



The Hays Humm

Newsletter of the Hays County Master Naturalist

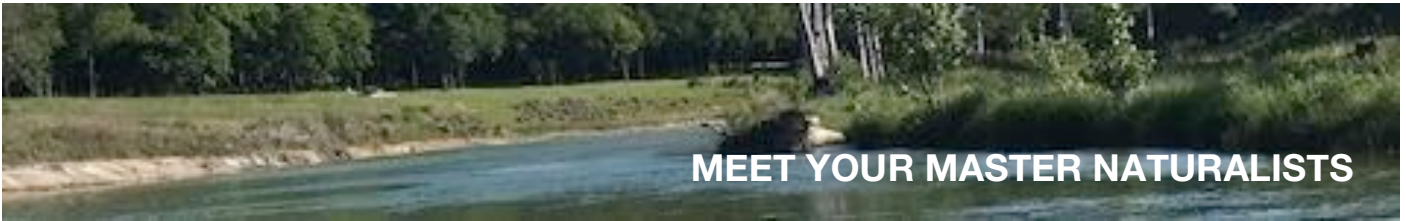
JULY 2018



Male Queen Butterfly on Texas Thistle

Tom Jones & Betsy Cross - Editors





MEET YOUR MASTER NATURALISTS



Art Crowe

About Myself: Marie and I moved to Wimberley one month before the Memorial Day flood. I retired from the State of Texas where I worked as a coastal fisheries biologist for the first half of my career. The second half I spent as an aquatic biologist in the 22-county area of Northeast Texas. I love the Hill Country, but salt water still flows in my veins. Member of the HCMN 2016 class, The Ravens

You May Not Know: I am an avid gardener. I have been my whole life. There is nothing quite like a fresh salad with some homegrown tomatoes from your own garden. I have recently taken up cooking as complementary hobby.

Favorite Master Naturalist Activity: I collect monthly water quality samples on the Blanco upstream of Wimberley. I volunteer at West Cave Preserve and Jacob's Well Natural Area. But my favorite activity is working at the Emily Ann Theatre and Gardens where I am project manager for the north prairie (602RM), which includes building and maintaining a nature trail and pollinator garden.

My Favorite Bird: The raven. It's kind of like a crow.



Shannon du Plessis

About Myself: I'm a Native Texan living in Wimberley with my South African husband, Kruger, three dogs, four chickens, and three grown children when they have time to visit. Kruger and I are both HCMN's (Texas Sages class) and used what we learned to create a certified Monarch Habitat on our property, which is also a Certified Wildlife Habitat. In addition to painted buntings and such, we finally saw our first golden-cheeked warbler just last week! My day job is owner of ACE Cloud Bookkeeping LLC. When I'm not crunching numbers I enjoy photography and travel.

You May Not Know: I am a major Star Trek fan and was thrilled to meet Leonard Nimoy (Mr. Spock) a couple of years before he died.

Favorite Master Naturalist Activity: Advocating for dark skies. I chair the Wimberley Valley Dark Sky Committee.

My Favorite Bird: I want to say I identify with the resplendent quetzal, but I actually took an online quiz (because we know how scientifically accurate those are) to find out what kind of bird I am and the answer was red-tailed hawk. Here's why, apparently. "You're a truly strong leader, and you get what you want out of life. Others might find you intimidating or be jealous of your success, but you're too busy to worry about the haters." Isn't that hilarious?

CHAPTER NEWS

CHAPTER BOARD

President – Anne Child
Vice President - Mary O’Hara
Secretary - Tracy Mock
Treasurer - Larry Calvert
Past President - Beth Ramey
State Representative and Volunteer
Projects Coordinator - Dixie Camp
TPWD Advisor - Gordon Linam
Training Coordinator – Mark Wojcik
Advanced Training - Beverly Gordon
Calendar - Beverly Gordon
Historian – Dana Martensen
Webmaster and Membership Chair -
Jane Dunham
Outreach & Marketing - Art Arizpe
Outreach Events - Roxana Donegan
Host Committee - Mary Dow Ross
Newsletter– Tom Jones, Betsy Cross
Willett Project - Candy Spitzer
Agrilife Sponsor- Jason Mangold

MN BOARD MEETING

Thursday July 12, 6:30pm – 8:30pm
Where: Agri-Life Extension office
200 Stillwater Drive Wimberley, TX 78676.

