



APRIL 2017

Chapter News

A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT KRISTINE RIVERS

Spring is upon us, and suddenly there are so many opportunities available that it's impossible to participate in everything! A few recent incidents made me think this is probably a good time to remind everyone of some simple things we can all do to stay safe while we're volunteering.

Wear appropriate footwear. If you've seen me in the last few weeks, you probably noticed that I was wearing a walking air boot cast. I forgot my hiking boots on one of our field trips and got a metatarsal stress fracture as a result. Hiking boots will also protect your feet from snake bites, which are a very real possibility, as you can see from this photo taken by Bill Ahlstrom in the Xeriscape at the Quintana Neotropical Bird Sanctuary on April 1st. He looked down to see a Western Diamondback Rattlesnake slithering inches from his left foot.



Another chapter member forgot to wear appropriate footwear and was stung repeatedly after disturbing a fire ant bed in front of the QNBS welcome station. I've seen broken glass, fish hooks, rusty wire and other hazardous objects on the beach and buried in the grass when I'm out working. I cringe every time I see someone wearing flip flops or sandals in the field, and it's even worse when it's a Master Naturalist who should know better.

Carry a first aid kit. The one I carry in my car includes Benadryl cream, which came in handy for the fire ant bites mentioned above; Neosporin, needed by another chapter member that very same day; Band-Aids of various sizes; and sterile gauze.

Wear insect repellent. Mosquitoes and ticks aren't just a nuisance; they can also carry serious diseases such as the Zika virus and Lyme disease. Insect repellent can also deter chiggers, which are plentiful in grassy

areas. I always carry repellent in my car and offer it to those who have forgotten it.

Wear sunscreen. I also always carry sunscreen. If you're fair-skinned like I am and burn easily, it's important to protect your skin. Wearing a hat is another good way to protect your head and face from the sun.

Stay hydrated. Be sure to carry plenty of bottled water with you, and drink it often throughout the day. Heat stroke is a serious issue in our Texas heat, and staying hydrated is one of the best ways to prevent it, along with wearing sunscreen and light-colored, loose-fitting clothing.

Notify others of any serious allergies. If you have any allergies that require you to carry an EpiPen, be sure to notify the person in charge of the event you're working, in case of an emergency.

Update your emergency contact information. Verify that your emergency contact information is up to date in VMS. If you have an iPhone, update the information in the Medical ID section of the Health app. You can note medical conditions, allergies, current medications, blood type, organ donor status, and emergency contacts. This information is accessible by emergency medical personnel even if your screen is locked or password protected.

Hopefully these precautions will keep us all safe and sound while we're out volunteering and enjoying nature. As the old saying goes, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!"

Kristine Rivers is the president of the Cradle of Texas Chapter. She can be reached at rivers@tmn-cot.org



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<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 socio-economic level, race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.

TMN-COT members can still attend Sea Turtle Patrol Detection Training: 11 April, 10 a.m., Quintana Beach County Park Discovery Event Center, 330 5th St., Quintana <https://tinyurl.com/mnrfovy> or 26 April, 6 p.m., San Bernard NWR, 6801 CR 306, Brazoria <https://tinyurl.com/lcffwsk>. Event is approved for up to 1.5 hours of AT (do not include travel). VMS Code: "AT: I Received Training." Description: "Sea Turtle Patrol Detection."

Texas Master Naturalist Program
Cradle of Texas Chapter
General Meeting and Advanced Training
Wednesday, April 12, 2017
Texas AgriLife Extension Building
21017 County Road 171
Angleton, Texas 77515-8903



8:30 AM – 9:00 AM	Fun and Fellowship Snack Team: Donna Graham, Mike Mullins, Pete and Peggy Romfh, Joan Simonsen, JoAnna Harlan, Julia Gielser
9:00 AM – 9:50 AM	General Meeting and Nature Notes Nature Notes: TBA <i>This meeting is approved for 1.00 hour volunteer time</i>
10:15 AM – 12:00 PM	Program: The Columbia Bottomlands: New preserves in Brazoria County established by The Nature Conservancy Speaker: William “Billy” Ward, TNC Field Representative



William “Billy” Ward is the Columbia Bottomlands Field Representative for The Nature Conservancy. He worked at Mad Island Marsh Preserve before assignment to the West Columbia area to open and manage two new nature preserves in Brazoria County. Prior to working for TNC, Billy worked as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Fiji Islands in environmental education. A native of New Mexico, Billy earned his degree in Zoology from Western New Mexico University in Silver City.

