

T E X A S

Master
Naturalist™
Elm Fork Chapter



Naturalist News

February 2026 Volume 26, Issue 2



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Master Naturalist™
Elm Fork Chapter



Naturalist News



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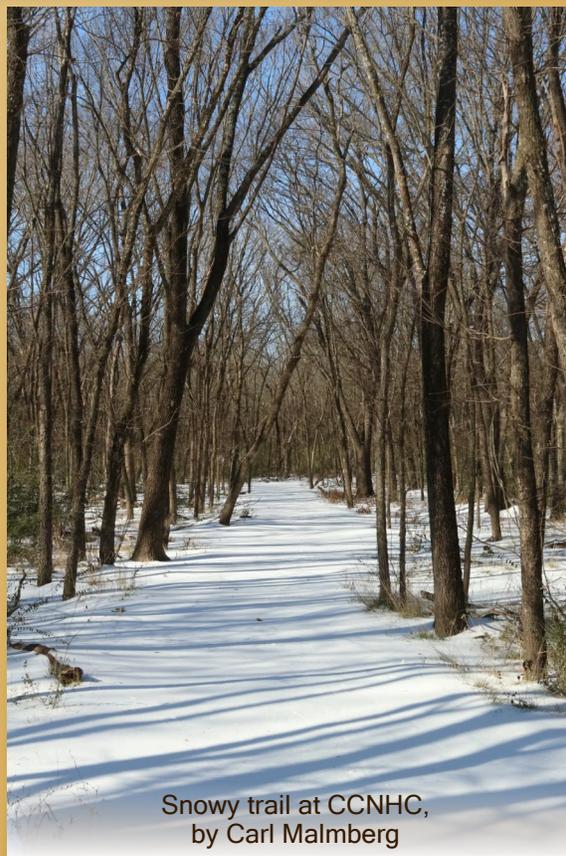
On the Cover:

House Finch (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) puffed up from the cold,
by Bryan Lewis

*Spring is
Just
Around
the Corner!*



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.



Snowy trail at CCNHC,
by Carl Malmberg

Announcements



H-E-B Pollinators for Texas Grant Green Acres is the Place to BEE native plants, rain collection system, photography exhibit



Feb 1-March 15
Flower Mound Library
**Green Acres iNaturalist Pollinator
Photography Exhibit**
Vote for your favorite pollinator photo

March 10, Tues, 7 pm
Flower Mound Library
**Program on certifying your yard
as a native habitat**

April 26, Sun, 2 pm
Green Acres Farm Memorial Park
FM Wild! iNaturalist how-to

May 16, Sat, 10 am
Green Acres Farm Memorial Park
**FM Wild! Caterpillars and Spring
Wildflowers**

June 12, Fri, dusk
Green Acres Farm Memorial Park
**Black-lighting with Sam Kieschnick,
DFW Urban Biologist**



Livy Reese, Aly Foreman, Becky Bertoni, Tom Kirwan



Announcements



1951 S Valley Parkway, Lewisville

Thrive Nature Park Nature Hike

Join us for a morning of
exploration and connection!

Link to register found on the City of
Lewisville Parks and Rec Dept Events

Third Sunday from
September to May

9 AM at the Picnic Table at the
S Valley Parkway Crosswalk

Contact Chris Chastain at cchastain@cityoflewisville.com for more information.



Phenology Week

March 16-20, 2026

Join us for a week of celebrating
phenology with daily challenges,
webinars, and more!



Phenology Week - a virtual celebration of the seasonal cycles of plants and animals. The purpose of Phenology Week is to celebrate YOU, our Elm Fork Chapter Texas Master Naturalists, Nature's Notebook observers, Time to Restore Texas program participants, and partners! We'll have webinars, awards, daily challenges, observer stories, and more.

Follow this year's Phenology Week 2026 events at
<https://usanpn.org/news/article/phenology-week-march-16-20-2026>

Announcements



About Leave 3

Join Texas Parks and Wildlife, Texas Master Naturalists, the Nature Conservancy, the Audubon Society, and many others in a fun challenge to see which city can document the most species during April 24 - April 27. It is easy to participate by joining an event or making observations on your own using the

Read More > Your Membersh

Edit Project Project Journal

Apr 24, 2026 - Apr 27, 2026



iNaturalist **2026** **CITY NATURE** **CHALLENGE** **APRIL 24-28**



Join EFMN-CNC 2026

It's that time of year again! The 2026 iNaturalist City Nature Challenge April 24-April 28. We will be competing with many cities across the globe for number of observations, IDs and number of species.

We have landed in the top 5 every year since the inception and plan to keep it that way. We have also finished No. 1 for the State of Texas, beating out Houston, San Antonio and all the other cities in TX.

Yes, we are that good!

THIS YEAR WE HAVE A NEW CHALLENGE!!!

MASTER NATURALIST COMPETITION WITHIN DFW!!!

#1 in OBSERVATIONS, IDS AND # OF SPECIES

Stay tuned for some mini blitzes we will have during the four days of observations at our project sites. We hope to have at least one a day during the challenge and hope to see eager ELM FORK iNaters on the trails taking photos. We will have until May 4th to ID observations. If you have any questions please email Mary Morrow, listed in the directory.

Upcoming Chapter Meetings

February Chapter Meeting and Presentations

Thursday, February 19th, 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Denton County Administrative Courthouse • 3rd Floor Conference Room
1 Courthouse Dr. • Denton, TX 76208

Annual Awards Presentation



*Image from
kjpargeter / Freepik*

Chapter Presentation:

What's New with Denton Urban Forestry

By Haywood Morgan, Jr.

Urban Forester City of Denton

With nearly three decades of urban forestry experience, Haywood Morgan enjoys teaching volunteers about trees. Morgan is responsible for the implementation of the City of Denton's Urban Forest Master Plan and all issues involving the management and maintenance of trees in his domain.

