

THE TEXAS STAR

HILL COUNTRY CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2004

VOL. 2, No. 2



Chapter Website: <http://www.hillcountrymasternaturalist.org>

FEBRUARY PROGRAM:

FASCINATING FREE-TAILS: LEARN ABOUT THE MEXICAN FREE-TAILED BAT AND HOW YOU CAN HELP THESE AMAZING MAMMALS!

Our February program will be a presentation on the Mexican free-tailed bat by Amy Sugeno, a Wildlife Biologist with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Amy is the new Area Manager of the Old Tunnel Wildlife Management Area between Fredericksburg and Comfort.

Every summer, millions of Mexican free-tailed bats (*Tadarida brasiliensis*) make their home in the Texas Hill Country. This species gives birth to one pup in June, and the pups can fly within about 4 to 6 weeks after birth. During their summer stay, Mexican free-tails provide a free alternative mode of pest control for area farmers. These bats can fly up to 10,000 feet high and 60 miles each night to satisfy their ravenous appetite for insects. They conduct nightly emergences that are so thick they are picked up by Doppler weather radar! Come learn more about these amazing mammals and how you can help a local population of three million Mexican free-tailed bats at Old Tunnel Wildlife Management Area.

Amy has a B.S. in Wildlife & Fisheries from Texas A&M and an M.S. in Biology from Tennessee Tech. University. She has worked with reptiles and amphibians, mammals, birds, plants, and even with insects. Most of her career work has been in several diverse ecoregions of Texas, but she has also done field work in Mexico, New Mexico, and Tennessee. Before her current position at the Old Tunnel WMA, Amy worked with TPWD project managers on how they could minimize impacts to rare and endangered species. Amy has also worked for The Nature Conservancy, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas Department of Transportation, Dow Chemical Company, and several universities.

This program will be held at Riverside Nature Center, 150 Francisco Lemos St, in Kerrville, on **Monday, February 23rd** beginning with a social time at 6:30 PM. The meeting and program begin at 7:00 PM. The meeting is free, and the public is invited to attend. We hope that you can join us.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BY SANDY PEÑA

There's lots of exciting news that I'm proud to share with you this month, especially those of you who weren't able to attend the January meeting.

First up is the 2003 Annual Report for our chapter, which is required by the state office. During the past year our members provided 2,181 volunteer service hours, and completed 398 advanced training hours--congratulations to all for these impressive numbers. Equally impressive, an amazing 24 out of 28 of our original group of members became certified MNs--that's more than 85%! Our current membership level is 51, including two transfer members. This is amazing growth for such a young chapter! I have no doubt that 2004 will be an even more impressive year for our volunteer efforts.

Second, one of our hardest-working members, Priscilla Stanley, has achieved the first state "milestone" in our chapter. That milestone is 250 cumulative volunteer hours, but Priscilla blew past that with 311 hours by the end of 2003. At our January meeting, the board presented Priscilla with a bouquet of flowers to mark her achievement. Congratulations, Priscilla!



Photo by Raul Pena

President Sandy Pena presents a bouquet to Priscilla Stanley in celebration of her 250 hour "milestone" of volunteer service.

Third, it was wonderful to see 12 of our members turn out for the MN regional retreat on January 31st at John Knox Ranch. No other chapter even came close to that kind of representation. Several of those there from our chapter are members of the latest training class, which is really exciting.



Twelve members represented our Hill Country Chapter at the Master Naturalist Regional Retreat, including (*clockwise from the lower left*) Lee Haile, Tracy Garofano, Wilma Teague, Emily Matheson, Sandy Pena, Bob Richie, Myrna Langford, Kathryn Harrison, Jim Stanley, Priscilla Stanley, Maggie Tatum and Edna Platte.

A large chunk of time at the retreat was spent on goal-setting activities, and our members came up with some important goals for our chapter to work on this year. Here they are:

1. Try to increase the diversity of our membership
2. Start a junior MN program of some type to increase our outreach to youth
3. Work on ways to get more members to our meetings
4. Develop and implement our proposed Land Management Assistance Program to help small land owners
5. Make our chapter website more useable

I hope each of you will think about these goals, and throw out your ideas and suggestions on how best to achieve them. Already the group came up with some great ideas for #3, which I will pass along to the program committee.

