

# LOST PINES CHAPTER

Texas Master Naturalist



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## Plantzilla vs. U.S. Cavalry by Larry Gfeller & Liz Pullman

Fire has completely changed my property. The first year following the Bastrop County Complex Fires, my land started over from scratch. In the beginning, plants familiar to me reappeared, but pokeweed and a number of other newcomers eventually got the upper hand. Then in year two something more pervasive appeared. For me it was a mystery plant that I struggled to identify, unsuccessfully it turns out. For two full years now, I have been battling a green avalanche of these new invaders I'd never had on the property before. They grow to 4-5 feet tall in a full season, are covered with tiny yellow flowers and they seem to come in larger numbers each year. You see, I'm trying to re-establish a loblolly pine forest, and pine seedlings don't grow as fast as these interlopers do. It's all I can do to keep them at bay so my seedlings can receive the needed sunlight, nutrients and rain to survive and grow. What *are* these plants?

Through two growing seasons, I have learned some of the behaviors of the invading plants and here's what I think I know. They start small in the spring, as tiny rosettes. Over the course of the rainy season, they flower and continue growing. Bring on the hot, dry summer and these things thrive, stretching up, branching out and multiplying like rabbits. In the fall, there appears a new and more intense blooming—the landscape is virtually blanketed in chest-high yellow flowers, reminiscent of bastard



The competition is tough!

cabbage. The leaves are sticky and resinous and blacken your gloves, clothes and anything you touch. They die back in late fall and winter, leaving a coarse, woody skeleton that remains until the following spring. Then the cycle begins again, this time with renewed vigor.

I am no taxonomist, but through my sophomoric attempts to identify the plant by Internet photos I got it into my mind that it was Texas Broomweed (*Gutierrezia texana*). *Gutierrezia* is a genus of plants in the sunflower/daisy Family (*Asteraceae/Compositae*), so that seemed to fit. Well, turns out I

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## Plantzilla, cont.

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was wrong. How do I know? Because I invited Liz Pullman to come take a look. Her verdict: Although there was some Broomweed on the property, that's not the problem plant. Now in case you don't know it, when Liz comes to look at your property, she comes armed—plant press, GPS device, collection bag, field manuals, notebook, sketches and prior research. It's akin to being cornered in the Palo Duro Canyon with your back up against the cliffs, surrounded by Comanches, only to see the U.S. Cavalry ride in from the west, bugles blowing, flags waving at full gallop. So, let's hear from the cavalry . . .



Sergeant Pullman and the gang

**Liz here everyone:** Finding Larry's place was almost as difficult as identifying his nemesis plant. I headed out of Bastrop on Hwy 21, performed one of those special u-eyes to get onto Kelley Road and began counting mailboxes. The directions should have been simpler: "Drive until you see YELLOW." That would be **DYC YELLOW**. I was asked to come look at two species of Broomweed (*Gutierrezia*). There was one species of Broomweed, but most of the remaining yellow was the more prolific and showy Camphorweed (*Heterotheca subaxillaris*), which is also called Golden Aster. *Heterotheca subaxillaris* has



A sea of Camphorweed (*Heterotheca subaxillaris*)

bugged three LPMN plant goobers since early spring when it emerged sporting large, strangely shaped leaves. We couldn't ID it. By late May we realized the leaves were stinky and covered in a sticky residue. Still no ID but we started calling it Gummyweed (not to be confused with Gumweed or *Grindelia* sp). It kept growing and when the flower buds confirmed the Aster Family, we narrowed our search. By August the bright yellow flowers opened up and we pinned down the ID. All of us noticed the change in the general aspect of the plants, going from crowded leaves, then to more sparsely leafy stems and into a lopsided shrub with lots and lots of bright yellow flowers.

