

T E X A S

Master
Naturalist™
Elm Fork Chapter



Naturalist News

February 2023 Volume 24, Issue 2



Clear Creek in February, from Clay Thurmond

We're on the Web www.txmn.org/elmfork

On Facebook: www.facebook.com/TexasMasterNaturalistElmFork/

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Naturalist News



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Red-bellied Woodpecker, from Win Goddard



What Happens Next

Elm Fork Chapter Annual Awards Meeting

Thursday, February 16

9:00 AM—12:00 PM

Denton County Administrative Courthouse
3rd floor, 2020 Room



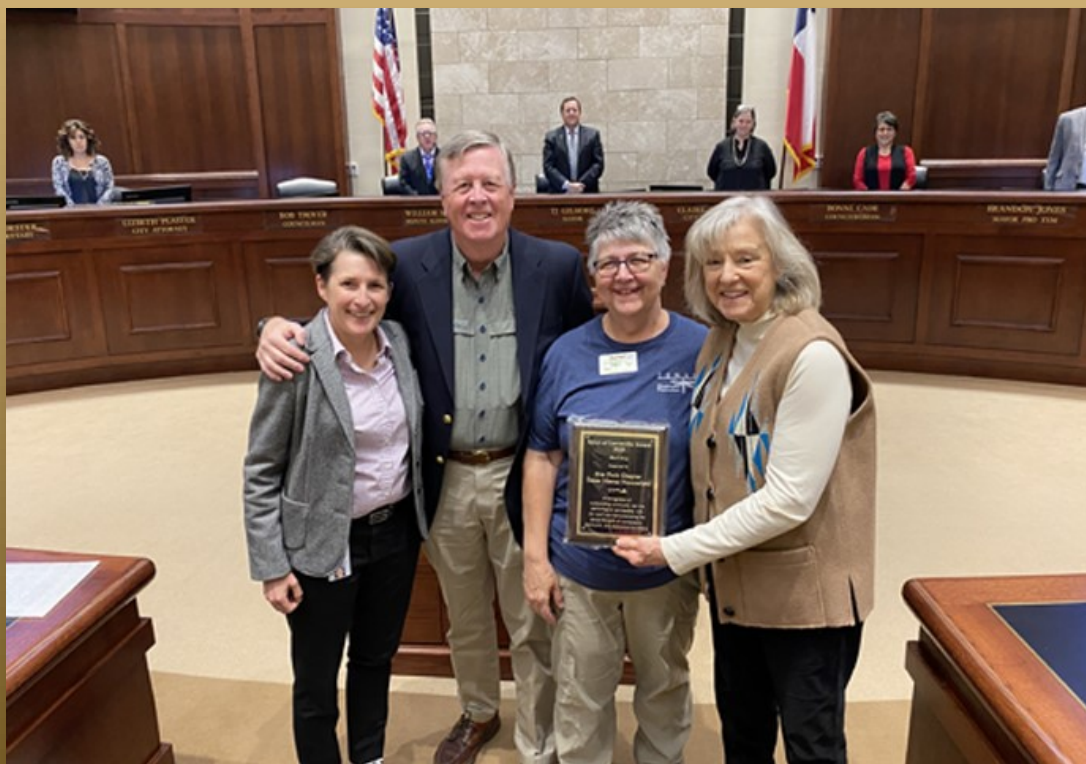
What You May Have Missed

Elm Fork Chapter Receives Spirit of Lewisville Award

From Jan Deatherage

Elm Fork Chapter was recognized by the City of Lewisville January 23rd at their City Council Meeting. We were presented the 2023 Spirit of Lewisville Award which recognizes our community service in partnership with city staff. As you probably know, we work closely with Lewisville Parks and Recreation on multiple projects including LLELA, Thrive, and Extending the Green. Stacie Anaya, who heads up P&R, provided us with the recommendation given to the Council on our behalf. It says a lot about our relationship building efforts and the value of our expertise across a wide spectrum of activities.

Scott Kiester, Sue Yost, and Jan Deatherage were there to accept the award on behalf of the Chapter. Congratulations to all members who have helped make a difference in Lewisville. There are too many of you to thank in this newsletter, but you know who you are. You are appreciated and your service is valued!



What You May Have Missed (cont.)

From the City of Lewisville



The Elm Fork Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalists (EFTMN) serves Denton, Cooke, and Wise counties. EFTMN has established three projects with the City of Lewisville including: LLELA/LISDOLA, Thrive Nature Park, and "Extending the Green".

