



JUNE 2020

# Chapter News

## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Everyone should have received and read the initial reopening guidelines from the Texas A&M AgriLIFE Extension Service that pave the way for our methodical return to VT service. To date, the guidance put in place by TPWD and Texas A&M AgriLIFE were layered on top of local, state, and federal directives to further assure that Texas Master Naturalist staff, advisors, and volunteers are able to maintain their health and safety as well as that of their families. Now, after a couple of months of sheltering in place, frozen pizzas, and pop tarts, it appears that there is a window opening for us to get back into the field and do what we do best: VOLUNTEER!

You might ask yourself what's changed in the world of the 2020 pandemic that allows us to get back to work, and I might tell you—not a heck of a lot. The virus is still there, there is no cure, there is no vaccine, and regardless of what you hear, the expert experts admit that there is no end in sight. Basically, anything you hear about the future with respect to COVID-19 is a guess—perhaps a highly educated guess, but it is still a guess. The few things that can be said about COVID-19 (with any degree of certainty) is that staying indoors, practicing social distancing, washing your

hands and not touching your face are very effective in slowing the spread of the disease.

Even so, if you are an individual in one of the high-risk categories, or someone who just doesn't want to risk his or her health or that of family and friends, don't feel compelled to get back in the 'groove' and start accruing VT hours. It's not worth it and remember—basically nothing has changed, and we don't know what is waiting for us around the corner. We do know that it is now hurricane (a.k.a. evacuation season) as well...

If we do have to evacuate this year, I personally don't know how welcome we'll be as we head away from the coast. There might be an outpouring of altruism or maybe an outpouring of shotguns and signs that say, "NO Vacancies." We're going to have more items to bring with us and probably fewer opportunities for room and board as we flee a storm.

That's all I have for now. Hope to see you all very soon.

Best regards, stay safe, be prepared, Bill

*Bill Ahlstrom is the president of the Cradle of Texas Chapter. He can be reached at [ahlstrom@tmn.com](mailto:ahlstrom@tmn.com).*



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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 Charles Jesse Miller Jr. taken at San Bernard NWR.

Texas Master Naturalist Program  
Cradle of Texas Chapter  
Chapter News – June 2020

## COT June General (Virtual) Meeting

Members will be emailed an invite to join the meeting. Plan to join at least 15 minutes prior to the 9:00 AM start time in case you have issues. The email will also provide contact information for technical support.

## Texas Master Naturalist Program—Cradle of Texas Chapter General Meeting and Advanced Training

**Wednesday, June 10, 2020, 9:00 AM**

Via email meeting invite to Texas AgriLIFE Extension Service's  
Microsoft Teams Meeting license

**ON-LINE MEETING - PLEASE LOG IN AND BE READY BY 9:00 AM**

9:00 - 9:15 AM	<b>Nature Notes</b> <b>Speaker:</b> Ed Barrios <b>Topic:</b> "Murder Hornets"
9:15 - 11:30 AM	<b>Advanced Training</b> <b>Speaker:</b> Mike Lange, COT Member and Land Acquisition Consultant <b>Topic:</b> "Habitat Conservation in the Columbia Bottomlands" <i>[Hours for Advanced Training (AT) TBD at close of meeting]</i>



**Mike Lange** has spent his career as a wildlife biologist, refuge manager, and land consultant. Mike began his professional career in Texas in 1983 as an assistant refuge manager and then worked as a wildlife biologist for the Texas Mid-coast Complex with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Also instrumental in helping the Service initiate and plan the Columbia Bottomlands Conservation program, Mike helped conserve over 35,000 acres that were added to the refuge system.

In 2015, Mike left the Service to work with the Trust for Public Land, acquiring land on the upper Texas Coast. In 2018, Mike established his own consulting company and is now working for several non-profit and governmental organizations, conserving more land in Texas.

**NOTE: Stay tuned for information and instructions via email in order to “attend” the June virtual General Meeting.**

## MEMBERSHIP DATA REPORT by Dave Brandes, Data Manager

Congratulations to those achieving awards or recertification as of May 31:

### Recertification

Mickey Dufilho	Jimmy Salinas
Debbie Nance	James Calvert
Jim Nance	Larry Peterson
Carolyn May-Monie	

### 2,500 Volunteer Hours

John Boettiger

### 15,000 Volunteer Hours!

Phil Huxford

### Impact Data YTD—31 May 2020

1628 Adults    5340 Youth    6968 Total

### Hours Totals YTD—31 May 2020

5592 Hours VT    1003 Hours AT

## TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST 2020 ANNUAL MEETING



Planning for the 21<sup>st</sup> TMN Program Annual Meeting is well underway. As it is being held in Houston, the COT chapter is one of several “host” chapters involved in supporting the meeting. While registration is not yet open until August 2020, information about the meeting is available at:

<https://txmn.org/2020-annual-meeting/>.

