



The CHACHALACA

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ED SEZ

It's Fall. Summer is a little slow in South Texas, but as this issue shows, the TMNs have been pretty busy. Mostly with plants. October is also our best month for putting in new plants. Things taper off as the weather gets cooler, and many of us have cut our grass for the last time this year. Gardening is shifting to maintenance for a while.

Fall also brings a general pickup in people-related activities. It seems that everyone was having some sort of exhibition or event in October. NABA, the Bentsen WBC Grand Opening, and other events put a premium on volunteers, especially the third weekend!

The Winter Texans will start arriving soon. The schools will start having field trips. The general public will increase their visits to our natural attractions. We will have the opportunity to fulfill one of the major goals of the TMN program, by helping them all enjoy, and learn from, their experiences.

Look around. Within thirty minutes' drive of your home, there is an attraction that can use your help as a guide. You don't have to be an expert. Your training has equipped you to learn what you need to know. A couple of trips around the trail with a knowledgeable guide, and a little book-work, will set you up.

Few pleasures compare to turning on the light for others. "Try it, you'll like it!"

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.

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Wish List

This is a new feature. If you need something to help you do your job, maybe someone out there has it!

FrankWiseman, our esteemed Secretary, could use:

Postage Stamps

Inkjet cartridges. HP ??

A MOTH STORY

Unless you are a TMN, you probably think that someone who spent eight weeks Moth Sitting needs to “get a life”. Back in March, while working at the NABA booth with Fred Klusmann, I learned of a research project being done by Dr. Robert Weast. Dr Weast has studied Moths for many years and is currently trying to establish documented evidence that there is a native population of Polyphemus and Luna moths in the Rio Grande Valley. Both have been documented as far south as San Antonio and the King Ranch. There are occasional reported sightings here in the Valley. The Polyphemus like nut trees and the planting of all the Live Oak may have expanded their range. Pecan trees would also be an appealing host plant. Fred is hosting one of three stations Dr. Weast has here in the RGV. There is one at the Valley Nature Center and one I believe near the Laguna Madre or at least in the Lower Valley.

Fred and his wife were off to Puerto Rico for a few months this summer and Fred asked if I would tend his bait traps. What an offer! First I had to learn the

difference between a male and female moth. That turned out to be easier than I thought. A male moth has very feathery fernlike antennae and the female has straight antennae. Then I had to put female moths in a bait trap to see if they would attract any local males.

Dr. Weast sends cocoons to the locations here that have been collected in the wild, or that he has raised. I was feeling kind of bad – the moths emerge from the cocoon and essentially I let them die. I can't release the males because we don't want to allow an accidental crossbreed that could create problems in the environment and the female just lay unfertilized eggs and die. Both of these species live only a short

time as an adult In fact, Fred told me that the male Luna moth emerges without mouth parts so basically they reproduce and die. At his home in Iowa, Dr. Weast actually tethers female moths and lets them be visited by males. Then he releases her to lay her eggs in netted trees, so essentially he is raising many of the cocoons we are nursing and they are not from the wild populations.

The bait trap consists of putting the female in a small can, with its end covered with a screen. The cans are then attached to a screen box at the mouth of a funnel. The pheromones (hormones that attract the males) should bring any passing

male to be trapped in the box. It is kind of a lobster trap for moths. It is an interesting project and I am glad I could be a part of it. It was reminder that research seldom yields quick results, which makes me believe make success all the sweeter.

If you are interested in this project check out Fred's web site at:



Luna Moth

<http://members.aol.com/FKusmann> . You can see some great pictures of these beautiful moths. Or I am sure if you stop by the Valley Nature center you can see the bait traps and any moths that have recently emerged.

