



OCTOBER 2018

Chapter News

A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT KRISTINE RIVERS



We're reminded that we're in Texas when weather goes from drought-like conditions to flash flooding within a relatively short period of time. In early August, I wrote about the impact of the change in habitat brought about by extreme heat and lack of rain; since that time, we've been dealing with the opposite—heavy downpours that have caused event cancellations and have given many people in our area Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) from vivid memories of the destruction caused by Hurricane Harvey.

Many of the wetlands in our area are ephemeral, and wildlife must adapt to an ever-changing habitat. Birds can move relatively easily to find more welcoming conditions, but this is not the case for many other animals that are land-based, and even less so for aquatic species. However, nature has a way of adapting and taking advantage of more beneficial conditions brought about by change in the weather.

If you observe closely, when you see many plants and wildflowers suddenly flourishing in a previously dry habitat, you can also see animals do the same. Pete and Peggy Romfh have been participating in the American Eel Project and noted the sudden, fascinating array of literally hundreds of small benthic and aquatic animals in the eel mops (but still no eels!). For example, check out the estuarine mud crab images on page six. This is

evidence of species quickly reacting to very wet conditions by reproducing in order to replenish their numbers that were negatively impacted by the drought. Pete and Peggy have taken many photos to document their findings and to help with identification. We are lucky to have such experienced and curious naturalists within our chapter.

The presentation scheduled for this month's meeting is on quite an interesting topic—herbal remedies. Bekka Laurent, our guest speaker, is a holistic health professional who has worked with and learned about herbs and herbal remedies for the past 11 years. I'm sure that many of you, like me, grew up with parents or other relatives who relied on these types of remedies for everything from cuts and burns to upset stomachs. I am looking forward to finding out more about how we can utilize native plants and herbs.

If you have ideas for Advanced Training presentation topics for our meetings or would like to share your own knowledge for the Nature Notes segment, please let Bill Ahlstrom know. There is always something new to learn about nature.

Kristine Rivers is the president of the Cradle of Texas Chapter. She can be reached at 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 Dept. Texas Master Naturalist programs serve all people without regard to socio-economic level, race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.

Masthead photo by Peggy Romfh



Captain Shishka Bob Needs YOU!!

November 7, 8, and 9

Sign up via <http://bit.ly/CaptBob18>

Texas Master Naturalist Program
Cradle of Texas Chapter
Chapter News – October 2018

Texas Master Naturalist Program—Cradle of Texas Chapter
General Meeting and Advanced Training
Wednesday, October 10, 2018
Texas AgriLIFE Extension Building
21017 County Road 171
Angleton, TX 77515-8903

8:30 AM – 9:00 AM	Fun and Fellowship Snack Team: Brazoria County Library System
9:00 AM – 10:15 AM	General Membership Meeting <i>This meeting is approved for 1.00 hour volunteer time</i> Nature Notes: Mike Mullins, “Beach Trash”
10:30 AM – 12:00 PM	Speaker: Rebecca Laurent Topic: <i>Colonial Folklore: Emphasis on herbs and plants</i>

Learn about aromatic and medicinal plants from herbalist Rebecca Laurent. This presentation will focus on the basics of using readily-available herbs in and around your home and for your health, including how to make herbal remedies for sunburns and those pesky bugs.



Bekka Laurent is a Holistic Health Professional and owner of Bekka’s Planet Herbal, Health, and Home. She empowers people with plant-based solutions for natural living. Bekka believes that living a life healthy and free of debilitating disease can be as easy as looking at what we eat and the items we use around us.

Her vocation started with one question years ago about an alternative treatment to the synthetic, chemical-based drugs for her son’s asthma. That question opened the door to herbal medicine and win after win in tending to common ailments—all done with natural healing, as we did generations ago.

Bekka has been working with and learning about herbs and herbal remedies for the past 11 years and is now finishing her formal training as Master Herbalist and Holistic Health Professional from Genesis School of Natural Health.



