

The Texas Star

Newsletter of the
Texas Master Naturalist
Hill Country Chapter
March 2021 Volume 19 Number 3

“We do not inherit the Earth
from our ancestors.
We borrow it from our
children.”

— Chief Seattle



The March Hill Country Chapter meeting will be a virtual meeting on Monday, March 22, beginning at 6:30.

Go to <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88596485278?pwd=NWV5NFcwREFDL3hiR1BnclA3ejcrQT09>

Richard Heilbrun and Mike Mitchell will speak on “Conservation Laws and Ethics” for the Advanced Training session immediately following the meeting. For further information, see the Vice President’s message on p. 2.

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE Elsa Roberts

We are sorry to announce that Darryl Pitts, our IT Director, needed to step back from the IT Director role. We wish him all the best and are grateful to him for still making himself available to us on a consultant basis. All IT support functions for the 2021 class are identified and we have other chapter members who have stepped up to continue to provide IT support without a hitch for the class.

The IT Helpdesk (helpdesk@hillcountrytmn.org) is still a resource for chapter members and 2021 class. While progress in the IT realm may slow down a bit, we will continue to move forward using these new tools and educate more chapter members as we go. Under Darryl’s leadership, the chapter made a lot of progress. He established chapter Microsoft 365 and OneDrive, which enabled us to establish a dedicated place to store chapter business files, “branded” chapter email addresses for board members (e.g., president@hillcountrytmn.org), and easing us into using Zoom for virtual meetings and presentations. These actions have made the unique course design for the 2021 class possible.

If you are interested in volunteering to help set up for the speaker at chapter meetings, including recording via Zoom, or being part of the IT Helpdesk, contact Carla Stang (membership@hillcountrytmn.org) now. Training will be provided. Thank you, Carla, for stepping up and assuming the responsibility of managing the volunteers who will be taking care of the IT needs of our chapter.

Our 2021 Training Class is well underway and from the feedback I am receiving, the trainees are excited, engaged, and impressed with the training format. There was good participation in the Volunteer Fair by trainees and project presenters, and everyone is ready to get to work. The last report I received was that 80% of the current class members are posting volunteer and AT time into the VMS. Impressive!

I hope all of you are beginning to recover from Winter Storm Uri. Some of our members have only recently had their utilities restored and many of you are still working on repairs to your homes and properties. The damage to the trees and native plants has been heartbreaking.

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The old growth oaks really took a beating and I am sure everyone is racing to get the broken limbs cut loose and the scars treated before the weather warms up and the season for oak wilt infection arrives. The Ashe Junipers really took a beating and it appears that there are very few of them that did not have broken limbs. I may need to replant my pollinator garden. Regrowth is not looking very hopeful at this point. The Damianita which is normally green throughout the winter is crispy critters and the plants that are normally showing new growth from the roots have not responded. The Cenizos have defoliated but are beginning to put on new leaves now.

So I, like you, will just need to wait-and-see what happens as it warms up. We all hope it's not as bad as it looks right now.

From Katy Kappel, Vice President

Last fall, many Master Naturalists experienced the Law and Ethics course presented by Richard Heilbrun and Mike Mitchell. They have reorganized it to share with our new class, and all chapter members, in a one hour format.

To qualify for AT credit, first watch the video and prepare your answers to the homework questions. Then log into the zoom event on Monday, March 22 at 6:30 for our meeting, and 7pm for their discussion.

Here is the link for the required video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpAmXOzanQg>.

And here are the homework questions:

Scenario 1: Your neighbor explains her child is in the third grade. One of her classmates found a live mockingbird and brought it to school. The chick is being sent home with different children each week to care for it. The chick seems healthy, but the mom is upset because the mockingbird is the state bird of Texas. What issues are at stake?

Scenario 2: You live in a residential neighborhood, and from walking the greenbelt, you know of a midden that clearly is several hundred years old and probably has native American arrowheads and ancient pottery buried inside it. It's on the other side of the fence on private property, but nobody lives there. Your archaeologist friend is visiting, and you'd like to take her to it to show her. She wants to become a master naturalist too. What issues are at stake?

You need not look up any legal references, although they technically exist for each scenario.

Recent Hill Country Naturalist Columns by Jim Stanley

2/6/21	Change Your Diet to Save the Planet?
2/13/21	How a Tree Works
2/20/21	Plants are Pretty Amazing Too
2/27/21	Exotic Ungulates in the Hill Country

These and all other Kerrville Daily News columns can be found at www.hillcountrynaturalist.org.

