



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 M. Lee Brown

I am so proud to have served as President of the RGV Chapter this year with the support of our hard working Board of Directors and Chapter members. We worked diligently to organize the administrative functions to run more efficiently and effectively as a 401(c)3 nonprofit organization. As our Chapter membership approaches 200 members spread out across three counties, it is essential that we maintain clear and open communication channels to keep our sense of cohesiveness and to be effective as a Chapter. I encourage Members to attend Board and Chapter meetings, to approach your At-Large Member and to serve on a committee. Your ideas and energy will propel us to reach more of the community with our Chapter's mission.

The RGV is also experiencing rapid population growth accompanied by added stressors on our thorn scrub, coastal prairie and wetland habitats, our water supply and the species that depend upon these natural resources. As Texas Master Naturalist volunteers we serve an important role in providing education and outreach to help our communities understand the importance of conserving and restoring the biodiversity of our beautiful Rio Grande Valley ecosystems. I believe our Chapter is ready for the challenge.

Our Chapter is fortunate to have Steve Lanoux stepping up to serve as the 2018 Chapter President. Steve is experienced in leading natural resource conservation efforts, volunteer organization administration and possesses a sincere sense of service to his community. I am looking forward to serving as your Past President. Onward! ♦

HOW ANITA WESTERVELT EARNED HER 2,500 HOUR PIN

By Frank Wiseman

Anita's volunteer locations are many and varied. Among the many are these: She...

Served on the Education Committee for two years

Was Vice President for two years

Served on the Monthly Speaker's Committee for three years

Was a W.O.W.E. volunteer, committee member and publicity chair

Worked at many Outreach Booths at various events

Since graduating in 2013, she has written and distributed to Valley-wide media, tourism booklets, and various electronic media, media releases for fall recruiting and significant events



Designed monthly meeting and special events fliers for Valley nature parks to print and post

Since 2015, has written monthly stories of 700, 500 and 350 words, with photographs, for Coastal Current, Valley Morning Star, McAllen Monitor, and Welcome Home RGV newspapers

Designed and presented numerous PowerPoint presentations to various groups including

- Native plants and butterflies

- Monarch butterflies and butterfly gardens

- TMN overview for lunch groups and fraternal organizations

- Nature Writing for Newspapers

- PowerPoint Presentation Skills Training

- Photography Elements of Composition

In February of 2015, Jimmy Paz invited her to write a Blog for the chapter Website. Since then, she has posted an average of two blogs a month on some aspect of our native Deep South Texas habitat from brush piles, bugs, native plants, the life style of Cormorants, to unique critters of the beach and sea.

Most significantly, in the fall of 2014, shortly after the death of long time TMN Ramsey Park volunteer Dick Roesler, Anita began to study the Dick Roesler Ramsey scholarship requirements and thought about how to make it more beneficial for the park.

With that, she contacted Ramsey Chairman Frank Wiseman and proposed a way to resurrect a viable volunteer team to help maintain, and where required, revamp, the specialty gardens around Harlingen's Hugh Ramsey Nature Park's Ebony Loop that a handful of original TMN Volunteers developed 17 years ago. From that idea evolved our weekly Thursday Morning Volunteer Team that has met and worked since January 2015. She has been a faithful co-coordinator of the team since the start.

As special requests, she has offered her guide services for private native plant tours of Ebony Loop. She helped to re-implement bi-monthly winter native plant tours that she and TMN volunteer Barbara Peet lead.

Her passions as a Texas Master Naturalist are butterflies and native plants. ♦

BEACH INVERTEBRATES

By Carolyn Cardile

Mike Mullenweg, Brazoria County Parks Interpreter and Peggy Romfh from the Cradle of Texas Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists presented an excellent program about several of the invertebrates that live along the mid-Texas coast. They presented interesting information about several different species while using power point photos and boxes of specimens which they prepared in advance and gave to the participants during the program. Several of the species they presented are described below using information from my notes and additional research.

Purse Crab

Persephona crinita



The Purse Crab has a round, globular shell (carapace) with a pale yellow shell. The shells can get as large as 2 inches wide, although the sample I received was only $\frac{3}{4}$ " across. They live in shallow water along the beach and bay where they feed on both dead and live fish, crabs, clams, and other invertebrates. Their predators include crabs, birds, and fish. After they mate in the summer, the female carries the fertilized eggs in a pouch on her abdomen until they hatch. This is why they are called Purse Crabs.

Atlantic Moon Snail (Shark Eye)

Neverita duplicata



The Moon Snail can grow up to 3.5" in diameter, but the sample in this photo is about 1 ½ inches. The colors may vary. It is easy to see why people call it a Shark Eye. This creature can be found just below the low tide line. Empty shells wash up on the beach. They are a predator species that eats bivalves that are buried in the sand. The Moon Snail drills a circular hole through the shell of its prey and eats its soft tissue through the hole in the shell.

Lightning Whelk

Busycon perversim pulley



The Lightning Whelk is a small snail that enlarges its calcium carbonate shell as it slowly grows to its full length of 8 inches over a 10-20 year period. It is protected from predators and damage from the surf by its thick shell. Lightning Whelks live in tidal channels, at the base of jetties, offshore, and in bays with higher salinity like the Laguna Madre. The seagrass beds of the Laguna Madre are an excellent home for them.

Lightning Whelks reproduce each year. They mate during the fall months and lay their eggs in early spring. Each egg is enclosed in capsules that look like a cord or necklace of egg casings that can contain from 50-175 egg capsules. The eggs hatch, the larvae stages all take place inside the capsules, and the tiny, shelled whelks come out of the capsules in late spring.

These carnivores will eat many kinds of live or dead animal matter, but they prefer small clams and oysters. Using its foot, the Lightning Whelk grabs its prey and wedges the lip of its shell between the shells of its bi-valve prey. Then the whelk inserts its proboscis into the clam or oyster and eats that creature's soft body parts.

The Lightning Whelk became the official State Shell of Texas in 1987. This shell is unique because its shell coils in a counter-clockwise direction with its opening on the left. It is easy to recognize with its unusual spiral shape and pattern of colored stripes that look like lightning. The State of Texas has established regulations to protect the Lightning Whelk from overharvesting.

Angelwing

Cyrtopleura costata



These mollusca Pholadidae are called piddocks or angelwings. They are a mollusk family that is similar to clams. Angelwings have some unique characteristics. Each side of their shells is divided into two or three separate sections. There are about 26 radiating ribs running vertically, and growth lines can be seen running horizontally. The angelwing has a spoon-shaped brace under the shell's beak where the foot muscles are attached. It also has long siphons that cannot be retracted into the shell so that the 2 valves do not close completely. Since the muscles that fuse the shell's valves together are weak, angelwing shells are rarely found with both halves intact. Angelwings are popular with shell hunters, especially if they are intact. Moon snails are a major predator, but many people also enjoy eating them as well.

