

Hays County Master Naturalists NEWSLETTER



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

February, 2006

FEBRUARY EVENTS

February 9 Meeting

General Membership Meeting Mixer and Pizza Party at Jacob's Well Preserve, Wimberley

You can't miss this huge Pizza Party and celebration at Jacob's Well! Here's your chance to meet old classmates and members of our next class.

David Baker, Executive Director of the Wimberley Valley Watershed Association, will welcome Master Naturalists and the incoming Class of 2006 to a Nature Walk around the newly acquired 50-acre nature preserve before the party.

WVWA announced its acquisition of Jacob's Well and adjoining properties on both sides of Cypress Creek in January 2006. WVWA's coup creating the preserve will preserve the spring from real estate development and protect the aquifer that feeds the spring and water wells in the Wimberley valley.

Following pizza, David will present "Jacob's Well Natural Area and Challenges," a review of the history and natural features of the property and an overview of the Association's plans to restore the area.

The tour begins at 5:00 pm. Pizza arrives at the old tennis pavilion at 6:00 pm, the membership meeting begins at 7:00 pm, and Baker's presentation at 7:15 pm.

The business session will focus on the adoption of new Chapter Bylaws and an Operating Manual. Both documents are available at the HCMN home page under "News and Reminders."

THE PRESIDENTIAL VIEW

Greetings HC Master Naturalists,

Over the past couple of months our chapter volunteers on the Board of Directors and its standing committees have been working hard to revamp our organization to better serve you and the mission of the Master Naturalist program. We have moved the

HAYS COUNTY MASTER NATURALISTS

President	Tom Watson
Vice President	Dale Shively
Secretary	Susan Nenney
Treasurer	Winifred Simon
Training Committee	Joe Piazza
Records Committee	Judy Telford
State Advisory Board	Walt Krudop
Web Master	Herb Smith
Editor	Richard Barnett,
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Extension Agent	Bryan Davis

board meetings and training classes to Wimberley so that these activities will be closer to the majority of the membership, requiring less average driving time for the chapter as a whole. Board and training class meetings will be held at White Wings Ranch, which is a great facility with outdoor amenities for our meetings.

Herb Smith, working with the Board and other volunteers, has revised and improved our website to which we are in the process of adding more and new content to aid you in your participation in chapter functions and activities. We are excited at the results of Herb's efforts. Please check out the revision at [Hays County Texas Master Naturalist Chapter](#). Please continue to refer to the website for new announcements, monthly newsletter, chapter calendar, and the many other features there. We will be updating the information there continuously and that is the best way to keep abreast of chapter happenings.

We have scheduled a general membership meeting on February 9th to kick off the year at Jacob's Well. This will be an occasion to tour Jacob's Well with David Baker, Executive Director of the Wimberley Valley Watershed Association, eat some pizza, and get acquainted with the new trainees who will be entering this year's training class. At this meeting we will ask you to vote FOR adoption of the state bylaws and chapter operating manual which will provide the chapter with more versatile, efficient, and clear procedures and

structures for moving our chapter forward. We are working on improving our criteria for approval of volunteer hours and advanced training and on improving the procedures for reporting volunteer hours. Dale Shively, our Vice President, has been working on programming for 2006 and will be polling the membership to see which activities are preferred. So please come and help us kick off the new year and welcome the new trainees.

The board has set as some goals for the coming year which are to increase the retention rate of our membership, increase outreach to the general public, and increase volunteer activity in chapter approved projects. Dale Shively is hard at work on a programming schedule. Myself and others are working to revise our volunteer projects and advanced training guidelines, including online hours reporting. We will be updating the website as our work progresses. Others are working to improve communications within the chapter membership, to enhance publicity offerings to the general public, to increase direct and indirect outreach programs, and so much more.

We hope that you will join us for a dynamic new year as we attempt to reach out to you and the general public. I think that we can have a lot of fun, renew many old acquaintances, enjoy volunteering and learning, and carry the mission of the MN program forward.

I look forward to seeing you at our Kickoff Party at Jacob's Well and to visiting with you throughout the year.

Take good care,
Tom

CHAPTER NEWS

February 16 Executive Board Meeting

Tentative Agenda:

- Reports from Committees
- Reports from Officers
- Old Business
 - Review of General Membership meeting on Feb. 9th
- New Business
 - Programming for membership in 2006 - Chapter calendar
 - Improvement of communications within and external to chapter
 - Discussion of how to implement goals of 2006 BOD established at last meeting:

- (1) Retention, (2) Increase of outreach volunteer hours, (3) Increase of general volunteer hours

Recognition of members for outstanding contributions to the chapter

Annual Dues Time

It's past time for your annual dues. Please send your \$12:00 check payable to "Hays County Master Naturalists" to your Treasurer, Winifred Simon, 600 Red Hawk Rd, Wimberley, TX 78676.

