Rio Grande Valley & South Texas Border Chapters
Texas Master Naturalist

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IN THIS ISSUE

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TEXAS Master Naturalist™

The Rio Grande Valley Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist program 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.

Ten Years and Counting

Article by Bob Schmidt, South Texas Border Chapter

In a year already filled with historic events and celebrations, the South Texas Border Chapter proudly celebrates 10 years of service to the people of Hidalgo, Starr, and Cameron Counties in 2025.

The chapter originated in 2015 to provide greater and more convenient accessibility to meetings and events in the upper part of the Valley for current and future Texas Master Naturalist members who were then part of the Rio Grande Valley Chapter.

Ten years and 70,000 volunteer service hours later, the South Texas Border Chapter has made an economic impact of over 1.6 million dollars while serving over 50,000 RGV residents in 21 Valley communities. After graduating a class of 28 in April, the chapter currently boasts 104 active members.

Velma Schmidt, chair of the South Texas Border Chapter's 10th Anniversary Committee, has focused her committee's early work on sharing the good news about TMN and the chapter's positive efforts in the communities that have benefited most throughout the past decade. Through contacts with local community leaders, the chapter has thus far received Civic Proclamations honoring its work in Pharr, Weslaco, and Mission. Similar celebrations are planned for Edinburg and McAllen.

City of Pharr (*above left*) and City of Weslaco (*left*) honor Texas Master Naturalist South Texas Border Chapter for their volunteer work -photos courtesy of respective cities

"It is important to me that our chapter members know we are appreciated and supported in our volunteer efforts. The proclamations we are receiving are being presented during City Council meetings and are a testimony to the efforts of our chapter and the impact we have made throughout the past 10 years. I am grateful to these cities for recognizing the good work that we do," said Schmidt.

Anne Mayville (*right*) speaks to Mission City Council – photo courtesy City of Mission

(*left*)Ernesto Garcia-Ortega also addresses Mission City Council – photo by Bob Schmidt

(*above*) City of Mission honors Texas Master Naturalist South Texas Border Chapter for their volunteer work -photo courtesy of City of Mission

At the May 12 Mission City Council meeting, South Texas Border Chapter President Anne Mayville thanked city leaders for their proclamation and ongoing support of the chapter's efforts in empowering communities like Mission to become more eco-friendly. Chapter Advisor Ernesto Garcia-Ortega praised the volunteer efforts of TMN in providing an educated corps of good people motivated by the desire to improve the quality of life for all of our citizens by promoting good stewardship and enjoyment of our natural resources.

Beyond the civic recognition received, the anniversary committee plans a series of special events and celebrations over the remainder of this year. A special tree planting at the May chapter meeting, a picnic at the chapter-supported public garden outside the Vannie Cook Cancer Treatment Center is in the works, all culminating in a major celebration during the fall, around the October chapter founding.

A Lasting Impact

-South Texas Border Chapter 10 Year Anniversary Tree Planting Ceremony

Article by Robert Hernandez, South Texas Border Chapter

The South Texas Border Chapter 10 year anniversary committee headed by Velma Schmidt, 1st vice-president, performed a tree planting ceremony at the St. George Pollinator Garden and Monarch Waystation to recognize the chapter's 10 years of existence within the Texas Master Naturalist program. Members Robert Hernandez and Anita Westervelt were charged with planning and executing the ceremony.

The Texas Master Naturalist program is sponsored by three different entities; Texas A & M AgriLife Extension Service, Texas Sea Grant Program, and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department all working in partnership to facilitate the organization's goals and objectives set forth in our mission statement.

The South Texas Border Chapter (STBC) was granted its charter in October 2015. Since its inception, our chapter volunteers have contributed more than 70,000 volunteer hours and have generated approximately 1.65 million dollars in economic impact towards in-kind match grants thanks to the hard labor of our volunteers.

Aside from the economic impact, STBC has developed a corps of well informed volunteers that promote education and outreach, provide service to the community, assist in on-going activities at nature parks, in turn all having an impact in enhancing the management of our natural resources.

As part of the STBC's 10 year anniversary and to help celebrate these accomplishments and other activities, we decided to plant two Texas persimmon (Chapote) trees, one male and one female, to build on the diverse collection of native plants at our St. George Pollinator Garden and Monarch Waystation.

STBC members plant two Texas persimmon trees in honor of the chapter's 10 year anniversary
-photo by Anita Westervelt

Why did we decide to plant a tree to celebrate our 10 years of existence along with other planned activities? Well, once planted the tree will grow and mature and eventually become a tribute to our organization. It will serve as a reminder of our goals and objectives and the impact that we have had on the environment of our ecoregion, the Rio Grande Valley. At the same time, it also provides a habitat for birds, butterflies, and other wildlife that contributes to a healthy natural ecosystem.

Three key elements of this activity:

1. Planting a tree connects us to nature and has a lasting impact on the environment.

2. The tree represents strength, growth and resilience of our chapter volunteers.

3. The tree provides a lasting legacy of the South Texas Border Chapter volunteers and can be enjoyed by future members and others within the community.

STBC members at the May 19, 2025 tree planting ceremony for the chapter's 10 year anniversary
-photo by Eric Luebanos

Alarm and Hope... Butterflies and Native Plants

Article by Mary Grizzard, Rio Grande Valley Chapter

This article was previously published as "New Report Cites Alarming Decrease in Butterfly Populations; Cultivating Native Plants Gives Hope" in the March 13-19, 2025 Port Isabel/South Padre Island Press.

The Red Admiral, nectaring here on Padre Island Mistflower, has seen an alarming 44% decrease in numbers since 2000 -photo by Javi Gonzalez

An alarming — although not surprising— study was published in the March 6 issue of the journal *Science*, reporting that between the years 2000 and 2020, the total butterfly population across the continental United States fell by 22%. Pesticides, climate change, and habitat loss were cited as the main reasons for these disturbing declines.

While the precipitous decrease of monarch butterfly populations has been well documented since the mid-1990s, (and monarch numbers did not fare well in this recent study, either) this is the first time that butterfly species across the board have been surveyed in the United States. The results confirm what many home gardeners and nature enthusiasts have themselves noticed over the years — there are far fewer butterflies gracing our lives than there used to be. Two species

we find in the Rio Grande Valley — the Red Admiral and the American Lady — have decreased in numbers by 44 and 58 percent, respectively.

This is terribly sobering news, not only to those of us who simply love the joy of butterflies, but also to everyone who likes to eat food. In another study, reported in the April 12, 2021 issue of *Science,* surprised researchers found that in addition to bees, many butterfly species also serve as significant pollinators in commercial agriculture.

Is there anything we can do to reverse this disturbing downward trend? The good news is yes, quite a lot, actually. The editorial summary in the *Science* article stated, "Many insects have the potential for rapid population growth and recovery, but habitat restoration, species-specific interventions, and reducing pesticide use are all likely needed to curb population declines." And while some of the needed interventions may be beyond the scope of everyday citizens, habitat restoration is something *everyone* who has a small yard or even a patio on which to set out flower pots can do.

