

T E X A S

Master
Naturalist™
Elm Fork Chapter



Naturalist News

May 2026 Volume 26, Issue 5



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

On Facebook: www.facebook.com/TexasMasterNaturalistElmFork/

T E X A S

Master Naturalist™
Elm Fork Chapter



Naturalist News



Inside This Issue:

- Upcoming Chapter Meetings.....3
- Awards and Recognition.....5
- Field Notes in Focus.....7
- Inside Outside News.....9
- Projects in the Community.....15
- Wild About LLELA.....16
- Features.....18
- Tweet of the Month.....25
- This Month's Contributors.....27
- Almost the Last Word.....28
- Who We Are.....30

Editors:

Tammie Walters-Design
 Karen DeVinney
 Mary Morrow

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:

Blanket flower (*Gaillardia pulchella*)
 and Horsemint (*Monarda citriodora*)
 in a field near Frisco,
 by Bryan Lewis



Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) at Green Acres,
 by Brynne Bryan

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
STEPHENVILLE
OVERTON
EL PASO
SAN ANGELO
TEMPLE
BRYAN/ COLLEGE STATION
BEAUMONT
UVALDE
CORPUS CHRISTI
WESLACO

Know of a neglected historic cemetery in need?

Learn more:

Cemetery Locations in Texas
Map source, Texas Historical Commission

Partnerships with:
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension
Native Plant Society of Texas
Dallas Pioneer Association
Texas by Nature
Jackson-Breeding Consultant Group

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.

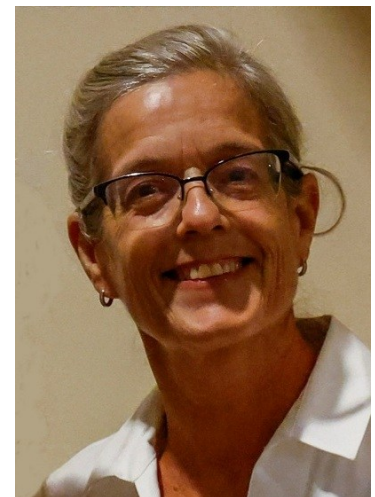


Jane Duke, PhD

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

April 2026

2026 Recertifications

Mindy Anderson	Class of 2015
Sharon Barr	Class of 2008
Delia Croessmann	Class of 2024
Hugh Franks	Class of 2019
Pamela Golcher-Beirute	Class of 2025
Catherine Griesbaum	Class of 2023
Susan Hamby	Class of 2022
Lin Hampton	Class of 2022
Jan Marie LaPine	Class of 2007
Rita Lokie	Class of 2013
Brenda McCoy	Class of 2023
Joe Rogers	Class of 2025
Deborah Rogstad	Class of 2024
Elise Spain	Class of 2017
Elaine Teves	Class of 2024
Chris Wayles	Class of 2022
Diane Wetherbee	Class of 2000
Shaleen Wunrow	Class of 2021



Congratulations!

Milestones on next page... 

Awards and Recognition

April 2026



250 Hour Milestone

Enita Perez

Class of 2023



1000 Hour Milestone

Diana Hatch

Class of 2007



1500 Hour Milestone

Jim Gerber

Class of 2019

Clay Thurmond

Class of 2016



2000 Hour Milestone

Whit Dieterich

Class of 2022

Marissa Shaw

Class of 2023

4000 Hour Milestone

Sue Yost

Class of 2017



Congratulations!

Field Notes in Focus



Gray hairstreak (*Strymon melinus*) and western honey bee (*Apis mellifera*) on Antelope Horn milkweed (*Asclepias asperula*), by Tammie Walters

Inside Outside News

Advanced Training



**Ripple Effect:
Water Quality and Wildlife in DFW**

**Saturday, June 6
10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.**

**Biodiversity Education Center at Coppell Nature Park
367 Freeport Pkwy., Coppell**



Wildlife Photography in DFW

**Saturday, June 13
10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.**

**Biodiversity Education Center
at Coppell Nature Park
367 Freeport Pkwy., Coppell**



For additional information about either of these events, click here:
[Coppell Community Experiences Summer 2026,](#)
or contact [joshua.carlos@coppelltx.gov.](mailto:joshua.carlos@coppelltx.gov)

Inside Outside News

Advanced Training

TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION

August 21, 2026 8am-3pm

Denton County Extension Office

611 Kimberly Dr
Denton, TX 76208



HABITAT *at* HOME

**Managing the land you have with
the wildlife you want**

\$35 - Early Registration (ends 7/21/26)

\$45 - Regular Registration

Lunch and all course materials included
with registration

Program Agenda

8-8:30am	Registration
8:30-9am	Welcome & Introduction to Wildlife Management
9-10am	Land Resource Inventory and Habitat Suitability Assessment
10-10:15am	Break
10:15-11am	Species at Scales: What Wildlife Can You Manage on Your Size Property?
11-11:45am	Managing Wildlife Habitat Within Land-Use Restrictions
11:45-12:15pm	Lunch (provided with registration)
12:15-1pm	Choosing Scale-Appropriate Wildlife Management Practices
1-2:30pm	Building Wildlife Management Plans
2:30-3pm	Building Communities of Conservation

Agenda and presentation titles subject to change

What is Habitat at Home?

