



The Chachalaca

VOLUME 17 NUMBER 1 MARCH 2020

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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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WONDERING IN NATURE WITH CHILDREN

By Diane Roman-Goldsberry, Painting Teacher

South Texas Border Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalists



Reading Rachel Carson's **A Sense of Wonder** is like an experiential journey into the beauty and deeper dynamics of the natural outdoor world. She takes her nephew Roger by the hand and leads him to the silvery seashore, the fern-carpeted forest, and the shimmering, starry night. Standing in awe of the great and small manifestations of the outdoors, they wondered. At the age of three when Roger saw a fish swimming around and around in a bucket of water, he told his aunt that it was the most beautiful thing that he had ever seen. From Rachel Carson we read: "A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us, that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring is dimmed and even lost before we reach adulthood." She writes further that if she could influence the good fairy who presides over childhood, she would ask that fairy to give every child in the world a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life. Wonder connects us to nature.

We now know that children need two things to maintain that sense of wonder. They need the companionship of at least one adult who can share the joys of the outdoors with them. And, they need to have access to the outdoors where they can spend many hours in free, unstructured play. David Sobel has written many books about children in nature. In **Beyond Ecophobia: Connecting Classrooms and Communities** she reminds us that many of the great naturalists, like E. O. Wilson, Rachel Carson, and Aldo Leopold, had direct wild experiences of wild nature. Hands-on experience at a critical time, not systematic knowledge, is what counts in making the naturalist. To be able to be fully immersed, to participate, in nature, to touch, to explore, to

observe all the processes and happenings in nature leads to delight, to wonder, and ultimately to a love of nature.

And, literary and artistic experiences of nature can enhance and elevate wonder to moral feeling. James E. Higgins in an essay “Words Full of Wonder” writes that **Charlotte’s Web**

has changed more people’s feelings about spiders than any scientific text that he is aware of. The wonder poem, “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star”, lives on in the heart of every adult who memorized it in childhood. Surely it was the door through which many a future astronomer entered the grand and glorious world of the night skies.

The relatively new interest in environmental education reached first for the scientific explanations. Well and good. This is without question essential. But, for the very young, the humanities and the arts are also essential. From Higgins we read “stories and poems, when they do their work, have the power to deduce from readers, listeners, young or old, feelings of wonder and awe concerning nature and their place in it”. Artistic activity also does this.

When a person admires what is beautiful, experiences beauty, just like little Roger did with Rachel Carson when he saw a fish swimming round and round in a bucket of water, that person, young or old, unites with the creative powers that are alive in nature and with creative activity itself.

Artistic activity can mirror the creativity of the natural world. During the Coastal Expo at the Edinburg Scenic Wetlands this past February, I was able to demonstrate a new way of working with color to hundreds of elementary age school children. In such a setting it is not practical to use the intended medium, transparent watercolor paint. Instead we used large block crayon colors to ‘paint’ a simple nature scene. The exercises that I teach from the e-Book, **Painting in Living Color**, are for children in the first through the third grade. We discovered during the Expo that the fourth and fifth graders were equally awed by this artistic process. Rather than draw or paint a little plant, we allow it to appear out of the color. The Nature Mood exercises show the children, by experience, that nature processes are also color processes, and that these are truthfully connected. These ideas, like nature, are best understood by experience. The following is the exercise that was demonstrated and ‘painted’ at the Expo.



The very first and basic exercise is “Paint Little Plant”. It begins with the painting of yellow streaming down from the top of a vertically aligned piece of art paper. The yellow streams down so far, about two-thirds of the way down the page. Then we ‘paint” blue flowing up from the bottom of the page, filling the last third of the page.

Now the blue is continued into the yellow. Green appears! This is an exciting moment for the children. A color appears that is completely unlike the two that are on the page. The children continue painting the blue into the yellow, and the beginning of the little plant appears. Add red for the flower in the yellow and red into the blue to form roots.

The children are fully absorbed, fully participating, in the creating of this painting. They have created a **Little Plant** out yellow-light and blue-water. There are many layers of experience in these seemingly, simple exercises just as there are in the experiences of nature.

The children are also actually participating in creative, nature processes. Both scientific and artistic, these types of exercises follow the new and developing orientation in science called Participatory Science. See the book **THE THIRD CULTURE, Participatory Science as the Basis for a Healing Culture** by John Michael Barnes. It is this type of experience that truly reveals to us our place in the world. We are co-creators with nature. And, we can help bring new ideas to the question of resource and park management. Perhaps those little, creative, nature-loving children will grow up to become Artist/Scientists who love nature, feel responsible for nature, and want to protect and conserve it with the a model that is perhaps based on wonder that has been transformed to love.

FORGOT TO PAY YOUR DUES???

Tamie Bulow

There are 42 TMN members who are in jeopardy of going inactive as of March 31. Don't be that person! We need you to remain active, to keep on volunteering, and to enter your hours! The state office ultimately takes credit for the contribution of hours from all chapters combined, and it is an impressive number. The Texas Master Naturalist program is a force to be reckoned with, and we want you to continue to push those numbers sky high. If you need to pay your dues for 2020, go to our website

<https://rgvctmn.org/join-us/> and use Paypal. Just do it before 3/31.



