



The Chachalaca

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Marylou Davis

RGV TEXAS MASTER NATURALISTS

THIS CHAPTER IS AN AFFILIATE OF THE TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST PROGRAM JOINTLY SPONSORED BY TEXAS AGRILIFE EXTENSION AND THE TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT.

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President's Message *by Virginia Vineyard*

Hello, Master Naturalists,

On a trip north on 77, it is already evident that this is going to be a beautiful spring for wildflowers, and for the trophic levels that these plants support. Of course, just their beauty alone can inspire many to look at nature in a more meaningful way. I hope each of you will take time out of your busy schedules to walk, garden, go birding, fishing, kayaking, or just relax and renew. Take the opportunity to introduce someone to what it is that our chapter does, and tell him/her what it means to you. Each of you can make the difference. Our place in the world depends on it!

Virginia



2010 Class Plant Printing Session *photos provided by Antoinette Budd*





Signs on the Upper Arroyo Colorado

by Sharon Slagle

My husband and I monitor water quality in the Arroyo Colorado south of Alamo and Donna twice a month, and we have been dismayed by the amount of trash -- mostly convenience store refuse such as plastic bags, styrofoam cups, cans and bottles, but also occasional car tires and household appliances -- discarded at state highway bridges over the arroyo.

Learning of the situation, supportive Texas Department of Transportation officials agreed to post regulatory "No Dumping" signs at specific known dumping crossings, and TxDOT installed the first signs in January 2010 (see photo). TxDOT has also given the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Partnership (ACWP) permission to affix to the back of each of these signs a weatherproof decal with the name and phone number of the appropriate County office a resident should call if s/he sees dumping.

The ACWP is additionally preparing "Entering the Arroyo Colorado Watershed" road signs for posting at these crossings, and they should be installed soon. These signs should help remind Valley residents of the existence and fragility of the Arroyo Colorado watershed.



Guided Native Plant Tour at Bentsen

by Paul and Shelley Bryant

Bentsen State Park, in cooperation with The Nature Conservancy of Texas, hosted a guided native plant tour led by Master Naturalists, Paul and Shelley Bryant, on Sunday, February 21, 2010. Nineteen people attended the tour, which was held at Chihuahua Woods Preserve, southwest of Mission. This is a 243-acre tract of Tamaulipan thorn scrub habitat owned and managed by The Nature Conservancy of Texas.

Twelve native cactus species were the topic of the tour, but many other native species of plants, trees and shrubs were also discussed. Ongoing projects at Chihuahua Woods Preserve include the removal of the non-native, invasive Salt Cedar trees, maintaining trails and re-introduction of native plant species. The preserve is open to the public during daylight hours.



Ramsey Report

by Frank Wiseman

Ramsey Park has been fortunate these past winter months in that rain and cold weather have taken their toll, both good and bad. Good because it has received the much needed moisture to reward us with a brilliant display of wildflowers this year. Bad in the fact that some of our younger shrubs and trees were a little frost-bitten with the two freezes they had to endure. All in all, the park did very well in its survival mode with all native plants. One thing for sure with “natives” is that they are adapted to our type of Texas climate, no matter what nature throws at them.

Our work schedule has been modified to an extent that we haven't done as much as our volunteers usually offer to keep the park in good shape for our winter visitors. The weather kept many from their weekly volunteer projects. However, Kelly Cohen and Ninfa Espitia, two of our new TMN class trainees, have undertaken a great project that has cleared away all of the guinea grass from around the large ebony and tepeguaje trees down near the Arroyo bank and the trail that leads from the Hachinal Area to the lower Arroyo trail. They deserve a big thank you.

Other volunteers from our training class, Sid Beckwith and others, have also offered their services where needed. Of course a big thanks goes to our regulars like Lou Osborne who has completely restored the pond area at Owl Pond. Diann Ballesteros, Bill Horton, Ginger Byram, Bob Archer, Linda Butcher, Christina Mild, Drew Bennie, and Frank Wiseman have offered their services periodically as usual in so many of the garden spots that RGVCTMN has developed over the years since 2002. Of course, we are waiting with anticipation for Dick Roesler to recover fully from his hip fracture a while back in early December to come and offer his much needed services as a top weed eater expert and mulch hauler.

