

LOST PINES CHAPTER

Texas Master Naturalist



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Audacity - A Tutorial by Larry Gfeller

Scourge of animal feeders, ornery pests, talented entertainers, family pets, wild game, thieving varmints. . . squirrels are regarded many ways. At our place, it depends on **who's doing the interpreting. My wife loves them almost like grandchildren, chasing one another through the trees, leaping from bough to bough, high wire daredevils—cute as stuffed toys. To my little runt dog, squirrels are infectious viruses, germs that cause incessant barking and maniacal fits of staged insanity—a common affliction if you're descended from wolves. For me, they're cunning opponents in an unceasing battle of wits; the bird feeder Olympics! Don't misunderstand, we all want and need our squirrels** here. It can get lonely and secluded these days. Our trees are sparse, only a scattering of oaks and a couple loblollies around our house remain. Shortly after the fire, three baby squirrels claimed our homestead as their own. They were vagabonds—gypsies from afar—looking for fun, travel and adventure. They commandeered our land as squatters. Now there are five. And why not? We provide food, water, shelter, recreation and a certain warmth of family. As it turned out. . . these sprightly orphans adopted us.



How a loser eats

I've never seen a glum or morose squirrel. Life bolts from their being like ragged shards of lightning from a broiling thundercloud. Impetuous, daring and irreverent, existence for them is one continuous bachelor party. What a simple and glorious amusement, these five. Be it in the early morning or the plum blush of dusk, food draws out impulsive ancestral foraging skills developed over eons. Our screen porch acts as an invisibility cloak. The squirrels think they are alone on their own private island. Bowls of shelled corn affixed to our two surviving loblollies. . . often sit ignored, untouched.

Only losers eat from squirrel feeders! You see, **they're all pirates at heart. . . bird feeders are what they crave!** Mere birds are no contest. Squirrels would rather match wits with the crows or each other in open combat for the spoils of two platform bird feeders. Every meal is an adventure, a new episode of Survivor. Who will get voted off the **island this week? But it's the suspended feeders, isolated, impenetrable and forbidden, that really juice their creativity.**

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Audacity, cont.

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Behind the shadow of screening, I watch as a wicked plot is hatched to raid a free standing bird feeder. First, you have to case the joint. . . the squirrel spraddle-walks on the ground with its head down, sniffing the fallen leftovers—braced on all fours, like a miniature tawny bear. The scariest moment is just before you start. Without warning, it lurches and snags the loblolly, hanging there, dark eyes ablaze, tail whipping. Birdbath at 2 o'clock! No sweat. Easily taken. Skill renders the whole concept of rehearsal meaningless. Then leap for the nearby suet feeder, swinging wildly. . . patience while it stabilizes. The wheels are turning. This is the big one. The final gamble—a huge vault to the distant dangling feeder—a superhuman feat by proportional standards. I think to myself: “Don’t do it, you fool!” Good advice sometimes just passes you by and all you can do is wave. The landing is nailed in one giant suicidal pounce! Confident and beaming, he gobbles the hard-won prize. . .black oil sunflower seeds



Audacity...

Ours are eastern red fox squirrels, the bigger cousins of the grey squirrels that inhabit the bottomland forests of east Texas. Fox squirrels get their name from golden tinted fur on their underbelly. The grey squirrel’s tummy is. . . well, grey. The fox squirrel nests in trees, preferring hollowed out trunks to an exposed leaf nest, but sometimes they will have both. They prefer tree holes for raising young in winter. They’ve also been known to inhabit owl nest boxes, apparently wagering a time-share with the owls. This is brassy—a timing mistake—and the squirrel is lunch. One interesting difference between fox and grey squirrels is how they respond to danger. Greys do not hang around. Greys boogie. . .they run, jump, climb and do whatever it takes in an eruption of gymnastic skill, deftly putting distance between them and their pursuer. Foxes, by contrast, are bolder—almost condescending—playing games of hide-and-seek, making sure there is always some obstacle (like a tree trunk) between them and their foe. Fox squirrels either believe solidly in the power of camouflage, or they are supremely confident—freezing on the spot, sometimes only a feet away from you. . .come on sucker. . .make a move!

