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# SIDE OATS NOTES

Fall 2019



A Newsletter for the Prairie Oaks Master Naturalist Chapter  
Volume 1 Issue 4

## OPENING NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Have you ever sat and watched a butterfly emerge from its chrysalis? It's fascinating! Once it has fully transformed from the caterpillar to a butterfly, and is ready, the butterfly breaks through the by-then fragile membrane of the chrysalis and spreads its tiny wings. It starts pumping its chubby abdomen and the wings start to expand. But, even once the wings are fully stretched out, the butterfly must wait a few hours before it can fly away. Take a look at the amazing process here: <https://youtu.be/OM-ptuFr-zc>

I think that our chapter is in a similar process of emerging. We have grown in size and talents, but we are still working out the kinks and figuring out how the gears will turn. We are developing processes and testing out programs. And we are continually learning from each other. We are starting to spread our wings, but we aren't quite ready to fly.

As a leader, it is hard to know what you want to happen but, at the same time, realize that you aren't quite ready for it yet. Honestly, it can be downright frustrating at times. In this season of our journey, I ask you to join me in embracing the present. It may be a little messy, but hey, we're Master Naturalists. Isn't messy what we do best?

Gratefully,

Karen



## CALENDAR

### September 19

Chapter Meeting  
6:00-7:00p  
AgriLife Research and Extension  
Classroom

AT program: Answering the Question "So What?" to create those "A-ha!" Moments: The Art of Interpretation, David Owens, Lake Mineral Wells State Park. 7:00-8:00p

### October 17

Chapter Meeting  
6:00-7:00p  
AgriLife Research and Extension  
Classroom

AT program: Entomology Workshop, Dr. Adam Mitchell, Tarleton State University. 7:00-8:00p

### October 18-20, 2019

TXMN Annual Meeting  
Rockwall, TX

### November 1

Registration begins for POMN 2020  
Spring Training Class

### November 21

Chapter Meeting  
6:00-7:00p  
Agrilife Research and Extension  
Classroom

AT program: Light Pollution: Education and Preservation of Our Night Sky, Taryn Gibbs, Girl Scout, TSU student. 7:00-8:00p

