



# 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 Linda Butcher*

Hello Master Naturalists,

We made it through another hot dry summer. I felt like my hand was glued to a water hose. I'm looking forward to cooler weather that will make volunteering much more enjoyable.

Our TMN state convention is Oct 23 through Oct 25. I have never been before, and I'm looking forward to the field trips and speakers. If you have never been, you should think about going. It will be held at Horseshoe Bay Resort near Marble Falls, Texas.

If you've missed the last few meetings, we've added a couple of activities. We're celebrating birthdays with snacks and have added a door-prize drawing. The tickets are \$1.00 each and, you're not limited to just one because the funds from the door prize will go to the scholarship fund. So far the response has been good, and some wonderful prizes have been donated, including a Richard Moore video and a beautiful Tony Bennett framed print. For those who don't know Tony, he is a local artist who has done artwork for at least two of the birding festival T-shirts. He will also have an exhibition of his work in Harlingen starting in November.

The RGV Birding Festival is just around the corner in November. If you are interested in birding, there are still spaces available to hear speakers and go on tours. TMN will have an information booth there so you will have an opportunity to volunteer as well.

Remember that the end of the year will be here before you know it; cooler days are ahead, so get out there and get in those volunteer hours.

Linda ♦

## **2015 Initial Certifications**

*by Jolaine Lanehart*

This has been an exciting year of growth and change for our chapter! We had record numbers for our January 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 certified:

### **APRIL**

Deborah McCoy (class of 2014)

#### ***Upper Valley Class***

Marilanda Caballero

David R. Hayner

Foss Jones

Glen M. Robbins

Linda J. Robbins

Jessica Tanguma

Dee West-Lipscomb

#### ***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

### **JUNE**

Velia Chavez

Miranda Caquias

Marie Farchik

### **JULY**

Ullisa Uribe-Zepeda (*to be awarded at October meeting*)

To all new members: I want to once again welcome you to our organization! Our continued growth depends on you, and we are so happy you signed on for this adventure! If you are a new member and want to become a certified member of TMN, please contact any of our officers or myself for assistance. With fall bringing somewhat cooler weather, the number of volunteer opportunities will increase significantly. So come join us, learn a little along the way, and have some fun! ♦

## **Successful First Outdoor Photography Workshop**

*by Anita Westervelt*

The idea was presented at a board meeting two short months ago for our chapter to give a series of photography workshops throughout the year. It is hoped that they will generate funds to replace the annual raffle. Raffles are fun but take an enormous amount of work, and not everyone appreciates a good raffle.

The RGVCTMN board is always interested in fund raising ideas. The more money we make, the more we distribute to worthy partner causes throughout the Lower Rio Grande Valley. On Saturday, September 12, we gave the first four-hour Outdoor Photography Workshop to 16 participants at a cost of \$50 each. Estero Llano Grande, in Weslaco, generously let us use their facility. For this gesture, we presented them a check for \$150, which included park pass fees for the students and workshop staff.



Ruth Hoyt and Greg Storms facilitated the class. The workshop included a PowerPoint presentation showing many of Ruth's beautiful photographs, instruction, field time, and critiques, and it ended with a question and answer session.

Instruction included holding and bracing cameras to get optimum stability for more sharply focused photographs. Students picked up the technique immediately.



During field time, students were given a chance to practice what they learned with roving field assistance from Ruth, Greg, Jimmy Paz, and Anita Westervelt.



The day was overcast, and the torrential rains of the previous night held off. Students photographed from the covered deck outside the classroom and then ventured out to the boardwalks. A Black-bellied Whistling Duck on a snag in the wetlands with chicks hovering at her feet was a popular target for the practicing photographers, as were grackles and an elusive Gallinule.

Snails and olive tree and silver nightshade blooms made great models for close-up work. Many of the students learned to use their cameras' manual settings for the first time and remarked at the difference it made in their photographs.



A variety of photography equipment was used, from phone cameras to point-and-shoot to professional gear. No matter the camera, everyone learned something new about their equipment and picked up pointers to improve their photography.





After the field work, each class member chose their best shot, with the help of Ruth, Greg, and Daena. The photos were downloaded and then shown on the big screen for critique.



Anita Westervelt found a great spooky mesquite tree to photograph using a camera phone on semi close-up to create this painterly effect.