**NOTE: The State Office will be announcing the status of the 2020 Annual Meeting—whether in person or on-line—on or about June 10.**

## PHIL HUXFORD ACHIEVES 15,000 VOLUNTEER HOURS

Earning the President’s Call to Service Award (4000 volunteer hours) in 2008 was barely the start of Phil Huxford’s volunteer career that has included a wide array of activities—all with the goal of helping Brazoria County residents understand local natural resources and use them wisely. Phil became a Texas Master Naturalist in 2001, and since that time, has volunteered in: bird banding; butterfly counts; plant surveys; guided tours; Migration Celebration (he chaired the event for many years); Xtreme Hummingbird Xtravaganza; and the Brazoria County Copperhead Study, to name just a handful of the many ways Phil has contributed. He of course continues to be known for coordinating the Birds of Prey Program that presents dozens of raptor programs at area schools and events.



Phil with Tom Morris at the 2007 COT picnic.



Phil answering questions after a 2010 *Birds of Prey* program.



Phil with Neal McLain during a 2011 boat trip to Matagorda Island. Photo by Lyn Hunter.



Phil with Mary Helen Israel and Neal McLain at the COT 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration in 2011.



Phil at the 2011 Hog Wild Holiday Feast with Tom Taroni and Charlie Clements.



Phil at the 2011 Brazoria Bird Count at Griffith Ranch with Sherry Summers, Tom Taroni, and Lisa Reznicek.



Phil with Laredo, a Harris Hawk, at O. W. Roberts Elementary School during a *Birds of Prey* program in 2014.



Phil with Carole Wenny and Ruby Lewis at the annual Brazoria Heritage Festival in 2014.



Phil with Mid-coast Refuges manager Jennifer Sanchez at the 2015 Volunteer Appreciation Dinner.



Phil and visitors at the 2015 Brazoria Heritage Festival.



Phil at the 2017 TMN 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting with (standing) Rich Tillman, Jimmy Salinas, and (seated) Neal McLain.



Phil and raptor handler Don McCullough at Lanier Middle School during the 2019 *Birds of Prey* season.

## STUDY FINDS MICROPLASTICS IN FLORIDA BIRDS OF PREY FOR 1st TIME

By Eleanor Imster in EARTH | HUMAN WORLD | May 22, 2020

*A new study has confirmed the presence of microplastics in birds of prey, including hawks, ospreys and owls. The accumulation of microplastics in birds' digestive systems could lead to poisoning, starvation and death.*

A new study has found, for the first time, the presence of microplastics in the digestive systems of Florida's terrestrial and aquatic birds of prey, including hawks, ospreys and owls.

**Microplastics** are not a specific kind of plastic, but rather any type of plastic fragment that is less than 5 mm in length—less than the size of a pencil tip. They enter natural ecosystems from a variety of sources, including cosmetics, synthetic clothing, and industrial processes.

The accumulation of microplastics in birds' digestive systems could lead to poisoning, starvation and death, according to a study that was published online in the journal *Environmental Pollution*. University of Central Florida biologist Julia Carlin, the study's lead author, said that birds of prey are critical to a functioning ecosystem:

Birds of prey are top predators in the ecosystem and by changing the population or health status of the top predator, it completely alters all the animals, organisms and habitats below them on the food web.

Past studies have documented increasing amounts of microplastics in the guts of fish, marine birds, and filter-feeding invertebrates, such as oysters. There have also been recent reports of whales dying from eating dozens of pounds of plastic, including plastic bags. However, birds of prey have not been thoroughly examined before, partly due to their protected status. The researchers for the new study were able to overcome this by working with the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey in Maitland, Florida, a rehabilitation center that helps injured raptors.



Ospreys, like the one pictured here, are among the types of birds of prey in Florida that have been found to be accumulating microplastics in their stomachs. Image via Linda Walters, University of Central Florida.

