



Rio Grande Valley Chapter, Texas Master Naturalists

# The Chachalaca

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The Rio Grande Valley Chapter Texas Master Naturalist is organized exclusively for charitable, scientific, and educational purposes, more specifically to develop a group of knowledgeable volunteers to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the study of conservation of natural resources and natural areas within the Rio Grande Valley of Texas.

## Strictly Texas

Article & photos by Anita Westervelt, South Texas Border Chapter

There's just something about a bug named Texas to make it personal and foster a real kinship with this unique land and its critters.

If I identify a bug or critter whose first name is Texas, I like it immediately. I think, "all right – it belongs here, it's a Texan," like the **Texas bow-legged bug**, *Hyalymenus tarsatus*, that has introduced itself to me at the black light moth sheet the last couple of years. They charge in and land on the taut sheet with a decided plop and shoot off again, which is somewhat stressful, but it's always fun to capture another photo of one if it will stay still long enough – and not land on me. I was delighted this summer to happen upon a couple's assignation on a snailseed vine, (*Cocculus diversifolius*) ensuring the continuation of the species on a sunny summer afternoon.



Texas bow-legged bugs feed on a variety of plants, especially euphorbias and seed pods of legumes and milkweeds. In the Valley, typical euphorbias are the sandmats and spurges, like graceful spurge, *Euphorbia hypericifolia* and nodding spurge, *Euphorbia nutans* and the native poinsettias. The nymph looks like a giant ant with an oversized, cubical-shaped abdomen.

Another cool critter named for our homeland is the **Texas spiny lizard**, *Sceloporus olivaceus*. They have spiny dorsal scales in an intricate pattern that change colors with habitat, temperature and lighting. Colors range from grey to tan, brown, navy blue, orange and pink. They are carnivores (insectivores) and eat beetles, wasps, grasshoppers and other insects. They are shy and nervous, can grow to eleven inches (including the tail) and are prey for snakes and raptors.



**Texas wasp moth, *Horama panthalon***, is a fun fella, once you figure he won't sting you. It's a wasp-mimicking moth. The adults drink nectar. The species is common to abundant in southmost Texas. A larval food source is desert yaupon (*Schaefferia cuneifolia*). The males have large feathering on the tibiae.



**Glassy-winged sharpshooter, *Homalodisca vitripennis*** – now that's gotta be a Texan with a skillset like that, right? It doesn't have Texas in its name but it's a Texas true bug. Sharpshooters are a subgroup of leafhopper bugs but larger, about three eighths inch long (leafhoppers are generally less than one quarter inch long). Sharpshooters are expert jumpers with powerful hind legs with a row of distinct spines on the tibia. They have piercing-sucking mouthparts and tap into and feed on xylem or phloem tissue of plants. It is estimated that they use about 70 different plant species. They lay masses of eggs on the underside of leaves and cover them with powdery white protective secretions.



**South Texas satyr, *Hermeuptychia hermybius***, is a newly named butterfly species in the Rio Grande Valley. Specific host plant information is not yet available although most Satyr butterflies use grasses as larval host.



**Texas tree cricket, *Oecanthus texensis*.** Tree crickets have very long antennae. The Texas tree cricket likes mesquite trees; they are active dusk to dawn, feeding on soft-bodied insects, like aphids; they are omnivores and also feed on leaves and fruits. They are not usually considered damaging. Their song is a continuous, musical trill.



**Texas mocis moth, *Mocis texana*,** has a pretty widespread range – most of the eastern United States and only west as far as the Rio Grande Valley. Its larval food includes various grasses, including crabgrass, in its range.

**Greater Texas bullet ant, *Neoponera villosa*** – AKA hairy panther ant has a very painful sting. In the subfamily Ponerinae (huntress ants), it is the largest ponerine in the United States, common in southmost Texas, nesting in stumps, knot-holes, logs and dead sections of live trees. They have great eyesight but don't like vibrations, according to antemporium.com. They eat a wide range of arthropods, including fruit flies, crickets, cockroaches as well as honey and fruit.



**Two myths proven:** Yes, there are unicorns, and yes, everything is bigger in Texas. Perhaps the most fun name-discovery was identifying a **Texas unicorn mantis**, *Pseudovates chlorophaea*. It



is the largest and bulkiest mantid and is found in the United States in southernmost Texas. These mantids have green wings, often with a few small brown spots; the rest of the body is various shades of brown. It seems to prefer flying insects much smaller than itself. It is an ambush-style predator and will sit and wait rather than pursuing prey. In the wild, the Texas unicorn mantis frequently eats small butterflies and moths, which explains why they are frequent visitors to my black light moth sheet set up.



**Texas brown snake**, *Storeria dekayi texana*, is nonvenomous and small (12-16 inches in length). When threatened, they will coil up, raise their head and strike repeatedly; their mouths are not big enough to bite humans, according to [wildlifeforthamerica.com](http://wildlifeforthamerica.com). The snake can vary in color from brown, tan or brick red with a faint lighter stripe down the middle of the back. Their diet includes earthworms, snails, slugs and beetles. They have specialized teeth and jaws that allow them to pull snails out of their shells and eat them, according to [biokids.edu](http://biokids.edu).

What may very well trump most of the above in diet, is the **Gulf Coast toad**, *Bufo nebulifer*, memorable for its stealth, enigmatic smile and golden stripe that begins between its eyes, like a custom-made spearhead and travels all the way down its back. Toads are carnivorous. They eat small fish, insects, flies, mosquitoes, grasshoppers, beetles, crickets, centipedes, millipedes, spiders, worms, grubs, slugs, snails and other small animals.







## **Grackle Large and in Charge**

**Relief printing Lino cut**

**Artwork by Sandra Mink, Rio Grande Valley Chapter**

## Butterflies: If You Let It Grow, They Will Come

Article by Roberto Gaitan, Rio Grande Valley Chapter

What happens when you shrink the lawn? You get butterflies stopping by to visit!



*A dozen Blue Metalmarks in a single crucita bush (Photo by Robert Gallardo).*



*Attendees were told not to fill up on the front-yard appetizer (Photo by Robert Gallardo).*

It began innocently enough. I posted some butterfly photos on the Facebook Group, Rio Grande Valley Butterflies as part of the Texas Pollinators BioBlitz.

At first I thought I was in trouble because I failed to include the location the photos were taken. After I included SE San Benito, I was asked what kind of place was this? After I said our yard, I was asked if someone could come by to see our gardens as a potential tour stop for the National Butterfly Center's 2022 Texas Butterfly Festival.

At first we were taken aback a bit because we would not call our lawn a garden. We have been shrinking our lawn for quite some time now and our butterflies were everywhere. Plus, did we really have butterflies that butterflies would be interested in? Little did we know the dozens of Blue Metalmarks we were seeing would be of great interest to butterflies.

Thus the show began!





We had four days of scouts coming by followed by the three days of tours for the festival. Every day ended with us being a bit more exhausted than the day before. It was great!

We basically had a crash course on butterflies of the RGV but, more importantly, butterflies of our home! After a week and roughly 100 guests, we have identified 84 butterfly species!

