



Highland Lakes Steward

May 2015

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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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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Cris Faught

Plans are already being arranged to handle the Class of 2016 by Marcy Westcott and Ann Cook. Marcy and Ann volunteered to take the reins from Melanie Huff for the next class, and they now realize how much work Melanie, Sharon Drake and Billie Gunther did this year to make the 2015 Class so successful. We all need your help in recruiting candidates (your friends and family) to come to the soon to be announced informational meetings, and consider signing up as a candidate for next year's class. Everybody knows somebody who would make a great addition to our Chapter. Please let Ann or Marcy hear from you.

Also, remember to check out the proposed Bylaws at www.Txmn.org under "Chapter Resources, Documents, Template" to become familiar with what we will vote on at the June meeting. We will have

the Bylaws review committee members at this meeting to answer any questions you come up with, but please read these proposed bylaws first. They will affect all Chapter activities in the future.

You all deserve a solid gold star for handling the triple booking for VS opportunities during the busy month of May. Your collective energy is nothing less than awesome!

Your Board of Directors will meet at 10am on 28 May 2015 in the Extension Office in Burnet and you are invited and encouraged to attend. We will keep the meeting short and sweet, so please come by.

It is an honor to serve as your volunteer president. Thanks for giving me and the Board Members your dedicated support. It is making 2015 an outstanding year.



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.

JUNE 3RD PROGRAM

by Melissa Duckworth

Michelle Haggerty, State Director of the Texas Master Naturalists, will be our speaker at the June 3, 2015 meeting. She will speak to us about current issues in the Texas Master Naturalist program and touch on the upcoming State Meet at the Horseshoe Bay Resort. Michelle is headquartered in Kerrville, Texas.

MAY PROGRAM

We had a welcome change of pace by having the May meeting at George Brugnoli's property. For the program, the group divided into two groups; geology with Charlie Beierle, and plants with Jerry Stacy and Linda Onan. Then each group went on a discovery tour. George's property proved to be rich in geologic and plant diversity and the outings proved to be educational and very enjoyable.

**GET WELL!**

The chapter has sent get well wishes to the following fellow Master Naturalists.

- Sue Kersey - Radiation Treatments
- Wade Hibler - wife, Ellen Ely, recovery from lung surgery - treatments for lung and breast cancer

Keep them in your thoughts and prayers.

COME TO THE NATURE CENTER MAY 24TH

by Billy Hutson

There is a huge Reveille Peak Ranch event on Sunday, May 24th called "Carry the Load" which draws hundreds of people every year and is open to the public and free. It honors our fallen soldiers. There are several military demonstrations scheduled for the morning and a morning service for those interested.

The nature center will use this public event to showcase a half dozen or more of our nature stations from 11 am to 2 or 3 pm and we wanted to be sure all the HLMN members had notice to plan on coming if you can.

We will showcase our Archaeology dig site, our world class Geology site, the habitat site, Camouflage site, Rainwater collection site, Master gardener demonstration site, NPSOT certified Monarch way station/pollinator site and maybe more. It will be a chance to see the ranch, experience the work that mostly our chapter of master naturalists have done and have fun all at the same time.

You can go to www.rprtexas.com for the schedule of events. We hope to see you there.

A SPECIAL PLEASURE

by Lyn Davis

As a Master Naturalist, I was asked to speak to the 2nd graders at Eanes Elementary in Austin on what goes on in the soil and the importance of our natives. They have a couple of raised gardens with native plants that have not been taken care of in years and are going to attempt to clean them up.

What an honor and delight to be able to spread my Master Naturalist knowledge to all these kids. Having each class for 30 minutes and having the class OUTSIDE, I was able to relate the cycle in our soil with the use of decomposers. I also covered the cycle that happens in our Texas natives from the insects, to the birds, to the trees and around the whole native cycle. I was blessed that between the first and second class, as I was looking in a flower bed nearby, a Texas spiny lizard appeared, which helped to enhance my talk on natives.

I broke the group down into smaller groups such as birds, insects, trees, etc. and played the game that Wade did with us last year. Not only did they love it but they saw the impact that losing just one level of our Texas natives such as the bees or trees, does to the rest of the cycle. After talking and hearing the wows of the game, I closed with a few interesting facts on roly-polys/doodle bugs, such as they are NOT an insect, a bug or spider but are related to shrimp and crawfish, breath with gills but will drown



in water again wows of "I did not know that".....

I encouraged them to read books on nature and spend more time outside just watching and listening to all the things that live with us in nature.

