Photos: Above-Zoe Rascoe, Left-Pat Porubsky



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Notice about COVID19

As a volunteer organization sponsored by Texas state agencies, it is the intention of CTMN to serve as a role model to other groups and to individuals by honoring the guidelines put forth by government authorities. We encourage you to do the same. We are looking forward to getting back to work out in nature as a group.

2020 Trainees Start Classes!

And they're off!! The 2020 CTMN Training Class is up and running. Sort of running in place, given our current "shelter-in-place" circumstances, but we are making it count. We were excited to get the Spring Training underway and the trainees were, too. The week before classes were to start, COVID19 completely interrupted our lives. Without the ability to hold classes, we began to work on other ways to engage our trainees. Some of those ideas are moving forward but the best idea was to hold the first training class on schedule with a webinar. There was a good reason to get started – once a trainee has attended their first class, they can begin volunteering and using those hours towards their certification. Dale Hughling, our talented and very patient IT resource, worked for the better part of 3 days to get all the technology and the presenter ready. I was very excited to call each trainee and let them know we were ON for the first class. How fun to be together by video! It was our first time to meet some of the trainees in person (sorta) while others have been with us a year waiting for the course to start. A second 1/2 day class was held by webinar the following week with Wizzie Brown, our favorite entomologist. We are impressed and appreciative of the trainees' flexibility and willingness to adjust to our changing circumstances. This



Zoe Rascoe rolls out the first webinar class

11th cohort of trainees, like each one before them, is diverse in experience and in their reason for joining our ranks. We are ALL looking forward to working shoulder to shoulder out in nature again.

" Welcome!!

Zoe Rascoe

Continued on page 4

President's Pen

- John Atkins



Howdy Folks! Well this ban on classes, meetings, and work really sucks, but it could be worse. Good time to give thanks that you live in the United States and didn't find yourself stuck on one of them floating petri dishes they call cruise ships. Social distancing is not an issue for me, I've been practicing it for years. I



once had a roommate in Iraq that I didn't speak to for six months. The week he moved in we had an early morning mortar attack, I shouted "Incoming!" to wake him up, he never thanked me, so that was the last word I ever said to him. End of story.



Tina Atkins working hard at Chalk Ridge Park in January—not in line at Walmart

My wife, QuaranTina, being naturally more gregarious than me, has had to make some adjustments though. She stays busy counting toilet paper rolls like a leprechaun counts his gold, shifting furniture around (to confuse me), and she has her elliptical (the hamster wheel) to exercise on. Well there is always T.V. to watch, right? Wrong. Your choices are the scrolling casualty counts on the channels or a bevy of apocalyptic movies. I think I've seen every end of days/zombie/ plague movie ever made during the past week.

I've actually enjoyed this little break from Master Naturalist work. This time of year, it normally gets a little crazy here with every

school, organization, and park asking us to do presentations or help with projects and don't forget we start training our new crop of naturalists. Luckily, we were able to get through Mother Earth News and the Home and Garden Shows before we were placed in lockdown. Great work was done both weekends and we contacted more people than last year at the Home Show. Linda Williams' Kid Zone gets better every year and Zoe has almost taken over the entire building! If anyone is interested in purchasing one of the leftover walking sticks, contact Lynn. They work great as social distancing reinforcers.

Cont.

President's Pen cont.



Don't feel guilty about the little break, just look back at some of the projects we have been involved with over the past two months. John Burns has kept us busy removing invasives from Miller Springs. Bill Abright and Jean Solana have been working hard



doing everything from removing invasives to teaching classes at Mother Neff State Park. Mary Ann led a school visit at Saegert Elementary. We had folks participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count and Copperas Cove Waterway Cleanup. We covered both "I Love My Parks Day" and the "Spring Outdoors Expo" in Harker Heights. We removed brush that was causing safety issues at Live Oak Ridge Park and removed invasives and repaired a boardwalk at Chalk Ridge Falls.

We even managed to get written up in the paper for the work that was done in Temple at the Lee Crossley Veterans Community. Our members were also pictured in the newspaper working in Harker Heights and attending the Stillhouse Lake Master Plan Meeting. The final volunteer event that we conducted also turned out to be one of the best activities I've been involved with. It was the Roots & Shoots bluebird box project which you can read more about later in this issue.

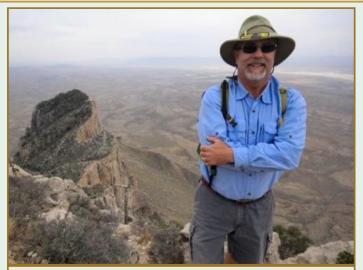
We have canceled all face-to-face activities through April 30th and will reassess further cancellations weekly. For our new trainees,



John welcoming the 2020 trainees to their first (virtual) class.

please stay flexible. You did great at the first webinar and by the time this comes out you will have a second one under your belt. Everyone is working hard to give you a useful and meaningful experience.

In closing, I want to remind everyone that there are many activities that you still can do. We just can't do them in groups. Be safe and take a Ranger Buddy with you. There are also a ton of prerecorded webinars to add to your AT hours and lots of citizen science projects. If you have questions, contact me. Stay healthy and safe, and I'll see you on the other side of this.



