

T E X A S

Master
Naturalist™
Elm Fork Chapter



Naturalist News

August 2025 Volume 25, Issue 8



Photo by Jonathan Reynolds

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

On Facebook: www.facebook.com/TexasMasterNaturalistElmFork/



Naturalist News

Inside This Issue:

Announcements.....	3
Upcoming Chapter Meetings.....	5
Awards and Recognition.....	7
Field Notes in Focus.....	9
Inside Outside News.....	10
Wild About LLELA.....	16
Features.....	18
Tweet of the Month.....	25
This Month's Contributors.....	27
Almost the Last Word.....	28
Who We Are.....	30

Don't have time to read this month's issue of *Naturalist News*? Then click the box below to *Stream* our newsletter in audio format, featuring the voice of Teri Schnaubelt.



On the Cover and below:

Indian Blanket or Firewheel
(*Gaillardia pulchella*)
by Jonathan Reynolds



Hello!



Eastern bluebird, by Brynne Bryan

Announcements

*Here is some information about the TMN Annual Meeting;
please go to the TMN Website to learn more.*

<https://txmn.tamu.edu/2025-annual-meeting/>



HOW TO STAY UP-TO-DATE FOR THE ANNUAL MEETING

TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST 2025 ANNUAL MEETING

 SIGN UP FOR OUR EMAIL LISTSERV! AND MAKE SURE YOUR SUBSCRIPTION IS SET TO REGULAR.

 FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK! BE SURE TO TURN ON NOTIFICATIONS TO BE THE FIRST TO KNOW.

 FOLLOW US ON INSTAGRAM! BE SURE TO FAVORITE OUR PAGE AND TURN ON NOTIFICATIONS.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE ANNUAL MEETING, VISIT:
[TXMN.TAMU.EDU/2025-ANNUAL-MEETING](https://txmn.tamu.edu/2025-annual-meeting)



**Ten \$250 Partial Registration Reimbursements are Available
for Chapter Members and 2025 Class Interns**

Criteria include:

- First come, first served basis
- Application completeness
- An indication of financial need
- What you hope to learn and how you will apply it towards volunteer service for our chapter

The application will be on our chapter website from August 20th-27th

Announcements

**THE NEED
IS GREAT.
THE TIME
IS NOW.**

T E X A S

Master
Naturalist™
Elm Fork Chapter



Donate Today

- 01 VISIT
NorthTexasGivingDay.org
- 02 SEARCH
Texas Master Naturalist-
Elm Fork Chapter
- 03 COMPLETE
your donation through SEPTEMBER 18

COMMUNITIES FOUNDATION of TEXAS
**NORTH TEXAS
GIVING DAY**
SPONSORED BY 

Visit northtexasgivingday.org and search for Texas Master Naturalist-Elm Fork Chapter starting Thursday, August 28th through September 18th

Upcoming Chapter Meetings

Chapter Meeting and Presentation

Thursday, August 21st, 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Denton County Administrative Courthouse • 3rd Floor Conference Room

1 Courthouse Dr. • Denton, TX 76208

August's Chapter Presentation:

Backpacks, Books, and Beyond: Discovering 4-H in Denton County

By Steven Baringer



As students return to classrooms and fall routines take shape, it's the perfect time to explore opportunities beyond the bell. In this engaging back-to-school presentation, we'll unpack what 4-H is all about – from its deep roots in hands-on learning to its exciting impact in Denton County today. Learn how local youth grow leadership skills, explore careers, and serve their communities through school-based programs and community clubs. Whether cooking, coding, showing animals, or leading service projects, Denton County 4-H helps students shine in and out of the classroom. Join us to learn more!

Steven Baringer serves as the County Extension Agent for 4-H Youth Development in Denton County, a role he has held since June 2021. His connection to Extension and 4-H spans most of his life. Originally from Oklahoma, Steven was an active 10-year 4-H member and developed a lifelong passion for youth development and agriculture.

He earned his Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Sciences from Oklahoma State University in 2019, with an emphasis in Agricultural Communications and Leadership. He continued his studies at OSU, completing a Master of Science in Agricultural Education in 2021.

Outside of work, Steven enjoys spending time outdoors with his Australian Shepherd, Rocky.



Upcoming Chapter Meetings

September's Chapter Meeting and Presentation

Thursday, September 18th, 9:00 am to 12:00 pm
Denton County Southwest Courthouse
6200 Canyon Falls Dr. • Flower Mound, TX 76226

Managing Fish Populations

By Tyson Keese

Tyson Keese is a pond management specialist. Originally from San Antonio, Tyson Keese is now based out of the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center at Overton. Keese provides educational programming and addresses questions and concerns people have about pond management, fish, and pond vegetation.

My favorite presentation is "Managing Fish Populations," which covers different fish species and their roles in the pond ecosystem, sampling methods, corrective management, and a few specific management strategies.



October's Chapter Meeting and Presentation

Thursday, October 16th, 9:00 am to 12:00 pm
Denton County Administrative Courthouse • 3rd Floor Conference Room
1 Courthouse Dr. • Denton, TX 76208

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center and Favorite Natives

By Jay Caddell

Jay Caddell, of Wichita Falls, earned a bachelor's in horticulture at Texas A&M University. He spent the past three and a half years as the nursery manager for the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin, where he increased his knowledge of plant propagation and native Texas plants. Caddell said he is excited to help Texans live better lives and continue teaching the benefits of native plants. In February, Jay Caddell joined the Tarrant County AgriLife Extension Office as the newest Home Horticulture Agent. He is happy to be moving back to the Fort Worth area.



