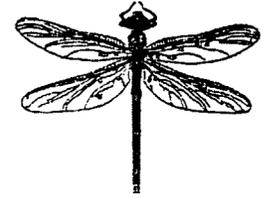


Hays County Master Naturalists NEWSLETTER



-- right here at home -- in the Hill Country

May, 2007

MAY EVENTS

May Board Meeting

The Executive Board of Hays County Master Naturalists will meet at 7:00 pm, May 3, at the residence of Winifred Simon, 600 Red Hawk Road, Wimberley.

Draft Agenda

1. Approval of Agenda
2. Officer reports
3. Housekeeping
4. Next Chapter Meeting
Date, Location, Program, Food
5. Discussion on Chapter Volunteer Projects
 - Focus
 - Revise project list?
 - Set up Volunteer Projects reviewer\committee?
6. Other Business
 - Future Board meeting dates \ Calendar of events
7. Adjourn

As always, board meetings are open to chapter members. ✨

June 23 Chapter Meeting

7:00 PM, WIMBERLEY COMMUNITY CENTER

Fire Prevention by Jan Fulkerson, Texas Forest Service. Social time with cookies at 6:30 pm. Program at 7:00 pm. Meeting open to the public. \$3.00 meeting cover charge. ✨

THE PRESIDENTIAL VIEW

Each year we celebrate Earth Day, and this year some of our Master Naturalists were busy manning booths at Emily Ann Theater in Wimberley and at Aquarena Springs in San Marcos. I happened to be at the event in San Marcos and it was relatively well attended, considering the damp weather. Numerous

HAYS COUNTY MASTER NATURALISTS

Board of Directors

President	Dale Shively
Vice President	Dixie Camp
Secretary	Susan Nenny
Treasurer	Winifred Simon
Past-President	Tom Watson
State Representative	Tom Watson
Training Committee	Nancy Turner
Membership Committee	Judy Telford
Web Master	Herb Smith
Newsletter Committee & Editor	Richard Barnett 512-847-6941 news@haysmn.org
Outreach Committee	Walt Krudop
Host Committee	Jean McMeans
Historian	Laurel Robertson
Extension Agent	Bryan Davis
TP&WD Rep	Lee Ann Linam
OTHER: Web Master	Herb Smith

people stopped by our booth, which was strategically located between the Master Gardeners and David Baker's Jacob's Well project. I talked with several college students who were majoring in different types of environmental science and listened to speeches by Congressman Lloyd Doggett, Rivers Center Director Andy Sampson, San Marcos Mayor Susan Clifford-Narvaiz, and County Commissioner Will Conley.

On Friday, I opened the San Marcos newspaper and saw an article by Melanie Typaldos entitled, "The Day the World Smiled." What really caught my eye was the photo of bluebonnets and a passing honeybee with pollen sacks filled. This was the day after our April Chapter meeting with guest speaker Dennis Jones (Brazoria State Park Superintendent) who gave us a wonderful interpretation of what Texas was like in the 1820s and how important prairie grasses are.

So what is the point of these comments you might ask? The point is that the Earth and all its wonders have been available to human beings for their enjoyment and use for

thousands of years. We are responsible for the continued care of her for our well-being and for generations to come. Dennis made one statement that really struck me at the meeting. As he traveled into Wimberley and saw the development, having been raised in the area until the late 1960s, he noticed the changes in the natural surroundings. He then remarked to himself, "Oh no, they are loving it to death."

As Master Naturalists, we realize the importance of protecting Mother Earth, not only during Earth Day events, but at all times. When I see young college students majoring in environmental science, and elementary students learning about frogs and plants, and retired individuals like our own Dr. Tom Watson who is leading several grass identification workshops, and other Master Naturalists who put in numerous hours of volunteer time in many ways, I know that we are making a difference. Keep up the work!

Dale ✨



MEMBERS IN THE NEWS

Norwood wins TCEQ Award

Rick Norwood, a new member of the Hays County Master Naturalists, has won the prestigious Texas Environmental Excellence Award as sponsored by TCEQ in the individual category for his work on the Fort Hood Avian Management System (FAMAS, the database system that now holds all of Ft. Hood's bird data).

