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# Coastal Prairie Chapter Courier



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We are a group of trained volunteers who share our appreciation and knowledge of nature with the community through outreach, education

and conservation/restoration projects

Photo by Erik Wolf

# Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge Field Trip by Debby Wendt



We set out on October 20<sup>th</sup>, a wet, cloudy day, to view the flora and fauna of the Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge near Freeport. It rained most of the way down to our destination but stopped a few miles before our arrival. It was still cloudy, but I was hopeful we would enjoy our day viewing beautiful nature on part of the 45,000 acres.

Our first stop was the greenhouse where they are raising milkweed, both tropical and native. There were many cuttings in plastic tubes which they will plant outside as a food source for the Monarch larvae. Asclepias perennis is an aquatic milkweed also grown there.

Next we walked on the Big Slough Boardwalk where we saw many varieties of aquatic plants such as duckweed and cattails which are part of the marshy area by the coastal wetland. There was a 4-foot alligator patiently sunning himself on the deck while his 12-foot mother floated nearby. Many dragonflies darted from plant to plant searching for the plentiful mosquitoes.

On the auto tour, we drove past little bluestem grass. We saw many birds such as clapper rail, black-necked stilts, great blue heron, coots, long-Billed dowitchers, least sandpiper, and Wilson's snipe. We also saw osprey, northern harrier, sora, American bittern, and least sandpiper. Debbie, Erik Wolf's girlfriend, almost stepped on a water moccasin which Erik picked up with his snake sticks for us to see. We enjoyed seeing a large formation of snow geese flying overhead.







Photos by Erik Wolf

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## Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge Field Trip (Continued)

We all enjoyed our time walking and driving through this nature treasure which is an hour or so from our homes. We encourage you to visit it sometimes and relax in the awesome nature

Our last stop was the butterfly lab which was about 6 miles down the road. In the controlled environment they are raising monarchs, painted ladies, and swallowtails in their netted cages. They give out many hundreds of butterfly eggs to school children to raise so they can learn about the butterfly cycle. This lab is small, about 12 X 6 and they have received funding to build a larger butterfly lab in the future.



#### Master Naturalist Annual Meeting By Karl Baumgartner, et al.

The 20th Anniversary Texas Master Naturalist state convention was the best yet!

It was certainly the largest. Six hundred forty-seven TMN members attended. Nineteen CPCTMN members were included: Karl Baumgartner, Bill Brookshire, Carol Brookshire, Jamie Fairchild, Carol Hawkins, Bill Johnson, Margo Johnson, Amber Leung, Blair Margot, Margo Margot, Sarah Marshall, Drea Morgenstern, Mark Morgenstern, Donna Pisani, Diane Russell, Bob Schwartz, Carol Swartz, Susan Walther. Carol Hawkins' husband, Richard, also participated the full event.

It was interesting how diverse are the interests of our chapter members. Here are some of the comments by CPTMN members.



<u>Donna Pisani</u> - What I enjoyed most was getting to see natural areas not yet open to the general public and the opportunity to get to see them in a different way from the public. These included the Edwards Plateau Ecosystem field trip at River Ranch County Park which is new and not yet open, and with an educator - Dr. Barron Rector. Also, the hike down the stream bed at the Miller Springs Center and Geology Trail – messy, off the beaten path, and gorgeous.

<u>Carol Hawkins</u> - Excellent meeting! We all enjoyed ourselves. ((Margo Johnson noted that Carol did a GREAT job of leading the round table discussion on Trainee Recruiting.)

<u>Debbi Wendt</u> – "STRAWS" – a Documentary for a Sea of Change. I was impressed by a young boy who was asking restaurant owners to quit serving single-use plastic straws that may end up in the ocean. They showed a turtle off Costa Rico with a straw in its nostril. It is estimated if that there will be more plastic than fish by 2050 without a change; the first evidence of micro-plastics in our diet. (Several other CPCTMN attending commented on STRAWS)

#### Master Naturalist Annual Meeting (Continued)



<u>Drea Morgenstern</u> – This conference is always amazing with so many different field trips. Actually, my favorite part is the people. Master Naturalists are the best group of people. I have enjoyed meeting other chapter members and learning about their projects. And the program by Diane Russell "A Visit to the Monarch Overwintering Sites of Michoacán" was wonderful. The room was packed, and her photos were so beautiful; I was happy to be a part of encouraging others to create the habitat that the Monarch Butterfly requires.

