

# The Texas Star

Newsletter of the  
Texas Master Naturalist Hill Country Chapter

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Photo credit: The Hill Country Alliance

## MARCH 25 MEETING: NIGHT SKY PRESERVATION

T E X A S

Master  
Naturalist™



In collaboration with The Hill Country Alliance, we will host William Wren from the McDonald Observatory, who will speak on the importance of reducing light pollution in order to preserve our ability to observe the night sky. Bill will discuss energy costs and health issues along with animals' changing nocturnal habits, and will provide examples of more effective and less expensive lighting choices.

Everyone is welcome to join us on Monday, March 26, at 7 p.m. in the Upper Guadalupe River Authority's lecture hall, 125 Lehman Drive in Kerrville. Arrive at 6:30 to chat with members and guests.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE . . . Vern Crawford

The past couple of weeks have granted me the opportunity to settle back, soak in, and appreciate all of the hundreds of sounds and sights happening all around our little red house here on the banks of the Guadalupe. How wondrous it all is, and how fortunate to have landed here in the beautiful Hill Country on our .96 acre Texas spread. As I sit out on our deck, the warm Texas sun takes the chill out of the tiles, transferring its warmth and energy right on up and through my bones to my core, and to every other life form out there in its path.

I have also had the opportunity to revisit the pages of the *Adventures of a Texas Naturalist*, penned by one of my favorite Texas wordsmiths and naturalists, Roy Bedichek. Not only do we have Aldo Leopold; we are blessed with our very own Bedichek. As he was musing about the unchallenged lordship of the mockingbird over his territory, I was reminded of one of my favorite encounters with one of these talented songsters.

As many of you already know, for the past four decades I have had the privilege of sharing almost an entire month each summer with a few hundred top notch singer-songwriters from all over the world. This group of talented folks have been gathering for an annual reunion on the Quiet Valley Ranch, about 9 miles south of Kerrville on Highway 16. Officially for only eighteen days straight, but gathering several days early to set up camp, then hanging around afterward to pack up, these troubadours shift from song-circle to song-circle, collaborating and sharing their music with one another and music lovers who share their love of hanging out in, and being inspired by, the Hill Country.

This music making goes on literally 24 hours a day for the duration of the gathering, with its own rhythm and heartbeat; peaking in intensity somewhere near midnight and then gradually settling down until a bit of a crescendo as the sun's rays begin to shine across Lamb Creek. Then the music becomes once again mixed in with the rhythms of a new day, with meals prepared over campfires or Colemans and often with short trips to area swimming holes in the afternoon.

Over the forty years that I've been involved, more than one mockingbird has been a significant participant in these exchanges of melody between artists. One year, a particularly vocal mockingbird had been making the rounds of song-circles, pausing politely at the edge of each "campfire" to remain for several songs and add supporting harmonies and embellishments to the works being created. This particular mockingbird was noticed by almost everyone on the ranch. He proudly claimed the entire campgrounds as his personal domain, and he seemed so pleased to have so many folks there joining in with him and providing multiple opportunities for him to solo with his own impromptu riffs.

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In the second week of the festival, in the early morning about an hour before sunrise, I was lingering near the main entrance into the grounds. This fellow had often flown to a branch somewhere nearby, and settled into one spot simply to perform an entire concert of his own songs and arrangements, inspired by all that went on in the cool of the previous night. He was proclaiming far and wide that he was the master of Quiet Valley!

As another volunteer and I listened, a group of young campers approached out of the darkness with a small battery powered "boom-box" cassette recorder. It seemed they had managed to record one of our mockingbird's solo concerts, and planned to play it back to him. This was twenty years ago, and I did not have the advantage of being a Master Naturalist, but none the less I suggested that they "think a bit, before hitting that play button." Well, youth being youth, they headed back down the road. At the end of a spectacular tune, our mockingbird paused, as if to take a bow and for listeners to express admiration for what he had done. Suddenly there was a slightly distant, but unmistakable repeat of the previous performance coming from the recorder.

Our little feathered friend was not to be heard from again for the duration of the festival.  
Vern



*Congratulations to members who received awards at the February meeting:  
Rheda Boardman, Glenn Randow, Sarah Hilburn, Kathy Ward, Junior Hilburn, John Walker*

## This Month We Honor



### Initial Certification

Margaret Carter      Terri Criswell

### 2013 Recertification

Carolyn Bean    Daneshu Clarke    John Huecksteadt  
Tom Hynes    Cynthia Johnson    Sandy Leyendecker  
Jim Stanley    Priscilla Stanley    Gracie Waggener

### Milestones

Ric McCormick - 250+ hours, Bronze Dragonfly  
Marilyn Knight - 1000+ hours, Gold Dragonfly  
Sandy Leyendecker - 1000+ hours, Gold Dragonfly

## Animal Behavior Studies: Fascinating Stories of How Animals “Think” and Act

Dr. Kent Rylander, retired Texas Tech Professor, author of *The Behavior of Texas Birds*, and a friend of mine, tells a fascinating story about a classic experiment in animal behavior. The researchers removed an egg from under a sitting goose and placed it next to the nest. The goose got up, extended her neck so that she could reach over the egg with her bill, and then pulled her neck back, pulling the egg back toward the nest. This motion was repeated until the egg was back in the nest.