Morgan holds a bachelor's degree in urban forestry from Southern University and A&M College in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and is a graduate of the Municipal Forestry Institute. He serves as vice president of the board of directors of the Texas Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture and chairs its Education Committee, Outreach Committee and Urban Forestry Track Committee for the annual Texas Tree Conference.



Upcoming Chapter Meetings

March Chapter Meeting and Presentation

Thursday, March 19th, 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Denton County Administrative Courthouse • 3rd Floor Conference Room
1 Courthouse Dr. • Denton, TX 76208

Municipal Mutualism: Creating Win-Win Relationships with our Communities

By Rick Travis

A personal narrative reviewing the steps taken over the past several years to develop a strong, productive, and trusting relationship between the Blackland Prairie Chapter and the Parks Department in Frisco, TX. This discussion will include examples of the significant positive impact this relationship has had on the inclusion of natural areas in the planning and design of parkland, as well as increasing chapter involvement in other education/restoration/conservation efforts within the city.

Rick owns a Bachelors' Degree in Forest Management and an MBA, both from Stephen F. Austin State University. With retirement from his business career, Rick is fulfilling a long-deferred desire for involvement in the environmental sciences. He is an active member of the Blackland Prairie Master Naturalist Chapter and served as Chapter President from 2022 through 2025. Rick is also a member of Frisco's Natural Resources Advisory Board and works closely with Frisco Parks on multiple projects within the city. He is a volunteer trail guide at the Heard Wildlife Sanctuary, Plano Parks and Trails, and Frisco Parks and Trails and serves as the Forest Ecology instructor for the Blackland Prairie Chapter and neighboring Master Naturalist chapters' training programs in the DFW area.



Upcoming Chapter Meetings

April Chapter Meeting and Presentation

Thursday, April 16th, 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Denton County Administrative Courthouse • 3rd Floor Conference Room

1 Courthouse Dr. • Denton, TX 76208

Miles and Miles of Texas: My Visit-Every-State-Park Retirement Adventure By Suzanne Tuttle

Suzanne Tuttle is a plant ecologist who retired in 2016 as Manager of the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge after a 23-year career at the park. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Biology from UT Arlington and an Associate of Applied Science degree in Horticulture from Tarrant County Junior College (now TCC).

Suzanne has taught training classes for various North Texas chapters of the Texas Master Naturalist program since 1999 and helped found the Cross Timbers Chapter.

Her first retirement project was to visit every Texas State Park and State Natural Area. The COVID pandemic slowed her progress for a couple of years, but she joyfully completed her quest on October 22, 2022 at Palmetto State Park near San Antonio. This presentation touches on her adventures and the insights she gained on her multi-year quest.



Awards and Recognition

January 2026

Initial Certifications

Clint Cassel
Sarah Pogue

Class of 2025
Class of 2025



2025 Recertifications

Yvonne Berry

Class of 2023



2026 Recertifications

Leonard Chochrek
Andrea Dixon
Robin Franks
Mary Morrow
Sue Yost

Class of 2019
Class of 2023
Class of 2025
Class of 2014
Class of 2017



Congratulations!

Milestones on next page....



Awards and Recognition

January 2026



250 Hour Milestone

Kevin Shaw Class of 2025



500 Hour Milestone

Patricia Kelly Class of 2019



1500 Hour Milestone

Toni Benjamin Class of 2015

5000 Hour Milestone

Becky Bertoni

Class of 2015



Congratulations!

Field Notes in Focus



White-throated Sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) at CCNHC, by Carl Malmberg

Inside Outside News

Advanced Training

North Texas Urban Forestry Conference 2026



Thursday, February 26th
8:30 am – 4:00 pm
Hurst Conference Center
1601 Campus Dr, Hurst, TX 76054

Sponsored by the Cross Timbers Urban Forestry Council, this year the conference's focus is on soils.

For more information and to register, go to:
[Conference | Cross Timbers Urban Forestry Council](#)



Native
Plant
Society
of Texas

SPRING SYMPOSIUM

**** IN PERSON OR VIRTUAL ****

Saturday, February 28th, 2026
10:00 am – 3:00 pm
Tours from 3:15 pm – 3:45 pm
Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center or Streamed Live
4801 La Crosse Ave, Austin, TX 78739

Click here for more information and to register:
[2026 Spring Symposium - Native Plant Society of Texas](#)

Inside Outside News

Advanced Training



First Signs of Spring Hike

Saturday, March 7, 2026
Coppell Nature Park
367 Freeport Pkwy
Coppell, TX 75019

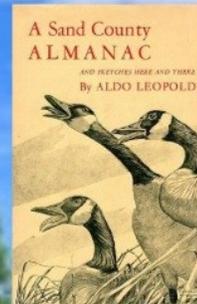
As we hike through Coppell Nature Park's prairies and cross timbers forest, we will look for the first signs of spring. What are the first trees to bloom in the forests? Which of the prairie's flowering plants are in bloom?

Led by a master naturalist, families are welcome. Children under 16 must be accompanied by an adult. Meet at the Biodiversity Education Center office.

For information contact Josh Carlos at joshua.carlos@coppelltx.gov



Drawing Nature Through the Seasons



Third Saturday each month from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
Coppell Nature Park
367 Freeport Pkwy., Coppell
For information, call 972-304-3581 or use the QR code.



To see more Coppell Community Experiences, click here:
[Coppell Community Experiences Winter/Spring 2026](#)

Inside Outside News

Advanced Training

CREATE YOUR OWN CERTIFIED
WILDLIFE HABITAT® USING NATIONAL
WILDLIFE FEDERATION GUIDELINES.



Part of the H-E-B
Pollinators for Texas 2025
grant
Green Acres is the Place to
BEE

Nurturing a Pollinator Habitat

Tuesday, March 10, 7:00 p.m.
Flower Mound Public Library
3030 Broadmoor Ln.



Nature's Notebook/Time to Restore -
Texas Phenology Training
Wednesday, April 1st, 2026
6:30 pm – 8:30 pm



Interested in becoming a Nature's Notebook observer? Our next online virtual live training ZOOM session will be April 1, 2026, from 6:30 PM to 8:00 PM CDT. Please register in advance at <https://arizona.zoom.us/meeting/register/Fca4vzmFRsCyC6gMhXmRUA#/registration>. Upon registration, you will receive an email providing you with a link and password for the class.

