

The Texas Star

Newsletter of the
Texas Master Naturalist
Hill Country Chapter

May 2021 Volume 19 Number 5



Photo by Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept.,
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The May Hill Country Chapter meeting will be a virtual meeting on Monday, May 24, beginning at 6:30.

Go to <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88596485278?pwd=NWV5NFcwREFDL3hiR1Bnc1A3ejerQT09>

Kelly Simon, Urban Wildlife Biologist, Central Texas, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, will be our speaker.

Her topic is "Urban Coyotes: Wily and Welcome? Or, Dangerous and Unwanted?"

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE...Elsa Roberts

Today was a banner day. It's Tuesday, May 11 and today the 2021 Training Class completed their training and enjoyed their commencement ceremony. Twenty-five new volunteers have been added to our chapter and they have increased our total membership to 235. Most of these new volunteers were originally approved to attend the class of 2020, but the events surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic changed all of that. They are to be commended for the fact that their determination to become Master Naturalists did not allow them to become discouraged or to abandon the hope that we would develop a training program that would overcome the difficulties we were all facing.

By January 1, 2020, our New Class Training Director, Sheryl Pender, and the Class Committee—all from the 2019 Training Class—were well along in planning for the 2020 Training Class. Then in March, the tragedy struck and everything came to an abrupt halt. As you all remember, all of our chapter activities came to a dead stop for about a month until our state directors began to work out restrictions and protocols that would allow us to begin operations on a limited basis. The restrictions brought the reality that if we were going to have training, it could not follow the traditional pattern we had followed for so many years.

The development of the current training program had many twists and turns, setbacks and hindrances to overcome. Sheryl, working closely with the Class Committee, began thinking outside the box, applying creative thinking to every aspect of the core training that was required. The Class Committee was heavily involved in the development of the training procedures that were used. Not being relegated to the traditional tasks of basic office tasks and managing the coffee and breakfast services which were no longer allowed, their abilities were unleashed to assist in problem solving and critical input on how to manage training under difficult circumstances—and how they did shine.

Carla Stang, Membership Director, developed an intensive mentor program that kept our waiting trainees engaged in the activities of our chapter until their formal training could begin. These mentors had a big part in the success of the training program.

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How difficult was it? The training plans had to be adjusted several times due to changes in the restrictions and requirements coming from the State Directors. We didn't know how to do virtual training, so this was a big hurdle to overcome. Fortunately, a new transfer member, Darryl Pitts, came to our aid. It just happened that he works professionally in the virtual world and volunteered to help us jump into the virtual scene. He not only helped our volunteers become tech savvy enough to set up and manage the necessary equipment for Audio and Visual, but how to manage the chapter's Zoom account. However, we weren't the only ones struggling with it. Our traditional speakers/trainers were also learning how to teach using the virtual option. So, for a while, we were unable to get confirmation dates with trainers while they also learned how to use the virtual option.

Then there was the problem of finding venues for in-person sessions. Our usual venue, the UGRA lecture hall, was closed to the public. The new venue had to be large enough to accommodate the social distancing requirements. The ideal place was the Kerr County Youth Event Center, but rental fees would be involved and we had never paid for training space before. Jake Williamson, Events Manager, gave us five-star service in so many ways. The reduction of fees, and the services they offered, were too good to refuse. The venues for the smaller Study Groups, in three different locations, also were very accommodating to us and we are grateful for all the support we received from each one.

The 2021 Class was:

- 1st Class to have a preliminary training class on technical topics related to virtual training
- 1st Class to receive virtual training
- 1st Class to participate in Study Groups
- 1st Class to have options of different locations for training
- 1st Class to self-conduct a personal field trip

The commencement ceremony was lived streamed to our Facebook page and I encourage you to view the presentation of their Training Certificates and name badges as they join our corps of well-trained volunteers. On behalf of all our members, Welcome to the Hill Country Chapter.

