

Lost Pines Master Naturalist's



Volume 12, Issue 2

MARCH 2012

Things
Are Starting
To Look Up!

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings Naturalists,

It was so wonderful to see the class of 2012 come together. And there are so many of you! I am very happy for you because of the new friends you will make along with the opportunities to learn and serve. Our environment needs what knowledgeable and caring people can give. I understand that one of the astronauts, while standing on the moon and looking to earth said, "That's our home." We have a little part of this "home" for which we are the stewards.

The wonderful rains have filled ponds and flushed waterways. It even appears that some of my winter vegetables may even suffer from too much water. They'll get over it! Only a few days ago I could walk nowhere in our front or back yards with out the unfamiliar squish of my boots on soggy sod. It was such a good sound after the months and months of dying grass and dust. It was great fun to walk in the wet winter grasses to reload the bird feeders.

Speaking of birds, I hope many of you participated in the recent bird count. My spouse is the primary birder in our family and it was great fun to play a supporting role as she counted. There were a lot of Look there's and Did you see that's? and Hand me my Sibley's over that week end.

There are always ways to add to your volunteer hours. Alert Chapter members try to get projects posted via the Yahoo group internet site. The projects are usually posted on these pages of our newsletter also.

Looking forward to seeing you at the next Chapter meeting at Red Rock on March 19, if not before.

Al Hoerig



CRITTER NEWS: SPRING BIRTHS

By LPMN member Susan Smith

With the advent of the vernal equinox on March 20, spring heralds in a riot of colors, along with joyous bird song and an awakening within every one of us. The earth transforms from sleeping dormancy to green finery that does credit to the season. Texas is at her best.

On these beautiful, glorious days, who doesn't feel drawn to the outdoors? As we take to our gardens and to the woods with wild babies all around us – in trees, under eaves, in fields, and in dens and burrows above and below ground, we are reminded to tread lightly. Breeding season is here! Migratory birds, like purple martins and bluebirds, typically arrive in Bastrop County from South America at the end of February and the beginning of March. Because of our unusually warm winter, this year is different as those birds are already here laying eggs.

Spring is a busy birthing month for many animals. In February, as well as August, opossums and fox squirrels give birth. In March, raccoons and E. cottontails are born, though cottontails are ahead of schedule this year. In May, skunks, deer and bobcats give birth.



So, while you are out and about, you hear a rustling in the brush. You have come across a wild baby. What do you do?





General Do's and Don'ts

Look at the baby. If the baby looks healthy to you, do a search. Look and listen for baby's mother or look for signs that the mother has been there. Is the baby's nest nearby?

If **yes**, put the baby **BACK**.

Or, is the baby cold, bleeding, vomiting, infested with maggots or fly larvae, covered in fire ants, or dirty from diarrhea?

If **yes**, place baby in a small container, like a shoebox with a towel for warmth. An empty drink bottle filled with warm water will also keep baby warm. Baby needs warmth, quiet and darkness.

After the initial contact, do not handle the traumatized baby.

Cover the box with a lid after you punch holes in it for ventilation.

No matter how cute the baby is, only a certified, Wildlife Rehabilitator is legally or ethically allowed to raise a wild baby with the intent to return it back to nature once it is old enough.

At the Wildlife Center, animal babies are fed formulas that are species specific. So, **NEVER** feed a wild baby. The most frequent killer of young wildlife is cow's milk fed to them by people with good intentions.

Call Austin Wildlife Rescue as soon as possible at **(512) 472-9453**. Your call will be appreciated and taken seriously. Prompt action may save the wild baby's life.

If baby appears to be healthy, but you cannot find its nest, or if you are not sure **which** nest the baby came from, put baby in a container near the spot where you found it.

Stay away from the area. Mother will not approach while you or your pets are nearby as adult, indigenous animals fear us, as they should. Upon mother's return, she will search for her baby. Human scent will not keep her from reclaiming her baby in spite of what you were told when you were a child.

Secure your pets or take them inside.

Wash your hands thoroughly as many wild animals carry parasites and diseases.

Six hours later, check on baby.

If mother has **NOT** returned, call Austin Wildlife Rescue for further instructions.



Specific Do's and Don'ts

If you find a baby bird on the ground, is the bird a nestling or a fledging? A **nestling** may not have many feathers. A nestling needs its parent's body for warmth. Somehow this baby fell out of its nest. **What to look for**...Is the bird injured with a broken wing or leg? Also, check for parasites. Fly eggs resemble yellow, rice grains bunched together.

If all is well, put the baby back in its nest if you are **certain** you have found its true nest. If you are not sure, put an empty hanging basket in the tree with crumpled paper towels in the shape of a nest. Or put dry leaves, not grass, in the basket being as grass mildews. Secure the basket to the tree (at your height) nearest to the downed baby bird. If you don't have a basket, use some other container after you punch holes in it in case it rains. A parent bird cannot physically lift its young, so parents will feed baby in the basket and its siblings in their nest.