What are the best native plants to nurture butterflies in the Rio Grande Valley? Happily, the list is a long one. The Port Isabel Press has featured several species in previous Native Plant News columns — among them Padre Island mistflower, turk's cap, seaside goldenrod, fiddlewood, cenizo — but comprehensive lists can be found online and by contacting local native plant nurseries and the Rio Grande Valley Pollinator Project. An extensive list of host plants for butterflies (those plants upon which butterflies lay their eggs and upon which their caterpillars feed) that are found in the Rio Grande Valley can be obtained online at texasento.net/RGV_Host_List.pdf. Even growing just a few of these native plants can have a significantly positive impact in restoring butterfly habitat. And imagine if everyone in the neighborhood did the same!

Most of us have delightful memories of chasing butterflies in our childhood. Maybe we even captured a monarch caterpillar and watched in awe and wonder as it metamorphosed into a spring green chrysalis with golden dots and then emerged as a glorious orange and black-winged beauty. We long for our children and grandchildren to be able to have those same cherished experiences. Whether they will, or not, is really up to us.

“Blowin’ in the Wind”

Article & photos by Anita Westervelt, South Texas Border Chapter

It was a very windy day. I was taking a break from mowing. Gazing at the trees I saw what appeared to be a trashy glob about to blow out of the canopy of one of the Mexican ash trees. It was straw colored, perhaps a dead palm frond that had become tangled in the branches. I watched, waiting for it to blow to the ground with the next hefty gust.

As I continued watching, the configuration began to remind me of an Altamira oriole’s nest, but others I have seen have been dark brown, neatly and intricately woven, like a designer basket. This one was shaggy, like a buffalo-hunter’s animal skins vest of yore.

Without my camera and long lens, I was at the mercy of my vision and the phone camera. The object was high in the tree and halfway across the yard from where I sat. As I watched, a bird came along, perched at the bottom, hopped to the top and entered the structure.

Dangling vegetation blowing in the wind

No more guess work. It was the nest of an Altamira oriole. After the bird exited, I moved closer. The exterior of the nest was covered in small branch tips from a honey mesquite, the small leaflets still intact, but turning golden as they dried.

Now, instead of waiting for it to fall, I was hoping it was securely fastened. One photo shows it attached to two branch tips of the ash tree.

The female Altamira oriole builds an elaborate nest, the male may bring materials, but the female is the expert weaver. The Altamira oriole is the largest of the North American orioles, and it builds the longest nest of any bird in North America. Nests have been found that measure to two feet in length and six inches in diameter.

Nest materials include long vines and palm frond strips and fibers, the inner bark of trees, grasses and other plants, aerial roots of epiphytes, long leaves, flax, horsehair and even string, plastic twine and other manmade materials, according to All About Birds.

The bottom of the nest is usually padded with plant down, straw, hair or feathers. Two typical Valley trees used by Altamira orioles for nest building are Mexican ash and sugar hackberry.

The Altamira Oriole nest is attached to two branch tips of the Mexican ash

The Rio Grande Valley is the top of the range of this tropical oriole which is common in northeastern Mexico, the Mexican Gulf Coast and northern Central America. It is a year-round resident in the Valley, most notably in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. In Texas, Altamira orioles breed from April to late July.

The Altamira oriole's diet is mostly insects, especially grasshoppers, crickets, caterpillars, ants and spiders. They also feed on berries and small fruits, including hackberry fruit and figs. They will drink flower nectar and will visit feeders for sugar-water.

The internet offers a number of sites for researching birds, including allaboutbirds.org, adubon.org, ebird.org and abcbirds.org.

The title of this article is from Bob Dylan's 1962 song, "Blowin' in the Wind."

How Owls Built a Community

Article by Ellie Kidd, South Texas Border Chapter

There are many people there who migrate to Texas for the winter. Some become locals and others return year after year. Some people came this past winter these for the first time. Many of these people are a little shy, and don't jump right in and join other groups of people. They keep to themselves, but as they venture out to hike or see one of the many nature areas the Rio Grande Valley has to offer, one of the first things they notice is the birds.

The birds of the Rio Grande Valley sure are different than those in more northern regions. Even "non-birders" are fascinated by the bright green, yellow and dark blue colors of the Green Jays *(Cyanocorax yncas),* the bright yellow and brown with the white and black mask of the Great Kiskadee *(Pitangus sulphuratus)* and the flashy orange and black of the Altamira Oriole *(Icterus gularis).* While not as flashy with colors, but always exciting to see is a Great Horned Owl *(Bubo virginianus).* Who does not love an owl?

Great Horned owlet a couple days old with adult

One particular owl, or pair of owls, pulled a whole community together. At our RV park we have had a returning pair for at least the last five years.

I first noticed the owls in late November this past year, calling to one another in the evenings. This is common courtship behavior. On December 12, after another evening of hooting at each other, I saw the larger owl (female) go into the side of a palm tree. Then she kept returning, and I knew we had a new nest site. Great Horned Owls go to a new site each year. This one was very conveniently right behind my RV so I was able to watch it a lot.

Great Horned owlets a couple weeks old

Based on my observations, and reading that Great Horned Owlets hatch about 30 to 37 days after incubation, I predicted we would see owlets in the nest by late January, and we did! The babies at first appear all white, with huge eyes and a big beak. They have long skinny wings and look kind of (excuse me) not cute. But babies in the nest of course attracted more attention from the birders and photographers (owl paparazzi) in our park.

Soon non-birding people were stopping by to see what we were all looking at. Then they brought their friends. People who did not know each other, or had kept to themselves, were now out talking to strangers about these owls. Everyone was excited. We watched, we photographed, and the owls watched us with big blinking eyes, or totally ignored us all together. People kept talking about the owls. Some owl images started appearing in home made jewelry, bedazzled

hats, paintings and woodwork. We even had a hat contest at a Kentucky Derby Race. The winning hat was a modified owl nest with two babies in it. Eveyone had owl fever.

Brancher owlet at six weeks with mama owl

After forty-two days in the nest, when the owlets are now as large as the parents, they fledge, or leave the nest. At this point they become "branchers" and will climb around the tree. Since palm trees don't have many branches, these owlets flutter from one tree to another, under that watchful eye of the parents, who are still feeding these gawky teenagers at this point. As is normal, we had one baby owl fledge a week before the other on February 26. The parents were always nearby both though.

When both of the young had fledged in early March, and were testing out their tree landings, it was like a big scavenger hunt to find them every day. They were not always together in the same trees. This really brought the people out and together. "I saw one over there!" "I saw two today!" and "I saw all four!" were common greetings called out to people out walking their dogs, going to Happy Hour, or just walking by looking. People were bonding over the owls.

As April came, the owls were still "branching" and would into the early summer. But many of the people in our RV park had to head north. There were many that had to see the owls one more time before they went, and many told the owls, "See you next year!" So we hope the owls will choose our park yet again. It has been an education and a true pleasure for them to share their lives with so many.

Owl paparazzi in the author's RV park

For more information:

Cornell Lab, All About Birds https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Great_Horned_Owl/overview
The Texas Breeding Atlas https://txtbba.tamu.edu/species-accounts/great-horned-owl/

Canada Geese Everywhere!

Article & photos by Carolyn Cardile, Rio Grande Valley Chapter

Our family moved to the Denver area in 1972 along with lots of other families from the mid-west and eastern U.S. My girls enrolled in the local elementary school in third and first grade. When my older daughter went to college in Ft. Collins about an hour north of our home in the Denver suburbs, I noticed that the campus was full of Canada Geese. I'd never seen these geese before going to Ft. Collins. I noticed that their droppings were everywhere. What a mess!

