

25TH ANNIVERSARY



My journey was made possible in 2014 by my then 12 yr old. He was in National Junior Honor Society and needed volunteer hours. Meanwhile, I personally was searching for a volunteer program that I could give back and really grow as a person. I've always loved nature and Texas, but had not ever connected that passion with volunteering.

I responded to a need for volunteers at Twelve Hills Nature Center in Dallas. I reached out and asked if they would accept a 12 yr old which they did. As we did gardening work, I noticed a few people around me - mostly dressed in a uniform of sorts and talking about prairies, grasses and invasive species. I asked them - literally- who are you people? They responded with we are Texas Master Naturalists. I asked them about the program. As my son and I walked back to our car, I looked at him and said "this is what I'm going to do."

KRISTEN WELTY,
BLACKLAND PRAIRIE CHAPTER

Storytelling PROJECT



25TH ANNIVERSARY



Do you remember the first time something “natural” caught your attention? Maybe it was a cool-looking bug hanging out in your backyard, or the sweet tweets of a colorful songbird. One of my memories from early childhood is the loud drone of cicadas that seemed to be the soundtrack for hot, humid summer days in southeast Texas.

I remember when I stopped noticing Nature, when the childlike wonder gave way to going to work and paying bills and sitting in gridlock and cooking dinner, on repeat. I wish I could say that the awe-inspiring, curiosity-stoking natural world never left my awareness, but it was too easy to get lost in the churn of daily life. Nature does her thing regardless, patiently waiting for you to return and see.

It’s been one year since I completed initial training to become a Texas Master Naturalist (TMN). February 2022 was the start of my “well-informed” immersion in the natural world. One day, grumpy from sitting in an uncomfortable office chair in front of a screen under cold fluorescent lights, I became acutely aware of how much I was missing, how much I had lost. This lamentation inspired me to contact the Coastal Prairie Chapter to ask about their spring training class. I jumped in with enthusiasm. The sight of the thick, comprehensive TMN textbook only strengthened my commitment to honor the environment that sustains us.



ESMERALDA FISHER,
COASTAL PRAIRIE CHAPTER

Storytelling PROJECT



25TH ANNIVERSARY



In August of 2022, I completed my volunteer service and advanced training hours to become certified. As a TMN, you're not expected to be an expert. It's helpful to get comfortable with saying "I don't know" and follow it with "but I aim to find out." Being a TMN is a fun, low-stakes way of staying connected to one's community, and engaging in conservation and preservation that adds up to an elevated purpose and benefit to nature. TMNs-in-training quickly find out it's almost impossible to know everything, and instead, lean into a particular area of interest. For instance, I'm an admirer of insects and mushrooms. Others in my chapter are avid birders. Some know nearly everything about flora. A few have replaced their lawns with lush, gorgeous pocket prairies and butterfly gardens. There are countless ways to make an impact as a TMN.

One of the great things about being a TMN is that the learning never stops. That may sound overwhelming, but once you get started, you'll want to keep drinking from the hose. The opportunities to learn by doing are enhanced by the incredible access to conservation and preservation practitioners and partners who are enthusiastic about sharing their knowledge.



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**ESMERALDA FISHER,
COASTAL PRAIRIE CHAPTER**

Storytelling **PROJECT**



25TH ANNIVERSARY



Since starting on this journey, I've learned common and scientific names of a few flora that I could previously only identify as "that yellow flower with that brown thing in the middle." I've done native plant bump-ups. I've absorbed the significance of the coastal prairie, the environmental heritage of people of southeast Texas. I've looked through binoculars and observed an eaglet snuggled in a treetop. I've gazed into the eyes of a spider, using a loupe of course. I've served as a mentor for a TMN-in-training and numerous other activities, not the least of which are the in-person presentations and webinars on a variety of topics. After every experience, I leave inspired, with actionable ideas and new things to explore. As a TMN, your appreciation for Nature grows. It sounds like excitement and wonder in your voice when you're speaking with fellow TMNs or members of the public. Through the TMN community of practice, you get to trade knowledge and impart a sense of curiosity and wonder.

