



FEBRUARY 2019

Chapter News

A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT KRISTINE RIVERS

Our chapter started off the new year with a bang on January 26 via the Bonus AT Day: “A Little R&R (Research & Resource Management).” I am so proud of all who worked hard to make the event a success and greatly appreciate our partners that participated: Gulf Coast Bird Observatory (GCBO), Brazoria County Parks Department, Texas Community Watershed Partners (TCWP), and the United States Fish & Wildlife Service. I hope you enjoyed the event as much as I did. The committee will be seeking your feedback soon before we begin planning for next year’s event.

As we recently reviewed citizen science projects that our chapter has participated in, we wanted to take a closer look at one of them in particular—the American Eel monitoring program. We’ve asked Stephen Curtis, Aquatic Biologist for TPWD, to provide members attending the February chapter meeting with details on the project’s progress. It should be interesting to find out what TPWD has learned based on input received from the various monitoring locations.

On the resource-management side, Chris Kneupper has already started on the Big Tree Registry project for which he received Board support in January. Check out the webpage at: <https://brazoria.agrilife.org/brazoria-county-big-tree-registry/>.

Is there a project that you would like to pursue? Stay tuned; we’re working out details of a new program for which we will be seeking membership approval.

I hope you’re taking some time to get out and enjoy nature in winter. I know most people

focus on spring migration, but in my opinion, fall/winter migration is just as exciting. There are so many interesting birds to see in our area right now including waterfowl, raptors, warblers, and sparrows. As a case in point, a Fork-tailed Flycatcher showed up in The Nature Conservancy’s Brazos Woods Unit at the end of December; it’s been consistently seen in the same location since that time. This species, a South American resident, is completely accidental in North America. A close relative of our common Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, it’s a beautiful and graceful bird (see photo, left).



It’s also fun to watch those birds already beginning to change into breeding plumage as they prepare for the onset of spring. I’m pleased to be presenting on that topic at our March chapter meeting, “It’s Time for a Makeover! Understanding Plumage Variation.” In this interactive presentation, I’ll discuss reasons for plumage variations; how molting can affect identification; and color changes of bills, lores, legs, and feet. Bring your favorite field guide to practice identification skills.

I look forward to seeing you at our meeting on Wednesday and to hear about what you’ve all been doing in 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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Masthead photo: Northern Shovelers and Lesser Scaups at Moccasin Pond, January 2019, by Peggy Romfh.

Texas Master Naturalist Program
Cradle of Texas Chapter
Chapter News – February 2019

SHOUT-OUTS—Thank you, **NEAL McLAIN**, for reactivating our Twitter account, <https://twitter.com/tmncot> and compiling birding-related resources on a new COT webpage, <http://tmn-cot.org/birding/index.html>. Thank you, **RUBY LEWIS**, for setting up and hosting visitors at the BNWR Open House, December 22 & 23.



Texas Master Naturalist Program—Cradle of Texas Chapter
General Meeting and Advanced Training
Wednesday, February 13, 2019
Texas AgriLIFE Extension Building
21017 County Road 171
Angleton, TX 77515-8903

8:30 AM – 9:00 AM	Fun and Fellowship Morning Snack Team: Julia Geisler, Becky Huff, Jo Myers, Jim Nance, John O'Connell, George Valadez
9:00 AM – 9:40 AM	General Membership Meeting <i>This meeting is approved for 1.00 hour volunteer time</i>
9:40 AM – 10:00 AM	Nature Notes Speaker: Tom Morris Topic: Highlights of Pelagic Excursions
10:15 AM – 12:00 PM	Advanced Training Speaker: Stephen Curtis. Aquatic Biologist. Texas Parks & Wildlife Department Topic: American Eel Project: How Eel Mop Data Captured by Gulf Coast TMN Chapters Fit the Original Hypothesis <i>[Hours for Advanced Training (AT) TBD at close of meeting]</i>

**Biologists seek assistance from anglers
in tracking American Eel in Texas waterways**



American Eel (*Anguilla prostrata*) [1]

AUSTIN—Every now and then, anglers fishing Texas waterways may reel in something unexpected: the slimy, secretive American Eel. “The American Eel is just such a unique species that you don’t see that often, and so when you catch

one or you see one, you remember it,” said Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) aquatic biologist Stephen Curtis; “It’s going to leave an impression.”

