

T E X A S

Master
Naturalist™
Elm Fork Chapter



Naturalist News

January 2024 Volume 24, Issue 1



Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center at sunrise, by Jonathan Reynolds

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

On Facebook: www.facebook.com/TexasMasterNaturalistElmFork/

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Naturalist News



Inside This Issue:

Buzz from the Board.....3

Here's What's New.....4

What Happens Next.....6

Awards and Recognition.....7

Field Notes in Focus.....9

Inside Outside News.....10

Quick Tips.....16

Projects in the Community.....17

Features.....18

Tweet of the Month.....21

25th Anniversary Special.....22

This Month's Contributors.....27

Almost Last Word.....28

Who We Are.....32



*White-tailed Deer at Ray Roberts Lake,
from Tammie Walters*



Buzz From the Board

Happy New Year, friends!

It always feels hopeful to start afresh, and, as we look forward to the promises of 2024, we have much to celebrate, including and especially our Chapter's 25th anniversary!

We will celebrate and commemorate throughout the year, and we'd love for you to start the year off right with us at our January 18th Chapter meeting. Our own TMN-EFC member (and 2024 Secretary), Jane Duke, will present "Soil is Key to Habitat Creation, Maintenance, and Restoration". As always, our monthly Chapter meetings are free and open to the public; the meeting opens with business and announcements at 9:30 am, immediately followed by our educational program (which usually begins around 10 am). You're also welcome to join us for pre-meeting social time beginning at 9 am. This month, we'll gather at the Denton County Southwest Courthouse (6200 Canyon Falls Drive, Flower Mound, TX 76226). Parking is limited; car-pooling is recommended (and appreciated!).

Before advancing into our new year, TMN-EFC joined our fellow Texas A&M AgriLife Extension associations (Denton County Master Gardener Association, Denton County 4-H & Youth Development, and Denton County Family & Community Health) to honor the Denton County Commissioners Court and present our accomplishments from the past year.

On December 12th, after a wonderful breakfast courtesy of the 4-H youth, Zach Davis, Denton County Extension Agent - Agriculture & Natural Resources, addressed the Court and shared a video recap of our 2023 programs and projects. Denton County Farm Bureau President Tommy Calvert presented the Court with a "check" for \$2,161,309.38, representing the value of our combined 69,162 AgriLife volunteer service hours this year.

Through our service in all three counties that we serve (Cooke, Denton, and Wise), TMN-EFC contributed more than 45% of that total AgriLife number (31,460 hours). Honestly, though, it's hard to quantify the value of our service, because, of course, volunteers are priceless! (TMN-EFC also collectively banked 3,432 hours of Advanced Training over the past twelve months.)

And, speaking of priceless, I'd like to publicly thank the stellar individuals who are sharing their time and talent as our 2024 TMN-EFC Board of Directors: Vice President Larry Duncan (2018), Secretary Jane Duke (2009), Treasurer Mike Hatch (2014), Past President Jan Deatherage (2011), Advanced Training Director David Jones (2019), Communications Director Fran Witte (2017), Membership Director Sharon Betty (2018), Outreach Director Trish Reyes (2021), Training Class Director Elise Spain (2017), Volunteer Management System Director Jim Gerber (2019), Volunteer Service Projects Director Troy Dale (2020), Member at Large Eric Houston (2023), and 2023 Class Representative Andrea Dixon (2023). We're also thankful for our Chapter advisors: Mindy Shumate, TPWD Park Interpreter (Ray Roberts Lake State Park - Isle Du Bois Unit) and Zach Davis, Denton County Extension Agent - Agriculture & Natural Resources, who is graciously filling in as our interim Texas A&M AgriLife advisor.

Friends, as we begin this new year, we are so very grateful for the opportunity to educate, engage, and serve our Cooke, Denton, and Wise communities. In the field or on the trail, we look forward to seeing you!

Kathryn

Here's What's New

A Big Welcome to Our Elm Fork Chapter 2024 Executive Board

Officers



Kathryn Wells, President

Class of 2017



Larry Duncan, Vice President

Class of 2018



Jane Duke, Secretary

Class of 2009



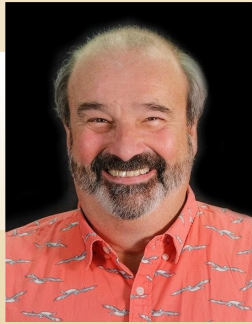
Mike Hatch, Treasurer

Class of 2014



Here's What's New (cont.)

Directors:



*David Jones, Advanced Training
Class of 2019*



*Fran Witte, Communications
Class of 2017*



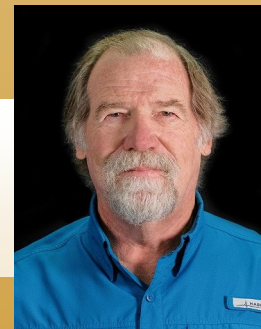
*Sharon Betty, Membership
Class of 2018*



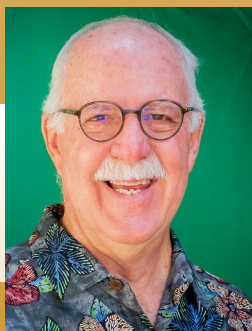
*Trish Reyes, Outreach
Class of 2021*



*Elise Spain, Training Class
Class of 2017*



*Jim Gerber, VMS
Class of 2019*



*Troy Dale, Volunteer Service Projects
Class of 2020*

What Happens Next

Chapter Meeting and Presentation

Thursday, January 18th, 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Denton County Southwest Courthouse

6200 Canyon Falls Drive

Flower Mound, TX 76226



This Month's Presentation:

Soil is Key to Habitat Creation, Maintenance and Restoration

By Jane Duke



Soil is one of nature's most complex ecosystems and diverse habitats on earth - making all life possible. Whether your chapter is setting up a Monarch way station, transforming lawns into a native space, or restoring an abandoned field, analysis of the under-ground soil food web is important for the regeneration of soil fertility and maintaining healthy ecosystems.