JULY CHAPTER MEETING

When: July 26 at Freeman Ranch
Where: Classroom 2101 Freeman Ranch Rd
San Marcos TX 78666

Guest Speaker: LaRay Geist aka *Talon Dancer* presenting:

“How We Got to Now – in the Hill Country” The presentation will borrow heavily from recent posts on the HCMN Forum. But it will include new images, maps, aerial photos and material about Texas Land Grants, etc. Time allowing, we’ll show a time lapse video of aerial photos of “master naturalist valley” from 1953 to 2017.

Dinner at 6:30pm Program at 7-8pm
Approved for 1 hour AT.

Please RSVP if you are attending and/or bringing a guest: <mailto:VP@haysmn.org> so that we can estimate enough food for all.

Advanced Training Calendar – Click the link below for more opportunities
<http://haysmn.org/calendar-at.html>

Projects Calendar –
<http://www.haysmn.org/calendar-projects.html>

THANK YOU! FOR SHARING YOUR PHOTOS

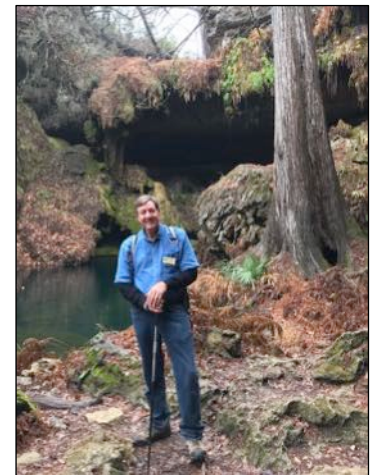
Betsy Cross
Art Crowe
Shannon du Plessis
Hope Shimek
Eva Frost
Tom Watson
Tom Jones

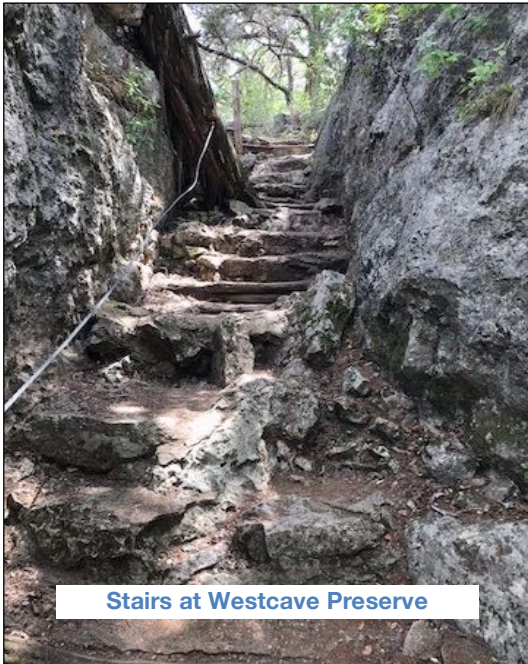


When I decided to become a Hays County Master Naturalist, I knew that guiding would be part of my volunteer efforts. But I did not know where or how to get there. Three months into the 2017 training class I contacted HCMN Suzanne Davis and got an invitation to the upcoming Jacobs Well Natural Area planning meeting. I wanted to find out what it was all about and how to join. This was my first step down the path to becoming a volunteer guide. Two months later, I volunteered for a conservation project at Westcave Preserve. This led me to Paul Vickery, Education Director at Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center. He agreed to let me observe and assist with their summer education program and a chance to earn my way onto their guide team. I had no idea of the long and hard path that lay ahead. Many months later, but before I completed my HCMN training, I finally started guiding on my own.

Being an outdoor guide is challenging work. You have to understand the basic facts about the area, its history and be able to describe its key features. You need to know what to say, when to say it and provide the right amount of information. Weather is always a factor, not only during the blazing hot summers, but also in winter. There seems to be an unlimited number of variables that you must quickly identify and adjust accordingly.