Forty years later Paul and I moved back to our old neighborhood in Thornton, Colorado. Thornton has changed from a suburban area built on the edge of the prairie to a well-run city filled with homes, apartments, shopping centers, parks, walking trails, open space recreation areas, lots of traffic, and geese. They're everywhere! At least that's true in the winter. Apparently, Canada Geese fly south every year to avoid Canada's cold winters, and they had moved south from Ft. Collins.

I decided to look them up. Here's what I learned from the National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America. Canada Geese have a black head and neck that are marked with "distinctive white chin strip." There are at least seven recognized subspecies. Their call is a deep honk. They fly in V-shaped flocks and feed in grasslands, wetlands, and agricultural areas. Their range map shows no Canada Geese living in Texas except in the most northern tip of the state. While most of these geese are in the upper half of the U.S. year-round, many return to Canada for the summer to raise a family, but others remain in the U.S. to breed.

Canada Geese have a black head and neck with a white chin strip

During the winter, I saw two juvenile geese in the flocks living along the lake near our apartment complex. In the spring there were very large gatherings of these birds in the general area. Then, suddenly most of them were gone. A few pairs remained around our lake, and we had families of Canada Geese all over our lawn and the adjoining park. Each group had two adults supervising the young as they grazed outside our apartment. I suspect that the male was one that hissed at me as I walked through their families on the way to my car to walk the dog several times a day.

One day I watched a Parks and Wildlife truck drive up to the lake on the sidewalk. A uniformed woman got out of the truck with a gosling. She walked toward a family of geese, put down a gosling, and watched it run toward a group with two adults and several goslings. It was accepted into the group without incident.

I've observed that the goslings seem to move from group to group. Sometimes a pair of adults supervised a small group, and other times two adults were with a very large group. I've noticed that the goslings started out as all yellow, resembling baby chickens, but over time their color changed to yellow with brown. The goslings in our yard are growing quickly. I wonder when they'll get their adult plumage.

Canada Geese and goslings are active in mowed areas

Here's what I know from my experience sharing my yard with flocks of over 100 Canada Geese. They're big, and they're not afraid of people. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 gives them federal protection. Consequently, they're self-assured. They know they're in charge of our lake front, our lawn, our sidewalks, and other local parks and lakes in our community. After all, they've been protected for 110 years. Even the dogs know they should leave those huge birds alone. P.S. Don't step in their poop. It's hard to get off your shoes.

Nesting Season for Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtles
-An Endangered Species and Their Fight for Survival

Article & photos by Ken Lee, Rio Grande Valley Chapter

The Kemp's ridley sea turtle (*Lepidochelys kempii*) is one of the most endangered sea turtle species in the world. Known for its unique synchronized nesting behavior, called arribada, this species has captured the attention of researchers and conservationists alike. South Padre Island serves as a critical nesting site for these remarkable creatures. Every year, these turtles return to the sandy shores of the island to lay their eggs, sparking a cycle of life that highlights both the fragility and resilience of nature.

The Kemp's ridley sea turtle is the smallest of all sea turtle species, typically weighing between 70 and 100 pounds and measuring up to two feet in length. These turtles are known for their distinctive heart-shaped shell and olive-gray coloring. What sets them apart from other sea turtles is their preference for nesting during the day, a behavior rarely observed in other species.

Unfortunately, Kemp's ridley is critically endangered, with its population plummeting due to human activities such as habitat destruction, accidental capture in fishing gear, and the illegal harvesting of eggs and adults.

South Padre Island is a vital nesting ground for Kemp's ridley sea turtles. The island's sandy beaches and coastal environment provide the ideal conditions for nesting, attracting turtles from across the Gulf of Mexico. Between April and July, female turtles make their way to the shore to dig shallow nests and deposit their eggs.

Kemp's ridley sea turtle laying eggs on South Padre Island

The Encounter

It was a typical windy day on South Padre Island when I set out for my scheduled beach patrol at 10:00 am. This was my third patrol of the season. My task was simple. Drive 32 miles north along the beach at approximately 10 mph, all the way to the Mansfield Cut, looking for tracks and nesting turtles. Around noon, at mile marker 11, I spotted her making her way up the beach. I immediately stopped the UTV about 75 yards away. She also stopped when she spotted me. I stayed very still. She hesitated for a few seconds and then resumed her journey. As I was watching her, I tried calling the responder team, but I had no cell signal. When she found what she considered a suitable spot she began to dig in the soft sand. In the meantime, I sent a text message to Dr. Amy Bonka.

Soon she stopped digging and started laying her eggs. This is when they go into a trance-like state, allowing me to sneak up behind her and snap a couple of pictures. I was unable to see any kind of tag. I also started marking her tracks with flags so that the response team could see where she walked up the beach. While she was laying eggs, I climbed up on top of the sand dunes to see if I could get a cell signal. Still no signal. At this point I just observed her while she was laying her eggs. After a few minutes she started covering the nest. By now the wind was picking up and sand was flying everywhere. Then she started making her way back into the water. The entire process took about 45 minutes.

Green flags mark the inbound path of nesting sea turtle

I immediately started flagging the disturbed area around the nest. In less than a couple of minutes the wind had smoothed out the sand to the point where you could not determine, without the flags, where the nest was. I also marked the outbound path with flags.

While I was placing the flags, Dr. David Adams drove up in his vehicle and I was able to describe my observations to him. I then continued my journey up the beach to the Mansfield jetties.

The Challenges

When a nest is found, its location is recorded, and protective measures are put in place to safeguard the eggs from predators, human interference, and natural threats such as high tides. On South Padre Island those hazards include vehicle traffic.

Kemp's ridley sea turtles face numerous challenges, even on protected beaches like South Padre Island. Predators such as raccoons, crabs, and birds often target turtle nests, while human activities, including coastal development and recreational beach use, can inadvertently disturb nesting sites.

Climate change poses an additional threat, as rising temperatures affect the sex ratio of hatchlings. The temperature of the sand where the eggs are incubated determines the sex of the turtles, with warmer sand producing more females. An imbalance in the sex ratio could have long-term implications for the survival of the species.

Another significant challenge is marine debris, particularly plastic pollution. My good friend and mentor, John Spreen, has been instrumental in educating the public about plastics. You can check out his videos on YouTube. Hatchlings often mistake plastic for food, leading to ingestion that can be fatal. Additionally, discarded fishing gear and other debris pose entanglement risks for both hatchlings and adult turtles.

What can be done?

Over the years, dedicated conservation efforts have been instrumental in protecting Kemp's ridley sea turtles on South Padre Island. Organizations such as Sea Turtle, Inc., a non-profit based on the island, play a pivotal role in these efforts. Their programs focus on rescuing and rehabilitating injured turtles, protecting nesting sites, and educating the public about sea turtle conservation.

Each nesting season, trained staff and volunteers, like me, patrol the beaches, ensuring that nests are located and secured. In most cases, eggs are carefully relocated to the Sea Turtle Inc. "corral" to increase their chances of survival. Once the hatchlings emerge, they are released into the sea, often in the presence of awe-struck spectators who gather to witness this event.

