excreting it via either their kidneys or urinary tract, thus saving water. Their diet of reptiles and mammals also provides a supply of moisture to their diet. To dissipate heat both adults and chicks flutter the un-feathered area below their chin.

Roadrunners are large cuckoos. Their distinctive shape makes them easy to identify with their long legs, extremely long tail and long neck. Their head has a short crest that is black with small, pale or tan spots, and their bill is long and heavy (good for rattle-



snake killing). They range in color from tan or brown with black streaks on their chest and back areas. They have a distinctive patch of blue skin right behind their eyes. Because they are fast and don't pose well for pictures you have to be quick to see this area.



The Greater Roadrunner

has been a resident of our property since we moved here in 2001. First there was one. Over the past several years two can be seen together. This pretty bad picture, compliments of my DROID cell phone, is one of our residents just as he exited the pool area. If you look closely you can find him standing on a rock in the far background. The second picture came from Google stock photos (much better).

Roadrunners, when mature, are usually between

20-24 inches in height. They spend most of their time on the ground. These birds love to run and will beat a human runner hands down. Top speed for these long, sleek birds is 15 miles per hour (coyotes can run 43 miles per hour). Flattening out while running, they appear parallel to the ground, using their long legs like rudders. They don't fly well or far but will fly up to a branch or post and use that structure as a perch or observation point.

They are great snake killers and are fond of rattlesnakes. They also will eat small rodents, birds, lizards, insects (including scorpions) and carrion. The poisonous prey eaten by the Roadrunner does not affect them. In my 13 years in Blanco County, I have never seen a rattlesnake on our place....maybe because we have Roadrunners.

The Roadrunner makes its nest in scrub trees, cactus, or a thicket from three to 10 feet off the ground. The nest is built by both male and female. The male brings the sticks. The female arranges them into something that resembles a platform with a cup of sticks on top. The completed nest measures up to 17 inches in diameter and up to eight inches high. The parents will line the nest with leaves and grasses and the female will lay 2-6 white eggs. The eggs hatch in 18-20 days. Both parents feed the young. The young leave the nest between 16-19 days.

GALLERY



Cottonmouths having fun



Male Monarch on Frostweed



I have had more Monarchs in the last week than in my 7 years in the Hill Country. I have a patch of Frostweed about 9X6 yds and had about 35 Monarchs on it today (and a few Queens too)
by Sondra Fox