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President's Column

Elaine Cearley

I hope you all had a wonderful holiday season. Now it is time to plunge back into the fun of being a Master Naturalist. I can't think of anything more important than our work to conserve our lands and environment.

As you know, we elected officers at the last meeting. I would like to thank Marcy Youngman for taking over the position of secretary after the seat was vacated this past year. Our new secretary will be Jan Walters and our new historian will be Bill Brooks. Welcome aboard and thanks for taking on these tasks. The other officers will remain the same.

Here's what else is going on:

- It is dues time again. They are only \$10 for the year, payable in January. Dues must be paid in order to be considered a member in good standing.
- Bastrop State Park hikes will be resuming in mid-February. Call Sue Fischer to get your chosen date to lead one.
- For those of us who are certified, the clock starts over on January 1. We now start again on our 40 hours of volunteer time and 8 hours of advanced training in order to earn the coveted prickly pear recertification pin in 2006. If you are still working on your *initial* certification, the hours you earned since graduation will continue to count towards your Dragonfly pin.
- And this year's training class orientation will be on Feb. 27, at 6:30 PM in the Bastrop State Park Refectory. I would certainly like our existing members to be there to let the new members get to know us.
- Don't forget our regular monthly meeting this month will be at Red Rock Community Center on January 16. We will present the proposed schedule of classes and ask for your help in getting the job done.

With this year's class we have a chance to nearly double our membership. We had a great year last year with certification milestones and amazing participation, the largest group EVER to go to the State Meeting. What a group! The class of 2005: I salute you!

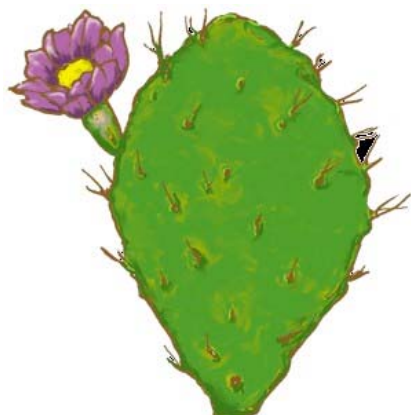
See you soon,

—Elaine

Inside This Issue

- 1 President's Column
- 2 Chapter Calendar
- 3 Volunteer Opportunities
- 4 Advanced Training
- 5 Editor's Notes
- 5 Join the Yahoo Group!

Please pay your 2006 dues! Dues for the year are just \$10 and are tax-deductible. Send your check to Marie Medrano, 505 Olive St, Smithville Tx 78957.



MISSION STATEMENT:

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.

STATE PROGRAM CONTACTS:

Website: <http://masternaturalist.tamu.edu>

State Coordinator: Michelle Haggerty,
mhaggerty@wfscgate.tamu.edu; 979-458-2034.

The Texas Master Naturalist program is sponsored by the Texas Cooperative Extension Agency and by Texas Parks and Wildlife.

SPONSOR CONTACTS:

Caldwell Co. Extension Office: Rachel Bauer, CEA-AG/NR; Caldwell-tx@tamu.edu; 512-398-3122

Bastrop Co. Extension Office: Maron Finley, CEA-AG/NR; Bastrop-tx@tamu.edu; 512-581-7186



CHAPTER CALENDAR

January

Monday, January 16

Chapter Meeting, 6:30 PM, Red Rock Community Center. Strategic planning for 2006 Class and programs.

February

Monday, February 13: Applications for 2006 training are due. If you have any acquaintances who might be interested in the class, please remind them to send in their applications.

Monday, February 27

2006 Class Orientation, 6:30 PM, Bastrop State Park Refectory. Please come and meet our new class!

NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

Deadline for the next issue is **February 10, 2006**. We welcome relevant contributions, photos, announcements or other material relating to the mission of the Texas Master Naturalist program, particularly those pertaining to our local area. Please send information to Andy Butler: butler@mdanderson.org; 512-321-1308.

CHAPTER WEBSITE

www.lostpinesmasternaturalist.org

Please check our website for updated event information and for links to many resources about our region's natural history.

