

Texas Master Naturalists ROLLING PLAINS CHAPTER

NEWSLETTER

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<http://txmn.org/rollingplains>

February 2021

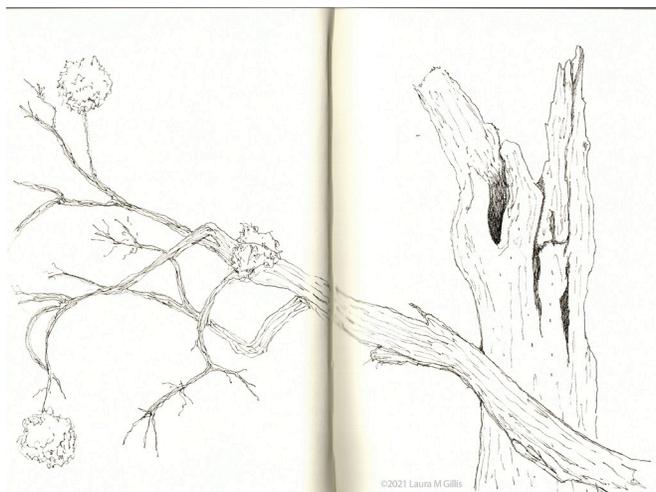
President's Report

Happy February! Is everyone ready to celebrate Ground Hog Day? Well, while they are celebrating with Phil in Punxsutawney, we will be celebrating here with our own fabulous (and much cuter) rodent... the Texas Kangaroo Rat! Dr. Joseph Veech will be our program Tuesday, February 2nd at 7:00 pm via Zoom. Please log on a little early so you don't miss anything and be sure to sign into the Chat area so we know you are there.

Our Spring Training is shaping up and Terry and the committee have been working hard to get everything scheduled. They have a great line up of classes and instructors so far and they are working out the logistics for field trips too. I think we could ALL use a good field trip! Members are always invited to attend the classes. Even though members can't count these hours as Advanced Training or Volunteer Time, the classes are a great place to learn more and meet the new trainees.

And speaking of field trips.... I am so excited that our Last Saturday Hike program is back on January's hike was led by Alex Nelson and the topic was Trees & Seeds.

Participants signed up and received an introduction video on the Saturday before where Alex showed us several seeds and trees and how to recognize them even with no leaves. Then, the hikers had a week to go out on their own to photograph or sketch trees and seeds. After their week of "collecting", the hikers gathered 'round for a virtual Campfire Conversation where we shared our discoveries. If you missed it in January, I do hope you will sign up for February's hike when we will be looking for animal tracks! Hopefully, we will be gathering 'round that campfire in person soon!

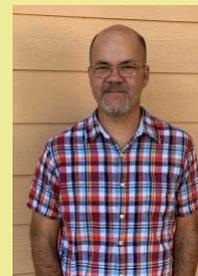


One of my early sketches from the Last Saturday Hike featuring "Trees & Seeds". Color and identification added later.

LOCALS

JANUARY 5: Rolling Plains Chapter Meeting - 7:00pm on Zoom - log in a little early so we can start the program at 7:00pm. A Zoom link will be sent out one hour before the meeting. Hope to see you all there!

The program: Dr. Joseph Veech will lecture on the Texas Kangaroo Rat!



Joe Veech is a wildlife ecologist and Professor of Biology at Texas State University in San Marcos. He has been employed there since Fall 2008.

His research is primarily directed at examining the habitat requirements of various species. He is also interested in studying how human activities and changes to the landscape affect wildlife and biodiversity in general. Joe teaches courses in conservation biology and typically advises between four and six graduate students at any one time. His interest in kangaroo rats dates back to the 1990s when he was a graduate student at the University of Nevada, Reno. In addition to the Texas kangaroo rat, Joe and his students have also conducted research on the Gulf Coast kangaroo rat, a species that is found in parts of south Texas and the barrier islands along the coast.

There are so many opportunities to get your hours and for many of them, you don't need to leave the house. For your 8 hours of Advanced Training, be sure to put TMN Tuesdays on your calendar every second Tuesday of the month at Noon. (<https://txmn.tamu.edu/tmntuesdays/>). We will also be providing AT programs at our monthly meetings.

