

Texas Master Naturalists ROLLING PLAINS CHAPTER

NEWSLETTER

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<http://txmn.org/rollingplains>

May 2020

President Report

Zoom! This word has an entirely new meaning for most of us now. It no longer is a verb meaning to travel or move quickly or to change smoothly from a long-shot to a close-up shot on a camera. Our chapter conducted our April Board meeting using the Zoom video conferencing app. We also had a Zoom meeting in which we instructed members about how to use the iNaturalist app for our City BioBlitz to correspond with the statewide City Nature challenge. In another Zoom meeting, we debriefed our findings from our City BioBlitz and discussed our findings and asked questions about the activity. ***This Tuesday evening we will also conduct our Chapter meeting using this app.*** I am so appreciative of Debra Halter and Lynn Seman for organizing and conducting these meetings!

For me, Earth Day, April 22, has always been an important day. This year was the 50th Anniversary. National Geographic was so wise to showcase Jane Goodall with a great documentary “Jane Goodall: The Hope.” If you haven’t seen it, you need to! I have seen it twice and plan to watch it again after I finish reading her book, *Jane Goodall Seeds of Hope*. Both works are a reminder that we all have a part to play in making a change in the environment. She stresses that we must all be stewards of the planet. Jane Goodall urges people to live purposefully “*Think about how you live and make ethical choices.*” Simple choices such as our diet (plantbased? and clothes (where and how are they produced?) are examples that have a cumulative effect.

Jane Goodall ends all of her lectures with her “*Five Reasons for Hope.*” I don’t know how you feel, but in these times, I have been searching for reasons to have any hope we can change the chains of events that are affecting our environment. Her reasons for hope are:

1. **Our Young People-**Many are planting trees, protesting, recycling and changing people’s attitudes.
2. **Our Amazing Brains-** We are coming up with more innovative solutions to deal with the problems we have created.
3. **The Resilience of Nature-** If we give her a chance, she will once again support life in the places we destroyed. Animals on the brink of extinction can be given another chance.
4. **For the First Time in human history,** we are able to reach out to people around the globe through Social Media, throwing a spotlight on problems and sharing solutions, urging an ever-growing body of people from different nations, cultures and religions to fight for social and environmental justice.
5. **And Finally,** there is the Indomitable Human Spirit. Those people who tackle problems that seem insoluble who won’t give up, and often succeed.

I feel certain that our chapter is working toward planting seeds of change in our community and environment. We may feel frustrated in these times of social distancing, but this shall pass and we will continue our important work. — Kay

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MAY 5: Rolling Plains Chapter Meeting - 7:00pm on Zoom - log in a little early so we can start the program at 7:00pm - Dr. Curtis Adams - Texas A&M Agriculture.

Use link below and password (Meadowlark)

Topic: May Chapter Meeting Rolling Plains TMN

Time: May 5, 2020 07:00 PM Central Time (US and Canada)

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86112866567?pwd=M0xJVIF4TTBHRWlnamRBTWQ0TEpCZz09>

Meeting ID: 861 1286 6567

Hope to see everything there (virtually)!

Congratulations

Our Chapter Advisor, Robert Mauk, has been selected to replace Tom Lang as Supervisor for the Wichita Falls District of Inland Fisheries effective May 1st. On behalf of the chapter, I’d like to offer our congratulations to Robert on this well earned promotion.

Congratulations to Debra Halter, Warren King, Sue King and James Masuoka on having recertified for 2020. Certificate and pin will be awarded the next time we meet.

House Cats Have More Impact On Local Wildlife Than Wild Predators

Lauren Sommer, NPR.org



Cats who roam outdoors tend to stick close to home, having a big impact on local wildlife. Louise LeGresley/Getty Images

What does an outdoor cat do all day? According to new research, it could be taking a heavy toll on local wildlife.

A tracking study of more than 900 house cats shows when they kill small birds and mammals, their impact is concentrated in a small area, having a bigger effect than wild predators do.

“Even though it seems like their cat isn’t killing that many, it really starts to add up,” said Roland Kays, a scientist at North Carolina State University and the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences. (Full disclosure: Kays isn’t a cat or dog person but a “ferret person.”)

