

# LOST PINES CHAPTER

Texas Master Naturalist



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## A Pig in a Poke by Larry Gfeller

We're lounging outside our travel trailer—I, my wife, and our dog—at Choke Canyon State Park in South Texas. Our campsite is carpeted with cool, green grass, the outer perimeter defined by a scrubby thicket of mesquite and black bush acacia. The sun is low in the west and evening shadows slip over our campsite like spilled paint. Suddenly, our little dog (who has led an indulgent life and is clueless as to the world's dangers) erupts into barking spasms and attacks the brambles. To his good fortune, I grab his tie-out and pull him up short before it's too late.



There, twenty feet away just outside the brush line, is a gaggle of wild pigs startled by the ruckus. As the females circle the youngsters like collie dogs, what is obviously an alpha male stands his ground, facing us with an acid smile, lips drawn back, canines exposed, eyes corrosive. I quickly scoop the dog into my arms as the boar stares with beady, forest eyes. He has the gunfighter's seat—back against the wall. He remains firmly entrenched until we all scurry inside the trailer. I now know it was poor eyesight that allowed him to remain around humans longer than other wildlife when startled.

This was our first close encounter with javelinas, a common animal in Texas brush country. Turns out most are skittish but they become dangerous when cornered or threatened—like when charged by a schizophrenic foo-foo dog with a Doberman complex! These javelinas in particular (we would later learn) carried themselves with a sense of special entitlement, living as they did within the protection of a state park. They could be seen openly foraging the campgrounds at dusk, oblivious to a swarm of campers stalking them with cameras. Apparently, they have a keen sense of hearing and smell, but we know from this experience they can't see for crap.

You would think you could turn to an institution of higher learning for the truth about javelinas, but NO, not in this case. Texas A&M - Kingsville, the only university in the United States with a javelina as mascot, unwittingly call themselves "hoggies." Truth is, javelinas are not hogs. Along evolutionary lines, there is only a distant connection with wild pigs; an equally distant ancestor is the hippopotamus! So how could they be so mistaken?

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Here's the bottom line: You put a picture of a javelina on a wanted poster and everyone will go looking for a pig! However, it would be a pig in a poke. Seems you have to know a lot about livestock to properly sort this out. Such arcane distinctions as number of toes on the hind feet, long vs. short tail, sweat glands for pigs, none for javelinas, straight canine teeth for javelinas, curved canines for pigs—for me, it's all too much. The fact is, true pigs evolved in Europe (old world) while javelinas exist only in the Western

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## Pig in a Poke, cont.

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Hemisphere (new world). Biologists believe that the confusion developed when European explorers first encountered javelinas and made the same mistake the Aggies did.

For the record, javelinas are peccaries (pronounced PECK-eries). In these parts, we use the Spanish word “javelina,” but we’re talking collared peccary (*Tayassu tajacu*), one of three species of peccaries that range from the southwestern United States south to central South America. The collared peccary is the only species found in the U.S. Its name comes from a white band of coarse hair, its “collar,” around the neck. Javelinas thrive in Arizona and New Mexico, too, and can be found as far south as Argentina. In Texas, javelinas hang out in the more arid parts of the state, with most occurring in the South Texas brush country, the Trans-Pecos’ desert grasslands, and the Edwards Plateau’s oak-juniper woodlands.



All peccaries are of North American heritage. Fossil remains indicate there have been at least 30 species of now-extinct peccaries. They used to be found in the Yukon, down throughout what is now the United States. That’s when they had thicker hair. As they evolved, this hair lost its under coat and became thinner and thinner—they didn’t waste any time heading south. As soon as the Central American land bridge formed (Isthmus of Panama), they quickly boogied into South America.

Would you believe javelinas have been sighted in Bastrop County? Chapter member Melissa Cole has game camera sightings and a confirmed kill on her property outside of Elgin. In addition, our own Frank May offers this personal account:

“It was 2015, early fall . . . September as I recall,” says Frank. “I was hiking the Cottonwood Kings trail going toward the railroad bridge. When I got to the CRR’s Two Bridge trail head, I went up toward the parking area and came face to butt with a young javelina. This youngster was headed into the brush going toward the railroad bridge. I reported this sighting to game warden Andrew Alexander.”



In javelinaville, herd life is dominated by the alpha male. He does virtually all the breeding in the herd and the pecking order from that point is based on size. Javelinas are small compared to feral hogs, weighing in from 30-55 lbs., but they do a good job of protecting themselves. Javelinas fend off adversaries by squaring off, laying back their ears, and clattering their canines. In a fight, they charge head on, bite, rip and tear. There’s no holding back!

