

The Prickly Pear



Our Purpose...
...to provide education, outreach, and service
dedicated to the beneficial management of natural
resources and areas within our communities...

June 2019

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T E X A S



TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION

Life's better outside.™

Texas Master Naturalist programs and activities are coordinated by Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service and Texas Parks & Wildlife. Programs serve all people, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, gender identity, disability, national origin, or socio-economic level.



Gaura
In the Garden

Word of the Day

Sessile - In biology: without a stalk or petiole. Term used when a leaf, flower, inflorescence, peduncle or pedicel attaches directly to the stem of the plant.



In zoology: fixed in one place; permanently attached to the substrate or to the base. Immobile, or at least not able to move or relocate. Barnacles and corals and numerous other marine creatures are sessile, as they are attached to rocks or piers or boats.

Uloborid - The *Uloboridae* is the only spider family that has no venom. They hang out around houses and also in foliage, where they spin small orb or spoked webs. Webs are made of cribellate silk strands, sometimes called "hackled silk," which looks feathery or fuzzy. The fuzzy silk compensates for the spider's lack of venom by entangling prey in its web. The front legs of the *Uloboridae* are long, sometimes longer than the entire length of the spider's body.



Sources: www.arachne.org; www.species.nbnatlas.org

Mystery Master Naturalists

By Carl Kieke

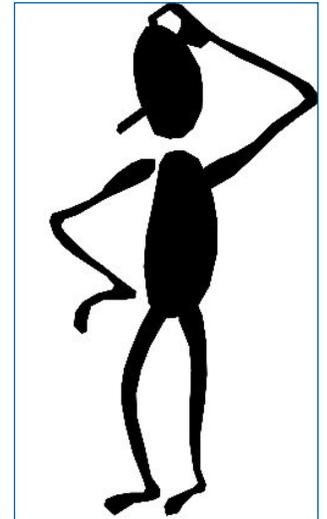
1. This Master Naturalist was born in Oklahoma City and moved to Abilene from Tennessee because Dad was career Air Force and he retired at Dyess. Graduated in 1968 from Cooper High School, then joined the Navy. Worked as an engine room mechanic aboard ship. Attended Texas State Technical Institute (now College), studying architectural drafting. After working several places, landed at Texas Department of Transportation, retiring after 33 years in the same office.

Heard a presentation on Master Naturalists while at work. Several years later, encountered members at a booth at Home and Garden show; signed up and took class.

Main MN interest is working at parks, doing trail work or similar chores.

This person:

- Was aboard the aircraft carrier that helped recover the Apollo 10 space capsule, the final test flight before the moon landing
- Used to compete in bicycle races, including a couple of times at the Hotter 'n' Hell in Wichita Falls
- Recently purchased a sailboat and is working to get it ready to sail
- Has been married for 46 years



2. This Master Naturalist was born in Rotan and graduated from Snyder High School in 1980.

Received a degree in forest management from Stephen F. Austin University in 1985 and worked for different companies in the environmental field for nearly 20 years. Tasks included water and soil sampling and remediation (cleaning up polluted sites, pumping out polluted ground water, etc.)

Got downsized and moved from Houston to Abilene four years ago. Saw a link to Master Naturalists on a state park website and “the rest is history.”

This Master Naturalist also:

- Enjoys hiking and kayaking (owns two and is willing to share skills)
- Worked 1 ½ years at Oak Ridge National Laboratories doing computer mapping
- Has lived in Tennessee and Massachusetts, where “I liked the people and, believe it or not, I liked the weather”
- Enjoys working on CALF because of the forest theme
- Likes current job because shift ends at 2 p.m., allowing time for other activities

