

## PRESENTER BIOGRAPHIES

### **Janet Rizner Backs**

University of Illinois – Chicago

Janet Rizner Backs is currently a research assistant professor in the Ashley Lab at the University of Illinois at Chicago where she was awarded a PhD in Biological Sciences in 2014. Her dissertation is entitled “Population structure and gene flow in two rare, isolated *Quercus* species: *Q. hinckleyi* and *Q. pacifica*”. She also has master’s degrees in Ibero-American Studies (University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1971), Chemistry (Northeastern Illinois University, 1985), and Natural Resources/Environmental Sciences (University of Illinois at Urbana--Champaign, 2008). She has been a partner in Sobek Consulting, Inc. from 1993 to the present, specializing in database design and support

### **Joshua Banta**

University of Texas - Tyler

Dr. Banta is an Assistant Professor of Biology at the University of Texas at Tyler. He completed his Ph.D. in Ecology and Evolution at Stony Brook University and his B.S. in Biology at the University Pittsburgh. His background is in the ecology, evolution, and genomics of plants, but he also does conservation biology-related research, focusing on a variety of taxa, with the Center for Environment, Biodiversity, and Conservation at UT-Tyler.

### **Heather Bass**

Botanical Research Institute of Texas

Heather Bass is a researcher at the Botanical Research Institute of Texas (BRIT) where she studies native prairie ecosystems and the use of native plants in sustainable urban landscapes. Heather received a Bachelor’s degree in Biology and a Master’s degree in Environmental and Earth Sciences from the University of Texas in Arlington. As an undergraduate she worked in Alaska researching the effects of climate change on Arctic tundra ecosystems and performed a study on the role of seed dispersal in the greening of the Arctic. The focus of Heather’s graduate thesis project was restoration of native prairie ecosystems in North Texas, where her passion for prairies grew. Heather is now working on a project examining the effects of common urban landscaping decisions on water use, pollinator habitat, and net carbon footprint, with the goal of informing more sustainable landscape design and maintenance practices on US federal properties.

### **Chris Best**

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Chris Best is a native of St. Louis, Missouri. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Plant Biochemistry from the University of Illinois in 1981 and a Master of Arts in Botany from Southern Illinois University in 1985. His thesis research on vesicular mycorrhizae in revegetated strip mine spoil led to a career in restoration ecology. From 1985 to 1989 he served as an agroforestry extensionist with the U.S. Peace Corps/CARE/INAFOR in Guatemala. From 1990 until 2006, he directed an ecological restoration program at Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge along the U.S. – Mexico border in south Texas. Chris has served since 2006 as State Botanist for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in Austin, Texas, where he is

dedicated to the conservation of rare, threatened, and endangered plants and their habitats in Texas.

**John Randall Bow**

Texas A&M University – Kingsville

John Randall Bow is the Central Texas Project Coordinator for Texas Native Seeds based in Stephenville, Texas. He has a Master of Science degree from Tarleton State University in Agronomy. He began working for the Central Texas portion of TNS this June having previously worked for the Borlaug Institute for International Agriculture with projects in South Africa.

**Katie Boyer**

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Katie Boyer is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Monarch Outreach Specialist for Texas and Oklahoma. In this role, Katie coordinates monarch conservation efforts with a variety of partners throughout both states. This position is a direct result of the unprecedented momentum to create and conserve grassland habitat for the declining monarch butterfly and other pollinators. Katie previously served as a listing biologist, working with teams of scientists to analyze the status of species under the Endangered Species Act. Katie holds a Bachelor of Science in Resource Conservation from the University of Montana and a Master of Natural Resources in Environmental Policy from Utah State University. Katie works for the Service’s Southwest Regional Office but is remotely located in the Austin Ecological Services Field Office.

**Janis Bush**

University of Texas - San Antonio

Janis Bush is a Professor of Environmental Science and the Director of the Environmental Science Academic Program at UT San Antonio. She received her doctorate at UT El Paso. She is a plant ecologist whose research has focused on factors influencing the conversion of grasslands to woodlands in the southwestern United States. More recently she has published several articles regarding oak recruitment. She has also conducted research on the puzzle sunflower, a rare species in west Texas.

