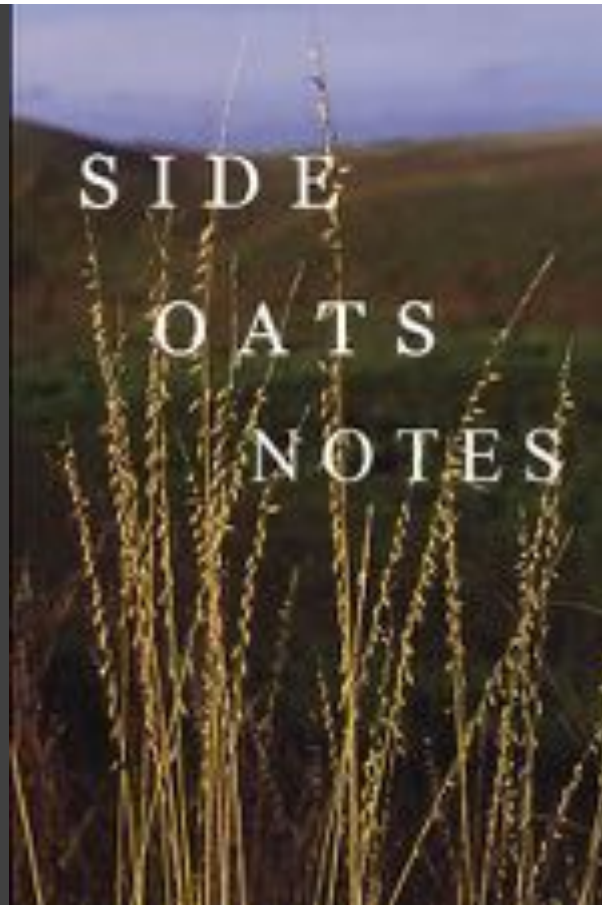


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**A newsletter by the Prairie Oaks Chapter
of the Texas Master Naturalist program**

Volume 4 Issue 2 - Spring 2022



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OUR MISSION

The Texas Master Naturalist Program's mission is to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the State of Texas.



NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

My daughter recently did a project for science class regarding secondary succession, and one of the questions she had to answer was "Why is biodiversity important?" Her answer, "It is important so that the organisms can thrive," might not have been the in-depth scientific answer that the teacher was wanting, but she made a good point. Diversity is a necessary quality of a healthy ecosystem and those areas that lack variety tend to be unbalanced.

Diversity is also an important quality of any chapter of the Master Naturalist program. One of my favorite things about our organization is that anyone can participate as long as they have a desire to carry out the program's mission. Each member brings with them a unique point of view based on their background and interests which allows our chapter to grow and succeed. If you are a member (or a trainee), I urge you to get involved as much as you can and share your skills and ideas. If you are reading this and you have been apprehensive about joining, know that you are welcome! While this year's training class is already underway, you are always invited to attend our monthly meetings and programs.

The Master Naturalist State Program coordinators have encouraged all chapters to continue the conversation on the subject of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Throughout the year, our board will be discussing ways that we can be more inclusive so if you have any ideas on this topic, please let us know. We want everyone to feel welcome so that the Prairie Oaks Chapter and its participants can thrive!

Katie Moses

prairieoaksmasternaturalist@gmail.com

katiemmoses@hotmail.com





CALENDAR

Events

Forest Bathing with Peggy Tolboom: Saturday, April 2, 2022

[See the Facebook Event](#)

Forest Bathing, should I bring a towel? No! Forest Bathing or Forest Therapy, is just another way of describing the many health benefits of spending time in the woods. Have you noticed how spending time outside in nature just makes you feel better? Join Texas Master Naturalist Peggy Tolboom, for a Forest Bathing themed nature walk on the Bosque Nature Trail.

