



INDIAN TRAIL MARKER

Nov./Dec. 2013

News, events & calendar of the Indian Trail Chapter, Texas Master Naturalists...Serving Ellis and Navarro Counties

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From the Desk of the PRESIDENT

Eileen Berger, President ITMN

The next two months will be busy ones for Indian Trail Master Naturalist members, as we will be electing a new secretary and two vice presidents, welcoming new committee chairmen, planning for the next year, and enjoying each others company at our Christmas party. We will also be continuing to plan for the next training class to begin in March 2014. Watch for email announcements for these and other activities, check your calendars, and come to any and all the events. See you there.

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Calendar of Events, Projects & Meetings

NOVEMBER

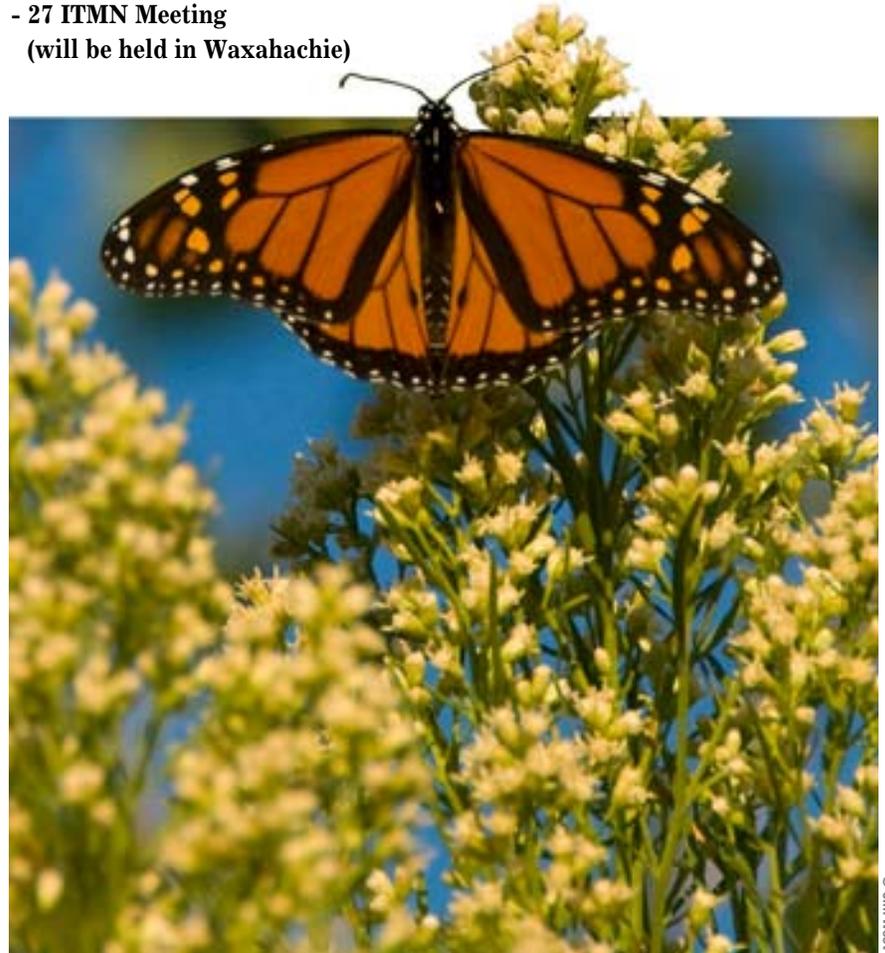
- 8 Kachina Prairie Burn Community Meeting with Q & A, 7 P.M., Tabernacle Baptist Church, Ennis, TX
- 9 Kachina Prairie Workday, 8:30 a.m.
- 14 Wolf Creek Workday
- 25 ITMN Meeting/How & Where to Report Bird Sightings - Tania Homayoun, Senior Conservation Biologist, Audubon Texas

DECEMBER

- 12 Wolf Creek Workday
- 14 ITMN Christmas Party - Home of Rebecca Schumacher

JANUARY

- 9 Wolf Creek Workday
- 27 ITMN Meeting
(will be held in Waxahachie)



© Jim West

Texas Master Naturalist 14th Annual Statewide Meeting

October 25-27, 2013 T Bar M Conference Center New Braunfels, TX

by Charlie Grindstaff, TMN

With 7 field trips, 71 advanced training classes and 8 social events to choose from there was something for everyone. The Texas Master Naturalist website states, "...we hope the impact will be felt by our local environments as we spread out over the State and go back to work with new ideas and new projects in mind. Hopefully, we are refreshed, encouraged, and full of new ideas!" I can assure you that I came home tired, brain overloaded and full of feelings of inadequacy. Thank goodness some rest took care of the first, my notes helped sort out some of the chaos and I am sure anyone taking a class from Barron Rector feels inadequate and that there is so much more we could be doing.

Ten members of ITMN attended this year's Meeting and from our conversations I believe each one had a good time and learned a lot. When asked about favorite classes we were all over the board...Native Bee Diversity and Identification, The Digital Plant Press, Conserving Biodiversity, Monarchs Milkweed and YOU, Save the Night, Watershed Workshop, and Drought and Its Overarching Impact.

This year's meeting was attended by the largest gathering (over 400) of Master Naturalists ever. One being Molly Hollar the woman who envisioned a native plants garden in Arlington. Many of us visited the Molly Hollar Wildscape as part of the ITMN Wildscapes Tour on September 28.