This Month We Honor



Recertifications

Tom Harrigan, Pam Lienhard, Gracie Waggener, Deb Youngblood

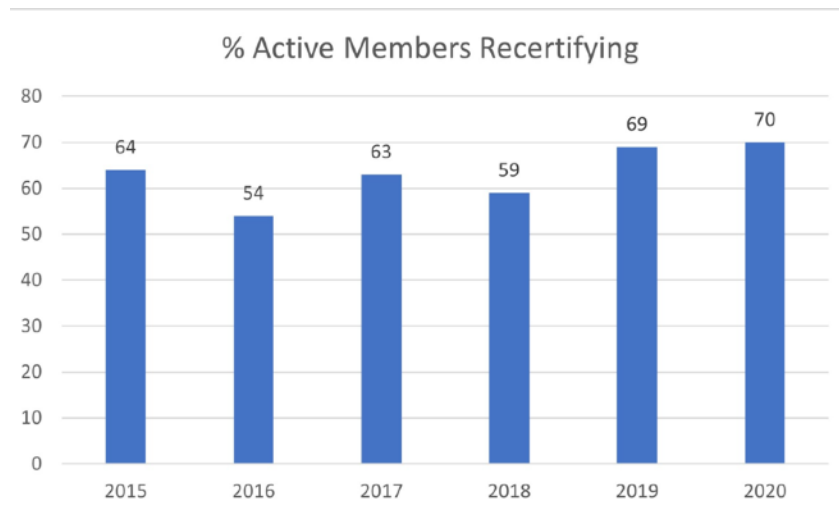
Milestones

Ron Childers - 500 hours, Brushed Silver Dragonfly

From Carla Stang, Membership Director

I can't stop being amazed by the resilience of our chapter members and their dedication to their volunteer projects! Thank you for documenting your activities in VMS so we can see the data that supports the wonderful stories you tell about your involvement.

Recertification Rate: I am so impressed that in 2020, 70% of our active members recertified. That's the highest recertification percentage to date!! AND as of Feb 28 we have 6 members who have already met the recertification requirements (8 hrs AT/40 hrs volunteer service) for 2021.



Volunteer Service Pin distribution: Keep your eyes peeled for an email from me soon regarding dates, times, and locations for pin distribution. The 2021 Volunteer Service Pin is Side Oats Gramma Grass and I already have a supply to start distributing.

Wanted: Membership outreach team volunteers: Do you have an interest and time to volunteer with me to work on some outreach efforts? As you know, due to COVID last year we weren't able to have any outreach events. I'm optimistic that some outdoor events and venues will be opening up soon. For example, the Kerrville Farmers Market is now open outdoors and I'm working on getting our spot there as I write this! What this all means is that there is a potential to get out to our 10 county chapter areas. I am looking for folks who would like to help spread the word about what being a Texas Master Naturalist is all about. I also need people who would help seek out venues electronically so we can map out our events. Naturally, you get volunteer service time credit for these activities. If interested, contact me at membership@hillcountrytmn.org.

The Big Freeze and Your Plants

The Great Texas Freeze of 2021 has come and gone, leaving in its wake downed power lines, broken pipes, and pothole-scarred roads. While city, county, and state governments have been scrambling to restore services and area plumbers have been working overtime to get supplies and make repairs to homes and businesses, life is resuming.

The freezing temperatures have given way to more springlike weather and with hints of spring come thoughts of getting our gardens in shape.

Right now, the freeze has left our yards looking pretty sad, but don't go out and start hacking down everything quite yet. Remember, even some of the dead plants still provide shelter to our songbirds and pollinators.

Your non-native plants, accustomed to warm moist climates, may not have survived—but your Texas natives may not be down for the count just yet.

The micro-climate of your urban yard may have affected your plants differently than the same species planted in your friend's hilltop garden outside of town. It all depends on the extent and duration of the freezing temperatures. In the Hill Country from Friday, February 12 until the following Friday, we only saw temperatures rise above freezing a few hours on one day, with three straight nights in the low teens and single digits; these are the coldest temperatures experienced here since the 1930's.

Some of the Prickly Pear around town look almost molten. Like all succulents, the pads have a fibrous cell structure that holds water and nutrients. The freezing temperatures lasted long enough to burst the cells, just like our pipes, and turn the pads into jelly once they thawed out.

Once the rotting pads have been cleaned up, check the main stalk; if it is also mushy then there is a good chance the plant has perished.

