

# Hays County Master Naturalists NEWSLETTER



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

July, 2011

## Chapter Events

### *Chapter Board Meeting*

The next board meeting will be held on Thursday, July 7<sup>th</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 Jeff Vasgaard, [pres@haysmn.org](mailto:pres@haysmn.org), by July 5<sup>th</sup>.

### *Chapter Meeting*

The next chapter meeting will be held on Thursday, July 28<sup>th</sup>, from 6:30pm to 8:00pm, at the AgriLife Extension Office, 1253 Civic Center Loop in San Marcos. A map is available [here](#).

The speaker will be Dr. Travis J. LaDuc, Assistant Curator of Herpetology at the Texas Natural History Museum. His presentation, "My Life as a Herpetologist," promises to be fun and entertaining and will cover all sorts of snakes in Texas.

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



## A Naturalist's View

*Bonnie Tull is the project leader for the Blue Bird Nests, Project #702. She was in the Class of 2005.*

### **My Naturalist's Passions**

Those who know me well will not be surprised to hear that, aside from my passion for birding and bluebirds in particular, I also harbor a deep interest in mountain lions, though I've yet to come up with my own project for studying them. One of my dreams is to be able someday to see one in the wild. Why do I have this interest? I think it is because of an almost unconscious desire to believe that there is something mysterious and wild and even dangerous still remaining in places where we commonly roam.

It seems like wherever we look in today's world, we see nothing but Man's imprint, and so often it is not a pretty one. Man's effects have been devastating to so many other species both

### *Board of Directors*

<b>President</b>	Jeff Vasgaard
<b>Vice President</b>	Brad Krimmel
<b>Secretary</b>	Becky Northcut
<b>Treasurer</b>	Larry Calvert
<b>Past-President</b>	Dixie Camp
<b>State Representative</b>	Tom Watson
<b>Training Committee</b>	Jean McMeans
<b>Advanced Training Comm.</b>	Mary Arizpe
<b>Membership Committee</b>	Beth Ramey
<b>Web Master</b>	Herb Smith
<b>Newsletter Committee</b>	Art Arizpe
<b>&amp; Editor</b>	<a href="mailto:news@haysmn.org">news@haysmn.org</a>
<b>Outreach Committee</b>	<b>Vacant</b>
<b>Host Committee</b>	<b>Vacant</b>
<b>Historian</b>	Dale Shively
<b>Volunteer Service</b>	Art Arizpe
<b>AgriLife Agent</b>	Richard Parrish
<b>TP&amp;WD Rep</b>	Lee Ann Linam

flora and fauna. It's nice to know that an animal as beautiful and majestic and awesome as a mountain lion can still thrive in such close proximity to humans. I liken this feeling to that of so many people, when they see some stunning work of art. With a minor in Art History, I'm not immune to inspiration from manmade art, but to me the greatest beauty on earth is what we find naturally existing and untouched by Man. We can try to mimic or enhance it, but our attempts usually seem feeble in comparison to the real thing. All my work in my own little wildlife habitat has been oriented toward trying to restore what our land must have looked like before it was overgrazed, over browsed, and regularly renewed by fire. But truth be told, the changes Man has wrought are so complicated that it is impossible to know what our landscape must have looked like only a couple of hundred years ago. Even so, my mother talked of my Great Grandfather remembering when Texas was still an oak savanna. I content myself with trying to fulfill my imagination of what it must have been like.

There is so much beauty still to see and excitement to feel everywhere, but one must look at it with appreciative eyes. There are thrills on every level, from the microscopic to the cosmic, and all we have to do is to open our eyes and to see with our hearts as well as our minds.

