

T E X A S

Master
Naturalist™
Elm Fork Chapter



Naturalist News

February 2024 Volume 24, Issue 2



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Naturalist News



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On the Cover:

Downy Woodpecker,
from Kathryn Wells



Inca Dove, from Tammie Walters



Buzz From the Board

Happy February, friends!

As the month unfolds, we're continuing to celebrate our 25th anniversary, and we are so delighted to introduce a new education and engagement feature - an audio version of our award-winning [Naturalist News newsletter](#).

Narrated by Class of 2023 Chapter Member Teri Schnaubelt (an award-winning audiobook narrator of over 400 titles and a traditional voiceover actor), [Stream](#) (our audio, on-the-go newsletter) is a handy (and oh-so-pleasant) way to catch up on Chapter news and brush up on timely (as well as evergreen) educational topics.

In addition to reading and savoring the traditional digital newsletter, we encourage you to [Stream the Naturalist News!](#)

Continuing the February festivities, our annual awards presentation and celebration will be held during our February 15th Chapter meeting. Led by 2023 acting Vice President Bryan Lewis, the awards committee received and vetted member nominations, and, as always, selected such wonderful and worthy recipients! To learn who we're recognizing (and why), please plan to join us as we reveal this year's honorees. Per usual, 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 program. 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!).

One of our favorite annual events is the [Texas Native Plant art exhibition](#), now in its 15th year. Led by Class of 1999 Chapter Member Marilyn Blanton, this year's traveling exhibition features beautiful and creative work by Denton 4th grade elementary students. During the month of February, the exhibit may be viewed at the University of North Texas in the Environmental, Education, Science, & Technology Building. Our budding generation of artists and environmentalists is impressive; I encourage you to visit and admire their paintings and drawings as well as their perspectives.

Friends, during this month when we traditionally acknowledge those whom we most appreciate, we are so very grateful for you! Thank you for supporting our Chapter and our community with your stellar stewardship. And, Chapter members, thank you for lending your time and talent to our Association; your volunteerism is truly a work of (he)art!

Kathryn

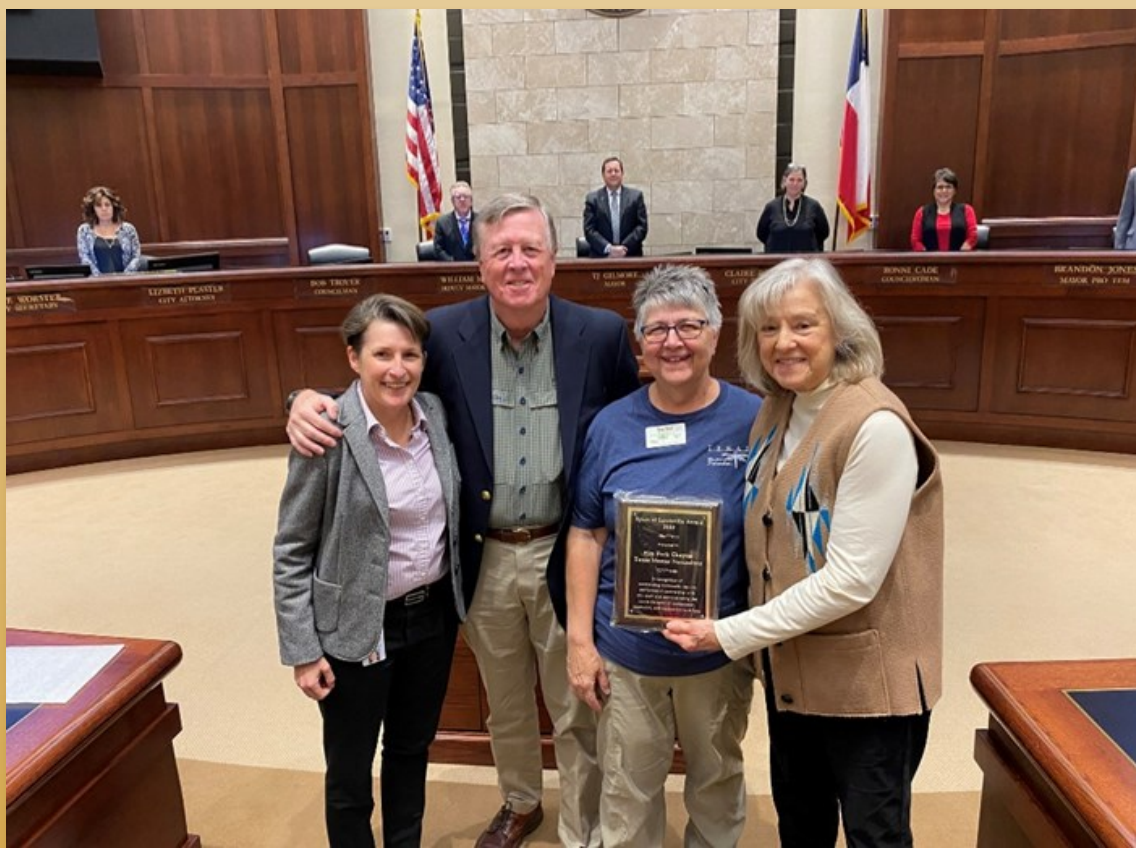
Here's What's New

Congratulations to Class of 2003 Chapter Member Scott Kiester who recently received the Supreme Service Award bestowed by the DFW Directors Association.

Nominated by City of Lewisville Parks & Recreation Director Stacie Anaya, Scott was recognized and honored for his remarkable contributions to our area parks and recreation services.

For more than a decade, Scott's impact in the DFW area includes (but is not limited to) serving as a founding member (and current President) of the Friends of LLELA, a 501(c)3 supporting the Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area, a 2,800-acre preserve, which he also stewards and leads as our Chapter's Project Manager. Scott also advised area park design and served on the Community Steering Committee, which developed Lewisville's award-winning Healthy Infrastructure Plan.

Scott's passion for service, stewardship, education, and outreach—and his ability to mobilize others for the same—is admirable, and we are so glad to celebrate his well-deserved recognition.



Beyond his recently bestowed Supreme Service Award, Scott Kiester (second from left) also received the 2023 Spirit of Lewisville Award on behalf of our Elm Fork Chapter with Class of 2017 Chapter Member Sue Yost (second from right), Chapter Past President Jan Deatherage (right), and City of Lewisville Parks and Recreation Director Stacie Anaya (left).

Here's What's New

Free Little Library

By Clay Thurmond and Katherine Vargas

If you have been to Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center lately, you may have noticed a new addition: a Little Free Library courtesy of the Denton chapter of Barefoot University Forest School, a non-profit organization for homeschool nature-based education for K-12 children and their families. Barefoot University was founded in 2019 by Madeleine Braden, class of 2023.

Katherine Vargas, Class of 2022, shepherded this service project from conception to initial stocking of the library with materials appropriate for various ages as they learn about and engage with nature. While children are the focus, adults are included as well, not just from a homeschooling perspective, but by virtue that a child's interest and engagement will draw in the adults in their lives. As future stewards of the environment children's participation and learning will rub off on their caregivers. It is a double investment in the future and the present. That is one of the reasons I promote iNaturalist as a family activity that fosters a learning and bonding activity, in and of nature, for the whole family. This nature oriented Little Free Library is a great step toward that vision and complements the mission of Texas Master Naturalists. What a great resource this can be for our community!

Katherine regularly checks thrift stores for nature related books and Denton Barefoot University has a bin of materials for re-stocking. Please join in and donate to this worthy project. I know I will be looking through my home library and keeping an eye out when at used bookstores. If the Little Free Library is full, you can leave donations with Clear Creek staff or bring them to any Chapter meeting, and we will make sure they get into the rotation. Thanks in advance for your help!

