



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

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President's Message

by Virginia Vineyard

Hello Chapter Members,

I hope the end of this quarter finds all of you well and busy. Congratulations to the newest TMN members, and a big “Thank you!” to everyone who helped make this year’s classes and graduation a success.

At this time our chapter is working on how to better connect our partners with chapter volunteers. We want to make it easier for chapter members to find out what kinds of volunteer opportunities are out there in a timely manner. We also want our partners to know what kinds of skills and expertise exist among our chapter members. Please help us by completing any surveys that the board sends out, and give us your suggestions on this important work.

Thanks,

Virginia

RGVCTMN April 2012 Graduates



On April 26th, the following students received RGVCTMN class completion certificates:

Mario Aguilar	Lema Conatser	Sally Merrill
Beatriz Alvarez	Gail Dantzker	Jesse Montoya
Elma Arredondo	Judy Emsley	Mary Ann Moore
Monica Barrera	Diana Farias	Joanne Phillips
Reyna Cavazos	Oralia Garcia	Harry Rakosky
Melissa Chadwick	Omar Landeros	Adrian Ramos
Esperanza Chapa	Jeanne Martinez	Jonathan Rodriguez

The following students certified as a Texas Master Naturalist and received class completion certificates, state TMN certificates, state dragonfly pins, chapter pins, and their name tags:

Marilu Trevino Alf	Linda Francis	Gloria Nelson
Ric Bull	Luci Gandy	Annette Rakosky
Sylvia Casselman	Veronica Guzman	David Reavis
Alicia Cavazos	Marie Montalvo	Mary Renk
John Ebner		

Congratulations to all! ♦

A Walk in Bentsen State Park

by Linda Francis

The day started out foggy and very still but pleasant enough for what we thought would be a fast walk to the hawk tower as we sometimes do. This particular morning though, March 29, we were forced to make several stops for interesting observations all along the way. Just past the maintenance yard, we first noticed that every few inches along the side of the road, the mowed grass was supporting these wonderful funnel-shaped dew-covered webs. After snapping a few pictures of the webs, we found that some of them seemed to be waiting to receive visitors!



You can read all about the Family Agelenidae (Funnel Weavers) at <http://bugguide.net/node/view/1974>.

Continuing our walk and reaching the trail to the hawk tower, it really looked more like Halloween than late March.



And no surprise in South Texas, it really turned out to be a beautiful day. As we approached the Nature Center on the way out, this guy hopped across the road in front of us and posed in the shade of a tree.



As we exited by the gate, another form of wildlife begged to be included in my pictures of the day. ♦



Prize-winning TMN Photos

In April, the El Camino Chapter of Milam County concluded its 2012 Nature Festival Photo contest, and our very own RGVCTMN member Mary Jo Bogatto earned two 3rd place ribbons. She entered five photos and won ribbons for:

- My Best Friend (white tail deer and the bird.)
- Tony and the Dragon (young boy flying the dragon fly)

Her other entries were:

- Friends
- Reflect
- Cactus Night Light

The El Camino TMN chapter website is at txmn.org/elcamino, but you can find her winning and other submitted photos at:

<https://picasaweb.google.com/ElCaminoRealMasterNaturalist/NatureFestivalPhotoContest2012#> (Click on the photo icon to see an enlarged version.) ♦

Ocelot Family Festival 2012

by Cristela Wise

As the children focus on coloring and decorating their “Viva the Ocelot” bookmarks, they are continuously batting gnats away from their faces. We are outdoors in front of the Marine Military Academy Auditorium in Harlingen where it is cloudy and muggy, and the winds are miserably calm. Texas Master Naturalist trainee Alicia Cavazos doesn’t let the annoying gnats stop her from using yarn to make colorful tassels for the children’s bookmarks. A cool breeze blows in from the north, and the children smile, proudly displaying the paw tattoos on their cheeks and their finished bookmarks.



As the music plays from a boom box, a little boy picks up a hula hoop and struggles to keep it in orbit around his waist; he then proudly shows his dad his arm hoop moves. He suddenly stops and announces that it is raining. He and his family quickly help us move supplies to a dry spot. As the rain and wind intensify, we move into a corner of the crowded auditorium lobby. Texas Parks & Wildlife personnel guard the doors and strongly encourage everyone to stay indoors because of hail and violent winds.

As Alicia and I talk to some very interesting people in the lobby, children and teenagers come to us wanting us to paint paw tattoos on their cheeks or hands. Then suddenly the intense rain and strong winds shift to a strange calm drizzle. People start to leave the auditorium, eager to check on their vehicles.