The WOW moments for me happened during the Digital Plant Press class...they taught us to scan plants to create our own field guide. No special equipment is required, just a cheap scanner and your computer. They do this with kids in the Bobwhite Brigade program so I think we could do this. I am thinking Kachina Prairie, Mockingbird Nature Park

and Wolf Creek could all use personalized field guides. Then some of us went to the Bracken Bat Cave and it was like someone rang the dinner bell. The merlins, red-tailed hawks, and Cooper's hawk arrived and waited with us for the bats to emerge. Yes, they did catch a few bats in flight. It was hard to know who to cheer for, the predator or the prey. When we cupped our hands behind our ears, the swirling bats sounded just like rain. Then the cry went up, "Skunk!" and sure enough at the mouth of the cave a skunk with a beautiful white flag tail was after grounded bats. We were told that during warmer evenings, snakes also wait at the mouth of the cave for any bat that comes within striking range. We left when it became too dark to see and the bats were still swirling counterclockwise out of the cave.

T Bar M Conference Center is a beautiful facility. The food was good. The weekend was full of education, entertainment and fellowship. The awards ceremony and keynote speakers were inspiring. Yes, I am refreshed, encouraged, and full of new ideas. They have not made a decision yet about the location of next year's meeting but I hope I will see you there.



Don Hellstern, Carolyn Ross, Paul Grindstaff, Carolyn Ogden, Pam Mundo, Cathey Collins, Joe Mundo, Charlie Grindstaff, Sara Cornett, Eileen Berger

If you are passionate about nature and wild things and enjoy learning, why don't you consider joining the Indian Trail Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists? Check out our website (<http://txmn.org/indiantrail/>) for meetings and information. We would love to have you.

PROJECT VIEWS

KACHINA PRAIRIE

The Texas Blackland Prairie was once a 12-million-acre sea of grass stretching from San Antonio to the Red River. Farming, grazing and urbanization have reduced the tall grass prairie to less than 5,000 acres, most of which is in small parcels of 3 to 15 acres. The 22 acres of Kachina Prairie are an outstanding example of the complex prairie ecosystem that supports a wide diversity of plants and animals and is a source of unique genetic material that is available nowhere else on earth.

This area is made available to the public through the generosity of:
The City of Ennis, Texas
The Ennis Garden Club
Natural Area Preservation Association



October 2, 11 volunteers at Kachina Prairie managed to clear 400-500' of the eventual 800' path from the city's mowed path to Lake Clark. Thanks to Ennis Garden Club president, Anne Anderson for working with us on this project.

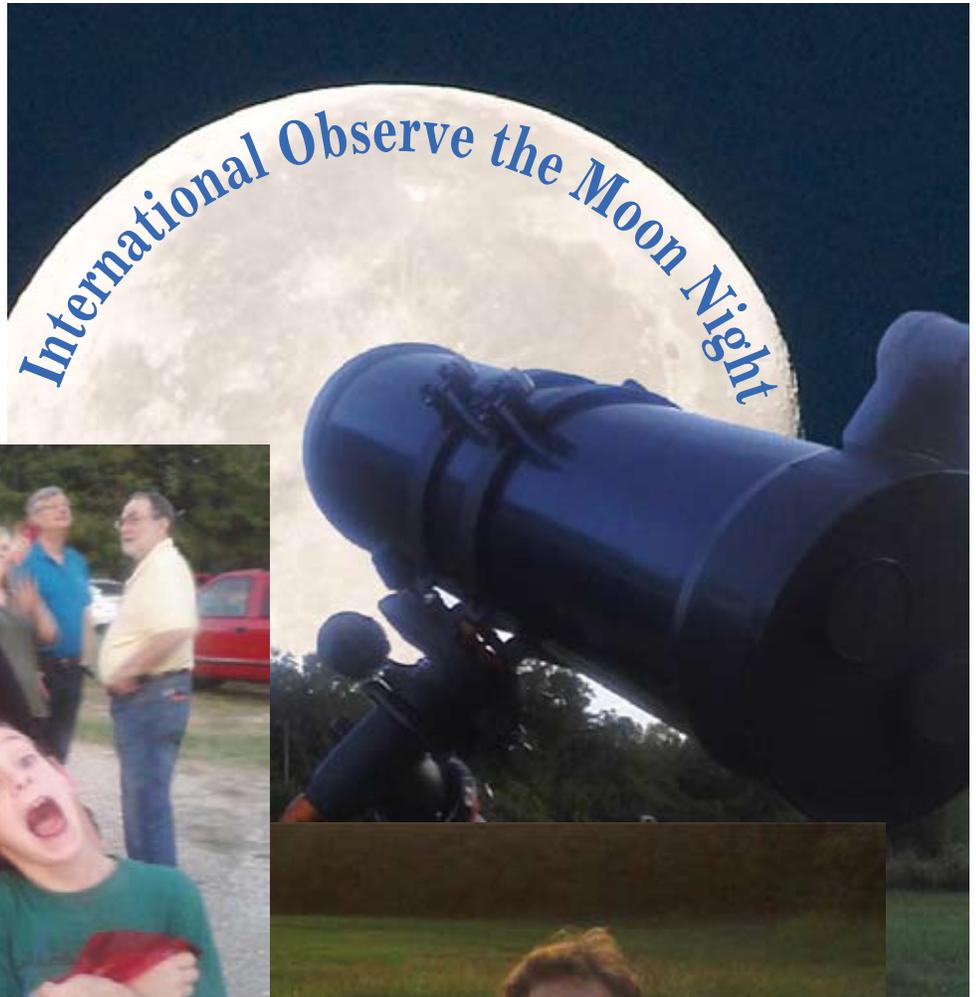


ITMN members attended the Ennis Garden Club meeting for a presentation with Daniel Deitz of the Texas Land Conservancy.



PROJECT VIEWS

51 attendees observed the moon on October 12 at Cherry Creek Nature Preserve in Red Oak.