As a group, they are even more effective. Javelinas are agile and quick and can turn on a predator in a heartbeat, driving off dogs, coyotes and bobcats. Despite the protection afforded by the herd, birthing mothers go off by themselves to protect their newborns from being eaten by the others until they are large enough to be accepted. Javelinas can breed any month of the year, but most births occur in May, June, or July, after a five-month gestation period. This may be to correspond with the summer rainy season. The average litter size is two, but occasionally is as high as five.

Musk glands on their rump play an important role in the communal life of javelinas and it’s what gives them their distinctive smell. You can often see them rubbing their heads on each other’s rumps—it’s like a secret password—everyone knows who belongs. It allows individuals to keep in contact with the herd. Territories are marked by rubbing against tree trunks, rocks and stumps.

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# What's Blooming?

by Liz Pullman & Judy Turner

The answer is “just about everything you can imagine.” Take a look at these two plants that were found at the Nature Trail under construction down in Luling.

In recent Biosensations Surveys so many plants have been encountered that I have a backlog of specimens waiting to dry and be identified. In addition, iNaturalist Projects have been created and now anyone can go online and view photos of plants (and critters) we have found. If you don't happen to agree with the identifications, you can disagree and/or post a query. The Biocensus team has several photographers and with the ability to post photos and ask for help, the identification process gets shorter. You can even get opinions on IDs of pre-and post-blooming plants if another iNaturalist recognizes the plant in any growth stage. Judy explains how to access the iNaturalist site and how to participate (or not) in this collaborative process.

According to Judy, the best way to learn about iNaturalist is to visit their website. The following information is for those of you that are not already an iNaturalist member. From the web page you can either sign up or explore. Let's explore first. From the top options bar select what you might want to look at. For example, select Projects, then enter a name - like McKinney Roughs - in the box and press Search. There are two that will be listed. The first one is a bio-blitz that Nicholas did on April 1st and 2nd. The second one is our Lost Pines Master Naturalist Biosensations Survey that we are currently doing for Nicholas. The first screen will show all kinds of statistics. Next, scroll down to recent observations to look at what has been reported. Select an observation of interest to see the information attached to it. Notice that on the right side is a list of other projects that are attached to this observation. When this project was created by Kathy McAleese, permission was given for our data to be included in other projects if their curators deemed it valuable. One of those massive projects is called “The Plants of Texas” and is curated by Texas Parks and Wildlife.



Large Buttercup (*Ranunculus macrantha*)

If you want to make a comment or add an observation to our McKinney Roughs project, you need to join iNaturalist and then join the Project. Return to the top selections options and click on Sign Up. Enter the required information on the “Join iNaturalist” screen. Be sure to change the time zone to Central. Under that box is the option to let anything you enter be available to anyone, not just other members of the McKinney Roughs Project. Think about this. One of the bits of data that gets included when you enter an observation is the GPS location. If your observation is on public land, that's okay to share. However, our LPMN Biosensations team has been doing surveys for private landowners who, for valid reasons, do not want this information available to the world. Once you have joined iNaturalists you can join projects or create one of your own.

To join other projects, select the name of the project from the top selections bar. In the box labeled Search Projects, enter, for example, McKinney Roughs as part of the name. That's us! At the top right of the project screen select “join this project.” Check the boxes that follow to share your observations with McKinney Roughs and the LPMN Biosensations. Allow the project curator to view the private coordinates of your observation by selecting “project members” then click on “Yes, I want to join.” You are in! Now, you can add your own observations or make a comment on a previous observation. When you select to add an observation, you will be presented with a screen of boxes to fill in. Be as accurate as possible in answering. Common names are okay since the system will supply the scientific name. For the McKinney project, enter



Red Buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*)

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# Spotlight on Bridge Maniacs

by Larry Gfeller

One of the longest-running sub-groups within our chapter is the Bridge Maniacs. They formed in 2010 and have met more or less regularly every Wednesday since. Back then, the Colorado River Refuge and Lost Pines Nature Trails received most of the focus of volunteer hours, as trails were cleared and cut, benches were constructed, an outdoor classroom was built and, of course, bridges. The name—Bridge Maniacs—was actually coined by a previous executive director of Pines and Prairies Land Trust (PPLT). Yes, it is an odd name and a bit off-putting . . . but it stuck!



While the group focuses on environmental projects, what makes the Bridge Maniacs unique is not what they do, but rather how they do it. They possess irrepressible ingenuity. Diverse backgrounds come together in creative ways to provide the wherewithal to solve almost any engineering problem. There is a will to succeed and to overcome, and it manifests as a group attitude. There are very few written plans, very little apparent organization or hierarchy—activity is more akin to an ant colony; workers sense what needs to be done . . . and do it.