The Columbia Bottomlands

In 2016 The Nature Conservancy established two new preserves in Brazoria County:

- Brazos Woods Preserve
- San Bernard Woods Preserve

These new preserves were funded by an \$8 million gift from BHP Billiton.

The Conservancy will manage the land and restore river frontage, grasslands, bottomland forests and wetlands on both preserves. Ongoing wildlife surveys and water quality monitoring in the San Bernard and Brazos rivers will measure how our work helps mitigate the impacts of encroaching development. The Brazos Woods Preserve will house an open-air educational pavilion for surrounding communities and visiting groups from Houston.

The Columbia Bottomlands is an ecologically rich, 700,000-acre expanse that feels like a million miles away from the frenetic pace of Greater Houston. The region is a unique mix of native Texas grasslands, hardwood forests and coastal wetlands. It connects us to the storied history of generations past. In the 1800s, Stephen F. Austin chose this region—which encompasses present-day Fort Bend and Brazoria counties—to settle a colony of 300 people; by the time of the Texas Revolution, some 30,000 immigrants called Austin’s Colony home.



Text and photo by The Nature Conservancy
<http://tinyurl.com/TNC-April-12>

Membership Report by Pete and Peggy Romfh, Membership Directors

Congratulations to those who recently recertified or reached new hours milestones in 2017. We are thankful to the many members who promptly and accurately make VMS entries, including impact data. Great job!

Those receiving awards in April include:

Recertification (Sea Turtle Pin)

Oron Atkins	Herb Myers
Susan Conaty	Lisa Myers
Garry Ellis	Peggy Romfh
Judy Green	Pete Romfh
Becky McClendon	Larry Ruhr
Sheree Muzny	Chip Sweet

250 Hours (Bronze Dragonfly Pin)

Judy Green
Lisa Myers
Kristine Rivers

Impact Data—January-March

2137 Adults
6285 Youth
8422 Total

Hours Totals—January-March

4236 hours VT
601.5 hours AT

The following awards were presented at the March TMN-COT general meeting. Six members recertified for the calendar year 2017, including: Carolyn May-Monie (class of '02), Jo Myers ('16), Ruby Lewis ('05), Kristine Rivers ('16), Don Sabathier ('15), and Jimmy Salinas ('16). Denise Kaplan ('16) achieved initial certification. Two members, Herb Myers ('16) and Janet Jackson-Ellis ('14), reached 250 hours of Volunteer Service (VT) and Sherry Summers ('01) reached the 1000-hour mark. Congratulations to all.



Kristine Rivers (Chapter President), Pete Romfh (Membership Director), Herb Myers (250 hours), Janet Jackson-Ellis (250 hours), Sherry Summers (1000 hours).
Text: Neal McLain. Photo by Richard Schaffhausen

Citizens Patrol Volunteer Training by Lisa Myers

Gulf Coast Bird Observatory's (GCBO) shorebird technician, Amanda Anderson, initiated a new effort to protect beach nesting birds during this year's spring and summer nesting season. By training approximately 30 volunteers at both GCBO and Bryan Beach on March 7, Anderson hopes that a program of increased stewardship and monitoring, with the support of partners including the



Front: Oron Atkins, Susan Conaty, Teresa Montgomery, Sherri Russell, Kristine Rivers, Jean Britt, Marlies Greenwood, Sheree Muzny, Janet Jackson-Ellis, Garry Ellis, Mary Holler, Jackie Hicks; Back: Jimmy Salinas, Bill Ahlstrom, Jim Calvert, Lisa Myers, George Valadez, Ann Lange, Mike Mullenweg, Vicky Kirby, Chip Sweet, Ed Peebles, Mike Mullins, Andy Smith.
Photo by Amanda Anderson