6:00-7:00p  
Agrilife Research and  
Extension Conference Room

**December 19**  
Holiday Party

## UPCOMING VOLUNTEER AND ADVANCED TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

**September 21**— Brazos River Nature Trail Bird Walk—8:30a

**September 26** —Lingleville School Outreach Project— 7:30a to 1:30p.

**September 28**—Comanche Pow-Wow Outreach Booth—9:00a-4:00p

**September 28**—Palo Pinto Mountain State Park Star Party—4:00p-8:00p

**October 5**— Stephenville Farmers' Market Outreach Booth— from 9:00a to 12:00p

**October 5**— Comanche Farmers' Market Outreach Booth— from 9:00a to 12:00p

**October 12**— Dublin Farmers' Market Outreach Booth —from 8:00a to 12:00p

**October 26**—Brazos River Nature Trail Bird Walk—8:30a

**October 26**—Rio Brazos Chapter—"Discover Earth Science"—Acton Nature Center—10:00a-3:00p

**October 27**—"Nature Fest" Fall Outreach Event—Bosque River Trail Nature Center—3:00p-9:00p

**November 2**— Stephenville Farmers' Market Outreach Booth— from 9:00a to 12:00p

**November 2**— Comanche Farmers' Market Outreach Booth— from 9:00a to 12:00p

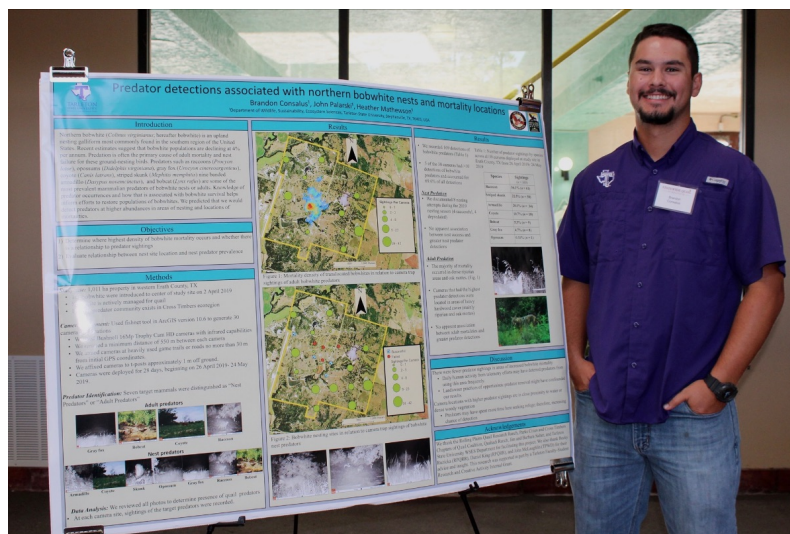
**November 9**—Dublin Farmers' Market Outreach Booth —from 8:00a to 12:00p

**November 23**—Brazos River Nature Trail Bird Walk—8:30a

**December 15**—Christmas Bird Count

For more information or to volunteer, contact Katie Moses or Emily Moore.

## KUDOS



Congratulations to Brandon Consalus, member of the 2019 Spring Training Class, for presenting undergraduate research "Predator Detections Associated with Northern Bobwhite Nests and Mortality Locations" at the Statewide Quail Decline Symposium. Coauthors were John Palarski and Dr. Heather Mathewson, WSES.



Congratulations to Lauren Spivey, member of the 2019 Spring Training Class for her work as a State Parks Ambassador at Lake Brownwood State Park and as an Americorp VISTA.



POTXMN owes a huge debt of gratitude to all three of these members, but the chapter meeting of July 15 was an opportunity to recognize the many behind-the-scenes contributions of Barbara Salter. Here, Rebecca Damron (left) and Marsha Stephens (right) recognize and congratulate Barbara on behalf of the chapter.

### More Naturalists Reaching Out

Last issue we mentioned the important outreach opportunities presented by local Farmers Markets and similar events. Here is Katie's report on some of those opportunities generated this last quarter.

A general outreach booth at an event such as the Farmer's Market is a great opportunity for members to share their interests and talents with members of the community and this summer we got to see just that! In June, Linda Wood brought a poster and activity that she made about pollinators to the Stephenville Farmer's Market. In Dublin, Peggy Tolboom brought jars of fresh wildflowers and with the help of Genet Kleppinger and Charles Ditmore and I, had visitors see how many they could identify. At Stephenville in July, Lance Trinque displayed his buffalo skull on the table and was able to share his extensive knowledge with the community. When a visitor asked if he could ID the bug bites she had, he quickly diagnosed it as Poison Ivy and taught her how to treat it! I supplied materials for kids (or adults) to make nature journals and Lynn Wood had an experiment on identifying soil layers. In Dublin, Genet, Lloyd and Gloria Lietz and I kept "cool" under a large shade tree and talked to visitors about a variety of topics. With Genet's wide range of volunteer experience, she is always a great asset to the booth and can give a great portrayal of what our organization is about. At Stephenville in August, Linda brought a poster on dinosaurs and along with Lynn and Sherrie Barton, battled the heat to talk to people about our chapter. Overall the months of June, July and August we added 20 new contacts to our list, passed out flyers on our upcoming training class, and had some great conversations about nature!

Katie Moses  
Prairie Oaks Chapter Texas Master Naturalist

## Member Spotlight on Linda and Lynn Wood



### Long-time teachers—lifetime learners

Prairie Oaks members Linda and Lynn Wood (from the Spring 2019 training class) live outside Dublin on acreage inherited from grandparents. Their place is near the infamous McDow Hole, a ghost-ridden place full of intriguing Texas lore. See <http://www.texasescapes.com/Ghosts/The-McDow-Hole.htm>

Both Linda and Lynn are native Texans, she born in Mount Pleasant and he in Lubbock. Both have PhDs in chemistry and they spent the last 30 years in Valdosta, Georgia, Lynn as a professor at Valdosta State and Linda as an analytical chemist and for 25 of those years a high school chemistry/science teacher.

