

THE TEXAS STAR

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HILL COUNTRY CHAPTER

JUNE PROGRAM

Our June program will be a presentation on cavity nesters by **Mark Klym**, an information specialist with the Wildlife Science, Research and Diversity Program at Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). Klym is also a former board member of the Texas Bluebird Society. Klym will discuss some of the common cavity nesting birds (both primary and secondary users) found in Texas, and how we can modify our landscaping habits to allow for and encourage these birds in our backyards.

Klym received Bachelor of Science degrees in Biology, Fisheries & Wildlife Management and Political Science from Lake Superior State University in Sault Ste Marie, Michigan. He worked for the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and as a private consultant before migrating to Texas in 1999. He is coauthor of the soon to be published *Hummingbirds of Texas*, and has authored a number of booklets for TPWD including *Introduction to Butterfly Watching*, *Nongame Freshwater Fishes of Texas*, *Introduction to Dragonfly and Damselfly Watching*, *Backyard Birds in Texas*, and others. He is coordinator of the Texas Hummingbird Roundup and Texas Wildscapes programs.

The program will be held on Monday evening, June 27, at Riverside Nature Center, 150 Francisco Lemos Street, Kerrville, beginning with a social time at 6:30pm. The meeting and program begin at 7:00pm. We hope to see you there!

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

This is the time of year when we see all kinds of caterpillars and worms in our trees and our landscapes, and it's not always easy telling the good guys from the bad. Some butterfly and moth larvae can defoliate entire trees, causing stress and in some cases permanent damage. The oak leaf roller, for example, has been particularly destructive in the Hill Country this spring. These small moths lay their eggs on twig tips and leaf buds in the spring, stay dormant for about ten months, and then hatch the following spring. It is at this caterpillar stage that they do the most damage, feeding on the trees' tender new growth. As long as the tree is healthy and does not suffer repeated attacks year after year, it should recover from the damage. There are some wasps and birds that will feed on the larvae, but there isn't much we can do to eradicate the caterpillars. Regular feeding and watering will help an affected tree recover.

In some cases, such as the gulf fritillary, we are willing to put up with the damage from the caterpillars because the butterflies will reward our tolerance with their spectacular beauty. The passionflower vine serves as the host plant for these butterflies, and some vines will be almost totally stripped of their foliage by the beginning of summer. But they usually recover quickly at the end of the season, and should be ready to provide another banquet by the following

spring.



Photos by Phyllis Muska

Some other Hill Country butterflies and their preferred host plants are:

- Black swallowtail caterpillars – dill, fennel and parsley
- Monarch caterpillars – milkweed (Antelope horns or Mexican or tropical)
- Painted lady caterpillars – thistle and artemisia
- Pipevine swallowtail caterpillars – native pipevine

The native *Eupatoriums* (*greggii*, *coelestinum*, *havanense*) as well as non-native Pentas are good "butterfly magnet" nectar plants. To attract butterflies, plant both host plants (specific plants on which eggs are laid and larvae feed) and nectar plants (most anything that flowers) in the landscape, provide damp or muddy spots so that the butterflies can extract the minerals they need from the soil, and refrain from using pesticides. Even *Bacillus thuringiensis* (BT), an organic control for caterpillars and other pests, should be avoided if at all possible.

There are plenty of field guides available for identifying butterflies, but not as many resources to help identify the associated caterpillars. A few web sites that may be helpful are <http://www.texasento.net/rearing.htm> and <http://www.whatsthis caterpillar.co.uk/america/>. The Austin Butterfly Forum lists a number of links on its website <http://austinbutterflies.org/Links/>. The Peterson *First Guide to Caterpillars of North America* is a pocket-sized book, great for field trips, although the number of caterpillars covered (120) is limited. There is also the new *Field Guide to Caterpillars* by Jim Brock, Thomas J. Allen and Jeffrey Glassberg, which provides photographs to help identify hundreds of caterpillars commonly found in North America.