A big thank you goes to the Photography Workshop Committee, chaired by Heidi Linnemann, and to the staffers who helped make our first workshop a success: Assistant Chair Tamie Bulow, Virginia Vineyard, Paula Parsons, Anita Westervelt, and Ruth's protégé and assistant, Daena Ciomperlik. Other committee members are Alicia Cavazos, Gail Dantzker, Barbara Peet, Patti Pitcock, Jolaine Lanehart, and Barbara Lindley.

Its director has offered Camp Lula Sams for our next photography workshop. Planning will begin shortly. Anyone who would like to join the Photography Workshop Committee is certainly welcome.



After expenses, the total to the RGVCTM treasury is \$585. A special thank you goes to Jimmy Paz and Jim Najvar for implementing PayPal on the RGVCTMN website. This workshop was the beta test and it was successful. ♦

## **Milestones**

*by Jolaine Lanehart*

I want to acknowledge our members who turn in their volunteer and advanced training hours. Hours are used by the State TMN office to seek funding and grants, as well as to document the impact TMN activity has made on the State of Texas.

Currently we are reporting hours using Google Sheets on the Cloud (with a few exceptions) and I encourage you to submit your hours monthly or at least every few months so that you contribute to the grand totals and, possibly, earn milestones. Should you be 1 or 9 months behind on reporting, please know that you can still report hours earned in 2015 up until December 31. However, the later you wait, the more difficult it can become to log your hours and ensure you receive credit. If you need assistance, please do not hesitate to reach out and ask for it. I am here to facilitate reporting and will work with you on the current reporting system as well as the roll-out of the new State system, coming in January.

Below is a list of the milestones awarded by month so far for 2015:

### **JANUARY**

100 Hours: Thadea Corkill

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

4,000 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

4,000 Hours: Jolaine Lanehart

### **MARCH**

100 Hours: Lynne Tate, Carolyn Woughter

250 Hours: Gail Dantzker

500 Hours: Mary Bennett, Barbara Lindley

1,000 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

1,000 Hours: Patti Pitcock

## **JUNE**

100 Hours: Pamela Gregory, Barbara Peet, Maile Worrell

250 Hours: David Foerste

The following milestones will be awarded at the October meeting. Sally Robey, membership chair, prepares the pins for presentation at the general meetings (*thank you so much, Sally*). We prefer to award milestones as soon as they are earned; however, both of us were out of the Valley during most of the summer.

## **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

1,000 Hours: Drew Bennie, Mary Ann Tous, Anita Westervelt

## **October:**

(To be announced...you just might be one of these members...get those hours reported!)

Remember: 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, 1,000, 2,500, 4,000, 5,000, and 10,000. When the 4,000-hour milestone is reached, the individual is also awarded the Presidential Volunteer Service award.

If you have any questions, or need assistance: [ljlanehart@gmail.com](mailto:ljlanehart@gmail.com). ♦

## **Finding a Bird Blind in Ramsey Park**

*by Anita Westervelt, photos by Anita Westervelt and Frank Wiseman*

The park itself hid the original bird blind from passersby off the Upper Mown Trail near Ani Cut in Harlingen's Hugh Ramsey Nature Park. One June day, Christina Mild and Mario Moreno pushed through tall Guinea grass and dense thorn scrub to see if the blind could be salvaged. Litter strewn in and around the structure hinted at nefarious activity – probably not of the bird-watching variety.

While others in the Thursday team of Ramsey volunteers worked elsewhere, Mario blazed a trail to the blind. At the end of the work day, he called our attention to it. During the next weeks, we concentrated on clearing and revitalizing the bird blind area.

When Mario first tackled it, the vegetation was snarly with twining granjeno winding tough, vine-like thorny branches that tangled with gangly, over-long meandering mesquite limbs, both species vying for sun and space.



The dastardly tree duo created a powerful thicket, competing to see which would be more powerful. The match was pretty much equal, but neither was a match for Mario's chainsaw and a group of volunteer warriors. Mario's way to blaze a trail is to look for the path of least resistance and chainsaw toward the objective. It is highly successful.

Karren Scheiner, Greg Storms, Tim Jarvis, and Mario make a good team with chain saws, extension saws, hand saws and loppers. Nothing goes to waste. Large logs are cut into manageable sizes to line gardens and paths. Smaller branches make forest brush piles for critter use. Vegetation is used for green mulch in barren spots. Tim, an engineer, is great at constructing brush piles. Mary Jarvis, Heidi Linnemann, and Anita Westervelt are really hard workers when it comes to carting debris off for its future use to eventually break down and add nutrients to the soil.













