

T E X A S

Master
Naturalist™
Elm Fork Chapter



Naturalist News

December 2023 Volume 23, Issue 12



Happy Holidays!

Pigeonberry at Green Acres, from Margaret Aten, volunteer at Green Acres

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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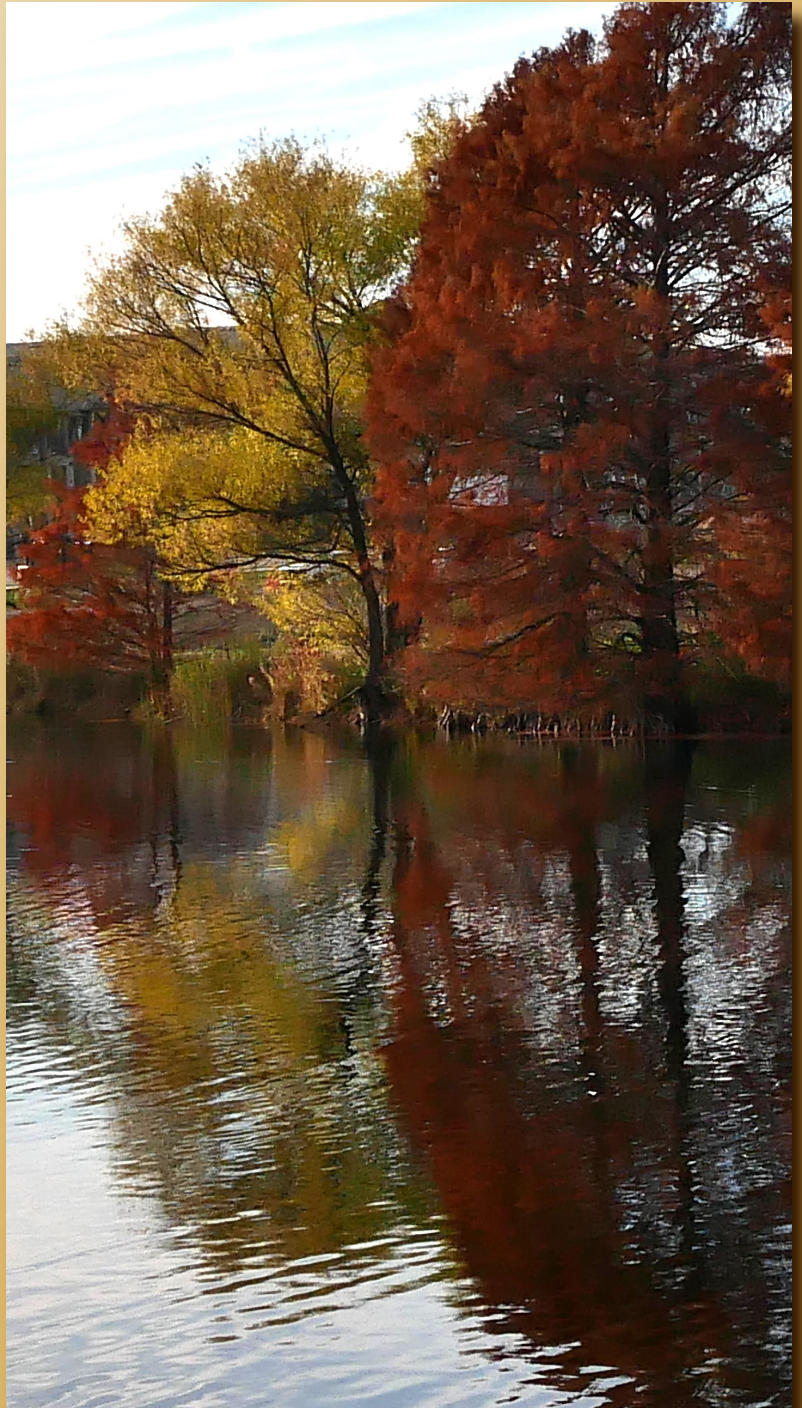
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On the Cover

Pigeonberry (*Rivina humilis*) is a Texas native that thrives in part to full shade. It grows to about 12 inches tall, has pinkish white flowers and clusters of bright red berries that attract birds.

Photo shared by Becky Bertoni



Fall color reflection, from Jonathan Reynolds

What Happens Next



DENTON COUNTY AGRILIFE
EXTENSION SERVICE
INVITES YOU TO OUR ANNUAL

COMMISSIONERS COURT APPRECIATION BREAKFAST

DECEMBER 12 AT 8:00 AM
ROOM 2020, THIRD FLOOR
DENTON COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE COURTHOUSE

Follow us to commissioners court at 9 AM
for our Interpretation report

Sponsored by the Leadership Advisory Board &
Denton County 4-H Youth and Club Leaders



What Happens Next

CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON

December 14th

10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

DCAC Elections Bldg

701 Kimberly

Denton

**Spread good cheer and see old
friends to jump-start your
holiday!**

*****Please bring a pot-luck dish or dessert to share
and wrapped nature-theme ornament*****

What Happens Next

Tis the Season for Giving

Instead of exchanging gifts, we are donating to:

WILD RESCUE, INC BAREFOOT UNIVERSITY

We will make donations at the Christmas Luncheon. Please make checks payable to the organization you wish to support. You may also make donations on-line under 'What's New' in the Member's Area from December 14th to December 21st.

WILD RESCUE, INC

SERVES NORTH TX IN DOMESTIC RABBIT AND WILDLIFE RESCUE AND REHABILITATION. CURRENTLY HAVE 150 DOMESTIC RABBITS TO LOCATE IN FOSTER HOMES OR ADOPT.

THEY CARE FOR 600-900 WILDLIFE EACH YEAR, MAINLY THE EASTERN COTTONTAIL, FOX SQUIRREL AND THE VIRGINIA OPOSSUM. THEY DEPEND ENTIRELY ON DONATIONS TO SUPPORT THEIR WORK.