Clearly fox squirrels are impressive jumpers, easily spanning fifteen feet in horizontal leaps and free-falling twenty feet or more to a soft landing on a limb or trunk. The little scamps are prolific. . . they breed all year long, although the romantic peak season is late summer and mid-winter. Babies usually come in groups of two to four and are born within six weeks of breeding. They develop more slowly than other rodents; however, within a year, the young squirrels are ready to begin the cycle again.



The lunch box

Fox squirrels have very sharp claws, strong forearms and extensors which help them in climbing. Their favorite food is tree seeds (acorns), but can make a meal out of almost

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Nature Education for Kids

by Louise Ridlon

Those of us who love the outdoors also enjoy sharing that passion with others, especially children. What better way to combat “Nature Deficit Disorder” than to give kids hands-on experiences with the natural world? The Lost Pines chapter has two ongoing volunteer projects that do exactly that.

Each spring and fall, the fifth graders from each elementary school in Lockhart spend a Friday morning going through four outdoor science labs, led by Master Naturalists and other volunteers.

Park Interpreter Josh Oyer coordinates the program, setting the dates for each school and recruiting volunteers. The lessons, which include safety orientation, bird beak simulations, and conducting deer census by counting droppings, are easy to teach, interactive, and very engaging for the students. If you're interested in participating, contact Josh at

Josh.Oyer@tpwd.texas.gov, or call the park at 512-398-3479.

Another youth outreach program is our Nature Ed series for Bastrop-area homeschoolers. Thanks to our



Rick Johnson directing Lockhart 5th graders in the activity, "What's Your Niche?"



Jim Estes leading students on a Safety Awareness hike

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Nature for Kids, cont.

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Bridge Maniacs, there is an outdoor classroom at the Colorado River Refuge where we meet. With support from the Pines and Prairies Land Trust, Master Naturalists plan and present lessons on a variety of topics every two weeks on Thursday mornings from late September to December, and again from February through May. Occasionally we meet at Bastrop State Park, the Bastrop library, or Fisherman's Park. We can have anywhere from fifteen to fifty "home scholars" attending, plus their parents. Past lessons have included Photograph and Journaling, Birding 101, Owls, Migration, and Not-So-Creepy Critters. Sometimes we bring in experts as guest presenters.

If you enjoy teaching, have a favorite subject to share, or would like to help facilitate these classes, contact Louise Ridlon at flridlon@hotmail.com. We hope to have some new participants next spring!



Homeschoolers at Bastrop State Park working on journaling scrapbook, assisted by Julia Akin, Marianna Hobbs, and Louise Ridlon



Looking for nature within a small space; kids at the Colorado River Refuge explore micro-habitats.

LPMN Launches New Website

by Roxanne Hernandez

Since Andy Butler's move to Colorado, the LPMN lost its website master. Thanks to hosting and website template services provided by Texas AgriLife Extension, however, we once again have a presence on the world wide web.

In mid-December, the Lost Pines Chapter launched its new website at <http://txmn.org/lostpines/>. Thanks to Andy's work on the original site, transition to the new one was easily accomplished. Ideally we'll be integrating Meetup events into the new site—this is currently being evaluated by AgriLife programmers.

The new website contains information and documents about:

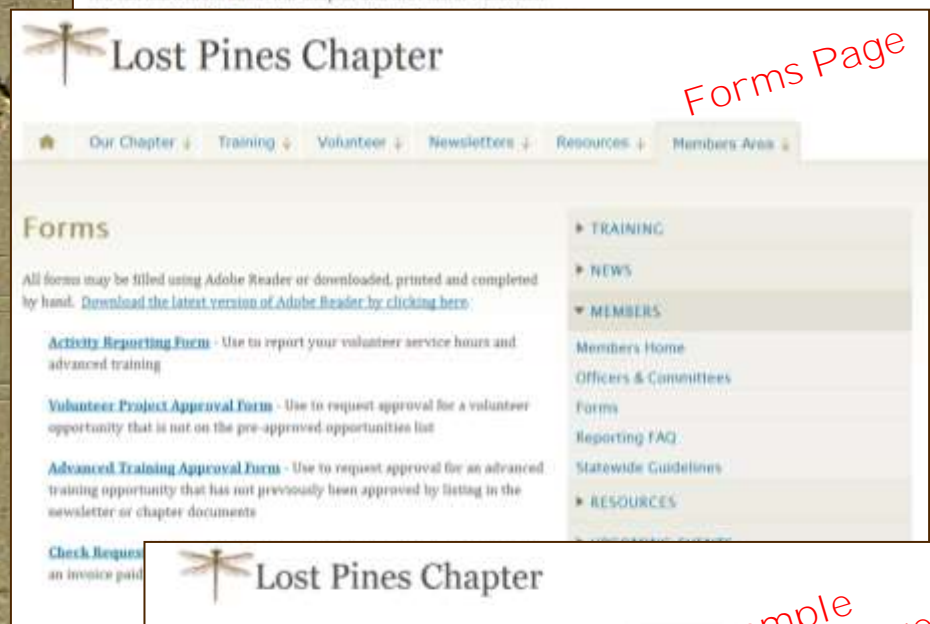
- Our chapter
- Training, basic & advanced
- Resources
- Current & archived newsletters
- Volunteer opportunities
- Officers & committee chair contacts
- Administration documents
- Downloadable & fillable forms

