



# The CHACHALACA

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## ED SEZ

Hi Y'all!

Beth and I are back in the Valley and getting into the swing of things. Aside from getting our old volunteer jobs lined up, we've been getting set up to help with next year's class. It's hard to believe we'll be starting to train another group of TMNs in just three months.

We went to MO Ranch for the annual TMN meeting. It was a great weekend. We got enough AT hours for the whole year! I took a course on using the GPS to modify maps. It was pretty fast, so I'll need to practice some, but we'll be able to put our own markers and trails on standard map when I get it down. Beth took a class on developing interpretive nature trails. She got some good info on planning, layout, and signage.

We also took an interesting class on developing plant keys to be used by lay persons. I have always maintained that keys and guides are organized for people who already know what's in them. When you roll your own, you can make it sensible for the non-expert.

Of course, the thing we enjoyed most at the annual meeting was meeting all those people! All those folks we knew only as email addresses became real people. Plus all those folk we hadn't had any contact with. We met several people who were starting new TMN chapters and like to think we helped them.

The exhibits let us see what other groups were doing. By the way, our exhibit got a lot of traffic. Joe Lee set it up, and I would swing over to it when I saw anyone looking at it and answer questions. The pictures and scrapbooks gave us a lot of talking points. I fielded quite a few questions about putting out newsletters, especially with the newer groups.

The big thing we learned was: "We are not alone!"

Other groups have the same problems we have. Some have solved them, most are still working on them. Things that worked with one group failed with another. Everything is a work in progress. Enjoy the ride.

We hope to see you all at the next meeting and the Harlingen Bird Festival!

Leo Garrett

## RGV MASTER NATURALISTS

This chapter is an affiliate of the Texas Master Naturalist program jointly sponsored by Texas Cooperative Extension and the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department.

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## Sell the Net. Buy a Camera.

Birders quit taking specimens long ago, but *some* "butterflyers" still collect. Of course, they tend to collect the rarer species.

For a discussion of collection, and what may be done, Gil Quintanilla asks that you read this article on the web and let him know what you think. Email [gquintanilla@rgv.rr.com](mailto:gquintanilla@rgv.rr.com)

[http://www.tsweekly.com/  
oregon\\_newspaper\\_archive/9-8-05%  
20archive/natural.asp](http://www.tsweekly.com/oregon_newspaper_archive/9-8-05%20archive/natural.asp)

(It's a little long. Type it all in as one line.—ed)

## **Prez Sez—Adventures of the Red Tide Rangers**

Answering the call of Tony Reisinger of the Marine Extension Office and Texas Master Naturalist sponsor, members of the Rio Grande Valley Chapter stepped up and have been assisting in monitoring the recent red tide bloom that is impacting our marine environment.

Red tide is a naturally occurring algae called *Karenia brevis* that produces a toxin that is fatal to many marine organisms including fish. The toxin also affects the respiratory system of mammals, including man. People are affected when the cells rupture and the toxin becomes an aerosol. The usual affects of the toxin on man are irritated eyes, runny nose and coughing and may range from mild to severe. The symptoms generally clear up rapidly once the person leaves the area where the toxin is present.

The algae is always present in the marine environment in low concentrations but when conditions are right it proliferates. This is known as a red tide bloom and this is when it begins to have an impact.

In September volunteers met at the Pan American University marine lab on South Padre Island where they received training from Reisinger and Dave Buzan, a Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Coastal Fisheries scientist. In addition to an overview of red tide history and its potential impact, trainees were instructed on collecting water samples and were taught how to recognize and count red tide cells under a microscope. Since then, volunteers have been collecting and examining water samples from the surf at South Padre Island and Boca Chica Beach, the Laguna Madre and San Martin Lake. In addition to reporting the actual occurrence of red tide, volunteers report the observable effects of the toxin including fish kills and estimates of the severity of the airborne toxin. To date it is estimated that over 500,000 fish have been killed in local waters by the red tide. The majority of killed fish have been forage species like mullet, menhaden and Spanish sardines but trout, redbfish, snook and many other species have also been succumbed to the algae.

The data collected by TMN is used by TPWD, Texas A&M, Univ. of Texas, Cameron County Parks, Convention & Visitors' Bureau, City of South Padre Island and interested researchers.

RGVCTMN members assisting as Red Tide Rangers are Antoinette and Cathy Budd, Susan Steffner, Tira Wilmoth, David Benn, Tim Colglazier, Sherman Lee, Cecilia Cervantes, Frank Wiseman, and Linda McGonigle.

**David Benn & Linda McGonigle**

## ***RESACA DE LA PALMA CLEANUP***

Resaca de la Palma Park is Brownsville's birding center.

