

# The Texas Star

Newsletter of the  
Texas Master Naturalist  
Hill Country Chapter

February 2024 Volume 21 Number 2



Photo by Terry Hibbitts

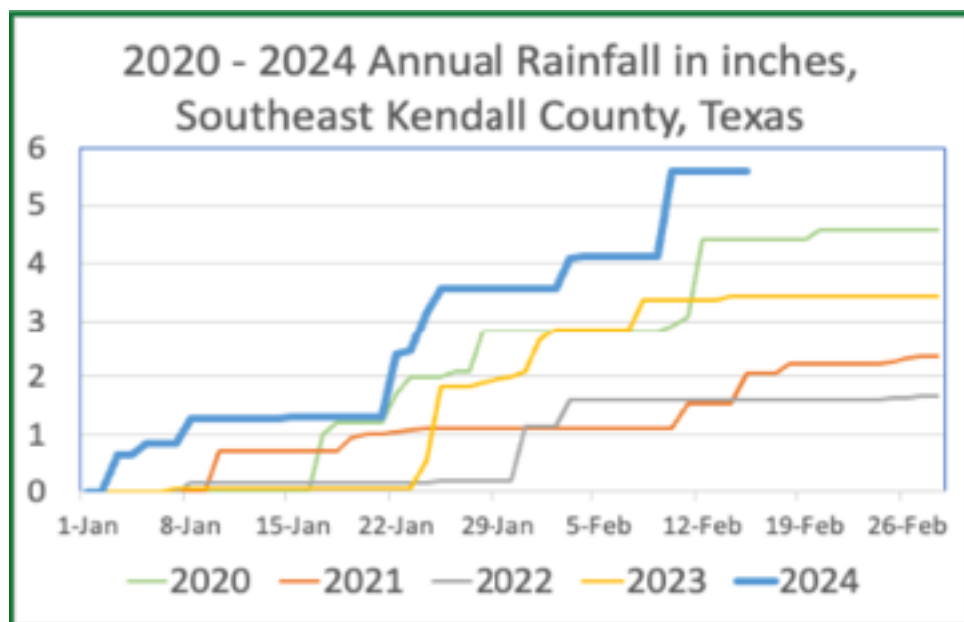


The February Hill Country Chapter meeting will be a hybrid meeting on Monday, February 26. Doors open at 6pm for socializing. The business meeting begins at 6:30 and the presentation at 7:00. The presenter, Terry Hibbitts, is a retired Biology teacher who has been documenting wildlife through photography since his youth and is a co-author of the essential reference book [Texas Amphibians: A Field Guide](#). He will share his techniques and strategies for photographing small creatures in the field, with a focus on butterflies, dragonflies, damselflies, moths, and beetles. The talk is for photographers of all skill levels, including novices whose only equipment is their cell phone.

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. You can then log into Zoom starting at 6pm on February 26.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE...JEFF SCHWARZ

Welcome to a wettest start of the year of the past five years! At my house, it's the wettest start to the year in the last five years since I started recording rain gauge data as you can see in this chart. I hope you can say the same. Overall, I'm still 19" behind since the beginning of 2020 compared to the Kendall County 21st century average of 31" per year.