**Brandon Carr**

USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service

Brandon Carr is with the USDA- Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and serves as the manager for the James E. “Bud” Smith Plant Materials Center in Knox City, Texas. He has been involved with the Plant Materials Program since 2009 focusing on plant release and technology development to meet various conservation needs throughout Texas and Oklahoma. Before coming to the Plant Materials Center, he was an assistant cotton breeder for a commercial seed company.

**Russell Castro**

USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service

Russell attended Sul Ross State University in Alpine Texas received a BS degree in Range Animal Science, majoring in Wildlife Management. Russell began his career as a Range Conservationist

working in Zapata, Bandera and Tulia, Texas. Russell worked as a District Conservationist in Edna, Texas before becoming the Area/Zone Biologist in Terrell and Weatherford Texas. He has worked as The Wildlife Biologist on the Water Resources Staff working primarily on the environmental permitting and issues associated with the NRCS Small Watershed Program, moving to the his current position as State Biologist for NRCS in Texas. Russell has leadership and responsibility for all biological actions regarding NRCS conservation efforts. Russell is versed in all aspects of biological issues effecting wildlife species, T&E species, pollinators, and wetland conservation and restoration.

**John R. Clark**

Center for Plant Conservation (CPC), CA

Dr. John Clark serves as President and CEO of the Center for Plant Conservation (CPC), a national collaborative network tasked with saving plants from extinction. CPC is a non-profit association of over 40 botanical gardens and similar organizations that work collaboratively to end plant extinction through programs in plant propagation, seed banking and long-term research and plant recovery. CPC originated at Harvard University's Arnold Arboretum in 1984 and was formerly based at the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis before moving to San Diego in late 2015 where it is now based at San Diego Zoo Global. Together, these two world class organizations work to "save plants and animals from extinction". John and his wife Steffani, an animal ecologist and conservationist, along with their four year old son Mnum, live in Escondido in North San Diego County where they enjoy the ocean, mountains and desert as often as possible.

**Laura Clark**

Texas Parks & Wildlife Department

Laura Clark is a Biologist/GIS Analyst for the Landscape Ecology Program at the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. Clark earned a Bachelor of Science in Botany and a Master of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies of Sustainability from Texas State University, wherein her Master's thesis consisted of utilizing an unmanned aerial vehicle for mapping vegetation, specifically *Tamarix ramosissima*. Her role on the Landscape Ecology team involves GIS tasks, remote sensing, maintaining the program website and social media, promoting the program and products, as well as general team support.

**Karen Clary**

University of Texas – Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

Karen is the Director of Plant Conservation programs at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center at The University of Texas at Austin. Clary provides programmatic oversight for all conservation programs and teaches "Native Plants" for the Center's Go Native U programming. Dr. Clary holds a B.S. in Anthropology from Texas A & M University, College Station, an M.S. in Anthropology from the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, and a Ph.D. in Botany from The University of Texas at Austin, where she studied speciation patterns, biogeography and taxonomy of *Yucca* L. Prior to coming to the Wildflower Center, Clary served as a Wildlife Habitat Resource Assessment Biologist at Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Austin. She worked with public and private partnerships to promote wildlife conservation through use of

environmentally friendly best practices on development projects. She was also the Lead Biologist for the Environmental Affairs Division at the Texas Department of Transportation, Austin, where she oversaw the agency's endangered plant conservation program. Clary is a Research Affiliate with The University of Texas at Austin, Plant Resources Center (Herbarium) and served as a contributor and scientific reviewer for the Flora of North America (Agave Family), Missouri Botanical Garden.

**Samuel Davis**

University of Texas – Tyler

Samuel Davis is an undergraduate student pursuing a B.S. in Biology at the University of Texas at Tyler under the Honors Program. He has explored topics in Conservation Biology in Dr. Joshua A. Banta's lab since August 2015.