<u>Diane Russell</u> – A talk on the last morning about snails by Dr. Benjamin Hutchins with TPWD followed by a walk. It was absolutely fascinating, and I plan to begin my own snail collection; they are so easy to keep in captivity and kids always prefer something living to look at. My presentation on the trip to Michoacán seemed well received—Master Naturalists are a jolly group of supportive, intellectually curious people – really the best audience anyone could have.

## Master Naturalist Annual Meeting (Continued)

<u>Karl Baumgartner</u> – A full day tour of the renowned 5500-acre Bamberger Ranch, which he purchased it in 1969 as a rocky, barren, dry area covered by invasive ash juniper trees. Bamberger has spent the past 50 years in prairie restoration, still active on a daily basis. He started by eradicating cedars, planting native grass seed, discovered springs by scraping down the cedars which led to numerous clear streams and ponds and lakes. He has introduced numerous native trees along walking paths and created countless outreach opportunities for different youth groups and organizations. Another instructive project was visiting Indangrass Preserve with Dr. Rector and walking through a native prairie amidst the "Seabourne Big Five"—Little Bluestem, Yellow Indiangrass, Big Bluestem, Switchgrass, and Eastern Gamagrass.

Jamie Fairchild – I enjoyed the snake handling class the most. We were introduced to the western hognose, corn snake, brooks kingsnake and trans Pecos rat snake. We learned how to use a snake hook to lift a snake and place it in a bucket. We practiced on the hognose first, which was a lightweight and calm snake, and our instructor demonstrated with a large bull snake which was extremely aggressive and putting on a showy display of hissing and striking. I'm ready for my own snake hook. I also enjoyed a beautiful hike through the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve, a beautiful and unique habitat which is typically closed to the public. It is a and distinctive and unique habitat, home to the endangered species the golden-cheeked warbler.

It was a fun trip. There was a little discussion that other chapters seemed more focused on the convention. For instance, due to an oversight, CPCTMN was omitted in a collage of photos provided for each chapter during meals highlighting chapter activities. At the final breakfast they awarded 30 + awards to other chapter members for photography, art, chapter accomplishments, etc. Our chapter attendance is lower than it was eight years ago. Perhaps next year we could create a small committee to plan a more cohesive approach to the state convention.



Photo by Debby Wendt

Jamie Fairchild and Carol Hawkins
received milestone awards

## Seabourne Nature Fest

Our chapter's signature event, Seabourne Nature Fest, is going to be held on November 3<sup>rd</sup> from 10am to 4pm! It is a fun family-oriented event and we need all hands-on deck for it! Even though it has a new name it is filled with the same fun and educational opportunities. We have expanded the exhibits to the prairie and bird areas this year.

You should have received a <u>SignUp Genius</u> invitation to volunteer for one or more of the many opportunities; if not contact <u>Jim Butcher</u> to get on the roster. It's a great way to get VSP hours and help the chapter. You have opportunities in areas with butterflies, prairie plants and prairie restoration, birds, and more. We especially need folks to sign up for the afternoon sessions.

Hope to see you out there! It is always a lot of fun.









## Texas Parks and Wildlife Sent in by Carol Schwartz



#### The Battle to Bring Back Horned Lizards

The beloved <u>Texas horned lizard</u> has many nicknames: horny toad, horned frog, horned toad. Many people have childhood memories of playing with the docile little reptiles and being thrilled to see one shoot blood from its eyes. But today, those same people have noticed horned lizards have pretty much disappeared.

Habitat loss, use of pesticide, fire ants and decline of harvester ants (a favorite food) formed a perfect storm and put horny toads on the <u>Texas Threatened Species List</u>. But we're working to get our state reptile back on the map.

Reintroduction of a species is a complicated task. This year, we and our partners bred horned lizards and <u>released the hatchlings</u> at <u>Mason Mountain WMA</u>. We hope some will survive, establish nests and have offspring. Meanwhile, we'll continue to learn more about captive breeding and hatchling release and keep fighting to bring back our horny toads.

#### **Hatchling Release Video**

#### **RAWA Is Our Best Chance to Save Wildlife**

The <u>Recovering America's Wildlife Act</u> (RAWA) is a bipartisan bill that, if passed, will give Texas more than \$63 million each year for conservation of at-risk wildlife species. Funding will come from existing monies received from energy and mineral production.

