

Texas Master Naturalists ROLLING PLAINS

NEWSLETTER

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December 2015

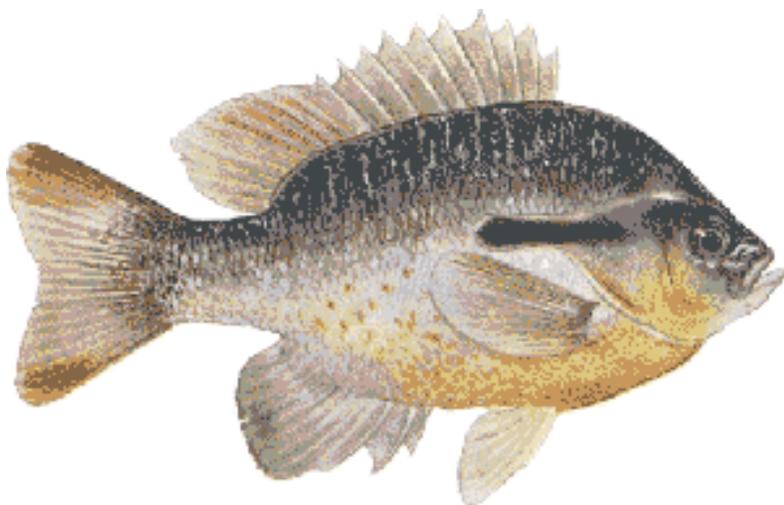
Redbreast Sunfish (*Lepomis auritus*)

The Redbreast Sunfish is also known as the Yellowbelly Sunfish and the Redbreasted Bream

This sunfish possesses a yellow belly that is sometimes an orange or a rusty color. It might have been better named the longear, as its opercle flap or ear is considerably longer than the opercle flap of the longear sunfish. In adults, the ear often reaches a length of one inch or more; it is narrow and usually not wider than the eye. The lower margin of the flap is usually pale. The redbreast is one of our larger sunfish, occasionally attaining weights of one pound or more.

In typical sunfish fashion, the redbreast spawns in beds or colonies on sand or gravel where the water is one to three feet deep. After hatching, the young may remain schooled for several weeks before scattering. Adults feed on insects, snails, crayfish, and small fish.

Redbreast sunfish were introduced into Texas from their original range, the streams of the eastern US that drain into the Atlantic Ocean. This species now occurs throughout the eastern and southern parts of Texas as far west as some streams of the Pecos drainage.



Drawing of Redbreast Sunfish (*Lepomis auritus*) Illustration © TPWD

At one time, this sunfish was raised by state hatcheries and widely distributed. Good populations of large redbreast can be found in the clear streams of central Texas, primarily in the San Marcos area.

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DECEMBER 1: Chapter Christmas Party. There will be a \$5.00 per person cover charge. Please bring a dessert and an item or cash donation for Wild Bird Rescue. There will be a “white elephant” gift exchange. The gift should hold a value of \$15.00 or less. Tickets for the party may be purchased at the November meeting or by e-mailing Larry Snyder who will send you PDF copies of tickets. Tickets must be purchased by November 15th so we have a head count.

DECEMBER 19: The Audubon Christmas Bird Count. *For more details see page 2.*

JANUARY 1: First Day Hike **Location:** Lake Arrowhead **Time:** 8:30 AM and 2:00 PM. *This is a volunteer activity for the chapter.* Start 2016 by earning hours toward certification. You are welcome to help out at either hike—the 5 mile hike starting at 8:30 a.m. or the 2 p.m. hike at the Dragonfly Trail. We usually have adult and children at this event and everyone is welcome. Reserve the date on your new calendar for January 1!



Spotted Camel Cricket

by Debra Halter

While cleaning up the Dragonfly Trail at Lake Arrowhead State Park on September 26, members of the Rolling Plains Chapter Texas Master Naturalist noticed a “varmint” hole along the trail and about a foot away, another smaller hole. When walking the trail before the “Take Me Outside” event at the Park on October 3, several of us noticed there was something inside both holes – some kind of insect with large back legs, reminiscent of a grasshopper. Carol Lunsford decided to get a better view after the rest of us moved on. She used a long thin stick, inserting it into the hole behind the insect. After slowly encouraging it to come out, she snapped



Spotted Camel Cricket (photo by Carol Lunsford)

at what scares them, in an attempt to startle a would-be attacker. It can jump very high and very far. It is recognizable by its humped speckled back and large size, with very long antennae. They have no wings and do not chirp. They feed on vegetation at night, and also will eat other insects. Females have a long ovipositor for laying eggs. Judging from Carol’s photos, this one is a female.

some photos. Researching it, Carol discovered that she had photographed a Spotted Camel Cricket.

