

T E X A S

Master  
Naturalist™  
Elm Fork Chapter



# *Naturalist News*

February 2025 Volume 25, Issue 2



Looking up from the Lost Pines Trail, Ray Roberts Lake State Park, Isle Du Bois, by Marissa Shaw

We're on the Web [www.txmn.org/elmfork](http://www.txmn.org/elmfork)

On Facebook: [www.facebook.com/TexasMasterNaturalistElmFork/](https://www.facebook.com/TexasMasterNaturalistElmFork/)



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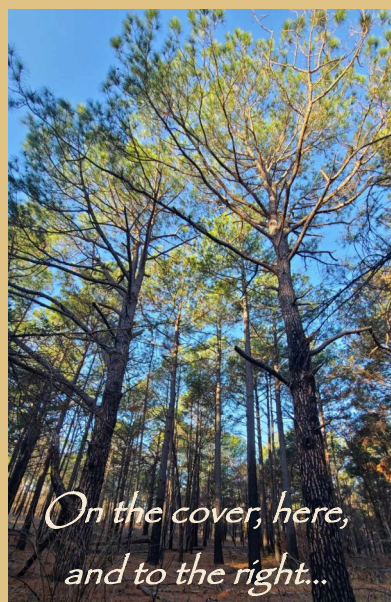
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# Naturalist News

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Known at Ray Roberts Lake as the Lost Pines, these pines were first planted about 1950 and they have done very well.

From [www.cityofdenton.com](http://www.cityofdenton.com)



Loblolly Pine (*Pinus taeda*), by Marissa Shaw

# Announcements

## Denton Becomes a Texas Bird City

From Clay Thurmond

After several years of applications and work, Denton finally became recognized as Bird City by Bird City, Texas, a cooperative program between Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas Audubon and applicant municipalities. The City of Denton Environmental Services and Sustainability Department led the effort with the support of UNT, TWU, Texas Master Naturalist Elm Fork Chapter, Denton Parks and Recreation, Denton Municipal Electric, Animal Services, and Denton Public Libraries. Clear Creek helped significantly through educational events and the bird walks.

One of the requisites for certification is controlling the feral cat population, a task tantamount to controlling feral hogs. But did you know that Denton already had a leash ordinance for cats even before Bird City? Yep. Animal Services has been working on this for a long time and will continue to do so. UNT's Bird Campus Committee also helped in tabling at events and educating on the impact of urban lighting on bird migration, complete with examples of bird strike casualties from around campus.

On the Elm Fork Chapter side, Scott Kiester and Clay were on the Denton Bird City citizens committee. Karen McGraw spoke on Lights Out and Scott offered several talks. Scott's 10 year service in leading bird walks gave some weight to ongoing public outreach which is a factor in initial and re-certification.

Thanks and congratulations to all who worked to attain the Bird City designation. Denton joins Dallas and Cedar Hill as 1 of 15 municipalities in Texas with that designation.



**BIRD  
CITY**  
**T E X A S**

<https://tpwd.texas.gov/wildlife/birding/bird-city-texas>



# *What Happens Next*



Special Chapter Meeting  
February 20<sup>th</sup>  
Denton County  
Administrative Courthouse  
2020 Room



9:00 - 9:30: Social Time

9:30 - 10:15 (or so): Brief Business  
& Other Updates

10:30 (or so):

2024 Awards Presentations



The 12 awards to be presented will represent the outstanding productivity of the Elm Fork Chapter in support of the Texas Master Naturalist mission. Please attend if you can, to congratulate the recipients and to begin looking forward to another productive year.

*We hope to see you all there.*



# Awards and Recognition

## December 2024 & January 2025

### Initial Certifications

Sherry Smith  
Janay Tieken

Class of 2024  
Class of 2024



### 2024 Recertifications

Janet Gershenfeld  
Michael Martin  
Katherine Vargas

Class of 2005  
Class of 2023  
Class of 2022



### 2025 Recertifications

Pam Bennet  
Samra (Sam) Bufkins  
Andrea Dixon  
David Jones  
Scott Kiester  
Mary Morrow  
Carl Patrick

Class of 2019  
Class of 2023  
Class of 2023  
Class of 2019  
Class of 2003  
Class of 2014  
Class of 2010



### 8000 Hour Milestone

Scott Kiester Class of 2003





# *Field Notes in Focus*



Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) by Jonathan Reynolds



# *Inside Outside News*

## Approved AT



## Texas Chapter of The Wildlife Society's 2025 Annual Conference

**February 19-21, 2025**

**Embassy Suites, Denton, TX**

The conference will have 12 workshops on a variety of topics, as well as poster sessions presented by students and technical sessions from wildlife professionals,

Attendees claiming AT need to list AT by day along with the name of the presentations they attend. Providing support would be advisory and outreach P070510:PO.

More information and registration can be found at:  
<https://tctws.org/annual-meeting-2/annual-meeting/>



# Inside Outside News

## Approved AT

### National Panel Discussion: "Bees Beyond Honey: Understanding Native and Managed Pollinators"

Thursday, February 20<sup>th</sup>  
6:00 pm to 7:00 pm

All are welcome to join this free virtual panel discussion exploring the vital roles of native, solitary, and honeybees in pollination and biodiversity. Featuring experts Sam Droege (USGS), Dave Hunter (Crown Bees), and Dr. Lora Morandin (Pollinator Partnership), this event will discuss into the challenges pollinators face, the balance between managed and wild bees, and actionable ways to support all pollinators.

Gain insights from over 90 years of combined experience and learn how to advocate for pollinator habitats through planting native species, participating in community science, and adopting responsible management practices.

Register here:

[Bees Beyond Honey: Understanding Native and Managed Pollinators](#)



### Spring Green Up

Wednesday, March 19<sup>th</sup>  
10:00 am - 11:30 am

Join us on Zoom for "Spring Green Up". We'll have 5 short presentations on how plants green up and will give away lots of DOOR PRIZES!

- How Soil Temperature Dictates Plant Physiological Functions
- How A Grass Grows
- How A Forb Grows
- How a Brush Plant Grows
- What Makes a Plant an Early successional Species

You must register to receive the Zoom link the day before. It's FREE!

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PPGreenUP>



# *Inside Outside News*

## Approved AT



### **FW-NPAT: How a Grant Expedited Invasive Species Control, Community Partnership, and Interns**

**Thursday, March 13, 2025 • 6:30 PM - 8:30 PM**  
**UNT Health Science Center**  
**Fort Worth, TX 76107**

**Presenter:** Michelle Villafranca, City of Fort Worth Park & Recreation Department

For a decade, the City of Fort Worth Park and Recreation Department partnered with the Friends of Tandy Hills Natural Area to eradicate privet, a non-Indigenous shrub, which crowds out biodiversity in one of the last remaining examples of Fort Worth prairie habitat in the city. Staff and volunteers spent thousands of hours manually removing privet on the 200-acre site. Unfortunately, privet is very aggressive and manual removal is a slow, labor-intensive approach. In 2023, the city had a rare opportunity to tackle privet and other improvements simultaneously when it received a \$150,000 grant from the Conservation and Environment Fund at North Texas Community Foundation. The grant enabled the city to expedite 43 acres of privet removal through a combination of aggressive tactics including forestry mulching, targeted herbicide and eventually prescribed burns, while meeting other long-term partnership goals to build trails, install interpretive signage and hire natural resource interns. Many challenges, lessons learned and triumphs unfurled while saving a prairie!

