



# The Coastal Prairie Reporter

“Covering and Recovering the Coastal Prairie”

Newsletter of the Texas Master Naturalists  
of Suburban Houston, Ft. Bend and Waller Counties, Texas

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## Sixty Prospective Students Request Fall Training Class Applications

**CPC's 2007 Training Class**, slated to run from September 6<sup>th</sup> to October 25<sup>th</sup>, is shaping up well, reports Peggy d'Hemecourt, who is coordinating the coursework. Sixty applications, a very healthy number, were sent to prospective students in July, most of them via email, and several responded immediately with payment.

The names of people interested in training had been collected by chapter members at CPC events, such as the Katy Home and Garden Show, over the last several months, Peggy says. The next step was to convert casual interest into true commitment, and that meant contacting each individual. Wendy Talkington and Margaret Giebelhaus offered their services for this stage, coming up with a final list of those who wished to receive formal applications.

Will the class fill with its full complement of 25?

“My experience is that you never know until the last few days,” Peggy says, remembering that Amy Burt, an active member who completed the training in 2006, showed up at the Ft. Bend Extension Office with her application on the final day of enrollment last year.

The deadline for enrollment this year is August 30<sup>th</sup>. In the meantime, Peggy is enrolling another select group of people: CPC members who would like to act as coordinators or assistants for the individual classes. The training schedule, including dates and locations, is available at our website, [coastalprairie.org](http://coastalprairie.org). Go to ‘Class Information’ in the green index pane on the left side of the home page.

Peggy may be reached at [p.dhemecourt@prodigy.net](mailto:p.dhemecourt@prodigy.net), or 281 342 4595.



Charlotte Wells of TAP at the CPC meeting on July 12.

Coastal  
Prairie  
Reporter

## Before You Grab That Can of Pesticide, Ask Yourself: Is There a Better Way?

**Charlotte Wells** spent much of her childhood in coastal Texas getting a natural history education the natural way: “...off on horses looking at bugs and trees and all sorts of stuff.” She learned a lot about natural history, but she didn’t learn one thing that most Americans know to be absolutely true: A good bug is a dead bug. It’s a perception she spends her time as Executive Director of Texans for Alternatives to Pesticides (TAP) trying to change, and the further shadings of it amuse her, ruefully. “Outdoors it’s a bug, indoors it’s a pest,” she said in a lively presentation to CPC in July.

The chemical industry thrives on that attitude, she said. In fact, “Pesticides are its most profitable product,” so the industry has done its utmost to bad-mouth bugs. Seduced decades ago by television commercials like the classic ‘Raid!’ ads, Americans now keep an array of insecticides at the ready, and over the years they’ve become convinced that nearly everything smaller than the family cat is dangerous. Herbicides, fungicides, rodenticides, virucides and bactericides are now “in every home, every school, every store,” she said, and it is in that realm – homes, schools, and public buildings – that she brings her greatest efforts to bear.

The biggest part of that job comes in trying to convince people to ask questions about the pesticides they keep on hand and consider alternatives. In retail products, she said, a tiny amount of pesticide, listed on

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# There Was an Upside and a Downside to All That Rain

Weather For a Duck is Also Weather For a Fire Ant



The rains are 'untimely' for the ground-dwelling Bobwhite, which is already threatened in Texas...

## One of the rainiest Julys in history

As July came to a close the National Weather Service ranked it as the ninth rainiest July in the Houston-Galveston area since 1889, when the first full year of data was collected. The region has been wet since last October, when heavy rains brought an instant autumn to the Upper Texas Coast. What has it meant for the wildlife of the coastal prairie?

### The upside and downside

David Heinicke, a naturalist at Brazos Bend State for the last decade, sees good and bad effects of the recent rains. The best and worst both have to do with invasive species.

The best? "A lot of young Chinese tallow trees are drowning," he says, smiling.

The worst? His smile fades. "Rain helps fire ants spread."

It's ark-building the quick way: The ants pile together in a raft and float safely away to higher ground. This remarkable adaptation has allowed fire ants to travel far and fast in the US since their accidental introduction in the early years of the last century. It's thought that they arrived from South America in soil used as ships' ballast. At BBSP, they often quickly re-colonize areas that have been carefully, methodically cleared by the park's volunteer fire-ant team, led by CPC member Ron Morrison.

And woe to the flood victim swimming for his life, says Heinicke, if he happens upon one of these ant arks in the water. They climb aboard and swarm.

### No flood in the prairie

Al Childs, who heads a volunteer research team for the Cradle of Texas Chapter of TMNs, monitors the fragments of coastal prairie at BBSP. As he prepared for a regular check in late June, he expected to find his transects flooded. Instead, "...conditions were so dry that I was actually able to drive a Gator up to both of the transect poles without getting wet or stuck in mud," he says. "While I was in the process of removing the transect poles, I noticed that even though the surface of the ground appeared to be very dry, in many places it was extremely wet just a few inches below the surface."

For Childs, this was an illustration in microcosm of the way that the historical prairie worked as a vast sponge to protect our area from major flooding. "...the grass roots hold the soil and water together and release the water very slowly," he says.

### Good weather for a duck

Proving the old saying, David Lobpries, CPC advisor and Natural Resource Specialist for TPWD, reports that the Texas coast's three nesting ducks are doing well this season. The Black-bellied Whistling duck, Mottled duck, and Fulvous Whistling Duck have found a lots of water and cover for their nests. Blue-winged Teal are also nesting in the coastal prairie this summer. "They usually go farther north to nest," he says, but the damp conditions this year have kept them local.

The lush growth of grasses has also benefited deer, which prefer heavy cover, he says. At the same time, the high water levels in our rivers and creeks are driving some animals out of the drainage areas: raccoons, armadillo -- and deer. It's a temporary situation, Lobpries says, reporting that he'd just received a call from a woman living near a waterway. She'd just found a young fawn in her yard.

For Bobwhite, the rains are "untimely," he says. This ground-nesting bird, already in serious trouble statewide due to habitat loss and infestations of fire ants, "needs optimum conditions, not too wet and not too dry."

Could the rains deeply impact populations? "Locally, yes," he says. "But we hope they'll recover."



...but Chinese Tallow seedlings are drowning along the edges of our waterways.