If you'd like to see something on the website that isn't already there, contact

Roxanne.M.Hernandez@gmail.com.



Home Page



Forms Page



Sample Resources Pages

Meet Jim & Joan Estes

by Larry Gfeller

A gravel road winds through the swaying bluestem as a cottontail skirts the fence line; in the distance a hawk circles the porcelain sky. The tree lined roadside seems a corkscrew. The countryside glistens in the early morning sun. Rounding the almost final bend, a free range donkey meanders across your path—peering through the windshield, checking you out. Unhurried, she shuffles out of your path. Through the trees and foliage, the final coil of road tunnels to an expanse of cool lawn grasses and exotic plants, exposing *La Madregera* (the hideaway). You are immediately welcomed by friendly, lop-eared dogs, excited at your arrival. It has a heavy human presence, like an unattended meal, still steaming. Solid stone. Exquisite Spanish architecture. A well-hidden desperado hideout in the Mexican hinterland? No. This is the country home of Jim and Joan Estes, just outside Lockhart, Texas.



Jim and Joan Estes

As a couple, the Estes's are a riddle. Both are comfortable in their own skin, both are jolly and quick to laugh—forged by the hardships and pleasures of successfully raising a family through years of give and take. Both are Master Naturalists as well as their son and daughter-in-law (they have three grown children). But they are as different as they are the alike: the adventurous part-Cherokee Indian, the brassy mid-western woman who completes his circuit. Their geometry is tricky: complimentary and tangential when working together; equally at ease with opposite angles. Joan, the lifelong surgical and trauma nurse. . . exact, disciplined and dedicated to meticulous attention to detail. Jim, the daredevil oil field entrepreneur—mercurial and effervescent—navigating life through sheer improvisation. It's a powerful union; a precise matching of opposites. Lock and key.

Most of us experience bouts of wellbeing only sporadically, tempered by the defeats and struggles of ordinary life. **Jim Estes is consciously content, open to any of life's ironies or mysteries, actively seeking chance encounters for what can be learned.** Naturally confident, fresh and unfamiliar stimulates him. Who, for example, finds joy in making their own homemade bacon from a store-bought side of ham? Who lights up at the prospect of engineering prize begonias, or nursing a nesting pair of crested caracaras, or contriving a river-fed irrigation system without putting pencil to paper. . . or painting their pet donkey bright and vivid colors for Easter? With a puppy-like curiosity, every waking moment carries the potential for delight. Meanwhile, Joan is often jetting all over the country on the most solemn of missions—teaching best practices to operating room staff and trauma center managers. **As a sought-after consultant, they'd work her to death if she let them. But she's retired.** Airports, suitcases, hotel rooms and restaurant food—traveling is tedious. The problem: **she loves this work. Most weekdays she's gone. Most weekends she's home. "Retirement" means being able to do what you want when you want.** This leaves Jim free. . . to be free.

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The Estes, cont.

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Jimmie Wayne Estes started out in Oklahoma, home of the Cherokee Nation; Joan E. Peltier was born and raised in Wisconsin—**America’s Dairyland**—where they first set eyes on one another. They met on a blind date in the capital city of Madison while he was in the U.S. Air Force and she was in nursing school. Joan was a synchronized swimmer on her high school swim team. Jim had trouble matching socks. He never had a chance! After earning a degree in Geology from the University of Oklahoma, Jim went straight to the oilfields and stayed there the rest of his formal working years. He was an oilfield application engineer and pump man, devising all manner of ways to get liquid gold out of the ground. Eventually, his irrepressible spirit pushed him down his own path—to start a successful oilfield equipment and service business. Through these years, Joan mostly raised their three children while also serving as an operating room nurse. Life was hectic, the hours were long and sleep was a luxury. One time on a train ride back to Wisconsin to visit family, both young parents dozed off to the hypnotic clack-clack of the passenger train, when Joan awoke to discover that infant Bryan had disappeared. . . on a moving train! Seems he slipped down into the diaper bag, fast asleep. A fitting example of the phrase “in the bag.”

