



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

President's Message

I hope everyone has had a great summer. My summer was not filled with exotic trips just staying around the home place and enjoying friends, family and nature.

I am looking forward to cooler weather and hopefully some much needed rain. I really enjoy the autumn months. It seems like I can get so much more work done at that time of year like a squirrel gathering nuts for winter.

If you haven't made reservations for the TMN state conference, you need to do so as soon as possible. A group of us went last year and had a great time. As a bonus we had some awesome educational opportunities with the seminars we attended. It's really enjoyable to associate with others interested in nature.

My two years as president is winding down to a close and I would like to thank everyone for your support, cooperation, and kind words of encouragement. Thank you to all the board members and committee chairs, we have had a very productive year. I would also like to thank Susan Kerens for all her hard work as hostess for supplying us with food and drink for our meetings. She will be stepping down as well. If you are interested in either of these positions or any other opportunity to serve please contact myself or Alicia Cavazos.

I want to remind members again that time is running out to get your volunteer hours completed to re-certify. As the cooler weather arrives volunteering will be much more fun. We have so many different opportunities that there should be something of interest to everyone. All you need to do is check our partner list; select where you would like to volunteer and give them a call. They will probably be happy to accept your volunteer service.

Linda ♦

The Many Stages of Old Man's Beard

Story and Photos by Anita Westervelt

An interesting late summer sight along city fences, fields and roadsides may seem like a fluffy mass of colorless fuzz. You might consider this is something to ignore as uninteresting and messy.

Don't disregard this native plant. The scientific name is *Clematis drummondii*. Locals know it as Old Man's Beard.

This fluffy mass takes shape the closer you get to the plant. Like most of our vines, it doesn't mind what it climbs over, whether fence, small shrubs, young trees, or on the ground. It will even cover, but not kill, invasive Guinea grass.

Old Man's Beard is dioecious – having male and female flowers on separate plants although these vines intertwine so intricately that it is hard to determine which flower is on what stem.

During spring and summer, the flowers are somewhat insignificant and the small, lobed leaflets are more prominent. The leaflets are an important food to white-tailed deer. Rio Grande turkeys occasionally will eat the leaves.

Late summer is the special time of year to study this vine. The female flowers begin a unique and elegant transformation as the fruits form. Three inch long silvery wisps of tendrils flow from the center of the flower and will carry mature seeds in the wind. The flowers in this stage of the plant's life give the plant its old man and goat's beard names

The older the plant the larger it's mass as it establishes and self-propagates readily from seed. The vines prefer well-drained soil and tolerate moisture and drought, assuring us of their annual show even in the driest of years.

The names for this plant are as varied as the flowering stages and include Texas Virgin's Bower, Graybeard, Love-in-the-Mist, Grandad Beard, and Goat's Beard or *Barbas De Chivato*.

Vines are an important addition to our native habitat. They provide shelter for snakes, lizards, ground-nesting birds and other critters. Their blooms are used by butterflies, dragonflies and other beneficial pollinators. Although aggressive if left untended, Old Man's Beard is a perennial and can be managed. ♦



Old Man's Beard Early Summer Blooms



Old Man's Beard Late Summer Blooms



Old Man's Beard in Fruit

Old Man's Beard Advanced Bloom



Old Man's Beard Bloom Stages

Robert Runyon: Border Photographer

Robert Runyon was born on a farm near Catlettsburg in Boyd County, Kentucky, on July 28, 1881, the son of Floyd and Elizabeth (Lawson) Runyon. Like many farm boys of his generation, he received only a limited formal education that did not extend through high school, a handicap he overcame in later life through self-instruction, determination, and sheer natural intelligence.

On September 16, 1901, Runyon married Norah Young in Ironton, Ohio. The couple's only child, William, was born on August 6, 1904, in Ashland, Kentucky, where Runyon had taken a job selling insurance.

On December 3, 1908, Norah died. In an effort to put the impact of her death behind him, Runyon left William with his late wife's parents and went to New Orleans and then to Houston looking for employment. In early 1909 the Gulf Coast News and Hotel Company hired him to sell sandwiches, fruit, candy, and cigarettes to passengers on the St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railway between Houston and Brownsville, Texas. Within a couple of months the railway offered to make him manager of Gulf Coast's lunchroom and curio shop in the Brownsville depot. Runyon accepted the position and, in April 1909, rented a room across the street from the railroad station and began a period of residency in Brownsville that continued without interruption for fifty-nine years until his death in 1968.