WILDRESCUETEXAS.ORG

BAREFOOT UNIVERSITY

THEIR MISSION IS "CONNECTING HOMESCHOOL FAMILIES TO NATURE AND EACH OTHER"

THEY CONNECT KIDS TO NATURE BY ENCOURAGING CHILD-LED EXPERIENCES, PLAY AND OUTDOOR HANDS-ON LEARNING. CURRENTLY CLEAR CREEK NATURE CENTER AND BOB JONES NATURE CENTER ARE USED AS CAMPSITES.

BAREFOOTUNIVERSITY.ORG

Awards and Recognition

November 2023

Initial Certifications

Abigale Beck	Class of 2023
Deborah Driver	Class of 2023
Catherine Griesbaum	Class of 2023
Eric Houston	Class of 2023
Brenda McCoy	Class of 2023
Enita Perez	Class of 2023
Christy Thompson	Class of 2023



Recertifications

Heidi Barr	Class of 2022
Matt Brown	Class of 2022
Nancy Blakney	Class of 2023
Eric Houston	Class of 2023
Vin Merrill	Class of 2011
Enita Perez	Class of 2023
Fritz Poppe	Class of 2001
Mary Strickland	Class of 2019
Barbie Van Order	Class of 2023
Katherine Vargas	Class of 2022
Beverly Walton	Class of 2019
Susan Warren	Class of 2019



Continued...



Awards and Recognition

November 2023

1000 Hour Milestone

Jim Gerber

Class of 2019



2000 Hour Milestone

Leonard Chochrek

Class of 2019

Hugh Franks

Class of 2019



Congratulations!



Field Notes in Focus



Cooper's Hawk, from Regina Dale

Inside Outside News

Volunteer Opportunities



LBJ Grasslands Clean Up

December 18th, 2023

9:00 am–12:00 pm

12:00 pm–3:00 pm

[Click here to sign up](#)



LLELA

Visitor Center

Saturdays and Sundays

Shift 1: 10:00–1:00

Shift 2: 1:00–4:00

Please review the available slots from the link below and click on the button to sign up. Thank you!

Click here to sign up: <https://tinyurl.com/LLELAVisitor>



Ray Roberts Lake Nature Centers

**Volunteers are needed at
Isle Du Bois and Johnson Branch**

Please check your calendars and
click on the links below to sign up:

[Johnson Branch](#)

[Isle Du Bois](#)

Inside Outside News

Approved AT

Environmental Education- Measuring Impacts For Growth

January 10th, 2024 (2:00-3:00 PM or 7:00-8:00 PM)

Webinar with Kelly Albus, Texas A&M AgriLife Research, Texas Water Resources Institute and Michelle Wood-Ramirez, Tarrant Regional Water District.

Environmental education programs are included in nearly all sustainable resource management strategies, with millions in funding going toward programs for public and youth audiences with the understanding that an informed, engaged public will benefit program outcomes. However, the majority of these programs have not assessed the impacts these environmental education programs actually have on either participants or the environment.

This webinar will discuss what we know about the impacts of environmental education programs, such as how knowledge gains may translate into behavioral change, or how peer communities can impact learning. As part of this webinar, we will share tips and tricks for designing your own impact evaluation survey to collect data for you and your team to improve reporting metrics, prove program value or return on investment, reach new audiences or even generate more funding. You will learn how environmental education programs are being evaluated for success, and gain some tips, tricks and tools you can use to evaluate your own programs. As a group, we will consider ways to include evaluation metrics throughout program design and implementation to increase success and generate more opportunities for growth.

Register at: [Environmental Education - Measuring Impacts for Growth Tickets in Austin, TX, United States \(ticketleap.com\)](https://ticketleap.com/Environmental-Education-Measuring-Impacts-for-Growth-Tickets-in-Austin-TX-United-States)

FINDING YOUR SPARK: HOW MOMENTS IN NATURE BENEFIT TEACHERS

January 13th, 2024 at 10:00 AM

Virtual Teacher Workshop with Catherine Hubbard, Camp Fire National Headquarters

We often speak of nature as the greatest teacher of all. But while nature does make an excellent partner, the premise that nature is all we need does a disservice to the teachers who are hauling out tools, planning lessons, leading activities, and setting the stage. The fact is, behind every enriching nature-based program is a teacher who has had to ensure students had appropriate gear; manage outdoor bathroom visits; keep others safe (while giving them opportunities for risk); all while continuing to meet academic standards, licensing requirements, and the expectations of both parents and administrators.

Research has shown that time in nature reduces stress levels in young people. This webinar makes the case that having teachers who are fully present, engaged, relaxed, and joyful is equally important. We will explore how schools and programs can create a nature-friendly culture that supports and inspires teachers, allowing them, in turn, to support and inspire the young people they teach. There will be examples of simple art, STEM, and literacy activities designed to get less experienced teachers outside. We will discuss some of the challenges (and solutions) that teachers face when taking their classes out. But our primary focus will be on how moments in nature, both alone and with students, can support, uplift, and reignite sparks within the teachers themselves.

Catherine Koons Hubbard is the Manager of Outdoor and Nature Programming at Camp Fire National Headquarters, a youth-serving organization with 47 affiliates across the country. She is the former Director of Schlitz Audubon Nature Preschool in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and is co-author of the book, "Partnering with Nature in Early Childhood: A Guide to Outdoor Experiences" with Dr. Patti Bailie.

Register at: [Finding Your Spark: How Moments in Nature Benefit Teachers - Texas Children in Nature](https://www.childreninnature.org/finding-your-spark-how-moments-in-nature-benefit-teachers-texas-children-in-nature)

Inside Outside News

Approved AT



Managing Eco-Anxiety through Outdoor Learning

January 16th, 2024 - 6:00 PM

With Educators and Earth Rangers, Stephanie Doyle and Nicole Forsyth.

When kids are worried about the environment, they can feel scared, overwhelmed and even hopeless. This is called eco-anxiety. But what can we do about it?

