



The CHACHALACA

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ED SEZ

Wow! For what is usually a slack season, you folks have been busy!

Real tourism doesn't usually start down here until after Christmas, but you have kept busy with local projects. I am pleased to see more local outreach. School groups, local parks, and festivals really spread the word about Master Naturalists, who they are and what they do. As traffic on the list shows, opportunities are increasing daily.

And someone is listening. Donna Berry, Education Chair, tells us we have 28 new students signed up for the class that starts February 1st. That's a big class. People from all over the Valley have enrolled, from Mission to Port Isabel. When aspiring TMNs are willing to drive that many miles, we must have something they want.

The group is diverse, but as with the past classes, they already have an interest in nature and conservation. One, for instance, is an NAI Certified Interpreter seeking local knowledge and background. Others have been volunteering on their own with nature groups. Some are family members of current TMNs. "Resistance is futile."

The course of instruction is somewhat special this year, also. One of the basic tenets of the TMN system is that, one day, the training wheels come off. This class is a giant step in that direction. Donna, and her committee, have arranged the course so that almost all the lessons will be given by local experts. Some are TMNs, some are professionals in conservation or biology. We will be using Valley resources for Valley people. This will reduce the load on our sponsoring activities so they can help other new chapters.

The best complement to the course of instruction will be mentors. Consider whether you can take one of these new students under your wing. We need to make it easy for field experience to reinforce classroom exposition. Think about it.

Leo Garrett, Editor

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

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Vice President	Frank Wiseman
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Recording Secretary	Mary Bindner
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Education/Adv. Training	Donna Berry
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Native trees available

I have planted many native tree seedlings and would like to offer them for free to any Master Naturalist. The only condition is that you plant them and use them. I have many Ebony tree seedlings, Sabal palm seedlings, and a few other native trees as well. They are in 1 gallon containers and are ready to go. Please contact me in San Benito at 399-8344 or e-mail me at jambenn9@aol.com to arrange a time to pick them up. As an extra bonus, many of the containers also contain other native plants that have sprouted up as well, such as pigeon berry or wild flowers. Now is the time to plant so if you have a project that calls for native trees, please contact me.

Drew Bennie, Texas Master Naturalist

Prez Sez—Hello 2006!

2006 Greetings, but what happened to 2005? By the way, that goes for January as well! Time flying reminds me that I'd better get on track with my new goals (resolutions). Since this is **2006**, I thought I could possibly stick with the number **6**, since it didn't seem to overwhelming, but more than minimal. I will make that number my mantra for all the things I hope to accomplish this year.

Some of my targets are:

Reading books about nature, learning new species of birds, butterflies, dragonflies, native plants, insects, etc

Bringing guests to our chapter meetings, visiting valley parks and preserves

Getting youth involved in nature,

Telling folks about our Chapter,

Planting native plants in my yard

Doing things in the nature world I've not done so far,

Volunteering at a variety of places

Six of each of these doesn't sound too difficult, but I'm sure that some will be much easier than others.

I did have the opportunity to read two books (only 4 more to go), one being **The Life History of a Texas Birdwatcher** by Karen Harden McCracken. This is a great read about Connie Hagar of Rockport who became a world renowned amateur birder. Not only did I learn about a jewel of a lady to the birding community, but picked up some knowledge about birds, their behaviors, history, and native plants. I found it difficult to put it down. I'm sure that some of you have read it, especially birders, and agree that it is a good pick! I also had a great opportunity to visit the Connie Hagar bird sanctuary in Rockport just this last weekend. Thousands of ducks and many shore birds were in abundance on site. I've been past this location many times in my life, but after reading the book, I finally stopped there with binoculars to observe.

It is time for our new class of trainees to begin their work as future TMNs. The schedule of classes will be as interesting and informative as ever. As of last count, I believe it was up to 28! Our Chapter is growing rapidly and that's good news for us and for our community. If you know any of the new trainees, please help them feel comfortable and encourage them to come with you to volunteer somewhere. Opportunities abound, for every kind of subject and cause in the natural world, especially as OUR valley is rapidly becoming a nature hotspot worldwide (although we knew it all along).