But then the researchers noted that if the egg rolled away from the goose and down a hill, the goose continued the motions of raking the egg back into the nest without the egg even being there. So once the motion of retrieving the egg was begun, it continued even though it wasn't accomplishing anything. They then discovered that if they placed other smooth round objects near the nest (including a volleyball!), the goose would retrieve those also.

The conclusions from this work are that the egg retrieval is an instinctive or innate behavior triggered by the sight of an egg outside the nest. They also found that this behavior only applied to adult, female geese on a nest and was not observed in any other setting. Any egg-like object next to a nest triggered in the female goose a set of actions that were neither “learned” nor necessarily even “logical,” but were clearly inherited. (The female goose never saw her mother do this.)

There are numerous other examples of animals displaying actions that are triggered by some specific event or occurrence in the environment. Here are a few other examples:

Male stickleback fish have a red belly, and they are aggressive in defending their territory, chasing all other male sticklebacks away. When researchers made a model of a male stickleback without the red belly and placed it in the territory of other males, it was ignored; but when they made many other models that didn't look anything like a stickleback, or even a fish for that matter, but which had red lower parts, all of those models were attacked.

Similarly, a male robin will attack a bundle of feathers with a red middle even though it doesn't even look like a bird, but a stuffed juvenile robin without the red breast will be ignored. In both of these cases, it is the red color that triggers the response, not the similarity in form, shape, or size.

This raises another question. Can learning override this innate response to certain triggers? “Learning” in this case is defined as the modification of behavior with experience. The answer appears to be yes, at least in certain cases.

Gull chicks when just hatched “know” to crouch and freeze whenever they hear an adult gull sound an alarm call. These same chicks, when first hatched, also display the crouching response to almost any moving objects above them, which is essential for avoiding predators.

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In time, however, the chicks “learn” that certain bird shapes they see flying above them are harmless and they cease responding when, for instance, a duck or a songbird flies overhead. But they still respond when the shape they see above belongs to a predator. It turns out that most predators show a shorter head and neck profile than most other birds, and so it is only the “predator” shapes that trigger a response.

But it is even more complicated than that. Researchers fashioned a “bird shape” to fly above the chicks that had a shape which, when flown above the chicks in one orientation, appeared to have a short head and a long tail; it triggered the crouch response. But when the same shape was flown over the chicks in the other orientation, it appeared to have a long neck and a short tail (like ducks), and the chicks ignored it! By the way, turkey and pheasant chicks respond the same way.

So the next time you see a young squirrel burying an acorn, ask yourself: Is this a response to some trigger like the length of the days or the presence of acorns, or did he learn this from his mother? He wasn't born when his mother buried her last acorn in the fall. Did he learn it from other squirrels?

Nature, like most of life, offers more questions than answers.

Until next time...

Jim Stanley is a Texas Master Naturalist and the author of *Hill Country Landowner's Guide*.  
He can be reached at [jstmn@ktc.com](mailto:jstmn@ktc.com) Previous columns can be seen at [www.hillcountrynaturalist.org](http://www.hillcountrynaturalist.org)

From Sandy Leyendecker

#### AN IMPORTANT REMINDER FROM THE DATA MANAGER

### **Please send your monthly Activity Reports by the fifth of the month.**

You must use one of the official report forms (Microsoft Word or Excel). Please be accurate when entering dates, AT Codes, and Approved Event and Instructor/Sponsor information. Check the Project ID codes for Volunteer projects, and be sure that the Project ID and Project Name are from the approved list. Monthly chapter meetings count only as one hour of AT.

**Use the website.** The monthly calendar has AT information and there's list of approved Volunteer Projects and Activity Report information and forms under the Volunteer tab.

Remember to include your name and signature (or electronic signature) on your report.  
If you have any questions, please call (830-792-4718)  
or e-mail: [sandy325@windstream.net](mailto:sandy325@windstream.net)

From Tom Hynes

## Tree Planting at Muleshoe Farm

Despite unusually strong and relentless wind, with gusts exceeding 50mph on Monday, February 25<sup>th</sup>, Master Naturalists Jim Clarke and Tom Hynes completed the planting of a cedar elm at Muleshoe Farm. This was the fourth of five, 45 gallon container sized, trees donated to the farm's preservation activity through the volunteer efforts of Master Naturalist Sharron Jay. The soil at this particular site yielded itself to pick and shovel for a hand-dug five foot diameter hole approximately 20 inches deep. The high wind provided a lesson for utilizing the precaution of staking the tree for its first year in the ground. (Footnote: The picture of Jim and Tom was originally sent with the comment "two old codgers " The word should be "cadger" and is derived from the early days of falconry, as were many more, including "haggard," "to rouse," "to cast," and "hoodwinked." In ancient times, a flat wooden frame was crafted, about four feet square, with pedestals placed on each corner to provide a place for hooded falcons to perch and be tethered. Two leather straps were fastened across two parallel sides to provide a shoulder harness of sorts for a man to carry the "cadge" as he followed the action in the field. Both young and old men acted as carriers, but the somewhat derogatory term perhaps arose as the older men had difficulty keeping up the pace, thus the term, "old cadgers.")



