



# 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 Linda Butcher*

As the year draws to a close, it's bittersweet for me. My two years as your president has been a rewarding experience, I look forward to the new year with high hopes for travel, birding and going to the beach. I know our new president will continue to take our organization forward.

We participated in many events through the year, WOVE, Yappopalooza and endless hours at the RGV Birding Festival. We provided education for 30 trainees in our 2016 class, as well as presentations for the 4H group in Brownsville. Although I was unable to go on the Ft. Davis adventure, I know it was a great success as well. Thanks to Jolaine and Jim. We had a good representation at our State Convention in October. I encourage you all to attend next year as it will be held in Corpus Christi.

In closing, I want to thank everyone for your help, your support, and kind words of encouragement. It has been an honor to have served as your president. ♦

Linda

# Cook's Branch Conservancy Tour

*by Alicia Cavazos*

The TMN Conference gives us an opportunity to attend field trips at locations that are not normally available to the public. That is the reason I signed up for the Cook's Branch Conservancy Field Tour. This is a preserve that is 5,600 acres that was created by the Cynthia & George Mitchell Foundation.

We were met at the gate by the manager of the preserve, Kathy Hutsun, and a biologist. Kathy has been working for the Mitchell's for the past 20 years, so she is very knowledgeable and has a big influence in how the preserve is managed. They escorted our van to the lodge where we could walk the grounds and just take in the beauty of the place.



The Mitchell family use this lodge during Thanksgiving and family reunions. George Mitchell got his wealth from oil & gas and the development of The Woodlands. He and Cynthia are no longer alive but the grandchildren are the ones that in unison decided not to develop this area and leave the land as is.

We needed to make room for a guide in the bus, so I and two others rode in Kathy's truck where she gave us some firsthand information about the preserve and the Mitchells.

The reason the preserve was created was due to the quick development of the area from Houston and loss of habitat of the piney woods. They discovered the Red-cockaded Woodpecker nesting on the property. This woodpecker requires old growth trees for survival. When the preserve was created, there were only 13 families of woodpeckers. Now there are 23 families. What makes this wood pecker special, is that it takes 2 years to build the holes in the trees. This is the only woodpecker that digs the cavity in living pine trees. It mates for life in small colonies. If the male dies, the female leaves also. When the hatchlings fledge, one male stays to help with the new family the following year (or to take over the hole if the male dies). They are predated by snakes which are abundant in the area. We were shown some of the traps they use for the snakes.



The preserve uses fire to manage undergrowth. Every area is burned every 3 years. This year Kathy said they were behind due to the huge amount of rain they got in the area this spring.

The Mitchell family allowed us to go in the preserve, but are very private. This is a private preserve therefore we could take but not share pictures on social media. We still thank them for creating this little piece of heaven and lucky to have seen it through the TMN group that arranged this. ♦

# A Session Sampler: State TMN Meeting

by Jolaine Lanehart

2016 marked the third State TMN meeting I have attended. The first one was great; the experience was invigorating and inspiring. The 2015 meeting also had many great sessions, but there were fewer of them and, perhaps, the uniqueness of the meeting had worn off for me? But, 2016 came around, and the catalog of sessions was so extensive, I just had to go! In two words: “Really worthwhile.” It was fun seeing folks I had met previously and making some new friends. It was also amazing to see the growth of our organization and the increasing number of “youth” coming on board.

So what did I learn?

**Wildlife Watching for Automated, Autonomous Cameras** presented by Claire Moore, Heartwood Chapter TMN. Claire reviewed the technical merits of different wildlife (game) cameras, including focal length and auto focusing, types of cards for storing images, and batteries. It is important to make sure you set the camera close enough to your subjects and that you fully understand how it focuses. Some models also can be set to capture video and time lapse photography. Using the latter, she showed a video she made of a Monarch caterpillar devouring a milkweed during a 36 hour period. The audience made her show that 3 or 4 times! Because the camera is stationary, the birds become accustomed to it and you are able to capture interactions you might otherwise miss. The cameras can also be setup to see just what comes around your feeders or water features at night or when you are not around. Costs range from about \$50 to over \$200.

