



# Texas Master Naturalist Rio Brazos Chapter

March 2022 – Spring Newsletter

## Officers and Committees

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

President – Robert Slaughter  
 Vice President/Programs – Kristina del Pino Borgstrom  
 Treasurer – Henry Bogusch  
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- [Hood County Extension Office](#)
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- [Somervell County Extension Office](#)
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## From the President

by Robert Slaughter



With winter hopefully coming to an end we can look forward to the coming of the spring season. As I sit here on my back porch I see northern cardinals, robins, and numerous finches flying and moving around the bare branches of red oaks, elms, hackberry, and Bartlett pear trees. The Bartlett pear is always the first to spring forward and bud before the last freeze of winter

and the spring equinox. I am excited in anticipation of the longer days, warmer weather, and hopefully April showers readying us for one of our busiest times of the year.

Our activities will be many for March, April, and May.

### March:

- Continuation of new member training classes
- Feather Fest
- Acton Nature Center projects
- Butterflies In the Garden at the Fort Worth Botanic Garden and the Botanical Research Institute of Texas

### April

- Spring Trash Bash in Burleson
- Earth Day
- National Volunteer Week
- City Nature Challenge

### May

- Chapter Field Trip to Central Texas
- Brazos River Cleanup and Campout

These are just a few of the opportunities that will be available during this spring cycle.

# 2021 Milestones Rio Brazos Chapter

## 250 Hours

- Kristina del Pino Borgstrom
- Beth Eschbach
- Tim Eschbach
- Gaston del Pino Borgstrom
- Charlene Davis
- Robert Slaughter

## 500 Hours

- Kristina del Pino Borgstrom
- Susan Reece
- Andrea Roiz
- Diane Humphries

## 2500 Hours

- Dagmar Higgins
- Wendy Moore
- Valerie Taber



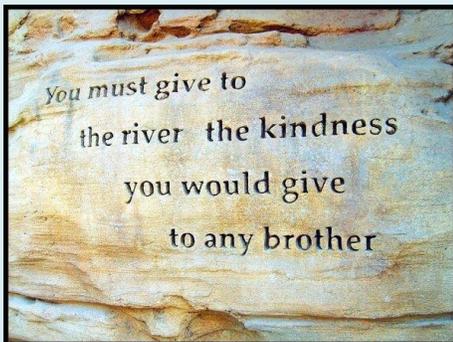
I also would like to let everyone know about a new project in southern Johnson County. If you remember, our presenter for last November's chapter meeting was Amber Arseneaux, Texas Land Conservancy North Texas Program Director. In her presentation she introduced us to the Malone Preserve in southern Johnson County, and in January a group of us got the

opportunity to preview the preserve. The preserve will have many opportunities for our chapter to prepare it for the use of communities surrounding this property.

In closing, this spring season we will once again be provided many opportunities to make contributions to the communities, parks, schools and wild areas under our charge as members of Texas Master Naturalist, Rio Brazos Chapter.

Robert Slaughter,  
President, Texas Master Naturalist, Rio Brazos Chapter

***"Ethical behavior is doing the right thing when no one else is watching- even when doing the wrong thing is legal." — Aldo Leopold***



## Congratulations to Our New Texas Master Naturalists

### 2021 Graduates

- ▶ Jennifer Adams (Double Certified)
- ▶ Pamela Brewster
- ▶ Jill Burk
- ▶ Mary Cauble
- ▶ Johnnie Chatman
- ▶ Cindy Davis
- ▶ Laura Dyer
- ▶ Theodore Dyer
- ▶ Amy Knoll (Double Certified)
- ▶ Christina Massey
- ▶ Ellen McDonald (Double Certified)
- ▶ Oliver McDonald
- ▶ Liza Nelson (Double Certified)



## Plant Collection Project

by Al and Kate Robertson



The Rio Brazos Chapter was honored to have Dale Kruse, curator of the S.M. Tracy Herbarium at Texas A&M University, introduce chapter volunteers to a project documenting plant species in Somervell County. On February 19, Dale and his A&M Team led a reconnaissance survey around the Little L Ranch in Somervell County to get a layout of the ranch for species collection and documentation. Thirty-two chapter volunteers and eight Native Plant Society of Texas, Prairie Rose Chapter volunteers participated in the survey and received training on proper collection and preservation of species.