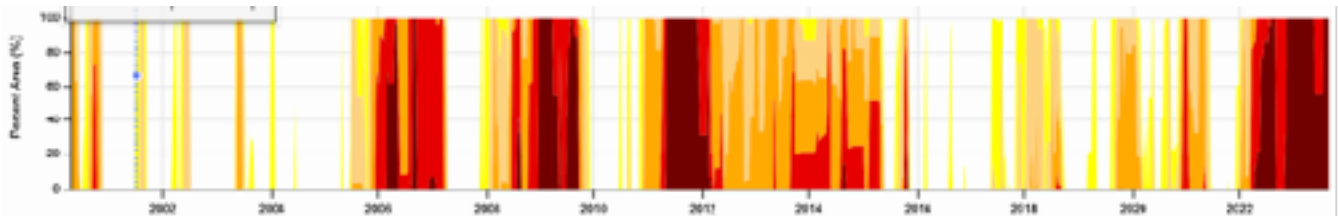
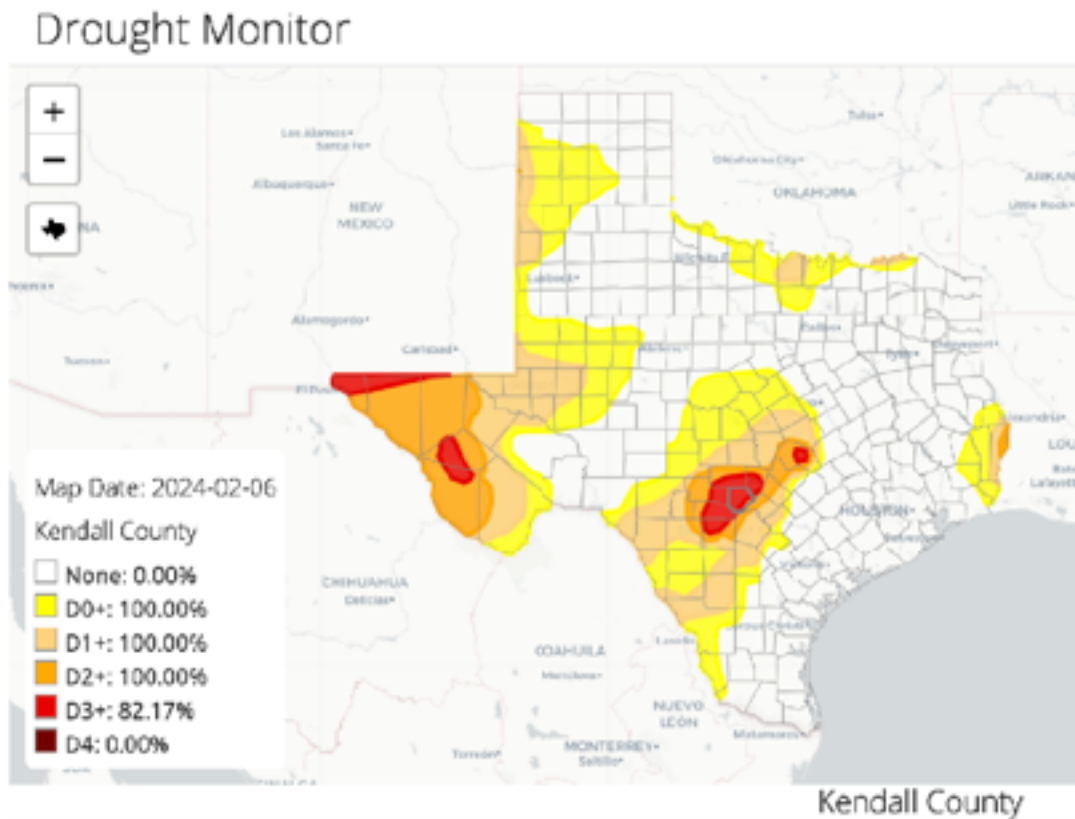


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Here's another interesting view of current and historical drought data. It was updated 2/06, so it doesn't show any effect of the February 10-11th rains. Yes, we are still in a red bullseye, but it has been getting smaller! The bottom graph shows the severity of drought events since 2000.

Here's the link to this neat website (can you tell yet that I'm a weather geek?) :

<https://www.waterdatafortexas.org/drought/drought-monitor?period=2024-02-06&areaType=county&areaName=Kendall>



I toured Cave Without a Name near Boerne yesterday. While it showed signs of the recent rain, it still wasn't as "drippy" as usual because of the long drought. Did you know there are over 7000 caves in Texas but only 7 that are lighted and open to the public? They are all generally in and around the edges of the limestone-dominated Hill Country. Can you name them?

**\*\*NEWSFLASH\*\*** The results are in from the member survey. The board very much appreciates the 106 members who submitted responses to the survey. We're still going through the responses to see what information we can glean from the answers and comments. More information will be shared with you over the next month or two, but here are a few early conclusions from the data, including some graphs that show that the responses were spread evenly among the class year groupings and bigger counties so the response data should reflect a good cross-sector of the chapter membership.

- Active membership in 2023 was the highest post-Covid (215 vs 202 in 2022, 200 in 2021).
- Logged volunteer hours of 29,900 in 2023 were 4% lower than 2022.
- With only a few months to log volunteer hours, the class of 2023 logged 950 hours!
- 457 comments were received! Thank you, thank you!! Particularly for the brilliant ones!

Winter is nearly in the rear view mirror. See you in the wildflower gardens soon! - Jeff

From Lisa Flanagan, Hill Country Chapter Recording Secretary

Ernesto Cariño

To all our friends in Hill Country Master Naturalists, NPSOT, Master Gardeners, and more, I sadly announce the passing of our dear friend, Ernesto, of Medina Gardens Nursery, during the early hours of February 16th. Ernesto's knowledge and generosity will not be forgotten. Many of you helped out at the nursery as Ismael Espinozo spent more time caring for Ernesto. Your efforts have been so appreciated. People have asked if the nursery will remain open, and it will. Sometime in the near future there will be a celebration of Ernesto's life. I am sure many of us will attend.

