

THE TEXAS STAR

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HILL COUNTRY CHAPTER

FEBRUARY PROGRAM

Our February program will be a presentation on *Geological Complexity and Plant Diversity* by **Bill Lindemann**. He will focus on the area west of the Pecos River and describe how the area's geological complexity enhances plant diversity.

Understanding the region's geological history provides an appreciation of the unusual plant diversity found in there. Plants have adapted to the many soil types derived from the rocks deposited during the major geological periods. More than 120 families of plants representing almost 2,000 species call this region home.

Bill, a long-time friend of our chapter, received his BA (1960) and MS (1963) degrees in geology from UT Austin. He was an exploration geologist for Exxon and moved to Fredericksburg after retiring in 1994.

He is president of the Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT) which is now headquartered in Fredericksburg. In 2003 he was awarded NPSOT's Nancy Benedict Memorial Award for an act of Conservation/Public Service for establishing the Fredericksburg Nature Center and the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center organization.

He is president of the Board of Directors for the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center. He also serves on the Board of Directors for the Hill Country Historical Foundation and the Hill Country Land Trust, where he is a vice-president. In addition, he is compiling a field guide for the wildflowers of the Trans-Pecos region.

Since 1997 he has written a weekly birding column, *Birding in the Hill Country*, which is published in the *Kerrville Daily Times*.

This meeting will be held on Monday, February 27, at 7:00pm at [Riverside Nature Center](#), 150 Francisco Lemos Street in Kerrville, with our social beginning at 6:30pm. We hope that you can join us.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BY JIM STANLEY

Well, the calendar says February, the temperature says April, the landscape says drought, and I see a dragonfly and a butterfly outside my window right now. There is always something interesting going on in the Hill Country, which gives me a chance to remind you of some things.

Master Naturalist is an organization designed for people not just to belong to, but to participate in and to be active in. So I want to encourage everyone to participate by attending our monthly meetings as well as those of kindred organizations such as the *Native*

Plant Society, seminars sponsored by *Riverside Nature Center* and *Cibolo Nature Center*, and any workshop, seminar, field day or class sponsored by the *Texas Cooperative Extension*, *Texas Forest Service*, *Texas Parks and Wildlife Department*, *Natural Resource Conservation Service*, *Kerr Wildlife Management Area* or *Bamberger Ranch*. Many (but not all) of the presentations made at these events will qualify as Advanced Training (AT). Phyllis includes notices of most of these events in every newsletter, and Jane sends out e-mail notices for almost all of the AT events. If you hear of an event you think should qualify as AT but don't get a notice of it, let me or Jane Crone know about it.

Of course, the other way to participate in *Master Naturalist* activities is by volunteering, which is the main reason for our existence. There are about forty different projects described on the volunteer list which is contained on our web site www.hillcountrymasternaturalist.org. Each of these projects has associated with it a *Master Naturalist* coordinator, so if you think you might be interested in one of these projects, call the coordinator and learn more about it. Not all projects are glamorous, many don't have any instant feedback, some may go largely unnoticed, but they all contribute to the education of Hill Country residents about the ecology of our area. The more we do, the more attention we attract, the more people we touch, the greater the impact we have, directly or indirectly, on the Hill Country environment.

So resolve today to be a participating, active member, and your rewards will be not only that you will learn something and make a contribution, but also that you will get to spend time with a lot of other really nice folks and good friends.

COWBIRD TRAPPING

March 1 marks the official start of the Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) cowbird trapping season. The program is designed to help control the effect of cowbird parasitism on our native songbirds. Fort Hood and the Kerr Wildlife Management Area began experimental trapping in the early 1990s, and the program has since expanded to include volunteer landowners across the state who trap the birds and report their numbers back to TPWD.

The brown-headed cowbird lays its eggs in the nests of more than 225 bird species, relying on the unwitting 'host' to hatch and raise the cowbird offspring. Our endangered black-capped vireo is one of the birds most gravely threatened; cardinals, painted buntings, gnatcatchers, chipping and fox sparrows, warblers and many other Texas songbirds are also victims. Cowbirds generally pick nests of birds smaller than themselves, targeting open-cup (as opposed to cavity) nests. The damage is done when the female cowbird tosses the hosts' eggs and/or chicks from the nest. Or, if both host and cowbird eggs hatch, the cowbird chicks frequently out-compete the host's chicks for food and care.

