



January 2022- Winter Newsletter

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For more information, please go to <https://txmn.org/rbc/> web page.
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Texas Master Naturalist Mission

The Texas Master Naturalist program develops local teams of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities. The program is a partnership among the Texas AgriLife Extension Service, Texas Parks and Wildlife, and other local partners. Chapter members work with partners to:

–Improve public understanding of natural resource ecology and management.

–Enhance existing natural resource technical guidance, stewardship, and outreach activities.

–Develop a Texas Master Naturalist coordinated volunteer network.

We are a group of citizen volunteers committed to the beneficial management of our natural resources and natural areas through volunteer service and educational outreach. Our chapter was established in Spring 2005, and we currently have about 80 members working throughout our three-county chapter area to carry out the mission of the Texas Master Naturalist program. Our chapter serves Hood, Somervell, and Johnson Counties in the Cross Timbers and Prairies Ecoregion.

Our coordinated volunteer network is trained and certified to provide natural resource education to the public, provide educational activities to schools, assist our partners with natural resource management, coordinate and lead citizen science activities supporting natural resources, sponsor multi-faceted outdoor learning events to the public, and more.



Monarch Event: by Wendy Moore

The Monarch Event by Wendy Moore

A huge congratulations to Gary Hinds for a splendidly successful Monarch Event. Many of us have missed our big public events during the pandemic and even though we are not out of the woods. Gary has managed to pull off an outdoor favorite: The Monarch Event.

This year's Monarch Event, as in years past, came in several different venues. The first was the mini event on the Friday before the public event, with the North Central Texas Academy and their seven students in grades 3-6. Dave Moore is the lead for this day where we get to hone our skills before the huge public events. He was assisted by Valerie Taber, Sara Paulsen and Wendy Moore. These are the most delightful students. We look forward to this very special group each year. We brushed up on our talks, dusted off our craft supplies and had a lovely morning.

On Saturday, October 16, the 35 volunteers began showing up at the Acton Nature Center at 7:00 AM on a cool 46-degree crisp, beautiful morning. Tents were erected, tables assembled, educational displays, and supplies for the crafts placed out ready for our first guests. Sara Paulsen had her aquariums of instars and chrysalises and even a J-hook ready to go. One of her reared Monarchs actually eclosed during the event! Of course, she has now set the bar so high for being ready that it remains to be seen if she can eclipse herself next year! One sweet little girl parked herself in front of the aquarium to witness the entire incredible event. If we are not reaching children with that, then we never will! The volunteers were ready when the first of the 270 attendees began arriving. Gary had wisely assigned the volunteers from our training class to assist with the stations. Our new transfer Master Naturalists Brittany Meagher and Adam Trimble joined the event, their 3rd event in three weeks! We even had Wendy's sister Ardea from Buffalo, NY and their nephew from France on hand to help. Gary had notified the local schools about the event and we heard that some students who attended were receiving extra credit for coming. Gary Marks was on hand taking some great pictures. Over 100 seed packets of *Asclepias viridis* (green milkweed) were handed out along with butterfly retreat native prairie seed mix with propagation instructions. We had one visitor from the Fort Worth Nature Center who brought Gary some native zizotes milkweed seed (*A. oenotheroides*) that she had collected for propagation. Sometimes the wild Monarchs come through the Nature Center for tagging and sometimes they don't. But the lack of Monarchs did not deter Dave and the tagging team from teaching the public about the tagging program. Thanks to Sara having a few reared Monarchs ready for release, they were able to demonstrate tagging on those butterflies. There were 2 craft tables for the children. They were able to make butterfly puddlers to take home and also to paint Monarch caterpillars from egg cartons. In addition, Catherine Hinds





had origami butterflies, and the children got to "tag" them with stickers. All those in attendance were able to obtain educational while enjoying the wonder of nature.

Thanks so much to all the volunteers who worked really hard on set up, parking, the chapter booth, the puddler station, the lifecycle and migration stations, the live stages of the Monarch exhibit, the tagging station, the caterpillar craft station, cleanup and thanks to all who brought coffee and snacks for everyone to enjoy. Thanks to Gary Marks for the great photos. Thanks to Nadia for producing the amazing flyer that was used for social media and distribution to schools. And a special bonus to the signing up of interested parties for the next chapter class. Thanks to Gary Hinds for leading this effort!



