

Hays County Master Naturalists NEWSLETTER



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

August, 2011

Chapter Events

Chapter Board Meeting

The next board meeting will be held on Thursday, August 4th, 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 Jeff Vasgaard, pres@haysmn.org, by August 2nd.

Chapter Meeting

The next chapter meeting will be held during our Chapter Social on Saturday, August 27th, from 10:00 am to 2:00pm, at John Knox Ranch. Directions are available [here](#) and a map is available [here](#).

There will be a speaker. Please watch your email for details.

If you have announcements you would like to have presented at the chapter meeting or suggestions for topics/speakers, please contact Brad Kimmel, vp@haysmn.org.



A Naturalist's View

Richard Barnett has served as the Newsletter Editor and was in the Class of 2001.

Aldo Leopold begins "A Sand County Almanac" by saying: "there are some who can live without wild things, and some who cannot."

As a city dweller, I have had to live without wild things for most of my life. Even then, I always had a yearning for wild things and wild places. I cherish early memories of horse chestnut trees and hawthorn hedges in flower, of hearing cuckoos call and thrushes sing, of seeing weasels in the Peak District of Derbyshire, watching red squirrels in hazel thickets, and gathering wild mushrooms, sloes and blackberries. I recall the healing peace of roaming through meadows and over moors at a time when wartime madness gripped the world.

When my own turn came to go to war, wild places kept me in touch with sanity. Boot camp could not prevent me from loving the acorn woodpeckers of the Salinas River valley or the many hues of the wildflowers on its green hills before summer crisped them. Even behind

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battle lines in Korea I observed house martins nesting in ammo bunkers, heard the cuckoos again, and found lily of the valley blooming in sheltered ravines of mountains that even then bore expanses of pink azaleas in the spring.

Perhaps I should have taken up biology or forestry, but accident and aptitude led me into geology instead. Fields of wooden oil derricks, still driven by steam and whiskey, surrounded Houston when I arrived there in 1946, and I caught oil fever. You might call it *ineptitude* rather than *aptitude* because a vocational aptitude test revealed nothing more than an innate disposition for beachcombing. Geologists can comb inland "beaches" and ancient beaches in sedimentary rocks. Geologists can go exploring in the course of business whenever they can concoct and present a compelling reason to management. And, best of all, geology is an eclectic science that takes in all branches of natural science and archeology and astronomy to boot. They all help in interpreting ancient sedimentary environments like beaches, and they make geology a career that combines vocation with avocation.

My resulting adventures took me to parts of the United States, Europe, and North Africa that ordinary tourists would miss. My grown daughters recall, with laughter, how I turned their vacations into exercises in reading the passing landscape and identifying flora and fauna.

Wild places and wild things have fed my imagination enough to go beyond writing professional reports and recommendations. They have enabled me to take up creative writing, an undertaking where I failed dismally in the confining environs of a system that imposed writing lines and essays as punishment on restless and undisciplined minds.

I shared my enthusiasm for wild things and places as a docent at the Houston Museum of Natural Science for several years before retiring to Wimberley in 2002. I had graduated from the Texas Master Naturalist training program the previous year, and Wimberley gave me the perfect place to comb for anything from fossils to butterflies.

July 4, 2002 saw the Canyon Lake reservoir overflow its spillway and carve out a gorge that exposed over 200 feet of Glen Rose Limestone along the Hidden Valley fault. The 2002 flood created an outdoor classroom and laboratory for geologists of every specialty plus hydrologists, biologists, and petroleum engineers. Its attractions include strands where giant sauropods trekked over 100 million years ago, pursued by hungry theropods while pterodactyls cruised overhead. The subsequent formation of the Gorge Preservation Society opened the Canyon Lake Gorge for research and for conducted tours. As a docent for public tours, I have the pleasure of helping visitors to recognize and understand what they see, geological and otherwise.

Those who do not know what they see in wild places do not care about them or care for them. They can live without either wild things and wild places. To know them is to live with delight and to delight in caring for them.

