

T E X A S

Master
Naturalist™
Elm Fork Chapter



Naturalist News

April 2025 Volume 25, Issue 4



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

On Facebook: www.facebook.com/TexasMasterNaturalistElmFork/

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Naturalist News

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On the Cover:

Redstem Stork's Bill
(*Erodium cicutarium*)
at Green Acres,
by Amy Montgomery,
class of 2023



Redstem Stork's Bill (*Erodium cicutarium*)
By Marissa Shaw

Announcements

We Love Advanced Training Hours... Just Make Sure They Are Approved First

We all need at least eight hours of advanced training (AT) to get initially certified or to receive our annual re-certification. But, those wonderful AT hours just don't magically appear. Members find opportunities. But, those opportunities need to be preapproved by our AT Committee before we can participate and log them into VMS. If you have an opportunity, request approval for AT hours by submitting the AT Approval Form. The AT Committee will review and approve (or ask questions for clarification), and will then send their approval with instructions to the Communications Committee to share with members, so members will know what's available for AT and how to enter the hours into VMS (Chapter Approved or Project Specific Approved).

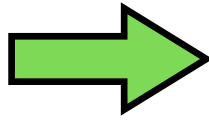
First, visit the chapter's webpage, Activities tab, then [Advanced Training](#). Click on [AT Approval Request Form](#). Allow two weeks notice if possible and complete the form.

Additionally, if you scroll to the bottom of the [Advanced Training page](#), you will see a list of "ONGOING AT OPPORTUNITIES." As these AT opportunities are preapproved, you do not need to submit an AT Approval Request Form for AT opportunities falling into any of these categories.

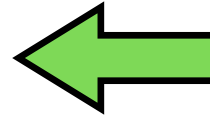
Finally, whether the AT opportunity hours you are interested in fall under "Chapter Approved AT" or "Project Specific AT," the AT opportunity must be approved. Typically, "Project Specific AT" will be submitted by a Project Manager for approval.

The AT Committee will take it from there. It's that simple. For more information about Advanced Training and the AT approval process, feel free to reach out to the AT Committee at AT@efctmn.org.

Announcements



Attn: Project Managers



Limited Table Space Available for Projects During the 2025 Projects Showcase

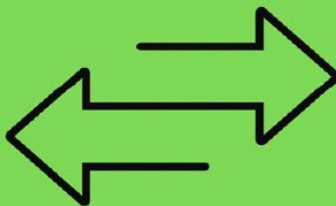
Project Managers...if you would like to have a table at this year's Projects Showcase on Thursday, July 17th, please click on the link to reserve your space. The Projects Showcase Manager will follow up with you regarding your table reservation and set up details.

Special note: Reservations will be accepted until June 1st or until all tables are reserved.

Link: <https://txmn.org/elmfork/2025-projects-showcase-table-reservation/>

Effective March 1st, 2025, you can record Volunteer Service Time for Travel to and from Chapter Meetings

Carpooling Encouraged



Similar to recording travel time to and from projects;
record time up to and including the service time during the chapter meeting
(which equals the business portion, but not the advanced training).

Members can now report service time in VMS for travel to and from each monthly chapter meeting not to exceed the chapter business portion of the chapter meeting. Example: if the chapter business portion is one hour, members can also include travel time up to one hour. As usual, service for attending the monthly chapter meeting is reported in VMS under "Chapter Administrative Work," Chapter Administration: "Chapter Meeting."

Announcements

Night Sky Celebration

Night hike
at 8 pm

Elm Fork Nature
Preserve
April 26 • 7-9 pm
Free for all ages



OUTDOOR

Join City of Carrollton Parks and Recreation for a celebration of the night sky for International Dark Sky Week. Learn about light pollution, the importance of going lights out for wildlife, participate in space themed activities, and join us for a night hike around Elm Fork Nature Preserve at 8 pm.

[Night Sky Celebration](#) | [Parks & Recreation Calendar](#) | [City of Carrollton, TX](#)

What Happens Next

Chapter Meeting and Presentation

Thursday, April 17th, 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Denton County Administrative Courthouse • 3rd Floor Conference Room

1 Courthouse Dr. • Denton, TX 76208

This Month's Presentation (via Zoom):

Protecting Texas Pollinators: Conservation Strategies for the Lone Star State

By Hannah L. Gray, PhD



Join us for an engaging talk on the conservation of Texas' vital pollinators with an emphasis on native bees. Learn about the challenges they face and efforts at Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to improve pollinator outcomes. We'll explore the major groups of native bees, and their habitat needs. Then we'll explore ways to get involved in citizen science projects to help us monitor the state of Texas bees

Left: Photograph of Sonoran bumble bee, (*Bombus sonorus*), on purple coneflower



Hannah is a Pollinator and Invertebrate Biologist with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Hannah is a Midwestern transplant who is falling in love with the diverse flora and fauna of Texas. Before joining TPWD, she spent 4 years at the University of Texas working on beneficial arthropod conservation in High Plains agroecosystems. She earned a Ph.D. in Entomology from the University of Minnesota where she assessed how local management and geographic context influence insect-mediated control of pests.

Awards and Recognition

March 2025

Initial Certifications

Penny Cooley	Class of 2024
Cindy Jones	Class of 2024
Monica Kelley	Class of 2024
Kelly Ring	Class of 2024
Lee Watson	Class of 2024
Ashlyn Wine	Class of 2024



2025 Recertifications

Gale Bacon	Class of 2018
Sharon Barr	Class of 2008
Barbara Beane	Class of 2018
Toni Benjamin	Class of 2015
Mary Cissell	Class of 2015
Regina Dale	Class of 2019
Troy Dale	Class of 2020
Cathy Griesbaum	Class of 2023
Susan Hamby	Class of 2022
Sue Hudiburgh	Class of 2018
Karen Jamieson	Class of 2017
Jim Kennedy	Class of 2024
Denver Kramer	Class of 2018
Sandy LaQuey	Class of 2019



More recertifications on
the next page!



