

Hays County Master Naturalists NEWSLETTER



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

August, 2010

August 2010 Events

Chapter Board Meeting

The next board meeting will be held on Thursday, August 5th, at the Camp Jacob Watershed Education Center at Jacob's Well Natural Area, from 7:00 to 9:00 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 Dixie Camp, pres@haysmn.org, or 512-517-3111, by August 1st.

Chapter Meeting

The next chapter meeting will be held on Thursday, August 26th, from 6:30pm to 8:00pm, at the First Baptist Church, 15951 Winters Mill Parkway, in Wimberley. A map is available [here](#).

The speaker will be Dr. Kevin Theusen, Program Manager of the Water Quality Protection Lands for the City of Austin Wildland Conservation Division. His topic will be "Advanced Fundamentals of Ecological Restoration".

If you have announcements you would like to have presented at the chapter meeting or suggestions for topics/speakers, please contact Tom Hausler, vp@haysmn.org, or 512-858-1015.



A Naturalist's View

This month we hear from our Larry Calvert, our Chapter Treasurer.

Silence in the City

Sometimes you begin to think the whole world thinks like Master Naturalists and then something shocks you into reality. One such event occurred on a recent trip.

We were recently visiting friends in Friendswood, TX. They live in one of those classic Houston suburban neighborhoods. They are just lovely with the tall old trees, manicured wall-to-wall St. Augustine grass, and landscaping with Azaleas and Crepe Myrtles.

As I'm known to do, I went out for an early morning walk. I walked in the neighborhood and soon found a Nature Trail that caught my eye. As I followed the

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trail I discovered it was unimproved and set within a basic forest surrounding. The trail was about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile long and bordered on two sides by two different but flowing creeks, with housing on the remaining sides. It was predominantly overstory with little understory (it was easy to look 100-200 feet into the forest without much obstruction to the view). I stopped because something seemed out of place; it was the silence. In addition I noticed there was no animal activity.

I spent 45 minutes walking on the trail and some in the neighborhood. In that time I heard a few birds high in the trees, saw one great egret on the shore of the creek, but not even a squirrel to represent animal activity. As I got thinking about it I realized that in the forest and the neighborhood there were no food sources. In the forest there was no understory for habitat, and the neighborhood was no better. It was a sad situation, so out of place, and a very lonely walk.

As I began to think about the situation I compared it to our situation in the Lone Man Creek Valley. We are so fortunate to have such a chorus of birds singing, frogs croaking, and various other animal sounds throughout the day and night. What a joy; and you feel a part of a wonderful natural setting. Then I realized we contribute to having such a wonderful natural setting. We all put our MN training to work to make habitat available, water plentiful

even in drought times, and provide lots of food sources both natural and supplemental. These, after all, are the basics we all need to make a place home for us and the wildlife.

As Master Naturalists I think it is important for us to remember from time to time that we do make a difference and the world is better for it in so many ways. One of the key roles for Master Naturalists is to educate. As we inform people of how they are impacting the world we have that opportunity to help someone else make the world a better place for all. So, don't let opportunities to inform others or do something positive yourself slip by you.

- Larry Calvert



Featured Project

Driftwood Wildlife Association / Birding Activities, #912

You're watching the sunset on a late summer day with some friends. The cooler next to you is full of your favorite beverage. The excitement builds as dusk approaches. Suddenly, a hush falls over the group as you spot the swifts approaching ...

Can you think of a nicer way to earn your volunteer hours? If this sounds like the way to go, then the Driftwood Wildlife Association's Swift Night Out is for you!

A Swift Night Out

As summer draws to a close and the swifts have finished raising their young, these fascinating aerial acrobats begin to congregate in communal roosts prior to their migration in the fall. Some roosts may consist of an extended family group of a half a dozen birds or so, but the larger sites can host hundreds or even thousands of swifts! We encourage you to involve your local Audubon chapters, bird clubs, scout groups and neighbors in this exhilarating spectacle.

Here is how it works: Keep your eyes to the skies at dusk and watch for areas where swifts are feeding. Look for a tall shaft, chimney or similar structure to locate where Chimney Swifts go to roost in your area.

On one night over the weekend of August 6, 7, and 8 observe the roost starting about 30 minutes before dusk and estimate the number of swifts that enter. When you have your number, contact us with your results at www.ChimneySwifts.org.

That's all there is to it!

The September "A Swift Night Out!" will be on September 10, 11, and 12. Please join us for that event as well!