Plumbed Worm

Diopatra cuprea



Although the Plumbed Worm is not a shell, it is admired by sea shell collectors. This segmented sea worm creates a parchment-like outer tube that can be up to a foot in length. Parts of the tube remain below the sediment, but some parts of tube are above it. The portions that are above the sediment become colonized by seaweeds and small animals. The young worms that are growing inside reach through the tube to feed on the attached seaweed and animals. They can even feed on things attached to a neighboring worm's tube. Sometimes these tubes wash up on the beach with their attachments still connected. They then look like a necklace, which makes them interesting to shell collectors.

Coquina

Donax variabilis



Coquina clams live in the Gulf of Mexico and along the Atlantic Ocean of the U.S. Most live where the tide ebbs and flows on sandy beaches. Their shells are small, long, triangular shaped that can be up to 15- 25 mm long. The shells in the above photo are only 1 ½ mm in length. Coquina shells have bands of color.

Coquinas are filter-feeders. Using their short siphons, coquinas eat phytoplankton, algae, bacteria, and other small particles in the surf. They move up and down the beach with the help of the waves. When the waves move down the beach, coquinas can bury themselves in the sand using their muscular foot to avoid being swept back into the surf. They can also move sideways across the beach.

Coquinas are a food source for shorebirds, fish, and humans. People also use the shells for decorating. ♦

EBONY LOOP'S ROBERT RUNYON GARDEN GETS A FACE LIFT

Story and Photos by Anita Westervelt

It pays to have a presence on social media -- for those who have mastered posting, chatting and responding, like Frank Wiseman.

Through Frank's weekly posts on the **Friends of Hugh Ramsey Nature Park Facebook Page**, our Thursday Morning Ebony Loop Volunteer team has received some important recognition. Last year, the daughter of the woman who is honored in the original Ebony Loop Garden, the Betty McEnery Memorial Garden, contacted Frank and donated money to our crew to rejuvenate the garden.

This summer, the granddaughter of Robert Runyon contacted Frank and they viewed the Robert Runyon Garden together. She donated money to the chapter for revamping that garden. We began the project in late summer.

A brief history about Robert Runyon: Originally from Kentucky, he moved to Brownsville in 1909 and established himself as a photographer and self-taught botanist. Later in life, he became involved in Brownsville politics and served as city manager and then later, mayor



Volunteers Clear Debris



Runyon's Water Willow



City Workers Help

Runyon is responsible for naming several cactus and succulents, including *Coryphantha robertii*, *Echeveria runyonii*, *Echinocereus runyonii* Orcutt, other native plants and grasses, and the curious phenomenon called Runyon's Dodder, *Cuscuta runyonii*.



Runyon's Violet Wild Petunia



Frank Wiseman Hard at Work

We began the Runyon garden project by cutting back a huge elbow bush that dominated the center. Leather Stem had had a field day around the center path. We transplanted baskets full of it to other areas of the park. Native grasses had been allowed to establish to keep Guinea grass and other aggressive native plants at bay, and to protect a few special plants from marauding critters. We removed the native grasses to other suitable homes around the Loop, then protected special plants with bricks, and removed native but aggressive dicliptera and granjeno.

With the center cleared, it freed space to widen the path. City workers spread chat for us around the walking path. We have populated much of the center with Runyon's Violet Wild Petunia, *Ruellia nudiflora* var. *runyonii*, (a host plant for the malachite butterfly).

Fallen mesquite limbs along the back and side edges of the garden were cleared; unruly mesquite limbs were trimmed so we could develop a side garden dedicated to Runyon's Water Willow, *Justicia runyonii*. (Also host plant for malachite butterfly.)



Center Garden Path

The other side of Robert Runyon Garden has an excellent specimen of a rare Runyon's Esenbeckia, *Esenbeckia berlandieri* [*E. runyonii*]. Also called limoncillo (little lemon), it is in the Rutaceae family, as are lemons. The tree was first reported in the Lower Rio Grande Valley by Robert Runyon.



Beyond Runyon

Several of us volunteers have continued beyond the Runyon garden, under Christina Mild's excellent guidance, to a small hill where we've aggressively removed Guinea grass, planted

plants that are not abundant in the park and are awaiting the plants to establish before we lead very special tours to this somewhat secret vista.

Frank Wiseman and Christina Mild and a handful of other chapter members were part of the original teams that designed the two gardens mentioned in this report, as well as most of the specialty gardens around Ebony Loop in ensuing years. ♦

ALLIGATORS

by Carolyn Cardile

As a volunteer at SPI Birding and Nature Center, I have become increasingly interested in alligators, *Alligator mississippiensis*. When I learned that Brazos Bend State Park would be presenting a program that included alligators, I looked forward to learning as much as possible from them. Although there are alligators in the Rio Grande Valley, Brazos Bend State Park has the unique opportunity to study these creatures because a very large number of alligators live in that park. The presentation included information about the growth and development, habitat, and daily life of alligators, how they are different than crocodiles, and safety information, such as how to behave when you encounter an alligator. I have included some of my own photos to illustrate some of the information below.

The group of animals called Crocodilians includes alligators, crocodiles, and gharials. Since alligators are part of our natural world in South Texas, it is important to know about them. Alligators are the apex or keystone species in their environment. Because the alligator is a cold-blooded creature, its body temperature is determined by the water or air around it. Alligators do not hibernate, but they do enter a state of *brumation*. Once temperatures go below 70 degrees, they slow down and stop feeding. As the temperature goes lower, alligators may hide under a layer of mud or make a den in the bank of a pond. They do not spend all this time sleeping, however, since they need to breathe and bask in the sun. If necessary, an alligator can remain under water for up to 24 hours. Unlike warm-blooded animals, alligators do not need to eat on a daily basis. Some larger gators may eat only once or twice a week in the summer. In fact, they can go for months without food if necessary. Alligators use their food for growth and repair rather than daily sustenance. An alligator's preferred foods are fish, turtles, crayfish, frogs, and mammals like raccoons, armadillos, opossum, and rabbits.



This alligator is nearly finished eating a raccoon at South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center.

However, these creatures will eat nearly anything that splashes in the water near them that they perceive as possible food. The Brazos Bend State Park staff states that alligators in Texas do not yet see people as food, and they educate the public about how to prevent this from happening.

Mature male alligators can grow to 14 feet or more in length, and females are about 9 feet long. The females are excellent mothers. They build their nest in an above-ground mound and lay approximately 15-60 eggs in it.



The nest on the right was built near the SPI Convention Center in 2011. Predators dug up the eggs.

As the nesting material decomposes, it creates heat inside the nest. When the alligator eggs hatch about 2 months later, the babies are about 8" long. The sex of the hatchlings is determined by their incubation temperature. If the internal nest temperature is above 89 degrees, the hatchlings are males, but if the temperature is 87 degrees or lower, they are increasingly likely to be females.

Once the eggs hatch, the mother fiercely protects her young for up to 2 years. She may hide them in her mouth or let them ride on her head and back. The babies grow about eight inches a year, reaching 12" at age 1 and 18" at 1 ½ years of age. During this time they are potential prey for numerous members of their environment. In fact, only 1% of baby alligators live to be 3 feet long because they are prey for many of the creatures that later become their food, such as fish, turtles, frogs, birds, snakes, and mammals. Other alligators may kill them when they begin to compete for the same food.



In 2015 this mother alligator raised several little ones. About 3 may still be on SPI today.



