



JUNE 2017

# Chapter News

## A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT KRISTINE RIVERS

There's no denying that summer is here—it is HOT! I hope you're staying out of the heat by accruing some of your volunteer hours assisting Ruby Lewis with the summer library program. There were 400 people in attendance at the Angleton Library events just last week, so she can definitely use more help if you haven't already signed up!

Our chapter has been asked to help with some fascinating citizen science projects lately! One of them, the Louisiana Eyed Silkmoth project, has already begun and has a few volunteers working on it, but they can always use more hands, if you are interested. It involves setting up traps during the day at various locations, timed with the dark phase of the moon each month, and then checking them the following morning to see if any moths of that species have been captured. Volunteers are documenting all of the species of insects captured, and apparently, it has been pretty interesting!

We also just received a request for assistance with another citizen science project that will begin in the fall; it involves searching for juvenile American Eels (known as "elvers") in order to learn more about the life history of this species in the state of Texas. Volunteers will deploy eel mops

in bayous and creeks within tidal streams and estuaries; the mops are checked periodically for juvenile eels throughout the duration of the project. Oron Atkins has been gathering information on this project and will tell us more about it soon.

At the recommendation of the training team, we've decided to have open intern registration throughout the year rather than limiting it to just a brief period at the end of the year. We often receive inquiries from people who are interested, but as they are unable to register at that time, they often don't follow up later once registration is open. Now they may register right away. If you know someone who might be interested in joining the chapter, please encourage him or her to attend our meetings as a guest and consider registering as an intern for 2018; next year's class will be limited to 15 interns.

Everyone has been doing a wonderful job volunteering, and Texas A&M AgriLife is hosting a volunteer appreciation picnic this Friday to show their appreciation. Details are below. I hope to see you there!

*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).*



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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.

Texas Master Naturalist Program  
Cradle of Texas Chapter  
Chapter News – June 2017

**REMINDER: Texas A&M AgriLife Volunteer Picnic, Friday, June 16, 5-7 p.m. at Brazoria Environmental Education Station, 799 E. Hospital Dr., Angleton. RSVP by June 13 to 979-864-1558 or [JenniferF@Brazoria-County.com](mailto:JenniferF@Brazoria-County.com).**

**Texas Master Naturalist Program**  
**Cradle of Texas Chapter**  
**General Meeting and Advanced Training**  
**Wednesday, June 14, 2017**  
**Texas AgriLife Extension Building**  
**21017 County Road 171**  
**Angleton, Texas 77515-8903**



8:30 AM – 9:00 AM	<b>Fun and Fellowship</b> <b>Snack Team:</b> Oron Atkins, Mike Bettorf, Cindy Goodrum, Judy Green, Denise Kaplan
9:00 AM – 10:00 AM	<b>General Meeting and Nature Notes</b> <b>Nature Notes:</b> Lisa Myers, "Opossums" <i>This meeting is approved for 1.00 hour volunteer time</i>
10:15 AM – 12:00 PM	<b>Program:</b> Echinoderms <b>Speaker:</b> John O'Connell, Extension Agent, Brazoria County



**John O'Connell**, the Coastal and Marine Resources Extension Agent for Brazoria County, was appointed in February, 2012, by the Brazoria County Commissioner's Court. Major responsibilities for this position include:

- Conduct front-end analysis to determine community needs and establish partnerships for the purpose of planning, designing, implementing, evaluating and interpreting Extension educational programs to address coastal and marine issues
- Develop and foster a corps of trained Master Naturalist volunteers to assist in dissemination of unbiased, research-based information through workshops, seminars, classroom instruction, tours, mass media, result demonstrations, and one-on-one contacts
- Serve as a resource for commercial and recreational fisheries, coastal community development, coastal hazards, water quality, nature tourism, 4-H youth programs and K-12 students and faculty.

O'Connell earned a Master of Science Degree and a Bachelor of Science Degree in Wildlife and Fisheries Science from Texas A&M University. His course work focused on aquaculture, fisheries management and fish nutrition, and his thesis was, "Effects of Dietary Calcium and Vitamin D3 on Weight Gain and Mineral Composition of Blue Tilapia in Low-Calcium Water."

