TEXAS Master Naturalist™ Elm Fork Chapter

Naturalist News

May 2025 Volume 25, Issue 4

TEXAS Master Naturalist™ Elm Fork Chapter

Naturalist News

Inside This Issue:

On the Cover:

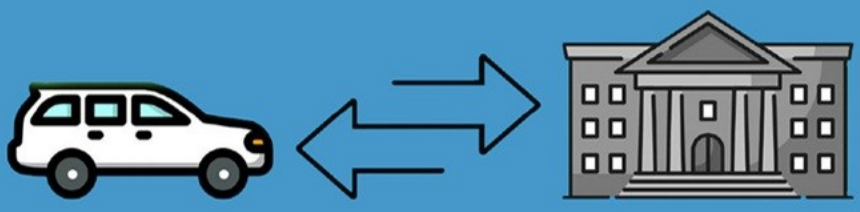
Bryan Lewis's photograph of a Southern Plains bumble bee (*Bombus fraternus*) on green milkweed (*Asclepias viridis*).

The Southern Plains bumble bee is being considered for federal protection under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

Purple paintbrush (*Castilleja purpurea*), by Tammie Walters

Announcements

Members can now report service time in VMS for travel to and from chapter meetings.



Similar to recording travel time to and from projects; record time up to and including the 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

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

Interested in the Texas Stream Team?

Advanced Environmental Monitoring Training with Dr. Kelly Albus

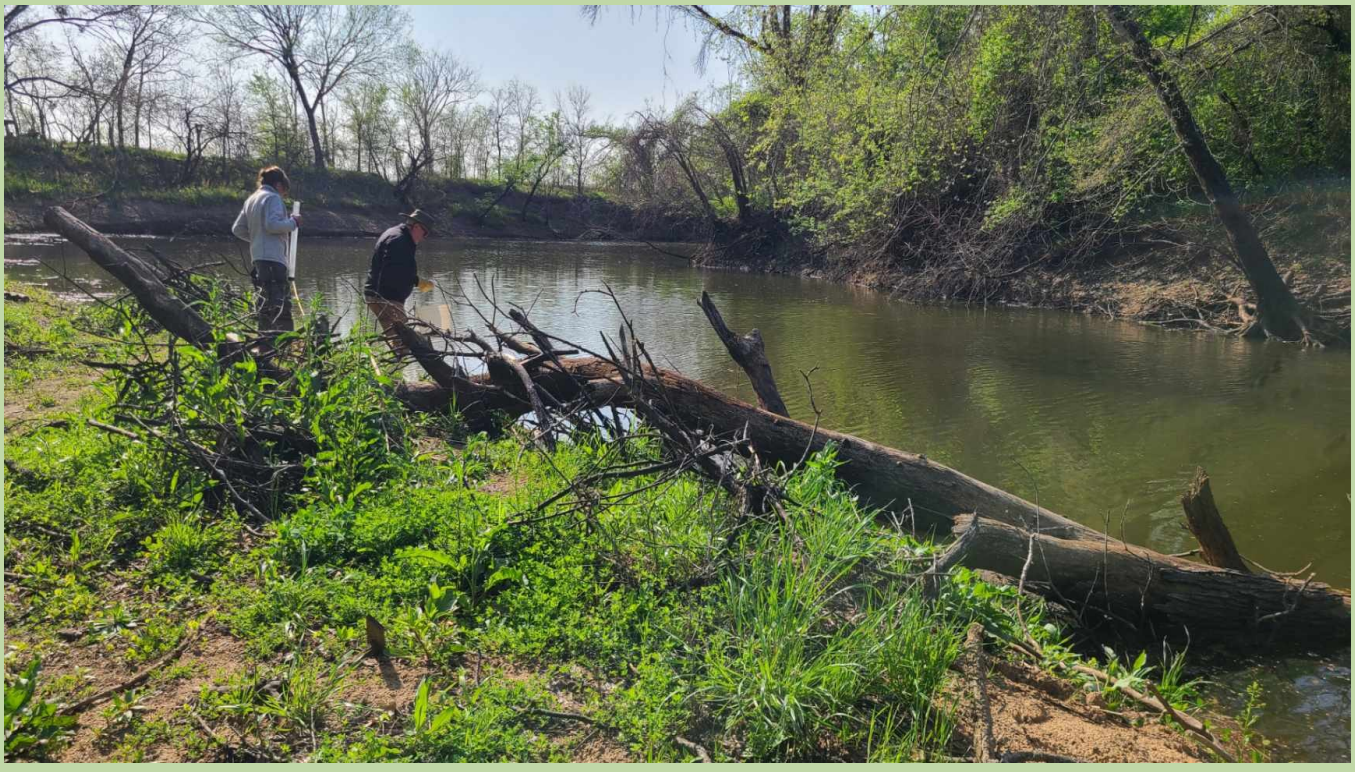
Saturday, June 28th
8:00 AM–12:00 PM
River Bend Nature Center
Wichita Falls, TX

Are you interested in attending an advanced water monitoring training with Adam Berglund and support from Dr. Kelly Albus? Please communicate your interest to Katey Pirot through the Membership Directory.

Dr. Albus has been pushing for this event to happen because there are several teachers and TMN members in the area that are interested in advanced water training, and that would benefit her research. Adam is going to be leading the training, but Dr. Albus will be present. She is also going to offer a tampling/optical brightener water quality test after the advanced training for anyone that would like to observe/participate. Additional information can be found at www.meadowscenter.txst.edu/leadership/texasstreamteam.

***Please note! Standard Core Stream Team training must be completed prior to attending the advanced training on June 28th.**

Feel free to contact Katey for more information. For assistance finding a Standard Core training opportunity, contact Katey or Tammie Walters through the Membership Directory.



What Happens Next

Chapter Meeting and Presentation

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

Denton County Southwest Courthouse

6200 Canyon Falls Dr. • Flower Mound, TX 76226

This Month's Presentation (via Zoom):

Wolves of the Sky: Harris' Hawk Sociality in Southern Texas

By Brooke Poplin, MS Biology Candidate, UNT

The University of North Texas (UNT) Harris' Hawk research team has begun research aiming to unveil the secrets of sociality in these majestic raptors. Recent findings have revealed that more than half of all Harris' Hawk nesting groups in south Texas consist of three or more individuals, engaging cooperative breeding and in dramatic cooperative hunts. In pursuit of a deeper understanding, our team has deployed VHF radio transmitters in 2023 to study these remarkable groups throughout the valley in both urban and natural habitats.