At LLELA, the EFTMN partners with the City, LISD, and UNT to conduct restoration efforts and provide engaging programs for visitors. At Thrive Nature Park, EFTMN assists Parks and Recreation Department staff in nurturing the native flora and fauna in the park and providing activities for visitors. At each project site, EFTMN works to identify invasive species, successfully remove them, and replace them with native plants. EFTMN members have worked at LLELA & Thrive Nature Park to develop restoration plans. In 2022, EFTMN assisted in growing and planting over 10,000 native plants and grasses at LLELA. The largest effort took place during the "Plant-a-Thon" event hosted with LISD when 7th graders visited LLELA for a one-day field trip during the fall and learned about the benefits of conservation and restoration before getting a chance to plant native species on the property. EFTMN also assists with trail maintenance, seed harvesting, trash removal at LLELA and Thrive Nature Park and hosts monthly nature walks/assists with special events at each park. At LLELA specifically, they serve as docents in the nature center, hosting monthly tours of the historic Minor-Porter Log House, serving on the board of the Friends of LLELA, or assisting in research projects such as bird banding, quail tracking, box turtle rehabilitation, and angler education.

To support the City's efforts in Extending the Green, EFTMN has partnered with staff to identify several small parks/natural areas to be developed using appropriate native species design. Some of these sites are in underserved neighborhoods providing outreach opportunities, hands-on environmental education, and access to nature. In the design of Glory Park, EFTMN members were consulted on plants, grasses and trees, and have committed to hands-on restoration work at the park. In addition, EFTMN has identified native plants/grasses in vacant lots about to be developed, then mobilized teams to harvest and transplant them to other parks and greenspaces. Department personnel and EFTMN have begun building community relationships in these areas through community engagement events, mobile recreation deployments, and hosting opportunities for public input. One outreach program that was launched in 2022 is called Nature on Wheels (NOW). EFTMN members visited various parts of the city where access to nature is limited. They brought several hands-on activities and lessons for youth participants to get them engaged in the natural world.

The efforts of the EFTMN impact the lives of all residents of Lewisville. From a broad viewpoint, the conservation and restoration efforts they perform work to improve the quality of life for all residents. This is accomplished through improved air quality, increased shade from tree plantings, reduced use of resources, and community beautification. From a more direct viewpoint, EFTMN members make meaningful connections with the audiences they serve in their projects. This includes cleanups and plantings at park sites in underserved communities identified in the Extending the Green project. They educate residents through educational programming and help provide opportunities for everyone to access outdoor recreation. While the clientele of people served by EFTMN is vast, it is inspiring to watch these volunteers seamlessly tailor their knowledge and skills to the specific audience they are leading to ensure engagement. They are one of the reasons that Lewisville recently received the Native Prairies Association of Texas City Steward Award.

The Parks and Recreation Department is honored to nominate our partners at the Elm Fork Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalists for the Spirit of Lewisville Award.

Awards and Recognition

January 2023

Recertifications

<i>Mary Cissell</i>	<i>Class of 2015</i>
<i>Hilton Dickerson</i>	<i>Class of 2009</i>
<i>Jerry Hamby</i>	<i>Class of 2014</i>
<i>Mary Morrow</i>	<i>Class of 2014</i>
<i>Carl Patrick</i>	<i>Class of 2010</i>



1500 Hour Milestone

Fran Witte
Class of 2017



Field Notes in Focus

Love is in the air...



Inca Doves, from Tammie Walters



© Denver Kramer Photography

Common Goldeneyes, from Denver Kramer

Happy Valentine's Day!



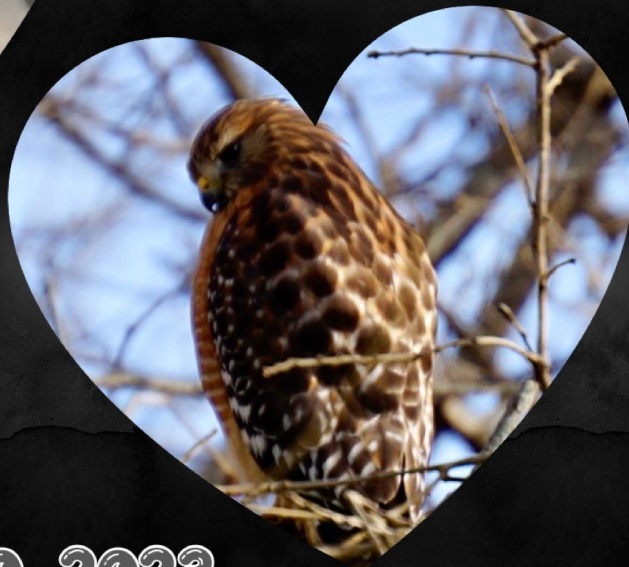
Northern Cardinals, from Tammie Walters



Black-necked Stilts, from Bryan Lewis

Inside Outside News

Great Backyard Bird Count



February 17-20, 2023

Hours for observing and entering data will be entered in VMS under 'Project Feeder Watch'. You can combine all 4 days together in one entry. If you take photos and enter them in iNaturalist, since this is an approved project, time spent entering data into iNaturalist can be entered in VMS.

