



HILL COUNTRY CHAPTER

# THE TEXAS STAR

JUNE 2006 VOL. 4, No. 6

## JUNE PROGRAM

Our June meeting will be a pot luck picnic dinner at Riverside Nature Center for members and their spouses. This annual get-together gives us an opportunity to visit and get to know each other on a casual basis. Bring a dish to share. The chapter will provide non-alcoholic cold drinks, plates, napkins, plastic flatware, plastic cups, and ice.

If you can help Bob Richie with this event, get in touch with him at 830 257 8939 or [brichie@ktc.com](mailto:brichie@ktc.com).

This get-together will be held on Monday, June 26, at 7:00pm at Riverside Nature Center, 150 Francisco Lemos Street in Kerrville. We hope that you can join us.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*BY JIM STANLEY*

I would just like to remind everyone of some upcoming summer events:

- On June 26 in lieu of a monthly meeting we will be having a pot luck supper for all MNs and their spouses.
- On July 7 we will have the second grass ID class.
- Rufus Stevens will be leading a prairie management workshop at Cibolo on July 15.
- On July 24 our monthly meeting will be about weather.
- On August 28 we will have the first gathering of the new class and the opportunity for all of the rest of us to meet them.

Details on these events will be elsewhere in this newsletter or in subsequent e-mails, but you can mark your calendars now. Now that the days are longer, traveling to and from these meetings is in the daylight so I hope to see everyone.

We are also considering a field trip to a member's property near Utopia. It is about an hour and a half drive from Kerrville, and will give folks a chance to see a little different part of the country. This field trip will also be a Land Management Assistance Program (LMAP) training session, but will be open to all MNs, not just LMAP people. I would like to know how many people would be interested in making such a trip before we finalize any plans, so if you are interested, please e-mail me at [jstmn@ktc.com](mailto:jstmn@ktc.com).

## ON THE LOOKOUT FOR INVADERS

*PART I*

As Texas Master Naturalists, we all have an appreciation for those plants and animals that are native to our area. *Invasive plants* are generally thought of as non-native plants that grow outside of desired boundaries and can out-compete our native species. A plant is potentially invasive if it is a non-native plant that is well-adapted to the climate and soils of our area *and* has high reproductive success.

Not all non-natives are invasive – some are well-behaved and do well for us in our landscapes. Crape myrtle, rosemary, and Copper Canyon daisy are all examples of plants from other parts of the world that are well-adapted to the Texas Hill Country. On the other hand, not all native plants are well-behaved, and some of them have ‘invasive’ tendencies as well: poverty weed and ashe juniper, for example, can crowd out our grasses and wildflowers. Greenbrier and grapevine can cover grown trees to the point that the tree may suffer from lack of light.

And how do these plants cause a problem, exactly? These aggressive invaders can affect our native species by:

- Reducing the amount of light, water, nutrients and space available;
- Altering hydrological patterns, soil chemistry, moisture-holding capacity, and erodibility;
- Changing fire regimes;
- In some cases, hybridizing with native plant relatives, resulting in unnatural changes to a plant's genetic makeup; and
- Harboring plant pathogens that can affect both native and non-native plants, including ornamentals.

Some of the invasive species that have escaped our landscapes and are becoming established along our creek beds and road sides include:

- KR bluestem – an important pasture grass for ranchers, but one of the reasons we have fewer wildflowers now;
- Giant cane – spreading rapidly along Town Creek in Kerrville, and taking hold at a number of creeks in Gillespie County and Fredericksburg;
- Nandina and ligustrum – seen at more and more parks and green belts throughout Central Texas;
- Chinaberry – spreading along the nature trail at Fredericksburg’s Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park, as well as along many other Central Texas creeks and rivers.

Those of you who walked the Canyon Lake Gorge a few months ago may recall that Chinese tallow has become thick in some areas – in just the four years since the summer floods cut the gorge in 2002.

If lack of diversity doesn’t seem like all that big a deal to you, think how boring our countryside would be if we could drive across Texas and see only Chinese tallow and johnsongrass in all 254 counties! It would be like having only two TV channels to choose from, or going to the grocery store and seeing nothing but strawberry jam and toilet paper on the shelves.

The renowned biologist E. O. Wilson has stated that invasion by exotic species poses the second greatest threat to our native species and biodiversity, exceeded only by destruction of habitat.

And the ecological and economic impacts worldwide can be enormous. Experts estimate the annual cost of invasive species to the US economy alone is in the billions.

