



HILL COUNTRY CHAPTER

THE TEXAS STAR

OCTOBER 2003 VOL. 1 No 10

OCTOBER PROGRAM:

PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

OF THE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PROPERTY TAX VALUATION

David K. Langford, Assistant Vice-President of the Texas Wildlife Association, will explain to us the complex subject of the Wildlife Management Property Tax Valuation. The Texas Wildlife Association is a statewide organization that is devoted to the perpetuation of wildlife, wildlife management, hunting and private property rights. The Association also participates at the national level of these issues with other groups dedicated to similar missions. Members of the Texas Wildlife Association control many, many millions of acres of wildlife habitat. As Executive Vice-President of the Texas Wildlife Association for twelve years before his retirement in 2002, David Langford was active in the evolution of the Wildlife Management Property Tax Evaluation, and thus can provide us with a unique perspective on this important topic.

Langford holds degrees in Marketing from both Texas A&M and the University of Texas. He served from 1961 to 1965 in the United States Marine Corps. He is professional photographer of nature, western images and wildlife, having won numerous national and international awards. Langford has served on many wildlife-related State Committees, and has testified before Congress, the Texas Legislature and federal and state agencies on private land concerns, natural resources issues and hunting matters. His family has been in ranching and the flour milling business in Texas since 1851. Langford still operates a family ranch, cattle operation and hunting leases. We have met him previously at our meetings as the husband of our Hill Country Chapter member and Secretary, Myrna Langford.

BOBWHITE QUAIL CONSERVATION

At the beginning of our program, we will have a presentation by **Trace Cowan** of Castroville, who is a cadet in the **Bobwhite Brigade**. The Bobwhite Brigade is a quail conservation education program using bobwhite quail to teach leadership development. The program has a camp providing intensive training on quail biology and management by leading Texas wildlife scientists. After graduation, each brigade member presents an educational program on quail. We will learn about quail from Trace Cowan as his required project.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BY SANDY PEÑA

In last month's message, I introduced the ladies of our 2003 fall training class, so now it's the men's turn. As with the ladies, the men are also nicely distributed among the four counties we serve: two from Gillespie, two from Kerr, one from Kendall, and four from Bandera. So, without further ado, here they are:

From Gillespie County:

Lonnie Childs is a semi-retired business executive who still does some management consulting. He owns a small cattle ranch and is engaged in land restoration projects there. Lonnie is currently the VP for programs at the Fredericksburg NPSOT chapter.

Gene Smith is a retired architect who spends much of his outdoor time fly fishing. He volunteers for the Heart of the Hills Fly Fishers, and belongs to two other fishing organizations as well.

From Kerr County:

Howard Platte is a Master Gardener volunteer and the hubby of our External Publicity Chairman, Edna Platte. He has a PhD in organic chemistry and worked for the petrochemical industry until he retired. He also volunteers for the Riverside Nature Center.

Bob Richie is a retired project manager who currently volunteers 6-8 hours a week at the VA Hospital. He also is a member of the Kerr County Cactus and Succulent Society and the Hill Country Archeological Association.

From Kendall County:

Matt Fuller is the Assistant camp director at the YMCA Roberts Ranch, where we held our 2002 class graduation party. Matt graduated from Southwest in San Marcos in December 2002. He loves the outdoors and participates often in hunting, fishing, and a lot of mountain biking.

From Bandera County:

Ed Gage works as an entomologist with the Texas Dept. of Agriculture, and concurrently does research projects for many organizations. His other interests include geology, archeology, paleontology, and orchid growing.

Lee Haile has been a professional folklorist/storyteller for over 20 years, during which time he also worked as an entomologist and agricultural consultant. He is also a dedicated naturalist, and is currently working on a video project at Lost Maples State Park.

Bobby Reagan works as an electrician, yet still found time to be a Master Gardener volunteer in Dallas for three years before moving to Bandera. Bobby loves to study nature-related subjects, especially herbs.

Billy Walker is an attorney and co-owner of a 900-acre ranch. Along with his wife, Billy maintains a 35-box bluebird trail, grows native plants and grasses, conducts prescribed burns, and cultivates bird habitat. Ask Billy about the Texas Ash tree he identified—it's the largest of its kind in the world!

We are really lucky to have such talented and enthusiastic men and women joining us. By the way, one of them will soon be elected to serve as the Class representative on our Board next year. Let's make them ALL feel welcome as they begin to get involved in our Chapter activities. It seems hard to believe that we are now 50 members strong!

CALENDAR

"APPROVED AT" INDICATES THAT AN EVENT HAS BEEN APPROVED AS ADVANCED TRAINING FOR OUR CHAPTER. OTHER MEETINGS THAT MAY BE OF INTEREST TO OUR MEMBERS ARE LISTED FOR YOUR INFORMATION, EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE NOT ADVANCED TRAINING.