GETTING TO KNOW NIKKI MILLER, 2013 CLASS REPRESENTATIVE

by Kathleen Mack

Can you give us some general information about yourself? Things like: Where were you born? Where do you live now? Family history — married, children, pets, etc.? Career info? Hobbies?

I was born in the middle of Big Cotton in West Texas and raised in the suburbs of Tampa, Fl. I've lived in north Texas since high school. I've been married for 17 years, this December. Before parenthood I worked as a home health aide, a sous chef, and caterer. Since parenthood, I've been a homemaker and home schooler. My husband and I sold our



collection of poultry and traveled the Pacific Northwest. We lived in a 25 foot Airstream with our son, 2 cats, a dog, and a rabbit.

How did you learn about ITMN?

Our house sits on a limestone escarpment. We have 3 acres of creek wash off bottom

land. My husband's grandparents ran a few horses on it for 30 years. It's been grown over for 25 years. I discovered the TMN in a wild scape book when we began cleaning up our property. It was 4 years before I went to training.

What made you decide to join?

I joined the Indian Trail chapter because their training was in the spring and I had missed the training for North Texas last winter.

What activities are you involved in for ITMN?

Since I completed training this spring, my mother has been diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer. I'm currently minimally active in my chapter.

What would you like to achieve as an ITMN?

I enjoy teaching, cooking, sewing, party planning, research, and animal care. I joined TMN program to learn more about nature and I have discovered that I am equally fascinated with learning about other people and how they relate to nature. It's a given that being a Master Naturalist will increase my knowledge about nature. I really look forward to interacting with people who share my love of nature

Anything else you would like to add?

My husband and I enjoy traveling.

A note from Travis Hull thanking Aaron and the chapter for their support in attaining his Eagle Scout certification.

Aaron Gritzmaker
PO Box 260
Maypearl, TX 76064

Dear Mr. Gritzmaker,

I would like to express my thanks for your support and help in my Eagle Project. I could not have accomplished such a project without you and your fellow Master Naturalist members' professional guidance. Thank you for helping my workers know exactly what brush needed clearing, helping ensure safety at the work site, and directly aiding in the clearing of the brush. I understand that your chapter has been working very hard to improve and maintain the park, so I have enclosed some before and after pictures of the work site so that you and your members may remember the progress made in the park that day at the project. Thank you for aiding an amazing service organization like the Boy Scouts of America in their duties to better the community. I will soon be sending you an invitation to my Eagle Ceremony on December 7th, 2013 at Ovilla United Methodist Church. You and all of your chapter's members are invited to attend. Once again thank you for your guidance at the project and I hope that you and your chapter will continue to enable other Scouts like myself to succeed in Eagle Projects like my own in the future.

Sincerely,

Travis Hull



Beelzebub Bee-eater *Mallophora leschenaulti*

As we were walking back from the bird blind at Mockingbird Nature Park this morning (October 21, 2013), we noticed a large black shape hanging from some broom weed at the side of the trail. On closer inspection, we saw it was a giant robber fly in a state of torpor. The weather was cool and cloudy, with the temperature about 55° and the fly was barely moving so we were able to get a good look at it. It was a Beelzebub Bee-eater and one of the largest Asilids in the U.S. This one was an impressive two inches long. The species was first reported and collected in south Texas in 1917. It is thought that several species commonly found in Mexico and South America were blown northward during a tropical storm in August 1916 and have since established populations here in Texas. According to BugGuide.net its current range is Mexico and Texas.

The adults lay a white egg mass, which is unusual for Asilids. This was documented near Austin in 2004. The eggs hatch into slender, legless larvae that develop through several stages in the soil before pupating. The life cycle usually requires more than one year to complete.

All adult robber flies have piercing-sucking mouthparts. They perch on stems of low plants or other objects and attack prey in the air. They feed on bees, beetles, dragonflies, other flies, grasshoppers, leafhoppers, wasps, and other insects. The larvae live in the soil, in compost and other habitats, feeding on organic matter, other arthropods such as white grubs, beetle pupae and grasshopper egg masses.

Classification

Kingdom Animalia (Animals)
Phylum Arthropoda (Arthropods)
Class Insecta (Insects)
Order Diptera (Flies)
No Taxon (Orthorrhapha)

Superfamily Asiloidea
Family Asilidae (Robber Flies)
Subfamily Asilinae
Genus Mallophora (Bee Killers)
Species leschenaulti (Mallophora leschenaulti)

Reference sources:

Mallophora page: <http://www.hr-rna.com/RNA/Rflypages/Mallophorapage.htm>

Mallophora leschenaultia: <http://bugguide.net/node/view/55198>

Texas A&M AgriLife Insect Guide: <https://insects.tamu.edu/fieldguide/cimg228.html>

NWF Certifies New Wildlife Habitat in Ellis County

Congratulations to our own Kitty Smith for her efforts.



Ennis, TX – 11-06-13. The National Wildlife Federation® (NWF) is pleased to recognize that Kitty Smith in Ennis, Texas has successfully created an official Certified Wildlife Habitat™ site. NWF celebrates the efforts of Mrs. Smith to create a garden space that improves habitat for birds, butterflies, turtles, frogs and other wildlife by providing essential elements needed by all wildlife – natural food sources, clean water, cover and places to raise young. “Providing a home for wildlife in our communities – whether it’s at home, or in schools businesses or parks – is the demonstration of a healthy and active ecosystem. There is no more rewarding way to stay connected to nature right outside your door,” said David Mizejewski, naturalist with the National Wildlife Federation.