**The Lichens: a brief introduction to one of nature's intriguing symbioses**, Dale Kruse, S.M. Tracy Herbarium TAES/TAMU. Having observed the amazing colors and different lichens in the Davis Mountains, I decided I needed to learn more about them. Wow! Little did I know how little I knew about these very basic organisms. Here are just a few (and I do mean a few) facts presented by Dale:

1. Lichens are a fungal lifestyle, not taxonomic plants.
2. There are 17,000-20,000 species.
3. They exist only in a symbiotic relationship with algae and fungi; and they take the name of the fungal partner.
4. The fungi must live with a photosynthetic partner, usually green algae.
5. They are slow growing, living up to/exceeding 1000 years.
6. They function as plants and are producers (not decomposers).
7. Mostly terrestrial, very few live in water, and they are found everywhere.
8. Very sensitive to changes in the environment, especially moisture. Pollution alters the symbiotic relationship, causing the lichen to die.
9. There are several forms of lichen:
  - a. Crustose – usually found on rocks, very low growing
  - b. Squanulose – looks like scales
  - c. Folios – taller, leaf like, loosely attached
  - d. Umbilicate – has a single attached rhizine (like an umbrella)
  - e. Fruticose – more 3-D, taller, hair-like and shrubby
  - f. Gelatinous (*oops, two hour session and he ran out of time!*)

Disclaimer – While highly informative, I am sure I missed some/many details (and probably misspelled some words). It was a highly technical discussion (at least, for some of us). Dale did have microscopes and lichen to view, which was fascinating. Even with much of the content a challenge, I am glad I attended the session.

**Pollinators and Natives: An Ancient Marriage**. Randy Johnson, Dallas Zoo. Randy is passionate about native plants and the coevolution of plants and insects. He pointed out that 1/6<sup>th</sup> of all species on the planet are

plants. Of the 12,200+ of angiosperms (flowering plants), 500 are pollinated by birds, 250 by bats, 875 are abiotic (wind and water pollinated), and remainder are pollinated by insects.

Habitat loss between 1982 and 2010 has been estimated at 4.3 million acres. Much of this loss is due to non-native plants, including King Ranch (KR) bluestem, Bermuda grass, Chinese pistache, and others, which often out-compete natives. Non-natives may lack the physical features that attract pollinators (some plants are so unique in their structure, they are a perfect match for a specific pollinator while excluding others). He warned against planting non-native plants but also against bringing in insects (like ladybugs) from other areas of the country for pest control.

How to combat non-native plants? Some are extraordinarily difficult to eliminate. KR bluestem, for example, is really at home in Texas and virtually nothing discourages its growth. Plus the State continues to plant it along highways. As individuals we might not make a dent in KR bluestem, but we can create plant colonies or patches of local native flowering plants that improve pollinator activity. Consideration should be given to different colors, blooming habits, and scents to attract a variety of insects year round. Don't forget grasses and those tiny ground cover plants (frog fruit, for example). A wider variety of insect life ultimately means greater diversity in the overall ecosystem.

Randy is a proponent of seed collecting and the best seed is harvested locally. If you decide to collect seed, there are some general guidelines to follow:

1. Harvest ethically, taking only a few seeds from plants scattered throughout the area.
2. Stay close to home – seed in Lubbock will be somewhat genetically different than seed in Corpus; not to mention the difference in humidity, etc. of growing conditions.
3. Be patient! Harvest mature seed only. If collected early, it won't mature.
4. Use paper sacks, not plastic, for your seeds.
5. Of course, watch for traffic, private property boundaries, and avoid collecting on State or National lands where it is forbidden.

