

Hays County Master Naturalists NEWSLETTER



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

April, 2012

Chapter Events

Chapter Board Meeting

The next board meeting will be held on Thursday, April 5th, at the Camp Jacob Watershed Education Center at the Jacob's Well Natural Area, from 6:30 to 8:30 PM. A map is available [here](#). The meeting is open to members and the public.

If you have any questions or items for the agenda, please contact Larry Calvert, pres@haysmn.org, by April 2nd.

Chapter Meeting

Our April Chapter Meeting is replaced by a field trip to the "Cave Without A Name", on Sunday, April 29th.

Cave tours are limited to 25 people. To accommodate 50 or so participants, we can have two cave tours. One cave tour will start at 12:00 pm and will take 60-90 minutes. At 1:30 pm there will be a discussion on the surface that will include both cave tours. Following the surface discussion, the second group will tour the cave.

This is currently being limited to HCMNs only. Later, if response is low, the field trip will be opened to family members and friends. Please respond for each HCMN wanting to come. If more than 50 people are interested, we'll have to make arrangements with Dr. Schwartz.

Cost: \$14 each for the cave tour.

RSVP required via this [Google Docs Form](#) or by contacting Anne Child at 512-919-9271 or childanne@gmail.com.

Who: Assistant Professor Benjamin Schwartz - Texas State University

Where: Cave Without A Name
325 Kreutzberg Rd.
Boerne, TX 78006

directions: <http://200mail.com/cwan/directions.htm>

Carpool coordinating questions are in the RSVP form.

What: Central Texas Hydrology - We will be looking at instrumentation on the surface and in the cave that is helping us to measure the amounts and rates of water movement in trees,

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soils, and bedrock as precipitation moves downward and ultimately recharges the aquifer system. The Cave is filled with spectacular formations of Stalactites, Stalagmites, delicate Soda Straws, Cave Drapery, magnificent Flowstones, Rimstone Dams and more. The cave tour covers six major rooms in comfort; 66 degrees year-round, easy walkways, and brilliant lighting.

Bring: sturdy shoes, camera, notebook, flashlights OK.

The field trip qualifies for at least 2 Advanced Training hours.



A Naturalist's View

Dell & Gerin Hood are long-time members. They helped start and were in the chapter's first class in 1999. Dell also served as Chapter Vice-President in 2001 and as President for 2 years, starting in 2002.

What do we want Texas to look like?

As we drive along Ranch Road 12, both north and south of Wimberley, we cannot fail to see the beauty in some of the central Texas landscapes that have been refreshed and invigorated with an almost perfect pattern of showers - the scattered clumps of vivid yellow Bitterweeds and the too-infrequent Redbuds that somehow survive in woods near the roadside. The bright, fresh pale green of newly-leafed Cedar Elms contrasts with the fading green-grey of Live Oaks shedding foliage seemingly out of synch with all other trees.

However, far too much of the right-of-way of RR 12 looks more like a foreign landscape. All that pale yellow stuff, sticking up from three to five feet tall in dense clumps, almost starting from the Junction and into San Marcos, on both the old 12 and the new bypass, is the new crop of Bastard Cabbage (*Rapistrum rugosum*), also known as Common Giant Mustard, Wild Turnip, and Wild Rape. The sides of the I-35 access roads in San Marcos are so densely covered with Bastard Cabbage that no native plants appear to be there at all. This annual member of the Mustard family (*Brassicaceae*), native to the Mediterranean basin and western Asia, has been spread through contaminated grass seed and mulching mixtures. Seeds germinate in the fall or winter, sending down a tap root that can be more than a foot deep in soft soil; robust, wide-spreading basal leaves can reach out as much as three feet from the stem and cover any native plant seedlings that may be trying to grow. The plant grows rapidly in early spring; this year, plants reached full flower by the third week of March. Once the seeds mature, millions of them will fall to the ground and result in tens of thousands more plants next year. It is obvious that natives can't compete with all these alien plants, so it's up to all of us who treasure natural landscapes to do all we can to control their spread. The best method seems to be pulling out plants before the seeds are ready to drop; this puts an end to this year's growth. We have spent many hours over the past few years trying to keep this plant out of the Wimberley Valley.