Prior to assuming his current position, O'Connell served as the Matagorda County Extension Agent—Coastal and Marine Resources.

Source: Press Release, Southeast Extension District 9 Office, March 12, 2012.

**Echinoderm** is the common name given to any member of phylum **Echinodermata** of marine animals. The adults are recognizable by their (usually five-point) radial symmetry, and include such well-known animals as sea stars, sea urchins, sand dollars, and sea cucumbers, as well as the sea lilies or "stone lilies." Echinoderms are found at every ocean depth, from the intertidal zone to the abyssal zone. The phylum contains about 7000 living species, making it the second-largest grouping of deuterostomes (a superphylum), after the chordates (which include the vertebrates, such as birds, fishes, mammals, and reptiles). Echinoderms are also the largest phylum that has no freshwater or terrestrial (land-based) representatives.

Source: Wikipedia: Echinoderm  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Echinoderm>

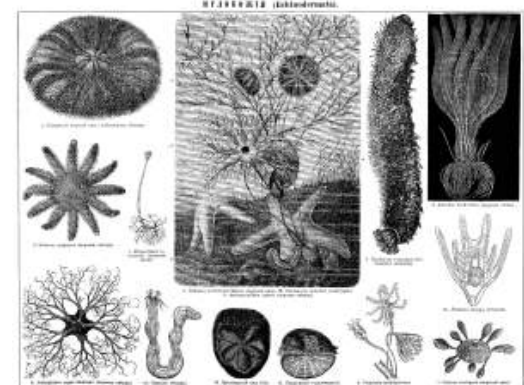


Illustration from Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopedic Dictionary (1890—1907)  
 Wikipedia <http://tinyurl.com/d44yh9s>

## Membership Report by Pete and Peggy Romfh, Membership Directors

Congratulations to those who recently recertified or reached new hours milestones in 2017. Those receiving awards in May include:

### Initial Certification

Michael Lasseter Edward Peebles

### Recertification (Sea Turtle Pin)

Dave Brandes  
Marlies Greenwood  
Susan Safley  
Carole Wenny  
Pam West

### 4000 Hours Milestone (Polished Gold Dragonfly with Ruby Pin)

Peggy Romfh

### Impact Data—January-May

7,813 Adults 24,268 Youth 32,081 Total

### Hours Totals—January-May

9,083 hours VT 869 hours AT

At the May 10, regular chapter meeting held at the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, all eight members of the TMN-COT Chapter's Intern Training Class of 2017 graduated. Each graduate received a certificate, a TMN-COT polo shirt, and an engraved nametag.

During the training program, the interns were divided into two independent-study teams. Each team studied a different topic and presented a report at the May meeting. The teams and their topics were:

- Bill Ahlstrom, George Valadez, Vic Wade, and Bob Whitmarsh presented "*An Ecosystem Survey of a Section of the Gulf Coast Beach in the San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge.*" Certified members Mike Mullins and Larry Ruhr served as team mentors
- Ed Peebles, Mike Lasseter, Ellen Lasseter and Megan Mainer presented "*Shadow Creek Ranch Nature Trail: A Man-Made Wildlife Oasis.*" Certified member Kristine Rivers served as team mentor.

Congratulations to all!



From left: Bill Ahlstrom, Bob Whitmarsh, George Valadez, Ellen Lasseter, Mike Lasseter, Megan Mainer, Ed Peebles. Not shown: Victor Wade. Photo by Richard Schaffhausen. Text by Neal McLain.

## Geoffrey L. Haskett to serve as President of National Wildlife Refuge Association by Neal McLain



After conducting an extensive national search, The National Wildlife Association announced in May the appointment of Geoffrey L. Haskett to

serve as President of the Refuge Association.

Haskett, who has been Acting-President of the Refuge Association since

early 2017, brings extensive experience with the National Wildlife Refuge System. He previously served as a leader and manager in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, including as Regional Director of the Alaska Region and Chief of Refuges in

Washington, D.C. He assumed responsibility as President immediately.

