



# The CHACHALACA

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 2

25 JULY 2004

## WE HAVE A SLATE!

**Tuesday, July 13th** - We held our monthly meeting at the Harlingen Public Library. At the top of the agenda, we selected a slate of officers for the upcoming election, to be held at the general meeting.

The nomination committee did a thorough canvass of the membership, but were unable to come up with any candidates for any of the offices. There were no nominations from the floor. Fortunately for our organization, the current officers were willing to serve another term. I wonder what would have happened if they had been tired of serving.

Our current officers are exemplary in their performance and dedication. I prefer to believe that the lack of opposition is an indication of the satisfaction we have in the current officers rather than a general unwillingness to serve on the part of our membership. I won't deliver a sermon on the subject at this time, but probably will next April.

Before the meeting commenced, Jimmy Paz received his 100-hr pin and Lois Shull received her Certificate, having completed the necessary volunteer hours. Congratulations to both of you!

Karen Woodard, of the Texas Forestry Service, gave a very interesting presentation on **Urban Forestry**. The emphasis was on planning your types and locations of trees so they would not provide problems later. Knowledge of the trees suitable for the area is the key. She provided a very good overview of the desirable plants for the Valley. Not necessarily Valley natives, but Texas natives. She exhibited a strong bias against Live Oaks. She also gave out the booklet *A Guide to Growing Healthy Trees in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas*. It is a very good reference on what and when to plant and how to maintain it.

As a bonus, one of Linda Williams art students exhibited her work. It represented all her high school years, so was quite varied in media and subject matter. It was a pleasure to talk with the artist. She is a personable, level-headed sort who has already been accepted in a New York design school. We wish her well.

Remember folks! Saturday, July 31 is **Family Fun Day** at Sabal Palms. Come out and help out! Bring the kids.

Leo Garrett

## 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

<b>President</b>	<b>Walter Berry</b>
<b>Vice President</b>	<b>Laura Duvall</b>
<b>Administrative Secretary</b>	<b>Frank Wiseman</b>
<b>Recording Secretary</b>	<b>Deanna Schaeffer</b>
<b>Treasurer</b>	<b>Diann Ballesteros</b>

### Standing Committees

<b>Education/Adv. Training</b>	<b>Donna Berry</b>
<b>Projects</b>	<b>Rudy Ruiz</b>
<b>Public Relations / Communications</b>	<b>Susan Steffner</b>

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## Don Bremer

We have lost one of our own. Don Bremer, one of the founders of our chapter, passed away June 30th. I never knew him, but he was admired and respected by those who did. Our most fitting tributes come from our peers and contemporaries. In that light, I am printing the following messages. -Ed.

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It is with great sadness that I am announcing the death of Don Bremer.

Don was a charter member of the RGV Chapter and an ardent believer in the Master Naturalists mission. He truly embraced the program's mission and lived by it day in and day out. He always went beyond the call of duty in his tireless quest to help conserve, and to help educate others, about the priceless value of the natural resources of the Rio Grande Valley.

He will be sorely missed.

Jesús Franco

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Don was indeed a great diplomat for the Texas Master Naturalists. He has touched countless lives with his untiring work especially with butterflies and the school children of the Rio Grande Valley. A few months ago he brought me some Gulf Fritillary caterpillars and chrysalis which he rescued from the Sharyland Acres Nursery. He cared deeply about nature and was indeed a true friend of the butterflies. One of his latest interests was with black swallowtails. A few weeks ago he brought me some caterpillars from his backyard. He gave me instructions as to how to raise them

and the result was some fabulous pictures of a very cooperative and stunning black swallowtail.

Both my wife and son will always have treasured memories of raising and releasing the butterflies he brought into our lives. He will always have a special place in our memory and our hearts.

Gil Quintanilla & family

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I didn't know Don Bremer very long, but he made an indelible impression on me when I first met him through the TX Master Naturalist program.

What set him apart was his instant willingness to share what he had learned, especially when it came to his new passion -- bats and butterflies. I had the pleasure to work with him on various environmental projects in area schools. He touched the lives of hundreds of students, volunteering a lot of his personal time building bird feeders and bird-houses for kids, and teaching them what he learned about the natural world. He was able to help kids understand the connection man has with nature because he was comfortable in his own skin.

His energy and wholehearted interest in sharing what he had learned is an example to people who merely talk a good game. I regret not having spent more time with the man. People like Don are sorely needed in our community.

-He will be missed.

