



# Texas Master Naturalist

## Rio Brazos Chapter

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### December 2010 Newsletter

## RBMN and Campfire USA Activities at Camp El Tesoro

By Jane Lovedahl



Jane Lovedahl and Santa at the Annual Awards Dinner hosted by Camp El Tesoro. Photo: Wanda Riley



Cathy Crocker and Karen Langdon with Weldon Hatch and Jane Lovedahl, filling seed buckets to establish temporary cover during the Camp El Tesoro planting and seeding day. Photo: Jim Crocker



Dave and Wendy Moore, with Wendy's mother Norma, planting wildflower seeds in one of Camp El Tesoro's grassy meadows. Photo: Jim Crocker

The Rio Brazos Chapter, Texas Master Naturalists, has recently entered into a partnership with Camp Fire USA to further the common goals of both organizations, and to make full use of one of the areas most treasured natural properties (Camp El Tesoro), which is located in the middle of our Chapter's three-county area. The two organizations have similar missions and many on-going activities that support each other. So, the partnership that has developed has been a perfectly natural one that has spawned many events over the past several months that have provided several volunteer opportunities for RBMN naturalists. For example, RBMN members assisted with a seeding and planting day at Camp El Tesoro in late September to establish temporary cover on a recently cleared area, and to create wildflower patches in one of the Camp's meadows. In October, RBMN naturalists led nature hikes associated with an event hosted by the staff at Camp El Tesoro for the Acton Community Association. Camp El Tesoro was also the location of the RBMN annual holidays and awards dinner, held each year in December to recognize individual accomplishments of chapter volunteers.

Although the partnership is only a few months old, Camp El Tesoro has had active programs in this area for some time. Camp Fire USA First Texas Council was founded in 1914. From the early days of Blue Birds and Camp Fire Girls, the organization has grown into one of the largest councils in the United States, with coeducational programs that include camping, child development, environmental education, truancy prevention, after school and summer programs as well as child care training

and advocacy. Camp Fire USA First Texas Council serves Tarrant, Denton, Parker, Johnson, Hood and Wise Counties.

Camp Fire's goal is for all children and youth to be:

- Ready to learn when they start school;
- Caring, confident and developing leadership skills;
- Respectful of the outdoor environment; and
- Actively involved with their families and other adults.

The RBMN/Camp Fire USA partnership focuses on Camp Fire's program areas that are connected to the Outdoor Division. These areas include:

**Outdoor Education:** Camp Fire's Outdoor Environmental Education program allows students to see past classroom walls and learn to understand and appreciate the natural environment through the experiential "laboratory" of Camp El Tesoro. Director of Curriculum Development Jane Lovedahl, working with the guidance of Texas Master Naturalist Weldon Hatch, has selected specific outdoor environmental education content topics that focus on the natural resources available at Camp El Tesoro. "The Treasures of El Tesoro" outdoor education curriculum includes units of study on birds, wildflowers, fossils, trees, compass and map reading, and geocaching, and supports the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills. Other units are in the development stage on topics such as animal habitats, insects, and aquatics. The program is available to

Camp El Tesoro, continued from page 1

public, private and home school groups as well as community and senior adult groups.

**Summer Resident Camp or Day Camp:**

Since 1934 children have been developing leadership skills while learning to appreciate nature at Camp El Tesoro, the 223-acre resident camp outside Granbury, Texas. El Tesoro offers a variety of challenging and fun activities, from hiking, canoeing, and horseback riding to swimming, arts and a challenge course. The camp experience helps boys and girls ages 6-16 gain self-confidence and independence while they learn new skills. As part of El Tesoro's inclusion program, each summer children with mild physical and cognitive disabilities are mainstreamed into cabin groups and camp activities.

**Horse Day Camp:** This is a week long course that is held following summer resident camp. Daily activities focus on building beginning and intermediate-level horsemanship skills, how to care for horses, and team building.

**Grief Camp:** El Tesoro de la Vida is a week-long summer resident camp for children who have experienced the death of a loved one. Founded in 1988, the program incorporates activities which help boys and girls through the natural grieving process, combined with traditional camp activities, like canoeing, horseback riding and archery. Licensed professional counselors lead daily group sessions that allow children to share their experiences with others like themselves.

**Family Camping:** Throughout the year, Camp Fire offers camping opportunities that allow families to reconnect and enjoy time together away from the frenzied pace of everyday life. Parents and children can choose from a variety of traditional camp and outdoor education activities, or can explore the beauty of Camp El Tesoro on their own. Camp Fire's Family Camping weekends are scheduled in the fall and spring of each year, and include special weekends such as "Mom and Me" and "Dad and Me."

