

Texas Master Naturalists ROLLING PLAINS CHAPTER

NEWSLETTER

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<http://txmn.org/rollingplains>

April 2020

President Report

I hope everyone is staying home and is health and safe! I met with Mary Pearl Meuth and Michelle Haggerty along with other TMN Chapter Presidents in a statewide Zoom meeting Monday. There are many changes coming to help our chapters. I will be communicating in the future as these changes are manifested. They decided to ease up on Advanced Training requirements. You may now earn 8 hours of Advanced Training hours with interactive Webinars. Before, they only allowed 4 hours. They want each chapter to be planning for fall field based training in the hopes that Shelter in Place will be eased up by then.

So far the Annual Meeting is a “go” because they have a contract with the hotel. Both Michelle and Mary Pearl do not know how this will play out. How can you ask for sponsorships in this unstable economic climate? Each chapter now has a Zoom account that we share regionally. Our chapter has its own password. Our Board will meet and we will discuss ideas about perhaps having Zoom Chapter meetings and presenters. Virtual events will also be considered.

The discussion of volunteer hours requirements was a hot topic. 40 hours is still the requirement. During Shelter in Place Michelle and Mary Pearl do not want us going out to work on our trails, pollinator gardens, etc. They do not want us traveling unless for essential activities. Many chapter presidents asked for them to reduce the 40 VT hours required to 30. They said they would consider it in the future, but not now. Their belief is that we will be back to our projects by fall. Some suggestions for VT activities were to write a newsletter article about a SGCN (species with greatest conservation need) or create a presentation to be given in the fall. Another suggestion was to verify observations in iNaturalist or eBird. (I really don't feel I would be qualified to do this, but we have members who are.) Participation as an Armchair Botanist was mentioned, but the Brit is closed now. I will let you know if this opportunity opens up. Another Chapter President Zoom meeting has been scheduled and a site has been set up for us to communicate with Michelle and Mary Pearl in order to ask questions and voice our concerns.

I realize that we are living in extraordinary times that require us to change the way “we have always done it.” I believe we have the ability and desire to meet these new challenges with intelligence and creativity!

LOCALS

APRIL 7: Rolling Plains Chapter monthly meetings have been canceled until notice.

Texas Master Naturalist Program Recognition for Milestones Explained

Congratulations to Lynn Seman on having achieved more than 3,000 hours of volunteer time with the Texas Master Naturalist Program.



The TMN program has official recognition for milestones at 250, 500, 1,000, 2,500, 4,000 (national recognition), 5,000, 10,000, and 20,000 hour milestone accomplishments.

Although there's no “official” TMN recognition pin for 3,000 hours, our chapter recognizes the 1,500, 2,000, 3,000, 3,500, 4,500, and 5,500 etc. hour milestone accomplishments by having the member who achieved those milestones select from an assortment of pins we've purchase.

Lessons from Nature

Text and Photos by Lynn Seman

Our Texas Master Naturalist chapter began this year by hosting “Monthly Nature Hikes” at local parks to have a healthy outdoor activity with the mission of getting people outside to appreciate nature. Also, our aim was for people to enjoy nature to balance their physical and mental state of mind. Wow! We had no idea that 2020 would require so much of us mentally!

Our January hike focused on Trees and Seeds and had a terrific turnout! We were able to hike Lucy Park and identify the local trees and seeds that could be found during “winter” conditions. Next, our February hike focused on Geology of this area. We learned about the ancient rivers that deposited sediments forming our beautiful red sandstones and mudstones. And then came March...

As we all know, life in our human world has changed drastically in a short period of time due to a virus outbreak. We didn’t want our connection with nature to end, so in March, we individually went on our own nature hikes around our homes to collect photos of birds to share with others “virtually” by use of the internet.

