



# The Chachalaca

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## RGV TEXAS MASTER NATURALISTS

THIS CHAPTER IS AN AFFILIATE OF THE TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST PROGRAM JOINTLY SPONSORED BY TEXAS AGRILIFE EXTENSION AND THE TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT.

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## **President's Message** *by Virginia Vineyard*

Hello, All,

I hope this quarter has found you able to keep ahead of the hot, dry conditions that have plagued us for the last few months. As I write this, I'm listening to the sound of rain against the window, a much needed break in the weather.

Congratulations to the newest RGVCTMN members who graduated in May. It was a lovely afternoon at Cactus Creek Ranch, with good food and good company. Thanks to all of you who participated. We're in the process of planning for next year's training, so please let the board know how classes can be improved.

We continue to have chapter meetings on the second Tuesday of each month. If you or someone you know has a topic that would be of interest as a program, please contact any board member. The Amphibian Watch training came at just the right time!

At a recent educator's convention, I was delighted to meet TMN members from other chapters in the state. What a marvelous network of instant friends who have similar interests and a love of volunteering. A heartfelt "THANK YOU" to all of you who work to protect and conserve what remains of our home.

Virginia

## **Congratulations to the RGVCTMN Class of Spring 2011!**

*by John Thaxter*

Twelve students started our 2011 chapter class, and all completed the training requirements, which included class sessions and field trips. Nine of the twelve are already fully certified, and six have earned 100-hour volunteer pins. They are all becoming active members of the chapter, and are all involved in their local natural areas. ♦



*Graduation photo: Terry Gaffner, Sally Robey, Jean Pettit, Karen Mencil, Joyce Fowler, Steve Fowler, Judy Svetanoff, Bob Hatcher, Cristian Escanuela, and Virginia Domhoff. Not pictured are Mike Ezell and Mary Thorne.*

## **Kudos to Mary Jo!**

*by Jesus Franco*

RGVCTM's own Mary Jo Bogatto has been recognized by Texas Parks and Wildlife with the Lone Star Land Steward Award for 16 years of conservation and outreach on Cactus Creek Ranch. TPWD's landowner-recognition program honors demonstrated stewardship of the land through excellence in wildlife habitat management, outreach, and education. The award goes to only one landowner in each of the 11 ecoregions of Texas. For more on the award and on Mary Jo's achievement, check out the super video at <http://www.youtube.com/user/TexasParksWildlife#g/c/3F404CE8D8D6E1A4> (see "2011 Lone Star Land Steward: Cactus"). ♦

## Streaming Wildlife Video Equipment for Sabal Palms

*Carol Hubing with photo by Cathy Budd*

RGVCTMN presented the Sabal Palms Sanctuary, which is operated by the Gorgas Science Foundation, with a check for \$1,192 to purchase video equipment. The chapter's Board approved a donation request of equipment to enable the sanctuary to offer live streaming video of activity within the 527-acre preserve. Cameras will be placed at feeding stations and other locations likely to feature wildlife. The equipment will let the public view on streaming video whatever the camera is seeing.

This new feature at the Sanctuary will allow visitors unable to stroll the trails to see our Valley's wildlife in action. The video will indicate that this was made possible by the RGVCTMN. ♦



*Accepting the check at the Visitor's Center from Carol Hubing, TMN treasurer, is volunteer sanctuary manager Jimmy Paz and RGVCTMN volunteers Juan Bonnin and John Tierney.*

## Additional Video Support for Sabal Palms

*Virginia Vineyard*

The Gorgas Foundation estimated three weeks using existing tools to dig the trench needed for the fiber-optic cable for equipment to support live streaming video of wildlife activity within the Sabal Palms Sanctuary. However, the RGVCTMN simplified the task by donating \$130 to rent a modern trenching machine, enabling completion of the task in a single day. The cable is now installed, two cameras and related hardware are on order, and the Sanctuary will begin broadcasting as soon as the internet link is up, probably before the end of July. ♦

## Ramsey Park Update

by Frank Wiseman

During the last few months Ramsey Park in Harlingen has suffered, as has the rest of the Valley, from a lack of rainfall. Plant growth has been inhibited by the excessive heat, and volunteers have been limited in appropriate gardening activities.

