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SPRING 2020

# The Wildlife Witness

*Washington County Wildlife Society Newsletter*  
*1305 E Blue Bell Rd, Ste. 105, Brenham, TX 77833*  
*979-277-6212*                      *wcwildlife.org*

## Looking For Nest Boxes?



On March 1, 2020, Scouts from BSA Troop 577 completed birdhouses for two Washington County landowners as a conservation service project. Troop 577 Scoutmaster is Michael McGinty and the unit is chartered at Christ Lutheran Church in Brenham. For information about Troop birdhouses, please contact Victoria Morgan at [morgan,jvt@att.net](mailto:morgan,jvt@att.net).

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### WILDLIFE NEWS INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

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### Spring Events

At this time we are cancelling all spring events to practice social distancing, but here are some ways to enjoy nature at home:

- Listen to the sounds of nature while you drink your morning coffee or tea.
- If you're working from home, take it outside for a little while
- Familiarize yourself with apps like [seek](#) and [inaturalist](#)

## President's Remarks

Spring is among us again. Unfortunately, we haven't had the Fall rains we need, but I see plenty of wildflowers starting to bloom especially our wonderful Bluebonnets and Indian paintbrushes.

I wish to thank all our members who attended the January Annual Meeting. We had a great time visiting, enjoying fabulous stew and giving of some nice door prizes. Thank you to all who helped set up, decorate, cook, clean up, donate items and contribute in anyway. A volunteers' Good Deed never goes unnoticed and it is truly appreciated.

Thank you again to our speaker, Ross Winton for his wonderful presentation on "Issues facing Pollinators". I hope some of his ideas can help each of us better understand the importance of our pollinators and how we can help them. We appreciate him giving of his time to speak to us.

I'm excited to be working with our new board for the next year and know they will be bringing some new ideas to the society. We welcome the new officers: President, Celeste Dickschat; Vice President, Natalie James; Secretary, Charlotte Von Rosenberg; Treasurer, Ginger Bosse.

Be watching for information on your local Spring WMA meetings. If you have an idea for a speaker, project or field trip for your WMA meeting, please let your Director know. Also, if you have a personal wildlife or "nature" experience that you would like to share as a newsletter article, please write it up and send it in to Faith at [faith.wcwildlife@gmail.com](mailto:faith.wcwildlife@gmail.com). We would love to read about it.

Finally, if you haven't paid your membership dues, please renew online on our website or you can mail it in.

**"If we had no Winter, the Spring would not be so Pleasant"**

*Celeste Dickschat*

## Directory

### WASHINGTON COUNTY WILDLIFE SOCIETY OFFICERS FOR 2020:

**PRESIDENT** - Celeste Dickschat, (979) 277-2331, [maroon-out@hotmail.com](mailto:maroon-out@hotmail.com)

**VICE-PRESIDENT** - Natalie James, [njames@brenhamk-12.net](mailto:njames@brenhamk-12.net)

**TREASURER** - Ginger Bosse, (713) 248-5587, [gbosse@ssccpa.com](mailto:gbosse@ssccpa.com)

**SECRETARY** - Charlotte Von Rosenberg, (512) 924-3068, [quebefarm@yahoo.com](mailto:quebefarm@yahoo.com)

### WMA DIRECTORS 2019

#### GREENVINE WMA

**Director** - Adam Seilheimer, (979) 830-3960, [texastrophyscapes@yahoo.com](mailto:texastrophyscapes@yahoo.com)

**Vice-Director** - Cary Dietzmann, (979) 203-3942, [cary@acountryliferealestate.com](mailto:cary@acountryliferealestate.com)