Carroll Adcock is a recently retired registered nurse whose hobbies include photography, birdwatching, camping, hiking and knife making. He enjoys spending time outdoors and has been a Boy Scout leader. He lives in Temple with his wife Cindy.



Julie Sieh is a recently retired dentist who enjoys fly fishing and fly tying, kayaking, camping, hiking and traveling. She is a member of Texas Fly Fishers Women's Club and participated in restoring riparian vegetation along the Llano River. She lives on Lake Belton with her spouse Brent Blumenthal.



Kelly Ann Blanchard is a homemaker and mother to a 3 and a 5 year old. She has a degree in Consumer Journalism. She grew up exploring nature and is a facilitator for the Free Forest School hikes at Miller Springs. Kelly loves family hiking in our local parks and stargazing from her back porch. She lives in Nolanville with her husband Tait.



Brent Blumenthal is a retired medical administrator and former paramedic who enjoys kayaking, hiking, camping and fishing. He has been a CPR instructor and a volunteer with the Boy Scouts. He lives on Lake Belton with his spouse Julie Sieh.



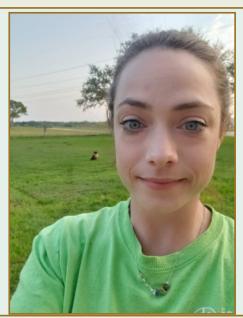
Bill Bowsher is a Range Control Safety Tech at Ft Hood whose hobbies include insect/bird watching, hiking, camping, fishing, artifact hunting and woodworking. He has been involved in past CTMN projects. Bill lives in Kempner with spouse Andi (CTMN class of 2019).



Bill Cornelius is a recently retired Temple College Professor who enjoys woodworking, knife sharpening, fly fishing and recycling. He has volunteered for various groups like San Gabriel Fly Fishers and the Texas Bamboo Society. Bill is a former Boy Scout. Bill lives in Round Rock with his spouse Rose.



Jennifer Chalmers is a former Finance Manager who enjoys bird watching, home remodeling, dog training and live concerts. She fosters pets and likes attracting wildlife to her property. Jennifer lives in Salado with her pet rescue menagerie.



Samantha Ernzen works in sales and her favorite activity is hiking. She also enjoys kayaking, camping, animal watching and exploring. She lives in Kempner and heard about CTMN from the Bowsher clan.



Jaime Harmon is a former University Administer whose interests include International Relations, gardening, traveling and landscaping. She has volunteered for the Red Cross, her local Animal Shelter and hurricane relief. Jaime grew up in the Appalachian Mountains but now lives in Belton with her spouse William.



Andrea Liles is a recently retired Dell Program Manager who enjoys hiking, running, puzzles, gardening and horseback riding. She and her husband own property in Bell County and are working to remove invasives and introduce natives. Andrea is considering beekeeping and is handy with a reciprocating saw. She currently lives in Round Rock with her spouse Wayne.



Chris Nixon is a financial analyst for Baylor Scott and White whose hobbies include primitive camping, hunting, trail running and drawing. He takes care of his family ranch and has enjoyed volunteering in a variety of programs since college. Chris has already begun volunteering with us at Miller Springs and is excited to learn about nature conservation. Chris lives in Temple with his spouse Jennifer.



Bill Novakoski is a Physician at Darnall Army Medical Center. He enjoys hiking, plant and animal identification and nurturing native species. He volunteers in his community cleanup events and trail maintenance. Bill and his spouse Nancy, a Bell County Master Gardener, live near Ding Dong. Google that!



Pat Porubsky is a retired account analyst who enjoys camping, fishing, photography and sewing. She volunteers with the Temple Literacy Council and is a Sunday school teacher. Pat grew up in Bell County and wants to preserve the land in its natural state. Pat lives in Troy with her spouse Dale.



Matt Ridley is a realtor with Nolan Creek Realty whose interests include hiking, camping, stargazing and reading. He has been volunteering for outdoor work at Miller Springs Nature Center and his church. He lives in Belton with his spouse Maxanne.



Stephanie Preciado is former TX Army National Guard whose interests include photography, hiking, camping, painting and is a Soldier's Angels VA Representative helping with volunteer management. She homeschools using Project Learning Tree and believes in a strong connection to the earth and nature. Stephanie lives in Killeen.



Susan Schneider formerly worked in retail and enjoys cooking healthy food, reading, bike riding and juggling. She has volunteered in projects such as Meals on Wheels, Keep America Beautiful and with Tree Folks. Susan enjoys exploring her surroundings and is studying permaculture so that she can turn her property into a food forest. Susan lives in Temple with her spouse Tom.



Sharon Schmitz is a retired registered nurse who enjoys observing and rescuing wildlife, camping, hiking, caring for grandchildren and digging in the dirt. She grew up in Connecticut, and was fascinated by nature going on Sunday adventures with her family to the state parks. She lives in Harker Heights with her spouse Steve Schmitz.



Steve Schmitz is former military and a recently retired dentist who has served as Chief of Dental Services and has practiced in a hospital setting. His hobbies include hiking, camping, shooting, photography, snorkeling and martial arts. He is interested in learning more about wildlife, fossils and archeology. He is the spouse of Sharon Schmitz and they reside in Harker Heights.



We are all getting more "facetime" on the screen. Thank you to our trainers willing to go online and our trainees for bearing with us as we try to keep the class moving forward best we can.

