



# The Chachalaca

VOLUME 11 NUMBER 2 30 JUNE 2014

## In this Issue

<b>President's Message</b>	2
<i>Alicia Cavazos</i>	
<b>Richard Roesler Memorial Scholarship</b>	3
<i>Heidi Linnemann</i>	
<b>Roesler Scholarship Press Release</b>	4
<i>Anita Westervelt</i>	
<b>A Few Memories of Dick Roesler</b>	5
<i>Christina Mild</i>	
<b>Monarch Grant</b>	7
<i>Anita Westervelt</i>	
<b>Our Own Sargassum Royalty</b>	10
<b>RGVCTMN Members Leading</b>	11
<i>Anita Westervelt</i>	
<b>RGV Caterpillars</b>	14
<i>Hannah Bushert</i>	
<b>Research on Valley Invasive</b>	15
<i>Anita Westervelt</i>	
<b>Updates from the UT-B Kline Lab</b>	17
<i>Kristen Kline</i>	
<b>Tour of Earthwise Organics, Inc.</b>	20
<i>Anita Westervelt</i>	
<b>Congratulations to Frank!</b>	21
<i>Jimmy Paz</i>	

## 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.

## Officers

<b>President</b>	<b>Alicia Cavazos</b>
<b>Vice President</b>	<b>Anita Westervelt</b>
<b>Recording Secretary</b>	<b>Heidi Linnemann</b>
<b>Treasurer</b>	<b>Jim Navjar</b>
<b>Past President</b>	<b>Virginia Vineyard</b>

## Advisors

<b>Texas Sea Grant</b>	<b>Tony Reisinger</b>
<b>Texas Parks and Wildlife</b>	<b>Javier de Leon</b>

## Standing Committee Chairs

<b>Outreach/Publicity</b>	<b>Jackie Field, Jr.</b>
<b>Host</b>	<b>Vacant</b>
<b>Membership</b>	<b>Jolaine Lanehart</b>
	<b>Virginia Vineyard</b>
<b>Listserv/Webmaster</b>	<b>Jimmy Paz</b>
<b>Historian</b>	<b>James Seguin</b>
<b>Lower Valley Education</b>	<b>Carolyn Cardile</b>
<b>Upper Valley Education</b>	<b>Sylvia Casselman</b>
<b>Newsletter</b>	<b>Sharon Slagle</b>



## **President's Message**

*by Alicia Cavazos*

Hello Everyone,

As we head into the summer, I reflect on the previous half year. We managed to train 55 new Master Naturalists. This has been the largest class ever, increasing our chapter by 31%. Our chapter is getting bigger and better because there are so many caring people in our valley.



During the Beach-n-Biker Fest some of our members worked at booths to obtain a donation to our chapter from their club. I am proud to announce that they provided a \$700 check for our conservation partners. And speaking of partners, we presented checks for partner programs to South Padre Island World Birding Center, Bentsen State Park, UT-Pan American Marine Mammal Tank, Coastal Studies Summer Camp, and North America Butterfly Association (NABA). Our donations came from funds raised through our raffle, and from money left over from our dues and class fees.

Everyone has been busy volunteering, earning pins. One of our founding members, Frank Wiseman will be receiving his 4,000-hour pin and the Presidential Volunteer Service Award this month. It will be presented to him on June 28<sup>th</sup> at 10:30 am at Ramsey Park. I hope everyone stops by to congratulate him. Since I have been presiding over this organization, there has not been one month in which no service hour pins been awarded. That just shows the dedication and commitment everyone has to their favorite organization.

As we head into the summer, please be safe as you travel around the country or stay in your backyard.

Alicia

## Richard Roesler Memorial Scholarship

by Heidi Linnemann

A tuition scholarship has been created by the Rio Grande Valley Texas Master Naturalists in honor of Dick Roesler, a member of the chapter since 2004, who passed away on April 12, 2014.

Dick was part of a group of eight RGVCTMN volunteers instrumental in developing and maintaining the plants and trees at the Hugh Ramsey Nature Park in Harlingen. He always worked with a smile and a happy heart. The scholarship, which will provide tuition for the Master Naturalist classes held each year, will be awarded to a person or persons wanting to continue Dick's work at Ramsey Park.