The years rolled along, the kids grew and now there are three grandkids. Grandkids are magnetic. When retirement time came, the Estes’s moved to Texas because that’s where their family lived. They decided on 76 acres outside Lockhart; that’s where they built *La Madrigera*. Still with all this land, the Estes homestead doesn’t allow animals; only pets. Animals require work; pets require *love*. From the complex needs of overindulged chickens to a brood of pathetic ducks that can’t swim, allowances are made. Everyone has a secure place in this family. The two greeter dogs—Bitsy & Jake—specialize in softening the hardest of hearts, like bruises on a peach. Perhaps the most bizarre is an impetuous female free-range donkey by the name of Patchwork Princess (“Patches”), who first sized us up on the drive in. An inquisitive and meddlesome property snoop, it’s her job to know what’s happening on every acre of the place. . . including what’s in your pockets. She craves attention—knows she’s a loved and unique family member. Will eat anything from your hand (especially carrots) and isn’t shy about reminding you that she’s expecting it. Pat her back and little puffs of dust escape, revealing that, beloved as she may be, she sleeps outside. But, oh, what a bedroom she enjoys! Stunning view. The gabled patio of this Spanish chalet looks out over a far reaching and gentle hill. You can see for miles. As the shadows lengthen at dusk and the sky is striped with broad bands of purple, the deer come to the feeder, secure enough to tease the dogs into a friendly game of tag. The trees broaden and expand, lit silver by moonlight. Here the human soul is merged with the stars and all life.



Patchwork Princess, aka “Patches”

Pat her back and little puffs of dust escape, revealing that, beloved as she may be, she sleeps outside. But, oh, what a bedroom she enjoys! Stunning view. The gabled patio of this Spanish chalet looks out over a far reaching and gentle hill. You can see for miles. As the shadows lengthen at dusk and the sky is striped with broad bands of purple, the deer come to the feeder, secure enough to tease the dogs into a friendly game of tag. The trees broaden and expand, lit silver by moonlight. Here the human soul is merged with the stars and all life.

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The Origin of a Maniac

by Larry Gfeller

There it is. A simple log bridge, barely discernible from the surrounding woods. Nestled amidst **the timber like some animal's camouflaged nest. It is not decorative landscape, but a functional part of the land.** It is not the work of nature, yet it relates. Warm and inviting; like a summer rain. I wonder who uses this bridge? What a delicacy for the casual hiker; a singular gift to surprise and delight.

I first met this bridge on the Internet. A photo. It seized my imagination. Snippets of narrative described a few men who built this bridge using cedars—available within a few yards of the ravine it traversed. They work here as volunteers. They come to the Colorado River Refuge regularly. I knew, from the photo, I wanted to be a part of this group. Later, when I met the bridge in person, it was like being with a favorite grandparent: secure, comfortable, a sense of wellbeing. All bridges take you somewhere, but this bridge takes you back to yesterday—with its unpeeled cedar, half-log decking and sturdy hand rails. Solid and reliable. Genuine. It connects generations to come in a way that a mere path in the wilderness never could. No one builds bridges like this anymore. It takes mutual respect—man and nature. Only the nails and re-bar are man made. Everything else came from the earth. Even the bottom support pilings are cedar stumps conscripted into service. This bridge **is more than engineering; it's an act of love.**

I joined this handful of volunteers in time for construction of a second cedar log bridge at the **CRR. In their 60's and 70's, these people were felling trees, limbing, bucking and transporting the logs overland to the construction site. Didn't they know they were old? Yes. . . they did. Frequent water and rest breaks, mutual welfare checks and a leisurely pace. . . there was no hurrying, no deadline. These folks knew who they were and what they were doing. They were having fun. I was swept up I tell you. Infected with something. It was like stepping in wide water only to be yanked downstream toward some joyful end. The second bridge required different specifications from the first, given the dissimilar terrain. There were no plans, no blueprints—just the shared rich experiences of multiple lifetimes. Common sense? No. Uncommon sense. Two more bridges would eventually be built at the CRR, but this would be the last cedar log bridge. Sometimes progress really isn't.**



The Bridge Maniacs' first cedar log bridge at the Colorado River Refuge.