For questions, please contact Karen Mangum, or projects@efctmn.org
For more information, click on [What's New? \(txmn.org\)](http://What's New? (txmn.org))

Inside Outside News



Become A Citizen Forester

VOLUNTEER TRAINING PROGRAM
Citizen Forester

Want to help your community take care of its trees? Register today to become a Citizen Forester!

9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
March | 6, 13, 20
April | 3, 12, 17, 24
May | 3, 8

Visit ctufo.org to apply and learn more about the role of Citizen Foresters in their community!

Registration costs \$165 (lunch included) and closes Feb. 27
 Classes are held at Denton Civic Center (321 E. McKinney St)

Sponsored by the Cross Timbers Urban Forestry Council, this Urban Forestry class is offered in partnership with Keep Denton Beautiful and the City of Denton

Questions about this class?

Mary Morrow (Citizen Forester)
 Abbey Schedler (KDB) | 940-349-8769
Abbey.Schedler@cityofdenton.com



This class falls under our project P140311 Trees and Forest Management. Hours in class and field exercises will be entered in VMS under AT: Project Specific, description: Trees and Forest Management.

We have 14 applications and will accept 20 in the class, if you are interested, please sign up today. Contact Mary Morrow (see Members Area Directory) if you have any questions.

Inside Outside News

*Be sure to see **Plan Your Week** or the **Elm Fork Chapter Calendar** for more volunteer service projects and advanced training opportunities.*

Click here: <https://txmn.org/elmfork/members-only-calendar/>

Or on the Calendar



<div> <div> <div>TEXAS</div> <div>Master Naturalist</div> </div> <div>Elm Fork Chapter</div> <div> <div>TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION</div> <div>TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE</div> </div> </div> <div> Home About Join Our Chapter Photo Gallery Activities Members Calendar Members Area Donate </div> <div>References</div>							
12 8:00 am - 2:00 pm ☞ LLELA Visitor Center – Volunteers Needed 10:00 am - 4:00 pm ☞ Ray Roberts Lake State Park – Johnson Branch Unit	13 9:00 am - 11:00 am ☞ Clear Creek Workday 9:00 am - 12:00 pm ☞ LLELA Monday & Wednesday Workday 9:00 am - 1:30 pm ☞ Environmental Discovery and Adventure (EDA) 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm ☞ Beginner Birder Virtual Series – AT	14 9:00 am - 12:00 pm ☞ LLELA TrailHead Tuesday Workday 12:00 pm - 3:00 pm ☞ Green Acres Workday 12:00 pm - 1:00 pm ☞ #TMN Tuesday – AT	15 8:00 am - 12:00 pm ☞ Beulah Acres Agroforest Workday 8:00 am - 3:15 pm ☞ North Texas Urban Forestry Conference – AT 9:00 am - 12:00 pm ☞ LLELA Monday & Wednesday Workday 9:00 am - 1:30 pm ☞ Environmental Discovery and Adventure (EDA)	16 9:00 am - 12:00 pm ☞ Chapter Meeting 10:00 am - 4:00 pm ☞ Ray Roberts Lake State Park – Johnson Branch Unit 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm ☞ Next Level Birding Workshop – AT 8:00 pm - 9:30 pm ☞ A World On The Wing – AT	17 Great Backyard Bird Count! 10:00 am - 4:00 pm ☞ Ray Roberts Lake State Park – Johnson Branch Unit	18 8:00 am - 2:00 pm ☞ LLELA Visitor Center – Volunteers Needed 9:00 am - 11:00 am ☞ Furneaux Creek Saturday Workday 9:00 am - 12:00 pm ☞ Texas Our Heritage (TOH) Native Demonstration Gardens Workday	
19 Great Backyard Bird Count! 8:00 am - 2:00 pm ☞ LLELA Visitor Center – Volunteers Needed 9:00 am - 10:30 am ☞ Thrive Nature Walk – AT 10:00 am - 4:00 pm ☞ Ray Roberts Lake State Park – Isle Du Bois Unit 10:00 am - 4:00 pm ☞ Ray Roberts Lake State Park – Johnson Branch Unit	20 9:00 am - 11:00 am ☞ Clear Creek Workday 9:00 am - 12:00 pm ☞ LLELA Monday & Wednesday Workday 9:00 am - 1:30 pm ☞ Environmental Discovery and Adventure (EDA) 12:00 pm - 1:00 pm ☞ Under Prairie Skies: The Plants and Native Peoples of the Northern Plains – AT 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm ☞ Beginner Birder Virtual Series – AT	21 9:00 am - 12:00 pm ☞ LLELA TrailHead Tuesday Workday 12:00 pm - 3:00 pm ☞ Green Acres Workday	22 8:00 am - 12:00 pm ☞ Beulah Acres Agroforest Workday 9:00 am - 12:00 pm ☞ LLELA Monday & Wednesday Workday 9:00 am - 1:30 pm ☞ Environmental Discovery and Adventure (EDA) 1:00 pm - 2:30 pm ☞ Let It Grow: A Showcase of No Mow Zones in North Central Texas – AT	23 9:00 am - 11:00 am ☞ Clear Creek Workday 9:30 am - 11:30 am ☞ SWAT Training and Meeting – AT 10:00 am - 4:00 pm ☞ Ray Roberts Lake State Park – Johnson Branch Unit 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm ☞ Next Level Birding Workshop – AT	24 10:00 am - 4:00 pm ☞ Ray Roberts Lake State Park – Isle Du Bois Unit 10:00 am - 4:00 pm ☞ Ray Roberts Lake State Park – Johnson Branch Unit	25 7:30 am ☞ Bird Walk at Clear Creek – AT 8:00 am - 2:00 pm ☞ LLELA Visitor Center – Volunteers Needed 8:00 am - 3:00 pm ☞ Native Plant Society Spring Symposium – AT 10:00 am - 4:00 pm ☞ Ray Roberts Lake State Park – Isle Du Bois Unit	