The American eel is found in rivers throughout the eastern half of the United States, but there are still many unanswered questions about the species, especially in rivers that flow to the Gulf of Mexico. Biologists at TPWD are currently collecting data to better understand this unique species, and they are asking anglers to help in the effort by submitting pictures and information about eels they have caught or observed in Texas waterways. “In order for us to better manage and conserve this species in Texas, we need to have a better understanding of its distribution, abundance and life cycle,” Curtis said. “We definitely need more data.” [2]

[1] Wikipedia: *American Eel*. November 2, 2017. <http://tinyurl.com/y7y69mpy>

[2] TPWD News Release, August 4, 2017. <http://tinyurl.com/yarn63fj>

[3] LinkedIn: Stephen Curtis, November 4, 2017. <http://tinyurl.com/y8u292pr>

Stephen Curtis

is an Aquatic Biologist with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, based in San Marcos. He has previously served as



Stephen Curtis [3]

Aquatic Scientist at the Environmental Institute of Houston at the University of Houston—Clear Lake. In this position he was responsible for the collection and management of biological and habitat data for various research and monitoring projects, and he led and managed field crews in data collection.

Stephen holds a Master of Science degree in Aquatic Resources from Texas State University. [3]

Membership Data Report by Pete and Peggy Romfh, Data Managers

Congratulations to those receiving awards at the COT February 2019 General Meeting:

Initial Certification Achieved (TMN Pin)

Brenda Martin Krissy Plunkett

Recertification 2018 (Ocelot Pin)

John O'Connell

Recertification 2019 (Warbler Pin)

Lisa Myers Kristine Rivers

500 Hours Milestone (Silver Dragonfly Pin)

Roger Allen

1000 Hours Milestone (Gold Dragonfly Pin)

Pam Peltier

Impact Data YTD—January 1—January 31, 2019

419 Adults 231 Youth 650 Total

Hours Totals YTD—January 1—January 31, 2019

980 Hours VT 367 Hours AT 72 Volunteers



At the January 2018 General Meeting held at the AgriLIFE Building in Angleton, Membership Director John Boettiger (left) and President Kristine Rivers (right) present Robert Salzer with a 500-hours milestone pin. Not pictured, Jimmy Salinas, who also achieved 500 hours.

Flying Toward the Light from The New York Times, September 17, 2018

Why are night-flying insects attracted to lights?

What draws some night-flying insects, notably a variety of moth species, to a flame or other bright light is one of the perennial riddles of natural science. Several theories have been advanced over the years, but none has been universally accepted or conclusively proved.

One idea is that moths use the moon, a natural light source, as a navigational beacon to orient themselves, maintaining a constant angle to its rays. They mistake a bright, artificial source for moonlight and alter their flight path in such a way that they spiral toward or circle the artificial source instead.

Another theory is that a very bright light creates the appearance of a dark area around it and that the moths are flying into that apparent dark space, perhaps to hide there.



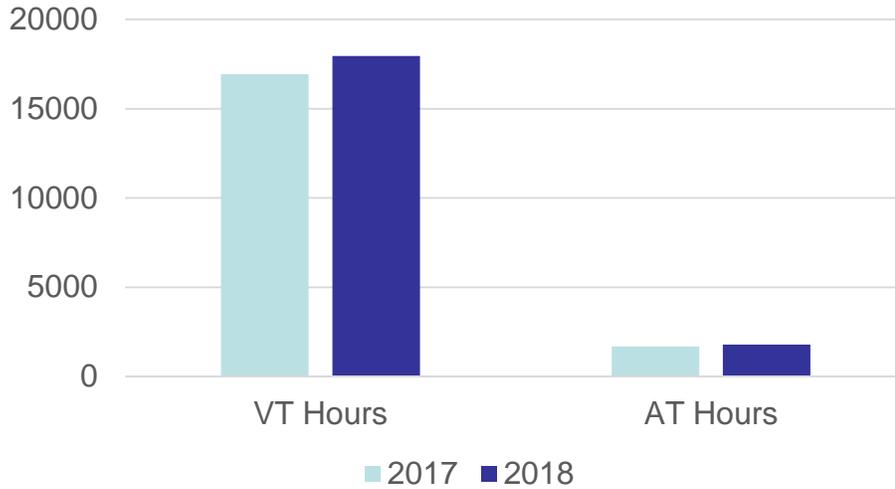
Others have proposed that the bright light dazzles the moths or temporarily blinds them, or that certain wavelengths mimic a food source or potential mate.