I have watched the Bridge Maniacs evolve in two short years from a coven of incorrigible old men into a diversified, organized volunteer force. From trail design and clearing to erosion control, environmental development, and construction of irrigation systems, we admit few

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VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

New Activities

Feral Hog check station attendant. Jan. 4, 8am-noon. Various feed stores in Bastrop and Caldwell counties. Contact

Meredith.Longoria@tpwd.texas.gov, 512-581-7180, if you are interested in volunteering.

Wildfire Recovery Projects, Bastrop State Park, 8am-noon. Loblolly pine seedling planting for 2014 is underway. Dates include January 11, 19 and 25. Visit the [Lost Pines Recovery Team's website](#) at for more information.

Ongoing Activities

Erosion Control. Erosion is one of the biggest issues in the park following the wildfire. We can mitigate some of these effects by installing straw logs, or wattles, on steep and eroding hillsides. This work is difficult and involves walking up and down steep, rocky hills, carrying straw bulky logs, bending and using hand tools. It is appropriate for ages 14 and up only.

Trail work at Bastrop and Buescher State Parks. If you are interested in being notified about those opportunities, please contact Resource Specialist

Reagan.Faught@tpwd.texas.gov.

Buescher State Park Trail Work Wednesdays. These are the third Wednesday of each month from 9am-1pm. On this day, park staff will be performing trail work from maintenance to construction to

tree and brush removal and everything in between, depending on what is a priority at the time. Show up at the walk-in/trailhead parking at 9am. No need to RSVP. Contact Cullen.Sartor@tpwd.texas.gov with questions, 512-332-6683.

Bastrop State Park Trail Work. This is moderately difficult work and involves hiking long distances, bending, and carrying and using hand tools. Contact the Friends of the Lost Pines at volunteer.flpsp@gmail.com for more details and to sign up. Contact Reagan.Faught@tpwd.texas.gov to be notified of work dates.

Colorado River Watch Network. Colorado River Watch Network monitors complete an 8-hour training provided by LCRA (Eligible for LPMN Advanced Training Credit), then regularly provide data to the LCRA. Visit the [LCRA volunteer web page](#) for more information.

Hornsby Bend Monthly Bird Count. Usually held the 2nd Saturday of each month. Meet at [Hornsby Bend, Center for Environmental Research](#) at 7am for the morning survey or 4pm for the afternoon survey.

Bridge Maniacs—every Wednesday, location TBD—contact LarryDGfeller@yahoo.com for details or stay tuned to Meetup.

McKinney Roughs Biosurvey. This is a regular series of plant, bird and other

wildlife monitoring at LCRA's McKinney Roughs Nature Park. Kathy McAleese coordinates these. The schedule varies, depending on weather and other factors. Usually there will be two outings (one during the week; one on the weekend) each month. Contact Kathy McAleese or Louise Ridlon at flridlon@hotmail.com for more information.

Bastrop State Park Nature Surveys. Surveys can be done ad hoc on your own schedule. Please make sure to use the proper reporting form for your results. Contact Louise Ridlon at flridlon@hotmail.com for details and information on reporting your findings.

McKinney Roughs Volunteer Activities. McKinney Roughs has a variety of activities available to volunteers. Contact Jana Hellbusch, 512-303-5073.

Friends of the Yegua Knobs. Volunteers are needed to survey plant and animal life, identify and clear camping areas and trails, plus other fun and rewarding tasks. Contact Jeremiah Jarvis at jjfrog@flash.net to volunteer.

PLEASE remember to complete an Activity Reporting Form for all Advanced Training taken and volunteer service performed.

NO report = *NO* credit!

Send reports to lpmnhours@gmail.com

ADVANCED TRAINING

Prescribed Burn Workshop. Friday, January 10 from 1pm-5pm. Hosted by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Prairie View A&M University Cooperative Extension Program, Texas Farm Credit and the South Central Prescribed Burn Association This workshop will be held at the Blinn College Rankin Agricultural Complex.

