



Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Bastrop County Audubon Society

May 2003

Useful Wild Plants

John G. Flowers

**Tuesday
May 20, 2003
7:30 PM**



Useful wild plants surround us. They are the trees, flowers, grasses, vines and bushes in your yard. They are what our ancestors ate, used to doctor the family and made tools from in the past. They are what we will use in the future as renewable sources of oil, fuel, food, pharmaceuticals, and more. Audubon Society members have a strong appreciation for the bird kingdom. The focus of this talk is to give a greater appreciation for the plant kingdom and the useful wild plants that are everywhere.

Worldwide plant and animal species are going extinct at an unprecedented rate. One of the ways of waking people up to the need to preserve nature is to communicate the usefulness and importance of those species that are being destroyed. Not only are approximately half of all pharmaceutical drugs based on the active ingredients found in plants in the rain forest, but there are many other valuable gifts that nature has to offer to us. Drugs, food, fabrics, textiles, lubricants, dyes, cosmetics, and countless other products of the future lie undiscovered in nature. As we destroy plant and animal species, we are making the future less rich, varied, comfortable, and healthy.

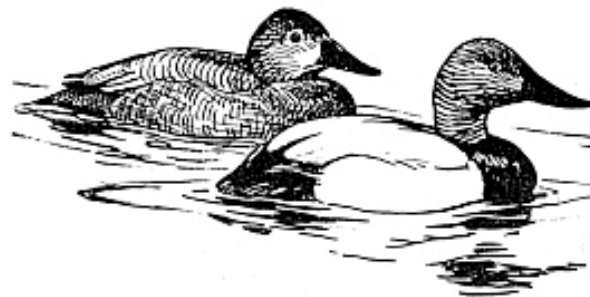
Useful Wild Plants is an organization dedicated to research, publication, and education on the usefulness of plants for food, medicine and industry. Speaker John Flowers will share information on UWP's programs and give examples of edible plants in the Bastrop area that are tasty and nutritious!

John G. Flowers, a long-time member of Useful Wild Plants and a dedicated plant enthusiast is recently retired from the Texas Rehabilitation Commission (1978-2002). A former Fulbright Scholar and winner of the Harry Ransom Achievement Scholarship, John is a passionate advocate of environmental issues.

Everyone is welcome to join the speaker and BCAS board members for dinner at 6PM at Jalisco's Mexican Restaurant (on Hwy 71 by HEB).

The May chapter meeting will be held the third Tuesday of the month on the 20th at 7:30pm in the Cecil Long Community Room of the First National Bank of Bastrop. The civic room is next to the bank on Main Street. Everyone is invited to stay for refreshments after the program.

BCAS CALENDAR OF EVENTS



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Friend of Bastrop County Audubon \$20
Includes membership in Bastrop County Audubon Society, a subscription to BCAS's newsletter, *Bird Calls*, and invitations to all BCAS programs, events, and field trips.

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

email _____

Please make checks payable to :

Bastrop County Audubon Society

Send to: Alan Jaeger, Treasurer
117 Kaelepulu Dr
Bastrop 78602

MAY 2003

May 17 – FIELD TRIP to Peckerwood Gardens near Hempstead. See article on the next page or call Loretta Hennard at 321-3818.

May 18 – Board Meeting at the home of Bill Montgomery & Margie Crisp, 281-5667

May 20 – Chapter Meeting: John Flowers of Austin's Useful Wild Plants Project.

May 21 – Texas Amphibian Watch Seminar, Wild Basin. Learn about the frogs & toads of Central Texas. Contact Marsha Reimer at 912-7062 or marsha.reimer@tpwd.state.tx.us

JUNE 2003

June 15 – Board Meeting. Barbara Carson's home in McDade. 273-2840

June 17 – Chapter Meeting: Gulf Coast Bird Observatory will present a program on prairie restoration and Project Prairie Bird. Board Members election. New Members Social!

JULY & AUGUST No meetings

SEPTEMBER 2003

September 14 – Board Meeting

September 16 – Chapter Meeting:

OCTOBER 2003

October 19 – Board Meeting

October 21 – Chapter meeting

NOVEMBER 2003

November 16 – Board Meeting

November 18 – Chapter Meeting

DECEMBER 2003

Solstice Party! Time and place TBA. Don't miss the best party of the year.



