

The Texas Star

Newsletter of the
Texas Master Naturalist
Hill Country Chapter

November 2019 Volume 17 Number 11



T E X A S



November 25 Meeting: BEE POLLINATORS

Rick Fink, President of the Alamo Area Beekeepers Association, is a full-time beekeeper who performs live bee removal and relocation as well as managing hives for honey production and pollination, and teaches both youth and adults. He will present an overview of the importance for the environment of both honeybees and native bees.

The monthly meetings of the Texas Master Naturalist Hill Country Chapter are free and open to the public. We meet in the Upper Guadalupe River Authority Lecture Hall, 115 North Lehmann Drive in Kerrville. Socializing begins at 6:15; the program starts at 6:45.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE Lisa Flanagan

Our 2019 Training Class has ended with Commencement on November 13. What a class! Not only do we have a group that has already certified; some have already earned their Special Recertification. Yes, they put in 40 volunteer hours and 8 advanced training hours, then did it ALL OVER AGAIN, all before December 31, 2020. Way ahead of what was called for. I am amazed, proud, so happy for these new Master Naturalist volunteers. It makes some of us older members stand up and take notice.

Also, are we all entering all of our volunteer hours on VMS to get credit for all our work, which also translates to more funding for our organization? I hope to see some of our earlier volunteers get online and get those hours in, helping us make a difference in the dollars this can provide for our organization. Just so you know.....the audit done on our chapter having to do with VMS entries....99.6% of our active/eligible volunteers reported hours during the 2018-19 audit period. 93.6% of our active opportunities (projects) had hours recorded for them. This is awesome! Keep up the good work.

Keep on your schedule our Volunteer Recognition Party on December 14th. We will recognize the efforts of a few of our volunteers as citizen scientists, educators, or "do-ers" of the more physical work on some of our projects. We have many, but will only be able to focus on a few. Next year we will do more.

We have a great slate of officers to be voted on at our next Chapter meeting on November 25:

President - Elsa Roberts, Vice President - Katy Kappel

Secretary - Jeralyn Hathorn, Treasurer - Nancy Scoggins

Please be there to vote in this great group. Nominations will also be accepted from the floor prior to the vote.

I am writing this on November 11th. Tonight we will have possible rain, then a freeze. And so the fun begins! As our holidays approach, many of us flying or going on the road: SAFE TRAVELS.

This meeting is our last for the year; if you are not at the December party, we will see you in January.

All my best to all my Master Naturalist friends.

This Month We Honor



Initial Certification

Lee Ann Booker

Special Recertification

Tom Burke

Recertifications

Richard Adams, Cathy Downs, Lisa Flanagan, Jim Jones, Becky Leal,
Carl Luckenbach, Amanda Martin, Tony Plutino, Regina Wheaton, Clark Williams

Milestones

Becky Leal - 250 hours - Bronze Dragonfly
Charleen Moore, 500 hours - Brushed Silver Dragonfly
Nancy Drukker, Charles Smith - 1000 hours - Gold Dragonfly
Sharon Hixson - 2500 hours - Polished Silver Dragonfly

Congratulations to members who received awards at our October meeting:



Certification: Koy Coffey, Martha Miesch,
Teresa Coleman, Stephen Dodge, Kay Harter



Recertification:
Travis Linscomb

photos by Gary Fest

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Milestone, 1000 hours: Susan McKinley, Kay Harter, Paula Harley



Milestone, 250 hours: Donna Dutton, Wendi Leonard



Milestone, 500 hours: Catherine Gauldin, Carla Stang

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Commencement Day for the Class of 2019

photo by Catherine Gauldin

Recent Hill Country Naturalist Columns by Jim Stanley

- 10/5/19 What Happened to Our Horney Toads?
10/12/19 SAVE EVERYTHING!
10/19/19 Dead Plant Material is Valuable
10/26/19 So Many Native Plants. Why Plant Exotics?