A **fledgling**, on the other hand, has short, stubby wings and tail feathers. A fledgling is a young bird that is learning to fly. The bird will sit or hop on the ground or try to get lift and land on a low bush. This behavior is normal. The parents are close by, watching. Parents may even jump up and down, frantic with worry. Both parents will continue to feed their babies during fledgling time and afterwards. Leave baby alone.

If you find a baby squirrel on the ground, look for injuries. Squirrels (and baby birds) are often flung to the ground during a rainstorm. Is there blood on the squirrel's nose or mouth? Are any of its limbs broken? If baby has NOT been injured, secure a tub or a basket to the tree. Put baby inside. Mother squirrel will lift her baby out of the basket and return it to her nest.

If you find a fawn, remember that a fawn is nursed at dawn and dusk. Mother browses 10-12 hours a day with her baby hidden in high grass. She has NOT abandoned her baby. Does are also good at reading human intent. Many times, a doe will leave her baby by someone's porch or in the back yard, knowing the place is safe. We humans are not aware of the strength of our scent. Predators don't like our smell.

What to look for...If the fawn can lift its head upright, that's a good sign. If the fawn lies flat like a dog, that's a sign of weakness and dehydration. Look at the fawn's eyes. Are they bright or sunken? Bright is good. Sunken is not. Is the nose wet or dry? Wet is good. Dry is not. Lift the fawn's tail. If its bottom is dirty, mother hasn't been there during the night to clean it.

If you find an Eastern Cottontail bunny, an important point to consider is this: E. cottontail bunnies are the MOST difficult wildlife to be raised successfully at the Wildlife Center. The **best** individual to raise an E. Cottontail bunny is its mother. A nest is often built in a depression in grass or in the ground. The nest will be lined with fur and grasses. Mothers feed their babies in the early morning before dawn and then again late in the evening. Between those hours, mothers forage, often times some distance from their nests.

What to look for...Does the baby have puncture wounds from a dog or cat, or has been cut with a grass mower, or has broken bones? Often, some of the bunnies in a nest are injured, while other siblings in the same nest are fine. **Leave the uninjured bunnies in the nest. Let mother raise them.** Place the **injured** bunnies on a towel in a dark, warm box with a lid with holes. Bunnies startle easily from sound, so there must be quiet while they are transported, or they fall dead from fright.

If you find a turtle that has been injured on a road, do you see body tissue or body fluids? If so, the turtle needs medical attention quickly. If the turtle's shell is only cracked, leave it alone. Let it continue **in the direction it was heading**. Of course, you can help it cross the road safely **in the same direction it was heading**.



If you find a dead mother opossum, probably near a roadway, look for small babies clinging to her fur or hanging onto her teats **inside** her pouch. A mother can have one litter on her back and one inside her pouch at the same time. Gently and firmly pull the babies off the teats. Possums cannot suckle, which is to say that they **cannot** be bottle fed. They will drown if not fed correctly by a wildlife rehabilitator.

If you find a baby raccoon, you may hear it chirping for its mother. Sadly, many people live trap raccoons, unaware of the devastation this causes to the uprooted adult no longer in its own territory with food, water and shelter, as well as to babies in the nest who will starve. Chirping babies are often found under porches or in attics that have been poorly secured. Young raccoons raised by untrained people will inappropriately bond with their captors and become emotionally neurotic, unfit for release to the wild. When handling wildlife, especially raccoons, wear gloves and wash your hands thoroughly.

If you find an armadillo den, and this happens where there is road or housing construction, put the four identical quadruplets in a cardboard box. The box should be turned over on its side in a safe place **nearby** as mothers have poor eyesight. Unless the babies are injured, allow 24 hours for mother to retrieve her young. She will carry them to another den by the scruff of the neck. If mother doesn't return, wear gloves when you pick up the babies to take to the Wildlife Center for proper care.

If you find a skunk nest under a porch, in the corner of a barn, or in a burrow, gently pinch the baby's skin to check for dehydration. Once a mother knows that her nest has been discovered, she will move her young. Sometimes a mother skunk is frightened and will drop a baby she is carrying. The most common scenario, however, is that someone live traps the mother, dumps her, and then discovers babies on their property. Again, the babies need to be taken to the Center for care. Skunks are released back to the wild when they are five months old.

Wild animals are good parents. They understand the needs of their young. Let us keep in mind that all creatures of the wild should remain wild. But, if something has gone wrong, it is our duty as stewards of this land to take the proper steps in seeing to the immediate needs of a wild baby.

Knowing what to do is that first step.

Contact Wildlife Rescue at **(512) 472-9453**; e-mail: wildliferescue@sbcglobal.net for directions to their facility or for information or advice.