With the center's permits, the researchers examined the stomach contents of 63 birds that were dead when they arrived at the center or died 24 hours after they arrived. Using dissecting microscopes and spectroscopy, the researchers found microplastics in the digestive systems of all birds examined.

The most common types of microplastic in the birds were **microfibers**, which accounted for 86% of the plastics found. Microfibers can come from synthetic ropes or clothing and may end up in ecosystems through wastewater from clothes-washing machines.

Study co-author Linda Walters, of University of Central Florida, suggested some solutions to the problem could be removing plastic from open landfills, carefully discarding plastic trash, buying natural fabrics instead of plastic-based ones, and retrofitting water treatment plants and stormwater drains to capture microplastics. Walters said, "We have all benefitted from the convenience of plastics, but plastics do not go away once produced."

Source: <https://tinyurl.com/microplasticsBofP>

## BRAZORIA COUNTY HISTORY: THE BRAZORIA PALM

By Neal McLain



Brazoria County is host to a unique species of the genus *Sabal* (palm) known as the Brazoria Palm, *Sabal x brazoriensis*. A stand of the Brazoria Palm is located in The Palm Unit of the San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge. This stand has been well-known locally among members of the naturalist community, including Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuges and the Cradle of Texas Chapter. The plant has been studied for years by various botanists to determine its proper taxonomic identity.

Douglas A. Goldman, of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, writing in the August 25, 2011, issue of *Phytotaxa*, has identified the plant as *Sabal x brazoriensis*, a hybrid nothospecies between *S. minor* and *S. palmetto*. In the article, Goldman writes:

*Robust plants with large trunks, [Brazoria Palms] are morphologically dissimilar to the much smaller and [trunkless] plants of S. minor, with which they occur. The only other large Sabal species in the U.S.A. are S. Mexicana and S. palmetto, with S. Mexicana native only to Texas... We sampled several plants of the putative hybrid and its possible parents in order to evaluate its possible hybrid origin. [The plant] seems to be a hybrid, but an old one, with clear genetic distinctiveness. However, these results also suggest a closer affinity of the putative hybrid with S. minor and S. palmetto than with S. Mexicana, excluding the latter species from possible parentage.*



Photo: Neal McLain

Brazoria Palm, Palm Unit of San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge, July 2009.



Photo: Neal McLain

Brazoria Palm, Palm Unit of San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge, July 2009.

Goldman's article also states that of the two parents, only *S. minor* presently co-exists with *S. x brazoriensis*. The nearest representatives of the other parent, *S. palmetto*, are 1000 km east. Thus, the authors conclude, *S. x brazoriensis* is indeed a very old hybrid, dating back perhaps as long as 1000 years.

Much of the early research related to the Brazoria Palm was the work of Landon Lockett, a former University of Texas linguist-turned-botanist. Although a polio victim confined to a wheelchair for most of his adult life, Lockett wrote extensively about the speciation of palms throughout Central and North America.

In one publication, Lockett states that the existence of the Brazoria Palm was known as early as 1941, noting it to be "taller by far than any *S. minor*, hidden in a thick forest in Brazoria County, south of Houston."

That "thick forest in Brazoria County" is now part of the Palm Unit of San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge. Lockett himself was instrumental in saving the property.

### GLOSSARY

**acaulescent** (of plants). *adjective*. Having no apparent stem above ground level.

**nothospecies**. *noun*. In botany, a *hybrid* that is formed by direct hybridization of two species.

**putative** *adjective*. Commonly regarded as such; commonly accepted as true on inconclusive grounds.

"**x**" between the genus and species name indicates that the plant is a *nothospecies*. If further research determines that the plant is a true species, the "x" may be removed.

*Continued next page*

## BRAZORIA COUNTY HISTORY: THE BRAZORIA PALM

### Continued

When I wrote the first version of this article, I contacted Mike Lange, who at the time was a wildlife biologist with the Texas Mid-coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex (TMNWRC). According to Mike, Lockett had contacted him about [what was to become the Palm Unit] in the early 1990s. Mike and Ron Bisbee, then the Project Leader for the TMNWRC, took up the cause.

After extensive negotiations, a 23-acre parcel was acquired by the United States Government in 1996 and was named the Palm Unit of the San Bernard NWR. Subsequent purchases of adjacent lands and a conservation easement donation by a neighboring landowner enlarged the unit to its present size.