For more information on Barefoot University, go to <https://barefootuniversity.org/>



What Happens Next

Chapter Meeting and 2023 Annual Awards

Thursday, February 15th, 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Denton County Southwest Courthouse

6200 Canyon Falls Drive

Flower Mound, TX 76226



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

Outstanding Service

Volunteer of the Year

Project of the Year

Awards and Recognition

January 2024

Initial Certifications

Nancy McWhorter
Chris Rice

Class of 2022
Class of 2023




Recertifications

Samra Bufkins
Mary Cissell
Andrea Dixon
David Jones
Mary Morrow
Brenda McCoy
Carl Patrick
Marissa Shaw
Kathryn Wells
Diane Wetherbee
Betty Zajac

Class of 2023
Class of 2015
Class of 2023
Class of 2019
Class of 2014
Class of 2023
Class of 2010
Class of 2023
Class of 2017
Class of 2000
Class of 2003



(The first to get the new Diamondback
Rattlesnake pin for 2024!)

Continued ... 

Awards and Recognition

January 2024

250 Hour Milestone

Angie Lindsey

Class of 2018

Trish Reyes

Class of 2021

Marissa Shaw

Class of 2023



1000 Hour Milestone

Cecily Pegues

Class of 2015



2000 Hour Milestone

Mike Hatch

Class of 2014



Congratulations!

Field Notes in Focus



Amanitaceae at Ray Roberts Lake, From Jonathan Reynolds

Inside Outside News

Approved AT



**YOU ARE
INVITED!**

MONTHLY PLANNING MEETING ADVANCED TRAINING/CONTINUING ED

DATE: THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2024

TIME: 9:30 A.M.—11:30 A.M.

**LOCATION: CLEAR CREEK NATURAL HERITAGE CENTER
3310 COLLINS RD., DENTON, TX 76208**

BUSINESS MEETING: 9:30 A.M.—10:30 A.M.

FOLLOWED BY AT/CE

**DISD SCHOOL DAYS 2024, 2ND GRADERS TRAINING LED BY
SHARON BETTY & ELISE SPAIN**

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

Monarch Larva Monitoring Program Virtual Training Workshop - Southern States

**Saturday, February 24th, 10:00 am-3:00 pm,
with 1-hour break at noon**

The MLMP team from MJV and the UW-Madison Arboretum co-lead virtual one-day training on how to collect data that contributes to our knowledge about the monarch population. Participants learn about monarch biology, monitoring procedures, and data entry protocols and are able to ask monarch biologists their questions about monarchs and monitoring.

Course Fee: \$50

Register at: <https://mlmp.org/get-started/in-person-training>



Inside Outside News

Approved AT

2024 Winter Outdoor Learning Virtual Workshop Series

Enhancing Climate Change Education Through Active Learning With Educator and Researcher, Dr Karen Acton

Tuesday, February 27th, 6:00 PM

This free online interactive workshop will provide highlights of Learning for a Sustainable Future's (LSF's) climate change education survey results, and support workshop participants in increasing their repertoire of active learning strategies to effectively teach the complex topic of climate change.

[Sign Up Here](#)



Soil Testing & Microscope Analysis Workshop at

Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center

From Jane Duke

Wednesday, February 28th, 1:30–3:30 PM

Or

Thursday, February 29th, 9:30–11:30 AM



Learn how to create a plan for soil restoration. We will first walk the Prairie and discuss the 4 pillars of restoration: slowing water down, removing compaction, adding organic matter and evaluating microorganisms. On our walk we will identify different types of erosion, test for compaction, and sample the soil for analysis back at the center. You will learn how to use a basic microscope, make sample dilutions and scan the slide to determine the abundance or lack of bacteria, fungal and other microbiology which may indicate a lack of oxygen in the soil. We will compare the Clear Creek soil to composted soil. There will be 5 microscopes set up and we will work in teams of 3. Workshop is limited to 15. Please register on sign-up genius.

Please bring leaves for Clear Creek composting!

[Sign Up Here](#)

Inside Outside News

Approved AT



LLELA Trail Guide Training

Thursday, February 29th, 9:00 am

LLELA Nature Preserve, Classroom and various trails

From Erin Piper, TMN and Outdoor Recreation Supervisor, PARD, City of Lewisville LLELA is offering Trail Guide Training Thursday, Feb. 29 to those MN's interested in committing to helping support our Environmental Education team. We are looking for folks who are interested in leading hikes, helping with school groups, outreach, and other interactive activities and who will commit to at least three opportunities within the calendar year.

If you are willing to make the commitment, please email Erin Piper, Outdoor Recreation Supervisor, at epiper@cityoflewisville.com to obtain the registration link.

*Note: This training is Project Specific with LLELA in the description.



Enjoy learning about improving water quality, water quantity, conservation practices, water law, and aquatic habitats. Join us throughout the year for FREE.

- **Wednesday, March 13 @ 6:30-7:30 PM CT** - Brittany Chesser, Aquatic Vegetation Management Program Specialist, with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service
 - * Aquatic Habitat Management on Private Land
 - * [Register](#)
- **Thursday, April 18 @ 6:30-7:30 PM CT** - Judy K. Adams, Division Manager, Jose Armando Garza, Water Treatment Manager, & Jacob Galvan with Brownsville Public Utilities Board; Southmost Regional Water Authority
 - * *Desalination: Southmost Regional Water Authority Brackish Groundwater Treatment Facility*
 - * [Register](#)

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

*Note: Texas Water Webinars AT: Texas Waters Certification Training



Inside Outside News

Approved AT



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

IT'S HERE! THE GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT FEBRUARY 16-19, 2024

Sponsored by The Cornell Lab and Audubon and
Wild Birds Unlimited

The **Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC)** is a citizen science activity occurring Friday, February 16th thru Monday, February 19th this year. To participate, just count at least one day for 15 minutes and report your count. You can count as much as you want in any locations you want during the four-day GBBC. You do not have to be a member of Project Feeder Watch. Everyone is welcome to participate! Be sure to keep track of your service hours and enter them under Project Feeder Watch on VMS. Be sure to note GBBC in the box where you would enter activity details.

This is an opportunity for Project Feeder Watch participants to do additional bird counts at home and also at locations away from your feeders during the four days of the GBBC. You can even do these counts while out at any location you see birds. Take a walk or drive through your neighborhood, visit a park or local lake to count waterfowl and yes you can count from your car. Unlike Project Feeder Watch, there will be a place to note if you are stationary or moving while doing your counts. Be sure to take binoculars and favorite bird guide. Not sure of a bird ID, snap a photo to look it up later.



Everything you need to know to participate can be found on the Great Backyard Bird Count home page at <https://www.birdcount.org>.

On the header bar click on PARTICIPATE, the dropdown menu includes HOW TO PARTICIPATE, USING MERLIN BIRD ID, USING EBIRD MOBILE, USING EBIRD ON A COMPUTER and MY EBIRD.

You will find links to download Merlin Bird ID and eBird Mobile when you click on the menu item and detailed instructions.

There are several ways to enter a bird count during the 2024 Great Backyard Bird Count: use the Merlin Bird ID app, use the eBird Mobile app, or use your computer (desktop/laptop) to enter GBBC counts. Log onto the eBird Website at: <https://ebird.org/>

Members participating in Project Feeder Watch use your current Cornell Lab ID and password to log in and enter data on the eBird website. You can log your GBBC as service hours on VMS under Project Feeder Watch, just be sure to note GBBC in the box where you would enter activity details.

Submit one or more lists over the four days of counting and you become a contributing citizen scientist. All eBird entries and saved Merlin Bird IDs over the four days contribute to the Great Backyard Bird Count.

HAPPY BIRDING!

Questions? Please contact Karen Mangum, EFCMN Project Feeder Watch Coordinator, through projects@efctmn.org, or through the Members Area Directory on the Chapter Website.