**Register Here:** <https://www.tickettailor.com/events/npatfortworthchapter/1514386>

# *Inside Outside News*

## Approved AT & Volunteer Opportunity



## **ROOTS FOR WINGS WORKSHOP**

**For Lewisville Residents only:**

**A Roots for Wings Workshop is being offered on**

**Saturday, March 1st, 9:00 am-1:00 pm**

**Free to Lewisville Residents**

**For more information and to register:**

**[https://app.amilia.com/store/en/lewisville-tx/api/Activity/  
Detail?activityId=x096ABa&date=2025-03-  
01&view=month&scrollToCalendar=false](https://app.amilia.com/store/en/lewisville-tx/api/Activity/Detail?activityId=x096ABa&date=2025-03-01&view=month&scrollToCalendar=false)**



# Inside Outside News

## Volunteer Opportunity



### Tree Planting - Memorial Park at Thrive

Saturday, March 15<sup>th</sup>

8:00 am - 11:30 am

Memorial Park, 1950 S. Valley Pkwy  
Lewisville 75067

Join us for a tree-planting event at Memorial Park on Saturday, March 15, 2025! As part of the City of Lewisville's Monthly Community Beautification Events, this volunteer effort will help enhance the park's beauty and environmental health for generations to come. No experience is necessary—just bring your enthusiasm! All tools and supplies will be provided. Meet us at Memorial Park at 8 a.m. to make a lasting impact on our community. Let's plant a greener future together! Stay for as little or as long as you can.

Click here to register: <https://app.amilia.com/store/en/lewisville-tx/api/Activity/Detail?activityId=xjvYPo0>

Contact Eric D'Antonio for more information: [edantonio@cityoflewisville.com](mailto:edantonio@cityoflewisville.com)



### 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

### Nature Walk in the LBJ National Grassland

Wednesday, April 16, 2025, 9:00 a.m. – noon

Sam Kieschnick, Mary Curry, and LBJ NG volunteers will lead participants across an open prairie, looking for native wildflowers.

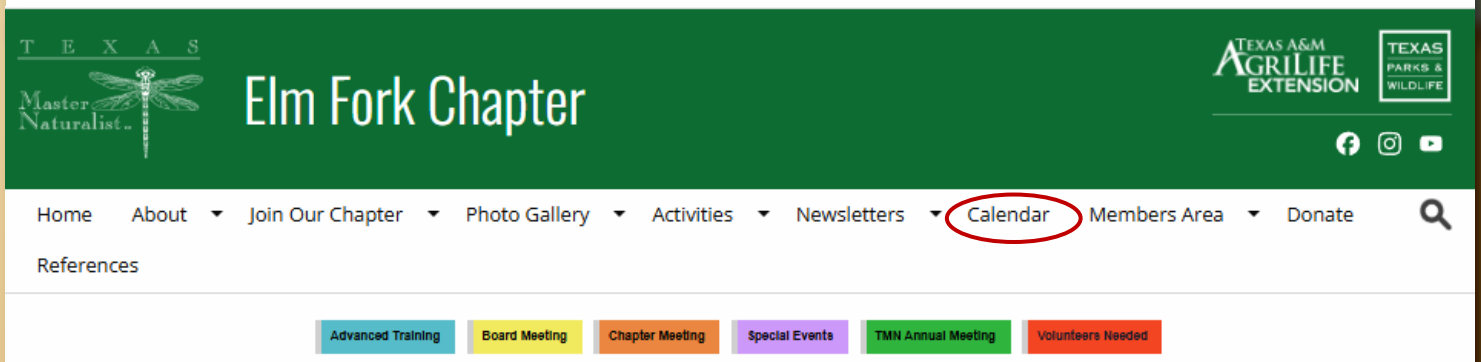
Expect a moderate-level hike of up to 2.5 miles.

Participation will be limited to 100 people, and registration will be available through SignUp Genius.

Participants may claim volunteer service hours (through iNaturalist) or project-specific advanced training.

*SignUp Genius for this event is now available on the calendar.*

*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

## The Texas Native Plant Art Exhibition From Marilyn Blanton

The Texas Native Plant Art Exhibition has moved to the Elm Fork Education Center at UNT. The display there features all of the award-winning artwork arranged by schools. The display will be at the center through February before going to Denton's three public libraries in March.

The Denton Senior Center is hosting a second display this month. The artwork they are showcasing is artwork that has not been displayed before since it's not the artwork that received ribbons. The award-winning artwork was displayed at the Denton Senior Center in November. They enjoyed it so much that they asked for another display! They said the artwork brightens up the center.





# Projects in the Community

## *Native Prairie Restoration with TCA at Green Acres Farm Memorial Park*

From Olivia Reese

On January 18th, 18 volunteers from the Green Acres crew (11) and Texas Conservation Alliance (7) collaborated on a native plant project at Green Acres Farm Memorial Park. The project was to suppress weeds growing around the little bluestem at Green Acres. We are hoping the little bluestem will thrive this year after struggling the year before.

The site was prepared by mowing and trimming before mulching the native little bluestem. Despite the event being scheduled from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM, several members of the team continued working until 1:00 PM. This was a committed group! Volunteers brought essential equipment including newspaper, wagons, mower trailers, and a large water tank to support the project's success. This effort, in addition to all of the manual labor, ensured as much coverage as possible.



Little bluestem project



Monica going for more water



Texas Conservation Alliance and Green Acres crew



# Projects in the Community

## Ask Us About the Ryan Rain Garden!

From Elise Spain

**The Rain Garden Pilot Project for Ryan High School (P241115)** was suggested to us last year by Dr. Kelly Albus from AgriLife and Texas Water Resources Institute. With funding from National Geographic, she and a team developed a curriculum called Classroom to Community, teaching students why and how to build rain gardens and tell the community about it. The studies were piloted at Ryan High School in Denton beginning last fall, and that's when planning began.

Planning took a big step forward recently when representatives from the Denton ISD Maintenance Team, Ryan High School Administrators and Teachers, AgriLife and TWRI staff, and TMN-EFC volunteers met to discuss the project. Now the visible work is about to begin!

The 2024 Training Class caught Kelly's enthusiasm for this project and for working with the students on the Green Team at Ryan High School. They selected the Ryan Rain Garden as the 2024 Class Project. We'll be following their progress over the next few months.



Dr. Kelly Albus planting the first flag marking the Ryan Rain Garden area on February 5.