Awards and Recognition

March 2025

2025 Recertifications (cont.)

Brenda Martin	Class of 2023
Dale Meyer	Class of 2011
Abigail Miller	Class of 2003
Katey Pirot	Class of 2024
Chryl Prestemon	Class of 2020
Ginny Richards	Class of 2022
Deb Rogstad	Class of 2024
Elise Spain	Class of 2017
Diane Wetherbee	Class of 2000
Kim Wootton	Class of 2017



Milestones

250 Hour Milestone

Tyler Leverenz	Class of 2022
Clarissa Molina	Class of 2020



500 Hour Milestone

Rob Blake	Class of 2024
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More milestones on the
next page!



Awards and Recognition

March 2025

1000 Hour Milestone

Samra (Sam) Bufkins Class of 2023
Marissa Shaw Class of 2023
Kim Wootton Class of 2017



1500 Hour Milestone

Tammie Walters Class of 2020



4000 Hour Milestone

Adelaide Bodnar Class of 2007



7000 Hour Milestone

Carl Patrick Class of 2010



~ Congratulations! ~

Field Notes in Focus



Nine-banded armadillo (*Dasypus novemcinctus*), by Marissa Shaw

Inside Outside News

Approved AT



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

Wednesday, May 14 @ 6:30-7:30 PM CT - Dr. Benjamin Hutchins, Assistant Director & Groundwater Ecologist with Edwards Aquifer Research and Data Center & TRIAGE - Texas State University

- Dark Waters, Strange Creatures: Amazing Life in Texas Groundwater
- [Register](#)

Tuesday, June 17 @ 6:30-7:30 PM CT - Kelly (Hibbeler) Albus, Research Scientist with Texas Water Resources Institute's Urban Water Team at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center at Dallas

- Texas WET (Water Education Training) Course: New (Online) Advanced Training Course for Master Volunteers
- [Register](#)

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

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

Standard Core Water Quality Training

Saturday, April 19, 2025, 9:00 am - 2:00 pm

Trinity River Audubon Center

6500 S. Great Trinity Forest Way, Dallas, TX. 75217

Texas Stream Team Standard Core training with the City of Dallas Stream Team. Standard Core monitoring involves performing tests for parameters of conductivity, dissolved oxygen, pH, total depth, water and air temperature, and water transparency using wet chemistry kit & observations while in the field; some fine motor control & vision is necessary to participate.

We will learn indoors, outdoors, and along shorelines, so please come prepared for the environment & weather! Training locations are generally accessible but may require participants to move over dirt track, trail, & shorelines. All locations have free parking within a 3-10 minute walk from our initial meeting location.

To find out more information or reserve a spot, you must contact:
Samonia Mosley: sam.mosley@dallascityhall.com

Inside Outside News

Approved AT

Make your plans now for the

Full Strawberry Moon Walk

Tuesday, June 10th at 8:30 pm
Elm Fork Nature Preserve, Carrollton, Texas

Take a walk in the full moon light at Elm Fork Nature Preserve with Amy Martin, the Moon Lady and author of *Wild DFW: Explore the Amazing Nature Around Dallas-Fort Worth*. After a poetic overview of the Moon, an audience-involving demonstration will explain the lunar phases and why we only see one side of the Moon, making you a pro-level Moon watcher, able to predict where the Moon will be at any time. Then off on a night hike with breaks for short raps on synchrony and the formation of life on Earth, nocturnal wildlife and how they use the Moon and nighttime for safety and adaptation. Includes contemplative time on the nature of moonlight, plus plenty of Moon-shadow dancing, and Moon song singing.

<https://www.cityofcarrollton.com/Home/Components/Calendar/Event/49519/1501?curm=6&cury=2025>

Registration is required at [cityofcarrollton.com/signupnow](https://www.cityofcarrollton.com/signupnow) under “Outdoor” tab in “Search.”



Photo: Getty Images / Castigatio

Inside Outside News

AT & Volunteer Opportunity

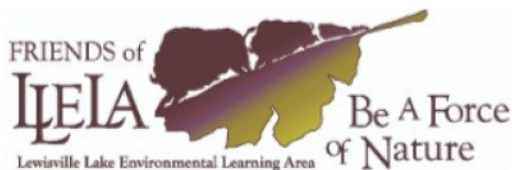


All funds will go towards repairing and activating the MOTUS tracking device located on top of the dam.

LLELA's
MINI SIT
Fundraiser
 May 3, 2025
 5:30am-12:00pm
 FREE picnic lunch
 \$20 a person



[Register at friendsofllela.org](https://friendsofllela.org)



The Friends of LLELA Mini Sit Fundraiser birding event will be held on May 3, 2025 from 5:30 AM to Noon. This event welcomes all bird watchers, from novices to pros at LLELA, the 2600 acre wildlife refuge below the Lewisville dam. Our species list is over 275. Create your team, from 3 to 6 birders, and record all observations during the event hours. At the end of the Mini Sit we will celebrate with a picnic lunch included in the \$20 per person fee. Please indicate your team leader's name when you register. All funds will go towards repairing and activating the MOTUS tracking device located on top of the dam. Details will be sent to all registered team leaders. Join us for a fun morning of birding! Questions? Contact Sue Yost through the Membership Directory.