Jane graduated with the North Texas Master Naturalist Class of 2009 and did most of her volunteering in Outreach and leading hikes at the Trinity River Audubon Center. She also presented at a state conference on how to get your chapter to agree to get on Facebook (it has been a while). She moved to Denton County in 2016 and volunteered mostly at Clear Creek and eventually

transferred to TMN-EFC in 2022 to pick up the DISD 4th grade project when it was discontinued. She and her husband live on a 5-acre farm in Oak Point with horses, bees, and chickens and they grow wheat and milo in the panhandle. She works as a certified Soil Food Web Analyst.

Awards and Recognition

December 2023

Initial Certifications

<i>Rebecca Fridley</i>	<i>Class of 2022</i>
<i>Theresa Schnaubelt</i>	<i>Class of 2023</i>
<i>Rachel Weaver</i>	<i>Class of 2023</i>



Recertifications

<i>Abigail Beck</i>	<i>Class of 2023</i>
<i>Brent Bloechle</i>	<i>Class of 2023</i>
<i>John Bodnar</i>	<i>Class of 2007</i>
<i>Lori Carroll</i>	<i>Class of 2021</i>
<i>Stephanie Durbin</i>	<i>Class of 2021</i>
<i>Sheri Fenter</i>	<i>Class of 2015</i>
<i>Bethany Griffin-Loftis</i>	<i>Class of 2022</i>
<i>Sarah Jay</i>	<i>Class of 2021</i>
<i>Richard Johnson</i>	<i>Class of 2009</i>
<i>Laura Jones</i>	<i>Class of 2019</i>
<i>Amy Montgomery</i>	<i>Class of 2023</i>
<i>Carl Parsons</i>	<i>Class of 2023</i>
<i>Cecily Pegues</i>	<i>Class of 2015</i>
<i>Kristina Richter</i>	<i>Class of 2021</i>
<i>Rob Roy</i>	<i>Class of 2005</i>
<i>Sharon Sahn</i>	<i>Class of 2016</i>
<i>Kenneth Saintonge</i>	<i>Class of 2018</i>
<i>Jon Smith</i>	<i>Class of 2013</i>
<i>Dawn Tallman</i>	<i>Class of 2019</i>



Continued... 

Awards and Recognition

December 2023

Recertifications (continued)

<i>Chris Teves</i>	<i>Class of 2019</i>
<i>Christy Thompson</i>	<i>Class of 2023</i>
<i>Denise Thompson</i>	<i>Class of 2015</i>
<i>Shaleen Wunrow</i>	<i>Class of 2021</i>



250 Hour Milestone

<i>Andrea Dixon</i>	<i>Class of 2023</i>
<i>Christine Wayles</i>	<i>Class of 2022</i>



500 Hour Milestone

<i>Karen DeVinney</i>	<i>Class of 2021</i>
<i>Chryl Prestemon</i>	<i>Class of 2020</i>
<i>Denise Thompson</i>	<i>Class of 2015</i>



2500 Hour Milestone

<i>Sue Yost</i>	<i>Class of 2017</i>
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Congratulations!

Field Notes in Focus



Red Bellied Woodpecker, from Regina Dale

Inside Outside News

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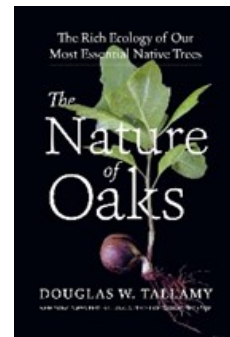


Native Plant Landscaping Seminar

Oaks and Other Shady Characters

January 20th, 9:30 AM to 3:00 PM

Lewisville Thrive
1950 S Valley Pkwy
Lewisville, TX 75067



1. Doug Tallamy, Author of *Bringing Nature Home*, will present *The Nature of Oaks*, his new book via Skype.
2. Colleen Murray, Dallas Environmental Commissioner for District 11, *The Benefits of Trees: Creating a Canopy in Dallas' District 11*
3. Liz Moyer, Master Gardener and Native Plant Society of Texas, *Shady Natives*
4. Kimberlie Sasan, Cross Timbers Texas Master Naturalist, *Gall Lady Presents Galls: Let's Get Curiously Addicted!*
5. Diane Wetherbee, Certified Citizen Forester, Texas Master Naturalist, Texas Native Plant Society of Texas, will lead a **Tree Walk** through the **Thrive Nature Park**.

Sponsored by [Friends of LLELA](#)

The cost for this seminar is \$40, which includes four outstanding speakers, a Tree Walk along with morning coffee, tea, and juice, and a boxed lunch at noon.

Click here to Register: <https://www.friendsofllela.org/event/2762/>

The following AT hours are approved for individual presentations:

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| • The Nature of Oaks, Doug Tallamy | 1.00 hrs AT |
| • The Benefits of Trees, Colleen Murray | 0.75 hrs AT |
| • Shady Natives, Liz Moyer | 0.75 hrs AT |
| • Gall Lady Presents Galls, Kimberlie Sasan | 0.75 hrs AT |
| • Walking tour of Thrive Nature Park, Diane Wetherbee | 1.00 hrs AT |

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Educator Workshop: Creative Conservation

Saturday, January 20th, 1:00-4:00 PM

Amon Carter Museum of American Art

3501 Camp Bowie Blvd.

Fort Worth 76107

Journey through Texas's unique but endangered grasslands with a tour of *Trespassers: James Prosek and the Texas Prairie*. Participants will learn strategies to guide students to examine and enjoy the diversity of the state's plants and animals while considering human impact on the environment. Educators will receive classroom resources and three CPE hours.