Inside Outside News

Volunteer Opportunities



McCord Park Wildscapes Workshop & Help Day

Monday, February 26th, 9:30 -11:30 am
1001 Witt Rd, Little Elm, TX 75068

We'll have a hands-on learning session with Chapter Member Kathryn Wells of a "brush-groom" method to thin the Native Tallgrasses in the Blackland Prairie Wildscape, and then we'll do a post-winter pruning and mulching of the Native Plant Butterfly & Pollinator Wildscape.

Bring gloves, proper shoes, and your favorite gardening tools. Kathryn recommends a small rake for the "brush-grooming" of tall-grasses.

[Sign Up Here](#)



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

Here's a Refresher...

Have you ever met someone in our chapter, but couldn't remember their name? Or did you hear their name, but don't know the face? Curious about who shares your interests and hobbies? Our member photo directory can help!

It's only as good as the information we've received.

Please take a look at your
information for 2024!



Access the Photo Directory

- ◆ Visit the members area page: <https://txmn.org/elmfork/members-area/> (type in the website password - remember the password change was Feb. 1st, 2024)
- ◆ Scroll down to the **Membership Directories** section and click on [Photo Directory](#)

Membership Directories

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

- ◆ [Photo Directory and Photo Directory Search Criteria](#)
- ◆ [2023 Membership Roster \(April 2023\)](#)
- ◆ [Training Class Photos \(Aug 2023\)](#)
- ◆ [2023 Training Class Roster](#)

- ◆ Enter the website password in the box and click ENTER:

ELM FORK CHAPTER OF THE TEXAS MASTER NATURALISTS

PROTECTED: PHOTO DIRECTORY

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

Password:

ENTER

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

Projects in the Community



The Texas Native Plant Art Exhibition

The Texas Native Plant Art Exhibition is now at the UNT Elm Fork Education Center in the EESAT Building, 1704 West Mulberry Street. All of the artwork that received a ribbon is displayed. The pictures are grouped by schools. It's a beautiful exhibit. I hope you have an opportunity to see it.

Thanks, Marilyn Blanton



Projects in the Community



Leave No Trace Recap From Clay Thurmond

The three day Leave No Trace (LNT) January 2024 Spotlight on Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center began with a well-attended workshop on *Effective Communication of Leave No Trace* presented by LNT teams from Boulder and Minneapolis. While to an extent it was preaching to the choir, the workshop introduced some new tools and perspectives that are transferable to guiding and interpreting.



The second day was a stewardship workday with crews picking up trash along the road and some trails, although most trails were quite muddy and wet from the recent rains and became more so after Friday night's rain. The Koan School (<https://www.koanschool.org/about>) brought out a sizable group of middle and high school aged kids who were participating that day as a school service project. Naturally, we sic'd them on privet removal off Wetlands where they doubled the area that had already been removed. We also got a chance to work the new chipper that took care of privet remains on the spot.



The final day, Saturday, was an expo that was very well attended and generated a lot of energy and enthusiasm for collaboration between the represented groups. Mayor Gerard Hudspeth dropped by to observe the event and read a mayoral proclamation for Leave No Trace at Clear Creek. Scott Kiester and the birding crew stopped in as well and Scott engaged with Mayor Hudspeth on the activities he has been involved with both in Lewisville and Denton as we promoted conservation, ecotourism and recreational aspects of these natural spaces.



In addition to Leave No Trace, other organizations that tabled at the expo included Denton Parks, City of Denton Watershed, Sustainable Denton, Texas Parks and Wildlife, Wildscapers, The Petal Project, Explore DFW, 4-H, and of course Elm Fork Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists and Clear Creek itself. Numerous conversations and connections between these groups will lead to collaborations and a synergistic momentum for our common interests.

Many thanks go to Carin Zeman, Outdoor Recreation Coordinator for Denton Parks for getting Clear Creek selected for this Spotlight and organizing the event. The LNT folks were fantastic as well. Now, it is time to reflect on the experiences and lessons of these past three days and carry this momentum forward; there is so much more we can do and we've seen the community we can partner with and support each other's missions.

Projects in the Community

A Day at Green Acres in Photos From Becky Bertoni



Malou, a community volunteer, caught this sky over us doing spring clean up at the monarch station.



Master Naturalist Lynn West and Margaret, community volunteer, pruning teamwork!



Lynn spotted this chrysalis on a pruned branch of the sugar hackberry tree.



From the riparian area we head to the prairie restoration: Lynn, Becky, Margaret, Dona, community volunteer, photo taken by Malou.

Come and see Green Acres!
4400 Hide-A-Way Lane, Flower Mound, 75022

Features

Bright Winter Morning

By Marilyn Blanton

Oh little chickadee, with feathers fluffed against the chill
On a cold winter morning, sunny and still

As shadows fall among the trees
On quiet spent leaves, there is no breeze

A woodpecker taps on the trunk of a tree
Cardinals flash through the air, lovely and free

A bluebird checks out a box that held a nest before
A sweet symbol of happiness in folklore

Lovely tufted titmice, dressed in soft grays
Add their charm to cold winter days

Bluejays decorate the scene with shades of blues
As the sun slips behind a cloud to play peek-a boo

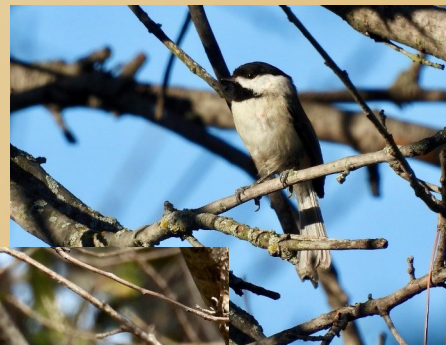
A murder of crows pester a watching hawk
The frustrated predator becomes the stalked

The leafless trees are eye witnesses to all
Like silent sentinels standing tall

Squirrels leap from branch to branch
It seems to me they're taking a chance

But life's an adventure trying to find balance
A journey of making choices and learning to dance

(Photos by Kathryn Wells)



Features

The Audubon Christmas Bird Count— Citizen Science for the Holidays

By Jerry Hamby



Sandhill Cranes Flying over Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR

The first Christmas Bird Count (CBC) occurred in 1900 and was proposed as an alternative to the traditional “Side Hunt,” a competition for shooting wild game. The CBC, which was organized by ornithologist Frank M. Chapman and sponsored by the newly established National Audubon Society, attracted twenty-seven birders across thirteen U.S. states and two Canadian provinces. More than 100 years later, the Audubon CBC is the oldest citizen science project in the world. Every year between December 14th and January 5th, tens of thousands of people in more than twenty countries compile an early-winter bird census over a twenty-four-hour period and, in the process, provide important data on species populations. Volunteers in all 50 states gather in one or more of the 2,100 “circles” that are located in National Wildlife Refuges, national and state parks, and urban and suburban centers. There are eight circles in and around the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, each defined by a fifteen-mile radius. Because the center of the Lewisville Circle is in Denton County, many of the participants in this local CBC are Elm Fork Chapter Texas Master Naturalists.



Birding at Sunrise on Armand Bayou

My wife Susan and I participated in our first Christmas Bird Count in 2016, volunteering for the Armand Bayou Circle, which was close to where we lived in southeast Houston. At the time, we knew very little about birding, but our contributions were still welcome. In fact, organizers (or compilers, as the circle leaders are called) encourage people of all skill levels to participate. That first year, Susan and I were fortunate to be assigned to a team that made morning observations aboard a pontoon boat traveling up and down Armand Bayou. After a lunch break, we spent the afternoon hiking through a restored Coastal Prairie, where we focused on identifying sparrows.

Since 2016 we have completed bird counts in other locations, including the Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge, sixty miles west of Houston. The highlights of that event were seeing—and hearing—dozens of sandhill cranes (*Antigone canadensis*) flying overhead and

The Audubon Christmas Bird Count (cont.)



Attwater Prairie Chicken at Captive Breeding Facility, Johnson Space Center

glimpsing two Attwater's Greater Prairie Chickens (*Tympanuchus cupido attwateri*) as they were flushed from a pristine tall-grass prairie remnant. To witness the latter, we hiked behind rangers who tracked the radio-collared birds. Because humans have destroyed most of their original habitat, fewer than 100 of these endangered birds currently exist in the wild.



