



The CHACHALACA

VOLUME 2 NUMBER 1

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ED SEZ

Wow! Where did the year go? We're starting the second volume of the Chachalaca already.

We have had a good year. According to Frank's annual report, we put in 7,081 volunteer hours in 2004. We've been learning as well, witness the 1693 Advanced Training hours we received. In truth, the actual hours are probably much more than the stated amounts, since none of us count all the time we put in.

Some attempts to quantify our activity have no real meaning. Example: Number of people served by our efforts. The work we have done at locations such as Ramsey Park may be said to affect everyone who visits the park.

In February we start training a new class of TMNs. This new class will be split into two groups, one receiving training in Edinburg, the other in Harlingen. While this split doubles the load on the training staff, we have no choice if we are to maintain ourselves as a true valley-wide organization. The new class totals 30 aspiring TMNs. We will have 100 members in our chapter after they all certify!

Our Board and Officers are to be commended for how far we have come since 2002. I don't believe any of us can really appreciate how much they have accomplished, nor how much of their time, energy and resources they have devoted to the chapter.

On behalf of our members, I would like to say,

Thank you!

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

President	Laura Duvall
Vice President	Linda McGonigle
Administrative Secretary	Frank Wiseman
Recording Secretary	Deanna Schaeffer
Treasurer	Diann Ballesteros
Standing Committees	
Education/Adv. Training	Donna Berry
Projects	Tim Colglazier
Public Relations / Communications	
	Joe Lee Rubio
Newsletter	Leo Garrett

Changes

Our Officers Roster is a little different this quarter.

Walter Berry, who has served so well, resigned as President. In accordance with our bylaws, Laura Duvall, VP assumed the office.

Linda McGonigle was then selected to fill the office of Vice President.

Tim Colglazier volunteered to fill the previously vacant Projects Committee Chair.

BREMER MEMORIAL

Martin Hagne, Director of VNC, accepts the check for the Bremer Memorial from Diann Ballesteros, RGVCTMN Treasurer.

RGVCTMN has purchased a commemorative brick from Valley Nature Center in memory of charter member Don Bremer . This brick will help support the Valley Nature Center and be a permanent memorial to Don. The brick will be engraved as follows:

In Memoriam**Don Bremer 1934-2004**

**" No one who has touched a
life, who has brought beauty
to the world, is ever truly
gone."**

Unknown

RGV Chapter

Texas Master Naturalist

Funds for the \$500 brick were donated by members of the RGVCTMN. A ceremony is being planned when the brick is in place.

THE RUNYON PROJECT: A GOOD START!

In March of 2004 while stumbling around the sand dunes at Boca Chica Beach on a Master Naturalist outing, I mentioned to Frank Wiseman and Diane Ballesteros how nice it would be to have a memorial set up to the pioneer amateur naturalist Robert Runyon of Brownsville. Recently this idea has come to fruition with the help of some dedicated Master Naturalists.

On Saturday, January 22nd, 10 volunteers pitched in and took the first steps toward building a memorial garden at Ramsey Park in Harlingen. They laid down a path, hauled dirt and compost, planted plants, trimmed trees and removed unwanted plants to make room for others. The plan is to plant specimens of plants that Robert Runyon brought to the attention of the scientific community and the world. Thanks to the volunteers, cactus donated by Diane Ballesteros and areas of Runyon's Water Willow (*Justicia runyonii*) are now planted as well as other native plants Frank Wiseman donated which were planted to provide a background. A short path leads through the beds to allow viewing of the plants. The highlight of the morning was the planting of the *Esenbeckia runyonii* tree kindly donated by Gene Lester who was there to help. The tree was prepared for transplanting and transported by Mike

Heep who was also there for advise and support. All proudly watched as this beautiful specimen was placed lovingly in the ground. The *Esenbeckia runyonii* tree is considered the rarest tree in North America and only a few specimens are known to exist in their natural habitat. We are truly fortunate to be able to have one for our memorial garden to display to future naturalists at the park. Thank you Gene and Mike!

The Runyon Garden is off to a great start. I plan to have future planting days to add more plants and to tend the plants that were recently planted. I hope to see you all at the next work day at this newest addition to Ramsey Park in Harlingen.

