

T E X A S

Master
Naturalist™
Elm Fork Chapter



Naturalist News

October 2026 Volume 26, Issue 10



Pamela Golcher

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

On Facebook: www.facebook.com/TexasMasterNaturalistElmFork/



Naturalist News

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If you don't have time to read this month's issue of Naturalist News, click [HERE](#) to stream our newsletter in audio format, featuring the voice of Teri Schnaubelt.



On the Cover:

American green tree frog
 (*Hyla cinerea*),
 by Pamela Golcher



Female Ruby-throated Hummingbird
 (*Archilochus colubris*)
 fighting with a male, by Kevin Shaw

Announcements



DENTON DIG IT!

DENTON COUNTY ARCHEOLOGY FAIR

Saturday, October 17, 2026

9 AM to 1 PM

Denton County Historical Park

317 W Mulberry St

Denton, TX 76201

Discover the fascinating history buried beneath the Lone Star State! This exciting event promises a day of fun and education for the whole family. Dive into the rich tapestry of Texas' history and explore the secrets of the past.

Activities - Demonstrations - Displays - Free!



PRESENTED BY THE DENTON COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION
DENTONCOUNTY.GOV/DCHC

Announcements



ARGYLE TEXAS

ARBOR DAY

Growing a Greener Argyle

NOVEMBER 7TH, 2026



250 TREES
WILL BE GIVEN AWAY!

ON-LINE REGISTRATION
FOR A FREE TREE
TO ARGYLE RESIDENTS
will open soon!



10 AM - 1 PM

EVENT LOCATION:
TOWN HALL
308 Denton St. E,
Argyle, TX 76226



Event Location: **TOWN HALL**
308 Denton St. E, Argyle, TX 76226



Time:
10 AM - 1 PM

Planting Today for a Better Tomorrow

This is a free, family fun event with free trees for Argyle residents (registration required to receive a tree), eco-vendors (including the Texas Master Naturalist Elm Fork Chapter, showing turtles and snakes to name a few), food trucks, face painting and an exotic animals and reptiles educational demonstration.

This event is open to the public. No registration is needed to attend.

Announcements

2027 Officer Elections & Member at Large Nominations

I am grateful for our members that consider and volunteer for leadership roles on our Board of Directors. So, I am pleased to present those below who have agreed to become Executive Officers for 2027, as recommended by the Nominations Committee composed of Susan Pohlen (2007), Allen York (2017), Brenda McCoy (2023) and myself. I also appreciate those who are nominated and become elected to be Member at Large and a member of the Board of Directors.

Please plan on attending the chapter meeting on November 19th that begins at 9:30 am at the Denton County Southwest Courthouse, located at 6200 Canyon Falls Dr, Northlake, TX 76226, to cast your vote regarding these excellent Executive Officer candidates and to nominate and elect a Member at Large for 2027.

Bryan Lewis (2020), Immediate Past President

And the 2027 Executive Board Nominees are:



Candidate for President
Sharon Betty, Class of 2018
1st Term; 5th Year on Board

Texas Naturalist-Elm Fork Chapter Service

Vice President, 2026;
Membership Director, 2022 to Present;
Project Manager and Co-Lead, SWAt, 2021 to Present;
Project Manager, DISD School Days, 2019 to 2023;
North Texas Wildlife Hotline for two years.

Other Service & Experience

Golden Triangle Dog Obedience Group, President, 2022 to Present;
Golden Triangle Dog Obedience School, Registrar, 2021 to Present
Retired from Denton ISD after 30 years as a Teacher,
Science Curriculum Writer and Trainer, and Science Coordinator;
MS in Science Teaching and a degree in Business Administration from Middle Tennessee State University;
Husband, Jerry, is a Previous TMN-EFC President;
Therapy Dog Handler and Trainer for Golden Triangle Obedience Group.



More on next page...



Announcements

2027 Executive Board Nominees (cont.)



Candidate for Vice President
Debbie Nobles, Class of 2024
1st Term; 3rd Year on Board

Texas Naturalist-Elm Fork Chapter Service

Secretary, 2026;
2024 Class Representative, 2025.

Other Service & Experience

President, Denton Quilt Guild;
Troop Leader, Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas;
Manager, Heart of Denton 4H Club;
Member, Denton ISD Bond Committee
40 Years in Public Education;
Principal, McMath Middle School;
Licensed Counselor.



Returning Treasurer
Ginny Richards, Class of 2022
2nd Term; 2nd Year on Board

Texas Naturalist-Elm Fork Chapter Service

Treasurer, 2026
Initial Training Committee, 2023 to 2025;
Webmaster, 2024 to Present;
Financial Audit Committee Member, 2025.

Other Service & Experience

Backup Webmaster, Native Plant Society of Texas - Trinity Forks Chapter; UNT
BBA (1985) & MS (1994) Degrees, University of North Texas (UNT);
UNT System Information-Technology; 23 Years Software Developer on HR/Payroll Team;
Creator of Stained Glass Art;
Aliner Camper/Glamper that has visited 75 of the 89 Texas State Parks, so far.



Candidate for Secretary
Cathy Griesbaum, Class of 2023
1st Term; 2nd Year on Board

Texas Naturalist-Elm Fork Chapter Service

Co-Director of Initial Training, Class of 2025;
Volunteer Service for Tree Surveys & at LISDOLA.

Other Service & Experience

45 Year Sales Career with IBM & RICOH;
Contract Development, Credit Reviews & Determining Financing Options;
Coordinated Teams for Installing and Implementing Hardware & Software Solutions;
Business Degree from TCU & attended London School of Economics;
Enjoys Crafting.

"I have enjoyed the opportunity to learn, serve, and work alongside so many members of the Elm Fork Chapter, and I look forward to contributing my experience, organizational skills, and enthusiasm as a member of the Board of Directors."



Upcoming Chapter Meetings

October Chapter Meeting and Presentation

Thursday, October 15th, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

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

Presentation:

John Bunker Sands Wetland Center: A Nature-Based Solution

By: Kayleigh Bucur, Executive Director
John Bunker Sands Wetland Center
www.wetlandcenter.com

Learn how this leading water conservation area plays a crucial role in the way 2.3 million North Texans get their drinking water—and how this wetland also provides a vital habitat for an impressive diversity of bird species.

