

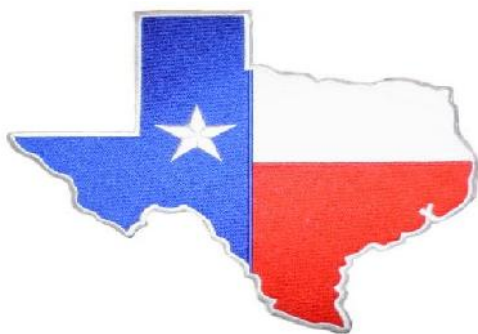


# The Chachalaca

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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*

Summer has arrived early to the Rio Grande Valley and already a tropical storm has stirred the gulf waters. Although I'm used to Texas summers, the intensity of the heat never fails to surprise me. With the hot conditions, remember to stay hydrated and to take frequent breaks. A tub of water for the wild critters and a weekly, deep watering to your favorite plants can sustain them through the dry, hot conditions.

The 2017 New Trainee graduation provided a fun evening and an energizing boost for all that attended. Thirty-three trainees received their Certificate of Completion or achieved their Texas Master Naturalist certification. The 2017 class was a diverse group who brought an incredible enthusiasm and supportive atmosphere to classes, field trips and volunteer efforts. Many have already achieved their 100 hour milestone. I extend a big thank you to New Class Director Joni Gillis and the Education Committee for a job well done.

The rest of the year promises to provide many opportunities for volunteering and advanced training. Our partner organizations are busy with outreach activities, habitat restoration and scientific studies and all are in need of volunteers. Check our website for a list of partners to find volunteer opportunities that fit your interest and skill. You will also find a list of presentation topics that our Chapter offers to community groups. Many thanks to Communication/Outreach Director Tamie Bulow, New Class Representative/Speakers Bureau Chair Steve Lanoux for compiling the information and to Webmaster Jimmy Paz for his wizardry on the website.

Our Chapter is hosting the Silent Auction at the TMN State Meeting in Corpus Christi on October 20- 22. Linda Butcher will be looking for volunteers to assist with the effort at the meeting. The State Meeting is a great place to find Advanced Training hours and to share ideas with TMN volunteers from other Chapters. I hope we have a long caravan of RGV Chapter members making the trek to Corpus.

Our Chapter lost a dedicated Texas Master Naturalist and good friend with the sudden passing of Jim Najvar in April. Jim engaged in all aspects of the RGV Chapter after completing his certification training in 2008. Recognized as an outstanding volunteer trainee at the graduation, Jim continued to serve the Chapter with dedication, achieving his 4000 hour milestone in 2016. Jim stepped up to serve on the board as Secretary in 2012 and continued serving as Chapter Treasurer this year. My first contact with the Rio Grande Valley Chapter was a phone call with Jim and Jolaine to inquire about transferring to the RGV Chapter and enrolling in the training class. My call was met with an open enthusiasm that encouraged me to pursue the class. As I got to know Jim, I learned that behind that enthusiasm was a truly good person with a glimmer of mischief in his eye and a deep drive to educate people, both young and old, about the importance of conserving our natural ecosystems. Jolaine and the family have established the Jim Najvar Memorial Scholarship to provide funding for a new trainee whose volunteer focus will be education.

Take care,

M. Lee

## Remembering Jim Najvar

“Jim Najvar was an exemplary Texas Master Naturalist and great friend who loved to share adventure. He had a mischievous sparkle in his eyes and infectious smile. He and Jolaine were inseparable. His organizational skills were legendary and he contributed to the stability and growth of our chapter, now one of the best in the state. On a personal note, whenever I was questioning my sanity, he would assure me things would work out and they did. I could always depend on Jim for advice. I will never forget him.” ~Tony Reisinger

“Jim was so great about encouraging others. He encouraged me when I first joined the chapter and encouraged me as the New Class Director. I know I had his full support. I think his dream was always to see a large class like the one we had this year and I believe it made him very happy to see all but one graduate. The night of the Graduation of the 2017 New Class, Jim told me I had done a great job. Whether I did or not, it was so nice to hear those words. I will miss hearing his encouraging words and having his support”.-Joni Gillis

"I didn't know Jim very well, since I'm a fairly new TMN (Class of '16), but I did get to know him better during last August's retreat at Davis Mountain State Park, which he and Jolaine organized to perfection and to the last detail. It was obvious that he was a very passionate man - passionate for education, for conservation and the environment, for young people, and perhaps other causes. And yet, I thought of him as a soft, cuddly teddy-bear - but whoa! That bear could rear up on his hind legs and be protective of whatever needed to be protected.