Izzy's garden has turned into Poppy Field because of the rainy weather this winter. If you want to see our native Texas poppies in full

bloom now is a good time to stroll to this area along the loop or take the upper Arroyo Trail and view not only the flowing Arroyo but all of the poppies and other wildflowers along these areas.

The caliche loop for the first time in many years has blossomed with colorful yellow bladder pods, verbenas, Texas vervain, gaillardia, huisache daisies, and for the first time in many years we have a nice outcropping of blue curls at Warbler Corner. Runyon Garden is one of the spots where you could see the brilliant blooms of the black brush ablaze with its spring blossoms and the cacti there started to show their colors also. This is a good time of the year to see the blooming varieties of our native cacti. The nipple (pinchusion), ladyfinger, mammallarias, twisted rib, horse cripplers, and some of the other varieties are all starting to show their beautiful once-a-year flowers.

One thing you can't miss is the fragrant blossoms of the huisache trees. They certainly are the harbingers of spring each year. Out front along the roadway the Texas bluebonnets, our state flower, are beginning to bloom and should be in their full glory in a week. This is your one chance not to have to venture further afield than Ramsey Park to see our own Texas bluebonnets here at home.

Remember to bring your camera to watch for the soaring Harris' Hawks that seem to have returned to the park after a short absence. Of course spring bird migration is upon us so there is no telling what you might see in the line of all sorts of warblers and others. Also remember to watch for the bobcat near Humming Bird Trail or the back of the Entrance Garden area. Pauraques or roadrunners might be there also, not to forget the usual thrashers, mocking birds, vireos, kiskadees and chachalacas. You never know what might happen into your binoculars' view.

Any day is a “good day” to be out in nature. Hope to see you out there.

RGVCTMN Photos



Awardees



More awardees



Joe Lee with Chachalaca print



January general meeting

The Texas Coastal Naturalist Program Today

by Tony Reisinger and Cathy Budd

The Texas Coastal Naturalist Program is the newest approach to addressing coastal issues and emergency response needs in South Texas. Don Hockaday, with The University of Texas-Pan American Coastal Studies Laboratory, first fielded the idea of a cadre of first response volunteers to assist the lab with emergency events more than ten years ago. The Rio Grande Valley Chapter Texas Master Naturalist (RGVCTMN) program decided to assist the lab in this endeavor by providing volunteers trained to respond to the red tides which are increasingly plaguing our area. This group, named the Red Tide Rangers, found themselves impatiently waiting for the next needed red tide response.

In an effort to provide more first response (and other educational) opportunities to volunteers, we have founded the Texas Coastal Naturalist Program. Originally, we thought the Texas Coastal Naturalists would only respond to certain coastal incidents requiring first responder volunteers. We are currently evolving to meet the changing needs of both the volunteers and the organizations concerned with coastal ecology issues.

The response subjects are now:

1. Hazardous algal blooms (such as red tide), and/or Phytoplankton monitoring
2. Sea turtle stranding (includes sea turtle patrol and/or cold stun response)
3. Marine mammal stranding (includes live and dead cetacean care)
4. Oiled bird response
5. Sand dune restoration
6. Wetland restoration

We particularly encourage you to be certified in the first three items on this list since this is where you can fulfill the original goals of the program. This list is truly dynamic as it is changing to respond to new challenges. We now have four actual first response efforts included in our certification. The oiled bird response has presented a challenge in that a costly hazardous materials certification is needed to be able to handle the oiled birds. Nevertheless, we are retaining this response subject since many of you have already completed the training and even though you cannot yet handle the birds, you can still help in many other ways.

Recently, we have added sand dune and wetland restoration trainings and are exploring other educational opportunities (see list below) that will familiarize you with coastal issues. Several of our master naturalists are already qualified as Texas Coastal Naturalists. We have had trainings in oiled bird rescue, phytoplankton, red tides, and sea turtles in the past. There is no time limit on how long ago trainings were attended and so if you think you are qualified, please contact us.

The educational and training opportunities we plan to offer will be open to all Master Naturalists, but you are not required to be a Texas Master Naturalist in order to be certified as a Texas Coastal Naturalist. We hope the Texas Coastal Naturalist program will be a hook for drawing volunteers into our Texas Master Naturalist program.

That brings up more good news if you are not thoroughly confused. Cathy Budd, our Education Chair and Texas Coastal Naturalist program coordinator, has designed our logo which is shown below.