Kayleigh Bucur is the executive director of the John Bunker Sands Wetland Center, the educational component of a unique public-private partnership between the North Texas Municipal Water District and The Rosewood Corporation. Located within a 2,000-acre constructed wetland designed to naturally polish and recycle water before it returns to Lavon Lake, the Wetland Center serves as a living laboratory for water conservation, wetland science, and environmental education.

Kayleigh holds a bachelor of science degree in wildlife and fisheries conservation from the University of Massachusetts Amherst and brings more than a decade of experience in environmental education and nonprofit leadership. Her career has included work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Trinity River Audubon Center and the Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas. She is also a Texas Master Naturalist and Northeast Texas Master Birder and is passionate about connecting people to nature while building environmental literacy and stewardship.



Outside of work, Kayleigh enjoys camping, hiking and birding with her husband and their two dogs, Pudge and Ladybird. She is an avid reader who is working toward a Goodreads challenge of reading 26 books this year, enjoys gardening and experimenting with a carnivorous plant terrarium, and is a beginner stained-glass artist. She and her husband are currently building an adventure truck to explore remote landscapes across the United States.



Upcoming Chapter Meetings

November Chapter Meeting and Presentation

Thursday, November 19th, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Denton County Southwest Courthouse

6200 Canyon Falls Drive • Flower Mound

Presentation:

Fort Worth Zoo's Texas Horned Lizard Reintroduction Program: Trials and Tribulations

By: Diane Barber

Senior Curator of Ectotherms

Puerto Rican Crested Toad Conservancy Founder, President

Fort Worth Zoo

The Fort Worth Zoo manages a large population of Texas horned lizards for reintroduction efforts in a dedicated greenhouse. This presentation will provide a general overview of their status, management of the breeding population, and research that has occurred to establish a new population of Texas horned lizards in Mason, Texas. The Zoo works closely with other breeding institutions and primary partners from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Texas Christian University for this effort, which has resulted in the release of over 3,000 hatchlings since 2017.



Diane Barber is the senior curator of ectotherms at the Fort Worth Zoo. She has worked in the zoological field for over 40 years and spearheads many conservation programs at the Zoo involving native species such as the Texas kangaroo rat, Louisiana pine snake, Houston toad, and the Texas horned lizard. She strongly believes that conservation should start in one's own backyard and endeavors to work with local landowners and governing agencies to find practical means of coexisting and managing resources for wildlife long-term.



Awards and Recognition

September 2026

2026 Recertifications

Daniel Arenas-Richieri	Class of 2017
Aly Foreman	Class of 2023
Beth Griffin-Loftis	Class of 2022
Diana Hatch	Class of 2007
Val Hibbeler	Class of 2025
Bryan Lewis	Class of 2020
Nancy McWhorter	Class of 2023
Cecily Pegues	Class of 2015
Susan Pohlen	Class of 2007
Rachel Weaver	Class of 2023



250 Hour Milestone

Tom Kirwan

Class of 2024



Awards and Recognition

September 2026



500 Hour Milestone

Beth Barger

Class of 2025



1000 Hour Milestone

Abbie Beck

Class of 2023

3500 Hour Milestone

Hugh Franks

Class of 2019



Congratulations everyone!

Field Notes in Focus



Male Twelve-Spotted Skimmer (*Libellula pulchella*) perched in a suburban Frisco garden.

By Bryan Lewis

Inside Outside News

Advanced Training

A stylized illustration for a bat festival. A large, dark, irregular shape resembling a bat's silhouette or a night sky contains the text 'BAT FEST' in large, bold, white letters. To the right, a bat is shown in flight, its wings spread. Above the bat, a yellow circle contains the text 'Bat trivia, prizes + food!'. Below the 'BAT FEST' text, there is a paragraph: 'Discover the vital role bats play in our world and embark on a bat walk at dusk!'. Below that, another paragraph says 'Free + limited to first 50 sign-ups!'. At the bottom left of the illustration, there is a link: 'BatFest Sign-up'. The background of the illustration includes green foliage and small white stars.

BAT FEST

Discover the vital role bats play in our world and embark on a bat walk at dusk!

Free + limited to first 50 sign-ups!

[BatFest Sign-up](#)

Bat trivia, prizes + food!



THRIVE RECREATION
CENTER, LEWISVILLE



OCTOBER 24TH



4PM to DUSK

RSVP by
Oct 17th



Texas A&M AgriLife Extension is an equal-opportunity employer and program provider. The Texas A&M University system, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts Cooperating.

Inside Outside News

Advanced Training

Thrive Nature Walk

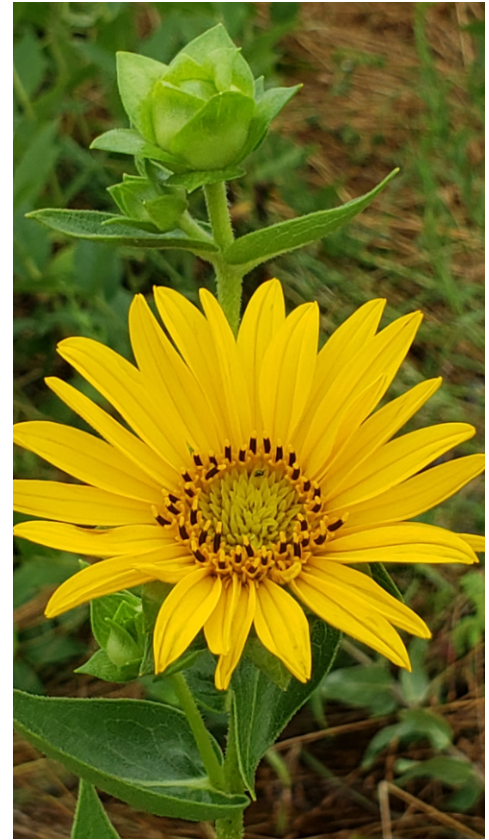
October 18, 2026
9:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

Thrive Nature Park
1951 S. Valley Pkwy
Lewisville, Texas 75067

Sights of plants and wildlife, smells of fresh air and trees, the sounds of birds and the blowing breeze. This is what you can experience on our monthly nature walk at Thrive Nature Park! Join us every 3rd Sunday for a guided walk to connect with nature and the outdoors. This family-friendly hike will last 90 minutes.

All ages welcome!

