

Hays County Master Naturalists NEWSLETTER

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

February, 2013



Chapter Events

Chapter Board Meeting

The next board meeting will be held on Thursday, February 14th, 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 Art Arizpe, pres@haysmn.org, by February 7th.

Chapter Meeting

The February Chapter meeting will take place on February 28th at the Episcopal Church of the Holy Spirit, 301 Hays Country Acres Road, in Dripping Springs from 6:30pm to 8:00pm. The lecture on the Barton Springs Salamander and the captive breeding program will be presented by Dee Ann Chambers. A map is available [here](#).

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



President's Message

Recently, at the Charro Ranch Park Bird Viewing Station ribbon-cutting, I listened as M. Lee Brown gave a very nice talk on the project and how she got involved. She related that as a young girl, about 7, she was in her bedroom and looked out the window. She saw a beautiful bird - blue, green, yellow, and red. It was a male Painted Bunting! She remembers it vividly and wanted to find out more about it. She says that at that moment she became a naturalist.

What a lovely memory! A naturalist can be defined as someone who studies the natural environment, generally with a broad range of interests. Can you remember when you first became a naturalist? I'm not talking about when you became a Master Naturalist, although maybe the two events are related. When did you first become aware of the natural world, its beauty, complexity, fragility and importance? That's when you became a naturalist.

Board of Directors

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That is why I'm particularly proud of all the work our Chapter does with young people. We're planting seeds. They may sprout immediately or they may lay dormant for a long time, but remember we're creating new naturalists. I love it!

I want to share a few highlights with you from our recently completed Annual Report to the state organization. We trained 37 new volunteers last year and have trained a total of 350 since the chapter began. We conducted over 10,600 Volunteer hours last year and conducted over 72,300 hours, cumulatively. Our members obtained over 1,550 Advanced Training hours last year and have achieved over 14,500 hours, cumulatively. We conducted 32 Outreach events last year and over 4,000 members of the public attended. That's more of the seed-planting I mentioned.

I'm very proud of and grateful for our chapter's accomplishments; all due to your hard work, dedication, and support. Thank you!

Art Arizpe, President



A Naturalist's View

My journey into the natural world began when I was a child growing up in San Antonio. I didn't necessarily appreciate it then, but as I've grown older, I now cherish those memories. To the outsider we appeared to be a typical middle class family. However, we were really a very low income family and because of this, we didn't do expensive activities. I grew up on the northwest side of San Antonio. This gave us a lot of different places to go and see that were just short drives away. So, for entertainment on the weekends, my parents would pack us up in the station wagon and head north or west to the beautiful Texas Hill Country. In the summer, our mission was to find a swimming hole. Being an adult now, I look back and wonder why we never got in trouble for trespassing because we had to have been on someone's land! We usually found our way to rivers and streams and we would park, swim, have a picnic, and enjoy the day. We would find snakes, tad poles, fish, animals, and the like. I even accidentally stepped in quicksand one time! Now, that is not an activity that I'd like to repeat!

My maternal grandparents also had a big influence on me and the outdoor world. They always had land. They lived south of SA in an area which was flat, hot, dusty, and had terrible tasting water. Oh, how my brother and I hated going out to spend the weekends with them in the summer. It was hot and my grandfather didn't believe in air conditioning (even though they had one). He also was always worried about running out of water, so taking a bath meant filling the tub with about 5 inches of water (which smelled like nasty well water) and trying to bathe in that. No doubt that we were in bed by 9:00 and up at 5:30 to start helping with the chores. First came feeding all the chickens; this was one of my most fearful things to do because there was a mean rooster who always chased me. Then, it was out to milk the few cows. Following that, it was time to feed the pigs, and then head out to the pastures to drop hay for the cows. Ironically, my 3 year old self began to think of the barn as a refuge and to this day, I find comfort in barns; their smells and textures invoke such a sense of security. For lunch and supper, we ALWAYS had to drink fresh cow's milk. It was thick and not always real cold and my brother and I could not believe that my parents left us there knowing that we would have to deal with some of these travesties! I learned how to churn butter and was

taught how to wring a chicken's neck, though I never put that particular skill into practice. Chores would usually be finished about 10:00 am or so and then we would usually resort to spending lots of time on the front porch, sweating to death. But, being the kids that we were, we often went exploring out on their land and found all sorts of interesting things to keep us busy. One time, we even "accidentally" burned half a pasture up and nearly sent our grandfather to the hospital with a heart attack. Of course, looking back now, I realize that we were just doing a controlled burn!