## Alt-Plants: CPC's 2<sup>nd</sup> Publication Offers AlterNatives to Invasives That We Plant at Home

**CPC members**, in association with the Gulf Coast MN's and the Native Plant Society of Houston, are working assiduously on an educational publication, a guide to native plants of the coastal prairie region that can work as alternatives to the many exotics and invasives now planted by residents of our region in their yards and gardens.

The work group, led by CPC President Cheryl Sedivec, foresees a full-color booklet covering annuals, perennials, trees, grasses, shrubs, and bog/pond plants. The booklet is based on a publication for the Austin area, and will focus exclusively on the greater Houston area. Cheryl and her work group have researched hundreds of species, and are narrowing their compilation down to about 15-50 plants per heading (annuals, perennials, etc.).

Making that final cut is a tough job, according to Linda Rippert, a member of the work group. One standard in particular that's sometimes hard to meet, she says: The native alternatives must be relatively easy to find in local nurseries, or via catalogs, with Texas sources as a preference.

Cheryl says that the work group hopes to post all the species it has developed on CPC's website in the coming months, including those that don't make the final cut for the booklet.

A publication date hasn't been set yet, and money is the reason. Unlike the chapter's first publication, the one-page 'Wanted:Alive' flier now available on our website ([coastalprairie.org](http://coastalprairie.org)), the multi-page booklet will be expensive to print and distribute, "And we'll need hundreds of copies," said Linda Rippert.

**TMNs who feel inspired to help, either as part of the work group or in developing funding, are urged to contact Cheryl Sedivec: 281 346 0099 or [peter\\_janak@msn.com](mailto:peter_janak@msn.com).**

# Beauty and a Beast

by Linda Rippert

## Here's the beauty...

A Monarch butterfly is a beautiful thing to see flying leisurely around your garden. Are you doing as much as you can to encourage the survival of this species? Monarchs need our help. Milkweed plants and butterfly nectar sources are declining, in part due to the widespread use of herbicides on croplands, pastures and roadsides. Urban sprawl is also eliminating habitats for monarchs and other butterflies, and displacing wildlife. Every home should have some milkweed plants to feed the baby caterpillars and some nectar plants to feed the adult butterflies.

Whether you're already a butterfly aficionado or a beginner, I recommend *Milkweed, Monarchs and More* (see title details below). This little field guide is chock full of information. It shows a gallery of various milkweed plants and the locales they cover. The largest section is on the many kinds of arthropods that live in the milkweed community, especially insects and spiders. Excellent photos and color coded symbols (denoting herbivores, milkweed eaters, nectivores, predators, parasites, decomposers or scavengers and simple passersby) with concise information make for easy ID of creatures in your gardens.

A Monarch "waystation" is an intermediate station between the locations in the U.S. where Monarchs live during the breeding year and during migration and the overwintering sites in Mexico. It's easy to visualize the value of resource-rich waystations along the monarch's route of migration. Without nectar from flowers to feed the butterflies and without milkweeds to feed the caterpillars along the entire route during the spring and summer months, the hope for successive generations is greatly diminished.

The Monarchs need you to help by creating Monarch waystations in home gardens, schools, parks, zoos, nature centers, field margins, along roadsides, and on other unused plots of land. A major effort is needed to restore milkweeds to as many locations as possible.

You can fill out a certification application online to make your yard a Monarch waystation. It's easy and you will be approved almost immediately. Your name will be listed on the online registry of waystations. Mine is #690 of about 1300 listed at the present time. Thousands more are needed to help replenish the habitats and resources that are dwindling daily due to farming practices, new developments, highway management practices, etc.

Learn as much as you can about this beautiful butterfly and share what you learn with as many



Monarch butterfly, *Danaus plexippus*

others as possible. Together we will help preserve the Monarch butterfly for future generations to enjoy.

## ...and here's the beast

If you have a compost pile, you may have already seen one of these critters in your yard or garden. Many of us have never seen one.

Mole crickets are superbly adapted to life underground. Their 1-1/2 to 2" long bodies are brown and cylindrical and are covered with very short velvety hairs. Their front legs are modified for digging, being broad and armed with stout teeth. The antennae are short, and the wings are also rather short, covering about half of the abdomen. They will feed on almost any plant (mostly the roots) including vegetables, sugar cane, and ornamentals, and will also eat small insects. They are nocturnal creatures and will fly around at night in search of new food resources or mates.

## Additional Resources:

A large amount of information about Monarchs is available on the internet at:

[www.monarchwatch.org](http://www.monarchwatch.org); and you may order the field guide mentioned above at this website too: *Milkweed, Monarchs and More: A Field Guide to the Invertebrate Community in the Milkweed Patch* (Paperback) by Ba Rea (Author), Karen S. Oberhauser (Author), Michael A. Quinn.



Mole cricket, *Scapteriscus*

## **Will It Fly?**

*TMN Ornithology  
Class in the Works  
for Winter, 2008*

*Dennis Jones, right, is  
designing the class*



CPC President Cheryl Sedivec reports that she and members of Gulf Coast TMN are working to launch a basic ornithology class next winter to be taught by the Assistant Superintendent of Brazos Bend State Park, Dennis Jones. Tentatively, the class will be held on four Saturdays: January 12th and 19th, and February 9th and 23<sup>rd</sup>, with each class lasting three to four hours.

Though Dennis Jones, hesitates to call it 'comprehensive', "It will cover more topics than most people have studied," he says.

The topics: Week one: evolution and taxonomy of birds. Week two: feathers, flight, food, feeding, digestion, and anatomy. Week three: behavior, voice, and breeding. Week 4: migration, conservation, how to attract birds and care for injured birds, and a primer on birding (field guides, optics, resources). "Everything but identification," says Jones.

The class will earn Advanced Training hours for participants. For copies of the tentative schedule and class content, contact Staci Hobbet, 281 242 8405, or [rshob@houston.rr.com](mailto:rshob@houston.rr.com).

## *Milestones*

Congratulations to these CPC members who recently reached TMN milestones:

*Amy Burt  
Class of 2006  
TMN Initial Certification  
Shrimp pin award (photo pg 8)*

*Cheryl Sedivec  
Class of 2004  
TMN Re-Certification for 2007  
Shrimp pin award*

*Wendy Talkington  
Class of 2004  
Completion of 250 hours  
Volunteer Service; pin award*

--Linda Rippert

## *Letter to the Editor*

*Send letters to Staci Hobbet  
[rshob@houston.rr.com](mailto:rshob@houston.rr.com)*

Dear Editor,

I want to tell you about the most enjoyable volunteer project that I have been involved with this summer. Call it "A Rookie's Adventures in Birdland".