At least two tuition scholarships will be granted each year. The scholarship is not need-based, but the applicant(s) must live in the Harlingen area, have a sincere interest in native plants and trees, and be willing to do volunteer work at Ramsey Park.



Many of the Master Naturalists who originally worked on Ramsey Park are now physically unable to do the work. They have, however, a warehouse of knowledge that they are willing to share with the applicants, providing mentoring and leadership as they establish a new group of Ramsey volunteers.

Interested potential applicants should apply to the RGVCTMN Board of Directors, indicating their interest in obtaining a designation as a Texas Master Naturalist and volunteering at Ramsey Park.

The Board will then set up an interview between the applicant and a group consisting of three members with volunteer experience at Ramsey Park and one Board Member.

Contributions to the Memorial Scholarship are being solicited in order that this program can be one that lasts for many years. If you are interested, please make your contribution to the RGVCTMN, designating it to be used for the Richard Roesler Memorial Scholarship Fund. ♦

## **Roesler Scholarship Press Release**

*by Anita Westervelt*

Texas Master Naturalist Frank Wiseman presented \$1,050 to the Rio Grande Valley Chapter Texas Master Naturalist beginning a memorial scholarship in honor of long-time member Richard Roesler who died earlier this year.

The scholarship is for Harlingen area applicants certifying as Texas Master Naturalists interested in native plants and who will dedicate volunteer work in Harlingen's Hugh Ramsey Nature Park. Initial money for the scholarship is from Roesler's close friends and family and donations continue to add to the fund.

Wiseman is one of the founding members of the Rio Grande Valley Chapter Texas Master Naturalist. He is a recent recipient of the President's Call to Service award for achieving more than 4,000 volunteer hours with the chapter.

The RGVCTMN was founded in 2002 and volunteers began working to re-vegetate Ramsey Park with as many Rio Grande Valley native plants as possible. "We went to many areas of the Valley to rescue native plants and transplant them in our project gardens around the Caliche Loop," Wiseman said. "I kept records of every plant that we dug up and transplanted and the areas where they were planted. We wanted to see how many would survive and multiply."

As the old guard gets less able to work as vigorously at the park, Wiseman wanted to honor his friend and provide an incentive for others to continue the native work in the park. "We were a group of volunteers, mostly retired professionals, who didn't know each other. We came together to volunteer at Ramsey Park. We worked together, we ate together, we became friends," Wiseman said. "Ideally, with this scholarship, we will encourage more people to establish a Ramsey Park volunteer team, much as we did in 2002."

During Roesler's ten year membership, he logged 1,655 volunteer hours, most of which were spent helping to naturalize Ramsey Park. "It took over eight years to achieve our goal of establishing the park as a true nature preserve with only Valley native plants," Wiseman said.

Due to efforts of the founding members of the RGVCTMN, the Arroyo Colorado Audubon Society and the city of Harlingen, the park now is a sanctuary for native plants and trees that attracts birders, butterfly enthusiasts, nature lovers, writers and

photographers from all over the world. Local citizens frequent the trails and educational programs offered by volunteers.

The Texas Master Naturalist program has chapters throughout the state. Training is region-specific about beneficial management of natural resources within a community. Classes are taught by local university professors, field experts from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, noted authors and photographers and other local professionals. The Rio Grande Valley chapter is an affiliate of the Texas Master Naturalist Program jointly sponsored by Texas Sea Grant, Texas AgriLife Extension and Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. More information about the local chapter is at [www.rgvctmn.org](http://www.rgvctmn.org). ♦

## **A Few Memories of Dick Roesler**

*by Christina Mild*

I first met Dick and Sharon Roesler through the Arroyo Colorado Audubon Society. They were among the first active volunteers in re-vegetation projects at Ramsey Nature Park in Harlingen.



Wherever Dick was working, you could usually find a large wheelbarrow. Often that's all you'd find, as Dick would be back in the brush somewhere hard at work. In those early days, a lot of watering was done by hand, and Dick was often the waterer. Many of my photos are of the back of Dick as he set off on his next mission. It was rare to find him in any posed picture.

