



The CHACHALACA

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PREZ SEZ

Be prepared, but not too much. It's no wonder that scouts use that motto. Try turtle patrol without sunscreen, hat, water and snacks and you'll know what I'm talking about. What about forgetting your binoculars on the best birding day ever? Hve you ever wondered why you didn't keep that particular field guide in your vehicle? How many of you wished you had remembered to keep a tablet or note pad or even a receipt from something along with a writing instrument of any sort?

Many of you have taken a look in my vehicle and seen that it looks as if I'm living out of it. Well, I am to some extent, but that's another story. I do have lots of things in there that are really handy. If I don't keep those things in my mode of transportation, I WON'T be prepared. Gee, I've got my work gloves, my little shovel, about 10 assorted field guides, binoculars, waterproof data book and "space pen", TMN bag with all my paperwork, turtle patrol info., tarps (rusted roof), knee pad, shears, clippers, portable stool, small cooler, foul weather gear, flashlight, water, power snacks, TMN badge, and much more.

I feel like I am prepared for the most part, but that is not a good thing when travelling up to Corpus Christi or anywhere that requires going through the checkpoint. I tried to explain why I carry all this stuff around to the BP agent, but he was not interested. The shower curtain/tarps offered suspicion enough to be pulled over and go through the search portion of my experience. Well, I was finally released to continue on. What an ordeal! I really wasn't nervous, but exhausted as it was my responsibility to replace ALL the stuff back in my SUV. I had to remember that I didn't put all that stuff in there at once either. I did make a big plug for our Chapter and all the good we accomplish. The BP agent still wasn't interested.

Just 5 more miles down the road though were birds flying everywhere, deer, exotic game, wild turkeys, a snake crossing the road and a javelina with her young. I quickly pulled over, grabbed my binoculars to take better looks, got back in my car and grabbed my field guides and made some notes for further study later. Uh oh, a thunder shower...back went the tarps over the stuff in my car WOW...I'm glad I was prepared.

Naturally speaking..... **Linda McGonigle**

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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Wow!

The Chachalaca got really fat this month. It took some time to pack stuff down to a size the Listserv would accept (1MB).

My apologies to those whose submissions I omitted. Most of what was omitted has already been posted on the web site or the listserv or both, so you might want to visit the gallery pages, too.

You folks have really been active this past quarter, and I am proud to be associated with this group.

Leo Garrett Editor

2006 TMN CLASS



Photo courtesy of Feank Wiseman

We continue our chapter's growth with the 24 members of our 2006 class. Graduation will be at the May meeting at the Los Ebanos Preserve. Come out and welcome them to the fold.

Unfortunately, it was impossible to get all 24 of our new TMNs together for a photo, but we do have all their names, in alphabetical order. They are:

Robert Archer, Erin Jane Bieberbach, Carlos Blanco, Maria Cristina Bonnin, David C. Carlson, Betty Ehrlich, Garry Ehrlich, Jackie H. Field, Jr., Karen Fossom, Damian G. Hairston, Deborah J. Holliday, Anita Keese, Jolaine Lanehart, Blake Marshall, Eileen Mattei, William D. Moulder

Jennifer Owen, Maria Luisa Paz, Marylyn C. Ponder, Howard J. Runkel, Crystal Salinas, Margarette L. Shelton, Soledad Strohmeier, Susan L. Thompson

Annual Potluck Graduation/Awards Meeting

The Board of Directors has planned our annual graduation/certification pot luck dinner at Los Ebanos Preserve on May 9, 2006.

Los Ebanos Preserve is located on Hiway 100 just 100 yards on the left after you turn on the Hiway going to Los Fresnos.

Dinner will be Buffet Style as usual. Please try to arrive between 6 and 6:45 p.m. We want to start the serving lines at 7:00 p.m. Dinner will be followed with a speaker and the awards ceremony.

