

The Texas Star

Newsletter of the
Texas Master Naturalist
Hill Country Chapter
August 2023 Volume 20 Number 8



photo by Vern Crawford



The August Hill Country Chapter meeting will be a hybrid meeting on Monday, August 28. Doors open at 6pm for socializing. The business meeting begins at 6:30 and the presentation by Grant Sizemore, the Director of Invasive Species Programs at the American Bird Conservancy, will begin at 7:10. His talk will focus on the conservation and public health science underpinning the need to manage domestic cats.

Prior registration is required for attending the meeting/AT session via Zoom. To register for virtual attendance, click [HERE](#). You will receive a confirmation email with information about joining the meeting, and can log into Zoom at 6pm on August 28.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE...JEFF SCHWARZ

As you read this, the 32 Members-in-Training (MITs) of our Class of 2023 will likely have two classes and a weekend field trip under their belts. It is exciting to be bringing on a new class that will increase our active membership and cadre of volunteers by 15%! I'm very impressed by the backgrounds of the MITs and their intentions as Hill Country Texas Master Naturalists.

The MITs will be providing refreshments at the next three Chapter meetings; they're calling these social engagements "Come Have Tea With Us." This should be some extra incentive for all members to show up at the Chapter meetings to meet our MITs! Show up early for the next Chapter meeting and guess which three MITs are professional Land Stewards, which four have become Kerrville Master Gardeners in the last two years, which one taught English abroad in at least six countries, which two have a tie to Alaska, and which two are cellists. The number of scientists in the group is also quite impressive.

We also have an interesting topic for the Advanced Training at the upcoming Chapter meeting. There will be a panel discussing FERAL CATS! Who doesn't like a feral cat? Well, some of us don't because they kill too many birds and lizards, but that's not the point. This talk will focus on the conservation and public health science underpinning the need to manage domestic cats and on opportunities for organizations and individuals to advance science-based solutions that benefit cats, wildlife, and people. Cat videos benefit cats, wildlife, and people. Cat videos at the break!

Welcome to the Chapter, Members-in-Training! We hope to see you at the Chapter meetings and as you're volunteering alongside the rest of us.

P.S. I've seen the hours posted for volunteer service year-to-date. Some of you, I know, are behind in reporting hours because I see you volunteering! Help out a friend, post your hours!

From Jane Jamison and David Matthews, 2023 Class Co-Directors

Come Have Tea With Us

You are invited to our Pre Chapter Meeting on Monday, August 28. We would like to introduce you to some of our NEW Members In Training (MITs). We will have cookies and tea (hot, cold, and flavored) from 6:00 – 6:30 pm. before the chapter meeting starts. Come One Come ALL!

This Month We Honor



Recertifications

Randi Jehle Mellon, Glenn Randow, Nellwyn Sadler,
Louisa Stone, Sherry Wilson, Phil Youngblood

Milestones

Kathy Loring, Vicki Schmidt - 250 hours, Bronze Dragonfly
Mark Hults, Jane Jamison, David Matthews - 500 hours, Brushed Silver Dragonfly
Trudy Eberhardt - 1000 hours, Gold Dragonfly

Congratulations to members who received awards at the July meeting:



Kim Ort, Janice Arterbury, Ron Childers, Koy Coffey, Amy Zesch, Hal Zesch, Laura King

From Lisa Flanagan

HAL AND AMY ZESCH

2023 LONE STAR LAND STEWARD AWARD

At our July Chapter meeting we were pleased to have Mark Mitchell talk about black tailed prairie dogs. Hal and Amy Zesch were also there, bringing with them two adorable baby prairie dogs. They were tame, allowing people to hold, pet, and feed them. How precious! These youngsters will be ambassadors for their species as they tour schools and other locations to help educate the public on these little critters.

I was proud to learn that the Zesch Ranch won a 2023 Lone Star Land Stewardship Award, part of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Private Lands Program. This program's objectives:

- Recognize private landowners for excellence in habitat management and wildlife conservation on their land.

- Publicize the best examples of sound natural resource management practices.

- Encourage youth education and participation in promoting responsible habitat management and improved ecosystem health.

- Promote long-term conservation of unique natural and cultural resources.

- Promote ecosystem awareness and acknowledge the best conservation practices in ecological regions in Texas.

- Enhance relationships between private landowners and Texas' natural resource agencies.

- Illustrate the important role of Texas' private landowners in the future of our natural resources.

