NEWSLETTER Winter 2019

WASHINGTON COUNTY Wildlife Society

1305 E. Blue Bell Rd., Brenham, Texas 77833
Telephone 979-277-6212 Fax 979-277-6223 www.wcwildlife.org

Please Join us for our

Annual Stew Dinner & Business Meeting

January 18, 2019

At the Washington County Fairgrounds Event Center, 1305 E Blue Bell Rd

Social begins at 5:30 pm followed by a Free Will Donation Dinner at 6pm and a short business meeting for election of officers for 2019

A dessert table will be available if you would like to bring your favorite dessert

Guest Speaker Kelly Conrad Simon

Presenting "Power to the Pollinators"

A program that investigates the function and adaptive physiology of pollinators and the pollinated, and seeks to heighten the awareness of participants in the interesting traits and characteristics of native Texas pollinators. The program also investigates keys to ensuring the success of a wildlife garden from the pollinator's perspective. This program was developed to specifically address TEA Region 13 Advanced Training requirements, but is appropriate for youth and adults interested in a "next step" learning experience.

Mrs. Simon has been with Texas Parks and Wildlife since 1995 and currently serves as the Urban **Wildlife Biologist for the Central Texas** area. Her projects generally involve the topics of native plants and wildlife habitat, exotic invasive plants, native wildlife from songbirds to woodrats, and engaging urban students of all ages in the study of nature. Kelly has coordinated the Texas Wildscapes Backyard Wildlife Habitat program and the Texas Hummingbird Round-up with Texas Parks and Wildlife, and is the author of Texas Wildscapes: Gardening for Wildlife. Her MS degree was earned in 1995 at Emporia State University (Kansas) and her BA was earned in 1992 at Southwestern University (Georgetown, Texas).

Please RSVP by January 16, 2019 online at wcwildlife.org/EventRegistration or by phone at 979-277-6212

*If you register online please count yourself as a guest

WASHINGTON COUNTY Wildlife Society

OFFICERS for 2018:

Celeste Dickshat, President, (979) 277-2331, maroon-out@hotmail.com
Jon Wellmann, Vice President, (936) 419-3910, jonwellmann@live.com
Dave Redden, Treasurer, (979) 218-0493, dredden00@gmail.com
Brick Peele, Secretary, (979) 278 3778, brickpeele@aol.com

WMA DIRECTORS for 2018:

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Mt. Vernon WMA

Director-OPEN

Vice-Director-OPEN

Sandtown WMA

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Gene Bishop, Web Administrator, g_bishop@austin.rr.com

Faith Chase, WCWS Coordinator/Newsletter, (979) 820-1673, faith.wcwildlife@gmail.com

President's Remarks

2018 was a very successful year for the Wildlife Society. Our membership is currently at 499, which includes 39 new members, both an increase from 2017. We want to thank you for your continued support and we welcome our new members and know they will be an asset to the wildlife society. Our Fundraiser, with our gracious donors and the addition of the silent auction at the summer meeting, helped us exceed our financial goal. Our educational meetings were well attended and our Good Works programs and the WMA meetings were very productive.

Our Winter meeting is set for January 18, 2019 at the WCF Event Center. Our speaker will be **Kelly Conrad Simon** of TPWD. Kelly will be speaking on "Bees and Other Pollinators". It will be an Informative program to help you understand the importance of our pollinating insects and to identify those native plants essential for their survival to help produce your beautiful landscapes and gardens. We hope once again to have a great attendance of our members at the meeting.

The County Deer Hunting report from our Biologist, Stephanie Damron, is the overall harvest is down due to the acorn crop is still good, but the quality is up. The average scoring is in the mid 130's which is good for our area. The Doe Day scoping meetings held on Dec. 3 & 4 showed a positive regulation view on the issue, so the public hearing meeting will be held late February to early March. If you are interested in attending a scoping meeting to learn more, there are meetings January 10 in Floresville, January 15 in Bastrop and January 17 in Lockhart. Check with the TPWD office on times and location.

