

T E X A S

Master
Naturalist™
Elm Fork Chapter



Naturalist News

November 2025 Volume 25, Issue 11



Jonathan Reynolds

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

On Facebook: www.facebook.com/TexasMasterNaturalistElmFork/



Naturalist News

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On the Cover:

White Oak (*quercus alba*) leaves showing their fall color in the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge, by Jonathan Reynolds

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.



Lichens on a log at CCNHC, by Carl Malmberg



Announcements



The Nominating Committee is pleased to recommend the following slate of stellar individuals for our 2026 Chapter Officers:

- President, Brenda Martin (Class of 2023, first term; third year on Board)
- Vice President, Sharon Betty (Class of 2018, first term; fourth year on Board)
- Secretary, Debbie Nobles (Class of 2024, first term; second year on Board)
- Treasurer, Ginny Richards (Class of 2022, first term; first year on Board)

Current president Bryan Lewis will serve as our Immediate Past President, continuing to support our Board and our Chapter with great generosity of his time and talents.

Members will vote to ratify the recommendation at our November 20th Chapter Meeting.

Please note that our other elected position is Member at Large; nominations are taken from the floor at the November 20th Chapter Meeting prior to the member vote. If anyone is reluctant to self-nominate at the Chapter Meeting, another person may nominate an individual with that person's permission. Could our next Member at Large be you? :-)

Those who served on this year's Nominating Committee included:

- Gale Bacon (Class of 2018)
- Rob Blake (Class of 2024)
- Marilyn Blanton (Class of 1999)
- Kim Wootton (Class of 2017)
- Kathryn Wells, Chair, Immediate Past President (Class of 2017)

We look forward to another great year with exceptional leadership stewarding our Chapter through 2026 and beyond.



Announcements

2026 Slate of Executive Officers (cont.)



President
Brenda Martin
Class of 2023
1st Term; 3rd Year on Board

Texas Master Naturalist Chapter Service

Vice President, Present
Volunteer Projects Director, 2024
Project Manager, DISD Days at Clear Creek, 2023 to Present

Other Service & Experience

Member at Large, Denton County Master Gardener Association, 2025-2026
Garden Tour Captain, Denton County Master Gardener Association, 2024-2025
Texas Master Gardener Association Delegate, 2024-2025
Denton County Master Gardener, 2023 to Present
Member, DCMGA Communications, Education, and Celebrations Committees
Member, Native Plant Society of Texas - Trinity Forks Chapter

No matter the role, Brenda has always been dedicated to serving others. From collaborating with donors in her development career at UNT to managing the university's vast alumni database and supporting students, parents, and staff as Dean of Students at Liberty Christian, her mission has always been to help and uplift those around her. Brenda approaches every task with the same wholehearted commitment, always striving to bring joy, comfort, and honesty to others. Blending her servant heart with a deep love of nature and compassion for wildlife, it's no surprise that most days you'll find her outdoors, hands in the soil, nurturing life in every form.



Vice President
Sharon Betty
Class of 2018
1st Term; 4th Year on Board

Master Naturalist Chapter Service

Board Membership Director for Awards & Recognition, 2022 to Present
Project Manager and Co-Lead, SWAt, 2021 to Present
Project Manager, DISD School Days, 2019 to 2023

Other Service & Experience

Golden Triangle Dog Obedience Group, President, 2022 to Present
Golden Triangle Dog Obedience Group, Registrar, 2021 to Present

Sharon retired from Denton ISD after 30 years as a teacher, science curriculum writer and trainer, and Science Coordinator. She has a MS in Science teaching as well as a degree from Middle Tennessee State University in Business Administration. Her husband, Jerry, is also a Master Naturalist, Class of 2018. Sharon stays very active as a Therapy Dog handler and trainer for Golden Triangle Dog Obedience Group, and she currently serves as President of the organization.



Announcements

2026 Slate of Executive Officers (cont.)



Secretary
Debbie Nobles
Class of 2024
1st Term; 2nd Year on Board

Master Naturalist Chapter Service

2024 Class Representative, Appointment, 2025

Other Service & Experience

Denton Quilt Guild, President
 Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas, Troop Leader
 Heart of Denton 4H Club Manager
 Denton ISD Bond Committee

After serving for 40 years in public education, Debbie retired as McMath Middle School Principal seven years ago. She also retired as a licensed counselor from a private practice. After spending all those years earning degrees and working with kids, she decided to do something completely different and joined TMN-EFC to earn AT hours and work with kids. When she's not engaged in those activities, Debbie is joyfully grandmothering her two sweet girls ... and annoying her only daughter.



Treasurer
Ginny Richards
Class of 2022
1st Term; 1st Year on Board

Texas Master Naturalist Chapter Service

Initial Training Committee, 2023 to Present

Webmaster, 2024 to Present

Financial Audit Committee Member, 2025

Other Service & Experience

Backup Webmaster, Native Plant Society of Texas - Trinity Forks Chapter, 2025

Earning both BBA (1985) and MS (1994) degrees from University of North Texas, Ginny retired in April 2021 from UNT System – Information Technology Shared Services (ITSS) after 23 years of software development on the HR/Payroll team. Since retirement, she's kept busy with a number of projects including building a backyard stream with two ponds (still under construction), customizing her Aliner camper trailer, and creating stained glass art. Ginny loves camping (although she really "glamps" instead of "camps"), and she is steadily working towards her goal of visiting all Texas state parks by 2028. (To date, she's visited 65 of the current count of 89.)