**Community Use of El Tesoro:** Through Camp Fire's community use program, corporations, churches, non-profit organizations and community groups are able to enjoy Camp El Tesoro as a rustic setting for day or overnight retreats and meetings.

## Cactus Moth (*Cactoblastis cactorum*) Trapping @ ANC

By Gary Hinds

I wanted to follow-up on Billy Teels very fine article in the August newsletter concerning *Opuntia spp.* (Prickly Pear Cactus). Billy pointed out that the often maligned prickly pear provides an important source of nourishment for the state's white-tailed deer, bobwhite quail, cactus wren and other native species. Prickly pear is also listed as an emergency source of forage for the state's cattle industry and as such, special scorching equipment has been developed specifically for cactus spine removal during periods of extreme drought. Because of the large market for the "tuna" or fruit as well as the "nopales" pads, it is one of only two native agricultural products (along with pecans) in the state of Texas. However, just east of the Texas-Louisiana border and in the swamps of southern Louisiana exists a looming threat to the state's native *Prickly Pear* population. Enter the Cactus moth, *Cactoblastis cactorum*; a native of Argentina, and probably the most effective biological control for the species ever used by man. The moth threatens many endemic *Opuntia spp.* of the arid southwestern regions of Texas. First used in Australia in the 1920s the cactus moth completely eradicated the non-native invasive prickly pear cacti that were causing serious damage to their cattle industry. It was then used in Africa and later the Caribbean islands of Nevis and St. Kitts with similar results. The unintended consequence of those experiments of course has been the subsequent escape of *Cactoblastis* to areas such as the southeastern US where they have infected native prickly pear populations, and have themselves become an invasive threat. First spotted in Florida in 1989, the moth has since spread as far west as Louisiana, where the state is now waging a pitched battle against its spread. Mississippi State University, with the aid of a USDA grant, started an early detection program to aid in the detection and eradication of the moth. This was extended to our state and is coordinated by Dr. Barron Rector, Range Specialist of Texas A&M University. I became interested in the program at the Master Naturalist State Meeting in October of



Cathy Crocker leading a nature hike at the Acton Community Association ceremonies at Camp El Tesoro. Photo: Jim Crocker



Weldon Hatch and Camp Fire USA staff preparing the evening meal for the ACA meeting. Photo: Jim Crocker



Jane Lovedahl providing information at the ACA meeting to RBMN volunteers Diane Cutler, Dagmar Higgins, and Dee Bogusch. Photo: Jim Crocker



The prime focus of Camp Fire USA's programs, on the picturesque swinging bridge that is the gateway to Camp El Tesoro. Photo: Jane Lovedahl

## Featured Plant: Sideoats Grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*) By Billy Teels

Sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*), our state grass, is a medium-size perennial bunchgrass generally reaching 15-20 inches in height at maturity. It is the largest of the gramas and can be easily recognized by its diagnostic inflorescence of 10-30 oat-like spikes that are borne on one side of a central seed stalk (as in a ship's banner). Its species name (*curtipendula*) means short-hanging, referring to the sessile (stalkless) nature of the spikes that hang downward (pendulous) from the stalk. The spikes are initially red in color, later becoming tan before shedding. The species can be recognized even when it is not in flower by examining its leaves which bear long, flimsy hairs that are borne on small bulb-like structures at leaf's edge that can be easily seen with a hand lens.

Sideoats grama begins growth in early spring and continues through mid-summer. It typically flowers in early summer, but may exhibit growth and flower again in September and October if moisture is available. While it is actively growing, its leaves are relatively stiff and bluish-green, but later they curl and become tan and light red after frost. Although sideoats grama is considered a bunch grass, it tends to be sod forming as well. It has both underground rhizomes near the soil surface and longer fibrous roots that extend downward as much as four feet in better soils. With its extensive root system, heavy seed production and high tolerance to grazing, it is one of the most common North American grasses.