Saturday, November 1st: Field trip to "Los Rincones" by the Native Plant Society of Texas – Kerrville Chapter. Los Rincones is a ranch near Kerrville with native plants in several box canyons. Meet at 10:15 AM at Riverside Nature Center to carpool to Los Rincones for a hike in the canyons. Bring water, and a sack lunch. For more information, contact Jim Stanley at

jpstan@ktc.com or 257-2094.

Tuesday, November 4th: Backyard Wildscapes by Rufus Stephens, a Wildlife Biologist with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in Boerne (and an Advisor to our Master Naturalist Chapter). This presentation will be at the Native Plant Society of Texas – Kerrville Chapter at Riverside Nature Center beginning at **2 PM**. For more information, contact Jim Stanley at jpstan@ktc.com or 257-2094.

The following events are all sponsored by Cibolo Nature Center in Boerne. There is a modest fee (\$10 for Cibolo members, \$12 for non-members, discounts for couples). **For more information, visit their website at <http://www.cibolo.org> at the “Learn” option.** Register by phone at 830-249-4616 or by e-mail at nature@cibolo.org

Fall Wildflowers and Prairie Restoration led by Janis Merritt, San Antonio Natural Resource Department

Saturday, October 25: 9 AM to noon

Come and learn about how to start and maintain a wildflower meadow or a native grass and wildflower prairie on your property. Janis Merritt is the Native Plant Specialist for San Antonio's Natural Resource Department and a resident of Kendall Country. She will present a slide show on local prairie restoration and we will take a leisurely walk to see some fine native plants that blossom in the fall. **APPROVED AT**

Hill Country Geology Part I and Part II led by Dr. Bill Ward (our MN Class Geology instructor)

Saturday, November 1 Part I at 9 AM to noon and Part II at 1 PM to 3 PM

Cost: members \$20/person & 30/couple, non-members \$25/person & \$40/couple

Part I. What is limestone and why do we have so much of it?

Using a series of slides, rock samples, and vivid diagrams, Dr. Ward presents the 100-million year-old origin of our pervasive limestone formations and the subsequent events that have shaped the Hill Country landscape. Class includes handouts and a short field trip on CNC property. **APPROVED AT**

Part II: Living with all that Limestone!

Dr. Ward will discuss how Hill Country culture is influenced by the limestone bedrock

that controls soil, vegetation, topography, and especially our underground aquifers. Limit: 20 **APPROVED AT**

Trees and Understory = Food and Cover for Wildlife! by Mark Peterson, TFS and Rufus Stephens, TPWD (Rufus is a sponsor of our Master Naturalist Chapter)

Saturday, November 8 9 AM to noon

All over the Texas Hill Country, land is being cleared for development and an excessively high white-tailed deer population is preventing regeneration of our hardwood trees. Come learn the dynamics of forest ecology and how hunting and other land management practices can benefit native plants and the wildlife that depend on them for food and cover. **APPROVED AT**

Stewardship for Endangered Birds by Leslie Lineham and Eric Lautzenheiser

Saturday, November 15 9 AM to noon

This is a field trip to see both golden-cheeked warbler and black-capped vireo habitat at Friedrich Park in Leon Springs. We will walk uphill through warbler habitat to an area that has been successfully restored for the vireos. Ms. Lineham has had many years of experience on the warbler monitoring project at Camp Bullis and Mr. Lautzenheiser is land manager at Friedrich Park, a critical area for both birds. **APPROVED AT**

TWO MORE MEMBERS CERTIFIED IN OUR CHAPTER

Barbara Lowenthal and George Tinsley will receive their Certified Master Naturalist certificates and dragonfly pins at our October meeting. Thus, ten months into our first year of Chapter meetings, we will have 68% of our members from the Class of 2002 certified.

For the information of our prospective members, a Master Naturalist achieves certification by completing the 40 hours of required training, a minimum of 40 hours of approved volunteer service, and the minimum of 8 hours of approved Advanced Training within approximately one year.

VOLUNTEER PROJECT OF THE MONTH:

BAT RESEARCH AT THE OLD TUNNEL WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

by Wilma Teague

I want to share with you one of my experiences in this first year as a Master Naturalist. This summer I have had the opportunity to work three evenings with a research scientist in the field studying "Annual and Temporal Population Characteristics of *Tadarida brasiliensis* (AKA Mexican freetail bat) and *Myotis velifer* (cave Myotis) at the Old Tunnel Wildlife Management Area, Kendall County, Texas. That is the title of Stephanie Shelton's research proposal. Stephanie is currently a graduate student at Texas State University (formerly Southwest Texas State University) at San Marcos working on a MS in Wildlife Ecology. She also teaches both graduate and undergraduate students. Stephanie has a background in art, business, and science---and grades her students' papers by a battery headlamp between bat catches at 3 and 4 AM!