Randy also described in some detail the way in which he propagates *Asclepias* (milkweed). He considers *Asclepias* a keystone species, meaning it is truly essential plant species. The link to his approach is found by searching keywords "Randy Johnson *asclepias*" and you should see the NPSOT, Boerne Chapter, article link, which will look a bit like this:

DOC] *Asclepias* Propagating practices by Randy Johnson

[npsot.org/wp/boerne/files/.../Asclepias-Propagating-practices-by-Randy-Johnson.docx](https://npsot.org/wp/boerne/files/.../Asclepias-Propagating-practices-by-Randy-Johnson.docx)

Click on the article and it will download it to your computer for personal use, not for distribution.

His parting words on planting *Asclepias*: "Install in the fall; summer is a bummer."

### **Other Sessions Attended.**

- I also attended a 4 hour session on photography that was a great review of how to use your camera, move off of auto and explore the other settings to improve your photographs. Carol Fox Henrichs presented and provided us with a list of ways to improve our photography and 2 handouts, Nature Photography (her suggested settings for things like birds in flight) and Hands-on Photography Projects (different "tests" that help you understand and use the appropriate setting for shutter speed, ISO, depth of field, and more).
- A 2 hour session, What's that Weed? With Sam Kieschnick of TPWD (Ft. Worth). Excellent presenter and fellow lover of those little ground covers like frog fruit and straggler daisy.
- How to Put on a BioBlitz with Teaming with Wildlife, True to Texas with Karly Robinson. A great overview on what to do and not do with a BioBlitz. A BioBlitz is when a group organizes to catalog plants, animals, insects, birds, etc. in a given area.
- eBird Basics with Cullen Hanks. Now I better understand the relationship between eBird, Nature Trackers, Merlin, and more! It seems Cullen actually reports *everything* he sees on one or more of the

citizen science projects; but, for the rest of us that might be too much. So, thankfully, you can use these programs/apps/citizen science projects and develop your own life list of plants/birds/insects/whatever. In fact, you can conduct your own personal yard “BioBlitz” and enter the data and photos for your place.

As you can see the State TMN Meeting is as diverse as our interests. If you have not thought about attending, please reconsider. It is fun, informative, and a great way to get AT. The 2017 Meeting will be at the Corpus Christi Omni, October 20-22. Pencil it in and let’s have a big group from RGVCTMN! ♦

# ***HONORING LEROY OVERSTREET***

*by Alicia Cavazos*

It happens often in the valley that we have multiple events that make us want to be several places at one time. Such was the case on the weekend of Saturday November 12 when Raptor Banding with Bill Clark, a work day on Green Island and the funeral of Leroy Overstreet were all scheduled on the same morning.

Green Island is a rookery island located about a quarter mile north of where the Arroyo Colorado empties into the Laguna Madre. It has been leased to Audubon Texas for many years. Access to this island is strictly prohibited during breeding season which is February through June. Many of our shore birds in the Laguna Madre and Arroyo area such as Roseate spoonbills, egrets, cormorants, go to this island to raise their young. It is very important to keep this island free of predators to maximize the number of chicks that mature to adult birds.

Leroy Overstreet was the Coastal Warden for this island.. He kept the coyotes, bobcats and ants from getting to the eggs or young chicks for over 18 years. He retired last year at the age of 93. By chance, Norma and I met him three years ago and asked him if we could go to Green Island. He would go twice a week and he told us we could go any time. I went with him several times and offered to get the Texas Master Naturalists and ACAS group to help clean up the trails. He very much welcomed the offer. Due to the south Texas heat we could only work a few hours at a time. We went several times that year and then he retired.

The new Coastal Warden, Larry Shriver, a member of ACAS and TMN also welcomes all the help we can give him. He obtained a pontoon boat to transport volunteers and materials for the upkeep of the island and to enjoy the beautiful Arroyo Colorado. We had scheduled a work day on November 12 to clean and paint the cabin. We also needed to remove the trash and enlarge the trails that grow over in a year's time.

We found out that Leroy had passed and his memorial service would be on November 12. Even though we wanted to go to the memorial service, we decided to honor Leroy and work at his beloved island on that day. ACAS and TMN have donated money and time to keep this rookery island as successful as it can be so our children and grandchildren can enjoy all the beautiful birds that grace the Laguna Madre area. I think Leroy would be happy to know that we are continuing his work.

