

San Antonio Audubon Society

# AUDUBON NEWS

A Conservation and Birding Club since 1954

Volume 63, Number 5

September/October 2017

## The Mexican Monsoon By Mike Scully

### Inside this issue:

Field Trips	2
Field Trip Recaps	3
New Members	3
Monthly Meetings	4
Annual Dinner	5
SAAS-Y Notes	7

The Eastern race of the Purple Martin, totally dependent as it is on human-supplied housing, is among the best-studied of our North American breeding birds. In particular, the relationship between the latitude at which a given martin population breeds and the timing of the onset of nesting has long been apparent. South Texas martins commonly begin nesting in mid-March to early April, whereas at the northern extreme of the breeding range in Saskatchewan, martins begin breeding in late May. Canadian martins migrating north in spring may encounter post-breeding southern martins already heading back south. The last of the various North American Purple Martin populations to start breeding each year are those of the Southwestern race native to Southern Arizona and Northwest Mexico. Southwestern Purple Martins nest in abandoned Gila Woodpecker cavities in saguaro cacti. These desert martins commence nesting in June, rearing their young during the hottest and seemingly most inhospitable months of the year, breeding as late as they do in order to exploit the insect populations present during the Mexican monsoon.

The term "monsoon" was originally applied to seasonal rains falling on the Indian subcontinent. The mechanism behind these monsoons occurs when warm air rising over arid landscapes creates areas of low pressure, resulting in an influx of humid air from the adjacent seas. A similar process occurs in the springtime along the West Coast of Mexico, bringing moisture by June from the Gulf of California to the arid slopes of the Sierra Madre Occidental and creating rainy spells in the states of Sinaloa, Sonora, Durango and Chihuahua. By July, monsoon weather has arrived in Arizona and New Mexico, also drawing in moisture from the Gulf of Mexico, resulting in increased thunderstorm activity in the Big Bend region. Along the California Coast, the cooler temperatures of the Pacific inhibit this phenomenon over much of Southern California, but by September, when the monsoons begin to subside, monsoon-related thunderstorm activity may reach as far as Southern Utah.

Within the affected regions, topography greatly affects the local distribution of precipitation, with precipitation further varying in amount between years. The net annual effect, however, is that this broad geographical area experiences a mid- to late-

summer blossoming of biological productivity reminiscent of that which occurs across the Temperate Zones each spring. Not surprisingly, many bird species native to these otherwise arid regions initiate breeding in response to these rains. In summer, birders flock to the Southern highlands of Arizona, braving the heat in search of such monsoon specialties as Sulphur-bellied Flycatchers, Five-striped and Botteri's Sparrows, Blue-throated, Broad-billed and Violet-crowned Hummingbirds, and Elegant Trogons.



The Yellow-billed Cuckoo is one species whose breeding pattern is affected by the Mexican monsoon.

Photo by Lora Render

and of finding a mate. For at least 15 North American bird species, a significant portion of the population migrates shortly after breeding to Northwest Mexico and

(Continued on p. 4)

## SAN ANTONIO AUDUBON CALENDAR: SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER

Please call the trip leaders if you have questions. Last-minute changes to field trips will be posted at [saaudubon.org](http://saaudubon.org), [www.facebook.com/saaudubon/](http://www.facebook.com/saaudubon/) or sent by email via SATXBirds. Please arrive early.

Friday, September 8, Evening

### Bracken Bat Cave

Coco Brennan will lead us on this evening trip to see the bats emerge from the Bracken Bat Cave. Contact Georgina Schwartz at 210/342-2073 or [gbird@att.net](mailto:gbird@att.net) to RSVP and receive meeting time and directions. You will be expected to sign a liability release. This trip is free, but please consider making a donation to Bat Conservation International.

Saturday, September 9, 8:00 AM

### SAAS Beginners' Bird Walk

Meet leader Georgina Schwartz (210/342-2073) at the Judson Nature Trails, 246 Viesca Street. We have some binocs to lend out and you don't have to be a beginner to come on this walk. From the 5900 block of Broadway, turn west on Ogden Street and drive to the stop sign at Greeley Street. You'll see a sign to Judson Nature Trails. Turn left, go one block and turn right on Viesca, then into parking lot on left.

