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SIDE OATS NOTES

Spring 2019



A Newsletter for the Prairie Oaks Master Naturalist Chapter
Volume 1 Issue 2



OPENING NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

As a child growing up in the woods of northeastern Pennsylvania, I spent most of my time outdoors exploring the forested land “out back” beyond my childhood yard. I slid



CALENDAR

over rocks in hopes of finding salamanders and on rainy nights I would jump out of my parents' car to move toads off our dead-end road to safety in a nearby ditch. In the fall I would skip a New York City shopping trip to spend the first day of buck season sitting under a tree with my father. I loved the outdoors and especially loved finding critters to keep in one of my many terrariums.

On one particular day I decided it was time to “clean up” some of the fallen tree limbs in the wooded area closest to my yard. The area was mostly pine with a nice open understory, but some of the dead trees had dirtied things up by falling over. I started by picking up some of the small debris and putting into a pile. Then I grabbed hold of a rotting limb that was about four inches around and broke it off with a loud crack. It fell to the ground and I realized what I had done. Not only had I just damaged some very beneficial habitat, but I had killed a red backed salamander that had taken up lodging in the rotting wood. I was devastated and even began to cry. I learned a very important lesson that day and vowed to care for the environment that I so deeply loved.

It's been at least two decades since that day, and sadly, I don't spend nearly as much time outdoors as I used too. (Of course, this Pennsylvanian doesn't do well in Texas heat, so that adds its own limitations.) My first job out of college was working as an instructor at an environmental education center in the Poconos. Then I went on to manage environmental programs (hikes, field trips, etc) and a hunting club at a camp with 3,000 amazing acres. Wow! I was very lucky to start off my career with those wonderful experiences!

I ended up here in Texas when my fiancé (now husband) moved to Waco for graduate school. Unfortunately I did not find a job doing environmental education, but I did volunteer with the Lake Waco Wetlands and met some wonderful Texas Master Naturalists while I was job-hunting. That was my first “touch” with the Texas Master Naturalist Program. Because of scheduling conflicts I could not participate in the Heart of Texas Chapter's class, but the idea stayed with me. Fast forward a few years and my husband and I were both working at Tarleton State University. I saw an advertisement that Seth Hamby, our esteemed Immediate Past-President and Founder had posted and immediately contacted him. Again, due to scheduling I couldn't do it, but I was the first application submitted for the class the following year!

So, here I am, thankful for the opportunity to serve as your President. I am extremely grateful for the amazing vision that Seth had and has for our chapter and for the amazing folks who helped get the chapter off the ground. Now we are all set for our first complete year with a full board, chairs, and committees, and I couldn't be more excited. We have a very talented team of volunteers that will help us not only to keep the “boring” organizational items going, but who will be our eyes, ears, and voices in these four counties we serve. There

6:00-7:00p

AgriLife Research and Extension Classroom
AT: program: Game Wardens in Natural Resource Protection
(Michael Hummers, Erath County Game Warden)
7:00-8:00p

April 18

Chapter Meeting
6:00-7:00p-
Agrilife Research and Extension Classroom
AT program: The Story of the Comanche Peak Prairie Clover
(Seth Hamby, Graduate Assistant)
7:00-8:00p

May 16

Chapter Meeting
6:00-7:00p
Agrilife Research and Extension Classroom
AT program: Let's Talk Ticks
(Dr. David Kattes, Professor (Retired) WSES, Tarleton State University)
7:00-8:00p

October 18-20, 2019
TXMN Annual Meeting
Rockwall, TX

Gratefully,
Karen L. Aho
President, POMN Chapter

POTXMN ROCK STARS!



On March 6, 2019 Seth Hamby successfully presented and defended his Masters Thesis: **Patterns of Regional Genetic Diversity in the Texas Endemic Plant, *Dalea reverchonii*.**

Many chapter members were on hand to cheer him on.

CONGRATULATIONS SETH.



On March 7, 2019 Katherine Hood successfully presented and defended her Masters Thesis: **Combating a Native Invasion; Targeted, Growing Season Defoliation Effects on Texas Wintergrass (*Nasella leucotricha*) Seed Production and Regrowth Under Mesquite Canopies in North Central Texas.**

Many chapter members were there to cheer her on.