Heaven is richer for our loss!" ~Madeleine Sandefur



“Jim and Jolaine (who will probably always be an inseparable pair in my mind) arrived in the RGV chapter of TMN shortly after I did, but it seems they were always there, because of their immediate and wholehearted plunge into leadership, which continued to the last moments of Jim's life. I know, too, that Jim had a passion and even a sense of urgency about supporting young people to become Master Naturalists. It is only fitting that his name will be always associated with a TMN scholarship fund. Our chapter benefited greatly from the intelligence, leadership skills, and love of nature that Jim gave us. And I know how fortunate I am to have known this good and decent man.” ~Joyce Hamilton

## 13 Facts about Bats



Mexican Free-Tailed Bat, Texas State Flying Mammal  
Photo Credit: Ron Groves

Called creepy, scary and spooky, bats often get a bad rap. They're an important species that impact our daily lives in ways we might not even realize. From pollinating our favorite fruits to eating pesky insects to inspiring medical marvels, bats are heroes of the night.

Check out some interesting bat facts below:

1. Did you know: There are 1,300 species of bats worldwide? Bats can be found on nearly every part of the planet except in extreme deserts and Polar Regions. The difference in size and shape are equally impressive. Bats range in size from the Kitti's hog-nosed bat (also called the

Bumblebee Bat) that weighs less than a penny -- making it the world's smallest mammal -- to the flying foxes, which can have a wingspan of up to 6 feet. The U.S. is home to over 40 species of bats.

2. Not all bats hibernate. Even though bears and bats are the two most well-known hibernators, not all bats spend their winter in caves. Some bat species like the spotted bat survive by migrating in search of food to warmer areas when it gets chilly.

3. Bats have few natural predators -- disease is one of the biggest threats. Owls, hawks and snakes eat bats, but that's nothing compared to the millions of bats dying from White-Nose Syndrome. The disease -- named for a white fungus on the muzzle and wings of bats -- affects hibernating bats across eastern North America, and was recently discovered in Washington State. More than 5.5 million bats have died so far from White-Nose Syndrome. Scientists are working to understand the disease. You can help -- avoid places where bats are hibernating, and if you do go underground, decontaminate your clothing, footwear and gear.

4. Without bats, say goodbye to bananas, avocados and mangoes. Over 300 species of fruit depend on bats for pollination. Bats help spread seeds for nuts, figs and cacao -- the main ingredient in chocolate. Without bats, we also wouldn't have plants like agave or the iconic saguaro cactus.

5. Night insects have the most to fear from bats. Each night, bats can eat their body weight or more in insects, numbering in the thousands! And because bats eat so many insects -- which have exoskeletons made of a shiny material called chitin -- some bat poop sparkles (cool but weird fact, we know)! This insect-heavy diet helps farmers protect their crops from pests and lowers the spread of mosquito-borne diseases like malaria.

6. Bats are the only flying mammal. While the flying squirrel can only glide for short distances, bats are true fliers. A bat's wing resembles a modified human hand -- imagine the skin between your fingers larger, thinner and stretched. This flexible skin membrane that extends between each long finger bone and many movable joints make bats agile fliers.

7. Bats may be small, but they're fast little creatures. How fast a bat flies depends on the species, but they can reach up to 60 miles per hour.

8. Some bat species are at risk of extinction. At least 13 types of U.S. bats are endangered, and more are threatened. Since most bats only give birth to one baby per year, bat populations are slow to recover from disturbances like white-nose syndrome. Other threats to bats include habitat loss and pesticides that kill insects.

9. The longest-living bat is 41 years old. It's said that the smaller the animal, the shorter its lifespan, but bats break that rule of longevity. Although most bats live less than 20 years in the wild, scientists have documented six species that live more than 30 years. In 2006, a tiny bat from Siberia set the world record at 41 years.