I've been helping to feed the baby birds at the Texas Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, one of our regular VSPs, as often as I can this summer. Shannon Beliew, one of my classmates from CPC's 2006 training class, is now the Volunteer Coordinator there, a paid position. Working with her and the baby birds is so much fun and the 4 hour stint goes by before you know it! Who knew baby birds don't care one hoot who feeds them and can be just as finicky as any human baby when peas are served -- by spitting them right back out? I swear they have different personalities too! Any "bird whisperers" out there who can confirm or debunk that one?

Let me start at the beginning. I quickly became terrified about being able to do this work successfully after the single informational class and printing out the 42 page "how to" manual. As I read it, I had to highlight every other line, which took basically all of a 3 hour plane trip I was then totally terrified that I would kill every single bird! I had nightmares about it, and went to my first shift clutching that manual and some quick-reference pocket-sized index cards. The experienced care-givers got a kick out of my terror, but all my fears were quickly relieved with the very first little one I handled. Doesn't this sound like the first time you held a human baby to feed it? Sheer terror then relief! The babies know what to do even if you don't: open wide so you can't miss!

Shannon had told us about the Rehab Center during our class last fall. She was fostering baby squirrels at the time, so I knew where to take a wounded bird I found in my yard as well as a lizard that I thought was dead. It was hibernating, it turns out.

This facility is wonderful. Contact Shannon, who will give you all the details: 832-233-9003 or [sbeliew@sbcglobal.net](mailto:sbeliew@sbcglobal.net). The center is staffed by volunteers, and during baby bird season they are needed from 8 a.m. until 8 p.m. Please participate in this fantastic TMN-approved volunteer opportunity next summer. The feeding starts in April and runs through the middle of August. You'll be glad you did!

Sincerely,  
*Amy Burt  
[abab@earthlink.net](mailto:abab@earthlink.net)*

# Count the Toes, Please

By Peggy d'Hemecourt



Looking like Rudolf, a Three-toed Box Turtle makes a foray into Peggy d'Hemecourt's back yard.

**How many toes does it have?**" was the question I heard upon answering the phone. It took me a few minutes to realize that my sister and fellow Master Naturalist Wendy was asking about the turtle sighting that I had reported to her a few days prior.

It had been hard enough to get a good picture that evening and it had never occurred to me that turtles had toes, much less to try to count them to facilitate future identification.

A few days prior, at just about dark, I had spotted something from my kitchen window moving in the grass. It was distinctly red in color, and my first thought was that there was a wounded Cardinal that might need my help. I sprang into action, only to discover that a turtle was ambling across the berm in the back yard, heading for a very weedy flower bed. Its head and legs were very red, unlike any other turtle I had encountered before.

Back inside I raced to get the camera – a simple digital camera without a strong zoom. My getting close enough to capture the unusual skin color in a photograph only resulted in the appendages taking shelter under the shell. So there I sat quietly in the grass for as long as I could manage as the sun set and mosquitoes made a feast of me.

Later attempts to research my sighting on the internet were for naught. But Wendy found a source of information on our Dad's bookcase, "A Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of Texas". There she found *Terrapene carolina triunguis*, the Three-toed box turtle.

According to the field guide, the Three-

toed box turtle is found throughout the eastern third of Texas and south to about halfway down the coast. It's terrestrial and primarily diurnal (had to look that one up, I admit: belonging to the period of daylight). It's most active during the early morning or after heavy rainfall. It's long-lived and may spend its whole life in a small area if conditions are right (I presume my prairie-grass yard and flower beds overgrown with weeds look pretty good to a Three-toed box turtle). It normally eats earthworms and slugs, as well as wild strawberries and mushrooms poisonous to man. If conditions warrant, it can go into a dormant state in a burrow it digs. The female digs a flask-shaped nest 3 to 4 inches deep during May, June and July and deposits 3 to 8 oval, thin-shelled eggs about 1 3/8 inches long. Hatchlings usually remain in the nest through the winter. The female is able to retain sperm for several years, enabling her to produce fertile eggs for several seasons after a single mating.

There hasn't been a second sighting of the turtle in the ensuing few weeks. I've yet to tackle the weeds in the flower bed to which the turtle withdrew that evening. When I do, I'll be more cautious than usual in the off chance that my garden hides a nest. And the next time I encounter a turtle, I'll be sure to count the toes.

## ***Yard Out of Control? Here's a Cure*** *Or at least an effective diversion*

### *Dandelion Wine*



*from Terri Schwab*

### **Pick 3 qts dandelion**

blossoms (no stems); pour 4 qts boiling water over blossoms and let stand 24 hours. Add: 3 lemons (sliced)  
3 pounds sugar

Mix until sugar is dissolved. Stir every day for two weeks. Keep in a warm place, out of drafts. Strain and put in bottles. Do not put caps on tight because it continues to ferment for a month or two.

## *Hmm... Where Do I Fit In?*

If you've been asking yourself this question in regard to CPC activities, here are some of the volunteer opportunities mentioned in this newsletter alone. Take your pick. There are more on our website calendar: [coastalprairie.org...](http://coastalprairie.org...)

- 1) Help or assist with our upcoming training classes, page 1
- 2) Help with the alt-plants booklet, page 2
- 3) Give input on the developing ornithology class
- 4) Write for the CPR, page 9
- 5) Join the Tallow Team or Fire Ant Team, page 7
- 6) Help develop a Recommended Reading List, page 8
- 7) Send Cheryl a Green Home & Garden Tip, page 12
- 8) Help Cheryl with the next GH&G Workshop, page 12

...and still more on page 12. See Upcoming Events.