In the years since these acquisitions, the Palm Unit has remained essentially unchanged. It is fenced behind a locked gate, and its location is not publicized.

The Brazoria Palms themselves have continued to grow and reseed. Mike Lange has collected some of the seeds for cultivation and has planted Brazoria Palms elsewhere in the Refuge Complex including the Hudson Woods Unit and the Refuge headquarters campus.

As for Landon Lockett, he died in 2010 without ever having published a formal description of the plant to which he had devoted so much of his life. That job fell to a University of Texas graduate student, the aforementioned Douglas Goldman, who is now associated with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service National Plant Data Team based in Greensboro, North Carolina.



Photo: Neal McLain

Twelve-year old Brazoria Palm at San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge in August 2011. USFWS Wildlife Biologist Mike Lange grew this palm from seed, nurturing it in a pot before planting it at the refuge.

In April 2011, Cradle of Texas Chapter member Phil Huxford led a tour of the Palm Unit for chapter members.

From left: Ann McLain, Monica Krancevic, Phil Huxford, Carole Wenny.



Photo: Neal McLain

#### Further Reading

Goldman, Douglas H, Matthew R. Klooster, M. Patrick Griffith, Michael F. Fay, & Mark W. Chase. "A preliminary evaluation of the ancestry of a putative *Sabal* hybrid (Arecaceae: Coryphoideae), and the description of a new nothospecies, *Sabal x brazoriensis*." *Phytotaxa* 27: 8–25 (2011), p. 9. Accessed 31 August 2011.  
<https://www.mapress.com/phytotaxa/content/2011/f/pt00027p025.pdf>

Lockett, Landon. "Native Texas Palms North of the Lower Rio Grande Valley: Recent Discoveries." *Principes*, 35(2), 1991, pp.64-71. Reproduced online by <http://dallaspalms.com/>. Accessed 31 August 2011.

[http://dallaspalms.com/brazoria\\_county\\_palms.htm](http://dallaspalms.com/brazoria_county_palms.htm)

Harms, Bob. "A Possible Return of Texas Palmettos to Waller Creek — Pure Speculation." Nokes, Jill. "How to Grow Native Plants of Texas and the Southwest" Austin: University of Texas Press. 2001, pp. 452-53.

## MIGRATION CELEBRATION NATURE PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

While the annual Migration Celebration, a USFWS event from the Texas Mid-coast National Wildlife Complex underwritten by Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuges, was cancelled due to the COVID-17 pandemic, the photo contest was judged. Several winning entries came from COT members, as indicated below by an asterisk (\*). Kim Richardson chaired the contest committee and Charles Jesse Miller Jr. judged. A display of entries is planned at a Family Nature Day to be held (hopefully) at Hudson Woods in October.



