

T E X A S

Master  
Naturalist™  
Elm Fork Chapter



# Naturalist News

April 2026 Volume 26, Issue 4



*Bryan Lewis*

T E X A S

Master Naturalist™  
Elm Fork Chapter



# Naturalist News



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



## On the Cover:

Black-chinned Hummingbird  
(*Archilochus alexandri*),  
by Bryan Lewis



Six-spotted tiger beetle (*Cicindela sexguttata*),  
by Tammie Walters



# Announcements



**Do you know someone who is ready for an adventure of the natural kind?**



**Applications now being accepted through April 24 for Initial Training 2026**

**Classes run Tuesdays August 11-October 27 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at Global Spheres**

**Apply at visit <https://txmn.org/elmfork/join-our-chapter/training/>.**

*This program may require walking on uneven ground. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is committed to participant accessibility and will provide reasonable accommodations. Please contact the Denton County AgriLife Office horticulture department at least 10 business days in advance of the program.*

The Texas Master Naturalist program is a partnership between



**The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is an equal opportunity employer and program provider.**



The 2026 Training Committee is asking for your help by actively seeking your gently used TMN Textbooks. We request any TMN-EFC Member that is not using their TMN Textbook to help us reduce, reuse and recycle your textbooks by donating it back to our Chapter. It is easy! Just bring your textbooks to the next few Monthly Chapter Meetings.

Contact Marissa Shaw or any member of the 2026 Training Committee to coordinate.

# 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



## **iNaturalist** **2026** **CITY NATURE** **CHALLENGE** **APRIL 24-27**



Join EFMN-CNC 2026

It's that time of year again! The 2026 iNaturalist City Nature Challenge is April 24-April 27. 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**

**EFC Members must join the EFMN-CNC 2026 project, join using the QR code provided**

Stay tuned for some mini blitzes we will have during the four days of observations at our project sites. We will have until \*May 10th\* to ID observations. If you have any questions please email or text Mary Morrow, listed in the directory.



## *iNaturalist City Nature Challenge Mini Blitzes*

<b><i>iNaturalist CNC Mini-Blitz</i></b>	<b><i>Friday April 24</i></b>	<b><i>Saturday April 25</i></b>	<b><i>Sunday April 26</i></b>	<b><i>Monday April 27</i></b>
<b><i>9:00 am- 11:00 am</i></b>	<b><i>Cross Timbers Trailhead- Brynne Bryan</i></b>			
<b><i>Noon- 2:00 pm</i></b>		<b><i>Lantana Petals &amp; Pathways- Diane Wetherbee</i></b>		
<b><i>3:00 pm - 5:00 pm</i></b>			<b><i>*2:00 pm Green Acres- Becky Bertoni</i></b>	
<b><i>7:00 pm - 11:00 pm</i></b>		<b><i>Nothing w/Sam - LLELA*</i></b>	<b><i>*No gate fee, someone will let participants enter/leave at the gate</i></b>	

***Sign Up Genius Link: to follow in Plan Your Week***

# Upcoming Chapter Meetings

## ***April Chapter Meeting and Presentation***

Thursday, April 16th, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

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 is one of the founding members of 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.



# Upcoming Chapter Meetings

## May Chapter Meeting and Presentation

Thursday, May 21st, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

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

Friends of the Warren Ferris Cemetery, The Native Plant Society of Texas and The Dallas Pioneer Association, Texas by Nature, Jackson-Breeding Consultant Group partnership introduces...

### The Constellation of Living Memorials

bringing sacred ground to life

2/3  
1/3 of 15,000+ Texas Cemeteries are neglected.

Imagine transforming those into native landscapes to expand local habitats and migratory pathways...

...to honor our pioneers and loved ones... and reconnect to the circle of life.

LIST OF TEXAS A&M RESEARCH & EXTENSION CENTERS INCLUDES HEADQUARTERS

AMARILLO, LUBBOCK, VERNON, DALLAS, EL PASO, SAN ANGELO, TEMPLE, BRYAN/ COLLEGE STATION, BEAUMONT, UVALDE, CORPUS CHRISTI, WESLACO, OVERTON

Know of a neglected historic cemetery in need?

Learn more:

**Cemetery Locations in Texas**  
Map source, Texas Historical Commission

## Constellation of Living Memorials

Presented by Julie Finneman and Jane Duke, PhD

The program introduces the CLM, a growing network of historic cemeteries reimagined as living civic infrastructure where cultural memory and native ecology are restored in tandem. To date the initiative has mobilized over 13,500 volunteer hours across multiple pilot cemeteries, documented over 3,000 species observations, cleared acres of invasive plant growth, and returned these sites to healthy, functioning ecosystems. Partnerships with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, the Native Plant Society of Texas, and other institutions have helped ground this work in science and community stewardship.

Participants will learn how new historic cemeteries are onboarded into the constellation, from initial site assessment to restoration planning, native planting strategies and ongoing care. Each cemetery becomes a “star,” contributing to a connected system that supports biodiversity, climate resilience, and cultural and natural preservation.

Elm Fork Chapter member Jane Duke will follow up the presentation with an update on the pending chapter project and selection of a cemetery in Denton County.

Continued on next page... 

# Upcoming Chapter Meetings

## ***Constellation of Living Memorials (cont.)***

### **Presenters:**

#### **Julie Finneman**

President, Friends of the Warren Ferris Cemetery  
Co-Creator, Constellation of Living Memorials  
TMN-North Texas Chapter

With over 33 years of professional experience, Julie Finneman has woven together her background in entertainment advertising photography, healthy living, and wildlife conservation into her current mission. After spending decades as a successful photographer—with works housed in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences archive—she shifted gears, drawn to ecological rehabilitation.