The third event was held at Dinosaur Valley State Park. Volunteers Sara Paulsen, Nadia Lambert, Jen Adams, Chris Paulsen and Kristina del Pino Borgstrom set up at the Monarch Larvae Monitoring Project (MLMP) plot so they could demonstrate how and why they use the plot. The discussion of the monarch life cycle was part of the event. To enhance that topic, the group conducted a survey of the plot. The public could come and go. Thanks to Kristina for making Monarch cookies, trail mix and apple cider.



Monarchs

The final event was also held at Dinosaur Valley State Park. The weather couldn't have been nicer. The volunteers had over 70 people come by to learn about tagging and the Monarch life cycles and migration. There weren't many flowers blooming to attract the Monarchs, so Dave Moore brought 15 from his backyard along with 2 Queens to show mimicry. Kristina del Pino Borgstrom, Jill Burks, Beth and Tim Eschbach, Wendy Moore and Gary Marks were there to help out. Thanks again to the expert photography by Gary to document and celebrate these events. A group of Boy Scouts came through, and the Monarchs were tagged and released. It was a lovely final day for the end of the migration season. We hope to see more nature lovers next year!

Thank you all who tagged Monarchs throughout the migration. The final number is 367, which is the all-time tagging record for our group. Dave tagged an amazing 274 mostly from our backyard, and 250 of those were tagged using the special, extra lucky ANC net # 60. He's got dibs on that net for next year!

ANC Homeschool Program

ANC FIRST FRIDAY HOMESCHOOL *by Malea Balmuth; photos by Cindy Davis*

Homeschool

Upcoming class schedule:

December 3rd –

Grasses – Billy Teels

January 7th – Mapping

and Orienteering –

Dave Moore

February 4th – Birding –

Billy Teels

March 4th – Faces of

the Moon – Gary Hinds

*(evening

class)

April 1st – Every Rock

Tells a Story – Melody

Holm

May 6th – Liquid Gold –

Water – Melody Holm



The first three classes this school year have been stellar for the homeschooling families. Andrea Roiz kicked off the year with a class on Bumblebees. The butterfly garden was humming with plenty of specimens for the students to examine. Wendy Moore instructed the students on Nature Journaling and provided them with their own art supplies, which will be kept for them in new ANC First Friday Homeschool string backpacks that they will pick up each month at the beginning of class.

Sara Paulsen followed Andrea's excellent pollinator lesson with the October class on Journey of the Monarch. Sara kept the students and adult helpers moving with an interactive game that was great fun and very educational about monarch migration. Valerie and Tim launched the Pollinator Project Hour with an informative and hands-on lesson on pollinators. Students were assigned homework, which is a new addition to ANC Homeschool.

In November, Kristina del Pino Borgstrom put much preparation and effort into educating the homeschoolers on composting and implementing a compost demonstration bin at the Acton Nature Center. The students sorted items into what can be recycled, composted, or needs to be put in the trash. They started a compost pile at the ANC and will learn compost pile maintenance through caring for the pile each month during their class. Special thanks to Joe Langdon for building a compost bin in time for the November class! According to Dave Moore the students did stellar work on their homework assignments during the Pollinator Project hour.

ANC Homeschool has been fortunate to have so many "Texas Master Naturalists, Rio Brazos Chapter" volunteering their time and skills this year. In addition to those listed above, Carrie LeBlanc and Amy Knoll get the day rolling with check-in and keep everyone on schedule. Andrea gives of her time and years of experience always knowing when to jump in with an idea or suggestion that keeps the group moving in the right direction. Cindy Davis always has a game in her back pocket ready to go if needed, thinks of every detail related to children, and is always willing to help. In addition, Cindy is helping with a digital scrapbook of our monthly gatherings. Jen Adams has also joined in to lend a helping hand, which is much appreciated. Over the summer, Keri Kelley was instrumental in developing the beautiful flyers and registration framework that promoted the program to the homeschool community.

Please contact ANC Homeschool at anc.homeschool@gmail.com if you have a topic that you would like to present as a class. The calendar for the 2022-2023 academic year is open and ready for new ideas and volunteers.

Friends of Dinosaur of Dinosaur Valley State Park



by Kristina del Pino Borgstrom

Friends of DVSP is off to get boots on the ground this year at the park. 2021 has been filled with many volunteer activities. Volunteers have helped connect visitor with various aspects of the park leading prairie hikes, tagging monarchs in the fall and celebrating a Christmas for the birds. Along with public outreach, our Friends group is dedicated to helping maintain the natural resources of the park. In 2021 we started an adopt-a-trail program and led quarterly trail maintenance days. So far, we have 4 trails adopted with a few additional sections worked on this fall. On trail-days, volunteers helped to prune back tree branches, pick up trash and help reclaim social trails. Within the last year, we have also helped the park fulfill their highway clean-up commitment for TX-DOT. Each quarter we go out and clean up FM 205 that runs in front of the park entrance road. It's always a fun challenge to see who will find the best treasure. The Friends group is proud to say that we are in the works of developing a future bird blind for the park. This will provide more opportunities for visitors and provide additional education station for park staff. We started fundraising for the project this fall through our first North Texas Giving Day and raised \$1,050. In 2022, we will be rolling out collectable holiday bird ornaments where each sale will support the project.