In 2009, HCMN began partnering with the Driftwood Wildlife Association for volunteer and advanced training opportunities. DWA is a non-profit (501c3), all volunteer organization dedicated to promoting research, education and conservation of native wildlife. The DWA's [web page](#) has more information about the Association and its activities.

The DWA also has a page dedicated to Chimney Swifts [here](#), where you can find more information about Swifts and view results from previous Swift Nights Out.

Ann Connell is the HCMN/DWA contact person for the project. Ann is a graduate of the HCMN Class of 2008, the Roadrunners. The HCMN class provided her an opportunity to learn more about land stewardship and habitat restoration. Ann enjoyed the class so much, she returned the next year on the training committee. For over 20 years, as a permitted wildlife rehabilitator, now retired, she has cared for hundreds of sick and orphaned white-tailed deer fawns, birds and even a couple of horned lizards.



Lin Weber with a Chimney Swift tower she and her husband recently built. A predator guard is near the top. Photo by Jill Harding (HCMN Class of 2002).

Lin Weber, also from the HCMN Class of 2008, and her husband recently built a tower and she reports a very successful first year. Her tower housed 3 chicks which have now left the nest. The tower sits on 2 foot steel legs and is itself about 12 feet high. The project cost about \$400 and took about 70 man-hours to complete over 3 weekends.

In addition to the Swift Night Out, the project provides other Volunteer opportunities:

- Construct a Chimney Swift Tower on your own property, school or public space
- Monitor and/or Maintain an Existing Chimney Swift Roost on your own property, school or public place.
- Site Preparation for Bird Banding Census – This activity is in Mason County in the spring and fall. Volunteers assist in clearing and maintaining mist net lanes. This is a multi-year project investigating the effect of prescribed burns on resident and migratory birds.

The project also provides Advanced Training opportunities:

A Chimney Swift Tower building workshop is held in March each year and a Nest Box building workshop is scheduled for October 10, 2010. Workshops are sponsored by Travis Audubon and held at Chaetura Canyon Sanctuary.



HCMN Mimi Boelter (center right) at the Chimney Swift Tower Workshop earlier this year at Travis Audubon's Chaetura Canyon Sanctuary. Photo provided by Paul Kyle.

Why should I care about Chimney Swifts?

- Chimney Swifts eat nearly one third of their own weight in flying insect pests such as mosquitoes, biting flies and termites every day.
- Chimney Swifts historically used large, hollow trees for nests and roosts. As the

ancient forests were cut down, they learned to use chimneys and other structures instead.

- Today, just like Purple Martins, Chimney Swifts rely almost entirely on man-made structures for nest sites.
- Because they cannot perch like songbirds, Chimney Swifts must have deep shafts in which to raise their families and roost at night.
- Chimney Swifts are protected by State Wildlife Codes and Federal law under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1916.
- Like all Neotropical Migrants, Chimney Swifts are declining in numbers and need our assistance.
- Like watching a beautiful sunset, the aesthetic value of observing Chimney Swifts' aerial acrobatics and interactions is a simple pleasure that nature has to offer.

What can I do to help Chimney Swifts?

- If you have a masonry or clay flue-tile chimney, keep the top open and the damper closed from March through October to provide a nest site for these insect-eaters. Metal chimneys should be permanently capped to prevent birds and other wildlife from being trapped.
- Have your chimney cleaned in early March before the Chimney Swifts return from their winter home in South America.
- Work with local conservation groups to construct Chimney Swift Towers and educate your friends and neighbors about Chimney Swifts.
- Join the North American Chimney Swift Nest Site Research Project as a Research Associate!

Please contact Ann Connell, asc0707@gmail.com, if you would like to help or learn more about this project.



Chapter News

2011 Training Committee Forming

Congratulations and thanks to our 2011 Training Committee Chair, Jean McMeans, and Vice-Chair, Lin Weber! Please give them your full support as they begin this important task for the chapter.

The application process for the Training Committee starts now. Here's your chance to help train another

great HCMN Class and pick up a refresher along the way! If you are interested in any of the positions, please contact Dixie Camp, pres@haysmn.org.

The Training Committee positions are listed below. You may find descriptions of these positions in the [Chapter Operating Handbook](#), Section E.1 on our web page.