Sitters can enter time as AT, helpers enter service as LLELA PO public outreach.

Inside Outside News

Volunteer Opportunity



ID What You See at the Park

Sunday, April 27th, 2:00 to 3:00 PM
Green Acres Farm Memorial Park
4400 Hide-A-Way Lane
Flower Mound, TX 75022

Learn how to use the iNaturalist app, then help document the plants, birds, insects, and animals that call Green Acres home. Bring your cell phones to take pictures! Please be sure to download the iNaturalist app and create your account ahead of time so observations can begin sooner. All entries from this program will count for the 2024 iNaturalist City Nature Challenge.

Please download the iNaturalist App www.inaturalist.org before the start of the program.

Participants have the option of enrolling online, which is the easiest option, or come to the Community Activity Center and register at the front desk. To register online go to [Program search | Flower Mound Parks & Recreation](#), then enter "ID What You See" in the search box.

Spring at Green Acres: Spring Blooms and Caterpillars

Saturday, May 3rd, 10:00 to 11:00 AM
Green Acres Farm Memorial Park
4400 Hide-A-Way Lane
Flower Mound, TX 75022

Learn about plants at the monarch station that you could use in your yard to attract caterpillars, butterflies, and other pollinators. Walk up to the prairie restoration and down to the riparian area to see spring wildflowers.

Participants have the option of enrolling online, which is the easiest option, or come to the Community Activity Center and register at the front desk. To register online go to [Program search | Flower Mound Parks & Recreation](#), then enter "Spring at Green Acres" in the search box.



Inside Outside News

Volunteer Opportunity



Denton ISD School Days at Clear Creek 26 days: March 17—May 13

Volunteers...

...provide nature experience and education to thousands of second graders each spring.

...Spring 2025 stations: Snakes, Turtles, Bobcats, Owls, Hikes.

...Sign-up genius is available on the website calendar. There is something for everyone and we'd love to have you join us!



Join us for a brief hike or nature station as we introduce nature to Denton's 2nd graders. For some, it is their first experience. Will you help us light the love of nature in the next generation? Sign up for as many or as few days as you like. Commit to a set day of the week or mix it up. Your schedule is up to you. We look forward to having you join us for fun and smiles. Please review the available slots in the SignUpGenius.

Thank you! Nancy Blakney and Brenda Martin

Inside Outside News

Volunteer Opportunity

Isle Du Bois School Field Trip Days

Isle du Bois Park and Nature Center will be hosting Field Trip Days for several public schools on several days over the next 3 months. Please look closely at the dates below, then go to the chapter website calendar to click on one of the “Isle Du Bois School Field Trip Days” and express your interest by emailing Mindy Shumate, Park Interpreter. (Mindy’s contact info will be available after clicking on one of the field trip days.)

Mindy will be handling all the arrangements and TMN Volunteer assignments for these varying dates. There is no place to sign up for this in SignUpGenius. Simply email Mindy.



Dates

Wednesday, April 30th
9:15 AM to 3:00 PM

Thursday, May 1st
9:15 AM to 3:00 PM

Wednesday, May 7th
9:15 AM to 3:00 PM
(In case of bad weather,
the date will be changed to
Thursday, May 8th)



Inside Outside News

Volunteer Opportunity

Greenbelt General Maintenance and Natural Resource Volunteers Needed

The Staff of the Greenbelt Unit of Ray Roberts Lake State Park serve as the management team for the Greenbelt and the Natural Resource team for the Ray Roberts Complex. We are looking for general maintenance and natural resource volunteers to assist us in maintaining the Greenbelt and conserve the natural resources of Ray Roberts.

General Maintenance Volunteers have multiple opportunities to volunteer at the park based on their areas of interest and the park's operational needs. Opportunities include but are not limited to a variety of maintenance tasks, special projects, and Customer-related opportunities.

Natural Resource Volunteers projects could include Blue Bird Nesting box monitoring, Fire break prep, Invasive management & habitat restoration.

This opportunity is available year-round and provides a flexible schedule. No Minimum hours/week are required. This volunteer opportunity doesn't not include a campsite.

Please contact the Greenbelt Manager at Matthew.moore@tpwd.texas.gov for more information.

Minimum age of volunteers: 16 (if under 18, Volunteer will need to print a Parental Release form and bring a completed copy to the park).

Criminal background check is required for non-TMN members.

PO60212:RM Ray Roberts Lake, RM
Blue Bird nest box monitoring would be PO60212: FR

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.

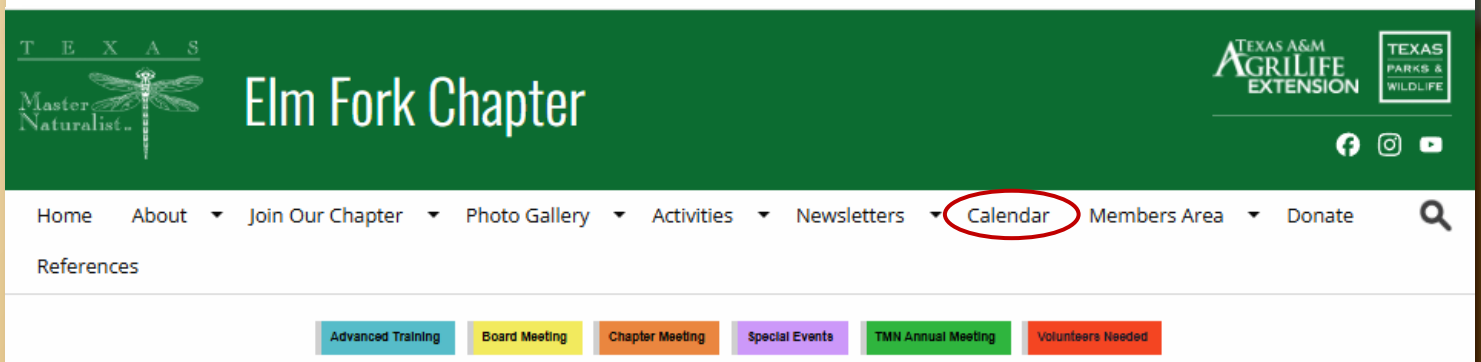
Expect a moderate-level hike of up to 2.5 miles.