Answers on Page 3

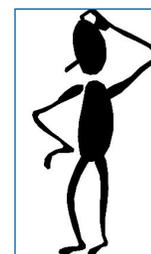
Activities and Events Calendar

- June 1 Lake Hike at Abilene State Park. Pay park entry fee at HQ, then go to lake entrance for hike, which begins at 9:00 am. Bring water and wear closed-toe walking shoes. Plan for a 2-3 hour walk. Mike Richins, 325-692-1708.
- June 1 Star Party at Abilene State Park. Begins at sunset. Around 8:45-9:00 pm. For info, contact Jessi Spitler, 325-338-2569.
- June 6-8 Children's Art and Literacy Festival (CALF) in downtown Abilene. BCMN will have a booth at the Grace Museum. Forest Theme and program activities. To help, contact Danielle Delhomme, 325-665-5871.
- June 15 Amazing and Mysterious Trees Hike at Abilene State Park. 9:00 am -10:30 am. Hike will be led by members Howard Pope and Destry Greenway. Bring water and wear closed-toe walking shoes.
- June 20 Monthly Chapter meeting at Extension Office. Meet at 6:00 pm for visiting and snacks. Program will be "Urban Wildlife Interface" by Annaliese Scoggin, TPWD Wildlife Biologist.
- June 29 Star Party at Abilene State Park. Begins at sunset, around 8:45-9:00 pm. For details, contact Jessi Spitler at 325-338-2569.
- July 6 Lake Hike at Abilene State Park. Pay park entry fee at HQ, then go to lake entrance at for hike which begins at 9:00 am. Bring water and wear closed-toe walking shoes. Plan for a 2-3 hour walk. Mike Richins, 325-692-1708.
- July 18 Monthly Chapter meeting at Extension Office. Meet at 6:00 pm for visiting and snacks. Program is tentatively set to be about Purple Martins, presented by BCMN member Randy Davis.
- July 20 Nocturnal Creatures Program and Evening Hike at Abilene State Park. Program begins at 8:30-8:45 pm. Hike after program. For details contact Jessi Spitler at 325-338-2569.
- August 3 Lake Hike at Abilene State Park. Pay park entry fee at HQ, then go to lake entrance for hike, which begins at 9:00 am. Bring water and wear closed-toe walking shoes. Plan for a 2-3 hour walk. Mike Richins, 325-692-1708.
- August 10 Star Party and Perseid Meteor Shower Event at Abilene State Park. Begins at sunset, about 8:45 pm. For info, contact Jessi Spitler, 325-338-2569.
- August 15 Monthly Chapter Meeting at Extension Office. Meet at 6:00 pm for visiting and snacks.
- August 17 Birding Program and Bird Blind Hike at Abilene State Park, 9:00 -11:00 am. For details contact members Ian and Danetta Shelburne.



Mystery Master Naturalist Answers:

1. William "Bill" Leach
2. Destry Greenway



Audubon Insectarium

By Terry Coffman

My wife, Tammie, and I visited New Orleans this spring. One of the highlights of this trip was encountering the **Audubon Butterfly Garden and Insectarium**. This is an insectarium and entomology museum with more than 50 live exhibits and numerous multimedia elements. The 23,000 square foot museum is the largest free-standing American museum dedicated to insects. It was opened in June, 2008 and in 2009 was awarded the Theas Award for Outstanding Achievement in a Science Center.

Some of the exhibits are:

Underground Gallery - Giant animatronic insects and oversized exhibits give guests a bug's eye view of the insect world.

Louisiana Swamp Gallery - sights and sounds of the Louisiana wetlands depicted with aquatic animals and special effects.

Termite Gallery - Formosan termites can be seen eating through a wooden skyline of New Orleans.

Butterfly Garden - a garden populated by hundreds of live butterflies with which guests can interact.

Metamorphosis Gallery - a working husbandry lab where an insect's entire life cycle is depicted.

Awards Night - a comic film with animated insect characters

Bug Appetit - Guests can watch chefs incorporate insects into their dishes and sample some of their exotic creations. I sampled chocolate chip cricket cookies and another type of insect. Crunchy!!

The entire experience was aimed at families and students, both experienced with insect contact and those with less experience or contact with insects. This was a Thumbs up experience for us! Definitely go see this Insectarium and Entomology Museum if you're ever in New Orleans.