Last, I want to mention another opportunity for our chapter. Michelle Haggerty, the state program coordinator, has asked our chapter to be the host chapter for the 2004 Annual Meeting, which will be held at Mo Ranch this year (right in our backyard). There's lots to do, so if you'd like to be involved, please let me know. (And, yes, this work does count for volunteer hours.) Michelle will be coming to visit us in late March to start the ball rolling. And if you have any suggestions for Advanced Training topics at the state meeting, speak up!

CALENDAR

"APPROVED AT" INDICATES THAT AN EVENT HAS BEEN APPROVED AS ADVANCED TRAINING FOR OUR CHAPTER.

For Cibolo Nature Center events, contact Cibolo at **(830) 249-4616** or by e-mail at nature@cibolo.org. **Class sizes are limited, so it is important to pre-register. Fees apply to some events.**

February 17-18: Garner State Park Tobusch Fishhook Cactus Survey APPROVED AT (see e-mail of 2/11/04)

February 18: Master Naturalist - Hill Country Chapter- Board Meeting - Noon at Riverside Nature Center. Chapter members may attend.

February 21: How to Attract Nesting & Migrant Birds by Dick Park at Cibolo Nature Center from **8:30 AM to 11 AM** (carpool to Old Daley Ranch at 8:30 AM). This class is **NOT** considered AT for our Chapter..

February 23: Texas Master Naturalist - Hill Country Chapter, "Mexican Free-tailed Bats" by Amy Sugeno of TPWD at **6:30 PM** at Riverside Nature Center, 150 Francisco Lemos St, Kerrville (*see article above*).

February 24 – 25 Spring Semester Trail Guiding Training: at Cibolo Nature Center from **9:00 AM – 2:00 PM** This is training to lead small groups of students in outdoor activities at Cibolo. Bring a lunch and enjoy getting to know the wonderful team of trail guides. **OUTDOOR CLASSROOM IS FUN AND FLEXIBLE and NO EXPERIENCE IS NEEDED.** Volunteer trail guides lead a small group of students through one activity in one of CNC's 4 different ecosystems: woodlands, creek, marsh or prairie. Outdoor Classroom is conducted March - June, Monday - Fridays, 8:30 - noon. **APPROVED AT**

February 27 - 28: "Managing to Make a Living: The Texas Hill Country" at The Fifth Annual Spring South Texas Farm & Range Forum at Honey Creek State Natural Area & Bulverde, Topics will include: Watershed Management, Brush Management, Deer Management, High-fencing, Exotics, Habitat Fragmentation, Predators and Non-game Species, Wildlife Appreciation, Nature Tourism, Endangered Species & Birding in the Hill Country, Wildlife Valuation & Landowner Liability Update. For more information, contact Susan Hughes at 210-822-4503 or susan@wordwright.com Cost: \$85 **APPROVED AT**

February 28: Cedar Management Workshop by Mark Peterson, Rufus Stephens, Lee Knox & Darwin Ressel at Cibolo Nature Center from **8:30 AM to 1 PM** (carpool to Dietz-Ressel Ranch at 8:30 AM). See 3 demonstration areas managed for the benefit of range improvement, forest ecology and wildlife conservation. Bring your lunch, drink, folding chair and sturdy walking shoes. **APPROVED AT**

February 28: Native Plant Spring Symposium 2004: sponsored by Native Plant Society of Texas and Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center; see www.wildflower.org for registration and fee information. **APPROVED AT**

Tuesday March 2 at 2 p.m. "The Less-Touted Environmental Advantages of Growing Native Plants" by Rufus Stephens of the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department at **NPSOT – Kerrville Chapter meeting** at Riverside Nature Center, 150 Francisco Lemos St., Kerrville.