Coreguatulations.



Kurt Wei-Kai Webster



Clive has been a regular at our workdays.

We are excited to announce that Melissa Jue (class of 2018) had her baby on March 26th—an induction that had to be postponed because the hospital was so full due to the COVID19 situation. Kurt Wei-Kai Webster weighed in at over 8 pounds and was 20 inches long (apparently taking after dad!) She said everything went quickly and really well. Clive loves his little brother and enjoys singing to him.

As a side note, Melissa said her babies tend to be born during global crises. Clive was born during the Zika virus outbreak and Melissa had been in Mexico for a family wedding early in her pregnancy. Kurt was born during the COVID19 pandemic. Her sister said if they have another baby, she's preparing for the apocalypse!

We wish Melissa, Clive, Kurt and Dr. Webster a safe and smooth transition to his fellowship in microsurgery at UCSF this summer.



Mother Neff State Park

1680 TX Hwy-236, Moody

- Bill Abright

Bill can be reached at <u>b</u> <u>abright@yahoo.com</u>

Chapter Activities

A pre-spring break workday was held at the park on February 27 with Jean, John Atkins, John Ziegeler, Ben Clement, Bill Abright and MNSP Lead Ranger James McDowell. Our focus was removing China Berry trees which had previously been marked with orange ribbons by MNSP Ranger Daisy Klassy (a CTMN member). Ben and the two John's are



John Atkins and Ben Clement Pullerbear Tree Wranglers

now "certified" Pullerbear operators! Invasive trees quake in fear now when those 3 are near. Our next scheduled workday, which was scheduled for the first week of March, had to be cancelled due to rain. And that brings us to the next chapter in Mother Neff activities.

As you all are so very well aware, group activities have been cancelled for now, and that includes Mother Neff and all of our state parks. However, don't forget that state parks are OPEN to individuals who observe appropriate safety precautions. Ranger James at Mother Neff sure could use some help in controlling invasive species at Mother Neff. Thus, despite all that has been going on this month, there are still a lot of ways to get volunteer hours.

Mother Neff State Park Cont.

Home Building Demonstrations at Mother Neff SP!

Jean Solana, our CTMN Vice President, is a frequent volunteer at MNSP helping Park staff in many ways. She is responsible for monitoring and maintaining several bluebird houses in the Park. In March, Jean presented workshops on "Bird, Bee and Bat Houses—How to be a Good Landlord" at the Park. She brought along building materials, tools needed and finished houses to show participants. With a springtime topic like that, her presentations were well-attended and much-appreciated.

Ongoing Volunteer Opportunities

MNSP, as of April 1st, is still open to individual or family member volunteers. During the on-going shelter-in-place and physical distancing orders,



Jean Solana and tools of her trade

please follow current recommendations. Anyone who wants to volunteer, please contact James McDowell, Lead Ranger, at james.mcdowell@tpwd.texas.gov or Melissa Chadwick, Park Superintendent, at melissa.chadwick@tpwd.texas.gov to let them know when you plan to volunteer so they can have any needed supplies ready for your task when you arrive. You can also call the office at 254-853-2389. If you are a CTMN member, please identify yourself as such since we have special projects going at times.

Bird Blinds – cleaning, filling feeders

Native Garden Maintenance – trimming, pruning, weeding, basic gardening

Trail Maintenance – walking trails to trim overgrowth, notifying rangers of downed trees, cleaning signage

Signage – ensure all signage is uniform on all trails

Painting – road signs, kiosks, gates and other equipment as needed

Debris removal at River Bottom Area – picking up small limbs, possible mowing

Carpentry projects – small wood projects and repairs

Chinaberry tree removal – on hold until larger groups can meet

CTMN Members, check the weekly calendar of events email for updates.



Hello Everyone!

Let's take a look back at the February and March workdays in the Miller Springs Nature Center. In February I was not able to attend as I was out of the state visiting beautiful Hilton Head, South Carolina. It really was a beautiful area, however, the weather while we were there was not the best. It was cold and rainy. We still had a great time reconnecting with old friends and enjoying the area between rain events. While I was travelling and having fun, the work continued as John Atkins took



over and led the volunteer group. Thanks John for keeping things on track. John had five folks present including himself. Tina Atkins, Ben Clement, Bert Peeples, and Marilyn Whitworth were all there ready to work. There had been some rain so John decided it was best to stay up in the area behind our storage containers. We had worked this area the month

Tina & John Atkins, Ben Clement, Bert Peeples & Marilyn's arm before and there were still invasive plants that needed to be removed. Honestly sometimes it is nice to work an area like this because

there are not quite as many invasive plants and it feels like we are making progress.

John A. made an observation during the day about the way we have been cutting trees. Some of the trees in this area had been cut 6 or 8 inches high and the Tordon herbicide had not killed the plant all the way to the ground. There were new sprouts coming out from the lower part of the stump. So, with that observation in mind, now we are going to make sure we cut the trees off closer to the ground. We will try to get leave no more than 2 or 3 inches as stumps. Hopefully this will provide a more consistent kill of the plants. The best option is if we can pull the trees out, roots and all, with the puller-bear or even by hand if they are small enough. Of course, the size of the tree may dictate that it must be cut. Additionally, for those who have never used the puller-bears it is VERY tiring so there are limits to how much pulling we are able to accomplish.