ZOOMING INTO A NEW AGE

First of all, I want to say that I am somewhat tech-challenged. I was not born into the computer age as my son was. He started learning about computers in kindergarten! That being said... I believe that technology gives us good tools for many things we do on a day-to-day basis. Zoom, for instance, allowed us to have a training class during the pandemic. It allowed our Board to continue meetings when face-to-face meetings were not allowed. Zoom is appropriate for small groups to meet when logistics make it otherwise difficult. Again, that being said....

We see our society, increasingly, becoming device-dependent. We all have our smart phones, iPads, and laptops that travel with us wherever we go. It is not unusual to see people with their phones out all the time. I must admit guilt here, but I'm working on that. It seems to me that people are getting so used to their devices that they can almost find themselves in panic mode if they forget their phone! They depend on technology every minute of the day! This may be a slight exaggeration, but just think about it. Has a nice meal in a restaurant ever been interrupted by an obnoxious ringtone, followed by a loud conversation nearby? Then look at the table full of teenagers, half of them with heads down, pounding away on texts, Twitter, etc. They don't talk to each other the way they used to.

Of course, we can use our smart phones for iNaturalist, Picture This, iBird and other apps good for Master Naturalists. We can take wonderful pictures of what we find, saving them to share with our naturalist friends. Yes, friends. Many made during face-to-face Master Naturalist training classes. Then, at face-to-face monthly chapter meetings, and face-to-face hands-on Advanced Training opportunities. Of course, I do like the webinar choices we have as well. Face-to-face offers community building, forging friendships that may last to your last day. Our volunteer services also create more chances to make new friends, like-minded in their interests. MN training classes, held mostly in person, also provide these opportunities.

Community building. Getting to know one another. Sharing experiences. Like-minded liaisons. I have heard members say they don't know a lot of people they are hearing about or seeing at chapter meetings. Go up to them and introduce yourselves. Wear your name tags. Help them to know you. If you have been a member for many years, you may be able to help them learn more about our organization, help them become better volunteers. You have experience. Share it. And they may have something of value to share with you as well.

So, does technology, such as Zoom, have a place in our chapter? Of course, it does, but it is a tool to use sparingly. We don't want to lose the human element in our training and volunteering. Let's move forward using something new, but don't toss out what has been here before. In the meantime, remember our mission statement: "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 for the State of Texas."

Lisa Flanagan Class of 2013, Class Rep for class 2013 during 2014, Membership Director 2015-2017, President, 2018-2019, Immediate Past President 2020-2021, current Recording Secretary

## This Month We Honor



### Initial Certifications (Class of 2023)

Vicki Andrews, Phil Roberson

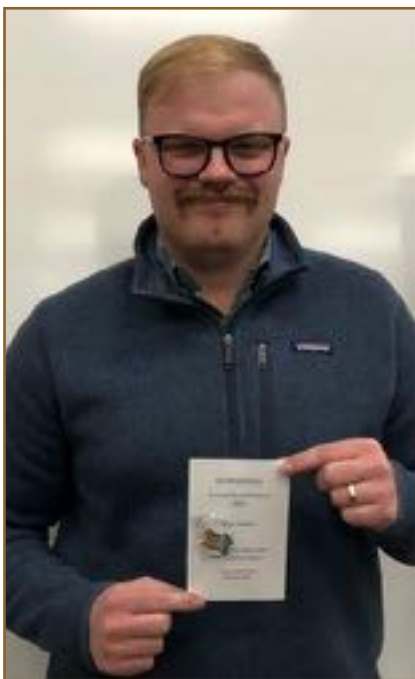
### Recertifications for 2024

Bob Binney, Patricia Poore, Gracie Waggener

### Milestones

500 hours: Eldon Sheffer - Brushed Silver Dragonfly

*Congratulations to members who received awards at the January meeting.*



Kevin Wessels



Selina Keeton, Lou Hugman



Chapter members are welcome and encouraged to attend and contribute to Board of Directors meetings. The board meets at the Riverside Nature Center from 2-4pm on the Monday of the chapter's monthly meeting.