Countless hours went into planning and organizing the Ocelot Family Fiesta 2012, but the forecast storm kept the crowds away. However, the proverb “every cloud has a silver lining,” was proven by the beautiful sunset and rainbow after the storm. ♦



Great Davis Mountain Adventure

by Judy Svetanoff

My husband and I recently went on a trip to the Davis Mountains with about 30 other Master Naturalists. Donna Cole of the Blackland Prairie TMN chapter put together an itinerary we couldn't resist, completely full of activities we could participate in or not. Our trip began May 3rd when we left Port Isabel for Fort Davis and the Davis Mountain State Park.

A Meet-and-Greet get-together Friday night featured a presentation from Kelly Bryan, hummingbird expert, bird bander, and Fort Davis resident. His knowledge of the area, along with Donna's enthusiasm, guaranteed our weekend was going to be interesting.

Saturday morning found us at the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute, a short drive from Fort Davis. We had two opportunities to explore: Modesta canyon or a botanical garden walk. (I opted for the garden, not as strenuous.) Our guide described some of the studies documenting various desert plants and led a tour of the greenhouse where some of the cactus are one-of-a-kind, grown there by seed and shared with other gardens. The CDRI had great facilities and a wonderful gift shop.

In free time afterward, we explored the Indian Lodge at the state park. Nestled into the hillside, it appears to be an old adobe pueblo. It was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930's and is a great example of their efforts. Barn swallows let us know who owned the balcony but shared graciously. Beautiful views, peace and quiet, and of course friendly helpful staff – we're in Texas.

Sunday was a free day to explore. We drove to Fort Davis, Marfa, and Alpine for a bit of shopping and sight-seeing. We hung out at a few of the birding stations in the state park and with our friends, Joyce and Steve Fowler, in the camp ground. We were rewarded with visits from acorn and ladderback woodpeckers, blue grosbeaks, towhees, Scott's oriole, javelin, and a ground squirrel.



Monday brought more excitement at The Nature Conservancy's Davis Mountains Preserve, with John Herron (Director of Conservation Programs) and John Karges (Associate Director of Field Science). The conservation center was impressive, and it houses firefighters when needed. We were fortunate to ride in the lead car as we bumped our way toward Mt. Livermore, stopping occasionally for John Karges to explain the history, eco systems, and

fire strategy of the area. We encountered mule deer, western tanager, and spotted the Montezuma quail! (I am still singing about them.)



At dinner Monday night in Fort Davis, we recapped what we learned and got to know some more about our companions, ending by discussing other possible trips. Special thanks to Donna, who made the trip special and extremely organized. It was great to meet other naturalists and discuss their areas of the state. It's wonderful to be a Texas Master Naturalist.

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RGVCTMN May Milestones

Photos by Wendie Allstot



Jim Navjar, 1,000 Hours



Patti Pitcock, 500 hours

Sabal Palms Sanctuary Gets a New Top

by Wendie Allstot

Usually John Tierney and I work with the plants in the butterfly gardens at Sabal Palm Sanctuary, but most of our May volunteer hours were spent re-topping a structure in the butterfly garden area. The old roof was not repairable.



We proposed re-topping the structure with pressure treated slats that should not require maintenance for some time. John and I removed the palm-frond roof in April. Gorgas Science Foundation (GSF), operators of the Sabal Palm Sanctuary, provided the materials.

We re-topped the structure in May with the help of GSF Staff member Guillermo Aguilar.



The project ended up taking a lot more time than I had anticipated. Numerous measurements had to be taken and the slats had to be individually cut because the structure had warped over time.

Recently I was pleased to see a presentation being given under the structure for one of the Summer Nature Camp groups. Unfortunately, I did not have my camera with me. ♦

Ramsey Park Update

by Linda Butcher

We have exciting times coming to Ramsey Park in the next few months. Harlingen Water Works System will be starting on the pipeline across the front side of the park in the next few days. The water will come underground past the restrooms and fill the water feature there. It will then flow down the stream into the other ponds. Several of the ponds have been dry or almost dry for several years.

With help from the Parks and Recreation Department, we have been clearing and removing Guinea grass along Retama Trail in preparation for planting native grasses and wildflower meadows in the fall.

As always, watering existing plantings is an on-going full-time job. If anyone is willing to help, please let me know. We have such low water pressure, only 2 or 3 hoses can be used at a time, so a strict schedule must be maintained. I am working on the water pressure problem.

We also need someone to fill the bird feeders once or twice a week. Seed is available in the storage building at the park.

Please come by and visit, you will be glad you did.