Its always fun to volunteer with at least one other buddy, so if it's a new trainee or just a veteran chapter member, make it happen! Maybe I will organize a volunteer group of **6**. After each work session, a different person in the group will get a chance to pick a place to eat. Just think, **6** new places to eat! I could even try **6** new things to eat!!! This **6** thing could be pretty exciting.

Naturally speaking,

Linda McGonigle - RGVCTMN, pres.

PROJECT WET WATER EDUCATION FOR TEACHERS

Our chapter sponsored a two day Project WET workshop for formal and non-formal educators.

Rhonda Artho, State Coordinator for Project WET, came from North Texas to hold the workshop for us. Her employer, North Texas Groundwater District, generously paid her travel expenses to the Rio Grande Valley so that we could have the workshop in our backyard.

We have some folks to thank for making this workshop a reality. First, a big thank you to the Olmito Water Supply Corp. for buying the curriculum guides for everyone that attended the workshop making the workshop available to interested educators for free. Thanks to Tommie Ellium for providing a Discover Kid's Book about the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Watershed to each person that attended the workshop. Thanks also to The Nature Conservancy for providing a place for the workshop and housing Rhonda Artho.



Photo courtesy of Jimmy Paz

How many TMNs?

All those familiar faces belong to Folks who are prepared to teach others about the Rio Grande Watershed and its importance to the Valley.

RGVCTMN Plans New Butterfly Garden in Ramsey Park

This past fall of 2005 the volunteers of Ramsey Park decided to develop a new area in which to plant a new butterfly garden. The area selected was covered with old palm trunks and fronds, concrete spoils and general waste of old plant trimmings.

The area was cleared of all the detritus and then marked off as to what we would use as the planting area. Ginger Byram, our Ramsey Committee Chair, was in charge of our group of volunteers to arrange to get details and ideas from all members as to what we would plant in the area. Volunteers have included Christina Mild, Diann Ballesteros, Sharon and Dick Roesler, Frank Wiseman, Liisa Matson, Kathy Sheldon, Sherman Lee, and Tommy Peters and some local citizens.

Our first order of business was to clear out a brick pile left over from a Boy Scout project. Tommy, Dick, and Frank took care of this chore on the last day of 2005. Then the following weekend Tommy Peters brought in his roto-tiller to till the whole garden area that was marked off to be planted.

Our next order of business was to ask Sherman Lee to bring in his tractor and front-end loader to haul some good mulch to cover the whole planting area. This was accomplished in record speed of about 5 hours work. Once Sherman

had dumped the piles of mulch all over the area, our faithful volunteers spread the mulch with rakes and shovels.

What a difference some hard work does to make a bad and neglected spot looking great. This will now be another of our bright spots for butterfly watching in Ramsey Park. This area is located along the south edge of the Caliche Trail, called Ebony Loop. It is near the water feature known as Owl Pond and the newly built bird blind.

Our group is now in the process of acquiring the plants for this area from Mike Quinn. The planting of 15 donated plants was done during the 3rd week of January. We hope the rest of the plants will be installed by February first.

We invite all of our members to come out and enjoy the fruits of our labors and to see the many species of butterflies that will soon be winging their way thru our area on their annual migration. Also come and watch our plants grow and prosper. The area will be a walk-thru garden with each plant identified with its own signage.

Come out and enjoy spring in the Rio Grande Valley and some of its plants and butterflies. Well, birds will be there also.—**Frank Wiseman**



Sherman Lee delivers mulch to Kathy Sheldon. Can she *really* use two wheelbarrows at one time?

All photos courtesy of Frank Wiseman



Above: Tommy & Dick having fun with a tiller. **Below:** Volunteers spread mulch.

Naturalists Lead Field Trips

From November, 2005 to January 2006 the RGVCTMN sponsored several plant field trips to both private and public properties.