The joys of volunteering as a guide are many. The biggest joy is just being outdoors. It is a new experience every time. Guiding is interactive with individuals and groups that want learn about a new place. I remember on one tour at Jacobs Well when a man asked me “can you wrap you mind around the geologic time scale where rocks are hundreds of millions years old”. I replied honestly, “I cannot”. I often tell this story to groups when talking about the geologic history. In mid-January, only 1 person showed up for a 10am tour at Westcave Preserve. The temperature was at or below freezing. With just the two of us, it is one of my most memorable experiences. The Grotto looks very different in winter, and it was an enjoyable one-on-one conversation the whole way. The cold just did not seem to matter.





Stairs at Westcave Preserve

But there are challenges on every tour. One challenge is when the unexpected happens. There are many dangers if you leave the trail. I have never experienced an injury during a tour, but there have been some close calls. For me, going up or down steep stairs with large groups is challenging, especially when wet. I have guided in all seasons. The summer heat poses a big challenge, especially if you forget a water bottle.

NANCY RUSSELL - HCMN
Guide at Jacobs Well Natural Area

“I have been a guide at Jacob’s Well for about eight years. My joys have been sharing the awe that I felt the first time I saw the water of Jacobs Well bubbling up out of the ground. (Yes, it was actually bubbling up in February of 2012.)

Other joys have been learning about the role of the plants, animals and land to the aquifer through other JW guides, Master Naturalists and, yes, even tour participants.

One major concern was preventing some of the few tour participants who insisted on charging ahead of the rest of the group. An unforgettable time occurred when a small child ran ahead and almost off of the upper cliff.”

JERI PORTER – Capital Area MN
Guide at Jacobs Well Natural Area

“Guiding at Jacobs Well offers a great opportunity to teach as well as learn. Our guests often know more than we do and I encourage them to share their knowledge with the group.

Children are often a challenge to our routine but their inquisitive minds open up new perspectives and I so love seeing the natural world through their eyes! They are the hope for the future.”

DEB BRADSHAW - HCMN
Guide at Blue Hole, Jacobs’s Well Natural Area & Canyon Gorge for ~10 years

“I love it for the light bulb moments - when someone’s eyes light up when they find a fossil, realize they’re walking the same path as an acrocanthosaurus, or they see their drinking water flowing through an exposed aquifer channel. When I talk about the flood at Canyon Gorge, I’ll always have a class or two of 5th graders jumping up & down with questions. Seeing the joy of learning never gets old.”

BETSY CROSS GALLERY
Black-crested Titmouse Feeding Fledglings



Black-crested Titmouse Feeding Fledglings



Diamondback Water Snake



Yellow-billed Cuckoo



Ringtail Ridge Natural Area Field Trip 2018 HCMN Training Class

Article and Photos by Andy Witkowski

On June 9th a group of the 2018 Hays County Master Naturalists met up at The Ringtail Ridge Natural Area just off of Old RR12 in San Marcos. This is an often overlooked area within the wider San Marcos Greenbelt. Historically a part of a larger ranch, the area still bears the marks of its past. Signs pointing you along the trail to “The Blood Pits” suggest a bleak utilitarian function of the little water hole, now filled with frogs and other water loving shore plants.



Bill Carr-State Botanist –Nature Conservancy discussing Buzz Pollination with the flower of Silver Leaf Nightshade.

Plants like Frost Weed, Texas Thistle, and Canada Wild Rye are species that seem to thrive in these disturbed areas and yet are important native plants.

Upon casual observation Ringtail Ridge Natural Area might feel overlooked and overgrown but after a couple of hours with Mr. Carr discussing the many varieties of plants present a diverse and dynamic botanical world emerged.



Bill Carr, the former state Botanist for the Nature Conservancy, led a really great tour along a 1.5 mile path.

Over 50 plant species were identified and discussed. Being a former ranch, and flanked on all sides by development, it is not in a pristine state. Though the area is quite beautiful the plants tell a story of disturbance. Bill pointed out that we are lucky here in Texas that many of the plants that thrive in disturbed areas are still native, and are still a valuable part of a landscape in any state of succession.