Sun, wind and sand protective gear are important for sea turtle patrol volunteers

Public awareness campaigns have also been crucial in fostering a sense of responsibility among locals and visitors. Beachgoers are encouraged to follow guidelines, such as keeping lights off at night to avoid disorienting turtles, steering clear of marked nesting sites, and properly disposing of trash.

Legal protections have been critical in the fight to save Kemp's ridley sea turtles. The species is listed under the U.S. Endangered Species Act and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which prohibit the harming, harassment, or trade of sea turtles and their eggs. In Texas, state laws further protect turtle nests and impose penalties for disturbing them.

Additionally, international cooperation between the United States and Mexico has been essential, given that the majority of Kemp's ridley nesting occurs along the Gulf Coast of both countries. Bi-national agreements and conservation programs aim to address threats to the turtles across their range.

While significant progress has been made in protecting Kemp's ridley sea turtles, much work remains to ensure their survival. Continued research is needed to better understand their behavior, nesting patterns, and the impact of environmental changes. Community involvement and education will also play a key role in fostering a culture of conservation.

Technological advancements, such as satellite tracking, offer new opportunities to monitor turtle movements and identify critical habitats. These tools can inform policy decisions and guide targeted conservation efforts.

The nesting Kemp's ridley sea turtles on South Padre Island are a testament to the resilience of life in the face of adversity. Their annual journey to the island's shores represents not only a natural wonder, but also a call to action for humanity to protect and preserve the delicate ecosystems upon which we all depend. Through a combination of science, legislation, and community engagement, we can ensure that these magnificent creatures continue to grace our planet for generations to come.

You can assist by volunteering at Sea Turtle, Inc. And you can donate money. Help educate the public about conservation and protection of this critically endangered species.

Sea Turtle Identification

Article & photos by Tia Offner, Rio Grande Valley Chapter

The Valley loves sea turtles. If you've ever been to the island, then you know just how much our area loves sea turtles. There are statues scattered around painted all sorts of colors; a sea turtle hospital and rehabilitation facility open to the public (Sea Turtle, Inc.); and always reports of sea turtles swimming around the jetties of Brazos Santiago Pass. But if you don't volunteer with the rehabilitation facility, or with the almost annual cold stun events, you may not be as familiar with all the types of sea turtles that can be found, both here in the Gulf and worldwide.

There are seven species of sea turtle that can be found in the world's oceans. Sometimes people say the number is eight, but researchers are not in agreement on whether or not the green sea turtles of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans are different species. So, for now, let's say the number is seven. Despite all of our species having similar morphology, there are slight distinctions between them all that make them unique. Our Gulf is extremely unique in that five of the seven species nest here!

The green sea turtle is the most common species you will see here on the island. Despite following the general pattern of turtle movement (Hatching on the beach, and swimming out to open ocean until returning to the beach to lay eggs), juvenile sea turtles are frequently seen by the rocks of the jetties, munching on algae. They also move in and out of the Laguna Madre based on the water temperature. They leave the bay as it gets colder, and that's why they are most impacted by cold stuns around here. If the water temperature drops too quickly, they cannot leave the bay fast enough, and cold stun.

All sea turtles are ectothermic, which means that their temperature is regulated by their surroundings. If they get too cold, they slow down until they start floating on the water's surface (cold stunning), and if they stay this way for too long, they die. Fortunately, we have an excellent rehabilitation facility on the coast and hundreds of volunteers that dedicate their time to helping them survive the cold (Thank you!).

If you are wondering if the sea turtle you are seeing around here is a green, the answer is probably yes. But to confirm this, look at the scutes (large patches) on its back. They should go in a pattern of 4-5-4: 4 on each side, and 5 down the middle. They also have a sunburst pattern on their scutes and have a greenish hue.

A green sea turtle rescued during the Laguna Madre cold stun event of 2024

Less commonly encountered on our coast is the Kemp's ridley sea turtle. These are the smallest and most endangered species of sea turtle on the planet. Our coast is super unique though in that they nest here during the summer! Sea Turtle Inc. actually does daily beach patrols to look for nesting turtles, so they can ensure the survival of the eggs after they've been laid. I've also personally seen them swimming just offshore, so there is a small possibility you may come across one while here.

The Kemp's Ridley can be identified by its scute pattern of 5-5-5 (5 on each side and 5 in the middle), and that the shell is very circular. Other sea turtles have shells that are much longer than wide, but Kemp's Ridley have the proportionally widest shell. They'll typically be a grey-green color.

Kemp's ridley sea turtle awaiting release in Mississippi, also after cold stunning

The other three sea turtles in the Gulf (loggerheads, hawksbills, and leatherbacks) are very rare off of our coast. But they sometimes show up, as seen by Sea Turtle Inc.'s recent rehabilitation of a loggerhead. Loggerheads also have the 5-5-5 scute pattern, and a very large head compared to their body size. They are typically a reddish brown, making their coloration distinct among turtles. Hawksbills also appear a reddish brown on top, however their shell follows the 4-5-4 pattern of the green sea turtle. Leatherbacks are instantly recognizable; they are the only sea turtle lacking scutes. They look like they have stripes running down their back, with a dark grey-black coloration. They are also massive, reaching up to 6 feet in length!

If you go to other parts of the world, you may be fortunate enough to encounter the two species not found in the Gulf: the olive ridley and the flatback. Olive ridleys can be found in all the world's oceans around the equator, minus the Gulf. Their range also extends well up the American West Coast. They look almost identical to Kemp's ridleys, but the olive ridley is slightly larger, with an olive coloration, and is much greater in number than the endangered Kemps'. In fact, olive ridleys are the most abundant sea turtles in the world! The final species, the flatback, can only be found around the Northern coast of Australia. It possesses that 4-5-4 scute pattern, but is distinguished by the much flatter top of the shell (or carapace) than any other sea turtle species. It appears as an olive-gray.

If you want to learn more about sea turtles, visit Sea Turtle Inc. on the north end of South Padre Island. They have plenty of information about all the Gulf's species, and a bunch of resident sea turtles to admire. If you're in town during the next winter, consider volunteering for the next cold stun event!

Literally hundreds of sea turtles are impacted during these weather events, and you can do your part to save their lives. You can also help by just picking up trash at the beach. This ensures that less waste ends up in the ocean, where sea turtles spend most of their life. These little things we can do help ensure that our area's sea turtles can be enjoyed by all who visit, for years to come.

Author and coworker, Jon (TPWD), with the cold-stunned sea turtles rescued in Laguna Madre

Bicycling at Resaca de la Palma

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

Sun-dappled foliage and pathways, birds and butterflies, cottontails and crisscrossing spotted whiptails—these images from this morning's bicycle ride at Resaca de la Palma State Park decorate my mind. It being springtime, a constant and rollicking chorus of chachalacas—calls that permeate every inch of the park—accompany these pictures.

Up at 6:15 this morning—early, for me—drinking a mere half cup of precious coffee, I took off for Resaca de la Palma, longing for a pleasant bike ride along the main route, before the late spring's heat settled in. I arrived about 8:00, as it opened.

The ride was as charming as I imagined. I paid my fee (half of the usual $4, being over 65), plus $5 to rent a bicycle. The well-maintained bikes come in a variety of sizes—including ones for even small children— and all have foot brakes. Canvas bicycle baskets are available, and the center also has some bicycle helmets.