Since we didn’t hear any screaming coming from the trail, we know this one was rather calm as they are known to jump



The Audubon Christmas Bird Count is December 19th

The Audubon Christmas Bird Count will be held December 19. Chapter members wishing to participate please contact one of the team leaders listed below.

- Penny Miller (867-9761) will do the Lake Wichita area.
- Jimmy Hoover (692-4975) is in charge of the Iowa Park area.
- Terry McKee (766-4097) will cover Lucy Park and Wichita Falls.
- Debra Halter is our compiler. Sue and Warren King have agreed to host the after-count spaghetti supper at their home on 3304 Robin Lane. That will begin at 5:30 p.m.

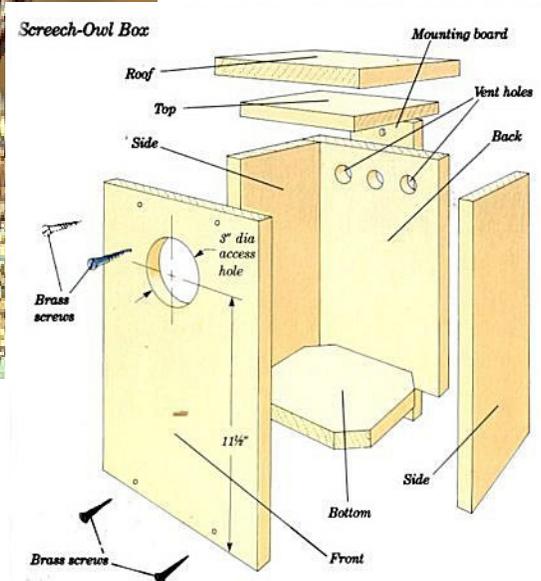
Building a Screech Owl Box

Screech owls are found all over Texas in both urban and rural areas. They’re small and have an eerie call, which can be spooky. But they more than make up for it because some of their favorite things to eat are those big tree roaches. You know, the kind that if it gets in a house and starts flying around, everybody freaks out. So screech owls are good birds to have around.

An excellent way to encourage that is to build them a house. They aren’t super-picky. Most cavity-nesting birds, including owls, will use a birdhouse if you build it to the right dimensions. Build a box from scrap wood, then add some ventilation and drainage holes, put some wood shavings on the floor and you’ll have yourself an owl house!

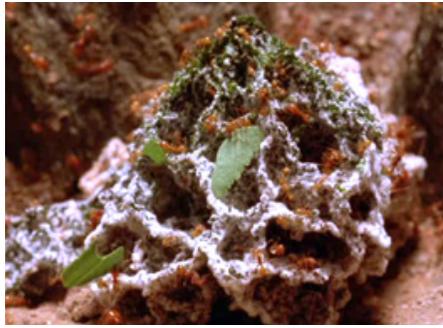


Screech owls nest in late winter, so now is the perfect time for you to build one. If you’re feeling motivated, build two - a birdhouse is a fine gift to give! Oh, and if you see a baby screech owl on the ground, it’s best to leave it there. It should climb back up to safety all on its own.



FACTS FUN

Leaf-cutter ants cut out bits of leaves from plants and carry them back to their underground nest. The cut leaves pieces are used to fertilizer special fungus farms that are grown inside the ant nest. There can be numerous fungus farms in a single nest.



Cut off from the sun, rain and wind that we experience on the surface, you might assume meteorological conditions in caves never change. However, the reality is that their climates do very significantly-not only from location to location, but within individual caves over time. The Er Wang Dong cave system in China is just one example.

The electric eel can emit up to 600 volts of electricity. All of an electric eel's vital organs are crammed into the front 20 percent of its body. The rest is packed with 6000 cells that act like tiny batteries.



Now Taking Membership Dues for 2016 Get Your 2016 Home & Garden Tickets

We'll be taking dues payments for 2016 at that meeting and we'll have tickets for the Home and Garden show available as well. Dues are \$15 for an individual and \$20 for a couple and Home and Garden Show tickets are \$5.00 each. We'll have a 100 tickets available. This is the only chapter fund raiser that we ask you to participate in. For each ticket sold your chapter gets \$4.00 in return.



RESOURCE

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The small, versatile military Style Tactical Backpack Design is Perfect when Full Sized Packs are Too Large. Heavy on Utility, it allows you to configure your pack to carry it as a Shoulder Bag, Chest Pouch, Back Pouch or simply Hand Carry it by the Hand Strap.

A generous number of dividers, straps, clips, loops, pockets, and snaps give this MOLLE compatible pack endless configurations for whatever your specific needs are.

SPECIFICATIONS:

Size: 11" x 7.8" x 3.9" (L x H x Thickness)

Weight: 0.86lb

Material: Military Nylon

Color: Black /Army Green /Tan / CP Camo /ACU Digital Camo

Chapter Contacts:

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