



# Chapter News

## CONTENTS

<b>Page 1</b>	President's Message
<b>Page 2</b>	Next General Meeting
<b>Page 3</b>	Membership Report
<b>Page 4</b>	GCBO Spring Fling
<b>Page 5</b>	Winter Photo Potpourri
<b>Page 6</b>	Migration Celebration
<b>Page 7</b>	Birds of Prey in Schools
<b>Page 10</b>	San Bernard River
<b>Page 12</b>	Officers and Directors



<https://facebook.com/TMN.COT>

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The Texas Master Naturalist program is coordinated by the Texas A&M AgriLIFE Extension Service and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Texas Master Naturalist programs serve all people without regard to socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.

## A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT KRISTINE



We've got a couple of new projects in the works that you will be hearing a lot more about in the upcoming months, and I hope that you will consider getting involved in one or both of them if they interest you. The first is a new initiative that I started with the Board's approval – a Speakers Bureau, which will be developed by Jimmy Salinas, who is joining the Board as Speakers Bureau Director.

We have a lot of opportunities to give presentations to the public at libraries, community groups, civic organizations, etc., and there is also a need for nature-based educational programs for youth at schools, scout groups, churches, and other organizations. Meeting these needs within our community also provides activities that are not as strenuous and/or time-consuming as some of our other opportunities, while showcasing the wealth of knowledge within our membership.

The Speakers Bureau will obviously need people comfortable speaking in front of an audience but Jimmy will be looking for other help, as well — people to assist with developing the presentations, putting together trunks of support materials for specific topics, contacting local organizations to determine needs, and more, as he develops the program.

Jimmy received his first speaker request on his first day on the job, so I'm sure he'll be reaching out to our membership soon to start building his team.

The Texas Master Naturalist program will be celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2018, and all of the chapters have been asked to collect stories and photographs that celebrate the history of the program.

Our chapter's 20th Anniversary Project

Chair is Lisa Myers. She will be conducting and recording a number of Oral History Interviews with current and former chapter members about their memories, fun stories, and successes within the TMN program. She'll be asking for suggestions of people to interview and looking for photos from activities, projects and celebrations throughout our 15-year history.

We're all very proud of everything that the Cradle of Texas chapter has accomplished within our community, and we want to be sure that it is well-represented in this statewide project. As you can imagine, this is a considerable undertaking, and Lisa will need a lot of help as it progresses. One specific skill that is needed is that of a videographer. The equipment is being provided to us, and training is available, so if you are interested and would like to help, let Lisa know!

Do you have an in-depth knowledge about native wildflowers but don't like talking in front of people? You could help develop a presentation! Do you have a large collection of seashells that is collecting dust on your shelves? You could create a trunk to support an educational program! Do you enjoy working with kids? You could visit a middle-school class and teach them about insects! Were you involved in a citizen science project that was really successful? You could share your memories in a video interview! Do you carry your camera with you everywhere you go or have a lot of photos from when you were an intern? You could create a photo journal of that intern class!

I hope that I've managed to pique your interest in these new projects, and started you thinking creatively about ways to get involved. I can't wait to see everything you do!

*Kristine Rivers is the president of the Cradle of Texas Chapter. She can be reached at [rivers@tmn-cot.org](mailto:rivers@tmn-cot.org)*

**Texas Master Naturalist Program  
Cradle of Texas Chapter  
General Meeting and Advanced Training  
Wednesday, March 8, 2017  
Texas AgriLife Extension Building  
21017 County Road 171  
Angleton, Texas 77515-8903**



<b>8:30 AM – 9:00 AM</b>	<b>Fun and Fellowship</b> <b>Snack Team:</b> Don Sabathier, Tom Morris, Candace and Leo Novak, John Minkert, Kim Richardson
<b>9:00 AM – 10:00 AM</b>	<b>General Meeting and Nature Notes</b> Nature Notes: George Bettinger ( <i>Vibrio vulnificus</i> ) <i>This meeting is approved for 1.00 hour volunteer time</i>
<b>10:15 AM – 12:00 PM</b>	<b>Program:</b> Ghost Crabs <b>Speaker:</b> Mike Mullenweg - Lead Interpreter, Brazoria County Parks Department



Mike Mullenweg is the Lead Interpreter/Events & Trails Coordinator for the Brazoria County Parks Department. He is a certified Texas Master Naturalist and a member of the Cradle of Texas Chapter. He received Master Naturalist training as a member of the Texas Mid-Coast Chapter.