Tuesday, September 19, 8:00 AM

### Crescent Bend Nature Park

Meet Sandi Wheeler ([wheels5683@gmail.com](mailto:wheels5683@gmail.com)) in the parking lot of the park. From San Antonio, take IH-10 east to the FM 1518 exit and go north toward Schertz. Look for a brown park sign at Schafer Road. Turn right and go 3 miles to the park. Entrance will be on your left before Cibolo Creek. Bring water.

Tuesday September 26, 8:00 AM

### Avenue A in Brackenridge Park

Meet leader Lora Reynolds (210/414-0792) in the Brackenridge Park parking lot on Red Oak, which intersects with Mulberry in the park. Bring water.

Saturday, September 30, 8:00 AM

### Castroville Regional Park

Meet leader Georgina Schwartz (210/342-2073) in the upper parking lot of the park. Take US 90 west to Castroville. At the end of the Medina River bridge as you enter Castroville, turn left in front of the Landmark Inn onto Florence Street and follow the signs to the park. Bring water and snacks; lunch at a local restaurant.

Saturday, October 7, 4:00 PM Hike, 5:30 PM Meal

### SAAS Annual Picnic

Join us at the Headwaters of the San Antonio River behind the University of Incarnate Word. SAAS VP Alex Antram ([alex.antram@amormeus.org](mailto:alex.antram@amormeus.org)) will lead a walk at 4 PM; we'll eat at 5:30 PM. The location has water, restrooms and picnic tables, but no electricity, so bring a dish to share that does not require heating and bring a chair, if you wish. SAAS will supply water and iced tea, cups, plates and plastic ware. Enter the UIW campus from Hildebrand and turn left. Follow the road around to back of the sports complex. Find the map here: <https://www.headwaters-iw.org/visit-1/>

Saturday, October 14, 8:00 AM

### SAAS Beginners' Bird Walk

See Sept. 9 field trip for info and directions.

Sunday, October 15, 8:00 AM

### Crescent Bend Nature Park

See Sept. 19 field trip for info and directions.

Thursday, October 26, 8:00 AM

### Haggard Ranch

We will meet Metha at her ranch in South Bexar County. Drive south on I-35, about 4 miles south of Loop 1604 and take Exit 137 (Shepherd Road). Go left across the bridge and then left on the access road. Drive 0.5 mile to the gate and cattle guard. Drive over the second cattle guard and go left at the fork to the house. For more info, contact Metha 210/622-3886.

Saturday, October 28, 8:00 AM

### Choke Canyon State Park

Meet leader Mike Creese (210/479-5552) at the entrance parking lot of the Calliham Unit. Go south on I-37 and take the exit to Three Rivers. In town, turn west on FM 72 and go past the South Shore Unit for about 10 miles. The road to the park is on the right. There is an admission fee or use a State Parks Pass. Bring water, snacks, and lunch.

Tuesday, October 31, 8:00 AM

### Medina River Natural Area

Meet leader Helen Rejzek ([hmr78253@gmail.com](mailto:hmr78253@gmail.com)) in the main parking lot of the Natural Area. From Loop 410 south, take the Palo Alto/SH 16 exit. Drive 4.2 miles south on SH 16; the park entrance is on the left just before the Medina River bridge. Bring water and snacks.

## SAAS FIELD TRIP RECAPS

View in-depth field trip reports at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SATXbirds/> and search using the message numbers below.

### Warbler Woods, 6/25

Led by Sandi Wheeler; hosted by Don and Susan Schaezler. Message #: 24800. Species: 35. Highlights: Northern Bobwhite, Great Horned Owl, Common Nighthawk, Chuck-will's Widow.

### Judson Nature Trails, 7/8

Led by Georgina Schwartz. Message #: 24812. Species: 28. Highlights: Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Bronzed Cowbird.

### Victoria, 7/15

Led by Chris Bailey. Birded Victoria Riverside Park, Invista Wetlands, and Saxet Lakes. Species: 63. Highlights: Wood Stork, Mississippi Kite, Purple Gallinule, Roseate Spoonbill.

