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Late again. Things have been piling up, as they are likely to do when one takes five months off to roam the countryside.

Last week I had an hour to kill in Harlingen, so I went down to Ramsey Park. I hadn't been there in quite a while and was surprised at the changes. Areas that were being planted and developed 18 months ago have flourished.

Our chapter sponsors several areas in the park and some individuals have taken up the park as personal projects. Drew Bennie talks about his project on the back page.

Robert Archer received his 500 hour pin at the last meeting. A big chunk of those hours were devoted to the Hummingbird Garden. He, and others, have done a great job of increasing the visual beauty of the park as well as its value as habitat.

The Butterfly Meadow, Runyon Memorial, Hummingbird Garden and the other areas the chapter sponsors speak highly of the Texas Master Naturalist program.

Most of the work at Ramsey has been done by a dedicated cadre of TMNs who regularly meet to get sweaty and dirty and do us proud.

The next time you're in Harlingen, take a little time to visit Ramsey Park and see what your fellow TMNs have done.

There are many other areas in the Valley where TMNs have made a difference beyond their number. The Turtle Patrol, Red Tide Rangers, and TNC Wetlands come to mind, and the numerous festivals, conventions, and nature events that have benefited from our volunteer efforts.

Well Done, TMNs!

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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It's what you do with what you got!



New Benches Installed in Ramsey Park



Our long awaited park benches for Ramsey Park arrived in late September and were installed by the Harlingen Parks Dept. in early Oct. We have placed a bench in the new Hummingbird Trail garden that TMN member Robert Archer developed. Other members of the Ramsey Work Crew gave their aid and support in this project. Ginger Byram, our Ramsey Committee Chair, along with Christina Mild, Diann Ballesteros, Richard Roesler, and Frank Wiseman all gave their help in selecting new plants to add to the area. Robert Archer developed the pond that he self-handedly made the bottom part from a recycled city plastic garbage dumpster.

This new TMN project in the park is going to be one of the first stopping off places for all visitors as it lies right along the Ebony trail as you enter the park's caliche loop. Stop by some time and enjoy the bench, the feeders, the pond, the plants and the gener-

ally quite bird viewing area.

Our second bench was placed in the Butterfly Meadow project that we started developing in January of this year. This was also a TMN project that we are quite proud of now. It has developed into a primo spot for viewing butterflies and birds. Our plants have matured into good specimens. With the addition of a nice bench we can now sit and enjoy the quite atmosphere of plants and animal life. It is one among many of our projects for the park's beautification. You will find this spot on the lower side of the same Caliche Loop Trail. - **Frank Wiseman**

Annual Meeting

Our Guys at the MO Ranch

From Left

Jackie Fields

Donna Berry

Cathy Budd



RGVCTMNs at State Meeting!

The Texas Master Naturalist 7th Annual Statewide Meeting and Advanced Training was held at MO Ranch in Hunt, Texas October 20-22, 2006. There were 248 Master Naturalist representing 25 Chapters.

Our chapter sent three members to the meeting this year. Jackie H. Field, Jr. was awarded the partial State scholarship, Cathy Budd and Donna Berry attended using the two scholarships with funds that were designated from our raffle fundraiser in 2005. All three have reported having a great time meeting other members from around the state and participating in some great training. Some of those programs are being brought to our area as advanced training for our members after the first of the year.

Thanks to Linda McGonigle for creating the display board for the Projects Fair. Our chapter entered the Red Tide Ranger Project in the competition.

The keynote speaker for the Annual Meeting was Dr. David Taylor who spoke on "The Necessity of Naturalists: A Taxonomy of the Texas Master Naturalist. Volunteer awards and Annual Meeting Contest Awards Presentation were given after the speaker. Our chapter was recognized with a PowerPoint Presentation by Meridith Byrd for the work our Red Tide Rangers. It was quite thrilling to have the whole state know about our work in conservation. Donna Berry was awarded a Platinum Dragonfly pin for completing 2,500 hours of service.