CONGRATULATIONS KATHERINE.

UPCOMING VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Feather Fest at Granbury Acton Center-March 23 10:00a-2:00p
Bird themed family event—Education and Public Outreach

Bioblitz at Hunewell Ranch—April 6

Stephenville Farmers' Market-April 6—Outreach Booth

Native Plant Sale at Stephenville Historical Museum-April 13—Outreach Booth

Spring Wing Ding at Dinosaur Valley State Park—April 20

Dublin Farmers' Market-May 11—Outreach Booth

For more information or to volunteer, contact Katherine Hood or Emily Moore.



A New Class, A Nice Mix

The reasons for attending the 2019 Master Naturalist training class are as varied as the vitae of the class attendees. Attendees from the community include new land owners, experienced ranchers and a Master Gardener. Several from the community expressed that they just want to learn more about ecology or preserving diversity in nature — but all strive to eventually become certified as a Master Naturalist.

In our unique setting for Master Naturalist training course, people from the community discover new interests in ecology while college students learn and decide on careers — possibly in one of the fields they will be introduced to during the course. Experienced ranchers sit side-by-side with students while learning something new about the land from our expert instructors.

Students are participating in the Master Naturalist training as an adjunct to the Tarleton curriculum course: *Conservation Outreach & Interpretation*.

This year there are 28 attending the Master Naturalist Training class sponsored by the Prairie Oaks Chapter. Fifteen are Tarleton students and the remaining thirteen participants are residents of Erath County (9) or from Hamilton, Palo Pinto or Tarrant Counties.

Career plans include wildlife biology, game ranch management, agriculture, equine and wildlife veterinary science, and even being a game warden. Several students expressed their hope that by taking the additional training and becoming certified as Master Naturalists, their resume will be enhanced.

Ten of the community group are rural landowners and a seven have degrees in range management, environmental science, biology or chemistry. “We have acreage and would like to know what is native and what is not” one community member stated. A married couple who are attending together said: “We are both chemists, kinda’ lab-rats — we’re not much into growing stuff.” It was suggested they might “be into” soil testing. They agreed.

The community group is evenly divided male and female. Retirees make up half of the group while the other half are active in ranching, farming, real estate, or firefighting. One is a minister. Their interests range from bee-keeping to birding, native plant gardening to range management, and from outreach to “just learning about ecology”.

Speaking to the class as the 2019 New Training Class Representative Bob McCormick said: “As an engineer I didn’t know much about ecology, biology or any of the many other subjects presented in the course, but now I am totally enthusiastic about what I have learned — and the importance of it.”

Initial interest will likely lead to involvement in volunteering. You value what you love. All of the class members have been introduced to volunteer opportunities they did not know existed. And those opportunities are just as varied as the individuals in the 2019 Master Naturalist class.

Contributed by Bob McCormick

Prairie Oaks Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists





IT'S A HANDS-ON CLASS!

Birds Count in Erath County

December 16, 2018, was a special day locally! On this day, the first Christmas Bird Count conducted in Erath County and officially sanctioned by the National Audubon Society was successfully completed. This puts Stephenville, Texas, in the record books for the 119th Christmas Bird Count, and it will join the annual report posted each year online by the

The drama began at 7:00 that morning, with members of the count teams gathering to begin their work (although none of them would call it work), and around 5:00 that afternoon the last of the participants gathered at a local eatery to tally the official totals for the day. The count teams consisted of hearty naturalists who walked and drove approximately 198 miles in an area delineated by a 15-mile diameter circle, centered on Stephenville. The count was sponsored by the Prairie Oaks Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists, and seven chapter members participated, as well as four birders from the DFW area and Dr. Carol Thompson, a local authority in bird identification.

Some team members were volunteer drivers for the teams, some were team recorders, and all helped identify and count the birds observed. Though it was cold, windy, and cloudy, 86 species of birds were observed, and this was based just on sightings from county roads and state highways and a few publicly accessible areas of land like the Stephenville City Park and Bosque River Trail. This exceeded the total from an “unofficial” Christmas Bird Count for the same area last year, so already the project is a success.