On my personal hike, I walked to a local creek not too far from my house. The creek is crossed by a busy highway overpass bridge and has a constant stream of trucks “vrooming” overhead, but I could still hear a chorus of birds singing. When I arrived at the creek,



I noticed the cliff swallows immediately left their mud nests nestled up to the concrete structure. My

appearance had sent them into a state of caution, circling overhead. The other birds that I heard singing so clearly and loudly on my approach, suddenly all became silent as I entered their territory. Sigh. Not a sound now was heard. I was determined not to give up so easily, and decided to find an inconspicuous spot to wait. I sat and waited, and waited, and waited. With my patience about to give out, I heard a sparrow, singing softly. Next, another bird, a cardinal, began with a “chip, chip”, in a tree facing me. And then, I saw it! A beautiful scissortail flycatcher landed on the tree right above me! Its song sounded like a melodious solo



that had been practiced for days. I quickly took the camera hanging around my neck and snapped its photo, several times, before it took off from its performance perch.

This whole experience got me to thinking. The human world is always so busy, going here and there, working, sometimes overtime hours, and just generally not paying much attention to the little things. And then the virus came...just like that, the human world came to a stop for so many. People realized that caution is a necessary thing. Nature knows this. When I intruded in the birds’ habitat, they immediately adjusted their behavior appropriately. They waited

with caution and watched what I would do. They contemplated if I was a threat to them or a friend to them. When they realized I was not there to hurt them, they went back to their activity, but remained cautious and aware. We can learn so much from nature! Stay aware, like the birds in our environment, watch and learn and notice the little things. Use this time to enjoy the



beauty of a newly bloomed wildflower or the song of a bird, but remain cautious and safe. And most of all, be patient, and wait, like the birds’ example.

Texas Waters Specialist Program 2020 Webinar Series

2020 Webinar Series

View live from 6:30-7:30 PM

- 1-14 One Water Conference and Review of SB1 and SB2
- 2-12 Texas Instream Flow Study
- 3-18 CoCoRaHs
- 4-7 Groundwater Conservation Districts
- 5-19 Comptroller Office Natural Resource Programs
- 6-17 Urban Water Cycle and Sustainability in the Swamp
- 7-16 Upper Coast Wetland Ecosystem Project
- 8-13 River Restoration Guidelines

For more information, visit: <http://tpwd.texas.gov/education/water-education/texaswatersprogram/texaswatersspecialist>

Students Use Invasive Species to Create Environmentally Friendly Hair Product for Black Women

Two science graduate students from the University of Michigan have started a company to produce biodegradable braiding hair made from phragmites (*Phragmites australis*), an invasive plant species. Jannice Newson and Nana Britwum founded the company, whose slogan is “Hair without harm.”

“That means no harm to women who use braiding hair and no harm to the environment,” Newson says.

“Inspiration came from the duo’s own unpleasant experiences with synthetic braiding hair. They both dislike how the plastic-based hair currently on the market is itchy, painful, heavy, and unhealthy. And both are troubled that discarded synthetic braiding hair contributes to pollution in landfills and oceans. women across the world can use.”

A prototype is currently in development with a soft launch date projected for this fall. The goal is plant-based hair that is much lighter than synthetic hair and doesn’t have the chemical coating found on plastic hair.

European forms of Phragmites (AKA: Common Reed) were probably introduced to North America by accident in ballast material in the late 1700s or early 1800s. Recent research using genetic markers has demonstrated that three separate lineages occur in North America – one endemic and widespread (native), one whose nativity is not certain that occurs across the southern U.S. from California to Florida and into Mexico and Central America (‘Gulf Coast’ type) and one from Europe (introduced invasive), which is the focus of this writing. The European Phragmites first established along the Atlantic coast and then spread across the continent over the course of the 20th century. The native form was historically more widespread, occurring throughout Canada and most of the U.S. except for the Southeast (Texas to Florida and north to North Carolina). It remains fairly widespread in the western U.S.