This workshop guides landowners through managing wildlife habitat on your land - regardless of acreage. From home pollinator gardens to white-tailed deer management, this series focuses on identifying the right wildlife species for your property, building a wildlife management plan, & integrating your land-use goals with your wildlife management.

Register Online



<http://tx.ag/2026habitatathome>

For questions about the program or sponsorship opportunities, email:
chase.brooke@ag.tamu.edu

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

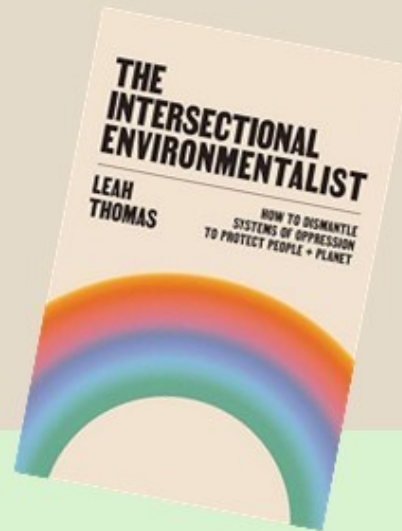


Inside Outside News

Advanced Training

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

Our Next Book For
Review on May 20th



When: Every 3rd 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



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

- **Tuesday, June 16th, 6:30-7:30 p.m.**
 - * *How the Texas Litter Database Supports Conservation Action*
 - * Kirsten Sorensen, Senior Program Manager, Research and Cleanups at Keep Texas Beautiful
 - * [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

Click the link below to view upcoming and ongoing AT opportunities:



<https://txmn.org/elmfork/staying-connected/advancedtraining/>



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 23rd
Full Day of Exploration & Advanced Training!
Nature Hikes, Birding, Bug Hunts & More!

For More Info: 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

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 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.

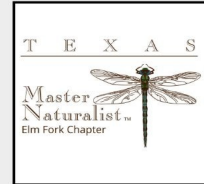
PO60212: RM Ray Roberts Lake, Bluebird nest box monitoring would be PO60212: FR

Inside Outside News

Volunteer and AT Opportunities

Outreach needs you!

Sign up to be a face of our chapter at an upcoming tabling opportunity!



Help fulfill our mission statement "to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas."

See the Elm Fork Chapter Calendar for opportunities!

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

The screenshot shows the website header for the Texas Master Naturalist Elm Fork Chapter. The navigation menu includes Home, About, Join Our Chapter, Photo Gallery, Activities, Newsletters, Calendar, Members Area, and Donate. The main content area displays a calendar for May 2026 with the following events:

- May 26 (Sun):** Naturalist City Nature Challenge 2026 (10am, 2pm, 5pm), Ray Roberts L.
- May 27 (Mon):** Elm Fork Educ (9am), LLELA Monday (9am), Clear Creek Wi (9am), Trophy Club Ph (9am), Ray Roberts L (10am).
- May 28 (Tue):** AT - 2026 CIG (9am), Beulah Acres F (9am), Green Acres W (9am), LLELA Trailhea (9am), Ray Roberts L (10am).
- May 29 (Wed):** Elm Fork Educ (9am), Beulah Acres F (9am), LLELA Wednes (9am), DISD Days (9:30am, 10am), Ray Roberts L (10am).
- May 30 (Thu):** DISD Days (9:30am), Ray Roberts L (10am).
- May 1 (Fri):** Ray Roberts L (10am), AT - Postponed (7pm).
- May 2 (Sat):** Early Bird (9am), Edible Nat (9am), Ray Roberts L (10am), LLELA - Guid (10am).
- May 3 (Sun):** Ray Roberts L (10am).
- May 4 (Mon):** Elm Fork Educ (9am), LLELA Monday (9am), Clear Creek Wi (9am), Trophy Club Ph (9am), Ray Roberts L (10am).
- May 5 (Tue):** Cinco de Mayo (9am), AT - 2026 CIG (9am), Beulah Acres F (9am), Green Acres W (9am), Ray Roberts L (10am).
- May 6 (Wed):** Elm Fork Educ (9am), Beulah Acres F (9am), LLELA Wednes (9am), Ray Roberts L (10am).
- May 7 (Thu):** Ray Roberts L (10am).
- May 8 (Fri):** Ray Roberts L (10am).
- May 9 (Sat):** Outreach Den (8am), Outreach Wor (9am), 2nd Saturday (9am), Furness (9am), AT - Furness (9am).
- May 10 (Sun):** Mother's Day (10am), Ray Roberts L (10am).
- May 11 (Mon):** Elm Fork Educ (9am), LLELA Monday (9am), Clear Creek Wi (9am), Trophy Club Ph (9am), Ray Roberts L (10am).
- May 12 (Tue):** Beulah Acres F (9am), Green Acres W (9am), LLELA Trailhea (9am), Ray Roberts L (10am).
- May 13 (Wed):** Elm Fork Educ (9am), Beulah Acres F (9am), LLELA Wednes (9am), Ray Roberts L (10am).
- May 14 (Thu):** Board Meeti (9:30am), Ray Roberts L (10am).
- May 15 (Fri):** Ray Roberts L (10am).
- May 16 (Sat):** Outreach Roo (9am), Ray Roberts L (10am), AT - Drawing (10am), AT - Spring at (10pm).
- May 17 (Sun):** 3rd Sundays N (9am), Ray Roberts L (10am).
- May 18 (Mon):** Elm Fork Educ (9am), LLELA Monday (9am).
- May 19 (Tue):** Beulah Acres F (9am), Green Acres W (9am).
- May 20 (Wed):** Beulah Acres F (9am), LLELA Wednes (9am), Ray Roberts L (10am).
- May 21 (Thu):** Chapter Meeti (9am), Ray Roberts L (10am).
- May 22 (Fri):** 4th Annual MNWR BioGitz (10am), Ray Roberts L (10am).
- May 23 (Sat):** Ray Roberts L (10am).