Dale has a Bachelor of Science degree in Rangeland Ecology and Management and a Master of Science degree in Ecosystem Science and Management, both from Texas A&M University. He is a lifelong resident of Texas and has been Curator of the S. M. Tracy Herbarium since 1999. He has recently overseen the merger of the Biology Department Herbarium at A&M into the S. M. Tracy Herbarium, creating the third largest herbarium in Texas with approximately 350,000 specimens. Dale's interests include systematics, ecology, and biogeography of the mosses, liverworts, and hornworts (bryophytes).

During the reconnaissance, Dale and his team quickly located several species of bryophytes and gave all of us a quick field class on family group identification. That afternoon Dale presented a hands-on class in the intricacies of collecting and preparing specimens acceptable for deposit to an herbarium. Instruction included the proper way to collect specimens, take field notes, press specimens, prepare a label, and mount specimens. Dale's team will make several trips to Little L Ranch over the next two to three years to gather plant specimens.

Chapter members have been invited to play a major part in the success of the project by supplying voucher herbarium specimens. Bob and Sherry Walker have invited chapter members to feel free to collect species at the Little L Ranch on their own, but to call in advance to arrange a visit. Members also can collect on other properties in Somervell County (with permission), with those collections counting toward the total Somervell County species count.

The collecting of voucher herbarium specimens for delivery to the S. M. Tracy Herbarium has been approved as volunteer hours if chapter members wish to participate.

What if you don't live in Somervell County? Not to worry! The S.M. Tracy Herbarium will welcome vouchers from anywhere if they are properly prepared and labeled to meet the "Darwin Core Standards", which offer a stable, straightforward, and flexible framework for compiling biodiversity data from varied and variable sources.

## Burleson Project by Maryann Mathews



We did it! In January, a team of Rio Brazos Chapter members were instrumental in completing the Oak Valley Nature Trail in Burleson with interpretative signs and benches. The Oak Valley Trail is the first pedestrian trail leg in the city's planned trail system. The trail also crosses a retained nature habitat in which nature hikes are provided by Rio Brazos Chapter volunteers.

In 2014 the development of the Oak Valley North Park was in the early stages of a city-wide system of trails being developed to connect the Burleson City Park lands. Rio Brazos Chapter had been active in offering nature hikes led by Jim and Cathy Crocker in this park, so we were familiar with the property.

After being introduced to iNaturalist and its mobile application in 2015, our team began documenting the flora and fauna in the all the parks of Burleson. The iNaturalist reporting option became very handy when in 2017, the city asked for a "meeting of the minds" and created a forum for everyone interested in nature in the city. The "Nature Trails" group consisted of the mayor, council members, community supporters, city employees, Master Naturalists, and Texas Parks and Wildlife representatives, to name a few.

Of specific interest was the creation of informational signs to educate the public about the choices made in the parks and the protection of our prairie dog coterie, which was at that time in the middle of a new subdivision being built.

We got to work by submitting the reports from iNaturalist for the zip code of the Oak Valley Project to document what was found in the park. The City Parks Department took that information to the City Council and received approval for \$67,000 to develop the interpretive signs in Oak Valley and the area in and around the prairie dogs at Bailey Lake. Our sign team worked with the city for the next several years to gather all the background and make diligent choices about what would work in this very active and growing community.

Signs were erected to designate the Black Tailed Prairie Dog Coterie area, asking dogs to be leashed. A park bench was installed to watch their activity, and a camera installed to assure their safety. In January 2022, four beautiful interpretive signs went up at Oak Valley North Park discussing the importance of riparian areas, the Cross Timbers Ecoregion, and flora and fauna in the parks.

We have been able to see the culmination of a very long project thanks to Dagmar Higgins, Katelyn Reeves, Maryann Mathews, Phillip Kastner, City of Burleson Park Staff, and **the team** of Rio Brazos Chapter members that support the activities of Burleson.