Monthly Speakers

Monthly chapter meetings at 6 pm; Speakers at 7 pm

April 21, 7 pm: **Monarch conservation in North America; a discussion of the monarch life cycle, decline since the 1990s, contributions to decline, and practices for conservation and management** with Dr. Adam Mitchell

May 19, 7 pm: **Mosquito and house fly biology and ecology and how best to manage these pests throughout the year** with Sonja Swiger PhD. (Chapter Advisor)

June 16, 7 pm: **Showcase of 45 native Texas forbs, shrubs, and trees that were used medicinally by many tribes** across Texas and the southern US with Ricky Linex

[Full Calendar](#)



ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Please save empty toilet paper rolls for a children's activity to make binoculars. Deliver to Peggy Tolboom.
- For possible activities at the Bosque River Nature Center, does anyone lead programs about watercolor painting or photography? Contact [Peggy Tolboom](#) at equest@dairysolutionsinc.com if interested.
- Barney Lipscomb sent copies of [The flora of Erath County, Texas, U.S.A from the Journal of the Botanical Research Institute of Texas by Allan D. Nelson, Turner Cotton, Sarah Brown, Paige Cowley, and Sara Harsley](#) to Layne Cassidy. She will bring to April's chapter meeting but if you would like a copy before then, please email [Layne Cassidy](mailto:emilylaynecassidy@gmail.com) at emilylaynecassidy@gmail.com
- This year is our chapter's 5 year anniversary so we will be planning some sort of chapter field trip and celebration. Be on the lookout for more information! 🎉

KUDOS FOR 2021

Volunteer milestones for 2021 were celebrated at the February chapter meeting.

Initial Certifications 🏆

Kaesey Browne
Layne Cassidy
Monica Cortez
James Gray
Denisse Trujillo

Milestones 🏅

250 hours award

Karen Aho
Katie Moses

500 hours award

Bill Hopkins
Marsha Stephens
Linda Wood

Re-certifications ✨

Karen Aho
Gail Bradshaw
Daniel Caulkins
Clayton Claborn
Bill Hopkins
Chris Inbody
Dayna Inbody
Katie Moses
Barbara Salter
Marsha Stephens
Peggy Tolboom
Linda Wood
Lynn Wood



Pictured L to R: Dayna Inbody, Katie Moses, James Gray, Marsha Stephens, Daniel Caulkins, Gail Bradshaw, Bill Hopkins, Lynn Wood, Linda Wood, Layne Cassidy

2021 Volunteer Service

2,124

31

Hours of Volunteer Service

Members Who Logged Hours

472

Hours of Advanced Training

303

Hours of Initial Training



2021 Bosque River Trail Nature Center Service

277

Hours of Volunteer Service

12

Members Who Logged Hours



Marsha Stephens was recognized with the prestigious "Golden Trowel" award!



Chapter Silent Auction

Article by Marsha Stephens

One of the activities at our February Chapter Meeting was a return of the silent auction where members contribute their accumulated books and other hoarded treasures, as well as notable original artwork, which are sold as a donation to the chapter coffers. The offering also includes an assortment of freebies that bring additional fun to the event. This was started as a book swap during 2018, evolved into the silent auction format in 2019, but then was on hiatus during 2020 and 2021. This year's contributions were voluminous, perhaps representing a couple of years of pandemic hoarding. In addition to books and artwork, there were tools, clothing, and collectibles. There were bidding wars and storytelling, all contributing to a raucous and joyful break during the evening. And last, but not least, despite a night of brutal, freezing north winds, a grand total of \$347 was donated to the chapter to support our routine expenses and special projects.

Many thanks to all of you who contributed items to the auction and freebie table. Many thanks to all of the buyers who made donations. Now is the time to start planning for the next silent auction! If you read a good nature/science book, save it to share with others. If you are a picker, look for bargains on those nature-oriented items that naturalists cannot resist. If you are an artist/artisan, please consider creating something to share with our members. And, equally important, if you like to indulge in acquisitions, start saving your pennies now. Get ready for the NEXT Prairie Oaks Silent Auction! Maybe later this year.....but for sure next year.



March 1 - June 15: JOIN US in Turning Lights Out at Night for Migratory Birds

Article by Dayna Inbody

Spring bird migration is now underway, and organizations across Texas will turn their lights out at night as we welcome hundreds of millions of birds migrating through our state on their way north from their southern wintering grounds.

I hope Prairie Oaks chapter members and friends will join us in supporting this important effort to protect migrating birds. We encourage you to turn off non-essential lights at night from 11 pm - 6 am during the spring migration period from March 1 - June 15, and where conflicts apply, prioritize lights out during the critical peak spring migration period from April 22 – May 12. Every light turned out at night helps save migrating birds by reducing collisions with brightly lit buildings. As an added bonus, turning off non-essential lights also saves energy and money for cities, local businesses, and homeowners!