Announcements

**...AND SO IT IS THAT TIME
OF YEAR.**

**LET'S GET TOGETHER AND
CELEBRATE WITH GOOD
FRIENDS, GOOD FOOD AND
GOOD FUN.**

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11

10:00 AM-1:00 PM

**BRING POT LUCK AND A
NATURE-THEMED
ORNAMENT**

**SIGN UP FOR DECORATING DECEMBER
10 FROM 1-4 AND HOSPITALITY AT
OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER CHAPTER
MEETINGS.**



Announcements

**....AND SO IT IS THAT TIME
OF YEAR.**

**WE WILL TAKE
NOMINATIONS FOR YOUR
FAVORITE NON-PROFIT AT
OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER
CHAPTER MEETINGS.**

**WE LIKE TO KEEP
DONATIONS IN DENTON,
COOKE OR WISE COUNTIES,
BUT ANYWHERE IN TEXAS
WILL BE CONSIDERED.**

**THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS WILL VOTE ON YOUR
FAVORITES AT THE DECEMBER BOARD MEETING AND
DETERMINE HOW MANY ORGANIZATIONS WE WILL SEND
DONATIONS TO. THE DEADLINE IS NOV 30TH.**

Announcements



Save the Dates:

- Saturday, November 15: Members-Only Field Trip to “Our Northern Neighbors”
- Saturday, November 22: Lecture Series - Scott Kiester: intro. to birding, fall migratory birds

Stay Connected:

- The City of Lewisville’s LLELA page features upcoming city-sponsored events (guided hikes, cabin tours, etc.), volunteer opportunities, and general information like hours and fees.
- The Friends of LLELA’s page features blog posts on nature, Friends of LLELA events, and information about our nonprofit’s board and mission.
- Join Friends of LLELA for \$25 per year and know that you are supporting the work at LLELA, receive our monthly newsletter, and get behind the scenes tours on two field trips per year.
- Not ready to join? Sign up for our monthly newsletter at no cost.
- Follow Friends of LLELA and LLELA Lewisville Lake on Facebook.

Flower Mound Launches Tree Rebate Program

Following approval from Flower Mound Town Council, the Town’s new Tree Rebate program is now available to Flower Mound residents. Residents who make a qualifying tree purchase between Oct. 1, 2025 to May 1, 2026 may receive a rebate from the Town. To qualify for the rebate, the purchased tree must be at least five (5) gallons or larger when purchased and must be chosen from the approved tree list. That list can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/yzrr4j75>.

To learn more about the program, see FAQs, and submit an application, visit www.flowermound.gov/treerebate.



Announcements

2026 ELM FORK CHAPTER TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST MEMBERSHIP DUES

It's time to start thinking about renewing your Elm Fork Chapter membership for 2026! A link to pay dues online will be available in the What's New? and Members Area of the website. (Or directly here: <https://txmn.org/elmfork/2026-dues/>)

Now through January 31, 2026, dues are \$25 (plus \$1.01 if paying online).

2025 Class Members DO NOT need to pay dues in 2026!

To avoid the online fee, you can send your \$25 check, made payable to Elm Fork Chapter, to:
Mike Hatch, EFCTMN Treasurer,
PO Box 1113
Gainesville, TX 76241.



Mike will also be able to take your payment in person by cash, check or credit card at the chapter meetings in November and December.

Upcoming Chapter Meetings

November's Chapter Meeting and Presentation

Thursday, November 20th, 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Denton County Southwest Courthouse

6200 Canyon Falls Dr

Northlake, TX 76226



***Developing and Submitting Presentations for TMN Annual Meetings—
including highlights from Jane Duke's and Scott Kiester's 2025 presentations.***



***Soil Regeneration at Denton
Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center
by Jane Duke (2009)***

***Vultures: The Life and Times of
an Unloved Bird
by Scott Kiester (2003)***



Awards and Recognition

October 2025

Initial Certifications

Beth Bargar	Class of 2025
John Cox	Class of 2025
Robin Franks	Class of 2025
Rob Hull	Class of 2025
Joe Rogers	Class of 2025
Aimee Santillán	Class of 2025
Kevin Shaw	Class of 2025
Roxann Strout	Class of 2025
Suzanne West	Class of 2025
Reese Wilks	Class of 2025



2025 Recertifications

Beth Bargar	Class of 2025
Steve Barns	Class of 2023
Nancy Blakney	Class of 2023
Jerry Clark	Class of 2021
Sarah Goodrich	Class of 2016
Dan Graves	Class of 2024
Ed Harrell	Class of 2020
Monica Kelley	Class of 2024
Patricia Kelly	Class of 2019
Ray Kreutzfeld	Class of 2014
Alice Mankoff	Class of 2016
Jean Mason	Class of 2017



Awards and Recognition

October 2025

2025 Recertifications (cont.)

Deborah Meyer
Renee Province
Chris Rice
Joe Rogers
Kevin Shaw
Clay Thurmond
Christine Wayles

Class of 2012
Class of 2008
Class of 2023
Class of 2025
Class of 2025
Class of 2016
Class of 2022



250 Hour Milestone

Deb Rogstad

Class of 2024



500 Hour Milestone

Catharine Griesbaum

Class of 2023



1000 Hour Milestone

Bryan Lewis

Class of 2020

Sue Hudiburgh

Class of 2018



Awards and Recognition

October 2025



2000 Hour Milestone

Gale Bacon

Class of 2018

3500 Hour Milestone

Kathryn Wells

Class of 2017



5000 Hour Milestone

Tom Mills

Class of 2014



Congratulations!