During the final clearing, a private benefactor happened by and offered our guru, Frank Wiseman, zizotes plants, *Asclepias oenotheroides*, a milkweed previously not established in Ramsey Park. One of our team goals has been to establish colonies of this hard-to-find Rio Grande Valley native plant, and locating plantings had been unsuccessful.

We readily accepted the generous offer and the next week planted the two dozen donated zizotes, deeply watering them in, and covering the area with a smattering of mulch that we were able to scrounge up. The zizotes established amazingly quickly, blooming by the following week and beginning to form seed pods. Heidi shared a couple dozen pigeon berry plants from her butterfly garden and planted them along the new path to the bird blind.



Frank offered up the name, Zizotes Circle, to the renovated area. We heartily agreed. Across the trail, and now visible from the blind, is a savannah of spring, summer and fall-blooming butterfly nectar plants rife with Mexican bluewing, queen, Julia heliconia, sulphur, and monarch butterflies.



Before long, we hope to have a water feature for the olive sparrows that frequent the clearing. ♦

## **Trip to Davis Mountains -- 2015**

*by Alicia Cavazos*

Our trip to Davis Mountains State Park starts on Sunday morning July 19, 2015, at the Tourist center in Harlingen at 6:00 am. We meet Paula Parson and Tony to caravan to the Davis Mountains. Paula is driving with Janet. Tony has Cissy Montalvo and Joyce Hamilton riding with him, and I ride with Virginia Vinyard. Heidi Linneman and Linda Butcher are about an hour behind. We plan minimal stops, so we have packed lunch, which we enjoy while bird watching at a rest stop west of San Antonio.

As we arrive at the Davis Mountains and check in, our agenda is ready. Other members of our RGVCTMN have arrived and have been out checking out the beautiful park: Jim and Joyce Fowler, Marilyn and Chuck Lorenz, Mary and Tim. We meet Jolaine and Jim, who host a



delicious hot dog and fixin's supper for us at the interpretive center, with an informative talk about the geology of west Texas by Elisa Barton, who works for TPWD.

Our groups split on July 20<sup>th</sup> for those who want to hike Modesta Canyon or hike a less strenuous trip at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Center. I opt for the Modesta Canyon, which is not disappointing but very strenuous. The geology of the mountain is fabulous with the different rock formations.



In the afternoon we attend a talk on the mountain lion, presented by Bert, a wildlife biologist with TPWD. It is very informative.



July 21<sup>st</sup> starts early at the scenic overlook of the Davis Mountains State Park. We hike about ¼ mile to find the Montezuma Quail, a specialty bird of west Texas. This bird is very elusive, and many people make a trip to the Davis Mountains to hear it only and not see it. We are lucky because not only does the bird show itself, it poses for everyone. We are a large group of about 20 people.



In the afternoon we attend a presentation on solar flares at the McDonald's Observatory. The tour is cut short due to the power going out from a rainstorm, but we do get to see one of the three telescopes.

Our final day is at the Nature conservancy where we watch Kelly Bryan band hummingbirds. There are the usual Black-chinned, but we are lucky to see a Lucifer Hummingbird, an early migrant to the area. We make a brief unguided tour of Madera Canyon, where we see a White-breasted Nuthatch. We spend the afternoon at Lake Balmorhea, where we see the Clark Grebe with chicks and the Scaled Quail. These birds are also specialty birds for this area.



It is a fabulous trip, enjoyed by all. Anyone can do as much as they want or as little as they want. There is plenty of wildlife to watch, or we just sit on the back porch of the Indian Lodge and take in the scenery.



## **We All Live in a Watershed**

*by Anita Westervelt*

A watershed is an area of land that water flows across, through, or under as it drains to a river, stream, lake, ocean or other body of water. With that definition, it's easy to understand how even our own backyard can affect the quality of water in our rivers, resacas, and gulf.





Five Rio Grande Valley Chapter Texas Master Naturalists joined a diverse audience of more than 60 federal, state, county, city, and regional participants at a recent Texas Watershed Steward Workshop at the Rancho Viejo Resort and Country Club. Virginia Vineyard, Barbara Peet, Tim and Mary Jarvis, and Anita Westervelt got the T-shirt, bag, books, and certificate for their attendance.