Special thanks to Kip Kiphart for his expert advice!

IF TREES COULD TALK

by Susan Sander, Master Tree-Hugger

As naturalists we look for stories that tell us about the history of the land. So we search for clues in river banks, road cuts and growth rings of trees. Unfortunately, to study a tree 'cookie' one needs to cut the tree down. A dendrologist uses an increment borer to drill a cross-section out of the trunk that resembles a pencil with lines (growth rings).

A large tree implies old age, but size is not the only clue, as some species don't grow large, and some habitats don't foster growth; nor does every growing season produce the same results.

In assessing age, we count either the dark or light colored rings. In Texas the growing seasons could last all year, but there is generally a slower, down time. Different species grow at different rates, and environmental conditions definitely have an impact on the amount of growth a tree can put on in a year. The bristlecone pines of the Sierra Nevadas, for instance, use only 100 gallons of water a year! In their rings scientists have found that a freeze happened back in the 1600s. Hence, studying growth rings can give us a look at the past in terms of rainfall and drought conditions, even wildfire scars.



L: Ring from Louisiana bald cypress log

R: ring from Ashe Juniper (note red heartwood)



A cross section of a timber log – note the darker comet shape of a branch that was “swallowed up” over time by new growth. One might also find evidence of disease, lightning strikes, injuries, old nails, wire fences, etc.

Photos by Susan Sander

The true Lord of the Rings is a Bristlecone pine – an estimated 4,700 years old – that commands the title of Methuselah. Imagine standing in one place, day in and day out since the Bronze Age. A younger cousin – only 1,500 years old – has a girth of 36 feet. The rings are so close together you need a magnifying lens to even see them. At the other end of the spectrum is the fast-growing lumber pine of today with 1/2" thick growth rings.

Susan Sander, a transplant from Washington Island, Wisconsin, holds a BA in philosophy and MA in environmental land-use planning. She was the founder of Riverside Nature Center and has served as education director there for ten years. She is also the author of A Treasury of Texas Flora: The Botanical Watercolors of Marie C. Wesby. Susan currently works for Texas Forest Service, Kerrville office.

NATURE NIGHTS AT LADY BIRD JOHNSON WILDFLOWER CENTER

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin is hosting *Nature Nights*, a special series designed to take advantage of longer summer days and cooler summer nights. The series will be held every Thursday throughout July from 5:30-9:00 pm - free for members and just \$1 per person for non-members.

July 7 – *Flying Jewels: Attracting Hummingbirds to Your Yard* with Mark Klym, Outreach Specialist & Manager, Texas Wildscapes Program

July 14 – *Slither and Slide: Get to Know the Snakes of Texas* with Dr. Andy Price, State Herpetologist

July 21 – *Symphonies of the Night: Finding a Frog Concerto in Your Backyard* with Lee Ann Linam, Texas Amphibian Watch Coordinator

July 28 – *Creepy Crawlies: Insects Working the Night Shift* with Mike Quinn, Invertebrate Biologist

The Wildflower Center has teamed up with Texas Parks & Wildlife to present this family-friendly series. Each week, you'll meet a new family of animals - snakes, birds, frogs, and bugs - learning about their habits and habitats. Most weeks, you'll even meet them in person! Programs begin at 7 pm with a repeat performance at 8 pm. Each week will also feature a habitat hike, walk, or talk by Wildflower Center Staff. The programs are free with admission, and registration is not required; however, seating and/or space is available on a first-come-first served basis.

Nature Nights is a rare and ideal opportunity to cool down and enjoy the magic of the Wildflower Center without the sun and heat. Bring a picnic dinner (tables provided just inside the entrance gate in parking lot) or enjoy special summer fare from the Wildflower Café. The gift store, *Wild Ideas*, will stay open late featuring books, toys, and gifts related to each night's theme. The Wildflower Center will close at 9 pm each evening. Spend the evening where the wild things are - just \$1 every Thursday in July! See <http://www.wildflower.org/?nd=nature> for more information.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATIONS STILL AVAILABLE, BUT TIME IS GROWING SHORT!