LOST PINES CHAPTER YAHOO GROUP

Join our Yahoo Group to keep up with the latest Chapter happenings. Send an email to LPMN-subscribe@yahoogroups.com or log on to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/LPMN/>. To join, you need to register (free) with Yahoo. Yahoo does a good job of protecting your privacy, and there is no need to give them more than the minimum required information about yourself. As a member of the Chapter Yahoo group, you can post messages for the group as well see a group calendar and receive reminders of events. Only registered subscribers will be able to view messages and other materials on the Yahoo group site.

Volunteer Opportunities

- ▶ **Spring 2006 LPMN Training**— We will need lots of help to organize this year’s training program. Whether its bringing refreshments, helping with facility arrangements, inviting speakers or giving a presentation, there are many needs and opportunities. If you would like to help, bring your ideas to the Dec. 12 Chapter meeting, or contact Elaine or Andy ElaineA@starband.net or butler@mdanderson.org.
- ▶ **Bastrop State Park Hikes**— Ongoing: Saturday mornings (10:00 AM) “Discover the Lost Pines” interpretive hikes at Bastrop State Park. This is a great excuse to go to the park! Lead small groups on a short hike (about 1 1/2 hr), giving them an overview of the importance of the park, both historically and ecologically. **Volunteers will be needed again for hikes in February.** To help, contact Sue Fischer at 512-321-1308; email smfischer@mdanderson.org.
- ▶ **Yesterfest**— April 29, 2006, at Fisherman’s Park in Bastrop. An **organizer** and volunteers are needed to plan an LPMN Chapter booth for this community event. Contact Andy (butler@mdanderson.org) or Elaine (ElaineA@starband.net) if interested.
- ▶ **FireCAP Facilitators**—Facilitators will make at least two presentations to home owners on how to protect their homes against wildfire, through creating defensible space and instituting other protective measures beginning in 2005. Facilitators were trained and certified at one of several workshops held early in 2005. Please contact Michal Hubbard 512-517-1416 or by email Michal_photog@yahoo.com for details.
- ▶ **Lockhart Demonstration Garden**—The Chapter Demonstration Garden now has a native wildflower plot and a tallgrass prairie plot. Some small trees have been planted so that a shade garden can develop. The garden is evolving to a demonstration of native plants for the home landscape. To help, contact Muriel Lem at 512-398-9427.
- ▶ **4H Sport fishing camp**—This will be an all day, week long camp, during June. Shara Kilarski is coordinating monthly meetings to plan for the June camp. Shara worked with Bill Brooks on his fishing programs in Bastrop & Buescher State Parks last summer. She welcomes fresh ideas and volunteers to join in the committee. Planning meetings are usually the first week of the month. The next meeting is scheduled for Friday January 13th at 9:30 AM at the Travis Extension Office (1600 B Smith Rd, Austin). Breakfast will be served! Contact Shara for further information (skilarski@ag.tamu.edu; 512-247-4807).

Monitoring Activities

- ▶ **Individual monitoring activities**—In addition to Chapter activities and events with our partners agencies, a variety of individual monitoring activities, such as those listed here, may qualify for Volunteer service, particularly when they involve reporting your results as part of a broader monitoring effort. Please get these activities approved by Chapter officers, preferably before you begin.
- ▶ **Great Backyard Bird Count**—Feb. 17-20. Monitor birds in your backyard or other favorite locale, for 15 min or longer any day between Feb 17-20. See <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/> for instructions. Report your results to the same web site. Sponsored by the National Audubon Society and Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the GBBC results are important to help ornithologists understand the winter dynamics of bird populations.
- ▶ **Hummingbird Roundup**—provides instructions for monitoring hummingbirds, along with suggestions and supplies for improving hummingbird habitat on your property in Texas. For information, call the Wildlife Diversity Program at 1-800-792-1112, ext. 4644.
- ▶ **Texas Amphibian Watch**—a partner with the North American Amphibian Monitoring Program. Use field guides, web sites and audio tapes to learn to identify the various species of frogs and toads native to their area by sight and by listening to their calls. For more information about Texas Amphibian Watch or about related workshops, contact the Wildlife Diversity Program at 1-800-792-1112, ext. 7011.
- ▶ **Texas Mussel Watch**—volunteers are helping document the presence or absence of native freshwater mussel species. To volunteer for Texas Mussel Watch, call the Wildlife Diversity Program at 1-800-792-1112, ext. 7011.
- ▶ **See the TPWD “Nature Tracker” web page for detailed monitoring information**—
http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/learning/texas_nature_trackers/index.phtml.
- ▶ **Remember**—Get approval for volunteer activities not listed *before* you begin a project. Report your monthly volunteer service to Sue Fischer at 144 Colovista Dr., Bastrop, TX 78602; email smfischer@mdanderson.org. Take a minute **now** to send in your hours. Activity report forms are available on our website at <http://www.lostpinesmasternaturalist.org/volunteer.html>. You can fill in the Microsoft “Word” form on your computer and return it by email, or print the PDF version and fill in by hand.