Since I do not have the immunizations to actually handle the bats, I get to run, fetch, record data, and observe for Stephanie. She drops a harp net designed by Merlin Tuttle to catch a sample of bats at the south entrance to the tunnel every hour after the bat emergence (between 7 and 9 PM) until the bats return to their tunnel roost (between 5 and 9 AM). A harp net allows for a quick capture of the bats (from one to five minutes) with a minimum amount of stress or injury to the bats. She places each bat in a small muslin bag and we gently roll the bags after she has sorted each bat according to sex, age, and reproductive status. Holding the bats in the muslin bags keeps them calm enough to be weighed on a digital scale while the data is recorded. A mature bat weighs about as much as fifteen paperclips. Within five to six weeks of a bat's birth, the pup (baby bat) weighs as much as an adult bat. Most of the bats captured at Old Tunnel (OT) are the Mexican freetails.

Stephanie is also doing a study on fresh bat fecal samples; there is no problem obtaining plenty of those samples after the bats have been out feeding all night. The estimated three million bats that make up the OT colony consume approximately **two tons of moths, beetles, and other insects every night**. Their appetite for these insects is of tremendous economic importance to agricultural interests near the OT. The bats can travel as much as one hundred miles one way each night to do their "grocery" shopping.

The research from this project will help create guidelines for a site-specific management plan that will benefit both the visitors and the natural resources at OT. The OT's bat population is unique in that there is no other freetail bat population cave, bridge, or even bat house maternal colony that is considered a pseudo-maternal colony. There is no known record of pups (baby bats) within the tunnel. However, there is a large portion of the summer population that is either pregnant or lactating females with a small population of males. There is no evidence that the females actually raise their young at OT. The young bats return to OT from nursery colonies in nearby caves (known to be up to forty miles away) after they are independent of their nursing mothers. The OT Parks and Wildlife management wants to allow visitors a memorable experience while protecting the bat colony's healthy environment.

The research will also benefit the scientific community in determining the management needs for these species. Other roosting locations (caves) have had their population of bats suddenly decrease or be totally eliminated and not enough is known about the contributing factors that caused the bats to change residence. In order to monitor and notice changes in the bat population at OT there needs to be accurate, current and site-specific population information. It is tremendously exciting to be a part of a research project that can benefit the ecology of these small mammals in their colonies. The information gained may help us understand the dependence of our local agriculture on these small, migratory mammals for pest control rather than depending on chemicals and perhaps in the pollination of crops. The compilation of statistical data on these two species of bats will increase documented knowledge as to their natural history to help researchers further understand their management needs.

The work with these little creatures is so interesting that I am always surprised when three million *whoooooshes*, a free-fall of up to 85 miles per hour as the bats re-enter the tunnel, announces the arrival of a new day at OT.

If you are interested in volunteering at the Old Tunnel, you can contact our members Wilma Teague, Myrna Langford or Maggie Tatum, who volunteered at the Old Tunnel this year, for information about volunteering next year.

NATURE OBSERVATIONS

by Kim Whitaker

On September 13th, I was out after dark exploring with my flashlight (you never know what you'll find after dark) and I came across several harvestmen (AKA daddylonglegs) actually eating winged termites. I don't think I've ever seen them eat anything before.

Editor's note: Harvestmen feed primarily on insects and other arthropods. Harvestmen belong to the Order Opiliones, and thus are not spiders (which are in the Order Araneae). There are 17 species of harvestmen in Texas, but members of only one family, Phalangiidae, are properly referred to as "daddylonglegs". Although there is a common belief that "daddylonglegs" are poisonous, this claim is **not** supported in the scientific literature. **Reference:** B. M. Drees & J. A. Jackman, *A Field Guide to Common Texas Insects*, p. 300.

Another interesting note: On September 11th when the rains came, so did the winged termites, and I found many large Gulf Coast toads out stuffing themselves. The strange part is that I thought something had happened to all my toads. I hadn't seen any in my yard all summer, but they sure knew when and where to find those termites. The **Gulf Coast toad** is very common in the Hill Country and can be readily identified by the prominent, white stripe down the center of its back. **Isn't Nature grand?**

Refreshments: Thanks to Sandy Pena and Kim Whitaker for our tasty treats in September.

The October refreshments will be provided by Julia Campbell and John Rogers.



Texas Star

Lindheimera texana