

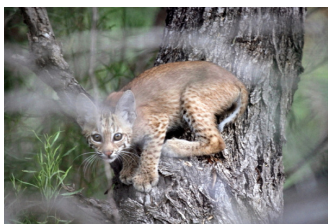


# The Chachalaca

Volume 6      Number 3      30 September 2009

## In this Issue

President's Message <i>Virginia Vineyard</i>	2
New Officers and Board Members Photos	3
RGV Junior Master Naturalist <i>Sister Sharon Horace</i>	4
Honored RGVCTMN Photos	4
Ramsey Report <i>Frank Wiseman</i>	5
Eastern Black Swallowtail <i>John Thaxter</i>	6
Water Quality in the Arroyo Colorado <i>Sharon Slagle</i>	7
New Coastal Naturalist Certification in the Works <i>Tony Reisinger</i>	8
Scenes from Recent Oiled-Bird Training	8



*Bobcat cub photo by Robert Archer. See Frank's  
Ramsey Report for details.*

## 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.

## Officers

<b>President</b>	<b>Virginia Vineyard</b>
<b>1st Vice President</b>	<b>Eileen Mattei</b>
<b>2nd Vice President</b>	<b>Ed Tamayo</b>
<b>Secretary</b>	<b>Lupita Escobar</b>
<b>Recording Secretary</b>	<b>Mary Bindner</b>
<b>Treasurer</b>	<b>Carol Hubing</b>
<b>Past President</b>	<b>Frank Wiseman</b>

## Sponsor

<b>Texas AgriLife Extension</b>	<b>Tony Reisinger</b>
---------------------------------	-----------------------

## Standing Committee Chairs

<b>Education</b>	<b>Cathy Budd</b>
<b>Communications</b>	<b>Jackie Field, Jr.</b>
<b>Host</b>	<b>Herman Budd</b>
<b>Newsletter</b>	<b>Karen Fossom</b>
<b>Listserv</b>	<b>Jimmy Paz</b>
<b>Historian</b>	<b>Antoinette Budd</b>



## **President's Message**

Hello, Master Naturalists,

We're off to a busy start to the 2009-2010 year. Grand openings, festivals, programs, and spring training plans are keeping everyone hopping. The annual raffle is about to get underway with proceeds going to Ramsey Park and other conservation sites. Of the two Junior Master Naturalist programs, one is going strong and the second soon will be. If you enjoy the marine habitats, then keep a look out for the Coastal Naturalist trainings that will be offered. There is also a possibility of a joint field trip and social with a neighboring chapter such as the Mid-Coast Chapter. If you have any ideas for chapter projects, small or large, let us know!

Since our chapter is so diverse, finding something for everyone is a challenge. That's why we need your input. Also, the area covered by our chapter is extremely large, so the logistics of getting to where the events are can be difficult. Not to mention the fact that there never seems to be enough time to accomplish all the things we want to accomplish. And, the economy, oh boy, we won't even go there. You get the picture.

Each of you has something to offer, and every thing you do, no matter how small, can have a positive impact on our environment. RGVCTMN, you are powerful; you are leaders; and you make the difference!

*Virginia Vineyard*

## New RGVCTMN Officers



*Pictured from left to right are Eileen Mattei, 1st Vice President; Virginia Vineyard, President; Lupita Escobar, Secretary; and Ed Tamayo, 2nd Vice President. (Missing from photo is Carol Hubing, Treasurer.)*

## And Some of the New Board Members



*Left to right are Frank Wiseman, Bill Horton, Janice Koning, Karen Fossom, Sharon Slagle, Joe Lee Rubio, John Thaxter, Jimmy Paz, Jackie Field, Tony Reisinger (sponsor), Juan Hernandez, Mary Ann Tous, Marylou Davis, and Maria Cotta Goma.*



## **RGV Junior Master Naturalist** *by Sister Sharon Horace*

The hot weather didn't stop the JRMN from getting outdoors to learn. In June students visited Bahia Grande with Tony Reisinger. They learned some of the areas native plants, like horse cripper and prickly pear cactus and saw spoonbills (for the first time). On a very hot July afternoon a group of students went to Resaca de la Palma to tour the park with a park Interpreter. It was a place we all enjoyed and many of the JRMN hoped to return there with their families.

Students will be studying Chapter 3 which will focus on Waterways and resacas this month.

If you would like more information about the Junior Master Naturalist or you would like to help, please contact Sister Sharon Horace 956-341-9324 or horace.dc@gmail.com

We would like to thank the RGV TMN for getting the Junior Naturalist field guides! We promise to put them to good use.