Ramsey Park Report

Since January of 2006 our Ramsey Work Crew that usually works on Monday and Thursday mornings in Harlingen's Ramsey Park has accomplished a lot of project and maintenance work.

Our crew now has volunteers that include Christina Mild as our usual mentor, Ginger Byram (our park chairperson), Dick Roesler, Diann Ballesteros, Frank Wiseman, Robert Archer, Anita Keese, Eileen Mattei, Liisa Mattson, Juan and Maria Bonnin and their son, Dita Strohmeyer, Alice and Tommy Peters, Sherman Lee and his invaluable front end loader, Karen Fossom, Kathy Sheldon, Howard Runkle, and volunteer Betty Rugaart from Bayview.

Besides the usual maintenance projects that include weeding and watering, we've added the task of pruning and trimming mesquite trees which overhang pathways and other shrubs. We have to thank Robert Archer for doing a lot of hard work in the tree trimming area. Robert has also re-opened an overgrown trail into a forgotten Hummingbird Garden. Dick Roesler has taken the weed eater to new heights in keeping places neatly trimmed around pathways, signs and pond areas. Mulching is another of his specialties, along with help from Kathy Sheldon. Dick recently trimmed and mulched all around the front Ramsey Park sign to keep it clear and accessible, and he cleared a nice pathway to the front pond area. Kathy has kept up with her chores in the butterfly garden we fondly call East Rocky Rim along the upper Arroyo Trail,

Eileen, Frank and the Bonnin family spread mulch all along the upper Arroyo Trail. Runyon Garden is being watered weekly by early riser Liisa Mattson. Liisa likes to come over early and get a head start on the heat of the day. Watering on week-ends and evenings has been a task taken on by several of our new members including Anita Keese and Karen Fossom. Dita Strohmeyer is a good hand at making plant cages to keep out the pesky rabbits and rats that like to chew on our new tender green plants.

Diann has been planning a new pond at Warbler Corner and a butterfly puddle pond in our new Butterfly Meadow garden. Those two areas are coming along nicely and will be two more of our TMN "show places" in the Park. The small water features will add greatly to wildlife viewing in those areas.

Our new pond at Warbler Corner is now flourishing with wild life. We even had a tortoise at it recently when a group of home-schooled students came by and got a big surprise and a lucky chance to view wildlife up close and personal.

Anita is taking care of the Boy Scout specimen walk-around by watering it in the evenings after she gets off work at TCEQ.

Karen Fossom used a whole week of vacation to help in several areas of the park such as planting cactus, spreading mulch and topsoil and planting new plants.

Eileen Mattei has brought and spread leaves to enrich the park's soil. She also trimmed pestilence from the easily-infested Lantana horrida. Eileen's initial project will help to improve the park's interpretive signage, as she has inventoried the existing signage installed and maintained by RGVCTMN.

We notice many more "citizens" strolling though the park these days at all hours. We have families who bring their children to show them the wildlife and the myriad of native plants. Our Palo Verde and Retama trees have put on a brilliant show of yellow blooms recently and the white blooms of the Wild Olives makes a great contrast in colors. We keep getting great compliments from our visitors and that is a reward in itself. One recent visitor from Rio Hondo said that he thought we had the Valley Nature Center beat for attractiveness and plants! A gentleman from Alabama said he got tired of Mexico and Padre Island and decided to discover local nature in our park. He thanked us for all the hard work to make an especially enjoyable nature park.

The native cactus has bloomed in April and several colonies of ladyfinger cactus really put on a show with their bright pink blooms. The Pitayas were especially pretty this year. The new cactus garden in Runyon Garden put on a great show this year for the first time.



This is a picture of : TMN Volunteers called the "Week-Day Ramsey Work Crew" shown as they are planting new plants in our Butterfly Meadow Garden at Ramsey Park in Harlingen.

Because we have so many examples of the native ladyfinger cacti, botanists from Germany will visit Ramsey Park during a visit to the LRGV during late April, accompanied by Chris Best of USFWS and Dana Price of TPW. Diann Ballesteros will be their guide.