“I enjoy watching birds and butterflies and seeing flowering perennials. Choosing Texas native plants in my yard not only gives me something to enjoy, but makes it more inviting to wildlife and conserves water,” said Kitty Smith. NWF’s Certified Wildlife Habitat program has been helping people take personal action on behalf of wildlife for more than 40 years. The program engages homeowners, businesses, schools, churches, parks and other institutions that want to make their communities wildlife friendly.

This new certified habitat joins NWF’s roll of more than 150,000 certified habitats nationwide. Wildlife habitats are important to year-round wildlife residents as well as species that migrate, such as some birds and butterflies. Each habitat is unique for both beauty and function.

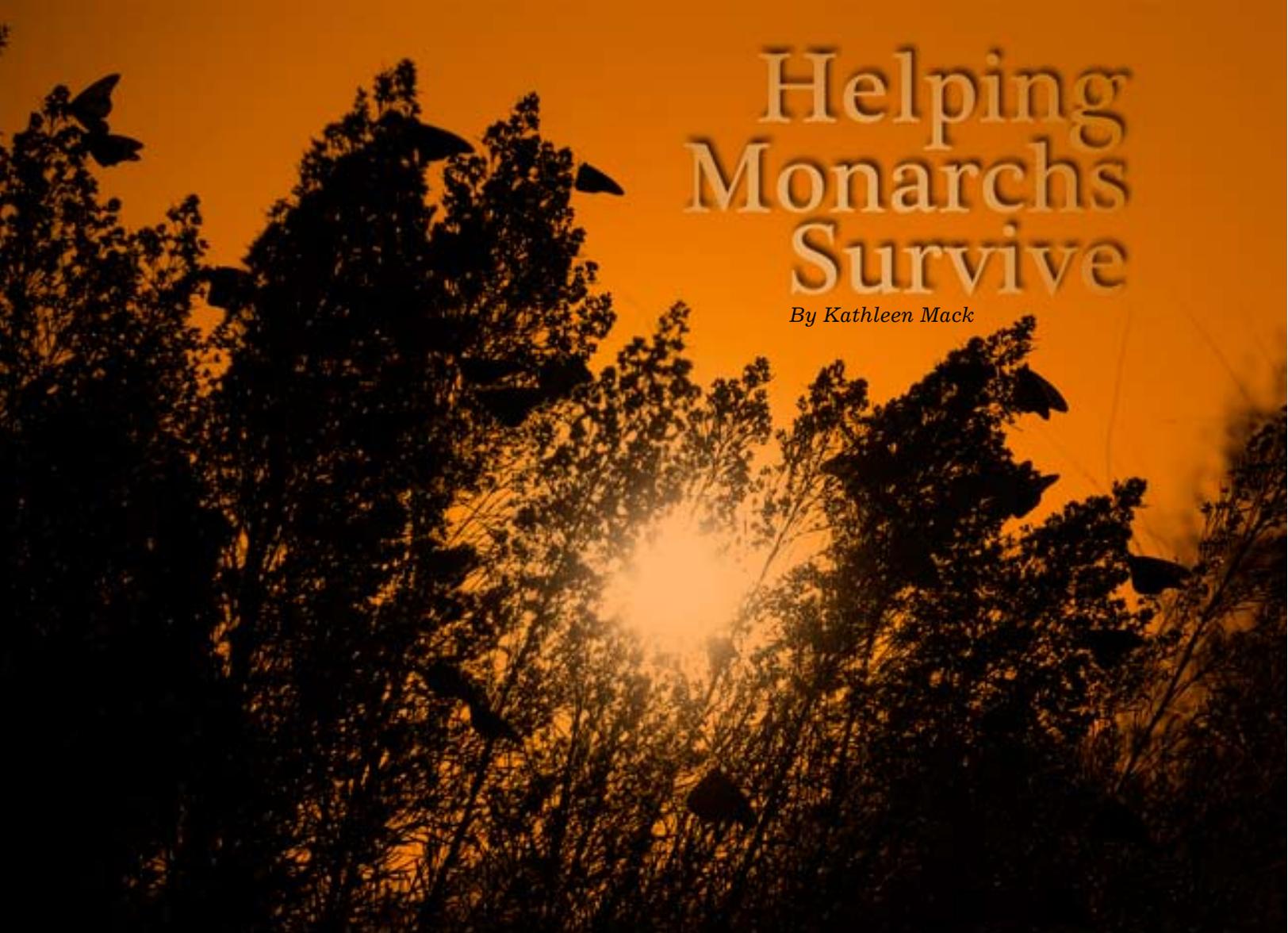
The Smith’s habitat comprises 20 acres of Blackland prairie that has seen both crop production and grazing prior to their purchase of the place. Over the ten years they have owned it, Kitty and her husband, Russ, have restored almost half their acreage to native prairie and hope to eventually

convert all of it.

To encourage wildlife they have a large tank that provides year-round water to turtles, frogs, dragon flies and migratory birds. In addition, they have landscaped their yard with drought-tolerant Texas native flowering perennials and shrubs such as Salvia Greggii, Pink Evening Primrose, Coral Honeysuckle, Flame Acanthus, Purple Cone Flower, Blackeyed Susan and many more. Bird baths and feeders in the backyard are inviting to birds and butterflies and provide an easy way for the Smith’s to watch and enjoy the diversity. “Previously, my yard wasn’t dynamic or exciting. Now, by adding a feeding station, native plants and bird baths my yard is alive with wildlife I had not seen before. Early on we installed blue bird houses in the back of our property and they get used every year. We also installed a bat house several years ago and hope one day that bats move in,” explained Kitty. “As member of Indian Trail Master Naturalists, I have really learned a lot about nature and the importance of preservation and conservation. The NWF Certified Wildlife Habitat fits right in with what Texas Master Naturalists are trying to do.”