### Crescent Bend Nature Park, 7/18

Led by Sandi Wheeler. Message #: 24824. Species: 26. Highlights: Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting.

### Crownridge Canyon Natural Area, 7/25

Led by Karen Moulder. Message #: 24828. Species: 20. Highlights: Hutton's Vireo, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Audubon's Oriole.

## MITCHELL LAKE MONTHLY BIRDING TOURS

### No reservation necessary

1st Sunday: Sept. 3 & Oct. 1, 8:00AM  
2nd Sunday: Sept. 10 & Oct. 8, 8:00 AM  
2nd Tuesday: Sept. 12 & Oct. 10, 8:00 AM  
3rd Sunday: Sept. 17 & Oct. 15, 8:00 AM  
4th Sunday: Sept. 24 & Oct. 22, 8:00 AM

**\$8 for non-members; Free for members**

Visit <http://mitchelllake.audubon.org/events> or email [mlac@audubon.org](mailto:mlac@audubon.org) or 210/628-1639

## CIBOLO NATURE CENTER

Visit [www.cibolo.org](http://www.cibolo.org) to view the calendar of events or call 830/249-4614.

## WELCOME NEW SAAS MEMBERS!

Kelvin Murphy  
245 Rainbow Drive  
Livingston, TX  
703/624-0306

Carolyn Valdivieso  
26238 Tuscan Woods  
San Antonio, TX 78261  
210/413-0067

Mathew & Teresa Wyatt  
211 Lindell Place  
San Antonio, TX 78212  
210/416-5173

## GOVERNMENT CANYON HIKES

Visit the website for info about the many hikes and programs offered monthly at Government Canyon. Natural Area fees apply. Reservations are required for most activities: [www.friendsofsgc.org](http://www.friendsofsgc.org) or 210/688-9055

## SAN ANTONIO BOTANICAL GARDEN

Visit [www.sabot.org](http://www.sabot.org) or call 210/207-3250. Located at 555 Funston, San Antonio, TX 78209.

Bird Walks: Third Saturday bird walks led by guides at 9 AM on Sept. 16 and Oct. 21.  
*Free to SABG members; \$10 non-members*

## CORPUS CHRISTI HAWK WATCH

The annual Hawk Watch at Hazel Bazemore County Park takes place daily from 9 AM to 5 PM from August 1 through November 15. Everyone is welcome! Educational interpreters will help you learn more about migration ecology, raptor identification, and the organization's research efforts.

**September 22-24, 2017 is the annual [Celebration of Flight](#) festival at the Hawk Watch.**

Directions from San Antonio: Take I-37 toward Corpus Christi and exit to 77 South. Almost immediately, exit to 624 on the right and go to the park on the right soon after Calallen High School.

For more info:

<https://hawkwatch.org/migration/item/82-corpus-christi-hawkwatch>

# SAAS MEETINGS CALENDAR

**Thursday, September 7 • 7:00 PM**  
**San Antonio Zoo Education Center**  
**Maine's Hog Island Nature Camp**  
**for Educators**  
**Kathy Alloway**

Join us for retired teacher Kathy Alloway's quick slide show of her trip to Hog Island and of activities of the afterschool Nature Club at Fair Oaks Ranch Elementary. Kathy retired a year ago after teaching elementary school-aged children for over 30 years. She has always been committed to creating memories for her students by providing engaging hands on activities—especially in math and science. Her second grade classes at Fair Oaks Ranch regularly planted, tended, and harvested from a vegetable garden on campus. A visit to her classroom by Monarch butterfly advocate Mary Kennedy and her butterflies began a relationship that inspired monitoring bluebird nesting boxes on campus, made possible Kathy's visit to Maine's Hog Island Nature Camp for Educators, and initiated the collaboration with Mary on an afterschool Nature Club for Fair Oaks students.