Due to the lack of rain, wildflowers along the loop did not come out for their usual annual show, but we did manage a few verbenas, poppies and thistles around the park. Currently, Huisache Daisy is blooming in several places.

Ginger has been working with our new Parks Manager, Jaime Lopez, to help coordinate our efforts in the park. We are requesting installation of several water lines, to facilitate planting of Medicinal Ridge, Hummingbird Heights and Bird Alley, and new interpretive gardens which are in the planning stage. Our other requests of the city include moving unsightly stockpiles of rough mulch, rocks, sand and other materials away from both entries to "Ebony Loop," where RGVCTMN projects are located.

Howard Runkel recently moved a lot of trimmed brush, which was a great help. Our volunteer citizen from Bayview, Betty Rugaart, usually helps us water in Butterfly Meadow on Thursday mornings. We appreciate that help, as hand watering is needed in some spots where sprinklers don't do the job.

We've planted over 100 plants in the park since January of 2006; most of them donated by our volunteers or rescued from our yards. When you see plants such as pigeon berry and skeleton leaf daisy proudly showing off their blooms, you can



"Lady Finger" cactus in bloom at Ramsey Park in mid April.

thank our volunteers for their plant expertise in growing them in pots at home and then transferring them over to the park. Our thanks also go out to Ken King and Dr. Alfred Richardson for donating 40 "barrel cactus" plants which we placed on the edges of the new Butterfly Meadow Garden. Ken and Al have often volunteered as tour leaders on many of our native plant tours. Recently in April some of the barrel cactus have already bloomed, sporting a pretty yellow blossom with a reddish center.



The new Bird Pond at Ramsey Park

railing to protect the birds from people walking through the area.

We do hope all of our members can make a trip to Ramsey to view all of our handiwork and just enjoy nature.

Submitted by Frank Wiseman

One item that can't be passed by is the work Robert Archer is doing to help the birds in the park. He is bringing over fresh grapes, oranges, grapefruit and birdseed for our birds and that makes for restful viewing in places like Owl Pond. Robert has single-handedly started development on a new area near the front entrance to Ebony Trail that will be a new cleared area for different cacti and hummingbird plants. We hope to install a new pond, feeders, a bench and a

Herbal, Medicinal, and Aromatic Gardens

One thinks of herbal gardens as containing cooking herbs, plants of medicinal value or having leaves with a pleasant aroma. Hardy specimens filling those criteria are LRGV “natives.”

Many plants come to my mind as candidates for such a place. I’ve written complete articles about most of them in the past. Together, they provide a realm of sensory pleasure.

Soft-leaved shrubs, often related to the family of mints, are typical of herbal gardens. **Desert Oregano**, *Lippia graveolens*, fits this description. Adorned with tiny white blooms, it smells as you’d expect. **Shrubby Blue Sage**, *Salvia ballotaeflora*,

Sports brilliant blue blossoms with a bit of fertilizer and watering. One imagines roasting poultry with a whiff of these leaves. It’s called *Mejorana*: even the aroma leaves a person feeling “better.” Leaves are used in cooking and for tea. *Aloysia macrostachy*, an airy shrub with spikes of tiny purple flowers, is **Sweet Stem** (*Vara Dulce*) for the fragrance of its foliage. **Scruffy Dalea**, *Dalea scandens*, is barely noticeable on sunny edges of Arroyo Colorado Brush, with clusters of nondescript pinkish blossoms. Scent makes it worth cultivation. It transplants readily, growing easily and rapidly with little care. *Hierba Negra*, *Lippia alba*, likewise has lovely aroma. Look for this **Sprawling Lippia** along the Arroyo Colorado’s banks in areas of relatively little disturbance. For the herbal garden on Resaca’s edge, this is a good choice. It roots easily to spread lanky limbs, adorned with purple blossoms at each node.

