TEXAS Master Naturalist™ Elm Fork Chapter 1999-2024 Celebrating 25 YEARS

Naturalist News

December 2024 Volume 24, Issue 12

Jamie Reneau exploring South Hickory Creek, by Tammie Walters

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Naturalist News

Inside This Issue:

Happy Holidays!

Pigeonberry (*Rivina humilis*), by Tammie Walters

Buzz from the Board

Happy December, friends!

As 2024 draws to a close, we are capping the year with our 25th Anniversary Celebration; what a joy to recognize and remember two and a half decades of stewarding the natural resources in our community … and helping others learn to do the same!

Throughout the year, we've commemorated this milestone in many ways including (but not limited to) special newsletter articles, interviews with our most veteran members, a member field trip (LBJ Grasslands Hike), an online storefront with select merchandise, county and city proclamations, our Instagram debut, and our audio newsletter debut.

So many have contributed to our celebration, our chapter, and our community this year … and throughout our 25 years; "thank you" seems inadequate to convey my gratitude for the gifts of time and talent shared, but I am extraordinarily grateful for the generosity of our members and thoroughly impressed by their knowledge, enthusiasm, and service.

And, as 2024 gives way to 2025, our chapter will continue under the oh-so-capable leadership of our incoming executive officers: President Bryan Lewis, Vice President Eric Houston, Secretary Delia Croessmann, and Treasurer Mike Hatch. They, along with our newly elected Member at Large, Jane Duke, were unanimously approved by our membership at last month's chapter meeting. Directors, to be appointed and approved in January, will round out a fine group of individuals who will steer us into our 26th year.

TMN-EFC members and Cooke/Denton/Wise county residents—what a pleasure and a privilege it's been to serve as Chapter President in our 25th year! May December be filled to overflowing with your very favorites, and may you receive every good and perfect gift this holiday season … and every season.

Kathryn

Announcements

2025 ELM FORK CHAPTER TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST CHAPTER DUES

It's time to start thinking about renewing your Elm Fork Chapter membership for 2025! A link to pay dues online is available in the What's New? and Members Area of the website.

2024 Class Members DO NOT need to pay dues in 2025.

Dues are on a sliding scale:

- $25.00 if paid by January 31st (+$1.01 convenience fee when paying online)
- $30.00 if paid February 1st through February 28th (+$1.11 convenience fee when paying online)
- $40.00 if paid March 1st through March 31st (+$1.31 convenience fee when paying online)
- After March 31st, a member who has not paid their dues will be moved to Inactive status in VMS

REMINDER: Please update your personal information in VMS

What Happens Next

TEXAS Master Naturalist™ Elm Fork Chapter 1999-2024

Celebrating 25 YEARS

DON'T FORGET OUR

25th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

DECEMBER 12, 2024

SILENT AUCTION TO BENEFIT

TMN ENDOWMENT FUND

COMMUNITY PARTNER RECOGNITIONS

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

LUNCH

SEE YOU THERE!

Awards and Recognition

November 2024

Initial Certifications

Jim Kennedy	Class of 2024
Kate Pirot	Class of 2024

Recertifications

Patricia Barry	Class of 2017
Nancy Blakney	Class of 2023
Craig Blow	Class of 2019
Beth Griffin-Loftis	Class of 2022
Edsel Harrell	Class of 2020
Wylie Harris	Class of 2023
Ray Kreutzfeld	Class of 2014
Karen Peden	Class of 2017
Fritz Poppe	Class of 2001
Deb Rogstad	Class of 2024
Christy Thompson	Class of 2023
Clay Thurmond	Class of 2016
Susan Warren	Class of 2021

Awards and Recognition

November 2024

250 Hour Milestone

Abigail Beck	Class of 2023
Rob Blake	Class of 2024
Cathy Griesbaum	Class of 2023

1500 Hour Milestone

Ray Kreutzfeld	Class of 2014

3000 Hour Milestone

Leonard Chochrek	Class of 2019
Sue Yost	Class of 2017

6000 Hour Milestone

Betty Zajac Class of 2003

Congratulations!

Field Notes in Focus

Mosquito fern (*Azolla*) and watermeal (*Wolffia*) found at CCNHC, by Tammie Walters
https://aquaplant.tamu.edu/plant-identification/alphabetical-index/mosquito-fern/
https://aquaplant.tamu.edu/plant-identification/alphabetical-index/watermeal/

Inside Outside News

Approved AT

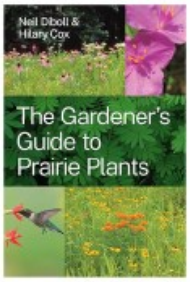
Just dig it!

Practical Ideas for Adding Native Plants to your Yard

Saturday, January 18, 2025
9:00 AM to 2:30 PM

Lewisville Thrive: Dogwood Room
1950 S Valley Pkwy, Lewisville, TX 75067

Prairie Garden Design Principles, presented by Neil Diboll (via Zoom): Neil will share his expertise in plant selection, garden layout, and integrating native prairie species into the home landscape.



Presenter Bio: Neil Diboll is the owner and consulting ecologist for Prairie Nursery, Inc., and, with Hilary Cox, the author of *The Gardener's Guide to Prairie Plants*. With over 40 years of expertise with native prairies ecology, Neil's work emphasizes "aesthetics, sustainability, and ecological compatibility with the land."

Pocket Prairies of the Blackland Prairie Chapter: Susan Abernethy and her fellow Blackland Prairie Texas Master Naturalists will share photos and discuss their process creating pocket prairies and pollinator spaces at home. They will answer questions about their experiences creating these native gardens in urban settings.

Presenter bio.: Susan has served as Outreach Director and on the Training committee. She volunteers in prairie restoration projects, is a Monarch Steward, and enjoys photographing pollinators, birds and plants for iNaturalist. She has a 20 x 10 foot pocket prairie and a pollinator garden at home.

Gardening with native Texas plants: The why and how of gardening with native plants.

Presenter bio.: Anna Hurst is the owner of Eco Blossom Nursery in Ft. Worth.

Pocket Prairies: Missy Singleton will explore the wonder of pocket prairies, highlighting their positive biological impacts.

Presenter Bio: Missy is a Private Lands Fish & Wildlife Biologist with the US Fish & Wildlife Service.

Partner and Vendor Tables: Seedsource and Trinity Forks Native Plant Society of Texas will host tables with information on native seeds and plants.

Cost: $40
Includes breakfast pastries & a boxed lunch
Register at: friendsofllela.org

FRIENDS of LLELA
Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area

Inside Outside News

Approved AT

Thrive Nature Walks

Every 3rd Sunday, 9:00 AM-10:30 AM
(Next walk is Dec. 15th)

Thrive Nature Park
1950 S. Valley Pkwy.
Lewisville TX 75067

Join Master Naturalists on an easy, family-friendly walk through Thrive Nature Park. We never know what we'll see or hear. Bring binoculars if you have them. Park at the Thrive Rec Center and meet up at the picnic table in the park near the Valley Pkwy crosswalk at 9am.

Volunteer Opportunity

DFW Wildlife Coalition

DFW Wildlife Coalition is looking for volunteers to do 2- or 3-hour shifts answering the phones from your home. You would do the same shift every week. We have an online training program for you to do at your own pace. All you need is a phone and a computer. We answer calls from 7 am to 10pm, 365 days a year.

You will learn all about Texas native wildlife, referring callers to rehabbers and answering questions from the public on how we can co-exist with our native wildlife.

Contact Betty Zajac through the Members Area Membership Directory or Projects (P091009).