On November 3rd our group of leaders, Christina Mild, Frank Wiseman, and Diann Ballesteros led its first tour of the newly re-opened Harlingen Thicket. We are also helped on these tours by Sharon and Dick Roesler who help field questions from the ones who lag behind the group. This piece of pristine arroyo brush property lies within the city limits of Harlingen off Taft St. Here we guided a group of 30 through the newly granite graveled-topped trails and also thru some of the more densely unmarked trails. The group was told about the history of this property and how it was saved from urban development by the efforts of the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival a few years back in the 90s. The Thicket offers an immense variety of native plants in their natural setting. Nothing has been planted by modern man in this area except for dumping the exotic African kalanchoes that are very invasive.

On November 5th our group led another expedition to the Arroyo Colorado edge property of James and Georgiana Matz. Their property is located along the arroyo north from Rio Hondo. This smaller group included mostly RGVCTMN members and was accompanied by our steadfast supporter and native plant expert, Dr. Alfred Richardson.

Richardson is the author of two native plant books . The visits to the Matz property are always a treat because we try to venture forth at different seasons of the year in order to enjoy the uniqueness of the plants at their different growing and blooming stages.

On December 6th we led a group of mostly winter Texans thru the Arroyo Park environs. This property also is native arroyo brush and is on the very edge of the banks of the arroyo along the Hike and Bike Trail. Our winter Texans seem very eager to learn more about our area and the plant and bird life that exists in this area.

On January 5th we led a group of winter Texans and local citizens thru C.B. Woods Park in Harlingen. We were faced with such a large group this time that we divided them into Winter Texans and Local Residents. Christina Mild took the Winter Texans one way and Diann Ballesteros, Frank Wiseman, Sharon and Dick Roesler and Liisa Matson took the local group thru the park in another direction. This worked out really well as we got to talk to the locals about their concerns for native plants in their own back yards, so to speak. They had abundant questions and learned from our interpretive tour guides. C.B. Woods is a wonderful little unknown native arroyo brush park at the end of Wilson Street in Harlingen and is also a location to one of the entrances of the Hike and Bike Trail.

The RGVCTMN sponsors the monthly tours to the Harlingen area native plant parks from October thru April each year. We invite all the general public and especially any members of our organization to participate. The tours are held on the first Thursday of each month at 9:00 a.m. and last for two hours. - **Frank Wiseman**

Front of a Student Thank You Card

The inside is on the
back panel

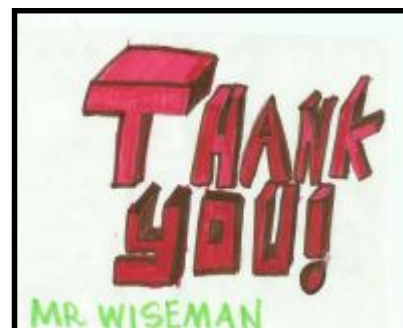




Photo courtesy Frank Wiseman

Sue Rubio Ardila, Winner of the Butterfly Garden Raffle is shown between Dick and Sharon Roesler who visited the winner's home in Los Fresnos to help plan her new butterfly garden.



Diann Ballesteros

Earns

Gold Dragonfly!

Diann (L) earned her new pin by completing 1000 Volunteer Hours.

Donna Berry presented the award during the recertification ceremony at the January meeting.

Photo courtesy of Frank Wiseman

TMN Hosts Nature Tour for Long Elementary Students

December 19th, '05 was a blistery, windy sort of morning when our group of TMN nature guides awaited the buses from Harlingen's Long Elementary School to arrive for their tour of Harlingen's Ramsey Nature Park. Our tour guides were Sharon and Dick Roesler, Frank Wiseman, Diann Ballesteros, Ginger Byram, Cortney Mild and Christina Mild.

About 9:00 a.m. the group of happy and rambunctious students descended the buses and met us at the new pavilion area in the park. Christina Mild gave the students and adult chaperons a few introductory remarks, introduced their teacher, Mrs. Leslie Wilder, to our group of tour guides, and then Mrs. Wilder divided the students into groups by grade levels and assigned each group to tour leaders.