Another large undertaking at Ramsey was spreading huge amounts of tangled heaps of woodchip mulch in areas cleared of guinea grass. Dick's partner in this undertaking was Bob Deputy, now deceased. They called themselves the "pitch and bitch" team, as they complained about whatever struck their fancy on the day, as they pitched mulch for endless hours.



I often described Dick as "the diggingest dog" as he was great at digging. He dug up plants in rescue operations from Brownsville to Rio Grande City, in soils varying from sandy loam and clay to caliche and hard-packed sand. He dug thousands of holes in Ramsey Park for planting rescued specimens, gallon-size transplants, and a wide range of other sizes and shapes of things to be added to diversify the vegetation or put up signposts. He was so fast at digging that 3 or 4 of us were kept busy putting in flags to show where holes should be dug, then planting things in the holes.

This is probably my favorite photo of Dick, taken on April 2, 2004, out in the brush near Rio Grande City, where we were rescuing plants ahead of the bulldozers. Frank Wiseman and Dick worked on many projects together, although I can't find any good photos of them together.

By 2006, Robert Archer was a regular volunteer in Ramsey, and he and Dick worked on various projects together. Robert probably has a few stories to tell from those adventures. Many of us who worked together at Ramsey Park are no longer able to do that type of heavy work on a regular basis, although Robert Archer is an exception to that rule. We've had joint replacements, gotten injuries, or have simply gotten old!

I consider the volunteers I worked with at Ramsey Park among my dearest friends, and the memories of our many adventures fill my heart with joy. If there were eight of us working on any one day, we considered that a very large workforce. More often there were two-to-six of us working at any one time. Amazingly and wonderfully, just a few workers putting in just a few hours each week has made an enormous difference over a matter of a dozen years.

Those are some of the reasons that several of us are asking members to contribute to the Roesler Memorial Scholarship Fund for future RGVCTMN members. We're specifically looking for younger or more able members who we can train to take on some of the work which we began at Ramsey Park.

Many of us are available for guidance, assistance and training. We hope to begin a new group of dedicated volunteers to carry on the efforts we began around 2002. ♦

## **Monarch Grant**

*by Anita Westervelt*

For three years, I have read of the plight of the Monarch butterfly, how the numbers wintering over in Mexico have diminished some 80%. Articles cite loss of habitat as a major contributor to the decreasing numbers. This year another such depressing article came across in my e-mail traffic; however, attached to the information was something enlightening: a solution.

The Bring Back the Monarchs to Texas program under the auspices of the Native Plant Society of Texas was offering grants. Deadline to apply was March 15. Winners were to be announced April 19. In early March, I got the go-ahead from the chapter TMN board, rounded up ten interested TMNs, and wrote a grant request to plant a Monarch garden. Heidi Linnemann, the first to express interest in the project, edited the grant application. We emailed it in.

In early May we were notified that our chapter had been approved for a \$180 grant. We purchased native plants from Mike Heep's Nursery. Mike had helped with the plant selection and placement plan provided with the grant application.

From the start, I knew we were a shoo-in. The Rio Grande Valley is at the bottom of the fall Monarch migration coastal flyway, and a Monarch-specific garden would be the first in the Valley. Harlingen's Hugh Ramsey Nature Park is nearly equi-distant from at least nine federal and state wildlife refuges and centralized among another some 80 recognized nature sites in the Rio Grande Valley. How could the grantors say no?

Grant criteria specified the location: full sun, open area of at least 10 square feet, water and protection for the butterflies and caterpillars, situated for educational

possibilities. Heidi spotted the perfect place as we walked along a path in Ramsey Park one morning. She took photos and outlined the plot.

**Location.** If you are in Ramsey Park parking lot looking toward the park, follow the left path. You will pass the lily pond on your left; keep walking. The outdoor lecture arena will be on your right and just beyond that, on the right, is the new Monarch Garden on a gentle slope leading to another pond just beyond a healthy stand of Mesquite and Retama trees. A city-placed bench remains in the middle of the garden for the time being. It is perfect for photographers or those wanting to get up close and personal with a Monarch.