This presentation will describe how we capture, mark, and observe Harris' Hawks, then delve into the results regarding how habitat complexity affects sociality of these special raptors. This research has broader implications for our knowledge of raptor behavior and the role of sociality in avian populations. Our discoveries offer valuable insights into the adaptability of Harris' Hawks and how their social structure contributes to their thriving presence in the harsh south Texas environment.

Brooke Poplin is a graduate student from the University of North Texas pursuing her Biology M.S. For her master's thesis, she is studying the social behavior of Harris' Hawks in the Rio Grande Valley using VHF radio transmitters in conjunction with direct behavioral observations. Brooke has been interested in ornithology since her early undergrad days as she became involved with multiple avian research projects in north Texas. Her ultimate career goal is to pursue a career as a raptor biologist, one day becoming a professor.

Awards and Recognition

April 2025

Initial Certifications

Greg Chadwick	Class of 2024
Lisa Lee	Class of 2024
Sue Ridnour	Class of 2024
Sarah Zaidi	Class of 2024

2025 Recertifications

Mindy Anderson	Class of 2015
Rob Blake	Class of 2024
Penny Cooley	Class of 2024
Delia Croessmann	Class of 2024
Amy Crook	Class of 2020
Dale Denton	Class of 2019
Deborah Driver	Class of 2023
Jane Duke	Class of 2009
Larry Duncan	Class of 2018
Mike Hatch	Class of 2014
Karen Kearns	Class of 2022
Kerry Kearns	Class of 2024
Tom Kirwan	Class of 2024
Dan Lemons	Class of 2022
Brenda McCoy	Class of 2023
Nancy McWhorter	Class of 2023
Susan Pohlen	Class of 2007
Susan Richmond	Class of 2024

Awards and Recognition

April 2025

2025 Recertifications (cont.)

Sherry Smith	Class of 2024
Tammie Walters	Class of 2020
Kathy Webb	Class of 2017
Kathryn Wells	Class of 2017

Milestones

250 Hour Milestone

Kerry Kearns	Class of 2024

500 Hour Milestone

Stephen Carroll	Class of 2021
Karen Jamieson	Class of 2017

1000 Hour Milestone

Kere Post	Class of 2020

4500 Hour Milestone

Jerry Hamby	Class of 2014

Field Notes in Focus

Star Milkvine (*Matelea biflora*), also known as Purple Milkweed Vine.
Found at Green Acres by Cindy Peirce, this plant was previously rescued from Harlington during the pandemic. Photo by Becky Bertoni.

Inside Outside News

Approved AT

Thrive Nature Talk: It's a Family Affair

Sunday, June 15th
9:00 AM–11:00 AM

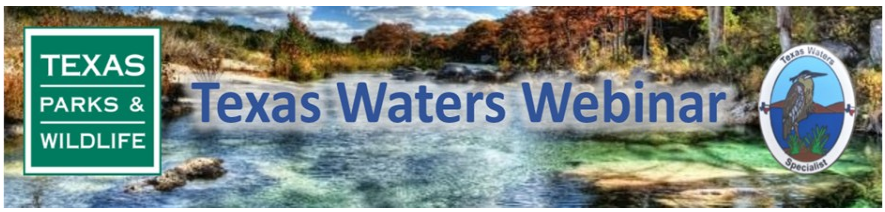
Thrive Rec. Center
1950 S. Valley Pkwy.
Lewisville, TX 75067


Photo Credit: Chris Jackson

We'll celebrate Father's Day on June 15 with a behind-the-scenes look at our local wildlife raising their families. Popular author Chris Jackson of DFW Urban Wildlife returns to Thrive to share his revealing trail cam footage and amazing photography.

Doors open at 9am and the presentation will be 9:30-11am. Free and kid-friendly but registration is required.

https://app.amilia.com/store/en/lewisville-tx/api/Activity/Detail?activityId=k1j06mr



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

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 Certificaton Training

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 under “Outdoor” tab in “Search.”

Photo: Getty Images / Castigatio

Inside Outside News

Volunteer Opportunity

ELM FORK NATURE PRESERVE CLEANUP DAY

Saturday, May 17 ✿ 9-11 am

2335 Sandy Lake Rd

Email daniela.parker@cityofcarrollton.com for more information.

Join City of Carrollton staff for a cleanup day at Elm Fork Nature Preserve. Volunteers will be picking up litter, removing invasive species, and more. Wear long pants, a long sleeved shirt, and closed-toe shoes. Bring a bottle of water, a snack, small tools, and sunscreen.

Project Number P210212, Activity Code RM

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.

