TEXAS Master Naturalist™ Elm Fork Chapter

Naturalist News

June 2025 Volume 25, Issue 6

Green anole (*Anolis carolinensis*), by Regina Dale

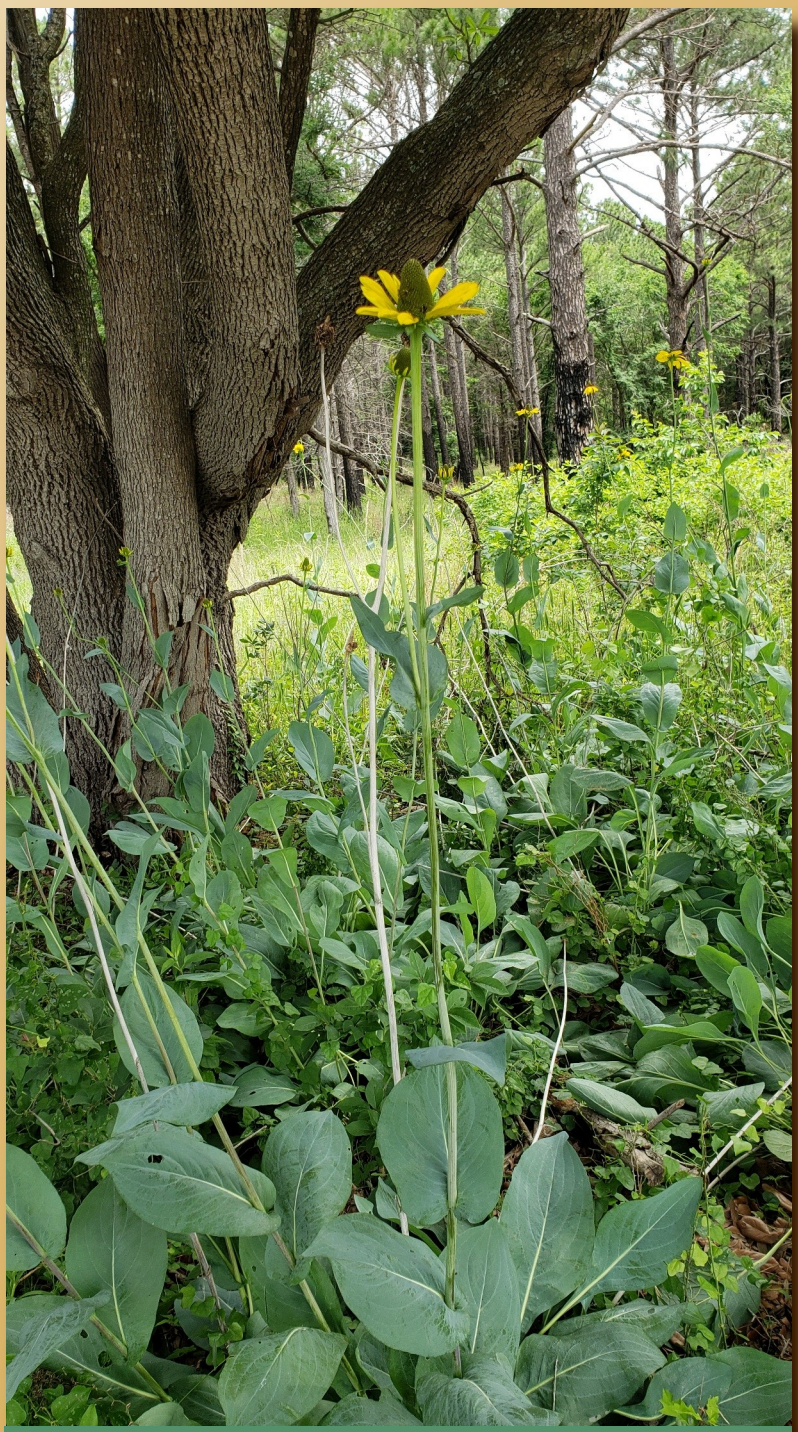
TEXAS Master Naturalist™ Elm Fork Chapter

Naturalist News

Inside This Issue:

On the Cover:

Green anoles, like all lizards, shed their skin as a natural part of their growth and development. This process is called ecdysis. Lizards shed their skin in pieces, often shedding parts of their skin on their neck, legs, and scutes (scales) on their shells. Some lizards even eat their shed skin.
(From Google AI)



Great coneflower (*Rudbeckia maxima*)
at Ray Roberts Lake, by Tammie Walters

Announcements

Elm Fork Chapter's 2025 Projects Showcase

On Thursday, July 17th, the Texas Master Naturalist Elm Fork Chapter will present its project showcase. This is an opportunity for members and the public to see a wide range of projects we support, and for all to see the **Big Picture** of the Elm Fork Chapter's work.

These members to the right, and on the next two pages, are already a part of the picture!

Projects Showcase (cont.)

Projects Showcase (cont.)

What Happens Next

Chapter Meeting and Presentation

Thursday, June 12th, 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:

Wildflower Trails of the LBJ National Grassland

By Jerry Hamby

Jerry Hamby has hiked in more than 20 of the 78 units that make up the LBJ National Grassland. During those visits, he has uploaded more than 2,400 observations on iNaturalist, representing 463 (mostly native) species. His presentation will consist of three parts: a description of the ecosystems that comprise the LBJ National Grassland, a tour of a few locations where people can find native plants, and a look at some of the most unusual wildflowers.

Jerry Hamby completed his initial training with the Texas Master Naturalist's Gulf Coast Chapter in 2014 while living in Houston. He moved to Denton in 2021 and joined the Elm Fork Chapter. In addition to monitoring bluebird nest boxes at the LBJ National Grassland, Jerry serves as Project Manager for Adopt-a-Loop, which documents iNaturalist and eBird observations on TPWD's Great Texas Wildlife Trails. He also works with fellow Citizen Foresters on a weekly tree inventory for the Lewisville Parks and Recreation Department, identifying, tagging, and assessing trees in Lewisville's public spaces.

Awards and Recognition

May 2025

Initial Certifications

Bonnie Hardy	Class of 2024
Cindy Pierce	Class of 2024
Cynthia Steward	Class of 2024
Elaine Teves	Class of 2024

2025 Recertifications

Brynn Bryan	Class of 2022
Kesa Clingman	Class of 2017
Beckey Cortines	Class of 2021
Jan Marie LaPine	Class of 2007
Rita Lokie	Class of 2017
Carl Malmberg	Class of 2021
Amy Montgomery	Class of 2023
Debbbie Nobles	Class of 2024
Kere Post	Class of 2020
Jamie Reneau	Class of 2022
Dave Rowley	Class of 2000
Chris Teves	Class of 2019
Janay Tieken	Class of 2024
LeeAnn Weaver	Class of 2004

Awards and Recognition

May 2025

250 Hour Milestone

Susan Richmond Class of 2024
Dawn Tallman Class of 2019
Silvia Zapata-Schleicher Class of 2024

500 Hour Milestone

Abbie Beck Class of 2023

1500 Hour Milestone

Whit Dieterich Class of 2022
Karen Peden Class of 2017

2500 Hour Milestone

Sharon Barr Class of 2008

4500 Hour Milestone

Becky Bertoni Class of 2015

Field Notes in Focus

Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*), by Bryan Lewis

Inside Outside News

Approved AT

Friends of Coppell Nature Park Lecture Series - Fantastic Fossils

Saturday, June 14th
10:00 AM–12:00 PM
Biodiversity Education Center at Coppell Nature Park
367 Freeport PKWY, Coppell, TX 75019

Come and learn about the history of fossils! What are they and how can we find them? Did you know the whole of Texas was under water 300 millions years ago? Is there still evidence of this now? Please bring any fossils you have found, and we will determine the animals that left them behind. Children under the age of 16 must be accompanied by an adult.