Tracking Attwater Prairie Chickens

After moving to North Texas in 2021, Susan and I have continued to participate in the CBC. In December of that year, we led a team at Coppell Nature Park, which is on the southern edge of the Lewisville Circle (in Dallas County). The Nature Center is known for its beautiful woodland trails and is one of our favorite local hiking destinations. For the past two years, we have led the team for Zone 8, which includes green spaces in Lewisville and Flower Mound. While these locations are not as scenic as the natural areas described above, they are certainly hot spots for birding. Master Naturalist Ginny Richards, who has been a member of our team since 2022, remarked on the density and diversity of the bird populations and said that participating in the CBC has made her appreciate how much wildlife exists in suburban areas.

Timing and luck can determine the quantity and quality of observations. In December 2022, for example, our team spotted nearly 200 cedar waxwings (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) congregated in a grove of sugar hackberry trees (*Celtis laevigata*), but during the 2023 CBC, we counted only thirty-two of the birds. Cedar waxwings are named for the waxy red tips on their secondary wing feathers. They are one of the few bird species in North America that specialize in eating fruit, which can have an intoxicating or even toxic effect if the berries they consume have begun to ferment.

In 2022 and 2023, our team made observations at Lenard L. Woods Park in Lewisville. From there we walked two miles along the Prairie Creek Greenbelt, a paved trail that follows the channelized waterway through several neighborhoods (before crossing I-35 and joining the Elm Fork Trinity River). To ensure that we didn't record the same birds more than once, we suspended our count for the return hike, adding only new species we encountered, such as the belted kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*) that announced its presence with a loud rattling call. We watched it hover several minutes over a wide bend in Prairie Creek as it hunted



Cedar Waxwing (Photo by Richard Wilbourn)



Zone 8 Team at Lenard L. Woods Park in Lewisville

The Audubon Christmas Bird Count (cont.)

for fish. Everything about this bird is conspicuous—its large head, shaggy crest, large bill, and white collar and band.

On Prairie Creek we also observed a pair of brown thrashers (*Toxostoma rufum*), which can be difficult to spot in the dense ground cover where they feed. In addition to having an extensive song repertoire, brown thrashers are capable of drawing blood in humans or dogs that venture near their nests. In 2022 and 2023,



Looking for Brown Thrashers on Prairie Creek Greenbelt in Lewisville

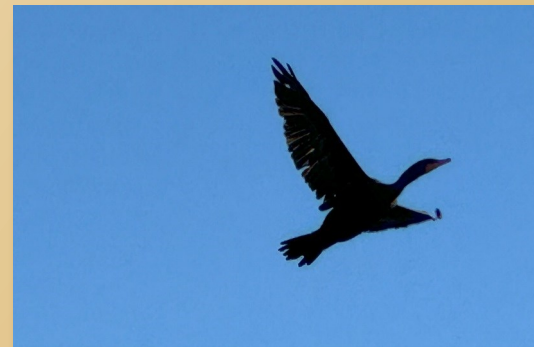


Ring-billed Gull over Prairie Creek



Great Blue Heron near Pink Evening Primrose Trail

our team recorded four species in the woodpecker family (Picidae): yellow-bellied sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*); red-bellied woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*); downy woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*), the smallest woodpecker species in North America; and northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*). This last species differs from other woodpeckers in that it eats ants and beetles on the ground.



Double-crested Cormorant Flying over Prairie Creek

In 2023 our final tally for Prairie Creek was forty species, including three types of hawks—Cooper's (*Accipiter cooperii*), red-shouldered (*Buteo lineatus*), and red-tailed (*Buteo jamaicensis*). While exploring the woods between the paved trail and the creek, we also saw a pair of coyotes, one of which showed signs of mange. Having seen Karin and Roberto Saucedo's presentation "Living in Harmony with America's Song Dog" (at last October's EFC meeting), I was aware of coyotes' susceptibility to mange and reported the location of these coyotes to Karin and Roberto, who track and treat such animals in the DFW Metroplex.

In 2023 our team grew from three to eight members, five of whom are Elm Fork Master Naturalists, so we extended our count to a full day. After completing our work at Prairie Creek and taking a lunch break, three of us moved on to Leonard and Helen Johns Park in Flower Mound. We canvassed the park and then hiked a section of the Pink Evening Primrose Trail, which follows Timber Creek. This added location provided several new species, including a flock of fifty female red-winged blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*). What made the afternoon count different from the morning one was the presence of open ponds, which attracted several species of waterfowl, including Canada geese (*Branta canadensis*), gadwalls (*Mareca strepera*), and American wigeons (*Mareca americana*).

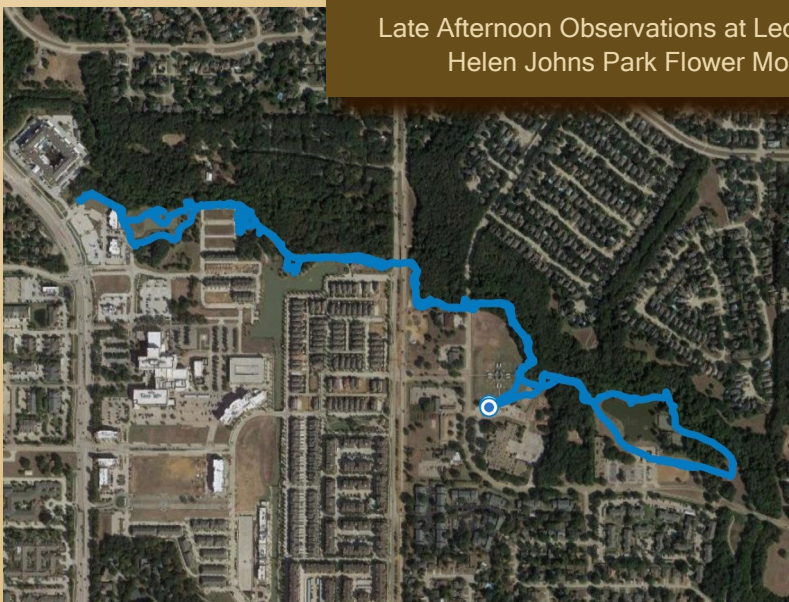
The Audubon Christmas Bird Count (cont.)

By the end of the day, we had hiked almost seven miles and had recorded forty-seven species of birds. All that remained was to finalize and submit the results, which was made easier (and more reliable) by having two record keepers. While one person ticked off results on a printed tally sheet, another counted species and numbers using eBird Mobile, a phone app loaded with a pack (or list) of birds seen in Texas.

As with most volunteer events, the potential for learning made this experience even more meaningful. The Cornell Lab's All about Birds website, an "Online Guide to Birds and Birdwatching," gave me access to facts, trends, and statistics: <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/>. The Audubon website provided detailed information about the Christmas Bird Count, including its history and an interactive map of every active circle: <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/join-christmas-bird-count>. I hope to see some of you during next December's Christmas Bird Count.



Late Afternoon Observations at Leonard and Helen Johns Park Flower Mound



eBird Map for Afternoon Hike along Timber Creek



Timber Creek Watershed in Flower Mound

All photographs by Jerry Hamby, except for Cedar Waxwing photo, by Richard Wilbourn, friend of Jerry Hamby.