For all the Board Members, Class Committee Members, Mentors, and volunteers who worked so hard to develop and facilitate the training program, this day was so rewarding. Thank you all for your extraordinary dedication toward making this day happen.



photo by Pat Lucas

Commencement Day for the Class of 2021

This Month We Honor

Recertifications

Pamela Bird, Rheda Boardman, Jill Boyter, Norma Bruns, Ron Childers, Kay Coffey, Ann Dietert, Nancye Drukker, Mildred Dworsky, Frank Garcia, Catherine Gaudin, Paula Hardy, Sharon Hixson, Barbara Jansen, Katy Kappel, Ric McCormick, Sheryl Pender, Darryl Pitts, Elsa Roberts, Nancy Scoggins, John Sloan, Mary Thomas, Rachel Thompson



Milestones

Tom Burke, Lois Gaines, Billy Guin, Jr. - 250 hours, Bronze Dragonfly
Patricia Lucas - 500 hours, Brushed Silver Dragonfly
Dale Bransford - 4000 hours, US Presidential Volunteer Service Award
Rheda Boardman - 5000 hours, Diamond Dragonfly

Recent Hill Country Naturalist Columns by Jim Stanley

4/3/21 What Is So Important About Native Plants?
4/10/21 We Are Lucky to Live in the Hill Country
4/17/21 Deer are Picky Eaters, Just Like Us
4/24/21 Demonstration of the Properties of Native Grasses

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



Kelly Conrad Simon, Texas Parks
and Wildlife Department

The speaker at our May 24 chapter meeting is Kelly Simon. Her topic is “Urban Coyotes: Wiley and welcome? Or dangerous and unwanted?” The coyote was once a symbol of the American west, but its adaptability and cunning have transformed the species into a successful denizen of nearly every habitat type in North America. After 100 years of concentrated eradication efforts, the species has now increased its population range by over 40%. So perhaps it’s time to change our tack. During this hour we’ll look at what we know about coyotes in urban areas and discuss how to manage risk and avoid negative encounters. With a little bit of forethought and some simple actions we can keep wildlife wild and enjoy their presence in our cities and countryside.

From Mary Pearl Meuth, Texas Master Naturalist Assistant Program Director



This month, we'll be hearing from Alex Bailey, founder of Black Outside, Inc., located in San Antonio. He will be presenting on "From Awareness to Allyship: An Intro to Black Outside, Inc. and Engaging BIPOC Communities."

Description: Since the onset of the COVID-19 and increased awareness of racial injustice, outdoor participation within black, indigenous, and people of color

(BIPOC) communities has increased. What does this increase mean for outdoor education? In what ways can one act in allyship to ensure a more inclusive outdoors in Texas? Learn from TEDxSan Antonio speaker and founder of Black Outside, Inc who will share more about the work of Black Outside, Inc and explore what it means to be in allyship with BIPOC communities in nature.

Prior to the session, Alex invites you to listen to his TED Talk [linked here](#). Want to know more about Black Outside, Inc? Check out their amazing work [here](#).

*To register for the May 18 12pm. **Be the Change** event, click [HERE](#).*

If you missed the April event, the recording is now posted to our website:
<https://txmn.tamu.edu/bethechange/>



Texas Master Naturalist 2021 Annual Meeting October 21st-24th

We're preparing this year's meeting as a hybrid event—both online and in-person at the Dallas/Fort Worth Airport Marriott. The event will be held Thursday October 21 through Sunday October 24. Join us for a long weekend of greenspace adventures in the hideways of our largest urban area in Texas.