R. G. Bell

• *Bird Calls* is published by the Bastrop County Audubon Society. It is edited and produced by Margie Crisp, Maggie Lambert & Priscilla Jarvis. Contributors for this issue include Alan Jaeger, Stan Wellso, Bill Montgomery, Dorothy Wells & Loretta Hennard.
• Deadline for next issue: **May 31st**
• PO Box 656, Elgin, TX 78621
• Margie (512) 281-5667 or Maggie (512) 321- 2569
• e-mail: Tiliqua2@earthlink.net

Visit our Web site for updates and additional information on field trips and events.
www.bastropcountyaudubon.org

Message from the President

This month BCAS will set forth nominations for the Board of Directors for the coming year. We are a volunteer organization and rely on the goodwill and good nature of our members to make our group run. With that in mind, I hope you will consider serving on the Board of Directors. There are a variety of positions, some encompassing significant responsibility, others reserved for members who want to be involved but would prefer less responsibility. Our Directors and Science Committee members are a resource that have proved helpful time and again. These board members give valuable insight and information to the elected officers, help on special projects and committees, and attend Board meetings when able. Many of our Elected Officers have “gotten their feet wet” and gotten to know our group as Directors.

I encourage all of you—long standing members and new members—to consider joining the Board. The potluck dinners after the meeting are a well-kept secret and a substantial reward!

I hope to see you at the next meeting.

Bill Montgomery, President BCAS

BCAS's Classy New Polo Shirt

The sale of this good-looking shirt helps support BCAS's conservation and education efforts.



shirt is delivered to you.

The image of the Pileated Woodpecker is based on a linoleum cut by BCAS board member Margie Crisp.

To order contact Alan Jaeger at 512-581-7451.

Or an order form is available on the BCAS web site.



FIELD TRIPS For the Birds

THE GRAND FINALE* ...at Peckerwood Gardens

Do we have a treat for you! We have arranged a private tour of Peckerwood Gardens on Saturday, May 17, and are taking reservations now. The cost is \$10/person, payable to BCAS—ASAP. Call me (321-3818) ASAP to get on the list and for carpooling information.

Peckerwood is near Hempstead; therefore, we'll need to leave quite early in the morning. We plan to have lunch at the Liondo Plantation and need an accurate headcount for reservations—ASAP (what else?).

Peckerwood's 19 acres are filled with “rare plants native to a wide region of the southern United States and to Mexico, mingled with their Asian counterparts,” according to their website at www.peckerwoodgarden.com. Sounds exotic, doesn't it? Whether the weather cooperates and is perfect or not, I can assure you (from experience) that we'll have a wonderful time because we're the fun-loving, nature-appreciating birders of Bastrop County Audubon Society.

Loretta Hemard, Field Trip Chair

**for this year's field trips!*

Shy Birds Populate State Park

And I thought the birds around our house were shy! When our small group journeyed to Palmetto State Park on Wednesday, April 23, I saw four (4) birds: a pair of ducks, a Cardinal, and a ground dove. I am not making this up! We knew they were there, though, because they performed magnificently for us as we traipsed through the woods, close to the swamps where the palmettos grow. Our fine-feathered friends remained behind a curtain of green as they performed their concert while we attempted to identify the varied vegetation for which Palmetto is so well known. Call us determined, tenacious, persistent: we'd been trying to get to that nearby park since last October, so who cares if we didn't spot many of the 39 species that nest there—

Loretta Hemard, Field Trip Chair

LBB's at the LBJ

By Margie Crisp

The LBJ National Grasslands are more than twenty thousand acres of restored native prairies and hardwood forests scattered across two counties northwest of Dallas/Fort Worth. It is a collection of parcels of land, all open to the public and ranging in size from a few acres to several thousand acres. "LBB" is birding lingo for "Little Brown Birds."

On a sunny Friday afternoon at the end of April, my husband Bill and I drove up to the LBJ National Grasslands to meet other members of the Texas Herpetological Society for the annual field meet. Their goal was to find, collect, identify, document and then release as many species of amphibians and reptiles as possible. My goal was to identify as many feathered creatures as possible while tromping through prairie and woods as Bill searched for scaley creatures. I'm not an expert birder by any stretch of the imagination but I was ready and willing; armed with binoculars, field guide, insect repellent, hiking boots, granola bars and a chunk of time.