Recent research suggests the possibility that moths exposed to bright, artificial light in the light-polluted urban areas of the modern world can evolve to avoid being drawn to it and thus escape being destroyed. A study published in the journal *Biology Letters* in 2016 compared the behavior of populations of small ermine moths of the genus *Yponomeuta* found in Europe that were hatched and raised in bright, urban areas with those that grew up in pristine, dark areas. The urban populations showed a great reduction in the “flight to light” response in contrast to the moths from sheltered populations, the researchers found.

2018 Volunteer Hours Recap

Prepared by Peggy and Pete Romfh, Data Managers

VT and AT Hours 2017 vs 2018



TOTALS

VT 2018: 17,954; **VT 2017:** 16,936

AT 2018: 1,793; **AT 2017:** 1,675

Impact 2018:

Adults 14,226; Youth 36,566

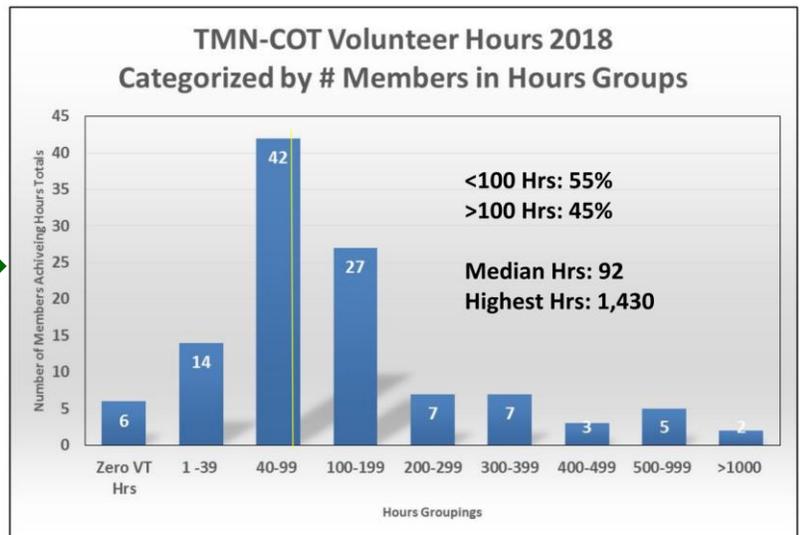
Trail Miles: 0.7

Note: Increase in 2017 versus 2018 hours may be due to an increase in activity or an increase in hours capture in VMS or both.

2018 Volunteer Hours Data Showing Number of Members by Hours Groups

Group	2018	%	<100 and >100 Hrs
Zero VT Hrs	6	5%	
1 -39	14	12%	55%
40-99	42	37%	
100-199	27	24%	
200-299	7	6%	
300-399	7	6%	45%
400-499	3	3%	
500-999	5	4%	
>1000	2	2%	
Total	113		

2018 Chart of Service Hours



Getting to Know Our New Members

The eleven-person intern class of 2018 included people of varied interests who share at least one common denominator: A desire to grow their knowledge about nature and share it with others. Recently, we invited interns to provide a bit of background biography; eight interns responded.



Mike Hampy—I grew up on a farm in central Missouri. My grandparents had a cabin on Lake of the Ozarks, which was always a great getaway. I received a B.S. in Industrial Arts from Central Missouri University (CMU) and taught shop and coached in Missouri for four years. I went back to CMU and received a M.S. in Industrial Safety, then worked at Bryan Mound for 31 years, retiring as the Environmental Safety and Health Manager. I enjoy nature, fishing, golf and gardening. I'm a member of the Brazosport Evening Lions Club and The First United Methodist Church. I joined COT-TMN to learn more about nature. I am married and have a daughter and two granddaughters.