People who create a Certified Wildlife Habitat receive a one-year subscription to the award-winning National Wildlife magazine, a personalized certificate and quarterly e-newsletters with tips for improving their habitat for wildlife. They also are eligible to purchase NWF’s special outdoor sign designating their yard or garden as wildlife-friendly.

For more information on gardening for wildlife and details on how an entire community can become certified, visit www.nwf.org/habitat or call 1-800-822-9919. The mission of the National Wildlife Federation is to inspire Americans to protect wildlife for our children’s future.



Helping Monarchs Survive

By Kathleen Mack

Migrating Monarchs gathering for the night at a butterfly B & B in an abandoned sand pit East of Ferris.

I was recently visiting my sister in St. Louis, Missouri, when she happened to mention that she had not seen any monarch butterflies this year. I responded that she needed to plant some milkweed.

Realizing that she did not know where to find milkweed seed, she contacted a friend who works for the Community Action Agency of St. Louis County, which is responsible for community gardens. One thing led to another, and she soon found herself being encouraged to create a Monarch Waystation.

Monarchs are among one of nature's most beautiful creatures, and their migration each fall is a truly remarkable and fascinating event. Hundreds of millions of monarch butterflies migrate from the United States and Canada to overwintering areas in Mexico and California. Nature, however, has created a

problem for the monarch because it is totally dependent upon the milkweed plant to reproduce. Perhaps when milkweed was in abundance this was nature's way of keeping the plant in check. Now, however, milkweed has been eliminated on farms and roadsides by herbicides and is in short supply. This in turn threatens the monarch, and they are in danger of disappearing.

That is where a Monarch Waystation, which is sponsored by the Monarch Watch program comes in. One of the places you can buy milkweed seed is at their website: <http://monarchwatch.org/waystations/>

In addition to selling milkweed seed you can also buy a kit, which contains plants that will provide both milkweed and nectar plants. Your space can also become a certified Monarch Waystation. *continued*

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Waystations can be in your home garden, or a community effort. They might even be at a business, school, park, or nursing home. In order to be certified, you will need a plan, which involves planting not only milkweed but nectar plants as well

All monarch life stages require shelter, which can be provided by the variety of the plants and the density, or closeness of plantings. Depending on the species and size of the plants a density of 2-10 plants per square yard is recommended. This density is the

most effective in providing shelter from both predators and the elements.

So, my sister and I made a trip to the Missouri Botanical Gardens where we did purchase milkweed seeds. It remains to be seen if she will be able to create a Monarch Waystation in her community, but one thing is certain. She will plant those seeds. Even small efforts will help. I plan on buying a kit myself. If you love the monarch perhaps you can help as well.



ON GOLDEN ROD.

The last drop of fall color; a double sunrise.

WHAT IS A BLACK VULTURE?

by Kitty Smith

The Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) is a large bird with a wingspan of 1.5 m (4.9 ft) though that's relatively small for a vulture. It has black plumage, a featherless, grayish-black head and neck, and a short, hooked beak. Black Vultures are resident in tropical and warm temperate climates from southern Canada to southern South America. In the northern parts of their range they have a southward migration in the fall and a returning spring migration.

The Black Vulture prefers an open habitat such as lowlands with adjacent highlands, open fields, desert terrain, garbage dumps, and urban or rural centers avoiding dense forests as much as possible. Black Vultures have weak feet, adapted more for running than for clutching. In flight, a short, square tail and a large white patch on the undersurface of the wing, at the base of the primaries, distinguish it from the Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*). The two species often associate: the Black Vulture makes up for its poor sense of smell by following turkey vultures to carcasses. Highly social birds with fierce family loyalty, black vultures share food with relatives, feeding young for months after they've fledged.

Black Vultures are monogamous breeders that hatch one brood per breeding season in open lowlands, highlands, and garbage dumps. They lay their eggs in hollow bases of trees or stumps at a height of 10 -15 feet, on the floor of shallow caves, on the floor of abandoned farm buildings, on cliff edges, on the ground under dense vegetation, in holes under rocks, in hollow logs, and in crevices in city buildings. They do not use materials to build their nests. Usually two eggs are laid that are pale grey-green or pale blue with brown spots or blotches. Both parents incubate eggs for 32 to 41 days and the young fledge, or leave the nest, at 63 to 70 days old. Natural hybrids have been

observed between the Turkey Vulture and Black Vulture in captivity.

Black Vulture males court a female in a small group that walks around her with wings spread partly and rapid head bobbing. They are highly social, forming flocks to forage and roosting in large aggregations. These vultures form family units by associating with immediate kin and extended relatives. When startled, the vulture will regurgitate food that it has just eaten in order to be able to take off to fly.

When hunting, the vulture rides thermals upwards for terrestrial soaring while only flapping wings from time to time. Usually the vultures are silent but may hiss, grunt, and utter low barking sounds when fighting over food source.

Black Vultures feed almost exclusively on carrion, locating it by soaring high in the skies on thermals. From this vantage they can spot carcasses and also keep an eye on Turkey Vultures, which have a more developed sense of smell and follow them toward food. Black Vultures often gather in numbers at carcasses and then displace Turkey Vultures from the food. Their carrion diet includes feral hogs, poultry, cattle, donkeys, raccoons, coyotes, opossums, striped skunks, and armadillos. Sometimes Black Vultures wade into shallow water to feed on floating carrion, or to catch small fish. When carrion is scarce they are known to kill skunks, opossums, night-herons, leatherback turtle hatchlings, and livestock, including young pigs, lambs, and calves. They also often investigate dumpsters and landfills to pick at human discards.

Data for this article comes from:
Animal Diversity Web and
allaboutbirds.org.