Awards and Recognition

July 2025

Initial Certifications

Rachel DeAnda
Tyler Dunne
Callie Morris

Class of 2024
Class of 2024
Class of 2024



2025 Recertifications

Pat Bragg
Jan Deatherage
Janet Gershenfeld
Kaye Jackson
Marian Kester
Angie Lindsey
Lisa Lee
Cindy Pierce
Trish Reyes
Jonathan Reynolds
John Thomlinson
Lee Watson
Sarah Zaidi

Class of 2021
Class of 2011
Class of 2005
Class of 2015
Class of 2007
Class of 2018
Class of 2024
Class of 2024
Class of 2021
Class of 2014
Class of 2022
Class of 2024
Class of 2024



Milestones on next page...



Awards and Recognition

July 2025

1000 Hour Milestone

Brenda Martin

Class of 2023



2000 Hour Milestone

Sharon Betty

Class of 2018



2500 Hour Milestone

Pam Bennet

Class of 2019

LeeAnn Weaver

Class of 2004



Congratulations!

Field Notes in Focus



Prairie nymph (*Herbertia lahue*) by Dale Meyer,
found while camping in central Texas

Inside Outside News

Approved AT

Lots of Fun!

Come join the Dallas Fly Fishers Club for a class that teaches all the basics. Learn how to catch fish and where to catch them. Classes are taught by instructors with years of experience.

- Bring family members and kids 12 years and older.
- Dress for the weather, and bring a snack for lunch.

Contact Richard Johnson through the Membership Directory with any questions or to enroll.

Casting Class

Saturday, August 23rd

9:00 am to 11:00 am

Castle Hills at King Arthur Blvd. and Lady of the Lake Blvd., Lewisville, TX

Basic Fly Fishing Class

Saturday, September 20th

9:00 am to 2:00 pm

201 East Jones Street, Lewisville, TX

Basic Fly Fishing Class

Saturday, October 18th

9:30 am to 2:00 pm

1330 E Rosemeade Pkwy, Carrollton, TX

Basic Fly Fishing Class

Saturday, November 8th

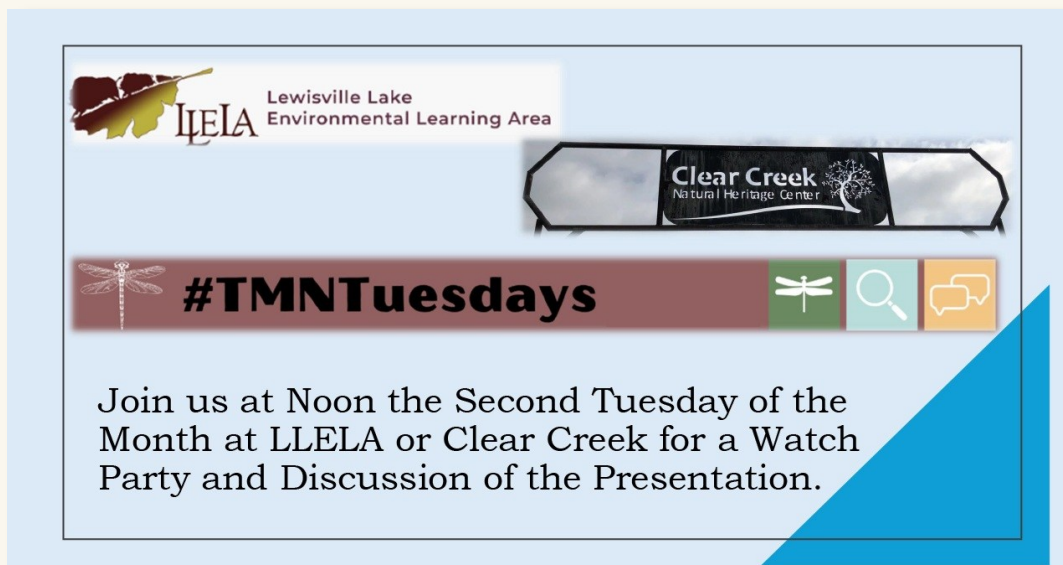
9:00 am to 2:00 pm

Coppell, TX- Location to be determined



Inside Outside News

Approved AT



Join us for group viewing and discussion of TMNTuesdays in the classroom at LLELA. Bring a lunch; the Friends will supply iced tea and lemonade plus maybe some cookies or such. Please use the email llelaoutdoors@gmail.com to let us know you're coming to LLELA, and contact Clay Thurmond through the Membership Directory to let him know you're coming to CCNHC.

Trail Guide Training

LLELA is offering Trail Guide Training Thursday, Sept. 11, 2025 from 9am - 1pm to those MN's interested in committing to helping support our Environmental Education team. We are looking for folks who are interested in leading hikes, helping with school groups, outreach, and other interactive activities and who will commit to at least three opportunities within the calendar year. If you are willing to make the commitment, please email Erin Piper, Outdoor Recreation Supervisor, at epiper@cityoflewisville.com to obtain the registration link.