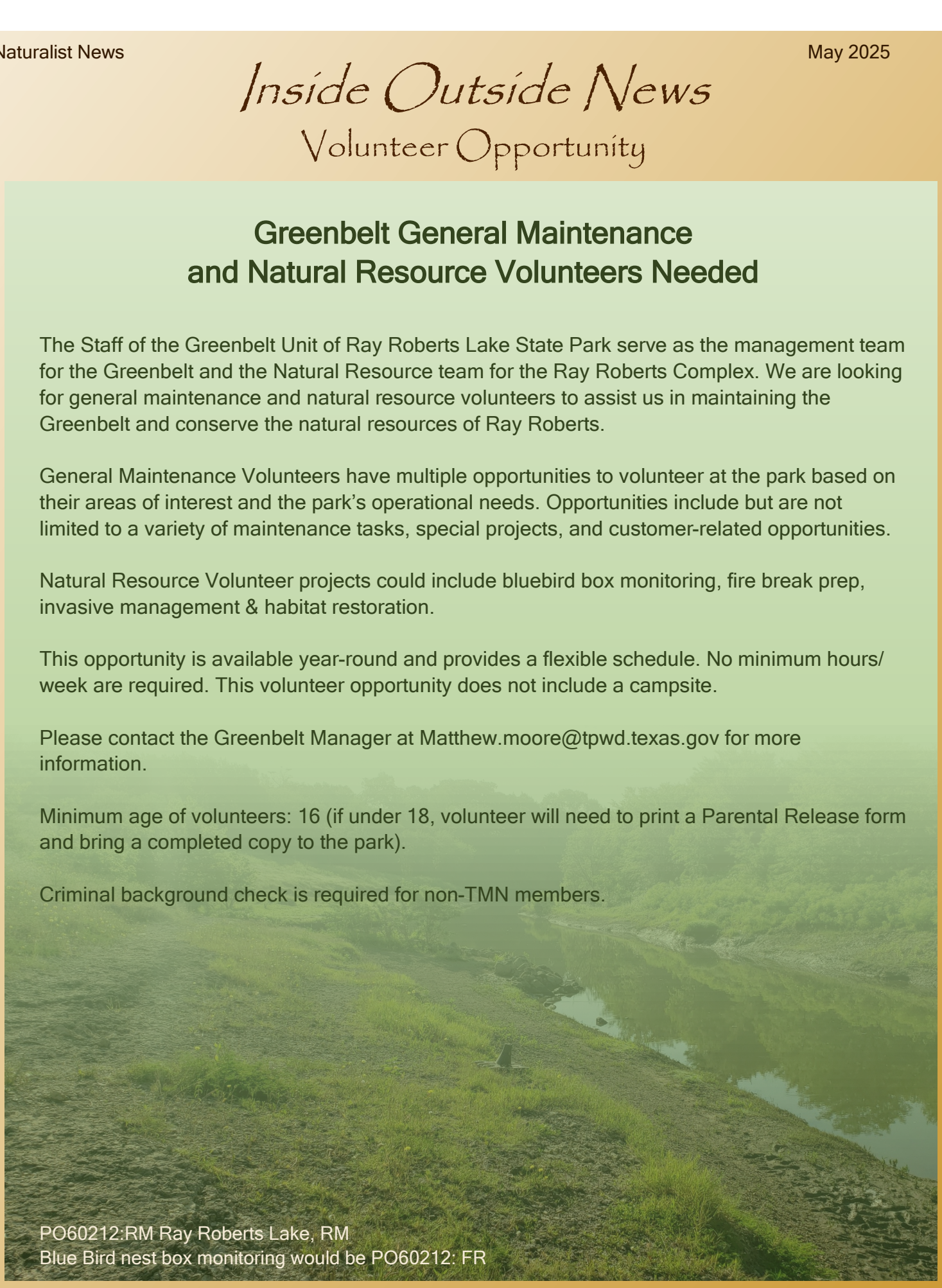
Natural Resource Volunteer projects could include bluebird box monitoring, fire break prep, invasive management & habitat restoration.

This opportunity is available year-round and provides a flexible schedule. No minimum hours/ week are required. This volunteer opportunity does 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.

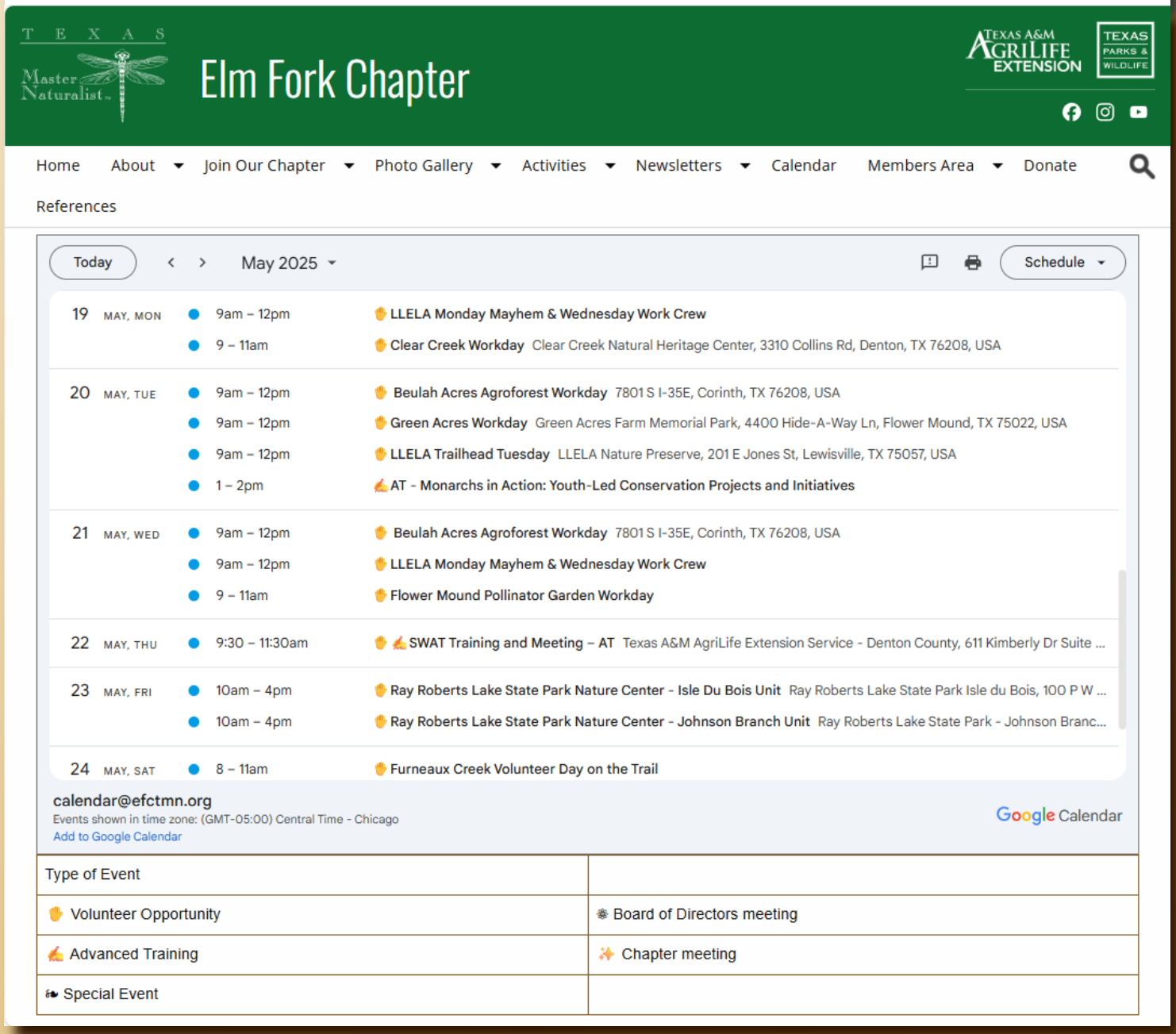


PO60212:RM Ray Roberts Lake, RM
Blue Bird nest box monitoring would be PO60212: FR

Inside Outside News

Volunteer and AT Opportunities

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



TEXAS Master Naturalist — Elm Fork Chapter

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension · Texas Parks & Wildlife

Home | About | Join Our Chapter | Photo Gallery | Activities | Newsletters | Calendar | Members Area | Donate | References