Arriving in Brownsville, Texas, in 1909, Robert Runyon entered a world very different from his native Kentucky. With its tropical climate and close proximity to Mexico, the town embraced two cultures and thrived on diversity. Throughout the rest of his life, Runyon took an avid interest in studying and recording this unique area. His photographs of the Lower Rio Grande Valley and Northeastern Mexico both document the region's history and stand as testimony to Runyon's affinity for the land and its people.

Runyon returned to Kentucky in the summer of 1910 to bring William back to Texas to live with him. On July 31, 1913, Runyon married Amelia Leonor Medrano Longoria, a young woman from a respected middle-class family with deep roots in northern Mexico. Between 1914 and 1926, Amelia bore five children: Lillian, Amelia, Virginia, Robert, and Delbert.

Robert Runyon worked as a commercial photographer from 1910 to 1926. During that time, he focused his camera on the mundane and the dramatic alike. His first images recorded urban life in Brownsville and Matamoros as well as the Rio Grande terrain. Then, during the summer and fall of 1913, he turned his attention to political events in Mexico as the Mexican Revolution reached the Texas border. On June 3, General Lucio Blanco and his Constitutionalist forces captured the Federal garrison at Matamoros. The next day, Runyon moved throughout the city, photographing the results of battle. He later recorded Blanco's land distribution ceremony and Los Borregos in August and proceeded to travel with Blanco's army south to Ciudad Victoria. Several months later, he returned to photograph Revolutionary events in Monterrey. Back in Texas, Runyon also photographed the results of two 1915 bandit raids across the U.S. border: the August 15 raid at Norias Ranch and the October 10 train wreck at Olmito. Although small in number, Runyon's images of the Mexican Revolution have great historical significance. The

conflict between Rebels and Federals in Northeastern Mexico has gone largely undocumented; his photographs provide a unique record of this important event.

As the Revolution intensified, the United States responded by activating Fort Brown and transferring soldiers from across the country to the Brownsville camp. Runyon prodigiously recorded this military buildup and the subsequent preparations for U.S. entry into World War I. His photographs show the military transition from animal to mechanical power that occurred during this time period as well as the soldiers' camp life and leisure activities. As with popular subjects such as bullfights and Mexican Revolution casualties, Runyon sold many of his Fort Brown views as postcards to the soldiers and to Valley residents and tourists.

After the tumultuous decade of the 1910s, Runyon returned to familiar subjects in the peaceful and prosperous 1920s. He continued to document city life in the Lower Rio Grande Valley and in Matamoros, Mexico, and he also took many photographs of local beaches, lakes, and, especially, the Rio Grande. He began to pursue a growing interest in botany as well and used his camera to record native plants, including palm trees, yucca, and cactus. Runyon also continued to make and market postcards, but his most profitable enterprise during the early 1920s was studio photography. He aggressively promoted his small studio opposite the Brownsville railroad depot, drawing in thousands of customers and enjoying unprecedented popularity as a commercial photographer. In addition to studio work, he photographed school groups, sports teams, and the numerous excursion groups which came to Brownsville in the early 1920s as potential participants in the Valley land boom.

By 1926, however, Runyon decided to leave commercial photography for the more profitable trade in curios and souvenirs. He became a partner with his brother-in-law in a curio store in Matamoros, and later owned a store in Brownsville. Although he continued to take pictures of plants in conjunction with his botanical studies, after the late 1920s Runyon built his reputation as a highly successful amateur botanist and local politician rather than a photographer. Runyon published two books on native plants, *Texas Cacti* (1930) and *Vernacular Names of Plants Indigenous to the Lower Rio Grande Valley* (1938), and in the 1920s began a crusade to save the native Texas palm, *Sabal texana*. Local politics became Runyon's passion in the late 1930s. He was appointed Brownsville city manager in 1937 and in 1941 was elected mayor. The "stormy petrel" of Brownsville politics, as Runyon was known, held the position through 1943. In 1952 he unsuccessfully ran for Texas House of Representatives. Runyon published a newspaper in the 1940s and wrote a small volume on family history, *Genealogy of the Descendants of Anthony Lawson of Northumberland, England*.