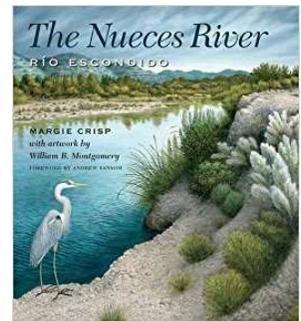


**2018 DUCK STAMPS:** Buy your 2018 Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation "Duck" Stamp at the September meeting. Just \$25 to aid conservation efforts!

**Thursday, October 5 • 7:00 PM**  
**San Antonio Zoo Education Center**  
**The Nueces River: Rio Escondido**  
**Margie Crisp, Author**

In the Texas imagination, the Nueces River has staked out its reputation as belonging to a wild, desolate land frequented by outlaws and filled with herds of wild mustangs and longhorn cattle. First appearing on early Spanish maps as the Río Escondido, or hidden river, it was later named Río de las Nueces after the abundant pecan trees along its banks.

Margie Crisp is a naturalist, writer and nationally exhibited artist whose artwork can be found in private and public collections in the United States and Mexico. In her new book, *The Nueces River*, she and illustrator William B. Montgomery follow the river from its fresh, clear headwaters on the Edwards Plateau, through the mesquite and prickly pear of the South Texas Plains, to the river's end in Nueces and Corpus Christi Bays on the Gulf of Mexico. Through vivid prose and paintings, they record their travels as they explore the length of the river on foot, in kayaks and fishing boat, ultimately weaving a portrait of today's Nueces. Capturing the river's subtle beauty, abundant wildlife, diverse culture and unique history of exploration, conflict and settlement, they reveal the untold story of this enigmatic river. Margie's previous book is the award-winning *River of Contrasts: The Texas Colorado*.



## **Mexican Monsoon** (Continued from p. 1)

remains there for some weeks while molting before continuing on to the winter range. Most of these 15 species breed on or around the Great Plains and points west, regions typically dry and relatively unproductive in late summer. These species include the Varied, Painted and Lazuli Buntings, Western Kingbirds, Western Tanagers, Lark Sparrows, and Bullock's Orioles.

Recent isotope analysis has shown that five of these species—Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Yellow-breasted Chat, Cassin's Vireo, and Hooded and Orchard

Orioles—can actually breed a second time upon their arrival in Mexico, perhaps hundreds or even thousands of miles away from their earlier breeding location. What proportion of the total populations of these five species breed a second time this way, and exactly where in North America they bred or attempted to breed earlier in the season, has yet to be determined.

Due to the difficulty of accessing many areas in Mexico, and because the rains occur during the hottest time of the year, it is only recently that the critical importance of the Mexican monsoon region to our avifauna has been recognized.

## AUDUBON ANNUAL DINNER 2017

**Dr. Bruce Beehler of the Smithsonian will speak at the  
2017 Audubon Annual Dinner:**

**Thursday, November 2, 6 PM @ The San Antonio Zoo Beastro Restaurant.**

Guests may enter the zoo at **6 PM** through the front gate (names of those who have purchased tickets will be on a list) and may stroll through the zoo to the Beastro for dinner at **7 PM**. Dr. Beehler will speak right after dinner.

Tickets for the dinner are **\$25 per person** and include Zoo Admission, a delicious dinner and the talk. **You may purchase tickets at the Audubon Society meetings in September and October OR you may send a check made out to SAAS for the number of tickets you want to purchase AND your meal preference to:**

San Antonio Audubon Society, Annual Dinner, 5150 Broadway, #257, San Antonio, TX 78209-5710.

**PLEASE INDICATE WHICH ENTRÉE OPTION YOU PREFER WHEN YOU PURCHASE YOUR TICKETS\*:**

**Greek-style Chicken Breast stuffed with spinach, white cheese, and sundried tomatoes**

**OR**

**Grilled Portobello Mushroom Steak (VEGAN)**

Both Entrée choices will be served with:

Greek Salad (Vegan Friendly)

Lemon Thyme Rice Pilaf (Vegan Friendly)

Rolls with butter on tables

Dessert: Brownie dusted with powdered sugar and berries (Vegan Friendly)

Iced Tea and Water

**\*DEADLINE FOR PURCHASING TICKETS TO THIS NOT TO BE MISSED EVENT IS  
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 27.**

An email with further instructions will go out on October 30 to those who have purchased tickets.

