

Hays County Master Naturalists NEWSLETTER



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

January, 2010

January 2010 Events

Chapter Board Meeting

The next board meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 6th at the Camp Jacob Watershed Education Center at Jacob's Well Natural Area, from 7:00 to 9:00 PM. A map is available [here](#). The meeting is open to members and the public.

If you have any questions or items for the agenda, please contact Dixie Camp, pres@haysmn.org, or 512-517-3111, by January 4th.

Chapter Meeting

The next chapter meeting will be held on Thursday, January 28th, from 6:30pm to 8:00pm at the Episcopal Church of the Holy Spirit, 301 Hays County Acres Rd, in Dripping Springs. A map is available [here](#).

The speaker will be Nyta Brown from the Old Tunnel Wildlife Area and her presentation will be about Bats and the Old Tunnel Wildlife Area.

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



A Naturalist's View

This month we hear from Dixie Camp, our Chapter President.

Thank you for re-electing me President for 2010. I really appreciate your confidence and I am honored to serve this excellent organization. Again, I ask for your help and I look forward to your suggestions and ideas for chapter activities and projects.

As reflected in our Annual Report, members planned and participated in numerous activities which resulted in many accomplishments in 2009.

Through direct outreach and education activities, we provided hands-on, active teaching components for individuals and groups. Our indirect outreach activities allowed us to share "the Master Naturalist story" as we took part in community events.

Through our volunteer projects, we provided a service and had a positive impact on many acres of

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land and miles of trails in the area. Several new partnerships allowed us to extend our reach further into the community and encourage management of natural areas and resources. In addition we retained and increased membership in the chapter.

Special thanks go to our outgoing board and committee members: Vice-President, Ben Adair; Secretary, Mary Arizpe; Training Committee Chair, Mimi Boelter; and Host Committee Chair, Jean McMeans. Their time and service helped to insure the continuation and improvement of the Hays MN program.

Welcome to the new officers and committee members: Vice-President, Tom Hausler; Secretary, Becky Northcut; and Training Committee Chair, Jean McMeans. We are fortunate to have very capable and willing volunteers to maintain the activities and leadership of the chapter. This year we hope to focus on programs and activities for our members, improvement in reporting and documentation of our activities and projects, and continued development of partnerships and securing of sponsorships.

Chapter meetings are scheduled on the fourth Thursday of the month in various locations. If you have suggestions or questions, please contact Tom Hausler at thausler@io.com. Board meetings are scheduled on the first Thursday of the month. If you

have items or proposals for the board, please contact me at dixie_camp@yahoo.com.

Thanks to each of you for your time and work in making 2009 a great year for our chapter through your participation in chapter projects and activities. I look forward to working with you in 2010 as we continue to serve the citizens and communities of Hays County.

- Dixie Camp



Featured Project

Barsana Dham, Project #909

Barsana Dham is a Hindu temple located on FM 1826, just a few miles north of the Salt Lick, on 200 acres. Spring Hollow Creek, a branch of Bear Creek, runs through the campus and is one of the most productive in the area, and one which hadn't gone

Barsana Dham was established in 1990 and there are 70 full-time adult residents. You may learn more about the organization at their [web page](#). A map to the facility is available [here](#).

Dennis Wagner is our project contact. Dennis was in the class of 2009, the Dire Wolves, and became interested in MN by word-of-mouth from people he would meet and who loved the program. Dennis' background is in real estate, with a focus on country property. A unique aspect of Dennis' real estate work is his counseling of all clients on MN principles. He's observed that most people want to do the right thing if given the opportunity and knowledge. It's exciting to realize that through this outreach, Dennis has the ability to facilitate the protection of thousands of acres in the coming years.