**Larry back again:** Okay, so the first year I'm oblivious to what this stuff was. Consequently, I didn't even think about control measures because when it appeared for the first time, it was a small plant. As the summer rolled on, it quickly began to look like someone traded the family cow for some of those magic beans—these plants kept growing taller when everything else was flinching back trying to conserve water. By the time I realized I was in trouble, it was almost too late. This plant seems to have no natural predators. The prior winter I was overrun by leafcutter ants, but they were nowhere to be found that summer and they probably wouldn't touch them anyway. The Camphorweed was too tall and too close to my seedlings to safely use herbicide, so I spent all summer and fall pulling these suckers *by hand* (this is when I realized the truism that weeds grow at precisely twice the rate at which you pull them out). By the time year two rolled around, I was no longer a newbie. I didn't know what the plant was, but I did have some experience fighting it. From the Native American Seed Co. I ordered one of those industrial strength hoes (trade name Tomahawk), started to work in March or April, and haven't looked back since. But when I noticed my plot thicken (*not* a figure of speech) in the second year, that's when I called Liz for help.

**Liz:** The prolific nature of Camphorweed (code name for Napoleonic compulsion to take over the world) can be explained. Being a composite, there are two separate conglomerates of flowers. There are disk flowers crowded into the circular center while all around the ray flowers are lined up—you know—as the ray flowers on a daisy for

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# New Volunteer Management System for the New Year

## by Joan Estes

We have all heard Scott Moore over and over asking us to PLEASE turn in our volunteer and advanced training hours monthly. Some members did not like the form provided and made up their own; some members sent months of time sheets to him at one time rather than submitting their hours regularly. Texas Master Naturalist requires quarterly and annual reports from each chapter, and this process is both labor intensive and time consuming. In spite of everyone's best intentions, the current system is fraught with problems - not just for Scott, but for the members as well. So, what's the solution?

The new year will usher in a new way for us to record and submit our volunteer hours. TMN has partnered with Samaritan Technologies to implement a software program designed to facilitate the management of volunteers by providing means to search and register for volunteer opportunities and to record volunteer hours. This system will automate some of the reporting to TMN, so Scott will no longer have to go through the labor intensive process of sorting and compiling our data.



You may be wondering how all of this began. In 2012, three chapters were involved in a pilot project to provide feedback on the feasibility of using a Volunteer Management System (VMS). A VMS Implementation Team consisting of three Master Naturalist volunteers with a background in software implementation was formed. They were tasked with suggesting further modifications to the system, developing a roll out plan, establishing a feedback and helpdesk system, producing system documentation, conducting training at the chapter level, and providing on-going support for the software.

The VMS is licensed by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and all Master Naturalist chapters will eventually report their volunteer service and advanced training hours through the software. The implementation of the system is mandatory for all TMN chapters.

### **Training**

Training on the VMS will be conducted by the Implementation Team using "WebEx" (a teleconferencing solution). Training will consist of training the person who manages the chapter's hours and, as needs dictate, other chapter members in the administration of the system. Members will then, generally, be trained by the chapter's trainers.

### **Helpdesk**

These are some of the features currently available on the helpdesk:

- Use guide documentation
- "How-to" videos
- Answers to frequently asked questions
- Ability to report software issues and questions
- Ability to search for a solution to your questions

The helpdesk system can be found at [texasmasternaturalist.freshdesk.com/support/home](http://texasmasternaturalist.freshdesk.com/support/home)

LPMN is listed to be one of the earlier chapters for roll out, but the dates have not yet been set. More information will follow once we are scheduled for training.

# Meet Ronnie Lanier

by Larry Gfeller

Some people are confirmed loners . . . private, stand-offish and uncomfortable around groups. Others talk a lot, laugh easily and grease the wheels of first acquaintance with joviality and an oversized grin. You can imagine, then, my reaction when I first met Ronnie Lanier. The incongruence was like a black caterpillar on an orange. I had to pull back, as if standing too close to a fire! It was the spring of 2011 and I was at the worksite of the Bridge Maniacs' second cedar log bridge on Dragonfly trail . . . Ronnie had just blown in like a cyclone from somewhere among the cedar elms, hooting and hollering in his inimitable way. My god, I thought to myself . . . they really are Maniacs!