ACAS donated \$500 for the purchase of paint, material to patch holes and screens at the November meeting. A water feature from rain water collection will also be built in the near future. There is a large number of warblers that pass through, but there is no fresh water on the island for them. This money will be used wisely. ♦



# Ebony Loop Guided Nature Walks

by Anita Westervelt

Harlingen's Hugh Ramsey Nature Park boasts some 250 species of Rio Grande Valley native plants, shrubs, trees, cactus and the untold numbers of birds, butterflies and critters that use this native habitat.

Many of the plants are highlighted in specialty gardens around the park's Ebony Loop.

Rio Grande Valley Chapter, Texas Master Naturalist volunteers maintain these gardens each week and provide free guided nature walks twice a month through May 2017.

This is a perfect time for this nature walk. It's tree planting time in the Valley. Take advantage of our knowledgeable guides and start a wish-list for your own landscape. Cooler temperatures November through February are ideal for planting trees and shrubs in the Valley. They have a better survival rate when allowed to establish without the heat and drought stress of summer.

You're probably familiar with a hummingbird favorite, native **Wild olive**, *Cordia boissieri*, but do you know it has a close relative in the park as well? Wild olive is found in no other state in America and not much more north than Willacy County. Its cousin, **Tamaulipan olive**, *Cordia alba*, is an adaptive species and was planted in the park by the original team of Texas Master Naturalists. Learn little known facts about these two trees on a guided tour.

**Mexican caesalpinia**, *Caesalpinia mexicana*, is showy all year with large clusters of bright yellow blooms that attract hummingbirds and butterflies.

Considered the rarest of all trees in Texas, **Runyon's Esenbeckia**, *Esenbeckia berlandieri* [*E. runyonii*] is showcased in two of the Loop's gardens. Once thought to be extinct in the wild here, a local native plant grower re-discovered it. Cameron County is its northern most range. We'll tell you who that nurseryman is and where you, too, can find an Esenbeckia to add to your landscape.



Esenbeckia (Photo: Anita Westervelt)

**Yellow sophora**, *Sophora tomentosa*, is a beautiful large shrub and prolific bloomer with soft, pastel yellow blooms spring to winter. The blooms attract hummingbirds, butterflies and other pollinators.

The amazing **snake eyes**, *Phaulothamnus spinescens*, shrub is still “making eyes,” but don’t get too close . . . . You got it -- find out more on a guided tour.



Snake Eyes (Photo: Frank Wiseman)

There’s always something blooming around Ebony Loop. Come hear about our native beauties from your fellow Master Naturalists and earn two hours of advance training.

Ebony Loop is an easy quarter mile level caliche trail. Wear sturdy shoes, bring water and bug spray for yourself if desired. Restrooms are located at the park entrance. ♦

**Hugh Ramsey Nature Park** is at 1000 South 499, just two miles south of Harlingen’s Valley International Airport.

Call 956-748-3190 or e-mail [rgvctmntreasurer@gmail.com](mailto:rgvctmntreasurer@gmail.com).

**Tours are from 9-11 a.m.** and begin at the south side of the parking lot.

**2017 Tour Dates:**

January 6 and 21  
February 3 and 18  
March 3 and 18  
April 7 and 22  
May 5 and 20

# **My First Annual TMN State Meeting**

*by Joni Gillis*

In October of this year I attended my first Annual State TMN Meeting. I was fortunate enough to ride with three great women from our chapter, arriving on a sunny Friday afternoon. After registering I plunged right in by attending a 4-hour afternoon session.

This first session was “Bird Song: A First Guide to Recognizing Songs and Calls” given by Scott Kiester from the Elm Fork TMN Chapter. Mr. Kiester gave hints as to the things to recognize about different calls in order to distinguish one from another. It became rather self-evident that learning bird calls certainly does not happen quickly but takes lots of time, attention and patience. Maybe listening to a CD over and over again would help. But, no wait. The bird call “Who Cooks For You” belongs to which bird? The Barred Owl? No, no. It belongs to the white wing dove. Here in deep South Texas we certainly hear things differently from the rest of the state and, maybe, country.