Registration is required through the
[Play Lewisville Store in Amilia.](#)

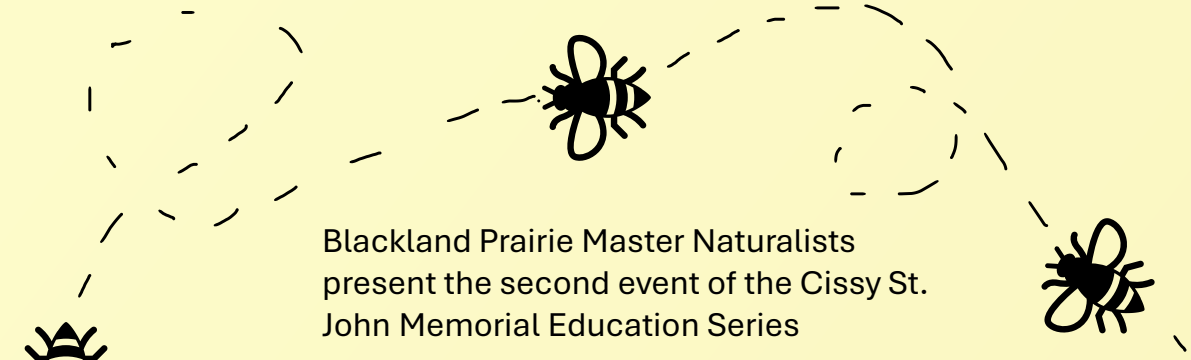
A promotional graphic for a webinar titled "Bats in the Backyard". It features two circular portraits of the presenters, Brandi Christiano and Megan White. The background is a sunset scene with silhouettes of trees and a bridge. The text includes the title, presenters' names, the date "October 21 st, 2026", and the time "6:00 to 7:00 p.m.". A logo for "WILD ONES" is also present.

Bats in the Backyard
presented by
**Brandi Christiano, PhD
and Megan White**
October 21 st, 2026
6:00 to 7:00 p.m.
WILD ONES

In this webinar, the presenters, from Bat Conservation International, will discuss the ecological importance of bats in North America and focus on habitat for attracting bats to your yard. They will discuss native plants that attract the bugs bats eat, when and where bat houses might be useful, eliminating hazards, providing food, water, shelter, etc., and making bat-friendly habitat improvements in spaces of all sizes. Register [HERE.](#)

Inside Outside News

Advanced Training



Blackland Prairie Master Naturalists
present the second event of the Cissy St.
John Memorial Education Series

Native Bee FUNdamentals

*Learn to recognize, understand,
and support our native pollinators*

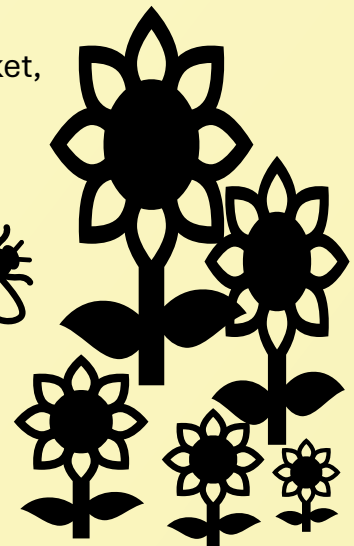
Thursday, October 29th, 1pm-5pm
Myers Park Event Center, McKinney, TX

Cost: FREE!

Guest speakers Dr. Keng-Lou James Hung, Laura Kimberly, Carol Clark, and Lauren Jansen Simpson will present fast-paced information on our incredible and diverse native bee species. Participants will get an overview of native bees and their importance, details about their weird and wonderful lifestyles and challenges they face, tips on landscaping to support native bees, a look at bee mimics, a quick dive into Bumblebee ID, and information on bee citizen science projects. Participants will also receive a resource packet, and a chance to win door prizes!

For further information and to register:

[REGISTER](#)



Inside Outside News

Volunteer Opportunities



Texas Pollinator BioBlitz

October 18

Ann Stuart Science Center, TWU Campus
1201 Old Main Circle
Denton, TX 76201

Hosted by:

TWU Environmental Science Club

With Special Guest:

Sam Kieschnick, TPWD Urban Biologist

We invite you to earn TMN EFC Volunteer Service hours and contribute to our Pollinators for Texas 2026 project by participating in the TWU Environmental Science Club's **Texas Pollinator BioBlitz** event on Sunday, October 18. Whether you are a budding birder, a novice entomologist, or just someone who loves reaching for your phone to identify a mystery plant or animal, the Texas Pollinator BioBlitz on the TWU Denton campus is for you!

We will visit multiple locations on the campus including our pollinator rain garden project site as we spot and identify as many species as possible. No previous scientific experience is necessary—just bring your curiosity, a sense of adventure, and a smartphone pre-loaded with the iNaturalist app. By recording what you find, you will contribute directly to active real-world scientific research by mapping the TWU ecosystem's biodiversity. Your observations will help build a baseline inventory for the Pollinators for Texas 2026 Rain Garden project. Your iNaturalist knowledge and skill will help mentor TWU students. Earn volunteer service hours using iNaturalist to record your observations and identifications.

TWU BioBlitz Event Times:

- The event is split into two distinct tracking sessions to capture both daytime and nocturnal species:
- **Daytime Species Survey (4:30 PM – 6:30 PM):** Explore the campus green spaces, including areas near the [Dr. Bettye Myers Butterfly Garden I & II](#), to log plants, birds, insects, and fungi using community science tools.
- **After Dark Species Survey (7:00 PM – 10:00 PM):** Switch gears to find the "night shift" of campus wildlife, focusing on nocturnal insects, moths, and other night-active organisms.

BioBlitz Participant Checklist

- **What to bring:** A fully charged smartphone with your chosen nature-tracking apps downloaded, comfortable walking shoes, and a flashlight or headlamp if attending the After Dark session.
- **Registration:** Space is limited for this event. Participants must register in advance to receive exact meeting location details.
- **Registration Link:** [TWU CAMPUS NATURE BIOBLITZ](#)

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 conserving the natural resources of the area.

General maintenance volunteers have multiple service opportunities 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 service.

Natural resource volunteer projects could include bluebird box monitoring, firebreak preparation, invasive species management & habitat restoration.

This opportunity is available year-round and provides a flexible schedule. No minimum hours per week are required. Campsites are not included.