The [Lights Out Texas](#) effort is led by a coalition of partners that includes conservation non-profits, universities, governmental organizations, and Texans dedicated to the conservation of birds. This spring [Texan by Nature](#) is co-facilitating Lights Out Texas, with friends and partners at [Audubon Texas](#). Given the mission, vision, and growth of Audubon Texas, Lights Out Texas is expected to reach new levels of success with their leadership.

It's easy to participate - simply turn off all non-essential lights from 11 pm - 6 am during the migration season or even all year long!

Please visit <https://texanbynature.org/projects/lights-out-texas/> for more information and resources such as the Lights Out Texas Spring 2022 [Outreach Toolkit](#) and [Social Media Toolkit](#). Contact Caitlin Tran at caitlin@texanbynature.org if you have questions or would like to learn more about how to get involved.

Feel free to share this invitation far and wide - we hope every Texan will join us in this effort!



Christmas Bird Count 2021

Article by Dayna Inbody

78 Species Logged

2,000 Birds Counted

15 Volunteers

4 Teams

This year fifteen volunteers joined us early in the morning on December 18, 2021, for Audubon's 122nd Christmas Bird Count. It was Prairie Oaks third time to participate in this citizen science project.

This year we had three Texas Master Naturalist chapters represented: Prairie Oaks, Rio Brazos, and Cross Timbers. One team included brand new student Jason Moden that has brought great enthusiasm and leadership already to our chapter. Jason has jumped in with both feet for many of our projects, is the new secretary of the Friends of Dinosaur Valley State Park, and as we found out a good birder. Many thanks to all who joined us; we hope to have everyone back again next year. We will continue the annual event the third Saturday of each December so that volunteers can make plans ahead of time.

This year the weather forecast seemed daunting, and while we did not get the rain that was talked about, we did get the wind and cold. This made it challenging for both the birds and the birders. The photographers in our group did not enjoy the lighting conditions either but were still able to get some great examples of species seen that day including a Barred Owl taken with a bino/cellphone combination that provided a pretty good image. It's what TMN's do, we adapt in the field as need be. It all worked out well and in the end we logged 78 species and over 2,000 birds were counted by the four teams.

We would like to add volunteers next year for feeder watch to our count day, and we have some ideas on how to set that up at our Nature Center. It might be a good way for some members to contribute a few hours to the project and to have some time together outdoors with other members learning about our feathered friends. More to come on this idea as next year's count gets closer. If you have any questions or ideas, please contact Chris and Dayna Inbody at inbodyd@gmail.com.

For those that are not familiar with the annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) it began in 1900. At that time early conservation was taking root and many people were becoming alarmed at the decline in bird populations. Frank M. Chapman, an ornithologist, and an early officer in what is now the National Audubon Society, proposed a new holiday tradition of counting the birds rather than hunting them (www.audubon.org/conservation/history-christmas-bird-count).

If you have access to property or bodies of water in the 15 mile diameter circle centered on Stephenville, please let us know if you're willing to allow volunteers to count there. We can provide count data for your property when we are done and other information that has been sent to Audubon. Until next year, enjoy time in nature and share any adventures with us you may have. And remember to turn your lights out for bird migration this spring March 1st to June 15th.



Member-in-Training Spotlight: Jeff Barron

Article and Photo by Cheryl Barron

Jeff Barron is a member of the POMN Spring Training Class. Originally born in Newport News, VA, he spent most of his years growing up in Houston, TX, with a family that included 3 brothers. College years took him first to Sam Houston State in Huntsville, then to the University of Texas at Austin, where he earned a BS in petroleum engineering. His wife of 41 years is fellow member-in-training, Cheryl Barron. They have two children, Angela and Brian, son-in-law Jody, and cute 2-month-old grandbaby Leona.

