



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 Alicia Cavazos

Hello Master Naturalists,

As we come to a close of 2014, I want to thank everyone for giving me the opportunity to be your president for the last two years. It has been a very rewarding experience. I have learned so much from everyone. The RGVCTMN is filled with individuals that are so fun-loving and thirsty for knowledge that when I retired from work three years ago and joined the chapter, I felt like I had found a new family that took me under its wing and helped me grow. I would also like to thank Tony Reisinger for being our advisor. He always has time for us when we need his guidance.

I want to congratulate Linda Butcher for taking on the responsibility as our new president. The new officers for 2015 are to be congratulated as well -- Anita, Gail, and Jim. We will have a good and strong group of leaders to guide us through the new year. We have a great line-up of speakers so 2015 should be an awesome year.

Happy Holidays to everyone....be safe and see you next year at the meetings or volunteering at the various partner locations.

Alicia

A Master Naturalist Will Survive

by Adrian Ramos

On Nov 14 and 15 a few RGVCTMN members (Tony Reisinger, Cecilia Montalvo, Beatriz Alvarez, Kit Doncaster, Ken Baker, and I) took part in a joint South Texas Engineering Math and Science (STEMS)/Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (TPWD) Outdoor Survival Skills workshop at the South Padre Island Hilton Garden Inn. Javier Garcia, University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB) STEMS Program Director, coordinated the event and invited TPWD Outdoor Educator Dawn Bello to facilitate the program. Instruction was provided on trip planning, water procurement and purification, wilderness first aid, expedient shelter construction, foraging for edible plants and weeds, knot tying, and survival gear.

The workshop began with Dawn giving a detailed accounting of a harrowing recent outdoor excursion with a group of women in which she was bitten by a copperhead snake and had to guide her students through backcountry emergency medicine and evacuation procedures. Fortunately, she was accompanied by a Certified Wilderness EMT who coordinated the effort to get her to a medical facility with antivenin. The key to her survival and recovery was her trip planning and preparedness for any emergency (even her own).

A trip plan should contain a map, a timeline, contact information for all involved, skills of the group, planned route and activities, gear and equipment available, communications methods and devices and emergency plan with routes and rally points. The trip plan should be disseminated to park personnel and your emergency contacts. All National Parks require a trip plan but not all Texas Parks do; however, it's a great idea to have one and submit it to park authorities -- it can save your life or of the life of someone in your party.

In the workshop, the Wilderness EMT provided a list of the most common wilderness injuries and their associated treatments. We then reviewed the contents of her first aid kit and found out we were missing some critical supplies.

Survival priorities should be the CORE FOUR:

- Shelter
- Water
- Heat (Fire)
- Food

FYI – the rule of 3's gives important survival information: you can survive 3 minutes without air, 3 hours without shelter, 3 days without water, and 3 weeks without food.

Creating a shelter if you are stranded in the wilderness depends on a number of things. How long do you need shelter? What is available for shelter? How much effort and energy will it take to build a shelter? Shelter is made for one thing – to protect you from the elements (sun, cold, rain and wind). Being exposed to the

elements can deteriorate your physical condition through hypothermia or hyperthermia. And psychological well-being can deteriorate even quicker – nothing is more depressing than being cold, wet, hungry and thirsty.



Kit is treated for hypothermia.

The ability to procure and purify water could mean the difference between life and death. Some methods we covered included solar stills, boiling water, rain water collection, and drinking and purifying stream water. There are numerous filtration devices available on the market, any of which should be in your emergency kit. The most basic is a type of straw with a filter on it (less than \$30). Water purification tablets cost are even less expensive.

There are a number of ways to create a fire in the wilderness. The timing, weather, and accommodations for this class were not conducive to covering this in great detail. Nevertheless, you should have a few basic fire-starting tools and tinder in your packs.