Rick's system was constructed for the Nature Conservancy at Fort Hood, which sponsors the Golden-cheeked Warbler and Black-dapped Vireo recovery program there. Rick transferred to HCMN last year and has volunteered an enormous amount of time and professional expertise to the development of this computer software system. He is working on a similar system for vegetation monitoring by the NC. Both systems can be used at any NC site across the nation and may become their national standard software package. ✨

HCMN Member Pledges Green Election Campaign

Melinda Gumbert, a candidate for a one-year position on the Woodcreek City Council in the May 12 election, has chosen to run a green campaign. Gumbert explains that her campaign will fight visual pollution in Woodcreek by not using yard signs. Instead, she will make a commensurate contribution to the Jacob's Well Natural Area and concentrate on meeting voters personally. ✨

Tom Watson Reaps Awards

The City of Austin's Wildlands Conservation Division named HCMN Past President Tom Watson as their Volunteer of the Year during a ceremony in Austin on April 26. Tom also received a Silver Volunteer Service Award from the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation.

Tom's awards recognize his leadership and efforts at the Water Quality Protection Land's Onion Creek tract in Driftwood. Tom's activities included recruiting and training volunteers, restoring native grasslands through juniper removal and reseeding with native plants, vegetation surveys, collecting tree seeds, monitoring invasive species, and conducting Botany Walks on Austin Nature Days.

Tom has left for a well-earned vacation in the Great Smoky Mountains. ✨

Granddaughter for Nancy Turner

The grapevine tells us that Nancy Turner, Chair of the HCMN Training Committee, has been presented with a new granddaughter. We have no further information at this time, but don't let that stop you from congratulating Nancy. ✨



CHAPTER NEWS

MN Earth Day Event at the Wimberley Butterfly Festival

The Hays County Master Naturalists led the Earth Day activities at the Emily Ann Butterfly Festival in Wimberley on Saturday, April 21. Ray Franklin gave nearly continuous rain-simulation demos to the community with the help of his newly trained MNs. Minnette Marr and Judy Telford's Discovery Walk, not only earned the hikers Advanced Training hours, but took the group back in time to see how the land and water have changed under the influence of the four groups of people that have inhabited this area: the nomads, settlers, ranchers, and suburbanites. For six hours, sixteen dedicated MN volunteers continuously gave seed-ball demos, drew children in with a butterfly-coloring station, handed out Richard Barnett's butterfly pamphlets, answered questions, and provided information for joining the HCMNs. As a result, twelve people have signed up for more information about how they can join the Hays County Master Naturalists.

As a footnote, on March 24th, thirteen MNs earned Advanced Training hours in *Worm Wrangling* at Wild Connections, the native butterfly farm in Dripping Springs.

By Karen Hulene Bartell ✨

April Chapter Meeting

Dennis Jones, Assistant Director of TP&W's Brazos Bend State Park brought a lively presentation to our April 26 meeting at the Wimberley Community Centre.

Dennis came clad in a handmade replica of an 1840s Texas frontiersman's attire, from shoes to hat, and he lit a fire in the meeting room by using his flint, steel, and tinderbox. Dennis did not set off any fire alarms, however, but he shared his insights into the ingenuity and adaptability of the early Texians who had to live off the land and make do with a minimum of industrial resources. Those were the days when the coastal plains and the Hill Country were seas of tall prairie grasses where bison roamed. A dwindling 0.1 percent of native US prairie habitat remains today.

No wonder Dennis finds a growing hunger to know more about the land as development consumes open space. He encourages Master Naturalists to learn and share the practical knowledge that enabled early Texians to survive and win their independence. ✨

Wild Ones Take School Outdoors

The Wild Ones have continued their program of outdoor education for 3rd grade students.

Earlier this spring a group attended the Project Wild: Aquatic training in Austin. This is a component of the Project Wild program.

The principal educational outreach effort of the Wild Ones is working with 3rd graders at Bowen Intermediate School in Wimberley.

Weather permitting, all the third graders will participate in an educational program at the Wimberley Bird Refuge and the Cypress Creek Nature Trail during the first week of May.

At The Refuge, the students will rotate to four learning stations:

Bird Nesting with Facilitators Jean McMeans, Maggie Broyles, and Linda Lang.

Bird Adaptations with Facilitators Cara Wernli, Cecilia Kelley, and Dorothy Knight

Bird Identification with Facilitators Jessie Huth, Jaci Kroupa, and Karen Hayward

Bird Habitat with Facilitators Jane Little, Pat Davis, and Sandy Lucas

After this program is completed the students will walk to the Cypress Creek Nature Trail and enjoy a picnic lunch. Then the Wild Ones will take small groups of students on a guided walk along the Cypress Creek Nature Trail. They will teach students about the trees and plants and reinforce the importance of protecting our waterways and watersheds.