Unfortunately, this is not the only aggressive alien plant despoiling our roadsides. We are also cursed this spring by a rich growth of other plants that should not be in Texas – Bur Clover, Star Thistle, Japanese Brome, and Bedstraw being the most common and problematic now. A bit later we'll have KR Bluestem and Johnson Grass along the verges of our highways.

All these non-native plants beg the question – what did Texas once look like – the Texas described by the first people to leave written records, a Texas rich with plants many of them had not seen before? For an excellent summary of what many early writers found, Del Weniger, the cactus expert, produced a two-volume work entitled “The Explorers’ Texas”. The first volume, “The Land and Waters”, covers plants, and is unfortunately out of print. Other fascinating accounts include books such as John Leonard Riddell’s “A Long Ride in Texas”; William C. Foster’s “Spanish Expeditions into Texas, 1689-1768”; Gideon Lincecum’s “Adventures of a Frontier Naturalist: the life and times of Dr. Gideon Lincecum”; and “Texas in 1837: an anonymous contemporary narrative”.

These are just the few we have discovered; there are many others we should be familiar with to be good Naturalists. But they make us yearn for a way to see and delight in a Texas that was, and will never be again.

- Dell & Gerin Hood



Featured Project

Hays County Master Naturalists Outreach Project #704

Outreach 2012

An important purpose of the Texas Master Naturalist Program, according to the by-laws, is to “improve public understanding of natural resource ecology and management by developing a pool of local knowledge about natural resource ecology that can be used to enhance education efforts within local communities.”

So, a pool of local knowledge – the Hays County Master Naturalists – must venture forth frequently and fearlessly to enhance education efforts within Hays County. In a word, Outreach.

Our chapter has been actively helping to educate Hays citizens about natural resource ecology since its beginning. From site visits to landowners to help them manage property, to helping children understand the life cycle of butterflies, to getting folks to look at and understand the value of native grasses, we have had the pleasure of sharing the knowledge that we’ve gained. Now that spring is here, it’s time to shift into high gear once again.

The intrepid members of the Outreach committee have generated this list of goals for 2012:

- Identify which events in the County should include a Master Naturalist Booth.
- Increase awareness and use of the Speakers Bureau.
- Purchase and/or create new display materials.
- Acquire new educational materials.
- Have a voice in the local press.
- Partner with our libraries throughout the county to have occasional displays.
- Begin implementing an Outdoor Educator Program in a second school district.



Outreach at the Emily Ann Theatre Butterfly Day. Photo by Art Arizpe.

Some of these goals are new in 2012 but most of them are continuations of work that has been on-going. We have always had a presence at fairs and festivals in the county. Many of you have been active at EmilyAnn Theatre's big annual Butterfly Festival, Earth Day at Aquarena, the Rainwater Revival in Dripping Springs and other annual events. We hope to be a part of as many of these events as possible with a double purpose of spreading the word about the Master Naturalist Program and helping people learn more about our environment.

Did you know that the HCMN has a Speaker's Bureau, available to any group interested in a presentation on topics ranging from Xeric landscaping to managing ash juniper? This group of very well-qualified speakers offers a talk with plenty of photos and sometimes even a hands-on demonstration. They are free to any group interested in a half hour or so of fascinating and useful information.

If you've been involved in manning a booth at a fair, you know only too well that festival goers are looking for fun. We are setting a goal this year to come up with some exciting and attention-grabbing exhibits that will explain who we are, what we do and why it matters. Any and all ideas are welcome. The same goes for educational materials. Everyone knows how effective the Rainfall Simulator is. We are also the fortunate owners of a state-of-the-art watershed model and an equally intriguing Aquifer model. These are the kinds of educational materials we would like to continue acquiring so any thoughts on this subject are also welcome.