Jim Clarke and Tom Hynes

Muleshoe Farm and Ranch Trust, located near Comfort, is a subsidiary of the Birds of Prey Conservancy, a 501(c)3 raptor rehabilitation facility in San Antonio. Friends of Muleshoe (Hill Country chapter volunteers) are working to develop a varied educational venue and provide experiences for people of all ages. The work is in the early stages including some building stabilization, native plant demonstration gardens, riparian walking trails, a mini-rainwater harvesting system, seasonal education presentations, and public programs featuring various raptors. A larger rain water harvest system is in the planning stage as well as additional planting of native trees and the restoration of acreage back to its pre-European settler condition. A most recent addition was that of placing several bluebird houses about the property for monitoring purposes.

Some members have received training in handling raptors and the terminology associated with the ancient art of falconry under the leadership of John Karger, Director of Last Chance Forever. These members participate in raptor presentations at Muleshoe. Activity at the ranch is led by Master Naturalist Cynthia Burgin.



Nina Wagner, Sally Garrett, and Cynthia Burgin



Jim Burgin and Sally Garrett

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Getting donations for non-profit organizations such as Last Chance Forever is not that hard. It is easier to ask for something for someone else than for yourself, and it is especially easier if you have a relationship with a person at the business where you're asking. Every one of us has contacts from previous jobs or companies, and most will be fine with donating to a non-profit when you explain the good that will come from their donation. I usually try to do business with small stores that are privately owned and not a chain store. They all need our support, and even though they may cost a small amount more, it's worth it to buy local and keep them in business. These trees came from Blanket Creek Tree Farm in Utopia. They are open to the public by appointment; just go to [BlanketCreekTreeFarm.com](http://BlanketCreekTreeFarm.com) for more information.

From Betty Clyburn

### Insect Structure Lesson at the Kroc Center

Craig Hensley from the Guadalupe River State Park presented an energetic and captivating experience for 21 children and six Master Naturalist volunteers at the KROC Center on Thursday, February 21. His program began with encouraging the children to define the parts of an insect. As each part was called out that child got the chance to draw it on the white board. Have you ever seen an insect drawn from the feet first? It worked and the exoskeleton was drawn last with a different color pen! Then we passed around different specimens of bugs preserved in acrylic. These fabulous teaching tools were provided by Craig. While he told about the different examples all of the children had the opportunity to hold an insect in their hands. The specimens included a praying mantis (because the emphasis was on the structure of the insect, Craig did not bother to relate the peculiar fact that the female eats the male after they mate), dragonfly, cricket, and beetle.



We divided into two groups to view butterfly specimens with long proboscises. The real highpoint for the children was when they had the chance to look through the nine microscopes at dragonfly claws, heads, and wings, fly heads, butterfly wings, and a bee with pollen on its legs. When one young entomologist excitedly exclaimed that he could see the pollen on the bee's leg, we asked him what that meant. The response was that he died happy!" We still got to the explanation about bees pollinating but not after a good laugh! These children are really tuned in and love learning. Even some of the squeamish ones were touching the specimens by the end of the hour.



Craig not only brought dead specimens but also had cages with live butterflies: the smallest sulphur, checkered whites, and orange sulfur. Master Naturalists Rheda Boardman, Julie Clay, Betty Clyburn, Sarah Hilburn, Pat Nelson, John Sloan, and Mary Frances Watson had as much fun as the fourth, fifth, and sixth graders.



From Eileen Gotke

The volunteers thanked in the December-January issue of *MLMP Updates* (An e-Newsletter of the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project; [www.MonarchLab.org](http://www.MonarchLab.org)) includes three Hill Country Master Naturalists who are long-time reporters to the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project: Kip Kiphart, for 11 years, Ginny de Wolf, for six years, and Myrna Langford, for four years.

I hope you have enjoyed using our new website and have easily found the information you needed. I added several new features since last month's column. You may have already discovered them. If not, you will learn about them in these "how-to" columns. This month's column will cover the chapter calendars.

The website contains two calendars listing chapter activities, events, and advance training opportunities: the new *Activities This Week!* calendar and our traditional Google calendar.

The new **Activities This Week!** calendar can be found at the bottom of the right side bar. Highlight *Activities This Week!* and click. The next ten upcoming events will display in an agenda listing. Use this handy calendar for quick reference for events happening soon.

Place your cursor over the event description and click for an easily readable page of event details.

Clicking *View Calendar* will open a page containing the *Activities This Week!* calendar. Use the *Month Day Week Agenda* buttons to change to your preferred view. Click *Expand All* to open descriptions for each event; then click *Read More* if needed. Use *Collapse All* to reduce. *Previous* and *Next* buttons will display the past ten or future ten events.

You can subscribe to this calendar by clicking the *Subscribe* or *Add to Google* buttons at the bottom of the expanded agenda view on the home page.

Our **Google** calendar is the last heading in the top menu. Place your pointer over *Calendar* to highlight the tab; then click and the Google calendar for the month will appear.