Brenda Martin—As a native of East Texas who was raised by a farmer/banker, I grew up helping with crops of field peas, peanuts and corn. I received an associate degree from Tyler Junior College and attended the University of Texas, Austin. Married to Jim Martin for 52 years, I have been a resident of Lake Jackson for 47 years and retired from First Baptist Church, Lake Jackson, where I served as church secretary for 15 years. I have two daughters and 11 grandchildren. My husband and I enjoy trailer camping in state and national parks; among my favorites are Glacier, Yellowstone and Zion. Camping friends interested us in birding and also introduced me to Texas Master Naturalists. We have enjoyed many after-Christmas trips to the valley for birding, where we saw the Bare-throated Tiger Heron and found the Flammulated Owl on Padre Island, both rare sightings in Texas. I enjoyed my first Freeport Christmas Bird Count this past December and plan to help with the Migration Celebration and DEEP programs.



Debbie Nance—I am from Alvin, Texas, and I've been married to Jim Nance for forty years. We have two sons, both married, a granddaughter, and a grandson due in March. I retired from my job as a school librarian in 2018. I love to camp, hike, and accompany my husband on rock digs. I'm also an avid reader and book blogger. My site is <https://readerbuzz.blogspot.com>. I hope as a Master Naturalist to assist my husband in developing an outreach program for children concerning rocks, minerals, and fossils.



Jim Nance—I am from Alvin, Texas, and retired in 2018 from my job in civil engineering as a project manager. I've been interested in mineralogy and paleontology since I was in junior high school and enjoy planning and participating in mineral and fossil digs throughout the United States. I am also a lapidary who especially likes to design and facet gemstones. As a Master Naturalist, I hope to develop an outreach program for children that concerns rocks, minerals, and fossils.

Continued on next page

Getting to Know Our New Members *continued*



Rose Wagner—I am a native Texan born at the old Dow hospital in Freeport. After getting a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology at UT Austin, my husband, young son and I moved to Denver, Colorado, for a year. We returned to Texas to be closer to family and now live in a log home in “the boonies” with a West Columbia phone number and a Sweeny address. I retired from Dow Chemical as an Information Systems Specialist in 2014. While at Dow I was very active in Healthy Culture and Environmental Sustainability. A member of Texas Operations Wildlife Support Team, I supported Dow's partnership with organizations such as Sea Center Texas, Gulf Coast Wildlife Rescue and Gulf Coast Bird Observatory. As a newbie Master Naturalist, I want to continue to learn and share my knowledge and love of nature with others, especially the youth who will become future caretakers.



Krissy Plunkett—I am a life-long resident of Lake Jackson and am employed by Brazoria County Parks Department as the administrator at Quintana Beach County Park. My love of nature was inspired by my parents, David and Jane. I began bird watching at a young age when my father installed a bird feeder in our back yard. In those days, it was not uncommon to see a Painted Bunting or Red Headed Woodpecker in the yard. In 2002, my parents and I became volunteers for U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service through the annual Migration Celebration. Later, I served as treasurer for the Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuges and manager of the Friends' nature store at Migration Celebration. From 2010 to 2015, I volunteered at Sea Center Texas. Considering my volunteer and nature background, joining Texas Master Naturalists was an obvious next step. Although full-time work gives me less time for volunteer opportunities, I am looking forward to expanding my education and understanding of nature via COT.