Submitted by

Mary Bindner - TMN

PLANT RESCUE IS COST SAVING FOR REVEGETATION

By Special TMN Volunteer Christina Mild

Plant rescue is an effort that some of the TMN plant enthusiasts have been trying to instill in our work ethic along with constant maintenance and revegetation plans for areas where we work such as Ramsey Park. This effort affords time for our group to be in the field together for all sorts of learning experiences and camaraderie as well as making our revegetation efforts much less costly.

Our group has gone to the far reaches of the Valley on the Balcones Escarpment near Rio Grande City, Green Island in the Laguna Madre, construction sites in and around the Harlingen city area, Brownsville, Boca Chica and Padre Island.

Plant rescue efforts conducted during summer brought a variety of plants from the Alton Gloor area in Brownsville, where a subdivision is in the making, to cleared areas of Ramsey Park. Mr. Gloor, who owns the wooded area, has been most cooperative in allowing plant rescue on his property.

Plants found in the area are widely diverse. It is an area of mature "resaca woodland."

Volunteers dug small specimens of many shrubs, to augment their limited numbers at Ramsey Park: Coma, Coyotillo, Guayacan, Skeleton leaf Daisy, Lotebush, Snake Eye's, David's Milkberry, Heartleaf Hibiscus, Amargosa, Barbados Cherry and Crucillo.

Several species, which were not previously planted at Ramsey, were obtained via rescue. These include: Oreja de Raton (*Bernardia myraecifolia*), Scaly Stem (*Elytraria bromoides*), Velvet Burr (*Priva lappulacea*), Bernadette (*Isocarpha oppositifolia*), White Mistflower (*Eupatorium incarnatum*), Noseburn Vine (*Tragia glandulifera*) and Globe Berry Vine (*Ibervillea lindheimeri*). While each of these species occurs in Arroyo brush, they were not yet present in Ramsey.

A number of grasses, especially those that grow in shaded areas, were rescued. (Most of the areas, which are ready for planting at Ramsey, are at least partially shaded by mesquite.) Rescued grasses include Texas Bristle grass, Buffalo grass, a short *Panicum*, and a species of *Bouteloua*.

Colorful herbaceous plants have been added to trailside locations, where blooms and fruit should attract wildlife for easy viewing. These include: *Trixis inula*, Pigeonberry, Leather Stem, *Celosia nitida*, Tube Tongue, Scarlet Sage, *Eupatorium azureum*, vines in the family Sapindaceae, *Passiflora foetida* and *suberosa*, Angel Trumpet Vine, Frostweed, Chilipequin, Plumbago, *Matelia* vine and *Perezia runcinata*.

Use of a lightweight wheelbarrow speeded our work considerably. Most plants were placed immediately into pots, which were filled with roadside-runoff topsoil. We focused on digging away from areas infested with guinea and buffle grass.

Sometimes an entire "colony" was rescued. A short grass, for example, often grew in close proximity to six or more specimens of Scaly Stem, with Bernadette or Noseburn Vine as a close partner. When a wide clump of vegetation was dug as an intact mound, it was often placed in a plastic grocery bag for immediate planting.

The hardest part of any rescue operation is the decision to stop digging and leave the rescue site. There are always more plants in need of relocation; one can never rescue all of them.

We've been blessed with frequent showers during summer 2004, increasing the odds that "rescued" plants will actually survive our well-intentioned meddling.

RGVCTMN PLANT FIELD TRIP TO EWBC

By Frank Wiseman

The October plant field trip for advanced training took a group of 10 RGVCTMN members to the Edinburg Wetlands Birding Center. Richard Lehman who was the director of this facility in 2001 and the landscape architect for the beautiful gardens that adjoin the large city lake in the former wetlands area met the group.

After paying a small entrance fee, Lehman invited our group inside the classroom area off the main lobby of the building in order to explain the beginnings of the park and gardens and the types of native plants that were brought into the area.

He also explained the many difficulties of transforming this barren, hard clay soil into a place that would sustain the native plants that were placed here. He explained that the city brought in over 500 truckloads of mulch and covered the entire area with a layer over a foot deep.