Thanks to the volunteers who came out in the January heat to help: Walter and Donna Berry, George Garcia, Frank Wiseman, Deanna Schaeffer, Diann Ballesteros, Dick and Sharon Roesler, Tim Colglazier. A special thanks to Mike Heep and Gene Lester for their generous contributions as well.

Submitted by Drew Bennie, Runyon Project Coordinator



Walter Berry, Donna Berry, Deanna Schaeffer, Dick Roesler, Diann Ballesteros, Drew Bennie, Frank Wiseman, Tim Colglazier, Sharon Roesler.

(George Garcia didn't make it into the picture but worked)

RGVCTMN PLANT FIELD TRIP TO RIO HONDO

A large group attended this field trip to one of the best intact pieces of Arroyo Colorado brush.

The portion of the property adjacent to the road is former cropland, revegetated with native species several years ago. The newest addition to this amazing habitat is a completed and filled pond. Christina Mild pointed out the diversity of native grasses along the pond's edge and participants spotted a number of dragon and damselflies.

We began and ended the fieldtrip at this pond, where our cars were parked on a levy.

Several mature trees and shrubs were pointed out by Ken King as we walked along the newly-blacktopped entry road. Some species of wildflowers were in bloom, including tropical sage.

Christina Mild introduced a number of additional people who could answer identification questions including Frank Wiseman and Diann Ballesteros.

Entering the mature brush via dirt trails, we split into smaller groups, choosing an expert to follow.

Most groups moved quite slowly at the outset, noting and identifying several species of cactus growing in the semi-shade of trail edges. Among these were the Pincushion, *Mammillaria*

heyderi, Twisted Barrel, *Echinocactus setispinus* or perhaps *sinuatus*, and Hair-Covered Cactus, *Mammillaria multiceps*. (Nomenclature taken from Everitt & Drawe's 1993 edition of *Trees, Shrubs & Cacti of South Texas*. Some species are easily distinguished by bloom color, but blooms were not present during our visit.)

Participants took the challenge of distinguishing the myriad plant species entangled virtually everywhere along the trails. Rarely was a single species growing in isolation.

Permission was granted to Diann Ballesteros by James & Georgiana Matz to collect fallen specimens of Ball Moss, *Tillandsia baileyi* and *recurvata*. These epiphytes were later re-attached to trees at Ramsey Park. Certain birds are known to nest in the vicinity of these plants.

Everyone met in the Matz' boat house for refreshments, provided by James & Georgiana. The boat house is a splendid setting, perched over the Arroyo Colorado.

As the group re-gathered at the pond's edge, birdwatching became the new focus. A male Vermillion Flycatcher spotted by Calvin Burgess posed beautifully atop nesting boxes on the pond's edge.

Christina Mild

Master Naturalists at Boy & Girl Scout Camporee!



Laura Duvall and Chris Black instruct Girl Scouts

The RGV Master Naturalists helped teach about our environment at the annual Boy and Girl Scout Camporee held in Brownsville on Jan. 29, 2005.

Master Naturalists assisted our TPWD sponsor, Jesus Franco, in two booths.

Jorge Garcia, Tim Colglazier, and Alan Duvall worked in the Birding and Binoculars booth instructing Scouts on how to use binoculars and how to identify birds in the field.

Laura Duvall, Chris Black and Donna Berry worked in a booth explaining about local wildlife using replica skulls of mammals and birds and bird eggs. All three members also experienced teaching using Owl Pellets - a first for all three.

The Scouts had a great time and MNs learned some new things as well.

Butterfly Garden Raffle Winners



Butterfly Garden—Margaret Colvin



Guides—Ginny Drawe (L)

The Drawing was held for the Butterfly Garden. First prize, a butterfly garden, was won by Margaret Colvin; Second prize, bird and butterfly guides, went to John Drawe, whose wife accepted for him. The winner of the third prize, a Texas Wildscapes book was won by Jesse Kristensen, whose picture was not available.

We will install the garden in February and will be recruiting volunteers then.

Frost Damage Reprint

Eugene Rouse

Our dry winter with roller-coaster temperatures and clear nights with little or no wind is a prescription for frost. Much of the foliage on our valley plants are stressed due to the dehydrating winds we've had. The frost completes the tissue damage.

Patience, patience, patience. It's a tremendous temptation to grab the pruning shears and go out to make things neat. Reliable nurserymen will tell you to wait until after February 20th. In the past ten years we have had a damaging freeze as late as March 1st.