- **Chair / Coordinator of Training Committee** – Jean McMeans
- **Vice-Chair / Assistant-Coordinator of Training Committee** – Lin Weber
- **Registration and Attendance** – (2 Positions)
- **Nature Watch Coordinator** – (1 Position)
- **Logistics & Documentation (videography)** – (1 Position)
- **Field Trip and Site Visit Coordinator** – (2 Positions)
- **Secretary** – (1 Position)
- **Speaker's Contact (includes logistics, gifts and evaluation)** – (1 Position)
- **Meals: supported by Chapter's Host**
- **Standing Committee** – (Coordinator and helpers as needed)
- **Graduation** - (Chair and volunteers as needed)
- **Other** - Volunteers as needed and determined by Chair and Vice-Chair

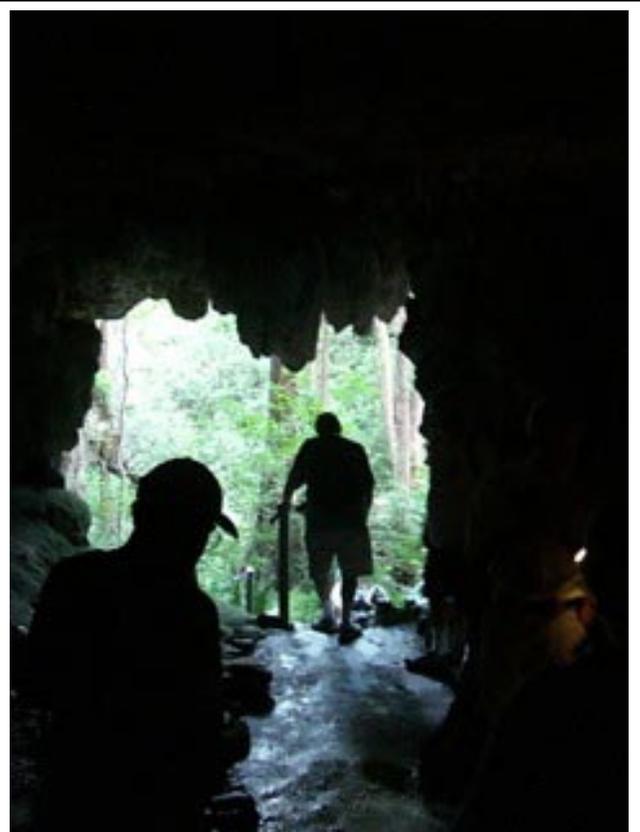
July Chapter Meeting

The July Chapter meeting on the 22nd was a field trip to the Westcave Preserve. John Ahrns was our tour guide and gave a very informative tour of the Westcave Preserve and grotto. He recently retired after 36 years on the job but lead the Master Naturalists on a tour.



John Ahrns leading the group. Photo by Dick McBride.

The Hill Country geology responsible for the formation of the Westcave Preserve and Hamilton Pool was our initial introduction. Plant life and the change in geology from hill top to cool, dark pool waters were discussion items along the walking tour.



In the cave. Photo by Dick McBride.

At the fern-covered grotto Master Naturalists were treated to a cautious view of the resident cottonmouth who stood watch from under a large boulder. The caves were a unique learning experience themselves as the MNs learned about their formation and use by the earliest settlers millennia earlier. The tour concluded at the very

interesting Warren Skaaren Environmental Learning Center with its innovative conservation technologies and teaching points for astronomy, geology, botany and related natural sciences.

- Lance Jones

New Rainfall Simulator

As you may have heard, the chapter now has a second rainfall simulator. The new rainfall simulator is currently at the Extension office but we are seeking volunteers to take responsibility for the unit.

This means keeping the tubs planted and watered, housing the unit, and ideally, being able to transport it when needed for demonstrations and events.

Please contact Dixie Camp, pres@haysmn.org, or 512-517-3111, if you're interested in helping.