Topics include:

- Prescribed Burning Laws and Regs.
- Writing the Burn Plan
- Prescribed Burn Weather and Safety
- Prescribed Burning for Wildlife

1 General, 1 IPM, and 1 Laws/Regs. CEU credits will be given for **those attending that have a TDA Private Applicator's License.**

Seating is limited, so please RSVP with the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service of Washington County at 979-277-6212.

Texas Wildlife Association – Lunchtime Webinar. December 12, noon-1pm

Topic: Songbird Management

Presented by: Cliff Shackelford, TPWD

Where: your home or office computer

To sign on: Simply point your browser to <https://texas-wildlife.webex.com> on the day of the webinar and click to join the Wildlife for Lunch webinar. Each web based seminar is fully interactive and allows you to engage the experts, make comments, and ask questions during the course of the presentation.

If you cannot make the live webinar, each webinar is archived and available for viewing following the initial air date at the TWA website here.

For more information contact Helen Holdsworth at hholdsworth@texas-wildlife.org.

WHO'S WHO

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Outreach, Jim Estes
jestes@ionet.net

Chapter History, Bill Brooks
bgbrooks@mail.utexas.edu

Stay connected!

The Lost Pines Master Naturalists uses Meetup.com to stay current on volunteer and advanced training activities. Use Meetup to RSVP and comment on upcoming events and those you've attended.

It's easy to sign up – just [follow this link \(www.meetup.com\)](http://www.meetup.com)

Audacity, cont.

(Continued from page 2)

anything organic: fruits, buds, insects, grain, small snakes, lizards, bird eggs and all manner of bulbs and roots. Caches of acorns and hickory nuts are heavily used in winter. Despite being expert climbers, fox squirrels spend most of their time on the ground. They have an acute sense of smell and hearing as well as excellent eyesight. They use scent marking to communicate with other fox squirrels. They also have several sets of vibrissae—thick hairs or whiskers that are used as touch receptors—to sense the environment. These are found above and below their eyes, on their chin and nose, and on their forearms. I had an uncle like that once!

Folks generally don't consider attracting squirrels a primary goal of their wildlife management plan; however, in

our burned out fire zone with no deer, opossum, raccoons, etc., we treasure our young family of squirrels. They are easy to attract. If you want fox squirrels, all you need is a snag or two, a few trees, food and water. Brush piles are appreciated too. If you offer a welcoming atmosphere—and provide the basics—chances **are you'll be rewarded with an** intimate and entertaining bond in short order. Because fox squirrels hold their ground and are keenly intelligent, they soon come to know their humans. . . . waiting patiently on the opposite side of a trunk while a feeder is replenished, or, flattening spread-eagle in plain view on the cool concrete of a shaded porch, in the fug of **summer's heat.**

My favorite spectator sport is watching the backyard action from the private box that is our screen porch. To appreciate squirrels with the right measure of reverence

requires an animal frame of mind. Most children innately have this animal frame of mind. But with the passage of time, routine and reason grinds down the sharp edges of our adult lives. Squirrels are entirely composed of sharp edges—and do not suffer the debilities of routine. Watching squirrel horseplay restores my edges and pulls me into a simpler, happy time, when thinking like an animal came naturally.

Newsletter Deadline

Deadline for the next issue is January 24, 2014. We welcome relevant contributions, photos, announcements, or other material relating to the mission of the Texas Master Naturalist program, particularly those pertaining to our local area. Please send information to

Roxanne.M.Hernandez@gmail.com.

Lost Pines Master Naturalist Monthly Meeting Schedule

January 20, 2014, 6:30 p.m., Red Rock Community Center

Poisonous Plant Program

Marian Buchanan, Dallas County Master Gardner since 1988, will join us to present "Wicked Plants - A Walk on the Dark Side of the Garden." She will examine some of the toxic plants we encounter in our homes, our yards, and on a hike or picnic. Marian says, "I don't attempt to scare people or to encourage them to rip plants out of their gardens, but to give common sense advice and resources to educate themselves and their families."

February 17, 2014, 6:30 p.m.

Speaker and location to be announced

The Estes, cont.

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Jim was in the Lost Pines graduating class with Jesus Christ; Joan graduated later—the class of 2011. Despite the pressures of travel, Joan nearly always manages to bring some gastronomic delicacy to chapter meetings, in addition to serving as Chapter secretary. Make no mistake, this lady can *cook*. Never stop moving. Jim is the patriarch of the Bridge Maniacs—one of the original two. His wealth of life experience and love of the outdoors transforms any volunteer experience into something fun, something you want to do again. It all began in 2010 when Jim and Nick Nichols **said “yes” to a request from then PPLT Executive Director, Carrie Knox to keep the Colorado River**



“Patches” dressed for Easter.