To see. To re-acquire that childlike wonder.

Because Nature deserves our undivided attention. When we observe Nature, we slow down and become mindful. Mindfulness, stillness in the act of observing is powerful. Nature beckons and drapes a welcoming arm around your shoulders. "Stay a while," she says. "There is so much to experience here."

ESMERALDA FISHER,
COASTAL PRAIRIE CHAPTER

Storytelling PROJECT



25TH ANNIVERSARY



Constellation of Living Memorials Program - A Friends of the Warren Ferris Cemetery, Native Plant Society of Texas & Dallas Pioneer Association Partnership (Julie Fineman, Harryette Erhardt & Kim Conrow)

Once an eyesore and embarrassment to the neighborhood, the historic Warren Ferris Cemetery is being transformed into a Dallas jewel. Through a native landscape restoration program, Friends of the Warren Ferris Cemetery is creating a beautiful environment and destination spot that has built community and connectivity through nature, while honoring the rich history of the Texas pioneers interred there. The Warren Ferris Cemetery, a 100-plus year old historic family burial ground in Forest Hills near the Dallas Arboretum, is using NPSOT's prescription of native plants as a model for restoration to reflect its original state. Our goal is to continue to evolve a native landscape that beautifies to the standards of a certified wildlife habitat and promotes environmental stewardship as a means to honor the pioneers buried there. To extend this noble concept to support native habitat development, a pilot program to revitalize 6 of the 5500 neglected, historic cemeteries throughout Texas has been born. This partnership can provide an educational hub offering guidance in reconnecting communities with nature through land restoration, while fostering a connection to their own cultural heritage and spirituality.

PATRICIA GRIFFIN,
NORTH TEXAS CHAPTER

Storytelling PROJECT



25TH ANNIVERSARY



The aim of the Constellation of Living Memorials is to create a cohesive, integrated plan which outlines a shared vision for how cemetery landscapes can transform into natural habitats statewide, broadening local and migratory wildlife corridors. It will be a tool to coalesce like-minded environmental groups to participate in projects that could include cemeteries throughout Texas, then countrywide.

Key Outcomes of The Constellation of Living Memorials program:

- Tackle climate change
- Adopt a native landscape restoration program designed for regional ecosystems
- Collect, propagate seeds and seedlings through NPSOT chapter fundraisers
- Experience the process of land restoration through native landscaping
- Build community through aligning neighbors to restore a neighborhood cemetery
- Promote and educate environmental stewardship and cultural history for each community
- Create synergy through a statewide “Constellation of Living Memorials” membership (eventually national)
- Increase the availability of way-stations for local and migratory wildlife

PATRICIA GRIFFIN,
NORTH TEXAS CHAPTER

Storytelling PROJECT



25TH ANNIVERSARY



Friends of the Warren Ferris Cemetery, The Native Plant Society of Texas and The Dallas Pioneer Association partnership introduces...