Katey Pirot, 2024 Class Project Manager, helped Kelly Albus and Tonya McDaniel with flags. Tonya teaches Advanced Placement Environmental Science, Biology, and Aquatic Science and is the Ryan High School Green Team Sponsor. Tonya recently moved her TMN membership from NTMN to TMN-EFC!

### Tentative dates (weather permitting):

- March 19 or 20 - DISD will use equipment to remove 460 square feet of grass, dig an 8' deep garden area and create berms.
- March 21 - All new materials will be delivered.
- March 22 - Garden soil will be added and tilled, rocks and water measurement equipment placed, plants planted and watered, mulch placed. Plants will be monitored and watered as needed through the summer.
- Late April (date tbd) - Come and see! There will be a Big Reveal for the community with table exhibits.

*Continued on next page...*





## Ask Us About the Ryan Rain Garden! (cont.)

Dr. Kelly Albus is presenting information on the Rain Garden Project on Zoom, Tuesday, February 18 (see the calendar for details). Also, there will be a Project meeting immediately following the February chapter meeting. Everyone is welcome to join the Class of 2024 for these events.



Tonya McDaniel is shown here (center front) with some of the students who helped place the flags and will help with every part of the building process. Then they will observe, measure, and document changes. Ryan staff are describing this as a long-term citizen science project for DISD students and the community.



# Features

## *The Greater Roadrunner - TMN Recertification Pin 2025*

By John Thomlinson



Greater Roadrunner at Post Oak Park in Flower Mound., by John Thomlinson

The TMN recertification pin for 2025 is the Greater Roadrunner, the fourth bird to be so honored. Among the many birds that could have been chosen, this one is arguably the most charismatic. Roadrunners are instantly recognizable, and they capture the imagination - there is a reason Warner Brothers had one as Wile E. Coyote's nemesis. They are loud, brash, and pretty much unafraid of humans or anything else. For example, they are known to predate upon the subject of last year's pin, the Western Diamondback.

While the Greater Roadrunner is mostly associated with the desert southwest, they range from southern Mexico north to about 36° 30' North latitude, west to the Pacific coast and east almost to the Mississippi. They are found throughout Texas in a range of habitats, mainly scrubby open country, but also in riparian zones, woodlands, and suburban areas. The last one I saw was in the parking lot of a medical facility on Long Prairie Road in Flower Mound, dodging cars and orthopedic patients.

Its scientific name is *Geococcyx californianus*, meaning Californian ground-cuckoo. There is one other species in the genus, the Lesser Roadrunner (*G. velox*) found in Central America and Mexico, and 11 species in the ground-cuckoo subfamily Neomorphinae, all found in the New World. A little-known fun fact: the ground-cuckoos contain the only brood-parasite cuckoos in the Americas - the more typical arboreal cuckoos all build their own nests (unlike the famous Common Cuckoo of the old world). Vernacular names include Chaparral Cock and Snake-killer. Many myths exist about Roadrunners, some of which have a grain of truth. One favorite is that they will find a sleeping rattlesnake and construct a corral of cactus spines around it, then aggravate it, causing it to impale itself on the spines. Part of the folklore about this species is, I'm sure, brought about by its rather odd appearance. The great ornithologist Elliott Coues<sup>1</sup> described them as "cuckoos compounded of a chicken and a magpie." Another field ornithologist, J. L. Sloanaker<sup>1</sup>, wrote: "Try and think of a long striped snake on two legs, a feather duster on his head and another trailing behind."



## *The Greater Roadrunner (cont.)*

Roadrunners have a fascinating life history. They will eat almost any animal they can catch, and they will smash larger prey items against rocks to break up the bones to make them easier to swallow. They have been observed jumping up to catch birds in flight. They kill rattlesnakes by repeatedly pecking them on the head, which indicates they are quite quick on their feet. In fact, they have been observed running at up to 26 mph, making them the fastest-running flying bird (the large flightless ratites are faster - with much longer legs). They prefer running to flying, though they will take flight to avoid predators. They mate for life, and both parents contribute to incubating eggs and raising young. They have a “broken-leg” display to distract predators from the nest. Roadrunners can go hypothermic at night and then raise their body temperature by sunning<sup>2</sup> - they have a patch of black skin in the middle of the back which they expose towards the morning sun.

All in all, the Greater Roadrunner is a great choice for the recertification pin. They are fun to watch and reasonably easy to find, but not so easy they become commonplace, and there is a sizeable folklore associated with them. Looking over the subjects of past years' pins, birds are ahead of mammals by one, but it is probably too much to hope that the 2026 pin will feature the coyote. Beep beep!

### References

1. Bent A.C. 1989. *Life Histories of North American Cuckoos, Goatsuckers, Hummingbirds, and Their Allies*. Dover, New York, NY, USA. Page 37.
2. Ohmart RD, Lasiewski RC. 1971. Roadrunners: energy conservation by hypothermia and absorption of sunlight. *Science* 172:67-69. DOI: 10.1126/science.172.3978.67





## Features

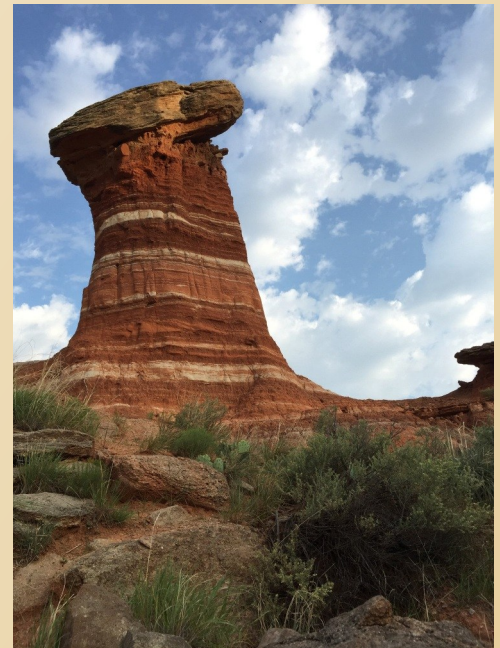
### Hoodoos, Peaks, and Pinnacles— Sacred Rocks of Palo Duro Canyon