*Next month: What we can do about the problem*

*Meanwhile . . . save the date: July 29 training on invasives sponsored by the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center – details to follow.*

**APPLICATION DEADLINE FOR**

## 2006 MASTER NATURALIST CLASS IS JULY 10

*By PRISCILLA STANLEY, MEMBERSHIP CHAIR*

Please don't miss it! If you are interested in becoming a Texas Master Naturalist, we encourage you to submit your application as soon as possible. If you are interested and do not yet have an application, please send your name, postal mailing address and e-mail address to Priscilla Stanley at [jpbstan@ktc.com](mailto:jpbstan@ktc.com) or call 830 257 2094 to receive an information and application packet. The close of our application period for the Master Naturalist Class of 2006 is Monday, July 10.

Last month we discussed some of the topics that will be covered in the thirteen weekly classes in our training starting in late August. This month we will discuss the three field trips that are also part of the training. Our geology instructor makes the trip understandable and exciting as you learn why we have marine fossils and so much limestone in the Hill Country. We have added a new field trip this year to the Bamberger Ranch, which is famous for developing methods of land restoration and land management that really work in our semi-arid Hill Country, taking a hilly cedar brake with no surface water to a productive ranch with springs, streams and lakes. Our third field trip is to Kerr Wildlife Management Area (KWMA), a 5,000-acre facility operated by Texas Parks & Wildlife as a research ranch for land management and deer and cattle management. Research at the KWMA developed prescribed burning techniques and methods for raising trophy deer that are in common use today on better ranches.

If you have any questions on the Master Naturalist program or our chapter training to become a Master Naturalist, please contact Priscilla Stanley at [jpbstan@ktc.com](mailto:jpbstan@ktc.com) or 830 257 2094. Applicants will be notified of their acceptance status by August 1 by mail.

## CALL FOR PHOTOS

*By SUSAN LONGACRE, CHAPTER ARCHIVIST*

Since I don't believe that 2005 could have passed without any of us taking pictures at chapter events, I can only think that we all have images stored away in computers or albums and we simply haven't added them to the archives. Well, the time has come for all good photographers to come to the aid of your archivist!

Please take a few minutes to search through your 2005 photos or images, whether from field trips, AT events, the 2005 class, projects for which you are a volunteer, the Christmas lunch . . . anything associated with Master Naturalists. If you have clipped any newspaper or magazine articles about the Master Naturalist program, we could use those also. I can accept images on CDs, on a memory stick, or on glossy paper from your processed film. You can get your material to me via several routes: meet me for lunch and hand-deliver them, leave them at Riverside Nature Center for me to pick up, or bring a memory stick to the picnic. (I will have my computer with me.) Just don't try e-mailing them, *please!*

I am advised that the annual meeting is a venue at which all the albums come out of the closet and are put on display – so it is in our Chapter's best interest to have lots of pictures to show our activities from the past year. So, roll up your sleeves, boot up your computer, get those albums out of the closet and find some goodies for us!

Reaching back into the past: If you were part of the 2003 Master Naturalist Class and have pictures from your class project or from graduation, I would love to add those to the archives. And I am interested in receiving items for the current year as well.

## A PAGE FROM THE HERBARIUM

**THIS MONTH'S PLANT:**

**AGARITA –**

## ***A NATIVE FOR ALL SEASONS***

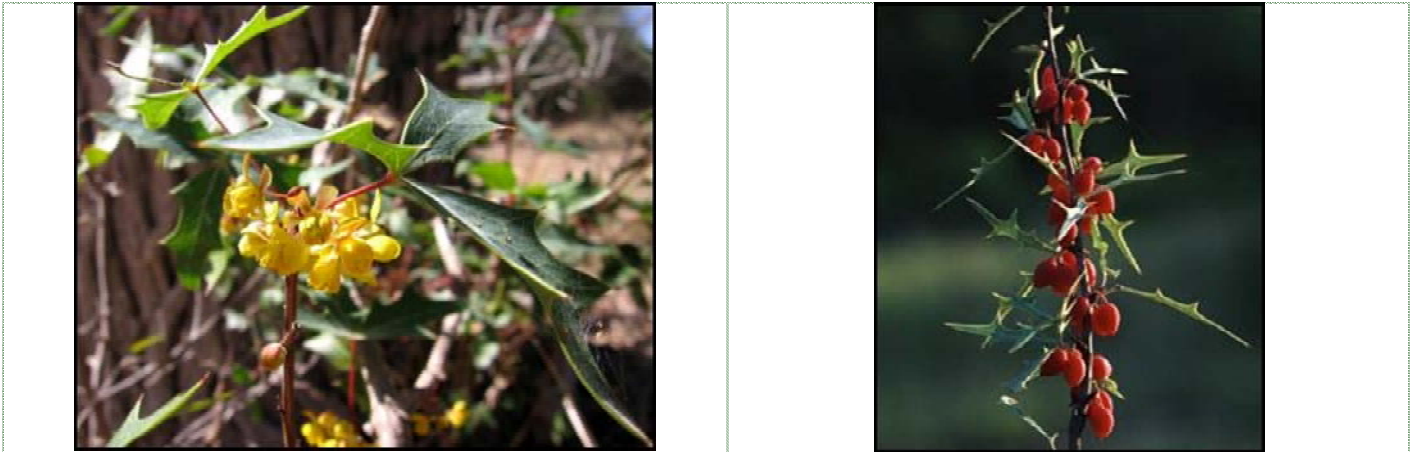
Scientific name: *Berberis trifoliolata*