It is also election of our officers for the WCWS. Currently we need to fill the treasurer position. If you or someone you know is interested in serving as a board member officer of the wildlife society, please contact our nominating committee chair Richard Thames at 979-278-3053 or email rbthames@industry.net.
I hope everyone had a Very Merry Christmas and I wish you all a prosperous and Happy New Year!

Celeste Dickschat

How you can pay your dues: Annual dues of $20 may be paid online at wcwildlife.org by logging in, by mail to 1305 E. Bluebell Rd, Suite 104, Brenham, TX 77833, or in person at the same address.

ADDRESS CHANGES

For address changes, or to be added or removed from our mailing list, please contact Faith Ferreri, (979) 820-1673, faith.wcwildlife@gmail.com

The Buzz on Texas Bees, by Kelly Conrad Simon, TPWD Urban Wildlife Biologist of Central Texas

For Christmas last year, I gave my husband a rather unusual gift: a small, empty, lidded ceramic jar embossed in yellow and black. He was ecstatic: That little honey jar represented our entry into the world of queens, pollen loaves, honey caps, nucs, and supers. The thought of being able to provide our family and friends with all-natural wildflower honey became a temptation we couldn't resist, and so we started our own very small operation. We began with one hive and high hopes, and we weren't alone.

All bees created equal?

The USDA American Apiary Inspectors estimate there are 2.6 million managed bee colonies in the United States. But the European honeybee, the social bee that is wrangled by backyard hobbyists and industrial generating operations alike, is a species introduced from Europe. In the US, we have about 4000 native species of bee, and in Texas we have about 800 native species. All of them pollinate plants as they eat and collect the nectar and pollen from their host plants. Most of our docile native bees are solitary and care for a brood that they hide in cavities in wood or tunnels in the ground. They come in a wide variety of colors and sizes, and some even look like tiny versions of their close relatives, the wasps.

But the news isn't all sweet. Colony collapse disorder has been widely reported in the news, and the USDA reports that Texas lost 40% of its honeybee colonies last year. People are worrying about the future of honeybees and the crops of fruits, nuts, and vegetables that depend on large-scale pollination. Industries have been mulling over potentially disastrous effects of a loss of honeybees on their crops. The popular grocery chain Whole Foods Market has even worked to bring this issue to the front of people's consciousness with its "This is your grocery store without honeybees" campaign.

Are bee populations declining?

Colony collapse disorder, the mysterious ailment that appears to have caused honeybee hives to fail, actually only affects the colonial European honeybee. Even the bumblebees – North America's only group of native social (colony-forming) bee species – do not appear susceptible to the disorder, although their hives can crash for other reasons (see http://www.xerces.org/bumblebees/) But many factors are working together to magnify potential impact on native and European bee species. Current large-scale farming techniques require that hundreds or thousands of acres are devoted to one crop, which means that bees only have one crop to pollinate and feed on. Once that crop has finished flowering, these acres become food deserts to all both native pollinators and honeybees. Added to that stress are residues of pesticides, such as a group of chemicals called neonicotinoids. These pesticides may cause bees to become disoriented, impacting their ability to forage and return to the nest or hive. Bees that are hungry from lack of plant nectar and pollen and disoriented from contact with pesticides may be much more susceptible to parasites like mites, which further weaken the bee and make it even more susceptible to pathogens like viruses.

Good news

But the news isn't all bad. Native bees and European honeybees appear to be able to co-exist without exhausting one-another's food and shelter resources. And thanks to native bees higher efficiency pollinating some species of plants (about 90% efficient, compared to a honeybee's approximate 75% efficiency), smaller scale farms can rely on native bee pollination without the assistance of industrial European honeybee hives. And there are other things that can be done to help ensure our native bees, and even those invited European honeybee guests, have the resources they need to survive. On monoculture farms, windrows (lines of woody plants planted along crop borders that slow wind erosion) can be established with a diverse selection of native trees, shrubs, and flowers that can provide diverse nesting and feeding resources. Providing native flowering trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants can support docile foraging native bees and honeybees as they look for the nectar and pollen they need to survive. For help on how to get started providing a native habitat, check out these resources:

Texas Wildscape Program (http://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/wildlife_diversity/wildscapes/)
Texas Wildscapes: Gardening for Wildlife Texas A&M Field Guides Edition (http://www.tamupress.com/product/Texas-Wildscapes,5190.aspx)
Build a bee condo (TPWD), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIVgYqIIPyU)

For more excellent bee information, see:

Urban bee legends (UC Berkeley Urban Bee Lab), (http://www.helpabee.org/urban-bee-legends.html)
10 Spectacular bees native to the US (Popular Science), (http://www.popsci.com/science/article/2013-06/10-spectacular-native-bees?image=10)
Less Honeybee, more Native Bee (http://nativeplantwildlifegarden.com/less-honey-bee-more-native-bee/)

Lone Star Water Forum presents 8th Annual Event, March 30th:

Groundwater in Texas is owned by the owner of the surface land above it. While this legal concept arguably is based on long precedence in Texas, in 2011, the Texas Legislature passed SB 332 for once and for all making clear that private ownership of groundwater is statutory Texas water policy.

Since 1949, the legislature's preferred method of groundwater regulatory management is by locally formed and locally controlled Groundwater Conservation Districts better known as "GCDs". Each GCD has its own set of rules promulgated by local decision valid as long as these unique rules remain within the broad framework of Chapters 36 of the Texas Water Code. Currently, there are 100 GCDs in Texas covering about 75% of the state.

The prediction that the population of Texas will grow rapidly yet again was confirmed by just reported 2019 U-Haul moving studies and other expert demographic analyses. Like it or not, Texas seems to be the United States' "go to" place to move, live, and work. Without proper water management this growth cannot continue without severe pain for all Texans.

The future water security of Texas will rely upon sustainable use of groundwater. Why?

Surface water is fully allocated in the state and has been so since the passage and long- time implementation of the Water Rights Adjudication Act of 1967. Desalination of both brackish groundwater and sea water is certainly possible, but the people of Texas seem to see this technology as too expensive.

Groundwater is the most readily available source to meet the needs of Texas growing population.

Transferring privately-owned groundwater across the state could help meet the challenges of population growth. But the transfer of groundwater out of GCDs has, in some areas of the state, been very controversial over the past few years. The Texas Water Code makes it clear that GCDs cannot discriminate against groundwater owners who make deals to lease or sell their water outside the district's boundaries. However, the political will of the people in places like Wimberley, Fort Stockton, and other regions of the state seems to be strongly against any transfer of groundwater out of their district. Several lawsuits are pending over proposed groundwater transfers with more surely to come.

A most basic issue must be addressed therefore considering that Texas exists in a constant state of "soon-to-be-in-drought."

Should landowners be allowed to transfer their groundwater out of their district (GCD)?

Several GCDs have readily issued groundwater transfer permits with little or no controversy. In other GCDs, permit applications are taking years of locally painful argument that often ends up in the courts. The legislature through its publications and committee hearings clearly wants to see groundwater transfers from "wet areas to dry areas" across the state.

Many areas, such as Washington County, voted against forming a GCD indicating that the political will of the voters in the county was not to regulate the groundwater in their area.

Groundwater Transfer: Limiting factors, Limitations, and Long-Term Implications

This year's topic for the Lone Star Water Forum, will explore and debate the critical issue of groundwater transfer from "wet areas to dry areas" in Texas. Our speakers will come from a pool of attorneys representing clients on both sides of several of the active groundwater transfer lawsuits, state and local officials who have exercised regulatory authority in these matters, and other testifying water rights experts.

Be sure and join us March 30th to participate in this timely and highly significant forum.

Environmental Literature, by Faith Chase, Newsletter Editor

As a student studying wildlife biology, between classes, labs that lasted at least two hours and working on top of it all, I didn't have time for much reading. Although I do enjoy reading good material, sometimes the text books just didn't fit the bill there. After I graduated, the first thing I did was read a book, just because I could! I didn't have to feel bad about reading for enjoyment since I didn't have text books to read anymore!

I was lucky enough to have a professor that appreciated and valued environmental literature while I was at Texas State University. In Dr. Simpson's course Techniques of Wildlife Management, we had required reading which included "A Sand County Almanac" by Aldo Leopold and "Desert Solitaire" by Edward Abbey. Fortunately for the students, the assignment was a book report so we were able to read leisure as long as it the assignment was complete by the due date. (continued page 5)

Environmental Literature (cont.)