In 2018 Julie embarked on restoring the historic Warren Ferris Cemetery near her home in East Dallas, transforming overgrown ground into a native prairie and wildlife habitat. Building on that success, she helped launch the Constellation of Living Memorials (CLM) pilot program to replicate that model across other neglected historic cemeteries, integrating restoration with community engagement, native landscape design, and ecological corridors. Julie has procured grants and facilitated partnerships to support this work, emphasizing the dual goals of honoring the cultural heritage of these cemeteries and rewilding the land to support biodiversity and climate resilience.

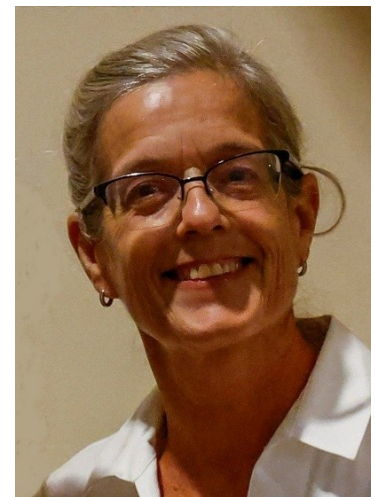


#### **Jane Duke, PhD**

Soil Restoration Educator and Systems Scientist  
Certified Soil Food Web Lab Microscopist  
TMN-Elm Fork Chapter

Jane Duke bridges the gap between microscopic biological data and macro-level ecological restoration. A soil restoration educator and environmental systems scientist, Jane helps land stewards and organizations move beyond guesswork by understanding the biological engine of the soil. She holds a Ph.D. in environmental design and a master's degree in environmental philosophy.

Jane graduated with the 2009 TMN-North Texas Chapter class where she was an outreach volunteer and led hikes at the Trinity River Audubon Center. Some of her contributions include leading the Denton ISD School Days project at Clear Creek, presenting at the TMN Annual Meeting, and serving on the TMN-Elm Fork Chapter Board of Directors. Jane and her husband live on a 5-acre farm in Oak Point along with their horses, bees and chickens.



# Awards and Recognition

## March 2026

### Initial Certifications



*Sarah DeLeon*

*Class of 2025*

*Sara Fanning*

*Class of 2025*

*Val Hibbeler*

*Class of 2025*

### 2026 Recertifications

*Elizabeth Bargar*

*Class of 2025*

*Barbara Beane*

*Class of 2018*

*Abigail Beck*

*Class of 2023*

*Toni Benjamin*

*Class of 2015*

*Sharon Betty*

*Class of 2018*

*Marilyn Blanton*

*Class of 1999*

*Kesa Klingman*

*Class of 2017*

*John Cox*

*Class of 2025*

*Karen DeVinney*

*Class of 2021*

*Whit Dieterich*

*Class of 2022*

*Jim Gerber*

*Class of 2019*

*Steven Hadidi*

*Class of 2025*

*Sandy LaQuey*

*Class of 2019*

*Marty Newman*

*Class of 2020*

*Susan Richmond*

*Class of 2024*

*Jim Terry*

*Class of 2017*

*Kathryn Wells*

*Class of 2017*

*Kim Wootton*

*Class of 2017*

*Betty Zajac*

*Class of 2003*



# Awards and Recognition

## March 2026



### 250 Hour Milestone

Joe Rogers                      Class of 2025  
Elizabeth Bargar              Class of 2025



### 500 Hour Milestone

Lin Hampton                      Class of 2022



### 1000 Hour Milestone

Brynne Bryan                      Class of 2022  
Kennedy Zapata-Schleicher      Class of 2024



