



Rolling Plains Chapter NEWSLETTER

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<http://txmn.org/rollingplains>

April 2022

The Rolling Plains Chapter partners with River Bend Nature Center and Wild Bird Rescue, Inc. in Wichita Falls; Lake Arrowhead State Park in Clay County; Copper Breaks State Park in Hardeman County; Whiteside Museum of Natural History in Seymour; and Comanche Springs Astronomy Campus in Crowell. Our Chapter covers Archer, Baylor, Clay, Foard, Hardeman, Jack, Montague, Wichita, Wilbarger, and Young Counties.

APRIL 5: Rolling Plains Chapter Meeting - 7:00pm at MSU's Bolin Science Hall, room 209. If you would prefer to attend via Zoom, watch for the link to the meeting in your email. Either way, I hope you will join us.

The program: Kimberlee Howell, Woodland Ecologist for the Texas A&M Forest Service in Mineral Wells. Her program will be on Ecological Changes in the Rolling Plains Region.

AT APRIL 1: Bumble Bee Short Course-Eastern Identification, 12:00 - 1:30 Bumble Bee Identification (note dual offerings and a later start for Western ID). Attend one or both sessions, Bumble Bees from Eastern North America. This is for the eastern species. Free, weekly webinars will focus on bumblebee



This month, Mother Nature was singing in the rain with the meadowlarks, mockingbirds and red wing blackbirds. If you stopped and listened, you could actually hear the earth sigh with contentment and relief as the rain soaked into the ground. Thirty minutes later, there were leaves and flowers popping out all over. It was truly amazing how fast things greened up.

But, while Smokey Bear was doing his happy dance here at my place, our friends in Jacksboro and Bowie were seeing the wicked side of Mother. I hope wherever you were, you were safe from the storms and the fires that have been raging in our area. Nature can be just as savage as she is beautiful.

Speaking of beauty, we have a beautiful class of 24 trainees this year! I hope our members will help make our trainees feel welcome. They are ready to learn and excited to get outside.

At the March Saturday Hike, we had a John Denver kind of day... Alex Nelson found a "secret" trail in Archer City and we filled up our senses on a Sensory Hike. The weather was perfect and it was a great day to get out and discover a hidden gem so close to home.

The April calendar is filling up fast and I hope you all have your iNat apps downloaded and are ready to go out and start making observations for the City Nature Challenge! The CNC starts April 29th and goes through May 2nd. Don't worry if you don't know the names of everything that you observe because we are going to have an Observation Party at the May meeting to help each other identify our postings.

The April meeting will also be your last chance to get your order placed for the Chapter t-shirts. The shirts are light blue with our Meadowlark logo

Spring Training Schedule for April 7:00-9:00pm Bolin 213

April 2—Field Trip 1: Electro-fishing at Lake Arrowhead State Park 9am-noon

April 7—Weather/Climatology

April 21—Herpetology with general discussion of local amphibians and reptiles

April 28—Mycology: Study of fungi

April 30—Field Trip 2: Wild-flower/nature journaling/Wichita Valley Rail Trail 9am-noon

biodiversity, ecology, and conservation. All sessions are on Fridays from 1 PM (Eastern Time) to 2:30 PM (Eastern Time) from March 18th to April 22nd. Presented by the University of Ohio.

AT APRIL 1: Bumble Bee Short Course-Western Identification, 2:00 - 3:30

VT APRIL 3-9: Adopt-a-Highway/Trash Clean Up Contact Lynn to set up a time and location for you to help keep the Chapter's Adopt-a-Highway section clean of trash. This a "do when you want to" clean up.

AT APRIL 8: Bumble Bee Short Course-Bumble Bee Botany, 12:00 - 1:30 Bumble Bee Botany by Randy Mitchell, The University of Akron. Free, weekly webinars will focus on bumblebee biodiversity, ecology, and conservation. All sessions are on Fridays from 1 PM (Eastern Time) to 2:30 PM (Eastern Time) from March 18th to April 22nd. Presented by the University of Ohio.

VT APRIL 9: BIRD OUTING at LASP 8:00-9:00 - meet at the dump station at the campground area.

on the front in black & white with the TMN 20th Anniversary logo on back. Unisex sizing S,M,L,XL, 2XL; Short Sleeve \$20; Long Sleeve \$25; Hoodie (dark gray) \$35. Many thanks to DeAnna Bullock on this project. She has gone above and beyond to get these done for us.