Today | May 2025 | Schedule

19	MAY, MON	9am – 12pm	LLELA Monday Mayhem & Wednesday Work Crew
		9 – 11am	Clear Creek Workday Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center, 3310 Collins Rd, Denton, TX 76208, USA
20	MAY, TUE	9am – 12pm	Beulah Acres Agroforest Workday 7801 S I-35E, Corinth, TX 76208, USA
		9am – 12pm	Green Acres Workday Green Acres Farm Memorial Park, 4400 Hide-A-Way Ln, Flower Mound, TX 75022, USA
		9am – 12pm	LLELA Trailhead Tuesday LLELA Nature Preserve, 201 E Jones St, Lewisville, TX 75057, USA
		1 – 2pm	AT - Monarchs in Action: Youth-Led Conservation Projects and Initiatives
21	MAY, WED	9am – 12pm	Beulah Acres Agroforest Workday 7801 S I-35E, Corinth, TX 76208, USA
		9am – 12pm	LLELA Monday Mayhem & Wednesday Work Crew
		9 – 11am	Flower Mound Pollinator Garden Workday
22	MAY, THU	9:30 – 11:30am	SWAT Training and Meeting – AT Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service - Denton County, 611 Kimberly Dr Suite ...
23	MAY, FRI	10am – 4pm	Ray Roberts Lake State Park Nature Center - Isle Du Bois Unit Ray Roberts Lake State Park Isle du Bois, 100 P W ...
		10am – 4pm	Ray Roberts Lake State Park Nature Center - Johnson Branch Unit Ray Roberts Lake State Park - Johnson Branc...
24	MAY, SAT	8 – 11am	Furneaux Creek Volunteer Day on the Trail

calendar@efctmn.org
Events shown in time zone: (GMT-05:00) Central Time - Chicago
Add to Google Calendar

Google Calendar

Type of Event	
Volunteer Opportunity	Board of Directors meeting
Advanced Training	Chapter meeting
Special Event	

Projects in the Community

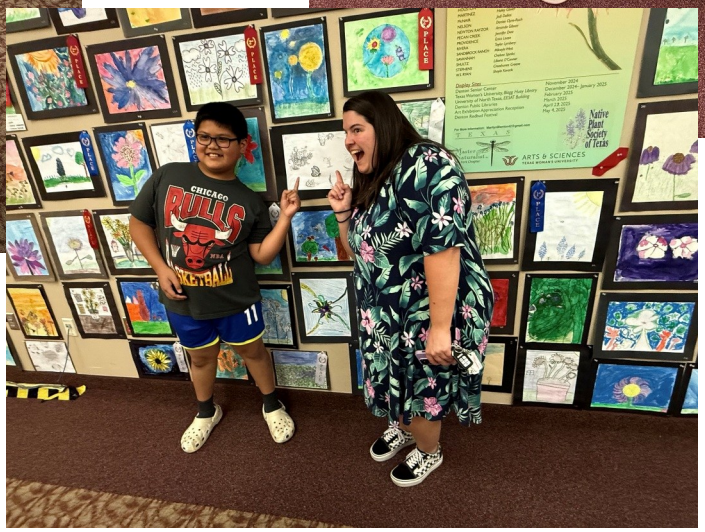
Texas Native Plant Art Exhibition

The Texas Native Plant Art Exhibition is ending with the school year but it will start all over again when the new school year begins in the fall. I'd like to thank all of the great volunteers that have helped to make this project a success.

The last three events featuring pictures of Texas native plants created by fourth grade DISD students were the Appreciation Reception, TWU Wildflower Day, and the Denton Redbud Festival. Everyone loves the young artists' pictures!

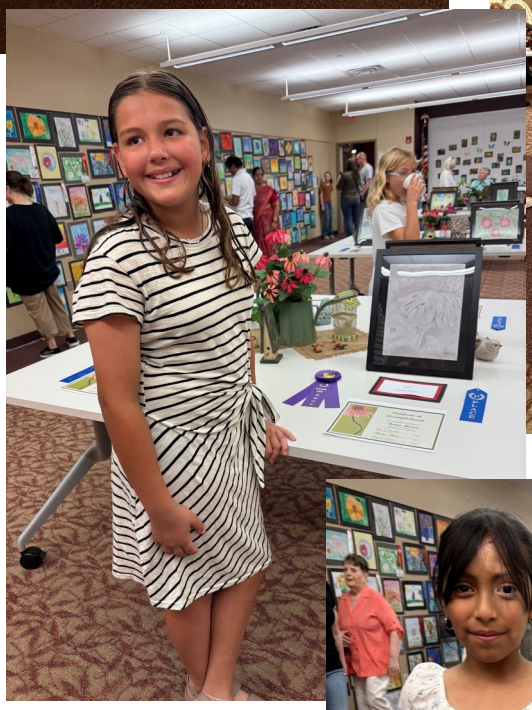
About 500 attended the Appreciation Reception! The reception was held at the DISD Professional Development Center. In addition to the art teachers, students and their families, we had the superintendent of DISD, representatives of the Board of Trustees, the Fine Arts Department, and our display hosts attending. All of the almost 700 pictures were displayed!

Marilyn Blanton
Project Manager



See more on next page...

Texas Native Plant Art Exhibition (cont.)



Features

Native Plant Propagation Center Tour

By Becky Bertoni, reviewed by Mei Ling Lui

On March 21st about 25 assorted Denton County Master Gardeners, Native Plant Society of Texas members, Texas Master Naturalists, all from various local area chapters, and owners of a wholesale native plant nursery, met from 10:00 a.m. to noon for a tour of the Native Plant Propagation Center, a Texas Conservation Alliance project at the Dallas Zoo.

Group tour at TCA Dallas Zoo

Many of us know from recent talks by Amy Martin that the Texas Conservation Alliance (TCA) was begun by local conservationist Ned Fritz, starting in about the 1970s. Ned worked to conserve native areas such as the Trinity Forest and the Big Thicket and the land surrounding the Trinity River.

The Native Plant Propagation Center is a TCA project in partnership with the Dallas Zoo. We learned about conservation efforts at the Dallas Zoo, and the history of the Texas Conservation Alliance propagation efforts for the last 3 years in cooperation with the Dallas Zoo.

With a small staff working limited hours, Mei Ling Lui, Community Conservation Director at this project, has worked very successfully with Katie of the Dallas Zoo. The plant propagation numbers are amazing; every year the goal is to sell/donate 10,000 plants.