Jeff spent his career in oil field operations and sales, living in South Texas, Shreveport, South Texas (again), Hurst, and finally Bluff Dale. Throughout life, he has enjoyed being outdoors. "Nature has always been in my blood; even in Houston I spent my free time catching turtles and snakes in the bayous, and fishing in the Gulf of Mexico. My Mom wasn't crazy about my keeping pet snakes in the house, but she finally relented. One time I put water in the bathtub, dumped in my water snakes (common and Graham's) and a bunch of minnows and sat back to watch the feeding frenzy." Cheryl will agree that many of their first dates were spent on snake hunting expeditions. At one point in early married life BC (before children), they were housing 50+ snakes in a spare bedroom and raising dozens of feeder rats and mice in an outdoor shed.

Other outdoor adventures include shooting a deer in the mountains of Utah, and upon returning with a 4-wheeler to retrieve it, finding large parts of it missing and bear prints and scat next to it. Jeff has been stranded on an oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico when a storm overturned a fishing boat. He has been bitten in the stomach by a 5' captive female boa who was not happy with the attention she was getting at the time. Jeff has lost and found 2 snakes in cars and 2 in his home. Padre Island fishing trips regularly involved swimming bloody baits out on surfboards to get them out to where

the sharks were. Playing it safer these days, Cheryl and Jeff are currently stewarding 8 goats, 2 donkeys, 3 dogs, several fish and a turtle along with various wildlife on their 38 acres. Now retired, Jeff enjoys hunting, fishing, fossil collecting and playing Pokemon Go.

When asked why he was drawn to the Texas Master Naturalist program, Jeff states that he wanted to learn how to become a better steward, not only of his personal acreage, but Texas lands in general. So far, the POMN Chapter training has brought in enthusiastic and very knowledgeable speakers, and it's been very enjoyable being around people with similar goals and interests. A bucket list nature experience for him would be to see the great wildebeest migration in person.



International Wildlife Trafficking Concerns Us All

Guest Article by Michael Mitchell

Retired Game Warden and an El Camino Real chapter founder, now living in Austin.

Photo by TPWD

Coronavirus has sent tremors around the world, grounded a billion people, cost trillions, and killed millions. Originating perhaps in a wet market in Wuhan China, many people attribute the origin to an illegally traded wildlife animal. Even if an alternate human-caused theory is viable, the occurrence of SARS (2002 and 2003), Swine Flu (2009), MERS (2013) and other recent zoonotic diseases still demonstrate the enormous risk that illegally trafficked animals present to humankind.

Zoonotic diseases are ones which can be passed from animals to humans. The source animals are typically vertebrates. But zoonotic diseases are not something to sneeze at. Over 75 percent of new diseases discovered in the last decade are zoonotic. Frighteningly, 61 percent of all human diseases are zoonotic in origin. And it is estimated that there are currently 1,500,000 diseases in wildlife that we know nothing about.

I'm concerned that we will have an acceleration of zoonoses as populations grow,

climate change looms, farming systems intensify, health systems strain, deforestation increases, antimicrobial resistance extends, and agricultural trade boosts.s

The exact wild animal, and the science linking the animal to the human outbreak with COVID, remains in debate. But the world's attention should be drawn to the practice of illegal wildlife trafficking. The pangolin, for example, is the world's most illegally trafficked animal. While the Coronavirus has brought this to the world's attention, more must be done as human lives, endangered species, and zoonotic disease risk are at stake.

The US has a role in all of this. It is one of the 176 countries involved in trafficking, often acting as a prominent destination of illegal animals. These days live birds and reptiles are the dominant US illegal imports. But we also have unusual problems that we create, such as a lack of corporate transparency in, say, Delaware corporations. We also tend to lead the way in, say, technologies (think of major online auction sites as an example) that inadvertently create marketplaces enabling trafficking. Fortunately, the Coalition to End Wildlife Trafficking Online now consists of 47 member companies across the tech sector and is making progress in this lattermost area.

Wildlife trafficking is the world's fourth largest transnational crime, lagging behind drugs, counterfeiting, and human smuggling. It generates something between \$8 and 20 billion annually. The cost is very difficult to pinpoint. Over 7,000 species of plants and animals are impacted worldwide.

These wildlife challenges are widespread. In Africa we saw the last northern white rhino in 2018. But right here in Texas, we saw the last native San Marcos gambusia in 1983.