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.

Only a few slots left, so sign up now if you want to join in!

*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



You're Invited!

Texas Native Plant Art Exhibition 2024 Appreciation Reception

Wednesday, April 23 - 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm

DISD Professional Development Center
1212 Bolivar Street, Denton, Texas

Please join us to honor the fourth-grade students and their art teachers that participated in the art exhibition and to thank the display site hosts. Stop by at your convenience to join the fun. The artwork will be displayed and refreshments will be served.

Thank you,

Marilyn Blanton, Project Manager



Features



Let's Go Fishing...for Trout Lilies!

Sue Yost, class of 2017

Spring in Texas means looking for the delicate Trout Lilies (*Erythronium albidum*). They can be hard to find. They grow in moist wooded areas, usually close to streams and creeks. Just the kind of habitat one would find on the Blackjack Trail at LLELA. Trout Lilies bloom in early spring before the trees growing above them develop leaves. Blooming at this time allows them unobstructed access to sunlight and time to grow when soil nutrient levels are high. I had the pleasure of finding them peeking out of the leaf litter while hiking the Blackjack Trail during the week of spring break camp (March 10-14).

The flowering cycle for the Trout Lily begins and ends very quickly, only a few days at most. A Trout Lily will reach a height of four to ten inches. Flower color can range from very pale white to bright white/purple and shows brownish streaks on the sepals, which may be lighter than the primary petals. In size it can be up to three inches across with six tepals (3 petals and 3 sepals) folding upwards. When the petals are fully reflexed, the bloom is approximately one inch across.

The White Trout Lily of the genus *Erythronium* is widespread across the continent. *Erythronium albidum* ranges from Ontario and Minnesota, south to Georgia, Kentucky, Missouri, and Northeast Texas. A yellow-flowered relative *Erythronium rostratum*, grows from East Texas eastward and northward to Alabama, Tennessee, Missouri, and Kansas.

The common name "trout lily" refers to the appearance of its gray-green leaves mottled with brown or gray, which allegedly resemble the coloring of brook trout.

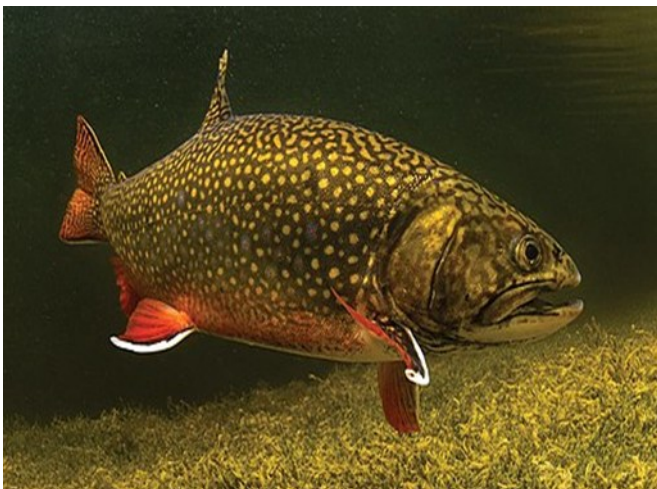


Photo by Sue Yost



Let's Go Fishing....for Trout Lilies! (cont.)

The solitary flower of the Trout Lily nods toward the ground. This is believed to be a defense mechanism to keep certain insects away from the pollen and nectar.

The flower opens so completely during daylight hours that the three petals and three sepals are reflexed or curled backwards. The flower then closes again each evening. The solitary flower above ground is pollinated by bees, and it may take as long as six years for a germinated seed to grow into a mature plant.

The flower is pollinated by flying insects and sometimes wind. It produces a seed capsule on the end of the stalk, which falls to the ground as the capsule matures and fades from green to white. The capsules are about the size and shape of a small chickpea, and contain 5-25 seeds, about a sixteenth of an inch in size. The seeds are spread by ants, who eat a nutritious appendage attached to each seed and leave the rest to germinate, often at a distance of several feet from the original plants. Ants can carry the seeds some distance and will eat the husk at their ant pile leaving the seed behind.

Scientists note there are two main threats to the trout lily colonies here in the Dallas area. The threat of habitat loss by humans and the spread of plants like invasive Garlic Mustard. And let us not forget about the highly invasive Chinese Privet that is capable of choking out all beneath it.

No baits or hooks are needed to fish for this “trout” at LLELA. Mark you calendar for next spring and go fishing for trout lilies on the Blackjack Trail!