Young alligators played on the side of the cement pond at Laguna Atascosa while their mother watched the photographer.

Young alligators that grow into adulthood can live as long as 40 years (females) to 60 years (males). A person can determine the length of an alligator using its head and a tape measure. Place the end of the measuring tape in the center of the area between the gator's eye and measure from that point to the end of its nose. One inch represents one foot of that alligator's length.

Alligators have some interesting physical features. The brain is generally smaller than a mammal's, but alligators have excellent sight, hearing, and sense of smell. Alligator's eyes have two sets of lids. One opens and shuts from the top like a human eye, and a transparent eyelid that closes from front to back, probably to protect the eye.



The lens is covering this gator's eye at Laguna Atascosa.



This SPI gator has its eyes open.

Their 80 conical teeth are made for tearing, so they cannot chew their food and must swallow everything whole. If these teeth come out, new ones grow in their place. Smaller prey can be caught and swallowed immediately. Larger prey is stored in the water where the alligator tears off a piece at a time and swallows it. Alligators vocalize throughout their lives. Babies call out when looking for their mother or asking for food. Although both male and female can bellow, the male's sound is louder. The male uses its bellow to attract a female during breeding season. Alligators use a rolling motion when breeding. They shift their weight internally to roll.

The babies, which are extremely vulnerable, have a striping that helps camouflage them. These creatures have even developed skill for hunting. Some alligators balance a stick on their snout during the birds' breeding season. When a bird tries to get the stick to build a nest, it becomes an alligator appetizer.

Many people confuse alligators with crocodiles. However, they differ in several ways. First, they prefer different climates. Crocodiles prefer a hotter climate. They can be found in south Florida but not in Texas. Second, they build different kinds of nests. While alligators build their nests in a mound, the crocodile digs a hole for its eggs. Finally, crocodiles and alligators look different than each other. Crocodiles are grayish-green in color, while alligators are grayish-black. The crocodile has a narrow, pointed skull and jaw than the alligator, and the gator's jaw is more rounded at its snout. When their mouths are closed, crocs show their lower teeth outside the mouth. Alligators have an overbite and only show two upper teeth when their mouths are closed.



Photo shows teeth on the largest alligator at SPI Birding Center in 2014 (left) and 2017 (right).

They also differ in their attitude toward humans. Crocodiles think of humans as food, while alligators usually do not. Brazos Bend State Park's ranger emphasized the importance of preventing gators from developing an appetite for humans.

To protect people, as well as the alligators, park officials educate the public about what to do and not do if they encounter an alligator. Alligators generally try to avoid people. If a person approaches an alligator that is basking in the sun on the shore, the gator should go into the water. If not, that gator may have a nest nearby. Alligators rarely chase people, but it is important to know that they can run up to 35 mph on land. A female might charge a person approaching her nest if that person does not leave. It is important to supervise small children very closely when they are playing in or near water. People should only swim in daylight hours where alligators might be. It is important to never feed an alligator, either intentionally by offering it food or unintentionally by leaving fish scraps near the water or on the ground. Never remove an alligator from the wild or keep one as a pet. When photographing alligators, people should keep at least 30 feet away from the gator. The ranger also defined "nuisance" alligators. A nuisance alligator is "an alligator that is killing livestock or pets or is a threat to human health or safety. An alligator that approaches a human, rather than walking away or going into the water is probably a nuisance alligator. People who believe they have encountered a nuisance alligator should contact Texas Parks and Wildlife. ♦



In October 2017 this young alligator discovered the fresh water pond in front of the South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center. It killed an opossum, stored it under the water, and spent its days snacking on his kill and basking in the sun only a few feet away from the entrance to the bird center. A red eared slider turtle often shared this spot. The gator was moved to Laguna Atascosa.

INSECT AND BEE BOXES

By Anita Westervelt

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Program Specialist Dr. Wizzie Brown presented a fascinating lecture at the Texas Master Naturalist annual October meeting in Corpus Christi entitled, **Creating a Backyard Habitat for Insects.**

Dr. Brown began her lecture with a profound statement: “Without pollinators, we’d have no beautiful flowering plants.” Her lecture centered on helping pollinators, especially in winter.

If plants require air, water, food and light, insects require air, water, food and shelter.

One of her first suggestions was to “leave the garden a mess” during the winter. Dr. Brown calls this “an opportunity to let nature be nature.” The concept of a garden mess gives insects a perfect habitat in which to shelter. Decaying logs, bundles of twigs and leaves, and snags also provide insect shelter.

Snags

Leaving snags in the garden was an interesting suggestion. Coincidentally, my four-year-old prolific-blooming Mexican Caesalpinia, *Caesalpinia mexicana*, one morning last month became a perfect example of a garden snag. One morning it was pushing out new leaves and the next, it was dead.

Leaving the tree in place, instead of cutting it down, promotes it from dead tree to “snag” status.

There are other fun things to do for insects in the garden that are quick, easy and less noticeable than a snag, if that's not your thing.

- Leave plants throughout the winter, even those that you might be thinking of clearing out to make the garden neat and tidy. Various heights of plants provide different layers of protection and habitat for diverse insects through the winter.
- Tuck a rotting log under a shrub, or place it amongst a dense mass of plants
- Artfully place a bundle of twigs and leaves or partially hide leaves under an overhang
- Pile small rocks in various places
- Leave a rocky and bare (un-mulched) area of soil for insects to lay eggs
- Build a miniature debris pile in the garden using dead grass, leaves, sticks, bark. (pictured)



Miniature debris pile, 12x12x8 inches



Decorative chunks of wood
serve as insect shelters



Elaborate Insect Hotel from stacked pallets

Possible workshop projects

Assemble an elaborate insect hotel by stacking six pallets and filling the cavities with things that will deteriorate and bugs will love. Bricks with holes provide fun little tunnels for bugs to crawl through, according to Dr. Brown. Bug attractions include bundles of sticks, rolled corrugated cardboard, earth clods with grass, soil-filled pots, logs of varying sizes, straw, seed pods, dried leaves, shredded newsprint and white paper, sawdust, wood chips, mulch and piles of rocks.

The potted vines in the top spaces, and the plants and rotting log around the base of the “sculpture” provide insect habitats as well as visual interest. Non-deteriorating objects were used for creativity. The logs with holes drilled in the ends are similar to the bee box* concept, as are the clay pots filled with bamboo.

Pallets are prevalent, cheap and sometimes free. Check out Brownsville Scrap Paper, Inc., 5850 FM 511, near the port.

During her lecture, Dr. Brown demonstrated a simple insect hotel for children to build. Using a large, empty coffee can, stuff it with any combination of shredded bits of cardboard, shredded paper or newsprint, wood chips, seed pods, sticks and dried leaves. This hotel would be placed lying on its side on the ground in a garden with the opening facing east to southeast.

Water is a necessity. A simple insect water feature is easy to set up.



***Bee boxes.** There are several designs for building bee boxes that Dr. Brown has shared in pdf form from the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, www.xerces.org, the National Wildlife Federation, www.nwf.org, and other sources. Anyone wanting these handouts, please e-mail me at jjvanm@gmail.com. Dr. Brown’s PowerPoint on insect habitats and bee boxes also is available. A number of workshop ideas for children, adults and community projects are outlined in the information. ♦



National Wildlife Federation Bee Box

MY FIRST TMN ANNUAL MEETING

By Carolyn Cardile



I got to touch a baby alligator!