The goal is to help at-risk Texas wildlife, like swift foxes, horned lizards, scissor-tailed flycatchers and otters, before they become endangered or extinct species. What's more, 10 percent of RAWA funding can go to help people get back to nature, learn about and help at-risk wildlife. Visit <u>Texas Alliance for America</u>'s Fish and Wildlife to find out more.

RAWA would be the best thing to happen to wildlife conservation in a generation, and it's our best chance of saving at-risk wildlife in Texas. But the bill may not pass unless people who care, people like you, #SpeakUp for wildlife and take action. <u>Contact your U.S. Representatives</u> to let them know you expect their support of RAWA.

Our Best Chance Video



# Texas Parks and Wildlife (Continued)



# **Butterfly Garden**

Fall is the best time to plant a butterfly garden in Texas. When starting yours, there are 2 types of plants to consider: flowering plants for the adult butterflies, and host plants, which are what their caterpillars eat. Native Texas plants that are also adult butterfly magnets include:

- prairie verbena
- Gregg's blue mistflower
- Maximilian sunflower
- purple coneflower (Echinacea)
- fall aster

You can actually grow butterflies in your garden by including host plants for their caterpillars. But they're very picky about what they eat. For instance, milkweeds are the only host plants monarchs use. To find appropriate plants, use the Native Plant Finder to discover the butterflies in your area, and which of their host plants will grow there. Then plant some!

**How to Build Your Garden** 

#### 5 Reasons to Put Down the Rake

If you dread raking leaves, we have good news. It benefits both desirable wildlife and your soil if you leave autumn leaves lying on the ground.

5 reasons to put down the rake:

- frogs, turtles & salamanders use the leaves for cover and hibernation
- some butterfly caterpillars overwinter in fallen leaves
- earthworms reside in leaf litter and are a source of food for birds and others
- decomposed leaves organically fertilize your soil
- soil enriched with decomposed leaves has better water retention

#### Did You Know...

Butterflies taste with their feet, which helps them choose the correct leaves for egg-laying.

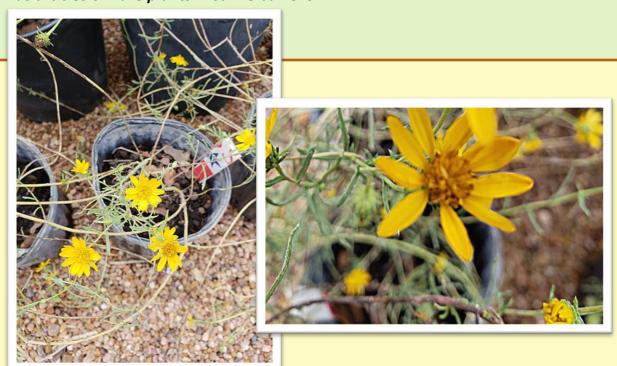
# Plant of the Month, the Houston Daisy (Rayjacksonia aurea.)

By Mark Morgenstern

Our featured plants this fall will focus on rare plants in Fort Bend and surrounding counties. The first one will be the Houston Daisy. The scientific name is Rayjacksonia aurea. This plant occurs on saline slick spots and pimple mounds at the Harris and Galveston County lines. Saline prairies are usually small and can occur away from the coast. They are usually flat areas that flood periodically.

This plant is very rare with 9 colonies left. A friend collected seeds at a prairie called Eastside, which is for sale and will be razed. After propagating it, word got out and I was told that proper protocols were not followed in the collection. Something this rare needs lots of paper work, including GPS coordinates and other information. My first step was to ensure that Trent Mercer Arboretum had it in their collection and they do. The second step was to find a saline prairie and donate them.

I contacted Tom Snyder with Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge and was told that there is a saline prairie there! Our members on the refuge field trip were shown the plants when they were dropped off at the greenhouse. So, I learned a lesson the hard way. Texas Parks and Wildlife has articles on rare plants in saline barrens.