The default view is *Month*. Use the blue and white arrow buttons to go back to the previous month or forward to the next month. Use the down arrow to the right of the month name to see a quick view of the monthly calendar.

Click *Week* to display events for the current week. The current day (today) will be marked with a yellow background. Use the arrows to move forward or backward by a week. To switch to the *Day* view (for any particular day), just click on a date displayed at the top of the *Week* view, or click on a date in the mini-calendar. Click *Today* to return to the current day.

Use the *Agenda* view to view all your events grouped by day as a list. After clicking *Agenda*, follow the same instruction used to view *Week*.

Events are posted by time and description. Click the time/description combo to open a box containing complete information for the event.

Subscribe to our Google calendar by clicking the + button at the bottom right of the calendar or follow instructions at the bottom of the calendar page (<http://txmn.org/hillcountry/calendar/>).

These two calendars should keep you up to date on all chapter happenings, activities, and AT.

Feel free to email me at [HillCountryWebmaster@gmail.com](mailto:HillCountryWebmaster@gmail.com) with any questions about our website.

## Never Kiss a Kissing Bug

One look at the kissing bug and kissing would be the last thought most folks would have, but even touching one can have dire consequences, said a vector-borne disease expert with Texas A&M University who is leading a study and asking for the public's help to determine the insect pests' current range in the southern U.S. The *Triatoma sanguisuga* adult female, sometimes called the kissing bug, is the vector or "carrier" of the parasite that causes Chagas disease in humans and dogs. The study team includes Dr. Sarah Hamer, study leader and an assistant professor, along with doctoral student Rachel Curtis, both with the department of veterinary integrative biosciences; Dr. Gabriel Hamer, department of entomology faculty member; and Dr. Karen Snowden, department of veterinary pathobiology, all at Texas A&M University. The team is studying kissing bugs and Chagas disease, which is caused by parasites that many of the bugs harbor. "Kissing bugs are commonly known as cone-nose bugs or Mexican bed bugs," Hamer said. "The adult bugs feed on blood at night. They are called kissing bugs because they often bite people around the mouth or eyes while they sleep."



Texas A&M University  
photo by Rachel Curtis

Rachel Curtis, doctoral student in the department of veterinary integrative biosciences at Texas A&M University, added that kissing bugs are not to be confused with the common bed bug of the cimicid family, or with other bugs that look similar but do not feed on blood, such as leaf-footed bugs. "Chagas disease is a major public health concern in Central and South America, but new evidence suggests that kissing bugs and the parasite that causes Chagas disease are becoming increasingly recognized in the southern U.S. Our research group is actively sampling the vector and mammals that may be infected to understand the natural cycles of disease transmission. "With the public's help, we hope to increase our sample size to understand the ecology of the disease emergence in the U.S.," Hamer said.

Hamer warns never to touch a kissing bug with a bare hand, because the parasite *Trypanosoma cruzi*, which causes Chagas disease in humans and dogs, may be present within the bug and its feces. Even if the bug is not carrying the parasite, a bite can cause an allergic reaction in some individuals similar to bites from other insects. "If you see a bug that you believe is a kissing bug and you would like confirmation of the species identity and to submit it for testing, our lab will accept carefully-obtained samples for research purposes," she said. To submit a sample, Hamer advised using a glove or small plastic bag to catch the insect while avoiding direct contact. Store the bug in a sealed plastic bag, in a vial, or other small container. All surfaces the bug touched should then be thoroughly cleaned.

Hamer said there are eleven species of kissing bugs in Texas with *Triatoma sanguisuga*, *Triatoma indictiva* and *Triatoma gerstaeckeri* being the three most common. They all are about an inch long and are found around woodpiles, yard debris and woodrat nests. Like many blood-feeding insects, they are also attracted to the lights and carbon dioxide associated with human houses and dog kennels. Hamer said the parasite that causes Chagas disease lives in the kissing bugs' digestive system. "After taking a blood meal from a human or dog, the kissing bug then defecates and the parasites are in the feces. Open wounds on the host animal, even the bite that the bug just made in feeding, and mucous membranes, are pathways through which the parasite can enter the host's body and cause infection."

Chagas disease causes a localized reaction at first, but the parasite can later affect the heart and digestive tract, and ultimately can cause death. No vaccines exist and medications are few and not always effective, Hamer said. Rachel Curtis is the primary contact at the Texas A&M lab for the public regarding questions about Chagas disease or inquiries about where to direct kissing bug sample submissions. She can be contacted at [rcurtis@cvm.tamu.edu](mailto:rcurtis@cvm.tamu.edu) or 979-458-4924.

"For our research, it is very important for us to know the time and date the bug was collected and exactly where the bug was found and what it was doing: flying, walking or some other activity," Hamer said. "Samples from the bugs, wild animals, and dogs are being tested for the parasite. One of our research goals is to understand how Chagas disease is being maintained among kissing bugs, wildlife, and domestic animals in order to reduce the risk of the disease becoming a major public health concern in the U.S." Hamer noted that Texas Health and Human Services also is a great contact for the public regarding insect identification and information.