#### SUN OIL FIELD WMA

**Director** - Charlotte Von Rosenberg, (512) 924-3068, [quebefarm@yahoo.com](mailto:quebefarm@yahoo.com)

**Vice-Director** - Judy Deaton, (979) 277-8426, [jadtmn@gmail.com](mailto:jadtmn@gmail.com)

#### ROCKY CREEK WMA

**Director** - William Amelang, (979) 337-4283, [williamamelang@gmail.com](mailto:williamamelang@gmail.com)

**Vice-Director** - John Knapp, (979) 289-5533, [jknapp@knappfralick.com](mailto:jknapp@knappfralick.com)

#### POST OAK WMA

**Director** - Jon Wellmann, (936) 419-3910, [jonwellmann@live.com](mailto:jonwellmann@live.com)

**Vice-Director** - OPEN

#### MT. VERNON WMA

**Director** - OPEN

**Vice-Director** - OPEN

#### SANDTOWN WMA

**Director** - Richard Thames, (979) 278-3053, [rbthames@industryinet.com](mailto:rbthames@industryinet.com)

**Vice-Director** - Amy Thomsen, (713) 408-6135, [amy.thomsen@icloud.net](mailto:amy.thomsen@icloud.net)

#### NEW YEARS CREEK WMA

**Director** - Terry Atmar, (281) 303-6023, [terry.atmar@yahoo.com](mailto:terry.atmar@yahoo.com)

**Vice-Director** - Richard Kenjura, (712) 551-1871, [rkenjura@live.com](mailto:rkenjura@live.com)

### RESOURCE CONTACTS

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**Gene Bishop**, Web Administrator, [g\\_bishop@austin.rr.com](mailto:g_bishop@austin.rr.com)

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## Hot Pursuit - May 2, 2019

Photos captured by John Lammers, member, Sun Oil Field WMA



## Texas Bird Talk by Dee Wolff, Greenvine WMA

Sometimes, I am fooled into believing the romantic notion that nature is silent. In the warming light of Springtime Texas, I will find a lovely spot of sun in the midst of the woods, sit with a cup of steaming coffee and listen for silence. In a minute or two, my ears fill with the intense sound of Mother Natures' Symphony for All. This music, composed of wind drumming through tree branches, rattling and shaking and crackling twigs, soft swooshing tall grasses, and the magnificent instrumental section of clacking, whistling, trilling, tweeting, whining and chirping birds, can certainly compete with any composition created by man.

A theater of birds continues the music, at various times of the day, in the bird feeders around our old farm house. With binoculars, coffee and bird books in hand, we have been able to identify many of the bird musicians that visit our yard. While we appreciate the unique beauty of each species, we also love to hear the songs and shared communication.

Birds do talk with one another, and we can learn to understand and enjoy their conversations. The Audubon Society calls identifying birds by sound, "birding by ear." Many of us can recognize the calls of the cardinal, chickadees, titmouse, robins, crows, woodpecker, blue jays and hummingbirds. But what are they saying? Are the clear and distinct notes of the cardinal an elegy to morning light or a rapturous poem about black oil birdseed? Are the chickadees clucking about their little black hats or complaining about their tiny stature in the bird kingdom? Do robins whisper sweet sounds to worms, luring them out of the ground and into warm hungry stomachs? And Mr. Blue Jay.....does his yelling and strutting show that he is the meanest kid on the block?

There has been much written about bird communication. It appears that birds can communicate non-verbally through eye contact, personal space and body language, and verbally through tone and volume of voice. Jason Knight, founder of Alderleaf Wilderness College in Washington State, has identified several categories of bird communication:

SONG: "Birds are known to sing to establish territory, as well as to attract a mate."

Some birds sing only in the spring time during breeding season, while others sing all year round. Those birds that thrill us with their songs include thrushes like the American Robin, Chuck Will's Widow, and the Northern Mockingbird. Some singers, like the American Robin are migratory.....but they certainly entertain while visiting.

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## Texas Bird Talk (CONT.)

The sweet hummingbirds that appear in the springtime feeders sing through their throats as well as their entire bodies. As they fly at speeds of 25 to 40 miles an hour, chirping sounds are created as the wind rushes through their more than 900 feathers

My favorite diva of all singing birds is the beautiful, brilliant red, male cardinal. He is the most confident and the most verbose of all of our Burton Farm birds. He often sits on the very top of Grandpa's dead juniper in the early morning light and belts out his own rendition of "it's a beautiful morning," and receives in response from his mate, "yep, yep, over here."

COMPANION CALLS: "Call notes are short communications, often single notes."

The crow calls that we hear around our place are descriptive of "short communications." The crow who finds a source of food will steadily begin his call of "caw, caw, caw," to alert other companion crows to gather to dine. Soon a flock will appear and flap, circle, and talk up a storm before they fly off to eat. The elegant pileated woodpecker cries are staccato, clear and concise. His unmistakable call fills the entire surrounding atmosphere. The little bluebirds that live in our various bluebird hotels gently squeak and giggle like little toys as they talk with one another in short sentences.

JUVENILE BEGGING CALLS: "These calls are generally cries for food."

They may also be a way to stay in touch with Mom. One can admire the forceful and consistent chirping of baby birds in a nest, opened beaks, waiting for food. Watching juvenile birds sitting on a branch, yelling for Dad to bring a bug or worm to stuff in their noisy little mouths, causes one to realize the instinctual bond of parent and child in all species.