Common Name	Family	Common Name	Family
Band-celled sister	Admirals & Relatives	Brown Longtail	Spread-wing Skippers
Common Mestra	Admirals & Relatives	Dorantes Longtail	Spread-wing Skippers
Mexican Bluewing	Admirals & Relatives	Guava Skipper	Spread-wing Skippers
Ruddy daggerwing	Admirals & Relatives	Hermit skipper	Spread-wing Skippers
Ceraunus Blue	Blues	Horace's Duskywing	Spread-wing Skippers
Marine Blue	Blues	Laviana White-Skipper	Spread-wing Skippers
Western Pygmy-Blue	Blues	Long-tailed Skipper	Spread-wing Skippers
Hackberry emperor	Emperors	Mazans scallopwing	Spread-wing Skippers
Tawny Emperor	Emperors	Mimosa Skipper	Spread-wing Skippers
Clouded Skipper	Grass-Skippers	Mournful Duskywing	Spread-wing Skippers
Common Mellana	Grass-Skippers	Sickle-winged Skipper	Spread-wing Skippers
Eufala Skipper	Grass-Skippers	Tropical Checkered-Skipper	Spread-wing Skippers
Fawn-spotted Skipper	Grass-Skippers	Turk's-cap White-Skipper	Spread-wing Skippers
Fiery skipper	Grass-Skippers	White Checkered-Skipper	Spread-wing Skippers
Julia's Skipper	Grass-Skippers	White-patched Skipper	Spread-wing Skippers
Ocola Skipper	Grass-Skippers	White-striped Longtail	Spread-wing Skippers
Olive-clouded Skipper	Grass-Skippers	White-tailed Longtail	Spread-wing Skippers
Sachem	Grass-Skippers	Cloudless Sulphur	Sulphurs
Southern Broken-Dash	Grass-Skippers	Dainty Sulphur	Sulphurs
Southern Skipperling	Grass-Skippers	Large Orange Sulphur	Sulphurs
Whirlabout	Grass-Skippers	Little Yellow	Sulphurs
Clytie Ministreak	Hairstreaks	Lyside Sulphur	Sulphurs
Dusky-blue Groundstreak	Hairstreaks	Mimosa Yellow	Sulphurs
Gray Hairstreak	Hairstreaks	Orange Sulphur	Sulphurs
Lantana Scrub-Hairstreak	Hairstreaks	Sleepy Orange	Sulphurs
Mallow Scrub-Hairstreak	Hairstreaks	Southern dogface	Sulphurs
Red-crescent Scrub-Hairstreak	Hairstreaks	Statira Sulphur	Sulphurs
Silver-banded hairstreak	Hairstreaks	Giant Swallowtail	Swallowtails
Gulf Fritillary	Heliconians & Fritillaries	Pipevine Swallowtail	Swallowtails
Mexican Fritillary	Heliconians & Fritillaries	American Lady	True Brushfoots
Variogated Fritillary	Heliconians & Fritillaries	Bordered Patch	True Brushfoots
Zebra Heliconian	Heliconians & Fritillaries	Common Buckeye	True Brushfoots
Blue Metalmark	Metalmarks	Painted Lady	True Brushfoots
Fatal Metalmark	Metalmarks	Pearl Crescent	True Brushfoots
Red-bordered Metalmark	Metalmarks	Phaon Crescent	True Brushfoots
Rounded Metalmark	Metalmarks	Red Admiral	True Brushfoots
Walkers Metalmark	Metalmarks	Theona Checkerspot	True Brushfoots
Monarch	Monarchs	Tropical Buckeye	True Brushfoots
Queen	Monarchs	Vesta Crescent	True Brushfoots
Soldier	Monarchs	White Peacock	True Brushfoots
South Texas / Carolina Satyr	Satyrs	Checkered White	Whites
American Snout	Snouts	Giant White	Whites



We will have to add, that butterflyers are a friendly bunch of folks. Given butterflies do not wake up until the sun has warmed up the day, butterflies do not come out on cold rainy days, and butterflies go to bed before the sun goes down, butterflyers are well rested and lively.



*Troy, Erin, Barbara, Roberto, Maria Luisa, Mary Lynn  
(Photo by Mary Lynn)*



*Jeffrey Glassberg, Roger Woodruff,  
Ryan Rodriguez (Photo by Roger  
Woodruff)*

We continue to venture out in our yard to see what butterflies are visiting. We have begun adding to our wildscape with host plants for butterflies we saw nectaring but also host plants for butterflies we would like to see. It means our lawn will continue to shrink, but our butterflies are okay with that.



Blue Metalmark



Common Mestra



Gray Hairstreak



Guava Skipper & Giant Swallowtail



Mimosa Skipper



Pipevine Swallowtail & Queen



Pipevine Swallowtail



Red Admiral



Red-bordered Metalmark



Silver-banded Hairstreak



Southern Dogface



White Peacock

A few of the butterfly species found in our yard – photos by Roberto Gaitan



## Weaving Her Story: An Orb in the Yard

Article & photos by Julia Jorgensen, South Texas Border Chapter

One recent November morning I was returning from a sunrise walk. As I approached my front door, a large golden web seemed to appear out of nowhere across the yard. The rising sun had aimed a finger of light around my neighbor's tree and then there was the web, about eighteen inches high and glowing like a Klimt tapestry. Without the sun's help, I'm sure it would have been invisible.



Orb weaver spiderwebs can appear as a work of art.

This web was strung between two branches of my jacaranda tree, with an anchor down in the grass. A light yellow-tan spider with a three-quarter inch body sat in its crux.

I took a few photos of the web, although the windy conditions made the spider herself impossible to photograph. Back inside the house, I began to worry that our lawn crew would run into the web and kill our spider.

Not to worry! In another half hour I discovered that she and her web had decamped.

Consulting *iNaturalist*, using only one poor photo and my memory, I decided she was likely a Tropical Orb Weaver, *Eriophora ravilla*, or an *Eriophora edax*, one of some 2800-3000 species of orb weavers in 170 genera in the family Araneidae. "She," because it is the female who makes and stays in the web -- the smaller male just roams, looking for a mate. And as I suspected from my experience, *E. ravilla* is a nocturnal spider who makes a new web each night and removes it at dawn.



Tropical orb weaver *Eriophora ravilla* or *E. edax*

Sad to say, her web was *not* there the next morning when I left the house. That evening about nine p.m. I went out with a flashlight to look for her and sure enough she *was* there, spread out in the crux of the web. Indeed, the following day she was there at dawn with the whole glorious web, and she was gone when I returned thirty minutes later.

As I learned more about orb weavers, I became impressed with the sophistication of their webs. The web is made out of more than one type of protein-based silk. The anchors, outside circle, and radii are made of plain silk, while the inner circlets are of sticky silk, and there is some evidence that the silk may contain neurotoxins to paralyze prey. Some orb weaver species make up to eight different types of silk, each from a different silk gland, and the typical orb weaver has about three pairs of spinnerets for weaving, each with its own specific function.

Building the web involves floating a line on the wind from one anchor to another and then dropping another line from its center, forming a “Y”. The outside circle and radii are put in place before the inner circlets.