By Jerry Hamby

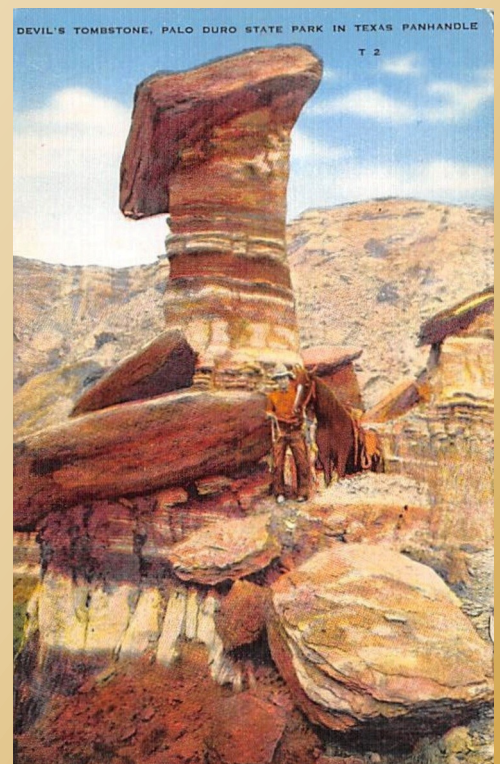
Long before I learned the word “hoodoo,” I knew what hoodoos were. Exploring Palo Duro Canyon State Park from the time I was a teenager, I had occasionally seen columns of soft red sandstone and white gypsum, each capped with hard sandstone that held the delicate structure in place. The term hoodoo comes from “oo’doo,” a Southern Paiute word meaning something that inspires fear or awe. Although they have never scared me, hoodoos continue to fill me with awe as I marvel at their physics and mystery. Over the years I discovered other kinds of rock formations in Palo Duro Canyon as well, most often while hiking with my buddy Rick Smith, whom I met at West Texas State University, where we were completing graduate degrees in English. During those years at WTSU and beyond, we searched the canyon for hoodoos, sometimes obsessively so.

In 2006, Rick and I discovered the Red Star Hoodoo about a mile down the Givens, Spicer, Lowry (GSL) Trail. It happened during one of the many reunion hikes we made after graduate school. I have returned to see Red Star Hoodoo, which is named after the ridge on which it sits, several times since, most recently to photograph it in the early morning light. The formation is a classic pedestal rock with one end of the capstone pulling away from the column and tipping toward the sky, seemingly defying gravity. Eventually, the capstone will break free and the column will disappear. Like most rock formations in Palo Duro Canyon, Red Star Hoodoo continues to be shaped by weathering and erosion.

The GSL Trail winds around Timber Mesa and cuts through Rustlers Draw before heading across Sunday Flats. Before the trail makes a sharp turn to the south, another hoodoo, Devil's Tombstone, is visible in the distance. This formation has a narrower column than Red Star Hoodoo, and its capstone is even more precariously balanced. Rick and I first learned about Devil's Tombstone while rifling through the archives of the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum in Canyon. It was there that we saw a hand-tinted photo of a cowboy and his horse standing at the base of the hoodoo. Like similar postcards of the 1940s, the romantic image was designed to lure visitors to the new state park, “The Grand Canyon of Texas,” as it was dubbed. One hundred twenty miles long and up to 800 feet deep, Palo Duro is the second largest canyon in the United States.



Red Star Hoodoo



1940s postcard of  
Devil's Tombstone





## Hoodoos, Peaks, and Pinnacles (*cont.*)

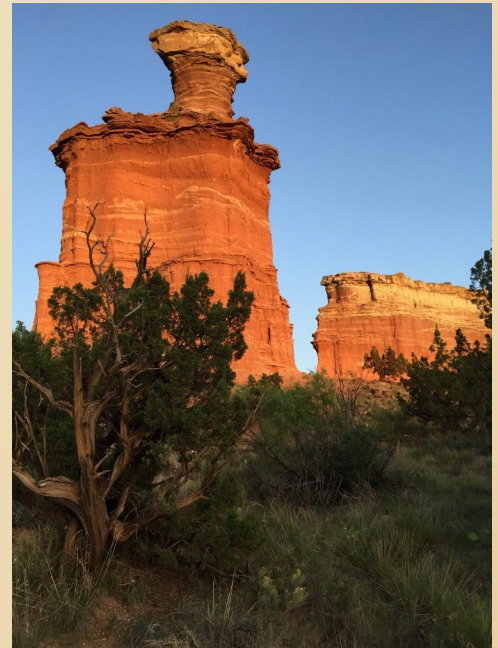
The GSL Trail is the longer of two routes that lead to the most famous rock formation in Palo Duro Canyon, The Lighthouse. While most people refer to it as a hoodoo, others insist that The Lighthouse is a pinnacle, the difference being that hoodoos are typically more uniformly thin, whereas pinnacles are wider at the base.

Whatever one calls it,

The Lighthouse, which is 312 feet tall, has earned its status as the symbol of Palo Duro Canyon. It is easily the most photographed feature in the park, but lurking in the background is an equally imposing formation called Castle Peak. It is of a similar height and depth but stretches much wider along its base. Both formations are joined by a land bridge that accentuates the dramatic tableau.



The author below The Lighthouse and Castle Peak, 2016 (photo by Don Hamby)



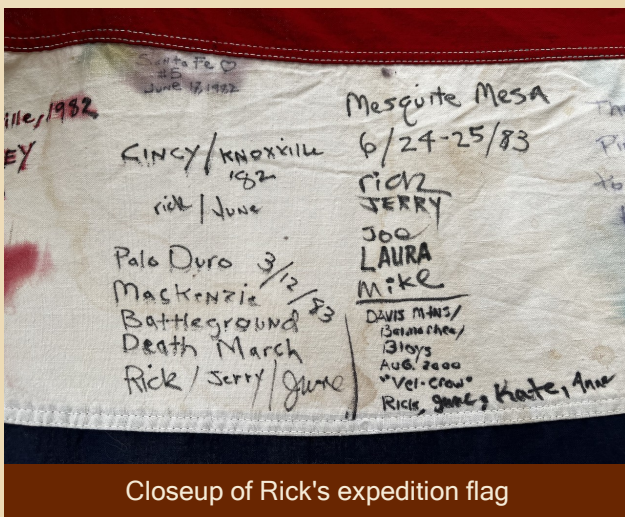
The Lighthouse and Castle Peak at sunset



Undated photo of Cathedral Peak

The most spectacular formation I have seen in Palo Duro, Cathedral Peak, is one I discovered by chance during a daylong hike to a historic site. The Battle of Palo Duro Canyon was a turning point in the 1874-1875 Red River War, a military campaign that displaced Comanche, Kiowa, Southern Cheyenne, and Arapaho tribes from the Southern Plains and drove them to reservations in Indian Territory. On September 28, 1874, General Ranald S. Mackenzie's men raided the Indian camp, burned their belongings, and captured and killed up to 2,000 of their horses. Most of the Indians returned to the Fort Sill reservation (near what is now Lawton, Oklahoma). A Texas Historical Marker at the south end of the state park chronicles the battle, noting that four Native Americans (and no cavalry soldiers) died in the battle.