For directions, do not use Google Maps. You will be taken to the wrong driveway. Enter through Wagon Wheel Park. We are located in the northwest corner of the parking lot. Park by the batting cages and walk the center path until you see our building. We are about 175 yards from the parking lot.

Program begins at 10:00 a.m. No one will be admitted after 10:05 out of respect for our speaker and the program.

Coppell Community Experiences Summer 2025

Second Mondays on The Flower Mound

We're starting summer hours for our monthly Second Monday workdays on The Flower Mound! We'll start bright and early at 7:00 am to try to beat the heat and work until 10, or we wear out. Each month will be a new adventure. We could be pulling or cutting invasives, removing woody plants, checking bluebird boxes, weeding around the monument sign. Who knows?

Wear: long pants, long-sleeved shirt, closed-toe shoes, work gloves, hat, sunscreen, insect repellant. Bring: water, loppers, hand saw, sharp shooter shovel or Root Slayer, if you have any of these tools.

For more information contact Jim Kennedy through the membership roster.

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

Volunteer with YMSL on second Saturdays at Green Acres

June 14th
July 12th
August 9th
September 13th
9:00 AM to 11:30 AM

Green Acres Farm Memorial Park
4400 Hide-A-Way Ln.
Flower Mound, TX 75022

Join us as we work with Young Men's Service League volunteers, moms and their high school age sons, to improve our areas in the Green Acres Master Naturalist project.
Contact Becky Bertoni through the membership roster for more information.

Inside Outside News

Approved AT

Terrain is up and down, rocky in places, with the best wildflowers on the first part of the trail. This trail is about a 45 minute walk, if not iNatting along the way. Birds, Butterflies, and Bees, oh my. There is a walk through the timbers, if the water from the lake isn't too high, we may stroll along the path.

Children are welcome. Sorry, strollers won't make it.

Please wear closed-toe shoes, dress for the weather, bring your camera or phone, water, hat, sunscreen, bug spray and anything to make your walk pleasant. Please have the iNaturalist app loaded on your phone prior to leaving for the Trailhead.

We will meet at the parking lot at the end of Durham Rd. Turn onto Durham Rd from FM377, it may be flooded from FM 1171. If you have met at the SW Courthouse, Durham Rd is south on FM 377, about 50 yards from the intersection at FM 1171. Easy to miss so be looking right when you go through the intersection at FM 1171 and FM 377.

Please provide your cell number. If weather does not permit the walk to go on you will receive a text message by 7:30 Thursday morning.

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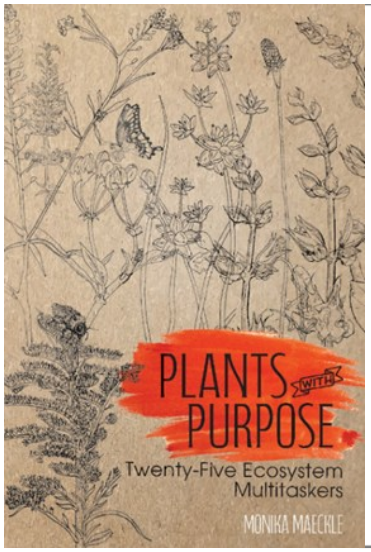

Plants with Purpose:
Twenty-Five Ecosystem Multitaskers

Author Talk

Featuring Texas author, Monika Maeckle
Thursday, June 19, 2025 @ 7 PM CST
Via ZOOM https://dfw.wildones.org/

Online/Virtual Meeting Presentation
Registration Required
Public Welcome
AT Approved
Free Event

Join Wild Ones DFW: Native Plants, Natural Landscapes and co-host Wild Ones South Central Texas for a special online presentation featuring author Monika Maeckle, who will introduce her new book, *Plants with Purpose: Twenty-five Ecosystem Multitaskers*, recently published by Texas A&M Press (May 19, 2025).

In this engaging session, Maeckle explores a fresh approach to plant selection by asking practical and ecological questions of each featured species:

Can you eat it or make tea from it? Does it serve wildlife or offer health benefits? Is it low maintenance or have a compelling cultural story? Does it provide a unique service to your landscape?

Every plant included in the book had to answer "yes" to at least three of these criteria—not including beauty. As Maeckle argues, in a time of increasing ecological urgency, aesthetic appeal alone is no longer enough. Our landscapes deserve—and ecosystems require—plants that work harder.

Whether you're a gardener, naturalist, or simply plant-curious, this presentation will inspire you to think differently about what grows in your yard and why.

About the Author:
Monika Maeckle is a San Antonio-based gardener, monarch butterfly tagger, and founder of the Texas Butterfly Ranch website and the city's annual Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Festival. With a long career in media, she also co-founded the San Antonio Report, where she remains a contributor. Maeckle's passion for pollinators led her to work closely with the National Wildlife Federation to designate San Antonio as the nation's first Monarch Butterfly Champion City and to launch a pollinator habitat initiative that now boasts over 1,100 registrants.

Register and read more about the author here: Wild Ones DFW Chapter

Inside Outside News
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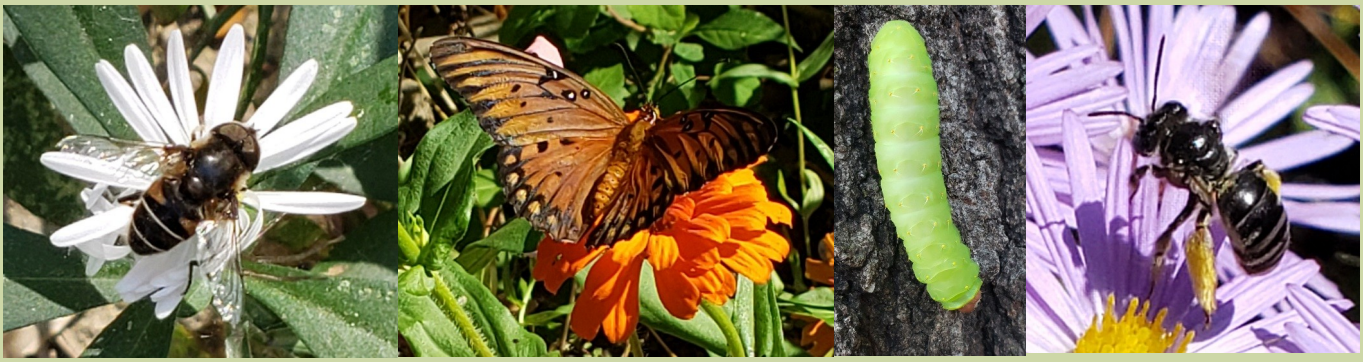


Entomology Short Course Advanced - Identification

August 5th-August 26th
Via Zoom

Join us for a four-part advanced entomology series focused on insect identification. Each session is 2 hours long and will be held live via Zoom. Can't make it live? No problem—recordings will be available on an unlisted YouTube channel for two months after the course ends.

