

# Hays County Master Naturalists NEWSLETTER



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

August, 2012

## Chapter Events

### *Chapter Board Meeting*

The next board meeting will be held on Thursday, August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 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](mailto:pres@haysmn.org), by July 31<sup>st</sup>.

### *Chapter Meeting*

The next chapter meeting will be held on Saturday, August 18<sup>th</sup>, at our Summer Social, from 10am to 2pm, at the Wimberley Community Center, [14068 Ranch Road 12](#), in Wimberley.

The speaker will be [Sky Lewey](#), President of the [Hill Country Alliance](#). She will talk about Riparian Management.

In addition, you will have a chance to meet and greet old and new members plus friends and family. Find out about fantastic volunteer possibilities along with getting to know more about Master Naturalists and their impact on Hays County.

If you come earlier (9:30 am) you can take a walk through the Patsy Glen Refuge and see the great bird watching stations in this small jewel besides the Community Center.

If you have announcements you would like to have presented at the chapter meeting or suggestions for topics/speakers, please contact Anne Child, [vp@haysmn.org](mailto:vp@haysmn.org).



## A Naturalist's View

*Jamie Kinscherff is a leader for the Canyon Gorge project and served for many years on the Training Committee.*

### **Anthropocene**

A geologic time chart will tell you that we live in the Holocene - the epoch that started at the end of the last ice age, 11,500 years ago. About a decade ago, Dutch chemist and Nobel prize

<i>Board of Directors</i>	
<b>President</b>	Larry Calvert
<b>Vice President</b>	Anne Child
<b>Secretary</b>	Chris Middleton
<b>Treasurer</b>	Beth Ramey
<b>Past-President</b>	Jeff Vasgaard
<b>State Representative</b>	Dixie Camp
<b>Training Committee</b>	Lin Weber
<b>Advanced Training Comm.</b>	Kim Ort
<b>Membership Committee</b>	Vicki Maxcy
<b>Web Master</b>	Herb Smith
<b>Newsletter Committee &amp; Editor</b>	Art Arizpe <a href="mailto:news@haysmn.org">news@haysmn.org</a>
<b>Outreach Committee</b>	Leah Laszewski
<b>Calendar Committee</b>	Tom Hausler
<b>Host Committee</b>	Helen Bowie Eva Gomez
<b>Historian</b>	Charles Maxcy
<b>Volunteer Service</b>	Art Arizpe
<b>AgriLife Agent</b>	Richard Parrish
<b>TP&amp;WD Rep</b>	Lee Ann Linam

winner Paul Cruzen coined the term Anthropocene - the age of Man. Earth has endured five major extinction events in the last half billion years and now is enduring the first caused by a single species.

Let's travel five million years into the future and pretend we are geologists and stratigraphers. In sedimentary rocks of the future many things will show up as markers of time. Plastic, for example, will mark the midpoint of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. That was when it came into common use and we started throwing it away. Now about 2.5 million plastic bottles are thrown away each hour. Will we see evidence in other ways? Sure, think of scientists who drill and study core samples in sediments and ice. The pollen record can be a marker of ecologic change. Think of the diversity of plants and grasses in our own Midwest before the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. After that, species diversity plummeted and food crops such as corn, wheat, and soybeans dominate the pollen record. Now, about 38% of earth's ice-free land is in agricultural use. In the next 50 years we will have to grow as much food for humans as we have in the last 8,000 years. Biologist E.O. Wilson has determined that humans account for 100 times more biomass than any large animal species that has ever walked the earth- that's a lot of groceries! Five million years from now, the paths of streams, rivers and creeks that are now active and flowing will be easily traced by following the layers of plastic and aluminum mixed with the sediments.

