

Texas Master Naturalists ROLLING PLAINS CHAPTER

NEWSLETTER

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<http://txmn.org/rollingplains>

July 2019

President Report

Summer is upon us and that means with the heat comes opportunity. The Whiteside Natural History Museum in Seymour recently celebrated their 5th anniversary and the Rolling Plains Chapter was there in force with a booth to educate the museum visitors. Not that it was all hard work. Many chapter members were able to talk with Dr. Robert Baker, paleontologist.



Coming up in July on the 6th, at Lake Arrowhead State Park; Laura Clepper will host a Bike Ride for kids with 3 nature stops along the way and would appreciate the chapter's help with the stops. This takes place at 10 am Saturday, July 6 and will count as volunteer time. We will have more about this at the meeting.

July 27, 3 Rivers Foundation will host a star party, also at Lake Arrowhead about dusk. Come learn about star constellations and planets.

July 20, beginning at 8 p.m. at Lake Arrowhead State Park, (I'm seeing a trend here), the chapter is sponsoring a moth watch at the dining hall. We will gather like a moth to a flame to count creatures that flock to the light during Moth Watch Day. We will have several light stations set up Saturday night on the 20th and the public is invited.



Several of the moths we may find are the Chickweed Geometer, a pretty little coral striped moth, and the Arge Moth with its lace-like wing pattern, both of which

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JULY 2: Rolling Plains Chapter training meets *in Bolin Science Hall room 209 at Midwestern State University* Time: 7:00 PM.
The program: Ranger L Clepper - Prescribed Fire Program

JULY 6: Bike Ride for Kids at Lake Arrowhead at 10 a.m. led by Laura Clepper. There will be 3 nature stops during the ride. Chapter help is needed with the stops. This will count as volunteer time.

JULY 13: Bird Walk at Lake Arrowhead led by Penny Miller. Meet at the dump station at 8 a.m.

JULY 20: Moth Watch at Lake Arrowhead. Meet at the dining hall at 8 p.m.

JULY 27: Star Party at Lake Arrowhead hosted by 3 Rivers Foundation starting at dusk.

SEPT. 21: Seed Collecting Workshop at Comanche Springs Astronomy Campus - sign up in advance. Cost is \$50 (includes lunch). To reserve your spot or for information e-mail christenas@3rf.org. Time: 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. **Note** that the registration fee is **NOT** refundable. Space is limited to 30 people. I'm sure this will count as Advance Training.



were photographed by Debra Halter in Wichita County.

Several events including the monthly bird walk at Lake Arrowhead led by Penny Miller on the 13th are planned for July.

Lynn Seman will continue to post upcoming activities so keep an eye on your e-mail.

Winners of the First Annual TMN Quiz Bowl!



From left to right: Terry McKee, Debra Halter, June McKee and Penny Miller

Congratulations Rolling Plains Chapter Members

Congratulations to Carl Brown on having achieved the Chapter Milestone of 1,500 hours.

Congratulations to Susan Lindsay for completing the required 40 hours of Master Naturalist Course training.

Congratulations to Maryruth Prose for having reached the Master Naturalist 500 hours of Volunteer Time milestone.

Congratulations to Larry Synder for having reached the Chapter milestone of 2,000 hours of Volunteer Time.

Congratulations on recertification for 2018: Debra Halter, James Masuoka, and ... me.

Congratulations to Betty Bowles who has reached the 250 hour milestone.

Cats—The Invasive Species in Your Backyard

from the May 2019 issue of Texas Invasives iwire

Domesticated cats (*Felis catus*) are now listed as one of the top 100 invasive species worldwide by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. They are directly responsible for the extinction of a number of animal species around the world. A recent study found that in the U.S., the popular pet is estimated to kill 1.3 - 4.0 billion birds and over 6.3 - 22.3 billion mammals annually, and that doesn't even include reptiles and amphibians. The study concluded that "free-ranging cats cause substantially greater wildlife mortality than previously thought and are likely the single greatest source of anthropogenic mortality for US birds and mammals." While the biggest threat is posed by feral cats — domesticated breeds that don't have an owner and aren't socialized to humans — even common house cats that are well cared for and fed will hunt and kill if let outside. Cats also transmit diseases. In 2014, of the domestic animals that contracted rabies in the U.S.,



which can then be spread to the local wildlife and humans, roughly 60 percent of them were cats.

And yet, we humans have been



happy to make this invasive species feel at home. We let them wander outdoors, and even feed feral cats.

Like nearly all invasive species, cats have rapid rates of reproduction. Females can start breeding at just 6 months old and can breed every 4 months, producing up to 12 kittens every year. In just the last 40 years, the number of domestic cats across America has tripled. While it's difficult to get an accurate count of feral cats, estimates suggest that today there are at least 30 million of them roaming our streets and neighborhoods. An additional 40 million pet cats have regular access to the outdoors. There are many colonies of feral cats that are maintained by people.

Managing cats in the United States is a controversial topic. Given the clear ecological damage they cause, it's not surprising that many managers of parks and other green spaces would like to be rid of them. One way to do so is of course to

kill them, but an alternative approach advocated by animal rights groups and others is the trap-neuter-return (TNR) program, in which feral cats are trapped and neutered and then returned to their colonies. They argue that this is humane as it allows the cats to live while reducing the population over time, reducing the impact on wildlife. Critics of these programs point out that the “humane” part of the argument is moot because the neutered feral cats are vulnerable to disease and injury that can’t be treated – the cats are being left to “fend for themselves”. For natural resource managers, it is this “fending for themselves” that makes the neutered cats problem-



atic – they are still out there killing wildlife. The same study that determined the ecological damage cats cause in the U.S. noted, “Claims that TNR colonies are effective in reducing cat populations, and, therefore, wildlife mortality, are not supported by peer-reviewed scientific studies.” And in many cases, even if the feral cats were eliminated, the domesticated cats that people allow to roam would still negatively impact those natural areas.