Mike holds an M.S. degree in Recreation and Leisure Studies from the University of North Texas and a B.A. in Communications from Stephen F. Austin State University.

Prior to joining BCPD, Mike has had an extensive career in natural resources management:

- **Program Coordinator**, Lower Colorado River Authority
- **Manager**, Natural Science Center, Matagorda Bay Nature Park.
- **Naturalist**, Parks and Wildlife Department
- **Park Interpreter** and Natural Resource Specialist, TPWD

Brazoria County Parks Department is based in Angleton Texas. BCPD operates ten parks, 23 miles of sandy beaches, 21 boat ramps, two RV campgrounds, historical homes, interpretive centers, day use facilities, playgrounds, a swimming pool, horseshoe and volleyball pits, and picnic areas. The Department also offers meeting room, cabin, dormitory, pavilion, and chapel rentals.



**Ghost crabs** are semiterrestrial crabs of the subfamily *Ocypodinae*. They are so named because of their ability to blend into the sandy beaches and dunes in which they live. Six strong legs are capable of carrying ghost crabs along at speeds up to 10 mph, allowing them to disappear quickly from sight (yet another reason for the name).

During the day, they spend most of their time housekeeping and digging their burrows. Extending from the carapace, or top section of exoskeleton, are two black eyes that are able to see 360 degrees simultaneously; however, they are unable to see directly overhead. You can often spot ghost crabs at night, which is when they feed on other crabs, clams, lizards, insects and detritus.

Characteristics of the subfamily include one claw being larger than the other, thick and elongated eyestalks, and a box-like body. The differences in claw sizes, however, are not as marked as in male fiddler crabs. The subfamily includes 22 species in two genera.



**Ghost Crab, Padre Island National Seashore**  
Public domain photo by Tracy Parris/National Park Service.

## MEMBERSHIP REPORT

by Pete and Peggy Romfh

Thanks to all of you for your 2017 volunteer efforts. As of February 28, COT members have entered

- 2751 volunteer service hours
- 294 advance training hours

If we continue accumulating hours at this pace, we will reach 16,000 hours by year-end.

We have several certifications and hours awards that will be announced at the March meeting. Congratulations to all who have certified, re-certified, or reached a new hours milestone!

Several members are using cell phones to access VMS and enter hours at the end of each volunteer or training event. Thanks for being innovative!

### RECERTIFICATION FOR 2017 (SEA TURTLE PIN)



Carolyn  
May-Monie

Don  
Sabathier

Jimmy  
Salinas

Kristine  
Rivers

Jo Myers

Ruby Lewis

### INITIAL CERTIFICATION



Denise Kaplan

### 250-HOUR PIN



Herb Myers



Janet  
Jackson-Ellis

### 1000-HOUR PIN



Sherry Summers

Also, we have started to capture impact data in VMS as members identify the numbers of adults and youth impacted via public outreach or training activities. These numbers are critical to showcasing the public impact represented by our chapter. Ruby Lewis is capturing and reporting the impact numbers for all volunteers for community events; Johnny Dwyer is reporting the numbers for DEEP; and Phil Huxford is reporting the Birds of Prey School Program numbers. For individual efforts such as hatchery tours at Sea Center Texas, we depend on each member to provide the data directly into VMS.

### Impact Data Entered through Feb. 28, 2017

	Adults	Youth	Total
January	366	78	444
February	776	1251	2027
Total	1142	1329	2471

## MEET BNWR RV VOLUNTEERS NINA and JACK STAPLETON



Nina and Jack Stapleton

Nina and Jack Stapleton have joined the Texas Mid-coast National Wildlife Refuge complex as temporary resident volunteers. During March they'll be working at the Discovery Center as visitor hosts. In addition to that job, Jack has taken on the assignment of painting the interior of the classroom. Nina describes their lives as volunteers:

*"We became volunteers by happy coincidence. Jack retired from a career in law enforcement. A few years later Nina retired from a career in nursing. We decided to volunteer at our local State Park while the house sold. It was such a great experience we decided to volunteer our way around this awesome country. We have been campground hosts, have given lighthouse tours, worked at a fish hatchery, and a county fishing park*

*"At Brazoria Wildlife Refuge we are helping at the Discovery Center. In addition to greeting the visitors to the DC, we have assisted the Naturalists with many school field trips. We have learned about the local ecosystem and never dreamed we would be handling snakes and alligators! Having a great time!"*

## COMING UP IN APRIL: GCBO SPRING FLING

By Pete and Peggy Romfh

Every April, thousands of migratory songbirds arrive on the Texas coast, a stopping point for many after a long journey across or circumnavigating the Gulf of Mexico. Most are headed to summer grounds farther north.