These and all other Kerrville Daily News columns
can be found at www.hillcountrynaturalist.org .

From Sharon Hixson

Nearly Three Billion Birds Gone

A new study by Cornell Lab of Ornithology finds steep, long-term losses across virtually all groups of birds in the U.S. and Canada. Click the link below to learn more:

<https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home/bring-birds-back>



NPSOT Boerne Chapter Monthly Meeting
On Tuesday, December 3 at 6:30, members will gather
for a holiday Pot Luck Dinner.
Cibolo Nature Center, 140 City Park Road

NPSOT Fredericksburg Chapter Monthly Meeting
The chapter will not meet in December.
On Tuesday, January 28, our speaker will be
John Thomas, founder and owner of Wildseed Farms.
Memorial Presbyterian Church, 601 North Main Street

NPSOT Kerrville Monthly Meeting
On Tuesday, December 10 at 1:30, members will gather
for a holiday party that includes making seed balls.
Riverside Nature Center, 150 Francisco Lemos Street

From Lisa Flanagan

Texas Master Naturalist Annual Meeting

Master Naturalists from all over the state of Texas got together in Rockwall for the 2019 Annual Meeting from October 18 through 20.

This is a great time to meet members from all the various regions of Texas. Also, the AT opportunities are many, whether in sit-down lectures with some hands-on activities, or on field trips. I participated in sessions on Dark Skies, Geology of Texas—Rock, Soil, and Water, Camera Trapping for Science, and a couple of Monarchs sessions (the Monarchs were flying through in great numbers) among others. There were competitions for photography and artwork, as well as for chapter newsletters, scrapbooks, project videos, and brochures.

During the evenings, we had dinner together and were treated to a variety of speakers. My favorites, by far, were two students, an eighth grader and a high school senior, who are both taking a pro-active role in their projects for their generation. KUDOS!! A definite high point was seeing Brenda Fest recognized for reaching 4,000 volunteer hours, and getting the President’s Award for her volunteering.

The location was the Hilton Hotel right on Lake Ray Hubbard. Great rooms, great staff. (Rockwall County was actually in the disaster zone declared by our governor for the Sunday severe weather that included a bad twister. When Brenda and I left before noon, we could see ominous gray clouds toward Dallas.)

My final morning, I attended the President’s breakfast, where I received our first delivery of the golden cheeked warbler pins. YAY! Also, the pin for next year was announced...the Bumblebee. We will not have the same delivery problems in 2020; fear not.

My overall assessment of the Meeting was. . .it was a great meeting. I encourage all of you to participate next year, when it will be held in Houston. To cut costs, I recommend having roommates and riding together.

I hope to see you at the Annual Meeting in 2020.



Autumn Arachnid Activities

I know that not everyone is a big fan of spiders, but I have to say that I really like some of them. Every year in late summer into mid-autumn, I find myself admiring the beautiful Black and Yellow Garden Spiders (*Argiope aurantia*) as they get ready to lay their eggs. You may have noticed some of these spiders throughout the summer, but it is in the autumn when the females *really* get busy. And BIG!



garden spider

This year was a banner year for garden spiders, due to our wet spring, I think. I had several in my tomato plants, trapping all kinds of bugs I did not want there, a few around the outside of my potting shed, and two especially large ones – one on my front porch and one on my bathroom window. One of my favorite things about them is that they manage to catch those nasty differential grasshoppers that I don't like (see the August newsletter) and devour them! Maybe I shouldn't, but I can't help but cheer them on when I see one of those grasshoppers hit the web.



garden spider & grasshopper

These spiders also spin stunning large orb webs which catch the morning dew and make it sparkle like a million diamonds. The family of spiders which weaves webs like these are known as the Orbweavers (Family *Araneidae*).



orbweaver

I've had a couple of other orbweaver species around the house this fall also. The banded garden spider (*Argiope trifasciata*) is quite a bit smaller than *Argiope aurantia* and has striped legs and less yellow on her body, but still spins an impressive orb web. And I've had a fuzzy fat friend, a spotted orbweaver (*Neoscona crucifera*), place her web over the top part of my office door. NOT fun when you walk out the door without seeing it! Sorry, girl! These spiders are nocturnal for most of the year but become diurnal in the shorter autumn days.



