

L.A.N.D.S. Outreach Teacher Workshops

Interactive Training in a Virtual World

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L.A.N.D.S. Outreach Teacher Workshops in 2019 versus 2020 (joining together in a very different way).

The L.A.N.D.S. Outreach Teacher Workshop is a professional development opportunity like no other.

Typically, workshops are offered in different locations across Texas by TWA's Conservation Legacy (CL) Outreach educators. The six-hour, free, summer workshop has become very sought-after, with spots often filling up even before the school year is over.

With a great lineup of lessons and activities for teachers to add to their science curriculum, and the added incentive of potentially earning Gifted and Talented (GT) update hours, it's no wonder why teachers want to participate in the workshop—sometimes year after year. The opportunity to visit a

local nature center, zoo, state park or other venue they may have never been to before is an added bonus. Included in the workshop are opportunities to share ideas, participate in hands-on group activities, experience outdoor fun and enjoy an overall great day of learning about native wildlife and natural resource conservation.

In early 2020, the CL Outreach Team was very excited about the 28 in-person workshops scheduled for the summer months and teachers were already eagerly registering. Then the threat of COVID-19 derailed plans to host the in-person workshops for the summer of 2020.

In March, students and teachers were enjoying their Spring Break but also nervously watching the world-wide

spread of COVID-19. They were not yet aware that they would not be returning to their schools to finish off what was left of the 2019-2020 academic year.

As positive cases started to rise in Texas, it became clear that the CL educators would not be able to resume school visits for their Wildlife by Design lessons either, so, the decision was made to cancel the in-person teacher workshops for everyone's safety and transition them to all virtual events. Through Zoom meetings, conference calls, and emails with the Outreach Team, an alternative plan for the 2020 L.A.N.D.S. Outreach Teacher Workshops began to take shape.

Keeping in mind that teachers might be overwhelmed by the transition to remote teaching, a full six-hour live



online workshop was decided against. Instead, a workshop model was developed that could be completed in two units—the Outreach Team worked relentlessly from March to May to ensure the virtual content would be accessible to all teachers regardless of the technological limitations they were facing.

the state, regardless of district or school location; however, traveling to a location outside of their region has been a barrier for teachers to attend in years past. Without having to travel or leave their home, teachers took advantage of the virtual offerings and teachers from over 50 counties joined a workshop in 2020.



Unit 1 would be three hours of a guided workshop led by a CL educator via the Zoom platform. During the Zoom meeting, a combination of lessons would be presented, including those from Wildlife by Design programs, the *Stewarding Texas-A Scientific Exploration* online resource, and Discovery Trunks. The teachers would participate and take notes on a provided Unit 1 workshop checklist.

Unit 2 would be a self-guided portion, with all the necessary lessons and resources housed on the TWA website, in which teachers would independently complete lessons, watch On-Demand Webinars, and submit work back to their TWA host educator.

The change from in-person L.A.N.D.S. Outreach Teacher Workshops to virtual offerings actually brought out more participants on average than seen the previous summer, even with fewer workshops offered. In 2019, 34 workshops were hosted in-person across the state and 754 participants attended. In 2020, 28 virtual workshops were hosted with 926 total participants.

Workshops are always open to any formal or informal educator from across

The lessons from *Stewarding Texas* and Discovery Trunks that were used in Unit 2 gave teachers an opportunity to explore ways to use different conservation and land stewardship concepts in their curriculum. They also encouraged teachers to experience the provided lessons the way a student would in the classroom.

After participants submitted their completed work for each lesson, they went through accompanying supplemental material and evaluated the material for their students' learning needs on the provided Unit 2 workshop checklist. Workshop participants submitted work in many creative ways including sending in photos, sketches, videos, PowerPoints and even a Flipgrid of their completed lesson materials.

One lesson in particular, *Observations with Leopold*, gave the teachers an opportunity to recognize and record local wildlife in their backyard. The lesson's goal is for students to recognize Aldo Leopold as a pioneering conservationist and distinguish between observations he used to collect data, including both qualitative and quantitative information.