Photo courtesy of Susan Faulkner Davis ©



WHAT IS PROJECT FEEDERWATCH?

by Kitty Smith, TMN

I JUST SIGNED UP FOR IT; YOU CAN, TOO!

Project FeederWatch is a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders at backyards, nature centers, community areas, and other locales in North America. Participants periodically count the birds they see at their feeders from November through early April and send their counts to Project FeederWatch by inputting the data online. FeederWatch data help scientists track movements of winter bird populations and long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance.

This citizen-scientist project is operated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Bird Studies Canada. Anyone interested in birds can participate including children, families, individuals, classrooms, retired persons, youth groups, nature centers, and bird clubs. Participants watch their feeders as much or as little as they want over two consecutive days as often as every week (less often is fine). They count birds that appear in their count site that are attracted by something that the participant provided (such as FeederWatch data) show which bird species visit feeders at thousands of locations across the continent every winter. The data also indicate how many individuals of each species are seen. This information can be used to measure changes in the winter ranges and abundance of bird species over time.

What sets FeederWatch apart from other monitoring programs is the detailed picture that FeederWatch data provide about weekly changes in bird distribution and abundance across the United States and Canada. Importantly, FeederWatch data tell us where birds are as well as where they are not. This crucial information enables scientists to piece together the most accurate population maps.

Because FeederWatchers count the number of individuals of each species they see several times throughout the winter, FeederWatch data are extremely powerful for detecting and explaining gradual changes in the wintering ranges of many species. In short, FeederWatch data are important because they provide information about bird population biology that cannot be detected by any other available method.

Project FeederWatch had its roots in Ontario in the mid-1970s. Through Canada's Long Point Bird Observatory, Dr. Erica Dunn established the Ontario Bird Feeder Survey in 1976. After a successful 10-year

run with more than 500 participants, its organizers realized that only a continental survey could accurately monitor the large-scale movements of birds. Therefore, Long Point Bird Observatory decided to expand the survey to cover all of North America.

Realizing they would need a strong partner in this venture, Long Point approached the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and a perfect match was soon made. The Lab's connection to thousands of bird enthusiasts across the United States, its sophisticated computer systems, and Long Point's experience at managing feeder surveys made Project FeederWatch a hit from



the start. During that first year, more than 4,000 people enrolled. FeederWatchers represented every state in the U.S. (except Hawaii) and most provinces in Canada, especially Ontario. The dream to systematically survey winter feeder birds over a wide geographic range was in place.

As of the 26th season (2012-13), the number of participants involved in FeederWatch had grown to more than 20,000. Project FeederWatch continues to be a cooperative research project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Bird Studies Canada (formerly the Long Point Bird Observatory). Today, FeederWatch is a proven tool for monitoring the distribution and abundance of winter bird populations.

I just signed up for it; you can, too! Check out <http://feederwatch.org/> for details.

It Takes a **Village**

By Julie Collins, Volunteer Coordinator at Dogwood Canyon

I LOVE THE TMN PROGRAM. I have been a member of the North Texas Chapter since 2005 and have made many good friends through this program. Even before I was Volunteer Coordinator for Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center (DCAC), I noticed all the MN volunteers and knew that it was truly a splendid match. I could go on and on about the value and excellent traits of our Indian Trail MN volunteers; priceless, enthusiastic, dedicated, mission-driven, well-educated and/or very curious and always want to learn more and often add to our own knowledge at the Center. Instead, I would like to share some examples of all that you do for DCAC.



Carolyn Ogden entering data...much more fun than cutting out masks!

Paul and Charlie Grindstaff are the first two volunteers that I met during my outdoor education internship at Dogwood Canyon. Just merely mention something you need and they come up with a solution. We needed a something to prop up a temporary welcome sign. No problem, they whipped up a nice iron stand to custom fit the sign. Oh, did you say you needed help with the sump pump for the basin? Ahhh, yes, the flooding basin...and the tedious job of renting a pump and hoses, connecting and then lowering the pumps, attached to a rope, over the railing and down into the flooded basin.

Tania, our Conservation Biologist, can now add sump pump to her list of skills. Tania was determined to get a working solution for the flooding basin and Paul came to the rescue with the needed skills. Now Paul was not going to go down into that little hole in the ground to set up the piping needed for a more permanent pump installation, but he was very willing and patient to teach Tania, step by step, how to prime and glue PVC pipe down in the hole. This took a few visits, shopping for parts, cutting, tweaking, but Paul saw it through and it got done.

On another occasion, our past Education Manager, Misty, was preparing for our Migration Celebration event. She thought boy, it sure would be nice to have a "What's your wingspan" activity for the kids. She and Charlie talked about it and agreed that with such short notice that just something temporary, out of cardboard perhaps, would be great. Well, Paul and Charlie show up one day (I don't remember how long, a week perhaps) and announce "It's done". Well, it was not only done, it was permanently done, as in beautifully painted wood carved wings, all perfectly layered on top of each other. Someone should have had a camera to capture all the gaping mouths on staff members, gawking, oohing and ahing over this piece of ART!

One of our primary objectives is to connect people with nature, especially children. With just one full time educator and one part time educator, you can imagine how much we are in need of volunteer educators, especially when 120 students are scheduled to be immersed in nature. Eileen Berger has been such a steady help for us.

Although she also helps as a Reception Docent, she jumps in when we need an educator and often more than once a week. Her vast knowledge has allowed her to step in to spur of the moment needs and is capable of teaching any of our modules, whether bird feeding experiment, animal encounter or guided hikes.

continued

Aaron Gritzmaker sprucing up the front entrance landscape during 4th Saturday habitat workday



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In fact, most recently, she came to help us at our Owl Prowl event. I had tasked her with either reception desk or monitoring crafts. We thought, depending on the crowd, we may do more than one night hike. Well, when over 200 people showed up, we immediately had a pow-wow to make some, ahem, slight adjustments. I knew that Eileen and the ITMN chapter had done many night hikes. I asked if she would mind leading a night hike instead, or two, or three; in all, we had 6 night hikes that evening with at least 2 going on simultaneously at all times. Eileen was a trooper and stepped right up to the task and the hikers had a wonderful experience!