Roy J. Rodriguez

## *In Memoriam*

The Board of Directors has accepted the following recommendation for a memorial in honor of Don Bremer, who passed away on June 30, 2004. Don Bremer was one of our founding members in the class of 2002. Don was greatly involved with native plants, butterflies and bats. He helped several schools with their butterfly gardens and presented butterfly programs to the students. He was also a volunteer at the NABA park. He built numerous butterfly cages and bat nesting boxes. He volunteered his time also at the Valley Nature Center.

Our chapter is planning to plant a memorial tree with a plaque in his honor at the recently established NABA Park. Don's wife, Geri, has told us that this was Don's wish.

You may also mail your donation to RGVCTMN, P.O. Box 532129, Harlingen, TX 78553. Please make your check out to RGVCTMN.

## MASTER NATURALISTS DO ADVANCED PLANT FIELD TRIP WORK

By Frank Wiseman

During the months of June and July several groups of RGVCTMN members and other volunteers have gathered on diverse properties throughout the Rio Grande Valley to do advance planning for our plant field trips that will begin on September 18th. We have traveled from Brownsville to Rio Grande City.

On June 14<sup>th</sup> Frank Wiseman, Diann Ballesteros, Sharon and Dick Roesler did a partial plant ID of Arroyo brush property owned by Ted and Bobbie Beumeler, located west of Rangerville Rd., south of Harlingen. The Beumelers had come to our general meeting on June 8<sup>th</sup> and asked for help to identify plants on their recently acquired property. We were glad to do this as a part of our naturalist learning experiences. After greeting our hosts, we were driven down to the banks of the Arroyo in golf carts and proceeded to walk all along the edges of the property, identifying plants of all the native species we could locate. Ted staked and wrote plant names on them as we went along. We identified over 40 different native species. The Beumelers plan to convert some of their acreage into an upscale RV park and want to apply for certification as a Texas Wildscapes from TPWD. We offered to return and help them with the required forms for Texas Wildscapes and the National Wildlife Federation Backyard Habitat certification. We hope they achieve this goal in the near future.

On June 21st Frank Wiseman, Diann Ballesteros, and volunteers Christina Mild and Bill MacWhorter joined TMNers Marisa Oliva, Jaime Guerra and Marisa's father to ID more of the plants on a small section of the Oliva property known as La Sagunada Ranch, north of Rio Grande City. This trip was pre-planning for our scheduled plant field trip on January 22<sup>nd</sup> of 2005.

We left Harlingen at 2:30 p.m. and arrived in Rio Grande City at 4:15 p.m. to meet with the others and begin our trek to the Oliva property. La Sagunada is a large tract of land, and we could only manage one small portion located in the more central part of the acreage near a man-made lake fed by a

ramadero. This is a natural drain area of the land. We walked over much of this particular area and located many of the plants previously found on the property from a partial drive-thru plant ID done by Ty Bartoskowitz of TPWD. Ty had listed 50 plants on this trip through the property and from Ty's printed list we were fortunate to locate about 40 of these plants. We were fortunate to identify about another 20 plants not previously recorded on the list. One of the finds of the day for us was locating the native Chomonque, *Gochnatia hypoleuca*.

When Ty had given a presentation of Native Shrubs, Forbes and Trees of South Texas to our members at the general meeting in July of 2003, he had shown a slide of this plant and none of us had ever seen it planted locally. This shrub only grows in the western counties of the Valley and in the counties extending up through Duval and Jim Hogg. It is found infrequently on rocky hillsides or caliche cuestas. (Information can be found in *Trees, Shrubs & Cacti of South Texas* by Everitt & Drawe.)

Our group spent over 3 hours on our walking tour. We then returned to Rio Grande City for a very late supper around 9:00 p.m. A long drive back to Harlingen got us home around 11:00 p.m. We hope our efforts on this excursion will be rewarding and helpful in identifying plants for the general public when we return in January. This trip will be one of the few opportunities offered to our group and the public to enjoy the ranch country of the Rio Grande City area and see the diverse vegetation of that area of the western RGV. The ability to have access to a privately owned area is a big plus for our chapter. We do thank the Olivas for their help.