Another thing that we were exposed to as we got a little older was the garden that my dad so lovingly grew. It was a pretty big garden; I'm guessing probably 40 by 40 feet or so. He eventually decided he wanted to grow cucumbers in the field adjacent to our lot because he wanted to learn how to make pickles. Here is what happens when you plant about 10 rows of pickling cucumbers: They GROW. And then they GROW some more. Before you know it, you wake up in the middle of the night and totally believe that those vines are snaking the walls and are going to strangle you in your sleep. But, I digress. My dad was so enthusiastic about his garden that he would bring us out to help plant things and then bring us out again to eat baby carrots right out of the ground (after rinsing of course). My love for heirloom tomatoes started then too and it was a pretty common activity for me to grab the salt shaker and head out to the garden to eat them, right off the vine, just as I would eat an apple. The smells that wafted about in the garden were just pure bliss.

Once I became a young adult, I left the natural world for a while. I was ready to forge my own path with school, working, and parties. It wasn't until I took horse riding lessons while living in the Dallas area about 8 years ago that I started to feel nature's magic calling me again. My Friday night routine for at least 3 years was to leave work an hour early and head to the barn. I'd always be there at least an hour before my lesson started and I'd go out and hang with all of the horses and then bring mine in to get him saddled and ready. Horse smell is another smell that is absolutely divine to me. To this day, I can have contact with a horse and just bury my nose in it's furry body and inhale deeply! We spent very little of our lesson time in the arena. There was about 50 fenced acres around us so there were plenty of places to ride. By this time, Mother Nature was starting to tickle my fancy again. We would ride under a full moon or pitch black skies through the woods and pastures. After a stressful workweek it was always so relaxing to ride outside and smell the nighttime aromas. Most times, it just smelled green and alive. Dew would begin to form which only intensified the smells. I would always leave the barn and head back home with my windows rolled all the way down, enjoying those country roads and the night time breezes.

Fast forward five years, and we made the decision that it was time to get out of the concrete jungle and move back HOME. While I didn't return to San Antonio, I did return to the Hill Country, which in the past had always just been day trips away from the city. However, by our second day here, I felt more at home than I have at any other time in my life. Our move took place in July of 2009. It was HOT. There had been no rain in forever. We were renting a home on 28 acres and it filled me with wonder. I do have to admit, though, that it sometimes freaked me out a bit. For example, after being here just a few nights, I walked outside and turned the porch light on only to see what must have been a Godzilla moth hanging around. The walking sticks were obviously on steroids. Being out in the country, we also suddenly became aware of different critters that would appear out of nowhere when we least expected them. It was mainly turkeys, possums, foxes, and of course, deer. And it seemed it would never rain and never cool off. It was hot of course in Dallas too, but this was a scorching, relentless desert heat.

Fortunately, the weather cooled off in early Fall and we started getting a lot of rain. After that happened, EVERYTHING changed. It was like Spring again with everything growing like crazy and turning green before our eyes. This time period sparked my true awakening to the beautiful nature that was just everywhere around us. The stars in Dripping Springs were nothing like I'd ever seen before. I could see the Milky Way! I started day tripping almost every weekend, driving all over our region; Enchanted Rock, Lost Maples State Park, Pedernales State Park, back roads, and then, even more backroads. I started carrying a camera with me everywhere I went. Seeing things through the camera lens was also another perspective. It helped to keep me immersed in the moment and more aware of everything that was around me.

So, during the past 4 years, I've been having a love affair with the Texas Hill Country. It's a harsh land we live on here and it most certainly has its share of tragedy, death, and suffering. During severe drought periods, it is sometimes hard to see any hope on the horizon.

When I heard that there was such a thing as a Master Naturalist class, I became obsessed about getting into the class. Fortunately for me, I got in the first time I applied. My appreciation of learning about our natural world continues to increase for me exponentially as time goes on. Once in class, I KNEW without a doubt that that was exactly where I belonged. I always left class feeling so elated about the evening and so proud that I was part of an organization that was teaching how to maintain and restore and enjoy all of the nature around us. Then, the more I learned, the more I wanted to teach; this was mainly to my family and friends wherein I usually started a conversation by saying, "Did you know...." Even if they don't always appear interested, I still feel compelled to continue on educating whenever I can.