I was excited all summer because I was finally getting to go to an Annual Meeting. I waited anxiously for registration to open and signed up right away, and I wasn't disappointed. In fact, it was even better than I expected. The conference was memorable for 3 different reasons: the field trips, the classes, and the time I spent with TMN members.

It was a treat to spend so much time with people who share my interest in the natural world. I enjoyed talking to a number of folks from chapters throughout Texas and spending time with members of my own chapter. It was fun to share a room with chapter members, eat meals with a variety of people, and work together on the silent auction.

We hit the ground running, arriving just in time for our first field trip to Padre Island National Seashore. After a warm welcome and slide presentation about the island, we enjoyed a guided beach walk, followed by a visit to a line camp once used by cattle ranchers. Because Padre Island National Seashore is protected from development, it is an ideal place to see what our coastline used to be like before it was developed. My second field trip introduced me to an outstanding place to go birding- Polliwog Pond. We saw a number of Valley species, but for me the biggest thrill was getting a close up view of a question mark butterfly. That was a first for me! Both field trips were outstanding.

In addition to those excellent field trips, I was able to attend two excellent classes. Both were part of the series, *It's a Wild Wild Life on the Mid-Texas Coast*. Although I live on South Padre Island there is a lot I don't know about the creatures that live at the beach. I learned a lot about them from *Beach Invertebrates*. The class was especially fascinating because they gave us 3 boxes of small creatures. Here's what was in one of the boxes:



Wow! I now have a Purse Crab, Lightning Whelk, Channeled Duck Clam, a Disk Dosinia, and lots more. Having the actual shells made a big difference in my interest and learning. Last week when my daughter was visiting, I found myself telling her some of the things I had learned at this workshop. I cannot thank Pete and Peggy Romfh from the Cradle of Texas Chapter for the time and effort they devoted to giving each member of the class this gift of hands-on learning! The next part of *It's a Wild Wild Life on the Mid-Texas Coast* that I attended was about Sea Turtles, Snakes, and Alligators. Once again the group was engaged because of the hands-on opportunities. It was a thrill to touch a baby alligator, and I learned new ways to tell visitors about alligators where I volunteer at South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center.

Now, I'm looking forward to going to next year's Annual Meeting in Georgetown. I can't wait to sign up for some field trips and classes, and I'm looking forward to spending time with TMN members from all over Texas as well as our chapter. ♦

Just Think...In One Year

Linda McGonigle

Time seems to have flown by...peregrine falcon style. Just 13 years ago, I was anxiously awaiting my graduation as a TMN, trying to get in my last required hours volunteering here and there and everywhere! Little did I know what was in store for me. All the incredible wonders which would touch my life, as well as the fine bunch of humanity connected to those wonders, has made this year, one, which I shall always remember.

Many thanks to those who gave me the opportunities to touch a REAL live bat, to taste the salt at Sal del Rey, to point out the differences in order to distinguish one warbler from another, to hold and watch a tiny sea turtle crawl out to sea on its perilous journey, to listen to myself over and over attempting to learn the names and characteristics of native plants, to laugh at phalaropes spinning 'round and 'round, to have my photo made holding a majestic raptor, to demonstrate how deep to dig the hole in order that the plant sleeve would be covered, to view a butterfly with transparent wings, and to guide me through the night in deep South Texas thicket, along the water's edge to hear the croaks which I had been instructed to listen for in species and numbers. There are so many more and some of these experiences are beyond description.



Linda McGonigle receiving her 2,500 hour pin from President M. Lee Brown

As I continue to discover my role in our "big blue marble" and more like in our four county area, I realize that I'm starting to give opportunities, in my own small way, to others in experiencing the wonderment of nature. I am the one showing how to clean, prepare and taste the prickly pear, passing the sea urchin from my hand to one much smaller, demonstrating how to prepare native seeds for planting, informing Island visitors about bans on shelling, passing out posters on how to avoid drowning in rip currents, explaining why I keep cut fruit on my fence tops, arguing with land developers about dozing up acres of native habitat, demonstrating how to keep records and observations through journaling and sketching, and much more.

As our Chapter grows, and IT IS growing, I realize the impact of our existence. What a wonderful job this Chapter is doing. It was very evident when our group was represented at the annual State Meeting in Corpus Christi last month. We have an abundance of talent and energy within our group. Our Chapter is full of teachers, leaders and we are ALL doers. Some members may not feel that their knowledge and skill is of importance to others and many are very humble about their expertise, but we have all graduated from the same great training and continue to broaden our scope in a myriad of directions. Venture out and find your niche. Don't be fearful as there are those who will take your hand and guide you along. Don't be afraid to ask. This group is one of the most sharing and caring. Yes, there are thorns out there, things that sting, dirt under the fingernails, and enough sweat to create a great pond, but at the end of the day, it's that great sense of accomplishment and pride, along with smiles and wonderment of our community, which carry you to the next event or project where continued opportunity lies to learn and serve!!

Naturally submitted, Linda McGonigle
Past-President-RGVCTMN

P.S. I am listing the places where I have worked so this might give our members an idea of where they also may want to volunteer,
Sea Turtle Inc, Red Tide Ranger, Beach & Coastal Clean-Up, Marine Mammal Stranding, Phytoplankton Monitoring, Surfrider Foundation-So TX Chapter, Rio Reforestation, SPI Birding & Nature Center, Rio Grande Delta Audubon Society, PI/SPI Shell Club, ACAS, Native Plant Center-SPI, VLF Sheepshead lots -SPI, Ramsey Park, NABA Park, Nature Conservancy-Southmost Preserve
Festivals RGV-Coastal Expo, WOWE, Brownsville International Birding Festival, Harlingen Birding Festival, Butterfly Festival Presentations
Offices-President, V.P., Committee Chair & member ♦

A NATURALIST'S YEAR IN REVIEW

By Frank Wiseman

I hope all of my fellow Texas Master Naturalists have had a year of fulfilling projects on which to work and learn from. Mine have been educational to say the least. I have enjoyed our monthly chapter meetings where our guest speakers always impart a piece of their varied experiences from their fields of study. Our volunteer hours at and in many locations have helped our environment and led to the betterment of our own health, knowledge and sanity.

We started our year with our annual recertification meeting in a new location in Harlingen and with our state coordinator, Michelle Haggerty as our guest speaker. That was an enjoyable evening to pat each other's backs for a successful past year of accomplishments and to actually see and hear from our state coordinator. Michelle had been the guest speaker at our very first organizational meeting back in my class of 2002. It was nice to see her again in our own locale to help us begin our celebratory 15th anniversary.

February, we listened to Kelly Bryan speak on Hummingbirds of Texas. That was a glimpse into birds from the west of Texas, the area of Big Bend country where most of us don't get to travel to very often. I only speak for myself, but I did learn a few new things about these fascinating birds and their migration habits. I couldn't believe that birds banded in West Texas actually ended up being seen in Alaska. Wow!