## The Beginnings of a Friends Group

by Cathy Crocker



I am often asked why my husband Jim and I started the Friends Group at Cleburne State Park. I'm glad we did. The group's accomplishments are many and have had a large impact on the park and the quality of guests' visits. We've accomplished things as large as facilitating a \$37,000 fishing pier for the park and purchasing kayaks, archery equipment, Dutch oven equipment, and fishing equipment. We also purchased small necessities such as soap for the park restrooms. But above it all, we've been blessed with being able to work alongside a group of dedicated volunteers who have a passion for maintaining and sharing the beauty of Cleburne State Park (CSP).

But it didn't start out that simple. I was in a high-pressure, high-stakes job calling on clients mainly in Dallas. I would spend my "escape" time camping with my son. It was the only way to get away from the constant beeping (remember beepers?) and the anxiety that comes with being on call 24/7. I observed the retired hosts at these various campgrounds driving around in their golf carts without a care in the world. And I realized that I wanted to do that one day.

Once retired, Jim and I joined the Rio Brazos Chapter in 2008. We volunteered to be park hosts at CSP while we were receiving our master naturalist training. We picked June, thinking that's a nice mild month to start. It was a record breaking 104 degrees most days, and we were inside a 24-foot camper during the heat of the day with a 100-pound German Shepherd named Charlie Dog. Feeling a little trapped, and not having received training yet from the park, we decided to invent our own work. I picked up trash on the trails (still my favorite thing to do) and cleaned up campsites. Jim worked with the maintenance crew. And we both started to develop a nature hike. We knew nothing. But we bought a book (Remarkable Plants of Texas), picked out five to six plants to talk about, and invented our walk.

We eventually launched the hike successfully to the public. Several years later, we had as many as 75 people attending at one time on our little narrow hiking path. (That's a story for another time.) We hosted again the next year in May, thinking it would be cooler. Well, that May happened to have an early record heat wave. Again, we were stuck in a 24-foot camper with a loveable but very loud and smelly Charlie Dog. We did our duty and led our hikes but decided that perhaps there was another way to be involved with the park.

So, the idea of starting the Friends Group was born. We currently have 30 dedicated, passionate members, who will come to the park at a moment's notice to pick up trash, lead nature hikes, teach angler education, clear trails, work events, and you name it. And we've had some awesome events – Take a Homeless Dog for a Walk Day; mentoring hundreds of school children through archery, kayaking, and angler education; Dutch oven training; and days where we teach the public kayaking basics. And we all have such a great time just being together – outdoors – accomplishing good works.

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## The Plant Family Asteraceae (Compositae) – Sunflower or Aster Family

by Dr. Billy Teels

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The Asteraceae is the second largest plant family in the world with over 21,000 species. It is the largest in North Texas with 263 species (nearly 12% of the total). Because the family is so large, taxonomists have subdivided the family into Tribes. The family is typically identified by its characteristic inflorescence, having flowers arranged in a head composed of many flowers that appear as one big flower, thus giving rise to the old family name Compositae (a composite of many flowers). Although there are many exceptions, sunflowers typically have two types of flowers that occur in each head – petal-like sterile flowers at the perimeter, called ray flowers, that attract pollinators; and often smaller, compact fertile flowers in the center, known as disc flowers. The vast majority of species are herbaceous (e.g., sunflowers and asters), but a few are woody shrubs (e.g., *Baccharis* spp.). Although most species are showy with traditional aster-type flowers, many have somewhat inconspicuous flowers, e.g., ragweeds (*Ambrosia* spp.) and sumpweeds (*Iva* spp.).

Because they are so widespread, sunflowers influence the ecology of nearly every Texas landscape, and many have significant economic importance. For instance, our common sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*) was being cultivated in America when the European settlers arrived. It is one of the few agricultural crops thought to have originated in the Americas north of Mexico. Today it, and its many improved varieties, are grown all over the world. Its seed, or derivatives, are sold as snack food, sunflower butter, cooking oil, bird seed, lubricant, and for many other uses. Other important food crops of the family include lettuce (*Lactuca sativa*), artichoke (*Cynara scolymus*), and safflower (*Carthamus tinctorius*). The family also contains many ornamental flowers common to homes and gardens, e.g., zinnias, cosmos, chrysanthemums, dahlias, rudbeckias, bachelor's buttons, and marigolds.

