



The Chachalaca

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RGV TEXAS MASTER NATURALISTS

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President's Message

by Linda Butcher

Hello Master Naturalists,

It looks like spring is here. The yuccas are blooming as well as the huisache. I just love all the fragrances this time of year.

I've been wishing for rain but the weatherman has said no. Maybe in a few days. It may be another year to make good use of our hoses and sprinklers.

Our 2016 graduation is just around the corner. We have another great class. We're going to have some enthusiastic volunteers with their heads bursting with knowledge just itching to go to work.

Migration will be here soon. There will be excited birders running around everywhere, cameras and binoculars in tow. I plan on being in the middle of it all. The South Padre Island Convention Center is a good place to start. Other must go places include Sabal Palm Sanctuary and Estero Llano Grande State Park. Every year there seems to be some rare bird, so there is no telling what you might see. Even if you are a novice, there will be someone there to help you.

There will be some new volunteer opportunities this year. The new Wildlife Biologist at the Arroyo Unit of the Las Palomas Wildlife Management Area is going to need volunteers. He is planning to do bird, plant, butterfly and herp surveys. Later in the year, there will be volunteer work to be done on Green Island. This will be a special opportunity because it is a protected nesting island for wading and shore birds. It is not available to the public and we will have to be accompanied by the new Coastal Warden. Larry Shriver has been appointed to that position. Larry and his wife Janet have recently returned to the Valley from living out of state and rejoined our organization. Welcome back Larry and Janet.

My final thoughts are, let's take our vitamins, get our tools ready, and GET OUT THERE AND VOLUNTEER.

Linda ♦

What I Learned About Monarchs and Milkweeds at the TMN State Meeting

by Paula Parson

Monarch butterflies were part of my growing up years in Hawaii. They were present year-round spending their entire life-cycle on the Crown Flower plant, a giant milkweed. Imagine my surprise when I first learned that they migrated thousands of miles in the fall as they flew south to the mountains of Mexico, and again north in the spring.

Over the years we've learned of the marked decline in the number of butterflies making this trek south. I had opportunity to learn more about the Monarchs and the milkweeds and efforts to improve their lot at the Texas Master Naturalist State Meeting in October.

According to Craig Hensley, Texas Parks and Wildlife Park Interpreter/Naturalist at the Guadalupe River State Park, several factors contributed to the early decline of monarch butterflies. Historically, the cutting of Mexico's oyamel fir forests in the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve, loss of habitat in North America due to agriculture and development and severe weather events at overwintering sites have set the stage for this decline. Recently GMO crops and widespread application of Round-up through the Midwest, decrease of Conservation Reserve Program lands, neonicotinoid used by growers of commercial garden plants and climate change have contributed to the issue. Recently a fellow naturalists suggested that the city spraying to control mosquitoes may also contribute to the problem locally. Barbara Willy of Monarch Gateway, a non-profit organization she founded, told us that the butterflies fly 50 miles each day and must stop to replenish their nectar after about 48 hours. This necessitates the availability of nectar plants along their migration route. Organizations are working to establish a chain of nectar and host plant areas in Texas to help these butterflies make a successful flight south.

Hensley provided information on milkweeds in Texas. Texas has identified 62 species of milkweeds statewide. The most common genus of milkweed is *Asclepias*, which has 37 recognized species of which 36 are native to Texas. The one exception is the Tropical Milkweed, popular in many butterfly gardens. If you have these in your garden, you will have witnessed the plant stripped of flowers and leaves devoured by voracious caterpillars. In my garden, however, the caterpillars are Queens, which are often mistaken for Monarchs.



Tropical Milkweed

Despite their popularity, Willy admonishes us to cut the Tropical Milkweed to six inches monthly from October to February and to pinch off the leaves. She explained that the plant is both a nectar and host plant, and also contains a chemical that may encourage Monarchs to remain in the area laying eggs that may not survive to adulthood, thus her admonishment to not make the Tropical Milkweed available to them in the Fall. Rather, Hensley suggests a fall-blooming wildflowers like Cowpen Daisy, Blazing Star, Maximilian's Sunflower and Frostweed that provide nectar as they move south to their winter grounds. In the spring as they migrate north, monarchs need milkweeds for egg-laying and rearing their young, which the Tropical Milkweed provide.