All I really know is that I can never return to the big city. This is where I belong. This is God's Country and I feel lucky to be a part of it. "Country roads, take me home...."

- Lisa Kay



Featured Project

The Friends of Okra Garden at The Dripping Springs YMCA

.....a work in progress

In the Fall of 2012, a group of Hays County citizens came together to commemorate our dear friend, Dr. Charles O'Dell, who had passed away the previous February. We decided that building a garden in his honor would be the perfect memorial. Charles was a father, a husband, a bon vivant, a Hays County Master Naturalist, an agricultural economist, a local good governance activist and a wonderful friend to so many in this area. Losing our friend and mentor Charles was like a vast library had burned down, and those of us who had depended on Charles' wisdom, humor and advice, found ourselves often wondering if there was something tangible we could do to honor our friend. Creating a garden, especially one like this that will be open to everyone in the community, has given us a way to grieve and

create at the same time. Charles' wife, Susan, told us that his favorite vegetable was okra and his old pickup truck had always sported an "Okra Is Okay" bumper-sticker. We decided to call ourselves, this merry band of friends and garden volunteers, the "Friends of Okra." We knew Charles would find this amusing.

The YMCA, along with the City of Dripping Springs, is in the midst of a growth spurt, and as part of their master plan, they offered us a large area near the gymnastics building to plan and create a community garden. Part of the site was a small, but very dense, woodland, and as we began to chop our way through the underbrush, we cleared out little cedars, marked native trees and other plants that we were careful not to damage, and we created a lovely pathway leading to a charming, social space inside these little woods that will soon be home to several limestone benches. We cut down and hauled

away numerous large dead trees, reduced the number of cedars, eradicated (we hope) the poison ivy we encountered, cleaned out metal and concrete pieces we found and made this a place where we would end our work days "inhabiting." We had rediscovered a beautiful natural area that had been lonely and disused for many years. There will eventually be a scenic walking path winding throughout the entire YMCA property, perhaps connecting someday to a larger walking trail throughout the city, and this walking path will meander through and around our garden. There is now talk of creating similar garden spots here and there on the "Y" property as a value to people visiting the YMCA and perhaps wishing to find a quiet spot to read, meditate, or just rest from their workouts.

After creating our woodland garden, we began working on the sunny garden areas adjacent to it. Finding an old stone wall on the property that is slated for demolition, we were allowed to repurpose this beautiful, weathered native stone for our garden borders and pathways. Each workday now, we haul several trailers full of large rocks and little by little, our garden is taking shape. Soon, we will add compost, rice hulls and sand to our garden beds, then plant with native and adapted trees, shrubs and flowers. Our future plans include a community garden where local citizens can adopt and grow their own food and flowers and we hope that other social and civic groups in town will follow our lead and adopt parts of "our" garden as their own, perhaps donating benches, trees and other plants to commemorate their fallen heroes or



Garden Gang. From left to right: Terry Tull, Margaret Mills, Kathi Thomas, Erin Foster, Andrew Backus, Carolyn Howe, Roger Kew, Bill Howe. Photo courtesy of Susan Cook.

just for fun. It is our hope that the work we have begun will continue into an indefinite future, making for a beautiful public garden space for the Dripping Springs community.

In recent weeks, our original band of volunteers has been joined by several Hays County Master Naturalists and we hope this trend will continue, as there are no better folks for bringing talent, motivation and experience to any project than MN's.

Although our garden is a work in progress, and like any garden will never really be "finished," we are planning to have a celebration on March 2nd, Texas Independence Day at 2 pm at the garden site. We hope to have lots of wonderful things planted by then, our limestone benches installed and plenty to eat and drink that day. Everyone is invited to join us. Bring a dish, or just bring yourself. We will continue to work on this garden, though likely not every weekend like we have done since last fall, so please consider adding this project to your volunteer list. We are a fun group, and this garden project has so much potential to be an asset to the community. The sky is the limit and we invite everyone to join us in this endeavor. Since we are pushing hard to have a garden to celebrate at our March 2nd party, we would love to have some more volunteers in February. We will be hauling more rocks, digging beds, planting, mulching, installing rustic limestone benches and enjoying one another while we work.