### 2000 Hour Milestone

Allen York                      Class of 2017

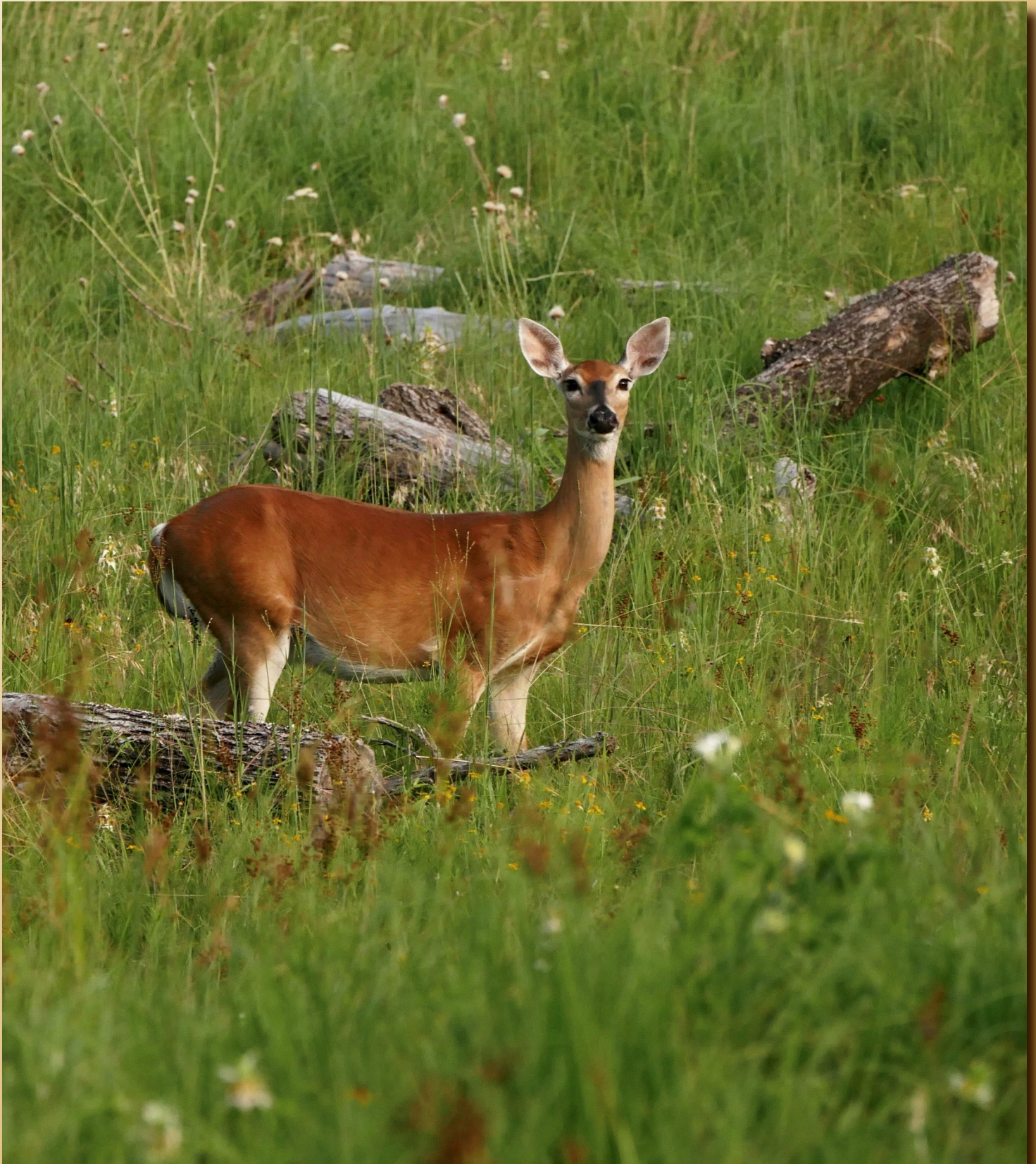
### 5000 Hour Milestone

Jerry Hamby                      Class of 2014



*Congratulations!*

# *Field Notes in Focus*



White-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) at Ray Roberts Lake, by Jonathan Reynolds

# Inside Outside News

## Advanced Training

### ***iNaturalist City Nature Challenge 2026! iNaturalist Beginners Training***

Monday, April 20th, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.

Location: Live on Microsoft Teams ([iNat 101 Webinar for CNC](#) | [Meeting-Join](#) | [Microsoft Teams](#))

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### ***iNaturalist City Nature Challenge 2026! iNaturalist Advanced Training***

Wednesday, April 22nd, 2026 at 6:00 p.m.

Location: Live on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/share/1GC6v7YwMu/>)

Click on LIVE VIDEO under Details on the FB event page.



Once again, Texas Nature Trackers (TNT) is proud to help sponsor this statewide community event that encourages everyone to get outside, explore the natural world around them and document local flora and fauna using iNaturalist. Not only is iNaturalist a great tool for self-learning about the natural world, your observations contribute to greater understanding of the state's plant- and animal-life.

This year's CNC event kicks off on Friday, April 24 at midnight and runs to midnight Monday, April 27. Then join people until Sunday, May 10 to continue uploading observations you made during the four-day period and help others to identify what they found.

For information about the City Nature Challenge:

[https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/wildlife\\_diversity/texas\\_nature\\_trackers/naturechallenge/](https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/wildlife_diversity/texas_nature_trackers/naturechallenge/)

Don't forget to join the Elm Fork Chapter City Nature Challenge project - you must join for the chapter to receive credit and be eligible for top honors in Most Observations, Most Species, Most ID'd Observations - we want to win this!!! The link to join: [The Elm Fork Chapter City Nature Challenge Project](#) or use the QR code.

Both events are entered in VMS AT: Project Specific, description 'iNaturalist, City Nature Challenge



# *Inside Outside News*

## Advanced Training



### **TWU Texas Wildflower Day** **Protecting Pollinators | Preserving our Future** **Friday-Saturday, April 24-25, 2026** **TWU ACT 301 and Dr. Bettye Myers Butterfly Garden**

Pollinators are essential partners in our food system and natural world, responsible for helping plants reproduce and ecosystems thrive. Native gardens feature plants carefully selected to nourish pollinators year-round, providing food, shelter, and safe passage throughout every season.

Our 2026 Texas Wildflower Day celebrates these pollinators. Learn how native plants support bees, butterflies, birds, and other pollinators—and how simple choices can help protect them for generations to come.

Click the link below to view the schedule of events and/or register:

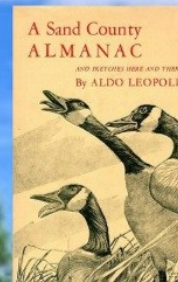
**[Texas Wildflower Day | Texas Woman's University](#)**

*Note: AT is approved by documenting each class attended in VMS and the number of hours per class.*

# Inside Outside News

## Advanced Training

### Drawing Nature Through the Seasons



[Click HERE](#) for more information

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.

### FM Wild! INaturalist How-to Sunday, April 26 at 2:00 p.m. Green Acres Memorial Park Register using this QR code.



The Texas Master Naturalist program is a partnership between



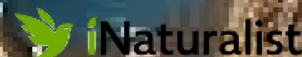
This program may require walking on uneven ground. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is committed to participant accessibility and will provide reasonable accommodations. Please contact the Denton County AgriLife Office horticulture department at least 10 business days in advance of the program.

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is an equal opportunity employer and program provider.

Pollinators for Texas



a partnership with



Learn how to use the iNaturalist app to document the plants, birds, insects, and animals that call Green Acres home. If you download the iNaturalist app and create an account ahead of time, you can start observing sooner! Our entries count toward the 2026 iNaturalist City Nature Challenge.