Entertaining speakers from the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service's Department of Soil and Crop Sciences in College Station, TX, presented the four-hour training.

The workshop was geared toward individual and locally organized watershed protection and management activities. Most of us—from Rangerville, Texas, to the Gulf of Mexico—live in the Brownsville-Resaca Watershed, with the Arroyo Colorado Watershed within spitting distance to the north. The Brownsville Resaca watershed drains an area of approximately 419 square miles or 267,993 acres.

Flowing water carries a lot of energy. It also carries away with it some of what it travels over and through. Think about it flowing through our urban streets and litter-lined roads, carrying oils, garbage, and fertilizers and pesticides from lawns and gardens.

“One gallon of gasoline destroys one million gallons of water for human consumption,” announced one of the speakers.

From agriculture, consider heavy-duty fertilizers and pesticides; from forests, animal activity. The instructors provided regional statistics for Cameron County's potential animal participation in the water run-off equation. Their estimates for four-legged inhabitants included 14,424 cattle, 465 hogs, 704 sheep and lambs, in addition to an unknown number of pets, deer, feral hogs and other creatures of the day and night. Just something to think about as water travels along a watershed.

Something individuals can do to help lessen the amount of chemicals entering the water table is to use fertilizer wisely, according to the instructors. Most people overuse fertilizer, we were informed. An option is to get soil-tested and then fertilize only for what is needed. For pesticides, use only enough to solve the problem; don't over-kill. Dispose of old or unused chemicals at local hazardous material collection events instead of tossing them out into the environment.

The Texas Watershed Steward program offers an online course with certificate at the following website: <http://tws.tamu.edu/online-training-course/>. More information about watershed management may be found at <http://tws.tamu.edu>. ♦

## Check It Out

Congratulations and gratitude to Jimmy Paz for his redesign of the RGVCTMN website – <http://www.rgvctmn.org>. Explore its offerings for important news articles, blogs, new class enrollment and scholarship forms, electronic payments, and a Sabal Palm live cam. ♦

## Announcements

from Javier de Leon, via <http://www.RGVCTMN.org>

### Special Events and Festivals

#### October

- **October 17<sup>th</sup>** – Autumn Nights Fundraiser  
Organizer: Frontera Audubon  
Contact: Sarah Williams < [fronteraaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:fronteraaudubon@gmail.com) >
- **October 17<sup>th</sup>** - Rio Reforestation  
Organizer: U.S. Fish and Wildlife  
Contact: Laura de la Garza < [Laura\\_delagarza@fws.gov](mailto:Laura_delagarza@fws.gov) >
- **October 23<sup>rd</sup> and October 24<sup>th</sup>** - Planta Native Festival  
Organizer: Quinta Mazatlan  
Contact: Colleen Hook < [chook@mcallen.net](mailto:chook@mcallen.net) >
- **October 24<sup>th</sup>** - Spooky Science Fest  
Organizer: Estero Llano Grande State Park  
Contact: Javier de Leon < [Javier.deleon@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:Javier.deleon@tpwd.texas.gov) > or Jose Uribe  
[joe.uribe@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:joe.uribe@tpwd.texas.gov)
- **October 31<sup>st</sup> – November 3<sup>rd</sup>** - 2015 Texas Butterfly Festival  
Organizer: National Butterfly Center  
Contact: Marianna Trevino-Wright [marianna@nationalbutterflycenter.org](mailto:marianna@nationalbutterflycenter.org)

#### November

- **November 4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup>** – Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival  
Organizer: RGVBF  
Contact: [info@rgvbf.org](mailto:info@rgvbf.org)
- **November 8<sup>th</sup>** - Gratitude Luncheon for the Weslaco Armory, Police and Fire Departments  
Organizer: Valley Nature Center  
Contact: Hollie Johnston < [hjohnston@valleynaturecenter.org](mailto:hjohnston@valleynaturecenter.org) >
- **November 14<sup>th</sup>** – Brew in the Woods  
Organizer: Valley Nature Center  
Contact: Hollie Johnston < [hjohnston@valleynaturecenter.org](mailto:hjohnston@valleynaturecenter.org) >
- **November 14<sup>th</sup>** – Migration Celebration  
Organizer: Edinburg Scenic Wetlands and World Birding Center  
Contact: Marisa Oliva < [moliva@cityofedinburg.com](mailto:moliva@cityofedinburg.com) >
- **November 14<sup>th</sup>** – Nature Chaser 5K  
Organizer: Estero Llano Grande State Park  
Contact: Jose Uribe < [joe.uribe@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:joe.uribe@tpwd.texas.gov) >