The Monthly Bird Spotter

Black Vulture By Jade Hems



- Black Vultures can be seen soaring on thermals or perched on utility poles at Seabourne Creek Nature Park. They are smaller than Turkey Vultures and hold their wings flat, punctuating their glide with several quick wing flaps.
- Feeding almost exclusively on carrion, Black Vultures search for carcasses visually as they soar.
- As carrion consumers, vultures are nature's cleanup crew. They are extremely important in disease prevention and maintaining a healthy ecosystem.
- > Adaptations such as their bald head and face and extremely strong digestive system, allow Vultures to eat rotting, bacteria filled carcasses.
- Lacking a strong sense of smell, they seek out and associate frequently with the larger Turkey Vultures. By doing so, Black Vultures benefit from the Turkey Vulture's keen sense of smell that allows them to locate carcasses more easily.
- > Once at the food source, Black Vultures congregate in large numbers, thereby out numbering and displacing the Turkey Vultures!
- > Their carrion diet is extremely varied and includes feral hogs! Black Vultures sometimes wade into shallow water to reach floating carrion and catch small fish.

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#### **Coastal Prairie Courier**



#### Black Vulture (continued)

- > Black Vultures are highly social, gathering in large communal roosts. Pairs stay together over many years, roosting and feeding together year-round.
- Families maintain social bonds throughout their lives and defend food sources and roost sites against outsiders. Aggressive defense behaviors include projecting putrid bacteria laden vomit at intruders!
- > Nests are reused for many years and located in dark cavities such as hollow trees, abandoned buildings and tree stumps. The young are fed for up to 8 months.
- Black Vultures do not have a voice box and their vocalizations are limited to hisses and grunts!
- > Black Vultures cool themselves on warm days by urinating on their legs, a behavior known as urohidrosis!
- Extremely wide ranging and numerous, North American Breeding Bird Survey data shows a population increase in Black Vultures from 1966 to 2014.

#### References:

Cornell Lab of Ornithology: https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Black\_Vulture/overview Live Science: https://www.livescience.com/48899-vultures-bacteria-microbiome.html



#### Not Just Bees: The Buzz on Our Other Vital Insect Helpers

We hear a lot about bees and how important they are for growing our crops. Well, they are – and we should also be concerned about <u>recent declines in bee populations</u> and their health. But bees aren't the only pollinators. Our recent global analysis has revealed that the "<u>non-bee</u>" insects are playing much bigger roles than had been appreciated.

These wild insect pollinators occur naturally in our crops and are not deliberately managed by growers. Among the important insects are bees, flies, beetles, butterflies, moths and wasps. We know that these other pollinators can be very important. For instance, the contribution by wild pollinating insects other than bees in oilseed rape in Sweden varied from 5-80%.

In Australia, we're not so sure. We need to make sure that in our focus on bees, we don't ignore our other pollinators. For more of this article go to: <a href="https://theconversation.com/not-just-bees-the-">https://theconversation.com/not-just-bees-the-</a>

buzz-on-our-other-vital-insect-helpers-52373 The Conversation, January 25th, 2016

Advocating for Western Monarchs at Stewart Meadows Golf Course

The Nine-Hole Facility's Five Certified Monarch Waystations Are a Rarity in The Pacific

Northwest Sent in by C.J. McDaniel

Josh Loy has become something of a celebrity in the Pacific Northwest's pollinator scene. Since Loy — Class A superintendent and a three-year GCSAA member — installed five monarch butterfly waystations at Stewart Meadows Golf Course in Medford, Ore., he and his course have been the subject of newspaper articles, TV spots and a podcast. Through it all, Loy has stressed one thought: It's all about the butterflies. "It's not for the notoriety," Loy says. "It's not about advertising for the golf course. We're not trying to brag. It's about being an advocate for the monarchs."

There's no dispute that pollinators — bees, butterflies and the like — have had a rough go. Some say the western monarchs have had it worst of all. Arguably among the most picturesque of pollinators, monarchs in the United States are divided by the Rocky Mountains into eastern and western branches. The eastern monarchs migrate to overwinter in Mexico. Out west, monarchs generally overwinter in coastal California, then lay eggs on milkweed in spring from Arizona through Washington.

The overwinter population in central Mexico is said to have declined a staggering 80 percent since the 1990s; according to the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, western monarchs have declined by more than 95 percent since the 1980s. Those numbers simply quantify what Loy had experienced. He recalls growing up in southern Oregon. In summer, Loy would look on milkweed plants in a field near his parents' home for monarch caterpillars, which he'd collect and "raise" in Mason jars. They'd hatch, and he'd release them to continue the cycle.