Two plants with high vitamin C come to mind. **Chilipequin**, planted everywhere by birds, seasons things with gusto. The range of color, shape and size of fruit on these plants is an attractive addition to any garden. **Barbados Cherry**, *Malpighia glabra*, sports frilly, delicate blossoms when moisture is sufficient. Bright red cherries, exceptionally high in vitamin C, bring resident mockingbirds to chase off pesky grackles. It grows as groundcover, shrub or hedge.

Several plants with specific medicinal properties are great candidates for visual impact in the herbal garden. **Sangre de Drago**, *Jatropha dioica*, spreads to form an unpredictable colony of short, rubbery sticks. Butterflies enjoy the funnel form blooms. These stems contain an astringent which tightens loose teeth. **Allthorn Goat Bush**, *Castela erecta*, is reminiscent of Oriental artistry, with stark contrast and angled branches. Tea from the bitter, tiny leaves (which lend the name **Amargosa**) wards off amoebic dysentery. Delicate blossoms and shiny red fruit add to the unusual character of this plant. **Toothache Tree** enjoys close proximity to Live Oak. It (*Zanthoxylum hirsutum*) is a strong shrub, well-armed, with prickly-edge shining leaves and strong thorns. The tingling sensation of a leaf upon one’s tongue is memorable enjoyable and soothes a toothache.

Teas to comfort and ease congestion are easily made from leaves of two common landscape plants: Purple-blooming **Cenizo**, *Leucophyllum frutescens*, is likely the most-easily grown, germinating readily from abundant seed. A nasty plant to encounter, **Colima**, *Zanthoxylum fagara* or *Lime Prickly Ash*, creates an effective and attractive barrier. Citrus tea from **Colima** is a time-honored custom among long-time local residents. **Sierra Madre Torchwood**, *Amyris madrensis*, will grow tall and erect with attractive upright branches. *Amyris texana*, **Texas Torchwood**, survives full sun or even shade of an ebony tree. Both torchwoods sport clusters of white flowers, followed by edible (if not tasty) fruit loaded with vitamin C. **Barreta**, *Helietta parvifolia*, threatened with extinction in the wild but available from native plant nurserymen, forms a lovely erect tree, with glossy, lime-green three-lobed leaves. The glossy leaves of native citrus provide a particular lovely contrast in winter.

Teucrium Canadensis (**American Germander**) leaves may be employed as antiseptic dressing for wounds. Seasonal, it thrives in cool, damp weather and spreads rampantly in watered gardens.

(See “Trees, Shrubs & Cacti of South Texas,” by Everitt & Drawe, 1993, for additional information and photos of each plant included in this article. See also (www.nativeplantproject.org)

Christina Mild

TMNs in the Field!

Crustacean Cruise! On April 8th, the 2006 class and others took a cruise with Captain George of *Fins to Feathers*.

We quote from Donna Berry's email:

We had a great trip today even with the high winds! We had 48 members, trainees, and guests in attendance....we had room for more!!

Thanks to Sherman Lee for arranging this field trip! A big thank you to Tony Reisinger for sharing his marine expertise with us!

We saw a pod of dolphins that included a brand new baby. The Captain of the boat said it was the smallest dolphin he had ever seen. Despite the rough water, the crew did put out a net and we did have a few critters to look at....a crab, a shrimp, a croaker, and a piggy perch. ...

Thanks to everyone that came out today!

Donna



Something is really interesting!



Tony explaining how a TED works.



Mark Conway had help from TMN Volunteers Eileen Mattei and Dick Roesler at a Bird Banding Session in Ramsey Park on April 22nd. They banded a total of 15 birds.

Learning How the Amphibian Watch Works

When there's a full moon and a good breeze over The Nature Conservancy's Southmost Preserve resaca, it follows that Master Naturalists and trainees will be outside, listening and playing Name That Toad.