Call for Proposals

As a workshop presenter at the Annual Meeting, you will have the opportunity to inform and train TMN members from across the state on various natural resource topics providing more in-depth information than their initial core training and curriculum. You are also encouraged to make this an opportunity to enlist and train our program volunteers to assist you, your program, and your work as part of their annual volunteer service commitment. The deadline for submissions is Sunday, May 31. Individuals wishing to present are invited to submit their proposal on the Texas Master Naturalist Annual Meeting website:

<https://txmn.tamu.edu/2021-annual-meeting/>



Sharon Hixson will present “Beneficial Arthropods (aka Bugs) in Your Garden” for our May meeting. The presentation will begin at 2 pm. A short chapter business meeting will follow the presentation. To be sure you catch the whole talk, be sure to join the Zoom a little before 2 pm., Tuesday, May 11. Zoom link: <https://tinyurl.com/5haefah3> (for full Zoom information as well as Sharon's bio and other chapter information, [click here](#) to go to our website).



1on1 with a Naturalist

Every Friday 10am-12pm
@ Riverside Nature Center

Jim Stanley, naturalist, author, and columnist will be available to meet one-on-one to answer questions, discuss various topics, or listen to ideas about nature.

During this current health crisis, we ask you to be mindful of those around you by practicing safe distancing & wearing a mask when possible.

**1on1 with a Naturalist is returning on
May 21**

VOLUNTEER SUMMER STUDY

REGISTER FOR THE 2021 VOLUNTEER SUMMER STUDY

[Link to registration form](#)

The Guadalupe River is one of the highest rated recreational and scenic rivers in Texas and is Kerr County's central asset. The river provides water to the citizens for domestic, agricultural, municipal, and recreational purposes. Therefore, maintaining excellent water quality is essential. Water quality is determined by the amount of contaminants in the water; as contaminant levels increase, water quality decreases. There are many types of potential contaminants originating from many sources. The objective of this study was to determine the level of one specific contaminant, *E. coli*. *E. coli* bacteria levels are commonly monitored to assess the quality of surface water because they are an indicator of water contamination. *E. coli* originates in the intestines of warm-blooded animals and the presence of *E. coli* indicates that warm-blooded animal feces have reached the water and that other pathogens may be present. Sources of *E. coli* can include inadequately treated sewage, livestock, pets, birds, and mammals.

Each summer, the Upper Guadalupe River Authority (UGRA) tests *E. coli* levels at popular swimming holes throughout Kerr County. The results of this Swimability Study are compared to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality's (TCEQ) standards for contact recreation. For a single grab sample, the standard for contact recreation set by TCEQ is 399 colonies of *E. coli* bacteria per 100 milliliters (mL). If *E. coli* levels are greater than 399 colonies of bacteria per 100 mL, then there is a higher risk of contracting waterborne illness while swimming.

In 2004, UGRA began the Volunteer Summer Study Program to supplement data collected during the Swimability Study and to include interested members of the community in water quality testing. The information collected by the volunteers also helps identify areas in need of further investigation.

The program begins June 1, 2021 and runs through August 31, 2021.

During the summer of 2020 we were assisted by 39 volunteers who collected 451 samples at 45 locations throughout Kerr County. UGRA commends the efforts of these volunteers for taking an active role in protecting the water quality of our river. Working together, we can maintain the pristine nature of the Guadalupe River and protect our community's most valuable natural resource.

2020 VOLUNTEER SUMMER STUDY REPORT

[View Report](#)

If you would like to be a Summer Study Volunteer, please contact Tara Bushnoe, Natural Resources Coordinator at 830-896-5445 or tbushnoe@ugra.org.

UGRA 18th Annual

River Clean Up

Volunteers Wanted!

- ◆ Conduct a cleanup in Kerr County on your own or in a small group anytime from July 1 to October 31.
- ◆ Pick your own site or select a site identified by UGRA. Suitable sites can be anywhere in the watershed (roads, drainage areas, bridges, waterways).
- ◆ UGRA will support your cleanup by providing supplies and coordinating trash drop off locations.

Let's Keep *OUR* River Clean!

T-shirts For First 400 Volunteers!!

Snacks and Prizes, too!!

For more info and to register, visit:

www.ugra.org

From Debbie Thompson, Texas Master Naturalist, Class of Spring 2021

Life in a Kerrville Canyon

Once crunchy leaves, now silent after the rain, give me a chance to watch a doe drink from the tinaja. We hoped and wished for rain. But now the deluge is too much for some of the trees that have only a feeble grasp on the rocky canyon walls, which now are peeled away to reveal the secret lair of roots never meant to be seen.