Of course, I have worked outdoors beside Ronnie ever since and I know him to be the gregarious jester everyone sees, but there's more—much more. I guess the word would be complex. Simple folk don't build their very own dance hall right next door to their home—for the use and entertainment of friends and relatives. Neither do simple folk design and rely totally on harvested rainwater to run the household, or raise blackberries, blueberries, peaches and limes in arid South Central Texas. Collector? "Intense" doesn't even come close to describing someone who searches the world over for things like old scales, rulers, counters, registers and other devices that measure stuff. Simple people might read, play board games, hike or fish, or play disc golf, or get excited about xeriscaping—but none would embrace all of these simultaneously. Who else do you know who hangs out in the flea markets of Moscow in the middle of winter because it's so damned cold everyone's willing to cut an easy deal just to get out of the weather? Who goes all the way to Cologne, Germany to start a Kolsch glass collection, or is thrilled by all the ways one can enjoy white asparagus in the springtime? Ah, dear reader, but we have only scratched the surface.

Ronnie Lanier is not a loner . . . he thrives on people, teamwork, combined talents and joint problem-solving. A devout man of faith, he holds dear the bonds of family and goes out of his way to keep them vibrant and strong. I can remember him recounting a trip through the South in 2013 to connect with long-lost relatives; we're talking about first cousins twice removed—the kind of kin most of us never even know. As he told the story I was expecting something right out of the movie *Deliverance* . . . the hoarse whisper of a Georgia mountain accent, "Hey, Virgil, there's one over here. Y'all remember the rope?" Instead, he described a sublime experience.



The Lanier homestead, complete with a dance hall



Lanier family Christmas

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# Ronnie, cont.

*(Continued from page 4)*

As a group, the clan visited an old family cemetery. Imagine being hit by the awesome sense of connection in an overgrown, rickety old plot, as you clip and tidy up the grass—only to uncover a great-great grandfather who fought in the Civil War! When I heard the story, I had to blink back a tear. Loyalty is a big thing to Ronnie. He maintains contact with his old workmates from Houston and retirees in the Hill Country. He even communicates with his old high school buds, indeed helped celebrate their 50th graduation anniversary last fall.

Although he may appear a bit harebrained on first encounter, don't you believe it! Ronnie loves numbers, analyzing complex things; he's a compulsive list-maker and fearsome worker. He captured a B.S. in math (minor in chemistry) from Texas A & I University in 1969, only to follow it up with an M.A. in college teaching from the University of Houston/Clear Lake in 1978. As an undergraduate student, Ronnie was selected for a cooperative education program with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) at the Johnson Space Center in Houston . . . and he never left. He worked on projects that are now household names: Apollo, Skylab, Space Shuttle/Space Station and, near the end of his tenure, publicizing and documenting NASA's efforts to understand and correct problems surrounding the horrific Space Shuttle Columbia accident. He's comfortable with translunar navigation schemes, program formulation, biomedical experiments within the Mission Control Center, payloads, training computer systems and supervising the Space Simulation System—and insects (fortunately for LPMN, he likes bugs). This means Ronnie can hold his own in any cocktail party conversation ranging from inter-stellar propulsion systems to chasing Emerald Ash Borers. Mercy!



Joe, Vada and Ronnie at the Nueces River Bridge

What kind of an upbringing produces a space mathematician? Born in Corpus Christi and raised in Kingsville, Texas, Ronnie's dad contributed a sense of humor and fun. He was a hard-working oil field worker who jumped at any chance he had to take Ronnie and his sister on Sunday drives in the country. While Ronnie may have inherited his love of a good time from his father, it was most likely his mother who set him up for success. Industrious, driven, improvisational, Ronnie says "she was the glue that held the family together." At 4' 10" and 100 lbs., she was a force to be reckoned with (even cousins were afraid of her). "She was a stay-at-home mom but she had so many ways to earn money," Ronnie said. "She made cakes and sold them at the local store and she ran a telephone answering service for over a decade." She introduced Ronnie to his first rocket flight by way of spearheading the family's twice annual fireworks business. You see, Ronnie was required to light and watch all the different items so he could describe them to the paying customers! Houston, we have ignition and liftoff—what better start can you have than that?