Painting by Chet Mink

VMS DOS, DON'TS, AND HELPFUL INFO

Julia Osgood & Tony Reisinger

: I get a lot of questions about the VMS and membership in general. The aim of this article is to answer some of those questions. Here's a sampling of questions that I hear

How to enter hours

Here's the info that I provide to new class members, but it applies to all of us.

Before you login into the VMS, refer to the list of opportunities and the list of approved partners. Know how you're going to enter an opportunity BEFORE you login to the VMS. This saves you time and it saves time for the VMS volunteers who will approve your hours. Here are some questions to ask yourself before you login:

- Did you learn something?
 - If so, enter AT hours.
- Did you volunteer?
 - If so, enter volunteer hours.

I can't stress reading the list of opportunities enough. The descriptions explain each opportunity. If you've volunteered and still don't know how to enter hours, then contact your hours approver and ask for their help. For the list of opportunities, go to [our website](#) and click on **Volunteer**.

The list of Approved Partners and Approved Opportunities are both listed there. You can download these files as PDFs.

If the applicable opportunity is not available in your drop-down list, email a member of the VMS team to get the opportunity assigned to you.

Why haven't my hours been approved/ Why did my entry get disapproved?

The answer to this can vary. Please keep in mind that the people who approve your hours are members of the chapter and are volunteers just like you. We do our best, but sometimes work and day-to-day responsibilities might mean a delay in approving your hours. But there are a few things that might cause your hours not to be approved.

The 45-day rule

If you attempt to enter AT or VT hours for something that you did more than 45 days ago, the system will not let you enter the time. In some cases, the VMS will let you enter the time, but it won't let us approve it. This 45-day rule is set up by the state. If there are extenuating circumstances, we can work with you, so please let us know if that is the case.

You didn't enter the AT or VT correctly

If you entered time but did not use the correct opportunity or you did not list the approved partner, your time will not be approved. Most of the time, your hours keeper will contact you by email to let you know why your time was not approved. If you have not received an email from them and you are awaiting approval of hours, contact your hours keeper or the VMS director for assistance with the issue.

The VMS team has divided the approvals by sections of the alphabet, as follows:

- A-E – Adrian Ramos - ramosad@earthlink.net
- F-L – Julia Osgood - jkoztx@gmail.com
- M-R – Joni Gillis - joni.rgvctmn@gmail.com
- S-Z – Heidi Linnemann - hhlinnemann@aol.com

I didn't re-certify last year. Am I still a member of the chapter?

If you don't re-certify, you are still a Texas Master Naturalist and you are an active member of the chapter if you have paid your dues for the year. Our chapter determines active membership based on whether you have paid your dues.

We start sending emails about dues around the first of the year. After April, your dues are considered to be late and after that time we will list you as inactive in the VMS. That means that if you try to enter hours, there won't be any opportunities in your drop-down list.

So, look for emails about dues and pay them on time to remain active in our chapter.

What are the requirements to re-certify?

If you're in the current or most recent class and you INITIALLY certify as a TMN during the current year, you must report a total of 80 volunteer hours and 16 AT hours (this combines the hours for the initial certification AND what is required for recertification).

If you were certified as a TMN before the current year, you must report 40 volunteer hours and 8 AT hours during the calendar year.

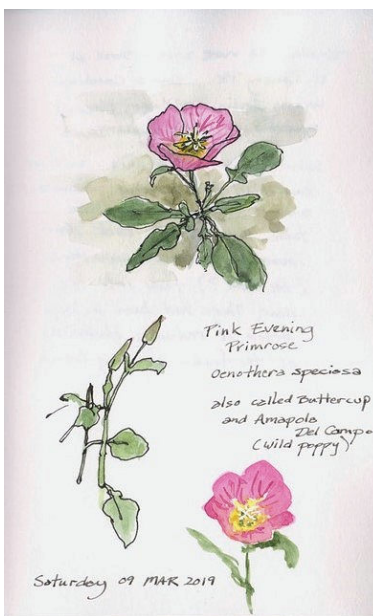
Note that only 8 hours of AT are required for recertification. While some people like to report excess AT, it doesn't help TMN in the same way that volunteer hours do. (See the section below.) TMN requires 8 hours of AT so that people will continue learning about nature so they

can pass that knowledge onto the public. If you want to report excess AT you can, but it's not necessary.

How do my hours help Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension?

The value of annual TMN volunteer hours for Texas is used to amplify the value of grants applied for in support of the TMN program. More volunteer hours and a higher value for volunteer time drastically improves our chances of successfully attracting grants in the highly competitive grant world. Every volunteer hour you earn as a Texas Master Naturalist counts to help this program survive.

Please keep in mind that the hours that you report (in the VMS) do count even if you don't re-certify.



Painting by Chet Mink

THERE'S A NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

Anita Westervelt

A plant that hasn't been seen in Hugh Ramsey Nature Park since the floods of 2010 wiped out a big patch along the Arroyo bank is now dominating its own Ebony Loop domain.



Buddleja blooms

The plant is Buddleja sessiliflora. The Thursday Morning Ramsey Park Ebony Loop Volunteer Team planted about a dozen *B. sessiliflora* between Hachinal Corner, where Ebony Loop takes a turn, and the Citrus Garden, after they cleared a mini jungle between the two gardens. The new specialty garden is called Buddleja Way.