Young American Gothic. From Left to right - Maggie Akers and Molly Akers. Used with permission of their father, James Akers. Photo courtesy of Susan Cook.

We meet every Sunday at 1 pm and we only work a couple of hours each week, but we get a lot done in a small amount of time and go home knowing we have accomplished amazing things. By the way, in addition to labor, we welcome donations of plants, trees, mulch and compost. We are going from zero to gorgeous in record time, so come and play with us this Sunday!

- Susan Cook

Contact:
Susan Cook
Majesta484@aol.com

HCMN project #1204.

FYI: The Dripping Springs YMCA is just behind the DS Home Depot and is located just south of the intersection of RR 12 and Highway 290 West. Entrance is from either RR 12 or Rob Shelton Drive off of 290 West. The Friends of Okra garden is at the back of the property, just north of the tennis courts, next to the gymnastics building.

If you lead or work on a project that you would like to see covered, please contact me with your ideas.

- Lisa Kay, news@haysmn.org



HCMN Directory Alert!

We are planning to update the current HCMN directory soon after the first 2013 training session (2/5/13). Please send any changes to the current directory to LCalvert2@gmail.com. Most of you that have a current directory picked it up at the Gala in November or at the January Chapter meeting. If you want a current directory, contact me at the same email address and we'll figure out how to get you one.

- Larry Calvert



Chapter News

January Chapter Meeting

Our first meeting of 2013 got us off to a great start! There were 52 attendees, including some members of the new class, and of the public. The meeting room at the AgriLife office was full!

Jeanette Larson, our guest speaker, presented "Hummingbirds: Facts and Folklore from the Americas." She has written a children's book by the same title and it's meant to combine information about the hummingbird's appearance, behavior, and habitat with retellings of hummingbird folklore from native cultures of America. She has a degree in Anthropology and the book gave her a chance to combine her personal interest in hummingbirds with her academic background.

She covered various aspects of hummingbird appearances, behavior, food sources, predators, and migration. Did you know that hummingbirds are only found in the New World? Scientists have recently discovered 30 million year old fossils in Germany, so it hasn't always been this way.

She further explained how the American native cultures had a fully-developed set of "Pourquoi Stories" which were meant to explain the how and why of the world, and many of



them were about hummingbirds. For example, in what is now Puerto Rico, the Taino people had a story about why hummingbirds are attracted to red. It is a tale of two lovers like our own *Romeo and Juliet*. They are forbidden by their families to see each other. In order to keep seeing each other, the boy turns into a hummingbird and the girl into a red flower. This is why hummingbirds like to visit red flowers according to folklore. Similar stories explain why hummingbirds don't sing, how they got their colors, and so on. Please be sure to visit her [web site](#) for more information.

Art Arizpe
President

2012 HCMN Accomplishments

We just submitted the annual report to the State MN office for 2012 and it reflects some fantastic results for our chapter. We submitted 10,632.75 volunteer hours for the year. Not only is that a mighty fine achievement, but it is also a 25% increase over our reported hours for 2011. This brings our total volunteer hours for the chapter to 72,634.75. WOW! From a different perspective, our TPWD sponsor is able to dollar-ize this achievement and apply for federal grants to support TPWD projects. The 2012 hours are valued at \$207,000! The federal grants are awarded on a 3 to 1 basis so this year's volunteer hours could potentially bring \$621,000 to TPWD. Also impressive is the fact that the volunteer hours we have completed since we became a chapter are worth \$1.4 million and have supported \$4.2 million in grants. You can be very proud of these achievements!

Part of our mission is to educate others and share what we have learned and experienced. We do this through the Chapter Outreach program and through our day to day discussions and sharing our knowledge with the public as Master Naturalists. In 2012 we educated 4,054 citizens through our Direct Outreach program. This is done in many ways such as the School Outdoor Educator program, presentations by our speaker bureau, and educating groups with our rainwater simulator and watershed or aquifer models, just to name a few. What we can't count accurately are the many more indirect contacts that we make at fairs and other public events. Needless to say, we are making a name for ourselves as people that can educate others about the environment around them. Thanks to all of you for this wonderful and meaningful work. Keep it up; we are making a difference out there.