It doesn't take very long being around the couple to know that Melinda, Ronnie's wife, is the apple of his eye. They go out dancing, to concerts and movies, and even take the occasional golf cart ride

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# What's Blooming?

by Liz Pullman

For certain all of you have noticed that many trees are without those gaudy blossoms. They bloom, but their flowers have only basic reproductive parts—no colorful petals. Assuming you can reach up and bring a limb down to eye level and check closely, there are recognizable stamens and pistils. Many of our trees have distinct male and female flowers—sometimes on the same tree and sometimes on separate trees.

Let us begin with the Elm Family, which has “perfect” flowers—with each flower containing both male and female parts. You may have seen the seeds floating down from two elms—American and winged (*Ulmus americana* and *Ulmus alata*). The very small perfect greenish flowers are evident if you ever look with magnification. Cedar elms (*Ulmus crassifolia*) actually bloomed last fall and were a TV newsworthy source of graphs documenting the rise and fall of irritating elm pollen. Hackberry (*Celtis spp.*) blooms show up early and FYI, hackberry has recently been moved from the Elm Family over to the Hemp Family (*Cannabaceae*).



Cedar elm (*Ulmus crassifolia*)

Next, check out Texas’ most abundant member of the Maple Family - box elder (*Acer negundo*), which produces staminate (male) and pistillate (female) flowers on separate trees (dioecious). Box elders are found in damp soil along streams and ponds but can adapt to drier sites. Because of the “leaves of three—let it be” poison ivy mantra, I find myself shrinking away from this tree when I pass one growing alongside a trail.

Cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*) is another tree with male and female flowers on separate trees. The *Populus* genus is in the Willow Family (*Salicaceae*). The “cotton” in the common name derives from the fuzzy tuft of hairs attached to the seed, which is dispersed by the wind.



Blackjack oak (*Quercus marilandica*)

Later in the spring we will have the oaks (*Quercus spp.*), members of the Beech Family (*Fagaceae*). Oaks are monoecious, having both male and female flowers on the same plant.

We do have several trees with colorful blooms. By late February the Texas redbud—(*Cercis canadensis texana*) from the legume family (*Fabaceae*) becomes evident. Bright pink flowers appear very early, before the heart-shaped leaves.



Texas redbud (*Cercis Canadensis texana*)

Mid-spring trees on the showy list are the fruit trees (*Rosaceae*). We have chickasaw plum (*Prunus angustifolia*), Mexican plum (*Prunus mexicana*), black cherry (*Prunus serotina*) and peach (*Prunus persica*)—these have somewhat fragrant white or creamy colored blossoms but for the peaches, which come in various shades of pink. Of course, there are also pears—*Pyrus* species. These flowers are white but do not expect them to have a pleasant odor. Pears are pollinated by flies and the blooms give off a rotten meat odor. The infamous Bradford pear—a cultivar of *Pyrus calleryana*—is extensively used in landscape and highway median plantings and the very similar fruit tree *Pyrus communis* is cultivated and frequently escapes cultivation.

We cannot forget dogwoods (*Cornus florida*). Those big bright white bracts against a backdrop of dark green loblollies (*Pinus taeda*), yaupon (*Ilex vomitoria*) and farkleberry (*Vaccinium arboreum*)—unforgettable!

Your vocabulary terms this month: stamen, pistil, dioecious, monoecious, bracts

# Brooks on Books

## Jean Andrews: One Remarkable Lady & One Lovely Friend by Bill Brooks

Jean Andrews was a dear friend of mine.