As I read "A Sand County Almanac", I felt like Aldo Leopold was in my head. He described the animals just as I would and I really enjoyed feeling like I made a new friend. Now Edward Abbey on the other hand can be a bit cynical, but I think with the way the world is changing today we can all find a way to relate to him as he describes the transformation of Arches National Monument into Arches National Park in Moab, Utah. Reading both of those encouraged me to explore other environmental classics such as "Silent Spring" by Rachel Carson and "Thinking Like a Mountain" by Susan L Flader.

Last year I read "Silent Spring" by Rachel Carson. It's not nearly as charismatic as Leopold or Abbey's work and is actually a compilation of case study examples, but It's a must read! It explores the effects of pesticides in every ecosystem of the US since they were first introduced and used in agriculture and horticulture. It is also considered to be a strong force in eliminating the production of DDT. Ms. Carson was a very intelligent woman, who was well versed in chemistry as well as biology, but not well respected until her later years. She wrote many other books including "Under the Sea Wind", "The Sea Around Us", and "The Edge of the Sea", which are a trilogy focused on her specialty, Marine Biology.

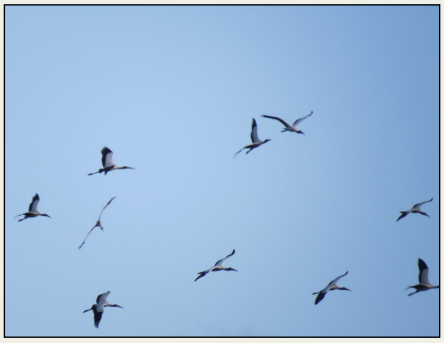
This year my goal is to read "Thinking like a Mountain", which reviews Aldo Leopold's entire career in Wildlife Biology. It is interesting since the only book of his I have read so far is "A Sand County Almanac", which takes place in Wisconsin and actually much of his career takes place in the Southwest and Washington DC. I encourage all members to read at least one of these books while it's too cold or wet to be out, you can enjoy nature a new way, but they are all worth the time. For Christmas I received a few more books including "Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder" by Richard Louv and one of John Muir's books. I look forward to those also and could share them as I have with these.

About the Christmas Bird Count, A review by Faith Chase, Newsletter Editor

In case you haven't heard of the Christmas bird count, it was started by the Audubon Society and has been going on for 119 years. It is conducted in various locations across the world between the December 14th and January 5 every year. Unfortunately, at the time of writing this there are not yet any results available from the 2018 Christmas Bird Count, but I can report on what was collected last year at observation locations nearest to Washington County. It was December 20, at the Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge near Eagle Lake. The day was fairly warm with a low of 55 and high of 67. Fifty-four observers spotted 169 species over the course of 130 hours for a total of over 50,000 birds. A bird count was also scheduled on December 16 in College Station by the Rio Brazos Audubon Society and Texas Master Naturalist—Brazos Valley Chapter. The weather was cooler on this day and included heavy rain in the afternoon with a low of 39 and a high of 62. There were fifty-two participants who observed 112 species in a total of 89 hours for a total of several thousand birds. As many of you know, any type of citizen science can serve as early warning signs for disease in populations and local environmental changes. If you would like to check for updates on the 2018 Christmas Bird Count you can check that data here.

Photos from the Wildheart Ranch

by Cherry Craven, New Year's Creek Member



Left: Flock of approximately 100 wood storks

Right: American Kestrel

Bottom Left: Buck F-13 (10 points) and Buck H-15(8 points) tracked since 2013 and 2015, respectively.

Bottom Center: Doe D12-10 had quadruplets this year. Tracked since 2009. When Cherry began tracking.

Bottom Right: Buck W-12. Tracked since 2012. Has 13 points in 2018.

Winter Greets Us..., by Dee Wolff, Greenvine WMA member

Winter greets us with a genetic disposition that cries to create homemade beef stew with carrots and cabbage and lots of onions and chili with beans and tomato soup made with summer tomatoes. A winter cup of hot chocolate is a vacation to an exotic land where chocolate grows on trees and one can pick a plump marshmallow to gently lay in the cup where it melts and swirls and turns into sugar lusciousness.