Slim Milkweed

Ladybird Johnson Wildlife Center is collecting milkweed seedpods from around the state to contribute to schools and organizations to encourage creating butterfly gardens. They collect pods from several plant sources to ensure the plant DNA is not all the same. They need help from Master Naturalists in South Texas to be on the lookout for the Slim Milkweed species for pod collection. A resource to identify milkweeds in Texas compiled by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department can be downloaded from the Ladybird Johnson Wildlife Center at <https://www.wildflower.org/plants/TPWD-Identification-Milkweeds-Texas.pdf>.

We were reminded that as we increase nectar and host sources for the Monarch, other species of butterflies, skippers and moths also benefit. ♦

Facebook, Photographs and Funding

by Christina Mild

Over the past year, the Facebook group: "Friends of Ramsey Park" has been created. One of the main contributors to that group has been Frank Wiseman, who has patiently recorded many volunteer exploits outside and inside Ramsey Park with photos posted on that Facebook page. I recently posted a large number of photos taken inside Ramsey Park, as it has been closed for parking lot reconstruction for months. One of those photos showed the recent devastation in the Betty McEnery Memorial Garden. It was necessary for a utility line maintenance crew to take out a number of rather tall mesquite trees, and the access point for doing so was via McEnery Garden. Unfortunately, the wonderful concrete benches in that garden are now without shade and one was damaged.

Shortly after I posted those photos, Mrs. Emily McEnery Cox contacted me via Facebook. She wanted to make a contribution to help in bringing the McEnery Garden back to a beautiful spot for wildlife. I thought she'd send a few dollars, which would be well-appreciated.

I had never thought of Facebook postings as a means of funding projects. However, I recently received a check in the amount of \$1000 from Mrs. Emily McEnery Cox, payable to: "RGVCTMN McEnery Garden." Mrs. McEnery Cox lives in Bryan, TX, not exactly next-door to Ramsey Park!

McEnery Garden was created upon the death of Betty McEnery, at the suggestion of Sue Griffin Snider, who suggested plantings in Ramsey Park as a way for friends and family to honor Betty. It was the first spot in Ramsey to have benches, the first to have a birdbath and a permanent bird-feeding platform. Frank Wiseman, Diann Ballesteros, Sharon Roesler, and I were insistent upon having the permanent features for visitor comfort and attracting birds, in addition to native plantings.

Until receiving Mrs. Cox's check, I had mostly considered "Friends of Ramsey Park" Facebook page as a means for us to keep in touch with other Ramsey volunteers, to keep everyone updated on what's happening in the park.

Over the years of working at Ramsey, I've found that we rarely have to cook up fundraising schemes. It seems that just when we need something most, help or contributions seem to arrive from unexpected places.

(Of course, we're still waiting for a miracle to make the Ebony Loop trailhead more user friendly! And there are definitely places where we'd like more water access.)
Many thanks to everyone who's posted photos and comments on our Facebook page for Ramsey Park. It has been a team effort, and it's certainly been worthwhile. ♦

Frontage Volunteers

by Anita Westervelt

This is the team that worked the Ramsey Park Frontage Hills this winter under Christina Mild's tutelage:

Christina Mild	Frank Wiseman	Anita Westervelt
Karren Scheiner	Pamela Gregory	Velia Chavez
Kim Kirby	Frances Barrera	Jorge Gonzalez, Jr.
Greg Storms	Louise Wilkinson	Barbara Peet
Mario Moreno	Heidi Linnemann	Robert Archer

Guest volunteers Volker, Rolando and Chris Escamilla

And our two mascots: Bruno and Wanilla

Most of the volunteers have a favorite tool and special knack, but we all pitch in and do the tasks at hand. Greg, Mario and Karren are wizards with chainsaws; Kim, Velia, Pamela and Heidi the queen Guinea grass eradicators; Frances is wicked with a weed eater; and Louise is the master of clearing and stacking dead limbs.

Frank and Christina are our knowledgeable gurus and Frank the author of the historical photo documentation.

Greg and Mario are the ones to call when the task requires muscle and when a job requires team effort, we all pull together. All the jobs are important and the dedication of this crew is something to be commended.