Every April, hordes of birders from Brazoria County and from all over the USA visit birding areas along the Texas Gulf Coast, hoping to see tiny warblers, vireos and other species that migrate through Texas.

At Quintana Neotropical Bird Sanctuary, the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory (GCBO) has established an event called "Quintana Spring Fling." During the month of April, GCBO staff, master naturalists, and other volunteers are stationed at the Host Station next to Quintana City Hall.

From 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. each day, volunteers work in shifts to:

- Serve as hosts for visitors, provide information about the sanctuary, help novice birders identify birds, or just provide maps and directions
- Periodically walk through the sanctuary to talk to birders and find out what birds are being seen and where
- Document the birds seen for the day on a board by the host station
- Assist with the operation of a small gift shop located in the host station by, selling snacks, water, soft drinks, and some nature store items.

Volunteers may work a full or half day at the host station. If you are new to volunteering in the bird sanctuary, you may ask to be paired with a more experienced member who will help you learn how to staff the host station. There are always plenty of experienced birders at the site who can help with bird identification!

**If you can volunteer, please contact Pete or Peggy Romfh ([peggyromfh@tmn-cot.org](mailto:peggyromfh@tmn-cot.org)) or call GCBO at 979-480-0999. Your help is needed to make Spring Fling a success!**

**Volunteer time counts as a Public Outreach activity in VMS, and all time spent volunteering, plus appropriate travel time, may be counted.** Even if you do not volunteer, you are welcome to come to the sanctuary at any time to enjoy seeing the migrating birds.

GCBO is a partner with TMN-COT. Its main focus is the study and conservation of birds and their habitat in and around the Gulf of Mexico.

### Directions to the Quintana Neotropical Bird Sanctuary:

Take SH 36/288 out of Freeport. Turn right on FM 1495 and continue over the Intracoastal Waterway bridge to the stop sign. Turn left onto Quintana Road (CR 723). Continue past the Freeport LNG plant until you reach Quintana City Hall at 814 Lamar St. Park in front of city hall, across the road from the Bird Sanctuary. The Quintana Xeriscape Park is located nearby. The host station sits near the road next to the city hall.



Photo: Female Ruby throated hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) stops for some nectar at Quintana Neotropical Bird Sanctuary during last year's spring migration. Photo by Pete Romfh

### Imagine, if you will...



You're on that obligatory annual trip. You've been traveling for hours and are brutally tired. You haven't seen a rest stop for many miles. You'd just die for a place to stop, rest, and refuel.

That's the plight of trans-gulf migratory birds. They have been flying for over 24 hours across seemingly endless miles of water when they finally reach the Texas Gulf Coast. A grove of trees, a small pool of water and some food are as welcome to them as a glittery desert oasis on an endless highway would be to us..

Such an oasis in our area is GCBO's Neotropical Bird Sanctuary in Quintana, Texas. Every April, at the peak of the Spring migration, Spring Fling volunteers greet crowds of birders who come to the area to see and enjoy the flocks of migrating birds. COT volunteers are welcome to come out and help run a small host station, record bird sightings, and keep things running smoothly. You don't need to be an expert birder to help out. Contact Peggy or Pete Romfh for details.

[peggyromfh@tmn-cot.org](mailto:peggyromfh@tmn-cot.org)  
713-688-4053 (h), 832-439-2870 (c)



Google maps. <http://tinyurl.com/mbg3ma2>

## WINTER PHOTO POTPOURRI

By Peggy Romfh

### Leafy Mistletoe (*Phoradendron tomentosum*) – Treetop Parasite Seen Best in Winter



The absence of foliage on deciduous trees in winter highlights the presence of mistletoe. Several clusters can be seen on trees at the edge of the Abner Jackson Plantation parking lot in Lake Jackson. Mistletoe is a hemi-parasitic plant that derives some of its nutritional requirements from the tree and some from photosynthesis. Mistletoe attaches to a tree by means of modified roots called *haustoria*. Many species of hardwood trees are affected by mistletoe and branch dieback is common. The berries are poisonous to small animals.