Marilyn Whitworth: pickup gal

Miller Springs Nature Center cont.

Moving on to March, we had a great turn out of nine volunteers. Myself, John Atkins, Bert Peeples, Shirley Watts, Ben Clement, Wade Matthews, and some first timers Daisy Klassy, Marian Riegel, and Sam Whitley (a friend of Ben's). This is the largest group of volunteers we have had come out for a Chapter MSNC workday. It was exciting to have this many folks out and willing to work.

Eight of us headed back down to our number one work area just off the Green Pond trail. With two chainsaws,

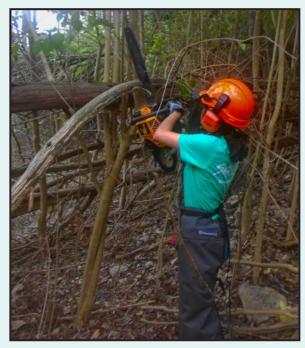


Wade Matthews, Marian Riegel and Daisy Klassy

two puller-bears, and numerous other tools, we all headed down the trail. As I was typing that I just thought, too bad we can't go up the trail to work so we could return on the downhill coming back when we are all worn out! Sometimes it seems like we are not going to make it back up the hill after working so hard.



Bert Peeples manning the PullerBear



Daisy Klassy on a chainsaw for the big cuts

We made a lot of progress even though it is hard to see each time since the forest is almost completely taken over with the Waxleaf Ligustrum. It can be a bit discouraging. On the bright side we have an endless supply of walking stick materials. I collected another ten sticks myself. I plan to have plenty of walking sticks for next year's Home and Garden show. Bottom line is we did get a lot of great work done thanks to everyone who came out!

Miller Springs Nature Center cont.

I almost forgot, if you noticed I said earlier eight of us headed down the trail to work. That is because Shirley came a little later and was pulling Mustard weed in the area next to the parking lot. Thanks Shirley for all the work you have done to get the Mustard weed at least semi under control in the nature center. None of us knew she was there until we returned and there she was digging and pulling away. Daisy joined



Shirley and helped pull weeds while I made another trip down the trail to pick up my future walking sticks. On my way back up the trail, as I was struggling with all the walking sticks that



John Burns will turn these invasives into beautiful walking sticks to sell

I had hoped to have some more good workdays before the heat of the summer hit, but I guess that will not happen with all our events currently cancelled. Now I hear things are changing as I



Wade Matthews, Daisy Klassy, Sam Whitley, John Burns, Ben Clement, Marian Riegel, Shirley Watts, Bert Peeples

am writing this article. Stage 3? I guess I better watch the news and figure out what this means. No matter what, I will be working on my property to enjoy the outdoors. If I am allowed, I had also planned to visit Mother Neff SP. I had reservations to camp for a few nights and had planned to pull some mustard weed while there. I guess we shall see if that is allowed.

I was able to talk to the City of Temple and found out they are looking into possible new trail markers for directional purposes in the nature center. The current trail markers are colored plastic tape. They are still in the investigation stages so I don't expect anything soon, but at least they are looking forward and planning some improvements.

I look forward to seeing everyone soon. Stay safe and God Bless!

Photos by Tina and John Atkins

CHALK RIDGE FALLS Root and Shoots

- John Atkins

The Chapter was contacted in January by Erika Giambalvo, a Temple resident who heads up the local Roots and Shoots Chapter. Roots and Shoots is a service-learning group through the Jane Goodall Institute. They have 12 kids, ages 8-12, in the group and they focus on projects that help the environment, community and animals. They were interested in putting up bluebird houses.



The Roots and Shoots group recently received a \$200 grant to build nesting boxes and were interested in having the Master Naturalists help them with appropriate placement. After two months of correspondence, we were finally ready to install them at Chalk Ridge Falls Park on 13 March. I was joined by Ben Clement and Dale Hughling, and Dale's young protégé, Levi. Levi quickly earned the nickname of John Henry because he insisted on carrying my sledgehammer for the two hours or so as we trudged around the park. He was a real

trooper and wanted us to tell his mom that he wanted a sledgehammer for his birthday. We laughed and told him he also needed a good crowbar to be a true one-man wrecking crew.

We had a great time with the Roots & Shoots kids! It was truly one of the best times we have had doing Master Naturalist work. I was amazed at how bright and energetic the kids were. Ben quickly "Tom Sawyer'd" the kids by showing them how much "fun" it was to drive 4 foot rebar stakes into the ground. Next thing we knew, all we had to do was point them to a location and let them go! Since Jean Solana's bluebird class was fresh in our minds, we were able to teach the kids how far to separate the boxes (they paced them off themselves), which



direction to face the entrance, what color the eggs are, and what their nests look like. By the end of the day, we had installed the 8 boxes they had built, stretching from the parking area north to the Scout camp. I was highly impressed that some of the kids could identify plants like wood sorrel and tell me which plants were edible. I think the only disappointment of the day was that the kids didn't get to see a rock squirrel on the dam.

If you have kids in the 8-12 age range, I highly encourage you to check out Roots and Shoots. I will be happy to put you in touch with Erika. I look forward to working with them in the future.