The Guided Tours and Self-Guided viewing of the exhibits are not approved for AT.

This workshop is free, but reservations are required.

Register at: [Educator Workshop: Creative Conservation | Amon Carter Museum of American Art](#)



Webinar: CULTIVATING CHANGE WITH LORRAINE JOHNSON

January 25th at 6:00 PM



Explore how native gardening can address climate challenges in our next Wild Ones national webinar, "Cultivating Change" with author and activist Lorraine Johnson.

Learn about the pivotal role of gardening as an act of stewardship in the face of climate and ecological challenges. Discover the profound connections between individual gardens and the broader world and learn how these green spaces can serve as catalysts for positive ecological and social change. Join Wild Ones for a practical and insightful discussion on gardening's positive impact on the environment and our future.

Register at: [Webinar: Cultivating Change with Lorraine Johnson on January 25th at 6 PM \(CT\) - Wild Ones: Native Plants, Natural Landscapes](#)

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It's the New Year and time to celebrate the announcement of the Texas Waters topics. Enjoy learning about improving water quality, water quantity, conservation practices, water law, and aquatic habitats. Join us throughout the year for FREE.

- **Tuesday, January 23 @ 6:30-7:30 PM CT** - Gregg Eckhardt, Senior Analyst, with San Antonio Water System
 - * *San Antonio Water: Sole Source to Diversity*
 - * [Register](#)
- **Wednesday, February 7 @ 6:30-7:30 PM CT** - Kathleen B. Ligon, Associate Executive Administrator, with Texas Water Development Board
 - * *Proposition 6: What Does that Mean for Texans*
 - * [Register](#)

Visit the [Texas Waters](#) webpage for information on becoming a certified [Texas Waters Specialist](#) and view recorded webinars from 2017-2023.

Webinar: Garden Design Principles Using Native Prairie Plants

Thursday, January 25th, 7:00-8:30 PM

Learn Garden Design Principles Using Native Prairie Plants, in a one hour online seminar presented by Neil Diboll, native plant industry pioneer and internationally recognized native plant ecologist.

Our beautiful, hardy prairie flowers and grasses provide year round interest as well as an excellent habitat for birds, butterflies, and a wide variety of pollinators. When designed and maintained properly, prairie gardens and meadows are low maintenance, and require little or no fertilizers, pesticides, or irrigation once established. Neil will share his 45 years of experience in planning, designing, and maintaining prairie gardens and meadows so you can apply these principles when establishing a more diverse, ecologically beneficial native landscape on your property.

Open to the public. Free!

Hosted by the Native Plant Society of Texas - Trinity Forks chapter.



Register at: <https://www.npsot.org/event/january-business-meeting-presentation/>

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**YOU ARE
INVITED!**

MONTHLY PLANNING MEETING ADVANCED TRAINING/CONTINUING ED

DATE: THURSDAY, JANUARY 25, 2024

TIME: 9:30 A.M.—11:30 A.M.

LOCATION: TAMMIE GURLEY'S HOME

3852 LEISURE LANE, DENTON 76210

BUSINESS MEETING AT 9:30-10:30 A.M.

FOLLOWED BY AT/CE

The SWAt Team extends this personal invitation to you to join us at our upcoming meeting. Come learn more about us and how you might fit in! Our program is ongoing throughout the year and we are always in need of additional volunteers.

For more information, please contact Tammie Gurley, Sharon Betty or Marion Arndt at sciencewithattitude@gmail.com



GREAT NORTH AMERICAN TOTAL SOLAR ECLIPSE COMING YOUR WAY...MONDAY, APRIL 8, 2024

This month's training will be a live virtual presentation, which we will observe as a group, on the upcoming solar eclipse. The speaker will be Dorian Wood Janney, Senior Education and Outreach Specialist from NASA.



Solar eclipses are dramatic events as a rule. But the total eclipse coming on April 8th is going to ratchet up the experience. Compared with the last total eclipse that crossed the United States in 2017, this year's total eclipse will last longer, the sky will fall darker, and the sun itself will put on a much livelier show. And millions more people will be able to step outside their front doors to see one of the most astounding astronomical events of their lives. It will also be the last major eclipse to cross North America for 20 years. All of that means that it's an especially rare opportunity for casual observers and scientists alike.

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Best Practices for Pollinators Summit

Online Webinar from Pollinator Friendly Alliance

February 27th, 28th and 29th

Learn ecologically sound land practices that promote pollinators, climate resilience, clean waters and lands. Practical knowledge and innovation on pesticide reduction, habitat installation, fostering soil health, pollinator biology, pollinator conservation and more.

Co-hosts: [Pollinator Friendly Alliance](#) and [The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation](#).

All three days \$60

- Feb 27, 2024: Tues, 10:00 AM - 3:00 PM CST
- Feb 28, 2024: Wed, 10:00 AM - 3:00 PM CST
- Feb 29, 2024: Thurs, 10:00 AM - 3:00 PM CST

To find out more or register, click here: [Summit – Pollinator Friendly Alliance](#)

This event is approved for AT with the following requirements:

- AT needs to be entered by date. AT cannot be lumped and entered, for all three - or two - days as one AT entry.
- Title / Name of the presentation attended must be entered for each presentation attended on a given date.

