



The Chachalaca

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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,

After a kind of slow August, things are picking up again for our chapter. Members are busy volunteering with their favorite groups and looking for additional ways to help. If you know of any volunteer events that members might be interested in, please post a notice on the listserve. There will be more opportunities to volunteer at Sabal Palms, Sand Castle Days in October, the RGV Birding Festival in November, and Rio Reforestation also in November.

Jimmy Paz, our new web master, is doing a great job with the website. Updated forms are there, and things are once again being posted on the website calendar. Raffle tickets will go out in October, and funds raised will be used to fund a chapter and/or partner project. The prizes this year are a Kindle (latest edition), a \$100.00 gift card to Academy, a one-year state parks pass, and a copy of the book, El Valle. Election of chapter officers will be held in December, so if you're interested in a position, let Frank Wiseman know. Also, if you would like to serve as an at-large board member, let Frank know.

I hope the past three months have been good ones for you, that the rain has been a blessing and not a problem, and that you have had much success in all your endeavors.

Virginia

Chapter Milestones

by Frank Wiseman

The July 2010 general meeting featured recognition of accomplishments by some of our members. ♦



John Thaxter receiving his 250-hour milestone pin from Virginia Vineyard.



Susan Kerens certified as a Texas Master Naturalist, class of 2010, with Virginia Vineyard.



Coastal naturalists receiving their Coastal Naturalist Certificates.
(Back Row L-R Terry Weymouth, Mary Ann Tous, Tony Reisinger, Karen Fossom, Virginia Vineyard. Front Row L-R Judy Weymouth, Wendie Allstot.)

RGVCTMN Donations to Valley Non-Profits

by John Thaxter

In July, our chapter donated \$300 to the Valley Nature Center of Weslaco and to Frontera Audubon of Weslaco. ♦



John Thaxter and Martin Hagne, Valley Nature Center



John Thaxter and Cindy Willson, Frontera Audubon

New RGVCTMN Class Coming Up

John Thaxter and the chapter's Education Committee are setting up the 2011 basic volunteer training class, which will be held from 6 to 9 pm every Wednesday starting January 12, 2011, and ending March 30, 2011. The classes will be offered at the Cameron County Annex Building located at the Williams Road exit in San Benito off of Hwy. 77/83. Class size is limited to 24 students, and John needs more volunteers to help with the Wednesday night classes as well as with Saturday field trips. If you are interested in helping with the training, contact John at 956-532-9789 or 817-913-1811 or email him at sjthaxter@gmail.com . ♦

Certified Interpretive Guide Training

Heidi Linnemann recently finished a course offered by the National Association for Interpretation (NAI), titled, "Certified Interpretive Guide" training. Heidi recommends the training as an excellent program for anyone who speaks publicly for the Master Naturalist group or who volunteer as guides, "especially good for those who do not have a background in education as it covers the methodology for really reaching your audience and getting them to understand and act on the message you are presenting." The course is taught by our own Jennifer Owen-White, who is willing to offer the program again here in the Valley if there is enough interest (minimum of 10 people).

The 4-day course can be taught on consecutive days, split up 1 day a week, or offered over 2 weekends. It costs \$360 a person, which includes the professional Certified Interpretive Guide certification and a 1-year membership in the National Association for Interpretation on completion. Contact Jennifer for more information – Jennifer.Owen@tpwd.state.tx.us. ♦

Ramsey Report

by Frank Wiseman

July, August and September 2010, have not been the best nor the worst for Ramsey Park in Harlingen. July started with plants flourishing everywhere and not much need for watering. Hurricane Alex came into northern Mexico and brushed by the Valley and didn't do much damage to our park. However, the aftermath of flood waters released into the Rio Grande Watershed left us with the Arroyo Colorado way above flood stage and also the Valley's alternate floodway system.

Rising water along the edge of Ramsey Park eased its way into one of our most recently restored garden areas, Izzy's Garden. Pictures show the level of the water in this area and the damage caused to our plantings. We lost over half of all the plants we had put into this area since January as well as many of the old established plantings. Among the plants lost due to standing water of over 8 days in the garden area proper were twisted rib cactus, yellow sophora, cenizos, desert yaupon, skeleton leaf daisy, leather stem, Bernadette, hibiscus, white and purple heliotropes, white and orange lantanas, Mexican trixis, blue mist butterfly bushes, Tamaulipan olives, anacuas, low crotons, kidney wood, and fiddlewood.



Izzy's Garden before the flood, July 2010.



Izzy's Garden flooded August 2010.



Izzy's Garden with dead plants after August 2010 flooding.

The area has now been cleared out of all of the dead plants and will be ready for mulching as soon as our volunteers gather up the necessary tools and good cooler weather to attack that job. Diann Ballesteros has done some cleaning around the weedy areas of Lily Agave hill where the many rare plants are and Bill Horton and Dick Roseler have done some work with the weed eaters and the chain saw. Frank Wiseman spent several evenings cleaning up Izzy's area and Linda Butcher has tried to get some work done on the north side of the park during the heat and rainy days.

We were sorry to have lost the entire garden with the water edge plants that Christina Mild worked so hard on for over a year along the upper Arroyo bank. The only successful plants that survived in that garden were the dew berries. These native arroyo plants seem to survive all disasters. Also lost were the recently nice plants of the large sacaton grasses that Bill Horton placed along the upper bank.



Sacaton Grass along upper Arroyo bank after flooding in August 2010.



Water's edge plants garden along upper bank Arroyo after flooding in August 2010.

On a happier note now that the flood waters have receded and the plants are beginning to show their colors again are a bumper crop of clammy weed and purple heliotrope along the upper Arroyo trail. One dreaded pest of the invasive type that never seems to die away is the castor bean. One healthy vine now thriving is the pretty white-blooming milkweed vine. We can always use volunteers at Ramsey and invite you to come out and enjoy the plants, the birds, insects and a wild boar or two and plenty of rabbits, and many other critters that belong among our park's "nature life". Don't forget your camera!!