Inside Outside News

Volunteer Opportunity

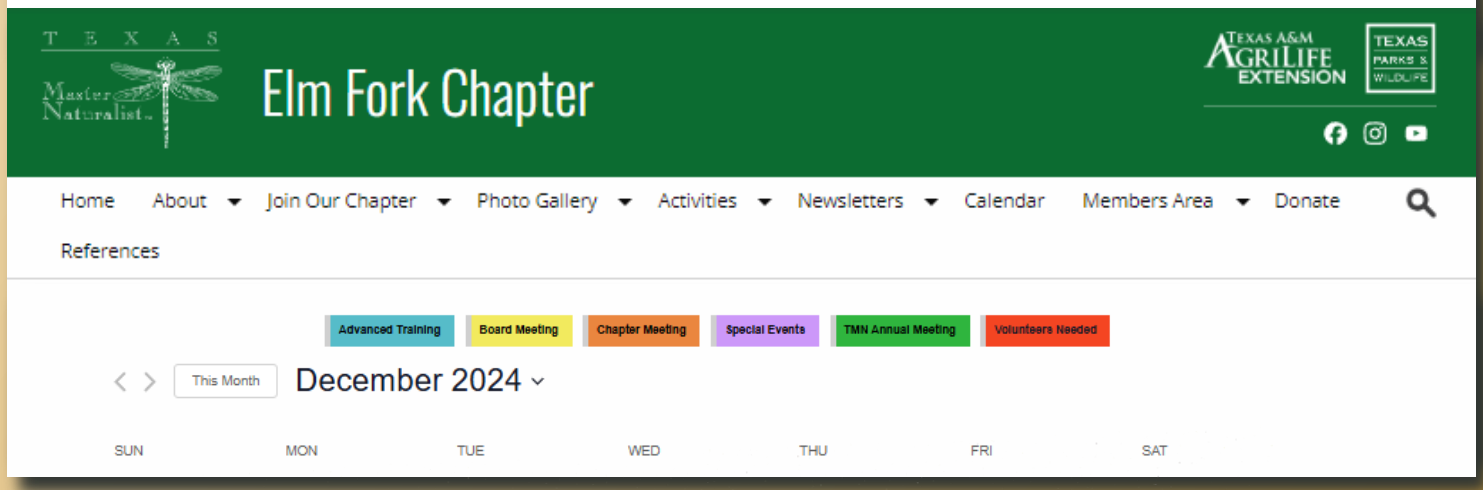
Cleanup Event in Lewisville

Saturday, December 21st - Thrive Nature Park privet removal. Meet at Thrive Nature Park at 7:30 a.m. The event will end at 10 a.m.

The point of contact for the event is Eric D'Antonio at edantonio@cityoflewisville.com. Volunteer hours should be entered under P21021:RM: Community Cleanup Events with a brief description of the work.

Volunteers can bring their own bug spray, water, tools, gloves and other PPE. Lewisville will handle all herbicide applications when applicable. Lewisville will also bring shovels, loppers, trash bags, picker uppers, gloves, etc. for those who do not have them.

Be sure to check Plan Your Week and the Elm Fork Chapter Website and Calendar for MORE AT and volunteer opportunities!



Projects in the Community

Green Wing Teal, Northern Shovelers, and Gadwall, by Denver Kramer

Last Saturday Clear Creek Bird Hike Celebrates 10th Anniversary

By Scott Kiester

Saturday, November 30, 2024 was a beautiful day to bird, with 34 species sighted at Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center. There were two, count'em, two Brown Creepers and eleven Wilson's Snipe, along with Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets. But honestly, we were more surprised by the birds we didn't see. No vultures, no mockingbirds, no thrashers, and only three sparrows, although one was a Fox sparrow. We saw one Great Egret and two Great Blue Herons, and only Green-winged Teals and Shovelers. All in all though, it was a pretty good day.

Brown Creeper

Great Blue Heron

Wilson's Snipe

Great Egret

Since it was the tenth anniversary walk, I went back though the spreadsheet and found something a bit odd. Prior to 2019 we were averaging over 30 species per walk, but since COVID we have been in the low to mid-twenties. So 34 species in one day is a good sign.

The monthly hike is held the last Saturday (4th or 5th) of most months, and AT credit can be earned, because every time you walk you see new birds or different views of a bird, and you get better at identification. You also learn about behavior, seasonality, vocalizations, and more.

More birds on next page...

Clear Creek Bird Hike *(cont.)*

American Goldfinch

American Robin

Cedar Waxwing

Belted Kingfisher

Greater Yellowlegs

Kildeer

Due to Holiday travel plans, the December Clear Creek bird hike will be on Saturday, December 21st. Meet in the parking lot at 7:30 am and be prepared for about 3 hours of great birding.

See the complete bird list on the next page.

Clear Creek Bird Hike *(cont.)*

CLEAR CREEK BIRD COUNT, NOVEMBER 30, 2024			
Species	Count	Species	Count
Northern Shoveler	19	Carolina Chickadee	6
Mallard	1	Tufted Titmouse	3
Green-winged Teal	14	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	6
Killdeer	3	Golden-crowned Kinglet	5
Wilson's Snipe	11	Brown Creeper	2
Greater Yellowlegs	3	Carolina Wren	4
Double-crested Cormorant	1	Eastern Bluebird	1
Great Egret	1	American Robin	150
Great Blue Heron	2	Cedar Waxwing	10
Red-shouldered Hawk	1	House Finch	6
Belted Kingfisher	2	American Goldfinch	45
Red-bellied Woodpecker	2	Fox Sparrow	1
Downy/Hairy Woodpecker	1	Dark-eyed Junco (Slate-colored)	4
Northern Flicker	1	White-throated Sparrow	2
Eastern Phoebe	1	Red-winged Blackbird	110
Blue Jay	1	Yellow-rumped Warbler	5
Gadwall	1	Northern Cardinal	11
American Crow	12		

Birders at the CCNHC wetland pond, photo by Samra Bufkins

All photographs are by Denver Kramer unless noted otherwise.

Projects in the Community

Happy 2025 from Green Acres!

Prickly Pear cactus (*Opuntia*), by Amy Montgomery

Features

A Hike in the LBJ National Grassland– A Twenty-fifth Anniversary Celebration

By Jerry Hamby

A significant milestone deserves recognition, so when Fran Witte asked me to lead a hike in the LBJ National Grassland (LBJ NG) to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Elm Fork Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists, I leapt at the opportunity. I was equally eager to share my love of this little-known jewel of North Central Texas. It had been more than fifteen years since the chapter had organized a hike in the Grassland, so an excursion was long overdue. To plan properly and to find the best location for an introduction to the LBJ NG, I enlisted the help of several chapter members, including Project Manager Jeanne Erickson.

Of the more than thirty units I have explored in the Grassland (out of 68), several stood out as good options to explore. Unit 75 is home to one of the 81 National Ecological Observatory Network (NEON) field sites in the United States and one of two in the LBJ NG. A visit to the NEON observation facility, which includes a 62-foot-tall meteorological tower, would provide a unique learning experience, but limited parking near the unit's access gate and a narrow path through dense woods weighed against the choice. Another favorite spot, Unit 31, has a vast open prairie with limestone outcroppings, as well as some of the most spectacular wildflowers in the Grassland, but a hike through the vast meadows would be better appreciated in late spring.

Rustic trail blazes

Because we planned to open the event to forty participants, we needed a meeting location with adequate parking, so Jeanne and I settled on Unit 30. It has a large gravel lot next to a pedestrian gate. However, we still needed to find a way to limit the length of the hike to less than three miles, a challenge made all the greater by the nature of the trail system in the LBJ NG, which is designed for horseback riders. The

A Hike in the LBJ National Grassland (cont.)

length of each trail varies from eight to twenty-six miles. One option, therefore, would have been to hike out and back on the same trail, but my preference was to find a loop trail. Fortunately, Unit 30 has a shortcut between two trails that looked promising, but Jeanne and I still needed to hike the route to measure distance and to assess trail condition.

After completing exploratory hikes in July and August with three other people, Jeanne and I were satisfied with the length of the route, 2.5 miles, but we discovered that the shortcut was overgrown. A week before the original date of the hike, November 8th, we revisited the site and brought two additional volunteers, Whit Dieterich and my wife Susan, to help prune trees in the quarter-mile shortcut. We expected a morning of light work but didn't anticipate constant rainfall from the time we arrived until we completed our hike. Much to our relief, however, we discovered that U.S. Forest Service (USFS) staff, who manage the LBJ and Caddo National Grasslands, had recently graded large sections of the trail and widened the shortcut trail, clearing overhanging branches as well. We were now assured that our chosen route would be easy to navigate, but a week of additional precipitation forced us to delay the hike by a week.

Thirty people gathered at Unit 30 on the morning of November 15th. It was a delightful 56 degrees when we started the hike and 67 degrees when we finished nearly three hours later. To give everyone a more intimate experience, we broke into groups of ten to twelve people. Whit led one group, Jeanne and Mary Curry led another, and I led a third. We also assigned designated sweeps–Cathy Griesbaum and Susan–to keep us moving along and to make sure no one got left behind. Jeanne and Mary took turns leading and keeping their group together.