Freeport Police, City of Freeport, American Bird Conservatory and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, will result in increased numbers of beach nesting birds, particularly the plovers she is currently studying, at Bryan Beach. Volunteers' role includes: patrolling the beach and "prime" posted nesting areas she calls First Area, Middle Area, and Big Flats; educating the public about these areas and the birds; and maintaining the symbolic fencing and signage. During the presentation portion of the training, Anderson emphasized a vigilant but friendly, informative and non-confrontational approach to informing beach-goers of laws governing the beach and dunes. She hopes that more "eyes and ears" will facilitate an attitude shift in support of conservation and serve as a deterrent to the relatively few "bad apples" who operate vehicles in dunes or posted areas, vandalize the symbolic fencing, dump refuse, speed on the beach or allow underage drivers to operate vehicles, harass or harm birds (or allow their unleashed dogs to do so), and other illegal and/or harmful behaviors. Those patrolling were asked to report illegal activities to Freeport Police. Volunteers were also provided "Breeding Birds of the Texas Coast" brochures to distribute while patrolling. Due to the popularity of Bryan Beach during the summer months, Anderson can use more volunteers. She can be contacted at aanderson2885@gmail.com or the GCBO office, 979/480-0999.

Photo Potpourri by Peggy Romfh

While some may enjoy Texas beaches in summer, with their pounding rays of UV sunlight, Pete and I find the winter and spring beaches far more interesting. Occasionally, a winter storm washes new or unusual shells, bones, or even animals ashore, and the wintering shorebirds provide ongoing amusement as they search for food in the shallows or along the wrack line. Similarly, wetlands ponds have their own set of critters on or under the surface, even in winter and early spring.

Why/When Do Dolphins Ride Bow Waves?



Photo by Pete Romfh, Port Aransas, Feb. 2017

We often stop to watch ship traffic from the Quintana jetty and are delighted whenever we see dolphins riding the bow waves of large tankers or freighters. We have observed that dolphins are not seen under the following conditions:

- When a large ship is moving slowly, thus creating only a small pressure wave at the bow
- Near smaller boats such as Coast Guard boats, tug boats or small pleasure craft.

It turns out that our observations have a basis in scientific fact, at least for dolphins off the Texas Coast. Gulf Coast dolphins generally do not approach to bow-ride any vessel smaller than about 20m long and generally limit their surfing to oil tankers and freighters. Dolphins are actually riding the ship's underwater pressure wave, but they must leave their position to breathe. They leap forward and at an angle to the surface before falling back toward the advancing bow.

Dolphins are so good at bow-riding that they are frequently propelled along entirely by the pressure wave, often with no tail (or fluke) beats needed. On our recent trip to Rockport/Port Aransas, we observed dolphins riding the bow waves of a large freighter for over 20 minutes. We had wondered why they never seem to tire, but if they are leaping up only to catch a breath, they actually are getting a "free" ride.

As to why they do it, no one knows. It is thought that they do it just for fun!

Source: <http://what-when-how.com/marine-mammals/bow-riding-marine-mammals/>

**Wacky + Wreck =
Wrack Line**

Wormy House Trailers in Wetlands



Photos by P&P Romfh, Shadow Creek Ranch Nature Trail, Pearland, Feb. 2017

Thanks to the help of Dave Brandes, we were able to identify what was causing these tiny (5mm) bits of debris to move on the wetland pond surface at Shadow Creek Ranch Nature Trail. A close look under magnification demonstrated the presence of a small segmented worm (*Oligochaete*) of the genus *Dero*. These worms build a "house" out of bits of debris then carry it with them as they move about in the water.

What's the Wrack Line?

The wrack line is the line of debris left on the beach by high tide. The wrack is usually made up of plants, shells, feathers, bits of plastic, and litter, but it may also include animal carcasses, branches, logs, and fishing gear. When surf and high tides combine for a big push up the beach, it is common to see big logs in a wrack line that reaches all the way to the foot of the fore dunes.