The next day was filled with a couple of sessions and a field trip. The morning session that struck a chord was titled “Alternative Funding: A Pivotal Moment for Wildlife Conservation” by Karly Denkhaus Robinson. Ms. Robinson spoke of looking into corporations in your chapter’s particular area that could be encouraged to help with chapter projects or be encouraged to get its employees to volunteer on chapter projects. She gave suggestions on how to go about looking into such possibilities and, if the company appears approachable, how to approach the individuals in charge. Could the new businesses coming into the Rio Grande Valley, such as LNG and SpaceX, be approached? Searching for alternative funding could be very time consuming but certainly a worthwhile cause. This session brought to mind the potential of cooperative efforts between different groups that are interested in the preservation and protection of wildlife. Could the need for nesting platforms on the spoil islands and the need of Boy Scouts to find Eagle projects be one of these opportunities? The possibilities are many.

The afternoon was a relaxing field trip to Elmer Kleb & Kleb Woods Nature Preserve. There was a festival going on at the park that day with activities for children and adults. There wasn’t much bird activity at the preserve that day. It became rather poignant that in Deep South Texas we are extremely fortunate to be able to walk out into our back yards and see a lot of birds almost any day of the week.

Sunday morning sessions included “TxDOT and Pollinators” presented by Dennis Markwardt and “Cultivating an ‘Intense Consciousness’ - The Value and Challenges of Engaging With College Students” given by Dr. Sam Whitehead of Concordia University. Mr. Markwardt informed us that the state maintains around 1,000,000 acres of land, mowing around 880 of those acres. TxDOT is creating Monarch way stations at 80 Rest Stops around Texas. 10% of pollinators are hit by traffic. They have worked hard to find 9 herbicides that won’t hurt wildflowers. TxDOT actually plants over 1,000 acres of wildflowers in the Fall. It is encouraging to know how much our wildflowers mean to the state as well as the public that Dr. Whitehead’s presentation was inspired by the fact that Concordia University is located on a 250 acre conservation preserve. Dr. Whitehead explained that millennials are very busy, because many of them work, but are easily bored. Many of them suffer from “Nature Deficit Disorder.” Before they engage in any project, they want to know how it will benefit them. The question to ask may be, “What do you want to put on your resume?” and advising them that employers want to hire individuals with project management skills. Dr. Whitehead believes that the TMN program is a great outlet for the idealists among the millennials, who need the value of conservation spelled out for them. There are also benefits for any chapter that can get millennials involved in the chapter. Youthful energy is contagious. Millennials add ‘new blood’ to the chapter and can assure the legacy of the chapter. College students have more impact on children K through 12. Millennials in any TMN chapter certainly sounds like a ‘win-win’ arrangement.

In conclusion, the Annual Meeting gave me plenty of food for thought. There are things I would like to do for our chapter based upon this experience; I just need to remember I cannot do everything all at once and all by myself. So, will I go again to an annual meeting? Certainly, if I am able. I would encourage any TMN member to attend at least one annual meeting - and attend as many of the sessions offered as possible. I came away inspired and believe anyone who attends will feel the same. ♦

# **21<sup>st</sup> International Sea Bean Symposium**

*by Linder Butcher*

Recently fellow Master Naturalist Diann Ballesteros and I attended the 21<sup>st</sup> International Sea Bean Symposium in Galveston, Texas.

There were exhibits of sea beans and a large number of different shark's teeth, All of them found on the beaches around Galveston. One display showed the different kinds of plastic waste that washes up on our shores and different ways you can recycle it. An item I found that would be very useful was made of strips of plastic bags crocheted into a very nice tote bag. As an added bonus, being made of plastic, it is water resistant. Another exhibit demonstrated how to polish your sea beans.