- Richard Barnett



Featured Project

Wimberley Parks & Recreation Blue Hole Regional Park Project #604

The Blue Hole Regional Park, located along Cypress Creek, in the heart of Wimberley, is Hays County's newest park and has just completed Phase I of development with Phase II well underway. The initial development included many critical infrastructure improvements: the main park road entrance, lighted parking, a gatehouse, bath houses, stone pathways, picnic tables, access points to the water and native landscaping.

Our chapter is partnering with the City of Wimberley, the Jacob's Well Nature Center, and the Friends of Blue Hole for this project, which started in 2006. Please visit the Friends of Blue Hole [web page](#) to learn more about it.

Dell Hood is our chapter's leader for this project and he also serves on the Wimberley Parks Board. Dell and his wife, Gerin, retired from the United States Diplomatic Service and moved to Wimberley in 1995. They became Master Gardeners under Billy Kniffen, who was the county agriculture agent at that time. When Billy said he wanted to start a Master Naturalist chapter, they jumped at the opportunity. They worked with Billy to develop the curriculum for the first HCMN class. The class started in the fall of 1998 and graduated in 1999. Dell and Gerin enjoyed doing site visits



HCMNs at the May 21st workday.

with Billy that first year and have now become experts on oak wilt. They've had dozens of calls for consultations on the conditions of tree in the past 8 years.

Dell was the Chapter's Vice-President in 2001. He became President in 2002 and served for two years. He's been involved with the Blue Hole Park since the beginning and served on the stakeholders group that worked with the Wildflower Center to develop the master plan.

The project's goals include habitat restoration – removing non-native plants and replacing them with natives, and developing a corps of docents to help with public education about the park and the Wimberley environment. The education covers the Blanco River – Cypress Creek watersheds.

In May of this year, more than 70 volunteers, including over 20 HCMNs, worked on a major replanting effort. About one acre in the immediate area of the swimming hole was planted with approximately 3000 native grasses, shrubs, and trees.

The Highland Lakes Chapter, from the Marble Falls area, visited the Blue Hole project in June. Dell presented on the Blue Hole project, landscaping under the SITES initiative and grants received (<http://www.sustainablesites.org/>). This was followed by a tour of the park and an enjoyable picnic lunch. More than 50 people attended.



Highland Lakes Chapter visits.

Dell reports that with Phase II, there will be plenty of opportunities for the chapter to help, so please watch your email for the Volunteer Opportunities. Please contact Dell, dellgerin@austin.rr.com, to learn more.



Chapter News

Charro Ranch Park

Dear Hays County Master Naturalists -

Thank you so much for coming to help at Charro Ranch. You did an awesome job. The parking lot is now a parking lot! I know that is not the glamorous job that Master Naturalist trained us for, but managing how people access an area is important to preserving the rest of the park.



HCMNs at Charro Ranch Park.

It means a lot to M Lee and me that we can show the Dripping Springs Parks Commission that Master Naturalists are good people to work with. Below is the report I sent them with joy.

Charro Ranch Park Committee-

What a blast the Master Naturalists had at the workday this morning. It was a great turn out. All worked from 7:30 - 10:30 AM.

Dick McBride - San Marcos
Judy McBride - San Marcos

Lance Jones - San Marcos
Donna Browning - San Marcos
Gena Fleming - - San Marcos
Leah Laszewski - San Marcos
Helen Marsh - Austin / Driftwood
Mark Chonko - Wimberley
Leigh Sebera – Dripping Springs
Leigh Erin Jandle - Dripping Springs
M. Lee Brown - Dripping Springs
Anne Child - Dripping Springs

Everyone dug right in to clear out the parking lot area. Then of course we, M Lee and I, wanted to share the park with everyone so we walked up to the Solstice Circle with our tools. From there we struck out on the Oak Wilt trench down to the pond area and then through the trees. We worked at filling in the holes, trimming back the brush and leveling it off to make it into a trail. Then we looped back on Lucy's trails. All along the way we enjoyed grasses (nimbelwill, and others), plants (barrel and prickly pear cactus, two leaved senna, persimmon and of course chinaberry trees), and birds (doves, wrens, cardinals, painted buntings).