Donna Berry and other award recipient at the annual State Meeting. Donna received her **Platinum Dragonfly** in recognition of 2,500 hours of volunteer service

Red Tide Rangers Recognized

Linda McGonigle

Red Tide Rangers have been recognized by winning 3rd Place in the EPA Gulf Guardian Award, Partnership category, during last year's red tide. Meridith Byrd, the Harmful Algal Bloom Response Coordinator from TPWD submitted an application nominating our organization this last September. "Thanks to all involved, this is the most comprehensive look we've ever gotten at a Texas red tide." commented Byrd, which is exactly what compelled her to make the nomination.

The EPA Gulf Guardian Awards were created in 2000 by the partnership of the Gulf of Mexico Program to recognize environmental excellence in Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. All 18 winners receive an impressive marble and glass memento, press coverage on their project, and recognition by their peers. The awards will be presented during the 3rd National Conference on Estuarine and Habitat Restoration. The ceremony takes place this December in New Orleans.

In anticipation of returning red tide on our southern coast due to the recent siege of red tide around the Corpus Christi area, a training session was held to train more Red Tide Rangers. The training was held at UTB in Brownsville with Meridith Byrd, Dave Buzan from TPWD and Tony Reisinger, our Texas Cooperative Extension Sea Grant sponsor, as instructors. Rangers, David Benn, Linda McGonigle, Cathy Budd, and Antoinette Budd assisted in training Chapter members, Dita Strohmeyer, Walter and Donna Berry, Sue Budd, Deb Holiday, Suzi Ostos, and Jorge Garcia.

Recent reports indicated that Red Tide has dissipated due to the cooling down of Gulf waters and a significant amounts of rainfall in south Texas.

This is another great reason and example of Chapter teamwork and that RGVCTMN does make a difference!



Tony Reisinger presented Certificates of Appreciation to RT Rangers David Benn and Cathy Budd

Halloween at Estero Llano Grande

Estero Llano Grande WBC, in Weslaco, celebrated its first Halloween by hosting an educational Safe Halloween. TGV Texas Master Naturalists were notable participants. There were crafts, the Bat Cave, snakes, and owls, as well as a Storyteller out in the marsh. There were lots of kids in cute costumes and the staff had as much fun as the kids. Let's hope it becomes an annual affair.



Left - Donna Berry explains the Benefits of bats.

Right - Beth Wargo and helpers Getting the bat crafts ready.



Left - Jennifer Owen showing the things that may be found in an owl pellet.

Xeriphytes of the Arroyo Colorado Brush

Summer 2006 was hot, dry and windy, leaving many unwatered areas in local nature parks and preserves in pitiable condition.

Human preference for plants with large leaves, conspicuous or large blooms, and copious fruit appear to determine what is planted in many wildlife-attracting gardens. Many of these gorgeous plants, Pigeonberry, Mexican Triantha, Heartleaf Hibiscus, Potato Tree, Tropical Sage, etc. are conspicuous in remote brushy areas only when moisture is plentiful. In hard times, they wither back, returning rapidly when rain returns.

Great joy and hope can be found in examining dry tracts of brush for plants which withstand xeric conditions in great form. Several of these plants, being especially thorny, difficult to propagate and painful to extract in plant rescue attempts, are rarely found in revegetation plots wherever extant colonies are too remote for seed to spread by natural means.

Each of these stiff and thorny plants is ideal for critter protection, including nest building. Each also plays a multitude of roles in providing fruit, nectar and other products useful to wildlife. In my opinion, they exhibit rare beauty.

This article will concentrate on *Koeberlinia spinosa*. Since backing my behind into an armed branch-tip, I call it the living hypodermic needle. I've chosen this plant for greatest elaboration as it's quite rare in the brushy places one normally visits. The specimens I'm aware of on publicly open trails might number less than 20. There's a large, ancient specimen near the Visitor Center at Laguna Atascosa, though I find it less beautiful than others remote from water faucets.

A whole range of "althorn" and similar prickly names can be applied to the whole group of spiny, woody xeric plants. Most folks can learn to pronounce Ko – bur – lynn – ia. So I won't add confusion by listing a bunch of less specific names for this uncommon plant.

The most distinctive feature of a healthy *Koeberlinia* specimen is stiff green spines, and not much else. Just following rain, these strong beautiful spines will bear many tiny green leaves, which one only notes upon careful examination.