Trout Lily sign on the Blackjack Trail at LLELA

Photo by Sue Yost



Features

Symphony in the Flint Hills— Exploring the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve

By Jerry Hamby

By most estimates less than four percent of the original North American tallgrass prairie, 170 million acres stretching from Canada to Texas, remains intact, and the highest concentration of preserved prairies can be found in the Flint Hills of Kansas. Because the shallow soil is too rocky to be plowed, much of the land that would otherwise have been farmed has survived as prairie remnants. The largest preserved area, the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve (NP), is located in the southeast quarter of Kansas, north of Strong City (population 386). Almost 11,000 acres make up the Preserve, which is divided into twelve sections and includes more than forty miles of hiking trails. In 2018 my wife Susan and I explored the Tallgrass Prairie NP, and while the trip was satisfying, we left knowing there were more than 25 miles of backcountry trails we did not get to explore.

I first learned about the Tallgrass Prairie NP after reading William Least Heat-Moon's naturalist / historic exploration of Chase County, Kansas, *PrairieErth: A Deep Map*. The 634-page book chronicles the author's experiences while walking every foot of the county and reflecting on the cultural and ecological importance of the great American prairie. While *PrairieErth* addresses tensions between ranchers and environmentalists over the potential creation of a national park, the Tallgrass Prairie NP, established in 1996, is now widely appreciated in Chase County.



Tallgrass Prairie NP monument



Tour bus at scenic overlook

The Preserve represents a unique partnership between The Nature Conservancy, which owns the land, and the National Park Service, which is responsible for maintaining the site and providing interpretive support through historic and cultural programs, tours, and ecological information. On our first day at the Preserve, Susan and I joined a ranger-led bus tour that took us into the backcountry and focused on the tallgrass prairie ecosystem. At a scenic overlook, we were given the choice of returning on the bus or hiking back to the Visitor Center via the Prairie Fire Loop and Davis Trail. We chose the latter option, a 3.5-mile hike that included a stop at the Lower Fox Creek School, a classic one-room school that has been restored to its nineteenth century condition.



Symphony in the Flint Hills— (cont.)



Lower Fox Creek School



Lower Fox Creek School interior
(photo by Susan Hamby)



Spring Hill Ranch

Closer to the Visitor Center, we saw the three-story 1881 Spring Hill Ranch House, built of limestone in the French Second Empire style of architecture. The Ranch House was open for self-guided tours, as was an equally imposing three-story limestone barn. In the adjacent barnyard, we also met the mascot of the Tallgrass Prairie NP, a friendly horse named Badger.

On our first day of hiking, we were struck by the unusual trail markers that, befitting the profile of a prairie, were placed low to the ground; some consisted of flat orientation maps bolted to limestone slabs, complete with QR codes, while others were brown cinderblocks with trail names stenciled in white paint. The intent is to minimize intrusions on the landscape while emphasizing the natural surroundings.



Badger, mascot of Tallgrass Prairie NP



Low-profile trail marker



Symphony in the Flint Hills— (cont.)

Over the course of four days, Susan and I hiked thirteen miles of trails at different times of the day. One trek took us through the Red House and Crusher Hill Pastures. The mowed paths of the Ranch Legacy Trail and Crusher Hill Loop meandered through meadows filled with native grasses and wildflowers before circling the top of a flat hill. Along the way, we identified three species of milkweed— Green Antelopehorns (*Asclepias viridis*), Butterfly (*A. tuberosa*), and Prairie (*A. sullivantii*), the last of which has large leaves and showy purple blooms. Even on a windy day, the flowers were covered in butterflies, moths, and bees. Since we visited the Preserve in June, Leadplant (*Amorpha canescens*), a shrubby legume, was just coming into bloom, its purple flowers covering long spikes. Although 2018 was a dry year, the prairie was lush and green.



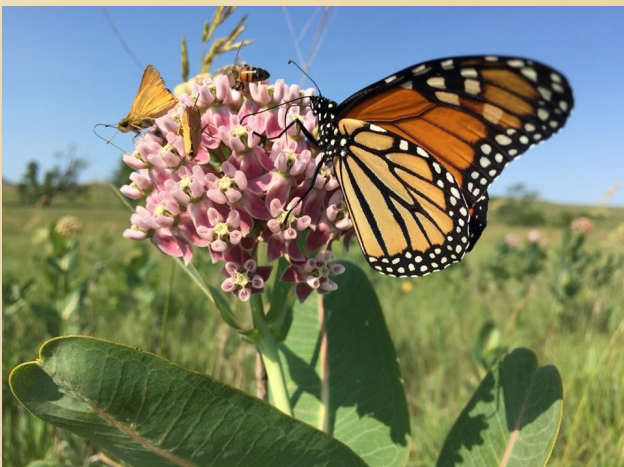
Hiking the Crusher Hill Loop
(photo by Susan Hamby)



Gray Coopers on Butterflyweed



Prairie Milkweed



Pollinators on Prairie Milkweed



Leadplant



Symphony in the Flint Hills— (cont.)



White Wand Beardtongue

Highway 177 runs north to south through the Tallgrass Prairie NP with most of the Preserve west of the highway. Of the three sections on the east side, Susan and I explored two, East Traps Pasture and Bottomland Field. This is where we saw the highest concentration of invasive species, particularly Smooth Brome (*Bromus inermis*), an old world grass that blanketed the meadows on both sides of the Z Bar Spur leading to Fox Creek. However, we also spotted several native species, including Eastern Gamagrass (*Tripsacum dactyloides*), Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), and White Wand Beardtongue (*Penstemon tubaeiflorus*).

The Visitor Center is located west of the highway. Reflecting the native state of the Preserve, Buffalograss (*Bouteloua dactyloides*) was planted around the building. Recalling the simple rustic look of this low-maintenance native species, Susan and I made it a central part of our prairie garden when we moved to Denton in 2022.