Photo: telegraph.co.uk

Membership Report by Pete and Peggy Romfh, Membership Directors

Congratulations to those receiving awards at the COT October General Meeting:

Recertification 2018 (Ocelot Pin)

Karen Leder

250 Hours Milestone (Bronze Dragonfly Pin)

Larry Peterson
Bob Whitmarsh

Impact Data—January 1—September 30

11,302 Adults 31,057 Youth 42,359 Total

Hours Totals—January 1—September 30

13,602 hours VT 1,449 hours AT 107 Volunteers



Left top, Pete Romfh and Peggy Romfh were presented 4000 and 5000-volunteer-hour-pins respectively by Vice President Bill Ahlstrom at the September General Meeting held at the AgriLIFE Building in Angleton, Texas. Below, Pam West, Chapter Host, helps Peggy Romfh serve cake commemorating Peggy's milestone.



Photo credits Richard Schaffhausen (above left) Neal McLain (left)

We're Digging October: Texas Archeology Month compiled by Neal McLain

Tuesday, October 9 – 7:00 p.m. – Presentation: Death and Burials in the Texas Prison System

Brazosport Museum of Natural Science, 400 College Drive, Clute

By Brazosport Archaeological Society, Brazosport Museum of Natural Science

Sandy Rogers, THC Texas Archeological Steward from Huntsville, will discuss her research on Texas Prison Cemeteries and a summary of her new book, *Electrocutions in Texas 1924-1964*. Sandy has worked with the Texas Prison Museum in Huntsville and done extensive research on the Texas Prison system and associated cemeteries across Texas, including many in Brazoria County. Sandy will provide an update on the recent discovery of a cemetery in Sugar Land. Sandy has written the most complete and accurate account of executions by electric chair in Texas, which was published in April 2018. This book reveals what went on in the death chamber at execution time as well as glimpses into the death-house cells and details of the crimes that caused these men to be condemned to death row.

<https://bcfas.org/bmns/>

Thursday Oct 11 – 6:30 p.m. – Frost Town

Brazoria County Historical Museum, 100 East Cedar, Angleton

Doug Boyd presents his discoveries while excavating the remains of Frost Town, Houston's first working-class neighborhood. The features and artifacts found, such as German-made dolls and hand-painted Mexican pottery, reveal some insights into the people who lived in Frost Town, founded in the 1830s.

<https://brazoriacountytx.gov/departments/museum>

Thursday Oct 18 – 6:30 p.m. – Gatorliths: Alligator Gut Gravels

Brazoria County Historical Museum, 100 East Cedar, Angleton

Dr. August Costa considers evidence that sheds new light on the argument that

indigenous inhabitants of the Galveston Bay area exploited alligator stomach stones for chipped-stone tool making.

<https://brazoriacountytx.gov/departments/museum>

Thursday Oct 25 – 6:30 pm – Forensic Sculptor: Killing of Levi Morris

Brazoria County Historical Museum, 100 East Cedar, Angleton

Internationally recognized forensic sculptor, Amanda Danning, reconstructs the life and skeleton of Buffalo Soldier Levi Morris.

<https://brazoriacountytx.gov/departments/museum>



PEGGY ROMFH REACHES 5000-HOUR MILESTONE by Neal McLain



The Texas Master Naturalist Cradle of Texas Chapter announced at its September meeting that Peggy Romfh, a member of the Class of 2012, had reached the 5000-volunteer-hour milestone.

Peggy's volunteer work on behalf of our chapter, frequently performed jointly with her husband Pete, includes numerous citizen science projects and other activities and service, including:

- American Eel Mop (2018)
- Louisiana Eyed Silk Moth (2017)
- Texas Stream Team Water Quality Testing (2014-present)
- Lady Bird Johnson wildflower.org (over 900 photos, Brazoria County plant species)
- Other Brazoria County species published on BAMONA, BugGuide, Lost Ladybug, i-Naturalist
- Vice President/Programs 2013-14
- Advanced Training Director 2015-16
- Membership Co-Director 2017-present
- Editor of the *Texas Mid-coast Nature Gallery*, 2013-present <http://www.refugefriends.org/photos/index.php> [website]
- Co-author of *Aquatic Macroinvertebrates, Brazoria NWR (Big Slough and Crosstrails Pond)* [online book, 2015-16]