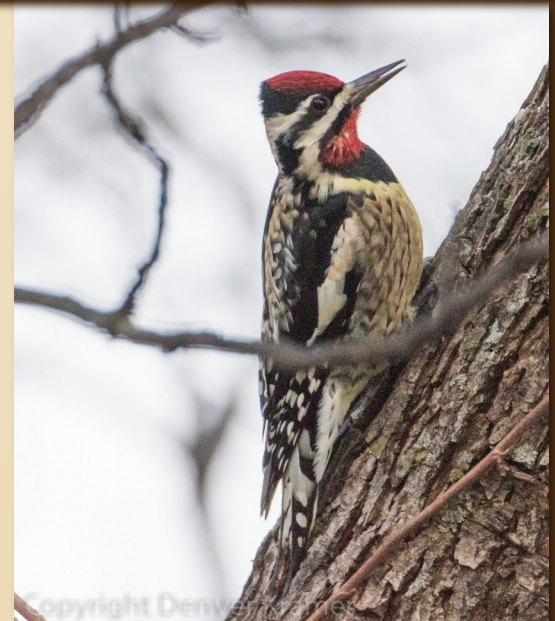
Tweet of the Month

By Sue Yost, class of 2017

The Story from a Sapsucker

Tap, tap, tap. Tap. Tap- tap-tap.

“Who is that tapping on my trunk?” yelled the Cedar Elm tree. “Will you please stop?” he yelled again. Tap-tap-tap-tap, it continued. “Show yourself!” bellowed the Cedar Elm. The Cedar Elm could hear and feel the tapping moving around its trunk. The mighty Cedar Elm now could see who was tap-tap-tapping on his bark. It was the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker! “Welcome back! Did you have a nice migration journey traveling to visit me this winter?” asked the Cedar Elm. The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker replied, “Why yes, I did, but the journey was long and there were many dangers in my way. I had a nice spring and summer in the woods of Canada, but the days were getting shorter, and food was becoming scarce, so I knew it was time to leave and head south to your woods in Texas.



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker,
by Denver Kramer



Cedar elms have small leaves with serrated edges. They are quite rough to the touch, like sandpaper.

And guess what?” the sapsucker declared. “You have more news to share with me? The elm questioned. “YES! Just listen to *this* story! A beautiful Yellow-bellied Sapsucker female picked ME for her mate. That’s because of all the sapsuckers in the Canadian woods, I made the loudest call and made the deepest tapping sounds, so she picked *me!* ME!

Once mating occurred, we used our chisel-tipped bills to skillfully excavate the perfect nesting cavity in a large deciduous tree we picked out together in our woods.” “How exciting! Is there more to your story?” inquired the Cedar Elm.

The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker went into more detail. “During nest excavation, we performed a courtship flight. This flight consists of me rapidly flapping my wings below my partner. It helps to build our pair bond and helps increase attachment to the nest. Did you know that sapsuckers can dance? We perform a mating dance where we bob our heads and repeatedly spread our wings halfway open. We also have a sweet

courtship ritual where we “kiss” or touch our bills together. Courtship vocals consist of giving “quirk” notes and, from a distance, “kwee-urk” calls. Sounds only a love-stricken sapsucker can understand!” the sapsucker happily said.

“How exciting! You do look handsome with that red forehead, your black and white face pattern, and your buffy yellow breast! And the way you go up and down and around my trunks just amazes me!” said the Cedar Elm. “Is there more to this story?”



Tweet of the Month (Cont.)

“I haven’t even gotten to the best part of my summer yet!” Gleaned the sapsucker. “My beautiful mate laid eggs! She can lay up to 7 eggs in a season. This time it was 5 beautiful pure white eggs. Even though my mate didn’t want to have anything to do with me during the egg-laying, once she was done, she let me help incubate the eggs. For 13 days we took turns. I usually had the night shift; she did the day shift. There were a few days where the temperatures were really warm, so that did give us a break in our incubation duties. This only happens about 16% of the time.” The sapsucker explained. “Now the fun really began! Once those eggs hatched, we still needed to take turns brooding them or keeping them warm under our downy feathers for another 8-10 days. We work together to feed the chicks insects which are occasionally coated in tree sap; is sap considered gravy, sauce, or syrup on a tasty insect?” Pondered the sapsucker. “Finally after about 28 days those chicks fledge [or leave the nest] and then in 2 weeks they are ON THEIR OWN! Our jobs as parents Are done for another season!

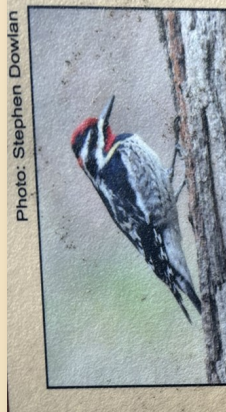
Being a parent is hard work! In addition to all of that, we must keep our guard up against climbing predators like snakes and raccoons. That’s why our nesting hole was high up the tree.” explained the sapsucker.

The Cedar Elm replied, “You *did* have a wonderful spring and summer! I am glad you have returned to visit my tree trunk. I know the tiny round holes you drill in neat horizontal rows will cause damage, possibly causing insects to attack me. I will still allow the holes to release my sticky, sweet sap for you to enjoy while you winter in my woods. All good things take time, so please be patient with me. The sap will slowly drip down my bark for you. You will be able to dine on a smorgasbord of insects that also like my sweet sap!”

Then mighty Cedar Elm said, “I will let you get back to enjoying your winter visit in my Texas woods. But please be sure to stop and say goodbye when the northern Canadian woods start calling you home this spring.”

“Thank you for hosting my winter vacation. I will certainly fatten up on your sweet insect attracting sap before I embark on my 1,900-mile journey to the northern woods where my yellow-bellied Sapsucker adventures start all over again.

Tap. Tap. Tap-tap-tap-tap!



Look for rows of holes pecked in the bark of many of our cedar elms. This tree species is a great favorite of yellow-bellied sapsuckers, who spend the winter in North Texas. These woodpeckers make a series of small holes through which sap oozes and is licked up by the birds. The sweet sap attracts insects, which are eaten by the sapsuckers and other birds.

Signage on the Cicada Trail at LLELA



Sapsucker trees can be found at LLELA on the Cicada and Cottonwood trails. Have you found any on your hike?

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.

Elm Fork Chapter Takes Root in 2000

By Samra Bufkins, Class of 2023

The second training class for the Denton County Master Naturalist Association (as it was called then) began in September 2000, with a roster of instructors from a wide variety of institutions all over the Metroplex—and some of those instructors still work with us today. While there wasn't yet a textbook, the curriculum was evolving to give trainees statewide a comprehensive understanding of our natural world and ways to communicate about it to diverse audiences. John Cooper, horticulturalist for the Denton County office of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service (as it was known then) coordinated and led the ten-week program.



News Article from June 23, 2000

The Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center as we know it didn't exist, and LLELA as a research, restoration and public use facility was in its infancy. Class field trips and study areas included the Heard Natural Science Museum in McKinney, The Fort Worth Nature Center, the Lewisville Independent School District Outdoor Learning Area, The Lewisville Aquatic Ecosystem Research Facility, Clymer Meadow in Greenville, a privately-owned Denton Wildscape and Hidden Cove Primitive Area near Frisco, among others.

Dave Rowley, a member of the class of 2000, remembers being excited to learn about things he never had the opportunity to experience when he was younger.

"I was a Boy Scout and always wanted to be a forest ranger, but that didn't happen," Rowley said, explaining he went on to a career as an engineer. "I always missed the experience of being a forest ranger. Becoming a Master Naturalist allowed me to learn and to do things I never had the opportunity to do before."

Diane Wetherbee was also a member of the class of 2000, and she recalls that in the early years, the different groups in the area worked together as the state organization expanded.

"We had campouts, field trips, potluck dinners and built trails together. There weren't as many places to volunteer as we have now, so we had to be creative."