Neoscona crucifera



garden spider egg sacks

The orbweavers we typically see are the females. The males are MUCH smaller and die (and are sometimes eaten by the female) shortly after breeding. The females can create up to four large egg sacs, which can contain over a thousand eggs each. They wait a while between each sac, eating and growing eggs until their abdomen is huge and then getting skinny again, like someone on a yo-yo diet. Both my front porch girl and the bathroom window girl managed to put up four sacs! The spiderlings will hatch in late winter or early spring and then exit the sac. Some will stay in the near vicinity (I've had multiple generations on my front porch), while others spin a strand of silk and 'fly' off on the wind.

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As you may recall, spiders differ from “insects” in quite a few ways, the most notable being that insects have only 6 legs (3 pairs), while spiders have 8 legs (4 pairs). In the world of classifications, spiders and insects branch very high in their lineage. Both are Kingdom *Animalia* (Animals), Phylum *Arthropoda* (Arthropods). And there it branches, with insects being in Subphylum *Hexapoda* (Hexapods). Spiders are classified into Subphylum *Chelicerata* (*Chelicerates*). *Chelicerae* are appendages that appear before the mouth, such as pincers or fangs. This subphylum includes some interesting characters, such as scorpions, sea spiders, horseshoe crabs and of course, spiders. Class *Arachnida* (Arachnids) includes quite a few orders, including Order *Araneae* (Spiders) and Order *Opiliones* (Harvestmen)².

Harvestmen are interesting in part because they include a “spider” which many of us loved to play with as children. A Daddy Longlegs (Family *Phalangidae*) will calmly walk up and down your arm if picked up and placed there. Order *Opiliones* differs from Order *Araneae* in many ways. While spiders typically have either six or eight eyes, Harvestmen have only two. While spiders have two separate body segments, Harvestmen have only one. Harvestmen cannot spin silk. And the thing that endears the Daddy Longlegs to children who like to play with them is that they have no venom glands! When I was a child going to summer camp outside of Grandbury, Texas, in country having a mix of juniper and oak woods, they were quite common, and I have seen them in similar environments in the Austin area. Here in southern San Saba county, I have not seen any Daddy Longlegs, but the Harvestman pictured here (*Eumesosoma roeweri*) is quite common. Outdoors, they like to gather beneath rocks or wood, but this fall a few have been sneaking into my house. I am not amused!



harvestman

Back to our spider friends in Order *Araneae* - below that, the classifications get more complicated, with some traditional ones being refuted¹, so let's just skip over these » Infraorder True Spiders (*Araneomorphae*)» No Taxon *Entelegynae*!

John A. Jackman reports in his book, *A Field Guide to Spiders & Scorpions of Texas*,³ that there are 48 different families of spiders in Texas. Their common names typically describe the kind of web they weave or some sort of physical characteristic. For example, Purseweb spiders (*Atypidae*), Trapdoor spiders (*Ctenizidae*), Jumping spiders (*Salticidae*), or my personal favorite, Orb Weaver spiders (*Araneidae*) with whom we started this little survey of arachnids.

The arrival of cold weather has brought the disappearance of our female Orb Weaver friends. Goodbye, girls. We will keep watch for the hatching of your spiderlings in the spring!

