

Hays County Master Naturalists NEWSLETTER



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

May, 2012

Chapter Events

Chapter Board Meeting

The next board meeting will be held on Thursday, May 3rd, at the Camp Jacob Watershed Education Center at the Jacob's Well Natural Area, from 6:30 to 8:30 PM. A map is available [here](#). The meeting is open to members and the public.

If you have any questions or items for the agenda, please contact Larry Calvert, pres@haysmn.org, by April 30th.

Chapter Meeting

The next chapter meeting will be held on Thursday, May 24th, from 6:30pm to 8:30pm, at the Wimberley Presbyterian Church, 956 FM 2325. A map is available [here](#).

The speaker will be Dr. Jesse Lasky. Just graduated from UT, Jesse will talk about "Conservation threats from barriers to wildlife movement, and the US-Mexico border fence".

Human activity along the US-Mexico border reduces the ability of wildlife to move across the landscape. He will review the biological threats of impediments to wildlife movement, specifically in reference to threats from hundreds of miles of fencing built on border. He will also discuss related policy issues.

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



A Naturalist's View

Art Arizpe is the Chapter's Volunteer Service Projects Coordinator and also Newsletter Editor. He was in the Class of 2007.

Last year I conducted a survey of all our chapter's approved projects. I had three main goals – first to introduce myself as the new Volunteer Service Projects Coordinator and offer help, second to make sure the Project Leader's contact information was correct, and third to find out how the project was doing.

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TP&WD Rep	Lee Ann Linam

I want to thank all of the Chapter's Project Leaders for their service. We all care about our environment or we wouldn't be Master Naturalists, but it takes extra effort to identify, lead, and organize a project. A common trait among our most successful projects is that they have a committed, passionate leader who not only has a vision for the project but is able to effectively communicate it and rally volunteers to the cause. Our Project Leaders are a truly amazing group!

I updated the [Approved Projects](#) list in March as a result of the survey. There are now 53 approved projects. The main updates were to contact info, but some projects were removed, either because I was unable to establish contact with the leader or the project had no hours reported last year. If your project is no longer on the list, I want to hear from you! Please contact me, volunteer@haysmn.org, so we can review the project's status.

I had the opportunity to review the approved projects list with the new Training Class in early March. I pointed out the wide diversity of projects available to them. Some meet regularly, some as needed. Some have work during the week and some on weekends. Some are large, team efforts and some are individual and self-directed. Some are at specific locations and some are county-wide. There are plenty of opportunities available to us – you should be able to find some that fit your schedule and interests.

I also reviewed the process for getting a new project approved with the class and it's worth reviewing here. To submit a project for approval, please fill out the [form](#) on our web page and send it to me. The form is pretty simple and asks for basic information about the project, a description, the project leader contact information, and most importantly how the project supports our Texas Master Naturalist mission.

One of the main feedback items we received from the member survey at last year's Summer Social was to provide more timely information about Volunteer Hour Opportunities. We are currently testing a new Volunteer Hours Google calendar and will introduce it to the Chapter shortly. The new calendar will allow Project Leaders to add their events themselves and also set up invitee lists, RSVPs, and reminders, which should help get the word out faster.

As Volunteer Service Projects Coordinator, I'm here to help you with any questions or issues you have regarding any of our projects, whether you're a Project Leader or a chapter member. Please don't hesitate to contact me, volunteer@haysmn.org.

- Art Arizpe



Featured Project

Texas Amphibian Watch

Project #1006

The wet weather ponds are full because of the spring rains. At dusk, and continuing into the night, the sounds of frog calls can be heard from quite a distance. Are they really that loud or does sound travel better at night? They seem to be calling and answering or maybe challenging and responding. They seem to be in a hurry as if they know the ponds won't hold

water for long. In just a few days, the ponds are teeming with tadpoles and then small frogs. What kind of frogs are they? How many? What do they do when the ponds are dry?

Participating in the [Texas Amphibian Watch](#) (TAW) can help answer these questions. TAW is part of the [Texas Nature Trackers](#), sponsored by Texas Parks & Wildlife. Texas Nature Trackers is a citizen science program associated with the Texas Master Naturalist Program and its goal is to enable long-term conservation of species of concern and appreciation among Texans.