**Timeline.**

- May 8 – Ed Langley, Heidi, and I worked for two hours planting 32 plants, building berms around plants on the slope, and watering them in well. Peggy Reeves helped prepare the site and with clean-up. Marsha Gramley has taken the lead to check the site several times a week and organize work parties when necessary. Heidi is recorder.
- May 10 and 11 – In spite of heavy rain, berms held, and plants survived.
- May 22 – Plants continue to establish themselves.
- May 28 – After another gully-washer in Harlingen, plants still look great, but some berms need attention
- June 5 – Berms are repaired and light weeding is completed.



Heidi and Ed planting Crucita.

Larval plants included in the garden were:

- 10 Butterfly Weed (*Veintiunilla*) *Asclepias curassavica*, blooms spring and summer.
- 8 Slim Milkweed, *Asclepias linearis*, blooms spring, summer, fall.
- 1 Climbing Milkweed, (existing) *Funastrum cynanchoides*, blooms summer and fall.





Heidi wrapping the found Climbing Milkweed around a found log.

Nectar plants included in the garden were:

- 8 Velvet Lantana, *Lantana velutina*, blooms spring and summer.
- 5 Crucita, Blue Mistflower, *Chromolaena ororata* (host to Rounded Metalmark butterfly), blooms mostly in fall.
- 1 Mexican Capraria, *Buchnera Americana*, blooms winter and spring.



Pink flags showing the new plants. View of the pond in background.

Initial volunteers included: Anita Westervelt, Heidi Linneman, Marsha Gramley, Roberto Gaitan, Ed Langley, Barbara Lindley, Gisela Chapa, Reggy Reeves, Louise Wilkinson, and Boyd Blihovde.

**The near future.** The Bring Back the Monarchs to Texas committee chairperson will monitor the progress of our project and may visit the site by June 30. By July 30, we will submit a written status report to the committee about lessons learned, volunteer

hours worked and an accounting statement with invoices for the committee's budget reconciliation and to help justify their 501(c)(3) status to the IRS.

Anyone interested in joining Team Monarch is welcome. Later we will need an apparatus for a Climbing Milkweed plant that we found as a volunteer at the site. Signage would be a plus. Re-seeding milkweeds, planting additional plants, and weeding will be needed from time to time. Educational talks will need to be coordinated and information about the Monarch Garden and project distributed to group leaders who lead walks through Ramsey Park so they can help deliver information about the Monarch watch. ♦



Milkweed, *Veintiunilla Asclepias curassavica*

## **Congratulations to Our Own Sargassum Royalty!**

Steve and Joyce Fowler were honored by being selected as King and Queen of Sargassum at the Turtle ball during Turtle week in May. This is an honorary position, and the Fowlers will be representing Sea Turtle, Inc., at fund raisers and events during the coming year. The cape, scepter, and garlands were graciously passed from previous King and Queen Mike and Linda McGonigle at the Turtle Ball at Casa Mariposa.

For more information about the hard work and dedication that earned this honor for the Fowlers, see page 5 of the Sea Turtle, Inc., May newsletter:  
<http://www.seaturtleinc.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/May-2014-Newsletter1.pdf>

♦

## RGVCTMN Members Stepping Up to Lead

by Anita Westervelt

**Birdwalk at South Padre Island.** John Thaxter mentioned recently in an email that some RGVCTMN members don't think they know enough to lead groups. That was the case when Chapter President Alicia Cavazos was asked to lead a bird walk at the South Padre Island Birding Center. However, Barbara Lindley volunteered to help, and she and Alicia led their first birdwalk one Sunday afternoon in April. I went along for support because it was scheduled to happen at a reasonable hour of the day. No surprise: they did a splendid job. As is usually the case when you don't think you know enough, Alicia and Barbara jumped in and found they knew more than they thought, and they learned even more along the way.



We all learned something. The group consisted of about 15 people, one couple from Canada, several photo enthusiasts, and a family from Pharr with four lovely children who played the scavenger hunt. Everyone in the group helped to add something to their scavenger hunt pages by the end of the tour.