Erin Piper

(she/her/hers)

Outdoor Recreation Supervisor | Lewisville Parks & Recreation

469.635.5482

epiper@cityoflewisville.com

playlewisville.com



Inside Outside News

Volunteer Opportunities

Invasive Species Removal at Elm Fork Nature Preserve

Saturday, September 13th

9:00 am–11:00 am

Saturday, November 15th

9:00 am–11:00 am

2335 Sandy Lake Rd, Carrollton, TX 75006

Join Carrollton Parks and Recreation staff for a invasive species removal at Elm Fork Nature Preserve. Wear comfortable closed-toe shoes and long pants with a long-sleeved shirt, and bring a bottle of water and snack. Tools and sunscreen will be provided to volunteers.



Project Number P240314, NPA (Nature/Public Access)

Inside Outside News

Volunteer Opportunities



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 repellent. **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.



Volunteer with YMSL on second Saturdays at Green Acres

September 13th

8:00 AM to 10:00 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.

Volunteer service is reserved for chapter members.

Inside Outside News

Volunteer Opportunities

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

Inside Outside News

Volunteer and AT Opportunities




DFW Wildlife Coalition



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

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

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

Be sure to check [Plan Your Week](#) and the [Elm Fork Chapter Website](#) and [Calendar](#) for More AT and Volunteer Opportunities!



Elm Fork Chapter

[Home](#)
[About](#)
[Join Our Chapter](#)
[Photo Gallery](#)
[Activities](#)
[Newsletters](#)
[Calendar](#)
[Members Area](#)
[Donate](#)

References

Today

< > August 2025

Schedule

18 AUG, MON	9am – 12pm	LLELA Monday Mayhem Work Crew
19 AUG, TUE	7:30am – 12pm	LLELA Trailhead Tuesday LLELA Nature Preserve, 201 E Jones St, Lewisville, TX 75057, USA
	8 – 11am	Green Acres Workday Green Acres Farm Memorial Park, 4400 Hide-A-Way Ln, Flower Mound, TX 75022, USA
	9am – 12pm	Beulah Acres Agroforest Workday 7801 S I-35E, Corinth, TX 76208, USA
	1 – 3pm	AT - Entomology Short Course Advanced - Identification
20 AUG, WED	8:30 – 10:30am	Flower Mound Pollinator Garden Workday
	9am – 12pm	Beulah Acres Agroforest Workday 7801 S I-35E, Corinth, TX 76208, USA
	9am – 12pm	LLELA Wednesday Work Crew
21 AUG, THU	9am – 12pm	Chapter Meeting Denton County Administrative Courthouse, 1 Courthouse Dr, Denton, TX 76208, USA
	1 – 2pm	AT - Environment for the Americas, learn how plastic impacts migratory birds, the solutions underway Virtual
22 AUG, 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 Branch...
23 AUG, SAT	9 – 11am	AT - Fly Fishing Kinn Arthur Boulevard & Irv of The Lake Boulevard Kinn Arthur Blvd & Irv of the Lake Blvd 1 a

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

Wild About LLELA

Sue Yost, class of 2017



One can find many “wild” things around LLELA. Animals and plants. Even a few “wild” EFMN volunteers! Snakes are part of that wild. Venomous and non-venomous ones: Copperheads, water moccasins, rough greens, rat, water snakes. But one kind of snake we do not have is rattlesnakes.

But wait! WHAT? They have been spotted on the prairie? And in the greenhouse too? Rattlesnakes at LLELA! Well snakes alive!

Oh, wait just one minute! The Rattlesnake Master, a prairie flower, is the only “rattlesnake” you will find at LLELA. Whew! It is also known as a Button Snakeroot, Button Eryngo, Beargrass, and Bear's Grass.

It doesn't look like a rattlesnake? It doesn't rattle like a rattlesnake? So why the name Rattlesnake Master then? Glad you asked! This perennial has the common name Rattlesnake Master because some Native Americans used to believe the root was a medicine to treat rattlesnake bites. The root system contains a central taproot that is surrounded by fleshy, fibrous roots. These roots and shoots can be cooked and eaten. They are also used as an herbal remedy for vomiting, fever and cough. (Please consult an expert if using it as a medicinal remedy.)



It blooms May-August and looks like a thistle but is in the carrot family. It is one of the few prairie plants I can I.D.! Long, narrow leaves are blue-green, yucca-like, with parallel veins and soft prickles widely spaced. Spherical flower heads are made up of many small white flowers with whitish bracts that appear at the end of branches. The fruit is a schizocarp, meaning it splits into separate segments at maturity, each containing a single seed. It has the fragrance of honey.

It's an evergreen perennial forb native to the southeastern United States. Part of the tallgrass prairies, it occurs in rocky woods, glades, and prairie meadows, like Barn Owl Ridge at LLELA. It likes it hot and dry. It is an important prairie indicator.



Wild About LLELA (cont.)