Mei Ling TCA

Antelope horn seedlings

The zoo receives 1,000 plants to use as they like in landscaping, as gifts for their employees, and as giveaways at special events, such as Oak Cliff Earth Day. Other plants are sold at spring and fall plant sales at Wild Birds Unlimited-East Dallas, at White Rock Lake's Native Plants and Prairies Day, which is May 3 this year, and at Redenta's Garden Nursery. Plants are donated to projects for restoring prairies and riparian areas through Plant Match programs, and for projects that promote use of natives in urban areas such as Roots for Wings in Lewisville.

Native Plant Propagation Center Tour (cont.)

We saw the greenhouse where plants are grown from seed or cuttings. Seedlings are up-potted to gallon size pots eventually. Then the plants are moved to the hoop house, which is an open-air storage spot.

Up-potting seedlings

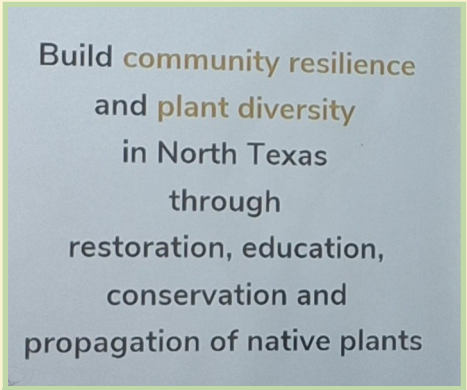
Hoophouse four nerve daisy

Mei Ling stated that her top goal right now is to get native plants into residential areas for conservation of the plants and water conservation.

The Native Plant Propagation Center has two big needs: seeds which they will gladly accept from verified native plant sources, and volunteers to help in their efforts. Volunteers are required to complete orientation with the Zoo and at the greenhouse and are expected to commit to 2 volunteer days per month for at least 6 months.

As a tour member I was impressed with all of the propagation happening at this Texas Conservation Alliance project. Mei Ling and her staff are doing an amazing job. Another benefit was meeting and talking with other participants of the tour.

TCA has another effort, outreach with local area conservation projects. Anne Beckman is the TCA staff person who coordinates these efforts. One Saturday in January several TCA volunteers worked with Green Acres volunteers on weed suppression around recently planted little bluestem, and on April 12th they will return to Green Acres to help remove hedge parsley, a non-native invasive, from Green Acres project areas and the whole park, before it makes sticktights, the seeds that attach to everything and spread the plant.



TCA program goals

Zoo's Browse Garden Project sign

All photos by Becky Bertoni

Features

THERE ARE DRAGONS ON THE LOOSE AT LLELA!

They have been spotted on the Green Dragon Trail! Have you seen them?

But these are not the fire-breathing dragons from the movies. These are *Arisaema dracontium*, or dragonroot, the herbaceous perennial plant. It is native to North America from Quebec through Minnesota south through Florida and Texas, where it is found growing in damp woods, like on the aptly named Green Dragon Trail at LLELA.

The plants grow 7.9–19.7" tall when in bloom and after flowering reaches 39", and each grows from a corm. Normally, a plant produces one leaf with a long petiole. Its leaf is composed of 7 to 13 leaflets, with its central leaflet being the largest one and with leaflets becoming smaller as they are produced distally; the leaflets are held out horizontally over the plant. During flowering in spring, a single slender green spathe 1.2–2.4" long is produced; it covers a tapering, long thin spadix. The tail-like spadix grows out around the top of its spathe. After flowering, up to 150 berries are produced in a club-shaped column. In late summer, the green berries turn orange red, each berry producing 1 to 3 seeds.

So yes, we have photographic evidence there are dragons on the loose at LLELA. Visit the Green Dragon Trail and see them for yourself. They are on the right side of the trail not too far from the beginning of the trailhead, mixed in with poison ivy.

Oh, and leave your dragon-fighting gear at home please. Weapons are not allowed at LLELA!

Sue Yost, class of 2017
Photos from Sue Yost, info from Wikipedia.

Features

Shooting Stars, Spittlebugs, and Bobwhite Quail— A Nature Hike in the LBJ National Grassland

By Jerry Hamby

Unit 31 is one of the most remote areas in the LBJ National Grassland (LBJ NG), accessible via two unpaved Forest Service roads that wind through other units. The landscape is surprisingly varied, consisting of limestone bluffs, sloping meadows, and pockets of Cross Timbers forest, all of which are connected by a multi-purpose trail. Several years ago the U.S. Forest Service gated the road that bisects the unit and suspended cattle grazing there. As a result many species of native grasses and forbs have seen a resurgence, making it a popular destination for wildflower enthusiasts.

The varied landscape of Unit 31 (photo by Carl Malmberg)

Sam Kieschnick and Mary Curry (photo by Kate Morgan)

I explored Unit 31 on Mary Curry's "First Wednesday" nature walk in April 2024 and was so impressed with the profusion of native plants that I returned three times over the next two months. Wanting to share that experience with members of the Elm Fork Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists, I invited Sam Kieschnick, Urban Wildlife Biologist with Texas Parks and Wildlife, to lead a nature walk in 2025. Fortunately, he was eager to participate.

Knowing that Sam would draw a large crowd, I enlisted other people for support: Mary, Jeanne Erickson (Elm Fork member and Project Manager for the LBJ NG), Kate Morgan, and Jeff Quayle. They know the Grassland extensively and work, in various capacities, with the Native Prairies Association of Texas and the Texas Master Naturalist program. More specifically, all four have expertise in identifying the native plants of North Central Texas.

In early April I asked Elm Fork Master Naturalists Susan Hamby and Whit Dieterich to visit the site with me. In addition to scoping out potential hiking routes, they helped compile a list of plant species we could expect to see on the day of the walk. We also searched for a

Shooting Stars, Spittlebugs, and Bobwhite Quail– *(cont.)*

Eastern shooting star

wildflower that is not common in Texas, eastern shooting star (*Primula meadia*). Because bloom density varies from year to year, I was excited to find several patches of this showy flower.

On the day of the walk, I suggested options for exploring the prairie. Most people chose to follow Sam up a gentle rise to a bluff, where he moved, as he likes to say, at "the speed of botany." Keeping close to the ground, he stopped frequently to identify plants, insects, lichens, and marine fossils, the last of which were scattered on the ground and embedded in limestone concretions. Picking up an ancient bivalve, he recalled natural historian Sir David Attenborough's comment that it might have been eighty million years since the underside of the fossil was exposed to sunlight. It is a humbling observation that puts our limited human presence on the planet into perspective. I will never look at fossils the same way.