Those who study ice core samples have recorded a large increase in atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> in just the last thirty years. This affects many things, not the least of which are coral reefs. Corals can only make their calcareous skeletons when the surrounding seawater is within a specific temperature range and acidity level. As oceans continue to absorb increasing levels of CO<sub>2</sub>, the acidity rises along with the temperature and corals will cease to exist. According to Ove Hoegh-Guldberg of the University of Queensland, this will happen in the next 20-30 years. Overfishing and unchecked pollution will contribute to the collapse. We may not be able to stop it, so maybe it's time to start planning for what's next. Millions of humans get huge portions of their nutrition from the life in these reefs. Coral reefs will be the first ecosystem to succumb to the Anthropocene - pretty sad...

Last month in the N.Y. Times there was an article by science writer Jim Robbins. He points out that our failing to be good stewards of the natural world can come back to haunt us in unexpected ways. Most epidemics including AIDS, Ebola, West Nile, SARS, Lyme disease and hundreds more that have occurred in the last several decades don't just happen. They are due to the impact of Man; 60% of emerging infectious diseases that affect humans start in animals. Two thirds of those originate in wildlife. AIDS, for example, was first transmitted to humans in the 1920's from chimpanzees when Bush hunters in Africa killed and ate them. Lyme disease is the result of the reduction and fragmentation of east coast forests into suburban neighborhoods and farmland. Predator species were driven away or killed, resulting in a five-fold increase in the population of white-footed mice - huge reservoirs for the Lyme bacteria and a favorite of tick larvae that carry the disease to humans. West Nile virus came here from Africa and spread easily since a favorite host is the American robin, which we find on our lawns and fields. Mosquitos, who spread the disease to us, find robins especially appealing. Our actions seem to increase species that play a "reservoir role." The tales of how we have affected our own health by our treatment of the natural world are many....

The scope of the problem is huge and complex. Human population is expected to peak in about 100 years at 10 billion before it is expected to decline. Much of the growth will be in places like sub-Saharan Africa where the climate easily supports bacteria and viruses and where destruction of eco-systems goes seemingly unchecked - a frightening scenario! By mapping human encroachment we can now predict where the next outbreak might happen. A 4% increase in deforestation of rainforest sparks a 50% increase in malaria! (Go figure.) Remember bird flu, swine flu?

The bottom line is education and awareness. There are very smart scientists that are paying close attention to animal borne diseases that have or may spread to humans. We Master Naturalists are ambassadors for sustainable practices and good stewardship. Indeed we are living in the Anthropocene, but together we make a difference in how folks see and treat the world around them. Thanks for all you do.

- Jamie Kinscherff



## Featured Project

### *Chaparral Wildlife Management Area Project #807*

The Chaparral Wildlife Management Area Project was last featured in the [May 2010 issue](#) of this newsletter. Please refer to that article for more background.

The Chaparral WMA is in LaSalle and Dimmit Counties and is located eight miles west of Artesia Wells on F.M. 133. It contains 15,200 acres of South Texas brush country. The area was purchased by the State of Texas in 1969 as a wildlife research and management facility. It was enclosed by a deer-proof fence in 1983 in order to provide a controlled environment for wildlife research. The Chaparral WMA's web page is [here](#), and a map is available [here](#).

Steve Carter, the chapter's project leader provides us with an update:

"The Chaparral Wildlife Management Area continues to be a project that I find tremendously interesting and one in which I enjoy contributing my time, but I always come away with a great deal more than I give.

In the past, I have been able to assist biologists at the Chap with some incredibly interesting activities such as placing tracking devices in rattlesnakes (see photo). On my most recent trip to the Chap, I was allowed to assist one of the Chaparral technicians (David Vickers) and a new biologist (Sarah) in the removal of brain stems from mature deer (see photo). This is incredibly important to



*Placing a tracking device. Photo provided by Steve Carter.*

the state-wide effort to identify the possible presence of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). Incidentally, I am sorry to report that just a few weeks ago the first two cases of CWD in Texas were discovered near El Paso along the New Mexico border.

The Chaparral Wildlife Management Area is essentially a 15,000 acre "Research Center." Because of the eight foot perimeter fences (and cross fences) and a no-supplemental-feeding policy, there is truly no place else in Texas like the Chap.

Valuable information is being gathered to study the effects of the massive fire that swept across the Chap on March 14, 2008 (burning 95% of the area) combined with the intense drought conditions that have taken its toll on this area as well as the entire State of Texas.