Thanks to the internet, you and I can watch the whole process of web-building. You will see the spider take a break during the process, likely so that she can switch to a different type of silk gland. This BBC Earth video shows and explains the entire construction process—normally one that takes thirty minutes to an hour—condensed to four minutes: “Beautiful Spider Web Build Time-lapse”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNtSAQHNONo>

During her time in the web the orb weaver responds to vibrations of the strands, rushing to whatever flying insect is caught, wrapping it in silk, biting it and waiting for it to die, and then taking it to the center of the web to eat. If prey is plentiful, she may not risk tussling with any unusually large insect or other animal that is caught. I found at least two reports of birds, a warbler and a bunting, who died, unconsumed, in orb weaver webs. In diurnal orb weaver webs, butterflies and diurnal moths will usually escape by shedding scales from their wings. Some new science shows that orb weavers even catch and eat pollen in their webs, so they are actually omnivores.

The web’s signaling power has also turned out to be much greater than expected, acting as a sound amplifier, magnifying acoustic vibrations that occur beyond the web, perhaps giving advance warning of predators. And communication via web isn’t limited to sound: males may have taste receptors on their legs which allow them to taste the silk and determine the female’s receptivity to mating.

We can also see a marvelous video showing an orb weaver quickly taking down a web, which she mostly consumes, in Jo Alwood’s “A Barn Spider Takes Down Her Web”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-WxGikaaiM>

Once her web is down, our spider will rest in a hidden spot, usually under a leaf, with her legs drawn up for the rest of the day.



Some other species of orb weavers produce very different shapes and sizes of webs and deploy them differently. At the extreme, bolas orb weavers do not make webs at all but instead fish for moths using a sticky moth-pheromone-laden globule suspended from the legs. There are even some social species of orb weavers who cooperate in building very large webs.



Spiny backed orb weavers, often seen in RGV backyards, make smaller and less organized-looking webs which they inhabit throughout the day.

Spiny backed orb weaver is common in the RGV

Some nocturnal orb-weavers rank potential web-building spots according to whether they have the correct amount of light for attracting insects. Adams (2000) found that spiders would build smaller webs and take them down sooner in places with higher prey density, thereby conserving energy.

One of the most interesting web variations appears in the genus *Argiope*, which includes some of our familiar black and yellow garden spiders, who are diurnal. This is the addition of a stabilimentum, criss-crossing bands of silk in the center of the web where the spider sits. Biologists have proposed that it may function as a lure for insects by reflecting UV light, as a warning to birds, or as a way of camouflaging the spider. It may also have been the inspiration for E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web*.

But back to our own spider, *Eriophora*, she of the lovely web. Her species lives about twelve months, laying eggs inside a fluffy cocoon attached to foliage. Her hundreds of spiderlings hatch in autumn and balloon off into the breeze on small silk strands, building tiny webs in vegetation and waiting until spring to fully develop and build larger webs (if they are female). It is now November, suggesting that the web I saw was one of our spider's last creations.

I found it moving that her skillful effort created an experience of beauty for another animal (a large, literate ape!). However frivolous, I felt grateful to her and hope to see some of her tiny spiderlings in the spring.

To read more:

About pollen consumption by spiders:

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24312430/>

About orb weaver webs:

<https://insideecology.com/2018/06/21/a-closer-look-at-spider-webs/#:~:text=There%20are%20four%20main%20parts,the%20web%20to%20the%20substrate.>

About the acoustic properties of webs:

<https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2022/03/orb-weaver-spider-uses-web-capture-sounds>

Photos of a variety of stabilimenta: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stabilimentum>

About bolas spiders: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bolas\\_spider](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bolas_spider)

About choice of hunting sites:

Adams, M.R. *Choosing Hunting Sites: Web Site Preferences of the Orb Weaver Spider, Neoscona crucifera, Relative to Light Cues*. Journal of Insect Behavior, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2000



## Seagrasses Meadows of the Laguna Madre

Article & photos by Joseph and Nellie Kowalski, Rio Grande Valley Chapter

There's something almost sacred about hiking through forests. It can evoke the same sort of reverence as walking beneath the vaulted ceilings of ancient cathedrals. Perhaps it is how the stout trunks rise, meshing and weaving canopies together, one tree to the next. As joined canopies rise above the forest floor, branches become ever smaller. In the canopies, varied species of birds and insects find food and protection from predators. Though we in the Rio Grande Valley are far from the vaulted ceilings of tall canopies, we do have forests in our midst: the underwater forests in the Laguna Madre.

Until the Texas Department of Transportation decides to build another bridge to get to South Padre Island, the Queen Isabella Causeway is the only way to cross the Laguna Madre. For the time-being it's the only way to get across. For the most part the mother lagoon begins at the bridge at the Brazos-Santiago Pass. If the tide is coming in, water from the Gulf of Mexico pushes into the lagoon on a high tide and the water appears as if emeralds have been squeezed of their color. A few hours later on a low tide, the moon and sun conspire and pull muddy tidal water from the Laguna Madre back out to sea. And so it goes on a daily basis.

The eastern part of the Laguna Madre, which reaches a depth of a half meter (20 inches) to one and a half meters (60 inches), provides much light and visibility. Many species of plants use this light, creating the diversity that forms seagrass meadows which resemble underwater forests. Below the water of the bay live layers of vegetation, just as in land forests, except these are on a smaller scale.



Mosaic of vegetation types in a seagrass meadow, Laguna Madre, Texas. Shown are the seagrass, *Thalassia testudinum* (turtle grass), the small bladed *Caulerpa mexicana*, and *Acetabularia crenulata*. (Mermaid's wine glass) in the Laguna Madre.

Varied seagrasses form the topmost layer, the canopy, which provides shelter to many animals, vertebrates and invertebrates alike. Swimming juvenile animals, trout, redfish, rays, sea horses and crabs move around and hide in the plants, much the same as birds hide in the canopies of the land forest. Some of these animals consume the seagrass leaves directly, while others, such as snails, glide up and down the leaves grazing on bacteria and other one-celled organisms, some photoautotrophic (those that can make their own food), others, not.

In the intermediate layer of the underwater forest live algal species, like Neptune's shaving brush, which resemble the bushes growing closer to the ground. Another algal species called Mermaid's wine glass resembles a cup used by royalty.

Broad field of *Penicillus capitatus* (Neptune's shaving brush) with *Thalassia testudinum* (turtle grass) in the background.



The bottom layer of the seagrass forest is composed of sediment and detritus, bits and pieces of what was once living matter, that can be compared to dead leaves that accumulate on the forest floor. For some marine animals, this is a feast of leftover scraps on a banquet hall. Hermit crabs cruise along the sediment, feeding on anything that can be called food. Worms and clams, live mostly buried in the sediment, sharing room with seagrass rhizomes and roots. Some snails prey on the clams by drilling holes in the shell and eating the flesh within.



(left) Bed of *Thalassia testudinum* (turtle grass) over-topped by drift algae (*Laurencia poiteaui*) with the omnivorous pinfish (*Lagodon rhomboides*). (right) A detailed image of *Penicillus capitatus* (Neptune's shaving brush) with curious pinfish; note the sediment detritus where the plant attaches.

As you can see, forests grow not just on land, but in unique and unexpected environments like the bay. If the second bridge over the Laguna Madre is ever built, it will open a new destination to don your swimming togs and face mask (No... not the Covid-19 kind) and discover a place of beauty and fascination as you explore a seagrass meadow.





**Reddish Egret with Reflections**

**Relief printing Lino cut**

**Artwork by Sandra Mink, Rio Grande Valley Chapter**



## Whose chick is it anyway?

Article & photos by Anita Westervelt, South Texas Border Chapter

The American Avocet, like a totally modern woman, secures child minding prior to the arrival of the little ones.