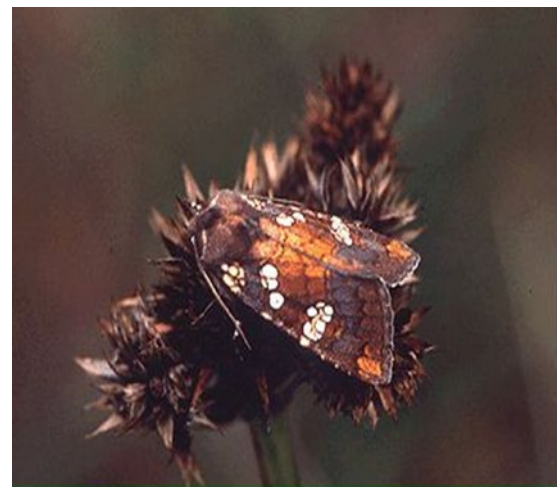
RATTLESNAKE MASTER
Eryngium yuccifolium
Unusual spiky blooms appear
May-August. The name refers
to the plant's historical use in
treating snakebite (ineffectively)

The Wednesday nursery crew propagates, grows and plants them at the LLELA greenhouse, restoring this beautiful native plant to our Blackland prairies. It does not transplant well because of the long taproot system. It doesn't tolerate disturbances well either. It is a staple of prairie restorations due to how quickly it establishes itself. It is a profuse self-seeder.

The spiny leaves are unpalatable to grazing livestock. The rosette of blue-green leaves and flowers is resistant to pests and unpalatable to deer and rabbits.

On the other hand, Rattlesnake Master plays an important role in supporting pollinators such as bees, butterflies, and beneficial insects. The *Papaipema eryngii* moth is a specialist consumer whose only food source is Rattlesnake Master. Do not try to keep them from nesting in your plant, as both the plant and the moth are experiencing decline and hosting them in your garden will help them both immensely.

On your next hike at LLELA be assured that the rattle you may hear on the prairie is not the snake but likely the keys and coins in your pocket.



See you on the trails!

Photos courtesy of Sue Yost, Bugguide.net

Text courtesy of Native Plant Society of Texas & Epic Gardener

Features



Summer to Fall



By Marilyn Blanton

Sunflowers stand tall and bold in the summer heat
Where an afternoon shower brings welcomed relief

Our thoughts turn toward the cooler days of fall
As the first hints of autumn appear, though subtle and small

Touches of color, yellow, white and purple start to show
Clusters of beautyberries' fruits take on a soft magenta glow

Fields of bitterweed, growing untented and free, make a lovely yellow sea
Big and knobby, green balls of horse apples fall from bois d'arc trees

Snow on the prairie waves green and white
A showy splash of color to the eyes' delight

Eryngo, dramatic and striking, with sharp purple bracts
Growing among browning grasses where other colors lack

Multiple tiny flowers make up the purple spikes of enchanting
gayfeathers
Charming the butterflies and bees in the still hot summer weather

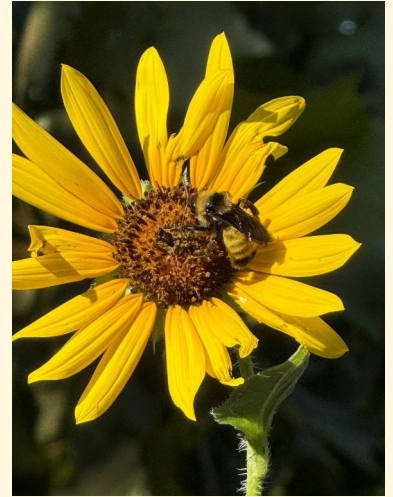
Big and little bluestem, switch and Indian grasses grow tall
Warm season grasses preparing their seed heads to display in the fall

Snailseed climbs, twist and twines over everything about
With mostly green berries that'll be turning red, without a doubt

Scrambling wild morning glories add their color to all they cover
Circles of pinkish-purple flowers, a pleasure for the bees to discover

Basket flower seed heads, now the color of straw
Stand as a promise to the coming days of fall

Mustang grapes, dark, dried and wrinkled, are scattered all around
Having fallen from vines growing high in the trees where they're found



Summer to Fall (cont.)

Goldenrods, dressed in sunny yellow and asters in white
Dance in the bright sun as well as shaded woodland light

On the tops of winged stems, blooms frostweeds' white flowers
Attracting and keeping myriads of flying insects busy for hours

Blackish-purple berries dangle among green leaves on magenta stems
They're the prize of pokeweeds, one of nature's shining gems

Beware of poison ivy with its ivory-colored berries lasting through the winter
They're a bounty to many birds and deer for a fall and winter dinner

The orange flowers of trumpet vines are a joy to the hummingbirds
They'll linger longer as the twitters of chimney swifts are still being heard

Brown seed pods hang from redbud branches
So many seeds to fall and take their chances

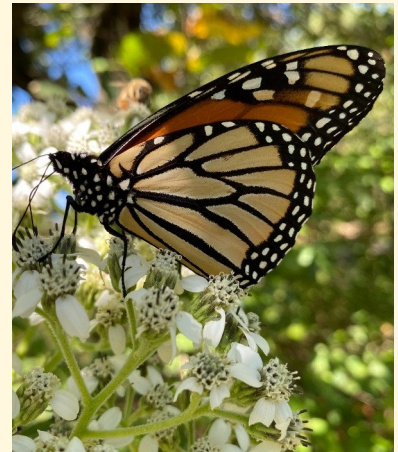
With tiny white flowers, green and red berries all at the same time
Pigeon berries, growing in the shade, are a nice find