The Christmas Bird Count began in 1900, at the suggestion of noted ornithologist Dr. Frank M. Chapman, to members of a group that would become the National Audubon Society. The first count took place on Christmas Day, and was conducted by a total of 27 observers in 25 locations, mainly in the northeast. Over the intervening years, the count has remained focused on a 24-hour period at each count location, but the window for conducting counts has been expanded to encompass three weeks during the Christmas season. Along the way, the methodology and size of count areas was also standardized, and gradually the count began to grow. According to the National Audubon Society website (www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count), the 118th Christmas Bird Count was conducted during December 14, 2017 through January 5, 2018. That count was conducted at 1,957 locations in the U.S. and 628 locations in other nations worldwide, and in the U.S., over 58,000 observers participated in the count! The data that has been collected and archived over the past 118 years is now used by scientists worldwide in studies to help understand long-term trends in bird populations. It is a stellar example of what “citizen scientists” can contribute to research, education and conservation of natural resources. And you don’t even have to be an expert birder to participate; in fact it is a great way to learn about local birds.

So mark your calendars for December 15, 2019, and count on counting with us for the 120th National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count!

Contributed by Marsha Stephens and Seth Hamby

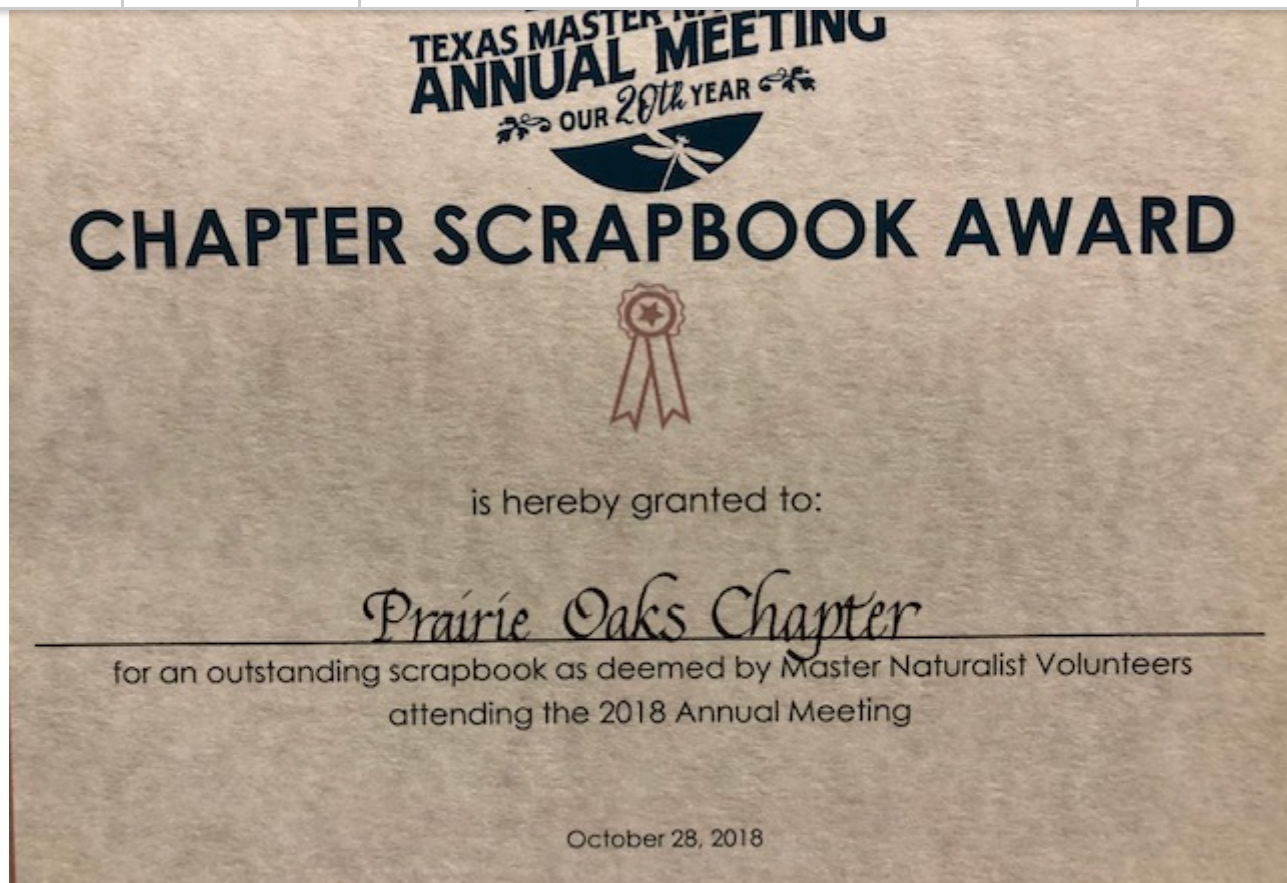
Member Spotlight



Our Spotlight members for this issue are Gail and Bruce Bradshaw from Comanche. Bruce grew up in Comanche and currently serves as the Police Chief, having previously served in CID with the Mesquite Police Department before retiring. Gail grew up in Dallas and attended Tarleton State University, where she and Bruce met. Upon graduation and marriage, Bruce and Gail settled in Forney to raise their daughters as Bruce began his career in law enforcement. Gail worked in research at UTSW Medical School and the A & M Experimental Station in Dallas before deciding on a teaching career resulting in a Masters Degree in Earth Science from East Texas State (now Texas A & M Commerce). She taught Science for almost thirty years and has brought those skills and her enthusiasm to the POTXMN outreach effort.

The Bradshaws currently live on the family farm in Comanche county where they raise cattle, hay, and native grasses. In addition to working on the farm and volunteering with POMN and their church, they spend time visiting with their two daughters, Laci, another Tarleton graduate, and Jodi, an Aggie. Laci's theater career has taken her to New York and all over the country with Broadway theater on tour. Jodi recently moved back to Texas after earning a PhD from Fordham University in New York. Her family includes Bruce and Gail's three grandkids, two girls and a boy.