Field Notes in Focus



Bordered Patch (*Chlosyne lacinia*), by Bryan Lewis

Inside Outside News

Approved AT

Nocturnal Creatures Hike

**Saturday, December 6th
5:00 pm – 6:00 pm
Coppell Nature Park
367 Freeport Pkwy., Coppell**



We will use dusklight/moonlight to look for nocturnal creatures during this hike, including owls, bats, and moths, and also discuss the unique adaptations of nocturnal animals. Anyone with weak eyesight is discouraged from joining this hike.

Participants under 16 years must be accompanied by an adult.

<https://city-of-coppell.dcatalog.com/v/Coppell-Community-Experiences-Fall-2025/?page=16>

Live Hawks and Owls Talk

**Saturday, December 6th
5:00 pm – 6:00 pm
Biodiversity Education Center at
Coppell Nature Park
367 Freeport Pkwy., Coppell**

The Blackland Prairie Raptor Center will bring their live raptor ambassadors and talk about these unique creatures. The talk will cover Peregrine falcons, hawks, kites, owls, and kestrels. Participants under 16 years must be accompanied by an adult.

<https://city-of-coppell.dcatalog.com/v/Coppell-Community-Experiences-Fall-2025/?page=16>

Announcements



Become a Citizen Forester

~Learn about trees!

~Volunteer to improve our urban forest!

Application deadline - December 31, 2025.

The **Citizen Forester** program is sponsored by the **Cross Timbers Urban Forestry Council**, a non-profit organization, focused on publicly owned trees.

Trained volunteers work in public areas including city parks, street trees, public school yards, etc. We provide public education through presentations and booth events. Our goal is to help communities reap the benefits of trees in the urban environment in a responsible manner.

The program consists of training on Tuesdays from February 10th through May 5th, consisting of in-house instruction and outdoor field exercises.

In-classroom training will be held at the Herring Recreation Center, Multi-Purpose Room, 191 Civic Cir, Lewisville. Field exercises will be announced at a later date.

Certified Arborists and Foresters will conduct training which includes tree identification, propagation, planting, pruning, pest and tree diseases and hazard assessment.

You will never look at a tree the same way again!

Go to ctufc.org to learn more about the Citizen Forester Program and click on **"Apply to become a Citizen Forester"** for the application. **(Applications will be on-line November 2025, deadline is December 31, 2025. Class limited to 25)**

Questions? Contact our Training Coordinator, Mary Morrow, hawkilittle@aol.com.



Inside Outside News

Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteers needed--new 2025 Master Naturalists are welcome!



November and December, 2025
Green Acres Farm Memorial Park
4400 Hide-A-Way Lane
Flower Mound, 75022

For our H-E-B grant project, we will:

1. water new plants and prep areas for sowing
2. dig holes, plant, sow seeds, care for the newly planted native plants

Come and help make "Green Acres the place to BEE!"

We meet every Tuesday, morning 9 am -12 noon or afternoon 12 noon -3 pm, depending on the weather.

Please email becky.bertoni@gmail.com to volunteer.

This is a state TMN project. Post your hours to Pollinators for Texas - 2025 RM.

Inside Outside News

Volunteer Opportunities



Volunteer with the Friends of LLELA!

We are currently seeking a Volunteer Manager who will:

- Work with partner organizations to recruit (through media and outreach), retain, and recognize volunteers by keeping volunteer lists, collaborating on tracking hours, and coordinating recognition at general/quarterly meetings
- Organize volunteers for LLELA workdays and events (weekly workdays, LISD 7th grade Field Experience days, Open House, Mariposas, and Christmas at the Cabin)
- Collaborate with city and UNT staff to host annual Volunteer Appreciation event

Estimated time commitment: 6 hours per month

Reach out to llelaoutdoors@gmail.com for more info.!

For more volunteer opportunities at LLELA, check the [Elm Fork Chapter Calendar](#), or contact Scott Kiester through the membership Directory.

Invasive Species Removal at Elm Fork Nature Preserve

Saturday, November 15th

9:00 am–11:00 am

2335 Sandy Lake Rd, Carrollton, TX 75006

Join Carrollton Parks and Recreation staff for an 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.

Contact Daniela Parker through the Membership Directory for more information.

Project Number P240314, NPA (Nature/Public Access)



Inside Outside News

Volunteer Opportunities

Cornell Lab of Ornithology Project FeederWatch 2025-2026 Starts Now!



Project Feeder Watch is a citizen science project where participants count birds that visit your bird feeders or bird attracting plantings or water features in your yard or a location that you can visit and count birds two consecutive days each week. Participation is flexible. Go to Project Feeder Watch at <https://feederwatch.org> and click on About and How to Participate for details. Join now for the 2025-26 FeederWatch season! This year the Cornell Lab Project FeederWatch season begins on Saturday, November 1, 2025 and runs through April 30, 2026. Cornell Lab is shipping research kits to new participants now. Participation in this project is approved for service hours by our Chapter. Project Number **P-080214**.