Native Americans used common reed for arrow shafts, musical instruments, ceremonial objects, cigarettes, and leaves and stems for constructing mats. Preserved remains of native Phragmites 40,000 years old have been found in the Southwestern United States indicating that it is a part of the native flora of that region. In coastal areas, preserved rhizome fragments dating back 3,000-4,000 years before present have also been found in salt marsh sediments indicating that it is also



native to these habitats. Both native and introduced forms have been used for duckblinds.

Common reed occurs in disturbed to pristine wet areas including tidal and non-tidal wetlands, brackish and fresh-water marshes, river edges, shores of lakes and ponds, roadsides and ditches. It prefers full sun and can tolerate fresh to mesohaline salinities.

Common reed is a vigorous growing plant that forms dense monotypic stands that consume available growing space and push out other plants including the native subspecies. It also alters wetland hydrology, increases the potential for fire and reduces and degrades wetland wildlife habitat due in part to its very dense growth habit. There is currently no evidence for of hybridization between native and introduced forms occurring in the field.



Description and Biology

Plant: perennial grass, stems to 15 ft., somewhat rough to the touch, lack fungal spots but some mildew may be present.

Leaves: blue green and darker than the native form; elongate, typically 1-1½ in. wide at their widest point; leaf sheaths adhere tightly to stem and persist through the winter; ligule is less than 1 mm long.

Flowers, fruits and seeds: flowers in bushy panicles, usually purple or golden in color; upper glumes 4.5-7.5 mm, lower glumes 2.5-5.0 mm (most <4.0).

Spreads: by seed which is dispersed by wind and water; vegetatively through rhizomes and transport of rhizome fragments.

Look-alikes: native form of Phragmites; other large grasses with plume-like inflorescences.

Seven Simple Actions to Help Birds

From The Cornell Lab of Ornithology Website

Helping birds can be as simple as making changes to everyday habits.

1. **Make Windows Safer, Day and Night:** Simple adjustments to your windows can save birds' lives.
2. **Keep Cats Indoors:** Indoor cats live longer, healthier lives. Outdoor cats kill more birds than any other non-native threat.
3. **Reduce Lawn by Planting Native Species:** The U.S. has 63 million acres of lawn. That's a huge potential for supporting wildlife.
4. **Avoid Pesticides:** Look for organic food choices and cut out some of the 1 billion pounds of pesticides used in the U.S. each year.
5. **Drink Coffee That's Good for Birds:** Shade-grown coffees are delicious, economically beneficial to farmers, and help more than 42 species of North American songbirds.
6. **Protect Our Planet From Plastics:** 91% of plastics are not recycled, and they take 400 years to degrade.
7. **Watch Birds, Share What You See:** Bird watchers are one of science's most vital sources of data on how the ecological world is faring.

For more details about the Seven Simple Actions to Help Birds, go to birds.cornell.edu.

WAIT BEFORE RESCUING



Every year, particularly during the spring and summer, hundreds of young wild animals are unnecessarily picked up by the general public, most commonly baby birds and fawns. Many such encounters are unnecessary and can even be detrimental to the animal. Call your local wildlife rehabilitator,

your game warden or the TPWD wildlife information line at (800) 792-1112. Here are a few tips to help guide you.

You hear a baby bird crying from the nest.

You may not be able to see the parent, but it is likely close by.

You find a blown-down nest.

If the nest is relatively undamaged and the young birds or eggs are unharmed, replace the nest in the tree from which it fell or in a nearby tree.

You see grounded baby birds.

Birds often fledge from the nest before they are fully

feathered or flight-ready. They will be fed on the ground for a day or two until they are able to fly. Usually, you will see a parent attending it or foraging nearby.

You find a deer fawn.

Mother deer typically leave their fawns bedded down while they are away foraging. If the fawn is not crying or covered in fire ants, its eyes are not swollen and there are no visible wounds, do not handle or disturb it.



Garden Discovery

Text and Photo by Paula Savage

While harvesting my abundant crop of weeds this past week, I happened upon a beautiful Polyphemus Moth. The Polyphemus Moth is one of five of the largest moths found in Texas.