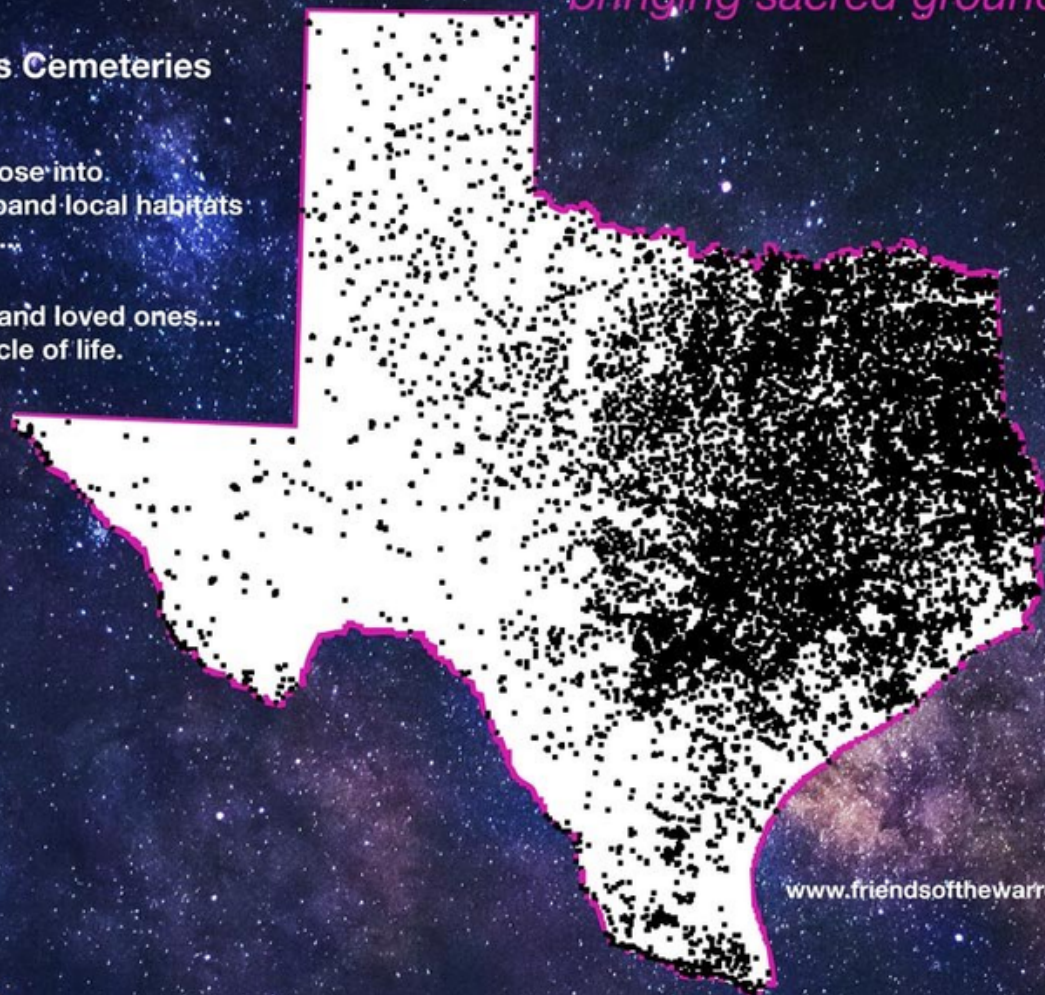
The Constellation of Living Memorials

bringing sacred ground to life

1/3 of 15,000+ Texas Cemeteries
are neglected.

Imagine transforming those into
native landscapes to expand local habitats
and migratory pathways...

...to honor our pioneers and loved ones...
and reconnect to the circle of life.



Know of a
neglected historic
cemetery in need?

Learn more:

www.friendsofthewarrenferriscemetery.org/projects



Cemetery Locations in Texas



Storytelling PROJECT

25TH ANNIVERSARY



During last year's City Nature Challenge, one of my goals was to top my previous year's 37 species of spiders. You can probably guess, spiders are my favorite subject. I was hoping to hit 40. By the end of the 2022 Challenge, I had recorded 54 species of spiders!

My favorite observation was a species of wolf spider that wasn't even listed on iNaturalist yet. As I scanned around Bensten State Park, spider sniffing with my flashlight, I spotted many eyes reflecting back at me from the grass. There was no particular reason I took a few photos of this one except it was nearby and good sized. It looked just like a regular wolf spider to me. A few steps in the other direction and I likely would have taken photos of a more common species instead. When I uploaded it, Eric Neubauer, a wolf spider enthusiast from El Camino Real Chapter TMN, commented that it looks unusual and tagged someone who was able to identify it as *Varacosa shenandoa*.