HOME SCHOOL NATURE LESSONS AT LOCKHART STATE PARK

by Susan Crone

Our new venture to provide nature lessons for home schoolers has begun! A group of 5 Master Naturalists met with 24 students and their parents at Lockhart State Park on Feb. 2nd. The families were excited to have us be a part of their routine. Our first lesson focused on observation skills and featured a series of Micro Hikes as well as a discussion of the four seasons. We will present a series of nature lessons on the first and third Thursdays of each month at 1pm in the park. Future lessons will focus on seeds, animals, birds, the water cycle and water quality. Josh Oyer from the park will be an integral part of our program. Master Naturalists will conduct the lessons with other LPMN members assisting. As you may know, we have provided similar lessons through Pines and Prairie Land Trust in Bastrop at the Colorado River Refuge. This new project originated with our chapter members. We hope to have good participation by LPMN in supporting this project. If you are interested in working with children and this group, please contact Susan Crone at 512-303-1884 or smcrone48@gmail.com.





ADVANCED TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

for Lost Pines Texas Master Naturalists

The Texas Wildlife Association provides monthly webinars to cover topics of specific interests to individuals in our chapter. As far as I know, no one in our chapter has successfully completed any of these webinars to give us any hints how to get the connection done. I will post the next 3 months of subjects each month. If you have any interest in working together and have a video streaming internet access, give me a call and we can work together to see how and if this webinar works.

General instructions are to log on to the live webinars. <https://texas-wildlife.webex.com> . For more information, attendees can contact: Courtney Brittain, Texas Wildlife Association, Education Program Coordinator, at (210) 826-2904 ext. 122 (office), (210) 393-3467 (mobile), www.texas-wildlife.org , or cbrittain@texas-wildlife.org

The next 3 monthly topics that would be considered advanced training are
March 15 - Pond Management, Michael Masser;
April 19 - Riparian Management 201, Sky Lewey; and
May 17 - Integrating Cattle and Wildlife on Small Acreage, Larry Pierce

AWU-CER Lunchtime Lectures occur at noon at Austin Water Headquarters Downtown (Waller Center ,Room 104 or 105 [625 East 10th Street – between I-35 and Red River). Lectures will be given the first Wednesday of each month. These lectures are free and open to the Public – bring a lunch and learn! The first series addresses **The History of Natural History [March – April]**. The remaining lectures are **March 7:** The History of Natural History: 20th Century Science and Literature [Room 105] and **April 4:** The History of Natural History: Contemporary Natural History. The second series addresses **Natural History and Ecological Change – Americas, Texas, and Austin [May – July]** and begins on **May 2:** The Natural History of the Americas: Discovery and Transformation.

Walt Elson contacted the Gault School of Archeology about a tour of the Gault Site. May 26th fits their schedule and we are penciled in for that date. The site is located near Florence, Texas which is about 82 miles north of San Marcos off of I-35 (6-10 miles west of Jarrell).

They are very familiar with TMN program and will tailor the tour for our interest. The program is generally 2 hours long and covers about 1 1/4 miles. Topics covered include:

- Hypotheses regarding the peopling of the Americas
- The geology and history of this area of Central Texas
- Cultural history of Central Texas
- Primitive technologies
- Important finds from the Gault site
- Observing current excavations

Our tour must have at least 10 people and the cost is \$10 each. A sign-up list will be provided at the March and April chapter meetings.

Let me know of any upcoming offerings that you think might work as advanced training.

Ronnie Lanier
Vice-President
(512)581-8117
nxplgr@wildblue.net



Lost Pines Master Naturalist Monthly Meeting Schedule

MARCH 19 2012 6:30 - 9:00 pm Red Rock Community Center Topic TBA

APRIL 16 2012 6:30 - 9:00 pm Red Rock Community Center Topic TBA

NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

FOR NEXT ISSUE MARCH 31ST. 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 Angie Morrison 512-629-3344 (angie.morrison@studiosdallas.com.)

PLEASE send text either in an email or in doc format. I cannot open any other form! Pictures should be sent as attachments of jpegs as big as you can send them. Please do not embed images in the email. Doing so greatly helps in the newsletter creation! Thank you!

STATE PROGRAM CONTACTS

Website: <http://txmn.org/>

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

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

SPONSOR CONTACTS

Caldwell Co. Extension Office: Position vacant; Caldwell-tx@tamu.edu; (512) 398-3122.

Bastrop Co. Extension Office: Rachel Bauer, CEAAG/NR; BastropTx@tamu.edu; (512) 581-7186.

Bastrop/Caldwell Co. TPWD Wildlife Biologist: Meredith Longoria, 804 Pecan, Bastrop, Meredith.Longoria@tpwd.state.tx.us; (512) 332-7280.

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