A walk through the park these days shows what heat can do to even the hardiest of our trees. Many of our Anacuas are showing signs of distress, and others, the flowering shrubs or small plants like the Wedelias, need water on a weekly basis to maintain some kind of growth.



*Fruiting Brasil shrub (Condalia hookeri) along the upper Arroyo Trail.*

A few RGVCTMN volunteers dedicate their time to the park and are so appreciated. Among those lately have been Diann Ballesteros, Christina Mild, Dick Roesler, Linda Butcher, and Frank Wiseman. We miss the help of Lou Osborne, who left in early May for his yearly trek back to Colorado.

We volunteers would appreciate any help from other RGVCTMN members: we encourage you to adopt one particular small area of the park, and come in and take care of it by watering it at least once a week. Perhaps 30 minutes to an hour of your time would be appreciated by the plants and your Master Naturalist friends.

If you would like to volunteer and feel the need for help and advice, give Frank a call at 364-1410 or Diann at 428-2781 or Linda at 423-1802. Let's all hope for a little precipitation relief this summer, perhaps in the form of a "slight" tropical event sometime soon. ♦

*Simple sunflower at Ramsey Park*



## **Students Benefit from Teacher's Learning**

*by Carolyn Cardile*

Sometimes we don't realize how much we influence others. When I began the Master Naturalist program in 2009, I wanted to learn about the wildlife and outdoor environment of my new home in the Rio Grande Valley. Colorado, my former home, was very different. There was so much to learn! Through the classes, field trips, and weekend volunteer work, I developed a love for the Valley's natural environment. For the past two years I've shared my enthusiasm about local birds and animals with my second graders with the hope of raising their awareness of the wildlife in their own back yards. A few weeks ago I realized that I had indeed made a difference.

The Episcopal Day School in Brownsville is an ideal place to teach children about their environment. Several buildings are spread across a lush campus, filled with a variety of flowering and fruit-laden trees, hedges, and gardens. Behind the soccer field, there is a nature trail with a platform on the Resaca. Various species of birds nest on campus or visit our bird feeders regularly. Butterflies fill the school's butterfly garden each spring and fall. The school also has an excellent science program. The science teacher provides several Nature Trail classes and organizes two field trips to teach second graders about birds. While I frequently marveled at the richness of our campus environment, most of the children took it for granted. I was surprised by how little they knew about the birds and animals living in their neighborhoods and on our campus. Once I felt confident in my new knowledge, I began sharing it with my class.

By March 2011 I was noticing significant changes in my students. Their learning showed on field trips, at home, and on campus. The children's behavior on our birding field trips demonstrated that they were learning to identify local birds. We did three bird walks. During the fall walk, the children learned to identify two kinds of hummingbirds. In February a naturalist came to our classroom to give a talk and take the children for a bird walk, using bird guides I'd made for the class. In May the children went to the South Padre Island Birding Center. I gave them a new bird guide made specifically for that trip. As they walked along the boardwalk, the children identified a number of birds, showing our guide and their parents what they saw. Many of the birds they recognized were not on the new bird guide. I was delighted that the children had learned to identify several species of local birds since the beginning of the year. The children's enthusiasm was also evident at home. During the last few months of school, several parents mentioned their children's new interest in birds. They were surprised by how much their children had learned and the enthusiasm they were showing. Several students had participated in the February national neighborhood bird count. They continued to involve their parents in bird watching on weekends.