A group of enthusiastic Central Texas Master Naturalists volunteered to set up and run a booth at the Mother Earth News Fair in February. The event attracts a wide variety of people from all over Texas and nearby states. We had 224 visitors step in our booth and some liked what we are about and are now trainees in the CTMN 2020 Training Course. A bee fan stopped by the booth and we realized our bee matched his shirt!











A biggo **THANK YOU** to all who built, painted, packed up, hauled in, setup, purchased our goods at full price, stood for hours and talked to visitors, tallied visitors, made change, played games, dressed in costumes, ran for free plungers so we didn't have to leave the booth, disassembled, packed up again and hauled back out. And are willing to do it again next year!

We ran a large Chapter booth and filled a big area in the Kids Zone. It took 30 of our members, two new trainees and three 4-H ambassadors to cover games, homemade nature item sales and providing information on our active Chapter. In the end, we interacted with 734 people that weekend. Well Done!

- Zoe Rascoe

These photos will show you how hard our folks worked to share our love for nature!



























What other booth had a life-sized frog, moth and owl? **NOBODY!** We rocked the Kids Zone! Many thanks go to our Screech (Lynn Williams) for organizing the nature playground and for members who ran the hard yards with the kiddos, and especially those who worked every shift in that area! Great help from 4-H Ambassadors too.









BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY AREA

North Carolina

- Kelly Ann Blanchard

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

For over 30 years, my family and I have vacationed in the same place. When my well-traveled husband and I were dating, he once asked me, "Why do you always go to the same place? Why not go somewhere new?" And while I do enjoy exploring new places, I also frequently



Autumn view from the family cabin near Sylva, NC

desire visiting a place that brings me joy and fills me with happy memories. For me and my family (including my husband, who has since changed his tune), this place is nestled in the heart of the Blue Ridge mountains in North Carolina.

After vacationing in the area

After vacationing in the area for many years, my grandfather purchased a cabin in Sylva, NC in 1972. This small, modest house with a beautiful view eventually became a hub for my whole

family, both immediate and extended. Located within the Plott Balsam mountain range, Sylva is a small mountain town offering a handful of familyfriendly breweries. outdoor apparel stores, local craft shops, and a weekly farmer's market. Sylva was also recently featured in the award-winning movie, "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri," and the surrounding area has served as a filming location for other popular movies including "The Hunger Games" and "The Fugitive."



Admiring the fauna at an early age

BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY CONT.

North Carolina

Only a short drive from Sylva is an entrance to the Blue Ridge Parkway, a scenic mountain road spanning 469 miles and connecting North Carolina and Virginia via twisting tunnels and switchbacks with extraordinary mountain views along the way. This parkway leads to some of our favorite hiking trails and overlooks, including Waterrock Knob, Richland Balsam (the highest peak on the Parkway at 6,410 feet), Graveyard Fields, and Black Balsam Knob.

Flora in the Blue Ridge mountains varies across many different ecosystems. Higher elevations range from dense spruce-fir forests to sparse balds - mountain peaks devoid of trees but teeming with native grasses and plants like American mountain ash, rhododendrons, and mountain laurels. Lower elevations feature fern glades, crisp mountain streams, and lush deciduous forests. My mother has always enjoyed finding and identifying local wildflowers on our hikes. With 1400 different species of wildflowers native to the area, there is almost always something blooming no matter the time of



Tom Branch Falls—Bryson City, NC

year. Our family favorites include flame azaleas, jewelweed, violets, honeysuckle, and squawroot (which is the most fun to say). My mother especially enjoys the challenge of spotting rare and elusive wildflower varieties like Indian pipes, lady slippers, jack-in-the-pulpits, and little brown jugs.



Richland Balsam Overlook



Jewelweed blossom

BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY CONT.

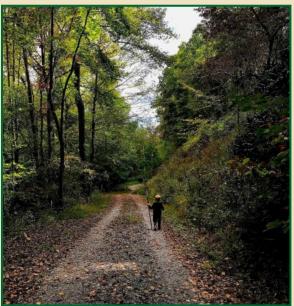
North Carolina

The local wildlife is just as diverse and exciting. My brother and I grew up competing to see who could spot the most rabbits and woodchucks on car rides. It is not uncommon to come across cars



parked on the side of the road to observe a mother black bear and her cubs resting in the trees. Perhaps our favorite location for wildlife viewing is Cataloochee, a collection of beautiful valleys off the beaten path within the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. In 2001, elk were reintroduced to the Cataloochee area and continue to thrive, offering ample opportunities to observe the elk individually and within their herds. Groups of wild turkeys also roam the fields within the valley.

Young male elk sparring, by Terry Rascoe Over the past few years, I have enjoyed passing along our traditions to a new generation. Our two boys (ages 5 and 3) already cherish our visits to the NC mountains, and I hope to foster their love of nature as my family did for me. Although our journey there is much farther now that we live in Texas, the beauty and diversity of the Blue Ridge mountains continue to draw us back time and time again.







Family of naturalists at work!

*Statistics retrieved from The Great Smoky Mountains National Park website: https://www.nps.gov/grsm/index.htm

Photos by Kelly Ann Blanchard except where noted

GUS ENGELING WILDLIFE MGT AREA

- Jean Solana



Wildlife Management Areas in Texas are one of our state's best kept secrets. They are large areas of land owned and managed by Texas Parks and Wildlife. They have rangers, but no park-like infrastructure like camping facilities, water, electricity or restrooms. There are 47 of them in

Texas, and you are supposed to buy a \$12 limited public use permit to hike in one (order online from TPWD). Usually hunters use them during hunting season, and everyone else can go the rest of the year.

