

# TEXAS PRAIRIE

FROM THE NATIVE PRAIRIES ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

## Blaze

June 1, 2018

### ***A Financially Self-Sustaining Prairie***

***Reflecting on NPAT's mission to protect, to restore and to educate***, we are proud of the platform our landowners and members have created: sharing invaluable lessons learned first-hand. This is making visible impacts on private and public 'prairies' (through methods, cooperation, volunteering time, and rethinking how **we can make a difference**). Illustrations can be found in The Kirchoff Family's restoration efforts. The 4 siblings have been featured in NPAT's eNewsletters. Don is a member of NPAT's board of directors and the San Antonio NPAT Chapter. He and his siblings are self-taught 'prairie restorers' of their land in Wilson County. They freely provide NPAT their documented 'trials-and-errors', challenges, obstacles, and rewards for us to publish; they have shared how as a family they defined and are working to achieve goals, including **Leaving a Financially Self-Sustaining Prairie**. Open the link for their report and more photos.

Top Left: Don Kirchoff standing in 6' tall prairie grass prior to cutting in 2017.

Top Right: Grasses in fields selected for haying (in 2018) are allowed to reach max growth & seed production.

Bottom Left: Hay being cut by local farmer.

Bottom Right: Peaceful field after the hay is cut and baled!



### **PRAIRIE CONSERVATION AWARENESS**

*Each month we feature one NPAT PRAIRIE,  
one Texas BIRD, one NATIVE GRASS & one BOOK OF THE MONTH.*

### **PRAIRIE of the MONTH: RIESEL PRAIRIE** (one of NPAT'S very FIRST Prairies) A remnant of the Blackland Prairie Ecoregion.

**Riesel Prairie** was permanently protected for future generations in 1994 when a past president of NPAT, Dr. Paul Mezynski, and his wife, Virginia Mezynski, donated the prairie to NPAT. We remain the steward of this tallgrass remnant prairie of the Blackland Prairie.

***Can 5-acres be a bona fide  
'Texas Prairie'?***



Photo of Eastern Gama Grass on Riesel Prairie by Terri White 06-2017.

It's bordered by farm land on 3 sides and a county road on the other. It has supported many native grasses which define our Texas prairies: **Bluestems** (big, little, brushy, eastern, spike silver); **Indiangrass**; **Sideoats grama**; **buffalograss**; **Texas cupgrass**; **dropseed grasses**; and **Texas bluegrass**. **Vines, herbs, and wildflowers** have also thrived on this small space from time to time!

NPAT's early surveys of Riesel Prairie identified invasive species, indicating restoration efforts were required to relieve the stress and inject life into Riesel Prairie's dormant seeds and habitats. We sought guidance from TPWD, followed their processes, and they recommended TPWD's "PRESCRIBED FIRE PLAN for Use on Private Lands". Detailed emergency plans were defined specifically for Riesel Prairie, the date was set, and a 10-foot firebreak was created to secure the parameter. TPWD conducted the prescribed burn in March of 2016. See "before and after" pictures on Riesel Prairie's webpage. It is AMAZING how new plant life appeared within 4 weeks' time which led to habitat restoration!

**WE NEED YOUR HELP at RIESEL PRAIRIE for ONE DAY**  
(Riesel Prairie is located in Falls County, near Marlin, east of Temple.)

Phillip Quast conducted our annual monitoring survey of Riesel Prairie in late 2017 and observed the "encroachment of non-native, invasive species, and woody tree and shrub species" since TPWD conducted the prescribed burn just 26 months prior. We are asking for help from one or two individuals to assist us in treating the invasive plants. This can be accomplished in a short period of time. If you can spare a few hours please send Phillip an email to coordinate: [phillip\\_quast@texasprairie.org](mailto:phillip_quast@texasprairie.org). **Thanks!**



**WILDFLOWER of the MONTH: THISTLE**

Several varieties of thistles are in bloom throughout Texas during the summer months:

- Texas Thistle** *Cirsium texanum*,
- Prairie Thistle** *Cirsium billii*,
- Dwarf Thistle** *Cirsium drummondii*,
- Pasture Thistle** *Cirsium discolor*, and others.

These are welcome landing zones for pollinators: monarchs and other butterflies, birds, bees, and bugs.