What You'll Learn

Each class will focus on identifying common insect families found in Texas. Topics include:

- **Butterflies:** Nymphalidae, Papilionidae, Lycaenidae, Pieridae, Hesperiidae
- **Moths:** Saturniidae, Sphingidae, Erebidae, Noctuidae, Lasiocampidae
- **Flies:** Syrphidae, Culicidae, Dolichopodidae, Muscidae, Bombyliidae, Asilidae, Calliphoridae
- **Bees:** Apidae, Halictidae, Megachilidae (includes subfamilies)

While we won't cover every insect family, we'll focus on the most common ones. You'll learn to identify insects to the family level, with some groups explored to subfamily, genus, or even species. Butterfly and moth sessions will also include adult and larval stages.
Note: Course content is subject to change.

Recommended Prerequisite

Entomology Short Course – Basics is highly recommended before enrolling in any advanced sessions.

Session Dates and Times

Virtual Sessions via Zoom every Tuesday from 1 p.m. - 3 p.m.

Session 1 - Aug. 5, 2025
Session 2 - Aug. 12, 2025
Session 3 - Aug. 19, 2025
Session 4 - Aug. 26, 2025

Register here: Entomology Short Course Advanced - Identification - New Registration

Note: Registration is $40.00

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.

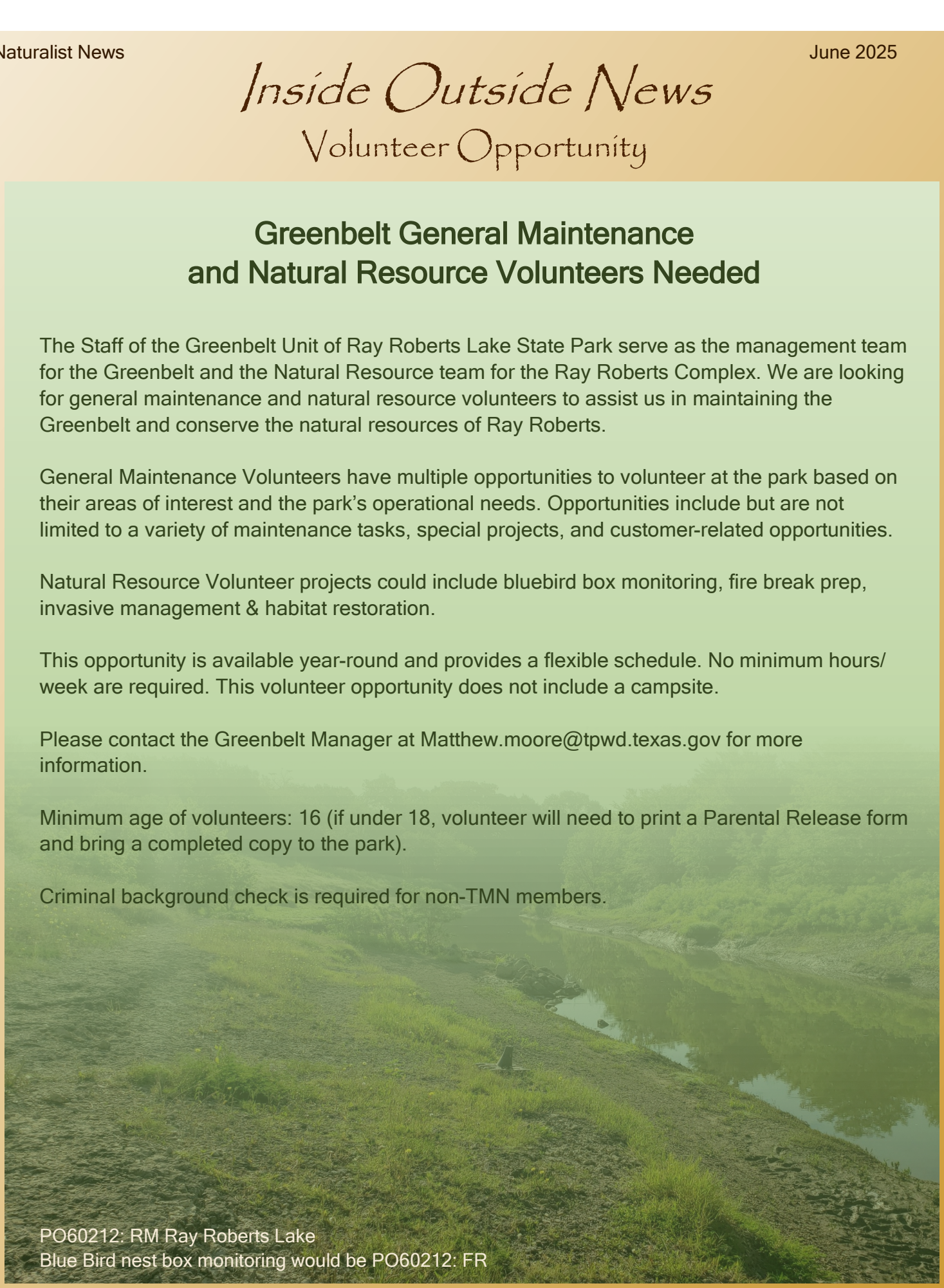
Natural Resource Volunteer projects could include bluebird box monitoring, fire break prep, invasive management & habitat restoration.

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
Blue Bird nest box monitoring would be PO60212: FR

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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 | June 2025 | Schedule

10 JUN, TUE	7:30 – 10:30am	✋ LLELA Trailhead Tuesday	LLELA Nature Preserve, 201 E Jones St, Lewisville, TX 75057, USA
	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
	12 – 1pm	✍ AT - #TMN Tuesday	
	8:30 – 10pm	✍ AT - Full Strawberry Moon Walk	Elm Fork Nature Preserve Trail Entrance, 2335 Sandy Lake Rd, Carrollton, TX 7500...
11 JUN, WED	9am – 12pm	✋ Beulah Acres Agroforest Workday	7801 S I-35E, Corinth, TX 76208, USA
	9am – 12pm	✋ LLELA Monday Mayhem & Wednesday Work Crew	
12 JUN, THU	9am – 12pm	✨ Chapter Meeting	
13 JUN, 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...
14 JUN, SAT	All day	Flag Day	
	7:30 – 9:30am	✍ AT - Bird Walk at LLELA	LLELA Nature Preserve, 201 E Jones St, Lewisville, TX 75057, USA
	8 – 10am	✍ AT - Furneaux Creek Trail Walk	

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

Bats of Elm Fork – Bat Project Acoustic Monitoring Was a Success in the First Year

By Samra Bufkins

Texas is home to more than 30 species of bats, with at least 8 known to live in the three counties that make up the Elm Fork Chapter of TMN– Denton, Wise and Cooke counties. The size of the state and the fact that most land in Texas is privately owned presents challenges to the study of these important flying mammals. Their value in terms of insect control as well as pollination is huge for the TX agricultural community.