People actually do still read the local papers and we need to be in them! Something along the lines of a regular column with information pertinent to Hays County is being discussed. The committee is working to create a clear idea of what we'd like to offer the papers and then get the writers among you busy.

Hays County is home to a number of excellent libraries whose missions are much more than lending books. Libraries today are more like community centers, offering knowledge in many forms.

We are exploring the idea of travelling displays about plants, animals, geology, whatever people are interested in. This kind of outreach, though indirect, can reach folks who may not be included in other venues.

The Wimberley Outdoor Educators, project number 809, has been working closely with the Wimberley ISD since 2008 to expose every child in the WISD to naturalist concepts and practices at the natural outdoor locations in Wimberley. They've really got it down now so we think it's time to start branching out to a second Hays school system. Anyone who has a particular interest in helping to make this happen has a great opportunity to get in on the ground floor of what has proven to be a very successful venture.



A Wimberley Outdoor Educators outreach event. Photo by Jackie Mattice.

One other type of outreach, maybe the most important in spite of being impossible to measure, is the message you send every day in speaking with your friends and neighbors. The families that wander by as you're out building trails or removing invasive plants or monitoring the rivers who ask what you're doing may also be inspired by your answers.

Leah Laszewski is the Chapter's Outreach Committee Chair and the following members attended the first 2012 Committee meeting or are on the committee: **Cara Wernli, Chris Middleton, Eva Gomez, Jackie Mattice, Jane Little, Jean McMeans, Karen Archer, Kim Ort, Lance Jones, Linda Land, Marilyn Brister, Mimi Boelter, Randy Garst, and Susan Nenney.**

While there is a formal Outreach committee, in reality, we are all part of the chapter's outreach work, so don't hesitate to make your ideas known and to be sure to make the best use of all your wonderful talents, writing, teaching, creating displays, leading hikes, whatever you are happy doing.

Please contact Leah, mn.leah@yahoo.com, if you'd like to learn more, help, or contribute ideas.



Chapter News

President's Message

I continue to be impressed with the turnout at the chapter meetings; thanks for your part in making them so valuable. The meeting in March was not only a wonderful and educational program, but also there was a lot of socializing both before and after. If you listened to the conversations during socializing time it was in true MN style - lots of sharing of sightings and learnings. Helen Bowie and Eva Gomez, the host co-chairs, have made sure there were plenty of good refreshments to energize us while we socialized. It makes you want to be sure you don't miss a single one. Please note in this newsletter about the April meeting since it is at a different time than usual.

I want to thank Art Arizpe and all of the contributors to the wonderful newsletters. Any MN who doesn't regularly read them really misses out. Just look at all the great information shared in the one you are reading now. Please remember that this is your newsletter and your projects and ideas are of interest to others. When you have something to share, drop Art an e-mail. It is also a great way to get the word to non MNs about what we do and all that we are learning. Give them the web site and encourage them to read it.

- Larry Calvert

Rain, Rain, Stay Today And Come Again Another Day!

Because our climate consists of so many droughts, it is always spectacular to see how some rain can completely change our landscape in such a short period of time and most importantly, to see our aquifers, rivers, and lakes replenished. The drastic differences between a drought year and a rain year have been an eye opener for me because I've seen an arid landscape grow into something green. However, during these rains, I've also witnessed just how much water streams down the hill in varying directions in the form of run-off.

Our house sits on a two acre lot which is on a steep incline. We've lived here less than two years, and the erosion that occurred during the last three months is staggering. Because of this, we have made it our mission to practice good land stewardship and begin our own restoration. One of the best examples of restoration and conservation of land is Selah, David Bamburger's ranch. I read his book before actually going out there for a visit and an education. My husband and I went out and took a tour, when everything was burned to a crisp all over the county. What an eye opening experience to SEE the effects of all that he has done! There was WATER flowing, and it was so pure that we could drink it right out of the ground, not to mention all of the fabulous wildlife that we saw.