Advanced Training

- **Prescribed burn workshop—Thursday, Feb 2, 2006**, Chaparral Wildlife Management Area, Artesia Wells. Topics include discussion of the effects of prescribed fire on vegetation and wildlife; planning a burn; prescribed burning procedures and safety; conducting a burn (hands-on activity). Registration is \$10 (includes lunch). To register, contact Texas Wildlife Association, %Helen Holdworth, 401 Isom Road, Suite 237, San Antonio, Tx 78216 (phone 210-826-2904). Chaparral WMA is south of San Antonio: take I-35 south to exit 56; turn onto FM133. The entrance is 8 miles west of I-35. (A PDF describing this event is available from our website, at <http://www.lostpinesmasternaturalist.org/training.html>).
- **Natural History of Central Texas Owls—Feb 3&4, 2006**, at Hornsby Bend Bird Observatory. Rob Fergus, founding director of the HBBO, will review the ecology, life history, and methods of finding, attracting, and managing the six owl species that regularly occur in Central Texas: Great Horned, Barred, Barn, Short-eared, Burrowing, and Eastern Screech. Friday evening will focus on the ecology and life history of each owl species. Saturday morning, participants will learn about attracting owls to their rural or suburban property, about different owl nest box designs, and monitoring owl species. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Ornithologist, Cliff Shackelford, will participate on Saturday to talk about building, installing, and monitoring eastern screech owl boxes. Optional owl excursions Friday night and early Saturday morning will search for the owls found at Hornsby Bend. Friday, February 3 (7-9:30 PM) and Saturday, February 4 (9 AM-4 PM). See location map on HBBO website www.hornsbybend.org. Cost: \$50 includes Saturday breakfast and lunch and information packets. To register contact Kevin Anderson by email at kevin.anderson@ci.austin.tx.us. Registration deadline is January 27th.
- **Master Naturalist Campout at Brazos Bend—Feb. 10-12, 2006**. The Gulf Coast Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists is sponsoring a “Hoot & Holler” campout and advanced training at Brazos Bend State Park near Houston. Several Advanced Training presentations will be available (also some volunteer activities). Fees are \$20 for Saturday only, or \$35 to campout. **Register by Feb 2.** For program and registration information, see the web site: <http://community-2.webtv.net/masternaturalist/EVENTSforTexasMNs/>.
- **Winter tree identification—Saturday, Feb. 18, 2006**, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, 4801 LaCrosse Ave, Austin. Explore winter woods with botanist Flo Oxley and learn about methods of winter tree and shrub identification. You will learn basic methods utilized in taxonomy and botany to effectively identify these slumbering native plants. Fee \$35 (members)/\$45 (nonmembers). For registration visit www.wildflower.org/?nd=registration.
- **Native Plant Spring Symposium: Native plants as habitat—Saturday, Feb 25, 2006**, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, 4801 LaCrosse Ave, Austin. Hosted by the Wildflower Center and the Native Plant Society of Texas. The Spring Symposium will include a plenary session reviewing ecological aspects of native plants as habitat, followed by in-depth afternoon break-out sessions. Specific animal and plant relationships will be addressed, and current biological research related to native plant ecology will be reviewed. Early registration is \$65; \$75 after January 31.
- **The Cultural and Natural History of Purple Martins—March 3-4, 2006**, at Hornsby Bend Bird Observatory. If you are a veteran martin landlord, a hopeful enthusiast with a new martin house, or just curious about these amazing birds, we invite you to join Rob Fergus, coauthor of “The Purple Martin” (UT Press, Austin: 2002) for a workshop on the cultural and natural history of the Purple Martin. Friday evening will focus on the natural history of the martins and the cultural history of human interactions with this gregarious bird. Saturday morning will be spent addressing the culture of martin landlords and techniques for maintaining and monitoring a purple martin colony. Participants will learn about various martin house and gourd designs as well as the proper placement and management of martin colonies. Participants will also learn monitoring techniques and protocols for recording breeding data. Dates are Friday, March 3 (7:00-9:00 PM) and Saturday, March 4 (9 AM –2 PM). See location map on HBBO website www.hornsbybend.org. Cost: \$50, cost includes breakfast and lunch and information packets. To register contact Kevin Anderson by email at kevin.anderson@ci.austin.tx.us. Registration deadline: February 24th.
- **See our Web site for more events!** Note: For events not listed in the newsletter or web site, please obtain **prior** approval for advanced training credit.