March and springtime always brings me to one of the favorite seasons of the year. Wildflowers! We invited Carol Goolsby and Ann Vacek to speak to us on our native RGV wildflowers. Carol hit us with the Big Bang in the Gulf of Mexico and how that very event brought us the plants that we now have in our area. Ann showed us via the presentation the beautiful pictures of the varied species of flowers available for us to see and photograph by wandering through the fields, along the roadways and in our RGV nature parks.

April was graduation time for the class of 2017. Javier de Leon, one of our two state sponsors, spoke to the group on citizen science. We welcomed our newly certified TMN members and enjoyed the friendship of our other members and guests.

May introduced us to a very important problem that exists in our cattle and wildlife. John Goolsby spoke to us about the Relationship Between Native vs. Non-Native Plants and Insect Diversity. Specifically, he told us of the problem with the fever tick that is affecting our cattle

and being carried northward on the ranchlands by the Nilgai population. I have a new respect for our scientists in this field of work. Tick eradication for our animal ranchers is very important.

June and hurricane season. Nathan Flores, TMN Member and Cameron County Emergency Management Planner, came to remind us about hurricane preparation. Aren't we glad we missed out on the bad one, Harvey, that did strike our Gulf Coast from Corpus on eastward. Nathan presented a humorous but important program on how we should prepare ourselves and our property for hurricane season and for proper emergency evacuation.

July was about Water! Our own TMN member, Steve Lanoux gave us a rundown on: Texas Waters-Their's Fighting Words. Water is and always has been a problem in Texas. Let's face it; our RGV doesn't receive the rainfall that other areas do. Our bare 25-27 inches is a pretty good yearly average for most of the RGV. Most of us just don't realize how big a problem it really is. Steve informed us of the many and varied problems in water distribution and presented maps that show the existence of myriad types of underground pipelines crisscrossing all of the state of Texas. A planner's headache for any type of construction!

August was about animal skeletal identifications. Elisa Velador spoke on Interpretation: Skins and Bones. We learned how to identify skeletal remains of the animals that are found in our area. Elisa divided us into groups and gave each group an animal's skull. Our goal was to I.D. the animal by using animal traits, e.g. eye position, skull shape, nose cavity, etc. I must say, "A challenging task." Our groups did an excellent job for a bunch of beginners.

September was the month that brought us back to the fields of the RGV. Dr. Meghan Clayton introduced us to the species of grasses native to our area. She offered a pre-test to see if we could I.D. several species of our native grasses. I think only one of our members correctly identified more than two species. Grasses are difficult to identify, except maybe our dreaded Guinea Grass. All in all, we experienced an evening of realizing how much we take our grasses for granted, even if we don't know or remember their names.

October brought us to the seashore, mainly our own South Padre Island, and Sargassum. Brandon Hill, Shoreline Management Director at SPI, spoke on Sargassum and how it affects our coastline. He taught us of Sargassum's usefulness in coastal dune protection and its usefulness in protecting small sea life. For many, this was a new learning experience about a "grass" we are usually oblivious to when we walk on the beach. We never think about how it really is so helpful; however, we also learned of the times when it can become a plague on our beaches due to an overabundance.

November was parrot time. Caleb Arrelano, Masters student at UTRGV in the Avian Ecology Lab, returned this year with an update on his work with the Valley's parrot population. His research has brought our members in contact with the parrot world out there in our cities from Brownsville to McAllen. He spoke of the many new things we are learning about the species of parrots that now inhabit the Valley. He told of the methods of counting the birds in several locations and also a review of their nesting habits. He showed examples of the new pipe nesting boxes being used.

December was a wrap with Jeff George from Sea Turtle, Inc. on South Padre Island. Jeff brought us news and views of the new Sea Turtle, Inc. building and its facilities to house the rescued sea turtle species that are found off our Gulf coast areas. We are fortunate to have such a life-saving

facility for our turtles. Our dedicated TMN members offer their volunteer service to this facility and to its spring-time turtle patrols.

In October, to end our 15th year as a dedicated 501©3 organization, many of us made the trek northward to Corpus Christi for the annual TMN symposium. We were the sponsor of the Silent Auction this year which earned us a bit of money that relieved us of a local fund-raising event. Attending the symposium was a special treat for those of us who attended to meet and greet so many new state-wide chapter members and to attend important lectures, presentations, and field events.

When I think back on all of the other volunteer hours I spent at Harlingen's Ramsey Park with our Thursday morning volunteer group, the monthly board meetings, the many Native Plant Project meetings I attended, and the Winter Outdoor Wildlife Expo presentations I enjoyed, I think it was a year to remember. Well, now, that was where many of you found me during the year. I wonder how your year went?

I almost forgot. I received recognition for my 5,000 hours volunteer service back in Feb. Here is a photo of our President M. Lee Brown presenting me with the pin. ♦



OFFICERS ELECTED FOR THE NEW CALENDAR YEAR

By Anita Westervelt

Steven Lanoux accepted the president's gavel from out-going president M. Lee Brown at December's annual election meeting. He will lead the chapter for calendar year 2018.

Also newly elected are First Vice President Norma Trevino and Secretary Deli Lanoux. Barbara Peet and Heidi Linnemann were re-elected to second vice president and treasurer, respectively.

Steve Lanoux holds a doctorate in systems management, the adaptation of structured organizational strategic planning as applied to the human side of a workforce. His master's degree is in organizational development and undergraduate degree in zoology with a focus on marine ecology and bio chemistry.

Following a 25-year career in U.S. Navy surface ships, retiring with the rank of Commander, Lanoux recently retired from the Assistant Directorship of the University of Texas Marine Science Institute in Port Aransas where he was responsible for all campus operations as well as the Marine Superintendent over the research vessel fleet, and the university marina.

He and his wife Deli currently live in Brownsville where both are certified as Water Quality Monitors by the Texas Stream Team. They have adopted Brownsville's Town Resaca for a continuous monitoring project with the approval of Texas Master Naturalist and the Stream Team.

Lanoux' goals for our master naturalist chapter are to improve the visibility of volunteer efforts in our core environmental projects; expand the contributions of the chapter's subject matter experts through public presentations and workshops; and raise funds for at least one substantial project in the region's nature preserves.

Lanoux recently served the chapter as New Class Representative and later as first vice president. He organized and coordinated our newly implemented speakers bureau where nearly half the chapter's membership signed up offering more than 50 topics available for community presentations.

Newly-elected **first vice president Norma Trevino** was born and raised in Brownsville and visited and/or lived on South Padre Island since she was six months old. She is a graduate of St. Mary's University in San Antonio where she graduated with honors with a double major in English and Communication. She was employed by Miller Brewing Company for nearly 20 years, and most recently as General Manager overseeing all Company business in Mexico. Throughout her career, Trevino has lived in Texas, Kansas, Wisconsin, and Mexico, moving back to the Island six years ago where she purchased BadaBing Bagels with her sister.

Trevino volunteers at Sea Turtle Inc., Coastal Studies Lab, and is a member of the Shoreline Task Force Committee.