The number four priority for survival is food because you can survive the longest without food. There are four ways to not starve in the wilderness – Hunt, Fish, Gather, and Scavenge. Our class focused on foraging for wild edible plants. Although STEM catered part of our meals, foraging for edible plants in the dunes provided a nice afternoon snack. Think of it as wild salty salad. Some of these plants could be eaten right off the ground without preparation while some would require cooking/boiling. Care should always be taken to make double- and triple-sure you are not eating something that will poison you or make you sick. There are lots of wild edible reference books out there – make sure you use multiple sources before taking a

bite. Some of the edible dune and beach plants include Searocket, Sea Purslane, Railroad Vine (aka Dune Morning Glory, if you're really starving) and even Sargassum.



Is sargassum really edible? Yuck.

After a quick class on essential knots to know in the wild, we finished up the class with a review of what you should have in your survival kit. Some of the items include but are definitely not limited to cordage (ropes, string, and twine), a knife, first aid kit, light source, fire starting tools, water purification and water storage, emergency blanket, signaling devices, GPS, compass, solar battery charger, communication devices, and personal protection. Your emergency bag can contain as much or as little as you feel necessary, but it should always amount to a kit no larger than one could readily carry, even on short day trips. Kits can always be modified for your specific circumstances.

After a day and a half of instruction, we departed knowing how to prepare for emergencies big or small and how to enjoy and respect the great outdoors and all it has to offer -- SAFELY.

For more information on the new Texas Parks and Wildlife Survival Series Workshop and courses, contact Dawn Bello, Outdoor and Wilderness Leadership Specialist at dawn.bello@tpwd.texas.gov or call 713-203-2915. ♦

New Chapter Update

by Sylvia Casselman

Editor's Note: After three years of TMN training sessions in Mission, the number of Valley TMN members has reached a level capable of supporting an independent chapter centered in Hidalgo County and serving Brooks and Starr Counties as well as jointly serving Hidalgo and Cameron Counties, with the Rio Grande Valley Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists. Here is an update on work to establish the new chapter.

It goes without saying that setting up a Master Naturalist chapter is not an easy task. Many in the RGV chapter of TMN can attest to this fact. For those of us in the Upper Valley area, the task has been easier simply because most of us are members of the

parent chapter, RGVCTMN. Our membership has afforded us the opportunity to receive training, advice, and help from other TMN members with years of experience. Because of that, the process that took many months for the RGVCTMN may be reduced to less than 6 months for us.

Since the first planning meeting in Upper Valley in early October, much has been accomplished. We created a Coordinating Committee comprised of 6 members of the RGVCTMN living in the upper valley area. This nucleus of people has helped to guide the Upper Valley group in its efforts to become a certified TMN chapter. A call to all members living in the upper valley went out in early October to meet and review all the requirements from the State Board. Both Javier DeLeon and Tony Reisinger have agreed to be advisors to the new chapter. The group chose South Texas Border Chapter TMN as the chapter name.

A schedule for monthly meetings is now in place, alternating meetings between a central location and volunteer partner locations. We hope to receive our state charter in time to have our first chapter meeting in February 2015. Our officers have been elected and are looking forward to the upcoming year with great anticipation. Marisa Oliva-Rodriguez will be President for our first year as a chartered chapter of TMN. The executive committee will consist of Ben Nibert serving as Vice President, Dr. Scott Hollinger serving as Treasurer, and Donna Horcher serving as Secretary. Many of the committee chairs have been named, including Tom Butler who will continue in the position of Education Chair.



Ben Nibert, Marisa Oliva-Rodriguez, Scott Hollinger, and Javier De Leon.

Hannah Buschert has already set up a website for our chapter. It is www.SouthTexasBorder.wix.com/TXMN. Check it out. Hannah has also helped us set up an email address for the fledgling chapter: STXBorderTMN@gmail.com. Nan Persinger will be Historian for the chapter. Other people are volunteering every day to

help with committees. The enthusiasm of members in the area is contagious. Our thanks go out to all those in RGVCTMN who have helped us along the way. ♦

Organizational Mitosis

by Tom Butler

When a cell divides, it partitions out its DNA into two separate packages, which then are enclosed in separate nuclei. Each cell gets a complete set of instructions matching the original cell (excepting mutations which occasionally occur). I use this analogy for the current situation with the Rio Grande Valley Chapter. One Texas Master Naturalist Chapter is dividing, becoming two chapters. Each chapter is receiving a similar (if not exactly matching) set of members. Cells that do this are called sisters and they are all working toward a common goal, to advance the species. The Rio Grande Valley Chapter and the South Texas Border Chapter are sisters, working toward a common goal, the better understanding of nature and supporting the organizations which also foster a better understanding of nature.