Thanks, Dave Jones

Inside Outside News

Volunteer Opportunities



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

**Volunteer slots are available at
Isle Du Bois and Johnson Branch**

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

[Johnson Branch](#)

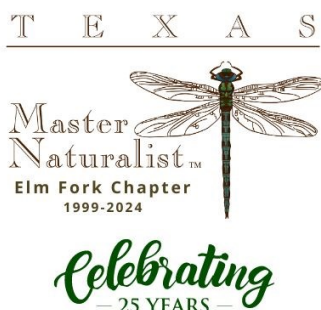
[Isle Du Bois](#)

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

Website Quick Tips

From Andrea Dixon

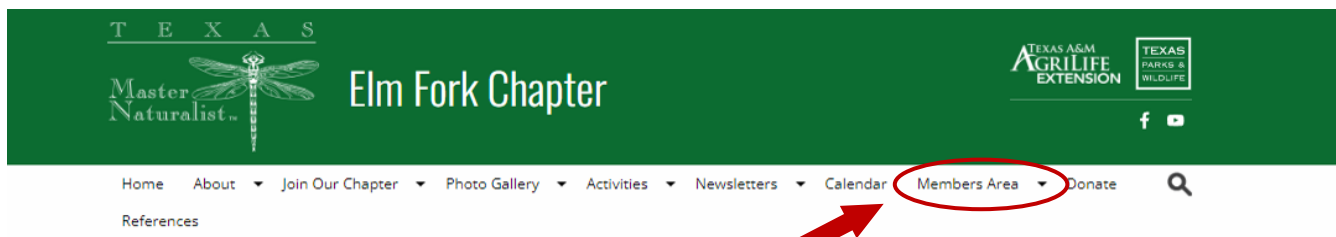
Have you heard there is a logo for the Elm Fork Chapter 25th Anniversary!



Do you ever need our Texas Master Naturalist Elm Fork Chapter logo? They are available for download on our website at <https://txmn.org/elmfork/publication-logos/>

Also, see our publication guidelines at <https://txmn.org/elmfork/publication-guidelines/>

(If you don't have the link handy, here's how to find them on our website:



- On our website, click on Members Area (enter Members Only password, if prompted)

- Scroll down to and click on **Publications**



- Scroll through the “PUBLICATION REQUIREMENTS AND LOGOS” section until you reach: The required logos are located in the [publications logos](#) section for viewing and download.

- Click the link

Projects in the Community



The Texas Native Plant Art Exhibition

The Texas Native Plant Art Exhibition is currently at the TWU Blagg-Huey Library. All of the award-winning artwork by fourth grade students from the 25 Denton ISD elementary schools is displayed. The exhibit will be at the library until the end of January. The exhibit will move to the UNT Elm Fork Education Center for the month of February.

See the TWU video at <https://youtu.be/4tOFYUFahY4?feature=shared>



Features

“First Wednesdays” – An LBJ Grassland Tradition

By Jerry Hamby

Mary Curry begins the December hike in the LBJ National Grassland as she often does, gathering the participants in a circle for informal introductions. In addition to the regulars, some of whom have joined Mary on her monthly “First Wednesday” hikes for years, there are a few newcomers. After sizing up this unusually large group (there are eleven of us), Mary deems everyone fit for the morning’s adventure, a two-and-a-half hour walk through the woods and, significantly, down a few gullies in search of the botanical wonders she has scouted out ahead of time.



First Wednesday Hikers Entering the Forest

The LBJ NG is comprised of more than 20,000 acres of federal land in Wise County, north of Decatur. The checkerboard sections are spread across 68 units and represent a mix of Western Cross Timbers woodland and Fort Worth Prairie grassland. This varied landscape, along with its mix of ecosystems, provides a wide range of hiking options and allows Mary to tailor the events to the seasons and weather conditions. In the early years, hikes were cancelled only when there was ice, and even now it is not uncommon to walk in the rain.

What began as a Texas Master Naturalist service project has evolved into a monthly walk through one of the most pristine natural areas in North Central Texas. In February 2024, “First Wednesday” will celebrate its twentieth anniversary. While the earliest hikes focused on birding, over time the emphasis shifted to plant walks.



Frostweed Ribbon

A few days before a scheduled walk, Mary shares the meeting location—GPS coordinates and unit number—and offers a preview of the day. A walk might focus on native wildflowers, such as the colorful paintbrushes (genus *Castilleja*) that appear in the spring or the half a dozen types of milkweed (genus *Asclepias*) that dominate the open prairies in the summer. Some walks involve the exploration of a specific geological formation, such as a limestone outcropping that reveals lesser known plants like limestone ad-der’s-tongue (*Ophioglossum engelmannii*).

The December walk begins south of Cottonwood Lake (Unit 74) on one of the five multi-use trails that crisscross the LBJ, and we move at “the speed of botany,” as TPWD’s Urban Biologist Sam Kieschnick describes the pace of such ventures. The goal is not to hike for distance but, rather, to investigate the natural wonders around us. On this frosty December morning, that means an emphasis on mosses, ferns, fungi, and lichens. It also means most of our exploration will take place in a series of narrow gullies that open up beneath the forest floor.

First Wednesdays (cont.)



American beautyberry

The first discovery is a perennial shrub, frostweed (*Verbesina virginica*), a native species that is especially valued in late summer and autumn when its delicate white flowers provide nectar for pollinators, including migrating monarch butterflies. On this chilly morning when the temperature has fallen below 32 degrees, this low-growing plant lives up to its name, releasing icy ribbons from its water-swollen stems that wind along the ground; they will melt within the hour.