Kays and colleagues collected GPS data from cats in six countries and found most cats aren’t venturing very far from home.

“These cats are moving around their own backyard and a couple of their neighbors’ backyards, but most of them are not ranging very much further,” Kays said. *“So initially I thought: ‘Oh, this is good news. They’re not going out into the nature preserves.’”*

Then Kays factored in how much cats kill in that small area. Some cats in the study were bringing home up to 11 dead birds, rodents or lizards a month, which doesn’t include what they ate or didn’t

bring home to their owners.

“It actually ends up being a really intense rate of predation on any unfortunate prey species that’s going to live near that cat’s house,” he said.

He calculates that cats can have four-to-10 times the impact of a wild predator. Native predators, like jungle cats, also kill a lot of small animals, but their impact is spread out over a larger area.

“The big concern is where we have an overlap of people and cats with native species that are small and vulnerable,” Kays said.

One study estimates that house cats, both domestic and feral, kill billions of birds every year.

“The simplest thing to do is to keep your cat indoors,” he said.

For those who refuse to keep their cat inside, there are potential options.

St. Lawrence University associate professor Susan Willson went

looking for one when she rescued a cat known as “the Gorilla.” He was fighting with her other cats, but when she let him outdoors, he brought home dead birds.

“I’m a bird biologist, so that’s just horrifying,” she said.

Willson tried putting a bell on her cat but didn’t see any effect. So she found a special brightly colored collar online.

“It looks kind of like an Elizabethan collar-slash-scrunchie,” she said. *“The whole idea is that the bird will be able to visually see this cat creeping up on it before it attacks it.”*

Willson tested the collar on both her cat and dozens of others. It dramatically reduced the number of birds the cats brought home, but small rodents weren’t so lucky.

“Which isn’t surprising, because [those] mammals see in black and white,” she said. *“They’re not as visual as a bird.”*

Still, she says a pounce deterrent may be better than nothing.

“I’m not saying these collars can make a significant difference in the massive bird mortality that we’re seeing,” she said. *“But each individual bird that somebody in their backyard is not finding dead, I think matters.”*

Since the study, Willson’s cat has given up its free-ranging ways.

“Gorilla is now a happy indoor cat, loving his life,” she says.

The Small Home Ranges Of Pet Cats

Outdoor housecats tend to stick close to home, as three cats in Durham, N.C., showed over a few weeks of GPS tracking.



Source: Kays et al, Movebank Data Repository. Cat photos courtesy of owners. Building and street outlines © OpenStreetMap contributors. Credit: Connie Hanzhang Jin/NPR

Weekend Nature BioBlitz for Rolling Plains TMN

Lynn Seman

Because of the shutdown of normal activities, this year's City Nature Challenge was modified for me. Normally, I would travel own to LBJ Grasslands to add some observations to the DFW numbers in this yearly BioBlitz, but this year, I decided to stay closer to home and conduct our own BioBlitz for this area. Consequently, we created the Weekend Nature BioBlitz for Rolling Plains Chapter of TMN.

First, we had an online meeting to spread information about the BioBlitz to new members. We had a great discus-



sion with a presentation by Debra Halter on iNaturalist and then some practice with using the App and website. It was great to see the faces of some of our members, even though it was only a virtual meeting.

Next, we were off on the adventure! Members such as Sandy Underwood, Marilyn Meador, and new trainee, Alex Nelson did an amazing job with collecting observations of some difficult to find species. Marilyn even got a photo of a Painted Bunting! Kay Murphy, Carol Gibbs, Tiffany Herring, and Jane McGough found

some amazing photos of local flora and fauna. Kay's garden attracts so many pollinators! Carl Brown posted a photo of an up-close Osprey found close to his house. Debra Halter, as always, was a HUGE help with identifying the observations, as well as added wonderful observations herself. Other members joined the BioBlitz, but have not been able to upload their observations quite yet. We expect more to come.

Finally, we conducted a follow-up virtual meeting in which we shared and discussed what we learned as a result of this project. As of the writing of this report, we observed 311 species with 775 total observations. Not only did we enjoy some outdoor nature time, but because of the BioBlitz, some members added some new "lifers" to their list of nature observations. One for me was a beautiful surprise Indigo Bunting that snuck into a photo I was taking of some saltcedar.