Larry Calvert
Past President

2012 Recertifications – Final List

Recertification

The newsletter previously recognized those HCMNs who completed recertification by the date of the Gala. Since then, others have achieved recertification as well. This is the final list as of year's end. Recertification requires completion, during the calendar year, of at least 8 hours Advanced Training and 40 Hours Volunteer Service.

Each HCMN who recertified received the 2012 Bat Certification Pin. Thank you to **Beth Ramey** for compiling all of this information for us!

Dell Hood	Gerin Hood	Richard Barnett	Herb Smith
Susan Zimmerman	Dixie Camp	Tom Watson	Karen Bartell
Jean McMeans	Susan Nenney	Bonnie Tull	Cindy Luongo Cassidy
Terry Tull	Cara Wernli	Ginger Geist	LaRay Geist
Karen Archer	Mimi Boelter	Larry Calvert	Linda Calvert
Beth Ramey	Art Arizpe	Judy Burdett	Tom Hausler
Brad Krimmel	Leah Laszewski	Leo Butler	Steve Carter
Randy Garst	Lance Jones	Helane Kennard	Jacqueline Mattice
Charles Maxcy	Vicki Maxcy	Lin Weber	Todd Derkacz
Jeff Vasgaard	Donna Browning	Melinda Seib	Deborah Bradshaw
Al Ohm	Jean Ohm	M. Lee Brown	Trent Carmichael
Anne Child	Garry Child	Jane Dunham	Leigh Erin Jandle
Helen Marsh	Dick McBride	Chris Middleton	Gordon Richmond
Jean Richmond	Helen Bowie	Marilyn Brister	Christine Byrne
Jim Donohoe	Steve Janda	Linda Land	Robert Austin Currie
Tracy Mock	Kim Ort	Nancy C. Russell	Susan Kimmel-Lines
Leigh Sebera	Don Wallace	David Womer	Lucille Trail Kirkham

Recognition Milestones:

250 Hours - Bronze Dragonfly

Karen Langridge	Cindy Luongo Cassidy	Jean Richmond	Steve Carter
Jean Ohm	Barbara Jacobson	Steve Janda	Helane Kennard
Kim Ort	Chris Middleton	Barbara Jacobson	

500 Hours - Burnished Silver Dragonfly

Jacqueline Mattice	M. Lee Brown	Donna Browning	Beth Ramey
Garry Child	Anne Child	Melinda Seib	

1000 Hours - Gold Dragonfly

Jean McMeans	Tom Hausler	Herb Smith	Lance Jones
Dick McBride			

February marks the beginning of the 2013 MN Class!

It's that time of year again! The Class of 2013 begins their first training class on February 5th! There are 39 new students in this year's class. Lin Weber is still working on the final class schedule, but we do know who the **2013 Training Committee** members are!

Connie Boltz	Attendance/Registration
Judy Elliott	Site visits
Steve Janda	Speaker contact
Katy Jordan	Meals
Helane Kennard	Secretary
Dick McBride	Videographer
Jean McMeans	Assistant Coordinator
Blaine Nelson	Meals
Jean Richmond	Attendance/Registration

Don Wallace
Lin Weber
David Womer

Site Visits
Coordinator
Nature Watch

Please give all of these folks some thanks. They all make such an impact on all of the new "young" minds that are joining our chapter! Thanks to **Lin Weber** for providing this information to us.



Contributing Writers and Editorials

Meet and Greet Your New Editor: Lisa Kay

Please welcome **Lisa Kay** as the new editor of the HCMN newsletter. I first met her when we both entered the 2011 trainee class as Painted Buntings and later admired displays of her work with the Hill Country Photography Club. While Lisa has a very big pair of shoes to fill as she succeeds our current HCMN President, **Art Arizpe** who served as the editor for the past four years, there's no doubt that she is up for the challenge. I asked Art if he offered Lisa any advice and here is what he had to say:

"I told Lisa that I enjoyed editing the newsletter because it was a great way to meet and talk to members and to stay informed on what was happening. The main advice that I gave her was that she didn't have to do it all herself. I think that the best issues I produced were the ones that had contributions from many people. I also gave her a list of the frequent contributor and suggested she stay in contact with them."