The Polyphemus Moth, *Antheraea polyphemus*, sports prominent, owl-like eye spots and a six-inch wingspan. The moth is dramatic. We had a hatch of these guys at the ranch one night and several fluttered against the porch spotlights. The sound of their wings hitting the floodlight was so loud, you would have thought birds or bats had paid a visit.

The Polyphemus gets its name from the Greek myth of the Cyclops Polyphemus (cyclops means one-eyed giant). They're not unusual and live everywhere in the U.S. and Canada. That they host on a variety of trees—oaks, birches, elms, willows and others—perhaps explains their widespread provenance.

Like many moths, these members of the Saturnid, or silk moth family, spend most of their life as caterpillars, eating up to 86,000 times their body weight at emergence in just two months. Once they become a moth, however, their vestigial mouth parts make eating impossible. Basically, their mouths don't work any more. Their sole focus as a moth is to reproduce.

Polyphemus change dramatically during the caterpillar cycle and in their final instar become a fantastic three- or four-inch green caterpillar with silver and/or red spots on the side.



Sea urchins have eyes in their feet. They have the light-sensitive protein, known as opsin, at the tips and base of their tube feet and, as they have tube feet all over, they can detect

light with their entire body like an enormous compound eye.

The bombardier beetle *Brachinus* fires a rapidly pulsed steam of boiling hot and noxious chemicals from the tip of its abdomen, and can swivel its rear end to hit attackers coming from any direction.



Caterpillars of the North American arched hooktip moth *Drepana arcuata* defend their territory by dragging their rear end aggressively across a leaf. At the tip of the abdomen is a modified hair, known as an anal oar, that scrapes over the leaf surface and the sound is clearly audible in a quiet environment. They also scrape and drum on the leaf with their mandibles.

Monarch Waystations installed on Interstate 35

The Native Plant Society of Texas designed and installed Monarch Waystations featuring native pollinator plants at Texas Department of Transportation highway rest stops in Hill County and Bell County in 2016, with partial funding by a grant from the US Fish & Wildlife Service.

As described by Monarch Watch, Monarch Waystations are patches of habitat that provide resources necessary for Monarchs to produce successive generations and sustain their migration.

The gardens are planted with native Texas milkweed and with native plants that are used as nectar sources by the migrating butterflies. Female Monarchs only lay their eggs on milkweeds and a few other plants in the same plant family. Most of the Monarch butterflies east of the Rocky Mountains migrate south to Mexico each winter and return north in the spring, traveling through Texas along a corridor that roughly corresponds to the path of Interstate Highway 35.

“Each species is a masterpiece, a creation assembled with extreme care and genius.” -Edward O. Wilson

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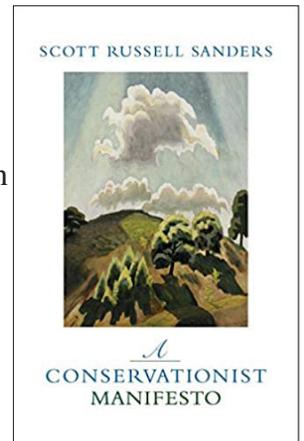
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RESOURCE CORNER

A Conservationist Manifesto
 by Scott Russell Sanders
 Paperback: 238 pages
 ISBN-13: 978-0253220806
 Price: \$18.95 on Amazon



As an antidote to the destructive culture of consumption dominating American life today, Scott Russell Sanders calls for a culture of conservation that allows us to savor and preserve the world, instead of devouring it.

How might we shift to a more durable and responsible way of life? What changes in values and behavior will be required? Ranging geographically from southern Indiana to the Boundary Waters Wilderness and culturally from the Bible to billboards, Sanders extends the visions of Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Rachel Carson to our own day.

A Conservationist Manifesto shows the crucial relevance of a conservation ethic at a time of mounting concern about global climate change, depletion of natural resources, extinction of species, and the economic inequities between rich and poor nations. The important message of this powerful book is that conservation is not simply a personal virtue but a public one.