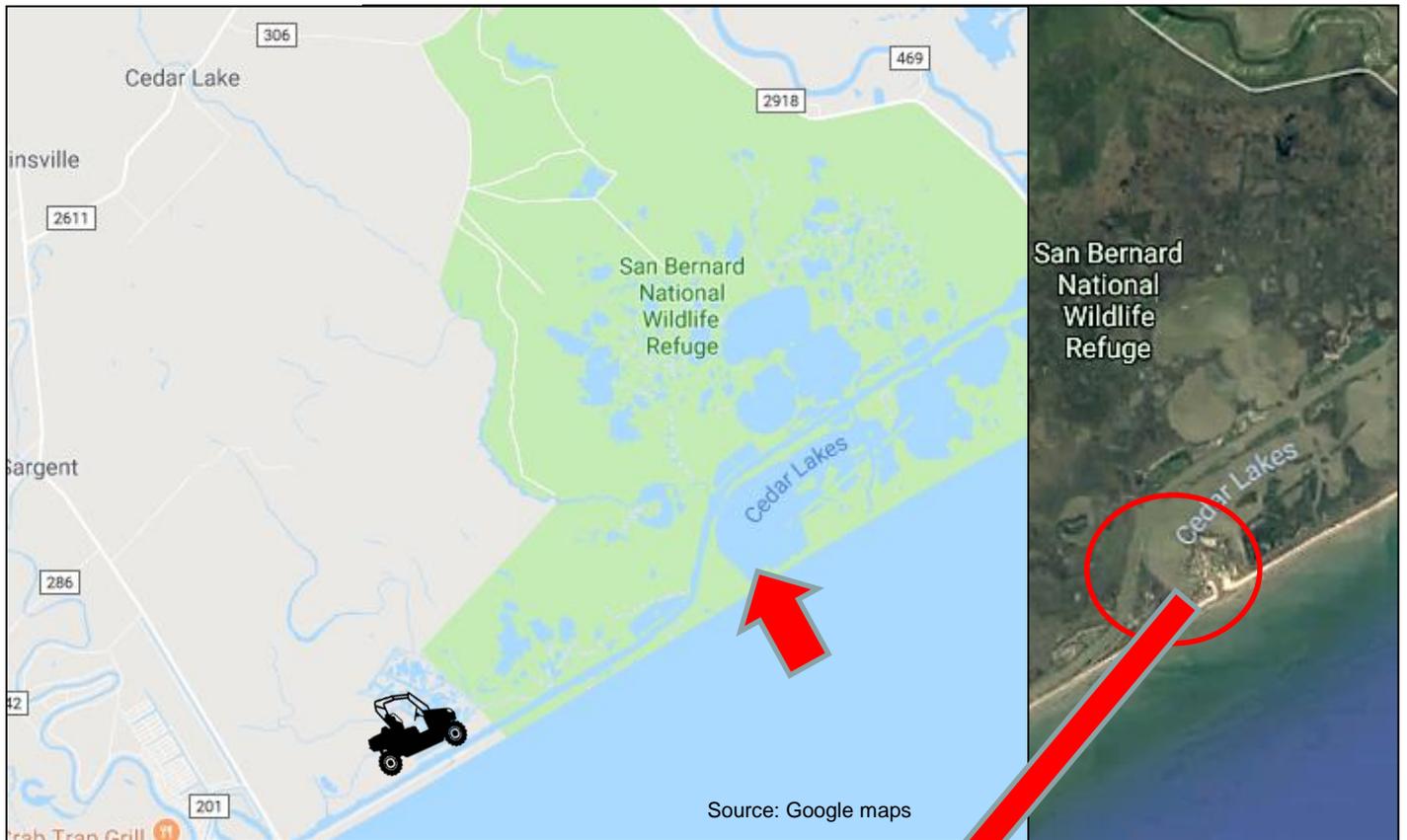


Mary Schwartz—I'm originally from Ohio, where I still have family, and currently live in Clute. I graduated from Ohio University with a degree in Chemical Engineering, went to work for The Dow Chemical Company in Midland, Michigan, after graduation, and transferred to the Lake Jackson area in 1994. I retired from Dow in August 2017 after a 36-year career. I've always had a soft spot for animals and enjoy taking pictures of them, so becoming a Master Naturalist seemed like a good fit. I've been volunteering at DEEP, participated in the Christmas Bird Count, and recently transported an injured hawk to San Antonio. I also recently transported a recovered vulture and released it back into its home territory near Palacios. I hope to continue with these activities and look forward to getting involved in many others.



Taylor Wilkins—Originally from Sugar Land, Texas, I now live with my parents in West Columbia and recently graduated from Texas A&M University—Kingsville, with a Bachelor of Science degree in Range and Wildlife Management. Nature fascinates me. I love bird watching, helping the wildlife environment stay as natural as possible, and identifying vegetation species that feed wildlife. I joined the Texas Master Naturalists to educate kids and the public about wildlife conservation and gain experience for a future job with Texas Parks and Wildlife. Currently, I volunteer at a wildlife rehabilitation rescue center where I clean equipment, maintain cages, and feed raptors, small mammals, and domestic animals that are rescued and brought to the center.

Cedar Lake Cut by Mike Mullins and Peggy Romfh



At the January 26 Bonus AT Day at AgriLIFE in Angleton, Mike Mullins' poster showed his work with Texas A&M taking drone photos of the Cedar Lake cut. Researchers are studying the methods by which the beach repairs itself. Several COT members asked Mike about the exact location of the Cedar Lake cut along the Gulf Coast.

The map and Google satellite images shown here give a "big picture look" of the details that Mike shared via his drone images.