Whit Dieterich and Jeanne Erickson in the rain

Clay Thurmond catching up to Cathy Griesbaum (photo by Marissa Shaw)

Marilyn Blanton photographing a beetle

Mary Curry holding a salt marsh moth caterpillar (photo by Fran Witte)

Each leader drew on his or her knowledge and background to provide a unique experience for the group. Mary, for instance, has led "First Wednesday" hikes in the LBJ NG for over twenty years and is the resident expert on the LBJ NG. Her book *North Central Texas Wildflowers*, now in its second edition, is an essential reference for anyone who wants to learn about the more than 400 native species found in and around the Grassland. For their hike Mary and Jeanne focused on plants and mosses and the critters that inhabit the Grassland. As always happens during Mary's hikes, participants made dozens of unexpected discoveries, including fungi and caterpillars, as they kept their eyes to the ground.

A Hike in the LBJ National Grassland (cont.)

Jeanne Erickson looking down a levee (photo by Mary Curry)

Whit, on the other hand, relied on his cultural and historical knowledge of the LBJ NG and the National Grasslands system. He talked about homesteading in the region, pointing to a windmill on the edge of a tree line as evidence of a ranch that was probably abandoned in the 1930s or 1940s. He also encouraged members of his group to share relevant experiences. Members of the LBJ Grassland Trail Riders, for instance, talked about their work in maintaining the trails, and Bill Coleman talked about his experience of surveying property lines. I happened to be driving behind Bill after the hike and pulled over when he spotted two bearing trees along the edge of Unit 68. The bright yellow markers can be found in the corners of every unit in the Grassland and are among my favorite discoveries when I walk along the fence lines.

Bearing Tree marker

For my hike I talked about the two ecoregions that define the LBJ NG, the Western Cross Timbers and the Fort Worth Prairie, each of which gives rise to different plant communities. Early on we walked across a levee constructed decades ago by the USFS, and we passed beneath tall loblolly pine trees (*Pinus taeda*) that were planted far from their native habitat of East Texas. We speculated that both modifications to the landscape were designed to slow the soil erosion that led farmers and ranchers to abandon their land during the Dust Bowl in the 1930s. The introduction of non-native trees, such as loblolly pines, was common fifty years ago, but because of unintended consequences, the practice has fallen out of favor.

Jerry Hamby stopping on the edge of a forest (photo by Marilyn Blanton)

We also talked about native trees commonly found in a Cross Timbers forest, including post oak (*Quercus stellata*) and blackjack oak (*Quercus marilandica*), which we saw in abundance. Even though we were not on a plant walk, I couldn't resist identifying some of my favorite native species, most notably little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) and silver bluestem (*Bothriochloa torreyana*), two grasses that lit up the meadows. In addition, we saw hundreds of narrow-leaf gayfeather stems (*Liatris punctata* var. *mucronata*), looking beautiful even though the blooms had gone to seed.

We also touched on the problems associated with aggressive non-native species, such as King Ranch bluestem (*Bothriochloa laguroides ssp. torreyana*), which was growing sporadically along the trail. It is encouraging, however, that the native grasses appear to be holding their own. Since deer season goes from

Loblolly pine forest (photo by Susan Hamby)

A Hike in the LBJ National Grassland (cont.)

Susan Pohlen surveying the prairie

Prescribed burn, Unit 74 (photo by Marissa Shaw)

November to January, we talked about high visibility clothing, which the group leaders were wearing that day. In addition, someone asked about primitive camping in the LBJ NG, which is free and typically requires no permit.

Since the LBJ NG is one of the Elm Fork Chapter's service projects, we discussed the volunteer work several of us do there. In addition to monitoring nest boxes for eastern bluebirds in spring and summer, Susan and I make quarterly observations for the Great Texas Wildlife Trails Adopt-a-loop project, which engages 350 Texas Master Naturalists across the state.

A few days before the hike, I learned that prescribed burns were planned for November 15th (in units safely to the east and south). Because winds were light on the morning of our hike, the smoke traveled straight up and was barely visible in the distance. As we drove away from Unit 30, however, we saw active burns near County Road 2560. We also talked about the ambitious burn plan the USFS puts in place every year; more than twenty units are on the schedule between now and next spring. Because the Forest Service employs a small number of staff, prescribed burns are administered by Texas A&M Forest Service and other contracted partners. During our hike someone asked about the effects of fire on native trees, so I pointed to dead eastern red cedars (*Juniperus virginiana*), which do not respond well to fire. Most mature native trees, however, have evolved to handle periodic fires.

The last half of our hike followed a section of the Audubon Trail, so named because of its proximity to the ghost town of Audubon (and which is named after naturalist John Audubon). Unsurprisingly, the town, which thrived from 1865 to 1883, fell on hard times when the Fort Worth and Denver Railway bypassed it. The post office closed in 1904, and the only reminders of the town's past are a Texas state historical marker and the rebuilt Bethel Baptist Church (established 1875) that was built on the site.

When Jeanne, Whit, and I finalized plans for the hike, we decided that each group should make a brief detour from the trail to visit the pioneer gravesite of R.R. St. Clair (1826-1892). The lone grave is less than 200 yards from the trail (ten minutes into our hike) and remains one of the great mysteries of the LBJ NG. While some details about his life are known, including his service as a Confederate soldier and the names of his two wives and his children, no one knows why he was buried less than three miles from the closest cemetery. Some members of Whit's group were so intrigued by the mystery that they searched for answers online while standing at the gravesite.

One thing I have researched successfully is where to eat after a hike at the LBJ NG. For anyone who had never visited the tiny town of Greenwood, I recommended going to its only eating establishment, Greenwood Grocery. More than a dozen hungry hikers made the pilgrimage to eat burgers and homemade pie and to soak up the local atmosphere. Some of us traveled to familiar haunts in Decatur, where we talked about options for the next organized hike, perhaps as soon as next spring.

Raccoon paw prints

All photographs by Jerry Hamby, except those noted

Features

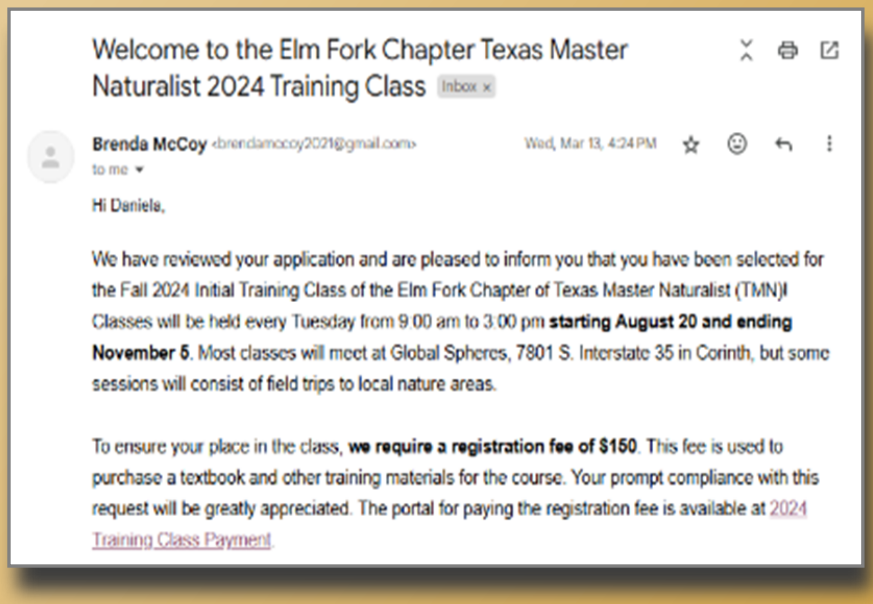
My Journey with the Texas Master Naturalist Program - Elm Fork Chapter

By Daniela Parker

When I first heard about the Texas Master Naturalist program, I had just graduated from Texas A&M University and was working at the Austin Nature & Science Center. At the time, I knew we collaborated with Texas Master Naturalists on various projects and programs, but I never explored beyond those interactions. Fast forward to my role as the Outdoor & Education Coordinator for the City of Carrollton; I found myself working alongside master naturalists from chapters like Blackland Prairie, North Texas, and Elm Fork. My curiosity about the program grew as I engaged with inspiring individuals such as Richard Johnson (Elm Fork), Kathy Webb (Elm Fork), Monica Morrison (North Texas), and Randy Moody (Blackland Prairie). Yet, I couldn't shake the doubt: Do I have what it takes to be a Texas Master Naturalist?