#### December

- **December 5<sup>th</sup>** – Holiday Kick-off  
Organizer: Bentsen – Rio Grande Valley State Park  
Contact: Roy Rodriguez < [roy.rodriguez@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:roy.rodriguez@tpwd.texas.gov) >
- **December 5<sup>th</sup>** - Noche de Arte  
Organizer: Valley Nature Center  
Contact: Hollie Johnston < [hjohnston@valleynaturecenter.org](mailto:hjohnston@valleynaturecenter.org) >

- **December 12<sup>th</sup>** – Jolly Night Hike  
Organizer: Resaca de la Palma State Park  
Contact: Gloria Alcaraz < [Gloria.alcaraz@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:Gloria.alcaraz@tpwd.texas.gov) >
- **December 19<sup>th</sup>** – Buñuelo Bites and Christmas Lights  
Organizer: Estero Llano Grande State Park  
Contact: Jose Uribe < [joe.uribe@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:joe.uribe@tpwd.texas.gov) >
- **December 20<sup>th</sup>** - Ho Ho Holiday Party  
Organizer: Valley Nature Center  
Contact: Hollie Johnston < [hjohnston@valleynaturecenter.org](mailto:hjohnston@valleynaturecenter.org) >

*from Anita Westervelt*

### **Volunteer ventures**

#### **Now**

- The South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center is gearing up for Winter Texans to arrive. They are looking for volunteers who would like to help lead the bird walks. Training is available if you're not sure you know enough yet. E-mail [p42339@aol.com](mailto:p42339@aol.com)
- The gift shop at Laguna Atascosa is looking for assistance in their gift shop. Call 956-748-3607 if you are interested.

#### **October – April**

- Harlingen's Hugh Ramsey Nature Park is offering free Nature Tours on the first Friday of each month, 9 to 11 am. Enjoy an easy ¼-mile walk on a caliche trail. Call: 956-748-3190 or e-mail: [rgvctmntreasurer@gmail.com](mailto:rgvctmntreasurer@gmail.com)
- Harlingen's Hugh Ramsey Nature Park is offering free Bird Walks on the third Friday of each month, 8 to 11 am. Call: 956-748-3190 or e-mail: [rgvctmntreasurer@gmail.com](mailto:rgvctmntreasurer@gmail.com)

### **Booth Events with the Outreach Committee**

- **November 3** for three hours (1 – 4 p.m.) at the Welcome Home RGV event at the McAllen Convention Center. RV park social directors network with non-profit organizations scouting for activities for Winter Texans. This is a good opportunity to get the word out about our chapter as well as promote various presentations that our members have available. If you have prepared talks that you would like to present at RV Parks, please e-mail [jjvanm@gmail.com](mailto:jjvanm@gmail.com)
- **November 4-8** – Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival at the Harlingen Convention Center. Check out all the activities available at <http://www.rgvbf.org>. Sponsor booths offer an array of binoculars, scopes, cameras and lenses, books and myriad of other fun things. RGVCTMN will have a booth during the event. If you've not done this before, it is a fun opportunity to network with people, talk about our program and give out handouts. Call 956-245-0177 to sign up to help work the booth.

*from Richard Ramke*

#### **October**

**October 17 (October 31 rain date).** USFWS will host the 24<sup>th</sup> annual Rio Reforestation on October 17<sup>th</sup> (rain date of October 31<sup>st</sup>) on the Ranchito tract of Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge land north of San Benito. The Ranchito tract has been identified as critical to establishment of a wildlife corridor that would allow migration of creatures such as

ocelots along the river and east toward a small known population in Cameron County, making reforestation of it especially important to USFWS. Rio Reforestation invites volunteers from the public – typically about 1,000 each year -- to plant seedlings on one of the prepared tracts scheduled for re-vegetation as part of the USFWS Farmland Phase-out and Re-Vegetation Program, and it is the only public outreach event associated with the Lower Rio Grande Valley NWR. For more information, see

[http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Lower\\_Rio\\_Grande\\_Valley/visitor\\_activities/special\\_events.html](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Lower_Rio_Grande_Valley/visitor_activities/special_events.html) ♦

