

THE TEXAS STAR

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HILL COUNTRY CHAPTER

JULY PROGRAM

The July 25 chapter meeting will also be our annual picnic. We will meet at Old Tunnel at 6:30pm, have dinner and hear a presentation from **Amy Sugeno**. Then we'll wait for the bats to emerge, which should be somewhere between 8:00 and 8:50pm.

The lower viewing area will be closed to the public that evening, so we will have the whole lower deck to ourselves for a good view of the bats. There will also be time to walk around and enjoy the trails. This meeting will not be open to the general public, but chapter members may bring a spouse or guest.

Amy Sugeno is the area manager and biologist at Old Tunnel Wildlife Management Area, and is one of our chapter advisors. She has been at Old Tunnel for about a year and a half, and with Texas Parks & Wildlife for over four years. For the past twelve years, Amy has worked with a variety of wildlife species across Texas, New Mexico, and the southeastern US, as well as some in Mexico. She grew up in Arlington, Texas, regularly catching snakes, lizards, bugs, and various other wildlife in the fields behind her house. She earned a BS in Wildlife & Fisheries Science from Texas A&M University and an MS degree in Biology from Tennessee Technological University, where she studied Canada geese.

The Old Tunnel Wildlife Management Area is located on the Old San Antonio Road between Fredericksburg and Comfort. See http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/wma/find_a_wma/list/?id=17§ion=directions for a map and detailed directions, or call Amy at 830 990 2659 if you have questions. You can also check the toll-free line for current information on Old Tunnel and the bat emergence: 1 866 990 BATS.

Meet at the lower observation deck, bring your picnic dinner (and a folding chair if you want), and be prepared for a fun, informative evening. We hope to see you there!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BY JIM STANLEY

When we surveyed our Chapter membership last winter, we found that many of you wanted at least some of our monthly meetings to be counted as advanced training (AT), so attendance would count toward the eight hours of AT we all need each year. The Board has considered this and related issues and formulated a new policy regarding our monthly meetings and advanced training.

Beginning with our August meeting, and for every monthly meeting after that, the Board will make a determination at the regular Board Meeting *after the monthly meeting in question* whether or not the previous meeting can be considered AT. If so, then *if* you attended that meeting you may count the attendance as AT time.

Whether or not a presentation qualifies as AT depends on two things: the topic in question and the level of the presentation. Some topics presented at some of our monthly meetings are not on a subject that represents advanced training for a Master Naturalist. They may be interesting, fun and/or entertaining, but not really academically advanced

training. Other presentations do not qualify as advanced training because the level or depth of the presentation is too elementary or because the material presented is largely repetitious of topics most MNs have already seen before.

It is not always possible, however, to determine in advance exactly what a given speaker will cover and in what depth. Therefore, determining in advance if a given monthly meeting qualifies as AT is not possible, but our experience is that some meetings clearly do so qualify. Therefore, in the future, the Board will make a determination *after the meeting* and notify all via a subsequent newsletter if attendance at that meeting is eligible for AT credit.

The fact that this may encourage greater attendance at monthly meetings, is of course, just icing on the cake. So, see you at the next monthly meeting???

GARDENING IN THE HILL COUNTRY

by Elizabeth Drozda-Freeman, LCRA

Those of us lucky enough to live in this part of the world must accept the price we pay for beautifully mild January weather — scorchingly hot, dry summers. In response to the question, “What should I be doing in the yard in July?” The answer is, “Not very much!”

July is a dormant season for plants. Planting mid-summer in the Hill Country can only be considered plant cruelty. Survival of new transplants is iffy, requiring careful attention and lots of watering. A better strategy is to use this season to plan and prepare for successful fall planting. Take a look at your landscape and think about what improvements you would like to make. Have you been noticing attractive yards that you might want to emulate? Are you fed up with mowing and watering?

If you decide it is time for a few landscape changes, the next step is to evaluate the current conditions of your yard. Do you have a sufficient soil depth for planting? What type of soil do you have? Do you have good drainage? Where are the areas of sun and shade in your yard? Finding answers to these questions will help you make good plant choices for your landscape.

After evaluating your site conditions, peruse books specializing in plants that are native and adapted to this region. The *Grow Green Guide to Native and Well Adapted Landscape Plants* is an excellent source, as is the Wasowskis' *Native Texas Plants*.

Once you have done some research, allow your inner artist to emerge. Print out photos of your front yard and try tracing new landscaping ideas over the top. Think about how you might be able to bring more texture, structural diversity and foliage color into your yard. See if there are any areas where it might be practical to replace lawn with well-adapted landscape plants, then sketch out a plan.