To me, the best part was watching the children's spontaneous, excited interest in the birds they observed on campus. The students looked up when we left our building to

check on the House Sparrow's nest built over the outdoor spot light. They slowed down when we passed the feeders to point out Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, Muscovy Ducks, Northern Mockingbirds, Golden Fronted Woodpeckers, Great Tailed Grackles, Green Jays, Great Kiskadees, and three kinds of doves. They were protective of a fledgling Northern Mockingbird that hopped around the campus during afternoon dismissal, and they watched with concern as a grackle tried to take a mockingbird chick from its nest. Fortunately, the baby mockingbird's mother drove off the grackle as the children watched with fascination.

At the end of the year they discovered that a pair of Bewick's Wrens had built a nest in an HEB reusable bag that was hanging outside the fifth grade classroom. Each morning children took a few minutes to check out the progress of the nest on their way to daycare. We were all excited when we heard the babies chirping inside the bag. The last day of school we watched the wrens taking food to their young. It was an exciting way to end the year. These changes in the children would probably not have happened without my Master Naturalist classes and volunteer experiences.



**Question for Readers:**

Here's a photo of the wren nest. It looks like the wrens have an egg from a different species: can you see the big blue egg above the wren eggs? If you know what kind of egg the blue one is, please let Carolyn know. ♦



**Turtle Release Photos – June 18-19, 2011**

*by Jean Pettit*





## Developing Bird Brains

by Jean Pettit

The Boys and Girls Clubs of Edinburg, Pharr and Port Isabel collectively have received a grant from the Texas Parks and Wildlife for a summer program called Bird Brains: The Ultimate Journey. Friday June 17th and Saturday June 18th was the Kick-Off event for their summer birding adventure. Friday night all three clubs (approximately 75 children) gathered at the Boys and Girls Club Laguna Madre facility where Patricia Burke from the SPI Birding and Nature Center gave a presentation on the history of birding, how to use the "tools" of bird watching and showed a brief collection of her photos taken at the Birding Center.

Saturday I joined the children for an eco boat ride on the Dolphin Watch, where we discussed the hypersalinity of Laguna Madre, erosion, gulls, and terns. Of course the dolphins gave us quite a performance! The kids were excited about all they saw and learned. For some of the children, this was their very first boat ride.



We then traveled to the South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center, where I and another guide lead them on a tour of the facility and boardwalks. Although the alligator did not cooperate and make an appearance, the children were able to observe many of our resident birds and enjoy their colors and habitats.

Over the next ten weeks the individual clubs will be going on field trips to the remaining parks in the World Birding Center and will have lessons, crafts and activities structured to increase their knowledge and enhance their enjoyment of birding.

If any of our RGVCTMN members would like to participate and help the clubs with their programs, please contact me at [dojeel@msn.com](mailto:dojeel@msn.com) or 713-899-9233. ♦

## Nature Studies in Cameron Park

by Peggy Knopp

Our own Dodie Greaney is back in the classroom again. After working with Sister Sharon's junior naturalist classes, she is now teaching nature studies to preschoolers in the Cameron Park Head Start Center in Brownsville. This is her favorite age group, and the students and their teachers responded eagerly and requested more. Her first lesson and craft activity dealt with birds. Stories supplemented with photos, toy birds, bird sounds, nests and feathers delighted all. The children made nests out of paper bags with eggs of clay. What's next? Spiders! ♦



## RGVCTMN Tidbits

by Jolaine Lanehart

Did you know that, according to the Chapter Handbook, you must wear your RGVTMN name tag or cap or shirt showing that you are a member of our organization if the volunteer hours you are working will be reported to the Chapter?

Also, hours spent volunteering for another organization you may belong to should not be reported, unless you are representing RGVTMN and not the other organization.

Did you know that, in order to remain an active RGVTMN member, you must earn at least one hour during the current year, in addition to paying dues and having a current Criminal History Background Check on file?

Currently, there are 25 members who have not reported any hours for 2011, and each of these members will be getting a reminder email over the next few weeks.

Did you know that one of the TMN's strategic partners is Bat Conservation International (website: <http://www.batcon.org/>)?

...and the United Nations has declared 2011-2012 the Year of the Bat! ♦