Gus Engeling WMA is located 2 hours northeast of Belton. Its most interesting ecological feature is its hardwood bottomlands that are flooded most of the time, creating habitat for ducks and other water birds. There are egret nesting grounds and wood duck nesting areas. Wood duck nesting boxes have been placed to increase the population.



Flooded hardwood bottomlands



Family of feral hogs

To access the wetlands, enter the south entrance to the park, off Highway 287. There is no entry charge, but you will need to complete paperwork at the unattended check-in station. Take the right turn at the marker that honors Gus Engeling, a park ranger killed by duck poachers in 1951. This will

take you down a gravel road to Catfish Creek. You park at the end of the road and hike into the wetlands – there are wide trails to follow.

Watch out for alligators and wild hogs. I saw this family group while I was there. They were busy eating, but finally ran off after I took their pictures and made a little noise. I didn't see any gators, but heard loud splashes ahead of me as I walked the trail.

cont.

GUS ENGELING WILDLIFE MGT AREA cont.

The rangers monitor the water levels in the wetlands and have pumps to control the water level. This helps maintain the habitat for the waterfowl and assists with flood control. There are many



species in birds present, including warblers, woodpeckers, and waterfowl. I saw a red-headed woodpecker and heard pileated woodpeckers.

There were many beautiful butterflies and other insects to see, and incredible plant diversity. There are deer, wild turkey, and many other mammals. Please take advantage of the calming therapy nature provides during this challenging time and explore our parks and WMAs.







Monarch Butterfly



Red-Headed Woodpecker

From TPWD: The initial goal and intended purpose of the GEWMA was to serve as a wildlife research and demonstration area where trained biologists could study and evaluate wildlife and habitat management practices. Around 1990 the majority of staff duties shifted from research to public use activities and development. Today, management of GEWMA seeks to balance the need for continued research and demonstration of wildlife management practices with providing a variety of public use activities. Click here for more information.

Photos by Jean Solana

My Sub-Urban Backyard

- Andreas Wooten

So here is the deal, I am not a birder nor am I much good with plant ID (especially if it is a fungus), but with the rain and COVID-19 keeping everyone at home, including me and my family, I have not been fishing in weeks, so a Fish Tale story will have to wait. Because the Fish Tale will have to wait, I am reverting to my back yard (at Zoe's request, and no, nothing had been killed or died in my yard Zoe! But thanks for letting everyone think my yard is a death trap!)

What I do have is birds, lots of birds. So far in 2020 I have been able to positively ID 18 separate species in my yard or flying over it. Here is my list (in no particular order):

Ladder-Backed Woodpecker	Lesser Goldfinch
Red-bellied Woodpecker	Yellow-rumped Warbler
American Kestrel	Blue Jay
White-winged Dove	Northern Cardinal
Mourning Dove	Chipping Sparrow
Black Vulture	Carolina Wren+
Red-shouldered Hawk	Carolina Chickadee+
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Black-crested Titmouse+
Cedar Waxwing	Eastern Bluebird+

OK, so what? Right? What is interesting is that all I have is a few trees, a feeder and a place for the birds to get water. I live in a typical neighborhood for my area and I even have 2 dogs in the backyard. I think it is the consistency of keeping water out year-round and only feeding in the spring and fall that keeps the birds coming back. Now if you noticed in the list above, four of the birds have a "+" next to them. That is because those birds are hanging out and building nests.



My Sub-Urban Backyard cont.



Carolina Wrens in the top of the Patio Heater





Blue Birds in the Chipping Sparrow House



Carolina Chickadees in the Dove Box









House photos by Andreas Wooten, birds from Travis Audubon

Black-crested Titmouse(mice?) in the Blue Bird House

The Titmouse nest is mostly moss at the bottom and then lots of yarn, string and Red and Blue Heeler



fur (from my dogs) for the top and egg area. This nest has two eggs right now, but we have had as many as five in a single nest for the Titmouse in the past.



Out on a Limb

- Mary Ann Everett

Tree Description: Evergreen, usually multi-trunked tree, reaching to up to 30 feet in height, however usually grow 10-15 feet.

Blooms: Bluish, lavender flowers, pea-like, in 3-7 inch drooping clusters, very showy and with a fragrance resembling grape Kool Aid. Bees are found busy at work on the blossoms each year, but the honey is considered by some to be mildly poisonous.

Fruit: A pod 3.5-5 inches long, hard, constricted, containing hard shiny red or orange seeds.

Location: This beautiful tree thrives in the poor limestone soil around Austin, but is also found from coastal South Texas across the Hill Country westward into New Mexico, and southward to San Luis Potosi, Mexico. Because it does thrive in rocky, limestone soil, it is a slow growing tree.

Leaves: Dense, dark green, glossy, compound leaves, composed of 7-9 shiny, leathery leaflets that are rounded on the ends. Leaflets are up to 2 inches long, terminated by a single leaflet.

Bark: Dark gray to black with narrow ridges.