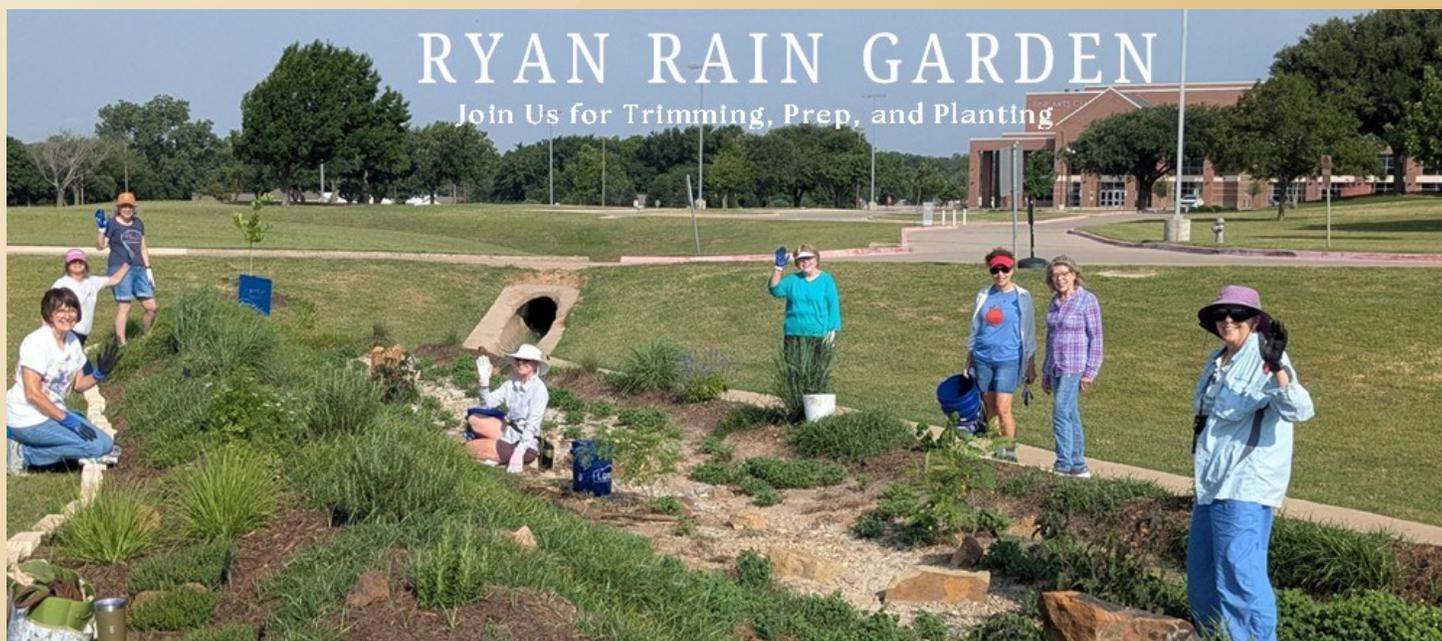
Elm Fork Chapter Approved Advanced Training (AT) hours are available for first-time attendees. If you have already attended this initial training session, you can still log AT hours and become a certified observer by completing the online Observer Certification Course found on your Observation Deck in your Nature's Notebook application. The Course is our primary training resource and covers the basics on setting up sites, selecting plants and animals to observe, collecting data with the mobile app, an in-depth look at the plant and animal phenophases and intensity measures, and a chance to practice making observations.

Upon successful completion of the course, you will become an official Nature's Notebook Certified Observer. You will receive a completion certificate, a badge for your Observation Deck, and you will be tagged in the Nature's Notebook database as a Certified Observer.

For more information, contact Tom Kirwan through the Membership Directory.

Inside Outside News

Volunteer Opportunities



Together, we're supporting native plants, protecting our watershed, and creating hands-on learning opportunities for students.

@Billy Ryan High School
5101 E. McKinney St. Denton, TX
(next to the baseball field)

March 7th 10-12

Winter Trimming & Soil Prep

Garden cleanup and soil prep to get the beds ready for spring growth

April 4th 10-12

Planting Day!

With a grant from **Wild Ones** we'll replace and add more plants



For more information contact
Pamela Golcher through the Membership Directory

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
Bluebird nest box monitoring would be PO60212: FR

Inside Outside News

Volunteer and AT Opportunities

Immediate Changes in Johnson Branch Nature Center Schedule

TPWD is making changes immediately in how the Nature Center at Johnson Branch is staffed. Their vision is to have the Nature Center at JB open daily.

Friday, Saturday and Sunday shifts will be covered by designated Park Hosts or park volunteers. This will ensure these "priority days," when more visitors are there, will be completely covered.

TMN volunteers will be able to volunteer Monday through Thursday for all or part of the day according to the volunteer's availability or desires. I see this as a positive change in our efforts to educate visitors about Nature.

Changes have already been made to the calendar and sign up dates are available through March of 2026.

Please take time to sign up now. We can't do it without you.