Projects in the Community

Texas Native Plant Art Exhibition

From Marilyn Blanton

The Texas Native Plant Art Exhibition Appreciation Reception was held at the DISD Professional Development Center on April 29th. All of the artwork that was submitted was displayed. The best-of-show pictures were framed for special recognition. Other display tables were set up to recognize the art teachers, the display hosts and the project sponsors. It was a fun event with 673 guests attending. There were lots of smiles! Guests included the fourth-grade students and their families, the art teachers, school principals, school board members, other DISD employees, representatives of the display sites and project volunteers. The project is an annual project sponsored by the Native Plant Society of Texas, the Texas Master Naturalist and Texas Woman's University.



Wild About LLELA

Sue Yost, class of 2017

The Beatles verse: "Let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be
There will be an answer. Let it be."

The LLELA verse: "Leaves of three, let it be, let it be. Just let it be! There will be an itch. Let it be."



Poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*). Every naturalist should know this plant, especially if you volunteer at LLELA. The subspecies *hispidum* may be native to China, but the species *Toxicodendron radicans* is native to Texas, and sure found its happy place at LLELA. It's prolific!

** The following information comes from Amy Martin, Master Naturalist and author of *Itchy Business*. (A book that should be in every naturalist's library!)

Poison ivy (PI) is one of the most common skin allergies in America, affecting over 50 million people every year, according to the American Academy of Dermatology. Although it sure feels like it is, the rash is not technically a contact one. Instead, it's an extreme allergic reaction happening within the skin. This itchy rash produces swelling and blisters that can last over two weeks in some cases. And lucky humans! We are the only animals that are allergic to PI! However, a lucky fifteen to fifty percent of people are not allergic to it, but anyone can become allergic or immune to it at any time. You



can get PI by petting a dog that has walked through it. You can get it if you breathe in smoke from burning firewood covered in it. Bird banders at LLELA risk the chance of getting it by handling the netted birds. (They use hand sanitizer after every bird.) When the LLELA turtle tracking volunteers were locating box turtles, many times they had to crawl through patches of the stuff. It's there. It's everywhere! Arghhh! It can be a vine, at ground level or



as big as a tree. The plant does not cause the allergic reaction. When the plant is disturbed, it releases urushiol (pronounced "oo-roo-shee-oh"). The reason the rash seems to spread over time is because the more firmly PI touches your skin, the sooner it will manifest in a rash and the more severe that rash will be. Light touches take longer.

If exposed, the first step is to get as much of the urushiol out of your skin as possible by always taking a "blue shower" with Dawn dishwashing detergent after working in the outdoors, focusing on skin that was not covered by clothes. You usually don't notice when you've made contact with poison ivy. It's the leaves of three you don't see that get you. Once begun, the rash goes through stages, each one requiring a different management. As Amy puts it, "you must become a PI ninja!"