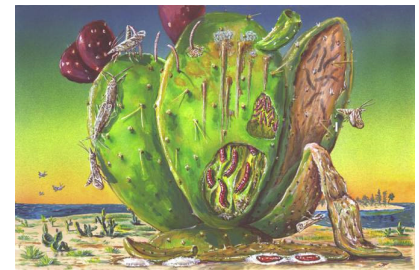
The species has a very wide distribution, occurring in prairies from Canada to Argentina. It generally inhabits well drained sites, but may also be found on a variety of soils mixed with other grasses. It is often included in seed mixtures to re-establish native grass stands, with several cultivars readily available for planting in different regions of the U.S. Although it is not as palatable as some grasses, its adaptability and productivity make it one of the most important plants on grazing lands. Because of its beauty, abundance, and grazing importance, it was designated the official state grass by the 62<sup>nd</sup> Texas Legislature in 1971.

Cactus moth, continued from page 2

of 2008. After establishing a pheromone lure trap station at the Acton Nature Center near a healthy prickly pear population, I have monitored the trap for evidence of the moth during its peak flying periods for almost two years. You have probably seen the trap site just off the trail behind the windmill. The good news is that we have not detected any *Cactoblastis* at the Nature Center nor in the other 230 traps scattered along the Louisiana border and Texas coast to Brownsville. The prognosis is not quite so rosy however, as the moth is expected to reach the state within the next year. I plan to start a sentinel survey program in the spring of 2011 and establish a couple of additional lure trap sites. If you would like more information about this threat or would like to help with the monitoring program, please contact me at [ghinds01@charter.net](mailto:ghinds01@charter.net). This would be a great project for someone who is interested in insects. The pheromone trap offers an interesting opportunity for surveying the insect population of ANC which to my knowledge has not been attempted.



Fruit (tuna) of Texas prickly pear (*Opuntia engelmannii*) at Acton Nature Center. Photo: Billy Teels



Infestation of prickly pear by the cactus moth (*Cactoblastis* sp.). Image: Gary Hinds



Sideoats grama, the state grass of Texas. Photo: Billy Teels



Joe and Karen Langdon, hosts of our summer gatherings at the Langdon Ranch in Hood County, Texas. Photo: Wanda Riley

## Notes from the State Meeting

### By Maryann Mathews

One of our newest members, Maryann Mathews, was the Chapter's scholarship recipient to attend this year's TMN State Meeting in New Braunfels. After returning she posted this report that several Chapter members read and enjoyed so much that they thought it should be included in this newsletter. So, here it is in its entirety. Thank you Maryann for sharing your thoughts about the state meeting and the many interesting people you met. It inspires all of us to be more passionate about the work we do as master naturalists and motivation to attend future state meetings. The report from Maryann:

"I expected the annual conference to be chalk full of training on subjects I know very little about and lots of new experiences. What I didn't expect is that almost everyone I met asked what I enjoyed about this work. What was I passionate about? Why would these dedicated folks think that I had anything of value to add? It made me wonder what the makeup of the room was. We already have a background of sorts on what a master naturalist should be, but I am just now learning what a master naturalist really is.

After attending class on Friday afternoon, I made my way through the maze of buildings to find dinner. I asked the first available table if I could sit and introduced myself to Shannon from the Big Country. Shannon is a cute young thing with lots of curly hair falling out of her ball cap. She was so in love with the state park in her area that she campaigned to get an office job there. After many interviews she is now managing the office at Abilene State Park and has wonderful stories to tell of the plants and animals who call it home. Shannon is the vice president of her chapter. She tells me that she loves working with the teenagers at her church and finding new, if not gory, ways to interest them in her park. She is concerned that we were not gleaning our share of funds provided under the sporting goods tax. She was eager to learn more and hoped to use the information to enhance her experience here. Shannon's passion is leadership.

The only empty table in the middle of the room is where I headed for breakfast. I looked up as a young woman with a burnt orange T-shirt asked if she could join me. How nice it was to meet Shirley from the Cradle of Texas chapter. She had arrived this morning and wasn't really sure where she was headed for class but was absolutely sure she wanted breakfast first. Her presence at the table attracted a few others from the Cradle chapter. Marty and his cohort dropped by and spoke about the class they took, the information they had gotten and wanted to know why Shirley had on the burnt orange of their rival university. Shirley discussed her strong belief in God and her feelings that he is guiding force for master naturalists, a fact that was easily understood since she worked for the church. In her 10 years as a master naturalist, Shirley's passion is her God and butterflies.

Tom from Hays County joined the table. He was introduced as an old friend of Shirley's. His sweet face held a wide smile as he explained that he would be traveling for the next couple of months, wanting to go where he had not gone before and experiencing people he has not had the opportunity to meet. I remember him saying "I better get started doing what I want to do or it will soon be too late." Tom rose, kissed and hugged Shirley, shook my hand and scooted on his way. A little later in the evening I saw Tom again as he accepted the silver dragonfly recognizing his 2500 hours of service. Tom's passion is people.