In order to lower the risk of another devastating fire in the near future, the Parks and Wildlife Service did enter a grazing lease on this 15,000 + acres for approximately 8 months of 2011. The 800 steer calves were rotated from pasture to pasture on a regular basis. It seems they did a great job of grazing down the buffel grass (that was present when this property was purchased) and aerating the soil so forbs and native grasses can get a "head start."



*Removing a deer's brain stem to look for signs of Chronic Wasting Disease. Photo provided by Steve Carter.*

Our lives change daily and so does the life of the Chap. David Synatzske, a 40-year veteran with the Division and a biologist whose footprints are figuratively and literally ALL OVER THE CHAP, will be retiring effective August 31, 2012. He will be sorely missed! There are also impending mineral activities taking place on the Chap. This WMA is in the heart of the Eagle Ford Shale exploration area and only time will tell what impact these activities will have.

Stay tuned ... change is coming."

- Steve Carter



## Chapter News

### *President's Message*

Planning ahead!

I know it is hot and we have slowed down the activities just so you will get the most out of our plans. Once the summer is over things really kick into high gear and I wanted to be sure you got some key activities on your calendar so we won't miss seeing you. Here are the items for your calendar:

Saturday August 18<sup>th</sup> is our second annual HCMN Chapter Social. It will be inside at the Wimberley Community Center from 10 am until 2 pm, so the weather will not be a factor. We'll have time to socialize, to look at several projects, some advanced training, and some more

socializing. You will get an RSVP e-mail which will give you the details, ask for your meal preference, and let us know how many guests you will have. HCMN Chapter members' meals are free but there will be a fee for guests. Watch for the e-mail and let us know ASAP what your plans are. The more the merrier.

Friday October 26<sup>th</sup> - Sunday October 28<sup>th</sup> will be the Texas Master Naturalist State Conference. This year it will be in Navasota, TX at Camp Allen. I will soon get an announcement about registration, and I will send that to you immediately. If this year is like the past years, you have to register as soon as registration is opened because there are so many MNs wanting to go, that the reservations slots get filled up very early. If you do get registered please let me know right away.

Saturday November 17<sup>th</sup> beginning at 6 pm we will have our annual Chapter meeting and Gala. If you wish to get your recertification pin at the Gala remember you must have your 40 volunteer hours, your 8 Advanced training hours, and have your 2012 dues paid by the end of October (Most of you paid the 2012 dues either at last year's Gala or by the end of 2011). The Gala also is our graduation ceremony. This is a really fun event and I'd hate to miss seeing you there.

- Larry Calvert

### *July 4 Kazoos and Kudos*

"Be nature's hero" was the call-to-action to parade goes on July 4<sup>th</sup> in Wimberley.

The July 4<sup>th</sup> Master Naturalist parade entry was equal parts outreach and camaraderie with a dash of chapter pride thrown in. Teamwork was the glue that made it go. Chapter members and trainees helped with planning, design, artwork, float construction and decoration including some who couldn't be on hand for the actual parade.

In addition to those who helped out ahead of time, forty-four volunteers (!) braved the July 4<sup>th</sup> heat to ride the float, carry the banner, provide percussion, distribute bookmarks or march in the band. Larry Calvert's lovingly constructed float was towed by the Hays County Agrilife Extension truck with agent Richard Parrish at the wheel, and followed by our finely tuned Marching Kazoo Band. Percussion by Dixie Camp and (KAPS drum instructor) kept us altogether. The crowd loved it.



*Kazoos a'going. Photo by Lance Jones.*



*Our chapter's float. Photo by Lance Jones.*

We didn't win an official prize but we far and away had more participants than any other organization.

My sunhat is off to all of you for your enthusiastic participation in this slightly wacky – but well-received – outreach event.

Kudos to Lance Jones for this compilation of parade photos  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/26239225@N04/sets/72157630427367882/>

Thanks for your great team spirit and undaunted dedication to outreach.