To start the Amphibian Watch/Nature Tracker class, Master Naturalist Chad Wilmoth asked: Why observe amphibians? He knows why he does: "It's tons of fun. And they are environmental indicators." Master Naturalist Tira Wilmoth explained TPW has three levels of amphibian watchers and reviewed the paperwork linked to each level: amphibian spotter, Adopt-a-frog and the heavy-duty, hard core Frog-Toad survey.

"TPW realizes you are being a citizen scientist," she said. "They realize you are doing the best job you can. Don't sweat it. The idea is to gather as much data as possible. The more you get into it, the easier it'll be."

And plenty more people could get into it, since last year only 35 persons submitted reports to the amphibian program.

Tira pointed out the need to have a Texas hunting licenses if you collect amphibians temporarily for the program and the importance of releasing specimens at the same point. There is a greater chance of noticing any malformations in the smaller/younger frogs and toads. Malformations usually don't let them live long. An injury, in contrast to a malformation, will generally show ragged edges.

Then the fun began: watching and listening to a CD of frogs, toads and their vocalizations. What does that sound like to you? It's as hard to describe some sounds as it to describe tastes. Surprisingly, there's no hard/fast difference between a toad and frog.

David Wilkens, herp curator at Gladys Porter Zoo, pointed out the species we might hear on the resaca while, in the background, a chorus was tuning up past Donna Berry's cement pond.

Leo Garrett displayed a tiny recorder, great for capturing pond-side noises. The more techno-savvy can download a play list of frog and toad tunes to their IPOD and go to the field fully-equipped.

Unfortunately, for the aurally-challenged like me, the in-class practice ID-ing was canceled so we went right to the resaca bank. It was like learning a language by immersion... so many different sounds simultaneously are overwhelming for the novice trying to separate them into discrete noises. A Mexican tree frog was at first mistaken for a coot by many. The rinkrink chorus never seemed to stop, although the longer we were on the bank, the louder the calls seemed to become. Yep. "The longer you're here, the more the frogs habituate to your presence," David said.

Back in class trying to decipher the calls from Leo's recorder, David said what the books and CDs tell you is not always correct. "We can help establish where they are and what they are."

FYI: In Texas only male frogs call. Frogs and toads often stay deep in the cracks until their pond or wetland is flooded.

Can you name these frogs/toads? Rinnnk rinnk rinnnk rinnnk. Bleeaaaaaat. Rrrrbit.



Tira stalking the elusive amphibian.

Master Naturalists at Work

Edinburg World Birding Center – What a Great Place!

For me, volunteering has always been about community building. And I've found the ideal setting in which to do both! I'm becoming a Master Naturalist for several reasons. The main reason is that I don't know much about nature, especially here in beautiful South Texas where I am a newcomer, and I want to know more. But my lack of experience hasn't kept me from being a team member as a volunteer at the EBWC. Marisa Oliva, the manager, has many interesting special projects to launch. Like it is at so many places, she and her wonderful staff don't have enough hours in the day to tackle them. Marisa has gotten me involved with some of these projects.

For example, Marisa has designed a Children's Discovery Garden. She asked me to help get the property surveyed and to get the landscape architect moving on his designs for the amphitheater that will be installed in this garden. After the amphitheater is completed, the gardens will have to be designed and planted. I hope to use my skills as an occupational therapist to help with some ideas about accessibility. And there's the Valle Verde web site – something that will let me contribute my writing skills. I'm learning about nature, too. I'm starting to get to know some of the birds found in the Center's wetlands by helping with bird counts. As trainings are available, I am invited to participate in those. What a perfect way to make a contribution and to learn!

Other volunteers also come to the Center. They help with bird counts, education programs, and data entry, but volunteers are needed to do much more. First, there is a need for knowledgeable volunteers to help with bird, butterfly, and dragonfly counts. Second, volunteers can help with wetlands educational programs. Third, anyone with expertise about any naturalist topic may volunteer to speak about that topic at the World Birding Center. Finally, volunteers are needed to help with special projects and with the Valle Verde Committee. If you live in the Edinburg area, the World Birding Center has many fascinating volunteer opportunities for you. For more information, contact Marisa Oliva at 381-9922.