Dinosaur Valley State Park will be starting off the New Year with many fun activities from taking one of several first day hikes to plunging into the chilly Paluxy River. Come and celebrate the New Year with us!

Learn more about DVSP events at https://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/dinosaur-valley/park_events.

If you want to learn more about Friends of DVSP contact us at friendsofdvsp@gmail.com.

Plant Families: by Dr. Billy Teels



(*Eryngium leavenworthii*)



(*Cymopterus macrorhizus*)

Apiaceae (Umbelliferae) – Carrot Family

The defining characteristic of the Apiaceae is the umbellate (umbrella-shaped) inflorescence that is typical of most of its species. It is a large cosmopolitan family with over 3,700 species worldwide (16th largest among flowering plants). Some of its members are important as spices and flavorings, e.g. dill, caraway, coriander, cilantro, cumin, parsley, and anise. Other members such as carrot, celery, and parsnip have large taproots and are important as foods. Most species that are cultivated are considered cool season plants and are grown in early gardens. Almost every cultivated species of the family is considered a good companion plant because their flowers and leaves are very attractive to a variety of useful insects that aid in pollination and pest control, not only for the umbellifer but for the plants that are next to them.

Most members of the family are aromatic and typically produce toxic psoralins to protect them from grazing animals. In fact, the family contains some of the most poisonous plants known that can be fatal if ingested by either livestock or humans. Remember, it was a tea from the umbelliferous plant, poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), that Socrates drank as his means of death. A number of umbellifers also produce phytotoxic compounds that sensitize human skin to sunlight, a condition known as phytophotodermatitis. Of all the plants known to cause this condition, approximately half belong to the Apiaceae. Whereas the vast majority of the Apiaceae have the typical umbellate inflorescence, not all do. One of the most interesting variants is our common Leavenworth Eryngo (*Eryngium leavenworthii*). Rather than having an umbrella shaped flower, its umbel is compacted into a tight, relatively round flower head, much like that of thistles or Old World teasels of the aster family. It also displays armored leaves and stems like that of thistles and teasels, making it a good example of parallel evolution—where two unrelated species develop similar traits in response to similar environmental conditions. In fact, it is so unlike the rest of the carrot family that most people mistake it for a thistle.

The umbellifers are well represented in north-central Texas with 39 genera and 52 species. As previously mentioned, most appear early with basal leaves often emerging during the winter. Leaves of our native species are usually finely dissected, giving plants a “feathery” appearance. Flowers are small and generally white or pale yellow, and though not individually conspicuous, they are numerous and in their umbels appear delicate and lacy and can be quite eye-catching and attractive.



Black swallowtail caterpillar: Although not considered toxic, Black Swallowtail caterpillars consume the leaves of umbellifers that contain various compounds thought to make them un-tasty to predators. This one is feeding on a Prairie Parsley (*Polytaenia nuttallii*) plant at the ANC.



Cymopterus macrorhizus: Bigroot springparsley (*Cymopterus macrorhizus*) is one of the earliest plants to flower at the ANC.



Daucus pusillus: Known as Southwestern Wild Carrot, *Daucus pusillus* has a small edible taproot that is similar in taste and texture to its larger cousin the tame carrot (*Daucus carota sativus*); however, it would take many of them to make a meal.



Eryngium leavenworthii: With armored stems, flowers, and leaves most people mistake Leavenworth Eryngo (*Eryngium leavenworthii*) as a thistle, rather than an umbellifer.





Birds are Everywhere

If you are a bird lover and want to learn about the birds in our area, we have bird walks the first Saturday of every month from 7:00- 9:00, lead by our resident bird expert Billy Teels. There is a wonderful bird blind room by the “Farm House”. The large glass window is there for you to observe local and migrating birds in their natural habitat without disturbing the visiting birds. Billy leads the bird walks and collects data to post to the wall of the bird blind. Check out the calendar on the Rio Brazos chapter website- <https://txmn.org/rbc/> . Billy Teels posts data from each walk to eBird.org as walks are part of a “citizen science” project.

