



# 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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## Newsletter

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## **President's Message**

*by Virginia Vineyard*

Happy New Year to RGVCTMN Chapter Members!

I hope you had a wonderful holiday season, and that 2010 will find you healthy, happy, and volunteering as much as you can. If any of you have been busy with our chapter partners, please let us know how it's going.

Some of you may have helped with the Christmas Bird Counts. These counts provide important data on bird populations on an international level. They're done in the winter because that's when the populations are the most settled. David Benn and I covered Sabal Palms the day after Christmas, and, boy, what a muddy mess! We trudged through sticky mud coming off the trails a few inches taller than when we started. Although we saw no rarities, we did count 63 species including three owl species and six raptor species. The Brownsville groups met at Cobbleheads at the end of the day to tally species, and enjoy some much needed refreshments.

The new training classes begin with orientation on Wednesday, January 13, 2010. If you would like to help with the classes and/or field trips, please contact Cathy Budd. If you haven't been to a general meeting lately, please make it a point to attend and take time to visit with other chapter members.

Again, Happy New Year to you all!

*Virginia*

*Editor's note:*

*In addition to the above described training classes, the first Coastal Naturalist training will be offered on Saturday, January 30, 2010, at 12:00 noon at UT Pan American Coastal Studies Laboratory in Isla Blanca Park on South Padre Island.*

*Renowned red tide researcher, Dr. Lisa Campbell, from Texas A&M University, will present a short course on hazardous algal bloom response and identification with emphasis on red tide.*

*To register, contact Cameron County Extension office at 956-361-8236.*

## **Invasive Tree Removal Project**

*by Paul Bryant*

My name is Paul Bryant. I am only sixty years old, but due to good fortune I am retired. In many ways I am not a typical or ideal Master Naturalist. I had a long career in the dreaded “oil field”. I enjoy being and working by myself, which keeps me from sharing my love of nature with others. Even though I am not an ideal Master Naturalist the organization has been good for me. It has allowed me to learn about and understand nature in more detail than I ever have before.

My non-scientific observations tell me that the typical volunteer is over fifty, hard working and full of knowledge that they want to share with others. Because I am in good health I try to make up for my shortcoming of not sharing my knowledge by taking on the more physically challenging tasks that many other volunteers don't always want. That leads me to the project I have taken on for The Nature Conservancy of Texas.

The Chihuahua Woods is a 349 acre tract located southwest of Mission. It has a spectacular cactus community and unfortunately a large stand of invasive Saltcedars and Brazilian Pepper trees. I enthusiastically volunteered to look after the everyday needs of the preserve and to remove the invasive trees.



The procedure of removing the trees involves cutting them down using a

chainsaw, cutting the downed trees into manageable size pieces, loading the pieces into my trailer, hauling the pieces to a burn pile and unloading them there.



The stumps are treated to prevent re-growth and the pile is burned when it reaches a certain size. Fortunately for me, and the surrounding community, the local U. S. Fish and Wildlife fire crew has been supervising the burning.



Between USFW and myself we have over 200 man hours into the project over a five month period and we are about halfway through it. I am happy to report that I still maintain my enthusiasm and I am lining up future projects.

## CoCoRaHS

by Rick Ramke

What's the point of measuring backyard rainfall when you can get precipitation data from TV, radio, newspapers, and web sites? The National Weather Service (NWS) reports official rainfall data from the NWS's Cooperative Station Network. In Hidalgo County, for example, there are 29 stations (McAllen Miller International Airport, Donna, Edinburg, Schuster Farm, Santa Rosa, etc.) in 1,583 square miles. Denser data collection is more useful for meteorologists and weather researchers.

The Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow Network (CoCoRaHS, [www.cocorahs.org](http://www.cocorahs.org)) provides an opportunity for citizens to help collect and map nationwide, dense precipitation data. As a volunteer I bought an official, standard 4-inch diameter rain gauge and installed it on a post in my backyard. Every day at 7:00 a.m. I observe the precipitation amount (if we're

lucky it's greater than zero), dump the rain gauge, and record the value on an easy-to-use web page on the CoCoRaHS website. Currently, Hidalgo County has 18 CoCoRaHS observers.



### **Junior Texas Master Naturalists** by Sister Sharon Horace

The Junior Texas Master Naturalists have learned much from our guest speakers the past two months. Dorothy Greaney prepared and gave lessons on insects. The naturalists were able to see some insects up close and made their own 'crafty' insects. Dorothy brought along Jimmy Paz to classes and he gave a presentation on spiders and another on bats. Tony Reisinger visited the group for presentations on marine life and on the Red Tide. The kids were eager to become "Red Tide Rangers" once they are old enough. Tony also took the Junior Naturalists to a resaca in San Benito where we were able to fish and experience the resaca's habitat. The Junior Naturalists will be completing Chapter 5- Bats and Birds- by the end of the year.