Butterflies and dragonflies make the most of their days
Flying, swooping and swirling, going about their ways

Notice the gradual changes and anticipate what's yet to come
Seasons circle, as a new one begins, an old one fades, its time is done

The seasons, always full of discovery, come and go
The natural world can teach us as it puts on a show

Nature offers many colors and many gifts in every season
We should appreciate them all even if we don't know the reason



Features

A Weekend in the Wichita Mountains

By Jerry Hamby



Entrance monument

Although it sounds implausible, an ancient mountain range lies buried thousands of feet below the Texas Panhandle. I learned about the Amarillo Mountains years ago during a visit to the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, in Canyon. The range, the result of a geologic uplift that occurred 300 million years ago, extends 200 miles to the east, where it emerges north of Lawton, Oklahoma, in what is now the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge (WMWR). In April 2025, after hearing about the opportunities for hiking, my wife Susan and I made the three-hour drive from Denton to explore those mountains. Our friend (and fellow Texas Master Naturalist) Whit Dieterich joined us on our weekend excursion.

We arrived ahead of a cold front, and knowing that rain was forecast for the duration of our visit, we made the most of the first day by hiking to the top of Elk Mountain. The out-and-back trail is only 2.3 miles long but has an elevation gain of 570 feet. While no blazes guide the way, the trailhead is clearly marked, and the path is well maintained and easy to follow. On the way up, I made iNaturalist observations of several plants common to the Central Great Plains ecoregion of Oklahoma. Tucked among the granite boulders, I spotted blunt woodsia (*Woodsia obtusa*), a cliff fern that can also be found in North Texas. I also observed Bailey's hedgehog cactus (*Echinocereus reichenbachii* ssp. *baileyi*), a hardy compact succulent that can withstand sub-zero temperatures. Its copper and white spines complement the yellow and chartreuse cobblestone lichens (*Pleopsidium flavum*) that grow on granite rocks throughout the Wildlife Refuge.

Near the top of Elk Mountain, in the center of the trail, we came across a crude concrete marker that commemorates trail "refurbishment" completed by a fire crew in 1928. The work predates that of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), which completed projects in the Wildlife Refuge between 1933 and 1941. The trail terminates at the east end of the summit, offering a commanding view of the Wildlife Refuge.



Bailey's hedgehog cactus and lichen-covered rock

When it was established in 1901, the Wichita Forest Reserve (as it was initially known) consisted of 59,000 acres, and it went through two additional name changes



Susan on Elk Mountain Trail



Trail refurbishment marker, Elk Mountain (1928)

A Weekend in the Wichita Mountains (cont.)

(under different government agencies) before Congress established the Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge in 1936. Today 22,400 of those acres—consisting of mixed grass prairie, granite mountains, and freshwater lakes and streams—are accessible to the public.

To learn more about the history of the WMWR, my fellow explorers and I began the next day at the Visitor Center, a low-profile prairie style building that blends in with the grassland that surrounds it. Interactive displays focus on the region's geology and ecology, and photographs chronicle humanity's complex history in the Wichita Mountains. After picking up a trail map, we planned the rest of our day.

Despite intermittent showers, we managed to complete three hikes of varying lengths, starting with a 1.6-mile out-and-back trail to the top of Little Baldy. Near the trailhead, we witnessed the craftsmanship of CCC Company #859, which built the dam on the south side of Quannah Parker Lake. A marker indicates that the 52-foot-high dam was constructed in 1935, one of several in the WMWR that were built by the CCC.

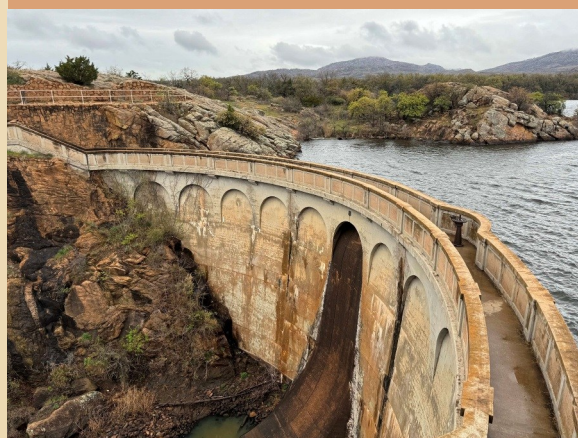
After crossing the dam, the trail winds along the back side of the mountain and leads to the summit (for an elevation gain of 160 feet). Granite steps and trail edges made for an easy hike, but the blustery weather encouraged us to keep moving. Although my iNatting was cut short by the rain, I made observations of my favorite native prairie grass, little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), and Texas Slimpod (*Amsonia ciliata* var. *texana*), an early spring bloomer whose pale blue flowers stood out along the trail.

After a lunch break, Susan, Whit, and I drove to the top of Mount Scott, which, at 2,464 feet, is the highest accessible peak in the Wildlife Refuge. A paved road provides the only route to the top, and it is closed to vehicular traffic on weekend mornings to allow safer access to hikers. Because of the 360-degree view at the top, it is easy to see why this is the most popular

site in the Wichita Mountains. After stepping away from the parking lot, we explored the edges of the summit. The dominant feature of the mountaintop is exposed rock (Mount Scott Granite), and vegetation is mostly limited to short grasses and low-growing forbs, such as crowpoison (*Nothoscordum bivalve*). Eastern redcedars (*Juniperus virginiana*), the predominant tree species, cling to the rocks and hang on long after they die, adding drama to the setting. The density and low porosity of the granite also allow ephemeral pools to form in shallow basins.