*This program is part of the H-E-B Pollinators for Texas 2025 grant Green Acres is the Place to BEE.*

*Inside Outside News*  
Advanced Training

**Conservation of Nature at Night  
AT Opportunity**

**Join us for a unique evening of learning at  
the International Dark Sky Community of  
Lakewood Village, TX**

**Learn About**

**The International Dark Sky Association  
The Journey to Obtain and Maintain Certification  
Benefits to Wildlife, Plants, and Humans  
Data Collection and Our Conservation Projects**

**After Dark:**

**Observe Neighborhood Dark Sky Lighting  
Night Sky Telescopic Tour**

**May 1, 2026, 7:00pm-9:30pm**

**100 Highridge (City Hall), Lakewood Village, TX 75068**

**Space is Limited - To reserve your spot, email Cynthia Steward (through  
the membership directory) with TMN Dark Sky in the subject line.**

**This is an indoor/outdoor event and could be changed or cancelled due to  
inclement weather, high wind, or even heavy cloud cover.**

*Note: This event is open to Elm Fork Chapter members only.*

# Inside Outside News

## Advanced Training



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

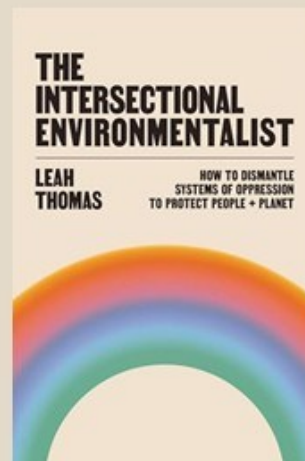
- **Tuesday, May 12th, 6:30-7:30 p.m.**
  - \* *River Systems Impacted by Floods*
  - \* Patrick Ireland & Mitch Nisbet, District Biologists at Texas Parks and Wildlife Department - Inland Fisheries (San Marcos / Austin and San Antonio Districts)
  - \* [Register](#)

Visit the [Texas Waters](#) webpage for information on becoming a certified [Texas Waters Specialist](#) and view recorded webinars from 2017-2023.

\*Note: Texas Water Webinars AT: Texas Waters Certification Training

### Join the fun at the TMN-EFC Naturalist Monthly Book Club

Our Next Book For  
Review on May 20th



**When:** Every 3<sup>rd</sup> Wed. 2:30 – 3:30 or 4 p.m.

**Where:** Emily Fowler Library, 502 Oakland St.

**AT:** Other TXMN Chapter Approved AT: TMN AT

**Questions? Contact J. Duke through the Membership Directory**

# *Inside Outside News*

## Advanced Training

Join Us at  
**HAGERMAN**  
**NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE**

**4th Annual HNWR BioBlitz**  
Hosted by Bluestem Chapter, TMN

**FRIDAY, MAY 22 & SATURDAY, MAY 23**

Friday Evening at Sunset!  
Mothing with Texas' Favorite Enthusiast  
**SAM KIESCHNICK**

**Saturday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>**  
Full Day of Exploration & Advanced Training!  
Nature Hikes, Birding, Bug Hunts & More!

For More Info: [trainingclassdir@bluestemtmn.org](mailto:trainingclassdir@bluestemtmn.org)

For questions, contact Scott Kiester through the Membership Directory.

# Inside Outside News

## Advanced Training

### THE EXTRAORDINARY CATERPILLAR

WILD ONES DFW presents THE EXTRAORDINARY CATERPILLAR film and panel discussion with North Texas conservationists on

**Tuesday, June 23, 2026**

**6:30 p.m. – 8:45 p.m.**

**Grapevine Palace Arts Center**  
**300 S Main St, Grapevine, TX 76051**

6:30 p.m. Meet & Greet

7:00 p.m. The Extraordinary Caterpillar

8:00 p.m. Panel Discussion



The Extraordinary Caterpillar invites viewers into the hidden world of nature's tiniest superheroes and the vital role they play in sustaining healthy ecosystems. Through stunning macro-videography and the insights of naturalists, scientists, and community advocates, the film reveals how caterpillars connect native plants, insects, birds, and other wildlife in an intricate food web. This captivating documentary encourages audiences to look more closely at the overlooked creatures in their own backyards and highlights why restoring native landscapes matters.

Afterwards, learn more during a 30-minute lively, knowledge-packed Q&A session with four outstanding local experts who are shaping conservation work right here in North Texas.

- **Sam Kieschnick**, Urban Biologist, Texas Parks and Wildlife
- **Jake Poinsett**, Education Manager, Trinity River Audubon Center
- **Carol Clark**, Conservation Specialist, Monarch Watch
- **Teddi Zonker**, VP, Wild Ones DFW: Native Plants, Natural Landscapes

Enjoy a rare chance to learn directly from these local leaders, ask your questions, and walk away inspired to make a difference.

Don't miss this opportunity to hear their insights, elevate your experience and spark new ideas.

**REGISTER & ADD YOUR SEAT TODAY—RSVP REQUIRED**

[https://dfw.wildones.org/events/?wo\\_event\\_id=12284](https://dfw.wildones.org/events/?wo_event_id=12284)

**Hosted by** Wild Ones DFW: Native Plants, Natural Landscapes. We connect people and native plants for a healthy planet. Join us to celebrate biodiversity, ecological stewardship, and the power of native plants to support life.

#### **Our Sponsors**

Wild Ones DFW - <https://dfw.wildones.org/>

Homegrown National Park - <https://homegrownnationalpark.org/>

# *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 preparation, 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](mailto: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



# Projects in the Community

## Results from the 2026 Green Acres iNaturalist Pollinator Photography Exhibit

By Becky Berton

The Green Acres iNaturalist Pollinator Exhibit ran from February 1st to March 15th, 2026 at the Flower Mound Public Library. On Monday, March 16th, we took down the photographs and the rest of the display, while the diligent ballot counting crew spent an hour and a half counting the 1089 ballots that the attendees had submitted for their favorite pollinator photo. The winning photograph for Best of Show, the People's Choice, was a Pipevine swallowtail, taken by Win Goddard, a Flower Mound photographer.