Quick Tips From Our Webmaster

Gale Bacon



Have you ever met someone in our chapter, but couldn't remember their name? Or did you hear their name, but don't know the face? Curious about who shares your interests and hobbies? Our member photo directory can help! It's only as good as the information we've received. We encourage you to enter or update your information for 2023!

How to Add Information to the Photo Directory

- On the Elm Fork Chapter website, visit the members area page: <https://txmn.org/elmfork/members-area/> (type in the website password, if prompted)
- Scroll down to the **Membership Directories** section and click on [Photo Directory](#).

Membership Directories

Information in the membership directories are **only** to be used for TMN-EFC business. Directory information should not be used for business or personal use.

- [Photo Directory](#) and [Photo Directory Search Criteria](#)
- [2022 Membership Roster](#) (Dec 2022)
- [Training Class Photos](#) (Feb 2022)

- Enter the website password in the gray box:

ELM FORK CHAPTER OF THE TEXAS MASTER NATURALISTS

PROTECTED: PHOTO DIRECTORY

This content is password protected. To view it please enter your password below:

Password:

ENTER

Continued
on next
page



Quick Tips (cont.)

- Next, click the '[here](#)' link:



- Review the directory help information, then select '[click here](#)' to receive your private email link.

- Everyone receives an email with their "private link" to their record, where they may update their interest selections, other organizations they might belong to and provide a social media link. If you have lost that email or don't remember your link, [click here](#).

- In your email, click on the private link and enter the website password:

ELM FORK CHAPTER OF THE TEXAS MASTER NATURALISTS

PROTECTED: PHOTO DIRECTORY

This content is password protected. To view it please enter your password below:

Password:

ENTER

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on next
page



Quick Tips (cont.)

- You can then check the boxes for your subject matter interests, personal hobbies, etc.

Subject Matter Interests	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Trees (and shrubs) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Forbs (flowering plants; wildflowers) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Grasses (and grasslike plants) <input type="checkbox"/> Mosses (and lichen) <input type="checkbox"/> Bees <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Butterflies (and moths) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dragonflies (and Damselflies) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Macroinvertebrates <input type="checkbox"/> (Other) Insects <input type="checkbox"/> Water birds <input type="checkbox"/> Perching (tree-clinging) birds <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hawks (and owls) <input type="checkbox"/> Upland (ground) birds <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mammals <input type="checkbox"/> Frogs (and salamanders) <input type="checkbox"/> Turtles <input type="checkbox"/> Lizards <input type="checkbox"/> Snakes <input type="checkbox"/> Paleontology <input type="checkbox"/> Geology <input type="checkbox"/> Forest ecology <input type="checkbox"/> Prairie ecology <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Wetland ecology <input type="checkbox"/> Land conservation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Water conservation <input type="checkbox"/> other: <input style="width: 100px;" type="text"/>
Personal Hobbies and Interests	<input type="checkbox"/> Art (drawing; painting; illustration) <input type="checkbox"/> Crafts (sewing; pottery) <input type="checkbox"/> Fishing <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Gardening <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hiking <input type="checkbox"/> Photography (nature) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rainwater (harvesting) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Recycling (composting) <input type="checkbox"/> Storm Tracking <input type="checkbox"/> Woodworking <input type="checkbox"/> other: <input style="width: 100px;" type="text"/>

- Click 'SAVE' to save your changes:

Save Your Changes

SAVE

- To update your photo, send a new photo to directory@efctmn.org

Coming next: tips on how to search the photo directory.