MEADOW CENTER/GAULT WAREHOUSE TOUR

by George Brugnoli

Twenty-two HLMN members trekked down to San Marcos for the second HLMN field trip of 2015, organized by Blair Feller. The day began with a too-brief tour of the small, but interesting, aquarium at the Meadows Center, followed by an excellent lecture by Dr. Fritz Hanselmann, Director of Underwater Archaeology for Texas State University. Eyes were opened as we began to comprehend the opportunities underwater archaeology provides to better understand early American civilization.

Texas has only one natural lake, Caddo. As all well understand, early civilizations centered around available water sources, many of which we have flooded by lakes created to address the needs of modern civilization. Thus, the history of the early Texans is often submerged. Dr. Hanselmann and his team are exploring underwater environments at the Meadows Center as well as other domestic and international locations, to better understand our origins. The Doc was "self-actualization" personified. The perfect marriage of advocacy and an avocation.

We then boarded electrically powered glass bottomed tour boats to examine the high and low pressure springs that make the Meadows Center unique. Our guide, Ben for some of us, explained how the Edwards Aquifer functions and how it is realized at Aquarena Springs. We learned a bit about how the Native Americans utilized it and how it was revered by the early Spanish explorers. He related a tale of the Spaniards awe when they "discovered" the main spring, spouting water as high as 55' into the air. Unfortunately, the spring is no longer that powerful and it's flow has been further "tamed" with pipes, but it's powerful currents are still evident in the crystal clear waters.

Finally, our guide led us on an exploration of the wetlands created by the springs and the lake created from it over 100 years ago. It was a great reinforcement of our understanding of the critical importance of wetlands areas and a chance to see some flora and



Aquarena Springs with guide Ben at right by Pat Campbell

fauna less common in our part of the Hill Country.

After lunch we met once again with Dr. Clark Werneke at the Gault Warehouse on the Texas State University campus to learn more about how archaeologists make sense out of the detritus of our ancestors. We were privileged to see the most extraordinary findings from the exploration of the Gault Site near Florence (extraordinary they are!), as well as rack after rack of small artifacts stored in monster-sized baggies that make up the large majority of the 2.6 million artifacts that are being/have been cataloged from the site. We learned that without an exhaustive analysis of that "trash" we wouldn't be able to establish our history in either place or time nor develop our understanding of how humans lived and learned. We also developed a deep appreciation for the dedication it takes to do the real work of archaeology (I will no longer be able to wear my Indiana Jones hat. ;>(These are special people. The ride home seemed short as Blair and I explored what we'd learned that day. Another exceptional HLMN Field Trip.

GOP 2015

by Cathy Hill

Well our Great Outdoor Program, GOP, has come and gone for another year and despite some bumps in the road (or maybe they were potholes!) we all survived! As the new coordinator of this yearly event and one cherished by many of us HLMN members I was certainly challenged but thanks to all our dedicated volunteers I would have to say it was once again a rousing success. Many thanks to all of you, whether you were there one day or all six or something in between, your service was vital to the overall effort. I especially want to thank George Brugnoli for his work with park staff and equipment needs as well as keeping us hydrated with either coffee or water. You thought of things I hadn't! As the previous coordinator, Terry Bartoli was definitely my adviser and sometimes slave, so many thanks! Plus

we couldn't have done it without our station leaders Phil Wyde at Aquatics, Sharon Drake at Animal Classes, Jennifer Daniels at Butterfly Migration, Sue Lilley and Ray Buchanan at Birding, Elaine Barnhill with park staff Ricky Garcia and wife Pat at Native Americans, and last but not least Ed Lilley as our guide master and his wonderful carved sticks. Also thanks to Thomas Ashcroft who took pictures for us and to Kay Herring for writing a newspaper article. We were also glad to have several of this years class members join us on non-class days. In all we had 50 HLMN members, 1 FOIL member, 1 Balcones staff member, and 3 park hosts.

This year GOP served 745 students and 369 adults from Burnet, Marble Falls, Llano and Lampasas ISDs. From my observations working at several of the sta-



tions it would seem they had a good time as they looked at and learned about birds, flitted like a butterfly (thank you Jennifer for getting the parents to participate), cuddled stuffed animal representations of the five animal classes, admired Native American items and beat on the drum, and picked up and observed small and large fish.

Hopefully getting their Nature Passports stamped helped them remember what they had just seen.

I must say I observed some interesting things from them too. For example they knew about amphibian metamorphosis but also thought you could find a dinosaur backbone along the roadside. Most of them seemed to know more about ocean animal life than lake life. No we don't have sharks in the lake.