Friday evening was spent catching up with friends over improvised dinners but after dusk, Bill and I decided to take a short walk to a nearby pond we'd spotted earlier. It was a disappointing muddy and barren cowpond. A few sturdy Leopard Frogs lived there but not much else. We cruised through the grass up over the dam to a wide nicely mown path that skirted the woods. "Just a little ways," I pleaded, "Who knows what we'll find." Bill relented and we spent the next two hours tracking noisy armadillos, looking for sleeping birds in the limbs of the oaks, and enjoying the mysterious shift of perception to smell and sound over vision. One busy armadillo, intent on tracking food snuffled his way through the spotlight of our flashlights right up to my insecticide-covered ankles. He bumped into my boots, took a whiff, sat down on his hindquarters and mulled over this new information in his tiny armored skull. After a time, he seemed to finally realize that the funny-smelling tree that quivered in a peculiar way might possibly be a predator. He popped straight up—all four legs off the ground at once—and galloped away in a full-tilt armadillo panic. We returned to camp with the low deep inquires of a Barred Owl wanting to know, "who cooks for you." accompanying our steps.

In the morning we set off early to retrace our path of the evening before. Skirting Post Oak woods and wading through last year's rusty bluestem we could hear the calls of Wild Turkeys (or hunters) in the distance. Blue-grey Gnatcatchers flitted through the limbs of the oaks. White-eyed Vireos lurked behind thick screens of foliage, taunting us with their distinctive song. A male Indigo Bunting left the protective cover of leaves to perch in the open and boldly

sing where we—and all his prospective gal pals—could admire his deep blue plumage. We saw three Mississippi Kites on a dead tree, waiting for the sun to warm them before continuing their journey north.

Harris, White-crowned, White-throated, Lark, Clay-colored and Chipping Sparrows were successfully identified from the multitude of Little Brown Birds popping up and flitting around the grasses, shrubs and trees. We watched Red-tailed Hawks circle the prairies and listened to the call and response of a trio of Red-shouldered Hawks flying intricate patterns. Crows watched us, Bluejays warned the world of our whereabouts, Chickadees and Titmice scolded us and Cardinals brazenly flashed through the trees.

Side trips away from the path down to willow-lined pools yielded a Common Yellowthroat, Red-winged Black-birds in raucous breeding hysteria and what I think might have been a Bewick's Wren.

After lunch, we drove to Parcel 55 in search of a flowing creek. We saw Bluebirds, Purple Martins and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers along the fencelines and near people's homes. Our search took us to Rucker Pond. The mud flats left by the receding water were hosting Great Blue and Little Blue Herons, Snowy and American Egrets. Killdeer patrolled the waterline along with what we finally decided were Lesser Yellowlegs. Black-chinned Hummingbirds hovered over the slopes of Indian Paintbrush, the territorial males alternating between feeding and chasing each other.

In the tall trees of the hardwood forest behind the pond Red-bellied Woodpeckers and Hairy Woodpeckers cried out in insistent voices. A Black and White Warbler caused momentary confusion; I was sure I was seeing a rare Creeper, or even better, a new and undescribed miniature woodpecker. A Hermit Thrush kept me entertained for thirty minutes while I followed her low flight through the brush along the dry creek and listened to the liquid notes of her song until she revealed herself to me. Was it really a female? I have no idea but she seemed to exercise feminine wiles with her tantalizing song and coy behavior.

We weren't as lucky in the "herps" department. With the creeks and ponds drying up the already secretive creatures became impossibly elusive. Around the various ponds we'd seen (or heard) Southern Leopard Frogs, Cricket Frogs, baby Bullfrogs, Gray Tree Frogs and Red-eyed Sliders. In the woods downed trees and rotten logs yielded one of my favorite lizards, a gorgeous Five-lined Skink with and electric blue tail. We also found a Texas Spiney Lizard, a Six-lined Race Runner with intelligent eyes and amazing speed and many coppery Ground Skinks that wriggled under the carpet of leaves. We found only two snakes, both by water, a Ribbon Snake and a baby Water Snake.

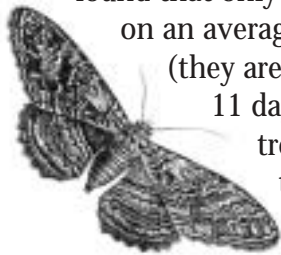
Saturday night we ate BBQ with our friends, traded stories, and listened to the rising evening songs. A mixed chorus of frogs and the lonely cries of Chuck-will's-widows



ZAP... ZAP... ZAP... ZAP

Do Bug Zappers really kill Mosquitos?