It would be good to get out there again with a front loader tractor and spread the rock piles. Yes I know it will take lots of work sifting out all the junk but we can use that junk to edge the parking lot. We also have lots more work to do to really level the trench into a trail and then to start restoration on the other trenches. We think just that one trench is all we'd like to have as a trail.

Anyway we all had fun and now a dozen people will go home and talk about Charro Ranch. Everyone thought this was a really neat park with lots of nice features. It was a good day for the park.

- Anne Child

On the Trail

Environmental Volunteering

While perusing Wikipedia recently, I came across the term environmental volunteering. I don't recall hearing the expression used in my MN trainee classes although I believe its time has come. Environmental volunteering refers to people who contribute time and talent towards environmental management, ecological restoration, and educating others about the natural environment. Consider it a niche in the broader spectrum of volunteering.

MN trainees need to perform 40 hours of volunteer service during 2011 to acquire their MN certification in November. A lot of us got started with a gung-ho attitude in the cool spring weather but have tapered off with the dog days of summer. With plenty of time left for fall volunteering, I asked some of my classmates what they are working on.

Kimberly Pankratz is trying to generate interest in the City of Kyle parkland on Dacy Lane where Bunton Branch Creek meanders through the area. She wants to begin with tree and plant identification, determination of invasive species, and basic litter clean up.

Dripping Springs resident **James Donohoe** found his forte at the Charro Ranch Park near his home where he can work on a number of projects independently and with others. He feels really good about making Charro a great community park. Other laudable projects that he vetted were John Knox Ranch, San Marcos Greenbelt, and the Wildflower Center. While each was worthwhile, Charro was the most suitable match between what he can offer and what people need.

Former teacher **Susan Richardson** tells us:

I had not realized how much I missed the classroom until I volunteered to deliver, and train in the care of, butterfly cages to the schools this spring. The children were so engaged and it was evident that they would carefully monitor the development of the cocoons and then the butterflies! Then I explained to other classes the water and pollution models. Again, the children were so interested and showed so much interest in their environment! I feel as though my small part is making a difference in our young generation, and furthering the goals of the Master Naturalist program. I haven't had this much fun in years! I am eager for more opportunities to share the wonders of our natural world.

Don Wallace grew up on a small ranch in North-Central Texas during the 1950's. Don states:

I recall my dad's concern about not enough surface water for our small herd of cattle. We only relied upon surface water and the drought of the 50's had no real meaning to me other than we were constantly shifting the herd from one pasture to the next. It was only within the past five years that I truly began to understand what my dad must have gone through during those terrible 50's. I had a 400 foot well dug on the ranch but it only produced brine and would have killed every animal and all the vegetation it came in contact. Unfortunately, most of the ground water in the surrounding counties is affected due to the perforation of the salt domes during the oil boom days of the early 20th Century.

I chose to volunteer at the Jacobs Well Natural Area as I saw it as an opportunity to be involved with issues related to ground water. My initial choices were to serve as a tour docent and to assist with grounds management. However, that all changed when I was asked to help with the 5th grade class of the near-by Jacobs Well Elementary School. I never saw myself as a teacher, but that one day of teaching "How Much Water Do You Use" was one of the most enjoyable experiences. After that day, I volunteered to help with the Austin Nature summer camps (ages 8-14) that visit Jacobs Well. I introduce myself as Paw Paw, and that I am a grandfather with grandkids their same age. It really seems like a good ice-breaker. These kids are so bright and energetic and have some great ideas how we can conserve water and protect the well, as well as some of the funniest and "off-the-wall" perspectives that leave me laughing all day. It is just such a fun day and gives me such a sense of accomplishment. In the future, I hope to volunteer to teach water conservation in our public schools, as I see education is key to the proper stewardship of our natural resources.