Balsam Gourd. Beautiful almost translucent fruit that seemed more appropriate for a tropical environment. Bill indicated to us that while it is beautiful and edible, its consumption should be discouraged by taste alone.



Though over 50 plant species were identified, below is a list of the more common and notable, both native and introduced.

Gulf Vervain	Plateau Goldeneye	Texas Lantana
Japanese Brome	Virginia Wild Rye	Cockle Burr
Pearl Milkvine	Texas Thistle	Agarita
Hairy Tube Tongue	Rescue Grass	Silver Bluestem
Bluewood Candalia	Wolly Bulimia	Western Horse Nettle
Carolina Snail Seed	Texas Winter Grass	Frost Weed
Wild Petunia	Palo Verde	Old Man's Beard
Elbow Bush	Blue Curls	Soap Berry
Monarda	Japanese Lugustrum	Texas Persimmon

RINGTAIL RIDGE NATURAL AREA

1814 Old Ranch Road 12, San Marcos, TX 30 parking spaces, no water, no facilities

Located on a caliche road between Dakota Ranch Apartments and Crestwood U-Haul
Additional pedestrian and biking trailhead between Community Baptist Church and Dakota Ranch Apartments.

Forty-five acres with a ½-mile Tex's Trail, a caliche trail circling three wet-weather ponds. Additional 2 ½ mile single-track trails offer beginner mountain bike experience. The stock ponds offer opportunities for birding and bug walks not easily found on the drier Purgatory Creek natural area.

The natural area is the former site of the Hughson Meat Company founded in 1947 by Cecil "Pop" Hughson and his brother, Johnny Hughson. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department awarded the City of San Marcos and SMGA a National Trails Grant in the amount of \$40,087 in August 2007. That project included a one-half mile accessible trail, parking lot improvements, and an interpretive kiosk.



Wimberley Valley Cities Become 3rd International Dark Sky Community in Texas

Press Release: In recognition of noteworthy local efforts to reduce light pollution and promote the benefits of nighttime darkness, the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) today designated the Wimberley Valley of Texas as an International Dark Sky Community. It is only the third such designation to date in the Lone Star State. The Wimberley Valley, situated in the Texas Hill Country between the Austin and San Antonio metropolitan areas, consists of the Cities of Wimberley and Woodcreek and neighboring unincorporated areas subject to limited municipal regulation. The Valley, home to some 14,000 people, has a strong tourism economy and hosts a thriving arts scene. To these characteristics, the community has added a proactive campaign to improve the quality of its outdoor lighting. “The importance of the Wimberley Valley’s achievement cannot be understated,” said IDA Board of Directors President, and part-time Hill Country resident, Ken Kattner. “It’s a validation of our belief that dark skies are for everyone and that there are important gains to be made in Texas, even in the shadow of our biggest cities. ”Inspired by the success of the nearby City of Dripping Springs, which achieved International Dark Sky Community status in 2014, a group of volunteers formed the Wimberley Valley Dark Sky Committee (WVDSC) a year later and began working toward IDA accreditation. Read the full Press Release using the link below: <https://darksky.app.box.com/s/cpqvijakvte5pkp1g9f5azkc2slkh34p>

Shannon du Plessis.

Wimberley Valley Dark Sky
Committee Chair & HCMN

“It’s been such a joy to work with the people in our community, who thank us for our efforts when they see us around town.”

What Dark Sky’s Designation Means to Wimberley

by Tom Jones – HCMN and Wimberley Resident

When I was young and growing up in East Texas, one of my biggest fears was venturing out into the dark piney woods surrounding the Boy Scout Camp where I spent many summers. And this fear stayed with me until I was an adult and father. When I started leading Boy Scouts on high adventure backpacking trips to Philmont (New Mexico), Big Bend and the wilderness areas of Colorado, I quickly lost that fear and discovered the joys of the night. The sounds of the Owls and other night birds. The howls of coyotes and the rustle of armadillos and raccoons. And the thrill of counting shooting stars. I think of these experiences now while writing my thoughts on what the Dark Sky’s designation means to Wimberley.