My specialty is hauling brush and creating brush piles. I think brush piles are the neatest thing since sliced bread. What's more fascinating are the natural brush pile builders -- the pack rats Christina mentions in her recap of the Frontage Hills.

Working weekly in the park provides us special entertainment, observation of the natural progression of our local nature and puts us spot-on for the first delightful blooms.

Follow us on Facebook for weekly installments of our adventures in Ramsey Park.

If you would like to join our team, e-mail me at jjvanm@gmail.com. I send out weekly e-mails to the team list so volunteers know what tasks and goals we'll be working on each Thursday morning.

Photos courtesy of Frank Wiseman and Christina Mild. ♦



Before



The Guinea Grass Must Go



Bagging It Up



After



Supervisory Committee



Watering New Plantings



Pack Rat Nest



Christina's Sign

2015 TMN CONFERENCE

by Alicia Cavazos

Our 2015 TMN Conference began with my ride to Horseshoe Bay near Marble Falls, TX with Paula Parson and Sally Robey. We started our day at 5:15am on October 23 and met up with Virginia, Linda Des Rosier and Linda Butcher at the Stripes in Harlingen.

Even though Hurricane Patricia was making landfall in Mexico and we were beginning to feel the effects of it, our trip to Marble Falls was uneventful and rain free. We check in to the hotel and I meet up with the group of my first field trip to the Upper Highland Lakes Nature Center. It started raining as we get to the nature center so we were unable to hike to the locations planned. We did see the butterfly garden, the rain water collection system and awesome geological formations and archeological finds exposed in a flood in 2012. This is a private/public nature park in which the landowner sponsors survival techniques to law enforcement agencies and long distance hikes to groups. The Highland Chapter of TMN became a partner and the butterfly garden and native plants are being restored to enhance the park. After returning in the evening and after an awesome dinner, I attended a lecture on "Bird Tales for the Elderly" This was on outreach to senior citizens at nursing homes and how they too can enjoy nature.

Saturday morning between rain and clouds, my first field trip was to see a bird blind built by the Highland Lakes Master Naturalists at Inks Lake State Park. This is a beautiful bird blind that may hold up to 60 children on a field trip. The design is such that the birds are not disturbed when you get near the blind. Due to the rain, we were unable to hike the park or go to the rest of the field trip.

My afternoon trip was also changed to help us stay dry. We drove to the Canyonland National Wildlife Refuge to see the habitat restoration used to help the Black Capped Vireo and Golden Cheeked Warbler thrive. This is one of the nesting sites for these endangered birds. The biologist explained what they were doing to maintain this habitat. Again the rain coming in from Hurricane Patricia cut our hiking on this field trip.

The evening was filled with dinner and fun seeing what other TMN chapters have done. It was also a time to view the silent auction items and make bids on items.

Sunday morning October 25, after breakfast, my trip was a walk in the hotel grounds. Even though the grounds were manicured and filled with exotic plants, we did manage to find some creatures and native plants tucked away between parking lots and empty lot. This was an excellent opportunity to learn from one of the best interpreters in Texas, Craig Hensley. He gave us pointers on how to relate to people when doing nature walks.

The morning went by quick, it was time to check out and head back to the valley. As I get in the car to move it to the front to pick up Paula and Sally, it would not start. Paula got the valet parking young man to give us a jump start and got us on our way. To avoid turning off the car we used the drive through at a Dairy Queen in Johnson City and ate in the parking lot. We were on our way and drove through until the rest stop outside Jordanton. I had to make a quick stop and made the mistake of turning off the car...well, it would not start....again....No one had

jumper cables and thus no one could help us. Sally called Triple A, and they came out within an hour. We made another quick stop at Mathis to get a battery, but the guy talked us out of getting one. He said it was the alternator. Paula still got some jumper cables....just in case. We gassed up and made it home before dark. It was a fun weekend with wonderful friends. ♦

Pelican Rescue

by Linda Butcher

Larry and Janet Shriver are members who have recently come back to our organization after living out of state for a few years. He has been appointed the new Coastal Warden in charge of Green Island and other nesting islands in the Lower Laguna Madre.

