



Views Around The Lake

by Cindy Klopsteck

"The change of leaves makes us reflect upon ourselves, wondering if we see change coming. Are we really red and yellow or would we change to brown all to quickly in our old age?" — Anonymous

"It's hard to believe. The prettiest colored leaves over there belong to that good-for-nothing tallow tree." My customer, a local rancher, was standing with me out in the cool, sunny autumn morning, admiring the small trees and shrubs along highway 90A East that had changed color due to the recent cool front.

There was a myriad of oranges and golds and yellows and tawny reds before us. But sure enough, the tree to which he was pointing and referring was the most brilliant of the reds — it was nature's beauty at its best.

"Why?" I asked. "Why is the poor tallow tree so unappreciated?"

"Just is. No one wants one in their yard..." and with that he drove away with no further explanation.

A friend and I had just returned from a memorable trip to the Texas Hill Country, specifically Lost Maples State Natural Area near Vanderpool.

Tree foliage had been changing color and the landscape there was beautiful. The maple trees in particular were gently losing their bright colored leaves to the cold front that was blowing at that time through the area.

Leaves were floating down around us as we walked and enjoyed a five mile hike through the park. Lost Maples is considered the best place in Texas to view the colorful autumnal "changing of the guard." We also had visited Garner State Park, enjoying a shorter hike there, absorbing the beauty of the colorful trees lining the Frio River.

Nothing is better than enjoying a tasty lunch and a bottle of good Texas Hill Country wine on a picnic table next to the river and its border of stunning trees.

But though I had just visited the area known for its special fall foliage, I was amazed at the sud-

den and beautiful leaf colors in our own backyard — Eagle Lake.

The Hill Country is known for its vast array of native and trans-plant trees to promote its tourism and notoriety. But here even the poor tallow trees must strive to dress in their very best natural attire to promote the changing of the seasons locally.

Formally recognized as the Chinese tallow, this tree — like many things in life — has both desired and less charming properties.

A small population considers it a popular ornamental tree due to its fast growth rate, attractive fall colors and its ability to resist damage from pests. However, the tallow can invade a variety of habitats, crowding out native species.

The leaves and fruit are toxic to cattle and cause nausea and illness in humans. In fact, Florida is so overrun by the tallow in many areas that landowners are actually encouraged to not allow distribution of its seeds and to remove the seedlings and trees

themselves. I guess my rancher friend was right.

A number of Eagle Lake citizens have shared with me how they really noticed and enjoyed the local colors of fall this year.

Hopefully that also meant an appreciation for the poor tallow tree, which seems to be getting a bad reputation these days.

Even the lives of notable and talented people such as Einstein, Edison and DaVinci have been questioned for years as exhibiting dyslexia and other learning disabilities.

Their brilliance certainly overcame any small deficiencies of nature. The tallow tree — like many things in life — might better be recognized for its strengths rather than its weaknesses.

We could learn from the tenacious tallow tree.

We could learn to show our own true and brilliant colors in life.

Cindy may be contacted at cindyj_k@hotmail.com regarding any comments.

Weekly Migratory Bird Report

Texas Parks & Wildlife Department

Dec. 2, 2009

Weekly migratory bird hunting reports are posted from early September through early February.

South Zone Duck: Duck hunters along the coast enjoyed the best duck hunting in the state during the first split.

The coast continued to produce steady duck shoots on the prairies, marshes and bays. Gadwalls, wigeons, shovelers and pintails and pintails were taken on the coastal prairies.

Large wads of green-winged teal were absent, but that should change with the strong cold front blowing through the state this week.

Bay hunters enjoyed limits to half-limits near Port O'Connor and Rockport. The brunt of the snow goose population finally arrived on the prairie over the weekend, albeit three weeks late.

Snow goose hunting has been difficult with mild temperatures and light winds. A small juvenile population has not helped either.

Specklebellies have cooperated at times, but have not been "gim-

mees." Sandhill crane numbers are steady, and hunters will get their first crack at the large gray birds Dec. 19. Reminder: hunters must possess the free crane permit to hunt sandhill cranes. The South Zone duck season opens again Dec. 12. Prospects are good.

