

The Texas Star

Newsletter of the
Texas Master Naturalist
Hill Country Chapter
June 2024 Volume 21 Number 6



Spotted Towhee photo from Lucy Griffith



The June Hill Country Chapter meeting will be on Monday, June 24. Doors will open at 6:00 for socializing. The business meeting will begin at 6:30 and the presentation at 7:00.

Our speaker will be Rufus Stevens. His topic is Land Stewardship for Birds. For more information on his talk, see Alice King's article on page 3.

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 June 24.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE...JEFF SCHWARZ

*"Summer breeze makes me feel fine;
Blowin' through the jasmine in my mind."*— Seals and Croft, 1972

Where were you in the summer of 1972? Most of us were teenagers when this song came out, and another group of us were young adults. I was just a twelve-year-old growing up in Boerne, spending most afternoons at the pool, riding my bike all over town or mowing yards. They were simple times.

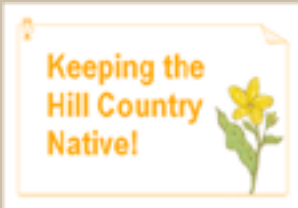
Summer breezes still make me feel fine, particularly if it means cooling off in the shade to avoid the hot sun and I have a cool drink in my hand. My tolerance for heat has shortened as I've gotten older. Same for most of us, probably.

As volunteers, we are the backbone of many organizations. Our dedication and impact are important to the organizations as well as the bugs and birds and plants we support! So how can we motivate ourselves as volunteers in the hot summertime? I asked ChatGPT to write me a 1000-word thesis on this question. I was impressed with its offering (Chat is a much better writer than I am!), but I didn't like most of the ten options it gave me as they really didn't apply to our world. Here are a few applications that may help us to stay engaged:

1. **Highlighting Impact:** We all seek meaningful experiences that align with our values. What examples do you have of how your volunteering contributes to our TMN mission? ***Please share successes, testimonials, and tangible outcomes of your work with me.*** Make them anonymous if you wish, but send me an email and I'll find ways to share stories which can reaffirm our sense of purpose and significance.
2. **Flexible Opportunities / Skill Development:** Flexibility is key to accommodating volunteers' summer schedules. We offer a variety of short-term, project-based opportunities that allow individuals to contribute without compromising their summer plans. Empowering volunteers to choose roles that align with their interests and availability fosters a sense of ownership and investment in the cause. See our volunteer projects list and calendar to see where you can step up and step in.

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This Month We Honor



Initial Certification - Class of 2023

Karla Marchell, Fletcher Thorne-Thomsen, David Touchon

Special Recertification - Class of 2023

Vicki Andrews, Selina Keeton

Recertifications

David Davies, Marylein Davies, Ginny deWolf, Mildred Dworsky, Brenda Fest, Cecilia Fuentes, Catherine Gauldin, Sarah Hilburn, Sharon Hixson, Terry Lashley, Pam Lienhard, Kathy Loring, Linda Myers, Rae Raiford, Tara Randle, Jeff Schwarz, Randee Thompson, Sherrill Wilson, Maura Windlinger

Milestone Awards

Alice King, Suanne Pyle - 500 Hours, Brushed Silver Dragonfly
Billy Guin, Jr., Patricia Poore - 1000 Hours, Gold Dragonfly

Congratulations to members who received awards at the May meeting.



Kirk Marchell



Kathy Webster, Travis Linscomb, Molly Houck, Tom Collins



Tom Collins received his 23rd consecutive recertification pin, and showed off his shirt.

President's Message, continued

Summertime is also a great time to learn something new. Many of our Advanced Training courses are done in the air-conditioned comfort of meeting rooms or your homes through hybrid meetings. The Advanced Training team is doing a wonderful job of communicating the many learning opportunities available to members.

3. Building Community: Summer provides an ideal backdrop for building vibrant volunteer communities. Organize social events, volunteer activities, and networking opportunities which foster camaraderie with your fellow Master Naturalists. Creating a sense of belonging and shared purpose can enhance motivation and retention rates. For example, Kathy Webster organized a lunch gathering on June 12th in Comfort for her class of 2022 (see picture). Be the Kathy Webster for your class or your neighborhood of Master Naturalists.



4. Flexibility and Adaptability: The last point I took from Chat was that we should recognize volunteers' evolving needs and preferences to maintain their engagement. Chat says, "Being receptive to feedback, adjusting strategies accordingly, and accommodating individual preferences demonstrates flexibility and responsiveness. Moreover, empowering volunteers to take initiative, propose ideas, and contribute in meaningful ways fosters a sense of autonomy and ownership." So, don't be afraid to offer your thoughts by email or phone.

From Alice King, Chapter Vice President

Rufus Stephens to address Land Stewardship for Birds at June Chapter Meeting

North American bird populations have declined steeply and continue to be under serious pressure throughout North America, Central Texas – largely due to human development. Mr. Stephens' presentation will describe ways that you can help shrinking bird populations recover through land stewardship techniques appropriate to specific habitats.

Needs for cover, food, and water can vary for woodlands and savannahs; grasslands; rivers and streams; canyons, springs, and seeps; constructed tanks, ponds, and lakes; and residential backyards. This is your chance to learn how to help our resident, migratory and over-wintering birds thrive and raise their young.

With Jan Wrede, Mr. Stephens has written Land Stewardship for Birds: A Guide for Central Texas (published by Texas A&M University Press, 2023). You can make arrangements to buy a copy of this book directly from Mr. Stephens at the June Chapter meeting by contacting Alice King at vicepresident@hillcountrytmn.org. The cost of the book is \$50. Alice can also communicate to Mr. Stephens any personalization request you have for your copy.