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

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

References

Today February 2026 Schedule

Date	Day	Time	Event
19	FEB, THU	All day 9am - 12pm 10am - 4pm	Green Acres iNaturalist Pollinator Photography Exhibit (Day 19/43) Flower Mound Public Library, 3030 Broadmoor... Chapter Meeting Denton County Administrative Courthouse, 1 Courthouse Dr, Denton, TX 76208, USA Ray Roberts Lake State Park Nature Center - Johnson Branch Unit Ray Roberts Lake State Park - Johnson Branc...
20	FEB, FRI	All day 10am - 4pm	Green Acres iNaturalist Pollinator Photography Exhibit (Day 20/43) Flower Mound Public Library, 3030 Broadmoor... Ray Roberts Lake State Park Nature Center - Isle Du Bois Unit Ray Roberts Lake State Park Isle du Bois, 100 P W ...
21	FEB, SAT	All day 10am - 4pm 10am - 12pm	Green Acres iNaturalist Pollinator Photography Exhibit (Day 21/43) Flower Mound Public Library, 3030 Broadmoor... Ray Roberts Lake State Park Nature Center - Isle Du Bois Unit Ray Roberts Lake State Park Isle du Bois, 100 P W ... AT - Drawing Nature Through the Seasons The Biodiversity Education Center, 367 Freeport Pkwy, Coppell, TX 750...
22	FEB, SUN	All day 10am - 4pm 1 - 2pm	Green Acres iNaturalist Pollinator Photography Exhibit (Day 22/43) Flower Mound Public Library, 3030 Broadmoor... Ray Roberts Lake State Park Nature Center - Isle Du Bois Unit Ray Roberts Lake State Park Isle du Bois, 100 P W ... AT - Wildlife Transporter Training Class Rogers Wildlife Rehabilitation, 1430 E Cleveland St, Hutchins, TX 75141, USA
23	FEB, MON	All day 9am - 1:30pm	Green Acres iNaturalist Pollinator Photography Exhibit (Day 23/43) Flower Mound Public Library, 3030 Broadmoor... Elm Fork Education Center @ UNT Elm Fork Education Center, 1704 W Mulberry St, Denton, TX 76201, USA

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

Projects in the Community

Elm Fork Chapter

BatFest2025!

Takes Flight

The Acoustic Bat Monitoring Project team kicked off October 2025 with the Elm Fork Chapter's first annual BatFest2025! at Thrive Recreation Center in Lewisville. About 30 people, young, old and one dressed as a bat, celebrated all things batty, culminating in an evening bat walk to detect bats in the area.



After playing some bat trivia games, Clarissa Molina, one of Elm Fork Chapter's project bat data analysts, gave a detailed introduction to the world of bats and their importance to us. She explained bats are the only mammals with true flight and of the 44 species found in the United States, 32 of those species are found in Texas.

She talked about the myths and phobias surrounding bats as well as their importance to the environment and agriculture. It is estimated that bats save farmers up to \$3 billion annually in crop damage and pesticides by eating the pests that plague crops. Some species of bats are pollinators, as well, and are the sole pollinator of blue agave, from which tequila is made.

Clarissa described the bats found in our area, their habitat, and the threats to each species. Most people were surprised to learn that Mexican free-tailed bats in Texas are all maternal colonies (mothers and pups) while the adult males remain in Mexico all year. Some bats, like the Mexican free-tailed bats, roost in large colonies under bridges, in mines and caves, and in structures. Others live alone or in small groups in trees, especially those with cracks, crevices, and holes to hide in.



BatFest 2025 (cont.)

Clarissa summarized the Acoustic Bat Monitoring Project, which just completed its second year, and its findings. She showed what the echolocation calls look like and how they are identified from the recordings.

The bats identified in 2025 in Denton, Wise and Cooke counties were Mexican free-tailed bat, Tricolored bat, Hoary bat, Gray bat, Eastern Red bat, Seminole bat and Northern yellow bat. The Gray bat and Northern yellow bat were observed for the first time in our area in 2025.



Jessie Woodall, outreach coordinator for Bat World Sanctuary in Weatherford, talked about the sanctuary and the rehabilitation of bats. Every year Bat World takes in hundreds of injured and sick bats and rehabilitates them for release back into the wild. Bats that recover but cannot be returned to the wild because of a disability are housed at the sanctuary for the rest of their

lives. Bat World also takes in orphaned bats and bats rescued from the exotic pet trade, zoos and research facilities. These bats can be observed via the sanctuary's "bat cam" available through its [website](http://batworld.org), batworld.org.

John Tomlinson, Elm Fork Chapter, summarized other research about bats, including a study of bats' use of residential swimming pools when natural water sources dry up in late summer or only stagnated ponds are nearby. He showed illustrations of the hand-like structure of their wings which makes them more maneuverable than birds, including hummingbirds.



BatFest 2025 (cont.)

He described major threats to bats including habitat loss and fragmentation, wind turbines, which tend to kill migratory tree-dwelling bats, urban sprawl and white nose syndrome, a highly communicable disease affecting hibernating bats. The disease doesn't kill the bats directly, but it irritates them, causing them to awaken from their winter sleep and expend their fat reserves. John also described ways of attracting bats, including bat houses and planting moth-attracting plants, and keeping trees and snags on your property if possible. He also showed migration routes as well as the best public bat-viewing sites in Texas.



BatFest2025! ended with a twilight bat walk at Thrive Nature Park, using miniature real-time acoustic monitors attached to phones. Lauren Young, Environmental Project Manager for TxDOT (and member of the North Texas Chapter of TMN), and Elm Fork Chapter project members Brynne Bryan, another project bat data analyst, and Samra Bufkins led groups through three different trails at the Nature Park listening for bats. The identified bats were Hoary and Mexican free-tailed bats, mentioned earlier as commonly found in our area. As a grand finale, a Hoary bat made a brief appearance swishing above us as we headed back from our bat walk, a perfect ending to a perfect BatFest2025!

The Bat Project Acoustic Monitoring team, led by Mary Morrow and Samra Bufkins, is looking forward to hosting BatFest2026! later this year. In addition to Clarissa Molina, other members of the team are Sue Hudiburg and Brynne Bryan, who have become experts at interpreting data and identifying bats by their echolocation signatures; Barbara Beane, who organizes Bat Outreach to educate the public of "everything about Bats"; Jim Gerber and Chris Teves, who assist with placement of bat monitors throughout Wise, Cooke and Denton counties.



See you all at BATFEST2026! this fall...

Samra Bufkins

Mary Morrow

Wild About LLELA

Sue Yost, class of 2017

WELL DAM! or is it DAMN?

All three of these words can be used at LLELA:



Dam: A barrier that stops or restricts the flow of surface water. LLELA has an earthen dam holding back Lake Lewisville. Used by the staff and volunteers daily.