We are honored to have Hal and Amy in our chapter! Keep up the good work!

To view the video that was shown at the awards ceremony, go to <https://youtu.be/kAJ4CPrA9GM>.

This video will also air on the Texas Parks and Wildlife show sometime this fall.



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 meeting.

From David Drake, Volunteer Service Director

In order to bring more visibility to volunteer opportunities, links to our Volunteer Opportunities Calendar and to Chapter Approved Projects are given at [Upcoming Events › Volunteer Opportunities › \(txmn.org\)](#) and [ChapterApprovedProjects2023-3-22.pdf \(txmn.org\)](#).

Please visit our News page for volunteer opportunities and current events. Organizations with immediate volunteer needs may be found at [News \(txmn.org\)](#).

If you have a new project that needs to be approved, post it at [Propose a New Volunteer Project \(txmn.org\)](#). If you need assistance getting volunteers, please send me a note at [Volunteerprojects@hillcountrytmn.org](#). Or, call me: 903-357-0828.

If you would like to post volunteer events on our calendar, please email our Communications Director, Mark Hults, at [Communications@hillcountrytmn.org](#).

Thank you for your time and efforts!

From Tara Bushnoe, UGRA General Manager

Urgent Request for Conservation

Kerr County is currently in the midst of an exceptional drought that rivals the worst drought we have ever experienced. As a steward of our beautiful Guadalupe River, the Upper Guadalupe River Authority (UGRA) is encouraging everyone to reduce the amount of water being withdrawn from the river or creeks.

Regulatory entities for surface and groundwater withdrawal have recognized the seriousness of the drought conditions and alerted permitted water users that they must reduce pumping. These are permit holders who are using surface or groundwater for regulated uses like irrigation or municipal supply. Although you may not be a permitted user, we hope you will support the effort to conserve water by reducing your own water use.

The current rate of flow of the Guadalupe River in Hunt is approximately four cubic feet per second, which is the lowest ever recorded at this time of year. River flow is 85 percent below the long-term average and continues to drop. Water levels of the Headwaters Groundwater Conservation District's index monitoring wells have dropped an average of 17 feet since the beginning of 2022. These declines are, in part, attributed to persistent below-average rainfall because we are now in our second year of severe drought. Our average annual rainfall is 30 inches, but in 2022, Kerrville received only 12.28 inches of rain. This is the driest year ever recorded. Year-to-date rainfall in 2023 is only 10.32 inches, which is also far below average.

As the drought continues and intensifies, every drop of water in the river, creeks, and aquifer is important. Please consider cutting back or eliminating surface water and groundwater usage for lawn irrigation, landscaping, and other non-essential purposes. Responsible use of our water resources is a necessary part of preserving healthy, flowing waterways in Kerr County. Whether you enjoy fishing, swimming, kayaking, or relaxing next to the cool water, conservation can allow these activities to continue during this drought period. UGRA urges you to conserve water. Please demonstrate your stewardship and appreciation of our water resources by reducing use – together we can make a difference! If you are already doing your best to conserve water, we thank you.

From Deb Youngblood

Guadalupe River Cleanup, 2023

We were a small but mighty group! We met up at Guadalupe Park at 8am for a safety briefing and then got to work. It was hot and exhausting even for the two in kayaks. Found lots of interesting and sometimes gross stuff. Glad to see it all out of the river.

We stayed hydrated and had a little fun. We cleaned up a lot of junk, bagged it and left it in the designated spot. We noted the location of large debris which will be passed on to UGRA for removal. Time: two hours and no one died of heatstroke. I took the photo below: Frank Garcia, Kathy Loring, Patricia Poore, Phil Youngblood, Karolyn Andrews, Manos Kaloudis, Ron Childers, Mark Loring, and Jeanne Bodine.





Monarchs and Milkweed Propagation Workshop II

September 13, 2023 – 10:00 A.M. to Noon

**Gillespie County AgriLife Extension Office
38 Business Court, Fredericksburg**

Here is your second chance! This fascinating Workshop was so well received in our February offering that we are repeating it to meet the demand.

This is a hands-on workshop where you will learn to identify and incorporate native host and nectar plants to draw monarch butterflies and other pollinators into your garden. During the workshop, you will ...

- Design your own monarch way station with keys and charts to take home;
- Learn to propagate native milkweeds on site and take home all the materials necessary for success; and
- Learn how, where, and when to collect native milkweed seeds.

