



The CHACHALACA

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ED SEZ

As some of you know, Beth and I left on an extended trip back in April. We spent a month in Jacksonville, Fla where my daughter and her family live. While there, we volunteered at a National Park Service historical site, Kingsley Plantation. It was a slave-supported plantation and we had to deal with some sensitive questions. We both gained some insight into NPS interpretation goals and methods.

I can't say there was a "party line" but there was an emphasis on factual, but neutral, content. It was an interesting and informative experience. We enjoyed it very much, and may do it again next year. No volunteer credit, though.

We stopped at several nature and historical sites from Florida to Nova Scotia and one thing was evident everywhere: Volunteers are necessary and appreciated. Most of the sites we visited could not stay open without volunteers. We met lots of them. They liked what they were doing and it showed in their presentations.

The RGVCTMN listserv kept us informed of chapter activities and we are pleased to see so much going on. The new class hit the ground running with almost half of them being certified upon graduation. The old-timers continued to support the old efforts, such as Ramsey Park and acquire new activities, eg the Harlingen Museum Nature Month. I had to add two pages to this issue to get everything in.

We still have the round of Fall fests to get through and we're looking forward to joining you in them when we get back. Not to mention getting the next class recruited and underway.

See you in October.

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.

Officers

President	Linda McGonigle
Vice President	Frank Wiseman
Administrative Secretary	Deanna Schaeffer
Treasurer	Alice Peters
Standing Committees	
Education/Adv. Training	Donna Berry
Projects	Tim Colglazier
Public Relations / Communications	
	Joe Lee Rubio
Newsletter	Leo Garrett

The Officer listing (above) is the slate for the upcoming election.

It is doubtful any new nominees will arise.

Should you desire to fill an office, send your name to the president via email by August 5th so a ballot may be printed, or submit your name from the floor at the August meeting. — Leo

Prez Sez—All Ya Gotta Do Is... Act Naturally

HELP. Most of us panic when we use that word or "think" panic when we see it. In looking at the term in a different perspective and visiting Mr. Webster for further clarification, I'm finding that the term PROMOTE (to change for the better) is what I will think of when I use the term "help". Why? Not too long ago, I asked several of our chapter members to "help" serve on the nominating committee. This task was important and vital to our organization in keeping our mission. "Help", they did, as they called many and informed and answered questions about the duties of officers and committee chairs. Yes, promotion was in full swing. Promoting from within is the best way to keep an organization strong in order to be more successful in external promotion (spreading the word about RGVCTMN and recruiting for new classes). A big THANKS to those who "helped/promoted" to create the slate of officers and to those who were willing to "help/promote" on the Board of Directors.

Much gratitude goes to numerous chapter members and other BOD this last year, especially the last 6 months for promoting (launching. contributing to growth) the offices I held. The support I received enabled confidence and capability to accomplish necessary tasks and furthered a sense of pride and admiration in leading a most worthy organization.

During the vocabulary research process, I found the word "promise" (to engage to do. bring about, or provide) above "promote". In context with the promotion with our organization's committees, I thought this went hand and hand. It is never too late to promote any of the parts of our chapter which contribute to the overall functions of our group. As Leo says, "If you can't solve the problem, create one you can."

Stay tuned to the List serve for Chapter activities: volunteer, advanced training, and social. I realize to some that the list serve might be annoying with an inundation of messages, but this is the life-line to the Chapter. It doesn't take any longer to read these than the funny jokes forwarded in mass. If you delete without reading them you won't have 7 years of bad luck, but you will miss many opportunities to "promote", learn, and make new friends. Many do not attend the monthly meetings, and this is the most effective way to keep in touch and "promote".

Did I mention the Harlingen Birding Festival? It is not too early to start gearing up for Nov. 10-13. Our Chapter needs promoters (volunteers) for the festival and perhaps for some of the tours. Join in the FUN as a participant for tours, listener for the expertise of speakers on hand and man the Chapter booth to promote. The HBF is a fabulous event and we are so fortunate to have it in our Chapter territory and that's because WE live in a fabulous place, envied by many all over the world as each year we are invaded by hoards wanting to see our valley.

This column is getting almost as "windy" as *Emily*, so I must part with a "promise" to continue to "promote" our Chapter mission and those who need any kind of promotion, just as I continue to receive unconditional generous promotion from RGVCTMN.

