

The Texas Star

Newsletter of the
Texas Master Naturalist
Hill Country Chapter
March 2024 Volume 21 Number 3



photo by Vern Crawford



The March Hill Country Chapter meeting will be a hybrid meeting on Monday, March 25. Doors open at 6pm for socializing. The business meeting begins at 6:30 and the presentation at 7:00. The presenter is Dr. Kim Arvidsson, Associate Professor of Physics and Astronomy at Schreiner University. He has been with Schreiner University for over ten years and is currently the Director of the Schreiner University Loftis Observatory as well as an Associate Professor of Physics and Astronomy. Dr. Arvidsson received his PhD in astrophysics from Iowa State University. He has presented to the Dynamic Learning Institute and is a TexS presenter (Schreiner's version of TEDx). Dr. Arvidsson will explain why eclipses occur and how rare they are. He will present what to pay attention to regarding the upcoming total solar eclipse, including eclipse viewing safety.

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 March 25.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE...JEFF SCHWARZ

It was only last month that my message was thankful for recent rains and hopeful for more. Alas, my apologies if I jinxed it. Thankfully, I don't believe in jinxes! The last good rain fell on my house on February 10, two days prior to my February newsletter submission due date. Most of the chapter area is still in an Extreme Drought and those that aren't find themselves in a Severe Drought. There's a good forecast for rain on the horizon so let's all pray we all will have received another dousing before the chapter meeting!

The chapter board is still digesting the great amount of feedback received from the membership in a survey taken last month. Today I would like to address one question, one that may bring out strong emotions in some. Question 14 asked, "What are your thoughts about the use of live online tools for Chapter and New Class meetings including whether it's a net positive or a net negative?"

An article in last month's newsletter expressed a concern about the use of online tools. While I agree with the author that meeting in-person versus remotely has many positive attributes, this view, if taken too far, tends to exclude some considerations in regard to in-person versus remote meetings. Readers who depend on online tools to participate in chapter meetings and training sessions may be wondering if the chapter was planning to pare back the use of online tools.

Fear not; online tools have become a significant part of our curriculum and communication with chapter members.

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The survey data affirms this assessment. 86 of the 106 survey respondents provided an answer to question 14, which asked about the use of online tools.

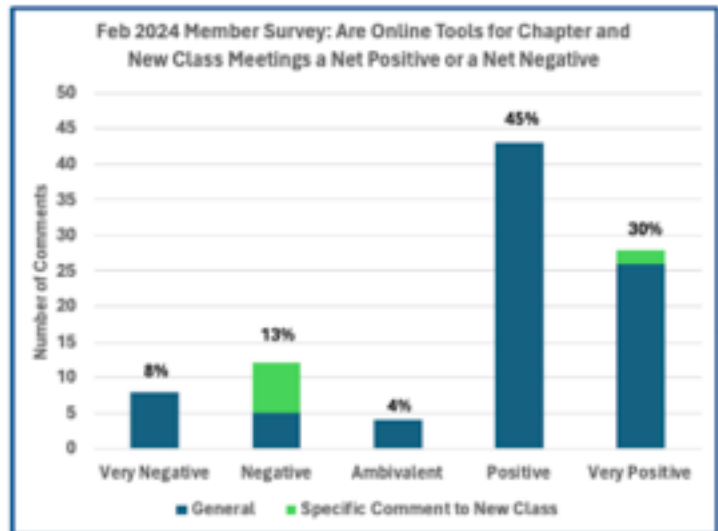
Nine of those provided dual responses on chapter meetings and new class meetings, so I considered the response count total as 95. As you can see in the graph, 75% of the responses were positive or very positive in response to this question.

Many of the positive responses focused on the theme of being a spread-out chapter: it's a long drive for many members to get to a meeting in Kerrville, and deer on an unlit highway do not make it a Sunday afternoon drive through the beautiful hill country.