TAW gathers long-term data to assess amphibian population trends. Work includes support to training (planning, preparation, meal prep, registration) and other related Amphibian Watch activities.

Amphibians are important species to monitor because of their two-stage life cycle and water-permeable eggs and skin which makes them especially sensitive to drought cycles and also to environmental pollutants such as pesticides and heavy metals. They serve as important bio-indicators of the health of fresh water aquatic ecosystems.

The following list comes from the [TAW web page](#).



Unidentified toad at John Knox Ranch. Photo by Art Arizpe.

What can you do to help?

- First, become familiar with the kinds that occur in your area; learn about their habits, habitats and life-histories.
- Second, learn to recognize potential threats to amphibian populations and work to help prevent them. If you own land with native wetlands, maintain some in their natural state.
- Build stock ponds with shallow areas where amphibians can breed, or don't stock them with fish.
- Instead of damming or capping a spring, let it run for a distance and then take the water out.
- Don't fill in or dump trash and chemicals into wet caves or sinkholes.
- Avoid deliberately or inadvertently introducing species of plants and animals, including amphibians, into areas where they are not native.
- Work with local civic authorities and organizations to promote amphibian-sensitive development.
- If you live in an urban or suburban setting, install an amphibian-friendly pond in your backyard. You can even create a "toad house" by knocking a hole in a flower pot and turning it upside down near your water faucet.
- One of the best things you can do is to join with other people in Texas Amphibian Watch to gather the long-term data without which it is impossible to really understand what is happening to our amphibian populations.

- Keep a map and field guide handy and watch for amphibians wherever you go. Pick a favorite pond or wetland and start counting the kinds and numbers of each species that use it.
- Develop your skills and join the national North American Amphibian Monitoring Program. It's the least you can do –for where would we be without amphibians...?

You can participate as an Amphibian Spotter. The program will provide you with data sheets and any time you see or hear any amphibian, you record it on data sheets and on a map. At the end of year, you mail your data sheets and maps to the program.

You may also Adopt-a-Frog-Pond and conduct amphibian surveys. These may be nighttime call surveys or daytime monitoring for malformations.

There is a TAW workshop scheduled for June 5th, from 6:30 – 9:30pm at the Beverly S. Sheffield Education Center (aka, the Splash! Exhibit next to Barton Springs Pool in Zilker Park,

<http://www.austintexas.gov/blog/beverly-s-sheffield-education-center>), in Austin.

You will learn how to identify frog and toad species in Texas and participate in scientific research. The workshop is sponsored by the Capital Area Master Naturalists (<http://camn.org/>). The workshop fee is \$10/person for materials.



Lee Ann explains frog habitat and behavior. Photo by Art Arizpe.

Registration is required. To register for the workshop, or for more questions, contact Kathy McCormack at 512-698-9880.

You may also contact our TAW project leader and TPWD Chapter Advisor Lee Ann Linam, leeann.linam@tpwd.state.tx.us , for more information.



Chapter News

President's Message

We are so lucky!

We are so lucky to be in such a wonderful and bountiful place. The Hill Country is number 26 in the world based on biodiversity which means we get to see animals and plant life in an abundance that most others don't. As Master Naturalists we take advantage of this in the exposure we get to so many different things. Our training and advanced training take full advantage of this abundance. Just look at the subjects that get addressed on the chapter's Forum and the learning that takes place from the many observations we share there.

I like to think we influence our part of the world with our knowledge and significant volunteer presence. One indication of an area we influence with our outreach is that Hays County is number one in rain water collection on a per capita basis in Texas. I encourage each of you to recognize the influence Master Naturalists make on your environment. Reach out to others and share what you know so they too know how lucky we are.

- Larry Calvert

8th Annual Naturescapes Contest and Exhibition

The chapter is again joining the [Hill Country Photography Club](#) in co-sponsoring the 8th Annual Naturescapes Photography Contest and Exhibition. The Chapter is sponsoring an award for the Best Natural Waterscape photograph.

The Awards Reception will be held at the San Marcos Activity Center on Saturday, September 15th and the Exhibition will run at the Walkers' Gallery from September 15th through November 9th.