By Steve Byrns; reprinted from [AgriLife Today](#), March 13, 2013

In previous articles on photography, we've discussed how to take better images. So, let's assume that you have used some of these techniques and now have many images that please you. Is this the end of your quest? Perhaps "yes" and perhaps "no." I believe there is a way to improve even on these "better than average photos." It is post-processing, or editing those pictures. When I mention this to most new or beginning photographers, I get quite a glassy stare. Even those with much experience, who are quite satisfied with their results, are not very warm to this suggestion. However, let us investigate it.

First, like digital photography itself, post processing of digital images on your computer has improved by leaps and bounds. It is not expensive. An excellent program, Picasa (a play on the name of the great artist Picasso), is actually free via download, as part of Google's suite of tools. It is not as controversial as some of Picasso's artistic styles and it is very easy to use; almost intuitive. Many of you may be familiar with Photoshop, or at least with the term, when used in the context of altering digital images. It is a very powerful program and is basically the standard that all professional and advanced amateur photographers use. But it has a rather steep learning curve. I have it and may use it for special needs. But Picasa is my daily go-to editor.

My workflow for 99.9% of my images is relatively easy. After a day's photography, I initiate (open) Picasa on my PC. I insert my media card into the PC's card reader and Import the images into Picasa by using the "Import" tab in the program (upper left corner). It asks you if you want to copy all images, and you reply with "yes." The program uses the date the photographs were taken to determine its file name in storage. When importing is complete, you start reviewing what you have photographed. Some of the images may not be satisfactory, but any that you may want to work with can be enlarged by double clicking on it. This action brings up a palette of actions on the left side of the screen. The first I use is "Crop." After initiating it, you can select the image size.

I pre-select 8x10 inches because this is the finished size I will want if I choose to print it. You may prefer a smaller size like 4x6 inches, which is the most popular snap shot size. By depressing the left mouse button and holding it down, you can move the image around in the three frames that are shown.



The rule of thumb is never to center an image. Always have the subject a bit off center unless the subject is symmetrical. Then it can be centered. This is a matter of your taste. The best way to develop your taste is to observe the work of professionals in outdoor/nature magazines. Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine is a great tutorial. Earl Nottingham's work is superb, as is the work of many other artists. Another advantage of cropping is the ability to increase the size of the main object in the photo. For instance, birds photographed at a distance can be cropped to increase their size in the photo. Butterflies and dragonflies can be cropped to focus the viewer's attention on these insects' exquisite detail.

There are other options that sometimes are helpful, such as the straightening tab. Photographs taken from boats or ships often have the horizon tilted. That is easily corrected. Also, there is a slider that can lighten your photo; use this gently. There is a second tab to the right of the opening tab that allows you to adjust the exposure of the photo--either lighten or darken it--and also bring out the highlights. A little experimenting will show you the results. The third tab allows you to improve the color of the photo and to sharpen it. I use the sharpen tool on almost every photo with a central subject (bird, insect, or flower). I rarely use it for landscapes. Every photographer uses this tool to bring out the edge detail of the photo. Again, use it gently or it will be obvious in the photo.

After following this editing regimen, you have two safeguards. First, your original image is always available in My Pictures. Picasa stores it there and actually adjusts the copy that it makes. Secondly, all adjustments (cropping included) can be reversed in Picasa. This may put your mind at ease about post-processing. That is all there is to it. Basically, two steps: crop and then sharpen.

We are entering the season to really expand our photographic interests. Enjoy the beauty of our natural world and use your photos to share it with others.

Bits and Pieces of Bird Happenings

Purple martins are the first of the spring migrants to find their way back to their summer homes in the Hill Country and across their breeding ranges. To my knowledge the earliest known arrival date in our area was on January fifth; not sure of the year. Early February is a good time to expect these swallows to show up in a normal year. The cliff and cave swallows are not likely far behind; check bridges and culverts in your area in the next ten days and you will likely find them. My purple martin-keeper friends all seem to have birds in their martin houses.

The word was out this week that golden-cheeked warblers were back on territories in several venues around the area. The golden-cheek males are usually among the first of the spring migrant arrivals. It was reported that the early birds were, in fact, about three weeks early this year. We have had a normal winter; temperatures have been above average with a few cold snaps in between the warmer periods. These birds do not get Hill Country weather reports in their winter homes, so I cannot give a definitive reason for their early arrival.

As to whether it is a good thing, or a bad thing, to be the “early birds”: the verdict can go either way. If the birds arrive early and the weather turns cold for an extended time, many of the birds may starve for the lack of flying insects. Some ornithologists believe that the older experienced migrant birds may get caught in this potential death trap by arriving too early in their quest for prime breeding territories. These ornithologists further reason this occurrence might be another way nature sorts out the survival of the fittest; the older birds being replaced by more virile younger birds.

I am sure most of my readers who feed nyjer seed likely think, as I do, that the seed venders somehow ordered the unusually large number of pine siskins this winter. The siskins are eating “good in the neighborhood” this winter, along with the lesser and American goldfinches. The lesser goldfinches are our permanent resident birds and should have first dibs on the goodies, but it doesn’t work that way in nature; the species with the highest numbers controls the scenes around the feeders. I did see one American goldfinch well on the way to his gaudy summer plumage. Is it a sign we may have a longer period to enjoy the American goldfinch males this spring?