Barsana Dham is a fairly new project, so if you're interested in participating in a project from the start, this is one you should check out. HCMN became



Elephants in the Hill Country! An Indian Fair held on the grounds with the Temple in the background. Photo provided courtesy of Barsana Dham.

dry since the great drought of the late 1950s, except in the last 15-20 years when increased well drilling along the 1826 corridor in the 1990s boom has substantially diminished the flow of all creeks in the watershed.

involved with this project in October 2009, when Dennis received the chapter's approval to begin. The project's goals are to integrate MN principles and practices into the master planning of the 200 acres including trail building and riparian improvements. In addition, public tours of the area will demonstrate MN principles and practices.



Purple Martin houses. Photo provided courtesy of Barsana Dham.

The opportunity to contribute to the properties master plan is especially attractive. The property is exceptionally beautiful with a wide variety of topography and features.



Riparian area along Spring Hollow Creek. Photo provided courtesy of Barsana Dham.

HCMN Volunteers have started building trails and regular volunteers to date include Dennis, Warren Ely and Bob Burke.



Dennis and Will working on a trail. Photo provided courtesy of Barsana Dham.

Please contact Dennis, at 512-288-4888, or by [email](#), if you're interested in helping.



Chapter News

HCMN 2010 Chapter Dues

Please make your check out to "Hays County Master Naturalist" for \$15 and mail it to:

Larry Calvert - Treasurer
650 Red Hawk Rd.
Wimberley, TX 78676

- Larry Calvert

Chapter Committees

The Chapter's Host Committee Chair is still open. Perhaps you would be interested in serving on or chairing this committee. Please contact Dixie Camp, pres@haysmn.org.

You may find a description of this committee in the [Chapter Operating Handbook](#), Section B, on our web page.

Farming on the Onion Creek flood plains

Another find at Onion Creek during restoration work in December has been a colony of leafcutter ants (*Atta texana*) which have only recently appeared on the flood plain near where Hays County Master Naturalists are doing the restoration work.



A leafcutter colony with multiple mounds. Photo by Tom Watson.

Their neat mounds (about 6 inches in height) have the shape of miniature volcanoes (minus the lava and other inorganic expectorants) including a crater in the center with an entrance hole in the bottom.

Intrigued by their domiciles and having only a bit of knowledge about these little agrarians, I set about

searching the online literature for information. Here is what I have found.



A side-view of a mound showing the distinct volcano form. Photo by Tom Watson.



A top-view of a mound. Photo by Tom Watson.

These bloody ants are socially and economically the equivalent of human communists, as are other species of ants. There are roughly five social classes of leafcutter ants, each caste with a particular function to perform for the colony. Each ant takes only what resources it needs for survival, leaving or providing the remainder for others, i.e., from each according to their ability (or function), to each according to their needs. Karl Marx would have been proud of these little critters.

What is different about these dainty souls is that they have devised a socio-economic system based around advanced agriculture, somewhat like what the most invasive species on the planet began around 10,000 years ago in the Fertile Crescent of the Middle East (Author and biologist Jarod Diamond - Collapse and Guns, Germs, and Steel - feels that agriculture was the biggest mistake that humans have ever made).

These small ants cut leaves which are carried into the nest and used as growth medium on which to cultivate a fungus (a kind of mushroom without the stool developing) which in turn serves as their foodstuff.



A worker with a leaf. Photo by Tom Watson.

Among the castes of the social system are gardeners whose sole responsibility is to tend the fungus fields. Interestingly, the food fungus is parasitized by yet another fungus, the latter being a scourge to the garden such as rust is to wheat fields. Not to be defeated, the gardeners deploy biological controls! Gardeners and other castes in the colony carry on their bodies a kind of bacteria (Actinobacteria) which produces an anti-biotic that kills the parasitic fungus, apparently without harming the crop.



Leafcutter workers come in 2 sizes. Photo by Tom

So not only are the ants communists, they are also agriculturists and conservationists (to the nth degree) who employ biological controls instead of pesticides while wasting very little resources and eating only what is required for growth and maintenance (have you ever seen an obese ant?).

As a side note: it may be of interest that there are only two other kinds of fungus cultivating agrarians: the mound building termites of Africa and a wood inhabiting beetle of Asia.