### Scalloped Toes on American Coot (*Fulica americana*) Prove Ideal for Walking in the Marsh



Did you ever wonder how an American Coot keeps its balance as it walks around on shallow marsh vegetation or how it swims so quickly without the benefit of webbed feet? The coot has adapted to life in water with the addition of large, scalloped toes. The enlarged lateral lobes facilitate efficient swimming. When the coot lifts its foot to move forward, the lobes fold so that they will not cause drag. The lobes will fold out when traction is needed. [Source: <http://www.besgroup.org/2008/07/11/feet-of-the-common-coot/>]



[photos by P&P Romfh]

### Nutria (*Myocastor coypus*) – Orange-toothed Habitat-eating Machines



Nutria, the common name for Coypu, are eating their way through the stems and roots of wetland plants throughout the South. Also called river rats or swamp beaver, nutria typically weigh 8-20 lbs. and consume about 25% of their weight each day in vegetation.

Although their round tail, webbed feet, and white muzzle help to distinguish them from beavers and muskrats, their most distinguishing feature is the set of large, bright orange-yellow incisors. Nutria use these large incisors to eat the base of above-ground stems, roots and rhizomes.

Mary Carol Edwards, who heads the Texas Coastal Watershed Stormwater Wetland Program, is continually challenged by the destruction that is caused by nutria that eat their way through newly planted stormwater wetlands. Iris may be the one plant that the nutria do not eat.

### What Color are Sandhill Cranes?

Per USFWS, sandhill cranes have grey plumage on the body, becoming white or paler grey on the face and upper throat. In some regions, birds preen in summer with iron-rich mud, which gives them a rusty-brown hue. The color lasts until the cranes molt in the fall. Juveniles are cinnamon brown but become grey their first year.

[Source:

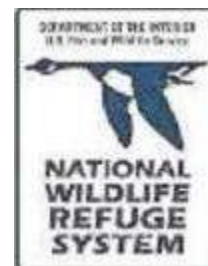
[https://www.fws.gov/uploadedFiles/Region\\_5/NWRS/Central\\_Zone/Montezuma/SandhillCraneFacts.pdf](https://www.fws.gov/uploadedFiles/Region_5/NWRS/Central_Zone/Montezuma/SandhillCraneFacts.pdf)]





## GET READY FOR MIGRATION CELEBRATION!

Migration Celebration is an annual spring nature festival presented each spring by the **U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service** and **Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuges**. Many Cradle of Texas Chapter members participate in the planning and execution of the celebration. Migration Celebration kicks off with a fundraising dinner at Freeport RiverPlace followed by two days of events at San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge.



DATE	EVENT	LOCATION	DETAILS
March 20, 2017	Photo Contest entry deadline	Drop off or mail your entries to either of the following locations:  <i>Migration Celebration Photo Contest</i> c/o NWR Refuge Complex 2547 County Road 316 Brazoria, Texas 77422  <i>Migration Celebration Photo Contest</i> c/o Brazosport Area Chamber 300 Abner Jackson Parkway Lake Jackson, Texas 77566  Individuals at these two locations cannot answer questions about the contest.	Rules and Guidelines <a href="http://tinyurl.com/MCPC17R">http://tinyurl.com/MCPC17R</a> Entry Form <a href="http://tinyurl.com/MCPC71E">http://tinyurl.com/MCPC71E</a>
March 31, 2017 4:00 – 5:30 PM	Photo feedback with the judges	Texas AgriLife Extension Building <a href="http://tinyurl.com/Brazoria-Agrilife">http://tinyurl.com/Brazoria-Agrilife</a>	Photographers meet with the judges and hear their comments
April 7, 2017 5:30 PM	Kickoff Dinner and photo exhibit	Freeport RiverPlace <a href="http://tinyurl.com/nabxv29">http://tinyurl.com/nabxv29</a>	Tentative Schedule <a href="http://tinyurl.com/ptjvfo7">http://tinyurl.com/ptjvfo7</a>
April 22, 2017 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM	Migration Celebration	San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge <a href="http://tinyurl.com/lud2vqr">http://tinyurl.com/lud2vqr</a>	Tentative Schedule <a href="http://tinyurl.com/os5yqw2">http://tinyurl.com/os5yqw2</a>
April 23, 2017 11:00 AM – 4:30 PM	Migration Celebration	San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge <a href="http://tinyurl.com/lud2vqr">http://tinyurl.com/lud2vqr</a>	Tentative Schedule <a href="http://tinyurl.com/o4qukom">http://tinyurl.com/o4qukom</a>

## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED for MIGRATION CELEBRATION

Volunteers are needed, and participation is approved for Volunteer Hours. This is a good opportunity to rack up some volunteer hours toward certification or recertification!