Other birding events:

February 19-20 – Great Backyard Bird Count- 7:00am both days. <https://www.birdcount.org/>

March 26th- Feather Fest. Activities and booths will be set up for the public.



Check out this amazing photo of an immature Swainson's Hawk taken by Gary Marks. Photo: Gary Marks



Jake Balmuth was home long enough over college break to get this great photo of a secretive LeConte's Sparrow during the January ANC bird walk. Photo: Jake Balmuth

Lights Out Texas; by Malea Balmuth

Lights Out Texas (LOT) is gaining momentum in our community and across the state. The goal of LOT is to protect migratory birds as they make their way across Texas during migration in the spring and fall. This statewide effort is led by: <https://texanbynature.org/> and supported by the research and technical guidance of Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Texas A&M University and Texas Parks and Wildlife provide centralized leadership for volunteer research efforts.

At the August Rio Brazos Chapter meeting, Malea Balmuth and Dayna Inbody gave a presentation on LOT in preparation for fall migration, asking everyone to turn out unnecessary lights between 11 PM and 6 AM during fall migration dates (August 15 – November 30) with peak migration dates of September 5th to October 29th. The Acton Nature Center is supporting LOT with promotion on their website, Facebook, and Instagram and in the kiosk and bird blind at the Center. Dayna created a trifold display, which was used by Wendy Moore at Master Naturalist events to educate the public about this important statewide initiative.

Plans for spring migration promotion will soon be underway. If you would like to be involved with this project or have ideas on how to spread the word in our community, please reach out to either Wendy, Dayna, or Malea.



ACTON NATURE CENTER COMMUNITY LECTURE SERIES

Learning to be stewards of our natural resources

Lectures are held the first Sunday of the month in January, April, July, and October at 4:00 PM. This lecture will be via Zoom. To register for this free program, email: actonnaturecenter@gmail.com

Prairie Ecology with Dr. Billy Teels – October 3, 2021

Can you name the most endangered ecosystem in North America? It is not the old-growth forest, arctic tundra, or Eastern deciduous forest. In fact, the ecosystem is so rare that most Americans have never laid eyes upon it. Nationwide it is 99 percent gone, and only remnants remain here and there. We are talking about the tallgrass prairie ecosystem that, along with the other prairies (mixed grass and short grass), comprised the largest ecosystem in North America. When European settlers first travelled westward from the eastern woods, they stood upon the edge of a 250-million-acre sea of grass, some of it much taller than a man. Because they had no reference for comparison, their description of it was like a “blind man describing an elephant,” with early characterizations calling it the Great American Desert. Now, after centuries of inhabitation, we have come to realize how fertile and productive the prairie can be—but not for the native grasses and grazing animals that once dominated its landscape, but for the many crops it produces—dubbing the region the “Breadbasket of the Nation.” This lecture will discuss what the prairie once was and what it is today, how man has altered it, and how at the Acton Nature Center we are now trying to maintain and nurture a remnant prairie landscape.

Programs are led by the Rio Brazos chapter of Texas Master Naturalists



Dates:

January 2, 2022 - Birds by Dave Moore
April 3, 2022 - The History of ANC by Andrea Roiz
July 3, 2022 - Snakes by Gaston del Pino



Services We Provide to Our Communities

The Rio Brazos Chapter offers the public a variety of opportunities for learning about nature and Texas natural landscapes, expanding knowledge about natural resource ecology and management, and enjoying the outdoors. Explore what we offer below and please let us know what we can do to help you and our communities learn about and enjoy nature.

Opportunities for Youth Education

Information for public and private school teachers: The chapter's education committee develops and maintains a collection of learning materials for use by members to assist teachers, camp hosts, and others in enhancing children's knowledge about wildlife, birds, insects, plants and trees, rocks and fossils, soils, and more. In addition, members can lead nature walks, field investigations, and citizen science activities.

Our volunteers have a variety of presentations that focus on different parts of the natural world. We develop content linked to Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) when possible. Presentations may be tailored to number of students, grade level(s), and lesson time available. Our most popular programs have general topics based on grade level with individual activities or lessons. Multiple activities and lessons for a single session are tied together under the general topic. Some of these activities are suitable and/or designed for outdoors. We offer many of our outdoor educational activities at Acton Nature Center. If you would like your program at ANC, please check Policies and Tips for Field Trips at Acton Nature Center.