“Geoff Haskett’s extensive knowledge of the Refuge System coupled with his strong leadership and ability to build support for national wildlife refuges will serve both the organization and the Refuge System well,” said Rebecca R. Rubin, Chair of the National Wildlife Refuge Association Board of Directors, adding, “Our new President is deeply knowledgeable about the Refuge System, he is committed to our mission, and he has the right skills to advance it.”

Photo of Geoffrey L. Haskett by Neal McLain  
Source: National Wildlife Refuge Association  
<http://tinyurl.com/NWRA-Haskett>

### Photo Potpourri by Peggy Romfh

With the warm April and May weather, the number of insect species seen expands rapidly. From mosquitoes to dragonflies to butterflies, beetles and bugs, insects either delight or annoy Master Naturalists on every field excursion.

Pete and I have been privileged this month to participate in the Louisiana Eyed Silkmoth trapping project with Jennifer Wilson, biologist for the Texas Mid-Coast Refuges. The moth traps attract moths as well as beetles and true bugs to their nighttime light. A few species are featured below.

#### There Are Tigers in Our Midst...Tiger Beetles



All photos by P&P Romfh

**Tiger beetles** are ground beetles and members of the Carabidae family. There are 47 species found in Texas.

Three species that we recently found on Brazoria NWR are:

- (upper left) **White-cloaked Tiger Beetle** (*Eunota togata*)
- (lower left) **Salt Marsh Tiger Beetle** (*Habroscelimorpha severa*)
- (near left) **Gulf Shore Tiger Beetle** (*Habroscelimorpha pamphila*).

Tiger beetles often have large, bulging eyes; long, slender legs; and large, curved mandibles. They range in color from black to bright metallic colors to the gold color of the Gulf Shore Tiger Beetle, which is found only along the coast.

#### ...and Tiger Moths



There are several species of Tiger Moths in the U.S. This Harnessed Tiger Moth (*Apantesis phalerata*) was seen at Brazoria NWR and the Sargent Unit of San Bernard NWR.

May I come  
live in Texas  
too??



#### Tanager 1...Dragonfly 0



A strong north wind on April 23<sup>d</sup> brought a "fall-out" of birds to Quintana Neotropical Bird Sanctuary, where this female summer tanager (*Piranga rubra*) enjoyed a meal of a large dragonfly.

Love Bugs (*Plecia nearctica*) and Great Southern White butterflies (*Ascia monuste*) filled the air in late April at Quintana County Park. Both species were attracted to the purple Texas Thistle (*Cirsium texanum*).

#### Texas Thistle—a Sharp Attraction



## Discovering a Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle Nest on Matagorda by Oron Atkins

On April 27, 2017, veteran sea turtle patroller Juliane Thompson and I, a second-year patroller, left the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) maintenance facility (where the Fish and Wildlife Service Utility Task Vehicle is stored) located at the mouth of the Colorado River on Matagorda Peninsula. Our departure time, around 7:05 a.m., was reported to Sea Turtle Patrol Coordinator Vicky Adams.

Weather conditions were good for patrolling, with surf medium-rough. The wind was NNE at 12 mph, and the temperature, 62°F. Just after hitting the beach and clearing the pier at the river's mouth, we headed ENE for our 22 mile, one-way patrol. We had travelled about 175 yards from the pier when we spotted a Kemp's ridley sea turtle almost 90 degrees to our left. At the time of the sighting, we were travelling the wet, packed sand between the high tide line and the wave wash. Just beyond the turtle we could also see the sand-disturbed nesting area she had made, which was only about 60 feet beyond the high tide line, and we also noted that the rear of her carapace (upper shell) had a substantial layer of sand on the top rear, a good indication she had nested. The area she selected to nest in was sugar sand—a popular, high-traffic zone, and her tracks, though very recently made, were already almost non-existent due to the windblown sugar sand media. Also, evidence of her nesting site was quickly disappearing due to wind, so we quickly placed flag markers around the perimeter of the disturbed area. Additionally, appropriate communications were made to report our sighting.