The contest started accepting entries on May 1st and the entry deadline is July 16th, so you have plenty of time to get your photographs ready and help promote awareness of the importance of preserving the beauty of our natural areas. Several HCMNs entered the contest and won awards last year, including Best in Show winner, Herb Smith. You can see last year's winners [here](#).

Visit the contest web page, <http://hcphotoclub.org/naturescapes.html> to learn more.

EmilyAnn Theatre Butterfly Festival

The 14th annual Butterfly Festival at the EmilyAnn Theatre and Gardens took place on one of the finest days Central Texas has to offer. There were more butterflies released than ever and, along with all the naturally occurring ones in the gardens, the record number of participants spent the day in a cloud of colorful wings.

The Master Naturalist volunteers stayed very busy all day with activities including a tank of local fish from TPWD, the aquifer and watershed models, rainfall simulator, a seed ball making table, and a station to answer queries and explain what the program has to offer.

Our very own Mother Nature, AKA Diane Spicer, was on hand to remind everyone to treat her with consideration and to enjoy the wonders she bestows.



*Children looking at local fish species through an aquascope.
Photo by Leah Laszewski.*

Melinda Seib, the HCMN contact person for Emily Ann's prairie restoration project, and Mimi Boelter, co-contact for the Butterfly Festival, have been working for months to get ready for this event and to ensure plenty of volunteers would be on hand. Ray Franklin did his usual terrific job of explaining the lessons of the rainfall simulator. We were fortunate to have 6

members of the newest training class helping, along with seven seasoned members and a small group from the Alamo MN chapter in San Antonio. All the volunteers had plenty of interaction with children and all the children seemed to really soak up information.

The traditional Nature Walk was led by Ray Franklin this year. Seven Master Naturalists, a troop of Girl Scouts and other interested folks enjoyed the opportunity to have a close look at the grounds and reflect a bit on the natural history of the area.

April is always a busy time but if you haven't yet had a chance to volunteer or at least visit EmilyAnn on Butterfly Day, try your best to get over to see the gardens and talk to Melinda about the work that still needs to be done on the grounds. It's a good place to practice land management techniques and see all the hard work pay off.

- Leah Laszewski

Red Letter Day for Wimberley's Blue Hole

Blue holes are located around the world, the most famous being the 663-foot Dean's Blue Hole in the Bahamas and scuba divers' beloved Great Blue Hole off the coast of Belize. While these iconic saltwater blue holes are widely known, the citizens of Wimberley would argue that their blue hole is the best of the best! Wimberley's blue hole is a deep spring freshwater basin formed by the dissolution of layers of limestone over a long period. Until a few years ago, it was privately owned with a reputation as a traditional swimming hole and popular vacation spot for generations of families. When private owners decided to sell the property in 2003, a forward-thinking group of Village of Wimberley leaders managed to acquire this unique 126 acre parcel a short distance from downtown. It has been a labor of love ever since!

On Saturday April 28th a group of HCMNs and highly committed Wimberley citizens assembled at Blue Hole Regional Park for a second Plant the Park Day. Volunteers showed up with spades, hoes, and sturdy work gloves to dig holes for a collection of native plants and to remove invasive species. The work was under the supervision of landscape architect Steve Speirs of Design Workshop. Attendees included Lin Weber, current chairperson on the HCMN Training Committee and current trainee class members Connie and John Boltz. When I asked Connie what she was doing for the day, she laughed and said, "digging"..... what modesty for

such a monumental task! Leo Butler, member of the 2008 Roadrunner class, had a shovel in hand and was sweating of brow. He is a neighbor of dedicated HCMNs Dell and Gerin Hood who were busy removing invasives. Anne Child was on hands-and-knees planting away and HCMN past-president Jeff Vasgaard was busy helping to orient volunteers. Helen Bowie shared that she was working with the Wimberley Garden Club to have the Blue Hole Park on the upcoming garden tour. While the work will not be completed by then, it's a good opportunity to generate interest for more volunteers and donations.



HCMNs at "Plant the Park Day". Photo by Steve Speir.

Former mayor and Blue Hole Executive Director Steve Klepfer was on hand, as were former councilpersons, Marilee Wood and Curt Busk, like the proud parents they are after years of commitment to this impressive venture.

If you missed this Plant the Park Day, there will be other opportunities. Blue Hole Regional Park is a work in progress for years to come.....stay tuned and come volunteer!

