

THE TEXAS STAR

FEBRUARY 2008 VOL. 6 No 2



HILL COUNTRY CHAPTER

Chapter Website: <http://www.hillcountrymasternaturalist.org>

FEBRUARY PROGRAM

“The Grass Issue and How it Relates to Land and Water in the Hill Country”

Bill Neiman, owner of Native American Seed in Junction and its parent company, Neiman Environments, Inc., will be the guest speaker at this month’s meeting of the Texas Master Naturalist—Hill Country Chapter. A lifelong environmentalist, Neiman became acutely aware of nature while backpacking with his dad in the Gila Wilderness of New Mexico during his early teenage years. He recalls, “sleeping on the ground, listening to the sounds of mountain lions in the night, and being awakened by the hot breath of a bear who wandered through our campsite looking for food.” They collected and ate nuts and berries and caught trout in a freshwater stream “so clean you could drink from it.” These experiences inspired him to help people create similar places close to home.

At nineteen he borrowed a shovel, rake, and lawn mower and began advertising “total outdoor care” services in the local garbage collector’s monthly billing statements. Six years later his company was taking on

large-scale commercial projects. Through Neiman Environments, Inc., he now specializes in helping large landowners and developers plan and execute environmentally responsible and economically sound restoration projects.

His recent projects include the San Antonio River Project, to restore native grasses, wildflowers, trees, and shrubs in highly visible and publicly accessible areas along both sides of the San Antonio River in San Antonio. He also recently provided ecological consulting services for 340,000 acres in a privately held refuge south of Big Bend National Park in the Sierra Del Carmen area of Coahuila, Mexico, which is the last preserve of black bears, big horn sheep, and mountain lions in North America.

The meeting will be at Riverside Nature Center, 150 Francisco Lemos Street in Kerrville, Monday, February 25, at 7 p.m.



THIS MONTH WE HONOR...

Milestones

Marilyn Murrmann – 1000 Hours (Gold Dragonfly)
Colleen Everson – 500 Hours (Brushed Silver Dragonfly)
Kim Whitaker – 500 Hours (Brushed Silver Dragonfly)



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

FIRE!!!

The pictures and articles in the newspaper and on TV could have been enough to focus my attention on this subject in the past few weeks. But last week when a neighbor of ours, less than a quarter of a mile away, decided to torch an 18' x 25' dead cedar pile on a day when the humidity was in the teens and the wind was gusting over 20 mph, he really got our attention. By the time we became aware of what was happening, the resulting grass fire had raced across 2+ acres of another neighbor's lot, up to their deck and wooden siding and up to the "T" intersection of the road that separates our property from theirs. We were fortunate that our local volunteer fire department arrived just in time to prevent any significant damage to our neighbor's house and to stop the fire at the road.

But I can tell you that the experience of the heavy smoke and seeing fire less than 250 yards upwind of your house is not a pleasant one. While we think we have enough Firewise practices in place that our house would have survived the grass fire had it come to us, our confidence is not nearly as great as it was a couple of weeks ago. This was a grass fire, and it had not yet encountered any cedar trees in its path, but the weather conditions and drought were such that it could have ignited cedar bushes and become a crown fire.

As Naturalists we may well revel at the sight of dense stands of tall native grasses around our homes, and feel good about how the health of the land is better for these grasses. But we should also think about and plan for the possibility that that beautiful little bluestem could be sending up 10' flames, and make sure that the flames can't get to anything you value highly. And finally, if your planning for such a contingency includes wetting down the area around your house with a garden hose before the fire gets to you, I can tell you from experience that that is not likely to be a viable, successful, or safe operation. Grass fires in high winds move VERY fast.

Be Safe.

Jim Stanley



FAREWELL TO A GREAT LADY WHO ENJOYED LIFE...

We just learned that Alice Bulecheck, one of our charter members, has passed away at an El Paso hospital following a stroke. She was on her way to Tucson for her son's 50th birthday, and had planned to return via Alpine for the Cowboy Storytelling.