Now that I am likely in an intelligence agency's computer somewhere or soon will be, I will close by saying that some biologists consider ant colonies to be super-organisms. By that I mean the colony as a whole may be conceived of as the body of an organism with each caste of ants performing as organs that give life to and sustain the body. If one organ fails so goes the body... I know the feeling well :-)

- Tom Watson

The Great Backyard Bird Count

It's almost time for the Great Backyard Bird Count! The next count is scheduled for February 12-15.

This is an approved chapter project, #701. You can find more information about the event [here](#) or you can contact [Ginger Geist](#).

New Wildlands Conservation Division Environmental Conservation Information Specialist

Hello Volunteers!

I wanted to take a moment to introduce myself as the new Environmental Conservation Information Specialist at the Wildlands Conservation Division, aka. "The New Daniel". I had the opportunity to meet some of you at the Volunteer Recognition Dinner and a few others on the trail and from what you have told me, I have big shoes to fill!

First, a little about myself: I have been an educator for most of my adult life teaching science, both at the high-school and college level, here in Austin and in Flagstaff, Arizona. More recently, I spent the last two years as a consultant helping companies comply with the multitude of local, state and federal environmental laws. I am an avid outdoor enthusiast and enjoy hiking, canoeing, birding, camping and sometimes just sitting outside and absorbing all the beauty that surrounds us. I see my position with the City of Austin as both a challenge and a tremendous opportunity.

My position with the city has many responsibilities, but where we will most often cross paths is on volunteer work days, accounting for your volunteer hours and, whenever possible, on the trail. For the last few months my supervisor Cappy Smith has

been juggling both my job and hers but now that I am on board, you can send your emails regarding volunteer hours to me and I will enter them into the system. I will also be coordinating a few work days coming up in December and January that will require many (50+) volunteers, so stand by for those opportunities.

It's always great living in Central Texas, and now that the weather is cooler and the creeks are flowing, it's time to get outside, get some work done and enjoy the open spaces that the Wildlands provide. Please feel free to contact me anytime with your ideas or concerns and I will do my best to address them. Thank you for all you do for your community and I look forward to working with you soon.

Marty Wise

Environmental Conservation Information Specialist
Wildland Conservation Division
Austin Water Utility
Office: **512-972-1682**

Texas Master Naturalist Listserve

To join the TMN LISTSERV mailing list, send an email to listserv@tamu.edu No "Subject" is required. You do not need to include your email address in your message. LISTSERV automatically uses the address from your email. Future subscribers can enroll by sending a message to listserv@tamu.edu with a simple "subscribe tmn" in the body of the message. The person signing on to the list will receive a response asking them to confirm this request, giving them both a web and email option for confirming that subscription.

Remember the listserv continues to be an excellent means of learning and sharing information for the Texas Master Naturalist program. Over 650 members are enrolled. Please encourage others.

Once you sign on you can select how you receive news and info from the program either as it goes out (message by message) or in what is called 'digest' format which is a collection of recent messages sent in one message to your in-box. The TMN listserv averages about 1 or 2 messages a week, however sometimes, like leading up to the annual meeting and registration notices are a little more frequent, though not extensive. The listserv is moderated so that spam and other messages of that sort do not come through.

HaysMN Forum

The forum's been pretty busy lately, with several interesting discussions covering bird watching and the fall color.

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 December 2009 are due by January 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

Tom Hausler reports a Bluebonnet, probably confused by our Texas weather, was blooming in his yard during Christmas week. Spring is coming!



December Bluebonnet. 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

Bee Wranglers

The San Marcos Association Bee Wranglers is offering a free beekeeping class series to be held on Jan. 6th, 13th, 20th, and 27th from 7 to 9 pm each session. The classes will be held at the San Marcos Library at 625 E Hopkins Street, San Marcos. Registration is through the library at 512-393-8200. It is recommended that a \$12.00 textbook be purchased at the first class.

This series of class is approved for 8 hours advanced training.