- Lucille Kirkham

THE BIRDS AND THE WEEDS AND THE FLOWERS AND THE BEES.....

A question that I am frequently asked is, "What is the difference between a weed and a flower?" GOOD QUESTION! What IS the difference? The dictionary defines a weed as "a plant growing where it is not wanted and that is in competition with cultivated plants". But, really, is THAT the definition of a weed? If this subject were to come up among Master Naturalists, our answers would be quite different, even amongst our group. If I were to ask one of my friends who lives in the city with a manicured lawn, their answer would be VERY different. I have heard many people this year talk about how many weeds they have in their yard because of the rain we had earlier this year. An interesting question, to say the least, and one that has many, many different answers. Perhaps weeds are like beauty; their definition lies in the eye of the beholder.



Corn Poppies, Papaver rhoeas. These are beautiful flowers! Do you consider this a "weed" because it is not native to Texas?? It is not invasive, however it is native to Europe and Africa. Photo by Lisa Kay.

I look at my little two acre plot of land and take such pleasure in identifying what is native and what is not. Restoration is our goal and what we view as weeds are mostly non-native and/or invasive species.

Regardless of what your definition of a weed is or isn't, many people want their "weeds" gone. Walk in to a Lowe's or a Home Depot and the options and products available can be overwhelming. Over the years, I have put a lot of thought and research into weed eradication and how our methods affect our environment. At the time I started thinking about this, I was not a Naturalist. My curiosity was formed because I had a dog which kept getting pancreatitis. It became chronic and kept wondering what could be causing this? The vet had no answer for me other than a broad array of possibilities. But, I had to ask myself, ARE THE PRODUCTS WE ARE USING ON OUR LAND CAUSING OUR DOG TO BE SICK? And so, a journey began for me to educate myself on chemicals and pesticides and balance between humans and Mother Nature. It was at that time that I decided it was time to go Organic.

I began my studies with the Master Naturalist group in February of 2011. One evening, at a site visit, I was stunned when I heard someone talking about the chemicals that they used on

their "weeds". I didn't say anything at the time because it wasn't my place to preach to someone about what they should or should not be doing. However, I will admit that I have been bothered by this. We are Naturalists and care deeply about doing no harm to our land and water. We live on very porous land and most of what is used on the land either seeps into water sheds or runs off into the water. There are ways to be less harmful than using chemicals. Everything that we do to our environment affects it, even when our intentions are good. A personal mission is to try to impact it as little as possible. Another interesting scenario that has popped up recently is regarding my mother in law's property on the Guadalupe River. She is an avid gardener and has a bright green thumb and loves nature. I was at her house a few weeks ago and she commented about the birds not returning to her house yet this year. I was once again stunned. Birds not returning yet? We have so many birds in my area that the sound can be deafening at times. As we walked around her property and then into her green house, I couldn't help but notice all of the chemicals that lined the shelves. Do her choices in weed and pest control affect her bird population? I'm not sure of the answer to that question, but it does make me wonder.

The safest thing to do is pull "weeds". However, sometimes that can be a daunting task depending on how many you have, etc. Another alternative is to use Horticultural Vinegar or boiling water. There is no "waiting" period if you want to plant something else in its place. Both work great. Every spring, I go to the nursery and buy my basic products that I'll be using throughout the year: Horticultural Vinegar, Horticultural Molasses, Orange Oil, Seaweed, Diatomaceous Earth, and Citrus oil. We also compost just about everything that we can which provides a nourishing natural fertilizer. Garlic, when crushed and combined with water and a drop of dishwashing detergent makes a great pesticide. FIRE, of course, is an excellent tool to help keep nature balanced. Not all of us have the option of using controlled burns, but a blow torch works well on a much smaller level!

A very educational book regarding "natural" or "organic" alternatives is called, "Texas Gardening The Natural Way" by Howard Garrett. While this book focuses on gardening, so many of the things in the book apply to natural land stewardship as well. It also offers organic alternatives to pest control if you have unwanted pests.