Naturally submitted, Linda McGonigle RGVCTMN - President

CLASS OF 2005 GRADUATES!

Classes for the 2005 Spring Training were held at two locations this year in an attempt to offer training at both ends of our geographical region. The Upper Valley class was conducted under the direction of Marisa Oliva and held at the Edinburg World Birding Center. Harlingen Chamber of Commerce was the location for the Lower Valley Class with Donna Berry, Education Chair in charge of that area.

Spring Training was attended by 37 apprentice members with 30 completing all the class requirements. Our chapter certified 15 new members at our May graduation and one member completed the requirements and certified at our June meeting. Trainees will be awarded certification upon completion of all their requirements and pins

will be given at our general meetings throughout the year.

Our yearly certification and recertification meeting will be held at the Harlingen Library on Tuesday evening, January 10, 2006 at 7:00 p.m.

Each year we award the title of Outstanding Volunteer to the trainee that achieves the most volunteer hours of all the trainees. This year we awarded one for each of the the training classes. Cathy Budd of the Harlingen Class and David Junkin of the Edinburg Class were the recipients of these outstanding volunteer awards. Each received an engraved and framed picture of our RGVCTMN chachalaca emblem.



These members of the Class of 2005 Attended the Graduation Ceremonies at Los Ebanos Preserve on May 10, 2005

Front Row L-R: Chad Wilmoth, Jennifer Liston, Ariel King, Sue Budd, Mary Olivares, Anitra DeMoss

Middle Row L-R: Statira Wilmoth, Alice Peters, Stand in Pic for Beth-Michele Wargo, Connie Garcia, Catherine Budd, Joyce Hamilton, Ginger Byram, Juan Bonnin

Back Row L-R: Lauro Solis, Tommy Peters, Sherman Lee, Alta Monroe, Suzanne M. Ostos, David Benn, Diana Rucker, Oscar Tagle

Volunteers Maintain Partial Schedule in Ramsey Park

By Frank Wiseman, Christina Mild & Diann Ballesteros

Our work in Ramsey Park in Harlingen over the past few months has been hampered a bit by construction work by the city and Peacock Construction. The park is receiving a facelift in many ways: new birding blinds and outlooks, a new bathroom and an educational pavilion. Hard-topped trails are being introduced along with improvements in the parking lot. At present, unsightly scarring from recent construction is abundant.

Gates have been locked and the park has been closed to the public, so it's been more difficult for RGVCTMN volunteers to maintain their twice-a-week work schedule. However, we've diligently maintained revegetated areas around the caliche loop and along some areas of the upper mown trail, with a steady watering schedule. Our hard workers deserve their due and a pat on the back from our chapter members. Our thanks go out especially to Dick and Sharon Roesler, Christina Mild, Ginger Byram, Kathy Sheldon and especially to our treasurer Diann Ballesteros, who has made sure that many of the areas have been supplied with needed water to survive over this hot and dry summer. We've received only 2 significant showers at Ramsey Park over summer. Months prior to the construction, we added approximately 50 plants and watering was crucial to their survival.

Seasonal changes during 2005 have brought us new understanding about revegetation and the park's inhabitants. During and after the very cold days surrounding Christmas, rats and rabbits were apparently ravenous. We were forced to construct and install protective cages around new transplants. Little growth occurred in the park during that cold season.

Spring brought a resurgence of growth and abundant food for animals. At that time, we were able to plant previously-rescued specimens to create the Tom Wilson Memorial Butterfly Garden. We also received a large donation of plants from Mike Heep's Native Plant Nursery. These were planted as an interior bird-food corridor extending between the Wilson Garden and an old birding blind. Regular watering has resulted in rapid growth for those new plantings.

As summer warmth became dreadful heat, we began to work much earlier or later to avoid the sun. Texas Tortoises were frequently sighted. One was observed eating the prolific Widow's Tears (*Commelina erecta*).

At least 3 species of *Commelina* occur in the park and all are rapid growers when moisture is available. Several colonies have needed relocation away from heavily-watered areas. We're planting them near tortoise hang-outs.