Summit of Little Baldy



Quannah Parker Lake dam



Stone stairs on Little Baldy Trail



Eastern redcedar on Mount Scott

A Weekend in the Wichita Mountains (cont.)



Ephemeral pool on Mount Scott



Cedar snag on Mount Scott

Comanches and other Native American tribes have long regarded the Wichita Mountains as sacred ancestral lands, and Mount Scott figures prominently in their mythology. A Kiowa myth recounts the fate of the buffalo after they were pushed to the brink of extinction by European settlers in the nineteenth century. In “The Buffalo Go,” Old Lady Horse describes the disappearance of the last bison into an opening on Mount Scott: “One young woman got up very early in the morning. The dawn mist was still rising from Medicine Creek, and as she looked across the water, peering through the haze, she saw the last buffalo herd appear like a spirit dream.” The herd then vanished into the face of the open mountain. This narrative is recounted in Ken Burns’ 2023 documentary film *The American Buffalo*, accompanied by footage shot on Mount Scott.



American bison

The WMWR has played a prominent role in the return of the American bison (*Bison bison*) to their native rangeland. The first fifteen bison that were brought back to the Wichita Mountains were offered to the federal government by the New York Zoological Park (later the Bronx Zoo) and arrived by train in 1907. A group of Native Americans, including Comanche Chief Quanah Parker, was present when the buffalo arrived. The 650 bison that currently roam the Wildlife Refuge represent one of seventeen herds under the conservation stewardship of the U.S. Department of the Interior, and the WMWR is the largest bison refuge managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. A highlight of the trip was getting to see bison roaming throughout the Wildlife Refuge.

Our final hike of the day was a dizzying exploration of an area known as the Parallel Forest (but officially called Cedar Plantation), a remnant of the early decades when the Refuge was managed as a forest. This sixteen-acre site contains 20,000 cedar trees, each planted in uniform rows, six feet apart. The trees might have been planted for future harvesting, but the area is now a popular hiking destination. Unfortunately, following the official trail is challenging due to the numerous “social trails” created (and marked) by visitors.



Parallel Forest



A Weekend in the Wichita Mountains (cont.)



Inside the Parallel Forest

One of our goals was to find an archaeological site along Cedar Creek that predates establishment of the Wildlife Refuge. After exploring multiple routes, we followed a dry stream bed past the forest to an arrastra, a primitive mill used to grind mineral rocks. The granite trough, fifteen feet in diameter, is mostly intact, and archaeologists have verified its use by the marks scored inside the channel. This early nineteenth century relic is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and provides a visual record of the short-lived gold rush that took place near the prospecting town of Meer.



Arrastra in the Parallel Forest

Relentless rain the following day forced Susan, Whit, and me to continue our exploration indoors, but, fortunately, there were excellent options for doing so in Lawton (fifteen miles to the south). At Whit's recommendation we started the day at the Comanche Nation Museum and Cultural Center, whose purpose "is to educate the public about the great Comanche Nation. ... through the collection and preservation of Comanche artifacts and fine art and the creation of educational exhibits."

One exhibition focused on the Battle of Palo Duro Canyon. Having grown up in Amarillo, I was familiar with this chapter of the Red River War, a United States Army military campaign in 1874 that displaced several tribes from the Southern Plains and

forced them back to reservations in Indian Territory. The exhibition emphasized the human toll of the campaign—the destruction of winter supplies, the slaughter of 1,500-2,000 horses, and the slow march to the Fort Sill reservation 200 miles to the west.

We spent the afternoon at the Museum of the Great Plains, which chronicles the history of the region's inhabitants, starting with the ancient Clovis culture and the traditions of subsequent Native American tribes. Other exhibitions tell the stories of non-Indian settlement, beginning with the Land Rush of the 1880s and continuing to the present.

One multimedia exhibition, "Terrible Tuesday," immerses visitors in a re-creation of the 1979 Red River Valley Tornado Outbreak, a series of twenty-two storms that took dozens of lives and destroyed property across several communities in Texas and Oklahoma. Viewers sit in a recreation of a storm cellar and experience—through video footage, emergency service radio transmissions, testimonials, and realistic sound effects—a simulation of what the storm survivors endured. Four days before the anniversary of Terrible Tuesday, it was an ominous way to end that stormy April afternoon and provided a reminder of nature's power.

That evening we walked through Medicine Park, a small town on the edge of the Wildlife Refuge that was built more than 100 years ago to accommodate the first tourists to visit the Wichita Mountains. The oldest structures employed an architectural style known as "cannonball," in which the



Cannonball architecture

A Weekend in the Wichita Mountains (cont.)

exteriors are covered with round cobblestones. A hotel, houses, and recreational buildings in town incorporated this style. When the CCC began construction in the WMWR, workers used it on several buildings as well.