If you decide to remove turf, mid-summer is the best season for bed preparation. Hot days create perfect conditions in sunny areas for killing weed seeds with solarization. Solarization has three easy steps:

1. dig up grass and weeds as best you can;
2. thoroughly wet the area; and
3. cover the area with clear (not black) plastic.

Leave the plastic in place for two weeks, allowing the sun to steam the weeds to death. After you have solarized an area, cover it with a three-inch thick layer of mulch until conditions are right for planting.

While you are out in the garden mulching your new bed, give your existing beds fresh mulch to help them through the heat. Then go for a swim, or find other cool activities to enjoy while you endure our dormant season in the Texas Hill Country.

Elizabeth Drozda-Freeman is the Conservation Landscape Specialist for the Lower Colorado River Authority. She can be reached at 512 473 3200 X2230 or elizabeth.drozda-freeman@lcra.org if you have comments,

questions or suggestions for future gardening topics.

PERSEID METEOR SHOWERS AND MARS APPROACH

Got the summer blahs? How about a nap during the heat of the day to prepare you for some late night stargazing?

The best time to look for the traditional Perseid meteors is during the hours before dawn on Friday, August 12. Set your alarm for 2am. Go outside and settle into your favorite chaise, or lie down on a blanket or pad with your toes pointed northeast. You'll soon see meteors racing along the path of the Milky Way. This year's meteor shower should be a good one, since we'll have dark skies with the first quarter moon.

If the 2am wake-up call is too much to ask, try looking up on the night of August 11 anytime after dark – preferably around 10:30 or 11pm. In some years, the early show is as good as or better than the one going on in the wee hours of the morning!

Meteor showers are the result of comets shedding debris. As comets orbit the Sun, they shed an icy, dusty debris stream along the comet's orbit. If Earth travels through this stream, we are treated to a meteor shower. Depending on where Earth and the stream meet, meteors appear to fall from a particular place in the sky, maybe within the neighborhood of a constellation.

Meteor showers are named for the constellation from which meteors appear to fall, a spot in the sky astronomers call the *radiant*. For instance, the radiant for the Leonid meteor shower is located in the constellation Leo. The Perseid meteor shower is so named because meteors appear to fall from a point in the constellation Perseus.

In the Texas Hill Country, our night skies are still relatively dark and free from light pollution. If you live in town, you may want to head out to the countryside or hook up with friends who live outside the city limits.

And while you're looking up, don't forget to check out the planet Mars, which will be closer to Earth than ever before in recorded history. The next time Mars may come this close is in 2287. The encounter will culminate on August 27 when Mars comes to within 35 million miles of Earth. Mars will be easy to spot, as it will be the brightest object in the night sky, after the moon. At the beginning of August it will rise in the east at 10pm and peak at about 3am.

By the end of August when the two planets are closest, Mars will rise at nightfall and reach its highest point in the sky at 12:30am. So start watching at the beginning of August to see Mars grow progressively brighter and brighter throughout the month.

See <http://www.heavens-above.com> for a great resource on astronomical information, satellites, iridium flares and other sky-related events.

CALENDAR

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

July 20: Texas Master Naturalist – Hill Country Chapter board meeting – 2:00pm at Riverside Nature Center, 150 Francisco Lemos Street, Kerrville – chapter members may attend.

July 21 and 28: Nature Nights – 7:00pm, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, Austin. See <http://www.wildflower.org/?nd=nature> for details.

July 25: Texas Master Naturalist – Hill Country Chapter monthly meeting – 6:30pm picnic dinner at Old Tunnel WMA. (*See above for details.*)

July 25-29 and August 1-3 – Texas Wild Rice Monitoring – 8:45am, San Marcos. Contact Jackie Poole at Texas Parks and Wildlife, 512 912 7019, to sign up or to learn more about volunteering for this project.

July 28: LBJ National Park monthly presentation – 7:00pm – FireWise techniques. Tips and techniques for a beautiful home landscape designed to protect property from wildfire. 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.

August 11-12: Perseid meteor showers – *see above for details.*

August 11-14: Big Bend Nature Festival – jeep tours, nature hikes, evening socials, and afternoon lectures about birds, bugs, mammals, geology, paleontology, and reptiles. Enjoy the cool Big Bend high country and learn from the experts the many wonders of the Chihuahuan Desert. See <http://www.visitbigbend.com/> for details.

August 15-17: Living with Nature in Marathon – workshops on sustainable landscaping, low impact development, and appropriate architecture in the west Texas desert. See <http://www.visitbigbend.com/> for details.

August 18–20: 9th Annual Davis Mountains Hummingbird Festival – Fort Davis. Hosted by the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute and the Fort Davis Merchants Association. Visit www.cdri.org/DMHBFestival/Home.htm for details.

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



Texas Star

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