Habitat loss and fragmentation, along with the presence of White-nose Syndrome and other issues affecting bats illuminates the need for more knowledge about the distribution of these creatures. The North American Bat Monitoring Program (NABat), which collects data on bats in Canada, Mexico and the United States, realized that the success of widespread research on bats would "...likely depend on the use of citizen scientist volunteers."

Traditionally, bats have been surveyed using mist-netting and roost counts, but passive collection of data using acoustic monitors has enabled researchers to expand their knowledge about bats worldwide. In early 2023, Craig Hensley and the Texas Nature Trackers staff began discussing the idea of incorporating acoustic monitoring of bats in partnership with Texas Master Naturalists. Craig agreed to the role of project manager and led TMN in the statewide project, Bat Project Acoustic Monitoring.

Acoustic monitoring involves recording the echolocation calls of bats in the overnight hours as they feed. Because their echolocation sounds are inaudible to humans, specialized equipment and software are needed to record and analyze their calls to determine which species of bats are active within the study area.

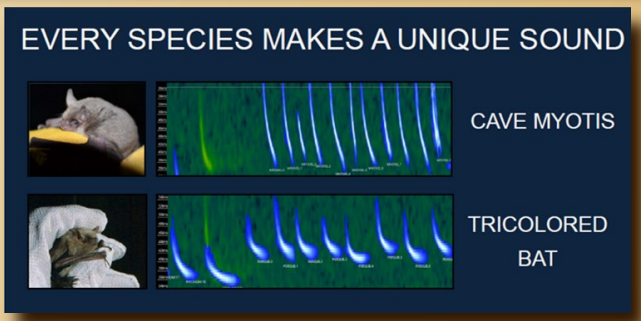
After acquiring grant funding and equipment, a special #TMNTuesday meeting was held in January 2024 to gauge interest in participating. More than 500 Texas Master Naturalists tuned in to the webinar. After weeks of planning and training, TMNs from 37 chapters placed the first acoustic monitors in the field on April 29, 2024.

Mary Morrow and Samra Bufkins volunteered to lead the project, Bat Project Acoustic Monitoring, for the Elm Fork Chapter, which involved using ARC GIS mapping to select 18 sites in 3 counties to deploy monitors, securing landowner permissions, recruiting and training data analysts, and managing the paperwork involved. Monitors were deployed over a 9-week period coinciding with the time of year the largest number of bat mothers and pups are in the state. Every Monday, from April 29 through June 24, Mary and Sam traveled to pre-selected locations to deploy monitors. The monitors were programmed with exact GPS coordinates and set to record from 30 minutes before sunset to 30 minutes after sunrise for four consecutive nights. On Friday, they retrieved the monitors, downloaded the data and ran it through the software to prepare it for analysis.

Mary Morrow and Jim Gerber mount an acoustic bat monitor on a structure as part of the project in May, 2024.

Samra Bufkins and Chris Teves installing an acoustic bat monitor in April, 2025.

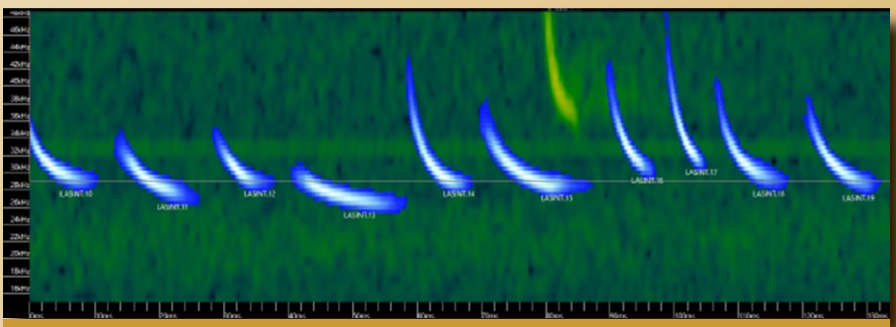
Bats of Elm Fork – Bat Project Acoustic Monitoring (cont.)



Locations were selected based on data collected by partners of NABat, using ARC info software and an algorithm that prioritized Generalized Random Tessellation Stratified (GRTS) cells based on the probability of the presence of bats.

For 2024, sites in Denton County were on private property in Oak Point, Double Oak, and Shady Shores; other locations included McCord Park in Little Elm, two locations at LLELA, Cross Timbers Trailhead in Flower Mound and Pratt Nature Center in Hickory Creek. In Wise County there were 2 locations on private property adjoining the LBJ Grasslands near Alvord, private properties near Boyd and Decatur, and one location in Cooke County on private property overlooking Lake Kiowa. We were pleased to place monitors at many of our Chapter project sites and all but one of the private property owners was a TX Master Naturalist, all, except two, from Elm Fork Chapter.

Several weeks into the data period, one of the two monitors assigned to Elm Fork Chapter failed, preventing collection of data. It turns out that model—an older model—failed when a firmware update was pushed out to all the monitors, and every chapter using that model was affected. Fortunately, those have been replaced by a newer version for the 2025 research period. To make up for lost data, Mary and Sam re-deployed the working monitor to those sites affected by the issue.



This sonogram illustrates the actual bat reference calls the data analysts use to identify the species of bats on the recording from that location. The acronyms are standard abbreviations for each species.

The data analysis team, made up of Sue Hudiburgh, Clarissa Molina and Brynne Bryan, spent hours staring at "blue blobs" on their computers and learned to distinguish the unique sonograms ('blue blobs') of the various bat calls recorded. This required multiple training webinars, patience, attention to detail, several in-person and plenty of Zoom meetings with Craig, Wildlife Acoustics, makers of monitors/software and other data analysts in other chapters.

Craig cautioned that the software did not necessarily guarantee a bat species was recorded. "We really don't know if a bat has been anywhere unless we've held it in our hand," he frequently stated. Various parameters, including accuracy ratios and number of pulses, etc., were employed to determine a "high probability" of a given bat's presence.

Bat species recorded during the 2024 study period were Eastern Red Bats (all 3 counties), Hoary Bats (Denton and Wise Counties), Evening Bats (Denton and Cooke Counties), Southern Yellow Bat (Denton County), Seminole Bat (Denton, Wise and Cooke Counties), Tricolored Bat (Denton County, specifically LLELA), Mexican Free-tailed Bat (Denton and Wise Counties), and the Silver-Haired Bat (Cooke County).

The Tricolored Bat is listed as endangered in several states and is under consideration by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for inclusion in the Endangered Species List under the Endangered Species Act. The Hoary, Evening, Southern Yellow and Seminole Bats are listed as Vulnerable in Texas.

Eastern Red Bat
Photo credit: Bat Conservation International

Bats of Elm Fork – Bat Project Acoustic Monitoring (cont.)