Projects in the Community

Are You Ready to NestWatch???

By Sharon Miggins, EFC NestWatch Project Manager



Mom and Dad Bluebird helping fledgling out of the box

Bluebirds are already going in and out of nest boxes at my house and claiming them for their own. It won't be long before nests start to appear, and volunteering opportunities arise. If you missed last month's article on NestWatch and how to participate, it can be accessed through txmn.org/elmfork/newsletters.

I have had several members contact me and ask where they can NestWatch. So, I compiled a list from project managers that responded to me. If I missed your project, please let me know and I will include it in the next newsletter. The following have nest box trails and opportunities for volunteering:

- ◆ Beulah Acres Agroforest
- ◆ Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center
- ◆ Furneaux Creek Nature Trail
- ◆ Bob Jones Nature Center
- ◆ LBJ National Grasslands Conservation Programs
- ◆ Trophy Club Park Conservation Area (help needed!)
- ◆ Green Acres
- ◆ The Flower Mound Project

Please contact project managers to participate in their NestWatch program. A list of project managers can be found at txmn.org/elmfork. Click on "members area", then "projects" and a list of the projects with contact information will pop up. Remember, you can NestWatch on your own property, as well.



Newly fledged Eastern Bluebird



Hey! Anyone can NestWatch!
(Even a Black-bellied Whistling Duck!)

If you have any questions about NestWatch, please feel free to contact me, Sharon Miggins (see Members Area Directory). I'm always happy to help.

Projects in the Community

Bluebird Monitoring at LBJ Grassland

From Jerry Hamby



Susan Hamby and Jeanne Erickson, Project Manager for bluebird monitoring at LBJ.
Photo by Jerry Hamby

Work recently completed in the LBJ National Grassland, where supports, predator baffles, and a few nesting boxes for Eastern Bluebirds were replaced.



Jody Springer, Jeanne Erickson, Susan Hamby, and Susan Tartaglino
Photo by Jerry Hamby



Jerry Hamby and Jeanne Erickson
Photo by Susan Hamby



Projects in the Community

Speaking of Bluebirds...

From Becky Bertoni

Eastern bluebirds love perching on our signs at
Green Acres



Photos from Win Goddard,
Green Acres Volunteer

Projects in the Community

Texas Native Plant Art Exhibition

From Jerry Hamby

The Texas Native Plant Art Exhibition features works by fourth grade students in DISD and is sponsored by the Texas Master Naturalist program and the Native Plant Society of Texas. Marilyn Blanton is the Elm Fork Chapter's Project Manager for the Texas Native Plant Art Exhibition.

Last week the works went up at the Elm Fork Education Center on the campus of UNT, a great place to see all the award-winning artwork. Brian Wheeler, who is Senior Program Project Coordinator, can be seen installing the exhibition. The Elm Fork Education Center, under Brian Wheeler's leadership, has hosted the Texas Native Plant Art displays for a number of years.



Tweet of the Month

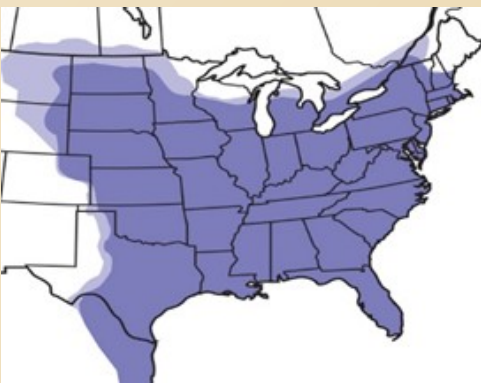
By Sue Yost, class of 2017

Eastern Screech Owl (*Megascops asio*)

The Eastern Screech Owl is one of our more familiar birds as it is found widespread over the eastern half of North America. Screech Owls tolerate human activity so they can be found somewhat easily in suburban neighborhoods. [like mine!]

Eastern Screech Owls don't actual "screech" but have several calls including a "whinny like a horse" and a liquid, wavering whistle. In the breeding season [happening now] males and females stay in touch with a soft, muted, one-note trill. They have that very distinctive descending trill they use to defend the nest or territory. To hear their calls log onto https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Eastern_Screech-Owl/sounds.

They are small birds not much bigger than a Cardinal. Males are about 8 ¼" tall with a wingspan of 21". Females, much like other owls, are slightly larger coming in at 9 ¼" and a 22" wingspan. Unless they are perched next to each other it is hard to tell them apart.



Eastern Screech Owls live in the U.S east of the Rockies. There is also a very similar Western Screech Owl that would be west of the Rockies. (The western can be found in far west Texas also.) Eastern Screech Owls live in lower elevations and can be found in many different habitats. Disturbed and pristine forests, evergreen and deciduous trees and are perfectly happy in an urban/suburban backyard. They avoid dense forests where predators like the Great Horned Owl lurk in the dark shadows.