We are excited about it and are in the process of ordering pins. The RGVCTMN has generously agreed to underwrite the cost.

We firmly believe the Coastal Naturalist Program will provide opportunities for all of coastal Texas and possibly other coastal states in the future. Texas Sea Grant and AgriLife Extension avidly support this endeavor. Many coastal entities like the Coastal Studies Lab and Sea Turtle Inc. have a real need for well trained volunteers. We hope you can take advantage of this pioneering Texas Coastal Naturalist program in order to provide an educated and well trained volunteer base to help our coast meet any future needs.

*Future Training Topics and Certifications for the Texas Coastal Naturalist program may include:
(we invite your suggestions)*

Coastal Ecology

Sea Grasses

Shells

Shore Plants

Bahia Grande

Coastal Weather

Marine Mammal Strandings (planned for this summer with a surrogate dolphin that is human!)

Sea Turtles

Sea Beans

Shore Birds

Fish Kills

Coastal Cleanups Beaches/Jetties

Fisheries

Marylou's Backyard Photos *by Marylou Davis*



TMN Trainees Learn About New Plants on Wildflower Field Trip

by Frank Wiseman

Saturday, March 20th, dawned cloudy and with a slight hint of change in the air. Cloudy skies didn't stop our intrepid trainees from the Wildflower trip to north expressway 77 on the outskirts of Raymondville.

Our group met at the Tourist Information Travel Center in Harlingen and carpooled to the spot just outside of the gates to the La Prieta Ranch. This has always been a favorite spot close to home here in the Valley for us to take a short jaunt to see the nearest grouping of Texas Wildflowers in March and April, when we have a good rain during the winter season. Those in attendance were Cathy Butcher, Susan Kerens, Heidi Linnemann, Judy Moore, Wayne Moore, Deborah Salazar, James Seguin, Judy Weymouth, and Terry Weymouth. The group was also joined by two other RGVCTMN members, Dick and Sharon Roesler.

Frank Wiseman led the group and guided them thru the fields of flowers along the roadside after a short lecture on proper books for Wildflower researching and identification, the rules of not picking our state's wildflowers, and handing everyone a list of 36 scientific and commonly named wildflowers in the area.

Among the most plentiful flowers this year are the Phox and Phacelia blue curls and many of the yellow composite flowers we so commonly see. The class trainees learned to identify each specimen up close and personal, which made a made difference in their outlook towards plant identification. They learned the differences among the many types of petals, leaves and plant growth habits. We were fortunate to see some plants like the Cardinal Feather ,

which has both male and female plants, growing side by side so that distinguishing characteristics were plainly evident. We also saw the differences between the two types of plantains growing, Red-Seeded Plantain and the Hooker/narrow leaf Plantain.

Cathy Butcher commented that she now realized that driving along the highway is going to make a big difference in how she sees wildflowers and other plants. There really are differences and they are not all a bunch of weeds.

With only a few more weeks left for classes and field trips, this year's class of Texas Master Naturalist trainees are developing a good taste for all the different aspects of "Nature" available right here in our beautiful Rio Grande Valley.



Texas Paintbrush with a Gaillardia next to it and a small phlox at the bottom

Ocelot Festival

by Eileen Mattei

The annual Ocelot Festival gave 2,500 visitors a chance to get up close and personal with ocelot habitat like that found at Laguna Atascosa NWR. The Texas Master Naturalists booth featured tangled, thorny brush curved over a low framework to resemble the thickets where ocelots sleep during the day, safe from predators. Toddlers were on eye level to spot the two toy ocelots hidden in the den. A mockingbird and cardinal (the plush squeaky kind) perched on the brush. Yes, ocelots are cats, and yes, they eat birds, as well as rabbits and rats.

Infra-red photos of ocelots at Laguna, provided by Jody Mays, showed the cats traveling at night through their preferred habitat.

Lupita Escobar, Maria Cottagoma, Eileen Mattei and a TMN trainee invited everyone to feel anacua leaves and to smell lime-scented colima, sweetstem and Mexican oregano. Some people recalled their grandmothers made teas with different native plants.



Toxic Algal Bloom and Seaweed Printing Trainings

photos provided by Antoinette Budd and Tony Reisinger





Have a great spring!