We then checked the turtle for identification. Although no physical tags were found, a tag scar on her right, front flipper was noted. Julianne used a PIT Tag (an inserted, coded electronic tag) detection reader to check the turtle's front flippers, but nothing was detected. We then used a scouring pad to clean the turtle's carapace of algae, and we did find where a living tag (skin grafts from the light-colored plastron to the darker-colored carapace), usually performed at the hatchling stage, had previously been affixed to the turtle's upper right, second costal. We then unsuccessfully attempted to insert a PIT Tag in the turtle's left front flipper because the PIT Tag launcher was defective; however, we did affix two stainless steel metal ID tags to the left-side flippers: UUU474 to the front and UUU475 to the back. The turtle was then released to the water at 8:15 a.m.

Next, we concentrated on the nesting site. Julianne probed and quickly found the nest cavity throat, while I went to dig "prime sand" (moist and clean) for packaging the eggs. As a rookie, only recently certified for sea turtle egg excavation, I agreed to demonstrate proficiency with the task at hand, and 78 eggs were excavated and successfully packaged.

The protected, crated eggs were then taken to the LCRA Nature Center and we called Padre Island National Seashore (PINS) to arrange for transportation to their hatchery. Because it was still early morning, we requested a driver from PINS to pick up the eggs at LCRA, which allowed Julianne and me to resume patrolling.

At 4:00 p.m. and 40 miles later, Julianne and I returned to the LCRA maintenance facility. Though nothing else was found, a lifetime experience had occurred. I thank Julianne for her mentoring, coaching and patience throughout the many patrols we have made together. Today was "pay day."

Note: We later received interesting feedback from PINS on the pictures we sent showing the "living tag" location on the turtle's carapace. Comparing our pictures to historical documentation revealed that our turtle was tagged in either 1987, at National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Galveston, as part of their Head Start program, or in Mexico in 1999, where a similar "living tag" program was being conducted at the time using the same right-costal location. There was no other documentation of this turtle having been sighted since initial tagging. So, if either of the historically documented living tag locations are a positive ID for our turtle, its age is either 30 or 18 years old.



From far left: Oron Atkins and Juliane Thompson with Kemp's ridley turtle; marked nest site; protected, crated eggs. Photos by Oron Atkins.

## Mouth of the San Bernard River Restoration Project By Neal McLain

The last time I wrote about the San Bernard River in this publication, in the March issue<sup>1</sup>, I noted that the mouth of the river is blocked with silt and that funding to reopen the mouth was expected to come from funds available under the RESTORE Act<sup>2</sup>, a federal act that directed the allocation of civil penalties (fines) paid by British Petroleum to settle claims resulting from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

Opening the San Bernard is just one of dozens of proposed projects seeking funding under the RESTORE Act. A not-quite-complete list of proposed projects is posted on the Gulf Spill Restoration website<sup>3</sup>.

The United States Department of the Treasury must now decide which projects to approve, and as part of the decision process, the Department has opened a 45-day public comment period ending June 30, 2017. Any member of the public may submit comments.

Friends of River San Bernard (FOR) is leading an effort to get as many people as possible to submit comments. For a sample comment, see the FOR website:

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

Comments should be submitted to: [rcomments@tceq.texas.gov](mailto:rcomments@tceq.texas.gov).

As the FOR notes: The mouth needs your voice!

<sup>1</sup> "State of the River Meeting: Re-opening the Mouth of the San Bernard River," *Chapter News*, March 2017, Page 10.

[http://tmn-cot.org/Newsletters/Chapter\\_News\\_2017-03.pdf](http://tmn-cot.org/Newsletters/Chapter_News_2017-03.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council: "About the RESTORE Act."

<https://www.restorethegulf.gov/history/about-restore-act>

<sup>3</sup> Gulf Spill Restoration: "View Submitted Projects."