"It was something I took for granted," Loy says, "and it made me think about my son." Tristyn was 13 at the time, and father asked son whether he'd ever seen a monarch in the wild. "He said, 'Yeah,'" Josh Loy recalls. "I said, 'Are you sure?' The way he said it, I took it that maybe he'd never seen a monarch in person. It made me think I wanted to do something to give kids a chance to experience what I had experienced as a child."

Loy says plans began in March. He visited with Isaac Breuer, superintendent at Gustin Golf Course in Columbia, Mo., and subject of the 2016 GCM article Making a way for monarchs. Loy also consulted with Southern Oregon Monarch Advocates, primarily Robert Coffan and Suzie Savoie, about where to place his waystations and what to put in them. "What convinced me was, we put color on the course," Loy says. "There's a lot of green out here. We don't get a lot of color until fall, when half the trees start to turn color. But by implementing these waystations around tee boxes and places that are not necessarily in golfers' play area, we added some color they can see but that doesn't really impede the track of golf." The waystations are spread throughout the nine-hole course. They measure between 3,000 and 3,500 square feet combined and were a relative breeze to install.

"It was a simple process," Loy says. "We had the means and the equipment."

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#### Advocating for Wester Monarchs at Stewart Meadows Golf Course-(Cont.)

He ended up with about 240 plants, a mix of showy and narrowleaf milkweeds for the butterflies to lay their eggs on (milkweed is the only plant monarch caterpillars eat; when the milkweed is gone, so are monarchs), and various nectar-bearing flowers that bloom throughout the season — black-eyed Susans and columbines and lilies and irises and the like — upon which adults can feed.

Loy says he budgeted around \$2,000 for the plants and went over by around \$500. "The labor part ... I didn't really factor that," he says. "We're here. If we're not doing this, we're doing something else on the course. "From the start, Loy wanted to make sure his waystations didn't become burdensome. Milkweed, after all, is a weed and grows like one. "One thing we were concerned with, milkweed does spread rather rapidly by seed and rhizome," Loy says. "Robert (Coffan) made us aware it will shoot up in grass where you don't want it."

The Stewart Meadows waystations are the only Monarch Watch-certified waystations on a golf course in Oregon. There are nearly 21,000 certified sites across North America, but certified waystations on golf courses are sparse to non-existent throughout the Pacific Northwest. Their novelty drew a crowd to an official ribbon-cutting ceremony on Aug. 10. Among the 30 or so attendees were golfers, representatives from monarch organizations, Alexis Wenker — executive director of the Oregon GCSA — and representatives of media organizations. For the rest of this article go to:

https://www.gcmonline.com/course/environment/news/stewart-meadows-monarchs?utm\_source=informz&utm\_medium=email&utm\_campaign=First%20Cut%2010.11.18



Suzie Savoie (left) of Southern Oregon Monarch Advocates and Josh Loy, Stewart Meadows Golf Course superintendent, plan plant locations for one of the five monarch waystations on the Medford, Ore., course. Photo by Robert Coffan



Stewart Meadows Golf Course maintenance employees Ron Neely (left) and Brian Champion work on the monarch waystation near the No. 1 green. This waystation is the largest of five recently created on the course. Photo by Josh Loy

The monarch butterfly waystation in Stewart Meadows GC's eighth tee box. "This waystation has really taken shape today," superintendent Josh Loy says. "The plants are much fuller and really give the tee box character." Photo by Josh Loy



# **In Our Own Backyards and Other Places**

# Barred Owls By Diane Eismont

This is the owl we are most likely to see and hear at our place - even during the day! If you hear an owl during daylight hours, most likely it is the Barred Owl. This photo was taken at one of our bird drippers under a pecan tree at 8:43 A.M. on 8/27/18. Notice the sunshine!

We hear one frequently in late afternoon. Their call is like hoo--- hoo ---hoo-hoo. In the early Spring mating season, we also hear a pair alternating calls from one tree to another - often around 10 P.M.

Notice the large dark eyes! This is the only large eastern owl with dark eyes!

U.S. Department of Agriculture Studies have shown that their food is 50% mice - plus frogs, lizards, crayfish, large insects and occasional birds.