How about turning Eco-Anxiety into Eco-Action? Eco-anxiety is a valid response to the real challenges our kids see around them. As adults, our job isn't to make their concerns go away; it's to help channel them into positive action. Join Stephanie and Nicole who will share research and practical ways on how Outdoor Learning and Environmental Action can help to manage Eco-Anxiety.

Stephanie Doyle, PhD, is the Education Programs Manager at Earth Rangers. Earth Rangers Homeroom supports K-6 educators in transforming children's concerns about the environment into positive action through classroom resources, an eco clubs program and the "Eco-Anxiety to Eco-Action" micro-credential.

Nicole Forsyth is the Managing Director for Earth Rangers, USA, a nonprofit committed to instilling environmental knowledge, positivity, and the confidence to take action in every child in Canada and now the United States.

All registrants will be entered to win some great draw prizes! Following the workshop, you will receive a discount code to access the resources shared, the recording, and a link to access your Certificate of Attendance.

Click here to register: [Free Virtual Workshops - Outdoor Learning Store](#)

The Advanced Training Opportunities keep coming!



Inside Outside News

See the [Elm Fork Chapter Website](#) and [Calendar](#) for MORE volunteer and Advanced Training opportunities!



Elm Fork Chapter

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References

Advanced Training
Board Meeting
Chapter Meeting
Special Events
TMN Annual Meeting
Volunteers Needed

10	11	12	13	14	15	16
<div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">10:00 am - 4:00 pm Ray Roberts Lake State Park - Isle Du Bois Unit</div> <div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">10:00 am - 4:00 pm Ray Roberts Lake State Park - Johnson Branch Unit</div> <div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px;">10:00 am - 4:00 pm LLELA Visitor Center</div>	<div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">9:00 am - 1:30 pm Environmental Discovery and Adventure (EDA)</div> <div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px;">9:00 am - 12:00 pm LLELA Monday & Wednesday Workday</div>	<div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">8:00 am - 11:00 am Beulah Acres Agroforest Workday</div> <div style="background-color: #9900ff; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">8:00 am - 10:00 pm Denton County AgriLife Extension Service Commissioners Court Appreciation Breakfast</div> <div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">9:00 am - 12:00 pm LLELA Trailhead Tuesday</div> <div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">9:00 am - 12:00 pm Workday on The Flower Mound</div> <div style="background-color: #00a0c0; color: white; padding: 2px;">12:00 pm - 1:00 pm #TMN Tuesday - AT</div> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 5px;">+ 1 More</div>	<div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">9:00 am - 1:30 pm Environmental Discovery and Adventure (EDA)</div> <div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px;">9:00 am - 12:00 pm LLELA Monday & Wednesday Workday</div>	<div style="background-color: #ffcc00; color: black; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">10:00 am - 1:00 pm Chapter Meeting</div> <div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px;">10:00 am - 4:00 pm Ray Roberts Lake State Park - Johnson Branch Unit</div>	<div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">10:00 am - 4:00 pm Ray Roberts Lake State Park - Isle Du Bois Unit</div> <div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">10:00 am - 4:00 pm Ray Roberts Lake State Park - Johnson Branch Unit</div>	<div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">8:00 am - 11:00 am Furneaux Creek Volunteer Day on the Trail</div> <div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">10:00 am - 4:00 pm Ray Roberts Lake State Park - Isle Du Bois Unit</div> <div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">10:00 am - 4:00 pm Ray Roberts Lake State Park - Johnson Branch Unit</div> <div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px;">10:00 am - 4:00 pm LLELA Visitor Center</div>
<div style="background-color: #00a0c0; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">9:00 am - 10:30 am Thrive Nature Walk - AT</div> <div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">10:00 am - 4:00 pm Ray Roberts Lake State Park - Isle Du Bois Unit</div> <div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">10:00 am - 4:00 pm Ray Roberts Lake State Park - Johnson Branch Unit</div> <div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px;">10:00 am - 4:00 pm LLELA Visitor Center</div>	<div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px;">9:00 am - 12:00 pm LLELA Monday & Wednesday Workday</div>	<div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">9:00 am - 12:00 pm LLELA Trailhead Tuesday</div> <div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">9:00 am - 12:00 pm Beulah Acres Agroforest Workday</div> <div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px;">12:00 pm - 3:00 pm Green Acres Workday</div>	<div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">9:00 am - 12:00 pm Beulah Acres Agroforest Workday</div> <div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px;">9:00 am - 12:00 pm LLELA Monday & Wednesday Workday</div>	<div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">10:00 am - 4:00 pm Ray Roberts Lake State Park - Johnson Branch Unit</div>	<div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">10:00 am - 4:00 pm Ray Roberts Lake State Park - Isle Du Bois Unit</div> <div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">10:00 am - 4:00 pm Ray Roberts Lake State Park - Johnson Branch Unit</div>	<div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">8:00 am - 11:00 am Furneaux Creek Volunteer Day on the Trail</div> <div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">10:00 am - 4:00 pm Ray Roberts Lake State Park - Isle Du Bois Unit</div> <div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px; margin-bottom: 5px;">10:00 am - 4:00 pm Ray Roberts Lake State Park - Johnson Branch Unit</div> <div style="background-color: #ff0000; color: white; padding: 2px;">10:00 am - 4:00 pm LLELA Visitor Center</div>
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Quick Tips From Our Webmaster

Gale Bacon



We'll miss those "quick tips"!



Elm Fork Chapter



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References

It's been an honor and a pleasure to serve as your webmaster since 2019.

You'll be in good hands with our new webmasters for 2024!

Email website@efctmn.org for website requests and questions.

Wishing all of you...



Gale

Projects in the Community

Thank You to DISD/CC Volunteers

From Elise Spain and Sharon Betty



It was another big year for Denton ISD field trips to Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center. Between 2nd graders in the Spring and 4th graders in the Fall, there were 4,863 school visitors this year. Thank you to all the volunteers who made this possible!