Wimberley resident and fellow trainee **Christine Byrne** has visions of a field of wildflowers that she can see from her front yard. She lives on Blue Hole Lane at the threshold of the fabled swimming hole and soon-to-be Blue Hole Park. Wimberley activist and HCMN **Dell Hood** tells us:

The City of Wimberley, The Design Workshop, and the Friends of Blue Hole hope to be able to schedule another "Plant Blue Hole Day" sometime in the fall, although a date can't be set yet. The two limiting factors are the extreme drought and the temporary slow-down in construction on more recreation facilities while fund raising continues. Whenever the day does come, the project will likely require as many willing hands as can be found, to plant native grasses, shrubs, flowers, and perhaps some trees, at sites to be determined in the park. The most probable sites will be at designated areas along the trail; at whatever sports fields or other developments have been completed; and perhaps at the swimming area to refresh whatever needs it after the first full season of use since the May planting. When a date has been set, the word will go out as it did for the May planting, through email lists, newspaper announcements, and word-of-mouth.

- Lucille Trail Kirkham

July Chapter Meeting

Flo Oxley, Director of Plant Conservation at the Wildflower Center, opened the evening with a brief overview of a project she is conducting to administer a survey to stakeholders of the San Marcos River regarding their knowledge of the resident endangered species. She asked for help from the Chapter to conduct her survey. Please contact Flo if you would like to help, oxley@wildflower.org. The project, #1106, is approved for volunteer hours.

Dr. Travis J. LaDuc, a herpetologist and assistant curator at the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Texas at Austin. His job at the University includes curation of the natural history collections as well as conducting outreach programs to a wide variety of educational and civic organizations throughout Texas. His research interests focus on the biodiversity and natural history of Texas reptiles and amphibians. Travis is also interested in all aspects of pit viper biology, including variation in venoms, population ecology, and systematics.

His talk covered a broad range of topics including his academic and career path, and some of his research projects. One project which he discussed in detail involved studying the strike speed and acceleration versus body size of rattlesnakes.

Chapter Committee Openings

The Chapter has two important committee chair positions open – the Host Committee and the Outreach Committee, and could use your help.

You may find a description of these committees in the [Chapter Operating Handbook](#), Section E, on our web page.

Please consider chairing or serving on either of these important positions. Contact Jeff Vasgaard, pres@haysmn.org, if you're interested.

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 2011 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

Tom Hausler

Here are a few photos from Tom's water trough. The Broad-winged Hawk comes daily for a bath and squirrel lunch; the young fox pup, raccoons, and ringtail kittens are learning were the water source is.



Broad-winged hawk. Photo by Tom Hausler.



Fox pups. Photo by Tom Hausler.



Raccoon and pups. Photo by Tom Hausler.



Ringtails. Photo by Tom Hausler.

Susan Nenney

Susan sends us this cute, but not funny, reminder to keep the water for wildlife flowing during this time of drought.



Trying to keep cool. Photo by Susan Nenney.

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.



Volunteer Opportunities

Charro Ranch Park, Project #1010

The Charro Ranch Park project is having monthly workdays, on the 2nd Saturday of the months. The next one will be on August 13th, starting at 8:00 am.

The plan is to start restoration of some of the oak wilt trenches. Please contact M. Lee Brown for more information: mleebrown1@gmail.com.

Please watch your emails for upcoming Volunteer Opportunities.



State and National News

Conservation in San Antonio is Saving More than Water

National Geographic reports on the effects of San Antonio's water conservation efforts:

"Who would believe that a translucent sightless amphibian that dwells only in dark underground caves could force a big Texas city to not only slash its water use but make water waste illegal? But the rare, four-inch Texas blind salamander has done pretty much just that – and spawned an unusual water story in San Antonio, where impressive conservation efforts are now being tested by one of the worst droughts in memory."

You can find the entire article [here](#).



Local News

Spring Lake Preserve and Wastewater: Where Do We Draw the Line?

The SMGA has an article about Sink Creek Wastewater Interceptor line.

"The issue of the Sink Creek Wastewater Interceptor line is complex. In some ways it is very simply about preserving the Spring Lake Natural Area as we, the citizens of San Marcos, wanted and promised to do. We voted for a bond to help fund conservation of the 251-acre area, and agencies worked together to raise a total of \$4 million for the project. Through a TPWD grant, an ADA accessible trail was recently completed, and educational kiosks, benches, a sundial, and a boardwalk were added to increase accessibility and educate visitors about the sensitivity and importance of Spring Lake Preserve."

You may read the 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