A few weeks ago we were on our way to Green Island to address some issues and decided to take a side trip up an inlet off the Arroyo to do some birding. Larry spotted a White Pelican that appeared to have an injured leg. He jumped out of the boat and was able to catch the bird. Upon returning to the boat, an examination revealed it had a hook in the web of one foot and a hook in its throat pouch. Both legs were tangled in fishing line as well. Larry was able to remove both hooks and the fishing line while I held the bird still. After checking for other injuries, we were able to release the pelican. As he swam away he turned and looked at us as if to say thank you. I was glad Janet was able to document this amazing event with her camera. This is just one of the reasons why we are Master Naturalists. ♦



Removing the fishing line



Removing hook from foot



Removing hook from throat pouch



All better

RETURNING to OUR FIRST CHAPTER PROJECT

by Christina Mild

In 2003, RGVCTMN conducted the first in a series of chapter projects by planting a number of trees and shrubs along the "frontage hills" of Ramsey Nature Park. The vegetation of the area is not highly diverse: guinea grass, mesquite trees and prickly pear. You wouldn't describe it as having interesting "landscape features" other than hills and depressions.

These are hills and depressions of the old Harlingen dump, an area visible from Loop 499, Ed Carey Dr., traversed by thousands and thousands of people on their way to and from the airport.

To water transplants in 2003, hoses were strung from the only faucet anywhere nearby, and attempts were made at regular watering. Water pressure was pitiful, but several of those transplants survived, among them: Trecul's Yucca, a white-blooming Cenizo and some purple Cenizo, several *Lantana horrida*, many ebonies, several cedar elms, and some anacua. There is only one huisache growing in the area, an ancient specimen by the size of it. Retama grows here and there; it seems unlikely that they were planted.

When the new hike and bike trail in front of Ramsey was completed last fall, I decided to study the frontage hills to see what condition the 2003 transplants were in. I found them, of course, nearly buried in guinea grass. It was simply a cryin' shame! I determined to clear the guinea grass away, and was exceedingly pleased to find that other volunteers were willing to help.

Thus began a year-long project: spraying guinea grass, removing dead guinea grass, spreading wildflower and other seed in cleared areas, transplanting things during wet weather, and many good finds!

There's quite a lot of buffalo grass (the marvelous grass which stays short and soft), lots and lots of Plains Bristlegrass (*Setaria*, a gorgeous lime-green clump grass with great bird seed), a few other good native grasses, at least three sizeable Wolfberry shrubs, and a bit of Amargosa

(*Castela erecta*). The largest colony of Buffalo grass which I've seen anywhere in the valley is up on top of the highest hill we've discovered. At the old city dump. Go figure. We have no doubt the place was/is a dump; we find old bottles and assorted semi-buried trash everywhere.

Last spring, I also concentrated on transplanting species which need little water to survive. These included Night-Blooming Cereus (abundant in my yard), and orange and red blooming Prickly Pear, from which I harvested pads inside Ramsey Park. In time, both species should bring some interest to the landscape along those hills. I intend to plant many more red and orange-blooming prickly pear pads, as soon as they bloom so I can find them.

I also transplanted *Ephedra antisyphylitica*, Candelilla, which is so rare that every locally wild specimen is known by GPS location. It's in a dry, sunny, well-drained spot, where I hope it will spread into a colony. The two Candelilla specimens are surrounded by Texas Stonecrop, a favorite of rabbits. Critters have nibbled on these plants, but they survive. Hopefully they will spread. Stonecrop is hostplant for the Xami Hairstreak butterfly.

Because last spring was so wet, the 2015 RGVCTMN class volunteers who trained at Ramsey Park were able to transplant several native species from my "arroyo" backyard to those frontage hills. Eight or nine Fall Mistflower transplants grew quite large and bloomed for many months. A number of other species were transplanted with less success, primarily because they were eaten to oblivion in days. Hopefully some will resurface from the root if we ever have rain!

We became much better acquainted with the packrat while working on those hills. We'd often see a packrat scurrying from one place to another. Their underground tunnels provide protection for many other animals, and the packrat provides food for many predators.

One of the things we transplanted in many places were Agave "bulbils", young Agave plants. Most were eaten almost entirely away before we learned that Agave leaves are a favorite of the packrat. We're still planting agaves; we just have to recognize that we're planting packrat food. The agaves which manage to grow to full size will offer some protection to blooming Trecul's Yucca, which is often pulled down by thieves illegally harvesting the blooms. It's pretty hard to walk thru a full-sized and well-armed Agave. (We've mostly been planting *Agave angustifolia*, which isn't native, but grows well and has been readily available. If anyone has offshoots of *Agave americana*, which is native and much larger, we'd prefer to plant that species. The packrat eats both without a seeming preference.)