There are four children who have completed all four chapters and twelve other children who participate on a regular basis. We want to thank the Rio Grande Valley Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists for their support and help. The field guides are great to look through and study birds, fish, butterflies, and insects! We also want to say thanks for the *JMG Gardener Handbook and Teaching Guide* that the RGVCTMN purchased for us. It will be a great resource for lessons as we move forward.

If you would like more information about the Texas Junior Master Naturalists group or would like to visit us, contact Sister Sharon Horace at Proyecto Juan Diego 956-542-2488.

## **RGVCTMN Supports Grant for New Harlingen Cycle & Walk Trail**

*by Frank Wiseman*

I was asked on December 9<sup>th</sup> by Harlingen Parks Director Jeff Lyssy to write a letter of support from our Master Naturalist Chapter to Harlingen Mayor Chris Boswell in support of a state grant to establish a cycle and walk trail that will be called the 25<sup>th</sup> Street Trail. The City of Harlingen commissioners' court unanimously passed the resolution to apply for the state grant that same evening at their monthly meeting.

This pedestrian trail will be 2.8 miles in length and connect popular local destinations. The trail connects the college campus of TSTC, Marine Military Academy, the airport, our local and nationally known Hugh Ramsey birding center, some schools, many neighborhoods and much of Harlingen together. It follows a scenic and readily available corridor which seems to be waiting for an opportunity to be

developed and used by all local citizens and visitors. It will be used as an alternative to using cars and provide the opportunity for people to exercise by using their bicycles, by jogging or walking.

A recent map shows that the proposed trail will begin at Hugh Ramsey Nature Park on Loop 499. The trail will run north and connect with Harrison Avenue and then travel west along Harrison Street to 25<sup>th</sup> Street, at which point it will turn north and end at the intersection of 25<sup>th</sup> Street and Loop 499 near the college campus of TSTC.

Our chapter has given our wholehearted support to this proposed nature trail and hope that it will be used as another venue like the already established Arroyo Hike and Bike Trail is now.

### **Some Milestone Awards**



*Pam Cornett, Jim Najvar, Wendie Allsto, and Tommy Ellium*

## Some More Milestone Awards



*Tim Bradshaw, Cheryl Owen and John Thaxter*



*Michele Robson*

## Brownsville Recycling

*by Peggy Knopp*



Jimmy Paz and Ed Tamayo on November 14th at the Brownsville recycling center are supporting Recycling Day. They emptied cars depositing items for recycling, handed out flyers to explain and encourage recycling and shared information to promote the Master Naturalist program.

A wonderful idea and a job well done.

## Unexpected Hummingbird In Cameron County

by David Benn

Late in the day of September 9, 2009 I received a telephone call from former Master Naturalist Max Pon, manager of The Nature Conservatory's Southmost Preserve. Max announced that he had a Magnificent Hummingbird visiting his backyard hummingbird feeders at the Southmost Preserve. Previous commitments kept me from visiting the Preserve that afternoon but I was there early on the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup>. There were many Buff-bellied Hummingbirds and lots of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, too, but a couple of hours of looking failed to turn up a new hummingbird. However, right after lunch the next day Max telephoned again. "It's back," he said and off I went.

This time I was lucky and walked in Max's front door, through the house and out the back door and immediately spotted a very large, dark hummingbird investigating a stand of flowering native turk's cap. Catching the bird in my binoculars I was able to distinguish a large hummingbird. At about 5.25 inches, this the largest of U.S. hummingbirds, was about an inch larger than the Valley's resident Buff-bellied Hummingbirds and 1.50 inches larger than the dozens of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds that were migrating through the area at the time. It had dark wings and was green on the back and dark in front with a green throat, a narrow grayish collar, a purple forehead and very dark breast and belly, appearing black. It had a conspicuous white spot behind the eye and a dark patch on the side of the face. Yes! No doubt about it.

This was an adult male Magnificent Hummingbird and only the fourth one ever documented east of the Pecos River. Historically, two Magnificent Hummingbirds had previously been recorded east of the Pecos in Texas and one has been documented in Louisiana.

According to The Handbook of Texas Birds, the Magnificent Hummingbird is a rare to uncommon and local visitor to the mountains of west Texas. Otherwise, the bird's range in the United States is generally limited to New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and Utah. No where in the United States is it numerous.

The Magnificent Hummingbird is a fairly common hummingbird in the mountains of Mexico and occurs regularly in the higher altitudes of the El Cielo Biosphere about 250 miles south of Brownsville. It is a frequent visitor to flowering plants and hummingbird feeders at Rancho Del Cielo, a biological research station in the tropical cloud forest of the Biosphere.