Wild About LLELA

Sue Yost, class of 2017

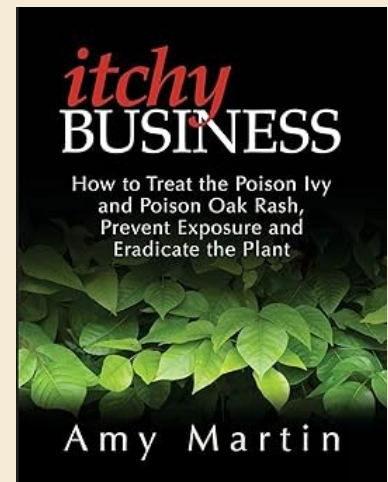
The name poison ivy came from the British explorer Captain John Smith, who in 1609 wrote (in so many words) "What the #&%* is this?!" Yet the rest of nature loves it. Birds and small critters eat the white berries, while deer and rabbits munch on the protein-rich leaves. The root system is good for soil erosion. The vines offer shelter to many things. And it is a pretty plant. From a distance! The leaves come in sets of three and can be lobed, ragged (look like mittens), or even smooth, but never have serrated edges. The stems **often** have a red cast. The leaves turn red in the fall/winter.



The poison ivy species *Toxicodendron radicans* thrives in open land, wooded areas and woodland edges. It's immune to climate change. It loves hot weather. Studies show it may become even more poisonous in the future.

Amy's book *Itchy Business* advises you what to do if exposed, how to remove poison ivy-exposed clothes properly, how to get rid of it on your property, everything you ever wanted to know about poison ivy. Just remember the song... "Let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be. There will be an answer. Let it be. Leaves of three, let it be, let it be. Just let it be!"

Info from Amy Martin's *Itchy Business* book
Photos: Sue Yost and Amy Martin



Features

How can we ever thank you?

By Barbara Brown
NSPOT-Trinity Forks Chapter
Editor, *Trinity Forks Native Plant Press*
(Shared by Becky Bertoni)

Irene Hanson has been a member of Trinity Forks NPSOT since 1992 (and a Texas Master Naturalist, Elm Fork Chapter member since 2014). She has been and continues to be a faithful volunteer for Trinity Forks and Texas Master Naturalist projects. Over many years, Irene spent countless hours propagating plants in the LLELA greenhouse for their prairie restoration efforts. She also helped create and maintain the LLELA pollinator garden while training “newbies” about the native plants that grow in North Texas.

Irene worked at Green Acres, establishing pollinator gardens and collecting seeds. She often gave educational walks at various locations in the Flower Mound area, teaching neighbors about our local native plants. Irene always educates with a smile and many helpful hints. Her positive impact on the Texas Master Naturalist program earned her Volunteer of the Year in 2019.

Irene’s yard and greenhouse are a testament to her love of Texas native plants. In March, a team of Trinity Forks volunteers worked with Irene to select and save hundreds of plants from her greenhouse to share with friends and offer to attendees at the Trinity Forks plant sale in April.



And here’s an article by Irene, originally posted in the November 2022 issue of Naturalist News, and re-posted per Becky Bertoni’s request...



A Gardener's Tale

By Irene Hanson



About 40 years ago, when I was starting out to landscape around our new home and to start a kitchen garden, it seemed I had a lot of choices and no one to warn me away from bad choices.

Pine Trees

The Texas Forestry people had sapling trees, evergreen and those that dropped their leaves in the fall. With four acres to fill up, I was happy to see the trees came in bunches of fifty for not too many dollars. I started by planting a hundred Loblolly Pines. With each one a little bigger than a potted geranium plant,



A Gardener's Tale (cont.)

I did a lot of digging and got my exercise. Most of them survived the planting and grew to be beautiful green bowers filled with birds and other critters. In the heat of summer, the air was filled with pine perfume. In winter, they shivered in the Arctic blasts as they broke the wind.

Alas, their true nature was revealed as the years piled up. Those Loblollies came from East Texas; there are no pines native to the North Texas area, specifically a spot in Denton County. Slowly, but surely those big, beautiful giants fell prey to borers, and drought. Worse, I had planted them along the property boundaries. Somewhere in the middle area, they could have stood bare of needles until a wind took them down. But these pines could fall on the neighbor's house or fence when the wind was up. Sadly, I had to call an arborist to remove those dead giants.

Way out in our backyard, a pine seed has volunteered; it looks like a Loblolly now as it heads toward the clouds. This young giant will be welcome to great-grand-kids. It can flourish and be a home for birds until in old age the branches are bare. No worries about what a storm or wind could do with all the open space around it.

Vines

Now, vines can be good and bad. Consider the Trumpet vine, with its brilliant trumpets as food for hummingbirds. *Campsis radicans*, Trumpet Creeper, Trumpet vine, Common Trumpet Creeper, Cow vine, Foxglove vine, Hellvine, Devil's Shoestring, as it scrambles up trees and along fences, displaying its bright flowers. It can be too vigorous for a small tree, and then it needs to be cut back. It must not be allowed to grow on a wall or in a cultivated garden. Since it is a Texas native, it is not invasive, but it will take over any spot that offers sufficient water and space.