On April 27, 2007, Cara Wernli and Jane Little facilitated a program at The Refuge and Cypress Creek Nature Trail for first graders from a private school in San Marcos (The Master School). They focused on teaching children about bird habitat and bird identification. They walked with the students to Cypress Creek and guided them on a hike along the Creek. Everyone had a very enjoyable time.

The Wild Ones look forward to presenting another summer day camp at The Refuge and to promoting our Chapter's second entry in Wimberley's Fourth of July Parade. Rehearsals

begin this month for the First International Kazoo Marching Band.

-- Jane Little 🦋

Abby Linam update

Well, I can't tell you how Abby is doing tonight, 'cause she's not here! She's having a sleepover at her friend Taylor's house. I'm sure there's lots of giggling, snacking, and practical jokes going on about now.

I have to take a moment to tell you about Taylor. She has been such a good friend to Abby (since they were 3 years old!), and, along with some other good friends, has been at Abby's side since the accident happened. I've truly marveled at how these young women (and a couple of young men) were brave enough to face the very frightening images in ICU, compassionate enough to stand by Abby's side and talk to her even when she couldn't talk back (and later, when what she said didn't always make sense!), devoted enough to stick with her through the very long rehab process even when their own lives were going on, and encouraging enough to make Abby feel so welcome back at school, at home, and at sports. Most of all, though, I have to tell you how their faith has inspired me. From early on Taylor told her mother that "Abby is going to be the same, God is going to make her completely well," and she's always acted like that. Wow--what a testimony of faith to all of us. Thanks girls--from Abby and her whole family.

Love, -the Linams 🦋

For latest information about Abby's progress, please check <http://www.hillcountryschool.net/index.php>.

Volunteers Needed for Committee Assignments

Judy Telford and Dixie Camp need volunteers to assist them in their Chapter Committee Assignments.

Judy is Chair of the Membership committee and deals with record keeping, database input, collecting volunteer hours, and reporting results to the Chapter Board.

Dixie, as VP, sets up the Chapter Programs for our bi-monthly meetings. She needs assistance in finding and coordinating speakers and working with the Host committee on

arranging chapter meeting locations and accommodations.

If you would like to help on either of these committees to earn volunteer hours, please contact Judy, Dixie, or Susan Nenney. 🦋

Reporting Reminder

Please use the online forms on haysmn.org, or email your reports of Volunteer Service hours and Advanced Training immediately to Judy Telford, preferably at recordscom@haysmn.org, or send them by USnail Mail to 2303 E. McCarty, San Marcos, TX 78666.

-- Judy Telford 🦋



CALENDAR

(The dragonfly logo 🦋 identifies official HCMN events)

April 1 to June 30: **A.R. Valentien Botanicals Exhibit.** LBJ Wildflower Center. This exhibit is on loan from the San Diego Natural History Museum.

🦋 May 3, Board of Directors Meeting, 7:00 pm, 600 Red Hawk Road, Wimberley.

May 4-6: **WildFest San Antonio.** More info below.

May 5-19, **Trans Texas Quail Count.** More info below.

May 12, **3rd Annual Wildflower Fiesta,** Gardening Festival, Plant Sale & Silent Auction. San Marcos Nature Center, 430 Riverside Drive. 10:00 am--4:00 pm. Volunteers needed. See below.

🦋 May--. **Grasses of Central Texas** Workshop with Tom Watson.

June 2: **Invaders of Texas Volunteer Workshop.** Waco. More info below.

🦋 June 4: Chapter Meeting. **Fire Prevention:** Jan Fulkerson, Texas Forest Service. Wimberley Community Center. Social time with cookies at

6:30 pm. Program at 7:00 pm. Meeting open to the public. \$3.00 meeting cover charge.

✧ July 4, **Independence Day Parade**, Wimberley

October 25. Texas Bluebird Society Annual Meeting, McKinney Falls State Park.



ADVANCED TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

WildFest San Antonio

WildFest San Antonio will take place May 4-6, 2007. Participants in the festival are required to register for all events, even the few that are being offered at no charge. It should be noted that costs were kept low in order to encourage participation in the over 70 events scheduled for WildFest. There will be field trips, seminars, and workshops scheduled in the mornings, afternoons and even at night! Check out the website at <http://www.wildfest.com>.