- Susan Nenny

### *New Board Members*

I am pleased to announce that the Board has approved my recommendations of **Vicki Maxcy** for Membership Chair and **Kim Ort** for Advanced Training Chair.

I welcome both Vicki and Kim to their new roles!

Many thanks to **Beth Ramey**, who continues serving as Chapter Treasurer, and **Becky Northcut**, for serving the chapter so well!

- Larry Calvert

### *Actor of the Year goes to ...*

*Heterodon*, meaning "large rear teeth", and *platirhinos*, meaning pig nose, comprise the latin name for the Eastern Hog Nosed snake. My first encounter with the Hog Nosed snake, ironically, was following a Saturday morning Master Naturalist class. I was driving from San Marcos to Wimberley via Fulton Ranch road and came across a large snake lying in the middle of the road, sunning itself. Curiosity got the best of me and I had to stop and take a good look (fortunately, there isn't much traffic on this road on an early Saturday morning). At the time, I didn't know what kind of snake this was, but I did notice that it was HUGE, or so it seemed at the time. Sitting in the safety of my vehicle, I ran through a mental checklist to confirm to myself that it wasn't a poisonous snake and once I was satisfied that it wasn't, I got out of my car to investigate further. I'm NOT one of those people who will start poking or messing with a critter to see what it will or will not do, so I just kept a comfortable distance and observed the snake. It wasn't bothered in the least by me walking around and looking at it, so I took a few moments to watch.



*Catching some rays! Photo Lisa Kay.*

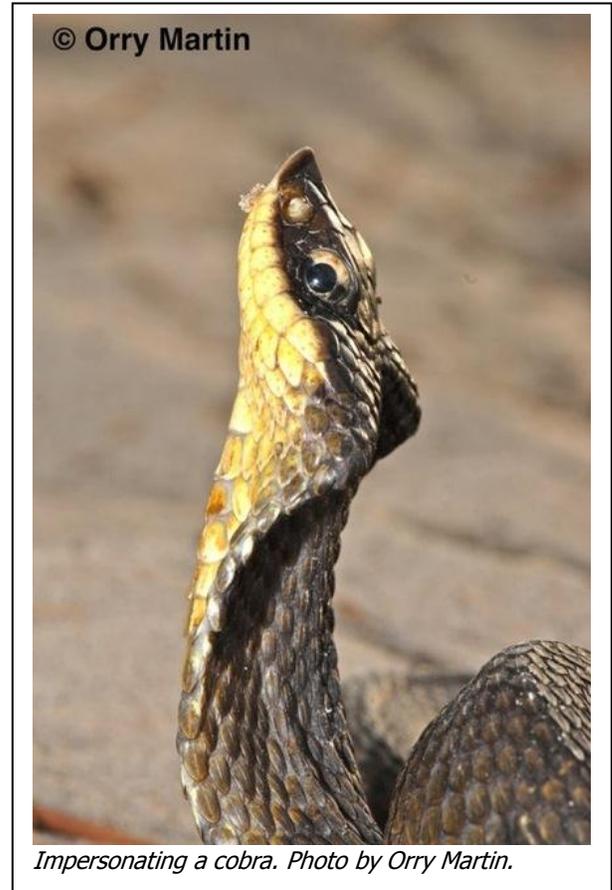
The first thing I noticed about this snake was that it was very thick! I would estimate that this particular guy was about two and a half to three feet long. It was brownish tan and had darker oval spots on its back. I immediately noticed the shape of its face as being unlike any snake

I'd ever seen before. Since I wasn't going to prod or touch the snake, I bid it farewell and went on my way.