The Cedar Lake cut is reached by accessing the beach in Sargent and following the dirt road or beach until the cut is reached. It is located in Matagorda County.

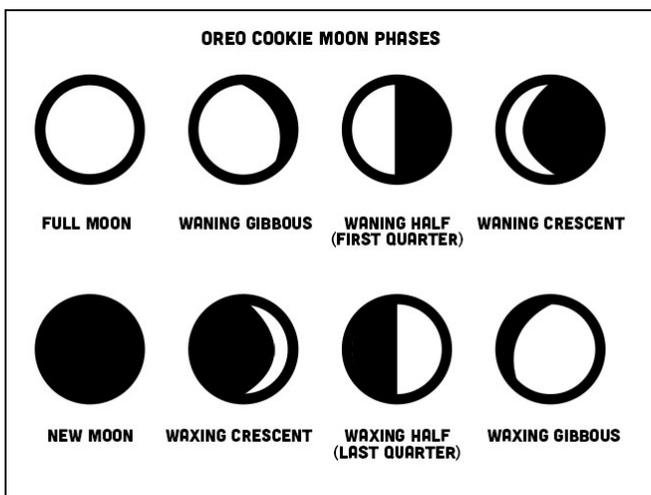
Giant Bugs and a New Moon by Pete and Peggy Romfh



Giant Water Bug

At the January 26 Bonus AT Day held at the AgriLIFE office in Angleton, we shared photos of the Giant Water Bug (*Lethocerus americanus*) that was found in the moth trap set at Rogers Pond in late April, 2017. At least six of these giant bugs, along with hundreds of beetles and moths, flew into the moth trap. They were photographed and released the next morning. The sight of six of these giant bugs crawling around in the trap had us proceeding very cautiously!

Also called Electric Light Bug, Toe Biter, and Fish Killer, this giant bug reaches 60 mm (about 2.5 inches) in length. It is large enough to feed on small crustaceans, tadpoles, snails and small fish. It will deliver a painful bite if bothered.



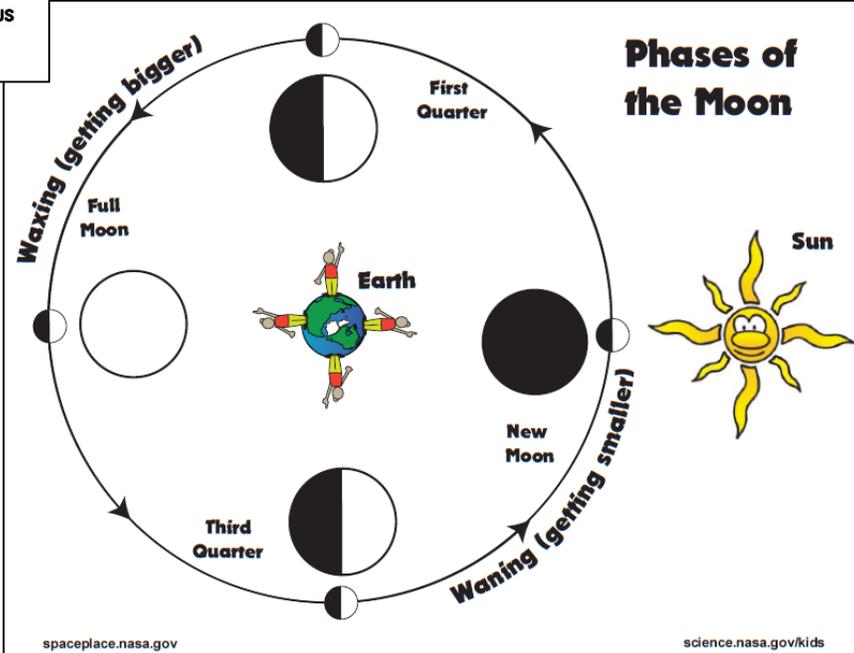
Oreo Cookie Moon Phases

During the Louisiana Eyed Silk Moth project, we had to set out traps when the sky was darkest, ideally on the night of a new moon, but in actuality, the setting occurred during the period between a waning crescent and a waxing crescent. NASA (see chart below) offers excellent explanations of moon phases.

We have found that creating moon phases with Oreo cookies is a visual summer-science project to do with grandkids, regardless of their ages.

Everybody learns or reviews his or her knowledge of the moon phases in a fun way, and at the end, you get to eat your experiment!