I also noted three other signs of spring in the past week. First, the turkey vultures are becoming more abundant as each day passes. The more common winter resident black vultures may have to dispute with the turkey vultures to see who eats well. The second appearance was that of the American robins. As robins tend to wander around in late winter, you see large numbers for several days and suddenly they are gone again. Finally, the numbers of cedar waxwings seem to be on the rise. I have seen several large flocks flying in their close, high-speed, flock formations. The waxwings and robins will be competing for our improved ashe juniper berry crop this year. . .

If you are a hummingbird enthusiast, you might consider putting one feeder up. Although it is still two weeks before the little hummers begin arriving, many birds are still hanging around the area. If a freeze is still in store for us, please take the feeder in for the night and put it out early the next morning. Who knows what might show up for some tasty sugar water.

reprinted from the Kerrville Daily Times, March 3, 2013

**Events at Riverside Nature Center**

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20**, Riverside Guide Basic Training 10 a.m.-noon.

In depth training to join the most elite RNC corps. Coffee and snacks provided. RSVP to Melinda Wasson, RG coordinator, at [melindaw@windstream.net](mailto:melindaw@windstream.net).

**FRIDAY, APRIL 5**, Ribbon-cutting for inaugural exhibit 5:30 p.m.

“The Guadalupe: Our River of Life”: RNC celebrates the Visitor Center revitalization with an exhibit centering on the Guadalupe and what it means to our everyday existence; followed by First Friday WineShare.

**SATURDAY, APRIL 20**, Earth Day festival and native-plant sale 8 a.m.-3 p.m.

Annual plant sale, open to the public, sponsored by RNC and NPSOT; also seminars on environmental topics, family-oriented activities and fun, educational displays, and more. Dress the kiddos in costumes for the “Things with Wings” children’s parade. Free admission. 4 p.m., River Trail interpretative walk with Susan Sander, “to find out what’s to celebrate in the earth.” Free.

## Birding Basics of Cavity-Nesting Birds

### Eastern Bluebird



Nest: Composed mainly of dry grasses and weed stems formed into a neat cup.

Eggs: Smooth & glossy & typically sky blue. 3% to 5% are white. (Blue & white eggs in same clutch indicates that eggs were laid by two separate females.)

Clutch: 3 to 5 eggs (but can have up to 7)

Incubation: 12 to 14 days

Fledging: 13 to 14 days

### Tufted Titmouse



Nest: Leaves, moss, dried grass, bark stripes. Lined with feathers, fur, wool, cotton, hair; sometimes snake skin.

Eggs: Smooth, non-glossy. White to cream colored. Speckled and spotted with chestnut red, purplish red, or brown marks.

Clutch: 5 to 6 eggs

Incubation: 12 to 14 days

Fledging: 15 to 16 days

### Carolina Chickadee



Nest: Moss base & cup of grass, plant down, & feathers. Lined with finer materials such as fine grass, fur, & hair.

Eggs: Smooth, nonglossy eggs are white with reddish brown specs concentrated at the larger end. During the egg laying phase the female covers the incomplete clutch with fine material whenever she leaves the nest.

Clutch: 6 eggs (5 to 8 can be present) Incubation: 11 to 14 days

Fledging: 13 to 17 days

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### Carolina Wren



Nest: Dome-shaped with a side entrance. Made from bark strips, dried grasses, dead leaves, sticks, pine needles, mosses, feathers, straw, shed snake-skin, paper, & string. Nests are lined with hair or fur.

Eggs: Creamy white to pinkish white, heavily spotted with purplish brown to rusty brown flecks. Flecking can form a wreath around the large end of the egg.

Clutch: 4 to 5 eggs (but can have up to 8)

Incubation: 12 to 14 days

Fledging: 12 to 14 days

### Bewick's Wren



Nest: Mostly made up of sticks. It is lined with leaves, grass, and feathers.

Eggs: White with brown spots

Clutch: 5 to 6 eggs

Incubation: 14 to 16 days

Fledging: 14 days

### Ash-throated Flycatchers



Nest: Messy, typically with rootlets, grass, weed stems, and dry cow or horse dung in the nests, and a cup lined with fine grass and matted hair/fur. Unlike Great\_Crested Flycatchers, they seldom add snake skin to their nests.

Eggs: Oval, smooth, & slightly glossy. Creamy white to ivory and sometimes pinkish white background color and are marked with fine or heavy streaks or blotches in browns, purples, and grays.

Clutch: 4 to 5 eggs (3 to 7 can be present)

Incubation: 15 days

Fledging: 16 to 17 days

*continued on next page*

## House Sparrow



Nest: Fills to the top of box. Dome-shaped with side entrance. Messy collection of grass, weeds, paper & string. Lined with hair & feathers.

Eggs: Whitish to greenish white eggs. Smooth, slightly glossy and blotched or spotted with gray, bluish gray, black & brown marks. Marks distributed over the entire egg, often forming a wreath at the larger end.