Winter greets us with flannel shirts that appear in stores in various shades of red, blue, yellow and green. Sometimes the plaids are like Scottish kilts and sometimes like grandma's quilts. Sometimes they are bold, woven bright ozo orange and black and yellows and a stripe of red. The blue flannels seem to have a bit of dignity about them….an air of country gentleman with a leather hat with a wide brim. The green flannels seem to be from Ireland with a hint of summer yellow flowers. Flannel shirts are easily wearable, likea-ble and comfortable. The ones that I wear are pink and white plaids. They are old and baggy and just right for sitting outside with a book and a hot cup of coffee.

Winter's gift seems to be a certain kind of quiet. One can feel it when walking by the deep emerald waters of the lake. Wood ducks fly up from their nesting grasses as a reminder that we are present in the woods, in the country, beneath the cool gray sky of winter. Reflections of water oaks and a blazing orange Cypress and leafless willows seem to be more intense, more real than those on top of the earth. It seems that one could walk gently into the lake and find fish languishing on the bottom in their warm mud houses. Would we be upside down in the cold water, like the reflected trees and clouds?

Before the approach of winter, we began to hear the sounds of migrating birds flying over the flight path that is directly above our old farm house. The honking of the Canadian Geese call us outside and greet us with long, rhythmically moving V-shaped lines as they make their way to warmer climates. Sand Hill Cranes trilling haunting musical songs in the clouds are not far behind. We are humbled by these hard working creatures and the mystery of migration.

One year not too long ago, before the approach of winter, my husband and I built duck blinds in various parts of the woods. We used camouflage netting and branches to build a comfortable hut in which to hide from the ducks. We placed homemade wooden chairs behind the netting and enjoyed sitting and waiting for ducks to land in the evening. We have been generously rewarded by Mother Nature for our efforts, by watching migrating ducks land and find refuge at our lake. It is quite a beautiful sight to watch them descend to earth in the light of the setting sun. Droplets splash up as they touch the water and are stirred by the wind, creating ephemeral diamonds in the sky.

We have seen elegant male wood ducks wearing their ancient samurai helmets approach the lake with female companions while crying their distinctive whistle which is always thrilling to hear. It seems that they are stellar protectors of their families as they spend the night outside the wood duck houses like soldiers protecting home and hearth.

Black bellied whistlers are regular visitors. They whistle a shrill call through the sky before landing. They seem almost comical with their red, yellow and blue beaks and large pink feet that look like fancy winter stockings. They love to surprise by sitting on top of the wood duck houses or walking along the peninsula before splashing into the cool water. They often find homes in the trees for the evening, settling in and nesting before the morning flight.

Male mallard with their beautiful green heads that look the color of emerald silk are regular visitors to our lake. One can see them swimming quietly with their less colorful female companions and then roosting on the shore in long grasses. They are sometimes visited by ring necks and teal. All seem to enjoy each other's company for the evening before moving on, a true camaraderie of nature's creatures.

We have seen many other kinds of birds on our lake, but I hesitate to name them. One year, we were certain that we saw a flock of whooping cranes. We confidently wrote the date in our "bird book" and told one of our friends about our sighting. He said that we must be "very lucky indeed, because there only about fifty known whooping cranes in existence." The lesson is that one learns to be careful when naming things!

Perhaps, while birds are migrating from autumn into winter months, we can learn from them- learn how to enjoy the journey that we encounter each day. Perhaps in the cool of a winter evening we could light an outdoor campfire and watch the messages in the fire, or enjoy conversations and a shared dinner with friends. Perhaps we could walk in the woods on a cool afternoon or begin the day an hour earlier and witness incredible winter sunrises.

Winter can be a time to be close to oneself, to gather back into one's arms a quiet time to reflect and to renew our love of life.

Update from the Grahams

Had planted 27 live oak trees. Deer may have killed all but 5 or 6. Will have to add human hair or mechanical guards when we plant replacements.

