

Native Plant Society of Texas



Tyler Chapter

Promote the conservation, research, and utilization of native plants and plant habitats of Texas through education, outreach, and example.

October 2009

Vol. VII No. 2

Next Chapter Meeting

**Monday
October 5th @ 7:00 PM
Fairwood United Methodist Church
1712 Old Omen Rd
Tyler, TX**

October Program

The Galapagos Islands: Natural History and Biogeography

Dr. Lynn Sherrod, Professor Emeritus (UTTyler).

Dr. Sherrod gave this lecture to a group of Environmental Science graduate students at Oxford University a few years ago. These islands are remote and of volcanic origin and support a wide variety of endemic plant and animal species. They have been used as a living laboratory for the study of evolution. He will present examples of these endemic species and try to explain their place in the nature of these remarkable islands.

See his write-up to the left.

Meet at Posados for dinner at 5:00 on Monday before the meeting.

Herb Jarrell

President's Message

Fall is here. Some of the leaves are beginning to fall, and a few are beginning to color. My beauty berry (*Callicarpa americana*) has lots of fuchsia berries on it, and the birds have already sampled some. The berries don't make natural dye like the Poke (*Phytolacca americana*) berries do, though. I've tried. The wild ageratum or mistflower

(*Eupatorium coelestinum*) is such a pretty color and the big goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*) has just started. Don't forget that it does NOT cause hay fever. It's the rag weed that is probably growing next to it that is the culprit.

I hope that some of you will come to our State Symposium on October 15. There are some really good papers and field trips—and good food. You can see from the State NPSOT newsletter what a wonderful place the Butterfly Conservatory is, in the article by the president of the chapter that has planned the Symposium. Paul is the person who planned and planted the different habitats represented there. The Conservatory is being opened free especially for Symposium attendees on Thursday afternoon.

However, if you can't come to the Symposium, the Fall Gardening Conference and Bulb Sale will be that same weekend—Saturday, October 17 at the Rose Garden Center. NPSOT will have a table there and you can help tell people about native plants and help “sell” the seeds that we packaged last meeting. (We always ask for donations.) We have plenty of garden flower seeds, but if you have any more native wildflower seeds, bring them to the chapter meeting on October 5 and we can package them too. Ron and I won't be at the meeting because we have to meet with the chapter at Wichita Falls to tie up any loose ends. We will hate to miss Dr. Sherrod's talk on the Galapagos, so y'all make up for our absence.

Ruth Loper

THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

Lynn Sherrod

The Galapagos Islands are a series of remote, oceanic islands formed by volcanic activity. They lie some 600 miles west of Ecuador along the Equator. Because of the influence of the north-flowing Humboldt Current, they are relatively cool and dry in spite of their equatorial geography. The waters surrounding them are very cool.

The Galapagos Islands were first described by Fra Tomas Berlanga in 1535. They were claimed for Spain and the various islands were given Spanish names. They were called *Islas Encantadas* (Enchanted Islands).

In 1593, English pirates first visited the islands and, because they were uninhabited, began to use them as a re-stocking location. Although there is no fresh water anywhere on the islands, the attractions were the abundance of life such as a variety of seabirds and most famously, large numbers of giant land tortoises. The wildlife was completely unafraid of humans (and remains so today), so the collection of large numbers was very easy. The giant tortoises were wrestled aboard, turned upside down, and used as the voyage progressed for fresh meat. These creatures could remain alive for months in this state.

Whalers began using these islands for the same purpose as early as 1793. Large numbers of ships wreaked havoc on the animal population. Also, some of their shipboard companions such as rats, cats, goats, and pigs escaped and established themselves on the islands. These invaders began their own depredations on the native flora and fauna.

Perhaps the most well-known visitor to the Galapagos Islands was Charles Darwin. In 1835, H.M.S. Beagle stopped here for about 6 weeks on a round-the-world mapping expedition. They had already mapped the coast of South America and would spend several more years mapping as they eventually returned to England.

Darwin was acting as ship's naturalist and was collecting specimens of rocks, plants and animals from every spot the Beagle put into shore. He sent these specimens back to England for cataloguing. He was intrigued by the strange flora and fauna of the Galapagos and collected numerous specimens while there. Today, we know that some of these specimens provided evidence for his eventual Theory of Evolution by Natural Selection, but this was 25 years into the future. Darwin did not recognize at the time the true uniqueness of these islands.

In 1904 and again in 1932 major scientific expeditions from the United States visited and catalogued the variety of flora and fauna. During WWII, the Allies established a naval base on the islands for defense against submarines and a landing strip was constructed to provide air support. After the war, all the facilities were turned over to Ecuador. Tourists today land on an air strip constructed during the 1940's.

