

# Hays County Master Naturalists NEWSLETTER



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

June, 2010

## June 2010 Events

### Chapter Board Meeting

The next board meeting will be held on Thursday, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 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](mailto:pres@haysmn.org), or 512-517-3111, by June 1<sup>st</sup>.

### Chapter Meeting

The next chapter meeting will be held on Thursday, June 24<sup>th</sup>, from 6:30pm to 8:00pm, at the County Extension Office at 6:30 PM. A map is available [here](#).

The speaker will be Dr. Peter English, Ornithologist and Lecturer at the University of Texas.

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](mailto:vp@haysmn.org), or 512-858-1015.



## A Naturalist's View

*This month we hear from Leah Laszewski, who serves on the Training Committee and is our contact for Project #408, the River Center.*

In 2006, after 30 beautiful but long winters in the pristine countryside of Vermont my husband Lee and I were ready for a warmer climate with more sunny days and a longer growing season. We sold our house, packed up the car and started out to find the perfect state and town. Basing ourselves in San Antonio, we soon discovered San Marcos and it didn't take a second look to know this was the place. Actually, for me, it was the first look at Spring Lake and the river that did it.

We found a small house on a tiny lot so we could spend our time not working on the house and yard, and then set out to pursue our passions. I had been a Master Gardener and was always active with the 4-H program so I visited the Extension office to see what they had going on and was intrigued to hear about the Master Naturalist program. Thank you, Bari.

## Board of Directors

<b>President</b>	Dixie Camp
<b>Vice President</b>	Tom Hausler
<b>Secretary</b>	Becky Northcut
<b>Treasurer</b>	Larry Calvert
<b>Past-President</b>	Dale Shively
<b>State Representative</b>	Tom Watson
<b>Training Committee</b>	Jean McMeans
<b>Advanced Training Comm.</b>	Betty Finley
<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>	Susan Nenney
<b>Host Committee</b>	<b>Vacant</b>
<b>Historian</b>	Dale Shively
<b>Volunteer Service</b>	Walt Krudop
<b>AgriLife Agent</b>	Kasey Mock
<b>TP&amp;WD Rep</b>	Lee Ann Linam

There were plenty of familiar plants in the Hill Country and on the Blackland Prairie but there were also many I did not recognize. The alkaline soils were the opposite of what I was familiar with and the surprising weather patterns were, well, a surprise. I enrolled in the class of 2007 and it felt like a crash course in much of what I would have absorbed had I grown up here.

One evening after class I mentioned to Nancy Turner, who was the Training Coordinator in the year of *The Madrones*, that the amount of information was a little overwhelming. She said "get on the training committee and you can hear it all a second time." Good advice. I'm now hearing it all again for the fourth time and it's definitely beginning to stick.

Perhaps the most important lesson has been that there is cause for optimism. Visiting so many properties that are being carefully managed, some even having conservation easements to ensure the future, seeing the number of people actively involved in caring for natural resources, having opportunities to show children the value and fragility of their world are all activities that help dispel that feeling of doom that sometimes creeps up on you.

There's still so much to learn but having such an outstanding group of folks to learn from and with is

a blessing I never imagined. Finding volunteer work to do that is meaningful, rewarding and so much fun feels like winning the lottery.

I would like to say that I truly do enjoy Central Texas but it's been the Master Naturalists who have made it feel like home. I'm grateful that the Elder Statesmen of the group were willing to struggle through the early days to create the vibrant chapter we now enjoy.

- Leah Laszewski



## Featured Project

### *Bluebird Nestbox Trails*

#### *Project #702*

Did you know the Eastern Bluebird was once one of the most common birds in North America? By the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, they were in serious trouble. By some estimates their numbers had declined by 90%.



*A male Eastern Bluebird. Photo courtesy Wikipedia.*

Their population had been reduced due to two main factors: invasive hole-nesters such as the English House Sparrow and European Starlings, and the loss of natural nest sites such as snag trees and wooden fence posts with old woodpecker holes.