Linda enjoys pottery, painting, gardening and running; Lynn is into woodworking, photography and astronomy/astrophotography, although he notes that the latter requires staying up awfully late.

The Woods have embraced the Texas Master Naturalist program as a way to learn about local natural resources so they can be responsible stewards of their property. In fact, Lynn's bucket-list natural history experience would be to return their property to the native plants appropriate for the region. (Linda's bucket-list wish is to go to the Galapagos Islands and experience the relationship of flora and fauna with their environment.)

To say that the Woods are active members of POTXMN might be an understatement. They have worked on service projects such as planting trees at Lake Proctor, working in the pollinator garden at Mineral Wells State Park, maintaining the Bosque River Trail and Nature Center Garden (where Lynn made the stakes and Linda used her ceramic skills to make signs to identify signature plants), working the Stephenville Farmers Market and, as illustrated above and below, giving "Track Talks" at Dinosaur Valley State Park. So as they learn about the ecosystem of the Prairie Oaks region, they also use their teaching skills to spread the word about the natural wonders of our State. Lucky for us that when they returned home from Georgia, POTXMN was the closest chapter to their country abode.

Next time you see them, say hello to Linda and Lynn Wood



### In the beginning ...

There is a movement among conservationists to build and maintain pollinator gardens. And with good reason! Pollinators are responsible for 1 out of 3 bites of food we take each day, and yet pollinators are at a critical point in their own survival. It is clear that increasing the number of pollinator-friendly gardens and landscapes will help revive the health of bees, butterflies, birds, bats and other pollinators across the country. There is, in fact, a National Pollinator Garden Network <http://millionpollinatorgardens.org/> The Network is a rich source of information about pollinator gardens. For instance it recommends that gardens provide a water source, be planted in sunny areas with wind breaks, create large "pollinator targets" of native or non-invasive plants, establish continuous bloom throughout the growing season, and eliminate or minimize the impact of pesticides.

One such garden is arising at the museum in Comanche County and in addition to the aid it will provide pollinators, it may be a rich resource for volunteer opportunities for members of POTXMN. Watch as this collaborative effort literally comes out of the ground. And watch for volunteer opportunities. You too can be a part of establishing this valuable mini-habitat.



This is the "before" picture.



The museum installed a rain capture system to supply a source of water.



A neighbor's tractor helped get the project started.





Now comes the heavy lifting - outlining the beds with stone. More work remains. It is a work in process.

### When the Bluestem Turns Red



Fall has arrived with fine cool mornings that hint of changes to come. On the roadsides, stands of Maximilian sunflowers flash gold to match the leaves of cottonwoods along creeks. Migratory insect-eating birds like purple martins, barn swallows and scissor-tailed flycatchers are on their way south. And forming the background to all of these changes are pastures with tall bunchgrass that is slowly turning from green and tan to coppery red. This widespread grass that paints the landscape ablaze in the fall is little bluestem, which occurs throughout the U.S. and southern provinces of Canada.

True to its name, the leaves and stems of little bluestem are blue-green when active growth begins in late spring, and throughout summer. As winter approaches, little bluestem produces tall seed stalks with white fuzzy structures containing the seeds. The seed stalks extend 2-3 feet above the grass clumps, so the entire plant can reach up to 8 feet. It is the seed stalks that exhibit the fall colors. An amazing aspect of little bluestem is that there is always more of the plant below ground than can be seen above ground; its fibrous roots can be 5-8 feet deep. This explains a lot about why this grass is highly drought tolerant and part of a wise landowner's defense against soil erosion. Add to that the fact that little bluestem features good protein content, especially during the early growing season, and you can see why it is a valuable part of effective rangeland management by cattlemen. This grass thrives in full sun on well-drained soils, and tolerates low soil fertility, shallow or rocky soils, and soil pH from acidic to alkaline. So no need for irrigation or fertilizer, and it grows almost anywhere; what's not to like about this grass?