# Seabourne Nature Fest This Saturday!

One way to publicize SNF is to share the following information on your Facebook, Twitter, or Next-Door accounts. Margo Johnson has developed the follow short blurb for everyone to share on their social media. You can attach the flyer, either using this photo below or go to the website and use that photo at <a href="https://txmn.org/coastal/files/2018/05/SNF-2018">https://txmn.org/coastal/files/2018/05/SNF-2018</a>-

Seabourne Nature Fest
Saturday, November 3 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Seabourne Creek Nature Park, 3831 Texas 36 South,
Rosenberg 77471

There will be lots of activities for kids and families! See butterflies and caterpillars, alligators and snakes, hawks and owls, beekeepers, and more. There will be a native plant sale, edible plant display, children's crafts, a petting zoo, face painting, nature talks, prairie walks and horsedrawn wagon rides.

The nature festival entry and events are free. There will also be a variety of food truck vendors.

Free and Open to the Public Conducted by Coastal Prairie Chapter – Texas Master Naturalists

The Texas Master Naturalists are sponsored by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. For additional information call 281-633-7033 or email mmcdowell@ag.tamu.edu

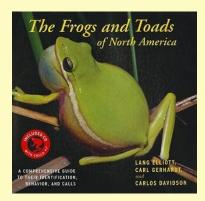
Website: <a href="https://txmn.org/coastal/">https://txmn.org/coastal/</a>

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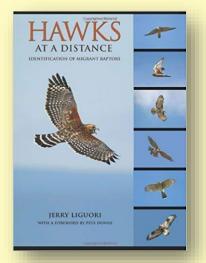


#### Book Corner



The Frogs and Toads of North American

Lang Elliott, Carlos Davidson, Carl Gerhardt



#### Hawks at a Distance

Jerry Liguori(author) and Pete Dunn (foreword)

# The Frogs and Toads of North America: A Comprehensive Guide to Their Identification, Behavior, and Calls by Lang Elliott, Carlos Davidson, Carl Gerhardt

A beautiful and comprehensive photographic guide that features all of the frogs of North America and includes an expert audio recording of their calls.

From the olive-and-black Pig Frog, which gets its name from its low-pitched, pig like grunt, to the X-marked and familiar-sounding Spring Peeper, frogs and toads are fascinating to casual nature lovers as well as expert herpetologists. Covering all 101 species in the United States and Canada, this book contains natural history information, identification tips, range and habitat information, and behavior profiles. It also includes detailed descriptions of calls that readers can listen to themselves on an accompanying 70-minute audio CD recorded by experts in the field, as well as sections on conservation issues, public participation in census programs, tips on photography and sound recording, and keeping frogs and toads as pets.

# Hawks at a Distance: Identification of Migrant Raptors by Jerry Liguori (author) and Pete Dunne (Foreword)

The ultimate must-have guide for identifying migrant raptors, Hawks at a Distance is the first volume to focus on distant raptors as they are truly seen in the field. Jerry Liguori, a leading expert on North American raptors, factors in new information and approaches for identifying twenty-nine species of raptor in various lighting situations and settings. The field guide's nineteen full-color portraits, 558 color photos, and 896 black-and-white images portray shapes and plumages for each species from all angles. Useful flight identification criteria are provided, and the accompanying text discusses all aspects of in-flight hawk identification, including flight style and behavior. Concentrating on features that are genuinely observable at a distance, this concise and practical field guide is ideal for any aspiring or experienced hawk enthusiast.

The Lighter Side



Thanks to Julie Gentry (Facebook)

**Doctor:** What's the condition of the boy who swallowed the quarter?

Nurse: No change yet.

Thanks to John Donaho (Facebook)

Tonight I'm gonna
have possum soup
made from
Himalayan
possum, because I
found Himalayan
on the road.

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See us at:

http://txmn.org/coastal

# COASTAL PRAIRIE CHAPTER OF THE TEXAS MASTER NATURALISTS

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Check out our Facebook Page at

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To post photos and information, email

John Donaho

Also, share our chapter Facebook entries with your friends on your Facebook Page



We also have a **Chapter-Only** Facebook Page that allows chapter members to post items. You can join by going to the website below and clicking on "Join". The administrator will allow you access. This is for chapter members only.

https://www.facebook.com/groups/18827346486623 15/?ref=bookmarks