Though the asphalt is rough—I learned when one of my grandchildren took a spill there in late April—it's refreshing to ride where vehicles pose no hazards. Only the slow-moving electric tram runs periodically. An attendant was most patient and helpful in finding appropriate bikes for the children that day, pumping tires when necessary.

This morning, I arranged my water and camera in the basket, binoculars around my neck and wallet in my backpack. Then I sprayed myself with insecticide. (Last week, perhaps while sniffing blossoms alongside paths at Sabal Palm Sanctuary, I evidently enticed a couple of tiny ticks to hunker down under my knees). I then happily began my trip down the sun-dappled pavement.

Cha-cha-lac, cha-cha-lac! cried the chachalacas in an overlapping call-and-response from every clump of trees, it seemed—a lively, happy accompaniment for the journey. Still, I spotted very few Plain Chachalacas. How do these abundant, noisy birds conceal their chicken-sized bodies so well? I wondered. I saw, I think, a flash of a marauding Harris's Hawk crashing into a clump of foliage, naturally eliciting a chase and ardent cries.

Plain Chachalaca noisily calling from the trees

I tooled down the asphalt, past several enticing trailheads, stopping now and then to photograph a Plain Chachalaca or Groove-billed Ani (disguised, I realized, as a Great-tailed Grackle), finally parking the bike at the start of Flycatcher Trail. Park rules dictate that we do not ride on the trails, lest thorns puncture the tires.

I've fond memories of Flycatcher Trail where, last autumn, I watched lovely blue metalmark butterflies feeding, along with ants and other creatures, upon scat, of all things. So often we see beauty among filth or harshness: lavender basket flowers spring from prickly foliage. Splendid yellow, orange and red blossoms emerge among spiny pads of prickly pears.

I walked, enjoying the symphony of chachalacas, which predominated, but also Northern Mockingbirds, Green Jays and Northern Cardinals, along with the high, light voices of Black-crested tTitmice and Couch's Kingbirds, the catlike cries of Great Kiskadees and harsh calls of Golden-fronted Woodpeckers. Taking a left turn at Hog Trail, I walked to an overlook and watched jays, doves and a Groove-billed Ani vie for space on bare branches bending towards the meadow, and I watched swallowtails and other butterflies.

After a few short detours, I followed Tram Road along stunning sunlit meadows and back towards the visitor's center. There I watched a few eastern cottontails and several spotted whiptails. Members of both species posed briefly for photos.

Eastern cottontail rabbit and Texas spotted whiptail observed along the trail in May

On our bicycle ride in April, the grandchildren and I discovered an Altamira Oriole near its elegant, tubular nest. Also, we found an intriguing velvet ant—actually, a wasp whose partially red body looks velvety. It lays an egg on the pupa of a bee or wasp, so its own larva has a meal when it hatches.

Klug's velvet ant is actually a wasp

Jumping spider previously encountered on the trail in April

And we spotted a jumping spider—either a Colonus puerperus or a Sylvan jumping spider—which, before I knew it, rested in my granddaughter's palm—causing no ill, fortunately, to either child nor spider.

Today, with detours, I completed the trip by 10:00, before temperatures reached the 90s. Even so, bicycling itself provides some ventilation.

It was a marvelous beginning to the day. I enjoy biking the trail in all seasons, as one can see different creatures from week to week. And some creatures—like Texas indigo snakes or bobcats—simply appear when they will. While chachalacas ruled the day this morning, in late October, I neither saw nor heard even one.

Resaca de la Palma is open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. every day, but its visitor center—and, naturally, bicycle renting services—are open from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday.

Going Batty in Hidalgo County

Article by Ellie Kidd, South Texas Border Chapter

Mexican free-tailed bat – photo by TPWD

In January of 2024, there was a Texas Master Naturalist (TMN) Mini Series presentation on "Acoustic Montoring of Bats" presented by Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD), Texas Nature Trackers. During this session, it was shown that there is a need to identify the bats in Texas, as no one had done this for many years. Changes in land use and climate show that a new survey should be conducted. This session was a plea for Texas Master Naturalists to aid in a new research project by monitoring calls of bats. And the TMNs stepped up. Chapters all over the state had answered the call, including South Texas Border Chapter.

Out of the thirty species of bats known to occur in Texas, twelve of these are to be found in the South Texas Border Chapter area. Six of these bats are species of "Greatest Conservation Need." This is a system in which a species is given a number to describe the urgency of a population. We have six bats that fall within S2 or S3 which are imperiled or vulnerable due to declining habitat or population in decline.

To do this project, TPWD teamed up with North American Bat Conservation Alliance who will eventually receive data collected. TPWD hosted web meetings for chapter coordinators. They distributed two sensitive recording monitors to each participating chapter. The plan is to use these monitors during a nine week period, when local bats are rearing young, and more stationary. The monitors are deployed by chapter members. The sounds bats make during feeding through echolocation are recorded. These recordings are then run through a computer program, which parses out random noise files, and identifies the type of bats making the calls. Each type of bat has its own call or call pattern. The program is not perfect so volunteer chapter members analyze some of the data to help with some of the identifications.

Because this is a new process for many chapters, there were a lot of adjustments and hurdles to overcome, but data was collected! In our county, we only had five sites we were able to use this first year (spring of 2024), but we were pretty successful. We collected 4,279 sound files. Of these, only 855 were unusable noise files. This left an incredible 3424 useable calls for data collection! Just for an idea how great this is, an analyst in Dallas told me they only had 15 call files to look at. We did amazing!

Of all the recorded bat calls in our area, almost three fourths (73%) were **Mexican free-tailed bats** *(Tadarida brasiliensis)*. Common throughout the state, these bats can eat six thousand to eighteen thousand metric tons of insects annually. These bats can save over 1.3 BILLION dollars in pest control by eating crop feeding moths. The Bracken Cave in San Antonio is the largest bat colony, and one of the largest concentrations of mammals on earth!

Twenty-three percent of our calls were found to be **Northern yellow bats** (*Lasiurus intermedius).* These are best known in coastal palm groves. Their population has been shrinking over time. It is interesting to note that in our area, we also have gotten some recordings for the **Southern yellow bat** (*Lasiurus ega)* which is an S3 level, which is a vulnerable species. We are the only area in the state to have both the Northern yellow and Southern yellow bats. TPDW is very excited about this.

We have other bats that we were able to pick up on recordings, but not in great numbers. Two of these are species of Greatest Conservation Need. There are h**oary bats** *(Lasiurus cinereus)* and c**ave myotis bats** (*Myotis velifer).* Hoary bats are high flyers and eat large moths. They are classed as S3 which is a vulnerable species. Cave myotis bats are an S2 species which is considered in peril. They roost in caves. Many have been lost to a fast-spreading fungal disease called white nose syndrome.

We have other bats that are highly likely to be in our area. These were recorded only a few times, but further research can verify. The **Eastern red bat** *(Lasiurus borealis)* is one that does not roost in colonies, but roosts alone under leaves in trees and shrubs. The **tri-colored bat** *(Perimyotis subflavus*) is the second smallest of all bats. When seen they can be mistaken for a butterfly or a big moth. They live in caves, trees or crevices. The **pallid bat** eats scorpions and centipedes and is yellow in color. They also feed on nectar and pollen. The **silver-haired bat (***Lasionycteris noctivagans)* is mostly black, but has white tipped hairs. They roost in tree cavities or under bark. **Evening bats** (*Nycticeius humeralis)* also roost in tree cavities or bark, but also in buildings.