Many sunflowers occur as forbs on grazing lands, and some offer high quality forage for both livestock and wildlife. For example, Engelmann's daisy (*Engelmannia peristenia*), Maximilian's sunflower (*Helianthus maximiliani*), and common sunflower are often included in seed mixes for rangelands because they are highly palatable and nutritious, containing from 15 to 25% crude protein. On the other hand, some sunflowers possess diverse chemical defense mechanisms to ward off grazing and are considered weeds in pastures and rangelands, e.g., western ragweed (*Ambrosia psilostachya*), annual broomweed, (*Gutierrezia dracunculoides*), bitterweed (*Helenium amarum*), and sneezeweed (*Helenium autumnale*). Thus, the relative abundance of certain sunflower species can serve as indicators of overgrazing.

The seeds of sunflowers are also an important food to many species of birds and wildlife. For example, the number one quail food in the Rolling Plains of Texas and Oklahoma are the seeds of western ragweed.

When most people think of allergies in this region, they think of tree pollen (e.g., the Junipers). However, ragweed pollen is just as intrusive to many people. Ragweed season begins in early August and runs through November. It is the leading cause of allergic rhinitis (hay fever) in the United States, affecting over 23 million people. One ragweed plant can produce up to a billion very fine pollen grains that can float through the air and wind up in your nose, eyes, or mouth, causing great discomfort.

## Photos and Captions taken at Acton Nature Center

by Dr. Billy Teels



Maximilian sunflower blooms from late summer through the fall, is from 5 to 7 feet tall, has long, linear leaves, and large, showy blossoms over most of the plant. In addition to its value for grazing, its tendency to form large colonies makes it ideal for wildlife food and cover.



Engelmann's (or cutleaf) daisy is a native cool-season perennial that produces high quality forage in spring and early summer. The plant produces an 8-inch basal rosette that persists through the winter and it blooms from early spring to summer. The leaves are about 8 inches long and deeply cut, giving rise to the name cutleaf daisy.



Not all members of the Asteraceae are beneficial. scotch thistle (*Onopordum acanthium*), is considered a U.S. invasive species, and can quickly spread to pastures and rangelands. Its long, prickly spines deter wildlife and livestock from grazing. Like most plants in the Asteraceae family, the flowers are heavily used by pollinators.



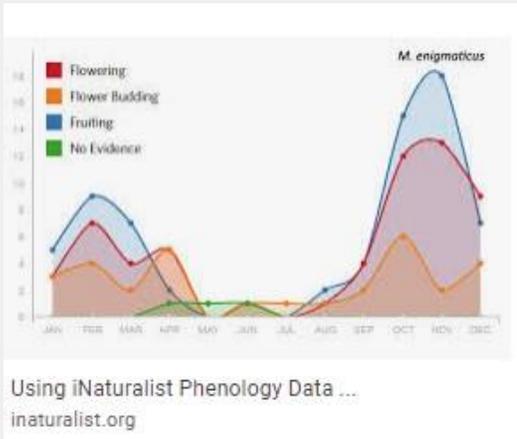
The common sunflower is composed of showy, but sterile, ray flowers at the margin of the head, and small, but perfect disc flowers in the center, each containing a stamen and pistil, and capable of producing a seed.

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# Phenology and a New Chapter Project

by Valerie Taber

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**What is Phenology?** It's the study of the cyclic timing of how the plants and animals interact with each other in relation to the climate or other environmental factors (e.g., daylength).

~ What triggers plants to begin blooming in the spring and pollinators to emerge to subsist on their nectar and pollen?

~ What happens if the region's fauna and flora are out of sync with each other as they adapt (or not) to cues from a changing climate?

We know from iNaturalist observations, for example, when certain plants routinely bloom at Acton Nature Center (ANC) and in Hood County. To answer the questions of ecosystem interactions, there's now a new Rio Brazos Chapter project in the works – a **Phenology Calendar** – that is approved for volunteer hours.