Margarette Shelton

Sabal Palms Sanctuary – What a Great Place!

Audubon Sanctuary at Sabal Palms is a world famous birders' paradise. As a long-time birder, one of the first things I did upon moving to Brownsville was to join the sanctuary and offer to help.

In order to increase the knowledge of the local people and their children we began programs at Sabal Palms and in the local schools as well. Jimmy Paz, manager of the sanctuary put together a Power-Point presentation with pictures and songs of the most common birds at Sabal. Together with some background material that I supply we have a good program for different age groups. We also have programs at the sanctuary. And have tours on the trails as well.

All of the personnel who work at Sabal Palms are Texas Master Naturalists. For all the Master Naturalists who would like a worthwhile way to spend their volunteer time I recommend Sabal Palms. You will love it!

Dorothy Greaney



Marylyn Ponder dressed as a rabbit and Licha Paz dressed as a green jay along on Charro Days Float.

Photo by Jimmy Paz



Margarette, third from left, with Marisa, second from left, and staff members



During Coastal Expo at EWBC, Maria Bonnin and David Junken give kids a peek at some tiny critters.
Photo by Juan Bonnin

EWBC Hosts

Coastal Expo Again

Many TMNs turned out for Coastal Expo 2006 at the Edinburg World Birding Center. There were more than 2000 school children attending the two day exposition.

“Master Naturalists DO make a Difference”

By: Yvonne Kautsch, TMN

“What a terrible eye-sore,” some would say about the Hidalgo County drainage ditch that wandered through the Alamo Country Club (ACC). But, to me, the ditch was a beautiful sight, filled with native plants and wildlife.

Because the ACC is located directly north of the Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge, the ditch provided a perfect flight path leading toward the refuge. It was a great place to catch sightings of numerous migrating and non-migratory birds. And, fortunately for me, the drainage ditch bordered our yard, almost encircling our property along the west side before curving eastward at the back of our house. About thirty feet of berm separated our yard from the ditch, so I decided this area was no-man’s-land and claimed it as my own. At the time, I knew nothing about native habitats, but a friend had given me several seedlings, so I began by planting native trees along the ditch, and as time went by, I added this shrub and that, still not knowing what I was doing. From time to time, my husband would remind me not to get too attached to my slow developing habitat, after all, it wasn’t *my* property. It belonged to the Hidalgo County Drainage Ditch Authority, and at any time, they could bulldoze the entire area. I chose to ignore his warnings and continued to plant. After adding feeding stations and a rather large pond, I began documenting the wide variety of birds, butterflies, and dragonflies that visited our yard. I became determined to learn as much as I could about trees and plants that would bring more wildlife to *our* property.

Somewhere along the way, I heard about the Texas Master Naturalist’s Program, so I sent in my application and never looked back. As a TMN, I took advantage of as many lectures, field trips, and opportunities as possible to volunteer or attend nature festivals around the Valley. Little by little, I began absorbing bits and pieces of information from experienced Valley naturalists who were always available to share their enthusiasm and knowledge of our Valley’s spectacular flora and fauna, and one by one, my ornamental plants were replaced by natives. Our pond, which is half on our property and half on Hidalgo County’s property, is often visited by such *drainage ditch* residents as Soft-shell turtles, Red-eared sliders, and even occasional nutria. Green Herons, Yellow-crowns, Whistlers, Great & Snowy Egrets, and all three North American Kingfishers are just a few of the water birds attracted to our property via the drainage ditch.