As for Lisa, she indicates that she is very passionate about this new venture and appreciative that she was asked to take on this new task. When I asked about her background, she stated that she has been writing since she was 7 years old and used to make up imaginative stories and write them all out. In 2011, Lisa had a life awakening, if not life altering experience when she had a major health scare. That's when she took a moment and asked herself what she wanted out of life and chose to leave her Corporate America job to devote more time to her writing. It's a skill that needs constant honing, but one that she feels is her calling. The thought process has also resulted in a book that is in process. So, it looks like we have a lot more to anticipate!

Photography? Lisa developed an interest in photography when she moved from Dallas to the Hill Country in 2009 and has been taking hundreds of photos ever since. I first saw her picture taking at the Walkers' Gallery at the San Marcos Activity Center last Fall where her photography was displayed along with other award-winning photographers in the Hill Country Photography Club. I was particularly impressed with her "Naturescapes 2012" entry called Summer Storm but liked equally '51 Hudson and Nostalgia from the "Vehicular Visions" portion of the show. Having grown up in San Antonio before the 21 years living in Dallas, Lisa's family used to take long Hill Country drives to find a watering hole or just to look at scenery. When she came back HOME, here's what she said:

"There was so much beauty around me that it was overwhelming and that is when I bought my first digital camera and began to notice everything around me, I almost always headed outside to observe and photograph. That contributed to me wanting to be a MN. I wanted to learn more about the environment that I was seeing and living in."

Why did Lisa decide to take this position as editor? She says it best:

"I took this position when Art asked me to because I felt like it was something that I would greatly enjoy and also learn a lot. It took me a while to do my first newsletter and I pretty much followed Art's template, but as I get more skilled in putting it all together, I'd like to add my own flair as well. It feeds my creative side. I've never been on a "Board" before; quite frankly, I just never wanted to spend my time doing that. However, in this case, I am enjoying it because I strongly believe in the MN program and it helps keep me in the know of things going on. Also, the MN people are just the nicest folks!"

Finally, I asked Lisa what the membership can do to help with the newsletter. It is a simple two-fold response: 1) Read the newsletter, and 2) Contribute your photos, write articles, or send ideas for articles. Diversity makes for a more interesting newsletter and she would like to see more awareness/participation if possible. **Leah Laszewski** recently asked if she could have a short monthly column to promote Outreach activities so now, we can look forward to regular reports, not just the occasional special occasion article. We are hoping that there will be other talented writers in the upcoming trainee class that would like to start contributing. Old-timers like to know what the newbies are doing so we have a great opportunity in waiting.

Lisa agrees that it is a good idea to switch editorship every few years because otherwise, it can get stale. Her comments put me on a search to find out about previous editors and **Historian Charles Maxcy** had this information: the newsletter started with the Chapter in 1998 when **Hays County Extension Agent Billy Kniffen** served as editor for about two years. After that there appears to have been a co-editor arrangement with **Sherwood Bishop, Helen Mehan, Buck Scheib, and Linda Keese** listed in the archives for 2000. Then, 2001 brought **Dawn Campos** and in 2002 **Winiford Simon** followed. **Melissa Brooks** served as the editor in 2003 and 2004. Then, **Richard Barnett** took over the position for a five year stint until **Art Arizpe** took it for the past four years. **Richard Barnett** was kind enough to comment about his experience and to update us on his current happenings:

"I graduated from the 2000 Fall class of the Gulf Coast Master Naturalists. They had no mascots at that time. I completed the volunteer hours and received my certification early in 2001. I moved to Wimberley in May, 2001 and transferred to the Hays County Chapter the next month. I served as editor for 5 years through 2008, and introduced the current masthead. Serving as editor kept me in touch with all of the active members and activities and I enjoyed all of the field trips. For our new editor, I recommend keeping up with new online technology and expanding the pool of contributing editors. They are potential successors. I used to take care of the HCMN wildscape plot at the San Marcos Nature Center, but had to retire because it was wearing out my back. I still serve as docent with the Gorge Preservation Society, but I don't know how long I can keep that up because of my aging knees. I also watch butterflies. You don't have to chase them with a net now, thanks to stealth tactics and binoculars that will focus on small subjects. Butterflies are not as elusive as birds, who we watch and feed lavishly. I have entered a few poems in the Wimberley View's bird poetry contests. None have placed. The editor likes sentimental doggerel."

So, there you have it! Let's salute **Lisa Kay** for taking the position of editor for our HCMN newsletter. Thank you, Lisa!