Not all Eastern Screech Owls look alike. There are 3 "phases" gray, red and brownish (sort of between a red and brown). Gray phase birds are more common in the North and in South Texas. Red phases are more common in the South. Our area can get both phases. The eyes and bill are yellowish (the Western Screech has a black bill) and they have the signature ear tufts which are not ears at all!



One-Eyed Owl

Tweet of the Month (cont.)

Screeches are very well camouflaged blending into a tree trunk. Sometimes when “found out” they will stretch tall and erect vertically to better blend in much like a tree branch. If you hear songbirds such as jays, wrens and chickadees loudly “fussing” up in a tree or near a cavity in a tree or nest box, then that sleeping screech just got found!



Adult Owl in Box

Screech Owls are secondary cavity nesters meaning they will nest in a tree cavity or a man-made nest box. Nest boxes need to be the proper size for these little owls and come with a 3” round entrance hole. Unlike other birds, they do not bring in material to make a nest, so cedar or pine shavings need to be provided in the box. The box can be on a telescoping pole or mounted in a tree 10’-30’ above ground.

Males put on quite a show to attract a female. (They also mate for life.) First they bow, raising wings while bobbing and swiveling the head. Then they do a full body bob all the while doing a slow “winking” of the eyes. The male brings food to female. Mated pairs preen each other's feathers and call-in duet. That’s enough to get any available female to take a second look, isn’t it? Once he has won her heart, they mate, and she gets ready for egg laying.

She will lay 2-8 eggs and starts incubating as soon as the first egg drops. This way they will all hatch at different times and hence fledge at different times. She will sit on the eggs for about thirty days. She will leave the box for brief periods for potty and water breaks. During this time, he will bring her food. The first egg laid will hatch first. The eggs will hatch in the order they were laid for the next week. Dad will continue food drops while mom keeps the featherless nestlings warm. The male is clueless when it comes to feeding so it’s all up to mom to rip and tear the prey to feed to the owlets. Once they start to feather out and no longer need to be kept warm, then mom will also join in the hunt to provide food for the hungry owlets.

Screech Owls are excellent hunters known as the “flying bobcat”. They are most active just after dark. They are “sit and wait” hunters. If they launch from a branch, they are most likely after an insect they catch on the wing. They can locate prey by sound as well as by sight. After 30 days of a steady diet of rodents, insects, small birds, crayfish, frogs, fish, geckos, and snakes, the owlets will fledge one by one.

Again, unlike songbirds that fly directly out of a nest box to the great blue yonder, screeches will haphazardly “fly” to the nearest foliage. If they land on the ground, they will walk to a tree trunk. Once on the trunk they will literally climb up the trunk using beak and talons to the



Owlets

Tweet of the Month (cont.)

safety of the crown of the tree. This is called branching. The new fledgling will make soft calls to tell his uber parents where they can find him to feed him! Young gain flight and hunting skills slowly; they depend on their parents for food for 8–10 weeks after fledging. The young will stay with the family unit throughout the summer.

This little owl is a generalist, with unfussy eating and nesting habits, and adjusts well to the presence of humans. In fact, suburban birds often survive better than their rural kin, as suburbs provide more prey, milder climates, and fewer predators. Eastern Screech Owls can live 8–10 years in the wild. Habitat destruction deprives these birds of a place to reproduce as well as reducing available prey. They are also very frequently struck by vehicles, and with such a small bird these impacts are usually fatal. It is tough being a little screech owl!

Some owl box owners set up live cameras outside and inside the box to observe the activity. This can be totally addictive! There is even a private Facebook page devoted to Screech Owls in the area.

FUN FACT: Adults may bring back small, wormlike Blind Snakes and release them in the nest, where the snakes burrow in debris in bottom of cavity, feeding on insects there, perhaps helping protect the young from parasites.



Possum in the Box

FUN FACT: It is not just owls that are attracted to nest boxes. Squirrels and small possums also love them. Plus, honeybees! When bees swarm they sometimes take over an owl nest box. This happened to 2 of my boxes. Lucky for me I knew fellow EFMN Deborah Holyfield, beekeeper extraordinaire who came to my rescue!!



Bee Swarm in the Box



Deb Holyfield Saving the Swarm

Features

River Otters at Clear Creek

From Clay Thurmond

Yes, we have them at Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center. There have been many occasions where something was spotted in the water, but determining whether it was a beaver, otter, or nutria always eluded us. Until recently. Two months ago, Dan Brockett, City of Denton Parks and Recreation, CCNHC Maintenance, caught a family of otters on a game cam he set up on the new property newly acquired property at CCNHC. Then, while doing water quality monitoring in December, we observed one in the water swimming to what might be a den in the log jam at the Confluence. Before all this though, a student from UNT set up a couple of game cams, one aimed toward the suspected den and another by a slide. We are trying to get access to those photos and report.