It wasn’t until this past November, when I caught a flash of red darting into a wild olive tree, that I was truly convinced our PRIME location had some serious wildlife potential. Sensing the “flash” was something I had never seen in our yard before, I grabbed my binoculars, and scanned the olive tree just as the bird flew out and landed on an open rock in our nearby pond. It was the “Jewel of the Nile”, a Painted Bunting! My “**Top Five**” Backyard Birding list was now complete: Swallow-tailed Kite, Groove-billed Ani, Vermillion flycatcher, Painted Bunting, and Cockatiel. My husband says the cockatiel was probably an escapee, but I choose to believe otherwise.

Two weeks after the Painted Bunting sighting, my worst nightmare came true. The bulldozers arrived without warning. Negotiations had been made between the ACC and the Hidalgo County Drainage Ditch Authority that the ditch was to be filled in. This was devastating news to me. My first thoughts were of the wildlife that lived among the cattails and brackish water...of the birds that nested there or used the ditch as a flight path. What about the trees that now towered along the ditch? My little habitat appeared doomed, and there was nothing I could do. Or was there? Two old familiar sayings came to my mind: “You can’t fight City Hall” and, “When one door closes, another one opens.” Armed with a box of Krispy Crème doughnuts, I approached the bulldozer operator and asked about the plans for filling in the ditch. His instructions were to fill in *only* the part of the ditch that ran along the west side of my house. The rest of the ditch that bordered the back of our house, would remain, and after consuming a third doughnut, he assured me that every effort would be made to save the trees and leave my habitat undisturbed. Once the ditch was filled, the question remained, what was to be done with an area measuring approximately 1000’x100’? The challenge was handed over to the ACC Garden Club made up of a majority of members who resided here only during the winter months. Although I was not a member of the garden club, I did have a plan - an all-native nature park. I contacted the club president and was granted time on the next meeting’s agenda. I was given ten minutes to explain the benefits of planting natives. Not only was my plea well received by the Garden Club, but by the homeowners as well. So, with the help of Billy Snider and Sue Griffin, a twenty-phase plan was presented to the ACC Board. What was formerly referred to as the ‘Drainage Ditch Area’ was now called, the *ACC Nature Park*, and it would progress only as quickly as donations and volunteers became available.

Because most ACC residents return north during the summer months, we hustled to recruit volunteers and implement a plan for a watering source. Our goal was to complete the first four phases by the end of April. Three of us took the lead; the Garden Club President would recruit volunteers, another would search the Internet for possible sources for grants, and I would oversee the planting and watering. On designated planting days, we prepared the soil, pinned down the plastic, dug holes for the plants, and covered the beds with mulch. Little by little, the nature park was beginning to take shape. It’s amazing what people can do when they pool their resources and come together for a common cause. At least once a day, someone calls or stops by to ask me whether plants in their own yard are suitable for transplanting into the nature park. Most of the time the plants are not appropriate, but at least people are beginning to feel a sense of ownership in the project, which is essential to the park’s success.

(Continued from page 10)

Although we have a long way to go, the nature park is a dream come true for me and a source of inspiration to others. Already, the Texas Lantana, Betony Leaf Mistflower and Frog-Fruit are attracting a variety of butterflies, while the Wild Olive and Chapote trees serve as lookouts for Mockingbirds and Whitewing Dove.

Just yesterday, as I sat typing this article (wishing I could be outside), I looked out the window and caught a small flash of red darting out of a shrub. I nearly fell out of my chair trying to grab my binos....could it be? Yes! The Painted Bunting was back...wait...there's another one...TWO male Painted Buntings at the pond! Life is good. The article would have to be finished another day. Nature was calling.

