



# Highland Lakes Steward

June 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

We are well on the way to another outstanding year for our chapter. We have already accomplished many things, including:

1. Moving into a new meeting place.
2. Celebrating the opening of the Science Mill in Johnson City.
3. Successfully completing the Great Outdoor Program and the Hatchery Outdoor Program.
4. Participating in two outstanding field trips.
5. Graduating nine new Master Naturalists.
6. Adopting new bylaws.
7. Accepting host responsibilities for

the annual statewide meeting to be held in October.

8. Conducting many teaching engagements for students from Marble Falls, Burnet and Blanco.

Now we have the challenge of record rainfall and a resulting flood in our area. Particularly Blanco County.

There are many more things to mention and many more things to come. I continue to be in awe at your eager willingness to volunteer in everything that gets presented, from field work to office work to teaching then to attending meetings. This is an outstanding chapter and I am extremely thankful to be serving as your president.



### 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](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.

### GET WELL!

The chapter has sent get well wishes to the following fellow Master Naturalists/family members undergoing treatment and surgery for breast cancer.

- Sue Kersey
- Ann Holly
- Gretchen Pachlhofer
- Ann Stevenson
- Ellen Ely (Hibler)

Keep them in your thoughts and prayers.

## JUNE PROGRAM

Michelle Haggerty, State Director of the Texas Master Naturalists spoke to us about current issues in the Texas Master Naturalist program and touched on the upcoming State Meet at the Horseshoe Bay Resort.



## AUGUST PROGRAM (TBA)

## SPECIAL RECOGNITION FOR JERRY STACY

We all know Jerry Stacy is a very knowledgeable plant guy and recently he was recognized for that talent.

From Bill Carr, he "had correct ID's on the two grasses, Briza minor and Bromus diandrus. The quaking-grass is a county record for the UT Herbarium. And the herbarium has only 5 specimens of ripgut brome, so another good one is welcome."

Congratulations Jerry!



Photo by Sue Kersey

## CONGRATULATIONS GRADUATION CLASS 2015!



Nine classmates of the 2015 Class of Master Naturalists graduated May 21st 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, Melanie Huff, Course Coordinator, and Sharon Drake and Billie Gunther assistants. Shown are, front row from left are: Kathy Griffis-Bailey, Sharon Drake, Melanie Huff. Back row: David Heatley, Jane Brunclik, Gretchen Pachlhofer, Billie Gunther, Karen Bruett, Susan Henrichson, and Thomas Henrichson. Not pictured are: Becky Copeland and Peggy Hairston.

## CONGRATULATIONS TO NEW HLMN TEXAS MASTER NATURALISTS!

Special congratulations to Gretchen Pachlhofer and Karen Brunclik who also earned the additional volunteer and advanced training hours needed to become Certified Master Naturalists!

Pictured L to R: Melissa Duckworth, vice-president HLMN; Melanie Huff, Gretchen Pachlhofer, and Jane Brunclik.



## DOIN' WHAT COMES NATURALLY!

by Billy Hutson

Recently our president (that's Obama not Cris) has instigated a national program to bring more awareness and ultimately more success to our pollinators. The goal is to subscribe one million pollinator gardens of any sort to the national list of an already existing 250,000 as a start.

The web site for this action is [www.millionpollinatorgardens.org](http://www.millionpollinatorgardens.org) And, if you go there, you will see some familiar names that are already involved as partners such as the Xerces Society, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, NFS, National Wildlife Federation, etc!

We have added the Nature Center to the growing list as our Monarch Way Station-Pollinator garden has been certified and is doing quite well. Thanks to the volunteer efforts of the HLNPSOT, HLMN, HLMGA and Friends of the Nature Center all headed up by Terri Whaley, Minnie Eaton and Ray Buchanan, we have a successful site (pictured below). I believe the

HLMN (although with no site of it's own) has many members that could add to the ever growing list with their existing gardens and/or to register (with permission) gardens we have helped to install. HLMN and HLNPSOT have helped to install Butterfly Gardens (funded in part by NPSOT grants) at the Falls on the Colorado Museum in Marble Falls and the Veterans Memorial in Johnson Park in Marble Falls and they are registered. We encourage you to join and let your friends know. It's free and easy to join the march toward more involvement and education about a very important natural resource. If you join the effort you can post their logo on your website or in your literature. And, for a \$20 donation, you can get a pollinator sign for your garden.