The Climbing Milkweed vine, *Funastrum cynanchoides*, Fringed Twinevine, Twine-vine, bought at a native plant sale was a surprise. It needed sunshine and water, so I planted it at the edge of my butterfly garden. As time went on, the vine that started at one edge had crawled to the opposite edge and beyond. It obviously was about to take over the entire garden. I later learned at a program about growing milkweed that the Climbing Milkweed Vine should never be turned loose in any cultivated space. It is safe to allow out in the open field dependent on whatever rain that falls for subsistence. With the Milkweed vine, I learned to be a wily gardener, and ask questions about how it grows.

Butter Daisy

When I pointed to a bright yellow daisy blooming in the walkway of a nursery and asked about it, the salesman dug it and potted it for me. This was how I was introduced to the Butter Daisy. Its best point is that it really grows and takes over a spot. The Butter daisy, *Verbesina encelioides*, Cowpen daisy, Golden Crownbeard, is in the Aster family. It can be an entire pollinator garden by itself. It is a good nectar source, especially for late-season butterflies. Native bees as well as honeybees gather on them. A hot summer morning will hum with bees busy gathering nectar and pollen. The daisies have a fragrance not everyone thinks is pretty, perhaps reminiscent of the cowpens it calls home. Cowpens are an example of the kind of disturbed soil on which it thrives. Miles of roadside can be seen covered with this yellow daisy as well as acres of farm or ranch.

The bloom season is long, from April to October, and it is found growing from the West Coast to the Eastern Shore, from Canada south into Tropical America. This deer-resistant daisy may be annual, but it is a serious seed producer, so no worries about more next year. Given time, the plant can grow three feet tall and just as wide. Come October, the golden flowers will be mobbed with countless pollinators. Scatter a few seeds anytime now, and you can have a meadow dotted with Butter daisies all next season.



A Gardener's Tale (cont.)

Chinese Privet

Finding the Butter daisy was a happy accident. Acquiring a Chinese Privet is something I wish I could undo, take back. My mother shared the small plant with me to be a small shrub in my garden. It would be covered with fragrant blossoms in the spring, and then those blossoms would become small black fruits containing seeds. Those fruits are toxic to humans but birds happily eat them and thus distribute the seeds far and wide.

Chinese Privet, *Ligustrum sinense*, is worse than Kudzu, because Kudzu needs sun to grow. Kudzu is the invasive vine that ate the South. The villainous Chinese Privet grows anywhere and everywhere, in sun or shade, in wet or dry soil. Scientists say it is growing all over more than three million acres of Southern forests and is now spreading as far north as Massachusetts. The intruder is popping up everywhere in my garden; I have accepted destroying it as my penance for welcoming it into my garden as a good guy. This lesson proves the rule that native plants are best for our environment.

Bermuda Lawns

Hailing from Chicago, Illinois, I grew up believing every home needed a lawn surrounding it. When my small family with toddlers transitioned from apartment dwellers to a new house, it was my first task to put in a lawn. Obviously my knowledge of lawn growing would not help here in totally different weather patterns, so I called the local agriculture agent for advice. Unfortunately, Bermuda grass or Saint Augustine were the choices I was given.

Not only is Bermuda grass, *Cynodon dactylon*, a garden bully, arrowing directly into my garden without any regard for edges or borders. It quickly goes to seed, causing much suffering from airborne pollen. Sadly, the goal of a thick, green lawn that feels good beneath bare feet never happened. Being a plain-dirt gardener couldn't accomplish this; it takes quantities of chemical fertilizer, and water. We are learning now that the longed-for lush, green lawn is in fact a desert, hosting no wildlife, from microbial populations on up to bees, butterflies and birds. In fact, reducing lawn and increasing native trees, shrubs, and forbs is wildlife friendly, sure to bring in the birds, bees, and butterflies.

Grasses are supposed to grow in a clump, not make long strings turning my garden into a weed patch. The worst trait of Bermuda grass is what happens after it claims the garden; the soil is filled with roots that can't be pulled, but must be pried out. Roto-tilling it will only make a million more grasses to remove. If non-native grass is the devil, our Texas native grasses are heavenly, like the difference between Beauty and the Beast.

Heed these Lessons

The above is to keep my promise to tell other gardeners what I learned not to plant, and what I wish someone had told me once upon a time. I have learned that trees are the answer for any problems, even for climate change; but plant the right trees in the right place. Anything can be grown in good, organic garden soil. Don't use chemical fertilizers and pesticides unless a desert is the goal. No garden can be lovelier than a butterfly garden, and we can all have one. Butterfly gardens can preside over the smallest corner of soil along the street.