Background Check Requirements

The Texas Cooperative Extension has modified their advisory regarding when background checks will be required for those performing volunteer work. Effective January 2, 2006, only those volunteers who will work directly with youth must be screened. These checks will be required every three years, and screening reports from schools, churches, youth groups, etc. will be accepted as well.

If you do volunteer work as a Master Naturalist with youth and do not have documentation of a background check within the last three years, you may obtain an application form from the County Extension Office by calling 512-393-2120. They will give you instructions on where to send the completed form. The \$10.00 fee should be made payable to Hays County Master Naturalist and sent to Winifred Simon, 600 Red Hawk Road, Wimberley, 78676. If you do have a current background check, you can send verification to the Extension Office.

Members in the News

Judy Telford takes office in February as a director of the San Marcos River Foundation.

Past President Dell Hood has been elected to the Board of Directors of the Wimberley Players. Gerin Hood is also an active member of the Players and a cellist with the Starlight Symphony.

Herb Smith was recently reelected as president of the Hill Country Photography Club (<http://www.hcphotoclub.org>).

CALENDAR

February 4. San Marcos River Foundation **annual membership party**.
<http://www.sanmarcosriver.org/calendar.htm>

February 9. **General Membership Meeting** and Trainee Mixer at Jacob's Well Preserve.

February 10-12. **Campout for Master Naturalists** hosted by Gulf Coast Master Naturalist Chapter at Brazos Bend State Park.
For all information about date, location, cost, registration and advanced training, please check <http://community.webtv.net/masternaturalist/EVENTSforTexasMNs>.

February 16. **Executive Board meeting**. White Wings Ranch. 7:00-9:00 pm.

February 18. **Winter Botany**: Winter Tree Identification with Flo Oxley. LBJ Wildflower Center. More information at <http://www.wildflower.org>.

February 21. **2006 Training Class** begins.

February 25. **Retreat for Central Region Chapters**, to be hosted by Heart of Texas Chapter at the Lake Waco Wetlands.
Chapters include Capital Area, Hays County, Highland Lakes, Hill Country, Heart of Texas, Lindheimer, Lost Pines, Tierra Grande, Trans Pecos and Western Edwards Plateau. Mark Klym will assist with the advanced training session. There will also be a tour of the Heart of Texas Chapter's project at the Wetlands.

February 25. **Native Plants as Habitat**. NPSOT Symposium at . LBJ Wildflower Center. More information at <http://www.wildflower.org>.

March 9. **Do-it-yourself Container Water Gardens** workshop. San Marcos Nature Centre. 6:00 – 8:00 pm. <http://www.ci.san-marcos.tx.us> under "Parks & Recreation – Nature Centre."

March 5, 2.00 pm, **SMGA Outing at Blanco Shoals**.
<http://www.smgreenbelt.org/NewsEvents.htm>.

March 11. **Volunteer Representatives Council Meeting**. Parrie Haynes Ranch near Killeen. Agenda, directions and meeting details will be sent in early March.

March 19, 2:00 pm, **SMGA Outing at Upper through to Lower Purgatory Creek**.
<http://www.smgreenbelt.org/NewsEvents.htm>.

April 5-7, 2006. **Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute 25th Anniversary Symposium** featuring "Frontiers in Wildlife Science: Linking Ecological Theory with Management Applications." Omni Bayfront Hotel in Corpus Christi and Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Center in Kingsville. For details of the symposium and registration information, please check www.ckwri.tamuk.edu or call 361-593-4025.

April 22. **Wildflower Fiesta Plant Sale & Gardening Festival**, San Marcos Nature Centre. 10:00 am – 4:00 pm. <http://www.ci.san-marcos.tx.us> under "Parks & Recreation – Nature Centre."

April 22. **Earth Day celebration**. St. Mary's Catholic Church, Wimberley.

April 23-29. **National Volunteer Week**.

May 11. **Making Floral Crafts from Your Own Backyard** workshop, San Marcos Nature Centre. 6:00 – 8:00 pm. <http://www.ci.san-marcos.tx.us> under "Parks & Recreation – Nature Centre."

June 17. **Backyard Habitat Planning & Certification Workshop**. San Marcos Nature Centre. 10:00 am – 1:00 pm. <http://www.ci.san-marcos.tx.us> under "Parks & Recreation – Nature Centre."