An iconic feature of the Preserve is the Tallgrass Prairie bison herd, which was introduced in 2009 when thirteen bison were moved from the Wind Cave bison herd in South Dakota. Due to the size of the pasture where the bison graze, the 1,100-acre Windmill Pasture, the

herd is limited to approximately 100 bison (*Bison bison*), but that number has fluctuated over time as disease and other natural conditions continue to affect the population. There are currently 80 to 90 bison at the Preserve.

A highlight of our trip was getting to hike among the bison herd. Signs outside the gates of Windmill Pasture warned us that bison are unpredictable and dangerous and suggested visitors stay 100 yards away from the animals. That advice was especially important given the fact that there were only three points of entry; the rest of the pasture was surrounded by electric fences, leaving us with no easy means of escape.

Fortunately, the bison Susan and I needed to be most careful to avoid—three dozen or so cows and their calves—were grazing below the ridge where we hiked. However, there were more than a dozen bulls behind and ahead of us on the trail, and even though we maintained a healthy distance, we could sense their size and power as they wallowed in the dirt and stirred up dust clouds. Tufts of wool blew across the trail and clung to shrubby brush. Although we took dozens of photos, they did little to capture the visceral nature of the experience.

Inspired by Least Heat-Moon's exploration of Chase County, Susan and I also visited several cultural sites in Chase County. One event the author chronicles took place sixteen miles from the Preserve. On March 31, 1931, University of Notre Dame football coach Knute Rockne died in an airplane crash along with seven other passengers. A tall granite



Bison bulls (photo by Susan Hamby)



Symphony in the Flint Hills— (cont.)

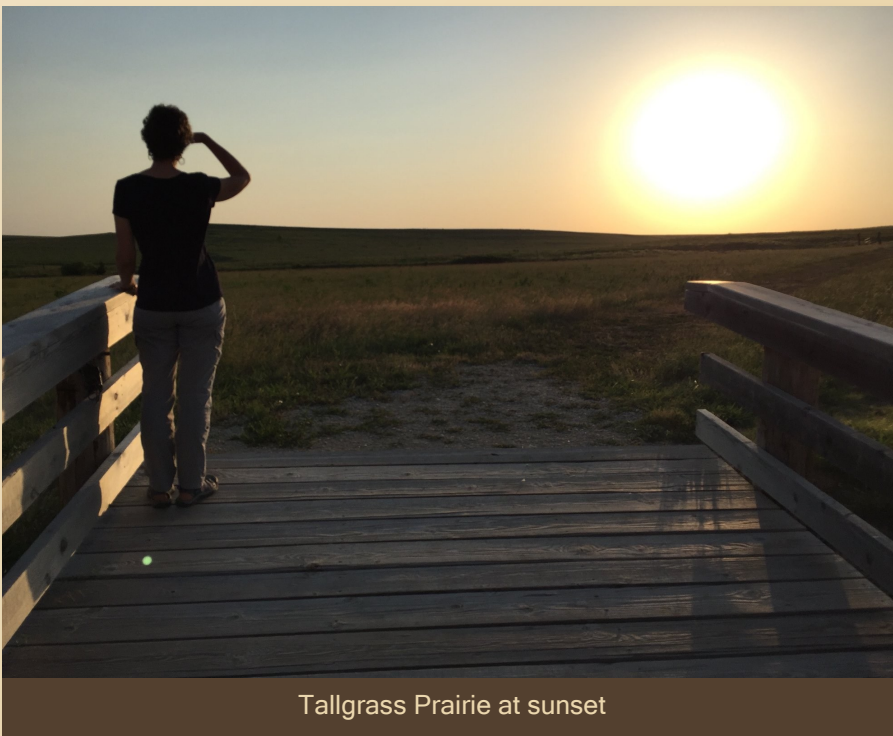
memorial on private property marks the crash site, which, unlike Least Heat-Moon, Susan and I were unable to see. However, a respectful, though macabre, Knute Rockne crash exhibit features prominently in the Chase County Historical Museum and Library in Cottonwood Falls. The exhibit features artifacts and photographs of the plane crash. A recent addition to the collection is a 1932 Rockne Studebaker.

With the largest population in the county (851 according to the 2020 U.S. census), Cottonwood Falls is the county seat and has an austere courthouse built in the same French Renaissance Revival style as the Spring Hill Ranch House. Across the street from the courthouse is Symphony in the Flint Hills, a performance and event venue that is also home to a non-profit organization whose “mission is to heighten appreciation and knowledge of the Flint Hills tallgrass prairie.” Its signature event is an annual prairie concert held in various locations across Chase County. The next Symphony in the Flint Hills, scheduled for June 14, 2025, will be the final one.

The inspiration for the first public prairie concert was a private event in 1994 hosted by Chase County Rancher Jane Koger, who brought together women musicians from across the Midwest to celebrate her birthday and to honor her mother. Koger had met Least Heat-Moon on one of his many visits to Chase County and decided to capture the magic of the prairie in her own way. The first Symphony in the Flint Hills that was open to the public took place twelve years later. Organizers had hoped to hold the inaugural concert on private land, but when no one stepped up to the challenge, the National Park Service, The Nature Conservancy, and other organizations agreed to host the event at the Tallgrass Prairie NP. The Kansas City Symphony performed that year and has done so since 2006 as the venue moved to private ranches.