Volunteer positions are available for a variety of interests — van drivers, parking lot assistants, information booth hosts, photo contest assistants, ticket takers, docents, tour guides, bake sale attendants, photographers.

If you've never participated in Migration Celebration before, check out these photos from 2014: <http://tinyurl.com/Migration-2014>

### WANT TO VOLUNTEER?

Contact Migration Celebration  
Volunteer Coordinator:

Ed Barrios

979-297-1815 home

979-415-4998 cell

[barrios@refugefriends.org](mailto:barrios@refugefriends.org)



**Birds of Prey School Programs**

Once again this year our Birds of Prey team is presenting programs at local schools. They've also scheduled several "bonus" programs open to the public. Check out the BOP website  
<http://birdsofpreytexas.org/>

### BIRDS OF PREY SCHOOL PROGRAM

By Neal McLain

Every year during March and April, EarthQuest brings the Birds of Prey program to Brazoria County for Migration Celebration. During the weeks preceding Migration Celebration, EarthQuest's wildlife handlers present Birds of Prey programs in a variety of venues including schools, service clubs, churches, and shopping malls. In past years EarthQuest has presented programs in more than 30 schools in the Alvin, Angleton, Bay City, Brazosport, and

Van Vleck School Districts, reaching a total audience of over 15,000 students and teachers.

The Birds of Prey Programs culminate at Migration Celebration with four programs during the two-day festival at San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge. These programs are funded by donors and are open to the public without charge.



Photo: Denis Mudderman  
EarthQuest Handler Steve Hoddy



Photo: Denis Mudderman  
Birds of Prey Program Manager Phil Huxford

#### UPCOMING PUBLIC BIRDS OF PREY PROGRAMS

**March 18, 2017**  
**11:00 AM**  
Brazos Bend State Park  
Nature Center  
21901 FM 762  
Needville, TX 77461  
Map: <http://tinyurl.com/BOP-170318>  
29.3714421, -95.6412435

**April 1, 2017**  
**10:00 AM and 2:00 PM**  
Lake Livingston State Park  
300 Park Road 65  
Livingston, TX 77351  
Map: <http://tinyurl.com/BOP-170401>  
30.656897, -95.001093

**April 8, 2017**  
**11:00 AM and 2:00 PM**  
Nurture Nature Festival  
Baytown Nature Center  
5213 Baytown Drive  
Baytown, TX 77520  
Map: <http://tinyurl.com/BOP-170408>  
9.754794, -95.035649

**April 15, 2017**  
**11:00 AM**  
Quintana Beach County Park  
330 5th Street  
Quintana, TX 77541  
Map: <http://tinyurl.com/BOP-170415>  
28.9342141, -95.3048623

**April 22 and 23, 2017**  
**Times TBA**  
Migration Celebration  
San Bernard NWR  
6801 County Road 306  
Brazoria, TX 77422  
Map: <http://tinyurl.com/BOP-170422>  
28.9149448, -95.5789089



**Steve Hoddy, EarthQuest**  
Steve is the founder and president of EarthQuest, a non-profit corporation based in Georgia. He brings the Birds of Prey programs to Brazoria County for several weeks each year for Migration Celebration.



**Phil Huxford, Birds of Prey Program Manager**  
Phil has been the driving force behind Birds of Prey school programs and often serves as Master of Ceremonies. Phil is a member of the Texas Master Naturalist Cradle of Texas Chapter Class of 2001.