Because the group was originally formed around the motivation to develop the Colorado River Refuge and Lost Pines Nature Trails, as time moved on, so have the venues. There are, it seems, a finite number of trails to be laid out and cut, bridges to be built, benches to be installed, etc. at any one location. Today, the Bridge Maniacs rotate through a number of regularly scheduled parks and natural areas including Buescher, Bastrop and Lockhart State parks, Lost Pines Nature Trails, Colorado River Refuge, Yegua Knobs, McKinney Roughs and Lake Bastrop South Shore. They do occasional appearances at Billing Ranch and Zedler Park South in Luling. They are always open to new venues and new opportunities.



One of the fun events each year is the auctioning of Bridge Maniac services at our chapter's annual Christmas Silent Auction. One never knows what tasks the auction winner has in mind. The maniacs have built porch railings, installed nest boxes, felled dead trees, done erosion control work, removed invasive trees/plants, poured concrete, planted trees & flower gardens, burned brush and more. It's good public relations for the maniacs and a great way to help LPMN members get kick-started through big projects around their property.

While certain aspects of Bridge Maniac ritual have not changed (Wednesday meetings, lunch at local restaurants following work) the group continues to evolve. Regular members were originally comprised of O.R.M. (old retired men). Today, the group contains both men and women and some of our newest members are neither old nor retired. The formula for success seems to include a lively sense of humor and a quiet respect for hard work. Love of the outdoors doesn't hurt either.

So, if these values align with yours or you have questions about the Bridge Maniacs or what they do, contact Audrey Ambrose, our Chief of Environmental Stewardship. Better yet, join us on any given Wednesday and see for yourself.





# Brooks on Books - New Finds

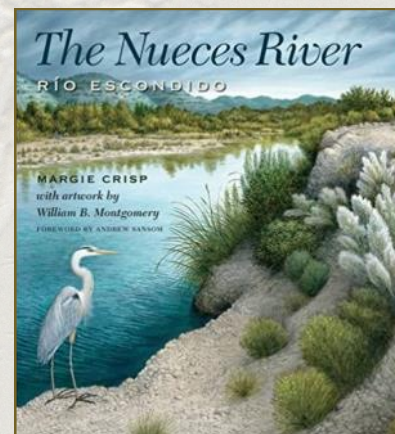
## by Bill Brooks

### “The Nueces River Rio Escondido”

Margie Crisp’s long awaited second book, “The Nueces River Rio Escondido,” with artwork by her husband William Montgomery, has now been released by the Texas A&M Press.

If you read Margie’s first book “River of Contrasts” about the Colorado River, you know what to expect. Her approachable writing is fun to read and full of facts. Like the Colorado book, this book is a description of the Nueces from its headwaters all the way down to the Gulf of Mexico. This time she made the journey down the river with much less help from landowners.

Bill Montgomery’s art is amazing. Not all the species in Bill’s drawings are labeled but you will find full information in the appendix.



I just enjoy it so when locals put out such an excellent reference. Their work in the early days of the Bastrop County Audubon Society is still appreciated.

### “Beginning Beekeeping: Everything You Need to Make Your Hive Thrive”

South Austin beekeeper Tanya Phillips and her husband Chuck Reburn are well known local authorities. This first book by Tanya was released this year. It is chock full of tidbits of knowledge needed to manage a successful hive. They should know. They are caring for over 150 hives and had a booth at last year’s Armadillo Christmas Bazaar to sell their delicious raw honey.

The book isn’t just full of experience-driven information, it is also a joy to view. The book designer and illustrator, Becky Batchelor, did a wonderful job on the very appealing appearance of this volume. You can get more information [here](#).

Tanya and Chuck are dear friends of mine. Tanya is the current treasurer and webmaster for the Horned Lizard Conservation Society. On multiple occasions Tanya and Chuck have hosted the HLCS on Memorial Day

Horned Lizard Surveys at the vacation home Chuck built near Terlingua.

### “Inferno in the Lost Pines”

I feel like the guy on a popular TV commercial. Why am I the last to know about everything? I have recently discovered another book about the 2011 Bastrop fire.

I have written about Randy Fritz’s 2015 book, “Hail of Fire.” Katrina Hoover wrote a book that came out before Randy’s. I have not read Katrina’s “Inferno,” which was published by the Christian Aid Ministries in 2013. Amazon is currently shipping me the volume.

Apparently she interviewed at least 19 residents affected by the 2011 fire. Among those interviewed was our fellow LPMN Nicholas Cowley. Ms. Hoover is an Indiana nurse who has written several other books.