Your input will be an integral part of this project as it grows and expands. Recording your observations in iNaturalist (with some additional details to be explained in more detail in a moment) will be a substantial part of the calendar record. However, other events that are not always practical or possible to record in iNaturalist are important as well. We'll call those **sightings**. When did you first hear Sandhill cranes migrating overhead? Did you see a Monarch fly by, but couldn't catch a photo? If you're in Hood County and especially at ANC (and it's not an observation you have made for iNaturalist), please keep a note of the date you saw the animal, what animal it was, and where you saw it. There will be a form for this type of sighting later on in the project, but just note that information for yourself right now.

As of February 24, 2022, there are more than 11,000 observations for Hood County in iNaturalist. Only 1,773 of them are reported at ANC. A look at the bounding box that supposedly defines ANC left out the Education Center, Bird Blind and Butterfly Garden entirely! Therefore, the phenology project uses all of Hood County for the database search.

Due to the scope of those 11,000 observations, the phenology project will begin with defining the database details in **iNaturalist for FLOWERING PLANTS**. This reduces the plant observations to only 4,000 or so!. This is where you will have an opportunity for volunteer hours! There are two parts.

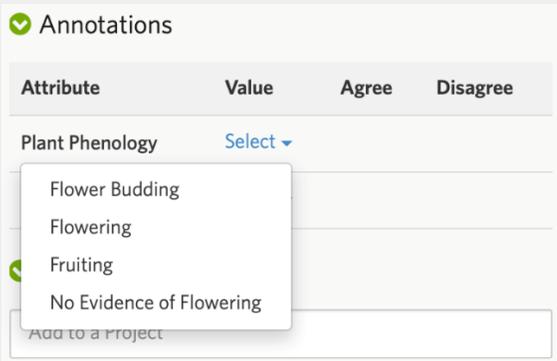
After you have recorded an observation in iNaturalist of a plant that is budding, has flowers, or fruit, or no sign of them, please edit your observation later on your laptop or desktop.

In the right-hand column, under the map, there will be a listing for Annotations.

Annotations

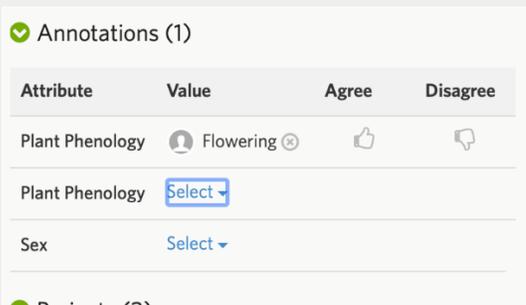
Attribute	Value	Agree	Disagree
Plant Phenology	Select ▾		
Sex	Select ▾		

Find the choice for Plant Phenology and select the Value field.



The screenshot shows the 'Annotations' section of the iNaturalist interface. It features a table with columns for 'Attribute', 'Value', 'Agree', and 'Disagree'. The 'Plant Phenology' attribute is selected, and a dropdown menu is open, listing four options: 'Flower Budding', 'Flowering', 'Fruiting', and 'No Evidence of Flowering'. Below the table is a button labeled 'Add to a Project'.

Choose whatever categories apply from the list. A flowering plant frequently has buds and flowers at the same time. If there is no evidence of flowering, include that as well. It is just as helpful to know when a plant isn't blooming.



The screenshot shows the 'Annotations (1)' section. The table has columns for 'Attribute', 'Value', 'Agree', and 'Disagree'. The first row shows 'Plant Phenology' with the value 'Flowering' and thumbs up/down icons. The second row shows 'Plant Phenology' with a 'Select' dropdown menu. The third row shows 'Sex' with a 'Select' dropdown menu.

After you enter one value for plant phenology, you have the option to continue to choose additional values.

Now comes **DEFINING THE EXISTING DATABASE DETAILS IN INATURALIST.**

Volunteers are needed to add these same annotations for individual observations of **FLOWERING PLANTS** by **MONTH** in **HOOD COUNTY**. If you'd like to participate, you will be assigned a link to a specific data field search – no hunting required on your part! Then your task will be the same procedure as listed above for the annotations, for the specific data field you have been assigned.