There are no moats around modern countries in our modern world. International conservation efforts must stop the devastation of species, such as pangolins, rhinos and elephants, birds, reptiles, timber, medicinal plants, and more. Over 250 non governmental organizations (NGOs) have called for a commercial end to wildlife trade in 2020. It's not about one particular country...it's all of us who are involved in a cycle of demand, trafficking, and poaching.

Wildlife trafficking is big business. But the stakes for the world couldn't be higher. The time to act is now, and the reasons are stronger than ever. I'm very proud of the work of Texas, United States, and other countries in fighting the problem. Here's some things you might consider doing wherever you are:

- Reduce meat consumption.
- Become educated of the origin of our foods. Sources, locations, processes. From apples to chicken, from chiles to fish.
- Become involved in sustainable food production, upholding animal welfare and a merciful death. Their health is our health.
- Empower environmental agencies, institutions, and organizations.

- Don't just document the disgrace. Take action: if we are not part of the solution, we are part of the problem.
- Children can get all the toys in the world, but they will always marvel at a living thing.
- Establish environmental education at primary and secondary schools.
- Work to bridge the gap between hunters and non-hunters, as well as those opposed to harvest activities.
- Increase access to private lands.
- Support private land conservation initiatives.
- Maintain public lands.
- Establish broad-based funding.

This is the kind of stuff that really makes me think. And weep. It reminds me of the old African proverb, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."



Lights Out Texas Fall 2021 Fall Report

Article by Dayna Inbody

In February we discussed Lights Out Texas in our chapter meeting, and it was noted we had not received Fall 2021 results and updates yet. Texan by Nature has since put out those results, and some of the highlights will be shared here. Information provided was taken directly from Fall 2021 report by Texan by Nature.

To remind us of the overview of what Lights Out Texas (LOT) is, it is a campaign of education, awareness, and action that focuses on turning out lights at night during the Spring and Fall migration to help protect the billions of migratory birds that fly over Texas annually.

The goals of Lights Out Texas are to:

- Increase statewide participation in Lights Out Texas at the business, local official, municipal, and community levels
- Reduce Migratory bird mortality
- Coordinate local volunteer efforts to collect and report data

Through email outreach efforts, 800+ businesses operating in Texas were targeted with Lights Out Texas messaging, and 92 businesses/organizations confirmed support and participation in turning out lights at night for migrating birds. Of the 92 businesses listed, 9 of them were from our area which included Acton Nature Center, Dublin newspaper, Proctor Lake Park, Dinosaur Valley State Park, Fossil Rim, Hood County News, Pecan Plantation Properties, Stephenville Empire-Tribune, and our very own Tarleton State University. Additionally, 2 cities and 1 county made proclamations, 237 and 405 individuals, municipalities, and businesses made pledges through Texas Conservation Alliance's Lights Out for Wildlife Certification and The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's pledges respectively. My goal is to see Hood and Erath added to the cities that make proclamations in the near future. Four organizations conducted on-the-ground volunteer efforts to understand bird-building collisions; 131 people contributed 971 volunteer hours and documented 497 bird casualties.

Lights Out Proclamations To Date

- City of Arlington – Lights Out Proclamation: Spring 2021
- City of Cedar Hill – Lights Out Proclamation: Spring 2021
- City of Dallas, Mayor's Office – Lights Out Proclamations: Fall 2021, Spring 2021, and Fall 2020
- City of Dripping Springs – Lights Out Dripping Springs (Perpetually)
- City of Fort Worth and Downtown Fort Worth – Fall 2021 and Spring 2021
- City of Galveston – Lights Out Proclamation: Spring 2021
- City of Houston – Lights Out Proclamation: Spring 2021
- Travis County – Lights Out Resolution (Perpetually)

2021 Bird Casualty Preparation and Cataloging

The Biodiversity Research and Teaching Collections (BRTC) at Texas A&M University received a total of 945 casualty birds resulting from Lights Out Texas route surveys during spring and fall peak migration in 2021. The number of specimens received varied by city, and can be attributed to several factors that could include:

- time and effort of the survey crews,
- nature of the buildings along the routes,
- and the effectiveness of Lights Out communications to building managers.