You can enter data on Mammals that visit your site also! The Mammal List can be used to report all mammals that you observed in your count site during your count. Here you will be able to tally domesticated mammals like cats and dogs, small-size mammals like squirrels and chipmunks, medium-sized mammals like opossums and raccoons, and large mammals such as bears or deer.

All you need to do to participate is:

SIGN UP ONLINE at <https://join.feederwatch.org>. CLICK for new participants or to renew. Renewing? Your FeederWatch I.D. number remains the same each year. Use it to sign in and renew.

-OR- CALL 1- (800) 843-BIRD (2473) Monday-Friday 8am-4pm ET for more information or join by phone.

There is a participation fee of \$18 for non-members (\$15 if you are a Cornell Lab member) you pay at the time you join Project FeederWatch. When joining online, be sure you sign up for USA (not Canada).

New participants are sent a Research Kit with complete instructions for participating, as well as a bird identification poster, calendar, and more. You provide the bird attracting location or feeder(s) and seed. Each fall participant receives a year-end report, *Winter Bird Highlights*. Participants also receive access to the digital version of *Living Bird*, the Cornell Lab's award-winning, quarterly magazine. You can do all data entry paperless, but the starter kit is very helpful. Paper forms are also available on the website at <https://feederwatch.org>.

When you register with Cornell Lab, you can choose to enter your hours and observations by paper or go paperless. Going paperless, be sure to sign up for the electronic newsletter. You will receive a Project Feeder Watch number that you will use to set up your location and submit data. If you participated last year, you use the same Project FeederWatch number to register and enter data this year. If your feeder locations have changed be sure to update your count location(s). You will also need to keep track of your count & data logging time separately and submit it for your service hours on this project on VMS.

This is a great project for anyone interested in birds. Lots of links and helpful information online. If you have temporary health or mobility issues, this is a great project to participate in to get your service hours and retain active member status.

REMEMBER, PROJECT FEEDER WATCH BEGINS NOVEMBER 1ST, SO THE TIME TO SIGN UP IS NOW! QUESTIONS? Visit <http://feederwatch.org> and go through the links for all the details A-Z.

Please contact me through the Members Area of our website if you have questions. Karen Mangum, Project Manager, TMNEFC Cornell Lab Project Feeder Watch Project Number **P-080214**.

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

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References

Today < > November 2025

Schedule

19 NOV, WED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9am – 12pm 9am – 12pm 2:30 – 3:30pm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beulah Acres Agroforest Workday 7801 S I-35E, Corinth, TX 76208, USA LLELA Wednesday Work Crew AT - Nature Book Club led by Texas Master Naturalists Emily Fowler Central Library, 502 Oakland St, Denton, TX 7...
20 NOV, THU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9am – 12pm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chapter Meeting Denton County Southwest Courthouse, 6200 Canyon Falls Dr, Northlake, TX 76226, USA
21 NOV, FRI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8am – 12pm 10am – 4pm 10am – 4pm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Green Acres is the Place to Bee H-E-B award volunteer opportunity Green Acres Farm Memorial Park, 4400 Hid... Ray Roberts Lake State Park Nature Center - Isle Du Bois Unit Ray Roberts Lake State Park Isle du Bois, 100 P W ... Ray Roberts Lake State Park Nature Center - Johnson Branch Unit Ray Roberts Lake State Park - Johnson Branc...
22 NOV, SAT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10am – 4pm 10am – 4pm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ray Roberts Lake State Park Nature Center - Isle Du Bois Unit Ray Roberts Lake State Park Isle du Bois, 100 P W ... Ray Roberts Lake State Park Nature Center - Johnson Branch Unit Ray Roberts Lake State Park - Johnson Branc...
23 NOV, SUN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10am – 4pm 10am – 4pm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ray Roberts Lake State Park Nature Center - Isle Du Bois Unit Ray Roberts Lake State Park Isle du Bois, 100 P W ... Ray Roberts Lake State Park Nature Center - Johnson Branch Unit Ray Roberts Lake State Park - Johnson Branc...
24 NOV, MON	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9am – 12pm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LLELA Monday Mayhem Work Crew

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

Google Calendar

Wild About LLELA

Sue Yost, class of 2017

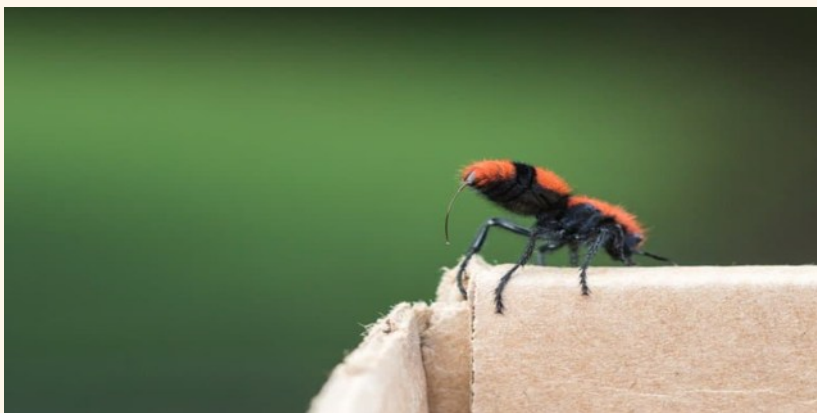
Things that make you go hummmm: Why are there no cows at LLELA? Because there are cow killers lurking in the grass and fields! YES! Cow killers! They are Red Velvet Ants. To set the record straight, they are neither ants nor cow killers. Confusing, huh?