Because guinea grass has been virtually eliminated from the main caliche loop, many of the park's shrubs and trees have shown rapid, recent growth. We are providing deep-root watering to fruiting trees and shrubs to increase available food supply for frugivorous birds. A few of the Texas Persimmon trees are already providing ripened fruit, very early in the

season.

Water pressure and availability and sprinkler cost and malfunction have been frequent problems. Addition of new water lines and connections by the city has helped considerably. (If you're ready to replace hoses, we can always use the older ones!)

Most of the sprinkler models we've tried in the past have broken quickly, blasted plants out of the ground, failed to oscillate, etc. Ginger Byram is responsible for introducing a new type of sprinkler to the park, one which requires only minimal water pressure to function. This type of rotary sprinkler (photo below) has no breakable gears. So far, we've been pleased with how consistently and well it functions. It's rarely available in local stores, however, and costs between \$15 and \$20.

RGVCTMN volunteers hope to receive more help in the near future through the Harlingen Parks' Dept. They have applied for and received a half-million dollar grant for upkeep, maintenance and new projects for the park. We're creating a list of priorities regarding how the city can best assist us in continuing to revegetate and educate.

Frank Wiseman's meticulous record-keeping (regarding RGVCTMN volunteer activities in the park) was instrumental to the city in securing and validating that grant.

The city hopes to have a grand opening in the near future and RGVCTMN members will help to represent that day. More news on all of the future events will be forthcoming as the fall season approaches.



May, Nature Month at RGV Museum

by Christina Mild

RGVCTMN volunteers proved essential to May, Nature Month at Harlingen's Rio Grande Valley Museum.

As volunteer curator for that event, I'd like to thank everyone who helped. Many of those volunteers need special mention.

Diann Ballesteros helped from day one of the "planning" stage until the final "hurrahs." I'm most appreciative of her participation in contacting speakers, suggesting children's activities, procuring inflatable snakes, orchestrating the native plant sale, setting up displays, introducing speakers and running equipment. Any of you who know Diann well can guess at the hundred other ways she helped out.

Joyce Hamilton grabbed the reins on collecting and packaging native plant seeds for sale packets. Since native plant seeds with local "provenance" are rarely available, the seed she provided was a valuable resource. Joyce took charge of introducing speakers and managing equipment for the exhibit's opening weekend. It's wonderful to know that you've left things in the hands of a capable professional.

Frank Wiseman presented his PowerPoint creation on developing a backyard (and front yard) habitat, which was one of the best-attended presentations. Frank helped us with publicity, which is always an under-appreciated and essential task.

Gil Quintanilla (y familia) introduced their audience to a love and appreciation for butterfly watching/gardening. It's hard to find something more enjoyable than Gil's photography and presentation style.

Thinking about Gil's presentation brought home the fact that

the RGV Museum has very few plants which bring wildlife to the museum grounds. (Yes, I've had several discussions with museum personnel and volunteers regarding this point.) An RGV Museum Association officer wanted to title the month "The LRGV Nature Experience." I couldn't lie sufficiently to follow that suggestion. The experience of nature isn't found inside a museum, after all.

Bob Stelzer provided wildflower seed, posters and miscellanea from the closing of "Wild Bird Center" in Harlingen. Kathy Sheldon periodically checked on the status of "give-away" maps, wildflower seed and pamphlets, re-stocking them as needed.

Ginger Byram returned unsold plants to Mike Heep's nursery. Many RGVCTMN members helped with execution of the sale, pick-up of plants and especially with purchasing plants. This was an excellent fundraiser for RGVCTMN and local citizens have asked me when the sale will be repeated.

Donna Berry provided the "Bat Cave" and other components of the bat education display. It was a favorite of many visitors.

An incredible number of school children visited the museum during May on school fieldtrips. The beautiful photographs exhibited by Mike Hannisian and Suzanne Hertzing gave many of those children their first glimpse of animals one encounters in this unique part of the world.

The museum board has tendered the idea of repeating May Nature Month. I'd rather spend my time escorting children (or adults) around Ramsey Nature Park, or any of the other wild places along Harlingen's Arroyo Colorado hike-and-bike trail. Photographs and stuffed-animals are pretty, but an actual "nature experience" is far more valuable.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR TMN ANNUAL MEETING

Several volunteers are still needed to assist with the Statewide Meeting and Advanced Training coming up later in October. Thank you to the dozens of you that already responded. However, more volunteers are still needed.