During River Critters class I met Joseph from Hill Country chapter. We were studying mussels and Joseph told me of his recent work with mussels on the Clear Fork. He knew all the scientific names for everything they threw at us, all the parts and pieces and really tried to keep his comments to himself as most of us just looked confused. Joseph sat back while the rest of us formed research teams, but was eager to help when asked to join our very inexperienced group. We made it through sorting and identifying with his help but when it came time to do field work he said he probably would not be going. We got him to go. His background is psychology, he is an author and a researcher and has spent the last 33 years studying these shelled creatures. Joseph's passion is mussels.



Our own Maryann Mathews with "none other than" at our annual awards get-together at Camp El Tesoro. Photo: Maryann Mathews



Two of our newly certified members, Dennis and Cathy Reger, on either side of Bill Diehnelt at the Annual Awards Dinner. Photo: Wanda Riley

## State Meeting Notes, Continued from page 4

Sunday morning Paulette from the Gulf Coast chapter joined me for a cup of coffee while we waited for the guest speaker to arrive. Paulette loves to create wildlife habitat on her property. Paulette has been a master naturalist for over 10 years. We talked about using the computer to keep in touch and informed. Paulette lives in an area that doesn't provide good internet service so she has not gotten a computer but is thinking about it very seriously. She said that when she was going through training she had to drive 60 miles each way. When she started there were very few chapters and the one she belongs to is on the far northwestern part of Houston. She still makes that drive to attend meetings and volunteer. There are chapters closer. Paulette would love to work in an ecosystem less urban but says there is still a need in the urban areas. Paulette's passion is loyalty.

Michelle gave us some interesting statistics that final morning. Over 70% of Texas counties are served by TMN chapters, donating more than 1,200,000 hours valued at over \$23 million dollars in economic impact. Over 300 of us attended the conference, half of which are 1<sup>st</sup> year folks just like me. I came away with valuable information but more than that I came away with heartfelt eagerness to live up to the passions of the people I met this weekend. After this weekend I think I understand what a master naturalist is: A master naturalist is a loyal leader who is passionate about preserving our natural resources, from mussels to butterflies. *A master naturalist is a quiet force for nature.*

## RBMN Activities at the Acton Nature Center

### By Billy Teels

Nature walks are now being sponsored by the RBMN on the second Saturday of each month at the Acton Nature Center. The walks are open to the public and are designed to convey knowledge on a wide variety of nature topics intended for all ages. Each walk is led by a chapter naturalist who provides general information about the history and ecology of the area, as well detailed information about a featured topic (e.g., grasses, fall fruits, animal tracks). Walk times vary depending on the topic and are posted in advance through the RBMN website and ANC notices. Written guides that include photos of featured plants and animals are passed out at each walk to give participants a "take-away" reference, as well as help guide the walk. Those guides are posted each month prior to the walk on the RBMN website under the listing "ANC Nature Walks."

This fall, approximately 12 home-schooled children, ranging in age from 6-11, have used the ANC as a classroom and outdoor learning theater to become more informed and appreciative of nature. This is part of a program to connect children with the natural world begun by Malea Balmuth in the spring of 2010. Between October and December, a total of six four-hour sessions have been conducted at the Center every other Friday. For the first hour of the sessions, games and activities are used to create "an invisible school" where children engage directly with plants and animals. After lunch, RBMN volunteers join the class on walks through the Center, pointing out interesting tidbits of information about nature and attempting to answer challenging questions that the children have formed after experiencing nature first-hand.

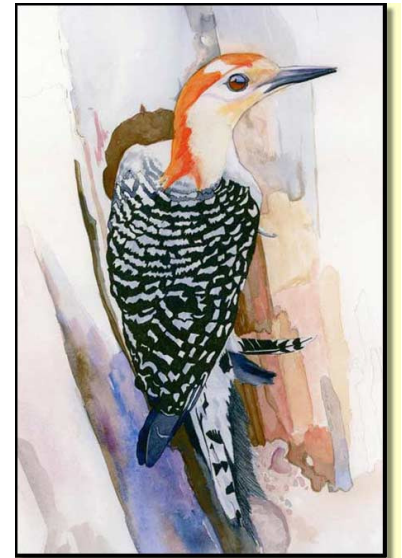
ANC work days have continued to improve the trails and markers throughout the Center and improve the appearance of grounds around the old house and butterfly garden. Structural improvements to the old house have continued and initial work on the house's interior has begun to transform it into its designed purpose, a nature education center. In addition, a post and cable barrier has been added to the parking lot to prevent off-road vehicle access into the Center.