Male Cowbird



© Washtenaw County Audubon Society

The female lays an average of forty eggs per year and may parasitize a single nest multiple times, completely disrupting the hosts' breeding success. Adding to the problem is habitat fragmentation, which creates large sections of the 'edge' environment that cowbirds favor. In these areas, some songbird species actually fledge more brown-headed cowbirds than their own young! Each adult cowbird represents the loss of 3.5 baby songbirds. Flycatchers, robins, and

other larger birds are more likely to thwart the efforts of the intruder by recognizing and removing the cowbird eggs.

The traps are large cages with an entry slot in the ceiling, usually stocked with several cowbirds to attract others into the trap. Trappers provide food and water in the cage, and check the traps regularly to release any songbirds which may have found their way into the trap.

Since volunteers began submitting data in 2000, over 200,000 cowbirds have been trapped and dispatched statewide, with a ratio of roughly three males to two females. In the Hill Country, we have the dubious distinction of trapping far more cowbirds than any other eco-region. In 2005, for example, 22,334 cowbirds were trapped in our Edwards Plateau eco-region – over 2/3 of the statewide total of 30,861. By county, Gillespie was by far the leader, with over 6,000 birds trapped last year. Kerr County came in third, with over 2,000 birds; and Bandera and Kendall reported over 1,000 each. Active traps in our four-county area numbered 23 in Gillespie, 35 in Kerr, 14 in Kendall, and 31 in Bandera County.

Cowbird numbers have been declining over the last few years, from a peak of almost 55,000 statewide in 2003. Hopefully this is an indication that the overall numbers are declining and that the program is a success.

Cowbird trapping is one of our chapter projects, and the official season runs through May 31. For further information, contact [Ron Hood](#), [Myrna Langford](#), or [Phyllis Muska](#). Additional details are also available from TPWD at <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/nuisance/cowbirds/>

A PAGE FROM THE HERBARIUM

THIS MONTH'S PLANT: PUCCOON

(Fringed Puccoon, Narrowleaf Gromwell, Golden Puccoon)

Lithospermum incisum Lehmann

BY SUSAN LONGACRE

The Puccoon or Gromwell is part of the Borage family (*Boraginaceae*), which also includes heliotropes and forget-me-nots. This family is characterized by rough, hairy, simple, alternate leaves and a series of funnel or tube flowers that uncoil as the flowers develop. The Puccoons include about fifty species of hairy low perennials occupying temperate habitats, with fifteen species in North America. Of the three Texas species, the most common is the yellow-flowering Puccoon which favors sandy soil in open fields, along roadsides, and at edges of woodlands.

The Puccoon plant consists of several erect stems, 6"-12" long, rising above a long, woody red tap root topped by a cluster of leaves. Stem leaves are covered in closely-pressed, rough, stiff, upward-pointed hairs that parallel the surface; leaves are alternate, linear to linear-lanceolate, up to 4" long, reducing in size up the stem.



Photograph by Sandra Magee

Of the two sets of flowers produced by Puccoons, the spring blooms are showy, yellow, trumpet-shaped flowers with five lobes that are conspicuously fringed at the edges. These flowers measure 1" across and are generally sterile. Numerous trumpets occur on a coiled terminal spike that elongates and uncurls as the flowers open. The second set of flowers are small (< 1/8 ") and hidden within the bracts in late spring and summer. Very fertile seeds are produced in these self-fertilizing but never-opening cleistogamous flowers.

Roots of the Puccoon yield a red dye that was extensively used by Native Americans and early settlers. It is still used to dye wool for weaving. Roots were also used by Native Americans in medicines and cooked for food. The root is being evaluated as a possible source for modern drugs.

Susan Longacre recently retired from ChevronTexaco, where she was a geologist who specialized in 'reading rocks" such as the limestones found in our hills.

Susan represents the Class of 2005 on the Board, and recently started working on the Virtual Herbarium and Los Rincones projects.

Sandra Magee retired and moved to Medina in 2002. She is a graduate of the Hill Country Master Naturalist Class of 2004.