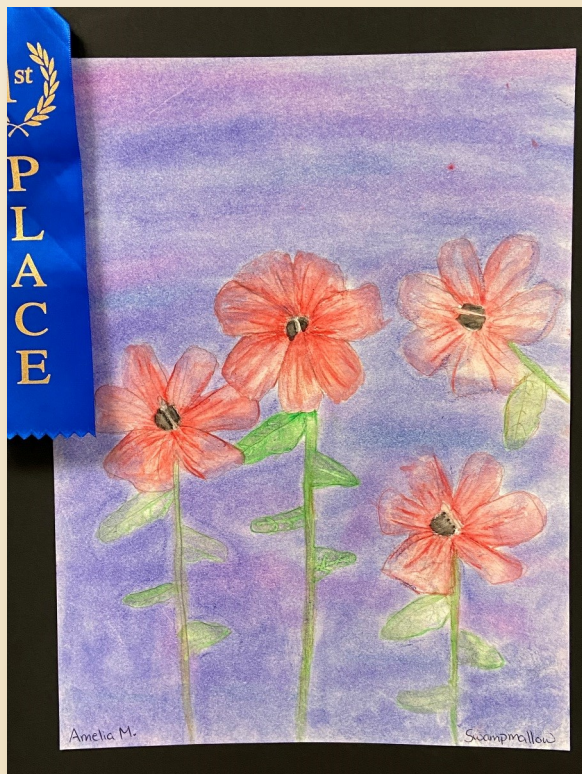
Spring field trips are scheduled to begin again on March 25 and end on May 10, 2024. There will be a new, creative Art in Nature station for second graders, thanks to Claire Kamego, plus hikes and other activities.

A signup for volunteers will be posted early next year. Thank you all for your support of Denton kids in nature. We look forward to seeing you at Clear Creek!



Projects in the Community

The Texas Native Plant Art Exhibition



The Texas Native Plant Art Exhibition was displayed at the Denton Senior Center during November and will be displayed at the TWU Blagg-Huey Library during December and January. We received 837 pictures of Texas native plants created by 4th grade students from all 25 of the elementary schools in Denton ISD. Our volunteers judged the artwork and awarded 312 ribbons. Don't miss an opportunity to see the colorful art! It will make you smile!

Marilyn Blanton



Features

2023 Training Class Mentors From Elise Spain

We are happy to honor this year's Initial Training Class graduates, posing here in their mentor groups, and to honor the mentors too. Many thanks to mentor Bryan Lewis for taking these photos, and to mentors Bev Walton, Beckey Cortines, Pam Bennett, Sharon Betty, and lead mentor Allen York for providing support to the 2023 class. Mentors help with every stage of planning the class and then meet up with new class members when the textbooks and handbooks are ready before class begins. Mentor groups are formed by geographic area to facilitate distribution of materials, but it also gives them local connections and encourages carpooling. Members in training recognize their mentors on the first day of class, when they are greeted at the door. Mentors also have lunch with their groups on some training days to answer questions and generally provide an "old friend" for each new member. Others on the 2023 Training Committee were Gale Bacon, Sharon Barr, Jan Deatherage, Ginny Richards, and Elise Spain. On November 14, we all gave the graduates a friendly shove out the door, wishing many years of happy TMN-EFC trails to them all!



Allen York's Group: Barbie Van Order, Christy Thompson, Madeleine Braden, Marissa Shaw, Nancy Blakney, Enita Perez, Brenda Martin



Bev Walton's Group: Brent Bloechle, Abbie Beck, Michael Martin, Wylie Harris, Scott Heffley, Gretchen Niendorff, Rachel Weaver



2023 Training Class Mentors (cont.)



Beckey Cortine's Group: Chris Rice, Deborah Driver, Nancy McWhorter, Dawn Marter, Danja Franklin, Catherine Griesbaum



Sharon Betty's Group: Steve Barns, Eric Houston, Brenda McCoy, Samra Bufkins, Brandy Gibson



Pam Bennett's Group: Aly Foreman, Amy Montgomery, Erin Lorange, Carl Parsons, Lynn West



2023 Training Class Mentors (cont.)



Bryan Lewis's Group: Teri Schnaubelt, Andrea Dixon, Lauren Johnson, Yvonne Berry, Glenn Lubbe, Hunter Weir

And the rest of the 2023 Training Class Committee:



Gale Bacon



Sharon Barr



Jan Deatherage



Ginny Richards



Elise Spain, Director

Features

Lost in the Thornscrub ***A Report from the*** ***2023 Annual Meeting*** By Jerry Hamby

As the Texas Master Naturalist program has grown over the past twenty-five years, the annual state meeting has evolved from the informal “camp style” gatherings of earlier years to full blown professional conferences at resort hotels. Of the more than 100 Advanced Training opportunities at this year’s meeting in McAllen, twenty were field sessions that allowed attendees to explore the diverse ecosystems of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. While the indoor sessions are always enlightening, for me the field trips are the highlight of this annual October event, and that was certainly the case this year.

The first field session I attended was a pre-conference all-day exploration of four coastal sites devoted to the conservation of South Texas habitat and preservation of wildlife. The field session, entitled “Coastal Conservation Cooperative,” began with a stop at Cactus Creek Ranch, a privately owned wildlife conservation ranch and learning center. After breakfast and orientation by owner and operator Mary Jo Bogatto, we toured the property and learned about its transformation from overgrazed cattle ranch to “re-wilded” coastal prairie and thornscrub forest, a process aided by the planting of more than 200,000 native grasses and forbs. On our hour-long hike, we encountered several gulf marsh fiddler crabs (*Minuca longisignalis*), and my wife Susan even picked one up and learned how to distinguish males from females. After getting back on the van and leaving Cactus Creek Ranch, we saw a flock of wood storks (*Mycteria americana*) on the edge of a pond.

Equally thrilling was spotting a trio of American alligators (*Alligator mississippiensis*) under a highway bridge as we drove to our next stop, Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, a coastal preserve encompassing 110,000 acres. We explored this pristine landscape with stops along the fourteen-mile Steve Thompson Wildlife Drive, a coastal prairie loop. At one of our stops, we hiked down a path that



Thornscrub at Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge



Viewing platform at Laguna Atascosa NWR



American Alligator under HWY bridge

Lost in the Thornscurb (cont.)