From Lisa Flanagan, Hill Country Chapter Recording Secretary

### 2024 Training Class

New Class Director Carra Milikien is moving forward with the 2024 Master Naturalist training class. She has an enthusiastic committee to assist her with all facets of the class, from scheduling and presenters to the smallest details, to make a successful class and give the best experience to our new trainees. It will be a Fall class, and we look forward to providing the chapter with a fresh group of new Master Naturalists.

From Shelly Plante, Nature Tourism Manager, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Now that we are getting closer to Spring, I want to be sure to reach out to tell all Texas Master Naturalists that Birding Classic teams have time to register and that conservation grant funding is still available this year from the 28th annual Great Texas Birding Classic!

The registration deadline for the Great Texas Birding Classic is just over one month away, so register today to join this fun, friendly, birdwatching event. There are categories for all ages and skill levels (including beginners!), so select the one that works best for you.

Registration Deadline: April 1

Tournament Days: pick any day from April 15 - May 15 to participate

REGISTER TODAY: <https://tpwd.texas.gov/events/great-texas-birding-classic/rules-and-registration>

Reminder: Big Sit! is the only tournament category with one or more people to a team. All other tournament categories have 3-5 people per team.

NEW THIS YEAR: For the first time ever, the Sunrise to Noon Tournament will be a Regional (not Statewide) Tournament, so be sure to select which region you choose to bird for that category this year.

Have questions? Please see the following to help.

Or reach out directly by email or phone ([shelly.plante@tpwd.gov](mailto:shelly.plante@tpwd.gov)), 512-389-4500). I'm happy to help!

Step-by-step process on how to register: <https://tpwd.texas.gov/events/great-texas-birding-classic/how-to-participate>

Online registration: <https://tpwd.texas.gov/events/great-texas-birding-classic/rules-and-registration>

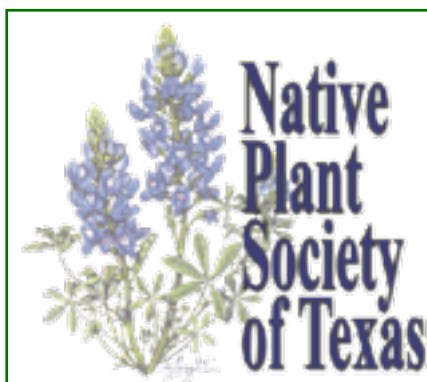
Tournament categories: <https://tpwd.texas.gov/events/great-texas-birding-classic/tournament-categories-1>

GTBC Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/birdingclassic>

Remember - it's for the birds! Registration fees and sponsorship dollars go toward Conservation Grants (<https://tpwd.texas.gov/events/great-texas-birding-classic/prizes>) for birding, nature tourism, and habitat restoration and enhancement projects throughout the state. Select winning teams will help choose which projects are funded. The more teams that register, the more funds raised and awarded through grants!

If you have any questions about the event, feel free to reach out. Join us for a fun way to spend Spring migration while also raising funds for birds and birding!

Shelly



The Fredericksburg Chapter monthly meeting will be at St. Joseph's Halle on February 27 from 6:30-8pm. George Cates, Restoration Specialist at Native American Seed, will share his knowledge about native seed selection and planting after the Business Meeting at 7pm.

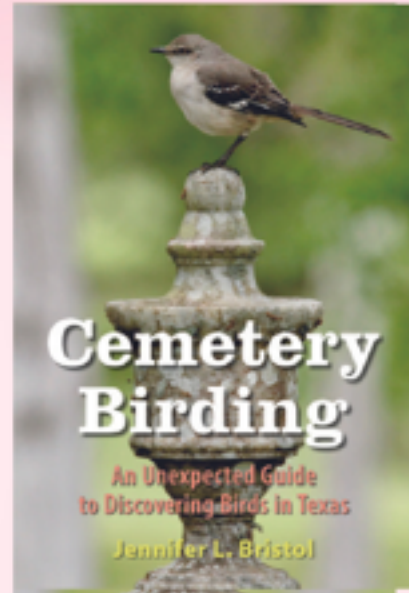
The Kerrville Chapter General Meeting on March 12 at the Riverside Nature Center. Doors open at 1pm; Business Meeting at 1:30; Presentation, Kerrville Water Update by Shelby Taber, UGRA at 2pm.