This spring, despite the current drought, those transplanted trees from the "first chapter project" are looking great. They're finally able to receive the full rays of the sun.

Over many months, I've collected bagged leaves wherever I encounter them. On several occasions, I've given an address and other volunteers have picked up the leaves and transported them over. Spreading leaves over the barren, dry, clay soil will help to absorb rain and increase soil porosity and fertility. Among the leaves are seeds and acorns which the packrat and other critters may use for food. I've also collected wild olive fruit and acorns (from parking lots) specifically for the packrat.

A Brownies troop was looking for a project and parent "workers" were part of the package. Heidi Linneman and I organized a planting. Guinea grass was dead on a relatively wide, flat expanse. Parents removed the dead guinea grass and kids picked up sticks and helped to move dead guinea grass away. Then the brownies learned to plant 3 native plant species from the seed or fruit: anacahuita, Mountain Torchwood, and Fiddlewood. Each seed was planted to a different depth.

Both kids and parents learned about those 3 species and how they provide for animals. They also learned about scarifying seed. Mike Heep provided planting information. Nothing has sprouted, of course, during these long dry months, but in time, who knows? Hopefully those families will be able to admire the fruits of their labors in the not too distant future.

We've encountered rabbits, a few snakes, a small Texas Tortoise and many lizards. At present, we've removed much of their cover: large mountains of guinea grass. Hopefully our efforts will improve their habitat over the long term.

This spring we transplanted a few new shrubs and trees, to add species which were not already present. These include spring bloomers like Guajillo, Palo Verde, Huisachillo, Anacahuita, *Caesalpinia mexicana*, Tenaza, and three Texas Torchwoods. In advance of planting, I ordered "cages" to protect each from predation. We partially buried the cages and secured them into the ground with stakes, to keep animals from burrowing underneath. So far, the cages have worked.

We've been watering twice weekly with gallon jugs we carry over. Because we can park on a wide verge very close to our new plantings, we don't have to carry water all that far. Since several people have begun to bring water, we've also been watering the few wildflower seedlings which have arisen from last year's seeding. So far, we have blooming Cowpen Daisy, Cat Whiskers, and one tiny Coastal Germander. In such a dry spring, we're happy for every tiny wildflower seedling which bursts forth.

Over time, this project should bring beauty to the roadside. It has served as an excellent outdoor classroom for the 2015 RGVCTMN class of trainees, as so many different methods have been employed in seeking to restore and enhance habitat and diversity. Because Ramsey's parking lot was under construction for several months, the "frontage hills" provided an alternate place for us to work and learn together in the best outdoor working weather of the year.

I intend to continue this project for as long as I am able. Many people have stopped to thank us for our efforts, and friends have commented that they are noticing and appreciating the improvements our efforts have wrought. ♦

2015 MILESTONES

by Jolaine Lanehart, Membership Director

Milestones are awarded for volunteer hours accumulated while you are a member of TMN. All hours must be with an approved partner, activity, or approved by the Board. The RGVCTMN awards a 100 hour chapter pin. The remaining pins are those sanctioned and provided by the State TMN office and are for hours totaling 250, 500, 1000, 2500, 4000, 5000, and 10,000. When the 4000 hour milestone is reached, the individual is also awarded the Presidential Volunteer Service award.

Milestones are typically earned sometime during the month before they are awarded at General Meeting. Below is a list of the milestones awarded by month for 2015:

JANUARY (milestones achieved during December, 2014)