White Wand Beardtongue



Tallgrass Prairie at sunset

As Susan and I peered through the windows of the venue space for Symphony in the Flint Hills, we admired prairie-inspired watercolors and oil paintings perched on easels and hanging on the walls. When we walked back to our car, dusk settled in the empty streets, and we began to see fireflies all around us. It was a reminder of the primal power and beauty of the prairie ecosystem, evident even beneath the streetlights of a small town, five miles south of the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve.

*All photographs by Jerry Hamby,
except those noted*

Tweet of the Month

By Sue Yost, class of 2017



Barn Swallows

Ballet dancers of the sky. There are many but my favorite is the Barn Swallow. They are the most widespread species of swallow in the world, occurring on all continents, with vagrants reported even in Antarctica. They are a bird with blue upperparts, rusty throat patch and a long, deeply forked tail making them easy to ID when dancing in the skies above.

The preferred habitat of the Barn Swallow is open country with low vegetation, such as pasture, meadows and farmland, preferably with nearby water. They are often seen at the dam and outflow at LLELA. The presence of accessible open structures such as barns, stables, or culverts to provide nesting sites, and exposed locations such as wires, roof ridges or bare branches for perching, are also important in the bird's selection of its breeding range.

Barn Swallows are semi-colonial, settling in groups from a single pair to a few dozen pairs, particularly in larger wooden structures housing animals. As barns etc. are slowly disappearing, "barnies" have adapted to the many housing communities with front entrances that are 2-3 stories high. The same individuals often breed at the same site year after year, although settlement choices have been experimentally shown to be predicted by nest availability rather than any characteristics of available mates. Another site selection observation, in North America at least, Barn Swallows frequently engage in a mutual relationship with Ospreys. Barn Swallows will build their nest below an Osprey nest, receiving protection from other birds of prey that are repelled by the fish-eating Ospreys. The Ospreys are alerted to the presence of these predators by the alarm calls of the swallows.

The Barn Swallow makes a half cup nest attached to a wall or on a ledge. It is constructed by both sexes, although more often by the female, with mud pellets collected in their beaks. They mix their saliva with the pellets of mud that cause the mud to harden. It takes about 1,000 trips to make a nest. Because it takes around 2 weeks for a pair to build a nest, old nests are highly prized. With that said, pairs will usually come back to the same place to nest year after year. Pairs will "remodel" the old nest. The photos show a nest from Lantana. The pair built a new nest on top of the old one! Look closely. It has lots of horsehair and is lined with grasses and soft white feathers. Amazing architects!



The breeding season of the Barn Swallow is variable: in the southern part of the range, the breeding season is usually from February or March to early to mid-September, although some late second and third broods finish in



Tweet of the Month (cont.)

October. In the northern part of the range, it usually starts late May to early June and ends at the same time as the breeding season of the southernmost birds. As with most bird species, the male Barn Swallow returns to the breeding grounds before the females and selects a nest site, which is then advertised to females with a circling flight and song.

The longer tail the better when it comes to female mate selection. Males with longer tail feathers are generally longer-lived and more disease resistant, females thus gaining an indirect fitness benefit from this form of selection, since longer tail feathers indicate a genetically stronger individual which will produce offspring with enhanced vitality. The nest building ability of the male is also sexually selected; females will lay more eggs and at an earlier date with males who are better at nest construction, with the opposite being true with males that are not. Who knew females barnies were so fussy!

Barn Swallows will normally raise two broods. The female lays two to seven, but typically four or five, reddish-spotted white eggs. The incubation period is about 14-19 days, with another 18-23 days before the chicks fledge. It gets pretty crowded in that high nest as they grow. One year, a couple of nestlings kept falling out (or were they pushed?). After laying chair cushions on the concrete below, I fashioned a hammock under the nest to catch them as they tumbled out. They all fledged that year! The fledged young stay with, and are fed by, the parents for about a week after leaving the nest. If you are lucky enough to have a pair nesting in your entryway or barn, you will know firsthand at what lengths they go to protect their young. Swooping down to intruders such as humans, cats or accipiters that venture too close to their nest, be sure to wear a hard hat!!

The Barn Swallow is an aerial insectivore. It typically feeds in open areas 23-26 ft above shallow water or the ground often following animals, humans or farm machinery and lawn mowers to catch disturbed insects. It will occasionally pick prey items from the water surface, walls and plants. Since they feed lower to the ground than other insectivores, they can take care of mosquitoes too! The Barn Swallow drinks by skimming low over lakes or rivers and scooping up water with its open mouth. It bathes in a similar fashion, dipping into the water for an instant while in flight.

The tolerance for this beneficial insectivore was reinforced by superstitions regarding damage to the Barn Swallow's nest. Such an act might lead to cows giving bloody milk, or no milk at all, or to hens ceasing to lay. This may be a factor in the longevity of swallows' nests. Survival, with suitable annual refurbishment, for 10-15 years is regular, and one nest was reported to have been occupied for 48 years. Its long journeys were well observed, and a swallow tattoo is traditional among sailors as a symbol of a safe return; the tradition was that a mariner had a tattoo of this fellow wanderer after sailing 5,000 nautical miles. A second swallow would be added after 10,000 miles at sea. The swallow sailor tattoo was typically placed on the chest, hand or arm. According to legend, a swallow tattoo guaranteed that the sailor would return home safely. Some even got a swallow tattoo when they set sail and had another swallow tattoo when they returned to their home port. Some believed that if the sailor drowned at sea the swallows would carry his soul to heaven.