Texas Tortoise at Laguna Atacosa NWR



Viewing Platform at South Texas Ecotourism Center



Bird Viewing at Quinta Mazatlán World Birding Center

tunneled through the dense growth of Tamaulipan thornscurb. From a viewing platform, we looked over coastal wetland habitats and Laguna Madre Bay. We also observed several native animals, including a Texas tortoise (*Gopherus berlandieri*), a javelina (*Dicotyles tajacu*), and several brilliantly colored green jays (*Cyanocorax yncas*). In the distance we glimpsed nilgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*), a species of antelope introduced to South Texas from Southeast Asia in the 1950s.

Our third stop was the South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center, whose mission is to educate the public about the flora and fauna of the island with the goal of expanding environmental awareness. Our guide for the entire day, Javier Gonzalez, works as a Naturalist Educator at the Birding and Nature Center and, in that capacity, led us on a tour of tidal wetlands. From the vantage point of boardwalks and blinds extending over the water, we saw dozens of species of native birds, including reddish egrets (*Egretta rufescens*), brown pelicans (*Pelecanus occidentalis*), and common gallinules (*Gallinula galeata*).

We ended the day with a tour of the South Texas Ecotourism Center, which, in addition to highlighting the natural assets of South Texas, provides an active demonstration of stormwater management through the restoration and preservation of the Laguna Madre, one of only six of the world's hypersaline coastal lagoons (which are saltier than normal seawater). This unique ecosystem is visible from an extended ramp and viewing platform; perched high above the flats, we had an uninterrupted view of this fragile landscape.

While the all-day coastal field trip offered the most immersive experiences, two half-day adventures were also rewarding. The next morning Susan and I joined dozens of other Master Naturalists at the National Butterfly Center, a 100-acre site dedicated to the conservation and study of butterflies in their native habitats. The native botanical garden attracts butterflies, other pollinators, and birds. The purpose of our visit, as we explored the garden and trails, was to participate in a bioblitz led by Wendy Anderson, a Texas Nature Trackers Biologist with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Our observations automatically populated an iNaturalist project created for the state meeting that covered every major natural site in South Texas. Only thirty-six ob-

Lost in the Thorns (cont.)

servers participated during the five days of the conference, but their contributions were impressive—a total of 4,164 observations, representing 1,067 species.

My third field session took place just a few miles from the McAllen Convention Center, at Quinta Mazatlán, a World Birding Center located on the grounds of a 1930's country estate. Surrounded by residential development, those fifteen acres afford unexpected solitude as soft trails wind through restored Tamaulipan thorn forest, the quiet broken only by the calls of green jays (*Cyanocorax yncas*), plain chachalacas (*Ortalis vetula*), and other birds drawn to this oasis.

The last full day of the annual meeting was an extended field session for the more than 400 conference attendees who traveled to El Sauz Ranch, one of six properties, a total of 217,000 acres, under the stewardship of the East Foundation. El Sauz is a working cattle ranch that adheres to wildlife management practices that are a model of rangeland conservation. In addition to viewing the annular solar eclipse on October 14th, attendees rotated through six outdoor field stations and learned about everything from South Texas brush ecology to ocelot research. El Sauz is one of the few places in Texas where these endangered cats live. More than thirty of the eighty or so ocelots living in the United States have been documented at El Sauz Ranch. They are protected by the remoteness of the site and the prevalence of Tamaulipan thorn forest, habitat that is essential to their survival.

My visit to El Sauz Ranch brought my experience at the 2023 meeting of Texas Master Naturalists full circle and reinforced the important lessons my collective field experiences provided. I left South Texas with a deeper understanding of the area's unique ecosystems that was even stronger because I was able to explore the area in depth.



Giant Toad at Quinta Mazatlán World Birding Center



Annular Eclipse at El Sauz Ranch



Features

Ecotourism and Our Hearts for Nature

By Karen DeVinney



On November 18 at Thrive in Lewisville, members of our Chapter, and others, presented arguments in favor of making Denton County into an “ecotourism” hub. Read all about it in the Denton Record-Chronicle at (https://dentonrc.com/edition/page-a1/page_2f4ce746-72f2-5db1-a8e7-470557e2826b.html) or watch it on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BeHeC_GVLzI. The Chapter members on the panel were Diane Wetherbee, Scott Kiester, Clay Thurmond, and Jerry Hamby. In the audience were Denton Mayor Pro Tem Brian Beck and others. We hope this is just the first step in drawing the attention of local policy makers to the importance of preserving our natural spaces. As Amy Martin said, “We’re obviously at a very pivotal time with the rapid development that’s going on. And we have to move very quickly. 2024 is going to be an absolutely essential year for preserving the nature in Denton County.” And that applies to Cooke and Wise Counties as well!

If “ecotourism” is a new term for you, here’s the definition according to The International Ecotourism Society: “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education” (<https://ecotourism.org/what-is-ecotourism/>). It’s immediately obvious why Master Naturalists might want to be involved in this initiative. “Interpretation and education” sounds like what we do every day. A deliberate emphasis on ecotourism makes our activities economically attractive, so municipalities have a strong incentive to preserve the natural areas we all love. As Master Naturalists, we find deep spiritual value in nature and want to share that love with others. This is a lot easier if we can make the argument that the experience has economic benefits for the local governments and businesses. We can’t count on policy makers to have the same hearts for nature that we have, although some of them do; we’re a special group!

In describing the value of what we do, then, it’s worth keeping in mind that there are different kinds of economic benefits. First, “direct benefits” describes jobs directly serving the tourist and the tourists’ spending while in the area. Then there’s “indirect,” to describe money going to suppliers to the businesses that directly serve the



Ecotourism and Our Hearts for Nature (cont.)

tourist. And then there are the ripples in the economy as a result of the wages paid to the direct beneficiaries, such as healthcare, retail, and restaurants. Using these three categories, the Commonwealth of Virginia has seen a 12-fold return-on-investment in ecotourism (<https://coast.noaa.gov/states/stories/virginia-ecotourism.html>).