The shrub's genus name was given to honor the Reverend Adam Buddle (1662-1715), a botanist and rector of a church in Essex, England. It was named in 1818 (after Buddle's death) by Carl Linnaeus, the 18th-century scientist who created the modern form of plant classification.

Linnaeus spelled it *buddleja* in the body of the book, although listed it in the index with an *eia* ending, according to information about the species on the Internet.

Historically, the plant has been spelled as Buddleia -- which follows the botanical Latin naming rules -- and as Buddlea. For the wordsmiths among us, Internet research can be as fascinating as it is fun, fruitful, frustrating and full of frightfully faulty, fishy facts. Several sites discuss the plant's name differentials and several explain that the plant was named during a time when stylized print settings printed some letters as, well -- stylized -- like the letter i was printed as j, u as v and s as f.

“Fortunately,” according to a countryliving.com interview with Peter Moore, keeper of the National Collection of buddleja in Hampshire, England, “no matter the spelling, the pronunciation is the same.” BUD lee uh

In common nomenclature, the plant is called butterfly bush. Wikipedia.org declares that *B. sessiliflora* is native to southern Arizona and the lower Rio Grande Valley, and also much of central and northern Mexico excluding the Chihuahua Desert and Baja California Sur.

The shrub grows in thorn savannah, forests, and riparian zones, along roadsides and in disturbed areas.

It is more than an attractive ornamental shrub. Its flowers provide nectar for butterflies and other insects. It will tolerate partial shade, moist, sandy soil and medium water use. It can grow to 6 ½ feet tall. See page 159 in Richardson/King's “Plants of Deep South Texas.”



Buddleja leaves

I sometimes like the website, Davesgarden.com, for comments from people who have had experience with plants I am writing about. A writer from Guadalajara, Mexico descriptively wrote:

“*Buddleja sessiliflora* is a wonderful bush, it grows very rapidly here in west central Mexico where I live. It is very common and grows by itself almost anywhere. When it grows well it has this light green silvery color with dashes of light yellow that sparkle beautifully in the sun almost like tiny emeralds dwindling in the air. It is a rapid grower and it has two wonderful values: one is the sweet scent it discharges. The smell is so strong when you are near this bush, that it almost makes you dizzy. The other thing that is amazing is that once it is established, it produces hundreds of little cluster-like yellow flowers that bees adore.”

Buddleja also has a non-native side to it that should be noted with a caution. Not our *B. sessiliflora*, but some of its cousins might be a bit problematic. Still commonly known as the butterfly bush, Buddleja is a genus comprising over 140 species of flowering plants endemic to Asia, Africa, and the Americas, according to Wikipedia.

The most impressive, if somewhat infamous, is *Buddleja davidii*, which also is the most popular cultivated species. It is from central China and named for the French Basque missionary and naturalist Père Armand David.

Butterfly bush is sought after, according to www.atozflowers.com, because “as its name suggests, the butterfly bush is a **magnet for all the butterflies** who pass through your garden. Butterflies are in love with this plant because it produces nectar that has a higher level of sucrose, glucose fructose than many other plants. Besides, the plant will attract hummingbirds, bees and insects.”

B. davidii is a glorious, colorfully flowering shrub with arching branches that develop beautiful spires of flowers at the branch tips in deep rich and vibrant colors, such as indigo, purple, lavender, vermillion, orange and rainbow-mix. Google: “buddleia colors” and fall in love. But read on. There are always two sides to a story.

Alas, this spectacular plant (*B. davidii*) has been classified as an invasive species in many countries in temperate regions, including the United Kingdom and New Zealand, according to Wikipedia. It is naturalized in Australia and in most cities of central and southern Europe, where it can spread on open lands and in gardens. Within the United States, it is widely established as an escape from cultivation, and classified as a noxious weed by the states of Oregon and Washington.

“*B. davidii* in particular is a great colonizer of dry open ground; in urban areas in the United Kingdom, it often self-sows on waste ground or old masonry, where it grows into a dense

thicket, and is listed as an invasive species in many areas. It is frequently seen beside railway lines, on derelict factory sites and, in the aftermath of World War II, on urban bomb sites. This earned it the popular nickname of 'the bombsite plant' among the war-time generation. (Wikipedia)

In praise of buddleia, “The Guardian,” a British daily newspaper founded in 1821, had a fun spin with describing the plant. “It is common as muck and as easy as dandelions to grow. But if you want butterflies, bees and moths on your doorstep, ignore the complicated recommendations of experts. A buddleia is all you need.”

Although not invasive everywhere, it is considered an invasive plant. **The site www.atozplants.com, describes it as “easy to grow, but sometimes hard to get rid of.** Once established, it will reduce or eliminate competing vegetation. Each year a mature plant can produce up to **3 million seeds**. However, many new cultivars are seedless and unlikely to reproduce.”

Rich Rewards

Diane Hall

While some people might seek monetary rewards for their actions, volunteers, on the other hand, often feel rewarded simply from the sense of making a difference. At Hugh Ramsey Nature Park, this simple satisfaction overflows. Beginning in February 2020, four Texas Master Naturalist (TMN) class members and I began our volunteer service with the Hummingbird Brigade at Hugh Ramsey under the direction of Norma Friedrich, Past President of the Arroyo Colorado Audubon Society (ACAS).