This year's annual event will be held October 21-23, 2005 at MO Ranch in Hunt, TX.

All Annual Meeting volunteers will receive a special gift and recognition at the Annual Meeting.

Call/Email Michelle Haggerty (mhaggerty@wfscgate.tamu.edu)
to sign up or to obtain more details as they become available.

Want to Make A Difference?

Last month a notice was sent out asking if anyone was interested in becoming a bat rehabber in South Texas since the one and only rehabber in South Texas was no longer available. After doing some research on what was required I thought I'd pass on the opportunity to our membership. The first question I asked was: Do I have to be a biologist or have a science or medical degree to do this? I was given an emphatic NO – which I found very encouraging since I have neither! Despite this being their busiest time, Amanda Lollar was very eager to talk about what they do and how I could become a rehabber. She was ready to sign me up as someone that would transport bats to rehabbers in other areas for care.

There is an organization in North Texas that offers training for taking care of injured and orphaned bats. They have a program called **BAT WORLD BOOTCAMP** that they hold each summer. We are too late to do this year's training but maybe with a little thoughtful planning and funding some of us could sign up for next year's program. We could really make a difference!

Requirements: Proof of rabies immunization and a completed agreement/waiver.

Cost: \$595.00, prepaid and non-refundable (unless the workshop is canceled by the Bat World Organization). Trainees are responsible for their travel, room and board expenses.

Check this organization out on the web: www.batworld.org

If you are traveling through Mineral Wells, Texas the Bat World Sanctuary is located at 217 North Oak Ave.

How our birds catch their dinner..... by Sean Smith

The waterbirds at Edinburg Wetlands get their food by many different foraging methods. By carefully watching the birds behavior, (birds are very active of course, but what at first appears aimless is usually a feeding technique or other interesting behavior), Some familiar ducks like Blue-winged Teal and Northern Shoveler primarily eat emergent vegetation or feed by "tipping" their bodies upside down, like an underwater handstand, or in this case a "beakstand" with their "bottom" sticking up above the waterline. These species are often referred to collectively as "puddle ducks" or "dabblers".

Other ducks, again seen primarily in our cooler months, are known as diving ducks or "divers". These birds submerge completely underwater, catching small fish or invertebrates, propelled by the most part by powerful strokes of their feet. Ruddy Ducks and Lesser Scaup are the most obvious examples of divers found in our wetlands.

Unlike ducks, grebes have only "lobed", not webbed feet, but the legs are short and situated near their rear end giving these aquatic birds quick underwater propulsion, much like a submarine. The feet serve as paddles and the birds feed on fish, frogs and invertebrates. Our larger Pied-billed Grebes are often in deeper water feeding on fish and the smaller Least Grebe tends to take more invertebrates. Both can quietly slip underwater in less than a blink of the eye. Grebes also have been observed silently gliding underwater and then bursting from the surface and snatching hovering dragonflies....no mean feat. Grebes also eat their own feathers and feed feathers to their young. Although this behavior is still largely a mystery, many believe the feathers help line the stomach and aid in the digestion of bony fish.

Long-legged herons and egrets, for the most part, patiently wait to strike at their fish, amphibian and crawfish prey, although Great Blue Herons are extremely opportunistic and will use their dagger-like bill to kill practically anything handy. They have been observed taking mice, ducklings, and even muskrat. Snowy Egrets and Little Blue Herons will actively chase food and sometimes canopy their wings to create a shadow that attracts fish. Perhaps the most ingenious method of herons capturing fish is occasionally performed by Green and Black-crowned night-Herons.....



Jesus Franco examines a bat caught during the mist netting field trip for Class 2005. This exercise is part of our curriculum and is fun as well as informative. You don't have to be a new trainee to participate, either.— Leo

CLATHRUS CRISPUS



Your nose will detect this mushroom before your eyes locate it even with its striking color and wiffleball/ watermelon appearance. This is the third season for its discovery in my front yard.

Always appearing near or within the limbs of asparagus ferns I grow prolifically. First time discovered I was seeking the decaying body of some unseen creature only to come upon this oddity.

