

JUNE 28TH MEETING: A POTLUCK PICNIC IN THE PARK

This month our meeting will be a Family Potluck Picnic in Louise Hayes Park on the Guadalupe River in Kerrville. We want our members and their families to come and get to know each other better, since we don't all volunteer for the same projects, or see each other that often since we hail from four different counties. We want this picnic to be a way to visit and enjoy each other. We have the Group Pavilion reserved from 5 PM to 9 PM, but feel free to come earlier to practice your plant and tree identification, chat with your friends, or simply enjoy the river. Bring frisbees or whatever sports equipment might be fun in the park.

We plan to eat at 6 PM. Everyone is asked to **bring a cold dish to share and a serving utensil.** Bringing your own **lawn chair** will give you many more options on where you sit to enjoy the tranquility of the park, perhaps even on Tranquility Island in the middle of the river. The Chapter will provide soft drinks. **If you plan to attend, please RSVP to Emily Matheson at ematheson@sbcglobal.net or 830-796-7680** so that we can have enough drinks etc..

While we welcome visitors to most of our meetings, **this Picnic is for "Members Only", and their families, and folks who have applied for our Training Classes, or who think that they might be interested in applying.** Our Chapter membership has nearly doubled in the past year, and we want plenty of time to learn about each others interests, skills, and volunteer projects.

We want to thank Emily and Jim Matheson for organizing our Picnic by the Guadalupe. If you have any questions, please contact Emily at ematheson@sbcglobal.net or 796-7680.

Finding the picnic site: The entrance to Louise Hayes Park is at the traffic light on Thompson Drive across from Penneys in River Hills Mall, and a carwash. (Thompson Drive is the street just south of the Guadalupe River.)

If you don't know where Louise Hays Park is located, it may be easiest to go to Riverside Nature Center, and then proceed south on Franciso Lemos St., over the river, to a light at a T junction. At the T, turn left onto Thompson Drive. The Park entrance will be on your left at a traffic light with a carwash and shopping mall on your right.

If you are coming on State Route 16 (Sidney Baker), at the light just south of the Guadalupe bridge, turn west onto Thompson Drive for one block to the first light. The Park entrance is on the right toward the river.

Enter the park, and drive east under the Route 16 bridge. The Group Pavilion is visible from the parking area, up the grassy hill to the southeast.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BY SANDY PEÑA

It's June again and our Chapter's fall class application process is in full swing. Kudos to Nancy Vaughan and her curriculum committee, who have put together another great lineup of instructors to wow the new class members. This time around, the Board has decided to add a new feature which has proven successful with many other chapters. We are starting a person-to-person mentoring effort to welcome the new trainees. The idea is to provide each of them with a personal contact for information, friendship, and support during the training period. Mentoring is a great way to reduce feelings of being a "stranger among strangers" and to make each trainee feel welcome and appreciated. So, we are looking for some enthusiastic Chapter members to act as mentors, matched one-on-one with a trainee who lives nearby (or at least in the same county!). Some suggestions for mentoring activities include:

1. Call the trainee before the class period begins to welcome them, answer questions, get to know their interests, let them know something about you, and why MN is important to you.
2. Offer to meet face-to-face, perhaps by inviting him/her to a Chapter meeting or volunteer project.

3. Contact the trainee periodically during the classes to see if there are any questions, problems, etc. that you can help with.

Since all of us have been through the training process, it should be easy to share that experience with new trainees, and make them feel like a part of the Chapter from the very beginning. So, please, if you'd enjoy being a mentor this fall, please email me (sandy@penasco.net) or call me at 830/634-2545. Those who volunteer to be a mentor will receive more specifics about the process later this summer. And, of course, your time spent on this activity will certainly count as volunteer hours!

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.

June 23: Master Naturalist - Hill Country Chapter- Board Meeting - Noon at Riverside Nature Center. Chapter members may attend.

June 28 Texas Master Naturalist - Hill Country Chapter, Potluck Picnic in the Park: Dinner at **6:00 PM**, but come earlier to socialize and enjoy Louise Hayes Park on Thompson Drive in Kerrville. **Please bring a cold dish to share.** (see article above).

June 29: Texas Wildscapes by Rufus Stephens of Texas Parks & Wildlife at **Native Plant Society of Texas – Fredericksburg Chapter 7 PM**. Note **new meeting location** at the Gillespie County Historical Society building, 312 W. San Antonio St., Fredericksburg, TX

July and August: The **Native Plant Society of Texas – Kerrville Chapter** and **Boerne Chapter** are in recess until September.

No educational nature classes or AT opportunities were identified at **Cibolo Nature Center** until Fall.

Use the summer to explore nature on your own!

MEET YOUR HILL COUNTRY LIZARDS:

GROUND SKINK

 *Scincella lateralis*



The Ground Skink is readily identified by its light brown, lustrous, nearly iridescent back.

The Ground Skink is a ground-dwelling lizard with smooth, flat, polished-looking scales and short (but fast) legs.

Description: The Ground Skink is a small, fast lizard with tiny salamander-like legs and is from 3 to 5 inches in length.

The dorsal ground color is light brown (varying from rusty or golden brown to brown on its back).