Update on the Sabal Palm Sanctuary

by Jimmy Paz

The Sabal Palm Sanctuary was closed to the public on May 15, 2009, due to lack of funds. The sanctuary looked like a wild jungle because it had been without maintenance for over a year. Audubon and the Gorgas Science foundation are forming a partnership to re-open the sanctuary. We hope to have the sanctuary open to the public by October 15, 2010.

RGVCTMN members John Tierney, Wendy Allstot, and Kathy Sheldon volunteered their time working in the butterfly garden at Sabal Palm Sanctuary. ♦



Kathy Sheldon



Wendy Allstot



John Tierney

A Sabal Inscription

by James William Seguin

My first and only tour of Sabal Palms came during a fieldtrip when I was rewarding a group of high school students (28) for their academic performance. While Jimmy Paz led us on trails carved through dwarf native tundra, images appeared in the corner of my mind reminding me of winter days in the late sixties when some companions and I had ridden our Honda dirt bikes up-n-over, traversing left or traversing right along the river's levee and into the grassland where the stout palms stood. Sabals, too numerous to count and with sparkling swaying fans, appeared as

though they were telegraphing the message that their turf would someday be sanctioned into a playing field where both people and wildlife would recreate. And so it was on the conclusion of our guided tour that we could claim our sighting of various indigenous singers and fliers that had intersected our paths, and with Jimmy's help distinctly identify the native trees. This excursion at such a unique locale, Sabal Palms Grove Sanctuary - as I knew it then, has made its blissful impression upon us and has marked my memory forever like initials on wood.

SPGS: An Acrostic Poem

Sabal Palms Grove Sanctuary beckons the dawn.

Ante meridian melodies hum from trees.

Blackness has been rattled by one wink of the sun,

As it sweeps the cool hazy fog around my knees.

Lift up your voices, birds of indigenous kind!

Peer attentively and take flight, winging like bees.

Ash trees of the Rio Grand stand tall and sublime,

Lean your leaves over me; shade me from mid-day time.

Meandering trails have been carved by mortal steps,

So these human eyes may view nature's elements.

Green grasslands protect dense meadows where wildlife lay;

Rio Grande extends her meandering sway.

Once a mighty river of many winding miles,

Volumes of green juice now dammed at voltaic piles.

Existence for the jaguarundi has stridden away.

Songs resounding by wrens, sparrows, and green jays

Are all harmonious in the cool of the day.

Now, the white tip dove has its enchanting, long talk,

Cooing soft breaths like wind over a glass bottle.

Texas' Sabal Palms Grove --- I'll go for a walk,

Unwinding my thoughts while my mind's off the throttle.

Artistic elegance speaks: tread softly, don't stalk,

Reminisce glimmers of wildlife and botany;

Yield to her Deity in thanks and litany. ♦

Master Naturalists Spread Their Wings...

by Mary Ann Tous

When the call went out from the South Padre Island Birding & Nature Center, asking for Volunteers to help with the one-year anniversary celebration being held Sept 25, 2010, the Texas Master Naturalists answered the call and joined the community to help. We were asked to be welcoming greeters and informative tour guides. This was a piece of cake for the TMN, and speaking of cake, some of us were actually serving the delicious birthday cake, as well as enjoying some. As evident in the photographs, there could not have been a friendlier group of TMN volunteers helping with the anniversary celebration.



Patti Pitcock, helping with the cake.

Even the weather cooperated with clear blue skies, as blissful pelicans, herons, and egrets dotted the surrounding marsh lands leading out to the Laguna Madre Bay, as if welcoming the visitors. Also, visitors stopped by The Turtle lady Aquarius laser memorial, admiring her likeness etched in stone, which was also a great focal place for a souvenir family photograph.

A tribute to Ila's respect for nature, the memorial is a historic reminder how one person can make a difference in caring for an ecosystem. Ila devoted her life to protecting the Kemp's Ridley sea turtle. This year, our turtle nesting season was brought to an abrupt halt when Hurricane Alex hit the island, but yet in the midst of this crisis a stranded Green sea turtle was rescued by the SPI Police Department and delivered to find refuge at the Turtle Lady's house. He was appropriately named Alex and brought to Sea Turtle, Inc., to recover, and he was eventually released back into the Laguna Madre Bay.

The Turtle Lady would name injured sea turtles after the person that rescued them. She soon found herself surrounded by gifts of every imaginable kind of turtle. She would name the turtle gifts after the individual that gave them to her.

In that tradition, I name my turtle gifts in the same manner. I came home from the anniversary with a beautiful carved wooden turtle. Her name is Janice, so guess who gave her to me!



Mary Ann Tous, Janice Koning, Paula Parson, Mary Jean Garcia

It was a memorable occasion, and now I have Janice to remind how special it all was, and how the TMN rose up to the occasion, making their presence known with smiles.

If you would like the full story on Alex please visit our website: www.theturtleadylegacy.org. ♦

Arroyo Colorado in Flood

by Sharon Slagle

When Rick and I showed up south of Alamo on Saturday morning, July 10th, to test water quality in the Arroyo Colorado where it crosses FM 907, we were surprised to see that it had filled its banks and over-topped the roadway, the result of water diversions into the floodway after Mexican rivers swollen by Hurricane Alex's rainfall flooded north into the Rio Grande. By Monday night, July 12th, Alamo Road had disappeared under the entire width of the floodway. (By the way, the flooding did NOT improve the water quality!) ♦



Saturday morning, July 10, 2010



Monday evening, July 12, 2010