Lehman and Ken King from Frontera Audubon rescued plants from Hidalgo and Starr counties and brought in hundreds of Betony (Padre Island Mist Flower) along with Eupatorium odoratum and many other native plants. Trees and shrubs of many native species were also planted. The main objective was to attract the birds, butterflies and other animals that would frequent this area. Some of the more prominent trees were the tepeguaje, wild olive, tenaza, Montezuma bald cypress and potato tree. Shrubs included crucillo, sage, coyotillo, white brush and snake eyes. Plants included Padre Island goldenrod, several of the lantana species, manfreda

variegata, and frog fruit.

The park and its gardens have turned out to be a luscious nectar and host plant location for butterflies. They lay their eggs on the host plants, which in turn hatch the caterpillars that munch their way to maturity on the leaves of their host plant. Nature photographers are usually found here in abundance trying to capture that elusive specie that seems to deny them access to their fluttering wings.

Our group concentrated on the hundreds of different native plants. Lehman and others in our group such as Donna Berry, Diann Ballesteros and Frank Wiseman patiently answered questions.

Lehman explained the plants' different uses for the critters occupying the park and the esthetic beauty of some plants and their usefulness to the park in general. Since water is not a real problem in this area due to the resources of the lake, Lehman explained that the city laid over 20 miles of watering system pipes that are used to irrigate the plants during dry seasons. Due to the heavy mulching of the entire area, the plants have grown rapidly. The gardens now offer a beautiful place for the public to stroll and enjoy our native plant beauty.

Those who have not visited this site may take advantage of it when you are in the Edinburg area. Marisa Oliva and Bill LeCroy, RGVCTMN members, work at the park and can be very helpful.

Our November Plant Trip will be to the Brownsville area of Palo Alto and Loma Alta.

We thank Richard for his participation in our trip as our guide.

Weed Lady's Advice on Care of Leather Gloves

Soft leather gloves are great to work in, but after they're stinky and caked with mud, how do you revive them? A whole assortment of drying methods leave them brittle and hard, uncomfortable and easily split at the seams.

But, there's hope of restoring that supple texture you were willing to pay \$8 for. Here's my solution. I wash them with the rest of my filthy work clothes. Then, I dry them in the electric dryer, WITH (and this is the key) a few sheets of softener.

Now I can wear my gloves at least twice, before losing them! C. Mild



RGVCTMN at the Edinburg Wetlands Birding Center



Summer into Fall Volunteers at Ramsey Park
(Story on page 6)

TMN MEMBERS TURN SUMMER INTO FALL AT RAMSEY PARK

By Diann Ballesteros

The Ramsey WMW (Wednesday Morning Workgroup) became the MTAW (Monday and Thursday Afternoon Workgroup) as summer heat was better tolerated in the late afternoons. Christina Mild, Frank Wiseman, Sharon and Dick Roesler, Kathy Sheldon and Diann Ballesteros make up this dedicated group of TMN members. They regularly do all kinds of work at Ramsey Park in Harlingen to help keep it in good shape for all visitors to enjoy.

Dick Roesler cleared tall grasses and tall plant debris from the trailsides, with a weed eater. Many of us used shovels, pickaxes, digging forks, newly patented weeding devices, and good old elbow grease to remove stubborn guinea grass and other unwanted "weeds" along the caliche loop.

Much of the summer work at Ramsey involved cleaning guinea grass away from areas where rescued plants were transplanted in late spring. Ample rain brought many opportunities to dig plants for rescue and to transplant. The same ample rain brought regrowth of guinea grass into areas where the grass had been previously killed with RoundUp. Areas which had been heavily mulched prior to transplanting new plants needed much less work, as little guinea grass reappeared there.

This summer about 160 plants of at least 25 different species were rescued from a subdivision off Alton Gloor Road in Brownsville. These were then transplanted into various areas in Ramsey Park.