## Pesticides

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the label as an 'active ingredient,' is mixed with what she called 'the inerts,' generally lower-cost stabilizers, preservatives, and dispersants. Consumers grab cans, bottles, boxes, and bags off the shelves at Home Depot, CVS, and even the grocery store, and yet, Wells asked, what do we know about the ingredients? So-called 'inert' ingredients usually aren't even listed on the label, she said, and 'inert' doesn't mean what the average consumer would assume: "having few or no active properties," a dictionary definition. The chemical industry uses the word much more narrowly, to describe any ingredient other than those directly responsible for poisoning the target species. A pesticide ingredient may well be 'inert' to a cockroach and cause severe asthma in a young child.

The effect of widespread pesticide use on children is the heart of the matter to Wells, especially very young children who live virtually at ground-level. "They always have their hands in their mouths," she said, and they have frequent, direct contact with the surfaces most frequently treated with pesticides, such as yards and gardens. Pesticides are designed to degrade in sunlight, she said, so when children bring it indoors on their clothes and shoes, it is transferred to carpets and furniture, and can persist. That hazard is made worse by children's higher metabolism and the permeability of young skin. Disorders such as allergies, asthma, ADD, and autism have all been on the rise in children. "You can't blame pesticides for everything," said Wells, "but where are they coming from?" Pesticides are tested — by the industry itself — "on 150-pound males. How would that (dosage) effect a child?"

What troubles Wells the most is how little we know about their effects, both on human health and the environment. "Pesticides have too many secrets," she said. She urged CPC members to consider alternatives, referring them to TAP's website ([nopesticides.org](http://nopesticides.org)) for inspiration and ideas. Diatomaceous earth, for instance, is an effective barrier to roaches, she said, and white vinegar makes a good weed-killer. Use the precautionary principle, she urged the audience, when you're considering the use of pesticides. "Ask, is there another way?"

The 30 CPC members in attendance were quick to ask questions and tell of their own experiences, and sometimes challenged Wells with special cases, such as how to control fire ants and Chinese Tallow without pesticides. She agreed that such vigorous invasives pose difficult problems, and stressed that she would never say never use pesticides. "We need to use less." A method commonly used to help control Chinese Tallow requires herbicide to be applied to a slash in the bark of individual trees, and that seems a reasonable use, she said. (See related article, page 7.)

Asked about her methods of countering the deep-seated anti-bug prejudices of the general public, she sighed and recalled that in a former career as a children's bookstore owner, she had a shelf-full of books about mice. "In a book, they're cute. In somebody's house...screech!" It's a good contrast to point out to kids. "I also had a big roach puppet," she said, indicating a monster ten inches long. "I really wish I still had that puppet."

## Additional Pesticide-alternative Resources:

TAP's website: [nopesticides.org](http://nopesticides.org)  
Mothers for Clean Air: [mothersforcleanair.org](http://mothersforcleanair.org)  
Safe 2 Use: [safe2use.com](http://safe2use.com)  
IPM Institute of No. America: [ipminstitute.org](http://ipminstitute.org)  
National Coalition for Pesticide-Free Lawns: [pesticidefreelawns.org](http://pesticidefreelawns.org)  
Beyond Pesticides: [beyondpesticides.org](http://beyondpesticides.org)  
Texas Pesticide Information Network: [txpin.texascenter.org](http://txpin.texascenter.org)  
National Coalition for Pesticide-Free Lawns: [pesticidefreelawns.org](http://pesticidefreelawns.org)  
Beyond Pesticides: [beyondpesticides.org](http://beyondpesticides.org)

## *M.S. and Ms. to Marry Soon Cody Dennison and Jonni Ann*

**'Spare time' is not a concept** CPC advisor Cody Dennison has much time for. Everyone in the chapter who has worked closely with him has come away wondering how he juggles so many responsibilities in his job as Waller County Extension agent when he's also been working toward his M. S. in Agricultural Science at TAMU-Kingsville. Then, in late July, he announced that on August 18<sup>th</sup>, just eight days after his graduation, he will marry his girlfriend, Jonni Ann Timmer.

Cody revealed the engagement in an email to the chapter, saying that he was busy working on a final research paper and planning his wedding after having called a rodeo until the wee hours that morning.

Ms. Jonni Ann and her two young daughters have attended several recent CPC events with Cody, so they are already part of the TMN family.



Cody with his new family: Jonni Ann, and her daughters Sidney, 8, left, and Emily, 5.

# A Perfect Storm of Chinese Tallow.....and a TMN Team on the Attack

## A Ferociously-Successful Invasive Can't Be Defeated, But Some Control is Possible



At Brazos Bend State Park, Jim Calvert, TMN, Cradle of TX Chapter, slices a Tallow trunk with his machete and sprays the wound with an herbicide.

If you happened to be considering a new tree for the front yard and checked in at Wikipedia, here's what you'd find in the entry for the Chinese Tallow Tree: (*Triadica sebifera*): It rivals the maple with its spectacular autumn foliage; it makes a fine shade tree, it grows almost anywhere, and as a bonus, "It is the second or third most productive vegetable-oil-bearing seed crop in the world, after oil palm and algae, therefore useful in production of biodiesel to combat climate change."

Heck, you'd plant a grove of the stuff and come away feeling noble.

Using more reliable sources, the fuller story isn't hard to find. Chinese Tallow may be the tree version of the Perfect Storm. It grows fast and furiously into large single-species groves, spreading by sucker, so it's difficult to kill. It can also spread by roots, cuttings, and stumps. If you yank a sapling out by hand and leave a small section of root below the soil, the tree is likely to sprout again. It has virtually no natural predators; its deep shade kills other species, and its leaf-fall taints the soil for natives. Its leaves, bark, and fruit are toxic to livestock, humans, and most animals. A few birds will eat the seeds, but they're recruited as dispersing agents by the tree to broadcast the seeds from the air. Three years is all a sapling needs to mature and produce its first annual load of Tallow futures in the form of thousands of seeds.

So: Can we use it to make biodiesel fuel? Well, maybe. Someday.

A large biodiesel plant, owned in part by Chevron, began operation this spring in Galveston. Designed for soybeans and a capacity of 20 million gallons a day, it may be expanded rapidly if biodiesel fuel finds a way into the market past environmental regulators and an industry set up almost exclusively for fossil fuels. To make a significant contribution to the nation's fuels supply, however, biodiesel producers will have to find alternate source crops for their alternate fuel: soybeans are too expensive. And that's where Chinese Tallow might come in.

But before that's possible, someone has to come up with a practical machine to harvest the seeds. The Chinese picked them by hand to make soap and candles, but we're talking 20 million gallons a day of biofuel at the Galveston plant alone.