Please contact Greenbelt Manager Matthew Moore 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 Opportunities

Cornell Lab of Ornithology Project Feeder Watch 2026-2027 Starts Soon!

Project Feeder Watch is a citizen science project where participants count birds that visit your bird feeders or bird attracting plantings or water features in your yard or a location that you can visit and count birds two consecutive days each week. Participation is flexible, go to Project Feeder Watch website <https://feederwatch.org>, click on About and How to Participate for details. Join now for the 2026–27 FeederWatch season! This year the Cornell Lab Project FeederWatch season begins on Saturday, November 1, 2026 and runs through April 30, 2027. Cornell Lab is shipping research kits to new participants now. Participation in this project is approved for service hours by our Chapter. Project Number P-080214.



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

All you need to do to participate is:

SIGN UP ONLINE at <https://feederwatch.org>. CLICK for new participants or to renew. Renewing? Your FeederWatch I.D. number remains the same number each year. Use it to sign in and renew. -OR- CALL 1- (800) 843-BIRD (2473) Monday-Friday 8am-4pm ET for more information or join by phone. There is a participation fee of \$18 for non-members (\$15 if you are a Cornell Lab member) you pay at the time you join Project Feeder Watch. Online be sure you sign up for USA (not Canada).

New participants are sent a Research Kit with complete instructions for participating, as well as a bird identification poster, calendar, and more. You provide the bird attracting location or feeder(s) and seed. Each fall participants receive a year-end report, [Winter Bird Highlights](#). Participants also receive access to the digital version of Living Bird, the Cornell Lab's award-winning, quarterly magazine.

You can do all data entry paperless, but the starter kit is very helpful.

Paper forms are also available on the website at <https://feederwatch.org>.

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

This is a great project for anyone interested in birds. Lots of links and helpful information online.

If you have any health or mobility issues, this is a great project to participate in to get your service hours and retain active member status.

REMEMBER, PROJECT FEEDER WATCH BEGINS NOVEMBER 1ST, SO THE TIME TO SIGN UP IS NOW!

QUESTIONS? Visit <http://feederwatch.org> and go through the links for all the details A-Z.

Please contact me through the Membership Directory if you have questions.

Karen Mangum, Project Manager, TMN-EFC Cornell Lab Project Feeder Watch Project No P-08021

Inside Outside News

Volunteer Opportunities

**WE
NEED
YOU!**



Outreach needs your help!

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

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

Denton Dig It! History Fair

October 17, 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Denton County Historical Park, 317 W. Mulberry, Denton

Argyle Arbor Day...Growing a Greener Argyle

November 7, 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Argyle Town Hall, 308 Denton St. E., Argyle

Denton Market

November 14, 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

317 W. Mulberry, Denton

See the Members Area calendar to view each opportunity and sign up on SignUpGenius.

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

*Be sure to check Plan Your Week
and the [Elm Fork Chapter Website](#) and [Members Calendar](#)
for more AT and Volunteer opportunities!*



Projects in the Community

Ryan High School Rain Garden Project inspires growth.



The legacy of the TMN EFC Class of 2024 project P241115, a Rain Garden Pilot Project for Denton's Ryan High School, continues to grow.

Dr. Kelly Albus, Principal Project Investigator and a National Geographic Explorer moved from her Research Scientist position at Texas Water Research Institute (TWRI), an affiliate of Texas AgriLife Extension Service, to Texas Woman's University in August 2025. Dr. Albus joined TWU as an Associate Professor in the university's expanding Environmental Sciences department. Her TWU course, SCI 3033 - Water in a Changing Environment, debuted in Spring 2026 and is again available for student registration during Spring semester 2027.

Texas Master Naturalist, Elm Fork Chapter's Elise Spain, Project Director for the technical guidance provided to the project by the Elm Fork chapter, and Katie Norris-Pirot, Class of 2024 Project Leader, led the pilot project's successful installation and operation the first year before transitioning leadership to Pam Golcher, TMN EFC's Class of 2025. Volunteers like Rachel DeAnda, Val Hibbeler, Leanne Watson, Carin Zeman, and others continue to provide their service to this project.

You can volunteer for this project by contacting Pam Golcher or joining the volunteer's Facebook site, [**Volunteers - Ryan High School Rain Garden**](#)

Shown is a composite overview of the rain garden design and here is a link to a short ten-minute video of the [**Rain Garden at Ryan High School | Classroom 2 Community Citizen Science**](#) project describing the garden's inspirational installation day.

Projects in the Community

Elm Fork Chapter receives Pollinators for Texas 2026 Award

a partnership with



The Texas Master Naturalist State Office notified the Elm Fork Chapter last month that our **Pollinators for Texas 2026 Initiative** proposal will receive funding for a **Pollinator Rain Garden @ TWU's Health Science Center**.

Our proposed project leverages learning from the Rain Garden Pilot Project at Ryan High School and provides additional Classroom2Community Citizen Science service-learning experiences for undergraduate and graduate students at Texas Woman's University as well as the Denton community. The project creates a pollinator friendly, native plant, rain garden incorporated into the green stormwater infrastructure on TWU's Denton campus within the master planned Creek Zone near the new Health Sciences Center. The garden demonstrates how to incorporate native pollinator plants into green infrastructure to preserve, conserve and restore natural resources, contribute to improved water quality, and provide productive pollinator habitat. Quarterly education and outreach events will inform Texans about how they can restore biodiversity for pollinators on both public and private lands.

The project will take about a year to complete. The kickoff event is an iNaturalist BioBlitz across the TWU Campus on October 18 to set a baseline inventory of species found. Later, an interdisciplinary group of TWU students from the science classes (Sustainability, Scientific Illustration, Water in a Changing Environment and Biology) will present their rain garden design to the community on November 13. Finally, save March 20, 2027, for the rain garden installation date. Contact Tom Kirwan, Project Manager, to volunteer as a project team member.