I also entered my ranch pollinator garden to the site so now Oatmeal is nationally recognized.

I call it "Doin' what comes naturally".



Photo by Paula Richards - UHLNC

Here is a link to our UHLNC website post where we explain our process, the list of plants planted and the volunteers that added to the mix from mother nature."

<http://uhlnc.org/2015/06/06/an-open-invitation-to-monarchs-and-pollinators/>

## HUGELGARTEN

by Joan Mukherjee



Relaxing at the lake last summer I read the local Sunday paper front to back and was introduced to a “hugelgarten” (hill garden in German). A hugelgarten works on the same concept as a keyhole garden and is a wonderful landscape feature. It is space saving, water saving and easy to care for. I know because I built one 18 months ago and it is beautiful and withstood the drought even when I was gone for month at a time.

I collected old wood that was rotting or just scrap and piled it up. I covered it with sand to fill in spaces among the logs. Sand was not called for but I have way too much sand and not enough loam. I covered the sand with a mixture of compost and loam to a depth of about 6 inches and covered that with a layer of mulch. I put a 6 inch deep depression in the top. It was a mound about 3 feet high and 8 feet in diameter.

I planted a few plants in the fall and a few more in April—several kinds of penstemon, evening primroses, *Salvia greggii* and milkweed. I watered by letting my hose run for an hour slowly into the hole in the top---it never seemed to get full. Then came the test. Two weeks after planting I left for a month during which the new plants were not watered and the rain was less than an inch. When I got home those plants were fine while other beds were wilted and none of the new plants in other locations survived. I took two more month long trips during our hot, drought stricken summer in 2014 and again the plants in the hugelgarten were as happy as could be. Furthermore, I found the added height shows off the plants so well! I believe the secret to success of a hugelgarten is the wooden core which absorbs and retains moisture. It is easy to water without needing an irrigation system.

# 2015 HOP

by Judy Parker

"This is the best field trip we have ever had!" That sentiment from a 5th grader was echoed over and over by student, teacher and parent alike during this year's Hatchery Outdoor Program (HOP) which (Apr 24– May 22). Hosting 395 kids from 4 schools over 5 days The Friends of Inks Dam National Fish Hatchery and The Highland Lakes Master Naturalists showed local 2nd, 4th and 5th graders how to make a solar print, how to become a 'Master Caster', how catfish reproduce and how to use binoculars for bird watching. With additional stations for Fish Morphology, Ecology & Geology on the Overlook Trail, the kids learned a lot of fun stuff and had a ball doing it! In truth, we who man stations, guide, make sure everyone stays safe and photograph the enthusiasm of the kids have just as much fun at this enormously well received annual outreach event. My heartfelt thanks to ALL who participated. The kids' reactions are truly our reward.



Catfish eggs are cool!



Where's the birdie?



Master Casters at work



Identifying critters in a vernal pool

## A HILL COUNTRY YEAR-ROUND RESIDENT THE LESSER GOLDFINCH

by Joanne Fischer

Some of you may recall from previous bird profiles in the Steward, that I am convinced that “everything is bigger (scorpions, rattlesnakes, centipedes), but not necessarily better” in Texas. But once again, the species I am going to profile this month is an exception to that rule. The Lesser Goldfinch is one of three goldfinches that are present in the United States (the other two are the American Goldfinch and Lawrence's Goldfinch) and it is the smallest of the three. I tried to find the origin of its name and could find no confirming report but I suspect that it acquired its name simply because it is the “lesser” in size of the three species.