2021 Total Casualty Birds Received by City:

- Dallas: 691
- Houston: 168
- San Antonio: 38
- Austin: 22
- Galveston: 8

- El Paso: 5

A total of 114 different species of birds were deposited at the BRTC as a result of the surveys. The group of birds most affected was the New World Sparrows (eg. White-throated Sparrows, Lincoln's Sparrows, Grasshopper Sparrows). Warblers were also highly affected particularly in spring migration. BRTC has prepared and cataloged a total of 332 specimens from the Lights Out efforts, with a majority of those specimens actually being from the Dallas 2020 fall surveys. Specimens from Houston for Spring 2021 have been prepared but have yet to be cataloged. All specimens are being prepared by student and community volunteers.

2021 feedback for volunteer efforts for consideration includes:

- The protocols were great. It being the first year, we have a few updates and ideas for improvement, but this was an excellent resource for our first year of statewide, coordinated collision monitoring.
- We customized the volunteer guide to our local protocol, and it worked really well. We conducted Zoom training based on the customized guide.
- The limited study site of 10 buildings reduces the ability to have meaningful inference for the city as a whole - this is reflected by some organizations covering more ground in cities versus others which may be a reflection of volunteer capacity.
- Participating organizations would like to have results oriented feedback as to what type of difference was made due to their Lights Out Texas volunteer efforts.
- Many organizations did not have enough time and/or volunteers to conduct the proposed volunteer efforts.
- These volunteer efforts require A LOT of time and energy to organize. Coordinating organizations spent lots of hours customizing forms, organizing materials, training, correspondence, etc.
- Finding enough willing volunteers to cover all the days during peak fall migration was tricky. Our core group of 19 were definitely burned out towards the end of the season and coverage dropped.
- Very little communication was given during the actual survey period, about survey methods and results, etc.
- More statewide communication
- Evaluate necessity of conducting volunteer efforts in West Texas due to lack of casualties
- Completed Fall 2021: Condense volunteer training to one video

Next Steps

Spring 2022 migration starts on March 1 and goes until June 15, with peak migration taking place from approximately April 22 – May 12.

Since Fall of 2020, Texan by Nature has led the statewide facilitation of Lights Out Texas. Texan by Nature will be co-facilitating Lights Out Texas this Spring, with Audubon Texas. Given the mission, vision, and growth of Audubon Texas, we expect Lights Out Texas to reach new levels of success with their leadership. After the Spring

2022 season, Lights Out Texas will fully transition from Texan by Nature to Audubon Texas for statewide facilitation. We expect the leadership transition to be seamless and the Lights Out Texas initiative to grow and thrive under Audubon Texas' vision.

Please contact Taylor Keys at taylor@texanbynature.org if you have questions, have information to contribute to this report, or would like more information. The link to the Fall 2021 report is here: <https://texanbynature.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Lights-Out-Texas-Fall-2021-Report-Created-by-Texan-by-Nature.pdf>

There has been much progress over the past two years with the project and lots of tweaking as they become more organized with a project this size. I feel with continued efforts and volunteers that are passionate about spreading the word, this will be a huge success for our bird friends that pass through Texas. It's an easy project to join, is an approved project in our chapter, and is flexible for volunteers to work with. As I shared, we have a small group of three at present in Hood County that is contributing volunteer efforts, and we welcome anyone who has an interest to join our efforts. There are many things to do, so if group meetings are not your thing, there are feet on the ground needs, and if volunteering from home is more your speed there are needs there, also. We usually attend several events a year with our display booth so feel free to contact us to volunteer to man the booth for a few hours at an event. This year so far we are looking at Feather Fest at Acton Nature Center, Spring Wing Ding at Dinosaur Valley State Park, and Nature Fest at Bosque River Nature Trail. Please contact Dayna Inbody at inbodyd@gmail.com for more information.



A Thought for Today

"Where flowers bloom,
so does hope."

Lady Bird Johnson



2022 Officers of the Prairie Oaks Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist program

President: Katie Moses

Vice President: Dayna Inbody

Secretary: Monica Cortez

Treasurer: James Gray

Statewide Sponsors of the Texas Master Naturalist program

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

If you would like to contribute to the newsletter, please email Layne Cassidy, at emilylaynecassidy@gmail.com.



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