We like this explanation of moon phases from NASA: “The Moon has no light of its own. Moonlight is sunlight bouncing off the Moon’s surface. As the Moon orbits Earth, the Sun lights up whatever side of the Moon is facing it. To the Sun, it’s always a full moon!”



How Many Birds Disappear Between Migration Seasons? We Now Have a Clue.

Excerpted from Audubon

A third of the avian population that winters in the mainland United States might not survive till spring. But why?

An American Robin takes off from its summer home in Montreal, Canada, putting everything on the line to fly 1,600 miles to spend the holidays in West Palm Beach, Florida. Even more grueling is the journey of a Scarlet Tanager that wings 2,700 miles from Dartmouth, Massachusetts, to Cali, Colombia.

Each fall, billions of birds like the robin and tanager make their way to the Lower 48 or to the tropics. But a big slice of them never flies back—casualties of natural causes like weather and predation, and unnatural causes like oil pits, feral cats, and glass collisions. Now scientists from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in Ithaca, New York, have put a first-ever estimate on those missing travelers. By tracking migratory night flights from 2013 to 2017 on weather radar maps, measuring the magnitude, and plugging the numbers into a cloud-computing service, they tallied how many land birds were—or weren't—traversing the country. Their findings show a titanic drop-off of 2.6 billion birds between fall and spring migrations. What's more, though species that winter in the United States have shorter fall flights, they suffered the bulk of the losses, indicating that northern populations face greater threats than those in the tropics.

It's a narrative that's bound to change, says lead researcher and migration expert Adriaan Dokter. As development in Latin America continues to climb, there will be fewer pristine habitats, which means some birds might not venture as far south. Drier, hotter conditions under climate change could make the trek even more costly for migrants that try to stick it out near the equator. It's a future we need to plan for, Dokter says. By both protecting tropical wilderness and reducing domestic dangers, we can boost the survival of billions of birds before they fly off the radar.

feathers. Dokter notes that similar patterns are seen on the flip side of the Atlantic, where migrants travel from the Russian Arctic to Europe and from Europe to Africa.

AVERAGE DISTANCE

860 Miles



1,960 Miles



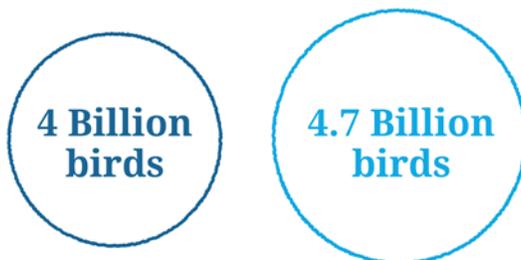
Going the distance has its perks. The tropics offer milder climates and richer resources. So even if the trip there is sapping, a spell in paradise can restore a bird and prepare it for the vital breeding season.

DEATH RATES



Short migrations mean lower survivorship. Species that spend less time in transit face fewer flight risks. But in exchange for their quick trip, they endure harsher winter conditions, which drive up mortality rates. Widespread urbanization and other human impacts in the contiguous United States also pose potential hardships that take a big bite out of the population.

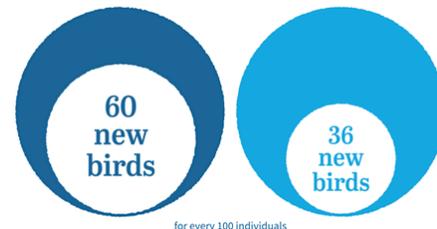
MASS MIGRATION



- land birds that migrate to the U.S. mainland for winter
- land birds that migrate to the tropics for winter

The “biomass” of land birds that moves north to south in fall differs continent-wide. Fewer individuals choose to linger in the Lower 48 once the breeding season passes, but not so few that the region becomes a ghost town for

BABY BOOM



Life compensates death. To make up for low survival rates on their stateside wintering grounds, northern breeding species generally crank out more chicks. Most of the young recruits won't survive fall migration, but their high numbers still give the population a boost before the grind begins anew.

<https://tinyurl.com/AudubonBirdMigrationWinter2018>

This story originally ran in Audubon Magazine (print) Winter 2018 issue as “The Billion-Bird Question.”