The last day of our excursion, we awoke to a light dusting of snow, but the weather did not deter us from taking a brief hike above Jed Johnson Lake. The one-mile trail, out and back, leads to a sixty-foot-tall observation tower that was built by the CCC in 1941, as work in the Wildlife Refuge was winding down. The concrete structure, which is covered in flat native stones, is no longer open to the public, and although the trail was muddy that morning, I enjoyed the rare opportunity of hiking in the snow while taking in a view of the lake.

As we left the Wildlife Refuge, Susan, Whit, and I discussed plans for a subsequent visit. We did not get to see Ferguson House, for instance, a cannonball farmhouse built in 1927, and there are more CCC marvels to explore. I would also like to hike the remaining fifteen miles of trails, including a challenging route through Charon's Garden Wilderness Area. Finally, to get a taste of local culture, I might venture to Meers Store and Restaurant, which claims to make one of the best hamburgers in Oklahoma.



Jed Johnson Tower (photo by Susan Hamby)

*All photographs by Jerry Hamby
unless noted otherwise*

Tweet of the Month

By Sue Yost, class of 2017

Since prairies are a big part of EFCTMN agendas, let's learn about a Texas bird that depends on the prairie for its survival.

The Dickcissel

In all seasons Dickcissels are found in tall grasslands, including prairies, hayfields, lightly grazed pastures, overgrown weedy fields and roadsides. The population is stable, for now, but their habitat is slowly disappearing due to human actions that include farmland being sold and developed. The use of pesticides including neonics is also affecting their populations here in the states and in their winter homes. Dickcissels also risk collision with towers, turbines, and glass during their nocturnal migrations.

The striking male Dickcissel resembles a big sparrow or miniature meadowlark, with a black, V-shaped throat patch contrasting with its bright yellow breast. The female is duller overall, lacking the throat patch and having only a faint hint of yellow on the chest. Both sexes have a large, thick bill resembling that of a Northern Cardinal or Rose-breasted Grosbeak. That is the first clue that they are seed eaters.



This bird is named for its loud, persistent song. The Dickcissel takes its common name with “dick” imitating one of the most repeated sounds and “cissel” derived from a word meaning small songbird. Let’s break it down: The first part of the name, “dick,” is an onomatopoeia - a word that phonetically imitates a sound. Specifically, “dick” mimics the sharp “dick dick” notes that the males repeatedly sing when attracting mates. The second half of the name, “cissel,” has old European origins. It comes from the Old German word “zeisig” and Dutch word “sijs,” both referring generally to small finch-like birds. This eventually evolved into “sissel” and “cissel” in English. Early American colonists were likely the first to start calling the bird by this memorable onomatopoeic name. They noted the bird’s call sounded like it was repeatedly singing “dick dick.” The distinctive call sounds somewhat like an electric buzzer.

Dickcissels forage on the ground, or by perching on stalks to pluck seeds. During the breeding season, they are omnivorous, taking seeds and spiders and insects including caterpillars and grasshoppers. During winter and while migrating, they switch to a predominantly granivorous (grain-eating) diet.

The Dickcissel is a polygynous species, with one male mating with multiple females. A male Dickcissel will defend a territory that contains both suitable nesting and foraging areas and may have up to six females nesting in his territory, although most attract only one or two.



Tweet of the Month (cont.)

Male Dickcissels continue to defend their territories while the female(s) that take up residence select nest sites, build the nests, then brood and raise the young. The nest, a bulky cup of weeds and grass stems, is built on or slightly above the ground, in dense vegetation or in a small shrub or tree. The female builds the nest, lays her clutch of three to six pale-blue eggs and incubates them for 12 to 13 days. After the nestlings hatch, she feeds them a variety of invertebrates until they are ready to leave the nest.

The Dickcissel breeds in the central U.S., including Texas, then migrates to Mexico, Central America, and northern South America for the winter. This bird is known to be a notorious wanderer, appearing in large numbers in suitable breeding habitats one year, only to be absent the next.

On migration and during the winter, the Dickcissel forms large flocks, some so large that they may contain 10- to 30-percent of the global population. These large flocks can damage rice and sorghum crops, and farmers use noise-making aids including cannons, bottle rockets, or banging pots and pans to scare flocks away from their fields. A few farmers deliberately poison Dickcissels during the winter, although many conservation groups have worked with farmers to find alternatives to poisoning.

The next time you hike a Texas prairie and hear a repetitive “dick dick” song, remember the history behind the name and appreciate the importance of this small prairie songbird. Look for it perched on a Little Bluestem and take in the beauty of the prairie and the Dickcissel.