¹ Cited from Wikipedia: Wheeler, Ward C.; Coddington, Jonathan A.; Crowley, Louise M.; Dimitrov, Dimitar; Goloboff, Pablo A.; Griswold, Charles E.; Hormiga, Gustavo; Prendini, Lorenzo; Ramírez, Martín J.; Sierwald, Petra; Almeida-Silva, Lina; Alvarez-Padilla, Fernando; Arnedo, Miquel A.; Benavides Silva, Ligia R.; Benjamin, Suresh P.; Bond, Jason E.; Grismado, Cristian J.; Hasan, Emile; Hedin, Marshal; Izquierdo, Matias A.; Labarque, Facundo M.; Ledford, Joel; Lopardo, Lara; Maddison, Wayne P.; Miller, Jeremy A.; Piacentini, Luis N.; Platnick, Norman I.; Polotow, Daniele; Silva-Dávila, Diana; Scharff, Nikolaj; Szűts, Tamás; Ubick, Darrell; Vink, Cor J.; Wood, Hannah M. & Zhang, Junxia (2017) [published online 2016], "The spider tree of life: phylogeny of Araneae based on target-gene analyses from an extensive taxon sampling", *Cladistics*, 33 (6): 574–616, doi:10.1111/cla.12182

² https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/beneficials/beneficial-46_harvestmen.htm

³ *A Field Guide to Spiders & Scorpions of Texas*, John A. Jackman, copyright 1997, 1999.

From Tara Bushnoe

Rainwater Harvesting Program

UGRA recently increased the maximum amount for their rebate program to \$200. The Rainwater Catchment System Rebate Program is available to anyone with a Kerr County address and will reimburse eligible applicants 50% of their rainwater catchment system equipment expenses up to \$200. This incentive program is open to businesses or individuals in Kerr County and each address is eligible once per calendar year. Proof of purchase for rainwater catchment system equipment must be dated within the last 12 months. Payment by UGRA is subject to the availability of funds. For more information, visit www.ugra.org or contact UGRA at 830-896-54

Also, UGRA is currently accepting applications for the Rainwater Catchment System Cost Assistance Program. If you are planning to install a rainwater catchment system in Kerr County, apply now through November 30th. Applications will be evaluated, and the winning entry will receive up to \$2,500 towards the cost of a new rainwater catchment system. Visit www.ugra.org for guidelines and applications or contact UGRA at 830-896-5445.

From Thomas Burke

NEW Project! CC-01-B-RM TPWD River Access and Conservation Areas [RACA]

Texas Parks and Wildlife sponsors a number of river access and conservation sites that allow fishers and kayakers access to public rivers and streams. Volunteer activities include infrastructure installation/maintenance and riparian restoration.

Need a chance to get your feet wet? Tony Plutino [tonyplutino@gmail.com] needs volunteers to work on December 7 at the Llano River James Crossing at Highway 2389 [2-4pm] and at Comanche Creek [10-noon] along the Jamie Hemphill Nature Trail in Mason. Please reach out to him for details.

This work project stimulated a wider discussion leading to the formation of a new cross county project that would allow volunteer efforts at any RACA site within our chapter area—currently Mason and Kimble counties--as well as the Junction and Guadalupe Paddling Trails. Additionally, chapter members working on a TPWD-organized cleanup or maintenance project at RACA sites in neighboring Llano and Valverde counties could also claim volunteer hours.

Volunteer hours at any RACA location should be coded under CC-01-B-RM. This project is already listed in the VMS drop down menu!



Monarch Larva Monitoring Project (MLMP)
Volunteer Training AT20-002

Kerr Wildlife Management Area Bass Center, Hunt



February 8, 2020 10:00am – 3:00pm

This will be the training for the MLMP Project for the Chapter in 2020. Speakers Cathy Downs and Craig Hensley will cover the MLMP Project, tagging, citizen science involving the monarch butterfly, and how volunteers can help with the declining monarch populations.

With this training, volunteers can join the team at the Kerr Wildlife Management Area or any of the other Chapter monitoring sites, or monitor their own property.