With recent needed rainfall, this first weekend in May will probably be a show-stopper for the number of blooming plants that will be seen on the trails along with the high number of butterflies visiting them. Because Bexar County is located in the crossroads of four different ecoregions, it is one the richest counties in the state when it comes to diversity in plants and wildlife. This means there will also be a great number of different wildlife species to see as well. A chance to see coyotes off in the distance, turkeys strutting their stuff in a nearby field, or lizards cocking their heads and giving you a once over as you bend over to get a closer look are all possibilities. Participants may also have the opportunity to see or hear one of our most coveted birds that resides in the area, the Golden-cheeked warbler. Birders from around the world would jump at the opportunity to add seeing this endangered bird to their birding life list (a list people keep of birds they've seen during their lifetime). Yet we have this bird present in some of our state and city parks here in Bexar County and it is considered fairly common at certain sites in the spring and summer months! It is fascinating that Bexar County claims up to 491 known bird sightings

throughout the seasons--out of the approximately 650 birds known to occur in the state. Hope to see you on the trails!
Judith Green, Texas Parks & Wildlife Dept. Urban Wildlife Office, 12861 Galm Rd.; San Antonio, TX 78254; 210-688-6444; Fax 210-688-6446. www.tpwd.state.tx.us.

Endangered Species Workshop

SATURDAY, MAY 12, 2007, 9am-4pm, W.G. Jones State Forest, 1328 FM 1488 Rd., The Woodlands/Conroe.

Learn about the endangered Red-cockaded woodpecker in a specially themed Project Learning Tree Workshop for formal and informal educators, pre-K to 8th grade. Sponsored in part by the Heartwood Chapter Texas Master Naturalists.

Participants receive a Project Learning Tree curriculum guide, lunch, and endangered species resource materials. Dress for the weather and in comfortable clothing appropriate for walking in the woods. Bring your binoculars.

To register, send a check or money order for \$20 (made out to Texas PLT) to Texas Forest Service, 1328 FM 1488 Rd., Conroe, Texas 77384, ATTN: Endangered Species Day

Include your Name, Address, Phone #, E-mail and if applicable, school and grade level.

Contact: John R. Warner, Urban District Forester, Texas Forest Service, 936273-2261 jwarner@tfs.tamu.edu.

Invaders of Texas Volunteer Workshop

Saturday, June 2, 2007, 9am-5pm. Texas State Technical College-Waco Campus Electronics Center, Room 164. Airline Dr. at 4th Street. (IH 35 to Crest Dr., east on Crest to Airline)

Come Learn About Invasive Plant Species in Our Area. We will learn to identify, document and track invasive plants in central Texas. A "Citizen Scientist" Program.

Cost: \$12 to cover lunch, snacks and computer room. All other supplies will be provided.

Minimum: 15 participants

Bring your digital camera, cable to hook it into the computer, and GPS units if you have them.

Registration deadline is May 19, 2007.

Please send the registration fee and a completed copy of the "volunteer interest form" [from butterflydragon@juno.com] to: Jeanene Betros, PO Box 20306, Waco, TX 76702.

Confirmation/questions via e-mail: butterflydragon@juno.com. Sponsored by: Heart of Texas Master Naturalists, Texas Forest Service and the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. TEEAC and SBEC credit pending

Kerr WMA First Saturday Tours

In an effort to reach more landowners the Kerr WMA has moved its First Friday Tours to the first Saturday of each month.

First Saturday Programs will begin in July and run through October with each program starting at 1 pm and wrapping up around 5 pm.

The program is an ecosystems approach as it pertains to range and wildlife habitat management. Topics discussed will include white-tailed deer management, grazing management, prescribed burning, brush control, and endangered species. The program will also include over 20 years of nutrition and genetics research conducted in the Donnie E. Harmel White-tailed Deer Research Facility.

Dates are as follows: July 7, August 4, September 8 (to avoid Labor Day weekend), and October 6.

Please pass this information along to anyone that may be working with landowners and/or cooperators who are interested.

For more information or registration, please call Dale F. Prochaska, Texas Parks & Wildlife Dept., Kerr WMA, 2625 FM 1340, Hunt, TX 78024. Office 830-238-4483; Fax 830-238-4738
windy.altum@tpwd.state.tx.us
www.tpwd.state.tx.us



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Trans-Texas Quail Count

Last year I introduced the idea of the Trans-Texas Quail Count. It met with a stormy reception--literally. Widespread rain and storms on the eve of the count day (Saturday, May 6, 2006) washed out many volunteers.

The Second Trans-Texas Quail Count will take place during a 2-week window (May 5 - 19), enabling more of you to participate.

