



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

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President's Message

by Virginia Vineyard

Hello Chapter Members,

July, August, September, another quarter is now history. As expected, summertime heat kept many of us indoors during the hottest times of day but made early mornings and late evenings even more deeply appreciated. Continuing drought in Texas has made our connections to water all the more apparent. A refreshing dip in pool, Gulf, or even canal (on the sly), was often enjoyed by many. Maybe a lazy canoe or kayak trip in the Laguna Madre, Arroyo Colorado, or the Rio Grande kept you near the water. Even sitting in your backyard near a dripping fountain or inviting birdbath made it clear what water means to all of nature. Repurposing water, such as with the water now flowing in Ramsey Park, is a great example of conservation efforts. Drought has certainly changed our Texas landscape, so please conserve and enjoy our precious water.

As always, thank you so much for your efforts, no matter how great or how small, to help conserve our piece of the planet.

Thanks,

Virginia

RGVCTMN Moments and Milestones

Photos by Wendie Allstot

General Meeting on June 12, 2012:



Adrian Ramos receiving certificate and pins for completing TMN certification



Steve Fowler receiving pin for 500 volunteer hours



Judy Svetanoff, Joyce Fowler, Steve Fowler, and Nancy Persinger receiving Coastal Naturalist certificate and pin



Tony Reisinger giving TMN mug to Sue Griffin, general meeting speaker

General Meeting on July 10, 2012:



Virginia Vineyard presenting TMN mug to Richard Moore, general meeting speaker

General Meeting on August 14, 2012:



Ric Bull receiving pin for 100 volunteer hours



Ben Nibert receiving pin for 250 volunteer hours



Tony Reisinger presenting Coastal Naturalist certificates and pins to Marie Montalvo and Alicia Cavazos



Linda Butcher, Norma Friedrich, and Kay Baughman with TMN cups after presentation on Arroyo Colorado Audubon Society and Ramsey Park ♦

Kemp's Ridley Recovery Adds Up to Success

by Mary Ann Tous

In today's world of instant media coverage, it is inspiring and uplifting to read success stories that deal with environmental issues. The Kemp's ridley success story is a powerful reminder that through team efforts we all can work towards the goal of preserving an endangered species. All contributing roles by volunteers will continue to make a difference in this goal. It is possible that in this decade, the Kemp's ridley sea turtle may be removed from the endangered species list due to all of the conservation efforts by so many groups that are working to ensure their survival.

Through the collaborative effort of government agencies, non-profit organizations, and volunteer groups such as the Texas Master Naturalists (TMN), the recovery of the Kemp's ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*) continues to be a success. In 2012 a record-breaking number of Kemp's ridley nests were found on the Texas coast: 116 nests on North Padre Island (including 106 at Padre Island National Seashore); 59 on South Padre Island; 10 on

Boca Chica Beach, and 24 for the rest of the Texas Gulf shores. A grand total of 16,500 Kemp's ridley hatchlings were released into the Gulf waters.

Other species of sea turtles left their flipper tracks on the Texas Gulf Coast as well. The Greens (*Chelonia mydas*) had a record-breaking total of 8 nests (6 on Padre Island National Seashore and 2 on South Padre Island). The last of these Green nests are expected to hatch and be released by the end of September. There were also a total of 5 Loggerheads (*Caretta caretta*) nests (3 on North Padre Island, 1 on South Padre, and 1 on Quintana Beach).

Public hatchling releases were conducted and well attended by thousands of visitors, both on South Padre Island and at Padre Island National Seashore. Here are photos from one of the most recent public releases for Kemp's ridley hatchlings on South Padre Island this year by Sea Turtle, Inc., in the early dawn hours of August 14, 2012.



The sea is calling the tiny hatchlings



Marching together, the hatchlings head to the sea



Early dawn trek to the sea



Hatchlings on their imprinting journey over the sands and into the sea

Adding to the complexity of this year's encouraging totals, we look further south towards the Mexican Gulf of Rancho Nuevo, where 21,792 Kemp's ridley nests were recorded. More than one million hatchlings were released between 6 interlocking camps.

I would like to thank the Division of Sea Turtle Science and Recovery at the Padre National Sea Shore for all of their help in writing this article: Louis J. Pena, T. Torres, Gladys Porter Zoo, who all helped in completing this successful sea turtle story. For more information, see <http://www.nps.gov/pais/naturescience/stsr-index.htm>

“Keep watching for my sea turtle children, for they will return.” *Ila Loetscher* ♦

September Ramsey Park Report

by Linda Butcher

The water project is finished at Ramsey Park (Arroyo Colorado, Harlingen) and we have four beautiful ponds. There is still a small issue with regulating the water flow, but that should be resolved soon.