Submit the Education Assistance Request Form to request nature-related educational assistance in the classroom or with a field trip or go to the Contact Us page to send us your question or nature of your request. Please try to submit assistance requests as far in advance of your anticipated need as possible (we suggest 3 months). We need adequate time to line up volunteers and assemble materials and may not be able to meet your need on short notice.

We enjoy hearing from people. Please send us your questions, suggestions, and requests by filling out the following form. If you have an education assistance request, please fill out and submit the [Education Assistance Request Form](#). Learn more about educational services we provide on the [Services to Communities](#) page.

Information for Home Schools

The chapter's Education Committee hosts a homeschool science program at Acton Nature Center on the first Friday of each month from September through May. Classes are 2-3 hours long and cover nature-related topics, including rocks and soils (Earth science); wildlife, plants, and insects (bioscience); and the night sky (astronomy).



*So much for rocks — we discovered a frog!
Homeschool geology and soils class. Photo by V. Taber.*



Composting 101 by Kristina Borgstrom

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To comply with COVID-19 safety guidelines, masks are suggested for in person classes that are held in the farm house or bird blind. Most classes are held at the pavilion located at ANC.

To learn more and to participate in this program, send a message to anc.homeschool@gmail.com. Please include your name and contact information.

Speakers

Some of our chapter members can give presentations about the Texas Master Naturalist program or special nature-related topics at meetings of community and civic organizations and groups. Limited services are available now, and we are working on expanding our capacity to provide speakers on a range of topics. Depending on the topic and time frame, we may be able to customize a presentation for your group, so please ask.

Please go to the Contact Us page on our website and submit a request about having a Texas Master Naturalist speak at your meeting or event.

EVENTS

The chapter organizes and hosts the following events yearly, listed from spring to fall. All events are at Acton Nature Center in Acton, Texas, and are free and open to the public.

Feather Fest — Celebration of birds and welcome to wildflower season. Exhibits, children’s activities, presentations, hikes. On a Saturday in March 26th.

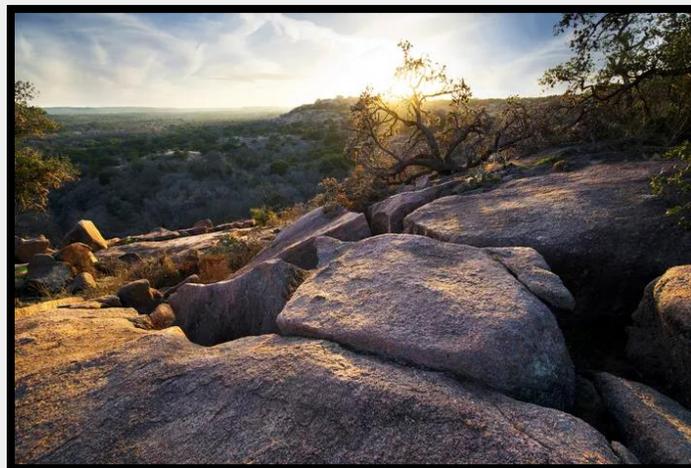
Mothing Event — National Moth Week event. Special speaker and children’s activities followed by gathering around light displays for attracting and identifying nocturnal insects. On a Saturday in July, late evening into the night.



Star Party — Special speaker followed by stargazing with telescopes and guides. On a Saturday in Fall, late evening into the night.

Monarch Event — Celebration of Monarch butterflies and their migration. Introduction to Monarch Watch Program. Education stations on Monarch life cycle; children’s activities; and capture, tagging, and release of Monarchs. On a Saturday in early October.

Discover Earth Science — Recognition of Earth Science Week. Earth science-focused interactive exhibits, children’s activities, geo-hikes, and Earth-inspired art. On a Saturday in late October.



Local Partners

The Rio Brazos Chapter has a number of local partners in addition to state partners (Texas Parks and Wildlife and Agrilife Extension). Chapter members serve as volunteers to assist local partners in carrying out various projects and activities that meet the goals of both the Texas Master Naturalist program and partner organizations. Google the following to access the partner websites where you can learn more about each.

- Acton Nature Center
- Botanical Research Institute of Texas
- Camp El Tesoro
- City of Burleson Parks & Recreation Department
- Cleburne State Park and Friends of Cleburne State Park (Facebook group)
- Dinosaur Valley State Park
- Fossil Rim Wildlife Center
- Native Plant Society of Texas, Prairie Rose Chapter
- Sunset Hill Tree Farm

If you need more information or want to become a certified “Texas Master Naturalist” please email - go to our chapter website at <https://txmn.org/rbc/contact-us/> and submit your questions and requests.



Bluebird Project



Turtle Tagging