It, of course, does not fit into my idea of mushroom (thinking along the lines of my Illinois morel mushroom prized for its delicious flavor) but if you look closely at the picture you will find a fly decidedly interested in its taste.

Christina Mild featured this particular mushroom in her Valley Morning Star column some months back, which removed the notion from my mind that it was some sort of fungus. Terry Fuller writes: "A very modified **stinkhorn mushroom** with slime on the inside to attract flies. We have had it, at times abundantly, in shady areas with leaf litter. Apparently a southern and island species." Terry did include a "MushroomExpert.com" address if you would care to see other similar mushrooms in this family.

Submitted: Deanna Schaeffer

Spring at Edinburg Scenic Wetlands/World Birding Center

Compiled by Sean Smith

By mid-April things are literally and figuratively heating up at EWBC with migration in full swing. Bird-wise things have really been “taking off” at the center. Some interesting observations have included male Hooded, Baltimore and singing Orchard Orioles, male Scarlet Tanager and Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Swainson’s Thrush and Blue Grosbeak. Black & White, Tennessee, Northern Waterthrush and Nashville Warblers as well as singing Yellow Warblers have been spotted by patient observers. Vying for highlights of the season so far were 3 gorgeous male Painted Buntings, a Purple Gallinule and a Least Bittern found a few days apart at the dragonfly pond. The first Least Terns were seen in mid-April. Occasional migrating hawks pass overhead including Swainson’s, Broad-winged and Mississippi Kites. Several displaying Black-chinned and Buff-bellied Hummingbirds, along with an occasional migrant Ruby-throated, have been seen at the sugar-water feeders, flowers and in the dragonfly pond areas. There are a couple of rather poorly constructed Mourning Dove nests with sitting birds behind the dragonfly pond. And, the patient observer can almost always find Edinburg’s City Bird, the Green Kingfisher, quietly perched along our watercourses.

Many of our water birds have paired up and are nesting elsewhere so the morning and evening “changing of the guard” is not as spectacular as in winter. But at dusk the dayshift herons and egrets still come “home”. You can still see dozens, if not hundreds of egrets, coming into roost, while the night herons begin their evening wanderings with a loud “queearkk” as they leave the wetlands. Breeding Black-necked Stilts are often seen on the South Pond.

- Excellent comparisons of Neotropic & Double-crested Cormorants & the closely related Anhinga, or “Snakebird” can be had along the edges of the ponds. And the center is arguably the best place in Texas for close up looks of Least Grebes.
- The north pond is especially good for comparing both adult and 1st spring immature Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night-Herons.
- Pyrrhuloxia, Long-billed Thrasher, and Lesser Goldfinch often give especially confiding views along the center’s trails. Clay-colored, Lark and Lincoln’s Sparrows are less confiding, but present.

There are interesting things that do not fly....

Most people are pretty ho-hum about Eastern Cottontails, the most common rabbit around here – (we do occasionally see Black-tailed Jackrabbits). If you are very lucky you might see the cottontails engage in some fascinating, if intimate, mating behaviour. And, of course, you know rabbits are adept at mating! This far south they have 4-5 litters a year and females born early in the spring can breed by year’s end.

A mating pair of Eastern Cottontails performs an interesting ritual before copulation. This usually occurs after dark, but if you are here early in the morning, you might see a buck cottontail chasing the doe until she eventually turns and faces him. She then spars at him with her forepaws. They crouch, facing each other, until one of the pair leaps about 2 feet in the air. This behavior is repeated by both animals before mating. Instead of kissing, cottontails bounce!

Our “herps” are also extremely watchable. A Red-eared Slider turtle was observed laying eggs near the parking lot. One female slider may have several clutches of eggs per season and lay 5-25 eggs at a time. Being prolific is essential for turtles because the adults provide no support once the eggs are laid. Clutches normally hatch within 3 months, if the eggs survive that long. Because the eggs are buried on land, sometimes a considerable distance from water, both the eggs and young are susceptible to a host of terrestrial and aquatic predators. Although it is not a hard and fast rule, generally, eggs exposed to average temperatures higher than 83F become females and temps. lower than that, but not too low, yield males. Of course genetics still play a large role in determining sex. Other turtles commonly seen at the Wetlands include the prehistoric looking, lightening fast, pancaked-shaped Texas Spiny Softshell and the smaller Yellow Mud Turtle.