For the past 10 years, volunteers have been maintaining hummingbird feeders in the park, according to Friedrich. This past September, Tony Henahan, Biologist with the Texas Parks and Wildlife, asked ACAS for help in maintaining more hummingbird feeders at Ramsey, thus attracting more hummingbirds to the area and benefiting Henahan’s hummingbird capture and banding study. Friedrich, along with Alicia Cavazos, Pam Smith, and Aaron Godfrey, stepped up to the plate to assist with this project and so the Hummingbird Brigade began. Daily checking of the feeders helped to avoid spoilage of the sugar water due to heat. “The group also encountered bees, ants, and animals that were destroying feeders and took action.” states Friedrich. The creation of a What’s App by team member Alicia Cavazos made for easy communication between Brigade members.

The next team of Brigade members beginning in February 2020 included Ruben Arteaga, Diane Hall, Sondra Leigh, and Butch and Skippy Palmer, all members of the current TMN 2020 class. Due to the cooler temperatures, our group has limited our maintenance to twice a week. However, we have been enjoying our volunteering at Ramsey immensely. “Spending time in the parks is one of my favorite pastimes,” shares Leigh.



Ruben Arteaga and Diane Hall



Sondra Leigh and Skippy & Butch Palmer

Skippy Palmer relishes the “peace, quiet, fresh air, sunshine, and tranquility” not to mention “the good feeling to be able to give something back to nature and the community.” I, too, enjoy helping to make a difference both for the birds and the enjoyment park visitors get while watching these small, bejeweled feathered friends. It’s a magical moment to watch the hummers flitting around the feeders and hear their series of fast chirps!

Volunteering at Ramsey gives one the opportunity to not only see wildlife, but also to meet people. “Happy people!” exclaims Palmer, along with the chance to get her puppy fix for the day. “Volunteering at the park gives me a great opportunity to see wildlife I don’t get to see in my daily life,” shares Leigh. Both the nectar and seed feeders attract numerous wildlife. Visit Ramsey for your chance to see hummingbirds (Buff-bellied, Black-chinned, Ruby-throated, and Rufus), orioles (Altamira, Hooded, Baltimore, and recently the rare for our area Audubon’s), Green Jays, Chachalacas, Golden-fronted Woodpeckers, and more!

Are we making a difference? Yes! “In my opinion, I can see how our efforts are helping to draw more hummingbirds to the park and more visitors,” states Arteaga, who received his TMN class registration as a Christmas gift from his wife. Arteaga is not only creating backyard wildlife habitat at home, but volunteers along with Hall and TMN members of the Ebony Loop Team to maintain some of the specialty gardens in the park.

Volunteer opportunities abound and the rewards are rich! Won’t you join us? For more information on the Hummingbird Brigade, contact Norma Friedrich at acaskiskadee@yahoo.com or 361-676-6416. For more information on the TMN program, visit www.rgvctmn.org.

OUTREACH

The **Mission** of the Texas Master Naturalist is to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the State of Texas. **YOU** are the informed volunteers, and I am the Chairman of the Outreach Committee, coordinating the efforts of our chapter to reach out to the Lower Rio Grande community.

It is my intention to try to schedule an outreach opportunity at least once a month, with our efforts providing outreach to all the various geographical areas where our members reside. Our committee has developed a variety of interactive activities which will attract visitors to our outreach booth and provide them with information relevant to the topics being presented by the hosting organization.

In **January**, 23 members assisted with the outreach effort at W.O.W.E, logging 139 hours of volunteer time and had contacting over 250 visitors to the event. We provided cookies made from mesquite flour, demonstrated the turtle release device used by shrimp fishermen, passed out seafood recipes, showed the sizes of various types of bird banding, introduced the “rope trick” showing the various wing spans of some common birds and provided an introduction to recycling plastic bags by creating projects made from Plarn. Plarn is plastic yarn made by cutting plastic grocery bags into strips and tying them together to make the yarn.



Alicia Cavazos and Joni Gillis Greeting Visitor at RGVCTMN Table During W.O.W.E.

In **February**, we worked with the new class and organized a Volunteer Fair with 13 partners providing information regarding their organization and letting the members know the types of volunteer help they need. We also had an outreach booth at the Beach Bash Cleanup on South Padre Island where 5 members contacted over 85 guests. Linda Butcher provided interactive discussions regarding sea beans and seashells that can be found on the beach.



RGVCTMN Booth at Beach Bash

For **March**, we are installing a butterfly garden along the front of the La Feria Public Library, receiving excellent support from the City of La Feria's Director of Public Works. Watch for details in next quarter's Chachalaca!

On April 24th we will have an outreach booth at the Harlingen Public Library. As the date is also National Arbor Day, we will have information on selection and planting of trees native to our area as well as seedling of redbud and tulip trees. We **will need some help in preparing the seedlings**, so if you have some time on April 22nd or April 23rd, please contact me. If you would like to **help with the outreach effort on the 24th**, please let me know.