Blooming occurs throughout the year when moisture is adequate. Blooms are delicate and beautiful. A most unusual feature of the plant is the blooms' aroma, which differs amazingly from time to time. Following the hottest dry seasons, probably fall, these innocent-looking blooms emit a noxious odor of carrion (rotting flesh). I've searched for carcasses in our wild piece of Arroyo Colorado brush, intent on remote disposal, only to find *Koeberlinia* in bloom. This scent attracts droves of pollinating flies; a probable location for checking off flycatchers on a birding list.

In cooler, wetter weather, a sweet and pleasant scent wafts from the innocent blooms, and the pollinating visitors are quite different: butterflies and myriad smaller insects.

Dr. Richard Hoverson, recently deceased, pointed out that *Koeberlinia* is a poor choice for planting upwind of a porch swing or picnic table, for anyone other than a family of vultures.



Koeberlinia spinosa

Distinctive features of the very thorny:

Koeberlinia spinosa (Junco, Allthorn, Crucifixion Thorn) green puncturing spines, tiny round black fruit, tiny

pale yellow blooms.

Ziziphus obtusifolia, (Clepe, Lotebush, Gumdrop Bush) (striations on blue/grey bark, copious leaves obscure thorns after rain, leaves frequently show signs of animal browsing, fruit ranges from sweet-tasting to fishy, leaves absent during drought, pale yellow-green blooms) Locals often tolerate this plant in yards, even along city fence rows, especially in corners.

Castela erecta (Althorn Goatbush, Amargosa) quarter-inch long narrow, stiff leaves always present, often pressed against the thorny branches. Plant appears leaf-less from a distance. The shiny leaves are extremely bitter, thus “amar”gosa. Dark fruit is sometimes as large as cranberries, and is similar in color. Fruit is bitter, but tolerable. Extremely valuable plant for



Castela erecta

the treatment of dysentery, in that an extract has been

proven to paralyze protozoan parasites. Tiny blooms are exquisite: coral-tinted petals with yellow sexual parts. Flowering occurs throughout the rain following rain. Flower and fruit may occur simultaneously, a sight of extraordinary beauty.

It's easy to see why animals would choose to hide and nest in the complex, thorny maze of such plants. The stark angles and beauty these plants retain in the worst of seasons keeps each of them near to my wild-loving heart.



Ziziphus obtusifolia

Christina Mild, www.riodeltawild.com

Invaders of Texas Volunteer Workshops

In cooperation with the Texas Forest Service, Texas Cooperative Extension, and Texas Master Naturalist the Invaders of Texas Citizen Science Workshop will be held in Brownsville on March 24 – 25, 2007.

Cathy Budd and Jackie Field, Jr. attended a 3 hour training on this program at the TMN State Meeting held at MO Ranch and felt it would be a great opportunity for our chapter to be participants.

Please check out the website for information on what is required of us and if it is something you'd like to take the training. This will be a great way to learn about plants and how to use a GPS unit.

Class is limited to 35 members. There is a \$10 fee that will be collected at the training to cover refreshments.

One Person's Project: Planting in Ramsey Park

I spent the weekends in September planting and watering various native plants that I have been growing at my house. I planted them at Ramsey Park along the Indigo Trail in an area recently cleared of grasses. I put in over 60 trees along the trail and in the adjacent areas. Many were planted along with Red Sage, Pigeon Berry, or other volunteer plants that had come up on their own in my flower pots. I also planted many Turk's Cap cuttings. I made chicken wire cages that surround the young plants to protect them from the ill mannered rabbits that frequent the park and tend to destroy young trees. A total of over 120 plants were planted over the 5 weekends. I now face months of watering to assist their growth and adjustment. I donated 3 hoses and other accessories to facilitate this. Luckily, it has rained several times in September which has helped.

Do you have a tree planting project in mind? Now is the time to plant trees while the weather is milder. I still have many trees at my house and would be glad to give small Ebony trees to anyone who wishes to plant some.

Drew Bennie

RGV CHAPTER, TEXAS MASTER
NATURALISTS

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