As with any project in its first year, there were unexpected hurdles. Mary and Sam arrived at one location to deploy a monitor and found it under about 8 feet of water! They simply hiked to higher ground, found a suitable location and mounted it there. One monitor was flooded during a severe storm but still recorded data. Transferring the huge data files turned out to be a bigger task than anticipated for all chapters, so changes had to be made on the fly, but eventually, everything was completed.

We had good times too! One of the most enjoyable aspects of the project was getting to know folks from other chapters as everyone navigated the complexities of the research, sharing tips and tricks along the way. Brynne and Sam have acquired personal real-time acoustic bat monitors they can plug into their phones to listen for bats in their backyards and in various places as they travel, like the Merlin Bird App. And of course everyone seems to have a favorite bat. Clarissa thinks the Eastern Red Bat is "super cute," Brynne likes how the Eastern Red Bat sleeps alone and kind of looks like a pinecone. Sue took to the Mexican Free-tailed Bat when she watched them emerge from a cave in central Texas and felt the whoooooosh!

As word about our project spread throughout the community, we have conducted several presentations on bats and staffed bat information booths at local events. One of our favorite presentations was delivered to a homeschool group that created a bat craft using items found in nature. "In addition to promoting conservation awareness, we hope that through our outreach efforts, bats will become beloved by those who previously viewed them as merely creepy creatures of the night," said Mary.

The 2025 study period is underway now, with monitors placed at the same locations as last year as well as locations along the shoreline of Lake Bridgeport in Wise County and another in Cooke County near Whitesboro.

The Elm Fork Chapter bat project managers and data analysts have amassed more than 731 service hours and 63.5 AT hours in the first year of the project. The statewide project was recognized as 2024 project of the year by the Alliance of Natural Resource Outreach and Service Programs.

We look forward to sharing more information about bats with our fellow Master Naturalists and the communities we serve.

Seminole Bat
Photo credit: Bat Conservation International

Those who assisted with the project in 2024:

The Bats!
Barbara Beane
Brynne Bryan
Sara Diaz
Whit Dieterich
Chuck Jennings, Town of Flower Mound
Jim Gerber
John Smith, Town of Hickory Creek
Sue Hudiburgh
IBM (provided grant money to purchase software for bat call analysis)
Scott Kiester
Bryan Lewis
Phil Kemmerer, Town of Little Elm
Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area
Clarissa Molina
Cecily Pegues
Jim & Mavis Sauer
Dinah Stults
Chris Teves
Christy Thompson
Barbie Van Order

Thank you to everyone who helped make the Bat Project Acoustic Monitoring a success in 2024.

Sam Bufkins
Mary Morrow

Wild About LLELA

Sue Yost, class of 2017

I am starting a new series called Wild about LLELA. Hope you enjoy it!

First it was dragons. Now it's tigers!

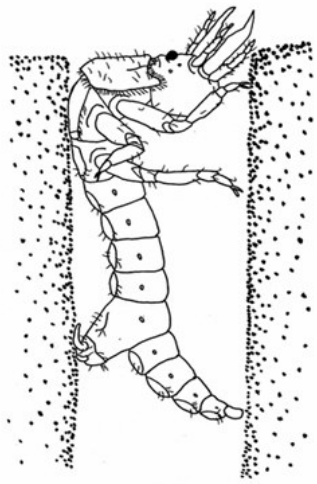
Yep. You read that right. Tigers at LLELA! But not the feline type of tigers, but the tiger of the insect world. The six-spotted green tiger beetle (Cicindela sexguttata).

Six-spotted tiger beettles are commonly found in deciduous forests in between Minnesota, southeastern Canada and south to eastern Texas, excluding the Florida Panhandle. They are easily recognizable by their large, white, overlapping mandibles and six small white spots on the beetle's metallic-green to metallic-blue-green elytra or wing covers. Some individuals may have more spots, fewer spots, or none at all, presumably due to genetic variation. The adults are 1/2-5/8" in length. They have fairly long legs. The beetle's bulging eyes give it superior vision, which aids in locating prey and avoiding predators. The mandibles give these attractive insects a ferocious appearance.

This species is associated with wooded areas, and they are often found in sunlit patches clear of undergrowth such as dirt paths and fallen logs. If you hike the Blackjack Trail in late spring and summer, they are easily spotted in the center of the trail. They continue to jump one step ahead of you on the trail making them hard to photograph. Tiger beetles' long legs allow them to dart across the ground at high speeds. In fact, they can run so fast that their eyes can't keep up, rendering them momentarily blind. This is why they only run short distances at a time. Amazing!

They hunt caterpillars, ants, spiders, and many other kinds of arthropods. While tiger beetles are voracious predators of small arthropods, they do not bite humans unless handled. During winter months, the adult six-spotted tiger beetles burrow into the soil to hibernate. As the temperature rises, they emerge again, ready for a new season of hunting and reproduction.

Wild About LLELA (cont.)



The female lays her eggs in sandy patches, and the larvae burrow into the ground after they hatch. The beetles develop as larvae for about one year before pupating, and the insect has a total lifespan of just under five years. The larvae are whitish and grublike with a dark head and large mandibles. The larvae are considered ambush predators. They create a vertical burrow, which can be up to 2 feet deep. They have hooks on their abdomens that they use to anchor themselves to the inside of the burrow, so they can lunge at and capture prey without getting dragged out. Stealth hunting skills just like the "other" tiger.

These insects play a crucial role in maintaining the balance within their ecosystem. They are predators that feed on other insects, including pests like the emerald ash borer, which can be harmful to plants if left unchecked. By controlling the populations of these pests, six-spotted tiger beetles contribute to the wellbeing of the plant life in their environment.

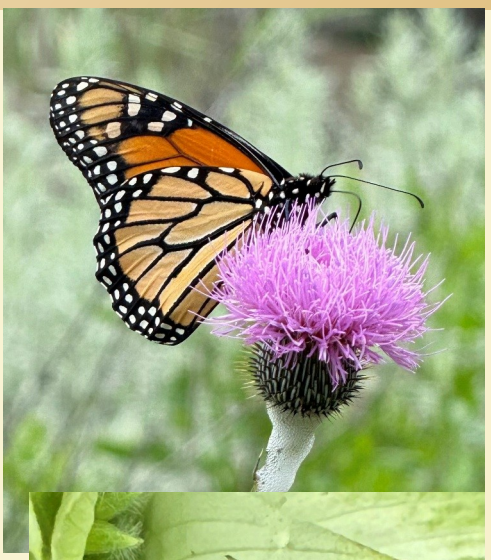
Go on a LLELA safari and look for the "tiger" on the Blackjack!