"I learned about different kinds of birds....and that some birds have long legs!" –Francisco, 9

"I learned the different names of birds."-Edward, 13

## **Some Recently Honored RGVCTMNs**



*Juan Hernandez, Larry Horkman, Cheri Horkman, Maria Cotta Goma, Lupita Escobar, and Sharon Slagle*



*Virginia Vineyard honors Eileen Mattei, Sister Sharon Horace, Linda Butcher, and Stan Sterba.*



## Ramsey Report *by Frank Wiseman*

The group of dedicated Ramsey Park volunteers has spent the summer months during the drought period diligently trying to water our garden spots in the park keep our plants alive and well. Most of the plants have suffered little damage and are holding on to life, even though we can see the struggle it is for them.

Our dedicated crew members, Bob Archer, Diann Ballesteros, Linda Butcher, Ginger Byram, Bill Horton, Christina Mild, Dick Roesler and Frank Wiseman, have had to laugh a times with our woes of heat, sweat drenched clothes and lack of water pressure. Christina has bought us many soaker hoses and that helps so that we can leave watering running overnight in various spots.

Her Arroyo trail garden of the water edge plants is doing well along with the patch of sacaton grasses that we planted along the upper mown trail. Bob's humming bird trail is always lush looking as he does keep watering it and the birds always look forward to his daily filling of feeders. The bobcat seems to enjoy some of his food droppings also. We see this animal often just along the Caliche Loop near his spot. See a picture of him along this article.



*Photo by Robert Archer*

Bob has managed to get a picture of a new arrival to the park, a road runner. We see him in various places, so we don't think he has yet picked out a particular spot to hang onto. His picture may be around here somewhere, too.



*Photo by Robert Archer*

Linda arranged a meeting with our City Parks Director, Jeff Lyssy recently to discuss our needs for equipment and other park necessities. We live on a shoestring at the park in that respect, but we hope to have things in that department improve now.

Ginger manages to maintain the front entrance garden and Linda works mostly on the north side in several spots. The rest of us work in several spots that RGVCTMN has put in over the years. Dick, Bill and I usually work in Izzy's, and we have pretty much gotten the plants established, so they should be attracting a lot of butterflies this fall season.

Christina and Diann have done some work in getting soaker hoses into Butterfly Meadow area and the Runyon Garden and have also done work on the upper trail and over at Medicinal garden areas.

All in all, I guess we have been a pretty happy bunch of volunteers during these trying times. Fortunately, the last weekend of August and the first week of September brought us over three inches of rain. At least this year it was not another hurricane Dolly.

September has turned out to be a life saving period for all of nature parks in the Valley area. Thanks to mother nature and the plentiful falling of the wet stuff all month long our Ramsey Park has taken on a new refreshed look. Everything is green and growing again.

Come out and visit us at the park and take a stroll and don't forget to bring your camera for that rare species you just might want to add to your album. We have plenty of volunteer ops for you, too.

## Eastern Black Swallowtail *by John Thaxter, photos by John Thaxter and Sue Thaxter*

Last May I noticed caterpillars on a fennel plant in our vegetable garden. There were about a dozen of them, and I figured they would probably wipe the one plant out in short order. Instead of plucking them off to save the plant I got out the camera and started documenting their development. I identified the caterpillars as larva of Eastern Black Swallowtail, *Papilio polyxene*, butterflies. We had other fennel plants, and this looked like a good time to watch critters instead of plants.

They grazed and grew, and some got eaten by birds that frequent our yard. Finally we were down to about eight caterpillars. I say 'about' because as they began to drift away from the host plant to find a place to pupate, I couldn't find all of them. I located six pretty easily. I learned that their pupa stage lasts around seven to ten days.



My grandsons were coming for a visit in a week, and I hoped I could keep track of the cocoons, and that they might emerge while the kids were here. They are six-year-old twins, and are interested in anything in nature. They live in Northern Virginia near Washington, DC. Their mother takes them to some science or nature related place almost every weekend. I was hoping I could find enough to keep them interested and entertained during their visit. They arrived on a Monday, and were fascinated by the chrysalises. I had clipped three branches off of other plants where the caterpillars had gone to complete their metamorphosis.

These branches were in an aquarium on the patio.



On Wednesday morning the pupas had begun to change color. The patterns of spots on what would eventually be butterfly wings showed through the covering.

By ten in the morning the first of the butterflies emerged.



We all watched as its wings expanded and stiffened in preparation for its first flight.



The sight of the adult butterflies heading out on their own gave us all a fresh perspective on the cycles of life.