You can see this photo on our Green Acres Farm Memorial Park iNaturalist project:

<https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/219398999>



Best of Show Pipevine swallowtail photograph  
(Photo taken by Becky Berton)



Working in the ballot room  
(Photo taken by Mary Morrow)

Join us at Green Acres, 4400 Hide-A-Way Lane, Flower Mound 75022, on Sunday, April 26 at 2 p.m. to take iNaturalist for the BioBlitz!



The ballot counting crew: Mary Morrow, Mary Strickland, Susan Richmond, Lynn Hampton, Becky Berton, Marilyn Blanton, Sue Ridnour, and Cindy Jones (Photo taken by Steve Strickland)

### Pollinators for Texas



a partnership with



# Projects in the Community



You're Invited!  
**Texas Native Plant Art Exhibition**  
Appreciation Reception

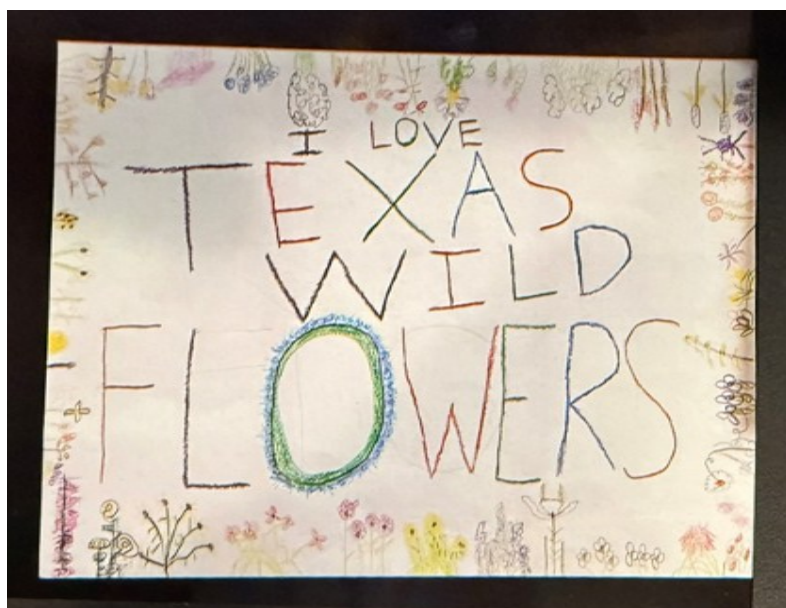
Wednesday, April 29 – 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm

DISD Professional Development Center  
1212 Bolivar Street, Denton, Texas



Please join us to honor the fourth-grade students and their art teachers. All of the artwork that was submitted will be displayed. Other displays will be set up to recognize the display hosts and project sponsors. Stop by at your convenience to join the fun.

Thank you,  
**Marilyn Blanton**



# Wild About LLELA

Sue Yost, class of 2017

On any given day, one can find a lot of "fun guys" that volunteer at LLELA. But they can't compare to the real fun guys....the many varieties of fungi that is! The best trails to spot some of these beauties are the Blackjack & Cicada trails, especially a few days after a nice rain.

Get WILD with this montage of the real fungi of LLELA.

Photos: Sue Yost



# Features

## Tuesday in the Park—A Long Course in Forest Ecology

By Jerry Hamby



Urban forest in winter

Tree identification can be challenging, especially in winter. Fortunately, when I completed Citizen Forester training in 2024, Suzanne Tuttle, former Manager of the Fort Worth Nature Center and Refuge, taught a classroom unit and led a field session on tree identification that gave participants pointers on using clues other than leaves. Those skills came in handy a year later when I volunteered for a project initiated by Lewisville Parks and Recreation to inventory and assess thousands of trees in the city's parks and other public spaces.

Led by the city's Urban Forester Eric D'Antonio, approximately twelve volunteers began the inventory on a Tuesday morning in January 2025. We have met almost every week since then and have uploaded detailed information on more than 2,800 trees into an online database. While most of the volunteers also work with the Texas Master Naturalist program, all of us have trained as Citizen Foresters through the Cross Timbers Urban Forestry Council. Last fall Eric took a new job, but the project has continued under his successor, Kyle Saner.

Our inventory began at Central Park, one of forty city parks in Lewisville. Armed with tools and supplies—diameter tapes and calipers, hand drills, hammers, nails, and inventory tags—volunteers also downloaded the mobile app Survey123, which allowed us to collect and upload data collected in the field. The primary goals of the inventory are to address the health and needs of trees, establish a framework for their monitoring and maintenance, and identify potential risks to people and property.

Before beginning the inventory, we familiarized ourselves with Survey 123 and divided into teams of two or three people. While one person measured and tagged each tree, one or two partners completed the online assessment. After noting the general location (park name), each assessor geotagged the tree and noted the species, seeking input from other volunteers as needed. Without leaves, some trees can be identified by bark, branching, or residual details, such as the reddish drupes (or fruits) that cling to the branches of sugar hackberry trees (*Celtis laevigata*). Another factor that aids identification is the preponderance of certain species in an area. Pecan trees (*Carya illinoensis*), for example, grow abundantly at Central Park, and their open husks can be seen in the trees or on the ground through winter, long after the nuts have disappeared.



Sugar hackberry drupes



## Tuesday in the Park—A Long Course in Forest Ecology (cont.)



Eric D'Antonio measuring a post oak, Lake Park



Mary Morrow using a tree caliper



Susan Hamby tagging a tree, Lake Park

For the sake of consistency, the person measuring the diameter of a tree does so approximately 4.5 feet above ground, a standard established by Gifford Pinchot, the first head of the United States Forest Service. The DBH (diameter at breast height) is taken above the flared base of the tree but within easy reach. The measurement is facilitated with the use of a diameter tape or tree caliper, both of which convert the circumference. The caliper has proved most useful when we are assessing trees in densely wooded areas, especially where greenbrier (genus *Smilax*) or poison ivy (genus *Toxicodendron*) are present.