100 Hours: Thadea Corkill

250 Hours: Sylvia Casselman, Thadea Corkill, Donna Horcher, Martha Jones

4000 Hours: Mary Jo Bogatto

FEBRUARY

100 Hours: Sara Reibman, Renee Rubin

250 Hours: Kristen Kline, Gloria Nelson

500 Hours: Chad Wilmoth

2500 Hours: Jim Najvar

4000 Hours: Jolaine Lanehart

MARCH

100 Hours: Lynne Tate, Carolyn Woughter

250 Hours: Gail Dantzker

500 Hours: Mary Bennett, Barbara Lindley

1000 Hours: John Tierney

APRIL

100 Hours: Bob Binney, Keith Foerste, Greg Storms

250 Hours: Bob Binney, Joni Gillis

May

100 Hours: Brigitte Goza, Norma Trevino

1000 Hours: Patti Pitcock

JUNE

100 Hours: Pamela Gregory, Barbara Peet, Maile Worrell

250 Hours: David Foerste

July

100 Hours: Tamie Bulow, Mary Jarvis, Tim Jarvis, Lorena Longoria, Karren Scheiner, Jaime Zepeda

250 Hours: Ed Langley, Cris Wise

August

100 Hours: Kit Doncaster

500 Hours: Bob Binney

September

250 Hours: Greg Storms, Maile Worrell

1000 Hours: Drew Bennie, Mary Ann Tous, Anita Westervelt

October

250 Hours: Norma Trevino

1000 Hours: Heidi Linnemann

2500 Hours: Linda Butcher, Virginia Vineyard

November

500 Hours: Susan Kerens

1000 Hours: Joyce Hamilton

December

500 Hours: Gale Dantzker, Keith Foerste

January, 2016 (milestones achieved during December 2015)

100 Hours: Paul Cardile, Marilyn Lorenz, Ullisa Zepeda

250 Hours: Barbara Peet

5000 Hours: Jolaine Lanehart

2016 MILESTONES

February

100 Hours: Gary Tate

1000 Hours: Bob Binney, Barbara Lindley

March

100 Hours: Velia Chavez, Pete Moore

250 Hours: Beverly Anastasoff, Marilyn Lorenz, Renee Rubin

2500 Hours: Carolyn Cardile

2015 INITIAL CERTIFICATIONS and RECERTIFICATIONS

by Jolaine Lanehart. Membership Director

This has been an exciting year of growth and change for our chapter! Record numbers enrolled in our January 2015 training classes and many new members met the requirements for graduation and for TMN certification. New members of the 2015 class who have not yet certified still have time to earn certification. Once a member has graduated, he/she needs to complete 8 hours of advanced training and 40 hours of volunteer service within 15 months of the start of their class (or, approximately, until the end of the 2016 class).

Here is the list of members, by the month they earned their **Initial Certification**:

APRIL

Class of 2014

Deborah McCoy

Lower Valley Class

Bob Binney
Tamie Bulow
Diana Douglass
Keith Foerste
Pamela G. Gregory
Mary Jarvis
Tim Jarvis
Kim Kirby
Marilyn Lorenz
Pete Moore
Barbara Peet
Karren Scheiner
Greg Storms
Norma Trevino
Maile Worrell
Jaime Zepeda

April (con't)

Upper Valley Class

Marilanda Caballero
David R. Hayner
Foss Jones
Glen M. Robbins
Linda J. Robbins
Jessica Tanguma
Dee West-Lipscomb

JUNE

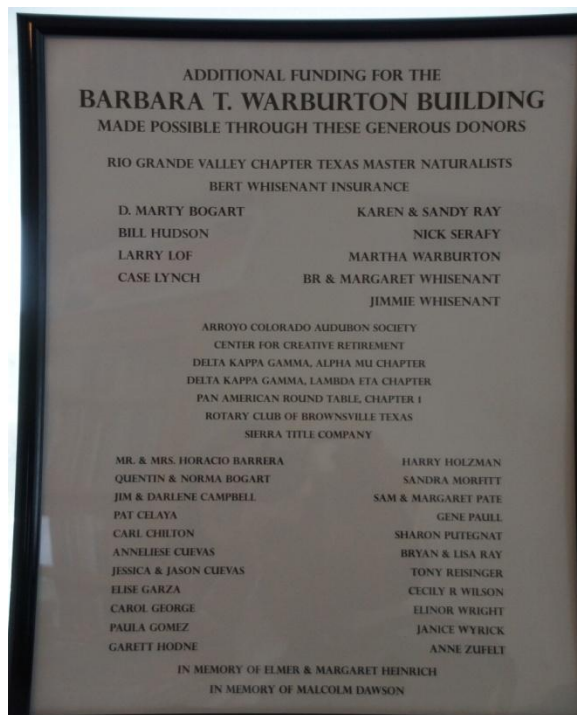
Velia Chavez
Miranda Caquias
Marie Farchik