Dam: A beaver impoundment. Used by anyone who walks the Bittern Marsh Trail and hikes or kayaks the beaver pond.

Damn! To swear at; curse; often used to express annoyance, disgust, or surprise. Now this one can be heard by the LLELA trail crews and staff on the Bittern Marsh Trail. Daily! And it's all because of the beavers! Beavers are wild about LLELA.



Beaver facts:

- They can live up to 24 years.
 - They can hold their breath for 15 minutes.
 - They have webbed feet.
 - They have a transparent extra eyelid so they can see underwater.
 - Beavers have good hearing, smell and touch.
 - They communicate with their paddle-like tail.
 - They build lodges with multiple rooms.
 - One for drying off, one for living in, one for food storage.
 - They have six to eight young.
- Their teeth never stop growing and contain iron that stains the teeth a rusty orange color.
 - A beaver's butt smells like vanilla. They secrete a chemical from their castor sacs located under their tails. It smells like musky vanilla and has a texture of molasses. The FDA has approved this as a natural flavoring.
 - They are nocturnal.
 - They are herbivores and eat bark, tree leaves and aquatic vegetation.
 - Beavers were almost hunted to extinction for their pelts.



Wild About LLELA (cont.)

The LLELA beavers are not cooperating with the LLELA trail crew on the Bittern Marsh. The crew punches holes in the dams (that continue to flood the trails) and by the next morning the busy beavers have them repaired and damming the water again. BUT hope is on the horizon! LLELA employee Clint (class of 2025!) is installing a Beaver Deceiver. Can LLELA outsmart the beavers? Time will tell. In the meantime, the words DAM! and DAMN! echo through the marsh silence.



Photo credits:
 animalia-life.club,
 Leonard Chockrek,
 Sue Yost,
 Gone with the Wind

Features

The Bobcat - TMN Recertification Pin 2026

By John Thomlinson



Bobcat at Boca Chica NWR, Cameron County, TX, by John Thomlinson

The TMN recertification pin for 2026 is the bobcat (*Lynx rufus*), the fourth mammal to be so honored. It is an appropriate choice - charismatic, quite common, but always a special treat to see.

The bobcat is in the genus *Lynx* along with, well, the three species of lynx. There are two recognized subspecies in the US, *Lynx rufus rufus* east of the Great Plains, and *L. r. fasciatus* to the west (Kitchener et al. 2017). There are also two subspecies in Mexico. This differs from previous classifications in which up to 12 subspecies were identified on morphological grounds. The combining of subspecies (or previously separate species) is known as “lumping.” (The opposite, when one species is found to consist of two or more species, is “splitting.”) The reasons for the lumping of bobcat subspecies give excellent insight to the (relatively new) role of DNA in determining phylogenetic trees, and if anyone is interested, I highly recommend dipping into the Kitchener et al. (2017) paper. The bobcat is listed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as “least concern,” meaning that their populations are stable and they do not face significant risks. There are local threats to populations, however, including habitat loss, disease, unintentional poisoning, genetic isolation, predation (this particularly in Florida, where pythons are taking their toll), and the fur trade (Kelly et al. 2016). TPWD mentions that the bobcat is the only native Texas cat that is important as a fur animal, though demand for animal fur as a fashion statement is declining.



Features

The bobcat is something of a habitat generalist, though Davis (1978) identifies a preference for rocky outcrops where available, and thickets elsewhere. Historically they preferred oak, piñon, juniper, or open pine forests, or chaparral (Davis 1978). They have adapted quite well to human activities, and they are now found in suburban areas. The iNaturalist project “DFW Carnivores” has 1133 observations of bobcat (as of Jan 25, 2026), making it the third most-reported carnivore (after raccoon and coyote). I think that most would agree, though, that they are much harder to see than raccoons or coyotes. Part of the reason for that is that they are more nocturnal, they don’t have the same penchant for eating human trash, and they just tend to be more cautious around humans.

Bobcats mainly eat small mammals and birds, though in Florida, in a nice turnaround, they are developing a taste for python - both eggs (New York Times 2022) and adults (Smithsonian 2025). Mammals such as mice, wood rats, squirrels, and rabbits made up about 2/3 of the diet in one study, and 2/3 of those were considered “harmful.” Some deer meat was found in bobcat stomachs, but it is thought that was probably scavenged. If you get on the internet (never really recommended), you can get the impression that bobcats are vicious predators just waiting to murder your pets: the reality is a little different. If they enter yards, it is most likely because they are attracted to rodents. However, if they encounter a small pet, they may treat it like any other prey animal. The most commonly given advice is, as usual, not to feed animals outside, either domestic or wild (except birds, obviously), and don’t leave small pets outside, especially at night. Occasionally bobcats will eat domestic sheep, goats, or poultry, but the damage done is “rarely great” (Davis 1978). Thus, on balance, they do not interfere with human activities in any meaningful way.

Seeing a bobcat is tough for most people. They are somewhat active at dawn and dusk, and the best places to see them seem to be near water, on greenbelts, or in parks. There are photographs on social media of them in people’s yards, often taken with security cameras at night. They do come out in daylight, but I have found that to be very hit or miss. It’s great to see one, but sometimes just knowing they’re there is enough. But, thinking positively, here’s hoping your 2026 is full of bobcats.

References

Davis 1978. The Mammals of Texas. TPWD Bulletin 41, Austin, TX.

