



MARCH 2019

Chapter News

A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT KRISTINE RIVERS

The weather has been pretty unpredictable, with temperatures ranging from the 40s to the 80s, but don't let that discourage you from getting out to enjoy nature! Trees are beginning to bud out all around us, and it will be spring before we know it. Many birds are already changing plumage, and now is a great time to brush up on identification skills. It's fun to beachcomb this time of year, as well. Bill Ahlstrom reports finding large, intact shells of many varieties and up to 25 starfish at one time—wow!

The spring volunteering season is starting to get into high gear and looks to be a busy one! A quick look at the calendar on our site reveals numerous opportunities for both VT and AT throughout March, ramping up to one of our busiest months ever in April. There are only a few spots remaining to help at the host station for GCBO's Spring Fling at Quintana Neotropical Bird Sanctuary, so please contact Peggy and Pete Romfh now if you'd like to participate. I also recommend signing up early for the largest partner event at which COT members volunteer: Migration Celebration at San Bernard NWR on April 27 and 28. Lisa Myers is coordinating the volunteer effort and will have sign-up sheets at the general meeting. The Migration Celebration

Kickoff Dinner is on Friday, April 12, and many COT members will have tickets to sell at the March general meeting.

We also have other, ongoing volunteer opportunities that are not listed on the calendar. If you enjoy sharing your knowledge with others, please consider joining our Speakers' Bureau (coordinated by Ed Peebles) or giving a Nature Notes presentation at an upcoming meeting (contact Bill Ahlstrom to schedule.) You can also get involved by joining one of our committees, such as the New Class Committee, Bonus AT Day Planning Committee, or Host Committee. There's something for everyone! Speaking of the Bonus AT Day, keep an eye on your email for a follow-up survey that will give you the opportunity to provide feedback and input as we plan for next year's event. We're also brainstorming ideas for other fun activities and projects for this year. We'll be rolling those out over the next few months—and would like your ideas as well—so be sure not to miss any meetings!



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: Rat snake, by Peggy Romfh.

BRYAN ADAMS MEMORIAL WATER GARDEN DEDICATION—Sunday, March 17, 2p to 4p at Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge.



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

Texas Master Naturalist Program—Cradle of Texas Chapter
General Meeting and Advanced Training
Wednesday, March 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: Oron Atkins, Brenda Martin, Mel McKey, Tom Morris, Larry Peterson, Kristine Rivers
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: Bill Ahlstrom Topic: “Micro Shelling on Local Beaches”
10:15 AM – 12:00 PM	Advanced Training Speaker: Kristine Rivers, lifelong birder, owner of Birding for Fun, and President of the Cradle of Texas Chapter Topic: “Its Time fore a Makeover! Understanding Plumage Variations” <i>[Hours for Advanced Training (AT) TBD at close of meeting]</i>



Kristine Rivers grew up in Manvel, Texas, and began birding at a very young age; by the time she was 14, she participated in her first Christmas Bird Count. As a Professional Zoology major with a primary interest in ornithology at the University of Oklahoma, Kristine was accepted into the junior/senior level ornithology class as a freshman. Although she didn't end up following that career path, Kristine has continued to be an avid birder for her entire life, has participated in every year of the Brazoria Christmas Bird Count since its inception in 1984, and was instrumental in working with the founder and compiler to restart it in 2010 after a 16-year lapse. She has been an Area Leader for the Brazoria CBC (now known as the Brazoria-Columbia Bottomlands CBC) since 2013. In addition, Kristine has participated in many other Christmas Bird Counts over the years, including the Houston CBC, Freeport CBC, and Brazos Bend CBC and has also participated in the Texas City Prairie Preserve Bird Count since 2016.

Kristine was the Birding Instructor for Pearland Parks & Recreation, teaching children ages 6-14 in summer camp and adults in both Beginning Birding and Intermediate Birding, as well as leading workshops at the Melvin Knapp Senior Activity Center. She is also the Birding Instructor for the City of Meadows Place, initiated their Beginning Birding course in fall 2016, and developed all of the curriculum, presentations, and field trips for the programs in both cities. A liaison for Galveston FeatherFest in 2016, Kristine led two FeatherFest field trips in 2017.

Kristine became a Texas Master Naturalist in 2016 and soon began leading workshops and teaching summer-camp classes about other native Texas wildlife in addition to birds. A member of the Houston Area Bat Team, Kristine is engaged in its citizen-science program that monitors local bat colonies.

She is currently the President of the Texas Master Naturalist Cradle of Texas Chapter.