A wise old walnut seems to have made better choices and spread its giant roots along the horizontal seams in the rock. Then the trunk leaned back into the slope with a relaxed “Ahhhh...think I’ll stay awhile.”

After one day of rain, the spring doesn’t seem to notice the recharge and bubbles up just like the day before...and the day before that...and the day before that. But after the third day of rain, its bubble was not visible under the stream of water going over its head.

I followed each of the three canyons to the convergence to see what changes the rain made. Natural suds from plant decomposition collect in the deeper pockets. Debris blockades created calmer pools and evidence that we need more remediation work to keep the upper land from washing away.

Life in the tinaja can be a ferocious little world. A colorful Sunburst Diving Beetle patrols for brunch. Not to be undone, Water Striders float the surface for any larvae that dares to come close, while lobster-like damselfly nymphs wait patiently until it’s time to crawl out of the water. Giant tadpoles tell me it will be noisy here soon. Should one let itself be carried away down the little stream, it’s in for a wild ride through the rock debris and mini waterfall. Though mini to us, I doubt the tadpole has the same perspective. From there it would travel underground through a tunnel and come back into the light to ride the rapids. Not until it reaches the pond can it relax and ponder why it hadn’t grown legs sooner. After three rainy days, tadpoles would no longer travel underground, but would have to endure a turbulent tumble which no doubt would be dizzying.

Chert washed clean from the rain makes me keep an eye out for archaeological finds and the telltale bulb of percussion.

Leaf litter in the well-shaded canyon makes digging easier than in the hardscrabble pastures, so it’s not surprising to find lots of creature holes. Stopping to watch the entrance, I wonder what wild thing is occupying it. No doubt the occupant is staring out wondering what wild thing is watching its front door.

A pile of fox bones is a reminder that the Texas Hill Country is not Disneyland. It is nature unedited.

Springs and runoff flow into West Creek, and then Turtle Creek, to the Guadalupe River. Water travels all the way down to the San Antonio Bay at Matagorda Island and into the Gulf of Mexico. So if you’re ever down there fishing for Mahi Mahi, please be on the lookout for my glasses.

Advanced Training

WE HAVE MORE THAN 40 ADVANCED TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FROM MAY 15 - JUNE 15.

To read the list of dates and titles, go to the Advanced Training calendar at <https://txmn.org/hillcountry/chapter-calendar/>. Chose “Agenda” at the top, right, of the calendar. This will bring up a list of the dates and titles for these events. Then click on any title to bring up complete information on that event.

The View from Rusty Bend



Fire and Feathers

How to Bobcat

After a rest, nested in a hollow tree,
wreathed in crepuscular mist, you
enter stage right with a long-legged stride.

Slip beneath the fence rail, pause
for an itch, backandforth.
Claim your place,

chin held high, wide-whiskered,
tufted ears clocking fore and aft.
Move easy, the definition of saunter—

for this is your queendom.
That swaying, swinging walk,
your brindled fur, silvered

with beads of fog, a jeweled robe.
You nose the breeze
for rabbits or coyotes.
As you exit stage left,
posing a question
with the curve of your tail,

all of my hairs stand,
to salute the queen.

continued on next page

Rusty Bend is greening. A late spring this year but this one's packed with power. Each day brings a new layer of green, and purple too, for it seems that Prairie Verbena thrives after snow. Let us go to the river. Walk with me.

There's a sea of yellow to wade through on the way. Four-nerve daisy everywhere. Buffalo grass seeds hang heavy. Pillars of Twist-leaf Yucca stalks peek from the shrubs. Canyon Wrens are singing and cheeping as they gather bugs for their babies. Their caterpillar patrol is in full swing. Now you can hear the turkeys across the river as they polish off fallen pecans. The switch grass on the banks of the river is climbing toward the sky, stabilizing the soil before our next flood.