There may be another reason or two to delay pruning. Critters. Some of this foliage may be the temporary home of eggs, chrysalis and caterpillars so tiny they are barely visible. The other reason, another frost may be in the forecast and leaving damaged foliage can shield live stems and bugs from tissue damage.

The best time for pruning depends upon the shrub. When shrubs lose their leaves, due to winter or drought, prune them at this time. A leafless shrub allows for the assessment of the overall shape and health problems, and for ease in seeing where cuts are to be made. Otherwise, light pruning to control growth throughout the year is acceptable. If you have pruning questions about your particular shrubs, contact your Certified Texas Nursery Professional.

--Eugene Rouse passed away in 2002. He was a past President of the Native Plant Project and an amateur naturalist who volunteered at the Sabal Palm Sanctuary for more than five years.

TMN MEMBERS TOUR THE HARLINGEN THICKET

A group of 10 RGVCTMN members participated in a Plant Field Trip in the Harlingen Thicket and Ramsey Park for Advanced Credit Training hours on Sat. Jan. 29, '05. Tour leaders Christina Mild, Frank Wiseman and Diann Ballesteros explained and identified the many native trees, shrubs and plants located in the pristine area of native brush along the banks of the Arroyo Colorado in Central Harlingen. It was a wonderfully cool and overcast day which led to ideal conditions for viewing the myriad plants available in both of these parks.

The group met at the Harlingen Tourist Center at 9:00 a.m. and caravanned to the site. The entrance to this location is locked on a permanent basis and is not open to the general public. The tour of this area, which consists of many hidden trails, afforded our group the opportunity to learn more about our local native plants, up close and personal. Each member was urged to ask questions and participate in the many ways one goes about identifying our native plants. Each member was given a sheet with the names of all of the plants that grow in this stretch of the Arroyo Colorado and in most areas of the RGV. Members were asked to check off as many as they were able to identify and record. Other plants not men-

tioned the sheet were also recorded, and members were given tips on how to identify plants thru their own associated learning skills.

To further enhance their skills our group went over to tour Hugh Ramsey Nature Park in Harlingen the native plants there.. This second trip reinforced their learning from the Thicket tour. Members participating in this field trip were Anitra DeMoss, Mary Olivares, Oscar Tagle, Mark Williamson, Linda McGonigle, Frank Wiseman, Diann Ballesteros, Kathy Sheldon, and Alice Peters. We want to especially thank Christina Mild for acting as our lead tour guide. Her expertise is always most appreciated in everything that we as Master Naturalist endeavor to undertake in the plant field.

We hope that our members will take advantage of our monthly plant field trips that we offer as advanced training credit on a Saturday when most members are off work. Our next trip will be to La Sagunada Ranch in the Rio Grande City area on Feb. 26th. This ranch is private property and will afford our members the opportunity to view the plants that are native to the western end of the RGV. Rare plants and cacti are a specialty on this trip.



TMNs who toured the Thicket



Texas Baby Bonnet, one of the few plants in FULL bloom on Jan. 29th.

Arroyo Parks Nature Interpretive Series: The next walk is scheduled for Tuesday, February 8th, 9:30 a.m. "*Tiny Habitats with Enormous Diversity*" is an easy walking tour of Harlingen's C. B. Wood Park. This tiny piece of preserved arroyo brush is host to an enormous diversity of plant and animal life. The earthen trail may be muddy. Join volunteers from Rio Grande Valley Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists for a nature tour of this very special piece of arroyo brush.

C. B. Wood Park is near Sam Houston Elementary School. It can be reached by driving west from 1st St. on Harding or Wilson Ave. Reservations are required: Frank Wiseman at 956-364-1410.

NATURE'S PRUNER

In the fall you may find twigs littering the ground under hardwood trees. This is the handiwork of the female twig girdler beetle. The twig girdler is most common in the southern states but is known as far north as New England, and west as far as Arizona.

In south Texas we have the mesquite twig girdler, *Oncideres rhodosticta*. These beetles are 1/2 to 3/4 inch long, dark brown with three shiny black dots immediately behind the head. It is found in the southern Rolling Plains, and prefers to feed on mesquite and acacia species.