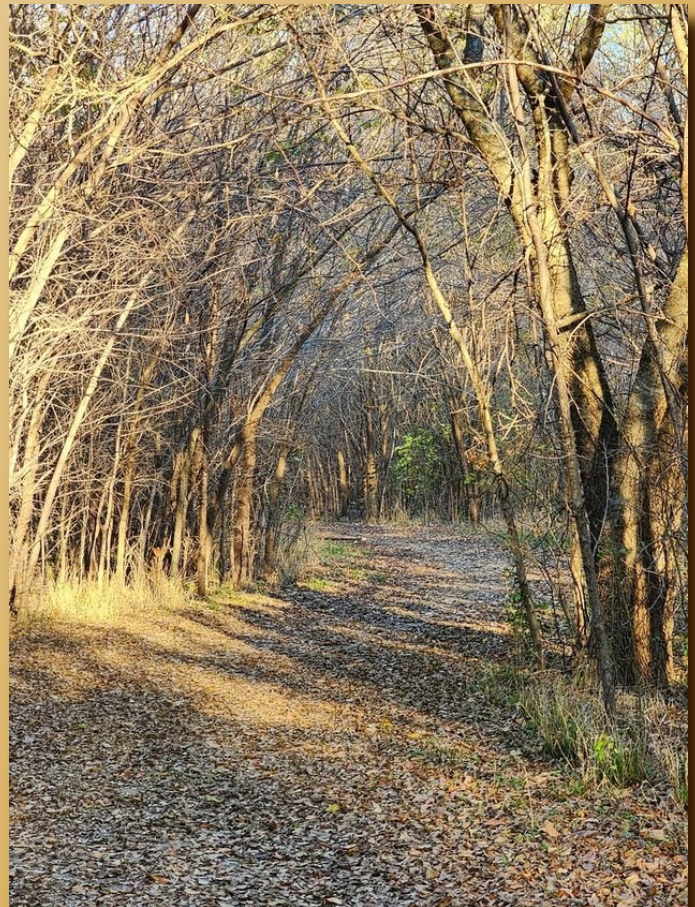
Closer to home, according to station KXAN's annual countdown, Ray Roberts State Park is the most-visited state park in Texas. During this fiscal year, 879,081 people camped, fished, hiked, and biked at one of the two branches. This is partially due to the park's proximity to the approximately 7.5 million people living in DFW. But it goes beyond just the ease of getting there. All those people don't make that drive only because Ray Roberts is so close to home; they also have a heart for nature. We can take advantage of that to encourage ecotourism in other areas of our tri-county bailiwick.

One idea may be an obstacle as we work to make our area an ecotourism hub. We may not think our three counties are exotic enough for ecotourism; to us, they're "just home." We can't bring people in to swim with dolphins; we can't offer overnight tent camping within earshot of roaring lions; we can't send birdwatchers across a zipline through the forest canopy to see exotic birds. But if we can look at our area with new eyes, eyes for whom our prairies and Cross Timber forests are different from people's everyday experiences, we can see the appeal it has to potential "tourists."

Here's a story that illustrates this. I remember checking the trails at Clear Creek during the COVID shut-down and encountering a man walking his Chow dog. He told me he was from Colorado and was in the area to take care of his ailing father. Now, I don't know about you, but Colorado has always made me both insecure and envious. They have the Rockies! They have snow! But this man told me, almost in tears, that Clear Creek had saved his life. Worried about both his personal situation and the world's medical crisis, he found peace and space for thought at Clear Creek. This really surprised me, but the memory of that encounter helps me to see Clear Creek through "new eyes."

It's worthwhile taking five minutes to put yourself in the place of someone from outside our region. What would they see that may "save their life"? Isn't it true that our area has saved our lives in some way, made our lives richer every day? How would you articulate this intangible economic value to a policy maker?

As our own Jerry Hamby said at that panel: "It is incumbent on us to articulate the benefits of natural spaces in our urban areas."



Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center,
Photo by Clay Thurmond

Features

Class of 2023 Brings New Enthusiasm to the Elm Fork Chapter

By Samra Bufkins



The Elm Fork Chapter class of 2023 is one of the largest ever, with 36 eager naturalists-in-training starting in August and all 36 graduating after completing 72 hours of initial training.

“The 2023 class brings significant promise to our chapter’s future,” said Jan Deatherage, immediate past-president, and trainee communications coordinator. Jan reviewed each of the more than 50 applications for this year’s class. “There’s so much talent and enthusiasm looking for an outlet.” She pointed out that a large proportion of class members have advanced degrees, with many also having backgrounds in science and/or experience teaching and interpreting nature.

A frequent comment throughout the training was “I feel like I’m drinking from a fire hose, there’s so much information to absorb.”

“I loved the TMN class—the quality instruction and engaging presenters answered so many of my questions and sparked even greater curiosity in the natural wonders of Texas,” said Scott Heffley. He complimented the training team, led by Elise Spain, on the comprehensive curriculum and attention to detail. But the highlight for Scott was interacting with his classmates. “I met so many intelligent, thoughtful, encouraging, and hard-working individuals. It is always great to be around like-minded people.”

This year’s training included three all-day field trips and an array of distinguished speakers. Field trips to the City of Denton landfill and recycling center, water treatment plant, Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center, Ray Roberts Lake State Park Isle du Bois Unit, Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Center, Green Acres Farm Memorial Park, and The Flower Mound rounded out the class’s training and piqued interest in the many projects the Elm Fork Chapter manages throughout the year.

“The field trips were key to my understanding of conservation and how natural resource management enhances the quality of life for everybody,” said Eric Houston, who will be serving on the 2024 board as Member-at-Large. He went on to say, “Visiting those places helped me appreciate the allure of conservation and the passion of the people working to conserve nature in this growing urban area.”