Clutch: 4 to 6 eggs.

Incubation: 10 to 13 days

Fledging: 14 to 17 days

## Cowbird



They are brood parasitic New World birds. These birds feed on insects, including the large numbers that may be stirred up by cattle. In order for the birds to remain mobile and stay with the herd, they have adapted by laying their eggs in other birds' nests. The cowbird will watch for when its host lays eggs, and when the nest is left unattended, the female will come in and lay its own eggs. The female cowbird may continue to observe the nest after laying her eggs. If the cowbird egg is removed, the female cowbird may destroy the host's eggs.

### Native Plant Society of Texas-Kerrville Chapter

On April 9 the Kerrville Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas will host Mack Barham, nationally known wildlife photographer and recent winner of the National Wildlife Photography Contest. Barham will share some of his incredible photographs of native plants, wildlife, and the natural beauty of the Texas Hill Country. The meeting is set for 3p.m. at Riverside Nature Center.

Members and guests are invited to bring their own cameras and try their hand at nature photography in the Riverside Nature Center gardens following the talk.

For more information contact Marilyn Butcher at 830- 238- 4513



## Family Fun Day

### Kreutzberg Canyon Natural Area

**May 4, 2013 - 9am to 3pm**

Join us for our first Family Fun Day at the new Kreutzberg Canyon Natural Area. Explore your new county natural area! Come see Kendall County's best wildlife viewing blinds! Free park entrance.

#### Activities include:

- Friendly, helpful birders at each of the three blinds
- Live butterfly tent and monarch butterfly exhibit
- Family bird walk at 10am
- Habitat and plant walk and talks
- Fossil tours throughout the day
- Scavenger hunt
- "Bugs-R-Us" walk with the renowned Craig Hensley
- Nature crafts
- Concessions with KCPP's famous brat-on-a-bun

Learn about Kreutzberg Canyon Natural Area and find a map at [kendallcountyparks.org/parks/kreutzberg-canyon-natural-area-kcna](http://kendallcountyparks.org/parks/kreutzberg-canyon-natural-area-kcna)

**KCPP is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit volunteer organization. We are supported by our community. If you donate a bag of bird seed on May 4, you'll help feed the birds and help KCPP. Email KCPP for information at [info@kendallcountyparks.org](mailto:info@kendallcountyparks.org).**

## Advanced Training

### **THURSDAY, MARCH 21 12-1PM WEBINAR**

AT 13-009 QUAIL MANAGEMENT -- TEXAS WILDLIFE ASSOCIATION

Go to <https://texas-wildlife.webex.com> on the day of the webinar and click to join the Wildlife for Lunch webinar. Each web-based seminar is fully interactive and allows you to engage the experts, make comments, and ask questions during the course of the presentation. For more information or help with access, contact Courtney Brittain at [cbrittain@texas-wildlife.org](mailto:cbrittain@texas-wildlife.org).

### **SATURDAY, MARCH 23 7:30-9PM GUADALUPE RIVER STATE PARK (GRSP)**

AT 13-085 A FROGGIN' WE'LL GO

They croak, gurgle and make a host of other sounds; hop and jump and range from slimy to dry. Join the Park Ranger at Guadalupe River State Park for a look at the world of frogs and toads. Following a presentation at the Amphitheater you'll head to the river with flashlights (bring your own) to listen for and capture a few of the four-legged hoppers.

### **MONDAY, MARCH 25 7-8PM UPPER GUADALUPE RIVER AUTHORITY (UGRA)**

AT 13-091 NIGHT SKY PRESERVATION

In collaboration with The Hill Country Alliance, we will host William Wren from the McDonald Observatory, who will speak on the importance of reducing light pollution in order to preserve our ability to observe the night sky. Bill will discuss energy costs and health issues along with animals' changing nocturnal habits, and will provide examples of more effective and less expensive lighting choices. Free; call Tom Hynes at 830-990-5750 for further information.

### **TUESDAY, MARCH 26 9-10:30AM WILDFLOWER BUNCHES CLASSES AT RIVERSIDE NATURE CENTER (RNC)**

AT 061A-E ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING FOR WILDFLOWER BUNCHES CLASS

The sessions will be every other Tuesday from April 2 - May 28 at 9 a.m. in the covered pavilion. Small groups focus on one blooming plant at a time in order to gather information and images of their assigned forb, compile that information, and give it to the coordinator for emailing to all participants. Registration closes on March 12. Cost: \$3 donation. For more information, contact Donna Oliver-Leep, [deo.08@verizon.net](mailto:deo.08@verizon.net) or 325-446-3583.

### **TUESDAY, MARCH 26 7PM HILL COUNTRY LAND TRUST AND THE HILL COUNTRY ALLIANCE**

AT 13-068 BETTER LIGHTS FOR STARRY NIGHTS

A dark night sky full of big bright stars is important, along with clean rivers, scenic vistas, and natural landscapes. Little by little, light by light, the magic of the big Texas sky is diminishing. But it's not too late to reverse this trend. Bill Wren of the McDonald Observatory will share his expertise on the value of starry nights and simple strategies to protect them. Location: Hill Country University Center, 2818 East Highway 290 in Fredericksburg. Free.

