



The Coastal Prairie Reporter

“Covering and Recovering the Coastal Prairie”

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

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CPC Takes On Water Education as Premier Project for Future

***A global issue that's also vital here at home
Team Meets Soon to Plan Public Approach***

In 2008, CPC takes on a new educational outreach project: Water Education. Below, Tricia Bradbury, who will chair the project, introduces us to the topic in order to provoke some thoughtful discourse and inspire us to action as we launch a major new effort.

Water Conservation and Education

By Tricia Bradbury, Chair of CPC's New Water Education Team

Water, water, everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink.

-- *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

No doubt about it, this project is going to be demanding. We all take water for granted, and it'll take some strong evidence to convince our audiences that they need to revolutionize their ways. After all, we turn on a faucet and we have all the fresh water we want. But 97% of the world's water is too salty to drink. Less than one percent of the water on the earth is fresh, and the remaining two to three percent is frozen in glaciers and ice caps. For a large portion of the world's population, access to clean drinking water is a major challenge. The U. S. isn't immune, and soon our region will face shortages too.

1. For instance: between 1950 and 2000, the U.S. population nearly doubled. In that same time, though, public demand for water more than tripled. It's estimated that in Texas, with the fastest growing population in the country, we may see the numbers more than double in the years between 2000 and 2060. That means our population could go from less than five million to almost eleven million. How will we ensure safe water supplies for so many?

A recent government survey showed at least 36 states are anticipating local, regional, or statewide water shortages by 2013. All across the country, our growing population and increased water demand is putting



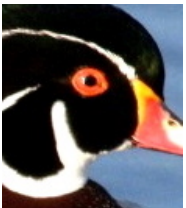
Amy Bradford, left, takes notes at a recent CPC Board meeting as Tricia Bradbury discusses water education with the members.

Have you paid your dues?

Keep your membership active
as CPC expands its horizons

See page 2 for details

**See
what's inside**



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stress on available water supplies and distribution systems. Americans now use an average of 100 gallons of water each day. That's enough to fill 1,600 drinking glasses.

All of us in CPC probably agree that by using water more efficiently, we can help preserve our fresh water supplies for future generations, save money, and protect the environment. But how do we, a group of 40 or so citizen scientists, really make a difference? How will we approach this daunting project? It's not as simple as just saying "use less water." We must begin by educating ourselves. First, let's look at a few more facts, the kind we want to get out to the public in 2008:

Saving water saves energy

Think about this: For about the same amount of energy, you can run your faucet for five minutes or burn a 60-watt light bulb for 14 hours. What we rarely think about when we turn on the faucet is that it takes a lot of energy to get it to that convenient point. American public water supply and treatment facilities consume about 56 billion kilowatt-hours (kWh) per year, enough electricity to power more than 5 million homes for an entire year.

Saving water saves money

If your household is like the average in this country, you spend as much as \$500 per year on water and sewer bills. But if we all installed water-efficient appliances, the country would save more than 3 trillion gallons of water and \$18 billion dollars per year. In addition, we'd reduce the need for costly water supply infrastructure investments and wastewater treatment facilities.

Saving water saves the environment

We're depleting our aquifers and reservoirs nationwide. Experts think this will lead to higher concentrations of natural contaminants, such as radon and arsenic, or human pollutants, such as agricultural and chemical wastes, putting water supplies, human health, and the environment at serious risk.

Saving water means educating the public

So we have a message for the public. The problem is how to frame it when most people aren't environmentally literate. What does that mean, exactly? Environmental literacy requires a fundamental understanding of the systems of the natural world, the relationships and interactions between the living and the non-living environment, and the ability to deal sensibly with problems that involve scientific evidence, uncertainty, and economic, aesthetic, and ethical considerations.

That's what we need to teach the public. And we can: It's the very stuff we've learned ourselves, through our TMN training. In order to figure out our exact approach, we've formed a Water Education Team, which will be meeting soon.

We can all be better stewards of our precious supply of fresh water by making lifestyle changes or simply making better informed choices in our homes, our gardens, our workplace, and even on our shopping trips. As TMNs we can help homeowners understand the issues linking water conservation, public health, environmental health, energy savings, and tax savings.

Join the CPTMN Water Education Team. Let's pull from our well of knowledge and resources and flood our area with reasons to save water!