The huisache girdler, *O. pustulatus* is 11/16 to 1-1/8 inches long, brown with a light brown band across the middle of the upper surface of the body and peppered with small shiny black dots. It is found in the Gulf Coast Prairie, south Texas and the Rio Grande Valley and prefers mimosa and huisache.

In late summer the female twig girdler lays her eggs in the branch tips of hardwoods such as mesquite. She then crawls along the twig a foot or two toward the trunk and cuts a groove almost completely through the wood, girdling the twig. Girdled



twigs are usually 1/4 to 1/2 inch in diameter at the girdle. The cut from the twig girdler is the only one made from the outside and is seldom complete, leaving a small central cylinder of wood attached. This creates conditions in the twig for the development of her larvae which spend the winter in the twig and emerge the following summer. The larvae feed inside the dead injured tree part, tunneling toward the severed end of the twig by feeding only on the wooden portion and leaving the bark intact. Because of this method the twig girdlers are not a threat

to tree health. Leaves on the girdled branches turn, die and fall, and the branches often fall from the tree during high winds and storms.

Girdling does affect the beauty and aesthetic quality of ornamental plantings. Natural controls are important in keeping the twig girdler population low; dessication of the eggs is apparently the greatest single mortality factor. In orchards and nurseries the severed twigs

are gathered and burned during fall, winter and spring when the eggs and grubs are in the twigs. Using this method populations can be greatly reduced in one or two seasons.

Frank Wiseman

Quickies

LRGV Native Plant website comes on-line: www.riodeltawild.com

Christina Mild has created her own website, featuring previously-published articles on native plants. Mild's "Rio Delta Wild" column appears weekly in the Saturday edition of Harlingen's Valley Morning Star. Articles published from July to December 2003 and January to June 2004 can be accessed at this time. The website includes comprehensive indexes, both chronologic and alphabetic by genus.

There's a new Google search engine that searches only academic texts (e.g., journal articles, theses, books, preprints, and technical reports) across any area of research. A beta version of the search engine is available at: Google Scholar . <http://scholar.google.com/> News courtesy of Mike Quinn

Volunteer Opportunity! The Ocelot Festival will be held on Feb. 12, 2005 at the Marine Military Academy in Harlingen. They would like to have volunteers volunteer for half day shifts 8:30 a.m. - 1 p.m. and 12:30 p.m. - 5 p.m. You can sign up for all day if you would like to or you can work half a day and attend the seminars for advanced training .

Please contact Linda Laack at 956-748-5607 to sign up or email her at Linda_Laack@fws.gov

Monthly Nature Walks in Harlingen are offered by Rio Grande Valley Chapter, Texas Master Naturalists. Each walk will explore one of Harlingen's public parks located along the Hike and Bike Trail. There is no charge to participate. Please RSVP to Frank at 364-1410 to reserve a spot.

On Tuesday, January 11th at 10 a.m. we will explore the Arroyo Park edges to observe how the native and exotic plants in the park's environs fared after the recent Christmas Freeze. We will begin on level terrain and then venture onto some of the rougher Arroyo Park's edges. This tour will show the many advantages of planting many of our native plants. For more information and to reserve a spot be sure to contact Frank at 364-1410.

On Tuesday, February 8th at 10 a.m. Tiny Habitats With Enormous Diversity is an easy walking tour of Harlingen C.B. Wood Park. This tiny piece of preserved Arroyo Brush is host to an enormous diversity of plant and animal life. Join volunteers from Texas Master naturalists for a nature tour of this very special piece of Arroyo Brush. C.B. Wood Park is near Sam Houston Elementary School. It can be reached by driving west from 1st St. on Harding St. or Wilson Ave. Call Frank at 364-1410 to reserve a spot.

On Tuesday, March 8th at 9:30 a.m. Return to Ramsey. Enjoy the signs of spring in Harlingen revegetated former landfill. Trees, shrubs, cacti and wildflowers should be in bloom throughout the park. Volunteers from the RGV Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists will point out the results of revegetation conducted by volunteer organizations. Tour meets in Ramsey's parking lot at 9:30 a.m. Wear good walking shoes. Ramsey Nature Park is located south of Harrison St and north of the Arroyo Bridge on Ed Carey Drive, Loop 499. Call Frank at 364-1410 to reserve a spot.

RGV CHAPTER, TEXAS MASTER
NATURALISTS

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