Early on class members hit the ground running, volunteering with new and ongoing projects such as DISD

Class of 2023 (cont.)

School Days at Clear Creek, clearing trails at Briarwood Retreat Center, volunteering at Lake Ray Roberts State Park, planting a demonstration pollinator garden at the Lewisville animal shelter, milkweed seed processing, workdays at LLELA, the State Fair of Texas, and more. They also embraced advanced training opportunities.

At the November Chapter meeting ten graduates received their initial certification and four were double certified for 2023, having earned their required volunteer and AT hours before the end of October. Even more will be certified, with some double-certified, by the end of 2023.

During class time and field trips trainees were quick to grab their phones to download apps, sign onto informational listservs, check out websites, and order books suggested by the speakers. Lunch hours and breaks were spent exploring with iNaturalist.

When it came time to choose a class project, there were multiple ideas and a strong desire to do all of them. Teri Schnaubelt described the strategy as “divide and conserve.”

Class members expressed an interest in reviving past projects that have become inactive or need a maintenance boost, as well as identifying new possible projects in all three counties served by the Elm Fork Chapter.



Class of 2023 (cont.)

“Revitalizing the forgotten became an underlying theme of all the discussions about class projects” said Andrea Dixon, who was elected Class Representative and facilitated several brainstorming sessions with the entire class.

The “official” class project will involve helping build elements of an ADA-inclusive nature trail behind the visitor’s center at the Isle du Bois unit of Lake Ray Roberts State Park—a previously proposed class project that became bogged down by administrative issues. Among other suggested projects were reviving and expanding a pollinator garden at an elementary school in Decatur, seeding The Flower Mound with bluebonnet seeds, and litter cleanups at the LBJ Grasslands and Big Sandy Boat Ramp on the shore of Lake Lewisville.

There is also interest in working at the Briarwood Retreat Center recently acquired by Denton County and installing and monitoring bluebird boxes at the Dixon Water Foundation property in Cooke County.

Three of these suggestions—seeding the Flower Mound and removing small trees, litter cleanup at LBJ grasslands and litter cleanup at Big Sandy boat ramp—have already been completed and may become regular workdays in the future.

Training Director Elise Spain expressed her appreciation to all the presenters. “So many of our long-time friends were presenters again,” she said. “I’d also like to express our gratitude to Global Spheres Center for hosting our training classes again this year.”

Jan Deatherage summed up the eagerness of the class of 2023; “Look out, here they come!”



Photos in this article are by Bryan Lewis

Tweet of the Month

By Sue Yost, class of 2017


 On
 the twelfth
 day of Christmas
 My true love gave to me
 12 drummers drumming 
 11 pipers piping 
 10 lords a leaping
 9 ladies dancing
 8 maids a milking
 7 swans a swimming
 6 geese a laying 
 5 gold rings
 4 calling birds
 3 french hens
 2 turtle doves 

and 
 a
 partridge
 in a
 pear
 tree

The 12 days of Christmas. The true Christmas season actually starts on Christmas Day itself. That's right: December 25 marks the official start of the 12 days of Christmas, the Christian tradition that shares its name with a relentlessly stick-in-your-head Christmas carol.

Here are a few things you may not know about the song and the season.

What are the 12 days of Christmas?

The 12 days of Christmas is the period in Christian theology that marks the span between the birth of Christ and the coming of the Magi, the three wise men. It begins on December 25 (Christmas) and runs through January 6.

The history of the carol is somewhat murky. The earliest known version first appeared in a 1780 children's book called "*Mirth With-out Mischief*." Some historians think the song could be French in origin, but most agree it was designed as a "memory and forfeits" game, in which singers tested their recall of the lyrics and had to award their op-

ponents a "forfeit" — a kiss or a favor of some kind — if they made a mistake. In any case, the song most of us are familiar with today comes from an English composer named Frederic Austin; in 1909, he set the melody and lyrics and added as his own flourish, the drawn-out cadence of "five go-ol'd rings."

Now that is the religious side of 12 Days but since this is a TWEET article, let's dig deeper into the BIRDS mentioned in the version we are accustomed to.



The 12 Days of Christmas (cont.)

7 swans a swimming. Swans are large, long-necked, white birds. There are 3 species found in the U.S.: the Tundra, the Trumpeter, and the Mute. None are found in Texas unless they are domesticated Mute Swans.

6 geese a laying. There are actually seven geese that can be found in TEXAS. Only one here that does any "laying" of eggs would be the Canada Goose. The other 6 geese are found in the U.S. are Brant, Emperor Goose, Ross's Goose, Snow Goose, Greater White-fronted Goose, and the Cackling Goose. The last four can be seen in huge numbers up at Hagerman NWR now through the winter months. Hagerman plants winter wheat to attract them.

4 calling birds. This one is tricky! That can refer to many Texas birds. The first one that comes to mind would be our state bird the Northern Mockingbird. They can call all day and into the night, annoying those of us trying to sleep! Over and over and over again!

3 French Hens. Our "hens" aren't fancy French breeds but would be the Rio Grande female Turkeys! Successfully re-introduced at LLELA!

2 Turtle Doves. Part of the pigeon family. The use of the term *turtle* in this pigeon's common name is derived from the sound of its call; the bird has no association with shelled reptiles. The closest thing we have around here is the Eurasian Collared Dove which is a non-native species.

And a Partridge in a pear tree. In the U.S. there is only one real partridge. It is a Gray Partridge. A plump chickenlike bird with a rotund body, a small head, a short tail, and a short, thick bill. It forages on the ground, not a pear tree. In North America it is found primarily in plowed fields and grasslands again, not in a pear tree.



To make this song all about birds what if...

12 drummers drumming refers to Ruffed Grouse "drumming" on a lek to attract a mate.

11 pipers piping could be 11 Piping Plovers pipping on the beach.



The 12 Days of Christmas (cont.)

10 lords a leaping could be the “lord bird” the extinct Ivory-billed Woodpecker. But is it really extinct???

9 ladies dancing is the Western or Clark’s Grebe fancy mating dance.