Robert Runyon died on March 9, 1968, in Brownsville after a short illness at the age of eighty-seven.

Texas folklorist J. Frank Dobie, an acquaintance of Runyon, best summed up his life: "You have to admire a man like Runyon, who cuts off a little hunk of the world and dedicates a lifetime to its study." ♦

Text from: The Center for American History, Robert Runyon Photograph Collection, 1907-1968: A Guide. Austin, Texas: The Center for American History, 1992.

The Big, Bold and Beautiful Need You

by Heidi Linnemann

One of the largest species of butterflies, the Monarch butterfly, needs help to survive. The North American monarch population has declined by more than 90 percent in the past two decades. Monarchs need all of us to make our homes, businesses, schools and community spaces more wildlife-friendly.

The Rio Grande Valley has started an initiative to accomplish this goal. The National Wildlife Federation recently sponsored a meeting at Quinta Mazatlan to establish a Rio Grande Valley Monarch Network. Three of our chapter members attended this meeting, and are enthused to work with this project. The network will be used to share expertise and experience, collaborate on events and engage mayors in the Mayor's Monarch Pledge.

There is a desperate need to educate the public regarding the plight of the Monarch and other wildlife in our area. Believing that our local political leaders have positions of influence, the NWF has started an initiative called the Mayor's Monarch Pledge, whereby local Mayors are asked to make a commitment to improve the habitats provided for the Monarch. Municipalities in particular can provide habitat at public parks, median strips, community gardens and municipal buildings that serve as community hubs such as recreation centers and libraries. Simple changes in landscaping ordinances or school policies can make a big difference for the monarch.

When Mayors speak up and take a stand, citizens notice.

Educating citizens about how and where to grow milkweed is a key piece of the puzzle. Creating habitat and educating citizens will benefit other pollinators that need healthy habitat as well. The newly formed RGVMN has set a goal to have 25% of our schools establish Monarch habitats.

Another major focus will be increasing the availability of native plants for sale to the public. We will be working with the big commercial garden centers to encourage them to carry more identified native plants.

There are plans in the works to have a Monarch Festival next year on SPI when a kaleidoscope of Monarchs is migrating through to their winter habitat in Mexico. A web site has been established which maps sites of existing Monarch habitats on the Zeemaps web site.

The NWF Monarch Outreach Coordinator for our area, Grace Barnett, impressed us with not only her commitment to this project, but also her attention to detail, organizational skills and her determination to make this project a success.

If you are as excited as I am to be part of this initiative, you are welcome to join the team! Contact me and we will discuss the commitment required to be part of this network. ♦

Betty McEnery Garden in Ramsey Park, A Redevelopment

Story and Photos by Frank Wiseman

In 2002 a lady by the name of Betty McEnery passed away. She was an avid birder and member of the Audubon Society. Her friends donated a sum of money to establish a memorial garden in her honor in Ramsey Park. A small group of Texas Master Naturalists undertook this task and established the first such garden spot on Ebony Loop. With the donated money our group purchased two concrete benches covered with decorative tiles, an upright concrete bird bath and a tall bird feeder for the garden area. Using many of the already established trees and shrubs as a starting point the group began adding many more butterfly and bird attracting plants.

Over the ensuing years the garden spot was kept under care by many of our naturalists including Diann Ballesteros, Christina Mild, Sharon and Dick Roesler, Frank Wiseman and others periodically. The garden saw changes over the years, but due to a mandate by AEP in 2014, the right of way under the electrical lines that crossed over this spot was directed to be clean-cleared.

With the aid of Parks Superintendent Jeff Lyssy, the AEP agreed to only clear cut the tall trees. However, in the process, much of the landscape was destroyed. That left our garden spot in complete disarray. However, with the removal of all of the tall trees under the electric lines it opened up the whole garden area so that it gives us more planting room for new plants that we did not have before in this spot. Also some older plants were discovered, such as a very old Guayacan shrub.

Seeing the new landscape problem, a group of Texas Master Naturalists decided to undertake the task of re-establishing the area to a semblance of its original state with new plants and other features.