River Otter Family at CCNHC, from Game Camera



River Otter Swimming, from Clay Thurmond

A river otter's expected lifespan is up to 12 years. They have litters of pups averaging two to three but can range from a single pup to six pups. The female can delay implantation for as many as 11 months, with a gestation period of 60 days. The pups are born blind and toothless and are weaned at about three months. Within six to twelve months, they become independent and reach sexual maturity at two to three years. They are omnivorous. River otters pretty much rule while in the water but are more susceptible to coyotes, bobcats, and wild dogs on land. While they are certainly prey for alligators, river otters have been known to return the favor by occasionally preying on alligators. Cute as they may be, they have a fierce side with strong jaws and sharp teeth.

Unexpected

Fear is a Friend

By Missy Adair

I do not speak of dread; that is anticipation of something bad. I do not speak of hyperventilation, which comes after fear. No, fear is in the very moment you realize something is amiss. Do not ignore it. It can save your life.

Caution is your very best friend. It keeps you from doing things you'd rather you hadn't. Nature doesn't know what you might be ignorant of or forgetful of; if you step in that fire ant bed you will be reminded.

When your sense of caution (or common sense) fails you there may be consequences you'd rather not have. Like unpleasant hallucinations, severe nausea, and a killer headache. Yes, when the professor showed us the inner bark of an invasive species in Florida, I tasted it. I had been tasting plants since I was a child (yes, it is a miracle I survived). That inner bark tasted delicious! I ate quite a bit. The professor just watched me with ironic eyes.

Back in the van, the unpleasantness began. My tongue went numb. Hallucinations began. I couldn't speak. When the effects began to wear off and the nausea and headache settled in, I plaintively asked the professor why he hadn't stopped me. He just said, without even turning around, "You won't eat random plants again." This time the natural world didn't kill me, but I'd been warned.

Our group are children of nature. We dance in the sunbeams and are in awe of the moon. But keep that nugget of fear and that abundance of caution. Then you won't end up in ignominy or the hospital!

The elderly professor told us he was taking us to see an alligator nest. We must stay well back and be prepared for a quick exit. Mother alligators lurk in the water near their nests and can charge at incredible speed to kill anything that might disturb the nest.

I wiggled with excitement. I could barely contain myself. An alligator's nest!

Remember that nugget of fear you should always keep to tell you when you are in real danger? I confess I don't have one. I'm pure enthusiasm. I get carried away with the thrill of raw nature. Do you too?

Mother alligators don't care that your intentions are pure. If you get too close, you will die. I kept edging closer. At the last moment a classmate grabbed me by my shirt collar and threw me into the car, which then raced off. I was never allowed on that refuge again.

You don't have to be constantly afraid in nature! But when common sense or a nudge of fear tug at your brain, you know it's time to exit the situation quietly. When you pack your water, trail snacks, magnifying glass and field guides, leave room for some caution. It will be your best friend.



This Month's Contributors



Missy Adair



Gale Bacon



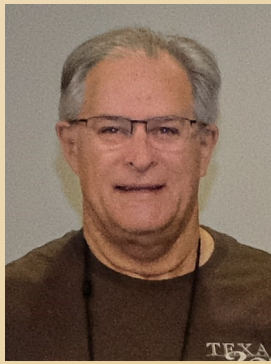
Becky Bertoni



Jan Deatherage



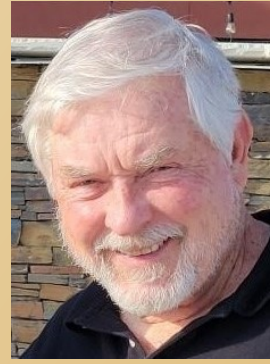
Jerry Hamby



Denver Kramer



Brian Lewis



Dale Meyer



Sharon Miggins



Mary Morrow



Clay Thurmond



Sue Yost



Tammie Walters, Editor

Thank you all!

Articles and photos for the *Naturalist News* are always wanted and welcomed!

Send submissions to: newsletter@efctmn.org

Deadline for the March 2023 submissions is Friday, March 10th.

Almost the Last Word

Our chapter governing documents for 2023 (Bylaws, Chapter Operating Handbook, and Chapter Management and Operations Protocols) have been moved to the Members Area of the website.