As you can see, we have had two events at South Padre island, and have events scheduled for Harlingen and La Feria, but I would like to see us be more geographically distributed. **If you know of an event being planned in your area, please let me know.**

Thanks for your cooperation, enthusiasm and efforts!
Heidi Linnemann, Outreach Coordinator

THINGS TO DO WHILE SOCIAL DISTANCING

Edited by Anita Westervelt, RGVCTMN

Elizabeth Perdomo, 2nd Vice President for South Texas Border Chapter Texas Master Naturalists, drew up a list of activities that chapter members and trainees can do to gain volunteer and advance training hours during this phase of social distancing when so many events, classes and field trips are being cancelled.

Elizabeth posted this on their chapter FaceBook page and others have added activities to her initial list.

You can follow our sister chapter on FaceBook at: South Texas Border Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalists.

Activities:

- Go Birding! Just with a friend or two. Stay out of crowds.
- Work on your own garden. This is a great time to plant and cultivate more native plants.
- One or two of you can work on the STBC-TMN Pollinator Garden at St. George's. Of course, don't come if you are feeling unwell in any way. Contact me for projects and work that needs to be done: mateliza@aol.com
- Our Texas Parks and Wildlife Department state parks are still open, as is Santa Ana and other U.S. Fish and Wildlife refuges. You can go for a walk/hike/bike where allowed. Just stay away from other people.
- Check out a park you've not yet been to and go with a friend or two. Take your own lunches and refreshments.
- One person posted that they did a driving tour and stopped and read all the Historic Markers they came to.

There are volunteer things one can do from home, too.

- Try researching and writing an article for our Chapter Blog, or for the RGVC-TMN newsletter, the Chachalaca, or both!
- Go outside and practice your iNaturalist.org skills in your yard, or neighborhood or at one of the nature parks
- Same with eBird, Journey North and other Citizen Science Programs -- these activities count as volunteer time
- We all have that giant TMN Textbook, right? Maybe time to read it - or re-read it.
- Do online webinars appropriate to our TMN goals and purposes. Follow us on FaceBook. We will post links as we come across them. Please tell us about others you become aware.
- Explore a part of the Rio Grande Valley where you've not yet visited. Again -- stay far away from the crowds.

- Create an educational hand out for your Chapter's activities. Ideas? Children's Nature Activities, Native Plants or Native Plant Edibles, Something Special that your Chapter is involved in: For example, the Vannie Cook Cancer Center 3 Phase Project.
- Some nature centers have materials or crafts used at educational events. Ask if you can pick up materials and assemble these at home.

Joseph Connors, our March "Creatures of the Night" presenter, added a suggestion: "If you have a topic you're really into, we could use more topics for the chapter's speakers' bureau. Let Elizabeth know and get started working on a presentation. She talked me into doing one last year and now Jessica and I have presented it three times. It took a lot of work putting it together, but now it's ready to go whenever and I have fun giving it."

Joseph has an excellent suggestion. Our chapter, too, would benefit from our new members trying their hand at building presentations and be willing to give presentations to clubs and organizations upon request. The RGVCTMN outreach chair is Heidi Linnemann. Other members who have new topics to add to the chapter speakers' bureau may also send those topics to Heidi: hhlinnemann@aol.com

- Time spent designing a PowerPoint presentation, researching information and rehearsing a presentation counts as volunteer hours.
- Time researching information to write a story and writing and editing a story about our native habitat counts as volunteer hours.
- Photographing, selecting, editing and writing captions for photos to accompany stories to the media or chapter newsletter count as volunteer time.

Photographing, editing, identifying and uploading photos for www.inaturalist.org count as volunteer time under VMS' Citizen Science Programs. There's nothing like classroom learning but the iNaturalist site has tutorials that are user-friendly.

Another important activity is to pot up native plants that you find springing up in your yard, and tend them for future use at a plant sale when the threat is lifted, or to donate to nature centers, community butterfly gardens or to add to the STBC-TMN pollinator garden.

Those black, one-gallon pots are relatively cheap. Grimsell's Garden Center in Harlingen sells them. Other Valley nurseries may have new ones for sale or used ones on the cheap for organizations. A quick call before travelling to the nursery is advised. For a list of Valley plant sellers, check out this site: <https://rgvctmn.org/rgv-plants/> Call to ensure when a nursery is open and to get their address.

Now would be a good time to explore the Texas Wildlife Association Website <https://www.texas-wildlife.org/> If you're not familiar with it, it's extensive and awesome!

Anyone with suggestions to add to this list, please post on FaceBook.

BEAUTY IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER...

Roberto Gaitan

We recently had our sprinkler system repaired after many years of wear and tear plus accumulation of dirt within the pipes. As our contractor was wrapping up his sprinkler duty, he threw in his landscaping pitch. He mentioned he had just the right chemicals to kill our weeds in our front yard and he would recommend laying a fresh coat of St. Augustine grass. I smiled kindly and said I would think about it.