Once you've finished the batch assigned, you may ask for more, or decide you've had enough. I will try to limit the batches to about 50 observations, unless you like doing this and want more. There are about 4,000 observations that need a plant phenology value.

\*If you would like to participate but would like some in-person advanced training (AT) first, that can happen too.

I am still smoothing out data details and organizing the initial project collection filters, but I would appreciate your help for this volunteer-hour-approved project. If you would like to help define the database, please email Valerie Taber. You'll find my email address in the Chapter Member contact list on our website after entering the password. I'll also send my email address out in a Chapter email separately after the Newsletter is published.

Thanks for your time and consideration!

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# Acton Nature Center, Great Backyard Bird Count

by Dr. Billy Teels

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With each passing season comes a new assemblage of birds that gather at Acton Nature Center (ANC). Although we have our share of local residents, e.g., Eastern Bluebird, Bewick's Wren, American Crow, and Northern Cardinal, we also have a host of species that migrate from their northern breeding grounds to spend the winter here. Winter bird populations are always changing and shifting. To monitor those changes, in 1998, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society launched the annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC). The GBBC was the first on-line citizen science project to collect data on wild birds and display the results in real time. The goal of the GBBC is to

provide an on-line system that allows everyday citizens to report their bird sightings on every corner of the continent, and in this way winter bird migration trends can be followed. As the name implies, the GBBC is designed for anyone interested in birds to count them in their own backyards, or to join group counts in places like the ANC. The GBBC is a 4-day event held in February of each year. This year's event took place February 18-21, and as in every year since 2008, the Rio Brazos Chapter held Saturday and Sunday bird walks at the ANC as our way of participating.

Participation in this year's event was aided by a front-page article published in the Hood County News just days prior to the walks. The article described the GBBC activities and invited the public to join. The GBBC walks are conducted using the same methods and route used during First Saturday Bird Walks. And, each year, after the Saturday walk, a lecture is given by Billy Teels on some aspect of ornithology, either at the ANC Education Center or at the Community Center at the bottom of the hill. This year's lecture was on "What's in a Name – Changes to the Bird List."

Eighteen people participated in Saturday's walk, and six showed up on Sunday, on near-perfect weather days. Bird species and numbers have been down this winter as compared to last; however, 31 species and one hybrid were counted on Saturday, the most of any walk this winter. Highlights of Saturday's walk included spotting a Sharp-shinned Hawk consuming a rodent under one of the Junipers near the bird blind. Naturally, the birds that had been coming to the feeders were reluctant to show themselves during this ordeal, but eventually appeared when the hawk left. Another highlight of the Saturday walk was a pair of flirting Ruby-crowned Kinglets. It is rare that one gets to see the namesake of the bird; however, on Saturday the male was flaring his brilliant red top as he darted around the female in attempts to impress her. There were so many participants on Saturday that we had to split into two groups, and both groups got to witness this behavior.

Sunday's walk found the birds at the blind sparse again, and again a Sharp-shinned Hawk was spotted perched low on a Juniper branch near the feeders. Like the day before, the birds didn't resume feeding until the hawk had left and were extremely skittish afterwards. Although the weather was perfect, only 24 species and one hybrid were tallied that day.

So, all in all it was yet another very successful GBBC at the ANC. Photographers got shots of over half of the species we saw, including the rodent-feeding hawk that was responsible for frightening all the birds away, at least temporarily. And, thanks to all that participated in either the walks or the lecture, it was lots of fun!



Participants in Saturday's GBBC walk got to see a Sharp-shinned Hawk consuming his rodent prey under one of the Junipers near the bird blind.

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## ***Bailey Lake Pocket Prairie Project***

**By Katelyn Reeves**

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The Burleson Pocket Prairie and Monarch Waystation is a big accomplishment for Keep Burleson Beautiful (KBB), the Rio Brazos Chapter, and the city of Burleson. The Bailey Lake Pocket Prairie is a publicly accessible demonstration garden of Blackland Prairie as well as Burleson's first certified Monarch Waystation.