Concerned enthusiasts began efforts to restore their habitat with nest boxes on Bluebird trails. Today, their numbers are recovering. To learn more about these beautiful birds and the efforts to save them, please visit the [Texas Bluebird Society](#) and the [North American Bluebird Society](#) web pages.

Bonnie Tull, who is our chapter's contact for this project, has been interested in nature since she was a little girl living in the country. Bluebirds first grabbed her attention on a trip to Fredericksburg in the mid-90s, when she saw them for the first time and was enchanted. When she heard about the MN program, she was primarily interested in pursuing it to gain credibility when talking with landowners about putting up bluebird nest boxes. She signed up and was in the Class of 2005, the Cougars.

Bonnie has a BA in Spanish from UT, a GRI in real estate, was a career Navy wife and has lived abroad for over 18 years. Her husband, Terry, is also an HCMN from the Class of 2005.



*A box at the Driftwood Firestation with a Bluebird. Photo by Bonnie Tull.*

She proposed the Bluebird Nestbox Trails project to the chapter and received approval 3 years ago. The project's goal is to increase the local population of Eastern Bluebirds by providing and restoring habitat. A secondary goal is to increase interest and awareness in conservation and our environment, as people are inevitably charmed by Bluebirds when they have an opportunity to observe them more closely.

This project is different than most because each volunteer is self-directed and operates fairly

independently, on their own schedule and in their own area. Each volunteer is given all the information and sources available to Bonnie. She also shows them examples of successful nest box designs.

The project involves not just building and mounting the boxes but also monitoring them during nest season to keep out invasive species and to record what kind of success you have. Those reports can then be sent to the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#) for their nest box monitoring program.



*A Chalet box with a Bluebird. Photo by Bonnie Tull.*

Volunteers help by learning about Bluebird habitat and behavior, building their own nest boxes, and talking to landowners who have good habitat about letting the volunteers mount and monitor nest boxes. This provides a wonderful opportunity to spread the MN message and get people interested in conservation!

Bonnie's personal Bluebird trail encompasses the area from the Friendship Baptist Church on FM1826 south to Karen Hulene Bartell's H2Oasis habitat near La Ventana and includes the Driftwood Fire Station and the Goldenwood neighborhood. Bonnie secured the cooperation of the Church and Fire Station as well as several neighbors in Goldenwood who have suitable habitat.

H2Oasis is also actively involved in the project. Future plans at H2Oasis include enlisting the Boy Scouts.



*Bonnie showing her PVC nest box which has been approved by the North American Bluebird Society. Photo provided by Bonnie Tull.*

Bonnie has taken the extra step of designing her own nest boxes to better withstand the heat of our Texas summers thus encouraging the birds to have more than just two broods. One of her designs, for a PVC fence post nest box, has been approved by the North American Bluebird Society, and she's constantly tweaking and coming up with new ideas. Sometimes her improvements are only a way to modify existing nest boxes for better use. The trick is in making something that is simple enough for most non-handy people to build yet which is effective and easy to clean and monitor.

Once you become interested in Bluebird nest boxes, that interest can lead to an interest in all sorts of nesting and nest boxes for other species too. You can get into the nest box video cam activity or you can learn to recognize various nests and eggs and make a habit out of hunting for nests each season to remove possible Cowbird eggs.

In Bonnie's case, it morphed into her whole interest in creating a wildlife habitat and nurturing as many animals, birds, and amphibians as she can. She points out that humans are the most numerous of all animal species as far as she knows, and it should be our job to be stewards of our environment for the benefit of all those species that are at our mercy.

Please contact Bonnie, [bonehead.tull@gmail.com](mailto:bonehead.tull@gmail.com), 512-858-2829, if you would like to help or learn more about this project.

\*\*\*  
**Chapter News**

***Kasey Mock Leaving!***

Our County Extension Agent, Kasey Mock, has announced that he has accepted a new job with Plateau Land and Wildlife Management Services, effective June 1<sup>st</sup>.

We enjoyed working with Kasey during his tenure and wish him well in his new position!

***Rainbow Ranch site visit***

The training class of Master Naturalists conducted their second site visit at classmate's Mark Chonko's property in Wimberley on May 25<sup>th</sup>. Mark and Donna reside on 10 acres off Lone Man Mountain road.