Speaking of being flexible, our habitat crew is often in for a physical adventure. Squatting to pull 'weeds', lunging up a hill with a wheelbarrow, bicep curls as stones are lifted, overhead press to remove hazardous limbs over the trail. Aaron Gritmaker is one of my dedicated habitat crew that is always positive and always up for whatever arduous task we ask of him. Need a hole dug? Done. Need rocks moved from pile A to pile B? Let's do it! Need 20 trips of filling wheelbarrows with mulch? You got it!

Aaron, a couple of NTMN members and myself headed up the West Loop trail to cut up dead juniper trees for use as main posts and filler slats. We hiked, we cut, we trimmed, we hauled, many, many trunks and limbs cleaned up and put in piles in 3 different overlook locations. Aaron even let me have a shot at working the pole chain saw; it required a little more finesse than I thought because Aaron makes it look so easy.

But I have to say that the most flexible volunteers are the Reception Docents. They truly have to be prepared for most anything. In addition to the usual tasks: greeting visitors, talking up the Center, giving out information, selling items in the nature store, making copies, folding more brochures, or checking and stocking the bird feeders, volunteers may also be helping to sweep up after it's rained and the trails are muddy, de-gumming old tape on plexi-glass, graphing and entering data, running after guests who just walked on by without paying (now a thing of the past) or researching, researching plant signs, researching citizen science programs, researching environmental observance days (the week of Oct. 21 was native plant week, by the way) and of course, the tedious of all tedium's, cutting out animal masks for the kids craft. I'll never forget; I had asked Carolyn Ogden to cut masks, which she dutifully began to do. When I came back to see if she would prefer another task, she immediately threw down

the mask and scissors and pushed it aside all while answering with a resounding 'Yes'! We all laughed. I understand; not all tasks are suited for everyone and when the opportunity arises, I will gladly play to your strengths! Of course, what one person thinks is uninteresting, another finds fascinating; either way, we find out what works and sometimes find a new interest for a volunteer. I had Debbie Pierce picking the teeny-tiny, itty-bitty baby snails off the old lettuce that was to be discarded, we didn't want to throw the little babies out and waste all that good reproduction! So, Debbie (and Kathleen, Cathey, Eileen, and others) will sit with a bright lamp, a pair tweezers or just their fingers and carefully lift off the wee snails and place them back in their container. Turns out Debbie liked doing this and mentioned

she liked the animals and would like to work with them more. Now she does, each Thursday afternoon. There are so many examples of how ITMN volunteers help the Center and the staff.

Volunteers save the staff time and allow them to work on other details that are often deadline-oriented. They help accomplish goals and complete projects in a few days rather than the weeks or months if done by staff alone. They save us money, for sure, which allows us to complete even more goals and projects. It's a lesson for me as well. I learn from my volunteers and hope to always improve as the volunteer coordinator and always appreciate their patience and enthusiasm. And, it's specifically the TMN enthusiasm for nature, connecting people to nature and caring for nature that also helps keep us motivated and enthusiastic about what we do. It truly does take a village to run a nature center. A million thank you's for making it happen.



Eileen Berger. Showing off Clyde, our 3-toed box turtle, and his adaptations.

ATTACK OF THE INVASIVES

SEVERAL REALLY GOOD REASONS TO GO NATIVE.

*by Jim West & Linda Dunn, Education Director,
JBS Wetland*

What you see in the above photo, was just last year, a field of almost solid bluebonnets. As you can see, there were not many last spring. This is the aftermath of an invasion of the plant, Mediterranean mustard, otherwise known as bastard cabbage. Once bastard cabbage becomes established, it will overtake almost any plant in its path; a sad ending for the bluebonnets in the picture. Therein lies the problem with bringing plants and animals from other locations other than Texas. These types of plants and animals are known as invasive species. More often than not, the invasive thrives and the native declines.

The natural controls that are in place in a species native environment are not present in the new environment when moved. With no natural predators or diseases to control them, they quickly thrive in their new habitat, pushing out the native species, often until there are no natives left.

In Texas lakes, one invasive species that is getting a lot of attention lately is the zebra mussel. The zebra mussel is originally from the Caspian & Black Seas. Being no more than 2" in length, able to have 1 million veligers (baby mussels) a year and colonizing by the thousands, each mussel filters approximately 1 gallon

of water a day. This takes food from native filter feeders and essentially changes an entire ecosystem over time. The zebra mussel was not introduced intentionally to the waters of the U.S. They were introduced into the Great Lakes from the ballast water from ships coming from Europe in approximately 1988. The fact that they have made their way into Texas waters in just a few years is a sterling example of how quickly an invasive species can get out of control.

In Florida, the Burmese python has been illegally released for years, first turning up in 1979, and having a negative impact on the Everglades National Park. With populations estimated at 10,000, pythons are eating the dominant predators (i.e. alligators) that keep other species in check.

These invasions have impact beyond the obvious as they divert funds from research and management of native species, to programs to remove and control invasive species. With few restrictions on the pet or nursery trade on what can be brought into the country, people are able to buy invasive species that more than likely, end up in the wild competing with the natives. The best defense against invasives is to not get them in the first place. The lesson here is that native plants and animals work in harmony to provide balance within the animal and plant world, as they are adapted to living in Texas. Go Texan!