So as you can see, for only a few monitored sites, we were able to pick up ten species in only five observation sites. We are hoping to deploy to more sites in the future. Want to join the bat team and help? We will need TMNs to deploy monitors nine weeks from April to June. We will also need some people would like to analyze data using a computer and looking at sonograms. We also need people with property in different types of areas where we can place a monitor for four days. If you want to help, let me know! Ellie Kidd, South Texas Border Chapter Bat Coordinator ek31773@gmail.com.

For more information

https://tpwd.texas.gov/education/resources/texas-junior-naturalists/bats

https://batconservationalliance.org/

City Nature Challenge 2025

Article & photos by Joseph Connors, South Texas Border Chapter

The City Nature Challenge (CNC), a global citizen science project, continues to grow as a celebration of biodiversity on iNaturalist. Worldwide, over 103,000 participants made more than three million observations, cataloging over 73,000 species. It is a powerful example of citizen science.

Notably, one of the 14 observations highlighted globally by the team behind the challenge was a rarely documented fly, new to iNaturalist, observed by Sam Kieschnick (SamBiology), a TPWD Urban Wildlife Biologist in Dallas/Fort Worth and a familiar face at Texas Master Naturalist (TMN) Annual Meetings. Great to see Texas represented!

Since the RGV first joined the challenge in 2018, Texas Master Naturalists have continually been key participants. This Citizen Science project allows us to show the unique biodiversity of the Rio Grande Valley.

While cities with larger populations and broader outreach efforts naturally log high observation counts, the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) continues to shine where it counts: species richness. This year, the RGV logged nearly 9,000 observations, which documented 1,666 species, with only 230 participants. That is an incredible achievement considering San Antonio had more than ten times the number of observers. Our local team is small, but we pack a punch.

The identification work doesn't stop when the challenge officially ends; species numbers fluctuate for weeks or even months after the challenge as unusual species get identified and mistakes get corrected. Currently, one of the top Texas cities has lost over 60 species since the final day, while most of the others have improved slightly. We gained nine species. This challenge puts a lot of strain on the small number of identifiers so quality, wild observations are appreciated.

The Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV) Annual City Nature Challenge Report, compiled by our local CNC Coordinator John Brush, is available now on Quinta Mazatlan's blog. It is a really good review of some interesting observations, a look into the numbers, comparison of past results, and some Q&A with some of this year's top contributors.

https://cuefornature.wordpress.com/2025/05/20/city-nature-challenge-2025-rgv-report/

We saw exciting increases in activity from Starr and Willacy Counties, regions that are biologically rich but are less well documented on iNaturalist. It’s wonderful to see more of these areas' unique species represented better this year.

Our chapter's second field trip to the Martin Refuge during the challenge again yielded impressive results, with 116 species, 10 more than we documented in 2023. Though I missed our trip this time, our members clearly made it count for this challenge!

I was fortunate to spend a good deal of time outdoors during the challenge, and once again found myself leading in both total observations and species count. The experience was, as always, so much fun, and all that walking was quite the workout!

It's no surprise that my observations leaned heavily toward insects and spiders, followed by plants. Mammal sightings were rare for me this year, although I did document a raccoon's muddy footprint and used our chapter's Echo Bat Detector to record several bats. My limited analysis of the audio suggests I may have six different bat species, pending expert verification.

Tiny *Paysonia lasiocarpa ssp. Berlandieri*

The observation that made me most curious this year was a tiny "weed" with orange flowers and greyish-green leaves growing in front of the Pharr Vanguard Academy Nature Center. I had never seen anything like it. After uploading, it didn't take long to be narrowed down to the Mustard family, but it took a few more days to be identified as *Paysonia lasiocarpa ssp. Berlandieri*, my first species of Bladderpod.

Banded Garden Spider *(Argiope trifasciata)*

My favorite spider of the challenge was a Banded Garden Spider *(Argiope trifasciata)* I spotted while wandering around Oleander Acres Butterfly Garden late at night. Similar to the very common Silver Argiope, I haven't seen one of these in five years. She wasn't very cooperative so I didn't get the shot I really wanted, but they are pretty easily identifiable.

A special shout-out goes to John Yochum, whose efficient approach is worth highlighting in second place for species. Of his 430 observations, a remarkably high percentage were unique, identifiable species—a testament to his sharp eye and memory.

In third with species was Anita Westervelt, always a very enthusiastic participant who uses what she learns from her iNaturalist observations in her nature articles. Other TMN members, Chuck Cornell, Mara Lee Moats, and Jennifer Rektorik also put up great numbers of observations and species.

Together, the top 10 observers contributed an impressive 60% of the RGV's total observations by the official deadline. But this event is about collective effort. Every single observation matters—and so does every observer. Participating in the first LRGV City Nature Challenge is what led

me to becoming a Texas Master Naturalist. And we have one prospective member from this year's participants. I am excited to point out that at least 15 of the top 20 species observers are either Texas Master Naturalists or closely connected to our two local chapters.

The second phase was getting everything uploaded and identified. This was the less fun part. I spent a week at the computer editing, uploading, and attempting to identify my 1,216 observations, striving to avoid too many duplicate uploads of the same moth or plant.

Identifiers: The Unsung Heroes

Documenting observations is just half the battle—identifying them is equally important. We owe immense gratitude to those who put in the time to make sense of our data.

Our 2nd Vice President, Jennifer Rektorik, deserves special recognition. She placed third in total observations and was also the top identifier for the RGV! Despite saying she sticks to "the easy ones," her contributions are invaluable. Quick, accurate IDs of common species, or even just narrowing down the possibilities, help the experts focus their attention where it's most needed and speeds up the whole process.

My own identifications, especially outside of my main focus on spiders and insects, were mostly the easy ones too. While I might not be able to identify many plants or birds on my own, I can often recognize when an AI suggestion is likely on the right track. Sometimes for observations accidentally left as Unknown that I don't recognize, all I can do is identify it as a bird or flowering plant, but that really does help. Otherwise, those observations may never be seen by someone who can identify them. I would like to encourage more people to do some identifications for others. Even if you can't get out into the field to make your own observations, you can participate this way. I know, for the South Texas Border Chapter, doing that important work helping people with identifying observations in the RGV counts as citizen science volunteer time. The more you participate in the identification process, the more you learn.

John Brush, our local CNC organizer, continues to be a powerhouse in both observations and identifications. Christina Mild is another standout for her excellent native plant identification skills. Next up in identifications was Jennifer's brother, Will Rektorik, who contributed RGV identifications from Florida. In fifth was Ernest Herrera, whose broad knowledge—especially in herpetology—was significantly helpful.

Thanks to everyone who participated. Whether you documented just a few or hundreds, helped with identifications, joined a field trip, or spread the word, your contributions were valuable. The data we gather on iNaturalist through our citizen science efforts makes a real difference. We are contributing real data to science, conservation, and education. John Brush's report details some ways iNaturalist data has been used by scientists.