That's going to take some time, and meanwhile, across millions of acres in nine Southern states and California, Tallow seeds sprout into voracious, nearly-indestructible trees, and



Calvert and Ron Morrison, CPC, point out a stand of dying Tallow treated two weeks before at the Park.

native plants continue to disappear, along with the wildlife dependent upon them.

**Ron Morrison, a CPC member** and graduate of the 2006 Training Class, has taken action against the Chinese Tallow at BBSP, where he volunteers up to several days per week. He doesn't expect to eradicate the tree: chop it down and it comes back like a Hydra, with several limber trunks. But it's possible to keep it – as well as the ubiquitous and equally destructive Fire Ant – out of the most public portions of the Park, he says. He's at work on both of these goals, along with a small but determined group of volunteers, among them Lisa Krotzer, CPC, and Jim Calvert, a TMN from the Cradle of Texas Chapter, who also helps Ron with trail-trimming, another Morrison-led CPC project at BBSP, one confined to the cooler months.

Staff at BBSP refer to Ron's Tallow project as Tallowhacking. Ron and Jim have a more colloquial term for their task: Hack & Squirt. It's a literal description: Ron and his team slice open the bark of individual trees and spray the gash with an herbicide. Within two weeks, the trees' leaves shift from tender green to flaming orange.

"It looks like New Hampshire in the Fall," says Ron, a change that gives him "immediate gratification."

A much more labor-intensive method of dealing with Tallow, sometimes used by Ron's team in the park, is to cut the Tallow down with a chain-saw, which creates huge piles of sawn trunks and branches, says Ron. Hack and squirt, by contrast, "looks totally natural," he says. As long as you don't mind a little autumn foliage in August, that is.

Ron's summer projects, Fire ant control and Tallow control at BBSP are both less physically-demanding than the trail-trimming he does in the winter. "We can always use a spotter," he says of the Tallow team, someone to spot the Tallow in a tangle of growth and make sure that a valuable native tree isn't hacked by accident. "And it's not hard work at all."

Lisa Krotzer helped with spotting in her last outing with the team. "I wore my rubber boots and carried a stick upright to get through all the spider webs," she reports. One of her highlights was "...finding a PVC pipe with about 10 green tree frogs inside."

Cont'd next page

# A Test of Wind Resistance

Live Oak Scores High, and Tallow.



Our sturdy live oaks do well in high winds, unlike the non-native Tallow, which evolved in a calmer environment.

**If we could only aim** incoming hurricanes at Chinese Tallow...

A recent article in *The New York Times* reviewed several studies of trees after severe storms to determine their vulnerability to wind damage. The coastal prairie is home to both the strongest tree, the live oak, and one of the weakest, the Chinese Tallow. A quote:

*"At or near the top of many lists of the fittest is the live oak. A 1982 study by the Forest Service listed runners-up like bald cypress, black gum, sweet gum and the Southern red oak. At the bottom of that list are the box elder, hickory, red maple and yellow poplar.*

*Another study, done in hurricane-prone northern Florida by the University of Florida extension service, and based on homeowners' reports of storm damage, found some regional variations.*

*'Dogwood, sand live oak, live oak, sabal palm and Southern magnolia are native trees that appear to tolerate hurricane-force winds extremely well,' the study found. 'Less wind-resistant are laurel oak, turkey oak, Chinese tallow and red maple. Southern red cedar, sweet gum and silver maple all appear to have crowns which are easily damaged by the winds.' The Carolina laurel cherry and the sand pine were the most vulnerable of all."*

Excerpted from *The New York Times*, 'Blowing in the Wind' by C. Claiborne Ray, 7/18/07.

**Amy Burt, right, CPC Class of 2006, qualifies as a TMN at July's chapter meeting. Linda Rippert, CPC Membership Chair, awarded Amy with her pin, which is in the shape of a Gulf shrimp for 2007. See 'Milestones,' pg. 4.**

## Tallow control

cont'd from page 7

Ron's Tallow and Fire Ant teams meet weekly at the Park (see CPC's online calendar for details, or contact Ron at [rcmorri@alltel.net](mailto:rcmorri@alltel.net)), and he welcomes new volunteers, even if they can't commit to regular work. Trail-trimming will resume in the winter.

There are a lot of worthy projects on the coastal prairie, Ron says, and he doesn't mean to compete with them but "to offer a physical challenge," he says, "and to benefit the Park."

**Resources, Tallow and Other Invasive Plants:**  
Mark Klym TPWD, 'The Dangers of Invasive Plants,' a powerpoint slide show under 'Educational Material' at [www.coastalprairie.org](http://www.coastalprairie.org)

[www.texasinvasives.org](http://www.texasinvasives.org)

[www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/plants](http://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/plants)

[www.invasives.org](http://www.invasives.org)

[www.usna.usgs.gov/Gardens/invasives.html](http://www.usna.usgs.gov/Gardens/invasives.html)

[www.weedcenter.org](http://www.weedcenter.org)

[www.ucssusa.org/invasive\\_species/state-invasion-portfolios.html](http://www.ucssusa.org/invasive_species/state-invasion-portfolios.html)

*Houston Chronicle*, Feb. 26, 2007, 'Oil giant Chevron bets on biodiesel' by Brett Clanton

## Your Most Indispensable Book?

A Recommended Reading list will be among the new materials given to CPC's 2007 training class, which begins September 6<sup>th</sup>, and CPC's Training Committee is soliciting members to help build the list. Terri Schwab has volunteered to coordinate assembling the list and will also prepare the list to share with class participants and our chapter members. If you have materials you'd like to recommend (field guides, general reference materials, historical materials, etc.), please forward the information to Terri by August 24 ([tschwab3@houston.rr.com](mailto:tschwab3@houston.rr.com)). Include title, author and one or two sentences explaining why you think the material is a must-read for our students.

Mary Beth McCaughey



## **Bill Petty Takes Up Post as Secretary on CPC's Board of Directors**



**Bill Petty, CPC's new Secretary**, has some wild shirts, a ready smile and a wit to match. "I've never been a secretary before," he says, reflecting on how his new position differs from others he has held. "You have to stay awake and be able to read your notes later."