Features

Forces of Nature—Mentors in the Field

By Jerry Hamby

On a trip to Austin in 2010, my wife Susan and I visited Bright Leaf Preserve, a little known 216-acre oasis surrounded by urban development. Then, as now, the preserve was accessible only by guided tour. Upon arrival we were greeted by a woman wearing a bright green vest adorned with a dragonfly pin and a name tag that proclaimed she was a Texas Master Naturalist. As we waited for other people to arrive, I peppered her with questions. I was ten years away from retirement but sensed that the TMN program might provide the kinds of activities I would enjoy at the end of my teaching career.

For the next three hours, our guide led us on a four-mile hike along a stream, up a hillside covered in Ashe junipers (*Juniperus ashei*) and Texas live oaks (*Quercus fusiformis*), and to a limestone ridge that offered a commanding view of the Colorado River to the west. Along the way our guide made well-timed stops to share a mix of natural history, geology, and native American lore, as well as the story of Georgia Lucas, the benefactor who made Bright Leaf her legacy through four decades of land acquisition. Our knowledgeable guide was providing interpretation, the art of connecting people to a natural space, something I would learn about through my own Master Naturalist training four years later.



First encounter with a Texas Master Naturalist (2010)



My first volunteer event, Exploration Green (2014)

Looking back, I realized that the mysterious woman in the green vest was the first of several people who educated, encouraged, and inspired me as I found my place in the TMN program.

In 2014, while participating in my first volunteer event, I met another Master Naturalist, Martha Richeson, who had recently trained with the Galveston Bay Area Chapter. Our primary job that day was to repot trees at Exploration Green, a nature park in Houston that was in the early stages of development. After talking to Martha about her training experience and recalling the woman at Bright Leaf who introduced me to the program, I contacted the training coordinator for the Gulf Coast Chapter, which serves Harris County, and reserved a spot in the next round of training, which began in August.

I have always enjoyed spending time outdoors, but until I trained with the TMN program, my knowledge of the natural world was limited. My education and subsequent teaching career were steeped in the fine arts and humanities, and my undergraduate science courses were limited to two semesters of general biology. As a result I felt a bit out of place when I attended the first night of TMN training. I quickly realized, however, that my concerns were unfounded. If there is one quality that defines the character of the TMN program, it is the sense of belonging its members—from the state leadership to instructors—extend to newcomers.



Forces of Nature—Mentors in the Field (cont.)



Jaime leading a field session at Katy Prairie



Jaime teaching prairie ecology



Switchgrass in the LBJ National Grassland



Northern grass mantis

Jaime González was one of several outstanding instructors who introduced my classmates and me to the biological diversity of the Upper Texas Gulf Coast. Jaime taught a unit on prairie ecology and led an all-day field trip to the Katy Prairie Preserve (now part of the Coastal Prairie Conservancy). In the classroom Jaime discussed the unique characteristics of the coastal tallgrass prairie, of which the Katy Prairie Preserve is one of the few pristine remnants. We learned about potholes—shallow wetland depressions whose natural linings retain rainwater—and mima mounds—slightly elevated hills that create unique microclimates. To help us visualize the root systems of native grasses, Jaime asked a few classmates to unroll a banner of a life-sized photo of big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), one of the “Big Four” perennial prairie grasses. The unfurled banner stretched to twelve feet, only three of which showed above-ground growth. The massive roots allow for greater water intake, providing a natural way to absorb floodwater.

Jaime also shared historical narratives of settlers crossing the Texas coastal prairie (by wagon and horseback) for more than 100 miles without setting foot on dry ground, and he described the landscape of the 1836 Battle of San Jacinto, where Texian soldiers moved undetected through tall switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*) as they approached the Mexican forces camping on the banks of Buffalo Bayou. To this day whenever I hike through switchgrass, as I often do at the LBJ National Grassland, I can imagine the density of a nineteenth century tallgrass prairie.

On our field trip to the Katy Prairie Preserve, my classmates and I learned about conservation easements, which are legal agreements between land owners and land trusts that restrict the use of property to protect its natural value. When we hiked through the Tucker Easement, Jaime handed out sweep nets for capturing insects, one of which was a northern grass mantis (*Brunneria borealis*), the only mantis species known to



Looking for a brown recluse spider

Forces of Nature—Mentors in the Field (cont.)

reproduce solely through parthenogenesis, a form of asexual reproduction. We also turned over a few logs to look for brown recluse spiders (*Loxosceles reclusa*); that day there were none to be found.

I appreciated Jaime's childlike curiosity and sense of adventure as well as his ability to make prairie ecology relevant to people's lives. When we met, Jaime was Community Conservation Director for the Coastal Prairie Conservancy, and in the years since, he has worked as Community and Equitable Conservation Director for the Nature Conservancy of Texas and elsewhere.

Another early mentor is Mary Carol Edwards, whom I met shortly after volunteering at Exploration Green. As a Stormwater Wetland Program Specialist with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, she spoke at a forum in Clear Lake, where community leaders unveiled the master plan for Exploration Green and recruited volunteers for the project. Among other topics, she explained the ecological benefits of establishing a wetland ecosystem in the park, particularly the ability of wetland plants to absorb chemical contaminants as they filter runoff water.