Initially, I told myself, "No way! These people are experts in their fields. I can't possibly measure up to their knowledge and skills." (Spoiler alert: I've since realized that being a Texas Master Naturalist is more about a shared passion for lifelong learning and nature than expertise.)

After encouragement from Richard Johnson and Eleanor Hough from the Elm Fork chapter, I decided to apply. I submitted my application as soon as it opened. A few weeks later, Brenda McCoy from Elm Fork called to confirm I understood the time commitment required for the training class. Nervously, but enthusiastically, I assured her I did. I hoped she would immediately say, "Congratulations, you're in!" Instead, she simply said, "Okay, sounds good," and hung up. Confused, I thought, "Well, there's always next year." But within an hour, I received an email welcoming me to the program. The true excitement began!



Welcome to the Elm Fork Chapter Texas Master Naturalist 2024 Training Class Inbox ×

Brenda McCoy <brendamccoy2021@gmail.com> Wed, Mar 13, 4:24 PM

to me

Hi Daniela,

We have reviewed your application and are pleased to inform you that you have been selected for the Fall 2024 Initial Training Class of the Elm Fork Chapter of Texas Master Naturalist (TMN)! Classes will be held every Tuesday from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm **starting August 20 and ending November 5**. Most classes will meet at Global Spheres, 7801 S. Interstate 35 in Corinth, but some sessions will consist of field trips to local nature areas.

To ensure your place in the class, **we require a registration fee of $150**. This fee is used to purchase a textbook and other training materials for the course. Your prompt compliance with this request will be greatly appreciated. The portal for paying the registration fee is available at 2024 Training Class Payment.

Starting the Journey

On August 20, I entered the Global Spheres building for the first day of training. I was greeted by smiling faces from the training committee and fellow nature enthusiasts who would soon become friends. We started by introducing ourselves, sharing our work, and expressing our passions. I had assumed most attendees had

2024 Training Class at LLELA

My Journey with the Texas Master Naturalist Program – (cont.)

2024 Training Class at LLELA

backgrounds in nature education, but I was pleasantly surprised by the diversity of professions–from sales and finance to homemaking and beyond.

The next 12 weeks felt like drinking from a firehose–overwhelming but incredibly enriching. We learned from exceptional speakers and participated in memorable field trips. The diversity of our group brought engaging perspectives to our class discussions. If you asked all 40 of us to name our favorite sessions, you'd likely get a wide range of answers. That's the beauty of the program: it's not just about one aspect of nature but about finding your unique niche, whether it's erosion control, invasive species removal, youth education, or something else entirely.

Two sessions that stood out for me were Forest Ecology by Rick and Lisa Travis and Mammalogy by Roberto and Karin Saucedo.

Forest Ecology by Rick and Lisa Travis

Before this class, I never considered myself a "tree person." But after hearing Rick and Lisa's presentation, I became one of the biggest advocates for native trees. They highlighted several benefits of trees, such as reducing carbon dioxide, providing food and shelter for wildlife, and conserving energy and resources.

The key takeaway? Native trees are vital. Planting native trees supports local wildlife by providing appropriate food and shelter, requires less water, and is more resilient to the local climate. Conversely, invasive trees can disrupt ecosystems, outcompete native species, and reduce biodiversity. Astonishingly, 85% of invasive plants and trees originate from landscaping choices. They have no population control since a lot of these species come from Asia because of the similar environment to us, and they have nothing to keep their population in control.

2024 Training Class, Forest Ecology Session

Their presentation inspired me to advocate for Texas natives. I've since shared resources like the Texas A&M Trees database (http://texastreeid.tamu.edu/content/listoftrees/) and Lisa Travis's Tree ID Brochure (https://txmn.org/bptmn/files/2023/11/BPTMN-Tree-Brochure-rev-2023-Lisa-Travis.pdf) to educate others about the importance of planting native species.

Mammalogy with Roberto and Karin Saucedo

Before the training, I'd often hear that joining the Texas Master Naturalist program would help me find my niche. After the mammalogy session, I discovered mine: urban wildlife. Roberto and Karin's presentation focused on coexistence with mammals, common species in urban and suburban areas, and their ecological

My Journey with the Texas Master Naturalist Program – (cont.)

roles. Generalists like bobcats, coyotes, striped skunks, and armadillos adapt well to human-dominated environments.

Many people fear wildlife like bobcats or coyotes when they appear in neighborhoods. However, these animals provide natural pest control and help maintain balanced ecosystems. Unfortunately, human actions—such as habitat loss and rodenticide poisoning—pose significant threats to urban wildlife.

The session emphasized coexistence guidelines, such as:

- Never intentionally or unintentionally feed wildlife.
- Keep pets from roaming freely.
- Eliminate accessible water sources.

These simple steps can foster harmony between humans and wildlife.

If you are interested in learning more about urban wildlife, I recommend resources like Texas Native Cats (https://www.texasnativecats.org/), Project Coyote (https://projectcoyote.org/), and Song Dog Watch (https://www.songdogwatch.org/) for further learning.

Beyond the Training

Completing the Texas Master Naturalist training has transformed me into a better educator, volunteer, and steward of my community. Since graduating, I've started volunteering with organizations like Texas Native Cats, the DFW Wildlife Coalition, and the Elm Fork chapter's social media team. I've also developed programs for the City of Carrollton that better serve the community while leveraging natural resources.

One of the most rewarding aspects of the program has been connecting with like-minded individuals. Whether through carpooling, mentor groups, or shared lunches, I've built friendships that enrich my experience. The diversity of talents within our group—from bakers and educators to speakers and event organizers—ensures that everyone can contribute in meaningful ways.

2024 Training Class at Ray Roberts Lake State Park

Looking Ahead

The Texas Master Naturalist program has given me the tools to give back to the environment that gives so much to us. Whether it's cutting down privet, picking up litter, or educating others, my goal is to protect and enhance our natural world. I'm excited to see how I can continue to contribute to the Elm Fork chapter and inspire others to join this incredible journey.

Features

LLELA: Inspiration for Future Conservation Researcher

By Samra Bufkins

As we reflect on the past year and look toward 2025 and beyond, it's worth considering the effect our conservation work has on the people who visit our project sites. I was recently introduced to a father and son duo by Scott Kiester and Nita Moates at LLELA, and they illustrate the life changing value of spending time in nature.

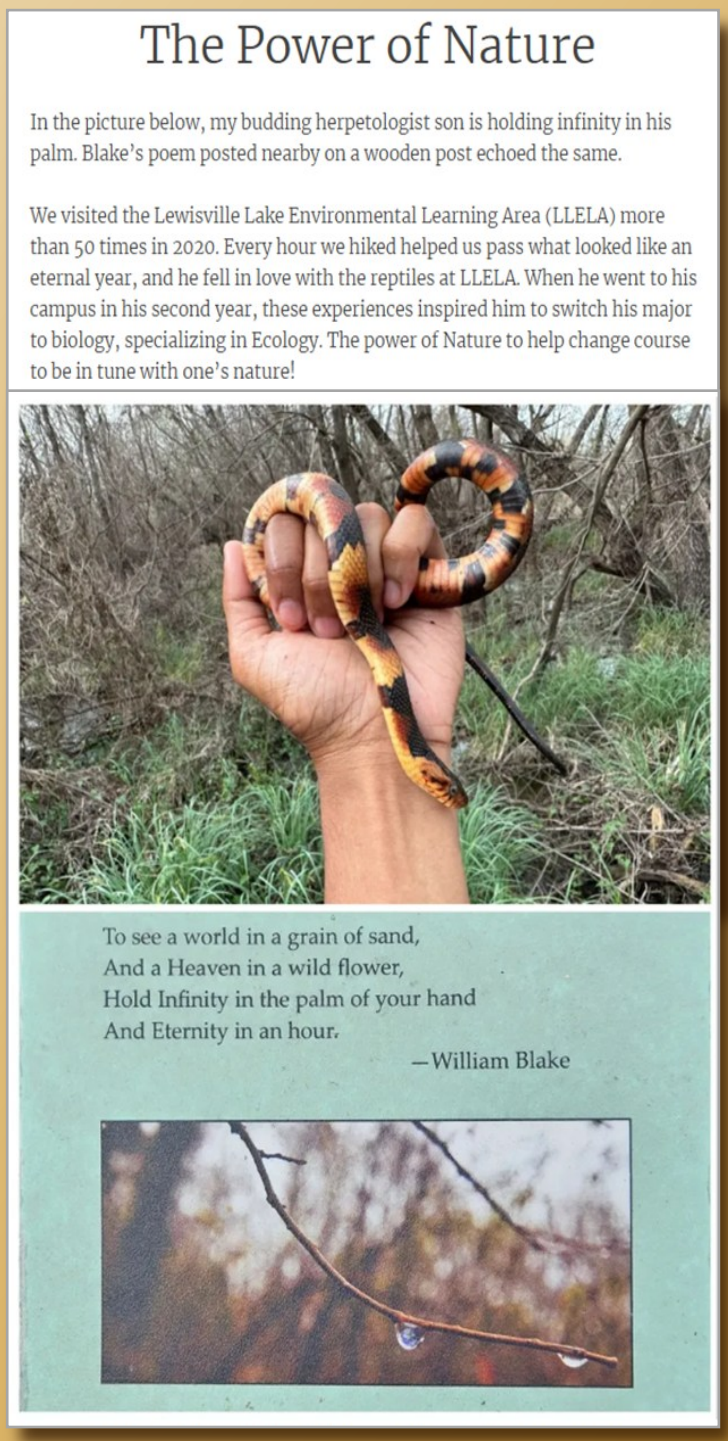
Ashwin Narayanan fondly remembers his seventh-grade field trip to the Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area. "I took a jar to collect grasshoppers in," he recalls. "I would always collect grasshoppers during recess in elementary school."