The Lesser Goldfinch, which is a tiny songbird of only 4.5 inches, is a year-round resident and the only breeding goldfinch in the Hill Country. It is a frequent visitor to backyard feeders and bird baths. Lesser Goldfinches have a relatively limited range in the United States that spans from Texas west to California and north to Colorado, Idaho, Nevada and Oregon. Lesser Goldfinches are for the most part non-migratory. However, it has been reported that they will travel short distances in winter to escape the cold in places like the Texas Panhandle (like many of us would!).

The male Lesser Goldfinch is bright yellow below with a glossy black cap and back. It has white patches on its wings and a black tail with large, white corners (to me I think of a bird in a tuxedo when I see a male Lesser Goldfinch). One point of interest is that the males in the eastern part of their range have a glossy black back while those in the western part of the range have a dull green or olive back. In fact the Lesser Goldfinch that resides in Texas is referred to as the “Black-backed”, while the olive backed Lesser Goldfinch is



referred to as the “Western or Green-backed”. The female resembles the female American Goldfinch and has an olive back, duller yellow underparts and black wings marked by two whitish wingbars.

Lesser Goldfinches are found in a variety of habi-

*(Continued on page 8)*

## THE 2015 WOOD DUCK NESTING SEASON AT ILSP

by Jerry Stacy

New Wood duck hatchlings this year totaled 81. That falls short of last year's record number of 97, but is the second highest since I started monitoring in 2008. We would have shattered last year's record if it hadn't been for creatures like the one to the right. I suspect the expert climbing Rat snake because the eggs just disappear, no shell, no blood, no goo, nothing! Six nests were destroyed this year with a total of 49 eggs. Last year, only one destroyed. This rather large Rat snake was in a tree at eye level on one of the trails to the nest boxes. Every year, we have one or two nests that are abandoned for some unknown reason, and this year the number was two with a total of 26 eggs. What a waste!



Here is what I enjoy seeing: A normal clutch and a calm hen on her nest.

### LESSER GOLDFINCH (Continued from page 7)

tats from thickets, forests, weedy fields and riparian settings to suburban backyards. They are also found to nest in a variety of trees including oaks, cottonwoods, willows, cedars and pines. They mainly eat sunflower and thistle seeds but can also be seen feeding on the buds and flowers of trees in spring and berries in fall. They feed in small groups, moving through low grasses and scrub areas and, like the American Goldfinch, they cling to the seed heads of tall grasses bending the stem down and hanging upside down to pick at the seeds. Depending on the time of year and seed availability they will occasionally supplement their diet with very small insects.

During the breeding season, the male establishes his territory by singing from atop tall trees. He then performs courtship calls to attract a female to his territory and woos her with a courtship display which includes neck stretching, bill touching and soft singing.

The Lesser Goldfinch is a tree nester with the female choosing the nest site, building the nest and in-

cubating the eggs while the male stays nearby and watches! Actually it is reported that the male will feed the female while she is on the eggs and both parents feed the nestlings. The nest is usually located in the fork of a tree four to eight feet off the ground and concealed by clusters of leaves or grapevines. The nest is a small woven cup about three inches wide and one inch deep which is constructed of leaves, bark and other firm materials and then lined with hair, feathers or soft plant fibers. Lesser Goldfinches may produce multiple broods per year. They are reported to be monogamous and may mate for life.

The population of Lesser Goldfinches is reported to be stable and increasing in some parts of their range and are not currently on any conservation watch lists. The Lesser Goldfinch is described as being gregarious and gathers in mixed flocks of several hundred in the winter. It can be found in fields and at feeders with the other species of Goldfinches as well as Pine Siskins, Sparrows and House Finches. If you want to attract these small, colorful birds be sure to have plenty of sunflower and niger seed in your backyard bird feeders all year round.

## GALLERY



Double Crested Cormorant at the Meadows  
(Aquarena Springs) by Alice Rheume



Red-Shouldered Hawk at the Meadows (Aquarena  
Springs) by Alice Rheume



Green Heron and American Coot at the Meadows  
(Aquarena Springs) by Alice Rheume



Rough-seed buttercup *Ranunculus muricatus*  
By Jerry Stacy