(Continued on page 9)

NORTH AMERICAN WOODPECKERS

An informative program on North American Woodpeckers was presented by David T. Daulphin of Mission, TX at the TMN July general meeting. Following is a summary of interesting detail presented to the audience of 52 members and guests.

Altogether, twenty-three species of woodpeckers can be found in North America, each of which features a chisel like bill used to collect insect food and create nest holes in addition to drumming a territorial signal to potential rivals, a neck mechanism designed to prevent brain damage during hammering, strong needle sharp claws and stiff tail feathers to help with balance. The drumming of the woodpecker is a notable species identifier according to Daulphin along with bird's call and color. Twenty-one of the species have 4 toes (two pointed forward and two back) while the other two species have 3 forward and a side 'thumb'.

It was pointed out that woodpecker species create a new cavity/roosting hole each season. Other birds benefit from this particular nesting habit, moving into a prebuilt home provided by the woodpecker in a prior season.

Mr. Daulphin presented, in addition to the numerous crisp photos, audio sounds and drummings of various woodpeckers. Along with identification of species and whether male or female, David pointed to specific U.S. locations for the species. It should be noted per Daulphin, that many a birder comes to the RGV to see our Golden Fronted Woodpecker, which is found only in Texas and usually no further north than the Brazos River.

A few of the provided photos included Black Creeper, Red Headed, Acorn, Nuttall, Red Bellied, Ladderback, Nut Olive, Downey, Hairy, Three-toed, Red Culcoid, Strickland, White Headed and in addition several of the Sapsuckers such as the Yellowbellied, Red Naped, Red Breasted and Williamson. Photos were also shown of the Pileated and the Ivory Billed concluding with discussion of the length of body and wingspans of these two large birds. A very enjoyable evening of photos and pertinent information. I will also take some space here to encourage all to locate the July-August issue of Audubon magazine, which features the Rachel Dickinson article about the rediscovery of the Ivory-billed woodpecker, a really great read. Dickinson's husband, Tim Gallagher, who authored the book "The Grail Bird: Hot on the Trail of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker", will be a featured speaker during the Harlingen Birding Festival November 9-13, 2005. Mark your calendar.

Submitted by **Deanna Schaeffer**

(Continued from page 8)

Mexican Ground Squirrels emerged from underground or at least became much more noticeable at the end of February. One of ten squirrel species found in Texas they are often active year round in the southern part of the state. They prefer dry, open areas but only hold territories of 500 square feet. Early in the spring they eat mostly green vegetation, and then with young around add more protein to their diet in the form of insects. But they also regular sample carrion, especially road-kill. Breeding takes place in late March and early April and now is the time to hear their distinctive high-pitched ringing trill but whether it's a warning or a "come-hither" is hard to say.

Diamond-backed Watersnakes are very active now, coursing pond edges and even swimming the breadth of the water. These aquatic reptiles don't seem to bother the birds. Diamond-backed eat small fish and amphibians and are *not* significant predators of game fish. But they have rather nasty temperaments; are numerous, relatively slow, and therefore noticeable, so they are often regarded negatively. Recent studies show their favorite prey to be small fish like sheepshead minnow and mosquito fish, as well as frogs, toads and salamanders. Interesting, studies show Diamond-backed feed by touch, sweeping their heads through the muddy water they prefer until "feeling" their prey. The reputation they do deserve, however, is their malevolence. Do not molest these snakes!

"Few other native snakes are as pugnacious as this one. Without warning, it strikes out viciously when cornered, its needle-like teeth creating a series of freely bleeding punctures or scratches. When handled it not only bites savagely but also discharges from it's cloacal opening a liberal amount of foul-smelling, glutinous material that it smears on its captors hands by twisting and thrashing. This often results in the snakes quick release".

Werler and Dixon, Texas Snakes



What's This?

RGVCTMN Members: Can you identify this amphibian?

If you think you know the name of this animal, please e-mail the correct reply to Donna at

gma2tex@sbcglobal.net.

The correct responses will be placed in a box and one correct entry will be drawn for a secret prize to be awarded at our Sept. meeting.

RGV CHAPTER, TEXAS MASTER
NATURALISTS

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