A 1920's era farm house was transported from a local donor's property onto the ANC in 2009, and has since been receiving structural improvements to convert it into a nature education center. Photo: ANC website



The dry follicle of a Texas prickly ash (*Zanthoxylum hirsutum*), splitting open to expose its glossy black seed. Fall fruits were the subject of the November Second Saturday Nature Walk at the ANC. Photo: Billy Teels



Although red-bellied woodpeckers have been heard calling during our bird walks at the ANC, we had not recorded one on the property until this October. Since then they have been fairly common in the live oaks in the north ravine, feeding on the heavy acorn crop. Watercolor: Wendy Moore

## Chapter Awards Dinner at Camp El Tesoro

### By Billy Teels

RBMN held its annual awards dinner at Camp El Tesoro on December 3 with a special appearance from none other than Santa Claus. Many thanks to Jane Lovedahl, Director of Curriculum Development for Camp Fire USA, First Texas Council and RBMN member, for arranging to have the Camp made available to us for that occasion. The evening was cool and crisp and the fire, warm surroundings, and Santa Claus gave a special holiday's feel to the meeting.

During the meeting, awards were presented to the following individuals for TMN certification and volunteer services.

Initial TMN Certification: Maryann Mathews, Catherine Reger, and Dennis Reger.

Recertification: Mike Balderas, Elaine Bell, Henry Bogusch, Bob Bullard, Gail Bullard, Jim Cheatham, Kenneth I. Coy, Kenneth W. Coy, Cathy Crocker, Jim Crocker, Diane Cutler, Bill Diehnelt, Linda Diehnelt, Donna Hagar, Dagmar Higgins, Gary Hinds, Pat Kriener, Joe Langdon, Karen Langdon, Carol Lee, Gregg Lee, Carrie McLaughlin, Gary Miller, Kathy Miller, Gail Rankin, Wanda Riley, Billy Teels, Robert Theimer, Gerald Van Zandt, and Lou Van Zandt.

250 Hours: Mike Balderas, Maryann Mathews, Gerald Van Zandt, and Lou Van Zandt.

500 Hours: Henry Bogusch, Bob Bullard, Gail Bullard, Kenneth I. Coy, Cathy Crocker, Dagmar Higgins, and Billy Teels.

1000 Hours: Gary Hinds.

On a sad note, our Chapter will be losing the services of two of our most faithful members. Lou and Gerald Van Zandt have been driving to our meetings all the way from Ellis County for the past four years. Our Chapter will miss their smiling faces, but our sad loss is a great gain for the newly established Ellis County Chapter of TMN. We wish them well.

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The First Saturday Bird Walks continue to turn up a few new birds. Since mid-summer, 6 new species have been added to the Center's list which now totals 102 (Bell's vireo, alder flycatcher, yellow-billed cuckoo, red-bellied woodpecker, grasshopper sparrow, and green-winged teal).

Sadly, one of the ANC's most faithful users will be leaving with her family to Mississippi. Golda Greaves has trekked the trails of the ANC from its very beginning, usually starting her daily hikes well before of dawn. There are not many days when she hasn't gotten in several miles at the Center before the first person arrives. A self proclaimed "country girl from east Texas" with a great love for nature, she says that "she will greatly miss our Center and can only hope to find a place of equal caliber in Mississippi." However, she cannot possibly miss us as much as we will miss her. She is a great inspiration to all of us who have an appreciation for nature and the need for daily exercise. As a token of our appreciation, in November, our chapter presented her with a certificate of honorary membership, along with a walking stick made from a limb of one of the Center's many Junipers. Our best wishes go to Golda along with the hopes that she can find a place in Mississippi where she can grace the trails the way she has graced ours at the ANC.



Ken Coy presenting Golda Greaves with a certificate of honorary RBMN membership (at the crack of dawn), along with a walking staff crafted from the limb of an ANC Juniper. Photo: Billy Teels



Some of the 2010 award winners at the annual awards dinner at Camp El Tesoro. Photo: Maryann Mathews



We are bidding a fond farewell to Gerald and Lou Van Zandt, to the left of Bill Diehnelt, at the Annual Awards Dinner. Photo: Wanda Riley