

The Facts

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COVERING BRAZORIA COUNTY ★ WHERE TEXAS BEGAN

Master Naturalists reach volunteer milestones

“Work is fun, even when it’s work. The rewards are the people you reach.”

—Phil Huxford, 10,000-hour Master Naturalist volunteer

By **ERINN CALLAHAN**

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LAKE JACKSON — Being a master naturalist is a full-time job for Phil Huxford.

Between January and April, it isn’t uncommon for Huxford to volunteer as many as 60 to 70 hours a week as part of the Friends of the Brazoria Wildlife Refuge, primarily traveling to Brazoria County elementary schools with the organization’s Birds of Prey program. And he enjoys every minute of it.

“Work is fun, even when it’s work,” Huxford said. “The rewards are the people you

reach.”

Since becoming a member of the Texas Master Naturalists’ Cradle of Texas Chapter’s inaugural 2001 class, Huxford has logged 10,000 volunteer hours — a feat that earned him an award from the Texas Master Naturalists. He was recognized during a luncheon Wednesday at the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory in Lake Jackson.

“I’m looking forward to the next 10,000 hours, because that means I’ve got another 15 years left,” Huxford joked during the luncheon.

A lifelong outdoors enthusiast, Huxford said it is the

people as much as the wildlife that keep him going.

“If the people I worked with weren’t the people they are, I wouldn’t have stayed as long,” he said.

The Cradle of Texas Chapter also recognized naturalists Sandy Henderson and Neal McLain for logging 5,000 hours each.

“I spent most of my 5,000 hours sitting at a computer, not out in the field,” McLain said.

Master Naturalists must attend 40 hours of instruction in order to obtain the initial

■ See **HOURS**, Page 3A

THURSDAY 3A
JULY 9, 2015

Hours

CONTINUED FROM COVER

certification, as well as eight hours of advanced training and 40 hours of volunteer service. They must then re-certify each year with another eight hours of advanced training and 40 more volunteer hours.

Only about 10 naturalists statewide have put in 10,000 hours since the Cradle of Texas chapter’s inception in 2001, President Dave Brandes said.

“I mean, that’s about 800 hours a year,” he said.

The luncheon also was a celebration of the chapter, whose members have collectively logged 17,000 hours and reached 45,000 people in 2014, and Brandes said he expects those numbers to climb this year.

“Those are huge numbers for a little group like us,” Brandes said. “We figured it was time to say, ‘Thank you,’ to ourselves.”



Facts file photo

A Harris hawk flies from Phil Huxford over the heads of kindergarten students at O.A. Fleming Elementary School during a 2012 Birds of Prey presentation. Texas Master Naturalists honored Huxford for 10,000 hours of volunteering, many of them with the Birds of Prey program.