Wrack lines seen during different seasons at Bryan and Quintana Beaches. From top left: sargassum; tree/branch debris; shell debris. Photos by P&P Romfh

The Incredible, Intelligible Coquina by Mike Mullenweg

One of the things I love most about summer is getting out and walking the beaches. I love listening to the sound of the waves crashing on the shore, smelling the salt air and looking for odd things to wash up in the surf. I especially love to see the little coquina clams constantly digging themselves back down into the sand. Until I started to learn more about them, they were just clams in the surf, and after discovering a few things about them, I can't stop thinking about what clever little animals they are.

The coquina clam is the common name for *Donax variabilis*. It is also known as a bean clam, digger boy or periwinkle in certain parts of the Gulf of Mexico. It is a small bivalve that comes in a variety of colors: blue, red, pink, purple, grey and even a few orange ones. In fact, its Latin name derives from the fact that you can find them in a variety of colors. They are filter feeders, primarily ingesting phytoplankton and algae. Just about everything on the beach loves to eat coquinas. They are the main diet of birds you find pecking around in the sand on the beach as well as ghost crabs that come out at night to feast on them. Even humans eat them: Boiling enough coquinas can create a wonderful broth with which you can make all kinds of soups.

The coquinas live their entire lives in the swash zone: that small strip of sand where the waves wash in and out on the beach. The action of the waves gives the sand in the swash a fluid characteristic. That means that the animals that live down there in sand don't really dig through the sand; they more or less swim through it. If you move up onto the beach, or out where the waves have less influence, the sand loses this fluid characteristic. The coquina has to stay



Coquinas, Willet eating a coquina. Photos by Mike Mullenweg



in the swash zone or it will not be able to move up and down in the sand, and this strip of fluid sand moves up and down the face of the beach as the tides move in and out. Coquinas can tell by vibrations in the beach whether the tide is coming in or going out. If the tide is coming in, they wait for a wave to go out and then "swim" their way to the surface. Then the next incoming wave will carry them up the beach. When the tide is going out, they will do the opposite and let the waves carry them back down the face of the beach. What an ingenious system to ensure that coquinas stay in their habitat, safe from predation. That's pretty smart for an animal that doesn't have a brain.

Who am I?



Each month or so, a less-familiar animal or plant will be featured along with a photo provided (usually) by a COT member. Guess what this animal is—then read on.

Rail lovers probably identified this marsh bird quickly, but even avid birders rarely spot a King Rail in the wild. Kristine Rivers snapped this *Rallus elegans* near Bryan Beach, where she visited on March 10 to scope out the nesting areas of plovers and other birds as part of GCBO's Beach Nesting Birds Beach Patrol. The medium-sized, chicken-like rail has a compact body, short tail and strong legs. Its long, slightly down-curved bill is evident in Kris's photo as are its reddish chest, neck and back and black and white stripes on the flanks. If you spot a downy chick, it is black, and a juvenile is like the adult but its markings are indistinct, with a variable amount of black on the sides.

According to "Cornell Labs, All About Birds," the King Rail's status, per the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN Red List of Threatened Species Version 2016-3) is "Near Threatened" (ver. 3.1), with a population trend of "decreasing." Cornell Labs notes, "King Rails declined by almost 5% per year between 1966 and 2014, resulting in a cumulative decline of 91%, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey. The North American Waterbird Conservation Plan does not list a population estimate but rates the species around a 16 out of 20 on the Continental Concern Score and lists it as a Species of High Concern. King Rail is on the 2014 State of the Birds Watch List, which lists bird species that are at risk of becoming threatened or endangered without conservation action...Declines in populations are related to the loss of wetlands across North America,...[but] pesticides may also play a role in the bird's decline, [and] King Rail are often killed by cars when moving around during breeding season."

Photo by Kristine Rivers; Source: Cornell Labs All About Birds https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/King_Rail/id

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- Instructions <http://txmn.org/staying-connected/sign-up-for-tmn-listserv/>
- Subscribe listserv@listserv.tamu.edu
- All messages are held for moderation by the TMN State Coordinator.

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