Photos by Terry Coffman

Diversity in the 'Hood

By Jan Carrington

Our back yard is full of birds this spring! The rain and fecundity of plants and insects has created an incredible neighborhood of bird diversity.

Scissor-tailed flycatchers have a nest in a tall mesquite tree just beyond our fenceline. We hope it survived the strong winds and rain from last night's storm. I love the chatter of scissor-tails. And of course, they are beautiful birds.



A family of Bewick's wrens has built their nest on our back porch. The nest is snuggled up inside a clay pot, and built on top of an old cotton washrag. There are 4 babies in the nest with their very big and hungry mouths. Momma and Poppa give us grief if we go out the back door, so we've moved all our in-and-out traffic to a different door while the babies are growing. This blessed event is just about the cutest scene we've been privileged to watch in a long time!



Red Oak tree in front yard is the home of the White-Winged Dove family. These beautiful birds have nested in our yard for a number of years. Last year, there was a nest in our Burr oak tree. This year, they've moved to the front and taken over the Red Oak. I hope they don't stake out the porch next year!



Our Afghan pine trees are hosting Mockingbirds this spring. At least two nests have been spotted, with several eggs each. I'm not sure how many babies are being fed at this point, but the parents are busy going back and forth through our small prairie/meadow area to forage and then back to the nests to feed the babies.

Brown Thrashers are definitely favorite birds at our house. They are big and bold and very friendly. Last year the Thrashers had a nest somewhere and we watched the babies hopping around on the ground while parents fed them after they had fledged out of the nest.

This year's nest is in our Redbud tree. Not sure how many babies this time, but I'm sure it will be fun to watch this brood grow up.

We have another nest of birds, sparrows we think, in our Loquat tree. We can hear them but are not sure who's nesting there.