One of the things I tell potential birders is that water is the most attractive ingredient for any wildlife habitat. Nothing makes that more obvious than a dry period such as our current frightening drought. One of my first projects in living here was to build a small pond. My goal was to make the pond look as natural as I possibly could – like it was bubbling up from a natural spring. It was such a fun and challenging project, especially considering that I had no heavy equipment to move the dirt and rock. After it was finally done, we sat back to enjoy the fulfillment of my motto, "If you build it, they will come." And come they did. On the day we filled the new pond, we had brought my elderly mother out to sit in a chair and watch. It was that magical golden hour near dusk, and what should appear on a nearby snag but one of my coveted bluebirds – perhaps the first and still rare appearance of one on our property – a wonderful omen. What an endless parade of entertainment we have had from this one feature! We never tire of watching all the minutiae and drama of life and death that goes on in and around the water and all the magnetism that the water has for birds and mammals. Alas, my game camera and I are still waiting for the day that my big cat comes walking by. Even if I never see one, just to know they are out there inspires me and feeds my soul. Yes, they ARE out there. . . .watching us.

Postscript: Who would like to talk about close encounters? By the way, on an apologetic note to the folks who came to our bluebird presentation several months ago and to whom we promised PVC bluebird box design plans. We have not forgotten and will deliver them as soon as the drawings can be finished.

- Bonnie Tull



## Featured Project

### *San Marcos Greenbelt Alliance*

#### *Project #424*

The team at the SMGA has been busy this spring. In terms of hours reported, they are one of the busiest projects in the chapter. The big effort this year has been the Bobcat Build, in partnership with Texas State University, which was held on April 9<sup>th</sup>.

Bobcat Build is a university-wide service day now in its ninth year and its mission is to connect students with San Marcos residents and build a stronger sense of community.



*Clearing around the karst. Photo courtesy of the San Marcos Greenbelt Alliance.*



*Removing the ligustrum sometimes took two, three people working together. Photo courtesy of the San Marcos Greenbelt Alliance.*

This year, the effort was concentrated at the Prospect Park portion of the Purgatory Creek Natural Area. The work included removal of invasive ligustrum, native grass planting, removal of a silt fence (replacing it with a stone wall), walking all the trails and removing new growth and other obstructions, repairing the tread on the ADA trail, opening view sheds for two benches and 'rescuing' and replanting native plants.

Last year the students, along with SMGA members and HCMNs, helped make major improvements to Ringtail Ridge, a 40+ acre greenspace in San Marcos. The greenspace lies in the Edward's Aquifer recharge zone and several karst features throughout the land give evidence to the drainage of rainwater directly to the aquifer. Almost 100 yards of the ADA trail was repaired and new erosion measures were established. In addition a new Montezuma cypress tree was planted in the first pond and many strands of barbed wire and fence posts were removed. The single-track trails were maintained and cleaned up.

The SMGA has many volunteer opportunities throughout the year. Please contact Todd Derkacz, [toderkacz@gmail.com](mailto:toderkacz@gmail.com), for more information.

Many thanks to the SMGA for providing much of the information for this article as well as the photos. Be sure to check out their blog: <http://smgreenbelt.blogspot.com/>



## Chapter News

### *CAMN Field Trip to Jacob's Well*

Our chapter hosted the Capitol Area Master Naturalist Chapter on a field trip to Jacob's Well on June 11<sup>th</sup>. Jeff Vasgaard and Barbara Atwell guided them through the site and talked about cedar management, the watershed, water conservation and pollution sources. Ray Franklin discussed native plants and grasses. There were about 25 attendees and everyone enjoyed the outing and learned a lot.



*Enjoying the view. Photo provided by CAMN.*

### *Highland Lakes Chapter Field Trip to Blue Hole*

The Highland Lakes Chapter, from the Marble Falls area, visited our Blue Hole project in Wimberley. Dell Hood presented on the Blue Hole project, landscaping under the SITES

initiative and grants received (<http://www.sustainablesites.org/>). This was followed by a tour of Blue Hole and an enjoyable picnic lunch at the park. More than 50 people attended.



*Relaxing in the shade. Photo provided by Doug Carter, Park Manager for the City of Wimberley.*

## *On the Trail*

### **MN Trainee Site Visits**

Site Visits are valuable tools for putting into practice what MN trainees are learning in the classroom. While only two 2-hour site visits are required for completion of the Master Naturalist course, there will be a total of five offerings for 2011.