These smaller groups were led off in different directions so as to crisscross later in the morning. We all started off with our jackets and gloves tightly wrapped around us, but as the morning wore on and the walking, looking and explaining took place, we started peeling off layers of outer clothing. Thanks to a good weather prediction, the morning turned out to be beautiful, clear and warming.

Our groups discovered plants, shrubs, trees and vines and saw birds and butterflies. One particular vine they really liked was our Balloon Vine. They thought that was a really neat vine. We found evidence of a turtle shell, beetles and ants, other insects and the like. These all fit into their studies of nature for the class project they were accomplishing. They actually learned a few plant names along the way and commented later on how "cool" these plants were. One group decided to climb a pile of new mulch and have their photo taken as though conquering a hill in the park. The kids had a great time!!!

For most of the students getting down close to the waters of the Arroyo Colorado was a highlight. Many had never thought about the old river that runs through Harlingen as actually being an important part of our Valley's landscape. The students gathered dry seeds from different plants and took them into the north part of the park to plant. This was a new and exciting venture for them also. They realized that they might actually be contributing to new plant growth.

We bid them all goodbye around 11:00 a.m. so they could continue on their day's science adventure that took them on to Santa Ana Wildlife Preserve.

Their teacher, Mrs. Leslie Wilder, had the students write thank you letters to our tour guides. Those were really appreciated. These were a very cleverly written and pictured thank you letters.

This is just one example of how we as Master Naturalists perform our outreach educational services to our schools. - **Frank Wiseman**

New Recording Secretary

Mary Bindner (mkbindner@hotmail.com) has taken up the challenge of Recording Secretary. She is lifting some of the load off Frank Wiseman and at the same time, helping spread the administrative burden onto newer members.

Reporting detail and time requirements have increased quite a bit since the first TMNs were certified, taking more time and attention. We are blessed that Mary stepped in.

On-line, as occurring reporting is out. Monthly reporting is in. If you are a computer user, the easy way is an en-of-month spreadsheet submission. If you don't use a computer, you can fax the report. Failing access to a fax machine, you can mail the report.

If are not on the Listserv, you already know this. If you're not, you should be.— **Leo Garrett**

TMN Members Invited to Tour Goat Island and Its Plants

Our new liaison TPWD sponsors, Sam Patten and Chris Wattenpool, invited the following RGVCTMN members on a scouting trip to Goat Island on Jan. 3rd. This "island" is really an old piece of native arroyo brush property that was formed when the Arroyo Colorado was dredged to form the ship channel into Rio Hondo. Part of the arroyo still flows around part of the property but is cut off from the main channel at one end that was dammed when the spoils of the dredged material was dumped to close it.

Goat Island is part of the La Paloma Preserve system, which encompasses several locations in Cameron County.

Our group was composed of Naturalists Max Pons, Dr. Alfred Richardson, Frank Wiseman, Kathy Sheldon, Diann Ballesteros, Christina Mild, Sharon and Dick Roesler and tour arranger Ginger Byram. We were met at the entrance to La Paloma Preserve where we transferred into four pickups with four wheel drive to make the trek to the back part of the preserve property.

Upon arrival, we disembarked and walked the trails around a 2 mile area. One of the highlights of this trip was to finally see a huge Guayacan tree. It must have been over 100 years old because of its height. We had never seen one that tall, about 25 feet. Another plant we had never seen in the wild was the Hachinal. It was growing quite well to a respectful height of 3 feet or so and full of its yellow blooms. The other usual native plants were seen, but one good example of the spring blooming *Eupatorium azureum* was evident in several places with a good start on its blooming season. We saw good examples of David's Milkberry and white lantana. A nice meadow of native grasses was one of the tranquil spots where we walked to view many of the edge trees such as the cedar elms.

At one point along the trail, Sam stopped to reload his trap camera, especially set up to try to catch any bob cats or ocelots who may venture thru that area. He asked if any of the ladies was carrying a perfume especially liked by these cats.