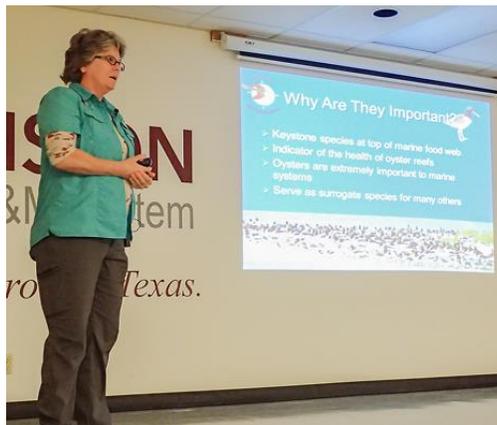
Bonus
AT
Day
2019



A LITTLE R & R (RESEARCH AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT)

SATURDAY, JANUARY 26 FROM 8:00 AM TO 4:00 PM

Brazoria County AgriLife Extension Offices
21017 County Road 171
Angleton, TX 77515

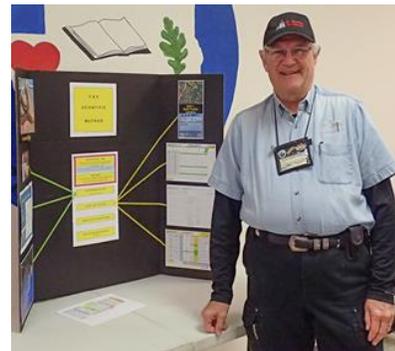
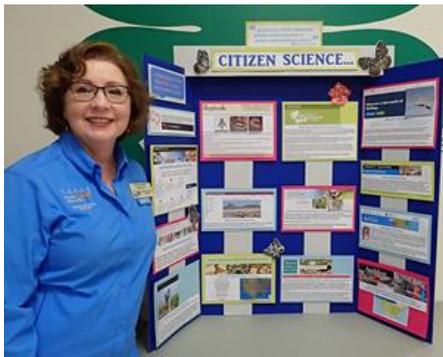


Row 1, left to right: Larry Ruhr welcomes attendees; attendees listening to a presentation (photo by Dick Schaffhausen); barbecue-stuffed potato lunch catered by Duran's (photo by Michael Gras); Row 2: Brazoria County Parks Department Director and COT member Bryan Frazier presents "BCPD: Rebranding of Public Beaches"; Susan Heath, Gulf Coast Bird Observatory Director of Conservation Research, presents "GCBO: Avian Research Projects"; COT member Oron Atkins presents Sea Turtle Patrol information; Row 3: Mary Carole Edwards, former Stormwater Wetland Program Coordinator, presents "Texas Community Watershed Partners: Wetlands Restoration and Management; a now-famous slide of an Oreocookie rendering of phases of the moon from Peggy Romfh's introduction to afternoon sessions (photo by Michael Gras); Turtle Patrol presentation materials provided by Oron Atkins. All photos this page, except as noted, by Pete Romfh.

Continued on next page

Bonus AT Day 2019

continued



Row 1, top to bottom: Phil Huxford with the “Columbia Bottomland Woods Preservation” display prepared by him, Mike Lange and Peggy Romfh; Oron Atkins with his “Sea Turtles” display; Pete Romfh with his and Peggy Romfh’s display of invertebrates found in their Louisiana Eyed Silk Moth trap (photo by Peggy Romfh); Larry Ruhr with his “Water Quality / Stream Team” display; Lisa Myers with her display on citizen science-related websites; **Row 2**: Mike Mullins with information concerning his “Drone Surveying Project”; Kemp’s ridley sea turtle (photo by Michael Gras); Pete Romfh’s improved Louisiana Eyed Silk Moth trap (photo by Michael Gras); Bill Ahlstrom with his display of “Cactus Moth Project” information; John Boettiger displays “American Eel Project” information. All photos by Pete Romfh except as noted.

Cradle of Texas Chapter Board

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Chapter Advisor	John O'Connell, AgriLIFE Extension Service
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Newsletter Contributors	Neal McLain (Chief Reporter, Editorial Advisor), Kristine Rivers, Peggy & Pete Romfh, Mike Mullins

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E-mail Listserv	http://tinyurl.com/TMN-COT-Mail



Master Naturalist Email Lists

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.

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 Thursday before the General Meeting. Send submissions by email to *Chapter News* Editor at news@tmn-cot.org. Submissions may be edited for clarity and spacing.