I got to know Mary Carol when she established and oversaw an onsite native plant wetland nursery at Exploration Green. In addition to teaching me about dozens of plant species, Mary Carol showed me how to organize community planting events. After volunteering for several wetland plantings, I developed enough confidence to oversee, along with my tree nursery partner Allen Brown, the first tree planting events in the park.

In the four years we worked together, Mary Carol led nursery tours and organized invasive species walks, the latter of which helped volunteers better understand the challenges of "rewilding" natural spaces. In 2017 Mary Carol and I made a joint presentation at the TMN Annual Meeting (in Corpus Christi) in which we talked about the evolution of Exploration Green from abandoned golf course to nature park.

In 2018 Mary Carol left her position with Texas A&M AgriLife to found Green Star Wetland Plant Farm, which provides locally-sourced native wetland plants for use in flood control basins, conservation and mitigation projects, and other projects. As a businesswoman she continues to improve the natural environment and to inspire others.

The person who nurtured my naturalist tendencies the most is Barry Ward, Executive Director of Trees For Houston. In the seven years we worked together, I learned invaluable skills in tree identification and maintenance. Barry taught me the basics of tree biology, including a tree's ability to compartmentalize structural damage, and he showed me how to prune outside the stem collar, which is a practice I have followed ever since. He also guided me through the challenges of operating a nursery and ensured that our on-site facility was operational by stocking it with supplies and more than 1,500 trees.



Mary Carol leading a planting event



Native plant wetland nursery tour



Susan Hamby and Mary Carol planting on a wetland shelf



Forces of Nature—Mentors in the Field (cont.)

Barry planting the first tree at Exploration Green (2015)



Barry repairing a damaged sycamore

Barry loved to problem solve and was most energized when the nursery team faced a major challenge. When we prepared to plant trees on a habitat island, the leadership team had to figure out how to transport almost 200 trees across a detention pond. Barry suggested loading the fifteen- and thirty-gallon pots onto flat-bottomed jon boats and pulling the vessels by rope between two temporary docks. While some people expected the enterprise to fail, Barry encouraged us to try something bold. Of course, the endeavor was a resounding success, and trees were similarly transported when volunteers planted on three additional islands.



Loading a tree onto a jon boat



Tree planting demonstration

Since moving to North Texas, I have worked extensively with trees, participating in inventories and surveys in several communities and providing tree maintenance in natural areas. This spring I was a member of the training committee for the 2026 class of Denton County Citizen Foresters, assisting with field sessions and helping students plant trees on the final class day. While I continue to learn from other people, the skills and knowledge I received from Barry still guide me.

One of the things I appreciate most about Barry is the fact that he, like me, came to the naturalist world from an unexpected background. He has a bachelor's degree in history (with a geographical focus on Europe). He was Director of the Battleship *Texas* State Historic Site and was a key player in the ship's early restoration. Since changing direction to lead Trees for Houston, he has overseen the planting of more than one million trees.

I am immensely fortunate to have worked with people like Barry, Mary Carol and Jaime. Each played a major role in shaping my ethos as a naturalist. They also inspired me to "plant it forward" and to encourage other people to do the same. Over the years I have recruited several friends, colleagues, and students to join the TMN program.

I never learned the name of the woman who started me on this amazing journey. I know that she was a member of the Capital Area Chapter, and I have a photograph of her from that day we met at Bright Leaf, but her name tag is illegible. I hope that one day we will meet up at the Texas Master Naturalist Annual Meeting.

Tweet of the Month

From Sue Yost, class of 2017

Belted Kingfisher

Rattle-rattle. That loud call unmistakably belongs to the king of the waterways, the Belted Kingfisher. That call is usually heard long before you can see the bird.

Living near water, the Kingfisher lives up to its name. Their main diet is fish! They also eat crayfish, tadpoles, frogs and aquatic insects. Hunting from a snag or branch near or over the water, they keep a watchful eye on the water and once prey is detected, they dive up to 25 mph into the water, spearing the prey with their long, sharp bill. They will retreat to usually the same hunting perch and either swallow it whole or slap it silly on the branch until it is dead and then swallow it, always headfirst. (I got to witness this behavior many years ago on the Bittern Marsh Trail at LLELA.) They also hunt by hovering over the water, bill downward, before diving after a fish they've spotted. Kingfishers have a special acid in their stomachs that helps them digest the scales, shells and bones. They also regurgitate pellets, much like owls do.



Kingfishers burrow into the sandy banks of rivers and waterways. The tunnel slopes upward from the entrance, perhaps to keep water from entering the nest. Tunnel length ranges from one to eight feet. The male and female take turns digging the burrow, with

These ragged-crested birds are a powdery blue gray; males have one blue band across the white breast, while females have a blue and a chestnut band. Females having more colors than the males is unusual in the bird world.