And they recognize the term plankton because there is a character in Sponge Bob cartoons with that name! However most of them did know of bass and catfish so all is not lost.

It is my hope that the scheduling overlaps and other snafus encountered this year can be remedied by a better coordination and communication with other groups and a much earlier scheduling of dates. It is such a great program and can only get better. I am open to suggestions and have already heard from some of you. And as for those of you who missed out on the fun this year, hope you will join us next time.

Again thanks to all who participated:

Thomas Ashcroft	Ray Buchanan	Kathy Griffis Bailey
Elaine Barnhill	Terry Bartoli	Morgan Beck
Jan Belz	Sherry Bixler	Judy Bloomquist
Linda Brown	Jane Brunclik	George Brugnoli
Pat Campbell	Joy Collins	Betty Cruikshank
Jennifer Daniels	Lyn Davis	Paula D'Orsogna
Sharon Drake	Melissa Duckworth	Minnie Eaton
Dennis Ellison	Nancy Ellison	Celia Escamilla
Cris Faught	Lori Greco	Billie Gunther
MJ Hansen	Judy Harrelson	Kay Herring
Cathy Hill	Eva Hobbs	Anne Holley
Sandra Landis	Ed Lilley	Sue Lilley
Bonnie Mikels	Mary Musselman	Vicky Myatt
Linda O'Nan	Gretchen Pachlhofer	Judy Parker
Karyn Parker	David Payton	Alice Rheume
Helen Smith	Jerry Stacy	Jan Warren
Lynn Wolheim	Phil Wyde	
Paula Richardson (FOIL)		Cindy Fronk (Balcones)
Rhonda Faith, Bill and Karen Fischer (park hosts)		



Lyn Davis instructing students of fishing

THINGS ARE NOT NECESSARILY ALWAYS WHAT THEY APPEAR TO BE! AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ZONE-TAILED HAWK

by Joanne Fischer

Kenn Kaufman, a world renown birding expert cautions birders (novice and experienced alike) about making snap identifications of birds while in the field. He warns that familiarity with a species in a certain locale can actually result in developing a tendency to identify a bird based on it's size and shape without paying attention to finer details associated with the bird in question. The bird I am going to cover this month is just such a species. It may often be overlooked because a birder may not pay attention to the finer details when it is seen soaring in the distance.

The Zone-tailed Hawk (*Buteo albonotatus*) is a medium to large-sized tropical hawk from northern South America whose range just reaches into the southwestern United States (Arizona, New Mexico and Texas). It is present, though uncommon, in the Hill Country. It is partially migratory in that most withdraw from the United States in winter, although a few are seen in southern Texas all year round.

The Zone-tailed Hawk is mainly slaty black except for white barring on its flight feathers, much like those on a Turkey Vulture. In fact from afar it may be mistaken for a Turkey Vulture unless one looks closely and notices that it also sports a banded tail (paying attention to the finer details). To make matters more difficult regarding its identification, it often flies with Turkey Vultures soaring and gliding on thermals with wings lifted just slightly above its back and tilting from side to side. The accompanying pictures point out the close similarity of the two species.

The Zone-tailed's diet consists of small rodents, birds, snakes, frogs and lizards. The diet varies according to the territory inhabited. It can spot prey from over 300 feet above the ground. It is speculated that the Zone-tailed Hawk uses its similarity to a Turkey Vulture to its advantage when hunting for food. Turkey Vultures do not normally prey on live animals while Zone-tailed Hawks do. Because the Zone-tailed Hawk mimics the flight of the Turkey Vulture, prey that is desensitized to the presence of vultures become "easy prey" for the Zone-tailed Hawk. Small animals in the southwest often



learn to ignore the abundant, and to them, harmless Turkey Vultures and therefore when a Zone-tailed Hawk happens along they fail to notice its approach until it is too late.

The preferred habitat of Zone-tailed Hawks is arid, semi-open woodlands, deep and rocky wooded canyons and tree-lined rivers near mountainous areas.

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A BIRDING TRIP TO SOUTH AND EAST TEXAS APRIL 17 -21, 2015

by Sherry Bixler

Several local Master Naturalists recently made a trip to the Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge west of Houston and decided to go on to world-famous High Island southeast of Houston and then to the Nacogdoches area for birds that occur only in the pine forests in that area. A possible future HLMN field trip was also in mind.

Although we were hit by a severe storm on the way to Attwater the afternoon before our tour, the prairie chickens were very cooperative, some coming right to the van. I had discovered that their Assistant Manager was John Magera who worked at Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico when I lived there. He has re-started the tours which were not available for a few years. Tour participants must make reservations and the tours are done monthly except in April when they are run weekly.