8 maids a milking are the doves and pigeons that produce a crop “milk” to feed their nestlings.

And finally, **5 golden rings** could be the Ringed Pheasant or even the Ring-necked Duck!

There you have it. A new bird 12 days of Christmas!!

Can YOU name all 12 days of Christmas? It might be easier than naming all of Santa’s reindeer!

Pour yourself a cup of spiked egg nog and give it a try!

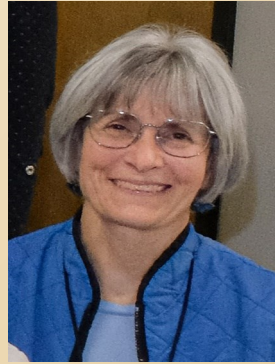
Happy Holidays!!
From the Bird Lady



This Month's Contributors



Gale Bacon



Becky Bertoni



Marilyn Blanton



Samra Bufkins



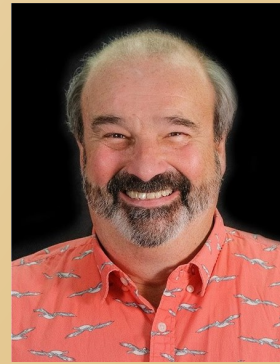
Regina Dale



Karen DeVinney



Jerry Hamby



Dave Jones



Bryan Lewis



Mary Morrow



Jonathan Reynolds



Elise Spain



Sue Yost



Tammie Walters, Editor

Thank you all!

Your articles and photos for the *Naturalist News* are so appreciated! I couldn't do it without you!

Please send submissions to: newsletter@efctmn.org

January 2024 submissions are due by
Wednesday, January 10th.

Almost the Last Word

#TMNTuesdays AT Update

After consultation with the state office, the following applies to Texas Master Naturalist Tuesday (TMNT) recorded webinars. Members-in-training, who join the chapter in a current calendar year, may view TMNT webinar recordings for AT credit for the calendar year in which they join the chapter. For example, the 2023 Class, which began training in August 2023, may view for AT credit any of the 2023 TMNT webinar recordings.

The following is now on the Chapter AT Page:

#TMN Tuesdays

Members and members-in-training have until December 31st, of the current year, to record VMS hours for watching recordings that were presented in the current year. Enter your AT hours under AT: TMN Tuesday. Recordings can be found at: <https://txmn.tamu.edu/tmntuesdays/>.

Thanks. ---Dave Jones



Texas Master Naturalist - Elm Fork Chapter 2023 Annual Awards @ Feb Chapter Meeting

Outstanding Service

Volunteer of the Year

Project of the Year

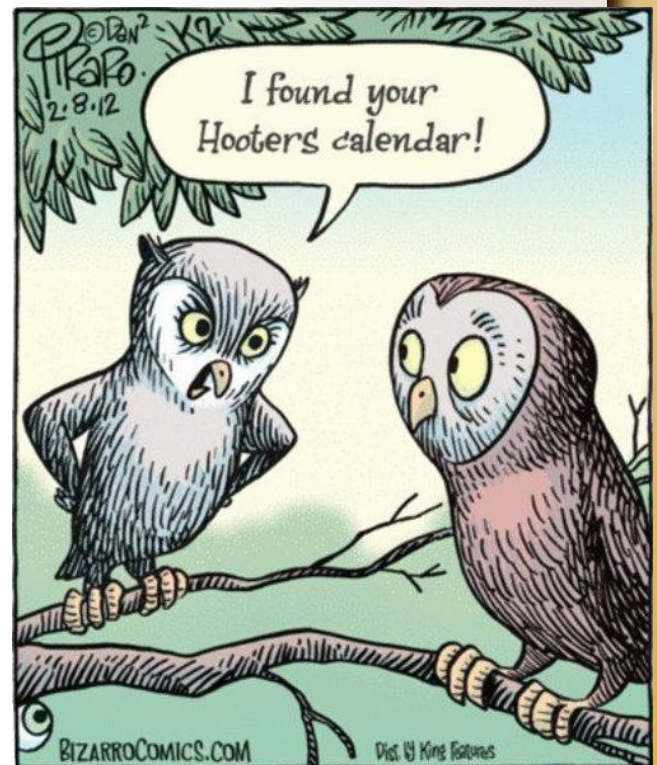
Deadline for Nominations is December 31st, 2023 (but why wait?)

Use the Link Below

<https://txmn.org/elmfork/2023-achievement-recognition/>

Almost the Last Word

Funny Finds from Sue Yost!



Help Wanted

Field Reporter Needed!

Are you looking for an exciting opportunity to get out in the field and learn about and report on all the fascinating projects that the Texas Master Naturalist Elm Fork Chapter has to offer??? Then this position is for you!

Job Requirements: Participation in at least one different TMNEFC project each month; take photographs of the volunteers and work being done; write a brief article describing the project; send photos and article to newsletter@efctmn.org.

Salary: All time spent volunteering, reporting, and documenting counts as service hours in VMS.

It's that easy!



Wishing you all a very
Special Holiday
Filled with
Happiness and Cheer
For the New Year!

Almost the Last Word

Have grandkids visiting this holiday season? Here is a cute family craft!



Who We Are



Texas Master Naturalist—Elm Fork Chapter

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

OFFICERS

President - Kathy Webb

Acting Vice President - Bryan Lewis

Treasurer - Ray Kreutzfeld

Secretary - Missy McCormick

BOARD POSITIONS

Immediate Past President – Jan Deatherage

Member-at-Large – Janet Gershenfeld

BOARD DIRECTORS

Membership - Sharon Betty

VMS - Mike Hatch

Initial Training - Elise Spain

Communications - Karen DeVinney

Volunteer Service Projects - Larry Duncan

Advanced Training Programs - David Jones

Outreach/Adult Education - Fran Witte

New Class Representative - Christine Wayles

CHAPTER ADVISORS

AgriLife – Zach Davis

Texas Parks and Wildlife – Mindy Shumate



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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