It was early migration so there was plenty to see: Rails, a Sora, which is reputed to be extremely elusive, Tricolored Herons in breeding plumage, Skimmers skimming, Black and White Warblers, Least Sandpipers, and many other birds that Alicia and Barbara identified. Alicia is really handy with the iBird app on her phone. Two in the group had electronic tablets and others had phone apps. It's really fun to have instant research right in the field with us.



Alicia and Barbara did such a good job that they have been offered a summer gig as birdwalk guides at South Padre Island.

**Animal Tracking.** Thadea Corkill had a first this year, too. Thadea is taking her interest in animal tracking to a high level. In the past year she has attended classes, workshops, and field expeditions throughout Texas, logging hours and evaluations toward certification. The Lower Valley education committee scheduled her to give a presentation during this year’s training. Thadea delivered an educational and entertaining program. She had developed an excellent PowerPoint and brought a lot of books for students to look through, as well as handouts and samples (all well-contained in plastic bags) to pass around and a plethora of information to share. Thadea even demonstrated animal pacing patterns, which Lower Valley Education Chair Carolyn Cardile captured in video on her phone. Listening to Thadea’s talk seemed like listening to a field of study that could be labeled “CSI Wilderness.” It was fascinating.



“Wildlife tracking is my passion,” Thadea said. “I love teaching and talking about it. Like with most hobbies, it takes practice, practice, and more practice. We are very fortunate that the Lower Rio Grande Valley has such great tracking spots.”

**Wow for WOVE.** Another chapter first came from Carolyn Cardile in February. If you ask her, she might tell you she has no idea how she ended up coordinating this year’s speakers for the Winter Outdoor Wildlife Expo (WOVE), a chapter partner, but her expertise in organization and her coordinating skills contributed to a quite successful event.

St. Andrew’s by the Sea Episcopal Church celebrated the 20th anniversary of its WOVE expo with a two-day event instead of the usual one day at the South Padre Island Convention Center. More than 45 programs, workshops and events were

scheduled including a number of new and popular topics covering a variety of interests like Geocaching and Digiscoping.

More than 1,200 people attended the workshops and activities and visited the vendors and exhibits that show-cased the outdoor recreation opportunities and promoted the great natural gifts of the island. The two-day event made it possible for visitors to attend all the lectures, some of them twice, just to capture more information.

**Children’s Day.** Cristin Howard, the new manager and marketing director at the South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center, and a new graduate of RGVCTMN, held her first Children’s day at the center.

Twenty-five children and their parents showed up. Cristin



started the program with a short PowerPoint using pictures from chapter member Carolyn Cardile of last spring’s bird migration fallout. Cristin included facts about the Central Flyway from the Texas Parks and Wildlife website. Children then went outside to make bird feeders out of toilet paper rolls spread with peanut butter and then rolled in bird seed. Cristin showed them how to hang the feeders on a tree branch while they toured the BNC butterfly garden.



Birding and Nature Center volunteers Jerry and Rose Ann Ramakowski spent an hour on the boardwalk with the children teaching them about shore birds and the Laguna’s ecosystem. After the nature walk, the kids played three games of bird

bingo. Families were invited to pack a sack lunch and enjoy their lunch on the patio with lemonade and cookies supplied by the center.

“It was a very successful three-hour event,” said Carolyn Cardile, who was on hand to volunteer and take photographs. ♦

## RGV Caterpillars

by Hannah Buschert

Inspired by Barry Nall's April presentation to the Native Plant Project about caterpillars and their host plants, I was given the task of looking for caterpillars in the Rio Grande Valley. This has proven to be an interesting assignment with several neat finds of moth and butterfly caterpillars. It was much easier to find moth caterpillars than butterfly caterpillars. This may be due to their feeding habits—moths are generally less picky than butterflies in terms of host plants.

This bright green caterpillar will eventually become an Io Moth (*Automeris io*). This is a beautiful moth that will either be yellow (male) or rufous (female). It will feed on a variety of broad-leaf plants. This individual was found on Sugar Hackberry (*Celtis laevigata*), but has fed on other species including Rio Grande Ash (*Fraxinus velutina*). This caterpillar will be orange in its first few instars and then eventually be green in its last instars. It builds its cocoon in dead leaves and other debris it finds on the ground. This species can sting you, so please be careful handling it!