Kelly et al. 2016. Full citation: Kelly, M., Morin, D. & Lopez-Gonzalez, C.A. 2016. *Lynx rufus*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2016: e.T12521A50655874. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2016-1.RLTS.T12521A50655874.en>

Kitchener et al. 2017. Full citation: Kitchener A. C., Breitenmoser-Würsten Ch., Eizirik E., Gentry A., Werdelin L., Wilting A., Yamaguchi N., Abramov A. V., Christiansen P., Driscoll C., Duckworth J. W., Johnson W., Luo S.-J., Meijaard E., O’Donoghue P., Sanderson J., Seymour K., Bruford M., Groves C., Hoffmann M., Nowell K., Timmons Z. & Tobe S. 2017. A revised taxonomy of the Felidae. The final report of the Cat Classification Task Force of the IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group. *Cat News Special Issue 11*, 80 pp. <https://www.catsg.org/cn-special-issue>

NYT 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/28/science/bobcat-python-eggs.html>

Smithsonian 2025. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/florida-bobcat-kills-13-foot-python-for-the-first-time-on-record-its-a-sign-of-nature-fighting-back-against-the-invasive-snakes-180986735/>

Features

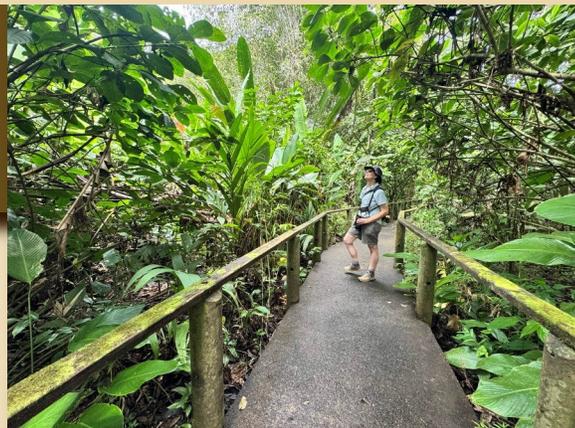
From Boat-billed Herons to Walking Palms— Exploring the Biodiversity of Costa Rica

By Jerry Hamby

Getting to Tortuguero National Park in Costa Rica is no simple feat, and the last leg requires a 1.5-hour riverboat journey. For my wife Susan and me, that leisurely ride was an exciting part of the journey, setting the stage for two days of birding and hiking. Fortunately, we left the logistics to Road Scholar, a not-for-profit organization that has been leading educational tours for more than fifty years. Tortuguero NP was the first of several natural sites we visited over twelve days. We traveled from bustling San Jose to the Caribbean Sea and across the Continental Divide to the Pacific Ocean. It was an amazing trip that, as the program title promised, explored the natural wonders of Costa Rica.

After arriving at Tortuguero NP, we visited Tortuguero Town, where we learned about the region's economic transformation from logging hub to ecotourism. Integral to that shift was a conservation effort to save green sea turtles (*Chelonia mydas*). Although our visit did not coincide with their breeding season, we visited the Sea Turtle Conservancy Visitor Center and discovered former nesting sites on the beach.

The next day began with a pre-breakfast canal safari in the national park. Led by our tour guide, Vinny Viquez, we saw dozens of native birds, including northern jacana (*Jacana spinosa*), green ibis (*Mesembrinibis cayennensis*), and boat-billed heron (*Cochlearius cochlearius*). We also spotted spectacled caimans (*Caiman crocodylus*), smaller tropical cousins to crocodiles. Because of strict guidelines for canal travel, the wildlife was abundant and easily observed from the quiet open-sided boat.



El Poponjoche Trail, Tortuguero National Park



Sea turtle nesting site



Vinny on the riverboat to Tortuguero National Park



Two-toed sloth

Vinny's background as a tropical biologist informed each outing, including a late morning hike on El Poponjoche Trail, accessible directly from our lodge. Though less than two miles long, the trail, an elevated boardwalk, led us through a dense secondary forest. Near the trailhead we discovered a Hoffmann's two-toed sloth (*Choloepus hoffmanni*) at the top of the canopy. Despite their medium size (up to 29 inches long), sloths are difficult to spot because they are solitary and sleep up to 20 hours a day.



From Boat-billed Herons to Walking Palms—(cont.)

Some of the most intriguing animals we found were the smallest ones, including a red-webbed tree frog (*Boana rufitela*), which was less than two inches long, and a line of leaf-cutting ants (*Acromyrmex octospinosus*), one of three



Red-webbed tree frog



Leafcutter ant

species of fungus-farming ants we observed in Costa Rica. Like other leaf cutters, *A. octospinosus* can defoliate a tree and carry its leaves to their nest in less than a day.



Slaty-tailed trogon

After completing the hike, Susan and I reversed the route to explore at a leisurely pace. Along the way, we spotted a slaty-tailed trogon (*Trogon massena*), a large bird (twelve to fourteen inches long) whose metallic green chest and red belly made him stand out in the dense understory. We watched him for several minutes as he sallied between a perching branch and a nest of conehead termites (*Nasutitermes corniger*) in a nearby tree, where he fed. Trogons often follow Panamanian white-faced capuchins (*Cebus imitator*) and feed on insects and lizards flushed out by the monkeys.

In keeping with the eco-friendly nature of Tortuguero, the rooms at Pachira Lodge are not air conditioned; screen windows and wrap-around porches provide ventilation and



Central American spider monkey

make the jungle experience more immediate and immersive. On the day we left, Susan and I awoke to the calls of mantled howler monkeys (*Alouatta palliata*), one of the loudest mammals on earth; their roaring and barking sounds can travel up to three miles. Stepping outside, we spotted a troop of Central American spider monkeys (*Ateles geoffroyi*) scrambling over rooftops and from tree to tree. Their playful performance provided a dramatic coda to our stay.

While our next stop in the Sarapiquí region focused primarily on sustainable agricultural practices, including a tour of a cocoa plantation, we also hiked at Tirimbina Biological Reserve, where we saw several walking palms (*Socratea exorrhiza*), unusual plants whose stilt-like roots create the illusion of movement toward sunlight. Our visit to Tirimbina provided our first opportunity to cross a hanging bridge.



From Boat-billed Herons to Walking Palms—(cont.)



Hanging Bridge, Mistico Park

The most famous hanging bridges are in Mistico Park, near Arenal Volcano, and the heart of the park is a two-mile trail that features six suspension bridges, the highest of which hangs 200 feet above the ground. In addition to providing views of the rainforest, the improved trails and bridges face Arenal Volcano. In a vacation filled with daily high points, walking above the rainforest was a truly extraordinary experience.