A great number of new birds have been in and around the ponds. We have had lots of waders and shorebirds including a juvenile yellow crowned night heron, white ibis, and little blue heron. Also seen have been black and white warblers, Wilson’s warblers, and American Redstart. I saw a large family group of Anis. The other day I also saw two beautiful coyotes. Really fat and healthy.

There will be a work day on October 20th. It will be come-and-go from 8 until noon. You can stay as long as you want. There is plenty to do from light chores to a little planting. Even if you are unable to work, we can use someone to pass out water or sodas. Hope to see you there. ♦

Video Links

by Mary Jo Bogatto

Here are a couple of video links that you may find interesting:

- Eagle Owl after prey -- <http://www.dogwork.com/owfo8/>
- Eagle doing a breast stroke -- <http://www.youtube.com/embed/87xNpOYOlQ4?rel=0>

♦

Volunteers Needed for Rio Reforestation

by Sharon Slagle

The Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge is soliciting volunteers for its annual Rio Reforestation event on Saturday, October 13th, from 8 to noon on the Refuge’s Garza-Cavazos tract west of Brownsville. We expect about 1,000 volunteers to help plant 31 species of native tree and shrub seedlings on 14 acres of Refuge land.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service initiated a re-vegetation program in 1984 to restore native habitat on cropland acquired by the Refuge to form a wildlife corridor linking habitat

fragments along the Rio Grande and throughout the river delta region. Since 1994 volunteers have helped replant nearly 600 acres. This will be the 21st Rio Reforestation event.

More than 530 species of birds and about 40% of all North American butterfly species (330+ species) occur in the four-county Valley area spanned by the Refuge. Rio Reforestation is helping restore important wildlife habitat in an area where less than 5% of the native vegetation remains. Creation of this native habitat corridor will ensure survival of the unique wildlife of this region, including 17 species of federally listed threatened, endangered, and migratory species such as the ocelot. Creation of the corridor also contributes to eco-tourism in one of the most impoverished parts of the nation – in 2011, non-consumptive nature tourism in the Valley was \$460 million.

Planting represents annual culmination of a wonderfully collaborative effort. Seedlings are grown locally by USFWS and by local nurseries. Valley Nature Center helps administer seedling contracts and preparation for planting. Local farmers help prepare the sites under agreements with the Refuge. Valley Proud Environmental Council, Audubon's Sabal Palm Grove Sanctuary, Valley Nature Center, local municipalities help with publicity and volunteer coordination, and planting is accomplished by a wide variety of groups and individuals.



For more information, check out http://friendsofsouthtexasrefuges.org/default/LRGV-General/RR%20XXI%20Flyer_2012.pdf . Come join us on October 13th! (In case of rain, planting will be rescheduled for Saturday, October 27th.) ♦

First year TMN at Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park

by Nan Persinger

After graduating from the Upper Valley TMN Class of 2012, I began volunteering at Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park in Mission, Texas. I thought I'd try my hand at submitting an article to the Chachalaca. Volunteering has opened my eyes and my every-day life to wonderful surprises, both large and small. Living only three miles from the Park afforded me a close and convenient place to volunteer, notwithstanding the fact the Park needs any and all volunteers who can help due to its budget crisis.

Volunteering at the Park Nature Center has allowed me to become more acquainted with the Park programs and to meet hundreds of people from all over the world and from all walks of life. In addition to making friends with some of the visitors, I have become acquainted with personnel from the Park – what a fantastic group of people. The school programs are a wonderful way to interact with all ages of school children/teens and help educate them about the nature that is right here in their own back yard. The bird walks, butterfly walks, dragonfly walks, and Creatures of the Night Tours are all part of the learning/teaching process for a TMN.

I highly recommend taking the TMN Program to anyone who expresses an interest in it. The classroom experiences and field trips are educational and informative. The field trips are an opportunity to learn what's in the area that surrounds us, as well as spending quality time with fellow classmates. It will certainly enrich your life.



"Can you see me now?" Squirrels will be there to welcome you.



Hummers will seek out this Turk's Cap.