An Unexpected Discovery

Article & photos by Anita Westervelt, South Texas Border Chapter

I'd just finished laboriously clearing vine-like growth from a lump at the water's edge that could have been covering the remains of a good-sized bear.

Prior to the vegetative removal, I'd taken the chain saw to three branches of an invasive Brazilian peppertree that were sticking out from the mound. My primary goal was to remove yet another Brazilian peppertree.

I didn't know what to expect under the (non-native) aggressive ground cover atop a thick detritus of decaying vegetation – also a target for tidying up the shoreline. We've been clearing invasive trees on our new property. I was pretty much surprised to find I'd cut the live branches from the remains of a peppertree's huge tree trunk that had been felled and left to the elements to eventually remove, but apparently with enough energy to continue vibrant growth.

Remains of invasive Brazilian peppertree

I cleared as much as I could of the ground cover from the five-foot long, two-foot diameter tree trunk, gathered my tools and was headed to the next project when movement caught my eye at corner of the log. A big spider. I snapped a quick shot, uploaded it to iNaturalist.org, where it was identified as a six-spotted fishing spider, *Dolomedes triton*. Within hours, the observation had reached research grade.

The six-spotted fishing spider is found in wetlands throughout North America and the contiguous United States, especially in the eastern half. My observation was the eighth one documented in the Rio Grande Valley; no others have been observed in Texas on iNaturalist.org below Corpus Christi, although the species is well documented along the Gulf of Mexico coast, around Florida's coast and onward north.

The six-spotted fishing spider is somewhat known for its large size and colored stripes running down the sides of the abdomen. The stripes vary from white to bluish to pale cream. The midday sun beating down on my specimen caused the stripes to glow a shiny gold color.

The female spider is larger than the male. She is about 2.4 inches long, including legs and a body

length of about .79 inches, according to Wikipedia. Leg span can be two to three inches.

The spider's habitat is semi-aquatic and in wetlands, ponds and lake shores. They are often seen with their legs sprawled out by the water, waiting for prey. They hunt by the water's surface; they can walk and travel on water like water striders. The ventral surface (the underside, or belly) of the body is coated with a hydrophobic substance that allows them to stay afloat and run across water, an ability they use in both prey capture and predation escape, according to Wikipedia.

Six-spotted fishing spider is rarely documented in the Valley

The six-spotted fishing spider can dive under water to about seven inches to capture prey and stay underwater up to 45 minutes, using air trapped in the hairs on its body, according to animaldiversity.org. Fishing spiders eat mosquitoes. They are capable of capturing fish up to five times their body size; they use venom to immobilize and kill prey. This species hunts during the day. They also eat aquatic insects and land insects that have fallen in the water, tadpoles, frogs and small fish.

The downside to being a fishing spider is they are eaten by many species of fish. They also are preyed upon by birds, amphibians and reptiles. The bullfrog is a chief predator, according to a Missouri Department of Conservation field guide.

The scary part of this tale is not the spider, whose venom is not harmful to humans, but that a long-presumed-dead invasive Brazilian peppertree stump can still be viable.

They're Back on the South Texas Sand Sheet…
Mesoxaea texana AND *Protoxaea gloriosa*!

Article & photos by Camille M. Rich, Rio Grande Valley Chapter

Dear Fellow Nature Enthusiast,

As I was making the rounds on my little place out in the South Texas Sand Sheet on Saturday, May 17, 2025, scouting for bees, birds, butterflies, and blooms, I was ecstatic to see and record a male *Mesoxaea texana* nectaring on *Waltheria indica* once again! Just like clockwork, and according to the records I have been keeping in my phenology journal, it was time for it to return! The male *Mesoxaea texana*, which I affectionately nicknamed "El Guapo" back in 2021, did not disappoint me.

(*Right*) Male *Mesoxaea texana* nectaring on *Waltheria indica*

The male *Mesoxaea texana* was such a welcomed sight that day. I was mesmerized by its flight patterns as it darted in and out of the native plants effortlessly. Seeing it glide through the mid-morning air was a bright spot in my day for sure. However, what made El Guapo's return sighting this year even more remarkable was that it was heralded just moments before by its fellow subfamily Oxaeinae member, the *Protoxaea gloriosa*--- which I had not seen since May 2021! The *Protoxaea gloriosa,* which I affectionately nicknamed "El Glorioso," was also nectaring on *Waltheria indica!*

Protoxaea gloriosa caught in a lynx spider's deadly embrace

As an aside, the last *Protoxaea gloriosa* that I recorded on my place was in May 2021. Remaining hopeful that "El Glorioso" would one day return, I have been looking for them ever since. It only took approximately four years of waiting, and it was well worth the countless hours I spent scouting its last known nectaring sites. Consequently, as a result of the return of the *Protoxaea gloriosa,* I have given myself a photo / video challenge: Record as much of "El Glorioso" as possible to share with all of us.

Scopal hairs apparent on male *Mesoxaea texana*

One of the distinguishing characteristics between these two bees has to do with whether or not they have scopal hairs. Scopal hairs are whitish, pale hairs that are apparent on the male and female *Mesoxaea texana*. Male *Mesoxaea texana* have scopal hairs that are located towards the tip of their abdomen. Female *Mesoxaea texana* scopal hairs are located along the sides of their sternum and also on the tip of their abdomen. In stark contrast, neither the male nor the female *Protoxaea gloriosa* possess scopal hairs.

Scopal hairs distinct on female *Mesoxaea texana*

My phenology records show a cyclical trend—maybe pattern or cycle might be better descriptions---on the amount of time I might expect to see the *Mesoxaea texana* and indicate that I will get to document the male a few weeks before the female *Mesoxaea texana* show up. The overall trends on when the cycle starts and stops for this rare native bee, according to my phenology journal data entries, demonstrate that its arrival on the South Texas Sand Sheet has historically been from the months of May to June—even sometimes carrying over into the first week of July.

Protoxaea gloriosa: Note the lack of scopal hairs on its abdomen

Last year, the *Mesoxaea texana* showed up between approximately May 26, 2024, through July 2, 2024. They were spotted on *Salvia ballotiflora*. A special treat occurred last fall 2024, when the *Mesoxaea texana* reappeared for a second cycle above the ground on the South Texas Sand Sheet from approximately August 24, 2024, through October 26, 2024. During their second cycle, they were spotted predominantly on *Waltheria indica,* but were also observed on *Salvia ballotiflora* (shrubby blue sage)*, Eysenhardtia texana* (Texas kidneywood)*,* and *Funastrum cynanchoides* (climbing milkweed).

Over the past four years, I have not been able to conduct the same amount of citizen science research for the *Protoxaea gloriosa* as I have for "El Guapo" because I have not laid eyes on it in four years. My luck seems to be changing this year, however! So now what? What about "El Glorioso?" How long will we possibly get to see it on the South Texas Sand Sheet? Will it be long enough to start collecting data? My hunch about "El Glorioso," based on what I have learned, is that the patterns I have observed and documented for the *Mesoxaea texana*, its subfamily member, will also apply and hold true for it as well. I guess we will see. Time (and data) will tell their tale.

I will be, once again, starting up my intermittent, random walking surveys of all nine monitored sights. I will be looking, in earnest, for their nests this year; it is on my bucket list to be able to document them! I will continue to record ground temperatures at the monitored sights, track rainfall, record what's blooming, and generally keep my eye out for anything that seems remarkable and worthy of note during these two rare, native bees time above the ground in this cycle of their lives on the South Texas Sand Sheet.