The first undertaking was north of Dripping Springs on April 19 at the home of Austin Native Plant Society President **Meg Inglis**. She provided a superb example of what can be done with natives in a subdivision where the eye is accustomed to manicured lawns. Only native species have been planted to accompany what was already on the property and a lot of work has been done to remove invasives such as KR Bluestem and Johnson grass. Meg has a rainwater collection system that services all indoor and outdoor watering needs. I asked what she most wanted classmates to remember from the visit.

*You can create a lot of diversity on a small piece of property. Juniperus ashei (cedar) is great for screening, so plan accordingly. Restoring a disturbed area is harder than restoring an area where the soil is not disturbed. Disturbed soil invites invasives to come and stay a while – King Ranch Bluestem, Johnson Grass, Roosevelt Weed. If you restore an area without disturbing the soil, the existing seed*

bank will regenerate the area and you will have fewer invasives. Don't be afraid to become a "sole source" rainwater household – you can have a yard using natives!

The second site visit was in Wimberley on May 24 at the Old Hundred Ranch, a magnificent 100-acre property that was purchased in 1943 by relatives of **Louise Curtis** and her brother **Ryan Willett**. Our animated host was Louise's husband, **Chuck Curtis**, a Master Naturalist from the Roadrunner Class of 2008. Chuck's comments:

*It is my hope that these site visits will not only illustrate some of the land management methodologies but also continue to stir the soul for a deeper appreciation of our impact on nature's web. We all may know about nature's web and still not fully appreciate the delicate interconnections among all the animals, insects and plant species. It takes a long time- in some cases a very long time- for the land to recover from ecological insults. Most of the land management schemes employed have inherent positives and negatives. We need to keep our eye on the negatives. What one sees before us today is the result of past management schemes. So, I think the site visits provide an excellent view of various repairs to the landscape as well as convey a more profound understanding of why we need to take care of our environment.*

*Something else you might mention down on our riparian area. Those magnificent old cypress trees all along Cypress Creek have been there for hundreds of years. Their big roots (we call them knees) dip down into the waters of the creek. If the creek dries up because of poor management decisions and urban development demands for water, the cypress probably will not survive. It gives me hope to see the students witness these old trees and appreciate their beauty, perhaps to be involved in good decision and policy making in the future.*

Most trainees will long remember measuring The General, a splendid cypress tree along Cypress Creek that took eight classmates clasp hands to surround the girth of the tree. Another highlight was TPWD expert **Lee Ann Linam** who provided commentary on amphibian and riparian habitats. The literal high point of the visit was Joe Wimberley Hill where an adventurous group used their mountain goat skills to climb to the top for an incomparable view of the Wimberley Valley.

The third site visit was near Dripping Springs on June 7 at property that was formerly a truffle farm. It is owned by MN trainee **Leigh Sebera** who is interested in pasture restoration and determining why her live oaks are dying. Leigh's comments:



Chuck points out nesting box along the creek. Photo by Robert Currie.



Master naturalists "guesstimate" the girth of largest bald cypress on Curtis property - eight people = ~48 ft. Photo by Robert Currie.

*To have so many master naturalists and trainees focus on the plants, animals and land was profound. The information from **Nevic Donnelly** of *They Might be Monkeys* was most helpful. To help understand why the trees are suffering and dying, he explained the long term effects of land clearing and livestock production on the trees. We did not get a chance to look at the remaining truffle orchard or look at the bottom wooded area but what we did discuss was plenty enough. I loved Nevic's suggestion to 'think like a tree.' I appreciated the idea that a 'central leader' can be groomed over time rather than created all at once. TPWD wildlife biologist, **Blake Hendon**'s explanation of wildlife management was succinct and hopeful. The agricultural wildlife tax appraisal is to the benefit of everybody. The better the environment for wildlife, in our case, primarily birds, the better it is for humans. I was impressed with his willingness to be fluid and go with the questions asked by class members. The MN training committee members, Donna, Deb, and Mark were great at organizing everything; all I had to do was show up. Thanks for a most helpful and memorable experience.*

Trainees can look forward to two additional site visits planned for the fall. For the moment we can all stay home, stay cool and read our classroom materials.