10. Like cats, bats clean themselves. Far from being dirty, bats spend a lot of time grooming themselves. Some, like the Colonial bat, even groom each other. Besides having sleek fur, cleaning also helps control parasites.

11. Dogs aren't the only ones with pups. Baby bats are called pups, and a group of bats is a colony. Like other mammals, mother bats feed their pups breastmilk, not insects. Mamma bats form nursery colonies in spring in caves, dead trees and rock crevices.

12. Bats are inspiring medical marvels. About 80 medicines come from plants that rely on bats for their survival. While bats are not blind, studying how bats use echolocation has helped scientists develop navigational aids for the blind. Research on bats has also led to advances in vaccines.

13. Innies or Outies? Humans aren't the only ones with belly buttons. With a few exceptions, nearly all mammals have navels because of mom's umbilical cord, and bats are no different. Now the real question is: Innies or outies?

Bats need your help. You can help protect these amazing creatures by planting a bat garden or installing a bat house. Stay out of closed caves, especially ones with bats.

Article reprinted courtesy of the United States Department of the Interior.

## HOW DO I GET INVOLVED IN THE MISSION OF THE RGV CHAPTER OF TMN?

*By Tamie Bulow*



Javi Gonzales (lf) and Alicia Cavazos (rt) participating in the Tip of Texas 2016 Christmas Bird Count

Photo Credit: Tamie Bulow



A recent member of the 2500-hour Club is a little spitfire by the name of **Alicia Cavazos**. Having participated in and graduated from the Class of 2012, Alicia earned her polished silver dragonfly pin, certifying 2500 hours of service in the name of Texas Master Naturalists, and was presented her pin at the April 2017 chapter meeting. So how did Alicia rack up all those hours? First of all, she says “YES”, and she says it a lot. Uncharacteristic of most new grads, Alicia stepped up to the plate by jumping into the presidency of the chapter! The need was great, and Alicia said “YES”. Since this was during the development of the Upper Valley chapter, she attended meetings in both locations and logged a few miles on her car. To relieve stress, she went to Ramsey Nature Park and pulled guinea grass in the evenings.

Recognizing her ability and enjoyment in leading groups, Alicia volunteered at Valley Nature Center and the Coastal Studies Lab when they had school classrooms visit. Then, in a unique opportunity, she drew upon her professional experience in telco wiring when the Rabb House at Sabal Palm Sanctuary was being remodeled. Following her growing passion for birding, she answered “YES” to the SPI Birding & Nature Center when they sent out an appeal for people to lead bird walks, and again when Resaca de la Palma State Park needed docent drivers for their tram tours. After meeting LeRoy Overstreet, the Coastal Warden at the time, she began clearing trails on Green Island, learning more about plants and birds along the way.

The annual Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival piqued her interest on a number of levels: involvement in the Festival planning and execution itself, plus manning the TMN and ACAS booths during the Festival in the Birders Bazaar. Back in the administration of the RGV chapter of TMN, she participates on the Education Committee planning agendas for the new trainee classes for the chapter. The common thread through all of Alicia’s volunteering is that she follows her interests and shares them with others. And she continues to say YES!

## **Don’t Touch the Black Slugs**

*By Anita Westervelt*



**Black velvet leatherleaf slug - *Belocaulus angustipes***

Class: Gastropoda

Family: Veronicellidae

In the early morning, I often find black slugs on the driveway and sidewalk. I identified them via the Internet as black velvet leatherleaf slugs and discovered these slugs are not only invasive; they come with a big caution.

Typically nocturnal, they avoid sunlight, extreme heat, cold or low humidity. Like other slugs, they tend to live underneath living or inanimate objects such as fallen trees, planks and garden pots. They surface more after a rain or if you water your lawns.

This slug is jet black, with a leathery appearance and has two black ocular tentacles. The underside is tan in color. It can grow to 3 ½ inches in length and is easily recognizable because the black velvet leatherleaf slug doesn't closely resemble any native terrestrial slug.

Native to South America: Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina, it has been found in Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Texas.

Their insatiable appetites make them a threat to many kinds of grasses and plants and one Website specifically mentioned St. Augustine grass.