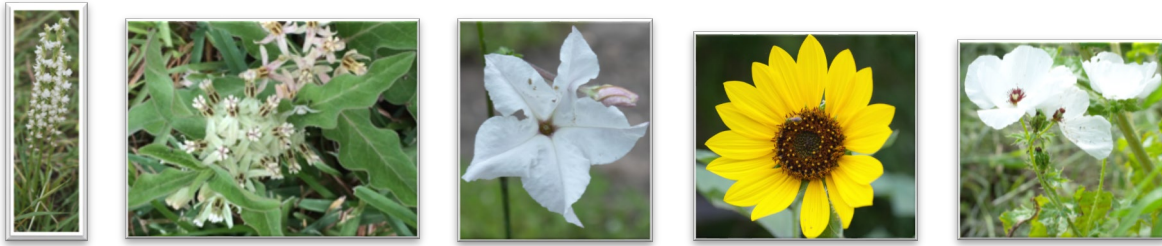
St. Augustine grass is a popular warm-season grass that is promoted by most landscapers, including our sprinkler repairman. Yes, it makes a thick, carpet of grass that crowds out weeds, but, being a non-native, high-maintenance water guzzler, how could any Texas Master Naturalist support St. Augustine without having to turn in his TMN name badge? After pulling six-foot long St. Augustine runners from within our elbow bush, lantana, google-eye, pigeon berry, and so many more, I've grown to hate St. Augustine.

But I did think about it. After all, we are all susceptible to the socially promoted definition of a beautiful lawn and its representation of success. So, I looked at a portion of our front lawn, approximately 50 ft by 4 ft, and here is what I saw:

First, we do have three crape myrtle bushes. They were planted by the previous homeowners and we haven't had the heart to yank them out. They do have a delicate white flower that a few pollinators like and the thin limbs make for beautiful spider web frames. Underneath the crape myrtles is a colony of iris plants that keep shooting up their leaves but I don't think we've seen their flowers for the five years we have lived here. We did plant two potato trees and a *caesalpinia*.

As our sprinklers stopped working, the St. Augustine's grip on our front lawn weakened. In its place, we have frogfruit, dandelions, butterweed, salvia, thistle, milkweed, bluebonnets, sunflowers, aster, mistflower, lady's tresses, coreopsis, tasselflower, nightshade, vervain, lawn orchid, gaura, plantain, nightshade, bluebell gentian, scarlet pimpernel, and many others we can't identify for sure until we see the flower. These wildflowers are all over just this small part of our yard. It would be difficult to count how many of each now are growing or predict how many more will show up as the weather warms further.





I haven't mentioned the butterflies, bees, and other insects enjoying our ugly yard. Or the pair of kiskadees that perch on my truck's side mirrors before launching themselves at these insects. Or the pair of cottontails that enjoy a bite to eat every evening. Or the owl that stands guard overnight.



And I, like so many, have never been fond of the marauding red-wing blackbirds that will feast on our birdfeeders every day. That is, until I noticed many would walk the yard hunting and pecking at insects, including those beetles decimating my milkweeds! I don't mind Redwings that much anymore...but if all I had was St. Augustine, wouldn't they only have my bird feeders to eat? So was it really my fault I classified Redwings as pests?



Dr. Tallamy asks us to consider the extent that our chosen plants play in our local environment. We cannot turn back the changes we have made in this world but I'm happy with the little dent we have made. What if everyone redefined what a beautiful lawn looks like?

THE GALLERY – WORTH A VISIT!

Anita Westervelt, RGVCTMN

<https://rgvctmn.org/galleries/articles/>

Our chapter website Gallery holds a great outreach, learning and teaching tool at the “articles archive.” It is an archive of well-researched, local newspaper-published articles written by chapter members. The link can be marketed during TMN presentations as a site where the public can learn about the Valley's native habitat.

The page is attention-getting with colorful teaser photos next to a link that shows the date, publisher medium, article title and author. The page is easily scrolled; users need only hover their cursor over the information next to a photo that has captured their attention and click to bring up the chosen story.

The range of articles is extensive, from those fun roly-poly bugs every kid has played with, to snakes, to critters on four legs, creatures in our Gulf waters to birds, plants, butterflies and awesome things in between. The stories span the gamut of our native Valley habitat and are mostly written by three of the Rio Grande Valley chapter members.

Meet the authors:

Marilyn Lorenz

A couple of years ago, chapter member Marilyn Lorenz wrote a series of bird articles for publication in the Port Isabel-South Padre Press, as a guest contributor. Our webmaster is in the process of uploading those previously published stories to the archives. Many of you may recall her fascinating bird stories, which were accompanied by the stunning photography of her husband, Chuck Lorenz.

Marilyn certified as a TMN in 2015. She had an interesting career path before getting to Texas, which included secretarial work for companies such as AT & T and Westinghouse, a fun stint at a television station, as a cosmetician and even a trail guide at a riding stable before finishing her working career as a medical professional assistant for the University of Connecticut.

As a young girl, spending most summers in Rhode Island on the beaches, Marilyn was captivated by the tidal pools and salt ponds. As a Texas Master Naturalist, her favorite volunteer opportunities are giving presentations and leading groups on nature walks so she can share her wildlife interests. Just as her working days were filled with a variety of positions, her Texas Master Naturalist interests follow that pattern.

“I have enjoyed every aspect of TMN,” Marilyn said, “whether I am cleaning up beaches, patrolling for turtles or doing outreach at an event somewhere. It all involves sharing my love of nature with others who feel the same or are not yet aware of what is available.” Marilyn is an avid birder and presents fun and interesting birding presentations.