Several years ago, KBB had planted some wildflower seeds as part of an Earth Day event, but after the spring bloom was over, the parks department mowed it down. It was a beautiful spot to document native bees and butterflies. We knew if we wanted something similar for more than a season, we'd need more structure to a future project.

We decided to build a pocket prairie and apply for the Bring Back the Monarchs milkweed grant, which we were awarded in spring of last year. After working with the Parks Department for several months regarding our vision for the space, they helped us prep the ground in a new area of Bailey Lake Park. We planted native plants from a rescue we did (more on this later!), the milkweeds, and a couple bags of Native American Seed "Blackland Prairie" Seed. Robert Slaughter hand-built an amazing cedar bluebird box that we installed in the center. The Rio Brazos Chapter and KBB crew were joined by interested members of the community on planting day, and it was wonderful! The tall prairie grasses and forbs thrived with the wet June we had last year, and many a pollinator was thankful for the native blooms to forage on.

Many folks have stopped to ask about the project and express gratitude that we created a wildlife-friendly place in a suburban park. I'm so excited to see our milkweeds spring up and monitor for monarch caterpillars this spring!

Thank you to everyone involved including Maryann Mathews, Dagmar Higgins, Cyndi Walker, Nancy Haubert, Robert Slaughter, Jesse Tate (KBB Executive Director), Mikaela Waldon (KBB), Carol Clark (Bring Back the Monarchs Educator), and the City of Burleson.

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***83% of land in the U.S. is privately owned. If we planted native on 50% of private land, we would restore biodiversity...***

***~ Doug Tallamy ~***

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# Friends of Dinosaur Valley State Park

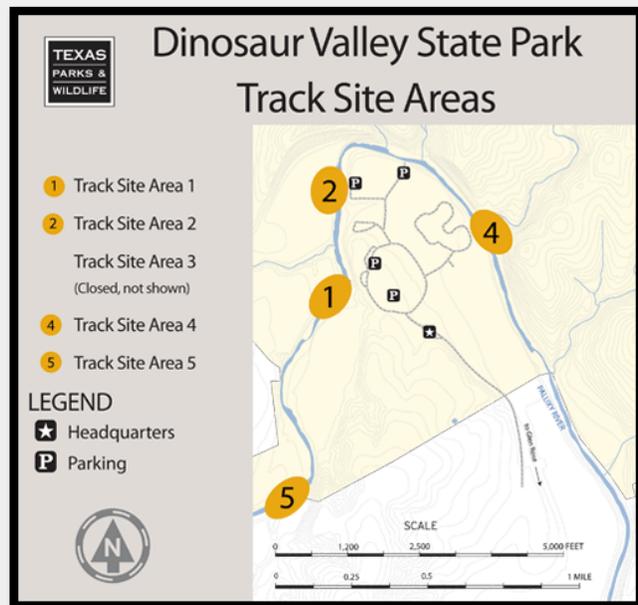
by Kristina del Pino Borgstrom

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There are always exciting activities and events at Dinosaur Valley State Park! Check out their upcoming March calendar. Spring break activities are planned and run by the park rangers and local volunteers from our own Rio Brazos Chapter. Learn more about DVSP events at [https://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/dinosaur-valley/park\\_events](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](mailto:friendsofdvsp@gmail.com).



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## Master Naturalists at Acton Nature Center – Upcoming Events

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### “Oh, the Places You’ll Go” – Dr. Seuss

The Acton Nature Center is a great place to get outdoors and enjoy nature. There are several events coming up in March and subsequent months. Go to their website to get a trail map and more information about the programs that are offered. <https://actonnaturecenter.org/>

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### Birds are Everywhere!

March 5 – 7:00-10:00 AM – First Saturday Bird Walks led by Master Naturalist Billy Teels (free public event)

March 26 – 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM – Feather Fest (free public event)



### Community Lecture Series



April 3 – 4:00-5:00 PM  
The History of ANC by  
Andrea Roiz



July 3 – 4:00-5:00 PM  
Snakes by Gaston del  
Pino