**Robert Denkhaus**

Teaming With Wildlife: True To Texas and Fort Worth Nature Center and Refuge

Rob Denkhaus is the volunteer director of the TWW:TTT coalition and the director of the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge. He is also a BRIT research associate and an adjunct

**Drew Duckett**

The Morton Arboretum, IL

After completing a M.S. degree at the College of Charleston in June 2016, Drew began work at The Morton Arboretum in Illinois. He is currently a research assistant in the labs of Dr. Sean Hoban and Dr. Christy Rollinson. His primary interests are the genetics and conservation of oak species.

**Philip Fay**

USDA Agricultural Research Service, Temple

Phil is a Research Ecologist with the USDA Agricultural Research Service in Temple, Texas. A native of the Flint Hills region of Kansas, he has worked on the ecology of the Central Plains grasslands his entire professional career, beginning with graduate studies at Kansas State University. There he worked on Konza Prairie, first on plant-insect interactions in grasslands, then switching to ecosystem-level studies including implementing the long-term Rainfall Manipulation Plots (RaMPs) experiment, a widely cited global change experiment. Over the course of his career he has published over 80 papers, book chapters and reports, and works with national and international collaborators on the effects of climate and nutrients on natural and managed grasslands.

**Naomi Fraga**

Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, CA

Naomi is Director of Conservation Programs at Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden where she provides leadership to the diverse conservation activities at the Garden and works with Federal, State, local agencies, and conservation partners to conduct botanical research that informs on the ground management decisions on public lands. Naomi is broadly interested in conservation of biodiversity and enjoys spending much of her time outdoors working in the field. Naomi's

personal research is centered on rarity and endemism in the California flora and a closely related group of plants in the family Phrymaceae (commonly called monkeyflowers). Through her research she hopes to provide a better understanding of species limits, and evolutionary relationships among closely related taxa.

**Richard Heilbrun**

Texas Parks & Wildlife Department

Richard Heilbrun is the Conservation Outreach Program Leader for Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. He is a wildlife biologist by training, and has worked throughout the state on projects that conserve wildlife, manage wildlife habitat, and help people connect with natural resources on a deeply personal level. Richard holds a Bachelors and Masters' degree from Texas A&M University in wildlife ecology and has worked for Texas Parks & Wildlife Department since 2002. He is proud to have worked with landowners, urban residents, volunteers, conservation organizations, and the general public to advance stewardship of Texas's natural resources. He currently supervises the Urban Wildlife Technical Guidance Program, the Texas Nature Trackers Program, and the Texas Master Naturalist Program. All of these programs aim to connect Texans with the outdoors, improve wildlife habitat throughout the state, and manage the state's most sensitive wildlife populations.

**Ricky Linex**

USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service

Ricky Linex is a wildlife biologist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service headquartered in Weatherford, Texas. Linex works 51 counties in north central Texas covering the Rolling Plains, Cross Timbers, Blackland Prairie and Post Oak Savannah vegetational regions. He has worked 34 years with NRCS in Goldthwaite, Snyder, Abilene and the past 14 years in Weatherford.

**Barney Lipscomb**

Botanical Research Institute of Texas

Barney L. Lipscomb, editor, author, writer, public speaker, and researcher, is the Leonhardt Chair of Texas Botany at the Botanical Research Institute of Texas. He began his career in 1975 at Southern Methodist University (SMU) in Dallas Texas as the herbarium botanist. Soon after his arrival at SMU, he became assistant editor of a botanical journal *Sida*, now called Journal of the Botanical Research Institute of Texas. He is now Director of BRIT's scientific press.

Mr. Lipscomb is one of the co-authors of the "Illustrated Flora of North Central Texas" (1999), a 1640 page, fully illustrated, comprehensive guide to a large portion of the diverse plant life of Texas. Lipscomb is also a co-author of a three-volume flora, the "Illustrated Flora of East Texas." [Vol. 1, 2006, 1612 pp]. He is co-author of the 392 page, Ferns and Lycophytes of Texas (Feb 2014). In addition, he has authored another 30 scientific publications.