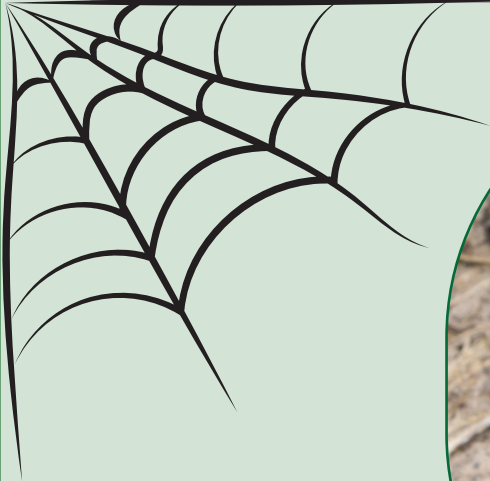


Storytelling PROJECT

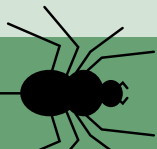
25TH ANNIVERSARY



As a member of one of the host chapters for this year's annual meeting, I am really looking forward to sharing our diverse local wildlife with members from all over Texas!



JOSEPH CONNORS,
SOUTH TEXAS
BORDER CHAPTER



Storytelling PROJECT

TMN 25TH ANNIVERSARY

The PowerPoint link is but one of 9 annual reports prepared on behalf of the volunteers at the Albert and Bessie Kronkosky State Natural Area. The property was donated to Texas Parks and Wildlife in 2011, and volunteers (both TMN and others alike) started showing up in 2013. As development commences, the baseline data collected by volunteers on the Natural and Cultural Resources will help to determine the location of infrastructure and trails.

James Rice, the Superintendent, selected volunteers to head various teams including: Monthly Bird Surveys and Golden Cheeked warbler surveys; Butterfly Counts and Monarch Larva Monitoring; Geology and Fossils; Deer and Hog Surveillance and Removal; Nest Boxes; Plant surveys and Prairie Restoration; Herpetology; Maple Tree surveys; and Streams and Canyons.

The Annual Reports have been prepared by Desi D'Orsogna, ABKSNA Historian and member of AAMN's Class 29. A 10th story is in the works which will cover volunteer activities in 2022.



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**DESIREE D'ORSOGNA,
ALAMO AREA CHAPTER**

Storytelling **PROJECT**



25TH ANNIVERSARY



In September 2013, one of my best friends passed away. A victim of breast cancer, Diane was a close friend to other moms in her daughter's elementary class. Because she could no longer drive, this group of friends, to which I belonged, took turns taking Diane home from work and to her many treatments. These commitments gave us all a meaning to our weekly routines. When Diane passed away, I felt not only sorrow, but also bereft of purpose.

On a Sunday afternoon the following January, as I sensed the hollow space in my coming weekly schedule, I spotted a newspaper notice of Texas Master Naturalist classes. It seemed Diane was saying, "Go. Breathe and listen and see the natural beauty around you." The classes filled me with curiosity and appreciation for my local native habitat. They filled me with awe for that natural beauty.



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BECKY JONES,
SOUTH TEXAS
BORDER
CHAPTER