July 20. **Cactus Gardening** Workshop. San Marcos Nature Centre. 6:00 – 8:00 pm. <http://www.ci.san-marcos.tx.us> under "Parks & Recreation – Nature Centre."

ADVANCED TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Arboriculture 101

The Texas Forest Service announces Arboriculture 101, an Advanced Training course for Master Naturalists.

Please see the Texas Forest Service website for a training description, agenda and registration info: <http://texasforests-service.tamu.edu/shared/article.asp?DocumentID=1175>.

The course is also listed under Events on our web page: <http://texasforests.tamu.edu>.

John R. Warner, CF, Urban District Forester
Conroe District Office, Texas Forest Service - TAMU
System, 1328 FM 1488, Conroe, Texas 77384.

Natural History of Central Texas Owls

February 3-4, 2006. Rob Fergus, National Audubon Science Coordinator of the Audubon At Home Program and founding director of the Hornsby Bend Bird Observatory will review the ecology, life history, and methods of finding, attracting, and managing the six owl species that regularly occur in Central Texas. Details at <http://www.hornsbybend.org/workshop-owl-feb06.html>.

Management of Black-capped vireo and the Golden-cheeked warbler at Fort Hood

February 20. Gil Eckrich, outreach coordinator for Fort Hood's natural resources branch, will speak at Wimberley Birding Society's quarterly meeting, 10:00 a.m., Monday, February 20, in the Wimberley Senior Citizens Center. Eckrich will explain the outstanding success Fort Hood has achieved in managing these two endangered birds. Details at <http://wimbirds.org/meeting-02-20-06.html>.

The Cultural and Natural History of Purple Martins

March 3-4. If you are a veteran martin landlord, a hopeful enthusiast with a new martin house, or just curious about these amazing birds, we invite you to join Rob Fergus, coauthor of *The Purple Martin* (UT Press, Austin: 2002) and National Audubon Science Coordinator of the Audubon At Home Program for a workshop on the cultural and natural history of the Purple Martin. Details at <http://www.hornsbybend.org/workshop-martin-mar06.html>.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Ringtail Ridge Trail

HCMN PROJECT #424

Starting March 4th and every Saturday during March and April San Marcos Greenbelt Alliance's trail crew will meet at 8:30 am at Ringtail Ridge, where work is underway to extend the primary hike and bike trail. Untrained? Unskilled? No problem: training happens with short briefings on site and one minute sessions while work progresses. Reading sources are available for those who want to know more about design and construction. If you can make only a few of the sessions, that's fine. We work for 2 hours and then go for the coffee shop. Bring strong gloves and eye protection if you have them. Contact tobe@austin.rr.com or <http://www.smgreenbelt.org/NewsEvents.htm>.

Wildscape Garden, San Marcos Nature Center

HCMN PROJECT # 405

The extended dry weather has not kept bluebonnet seedlings from growing. Although their numbers appear to be fewer than last year, a timely rain should again give us the most colorful display in the Nature Center. We have a few pink evening primroses in flower. The hedge parsley, however, has also sprouted, and there's no stopping dandelions, sow thistles, wild geranium, medicago, red henbit, bermudagrass, and similar invasive plants. We have to pull up these aggressive invaders to control them.

We welcome contributions of seeds or seedlings of annual and perennial wildflowers to improve the diversity of our garden.

Brown Headed Cowbird Trapping at Balcones Canyonlands

Goal: The goal of this project is to incorporate volunteer assistance to expand the number of traps in operation beyond what biologists could manage in conjunction with golden-cheeked warbler surveys.

Date: This project requires a commitment of participation from mid-March through June.

Time: Traps need to be visited 3 times per week. A team of volunteers can share the responsibility for one trap. For example, a team of 3 individuals can each take one visit per week. Alternatively, biologists can share the responsibility for a trap with

1 or more volunteers if the volunteers cannot commit to a full week of visits.

Location: Various properties within Balcones Canyonlands Preserve

The Details:

Staff biologists need assistance in operating brown-headed cowbird traps during the breeding season of the golden-cheeked warblers and black-capped vireos. Operating a cowbird trap as a volunteer requires:

- * Providing your own transportation to the property upon which the trap is located;
- * Following protocols for security and safety;
- * Walking to trap that may be a short hike from any drivable road;
- * Entering the trap to replenish seed and water;
- * Visually checking the trap to make sure it has not been damaged;
- * Contacting the biologist managing that property when new cowbirds are in the trap.

No specific skills are required. Volunteers will be trained either in one group or by the biologist managing the property with a trap.