**BEST OF SHOW**  
Ed Barrios\* “Reflection in Norway”



**BIRDS OF TEXAS—First Place**  
Ken Conkle “Striking a Pose, Ladybird”



**BIRDS OF TEXAS—Second Place**  
Richard Schaffhausen\* “Feed Me”

*Continued next page*

**MIGRATION CELEBRATION NATURE PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS** Continued



**BIRDS OF TEXAS—Third Place**  
Ken Conkle "Crawfish; It's What's for Dinner"



**LANDSCAPE/SCENERY OF TEXAS—First Place**  
Mike Zarella "Carpet of Wildflowers"



**LANDSCAPE/SCENERY OF TEXAS—Second Place**  
Mike Zarella "Bird's Eye View of the Pedernales"



**LANDSCAPE/SCENERY OF TEXAS—Third Place**  
Ken Conkle "West Texas Scene"



**VERTEBRATES OF TEXAS—First Place**  
Richard Schaffhausen\* "Gotcha"



**VERTEBRATES OF TEXAS—Second Place**  
Averi Kent "Basking"

*Continued next page*

**MIGRATION CELEBRATION NATURE PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS** Continued



**VERTEBRATES OF TEXAS—Third Place**  
Averi Kent “Rainette”



**INVERTEBRATES OF TEXAS—First Place**  
Averi Kent “Dime Sized Friend”



**INVERTEBRATES OF TEXAS—Second Place**  
Stan Bravenec “Zebra Swallowtail”



**INVERTEBRATES OF TEXAS—Third Place**  
Averi Kent “California Pipeline Swallowtail”



**PLANT LIFE OR FUNGI OF TEXAS—First Place**  
Bill Ahlstrom\* “Green Eyed Lady”



**PLANT LIFE OR FUNGI OF TEXAS—Second Place**  
Bill Ahlstrom\* “1000 Points of Light”

*Continued next page*

**MIGRATION CELEBRATION NATURE PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS** Continued



**PLANT LIFE OR FUNGI OF TEXAS—Third Place**  
Averi Kent “Blackberries”



**NATURE THEMED DIGITAL ART OF TEXAS—First Place**  
Stan Brevenec “Blowing in the Wind”



**PHOTOS FROM AROUND THE WORLD—First Place**  
Ed Barrios\* “Northern Lights”



**PHOTOS FROM AROUND THE WORLD—Second Place**  
Stan Bravenec “Fall Colors”



**PHOTOS FROM AROUND THE WORLD—Third Place**  
Ken Conkle “Lip Licking Bunny”

### NATURE IN THE TIME OF PANDEMIC



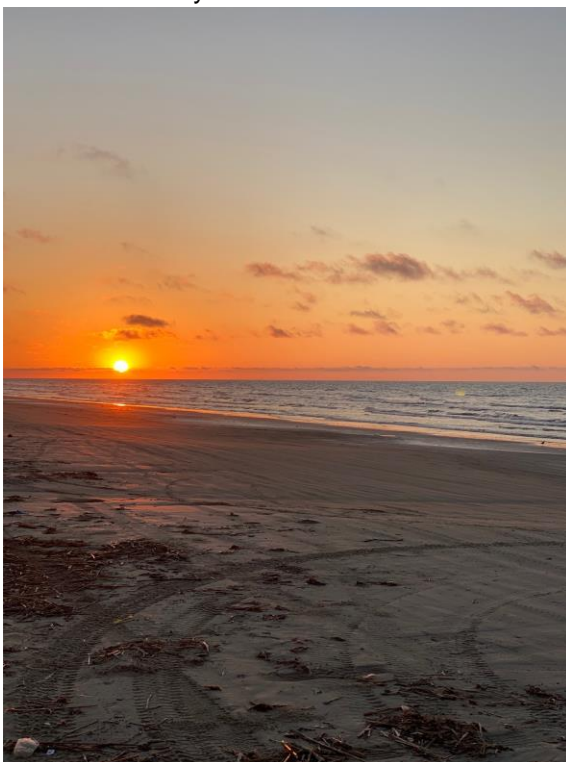
Deb and Jim Nance recorded these turtles while participating in the City Nature Challenge 2020. Photo by Deb Nance.



Cindy Vincent captioned her shots as follows (clockwise from left): “Flower has Been Bugged”; “Bull Nettle—Fly with the Wind”; “Annoying Pine Pollen.”



Below: Larry Peterson captured these scenes during Turtle Patrol on Brazoria County Beaches.

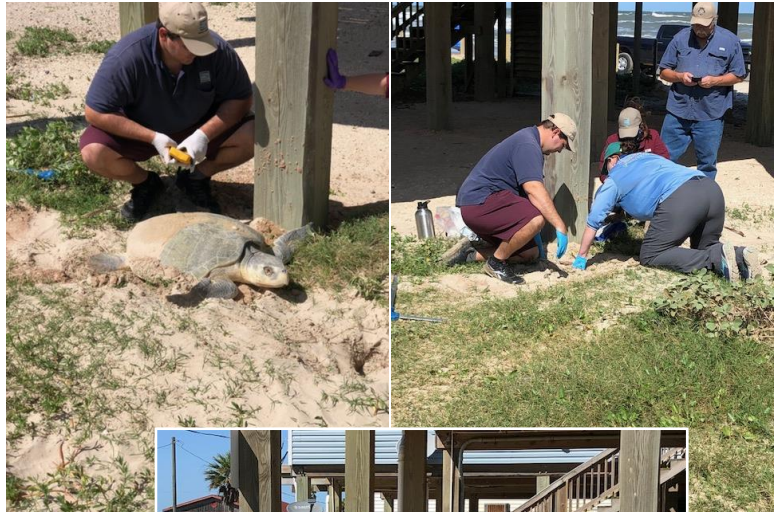


Lisa Myers viewed this 7-8” bullfrog from the SBNWR Bobcat Woods Trail’s Wolfweed Reservoir observation platform. *Continued next page*

## NATURE IN THE TIME OF PANDEMIC Continued

Jimmy and Luanne Salinas reported the following: On May 6, Luanne and I were in Surfside, near some beach houses that are closest to Jetty Park, when we noticed a lot of people standing and staring in a certain direction. Thinking the worst (someone must have drowned) we inquired and to our delight, one of the onlookers said that a sea turtle had been discovered creating a nest and depositing eggs right between two beach houses!