The Intern Class of 2016 Loblolly Pine Team at Camp Mohawk County Park, 2016. **Front row:** Jerry Krampota (mentor), Karen Leder, Lisa Myers, Kristine Rivers. **Standing:** Jo Myers, Herb Myers, Bryan Frazier (mentor).

Membership Data Report

by Pete and Peggy Romfh, Data Managers

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

Recertification 2019 (Warbler Pin)

Neeta Allen	Chris Kneupper
Roger Allen	Neal McLain
Oron Atkins	Kim Richardson
John Boettiger	Peggy Romfh
Marty Cornell	Pete Romfh
Phil Huxford	Bob Whitmarsh

Impact Data YTD—January 1—February 28, 2019

800 Adults 668 Youth 1,468 Total

Hours Totals YTD—February 28, 2019

2,309 Hours VT 634 Hours AT 90 Volunteers

Right: The February 2018 General Meeting speaker Stephen Curtis, Aquatic Biologist, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, gave an engaging talk on “American Eel Project: How Eel Mop Data Captured by Gulf Coast TMN Chapters Fit the Original Hypothesis.”



Above: At the February 2018 General Meeting held at the AgriLIFE Building in Angleton, Membership Director John Boettiger (right) and President Kristine Rivers (left) present initial-certification pins to Brenda Martin and Kristin Plunkett.



Left: Roger Allen, far left, receives a 500-hour milestone pin from COT President Kristine Rivers and Membership Director John Boettiger. Not pictured: Pam Peltier, who achieved 1000 hours. Photos by Dick Schaffhausen.

Texas Mid-coast National Wildlife Refuges

2018

Volunteer Recognition

Tuesday March 26, 2019

Arrive at 11:00 am for 11:30 lunch



Clute Event Center
Clute City Park
100 Parkview Drive
Clute, TX



Menu:
Crayfish, Chicken Etouffee, salads, bread,
dessert, iced tea, wine, beer--
Provided by Refuge staff



Bring your family for awards, food and fun!

Migration Celebration Fundraiser

celebrating

25

1994 2019

Friday, April 12, 2019

RiverPlace, Freeport





Featuring...
Amy Lueders,
SW Regional Director,
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

“Our Refuges: for Wildlife,
for the People,
for the Future”

The Menu

Sage-rubbed Smoked
Pork Shoulder

Cornbread, Sausage,
and Pecan Dressing

Borracho Beans En Jus

Salad with Apples,
Pecans, and Cranberries

Kahlua Chocolate Cake

Iced Tea

- ✓ Photo Contest
- ✓ Raffle
- ✓ Nature Store
- ✓ Tickets \$30
- ✓ Donations Appreciated

Supporting Migration Celebration 2019
April 27th and 28th
San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge

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The Sky is the Limit for Spring Fling at Quintana Neotropical Bird Sanctuary April 6 – May 5, 2019

170 DIFFERENT SPECIES WERE SEEN DURING SPRING FLING 2018!

The month of April brings Spring Fling, an annual event at Quintana Neotropical Bird Sanctuary (QNBS). The Gulf Coast Bird Observatory (GCBO) sponsors a host station at this incredible bird migration stop-over point on the Gulf.

Volunteers post bird sightings daily, provide maps and directions to visitors, and welcome them to the joys of Gulf Coast birding.

Over the past year, a new tower has been constructed at QNBS, and visitors will have a 360 degree, bird’s-eye view from the beach to the Quintana Xeriscape Nature Reserve (QXNR) to the sanctuary itself.

The QNBS is located across from Quintana City Hall on CR723, Quintana Road. It contains both wooded and xeriscape areas.



The thick foliage of the QXNR provides great habitat and food for migrating birds.

QNBS Volunteer Facts 2018
35 Volunteers staffed host station (most volunteers were Master Naturalists)
459 Volunteer hosting hours at QNBS station



Visitors with binoculars and cameras both delight in sighting birds at QNBS. Visitors average about 40 per day, but a peak day can bring up to 100 visitors to the site.



QNBS Visitor Facts 2018

Over 1,000 people visited QNBS during Spring Fling 2018. For 237 people, it was their first visit to the sanctuary.

Visitors came from:

- 116 Texas locations
- 65 non-Texas locations across the USA from 26 different states
- 6 Locations in other countries of the world, including Canada, United Kingdom, Indonesia, Japan, Netherlands and South Africa.

Early AM
Best time to find birds that spent the night

Mid-Day
Bird numbers vary based on weather

Early Evening
New birds arriving from across the Gulf

FALLOUT!

Bird enthusiasts live for a “fallout” during spring migration. As birds migrate across the Gulf of Mexico, a strong north wind may cause them to tire and literally fall out of the sky along the coast.