His father, Narayan Srinivasan, credits the seventh-grade ecology field experience for introducing the whole family to LLELA. "I had no idea it was even here," he said.

A May 2024 graduate of the University of Texas with a degree in biology (concentrating on ecology, evolution & behavior), Ashwin originally started college as a chemistry major, anticipating a career in research. But the Covid 19 pandemic lockdown forced him and other students home to take online classes in isolation. "I was stuck in the house for like a month, and didn't know what to do," Ashwin explains. "I found a reptile and amphibian checklist online, because I was adjacently interested in herps, and my dad and I started going to LLELA every day to find as many herps as we could."

Ashwin has nearly completed the list. "I came here a ton in 2020 and 2021." He's still hoping to find a Speckled Kingsnake at LLELA. "It's the one I really want to see here."

He always had an interest in animals and found herps fascinating. "You can interact with them in ways you really can't with other wildlife. Mammals can tear you apart and birds are kind of hard to hang on to."



The Power of Nature

In the picture below, my budding herpetologist son is holding infinity in his palm. Blake's poem posted nearby on a wooden post echoed the same.

We visited the Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area (LLELA) more than 50 times in 2020. Every hour we hiked helped us pass what looked like an eternal year, and he fell in love with the reptiles at LLELA. When he went to his campus in his second year, these experiences inspired him to switch his major to biology, specializing in Ecology. The power of Nature to help change course to be in tune with one's nature!

To see a world in a grain of sand,
And a Heaven in a wild flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.

—William Blake

Ashwin is most familiar with the Cicada, Cottonwood, and Blackjack trails at LLELA, and can describe places where he almost always finds snakes, citing a favorite area on the Cicada Trail where the creek meets the old channel. "There are a lot of water snakes there."

LLELA: Inspiration for Future Conservation Researcher (cont.)

Ashwin holding a Rough Green Snake at LLELA, Nov. 2020

Ashwin feels the Broad-banded Water Snake is the most common snake at LLELA, but overall, he's impressed with the diversity of wildlife there. "However, there are lots of Cottonmouths in the vernal pools along Cottonwood Trail."

"Time spent at LLELA encouraged me to change my major to biology," Ashwin said. His dad added, "He'd go hiking with students at UT and they'd ask, 'are you an EEB major?' and he'd say, 'what's that?'" After joining the Texas EEB club, he realized wildlife conservation would become his career path. "I also realized I could probably make more of a difference in the world with a biology degree than chemistry. I'd found my niche."

While he's enthusiastic about research, since changing his major he's become more focused on field work, which he hopes to continue throughout his career. Since graduating last spring, Ashwin has been working for the state of North Carolina as a roadkill survey technician. "Yes, that's really my job title," he laughs. "I literally drive around there looking for roadkill." The results of his research are being applied to the development of wildlife crossings in the heavily traveled area near the Outer Banks, where a small group of critically endangered Red Wolves have been reintroduced.

Ashwin explains that his team travels a set route every morning, scanning for any kind of vertebrate roadkill. Once found, they stop, photograph it, mark the GPS, record other information like conditions, etc., and move on. This past October their preliminary data went into a proposal submitted to the North Carolina Department of Transportation for funding for the wildlife crossing program. "We are seeing patterns of where and which kind of wildlife is crossing the roads" he explained. "Knowing travel patterns and finding ways to protect those endangered animals is essential."

Ashwin explains that mammals can be sporadic about when and where they cross. During cooler weather they cross highways more often. Crossing patterns change seasonally, too. During the summer months, more animals are vulnerable to vehicle encounters because of increased traffic to and from the beaches and resorts.

Earlier this year a male Red Wolf was hit by a car. He had a mate with five pups, and because he couldn't provide for them, the mother abandoned the litter, and they died. "Wildlife crossings are extremely important in areas where endangered species live. That one car wiped out six wolves, or 20% of the population."

Ashwin recounted that a female wolf known to have eight pups hasn't been seen since June, and they have no way of knowing what happened to her or her pups. "We won't know if any survived until next year." Ashwin believes the political will exists to build wildlife crossings in the area, which is teeming with wildlife.

"Coastal Carolina is also black bear country," he said. "We've found 2 dead bears in our surveys."

He explained the bears there are really big, and easy to see along US Highway 64 on the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge in the early mornings. "We've seen up to 10 in one trip."

Ashwin gets down to earth at LLELA, Oct. 2020

LLELA: Inspiration for Future Conservation Researcher (cont.)

Driving around looking for wildlife isn't new to Ashwin, who used to drive the country roads in Denton County with his mother looking for animals to identify and document with iNaturalist. The whole family spends time at LLELA on occasion, and Ashwin's dad hikes there weekly with friends.

He enjoys finding and visiting the little areas where herps congregate and documenting them to identify location patterns. While he's adept with iNaturalist, Ashwin currently favors an app called HerpMapper. Officially launched in September 2013, HerpMapper is a volunteer-run organization of professional herpetologists, IT specialists, and field herpers with decades of experience. Ashwin likes it because it reports users' findings directly to the partner agencies and organizations that work with https://www.herpmapper.org/.

His expertise with iNaturalist convinced a professor to start using it. Ashwin described a project where each student was assigned an acre of their field station to characterize. Ashwin relied primarily on iNaturalist to identify the plants, because he admits "I'm not really a plant person." He explained that this professor is 80 years old but now uses iNaturalist with his classes after seeing how well it worked.

Ashwin tells one story about visiting LLELA with extended family members. "When we started out, my aunt was very leery of snakes. By the end of the hike, she was touching snakes that I picked up" Ashwin says proudly. "We can erase fear and destigmatize wildlife myths with education."

Ashwin is considering what his next steps will be, but they definitely include graduate school. "I'm pretty sure I want to be a research herpetologist, with lots of field work involved," he muses. He's networking and considering options for continuing his education in the wildlife conservation field while he finishes collecting data in North Carolina through July of next year. One thing for sure is that he and his dad will have a presence at LLELA long into the future.

While neither Ashwin nor Narayan are master naturalists yet, (we're working on them), it's important to remember how the places we do our work have an impact on the people in our community. It's human nature to put our interests, whether citizen science, trail building, pollinator gardens, bird banding, etc., into little silos and not always consider their individual impact on the larger ecosystem. No matter how small our contribution may be, doing data analysis or committee work or in the physical environment, always know that the many people touched by our projects at places throughout the Elm Fork Chapter appreciate our work and the potentially life-changing inspiration it can be.