Gail and Bruce joined the Texas Master Naturalist program through the Rio Brazos Chapter in Granbury and joined Prairie Oaks soon after it was founded. One of Gail's hobbies is scrapbooking. We know she is accomplished at this because she created a scrapbook for POTXMN, presented it at the state convention and came home with this! Well done, Gail!



And now "The Rest of The Story" about the scrapbook in Gail's own words:

Nothing quite prepares you to hear the words, "It is cancer". A thousand random thoughts go through your mind at once...."Not now. Not me. How will I tell Bruce? How will I tell my family? I don't have time for this. What's going to happen?" And then you hear, "There is some good news". The cancer is slow growing, Phase 1A. You need to call and schedule a pre-op appointment and surgery. I opened my appointment book and called to make the needed appointments. I was told the earliest available date was Oct. 29. I started to ask for another later date, but decided the day after our Master Naturalist state meeting would work great. What better way to take my mind off surgery than a long weekend with friends enjoying all the activities at the state meeting.

As I ended the call, a wave of depression hit. The state meeting! I had been working on a scrapbook of our chapter's first year with hopes of entering it in a competition at the state meeting. With all the doctors' appointments, lab work, stress, and worry, working on the scrapbook had been put on hold. I suddenly realized that it would be very difficult to finish our chapter scrapbook on time, and of good enough quality, to take it at the end of Oct. But then, as quickly as the dark thought had entered my mind, a brighter confident thought pushed it away. I have three weeks. That's plenty of time to finish the book if I work hard and it will keep my mind off surgery. I began to put together a game plan.

I've always enjoyed scrapbooking. Even as a young child I enjoyed putting old black and white photos and newspaper clippings into photo albums. I still have one of my favorites, a scrapbook filled with historic newspaper reports about the first moon landing. But, my love of collecting memories became a true serious hobby after we moved to Comanche and I went to work at Dublin High School. Several of the teachers and

memories.

And so, using techniques I learned over the years, I went to work with a goal to finish our first Prairie Oaks chapter scrapbook in three short weeks. I had already created layouts from paper decorated with nature scenes and earth tone paper stock. Next, I would add photos, embellishments, and journaling to tell a story on each layout. I had organized photos that I had taken of activities detailing the first months of our new chapter, along with photos contributed by other members and photos from our Face Book page, to include in the book. All the photos were arranged by month and stored in files on my computer desktop. The days and weeks past quickly as I added photos to paper. For a brief time as I scrapbooked, I could escape thoughts of cancer and the surgery ahead.