<http://tmn-cot.org/Resources/Macroinvertebrates.pdf>

- Co-author of *Sedges and Rushes of the Texas Mid-coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex and its Counties* [online book, 2016]

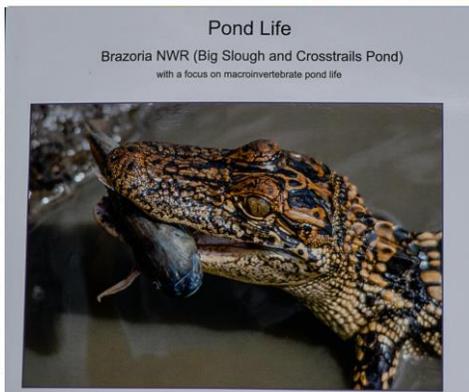
<http://tmn-cot.org/Resources/Sedges-and-Rushes.pdf>

- Author of *Highlights from our History: 50th Anniversary Recognition* [PowerPoint, 2016]

<http://tmn-cot.org/Presentations/15th-Recognition.pdf>



Above left, Peggy presents at the COT 2018 Bonus AT Day in January, 2018; right, Peggy checks for invertebrates from the eel mop at Cedar Lake Creek, SBNWR. Below, Peggy tests water samples from Oyster Creek Municipal Park.



Pond Life: Brazoria NWR
By Peggy and Pete Romfh, rev. 2018

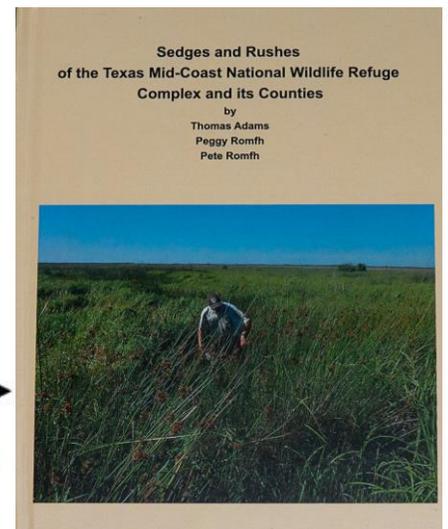
Books written by or co-written by Peggy and Pete Romfh, pictured left and right.

Sedges and Rushes... can be viewed and downloaded via

<http://tmn-cot.org/Resources/index.html>

The latest edition of **Aquatic Macroinvertebrates: Brazoria NWR**, is now called **Pond Life: Brazoria NWR**, and will be posted to the web in the near future.

Sedges and Rushes of the Texas Mid-Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex and its Counties
By Thomas Adams, Peggy Romfh, Pete Romfh, 2016



TMN-COT

WELCOMES INTERN CLASS OF 2018



Mike Hampy



Josefat Jimenez



Brenda Martin



Debbie Nance



Jim Nance



Left to right, the 2018 COT intern class, photographed at the September General Meeting: Kristin Plunkett, Mary Schwartz, Rose Wagner; Brenda Martin; Cynthia Grandjean (withdrew due to injury); Josef Jimenez; Regina Tippett; Mike Hampy; Taylor Wilkins; Debbie Nance; Jim Nance; not pictured: Catherine Sweet. Photo by Dick Schaffhausen. Headshots by Jimmy Salinas and Dick Schaffhausen.



Kristin Plunkett



Mary Schwartz



Catherine Sweet



Regina Tippett



Taylor Wilkins



Rose Wagner

Playing in the Mud

Among the many invertebrates that we have found in the eel mop at Cedar Lake Creek, an estuarial site included in the American Eel Project sponsored by TPWD, the **Estuarine Mud Crab** (*Rithropanopeus harrisi*) stands out with its fierce expression and white fingers and palms.