**Leah Murray**

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Leah Murray is a Botanist for the San Marcos Aquatic Resources Center in San Marcos, TX. Her primary focus is maintaining a refugium of Texas Wild Rice (*Zizania texana*). She also

propagates native aquatic and riparian plants for the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan. Murray received her B.S. from University of Michigan in Plant Biology. She has worked as a native seed collector for Seeds of Success in the Mojave Desert of Nevada, Great Basin of Southwestern Montana, and all throughout the Prairies of the Midwest.

**Deseri Nally**

Texas A&M University – College Station

Deseri Nally is a graduate student in the Ecosystem Science and Management Department at Texas A & M. She received her degree in Ecological Restoration from Texas A&M in 2012 and has worked with *Spiranthes parksii* since 2010. She has also worked with invasive species in South Africa and dam effects on hydric soil properties in East Texas.

**Allan Nelson**

Tarleton State University – Stephenville

Allan D. Nelson is a professor and department head at Tarleton State University. He received his Ph.D. in Botany at the University of Oklahoma, where he worked on speciation in *Chelone*, an eastern North American endemic. At Tarleton, he completed taxonomic treatments for *Chelone*, *Nothochelone*, and *Castilleja*. He has been involved in numerous ecological studies in Texas, especially in the southwestern Cross Timbers and Lampasas Cut Plain.

**Robert O’Kennon**

Botanical Research Institute of Texas

Bob is co-author of *Shinners and Mahler’s Illustrated Flora of North Central Texas* and the upcoming *Illustrated Flora of East Texas*, as well as the *Flora and Natural History of Gillespie County, Texas*. In addition, Bob is collaborating with James B. Phipps of the University of Western Ontario to publish a field guide to the hawthorns (*Crataegus*, Rosaceae) of the world. He is, or has been, on the board of directors of several other organizations involved in landscape ecology and conservation, including the Natural Area Preservation Association (NAPA), the Native Prairie Association of Texas (NPAT), the Fort Worth Nature Center, the Dallas Nature Center, and the Useful Wild Plants of Texas project. Besides maintaining an extensive database on the flora of Texas, Bob has carried out fieldwork in Asia, Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, Central and South America, and Mexico. Bob is a retired senior Captain with American Airlines, where he piloted jets to Asia, Europe, the Caribbean, Central and South America, and throughout North America.

**M. Rebeca Quiñonez-Piñón**

Forest for Monarchs – Mexico

Dr. Quiñonez is the Executive Director of Forests for Monarchs, a non-profit organization that supports sustainable forestry programs in Central Mexico, including the *oyamel* fir forests of Michoacán, the winter refuge of monarch butterfly. Her background in forest hydrology (Ph.D. in Geomatics Engineering, University of Calgary, Canada), remote sensing and geographical information systems inform her research interests: To work on projects that provide more accurate estimates of the components of the water balance equation, especially

evapotranspiration, and to create –at the local and regional scales— more effective strategies for sustainable water use and conservation.

### **Niraj Rayamajhi**

Texas Tech University-Lubbock

Niraj Rayamajhi is Ph.D. candidate in informatics at the University of Illinois-Chicago. Niraj is from Nepal and completed his undergraduate degree from Institute of Agriculture and Animal Science (I.A.A.S.), Nepal, in 2011. He is interested in plant genetics and began his graduate research in January 2013. His research focus for the M.S. program is conservation genetics of *Sclerocactus brevihamatus* ssp. *tobuschii*, a cactus endemic to Texas. He conducted this research under the supervision of his major adviser Dr. Jyotsna Sharma at Texas Tech University.