Secretary Deli Lanoux is a former educator who believes in addressing the needs of the whole child through diverse learning and teaching styles and is an ardent proponent of gifted education, science, and math. ♦



Lee Brown relinquishes the gavel to newly-elected chapter president, Steve Lanoux at December's meeting.



New Officers for 2018 from left, Norma Trevino, first vice president; Barbara Peet, second vice president; Steve Lanoux, president; Heidi Linnemann, treasurer; Deli Lanoux, secretary.

MY RECENT PROJECT AT RAMSEY PARK

By Drew Bennie

For the past 2 ½ years I have been working at the extreme east side of Ramsey Park along Indigo Trail up to Kingfisher Overlook. This area had been an ocean of guinea grass that kept any other plants from growing except the mesquite trees that towered above. It also had a kind of spooky feeling because you couldn't see what was in the tall grass that surrounded you as you walked the trail. In fact, I did not realize there was a drainage ditch along the north side until I cleared

the area some. I started off by knocking back the guinea grass a little at a time until enough was cleared to start planting. I tried to plant things that would spread on their own and not need much water since this area of the park has no water available. Some plants I grew myself at home and others I bought. I selected a diversity of plants including food plants for birds and host plants for butterflies and colorful ones to attract people. I also spread what seeds I found in other parts of the park. I was surprised by the number of volunteer native plants that sprouted up on their own once the invasive grasses were removed. Plants with windblown seeds such as vining milkweed, white mist and blue mist were common. Seeds, spread by birds from plants such as anacua, granjeno, lantana, and passion flower also sprouted on their own. Over 2 spring seasons wild flowers have bloomed and dropped seeds and are gradually spreading as well. Even though this year has seen a rainfall deficit of at least 8 inches in the Ramsey Park area, the little rain we have received has done wonders. I am hopeful that with a little more rain over the winter months the spring wild flower bloom here will be very colorful. This success of seedlings however has created more work for me because any guinea grass seedlings that still pop up must be pulled by hand. If I sprayed with herbicide, I would kill too many native plants growing nearby. It has been a lot of work thus far and much more will be needed in the future. However, it is great to see the transition from a monoculture of invasive grasses and mesquite to a more diverse landscape. ♦

CONGRAULATIONS TO ROBERT ARCHER ON ACHIEVEING 5,000 HOURS OF VOLUNTEER WORK

Just in case you haven't heard, the Rio Grande Valley Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalists has a new star in its galaxy of super achievers. Robert Archer was presented with his pin and Letter of Achievement for amassing 5,000 hours of volunteer work at the December General Meeting by Chapter President M. Lee Brown on 12 December.

Although Robert has many achievements to his credit, he is most probably best known for his unrelenting efforts to develop the Hummingbird Trail area at Ramsey Nature Park. This area is not only beautiful but is also the most popular attraction in the Park. Thank you, Robert for your unceasing work to help develop our natural environment and protect it for future generations. ♦



Robert Archer receiving his Letter of Recognition and 5,000 hour pin from President M. Lee Brown

THE CHACHALACA'S CURSE

BY DREW BENNIE

AT NIGHT WHEN IT'S QUIET WITHOUT A SOUND,
A RAILROAD TRAIN CHUGS THROUGH MY TOWN.
AS IT APPROACHES ITS WHISTLE SOUNDS
WAKING ALL THE CHACHALACAS AROUND.

I GUESS THEY THINK IT'S TRYING TO TAKE THEM
FROM MY NATIVE BACKYARD SANCTUM
AND AS IF POSSESSED BY SATAN,
THEY MAKE THEIR CALLS WITHOUT HESITATIN'.

FIRST ONE CALLS AND THEN ANOTHER
TO WAKE US UP FROM OUR SLUMBER.
THEY REPEAT THIS WHILE HALF AWAKE WE MUTTER
DEROGATORY THINGS ABOUT THEIR MOTHERS.

BY THE TIME THAT THEY ARE QUIET
FROM THIS NIGHTLY AVIAN RIOT
I'M AWAKE ON MY PILLOW CRYIN'
"THESE BIRDS ARE CRAZY, I CANNOT DENY IT!"

My Yellowstone Experience

By Cristela Wise

Have you ever seen a Yurt? I saw a modern Yurt for the first time when I visited Yellowstone National Park. A Yurt is a round tent covered with skins or felt and used as a dwelling. Portable Yurts are used by nomads in the steppes of Central Asia. Permanent modern Yurts are an alternative way to experience camping without having to set up a tent, haul your gear, or go without a nice hot shower.



My June 2017 grand adventure of Montana and Wyoming was an incredible experience! Yellowstone preserves the largest collection of hydrothermal features on the planet. Photos and videos don't do justice to the beauty and amazing unique volcanic geology. Visiting Yellowstone gave me the unparalleled opportunity to view hot springs, geysers, mud pots, fumaroles, waterfalls, rivers, lakes, canyons, travertine terraces, valleys, snow-covered mountains; bison, water fowl, bears, elk, antelopes, a fox, wolves; and people from all over the world fly fishing, biking, hiking, camping, horseback riding, and enjoying the sights. Yellowstone's human history

spans at least 11,000 years and includes the sagas of Native Americans, fur trappers, explorers, surveyors, photographers, artists, and the US Army. Photographs by William H. Jackson and sketches by Thomas Moran influenced Congress in 1872 to make Yellowstone the world's first national park.

Where else can you enjoy the view of boiling hot springs discharging their waters into a chilly lake while elk walk the boardwalk towards you? Park visitors are encouraged to stay on boardwalks and trails in hydrothermal areas and to stay at least 100 yards away from bears, wolves, bison, and elk. Although we were in a hydrothermal area, we were lucky to be able to get off the boardwalk at West Thumb Geyser Basin when a huge elk hopped onto the boardwalk towards us!

I have never seen so many primal colors in nature. The ribbons of color in and around the thermal features are formed by heat loving organisms such as algae, bacteria, and archaea. Numerous other thermophiles have been found in Yellowstone, each producing unique enzymes potentially important to society.

At the heart of Yellowstone's past, present, and future lies volcanism. Huge volcanic eruptions have been occurring here for the last 2 million years. The magmatic heat powering those eruptions still powers the park's geysers, hot springs, fumaroles, and mud pots.

The excitement of waiting with hundreds of spectators for Old Faithful's spectacular eruption was heartwarming. To see so many families enjoying the fantastic phenomena that members of the Washburn Expedition of 1870 named was surreal. Old Faithful erupts more frequently than any of the other big geysers. During summer, you can find forecasted eruption times in the lobby of the Old Faithful Visitor Center.

All of Yellowstone is bear habitat, but the best places for sightings are north and east of the park's Grand Canyon; best time is before 11 am. Although all 5 of our bear sightings were more than 100 yards away, we spoke with visitors who were approached by a black bear while they were in their vehicle.

The evening temperatures dipped down into the low 30's and climbed up to the high 80's by mid afternoon during our June visit. The vehicle traffic in the park was heavy. The best time to visit Yellowstone is April through May or September through November. These seasons offer mild weather and fewer crowds. If you visit Yellowstone during the summer months, I strongly recommend leaving the park by 3 pm to avoid the long lines of vehicles exiting the park.