The Ladybug's Creepy Larva

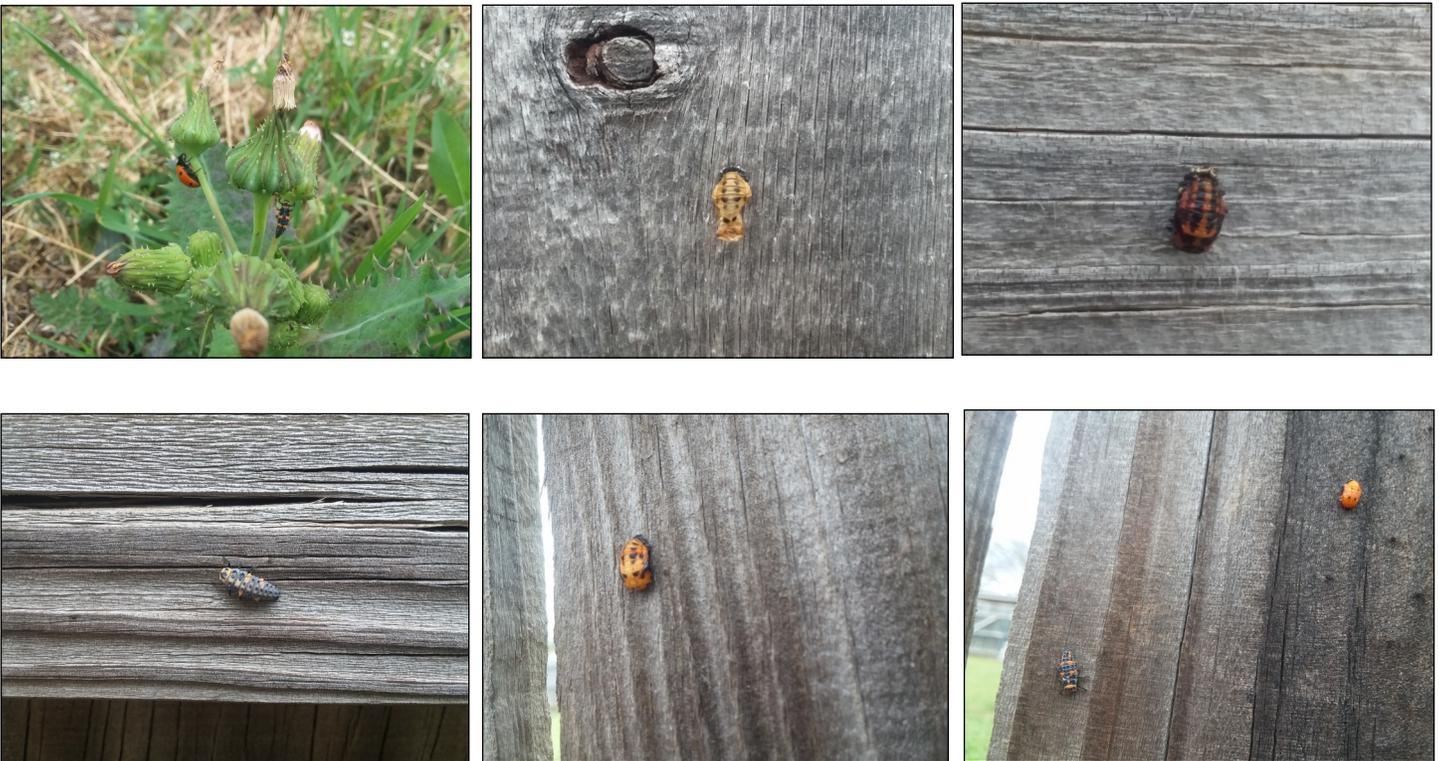
By Heather Brown

So, there I was enjoying the afternoon at my house when I saw a strange bug crawling around on the floor. I had never seen it before and didn't know what it was...so I killed it. I looked it up and discovered that I had killed a lady bug larvae. I decided to study a bit about ladybugs and discovered they have four stages, egg, larvae, pupa and adult. The larvae does not look anything like the adult, so it can easily be mistaken for something more sinister.

A few days later, I was out in my yard and saw both an adult ladybug and a larva on the same plant. I was taking pictures and showing my 5-year-old niece. She told me she had to show me something on the fence. I took my time but then went over and saw that she had made quite the discovery. Apparently, the ladybug larvae have chosen the fence as their ideal site for their pupal stage. There are numerous casings on the fence along with a few ladybugs still inside. I also spotted a larva just beginning the pupal stage. My fence has essentially become a showcase of the entire ladybug life cycle.

There are actually over 5,000 species of ladybugs but the one we are most familiar with is the Seven-spotted ladybug, *Coccinella septempunctata*. These insects are native to Europe and were brought to the U.S. to fight crop pests such as aphids. Ladybugs can be found essentially everywhere except for the Arctic and Antarctica. Ladybugs actually have a life-span of 2-3 years and hibernate in large colonies over the winter. There are a few really cool time-lapsed videos of ladybugs on YouTube showing their lifecycles from egg to adult. Check them out if you have time. Viewer discretion might be advised on some of them, as cannibalism and aphid-eating are involved. Ladybugs can be pretty mean.

I guess the moral of this story is if you want to conserve the number of ladybugs in your yard, be careful not to kill their creepy looking larva.



Source:

National Geographic. (2018). *Ladybug*. Retrieved from National Geographic Kids: <https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/animals/ladybug/#ladybug-daisy.jpg>

All photos by Heather Brown

The Ugly Nest

By Randy Deming



I have an ugly barn swallow nest on my back porch. It consists of mud, sticks and poop that hangs directly over our back door. The bird droppings fall from the nest and if not cleaned, eventually coat the door sill.

This forces us to make an uncomfortable long step to go inside. I keep

thinking the birds will also decide this is not a good location since we seem to disturb them each time we open the door. But this is apparently not the case. The nest is now 4 years old and many broods have been raised during this period.