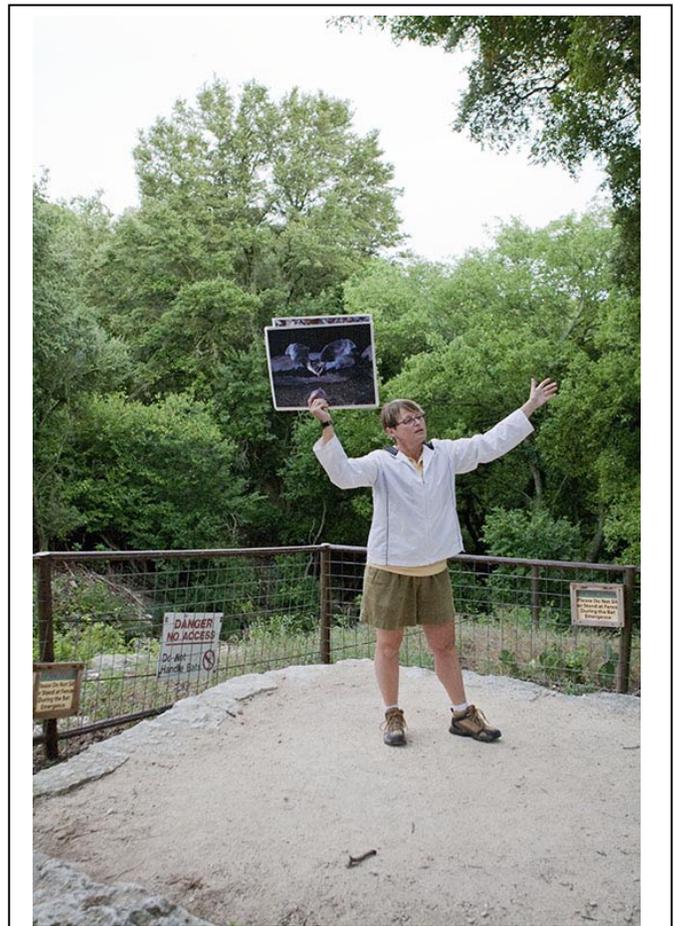
Old Tunnel Wildlife Management Area Field Trip

The Chapter Field Trip to the Old Tunnel Wildlife Management Area was held on July 28th and 17 HCMN attended. You can find out more about the Old Tunnel WMA at their [web page](#).



The south entrance to the Old Tunnel. Photo by Tom Hausler.

TPWD bat education specialist, Nyta Brown, who also spoke at our January Chapter Meeting gave an interesting talk on the history of the tunnel, the bats, and their role and importance.



Nyta Brown discusses the resident bats. Photo by Art Arizpe.

The bats emerged from the tunnel at dusk, about 8:47pm and provided a unique experience for about half an hour. The current population is about one million Mexican Freetail bats, but peaks at about three million.

Jacob's Well Natural Area

Things are busier than ever at Jacob's Well Natural Area and to make it easier to keep up with everything JWNA-related, we've created a Twitter account and a brand new Facebook page.

Twitter: @lovejacobswell

Facebook (Be sure to click the Like button): <http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#!/pages/Jacobswell-Natural-Area/134412899910086?ref=sgm>

- Becky Northcut

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 July 2010 are due by August 7th. 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.



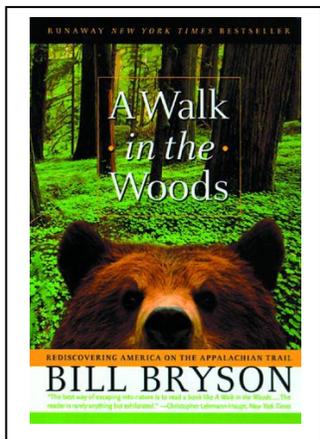
Members News

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.

Book Review by Lance Jones

A Walk in the Woods
by Bill Bryson

I wish all my textbooks and required reading were as interesting as these 274 pages were. Bryson, a prolific writer, is credited as being a comical, humorous writer. What he is, is a story teller so interesting as to impart knowledge without force-feeding.



Did you know that the Appalachian Trail, at more than 2,000 miles in length, was completed in 1937 in under seven years using volunteer labor?

Bryson's remarkable story is his attempt to hike the entire distance in one year. Along the way we learn many different facets of natural science and the agony and thrill of accomplishment in just attempting such an undertaking.

Bryson integrates the natural sciences into a compelling description of human nature that makes for an easy read. Although he did not reach the summit at Mount Katahdin, he and his hiking partner, who provides some of the comic relief, did journey more than 870 miles on the Appalachian Trail. No small accomplishment.

- Lance Jones

Tom Hausler's Wildlife Cam

Tom shares a photo of a White-tailed deer and her twin fawns. He reports that his wildlife cameras have been quiet, with just a few squirrels, raccoons and deer. There have been more twin fawns this year.



A White Tailed Deer and here twin fawns. Photo by Tom Hausler.

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



Advanced Training Opportunities

Wildland Conservation Division

Our Wildlands hikes take a hiatus during the heat of summer, but we'll be back full swing in the fall. The BCP Hike and Lecture Series will continue, so check out the following hikes and we'll see you on a trail soon!