### **Charlotte Reemts**

The Nature Conservancy, Texas Chapter

Charlotte (M.S., plant biology and ecology, Michigan State University) has been studying plants in Texas for almost 12 years. Her research interests include rare plants (especially Tobusch fishhook cactus, Texas snowbell, and star cactus), fire ecology, prairie restoration, and plant community monitoring. She is currently working on projects across Texas, including studying ponderosa pine forests in west Texas, longleaf pine in east Texas, oak-juniper woodlands in the Hill Country, Blackland prairies and coastal prairies. the cactus. Finally, we'll discuss an upcoming shrub removal experiment.

### **Tiana F. Rehman**

Botanical Research Institute of Texas

Tiana Rehman joined the BRIT staff in 2003 as Herbarium Collections Assistant, having previously volunteered with the BRIT Andes to Amazon Biodiversity Program. Tiana has been the Collections Manager of the BRIT herbarium since 2009, and as such facilitates the care, usage and growth of the plant collection housed in the BRIT herbarium, as well as its interpretation for the public. Tiana's interests in collections management include the task of keeping the myriad physical and virtual data elements that contribute to project-based research both current and accessible. Tiana's M.S. in Environmental Science from Texas Christian University was earned while working at BRIT, and her thesis addressed the diversity and small-scale distribution of members of the Myristicaceae (nutmeg family of plants) at the Los Amigos Biological Station in Madre de Dios, Peru. She continues to be an active field botanist and has contributed specimens to local (Texas) and international (Peru, Costa Rica, Jamaica) floristics projects. Additionally, Tiana has interests in photography, microscopy and biodiversity informatics (e.g. Atrium Biodiversity Information System, Apiary Project).

### **Haley Rylander**

Botanical Research Institute of Texas

Haley Rylander is TCU graduate with a B.S. in Environmental Science. After interning with BRIT in summer 2015, she has been working in research and operations since last winter. Haley is passionate about environmental conservation, sustainability, travel, books, and food, and plans

to continue pursuing research with a graduate degree in horticulture and sustainable agriculture in the coming years.

**Colin Shackelford**

Texas A&M University – Kingsville

Colin Shackelford is the Project Coordinator for West Texas Native Seeds based in Alpine, Texas. He has been with the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute at Texas A&M Kingsville since 2011. He received his B.A. in psychology from Austin College in Sherman, Texas, and his M.S. in rangeland ecology from Texas A&M University in College Station. Colin's most recent experiences include positions as the grants project manager for the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute as well as the Director of Stewardship for The Nature Conservancy's Davis Mountains Project in far west Texas. He currently serves on the board of the Texas Society for Ecological Restoration. Colin's work with West Texas Native Seeds focuses on the collection and development of native seed sources for west Texas.

**Jyotsna Sharma**

Texas Tech University – Lubbock

Dr. Jyotsna Sharma is a plant ecologist who is particularly interested in rare plant ecology. The Sharma Lab investigates how biotic and abiotic processes interact over spatial, temporal, and taxonomic scales to explain the dynamics of angiosperm populations and communities. Their projects include complementary manipulative and non-manipulative studies in epiphytic and terrestrial plant communities and are supported by state, regional, national and international funding agencies including NSF, DoD, DoI (USFWS, NPS), IUCN, NFWF, UT-LBJWC, and TPWD, among others.

**Jason Singhurst**

Texas Parks & Wildlife Department

Jason Singhurst received a B.S. and M.S. from Stephen F. Austin State University. He has served as a botanist/ecologist in Texas for the past 21 years for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. He has conducted field research on rare plant communities and rare plants across Texas. His expertise includes natural areas inventory and vegetation ecology. He has described five plant species new to science that are endemic (restricted) to Texas. In 2008, he co-authored *Rare Plants of Texas*. He has an extensive knowledge of the flora of Tallgrass Prairies. Recently (2015) he developed an Identification of Milkweeds Field Guide in support of the Texas Milkweeds and Monarchs iNaturalist mapping project. He has published over 100 scientific publications on the flora and ecology of Texas, Arkansas, Kansas, and Oklahoma.