The islands have belonged to Ecuador for many years and are now considered a province. In 1959, all the islands were established as a National Park. More recently, they have been designated as a World Heritage Site. Tourism began in the 1960's.

Although the islands were originally uninhabited, Ecuador initially sent prisoners there. More recently several small towns have been established. The current population is between 40,000 and 50,000. The majority of economic support comes from tourism.

Because of the fragile nature of these islands, Ecuador has attempted to limit visitors. Since access can be strictly controlled, this has had some success. However, tourists mean dollars and, for a poor South American country, hard to ignore. Therefore, limits on visitors are mostly controlled by levying very high visitor's fees. It is also required that every visiting group use a licensed, Ecuadorian guide and the boat crew must also be Ecuadorian. Visits by private boats are strictly regulated.

The biological uniqueness of these islands is unparalleled. The greatest variety among animals is the bird life. Most of these are not unique to these islands but are found in other locations around the Pacific. Exceptions to this are the famous "finches" and others such as mockingbird, coromorant, and the world's only equatorial penguin.

Land animals are relatively rare. There are no native mammals or amphibians. The top predator is a hawk. However, among the truly unique reptiles of the world are two species of iguana and a giant land tortoise.

Plant life is almost totally endemic with the exception of mangroves. Other plants include several unique species of cactus, composites, and nightshades.

One of the central questions of biology when looking at a unique place like the Galapagos is, "How did this uniqueness come to be?" When considering the remoteness of the islands and their volcanic origins, answering this question requires study of such matters as dispersal, reproduction, food requirements, habitat requirements, genetics, etc. In short, such an answer involves almost all the elements of biology and can require years of patient study.

Fortunately, many of the answers have been provided. There is solid speculation about other answers. In this talk, I will point out the uniqueness of these islands and try to explain some of the mystery about how such a unique flora and fauna came to be here and how it subsists.

Symposium 2009
People, Prairies: Partners
Wichita Falls
October 15-18

Why should you come? Lots of reasons – most of them good. (The only bad one is that I might haunt you if you don't!) Seriously, Wichita Falls is a nice place to visit – traffic is usually easier to manage than in Tyler. If I can do it, then none of you should have trouble. The Howard Johnson Plaza hotel is not expensive: \$64 plus tax is a good deal. The papers, Silent Auction, and Vendors are all at the hotel, and River Bend Nature Center – the other site for Workshops – is close by and easy to reach. Registration is only \$120 this year, and that includes evening meals on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. So there: economically, it is a good deal.

You will have a good time: aside from the chance to visit with NPSOT people from across the state – some of whom you see only at Symposiums – you will have some unique experiences. Try buffalo burgers on Thursday night, and listen to some Cowboy Poets. Meet Native Americans on Friday night and try roast buffalo. See the Priddy Conservatory at River Bend – there may not be another like it in the state.

Hopefully, you will learn some things: about the Prairie (Rolling Plains) and the Western Cross Timbers, about the People who have lived in the area, and about how we are working to be Partners with the land and preserve and restore it. There will be papers and Field Trips covering all of these topics, plus Workshops to give you some hands-on experiences. (No, you won't have to skin a buffalo!)

Those of you who have attended past symposiums know how much you can get out of one. For our new members, this is a great opportunity for learning about our world and about our organization. Don't miss it!

Ron Loper

Field Trips

No Field trip is scheduled at this time

Sonniah Hill & Fran McKinney

Other Events

Fall gardening Conference, free

Saturday Oct 17 Rose Garden 8:30-11:15

bulb sale 11:30-2:30-- List of bulbs to come.

Need some members to man a table to tell about natives and sell our seed packets.

Fall Plant sale, free

SFA (Stephen F. Austin) Arboretum Oct 3, 9 AM

Membership news

There are no new members at this time

Kathryn Greene

TEXAS NATIVE PLANT WEEK CELEBRATION

This summer, the Texas Legislature declared the third week of October each year to be Texas Native Plant Week. To recognize and promote this, the Tyler chapter of NPSOT will have a Native Plant Conference open to the public on October 24. It will be at the Nature Center on Hwy 848, from 10:00 to 12:00. We will have David Sierra, from the Nature Center, talk about plants for attracting birds and butterflies, and Vanessa Adams, from Caddo Wildlife Management Area, tell of her problems with invasives. Then we will have a question and answer session by our own members. Everyone is invited to bring a picnic lunch and stay for a nature walk, beginning about 1:00. We have ordered wildflower seed from Native American Seed that will be repackaged by Elizabeth Parks into individual handouts, along with a brochure on invasives. This year is a good start. Next year, we can plan something more intensive. Y'all come, and tell your friends.

Ruth Loper