After spending 15 years with the City of Houston in environmental compliance and monitoring, and another 15 in solid waste management, Bill 'retired' to a position with Ft. Bend County's Engineering Department as its 'Household Hazardous Waste Facilitator.' On Mondays, he receives, screens, and sorts everything in 16 categories of waste that comes his way; on Wednesdays, he packs the stuff up himself, "in drums or boxes, or whatever is suitable."

His shifts are 12 hours long, and they're outdoors, whatever the weather. He wears "Splash goggles, hard-toe boots and an apron over long pants and shirts." Plus double gloves. It's a job description that would make most people quail, to say nothing of sweat. One time, he says, "I lost 8 pounds of water in a 12-hour shift. That's a gallon."

He has always been interested in the Master Naturalists, he says. He sought them out when only one Houston-area chapter existed. "But the classes were in Clear Lake and I live in Tomball." He decided to wait, "and forgot about it for a while," until a conversation with Margo MacDowell at the Ft. Bend Extension office spurred him to join CPC's second training class, in 2005.

"I'm still discovering my little niche," he says. It's a case of too many interests rather than too few. He's fascinated by many things, including archeology, and the history and politics of waste management; and he's a potter as well.

"I've gone back and forth from the functional to the decorative to the functional," he says of his pots, and he went through what he calls his 'primitive phase' when he made pots as the Caddo Indians did. There's no kiln involved. "You build a bonfire and toss your pot in."

Bill plans to write a piece for the next CPR on the history of plastics. As prosaic as that may sound, it could be said that plastics have changed Western culture. They've certainly altered the environment. Recalling the garbage pits of early Texas settlers, Bill says, "They had fresh fruits and vegetables, some glass and metal. That's it. They didn't throw much away."



*Come out  
of the  
dark  
and*

***Write for the CPR***

***Next CPR deadline:  
October 22<sup>nd</sup>***

## **Thanks to Our Contributors**

**and an invitation to everyone else**

from Staci Hobbet, Editor, [rshob@houston.rr.com](mailto:rshob@houston.rr.com)

**Articles and photographs** from inside and outside of our chapter are again featured in this edition of CPR.

### **Photo credits:**

Page 1: dragonfly by Don Johnson, others by Staci Hobbet; page 2: Bobwhite by Greg Lavaty, Chinese Tallow by Ron Morrison; page 3: Linda Rippert; page 4: Staci Hobbet; page 5: Three-toed Box Turtle by Peggy d'Hemecourt, dandelion by Chuck Duplant; page 6: by Scarlet Estlack; page 7: Calvert by Ron Morrison, Calvert and Morrison by Staci Hobbet; page 8: Staci Hobbet; page 9: Petty by Staci Hobbet, Pileated woodpecker by Greg Lavaty; page 10: photo of Jeff McMullan by Staci Hobbet, bee-hive by Jeff McMullan, Bradbury by Tim Bradbury; page 11: by Wayne Rhoden; page 12: Staci Hobbet

### **Text credits:**

Tricia Bradbury, Amy Burt, Peggy d'Hemecourt, Jaime Gonzalez, Mary Beth McCaughey, Jeff McMullan, Linda Rippert, Terri Schwab, and Cheryl Sedivec. All articles without bylines by Staci Hobbet.

### **Regional and Seasonal Coverage**

Both the *Coastal Prairie Reporter* and our website, [coastalprairie.org](http://coastalprairie.org) welcome your participation. Our goal is to keep both publications regional and seasonal, and to generate the text and the photographs from our own chapter members as much as possible. If you scroll through the Newsbriefs section on our home page, you'll quickly see how easy this can be. Some consist of a few lines of text and a single digital photo. No doubt you see enough in your own backyard to qualify for an interesting Newsbrief. Let us know what's going on in your neck of the coastal prairie.

**Staci Hobbet, Editor**

# A Back Yard Breaks Out in Hives

And With Africanized Bees Around, the Question Is: To Bee or Not to Bee?

by Jeff McMullan



**Let me confess...** I'm trying to do backyard bees. It all started when a colony of honeybees moved into an old flower pot in the back yard.

I knew of two area deaths due to violent mass attack by Africanized "killer" bees and had attended programs about these deadly bugs. I remembered that besides an evil disposition, ground-nesting was a characteristic trait (water meter boxes are a favorite). I immediately searched the internet for how to quickly eliminate this threat without starting WWIII in my back yard.

In my reading, I learned that in many areas pesticides, parasites and disease have virtually eliminated feral honeybee colonies, and it dawned on me that foraging bees had become an uncommon sight in our neighborhood. The fragrant white bloom clusters in *Ligustrum* hedges were no longer abuzz in spring. I also recalled the disappearance of my favorite honeybee colony from a cavity in one of the huge live oaks near the Nature Center at Brazos Bend State Park. And years of yap about Africanized bees had everyone (including me) feeling like "the only good bee is a dead bee."



I soon noticed that there had been no aggressive moves in the back yard. Whenever I ventured near the bees, I was virtually ignored, and so I stood closer and closer to see what they were doing. The more I read, the more I realized that the little guys (mostly girls I learned) need all the help they could muster. After much research and consultation with beekeepers Elton Reynolds and Rob Fogal, and advice from Claude Pawelek, I successfully moved the colony into a real hive.

This spring I introduced a new Hawaiian queen, a line that has a reputation for well-behaved bees. Every afternoon I watched her sons (male drones) leave the hive in search of an opportunity to introduce their desirable genes to feral colonies in the area.

I captured my second swarm in my brother-in-law's neighbor's backyard while an audience peered at me through the windows, and everyone said it looked like I knew what I was doing.

This past spring I managed to lure another neighborhood swarm into a hive I offered them in my back yard. Those two newer hives, plus Rob Fogal's two hives, are at my farm, filling comb with nectar from the five acres of clover I planted in my pecan orchard to help with soil nitrogen.

While the "country girls" are going great guns, the backyard bees recently lost their struggle with hive pests and have abandoned their home. I'd chosen the location for the hive, but it turned out that the best location for me was better for pests than my bees. I learned the hard way that without a good site in full sun, a honeybee colony must be very strong and needs the beekeeper's help in defending their brood and precious stores from small hive beetles and wax worms.