BCP Hike and Lecture Series

Sat., Sept. 11, 9am to 11:30am - Birding Habitat of Westcave Preserve **2.0 Hours Advanced Training**

Sat., Sept. 25, 9am to 11:30am - Exploring Wild Basin **2.5 Hours Advanced Training**

Sat., Sept. 25, 1pm to 3:30pm - Exploring Wild Basin for Kids & Families **2.5 Hours Advanced Training**

Sat., Oct. 9, 10am to 1pm - Rediscover Hamilton Pool **3.0 Hours Advanced Training**

Sat., Nov. 13, 9am to 11:45am - A Bird's Eye View of Stillhouse Hollow

2.75 Hours Advanced Training



Volunteer Opportunities

Monitoring Chimney Swifts, Project #912

The North American Chimney Swift Nest Site Research Project (NSRP) is a joint effort of the Driftwood Wildlife Association with support from Texas Partners in Flight and the Nongame Urban Program of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. The goal of the project is to monitor existing nest and roost sites and to develop and test smaller, more manageable towers which can be easily installed by homeowners.

To find a nesting site or roost, keep your eyes on the skies at dusk and watch for areas where swifts are feeding. Look for a tall shaft, chimney or similar structure to find where Chimney Swifts go to roost in your area. Observe the roost starting about 30 minutes before dusk and estimate the number of swifts that enter. E-mail the roost location and number of swifts observed to DWA@austin.rr.com. Monitoring can be done on a one time basis or regularly until the swifts migrate in October.

Also, mark your calendar to participate in Swift Night Out, a continent wide event, to raise awareness about Chimney Swifts. On one night over the weekend of August 6, 7, 8, and/or September 10, 11, 12 observe the roost starting about 30 minutes before dusk and estimate the number of swifts that enter. When you have your number, email us at DWA@austin.rr.com. That's all there is to it!

Want to do more? Build an artificial Chimney Swift tower or if your chimney flue is not metal, take the cap off and enjoy being a Chimney Swift landlord.

For more information, go to www.chimneyswift.org or contact Ann Connell at asc0707@gmail.com or 512.913.1441.

Barsana Dham Trail Building

Friday, August 6th, 13th, 20th, 27th

9:00am-12:00pm

Hays MN Project #909

For more information, contact Dennis Wagner (Dennis@UnitedCountryCentralTexas.com).

Elephant Ear Removal

Wednesday, August 4th & 18th

4:00pm-7:00pm

Hays MN Project #408

The unique and critical habitat of Spring Lake requires a carefully managed habitat conservation program. Volunteers meet the first and third Wednesday of each month to remove the invasive Elephant Ear plant that grows along the banks of the lake. Work begins at 4pm.

For more information, contact Leah Laszewski (laszewski@yahoo.com).

Hyacinth Removal

Saturday, August 28th

9:00am-12:00pm

Hays MN Project #408

The unique and critical habitat of Spring Lake requires a carefully managed habitat conservation program. The San Marcos River Foundation works with Aquarena to provide regular water hyacinth removal the 4th Saturday of every month. Volunteers meet at the Wetlands nursery at 9 AM and work until about noon.

For more information e-mail Diane Wassenich (wassenich@grandecom.net).



State and National News

Robins can literally see magnetic fields, but only if their vision is sharp

From Discover:

"Some birds can sense the Earth's magnetic field and orientate themselves with the ease of a compass needle. This ability is a massive boon for migrating birds, keeping frequent flyers on the straight and narrow. But this incredible sense is closely tied to a more mundane one – vision. Thanks to special molecules in their retinas, birds like the European robins can literally see magnetic fields. The fields appear as patterns of light and shade, or

even colour, superimposed onto what they normally see.”

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



Local News

The End of the Hill Country

The Texas Observer has a provocatively-named article about the on-going battle between developers and conservationists.

“Are you sick of hearing about water yet?

Well, too bad.

Critical decisions are coming down the pike this summer that could determine the fate of Texas water for the next 50 years. By Sept. 1, 16 groundwater management areas must decide how much groundwater to leave in aquifers. The long-simmering tension between conservation is Drill, Baby, Drill are coming to a boil.”

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



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
LBJ Wildflower Center -- www.wildflower.org
San Marcos Nature Center -- www.ci.san-marcos.tx.us/departments/parks/Nature_Center.html
Gorge Preservation Society -- www.canyongorge.org