Thanks to the leadership of the Rio Grande Valley Chapter, an active and experienced group of Texas Master Naturalists in the Hidalgo, Starr, and Brooks county area will form a new chapter of Texas Master Naturalists. More than 50 TMN members will be joining the South Texas Border Chapter. This is not a baby or junior chapter -- this will be a fully functioning chapter of experienced Texas Master Naturalists. The two Valley chapters are not competing (a term from politics, sports, business, and economics) but rather are supporting one another. Together, we are both committed to a better understanding of nature in the general population. We share a common goal and we should support one another.

We are coordinating the 2015 Winter TMN Training just as we have in the past. We are allowing trainees to attend classes or field trips in San Benito or at Bentsen State Park and receive credit for those classes or field trips. We have scheduled speakers from the State level so they can speak to both classes on successive evenings. We are working closely together to develop a single schedule that accommodates both classes. We will share orientation for the first time and are planning separate graduation ceremonies. It is our sincere hope that this cooperation will continue into the future. It makes our educational offering twice as rich as doing this separately or competitively would be for our trainees.

Separately we will each be effective, but we can be more than effective: we can work together cooperatively and be a dynamic force supporting the understanding of natural resources. Think of the South Texas Border Chapter as siblings, all working for a common goal. ♦

Interesting Links

- RGVCTMN – Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/groups/449584998398407/?ref=br_tf, and website: <http://www.rgvctmn.org/>
- South Texas Border Chapter (TMN) website – www.SouthTexasBorder.wix.com/TXMN
- Cactus Creek Ranch – Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Cactus-Creek-Ranch/344569882304536>, and YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mG9cBhaTE0
- Friends of the Wildlife Corridor – Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/friendsofthewildlifecorridor>, and website: <https://friendsofthewildlifecorridor.org/>
- Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park Facebook – <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Texas-Parks-and-Wildlife-Bentsen-Rio-Grande-Valley-State-Park/118671564819697> ♦

2015 General Meeting Speakers

- January 13 – Oil Spills, Christine Hale, Texas Sea Grant Oil Spill Science Outreach Specialist
- February 10 – Interpretive Speaking, John Yochum, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- March 10 – Urban Birding, John Brush, Ornithologist and Nature Guide
- April 14 – Volunteer Experiences at Davis Mountain, Jim Najvar and Jolaine Lanehart, Rio Grande Valley Chapter Texas Master Naturalists
- May 12 – Beach Ecology, Richard Kline, Ph.D, Assistant Professor, Biological Sciences University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, and tour of new Port Isabel Event & Cultural Center, Mari Galvan, Event Center Director
- June 9 – Beach Combing (at the beach) with Diann Ballesteros and Linda Butcher, Rio Grande Valley Chapter Texas Master Naturalists
- July 14 – Fossils, Minerals and Gem Stones, Linda Butcher, Rio Grande Valley Chapter Texas Master Naturalist
- August 11 – Meteors, Don Hoak, Amateur Astronomer and Consultant
- September 8 – Texas Tortoises, Kiley Briggs, University of Texas Brownsville, graduate student
- October 13 – Taking Care of Trees, Salvador Alemany, Texas State Forestry Service
- November 10 – Native Plants, Emily Neiman, Environmentalist ♦

Remembering Jackie Field

by Frank Wiseman



Our Chapter lost one of its own on December 11, 2014. Jackie Field, a long-standing member of RGVCTMN from the class of 2006 and a board member since 2007, died at his home in Palmhurst.

Jackie served our organization faithfully over the years, acting as our Publicity /Outreach board member. He helped us one year with our taxes, and he engaged vendors for better prices for our merchandising programs over the years. He was always ready to help our organization in any way that he could. We appreciate all he did for our chapter.

Jackie was a retired businessman, photographer, plant lover, fisherman, and family man. His love of nature showed through in all that he accomplished.

Jackie will be missed by all. Our condolences go out to his wife Trudy and his children and grandchildren. ♦