Approximately 30 students and training committee members toured the site that is naturally terraced with four levels of limestone shelving.



*Donna Chonko leads the class around the house and toward the rainwater storage area. Photo by Lance Jones.*

Donna Chonko gave a brief overview of the house and the rainwater collection system that provides most of the water needs. The tour was led by Richard Stark, archaeologist and Paul Johnson of the Texas Forest Service.

- Lance Jones

***Birding with Jesse Huth***

Master Naturalists and members of the San Marcos Greenbelt Alliance marked the International Bird Migration Day May 15<sup>th</sup> with a birding walk in Schulle Canyon Preserve. It had rained earlier in the morning and the clouds kept the skies overcast and humid.

Jesse Huth, an expert birder from Wimberley, led the half dozen interested walkers along a trail designated in the Heart of Texas birding trail through a live oak, ashe juniper, and elm preserve in the city limits. When the sky was overcast and cool the birds remained in the tall canopy and sang nosily. Warblers were in abundance as the magnolia, yellow, common yellow throat and Wilson's warblers were heard and then seen as they passed through the Hill Country for destinations north. Numerous native birds were also sighted including red-eyed vireo, Bewicks and Carolina Wrens, and mockingbirds.



*The group scans the treetops in search of the elusive warblers. Photo by Lance Jones.*

All the activity wasn't confined to the skies as student Master Naturalists Gena Fleming, Judy and Richard McBride found a wealth of insects including beetles and caterpillars climbing about on the tall grasses and wildflowers.

The walk concluded just as the sun broke through and the temperatures began to rise.

***Dahlstrom Ranch***

Our chapter has been asked to participate in the Dahlstrom Ranch educational planning project. The goal is to develop a plan for delivering programs at the Dahlstrom Ranch public access area.

If you're interested in helping with this or have any questions, please contact Walt Krudop, [volunteer@haysmn.org](mailto:volunteer@haysmn.org).

***May Chapter Meeting***

Billy Kniffen, a Water Resource Specialist with the Department of Biological & Agricultural Engineering, Texas AgriLife Extension Service, and former Hays County Extension Agent delivered a very informative and fast-paced presentation on all aspects of rainwater harvesting.

Such is the power of Billy's talk, that he also brought much-welcomed rain and a rainbow, as a bonus!

### ***Vote on the TX Master Naturalist Program to become a National Model!***

A national dialogue about conservation in America has been launched to learn about some of the smart, creative ways communities are conserving natural areas and natural resources. The premise is that these ideas can be "voted" on or "promoted" and possibly selected as national models for the country to adopt through the recent "America's Great Outdoors Initiative" and the national plan that will be developed.

The Master Naturalist program has been added as one of the ideas to promote nationally using stats and information from the Texas Master Naturalist Program in the categories of: Reconnect with the Outdoors AND Public Lands Conservation.

Visit the following website to vote and promote the Master Naturalist Program Ideas as an idea or program that every state in the nation should have!

Its easy-- go to:  
<http://ideas.usda.gov/ago/ideas.nsf/>

Create your own log in and password in the upper right hand of the page.  
Then search "Master Naturalist" and click the "promote" words and/or add a comment if you like.

Read more about the national initiative at:  
<http://www.doi.gov/americasgreatoutdoors/>

Michelle M. Haggerty  
Texas Parks & Wildlife Department  
Master Naturalist Program Coordinator  
309 Sidney Baker South  
Kerrville, TX 78028  
Ph: 830-896-2504  
Fax: 830-792-6167  
Mobile: 979-587-2627  
[mhaggerty@wfscgate.tamu.edu](mailto:mhaggerty@wfscgate.tamu.edu)

TMN Homepage: <http://masternaturalist.tamu.edu>

### ***Old Tunnel Bat Cave Field Trip***

There is a Special Field Trip scheduled for July 28<sup>th</sup> to the Old Tunnel Bat Cave Wildlife Area. HCMNs will be treated to a private tour by Nyta Brown who spoke at our January chapter meeting. We can have

a maximum of 70 people attend. Please RSVP to Tom Hausler, [vp@haysmn.org](mailto:vp@haysmn.org), or 512-858-1015.