We now turned our attention to the southern end of the Valley by doing some plant rescue in Brownsville on Gloor Rd., The Woods subdivision. On this July 6<sup>th</sup> venture, Christina Mild acted as our guide. Christina led Diann Ballesteros, Frank Wiseman, and volunteer Jan Miller through an ebony-covered, brushy area on the east side of this newly constructed subdivision. We were delighted to find some examples of hardy leather stem, *Jatropha dioica*, growing here. Also present were many good

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specimens of lotebush and David's milkberry. We found excellent examples of woody groves, an elongated wasp nest, and evidence of many mammals and herps. Butterflies were plentiful in most of the areas we visited, notably the rare Blue Metalmark, nectaring on blooming colima plants. Christina and Frank had previously talked to Ken King from Frontera Audubon and Martin Hagne from VNC about the feasibility of rescuing some plants before the bulldozers completely destroyed this beautiful native landscape. We had permission from Mr. Gloor to dig and rescue as many plants as we wanted. We rescued some of the more easily dug plants for revegetation projects elsewhere. These outings offer us the chance to see the much-varied plant life in our Valley in its natural state in the wild, instead of park plantings and homeowners' yards.

The last outing that our group of TMNers (Frank, Diann, Sharon and Dick) and volunteers (Christina Mild and Susie Conway) undertook was a trip down Rd. 1018 in eastern Willacy County. Near the levee of the floodway in an almost dry wetland area, we collected seed and a few plants of the recently discovered rare Pink Abutilon known as *Abutilon hulseanum*. Jann Miller discovered these plants on one of her private rural huntings for old Camino Real roads in this area. According to Mild in her recently-published article about this plant in the *Valley Morning Star*, Section C, pp. 1 & 3, July 10, 2004, this plant had not been seen in all of the state of Texas for many years. This particular pink mallow grows to a height of one meter and has beautiful pink flowers with a yellow center.

It is easily sighted from the road (but only after 4pm, when distinctly colored pink blossoms are open).

Since the property borders the floodway, we did not need permission to approach these areas. I don't recommend plant rescue, which involves trespassing on property without prior permission from the owners.

A good amount of seed was collected for future plantings. We hope the few small plants we rescued will survive in pots until cooler weather arrives, and they can be put in the ground. This area will not be on one of our field trips for the calendar year '04-'05. However, for those interested, we could plan a special trip next year when the plants are blooming to show them to you.

Our chapter will be conducting native plant field trips beginning in September. One of our local Naturalists, Ken King from Frontera Audubon, will act as a tour leader on some of our trips. Other leaders will be Christina Mild and Dr. Alfred Richardson and possibly Dr. Robert Lonard. We hope that most of our TMN members will take advantage of these trips. Trips are scheduled once a month beginning on September 18<sup>th</sup> and offered as advanced training opportunities. Our completed calendar will be published on the RGVCTMN Website in August.

For those members interested in partial plant listings for the different areas, contact Frank at our e-mail. One last item to mention about plant field work and plant rescue operations: wear appropriate clothing for the area, take sunscreen and insect repellent and lots of water to keep hydrated.

### ***Holey Ebony Beans!***

The next time you're around an ebony tree, take a close look at the empty bean pods on the ground. You'll find holes usually. Sometimes, every bean bulge has a neatly drilled hole in it. Other times, there may be only one or two.

These holes are drilled by a particular beetle that lays its eggs in the bean. I believe the hole is made when the larva eats its way out of the bean. When is the egg laid? In the flower, or new green beans? What does this beetle look like? What's its name?

If you know, post a message to the RGVCTMN list. If you don't know, you're not alone! - Ed.

## ***Master Naturalists and NABA Team Up for Butterfly Count***

Texas Master Naturalists and the North American Butterfly Association (NABA) teamed up to kickoff the 2004 July 4<sup>th</sup> Counts in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. The first of five counts was done in and around the Sabal Palm Grove in Brownsville, Texas on Saturday, July 17th. Tracking through butterfly gardens, fields, parks, and native habitat, fifty two species and close to one thousand butterflies were spotted with the help of the following participants: Cindy and Mike Johnson, Tim Calgazier, Joe Lee Rubio, Gwyn Carmeon, Jorge Garcia, Paula Parson, Ellie Thompson, Richard Lehman, David & Jan Dauphin, and Taffy Heridge.

The butterfly enthusiasts found pay dirt when they came across rare and uncommon species like the showy Erato Heliconian, Orange-barred sulphurs, Two-barred flashers and the secretive Xami of Loma Alta fame. Butterflying is fast becoming a favorite pastime for thousands of Americans and a passionate sport for those in pursuit of new U.S. species records. The lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas is unique in that it is, bar none, the best place in the entire country in which to butterfly. Due to its location, flora, habitat, biodiversity, and the like, over 300 of the 700 known U.S. species have been spotted in this environmental treasure trove. With the development of the NABA International Butterfly Park in Mission, Texas it will soon become the

top destination for Butterfly enthusiasts and (like birding) a major boon to the Valley economy.