Wild About LLELA

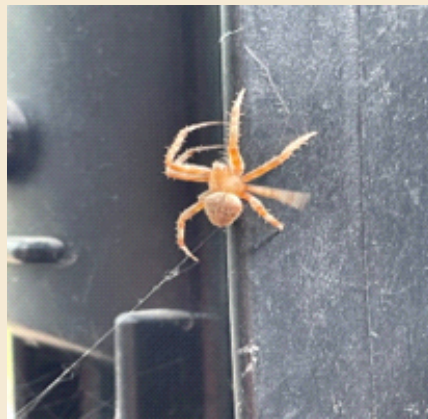
Sue Yost, class of 2017

The itsy-bitsy spider went up the waterspout.
Down came the rain and washed the spider out.
Up came the sun, and dried up all the rain,
and the itsy-bitsy spider went up the spout again.

The exact origin for the song "Itsy Bitsy Spider" is unknown. It is a song that a Master Naturalist can sing anywhere—especially at LLELA. And LLELA has spiders!



Orb weavers
Trapdoor spiders
Texas Brown tarantulas
Yes. Tarantulas!



One October, many years ago, tarantula babies were released at LLELA. To my knowledge, none have been rediscovered, so that population remains a mystery. Did they survive? Recently, at a Friends of LLELA lecture, one of the participants asked if we would like a brown Texas tarantula to join our two educational corn snakes. She was needing to find a good home for it and LLELA seemed a perfect fit. The yet-to-be-named female now resides in the classroom in her own private enclosure.

The Texas brown tarantula (*Aphonopelma hentzi*) is one of the most common species of tarantula living in the Southern United States today. Their bodies are dark brown, though shades may vary between individual tarantulas. The colors are more distinct after a molt, as with many arthropods. Males develop black legs with a copper-colored carapace. Immature and males come in many shades of brown with considerable variation in greys and reds.



Wild About LLELA

Sue Yost, class of 2017



Texas Brown Tarantula

A female can lay 200 to 1,000 eggs. She secures them inside a hammock-shaped web within her burrow and guards them closely. Eggs hatch in 45 to 60 days. Once spiderlings leave the egg sac, they often stay with the female for several days before dispersing to make their



own burrows. Females are known to live up to 40 years but males only live about a year in the wild.



This species is rather docile and non-aggressive, preferring to flee when disturbed. If cornered, a tarantula will first rear up onto its hind legs and expose its fangs—a bluffing posture that usually ends the encounter. If the threat persists, their next line of defense is deploying their urticating hairs. These are patches of barbed, defensive hairs located on the tarantula's abdomen. When harassed, the spider will brace itself and use its hind legs to rub these hairs off, launching a cloud of them at the attacker. While not venomous, these barbed hairs lodge into skin, eyes, and airways, causing intense itching and irritation that can last for days. Because discarded tarantula molts retain

these irritating hairs, it is highly recommended to use tweezers when picking up a molt. Biting is strictly a last resort. It almost exclusively happens if the spider is actively grabbed or pressed directly against the skin.

Texas brown tarantulas build a "no-snare" web. They dig a silk-lined burrow 15–40 cm deep in firm prairie soil or move into an abandoned rodent hole or a crack under a rock. A thin apron of silk at the entrance is called a hammock and works as a trip line, carrying the vibration of a passing insect down to the waiting spider, which lunges from the burrow mouth, usually after dark.

The hunt is on for the Texas brown tarantula at LLELA. Will you be the one to document it?

Photos & text credits: Sue Yost, Wikipedia, spideridentifications.com

Features

Help. I've Fallen. (In love with iNaturalist.)

By Suzie Agnew, 2026 Trainee

A few nights ago, I dropped by Green Acres Farm Memorial Park in Flower Mound to do some iNatting. It was nearing sunset and the bluebirds and queen butterflies were a flutter of activity, a testament to the hard work of the many volunteers at this Master Naturalist project site. I soon realized that I should have taken my DSL camera instead of relying on the camera in my phone. I vowed to return a few days later with both my “real” camera and my husband, as he was not familiar with this park even though it is only a few miles from our house. So that is how I found myself on Sunday morning, deep along a path into the riparian/prairie, focusing on a new-to-me iNat species, the colorful ailanthus webworm moth.



“Skunk,” my husband calmly said.

Skunk. One of those words you never want to hear someone utter while out in nature.

“Where?” I nervously asked, unsure at that moment where either my husband or said skunk was in relation to where I was standing.

“Behind you,” my husband answered.

“Where behind me?” I needed details. Is the skunk on my heels or further away?

“Right behind you.”

Worse-case scenario. I have a skunk directly behind me.

Thankfully, my husband quickly realized my fear of his poor choice of words and clarified. The skunk was up the hill from me, along the fence line that separates the park from the neighbor’s pond. Yes, directionally “right” behind me, but far behind me.

I snapped a few more photographs of the moth before walking slowly up the hill, in the direction of the fence, in hopes of – safely! – capturing a photograph or two of the skunk. I tucked my DSL camera away (just in case) and did, indeed, manage to capture two grainy photographs of the skunk with my phone’s camera, which iNaturalist did agree was a striped skunk. It was then that I realized: Help. I have fallen. In love with iNaturalist.

I am in the Master Naturalist class of 2026 and we are having an iNaturalist competition to see who can record the most observations and the most species. I had tried to use iNaturalist off and on over the years and never really got into it, as I felt the app was clunky and well, just not my thing. But a competition? Game on!



Help. I've Fallen. (cont.)

A week into the competition, a close family member asked me how I was finding my observations, i.e., were they casual observations in my own garden, or was I going somewhere to find flora and fauna? My reply – Oh, you know me. I have a notebook and a clipboard with a schedule and I have a plan.

It is perhaps my OCD tendencies, along with my love of reading published garden and nature journals, but I have always wanted to spend a year documenting the wildlife that happens upon my garden. I have also long wanted to visit – and walk – the many miles of trails and parks in Flower Mound, my home for the past three-plus decades. This iNaturalist competition seemed like as good a time as any to start on both journeys. Alas. The competition started in late August, as the heat of a Texas summer was beating down on us. But I was determined. Or maybe I was getting addicted to iNaturalist.