Instructors: **Cathy Downs** - Monarch Watch Conservation Specialist; Past Chair of Bring Back the Monarchs to Texas (BBMT), and Certified Monarch Larval Monitoring Project Educator. **Gracie Waggener** – Texas Master Naturalist with over 11,000 volunteer hours; Bring Back the Monarchs to Texas Committee; Fredericksburg Nature Center Pollinator Garden Project Leader.

This Workshop will be held at the Gillespie County AgriLife Extension Office, 38 Business Court, Fredericksburg, TX from 10:00 A.M. until 12:00 Noon. **Please make Type to enter text early by emailing Gracie Waggener at gwaggener@flow-apps.com. Approved for two (2) hours of TMN AT credit.**



Sponsored by The Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center

From Lucy Griffith

The View from Rusty Bend



Straggles-eared drops by

Ode to Fledging

Goldfinch nestmates
chase their mom,
colliding and stumbling mid-air.
Baby raven fledges by accident
with a cartwheeling fall,
a top hat crashing
branch to branch.
Fresh Canyon Wrens
sit on the porch rail, clueless,
ducking at every flyby.
New titmice hang
upside-down from the fence wire,
a parody of kids on monkey bars.
Stuck, peering right and left,
now what?
Hummingbird tries a bath
dipping like a tea bag.
Trial and error,
strewn with mimicry,
an exuberance of mistakes.
A ten-year-old inside me
that flies my heart away.

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Hard summer at Rusty Bend. Heat, drought, more heat. As an antidote to despair, I try to put on my citizen scientist hat and stay curious. I wander out each morning, crunch, crunch, on the thatch. The air smells like ten-year-old hay in an old barn. Tending the bird feeders and water sources feels imperative.

Thank goodness for the critters, especially the new ones. We notice new things, such as black beaks on a straggly bird signaling a juvenile. We see it on tanagers and cardinals in all their cluelessness.

We witness in wonder each bird's parenting styles and all their variations. Hardly a raptor passes by without a squadron of scissortails above them, elegant arial harassment, driving them far from vulnerable fledglings. Teamwork, power in numbers.

We see another kind of tough love, when a baby Rufus-crowned Sparrow rings his bell on the window, laying stunned on the porch. His mother arrives nearby to check. Andy puts him up carefully on a wall for safety, admiring his eyelashes.

The mom comes back in and lands beside her baby. We expect her to nudge and offer comfort but no! She bites him hard on the butt! He flies unsteadily into the yard. Not good enough. She goes to him and nails him again. *Get off the ground, you idiot!* Eventually she drives him back to the trees. Hard world out there.

Hard for mammals too. On the way back from town, mid-afternoon I see a grey fox trotting across the highway with a mouthful of Leghorn, feathers flying. Hunt in daylight, chicken dinner tonight.

One morning, three baby armadillos tumble out of the bushes to practice their digging skills. Their ears are full size on their little bodies. I'm a sucker for big-eared things. They wiggle as if to make my day.

Ants come in the house looking for water. Rat snakes appear on the porch once the sun sets. If it's in the 80s we watch our step. My garden is nuked.

What tomatoes I coaxed to life end up cooking on the vine, parboiled.

Andy stays busy several times a day, catching every drop of AC condensation, and parsing it to droop leaved trees. We notice which trees suffer and where and dream of a stable aquifer.

We can't change the weather, but we can pay attention, maybe learn something new. Sometimes, what else can you do but laugh?



Straggly-ear headed to the den

Poem, images and essay by Lucy Griffith Copyright 2023

Lucy Griffith, PhD co-manages Rusty Bend 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. A joint project of bird poems and images, with wildlife photographer Kenneth Butler, *Wingbeat Atlas*, can be ordered from [Wingbeat Atlas — FlowerSong Press & Juventud Press](#).

Comments welcome at lucy@lucygriffithwriter.com

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.



Chapter meetings are held on the fourth Monday of the month (except in December). Members and the public are welcome to attend in person or virtually. There is no cost to attend.

We meet in the auditorium at the Guadalupe Basin Natural Resources Center (GBNRC) at 125 Lehmann Drive in Kerrville. Doors open at 6PM for socializing. Business Meeting begins at 6:30PM. Advanced Training session is 7:10-8:10PM.

Board of Directors 2023

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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 [Lenore Langsdorf, Editor](mailto:Lenore.Langsdorf@hillcountrytmn.org).

Questions about our chapter?

Email Membership Director Dot Maginot
membership@hillcountrytmn.org

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