At the Bentsen RGV State Park Nature Center, we have been raising caterpillars of our own. Several volunteers and staff have brought in Black Swallowtail (*Papilio polyxenes*) caterpillars, who will feed on parsley, dill, and other family members. The caterpillar in this picture is bracing itself to form its chrysalis.



This “wooly bear” caterpillar is a Giant Leopard Moth (*Hypercombe scribonia*) that was found on Sugar Hackberry (*Celtis laevigata*). When spooked, it will form a ball and show the red stripes on his body. This individual may have overwintered as a caterpillar, but in the Deep South they may have two generations each year. In cooler areas, they will overwinter and form their cocoon in May. It eats a variety of broad-leaf plants and tried to hide underneath things to avoid the sunlight, as this caterpillar is nocturnal.



The Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*) caterpillar below was found on Milkweed (*Asclepias spp.*) at Quinta Mazatlan. There will be several generations of these butterflies on their northward migration whilst the next generation was forming in the valley. They were fairly easy to find on good, healthy milkweed. These caterpillars are somewhat easy to raise and are fun to watch grow!



I encourage you to look around your garden and see what you can find! ♦

## **Biological Research Helps Manage Valley Invasive**

*by Anita Westervelt*

If you're in the Rio Grande Valley and think you're seeing bamboo, that's not a good thing. Chances are the giant reed is carrizo cane, *Arundo donax*. It is an exotic and invasive weed of riparian habitats and irrigation canals of the Rio Grande River Basin, according to Dr. John Goolsby, who delivered a comprehensive lecture about invasive species at the April monthly RGVCTMN meeting.



*Arundo donax* invading a resaca edge.

Goolsby is employed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as a research entomologist. His current research includes biological control of invasive species that affect the Rio Grande basin and South Texas agriculture, including carrizo cane, an invasive European weed.

*Arundo* is a serious threat to rivers and other waterways because it forms huge persistent colonies that quickly overwhelm a shoreline, blocking access for wildlife and livestock, smothering other plants, and soaking up large quantities of water. Because of its great height, up to 20 feet, cane along the Rio Grande also impedes visibility, hindering the operations of the Border Patrol.

A natural enemy to the invader is a plant-feeding wasp from the cane's native range. For those with *Arundo* on their property, Goolsby recommends topping the stalks at about three feet. The plants will then bush out with side shoots and can be attacked by the wasps. The topping also allows native vegetation to re-grow and shade out the *Arundo*.

If you can see holes in the side shoots about the size of a BB, the wasps' exit holes, that's a good thing.



Wasp exit holes on side shoots of *Arundo donax*.

That means you probably have the wasp and nature already is managing the species. ♦



## Updates from the UT-B Kline Lab

by Kristen Kline

As a member of the Class of 2014, I am thrilled to be in a position to fulfill part of our mission by assisting graduate students with scientific research. The natural resources of the Rio Grande Valley provide us not only with respite from hectic lives, but also the opportunity to deepen and broaden our understanding of the world around us. Two young women from the University of Texas at Brownsville are currently conducting research under the direction of my husband, Dr. Richard Kline, and their projects have given volunteers from our chapter a chance to participate in projects that will directly contribute to scientific knowledge about wildlife in South Texas.

**Ocelots and Bobcats.** Sarah Nordlof shared the results of her work thus far with RGVCTMN members at the June chapter meeting. Earlier in the year several volunteers from the Class of 2014 assisted Sarah in her quest to capture images of wildlife, especially ocelots and bobcats, on camera traps set in strategic locations in and around the Laguna Atascosa Wildlife Refuge (LANWR). Some helped place these cameras in the field, and others spent hours in front of computers sorting thousands of photos into folders in preparation for statistical analysis. Her preliminary results, as well as some endearing photos of our furry and feathered neighbors, captivated and delighted a large crowd on June 10.



Sarah Nordlof and Rick Kline preparing to set camera traps.



Juvenile bobcat preening.



Bobcat cubs playing in underbrush.



Coyote on camera.



Roadrunner posing.