Photos: Sue Yost
Info courtesy of:
Wikipedia, University of Minnesota Department of Entomology, whatsthatbug.com

Features

Lose Yourself in Wonder

By Marilyn Blanton



Look at the beauty in a butterfly's wings
Listen to the sweet song the little wren sings

Marvel at the strength of a spider's web
Notice the brightness of the cardinal's red

Count the petals around the center of a flower
Watch shadows shift as day fades to the night hour

Gaze at the stars on a clear dark night
Be ever thankful for the sun's morning light

Follow a bumblebee as it buzzes around
Study a beetle crawling over the ground

Observe a caterpillar as it continues to eat
Knowing it must for the transformation it'll complete

Be entertained by the squirrels scampering in the trees
Feel the sun on your face and the gentle breeze

Imagine the life of a slow moving snail
Think of a racoon's adventures if only it could tell

Lean against an old oak tree and wish it well
Appreciate its long life and hope it doesn't grow frail

Wonder how a hummingbird's wings can beat so very fast
Examine seeds, some large and some tiny, what a contrast

Catch a glimpse of a lizard scurrying for cover
Spy on baby birds being fed by their mother

Lose Yourself in Wonder (cont.)

Linger by a pond and watch dragonflies swirl
Pause by a closed flower and watch it unfold

Stand on a hillside and look over the land
Sit quietly in a forest, watch and see what's at hand

Touch the many leaves and the furrowed bark of a tree
Study the mosses and lichens, there's so much to see

Learn which plants that it's best not to touch
Beware, some have thorns, prickles, stinging hairs and such

Notice the mushrooms that spring up from the ground
Look while they last, they'll soon disappear and can't be found

Develop a sharp awareness and respect for the wild
Be smart, observant and keep a sense of wonder like a child

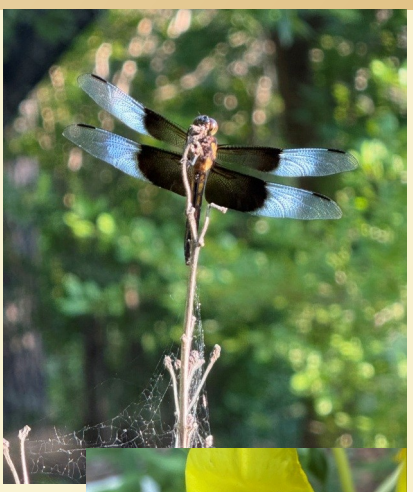
Breathe in the sweet fragrance some flowers release
Be filled with true amazement, joy and peace

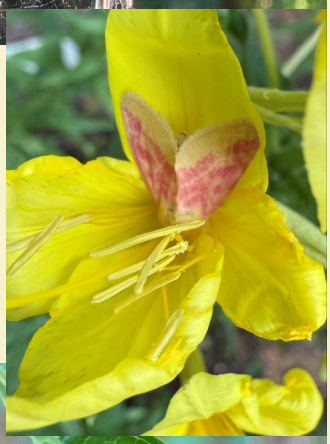
Experience the splendor of a sunset at the day's end
Be kind to woodland creatures, treat them as friends

Take time to notice the smallest of things
Stand still, enjoy and learn from what nature brings

Be inspired by the colors, movements and sounds
Find fascination and be charmed where nature abounds

Lose yourself in nature's many wonders
Appreciate the sun, clouds, rain and thunder





Photos by Marilyn Blanton

Features

Suburban Lawn to Backyard Prairie—Building a Small Wildlife Sanctuary

By Jerry Hamby

It is no secret that the North American tallgrass prairie, one of only four temperate grassland systems in the world, is continuing to disappear. As agricultural and urban development destroy complex ecosystems, less than five percent of original prairie system, stretching from Canada to Mexico, survives. In Texas the loss is even greater with less than one percent of the original prairie intact. While The Nature Conservancy, Texas Land Conservancy, and other conservation groups work with communities and private landowners to protect and restore native habitats, individual homeowners have a role to play as well.

In his landmark 2007 book *Bringing Nature Home: How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens*, Doug Tallamy urged home gardeners to incorporate native plants into their landscapes. With the creation of Homegrown National Park, and its mission "[t]o regenerate biodiversity" for the survival of humanity, Tallamy continues to inspire people to rebuild native ecosystems in their own yards.

The initial inspiration for my wife Susan and me to "rewild" our backyard came from Sally Wasowski, who began writing about native gardening in the late 1980s. Her book *Native Texas Gardens: Maximum Beauty, Minimum Upkeep* showed us, through hundreds of photographs, what we could accomplish in a suburban yard. Before we moved to North Central Texas in 2021, Susan and I added native plants to our garden beds in Houston, relying heavily on the knowledge gained from the Native Plant Society of Texas Native Landscape Certification Program. Since 2023 we have transformed our backyard in Denton into a small sanctuary for native wildlife by installing native plants.

Backyard after final herbicide application

When we bought the house, there were two thirteen-year-old Southern live oak trees (*Quercus virginiana*), in the backyard, and Bermuda grass filled the rest of the space. Starting from scratch made it easier for us to envision the potential for a native garden. To ensure the end result looked professional and aesthetically pleasing, we hired a landscape designer to lay out the beds—an herb garden, a shade garden (beneath one of the oaks), and four flower beds along the fence and the back of the house. In the center of the yard, we decided to install native buffalograss (*Bouteloua dactyloides*), a low-maintenance sod that requires minimal watering. Since installing it, we have mowed it only twice a year.

Newly installed buffalograss (2023)

Over time a natural swale had developed in the back of our lot, resulting in erosion and runoff with even moderate rainfall, so we asked our designer to devise a natural solution. The result is a narrow dry creek with river pebbles on the bottom and larger rocks lining the banks. As the creek bed widens near a corner of the yard, a series of alternating sandstone berms slows water flow and limits soil erosion around one of the oaks.

Suburban Lawn to Backyard Prairie (cont.)

Early phase of hardscape installation

Creek bed berms slowing water runoff

The designer and his staff installed all the hardscaping, including a small seating area consisting of flagstone pavers near the second oak tree. This area overlooks the new garden space and, on the far side of the house, a vegetable garden consisting of eight metal raised beds, which Susan and I installed. Dozens of zinnias, some of the few non-native flowers we used in the yard, fill the space between the house and a flagstone path.

Installing first plants in dry creek (2023)

The landscape designer provided a detailed garden design and a list of plants, which Susan and I consulted when we began purchasing native plants for the new beds. Although the designer's crew could have completed this phase of the installation, we opted to do the planting ourselves. For the first stage, we installed native shrubs—American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*), coralberry (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*), Southern wax myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*), possumhaw (*Ilex decidua*), and Texas lantana (*Lantana urticoides*)—as anchor points in several of the beds.

Next, we chose forbs, more than sixty species, that would attract native wildlife to the yard. In addition to two kinds of milkweed—green antelopehorns (*Asclepias viridis*) and antelopehorn milkweed (*A. asperula*), which are two host plants for monarch butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*), several other flowering plants provide food for caterpillars. We planted yellow passionflower (*Passiflora lutea*), for instance, for gulf fritillaries (*Dione vanillae*) and white heath aster (*Symphyotrichum ericoides*) to attract pearl crescents (*Phyciodes tharos*). I have made numerous iNaturalist observations of all three butterfly species in the yard.