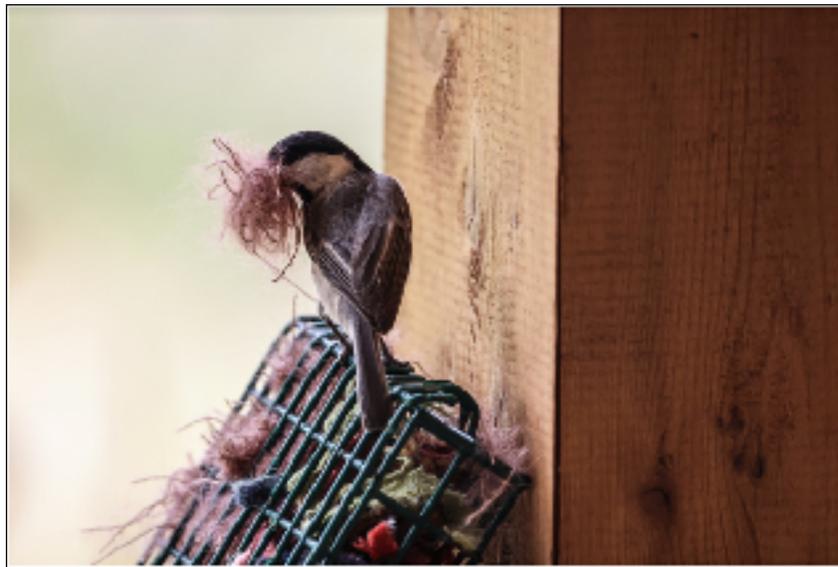
There, on a dead limb, Osprey dismantles a bass. Sliding the carcass up as he nibbles away balanced on one foot. This patient process takes an hour. Listen to Summer Tanager as he glows red-orange calling pit-ti-tuk!

Cooper's Hawk darts through the oaks on his way to harass the cowbirds in the cage. Black-chinned Hummingbird leaves a wake of swaying flowers as he maneuvers among blue blossoms of salvia. The river is low and slow and yearning with us all for rain.

Look down, those dens beneath the rocks. Tantalizing in their darkness. Who's home? Porcupine? Raccoon? Fox? Armadillo? What is that smell? Wild garlic underfoot.

Look up. In the tallest cypress a mated pair of Red-tailed Hawks is building a nest. They work on it when it's not windy. They leap off and drop to gather sticks, then fly back up to balance on the branches. We see one of them trampolining to secure the weave of the nest. Bouncing up and down like a five-year-old. Nearby ravens—not pleased at all with this neighborhood development.

On a smaller scale, the monarchs are roosting in the Cedar Elms. Sonoran Bumblebees find nectar in every flower and hum a quiet symphony. Let us sit and listen. The room sized rocks are perfect perches for us two-leggeds. Lean against the limestone. Let it hold you. The smell of green is everywhere and laced with perch. Carp wave the golden flags of their fins in the shallows. From their line-up on a log, large to small, river coolers ease into the water, one by one.



Carolina Chickadee gathers mohair for the nest Image by Julia Robinson

Poem, first image, and essay by Lucy Griffith Copyright 2021

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 awarded the 2020 Willa Literary Award for Poetry as well as the Wrangler Award by the Cowboy Hall of Fame. Both Lucy and Andy are certified Master Naturalists. Comments welcome at lucy@lucygriffithwriter.com

T E X A S



We meet on the fourth Monday of most months (but not during pandemic) 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 2021

- Elsa Roberts -- President
- Katy Kappel -- Vice President
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- Catherine Gauldin -- Communications Director
- Carla Stang -- Membership Director
- Tom Burke -- Volunteer Service Projects Director
- Sheryl Pender -- 2021 Class Director
- Billy Guin -- 2020 Class Representative
- Lisa Flanagan-- Immediate Past President
- Vern Crawford -- State Representative

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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