These beautiful little birds are a blessing. They are beautiful even if their nests are ugly. Their coloring is cobalt blue on their head, backs and wings with a tawny peach colored belly. Their throats and foreheads are collared with an attractive rusty orange. Their forked tails, which are visible when they take flight, set them apart from the other swallow species. They are acrobatic flyers and entertaining to watch, but their main



contribution is the control of insects. Purple martins are also nice birds to have around for insect control, but they tend to feed on larger insects and at higher elevations. Barn swallows love flies and mosquitoes, and they feed closer to the ground all around our house.

One nest on your porch equals many barn swallows. The male and female pair are not the only birds that feed and care for the young. Older siblings also help. Our back porch is a constant coming and going of birds whenever babies are in the nest. Parents are also neat freaks. They constantly do housekeeping chores in the nest, which explains the inconvenient coating on our doorsill.

The birds return from their winter travels to Central and South America around mid-March and leave at the end of August. They will raise 2 to 3 broods each year with 4-5 young in each brood. The young take flight approximately 3 weeks after hatching.

They will usually hang around a few days after leaving the nest, perched on the lawn furniture and window sill, until they develop enough strength to fly virtually non-stop and hunt insects.

Barn swallows are not endangered, but a lot of people may not realize that in the latter part of the 19th century they were hunted for their feathers, which were used to make hats. In 1886 George Bird Grinnell wrote an editorial for "Forest and Stream" that called for an end to this practice. His essay resulted in the founding of the Audubon Society.

My experience with barn swallows has contributed to a change in the way I interact with the plants and wildlife on my property in Callahan County. A few years ago, I worked hard to control and dominate the natural environment around my house. I spent a fair amount of time and money mowing, watering, and fertilizing a lawn. At different times, I have fought with wasps, sandburs, and fire ants. I finally began to notice that the areas I left untouched had fewer sandburs and fire ants. There was also the added bonus of attractive wildflowers, butterflies and lizards. Nature had a way of keeping unwanted pests in check and the resulting beauty was something I could not replicate.

Consequently, I faced a decision with our barn swallows. I could take down their ugly, inconvenient nest or I could leave it. I decided to work with our swallows rather than work against them. This partnership has been its own reward, even without the insect control. There is now a second nest being built along the back of the house! These birds are a constant source of fascinating entertainment.



Sources: "Guide to North American Birds" at www.audubon.org
"The Cornell Lab of Ornithology" at www.allaboutbirds.org

All Photos by Randy Deming

Earwigs - The Name Doesn't Help

By Carol Hayward



How many of you have seen or remember the Night Gallery show from the early 70's? There was an extremely creepy episode where a man plotted to get rid of a rival by having an earwig inserted in his ear while he slept. Being unable to work its way back out, it would drive the man insane and eventually to death as it feasted on his brain. Unfortunately, his accomplice put it in his ear by mistake. The irony! After scenes of him tied to the bed in horrific agony the earwig miraculously makes its exit from his other ear with seemingly little damage. A happy ending. Wait...that was a female earwig. Oh NOooooo!

Who isn't freaked out by the idea, but could it really happen? Thank goodness no. Earwigs get their name from the shape of their wings, which most folks have never seen or don't even know they have. The mean looking pincers (cerci) on their back ends aren't exactly endearing either.



Male cerci are curved and they sometimes poise them over their backs for battle like a scorpion. They fight other males for food, resources, and females. Females' cerci are straighter.

Earwigs usually hide in small moist dark places during the day and feed at night on plants and arthropods. During mating season the male and female will hole up together in a crevice or chamber in litter or soil and the male will leave or be shown the door by the female before she lays her 20 to 80 eggs. For the entire seven days before they hatch, the female constantly cleans the eggs to protect them from fungus. For a non-social insect, earwigs are very attentive mothers. She will feed them regurgitated food and care for them through their 2nd molt. Earwigs undergo incomplete metamorphosis and develop in stages of 4 to 6 molts called instars. They live for about 1 year.



From the Editor

By Jan Carrington

Waybread, Rat's Tail's and White Man's Foot.....