In contrast to the U.S., Australia has largely accepted that cats are such an extreme threat to its native fauna that it has set a goal of removing two million cats between 2015 and 2020, according to an excellent article in the New York Times. Cats are the likely main cause of the extinction of 22 of the 34 mammal species that have gone extinct there. And you may think much of Australia is desert and

inhospitable to cats, but it is estimated that a whopping 99.8% of the country hosts cats!



So, if you have a cat, don’t let it be part of the problem. Don’t let it roam outside (the best option), or place a bell or other noise-maker on it. Be sure it is neutered so that it can’t contribute to the feral cat population. Finally, volunteer to educate your neighbors about the dangers cats pose, and to help manage feral cats in your neighborhood.

Aplomado Falcons Making a Comeback



The agile Aplomado falcon had all but vanished from Texas by the 1930s, mainly due to loss of the prairie grassland they need to hunt. In 1986 this falcon was listed as an endangered species.

TPWD and our partners, the Peregrine Fund and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, began releasing Aplomado falcons in Texas in 1993. Knowing the birds wouldn’t survive without their prairie habitat, we also worked to rebuild and maintain natural grasslands.

Mustang Island was an Aplomado falcon release area, and on June 1 this year two fuzzy falcon chicks were banded, the offspring of a wild Aplomado pair. A few days later, the 500th Aplomado falcon was banded in Texas. We’ll continue working to restore these endangered birds so that future generations can also enjoy them. If you’d like to try to see the adult falcon pair, our press release has more information on where to find endangered Aplomado falcons on Mustang Island.

The 4 Fascinating Foxes of Texas

Foxes are members of the dog family but possess cat-like qualities, thus their young may be called pups or kits. There are 4 different fox species in Texas.



Left to right: kit fox, red fox, gray fox, swift fox

1. The **red fox** was imported to train tracking dogs. Its many feline traits include elliptical pupils, kits that hiss like kittens, and it will arch its back and puff up when threatened. Most red foxes live in North Central Texas.
2. The **gray fox** is the only fox that climbs trees. It will nap in the branches, travel through the tree canopy, and build a den high in a hollow. Gray foxes are found all over the state.
3. The **kit fox** weighs only 3-6 lbs. Built for desert life, its yellowish coloring provides camouflage, and large ears help this tiny fox stay cool. Kit foxes live in the deserts of West Texas.
4. The **swift fox** is similar to the kit fox, and only slightly larger. Once found in 77 counties, they’re now in only 2, both in the Panhandle.

TPWD is working to learn more about swift and kit foxes. But finding a small fox isn’t easy, and we need your help. If you think you see one, report it on iNaturalist.

FUN FACTOIDS

According to Kaufman field guide, yellow-headed blackbirds attract attention with their flashy colors and terrible attempts at singing. The song is described as “a few gurgles followed by a long, strangled buzzing noise.”



What appear to be giant eyes on the Spicebrush swallowtail caterpillar are really just eyespots to fool predators into thinking this insect is much larger than it is. They roll

leaves around their bodies to create safe shelters to eat and rest. Later stages of this caterpillar are bright green turning a brilliant orange just before the final molt into a chrysalis.

The poison from a black widow spider is 15 times as potent as the poison from a rattlesnake. A black widow will inject a lot less poison than a rattlesnake in a typical bite. Black widows can live up to 3 years. Sometimes the female will kill and eat the male spider, which is how the black widow got its name.



Draw in Pollinators with Horsemint

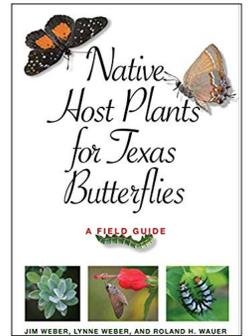


Horsemint is in abundance this year, and you may have seen its tall stems of purple flowers in roadside fields. You can grow horsemint almost anywhere with enough sun. It’s a good cut flower, and best of all, hummingbirds, bees and butterflies are drawn to it.

Horsemint is also known as bee balm, due to its use as a salve for stings. It’s sometimes called lemon mint, and Native Americans used it to make a lemony-mint tea to soothe sore throats. Add this native Texan to your garden this fall.

RESOURCE CORNER

Native Host Plants for Texas Butterflies: A Field Guide
by Jim Weber
Paperback: 260 pages
ISBN- 978-1623496463
Price: \$23.56 on Amazon



While many growers focus on attracting adult butterflies to their gardens, fewer know about the plants that caterpillars need to survive. Native host plants—wildflowers, trees, shrubs, vines, grasses, and sedges—not only provide a site for the butterfly to lay its eggs, they also provide a ready food source for the emerging caterpillar. Think of these plants as the nurseries of the garden. This user-friendly, heavily illustrated field guide describes 101 native larval host plants in Texas. Each species account includes descriptive information on each plant, a distribution map, and photos of both the caterpillars and adult butterflies who frequent those plants.

An adult butterfly may nectar on a wide variety of flowers, but caterpillars are much more restricted in their food sources. Some feed on only a limited number of plant species, so female butterflies seek out these specific plants to lay their eggs.

Learning more about the plants caterpillars need is crucial for butterfly conservation. Butterflies’ dependency on specific caterpillar host plants is one of the key factors restricting their range and distribution. Armed with this knowledge, readers can also hone their ability to find specific species of breeding butterflies in nature. This is a handy guide whether you are in the field searching for butterflies or on the hunt for butterfly-friendly options at your local plant sale.

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