The weekend of the Master Naturalist State Meeting arrived. Bruce and I were traveling to Georgetown early Friday and I stayed up late the night before finishing the last few lay outs. Before packing the book, I flipped through the pages one final time. If only I had more time to journal! I needed to tell more of our chapter's story! Did I do justice to our chapter and its members? I relived the earliest days before we were an actual chapter as Seth and Kenneth worked to make Prairie Oaks a reality. Memories of members working at the Bosque Nature Center and the TSU Permaculture Site were brought to life on the scrapbook pages. Our first training class members, nature hikes, guest speakers, advance training field trips, chapter socials, and other activities illustrated how individuals were molded into a team of certified Master Naturalists sharing their love of nature and our natural resources. I had made the deadline and finished the project. But, the scrapbook was not mine alone. It came to life because of all the members of our chapter, the stories they told through their volunteer work and dedication, and the memories we share as a "family" of Prairie Oaks Master Naturalists. Without our members, the pages of the book would be blank.

Several categories of art and creative work from the many Master Naturalist chapters are displayed at the State Meeting. They include photography, paintings, newsletters, and scrapbooks. Volunteers view and vote on their favorites by secret ballot. Announcements are made at the general meeting and certificates are awarded to the favorite by popular vote in each category. This year, Prairie Oaks Chapter was awarded "The Annual Meeting Chapter Scrapbook Award for an outstanding scrapbook as deemed by Master Naturalist Volunteers attending the 2018 Annual Meeting". Our greatest accomplishment...We are now recognized as an official chapter. And we have a scrapbook to prove it.

Oh, and as for my cancer surgery. They tell me it was a great success. All the cancer has been removed. No further treatment is needed except a check up every six months. There were lots of tears, fear, prayers, and stress. I survived with faith, family, friends, a state meeting, and a scrapbook.

The Web Of Life

Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect.

The great lesson of ecology is that everything is truly interconnected. Thus the introduction of a non-native element, whether plant or animal, can have a widespread, although sometimes subtle effect. But when the non-native species is an apex predator, without natural enemies within its new natural habitat, the effect can be predictably dramatic. The following article from an Orlando, Florida newspaper was brought to our attention by Peggy Tolboom. Thanks, Peggy.

The Florida Everglades are famous throughout the world, with alligators as perhaps their best-known inhabitants. However, there's a new predator, the Burmese python, in town and it is wreaking havoc on the ecosystem. By some estimates, python numbers may now exceed 150,000. The huge reptiles can grow to lengths of 23 feet, and can weigh in at 250 pounds. Pythons eat many different kinds of animals. Studies show pythons have eaten their way through much of the native wildlife, including raccoons, foxes, marsh rabbits, and birds.

Before 2000, mammals were encountered frequently during nocturnal road surveys within the Everglades National Park. In contrast, road surveys totaling 35,400 miles from 2003–2011 documented a 99.3% decrease in the frequency of raccoon observations, decreases of 98.9% and 87.5% for opossum and bobcat observations, respectively, and failed to detect rabbits.

Burmese pythons are established in the park due to accidental or intentional release of captive pet animals in ENP. Even though pythons are large snakes, their coloring and behavior allows them to blend into the environment. Since they are so hard to find in the wild, estimating the number of pythons is very difficult. Officials say invasive Burmese pythons have no natural predators in the everglades.

To protect the remaining wildlife, the South Florida Water Management District has licensed a select group to participate in its python hunting program, which began last year. Python hunters have now eliminated 1,859 of the snakes on district lands. The agency has extended the program and the ENP is joining the effort, recruiting python hunters to remove the snakes and permitting the use of shotguns.



As the pythons run out of native mammals, numbers may stabilize — or neighborhood cats and dogs



Mary Oliver (1935 – 2019)

On January 17, 2019 America lost one of its most beloved and renowned poets. Mary Oliver won many awards for her poetry, including the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize. The New York Times described her as "far and away this country's best-selling poet." She was intimately connected to Nature. Her poetry was noted for applying teachings from her clear observances of the natural world to her introspective view of human nature and the human experience. Here is one of her most widely cited poems. R.I.P Mary Oliver.

Wild Geese

You do not have to be good
You do not have to walk on your knees
For a hundred miles though the desert, repenting
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
Love what it loves
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,

over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

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