An example of that creativity occurred with one intern who had a job and children at home. She needed to find a volunteer project where she could get her 40 hours in on a regular schedule. Wetherbee recalls "The

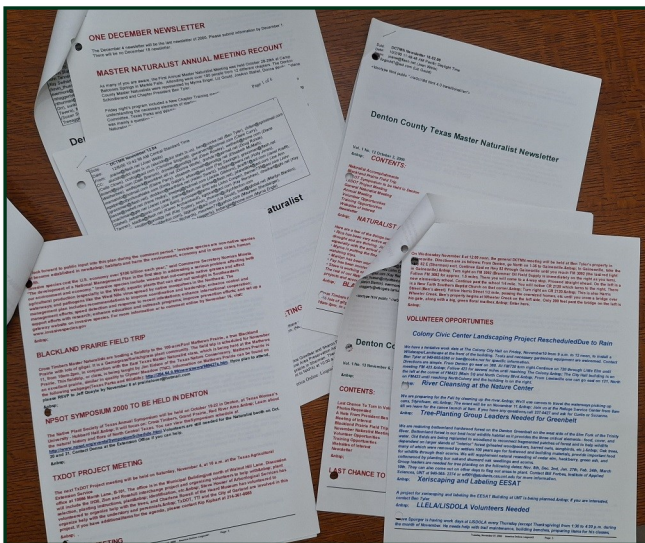
25th Anniversary Special

Elm Fork Chapter Takes Root in 2000 (cont.)

LLELA office was at an old Corps of Engineers building on Mill Street. We didn't have the greenhouse, but we wanted to grow plants for prairie restoration, so Richard Freiheit started plants in pots in the parking lot. This volunteer worked on them every Wednesday, and that's how Richard's Wednesday workdays got started."

Rowley became involved with aquatic plant projects at the Upper Trinity Water District. "I didn't know a thing about them, and really enjoyed working around water and water plants, and seeing what happened when those plants grew" Rowley recalls. "It became a real advantage to the city to have a variety of plants in places like Cross Timbers Park." (Look for a future article about Master Naturalist involvement in the development of Cross Timbers Park in Denton.)

Rowley also became involved in building trails at Clear Creek. "Working out there didn't seem like work at all. It's really fun."



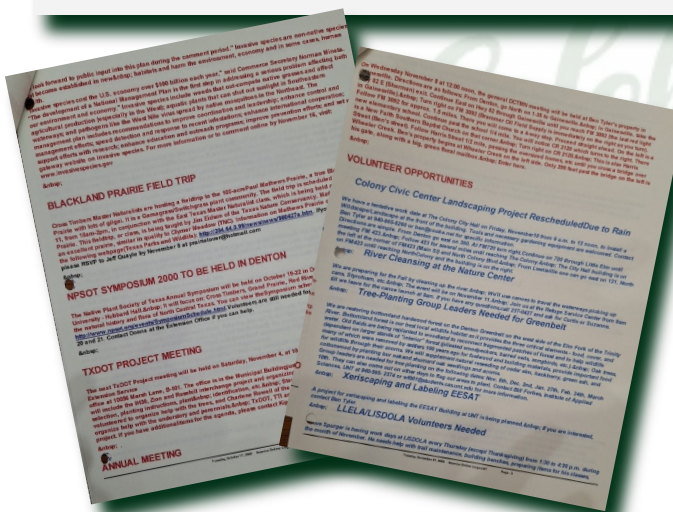
Denton County Master Naturalist Newsletters from 2000

Newsletters from the early years of the chapter (emailed bi-weekly) reflect activities like canoe trips, picnics, wetlands construction, and building a network of bat and purple martin houses along the greenbelt. The group was small enough that most people mentioned were identified by their first names only.

Master Naturalists were routinely invited to TxDOT project meetings to help with plant selection and identification related to highway expansion projects. Organizations like Keep Lewisville Beautiful put out a call for members to volunteer on their boards.

"We didn't have formal projects like we do now—we just saw something that needed to be done, got folks together and did it" said Wetherbee. "In some ways I miss the spontaneity, but the chapter has grown so much we need organization and accountability, especially to demonstrate success so the sponsoring partners can maintain funding."

Another project was restoring the bottomland hardwood forest in the Greenbelt. Identified as ideal habitat for wildlife, with food, cover and water, this project connected fragmented patches of land cleared by settlers over 100 years ago for agriculture, building materials and oil wells. Returning the land to an approximation of its natural state got a



25th Anniversary Special

Elm Fork Chapter Takes Root in 2000 (cont.)



Master Naturalist at Work at LISDOLA, from 2000

boost from the planting of Shumard and Bur oaks among the other native trees like cedar elm, hackberry, green ash and cottonwood that were naturally reseeding there.

Throughout the year Master Naturalists and Master Gardeners teamed up to landscape the new Lewisville Independent School District Outdoor Learning Area, digging a pond, transplanting native grasses and plants from other locations, and nursing the new gardens through the hot, dry summer that year.

“There were lots of native plants that we dug up from various locations,” Wetherbee remembers. “We installed a solar-powered pump on a pond and landscaped around the temporary buildings.”

In 2000, working with native plants in landscaping was new to many gardeners and volunteers. Learning on the job was as important then as it is today. Wetherbee laughed as she recalled, “I was weeding around a building and Rica Potenz walked up and asked about the Dutchman’s pipevine (*Aristolochia tomentosa*). I had pulled them all up. We laughed.”

Wetherbee wanted to emphasize that it’s important for naturalists, especially new graduates, to relax and realize “...we’re human, we don’t have to be perfect.”

Timekeeping in those days involved filling in a spreadsheet. People filled it in when they thought of it, often waiting until the end of the year to record all their hours.

“We’d just write in “I worked for 3 hours at LISDOLA.”

Both Wetherbee and Rowley are proud of the accomplishments of the Master Naturalist program over the years.



Continued ...

25th Anniversary Special

Elm Fork Chapter Takes Root in 2000 (cont.)

“My job required me to lead meetings and give talks, and I hated that,” Rowley said. “It was the last thing I wanted to do when I retired. But early on the chapter needed those skills, and I was glad to help get things organized over time.”

Rowley said his involvement with the program led him to get involved with the City of Denton, even serving on the Denton Parks Board. “Because I was a Master Naturalist, I was able to have input into the parks program.”

Looking toward the future, Rowley said he’d like to see more younger people involved with the program. He also feels the area needs more places like LLELA, with partnerships between cities, universities, and volunteer organizations like the Master Naturalists. “Denton has the means and the opportunity, but it hasn’t happened yet.”

Wetherbee concurs. “We need more pocket prairies.” She is proud that the Master Naturalists are becoming better known and respected for their expertise.

“We’ve had a huge impact on natural resource conservation, education and resource management statewide,” she said. “Considering all the projects we serve, many of these institutions couldn’t afford to do much of what they do without us volunteering. That makes me proud.”

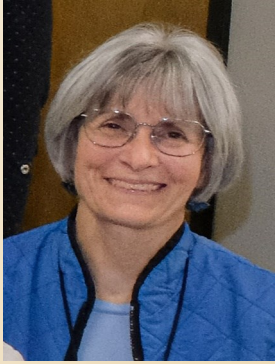


Plantings at LISDOLA, April 2000

LISDOLA Pond, September 2000



This Month's Contributors



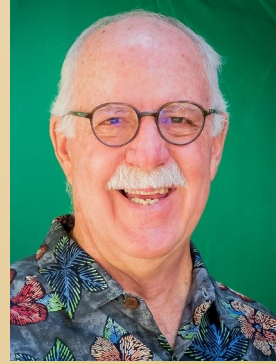
Becky Bertoni



Marilyn Blanton



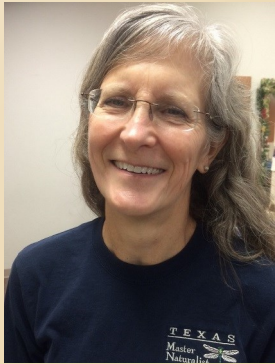
Samra Bufkins



Troy Dale



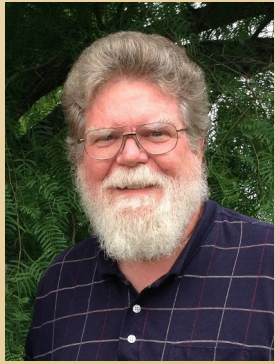
Andrea Dixon



Jeanne Erickson



Jerry Hamby



Mike Hatch



Bryan Lewis



Karen Mangum



Jonathan Reynolds



Clay Thurmond



Katherine Vargas



Kathryn Wells



Sue Yost



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

March 2024 submissions are due by
Wednesday, March 6th.