The Southmost Preserve Magnificent hummingbird didn't remain in the area long and was last seen on September 12, 2009.

Though not many people were able to see the bird as, like most Nature Conservancy properties, the Southmost Preserve is not open to the public, nature photographer Seth Paterson was able to obtain excellent photographs to document this rare visitor to the Valley.

## 2009 TMN Raffle Winners



*Tony Reisinger, artist, holds his gyo-taku print of a spotted seatrout won by Carol J. Brown (not pictured).*



*Virginia Vineyard accepting the Valley Land Fund book donated and presented by Joe Lee Rubio.*



*Marylou Davis won the chachalaca print donated, signed and presented by artist F. P. "Tony" Bennett.*



*Virginia Vineyard presents Karen Fossom with a basket of singing birds.*



## Scenes from the Annual Meeting

*by Antoinette Budd*



*Mo Ranch*



*Red Tide Rangers Cathy Budd, Tony Reisinger and Antoinette Budd*



*Jackie Field, Jr., Cathy Budd and Tony Reisinger*



*Red Tide Rangers Virginia Vineyard, Tony Reisinger and Lupita Escobar*



*Lupita Escobar and friends*

## Recent Freeze only Nips a Few Plants at Ramsey Park

by Frank Wiseman

Our recent freeze did slight damage to our plants at Ramsey Park. A recent walk around the loop area, Ebony Trail, shows damage done to some plants depending on their location in the park. Strange as it sounds, some things do get better protection than others.

On the north side of the loop the white plumbago suffered damage to its leaves and will rebound as it always does. Further on at Izzy's Garden the leaves of the newly planted white lantanas were pretty hard hit as were the leaves of the potato tree and the Tamaulipan olive trees. So all in all we were pretty lucky this time around. Mother Nature is kind to us at times, remembrances of the 2004 Christmas snow come to mind.

Anyone desiring a stroll through the park these days will still see showy blooms on all of the lantanas, the white plumbago, Mexican trixis, and some other plants such as the senna with its bright yellow flowers. Hanging on in places where they are protected by other taller shrubs and trees, are the remnants of the fall blooming blue mist flowers.

We have continued to work at most of the garden spots to keep them healthy and stable and weed free. I wonder what spring will bring due to all of the recent winter rains. They have been a God-send for our watering needs.

Linda Butcher has put in a lot of long and arduous work hours on the north side of the park trying to put in more plants and keep up with what she has already built up in that area. Her little pond area is worth a look and maybe a picture or two might beckon you that way also. The larger ponds in that area attract many of the water fowl birds and they are always worth having your camera by your side.

Diann Ballesteros, in addition to her many projects, has been pulling guinea grass from around the pitaya cactus on Pitaya Butte so they

can put on their spring bloom show around March and April. Lou Osborne has taken on a huge project at owl pond to completely clean out the pond and clear the area of its unwanted diptera and some other invasive weed plants.

One regret we had this month was having Dick Roesler take a fall on Medicinal Ridge when he tripped on a vine, fell on his hip, got a hairline fracture and the doctors, in their astute knowledge, decided that a few pins and a plate should help him heal a lot faster than just bed rest. Dick is up and walking now with the aid of a walker and should be walking as usual in a couple of months. Dick says, "That's what I get for trying to put out grapefruit for the birds." Get well soon, Dick, as we miss you at the park. No one else hauls so much mulch as Dick does.

Our thanks to all of our volunteers who helped at the birding festival table we sponsored along with ACAS this year. We passed out maps of the park and informed visitors about how to best use the park for their birding experiences. These were three exciting days there in the shade of some of our trees, getting to talk to so many out-of-town visitors and hear them pay us nice compliments about our Nature Park.

We thank our usual Monday and Thursday morning crew of volunteers for all the work they do to help keep the park as nice looking as possible.

Our friends Jan and David Dauphin have recently done an excellent photo essay on Ramsey Park and have given our chapter volunteers a lot of credit for their work in the park. If you would like to view it, please go to their web site at <http://www.thedauphins.net/id101.html> .

As usual, we invite you all to come and volunteer at the park or just come out and talk and enjoy being among your fellow Texas Master Naturalists.

## A Final Note

Leo Garrett, our dear friend and original *Chachalaca* editor, will be missed and thought of often. His work lives on through his many acts of generosity and the Leo Garrett Scholarship Fund, established by his wife and soul mate, Beth Wargo, and by the RGVCTMN.

Leo Garrett

3 April 1935 - 4 October 2009



*Photo by Jimmy Paz*