The next step is placing a physical tag on the tree and recording the number in the online survey. Being able to find a physical tag will make it easier to locate a specific tree among several inventoried in close proximity. Another standard we maintain is to tag only trees with a DBH of six inches or greater.

The inventory checklist in Survey 123 is a simplified version of the Basic Tree Risk Assessment Form, which was developed by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) and provides a standardized method for assessing tree failure risk. Inputting information from drop-down options and typing in fields, the person completing the assessment works from the bottom of the tree to the top—root and root collar to trunk to crown. Several aspects are considered—condition, pruning history, vigor, estimated risk rating, overall condition, and maintenance recommendation. The assessor also uploads one or more photos and can add notes to clarify anything not addressed elsewhere. Completing the form takes only a few minutes. The goal is to provide enough information to help other people make decisions about the tree without overwhelming them with too many details.

Over time we have noticed common problems, including broken branches and hangers (snapped branches or limbs caught in the canopy), as well as issues unique to certain species. Cedar elms (*Ulmus crassifolia*), for instance, are more susceptible to the infestation of American mistletoe (*Phoradendron leucarpum*) than most tree species. Because mistletoe is hemiparasitic, stealing water and nutrients from its host, it causes branch



American mistletoe



## Tuesday in the Park—A Long Course in Forest Ecology (cont.)



Hypoxylon canker



Brown-rot fungus on eastern redcedar

dieback and stresses the tree on which it relies. More significantly, oak trees, particularly post oaks (*Quercus stellata*), are vulnerable to Hypoxylon canker (*Biscogniauxia atropunctata*), a fungal disease that proves fatal to hardwood trees. In contrast, brown-rot fungus (*Fomitopsis juniperina*) only affects the aesthetic appearance of mature trees, particularly eastern redcedars (*Juniperus virginiana*), and rarely causes longterm damage.

A pattern of concern that we have spotted in some parks is destruction caused by the emerald ash borer (*Agrilus planipennis*), an invasive beetle from Asia that kills all species

of North American ashes (genus *Fraxinus*). Dieback typically starts at the top of the tree and works its way down. A dead tree also increases safety risks when it is close to picnic areas or walking trails.

In addition to learning about the difficulties that trees endure, project volunteers have made fascinating discoveries. At L.L. Woods and Austin Kent Ellis Parks, we found dozens of Osage orange trees (*Maclura pomifera*), a species commonly found in the Cross Timbers ecoregion and one that has been on Earth for 20 million years. *M. pomifera* is considered an evolutionary “ghost” since it coexisted with mastodons, which consumed its large fruit, and its adaptations are not suitable for modern seed dispersal. Its ancient history might also explain why it developed long thorns as protection against predation by herbivores.



Osage-orange hedge apple

At 660 acres, Lake Park is the largest municipal park in Lewisville and is, therefore, where we spent the greatest time completing our inventory. Because it is part of the Eastern Cross Timbers, the park has a large concentration of post oak trees, one of two apex oak species in the ecoregion, the other being blackjack oak (*Quercus marilandica*). Because they have demanding growing conditions and do not tolerate soil disturbance, post oaks are difficult to grow, particularly in a nursery setting, so their presence in urban forests is especially valued.

A large number of the post oaks we found at Lake Park had vertical lines indicating some type of wound, possibly caused by frost, drought, or lightning strike. Most of the wounds had sealed through a process called compartmentalization, whereby new wood grows over the injury. We estimated that one post oak with a long vertical scar was probably more than 100 years old and thriving.



Compartmentalization of a vertical crack, Lake Park



## Tuesday in the Park—A Long Course in Forest Ecology (cont.)



Gum bumelia sapling



Eve's necklacepod

Another phenomenon I have noticed is the way microclimates develop at the base of many canopy trees, partly because more vulnerable plants are more protected against the elements and are less likely to be hit by mowers. In several parks, I have uploaded iNaturalist observations of dozens of these “nursery” species, including gum bumelia (*Sideroxylon lanuginosum*), western soapberry (*Sapindus drummondii*), and Eve's necklacepod (*Styphnolobium affine*).

The sense of discovery is heightened by seasonal change. It can be something as simple as seeing the bright yellow leaves of a black hickory (*Carya texana*) in the fall, which I experienced in an abandoned campground area at Lake Park. Even though I have seen hundreds of blackjack oaks, their three-lobed “duck-foot” leaves always captivate me, especially when their pigmentation turns from green to rust.



Blackjack oak



Black hickory



## Tuesday in the Park—A Long Course in Forest Ecology (cont.)

American elm trees (*Ulmus americana*) have a reputation for being weak due to their V-shaped branch joints, but I have long advocated for planting them. For almost 100 years, they have been susceptible to Dutch elm disease and are still on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species. On the first day we inventoried trees in Raldon Park, Carl Parsons, who was my partner that day, and I spotted a large American elm. It is not visible from the parking lots at either end, but anyone who walks behind the houses on the eastern side of the park can see a remarkable tree.

Because Carl and I were the first volunteers to arrive that day, we had the honor of adding the tree to the inventory. It was in remarkable condition—a balanced crown, robust growth, little visible damage—and based on its DBH of 57 inches, it is probably at least 100 years old. It is an extraordinary cultural and natural artifact in an urban forest, and its existence validates the importance of this project.



Carl Parsons under a large American elm, Raldon Park



Kristina Richter assessing trees, Raldon Park

Since we began working, the City of Lewisville has begun using LiDAR tree technology to assess many of the public trees we have not inventoried, particularly along roadways. LiDAR creates 3-D models and generates more precise data than humans can, but the technology can only be used from a vehicle. Therefore, we can get close to trees that LiDAR cannot. If our team ever completes the tree inventory, my hope is that we will return to Central Park, where we started, and begin updating assessments for the trees in the database. If that happens, we will continue to spend our Tuesdays in the park.