# Discovering Birds in Unlikely Places!

It might seem unlikely that a place designed for the departed could be teeming with life. Cemeteries have a long history of serving the dual purpose of honoring the deceased while also providing a space for the living to gather and grieve in the embrace of nature. Touted as some of the earliest public parks in the country -- with mature trees, open grasslands, meadows of wildflowers -- cemeteries are also attractive to birds and wildlife. In an age of distractions and disconnection, cemeteries create a sense of place where visitors can reconnect with nature while exploring the cultural history of a region. For bird watchers, cemeteries offer easy walking, open spaces to peer into habitats, and a peaceful place to feel the breeze and listen to the quiet conversations of nature.

From Beaumont to Amarillo and beyond, the cemeteries of Texas are alive with the sound of birdsong, and the FFNC invite you to join us and author Jennifer Bristol as she takes us on a birding journey that combines an extraordinary blend of Texas history and culture as well as tips and advice on what birds can be seasonally observed while treading carefully and ethically when exploring these sacred spaces.



## ***“Cemetery Birding”***

**A Nature Series Workshop Sponsored by the Friends of the Fredericksburg Nature Center**

**Presenter: Jennifer L. Bristol**

**Saturday, March 16, 2024 - 10:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M.**

**AgriLife Extension Office - Fredericksburg\***

**\*(Following the presentation, there will be a Book Signing and optional field trip to Greenwood Cemetery in Fredericksburg. Field trip limited to the first 30 people who register).**

**To register, contact Gracie Waggener at [gwaggener@flow-apps.com](mailto:gwaggener@flow-apps.com)**

**Approved for a total of Three (3) Hours of TMN AT Credit: Presentation 2 and Cemetery Walk 1.**



JENNIFER L. BRISTOL is the former director of the Texas Children in Nature Program at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Bristol is the 2018 and 2019 recipient of the Most Valuable Birder in the Great Texas Birding Classic and she guides walks for Travis Audubon. In addition to *Cemetery Birding*, she is also the author of *Parking Lot Birding: A Fun Guide to Discovering Birds in Texas* and is a contributor to *Texas State Parks the First 100 Years 1923-2023*. She resides in Austin, Texas.

From Jillian Mitchell, Content Specialist Coordinator, National Wildlife Federation

Are you passionate about monarch butterflies and their conservation?

Here's your chance to make a meaningful impact as a Citizen Scientist!

The National Wildlife Federation's Monarch Stewards Program is hosting a Citizen Science Workshop on March 28 at the Cibolo Center for Conservation in Boerne. Join for an exciting workshop that plays a vital role in the Tri-National monarch conservation efforts.

Click the following link to register!: <https://bit.ly/CitSciBTX>

Key Topics Include...

1. Understanding and utilizing the Larvae Monitoring Protocol (MLMP)
2. Testing for the *Ophryocystis elektroscirrha* protozoan parasite (Monarch Health)
3. Monarch tagging techniques for fall migration tracking
4. Collecting data on monarch sightings and reporting to esteemed organizations like Monarch Health Lab, Monarch Watch, and Journey North
5. Efficiently using iNaturalist and the Texas Nature Tracker as platforms for species identification and collecting specific monarch data

If you have any questions, please email [MonarchStewards@nwf.org](mailto:MonarchStewards@nwf.org).



### Agricultural Tax Appraisal Based on Wildlife Management



TPWD biologists invite you to join them as they discuss requirements and guidelines on how to maintain an agricultural appraisal through wildlife management. To register, please go to:

<https://tpwd.texas.gov/forms/wildlife/wildlife-tax-valuation-workshop-registration>

|         |    |   |
|---------|----|---|
| January | 26 | Online<br>9 am – 11 am  |
| Feb     | 16 | Hill Country Youth Event Center<br>3785 TX-27<br>Kerrville, TX 78028<br>8 am – 1 pm                                       |
| March   | 15 | AgriLife Extension<br>38 Business Ct<br>Fredericksburg, TX<br>8 am – 12 pm<br>*Optional field tour following the workshop |

**Questions?** Contact Erin Wehland  
[Erin.Wehland@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:Erin.Wehland@tpwd.texas.gov)

Upcoming Workshops

## Preserving & Conserving Our Waters

**Monday March 4, 2024- 9 AM CST**

**Frio Pecan Farm**  
144 Red Wright Rd  
Leakey, Texas 78873

**Landowner Workshop**  
Learn more about water on rangelands, riparian areas, water conservation strategies, and landowner assistance programs.

**Contact:**  
Rainey Bingham, Real CEA  
[rainey.bingham@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:rainey.bingham@ag.tamu.edu)  
(830) 232-6464  
Mike Morris, Kerr CEA  
[mike.morris@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:mike.morris@ag.tamu.edu)  
(830) 257-8688

Please RSVP by Wednesday, February 28, 2024

**AgriLife Extension**  
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension provides educational programs to people and enhances local resources regardless of race, color, age, religion, national origin, disability, sex, genetic information, or gender identity. \*The Texas A&M System is an Equal Opportunity Institution and does not discriminate on the basis of race or ethnicity.