Photo courtesy of Alan Gann

Info courtesy of American Bird Conservancy, Birdful.org, Wikipedia

This Month's Contributors



Gale Bacon



Becky Bertoni



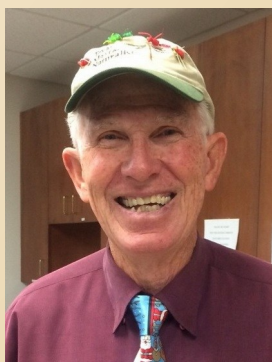
Marilyn Blanton



Brynne Bryan



Jerry Hamby



Richard Johnson



Brenda Martin



Dale Meyer



Daniela Parker



Jonathan Reynolds



Diane Wetherbee



Fran Witte



Sue Yost



Betty Zajac



Karen DeVinney

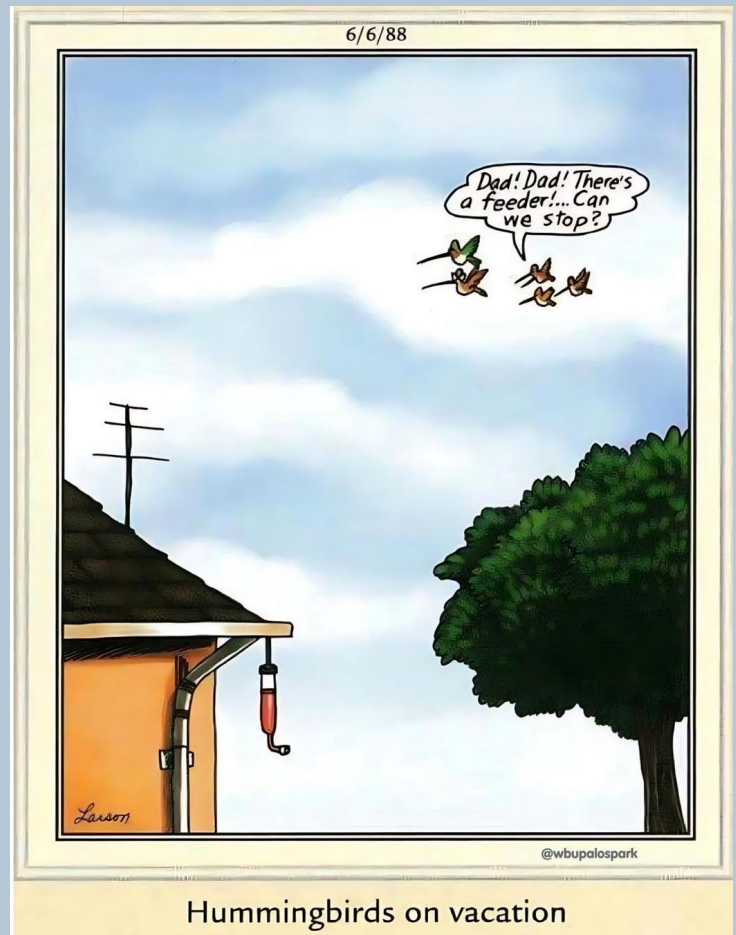


Mary Morrow

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

Almost the Last Word

Funny Finds From Sue Yost!

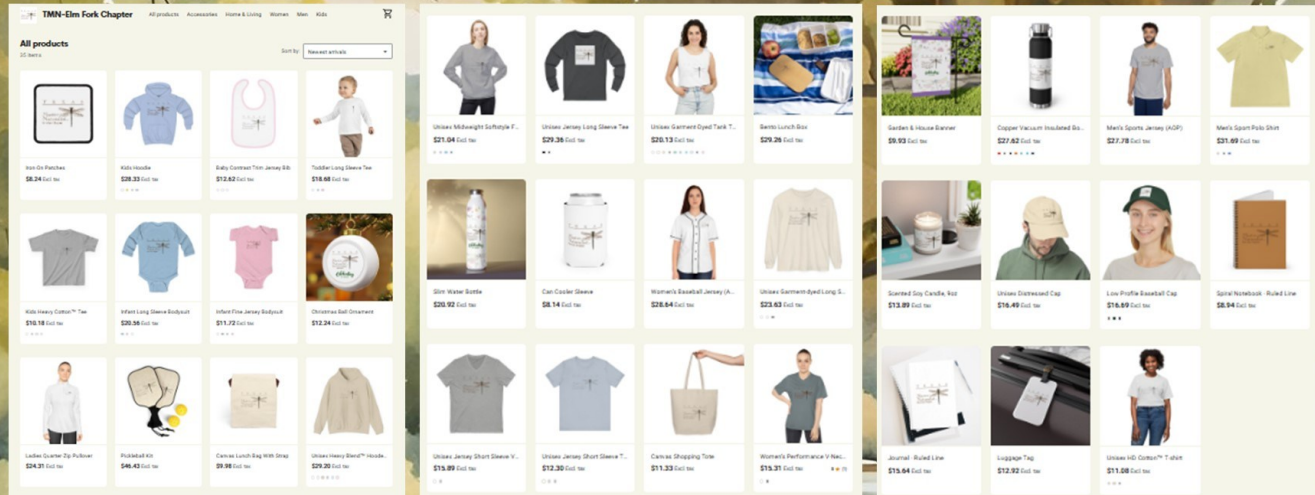


Hummingbirds on vacation



Almost the Last Word

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



* New *
items

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



**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

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

September 2025 submissions are due by:

Monday, September 8th



Tammie Walters,
Editor

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 - Sue Ridnour

New Class Representative - Debbie Nobles

CHAPTER ADVISORS

AgriLife – Erin Smith

Texas Parks and Wildlife – Mindy Shumate

TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION



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.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension provides equal opportunities in its programs and employment to all persons, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. The Texas A&M University system, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts Cooperating.

Persons with disabilities needing accommodations for effective participation in the program should contact the County Extension Office at least one week prior to the program or event to request mobility, hearing, visual or other assistance.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

Hulcher Services Building B, Suite 151
611 Kimberly Drive
Denton, TX 76208
940-349-2883