Volunteer Time can add up quickly by serving on a committee or participating in one of our many on-going projects. We are still need volunteers to help with Outreach, Publicity, and Historian. If you would like to volunteer, please let any of the Board members know. We would appreciate the help and it's a great way to get some Volunteer Hours.

I look forward to seeing everyone on the meeting Tuesday, February 2nd at 7:00 pm. Look for a link to the meeting in your email soon!

Happy Hiking!
Laura

Upcoming Events

February 9: TMN Tuesdays This month: Doug Tallamy – Nature's Best Hope. *Advanced Training*

February 13: Bird Walk at LASP – 8:00am

February 12- 15: The 24th annual GBBC (Great Backyard Bird Count)

February 27-28: Home and Garden Show If you pre-ordered tickets, you should have received them in the mail by now.

Adopt a Loop Project is ready to start volunteering. Penny will do a Q&A on it soon.

Keystone Critter at Comanche Springs

Text and Photos by Lynn Seman

One of our amazing partners for the Rolling Plains Chapter of Texas Master Naturalist is Comanche Springs Astronomy Campus with 3Rivers Foundation near Crowell, TX. This 3200-acre ranch land has a plethora of new places to explore. Since 2015, Christena Stephens has been documenting wildlife, constructing lists of species, and providing conservation assistance to the foundation. As their wildlife biologist and director of outdoor education, she has been monitoring camera traps all over the campus with over 600,000 photos since she began this work on biodiversity documentation. (You can view the photos on iNaturalist by following [texas3rf](#).)

I have fortunately been able to tag along with Christena a few times to open the gates, scan the landscape, and join in the exploration of the new territories to monitor. Recently, we made a heartwarming discovery on the campus.

First, you will need a little bit of the history behind the story as explained to me by Christena. The young granddaughter of the historical land owner told her grandpa, when asked what she wished for her birthday, she would like a pair of beavers. Wish granted! Her grandpa went to Colorado and trapped a couple of the furry flat-tailed mammals to bring back and release on the ranch for her birthday. Sadly, over time, the beavers seemed to disappear into the wild and were remained unseen until one was spotted by Christena



and a friend in Good Creek a several years ago.

Since that sighting, Christena has continued to religiously look for signs of the beaver including gnawed trees, muddy footprints, dam building, or a lodge in that area. This caught my attention! The North American beaver, *Castor canadensis*, has always been my most favorite animal in the world! This adorable round ball of fur is responsible for providing habitat for so many species by creating its own ecosystem and engineering an entire dam to hold valuable water resources, giving rise to its title “keystone” species. In bridge building, the keystone keeps the bridge from failing, thus the parallel with the presence of beavers in an environment. Unfortunately, none of these beaver signs surfaced, until...

The last weekend of January 2021, we were out exploring new territory near Good Creek on the west side of ranch and I heard a scream from Christena. Anytime I hear Christena scream, it could be for a variety of reasons, such as the spotting of a special plant, an owl perching in a tall tree, or a prickly porcupine waddling across the road. This time it was a juniper tree that had been chewed down with fresh wood chips sprinkled all around it. When I walked toward the scream, I found Christena jumping up and down and instantly knew what this meant. A beaver was in the area!

We began our search by the water's edge and found more evidence. First, we found a "slide" along the creek where beavers could easily slip into the water. Next, we found mud with the distinctive webbed back footprint of this large furry rodent. And then, all uncertainty was put to rest when we found it, the beaver lodge, carefully constructed along the edge of the creek with a prime location to water access. The beaver had chiseled its way through the cattails to form "highway" canals and a wide-open area to swim and play. After we discussed how this beaver did not have the "traditional" lodge out in the center of the pond, but a "bank" built lodge as many adaptive



was a mud packed wall with a pungent smell of decomposing pond sludge. Feeling brave, we decided to walk the dam across the pond to the other side. After a few squeals from slippery footing and "cattail surfing", we made it across about a 30-meter well-constructed beaver dam that was successfully holding back the creek water. We pondered at the perseverance of the beavers who built this wonder of nature. With rain in the forecast, we knew that the beavers would be busy soon maintaining the dam's integrity to keep the water in their beaver neighborhood; therefore, Christena decided to retrieve one of her nearby game cameras and relocate it to observe the beaver lodge.