The battle site is located between the state park and State Highway 207, which crosses the canyon near the tiny town of Wayside. On March 12, 1983, Rick and his wife, June, hiked with me to the battlefield. I know the date because Rick brought along an expedition flag that we signed after reaching what we estimated to be the site of the Indian camp. The hike turned into a twelve-mile excursion, roundtrip. It was an exhausting experience in which we slogged through sand while following the Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River. The words "Mackenzie Battleground Death March" are written on Rick's flag above our names



Closeup of Rick's expedition flag





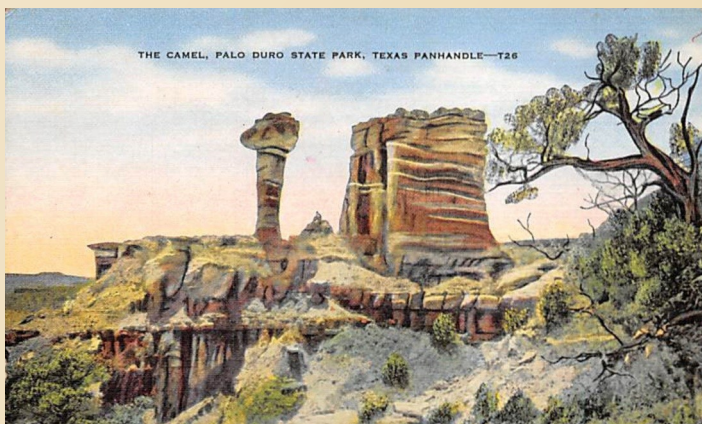
## Hoodoos, Peaks, and Pinnacles (*cont.*)



Cathedral Peak (photo by Jim Womack)

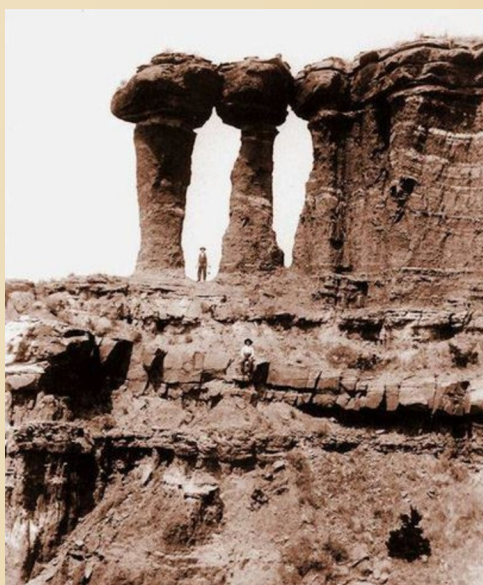
and the date. While I admit to having a history of dragging friends on grueling hikes, I found this experience to be exhilarating, and the highlight was discovering Cathedral Peak.

Unlike rock formations I had previously encountered, Cathedral Peak was enormous, and the impact of seeing it was all the greater because, until we rounded a bend in the river, it was hidden from view. The pyramid-shaped peak sits on a ridge above the riverbed, near the bottom of the canyon, and stretches wider than its height of more than 300 feet. The soft sandstone tip is completely exposed, yet the peak has been surprisingly resistant to erosion. Photos from nearly 100 years ago, some of which refer to the formation as “Giant’s Tower,” look remarkably similar to recent ones. Unfortunately, neither Rick, June, nor I packed a camera to record our excursion, but I recently tracked down a backcountry hiker, Jim Womack, who generously allowed me to share one of his photos of Cathedral Peak.



1940s postcard of The Kneeling Camel

The most extensive backcountry adventure that Rick and I had began shortly after we hiked to Cathedral Peak and the battleground site. For more than a month, we searched for a hoodoo named The Kneeling Camel. In the 1930s and 1940s, it was described in newspaper articles and appeared in some of the earliest publicity for Palo Duro Canyon State Park. Its unusual profile was captured in postcards and a fanciful treasure map; it was even emblazoned on a commemorative plate. The publicity was part of a campaign to have Palo Duro Canyon developed into a million-acre “National Park of the Plains,” but the initiative lacked the necessary funding and support. It is notable that The Kneeling Camel has never been accessible to the public.



1930s photo of The Kneeling Camel (by R.V. Davis)

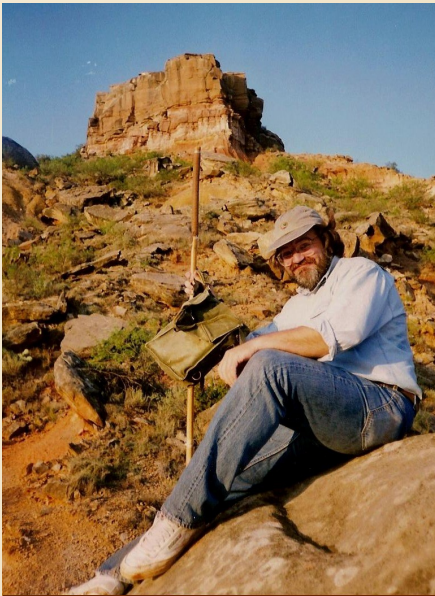
When Rick and I looked for The Kneeling Camel, we knew only that it was located just below the north rim of Cita Canyon, an area that covered several miles. Reaching Cita Canyon required us to hike completely off trail, climbing from the canyon floor to the rim and across a flat expanse called Mesquite Park. Our only navigational tools were a compass and a U.S. Geological Survey map, the latter of which we marked to keep track of where we hiked. Our greatest challenge was finding a reliable route to Mesquite Park, but we finally settled on an abandoned horse trail.

For each outing we allowed two hours to reach Mesquite Park and up to an hour to get to Cita Canyon, where we resumed the search. Of course, the return hike took almost as long, excluding the time devoted to walking along the canyon rim. In other words, every search for The Kneeling Camel turned into an all-day event.