Almost the Last Word

From Jeanne Erickson...

Here is information on two websites that can assist one in identifying feathers they find. I just learned about it yesterday - it may be old news for some but many may find it useful.

The Feather Atlas - Flight Feathers of North American Birds

Identify Feather Tool - US Fish & Wildlife Service - Forensics Laboratory

<https://www.fws.gov/lab/featheratlas/idtool.php>

Tabs include:

Identify My Feather Tool, Browse Scans, Search Scans, Glossary (illustrated) and More Information (About the Scans, About our Methodology, How to Determine Feather Position, Feathers and the Law)

From the web site:

ABOUT THE FEATHER ATLAS PROJECT

For each species, the Feather Atlas typically illustrates all the primaries (outer wing feathers; usually 10), 10-12 secondaries (inner wing feathers), and six rectrices (tail feathers) from an individual bird. Some scans from the early days of the Feather Atlas show a combination of primaries and secondaries ("wing scans"). We are in process of re-scanning these to show separate images for primaries and secondaries.

In all cases, the feathers from the right wing and the right side of the tail are shown, with the outermost feather always on the left. Feathers are shown in dorsal view. For a few species with distinct patterns on the underside of the feathers, a ventral view is also provided.

A data table of total feather lengths and vane lengths is provided for each scan, beneath the image of the scanned feathers. This table also summarizes age, sex, and locality data for the specimen represented in the scan. For more information on how the scans were created, go to the Methodology section. Definitions of feather terms, with illustrations, can be found on the Glossary page.

All feathers on the Feather Atlas come from salvaged dead birds; no birds are killed to provide *specimens*.

FEATHERS AND THE LAW: Feathers are beautiful and remarkable objects. If you find feathers in nature, please appreciate, study, photograph them, and leave them where you found them. Under federal law, it is illegal to take them home.



Continued ... 

Almost the Last Word

Website information from Jeanne Erickson, continued...

Featherbase

<https://featherbase.info/en/home>

From the web site:

Since the 20th century, scientific ornithology has been closely linked to the conservation of birds. The study of feathers is a factor that is often overlooked. In museums, the majority of their bird skin collections are archived, stored away in drawers under lock and key and only ever seen by a very selective audience and not the general public.

Being able to touch, feel and study a feather in the hand engages people, especially children, with nature; what child hasn't stopped to pick up a feather in a park or their backyard and marvel at it, and wonder what bird it came from. From a long, slender Arctic Tern primary, which has undertaken an incredible migratory journey of around 37.000 miles / 60.000 kilometers from pole to pole, to the soft, downy feather of a Barn Owl, helping the bird to fly on silent wings as it hunts at night; every feather has a fascinating story to tell, each so unique in its makeup, shape, form, texture, color and function it serves to the bird. Feathers can teach us so much about birds and how they live. They bring people closer to the natural world - and therefore play an important role in its preservation.

Featherbase is a working group of German feather scientists and other collectors worldwide who came together with their personal collections and created the biggest and most comprehensive online feather library in the world. Using our website, it is possible to identify feathers from hundreds of different species, compare similarities between them, work out gender or age-specific characteristics and look at the statistics of countless feather measurements. In contrast to the conventional work of museums, Featherbase is much more oriented towards the general public, allowing not just enrolled scientists the opportunity to gain access to the collection, but anyone with an interest in studying birds and their feathers. Featherbase also frequently collaborates with scientific or educational organizations by offering images, data or teamwork in general.

Featherbase works completely independently, without administrative affiliation, and first and foremost without commercial interests. We are a non-profit making entity and funded entirely by our own contributors. The collecting of feathers and skins for our database is approved by the relevant authorities, and for any protected/CITES listed species held, we are fastidious about maintaining records of their origin.

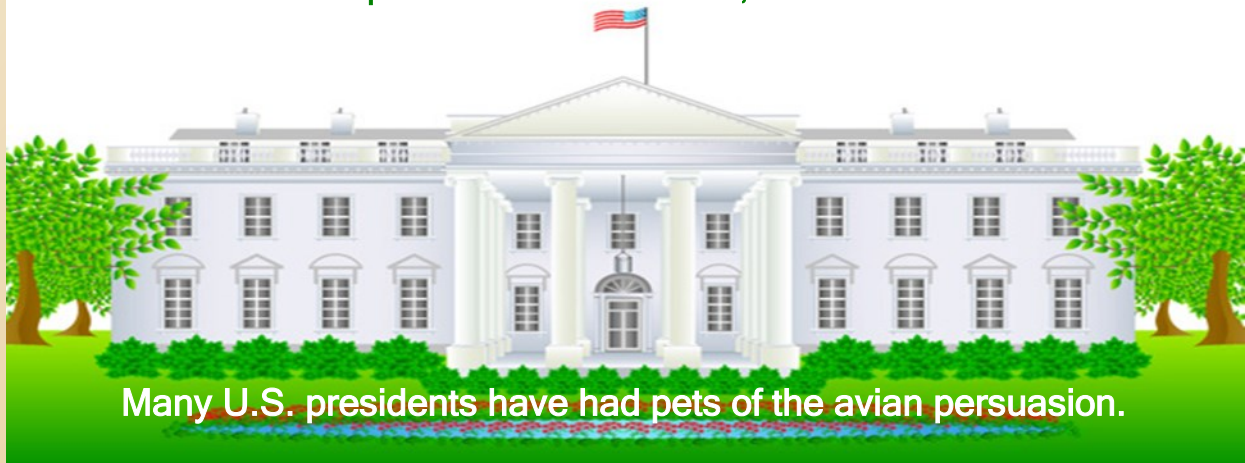


Almost the Last Word

In honor of Presidents Day, from Sue Yost...

White House Pets

Excerpt from *Bird Brain Teasers*; Patrick Merrell



WASHINGTON: Polly the Parrot

JEFFERSON: Dick the mockingbird sang German & French folk songs, perched on the president's shoulder & hopped up the stairs. after him.

JACKSON: a parrot named Poll

TYLER: Johnny Ty the canary

BUCHANAN: two Bald Eagles

LINCOLN: Jack the Turkey was saved from the Thanksgiving table by pleas from one of Lincoln's sons.

GRANT: roosters and a parrot

HAYES: four canaries and a Mockingbird

CLEVELAND: canaries, game chickens and Mockingbirds

McKINLEY: Loretta a Mexican double-yellow-headed parrot and chickens.

TEDDY ROOSEVELT: Eli Yale the blue Macaw, Baron Spreckle the hen, a Barn Owl, two parrots and a one-legged rooster

WILSON: chickens

HARDING: canaries and a Turkey

COOLIDGE: Nip and Tuck the canaries, Snowflake the white canary, Old Bill the thrush, Enoch the goose and a Mockingbird