One of Costa Rica's iconic landmarks, Arenal Volcano is officially active but has been dormant since 2010. In 1968 violent eruptions destroyed three villages and killed 87 people, burying a six-square-mile area under rocks and lava. Our excursion to Arenal



Arenal Volcano

National Park, located at the base of the volcano, was the only time we hiked in the rain, but, fortunately, the storm passed quickly.

Our final activity in Alajuela Province was hosted by Night Wings Project, an educational research center located on a cacao farm. In addition to discussing the challenges facing native bat species, zoologist and researcher Willy Pineda showed us five bats captured in a mist net. Among them was a Pacific tent-making bat (*Uroderma convexum*), a fruit eater that, as its common name implies, roosts under palm leaves. Another species we saw, pygmy round-eared bat (*Lophostoma brasiliense*), feeds primarily on large insects such as beetles and moths.



Pacific tent-making bat

The next day we traveled to Canto del Río, an eco-friendly lodge in the mountainous Alajuela Province. Owner and conservationist Edwin Ramirez gave a lecture on cloud forest ecology and then led us on a hike. Sitting more than 3,600 feet above sea level, Canto del Rio is shrouded in clouds. The "horizontal precipitation" from constant mist supports a lush environment, a point illustrated by a stack of concrete pavers that was completely covered in mosses and epiphytes. We were surprised to learn that the pavers had been exposed to the elements for only ten months.



White-nosed coati

Near the end of our hike, a white-nosed coati (*Nasua narica*) ambled from the underbrush. Unlike its relative the common raccoon (*Procyon lotor*), coatis are active during the day. Before

From Boat-billed Herons to Walking Palms—(cont.)



La Paz River, Canto del Rio



Ecuadorian hermit crab



Carara National Park

leaving Canto del Rio, we ate a delicious lunch that was locally sourced. While conserving the rainforest for more than twenty years, Edwin has supported the work of neighboring farmers who follow sustainable practices. Like many preserved areas in Costa Rica, Canto del Rio is privately owned. At least half of the natural sites we visited were owned and maintained by individuals or non-profit foundations.

Our final days of exploration led us to the Central Pacific coast. Shortly after our arrival, Susan and I took a sunset walk on the gray sand of Playa Hermosa, where we spotted a gulf ghost crab (*Hoplocypode occidentalis*) and dozens of small Ecuadorian hermit crabs (*Coenobita compressus*). Despite their name, hermit crabs are social animals, a behavior we observed as the crabs scurried in groups along the tideline. An evening dinner on the beach provided a brief respite before two more days of adventure.

The next morning we hiked at Carara National Park, which is in a transition zone (between Pacific lowland rainforest and dry deciduous forest). Near the trailhead, we saw several black spiny-tailed iguanas (*Ctenosaura similis*), one of the largest members of the family Iguanidae. In the forest we also saw a small troop of Panamanian white-faced capuchins (which we first encountered in Tortuguero). Vinny described their deceptive behavior, raising false alarms, for instance, to distract other monkeys from their food. In addition, they have learned how to unzip backpacks and steal food from humans.

At Carara NP we also saw a pair of scarlet macaws (*Ara macao*), one of several neotropical bird species we encountered during the trip. Along with yellow-throated toucans (*Ramphastos ambiguus*), which we found near our hotel, scarlet macaws are among the most iconic birds of Central America. A final early morning walk also allowed us to spot common black hawks (*Buteogallus anthracinus*) perched near the top of coconut palms (*Cocos nucifera*), patrolling the beach for crabs.

On the bus ride back to San Jose, we stopped for a boat tour on the Tárcoles River. In addition to seeing American crocodiles (*Crocodylus acutus*), we observed hundreds of birds overhead and on the shore, especially where the Tárcoles empties into the Pacific. Among the two dozen species we spotted were the magnificent



From Boat-billed Herons to Walking Palms—(cont.)

frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*), a large seabird with angular wings and a forked tail, and a flock of small mangrove swallows (*Tachycineta albilinea*), which were hunting insects close to the water.

During our stay in Costa Rica, several species of flora and fauna also stood out, including golden silk spiders (*Trichonephila clavipes*) and green iguanas (*Iguana iguana*), which can exhibit a vibrant range of colors (such as orange, red, and blue). Ultimately, however, I am drawn most to forbs and trees. Among the 141 plant species I uploaded on iNaturalist, the Kittykat heliconia (*Heliconia vellerigera*) and the kapok tree (*Ceiba pentandra*) are two standouts, the former for its fuzzy bright red bracts that attract hummingbirds and the latter for its enormous height (up to 200 feet), umbrella-shaped canopy, and wide-spreading buttress roots (which stabilize the tree).

Costa Rica ranks as one of the most biodiverse countries in the world. When you consider that it makes up only 0.03% of the Earth's landmass, however, it ranks near the top in biodiversity density. The 400 observations I uploaded onto iNaturalist represents only a tiny sample of the plants and animals that populate the country, which includes more than 500,000 species. If I have an opportunity to return, I hope to discover more of them.



Playa Hermosa (photo by Susan Hamby)

*Photographs by Jerry Hamby
unless noted otherwise*

Tweet of the Month

From Sue Yost, class of 2017

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*)

Four feet tall. Six-foot wingspan. The Great Blue Heron (in the birding world, known as GBH), is one of the largest birds of the North American heron and egret family. Despite their impressive size, Great Blue Herons weigh only five to six pounds thanks in part to their hollow bones—a feature all birds share. Males will be slightly larger than females.

Their territory is widespread across the United States. In Texas, they are usually found along the coast but they are also found beside streams, ponds and lakes and our ever-present retaining ponds and ditches in suburbia. The birds from the north will migrate south in the cold winter months but can remain through those cold northern winters, as long as waters remain unfrozen and they can find fish.