1. Anyone who has camped or just sat around a campfire after sunset has experienced awareness of the night. It's incredibly beautiful, that it has its own scents and sights and sounds that enrich our lives. With its rural location, Wimberley's night awareness can be felt. The Dark Sky Designation helps preserve this.
2. It maintains the opportunity to look up and gaze upon the stars and think about our spiritual connection and our place in creation.
3. Many of the big cities wrapping around Wimberley are lit very brightly at night. In some commercial areas it is like the sun never sets. All of the Wimberley Valley can benefit with a little less light at night.



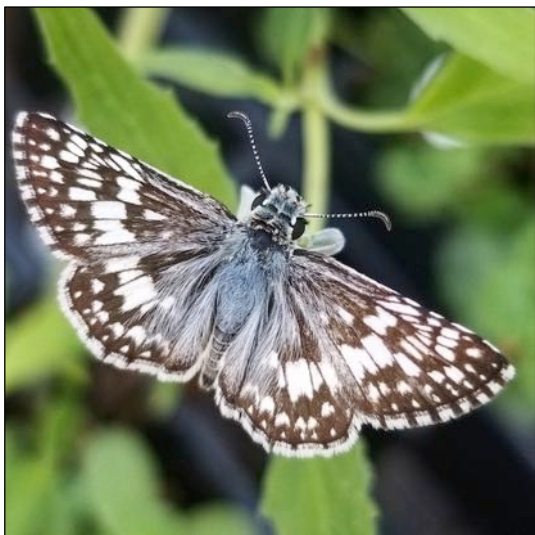
Link to official IDA page including a link to the Wimberley application supporting the Dark Sky designation

<http://darksky.org/idsp/communities/wimberleyvalley/>

HOPE SHIMEK GALLERY



Giant Green Eyed Robber Fly



Adorable White Checkered Skipper



Brown Eyed Susana-to mind this heat



OF CABBAGES and SUN

More Flotsam and Jetsam in a Naturalist's Mind

*By: Sun Gatto
Class of 2017 Nighthawks*

Reprinted from the October 2017 Newsletter
Edited June 2018 by Sun Gatto

Many of my musings this month revolved around the sun. You know, because of the eclipse thing. Some friends of mine even drove to Missouri to see it in its totality.

Well, I love the sun, my name is Sun after all, but somehow seeing the whole thing covered up just really doesn't get me too excited. I prefer seeing all three celestial objects in the sky at once, like in the early summer when you can see the sun, moon, and the stars all in the same sky. That's my kind of astronomical dream.

Or maybe I've just read too many books with eclipse plotlines. "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court" by Mark Twain is the obvious one, but there is also "Nightfall" by Isaac Asimov and Robert Silverberg. Carly Simon sang about it in her song "You're So Vain" and I remember reading about TinTin's eclipse encounter in "Temple of the Sun" when I was a kid.

A lot has been written about animals and their reactions to the eclipse, such as putting themselves to bed for the night. Well, come on, if it gets dark at noon, like on a rainy day, don't you want to go back to bed?

Nope, what got the flotsam and jetsam of my mind ebbing and flowing was the idea of the sun itself. So much power, so much energy, so much hotness! Oh, that big beautiful ball of gas.

Being a former Yankee, I can't help but remember those incredibly bright winter days that made you squint. But when you went out to play in the sunshine, you discovered it was so cold the snow had dried out and made chalkboard noises when you stepped on it. Talk about a contradiction in expectations.

I remember living at 8,000' in the Rockies; the sun was out and about a lot. But it wasn't always warm, even in August.

Eventually I moved to Austin and the first thing I noticed was that it wasn't sunny here. No really, it isn't. I even contacted one of the weather guys on TV and he called me back to say I was right. (Ah, how I loved to hear that.)

He said Austin averaged about 60% sunny days in a year, but of those 60%, about half of them were only partly sunny, not totally sunny. In meteorological terms, a sunny day has less than 30% cloud cover during daylight hours. So compared to where I had been in CO, and its 70% sunny days, this wasn't a sunny place at all. But it was warm; I stayed.

What made me notice that lack of sunshine; what made me care? While I am a gardener, I'm not a plant and don't feed myself through photosynthesis, which as master naturalists, we all remember is how plants convert sunlight into food.