Bordered Patch caterpillars on Sunflower



Bordered Patch drying wings, soon to take flight



Blue-collared Lizard at the Nature Center



Immature Cane Toad (Giant Toad)



Javelina will be watching you...



"Beep-Beep" eating his breakfast



Walking Stick



Tarantula lurking in rocks and leaf debris



Praying Mantis



The Horned Lizard runs surprisingly fast.



Two Tortoises



You just might witness a "ritual" taking place.



Fred, the Blue Talapia, waiting to greet you inside the Nature Center.



Take the Creatures of the Night tour and surely you'll see some Scorpions.

I have always loved photography (only as an amateur, mind you), and this gives me an opportunity to share some of my photos. ♦

Weed or Croton??

by Frank Wiseman



That was the question I asked myself a few months back this spring. I decided to let it grow in my front small rock garden space by the driveway. It looked like a good volunteer plant, and I wanted to see what would happen as it matured.

After about a month, I asked my fellow TMN colleague, Diann Ballesteros, what she thought about it. We both decided that we would get an expert opinion about this plant that resembled the other crotons that we knew so well. We took it to our Native Plant meeting so Ken King could give us his opinion. Sure enough: He knew immediately what it was. It is a White Leaf Croton, *Croton leucophyllus*. We found it listed on page 218 of his and Dr. Richardson's book *Plants of Deep South Texas*.

According to their book the plant is an annual and grows up to 20 inches high. This one has surpassed this expectation and is now about 30 inches high. Leaves are alternate, simple; blades ovate, up to 3 inches long, with star shaped hairs on both surfaces. Flowers on male and female plants are tiny and in the same cluster. Calyx lobes on the female flowers are unequal, with 3 large and 2 small. Fruit is a two-seeded capsule about 3/10 inch tall. The blooming period is spring, summer, and fall. The distribution is Cameron, Hidalgo, and Starr Counties.

The book comments that identification of the crotons is often difficult, but the irregular calyx lobes of the female flowers are helpful in identifying this species. The specific epithet comes from Latin words for "white leaf." Many Crotons have whitish leaves.

I have no idea how this plant came to land its seed in my garden spot, but I am glad that I left it alone to grow and reproduce. There are now four more growing in the immediate area. I did try to transplant one into a pot so that I could place it in my back yard area, but haven't been successful. My advice: if not sure about a particular plant, let it grow. We love our "weeds", too. ♦

Editorial Correction

by Sharon Slagle

Our June 2012 issue of the newsletter omitted a few names in its list of April 2012 RGVCTMN graduates. My apologies. The article and its lists should have read as follows:

On April 26th, the following students received RGVCTMN class completion certificates:

Mario Aguilar	Lema Conatser	Sally Merrill
Beatriz Alvarez	Gail Dantzker	Jesse Montoya
Elma Arredondo	Judy Emsley	Mary Ann Moore
Monica Barrera	Diana Farias	Joanne Phillips
Reyna Cavazos	Oralia Garcia	Harry Rakosky
Melissa Chadwick	Omar Landeros	Adrian Ramos
Esperanza Chapa	Jeanne Martinez	Jonathan Rodriguez

The following students certified as Texas Master Naturalists and received class completion certificates, state TMN certificates, state dragonfly pins, chapter pins, and their name tags:

Marilu Trevino Alf	Veronica Guzman	Carol Ann Schwartz
Ric Bull	Marie Montalvo	Kathy Mauer-Tonn
Sylvia Casselman	Gloria Nelson	Susan Visser
Alicia Cavazos	Annette Rakosky	Kathy Whittier (also recertified for 2012)
John Ebner	David Reavis	Cristela Wise
Linda Francis	Mary Renk	Del Zander
Luci Gandy		

Louise Reavis certified as a Texas Master Naturalist and received a 100-hour pin.

The following students certified as Texas Master Naturalists, received 100-hour pins, and recertified for 2012:

Tom Butler	Ben Nibert	Ron Renk
Carol Dolan	Nan Persinger	

The RGVCTMN class of 2012 spent 1,419 hour in class, went on 769 hours of field trips, attended more than 440 hours of advanced training, and volunteered more than 2,000 hours!

In May 2012, Joanne Phillips certified as a Texas Master Naturalist, and Ric Bull received his 100-hour pin. In June 2012, Lema Conatser, Sally Merrill, Adrian Ramos certified as Texas Master Naturalists, and Annette Rakosky received her 200-hour pin.

Congratulations to all! ♦