**Anna Strong**

Texas Parks & Wildlife Department

Anna W. Strong has worked in the field of rare plant conservation for over ten years, starting with her master's degree in biology from Texas State University where she studied the reproductive biology of the endangered *Astrophytum asterias* (star cactus). Afterward, she worked for five years in St. Louis, MO as Conservation Projects Coordinator for the Center for Plant Conservation, a national organization that works to protect and conserve the rare flora of

the United States. Since 2015, Ms. Strong has been a botanist in the Nongame and Rare Species Program at Texas Parks and Wildlife Department overseeing the 400+ rare plants in the state of Texas.

**Kim Norton Taylor**

Botanical Research Institute of Texas

A vascular plant survey of Enchanted Rock State Natural Area, Gillespie and Llano counties, Texas, was conducted from 1984 through 1994 and 2014 through 2015. The property sits near the southern border of the Llano Uplift, a primarily granite region. During the course of the study, 450 additional taxa were documented, bringing the total for the park to 948 taxa. Twenty-eight taxa are considered rare at the state or global level, including 22 state-tracked taxa. The vascular plant diversity of the park will be examined with a focus on the rare and endemic flora. Conservation implications for the park and the region will be also be discussed.

**Martin Terry**

Sul Ross State University

Martin Terry emerged from the weeds of Texas with an early interest in living things. He was educated in such matters in the curvi-linear de facto nature preserve consisting of the riparian areas adjacent to Braes Bayou in Houston, Texas. Attempts were made to educate him further at Harvard College and Texas A&M University, resulting in the degrees of A.B., D.V.M., a Ph.D. in Veterinary Toxicology, and for good measure another Ph.D. in Botany. He has worked in North America, southern Africa, South America and Europe. He currently lives with his wife in Alpine, Texas, where he teaches and researches biology at Sul Ross State University, with a particular penchant for the study of cacti.

**Anita Tiller,**

Mercer Botanic Gardens, TX

Anita Tiller has served as botanist and conservation manager for Mercer Botanic Gardens (MBG), Harris County (HC) Precinct 4(P4), TX since December 2000. Tiller manages MBG's living and herbarium collections databases; endangered plant seed bank; botanical signage; library and archives; and manages the HC P4 Prairie Dawn Preserve. Tiller teaches for TX gardening, naturalist, invasive plant and Center for Plant Conservation (CPC) programs. As CPC officer at MBG, Tiller conducts research for plant conservation projects in east Texas and the Upper Gulf Coast. Tiller received a M.S. in Botany at University of Florida-Gainesville with an emphasis on aquatic botany; a B.S. degree in biology (plant communities ecology) and a Certificate in Environmental Science from the University of Alabama. Tiller worked as scientist and manager for clinical and research labs at the University of Florida Veterinary Teaching Hospital and Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, for thirteen years prior to joining MBG.

**Michelle Villafranca**

Fort Worth Nature Center and Refuge

Michelle is a Natural Resource Specialist at the Fort Worth Nature Center and Refuge. She serves on the boards of the Society for Ecological Restoration, North Texas Chapter and the Fort Worth Chapter of the Native Prairies Association of Texas.

**Rose Hsiao-Hsuan Wang**

Texas A&M University – College Station

Dr. Rose Wang is a Research Scientist at Ecological Systems Laboratory, Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences, Texas A&M University. Dr. Wang has seven years of experience developing species distribution models, with particular emphasis on the roles of dispersal and habitat selection in producing the spatial distributions of populations across landscapes. Her primary research is on developing and testing probability-based theories of species distribution and dispersal and developing analytical techniques for characterizing the resulting patterns over a range of spatial and temporal scales as a means of identifying critical, pattern forming ecological processes. Her recent research has focused on application of these techniques to topics ranging from endangered species management to management of invasive species to management of vectors of emerging disease

**George Yatskievych**

University of Texas - Austin

After 28 years at the Missouri Botanical Garden, last November Dr. Yatskievych became curator of the TEX-LL herbaria in the Plant Resources Center of the University of Texas at Austin. His research interests include floristics (especially of North American floras), systematics of various ferns and parasitic angiosperms, and plant conservation.