Family: Barberry

BY SUSAN SANDER

If you want a truly tough Texas native in your garden, agarita is a wise choice. It adds dramatic structure with its holly-like three-part leaf. In February it sports a yellow glow with thousands of tiny yellow blooms that scent the air with a spicy fragrance. The bush will literally hum with the activity of foraging bees. By May the flowers will have been transformed into a bounty of red berries that are quickly devoured by man and beast of all kinds. Humans need to proceed with caution to gather the tart fruit: a sheet spread under the bush is useful in collecting berries beaten loose with a stick. They can be eaten raw (although they are full of tiny little seeds), or made into jellies or wine. However, since they are so important for wildlife, from birds to small mammals – and probably bears in the good old days – I tend to eat a handful and let Mother Nature feed her own with the rest. The new reddish leaf growth is also edible (tastes “green”) and is browsed by deer.

The plant’s blue-green leaf surface is really a waxy coating that helps it conserve moisture during the hot Texas summer. Agarita (aka *Algerita*, *Agrillo*, *Chaparral Berry*) ranges over most of Texas (except the east and southeast), west into Arizona, and south into Mexico. It can reach heights of 10 feet, and can become quite leggy in the shade. A similar species, *Berberis swaysei*, has five leaflets and is endemic to the Edwards Plateau. The older genus name of *Mahonia* honored Bernard M’Mahon (1775-1816), an American horticulturist.



Agarita’s bright yellow wood and root make a vibrant yellow dye without a mordant. Since the wood is quite hard it takes much effort to break it into smaller pieces, but fortunately, it doesn’t take much to make a dye bath. In frontier times the roots were also used to treat toothaches, although it contains berberine, which in sufficient quantities can be fatal.

One of the unsung virtues of agarita is its role as a nursery plant. As herbivory by deer, exotic ungulates (including goats) is a major impact to the ecosystem and responsible for the lack of regeneration of many hardwood species, seeds dropped within the protective structure of an agarita create a ready-made “cage” to protect the young sprouts. Within the protective spiny branches one can find a wide variety of native plants, from grasses to madrone trees. It also serves as shelter for ground nesting birds, and escape cover for small mammals, lizards, and other diminutive creatures.

A word of caution about using agarita in the home landscaping: it can burn like gasoline (as does *sotol*). Keep it away from wood structures.

*Susan Sander is a transplant from an island in Lake Michigan (which was also limestone based).*

*To learn more about the Hill Country, she founded the Riverside Nature Center in Kerrville.*

*Susan is now with the Texas Forest Service (oak wilt and invasives) as well as an environmental educator with school children.*

*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](#).*

## PRAIRIE MANAGEMENT SEMINAR OFFERED AT CIBOLO

**Rufus Stevens**, Biologist with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, is hosting a morning workshop on grasslands management at Cibolo Nature Center on Saturday, July 15. Cibolo is one of the most enjoyable and active nature centers in our area, akin to a small Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. The center is surrounded by four ecosystems (riparian forest, tall-grass prairie, marsh, and live oak savannah) which have been restored, maintained, and researched by volunteers like us. The center is a pioneer in the volunteer 'citizen scientist' concept in which Master Naturalists and others, in coordination with state and federal agencies, study the effect of land management practices and survey populations of plants, birds, small mammals, insects and reptiles. The tall grass prairie restoration is spectacular, a 'must see' for all Master Naturalists.

There will be an indoor presentation by Rufus Stevens followed by outdoor demonstrations of vegetation survey techniques, like those that some of us employ in our volunteer projects. There will be advanced training credit given for this workshop.