Of course, as soon as I got home, I had to look online and in my snake book to see what kind of critter this actually was. The head gave it away immediately. It was surprising to me to read about all of this snake's defense mechanisms considering the snake I had observed was not bothered at all by me (however, I did stay a good four feet away from it). Since that time, I have seen a few more Hog Nosed snakes out and about and their behavior has been a little bit different. The first line of defense for the Hog Nose is that it will raise its head and neck and flatten out and hiss like a cobra would do. If it continues to be aggravated, it will then go through the motions of striking. However, the snake does not open his mouth when striking so if it does hit anything, it is going to be more of a head butt than a snake bite. Lastly, if that doesn't work, then it will open its mouth and roll over and play dead. If someone were to pick the snake up, it would be limp to further convince that it was dead. But, once put back on the ground, it immediately turns itself over again to play dead, not realizing that by rolling over again, it is showing that it is not dead! When playing dead, it also can secrete a strong musk odor produced by its cloacal gland near the end of its tail, giving further validity to its deadness.

The Eastern Hog Nosed snake inhabits the eastern part of the United States, including Texas. Unfortunately, because of the different ways that they "bluff", they are often killed by humans who are not educated about the antics that this snake will use to defend itself. To make matters more confusing, they can be brown, orange, black, gray, and variations of other colors as well. They can have markings on them that are also varied or they can have no markings at all. The only common physical trait between the snakes is the pig shaped head that they all have. However, while Hog Nosed snakes have a very mild venom, they will very rarely ever bite.

The Hog feeds mainly on toads and has immunity to the toxins that the toad secretes. When a toad is threatened, it will blow itself up to make it appear larger than it is. The snake's large rear fangs are able to puncture the skin of the toad, thereby deflating it and making it feasible



to swallow. It will also eat other small reptiles and some small mammals but its main diet consists of the toad.

Females mate and lay around 15-25 eggs in the Spring and early Summer. Eggs are left in depressions in the ground usually under a log or rock. The female will then leave her eggs, not caring for them or for the young when hatched. The eggs will hatch between one and two months after being laid. The hatchlings are approximately six to eight inches in length. It will take about two years for the hatchlings to become sexually mature. Females are typically larger than males and can get up to four feet in length. Males usually don't get over three feet long.

This snake is not endangered in the United States, though it is on the endangered list in eastern Canada. Some people like to keep these snakes as pets in captivity, though they do not do well out of the wild because they do not adapt very easily to eating a mice diet.

By observing these snakes, and then doing a bit of research on them, I am once again reminded that Mother Nature is truly a wonder! Youtube offers some wonderful videos of the Eastern Hog Nose in its various stages of self-defense. In my pre Naturalist life, I would have NEVER even approached a snake to look at it unless it was behind glass. I'm so grateful to be receiving an education and exposure that the Master Naturalist program provides all of us! Happy Naturing!!

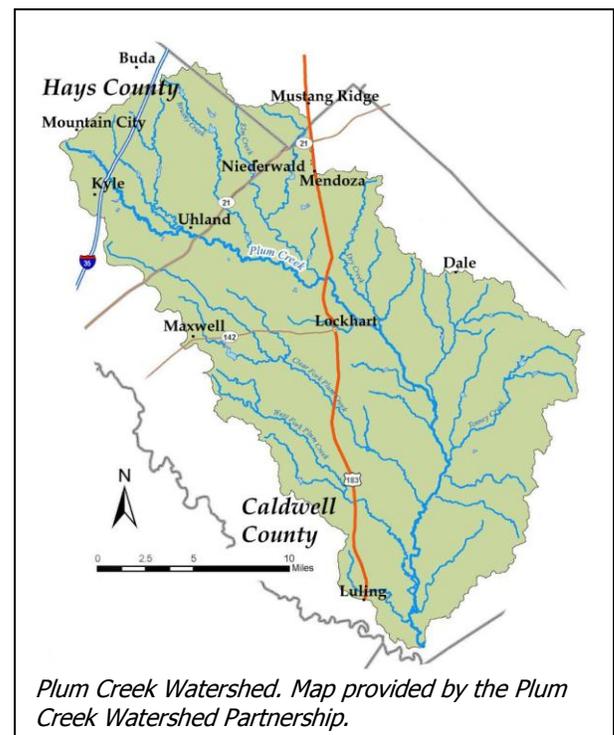
- Lisa Kay

## *July Chapter Meeting*

Nick Dornak, the Plum Creek Watershed Coordinator presented "An Introduction to the Plum Creek Watershed Protection Plan".