It appears to be a Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle. Got great footage of the turtle covering the nest (<https://tinyurl.com/SurfsideTurtle>) and some stills of the TPWD Coastal Fisheries Team, who extracted the eggs for transport, presumably to the hatchery at South Padre Island. Truly a neat thing to observe.



Candace Novak says, "I have been gardening a lot since I'm not working three days per week. Maybe some of you bug specialists know why red wasps keep flying around in my garden plot? I don't know if they are helpful or harmful."

## REMEMBERING THOMAS (TOMMIE) LLOYD HOLT III

Text from Restwood Funeral Home & Memorial Park



Thomas Lloyd Holt III (Tommy), 86, of Lake Jackson, Texas, was born on April 24, 1934, and departed his earthly home on May 22, 2020.

Tommy was born to Thomas Lloyd Holt, Jr., and Ruth Elizabeth Moers on April 24, 1934, in Houston, Texas. He attended Milby High School and went on to graduate from Texas A&M in 1956.

On June 18, 1960, in Houston, Texas, he married the beautiful Catherine Lois Gaudin, accepted a job at Dow Chemical, and they moved to Lake Jackson, Texas, where they built a life together that revolved around his love for their children (and later their grandchildren), their church, and service to the community.

Tommy's endless enthusiasm for life led him to volunteer for many organizations: 4-H Adult Leaders; Brazoria County Fair Association, Christ Renews His Parish, Knights of Columbus, RCIA, Brazoria County Master Gardeners and Texas Master Naturalists. He was also a past president of Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuges. His selfless service garnered awards from many organizations.

In addition, Tommy umpired for both baseball and softball, encouraging many young athletes. He was a member of St. Michael's Catholic Church in Lake Jackson, Greenwood Gun Club, the NRA and TSRA.


Tommy loved gardening, making beer and wine, fishing, photography and shooting sports. When he joined an organization or picked up a hobby, he gave his all and enjoyed it to the fullest. Tommy never met a stranger.

After 35 years as a respected employee of Dow Chemical, Tommy retired to spend the rest of his life surrounded by his loving family and faithful friends. Tommy is preceded in death by his father, Thomas L. Holt Jr., mother, Ruth Elizabeth Moers Holt, and wife Catherine. He is survived by four children: Pam Hughes, Lee Holt (and wife Rosemary), Kimberly Robbins, and Jackie Moore (and husband Robert); seven grandchildren: Ryan Chehovits, Rita Holt, Samantha Koenning, Matthew Watts, Quade Menard, Leah Moore, and Jacob Moore. He is also survived by six great grandchildren.



Tommy speaking to Alice Sealing at their COT Class of 2004 graduation.

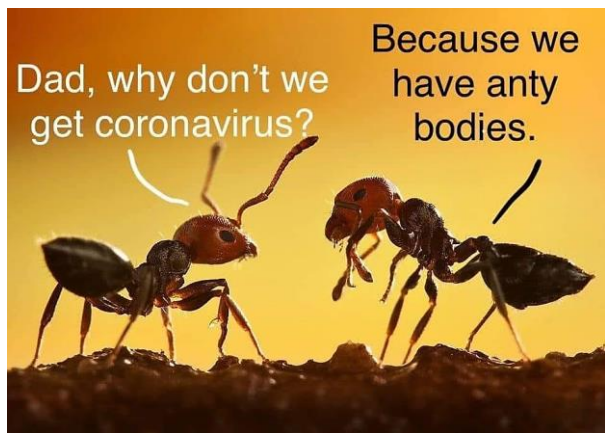
### A NOTE OF NATURE LEVITY

<b>Possums VS Opossums</b>	
	
<b>Smelly</b>	<b>Osmelly</b>
<b>Nocturnal</b>	<b>Onocturnal</b>
<b>Scavengers</b>	<b>Oscavengers</b>

FUNNYDIE



The woods were dark and foreboding, and Alice sensed that sinister eyes were watching her every step. Worst of all, she knew that Nature abhorred a vacuum.



## 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](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 Thursday 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.