Well, that may be putting it in too perfect a light about the pre-planning. female American Avocets have been known to sometimes lay their eggs in the nest of another female who incubates them without noticing. She may also do it with other species. Baby-sitting's not that much trouble for the stand-in mom anyway, once the hatchlings emerge; American Avocet chicks leave the nest within 24 hours of hatching. At a day old, avocets can walk, swim, find food and even dive to escape predators.



Elegant strut of the American Avocet



Black-necked Stilt

Common Terns and Black-necked Stilts may do the same to an avocet nest. American Avocets place their nests directly on the ground, as do Black-necked Stilts, which might be just a small depression, bare or lined with grass, other vegetation or pebbles and other small objects – not a lot of security, which allows for that surreptitious egg or two to be added. In the case of the stilts, the avocets have reared the hatchlings as if they were their own. So, it's all good!

Avocet nesting and breeding antics aren't something we'll witness here on the Texas Coast. We're likely to only see the avocets in the winter when they head to the coast to lagoons, saltwater ponds and mudflats from their breeding grounds in the western Great Plains, Canada, Montana, Dakotas, eastern New Mexico and the Texas Panhandle. If the water conditions are right, the avocets are likely to join our permanent resident Black-necked Stilts.

American Avocets are not frequent visitors to our ever-changing resaca conditions on the outskirts of San Benito. The only other time was August 2012, when a pair showed up still in breeding plumage: rusty-cinnamon head and neck. The five visiting this November are in basic colors, light gray head and neck, black and white uppers, pure white underparts and light blue legs. According to [allaboutbirds.org](http://allaboutbirds.org), “you’ll have to look long and hard for an American Avocet because they are extremely selective, especially liking shallow wetlands with little vegetation.” With the lack of measurable precipitation this year, the receding waters of our resaca offer those shallow conditions.

Both American Avocets and Black-necked Stilts have long necks and long slender bills. American Avocets are a graceful and elegant long-legged bird, the tallest in their family, the *Recurvirostridae* family. Black-necked Stilts, a smaller black and white plumaged member of the same family also have long slender legs, but strikingly reddish in color.

Avocets feed by thrusting their bill underwater and swinging it side to side along the bottom to stir up aquatic insects. They eat beetles, water boatmen, midges, brine flies, fairy shrimp, water fleas, larvae, small fish and sometimes seeds from aquatic plants.



American Avocet foraging

Black-necked Stilts feed by capturing prey in a quick peck, or they will chase small fish and trap them in the shallows for easy striking; they also will swing their bill side to side in the water to feed, like avocets do. Their diet is similar to the American Avocet along with mosquito larvae, caddisflies, dragonflies, mayflies, crickets, grasshoppers and small frogs. Like avocets, their young are able to walk within 24 hours of hatching and feed themselves; the parents of both groups continue to care for their chicks until first flight, which isn’t until the young are four to five weeks old.

## Celebrating Frank Wiseman

Article by Volker Imschweiler, Rio Grande Valley Chapter

On Saturday morning, the 29th of October 2022, over 40 people gathered at the entrance of Ramsey Park to a memorial for the late Frank Wiseman, team leader and teacher of the local Master Naturalist groups.



*Friends, family and colleagues of Frank Wiseman (Photo by Maile Worrell)*

The participants quickly used the opportunity of a social event to exchange all kind of information between fellow Naturalists and friends, sometimes arrived from a distant home.

Spontaneously a few plant walks were arranged, bringing debate about milkweed, at least three not yet identified mallows, several grass species, native but seldom seen, as well as valuable background information on habitat and park arrangement.

The day showed how important presence and personal contacts are. One can only hope for the future that similar events will be scheduled rather than cancellation or Zoom anonymity.

The spirit of Frank Wiseman lives on, through the hands and minds of those who touched his presence.





*Self portrait and Brass bell collected by Frank Wiseman.*



*Frank was Charter Member of the Rio Grande Valley Chapter - Texas Master Naturalist.*



*Frank's milestone pins earned through his dedication doing what he loved.*



*Frank's annual re-certification pins.*

## Heart Leaf Hibiscus - - in memory of Frank Wiseman

Article & photo by Camille M. Rich, South Texas Border Chapter, Steward of El Mesteño Ranch & Arboretum, Puerto Rico, Texas



Tulipán Del Monte, also referred to as the Heart Leaf Hibiscus, is a strikingly beautiful plant native to the Rio Grande Valley. Noted as being found in Cameron, Hidalgo, Willacy, and Starr Counties, it naturally grows among woodier shrubs and can be difficult to locate unless it is in bloom and its gorgeous, velvet-like petals are unfurled and on display for all to see.

After years of trying to grow this beauty from seed, I gave up. Much to my pleasant surprise, it came up years later in a pot filled with recycled potting soil, native seeds from some species that, now, escapes memory, and mulch from previous native seed-starting attempts.

This flower's beauty never fails to take my breath away as I marvel at its striking color and am mesmerized and dazzled by the visually fascinating intricacies of its overall structure. I hope that this image will bring a smile to your face and brighten your day!

For more information about this beauty:

[Plants of Deep South Texas: A Field Guide to the Woody and Flowering Species](#), by Alfred Richardson and Ken King. Texas A & M University Press. College Station, Texas. 2011.

[Wildflowers of Texas](#), by Michael Eason. Timber Press, Inc. Portland, Oregon. 2018.

## A Parting Shot - - Memories of Frank Wiseman

Article by Anita Westervelt, South Texas Border Chapter

Frank Wiseman was the quintessential group photo guru. No matter what, it either began with a group shot or ended with a group shot.



Friends and family of Frank Wiseman gathered to celebrate his memory. (photo by Sue Wiseman)

Sue Wiseman, Frank's sister-in-law of 53 years, knew this about Frank. Sue, even after losing her husband, Charlie, Frank's brother, just weeks after Frank's death in February, came down in October, with her son Mike, her siblings, their spouses and friends for a final celebration of Frank's life and to spread his ashes in the park that Frank loved. Here at Hugh Ramsey Nature Park he spent thousands of volunteer hours during a span of 20 plus years helping to revegetate and create native specialty gardens, first with the Arroyo Colorado Audubon Society, the Native Plant Project and then as a Texas Master Naturalist.

Sue designed a memorable send off for Frank, beginning with a picture journey of his life before any of us knew him. She had put together a notebook for us, sharing early photos of Frank, his awards and honors and telling us many things we didn't know, like his love of little theatre where he worked behind the scenes, but never on stage, and his time as an artist, his love of gardens, flowers and traveling.

During the journey of Frank's life, Sue talked about his career with the Department of Defense, where he taught high school children of American military and diplomatic personnel from all over England and Europe. Sue spoke of Frank's love of traveling and the many experiences he enjoyed – and his collection of bells from so many places – which she left on the Ramsey Park pavilion tables for us mourners to take as a remembrance of Frank.