-**Bill and Maurine Graham, Greenvine WMA, members**

Great Backyard Bird Count, submitted by Ann Thames, Sandtown WMA, Member

Launched in 1998 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, the Great Backyard Bird Count was the first online citizen-science project to collect data on wild birds and to display results in near real-time.

Now, more than 160,000 people of all ages and walks of life worldwide join the four-day count each February to create an annual snapshot of the distribution and abundance of birds.

We invite you to participate! For at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count, **February 15-18, 2019,** simply tally the numbers and kinds of birds you see. You can count from any location, anywhere in the world, for as long as you wish!

If you're new to the count, or have not participated since before the 2013 merger with eBird, you can now create a free online account to enter your checklists. If you already have an account, just use the same login name and password. If you have already participated in another Cornell Lab citizen-science project, you can use your existing login information, too.

Click here for more info on how to get started.

In 2018, Great Backyard Bird Count participants in more than 100 countries counted more than 6,400 species of birds on more than 180,000 checklists!

During the count, you can explore what others are seeing in your area or around the world. Share your bird photos by entering the photo contest, or enjoy images pouring in from across the globe. You ca even add photos and sounds to your checklist. Read more.

Your help is needed every year to make the GBBC successful!

Then keep counting throughout the year with eBird, which uses the same system as the Great Backyard Bird Count to collect, store, and display data any time, all the time.

Why Count Birds?

Scientists and bird enthusiasts can learn a lot by knowing where the birds are. Bird populations are dynamic; they are constantly in flux. No single scientist or team of scientists could hope to document and understand the complex distribution and movements of so many species in such a short time.

Scientists use information from the Great Backyard Bird Count, along with observations from other citizen-science projects, such as the Christmas Bird Count, Project FeederWatch, and eBird, to get the "big picture" about what is happening to bird populations. The longer these data are collected, the more meaningful they become in helping scientists investigate far-reaching questions, like these:

• How will the weather and climate change influence bird populations?

• Some birds, such as winter finches, appear in large numbers during some years but not others. Where are these species from year to year, and what can we learn from these patterns?

• How will the timing of birds' migrations compare with past years?

• How are bird diseases, such as West Nile virus, affecting birds in different regions?

• What kinds of differences in bird diversity are apparent in cities versus suburban, rural, and natural areas?

The Great Backyard Bird Count is led by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, with Bird Studies Canada and many international partners. The Great Backyard Bird Count is powered by eBird. The count is made possible in part by founding sponsor Wild Birds Unlimited.

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Northern River Otter *(Lontra Canadensis),* by Faith Chase, Newsletter Editor

I choose to feature the river otter because I have heard a lot of chatter about them this past year. An otter looks just like you imagine thick, short, glossy fur with a lighter underbelly, short legs, webbed feet, and a long, thick tail. They are can be up to 4 ft long nose to tail and usually weigh between 13 lbs and 15 lbs but, sometimes as much as 22 lbs. Washington county is in the center of their historical range but on the western edge of today's otter population. Naturally you will find otters near bodies of water and they are opportunistic with habitat using whatever wetlands are valuable. They like borrow ditches and sloughs. Their favorite place to be is a deep swamp where they can hide out near a clear lake or pond for fishing and playing. They enjoy sliding down mud banks into the water and are very social and friendly. They dig their dens with an entrance below the water's surface and occasionally kill other occupants such as muskrats or beavers to take over their dens. Studies have determined that otters are most active in the winter and are crepuscular, meaning they are most active around dawn and dusk. As it gets colder , otters become more active and males were significantly more active than females. The average distance traveled by otters in a 24 hour period is about 2 miles but they have been know to travel up to 5 miles. Otters are not picky eaters. They eat mostly fish but, will eat just about everything that can be found in and around a body of water. Males typically do not mate until they are four years old and females rarely breed before age two. Males spend most of their time alone, except when they are with a female. They mate in the water and delay of implantation can extend they gestation up to 270 days. They usually have two pups , but can have up to five. The pups eyes open between 22 and 35 days and are weaned at 3 months. Although it has not been witnessed, it is believed that their only real enemy are large carnivores, otherwise they are known to live up to 20 years.