

# Texas Master Naturalists ROLLING PLAINS

## NEWSLETTER

Vol. 7, No. 10

<http://txmn.org/rollingplains>

October 2015

### Black-tailed Prairie Dog

Prairie dogs play an important role in the prairie ecosystem. They serve as a food source for many predators and leave vacant burrows for the burrowing owl, the Black-footed Ferret, the Texas horned lizard, rabbits, hares, and even rattlesnakes.

A close cousin of the ground squirrel, the Black-tailed Prairie Dog is a heavy-bodied rodent with a black-tipped tail. Prairie dogs have large eyes, short tails and a brownish-tan pelage. Prairie dogs are very social



animals. They live as a group in prairie dog “towns” which range from one to over 1,000 acres. These towns are subdivided into wards that are arranged like counties within a state. Wards are further subdivided into distinct social units called coteries. A coterie usually consists of a single



adult male, one to four adult females, and any offspring under two years of age. Movement between wards is uncommon; however, among family members, prairie dogs greet each other with bared teeth with which they “kiss” as a form of recognition.

Prairie dogs are strictly diurnal animals. They are most active during the cool hours of the day, when they engage in social activities such as visiting and grooming each other as well as feeding on grasses and herbs. When prairie dogs are out, a sentry perches on the volcano-like ring that surrounds the burrow. Should a predator or any other danger become evident, the sentry will bark out a warning, after which the community will dive into their burrows and wait for the “all clear” call before venturing out again.

### E LOCALS

**OCTOBER 6:** Rolling Plains Chapter monthly meeting is at River Bend Nature Center. **Location:** 2200 3rd Street, Wichita Falls, Texas. **Time:** 7:00 PM. **Program:** Betty Bowles will be speaking about Queen Conch Conservation.

**OCTOBER 10:** Owl-o-ween **Location:** Wild Bird Rescue, 4611 Lake Shore Drive. **Time:** 4:30 PM. to 11 PM. To volunteer, contact Cassandra @ 691-0828. (chapter partner)

**OCTOBER 15-18:** Native Plant Society of Texas 2015 Symposium **Location:** Austin’s Airport Hilton in Austin, TX. *See page 4 for additional information.*

**OCTOBER 16:** Not so Scary Halloween **Location:** River Bend Nature Center. **Time:** 6 PM. to 9 PM. Call 767-0843 to volunteer. (chapter partner)

**OCTOBER 23-25:** Texas Master Naturalist 16th Annual Meeting **Location:** Horseshoe Bay Resort in Marble Falls, TX. *For registration information see page 3.*

**OCTOBER 30:** Halloween Party **Location:** LASP dining hall **Time:** 6 PM. Special guest will be Penny and one of the education owls from Wild Bird Rescue.

Female prairie dogs produce only one litter of approximately four to five young per year in March or April. The pups are born blind and hairless after a gestation period of 34 to 35 days. They do not make an appearance outside the burrow until they are about six weeks of age. Not long after, the family gradually will disperse. The young males of the family usually move away before their first breeding season while the females may spend their entire lives in their original coterie. Female prairie dogs may live up to eight years of age while male prairie dogs usually live to be no more than five years of age.

Prairie dogs are native to short-grass prairie habitats of western North America. They avoid heavy brush and tall grass areas due to the reduced visibility these habitats impose.

Prairie dogs are native to the western North American plains. In Texas, they may be found in western por-

tions of the state and in the Panhandle. Huge prairie dog towns, such as one that covered 25,000 square miles and supported a population of approximately 400 million prairie dogs, once were reported from Texas. Although prairie dogs still locally are common, today less than one percent of the prairie dog population and habitat remain.

Prairie dogs have been pushed out of their native habitat ranching and farming activities for the past 50 years or more. As a result, their former range and numbers have shrunk dramatically. Although it is true that large concentrations of prairie dogs can damage cultivated crops or compete seriously with livestock, the wisdom of eliminating them entirely from rangelands has not been proven. Ranchers in certain parts of Texas, for example, claim that removal of prairie dogs is related to the undesirable spread of brush. This has had detrimental effects on the livestock industry which far outweighs the damage prairie dogs might do.

## Chapter Activities for September 2015

It has been a very active month for members of the Rolling Plains Chapter from road side quail counts to Sikes Lake Clean-up to Dragonfly Trail Restoration at Lake Arrowhead State Park to Monarch tagging to Take Me Outdoors at Lake Arrowhead State Park.



# It's time! Registration is **NOW OPEN** for the Texas Master Naturalist 16th Annual Meeting!



**Registration Open - <http://txmn.org/2015-annual-meeting/>**

This year's event will mark the Texas Master Naturalist Program's 16th Annual Meeting and will be the 17th year of the program. The event will be hosted at a larger than ever before facility, Horseshoe Bay Resort, just west of gorgeous Marble Falls, Texas. Situated along the lakeshores of Lake Lyndon B. Johnson, this year's meeting location will offer scenic views, close proximity to local, state and even national wildlife areas and nature centers, along with state of the art meeting rooms, resort style accommodations and award winning meals. The Annual Meeting provides an opportunity for the Texas Master Naturalist volunteers from around the state to gather, participate in hands-on educational seminars, and receive all of their Advanced Training requirements for the year within one weekend. It's also an opportunity for program participants and supporters to network, share new ideas/projects, and to learn from different chapters from different regions of the state.