Some watering of newly planted areas was necessary. /Because of the abundance of rain this summer, less time was dedicated to watering than in past summers.

Frank Wiseman spent many afternoon trimming mesquite, retama, and other overgrown trees to allow room and sunlight for growing under story plants.

Drew Bennie made several trips thru the Park to help select and design the area that has been

designated as a special spot for a Robert Runyon Garden. A Robert Runyon fund has been created from donations to honor the late Brownsville Mayor, photographer and plant specialist. If you would like to donate to this worthy cause, please send all donations to our PO Box 532129, Harlingen, TX 78553. We are actively seeking funds to complete the area with more of the plants named for this Valley man, to buy benches, and signage. It will be the first spot in the Rio Grande Valley so designated to honor this special Valleyite. We have been coordinating these plans with ACAS' Ramsey Habitat Chair/TMN member Gene Lester.

In July, Frank Wiseman and Sharon Roesler guided a group of twelve Cub Scouts thru the park to help them earn their Forestry Badge. Diann Ballesteros led a group of elementary students from St. Paul Lutheran School on a nature walk thru the park.

David's Milkberry plants, donated by Mike Heep, bloomed for the first time this summer. Several more Milkberry plants were planted in the same area that is known as Warbler Corner. The work group has all of the designated work areas named with special monikers such as Pitaya Butte, Betty McEnery Memorial Garden, Coral Bean Cove, Skull Mountain, HHSS Corner, Hachinal Bend, Izzy's Garden, and Stump Hollow. This helps us all recognize where we will work and what is to be done in each area in advance of our workdays. Planning and executing the work is a delight when so many eager volunteers offer their services. Among other TMN members who helped at the park this summer were Tim Colglazier and his son Tom and Jerry Paschke.

It was a busy but productive summer for our group and Ramsey Park reaped our rewards in many different ways. Visitors will now be able to view a myriad plants with signage, making our work a rewarding cause.

Good friends made the work lighter. Beautiful sunsets, flocks of screeching parrots, scurrying rabbits, flitting butterflies and singing birds were our companions. Who could ask for more?!!!

SEPTEMBER PLANT FIELD TRIP

By Frank Wiseman

September 18th saw the dawning of a new effort by our plant group in RGVCTMN. Members Frank Wiseman, Donna Berry, Diann Ballesteros, Walter Berry, Max Pons, and volunteers Ken King and Christina Mild, met at the TNC in Brownsville in early June to plan a schedule for our monthly plant field trips.

Each field trip will be counted for TMN members as advanced training. We are partnering with Frontera Audubon Society in Weslaco for these field trips and will have Ken King, plant biologist, along on many trips as a tour guide. Other guides will include native plant nurseryman Mike Heep; Christina Mild, plant biologist; Dr. Alfred Richardson, noted plant author and professor emeritus at UTB; Bill McWhorter, retired city planner; Max Pons, Manager at TNC and TMN member; and Richard Lehman, butterfly expert. Diann Ballesteros and Frank Wiseman will act as coordinators and planners for all trips.

Our staging area for all trips will be the Tourist Information Center on West Harrison Street in Harlingen. All tours will leave this area at 9:00 a.m. to caravan to our different native plant sites.

September 18th trip to Heep's nursery and Wyrick's acreage:

Each member of the 21 present on this trip received a list of ten plants for Mike Heep's front yard and 14 plants at the Jan Wyrick Arroyo Brush property.

Our first stop of the morning was to the home of Mike Heep for a tour of his front yard and extensive native plant nursery, located behind his home. Heep explained the reason for planting such plants as frog fruit, ruellia, heart leaf hibiscus, shrimp plant, pigeonberry, heliotrope, tropical sage, Texas mountain laurel, selene, and skeleton leaf daisy. He then took us to see how he propagates and grows the thousands of native plants in his nursery. This was a "tour deluxe" and our members

learned a lot with their hands on experience. Photographers were adept at clicking shutters to capture butterflies and hummingbirds that were in abundance. One notable tree of mention is a tree called the Kapok, over 40 feet tall and covered with orchid-like flowers that attracted the multitude of hummers that day.