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## Pig in a Poke, cont.

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Javelinas are not gourmets; they have a complex stomach capable of digesting all sorts of coarsely chewed stuff. They will eat anything, from lizards to dead birds, rodents, garbage, pet food, some flowering plants, bird seed and even the contents of your unprotected cooler! Despite a widely supplemented diet, they really have a special place in their little black hearts for agaves and prickly pears. They also feast on a wide variety of fruits, tubers, rhizomes, bulbs, acorns, grass, green shoots of annuals, lupines, mesquite beans and lechuguilla. Discriminating they are not.



In the winter, they are generally active in the early morning and late afternoon. Javelinas are largely nocturnal during the hotter times of the year. Peccaries tend to remain near permanent sources of water (on our trip that was Choke Canyon Reservoir). Unlike coyotes and bobcats, peccaries are unable to evaporate moisture through panting to prevent overheating. Succulent prickly pear pads make it possible for javelinas to survive until rainfall provides additional new annual food plants and water sources. Javelinas drink when water is available, but it is not essential as long as succulents can be found.



After feeding, the band will bed down under rocky overhangs, in caves, and in shallow depressions with heavy brush cover. They will huddle together for warmth and protection in one big, smelly group hug.

In Texas, javelinas are classified as a game animal and may be legally harvested with a hunting license, during hunting season, in counties which have a season. I, for one, am not much for Aggie jokes, but I just gotta wonder if around Kingsville Aggies can be found in a cold pre-dawn hunting blind waiting for a flock of javelinas to fly over? Naw . . . not in a pig's eye!



## Blooming, cont.

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the name of the hiking trail and "McKinney Roughs, Bastrop, Texas" as the place you made the observation. Enter latitude and longitude, if known. Use 100 meters for ACC (meaning the lat/long are within 100 meters of the object). Make sure the time zone is correct. If you don't know the lat/long, it may be imbedded in the photo file you attach. On the right side of the screen, select "choose files" in the "add photos" box. A Windows (Safari for Macintosh) file finder screen will be displayed for you to find and select the desired photo. Once selected, click "open." Then the file name will be shown in the Add photos box. Check the box "Sync obs. w/photo metadata" to include lat/long and date taken in the photo information you upload. Leave the "change geoprivacy" box to "open." Now scroll down to the bottom of the screen and click on "save observation." It may take a few minutes, but shortly your photo will be displayed on your screen as an observation to the McKinney Project. It will also be available for all to see and comment on. If you have more photos to add, just repeat these steps for the number you want to include in the project. See - wasn't that easy?





## EARLIEST EVIDENCE OF LIFE ON EARTH 'FOUND'

“Scientists have discovered what they say could be fossils of some of the earliest living organisms on Earth. They are represented by tiny filaments, knobs and tubes in Canadian rocks dated to be up to 4.28 billion years old. That is a time not long after the planet's formation and hundreds of millions of years before what is currently accepted as evidence for the most ancient life yet found on Earth.

Any claim for the earliest life on Earth attracts skepticism. That is understandable. It is often hard to prove that certain structures could not also have been produced by non-biological processes.” [The researchers report their investigation in the journal Nature.](#)

## HOW FAST CAN YOU FLY?

It looks like our Mexican free-tailed bat (*Tadarida brasiliensis* – also called the Brazilian free-tailed bat) is the fastest documented bird or bat traveling in level flight. A Mexican free-tailed bat has been clocked going 99.42 mph. The fastest bird is the common swift (*Apus apus*) clocked at around 69.7 mph (Bats magazine, Issue 1, 2017, pg. 3).



## FIRST FLOURESCENT AMPHIBIAN

Scientists have found the [first fluorescent amphibian](#). The Polka Dot Tree Frog found near Santa Fe, Argentina glows an intense greenish-blue under a UV light. Fluorescence has also been seen in hawksbill sea turtles.

## SOIL-DWELLING ARACHNID LEAVES BITTER TASTE IN MOUTH OF ATTACKERS WITH POISON PRECURSOR

“Although the *Oribatula tibialis* mite is only the size of a pin head, [it packs a punch when it comes to defending itself from predators](#). It produces a compound that releases hydrogen cyanide – one of the quickest acting and most toxic poisons – when it comes into contact with an attacker’s saliva.

Of the 80,000 known arachnid species many use toxins to kill their prey or protect themselves, but the soil-dwelling oribatid mite is the first to defend itself using hydrogen cyanide – a poison usually only found in plants like the South American cassava and in a handful of other animals, most of them insects.”