Goals of this exercise include:

- * Bring attention to plight of quail across Texas
- * Evaluate breeding capital after the worst quail season in 25 years
- * Demonstrate appreciation for quail along a broad array of stakeholders
- * Identify remnant quail populations, especially in areas of east and central Texas
- * Spark an interest in rekindling struggling quail populations
- * Presence or absence of bobwhites will reflect availability of quail habitat
- * Identify usable and non-usable space for quail

A PowerPoint, data sheets, and additional information on this effort are available at <http://teamquail.tamu.edu>. I hope you will be able to participate, and please forward this invitation to others in your respective circle of influence as appropriate.

I see this as an excellent opportunity to demonstrate what quail appreciation is all about. The exercise would be especially important for the eastern half of Texas where bobwhite abundance may be disjunct, and at or below any critical mass for hunting, and thus "politically" unimportant. For those who've worked with deer co-ops, consider the whistle count as a "spotlight" count for quail, i.e., the producers get their "hands on" the data in real time.

My goal for 2007 is to get 75 counties involved, then grow that to 125 in 2008, and 200 by 2009. Out-of-pocket costs are minimal.

Please indicate your (or your group's) interest in being a player as this evolves over the next 2 weeks; I'll refine the list and future updates will be provided as necessary.

Thanks!

Dale Rollins, Texas Cooperative Extension Wildlife Specialist, San Angelo. 325-650-0311.
<http://teamquail.tamu.edu>



3rd Annual Wildflower Fiesta

The San Marcos Nature Center needs volunteers to help out with our 3rd Annual Wildflower Fiesta Gardening Festival and Plant Sale. Saturday, May 12th, 9:00 am-5:00 pm.

Please volunteer in one of our **2-hour** time slots. Volunteers will receive a **free** t-shirt and lunch. For more information, go to www.smgreenbelt.org or contact Andrea Dravigne directly at andrea_dravigne@ci.San-marcos.tx.us.

Andrea Dravigne, San Marcos Nature Center, 430 Riverside, San Marcos, Texas 78666. Office 512-393-8448; Cell 512-300-9052 Parks and Recreation 512-393-8400.



State Youth Water Camp

Master Naturalist Volunteers are needed to assist with the State Youth Water Camp to be held July 8 to 12 in Monahans, Texas. The Camp organizers need instructors and youth leaders/mentors.

Please contact the Texas Cooperative Extension, Ward County at 432-943-2682 or 943-4112 for more information about the camp and a volunteer leader application.

Master Naturalists assisting with the camp may receive both Master Naturalist service hours and advanced training credit for assisting with and participating in this event depending on their level of involvement.

The State Youth Water Camp provides a wonderful opportunity and environment for high-school aged youth to participate in field trips, tours and hands-on group project work that relate to water-related issues and needs. It is truly a unique and memorable experience for all who participate!



Texas Outdoor Education Conference

The Texas Outdoor Education Association Fall Conference, October 5, 6, and 7 at the H.E.B. Foundation camp near Leaky, Texas will offer a Project Wild workshop and a Science & Civics workshop. The WILD workshop will be 6

hours and Science & Civics is a minimum of 2 hours.

Please let me know if you would be interested in conducting either or both workshops. I believe that you will be able to pick the date that best fits your schedule. TOEA will provide food and lodging at the HEB camp for the Facilitator. (We hear they have new cabins and the food is great. Fresh baked cookies every afternoon!)

Thanks for your consideration and keeping Texas WILD!

Windy Altum, Outdoor Learning Programs, Texas Parks & Wildlife Dept., 4200 Smith School Rd., Austin, TX 78744. 512-389-8183; Toll Free: 1-800-792-1112, ext 8183; Fax: 512-389-8042. windy.altum@tpwd.state.tx.us; www.tpwd.state.tx.us



Trail Building at WQPL Slaughter Creek Tract

The Austin Ridge Riders is constructing a trail on one of the city of Austin's Water Quality Protection Lands near FM 1826 and Slaughter. This multi-use trail will be a great asset to the community. For more information and for work dates go to www.austinridgeriders.com/trailwork.htm

Wildscape Garden, San Marcos Nature Center

HCMN PROJECT #405

April rains have kept everything growing at blooming. The bluebonnets have set seed, but Gaillardia, lizardtail Gaura, pink Oenothera, and pink yucca have succeeded them. Sunflowers and maypops are not far behind. Sow thistles, hedge parsley, and black medicago thrive regardless of regular weeding.

We welcome contributions of seeds or seedlings of annual and perennial wildflowers to improve the diversity of our garden.

CONTACT: Richard Barnett, news@haysmn.org.



Nature Conservancy Project Proposal

HCMN PROJECT #606

STARTING DATE: 9/1/2006

ENDING DATE:

TYPE OF ACTIVITY: Environmental conservation and education.