Twenty eight people from TP&WD, Master Naturalists, Healthy Communities of Brownsville, Brownsville Beautification Committee and other valleywide volunteers helped rid litter at the new Park located off New Carmen Ave south of FM 1732 on August 11, 2005.

The event was hosted by TP&WD. The park is open only for special events such as this until construction of the new facility is completed. To find out more information on the park contact Pablo DeYturbe at [pablo.deyturbe@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:pablo.deyturbe@tpwd.state.tx.us) or Jennifer Liston at [jennifer.liston@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:jennifer.liston@tpwd.state.tx.us) or 956-584-9156 x 237.



*Photo courtesy of D. Cox*

***How many TMNs?***



## What One TMN Does

I would like to report to my fellow RGVCTMN members about my volunteer work with the Frontera Audubon Center in Weslaco. After receiving training (given in Spanish, by the way!) from Marta, one of the groundskeepers employed by Frontera, I began in early May stocking the bird and nectar feeders early (just after dawn) on weekend mornings. During the early summer, I was able to volunteer on Saturdays AND Sundays, but have had to scale back to only Saturday mornings since mid-summer. (By the way, let me know if you'd like become a volunteer feeder-stocker like me. I'll be glad to train YOU...although I admit I will probably need to do this in English.)

Arriving just as Selena King (executive director of FAS) opens the gates at 7 a.m., my procedure is to stir up the pre-mixed banana/beer/yeast mixture and pour it into the bottle for dispensing into the 14 nectar feeders throughout the thicket; place it into the bucket along with a bag of thawed-out frozen cranberries (still tempting the trogons!), drop in a knife and proceed to the citrus grove to pick and slice a nice bunch of grapefruit for the chachalacas and other birds and critters who await them. In the shed, I fill up a bucket with dried corn and sunflowers and head to the thicket's central feeding station, where I can always count on a flurry of doves and chachalacas noisily hovering about, and buff-bellied hummers chirping at me to hurry up with the nectar.

In the six months I've spent volunteering at Frontera, I've learned so much! And I've had a wonderful, sometimes even

enchanting, time learning. I've walked into the thicket on an early fall morning to the sound of wings rustling and flapping above, to see as many as 20 broadwing hawks leaving their roosts in the tepeguaje trees. I've noticed fleeting little movements low in the bushes and have seen my first Olive sparrows up close. I've seen beautiful leafwings and Great Swallowtails lighting on the nectar feeders, and I've listened to the loud yet melodious song of the long-billed thrashers hidden back in the thick brush. I always feel like I'm being followed by the buff-bellies as I carry the nectar bottle along the trail, because at each stop I can hear their little chirps and chatter. And I've seen the not-so-common Clay-colored Robin, pecking around in the grass in the yard just outside the Center, then retreating to a pile of brush.

Occasionally I have come out from the thicket to help in the office, folding newsletters for mailing, handling gift shop purchases for visitors, and just "holding down the fort" while Selena and Martin Hagne from the Valley Nature Center conduct their monthly kids' program.

The Master Naturalist organization provides us with wonderful opportunities by encouraging us to go out and volunteer in the community. Although my primary volunteer effort has been with the Frontera Audubon Society, I've also enjoyed helping answer the phones at the KMBH/KHID fundraisers. By wearing our Master Naturalist name badge at these events, we are spreading awareness of this terrific organization we are part of. Enjoy!



**Joyce  
Hamilton  
Stocking a  
Butterfly Lure**

*Photo courtesy of  
Selena King*

## Nature Park Signage

By David Junkin

Not-for profit nature parks can benefit from signage posted in strategic locations to enhance the experience of the visiting public. These signs of just a few words help people locate significant features and inform them of where they are or perhaps how to get to another location.

This past winter and spring, as part of my volunteer effort for the Rio Grande Chapter, Texas Master Naturalist program, I routed signs from old boards. I used two inch cardboard letters as templates and then "free-hand" routed the letters. In general the signs had two or three words and were about 20" x 12". A couple had six words and measured 36" x 18". The signs were then painted and the old board appearance was covered up. These signs were made for NABA International Butterfly Park in Mission and Ramsey Park in Harlingen.

In the winter of 2005-2006, I will again offer this service. The cost should be minimal to the park wishing the signage, just for boards and paint. Letter size can be 3/4", 1", 1 1/4", 2", 3" or 4 1/2". Or perhaps other variations, using computer generated letters. The erection of the signs at the park will be the job of park personnel.

Requests for signage can be made to David Junkin - TMN Class of 2005. I can be contacted at [sdjunkin@aol.com](mailto:sdjunkin@aol.com) Or 956-287-8844 after January 1, 2006.