## Hoodoos, Peaks, and Pinnacles (*cont.*)



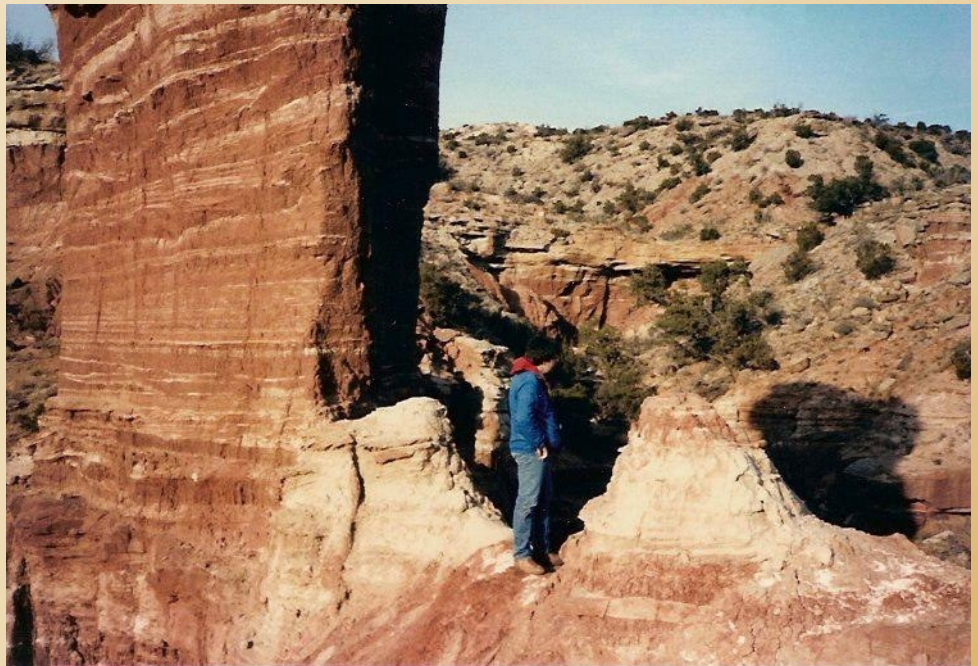
Rick below Mesquite Park, 1996

Six weeks after we began looking for it, Rick and I found The Kneeling Camel, but it looked dramatically different than it did in the photographs. The earliest newspaper image, taken by R.V. Davis, shows his employee Dusty Brown standing between columns of what was a three-section hoodoo, and another man is sitting on an outcropping below. In subsequent photos the middle column was gone, and the last known picture that includes the neck was snapped in 1954. Rick and I had already been warned by a park ranger that only the camel's hump remained. Nevertheless, when we spotted what remained of the formation, there was no doubt that it was indeed The Kneeling Camel. From every angle it matched the photos we had scrutinized in the museum archives, and while the neck and the middle column were gone, the stumps, four feet tall, were still evident.

On that late spring day in 1983, I remembered to pack a camera, so several photographs document the event, most of them showing Rick standing above or next to The Kneeling Camel. I even snapped pictures of cairns and permanent landmarks on the return route, assuming we would come back to see The Kneeling Camel again, but we never did. I did, however, continue to explore Mesquite Park, most recently in 2005 when my wife Susan and I returned to find a more perilous and overgrown trail. I now know the GPS coordinates of the Kneeling Camel, but Mesquite Park, Cita Canyon, and other sections of the state park have been designated as restricted areas.



The Kneeling Camel, 1983



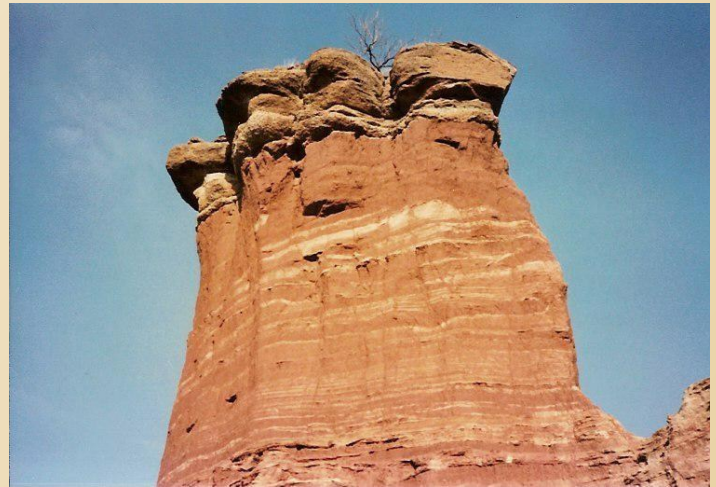
Rick standing between Kneeling Camel hoodoo stumps, 1983





## Hoodoos, Peaks, and Pinnacles *(cont.)*

Rick did not bring his expedition flag on the day he and I found The Kneeling Camel, but I continued to sign it for the next twenty years as we hiked in state and national parks all over Texas—from Big Bend to Fort Davis, Seminole Canyon to Lost Maples, and back to Palo Duro Canyon. The last time I saw Rick's expedition flag was at a memorial service in 2022, a few months after he passed away at the age of 67. Among the photographs, camping gear, and other objects associated with Rick's life was an enormous laminated map of Texas. Everyone in attendance was encouraged to sign their name on a location where they had met or shared an adventure. Of course, right below the Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River, where Palo Duro Canyon was spelled out in blue letters, I signed my name one last time.



Closeup of The Kneeling Camel, 1983



Rick above The Kneeling Camel, 1983

*All photographs by Jerry Hamby,  
except those noted*



Rick's expedition flag

# Tweet of the Month

By Sue Yost, class of 2017

## For the LOVE of Birds February is National Bird Feeding Month



On February 23, 1994, Congressman John Porter (R-IL) proclaimed February as National Bird-Feeding Month when he read a resolution into the Congressional Record. Below is the formal resolution that he read. (Courtesy of Wikipedia)

*"Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize February, one of the most difficult months in the United States for wild birds, as National Bird-Feeding Month. During this month, individuals are encouraged to provide food, water, and shelter to help wild birds survive. This assistance benefits the environment by supplementing the wild bird's natural diet of weed seeds and insects. Currently, one-third of the U.S. adult population feeds wild birds in their backyards.*

*In addition, Mr. Speaker, backyard bird feeding is an entertaining, educational, and inexpensive pastime enjoyed by children and adults. Bird feeding provides a needed break from today's frantic lifestyles. Adults enjoy the relaxation and peacefulness afforded by watching birds -- nature serves to relieve the stress and can get one's day going on a tranquil note.*

*Young children are naturally drawn to the activities involved in feeding wild birds, which can serve as excellent educational tools. Children can identify different species of birds with a field guide and can learn about the birds' feeding and living habits. These observations can then provide excellent research opportunities for school projects and reports.*

*Feeding wild birds in the backyard is an easy hobby to start and need not overtax the family budget. It can be as simple as mounting a single feeder outside a window and filling it with bird seed mix. For many people, the hobby progresses from there. They discover the relationship between the type and location of feeders, and the seeds offered in them, and the number and varieties of birds attracted. Parents can challenge an inquisitive child's mind as they explore together these factors in trying to encourage visits by their favorite birds."*

Feeding the birds is good for the birds but also good for the human. It can improve your mental health. We all know that just being outside, in nature, is healthy. When you add watching and listening to the birds, it makes nature even better. It makes it better for your state of mind, your mood, even your blood pressure!





## Tweet of the Month (cont.)

In 2019, bird watching was studied by the American Psychiatric Institute. Their research found that about 7 out of 10 people experienced a change in their mental health after bird feeding for only once a week. This statistic suggests that even 70% of people who engage with birds in their yard will experience a mental health change.

The intimacy of being in nature and having a careful and protective connection with the birds can make all the difference in your day. You will start to care for the birds and see them as friends in your life. Spending time outside for 10 minutes a day has been proven to boost serotonin and dopamine levels (American Psychiatric Institute).

Bird watching is not just a hobby for enthusiastic ornithologists; it's an activity that offers numerous benefits for people of all ages. Young or old. In particular, seniors can find great joy and fulfillment in bird watching. The calming presence of nature, the thrill of spotting a new bird and the opportunity for social engagement make it a perfect pastime for older adults. Kinda like being a master naturalist!