The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.

M.N. CONTACT: Rick Norwood, 830-693-5901; rnorwood@tstar.net

M. N. COMMITTEE MEMBERS FOR THIS PROJECT: none at this time. ✨



State News

Texas Monarch Watch

The nationwide map of Monarch Butterfly sightings on April 26 shows a narrow string of sightings stretching across Illinois all the way to central Wisconsin. An early Monarch was spotted at latitude 44°N in Wisconsin on April 20th, far ahead of other Midwest sightings..

Old Monarchs with well-worn wings were still being seen last week. People reported them from these five states: MS, OK, KS, IL, VA, and MD. But sightings of fresh-winged butterflies mean that the new Monarch generation has arrived.

"Our first adults have now emerged from the chrysalis stage and are on the wing," wrote Bill Stark from Clinton, MS on April 25. "These adults appeared 32 days after the eggs were deposited."

Please report any spring sightings you have and I'll pass the information on to Journey North for mapping purposes:

<mailto:mike.quinn@tpwd.state.tx.us>

Texas Turtles Reaped, Sold as Delicacy

By Chris Vaughn, Fort Worth Star-Telegram, April 2, 2007.

Tens of thousands of Texas turtles are being hauled out of lakes, streams and stock ponds every year, virtually all of them bound for dinner tables in China or Asian food markets in big U.S. cities.

The take is so significant and so unregulated that biologists, conservationists and the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department agree that the state must step in soon with tougher regulations, or the turtle population may never recover.

"This is no different than the buffalo slaughters of the 1800s," said Christopher Jones, an environmental lawyer for the Texas Committee on Natural Resources. "If we don't do something, a few people have the capacity to legally harvest every turtle in Texas on the nongame list. Every single one."

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission, which has oversight of all wildlife, is scheduled to take up the issue of turtles at its monthly meeting in Austin on Wednesday and Thursday, April 4 and 5.

The commissioners have a choice: side with the Texas Committee on Natural Resources and declare an emergency prohibition on the collection of all turtles, or back its staff-driven proposal to safeguard all but one species on a slightly slower timetable.

"I think it's important to know that we are moving in the same direction, but we're not sure there is an emergency," said Matt Wagner, wildlife diversity program director for Parks & Wildlife.

"We can agree that unlimited turtle harvesting cannot go on."

Much of the concern is due to one man -- Bob Popplewell, a Palo Pinto County businessman who has 400-plus people who collect turtles and sell to him for shipment.

Popplewell, who owns the Brazos River Rattlesnake Ranch in Santo, contends he is not only ridding ranchers and farmers of unwanted "vermin," he is also engaging in rural economic development and helping reduce the trade imbalance with China.

"This is a vast renewable resource," Popplewell said of turtles. "If you line up 1,000 farm boys, 999 will tell you they have shot turtles, and the other one is probably lying. That's what you do in Texas. You shoot turtles.

"But if there's a place on the globe that will use these turtles, why shouldn't we turn that vast renewable resource into a valuable resource instead of wasting it?"

Of equal and immediate concern to biologists and environmental groups is the suspicion that the turtles may be harmful to people. Some of the turtles are being collected in rivers and lakes in which there is a ban on

fish consumption because of high levels of PCBs and pesticides, Jones said.

John D. Parker, a Parks & Wildlife commissioner from Lufkin, said he is "critically concerned" that people in Texas are buying potentially contaminated turtle meat. He said he wants Parks & Wildlife and the Department of State Health Services to look into the matter immediately.

"We have an obligation to the people of Texas who shop in these markets to be absolutely certain that the food they are buying is clean of all chemicals and residues that would harm them," Parker said. "If this means we shut down all trafficking of commercial turtle meat, so be it."

Although the Texas Department of State Health Services tests fish for contamination, it has never done so on turtles, according to spokesman Doug McBride.

Open season

The commercial harvesting of turtles has been going on in Texas for years.

Nine species of turtle in Texas, including five sea species, are protected and off-limits for collection.

But for the rest of the turtles, no law governed collecting them until 1999 when Parks & Wildlife became concerned with the growing business.

Since then, as long as a person buys a \$25 permit for collecting and a \$50 permit for buying and selling, harvesting is legal.

But the number of turtles collected in recent years continues to climb, reaching levels that finally drew the attention of environmentalists, conservationists and scientists from the public, private and academic worlds.