Angel Gonzales, Grounds Manager for International Butterfly Park, standing at the entrance of the Butterfly Park Gift Shop with one of David's signs.

*Photo courtesy of David Junkin*



## Butterfly Kisses

Members of RGVCTMN convened at Frontera Audubon for a class on native plants and butterflies on Saturday, Oct 8th.

Gil Quintanilla gave a presentation then led a field trip through the Frontera thicket.

We were honored with the presence of last year's winners of the NABA Grand Prix, *Buck and Linda Cooper*.

Evidently, Linda was recognized as an old friend by a Red-bordered Pixie butterfly.

*Photo by Beth Wargo*

## ***NABA in Southern Living***

Mission, Texas, October 19, 2005 - The North American Butterfly Association (NABA) South Texas Chapter recently had the distinct honor of teaming with Southern Living magazine promoting the public enjoyment and conservation of butterflies in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas.

Southern Living's executive editor, Dianne Young, and senior photographer, Mark Sandlin joined many butterfly enthusiasts during a two-day tour visiting local points of interest. Mission native and Texas Master Naturalist, Gil Quintanilla, organized the comprehensive tour which included visits to the NABA International Butterfly Park, Bentsen World Birding Center in Mission, Quinta Mazatlan in McAllen, and Frontera Audubon in

Weslaco. Additionally, the tour group observed several residential butterfly gardens in Mission, McAllen, Pharr, and Weslaco.

Thousands of butterflies were tallied during the tour including South Texas specialties such as the Red Bordered-Pixie, Guava Skipper, Great Purple-Hairstreak, and the Mexican Bluewing. The article is expected to publish in the Southern Living October 2006 issue.

For more information, visit the North America Butterfly Association at [www.naba.org](http://www.naba.org) or contact Sue Sill, Butterfly Park director at (956) 583-9009.

**Gil Quintanilla**

## ***Wild Walk Outdoor Adventure***

The McAllen Chamber of Commerce recently hosted its annual "Wild Walk Outdoor Adventure" for elementary school children from all across the Valley. The educational event, held on October 6-7 at Archer Park in McAllen, gave participants an opportunity to see, smell, and touch insects, reptiles, and animals, learning first hand about our wonderful planet and the various creatures that inhabit it.

Arts and crafts booths, activities, hands-on learning centers, and Kid Fish tank were all a part of this wonderful two-day adventure. There were special guest appearances on both days from Mad Science of the RGV and the Texas State Aquarium's "Ocean in Motion". Also appearing were Tim Smith from News Channel 5 and Chad Sandwell from Action 4 News who explained weather patterns to hundreds of eager students.

The Wild Walk Outdoor Adventure, part of the Texas Tropics Nature Festival, attracted over 2500 school children. Over 20 animal and nature friendly organizations from across Texas and the Valley offered students and the community an appreciation for those not always admired creatures while providing an understanding of how we can share the planet.

TMN member, Yvonne Kautsch, served on the planning committee for Wild Walk and coordinated volunteers for the event.

**Yvonne Kautsch**





**The Backyard habitat Committee** visited South Padre Island on Monday, October 10th. The purpose of the visit was to locate and photograph public and private sites that use native plantings to attract wildlife. Selected photographs will be used in presentations and guides promoting our Backyard habitat Project. Members of the committee are shown here in the back yard of “Barbara’s House”, a Mecca for birders. Barbara is the lady in the blue shirt.



***You too  
can earn this  
Certificate!***

Found in a Bay  
side front yard.

## **CRP: working for the ocelot and other native species in South Texas**

June 1, 2005

Submitted by Karen Chapman, Environmental Defense

When Michael and Joanna Troppy started looking around for programs that would allow them to plant native grasses and brush on their Willacy County, Texas farmland, they first turned to the Conservation Reserve Program offered by the Farm Services Agency. Natural Resource Conservation Service District Conservationist Juan Peña traveled to their sorghum field to talk to them about what type of practice they could enroll the property in to start putting some native vegetation back. Joanna and Mike are active in wildlife conservation in their area, and their daughter has become a local bird expert. Because of their interest in conservation, Juan recommended they enroll the field in the wildlife habitat practice (CP 4d) and helped them decide which native grasses and forbs they should plant. The Troppys wanted to enroll just a fraction of the field initially, reserving the remaining portion for later enrollment the following year.

