

Texas Master Naturalists ROLLING PLAINS CHAPTER

NEWSLETTER

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“Perishable – Handle with Care”

by Lynn Seman

I was thrilled to learn from Horned Lizard Conservation Society (HLCS) President, Leslie Nossaman, that representatives from the Dallas Zoo and Fort Worth



Baby horned lizards being released at Mason Mountain WMA in Mason, Texas.

Zoo were bringing a fresh clutch of raised baby horned lizards to release back into the wild. The release would take place in an area that historically had a population of horned lizards, but were extirpated over time – the Mason Mountain Wildlife Management Area (MMWMA). Their goal is to bring back native horned lizards. In a valuable partnership, the Texas Parks and Wildlife staff of MMWMA, Kerr WMA, Dallas Zoo, and Fort Worth Zoo all came together for this special occasion, which I was fortunate enough to get a front row seat.

After leaving my house at 3:40am on September 5th, I drove to the heart of Texas to witness this release of 93 tiny Texas state reptiles, and it was well worth the drive! When I arrived, two staff experts, Diane Barber, and Jaimie Peltier

from the Ft. Worth Zoo were carefully attaching tiny tracking devices on the backs of each reptile with an entourage of curious onlookers. The tracking device will allow the

researchers to monitor progress and hopefully survival for a limited period of time. When they finished preparing the devices, Diane shared information about the technology used to track these lizards. These strip tags will reflect a signal back to the handheld transmitter/detector which converts it to a sound signal. As each young lizard was prepared, the TPWD Wildlife Biologist, Jim Gallagher, photographed the underside of the lizard. Each one has a unique “spot” pattern on their bellies that might be important with identification at a later date.

When the Dallas Zoo crew including Reptile Supervisor Bradley Lawrence and Supervisor Assistant Amber Faasen arrived, their quarter-sized hatchlings were also prepared and then combined with the others for a total of four groups

E LOCALS

OCTOBER 1: Rolling Plains Chapter training meets *in Bolin Science Hall room 209 at Mid-western State University* Time: 7:00 PM. **The program:** Bring a plant to share info. with group.

OCTOBER 7: NEW Work Day at Comanche Springs Astronomy Campus - contact Lynn if you are interested in helping with this day.

OCTOBER 11: Not So Scary Halloween - Moth and Insect Booth at River Bend Nature Center - 6:00pm to 9:00pm We will set up our new Moth Light.

OCTOBER 12: Bird Walk with Penny Miller at Lake Arrowhead State Park. Time: 8 a.m.

OCTOBER 12: BioBlitz and Moth Watch at LASP 7:00pm to 9:00pm at Equestrian Camping Area - set up Moth Light.

OCTOBER 18-20: TMN Annual Meeting in Rockwall, TX.

OCTOBER 26: Critter Event at Copper Breaks State Park - Moth Table - set up Moth Light.

OCTOBER 30, 31, NOV. 1: Bats a Billion at Region 9 - 9:00am to noon - contact Lisa Taylor to help out.



Tagged Texas horned lizard ready for release (held by Dr. James Gallagher TPWD)

to be released at four separate locations. Not all of the little critters got a tag, only 24 were donned with trendy tracking apparel due to limited resources.

Next in the adventure, the horned lizards were snuggly placed in a big box marked ‘PERISHABLE – HANDLE WITH CARE’ for the short trip to their new home on Mason Mountain. TPWD Devin Erxleben and Nathan Rains both explained how important it is to keep them safe, cool, and “stress-free” in this release. If they get too hot or over excited, it can cause unnecessary stress which would be detrimental to the mission of this project.

The lizards’ box was carefully loaded into the air-conditioned Ft. Worth Zoo van and the rest of us filled in on the open-air rangers for the trek. I climbed up in the back high seat on a ranger next to Kerr Wildlife Management Area Biologist Deanna Pfeffer, and chuckled after ducking a few oak tree branches as we rumbled down the sandy road. When we arrived at the location, we dismounted the vehicles, grabbed our cameras, and walked to the release locations.

The Zoo experts who cared for the babies and Mason Mountain Wildlife Biologist were given the honor of setting the little critters free for their first venture into the wild. Everyone readied their cell phones and cameras to catch the moment. One by one, the babies moved off on their own. It was difficult to see the little guys because of the cryptic coloring as they scooted along the ground. All the observers had to stay still and watch every step tak-

en to avoid stepping on a hiding lizard. Within a couple of minutes of their new found freedom, they were eating! Yes, that was the first priority of their new adventure, which was a good sign. According to Jaimie Peltier, young hatchlings eat about 30 termites a day. In captivity, the termites cost about 14 cents each for

every lizard, but in the wild when horned lizards grow larger, they begin a diet of red harvester ants, their food of choice. After the first release, we moved on to three more sights and repeated the process. I couldn’t help but laugh out loud when Biologist Jim Gallagher started humming “William Tell’s Overture” as they scurried off in all directions -the perfect selection of background music for a frenzied release.