Much to our surprise, Claire Heep served us a delicious buffet brunch of Philippine food. Eight-month old Michael Matthew Heep surveyed the group with curiosity. We thank the Heeps for such a warm welcome, the excellent food, and the private tour of his nursery and yard.

Our next stop was to the large Arroyo-backed property of Jan Wyrick. The Wyricks have an old country home that is beautifully landscaped with natives and a large pond area in the back yard. Leading down from this area our group wandered thru an old pasture area that has undergone some revegetation, primarily with tepeguaje. Trails led around a large pond area, which is a haven for birds and dragonflies, and over a stream. The stream meanders from the front pond back to the rear pond area with bridge crossings and plant-strewn paths that are wonderful places to practice native plant identification.

Reaching the rear of the property we passed thru small openings in the native brush, seeing such plants as the leather leaf, Texas torchwood, mountain torchwood, *Bernardia*, guayacan, coyotillo, Vasey's Adelia, amargosa, crucillo, colima, lotebush, allthorn, and rabbit brush. The blaze of green stretching along the edges of the Arroyo banks was a butterflyers delight, as many Mexican Blue wings were present in the Adelias.

All present on the tour agreed that it was a rewarding and learning experience. Once again we thank our hosts, the Wyricks, for allowing us to tour their property.

WBC HQ Has Grand Opening!

The Headquarters of the World Bird Center held its Grand Opening the weekend of October 23rd. Beth, my wife, and I had signed up to help out, so Friday we drove the RV up and parked in the Bentsen Palms RV Park, right across from the HQ.

The RV park is first class. It is several acres in size, and the RV spots are in four large circles. The sites are large and the RVs point toward the center of the circle. The entire park is planted in native vegetation. Each site has its own little hummingbird/butterfly patch. The NABA Garden is only a mile down the road so the park is a "toofer".

After we got hooked up, we strolled over to the HQ and checked in with Jennifer Liston, the ranger who was coordinating the volunteers. Beth had signed up for the Crafts Table and I had committed to the HQ Butterfly Garden area.

There is an eight mile bike trail around the RV park so we rode a couple of miles out and back. No hills, but the wind was in our faces both ways. ??

Saturday morning we checked in and Beth went into Bentsen Park as the Crafts were in the pavilion there. I took up my post between the HQ buildings. The buildings are in two parallel rows, offices, gift shop, and coffee shop in the north row, lecture and exhibition halls in the south row. The buildings are brick with Quonset-hut style metal roofs. A system of gutters and pipes collects all the water from the

roofs into large tanks. It is then used to supply the gardens and ponds between the buildings.

The gardens are planted in native trees and shrubs, and provide a very good South Texas botany classroom. The bushes were doing their job as the butterflies and hummingbirds were out. Mary Bindner came by one day and helped me be more specific about Sulphurs and Skipper. I also found out that a Gulf Fritillary is a butterfly, not a place for surf fishermen to get their catch fried!

Several TMNs were there. Mary, Gene Lester, Alan Duvall, and others I am sure. (I didn't get into the park until we rode through Sunday AM before reporting for our second tour.) Several of the folks from other parks were there and I got to see friends from Santa Ana as well. I also met Ron Wauer, the author of the LRGV Butterfly book and thanked him for providing such a great local reference.

The HQ staff expected 1000 guests each day and I believe they met expectations. Lots of families came. The trams ran about every 15 minutes and there was always someone on board. The small children were out in force and Beth had a good time helping them make owls, hummingbirds, and butterflies. Some visitors sat down and helped cut out things too!

Beth and I had a great time at the opening both as volunteers and Rvers. Now, when and where is the next WBC opening?

Leo Garrett

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NATURALISTS

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