The deadline for 2005 membership applications is **July 15**. All applications must be postmarked on or before this date. We encourage prospective members to submit applications as soon as possible. A check for \$95 must accompany the application.

Anyone interested in becoming a Texas Master Naturalist should send name, postal mailing address and e-mail (or phone number) to **Priscilla Stanley**, Chapter Membership Chairman, at jpbstan@ktc.com or 830 257 2094. You can also contact Priscilla if you have any questions about the Texas Master Naturalist program or the Hill Country Chapter application process.

MASTER NATURALIST MILESTONES/ACKNOWLEDGMENTS/KUDOS

Betty Gardner, Cynthia Johnson and **Phyllis Muska** received their 2004 certifications in May, and **Alice Bulechek, Sharon Corley** and **Bob Richie** were recertified for 2005.

These Master Naturalists qualified for special first year recertifications under the new guidelines:

- **Ginny deWolf** and **Phyllis Muska** – 2005 Blue Kingfisher
- **Nancy Vaughan** – 2004 Green Frog
- **Sandy Pena, Jim Stanley** and **Priscilla Stanley** – 2003 Texas Star

Ron Hood and **Bob Richie** reached the 250 volunteer service hour milestone for a bronze dragonfly.

Congratulations to all these achievers!

Sandra McGee and **Wanda Mattarocci** are providing snacks for the June meeting. Volunteers still needed for August and September meetings – sign up with Wanda!

CALENDAR

June 18: River Clean-Up Day – 9:00am at Riverside Nature Center, 150 Francisco Lemos Street, Kerrville. Heavy labor (wet) workday – bring a change of clothes. Project ID #KR-02-D. For more info or to set another date, call Clear River Advocates at 830 377 9839.

June 21: Tree Pruning Workshop – 4:00pm–8:00pm at Riverside Nature Center, 150 Francisco Lemos Street, Kerrville. Pruning session with foresters of the Texas Forest Service. Learn and practice proper tree pruning. 1.5 hours of training followed by service project. Project ID #KR-02-D. Contact Susan Sander at Texas Forest Service, 830 257 7744.

June 22: Texas Master Naturalist – Hill Country Chapter board meeting – 2:00pm at Riverside Nature Center, 150 Francisco Lemos Street, Kerrville – chapter members may attend.

June 22: UGRA Volunteer Orientation, Summer Bacteria Study – 3:30pm, Upper Guadalupe River Authority, 125 Lehmann Drive, Kerrville. Project ID #CC-01-A. For more information, contact Gretchen Reutzel at 830 896 5445.

June 23: LBJ National Park monthly presentation – 7:00pm – *Making Every Drop Count*. Presentation on rainwater harvesting. LBJ National Park Visitor Center, at the corner of Avenue G and Ladybird Lane, two blocks south of U.S. Highway 290 (Main Street) in Johnson City. For further information or specific driving directions, please call (830) 868-7128, extension 244.

June 27: Texas Master Naturalist – Hill Country Chapter monthly meeting – 6:30pm, Riverside Nature Center, 150 Francisco Lemos Street, Kerrville. (*See above for details.*)

July 16: River Clean-up Day – 8:00am–noon, Guadalupe Park, Kerrville. Sponsored by the Upper Guadalupe River Authority (UGRA). Project ID #CC-0-1A. If you would like to participate, please contact Gretchen Reutzel at the UGRA, 830 896 5445.

July 7, 14, 21, and 28: Nature Nights – 7:00pm, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, Austin (*See above for details.*)

July 25: Note that our July meeting will be a picnic at Old Tunnel Wildlife Management Area – plan now to meet at Old Tunnel on July 25 at 6:30pm. Bring a picnic dinner and plan to stay for the bat emergence! Details in the next edition of *The Texas Star*.

Please send newsletter contributions and comments to Phyllis Muska at pmuska@omniglobal.net.



Texas Star

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