These are just a few of the common names from around the world for the ubiquitous plantain, *Plantago major* and other species and sub-species of this genus in the Plantaginaceae family. Plantain is a hardy plant, considered a weed by many people. You know it, you've seen it, and you've probably dug it up to get rid of it. BUT... not so fast! I've learned a lot about this little plant lately, and I'm now a convert to its unique specialities. This is not the plantain that gives us bananas, but it is just as interesting.

Plantago major is native to Europe but is now found all over the world, recognized as one of the most abundant and accessible medicinal herbs. It is loaded with iron and many bioactive compounds, and has been scientifically studied to determine if its folk-healing reputation is real or bogus. The results: plantain is the real deal. It has been shown to have a range of biological uses, including "wound healing, anti-inflammatory, analgesic, antioxidant, and antibiotic activity." It promotes healing of cuts, speeds cell regeneration, kills pathogenic organisms, reduces inflammation, and disinfects injuries. It is apparently especially useful in easing the discomfort of bug bites and stings and in drawing out splinters. There are many recipes for salves, tinctures, poultices, ointments, and teas in books and on the internet. And the tender spring leaves are edible.

Plantain has been around for a long time and noted throughout history. It is reputed to have been brought to Europe from Asia by Alexander the Great in 327 BCE. It was known to Greek and Roman physicians. In fact, Greek physician Dioscorides (40BC - 90BC) recommended it for wound healing, dog bites and burns. And Roman Pliny said the plant was a must for healing injuries caused by bites from wild animals. Plantain is one of the sacred plants referenced in the Saxon Nine Herbs Charm and was called the "mother of herbs." It was also considered an early Christian symbol of the "path followed by the devout."

Scandinavians call it "groblad," which means "healing leaves." Native Americans called it "Whiteman's Foot" because it seemed to spring up wherever the early colonists walked. It has also been called "Cart Track" for similar reasons. The common name "Waybread" comes from where it is often found - a small plant that has bred by the wayside of a road or path. It is known in Chinese and Asian medicine, as well as in African remedies.

Both Chaucer and Shakespeare referred to the plant in their writings. Shakespeare seems to have been particularly fond of it, mentioning it in "Troilus and Cressida," "Romeo and Juliet," and in "Love's Labours Lost" when Costard the Clown cuts his shin and cries out for a plantain!

Plantain grows in a rosette of leaves in late winter. Leaves are palmate, with veins running parallel from the base of the leaf to its tip. The flower is a thin stalk (hence names like "Rat's Tails" and Devil's Shoestring) that is not very pretty. The plant is wind-pollinated and hermaphroditic, with both male and female organs. It is self-fertilizing, and its seeds ripen from July to October. And it has found a forever home in my yard, which is good, since it is everywhere this spring!

Sources: www.richmondherbalismguild.wordpress.com; www.botanical.com; www.foragingtexas.com; www.wellnewssmama.com; www.herbal-supplement-resource.com;

[A Modern Herbal](#) by M. Grieve (1931), a classic book that is now on the Internet.

Photos by Jan Carrington





The Big Country Chapter includes the following counties:
Callahan, Coleman, Eastland, Fisher, Haskell, Jones, Knox, Nolan,
Runnels, Shackelford, Stephens, Taylor, Throckmorton.

The beautiful and under-appreciated Texas Dandelion.

Pyrrhopappus multicaulis may be a mouthful to pronounce, but this delicate little flower is a beauty! Its blooms light up a field with lemony yellow sparkles that burst open in the early morning and close up before noon. Open for breakfast only! Here are some pics of this showy but under-rated little flower. All photos by Jan Carrington.



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2017 - Kerry Hedges
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BCMN Board Meetings are held the first week of January, April, July, and October, in the Taylor County Extension Office Conference Room. Check with a Board member for meeting times.

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The Prickly Pear is published quarterly the first week of March, June, September, and December. Send information, photos, and articles for publication in *The Prickly Pear* to Jan Carrington at jancarrington149@gamil.com.

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