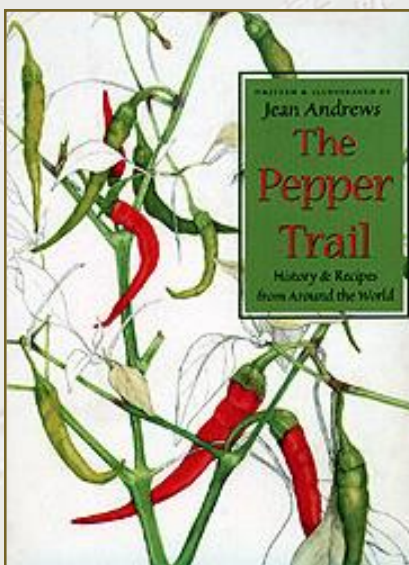
I first discovered her through her definitive books on Gulf Coast sea shells. When she lived in Corpus Christi she was known as the “Shell Lady.” She began collecting sea shells in 1959, even learning to scuba dive so she could increase her collection of shells from Panama, Costa Rica, Australia’s Great Barrier Reef, the Philippines and the Red Sea. Her first book, “Sea Shells of the Texas Coast,” was based on her research for her M.S. at Texas A&I University in Kingsville (now Texas A&M) and was published in 1971. She took all the photographs and insisted that they accompany the descriptions, not at the back of the book as all other shell books were arranged. Her Ph.D. studies took her to North Texas University where she published “Sea Shells and Shores of Texas” in 1977. Small field guides that were easier to take into the field followed. “Texas Shells - A Field Guide” was published in 1981 and “A Field Guide to the Shells of Texas” came out in 1991. She collaborated with John Tunnell, Jr., Noe Barrera, and Fabio Moretzsohn to write the acclaimed “Encyclopedia of Texas Seashells: Identification, Ecology, Distribution, & History,” which was published after her death.



Dr. Jean Andrews (1924-2010)

Before moving to Austin Jean won awards for her flower arrangements. Once in Austin she wrote a book on bluebonnets. The University of Texas Press published “The Texas Bluebonnet” in 1980. Her next book, the beautifully illustrated “American Wildflower Florilegium,” was on the Choice’s List of Outstanding Academic Books.

In 1983 she endowed two visiting professorships at UT – one in the Economic Botany Department and another in Human Nutrition - in memory of her daughter. For seventeen years she supported a 150-woman sewing co-op in Costa Rica that helped women achieve financial independence.



After she got a Ph.D. in art from North Texas University and even before writing her bluebonnet book, the cuisine and spices of Texas were pulling her ever-inquisitive mind in another direction. Soon those who knew her in Austin knew her as “The Pepper Lady.” In 1984 her art graced the pages of “Peppers: The Domesticated Capsicums.” This was quickly followed by “The Pepper Lady’s Pocket Pepper Primer” (1984), and “The Pepper Trail: History & Recipes from Around the World” (1999). This book includes chili recipes from chefs all over the world and her research took her to more than 100 countries.

Jean Andrews was awarded Distinguished Alumna from both the University of North Texas and the University of Texas. She was also the first woman to be named to the Hall of Honor in the College of Natural Sciences at the University of Texas.

I was fortunate enough to be invited to several of her renowned dinner parties. I actually met LPMNs Andy Butler and Sue Fischer at one of Jean’s parties long before I ever moved to Bastrop. Seldom does one cross paths with someone with such an inquisitive mind and joyful spirit. I count myself extremely lucky to have been one of her friends. Your life can be enriched, too, by reading some of the printed legacy Jean left us. ✨

# Master Naturalists Attend CPR and First Aid Classes by Carroll & Beth Moore

*What would you do if someone suddenly experienced a medical emergency?*

Nine members of the Lost Pines Chapter attended a **CPR/AED** training course in mid-October last year in Bastrop. Karen Shirk, RN, BSN, is a local ER nurse with years of experience, both in and out of the hospital setting. She was able to present real life scenarios to augment and enhance the various video segments of this bystander emergency response training.



Karen Shirk, RN, instructs Bev Kithcart & Rosemary Fulton on one way to splint a broken arm.

This dynamic class included comprehensive training in **CPR** (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) and the use of the **AED** (automated external defibrillator). The hands-on experiential training included life-saving techniques for adults, children and infants. Active participants practiced victim body positioning, the Heimlich maneuver, assessing victim responses and initiating appropriate treatment. Legal aspects of offering help in an emergency were also discussed.