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Lucille Trail Kirkham

Book Review

Although Naturalists never lack food for thought, it's still lovely when someone serves it up in an elegant banquet. Bernd Heinrich's 2012 book, *Life Everlasting; the Animal Way of Death* is just such a treat!

Taking a look at nature's undertakers whose role is to change death into other kinds of life, Heinrich begins with a discussion of burying beetles who not only bury carcasses to protect them from other scavengers, but also use them as nurseries and pantries for themselves and the young that they continue to care for.

Stories and observations of the ravens in the woods of New England as well as vultures around the world serve to increase our appreciation for these wild undertakers whose value is often underestimated. Heinrich has studied Ravens in New England for many years. His experiences lead to interesting conclusions as well as the understanding that some of the best science comes from long, quiet, careful watching; the very thing we enjoy best!

In the chapter on Plant Undertakers, we are given a glimpse of how plants, the "ultimate biochemists," use water, sunshine, and carbon dioxide to build themselves until they are ultimately recycled by a myriad of organisms. Some concepts that we are already aware of are explained in a compelling new light.

Juxtaposed to the recycling of terrestrial life is the section on watery deaths where the same principles of recycling are differently applied. Heinrich's description of a "whale fall", and what becomes of the huge carcass of a whale when it sinks to depths below 2,000 meters where there is no free oxygen and no bacterial decay may be the most fascinating chapter of all. This is new territory for science and if this book is food for thought, here is dessert.

So many wonderful examples of how all living things are not only related, but are actually all parts of the whole lead inevitably to thoughts of the most damaging behaviors of mankind to this fragile system. For the most part, our failure to be good stewards is gently implied and the book is far from a diatribe on the abuses of humanity toward the planet. However, he does tell us that there are about "84,000 chemicals in commercial use in the United States and many are exported to other parts of the world. We don't have any idea what even 20 percent of them are or if they are potentially harmful because they (and their effects) are classified as 'trade secrets.'" In one example, he mentions that there has been a precipitous decline in populations of four vulture species due directly to the use of thallium sulfate as a rodenticide in Israel. His conclusion after a short discussion of similar poisons is simply that biocides should be outlawed.

Life Everlasting; the Animal Way of Death, published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt in 2012 belongs on the bookshelves of Naturalists. There is a wonderful bibliography at the end for further reading. It is a book that can be read and reread and, in my opinion, is uplifting in its message of regeneration.

- Leah Laszewski
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01.01.13 Commitment Day

One of my en vogue friends told me that Commitment Day on January 1st was a trendy thing to do this year. Well, don't we all want to be trendy? She also referred me to www.commitmentday.com, a website that we all need to peruse. I think we are going to continue to hear more about this movement as each new year arrives. In simplest terms, it is intended to jump start a new year of fitness and define how each of us will live the rest of our lives. We are faced with rising cardiovascular disease, obesity, sedentary lifestyles, children with a life expectancy less than ours, higher health care costs, and kids sitting in front of

electronic screens 30% of the time. Why not combine our interest in nature with our desire to improve our personal health and save the environment all at the same time? Even better, we can use our enthusiasm to inspire others. It's surely a win-win!

As both a Master Naturalist and fitness buff, I've never been able to separate the two. When I heard about the national movement to get the populace out and moving on New Year's Day, it was a no-brainer to have my walking shoes bedside on January 1st ready for an adventure. Living in Wimberley, I had a choice of some great hiking/nature viewing locations, but decided on Jacob's Well for some exploration and exercise. My previous visits had been on green Spring or lazy Summer days, so the dead of winter was an experience in itself. The only wildlife was a friendless turtle swimming aimlessly amid a few small fish nipping at the surface, an occasional tweeting bird, and my noisy companion. There were no signs of bikini



Far Shot of Jacob's Well. Photo by Susie Peters.



Occupant of Jacob's Well. Photo by Susie Peters.

clad swimmers or romantic picnickers. Green had turned to gray with a beauty of its own; there were random fingernail red berries atop barren twigs and abandoned bird nests secured in tree tops as well as mistletoe fragments and a bit of Spanish moss. There was plenty to observe and the attending solitude was worth every minute. Before Springtime arrives, please enjoy the accompanying photos and then put on your best walking shoes for a journey to Jacob's Well. Then think about participating in Commitment Day 01.01.14; remember, it's a commitment, not a resolution!