<http://tinyurl.com/SubmittedProjects>



## New Texas Parks and Wildlife Website for Plants of Texas

The "Federal and State Listed Plants of Texas" website was recently launched by Texas Parks and Wildlife. As of April 25, 33 plants, either endangered, threatened, or candidates for designation, are currently listed, with links for 31 of those plants. Written with a general audience in mind, each species' page includes:

- Texas distribution map
- Names (scientific, other scientific and common)
- Status (endangered, threatened, candidate or deleted)
- Ranks—global (G-Ranks reflect an assessment of the condition of the species across its entire range) and state/subnational [S-Rank is the NatureServe conservation status from a state/subnational (e.g., a province), characterizing the relative rarity or imperilment of the species] (see <http://explorer.natureserve.org/nsranks.htm> for a "National and Subnational Conservation Status Definitions" table)
- Global Location
- Description and photos and/or diagrams
- Similar Species and photos
- Habitat and photo(s)
- Life Cycle Events and Survey Season
- Comments
- Citations and Additional Information links

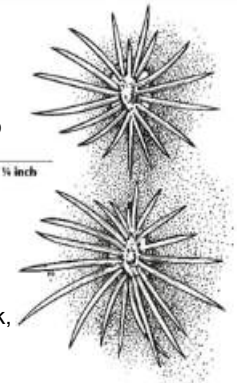
The site is located at:

[https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/wildlife\\_diversity/nongame/listed-species/plants/](https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/wildlife_diversity/nongame/listed-species/plants/)



From the "Black Lace Cactus" page: "Black lace cactus typically has spines with dark purple tips, which gives the plant an overall blackish hue. Credit: Dana Price, Texas Parks & Wildlife Dept."

"Black lace cacti have vertical ridges that are divided into spine-tipped, cone-shaped projections. There are typically 14-20 radial spines, which lay flat against the stem. Credit: Patrick Stark, Texas Parks & Wildlife Dept."



## Sargent Swing Bridge Will Become a Corkscrew

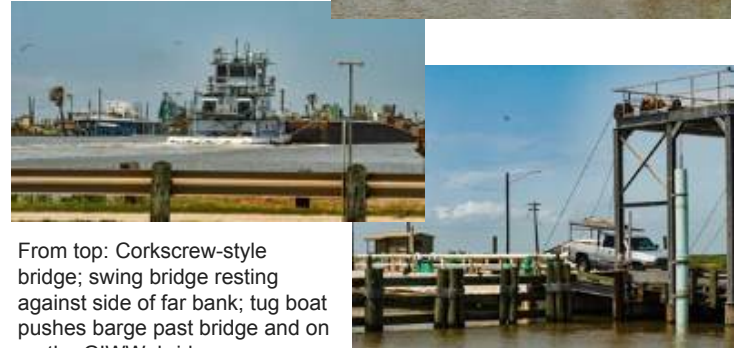
by P&P Romfh

A swing bridge across the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW) on FM457 provides the single access point to the beach or the public boat ramp at Sargent. A moving piece of Texas history (pun intended), the Sargent bridge is the last floating (pontoon style) swing bridge in Texas. First built as a floating wooden pontoon in 1943, the bridge was replaced in 1975 by a new, metal, pontoon bridge. Except for new approaches built at either end in 1981, the bridge has remained unchanged.

Located at the southern tip of FM457, the bridge is actually a 120-foot pontoon barge. When boats and barges need to pass on the GIWW, they radio the bridge tower. The tower staff turns on stop lights, drops signal arms across the road, pulls up the approach ramps and then swings the bridge east against the bank of the GIWW using a cable attached to the floating pontoon.

All of this takes time, and the bridge often becomes a choke point for the heavy barge traffic along the waterway. Passing barge traffic requires the swing bridge to remain open about 15 minutes, which also creates delays for people trying to access (or leave) the beach or boat dock.