## PHIL HUXFORD, MIGRATION CELEBRATION, and the BIRDS OF PREY SCHOOL PROGRAM

### ONE MAN'S PERSPECTIVE

By Judy Green



Phil Huxford at  
AgriLife Extension  
Building, 2004

*Editor's note: As I noted in the article on the previous page about the Birds of Prey School Program, EarthQuest's President Steve Hoddy brings the Birds of Prey program to Brazoria County every year for Migration Celebration. During the weeks preceding Migration Celebration, Hoddy presents Birds of Prey Programs at local elementary and intermediate schools.*

*TMN-COT member Phil Huxford, Class of 2001, has been the driving force behind the Birds of Prey School Program since its inception. Phil founded the program in 2002 and organizes each year's school schedule. Phil also acts as Master of Ceremonies during the programs,*

*This year of 2017 marks the 15th anniversary of the Birds of Prey School Program. In recognition of Phil's efforts on behalf of the program, I asked TMN-COT member Judy Green to interview Phil and write an article about it for Chapter News. Judy's article appears below. My thanks to Judy for her effort in preparing this article.*



Phil Huxford at  
Migration  
Celebration, 2015

—Neal McLain

Phil Huxford first became interested in helping the environment and Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge (BNWR) in 1989. His home in Clute was a mere seven miles from the front door and he had frequently wandered in BNWR before he formally volunteered to help the refuge wherever he could. One of his first tasks involved dismantling a dilapidated fence behind what was then called the "Environmental Education Center" — a 3-door steel equipment garage.

That was 15 years before the *Birds of Prey* first appeared in our schools, 12 years before TMN-COT became a chapter, five years before the existence of Migration Celebration and even before Friends of Brazoria National Wildlife Refuges (FOBWR) was organized.

Huxford had started a landscaping business and naturally joined the Brazosport Chamber of Commerce, where he heard Ron Bisbee speak about the organization, "The Brazosport Birders," which still meets today. In 1994 Ron Bisbee, Tom Schneider, Dick Hickner, Huxford and several others got together and decided it would be a grand idea to have an annual birding festival. They officially launched Migration Celebration that same year.

Initially, it was a pay-as-you-go event for birding enthusiasts. One year a birding organization provided birds that performed an aerial show at Migration Celebration. The following year, Huxford contacted Steve Hoddy, President and Founder of EarthQuest, a non-profit environmental education organization, and asked him to provide a program featuring his birds.

Hoddy's credentials included working with animals his entire life. He had appeared with his birds on *The Tonight Show* and *The Late Show with David Letterman*.

Hoddy's bird program proved popular with the festival attendees, and for the next several years Migration Celebration featured a *Birds of Prey* program.

By this point Migration Celebration was seven years old. Huxford felt that the important message about the refuge — and in particular the message that citizens are caretakers of our environment — wasn't getting the attention it deserved. Migration Celebration was still relatively unknown in Brazoria County. Huxford concluded the best way to get the word out was to take the *Birds of Prey* programs into the public schools as part of an effort to educate children about wildlife and

*Continued next page*



The Environmental Education Center at Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge, 1989-2004



## PHIL HUXFORD, MIGRATION CELEBRATION, and the BIRDS OF PREY PROGRAM cont'd

### ONE MAN'S PERSPECTIVE

the environment. That also meant free publicity for the program. His idea proved fruitful.

In 2002, the *Birds of Prey* program premiered in five elementary schools. Northside Elementary in Angleton and O.M. Roberts Elementary in Lake Jackson were among the first schools, thanks in large part to the efforts of Bryan and Vicky Adams and their daughter. As Huxford recalls, that first year the *Birds of Prey* program consisted of an Andean Condor, a Peregrine Falcon, a Harris Hawk and a Black Vulture. The programs reached a total of about 2,200 students.

According to Huxford, the number of schools involved and the number of children reached grew every year. Phillips 66 was one of the first businesses to answer the call and readily donate a \$1,000 grant to support both Migration Celebration and the *Birds of Prey* program. The company has continued to provide financial support every year since. The company's latest grant of \$12,000 enabled Huxford to take the program into four schools in Freeport and twelve schools in Matagorda County.

Besides Phillips 66, another 50 to 60 individual donors have provided financial support to maintain and expand the program.

Huxford estimates that it costs just under \$1 per student to bring the 35- to 45-minute program to each school.

He proudly states that he is the only official volunteer for the program. As a member of the Cradle of Texas Chapter he has accrued more than 10,000 hours of volunteer time.

EarthQuest receives remuneration for providing the birds, the equipment, and other costs related to the program.

January is generally the month when Huxford books *Birds of Prey* for the year. He is always looking for new schools in which to offer the *Birds of Prey* program, regardless of

whether the school can offer any financial support. To date, he figures his program has reached a total of 20,000 children.

When asked his thoughts about the program and the future, Huxford said that he believes the "community is more aware now of environmental issues." He attributes this to numerous overlapping programs delivering similar messages, including Discovery Environmental Education Programs (DEEP) at BNWR, Migration Celebration, the Texas Master Naturalist program, Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuges, Friends of the River San Bernard, and the Texas Master Gardener program. Of course he cites the influence of the *Birds of Prey* program. He strongly believes that more people are paying attention to wildlife and their issues because of these programs.