To view these documents, click on the 'Members Area' on our website, or click here: <https://txmn.org/elmfork/members-area/>

Login with the website password and click on the '[Elm Fork Chapter Governing Documents](#)' link under Forms and Documents

Forms and Documents

- [2023 Dues](#)
- [Expense Reimbursement Form](#)
- [IRS Determination Ltr 501\(c\)\(3\)](#)
- [Nametag Order Form to Take to Trophy House](#)
- [New Service Project Initiation Form](#) (rev. Dec 2020)
- [Special Short Term Project Proposal Form](#) (new Dec 2020)
- [Elm Fork Chapter Governing Documents](#)
(Bylaws, Chapter Operating Handbook, & Chapter Management and Operations Protocols)

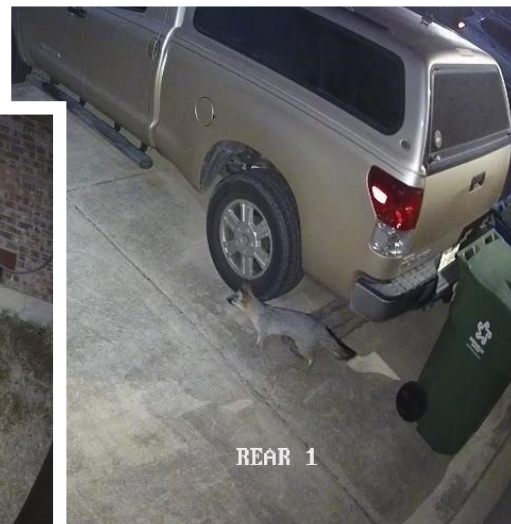
Some urban wildlife from Dale Meyer's home security cameras!



Bobcat

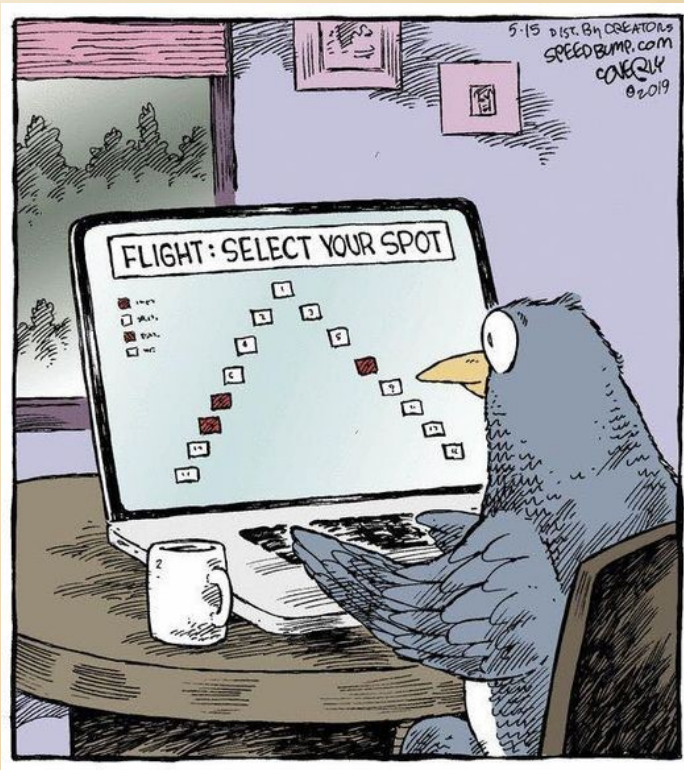


Grey Fox



Grey Fox

Almost the Last Word



Naturalist News needs your love...

and knowledge
and articles!

Please share your love of nature and wealth of knowledge about
our flora and fauna with our chapter by submitting an article or
two to our newsletter at

newsletter@efctmn.org

Remember, time spent in researching
and writing is countable
volunteer hours!

Who We Are



Texas Master Naturalist—Elm Fork Chapter

<https://txmn.org/elmfork/>

OFFICERS

President - Jerry Betty

Vice President - Kathy Webb

Treasurer - Ray Kreutzfeld

Secretary - Missy McCormick

BOARD POSITIONS

Immediate Past President – Jan Deatherage

Member-at-Large – Janet Gershenfeld

BOARD DIRECTORS

Membership - Sharon Betty

VMS - Shaleen Wunrow

Initial Training - Steve and Lori Carroll

Communications - Karen DeVinney

Volunteer Service Projects - Jerry Clark

Advanced Training Programs - David Jones

Outreach/Adult Education - Fran Witte

New Class Representative - Christina Wales

CHAPTER ADVISORS

AgriLife – Janet Laminack, Extension Agent

Texas Parks and Wildlife – TBD



Our Mission

“To develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the State of Texas.”

Our Vision

“In our community, Elm Fork Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist will be recognized as a primary source of information, education, and service to support natural resources and natural areas today and in the future.”

Regular Monthly Chapter Meetings

Meetings are on the third Thursday of each month at 9:30 a.m. preceded by a social time at 9:00 a.m.

Chapter meetings are open to the public.

Board Meetings

The Board meets each second Thursday of the month at 9:30 a.m.

Monthly Board meetings are open to members.

Educational programs of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, genetic information or veteran status. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

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