## MEASURING THE PLASTIC IN SAND

Some of you may know Susan Leslie. She is a past president of the Bastrop County Audubon Society. Her grandson has been traveling around the world collecting beach sand. This sand will come back to the US to study the amount of micro-plastic beads imbedded in this sand. [Follow this amazing journey.](#)

## ARISTOTLE'S LANTERN

Aristotle was a Greek teacher who lived more than two thousand years ago. To be exact, he lived from 384 to 322 B.C.E. (before the common era). Do those dates look backward to you? You need to remember that before Christ, dates count down to his birth and afterwards they count up. So if you do the math, 384 years plus our current date, you will find that if Aristotle was still alive he would be more than 2,400 years old! If you are vaguely interested in sea urchin anatomy or discovering “Aristotle’s Lantern” please [look it up](#).

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# Snippets, cont.

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## DEADLY FUNGUS INVADES TEXAS

The fungus *Pseudogymnoascus destructans* (Pd) was detected on three species of hibernating bats in northern Texas: the cave myotis (pictured), Townsend's big-eared bat, and the tri-colored bat. This is the first discovery of Pd on the cave myotis and the first detection of the fungus on western populations of Townsend's big-eared bats - two bat species with distributions extending further into the west.

The fungus was detected in six Texas counties from samples collected in January and February 2017 by Bat Conservation International and Texas A&M University biologists as part of a larger national surveillance study led by University of California, Santa Cruz. The cave and bat samples were collected in Childress, Collingsworth, Cottle, Hardeman, King, and Scurry counties.

White-nose Syndrome has been rapidly expanding westward since its discovery in New York in 2007. Millions of bats have been killed by the disease, with population declines greater than 90% in some states.

The discovery of the fungus in Texas is significant on a national scale as biologists are concerned that the spread of Pd into western states will be exacerbated as this and other western species are exposed.

"The detection of Pd in Texas comes on the heels of last week's announcement of White-nose Syndrome being confirmed in Nebraska. Although there is no known treatment for White-nose Syndrome, we are actively working on research that may prove effective," Winifred Frick, BCI Senior Director of Conservation Science explained. [Read more.](#)



## INVASIVE ARMORED CATFISH

"Researchers have estimated that invasive armored catfish" (also called the Plecostomus) "account for 51% of the ichthyomass in the San Marcos River" (Andy Gluesenkamp on FB).



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## STATE PROGRAM CONTACTS

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**State Coordinator:** Michelle Haggerty, 979-845-5777, [mhaggerty@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:mhaggerty@ag.tamu.edu)

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

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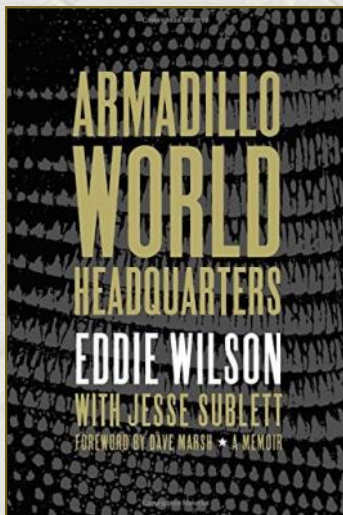
**Bastrop/Caldwell County TPWD Wildlife Biologist:** Robert Trudeau, 512-332-7280, [Robert.Trudeau@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:Robert.Trudeau@tpwd.texas.gov)





## Books, cont.

(Continued from page 5)



### “Armadillo World Headquarters: A Memoir”

This book has nothing to do with central Texas natural history. I’m adding this for all the long time Austin and surrounding area residents. Eddie Wilson, who owns the two Austin Threadgill’s restaurants, has finally written his long awaited book on the Armadillo World Headquarters, a popular ‘70s concert hall. He founded and co-owned this popular venue. This is his second literary endeavor. In 1996 he wrote “Threadgill’s The Cookbook.” Jesse Sublett, an Austin author and musician, co-authored this book. I don’t have to encourage anyone who went to the Armadillo to read this book. They will. If you haven’t eaten at Austin’s Threadgill’s restaurant, you should. Although it hasn’t been announced yet, Eddie Wilson will be signing his new book on June 4th at 5pm at BookPeople in Austin.

Read on and enjoy!



## Snippets, cont.

(Continued from page 8)

Many of us know snakes smell using their tongues and an organ, the Jacobson’s Organ, located on the roof of their mouth.

Did you know that dogs also have a Jacobson’s Organ in their nose? I didn’t.



## Newsletter Deadline

Submission deadline for the next issue is June 23, 2017. 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. Submissions may be edited for clarity, grammar, spelling, and space requirements. Please send information to the editor at [Roxanne.M.Hernandez@gmail.com](mailto:Roxanne.M.Hernandez@gmail.com).

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