For the most part, we tolerate our "weeds" and pull them when we need to. We are slowly adding native grasses, wildflowers, etc. to restore our property. It is a process and one we enjoy. It is also an ongoing educational experience. Admittedly, I do find joy in identifying my "weeds" along with my natives. I just experience an overwhelming sense of gratitude every time I'm outside enjoying the birds, the butterflies, the critters, the trees, the "weeds" (chuckle), the flowers..... Mother Nature feeds not only my body, but also my soul. I just want to make sure that I'm not feeding her chemicals in return.

Happy "Weeding"!

- Lisa Kay

Spring Lake Preserve Hike

HCMN Donna Browning led a group of 8 HCMNs on a hike at Spring Lake Preserve on April 8th. They spent some time identifying plants along the trail.



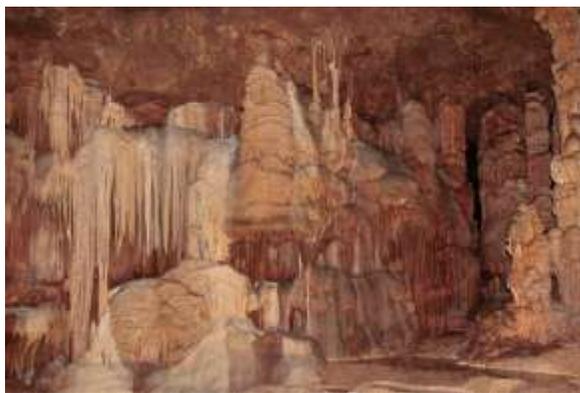
Donna identifying a Bluewood Condalia bush. Photo by Bob Currie.



Donna identifying a Mountain Mustard. Photo by Bob Currie.

April Chapter Meeting

Our April meeting was a Field Trip to the "[Cave Without a Name](#)" near Boerne. The cave is recognized as a National Natural Landmark. The tour sizes are limited to 25 people and there was so much interest from our chapter that we had to split into 2 groups. Each group spent an enjoyable 90 minutes, in a constant 66 degrees, touring the 6 major rooms. The guide explained how the cave was formed by underground flows from the nearby Guadalupe River and how the various structures, including stalactites, stalagmites, columns, curtains, and other features have formed.



Intricate cave formations. Photo by Art Arizpe.



The tour group in front of cave pools. Photo by Art Arizpe.

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 April are due by May 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 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

Art Arizpe

Our game camera got some nice shots last week.

First, a Bobcat, kindly identified by Tom Hausler, based on the spots on its legs. In 4 months of operation, this is the first time we got a bobcat.



Second, a nice shot of a Turkey couple. We frequently capture wild turkey shots, but they both seem to be displaying in this one. I think they're doing a mating dance!



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.

Reminder: Rather than replying to the Advanced Training e-mails which come from the Chapter Secretary, you should send questions about AT Opportunities to Becky Northcut, the AT Committee Chair, at atcom.haysmn.org.



Volunteer Opportunities

Please watch your emails for upcoming Volunteer Opportunities.



State and National News

The Associated Press has an article about how fire ants are impacting the endangered Prairie Chickens.

“HOUSTON (AP) — Trapping voracious fire ants accidentally imported in a ship's ballast to the United States in the 1930s has helped the recovery of an endangered prairie chicken in Texas and could help other wildlife, according to research released Thursday.

Red imported fire ants have damaged agriculture, soil and wildlife in the southeastern United States, costing the Texas economy alone about \$1.2 billion annually. The new research conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service indicates that by laying traps to kill fire ants, some of the damage can be prevented.

In Texas, the fire ants have largely consumed insects that are the main food source for baby Attwater Prairie Chickens, said Terry Rossignol, manager of the Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge.”

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



Local News

Group looks to preserve starry skies

From the statesman.com:

“SAN MARCOS — Fearful that cloudless Hill Country skies could also become empty of stars, a new cooperative is trying to curb encroaching light pollution.

Earlier this month, about 10 residents, businesses and ranchers rallied to form the Hill Country Night Sky Cooperative, an offshoot of the Hill Country Alliance, pledging to eliminate light that unnecessarily escapes from outdoor lighting fixtures on their property.

According to the Bee Cave-based Hill Country Alliance, approximately 30 percent of the cost to power an unshielded outdoor bulb is spent illuminating the sky, with \$2.2 billion wasted annually in the United States each year.

The group's hope is that through education and leading by example, neighboring landowners and businesses will be encouraged to follow suit.”

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

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