*Terri White photographed a bee landing atop this Texas Thistle at Riesel Prairie during NPAT's Blackland Chapter's bus tour in June, 2017.*

**Thanks, Terri!**

**BIRD of the MONTH: Find the Chuck-will's-widow, *caprimulgus carolinensis*, in this photo!** (From [Audubon Field Guide](#))

"Thought to be declining in parts of its range, possibly because of loss of habitat," [Audubon's Guide to North American Birds](#). The Chuck-will's-widow experienced a cumulative decline of 69% between 1966 and 2015 noted in a [North American Breeding Bird Survey](#)

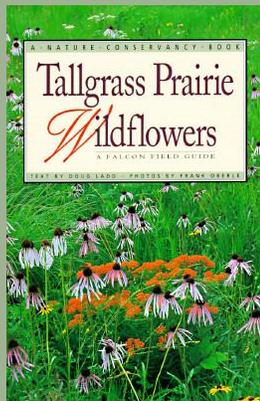


A member of the "Nightjar" family with long wings, short legs and very short bills. We celebrate **FOUR DISTINCT CHARACTERISTICS** of the Chuck-will's-widow!  
**First: it has a camouflaged appearance:** This bird is adorned with camouflaged feather patterns and

is seldom detected while resting on a tree limb or on the ground. If stirred from its rest it will flap its wings silently like an owl and fly off hovering low to the ground. **Second, it has Whiskers** (not commonly observed on birds)! These **tiny WHISKERS** extend outward from its beak toward the end of its jaw! **Just look at these drawings!** **Third, it has a very distinct "Call!"** It sounds as if it's calling its own name repeatedly, 'chuck-will's-widow' (with a little hiccup at the end). **Fourth, it only calls at night** (from dusk to ?). Note: we haven't stayed awake, outside, through the night to confirm WHEN it stops! It stops before sunrise when we hear other songbirds.

The **Chuck-will's-widow** lives in the hills & distant woods of Texas throughout the summer months. **To experience its "echoing" first-hand: get away from the noises of cities and creatures (like cicadas).** You may have to try and ignore the rollcall 'songs' of our state bird, the Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos*. After dusk listen closely for a **soft, echoing sound** in well-pronounced syllables, '**Chuck-will's-wid-ow**' is worth the effort. Hearing a couple talk to each other is a sweet sound!

**Report on Maddin Breeding Bird Survey, May 25 - 27, 2018, by Kirsti Harms (open the link for Kirsti's report)** Despite the fact summer had not "officially" arrived the intense heat presented challenges to the dedicated team. They conducted the vital breeding bird survey, took care of some chores, and even enjoyed the somewhat cooler evenings outdoors! (Breeding Bird Survey on Maddin Prairie Preserve to be filed soon with details and photos.) Right: NPAT photo of Eastern Bluebird *Sialia sialis*, 3/24/17, Maddin Prairie Preserve!



#### **BOOK OF THE MONTH:**

#### **Tallgrass Prairie Wildflowers a FALCON FIELD GUIDE**

Originally published in 1995;  
Author: Douglas M. Ladd; Illustrator: Frank Oberle Sr.

Identified as "A Nature Conservancy Book", this is a valuable reference. Prairie enthusiasts, including novices, can quickly and accurately identify tallgrass prairie plants!

#### **JUNE, 2018 @ NPAT**

*We hope to share time with you and other prairie enthusiasts!*

**June 2 - National Prairie Day:** Celebrate native grasslands, what you can learn from prairies!  
**June 5 - SANPAT, 7-8:30pm:** **Katie Boyer**, "*The Monarch Conservation Movement*". Eastern migratory population of the monarch butterfly **declined by 80-90 percent in the past 20 years.**  
**June 11 - FWNPAT, 6:30-8:30pm:** **Dan Caudle**, "*Blue Mountain Peak Ranch Prairie Surveys*".

***JUNE 16 - 7:30am-9:45pm - Blackland NPAT Chapter's 3rd Annual "NE Texas Prairies and More Tour"!! DO NOT MISS VISITING AMAZING SITES !! REGISTER NOW***

**JUNE 16 - "3rd Saturday Prairie Restoration Workday" 8am to? at Kirchoff Family Farm.**  
**June 23 - Invasive Species ID and Removal Workshop 9a-1pm. Registration is Open!**  
(Cohosts: HNPAT & CPP) Location: Lawther-Deer Park Prairie, 1222 E. Purdue Ln, Deer Park, 77536

**NPAT's Chapters** offer opportunities to meet people with common interests! Relevant talks are presented each month by dedicated and highly-qualified individuals serving in water conservation, native vegetation, habitat restoration, ecological practices, and much more, whose knowledge benefits landowners, nature conservationists, wildlife experts, and the rest of us who are dedicated to **sharing knowledge - for the future of our great prairies!**

*Learn more about conservation and flora and fauna in your area!*  
**NPAT MEMBERSHIP NOT REQUIRED -- ADMISSION IS FREE!!!**

**Support Us with Your Donation!**  
***WE ARE ALL CONNECTED! Our actions affect many other living things!***