Although the frostweed has lost its blooms, a few native plants still display their colors, none more brilliantly than American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*), another native shrub that blankets the slopes of the forest. Dense clusters of purple fruit cling to mostly bare branches. Silver bluestem (*Bothriochloa torreyana*) spikelets and wiregrass (*Genus Aristida*) stems shine in a sunlit meadow as Mary leads the hikers into a gully.



Tree Leaning over Gully

Jeanne Erickson, who has attended Mary's hikes for more than a decade, says, "Gullies are where it's at." Passing underneath a mature oak tree that clings to the bank, its massive root ball exposed, one appreciates how fragile and volatile this landscape is. Moving deeper between the banks of a dry stream bed, we observe the organisms that shape and hold the earth in place—ferns such as ebony spleenwort (*Asplenium platyneuron*), blunt woodsia (*Woodsia obtusa*), and purple-stem cliffbrake (*Pellaea atropurpurea*), whose common names are as evocative as their delicately shaped fronds. Mary urges us to look on the underside of a cliffbrake frond to see the spores that line the edges of the elongated blades. This is a world in microcosm that most of us would miss on a casual hike but that are a main attraction of First Wednesdays.



Purple-stem Cliffbrake

Other small wonders are wood-decaying polypores and puffball mushrooms (family Lycoperdaceae), decomposers that break down organic matter and enrich the forest soils. Jeanne cannot resist squeezing a puffball to release a fine cloud of brown dust that is actually the spores of the fungus. Spotting a patch of turban cup lichens (*Cladonia peziziformis*), complex organisms that resemble a miniature verdant landscape, Jeanne examines them through a loupe to better to see the component fungi and algae.

What grabs my attention most in this gully is a tree root that drops below the topsoil, is exposed for a foot, and then plunges back into the sandy bank. It is striking for its neon green color, and it looks as if it has been uniformly painted this way, but, in fact, the root is covered in gold dust lichens (*Genus Chrysothrix*), a powdery variety made up of soredia, small bundles of fungi and algae that are difficult to see with the naked eye.



First Wednesdays (cont.)



Wood-decaying fungus

Before climbing out of this subterranean world, we pass a rotting tree trunk stretched along the stream bed, and tucked inside this hardwood log is a coral tooth fungus (*Hericium coraloides*). The light yellow branches of this mushroom resemble marine coral, and their brittle nature suggests they are mature.

The highlight of our hike also turns out to be the most elusive find, a jack-o'-lantern mushroom (genus *Omphalotus*). Mary discovered it a week ago when she plotted today's route, but it was nowhere to be found when we began our earlier descent into the gully. Emerging in a different spot ten or more yards away, however, Mary spots the jack-o'-lantern in the underbrush, detached from the base of its host tree. An animal might have moved this poisonous mushroom. Although it looks similar to the edible chanterelle, *Omphalotus* is toxic to humans. It is, nevertheless, a beautiful organism, golden yellow to brown on its cap and brilliantly orange along the gills. After everyone has had a chance to photograph the mushroom (and I have uploaded an observation on iNaturalist), we hike the half-mile trail back to our starting point.

For most of the participants, today's hike ends at Greenwood Grocery, which is located in a small historic town ten miles to the east. It's more of a cafe than a store and is well known for the wide assortment of homemade pies. Over burgers and brisket, we discuss the hike we just completed and anticipate the next one, which will introduce us to another site in the LBJ National Grassland and more natural wonders.



Gold Dust Lichen



Coral Tooth Fungus



Jack-o-lantern Mushroom

*All photographs by
Jerry Hamby*

Tweet of the Month

By Sue Yost, class of 2017



Dark-eyed Junco *junco hyemalis*

Slate-colored Junco, Oregon Junco, Dark-eyed Junco, White-winged Junco, Yellow-eyed Junco, Gray-headed Junco, Pink-sided Junco, a junco is still a junco no matter where you bird. They all have long tails, a pinkish bill and white outer tail feathers easily seen when in flight, mostly dark heads with contrasting breast/bellies. But today we will concentrate on the little junco we get in Texas, the Dark-eyed Junco.

Dark-eyed Junco's breed across the Arctic, Alaska, Canada and throughout the mountains in the East and West. They migrate south for the winter. During the winter, here in Texas you will see them foraging on the ground in small flocks on trail edges, open woodlands and backyard feeding areas.

The males have a dark hood and a whiteish belly while the female is duller grayish brown in appearance. The plumage of the junco gives it the nickname of "snowbird" as its plumage was said to mirror the winter season: leaden skies above, snow below. I like to think the juncos are wearing fancy tuxedos for formal dining in our yards!

Most backyards can easily attract Juncos. Add millet, sunflower chips, safflower or nyjer thistle to a ground feeder or just toss a handful on the ground. Be sure to make a brush pile for added protection from predators.

It's not just a junco but a Dark-eyed Ja-ja Junco in these here parts!



T E X A S



Celebrating
— 25 YEARS —

25th Anniversary Special

2024 marks the 25th anniversary of the Elm Fork Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists. All year we'll be looking at milestones in the chapter's history through articles, illustrations, and the recollections of our members. If you have a story or anecdote to share about your experiences in the Elm Fork Chapter, please contact Samra Bufkins, Class of 2023.