The schedule for the events at the center is:

8:30am – 9:30am:

- Overview of prairie management goals & management techniques
- Research results from CNC prairie surveys
- Review CNC prairie survey techniques

9:30am – 11:00am:

- Demonstrate prairie survey techniques
- Vegetation transects
- Survey technique
- Grass/plant ID
- Tour of prairie management plots

RSVP instructions: Please send your reservation with e-mail address to Tom Watson at [twatson11@austin.rr.com](mailto:twatson11@austin.rr.com) by Friday, June 30. Detailed directions to the nature center will be supplied to registrants after the registration period has ended. Cibolo Nature Center is in Boerne, about halfway between San Antonio and Kerrville.

*Note: As of June 15, the workshop was full and registration period has been suspended.*

## MASTER NATURALIST MILESTONES/ACKNOWLEDGMENTS/KUDOS

Three more members of our Class of 2005 have achieved certification as Texas Master Naturalists by completing all the training sessions, forty hours of volunteer service and eight hours of advanced training. **Cathy Downs, Diane**

**McMahon and Rebecca Shupp** will receive their TMN certificates and dragonfly pins.

Seven more members of our earlier classes have achieved re-certification for 2006 by completing forty hours of volunteer service and eight hours of advanced training since January 1, 2006. **Ginny de Wolf, Angelo Falzarano, Betty Gardner, Kip Kiphart, Myrna Langford, Scott Magee and Maggie Tatum** will receive the 2006 TMN pin of the year, the Texas Prickly Pear, representing the West Texas desert ecosystem.

We now have 25% of our 92 members certified or re-certified for 2006. Overall our Chapter members have provided 2,984 hours of volunteer service in our four-county area since January 1, and attended 530 hours of advanced training. Using the federal volunteer rate of \$18.04/hour, our volunteer service represents a value of \$53,831 to our communities in Bandera, Gillespie, Kendall and Kerr counties!

The Master Naturalist program also has awards for cumulative volunteer hours throughout a person's membership. **Julia Campbell and Myrna Langford** have earned Silver Milestone awards representing 500 hours of volunteer service, and will receive their silver dragonflies. **Betty Gardner and Ginny de Wolf** have earned Bronze Milestone awards for 250 hours of volunteer service, and will receive bronze dragonflies.

Congratulations to all our chapter's achievers this month!

## CALENDAR

**June 21: Texas Master Naturalist – Hill Country Chapter board meeting** – 2:00pm at Riverside Nature Center, 150 Francisco Lemos Street, Kerrville. Chapter members may attend.

**June 26: Texas Master Naturalist – Hill Country Chapter monthly meeting** – 7:00pm, Riverside Nature Center, 150 Francisco Lemos, Kerrville. Potluck Picnic for members and their spouses. *See above for details.*

**June 27: Fredericksburg Chapter, Native Plant Society of Texas monthly meeting** – 7:00pm, Gillespie County Historical Society Building, 312 W San Antonio Street, Fredericksburg. Program on *Wildflowers of the Hill Country and Big Bend National Park* by **Lou Ellen McGinley**, Gillespie County rancher and co-author of *Texas Wildflower Portraits*.

**July 7: Advanced Grass ID** – 9:00am, Riverside Nature Center, 150 Francisco Lemos Street, Kerrville. *AT hours available.*

**July 7: Kerr WMA-Range & Habitat Seminar** – 1:30 – 5pm. An ecosystems approach as it pertains to range and wildlife habitat management. Topics discussed will include white-tailed deer management, grazing management, prescribed burning and brush control. The program will also include over 20 years of nutrition and genetics research conducted in the Donnie E. Harmel White-tailed Deer Research Facility. Reservations required – 830 238 4483.

**July 8: Second Saturday Nature Walk** – 9:30am, Cibolo Nature Center, 1 City Park Road (off Highway 46, east of Boerne). Aquatic specialist's presentation on riparian habitat. Call 830 249 4616 or e-mail [nature@cibolo.org](mailto:nature@cibolo.org) for more information.

**July 10: Work morning** – 8:30am, Native Plant Garden, Pioneer Museum in Fredericksburg. Contact **Jane Crone** [jjcrone@hctc.net](mailto:jjcrone@hctc.net). Project # GL-02-C.

**July 15: Prairie Management workshop** – 8:30am, Cibolo Nature Center, 1 City Park Road (off Highway 46, east of Boerne). Presentation by **Rufus Stevens**, Texas Parks & Wildlife biologist. RSVP by June 30 to Tom Watson at [twatson11@austin.rr.com](mailto:twatson11@austin.rr.com). *See above for details. AT hours available.*

**July 29: Invaders of Texas workshop** – 9:00am, Texas Cooperative Extension Office, 5001 San Antonio Highway, Kerrville. Sponsored by Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. Details in next issue of newsletter.

Please send newsletter contributions and comments to Phyllis Muska at [pmuska@omniglobal.net](mailto:pmuska@omniglobal.net).