Success with backyard bees will be difficult, but I intend to keep trying. I recovered a few jars of honey from the flower pot last summer and expect a whole lot more in a few weeks....my reward for doing my part to help the honeybees.

## Plastic Thoughts: We are what we think

An essay by Tricia Bradbury

At the Contemporary Craft Museum awhile back I ran across a piece by thread artist Cindy Hickok. I don't remember what the work of art looked like at all, but the title, "Surrounded by plastic ferns one thinks plastic thoughts," really struck me, and I found myself thinking about humans and our relationship with the natural world.

You've probably run across folks who prefer to enjoy nature in ways you wouldn't consider natural at all. They listen to surf sounds and bird song on a Tranquility CD they picked up at Target. They experience the night sky on their screensaver, or they gaze up at little plastic planets and stars stuck to the ceiling of their bedroom. They watch The Discovery Channel, but call Animal Control when they see a possum or raccoon in their backyard. They shop at Nature Company for pinecones cast in brass or dandelion blooms preserved in acrylic. These people have lost their senses - of smelling, hearing, tasting, seeing and touching.



Increasing technology is a major culprit. Case in point: Researchers at Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Media Laboratory are working to make computers invisible in the home. New York architects Gisue and Mojgan Hariri promote their Dream Digital House idea—the walls are LCD screens. We won't even need to go out of the house to experience nature—simply project it on the walls!

In his latest book, *Last Child in the Woods*, Author and child-advocacy expert, Richard Louv, says that many people suffer from cultural autism. What are the symptoms? Basically, a mental atrophy: tunneled senses and feelings of isolation and containment. Edward Reed, the late associate professor of Psychology at Franklin and Marshall College wrote in *The Necessity*  
*Cont'd on page 13*

*"You can't Google nature, you have to be there."*

# ***It's Called a Weed, But It's Also a Nectar-Rich Native***

*A plant bio by Mary Beth McCaughey*

It's been an unusual summer so far, but it's probably safe to say that we've got lots of hot weather ahead of us before things begin to cool off in September and October. The hot days and gradually cooling nights of late summer and fall bring many native plants into bloom. Here's a native to be on the lookout for – it's a beautifully architectural plant and there is some interesting Native American lore in its history. All that and it's a great nectar source for butterflies, wasps, beetles and other nectar sipping insects.

## ***Joe Pye Weed (*Eupatorium fistulosum*)***

*aka Hollow Joe Pye Weed*

Joe Pye weed is a robust upright perennial, 3-10 feet tall, with a maroon purple stem that is unbranched below the flower clusters and mostly hollow. The lance shaped leaves are 8-12 inches long, and arranged in whorls of 4-7 at each node on the stem. The leaves have a vanilla scent when crushed. The flower heads are pink or purplish mauve and densely packed in several large rounded clusters at the top of the stem. The showy flower clusters can grow up to 18 inches across. Some authorities recognize additional, very similar species with similar growth habits as other Joe Pyes. Though the taxonomy is a bit confused, for the purposes of this article we'll stick with *Eupatorium fistulosum*. The species name '*fistulosum*' refers to the hollow stem.

Native Americans used concoctions of Joe Pye weed to treat a diversity of internal and external ailments. In fact it's named after an Algonquin who was said to have cured typhus fever with the plant. I also found sources indicating that the Cherokee used the stem of this or other Joe-Pye Weeds to suck water from shallow springs which was convenient since they are often found in wet areas. It was also used as a kind of blowgun to apply medicine. Huron H. Smith an Ethnobotanist who worked with several North American tribes during the nineteen-twenties and thirties was told that the Meskwaki used the root as a sort of "love medicine" nibbling it when speaking to an intended and that the Potawatomi used the flowers as a good luck charm (talisman).

Happily enough, Joe Pye Weed selections are finding their way into retail nurseries these days. A tall, dominant plant, Joe Pye Weed is not for the tidy flower bed or formal border. If you'd like to add this to your landscape, grow it as the back layer of a bed or to camouflage a fence. It works well in a semi-wild naturalistic garden or along a stream or pond. Though Joe Pye weed normally gets pretty tall before it flowers in summer, you can prune it back in late spring and it will bloom at a much lower height. This plant grows best in full sun and it needs plenty of water. It will survive dry sites, and is even considered to be drought tolerant, but it never will be as robust and showy as when grown with adequate moisture. Joe Pye weed can tolerate periods of inundation. Certainly a characteristic that endears it to naturalists and gardeners alike this year!

### **Sources:**

<http://2bnthewild.com>

<http://www.cas.vanderbilt.edu/bioimages>

<http://floridata.com>

<http://plants.usda.gov>

Medicinal and Other Uses of North American Plants, by Charlotte Erichsen-Brown



## ***What the Real World is About***

Jaime González of KPC, wrote in the organization's July newsletter of his conversation with David Nelson, an "old farm boy" who had been born and raised on the Katy Prairie. A few excerpts from the interview:

*During the past sixty-five years he has witnessed the dramatic transformation of the landscape from wet prairie to farmland to residential magnet... One of the biggest changes that David has seen on the Katy Prairie is the abundance and distribution of its flora and fauna. He remembers large expanses of "old prairie grass waist-high or higher" on and around the family farm. "Of course we had a lot of prairie chickens," Nelson adds. The now endangered birds were hunted along with resident ducks in those days. Interestingly, he notes that geese, often associated with the Katy Prairie, did not show up in large numbers until the introduction of large-scale rice in*

*Cont'd pg 12*

# President's Message

By Cheryl Sedivec

Great news...

...We've started a new page in the 'Resources' section of our website called 'Educational Material.' It's going to include all sorts of things for our use and, importantly, the public's use. Things like Cody's PowerPoint presentation on Edible Plants, and our beneficial insects flier (Wanted:Alive) are there now, as well Mary Beth's Native Plants PowerPoint presentation. We'll post our Green Home and Garden Tips there soon and our Native Plant Alternatives booklet eventually. Our chapter is working on the booklet now. (See the update on page 2.) This new section will be a great asset to our chapter and the public alike.

I suppose you're asking yourself: 'What is a Green Home and Garden tip?' These are tips provided through a joint project between our chapter and the Gulf Coast TMN chapter. The idea for it came from the first-ever Green Home and Garden workshop, hosted by our chapters earlier this year, and we've begun sending out monthly 'Green Home and Garden Tips' (GH&G tips) to the newsletters of several home-owner associations in the area.