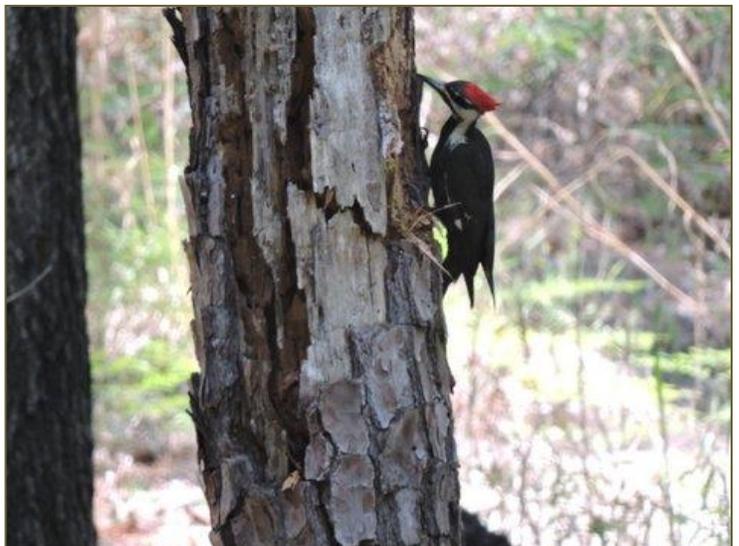
There was still a lot of standing water and since the roads are somewhat elevated, both prairie chickens and bobwhites were using them. We learned that the refuge is spreading fire ant poison on part of their acreage each year and it is working to reduce the danger they present to both species - of course as Master Naturalists we asked if beneficial insects are harmed by this and John said no. They did a lot of testing before spraying large areas and found that the fire ants are so fast and voracious that they get to the poison before any other insects can eat it!

Listening to the male prairie chickens boom is quite entertaining as they sound like someone blowing over the top of a coke bottle. The Attwater's Prairie Chicken is a very isolated subspecies of the Greater Prairie Chicken, which occurs much further north.

We continued to High Island and spent the day birding Boy Scout Woods and Smith Oaks. The trails were a bit muddy but better than expected; water was still standing in every field. High Island had over 20 species of warblers plus orioles, tanagers, grosbeaks, buntings, cuckoos, vireos and many others including one Common Nighthawk flying on a very cloudy day, one Purple Gallinule and a lovely rookery for egrets and Roseate Spoonbills.



Roseate Spoonbill



Pileated Woodpecker

The following day we drove to Boykin Springs south of Nacogdoches and checked nest hole sites for the Red-cockaded Woodpecker with no luck. These boxes are built into the trees but it was a little early for nesting activity so we knew we would have to look elsewhere. We did see the elusive Bachman's Sparrow quite well on the Sawmill Trail there and met people who had seen the woodpecker along the trail. We saw half a dozen beautiful Pileated Woodpeckers which almost made up for missing the Red-cockaded.

The next day we drove on really bad forest roads

(Continued on page 9)

ZONE-TAILED HAWK *(Continued from page 7)*

In general, they prefer hilly or mountainous terrains. They often nest in tall, somewhat isolated, trees (often pines or cottonwoods) along streams. The nest is placed more than thirty feet above the ground, sometimes as high as 100 feet and is a bulky platform of sticks lined with softer materials. Some Zone-tailed pairs will reuse their nest site for multiple years.

This is another species that is reported to engage in spectacular courtship displays. Both the male and female will perform aerial loops, dives and rolls from heights of about 1,000 to 1,600 feet above the ground. The Zone-tailed Hawk is known for aggressively defending its nesting territory and is capable of attacking other birds larger than itself (like Golden Eagles and Red-tailed Hawks) and will even try to aggressively scare off humans.

Several of us have experienced this at Honey Creek because a pair of Zone-tailed Hawks nested there last year. They literally made it almost impossible for us to bird within their defined nesting area during the breeding season due to their raucous cries and dives from above. Even if we had ignored their aggressive defensive tactics they managed to scare all the other birds out of the area so it wasn't worth our time trying to hang around! And fortunately, or unfortunately, we hear that they have returned again this

year.

The Zone-tailed Hawk's clutch consists of one to three whitish eggs. Incubation takes approximately 35 days. Both parents feed the hatchlings which are able to fly after 6 to 7 weeks. Given 35 days of incubation and another 45 days or so before the hatchlings fledge – makes for a long period of time to be unable to bird near their nest!