Ashwin at LLELA, Oct. 2020

Copperhead at LLELA, June 2021

Ashwin is on Instagram @Herp_thusiast

Video: https://abc11.com/post/5-red-wolf-pups-die-eastern-north-carolina-after-father-hit-killed-vehicle/15315952/

Tweet of the Month

By Sue Yost, class of 2017

November was a month of thanks. Thanking our police and firemen, our families, and most importantly, our servicemen and veterans. But not all of the military veterans we thanked last month were humans; some were animals. Everyone has heard about the dogs, mules and horses that were part of the military. But how about the camels, elephants, mongoose, cats, mice, desert rats and the pigeons. Yes, the common, everyday pigeon. One of the most disliked birds in America. This article will make us think differently about the lowly pigeon.

Domestic Pigeon or Rock Dove (*Columba livia domestica*)

The rock pigeon is the world's oldest domesticated bird. Mesopotamian cuneiform tablets mention the domestication of pigeons more than 5,000 years ago, as do Egyptian hieroglyphics. Pigeons were most likely domesticated in the Mediterranean at least 2000-5000 years ago and may have been domesticated earlier as a food source. Research suggests that domestication of pigeons occurred as early as 10,000 years ago.

Pigeons have held historical importance to humans as food, pets, holy animals, and messengers. Due to their homing ability, pigeons have been used to deliver messages, including during the world wars. More on that later. Despite this, city pigeons, which are feral birds released for one reason or another, are generally seen as pests, mainly due to their droppings and large flocks. Feral pigeons are considered invasive in many parts of the world and were brought to America by the early settlers. Though they have a positive impact on wild bird populations, they serve as an important prey species. Pigeons are a favorite meal item for Peregrine Falcons and other birds of prey. Since pigeons have adapted to “city” living, those birds of prey, that in a natural world would nest in high mountains, have also adapted to the city life of tall office buildings with plenty of prey to support them.

Because domestic and feral pigeons have extensively interbred with wild rock doves, genetically pure wild-type pigeons may not exist anymore, or are nearly extinct. This frequent admixture further muddies the true origins of pigeons. We won’t dive into genetics but there is a wide variety of them. There are homing pigeons, sporting pigeons, racing pigeons and fancy show pigeons. All of those will be banded and tracked by the owners.

Pigeons bred for meat are generally referred to as a meat or utility breed. The term "squab" can either refer to young birds or the meat harvested from them; these birds grow to a very large size in the nest before they fledge and are able to fly; during this stage of development they are often fatter and seen as being tastier than the fully-flighted adults. Pigeon meat, both from squabs and from adult birds, is still a source of protein for people worldwide.

Tweet of the Month (cont.)

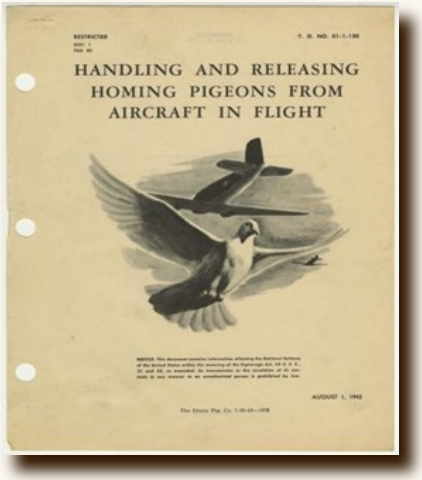
Now more about these veterans of the world wars. Homing pigeons are a specialized type of pigeon bred for navigation and speed. Originally developed through selective breeding to carry messages, these breeds of domestic pigeons, especially when trained, are able to return to the home loft if released at a location that they have never visited before and that may be up to 1,000 km (620 mi) away. This ability of a pigeon to return home from a foreign location necessitates two sorts of information. The first, called "map sense" is their geographic location. The second, "compass sense" is the bearing they need to fly from their new location to reach their home. Both of these senses, however, respond to a number of different cues in different situations. The most popular conception of how pigeons are able to do this is that they are able to sense the earth's magnetic field with tiny magnetic tissues in their head (magnetoception). Another theory is that pigeons have compass sense, which uses the position of the sun, along with an internal clock, to work out direction. However, studies have shown that if magnetic disruption or clock changes disrupt these senses, the pigeon can still manage to get home. The variability in the effects of manipulations to this sense of the pigeons indicates that there is more than one cue on which navigation is based, and that map sense appears to rely on a comparison of available cues.

Homing pigeons have long played an important role in war. Due to their homing ability, speed, and altitude, they were often used as military messengers. Carrier pigeons of the Racing Homer breed were used to carry messages in World War I and World War II.

During World War I and World War II, carrier pigeons were used to transport messages back to their home coop behind the lines. When they landed, wires in the coop would sound a bell or buzzer and a soldier of the Signal Corps would know a message had arrived. The soldier would go to the coop, remove the message from the canister, and send it to its destination by telegraph, field phone, or personal messenger.

A carrier pigeon's job was dangerous. Nearby, enemy soldiers often tried to shoot down pigeons, knowing that released birds were carrying important messages. Some of these pigeons became quite famous amongst the infantrymen for whom they worked. One pigeon, named “Spike,” flew 52 missions without receiving a single wound. Another, named Cher Ami, lost his foot and one eye, but his message got through, saving a large group of surrounded American infantrymen.

Homing pigeons were used extensively during World War I. In 1914, during the First Battle of the Marne, the French army advanced 72 pigeon lofts with the troops. The US Army Signal Corps used 600 pigeons in France alone.



United States Navy aviators maintained 12 pigeon stations in France, with a total inventory of 1,508 pigeons when the war ended. Pigeons were carried in airplanes to rapidly return messages to these stations, and 829 birds flew in 10,995 wartime aircraft patrols. Airmen of the 230 patrols with messages entrusted to pigeons threw the message-carrying pigeon either up or down, depending on the type of aircraft, to keep the pigeon out of the propeller and away from airflow toward the aircraft wings and struts. Eleven of the pigeons thrown went missing in action, but the remaining 219 messages were delivered successfully.

Within the National Air and Space Museum’s Archive’s holdings are more than 75,000 aircraft maintenance manuals, engine overhaul manuals, and parts catalogs, but there actually exists a U.S. Army Air

Tweet of the Month (cont.)

Forces (AAF) manual that details the use of homing pigeons in combat zones during World War II. This document, *Handling and Releasing Homing Pigeon from Aircraft in Flight*, was issued to service personnel in August 1943 and was given a "restricted" security clearance by the U.S. Army.

Pigeons were considered an essential element of naval aviation communication when the first United States aircraft carrier USS *Langley* was commissioned on 20 March 1922, so the ship included a pigeon house on the stern. The pigeons were trained at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard while *Langley* was undergoing conversion. As long as the pigeons were released a few at a time for exercise, they returned to the ship; but when the whole flock was released while *Langley* was anchored off Tangier Island, the pigeons flew south and roosted in the cranes of the Norfolk shipyard. The pigeons never went to sea again.

During WW II, the United Kingdom used about 250,00 homing pigeons for many purposes, including communicating with those behind enemy lines. In WWI, Cher Ami (French for "dear friend") was used by the U.S. Army Signal Corps in France. She delivered a crucial message from the famous American "Lost Battalion" which was encircled by German troops during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive of October 1918. For her courageous service (while in flight, she was shot by enemy troops and severely wounded in this action), she was awarded the Croix de Guerre medal with a palm Oak Leaf Cluster. Upon her death a year later, Cher Ami was stuffed and is currently on display at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History. The Dickin Medal, the highest possible decoration for valor given to animals, was awarded to 32 pigeons, including the United States Army Pigeon Service's G.I. Joe after delivering a life-saving message during combat conditions in Italy in October 1943, and 32 pigeons were awarded for their services in saving human lives.

Cher Ami, the one-legged pigeon on display

The UK maintained the Air Ministry Pigeon Section during World War II and for a while thereafter. A Pigeon Policy Committee made decisions about the uses of pigeons in military contexts. The head of the section, Lea Rayner, reported in 1945 that pigeons could be trained to deliver small explosives or bioweapons to precise targets. The ideas were not taken up by the committee, and in 1948 the UK military stated that pigeons were of no further use. During the war, messenger pigeons could draw a special allowance of corn and seed, but as soon as the war ended this had been cancelled and anyone keeping pigeons would have to draw on their own personal rationed corn and seed to also feed the pigeons. However, the UK security service MI5 was still concerned about the use of pigeons by enemy forces. Until 1950, they arranged for 100 birds to be maintained by a civilian pigeon fancier in order to prepare for any eventuality. The Swiss army disbanded its Pigeon section in 1996.