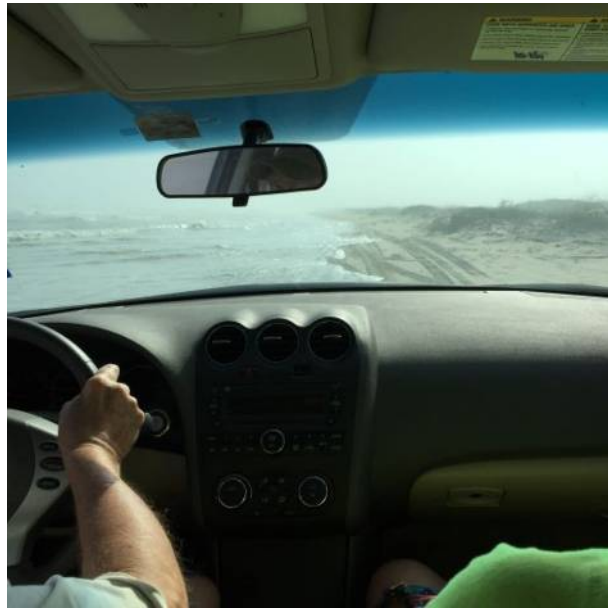


More than a dozen of Frank's friends told stories and talked about Frank's memorable ways; we laughed and cried. He touched so many lives, sharing his knowledge, teaching about plants and the native habitat. Frank will be missed by so many.

Oh, yeah. The beautiful ceremony ended with a group shot. And if you're wondering, Frank's brother-in-law assured me Frank would get it – they were posting it “to the Cloud.”

Frank and Charlie Wiseman's mother was in the local Shell Club, probably from its inception. Frank also was a long-time member. A portion of Frank's ashes were co-mingled with Charlie's. The two brothers did not plan that, but it came to be, and as both men had wished, their ashes were spread on the beach in October by Sue and family.

I'd like to share a fun Frank-on-the-Beach story. One Christmas day, when my husband was deployed, Frank, Pamela Gregory (former Texas Master Naturalist) and I went to the beach and had gas station burritos for Christmas dinner, sitting on the jetties.



We looked for beach things in the sand, played in the surf and found silly objects that had washed ashore that we called dragon eggs. We dallied a little too long; the tide came in too fast. We quickly scrambled into Frank's car and splashed through the surf at high speed – it was ever so much fun! Then he drove us around to the back side of the sand dunes and we stopped at all the native plants for endless discussions! It was a memorable and fun Christmas!

The great escape on the beach (photo by Anita Westervelt)



Frank William Wiseman  
March 12, 1933 –  
February 21, 2022

Founding member  
Rio Grande Valley  
Chapter  
Texas Master Naturalist

## Shrink the Lawn: An Eight Year Journey

Article & photos by Roberto Gaitan, Rio Grande Valley Chapter

When we were looking for a house in 2014, we had decided we wanted space, so we would not have a neighbor right outside our window, and ideally we wanted to live near a resaca. As the new school year loomed and our house hunting had failed to produce any results, we decided to give up until next summer; however, we had one more home to see. It was a winner!

Having just finished my Texas Master Naturalist training (Barbara had tagged along with me, she would complete her training in 2015), we knew about natives but still had not made them an integral part of our lives. The home that we moved into, was not a stellar candidate for being native friendly.



*Google Earth photo (Aug. 2014)*

Fast forward to 2022 and our ongoing journey has brought about change.



While we purposefully planted some natives, many plants came up after we left nature be itself. We did let some plants grow that later turned out to be invasives and we also learned that some natives did not like being relocated or coddled. Natives like to grow where they like to grow.

Our endeavor required me to change my process of mowing. I could no longer simply mow short and often. Instead I set the mower at the highest level and move slowly to let the butterflies, moths, frogs, grasshoppers, and other fauna get out of the way while I keep a sharp eye for anything growing amongst the grass. I also wait a month between mows to allow natives a chance to make themselves visible.

We are still adding natives to our lawn to increase our diversity and thus make further improvements to our yard's contribution to our regional ecosystem. While we still have some lawn to tend to, it has shrunk significantly.



As an added benefit, we have been simply amazed at the butterflies we have seen this year! We are true believers of “if you plant it, they will come” or alternatively “if you let them grow, they will come”.



## An Interesting Visitor - - Coachwhip Snake

Article & photos by Camille M. Rich, South Texas Border Chapter, Steward for El Mesteño Ranch and Arboretum, Puerto Rico, Texas

This long, slender, non-venomous Coachwhip, a Texas native snake, stopped by the other day for a nice visit. It was basking in the sun near an old, repurposed hay cart that had been adorned with pieces of dead, dried black brush tree branches in order to support two different varieties of native passion flower vine.



Coachwhip snake (*Masticophis flagellum*)

This slender snake, with a small head and large eyes, lay motionless. Its concealment was incredible; it very closely resembled the dead, dried black brush tree branches that it was lying near at the time. It took a moment for my brain to process exactly what I was looking at.

When I finally realized that I was staring at a snake, I was quite startled! I must have jumped back about five feet! Very quickly, however, my “fear” reaction shifted to one of curiosity, wonder, and amazement at its beauty. Naturally, I wanted to document this lovely creature with a portrait, but where was my camera when I needed it?



I made a mad dash a few yards back to my truck to grab my camera in order to try and snap a few pictures of its cute little face before it decided to move along to another location. Lucky for me, it was in no hurry to high tail it out of there. I was able to photograph its head and the interesting upward arch of the first sections of its vertebrae as it appears to hold its head up in a telescoping fashion.

Coachwhip snakes are agile and quick, and even hunt rattlesnakes!

If you would like more in-depth information on Coachwhips and other snakes that are native to Texas, sources for this information are plentiful. Nonetheless, one of the books that I keep close by for quick reference is, Texas Snakes: A Field Guide, by James R. Dixon and John E. Werler. Drawings by Regina Levoy. University of Texas Press. Austin, Texas. 2000.

## Abstract beauty in unexpected places

Article & photo by Anita Westervelt, South Texas Border Chapter



Golden daggers of the Christmas cholla in Falcon State Park

Christmas was long past. The weak afternoon glow of a cloudy west Texas fading March sky had only enough strength to highlight the golden dagger tips of an erect, five-foot tall, spent Christmas Cholla. I was mesmerized by the plant's startlingly wicked achromatic beauty. The plant was off the beaten track, three layers deep, nearly hidden by ancient, drought-petrified thorn scrub – but worth the shredded clothing to get the shot.

This native cactus has many names: tasajillo, Christmas cactus, desert Christmas cactus, pencil cactus, rat-tail cactus and turkey pear. Its scientific name is *Opuntia leptocaulis*. It is a pencil-thin, slender, jointed cactus with long, golden, very sharp and obvious spines. Hundreds of other tiny spines in surprising parts of the plant are nearly invisible to the naked eye.

Bright yellow-green flowers in spring are followed by fleshy green fruit that turn Christmas red during winter – a treat for bobwhite quail, wild turkey, mockingbirds, curved-billed thrashers and many other songbirds, who in turn readily deposit the seeds. The plant grows upright or sprawling and can quickly form dense colonies and impenetrable (except for the determined lady with a camera) thickets. In West Texas, it is a larval host plant for the staghorn cholla moth.

The jointed branches take root easily as segments drop to the ground where animals inadvertently break them off as they travel, earning it yet another name: jumping cactus. In truth, the segments easily detach when disturbed. Coyotes, rodents and other small mammals eat the fruit, too. A close look at the upper left quadrant of the photo shows one lone dried red fruit on a branch.