There was a large table of raffle items. All of them were beach related. They included a ginger jar lamp full of different sea beans, a table centerpiece with autumn leaves and sea beans, coasters, books and one of the tote bags made of plastic bags.

Presentations were given both on Friday and Saturday. They included presentations on Sea Turtles and the Dangers Plastics Pose, Dolphin Strandings, Beachcombing at Bolivar, and my favorite, Sea Bean Basics and Identification by Ed Perry Jr. He is the co-author of Sea Beans from The Tropics. That's the sea bean collector's bible.

It was announced that each year the symposium location will now alternate between Florida and Texas. I'm already looking forward to 2018 when it will return to Texas.

If you want to learn about sea beans, I will be giving a presentation at the Winter Outdoor Wildlife Expo at the South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center. Each person attending will be given a sea bean to start their collection. ♦

# **Texas Master Naturalist State Meeting 2016**

*by Linda Des Rosiers*

This year was my third time to attend the state meet. Each time I have not been disappointed. What a wonderful weekend meeting other TMN from all over Texas and learning so much.

I went on a field trip to Lake Creek Greenway. It reminded me of NH where I am from. There were lots of pine needles and oak leaves on the trail.

Some of the sessions I enjoyed were “Bird Songs” a guide to recognizing songs and calls. Other were “Plants of the Prairie”, and “Amphibians and Reptiles of Texas. I also enjoyed learning more about eBird.

The session I found extremely interesting was “Caddo, the Lake, the Battle”, presented by Carl Turner. Caddo Lake is a 25,400 acre Lake and wetland found in northeast Texas just west of Shreveport LA. It is a bayou with the largest Cypress forest in the world. Legend indicates that the lake was formed by an earthquake in the early 1800's, but most geologists say that the lake was formed by a huge log jam on the Red River.

As the logs were removed over time, the lake depleted to a point that many of the cities that had thrived on the lake were destroyed. Then oil was discovered under the lake, which really effected the ecosystem. Fortunately the oil rigs found other rich oil fields and left the lake.

Texas established Caddo Lake State Park in 1934. The Caddo Dam was completed and began controlling the water in 1971. In 1993 the Nature Conservancy bought and protected 7000 adjoining acres.

The “Battle” is Giant Salvinia which was brought to the lake from a boat or boats. The weed doubles in size every two to four days. The presenter showed us a fast forward video covering three to four months. It was very disturbing. The weed quickly produced a thick mat on the lake.

The Center for Invasive Species Eradication worked to reverse the growth by building a salvinia weevil facility. The weevil eats the Giant Salvinia. They operated and maintained a salvinia weevil rearing facility as a source to be used at Caddo Lake. This seems to be helping in the warm months, but there are still studies of the survival of the weevil during cold temperatures. They released 100,000 salvinia weevils on the lake in 2011. They monitored the impact on the weed, and continued to evaluate the progress. They studied the weevil and their behavior, but also other possibilities including chemical, biological, mechanical and other management.

The program expired in 2014, and was taken over by Texas Parks and Wildlife. ♦

Interesting facts about Caddo Lake:

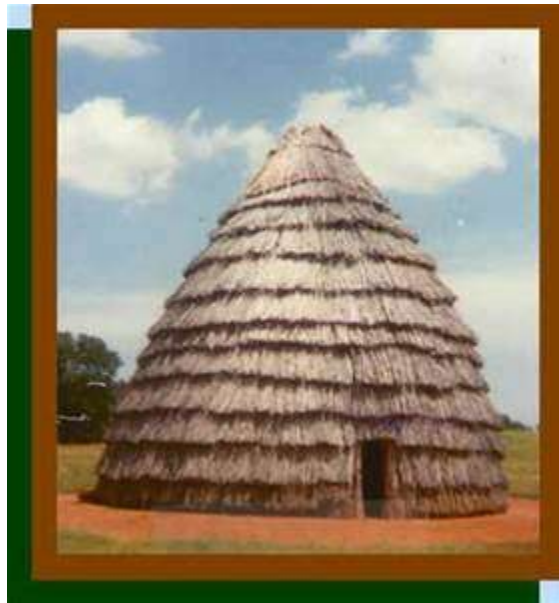
There have been hundreds of alleged “Big Foot” sightings at Caddo Lake.