Next year, we hope to have Wichita Falls area included in the City Nature Challenge!

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Confirmed in Texas, Die-Offs Reported

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) has received test results confirming that Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHD) was diagnosed in a wild black-tailed jackrabbit in Lubbock County and a wild cottontail rabbit in Hudspeth County. This marks the first confirmed cases of RHD in wild rabbits in Texas and follows the discovery of the disease in domestic rabbits in Hockley County, which was announced in a recent Texas Animal Health Commission news release.

Since March 23, detections of the disease in both wild and domestic rabbits have occurred in New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona and Mexico. There have been reports of mortality events in both wild cottontails (genus *Sylvilagus*) and jackrabbits (genus *Lepus*) in El Paso, Hudspeth, Brewster, Terrell, Lubbock and Pecos Counties in Texas.

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHD) is a highly contagious viral disease that can affect both domestic and wild rabbit species. This disease is nearly always fatal and primarily affects adult rabbits. The viral agent, Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus (RHDV), is a



calicivirus with two strains, RHDV-1 and RHDV-2, being reported in North America in recent years. RHDV-2 is known to affect wild rabbits and was determined to be the agent in the Lubbock and Hockley County cases.

RHD is a Foreign Animal Disease (FAD), but has been detected in Canada, Washington and Ohio.

RHDV appears only to affect rabbit species (lagomorphs). It is not known to affect humans, livestock or pets other than rabbits. However, pets should not be allowed to consume dead animal carcasses.

"The loss of this prey species can affect big game populations as well as other populations like rodents due to a shift in what predators will go after," said John Silovsky, TPWD Wildlife Division deputy director. "That's especially true in fragile areas like the Trans Pecos."

Often the only clinical sign is sudden death. In less acute cases, clinical signs may include the following: dullness/apathy, not eating, ocular and/or nasal hemorrhage and congestion of the conjunctiva. Some may develop neurological signs such as incoordination, ex-

citement or seizure like episodes. Infections in young rabbits are usually sub-clinical and deaths are rare.

This is a highly contagious disease that spreads between rabbits through contact with infected rabbits or carcasses, their meat or their fur, contaminated food or water, or materials coming in contact with them. RHDV2 can persist in the environment for a very long time. These factors make disease control efforts extremely challenging once it is in the wild rabbit populations.

Invasive Spotlight: Malta Star-thistle



Malta star-thistle is an annual (rarely a biennial) that occurs in open, disturbed sites such as grasslands, rangeland, open woodlands, fields, pastures, roadsides, waste places and fields. It is a native of southern Europe and northern Africa. It crowds out native plants, and its spiny flower heads can make it painful to walk through. High infestations of star-thistle can cause water stress in native species even in years with normal rainfall.

Malta star-thistle grows as a rosette when young in winter and produces a spiny, yellow-flowered head that typically reaches 1 m tall. As a rosette, it can be distinguished from other similar species by its lobed simple leaves whose lobes are smoothly rounded and terminal lobe is usually simple, broad, and rounded or oval. Other rosettes with which the species might be confused usually have either more angular lobes, or the lobes are further toothed, serrated, or divided. The leaves start off quite small in mid-winter and subsequently grow to 3” to 5” (7.5 to 13 cm) as the rosettes enlarge. The rosette may also have a fuzzy whitish center. Rosette leaves typically wither by flowering time. The flower stems are stiff and openly branched from near or above the base (sometimes unbranched in very small plants). Stem leaves are alternate, and mostly linear or narrowly oblong to oblanceolate. Margins are smooth, toothed, or wavy, and leaf bases extend down the stems (decurent) and give stems a winged appearance. The yellow “flower” is actually many flowers (the plant is a composite or asteraceous) and it looks as though it is trying to squeeze out of the flower base: it never widens like a dandelion flower.



Control is easiest when the plant is in its rosette stage and before flowers open. Small infestations can be controlled by hand. Larger infestations may require herbicide application. The same methods used to control yellow star-thistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*) can be used to control Malta star-thistle.

“Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) will be monitoring wild rabbit populations to determine the extent of the disease,” said Dr. Bob Dittmar, TPWD wildlife veterinarian. “We are continuing to receive reports of dead rabbits from the western part of the state.” People can contact their local TPWD wildlife biologist if they notice sick or dead rabbits. We want to reassure everyone this disease does not affect people or pets. TPWD will work with TAHC to keep the public informed as we learn more about the extent and severity of the disease.”

Murder Hornets

Officially called the Asian giant hornet, or *Vespa mandarinia*, the huge insects have been spotted in the US for the first time in recent



months, appearing in Washington state.

The hornets, which are over two inches long, were first spotted

in December last year, and generally become active in the spring. While generally not aggressive towards people or pets, the hornets can attack if provoked, officials say, and have killed humans in extreme circumstances.

Their main target, however, is the hives of honeybees, which they attack and often will destroy, largely by decapitating the bees in the hive, according to the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA).

“Asian giant hornet attacks and destroys honeybee hives. A few hornets can destroy a hive in a matter of hours. The hornets enter a “slaughter phase” where they kill bees by decapitating them,” the department said.

“They then defend the hive as their own, taking the brood to feed their own young. They also attack other insects but are not known to destroy entire populations of those insects.”

Scientists are keen to make clear that people should be extremely cautious around the insects.



Most snakes live on land, but there are about 70 species of snakes that live in the Indian and Pacific oceans. Sea snakes and their cousins, kraits, are some of the most venomous snakes that exist,

but they pose little threat to humans because they're shy, gentle, and their fangs are too short to do much damage.

One of the things Mockingbirds are known for is singing at night, often loudly and incessantly, which usually makes them unpopular with their human neighbors. An individual Mockingbird can imitate over 150 different sounds. They are not mocking the species they imitate, just showing off their own vocal ability.



As deer eyes are on the side of their head, they have 310 degrees' vision. This is much more than humans, who have 180 degree vision. Deer also have very good night vision which is particularly useful at dawn and dusk when they are most active.

Butterfly Breeding Gives Insight into Evolution of Iridescence



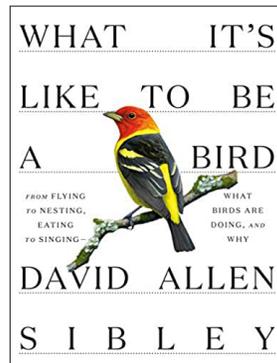
A unique butterfly breeding experiment gave researchers an opportunity to study the physical and genetic changes underlying the evolution of structural color, responsible for butterflies' iridescent purples, blues and greens. Using helium ion microscopy, the

scientists discovered that a 75 percent increase in thickness of the chitin lamina of wing scales turned iridescent gold to shiny blue. They showed that knocking out a gene called *optix* achieves the same result: a bluer Common Buckeye.

For more detail visit [Science Daily.com](http://ScienceDaily.com)

RESOURCE CORNER

What It's Like to Be a Bird
by David Sibley
Hardback: 240 pages
ISBN-13: 978-0307957894
Price: \$24.92 on Amazon



“Can birds smell?” “Is this the same cardinal that was at my feeder last year?” “Do robins ‘hear’ worms?” *In What It's*

Like to Be a Bird, David Sibley answers the most frequently asked questions about the birds we see most often. This special, large-format volume is geared as much to nonbirders as it is to the out-and-out obsessed, covering more than two hundred species and including more than 330 new illustrations by the author. While its focus is on familiar backyard birds--blue jays, nuthatches, chickadees--it also examines certain species that can be fairly easily observed, such as the seashore-dwelling Atlantic puffin. David Sibley's exacting artwork and wide-ranging expertise bring observed behaviors vividly to life. And while the text is aimed at adults--including fascinating new scientific research on the myriad ways birds have adapted to environmental changes--it is nontechnical, making it the perfect occasion for parents and grandparents to share their love of birds with young children, who will delight in the big, full-color illustrations of birds in action. Unlike any other book he has written, *What It's Like to Be a Bird* is poised to bring a whole new audience to David Sibley's world of birds.

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