Huxford believes that at this point his *Birds of Prey* program could stand alone thanks to the broad community support it now receives. He hopes to attract younger volunteers to carry the program forward in the future; not surprisingly, he cites his grandson Tyler Wise as one of the candidates.

Phil Huxford humbly states that as long as his health continues, he will continue with the *Birds of Prey* program. As he simply commented, "I'm loving it."

If you know of a school that hasn't already booked the *Birds of Prey* program and would like Huxford to contact it, please email him information at [huxford\\_habitat@yahoo.com](mailto:huxford_habitat@yahoo.com)

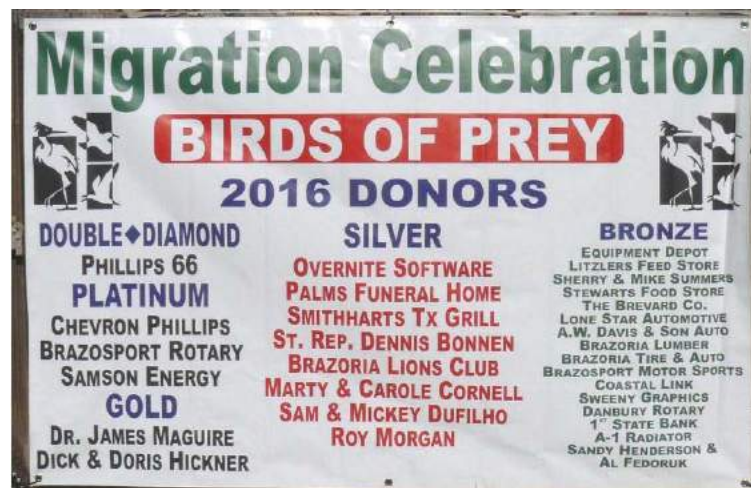


Tyler Wise, 2015



The Donor Banner. This banner is displayed at Migration Celebration and other public *Birds of Prey* Programs.

◀The *Birds of Prey* Team: Phil Huxford, Tyler Wise, Steve Hoddy, at KBR Kids Day 2015.



# FRIENDS OF THE RIVER SAN BERNARD: “STATE OF THE RIVER” MEETING RE-OPENING THE MOUTH OF THE SAN BERNARD RIVER

By Neal McLain

I recently attended the “State of the River” meeting sponsored by Friends of the River San Bernard, a non-profit organization of citizens who live on or around the river. According to its website, FOR has “many goals to achieve, but our main concern is to keep the river clean and its mouth open.” [1]

And that’s the topic of this article: keeping the mouth of the San Bernard River open.

As I have reported in previous issues of *Chapter News*, [2] the mouth of the San Bernard has been blocked by silt on two previous occasions. As I wrote in 2016, when the Corps of Engineers diverted the nearby Brazos River in 1929, silt from its jetties progressively choked the mouth of the less powerful San Bernard, four miles southwest. Eventually the San Bernard no longer reached the Gulf, and the resulting blockage had diverted the water flow



**Fig 1. Mouth of the San Barnard River, 2010.** Image © 2012 OpenStreetMap contributors under Open Data Commons Database License. Cartography licensed under Creative Commons License CC-BY-SA.



**Fig. 2. Mouth of the San Bernard River, July 2010, looking southeast toward the Gulf of Mexico.** Note the silt deposition on the northeast side of the river — a broad sandy beach completely covering the channel dredged the previous year. Composite photo by Neal McLain. Public domain.

into the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway eastward, exiting through the Brazos River Flood Gates. The increased current there has created problems for commercial navigation.

In January, 2009, the Galveston District of the Army Corps of Engineers awarded a \$2 million contract to dredge the mouth of the San Bernard River. The contract called for dredging almost 339,000 cubic yards of material. The work was completed before the end of the year.

Almost immediately, the mouth began silting up again as silt continued to flow southwest from the Brazos River jetties toward the mouth of the San Bernard. Drought conditions during 2008 reduced the flow of the San Bernard, thus exacerbating the situation. By July 2010, the mouth had already shifted southwest, leaving a broad sandy beach where the dredged canal had been (Figs. 1 and 2). By mid-2012, the mouth was again completely blocked, and the entire discharge of the

*Continued next page*



**Fig. 3. Mouth of the San Bernard River, 2016.** The river heads in a southerly direction before making a familiar turn to the west to meander as far as it can, trying to find a way out to the Gulf. Photo by A. G. Bert Smith, courtesy of Friends of River San Bernard. Used by permission.