Also last fall, five LPMN members attended a **FIRST AID** training course, again presented by Karen Shirk, under her affiliation and certification with The American Safety & Health Institute. This course, designed for “first responders,” included training for a wide variety of emergency medical events, such as the recognition of choking and stroke, and the handling of traumatic injuries.

As many Master Naturalists are often out in nature and likely away from emergency equipment or personnel, it is important for our members to learn and benefit from this type of emergency training and preparedness. **Customized First Aid Kits** have been created for use by The Bridge Maniacs and other members to use while in remote areas of our state parks and worksites.

Karen Shirk did a masterful job of making the classes practical and useful, while at the same time entertaining. Her many years of front line experience in local emergency rooms helped her present very useful and down-to-earth instructions. Her website is <http://www.qualitycprandmore.com> and her email is [qualitycpr@earthlink.net](mailto:qualitycpr@earthlink.net).



Carroll Moore & Instructor Karen Shirk, RN, practice CPR.



# Ronnie, cont.

*(Continued from page 5)*

around their property at sunset (nursing their favorite adult beverage) until the last of the colors die in the west. And Melinda can make one mean pineapple cobbler! She reads voraciously, is shy but exceedingly friendly, and just rolls her eyes at Ronnie's antics. How did they meet? Through an unfortunate twist of fate, both Ronnie and his sister, Linda, found themselves widower and widow at the same time in life. Linda and Melinda met at a church retreat. Being somewhat of a matchmaker, Linda coaxed Ronnie to take Melinda on a first date to the Houston Rodeo Volunteers party. At first, Ronnie thought Melinda was too young for him, but it didn't matter what he thought because he was already irreversibly smitten. The rest, as they say, is history. Today they live near Upton on about 22 acres of fresh air, having moved there from Dickinson after Ronnie retired from NASA in 2006. Between them, the Laniers have five daughters and seven grandchildren (and they're not done yet)—more than enough to put that dance hall to good use.



Ronnie and Melinda Lanier

Ronnie was attracted to the Texas Master Naturalist program because of his childhood, which was spent running around collecting bugs, animals and skeletons with characteristic passion. "Moving from the Gulf Coast to Central Texas created a lot of questions, but moving from the city to the



Fishing on the Colorado River

country was even more baffling. Out in the country, I was mesmerized," he says. "I didn't recognize most of the trees, flowers or other natural phenomena. When I saw the ad for LPMN training in the Smithville Times, I was almost like a kid with their first car . . . I could not believe my luck." After a career based on research and digging to get the information he needed, Ronnie says, "The TMN program was like spoon feeding, and I loved it." A graduate of the class of 2007, he volunteered to man booths at local nature fests, clean up city, state and nature preserve areas, participated in the "Go Fish" program (one of his favorites) and helped to develop

chapter training classes and advanced training programs. Ronnie served as chapter Vice President in 2012 and currently heads up the chapter's Bastrop County involvement in the Emerald Ash Borer Detection Program and co-chairs our Bug Interest Group with Cat May. Ronnie currently holds third position in seniority within our Bridge Maniacs. He has 500+ volunteer hours under his belt.

Bottom line: He's happiest when his "to-do" list is complete and he's free to pursue his many excitements. A Bloody Mary with breakfast, fish a little (or play a round of golf), take a nap, later make cocktails while cooking steaks on the grill, hit a movie . . . then come home and read before settling in for the night—these are a few of his favorite things. How do he and Melinda manage to organize all this in one day? They do it the NASA way—they planet!

## Plantzilla, cont.

(Continued from page 2)

the “he loves me, he loves me not” ritual. In the Camphorweed, both disk and ray flowers are fertile, but maturation timing is different. The disk flowers bloom, form seed, and are ready to germinate immediately. Not so the ray flowers. These are dormant at maturity and require higher temperatures to ripen so that germination is postponed—Plan B for *Heterotheca subaxillaris*! Seeds that have germinated in the fall form winter rosettes that hug the ground until spring. In addition, during a mild winter, the older plants with taproots can sort of hunker down and burst forth in the spring from the base of the plant. Given the fact that this plant can thrive on bare soil of any type, what you will have is what Larry has—a sea of bright yellow flowers as far as the eye can see!