If you have any questions, please contact Patsy Inglet [saasforbirds@gmail.com](mailto:saasforbirds@gmail.com)

### ABOUT OUR GUEST SPEAKER

**Dr. Bruce Beehler**, guest speaker at our Nov. 2 annual dinner, is an ornithologist and research associate of the Bird Division of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History. Prior to this appointment, Beehler worked for Conservation International, the Wildlife Conservation Society, Counterpart International and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.



Dr. Beehler graduated from Williams College. He earned his Masters and PhD studying the behavioral ecology of the birds-of-paradise at Princeton University. He has been an authority on New Guinea birds for several decades, having authored or co-authored several major works on the biodiversity this, the largest tropical island, including *The Birds of Paradise (1998)*, *The Birds of New Guinea (1986, 2014)* and the two-volume *Ecology of Papua (2007)*.

To the general public, he is best known for having co-led a widely published rapid assessment survey on biological diversity in 2005 to the Foja Mountains, Papua, where he, with an international team of 11 scientists, made a number of scientific discoveries.

Dr. Beehler will have copies of some of his books for signing and sale at the dinner:

*Lost Worlds* (Yale 2008): About tropical rainforests and their importance to human well-being

*Field Guide to Birds of New Guinea* (Princeton 2015)

*Birds of New Guinea: Checklist* (Princeton 2016)

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## *Be patient, listen, watch*

By Forrest Milburn

*Reprinted with permission from San Antonio Express-News, July 9, 2017*

Spotting movement out of the corner of her eye, Georgina Schwartz points her binoculars to the sky as she motions the group behind her to join in.

This isn't the San Antonio woman's first venture into bird-watching, although it was for many who followed her lead.

"Is that a plane up there?" Schwartz asked.

Excitement quickly followed.

"No," she said, gleefully, "it's a big white bird."

In the cool early hours of Saturday morning, Schwartz joined several aspiring bird-watchers for her monthly tour of local bird species at Judson Nature Trails in Alamo Heights. The group, part of the San Antonio Audubon Society, is a mishmash of experience levels, from novices just trying to dip their toes into the bird-watching waters to self-identified professionals who scout for avians every day.

With more than 40 years of experience, Schwartz is the designated leader of the group, but there are two other experienced bird-watchers who joined her Saturday.

"It's being useful, I think, bird-watchers are compulsive," Schwartz said, when asked why she's bird-watched for so long. "A friend once told me that my hobby was a lot like my job, and I was a hematologist. When you do that, you're classifying blood cells; here, you're classifying birds."

Many of the more experienced birders said there isn't a time when they stop learning, especially with the next rare species just waiting to be spotted.

For Rick O'Brian, 75, getting to spend time outdoors is reason enough to come back every month.

"When else do you get to dress up like Jungle Jack Hanna and it's not even Halloween?" said O'Brian, a San Antonio resident who has bird-watched for about three years.

For a few hours Saturday, Schwartz and the group classified several local, general species of birds that

are plentiful for the region — including the mockingbird. Some of the "biggest hits of the day," Schwartz said, was spotting a bronzed cowbird, red-tailed hawks and a cuckoo.

"That's a summer bird, that's a good bird," Schwartz told the group, referring to the cuckoo.

"That's the advantage of having multiple eyes," she added. "If I'm looking down, then someone else finds a prized bird."

It takes both sight and hearing to excel at being a birder, Schwartz said. Oftentimes, if a bird is difficult to find, a watcher can rely on the bird's familiar call to categorize it, she said.

"This lady will catch more birds in one day than I will in a lifetime," said Ozza Regueira, a San Antonio resident who has gone on five of Schwartz's tours over the past year and a half.

About halfway through the trail, Schwartz paused to test how much information the group had absorbed.

"And now what did I say about mourning doves?"

Many in the group just looked around at each other, at the ground or at the trees for another bird.

"Heck if I know," someone in the group said quietly.

That's OK, Schwartz said, because bird-watching is something that doesn't always come easy to everyone. There's one primary piece of advice she offers beginners: Learn to take your time. It can be complicated to classify a species.