The April meeting will be in person at 7:00 PM in Bolin Science Hall, Room 209 at Midwestern State University and also on Zoom at the same time. (Watch for a link in your email.) We have an impressive list of people to congratulate with new certifications and milestone awards this month and our program will be Kimberlee Howell, Woodland Ecologist for the Texas A&M Forest Service in Mineral Wells. Her program will be on Ecological Changes in the Rolling Plains Region. I hope to see you there.—*Laura*

SPRSEF Conservation Award from Rolling Plains Chapter TMN

by Lynn Seman

Tiffany Herring and I were excited and ready to head to Lubbock for the regional science fair to select a winner for our Rolling Plains Chapter Texas Master Naturalist Conservation Award. The certificates were ready, the car was packed, but then came the ice storm. Travel was discouraged in our area

because of slick roads and possible black ice conditions so we made the decision to stay home. Fortunately, Christena Stephens from 3RF (Three Rivers Foundation) had planned to be there also to give out special awards for the fair so I contacted her and asked if she could judge for our award also. Christena is a great friend and partner to our chapter with our projects at Comanche Springs Astronomy Campus. She immediately agreed to help us out.

After careful and thorough consideration, Christena chose two enthusiastic fifth grade students who worked on a team project as



Ava Grace Sadler and Laney Evans photo by Christena Stephens

the recipient of our award -Ava Grace Sadler and Laney Evans from Southcrest Christian School in Lubbock, TX. The title of their project is "Flores Ardentia: The Flammability of Common Texas Roadside Plants". Their experiment included testing of non-native and native

plants such as Bermuda grass and silverleaf nightshade. Their research allowed them to learn more about differences between native and non-natives as well as their chemical properties and uses in erosion prevention. As part of their research, they learned more about wildfires and its occurrence and role in the ecosystem.

We want to say a huge thanks to all those with the South Plains Regional Science and Engineering Fair for giving students a place to showcase their research and Christena Stephens, who stepped in to help us choose a worthy project for our award!

AT APRIL 9: *Whiteside Museum Field Trip-registration required 9:00-1:00 THIS EVENT IS SOLD OUT.* Rolling Plains Chapter members have permission to attend one of these sessions. You can count your time for one field trip only. Alternate date is April 16. There are still openings for the May 14th trip

AT APRIL 12: *TMN Tuesday 12:00-1:00* On the Second Tuesday of each month at the noon hour (12:00pm Central Standard Time), the TMN State Office will offer an hour-long virtual advanced training event – which will sometimes include some fantastic new and returning guest speakers. Most run for one hour. You may watch this webinar live or its recording at a later date (as long as it is watched within the calendar year it was recorded).

AT APRIL 15: *Bumble Bee Short Course-Threats and Opportunities for Conservation, 12:00 - 1:30* Threats and Opportunities for Conservation by Hollis Woodard, University of California, Riverside. Free, weekly webinars will focus on bumblebee biodiversity, ecology, and conservation. All sessions are on Fridays

10 Fun Facts About the American Crow

From holding their own funerals to their penchant for maintaining grudges, this is one fascinating corvid.

American Crows are a familiar sight across the country, common everywhere except our hottest and driest deserts. While crows in folklore and fiction are often associated with trickery and death (a group of crows is, after all, called a “murder”), recent research has shed new light on just how intelligent and family-oriented these birds can be. So throw out any preconceived notions you might have about crows, and get to know one of America’s cleverest birds a little better below.

1 Wondering what that big black bird is overhead? The American Crow is one of just two species of crow commonly seen in the mainland United States, the other being the Fish Crow. Until recently, there was a third species called the Northwestern Crow, but it was absorbed into the American Crow in 2020. Another species, the Tamaulipas Crow, is an infrequent winter visitor to the southern tip of Texas.