If you've been trying to get rid of that plant, Mother Nature may have just helped you out. One thing Prickly Pear is very good at is producing seeds, so don't be surprised if you see new plants spring from the earth. You might be digging up new sprouts for several years.

This year, freezing was so severe and so long that many branches of these Spineless Prickly Pear actually froze and fell off the plant. It remains to be seen if they will survive or not.



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The agave family has been highly hybridized since before we had written language on this continent and some varieties are adapted to colder and drier climates. Other agaves live as far north as Utah and Nevada and tolerate the cold well, but are not native to Central Texas and are usually not widely grown here.



While our broad-leafed succulents have succumbed to the freeze, the thin leaved varieties like Twist-leaf Yuccas and Texas Red Yucca will be slower to reveal the extent of the damage.

This Texas Red Yucca in the front yard could make a comeback this spring. It probably benefited from being planted up against the south facing rock wall. The yellow fronds are punky and will get pruned out as they continue to appear, but I'm hoping there are enough strong green fronds to sustain the plant.

The leaves and stems of the Carolina Jasmine in the background have all turned brown, but we hope it will be back this summer after some long overdue pruning.



As the weather warms and Spring comes back to the Hill Country, we will probably be surprised by which of our Texas native and adapted plants manage to come back and which ones do not. Looking around my front yard I see a bleak landscape. But there are already signs of hope. The grasses that had been brown and deer-stomped to oblivion are turning green and the Dandelion, which had wilted in the snow and ice, have flowers on them—providing the only nectar for our native bees right now.

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This Texas Sage and Rosemary are both shedding leaves but have healthy, well established root systems and we are hoping they can rebound from the freeze.

The freeze devastated cold weather annuals while native perennials like White Mist flower, Flame Acanthus, Turks Cap, and Gregg's Mistflower probably will return.

Wait to prune for a few weeks; that will give the plants a chance to reveal the full damage and to sprout new growth in a true spring climate.

At Riverside Nature Center you can check out the gardens maintained by Native Plant Society of Texas volunteers to see what they are pruning back and what will get replaced as the season progresses.



This is a good example of how location can have an effect on a plant's survivability.

Of the three boxwoods planted at the corner of the house, the middle one and the one on the right are tucked up close to the foundation, and look fine. The one on the left, away from the house and near the driveway, with a more northern exposure, took the most damage and will require a good trimming. The Mountain Laurel in front looks fine, as does the other mature Mountain Laurel in our front yard.

So, the watchword for the next few weeks is patience. We need to give the plants in our landscapes time to recover.

Some will come back, some will not. That will give you some time to contemplate what you might want to do with your plantings going forward, or it might prompt you to seek help in planning how to move forward in our changing climate.

The Hill Country Master Naturalists offer the Pollinator Garden Assistance and Recognition Program, (PGARP). The website at <https://txmn.org/hillcountry/PGARP/> offers a wealth of information about native plants, and you can request a visit by PGARP volunteers who will come out, visit with you, and make recommendations based on your property and desires for your gardens. You can also email your questions to pollinatorchampion@gmail.com.

Special thanks to Robert Howell for images and his wealth of knowledge on succulent plants.

The View from Rusty Bend



Another snowfall at Rusty Bend

Ode to the Pocket

... experts have found that ... [butterflies] "clap" their wings together -- and their wings are perfectly evolved for better propulsion. ~ Interface, 1-20-21

Birthered from a twisted pocket,
those wet wings push, unfurl,
dry slow in the wind—then
off you lift to flit.

The puzzle of your miracle
finally solved.
Managing swift take-off
with such short broad wings.

How can a whisper
of wing
lift the cylinder of your body?
Ah, your wings flex as they clap.

Let's call it soft applause.
On each upstroke, they
make a pocket for propulsion.
Bending is your trick

With one step yet in winter,
shadow smudges bruise
the land, still you arrive,
an ovation of auburn and black,

flashing mica, rousing the psyche,
sidling next to sweetness.

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Adaptation is the name of the game this wild February at Rusty Bend. In just a few days, we swing from five degrees to 85. We prepare for the cold with a rick full of seasoned oak, chili on the back of the stove, feeders full, pipes wrapped, and fingers crossed that our solar panels and Tesla storage walls keep us warm and watered. (They did.) As the temperature dives, we break the ice on the pond and troughs for the critters. We marvel at the sounds, smells, and landscape sculptured by ice then snow.