The Birth of the Elm Fork Chapter

By Samra Bufkins, Class of 2023

In 1998 Donna Wolfe was working for the Texas Agricultural Extension Service (now known as Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service) Denton County office when John Cooper, County Extension Agent, saw a tiny notice in an agency publication about the formation of a Texas Master Naturalist class in Dallas. Intrigued, Wolfe and a friend signed up for it out of curiosity. They trekked down to Dallas every Tuesday night for the class, and again most Saturdays for field trips. "We didn't have a book, just handouts and a great lineup of guest speakers," Wolfe said.

At the same time, Cooper was working with the Denton County Master Gardeners (the eighth chapter in the state, established in 1989) at a time when they were shifting their focus to Wildscapes and pollinators. "The gardeners' program was evolving toward more study of ornithology, butterfly gardening, and wildlife habitat," Cooper said. "So around 1997 we developed an ecology specialty within the Master Gardeners program that was really designed to develop naturalists." He went on to say that there was a thirst for learning more, beyond the garden gate.

Like today, the first TMN interns were required to put in service hours to earn certification. "I did most of my service hours at the Fort Worth Nature Center on Saturdays," remembers Wolfe. "I also learned how to take down and roll up barbed wire fencing to create a trail," she says proudly.

With Wolfe's assistance, Cooper decided to teach the first Master Naturalist class in Denton in the fall of 1999. Pulling together the curriculum was easy. "In my job I had business with all the agencies that were responsible for all aspects of the environment. My specialty was environmental stewardship. On a trip to Colorado, I sat by a stream and made a list of all my contacts with expertise in all the broader aspects of the naturalist environment," Cooper remembers. "Those people all knew people, and



1999 training class at graduation. Left to right: Jackie Gibbons, Rica Potenz, Marilyn Blanton, Fay Saxinger, Susan Swartz, JoeAnn Stahel, Ben Tyler (who became the chapter's first president), Myrna Engle, Suzie Agnew, Janet Lane, Joe Bain, John Cooper, Kay Swihart, Shirley Lusk.



25th Anniversary Special

The Birth of the Elm Fork Chapter (cont.)

together we built the curriculum.”

Working alongside Cooper, Wolfe managed administration of the first class. She also fielded questions about what a Master Naturalist does. “More than once I was asked if I was a nudist,” she laughs. “That opened the door for me to educate them on what we do.”

Marilyn Blanton was in the first Denton Master Naturalist class 25 years ago. “My husband saw an article for it, and I decided I wanted to do it, because I grew up outside, chasing butterflies and catching horned lizards. I remembered my grandfather teaching me the names of wildflowers” Blanton said of her interest in the class. Taking the training was a challenge. She was working at the time but arranged to take a vacation day every Tuesday for three months to attend class.



Marilyn Blanton with her Class of 1999 project displaying native seed heads and seeds of native plants. She duplicated this exhibit at the Native Plant Society of Texas state meeting in 2000.

There was no official class project in those days, so everybody did individual projects. Blanton’s project involved collecting seeds and seed heads of Texas native plants, which she displayed at several venues around Denton over the course of several years.

Her love of native plants led her to establish the Native Plant Art Project in 2009. “We started it to recognize Texas Native Plant Week when it was established by the Texas legislature.” School students study native plants, then paint pictures of them, which are judged and selected for an exhibition that runs from November to April in various locations around the area. There’s a big reception held for the participants and their families. “The kids are so excited too and proud to show their parents their paintings on display,” Blanton said.



Class of 1999 canoe trip along Elm Fork between Ray Roberts Lake and Lewisville Lake.

One of the more memorable parts of that first training class was a canoe trip recalled by both Cooper and Blanton. “The plan was to canoe from Lake Ray Roberts to Lake Lewisville” Cooper relates.

Blanton said the intention was to pair experienced canoeists with inexperienced ones. “It was a great idea, except hardly anybody had any experience.”

Cooper remembers one boat tipping over, and Blanton says she and her partner bounced off both the creek banks and got turned around going the wrong way up the river. “It wasn’t a fun experience for



25th Anniversary Special

The Birth of the Elm Fork Chapter (cont.)

anyone, I have to tell you” Cooper quipped. “In the end we all made it out alive. We weren’t proud of it, but we survived and that’s what counts.”

Cooper points out that when you follow the Elm Fork from Cooke County (now part of the Elm Fork Chapter) through Lake Ray Roberts, and the three units of Lake Ray Roberts state park down the Greenbelt into Lake Lewisville, and include LLELA below the Lewisville dam, we have about 10,000 acres of contiguous land to explore. “Getting into those places and exploring and seeing how people interact with it is the fun part,” according to Cooper. “If you have sentiments for creating and sustaining a healthy environment, being a naturalist provides so many avenues to participate.”



Class of 1999 canoe trip down Elm Fork Trinity River.

Wolfe, who was born and raised in Virginia, says the Texas Master Naturalist program gave her an appreciation for Texas as a whole. “To be honest, when I first transferred to Texas for my job, I didn’t want to be here,” Wolfe admits. “I wanted to leave. Being a Master Naturalist allowed me to learn what a great state Texas is, with its diversity of flora, fauna and landscapes.”

Blanton thinks because of the Master Naturalist program people are becoming more aware of the environment. “On the street where I live, the neighbors mow around the wildflowers now. They don’t mow them down anymore.”

The Elm Fork Chapter was the eighth chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist program established in the state. All three of the Elm Fork Chapter pioneers agree the chapter’s growth over 25 years has opened people’s eyes to what we have around here, and to not take it for granted. All are equally impressed with the number of people who have stuck around for a long time, learning and sharing their knowledge with people of all ages and backgrounds.