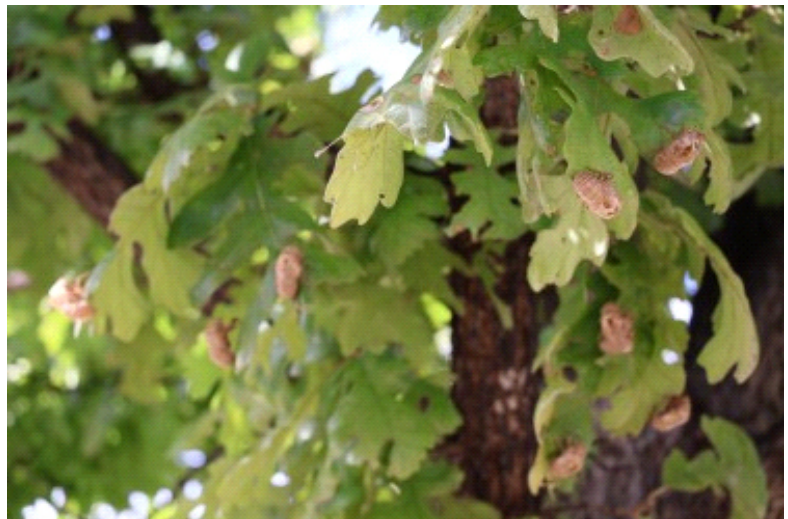
Many mornings, while still hot and sweaty from a gym class, I would drop by a park and walk a mile or two, stopping to document interesting things along the way. I also found myself happily getting up at 6 on Saturday mornings so I could be out on a trail by 7, to get in a longer hike before it got brutally hot.

Despite our record setting drought and prolonged heat this summer, there were flowers blooming in most of the parks and trails I visited. It is no surprise that a number of those flowers have “weed” – bitterweed, camphorweed, buttonweed, Texas snakeweed - in their name but what is a weed but an unloved flower?

Somewhere along this iNat competition, I began to notice – It wasn't about watching my observations and species counts climb. It was about getting out in nature, slowing down, taking time out of my day to pause in this fast-paced world and enjoy what an incredible world we live in.

It was watching a green anole stalk a moth in my garden. Or a green lynx spider at LLELA as it injected venom into a differential grasshopper.

Catching a photograph of a green anole mid-jump. Standing at the edge of a small pond as a flock of Canada geese circled around and landed on the water. Finding wildlife that I have never witnessed before – a Blanchard's cricket frog, a dainty sulfur butterfly, a roseate skimmer, an ochre euchlaena moth. It was that moment while photographing a bur oak tree at a local park and looking up and realizing that it must have been the place to be if you were a cicada and needed a leaf to cling to as you molted.



It was in each of those moments, capturing the awe and wonder of our natural world, that has made the iNaturalist competition so rewarding.

Features

Prairies of the Springfield Plateau—Life in the Off-season

By Jerry Hamby

Driving down a dirt road in Southwest Missouri, I am searching for a prairie. GPS coordinates guide me to a narrow pullout, and a Missouri Prairie Foundation (MPF) sign tells me I am in the right place. Linden's Prairie is the first of four conservation sites that I will visit in the next two days, and despite the blistering August heat, I look forward to exploring new territory. It is easy to love a prairie in spring and summer when colorful wildflowers fill the meadows, but it takes more effort when the rewards are more subtle. Having evolved for millions of years, prairies have adapted to survive a flash drought, like the one Missouri is experiencing now.

Inside the gate I read an interpretive sign that summarizes the history of this 171-acre site. It is a rare dry-mesic chert prairie, a grassland environment that grows on top of rocky soil. This unplowed remnant is named after Linden Trial, a career entomologist with the Missouri Department of Conservation. The remnant is notable for its biodiversity and native plant conservation.

An eastern meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*) flies overhead as I wade into the prairie, and spicebush swallowtails (*Papilio troilus*) feed on the purple passionflower (*Passiflora incarnata*) shaded in the tallgrass. Moving to higher ground, I see more wildflowers—giant blue sage (*Salvia azurea*), tall thistle (*Cirsium altissimum*), and sweet black-eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia subtomentosa*). These hardy plants bloom from midsummer to fall. The thistles sway in a swift breeze, attracting dozens of Delaware (*Anatrytone logan*) and huron skippers (*Atalopedes huron*).

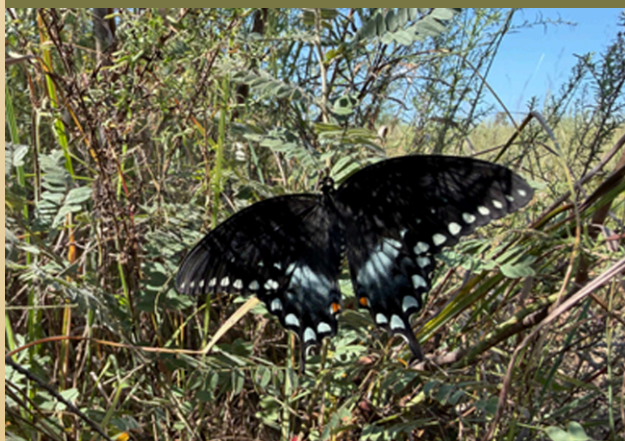
I follow a service road, doubling as a trail, to a high point in the prairie and stand in a sea of big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), and Indiangrass (*Sorghastrum nutans*). Their roots, eight to twelve feet deep, draw water far below the surface, keeping the prairie green. I am hiking on the Springfield Plateau, a lower-elevation section of the Ozark Mountains. Standing on this rise, I can almost imagine the once-expansive tallgrass prairie that covered North America from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico.



Missouri Prairie Foundation sign



Linden's Prairie



Spicebush swallowtail

Prairies of the Springfield Plateau—Life in the Off-season (cont.)



Skippers on tall thistle



Giant blue sage



Sweet black-eyed Susan



Whorled mountain mint



American bluehearts

On the far side of the rise, the road forks, forming a loop that returns to the main trail. A tree line on the edge of the property looks enticing, but I have another stop to make before the temperature tops 100 degrees. Following the loop back to the gate, I spot a patch of whorled mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum verticillatum*), a tall fragrant herb that draws more pollinating insects.

Linden's Prairie has a Coefficient of Conservatism (CC) value of 4.69, the third-highest of the 36 properties the MPF manages. A prairie's CC value reflects its tolerance to habitat disturbance, and anything above 4.0 indicates high natural integrity. The mean CC value of the modern Missouri landscape, in contrast, falls below 3.0. The biodiversity of Linden's Prairie is reflected in the 200 documented native plant species, of which I have observed approximately thirty.