Velvet ants belong to a family of wasps (Mutillidae) that includes more than 7,000 species, 400 in the American Southwest. The wingless females (only the males have wings) resemble large, hairy ants, which gives them their name. They are usually bright red or orange, but are also black, white, silver, or gold. Their bright colors advertise to predators that they are not worth attacking. This is called an aposematic signal. They don't have the social system of true ants and are mainly solitary. Spotting a velvet ant is still relatively uncommon and there is a lot that is still unknown about these insects.

Most of the species are found in hot, sunny and sandy areas. They can be found anywhere where there are suitable host species for the laying of their eggs - in wooded areas, wetlands, meadows, and urban areas, too.



Velvet ants have a lot of features to protect themselves. For instance, their exoskeleton is unusually tough. Some entomologists say they have difficulty mounting them for display because steel pins don't penetrate! This characteristic allows these insects to invade the nests of their prey and also helps them retain moisture.



Female velvet ants have developed a series of defense mechanisms to prevent attack: speed, strength, a loud squeak, and a venomous sting. Only females can inflict their painful sting. The stinger is a modified female organ called an ovipositor, which is unusually long and maneuverable. Their stinger

can be as much as one half of their body length and emits a venom with a pain rating as high as 3 out of 4 on the Schmidt's sting pain index. This is lower than the likes of the bullet ant and tarantula hawk wasp, which are all 4's. The strength of their sting and the excruciating pain it can cause has earned some velvet ants the nickname of "cow killer." Red velvet ants are not aggressive, however, and sting only in defense.



Wild About LLELA (cont.)

All these defenses have contributed to velvet ants being given the title of "the indestructible insect." Experiments pitting velvet ants against their potential predators resulted in the survival of the ant. They are also pretty fast runners.



Adult males feed on nectar. Although some species are strictly nocturnal, females are often active during the day.

The males' ability to fly comes in useful for reproduction, as it allows them to look for females. After mating, the female enters a host insect nest, typically a ground-nesting bee or wasp burrow, and deposits one egg near each larva or pupa. The mutillid larvae then develop and eventually kill their immobile larval/pupal hosts within a week or two.

You will see plenty of real ants at LLELA. You will not see cows at LLELA. But watch where you step as you may just find a Red Velvet Ant like this one on the left seen near the Cicada pavilion! Hummmmm?

Information courtesy of Wikipedia. Photos courtesy of Sue Yost & Factanimal.com



Features

Homecoming—The 2025 TMN Annual Meeting at College Station

By Jerry Hamby

Part of the appeal of the Texas Master Naturalist Annual Meeting is anticipation of major events, including the keynote address, celebration of attendees' service milestones, and announcement of the next recertification pin. However, this year's gathering in College Station was different in one respect as the nearly 600 attendees converged on the campus of Texas A&M University (TAMU), whose AgriLife Extension Service, along with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), sponsors the TMN program. That access to TAMU created unique opportunities for Advanced Training, especially when it came to field sessions, both on campus and off.

The first field session I attended was a "Post Oak Savannah Ecological Restoration Tour at Cedar Hill Nature Preserve," a privately owned 700-acre natural area 40 miles north of College Station. Since 2003 the owners have been reestablishing the native Post Oak Savannah ecosystem by removing exotic plant and animal species and overseeing the Herculean task of controlling aggressive native woody species that, historically, would have been suppressed by natural fire. Restoration has also included reseeding the prairie with native grasses and forbs and introducing prescribed burns. The work has been accomplished through a partnership with TPWD under the Texas Wildlife Management Program, assisted by federal grant money. One goal of the current phase of the project is to create 140 acres of habitat for the endangered Houston Toad.

The use of heavy forestry equipment to mulch understory and canopy trees costs approximately \$1,200 per acre, but the results are striking. After meeting land owner Michael Conner, our group joined Tim Siegmund, Private Lands Program Leader (TPWD) on a hike through (mostly) restored areas to illustrate the increase in biodiversity that has followed the return of the Post Oak Savannah. One notable species in the ecoregion is the sand post oak (*Quercus margarettae*), which I recently discovered through Citizen Forester volunteer work. Often smaller than the more common post oak (*Q. stellata*), *Q. margarettae* prefers to grow in dry sandy soil.

I was drawn to this field session, in part, because of the owners' efforts to retrace El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail, a portion of which runs through the property. Originally created by Indigenous People, El Camino Real was further developed by 18th century Spanish colonialists and early



Cedar Hill Nature Preserve



Restored Post Oak Savannah, Cedar Hills NP



Retraced trail, Cedar Hills NP



Homecoming—The 2025 TMN Annual Meeting at College Station (cont.)

settlers. The United States section of the trail begins south of Eagle Pass (on the Mexican border) and terminates in Natchitoches, Louisiana. The Rancheria Grande Trail at Cedar Hill NP parallels El Camino Real and is open to the public (through reservation). Swales that define the contours of the original trail are visible from the restored path.