AGGRESSION CALLS: "These are calls that claim territory. "

A bird sitting at a feeder might be saying, "This is my food, enter this feeder at your own risk." Or the call might express relationship, "leave that bird alone, that's my baby!" These calls may also involve posturing, chasing, puffing of feathers, flying at or running after an adversary.

ALARM CALLS: "Alarm calls are usually loud, repetitive and scolding."

These calls are perhaps, "Look, run, fight, a predator is near!" or "watch your back!" Sometimes a bird will move to a safe location before sounding the alarm. Avian alarm calls have been extensively studied by Robert D. Magrath, an ornithologist and behavioral ecologist from Australia. He has co-authored many studies about interspecies communication among birds. Some of his studies highlight how warning cries cut across species lines in the bird world. Almost every species of bird will respond to the coos, grunt, squeaks and calls of warning cries from another bird species.

In our neck of the woods, we have heard the black capped chickadees cry with a high pitched "chick-a dee-dee" to tip off other birds around the feeder, when a winged predator such as an owl, shrike or hawk is flying overhead. The little guy is like a 911 call to help his bird brethren escape harm. If an animal is particularly dangerous, he might add another "dee-dee" to his call.

We have also heard the frantic cries of warning and calls for help from crows when a hawk threatens a nest holding young birds. Soon, there is an air born force of crows noisily cawing and threatening the hawk with full body swoops until he flies off to find food in another place. The little wrens that build nests in the corners of the porch roof, twirp and scold and frantically fly from tree to porch and back again, until either the guilty humans or more guilty cat retreats away from their nests.

Some birds just like to talk! How wonderful that the state bird of Texas- in the friendly State of Texas- is one of the most talkative of all birds! The Mocking Bird is a remarkable bird (mimus polyglottis-to mimic with many tongues) who can emit up to 200 distinct sounds. It can mimic impressions of car alarms, squeaking gates, blue jays, wrens, cardinals. A mocking bird will sometimes sing through its' entire repertoire as though it was auditioning for a Broadway musical. David Gammon of Elan University in North Carolina has studied the state bird of Texas for many years. He says that "no one really knows why a Mockingbird mimics others, but they also have their own distinct voice. They tend to mimic sounds that are similar in rhythm and pitch of their own voices." Gammon says that it may be that the females choose their mates on how accurately the bird mimics the vocalization of other birds. Think of the sophistication of this....as a human voice can have a definite attraction or repulsion for another human!

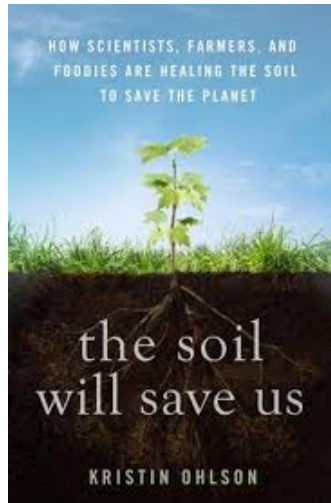
If wealth can be measured in many ways, we are truly wealthy from the abundance and variety of bird species that grace our neighborhood with their beautiful songs. It is a joy to watch and listen to these sophisticated little avian creatures who remind us....that if we look around.....there is always something to sing about!



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## Book Precis: The Soil Will Save Us by Kristin Ohlson

by Charlotte von Rosenberg, Director, Sun Oil Field Director



This book was published in 2014 and is 235 pages.

Here is a very readable book on soil health and where we are now, almost a century after the Dust Bowl. Ohlson is a non-scientist who thoroughly explains, in language I can understand, the relationship of soil carbon to the atmosphere and how it can save us from climate change and maybe even reverse it. She explains the chemistry of carbon and soil in the early chapters. Plants and photosynthesis are “the lungs of the planet” a metaphor we can understand.

The eight chapters have titles like Where Did All The Carbon Go? and Send in the Cows. Ohlson discusses conventional agricultural practices and new (again) practices like no-till and cover crop. Soil carbon is that black crumbly tilth that indicates healthy soil structure with healthy microorganisms.

She's a good story-teller; which is the best thing I can say about a writer. Her reporting makes me think of an Anthony Bourdain- “Parts Unknown” - of Agriculture. The most cutting edge practices and the leaders like Savory of Holistic Management, Rodale's organic gardening and others are discussed most interestingly. The mysteries of compost and compost tea are revealed. One eccentric soil scientist walks barefoot on the soil to evaluate its health. With a nod to Aldo Leopold, scientists and ranchers are using cows as “mobile microbe tanks” to help heal damaged soil. The book is full of different land restoration stories about the new wave of farmers which the author calls “rock stars”. This is the “vibrant fringe” where new things are happening outside of the agricultural mainstream. The author ends on a note of optimism based on the recognition of common ground between environmentalists and agriculturalists. Ohlson tells this story well.