Fish Crow. Photo: Alejandra Lewandowski/Audubon Photography Awards



American Crow. Photo: Carter Kremer/Audubon Photography Awards

2 American Crows are easy to confuse with Fish Crows, as well as their other close relative, the Common Raven. Luckily, there are some tricks for telling them apart. The Fish Crow is slightly smaller, but the surest way to distinguish it from an American Crow is to listen for its distinctive nasal call. Fish Crows typically stick near water

and are most common near the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts, but they also can extend far inland along river valleys. Common Ravens are heftier, with a bigger beak, shaggier throat feathers, and a wedge-shaped tail. Listen for their croaking call.

3 If you still have a hard time telling these species apart, don’t beat yourself up too much—crows

and ravens are all members of the same genus, *Corvus*. There are more than 40 different species in the genus, spread out across every continent except South America and Antarctica, as well as several Pacific islands. We typically refer to the big ones as “ravens” and the smaller ones as “crows,” but there’s no real genetic basis for the two categories.

4 Crows and ravens are some of the smartest animals in the world, with their intelligence considered on par with chimpanzees. The New Caledonian Crow is probably the most famous example of one sign of intelligence—tool use—but this behavior has been recorded in several other species of *Corvus* as well. Examples of tool use in American Crows include a captive individual dipping a cup in some water

from 1 PM (Eastern Time) to 2:30 PM (Eastern Time) from March 18th to April 22nd. Presented by the University of Ohio.

VT APRIL 22: Bugfest - River Bend Nature Center 6:00pm to 9:00pm - This is also a family event that usually has a great attendance and can always use volunteers! More to come about this soon!

VT APRIL 30: City Nature Challenge 2022 at River Bend Nature Center - River Bend will have FREE admission this day! We are planning to have Texas Master Naturalist lead guided tours at River Bend to show people how iNaturalist works and conduct a BioBlitz.

VT MAY 14: Global Big Day - bird watching 8:00am Rolling Plains Chapter Monthly Bird Outing at Lake Arrowhead State Park. We will be censusing the birds in the park for the Global Big Day. *Contact Debra Halter for more information.*

to moisten a container of dry food and a wild crow ripping off a splinter of wood from a fence to try to spear some prey in a hole

5 Crows might be associated with carrion, but the crafty corvids are opportunistic eaters who use their intelligence to eat just about anything—from crops to other birds' eggs—they can get their beaks on. American Crows have been seen digging pits to forage for clams, distracting river otters to steal fish, dropping nuts on hard surfaces to open them, and stealing pet food from outdoor dog dishes.

6 Crows' penchant for crop thieving in particular has made them some enemies over the years. (Scarecrows and other figures meant to frighten crop-destroying birds go back centuries.) In the 1930s, there was even a brief attempt to eat away at their numbers by popularizing them as a dinner item. A man in Tulsa, Oklahoma hosted a series of "crow banquets" to prove how tasty the birds were, and apparently impressed the governor of Oklahoma so much that he established

a "Statehouse Crow Meat Lovers Association." Luckily for the crows, however, eating crow never really caught on—the fad faded by the early 1940s.

7 That's probably for the best, because crow communities can hold a grudge for generations. A team of researchers at the University of Washington ran an experiment where they captured American Crows in nets while wearing a caveman mask, then released them back onto campus. When the researchers later walked across campus wearing the same mask, the crows scolded and dive-bombed them. More than 10 years after capturing just seven crows, more than half of the crows on campus still raised the alarm at the sight of a caveman mask.

8 Recent research has also shown that crows are also known to hold "funerals" and "wakes." When an American Crow finds the dead body of another crow, it will call out to alert others in the area, who will gather and begin to make a ruckus themselves. Researchers think the behavior helps crow communities learn

about potential threats (like those researchers in caveman masks), so that they know which locations and predators to avoid in the future.

9 This communal learning is possible because crows are particularly social and family-oriented birds. American Crows will form large flocks to forage at garbage dumps and farms during the day, and they roost in numbers ranging from hundreds to two million in the winter. They also form close family units of up to five generations. Yearlings and two-year-olds will even give their parents a hand with chick-rearing, helping to build the nest, keep it clean, and feed their mother while she's sitting on the nest.

10 American Crows' smarts and adaptability have served them well in the Anthropocene. They've been getting more numerous in recent decades, especially in urban centers. According to BirdLife International, their population has grown by nearly 20 percent each decade for the past 40 years. The total breeding population of the species is currently estimated to be 27 million.

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