This is a great outreach opportunity and a great way to get hours. All you have to do is write a paragraph or two on a topic that will help people better understand our ecosystem and how to protect it. No writing experience is required (they even let me write articles!), and we don't hold committee meetings. The tips are edited communally by all of the TMNs involved, and if necessary, we research the tips some more. Everything is done via email. How easy is that?

By the way, there will be another GH&G workshop on February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2008. Anyone want to help?

Now, back to the Educational Material page on our website: you can submit articles or presentations for posting here, too. Just let me know what your idea is, write it up, and there you go: another way to help get information out to our chapter and the public -- and no committee meetings.

On another front, summer is nearing its end (and hopefully the rain too) with a graduation of last year's class on August 25th. I hope to see everyone one there for the party. Fall is gearing up to be a busy time for us. The new training class starts on September 6th and could be full. Ft. Bend and Waller counties are having their fairs and Ag Barns in October, which require our help. And there's Texian Market days at George Ranch in October too. We have a busy fall ahead of us and I'm counting on all of you to help with organization and volunteering to make these events enjoyable and successful.

Cheers,  
Cheryl



David Nelson

Cont'd from pg 11

the "late 1950's." He also recalls the red wolves that he saw on the prairie in those days as "big dogs" that weighed "75 or 80 pounds" and which had a "mannerism very different from a coyote." He recalls that unlike coyotes, which tend to slink away quickly if spotted, red wolves would "look at you broadside" without flinching. Today, few red wolves remain (mainly on isolated islands). They are extinct in Texas... When we asked David what his message would be to folks who have never visited the Katy Prairie... he quipped that if people don't visit the Katy Prairie they are "missing a tremendous opportunity to find out what the real world is all about." He feels that people should be more connected with where their food originates, and laments the fact that "a lot of kids don't know what the countryside is" anymore.... He brought a group of city kids to (his rice farm) once and they were amazed that "the heavens were full of stars."

## Upcoming Events

For details and updates

See our calendar at [coastalprairie.org](http://coastalprairie.org)

### Monday, August 6

First meeting to plan CPC's role in Ag'Tivity Barn at Ft. Bend Co. Fair, beginning 9/28/07 (see below)

### Saturday, August 25

CPC Class of 2006 Graduation

### Wednesday, September 5

Chapter Meeting: Speaker (TBA) will continue theme of limiting pesticide use

### Thursday, September 6

CPC's 2007 Training Class begins

### Saturday, September 15

Texas Amphibian Watch Training

### Thursday, September 27

Chapter Meeting  
Dr. Baron Rector, speaker  
Topic and location TBA

### Friday, September 28 through Saturday, October 6

Ft. Bend Co. Fair, with Ag'Tivity Barn  
Annual CPC event

### Thursday, October 25

CPC's 2007 Training Class ends

### Friday & Saturday, October 26-27

Texian Days at George Ranch  
Annual CPC event

### Tricia Bradbury, cont'd from page 10

of Experience, "There is something wrong with a society that spends so much money, as well as countless hours of human effort—to make the least dregs of processed information available to everyone everywhere and yet does little or nothing to help us explore the world for ourselves." A whole century ago, John Dewey, one of America's most influential educators, warned that the worship of secondary experience in childhood came with the risk of depersonalizing human life.

Are we dumbing ourselves down with computer-based experience? Instructors in medical schools report that it's becoming increasingly difficult to teach even the basics of how the heart works because students have so little real-world experience that would allow them to grasp analogies. They haven't used a siphon, worked on a motor, or may have never even hooked up a garden hose. These students aren't stupid, but they are largely ignorant of the outdoors and so lack the depth of experience that Nature offers and can supply in infinite variety. Every day in nature is different. Even our own backyard is not exactly the same from day to day.

How do we as Master Naturalists deal with people who think plastic thoughts? --those who look, but don't touch, who have their bouquet of plastic flowers and never enjoy the fragrance of the real thing, who hear the cicadas only on a CD? Our initial response may be frustration, but as part of a state-wide corps of well-trained, well-informed volunteers, we are uniquely qualified to help them. Many people need only a taste, a sight, a sound, a touch in order to reconnect with that receding world of the senses. We can inspire that change -- through education and outreach. Our challenge is to learn as much as we can and then share that knowledge with others.

Jump at the chance to take part in educational activities. Make learning fun. Make them understand you can't Google nature, you have to be there.

*"I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and to have my senses put in tune once more."*  
-John Burroughs

# Coastal Prairie Reporter



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### Partners of the Coastal Prairie Master Naturalists

**Brazos Bend State Park**  
<http://www.brazosbend.org/home.htm>

**City of Sugar Land**  
<http://www.sugarlandtx.gov/>

**Fort Bend County Extension**  
<http://fortbend-tx.tamu.edu/>

**Waller County Extension**  
<http://waller-tx.tamu.edu/>

**George Ranch Historical Park**  
<http://www.georgeranch.org/>

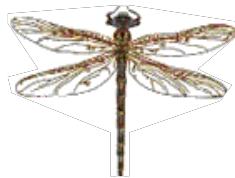
**Gulf Coast Bird Observatory**  
<http://www.gcbo.org/>

**Katy Prairie Conservancy**  
<http://www.katyprairie.org/home.html>

**Keep Sugar Land Beautiful**  
[www.kslb.org](http://www.kslb.org)

**Texas Master Naturalists**  
<http://masternaturalist.tamu.edu>

**Texas Parks and Wildlife Department**  
[www.tpwd.state.tx.us/](http://tpwd.state.tx.us/)



## Interested in Becoming a Coastal Prairie Master Naturalist?

Our annual classes will begin September 6th, 2007.

Deadline for Application: August 30<sup>th</sup>.

For up-to-date information, please send an email to:

[classes@coastalprairie.org](mailto:classes@coastalprairie.org)

Or call the Chapter office: 281 633 7042.

provide your name, home address, home phone number  
and email address

J. Cody Dennison  
CEA—Waller County  
Agriculture / Natural Resource Agent

David S. Lobpries  
Wildlife Division  
Natural Resource Specialist IV



*Extension programs serve people of all ages regardless of socio-economic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability, or national origin. The Texas A & M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas cooperating.*

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