In 2016, our hopes were met when Betty McEnery's daughter became aware of the plight and donated a new sum of money to be used for the garden's beautification. Our regular Thursday group of volunteers spearheaded by Anita Westervelt, Frank Wiseman, Barbara Peet and Greg Storms plus a few others undertook this new task. We immediately saw the need for a new pond, new plants and a new recycled plastic bench with Betty McEnery's name engraved on it.

We set to the job of clearing away the detritus left by AEP, trimmed, pruned and hauled away the dead limbs, pulled guinea grass and dicliptera plants and spread mulch over much of the garden spot.

Two plastic pond basins were purchased. Robert Archer, Texas Master Naturalist and guru in ponds, undertook the task of installing the new bird pond. Large gravel rock has hauled to help Robert with the pond's outer lined area. Thanks to Robert and his expert guidance and hard work, the pond is an attractive new feature to area.

Anita and Greg managed the installation of new plumbing, and Volker and others helped with the digging of a trench to lay the pipe needed for the new pond.

Frank ordered the new bench and oversaw the purchase and donation of new plants to add to the area. Velia Chavez donated new mistflower plants she grew from cuttings, and other members have donated plants such as a potato tree and a yellow Sophora.

Continued work and maintenance will be needed on a weekly and monthly basis to maintain this area. Our faithful volunteers are up to the task. Some others who helped in this effort were :Louise Wilkinson, Mario Moreno, Jorge Gonzalez, Delia Lowe and Frances Barrera. We thank all who participated in this project. ♦



Garden Entrance Before Reconstruction



Garden Entrance After Reconstruction



New Pond and Original Birdbath



New Composite Memorial Bench

Recertification for 2016, Deadline Fast Approaching!

by Jolaine Lanehart, Membership Director

Just a reminder: to receive the recertification pin for 2016 (the Guadalupe Bass), members must report at least 8 hours of Advanced Training and 40 hours of Volunteer Service during the calendar year (January 1 to December 31, 2016). New members who received their initial certification during 2016 may also recertify, but need to report a **grand total** of 16 hours of Advanced Training and 80 hours of Volunteer Service.

You are not required to recertify to maintain your membership. But, please pay dues for 2017 and make sure your Volunteer Management System information is updated in the event you have changed your phone or address.

If you are having problems getting your hours entered, please contact any of the following members for assistance: Heidi Linnemann, Gail Dantzker, Jim Najvar, Joni Gillis, Sally Robey, or Jolaine Lanehart. ♦

Letter of Gratitude from Emily Cox

Frank Wiseman received the following letter from Emily Cox, the daughter of Betty McEnery, expressing her gratitude for the hard work put in by members of our chapter on the restoration of her mother's memorial garden.

Hello Frank,

Thank you for your letter concerning my Mom's memorial garden. You and all the hard-working volunteers are to be commended for sustaining and preserving the valuable habitat at Hugh Ramsey Park. My parents first became birdwatchers in the early 60's. They also advocated to ban DDT in the late sixties and early 70's. They were members of the San Antonio Audubon society for many years and worked hard to support conservation programs and policies. My Mom made the valley her home the last 16 years of her life because of the wonderful birding there.

Words cannot express my heartfelt thanks to preserve my Mom's garden for generations to come. She would say that each one of us has a responsibility to advocate and preserve our natural resources and to be good stewards of protecting ecosystems/habitats. The Betty McEnery Memorial Garden is in some small way fulfilling that responsibility. Protecting our environment is a sacred duty for each one of us.

Bless you and each one of the dedicated volunteers at Hugh Ramsey Park. I enjoy the pictures on the Facebook page and share them with my family.

Kind regards,

Emily McEnery Cox
3919 Park Meadow Ln.
Bryan, Texas 77802

We're Proud of You
Milestones Reached this Past
Quarter

Initial Certification

Angelica Jackson
Kimi Jackson
Charles Schmidt

100 Hours of Volunteer Service

Rita Galloway
William Little
Deborah McCoy
Janet Schofield

250 Hours of Volunteer Service

Carole Rausch
Janet Shriver

500 Hours of Volunteer Service

Robert Gaitan
Ed Langley
Barbara Peet
Larry Shriver
Cecelia Montalvo
Madelaine Sandefur

1000 Hours of Volunteer Service

Mary Jean Garcia