Heat & Drought Tolerance: Drought tolerant. Low water use. Cold and heat tolerant. Loves rocky soil.

Interesting Facts: Archaeological remains indicate ceremonial use of the seeds dating before A.D. 1000. They were often ground and mixed with mescal, an alcoholic drink made from the Century Plant, to make it more intoxicating. In 1539 Cabeza de Vaca reported the use of mescal beans as trade items among the Texas Indians. The brilliant red seeds contain highly poisonous alkaloid cytisine (sophorine) which is related to nicotine and is used as a narcotic and hallucinogen. Comanche Indians crushed the beans, boiled them in water, strained the liquid and poured in aching ears.





MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS











Jerry and Zoe received recognition in February. Can you tell by the "elbow bumps" that the rest were in early March?



MEMBERS IN THE NEWS



Volunteers in our Chapter were **OUT in February and March** building, planting, recruiting, teaching and learning. Thanks to the Temple Daily Telegram for sharing our story.



Building better homes for birds, bats and bees

BY JANICE GIBBS

Birds, bats and bees have some similarities—all three fly and live outside. Their existence benefits us all by pollinating crops, as well as our vegetable and flower gardens, trees and shrubs, and they consume thousands of insects. Last week, Central Texas Maser Naturalists of insects flow to Be a Good Landford! Jean Solana, a certified Master Naturalist and a member of the Central Texas group, made the presentation. Solana wasn't above bribing her audience with candy to keep their attention. Answer a question correctly after the end of each segment and get a fun-size candy bar.



SUSTAINABLE LIVING

Dale Hughling, right, a Central Texas Master Naturalist, talks about constructing Please see HOMES, 3A as Julie Sieh listens, following a program last week at Belton Church of Christ. tructing bat house

Bell County residents attended an open house Thursday held by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to comment on the Corp's update to the Stillhouse Hollow Lake master plan. The open house at the Harris Community Center in Belton starts a 30-day window for the public to give input on what they would like done to the lake.

tdtnews.com



Jenna Chappell, right, and Jessica Dieter, both Master Naturalists, removed weeds and Bermuda grass from a garden bed in front of the community center at the Crossley Veterans Community in Temple.

Janice Gibbs | Telegram

February CHAPTER MEETING

- BILL ABRIGHT

Editor's Note: Bill was trained in "Stop the Bleed" techniques during a First Aid course and saw the benefit to our chapter members both personally and at our workdays when chainsaws are in use. The program was launched in 2015 in response to the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown, CT.



campaign and call-to-action. It is intended to cultivate grassroots efforts that encourage bystanders to become trained, equipped, and empowered to help in a bleeding emergency before professionals arrive".

"Stop the Bleed is a national awareness

During our February meeting, James Grant, a volunteer firefighter from Bartlett, assisted by Laura, an emergency room nurse from Lampasas, both certified Stop the Bleed

instructors, presented the program to our members. They felt that it was extremely important for us to learn the emergency techniques in the Stop the Bleed program because of our frequent use of tools that can cause serious injuries in an accident. Also, in keeping with the mission of the program, they wanted everyone to be prepared, whether they use sharp and dangerous tools or not. Currently, the chapter has an advanced Stop the Bleed emergency kit that is stored with our tools.



BMHB B

Right: Bert Peeples packs a wound as the instructor looks on.

March CHAPTER MEETING

- MARY SHARP

Jean Solano presented the Advanced Training topic of "Birds, Bees, and Bat Houses: How to Be a Good Landlord" at our March 2020 Chapter Meeting. Jean holds a Wildlife Biology

degree and is a graduate of our CTMN Class of 2019; she is also Chapter Vice President and manages the bluebird houses placed last year at Mother Neff State Park.

We had a full house with over 50 attendees hearing a wonderful presentation on the types and numbers of birds, bees and bats that we see in Central Texas and the importance of providing housing for them. Each segment of information was followed by a lively Q&A session about what we had just learned (there was chocolate involved). Then we gathered around tables set up specifically for birds, bees, and bats for hands-on demonstrations. Jean handled the duties at the nest box table, fellow



CTMN 2019 graduate Jenna Chappell covered the bee house display, and Technology Board Member Dale Hughling shared about bat houses. Each table had an assortment of boxes to look at, examples of materials and tools needed, and handouts with instructions to build your own. Free bamboo tubes were available to help you get started on your own mason bee house and nest boxes were available for purchase. Thank you, Jean for sharing your knowledge of how to be a good landlord for some of our Texas creatures.



March CHAPTER MEETING

(Top left) Jean Solana describes box houses; all are welcome!; Bill Bowsher and Joan Stanley select bamboo for their own bee house; Bill Novakoski checks out the important interior design to a bat house; John Ziegeler has made many-a bird house and offers advice (and sales!); Dale Hughling talks to Julie Sieh and Brent Blumenthal (who is moving on to the bee house station) about bat house construction (photo by Janice Gibbs). *Photos by Zoe Rascoe except where noted.*











THE ZEBRA MUSSEL

- Yvonne Eele

Dreissena polymorpha (Pallas) The Zebra Mussel

We have all heard something about the Zebra Mussel, but it might be a good idea to get to know this creature a bit more.