After the ice storm, the trees scratch and creak, the ground heaves and cracks with the cold. There is a metallic smell to the ice and we wonder how far nature's pruning will go as we move from glazing to encasement. Many birds fly clumsily as if snow blind or cold-stunned. The deer drag their feet as they wander by. I love that the fox tracks are just where we expect them to be. The landscape is revealed rather than concealed by the snow, the curves of the ground highlighted in new ways. As the snow finally melts, a soft fogginess appears as if the snow was breathing.

Several birds lose their tail feathers the first night. Hence the term *freeze your tail off*? Cardinals fly with ice on their backs. A single fatality of White-wing Dove lies belly up like a sad story in a snowbank. We watch Wren TV with interest. Bewick's Wrens adapt the fastest, sweeping away the snow with their tails, then spin to find errant seeds. Zone-tail Hawk and Redtail Hawk cruise by each morning and two days after the storm, Redtail parades by with a long snake snagged from the river bottom, as if he was bragging. We couldn't fathom where he found it in such cool temperatures.

Now we are left with more questions. How many deer perished? Will the Mexican Elder endure with its sad black leaves shriveled on every branch? Are those Live Oaks dead or just losing their leaves early? The salvias look crispy and tragic. Evergreen Sumac has risen from the ground but looks *right poorly* as my father would say. The entire countryside now has a grey rinse. Who will survive? Whose adaptation met the challenge?



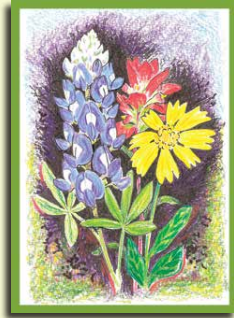
One of several birds that lost their tails. Raven watches.

Poem, images and essay by Lucy Griffith Copyright 2021

Lucy Griffith, PhD co-manages the Rusty Bend Ranch with her husband, Andy Robinson. She also writes poetry; her muse, a tractor named Mabel. The story of the Burro Lady of West Texas, told in poems, [We Make a Tiny Herd](#), has just been awarded the 2020 Willa Literary Award for Poetry as well as the Wrangler Award by the Cowboy Hall of Fame. Both Lucy and Andy are certified Master Naturalists. Comments welcome at lucy@lucygriffithwriter.com.

Native Plant Society of Texas - Kerrville Chapter
Texas Master Naturalist - Hill Country Chapter
& Riverside Nature Center
invite you to...

SAVE THE DATE



SPRING Members Only Native Plant Sale

Orders Accepted:
April 3rd- April 4th

Pick Up Date:
April 14th



Watch riversidenaturecenter.org
for more details

From Ken Butler, Bexar Audubon Society

Herff Farm Habitat Bird Survey

Volunteers will identify and count bird species in identified habitats on Herff Farm. This survey is jointly sponsored by the Bexar Audubon Society and Cibolo Center for Conservation. All levels of birding experience are welcome; this is a good opportunity to practice and expand birding skills. The initial survey is on April 19, 2021 (8—11:30am); future surveys will be on the third Monday of each month. Volunteers can report hours under KL-02-A-FR and need to bring birding binoculars. Sign-up on GivePulse at this link: [Herff Farm Habitat - Bird Survey](#). For additional info, contact Ken Butler (kenbutler67@gmail.com; 713-409-8656).

Advanced Training

WE HAVE MORE THAN 60 ADVANCED TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FROM MARCH 15 - APRIL 15.

To read the list of dates and titles, go to the Advanced Training calendar at <https://txmn.org/hillcountry/chapter-calendar/>. Chose "Agenda" at the top, right, of the calendar. This will bring up a list of the dates and titles for these events. Then click on any title to bring up complete information on that event.

T E X A S



We meet on the fourth Monday of most months (but not during pandemic) at 6:45 PM in the Upper Guadalupe River Authority Lecture Hall at 125 North Lehmann Drive in Kerrville.

Join us at 6:15 for our social half-hour.

Everyone is welcome.

Texas Master Naturalist mission:

To develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities.

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The Texas Star is a monthly publication of the Hill Country Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist Program. News, essays, comments, and ideas are welcome.

Please email them to:

Lenore Langsdorf, Editor
LenoreLangsdorf@gmail.com

The Hill Country Chapter does not recommend or endorse organizations or commercial sources mentioned in our newsletter. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and editor.



Questions about our chapter?

Email Carla Stang

Membership Director

hillcountrymembership@gmail.com