### **THURSDAY, MARCH 28 6-8PM CIBOLO NATURE CENTER (CNC)**

AT 13-090 EDIBLE LANDSCAPES AND GARDENS

Edible plants are terrific for your garden and your landscape. Join Keith Amelung to learn about cultivating and incorporating edible and ornamental plants around the home and garden. You will learn about natural gardening techniques that are useful in both vegetable gardens and native landscapes to create healthy and abundant vegetation. Keith will also discuss native ornamentals that provide food to humans, birds and butterflies. Cost: \$15, members; \$20, non-members. To register, go to [www.cibolo.org](http://www.cibolo.org)

### **SATURDAY, MARCH 30 10-11:30AM GUADALUPE RIVER STATE PARK**

AT 13-086 CRITTERS BIG AND SMALL

Go on the prowl for animals of all kinds and sizes during this nature walk along the trails of Guadalupe River State Park. From butterflies to birds, you'll discover who is out and about. Meet at the Amphitheater behind the Discovery Center.

**SATURDAY, APRIL 6 9AM-4:45PM; SUNDAY, APRIL 7 8:30AM-3PM RIVERSIDE NATURE CENTER  
AT 13-002 ARCHEOBOTANY**

Dr. Leslie Bush will chair several sessions that feature expert archeologists presenting their research and leading hands-on demonstrations. Topics include ethnobotany, plant dyes, earth ovens, nut processing, emerging technologies, and a plant walk. To register, go to <http://www.txarch.org/Activities/academy/index.php> Cost: \$95, members; \$155 (including TAS membership dues), non-members. Lunches, snacks, and drinks will be provided during each session. Registration deadline: March 22.

**TUESDAY, APRIL 9 11:30 AM-12:45 PM RIVERSIDE NATURE CENTER****AT 13-070 FIREWISE LANDSCAPING: SECOND TUESDAY BROWN BAG LUNCH & LEARN.**

Certified Master Gardeners and firewise landscaping specialists Carol Hagemeyer and Leigh Thomas will speak on protecting your property against fire loss. Cost: \$3, RNC members; \$6, non-members; free to those joining RNC at the meeting. Reservations not required. For more information, call 830-257-4837 or go to [www.riversidenaturecenter.org](http://www.riversidenaturecenter.org).

**THURSDAY, APRIL 18 -- THURSDAY, JULY 18, 6:00-8PM BANDERA COUNTY EXTENSION OFFICE****AT 13-066A-D LANDOWNER EDUCATION SERIES**

These classes address forage production and rangeland management. Attendees may participate in one class or the entire series. Cost: \$15 per class or \$40 for the series. To register, call 830-796-7755 by Friday, April 5.

**SATURDAY, APRIL 20 10AM; 11:30AM RIVERSIDE NATURE CENTER****AT 13-087 EARTH DAY SPEAKERS**

Rainwater Harvesting: Why & How (10am) Jim Stanley, who helped design the RNC rainwater harvesting system and has built his own system, will explain the reasons for harvesting rainwater as well as the basics of how to collect rainwater, the equipment needed, and its availability. Questions & answers discussed; followed by a tour of the RNC's rainwater harvesting system. Free.

The Magic of Monarchs (11:30am) Cathy Downs, Chair of the Bring Back the Monarchs to Texas (BBMT) program, will provide a close and interactive look at the world of monarch butterflies. See live caterpillars, chrysalis, and adults, while learning about monarch biology, habitat, and migration. Suitable for both children and adults. Free.

**FRIDAY, APRIL 26--MONDAY, APRIL 29 NOON LADY BIRD JOHNSON MUNICIPAL PARK, FREDRICKSBURG****AT 13-067 THIRD ANNUAL WINGS OVER THE HILLS NATURE FESTIVAL**

For information, go to <http://www.wingsoverthehills.org/index.html> AT is for presentations/lectures only. For information on volunteer opportunities, contact Jane Crone at 830-990-9823 or email [jcrone@austin.rr.com](mailto:jcrone@austin.rr.com)

The newsletter's publication schedule does not allow listing all AT events in each issue. Check email announcements and the chapter calendar on our website for additional AT notices.

Earning this 2013 recertification award pin certifies that a Master Naturalist volunteer has completed at least 40 hours of approved volunteer service and eight hours of approved advanced training in this year.





We meet on the fourth Monday of most months at 7:00 PM. in the Upper Guadalupe River Authority Lecture Hall at 125 North Lehman Drive in Kerrville.

Join us at 6:30 for our social half-hour.

Everyone is welcome.

Texas Master Naturalist mission:

To develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities.

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The Texas Star is a monthly publication of the Hill Country Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist Program. News stories, comments, and ideas are welcome.

Please email them to:

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LenoreLangsdorf@gmail.com

The Hill Country Chapter does not recommend or endorse organizations or commercial sources mentioned in our newsletter. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and editor.

*Questions about our chapter?*  
Email Valeska Danielak,  
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imatxn10@yahoo.com