## San Benito Wetlands: Helping Shape Its Future

Article by Alicia Cavazos, Rio Grande Valley Chapter

The San Benito Wetlands is 165 acres of ponds that were previously used to treat the City of San Benito's wastewater. Many are unaware of the site so *let's begin with the backstory. . . .*



Black-necked Stilts (photo by Sylvia Canales)

*A little history of the wetlands:* In 2005, the city was facing a 3 million dollar fine due to sewer water improperly flowing into the Arroyo Colorado downstream. The solution was to create a new Wastewater Treatment Plant. In partnership with Texas Water Institute and TCEQ (Texas Commission on Environmental Quality Standards) the effluent water then flowed through the ponds that are filled with rocks where any remaining sediments were deposited. Clean water then flowed into the Arroyo Colorado. The new facility was built in 2008. This was done in phase 1-3 which met the clean-up requirements and waived the fine.



Great Blue Heron (photo by Sylvia Canales)

*ACAS support:* The Arroyo Colorado Audubon Society was invited to help plant trees and shrubs along the banks of the ponds in 2018, the beginning of development for local recreational use such as birding and fishing. Several bird surveys were conducted during this time. Unfortunately, once the COVID-19 pandemic hit, development was halted. Soon after, the older structure at the entrance collapsed and the city restricted access to ensure the safety of visitors.

*That brings us to the present:* Jaime Flores, Program Coordinator for the Texas Water Resource Institute, has initiated the next phase of development and is preparing grant requests to include a parking area, new caliche trails, restrooms and drinking fountains.

Jaime has been escorting ACAS volunteers on *the third Saturday of each month* (until July 2022) to the wetlands to document birds being seen. Our eBird lists are evolving with each trip due to seasons, weather, water levels, etc. Earlier this summer, 192 species of birds have been observed at this eBird hotspot.

Jaime is utilizing this information to keep the city informed about the value and interest in the San Benito Wetlands Project. As a group of birding enthusiasts, we know all-too-well what a hotspot the wetlands can be. In November 2021, there was a Fork-tailed Flycatcher spotted in the area. Many birders were able to view it since it perched near the front of the property. Also, a pair of Groove-billed Ani spent the 2021 winter close to the road bridge and were viewed by many.



Neotropic Cormorants and American White (photo by Sylvia Canales)

Although the site will remain closed to the public until the enhancements are completed, the RGV Birding Festival got special permission to visit the site during the festival. We had 386 visitors from 39 states and six countries. During this time the bird species increased to 209.

## We need your help – Harlingen Christmas Bird Count

Article by Alicia Cavazos, Rio Grande Valley Chapter

Our date for the Harlingen Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will be our usual last Saturday of the count which falls on December 31, 2022 for this year. As many of you know, Norma Friedrich has officially retired from the duties of co-compiler and she has left some *mighty big shoes* to fill. I, along with Laura Robinson and Susan Upton have agreed to help out. Mark Conway, co-compiler, will continue to tabulate all the bird entries.

Please get together with your former team-mates and let me know if you will participate in this count; [hgtxcbc@gmail.com](mailto:hgtxcbc@gmail.com). If you don't have a team I can help create one or put you with an existing team.

Arrangements will be made with each area's CBC compiler to deliver the packet of information. Also, please let me know if you are conducting a backyard bird count as well.



Laura, Sue, Alicia and Susan at Coastal Tip CBC



Plans are underway to organize an aftercount gathering at a local eatery. Since we have not been able to meet for a couple of years due to COVID, this should be a lot of fun and a great opportunity to catch up with our birding friends and meet new ones. And yes..... we will have prizes to award those special finds and counts!! Details to follow.

Results will be announced by email and at the first Arroyo Colorado Audubon Society (ACAS) meeting following the final tabulation and entry of our count to the Audubon CBC database.

This will be an exciting count as vagrants are already popping up across the Valley!

Birders observing at ponds during 2022 RGV Birding Festival



## Bifurcate Trashline Orb Weaver

Article & photo by M. Kathy Raines, Rio Grande Valley Chapter

What are those dingy greenish pearls dangling in this spider web? I wondered for years. Then, finally, this summer, I caught one, in a photo anyway—a tiny bifurcate trashline orb weaver—perfectly camouflaged among her jewels.

The aptly named bifurcate trashline orb weaver (*Alloycyclosa bifurca*)—meaning, in Latin, “like a circle,” for its spherical web and “forked abdomen” for its ‘M’-shaped rear—spins its web beneath eaves and among prickly pear pads, date palms and other plants, as well as from brick and rock faces. Prevalent in the Rio Grande Valley southwards to Mexico and Central America, it also appears in Florida and the West Indies. I see these orb weavers frequently in my yard. Prior to 1999, it was in the genus ‘Cyrtophora’.



Bifurcate trashline orb weaver (*Alloycyclosa bifurca*)

The moniker “trashline” comes from the spider’s linear, woven stabilimentum, or web decoration, which resembles a line of debris. In fact, the bottom half of the row, below which the spider perches, is just that—a row of discarded carcasses. Above the wee creature is her row of up to five egg sacs. Distinguishing this spider, with her tiny legs, from her egg sacs and debris requires close attention.

Male bifurcate trashline orb weavers are so rare—in one study, only two males appeared out of 350 spiders—and the female’s reproductive organs so underdeveloped that some have proposed that they are parthenogenetic, or able to reproduce without males. While females are about 1/5 to about 3/10 of an inch long, males reach about 35% that size. Only the female’s underside bears a splotch of red, and only she spins a web. The spider has a biforked abdomen, ending in what looks like the back of a fish.

A particular ichneumonid wasp—one whose larvae feed upon spiders and insects— *Polysphincta gutfreundi*, preys upon bifurcate trashline orb weavers. Unless the spider quickly rides a dropline out of its web, remaining away for a few minutes, the stealthy wasp, entrapping and stinging the spider, deposits an egg on its abdomen. Then, the wasp's hatched larva, or sometimes, larvae, drills holes, attaches itself and, for about a week, feeds on spider juices. Also, it appears to inject its unwitting victim, trapped in its own web, with psychotropic drugs that alter its web-weaving behavior to the larva's benefit.

These chemicals apparently induce the spider to weave a web noticeably different from its own tidy, symmetrical insect-catcher—a sturdier, asymmetrical one designed to protect the larva's prospective cocoon, one also including linear stabilimentum to camouflage it. Then, after about a week—the spider's having done its bidding—the larva sucks it dry, killing it. However, when researchers removed larvae before they offed their victims, the spiders' behavior gradually normalized, in the reverse order that their alterations occurred.

Scientists have yet to learn precisely what the wasps' injected chemicals do to the spiders; some surmise that they reduce the volume of silk in their glands, thus altering the amount and lengths of radii and spiral loops. To read more about this fascinating phenomenon and see excellent photos of both original and altered webs, consult this site:

<https://insider.si.edu/2010/01/drugged-spiders-web-spinning-may-hold-keys-to-determining-how-animal-behavior-is-controlled/>

The bifurcate trashline orb weaver, along with a few other species, appears to have a particularly short circadian cycle, or biological clock—one that assists creatures with performing recurrent daily actions like eating, sleeping and hunting. However, these spiders' short cycles may, in fact, be useful in avoiding diurnal predation, since, usually motionless during the day, they begin web spinning a few hours before dawn.