Around the same time, the Troppys received a phone call from Karen Chapman, a representative with Environmental Defense (ED), a national conservation organization working with private landowners to establish wildlife habitat on lands that might be used by native and endangered species. Chapman had heard from a colleague that the Troppys might be able to spread the word about a new program Environmental Defense was offering in the area, and perhaps be willing to serve as an example to other landowners. The ED program – called the Landowner Conservation Assistance Program – interested the Troppys because it offered to help with the costs of establishing native seedlings. They sat down with Chapman - ED's South Texas private lands representative, and began to explore their options. It soon became clear that the project would be most effective as a collaborative effort between the USDA, ED and the Troppys, and all four sat down to discuss details of how the effort would work. The Nature Conservancy of Texas would eventually be brought in as well, for their expertise in native seedling germination and planting.

In Fall 2004, under their new CRP contract, the Troppys planted 7 acres of former sorghum field in native grasses, like four-wing saltbush, Alamo switchgrass, green sprangletop and plains bristlegrass. Two months later, a team from the Nature Conservancy, under contract to Environmental Defense, manually planted some 2,000 native thornscrub seedlings on the same 7 acres in motts amongst the native grasses.

Thornscrub once dominated parts of the South Texas ecological landscape, and species like the now endangered ocelot and jaguarundi (secretive, nocturnal cats), as well as birds like green jays and altamira orioles, thrived in the humid brush country. Thornscrub consists of shrubby, thorny vegetation that when mature forms a dense thicket rather inhospitable to humans but loved by wildlife, and includes species like granjeno (spiny hackberry), desert olive, lantana, lotebush, crucita, fiddlewood and mesquite.

The Troppys are also interested in providing habitat for the bobwhite quail, so the planting incorporated a pattern of motts and open grasslands, with cover and food sources supplied from both the forbs and fruits from the native seedlings.

In follow up monitoring conducted in April 2005, an estimated 80% of the seedlings have survived so far

*(Continued on page 9)*



(Continued from page 8)

and the native grasses have established well. The native grasses help to provide a hospitable environment for the native seedlings, modifying the microenvironment, blocking desiccating winds, and cooling the soil. The native seedlings are slow growing and take some time to establish. Mid-contract maintenance for the project will likely include some herbicide control of non-native grasses along the perimeter and adjacent ditches, as these can quickly spread and out-compete the natives.

Revegetation of thornscrub is not a new practice in South Texas: the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has been in the business of restoring habitat on public lands for several decades and has significant expertise. In the early 90's, the Nature Conservancy of Texas began working with private landowners to restore habitat, but the program was not continued over the long term. Today, CRP provides a number of avenues for private landowners to restore habitat, and many are taking advantage of these avenues. Environmental Defense is also working with the state FSA, NRCS regional representatives and others to write a Rare and Declining Habitat standard for the South Texas region that will help assist with the cost of planting native thornscrub under the CRP, as well as native grasses. In this way, the cost share will be distributed among the landowner, Environmental Defense, and the Farm Services Agency.

Ultimately, the survival of species like the ocelot will depend on the targeted stewardship of private landowners. The CRP is an important element in helping to ensure that stewardship is affordable, and it can work well in collaboration with other conservation programs, as long as it can be implemented with flexibility and responsiveness to changing times and changing landowner priorities.



### ***Vine Sphinx Caterpillar***

Frank Wiseman, TMN, took the photo of the caterpillar at left in Hugh Ramsey Nature Park in Harlingen, TX on Sept. 7, 2005. It was tentatively identified as a Sphinx Moth caterpillar. To make sure, he sent a copy to an expert, Bill Oehlke, who lives on Prince Edward Isle, CA. Oehlke maintains an online database of moths.

Not only did he identify it as a Vine Sphinx Moth, but he asked Frank's permission to use it on his site!

It won't be up for a while, but his site is worth a visit. The portion for Texas moths is:

<http://www.silkmoths.bizland.com/Txsphinx.htm>

Good work, Frank!



Vine Sphinx Moth—gemstone.blurty.com

## ***Texas Master Naturalist Program Wins Award***

WASHINGTON - The Texas Master Naturalist program was honored today (*Sept 30th*) with The Take Pride in America award at ceremonies here. The award was in the state programs category.

Texas Master Naturalists is a joint effort of Texas Cooperative Extension and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. The program develops "master volunteers" at local levels to provide education,

outreach and service for the management of natural resources and natural areas.

The program's high number of volunteer hours and impact on the state's wildlife and native plants were among the reasons cited for the award.

Since its establishment in 1998, the naturalist volunteer program has provided more than 334,000 hours of service, valued at more than \$3.38 million, according to Michelle Haggerty, program coordinator. That has

resulted in enhancing 75,000 acres of wildlife and native plant habitat, reaching more than 530,800 people and discovering a new plant species, she said.

The Take Pride in America initiative was created by the U.S. Department of the Interior as a partnership between federal, state and local governments and various groups "dedicated to instilling a sense of volunteerism and good stewardship in all public land users," according to the entity's Web site.

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