HOOVER: a bird named Caruso

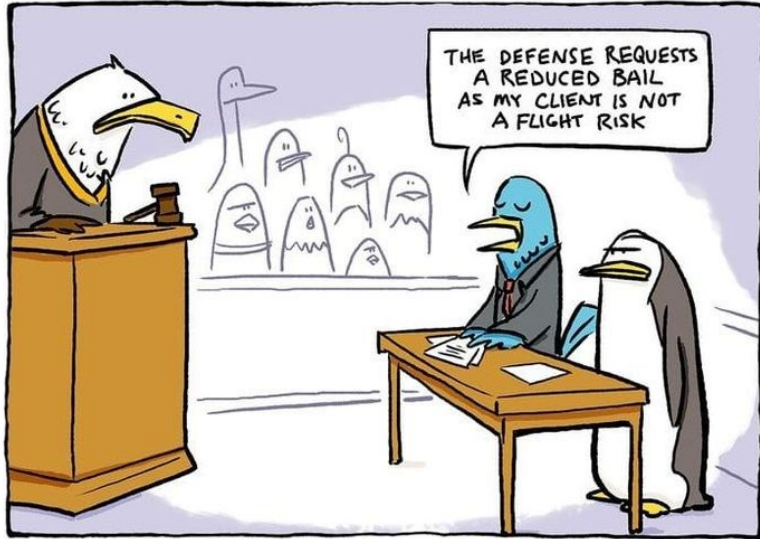
EISENHOWER: a bird called Gabby

KENNEDY: Robin the canary, Bluebell and Marybelle the parakeets

LYNDON JOHNSON: lovebirds

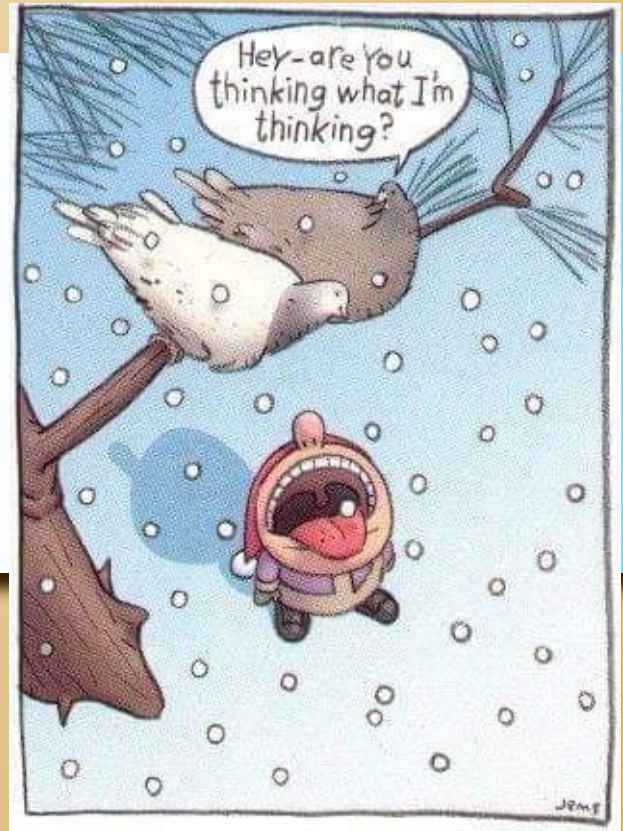
Almost the Last Word

Funny Finds from Sue Yost!



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NEW AGRILIFE OFFICE LOCATION:

611 Kimberly Drive
Hulcher Building B, Suite 114
Denton, TX 76208

Office phone numbers remain the same.

NEW RESOURCE ROOM LOCATION:

Frederick P. Herring Building
191 Civic Circle
Lewisville, TX 75067

**SWAt resources are housed at the Hulcher building.*



Almost the Last Word

Stream: The Naturalist News

Our newsletter is now available in audio format so you can listen while you do your TMN thing!

Click the AUDIO button below to listen to the January 2024 edition.

[AUDIO](#)

The Community Cleanup Events Project

The Community Cleanup Events project has a new Project Manager. Marty Newman will now be responsible for approving all cleanup events and making the necessary chapter announcements for each event as it is scheduled. The sponsoring community will be in charge of all scheduling and information regarding their own event. Chapter members may propose events for our participation by contacting Marty well in advance of the event. Only trash pickup sponsored by a community will qualify for this project. Marty can be reached through projects@efctmn.org, or the Members Area Membership Directory on our website.



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:

- \$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

One of my favorite images of our small, beautiful world is of morning's first light sweeping around the globe, continuously, relentlessly, forever circling and returning to repeat the cycle.

Always, somewhere, it is dawn, and always, somewhere,
the birds are singing.

Don Kroodsma, birdsong expert
and author of *The Singing Life of Birds*.

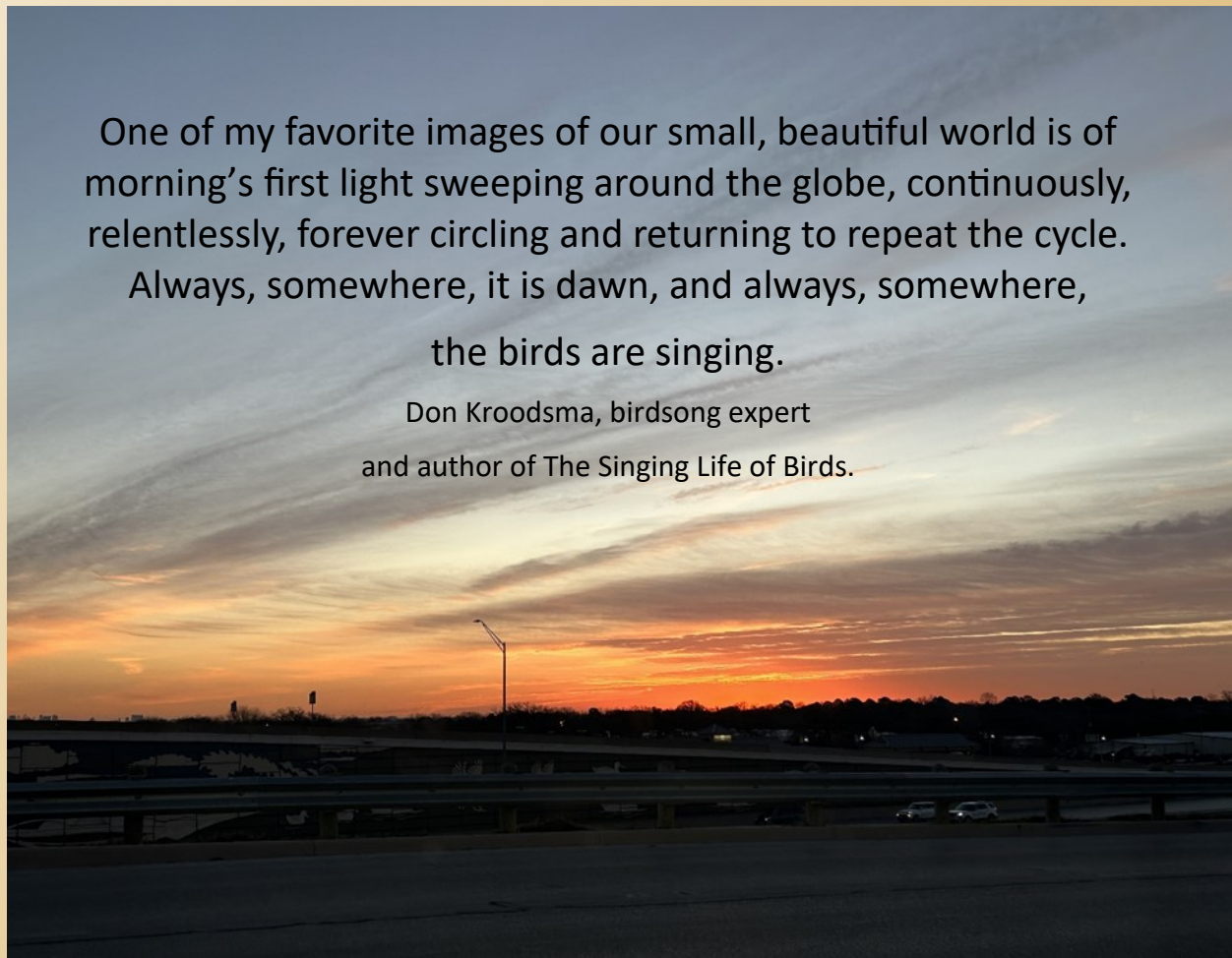


Photo by Sue Yost



Happy Valentines Day to You All!

Photo by Tammie Walters

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 - Larry Duncan, Interim

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 B, Suite 114

611 Kimberly Drive

Denton, TX 76208

940-349-2883