To register, please email
Gracie Waggener, gwaggener@flow-aps.com

The Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center
invite you to attend our January Nature Series Workshop



Build a Better Bluebird House

Our speaker, Kevin Pillow from Wildbirds Unlimited, will be covering the hows and whys of bluebirds, and their housing wants and needs. After the presentation, we will be making birdhouses from gourds as a hands-on activity.

Saturday, January 25, 2020 10:00 to 12:00
Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park, in the Tatsch House, Fredericksburg

To register, please contact
Nancy Person, nancykperson@gmail.com or 830-992-8411

This workshop (AT20-001) will be limited to 25 participants
Suggested donation, \$10.00

The View from Rusty Bend

Thoughts from the Trough

*The last soak of summer,
in the horse trough I float.
Drink in the calm, that salve
for sun-chapped skin, invite reflection.*

*Find in each cloud a friend and think—
I am made of water, drift in water.
Jealous of edges of clouds,
a drowsy froth*

*that vanishes, or
winks at me
with a sundog,
a momentary rainbow.*

*Lying back, I track the vultures
with a long patience—
those joy riders way, way up, against the meringue,
no hope for carrion, just because they can.*

*No music for me, but the chickadee.
I lie still as a sigh. Then,
roadrunner stops by,
a barcode with wings.*

*Tail up, tail down,
He is bound to the ground.
Launches, pins a bug,
clacks his castanets and is gone.*



October light at Rusty Bend

Pickings are mighty thin at Rusty Bend. The air smells of burnt dirt. The scanty rain that traveled through these parts passed on either side of us. The meteorologists called it “dry slotting.” Living in a dry slot means that trees are showing signs of drought stress and white-tail deer are emaciated. There aren’t any forbs for them so now they eat everything they can reach. The blue-flowered plants that deer normally avoid, like Greg’s Blue Mist and Ruellia, are just gnawed sticks. We even have a browse line beginning to show for the first time in years. I see Gray Fox come to water and he too is thin and wan. The Guadalupe River has gotten so narrow it is nearly leapable. Nearby cottonwood leaves are so parched, they sound like shuffled cards.

October is migration time but we have a meager count of Monarch butterflies this year. I can’t blame them, there is so little to sustain them. Even hearty Texas Persimmon trees are showing drought stress by coiling their bark off in wide sheets. The ground around them looks like a woodshop floor strewn with planed curls.

With no grubs in the dusty ground, White-nose the armadillo is showing his hipbones under his shell. Now he’s a four-legged backhoe who’s developed a taste for fire-ants and blasts deep to excavate their mounds. We watch him shrug and twitch, undeterred by their stings.

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October started with record highs in the upper nineties and ended with early freezes, but it's really the lack of rain that's the story. I distract myself with my ongoing love affair with October light. The way the trees are painted with perfect shadows, the ambering of the pasture, the softening of the landscape—all are soothing. Then out on the porch, Andy and I enjoy our own personal reality show. The sudden appearance of a tumbling osprey as he shifts from fishing for perch to grabbing a palm-sized dragonfly, burnt orange in the light. His somersaults make us gasp. The next day we watch more than 200 Cattle Egrets dig for freshly planted oats in the neighbors' pasture, then rise together, twirling like white confetti, to drift downstream, circle, circle again and settle on cypress limbs like snow on a bough. One warm afternoon three Eastern Bluebirds arrive for a communal wash, Bathtub Blues. I remind myself there is no such thing as a small pleasure.

So that's life in the dry slot. Sometimes you win, sometimes it's thin. Still, it's October and the cypress on our curve of river are burnished—heralding the copper luminescence that inspired the name, Rusty Bend.



Still life with curves

Lucy Griffith, PhD co-manages the Rusty Bend Ranch with her husband, Andy Robinson. She also writes poetry, her muse, a tractor named Mabel. The story of the Burro Lady of West Texas, told in poems, We Make a Tiny Herd, has been published by Main Street Rag. Both Lucy and Andy are certified Master Naturalists. Comments welcome at doctorluz@hctc.net.