Finally! Ocelot rushing past camera.

Sarah's research focuses on analyzing the movements of ocelots and bobcats near LANWR and their use of wildlife crossings and corridors along F.M. 106. She uses camera traps and GPS data from previously collared cats to record their range. Stay tuned for an announcement of Sarah's upcoming thesis proposal defense!

**Sirens.** Taylor LaFortune has been collecting sirens in Cameron County since last autumn for her thesis project. She is studying habitat preferences, distribution, and population genetics of the South Texas Siren. Little is known about the South Texas Siren, so Taylor is expanding her search for this elusive creature beyond Cameron to the southernmost counties of Texas, including Willacy, Kleberg, Kenedy, Hidalgo, Starr, Zapata, Jim Hogg, and Brooks. **She wants our help locating sirens of any type:**

- If you have seen sirens, (sometimes referred to as two-legged eels or mud eels), please let Taylor know when and where they were sighted.
- If you have access to land with a pond, resaca, or other murky water body, or if you know someone who does, please contact her. Taylor is trying to set traps in as many water bodies as possible in the next few months.

Taylor has a collection permit from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and takes great care to ensure that no animals are harmed during the study. Her method of collection entails setting 30 traps in a chosen body of water in the late afternoon or evening. Inside each trap are bait and a floatation device (so the sirens can remain in the water but have access to air). Water parameter measurements are taken and recorded, as well as a description of the surrounding vegetation. The traps remain in place until morning, at which time Taylor and at least one volunteer retrieve them. The number and type of species caught in the traps is recorded, and if she is lucky, sirens will be present, too! Measurements and photographs of the sirens are taken, to be used for identification using a sophisticated software program that isolates spotting patterns on the animals' heads. Tiny fin clippings are also taken, to be analyzed in the laboratory.



Taylor LaFortune and Rick Kline with sirens at Sabal Palms Sanctuary.



Taylor and student volunteer, Maria Cooksey, preparing to set siren traps.



Student volunteer, Kiley Briggs, helps with siren project.



TMN volunteer, Kristen Kline, records water parameter at Resaca de la Palma.



Siren spotting pattern, external gills, and small front legs.



Siren waiting to be weighed and measured.

If all goes well, Taylor hopes to collect at least 200 sirens by September. Thirty-one have already been captured and analyzed, so she will be collecting nearly every day this summer. If anyone would like to take part in this exciting research, feel free to contact Taylor for more information at (210) 296-9648 or [taylorlafortune@gmail.com](mailto:taylorlafortune@gmail.com)

◆

## **Tour of Earthwise Organics, Inc.**

*by Anita Westervelt*

Rio Grande Valley Chapter Texas Master Naturalists and Master Gardeners shared an event for a two-hour tour of Earthwise Organics, Inc., a 10-acre compost operation on a 30-acre spread between Rio Hondo and San Benito.

Earthwise President Thomas Harr began the business nearly 18 years ago. Initially, it began operation with by-products from an adjacent feedlot. Although the feedlot is no longer in operation, the company's raw material now is gin mill and sugarcane waste and waste from a Brownsville seafood breeding company. They also have an operation in Rio Grande City next to an active feedlot. The end product is the same, no matter the nature-based raw material, according to Harr.



“Anyone who irrigates their garden here in the Lower Rio Grande Valley would benefit from using an application of sulfur once or twice a year,” said Harr. “The water here has a high salt content. When the water is gone, the salt remains.”



Earthwise Organics sells compost with added sulfur as well as other products. They serve a number of large organic farmers, landscapers, and private gardeners at their retail store in Harlingen. See [www.earthwiseagriculture.net](http://www.earthwiseagriculture.net) ♦

## **Congratulations to Frank Wiseman!**

*by Jimmy Paz*

Frank Wiseman received the Presidential Award for volunteer services as a founding member of the Rio Grande Valley Chapter Texas Master Naturalist. In addition to a letter from President Obama, Wiseman also earned the 4,000 hour pin and was presented with a bench that will be installed on one of the trails at Hugh Ramsey Park. See the RGVCTMN Facebook page for photos and more information. Three cheers for Frank! ♦