I hope this summary of my Yellowstone experience will encourage my fellow TMN members to visit our national parks. ♦

LIST OF APPROVED PARTNERSHIPS FOR RGV CHAPTER TEXAS MASTER NATURALISTS:

- **Arroyo Colorado Audubon Society (ACAS)**
 - Monthly meetings on the 2nd Thursday of month at Harlingen Public Library (6:00 pm)
 - Monthly field trips from Sept. to May (AT) and Citizen Science projects (V).
 - Contact: Norma Friedrich, Pres., 361-676-6416
 - arroyocoloradoaudubon.org
- **Arroyo Colorado Conservancy (Arroyo Colorado Watershed)**
 - Arroyo Colorado Watershed area
 - Contact: Jaime Flores, jjflores@ag.tamu.edu, 956-969-5607
 - <http://arroyocolorado.org>
- **Association of Nature Center Administrators (ANCA)**
 - Administrative assistance (V)
 - Contact: Marisa Oliva, moliva@edburgwbc.com (Edinburg WBC)
 - <http://www.natctr.org>
- **Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park/World Birding Center**
 - Nature center in Mission; need help in office, docent, trail maintenance; (V)
 - offer programs (AT)
 - Contact: Nina Cardenas, Cardenas@tpwd.texas.gov, 956-584-9156x236
 - tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/bentsen
 - <http://theworldbirdingcenter.com/Bentsenstaff.html>
- **Citizen Science Programs/Projects**
 - See individual web sites for volunteer opportunities (V)
 - For example, Cornell Labs projects, Hawk Watch sites, Parrot Surveys, TERN, Christmas Counts, Breeding Bird Surveys;
 - nwf.org/Wildlife/Wildlife-Conservation/Citizen-Science.aspx
- **Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program (CBBEP)**
 - Monitoring (V) and workshops (AT) offered
 - Contact: Stephanie Bilodeau, Stephanie@cbbep.org
 - <http://www.cbbep.org>
- **Coastal Naturalist/Red Tide Rangers**
 - Volunteer group that assists during red tide outbreaks (V)
 - Training offered (AT) and required
 - Coastal Studies Lab/Texas Sea Grant
 - Contact: coastal@utrgv.edu, 956-761-2644

- <http://www.utrgv.edu/csl/public-service/red-tide/index.htm>
- **Coastal Studies Laboratory (CSL)**
 - Red Tide Rangers, Beach Watch, Marine Mammal Strands, Texas Beach Watch, Sea Turtle Salvage, Texas Coastal Naturalist (AT) (V) and is always looking for classroom assistants (V)
 - Coastal Studies Lab, UTRGV, SPI
 - Contact: coastal@utrgv.edu, 956-761-2644
 - <http://www.utrgv.edu/csl/public-service/red-tide/index.htm>
- **Community Parks (Trails and Native Plant Gardens)**
 - Ramsey Park, Valley Nature Center, SPI Birding & Nature Center (V)
 - See individual websites for volunteer opportunities
- **Edinburg Scenic Wetlands/World Birding Center**
 - Nature center in Edinburg; need help in office, trail maintenance; (V)
 - offer programs (AT)
 - Hosts Coastal Expo in Feb each year (V) (AT)
 - Contact: Marissa Oliva, moliva@edinburgwbc.com, 956-381-9922
 - edinburgwbc.org
 - <http://theworldbirdingcenter.com/edinburg.html>
- **Estero Llano Grande State Park/World Birding Center**
 - Nature center in Weslaco; opportunities in office, trail maintenance (V)
 - offer programs (AT)
 - Contact: Javier de Leon, deleon@tpwd.texas.gov, 956-565-3919
 - <http://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/estero-llano-grande>
 - <http://theworldbirdingcenter.com/estero.html>
- **Fishing's Future**
 - Involve youth and family activities through knowledge and joy of fishing (V)
 - Contact: Andres Garcia, garcia@fishingsfuture.org or Shane Wilson,
 - <http://fishingsfuture.org>
- **Friend's Groups of Approved Partners**
 - 'Friend's Groups' are the fund raising arm of many partners (V)
 - Friends of Laguna Atascosa, Friends of ...
 - See individual web sites for details
- **Frontera Audubon**
 - Nature center in Weslaco; need help in office, trail maintenance (V)
 - offer programs (AT)
 - Contact: Sarah Williams, fronteraaudubon@gmail.com, 956-968-3275
 - <http://fronteraaudubon.org>
- **Gardening Clubs**

- Area gardening clubs often looking for speakers (V)
- **Gladys Porter Zoo**
 - Docents, outreach (V) for this Brownsville property
 - Contact: Alicia Molina, Educ@gpz.org, 956-548-WILD
 - <http://gpz.org>
- **Hugh Ramsey Nature Park & Harlingen Arroyo Colorado/World Birding Center**
 - Work days to re-establish native habitat (V)
 - Contacts: Linda Butcher, 956-423-1802, or Frank Wiseman, 956-364-1410
 - <http://www.theworldbirdingcenter.com/harlingen.html>
 - Friends Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1171515522864527>
- **IDEA Camp Rio (formerly, Camp Lula Sams)**
 - Contact: Omar Garza 956-802-8839
- **Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge (LANWR)**
 - Wildlife refuge in Los Fresnos; need help in office, visitor services, trail maintenance (V)
 - offer programs (AT)
 - Friends Group associated; Jolaine Lanehart 956-832-3905;
 - https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Laguna_Atascosa/Get_involved/friends.html, (V)
 - Contact: Marion Mason, Marion_Mason@fws.gov, 956-748-3607
 - https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Laguna_Atascosa
- **McAllen Nature Center**
 - Nature center in McAllen; need help in office, trails (V)
 - offer programs (AT)
 - Contact: Tiffany Kersten, 956-748-6907
 - <http://mcallen.net/departments/parks/mcallen-nature-center>
 - facebook.com/mcallennaturecenter
- **National Wildlife Refuge System (US Fish & Wildlife)**
 - Lower RGV, Laguna Atascosa NWR (Los Fresnos), Santa Ana NWR,
 - Check for Friends Groups
 - Need docents, maintenance, hosts (V)
 - See individual refuge web sites
- **Native Plant Project (NPP)**
 - Meets at 7:30 PM on the last Tuesday of each month at Valley Nature Center (AT)
 - Contact: Bert Wessling, bwessling@gmail.com,
 - nativeplantproject.com
- **Non-profit Youth Groups**
- Organized groups such as scouts, 4-H, Boys/Girls clubs, etc. (V)