Discovering a spider hole, Sam asked the group if all spiders are venomous. All but a few species, it turns out, have venom glands, although most spiders are not harmful to humans. Sam then prodded the burrow with a stick until the front legs of what appeared to be a wolf spider emerged and then disappeared. Sam also caught a three-ribbed darkling beetle (*Eleodes tricostata*) and, tipping it forward in the palm of his hand, explained how the insect has adapted to survive in an arid environment by collecting water on its back and channeling it toward its mouth.

Three-ribbed darkling beetle (photo by Rick Travis)

Removing a tiny hill-prairie spittlebug (*Lepyronia gibbosa*) from a blob that resembled saliva, Sam said that as nymphs, spittlebugs (of which *L. gibbosa* is one of many species) feed on plant sap and protect themselves with the foam they produce. They appear in prairies every spring and can be spotted close to the ground. Sam colorfully described the spittle they excrete as "fart bubbles." He had an equally vivid phrase for a colony of star jelly (*Nostoc commune*), which he described as "snot rockets." When dry, its curled edges look like crisp mats of dirt, but when star jelly is doused with water, it turns gelatinous and reveals a range of bluish-green colors. According to folklore, star jelly fell to earth during meteor showers. In parts of Africa, Asia, and South America, it is used as an herbal medicine. A cyanobacterium, *Nostoc commune* is one of the oldest life forms on earth and one of the first to produce oxygen.

Sam Kieschnick in a patch of Texas paintbrushes (photo by Susan Hamby)

Kneeling in a patch of Texas paintbrush (*Castilleja indivisa*), Sam discussed the plant's hemiparasitic nature. Unlike "true parasites," which are completely dependent on their hosts to survive, hemiparasites penetrate the roots of host plants, mainly grasses, for nutrients while creating their own food through photosynthesis. Sam spotted a plant of the same genus, purple paintbrush (*C. purpurea*), which hybridizes with *C. indivisa*, producing dramatic color variations. *Castilleja indivisa* is one of

Shooting Stars, Spittlebugs, and Bobwhite Quail– *(cont.)*

the most prolific wildflower species in the LBJ NG (and, indeed, in all of North Texas), but *C. purpurea* is less common.

While most participants spent the entire morning with Sam, others wanted to explore more territory, so Whit and I led two groups on longer hikes that crossed several ecosystems. Our route traced a section of the White Trail, one of five color-coded trails in the LBJ NG used by equestrians, hikers, and bikers. One of the first flowers my group spotted was Texas vervain (*Verbena halei*). Because of its slender stems, narrow leaves, and tiny purple blooms, the plant is easily overlooked, but we eventually observed several of them along a woodland edge.

Texas vervain

Narrowleaf puccoon

Early on, the trail passed through a section of Cross Timbers forest, which was densely populated with blackjack oaks (*Quercus marilandica*), and emerged into a meadow, where we encountered Carolina woollywhite (*Hymenopappus scabiosaeus*), a leggy member of the daisy family often found in tallgrass prairies. In large colonies, the dense white flowers sway dramatically in the wind.

White milkwort

Another prairie plant, narrowleaf puccoon (*Lithospermum incisum*), was easy to spot with its yellow trumpet-shaped flowers. Historically used to treat infections and inflammation, this member of the borage family was prized by Zuni people and other Native Americans. Similarly, white milkwort (*Senega alba*) has several medicinal uses, including the treatment of respiratory ailments and snakebites. With long racemes covered in small white flowers, white milkwort is one of my favorite spring wildflowers, and it was abundant on this mid-April morning.

Jeff spotted a less dramatic yet fascinating plant he called chickenthief, which is also commonly known as stick-leaf (*Mentzelia oligosperma*). The leaves are covered with barbed hairs that bind to fabric and can remain intact after emerging from the washing machine. Jeff was only too happy to demonstrate their adhesive quality by “sticking” a leaf on my shirt.

Fringed bluestar

Other wildflowers we observed include fringed bluestar (*Amsonia ciliata*), inland ceanothus (*Ceanothus herbaceus*), Berlandier's sundrops (*Oenothera capillifolia*), and blue-eyed grasses (Genus *Sisyrinchium*). However, the species my group was most eager to find was the previously

Shooting Stars, Spittlebugs, and Bobwhite Quail– *(cont.)*

Berlandier's sundrops

Inland ceanothus

Blue-eyed grass

mentioned eastern shooting star, a delicate nodding flower whose blooms range from white to pink to purple. It is easy to see why settlers called the plant "prairie pointers"; the leafless stalk terminates with a dramatic flower whose petals create a star pattern with their upward divergence. In 2024 eastern shooting stars filled several fields in Unit 31, and while the flowers were not as abundant this year, the ones we saw did not disappoint.

Stiff greenthread

At the top of a rise, where the trail bent sharply to the east, my group was given two options for finishing the hike–head northeast another quarter of a mile to see an even larger patch of shooting stars or stay on the trail and loop back to our rendezvous point. Kate walked ahead with the former group while I led everyone else. As a side trip we followed the trail into a bottomland filled with typical understory trees and shrubs, including eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) and coralberry (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*). An unexpected discovery was yellow passionflower (*Passiflora lutea*), a less aggressive grower than purple passionflower (*P. incarnata*), both of which are host plants for the gulf fritillary (*Dione vanillae*), a bright orange butterfly with long, narrow wings.

For the final leg of the hike, we ascended the bluff where Sam's group had spent the morning. Along the way we saw stiff greenthread (*Thelesperma filifolium*) covering the slope. In the coming weeks, its golden-yellow ray flowers and red disc flowers will make it instantly identifiable, and later this summer the ripe seeds will provide food for the painted buntings (*Passerina ciris*) that inhabit the LBJ NG.

As we met Whit's group, Kevin Shaw was carrying a snakeskin that he picked up after seeing what appeared to be a rat snake (Genus Pantherophis) shed the skin in the grass. Kevin is married to Elm Fork Chapter member Marissa Shaw and has applied to train with the class of 2025. He has certainly earned his bonafides as a Master Naturalist.

Kevin Shaw holding a snakeskin

Shooting Stars, Spittlebugs, and Bobwhite Quail– *(cont.)*

As we finished the three-hour walk, another member of our group discovered a female northern bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) hiding in the grass. Like many other species of New World quail, northern bobwhites (or bobwhite quails, as they are also known) have experienced population declines over the past fifty years due to habitat loss. Working with the U.S. Forest Service, Mary has monitored the species' population in the LBJ NG, for more than twenty-five years. She reports that the numbers have always been low but fluctuate year to year. One complicating factor is that people release bobwhites in the Grassland, making it difficult to gauge the population of wild birds.