*Bamberger Ranch in September, 2011, during the worst drought year ever on record. This is what is possible with good land stewardship!
Photo by Lisa Kay.*

Now that the rains have come and washed away a good part of our "soil", we have developed a plan to start restoration of our own little 2 1/2 acres of property. We have begun to stock pile all of our cedar posts (we have hundreds) and are now putting those in place to help divert the water more evenly rather than having most of the hill running off in three different directions. Native American Seed Company was recommended highly to us and after perusing their catalog and researching the different types of areas we have to plant in (caliche, hill side, flat areas), we placed our order. I didn't realize that mindful restoration is such a simple thing; it just requires being willing to be educated and willing to do some physical labor. Our planting will focus mainly on native grasses which act like sponges when it rains pulling the water into the earth. By damming our hillside with cedar posts and rocks, we hope to slow the run-off so that the grasses can do their job well. The top of our hill has a man-made small tank and it is only now, after our recent rains, that we have seen how much water it holds, thereby eliminating more runoff. It is so exciting to us to be able to start this process and see what will be possible by working with Mother Nature versus ignoring Her! Of course, I would have been oblivious to all of this without the Hays County Master Naturalist class. I look forward to our own personal project, continuing to learn, and also sharing my own knowledge with the people that I know and interact with.



Our holding tank in August 2011. Photo by Lisa Kay.



Our holding tank in March 2012. Photo by Lisa Kay.

- Lisa Kay

Book Report

Hill Country Landowner's Guide

By Jim Stanley

Texas A&M University Press, www.tamupress.com

\$19.95

This book is an outstanding primer for current and prospective Texas Hill Country Landowners and all Hill Country area Master Naturalists. It is a new tool to help landowners manage their land well. It charts a practical course for understanding and handling a variety of problems landowners will confront.

This book is filled with advice that landowners can easily absorb and implement. It conveys basic knowledge the author has gained from experience and from experts during his years in the Hill Country.

For Master Naturalists, this book will be a valuable, easy-to-read refresher. Trainees and experienced Master Naturalists alike will want to add this book to their libraries. Jim Stanley is a member and three-time past president of the Hill Country Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists.

"There are many good books that are useful in helping understand appropriate stewardship of natural resources in the Texas Hill Country. Only a handful, though, fit into the category of being truly great. Jim Stanley's book is one of those. Everyone who owns land, manages land – or dreams of doing either - anywhere, should have Stanley's book for reference and pleasurable reading." - David K. Langford, vice president emeritus, Texas Wildlife Association

- Randy Garst

Spring Lake Tour

Nineteen HCMNs took a four-hour tour of the Spring Lake Preserve natural area in San Marcos on March 11th, 2012. They were led by Minnette Marr and Todd Derkacz. The group began at the Texas Rivers Center and wound uphill to interpretive signage about local birds and then downhill to the very full stock tank. The group wound through meadows cut by Sink Creek which had water in the normally dry creek bed.



On the trail – Minnette describing the effect of recent rainfall. Photo by Lance Jones.

Minnette discussed the numerous plants that were thriving with a generous supply of rain following drought and the intense heat of the previous summer. Mountain laurels were still in bloom and providing nourishment for honey bees and Red Admiral butterflies.

- Lance Jones

March Chapter Meeting

Greg Lasley delivered a great presentation about wildlife photography to our March Chapter meeting. There 41 members or guests attending and several were from our Naturescapes Photography Contest partner, the Hill Country Photography Club.

Greg described how he got involved with wildlife photography, starting with birds from a documentation point-of-view, to photographing for commercial purposes and appreciation, and then branching out to other wildlife, such as mammals, reptiles, and dragonflies. In addition to showing us many beautiful images, Greg also talked about the habitats and behaviors of his subjects and what it took to obtain some of his photographs, as well as his equipment. There were many questions throughout his talk and a lively question and answer session at the end.