Little information is available on this quite common but fascinating little creature. Also, though this orb weaver's abundance in the Valley suggests that the presence of *Polysphincta gutfreundi*, the closest records I've found of this wasp's appearance are in El Cielo, Mexico, roughly 200 miles south of us. I am looking forward to reading further studies on the bifurcate trashline orb weaver, especially those done by fellow residents of the Rio Grande Valley.

## South Texas Ecotourism Center: STEC Fall Speaker Series

Article by Ed Meza, Rio Grande Valley Chapter

The South Texas Ecotourism Center (STEC) created a Fall Speaker Series for the first and third Wednesdays in the months of October, November and December. The series scheduled various speakers and topics that supported the educational mission of the STEC to promote the preservation and appreciation of our natural resources. During the days of the speakers, the Center was open until 8:30 pm for visitors to have a chance to experience the park in the evening. Presentations were given at 6:30 pm. and refreshments were served. The programs were sponsored by the Laguna Madre Museum Foundation.

October and November topics included: “History of the STEC,” by Edward Meza, STEC Director and Texas Master Naturalist, highlighted the history of the STEC from its very beginnings to what is planned for the future; “Light Pollution” by Jennifer Rektorik, South Texas Border Chapter Texas Master Naturalist, shared the way light can affect the night skies, your vision at night and nature. It was amazing to learn about what light pollution causes and how to help reduce the problem.



Jennifer Rektorik sharing about light pollution



Marilyn Lorenz highlighting backyard birds

The fall Speaker Series continued with “Backyard Birding.” Marilyn Lorenz, Texas Master Naturalist and STEC volunteer, highlighted what birds you can find in your own backyard including native and migrating ones. She used her late husband’s amazing photography to showcase the various birds.



The final November program, “Floating Gardens” by Diana Lehmann, Texas Master Naturalist and STEC volunteer, shared the history of floating gardens and the beneficial and destructive water plants and algae. Her presentation inspired us to make our own floating gardens at home.

Our speakers were all Texas Master Naturalists whose knowledge and experience in their field made the presentations more enjoyable and educational. The Rio Grande Valley is fortunate to have such a group of knowledgeable and enthusiastic specialists who love to share their knowledge with others.



Diana Lehman educating about floating gardens

Education is one of the major goals of the center and the Speaker Series added so much to our events. Our next two topics for the remainder of the series will be on December 7, the screening of the film “Deep in the Heart.” The film is a visually stunning celebration of Texas’ diverse landscapes and remarkable wildlife found nowhere else. The film aims to conserve our remaining wild places, to show the connectivity of water and wildlife and to recognize the importance of conservation on a continental scale.

The last presentation of the series will be on December 21. Javier Gonzalez, educator for the SPI Birding Center and Texas Master Naturalist, will be speaking about the Christmas Bird Count that the Birding Center holds annually.

For the spring, we plan to have other events that would enhance the experience of our visitors such as nature walks, noon presentations, and nature-related workshops.

The South Texas Ecotourism Center is a department of Cameron County which is free to the public and open daily from 8 am to 5 pm. It is located at 501 W. State Highway 100, Laguna Vista, Texas. For information please call (956) 772-0210. Please check out our webpage [www.stec-lv.org](http://www.stec-lv.org) and FB page: [www.facebook.com/STECLV](https://www.facebook.com/STECLV).

## Blue Crab Memories

Article by Jack Austin, South Texas Border Chapter

My wife and I grew up on coastal tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay in Virginia. Catching and eating blue crabs were activities we both enjoyed and often we had family gatherings where we sat around a picnic table covered with newspaper. A mound of steamed crabs was spread on the table, and we picked the delicious white meat out of the crabs and enjoyed the feast.

Now that we live in Texas, we haven't found a good place to catch crabs, nor have we seen others crabbing. I know there are plenty of crabs in local waters, but we haven't seen crabs for sale in seafood stores in places like Port Isabel. I therefore have done a little research and found some information about crabbing in Texas.

The season for recreational crabbing in Texas is open all year and the only requirement is a Texas saltwater fishing license. Crabs in the Laguna Madre are available throughout the year, but the best crabbing occurs during the warm summer months. The Atlantic blue crab (*Callinectes sapidus*) inhabits salty or brackish waters along the southern Atlantic Coast as well as the Gulf of Mexico. These crabs are mainly found in the warm, shallow rivers and bays.



Atlantic blue crab (photo by / CC-BY-Jarek TuszyńskiSA-3.0 June 2014)

Crabs feed mainly on small fish, shrimp or other crustaceans which it catches with its strong claws. Blue crabs have a hard exoskeleton which it sheds periodically as it grows. Before shedding, a new soft shell is formed inside the old exoskeleton, and this slowly expands and hardens after the crab moves out of the old shell. For a few hours the soft crab is practically helpless and subject to predation by larger fish, wading birds, pelicans and sea gulls.

The soft crab is sought by commercial crabbers who catch them when they are about to molt, then place them in shedding tanks until they emerge as soft shells. These crabs are then sold to restaurants. Crabs must be at least five inches from tip to tip of the top shell to be legally kept. Also, female crabs carrying egg sacks on their undersides must be returned alive so that the species can replenish itself. The female mates only once in its lifetime but it can release more than two million eggs. The egg sack is orange colored and spongy. Female crabs carrying this egg sack are referred to as sponge crabs or sooks.

There are several ways to catch crabs. A recreational crabber need only have a long-handled crab net and a bucket to wade along the shore in two or three feet of water, searching for crabs on the bottom. When an unsuspecting crab is spotted, the crabber carefully moves closer and scoops the crab up with the net. An easier technique is to tie a piece of chicken or a piece of fish on a string and toss it out in the water and wait until the crab tugs at it. When the crab starts to pull, the string is slowly pulled to the surface and the crab is netted and tossed in the bucket.

Other productive methods of catching crabs require a wire trap such as the pyramid trap with folding sides. The trap is baited by attaching the bait to the floor of the trap and dropping the trap from a cord to the bottom, letting the sides drop so the bait is accessible to the crabs. When the crab starts feeding, the cord is pulled tight trapping the crab inside and the trap is pulled up and the crab emptied into the bucket.

Another method is to use a commercial crab pot. These are square-shaped traps made of wire which are dropped in deeper water and tied to a pole or a small buoy. The bait pocket located in the middle of the crab pot is filled with chicken meat or oily fish such as menhaden or mullet which will attract crabs to enter the trap through funnel shaped openings located low on the sides of the pot. Crabs cannot escape once inside the pot. This method is also used by commercial crabbers who often put out a hundred or more pots and work the pots from their boat. The crabber pulls the pot onto a flat surface called a culling board where the pot full of crabs is emptied and the crabs are sorted by size. Small crabs and sponge crabs are returned to the water and the rest are taken to market.

Cooking methods and seasoning of crabs vary by region and personal preference. Hard crabs are washed off and either steamed or boiled. I like to steam them in a fairly large cooker I obtained from Bass Pro Shops. It consists of two pots with the bottom pot filled with water (or beer) and the top pot filled with crabs. I place this on a propane cooker after seasoning the crabs with a red pepper seasoning such as Old Bay. I steam the crabs for about thirty minutes or until their shells turn a rosy red. In Louisiana, the crabs are usually boiled and sometimes mixed with other meats such as sausage or shrimp. This is seasoned with mesh sacks of special Cajun spices.