Texas lantana

While they might not be as widely appreciated as butterflies, moths are also important pollinators that increase wildlife diversity. Possumhaw, mentioned earlier, is a host plant for the pawpaw sphinx (*Dolba hyloeus*), and our oak trees attract the Horace's duskywing (*Erynnis horatius*). These and other moth species are frequent visitors to the yard. Two valuable reference books, both written by Jim and Lynne Weber, are *Native Host Plants for Texas Butterflies* and *Native Host Plants for Texas Moths*. Susan and I have planted two dozen species listed in the Webers' books, evenly divided between plants that benefit moths and butterflies, and we are keeping a list of plants for future additions.

Suburban Lawn to Backyard Prairie (cont.)

Clockwise (in foreground)

Queen on palmleaf mistflower

Garden bed along dry creek

Queen on palmleaf mistflower

Blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*)

The desire for biodiversity has shaped many of our planting decisions, reflecting a balance of seasonal blooming (and often nectar) for insects, for instance. Spring bloomers, such as blackfoot daisy (*Melampodium leucanthum*), clockweed (*Oenothera lindheimeri*), and starry eyes (*Nierembergia gracilis*), bring the first splashes of color to the garden, followed by palmleaf mistflower (*Conoclinium dissectum*) and two species of bergamots–spotted horse mint (*Monarda punctata*) and lemon beebalm (*M. citriodora*). Purple coneflowers (*Echinacea purpurea*) and flame acanthus (*Anisacanthus quadrifidus*) bring brighter colors to the garden as summer heats up. In the fall, three species of goldenrod (Genus *Solidago*), obedient plant (*Physostegia virginiana*), and the previously mentioned white heath aster provide nectar for migrating butterflies, including monarchs and queens (*Danaus gilippus*).

When creating pollinator gardens, people sometimes overlook the importance of native grasses. In addition to providing visual interest, they add structure and, more importantly, protection for insects, birds, and other animals. Sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*) is a compact grass that also happens to be the official state grass of Texas. Like the other grass species Susan and I planted, it is a reliable perennial that does not spread aggressively. We also planted clumps of Blue grama (*B. gracilis*), a drought-resistant species that is a short ornamental grass. My favorite native grass, little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) is one of the “Big Four” staple grasses of the tallgrass prairie; we have planted more than two dozen clumps of this majestic species throughout our garden. Little bluestem looks attractive throughout the year as its colors change from blue-green and silver in spring and summer to bright copper and red in the fall.

One of the many advantages of choosing native plants over cultivated species is for their minimal maintenance.

Suburban Lawn to Backyard Prairie (cont.)

As our plants fill the garden beds, they discourage the growth of weeds and allow Susan and me to use less mulch than we would with cultivated plants. Even after the perennials, which is what most of our plantings are, go dormant in winter, we wait until late February to cut them back, allowing them to provide late season seeds for birds and shelter for even more animals.

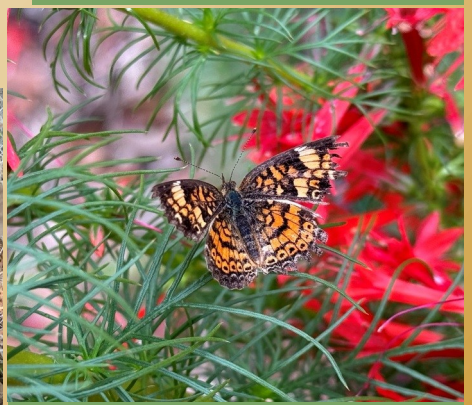
One of our goals in establishing a native garden was to bring wildlife diversity to our yard, and this is where Susan and I have been most successful. In addition to observing dozens of butterflies, moths, dragonflies, bees, and wasps, I have uploaded iNaturalist observations of thirty-five species of birds, many of which were attracted to plants in the yard. I saw a ruby-throated hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*), for instance, drinking nectar from a standing cypress (*Ipomopsis rubra*). I also observed mating pairs and families of other birds, including downy woodpeckers (*Dryobates pubescens*) and brown thrashers (*Toxostoma rufum*). The increased population of caterpillars in our yard means there is a greater supply of food for chicks.

Admittedly, many birds are drawn to our yard by feeders, but some birds are finding the habitat suitable for raising chicks. This spring four species built nests in our yard, including Carolina chickadees (*Poecile carolinensis*) and eastern bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*), both of which produced successful fledgelings. For more than two weeks, I watched the adult bluebirds hunt for caterpillars in the backyard and feed them to their chicks. More recently, I saw a male adult feeding one of his juveniles on top of a nest box, possibly preparing the young bird for cooperative feeding (since there is already a second clutch of eggs in the nest box).

As Susan and I continue to add plants to our backyard prairie, we have begun discussing plans for the front yard. This time we will have to get our HOA to approve the design, which means we might have to keep some of the Bermuda grass that currently dominates the yard. However, as we did in the backyard, we plan to make the new garden beds look “intended, not untended,” creating a space that is aesthetically pleasing even as it provides habitat for native wildlife.

Great coneflowers

Eastern bluebird feeding chicks



Queen on palmleaf mistflower

Common yarrow

Carolina Chickadee in a nest box

All photographs by Jerry Hamby,

Tweet of the Month

By Sue Yost, class of 2017

Photo by Brenda McCoy

Golden Swamp Warbler

The Golden Swamp Warbler is better known as the Prothonotary Warbler. It is named for its plumage, which resembles the yellow robes once worn by papal clerks (named prothonotaries) in the Roman Catholic Church. Bright yellow with soft gray accents.

Most warblers nest either on the ground, in shrubs, or in trees, but the Prothonotary Warbler and the Lucy's Warbler build their nests in holes in standing dead trees or artificial cavities, sometimes using old Downy Woodpecker holes. Nests are often near or over standing water in bald cypress, willows, cypress knees, and sweetgum trees. Nest height ranges from about 2-33 feet above the ground, depending on availability of nesting holes.

When the male establishes his territory, he searches for potential nesting sites in standing dead trees and places a layer of moss in each hole. He selects a few good spots and displays in front of each site for the female. He flies slowly up above the tree canopy with tail spread and slowly flutters back down. To entice the female to check out potential nesting sites, he enters and exits the hole several times. As soon as the female selects a site, she starts building a nest by adding rootlets, plant down, grape plants, or cypress bark. She lines the cup-shaped nest with grasses, sedges, rootlets, old leaves, and poison ivy tendrils. It takes the female 3-8 days to build a nest. The entrance hole to the nest cavity is around 2 inches across. The nest cup is about 2 inches wide.

Clutch Size is about 3-7 eggs that are white, spotted with rust-brown to lavender colors. They can produce up to 3 broods in a season. Incubation is about 12-14 days, and the nestlings take another 9-10 days before they fledge. Males and females aggressively defend their territories, chasing away intruders with snaps of their bills and sometimes with physical attacks.

Prothonotary Warblers breed in flooded bottomland forests, wooded swamps, and forests near lakes and streams. They do breed in Texas and are one of the few warblers to actually stay in Texas for the summer. However, they may nest near other bodies of water such as creeks, streams, ponds, and even swimming pools. They also tend to return to the same breeding site in subsequent years, especially if they successfully raised offspring at that site. The habitat of the warblers during migration is not well known. However, they are particularly prominent in Belize during spring migration. The warblers winter in the West Indies, Central America and northern South America, primarily in Mangrove Swamps.