Suzanne Young, of the Cibolo Nature Center says: "...she was a wonderful Hill Country Master Naturalist, Cibolo Nature Center member/volunteer, Wildlife Field Research (WFR) Team Leader, mother, grandmother, and friend to everyone she met...She stepped up wherever and whenever she could help." Our TMN chapter president, Jim Stanley writes, "On the very first day of the first Hill Country Chapter class, Alice and I happened to be sitting together, and that is when we discovered that we grew up in adjacent little towns in west Texas, just 30 miles apart. She was a great lady who really enjoyed life. Her travels took her from here to Alaska several times, frequently driving alone, and often stopping in State and national parks to work as a Park Host for a while. She loved people and nature. She will be missed. "But," Suzanne says, "I'm thrilled she was finally able to attend the New Mexico Hot Air Balloon festival (in Albuquerque) last October."





VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

All Aboard!!! It's time to consider signing up to volunteer at the **Old Tunnel Wildlife Management Area**. Old Tunnel WMA, owned and managed by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, is located in Kendall County on county road Old No. 9 halfway between Comfort and Fredericksburg. Our volunteers get to participate in many activities, not the least of which is helping educate the public about the importance of bats to the environment. Volunteers are needed seven evenings a week beginning May 1st and running through November 30th. We have

volunteers who sign up for one night each week and there are those who volunteer one night each month. You can sign up for as few or as many evenings as you wish.

In addition to talking with visitors about bats, volunteers are also given opportunities

- assisting with trail maintenance and clean-up
- working in the wildscape
- assisting with off-site programs for schools and organizations
- participating in the astronomy programs
- assisting with any research activities that are conducted at Old Tunnel and some of the other management areas in the Hill Country

In appreciation of our volunteers' efforts

- we have a cumulative volunteer award program
- we offer several volunteer appreciation outings to other bat sites in Texas
- we provide opportunities to learn about bats through bat netting excursions at parks and management areas
- we provide an in-depth training once each year prior to the beginning of bat season

We welcome new volunteers and would like to invite any who are interested in becoming a volunteer at Old Tunnel to contact the biologist for Old Tunnel, Nyta Hensley, by email at nyta.hensley@tpwd.state.tx.us or by phone at 830-990-2659 so that she can put your name on the list to receive an invitation to the 2008 Volunteer Training which will be held on Sunday, March 30th. (The training class size is limited.)

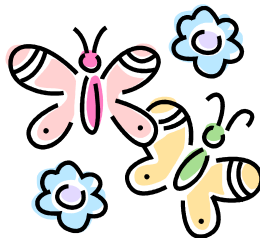
Nyta Hensley & Myrna Langford

TWO OPPORTUNITIES AT RIVERSIDE

Join us on **Tuesday mornings from 9:30 till noon** to work at **Lawson's store at Riverside Nature Center**. We are sorting a vast collection of Nature related materials that are used for displays, exhibits, student and adult educational guided tours, and archives. When sorting is completed and organized, the

materials will be cataloged so it can be easily found and be available for references as needed. Lots of gabbing and time well spent helping the Nature Center will be your reward plus volunteer hours to help the Hill Country Master Naturalist's chapter. For more information contact Martha Miesch at 830-792-4750.

Also on **Tuesday mornings, the Meadow Monarchs** gather. If the weather is gorgeous, as it is so many mornings, you can help in the meadow area planting, weeding, gleaning seeds, pruning and learning about over a hundred plants with the skilled guidance of Barbara Lowenthal. This lady loves plants, knows plants, and loves to share everything with novice Master Naturalists.



This takes the pain out of learning countless plant names and how they fit in the Hill Country ecology. Lots of laughing, talking, and fun go along with this activity as well. When rains or winds make us run for cover, you can assist with the Lawson store project and be inside. For more information contact Barbara Lowenthal at 830- 896-0696.

Martha Miesch



IN CENTER POINT – CAMP CAMP CALLS FOR MN VOLUNTEERS

CAMP, or Children's Association for Maximum Potential, enables children with disabilities to thrive in a recreational environment where safety and nurturing are primary. CAMP is a private, nonprofit agency that operates programs at a rustic camp setting in Center Point, Texas (between Kerrville and Comfort). Campers vary in age from 5 – 30 years old and vary in levels of physical and mental ability.

Regular Friday workdays at Camp CAMP in Center Point started on February 15. Coffee and snacks are provided at the dining hall, where we visit and plan, between 8:30 and 9 am. We usually work until about 1:00, but stay as little or as long as you can. We have three great projects set up for spring! Work gloves, good footwear, water and some hand tools will be needed. We have rakes, shovels and the like, but not many hand tools.