Northern bobwhite (photo by Abbie Beck)

While no fewer than ten people uploaded observations of the northern bobwhite, I never found out who first spotted her. After taking appropriately distanced photographs of the bird, our large group quietly dispersed and made our way back to where we began. I did not get an official count for the nature walk but estimate that there were seventy people, many of whom had never previously visited the LBJ NG. I hope they are inspired to return; there are 20,000 more acres to explore.

Pre-hike group photo

All photographs by Jerry Hamby, except those noted

Tweet of the Month

By Sue Yost, class of 2017

Summer Tanager

It is spring in the metroplex. You are enjoying a hike in the woods. The spring and summer residents are migrating into town. You see a flash of red. You write it off as "just a Cardinal." Cardinals are the only red birds found in our area, or are they? This time of year, one must look and listen closer as you may be seeing a flash of red/orange that belongs to the Summer Tanager.

Formerly placed in the tanager family, it and other members of its genus are now classified in the cardinal family. The species' plumage and vocalizations are similar to other members of the cardinal family.

Adult male Summer Tanagers have an overall vibrant crimson-red plumage with a tinge of black to their primary flight feathers and a dark wash on their wings and tail tip. However, they usually appear uniformly red. Adult female Summer Tanagers have mustard-yellow plumage. If you look a bit closer, you can see that their backs are slightly olive-toned whereas their undersides and heads are yellower. Their wings appear a bit darker, similar to the males. Both sexes have dark legs, black eyes, and may have a slightly crested head at times. Juvenile Summer Tanagers look similar to females. However, as the males mature, they develop blotchy yellow and red plumage before they acquire their red adult plumage. As with all other birds, all red and orange colorations are acquired through their diet.

They mainly eat insects, but also regularly supplement their diets with fruit. Even though they are not known as feeder birds, you could try and attract them to your backyard by offering oranges cut in half, grape jelly, suet, and mealworms. Providing a bird bath with moving water can also draw them in. The Summer Tanager is known as a bee and wasp specialist. They have developed remarkable techniques to safely consume these stinging insects. They will frequently attack wasp nests, repeatedly until the wasps leave. When the bird has caught an insect, it will bring its prey back to a perch and smack it into the perch until it dies. If it is a wasp or a bee, they will wipe it against a branch to remove the stinger. Summer Tanagers also break into wasp's nests to eat their larvae. They also have an adaptation to handle the stings. This allows them to consume a substantial number of bees and wasps that other birds might avoid. Summer Tanagers consume a wide array of other insects. Their diet includes beetles, cicadas, caterpillars, spiders, grasshoppers, bugs, and flies. They are efficient foragers, capturing these insects on the wing, gleaning them from foliage, or snatching them from tree trunks and branches.

Tweet of the Month (cont.)

Summer Tanagers also have a sweet tooth. They incorporate berries and small fruits into their diet, especially during the late breeding season, during migration, and on their wintering grounds. They are known to consume a range of fruits, including blackberries, mulberries, pokeweed berries, citrus, apples, and even bananas. They can be seen foraging on backyard berry bushes and fruit trees,

Summer Tanagers are long-distance migrants and will often return to the same breeding grounds each year. They leave in September and October and return by mid-May. They spend their winters in Central and South America.

These birds are monogamous, which means that they pair-bond for a breeding season and raise the young together. Males sing to establish and defend their nesting territory and chase females, sometimes offering them food.

Summer Tanagers nest 10-35 feet above the ground on a horizontal branch away from the trunk in a cluster of leaves or a fork of branches. The female is in charge of gathering material and building the nest. The completed nest is a shallow cup made of grasses, bark strips, leaves, fine grass, and other dry and fine plant material measuring 3.5 inches across and 2 inches high. They lay 3-4 eggs in a clutch that are pale blue or green with brown markings and about an inch long and 0.6-0.7 inches wide. The female incubates the eggs by herself for 11-12 days and the male may feed her. The young leave the nest after about 8-10 days and reach independence 2-4 weeks after fledging. During that time, the parents will feed and take care of them.

These birds prefer open wooded areas, especially with oak trees. During the summer, they can be found in different deciduous and mixed open woodlands, sometimes also in orchards and parks. They can be hard to spot as they tend to forage high in the treetops.

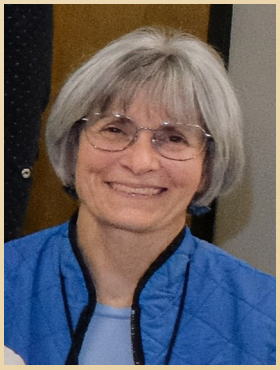
I always advise those birding LLELA to never assume that flash of red is the common Cardinal. Look again. You may have just spotted the beautiful spring/summer resident.

The Summer Tanager

Source/photos:
Birdzilla and Wikipedia

This Month's Contributors

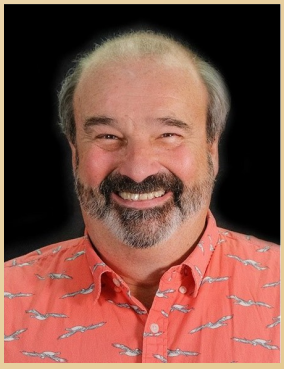
Gale Bacon



Becky Bertoni

Marilyn Blanton

Jerry Hamby



Dave Jones

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Katey Pirot

Michele Rawleigh

Fran Witte

Sue Yost

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

Almost the Last Word

Many of our beloved Texas wildflowers have myths and legends associated with them. Here are a few that you might like:

The Comanche legend states that during a drought, a young girl sacrificed her most cherished possession, a cornhusk doll with a blue feather, which then miraculously transformed into the first bluebonnets, bringing rain and hope to the tribe. This act of selfless giving, according to the legend, is how the bluebonnet, the state flower of Texas, came to be.

a Native American boy had a dream that he would paint the colors of the evening sky, and he spent his life becoming a painter. He eventually found the vibrant colors to capture the beauty of the sunset, fulfilling his dream. His fallen paint brushes sporuted into flowers and gave the plant its name.