Cooper sees another plus for the program. “All of you are citizen volunteers, and in your lives, you serve on boards and committees and work for many different organizations that participate in the decision making that results in the way we treat our environment. An educated citizenry is really the key result of the naturalist program” Cooper mused. “You’re training people to understand their surroundings—all the interactions, the competition, and the interests that may not always agree on the utilization of natural resources. Thoughtful consideration of those and experiencing new sides of an issue before you get into the decision-making process is part of what I see as the value of the Texas Master Naturalist program.”

Jan Deatherage contributed to this article

1999 class canoe trip photo credit: Joe Bain

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In The Beginning... The Genesis of the Elm Fork Chapter, Texas Master Naturalists

By John Cooper

*Founder and Life Member of the Elm Fork Chapter
of Texas Master Naturalists*

I was asked by Samra Bufkins (Class of 2023) to make a few comments on the founding of the Elm Fork Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists 25 years ago. In response I thought I would tell you about the pre-history of the chapter. Please allow me to relate a series of significant events that led me to establish the Elm Fork Chapter.

When I got to Denton County in 1985, one of my first experiences was the Annual Texas Wildflower Day, inspired by Lady Bird Johnson, sponsored by the Native Plant Society of Texas, and hosted by Texas Women's University. It was a big event, attended by hundreds over two days, with a ton of local and statewide support, both amateur and professional.

In 1985, the U.S. Congress passed The Food Security Act of 1985, which required farmers to take "highly erodible land" out of production and restore the native grasses and forbs to remain in USDA farm subsidy programs. The increased demand for native grasses and forbs to revegetate highly erodible farmland resulted in a massive increase in production of seedstock for native grasses and wildflowers in Texas.

Also in 1985, the nursery industry in Texas was supplied largely by wholesale growers in Florida, California, Louisiana, Missouri, and Tennessee. Native Texas plants were hard to find in nurseries because there were few wholesale nurseries that grew plants native to Texas. The Native Plant Society of Texas was instrumental in building support for native plants and gradually, by the mid-90s, the native plant industry was well-established and flourishing throughout Texas.

During this time, the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), at their Lewisville Aquatic Ecosystem Research Facility (LAERF), located conveniently in the Elm Fork River basin, was researching aquatic plants native to Texas to develop aquatic plant propagation and management for aquatic habitat restoration. Gradually, lessons learned and plants propagated at LAERF were adopted not only within USACE itself but also by municipalities, ecological services companies, landscape contractors, and private landowners. So, by the mid-90's we had all the plant materials needed to restore prairie, woodland, and aquatic habitats in Texas.

In 1994, the USDA Soil Conservation Service (SCS since 1935) changed their name to Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). This new name more accurately reflected the scope and focus of the agency, which was always more than just about the soil but the plants that grow on the soil, conserve it, and support the wildlife that live there. The old SCS developed "range site descriptions" that described the composition of plants that existed on each and every soil type they surveyed before it was disturbed by man. The NRCS used these descriptions to help landowners determine not only what was native to their various soil types, woodland or prairie, but best methods to re-establish them on site. The NRCS, with their

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In the Beginning... (cont.)

knowledge and resources, helped me immensely, and they remain a vital resource in ecological conservation and restoration today.

In 1995, an amendment to the state constitution passed by a two-thirds majority in the November general election. The amendment provided for open space tax valuation of agricultural land managed for wildlife. This constitutional amendment allowed landowners to manage their land for wildlife habitat and receive the same tax treatment as if they were raising crops or livestock. By this time, all the materials and incentives to manage landscapes for wildlife habitat on any scale were in place.



In 1989, I established the Denton County Texas Master Gardener program to help customers with their landscape and gardening needs. Interest in native landscapes and wildlife habitats grew until by 1995, Denton County had 19 properties certified as a "Texas Wildscape" by the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, and the largest in the state was comprised of 71 acres in Corinth. Texas Master Gardeners led public tours of these "Texas Wildscapes" and helped landowners establish new ones.

Then, in 1998 the Texas Master Naturalist program established its first chapter in Bexar County, Texas. I was keenly interested for reasons previously stated. I was unable to navigate the intricacies of the fledgling program so, to get the ball rolling, in the fall of 1998, I started an advanced "special interest" certification for my Denton County Master

Gardeners called "Texas Master Gardener - Ecology." There was strong interest, so I held the first class of Texas Master Naturalists the following fall.

Initially, I thought that Texas Master Gardeners would collaborate with customers inside the garden gate and Texas Master Naturalists would collaborate with customers outside the garden gate. Well, of course they began jumping the fence, but eventually things settled out and everyone found their place. Some became both naturalist and gardener until the full-spectrum of specialty interests we see today emerged.

Many praise-worthy developments have been made in the chapter over the years, but I must say I love the initiative to make Denton County an Eco-Tourism Hub/Destination. It is evidence that the chapter has made immense progress in engaging people in their natural surroundings and is affirmation to me that the vision I had back in the late 90's was well-founded. No one could have imagined how our investments in one another would play out, but I am amazed at what beautiful new things have come to light and remain hopeful the chapter will continue to grow and enrich peoples' lives through lessons we learn from nature every day for generations to come.

And with that, I leave you with my favorite quote, "Nature is where you find it." Make the most of it. And now, from all the evidence I can see, I believe you have! Congratulations on 25 great years!

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This Month's Contributors



Gale Bacon



Marilyn Blanton



Samra Bufkins



Andrea Dixon



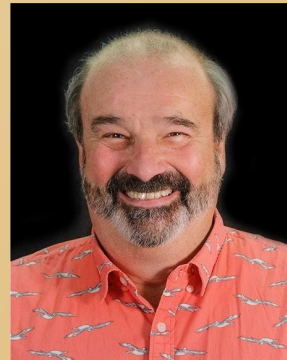
Mike Hatch



Regina Dale



Jerry Hamby



Dave Jones



Jonathan Reynolds



Elise Spain



Sue Yost



Kathryn Wells



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

February 2024 submissions are due by
Wednesday, February 7th.