JULY

Ullisa Uribe-Zepeda

DECEMBER

David Lohse
Hunter Lohse



Plaque recognizing RGVCTMN support



Jim Najvar and Paula Parson presenting check to Seth Patterson, manager of Sabal Palm Sanctuary

2015 RECERTIFICATION

Eighty-three members reported at least 40 volunteer service hours and 8 advanced training hours during 2015 to meet the requirements for recertification. This includes 15 newly certified members who reported 40 volunteer service hours and 8 advanced training hours above the Initial Certification to recertify. The 2015 pin is the Texas Bluebonnet.

The new year means a new cycle for recertification - another 40 volunteer service and 8 advanced training hours will earn you the 2016 pin, the Guadalupe Bass. Be sure to get those hours recorded.

Below are those who recertified in 2015:

Alf, Marilu	Gregory, Pamela	Paz, Jimmy
Allstot, Wendie	Groepper, Gregg	Peet, Barbara
Archer, Robert	Groepper, Julie	Pitcock, Patti
Barrera, Frances	Hamilton, Joyce	Platt, Kamala
Bennett, Mary	Howard, Cristin	Ramke, Richard
Bennie, Drew	Hoyt, Ruth	Ramos, Adrian
Binney, Robert	Jarvis, Mary	Rausch, Carol
Bogatto, Mary Jo	Jarvis, Tim	Regan, Sharon
Borrayo, Sherry	Junkin, David	Robey, Sarah
Bulow, Tamie	Kerens, Susan	Rubin, Renee
Butcher, Linda	Kirby, Kim	Scheiner, Karren
Cardile, Carolyn	Kline, Kristen	Slagle, Sharon
Cardile, Paul	Lanehart, Jolaine	Storms, Greg
Cavazos, Alicia	Langley, Ed	Svetanoff, Judy
Cornett, Pamela	Lindley, Barbara	Thaxter, John
Culp, Larry	Linnemann, Heidi	Tierney, John
Dantzker, Gail	Longoria, Lorena	Tous, Mary Ann
Des Rosiers, Linda	Lorenz, Marilyn	Vineyard, Virginia
Doncaster, Kit	Mattei, Eileen	Westervelt, Anita
Douglass, Diana	McGonigle, Linda	Wilmoth, Chad
Elium, Tommie	Montalvo, Cecilia	Wilmoth, Statira
Foerste, Keith	Moreno, Mario E.	Wilson, Sherry
Fowler, Joyce	Najvar, Jim	Wise, Cristela
Fowler, Steven	Nelson, Gloria	Wiseman, Frank
Garcia, Jorge A.	Osborne, Louis	Worrell, Maile
Garcia, Mary Jean	Owen, Cheryl	Woughter, Carolyn
Gillis, Joni	Parson, Paula	Zepeda, Jaime
Goza, Brigitte.		Zepeda, Ullisa

MILKWEED

by Marsha Ralston Wood

As a new Texas Master Naturalist trainer, I decided to volunteer at the National Butterfly Center in Mission. My task there was to make seed boxes, fill them with dirt and plant milkweed seeds. The center has been given a grant to help save the Monarch by producing 40,000 seedlings and then distribute them to different refuges and sites through-out the Rio Grande Valley.

My curiosity led to some interesting discoveries. In 2015 the U.S. Government pledged \$3.2 million to save the Monarch Butterfly . The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has the Monarch under review to determine whether to classify it as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. The species has experienced a 90 percent decline in population, with the lowest recorded population occurring in 2013-2014.

Most Monarch Butterflies spend the winter in Mexico where they find the Oyamel fir tree and hibernate there. With illegal harvest of the forest and Global Warming occurring this has been a challenge for the Monarch.

The Monarchs lay their eggs exclusively on the Asclepias (milkweed plant). Conversion of the prairies to cropland and the increase use of weed killer have greatly reduced the extent of the milkweed. Worldwide there are over 200 species of Asclepias growing and in the U.S. alone over 100 species grow native. Locally we have 6 or 7 species (annuals and perennials).

Education is the key to help this project to be a success and all of us can help by planting several species of milkweed and gather the seed pods and replant in the spring. ♦