- See individual web sites for volunteer opportunities
- **National Butterfly Center (NBC)/North American Butterfly Association (NABA)**
 - Nature center in Mission; need help in office, trail maintenance (V)
 - offer programs (AT)
 - Contact: Marianne Trevino-Wright, 956-583-5400
 - nationalbutterflycenter.org
- **Native Plant Center**
 - Retail sales of native plants on South Padre Island
 - Contact: Thor Lassen, 703-434-1444
- **Old Hidalgo Pumphouse/World Birding Center**
 - Nature center in Hidalgo; help in office, docent, grounds (V)
 - Contact: Andres Flores, aflores@cityofhidalgo.net, 956-843-8686
 - <http://theworldbirdingcenter.com/Hidalgo.html>
- **Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park**
 - Maintenance , gift shop, docent, interpretive guides (V)
 - Seed collections (FS)
 - Contact: Ruben Reyna, 956-541-2785 or Visitor Center at x333
 - <https://www.nps.gov/paal/index.htm>
- **Port Isabel/SPI Shell Club**
 - Monthly meeting on 4th Sunday 2PM from Oct-May (AT)
 - Field trips (AT)
 - Contact: Adrian Ramos 832-444-8793
 - pi-spi-shellclub.weebly.com
- **Quinta Mazatlan/World Birding Center**
 - Nature center in McAllen needs help in office, trail maintenance (V)
 - offer programs (AT)
 - Contact: Colleen Hook, chook@mcallen.net, 956-681-3370
 - quintamazatlan.com
 - <http://theworldbirdingcenter.com/Quinta.html>
- **Resaca de la Palma State Park/World Birding Center**
 - Nature Center in Brownsville
 - Need help in office, docent, trail maintenance, lead tours (V)
 - Contact: Gloria Alcaraz, alcaraz@tpwd.texas.gov, 956-350-2920
 - <http://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/resaca-de-la-palma>
 - <http://theworldbirdingcenter.com/Resaca.html>
- **Rio Grande Delta Audubon**
 - Currently reorganizing

- **Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival**
 - Annual festival in November at Harlingen Municipal Auditorium
 - Need volunteers in kids activities, info booth, silent auction (V)
 - Offer 90 field trips and multiple workshops/programs (AT)
 - TMN Booth in trade show (V)
 - Contact: Tamie Bulow, registration@rgvbf.org, 956-423-5565
 - rgvbf.org
- **Roma Bluffs/World Birding Center**
 - Nature center in Roma; need docents, grounds (V)
 - Contact: Christine Donald, Christine_Donald@fws.gov, 956-849-4930
 - <http://theworldbirdingcenter.com/Roma.html>
- **Sabal Palm Sanctuary** (Gorgas Science Foundation)
 - Gift shop, docent, lead walks, trail maintenance (V)
 - Looking for member to adopt and maintain a specific area (V)
 - Offer programs (AT)
 - Contact 956-541-8034
 - <http://sabalpalmsanctuary.org>
- **Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge (SANWR)**
 - NWR in Alamo; need office, gift shop (V)
 - Contact: Christine Donaldson, Christine_Donald@fws.gov, 956-784-7500
 - https://www.fws.gov/refuge/santa_ana
- **Sea Life, Inc.**
 - Dolphin Research & Sealife Nature Center in Port Isabel needs docents (V)
 - Contact: Scarlet Colley, 956-299-1957
 - spinaturecenter.com
- **Sea Turtle, Inc. (STI)**
 - Information center on S. Padre Island; need help in office (all year), turtle nesting patrol (Apr-Jul), turtle strands (V)
 - offer programs and trainings (AT)
 - Contact: Kat Lillie, lillie@seaturtleinc.org, 956-761-4511
 - <http://www.seaturtleinc.org>
- **South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center (SPIBNC)/World Birding Center**
 - Nature center on S. Padre Island; need help in office, trail maintenance, docent, gift shop (V)
 - offer programs (AT)
 - Contact: Cristin Howard, choward@spibirding.com, 956-761-6801
 - spibirding.com
- **Surfrider Foundation, South Texas Chapter**
 - Organization to protect oceans through conservation, activism.

- No contact information at this time.
- <https://southtexas.surfrider.org>
- **Texas AgriLife**
 - Chapter sponsor, located in Cameron County Extension Offices.
 - Contact: Tony Reisinger, reisinger@ag.tamu.edu, 956.361.8236
 - <http://cameron.agrilife.org/contact>
- **Texas Audubon**
 - Local chapters: Arroyo Colorado Audubon Society, Frontera Audubon, Rio Grande Delta Audubon
 - See individual web sites
- **Texas Butterfly Festival**
 - Annual event in early Nov in Mission
 - Offer programs (AT) and need help (V)
 - Contact: National Butterfly Center, 956-583-5400
 - <https://www.texasbutterflyfestival.com>
- **Texas Colleges and Universities, Schools**
 - Public and private, seeking speakers (V)
 - See individual web sites
- **Texas Nature and Environmental Photographers (TexNEP)**
 - monthly meetings 3rd Thursday each month in McAllen at 7:00 PM (AT)
 - Contact: Wayne Williams 956-867-7877
 - <http://www.texnep.org>
- **Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPW)**
 - Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley (McAllen), Estero Llano Grande (Weslaco)
 - Resaca de la Palma State Parks
 - See individual listings
- **The Nature Conservancy (TNC)**
 - Part of the Southmost Preserve (Lennox Foundation) (V)
 - Contact: Southmost Preserve Office, 956-546-0547
 - <http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/texas/place/sweprotect/lennox-foundation-southmost-preserve.xml>
- **The Turtle Lady Legacy (TTLL)**
 - Administrative work (V)
 - Contact: Mary Ann Tous, 956-761-4002
 - <http://www.theturtleladylegacy.org>
- **UTRGV Coastal Studies Lab**
 - Training for Red Tide Rangers and Coastal Naturalists (AT)

- Contact: Bridgett Goza, coastal@utrgv.edu, 956-761-2644
- <http://www.utrgv.edu/csl>
- **Valley Land Fund**
 - Protect and preserve habitat and historic lands (V)
 - Contact: Jim Tabek or Debralee Rodriguez, info@valleylandfund.com, 956-686-6429
 - <https://valleylandfund.com>
- **Valley Nature Center (VNC)**
 - Nature center in Weslaco needs office, trail maintenance, garden, docent group tours (V)
 - offer programs (AT)
 - Spring Chirp festival (V)
 - Contact: Emily Orozco, info@valleynaturecenter.org, 956-969-2475
 - <https://www.valleynaturecenter.org>
- **Valley Proud Environmental Council**
 - Environmental organization with projects (V)
 - Rio Reforestation co-sponsor (V)
 - Contact: Delilah Garcia, vpec@valleyproud.org, 956-412-8000
 - <http://valleyproud.org/index.php>

If you have a question about the validity of a partner organization, contact Jolaine Lanehart at ljlanehart@gmail.com

GUIDED NATIVE PLANT WALKS ARE BACK AT HARLINGEN'S HUGH RAMSEY NATURE PARK

Texas Master Naturalist guides Anita Westervelt, Barbara Peet and Jorge Gonzalez, Jr. offer free guided walks around the specialty gardens of the park's Ebony Loop twice monthly.

Every month is different. See what's in bloom now and how many butterflies you can spot! One of the mysteries of our native trees is that many of them bloom after rain. With the early December rains, it's a good opportunity to see which trees will begin pushing out blooms.

Ebony Loop is a quarter mile, level, caliche path. Bring bug spray and water for yourself, if you'd like. The park has facilities near the entrance.

Attending the walks qualifies as two hours of Advance Training.

The walks are on the **first Friday** and **third Saturday** through May 2018, from 9 to 11 a.m.

Meet the guides in the parking lot to begin the tour.