It's amazing to watch a GBH hunt for food. Standing quietly and tall, it slowly turns its head to focus on the water. It slows its pace to a careful stalk. Then, in a motion almost too fast to catch, it drives its head beneath the surface and comes up with its prey impaled on its thin long beak. Was it a fish? (their main diet) A snake? A crawfish? A frog? A young turtle? Could be any of those. On land they also will prey on nestlings and small rodents. Depending on the type and size of prey a GBH may stab it a few times before swallowing it whole, usually headfirst! A big lump in the long thin neck can be seen! I have witnessed the catching of HUGE fish thinking there is *NO WAY* that the GBH is going to be able to have *that* for lunch, but GULP!



Great Blue Herons can be easily identified in flight by the shape of their bodies. Their long necks are drawn back in a graceful S-curve and the long legs trail behind. The wide wings beat only twice each second. Beautiful various shades of blue-gray color the body feathers, crisp white feathers surround the head and a black feathered crown trails off the back of the head. During the breeding season the males have ornate long wispy plumes that decorate their head, neck and



Great Blue Heron (cont.)

back. Great Blue Herons have specialized feathers on their chest that continually grow and fray. The herons comb this “powder down” with a fringed claw on their middle toes, using the down like a washcloth to remove fish slime and other oils from their feathers as they preen. Applying the powder to their underparts protects their feathers against the slime and oils of swamps.



Although nests are often reused for many years and herons are socially monogamous within a single breeding season, individuals usually choose new mates each year. Males are the first to arrive at colonies and court females from their chosen nests; most males choose a different nest each year. The mated pair will both construct the nest. The nest is made up of crude interwoven sticks usually high in a tree. It's lined with twigs and leaves. Nest building can take from three days up to two weeks; the finished nest can range from a simple platform measuring 20 inches across to more elaborate structures used over multiple years, reaching 4 feet across and nearly 3.5 feet deep. They are colony nesters so you will find large groups of herons nesting together in the same area. This is known as a heronry. Colonies can consist of an average of 160 individual nests, with multiple nests per tree built 100 or more feet off the ground. On occasion they join with egrets and this nesting area is then known as a rookery. (GBH will nest higher up than the others.) The sites are usually over or near water, supposedly to ward off mammalian predators. Alligators in the water below act as “security guards” for likely predators but they also readily snatch up any nestlings that fall (or get pushed) out of the nest.

Heronry are one of many species of birds that are known for the extreme form of sibling rivalry at a nest that may lead to siblicide. Siblicide occurs when a nestling's behavior leads to the death of one or more of its siblings through starvation, physical injury, or eviction from the nest. Siblicide in birds often occurs as soon as a larger or more aggressive nestling gains the size, strength and weaponry (such as a sharp beak) to cause significant harm to its younger and smaller nest mate(s).

The female Great Blue Heron will lay three to five light bluish-green eggs. Both the female and male will incubate the eggs for about 28 days. They are born semi-altricial, meaning they are born with downy feathers and are not helpless, but are not big enough to leave the nest in a few days as if they were



Great Blue Heron (cont.)

precocial. It will be about 60 days before they leave the nest after a steady diet of fish regurgitated by both parents. Remember the rule of thumb...the bigger the bird the longer it takes to fledge. Heat and drought can take a toll on nesting herons and egrets. Nestlings sometimes leave the nests before they are ready.

Great Blue Herons aren't likely to visit a typical backyard. However, they are sometimes unwelcome visitors to yards that include koi ponds. Herons, like most of our birds, are legally protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

The oldest recorded Great Blue Heron was found in Texas when it was at least 24 years, 6 months old. Now that is what I call "one tough old bird!"

Great Blue Heron numbers are stable and increased in the U.S. between 1966 and 2019, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey. [Partners in Flight](#) estimates a global breeding population of 700,000 and rates the species 8 out of 20 on the Continental Concern Score, indicating a species of low conservation concern. Because Great Blue Herons depend on wetlands for feeding and on relatively undisturbed sites for breeding, they are vulnerable to habitat loss and human impacts such as traffic, logging, motorboats and other intrusions that can disrupt nesting colonies. Discarded fishing lines can also impact survival. Other threats include chemical pollutants or other causes of reduced water quality. Although contaminant levels have declined in many areas, pollutants such as PCBs and DDT and newer types of industrial chemicals continue to affect heron habitats and can contribute to factors such as reduced nest site attendance.



Take a walk near water, look to see if you can spot this great hunter, the Great Blue Heron. They are a GREAT bird in more ways than one!

Copy: Wikipedia

Photos: Sue Yost, doorcountypulse.com, sandiegebirdspot.com, birdfact.com, dreamstime.com

This Month's Contributors



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



Tammie Walters,
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Almost the Last Word

Funny Finds From Sue Yost!



**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!

We couldn't do it without you!

Please send submissions to: newsletter@efctmn.org

March 2026 submissions are due by:

Monday, March 9th



In Memoriam

Dear Friends,

It is with a heavy heart that I share the sad news that Ray Kreutzfeld (Class of 2014) passed away unexpectedly last week.

Ray was a cherished member of our chapter and a dear friend to so many. His presence, generosity of spirit, and deep love for nature and his friend's will leave a lasting mark on our community and on each of us who had the privilege of knowing him.

At this time, we do not have information regarding services, but we will share details as they become available.

We will hold a special time of remembrance for Ray at our February meeting. Please join me in honoring his life, holding his loved ones close in thought, and giving thanks for the remarkable naturalist and friend he was.

With heartfelt sympathy,
Brenda
Brenda Martin
TMN-EFC President



Ray Kreutzfeld, Texas Master Naturalist Elm Fork Chapter President, 2017



In Memoriam

THURSDAY, APRIL 23, 2026

Memorial Service

2:00 pm - 6:00 pm

RHOTON FUNERAL HOME

 [1511 South Interstate 35e](#)
[Carrollton, TX 75006](#)

Ray Kreutzfeld, Texas Master Naturalist
Elm Fork Chapter President, 2017



Who We Are



Texas Master Naturalist—Elm Fork Chapter

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

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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.

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