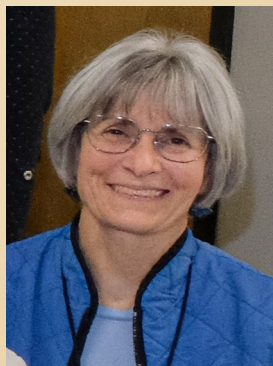


Barn Swallows are now back in Texas. If you are lucky enough to have one pick your place for a nest, congratulate yourself for providing a perfect habitat for these aerial ballet dancers.

This Month's Contributors



Gale Bacon



Becky Bertoni



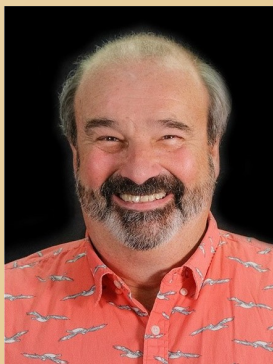
Marilyn Blanton



Pat Bragg



Jerry Hamby



Dave Jones



Bryan Lewis



Brenda Martin



Amy Montgomery



Daniela Parker



Marissa Shaw



Fran Witte

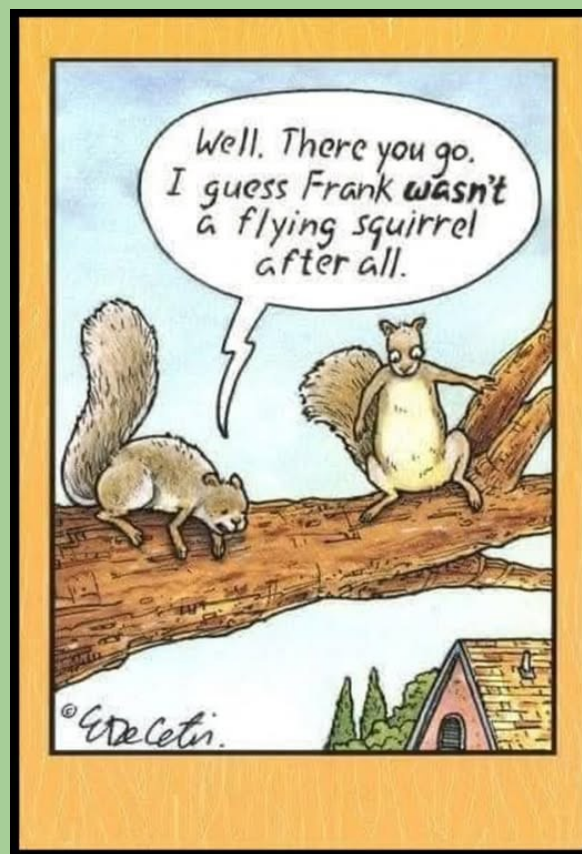


Sue Yost

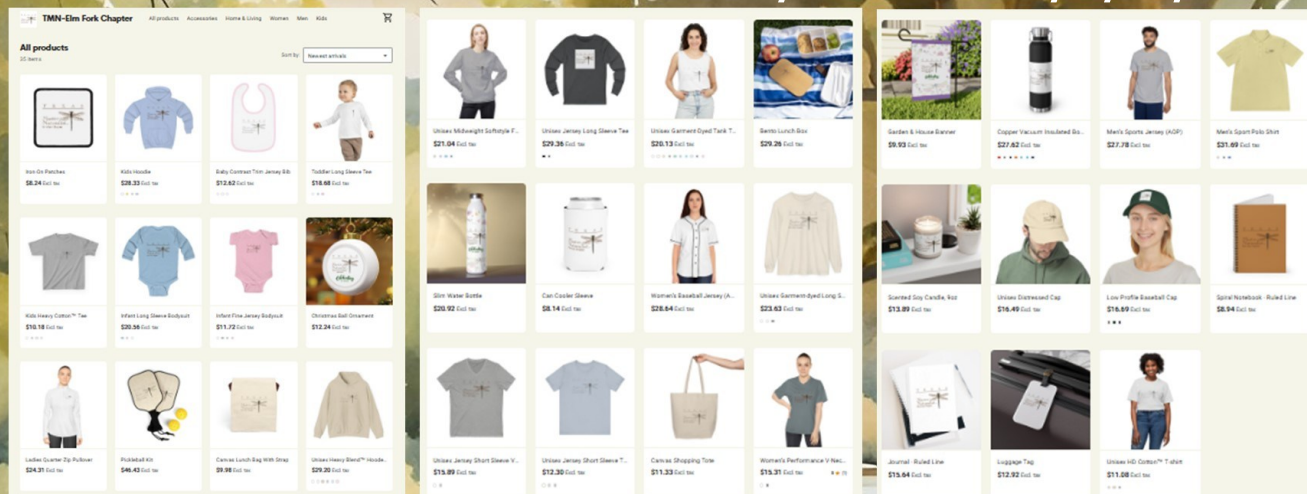
And a big thanks to Karen DeVinney and Mary Morrow for proofing!

Almost the Last Word

Funny Finds From Sue Yost!



Remember to visit the Elm Fork Chapter's online pop-up store



* 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

Another funny find from Sue Yost!

off the mark.com by Mark Parisi



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

May 2025 submissions are due by:

Monday, May 5th



Tammie Walters,
Editor

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

Who We Are



Texas Master Naturalist—Elm Fork Chapter

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

OFFICERS

President - Bryan Lewis

Vice President - Brenda Martin

Treasurer - Mike Hatch

Secretary - Delia Croessmann

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Member-at-Large – Jane Duke

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VMS - Jim Gerber

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Communications - Fran Witte

Volunteer Service Projects - Brenda Martin

Advanced Training Programs - David Jones

Outreach/Adult Education - Open

New Class Representative - Debbie Nobles

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.

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