While the trip to Cedar Hill was my only outdoor field session, on Friday I toured two facilities on the A&M campus that support scientific programs. The first was an open house at the Natural History Collections. As our



Alligator gar

group was led through the Biodiversity Research and Teaching Collections (BRTC), we were shown preserved specimens of fishes, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals and learned about the scientific research the collections support on campus and elsewhere. We also learned about the S.M. Tracy Herbarium, which includes one of the largest grass collections in the world.

Curators and professors described their work as they displayed unique items in the collections, including the widemouth blindcat (*Satan eurystomus*), a critically imperiled cavefish that lives in the subterranean Edwards Aquifer in Bexar County. The species, the only one in the genus *Satan*, is endemic to Texas. We also saw the skull of an alligator gar (*Atractosteus spatula*), one of the largest freshwater fishes in North America.

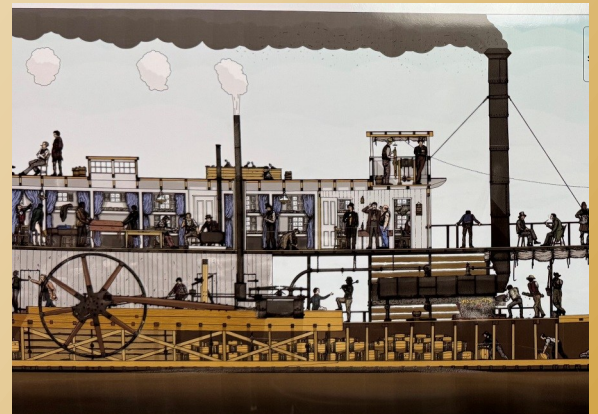


Gary Voelker, Curator of Birds, BRTC

The most colorful specimens we saw came from The Collection of Birds at the BRTC, which contains over 24,000 species. Dr. Gary Voelker, Professor and Faculty Curator of Birds, demonstrated the iridescent plumage of male African sunbirds by holding up several “study skins” (specimens preserved for scientific study rather than display) while turning them in the light. Sunbirds’ family name, Nectariniidae, refers to the fact that most species feed primarily on nectar. The birds are distantly related to American hummingbirds and Australian honeyeaters.

A highlight of the conference was a Friday afternoon visit to the facilities of the Texas A&M University Nautical Archaeology Program (NAP), where our small group was led on a behind-the-scenes tour of four labs. In the New

World Laboratory, Dr. Kevin Crisman, professor in the TAMU Anthropology Department, recounted the fate of the western steamboat *Heroine*, which sank in the Red River between Oklahoma and Texas in 1838 while carrying supplies to Fort Towson (in Indian Territory). In addition to describing the arduous conditions of traveling on a river steamboat,



Scale illustration of steamboat *Heroine*

Homecoming—The 2025 TMN Annual Meeting at College Station (cont.)

Dr. Crisman, who directed the excavation from 2002 to 2008, discussed the limited visibility at the diving site and the logistical challenges of the recovery.

A model of *Heroine*, built by Glenn Grieco in the TAMU Ship Model Shop, now resides in the Oklahoma History Center (in Oklahoma), but our group saw models he is currently working on, including *La Belle*, a seventeenth century French frigate that was wrecked in Matagorda Bay in 1686, where it lay, forgotten, until 1995.

Work inside the Conservation Laboratory includes waterlogged archaeological artifacts

recently recovered from the Battle of Valcour Island (Lake Champlain, New York). During our tour, Dr. Chris Dostal let us hold a six-pound cannonball recovered from the *USS Philadelphia*, a small gunboat that was sunk by British naval forces on October 11, 1776.

My final field session was a Sunday morning visit to the Schubot Center for Avian Health. Dr. Sarah Hamer (Director of the Center) and Dr. Meredith Anderson oversaw a tour of the facility, which houses a mixture of exotic birds. We also learned about current research into bird health and climate change being conducted by graduate students.

In addition to field sessions, this year's Annual Meeting had more than 100 scheduled classroom presentations. To narrow my options, I settled on a few topics I knew little about. One of the sessions, "Why We Dig," focused on spelunking and the intricate cave systems of Central Texas. Presenter Gregory Sullivan also talked about Underground Texas Grotto, an Austin-based non-profit group whose members map, explore, and restore caves on private land. Sullivan also showed time-lapse



Glenn Grieco, Director of Ship Model Laboratory



Ship Model Laboratory



Cannonball recovered from
USS Philadelphia



Shipwreck artifacts,
New World Laborator



Sarah Hamer (right), Director of Schubot
Center for Avian Health

Homecoming—The 2025 TMN Annual Meeting at College Station (cont.)



videos of a recent dig that revealed a cave previously filled with rocks, dirt, concrete, and trash. The group's website, <https://utgrotto.org/do-you-have-a-cave/>, reveals a busy calendar with weekly digs at Austin-area caves, along with links to the above-mentioned videos.

I chose another session for the speaker as much as the topic. I first saw Craig Hensley present at the 2014 Annual Meeting, the last of the camp-style gatherings (at Mo Ranch, near Kerrville), before the TMN program outgrew such venues. At the time, Hensley was a TPWD Biologist and Interpreter. In the years since, I have seen him speak at Annual Meetings, chapter meetings and training sessions on topics ranging from dragonflies to sparrows. At this year's event, he made a three-hour presentation on native plants and pollinators, and as always, he shared personal photos and videos from the field and enlightened attendees with his unique experiences and perspective. Hensley recently retired after working in interpretation and as a biologist for 42 years.