"Patience is something you have to have. A lot of the greatest birders I've known have been patient, more so than I ever am," she said. "Besides, if you don't like it, go do something else and come back. Everybody is welcome."

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*Editor's Note: Georgina Schwartz is a member of the San Antonio Audubon Society Board of Directors. She leads the SAAS Beginners' Bird Walk at the Judson Nature Trails on the second Saturday of each month.*

## SAAS-Y NOTES

### REMEMBRANCES

SAAS member Carol Fawcett died of leukemia on May 23. We send our condolences to her husband, Tom.

Jean Petersen, frequently active at Mitchell Lake events, died June 12 after a valiant battle with cancer. We send our condolences to her husband, LaMarr.

### SAAS DONATIONS

At the August SAAS meeting, Treasurer Betty Walters announced that SAAS donated money to the Mitchell Lake Audubon Center, Warbler Woods and the Land Heritage Institute. The Board decided that the checks would be mailed out to the organizations this year rather than presenting them in person at meetings.

### NOMINATE YOUR SAAS HONOREE OF THE YEAR

Each year, San Antonio Audubon Society honors individuals who have provided exceptional service to SAAS this year or over an extended period of time. To submit a person for this award, please provide to any board member a written description of why your nominee deserves the award. The deadline is October 20. Board members are listed to the right. The Board of Directors will make the selection at the October Board Meeting from names proposed by the membership.

### SAAS Board of Directors Meeting Back of Donkey Barn at the SA Zoo Thursday • Sept. 28 • 6:00 PM Thursday • Oct. 26 • 6:00 PM

All are invited. Contact Christine Turnbull for more info: [cbsturnbull@hotmail.com](mailto:cbsturnbull@hotmail.com)

### SAN ANTONIO AUDUBON NEWS

Editor: Lora Reynolds  
Contributing Editor and Mailing: Georgina Schwartz  
Mailing Labels: Tom Inglet  
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### San Antonio Audubon Society

5150 Broadway #257  
San Antonio TX 78209-5710  
[info@saaudubon.org](mailto:info@saaudubon.org)  
[www.saaudubon.org](http://www.saaudubon.org)

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SAAS NEEDS YOU  
TO VOLUNTEER!  
[info@saaudubon.org](mailto:info@saaudubon.org)

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Bird Records  
Dodge Engleman-----[birdreports@saaudubon.org](mailto:birdreports@saaudubon.org)  
Education/Outreach  
Patsy Inglet-----[info@saaudubon.org](mailto:info@saaudubon.org)  
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Newsletter, Lora Reynolds-----[editor@saaudubon.org](mailto:editor@saaudubon.org)  
Website, Bill Collins-----[web@saaudubon.org](mailto:web@saaudubon.org)

### SAAS Membership

For those few of you still receiving your SAAS newsletter by U.S. Postal Service, the first line of your mailing label includes your membership type and the date your current membership expires. The date on the label is the only "notice" you will receive; if your membership expires, we must stop sending you the newsletter. Therefore, please pay attention to the expiry data on the label and renew when appropriate. We want you to continue participating in and supporting SAAS efforts.

If you receive the SAAS newsletter by email, you will receive a membership renewal notice by email. You will also have the advantage of receiving the newsletter in color.

Although we no longer mail out a printed membership roster to everyone, a PDF copy is available by email from the membership secretary at [members@saaudubon.org](mailto:members@saaudubon.org)

SAN ANTONIO AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC  
5150 BROADWAY #257  
SAN ANTONIO, TX 78209-5710

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Donation: Special Projects Fund                      \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Donation: Judson Trails Fund                              \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Donation: General Operating Fund                      \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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Payments can also be made online at: <[www.saaudubon.org/membership.html](http://www.saaudubon.org/membership.html)>

**MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR SAAS EVENTS! (See p. 4)**  
**7 PM, Thursday, Sept. 7, Kathy Alloway: My Hog Island Trip**  
**7 PM, Thursday, Oct. 5, Margie Crisp, Author, The Nueces River**