*...the hidden poetry of the world,
a poetry that only stays hidden when
we don't take the time to look deeply enough
—Gary Braasch, photographer*

Editor's Notes

Andy Butler

As a Chapter, we are making a difference. In 2005, Chapter members contributed nearly 1200 volunteer hours to our communities. That's up from under 700 in 2004 and previous years. Sadly, I know that these numbers are not the whole story, since there are some people who **have** done volunteer work, but **not** reported it! Remember, it doesn't count if you don't report it. Even if you didn't have enough hours to re-certify in 2005, **all** of your volunteer hours still count towards milestone awards (e.g. 250 hour pins).

Several members of the 2005 class have already certified; several more of you are getting very close. Remember that you have until the end of May to complete your initial 40 hours of volunteer activities. There will be several good opportunities coming up this spring; helping with the 2006 class is one, as well as other Chapter committees. For an outdoors activity, look at interpretive guiding and other activities in the State Parks. There will also be opportunities coming up with Pines & Prairie Land Trust's Colorado River Refuge. We also need volunteers to organize and man Chapter booths at Yesterfest (April 29) and other community events.

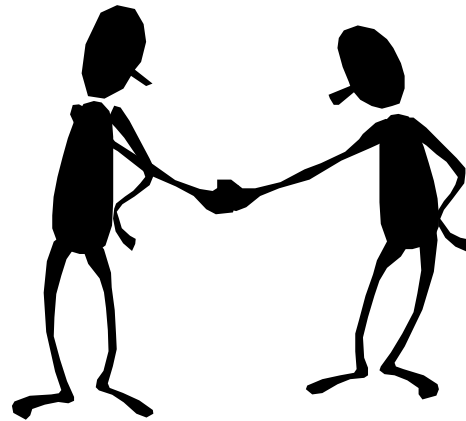
If you are looking for something a little less organized, there are various monitoring opportunities; you can count the birds in your backyard on the weekend of Feb 17-20 as part of the Great American Backyard Bird Count.

If you are just joining our Chapter as part of the Class of 2006, please take advantage of these Spring events to begin fulfilling the volunteer hours needed to complete your certification.



Volunteer Hours

Last Chance! This is your last chance to report your 2005 Volunteer and Advanced Training hours. Forms are available on our website or at the January 16 meeting. Send your reports to Sue Fischer, 144 Colovista Dr, Bastrop Tx 78602 (or return by e-mail, smfischer@mdanderson.org). Even if you didn't have enough hours to certify in 2005, your totals will still apply towards "milestone" awards and will also help the Chapter. **Please use the supplied forms**, as it is impossible to keep track of your hours otherwise. Remember that you get volunteer credit for administrative work done for our Chapter (Chapter development), as well as for your "hands on" projects.



LPMN "Yahoo Group"

Andy Butler

We have a new way to communicate, in the form of a Yahoo Group. If you haven't already subscribed to it, we encourage you to do so. The web address is <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/LPMN/>. There are two **immediate** significant advantages to joining to this forum. First, **any** subscriber can post a message that will be seen by **all other** subscribers. You can also use the site to send messages to other *individual* subscribers, even though you don't have their personal Email address. Second, the site contains a **calendar** that will be updated with events of interest, including Chapter meetings, volunteer opportunities, advanced training, and other happenings of general interest. Note that the message traffic through this site will be relatively light; and since messages must be approved by a moderator (currently either Elaine Cearley or myself), you should **never** receive "spam" Email as a subscriber. If your Email box is always full, you can choose to just get a *digest* of any messages sent on a given day. The more of us who join, the more useful the site will become, so sign up today.