## “STATE OF THE RIVER” MEETING

Continued from Page 9

river again flowed northeast through the Intracoastal Waterway to the Brazos (Fig. 3).

At this point it was obvious that any plan to reopen the river again must be accompanied by a plan to prevent further silting. To that end, the Brazoria County Commissioners Court hired Dannenbaum Engineering Corporation of Houston to evaluate the situation and to recommend a solution. Christopher Sallesse, Coastal Programs Manager for Dannenbaum, led the effort. As some chapter members may recall, Sallesse was our guest speaker at the January 2016 Chapter meeting.

Meanwhile, the question of funding remained open. And this brings us to the recent State of the River meeting. As Friends of the River wrote on its website:

*One hundred and six attendees cheered as Commissioners Dude Payne and David Linder reported at the annual FOR "State of the River" meeting Saturday February 18 that the project to open the mouth of the river has been included in the list of projects the state will submit to the U.S. Treasury for funding from monies coming from the Deepwater Horizon settlement.*

*Commissioner Payne clarified that this is not a "short list" to be paired down further but rather the complete list of projects the state intends to pursue with its \$66M share of the state discretionary or "Pot 1" funds from the RESTORE Act. The \$10.766 million project to open the mouth is part of \$27.5 million allocated to three Brazoria County projects, one Matagorda County project, and one shared project.*

*The next two hurdles for opening the mouth are approval of the permit to dredge and final approval from the Treasury to fund it. The Treasury is still developing its process to formally apply for the funds, but a 45-day public comment period is opening soon. We'll let you know as soon as that period begins, and we ask everyone to please access the site using the link when available and lend your support to the project to open the mouth of the San Bernard.*

*Final approval and start of dredging may still be a long way off, but it's looking better than ever that it's a matter of when and not if. Stay tuned for further information as it happens! [1]*



**Brazoria County Commissioners Dude Payne** (Precinct 1) and **David Linder** (Precinct 4) reported the news at the State of the River Meeting. [1]



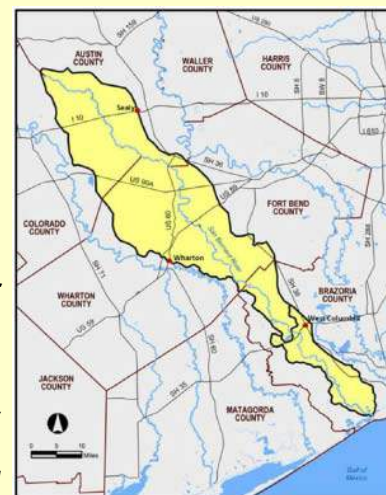
**Congressman Randy Weber**, 14<sup>th</sup> District, and wife Brenda, attend the meeting and praised the news. [1]

### THE SAN BERNARD RIVER

The San Bernard River flows from a spring near New Ulm, Texas, to its mouth on the Gulf of Mexico, some 120 miles (190 km) to the southeast of the source. Its principal tributary is Caney Creek. It passes through portions of Austin, Brazoria, Colorado, Fort Bend, Matagorda and Wharton counties. It passes alongside the Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge, which shelters one of the last populations of the critically endangered Attwater's Prairie Chicken, a ground-dwelling grouse of the coastal prairie ecosystem.

The San Bernard River is one of a small number of rivers in Texas which empties directly into the Gulf. Its mouth was impeded in 2005, causing it to drain into the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, but was later corrected. Shortly after being reopened, the entrance silted in again and remains so at this time.

—Wikipedia



#### San Bernard River Watershed.

Source: Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and Houston-Galveston Area Council

[1] Friends of River San Bernard website, Feb 19-20, 2017.

<http://www.sanbernardriver.com/>

[2] McLain, Neal. "San Bernard River: Still Blocked." *Chapter News*, Jan 1, 2016. p3.

<http://tinyurl.com/CN-20160101>

This issue of Chapter News includes one Attachment  
 Whooping Crane Trip Report – Feb 14, 2017 By Tom Morris  
<http://tmn-cot.org/Scrapbook/WhoopingReport-2017.pdf>

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