The Zebra Mussel is native to southern Russia and the Ukraine. It came to the U.S. (Great Lakes) in the mid-1980s through ballast water of transoceanic ships and has since spread to many bodies of water in the U.S. Zebra mussels grow to 1-2 inches long and live approximately 2-5 years. They can start reproducing by their second year. The female can release 30,000-40,000 eggs in each reproductive cycle and as many as 1 million in a year. The



male releases 200 million sperm. The eggs are fertilized after release.

About two days after fertilization, the eggs develop into free swimming larvae called veligers and are transported long distances by water currents. After two to three weeks, the veligers begin to settle out due to the weight of their forming shell and they attach to a hard surface by means of threadlike strands called byssal fibers that are tipped with a sticky substance. As



many as 700,000 mussels can occupy a square meter.

Once attached, the zebra mussel will generally stay put but are able to detach and crawl to a new location if environmental conditions change. Adults feed by filtering large amounts of plankton and detritus. Each mussel can filter one liter of water a day. They thrive in nutrient rich water that supports healthy plankton populations and prefer slightly alkaline water between 68-77 degrees.

THE ZEBRA MUSSEL cont.

Zebra mussels can attach to manmade structures, especially pipelines and water intakes, impeding water movement through turbines, They have destroyed boat engines, boat launches, fouled beaches, and damaged boat ramps and docks. Zebra mussel fecal matter can foul the taste of drinking water.

Zebra mussels also harm aquatic ecosystems by endangering native species. In large quantities they out-compete other filter feeders. They also attach to any hard surface which can include native mussels, turtle shells, and even slow-moving cray fish. Zebra mussels contribute to biomagnification, the toxins they filter out of the water are concentrated in their bodies and passed to predators. They also cause an increase in blue green algae which can be toxic to livestock, wildlife, and pets. As the algae bloom subsides, decaying algae can reduce oxygen levels causing stress and death to aquatic animals.

The U.S. Corp of Engineers called the Zebra Mussel the "most troublesome freshwater biofouling organism in North America."

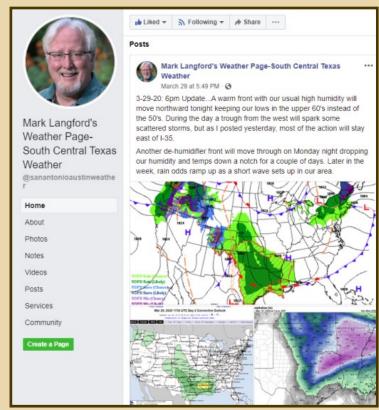


The invasive Zebra Mussels were first found in Lake Texhoma in 2009 and have since spread to 30 Texas lakes and 7 or more river basins. Both Lake Belton and Stillhouse Hollow Lake are classified as fully infested with an established, reproducing population. Further spread is being addressed through state regulations requiring boat owners to "clean, drain and dry" their boats and trailers each time they leave a lake or river. For more information from Texas Park and Wildlife on this Texas Invader, including how to properly clean your boat and trailer, go to https://texasinvasives.org/zebramussels/.

Good to know...

We can recommend Mark Langford's interesting weather page on Facebook. He also has a blog and Central Texas weather website at MyWeatherPage.com







Marilyn Whitworth and Richard McCarthy—Class of 2010—are sporting the new Maui Blue logo shirts (ahem) a few years ago!

H&H Printing, 5696 FM 439, Belton 254-939-1100 whale@hhtexas.com

1st Place Awards and Gifts, 2304 N. Main St, Belton. justin@1stplaceawardsandgifts.com 254-939-2442

CTMN shirt to your collection of outdoor wear? "1st Place Awards and Gifts" and "H&H T-shirt Printing", both in Belton, have our logo on file. You can take any shirt or other item to be monogramed for a fee. If you've noticed a lot of aqua shirts at our events, it is a Port Authority brand shirt (or something similar) in Maui Blue color. There is no requirement to have a monogramed shirt or use the Maui Blue color, though.







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Editor: Zoe Rascoe

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Contributing Writers: John Atkins, Jean Solana, John Burns, Bill Abright, Mary Sharp, Andreas Wooten, Mary Ann Everett, , Yvonne Eele, Kelly Ann Blanchard, Zoe Rascoe.

Contributed Images: John Atkins, Tina Atkins, Andreas Wooten, Kelly Ann Blanchard, Terry Rascoe, Janice Gibbs, Daisy Klassy, Zoe Rascoe.

Have you noticed the recurring feature articles on member visits to National Parks and Texas State Parks, "Fish Tales" (of any kind!), backyard nature, travel to places unlike Texas and more. If you have a story to share, just send me your idea. Volunteer Service hours apply!

Zoe Rascoe trascoe@hot.rr.com

Chapter Advisors

Whitney Grantham, Bell County Extension Agent, Natural Resources Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

Derrick Wolter, Wildlife Biologist, Texas Parks and Wildlife

AS DIRECTED, ALL MEETINGS ON HOLD UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

Chapter meetings are held the 2nd Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m. at the Belton Church of Christ at 3003 N. Main. Location exceptions are in December (Holiday party!) and June (trainee graduation!) Meetings include a nature-related program and the public is welcome to attend. Find topic information on our website and Facebook page.

The Board of Directors meets the 1st Monday of each month from 11:30am-12:30pm in the Board Room at the AgriLife Extension Center at 1605 North Main in Belton. All members are welcome at attend.