Kathy Raines

Another set of articles recently added to the archives are from a current series in the Port Isabel-South Padre Press by chapter member Kathy Raines, who writes the column, “Creatures Among Us,” as M. Kathy Raines.

Kathy certified as a TMN in 2017, the year she retired from being a high school English teacher, she said. She taught middle school English in Brownsville for 26 years and high school in Los Fresnos for 10.

Kathy has found her volunteer niche in the Russell Aquatic Center at Gladys Porter Zoo, which gives her ample material for writing about her favorite creatures and opportunities for interviewing experts as she researches for her articles.

“I enjoy all the volunteering I do,” Kathy said, “feeding fish, turtles and other native aquatic life-- some of my favorite creatures being the alligator gar, cow nose rays, scrawled cowfish and toad fish, and octopus when they've had one.” Kathy also volunteers at Sabal Palm Sanctuary on Friday mornings where she enjoys intermingling with curious visitors, sharing notes and comparing photos.

Anita Westervelt

Anita Westervelt began writing nature stories in 2015 when a McAllen Monitor editor asked her to write native stories once a month. Last fall, she began providing two stories a month for their Saturday Vida Outdoor section. She often contributes plant stories to the Valley Morning Star's Sunday Gardening Page. She certified as a Texas Master Naturalist in 2013.

Anita is a 20-year active duty (retired) U.S. Navy Chief Journalist with degrees in communication and fine art. She and chapter-founding member and plant guru Frank Wiseman are co-chairs of the Thursday Morning Ramsey Park Ebony Loop Volunteer Team that meets year-round. That team maintains and designs the specialty gardens around Ebony Loop in Harlingen's Hugh Ramsey Nature Park.

Anita leads writing and photography workshops to inspire other Texas Master Naturalists and local residents to write. A few of her favorite volunteer projects, besides writing, are designing native habitat PowerPoint presentations, learning about and growing plants to attract butterflies, photographing and identifying native habitat, and working booth outreach. She is a hearty advocate of www.iNaturalist.org.

The key theme with these three Texas Master Naturalists-cum-newspaper columnists is that they most enjoy sharing their knowledge of the Valley's weird, wonderful and wild native habitat with others, whether through the written word, as nature walk leaders or outreach enthusiasts.

Stewards of the RGV...

Roberto Gaitan

Many of us have had the pleasure of attending a presentation by Larry Lof, President and CEO of the Gorgas Science Foundation, where he shared his knowledge of the history of the Rio Grande River. It is amazing to learn what the river used to look like and to learn of the river traffic that used to exist. Most would understand the need to tap into the river for irrigation and the need to dam the river to avoid the deadly annual flooding. Nevertheless, it is still a bit depressing to compare the river's current state, often just a trickle at the coast, to its mighty historic role. But have you considered what the change in the Rio Grande's flow means to our delta?



I remember going to South Padre Island when I was young and marveled at how much sand there was. I couldn't believe I would be spending the day in all this sand! By the end of the hot summer day, I would be complaining at how much sand there was...in my pockets, my hair, my ears. I couldn't believe we wasted the whole day in all this sand!



Today, much older and a bit wiser, I still wonder at all the sand but am saddened that it isn't as infinite as I once thought. The sand that I played in when I was young is not the sand I walk on today. The sand of long ago gradually migrated north. The winds, tides, and currents carry sand along South Padre Island northward. They have done so since our great barrier island formed 6000 years ago. Our 994-mile-long island formed from the sediment deposited onto our shores by the Rio Grande River. A source of sediment that doesn't exist anymore.

Our river delta...ok, our “valley” was created over the past 6500 years from sediment delivered by the Rio Grande along its 1,885-mile journey from the Colorado Mountains. The sediment built-up and spread out as the river mouth meandered back and forth during its annual flooding events. In our great wisdom, we stopped nature from behaving so erratically but by doing so, we have cut off all sediment from reaching the Gulf of Mexico.



What does it mean when we, over the past hundred years, have choked off the sediment that has nourished the Rio Grande Valley and sustained Padre Island? Without fresh soil and its nutrients, what will happen to our valley? If the erosion of our top soil continues unabated, what will happen to our delta? We only have to look at what is happening to the Mississippi Delta, the Nile Delta, and every other delta in the world: deltas are sinking, islands are disappearing, shorelines are retreating.

So, do we throw up our hands in defeat? Ninety-seven percent of our natural world has been altered to fit our needs. Ninety-seven percent of our Rio Grande Valley has been changed since we moved into the delta. We can't turn back the clock.

Strangely we can be thankful for the strong storms whose storm surge may be the last natural source of replenishing sand. We can be grateful for money spent to develop South Padre Island because it gives people a reason to invest on the dredging and sand mining to unnaturally replenish the much-needed sand. (Unfortunately, it will likely be the tax payers that will bail out huge developers.)

There isn't much I can do to stop poor agricultural practices or stop further island development. However, I can plant natives that stabilize my yard and create shade to conserve what moisture might be in the soil. I can capture rainwater that would have otherwise just washed away. I can stop mowing on dry days when I'm mostly blowing dirt around. I can mulch my clippings to return the nutrients back to the earth. Maybe, just maybe, I can develop my yard to the point I can stop using my mower completely!