Here Are the 10 Benefits of Bird Watching for Seniors (from alzheimerslab.com):

1. Connecting with Nature: In today's fast-paced world, it's easy to feel disconnected from nature. Bird watching provides seniors with an opportunity to immerse themselves in the beauty and tranquility of the natural world. Imagine sitting on a park bench, observing a colorful cardinal perched on a branch, or listening to the melodious chirping of finches. Such moments can be incredibly peaceful and grounding, offering a much-needed respite from the daily hustle and bustle.
2. Physical Activity: Bird watching may not require intense physical exertion, but it encourages seniors to get outdoors and engage in gentle exercise. Walking along nature trails or strolling through parks in search of birds provides a low-impact form of exercise that benefits cardiovascular health, joint flexibility, and overall well-being. It's a great way to stay active without putting excessive strain on the body.
3. Mental Stimulation: Identifying and observing different bird species can be a mentally stimulating activity. Seniors must sharpen their observation skills, pay attention to subtle details, and learn to recognize distinct behaviors. This mental exercise helps keep cognitive abilities sharp and improves memory retention. Additionally, the challenge of identifying new species keeps the mind active and curious, fostering a sense of continuous learning.
4. Stress Relief: Life can become stressful as we age, with its share of worries and anxieties. Bird watching provides a calming escape from these everyday pressures. The serenity of nature combined with the excitement of spotting and observing birds can help seniors relax and unwind. Gazing at the graceful flight patterns of birds or listening to their soothing calls can have a profound effect on reducing stress levels and promoting a sense of inner peace.
5. Social Interaction: Bird watching is a wonderful opportunity for seniors to connect with like-minded individuals and build new friendships. Joining local birding clubs or attending group outings introduces seniors to a vibrant community of fellow enthusiasts. Engaging in discussions about bird species, sharing experiences, and participating in group activities create a sense of belonging and foster social connections that are vital for mental and emotional well-being.
6. Sense of Accomplishment: Spotting a rare or elusive bird can evoke a tremendous sense of accomplishment. Seniors can set personal goals, such as observing a particular species or maintaining a bird-watching journal. Achieving these goals provides a boost of self-esteem and a sense of purpose. The thrill of successfully identifying and documenting a unique bird sighting can bring immense joy and a feeling of achievement that transcends age.





## Tweet of the Month (cont.)

7. Enhancing Patience: Bird watching teaches patience, an invaluable quality that often grows with age. It takes time and attentiveness to spot birds and understand their behaviors. Sitting quietly in nature, waiting for that perfect moment to observe a particular species, cultivates patience and mindfulness. Seniors can embrace this slow-paced activity as an opportunity to appreciate the present moment and develop a greater sense of tranquility.

8. Stimulating Creativity: Birds are renowned for their vibrant plumage, intricate songs, and captivating behaviors. Observing these natural wonders can inspire seniors' creativity. The beauty of a painted bunting's colorful feathers or the melodious symphony of a mockingbird's song might ignite a spark of artistic expression. Whether through painting, photography, or writing, bird watching can serve as a wellspring of inspiration for seniors to explore and unleash their creative talents.

9. Environmental Awareness: Bird watching encourages seniors to develop an appreciation for the environment and a desire to protect it. By witnessing the splendor of birds in their natural habitats, seniors become more aware of the importance of conservation efforts. They may advocate for the preservation of local birding sites, support bird-friendly initiatives, and become ambassadors for the protection of avian species. Bird watching thus fosters a deeper connection to nature and a commitment to environmental stewardship.

10. Sense of Wonder and Joy: Finally, birdwatching brings a sense of wonder and joy to seniors' lives. Witnessing the delicate balance of nature, marveling at the diversity of bird species, and experiencing unexpected encounters with these fascinating creatures can rejuvenate the spirit. Bird watching offers a renewed sense of awe and childlike wonder, igniting a youthful joy that transcends age.

Questions people ask. Yes, really!

Birds do not need extra food from feeders. Let them search on their own. Feeders are only a supplement to birds' natural feeding habits. In inclement weather birds can use a boost especially if they are insectivores. Insects hide when it's rainy or cold making it more difficult for those birds to find food. They also need extra food to prepare for migration. Natural food is scarce in the winter. They eat to stay warm on the long winter nights.

I want to feed the birds NOT the squirrels! You can! There are many solutions to prevent squirrels and rodents from feasting on the bird food. Specialty feeders to keep them out, baffles to prevent them access and food they do not like.

It will attract rats! The rats are already out there, bird feeding just concentrates them into one area making them easier to see. Seeds with no hulls, rat-proof foods, and baffles are the solutions.

Birds poop all over my car and walks. Yes, they can but it's nothing a garden hose can't fix. Park the car under a carport or in the garage. (Birds particularly like freshly washed cars too!)

The seed drops to the ground and grows weeds! Stick with a good quality seed (not big box or discount kind) that is fresh with no fillers. There are seeds with no seed hulls making it impossible to grow. Let your feeders go empty for a few days and the birds will do maintenance clean-ups. Some feeders are better at keeping the seed from going to the ground.

All I get are Grackles. There are seeds that Grackles do not like & feeders they have a difficult time perching on.





## Tweet of the Month (cont.)

*The doves eat all the food.* There is no food they won't eat but there are feeders they cannot eat from.

*Bird baths will attract mosquitoes.* Bird baths should be cleaned once a week (mosquito eggs take 2 weeks to hatch). There are granules and dunks that are safe for the birds that will kill the larvae in fountains & ponds.

*I don't feed in the summer. There is plenty of stuff they can eat.* Summer brings nesting. Most birds will feed insects to their young but mom & dad expend much of their energy foraging for insects and need the extra calcium they can get from specialty seed blends. Summer also brings heat that dries up natural resources for feeding, drinking and bathing.

If you are not feeding in your backyard, you have no excuses now. Start in February in honor of National Bird feeding month! The Great Backyard Bird Count is Feb. 14-17 and is approved for service hours. Get more information at <https://www.birdcount.org>. Project Feeder Watch is approved for service hours and can be started at any time and runs to the end of April. Go to <https://feederwatch.org>.

Learn more about birds and their habitats (which dictates what bird you get at the feeders) by going on a guided Elm Fork master naturalist led bird walk, AT approved! Second Saturday Bird Walk at LLELA or First Saturday Early Bird Walk at Furneaux Creek or Last Saturday bird walks at Clear Creek. Check the calendar for details.

Join us “BIRD NERDS”.



Do it for your health, do it for your peace of mind and do it for the birds!

WARNING! Once you start there is no going back.