Belted Kingfisher (cont.)

males spending about twice as much time digging as females. They usually take three to seven days to finish it but may sometimes take up to three weeks. The female lays five to eight glossy white eggs. Incubation takes 22-24 days and fledging starts at 27-29 days. They can have one to two broods a season. Predators of Kingfishers include hawks, mammals, and snakes.

Pleistocene fossils of Belted Kingfishers (to 600,000 years old) have been unearthed in Florida, Virginia, Tennessee and Texas. The oldest known fossil in the Kingfisher genus is 2 million years old, found in Alachua County, Florida.

In our area we only get the Belted Kingfisher. In the very southern part of the state, you can also find the smaller Green Kingfisher and the larger Ringed Kingfisher. They can be found around the world. The family contains 118 species. The Kingfisher family *Alcedinidae* is in the order Coraciiformes, which also includes the Motmots, Bee-eaters, Todies, Rollers and Ground-rollers.

Next time you are at LLELA, hike the Cottonwood Trail to the beaver pond or hike the Redbud Trail along the river. Listen carefully. You may just get to see one of the most fascinating residents: the beautiful Belted King. *Rattle-rattle!!*

Text courtesy of Cornell's All about Birds and Wikipedia
Photos courtesy of All about Birds, Flickr, and Denver Kramer



Copyright Denver Kramer

This Month's Contributors



Gale Bacon



Becky Bertoni



Marilyn Blanton



Brynne Bryan



Delia Croessmann



Jane Duke



Jerry Hamby



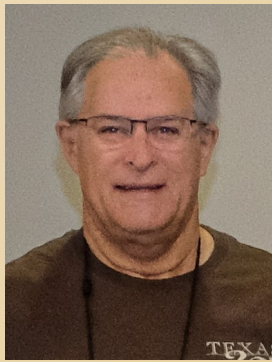
Irene Hanson



Scott Kiester



Tom Kirwan



Denver Kramer



Bryan Lewis



Susan Richmond



Sue Ridnour



Marissa Shaw



Fran Witte



Sue Yost



Karen DeVinney



Mary Morrow

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

Almost the Last Word

Funny Finds From Sue Yost!

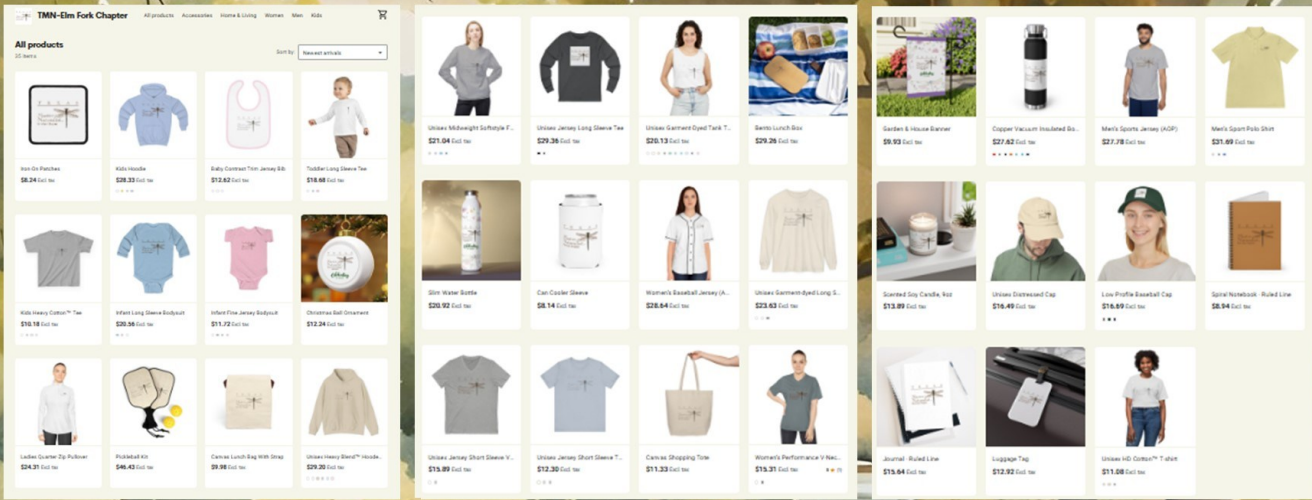


The 2026 Training Committee is asking for your help by actively seeking your gently used TMN Textbooks. We request any TMN-EFC Member that is not using their TMN Textbook to help us reduce, reuse and recycle your textbooks by donating it back to our Chapter. It is easy! Just bring your textbooks to the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

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

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



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

June 2026 submissions are due by:

Monday, June 8th



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.

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

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.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

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