The area was populated with Caddo Indians. They were sedentary, because they were farmers staying in one area with permanent homes. Some of those homes can be found at Caddo Lake State Park.

Sources:

Presenter at TMN State Meet – Carl Turner  
Caddo Lake Wikipedia

TX A&M Agrilife Research Extension  
History of Caddo Lake  
Caddo Lake State Park  
Caddo Indians of Texas  
Caddo Salvinia Blogspot  
US Army of Engineers/ Caddo Lake



# Communication Director's Volunteer Spotlight on

## Greg Storms

*by Frank Wiseman*

A Texas Master Naturalist who deserves a little recognition for his work this past year is Greg Storms. Greg was in the class of 2015. Since then he has been a faithful volunteer with Ramsey's Thursday morning volunteer group maintaining and improving the specialty gardens on the park's Ebony Loop. Volunteers say, "We couldn't have done it without Greg."

Greg is also an accomplished photographer. He works as a consultant for the owner of La Jarra Ranch in Raymondville. Part of his job there is to showcase the animal and plant life in a magazine which the ranch publishes as an advertising tool.



He has contributed to several local Chamber of Commerce publications and a number of La Jarra Ranch publications, including a La Jarra Ranch Photography. His award-winning images are displayed at various local and state locations.

Currently he is a freelance wildlife photographer and photographic consultant and guide at La Jarra Nature, Birding, and Heritage Center near Raymondville. His pictures appear on La Jarra's Facebook page.

Greg's photos appear on our new Chapter Outreach Banner.

For the RGVCTMN, he has been a teacher and organizer for our photography workshops this past year in levels one and two of basic photography and was a featured speaker at the 2016 W.O.W.E. He has been a board member representing Raymondville and Willacy County and a member of the Education Committee for two years.



You can find Greg each month setting up our general meeting room and greeting members as they arrive as a member of the Host Committee. Before coming to make his home in Raymondville as a science and math teacher, Greg also taught school in his native state of Michigan.

We salute this Texas Master Naturalist. ♦

# The Vultures Are Back!

by Anita Westervelt

Beautiful when effortlessly soaring on the thermals with out-stretched wings, up close, turkey vultures, *Cathartes aura*, bare-skinned red head with greenish warts and hooked white bill do not attractive birds make.

Not everyone appreciates this species, but these carrion scavengers perform a much-needed environmental service.

The word tenacious comes to mind with turkey vultures. One morning on a busy road near the house, a vulture zipped up about six feet and then down, smack in the middle of the road. It repeated this with each passing car. It was still there in the afternoon. I wondered why it didn't just haul the road kill to the side of the road where it would be safer.

A little research gave the answer. Turkey vultures are unable to carry off their carrion. Their feet are chicken like, not talon-like as hawks or eagles. They are the only scavenger birds that can't kill their prey.

Their beak, however, can pierce through the toughest cow hide.

A turkey vulture's diet consists entirely of dead animal remains. There's an opportune time as far as road kill -- the fresher the better. They won't eat extremely rotted carcasses.



Turkey vultures are among the very few birds that can smell. They can smell carrion less than 12-24 hours old. They detect by sight, but also rely heavily on their sense of smell. They can sniff out a dead critter from more than a mile away. Their sense of smell is so acute that they can even locate hidden food as small as a dead rat under a pile of leaves. They are more likely to search out food away from urban areas. They've been known to cruise 30 to 50 miles in search of food.

An adult turkey vulture wingspan reaches to six feet. They can swoop up to 60 mph. In spite of their large size, they surprisingly only weigh between two to four pounds.

Because of their light weight, they can virtually float in the sky using the thermal currents (rising columns of air) to get around the sky. This technique uses very little energy as the vultures rarely need to flap their wings. It

has been noted that vultures are so efficient at finding thermals, hawks will look for kettles of vultures and then fly over to take advantage of the rising air.