## Water Quality in the Arroyo Colorado *by Sharon Slagle*

The Rio Grande Valley averages only about 26 inches of rain per year, and that gives special environmental significance to its two natural waterways, the Rio Grande River and the Arroyo Colorado. Access to and pollution of the river are common political topics in the Valley, but the Arroyo Colorado's problems get less publicity. An ancient distributary channel of the river, the Arroyo now carries treated wastewater from valley cities to the coast. It is important to the region as a source of fresh water for the hypersaline coastal Laguna Madre and as a critical drainage path for flood water after a hurricane. It also sustains a variety of wildlife and offers potential for human recreation, especially if water quality problems are resolved.

The eastern segment of the 90-mile Arroyo is tidally influenced and much appreciated by fishermen in spite of notorious fish kills in the past 20 years. The fish kills have been linked to low oxygen levels, probably caused by excess nutrients like agricultural fertilizers that have been washed into the waterway. Some of the problems in this downstream segment start upstream. The freshwater upstream segment begins in Mission and snakes through the floodway and adjacent fields towards Mercedes and Harlingen. In the mid-Valley the Arroyo can be hard to distinguish from large irrigation canals that carry water to the agricultural crops.

In addition to the threat posed by run-off of agricultural byproducts from nearby fields, quality of water in the Arroyo is threatened by inconsistent or unreliable processing of wastewater by 18 Valley cities that are allowed to discharge into it. Treated discharge from these plants is authorized and monitored by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), but accidents have occurred.

Illegal dumping poses another common problem for the Arroyo. You can see the outlines of discarded automobile tires underwater in its bed. Bags of household trash flung out of passing cars spew down its banks, and its waters carry not only fish and turtles but also convenience store refuse -- plastic bags, styrofoam cups, cans and bottles. Worse, trucks carrying septic tank and oilfield waste are said to sometimes back up to the Arroyo and empty their tanks, saving fees and travel to authorized and regulated dumping sites -- frequent spikes in *E. coli* bacteria counts suggest this may be true.

Opposing these challenges, the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Partnership (ACWP) has been working since 2003 to restore the health of the waterway. Administered by the Texas Water Resources Institute and TCEQ, the ACWP includes more than 400 representatives of all public sectors in the region, and it is making steady progress against these problems:

- Planning. The ACWP has developed an official Watershed Protection Plan that defines the features of the watershed and its issues and resources, and establishes goals and priorities for restoration. The plan is available on the web at <http://www.arroyocolorado.org/WPP.php>.
- Education. The ACWP is supporting numerous projects to educate the general public and, more specifically, farmers and cities, about steps they can take to protect the Arroyo. You can see a list of current projects at <http://www.arroyocolorado.org/Projects.php>. My favorite is its wetland project, which collaborates with the cities of San Juan, La Feria, San Benito, and Mercedes to develop city wetland systems to help organically remove any pollutants in treated wastewater before it gets into the Arroyo.
- Signs. Believing that Valley residents who are aware of the Arroyo and its fragility are more likely to respect it, the ACWP is supporting development and installation of road signs to identify watershed boundaries and warn against dumping. See <http://agnews.tamu.edu/showstory.php?id=860> for more information on this effort.

The ACWP depends on data about the quality of Arroyo waters to assess the direction and results of its work, and much of the water quality data is gathered by volunteers. The Texas Stream Team is a group of trained volunteers working under the direction and support of Texas State University, TCEQ, and the US EPA, and they measure dissolved oxygen, conductivity, pH levels, and bacteria counts at various sites along the Arroyo. The RGVCTMN provides volunteers -- including me and my husband -- for this effort, and more information about volunteer work is available at <http://txstreamteam.rivers.txstate.edu/Projects/Arroyo-Colorado.html>.

## **New Coastal Naturalist Certification in the Works** *by Tony Reisinger*

The Coastal Naturalist Certification will require a volunteer be certified in at least three of six or more areas that include first responders to:

- 1) Hazardous algal blooms (such as red tide),
- 2) Sea turtle strandings (includes sea turtle patrol and cold stun response),
- 3) Marine mammal strandings (includes live and dead cetacean care),
- 4) Oiled bird response,
- 5) Phytoplankton monitoring, and
- 6) Beach watch (includes responding to bird migration mortalities and how to report illegal netting of fish off our beaches, illegal four wheeling in the sand dunes, illegal live shell collecting, and littering or dumping).

These are all tentative and subject to board approval.

### **Scenes from the Recent Oiled-Bird Training**

#### **RGVCTMN Participants**



*From left to right: Becky Thompson, Wendie Allstot, Cathy Budd, Herman Budd, Vivian Vineyard, and Eileen Mahoney*



## And, Washing the Duck!



*Special thanks to everyone that contributed to this issue of the Chachalaca, to Tony Bennett for our new logo, and, as always, to Leo Garrett for his ongoing support. - Karen*