And a measly 31% cloud cover in a day wouldn't make a big difference, would it? I mean it's not like I moved to Seattle.

Speaking of plants, why would a plant that requires full sun in Chicago only tolerate morning sun here? What makes those plants want to hide from the afternoon sun? Chicago isn't sunnier than here, and it gets 100+° in the summer too.

Is it something as simple as the different latitude? Could that little bit of change in the length of the day affect a plant's circadian rhythms and make it want to take an afternoon nap? Do they even have circadian rhythm? Or is it more about the humidity? And if so, would it be happier in Houston or Terlingua?

Could it be that big beautiful ball of hotness isn't really the problem? Maybe it's something completely different or is it just so interconnected with other natural causes that I have a lifetime of learning ahead of me. Will I ever know? Why do I care? You're a master naturalist, why do you care?

“People believe a little too easily that the function of the sun is to help the cabbages along.” — Gustave Flaubert

ITS TIME TO GET BACK TOGETHER



**The Hays County Master Naturalist Chapter's 2018
Summer Reunion**

**Saturday, August 11, 10 a.m. - 1:15 p.m.
Dripping Springs Ranch Park**

**The Summer Reunion Features displays of chapter
projects, a speaker, catered lunch, and door prizes**

Reservation information will be sent out mid-July.

SUMMER REUNION



Jackie Mattice and Lin Weber

May 30

HCMN table at the Wimberley Library's kick-off of the summer reading Program.

Kids learned about mosquito larvae and wildflowers.

**Opportunity for FUN!
Wimberley 4th of July Parade**

Wed. July 4 – 10am

Be a part of the award winning HCMN Kazoo Band in the Wimberley 4th of July Parade! It's that time again and our HCMN chapter is participating. Chapter members will walk in the parade and play kazoos. We have had tons of fun doing this in the past. It increases our visibility in the community, and you even get volunteer time for being a part of this event!! As an added bonus this year, anyone in the parade will be given a free "T " shirt. Wear a fun sun hat, too.

For More Information contact:

Dana Martensen

lapin@homie.net - text (415) 244 - 1987



WESTCAVE
OUTDOOR DISCOVERY CENTER

LINK TO WESTCAVE

<https://westcave.org/>

LINK TO EVENTS & BIRD WALKS

<https://westcave.org/events>

**VOLUNTEER AT WESTCAVE
PRESERVE**

<https://westcave.org/get-involved/volunteer>

**HCMN PROJECT CALENDAR
REMINDER TO PROJECT LEADERS**

Beverly Gordon

The HaysMN Project Calendar is a great way to promote your project and recruit volunteers. There is another fantastic class of HaysMN trainees underway seeking volunteer opportunities. The Calendars are found at the bottom left of haysmn.org. If your project is not already on the Project Calendar, please forward the following information to calendar@haysmn.org:

- Project name and number
- Project date(s)
- Start and end time
- Location
- Brief Description of work required & equipment needs



LINK TO JWNA WEBSITE:

<http://www.co.hays.tx.us/jwna.aspx>

FACEBOOK LINK:

<https://www.facebook.com/JacobsWellOfficial/>

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES:

quincy.kennedy@co.hays.tx.us

HCMN on FACEBOOK

Find us, like us, share with us! Click icon for HaysMN Facebook page.



NEWSLETTER

Do you have some awesome photos or want to share a volunteer experience? Let us know! We are looking for interesting items for the newsletter. Contact Tom Jones wimberleytom@gmail.com or Betsy Cross betsy.cross@sbcglobal.net

HAYS MN FORUM

Join the Forum! It's a great way to connect with fellow naturalists, ask questions, and learn from each other. Click the Forum link.

<https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/haysmn>

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Watch your e-mails for upcoming volunteer opportunities! Check out the Projects Calendar for more information.

<http://www.haysmn.org/calendar-projects.html>

HAVE YOUR PROJECT ADDED TO THE CALENDAR

Send requests to calendar@haysmn.org

LINKS to Chapter Partners, Program Sponsors, Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapters and Other Sites of Interest

Link: <http://www.haysmn.org/links.html>



Blanco River near Wimberley – T. Jones