Migrating Wood storks



NATURAL reads

Book review by Jean Kastanek

Chimney Swifts: America's Mysterious Birds above the Fireplace ISBN-13: 978-1585443727

When Paul and Georgean Kyle moved to Austin in 1973 to begin construction of their home on newly-purchased land, they had no idea that the direction of their lives was about to change—all because of a bird.

Their eight-acre parcel of land was full of life. The Kyles frequently came across injured animals and fallen nestlings. Before they knew it, their new home was full of incubators, cages, and a fenced garden to accommodate the injured animals. The Kyles soon applied for and received their state and federal permits to rehabilitate protected native wildlife

They were introduced to their first Chimney Swift at the Travis County Humane Society in 1983. The bird had collided with a window and was unable to fly. Then they received a box of orphaned baby swifts, and, in their own words, they “fell in love”. They spent the next twenty-plus years rehabilitating, observing and documenting the behaviors of Chimney Swifts on their property.

In this book, the Kyles tell the story of their journey. Their research during this time revealed that the Chimney Swift population had declined by over fifty-five percent in North America from 1966 through 1991. Chimney Swift populations continue to decline,

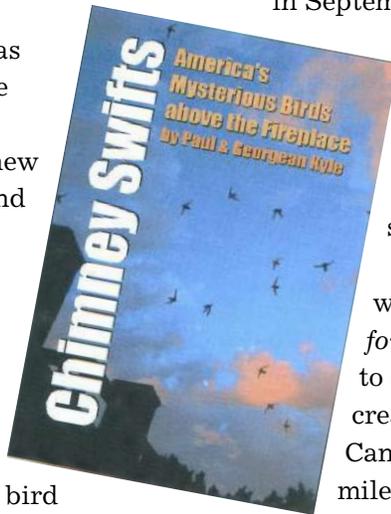
due to public ignorance about the birds (many people are not aware that Chimney Swifts are protected by state wildlife codes and federal law under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1916.). They describe the home and social lives of Chimney Swifts, noting that the birds are devoted mates and parents. They discuss the reasons these birds nest and roost in chimneys. Perhaps most fascinating is that in mid-March every year, Chimney Swifts migrate from Peru, Chile, and Brazil to the United States and Canada to breed and raise their families. They return to their winter homes in September and October. Why should we care about

these birds in particular? They eat up to nearly one-third their own weight in flying insects such as mosquitoes, biting flies, and termites. Why not erect Chimney Swift towers in our communities, instead of spraying chemicals to kill mosquitoes?

In addition to this book, the Kyles have also written *Chimney Swift Towers: New Habitat for America's Mysterious Birds*. Further efforts to educate the public about these birds include creating the 10-acre Travis Audubon Chaetura Canyon Bird Sanctuary on their property, 20 miles from downtown Austin.

Chimney Swifts, America's Mysterious Birds above the Fireplace is so much more than an informational text. It is the story of a couple of toymakers (yes, they earned their living by selling wooden toys in a shop in Austin) who fell in love with a bird and became passionate about its survival.

By sharing their knowledge with us, they empower us to do something as well. For example, I see a Master Naturalist project here: building Chimney Swift towers in our communities. I also see a possible trip next spring to Chaetura Canyon. Anyone want to join me?



Northern crab spider on Eryngo plant.

Whooping Crane Migration

by

Pam Mundo, Texas Master Naturalist, Indian Trail Chapter



Photo taken by Chris Tyreman on September 19, 2013 @ at Radisson Lake, Radisson Saskatchewan Canada www.spaceweather.com

Be watchful, now is the time of the Whooping Crane migration through Texas.... reports members of the Texas Whooper Watch.

Texas Whooper Watch is a group of trained citizen scientists assisting the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to identify the Whooping Crane migration, their stopover sites and non-traditional wintering areas. They hope to assess whether any hazards exist to whoopers at these sites and learn more about behavior and habitat use at these sites. Whooping Cranes are an endangered species with only 300 remaining in the wild. Reporting in August from Wood Buffalo National Park in Canada, scientists have found 28 families with one chick each. A typical family consists of two parents and up to two chicks. Two families successfully produced two babies for a total of 33 new chicks. The chicks and their parents with the other wild whoopers are now on a 2,500 mile trek to their wintering grounds on the Texas Coast, mostly in the Aransas Nature Refuge near Corpus Christi, TX. The Whooping Cranes officially arrive in mid-October from Canada. The flight path is a 200 miles wide corridor flying over Wichita Falls to the Texas Coast. They will stop overnight generally for short periods to feed in harvested fields or in wetlands on the edge of a lake or pond.

The whooping crane, when standing, is a 5-foot tall bird and totally white except for a red patch on the head and primary wing feathers which are black and can be seen in flight. They travel in small groups of 3 to 8. Whooping cranes can be confused with the Great Egret which is also tall. A couple quick ways to differentiate are the neck and feet. The egret flies with its neck and feet tucked in flight while the whooping crane flies with neck and feet straight out.

Besides the 300 wild whooping cranes there are experimental flocks of whooping cranes. One of the experimental flocks was raised in Louisiana from eggs taken from Canada to diversify the gene pool. We have seen these Louisiana whoopers travel from their original home in Louisiana to areas around the DFW metroplex. The behavior monitoring of this group of whooping cranes has been interesting. The original group of 7 juveniles is now two separate groups, consisting of 5 and 2 respectively, staying in different locations.

If you see whooping cranes you should stay at least 2000 feet from them and report the sighting to whoopingcranes@tpwd.state.tx.us . Observers are asked especially to note whether the cranes have colored leg bands on their legs.

MASTER NATURALIST PROGRAM 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.

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The mission of this newsletter is to inform, educate and entertain Indian Trail Master Naturalists and their circle of friends.