For many people a highlight of the Annual Meeting is participating in one of Sam Kieschnick's blacklighting events. This year the most well known TPWD Urban Wildlife Biologist in North Texas hosted four mothing events. While I do not consider myself a moth-er, I attended an on-campus mothing event at Leach Gardens, primarily to learn from nocturnal naturalists, whose enthusiasm is infectious. Doing so also gave me the chance to spend time with some of my old friends, such as Rich Sommer (from the Gulf Coast Chapter) and Scott Buckel (from the Galveston Bay Area Chapter), with whom I volunteered for many years in Southeast Texas.

One of my favorite sessions at the Annual Meeting is the Trivia Contest (Quiz Bowl), which, according to presenter Richard Heilbrun, Wildlife Diversity Program Director, TPWD, made its first appearance at a "sparsely attended" gathering many years ago. Neither the Annual Meeting nor the Quiz Bowl suffers from low attendance anymore. In a crowded room, participants, competing in teams of four, answered questions in six categories that ranged from serious (names of animal young) to silly (drawing memes). One of my team members this year was Mary Pearl Meuth, Assistant State Coordinator of the TMN Program, and her artistic skills helped us rack up eight points in the meme category. My team has never won the Quiz Bowl, but we always enjoy the lively competition and laughing at some of Heilbrun's questions (and answers).

While I always look forward to exploring new parts of Texas and learning about the natural world from knowledgeable authorities, the most memorable part of the Annual Meeting for me is sharing the magical experiences with friends and fellow naturalists, some of whom I met years ago at Mo Ranch. As long as I am able to do so, I will continue to attend this delightful gathering. I am already looking forward to the adventures awaiting me in Waco, site of next year's Annual Meeting.



Scott Buckel (right),
Galveston Bay Area Chapter



Mary Pearl Meuth,
Assistant State Coordinator, TMN

Tweet of the Month

By Sue Yost, class of 2017

Gobble, gobble, gobble!

Yep! It is November so that means it is turkey time!

Here are some fun facts about turkeys to share around the dinner table this Thanksgiving.

1. The largest known wild turkey weighed in at 37 pounds.
2. There are over 5,000 feathers on a turkey.
3. In the early 1900's turkeys were almost hunted to extinction.
4. Turkeys were originally bred for their beautiful feathers.
5. Male turkeys are known as toms or gobblers.
6. Male & female droppings are shaped differently. Males are "J" shaped, females are spiral.
7. Turkeys can run 12 miles per hour and fly at 60 mph.
8. We eat more than 40 million turkeys each Thanksgiving.
9. They have waddles, snoods and beards.
10. Turkeys have excellent eyesight and see in color.
11. North America is home to over 7,000,000 wild turkeys.
12. Males have a sharp spur on the foot for fighting.
13. Benjamin Franklin never proposed them for the national bird.
14. Wild turkeys only live 3-4 years.
15. Turkeys heads are covered in caruncles, that look like warts.
16. The wattles change color depending upon their mood. Blue: scared. Red: ready to fight.
17. In 1969, the first meal eaten on the moon by Neil Armstrong & Buzz Aldrin was turkey.
18. Turkeys don't have ears but holes behind the eyes and can hear a mile away.
19. Jennies are juvenile females and Jakes are juvenile males.
20. A group of turkeys are called a gang, rafter or mob.
21. The bigger the scat, the older the turkey is.
22. Contrary to belief, eating turkey does not make you sleepy.
23. Only males gobble to attract a mate.
24. Benjamin Franklin praised them as being "much more respectable" than Bald Eagles.
25. Turkeys eat berries, seeds, insects, nuts and acorns.



HAPPY THANKSGIVING!