Lucille Trail Kirkham

Calling All Blogs!!!!

With so many naturalists in our Chapter, I am certain that we have bloggers out there! Please let us know who you are, where to find your blog, and we will share them in our newsletter!

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 are due by February 5th. 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 hourshaysmn@gmail.com, and you will receive 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 sends us "First Sign of Spring".



Cedar Waxwings. Photo by Tom Hausler.

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. You may also find information in the [Advanced Training Calendar](#) on our web page.

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.



Volunteer Opportunities

Please watch your emails for upcoming Volunteer Opportunities. You may also find information in the [Projects Calendar](#) on our web page.



State and National News

Coalition Launches Texas Natural Resource/ Environmental Literacy Plan

First Lady Laura Bush To Speak, Experts Gather Jan. 25-26 in San Antonio

SAN ANTONIO – For the generation of the great indoors, when most Texans don't know where their drinking water comes from and may struggle to navigate similar environmental issues, a broad coalition of statewide natural resource and education leaders is gathering here Friday, Jan. 25 to start implementing the Texas Natural Resource/Environmental Literacy Plan. The plan provides a framework for natural resource teaching through education, recreation and life-long learning.

The Texas Natural Resource/Environmental Literacy Summit runs 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. Friday, Jan. 25 and 8:30-11:30 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 26 at the TriPoint Conference Center, 3233 N. St. Mary's Street in San Antonio.

Former First Lady Laura Bush will deliver the summit keynote address at 11:30 a.m. Friday. In 2011, Mrs. Bush and a board of scientific experts, private landowners, conservationists, and businesspeople founded Taking Care of Texas, a nonprofit organization which recognizes the many benefits of conservation literacy, especially for its vital role in the future of Texas's land and water resources.

"As the trend away from outdoor experiences, upbringing, and learning deepens, we face sobering consequences for our health and well-being," said Carter Smith, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department executive director, who will introduce Mrs. Bush at the summit. "But we can reverse this trend. We can restore our children's well-being and their relationship with Texas's rich natural and cultural heritage."

Smith and other summit leaders emphasized that environmental literacy is a non-partisan effort.

“It’s not a process of advancing any one agenda,” Smith said. “It’s about building science-based knowledge and experiences to help people make informed choices. With the long-term challenges our state faces, such as how to provide water for people and the environment, we can’t afford an illiterate citizenry when it comes to our natural resources.”

Environmental literacy connects with a companion issue: the problem of increasingly urban families and children growing up disconnected from nature and the outdoors. The literacy plan is backed by the more than 60 organizations that launched the Texas Partnership for Children and Nature in late 2010. It also arises in part from the federal No Child Left Inside Act (HR 2054).

The effort is motivated by some sobering statistics:

- Children ages 8-to-18 spend an average of 7.5 hours a day, over 50 hours per week, connected to a television, computer, video games and other electronic media.
- A child is six times more likely to play a video game than ride a bike.
- According to the Texas Education Agency’s Fitnessgram[®], less a third of Texas youth are physically fit, and fitness levels decline in the upper grades. There is a strong correlation between a student’s fitness and scholastic success.

The good news is studies show the problems are solvable. Families can reconnect with nature, children who play in nature are healthier, happier and smarter, and literacy can be improved by common-sense steps called for in the plan.

Although the No Child Left Inside Act focuses on grades PreK-12, the Texas environmental literacy plan is broader, involving adults and communities as well as young people and schools. The plan has six main components: Lifelong Learning and Community Connections, Formal Education, Informal Education, Professional Development, Assessment and Funding and Support.

See details about the Jan. 25-26 summit conference and read the Texas environmental literacy plan on the [Texas Association for Environmental Education](#) website.

by Tom Harvey, TPWD



Local News

A Packed House in the Hill Country hears Water Projections and Warnings about Urban Needs

From the [Hill Country Alliance](#):

“Almost the entire state is owned by private citizens, and we are in better condition because of their stewardship” stated Andy Sansom at the recent Water Forum in Fredericksburg, “But the biggest terrestrial issue we face is that family members are leaving their land and the fracture of that land. We’re building roads, malls and parking lots, and every time that is done, we interrupt the hydrologic cycle.” [Read the full story](#) By Fredericksburg Standard editor, Ken Esten Cooke.



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