beavers in Texas seem to build, we continued exploring downstream. We came upon a beaver "cache" in which the beaver had stashed away some tasty juniper branches under water for a later meal, another sign of beaver activity. Curiously, we noticed a difference in color of the rust colored cattails to an abrupt change to a lighter color and then the realization hit us. We had discovered the beaver's dam!

When the game camera was all set, we spent a few moments of time just sitting and watching the beautiful site all around us at Good Creek. I couldn't help but feel at peace knowing that the beavers were here. We thought they were gone for good, but they were here again, living, breathing, and tirelessly providing an ecosystem for so many other critters that live in that landscape. This "keystone" is in place to hold this habitat together once again!

Winding across Good Creek in a snake like pattern

Invasive Spotlight: Yellow Floating Heart

Yellow floating heart is a fresh-water floating perennial that grows in slow-moving water ways, such as lakes, ponds, swamps, channels, and even mudflats. It grows rapidly, covering the entire surface of the water, shading out and outcompeting native vegetation. Decomposing vegetation impacts water quality causing severe declines in algae, disrupting the entire food web. Thick mats can create stagnant, low- oxygen water conditions that create ideal conditions for mosquitos, but force fish to relocate, and make water recreation impossible.



from 1.2 - 5.9 inches in diameter (3 - 15 cm). They have slightly wavy margins, and usually grow in an opposite



and unequal arrangement. Leaves are green to yellow-green and often purplish underneath. Flowers are bright yellow with five petals, each with fringed edges, and range in size from 1 - 1.5 inches (3 - 4 cm) in diameter. Two to five flowers grow from each node above the water surface on a stalk. The plant usually flowers between May and October.

Yellow floating heart possesses runners (stolons) that grow up to 2 meters, and aggressively root in the substrate. The round to heart-shaped leaves float and range

Yellow floating heart was intentionally introduced in the U.S. as an

ornamental plant in water gardens, and escaped captivity. It has since spread to numerous states both intentionally and accidentally. It is spread naturally by producing daughter plants that break off and float to new areas, via rhizomes and tubers, and by hairy seeds that are spread by water currents or animals. Watercrafts also spread it by fragmenting and carrying it to new locations. Although this species is prohibited in some states, includ-



ing Texas, it is widely available for purchase online. As a TPWD regulated species, it is illegal to sell, buy or transport yellow floating heart in Texas.

Yellow floating heart threaten aquatic habitats, especially in East Texas. If you believe you have identified a suspected yellow floating heart, please REPORT IT!

If you are a private or public water property owner with exotic aquatic species that you wish to remove, you may now have new options for removal due to rule changes recently issued by TPWD. See TPWD adopted rule changes.



#TMNTuesdays

FEBRUARY 2021

TEXAS MASTER NATURALISTS |



Photo by: Maureen Nolin-Wilde, Galveston Bay Area Chapter



Photo by: Linda Swickheimer, Mid-Coast Chapter



Photo by: Allison Copony, Heartwood Chapter

What's New This Month?

February is already here! A new month means a new #TMNTuesday speaker session, and we can't wait for Dr. Doug Tallamy to share his stories and his inspiration with you, especially if this is your first time hearing him speak. Remember that you can view recordings of each session at txmn.tamu.edu/tmntuesdays if you ever can't make it!

Now that spring is almost here, it's time to start planning for your outdoor space and how you can make a difference for the betterment of native species, healthier ecosystems, and even wildlife corridors--all in your very own backyard! There's no better teacher to get you started than Dr. Doug Tallamy, who's 2020 New York Times Best Seller, 'Nature's Best Hope,' inspires just that.