While we celebrate no more flooding in the valley, we need to acknowledge no more fresh soil and nutrients while our clear-cutting for development and agriculture continues to lead to further erosion. While we bask in the sun on our sandy beaches, we need to recognize that the sand travels northward via waves, winds, and currents and we have stopped the supply of fresh sand. We need only examine the current state of the Chandler Islands along the Mississippi Delta to get a glimpse of what might be.

No, this doesn't mean we bury our heads in the disappearing sand. This does mean our work as naturalists seeking to understand and share what we know is more important than ever before. What can you do to be a better steward of our Rio Grande Valley?

Monarch Ultra 2019

Elizabeth Perdomo

STBC TMN

The Monarch Ultra was a 4,200km ultra marathon relay run through three countries over 47 days. They ran from the northernmost range of the Monarch Butterfly, in Ontario, Canada, South through the USA, then further into Southern Mexico, the Sierra Madres, where the Monarchs winter each year. The runners followed the basic route of the monarch's annual journey south - to be sure, facing their own obstacles and challenges in route, and meeting with, educating, bringing greater awareness to people along the way. Their goals included raising awareness of the decline of pollinators and to instill hope across three countries.

It was a huge blessing for us that the very last stop in the USA was here, in the Lower Rio Grande Valley on Sunday, October 20, 2019! The South Texas Border Chapter TMN hosted the Monarch Ultra Team that evening at the St. George's Orthodox Church Hall.

Representatives from local organizations, including the RGV Chapter TMN, nature sites, agencies, etc. who play a part in promoting and protecting pollinators in the Valley were present to share information with the public, as we met the Monarch Ultra runners and team. The director of the Monarch Ultra spoke about the journey thus far. And we had some local speakers sharing what is being done in the Valley for monarchs and other pollinators.

You can learn more about the journey and see photos at <http://www.themonarchultra.com/>



Monarch Ultra Photo by STBC Member Jack Austin



2020 Birding Classic Postponed to Fall

The health and safety of our Birding Classic participants, staff, and the birding community are paramount. We therefore have made the difficult decision to **postpone** the 2020 Great Texas Birding Classic.

We remain hopeful that the situation will improve over the next several months. If so, we plan to host the Birding Classic during peak fall migration for a once-in-a-lifetime version of this popular event. We hope all our loyal participants will still have a chance this year to enjoy the Classic and that we will be able to continue to raise funds for habitat conservation and bird viewing opportunities.

**Great Texas Birding Classic 2020 will take place Fall 2020,
pending re-assessment of Covid-19 situation in July.
We will announce exact dates and additional details soon.**

If you have already registered and paid your fees, we will be in touch by the end of the week with options on how to handle your existing registration. We hope that you will be able to join us this fall and simply transfer your team registration to the new dates, but we realize that may not work for everyone and will have options for all situations.

THANK YOU, CHAPTER MEMBERS, FOR VOLUNTEERING AT WOVE!

Carolyn Cardile

All the members of the WOVE 2020 steering committee want to thank everyone in the Rio Grande Valley Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists for their participation and support again this year. The next time you come to the Birding and Nature Center, take a look at the paver that Cristin Howard, the Director of the birding center, installed in the entry sidewalk as a thank you to the chapter last year after the 2019 WOVE.



Our chapter has been volunteering at WOVE since 2014 when it was still sponsored by St. Andrew's Church. That year the convention center doubled the number of days for WOVE to rent the building. When asked to participate, our chapter members provided enough volunteers and additional speakers to make the event a success. When the SPI Birding and Nature Center took over WOVE as a fundraiser, our chapter was there to help. Each year our many members have participated in WOVE in numerous ways. Their help has been an important contribution to the success of this 5-day nature program.

During the 2020 Winter Outdoor Wildlife Expo many members of our chapter played an important role. You might be surprised to learn that eleven of this year's 37 presenters are members of our chapter. In addition, chapter members filled 20 volunteer different jobs per day for 5 days. Several TMN members also volunteer on the Steering Committee throughout the year. I can't thank everyone enough for your help!

BIRDING CENTER STAFF MEMBERS AND TMN

There is a strong connection between our chapter and the SPI Birding and Nature Center. Cristin Howard, the Director of the birding center, is a member of our chapter. She has encouraged her

staff to become members as well. Five of the staff has completed our Texas Master Naturalist course, and one is enrolled in our new class. Several chapter members volunteer there regularly.

REACHING OUT INTO THE COMMUNITY

This year our chapter has increased its outreach to members of the community, letting people know about nature and our organization's program and activities. Heidi Linnemann is doing an excellent job organizing outreach opportunities at various community events.



Karren Scheiner and

Heidi Linnemann

VIDEO CLASSES

Joseph Connors, STBCTMN

The South Texas Border Chapter would like to thank our sister chapter for helping our 2020 Class finish the classroom portion of their training through the use of the RGVC's video recorded classes. Due to the spreading virus, TMN events, programs, and meetings were cancelled statewide while we still had three remaining classes. It was a relief to have this valuable local resource to draw upon so our students can complete their class time.



Painting by Chet Mink