Poem, images, and essay by Lucy Griffith
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Chapter members are welcome and encouraged to attend and contribute to Board of Directors meetings. The board meets at the Riverside Nature Center at 2:30 on the Monday of the chapter's monthly meetings. Our meetings will resume in January.

Advanced Training

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 19 10:30-11:30AM RIVERSIDE NATURE CENTER, KERRVILLE

AT19-244 SPIDERS OF CENTRAL TEXAS

The speaker at the NEd Talk will be Sheryl Smith Rogers. Suggested donation: \$5.00.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 20 9AM-12PM SAN ANTONIO BOTANICAL GARDEN

AT19-246 TEXAS NATIVE TRAILS WORKSHOP

Gary Poole, Conservation and Adult Programs Specialist at the Garden, will identify natives and discuss their requirements while working on the Native Trails area of the Garden. Free; tools and snacks will be provided; wear comfortable clothing. Registration is required; contact 210-536-1400.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 20 7-8PM SCHREINER UNIVERSITY CCAC BALLROOM, KERRVILLE

AT19-214 'SHAKE ALERT': THE EARTHQUAKE EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

Robert DeGroot, a Senior Seismologist with the U.S. Geological Survey, will speak live, via Skype. For further information, contact Richard McAlister at richardmcalister@outlook.com .

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 21 7-9PM CIBOLO NATURE CENTER, BOERNE

AT19-242 CNC THIRST FOR NATURE: STORIES IN THE STARS

A presentation by the San Antonio League of Sidewalk Astronomers in the auditorium will be followed by an outside star party with telescopes. Nonmembers, \$10; Members, \$8; Kids, \$5; 6 and under, free.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 25 7-8PM UPPER GUADALUPE RIVER AUTHORITY AUDITORIUM, KERRVILLE

AT19-245 BEE POLLINATORS

Rick Fink will present an overview at our monthly chapter meeting of the environmental importance of honeybees and native bees.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12 12-1:30PM WEBINAR

AT19-211 WIND METEOROLOGY AS A SUPER HERO

Greg Poulos from ArcVera Renewables in Golden, CO, will discuss the intertwined history of meteorology and renewable energy, how wind farms began, and the rise of offshore wind energy in the U.S. Event website: <https://www.cocorahs.org/Content.aspx?page=wxtalk> .

SATURDAY, JANUARY 25 10AM-12PM LADY BIRD JOHNSON MUNICIPAL PARK, FREDERICKSBURG

AT20-001 BUILD A BETTER BLUE BIRD HOUSE

Kevin Pillow from Wildbirds Inc. in Kerrville will discuss bluebirds and their housing wants and needs. Then we will make birdhouses from gourds. For further information, contact Gracie Waggener at gwaggener@flow-apps.com .

TUESDAY, JANUARY 28 7-8PM MEMORIAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, FREDERICKSBURG

AT20-003 THE STORY OF WILDSEED FARMS

John Thomas, the founder and owner of Wildseed Farms, will discuss the history of Wildseed Farms and the growing consumer and corporate interest in wildflowers at the monthly meeting of the Fredericksburg NPSOT chapter.

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

The C.A.R.E. committee invites you to join fellow Master Naturalists for an informal social hour prior to our monthly meeting. Gather at El Sombrero, 303 S.Sidney Baker St. in Kerrville, at 4:30 and order dinner if you wish.

T E X A S



We meet on the fourth Monday of most months—but not in December—at 6:45 PM in the Upper Guadalupe River Authority Lecture Hall at 125 North Lehmann Drive in Kerrville.

Join us at 6:15 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.

Board of Directors 2019

- Lisa Flanagan -- President
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The Texas Star is a monthly publication of the Hill Country Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist Program. News, essays, comments, and ideas are welcome.

Please email them to:
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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?
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