Ah, the pleasant sound of insects self-destructing on an electrocuting ultraviolet insect device. These outdoor devices are purchased with the good intent of killing mosquitos and/or perhaps wasps and hornets. However, these zappers do not kill many of the pests as they are rarely attracted to the devices. One study found that only 3.3% of the 3,212 insects killed



on an average night were female mosquitos (they are the ones that bite). Even after 11 days of continuous use, the electrocuting devices failed to reduce the mosquito biting rate.

Even worse, many beneficial insects such as Ladybugs, beetles and moths are being killed by such devices each day. Winged insect species amount to about 88% of our insect fauna, and the adults and their progeny (nymphs, naiads, and larvae) are important food sources for songbirds, fish, frogs, bats, spiders and other insects. In addition, many of these insects are responsible for the pollination of important plants.



Suggestion: focus on preventative measures such as dumping standing water, adding Mosquito fish to ponds to eat mosquito larvae, putting up a bat house and wearing long pants and long sleeve shirts at dusk when mosquitos are most active.

Thanks to Dr. Stan Wellso, entomologist, birdwatcher and Bastrop County naturalist for supplying the information for this article.

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LBB's at the LBJ, continued

echoed across the prairie. Close to midnight a Barred Owl came to the grove where we were camped and woke us briefly.

Sunday morning we had show and tell with all the different herps collected by the members of THS. The dry weather had skunked even the most experienced and dedicated herpers. After photos had been taken, records documented, and the few animals returned to their original habitats, the group dispersed. Bill and I returned to our Bastrop County habitat happy, tired, a little sunburned and definitely itchy. Texas in the spring is a wonder indeed.

For more information about the LBJ National Grasslands, visit www.fs.fed.us/grasslands/

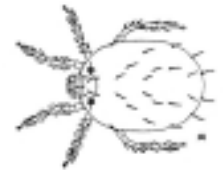


CHIGGERS!

Making your life miserable one bite at a time . . .

Fascinating Chigger Facts

- Chiggers aren't insects but are arachnids like spiders and mites. They go through four life stages—egg, larva, nymph and adult. It's only as larvae that they cause problems.
- Chiggers don't burrow under the skin or suck blood. The larvae inject a tissue-dissolving enzyme into the skin when they bite us. The chigger sucks up the resulting goo (yum) through straw-like tubes, or stylostomes, formed by a reaction from our autoimmune system. It is the abandoned stylostome in our skin that causes the itching.
- Chiggers prefer grassy spots, especially in damp shady areas.
- Female chiggers lay eggs in clusters and the hatchlings don't stray far. The young chiggers hang around until some tasty host happens by—be it bird, lizard or unlucky human. Tipped off by the aroma of exhaled carbon dioxide, they pounce.
- If you can't avoid chigger-infested areas, wear long sleeves and stuff your pants in your socks. An application of insecticide on your skin will help. Or try Permethrin, an insect repellent that is sprayed on the outer clothing.
- Wash those critters off as soon as you can! The nasty little beggars may crawl around your body for a couple of hours before settling down for a meal around your waistband or other sensitive spot.
- You can't kill chiggers with nail polish though it does slightly relieve the itching. The chigger is long gone and it is the stylostome that itches. Antihistamine ointments, hydrocortisone and cool compresses will help.
- The National Chigger Collection is housed in Honolulu at the University of Hawaii. The collection of 25,000 specimens represents the 1,800 identified species of chiggers.
- Cooper, Texas holds its Chigger Festival every October. Now that would be a field trip for BCAS!



Adapted from an article by Sherri Deatherage Green in Texas Co-op Power, April 2003

THE LEARNERS' CORNER

Join Board Member Margie Crisp as she plays the songs of a few common and uncommon Bastrop County birds and discusses the benefits of learning to bird by ear. She will be using the Thayer Birding Software eField Guide to the Birds of Texas which includes photos, songs, maps and videos!

The Learners' Corner meets at 7:00 PM before the general meeting.



MAY REFRESHMENTS:

**Mary Ellen Branan
& Marlis Maurer**

PARTY! • PARTY! • PARTY!

June Meeting To Honor New Members

Members who joined the Bastrop Audubon Society during 2002-2003 will be recognized at the June meeting during the refreshment period following the meeting. Please join us in welcoming the new members. Punch, cake, and other refreshments will be served.



SNACKS! PUNCH! CAKE! FUN!



R. G. Bell

**Bastrop County Audubon Society
c/o Jarvis
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Return Service Requested