**Larry:** Here’s what I’ve learned as a plant novice: If I pull on a plant and it comes out of the ground easily, it’s not a weed. While I accept that every plant has a place and a role on this earth, my view is that if the common name includes the suffix “weed,” I generally want it to fulfill its destiny on some other part of the planet! So, Liz, what’s this Camphorweed good for? Can you make a salad out of it and eat it?

**Liz:** Yes you can, but check back with me tomorrow and tell me how you feel! The real question is, is it EDIBLE? If animals will not browse it, you shouldn’t either, so scratch the plan to use it in a salad or cook it up with a ham hock. The gummy, smelly properties of the plant (descriptions range from piney aroma to cat urine in the hot sun) are attributed to terpenes (noxious substances used widely in the making of medicine and aroma therapy products). So, Larry, you can whip up an anti-inflammatory tincture or tea to use as a liniment for arthritis or as an antiseptic for skin abrasions, or you can put some in a sock and sniff it if you like—and remember the gummy residue is not a substitute for Gorilla Glue—**but no smoking!**

**Larry:** Nobody likes a smartass, Liz! Is it a native plant?

**Liz:** Watch your mouth, sonny . . . of course it’s native . . . everything’s native to somewhere! We think it arrived from Mexico or Central America and has now spread to the lower two thirds of the U.S., due mainly to its ability to thrive on almost any substrate and in almost any climate—especially warm weather. *Heterotheca subaxillaris* heard the biblical command, “Go forth and multiply,” so the plant’s simply doing what comes naturally.

**Larry to close:** So here we go loopy-loo . . . Liz did her part—she correctly identified a zombie plant that just keeps on coming. It’s drought-tolerant, has low nutrient requirements and can tolerate high sand temperatures. Okay, I’ve got it. “Step right up folks, get your free cuttings here, and fill those stockings with holiday cheer!” ✨



Plantzilla close up

## Newsletter Deadline

Submission deadline for the next issue is February 20, 2015. 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. Submissions may be edited for clarity, grammar, spelling, and space requirements. Please send information to the editor at [Roxanne.M.Hernandez@gmail.com](mailto:Roxanne.M.Hernandez@gmail.com).

# A Message from Julia Akin, LPMN President

Well, we did it again. Another delightful chapter party, this time the Holiday Party on December 8th, which was full of great fellowship, good food and a very successful silent auction. We collected a total of \$1,423.00 that night, with \$1,207 in silent auction proceeds, \$160 in membership dues, and \$56 in sales of hats and t-shirts. Everyone there contributed to the success of the event, but there are a few people who deserve special thanks and recognition: Lori Baumann coordinated the food and drinks for the event – no small task; Dave Hill and Larry Gfeller solicited, gathered, arranged and made bid sheets for all the silent auction items; Cat May designed and arranged beautiful yaupon and birds nest centerpieces for each table; and Frank May and Mike Barrett were on hand two hours early to help set up. Thank you, thank you!



Holiday party centerpiece

It has been such a pleasure serving as chapter president in 2014, and I am delighted to have been elected to serve again in 2015. 2014 has been quite a productive year with the initiation of our special interest groups (Larry Gfeller's brainchild); increased chapter exposure in Bastrop County as a result of our work at Lost Pines Nature Trail, which is the direct result of Frank May's vision and motivation; a chapter newsletter to be proud of and a website that is easy to navigate thanks to Roxanne Hernandez's dedication and hard work; a continued, mutually beneficial working relationship with Bastrop and Buescher State Parks due to the work and organization of Rick Gast and Gary Buckwalter; construction of 250 bluebird nest boxes for Texas Bluebird Society thanks to the leadership and construction skills of Jim Estes; and creation of a new, unique chapter pin thanks to Mary Wier and Audrey Ambrose. Those are just a few highlights. Larry's hike leaders touched another 248 people this fall and are geared up to repeat their success beginning in the spring of 2015. Our working relationship with McKinney Roughs is improving as a result of Louise Ridlon being named our liaison to the park and more volunteer opportunities will develop for 2015.