This book is also available for purchase online from Texas A&M Press at <https://www.tamupress.com/book/9781648430794/land-stewardship-for-birds/>. Many of you may have the prior version, "Attracting Birds in the Texas Hill Country." The current version includes new content on wildfire, improved bird census guidelines, updated plant lists, the latest standards for managing bird boxes, a more robust guide to managing brush species, and helpful apps and online resources.

Rufus Stephens is a long-time and champion of land stewardship in Texas. He worked for over 23 years with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and is one of the founders of the Texas Master Naturalists. He currently operates a consulting firm in Boerne, Rufus & Associates Wildlife and Natural Resources Consulting, LLC, where he assists landowners and communities in managing land for wildlife diversity, including attaining wildlife tax valuation status.

THE 2024 NEW CLASS IS IN PLACE and READY TO GO!

A new TMN training class has been selected. Thirty-two trainees are ready to begin on August 14 at the Welcome Reception in Fredericksburg.

Some 42 applications were received according to Phil Roberson, Membership Director. Applicants must have agreed to a background check and have paid for the class tuition of \$200. Scholarships are always available if requested.

And so, the 2024 New Class Committee is ramping up for the *implementation* phase of training curriculum.....classes in Fredericksburg, Kerrville, and Boerne, field trips to some of our favorites....Kerr Wildlife Management Area, Selah Bamberger Reserve, and Canyon Lake Gorge. It is a jam-packed schedule with 60+ hours of training and time for volunteer service!

Mentors are being recruited and assigned to individual trainees.

Want to be a mentor and have not volunteered? Mentor training is slated for a morning session on July 10. Contact Membership Director Phil Roberson at membership@hillcountrytmn.org.

Early Naturalists "Theater" to bring this training topic alive and in-person. Join the fun and costumes by volunteering to assist.

If you have a favorite naturalist, or just like to dress-up in costume, break out your butterfly net, and fishing vest, or bee-keeper suit, please join us in welcoming the new class. The session will be on Saturday, August 24th at Riverside Nature Center. Time to be determined.

Contact either Carra Milliken - newclassdirector@hillcountrytmn.org or Randee Thompson – RSThomp11@gmail.com.

Training schedule continuously updated on the Hill Country Chapter website:

<https://txmn.org/hillcountry/2024-class-schedule/>.

The View from Rusty Bend



Lady Guadalupe showing off her shadows

Artesian

I live on a cliff, above a river,
but there's a river below the river
that only I can hear
and even then, just sometimes—
when I am quite still.
I feel it, that positive pressure
pulsing through her foamy veins,
her heart beating slow as a whale.
Sometimes I sense the way she softens,
her secret truths, her hungers.

She's befriended the self below my self,
priming that which is under, that part
that feels too much,
that part that would crack me.
The river below the river makes
her argument for contentment
as she murmurs a path to the sea.
Buttressed by cypresses,
limbs like cathedral beams,
she swallows light, breathes a
circle of sky into each arch.
Shadows lie sooty across her pools
and eddies, then she
sings an invitation—
Come, let your soul go incognito,
rest yourself below.

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This May at Rusty Bend is a strange one. They call it a green drought. There has been enough rain to keep the wildflowers splashing the pasture with their colors—yellow, gold, purple. Also enough rain to keep the grasses green, hence the name. No deep moisture, though, and thus the trees are stressed, the river shrinking day by day. Sobering, so we ration water with due care.

Still my garden is thriving and relish now decorates the pantry. Tomatoes for every meal is my recipe for happiness. I go out every morning and remember how many poets sought solace in their gardens. I hear my father's approval when veggies pile in the basket in all their jeweled colors. A plate of vegetables was his love language.

We tried to keep the deer from eating my herbs by draping them with bird netting. Worked for deer, did not work for snakes. I found a Texas rat snake all tangled one day. She had gotten caught after raiding the titmouse nest.

Grrrr. Still, I felt sorry for her and spent 45 minutes bent over untangling her, cutting away the netting. Andy found a coachwhip in a similar mess a few days later. Both of them curiously calm, no striking, as they were rescued. We retired the netting for a piece of fencing.

We have so many juvenile birds for entertainment. Baby Painted Buntings make us laugh with their bad balance, crash landing on the perch above the bird bath. Juvenile titmice, all have bad haircuts, floppy pale mohawks. Young Canyon Wrens have returned to the porch after fledging. They are trying to learn their parents' descending song. They sound like they are revving a motor, ascending, all backwards. They have the notes, just the wrong order.

Zone-tail hawks are hanging around. We think they might have a nest nearby because they don't spook and fly away but just rotate their heads to watch us walk by. Their beaks shine in the sun.

The heat is on us early this year. Perhaps it's "character building" as my dad used to say. It's even too hot for the snakes. All the birds vanished as Andy's coachwhip rose up from the bushes to glide carefully across the bird bath like a creature from another world.

We take notes and do what we can to stay cool, finding contentment in the smallest pleasures, remembering to stretch and glide.



Canyon Wren nest building with cottonballs

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 begins at 7:00PM.

Board of Directors 2024

- President.....Jeff Schwarz
 - Vice President.....Alice King
 - Secretary.....Lisa Flanagan
 - TreasurerDot Maginot
 - Advanced Training DirectorPatricia Poore
 - Class Training DirectorCarra Milikien
 - Communications Director.....Mark Hults
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 - Volunteer Service Director.....David Drake
 - Past Class RepresentativeLou Hugman
 - Past PresidentCarla 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.

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. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and editor.