Refuge mowed. As time passed, people came and people went, but Jim and his small crew of stalwarts accomplished amazing things—and had a blast in the process. They built their first bridge—a cedar log affair spanning a ravine—using only what nature provided (and a few nails, some re-bar). As bridges go, it was a simple affair, but creative—like something settlers might build. You can see it today on the Dragonfly Trail at the CRR. Other bridges soon followed and the rest is chapter history. Thus, with the virtues of hard work and ingenuity—and a willingness to take on anything—someone tagged the group with its intrepid name. Aside from his work with the Bridge Maniacs, Jim is also *the* Outreach Committee for the chapter. **If there’s an obscure event somewhere** in need of a MN to extol the virtues of getting outside and communing with nature, you will most likely find him there. He loves budding and curious naturalists, doing

something for the first time, helping people learn to negotiate the outdoors and he especially loves making connections. He can make the most mundane experience memorable. **Take a walk in the woods with him sometime. You’ll be surprised what you learn.**

These two amplify their surroundings. Like pebbles tossed in a pond, the ripples of their personalities wash over the lives of others, changing everyone in small, incalculable ways. Understanding is **about more than speech. It’s the moment of realization**—these are people of character—that opens the channel, sends out little tendrils and clinches a bond of friendship. The message: learn to *value what is good in life*. **The Estes’ have touched many souls in their journey, sowing little bits of themselves in wide swaths.** Among fertile ground, possibilities expand, doubts dissolve and raw optimism is free to fly. They are infectious pathfinders, always willing to step up and do. Whether **it be to lead or work quietly in the background, it’s never about them—it’s about life, joy and commitment.** Any organization should be so fortunate as to count them both as members. Once **exposed, you’re drawn in**—animals and people alike—for there is a fundamental essence here. . . truth un-husked. **Anything’s possible in a life well-lived.**

Maniac, cont.

(Continued from page 8)

constraints. Hell, we could wire Yankee Stadium for night games! Today, in expanded form, we have several stalwart ladies who add competency, hard labor and perspective. The legend grows. New members enrich our pool of experience and, so far, all are Texas Master Naturalists. Leadership challenges have grown as well, and what was once a loose consensus is more formal and specialized. It works.

When we visit the CRR now, it's like a pro football team on offense. We use different formations, organized around personal skills and equipment, depending on the task at hand. As our size and confidence grows, our field of influence widens. We volunteer for other projects at other properties—but the CRR remains our primary focus. And of course, our playbook contains more than building bridges.

The experience is magical. There is something elemental going on here. Like a bunch of old lions, **we've lost our enchantment with the hunt; this stage of life is a time for friendship and reflection.** **The pull of a greater gravity which binds us together is almost like shared genes.** It's as if we come from the same womb. We all feel it to one degree or another, yet it remains undefined. We're like a pack of dogs chasing a car: we don't really know why we're doing it, we just love doing it. It is uniformly satisfying to experience a reconnecting of human spirit with the land, a connection that was long broken with this neglected tract before it became the CRR. Bottom line: the land is renewed; the people who care for it are uplifted in the process. It is completely appropriate to question who is the caretaker and who is the cared for.



Work day on the Colorado River Refuge. Pictured are Julia Akin, Raymond Butler, Mike Barrett, Carroll Moore (front), Audrey Ambrose, Jim Estes, Julie Erlon, Larry Gfeller, Rick Gast, Ronnie Lanier, Nick Nichols, Rob Sutherland (back).

STATE PROGRAM CONTACTS

Website: <http://txmn.org>

State Coordinator: Michelle Haggerty, 979-458-2034, mhaggerty@wfscgate.tamu.edu

The Texas Master Naturalist program is sponsored by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

SPONSOR CONTACTS

Caldwell County Extension Office: Michael Haynes, 512-398-3122, caldwell-tx@tamu.edu

Bastrop County Extension Office: Rachel Bauer, 512-581-7186, bastroptx@tamu.edu

Bastrop/Caldwell County TPWD Wildlife Biologist: Meredith Longoria, 512-332-7280, Meredith.Longoria@tpwd.texas.gov