As you can see, the momentum is tremendous thanks in large part to the people named above and to your hard work as volunteers. Thank you all! ✨

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## BUILDING NEST BOXES IS A PERFECT WINTER ACTIVITY

Contributed by Bonnie Shimek

Whether it's a bluebird, chickadee or even woodpecker, having birds take up residence in your yard can be a thrilling experience. Hearing the same songbird's song every morning; learning their different "personalities" from seeing them each day; or even watching as babies are born, grow and leave the nest.

Choosing the right birdhouse is critical to attracting your favorite cavity-dwelling birds to your garden. Because shelter and places to raise young are essential elements to birds' survival, providing the correct type of nest box is critical. [Visit the National Wildlife Federation's guide to learn more about next box design for your target bird species.](#)



## SIMPLE FEEDER DOS AND DON'TS

Contributed by Roxanne Hernandez

Finding the perfect location for a bird feeder is a balancing act between getting the views you want and birds' safety. Where do you watch birds from? Your patio? A kitchen window? The living room? You can start by limiting the possible area by deciding on a focus zone in the yard.

Next you need to check for known dangers to eliminate unsafe locations within that zone. Ornithologists estimate that millions of birds are killed each year by hitting windows. Window strike mortalities can be reduced by moving your feeders to within 3 feet of the window or greater than 30 feet away. [Learn more about feeder placement at The Cornell Lab of Ornithology.](#)



## WEED-B-GOOD

Contributed by Bill Brooks



Perhaps we shouldn't be so harsh on our weeds. According to "The Audubon Society Guide to Attracting Birds," the oil-rich seeds of pig weed and other amaranths are eaten by 47 species of birds, and ragweed seeds are consumed by 60 species of songbirds and upland game birds ([Wildflower Magazine, Winter 2014, pg. 19](#)).

## CITY OF MISSION DECLARED A SANCTUARY FOR BUTTERFLIES

Contributed by Bill Brooks

On October 27, 2014, the Mission City Council passed Ordinance 4158, which makes the City of Mission a Butterfly Sanctuary and prohibits collecting or intentionally killing wild, free-flying butterflies. The ordinance also bans the release of farmed or commercially raised butterflies, and sets fines for violations of the provisions made to protect butterflies on public property within the city limits. [Learn more at the National Butterfly Center's website.](#)



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# Snippets, cont.

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## BEES & WASPS ON THE DECLINE IN BRITAIN

Contributed by Miriam Hall

“Do you like apple pie, guacamole and orange juice? Then you'd better be worried about disappearing bees. The insects are prolific pollinators, credited with helping a variety of fruits, nuts and other commercial crops flourish. But since the early 2000s scientists have been sounding the alarm that pollinating bees are being stricken with disease or mysteriously vanishing from their hives.” [Read the Smithsonian's full article by clicking here.](#)



## NOT NESTING, BUT ROOSTING

Contributed by Roxanne Hernandez

I've wondered why throughout the winter I'd see birds in the entrances of our nest boxes. Now I know why. Most cavity-nesting birds will use nest boxes as a warm, dry place to sleep at night. Cavity roosting, especially in groups, can reduce heat loss, which in turn helps survival. Read more at the [Cornell Ornithology Laboratory's website.](#)

## Lost Pines Master Naturalist Monthly Business Meetings

The monthly business meeting, which occurs on the third Monday of each month, is an opportunity to hear first hand about volunteer and advanced training opportunities. The chapter's project leaders update members on their work and recruit volunteers if needed. In addition, chapter administration issues are discussed: brief committee reports, financial decisions, and news from our state organizers. Stay tuned to [Meetup.com](#) to learn more about upcoming meetings.

*One hour volunteer time is awarded for attendance at qualifying business meetings.*

## STATE PROGRAM CONTACTS

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The Texas Master Naturalist program is sponsored by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

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