We thanked our drivers from TPWD and Sam and Chris for the opportunity to explore this seldom seen area in Cameron County. Sam and Chris have offered our chapter their full support in our endeavors to view more of the La Paloma Preserve's properties in their other locations in Cameron County.

In the near future our chapter can expect a field trip offer to one of the locations. - **Frank Wiseman**

What's This?

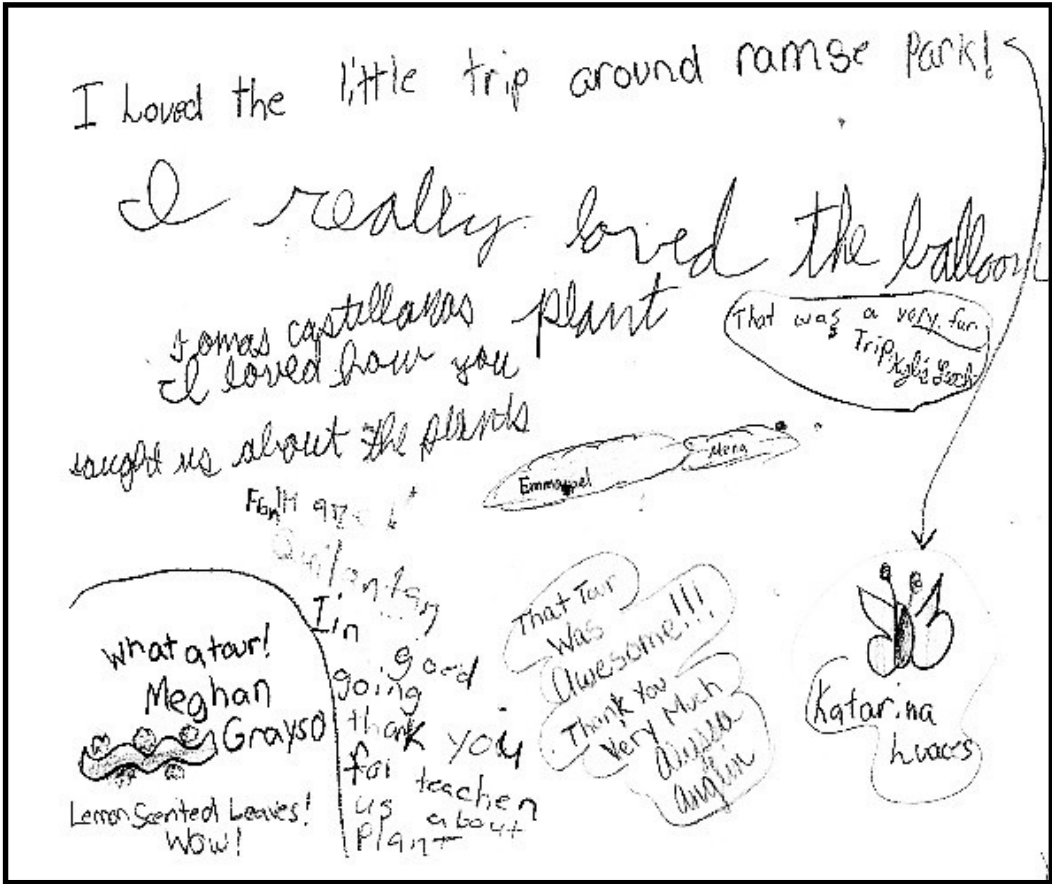
Submit replies to Donna Berry at DBerry@tnc.org



Digital Photo Class

There are still some openings at the Digital Photo Workshops held the 1st and 3rd Saturday's of Feb and March at the Edinburg WBC.

Anyone interested can contact EWBC for the details or to register.



Inside of Thank You sent by students after TMN field trip.

RGV CHAPTER, TEXAS MASTER
NATURALISTS

29842 Road 725
San Benito, Texas 78586

Phone: 956-399-3382
Email: lgarrett@avocadoflats.org