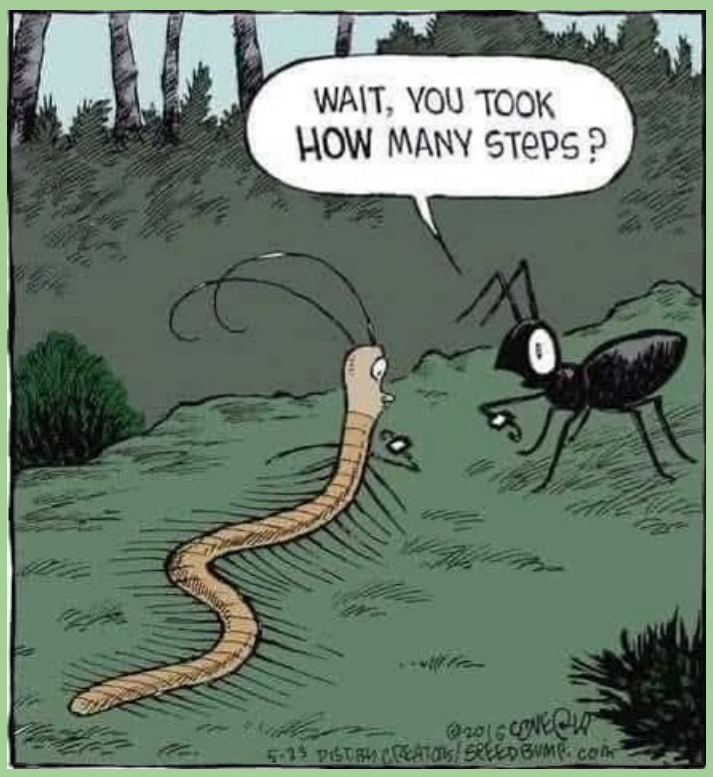
According to a Scottish legend, if you want to see a fairy, you must eat a primrose (please don't). Leaving primroses on your doorstep will ensure fairies will bless your house, and putting primroses in a cowshed will convince them not to steal the milk. Not surprisingly, the flower is also known as "fairy cup".

A Chief went to war and his wife prayed for his safety. She wove a blanket of her prayers using red and orange thread. At this time, the Chief's young daughter wandered into the woods and lost her way. She prayed to the Great Spirit to shelter her with the blanket through the night . When the little girl woke up she was covered in red and orange flowers. Her father found her covered in these red and orange flowers on his return.

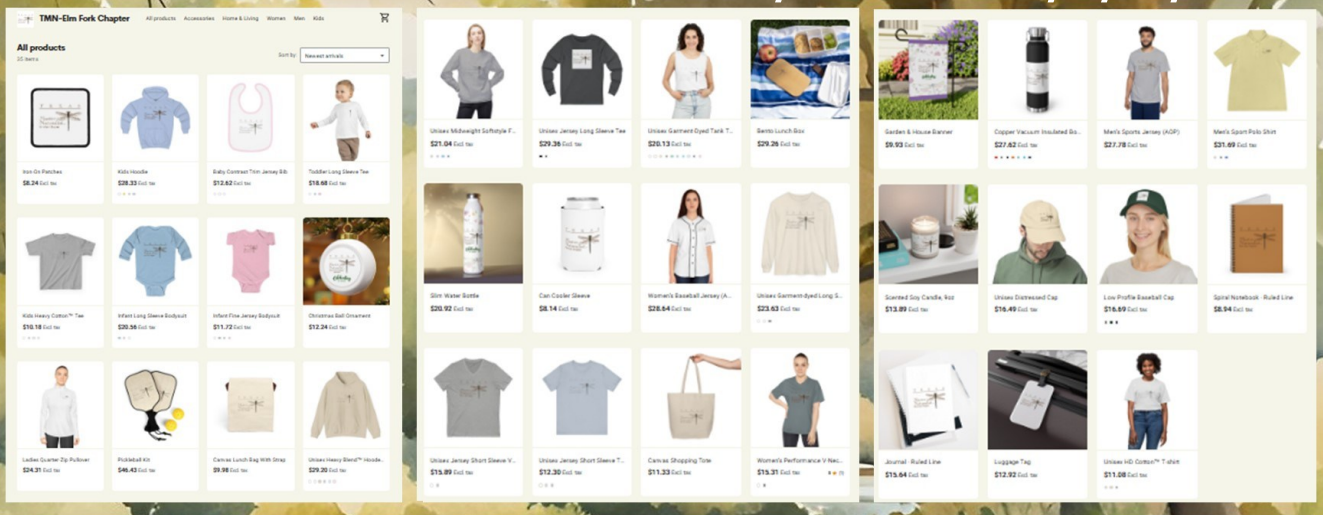
From Washington on the Brazos State Historic Site

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.

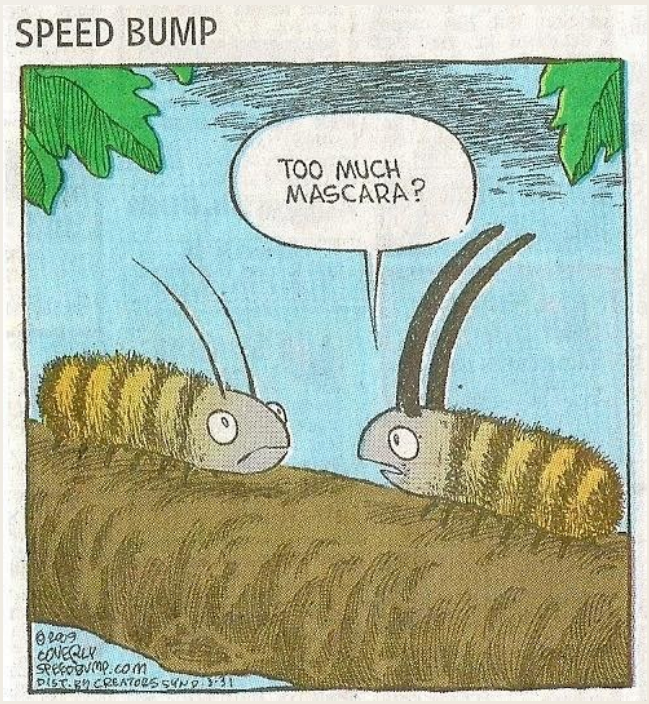
Stream The Naturalist News

WE ARE ON INSTAGRAM!

Please follow us at elmforkchaptertmn 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



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

June 2025 submissions are due by:

Monday, June 2nd

Tammie Walters, Editor

Notice

Next month's newsletter submission deadline is a week earlier due to the chapter meeting being a week earlier because of the Juneteenth holiday on June 19th.

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

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 – Andrea Dixon
Advanced Training Programs – TBD
Outreach/Adult Education – TBD
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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