There is a lot of digestable information in this compact book. At the end of the book is a list of references worth having. I liked the voice and presence of the author who is engaged, open and informative on the subject of climate change without preaching or spinning. She adds a personal, human presence to the story of carbon science.

## Bees: You're Not Getting the "HOLE" Story

by Faith Chase, Newsletter Editor

What do I mean by the “hole” story? Well, according to Texas Parks and Wildlife approximately 90% of bees native to Texas are solitary. These solitary bees are not aggressive and nest in holes!

Unlike social bees, solitary bee females establish and care for nests on their own with no assistance from other individuals. There is no division of labor into queens, workers, or drones. Solitary bees do have stingers but, female solitary bees tend to flee or hide when disturbed at the nest. The nest sites of native solitary bees can be approached without fear of a defensive attack. Always first observe nests of bees and wasps from some distance in the case they may be a social species. Stings from native solitary bees typically only occur if an individual bee is trapped in clothing or grasped by hand. Artificial nest structures for these bees can be safely placed next to areas of human activity.

The majority of solitary bees are ground-nesters. They excavate burrows in well-drained, sunny patches of bare-ground. Ground-nesting species may occur in large aggregations noticeable through the presence of dozens of small holes surrounded by mounded piles of dirt. I have witnessed this and you do not want to run your hay equipment or shredder over these holes without a cab on the tractor. Although these bees are not aggressive, it sure does scare you when you see a handful of them coming to check you out. Other solitary bees nests in existing cavities in dead wood (generally galleries left by wood-boring beetle larvae) or chew their own cavities into woody material. There are even a few solitary bees that nest in discarded snail shells and dried cow dung.

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**“We still do not know one  
thousandth of one percent of  
what nature has revealed to us.”  
~Albert Einstein**

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During the spring and summer months, female solitary bees provision nests with food (lumps of pollen mixed with nectar and saliva), lay eggs, tightly sealing the nest upon completion. Females often establish multiple nests over their adult lives that may span several weeks up to a few months. If a lone female solitary bee dies, she could lose her entire reproductive efforts for the year; there is no colony to care for her young in her absence. Male bees do not collect pollen to provision young or otherwise assist in raising offspring. After a nest is completed, females move on to the next nesting opportunity never to revisit or safeguard their previous work. Their eggs and the resulting larvae feed on the stored food, overwinter inside the nest, and emerge the following year as adults to begin the cycle again.

Solitary bees tend to be less frequently observed than their social relatives. They may even be hard to identify as a "bee" given their wide range of shapes, sizes, and color patterns. Less well-known solitary bees such as large carpenter bees, leaf-cutter bees, mason bees, mining bees, squash bees, sunflower bees, and sweat bees are responsible for a substantial amount of pollination in agricultural and ecological systems. Learn about the major groups of bees at BugGuide: Bees. For help identifying bees you observe, join and report your observations to the Nongame and Rare Species Program's Bees and Wasps of Texas (iNaturalist) project.



Mexican Carpenter Bee  
(*Xylocopa mexicanorum*)



Leafcutter Bee  
(*Megachile coquilletti*)



Mason Bee  
(*Osmia subfasciata*)



Left: Sunflower Bee  
(*Diadasia enavata*)

Right: Long Horned Bee  
Genus *Melissoptila*





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## Bees: You're Not Getting the "HOLE" story (CONT.)

Now that you've been briefed on solitary bees, why are they important? They don't make honey so I don't get anything out of them. Couldn't honeybees do all of the pollinating? What's the big deal?

The big deal is that researchers at UC Davis are finding out that for some crops, especially those who have very close symbiotic relationships with bee species, native bees are able to pollinate them more efficiently. They do a better job because they don't have sacs on their legs to store the pollen in so they spread it around more. You can take advantage of this in your home garden by providing solitary bee hotels and planting their preferred species to promote their presence. PRO TIP: Squash Bees like to pollinate squash flowers, so if you just planted your squash consider offering squash bees some lodging.

It's pretty simple to put up a bee hotel, house, cottage, chateau whatever you want to call it! You could buy one online, but odds are you already have the materials at home. First you need a frame for your tubes. This frame should be at least 8 in deep. The back of the house should be solid so that no light enters. Houses can consist of individual tubes in a frame or it could be a block of untreated wood with holes drilled into it. Holes should be 4 inches deep and 3/16, 4/16, and 5/16 inches across to accommodate varying-sized bees. The cavities can be filled with paper straws that are changed yearly to keep the block clean. Blocks without straws should be replaced after two years. The nesting tube or block should be protected from the afternoon sun and secured so it does not move in the wind. An overhang to protect it from rain is also beneficial.