High Plains Mallard Management Unit: Outfitters said the pre-Thanksgiving cold front pushed more geese to the High Plains.

Goose hunters enjoyed better decoying action near Dumas, Spearman and Amarillo. Specklebellies and Canadas continue to work in Knox and Haskell counties.

Duck numbers continue to build in the Panhandle, with more mallards showing with the cool front. Lots of water has scattered ducks throughout the region, with the exception of the Knox City area, which could use more rain. Sandhill crane hunters enjoyed great decoying action. Prospects are good.

North Zone Duck: The first split of duck season ended at sunset Nov. 29 and results across the region ranged from poor to fair.

Lack of ducks in Texas was not the problem, rather, too much water and flooding put a kink in efforts. The good news is more mallards have shown with the fronts and receding water should make backwater sloughs and rivers prime when the second split opens Dec. 12.

Biologist Jared Laing said most of the mast crop was washed away with the flooding, but sloughs and river bottoms have been attracting good numbers of wood ducks.

Gadwalls and wigeons have been taken in shallow coves of lakes and reservoirs. Hunting remained steady around the zone boundaries of IH-10.

Freshwater impoundments have held pintails, wigeons, shovelers and wigeons. Hopefully strong concentrations of green-winged teal show by the second opener. Prospects are fair to

TPWD Concerned About 'Nature Deficit'

By Texas Parks and Wildlife

Blackberry — juicy fruit or electronic gizmo?

Thanks to changes recently made to the Oxford Junior Dictionary for children, a "blackberry" will now be defined as an electronic device or smart phone, rather than the fruit.

In fact Oxford University Press has dropped more than 90 common plant and animal names (beaver, heron, otter, acorn, and others) from the dictionary to make room for more modern words, such as blog, MP3 player, voicemail, and broadband.

Robert Bateman, world-famous wildlife artist, is horrified by the change.

Bateman states, "If you can't name things, how can you love them?"

And if you don't love them, then you're not going to care a hoot about protecting them or voting for issues that would protect them."

The dictionary change may reflect a broader, more alarming trend of children losing connection with nature.

Termed "nature deficit" by Richard Louv, author of Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder, Louv points to research

that shows today's children spend 50 percent less time outdoors when compared to 20 years ago.

Instead, children spend an average of 6.5 hours a day "plugged in" to television, computers, and electronic media.

During this same period, childhood obesity rates and cases of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder have increased.

Recent studies cited at the Children & Nature network indicate that children who play outside in nature are healthier both physically and mentally, have higher self-esteem, cooperate more with others, are more creative, have higher test scores and do better in school.

Those students also feel more connected to nature and will be tomorrow's conservation leaders.

When was the last time your children or grandchildren spent time outdoors?

If you love and respect nature, how did you learn that appreciation?

Did you, like many adults, spend your childhood wandering in the woods, climbing trees, catching frogs in the creek, chasing lightning bugs in the backyard, listening to owls hoot in the trees and watching the stars twinkle overhead at night?

Or did you learn to love nature

from your parents during hunting trips, or on family vacations, watching bears in Yellowstone or camping in our state parks?

Being outdoors and immersed in nature is important to our well-being and that of our children.

Children who actively explore nature feel the connection and will bring that love for the natural world into their adult years, influencing future decisions about nature, wildlife and the land.

Children are never too young to start learning about nature.

Start close to home in your own backyard.

Take a walk, look at birds and bugs.

Plant flowers for the butterflies and hummingbirds.

Go fishing or hunting, paddle a canoe down a creek, or watch bats fly.

Hike or bike down a trail. Camp in a state park.

Share your knowledge and appreciation with others and help the wonder of nature spread... before it's too late.

For more information about "nature deficit disorder," please visit the Children & Nature Network at www.childrenandnature.org.

For ideas on exploring nature with children, please check out the Texas Parks and Wildlife website at www.tpwd.state.tx.us.



One of the many "Snow Scenes" that popped up around Eagle Lake during the brief winter weather last Friday afternoon.

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