(And don't ask me how many feeders I have!! LOL)



## *This Month's Contributors*



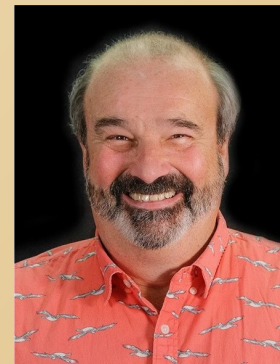
Gale Bacon



Marilyn Blanton



Jerry Hamby



Dave Jones



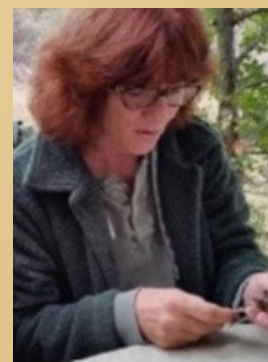
Scott Kiester



Bryan Lewis



Abigail Miller



Mary Morrow



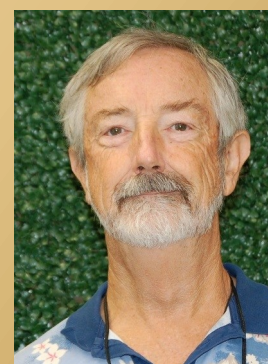
Michele Rawleigh



Olivia "Livy" Reese



Elise Spain



John Thomlinson



Clay Thurmond



Fran Witte



Sue Yost



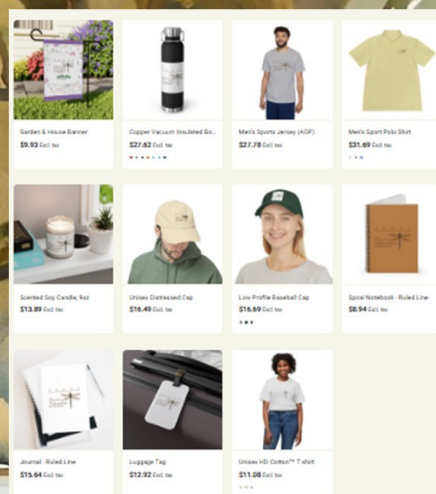
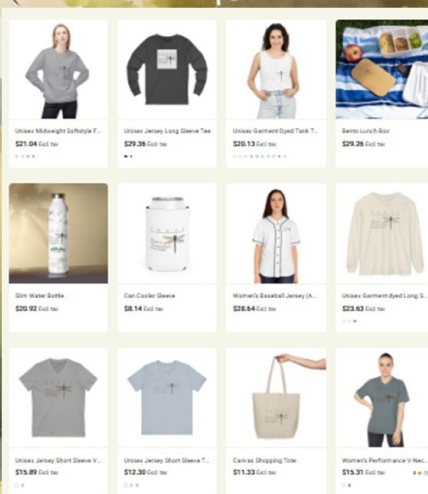
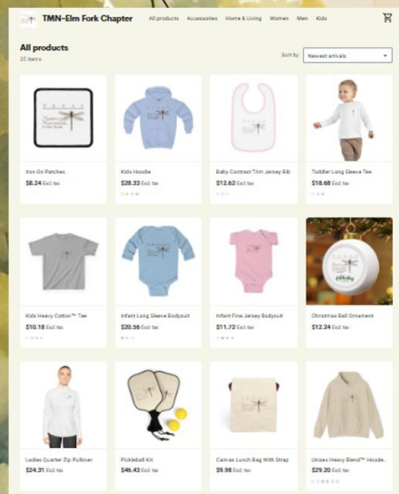
Betty Zajac

*And a big thanks to Karen DeVinney and Mary Morrow for proofing!*



# Almost the Last Word

## Funny Finds From Sue Yost!



\* New \*  
items

<https://tmn-elm-fork-chapter.printify.me/products/1>



# 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.



**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 [socialmediateam@efctmn.org](mailto:socialmediateam@efctmn.org)

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](mailto:newsletter@efctmn.org)

March 2025 submissions are due by:

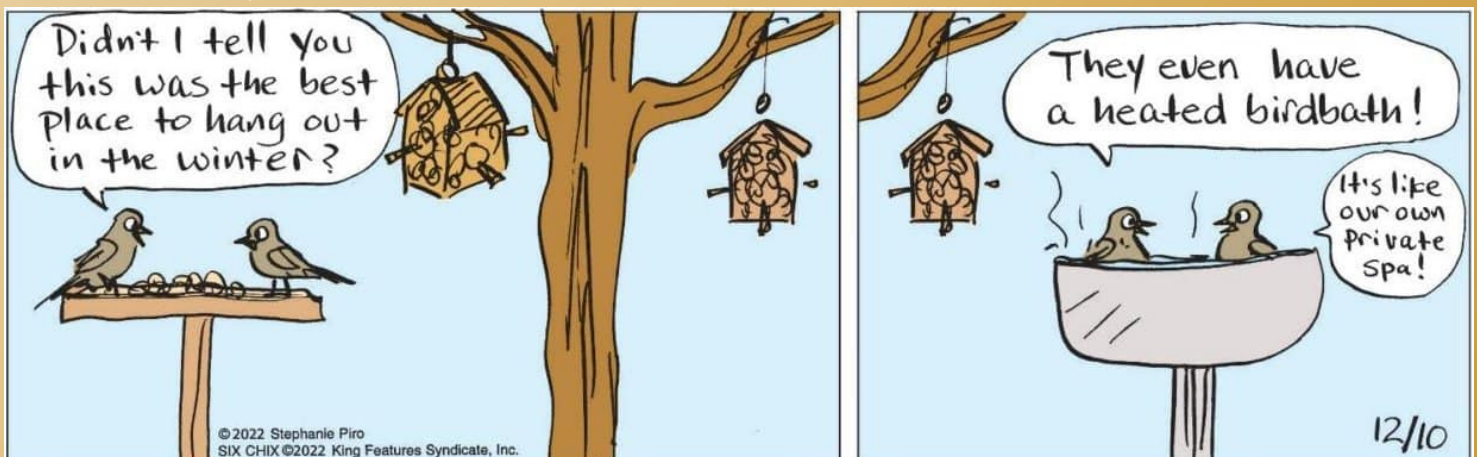
**Monday, March 10<sup>th</sup>**

**Note:** The submission deadline has changed from the Wednesday the week before the chapter meeting, to the **Monday** the week before the chapter meeting.



Tammie Walters,  
Editor

Another funny find from Sue Yost!





# Who We Are



## Texas Master Naturalist—Elm Fork Chapter

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

### OFFICERS

President - Bryan Lewis

Vice President - Eric Houston

Treasurer - Mike Hatch

Secretary - Delia Croessmann

### BOARD POSITIONS

Immediate Past President – Kathryn Wells

Member-at-Large – Jane Duke

### BOARD DIRECTORS

Membership - Sharon Betty

VMS - Jim Gerber

Initial Training - Brenda McCoy, Cathy Griesbaum

Communications - Fran Witte

Volunteer Service Projects - Brenda Martin

Advanced Training Programs - David Jones

Outreach/Adult Education - Open

New Class Representative - Stevie Wyatt

### CHAPTER ADVISORS

AgriLife – Erin Smith

Texas Parks and Wildlife – Mindy Shumate



### Our Mission

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

### Our Vision

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

### Regular Monthly Chapter Meetings

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

Chapter meetings are open to the public.

### Board Meetings

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

Monthly board meetings are open to members.

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

### Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

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