The count program has been held annually since 1975, when only 29 counts were held. In 2003, 471 counts were held in 44 U.S. states, 5 Canadian provinces, and 1 Mexican state. Volunteers around North America select a count area with a 15-mile diameter and conduct a one-day census of all butterflies observed within that circle. The count program is intended to promote interest in butterflies and provide results useful for scientific monitoring of butterflies.

Thanks to the efforts of the Rio Grande Valley Master Naturalists and the publicity put together by Walter & Donna Berry, Jimmy Paz, Frank Wiseman, and others, the first count also attracted the interest of the Brownsville Herald's, Ildefonso Ortiz and photographer, Brad Doherty who ran a major story in the Sunday edition. The major Mid-Valley newspaper, The Monitor, followed up with a front page article about butterflies and the remaining counts. Hopefully the Counts will become a major tradition and an event which will promote interest in butterflies and showcase one of our best and least recognized natural treasures.

Gil Quintanilla,

Rio Grande Valley Master Naturalist

## ***TRAINING UP THE VALLEY***

The 2004 Spring Training Class was our chapter's third training for volunteers. This class was an unqualified success with over half of the class certifying in May and 90% completed all class requirements. All class members have a full year to meet all the qualifications to be Certified Master Naturalists.

Plans are already in the works for the Class of 2005. The Board of Directors is trying a new strategy for reaching more potential volunteers in

the Rio Grande Valley by scheduling two classes in the Spring. One class will be held in Harlingen and the other will be held in Edinburg and will run simultaneously.

This is an innovative approach that will make it easier for volunteers to be trained in both ends of the valley and not have to wait for the next class to be held in their area.

Our membership will have an opportunity to assist in making this pilot a success. Please volunteer to help the Education Chair in your area.

Donna Berry

## *The Heart of the Volunteer*

After the battle of Palo Alto General Z. Taylor looked at the field of battle and declared that if it were not for the volunteers and their attitude of, never giving up, that the battle would have been carried by the Mexican troops. It is this kind of spirit of resolve, which reflects our attitude towards the conservation of our natural world in the Rio Grande Valley. We are the volunteers that have not given up the love of nature and refuse to surrender to indifference.

The Master Naturalist is the volunteer that has a sense of the future and knows from experience that we are in trouble. I know that the volunteer is the only source of real influence left that works for a better natural tomorrow. I am proud of the members of this group not because of who they are but because of what they do. It is with much hope and good feeling that I salute the Master Naturalist of Texas Rio Grande Valley Chapter.

Walter E. Berry



**Kim Garwood**, NABA South Texas chapter president, **Bill Lecroy**, **Jo Lee Rubio**, and **Jan Dauphin** observe Mexican Bluewing butterfly that is in Lecroy's hand. 2004 4th of July butterfly count at Santa Ana



## ***FIRST 2004 RIDLEY RELEASE!***



The Ridley turtle conservation/restoration project started in the late 70's at Rancho Nuevo, Mexico.

At that time, only a few hundred turtles were nesting each year. Now, thousands nest in the old grounds at Rancho Nuevo and their nesting range has steadily increased, so that South Padre Island now has Ridleys nesting on its beaches.

During the nesting season volunteers patrol the beach thrice daily. When a turtle nest is found, it is relocated to a corral to prevent predation. The corral nests are monitored closely and when the hatchlings emerge they are counted, examined, and marked. They are then released into the sea.

It appears that the Ridleys return to their original nest beach, when possible, so we can expect to see more and more Ridleys at South Padre Island and points north.

As you can see, there was a good audience for this first release of the year. The upper photo shows the turtles at the water's edge.

Several Texas Master naturalists participated in this project.

*Photos courtesy of  
Linda Williams*





# Trees

I think that I shall never see  
A poem lovely as a tree.

A tree whose hungry mouth is prest  
Against the sweet earth's flowing breast;

A tree that looks at God all day,  
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;

A tree that may in summer wear  
A nest of robins in her hair;

Upon whose bosom snow has lain;  
Who intimately lives with rain.

Poems are made by fools like me,  
But only God can make a tree.

**Joyce Kilmer**

RGV CHAPTER, TEXAS MASTER  
NATURALISTS

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