Our Communications team continues to work out the kinks in order to make using online tools, such as Zoom for our monthly chapter meeting (including both business and AT sessions), a more enjoyable and productive tool. Please be patient with us.

I had a reminder through a Benjamin Franklin quote today. I'll leave you with that still timely quote:

"Without continual growth and progress, such words as improvement, achievement and success have no meaning."



This Month We Honor



Initial Certification - Class of 2023

Nancy Cole, Randee Thompson

Special Recertification - Class of 2023

Gordon Downey, Lou Hugman, Mark Moldrawski, Phil Roberson, Aimee Tennant

Recertifications for 2024

Janis Arterbury, Stephen Bishop, Norma Bruns, Lisa Flanagan, Frank Garcia, Bob Hansen,
Mark Hults, Katy Kappel, Dot Maginot, Lisa Marler, Deb Youngblood

Milestone Award

Lucy Spade, Debbie Thompson - 1000 hours, Gold Dragonfly

Congratulations to Eldon Sheffer, shown receiving his 500 hour award from Phil Roberson, Membership Chair, at the February chapter meeting.



Apply Now for the Class of 2024!

The Hill Country Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists is now accepting applications for our annual certification course. Learn about the natural world around us. Birds, bees, clouds, soil, trees, native grasses and more.

For application information visit our website and look under Course Info > 2024.

From Shelly Plante, TPWD Nature Tourism Manager

2024 Birding Classic Registration

Now that we are getting closer to Spring, I wanted to be sure to reach out to all TMNs to let them know 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 weeks 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. 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>

From Deb Youngwood

UGRA River Cleanup

UGRA has announced the 21st Annual Guadalupe River Cleanup. It will be on 7/27/2024. As last year, Flat Rock Park will be the gathering place after the cleanup. If you don't mind the heat, you're are encouraged to participate in the cleanup and festivities. However, many of you have indicated to me that July is just too hot. I concur. So, we will tackle something a little different for UGRA: a yearlong cleanup on Town Creek across from the soccer fields. We will still get the t-shirts and other UGRA gimmies for our effort and you can still show up at Flat Rock Park to celebrate on 7/27.

Register now at https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScUrJu5XVYavOcnQxhZJU7VFC1fBI0ABasKpqzGV3etsdHeKg/viewform?usp=sf_link .

Be sure to indicate that you are a TMN and the location you want is Town Creek. If you plan to bring friends and family, be sure to register them, too.


Before each cleanup, I will swing by UGRA to pick up trash bags and other supplies. Bring your own water containers and I will have plenty of water on hand for refills. I'll bring snacks, too. You bring you...and friends. Be sure to wear long pants, long-sleeved shirt, leather or canvas gloves and sturdy shoes that you don't mind getting wet. Wear a hat, too. If you have loppers or clippers for cutting out green briar, bring those, too.

Report your service using KR-08-C-FR Guadalupe River Cleanup and if you are a Texas Waters Specialist, put a check in the block.

I am looking forward to working with you again this year!
Deb

P.S Link to the video from last year: <https://youtu.be/sE0j2InCyxw>

Deb Youngblood
TexasWaters@hillcountrytmn.org
210-268-8187

	<p>Cheryl Hamilton, co-founder of the Balcones Invaders chapter, will share her extensive knowledge about non-native, invasive plants and how to eradicate them at the next meeting of the Fredericksburg Chapter on March 26 from 6:30-8 pm. at St. Joseph's Halle.</p> <p>The Kerrville chapter will provide a Library Talk by Pam Lienhard, "A Conversation About Invasive Plants: What They Are, Why They're Harmful, and How We Can Do Better," on April 13 at Butt-Holdsworth Memorial Library, 10:30-11:30am.</p>
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The Gardens at The Ridge becomes a Pollinator Champion