Featured Speaker: Dr. Doug Tallamy

Doug Tallamy is a professor in the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware, where he has authored 103 research publications and has taught insect related courses for 40 years. Chief among his research goals is to better understand the many ways insects interact with plants and how such interactions determine the diversity of animal communities. Doug has received many awards for his work, and his new book 'Nature's Best Hope' is a New York Times Best Seller. <http://www.bringingnaturehome.net/>

Save the Date:
February 9, 12pm

"Being with people who care about nature and who want to educate the future generations that will take our places is the most important thing."

**ZACH CHAPMAN, CROSS
TIMBERS CHAPTER**

TXMN.TAMU.EDU



Nearly all the gold on Earth came from meteorites that bombarded the planet over 200 million years after it formed. Gold is extremely ductile. A single ounce of gold (about 28 grams) can be stretched into a gold thread 5 miles long. Gold threads can even be used in embroidery.

Only 3% of the earth water is fresh, the remaining 97% is salted. Of that 3%, over 2% is frozen in ice sheets and glaciers. Leaving less than 1% of the fresh water to be found in lakes, rivers and underground.



One catfish can lay up to 4,000 eggs a year per pound of body weight. The catfish has over 27,000 taste buds. Young catfish are called “sac fry” because they still live off of the food supplied by the yolk sacs. When catfish reach 4 inches long they are called “fingerlings” (the size of an index finger).

New Fossil Found at MSU's Dalquest Research Site

Families are complicated. For members of the Alligatoridae family, which includes living caimans and alligators -- this is especially true. They are closely related, but because of their similarity, their identification can even stump paleontologists.

But after the recent discovery of a partial skull, the caimans of years past may provide some clarity into the complex, and incomplete, history of its relatives and their movements across time and space.



Michelle Stocker, left, and Rachel Wallace excavate the fossil remains of a 42-million-year-old caiman – an alligator relative – at the Dalquest Desert Research Station, south of Alpine.

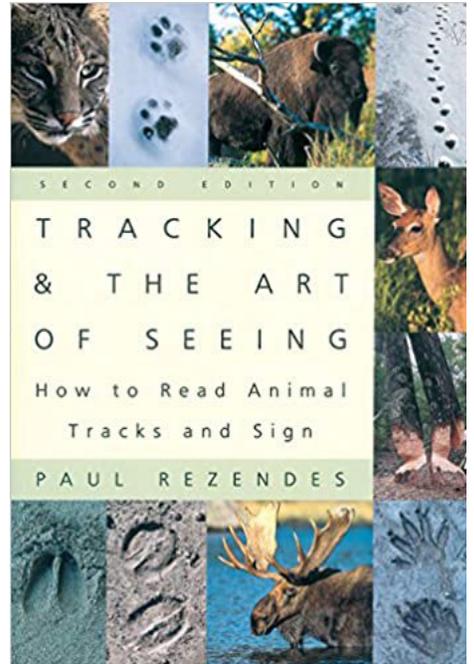
Michelle Stocker, an assistant professor of vertebrate paleontology in Virginia Tech's Department of Geosciences in the College of Science; Chris Kirk, of the University of Texas at Austin; and Christopher Brochu, of the University of Iowa, have identified a 42-million-year-old partial skull that may have belonged to one of the last prehistoric caimans to roam the United States.

For the complete story go to www.sciencedaily.com

RESOURCE CORNER

Tracking and the Art of Seeing: How to Read Animal Tracks and Sign

by Paul Rezendes
 Paperback: 336 pages
 ISBN-978-0062735249
 Price: \$25 on Amazon



In this newly revised and updated edition of his highly acclaimed field guide, renowned nature photographer and tracking expert Paul Rezendes brings the fields and forests to life with his unique observations on North American wildlife and their tracks and sign. Illustrated with hundreds of his original photographs, *Tracking & the Art of Seeing* provides complete information on the behavior and habitat of over 50 animal species and shows you how to identify animals by their tracks, tail patterns, droppings, dens, scratches and other signs.

Don't forget to sign up for February's nature hike when we will be *looking for animal tracks!* Afterwards the hikers will gathered 'round for a virtual Campfire Conversation where we shared our discoveries.

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