The Texas Hill Country Virtual Herbarium is a project dedicated to creating a photographic database to be used for identification of plants native to the Texas Hill Country area.

For more information, contact [Barbara Lowenthal](#).

TRAINING AND VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST RETREAT

The annual retreat for Central Region chapters of Texas Master Naturalist will be held February 25, hosted by the Heart of Texas Chapter at the Lake Waco Wetlands and open to all chapter members. Chapters of our region include: Capital Area, Hays County, Heart of Texas, Highland Lakes, Hill Country, Lindheimer, Lost Pines, Tierra Grande, Trans Pecos and Western Edwards Plateau. An advanced training session is planned for the afternoon. There will also be a tour of the Heart of Texas Chapter's project at the wetlands. Further details will be available shortly.

TEXAS TECH TECH LIFELONG LEARNING COMMUNITY

Texas Tech's Lifelong Learning Community is a membership organization which provides learning opportunities for people 55 years of age and older who want to continue to expand their knowledge and interests. No tests, no grades – just the opportunity to learn something new! Through this program, you will meet and interact with people in the community by participating in classroom learning, lectures, discussion groups, and other special events. You can join as an official member and enjoy various benefits, or simply enroll in any offering that sparks your interest.

The spring offerings include two sessions that should be of interest to Master Naturalists:

Life Under the Microscope

In a single drop of creek water lies a world unknown to most people: amoebas chasing or lying in ambush for their next meal, algae forming a microscopic 'forest' inhabited by numerous insect larvae and microscopic organisms, and a host of other fascinating plants and animals that are easily viewed with a microscope. The class will take a short field trip to creeks and ponds in and around Fredericksburg to collect water samples, which they will examine under a microscope back in the classroom. Students will learn how to identify the organisms they collect as well as the ecological significance of these organisms. Instructor will be **Kent Rylander**, an ornithologist and retired Professor of Biological Sciences at Texas Tech University.

Fridays, March 24 and 31 and April 7, 4:00-6:00pm; and Saturday, April 8, 8:00am-noon; \$39 for members; \$49 for non-members. **Advanced Training hours available.**

Meet the Birds of the Hill Country: An Introduction to Birds and Birding

Join avid birder and local expert **Bill Lindemann** to learn about Hill Country birds. The class starts with an overview of the sport and hobby and continues with the process of identifying the birds, including how and what to look at while birding. Discussion will include migration, the four groups of birds that live in and/or pass through the Hill Country, ways to attract birds, nesting requirements for potential birds in your area, and birds' role in nature and what threats they face. The class will conclude on Saturday morning with a field trip to Enchanted Rock State Natural Area.

Friday, April 21, 6:30-8:00pm and Saturday, April 22, 8:00am-noon; \$25 for members; \$35 for non-members

Classes will be held in Fredericksburg at 102 East San Antonio Street, Suite D, located off South Adams Street across from the Gillespie County Courthouse.

For more information on the Texas Tech Lifelong Learning Community program, see <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/oes/TLLF.asp> or call Wanda Merchant at 830 990 2717 X232.

WOMEN LEARNING ABOUT THE LAND

Women who are interested in learning more about outdoor and land management skills should sign up for *Women of the Land*, a weekend workshop scheduled for March 10-12 at the Franklin Family Ranch near Blanco, Texas. This two-day program is geared towards women who are interested in plants, deer ecology and habitat management techniques, as well as shooting, photography, fly-fishing and outdoor cooking. The program is open to all women fourteen and older. The workshop is sponsored by the Texas Wildlife Association, the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo, and Texas Parks & Wildlife. The cost is \$150 per person for all the classes, meals, and lodging for Saturday night. Lodging for Friday night is also available for an extra fee. For more information, contact Tamara Trail of the Texas Wildlife Association at 972 681 1701 or Linda Campbell

of Texas Parks & Wildlife at 800 792 1112 X4395. You may also download a registration form from www.texas-wildlife.org.

CALENDAR

February 18: Texas Watch Water Monitor Training – Landa Park, New Braunfels. Preparation for new research project at Old Tunnel Wildlife Management Area.