This Month's Contributors



Gale Bacon



Becky Bertoni



Jerry Hamby



Michael Hatch



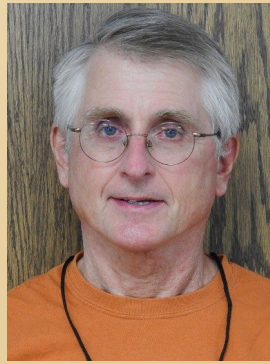
Scott Kiester



Tom Kirwan



Bryan Lewis



Carl Malmberg



Karen Mangum



Brenda Martin



Mary Morrow



Daniela Parker



Jonathan Reynolds



Kathryn Wells



Fran Witte



Sue Yost



Betty Zajac



Karen DeVinney

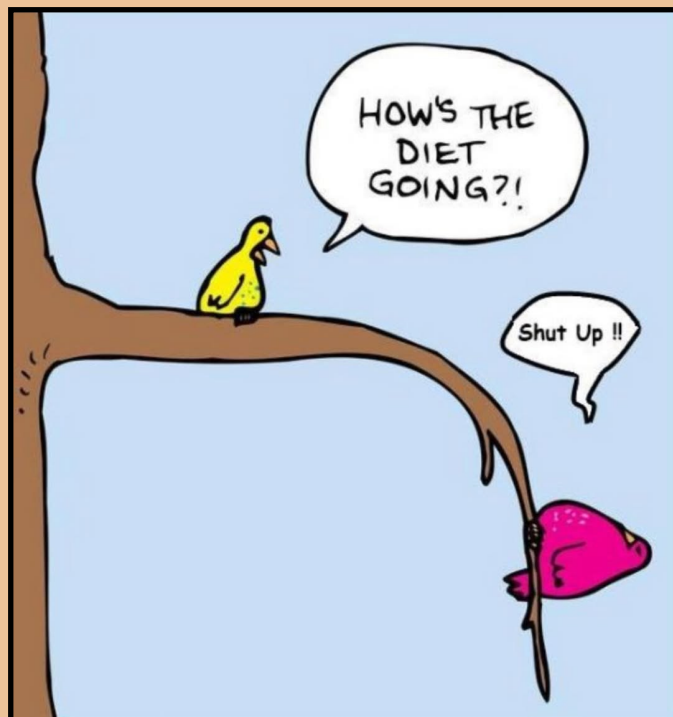
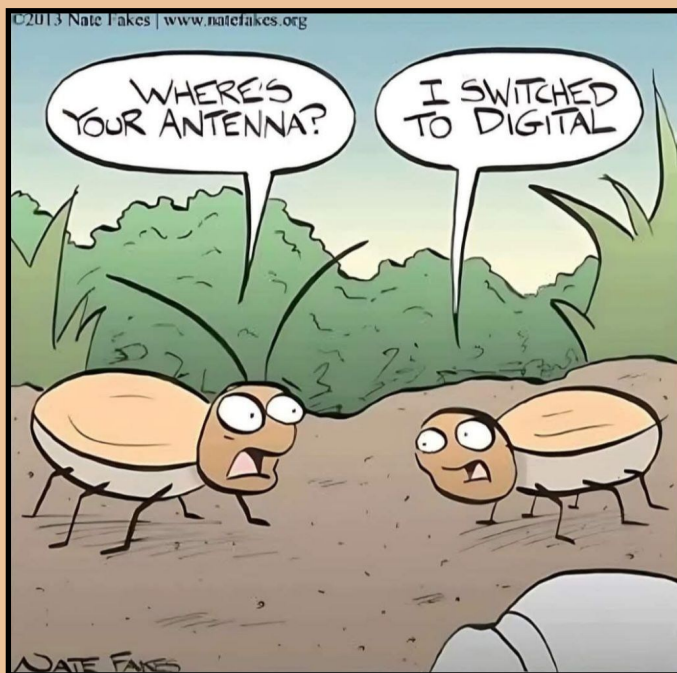


Tammie Walters,
Editor

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

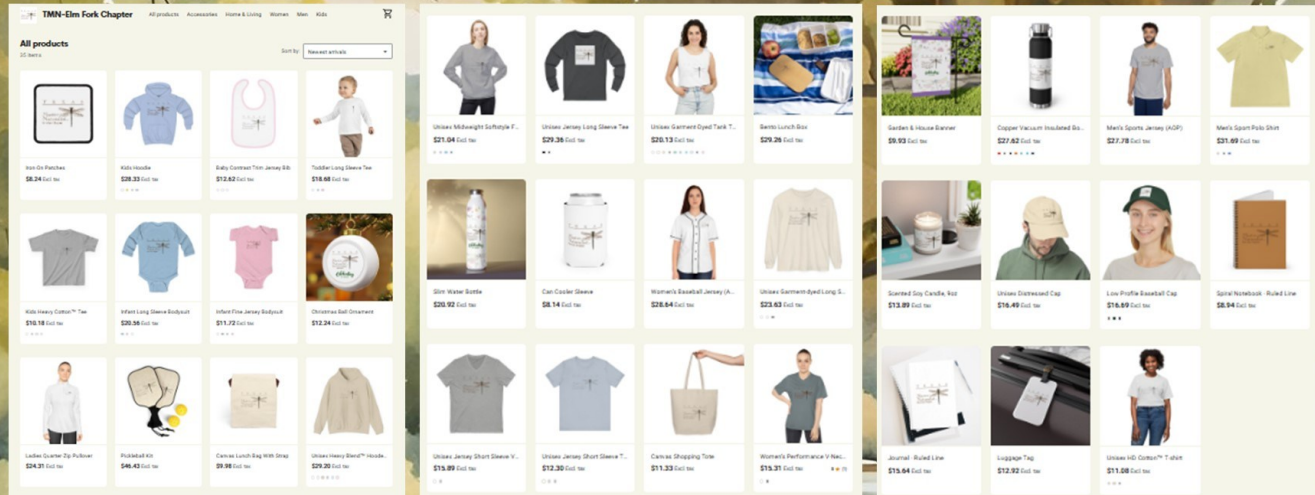
Almost the Last Word

Funny Finds From Sue Yost!



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](https://www.instagram.com/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



**Attention Project Managers
and Board Members:**

Budget Requests for 2026 are due by
Wednesday, December 10, 2025.

Watch for a link to the new online request form on the
website or simply click here:

<https://media.efctmn.org/budget-request/>



Naturalist News WON FIRST PLACE

for Outstanding Chapter Newsletter
at the TMN Annual Meeting!

Thank you all for your amazing articles and photos.
We couldn't do it without you!

Please send submissions to: newsletter@efctmn.org

December 2025 submissions are due by:

Monday, December 8th

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

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