Almost the Last Word

Funny Finds from Sue Yost!



The AgriLife Office has a new location:

**Hulcher Services Building
611 Kimberly Drive
Denton, TX 76208**

Office phone numbers remain the same.



Almost the Last Word

AT Submittal Process Details:

1. Please use the "Request for Approval of AT" form found on the homepage of the EFC TMN chapter website. From the homepage, hover over "Activities," click on "Advanced Training" from the dropdown menu and click on "AT approval request form" in the body of the AT article.
 - Here is a direct link: <https://txmn.org/elmfork/request-for-approval-of-at/>
 2. When submitting the "Request for Approval of AT" form for the approval of an online seminar that requires registration, please include a link to the registration form in addition to the organization's web site as this saves me time, a lot in some situations.
 3. When submitting the "Request for Approval of AT" form for the approval of presentations in a conference, symposium, annual meeting (i.e., Master Gardeners), etc. please do not submit that request until the schedule - speakers, topics, and times - is available. Part of my approval process is informing the VMS team how many hours of AT are approved from the conference, symposium, annual meeting (i.e., Master Gardeners), presentations.
 - Specify which presentations from the conference, symposium, annual meeting (i.e., Master Gardeners), etc. you are requesting approval.
- ◇ If a request for AT is submitted in email form, rather than using the "Request for Approval of AT" form, I will respond to you asking you to complete the form.
- ◇ If the "Request for Approval of AT" form is submitted without the information requested in Items 1 and/or 2 above, I will respond to you asking for additional information or to wait until the information is available.

Thanks. ---Dave Jones, Director AT & Programs

2024 ELM FORK CHAPTER TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST CHAPTER DUES

Reminder to PLEASE UPDATE YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION IN VMS

2023 Class Members DO NOT need to pay dues in 2024.

Dues are on a sliding scale:

- \$25.00 if paid by January 31
- \$30.00 if paid February 1 through end of February
- \$40.00 if paid March 1st or later
- After March 31, a member who has not paid their dues will be moved to Inactive status in VMS



Pay online with a credit card, or PayPal via the 'Pay Now' button below.

There is a \$1 convenience fee to pay online.

If you prefer to mail a check, make a check payable to **EFCTMN** and mail to:

Mike Hatch, EFCTMN Treasurer
P.O. Box 1113
Gainesville, TX 76241

Almost the Last Word



*Congratulations,
Ranger
Mindy!*

TMN-EFC Advisor Mindy Shumate,
TPWD Park Interpreter at
Ray Roberts Lake State Park -
Isle du Bois Unit
is Region 6 Interpreter of the year!

Congratulations to our TMN - Elm Fork Chapter Advisor Mindy Shumate, TPWD Park Interpreter at Ray Roberts Lake State Park - Isle du Bois Unit, who is Region 6 Interpreter of the Year!

For a glimpse into Mindy's great work, check out this April 2023 [Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine article](#); Mindy is highlighted in the "Ranger Talk" section.

You're the best, Mindy; we're so proud of you!



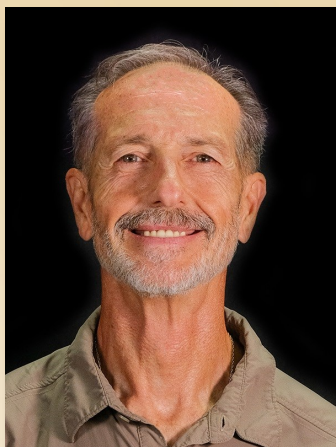
Almost the Last Word

With great sadness, a tree has fallen...

As many of you know by now, Jeff LaQuey (EFCTMN 2019) passed away while cycling at Ray Roberts Lake on December 31, 2023. Jeff and his wife, Sandy, began volunteering at Clear Creek while in their initial training class and both have been dedicated and invaluable volunteers with a heart for Clear Creek out of the many projects they worked on. A life-long cyclist, Jeff worked on DORBA bike trails prior to volunteering to help lay out and build the bike trails at Denton Mountain Bike Park next to Clear Creek. On many workdays, Jeff's bike was in the back of his truck, ready for a ride following a morning of work at Clear Creek.

Jeff's thoughtful and easy-going manner helped make workdays a pleasure, whether wrestling with Honey Locust removal, renovating the greenhouse, doing trail maintenance, helping with transplanting grasses and forbs, or helping to create the new extension of Creekside Trail among the many projects and tasks he took on. Jeff will be sorely missed, but his presence will remain throughout Clear Creek.

From Clay Thurmond



Who We Are



Texas Master Naturalist–Elm Fork Chapter

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

OFFICERS

President - Kathryn Wells

Vice President - Larry Duncan

Treasurer - Mike Hatch

Secretary - Jane Duke

BOARD POSITIONS

Immediate Past President – Jan Deatherage

Member-at-Large – Eric Houston

BOARD DIRECTORS

Membership - Sharon Betty

VMS - Jim Gerber

Initial Training - Elise Spain

Communications - Fran Witte

Volunteer Service Projects - Troy Dale

Advanced Training Programs - David Jones

Outreach/Adult Education - Trish Reyes

New Class Representative - Andrea Dixon

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

Hulcher Services Building

611 Kimberly Drive

Denton, TX 76208

940-349-2883