Here's one eye-popping number -- 256,638 wild-caught adult turtles were flown out of Dallas/Fort Worth Airport to Asia between 2002 and 2005, according to data from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that was obtained by the Fort Worth Zoo.

Adding to the concern is evidence that the information being reported by commercial businessmen is less than accurate, state officials say.

"It's safe to say that when you have a system of self-reporting and self-regulation, there tends to be underreporting," Wagner said, citing huge discrepancies between the numbers of soft-shell turtles reported as "wild-caught" versus the number purchased for export.

The turtle situation in Texas is another example of globalization.

China's literal appetite for turtle meat, a delicacy, has decimated the wild populations in China, and also in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and other Southeast Asian nations.

Many of Asia's species are on the brink of extinction, their losses fueled in the last 15 years by an exploding number of rich Chinese who will pay top dollar for turtles.

As Asia's wild populations have dwindled, turtle farms have sprung up, but they cannot keep up with demand, experts said.

North America was the natural choice to make up the difference, according to Rick Hudson, a conservation biologist at the Fort Worth Zoo and the co-chairman of the Turtle Survival Alliance.

"We knew it was a matter of time before the tentacles of this would reach North America," Hudson said. "Once they're done here, they'll go to Africa and South America. There is the potential for a devastating drain on turtles worldwide. This is commercial market hunting in its purest form."

Looking at options

Popplewell runs what is essentially a co-op with collectors around the state who pay \$249 to join and then sell their take to him for shipment. Reportedly, he pays the collector anywhere from 10 cents a pound for a red-eared slider to \$1 a pound for a snapping turtle.

He declined to say how much he gets for the turtles.

He has been on a recruiting push statewide, just last week at an appearance in Corsicana, because he needs more turtles to meet his contracts in Asia.

He said he tries to steer the collectors only to privately held stock tanks and ponds and does not encourage people to take them from public lakes and rivers. He said turtles can overtake stock ponds or lakes and rid the water of fish.

"They are damaging to small bodies of water," he said. "They're at the top of the food chain in a closed environment. I had a woman sign up last night because all she wants to do is get the turtles back under control in her lake. If you're going to get rid of the turtles, why don't you get the cash? It's just like selling the pecans on your land or selling a deer lease."

The problem, biologists say, is that turtles are not exactly rabbits.

Very few of the young survive to adulthood, and those that do are late to mature

sexually. But turtles make up for their high losses of young by living a long time, up to 50 to 70 years in many common species.

Taking the older, mature females out of their environment rids the population of their opportunity to rebound, biologists say.

A number of states, including Tennessee, Mississippi, North Carolina and Alabama, have prohibited all commercial collecting of turtles in recent years, which is putting more pressure on Texas' animals, Jones said.

Texas Parks & Wildlife staff have proposed a ban on any commercial collecting except of the red-eared slider, the most abundant turtle in the state.

Because the state is required to publish the change in regulations and accept public comment, it would probably be summer before the regulation takes effect, Wagner said.

"We have to be able to train our game wardens in identifying turtles, and we are taking steps to do that," Wagner said.

Popplewell said he hopes Parks & Wildlife will "be rational" about their decision and not impinge on private property rights of landowners.

"Everybody needs to calm down," he said. "It's one thing to curb something. It's quite another to shut it down."

Earth Portal Launched

The National Council for Science and the Environment (NCSE) announces the formal launch of the Earth Portal web site at <http://www.EarthPortal.org>.

Earth Portal is a comprehensive, free and dynamic resource for timely, objective, science-based information about the environment built by a global community of environmental experts: educators, physical, life, and social scientists, scholars, and professionals who have joined together to communicate to the world.

In contrast to information from anonymous sources with no quality control, the Earth Portal is created and governed by individuals and organizations who put their names behind their words and where attribution and expert-review for accuracy are fundamental.

The Earth Portal includes:

- * Encyclopedia of Earth (www.eoearth.org) has an initial 2,300 articles from over 700 experts from 46 countries, the World Wildlife Fund, and the United Nations Environment Programme. The Encyclopedia is a

means for the global scientific community to come together to produce the first free, comprehensive expert-driven information resource on the environment. The Encyclopedia includes articles, e-books and reports, interactive maps, and biographies. It will eventually be published in other major languages. Environmental scholars and experts are invited to become contributors to the Encyclopedia.

- * Earth News (www.earthportal.org/news) includes breaking news updates from many sources, with links from key words to Encyclopedia articles, enabling readers to learn about the science behind the headlines.

- * Earth Forum (www.earthportal.org/forum) allows the public to engage in discussions with experts, ask questions and get answers, and to participate in community debates about issues that matter to them.