Monday February 26, 2024 was an exciting day for Gardens Director Sherry Hicks, her native plant warriors, headed by Tirza Kaylene, and the crew at The Gardens at The Ridge near Kerrville. They were recognized with a Pollinator Champions plaque presented by Sheryl Pender, the Kerrville coordinator for the Pollinator Garden Assistance and Recognition Program, and her team of PGARP volunteers. The PGARP program is a joint project involving both Texas Master Naturalist and Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT) volunteers who "educate local homeowners, groups, institutions and organizations about the importance of native plants and habitats in our Hill Country environment." (<https://txmn.org/hillcountry/pgarp/>)

Sheryl Pender and Donna Dutton first visited The Gardens at The Ridge last August and left some recommendations towards the installation of a demonstration pollinator garden. Since that time Tirza, along with Jenny Caesar, the garden's event creator, and pollinator warrior Shelly, have created a beautiful garden that is sure to attract lots of birds, bees, and butterflies this spring and summer. The Gardens at The Ridge can now proudly display their plaque, announcing to the public that they are Pollinator Champions.



Tirza Kaylene with (l-r) Sherry Hicks, Patricia Poore, Sandi Kennedy, and Sheryl Pender

WELCOME

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.



Spring's first wildflower, Wind Flower

Pleasant Duty

Invasive weeds can spoil a spring.
Rosettes of Malta Star Thistle
mock me, grinning
from under the fence. Musk
Thistle seems to grow overnight,
pure prickle.
My thoughts turn to massacre.
My weapons need tuning.
In the breezeway of the barn,
I gather hoe, shovel, loppers.
Sit quiet to my task.
Sliding the whetstone,
its perfect angle to the bevel,
five passes for each edge.
I know now —
don't muscle it, make
a pleasing rhythm and hum,
a minor chord
that whistles sharp.

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After so many years with a frustrating late arrival of spring, this February at Rusty Bend ushers in an early one. First signs are the smells. The wind shifts around to the southeast and some mornings it smells like the Gulf of Mexico is on my doorstep. Makes me want fried shrimp.

Today I walk outside and agarita blossoms have sugared the wind, the air smells like vanilla cookies. Then, tucked in the oak motts, elbow bush has bloomed and is quivering with small bees. No wonder it's nicknamed "spring herald."

Now I hear little hymns of spring begin. The descending piccolo of the field sparrow. The romantic aria of Bewick's wren: *chip, chip, chip, de-da-ah, tee-dee!* Carolina Wren, we call the hospital administrator bird: *Procedure, procedure, procedure, proceed!* The mated pair of ravens strokes slowly by, interested in my doings in the pasture. I be-caw at them like I always do. They reward me with some glottal tick-toks. Delicious to the ears.

I hear bugling and look up. Search and search and there they are in a long, undulating V. Hundreds of Sandhill Cranes heading back north. They set off a suite of yearning in me. Unclear, for what. I will ponder.

Then I remember to also look down. If the temps in the 80's, snakes might emerge for warming. But no, I find rosettes of early forbs and see the ones I know as invasives begging to be chopped. My tools are sharp and ready.

I see the little clouds that Mexican Plum pushes forth and the purple clusters of the Mountain Laurel I have waited for so long. They smell like grape Kool-aid. The bees are blissed out.

The neighbor's sheep have dropped their lambs. They drowse in puddles of cream and white. Just looking at them lowers your blood pressure.

Finally, our garden is ready to go. No freezes in the forecast. No rain to speak of either. Still a girl can dream. I ride the incoming curve of March and try to take the long view. It will rain when it does.

My poet hero, Margaret Atwood, says that "in the spring, at the end of the day, you should smell like dirt." That I can do for sure, I've got a fistful of new asparagus.



Mountain Laurel blossom with passenger

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*

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) 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

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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.

Questions about our chapter?

Email Membership Director Phil Roberson
membership@hillcountrytmn.org

The Hill Country Chapter does not recommend or endorse organizations or commercial sources mentioned in our newsletter.
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