The dorsal pattern consists of a black dorsolateral line from the eye to the tail (a dark stripe runs along each side of the body). Ventral surface (belly) is light and unmarked.

Comparatively long tail, about 2 times the head-body length. Tail breaks off very readily if seized.

Similar species: The two-lined salamander has moist skin instead of this skink's smooth scales.

Habitat: This skink is often observed in moist, humid, wooded environments among leaf litter or other debris; also in moist places near streams. It is common in urban gardens.

Behavior: This diurnal (active in the daytime) skink is wary and retreats quickly when approached. It forages for insects in leaf litter. It has snake-like movements. It also has a clear patch in its lower eyelid, allowing it to see when the eyes are closed.

Reproduction: Breeding takes place from January to August. This skink lays up to 7 hard eggs in rotten logs, stumps or humus. Incubation is 8 to 10 weeks. Females breed as many as five times during the season. No parental care is exhibited.

Range: This skink has a broad range in North America, from New Jersey to Kansas and through the Deep South to the Gulf of Mexico.

In Texas, this skink is found in the eastern half of the state and the western reaches of central Texas.

References:

University of Texas; Herps of Texas, Lizards; <http://www.zo.utexas.edu/research/txherps/lizards/scincella.lateralis.html>

Daviess County Audubon Society, Daviess County, KY

EASTERN FENCE LIZARD

 *Sceloporus undulatus consobrinus*



Photo by Priscilla Stanley

The Eastern Fence Lizard displays a distinctive gray, black and brown pattern.

The Eastern Fence Lizard, a member of the Spiny Lizard family (*Sceloporus*) is America's most widespread lizard. This lizard is 3.5 to 7 inches in length. The males, like those of other spiny lizards, usually have bright blue belly patches, displayed when they flatten their sides to attract a female or warn off an intruder. This lizard lives primarily on the ground, but can climb trees, rough walls and screens in its search for insects. It is often found in rock walls or leaf litter.

Description: Dorsal ground color is light brown. The dorsal pattern consists of 2 light stripes, one from each side of the neck, down each side of the back and dark spots and/or bands in the middorsal region. This lizard has a long tail, up to 1.5 times the body length.

Habitat: This lizard prefers rocky areas which provide shelter and basking surfaces.

Behavior: This diurnal lizard is terrestrial in open areas and arboreal in wooded areas.

Breeding: Breeds in spring and summer. More mature females may lay several clutches of eggs each year.

Range: This lizard lives in Central Texas. Other sub-species live in east Texas and north Texas.

Commentary: We enjoy daily encounters with these lizards in our yard. Several skinks and a fence lizard are dependable inhabitants of their respective sections of the flower beds. Similarly, a large fence lizard frequents the leaf accumulation near the air conditioner, and noisily dives underneath the air conditioner if we surprise him. Several smaller fence lizards live in various rock walls and bask on the rocks. The smaller lizards become more accustomed to us working around them, and tend to ignore us, as long as they are close to the safety of a rock wall.

While I do not have annual lizard censuses to prove this, we seem to see many more lizards, frogs and toads now than when we first bought our property as heavily grazed rangeland. I can think of several changes that might have impacted the herps population. Inside our acre deer fence, we have more understory vegetation now, especially forbs and shrubs and more grasses. We now have several water sources for wildlife, including a sun-dappled plant nursery, which is a skink favorite. We have not had any pesticide applications around the home exterior in two years, which has resulted in more spiders and insects, and apparently more lizards. Perhaps we are another example of the benefits of a Texas Wildscape as described in the presentation by our advisor, Rufus Stephens of Texas Parks and Wildlife, "Build a suitable habitat, and the critters will come." (Rufus will be giving the Texas Wildscapes presentation on June 29 in Fredericksburg (see *the Calendar section above*) for any of you who might have missed it before.)

References:

University of Texas; Herps of Texas, Lizards; <http://www.zo.utexas.edu/research/txherps/lizards/sceloporus.undulatus.html>

North American Wildlife, Readers Digest, p. 168

MASTER NATURALIST CERTIFICATIONS FOR 2004

At our May meeting, **Alice Bulechek**, **Sandy Peña** and **Maggie Tatum** achieved re-certification for 2004 as Texas Master Naturalists. This year's re-certification pin is a delightful green frog.

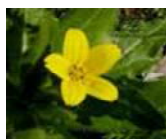
In addition, **Sandy Peña** was recognized for reaching the first Milestone of 250 hours of volunteer service. She will receive a Bronze Dragonfly pin at the annual Master Naturalist State meeting to commemorate this achievement.

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. The Master Naturalist program encourages members to continue serving their communities, and to continue their education by requiring a minimum of 40 hours of approved volunteer service, and a minimum of 8 hours of approved Advanced Training in each successive year to achieve re-certification for that year.

REFRESHMENTS

Thanks go to **Milby Moore** and **George Tinsley** for the fine refreshments at our May meeting.

For our June picnic, we each bring a dish to share.



Texas Star

Lindheimeria texana

Please send contributions and comments to your Editor, Priscilla Stanley at jpbstan@ktc.com