Crab meat is not only tasty, it is also a healthy food source containing vitamins, protein, amino acids and minerals. Restaurants such as Joe's Crab Shack might be a good place to learn to eat crabs for those not accustomed to it. Crab meat is also used to make crab cakes and crab cocktails. Any way its fixed, it tastes good to me!



## A Glimpse into 2023

Article & photo by Roberto Gaitan, Rio Grande Valley Chapter

### New Officers

As our 20<sup>th</sup> year of service comes to a close, we have a slate of officers that have volunteered to lead us into 2023.

**President – Roberto Gaitan (Class of 2014)**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President – Robin Gelston (Class of 2019)**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-President – Yvette Cano (Class of 2022)**  
**Treasurer – Elizabeth Hosick (Class of 2021)**  
**Secretary – Carolyn Cardile (Class of 2009)**

Pending any nominations for these roles from our membership and our formal election process in December, I would like to thank Robin, Yvette, Betsy, and Carolyn for their willingness to devote their time and energy to our chapter for 2023. It is enjoyable to help on a project, to volunteer with a partner, to staff an outreach event, etc., but we can not do any of that without the chapter leadership that keeps our organization going.

### Gone but not too Far

Absent from our officer list is Barbara Peet. As you know, Barbara has served as Second Vice-President for several years and stepped up to help us tackle the virtual world. Last year Barbara took the role of New Class Training Director from Joni Gillis, who had served in that role for several years, and, though Barbara has stepped down from the Officer list, she will continue as our 2023 New Class Training Director.

### Third Year as President

If elected, I will be entering my third and final year as your President. I have been glad to use my technical background to guide our chapter through the challenges we faced in the virtual world. I am thankful you have had the confidence in me to try new things and redefine our new normal.

In order to ensure our success in 2023 and beyond, I encourage anyone wishing to take a leadership role in our organization to let me know. With various committee, event, and outreach roles, you don't have to be an officer to help out. Today your officers and directors wear multiple hats and it does wear us down. We can only keep up our pace for a while before we tire. We need your help.

While I am looking forward to my third year as President, I am a firm believer that new leadership is vital for an organization to be healthy, innovative, and agile. We don't know what new challenges we will face in the future but we need someone that can bring a fresh perspective in every leadership role we have or in every activity we perform.

## 2023 TMN Annual Meeting

As we continue with our “normal” work in 2023, I am excited that our 2023 TMN Annual Meeting is coming to the Rio Grande Valley. It is the 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting but it marks the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Texas Master Naturalist Program. It is also the first time the Annual Meeting has ever been to the RGV.

The event will bring some challenges as any event like this will do, but this is the 23<sup>rd</sup> event. I have no doubt that our state leadership has learned a thing or two on how to run these. Our role will be to help as much as we can to ensure its success. My hope is our chapter will step up and let our pride in our home shine as we showcase the uniqueness of our region.

Keep an eye and an ear out for further details on the event plans. We will be meeting with Mary Pearl Meuth and Michelle Haggerty from the State Office soon and will share what we know as soon as we can.







27th Annual

# W.O.W.E SAVE THE DATE



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9TH-11TH  
2023

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RAPTOR SHOWS  
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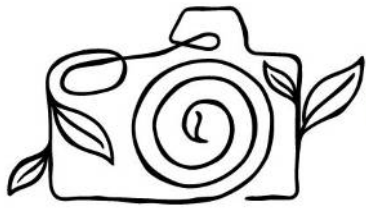


Jonathan Woods  
-Raptor Project-



Tiffany Kersten, a local RGV birding guide, spent 2021 traveling to all corners of the Lower 48 States, tallying birds and gifting personal safety alarms to women she met along the way. Her goal was to see 700 bird species, and to raise awareness of women's safety in the outdoors. She ended up surpassing her goal and setting a NEW Lower 48 Big Year record of 726!! As seen on TEXAS MONTHLY.





# **WINTER OUTDOOR WILDLIFE EXPO**

## **Photo Contest**

### **Fundraiser**

**The southern coastal tip of Texas offers an incredible landscape and biodiversity for outstanding nature photography opportunity!**

**This year, WOWE is celebrating this special nature through the lenses of the people that enjoy it so much via a friendly nature photo contest!**

**Funds raised will support habitat projects and education initiatives at the SPI Birding Center.**

**We are excited to see your nature point of view!**



**For more details and to submit photos visit:  
[spibirding.com/wowe-photo-contest](http://spibirding.com/wowe-photo-contest)**

T E X A S



Milestones & awards for September 2022,  
October 2022, and November 2022



# Congratulations!

## Newly Certified Texas Master Naturalists

Joseph Kowalski '22

100 Hours Milestones

Jeff Bradley S'20

250 Hours Milestones

Kathy Coster '14

Skippy Palmer '20

500 Hours Milestones

Emma Gonzalez S'19

Re-Certification for 2022

Pat Avery  
David Batot  
Anna Coster  
Alex Gomez  
Eileen Mattei  
Chet Mink

*Keep up  
the  
hard  
work  
all!*

Pete Moore  
Jimmy Paz  
Barb Peterson  
Linda Poovey  
Javi Gonzalez  
Janis Silveri

Making a total of 60 members who have re-certified for 2022. . . so far.

## Contributors to this issue of The Chachalaca



Jack Austin



Alicia Cavazos



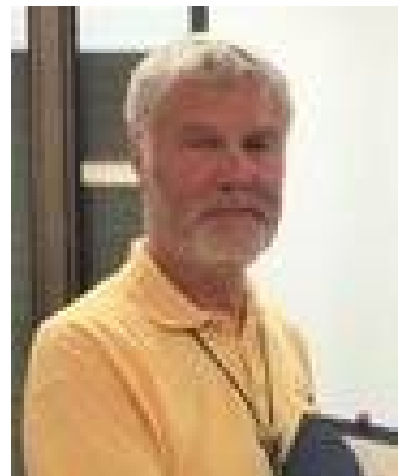
Roberto Gaitan



Joni Gillis



Diane Hall



Volker Imschweiler





Julia Jorgensen



Nellie & Joe Kowalski



Ed Meza



Sandra Mink



M. Kathy Raines



Camille M. Rich



Anita Westervelt

## RGVC Leadership Team 2022

### Officers

President	Roberto Gaitan
1 <sup>st</sup> Vice President	Robin Gelston
2 <sup>nd</sup> Vice President	Barbara Peet
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### Directors

Membership	Joni Gillis
New Class	Barbara Peet
Communications	Diane Hall
Advanced Training	Teresa Du Bois
Volunteer Service	(open)
New Class Rep	Dan Martin
At Large: Winter Texans	Carolyn Woughter

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Membership	Adrian Ramos, Norma Trevino
Training	Robin Gelston (chair), Pam Bradley, Barbara Peterson, Emma Gonzales
Education	Penny Brown
Outreach	Pat Avery, Diana Lehmann, Jerald Garrett
Volunteer Service	Tira Wilmoth
Communication	Diane Hall, Chet Mink, Tamie Bulow, Roberto Gaitan

### Advisors

Texas AgriLife	Tony Reisinger
Texas Parks & Wildlife	Javier de Leon

**Would you like to help? Please contact us at [riograndevalleychapter.tmn@gmail.com](mailto:riograndevalleychapter.tmn@gmail.com)  
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