That's not the worst thing about these slugs. In Honduras, where the black velvet leatherleaf slug also is invasive, it was reported as an important vector of the nematode parasite **Angiostrongylus costaricensis** that causes abdominal angiostrongyliasis in humans.\*

Thankfully, the slugs have not been confirmed to vector this nematode in the United States, but that doesn't mean those not tested are free of the nematode. They should be treated as a dangerous, invasive species, and it is recommended to not touch them. If you do, they caution you to wash your hands in soapy water and then rinse them in alcohol or a standard hand disinfectant. They also recommend wearing latex gloves or handling them by using a plastic bag around your hand.

Why you might want to (safely) handle these slugs is because specimens can be sent to APHIS, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, an agency under the United States Department of Agriculture. Since the slugs have been documented in Hidalgo County, I don't personally think it necessary to send any off to APHIS.

If you are so inclined to do so, the following link [explains how to preserve them and where to send specimens.](http://www.tsusinvasives.org/images/BelocaulusUSDA.pdf) <http://www.tsusinvasives.org/images/BelocaulusUSDA.pdf> Directions are excerpted below:

“Specimens of slugs should be preserved in the following manner: the slug has to be drowned in water before being preserved: the specimen first should be placed in a vial or specimen bottle of water that is then sealed as it is held under water to make sure that no air bubble remains inside. The container should be placed in a cool place for about 12 hours, by which time the mollusk will have died in a fully extended (relaxed) condition. The specimen then should be transferred to 75-80% ethanol (not denatured if available), and then submitted for identification.”

Even though I don't intend to send specimens to APHIS, the more slugs I remove from the yard, the less there are to procreate; so I've waged a campaign on our homestead. Initially, I scooped five of these slugs into a clean cottage cheese container by shooting them into the container with a flick of the lid edge, then shook the slugs into a five-gallon bucket and hosed in about three inches of water. After returning from a quick errand, the slugs hadn't drowned, they'd escaped.

Seven slugs from the previous day were dealt with in the same manor and quickly dumped into the resaca to drown or become fish food. I suspect they crawled back to the St. Augustine grass.



After researching the species, I'm also thinking these may not be good for the catfish in the event the slugs do carry the nematode.

With more success, I stuck my hand in doubled-up plastic carry bags and simply picked up nine slugs with the covered hand, reversed the bag, tied it off and dumped it in the garbage bin. A friend mentioned doggy poop bags, purchased from a pet store, have a thicker mil than a veggie bag, are not as voluminous and have tie-off flaps or ties for an easy roll-off-and-tie solution.

The "salt" trick we learned as kids would leave a mess and would still need to be cleared up.

Suffocation in tied-up bags probably isn't a quick kill, and I'd certainly entertain suggestions:

[jjvanm@gmail.com](mailto:jjvanm@gmail.com).

Check out the Texas Invasive Species Institute Website for more information about the species:

<http://www.tsusinvasives.org/home/database/belocaulus-angustipes>

\* *Angiostrongylus* <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/angiostrongylus/> "**Angiostrongylus** is a parasitic nematode that can cause severe gastrointestinal or central nervous system disease in humans, depending on the species. **Angiostrongylus cantonensis**, which is also known as the rat lungworm, causes eosinophilic meningitis and is prevalent in Southeast Asia and tropical Pacific islands. The recognized distribution of the parasite has been increasing over time and infections have been identified in other areas, including Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States. **Angiostrongylus costaricensis** causes eosinophilic gastroenteritis and is found in Latin America and the Caribbean."



Texas Indigo snake (*Drymarchon corais exebennus*) hunting at Owl Pond. The largest species of Non-venomous snake in the state, it enjoys Texas state protected status.

Photo credit: Lou Osborne

***We're Proud of You***

Milestones Reached this Quarter

April - June 2017

**100 Hours of Volunteer Service**

Stephanie Bilodeau

James Taylor Blanton

Amy Daley

Christine Freeman

Daniel Freeman

Michelle Gardner

Louise Wilkinson

**250 Hours of Volunteer Service**

Julie Gropper

Justin Spaulding-LeClaire

**500 Hours of Volunteer Service**

Tamie Bulow

Eileen Mattei

Madeleine Sandefur

**1000 Hours of Volunteer Service**

Susan Kerens

**2500 Hours of Volunteer Service**

Alicia Cavazos

**4000 Hours Volunteer Service**

Pam Cornett – **LIFETIME**

**ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**