Tuesday March 2 at 6:30 p.m. "The Ecology of Plant Use" by Pat McNeal, plant propagator, wholesale nursery owner and land restoration specialist at **NPSOT – Boerne Chapter** at the Cibolo Nature Center in Boerne. See *their website for driving directions* at www.npsot.org/boerne

March 6: Deer Management by Rufus Stephens, TPWD Wildlife Biologist at Cibolo Nature Center from **9 AM to noon** Includes choosing management goals, conducting a deer census, harvest strategies & more. **APPROVED AT**

March 11: Reconnecting Food Systems with Ecosystems: A Workshop on Enhancing Biodiversity in Agriculture: 9 AM – 5 PM by Holistic Resource Management at the Center for Environmental Research at Hornsby Bend in Austin. For more info, contact 512-972-1960 or Kevin.Anderson@ci.austin.tx.us (AT status has not yet been determined)

Tuesday, March 30th at 7 p.m. "Native Shade Trees" by David Will, wholesale nurseryman at **NPSOT - Fredericksburg Chapter**. at the Gillespie County Agricultural Building, 1906 N. Llano St., Fredericksburg.

VOLUNTEER PROJECT OF THE MONTH: MONARCH MONITORING: also known as VISITING WITH ROYALTY by Maggie Tatum

As some of you know, I have a passion for bats, however, I have to admit that I'm not completely faithful to them.

Like most people, from the time of childhood, I've admired butterflies. They are so pretty and delicate. Several years ago, I parked at the back of the library in Kerrville in order to take my big black dog down to Tranquility Island (isn't that a wonderful name!) to swim. As we strolled to the top of the stairs going down to the park, we walked into a roost of Monarch butterflies. Magnificent! They were in my hair, covering Sydney's shiny black coat, and even perching on her nose. We were both awestruck. I don't know how long we stood there, but eventually we had to move. Later, on the island, we saw a number of them in the cypress trees. I was absolutely captivated.

Subsequently, I would call the Monarch telephone line and consistently search for them each year. Then imagine my delight to find through my classes in the Texas Master Naturalist program, that I could go to Cibolo Nature Center, take a class with Mary and Kip and then participate in the Monarch Larval research. If you are looking for some volunteer hours this is a great project. I was definitely hooked when, at one stage during the class, we went outside to search for milkweed and I found the first plant and Lo and Behold there was an egg. For this discovery I was pleasantly surprised to be given a great looking Monarch t-shirt. After taking the class, volunteers search for eggs, larva and butterflies once a week. This does not mean the same volunteers go every Saturday. We volunteer to take turns.

I was amazed to find Monarchs are not as delicate as they look, so they are wonderful little animals to work with in the classroom. They are even tagged with little "post it" labels on one wing, so that their travel from the north to Mexico can be followed.

Of course there are always rewarding occurrences that come from a particular volunteer effort. While monitoring at Cibolo Nature Center, I came across wildflowers that I had never noticed before, such as Ratany (*Krameria lanceolata*). Also, it was rewarding on our trip to Love Creek Preserve when I could show some others in the group a Monarch egg on milkweed and answer questions about it. I have to admit it is an ego boost, considering how little I know about the natural world, when someone seems so grateful for the sharing of a little knowledge.

In conclusion, I will be back with my little, furry, mammal friends next Spring, although I intend to continue hunting in the fields at Cibolo for royalty.

HUMMINGBIRD ROUNDUP

Sandy Pena mentioned the Hummingbird Roundup last month. If you are not already participating in the wintering-over hummer observation, a new phase begins in March when the migratory hummingbirds begin appearing. Participants are asked to set aside a certain amount of time during convenient intervals (about 2 hours per week) to observe their feeders and record the highest number of each species and gender observed. Breakfast and dinner time are good times to watch because the birds are actively feeding at these hours. If you fall short one week, or are away, you just record what you saw, and continue on. The observation period continues through the end of the year, when you send your data to the Wildlife Diversity Branch of TPWD.

This is the tenth year of the Texas Hummingbird Roundup. Your participation, along with over 1,000 other Texans, will help TPWD determine more about the range, distribution, favored sites, and feeding habits of the 18 amazing species of hummingbirds recorded in Texas. Data collected from the Roundup will add insight on conservation and habitat needs for these fascinating birds. Participants will receive a Hummer newsletter describing the results of the year-long study.