There is a moral to the story: *What at first you might think is devastating, can indeed turn out to be something very positive.*
*Master Naturalists **can** make a difference.*

A Turtle Story

During the early morning hours, my husband received a call from Jim's Pier telling him there was a cold -stunned turtle at the docks. Since I had just started volunteering at the Sea Turtle, Inc., he asked me if I would like to get it! So naturally, I jumped out of bed grabbed a towel and headed for the door. What usually takes me about 15min to get to Jim's, took me about 5. I asked the general manager where the turtle was and he told me that he had taken it and put it in an ice chest which had been filled with water. Clearly, putting a cold-blooded reptile in such a confined space in 45 degree weather was not a very good idea. So I took the poor little guy out, which happened to be a baby Green, wrapped it in the towel and took it inside the heated store to call Lucia at Sea Turtle, Inc. It was then that we noticed that not only was it cold-stunned, but it was injured, the little guy or gal had been lacerated on the belly and had a part of its shell missing, we figured it was probably hit by a propeller that morning. Shortly after I made the call, Lucy picked up the turtle and took it to Sea Turtle, Inc. where it could be properly taken care of.

The next morning I went to Sea Turtle Inc. to check on the turtle, which is now named Way Behind since all who encountered the turtle were made way behind that morning, and it seemed to be doing OK under the circumstances. In conclusion, it was confirmed that it was hit by a prop. Jeff and Lucia gave it an antibiotic to prevent infection and now we could only hope for the best.

A week later, I went back to Sea Turtle, Inc. and found that Way Behind had passed away due to internal bleeding. I thought about not writing this article because of its sad ending, but I wanted other Master Naturalists to read my experience and understand that I and Sea Turtle, Inc. did everything in our power to save it, and that it passed under the most comfortable surroundings possible. Had I not joined the RGVCTMN, I would not have volunteered at Sea Turtle, Inc., much less known what to do with a hurt turtle. I am thankful for my experience and will continue volunteering at Sea Turtle, Inc. as long as I can.

Dita Strohmeyer



What's This?

Instructions: If you know the name of this shell and its importance, please send the correct information to

RVCTMN1@RGV.RR.COM

You entry will be placed in a winning entry form box and a drawing for a prize will be held at the next general meeting.

Master Naturalists Help at NABA International Butterfly Park

April was a very busy month for volunteers at the NABA International Butterfly Park south of Mission. Community volunteers and TMNs helped park staff plant over 1,000 seedlings on the southern tract of the park and are scheduled to help out with our upcoming fundraiser, Feria de Mariposas.

The 1,000 seedlings were just part of a 3,000 seedling revegetation project on 22-acres of former farmland. After all seedlings are planted, 70 species of native plants will recreate four native plant communities found in the Rio Grande Valley. Planting took place every Saturday in April from 9:00am through the late afternoon. Between 150 and 200 seedlings were planted every Saturday.

It has been great to see how many TMNs have offered their help with the revegetation effort. Members such as Gil Quintanilla and Diann Ballesteros helped out with our planting. New members who volunteered on Saturdays included Dave Carlson from Edinburg, , Carlos Blanco from Mission, and Crystal Salinas from Edinburg. The 3000 flags that were used to mark the seedlings were assembled by Master Naturalist Dave Junkin from New York and a new member, Erin Bieberbach, from Alamo.

TMNs are also helping out with upcoming events at the park. On April 29th the park will be hosting the "Feria de Mariposas", a family oriented event that will feature fun activities for families, as well as butterfly walks and information on native landscaping. To help prepare for this event, Dave Carlson dropped in a couple of times a week to give the park staff a hand getting ready for the Feria. Gil Quintanilla is scheduled to speak during the event about local butterflies in Spanish as part of the lecture series about our native plants and butterflies.

I should also mention that our TMN recording secretary, Mary Bindner, is at the park most weekends helping out with the park's office management.

I am always pleased to see other TMNs at volunteering events and festivals. Since I am now working as an intern at NABA where volunteers are needed, it has been a treat to be able to catch up with many TMNs that I haven't seen in a while, as well as meeting members from this year's class. If anyone else would like to come to the NABA Park and help out or if you would just like to come and see all the butterflies and other wildlife you can call (956) 583-9009 for directions or visit < www.naba.org >.

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