Although the Zone-tailed Hawk from a conservation standpoint is classified as a species of least concern, it is an uncommon and local species. It is disappearing from some of its breeding range due to loss of nesting sites, such as tall cottonwoods along streams and rivers.

And for those of you who like to remember rather inane facts: a group of hawks has several collective names including a “boil”, a “knot”, a “stream” or a “tower” of hawks!

Bird guides do state that at a reasonable distance one can distinguish a Zone-tailed Hawk from vultures by their smaller size, the typical hawk shape of the wings and head, and if noticed, the pale stripes on the tail. But my final caution to you is this: remember – always look closely at birds for the finer “details” to ensure not only proper identification of a species but to also ensure that you don't miss out on spotting a unique and uncommon bird like the Zone-tailed Hawk.

BIRDING TRIP *(Continued from page 8)*

with hundreds of deep potholes and gullies from the storm, which hit them harder than elsewhere. There were also downed trees and while we were able to hold some back, we had to backtrack and detour around others. We found another nesting site for the Red-cockaded Woodpecker but no activity there either. We did find a few spots where other birds were very active. Some warblers prefer mature pines while others like young growth but we had seen so many warblers at High Island that our remaining objectives were the woodpecker and the Brown-headed Nuthatch.

Needing both, we decided to return to Boykin Springs the next day even though it was somewhat out of the way for our trip home. Luckily, the Red-

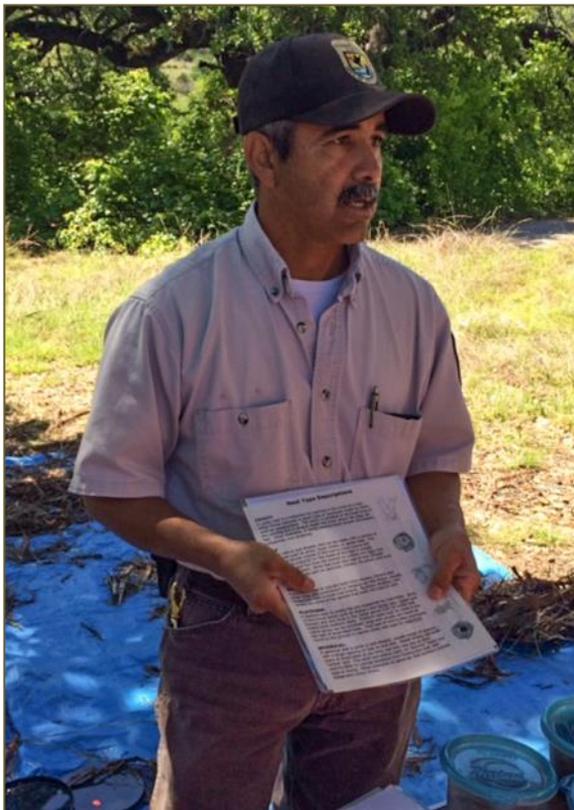
cockaded woodpeckers were quickly sighted as they chipped large pieces of bark off the pines while searching for insects. On the road, we saw what may have been a couple of Brown-headed Nuthatches but not a good enough look to be sure, so another trip may be needed – the Bachman's Sparrow and the woodpecker and nuthatch are found from east Texas east but do not occur any further west.

We drove about 1100 miles, had great seafood, and came home in a car that looked like a big blob of red mud. For a future trip for our group, I would suggest Attwater's and then two to three days at High Island and nearby Anahuac and the Coastal birding area. The east Texas birding is more difficult and there are fewer birds, both species and numbers. There is also the helpful crew from Tropical Birding who have employees at High Island during April to answer any questions.

BRIDGES TO BIRDING PROGRAM FOR LIBERTY HILL ELEMENTARY

by Cindy Fronk

We finished 4 days of environmental education programs, connecting 435 elementary students to the outdoors. Thanks to all the volunteers who came through and made these days a success. A big attaboy to Cixto Saucedo (FWS employee), Joan Muckerjee, and especially to Jane Brunlik HLMN 2015 class and Jane Laughead that jumped right into a station for the first time and did a GREAT job!



GALLERY



Lace cactus photo – I have had this Lace cactus for over 40 years (since I was a child!). It had 44 buds this year. The blooms were full of bees, beetles, etc.
by Sondra Fox



Easter Visitors by Pat Campbell



Scarlet darter dragonfly by Billie Gunther



Pearl Milkweed by Mike Childers

GALLERY



Drummond Phlox by Mike Childers



Texas Flax by Mike Childers



Drummond's Skullcap by Mike Childers



Celestials by Mike Childers