Article and photos by P&P Romfh

Whooping Crane Trip Report—February 20, 2019 by Tom Morris

Thirty Cradle of Texas Master Naturalists, including some spouses and friends, made the trip to Rockport despite dubious weather reports. Luckily, the fair-weather reports for February 20 were correct, and before we boarded, clear skies approached. By the time the group reached the intracoastal canal, we had full sun and the wind had calmed somewhat. The temperature was a chilly 52 Deg. F initially but reached 65 by the time we returned to Rockport.

We had a great time the evening before at Latitude 28 02 restaurant, where all who were spending the night in the Rockport area (23) were rewarded with good food and fellowship. As is the case with most buildings near the water in Rockport, the restaurant received heavy damage from hurricane Harvey, but there was no trace of it now. Throughout Latitude 28 02 were numerous paintings and photographs by local artists (see below).



The following people attended this year's trip:

Bill Ahlstrom and Monica Berry	Sheree Muzny Lisa Myers
Roger and Neeta Allen	Pam Peltier
John and Nancy Boettiger	David Plunkett
Kathy Lee Davis	Krissy Plunkett
Cindy Goodrum	Archie and Ruth Ann Pratt
Mary Holler	Kim Richardson
Bill and Becky Huff	Mary Schwartz
Phil Huxford	Janice Sims
Rainbo Johnson	Chuck and Judy Stone
Don McCullough	Regina Tippet
Tom and Ethel Morris	Rose Wagner

Birds seen from The Skimmer, February 20:

1. Blue-winged Teal
 2. Northern Shoveler
 3. Gadwall
 4. American Wigeon
 5. Northern Pintail
 6. Green-winged Teal
 7. Redhead
 8. **Lesser Scaup ~1500**
 9. Bufflehead
 10. Common Loon
 11. Pied-billed Grebe
 12. American White Pelican
 13. Brown Pelican
 14. Neotropic Cormorant
 15. Double-crested Cormorant
 16. Anhinga
 17. Great Blue Heron
 18. Great Egret
 19. Snowy Egret
 20. Little Blue Heron
 21. Tricolored Heron
 22. Reddish Egret
 23. Black-crowned Night-Heron
 24. White Ibis
 25. Roseate Spoonbill
 26. Black Vulture
 27. Turkey Vulture
 28. Osprey
 29. Northern Harrier
 30. Red-tailed Hawk
 31. Crested Caracara
 32. American Kestrel
 33. American Coot
 34. Sandhill Crane
 35. **Whooping Crane ~29**
 36. American Oystercatcher
 37. Long-billed Curlew
 38. Spotted Sandpiper
 39. Greater Yellowlegs
 40. Willet
 41. Sanderling
 42. Ruddy Turnstone
 43. Short-billed/Long-billed Dowitchers
 44. Black-necked Stilt
 45. Laughing Gull
 46. Ring-billed Gull
 47. Herring Gull
 48. Caspian Tern
 49. Royal Tern
 50. Forster's Tern
 51. Marsh Wren
 52. Savannah Sparrow
 53. Red-winged Blackbird
 54. Great-tailed Grackle
- Birds Seen in Rockport:**
55. Hooded Merganser
 56. Red-breasted Merganser
 57. Rock Pigeon
 58. European Starling
 59. Common Grackle
 60. Eurasian Collared Dove
 61. Mourning Dove
 62. Mockingbird
 63. Blue Jay
 64. American Crow
 65. House Sparrow

Note: All photos by Tom Morris except where indicated.

Continued next page

Whooping Crane Trip Report—February 20, 2019 continued



The Inn at Fulton Harbor



The Skimmer at Fulton Harbor



A chilly beginning at the dock

Captain Tommy Moore reviewed the rules before departure. Only three intrepid souls ascended to the upper deck with Captain Tommy during the quick trip from the harbor to the Intracoastal Canal, where the whoopers are generally located. The captain had a Plexiglas windshield, and we huddled behind it and him; otherwise, we would have been downstairs.

On the way, Captain Tommy gave a good summary of the whooping crane population and its dramatic increase. In December 2018, the survey resulted in a 17% increase for a total of 505 in the Aransas (or Western) group. There is an Eastern group wintering in Louisiana that numbers around 100. The 17% increase in the Aransas flock represents 85 new cranes in one year! The last time we were here, the estimate was about 330 for 2016 in the Western group, so there have been over 175 new cranes in the past three years! I must admit that I was not aware of the magnitude of population growth in recent years.