- * Environment in Focus (www.earthportal.org/?page_id=70) provides an exploration of a major issue each week--energy, climate change, environmental economics and other topics--led by a prominent expert in the subject and involving articles, news, places, discussions, Q&A, interesting facts, and more.

The National Council for Science and the Environment (www.NCSEonline.org) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving the scientific basis for environmental decision-making. The NCSE specializes in programs that foster collaboration among diverse institutions, communities and individuals. The NCSE serves as secretariat for a growing Environmental Information Coalition of environmental experts and organizations, which is building the Earth Portal. ManyOne Networks, an IT firm based near San Jose, California, provided engineering and vision for the Earth Portal.



Local News

Pollinator-Friendly Parks

A new publication from the Xerces society contains practical advice on how to provide for the habitat needs of native bees and butterflies--including choosing plants that offer nectar and pollen, hostplants for caterpillars, and creating nest sites for solitary bees--in all types of parks.

Pollinator-Friendly Parks: How to Enhance Parks and Greenspaces for Native Pollinator Insects, by Matthew Shepherd, Mace Vaughan, and Scott Hoffman Black. 2006. The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, Portland, OR. 54 pp. For more information on this publication, go to: http://www.xerces.org/pubs_merch/Pollinator_Park_Guidelines.htm. To download a free copy, go to <http://tinyurl.com/3apmgc> (PDF - 1.8MB file).



Wimberley Butterfly Watch

Butterflies observed in and around Wimberley in April increased in number of species and individuals despite the number of cloudy, windy, and relatively cool days.

	1-10	11-20	21-30
Giant Swallowtail	x	x	x
Pipevine Swallowtail	x	x	x
Black Swallowtail	x	x	x
Eastern Tiger Sw'tail	x		
Checkered White	x	x	x
Orange Sulphur	x	x	x
Southern Dogface	x	x	x
Lyside Sulphur			x
Cloudless Sulphur			x
Large Orange Sulfur			
Little Yellow	x	x	x
Sleepy Orange	x	x	x
Dainty Sulphur	x	x	x
Great Purple Hairstr.	x	x	x
Henry's Elfin			
Juniper Hairstreak	x	x	
Oak Hairstreak			x
Gray Hairstreak	x	x	x
Reakirt's Blue			x
American Snout		x	
Gulf Fritillary		x	x
Variiegated Fritillary	x	x	x
Bordered Patch		x	
Theona Checkerspot	x	x	
Pearl Crescent	x	x	x
Texan Crescent	x		x
Question Mark		x	x

Red Admiral	x	x	x
American Lady	x	x	x
Painted Lady	x	x	x
Common Buckeye	x	x	x
Hackberry Emperor			x
Tawny Emperor			x
Carolina Satyr	x	x	
Monarch	x	x	x
Silver-spotted Skipper			
Northern Cloudywing	x	x	x
Juvenal's Duskywing		x	x
Funereal Duskywing	x	x	x
Sleepy Duskywing			
Checkered Skipper	x	x	
Orange Skipperling			x
Fiery Skipper	x		x
Dun Skipper			x

Checkered Whites have been common during March and April. They were absent from Wimberley last spring.

Hackberry Emperors, Tawny Emperors and Oak Hairstreaks appeared in numbers at the end of the month.

If you spotted something we missed, please email your editor at news@haysmn.org



Links to Chapter Sponsors and Partners

Sponsors:

- Texas Master Naturalist - State Website - masternaturalist.tamu.edu
- Texas Cooperative Extension – agextension.tamu.edu/
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department – www.tpwd.state.tx.us/

Agencies of Interest:

- Bamberger Ranch -- <http://www.bambergeranch.org/workshops.htm>
- Native Plant Society of Texas – www.npsot.org/
- San Marcos Greenbelt Alliance -- <http://www.smgreenbelt.org>.
- San Marcos River Foundation – <http://www.sanmarcosriver.org>.
- Texas Outdoor Women's Network - <http://www.townsanmarcos.org/>
- Texas Cooperative Extension – Sea Grant Program – texas-sea-grant.tamu.edu/
- Texas Forest Service – txforestservice.tamu.edu/

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers –

www.usace.army.mil/

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – www.fws.gov/

U.S.D.A. Natural Resource Conservation Service –

.nrcs.usda.gov/

Partners

Austin Nature Day --

<http://www.austinnatureday.org/>

LBJ Wildflower Center -- <http://www.wildflower.org>

San Marcos Nature Centre --

<http://www.smgreenbelt.org>