For more information, visit http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/nature/birding/hummingbird_roundup/. You can download the Hummingbird Roundup Survey form and link to more information about common wintering hummers in Texas, such as the Rufous hummingbird. Your editor and her spouse have enjoyed a female Rufous all winter. We saw her quite often in December. Once I began the Survey, watching 15 to 20 minutes at dawn each day, I discovered much more about my little friend. Typically she comes to the feeder at 7:17 AM for her first micro sip (less than one second long). After a few of these brief visits, she arrives for her breakfast of 5 to 8 long sips. We occasionally see her return during the day, but we have no idea how she spends the rest of her day with so few plants in bloom now, and no other hummers to chase. The Survey literature lists 10 references on hummingbirds, one of which should arrive here any day, and perhaps will give me some insight into the daily life of a wintering-over hummer in Texas. I highly recommend this Survey as a great way to both learn more about and develop a greater appreciation for these remarkable little birds.

Interesting hummer facts: The Rufous Hummingbird has the longest migration of any hummingbird, more than 5,000 miles a year. It flies from central Mexico to Alaska and back again. Hummingbirds migrate, not in flocks, but each one entirely alone. Males leave first followed by females several weeks later. On the south-bound journey the young leave last, flying alone on their first migration with no adult to guide them.

In its migration to Mexico, the tiny Ruby-throated hummingbird, almost unbelievably, tackles the sea crossing directly. Its cruising speed is about 27 miles an hour, so if conditions are favorable, it can make the transit, non-stop, in around 18 hours. But the passage is a formidable one and it taxes the hummingbird to the limit of its endurance. A head wind, even a mild one, may hamper it so severely that it will never reach the far shore and perish at sea. The hummingbird may lose one-third of its body weight in this long crossing. *Can you imagine losing 40+ lbs in one day of hard work?*

Hummingbirds feed about every 15-20 minutes all day long to maintain their energy levels. However at dawn and dusk there is heavier feeding to catch up from the nightly fast and prepare for the night ahead. When there is a supply of nectar, as from a feeder, they may not need to feed as often as when feeding from flowers. When the weather is bad and they can't feed they will go into a state of torpor to save energy. Torpor occurs when the weather is too cold. Its function is to help the birds conserve energy. The hummingbirds are still and stiff and cannot fly, which might account for fewer sightings on very cold days. While a hummingbird's normal temperature is 105°F, it can drop to 66.2°F during torpor.

Hummingbirds catch flies, ants, small beetles, tiny wasps and other small insects, and eat nectar and sometimes tree sap as well. They need the insects for protein and nectar for energy. **Sugar mixture for home feeders should only be 1 part white sugar to 4 parts water.** Use no other type of sweetening...No honey, no juice or artificial sweetener. No red food coloring since it may be harmful to hummingbirds. Feeders are usually red plastic, which will attract the hummers.

Here's something else you can do for hummingbirds. Though they get the bulk of their energy needs from sipping nectar or sugar water, they need more than that to stay aloft. Most of their PROTEIN requirements, for example, are met by eating small insects. One way you can help them get that protein is by placing overripe fruit near your hummingbird feeders to attract tiny, fruit-loving flies (putting the fruit in a hanging basket works nicely). Banana skins seem to be especially effective.

Hummingbirds have the largest brain, relative to size, of all birds. The brain is 4.2% of total body weight. Hummingbirds have proportionally the largest hearts of any living animal. 1.75% to 2.5% of body weight. Resting heartbeat is 480 beats per minute and can go as high as **1,260 beats per second when excited.** Resting hummingbirds breathe 250 times a minute.

Small hummingbirds beat their wings **38 - 78 times a second.**, larger hummingbirds 18 - 28 times a second.

References: Hummingbird sections of TPWD website, and its links, including "All you want to know about hummingbirds" www.mschoe.com/hummer/huminfo.htm .



Texas Star
Lindheimeria texana

Please send contributions and comments to your Editor, Priscilla Stanley at jbstan@ktc.com. If you are unable to see the photos in the newsletter, please let me know, and I can send you the photos separately. I would appreciate knowing what you see instead of photos, (red "x" or an error message, etc.) and the operating system you are using, so I can try to improve our newsletter. Thanks.