### ***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 May 2010 are due by June 7<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***

*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).

### ***Mother Nature's Son Blog***

Art Arizpe is writing a blog, called Mother Nature's Son, devoted to his Master Naturalist activities and Nature Photography.

Be sure to check it out at:

<http://mother-natures-son.blogspot.com>

Please feel free to leave comments or suggestions.

## *Larry Calvert's Agarita Jelly*

Agarita Jelly -- Really!!

This spring has been such a joy with all the blooming plants and happily fed animals. One of my favorite times of the day is during my morning walks. I usually am walking somewhere around sunrise. There is so much to see and hear without the "noise" of people around. This year I particularly enjoyed the daily changes--flowers, grasses, birds, and the agarita bushes. I had tried agarita berries during one of the Freeman Ranch Master Naturalist training classes and they have tempted me ever since. So as soon as I found some ripe berries, I started picking and eating them as I walked. After awhile I brought up the idea of making agarita jelly. Everyone at home was interested--and curious. I have fond memories of all the canning my mom did and I figured I could do it. With no recipes or experience, I turned to the Internet and got plenty of help.

Convinced that agarita jelly was a good idea, I started picking berries despite the pain. Then I got smarter. One of the recipes suggested shaking the branches over a sheet. I added some plastic garden gloves to the equipment list and off I went. With these improvements and some serious field experience, I was able to achieve a rate of about 3 pounds an hour depending on the bush.

With 5 pounds (about 5 quarts) picked, I started the jelly-making process. The recipes recommend triple washing. The first wash was a killer. My wife took pity on me and helped with the first wash. We spent a collective 7 hours over the sink removing agarita leaves (painfully), stems, trash grasses, and berries that looked to have been nibbled by birds or bugs. With this task behind us, the next 2 washings and the actual jelly-making process were pretty much like any other canning process. I did learn that none of it was as easy as mom made it look.

The process resulted in 14 ½ - 8 oz. jars of beautiful red agarita berry jelly with a fresh flavor that is truly distinctive. Although it took a good bit of time, I plan to do it again next time the crop allows and put the things I learned this year to work to streamline the process. We think we could cut the overall time by 1/3, maybe even 1/2.

It is not too late to try to make some agarita jelly this year if you hurry out and start the process right away. Good luck! If you have questions, please give me a call.

- Larry Calvert

## *Tom Hausler's Bird Photos*



*A Screech Owl. Photo provided by Tom Hausler.*



*A Scott's Oriole waiting to use a hummingbird feeder. Photo provided by Tom Hausler.*

## *Lee Ann Linam*

On May 22<sup>nd</sup>, The Austin American Statesman ran an article, "Water suppliers may need to consider the health of mussels", about a recent federal ruling on the health of freshwater mussels and the possible listing of 11 species as endangered. Lee Ann Linam is in a photograph showing a survey on the Brazos.

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



## **Advanced Training Opportunities**

### *Texas Invasives*

The following website [www.texasinvasives.org](http://www.texasinvasives.org) provides information on invasives and the program for monitoring. Information is also provided on monitoring training programs. See the website for details and locations of trainings. MNs who attend a program scheduled from 9:00 to 4:00 will earn 6.0 hours of advanced training. One training will be held

in Comal county in the fall; others are scheduled throughout the state.



## **Volunteer Opportunities**

### ***Monitoring Chimney Swifts, Project #912***

The North American Chimney Swift Nest Site Research Project (NSRP) is a joint effort of the Driftwood Wildlife Association with support from Texas Partners in Flight and the Nongame Urban Program of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. The goal of the project is to monitor existing nest and roost sites and to develop and test smaller, more manageable towers which can be easily installed by homeowners.