The Plum Creek Watershed is 52 miles long and drains an area of 397 square miles. Plum Creek begins just north of Kyle and flows southeast through Caldwell County before joining the San Marcos River.

It was placed on the state's List of Impaired Waters in 2004 and was slated to be placed under a Total Maximum Daily Load plan which is an agency-driven water improvement plan which places restrictions on the maximum amount of pollutants that a body of water can receive and still meet water quality standards. An alternative way to improve water quality is a Watershed Protection Plan, which is community-driven and voluntary in nature. It relies on education, outreach, and engagement with the community and stakeholders to work together to improve water quality. Watershed Protection Plans must also meet EPA guidelines.



The next PCWP Steering Committee meeting will be held on August 9<sup>th</sup>, from 6:30pm to 9:00pm at the Lockhart State Park.

You can learn more about the Plum Creek Watershed Protection Plan at their [web page](#).

### *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](http://haysmn.org) web site and look for the Forum application in the menu.

Please let Herb Smith, [web@haysmn.org](mailto: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 are due by August 5<sup>th</sup>. Please submit your reports of Volunteer and Advanced Training hours by using the friendly report forms at [www.haysmn.org](http://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](mailto: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!

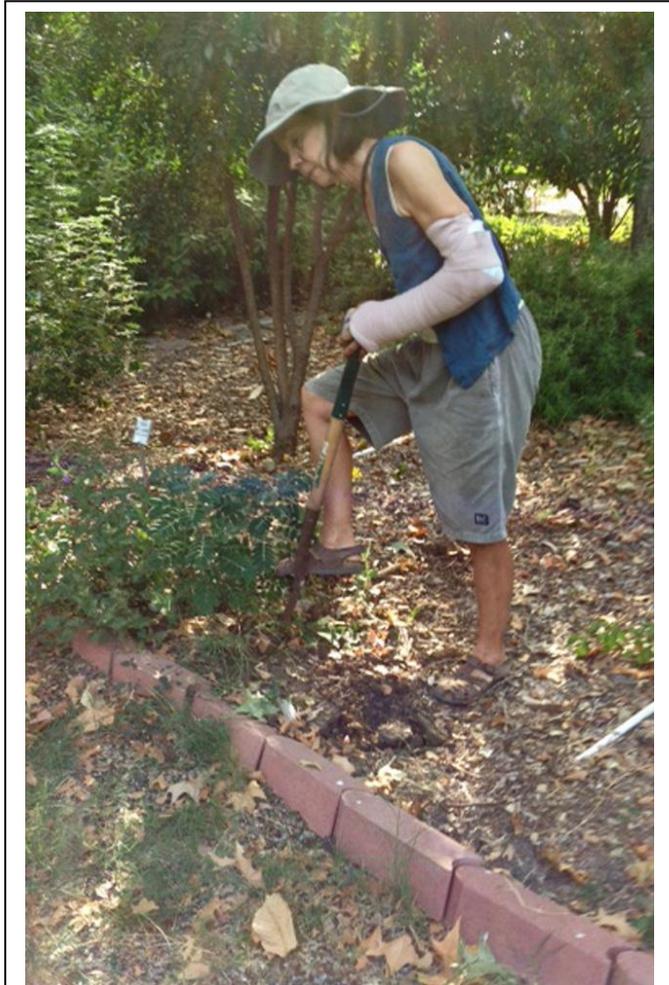
Please send your comments, news items, and photos to [news@haysmn.org](mailto:news@haysmn.org).

## Members News

### *Ann Whitus*

**Judy McBride** sends a photo showing *true dedication!* **Ann Whitus**, who is in this year's training class, didn't let a broken wrist slow her down.

Thanks Ann, for showing us how it's done! And thanks to Judy for sharing!