My next stop, the Rae Letsinger Prairie, lies eighteen miles south of here. The MPF purchased this 68-acre unplowed remnant in 2020, and it is still being inventoried. During my one-hour hike, I observe twenty-five species of native plants and animals, eight of which are new to me, including American bluehearts (*Buchnera americana*). Wading through the low grasses, I am surrounded by delicate violet blooms.

Another new discovery is prairie false indigo (*Baptisia lactea*). Like all wild indigos, *B. lactea* is a bushy plant with elliptical trifoliate compound leaves. The blooming season ended in June, leaving behind black seed pods that stretch along rigid stems.

During four hours of hiking, I have photographed sixty species of native plants and animals, which I will later upload onto iNaturalist. Because the preservation sites I am visiting are packed with native forbs and grasses,



Prairies of the Springfield Plateau—Life in the Off-season (cont.)



Prairie false indigo



Homestead fenceline, Noah Brown's Prairie



Diamond Grove Prairie

would recharge the blooms for migrating monarch butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*). Prairie blazing star is a core signature species of the North American tallgrass prairie, growing from Minnesota to Texas.

My hike through Diamond Grove Prairie reminds me of the connections between prairie ecosystems. Both the Springfield

only a few of my observations are for introduced species. I am hopeful that tomorrow's adventure is just as rewarding.

I get an earlier start the next day and arrive at Noah Brown's Prairie at sunrise. What this nineteen-acre preserve lacks in size, it makes up for in biodiversity. One of the most dramatic native plants I encounter is willowleaf sunflower (*Helianthus salicifolius*). Its long narrow leaves resemble those of a willow tree, and the plants I spot are six feet tall. Native bees and migratory butterflies will rely on this fall bloomer, which is beginning to set buds. Prairie rosinweed (*Silphium integrifolium*) is another showy wildflower that favors dry conditions. Although its blooms are spent, the flat brown seeds are visible on the outer ring of the flower head's disc, a defining characteristic of all species of rosinweed.

In 1965 when Noah Brown purchased the two 80-acre parcels that include this small prairie, he found a hand-dug well and the remains of a house. Today the only signs of a homestead that I see are two short sections of a wooden fence, its hand-split posts and rails tied together with baling wire. After photographing these artifacts, I complete my hike along the perimeter and drive six miles to my final stop.

Diamond Grove Prairie Conservation Area is an 852-acre preserve that, because of its large size, has the critical mass needed to conserve its ecosystem. Unlike the other remnants I have visited, which are under the management of the MPF, Diamond Grove Prairie is owned by the Missouri Department of Conservation. The site is maintained in a primitive state, allowing visitors to wander as they choose, but hiking trails and mowed fire breaks provide some direction.

A hundred yards past the gate, prairie blazing star (*Liatris pycnostachya*) begins popping up on both sides of the narrow trail. The stalks are loaded with dozens of flower heads, but in this dry summer, the blooms show only a hint of pink. The tall stems punctuate the open spaces, and a good rain



Prairie blazing star

Prairies of the Springfield Plateau—Life in the Off-season (cont.)



Golden Prairie under a winter sky

Plateau, on which Diamond Grove Prairie sits, and the Cross Timbers, where I live in North Texas, are transitional ecotones where eastern deciduous forests meet the western prairie. As such, many core species exist in both ecoregions. I pause in the shade of a post oak (*Quercus stellata*) and a blackjack oak (*Q. marilandica*), both of which also grow in the Cross Timbers forest. These and other tree species are carefully managed in the Diamond Grove Prairie to limit their encroachment on the grasslands.

This is not my first visit to Diamond Grove Prairie. I was last here after a prescribed burn in December. Even in deep winter, recharged grasses were sprouting beneath my feet, and on the green side of the fire break, I found clumps of broomsedge bluestem (*Anatherum virginicum*) displaying silver tufts of inflorescence.



Coralberry

That same winter I also visited the largest MPF preservation site, Golden Prairie, which includes 320 acres of unplowed land. Hiking beneath an overcast sky, I found red drupes clinging to leafless branches of coralberry (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*), and fluffy white seed heads of goldenrod (genus *Solidago*).

Walking along the edge of the prairie, I happened upon the hunting grounds of a loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*), a bird species whose population has declined precipitously since the 1970s. Although I did not see any shrikes in the prairie, I found evidence of their predatory behavior. On a barbed wire fence, grasshoppers were impaled, several yards apart, on the points of the top strands of wire.

Shrikes maintain such “pantries” to store food for future consumption, particularly during lean times. They also leave insects impaled for days or weeks to degrade the toxins. Pristine prairies like this one provide ideal habitat for the “butcher bird”; up to thirty species of short-horned grasshoppers thrive in Golden Prairie.

The fate of the loggerhead shrike dramatically illustrates the urgency of preserving undisturbed natural sites. In addition to grass-obligate birds (such as grouse and meadowlarks), mammals, herps, and invertebrates rely on native prairies for their very survival.

As much as I appreciated these prairie remnants in the off-seasons, I look forward to revisiting them in late spring and early summer. That is when I would expect find the most iconic Missouri wildflowers, including pale purple coneflower (which is on the MPF signs) and royal catchfly (*Silene regia*), a bright red wildflower that grows primarily in prairie remnants. This beautiful red flower has formed a symbiotic relationship with the ruby-throated hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*). Of course, there are hundreds of other species of flora and fauna waiting to be discovered.



Grasshopper impaled on barbed wire

All photographs by Jerry Hamby

Tweet of the Month

From Sue Yost, class of 2017



Since it is October, I am going to share some bird myths, superstitions and folklore. We tend to take our feathered friends for granted, but many bird superstitions involve good luck and bad luck! These omens are different in different cultures. Here are a few.

If a bird flies into your house, many believe it signifies an important message is on the way: A message from above.

If the bird is white, it could mean there will be a death, a dramatic change or ending.

If a bird is tapping on your window, in some cultures they believe it is the spirit of a loved one.

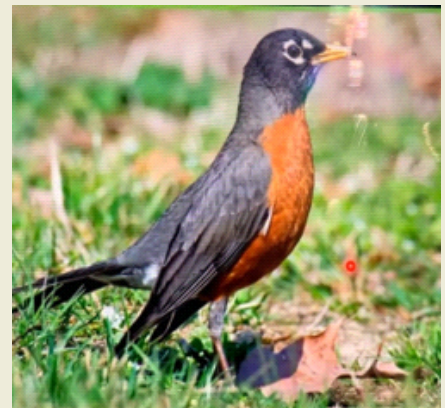
If a bird flies into your window, you may encounter an obstacle in your life soon.