Scientists say they are about half way to their goal of reaching 1000 individuals in the Western group; they believe that a 1000 flock is sustainable, assuming preservation of suitable habitat. This is the only migrating flock from the traditional nesting grounds (Wood Buffalo NP in Canada), which was not discovered until 1952. The Whooping Crane is still one of the most endangered species in the world but is making a dramatic comeback. Why isn't its status and growth covered by major news outlets?



Janice Sims and Mary Holler



Captain Tommy Moore



Neeta and Roger Allen

Continued on next page

Whooping Crane Trip Report—February 20, 2019 continued



Rose Wagner, Bill Ahlstrom, Ethel Morris



Rainbo Johnson, Nancy Boettiger, Pam Peltier, Sheree Muzny, Cindy Goodrum



Left of aisle: Pam Peltier, Rainbo Johnson, Krissy Plunkett, Bill Ahlstrom (waving). Right of aisle: Mary Schwartz, Kim Richardson, Rose Wagner

Our first group of Whooping Cranes was spotted not long after entering the Intracoastal Canal. A family of two adults and a juvenile were feeding in the grasses and later moved to a small pond. The juvenile, in the photo top right, is about eight months old, will not achieve full, white plumage until it is about one and a half years old, and will not mate until it is about six years old; however, it will leave its parents by the next migration and join other non-breeding cranes. The cranes' favorite food in wintering grounds is blue crab. If there is insufficient food in the winter, the population also suffers in the breeding grounds.

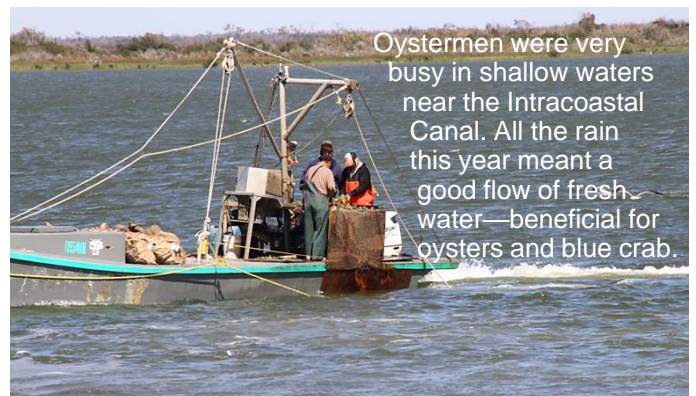
A good site for more info is Cornell Lab of Ornithology's: https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Whooping_Crane/lifehistory.



Photo by Bill Huff.



This adult (above) is well banded. Some are banded before they can fly while they are still at Wood Buffalo National Park. This practice is declining in lieu of netting, and approximately 10 per year are banded.



Oystermen were very busy in shallow waters near the Intracoastal Canal. All the rain this year meant a good flow of fresh water—beneficial for oysters and blue crab.

Continued on next page

Whooping Crane Trip Report—February 20, 2019 continued
 Some additional trip photos and comments by **Bill Ahlstrom**



Above left: Osprey Carrying a Fish. The Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) always carries its catch head-first in order to reduce drag while flying. **Right:** These American White Pelicans (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) winter on the Texas Coast and are beginning to show breeding plumage. Their beak bumps will disappear after the breeding season. Their wing spans can exceed nine feet, whereas whooping cranes' is seven feet. A White Pelican's bill can hold three gallons of water.



Above left: Red-breasted Mergansers (*Mergus serrator*) in the bay at Rockport. They winter farther north and farther south than any other American mergansers and also prefer salt water more than the other two species of mergansers (common and hooded). **Right:** Another sign of Spring: The first blooming Yucca plant Captain Moore had seen along the Intracoastal.



Above left: Great Blue Heron roost near Rockport. These *Ardea Herodias* use a tree in the bay to roost and prepare nests for the upcoming breeding season. **Right:** The Reddish Egret (*Egretta rufescens*) is an endangered species found only in coastal salt marshes along coastal areas of Mexico, the U.S. Gulf Coast, the Caribbean, and parts of Central America. The TP&WD estimates only 1,500 to 2,000 nesting pairs remain in the U.S. Destruction and degradation of their coastal habitat are its greatest threats.

March 2nd Brazoria Heritage Day + COT = Fun for All



Photo by Dick Schaffhausen



Photo by Dick Schaffhausen



Photo by Dick Schaffhausen

Clockwise from top left: Chris Kneupper explains mammal pelts; Layna Lewis with the box turtles; Don McCullough of EarthQuest; Phil Huxford assists with the raptors; Dick "Not-a-Birdbrain" Schaffhausen with a new friend; Mike Lasseter and a rat snake; (center) Ed Barrios shares a baby alligator with a visitor. Also volunteering: Marty Cornell, Ruby Lewis, Ellen Lassiter, Mel McKey, and David Plunkett. Photos by Neal McLain unless otherwise indicated.