Greg's talk was an amazing introduction to the world of wildlife photography and a great source of inspiration and knowledge for us to get ready for [Naturescapes](#)! The contest will start accepting entries on May 1st, so get your cameras ready!

HaysMN Forum

The forum is a great learning resource. Be sure to check it out. To join the HaysMN Forum, simply go to the haysmn.org web site and look for the Forum application in the menu.

Please let Herb Smith, web@haysmn.org, know if you have any questions or suggestions. Better yet, use the Forum to discuss the Forum.

Reporting Reminder

Reports for January through March are due by April 6th. Please submit your reports of Volunteer and Advanced Training hours by using the friendly report forms at www.haysmn.org.

As a reminder, 8 hours of Advanced Training and 40 hours of Volunteer work are required each year to recertify. You have until the end of the year to complete these hours.

If you are uncertain about your status, please contact Beth Ramey, hourshaysmn@gmail.com, and she can send you a report.

Newsletter Items

Have you read a good book lately? Submit a short review and share with the chapter! Have some neat photos of a volunteer or training activity? Let us see them! Do you have news about yourself or another HCMN? Send it in!

Please send your comments, news items, and photos to news@haysmn.org.

Members News

Dell Hood

Congratulations to Dell Hood! In January, he was elected Vice-President for Administration of the [NPSOT State Board](#). We wish him the best in his new position!

This section is your opportunity to update the chapter about what you've been doing. Perhaps you went on an interesting field trip and took some nice photos; basically, anything you'd like to share.

Please send your news items to news@haysmn.org.



Advanced Training Opportunities

Please watch your emails for upcoming Advanced Training Opportunities.

Reminder: Rather than replying to the Advanced Training e-mails which come from the Chapter Secretary, you should send questions about AT Opportunities to Becky Northcut, the AT Committee Chair, at atcom.haysmn.org.



Volunteer Opportunities

Please watch your emails for upcoming Volunteer Opportunities.



State and National News

Rainwater harvesting growing in popularity

The San Antonio Express News has an article about the growing popularity of rainwater harvesting:

"A well driller wasn't among the contractors Bobby Watson hired when he built a new home overlooking Canyon Lake. Like a growing number of Texans, he opted to get water from the sky.

'The wells have been bad here,' 74-year-old Watson explained. 'The water comes out dirty and ruins your washer and dryer, and they go dry.'

You may read the full article [here](#).



Local News

10 Good Reasons to Get Outside

Texas Parks & Wildlife Director, Carter Smith, spoke at our chapter meeting in February.

[Here's](#) another message from Carter:

"Much of Texas is still way behind its average annual rainfall, but it looks like winter rains in many areas of the state will make for an excellent spring," says Texas Parks and Wildlife Executive Director Carter Smith. "Weather forecasters say we may still be in for more drought, so it's a good idea to make the most of spring while it lasts."



Links to Chapter Sponsors and Partners

Sponsors:

Texas Master Naturalist -- State Website -- masternaturalist.tamu.edu

Texas AgriLife Extension -- texasextension.tamu.edu

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department -- www.tpwd.state.tx.us/

Agencies of Interest:

Bamberger Ranch -- bambergerranch.org
Native Plant Society of Texas -- www.npsot.org
San Marcos Greenbelt Alliance -- www.smgreenbelt.org
San Marcos River Foundation -- www.sanmarcosriver.org
Texas Outdoor Women's Network -- 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 -- www.nrcs.usda.gov
Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority -- www.gbra.org

Partners

Austin Nature Day -- www.austinnatureday.org
Gorge Preservation Society -- www.canyongorge.org
Hill Country Photography Club -- hcphotoclub.org
LBJ Wildflower Center -- www.wildflower.org
San Marcos Nature Center -- www.ci.san-marcos.tx.us/departments/parks/Nature_Center.html