These message-carrying pigeons served bravely during times of war. I hope this article helps to remind you of the contributions our feathered friends made under, at times, dangerous and harsh conditions. Thank you to all of you who served in the military and thank you to the lowly pigeon. Being a pigeon is not so bad after all! BUT being a statue in Central Park, now THAT is not so good.

For more information on war pigeons, here are some good reads:

Pigeons at War: How Avian Heroes Changed History, Connie Goldsmith

War Pigeons. Winged Couriers in the U.S. Military, Elizabeth G. Macalaster

More detailed information on all things pigeons can be found online on Wikipedia.

25th Anniversary Special

2024 marked the 25th anniversary of the Elm Fork Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists. All year we've been looking at milestones in the chapter's history through articles, illustrations, and the recollections of our members. We hope you enjoy this last 25th Anniversary Special article by Samra Bufkins, Class of 2023.

Class of 2020 Zooms into Initial Training

By Samra Bufkins

Four years after the pandemic lockdown, Zoom and Webex meetings are routine for most of us. But for many involved with the Elm Fork Chapter Texas Master Naturalist initial training class of 2020, it was an experience like no other, and a real shift in strategy for the training committee.

"We started planning in January, as we always do, and intended to put on the class in person like usual," said Training Committee Chair Elise Spain. "When the lockdown loomed in mid-March, we never accepted cancelling the class as an inevitability."

Crocheted Zoombee by Amy Crook

Early on the committee decided to limit the number of people in the class to sixteen, so that everybody, the speaker and the facilitators, could be visible on the screen at once. Class members dropped by Elise's house to pick up their course materials, and she took their individual photos out on her front porch.

"Regina Dale (training class co-chair) and Jim Gerber came up with the class name of Zoombees. We even had a "mascot" Elise shared. Class member Amy Crook (who went on to become 2020 Class Representative) crocheted a "Zoombee" based on the mascot designed by Regina Dale.

Jim, who managed the technology, acquired a video editing program for preparing and posting presenters' videos. Classes were held live but recorded using the Zoom record function, and when they downloaded the entire video so students could access the presentations, they realized the video downloads required 8–10 hours. Jim said this was necessary so they could edit out long pauses and class breaks. During the classes themselves, Jim monitored the feed with dual monitors, one showing the entire class, and the

Zoom Class Screen

Continued ...

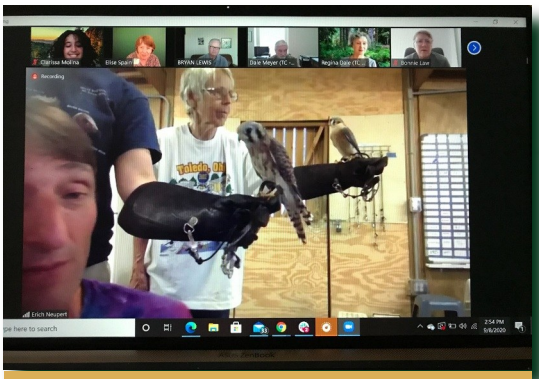
25th Anniversary Special

Class of 2020 Zooms into Initial Training (cont.)

other showing the presentation by the speaker–in order to be prepared for any technical issues. “Most of the presenters had never done Zoom,” Jim recalls. “We really had no idea if this was going to work.”

But class member Tammie Walters felt the entire program “…went off like they’d always done it this way, it was so professional.”

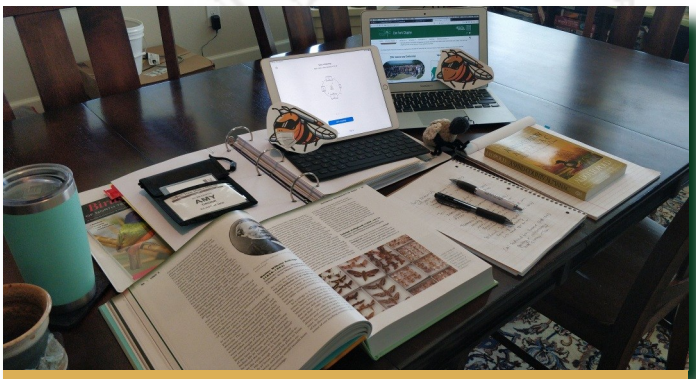
The only technical issues encountered were the usual situation with someone having trouble logging in, but that subsided as the process became routine. Tammie also remembers a power outage during a thunderstorm that affected some people.



Student view, from Clarissa Molina

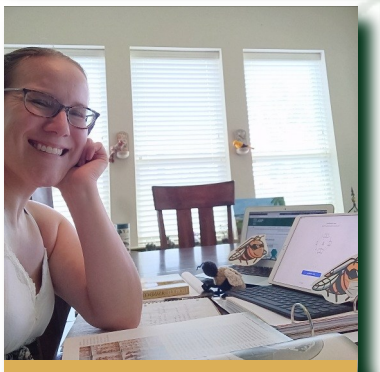
Elise feels weekly practice sessions with the speakers helped ensure things ran smoothly. Speakers could practice sharing their screens and getting used to being in an unfamiliar environment.

“You could see the effort that went into each class session,” said Clarissa Molina. “Being online wasn’t a subpar experience at all.” Clarissa was an undergraduate at UNT at the time, taking all her classes online during lockdown. “I had a visceral comparison to online courses at UNT, where it was obvious some professors hastily threw their class lectures online and left it at that. I never felt that way about the initial training class.”



Amy Crook's desk

Amy found the idea of remote learning appealing because of her work schedule. She set up her workspace and approached the program as if it was a college class. She admits, however, that there were a few aspects of an in-person class that she missed. “There wasn’t much chance of socializing during class breaks, and it would have been fun to have the camaraderie of eating lunch with my classmates,” Amy said. She complimented the training committee for going above and beyond to keep everyone involved.



Amy Crook at her desk

Clarissa recalled that people began logging in to Zoom at least 30 minutes before class started, to socialize and network, something the in-person classes do over coffee and snacks brought in each week. There were also opportunities to break into small groups on Zoom, as well as occasional face-to-face meetings with their mentor groups. “Mentor group meetings were fun, always outside, but we had to keep our distance,” Clarissa said. Other mentor groups met online, which quickly began to feel normal.

Continued ...

TEXAS Master Naturalist™ Elm Fork Chapter 1999-2024 Celebrating 25 YEARS

25th Anniversary Special

Class of 2020 Zooms into Initial Training (cont.)

Despite the pandemic, the TMN program still required the minimum of 60 hours of initial training, so every effort was made to preserve the integrity of the 72 hours of training content offered. Jim said they incorporated plenty of "stretch breaks" to ease the monotony of sitting in front of a computer screen for more than 6 hours at a time.

"The speakers were all very good at keeping everyone engaged," Tammie recalls. "They asked us questions, and we answered and asked questions using the chat function."

In the age of social distancing, field trips presented new challenges. The class was divided into two groups, remained socially distanced, and wore masks on their trips to Ray Roberts State Park, LISDOLA, Clear Creek and LLELA.

Bryan Lewis, incoming 2025 president and a 2020 class member, said "Our class didn't meet in person until our first field trip, at Ray Roberts State Park, Isle du Bois Unit, and we were extremely glad to see each other. We had to wear masks even though we were outside."

Elise recalls that "…we got to see everybody's face on screen each week. Sometimes in the classroom you only see the people sitting around you, or the back of their heads if you sit in back. So, we all knew each other pretty well, then when we got to the field trip, we were all wearing masks!"

LLELA Field Trip

Art in the park at Ray Roberts, from Clarissa

Zoombees were here

Ray Roberts Field Trip 2020, from Clarissa

Clarissa recalls telling one class member "I didn't expect you to be this tall!" Amy recalled immediately recognizing classmates by voice, since half their faces were covered by a mask.

Amy felt the field trips were more intimate than they would be with a large group. "It was a walk in the woods with 8 or 10 of your close friends."

With so many public spaces closed due to the pandemic, earning volunteer hours became a challenge for some class members, but people at the venues that were open were creative about finding things to do.

Continued ...