The top of its claws are brownish with scattered dots. The carapace is almost square-shaped. Unlike the many blue crabs we also find, their last pair of legs is normal, not flattened into a flap for swimming.

The photo at bottom right shows an ovigerous (egg-bearing) female mud crab with a mass of green eggs attached.

The Estuarine Mud Crab is usually found in bays near vegetation or oyster reefs, but it has recently invaded several Texas freshwater reservoirs. It can tolerate a wide range of salinity. Text and photos by P&P Romfh.



The Stuff That Helps Leeches Get Their Fill of Blood

by Veronique Greenwood, 19 July 2018, *The New York Times*



Once they've fed, leeches can also keep the blood from solidifying in their own digestive tract long after they've detached, living off a single blood meal for a year. Credit: the4js/iStock, via Getty Images.

You might think you know leeches: Go for a swim in the wrong shallow lake, and you'll emerge covered in sleek, black bloodsuckers that have decided you're their next meal. But inside a leech, fascinating things are happening.

The slimy creatures manufacture a wide portfolio of substances that help keep blood flowing once they've attached themselves to a host. They don't just latch on to you; they pump out anticoagulants that prevent the wounds they create from clotting too quickly. And once they've sucked your blood—they can consume many times their own body weight in one sitting, or rather, sucking—they're not done. Leeches must also keep the blood from solidifying in their own digestive tract long after they've let go of their host.

"We've had leeches that can live off a single blood meal for a year," said Michael Tessler, a researcher at the American Museum of Natural History who is a co-author of a recent paper on leeches in the *Journal of Parasitology*, which focused on the anticoagulant genes in leeches' salivary organs. Medicinal leeches, which have minuscule jaws and which doctors may use to keep blood flowing in the treatment of injuries that might

otherwise lead to amputation, have been examined like this before. But Dr. Tessler and his colleagues chose eight less-studied types of marine leeches that can feed on creatures like turtles, fish and even sharks.

Researchers collected the leeches' salivary organs and looked to see what genes were active and compared the sequences to a database of known anticoagulants to make their identifications. In each of the species looked at, they found an average of 43 different genes for anticoagulant substances at work. They were surprised to find that despite the leeches' differing taste in hosts, they made many of the same anticoagulants.

The team had thought that perhaps leeches feeding on turtles and sharks would be very different, Dr. Tessler said, but that was not the case. One substance, called destabilase, particularly intrigued the researchers because it is also common in the jawed leeches, which are a more recently-evolved group. "When they bite you, they kind of saw at you," explained Dr. Tessler. "But the marine leeches feed with a proboscis."

The fact that both branches have the substance helps support the idea that eating blood is an ancient feature of leeches rather than a new development. This is a more controversial point than you might think. Many leech species do not suck blood but instead live on the bodily fluids of snails or other invertebrates. Others eat earthworms, swallowing them whole. Whether these groups lost the ability to eat blood, or others gained it, is a subject of continuing research, about which tracing anticoagulants may shed new light.



COT volunteers stepped up and turned out to help our partner organization GCBO at this year's Xtreme Hummingbird Xtravaganza. Spotted in the heat and a bit of rain (on Sunday) were: Marty Cornell, Lisa Myers, Ed Barrios, Donna Graham, Ann Lange, Dick Schaffhausen, Dave Brandes, Christina Hartman, Pam West, David Plunkett, Phil Huxford, Chris Kneupper, Mickey Dufilho, Carole Wenny, Judy Green, Kim Richardson, Tom Morris, and Mary Schwartz.

Also Spotted at GCBO's 2018 Xtreme Hummingbird Xtravaganza

While hummingbird banding took center stage at XHX, Pete and Peggy Romfh captured some of the birds feeding and flying and also snapped a few non-avian guests provided by Sea Center Texas.



Photos above by Pete Romfh; photos below by Peggy Romfh.



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TMN-COT Chapter list

- Instructions http://tmn-cot.org/Email_Lists/index.html
- Send messages to 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
- All messages are held for moderation by the TMN State Coordinator.

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