Storytelling PROJECT

25TH ANNIVERSARY

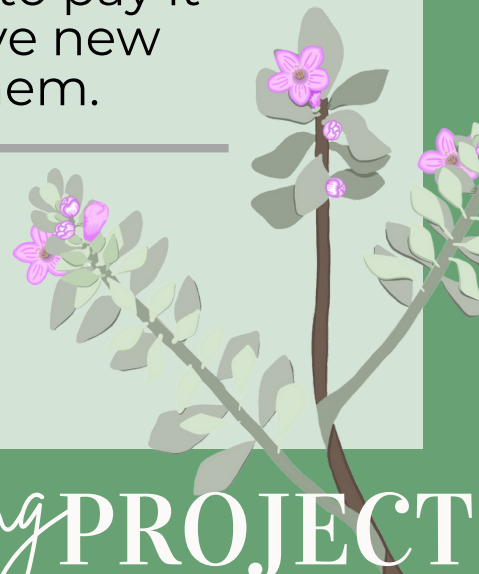


Several years later, my chapter, the South Texas Border Chapter, was approached to help restore the atriums of our local children's cancer center. The atriums were bare of vegetation and surfaced in torn black plastic and pebble. It was once again a calling. I volunteered to co-chair the project. With enthusiasm and strong cooperation, the chapter took up the challenge and replanted the atriums in native butterfly and hummingbird plants. It took several years to raise the money and do the physical restoration. We installed fountain features and ADA compliant seating for the staff and families of the patients. We placed and maintained hummingbird feeders outside the infusion room of the center. We enlisted support from the neighboring communities, the City of McAllen, and the local Master Gardener Chapter.

These days, when I enter the gardens to refill the hummingbird feeders, I'm often greeted by the whirring beat of hummingbirds. I like to think it's Diane thanking me for my attempt to pay it forward for the young cancer patients who now have new opportunities to enjoy the natural beauty around them.



**BECKY JONES,
SOUTH TEXAS BORDER
CHAPTER**



Storytelling **PROJECT**



25TH ANNIVERSARY



Becoming a Texas Master Naturalist changed my life. In 2006, I saw an advertisement in the local paper explaining about a class starting soon that involved training in local geology, botany, animals, and a wide range of environmental science opportunities. I was a full-time elementary teacher and mother with many responsibilities already, but I knew this was an opportunity. I scraped up the registration fee and got started on my new journey. After meeting new like-minded people and completing the requirements, I became a certified Texas Master Naturalist in 2006!

My life changed in several ways. First, I became a better teacher of all sciences. I became more aware of the plants and animals in my local area and was able to pass on what I knew. My lessons began to include Monarch tagging, species of greatest conservation need, wildlife studies, and so much more! In 2007, I was awarded the honor of the Texas State Elementary Teacher of the Year by the Texas Academy of Science Organization. This honor would not have been possible without my newfound knowledge from being a Texas Master Naturalist. I continued to incorporate my master naturalist experiences with my students until I retired from teaching in 2016.

Second, I have obtained valuable experiences to make me a full-time volunteer. Being a Texas Mater Naturalist has opened doors of volunteering in so many areas of science! I enjoy sharing knowledge with children at our local nature center, River Bend Nature Center. I get to take kids on nature hikes, teach them about geology, paleontology, hydrology, fishing, and the list continues! I have done water testing with kids of all ages and became a member of the Texas Stream Team.

LYNN SEMAN,
ROLLING PLAINS CHAPTER



Storytelling PROJECT

25TH ANNIVERSARY



At least once a week, I volunteer at the Whiteside Museum of Natural History in Seymour, Texas, the best place to find specimens of the dimetrodon, a pre-dinosaur synapsid found right in our region. I get to experience the wild at Comanche Springs Astronomy Campus, out in the “boonies” near Crowell, Texas. I conduct horned lizard surveys, document the flora and fauna, and help with outdoor excursions on the campus from time to time. I am involved with our quail study that has been going on for 10 years now on the Waggoner ranch near Electra, Texas. All these experiences, plus more, would not be possible without my involvement in the Texas Master Naturalist program.

Finally, I have become happier in life from being a Texas Master Naturalist. In our world today, there is too much sorrow and mental distress. The Texas Master Naturalist program allows people to find others with a like-minded outlook on life. We “nature-nerds” seem to find each other while out on the trails or while teaching children about insects. I have made lifelong friends in the program that I would have never known without it. When you come across a diamondback rattlesnake in the wild, you develop a bond with those who jumped three feet in the air with you! When you and your fellow master naturalists see the excitement in a child’s eyes when he/she sees a Texas horned lizard for the very first time, you develop a bond that can’t be broken. I can list so many more examples of these moments. To sum this all up, becoming a Texas Master Naturalist has made me a better person and has changed my life. Thank you, TMN, for the first 25 years, and I can’t wait for more wonderful years to come in the future!

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LYNN SEMAN,
ROLLING PLAINS CHAPTER



Storytelling PROJECT