# Tweet of the Month

From Sue Yost, class of 2017

## Eastern Bluebird

(Text from Wikipedia) There are 3 kinds of bluebirds: Eastern, Western & Mountain. All three can be found in Texas. In our area, the Eastern Bluebird is found.

Bluebirds tend to live in open country around trees, but with little understory and sparse ground cover. Original habitats probably included open, frequently burned pine savannas, beaver ponds, mature but open woods, and forest openings. Today, they are most common along pastures, agricultural fields, suburban parks, backyards and even golf courses.



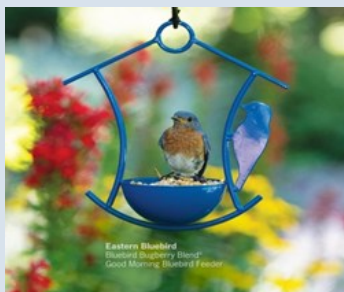
Mating occurs in the spring and summer. A mature female typically raises two broods each season but can have up to four. Nests are constructed in trees within abandoned woodpecker holes or other cavities that provide adequate protection (usually several feet above ground). They will readily come to a Bluebird box mounted on a pole with a raccoon/snake baffle. Construction of the nest is done primarily by the female and takes around 10 days to complete. These nests are small, cup-



like structures lined with grass, feathers, stems, and hairs. Each female lays three to seven light-blue eggs. The female incubates the eggs, which hatch after 13 to 16 days. The young cannot care for themselves upon hatching. The female broods the chicks for up to seven days after hatching. Fledglings then leave the nest 15 to 20 days after hatching.

Both parents cooperate in raising the young, which they feed a diet consisting almost entirely of insects. Some young stay around the nest to help raise another brood. Fledglings are grayish in color, with speckled breasts. The blue color becomes much more prominent and the speckles on their breasts disappear as they mature. Bluebirds may begin breeding the summer after they are hatched.

About two thirds of an adult Bluebird's diet consists of insects and other invertebrates. The remainder is made up of wild fruits or berries. It prefers grasshoppers, crickets, katydids, and beetles, and will also eat earthworms, spiders, millipedes, centipedes, sowbugs, and snails. They will feed on live mealworms and sunflower chips from a designated Bluebird feeder.



Bluebirds feed by perching on a high point, such as a branch or fence post, and swooping down to catch insects on or near the ground. The availability of a winter food source will often determine whether a bird will migrate. If Bluebirds do remain in a region for the winter, they group and seek cover in heavy thickets, orchards, or other areas in which adequate food and cover resources are available. During the "Snowmageddon" several years ago, LLELA lost many Bluebirds. Unable to forage for insects during the day to build up necessary fat reserves, many bluebirds struggled to survive.



## Eastern Bluebird (cont.)

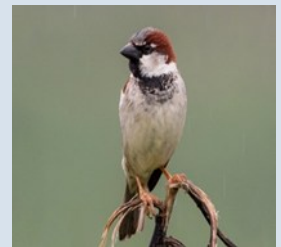


LLELA nest monitor Denver Kramer, TMNEFC, found eight males stacked inside a nest box that didn't survive, once he could finally get out to check boxes. Happy to say the Bluebirds have made a great comeback.

Eastern Bluebirds can live for six to ten years. However, most Bluebirds die within their first year of life. Starvation and freezing are a danger to the young, but most threats come from other animals, including humans. Natural predators of eggs and nestlings can include fire ants and raccoons. Bluebirds of all ages (including adults) are threatened by rat snakes, Eastern racers, American Kestrels, and domestic cats. Introduced species such as European Starlings and House Sparrows are competitors for nesting sites.

They will break the eggs, kill the nestlings or even build a nest on top of the Bluebird nest. Cowbirds will also lay their eggs in Bluebirds' nests. When approached by a predator, the male makes a song-like warning cry. If no male is present, a threatened female will begin to sing, hoping to attract a protective male back to the territory. Both males and females also flick their wings and warble when predators are nearby.

Eastern Bluebirds thrived in the 1700s and 1800s. This flourishing is thought to relate to the activity of settlers. Clearing forests made new habitat available for Bluebirds and nesting sites were created in the increasing numbers of apple orchards and in wooden fence posts that eventually rotted. It is believed that Bluebirds were most abundant around 1900. However, increasing competition with the invasive species of European Starlings and House Sparrows, along with loss of farmland, began to take a toll on Bluebird populations. Along with these, pesticides and scarcity of food during winter compounded to cause the number of Bluebirds to fall. A definite drop has been shown to have occurred between 1938 and the late 1970s.



Conservation efforts are seen as early as 1934 when Thomas Musselman created the first Bluebird trail by setting up rows of Bluebird houses along roads. Also in the 1930s, William Duncan created a Bluebird house design and educated others about these birds. In 1964, The National Association for Protection and Propagation of the Purple Martin and Bluebirds of America was founded. After it went out of existence, the Nature Society kept up with conservation work. In 1978, the North American Bluebird Society was founded. There is a Texas chapter of the Bluebird Society. Wills Point, Texas, boasts they are the Bluebird Capital of Texas.



Bluebirds were popular with early American colonists and associated with the coming of spring. Bluebirds have been mentioned in the works of many writers including Thoreau's writings, Robert Frost's "The Last Word of a Bluebird (as told to a child)," the "Over the Rainbow" song from The Wizard of Oz, and John Burroughs's "The Bluebird." And who can forget the cute, animated Bluebirds that helped Cinderella make her ball gown! Lawrence Zeleny said that Bluebirds represent joy to Americans. Get happy! with the bluebird of happiness!!