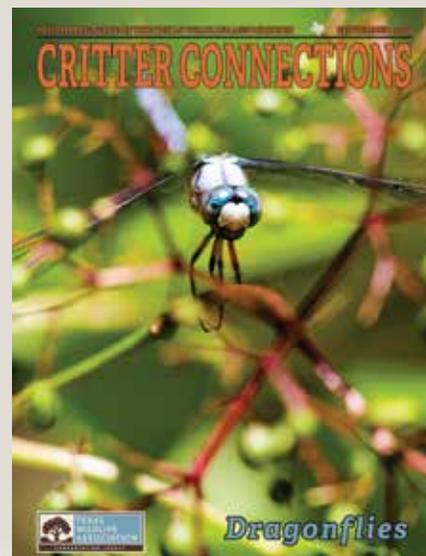
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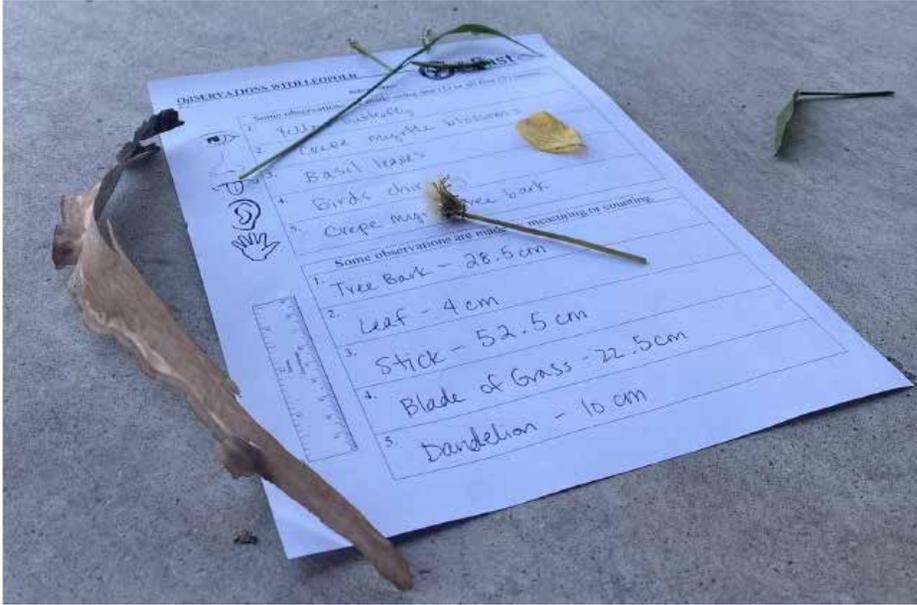
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The work submitted by teachers included a wide variety of observations from qualitative methods using their senses and quantitative methods using units of measurement. The results illustrated the diversity of wildlife found across Texas.

Participants across the state discovered a wide array of wildlife in their own backyards and neighborhoods through this exercise, including everything from blue jays and hummingbirds to dragonflies, frogs, and squirrels. The diversity of Texas ecosystems was apparent in the variety of plants identified, including sunflowers, yuccas, mesquite, mulberry, live oak, and buffalo bur. Many abiotic factors were also observed and gave clues as to the climate variety found among the many ecosystems in Texas.

Teachers were also able to get in touch with their creative side with a lesson called *Blending Butterflies*. This lesson explores different types of camouflage in animals such as concealing coloration, countershading, disguises, disruptive coloration, and mimicry.

For the workshop, teachers designed a butterfly so that its camouflage allowed it to hide somewhere in the classroom or home. (One teacher even made a butterfly camouflage with her dog.) When the lesson is utilized in the classroom, students color their butterflies to blend in somewhere in their classroom,

then attempt to find as many of their classmates' butterflies as possible.

The feedback from participants highlighted many positive aspects of the virtual L.A.N.D.S. Outreach Teacher Workshops.

You were awesome. I am an administrator and I would have rated you extremely high on T-TESS. [T-TESS refers to the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System which focuses on providing continuous, timely and formative feedback to educators so they can improve their practice.] You had hands-on activities, kept your students involved and checking to see they were on board by using the polls.



You also had a ticket out for each activity. Your guided practices were fun and easy to follow by any level student and your high-level questions engaged the higher learner. Great information.

~ Tina Saenz, Administrator,
San Diego ISD, San Diego, TX

I really enjoyed how the lessons all had a virtual component...with the status of this upcoming year in question, it will be nice to have some lessons ready to use in the event that we have to resort to distance learning.

~ Deborah Kingsmill,
Junior High Teacher,
Goose Creek ISD, Baytown, TX

As a newly minted Master Naturalist I am thankful that I could take part in this workshop to learn how knowledge about nature can be transmitted. Should I come about teaching opportunities with children, I have some good examples and material that I can now use. Thank you very much for letting me take part in the workshop.

~ Sophie Voswincke, Master Naturalist,
North Texas Chapter, Dallas, TX

The TWA CL Outreach Team has been helping teachers incorporate land stewardship and native Texas wildlife in their science curriculum since 2013 and hope to continue to do so for many years to come. Prior to COVID-19, workshops were successfully planned and presented professionally, with teachers overwhelmingly satisfied with their participation.

When COVID-19 surfaced, TWA educators jumped into action, with very little time to adjust. Virtual lessons were implemented with excellent attendance and success.

Virtual L.A.N.D.S. Outreach Teacher Workshops may even become a permanent offering to serve more teachers statewide than ever before. Based on the numerous glowing evaluations about the adjustments made in 2020, the L.A.N.D.S. Outreach Teacher Workshops continue to be a relevant resource, and whether offered in-person or virtually, the content and the educators who make the lessons come to life are immensely valuable to educators statewide. 🌟