- Lucille Trail Kirkham

## *June Chapter Meeting*

Bill Carr, botanist with the Nature Conservancy of Texas, presented "Some Interesting Plants of Hays County and Vicinity". He started by pointing out that there are 5500 – 6000 plant species in Texas, far more than mammals or birds, and that the major vegetation types mirror the surface geology. Most of Hays County is located on the Edwards Plateau but some of the eastern part is in Blackland Prairie. The Edwards Plateau has about 2300 species (about 1/3 of the state total) and 50 are endemic. This leads to a highly diverse flora in our county.



*Bill Carr and Larry Calvert. Photo by Lance Jones.*

He covered several endemics including Texas wild rice, Texas snowbells, Canyon mock-orange, Gravel bar dentate, Shining coral-root, Warnock's coral-root, Hill country silverbush, and Texas barberry.

He pointed out the [UT Herbarium Database](#) as a great resource.

## *Chapter Host Committee*

The Chapter's Host Committee Chair is still open. Perhaps you would be interested in serving on or chairing this committee. Please contact Jeff Vasgaard, [pres@haysmn.org](mailto:pres@haysmn.org).

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

2nd Quarter Volunteer Hours report to the State are due by July 5th. Please send all hours worked thru June 30th by that date. 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*

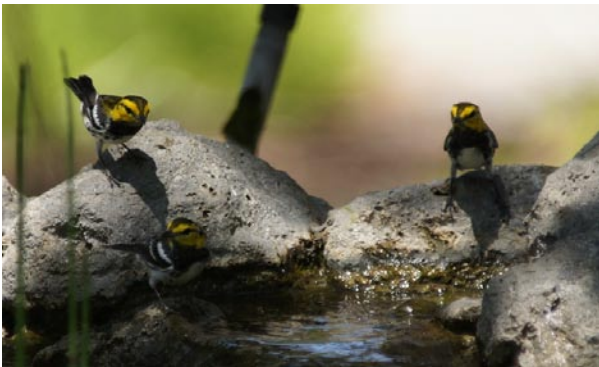
Have you read a good book lately? Submit a short review and share with the chapter! Have some neat photos of a volunteer or training activity? Let us see them! Do you have news about yourself or another HCMN? Send it in!

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

## **Members News**

### *Tom Hausler*

June was an amazing month for bird watching. Due to the lack of water the pond has brought more birds to the water. I have seen more Painted Bunting, Golden-cheeked Warblers, Black & White Warblers, Summer Tanagers, Eastern Blue Birds than ever. Here are two of my favorite photos.



*Three Golden-cheeked warblers. Photo by Tom Hausler.*



*The Trio. 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](mailto:news@haysmn.org).*





## **Advanced Training Opportunities**

*Please watch your emails for upcoming Advanced Training Opportunities.*



## **Volunteer Opportunities**

*Please watch your emails for upcoming Volunteer Opportunities.*



## **State and National News**

### ***Drought presents a genuine danger for birds***

From the San Antonio Express-News:

"The devastating effects of the Texas drought on birds was evident during a hike deep in Sam Houston National Forest.

I should have found a profusion of prothonotary warblers. But I found only few nesting pairs. And I couldn't find a single Swainson's warbler. White-eyed vireos and Northern parulas nesting along the few tributaries holding water were doing OK but not showing up in spectacular numbers, and few if any had fledged young.

More worrying was the dearth of insects. Dragonflies and damselflies, a major food source, were scarce. Even wasps were not to be seen. And swallowtail butterflies, whose caterpillars and winged forms nourish birds, weren't showing up in plentiful numbers.

The lack of water and insects means many songbird chicks may die from lack of nutrition. Many parent songbirds may be dangerously weakened from lack of food before their migratory journey south in a few months."

Read the entire article [here](#).



## **Local News**

### ***Hays County Parks, Open Space & Natural Areas Plan***

A draft of the Parks, Open Space & Natural Areas Plan was unveiled on Thursday, June 30, at the Hays County Extension Office. This was the first opportunity to see the results of all the input gathered from many of us through meetings and online surveys.

The final version for adoption by the commissioners may not be complete until September. Click [here](#) for more info on the parks master plan process.



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