In closing, if you would like to see photos of the *Mesoxaea texana*, please visit www.elmestenoranch.com. If you would like to observe the *Mesoxaea texana* and *Protoxaea gloriosa* flying around on the South Texas Sand Sheet for yourself, you will find many *Mesoxaea texana* videos and one *Protoxaea gloriosa* video on the following **YouTube channel: El Mesteno Ranch and Arboretum.**

Please stay tuned. There is more to come, and thanks for your time!

All my best,
Camille Marie

Books containing information on the *Mesoxaea texana* and *Protoxaea gloriosa*:

"A Guide to North America's Bees: The BEES in Your Backyard," by Joseph S. Wilson & Olivia Messinger Carril, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2016.

"Native bees of the Lower Rio Grande Valley: A Photographic Guide," by Paula Sharp. Texas A & M University Press, January 29, 2025.

Lunch Time

Photo page by Volker Imschweiler, Rio Grande Valley Chapter

Sphinx caterpillar species munching on Common Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*)

Possibly a pluto sphinx moth caterpillar (*Xylophanes pluto*)

Milestones & Awards for
March, April & May 2025

Congratulations!

Well done all!

2025 New Class Graduates

Christopher Alana
KJ Ayres-Guerra
Dorothy Boven
Norma Carrete
Cassandra Chapa
Keri Cooper
Eileen Davis
Vanessa Delgadillo
Bianca Delgado
Julia Delgado
David Edward
Greg Fink
Gracie Granados
Marcelina Gutierrez
Ken Lee
Tia Offner
Rosalinda Oswald
Linda Pelli
Callum Poulin
Marcie Ronken
Ruth Scott
Sam Solfest
Rebecca Tyler
Rita Tyler-Aguilar
Clarissa Villarreal
Joaquin Villarreal
Savannah Zarate

Newly Certified Texas Master Naturalists

Christopher Akana ‘25
KJ Ayres-Guerra ’25
Keri Cooper ’25
Eileen Davis ’25
Julia Delgado ’25
Greg Fink ’25
Gracie Granados ’25
Savannah Zarate ‘25
Ken Lee ‘25
Rosalinda Oswald ‘25
Linda Pelli ‘25
Marcie Ronken ‘25
Ruth Scott ‘25
Sam Solfest ‘25
Joaquín Villareal ‘25
Michell Sosa ‘24
Rolando Garza ’24

Milestones & Awards for
March, April & May 2025

100 Hours Milestones

Blanca Martínez ’24
Julia Delgado ’25
Rosalinda Oswald ’25
Linda Pelli ‘25
Eileen Davis ’25
Danny Salinas ‘24
Mark Sorenson ‘24

250 Hours Milestones

Joyce Baer Halpern ‘23
Susan Manning ‘23

500 Hours Milestones

Terrilyn Alaníz ’24
James Grizzard ’23
Theresa De Salvo ‘24
Camille Rich ‘13

1,000 Hours Milestones

Barb Peterson ‘19
Kamala Platt ‘08

South Texas Border Chapter

Milestones & Awards for
March, April & May 2025

Congratulations!

Recertification 2025

Anita Westervelt
Mary Levandoski
Judy Gibbons
Stevan Schiefelbein
Lorie Archambault
Ellie Kidd
Kathy Mauer-Tonn
Logan Dovalina
Zeke Schmidt
Jack Austin
Tom Butler
Alex Maldonado
Orlie Ozuna
Eric Luebanos
LynnAnn Scharf
Bob Schmidt
Raul Hinojosa, Jr.
Joseph Connors
Ann Whitney
Joseph Kowalski
Jim Gerry
Janet Schofield
Jennifer Rektorik

Well done!

5000 Hours

Anne Mayville

1000 Hours

Susan Coleman

250 Hours

Julia Jorgensen

100 Hours

Raul Hinojosa, Jr.
Eric Luebanos
Bob Schmidt
Orlie Ozuma

Contributors to this issue of The Chachalaca

Carolyn Cardile

Joseph Connors

Mary Grizzard

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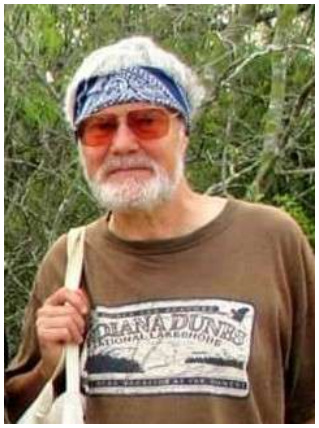
Robert Hernandez



Volker Imschweiler

Ellie Kidd

Ken Lee

Tia Offner

M. Kathy Raines

Camille M. Rich

Bob Schmidt

Karen Weaver

Anita Westervelt

Rio Grande Valley Chapter Leadership Team 2025

Officers

President	Robin Gelston
1st Vice President	Rob Gardner
2nd Vice President	Chad (TC) Wilmoth
Secretary	Evelyn Alpert
Treasurer	Betsy Hosick

Directors and Committees

Past President

Membership	Karen Weaver
New Class	Barb Peterson
New Class Rep	Sam Solfest
Program Chair	Tamie Bulow

Communication

Outreach: Marilyn Lorenz — Historian/Archivist: (open)

Newsletter Editor: Diane Hall — Facebook Editor: Mara Lee Moats

Website: Chet Mink, Richard Blanton

Accountant	Jody Nelson
Parliamentarian	Penny Brown
Advanced Training	Teresa Du Bois
Volunteer Service Project	David Batot
At-Large: Winter Texan	Joyce Baer Halpern

At-Large: Tira Wilmoth, Mary Grizzard, Rolando Garza, Emma Gonzalez

Advisors

Texas Parks & Wildlife	Javier de Leon & Ernesto Garcia-Ortega
Texas A&M AgriLife	Sara Stewart

RGV Chapter Texas Master Naturalist: This chapter is an affiliate of the Texas Master Naturalist Program jointly sponsored by Texas AgriLife and the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department.

Educational programs of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and Texas Sea Grant at Texas A&M University are open to all people without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, or veteran status. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating.

South Texas Border Chapter Leadership Team 2025

Officers

President	Anne Mayville
First Vice President	Velma Schmidt
Second Vice President	Jennifer Rektorik
Secretary	Melissa de Pagter
Treasurer	Taylor Kittleman

Directors

Immediate Past President	Donna Otto
Membership Director	Jaime Rodriguez
Awards: River Rivera	
Hours review/approval: River Rivera, Donna Otto	
New Class Director	James Gerry
Communication Director	Anita Westervelt
Publicity: Anita Westervelt	
Newsletter: participate with RGV Chapter	
Webmaster/IT: Joseph Connors	
Outreach Director: Velma Schmidt	
Historian/Archivist: Donna Otto	
Advanced Training Director	Kim Madrigal
Volunteer Service Project Director	Kim Madrigal
At-Large Director	Robert Hernandez
Winter Texan Director	Mary Baker
New Class Representatives	Eric Luebanos, Bob Schmidt
Chapter State Representative	President assumes role

Advisors

Texas Parks & Wildlife Advisors	Javier DeLeon & Ernesto Garcia-Ortega