If a Robin is seen tapping on a window or flying into a room, it signifies that a member of the household will die.

Make a wish when you see the first Robin of the year for good luck.

If a Robin is seen singing out in the open, good weather is on the way. But if it is sheltering among the branches of a tree, rain is on the way.

If a Robin is the first bird you see on Valentine's Day, it means you are destined to marry a sailor.



In Korea, Magpies are said to bring good luck. They are their national bird.

If you see two Blackbirds perched next to each other, this means good luck. If they nest close to your house, then you can look forward to a year of good fortune.

Sailors believed that if an Albatross flew around their ship in the middle of the voyage, it meant bad weather and windy conditions were to come.



It is considered unlucky to bring a Peacock feather into a house, because the "eye" at the end of the feather was a sign of the evil eye that would bring bad luck and ill fortune to your house.

In theater, it is bad luck to have a Peacock feather on stage or on a costume, as a prop or scenery. A disaster will occur during the performance. Peacocks are symbols of spirituality in India, where they are the national bird. They represent vigilance, awareness and protection.



Doves are believed to be the one bird that the devil cannot change himself into, and the one bird that is immune to the devil's curses.

If a Pigeon poops on you, it is bad luck.



Owls are another bird that in some cultures means an impending death if it hoots or flies around your house.

In Wales, hearing an Owl hoot in the night was a sign that snow was coming. The ancient Welsh also associated Owls with fertility.

If an Owl hoots three times, be extra careful.

Owls were once used in traditional medicines. Owl broth was eaten in belief that it could help alleviate the symptoms of whooping cough. Eating Owl eggs was reputed to help improve eyesight, avert epileptic fits and even sober people up if they were drunk.

If a pregnant woman heard an Owl hoot it meant she was going to have an easy labor.

If you hear a Cuckoo, it foretells good luck (especially if heard in the right ear).

Hawks mean a powerful enemy is about to threaten you.

Kingfishers signify that a big scandal threatens your happiness.

If Swallows build a nest under your room, it's good luck.



And lastly, the most famous myth is if you see a Cardinal in your yard, it is a loved one coming to check on you and to let you know they are OK.

That is one we can all believe in.

Do YOU believe?

Photo credits: Sue Yost. vanish.co.in, superstitionsomenssymbolism.com/

Text: exemplore.com/spirit-animals



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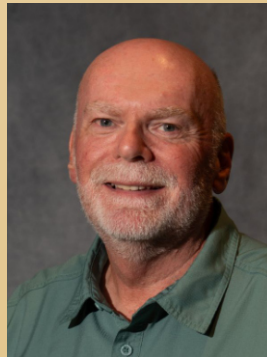
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*And a big thanks to
Brynne Bryan,
Karen DeVinney
and Mary Morrow
for proofing!*

Almost the Last Word

Funny Finds From Sue Yost!

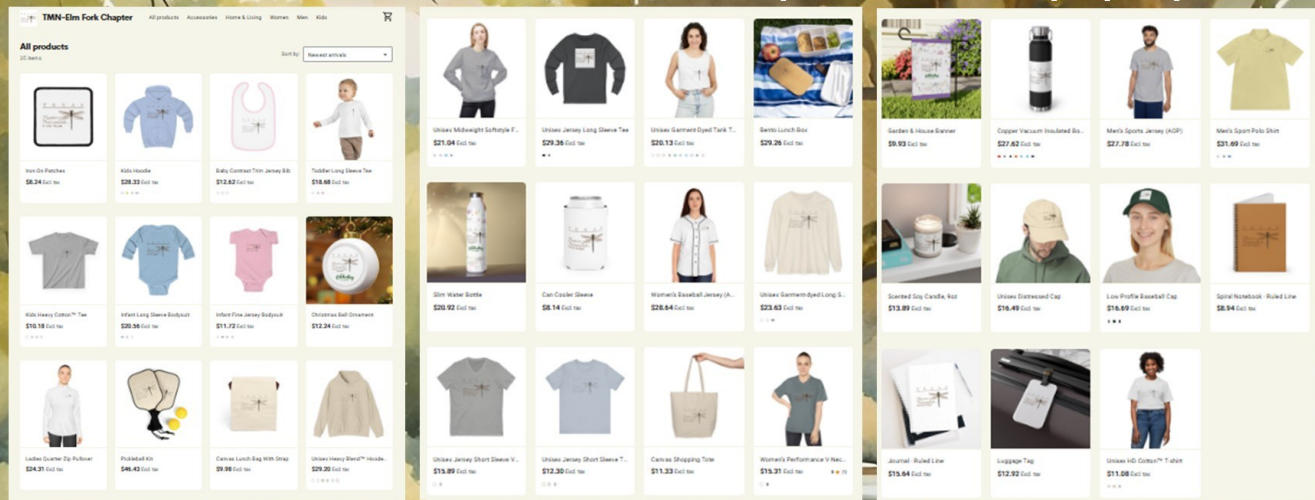


Here is the book list from Bob Richie's lecture on Mycorrhizal Fungi, presented at last month's chapter meeting:

1. *The Hidden Life of Life: A Walk Through the Reaches of Time*
Elizabeth Marshall Thomas
2. *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*
Elizabeth Kolbert
3. *The Ends of the World*
Peter Brannen
4. *Inheritors of the Earth: How Nature Is Thriving in an Age of Extinction*
Chris D. Thomas
5. *Thus Spoke the Plant: A Remarkable Journey of Groundbreaking Scientific Discoveries and Personal Encounters with Plants*
Monica Gagliano
6. *The Light Eaters: How the Unseen World of Plant Intelligence Offers a New Understanding of Life on Earth*
Zoë Schlanger
7. *The Cosmic Serpent: DNA and the Origins of Knowledge*
Jeremy Narby

Almost the Last Word

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



* New *
items

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Tammie Walters,
Editor

Thank you all for amazing
articles and photos for the
Naturalist News!
We couldn't do it without you!

Please send submissions to
newsletter@efctmn.org

November 2026 submissions
are due by:

Monday, November 9th



Who We Are



Texas Master Naturalist—Elm Fork Chapter

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

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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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