As we watched the last of the little critters head off into the unknown, I couldn’t help but think about the significance of the moment. In a world full of news of burning Ama-



Baby Texas horned lizards with tracking gear.

zon rainforests, extreme weather catastrophes, climate concerns for the future, it felt so good to witness something positive happening in our world. Through the hard work, dedication, and genuine concern for conserving the critters that make up our Texas ecosystems, the valuable people of Texas Parks and Wildlife and the passionate staff of the Dallas and Ft. Worth Zoos were making a difference, one little lizard at a time, to restore the existence of one of the most loved reptiles in our state, the Texas Horned Lizard.

Sapsuckers are “Keystone” Species

by Ro Wauer

One of our most interesting wintertime birds is the yellow-bellied sapsucker, a member of the woodpecker family that occurs in Texas only from about October to March. Most of the year it resides on its nesting ground in the far northern portion of North America, in a broad belt from Alaska eastward across Canada to the Maritime Provinces and barely reaching the northeastern corner of the United States. Breeding birds utilize the northern deciduous forests.

Although sapsuckers are only a middle-sized bird, about 8.5 inches in length, they



are far more influential than their size might suggest. It is their inter-relationship with other birds and additional animal species that gives them a centerpiece or “keystone” status within the wildlife communities. While woodpeckers also have considerable influence on other birds, because so many other cavity nesting birds are able to use their deserted nest cavities when they move on to another cavity, sapsucker activity affects a much wider range of wildlife.

All members of the woodpecker family “drill” into woody plants to extract food. In the cases of woodpeckers, they extract insects, such as beetle larvae and ants. Sapsuckers make only shallow holes, known as sap wells, in woody plants that allow the sap to flow. They then lick up the sap, their principal source of nutrients. Flowing sap in turn attracts other birds as well as numerous insects. The numerous insects then attract several other birds that feed on the insects, although they never utilize the sap per se. Some wildlife communities become dependent upon the sap wells that are maintained by the sapsuckers. This situation occurs on both their breeding grounds as well as on their wintering grounds, such as those in South Texas.

Common in eastern North America, Barred Owls (AKA hoot owls) make a range of calls and are more likely to be heard during the day than other owls. Barred Owls are very territorial and are aggressive to intruders on their territory, especially during nesting season (particularly the females). These owls will chase away intruders while hooting loudly, sometimes striking with their feet.



Bay Scallops have 18 pairs of blue eyes set along the margin of the shell which detect shadow and movement. Like all bivalves, scallops lack actual brains. Instead, their nervous system is controlled by three

paired ganglia located at various points throughout their anatomy.

One of the smallest primates in the world is a scant three and a half inches in length. Although they may look adorable, Tarsiers are the only truly carnivorous primates, grabbing beetles, bats, and even snakes—often in midair—before devouring them.



Monster Tumbleweed: Invasive New Species is Here to Stay!

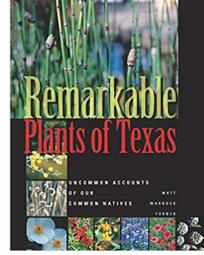
A new species of gigantic tumbleweed (*Salsola ryanii*) once predicted to go extinct is not only here to stay -- it's likely to expand its territory in North America. A new study supports the hypothesis that the new tumbleweed grows more vigorously than its progenitors because it is a hybrid with doubled pairs of its parents' chromosomes. The species, *Salsola ryanii*, is significantly larger than either of its parent plants, which can grow up to 6 feet tall. Currently, *Salsola ryanii* has a relatively small but expanding geographic range. Climate change could increase its territory takeover.

Though tumbleweeds are often seen as symbols of America's old West, they are also invasive plants that cause traffic accidents, damage agricultural operations, and cause millions in property damage every year. Last year, the desert town of Victorville, California, was buried in them, piling up to the second story of some homes. [Read more at sciencedaily.com](http://www.sciencedaily.com)



RESOURCE CORNER

Remarkable Plants of Texas: Uncommon Accounts of Our Common Natives
by Matt Warnock Turner
Paperback: 352 pages
ISBN- 978-0292757035
Price: \$19.99 on Amazon



With some 6,000 species of plants, Texas has extraordinary botanical wealth and diversity. Learning to identify plants is

the first step in understanding their vital role in nature, and many field guides have been published for that purpose. But to fully appreciate how Texas's native plants have sustained people and animals from prehistoric times to the present, you need *Remarkable Plants of Texas*.

In this intriguing book, Matt Warnock Turner explores the little-known facts—be they archaeological, historical, material, medicinal, culinary, or cultural—behind our familiar botanical landscape. In sixty-five entries that cover over eighty of our most common native plants from trees, shrubs, and wildflowers to grasses, cacti, vines, and aquatics, he traces our vast array of connections with plants. Turner looks at how people have used plants for food, shelter, medicine, and economic subsistence; how plants have figured in the historical record and in Texas folklore; how plants nourish wildlife; and how some plants have unusual ecological or biological characteristics. Illustrated with over one hundred color photos and organized for easy reference, *Remarkable Plants of Texas* can function as a guide to individual species as well as an enjoyable natural history of our most fascinating native plants.

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