We are pleased to extend an invitation to ALL Texas Master Naturalist Program volunteers, along with all other program affiliates. This includes those certified volunteers, those still in training, program administrators and advisors of local chapters, and your local chapter partners, sponsors, or special guests. This year's gathering has several chapter enhancement and Advanced Training topics to choose from. Our social times, chapter project fair showcase and round table discussions will offer great opportunities to meet your fellow Texas Master Naturalist peers from our 45 Chapters across the state and share new ideas from the past year. Hear what projects your peers are contributing their volunteer time towards and make new acquaintances all at the same time. The Texas Master Naturalist Store and other surprises are also on the agenda. So, come out for a weekend filled with fun, fellowship, and learning in a beautiful October, Texas Hill Country setting.

This year's meeting is scheduled for October 23rd through 25th at the hill country scenic Horseshoe Bay Resort, located on the shores of Lake Lyndon B Johnson. Registration for this highly anticipated event is NOW available through the Annual Meeting page on the Texas Master Naturalist State website at <http://txmn.org/2015-annual-meeting/>. Additional information about the annual gathering weekend, annual awards and contests, the advanced training sessions agenda, and registration details can be found on the website as well.

We look forward to seeing you this fall!

Thanks,  
Michelle & Mary Pearl

Michelle M. Haggerty  
Texas Master Naturalist State Program Coordinator  
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department  
Office: 830-896-2504  
Cell: 979-587-2627  
E-mail: [mhaggerty@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:mhaggerty@ag.tamu.edu)  
309 Sidney Baker South  
Kerrville, TX 78028

Mary Pearl Meuth  
Extension Associate – Texas Master Naturalist Program  
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service  
Office: (979) 845-7294  
Cell: (727) 366-1144  
E-mail: [mpmeuth@tamu.edu](mailto:mpmeuth@tamu.edu)  
102 Nagle Hall, 2258 TAMU  
College Station, TX 77843

**FUN FACTS**  
**OLD**

The spines of the Lonomia moth caterpillar inject a powerful anticoagulant. Brushing past a group of them can cause inner hemorrhaging as well as kidney failure.



Porcupine caribou hold the record for their incredibly long



migration of up to 2,983 miles per year across the frozen tundra of North America.

Around one in every 10,000 of the cells lining a trout's nose contains powerful magnetic material, which responds rapidly to changes in the external magnetic field.



**Native Plant Society of Texas  
2015 Symposium**

Austin will be hosting the Native Plant Society of Texas 2015 Symposium, October 15-18, at Austin's Airport Hilton.

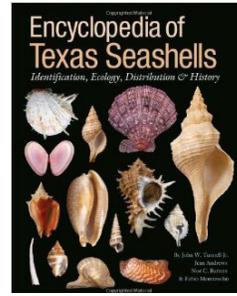
This year's symposium will focus on the ecoregions surrounding Austin and the plant communities found there. Learn how the Edwards Plateau, the Blackland Prairie, the Cross Timbers and the Post Oak Savanna have influence native plants.



Enjoy presentations from a great line-up of speakers, guided hikes, and information about the Invaders of Texas Citizen Science program with Texasinvasives.org. Learn more about the presentations and hikes at 2015 NPSOT Symposium.

**RESOURCE**  
**CORNER**

*Encyclopedia of Texas Seashells: Identification, Ecology, Distribution, and History*  
by John W. Tunnell Jr.  
Hardcover: 512 pages  
ISBN-10: 1603441417  
Price:\$38.79



An essential reference book for every collector and researcher of American seashells, *Encyclopedia of Texas Seashells*

is a complete sourcebook and up-to-date identification guide, covering an unprecedented nine hundred species of seashells and mollusks that reside in the marine habitats of the Gulf of Mexico.

**Special features:**

- Illustrated guide to the general features of mollusks
- Family overviews
- Descriptions of deep-water, tropical, coral reef, and bank species
- Information boxes on notable species
- Assemblage photos of dominant species in primary Texas habitats
- Checklist and glossary

This reference contains 987 detailed and data-rich color images for even the tiniest shells, a valuable primer on shell collecting as a hobby, and a wealth of entries on the history of use and study, habitats and ecology, shell characteristics, distribution, biology, and identification.

Covering species that range from Florida to South America, the *Encyclopedia of Texas Seashells* will also be a valuable resource for anyone interested in seashells of the Western Atlantic.

**Chapter Contacts:**

Jim Hensley, President 569-4713; Kay Murphy, Vice President 704-0406; Judy Snyder, Secretary 569-4534; Larry Snyder, Treasurer 569-4534

**Committees Chairperson:**

Leslie Fernandez, RiverBend Liaison 767-0843; Paula Savage, Newsletter Editor and Designer 691-0231, pasavage@sbcglobal.net; Tami Davis, Website Manager 224-0131; Activities Chair: Terry McKee 766-4097; Dian Hoehne, Communication Chair 692-7234

**Advisor:** Robert Mauk, TPWD Advisor 766-2383