To find a nesting site or roost, keep your eyes on the skies at dusk and watch for areas where swifts are feeding. Look for a tall shaft, chimney or similar structure to find where Chimney Swifts go to roost in your area. Observe the roost starting about 30 minutes before dusk and estimate the number of swifts that enter. E-mail the roost location and number of swifts observed to [DWA@austin.rr.com](mailto:DWA@austin.rr.com). Monitoring can be done on a one time basis or regularly until the swifts migrate in October.

Also, mark your calendar to participate in Swift Night Out, a continent wide event, to raise awareness about Chimney Swifts. On one night over the weekend of August 6, 7, 8, and/or September 10, 11, 12 observe the roost starting about 30 minutes before dusk and estimate the number of swifts that enter. When you have your number, email us at [DWA@austin.rr.com](mailto:DWA@austin.rr.com). That's all there is to it!

Want to do more? Build an artificial Chimney Swift tower or if your chimney flue is not metal, take the cap off and enjoy being a Chimney Swift landlord.

For more information, go to [www.chimneyswift.org](http://www.chimneyswift.org) or contact Ann Connell at [asc0707@gmail.com](mailto:asc0707@gmail.com) or 512.913.1441.

### ***Barsana Dham Trail Building***

**Friday, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>  
9:00am-12:00pm  
Hays MN Project #909**

For more information, contact Dennis Wagner ([Dennis@UnitedCountryCentralTexas.com](mailto:Dennis@UnitedCountryCentralTexas.com)).

### ***Elephant Ear Removal***

**Wednesday, June 2<sup>nd</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup>  
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](mailto:laszewski@yahoo.com)).

### ***Hyacinth Removal***

**Saturday, June 26<sup>th</sup>  
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](mailto:wassenich@grandecom.net)).



## **State and National News**

### ***Think Before You Drink: Coffee Choice Helps Birds***

*Ithaca, NY*—A simple lifestyle choice can have a positive impact on bird conservation around the world. Scientists have established that the traditional method of growing coffee—beneath the canopy of a forest, rather than chopping down the trees for sun-grown coffees—provides vital habitat for birds.

“It’s a simple formula: keep the trees, keep the birds,” says Dr. Kenneth Rosenberg, director of Conservation Science at the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#). “When trees are retained, this has tremendous value to birds, especially migratory birds that winter in Central and South America and breed in North America during the summer.”

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



## Local News

### *6th Annual Naturescapes Photo Contest Underway*

San Marcos Greenbelt Alliance and the Hill County Photography Club announce the 6th Annual Naturescapes photo contest. The unique beauty of the natural areas within San Marcos inspired the Naturescapes Photography Contest. The contest now includes photographs taken in greenspaces throughout Hays County, with a special award for the best photograph taken in San Marcos parks and other natural areas within five miles of San Marcos city limits.

The contest is open to resident and visiting photographers of all ages. A \$200 prize will be awarded for Best in Show and \$150 for the best San Marcos area photo. Up to four \$100 Awards of Excellence will be presented for the next most outstanding photographs. Additional Awards of Merit will be presented at the discretion of the contest juror.

Suggested subjects include scenery, wildlife, plants, people and pets. Goals of the contest include increasing public awareness of the importance of protecting our natural world and giving photographers at all levels of experience a chance to capture, share, and receive recognition for beautiful and inspiring images. Complete rules and entry forms are found at [hcphotoclub.org](http://hcphotoclub.org). Entries must be submitted online or in person no later than 5:00 pm Monday, **July 12, 2010**. Entries will be accepted starting April 1, 2010. An award ceremony will be held at the San Marcos Activity Center, Saturday, September 11, 2010 from 5:00 pm – 7:30 pm.

Judging the event is [Adolfo Isassi](#) who has been looking through the lens since he got his Agfa-Matic for his 7th birthday, and using photography as an art medium since he graduated from the Instituto Tecnológico de Monterrey in Mexico in 1985 with a major in architecture and a minor in graphic design. He has exhibited his work with the Austin Association of Visual Arts, Texas Documentary Photographers shows, the City of Austin Cultural Arts Division, PX3 De La Photographie Paris, and fine art galleries around Central Texas.

Additional information, including past winners, can be found at [smgreenbelt.org](http://smgreenbelt.org)

- SMGA



## 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)