Little bluestem also makes a big contribution to wildlife, especially ground dwelling birds like bobwhite quail. At the base of the grass clumps, the outer lower leaves and stems curve downward, forming densely covered cavities that are perfect for nesting and roosting of small birds. Looking at healthy native rangeland as a whole, little bluestem is part of the diverse plant community that provides the food and habitat for all of the animals of a prairie ecosystem, from lizards and rodents up to deer and pronghorn. In most areas of this region, it is the only surviving representative of the "big four" species of native tallgrass prairie (originally occurring alongside big bluestem, Indian grass and switch grass). If you are lucky enough to have access to a healthy native prairie site, look for the many other grasses that may be present, like sideoats grama (the Texas state grass), Texas bluegrass, and buffalograss.

Little bluestem is readily grown from seed, and spreads primarily by seed dispersal. The seed is usually part of the seed mix used in rangeland restoration projects. As landscaping with native plants has gained in popularity, it is also being cultivated for use as a bedding plant and even as part of mixed grass lawns, especially where low water usage is desirable. Many commercial varieties have been developed in different areas of the nation, with some that are better for pasture grass and others that are better for landscaping.

Perhaps this review of the nature and role of little bluestem will give you a new or expanded appreciation for that tall grass that colors the hillsides in the fall. If you catch a view at sunset, the seed-covered stalks virtually glow with the sun behind them. Bring a few stalks home to add to your Thanksgiving Day cornucopia and celebrate the bounty of nature's beauty.

Marsha Stephens  
Prairie Oaks Chapter, Texas Master Naturalists



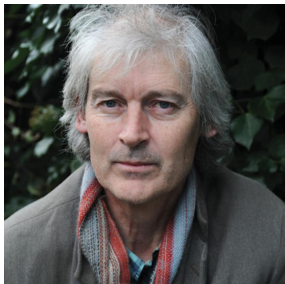
### Nature in Poetry

There is a strong affinity between the natural world and poetry. This poem is especially for one of our members who says her favorite creature is the red-spotted newt. (Did you know that the red-spotted newt is the state amphibian of the state of New Hampshire?) This poem describes one of the newt's defense mechanisms. Some of you may notice several references to playing poker.

#### The Bluff

The newt that plays so delicately dead  
 must be on the qui vive unless terror  
 just flicks the switch. Its limbs go limp,  
 its upturned orange underbelly over-ripe:  
 a toxic flag unfurled from the beyond.  
 – Clubbed fingers, clammy green and spectral,  
 appear to have slipped off the frets  
 of a miniature guitar.  
 Unstrung, inert, the major risk it runs  
 from a sentimental species such as ours  
 is premature burial, but even that it seems to have  
 rehearsed for, lying days out under a stone.  
 It keeps dead up for quite some time and then  
 gives itself away. A blink. A twitch. How easily  
 it shuffles off its life – and then its death.  
 If this is play, it's play for mortal stakes.  
 Play for keeps, and not keepsakes.  
 An all-in bluff no river card could save.  
 Sorry to intrude, I replace the newt  
 beneath its stone. There it can lie  
 pretending, presumably, to be alive.

Jamie McKendrick



Jamie McKendrick was born in Liverpool, England in 1955. He is the author of six collections of poetry, including *The Marble Fly* (1997), winner of the Forward Prize for Best Collection and a Poetry Book Society Choice; *Ink Stone* (2003), shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize and the Whitbread Poetry Award; and *Crocodiles & Obelisks*, shortlisted for the Forward Prize. *Out There* (2012) won the Hawthornden Prize.

### A THOUGHT FOR TODAY:

You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you.  
 What you do makes a difference and you have to decide what kind of a difference you want to make.

Jane Goodall —English primatologist, anthropologist (1934- )

#### POMN Officers 2019

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