Wildlife Tax Valuation Seminar: January 9th, 16th and 23rd

Do you have an agriculture tax valuation on your land? Are you interested in managing for wildlife? This in-depth seminar is especially for owners of less than 500 acres and emphasizes wildlife management for songbirds. Our presenters will help you gain land management knowledge, understand the history of this Texas law and fulfill requirements to qualify for a wildlife management tax valuation. Many participants complete the seminar with a concrete plan and are ready to apply.

Session 1: Overview & Property Inventory
Advanced Training 4.0 Hours
Saturday, January 9
9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Session 2: Management Practices & Habitat Assessment

Advanced Training 5.5 Hours

Saturday, January 16
9 a.m.-2:30 p.m.

Session 3: WTV History and Update on the Law, Application Procedures, & Putting It All Together

Advanced Training 4.0 Hours

Saturday, January 23
9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Members \$80/person and \$100/couple; non-members \$100/person and \$125/couple. Limit: 35. Pre-registration required. Call 830-249-4616.

Made possible in part by the Marcia and Otto Koehler Foundation.

Location: CNC Auditorium

Cibolo Nature Center
140 City Park Road
Boerne, TX 78006
Ph.: 830-249-4616

Native Plant Society Monthly Meeting

The following meeting is approved for 1 Hour Advanced Training

The Lindheimer Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas will meet Tuesday, January 19, at 7:00pm in the GVTC Auditorium, 36101 Smithson Valley, New Braunfels. Mark Peterson of SAWS (San Antonio Water System) will speak on Plant & Tree Selection/Water Conservation.

Meetings have "Growers Tip," "Plant of the Month," and "What's in Bloom."

Open and free to public. Contact Mary Moses (830) 226-5552.



Volunteer Opportunities

Barsana Dham Trail Building

Friday, January 8th, 15th, 22nd, & 29th
9:00am-12:00pm
Hays MN Project #909

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

Elephant Ear Removal

Wednesday, January 6th and 20th

4:00pm-7:00pm

Hays MN Project #408

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

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

Hyacinth Removal

Saturday, January 23rd

9:00am-12:00pm

Hays MN Project #408

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

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



State and National News

Drought Kills Salamanders in Barton Springs

From the Texas Wild Network, an article by Cheryl Lane:

Austin's two-year drought has introduced a new threat to the already endangered Barton Springs salamander: low oxygen levels in the water. Recent rains have improved the situation slightly, but there's still not enough dissolved oxygen to support a healthy population of the 3-inch amphibians, which breathe through gills.

Placed on the Endangered Species list in 1997, the salamander (*Eurycea sosorum*) lives only in the springs in and around Barton Springs pool.

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



Local News

County Greenprint Map Completed

From Netstreamz:

Hays County's \$50,000 contribution in 2008 to the Central Texas Greenprint for Growth project bore fruit last month in the form of interactive Geographic Information System (GIS) maps depicting the region's land conservation priorities.

Overseen by the Trust for Public Land (TPL), Envision Central Texas (ECT), and the Capitol Area Council of Governments (CAPCOG), the Central Texas Greenprint project identified six conservation goals for the county based on input obtained from residents, business owners, elected officials, governmental agency representatives and local experts between May 2008 and June 2009.

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



Links to Chapter Sponsors and Partners

Sponsors:

Texas Master Naturalist -- State Website -- masternaturalist.tamu.edu
Texas AgriLife Extension -- texasextension.tamu.edu
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department -- www.tpwd.state.tx.us/

Agencies of Interest:

Bamberger Ranch -- bambergerranch.org
Native Plant Society of Texas -- www.npsot.org
San Marcos Greenbelt Alliance -- www.smgreenbelt.org
San Marcos River Foundation -- www.sanmarcosriver.org
Texas Outdoor Women's Network -- www.townsanmarcos.org
Texas Cooperative Extension -- Sea Grant Program - texas-sea-grant.tamu.edu
Texas Forest Service -- txforestservice.tamu.edu
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers -- www.usace.army.mil
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service -- www.fws.gov
U.S.D.A. Natural Resource Conservation Service -- www.nrcs.usda.gov
Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority -- www.gbra.org

Partners

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