***It is a wonderful feeling whenever you see a Bluebird!***

Photos: Sue Yost, Wikipedia (sparrow), Wild Birds Unlimited; Animated image: Disney

# *This Month's Contributors*



Gale Bacon



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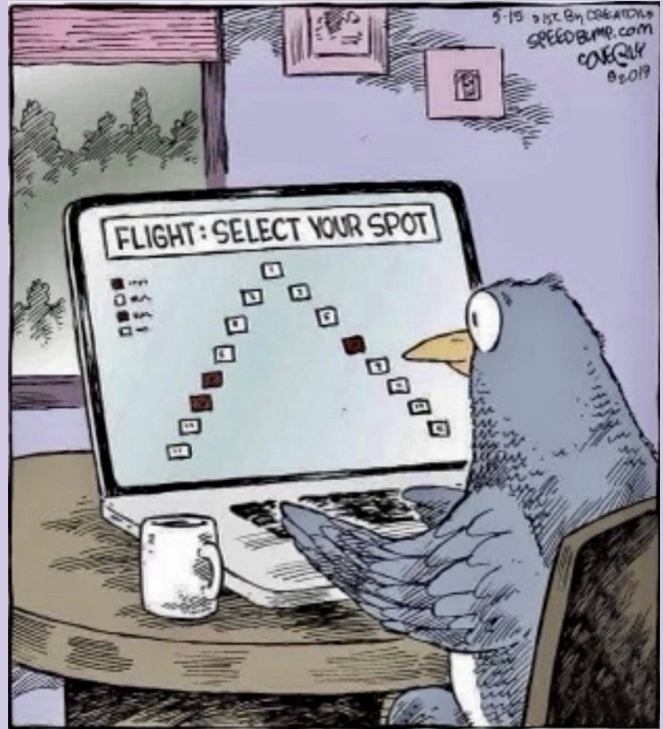


Mary Morrow

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

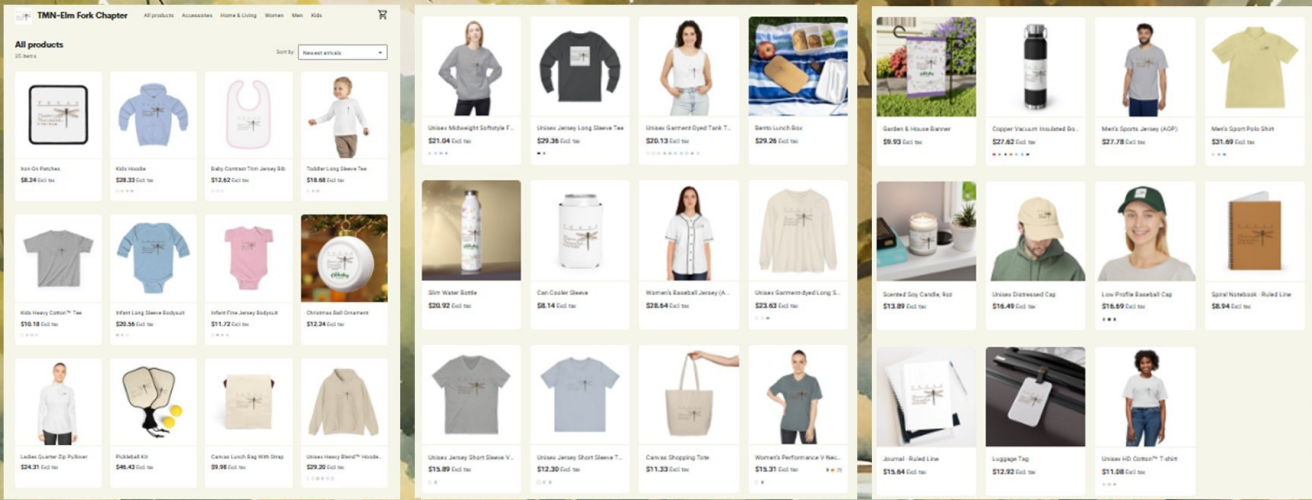
# Almost the Last Word

## 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* 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](mailto:socialmediateam@efctmn.org)



Tammie Walters, Editor

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](mailto:newsletter@efctmn.org)

May 2026 submissions are due by:

**Monday, May 11th**



# Who We Are



## Texas Master Naturalist–Elm Fork Chapter

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

### OFFICERS

President - Brenda Martin

Vice President - Sharon Betty

Treasurer - Ginny Richards

Secretary - Debbie Nobles

### BOARD POSITIONS

Immediate Past President – Bryan Lewis

Member-at-Large – Rob Blake

### BOARD DIRECTORS

Membership - Sharon Betty

VMS - Jim Gerber

Initial Training - Marissa Shaw

Communications - Susan Richmond

Volunteer Service Projects - Andrea Dixon

Advanced Training Programs - Delia Croessmann

Outreach/Adult Education - Sue Ridnour

New Class Representative - Kevin Shaw

### CHAPTER ADVISORS

AgriLife – Erin Smith

Texas Parks and Wildlife – Mindy Shumate



### Our Mission

*“To develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the State of Texas.”*

### Our Vision

*“In our community, Elm Fork Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist will be recognized as a primary source of information, education, and service to support natural resources and natural areas today and in the future.”*

### Regular Monthly Chapter Meetings

Meetings are on the third Thursday of each month at 9:30 a.m. preceded by a social time at 9:00 a.m.

Chapter meetings are open to the public.

### Board Meetings

The board meets each second Thursday of the month at 9:30 a.m.

Monthly board meetings are open to members.

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*Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is committed to participant accessibility and will provide reasonable accommodations. Please contact the Denton County AgriLife Office horticulture department at least 10 business days in advance of the program.*

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