A Wonderful Walk in the Columbia Bottomlands

Carolyn May-Monie Shares Her West Columbia Backyard

With an almost-imperceptible mist hanging in the air, moistening vegetation and people alike, and early-growth greenery bursting forth everywhere, it was easy for those of us visiting Carolyn May-Monie's vast "backyard" to imagine Eden.

Carolyn and her late-husband Maurice obtained a conservation-easement agreement with USFW on the West Columbia property not only for its tax benefits but also to protect in perpetuity this almost-untouched slice of the Columbia Bottomlands.

In addition to Carolyn and co-guide Phil Huxford, other Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuges (and COT) members attending the monthly FOBWR field trip on March 3rd were: Mickey Dufhilo, Mike and Ann Lange, Heardy and Lisa Myers, and Chip and Cathy Sweet.



Clockwise from top left: Mickey Dufhilo; brightly-colored fungus; interesting tree bark; Mike Lange; from left, Mickey Dufhilo, Carolyn May-Monie, Cathy Sweet, Chip Sweet, Phil Huxford, Ann Lange, Mike Lange, Lisa Myers (not pictured, Heardy Myers); Ann Lange. Photos by Lisa Myers.

Brazoria County Big Tree Registry

By Chris Kneupper and edited by Neal McLain

The Cradle of Texas Master Naturalists and Brazoria County Master Gardeners have teamed up to build the Brazoria County Big Tree Registry—a list of the biggest and most historically-significant trees in Brazoria County. Each tree will be certified and ranked by trained volunteers from each of these organizations. Trees of historical significance will be placed into a special category of those with a connection to history irrespective of size.

Texas A&M AgriLIFE Extension Service office of Brazoria County has created a series of web pages to make this information available on-line. The starting page can be found at <https://brazoria.agrilife.org/brazoria-county-big-tree-registry>. Based on the state-level project known as the Texas Big Tree Registry, the project is maintained by the Texas Forest Service, and much information is available on-line there as well, including all current and past state-level champs and some “also rans.”

A similar project was previously sponsored by the Brazoria County Master Gardeners, and through their efforts, 31 champion and seven historical trees were certified in early 2000. However, the initial Big Tree Registry was a short-term project and was not maintained over time. The current project will use as its basis information gathered earlier, and the vision is to establish ongoing work involving the residents of Brazoria County.

With a focus on wild or native trees in addition to planted or cultivated specimens, the desired objective is to simply recognize the largest, oldest or historically-significant trees in the county. The website cited above contains links to existing lists for Champion Trees and also Historical Trees. Some trees are on private land,

not generally accessible to the public, and their location details will consequently not be shared. However, the tree’s webpage (with photos) will allow the public to make a “virtual visit” instead.

Trees are measured for trunk circumference (at 4.5’ height), total height, and crown spread (average width). These data are then used in a formula to calculate the Tree Index, which is equal to the circumference (in inches) + height (in feet) + 0.25 x crown spread (in feet). Trees are then ranked by this index.

The website also contains a link to an electronic Nomination Form to fill out and submit to the AgriLIFE office. Owners or nominators are asked to estimate the tree’s dimensions as part of the nomination, and volunteers from participating organizations will then be dispatched to confirm the exact species involved, officially measure the tree, and take photographs. If found to be in the running for a champion, this information will be used to create a webpage for each big tree using the web tool iNaturalist. For example, our county’s beloved huge Live Oak called the “San Bernard Oak” can be found at

<https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/19949500>. Sadly, this tree was disqualified as state champion in 2016, since it did not comply with newly-issued rules. So, let’s find another big Live Oak in the county that can take back the title!

If you have or know of a big tree and it is bigger than the ones in the list, please submit a nomination. Or, if you have a species that is yet not in the list, tell us about it. If big trees that can compete at the state level are discovered during our county-level project, we can provide assistance to forward the nomination to the Texas Forest Service.



From far left: **Durand White Oak** (*Quercus sinuata* var. *sinuata*). This specimen is the largest Durand White Oak currently listed in the Brazoria County Big Tree Registry. It is in western Brazoria County near Danciger. **Post Oak** (*Quercus stellata*). This specimen is located at the Krampota-Lance Chocolate Bayou Preserve near Alvin. **Southern Live Oak** (*Quercus virginiana*). These oaks are located at the Stephen F. Austin death site a few miles north of West Columbia. Photos by Chris Kneupper.

Cradle of Texas Chapter Board

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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.