**NRCS**  
NATIONAL RURAL COUNCIL FOR SCIENCE

**TEXAS COUNCIL FOR THE ENVIRONMENT**

**PROGRAM COST: \$75 LUNCH PROVIDED!**

## The View from Rusty Bend



*First bird of the year, Carolina Wren*

### Initiation

*Give me again O Nature, your primal sanities - Walt Whitman*

I put a leash on my grief,  
let it pull me outside.

Together we wander to the river,  
running aquarium clear in winter.

I let go.  
Cypress trees line the banks,

their knees soaking,  
like a row of crones

taking the waters.  
Their ways of knowing

gnarled and true.  
They talk amongst themselves

in muscular whispers, their breath  
scenting the air with balsam.

I lean against the smooth grooves of bark  
like the deep folds of a mother's skirt.

As if I must,  
I stay for hours.

I listen to their guardian wisdom.  
I hear them in my marrow.

Together we root  
in a shared quietude

as they heal something in me  
that they didn't break.

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January at Rusty Bend and I'm following a birding tradition—to let the first bird I see set the tone for the year to follow. My goal is to let it inspire my perspective and my imagination. New year, first bird, new outlook.

So as I held the year's first cup of coffee, warming the joints of my hands, up from the Mexican Sage bush jumps Carolina Wren. Perfect. Streaked with my favorite color, rust. Deep knee bending, facing this way and that, alert and singing so many songs. A perfect bird for perspective taking, always looking up, down, left, right.

I think of January as a time for rest, using dormancy to gather energy for growth in spring. Taking a clue from wren however, I look again and notice January is also a time of adaptation. The weather spins like the Wheel of Fortune— warm, damp, cold, dry, crazy cold, windy, smoky, foggy.

Mockingbird surprises me one frozen morning by skidding to a halt on the birdbath, picking one spot to drill, as if he knew exactly how long it had been below freezing. He expertly drills away like an ice fisherman, until he can drink. Perhaps he's mocking woodpecker. Other birds look on, heads cocked, as he raises his head to swallow. Eight male cardinals line up in the oak tree like little red planes on a taxiway, as if waiting, bemused.

I see more adaptation as the smaller birds figure out the suet feeder. If it is really frigid and the suet is hard, they can't get at it. So they wait nearby as the bigger birds hack it out, making a mess below them. Chickadee and wren dart in to grab the fallen treasures.

Looking far across the landscape, I enjoy the fresh play of morning sun on the bare branches of pecan and cottonwood. Dark, light, dark, light. My eyes search to find the red-tail couple warming after a cold night, scanning for a breakfast of voles. With no leaves, they stand out like stoplights.

A raven flies over. I look again. She has a white feather on her shoulder. I wonder at that, what the story might be. I became at her. She became at me.

I look it up and read that native peoples believed that the white reflected a purer embodiment of the raven's soul, representing her inner light and purity. I'll take that as a good omen.

Like my hero Aldo Leopold, I am one of those who cannot live without wild things. My thanks to the wrens for reminding me to look up, down and all around, to move with industry and the occasional song, to protect, preserve and restore their home.



Rusty Bend masquerades as an impressionist painting

Poem, images and essay by Lucy Griffith Copyright 2024

*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. A joint project of bird poems and images, with wildlife photographer Kenneth Butler, Wingbeat Atlas, can be preordered from [www.flowersongpress.com](http://www.flowersongpress.com)*

Comments welcome at [lucy@lucygriffithwriter.com](mailto: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) Building 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 2024**

President.....Jeff Schwarz  
Vice President.....Alice King  
Secretary.....Lisa Flanagan  
Treasurer .....Dot Maginot  
Advanced Training Director ....Patricia Poore  
Class Training Director .....Carra Milikien  
Communications Director.....Mark Hults  
Membership Director.....Phil Roberson  
Volunteer Service Director.....David Drake  
Past Class Representative .....Lou Hugman  
Past President .....Carla Stang  
Chapter State Representative...Vern Crawford  
Chapter Advisor: Michelle Hagerty



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 Phil Roberson  
[membership@hillcountrytmn.org](mailto:membership@hillcountrytmn.org)

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The opinions expressed are those of the authors and editor.