*Ann Whitus volunteering at the San Marcos Nature Center.  
Photo by Judy McBride.*

*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](mailto: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 Kim Ort, the AT Committee Chair, at [atcom@haysmn.org](mailto:atcom@haysmn.org).*



## Volunteer Opportunities

### *Wimberley Outdoor Educators, Project #809*

The Wimberley Outdoor Educators are gearing up for the new school year. They will have a planning session on August 22<sup>nd</sup> at 9 am at Jackie Mattice's house. The planning as well as the actual events all count as volunteer hours.

The first field experience will be for 2nd graders at Jacob's Well Elementary School outdoor education facility. At the moment it looks like it will be during the week of October 15<sup>th</sup>.

The Middle School field trip to Blue Hole is November 13<sup>th</sup> (Tuesday).

Contact Jackie Mattice, [jrm44313@yahoo.com](mailto:jrm44313@yahoo.com), if you are interested in participating and she will send you directions to her house.

*Please watch your emails for upcoming Volunteer Opportunities.*



## State and National News

### *The New Lawn: Shaggy, Chic and Easy on the Mower*

The Wall Street Journal has an article about the latest trend in lawns:

"What if the grass in your yard was supposed to be that long?

Pushing back against perfect lawns, some homeowners are adopting a shaggy-chic look for their properties, planting a long-haired meadow in the backyard, and even in front.

Meadows are naturally pretty and abuzz with blooms and butterflies, but their real appeal is this: Once the meadow is established, mowing is recommended just once a year."

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



## Local News

### *More Feral Hog Sightings*

From the [SMGA web page](#):



We are noticing increasing feral hog activity in our natural areas. Please report such activity to Melani Howard [mhoward@sanmarcostx.gov](mailto:mhoward@sanmarcostx.gov). For more information on feral hog management, the Wildlife and Fisheries unit of Texas AgriLife Extension Service released four new videos

directed at landowners. The links to the videos are below.

History, Biology, and Population Dynamics - <http://youtu.be/GDDuYu0uiqM>

Why do Landowners need to Control Populations? - [http://youtu.be/FwjS059\\_gjg](http://youtu.be/FwjS059_gjg)

Control Techniques and Regulations - <http://youtu.be/L9F2clhrOPY>

Exclusion Fencing around Feeders - <http://youtu.be/1uKbZQ9IYIA>



## Links to Chapter Sponsors and Partners

### *Sponsors:*

Texas Master Naturalist -- State Website -- [masternaturalist.tamu.edu](http://masternaturalist.tamu.edu)

Texas AgriLife Extension -- [texasextension.tamu.edu](http://texasextension.tamu.edu)

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department -- [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/)

### *Agencies of Interest:*

Bamberger Ranch -- [bambergerranch.org](http://bambergerranch.org)

Native Plant Society of Texas -- [www.npsot.org](http://www.npsot.org)

San Marcos Greenbelt Alliance -- [www.smgreenbelt.org](http://www.smgreenbelt.org)

San Marcos River Foundation -- [www.sanmarcosriver.org](http://www.sanmarcosriver.org)

Texas Outdoor Women's Network -- [www.townsanmarcos.org](http://www.townsanmarcos.org)

Texas Cooperative Extension -- Sea Grant Program -- [texas-sea-grant.tamu.edu](http://texas-sea-grant.tamu.edu)

Texas Forest Service -- [txforestservice.tamu.edu](http://txforestservice.tamu.edu)

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers -- [www.usace.army.mil](http://www.usace.army.mil)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service -- [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov)

U.S.D.A. Natural Resource Conservation Service -- [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov)

Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority -- [www.gbra.org](http://www.gbra.org)

### *Partners*

Austin Nature Day -- [www.austinnatureday.org](http://www.austinnatureday.org)

Gorge Preservation Society -- [www.canyongorge.org](http://www.canyongorge.org)

Hill Country Photography Club -- [hcphotoclub.org](http://hcphotoclub.org)

LBJ Wildflower Center -- [www.wildflower.org](http://www.wildflower.org)

San Marcos Nature Center -- [www.ci.san-marcos.tx.us/departments/parks/Nature\\_Center.html](http://www.ci.san-marcos.tx.us/departments/parks/Nature_Center.html)