If you do choose to set up a bee hotel, the tubes should be replaced annually to prevent the disease. Both cardboard and bamboo tubes are available; be sure to purchase tubes that are closed in the back or bees will not use them. Replace tubes in the spring once the material filling last year's tubes has been chewed open. This indicates that the bees developing in the tube have matured and left.

Aren't you glad you finally got the "HOLE" story!



Left: An easy DIY Bee Hotel made from a metal coffee can and tubes

Left: Bee Blocks with Various sized holes (notice the "roof" added to protect from rain)

Right: a simple bee house using a wood frame and tubes



## Ding-Dong Deer Dash

by Mary Mann, member, Rocky Creek WMA

Check out [this video](#) in the Rocky Creek area near Somerville state Park



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**"In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks."**  
~John Muir

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## Support Wildlife Rehabilitators!

by Faith Chase, WCWS Coordinator & Newsletter Editor

It's spring time and that means baby animals are being born! What a wonderful thought! Of course for Rebecca McKeever with the Lone Star Wildlife Rescue that always means more "patients". It's common for baby birds, squirrels even opossums to fall out of the nest, or pouch rather for that last one. She is our only local rehaber and is always busy! She does her best not to turn anyone away even accepting a wood rat my mother-in-law found. Most rescue and wildlife rehabilitators are volunteer efforts with little to no funding available through the federal or state agencies. They strictly rely on donations and creativity, but somethings you can't invent. So with that in mind, the WCWS board would like to encourage you to donate to Lone Star Wildlife Rescue. Please review this short list of rescue and wildlife centers, that you may contact with any questions or make a direct donation. Also, we have a separate category under the Donate button on our website, which includes the Annual Fundraiser and Scholarships categories.

- **Lone Star Wildlife Rescue**--Rebecca McKeever, Director; [director@lonestarwildlife.org](mailto:director@lonestarwildlife.org)  
Bellville, Texas and surrounding counties  
LSWR is an all-volunteer organization that rehabilitates injured and orphaned wildlife in south central Texas. Determine if the animal really needs help. Do not kidnap a healthy baby!  
Please call LSWR at (832) 444-6996 for advice.
- **Brazos Valley Fawn Rescue**--Louis and Kay Gaston, 979-255-7206, [info@BrazosValleyFawnRescue.com](mailto:info@BrazosValleyFawnRescue.com)  
Brazos Valley Fawn Rescue is a non-profit organization dedicated to rescuing abandoned fawns in the Brazos Valley and surrounding counties. We are committed to providing the care they need in order to be rehabilitated and eventually released back into their natural environment.
- **Texas Rehabilitation Coalition Inc. (TWRC Wildlife Center)**  
Houston's first urban wildlife emergency and rehabilitative care facility.  
10801 Hammerly Blvd., #200, Houston, TX 77043; 713-468-8972; [info@twrcwildlifecenter.org](mailto:info@twrcwildlifecenter.org)

## Creature Feature: Northern Cricket Frog (*Acris crepitans*)

by Faith Chase, WCWS Coordinator & Newsletter Editor

Here we are again, Spring time! Always a favorite of mine,! I'm sure it's because I have an April birthday, but there's so much to love about spring low power bills etc. Just kidding! It's just so nice to see everything waking up from it's winter sleep, even after a mild winter. In that category I have shared several times that I enjoy hearing the frogs call, so here I am again grabbing the opportunity to highlight a froggy fave of mine.

You don't know it but you DO know this frog....by it's call! The Northern Cricket Frog can be found Southeast and Midwest US and is one of the smaller frogs we find in our state growing to only 1 and a half inches at most. This species is diurnal, meaning it's most active during the day, but also at night throughout the year. You will find this species basking in the sunlight, but when you come near it, it will jump into the water. Not only is this frog common because of it's wide rang but also because it has an extended breeding season that runs from February through late summer. These frog are most often found in shallow ponds with vegetation and full sun or shallow gravel-lined creeks. As you get closer to the Gulf , they can even be found in shallow pools of brackish water close to the sea. And finally what you have all be wanting to know. What does it's call sound like? It sounds like two marbles clicking together sometimes slow and sometimes very quickly! [Click here to hear it's call!](#) From now on you will always recognize the cricket frog, but probably never see it because it's just too darn quick! Even if you did see it it may not look like the one shown here, thanks to polymorphism.



Photo Credit:Shannon Chapman