When flying, turkey vultures, hold their wings in a “V” above their backs, creating a slight angle that stabilizes their flight in turbulence.

Turkey vultures possess an unusual defense mechanism -- they regurgitate their last meal. Apparently a worse smell than decaying meat and effective against any predator with a sense of smell. ♦

# NEW CHAPTER OUTREACH BANNERS

*by Anita Westervelt*

The much-asked-for new banners are here! Thanks for Communication Director Frank Wiseman spearheading the committee with Greg Storms and myself assisting. Together we designed two banners, found a really great price, and they are ready to use at outreach events.

Both products were designed to be attention-getters using bright color and dynamic artwork.

The retractable banner sports chapter-specific information and gives just enough to pique someone's interest to ask questions about our chapter from those working the outreach table. Or write down our Website and research on their own when they get home.

It is recommended to stand alongside an outreach table or at the traffic edge of the booth where people can read it without overcrowding the table area. It should be a great recruiting tool even as a stand-alone. It comes with its own carrying case.

The wall-banner is an easily manageable size. We chose artwork, colors and wording that will grab attention as soon as anyone enters an exhibit hall. They'll head straight to our booth.

Thanks goes to Jimmy Paz for his permission to use his colorful and artful chapter Web page design on the banner and thanks for Greg Storms sharing his beautiful Rio Grande Valley nature photographs for the retractable banner.

Allegra Signs in Harlingen cooperated with all our specifics and honored our chapter's tax-free status.

The total cost from the chapter's treasury is \$273.

31" X 88" Deluxe Retractable Banner - \$192.

3' X 4' Vinyl Banner with Grommets - \$81. ♦

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# A New Look at Pigeonberry

by Lou Osborne

Pigeonberry, *Rivina humilis*, is listed as a small groundcover that provides many different colors all season long. It is unique in that it is covered with small white and pink flowers, green and red berries, and red and green foliage at the same time. Birds love the berries which provide them with winter forage. It is also attractive to bees and butterflies. The plant is salt tolerant which makes it useful in coastal planting situations. It tends to disappear in times of drought only to return when supplied with ample water. It is an excellent plant for hardiness zones 7 through 10.

Now imagine Mike Heep's surprise when he was sorting through his well stocked inventory of native plants and came across a *Rivina humilis* that displayed not red but white berries. In Mike's word's, "This is the first time I've seen this phenomenon!" My search of the available literature revealed no information on this phenomenon. Congratulations, Mike. You may very well have come across a truly unique variation of this humble groundcover. ♦



Red-Fruiting Pigeonberry

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White-fruited Pigeonberry  
(Photo by Mike Heep)

**We're Proud of You**  
Milestones Reached this Quarter  
September – December 2016

**Initial Certification:**

Anna Manual  
Ayla Truan

**100 Hours of Volunteer Service**

Charles Schmidt  
Andrea Fazioli

**250 Hours of Volunteer Service**

Sandi Jaeger  
Rene Rubin

**500 Hours of Volunteer Service**

Thadea Corkill

**1000 Hours of Volunteer Service**

Marilu Alf  
Sharon Slagel

**4000 Hours of Volunteer Service Jimmy Navjar**

**Notes:**

Sandi: WOVE, Turtle patrol (10 mile walk round trip), Laguna Atascosa book store; planning to teach kids, Parrot count

Teddy Corkill – volunteers Laguna Atascosa, many hobbies, stained glass; Rec'd wilderness tracking tuition scholarship from board, has continued training and is now certified at level 1, goal is to get to level 4 certification. Loves to teach kids.

Sharon – *Chachalaca* editor for many years. Volunteers at Santa Ana, very involved with Rio Reforestation

Jimmy Navjar: Volunteers at Laguna Atascosa and Davis Mt. State Park where 30 hrs/week is required as part of job, rest of time there is volunteer. Board Treasurer since 2015 (?)