Tweet of the Month (cont.)

Prothonotary Warblers once were abundant at LLELA near the Beaver Pond and Bittern Marsh trail but years ago, during a prolonged drought, they abandoned LLELA. BUT! During our annual LLELA Mini-sit event in early May they were once again heard and seen around Beaver Pond!

Prothonotary Warblers forage in the understory, slowly hopping along branches, twigs, and on the ground in search of food. Sometimes they climb up tree trunks and pick insects off the bark. Prothonotary Warblers eat spiders, butterflies, moths, beetles, snails, flies, caterpillars, mayflies, midges, grasshoppers, ants, and leafhoppers. They also eat snails and mollusks. During the nonbreeding season they eat fruit and seeds in addition to insects.

Prothonotary warblers experience parasitism by the Brown-headed Cowbird and are outcompeted for natural nest cavities in our area by the invasive European Starling.

As habitat specialists, these warblers are vulnerable to the loss and alteration of forested wetlands on their breeding grounds. Removal of standing dead trees and channeling of streams can affect the availability of nest sites as well as nest success. Nests above standing water greater than 11 inches deep were less likely to be raided by raccoons than those in shallower areas. Prothonotary Warblers are also vulnerable to the loss of mangroves on their wintering grounds along the coast of Mexico and Central and South America due to coastal development and aquaculture. Installation of nest boxes with predator guards and restoration of natural flood regimes to forested wetlands on their breeding grounds have been successful at increasing local populations.

The next time you hike to Cottonwood Trail, stop by Beaver Pond and listen for the simple, loud, ringing sweet-sweet-sweet-sweet-sweet of the beautiful Prothonotary Warbler.

WELCOME BACK TO LLELA LITTLE WARBLER!

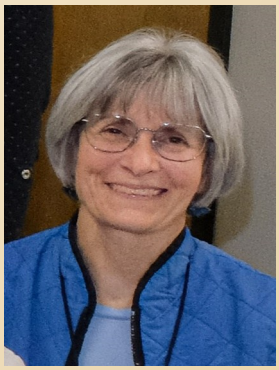
Photos by:
Brenda McCoy and Denver Kramer

Credits:
Wikipedia and Cornell All About Birds

Photo by Denver Kramer

This Month's Contributors

Gale Bacon



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Diana Hatch

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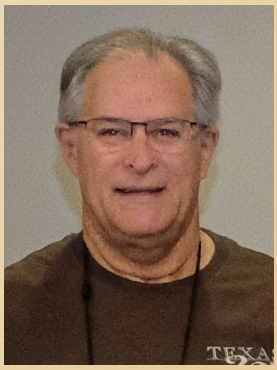

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Michele Rawleigh

Susan Richmond

Diane Wetherbee

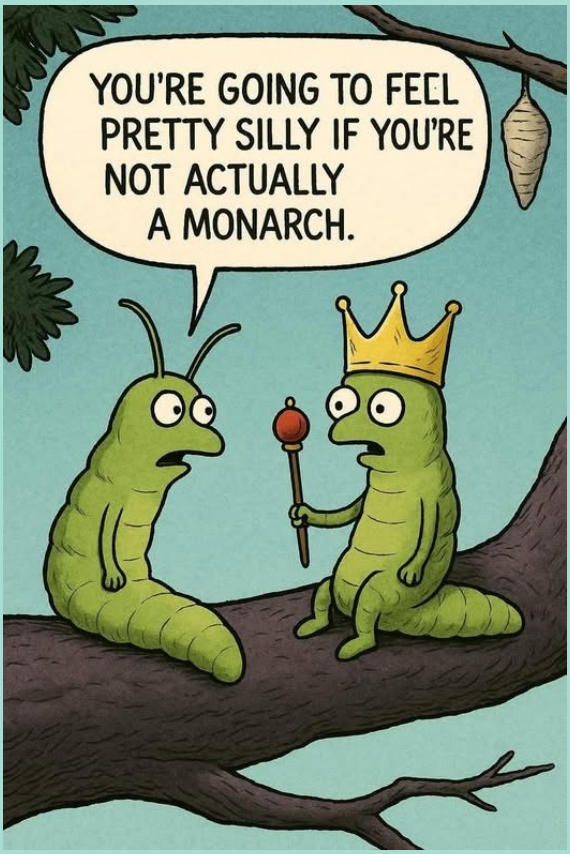
Fran Witte

Sue Yost

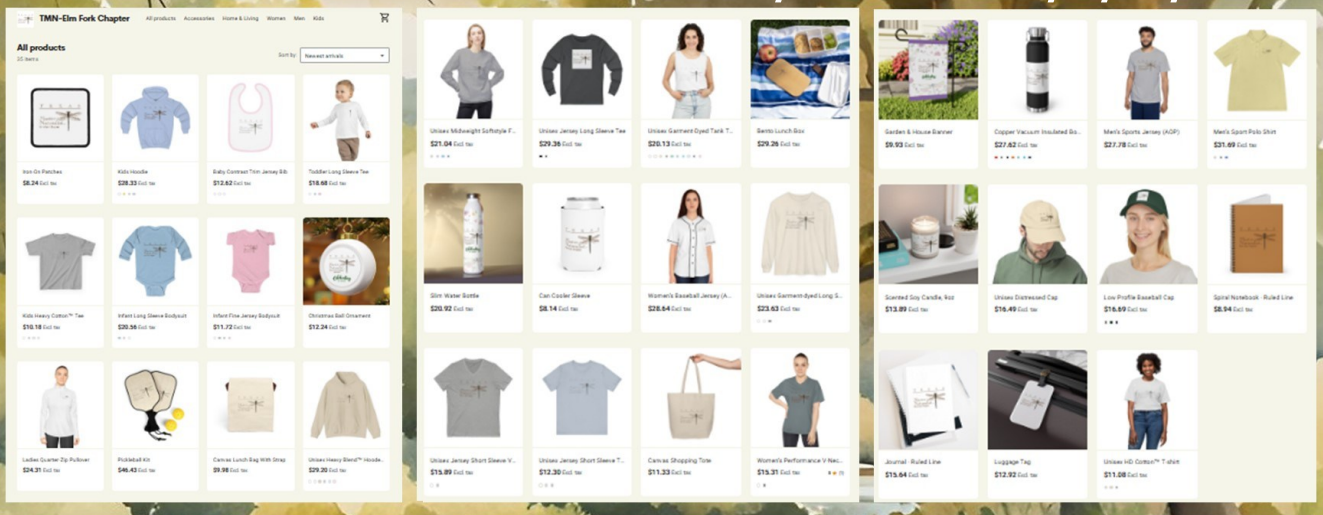
And a big thanks to Karen DeVinney and Mary Morrow for proofing!

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.

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 find from Sue, courtesy of Bird Feeder Hub

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

July 2025 submissions are due by:

Monday, July 7th

Tammie Walters, Editor

Who We Are

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

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President – Bryan Lewis
Vice President – Brenda Martin
Treasurer – Mike Hatch
Secretary – Delia Croessmann

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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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