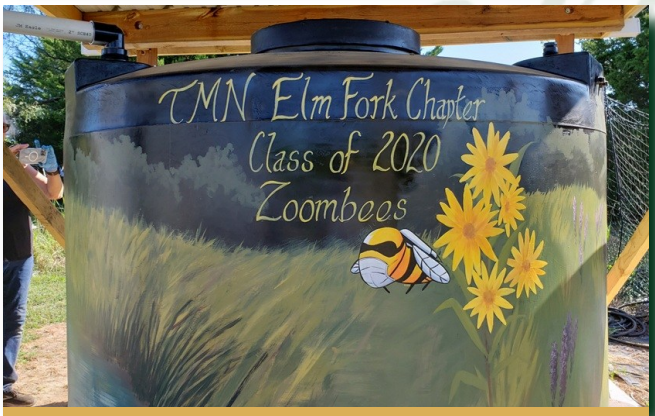
25th Anniversary Special

Class of 2020 Zooms into Initial Training (cont.)

Amy said the folks at Ray Roberts State Park were instrumental in producing projects for them to work on. She described how they spread out and walked to collect wildflower seeds to share with other state parks. She also cited the Virtual Volunteer Fair as inspiration for finding ways to use their newfound knowledge. "The peace and serenity of being out in nature, with other people, but still not too close, was invaluable during the stress of the pandemic" Amy recalled.

2020 class project–work crew

2020 class project–installing the roof



2020 class project–completed

Elise is immensely proud of the class, especially when it comes to their class project. A water tank had been donated and delivered to the Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center, but it needed a lot of work to install and be made functional for delivering irrigation water.

They worked with the Corps of Engineers to get the slab poured and built an 8' x 8' pole shed to cover the tank. The corrugated tin roof on the shed serves to collect rainwater, protect the cistern and inhibit algae growth. The class installed a gutter system to redirect rainwater runoff. The class also landscaped the immediate area of the tank and shed with native plants. Tammie Walters designed the painting on the tank, representing the ecosystems at CCNHC: the native prairie, the bottomland hardwood forest, and the wetland. The painted decoration includes a bee wearing a mask, the Zoombee.

"By the time work commenced on the project in early 2021, treatments for COVID were becoming available, as well as vaccines," Elise recalled. "This enabled the class members to work more closely together to accomplish their goal."

Amy said, "We could relax and really enjoy being together."

Tammie said the class far exceeded her expectations. "With the wealth of information the class provided, it didn't matter that it was all online. I had no idea what I was missing."

Clarissa agreed. "The entire committee, especially Elise, was always available to us."

Continued ...

25th Anniversary Special

Class of 2020 Zooms into Initial Training (cont.)

Tammie fondly recalls how passionate Regina was about TMN and the training class, and Amy agrees. “I’ve become committed to educating children because of this class and LISDOLA. Taking kids out into the woods and teaching them about nature might be my favorite thing.”

Jim feels the lessons learned during online training have been helpful. “Zoom increases the probability of getting speakers we might not otherwise be able to get for initial training, advanced training, and chapter meetings.”

Looking toward the future, all class members interviewed see the potential for growth in programs in the Elm Fork Chapter. Amy would like to see the chapter revisit projects that have been around for years and help them out by refreshing and revitalizing them. Clarissa and Amy both would like to see more public outreach and education through workshops for the community and more awareness of the TMN program at UNT.

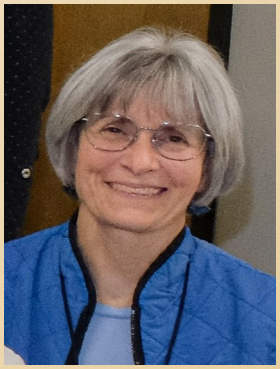
Of the 16 Zoombees of the class of 2020, 13 remain active today, proving that online programs can be uniting, not isolating. Clarissa feels one of the strengths of the Elm Fork Chapter is community building. “We do an excellent job of developing projects, and through those we can develop personal friendships that will last a lifetime. That sense of belonging, to nature, and to each other, is most rewarding.”

Graduation day for the 2020 training class

TEXAS Master Naturalist™ Elm Fork Chapter 1999-2024 Celebrating 25 YEARS

This Month's Contributors

Gale Bacon

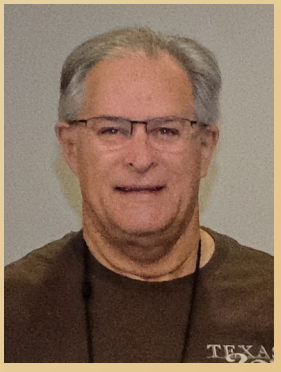


Becky Bertoni

Samra Bufkins

Jerry Hamby

Scott Kiester



Denver Kramer

Bryan Lewis

Marty Newman

Daniela Parker

Michele Rawleigh

Kathryn Wells

Fran Witte

Sue Yost

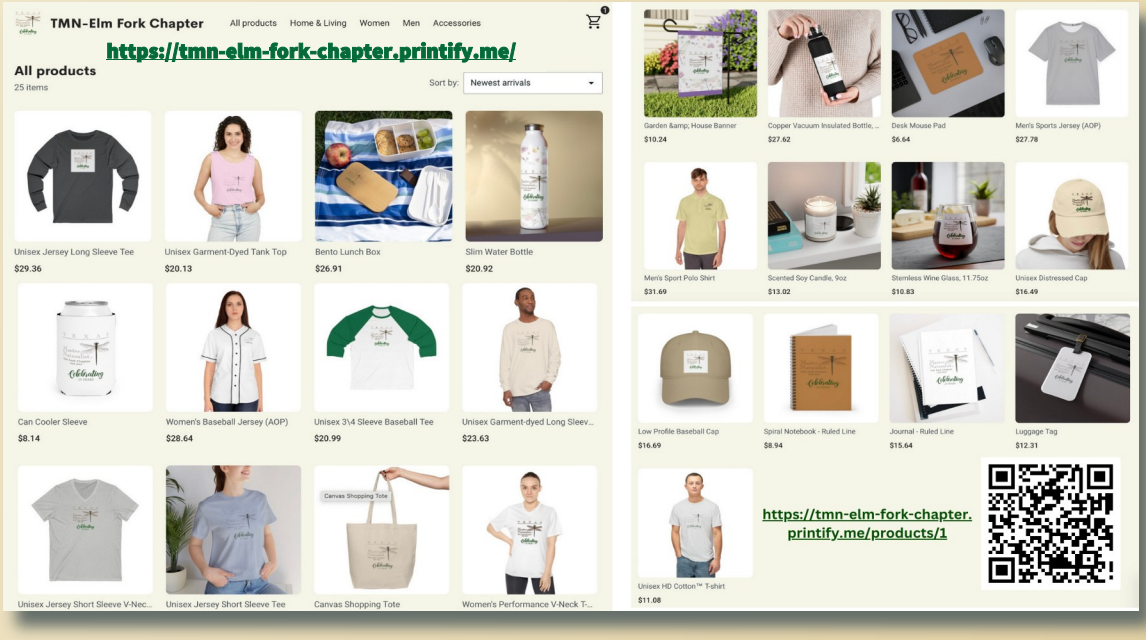
Betty Zajac

And a big thanks to Karen DeVinney, Samra Bufkins, and Mary Morrow for proofing!

Almost the Last Word

Funny Finds From Sue Yost!

Remember to visit the Elm Fork Chapter's online pop-up store.
Last chance for theTMN-EFC 25th Anniversary merchandise!



Almost the Last Word

Click below to Stream this month's issue of Naturalist News, our newsletter in audio format, featuring the voice of Teri Schnaubelt.

Stream The Naturalist News

WE ARE ON INSTAGRAM!

Please follow us and check out all the neat photos from our chapter.

Show your project workday on Instagram! Send one to three photos to socialmedia@efctmn.org.

Another funny find from Sue...

Thank you all for your amazing articles and photos for the *Naturalist News!*

I couldn't do it without you!

Please send submissions to:
newsletter@efctmn.org

January 2025 submissions are due by:
Wednesday, January 8th

Tammie Walters, Editor

Wishing you the happiest of holidays and a wonderful New Year!

Who We Are

Texas Master Naturalist–Elm Fork Chapter
https://txmn.org/elmfork/

OFFICERS

President – Kathryn Wells
Vice President – Bryan Lewis
Treasurer – Mike Hatch
Secretary – Jane Duke

BOARD POSITIONS

Immediate Past President – Jan Deatherage
Member-at-Large – Eric Houston

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Membership – Sharon Betty
VMS – Jim Gerber
Initial Training – Elise Spain
Communications – Fran Witte
Volunteer Service Projects – Brenda Martin
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.

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