One: Nature Center expansion

The Nature Center Expansion includes a 2-acre nature study area allowing wheelchair viewing, sensory plants, raised beds for native grasses, a native perennial bed, a native wildflower meadow area, a hill country priority plant area, a native woodland understory area, a bird blind, and a small pond. The footprints for the planting beds have been marked. Volunteers will dig bed areas and prepare for planting of seeds, starts, and plants. This area will be, at times, very labor intensive.

We have applied for a grant through Wild Ones.org, and should hear from them soon, to help with the purchase of stock for this area.

Two: The Native Meadow Garden

This area needs spring cleaning and the invasives pulled. We would like to enlarge this area, prepare the bed for spring planting and reframe the area with rock.

Three: The Sioux Site Garden

The garden beds here need weeding out, some prep work for the spring seed planting and general sprucing up. We will be considering what materials would be best for wheelchair access on the paths.

For additional information contact: Colleen Everson, [830-370-8131](tel:830-370-8131). For directions, contact Bob Tanner, [830-370-3201](tel:830-370-3201).



MEANWHILE, IN KERRVILLE... THE BUTTERFLIES ARE COMING

Project manager Cathy Downs says, "We'll begin regular workdays at the **Butterfly Garden at Kerrville Schreiner Park** this week. As

the weather is still cool in the early mornings let's begin at 9:00. This will be a cleanup at first, cutting back annuals, etc., pruning, pulling grass and the wild geranium (which seems to ignore the fact it has no water). There is some seed to be recovered if you need it: Goldenrod, Echinacea, Liatris among others. There

are viable plants that can be pulled out of the common areas such as Pavonia, Englemann's and others that can be potted and shared.

I'm looking forward to seeing you all again. Please share this information with anyone you feel might be interested in joining our group. "



ADVANCED TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Saturday, February 23 1 pm – 4 pm – Mitchell Lake Audubon Center in San Antonio (10751 Pleasanton Rd). *Monarchs, Milkweed and MLMP*. Kip Kiphart will be the trainer. (A second part of the program will be offered on March 15 by Mary Kennedy at Cibolo Nature Center – stay tuned.) For more information about this class contact Michelle Santisteban msantisteban@audubon.org.

Saturday, March 1, 10 am – 11:30 am. at Riverside Nature Center: 2008 is for the Birds LeAnn Sharp, Vice President of the Texas Bluebird Society will speak on bluebirds and Other Small Cavity Nesting Birds.” Cost is \$/adults, \$2.50 for RNC members and kids under 12. For more information, call 830-357-4837.

Also of Interest...

Saturday, March 1, 7:30 pm, at Riverside Nature Center: Stories in the Stars. Dr. Kathleen Hudson, Professor English at Schreiner University will invite us to explore the stories created by humans about the skies overhead.. Come prepared to share and to create some of your own stories about the sky! Mars and Saturn will be visible, as will plenty of nebulae, star clusters, and globular clusters.



PURPLE MARTINS ARE ON THEIR WAY



Photo: T.H. Collins

Sometime in the next couple of weeks the first of the Purple Martins will be arriving in the Hill Country. The earliest dates are around Valentine Day, but the Martins don't start reaching large numbers until mid-March. If you have not put up a Martin residence now is the time For those of you, who have them, make sure they are raised to their full height, have been cleaned out and I prefer to dust each nest cavity with sulphur to kill any mites that might have survived the winter temperatures. Martins prefer their homes close to water, with plenty of flight room, places to perch close by – electric and phone lines do nicely – and as the utilities are close to homes, their nest structures do nicely near homes as well.

Perhaps one of the most popular nest structures are gourds hung from multiple levels on a pole. It's important to remember that House Sparrows and European Starlings will attempt to nest in any Martin structure and you may have to lower it several times to remove the intruder nests. This will not interfere with the Martins using the nest structure and will help keep the colony free of invasive species.

To follow the progress of Martin migration and to learn more about them, go to the Purple Martin Conservation Association Web Page - <http://purplemartin.org/>

You can also help track their progress by submitting your first sighting on this web page. Some 360 plus scout reports have already been submitted this season. I would also appreciate any early sightings to be submitted to Texas eBird (<http://ebird.org/content/tx/>) or you can send them to me (towhee@maverickbbs.com) and I will submit the sighting – just tell me when, where and how many.

Tom Collins





Lindheimeria texana: Texas Star