According to the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), the swing bridge needs to be replaced because of its age and associated upkeep. The TxDOT is proposing to replace the current swing bridge with a new, concrete 'corkscrew' bridge, one in which the traffic crosses under and then over itself in a 'corkscrew' fashion (see photo top) to gain the height needed above barge traffic. However, the proposed bridge will cover much more of the landscape than the current swing bridge and is expected to cost \$28.7 million. It will be 2,363 feet long and 50 feet wide with two 12-foot travel



From top: Corkscrew-style bridge; swing bridge resting against side of far bank; tug boat pushes barge past bridge and on up the GIWW; bridge swung back in place and approach ramps are down for vehicles to pass.

lanes. The original bridge cost \$270,000 to build but has about \$500,000 per year in maintenance costs. The start date for construction is planned for mid-2017.

Still, it will be sad to see another piece of coastline gobbled up with a large, concrete structure, and a piece of Texas history will go with it.

Photos by Pete Romfh.

Source: <https://ftp.dot.state.tx.us/pub/txdot-info/ykm/fm457-bridge-replacement-factsheet.pdf>.

## Who/What am I?



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

Diane Porter, writing for *birdwatching.com*, notes, "Baby birds that hatch with their running shoes on are called **precocial**,... [or] 'ripened beforehand,' [as opposed to **altricial** birds] that hatch blind, naked, and helpless. When these killdeer eggs hatch, they will have been "in the egg twice as long as altricial birds, so they have more time to develop. A one-day-old killdeer chick is actually two weeks older than a one-day-old robin nestling. Although adult robins and killdeer are the same size, a killdeer's egg is twice as big as a robin's. There's more nourishment built into the killdeer egg to sustain the embryo for its longer time in the shell." Other precocial birds besides killdeer are chickens, ducks, and quail.

As can be seen in this photo taken by Kristine Rivers on May 5 at The Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge, "Killdeer nest on open ground, often on gravel. They may use a slight depression in the gravel to hold the eggs, but they don't line it at all, or line it only with a few stones. Since there is no structure to stand out from its surroundings, a killdeer nest blends marvelously into the background. Furthermore, the speckled eggs themselves look like stones.

The parent killdeer start sitting on the eggs to incubate them as soon as all the eggs have been laid. Killdeer embryos inside the first-laid three eggs do not start developing while the eggs are sitting out in the cold. But when they feel the warmth of the parent killdeer, all four killdeer embryos start developing at the same time. So even though the first-laid egg spends a longer time in the shell than the last-laid, all the killdeer chicks have the same development period. It takes 24 to 28 days of incubating for the chicks to hatch." See Kristine's video of the killdeer at <http://tinyurl.com/ydhgqh25>.

Photo by Kristine Rivers; Text from *birdwatching.com*. <http://www.birdwatching.com/stories/killdeer.html>

# Looking Back Ten Years...Food, Fun and Fellowship By Neal McLain

Way back in June 2007, TMN-COT Chapter Members gathered at GCBO for a day of fun and fellowship. Find more photos at <http://funfoodfellowship.blogspot.com/>



Ruth Tvedt



Rich Tillman



Jan and Jean Kater



Phil Huxford, Tom Morris



Ed Barrios, Ed Hunter and sous chefs



Carl Dodson



Marty Cornell, Mickey Dufilho, Tom Morris



Mary Helen Israel and granddaughter



## Cradle of Texas Chapter Officers

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## Master Naturalist Email Lists

### **TMN-COT Chapter list**

- Instructions [http://tmn-cot.org/Email\\_Lists/index.html](http://tmn-cot.org/Email_Lists/index.html)
- Send messages to [TMN-COT@googlegroups.com](mailto:TMN-COT@googlegroups.com)
- Message Archive <http://tinyurl.com/TMN-COT-Mail>
- All messages are sent immediately.

### **State Master Naturalist list**

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

*Chapter News* is published monthly on Monday before the General Meeting by the Texas Master Naturalist Cradle of Texas Chapter. Submissions are welcome; submission deadline is 5:00 PM on Friday before the General Meeting. Send submissions by email to *Chapter News* Editor at [news@tmn-cot.org](mailto:news@tmn-cot.org). Submissions may be edited for clarity and spacing.