February 20: Oak Wilt and Tree Planting Class – 1:00-4:00pm, [Gillespie County Ag Extension Building](#). A three-hour discussion of oak wilt and tree planting to be presented by **Robert Edmonson** of the Texas Forest Service in the Fredericksburg Ag Extension Office. **Limited to chapter members only. AT hours available.**

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

February 25: Texas Master Naturalist Regional Retreat – Lake Waco Wetlands. Contact [Sandy Peña](#) for additional information.

February 25: Attracting Birds to your Hill Country Property – 9:00am-noon, [Cibolo Nature Center](#), Highway 46 east of Boerne. Class led by **Dick Park**. For reservations, costs and more info, call Cibolo Nature Center, 830 249 4616. **AT hours available.**

February 25: Native Plant Spring Symposium 2006 – 8:30am–5:00pm, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, Austin. Conference for native plant experts and enthusiasts. Theme of *What's Hiding In the Bushes? Native Plants as Habitat* will address specific animal and plant relationships and review current biological research as related to native plant ecology. \$55. For more details or to register, see <http://www.wildflower.org/?nd=registration&view=full&key=93>. **AT hours available.**

February 27: Texas Master Naturalist – Hill Country Chapter monthly meeting – 7:00pm, [Riverside Nature Center](#). *See above for details.*

February 28: Fredericksburg Chapter, Native Plant Society of Texas monthly meeting – 7:00pm, 312 W San Antonio Street, Fredericksburg. Presentation on *Flora and Fauna of Big Bend* by **Beth Francell**, NPSOT-Big Bend Chapter.

March 3: Birding Hike at Old Tunnel Wildlife Management Area – 9:00am-11:00am, Old Tunnel WMA on Old San Antonio Road between Fredericksburg and Comfort. Bring water and binoculars; picnic tables available for those wishing to bring lunch. For additional information, contact [Amy Sugeno](#), Old Tunnel WMA Area Manager, 830 990 2659.

March 4: Rainwater Catchment Workshop – 9:00am-noon, Cibolo Nature Center, Highway 46 east of Boerne. Class led by **John Knight**. For reservations, costs and more info, call Cibolo Nature Center, 830 249 4616. **AT hours available.**

March 7: Kerrville Chapter, Native Plant Society of Texas monthly meeting – 2:00pm, [Riverside Nature Center](#).

March 7: Boerne Chapter, Native Plant Society of Texas monthly meeting – 7:00pm, [Cibolo Nature Center](#), Highway 46 east of Boerne.

March 9: Riverside Nature Center Brown Bag Lunch – 12:00pm-1:00pm, [150 Francisco Lemos, Kerrville](#). Presentation on *Hill Country Wine Making* by **Danny Hernandez** of Sister Creek Winery. \$3 per person, free to Riverside Nature Center members. Call 830 257 4837 for more information.

March 11: Bandera Chapter, Native Plant Society of Texas monthly meeting – 2:00pm, Medina Community Library.

March 10-12: Women Learning About the Land Seminar – Franklin Family Ranch, Blanco. *See above for details.*

March 12: Cibolo Nature Center Second Saturday Nature Walk – 9:30am, [Cibolo Nature Center](#), Highway 46 east of Boerne. Enjoy a walk through Cibolo’s varied ecosystems with CNC education director **Jan Wrede**.

March 14: Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center – 7:00pm, [Gillespie County Ag Extension Building](#), 95 Frederick Road, Fredericksburg. Presentation on dragonflies by **James Lasswell** from the Texas A&M Research Station at Stephenville. Lasswell is co-author of the book *A Dazzle of Dragonflies* as well as a contributor to the beautiful poster of Texas Dragonflies.

March 18: Nature Photography Symposium – 8:30am-5:00pm, TMI, The Episcopal School of Texas, San Antonio. Images for Conservation Symposium for Landowners and Photographers. \$75 per person including lunch. Contact [Sam Mason](#), 956 381 1264. See www.imagesforconservation.org for more information.

March 24 and 31, April 7 and 8 – *Life Under the Microscope* class sponsored by Texas Tech Lifelong Learning Community and taught by **Kent Rylander**. *See above for details. AT hours available.*

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



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