Contact: Gail McGlamery, 512-263-6347; fax 512-263-1276; gail.mcglamery@ci.austin.tx.us

STATE NEWS

Texas Monarch Watch

Last year at this time, I predicted that the total hectares for the monarch overwintering population would be less than 4 hectares. My prediction was based on the conditions in the spring, those through the summer, and the reports from taggers in the fall. The reports from the taggers suggested that the migration was the poorest in 16 years. This assessment was subsequently supported by the count of the total number of butterflies tagged. This total was a bit less than 26,000 and was the lowest number of monarchs tagged since the fall of 1996, the fifth year of our program. The total overwintering population was only 2.19 hectares, the lowest population recorded to date. My prediction of less than 4 hectares was borne out, but I suspected that the final population would prove to be much lower since there were many similarities to 2000, when the final numbers were only 2.83 hectares. A partial analysis of the reasons for the low numbers of monarchs in 2004 can be

found in the "Teaching with Monarchs" section of the January 2005 Update:
<http://www.monarchwatch.org/update/2005/0114.html#5>

The situation this year is quite different. I have been predicting an overwintering population of at least 7 hectares with a total of about 5 hectares for the three major colonies, Sierra Chincua, El Rosario, and Cerro Pelon. This estimate, like the prediction for 2004, is also deliberately conservative. The population could certainly be higher. Indeed, all the reports we have received from Mexico suggest that the number of monarchs this year may be above the long-term average of 9 hectares.

However, it is hard to assess these eyewitness accounts. People remembering the low numbers of last year are likely to be overly impressed with any increase in the population. One reporter I spoke with mentioned that one of the Mexican authorities, I'm not sure whom, was predicting a total population of 200-220 million monarchs. If this prediction was based on the assumption that there are an average of 10-12 million monarchs per hectare, then they are predicting that the total population could be 17 to 20 hectares. Wow! If true, this would certainly blow away my conservative prediction and the total number of monarchs would rival the numbers reported in 1996 (20.97 hectares) - the largest population reported since the monarch colonies became known to science. Further, such numbers would signal a truly remarkable comeback, since the spring population that moved north in 2005 had to have been one of the smallest, if not the smallest, in the last 30 years. As it is, a comeback to a population of 7-9 hectares from one that was only 2.19 last year is amazing.

The answer to the size of the population this winter will soon be known. Eduardo Rendon Salinas and his crew (World Wildlife Fund Mexico) are measuring the colonies now and will continue to do so through January. These measurements of the colonies are the only way to assess the true size of the population and the only way to get a perspective on the differences from one year to the next. This is truly a unique and valuable service provided by the World Wildlife Fund Mexico (WWFMX). This is the third year during which WWFMX has managed this task. Previously, these measurements were provided by Eligio Garcia Serrano, who worked under the directive of the office of PROFEPA (Procuraduría Federal de Protección al Ambiente - The Federal Ministry for Environmental Protection) and who worked frequently with Eduardo from 1993-2002. In

2002, Marco Bernal, Bill Calvert, Isabel Ramirez, Jose Maria Suarez, and Lincoln Brower measured the colonies. Eligio and Eduardo, with the support of their organizations and the additional crew in 2002, have provided us with a continuous record of the monarch overwintering populations from 1993 to the present. Would you believe that monarchs are the only insect in the world for which there is an estimate of a continentally distributed population and is only one of a relatively small number of animal species for which there is an annual census of this type? Numerous evaluations of insect populations have been undertaken in the last 40 years, and some are quite long in duration, but all deal with species confined to special habitats, or, in many cases, endangered species. The measurement of numbers of hectares occupied by the monarchs each year in Mexico is extraordinary and provides valuable insights as to the factors that drive the population.

-- By Chip Taylor. The complete web version of this update is available at:
<http://www.MonarchWatch.org/update/2005/1130.html>.

Links to Chapter Sponsors and Partners

Sponsors:

Texas Master Naturalist - State Website -
masternaturalist.tamu.edu

Texas Cooperative Extension – agextension.tamu.edu/

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department –
www.tpwd.state.tx.us/

Partners:

Bamberger Ranch --

<http://www.bambergerranch.org/workshops.htm>

LBJ Wildflower Center -- www.wildflower.org

Native Plant Society of Texas – www.npsot.org/

San Marcos Greenbelt Alliance --

<http://www.smgreenbelt.org>.

San Marcos River Foundation –

<http://www.sanmarcosriver.org>.

Texas Cooperative Extension – Sea Grant

Program – texas-sea-grant.tamu.edu/

Texas Forest Service –

txforestservation.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

– .nracs.usda.gov/