Do Those Dues That You Do So Well

A new year has begun and that means it's time to submit your CPTMN dues so we can continue our chapter activities. The annual dues are still only \$20 per member. You'll find a downloadable renewal form on the homepage of our website, coastalprairie.org. We need this information to be certain our contact data is current and to determine your interests in serving on any of our committees. If you haven't already done so, please mail your check and renewal to the address on the form.

Also, please keep in mind that you are not required to have completed your VSP and AT hour requirements in order to continue to be a Texas Master Naturalist Member, but you do have to complete the hour requirements to be a **Certified** Texas Master Naturalist. I hope this will entice some of you who don't have the requisite hours to continue your membership in our Chapter.

John Cotterell
Treasurer, CPTMN

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At an age when many people harrumph at anyone under 50, A B Gartman, 77, still eagerly seeks out the company of kids. A member of CPC's first class in 2004, he has volunteered steadily since, often coming from his home in Waller County to help in Ft. Bend County events, and he favors anything that allows him to teach kids about natural history, especially fishing. He approaches the topic globally, teaching kids the skill, the art, the biology, and the sportsmanship of fishing. He connects instantly with young people. His secret is his manner: it's warm, light-hearted, and eminently respectful. They know from the first words he speaks that he considers them colleagues not underlings, which may teach them something well beyond the topic of fishing. It's this: What you have to say and how you say it are equally important. Not a bad lesson to pass on to a kid as you talk about bass and crappie.

Born in South Carolina, A B (the initials alone make up his birth name, with no periods; it's not an abbreviation) got his own first childhood lessons in natural history from local farmers. His first lessons in tragedy came during those tender years too. In 1935, when he was just five, both his parents were killed in a tractor accident. "The last thing anyone wanted at that time was a five-year-old," he says, explaining why he was put to work by several farmers in the area but never adopted permanently by any of them. He was literally farmed-out. Yet he refuses to see his childhood self as a tragic figure. "I had five fathers," he says emphatically.

Profile: A B Gartman

It's his responsibility to educate kids, he says. "If not me, who?"



He lived in an orphanage until he was discharged at 18 with "four dimes and a ditty bag." After wandering through Memphis and New Orleans, he joined the Army and found a home there, staying put for the next two wars: Korea and Vietnam. He was wounded in both, and left the service on disability. But he didn't stand still for long. He soon joined the State Department and went to the Sinai Desert after the Camp David Accords as part of a multi-national peacekeeping force charged with the task of returning that contested land to Egypt. There, working as 'Camp Manager' he became known for his keen interest in natural history, and was named 'Game Warden of the Sinai Desert' by the Governor of the Sinai.

"I retired for good in 1987," he says, but it's not quite true. He took on several new vistas: a move to Texas, a marriage, his first. He'd been a life-long bachelor until he met Lori, whom he still calls 'my bride' after 21 years. He also launched eagerly into outdoor pursuits and was given a seat on the TPWD Freshwater Advisory Board, a highly prestigious appointment which he earned by founding and leading The Catfish and Crappie Association of Texas. He shrugs in talking about it now, but it was no small accomplishment: it had 27,000 members.

He first read about the TMNs in the newspaper, he says, "and I knew I wanted to be part of it." He met with Cody Dennison, our chapter's advisor in Waller County and the Texas AgriLife Extension agent there. Cody considers him a model Master Naturalist, and has even asked him to visit a Waller County landowner or two as a casual advisor on natural history matters.

But it's his work with children that inspires him. "I no longer blame anyone else when kids don't know about the outdoors," he says. "It's my responsibility. If not me, who?"

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Please note the correction of some of the information contained in my article from October's "Reporter" on the TMN State meeting.

The Red-tailed Hawk at the Last Chance Forever Conservancy was having "rehabilitation" not "doctoring" performed on its wing in preparation for possible release back into the wild. Secondly, the giant condor at the Conservancy is not a "California" one "awaiting release". It is a South American Andean Condor who has been a permanent resident since coming to the conservancy from a zoo as a chick.

Sincerely,
Amy Burt
abab@earthlink.net

Coastal
Prairie
Reporter



Plastics Turn 100

And they'll be around a long, long time...

...whether we use them or not

By Bill Petty

Bill is a CPC member and the Household Hazardous Waste Facility Manager at the Ft. Bend County Recycling Center in Rosenberg.

Plastic is entering its second century. It was in 1907 that Leo Baekeland, a Belgium-born inventor intent on making an insulator, came up with the first plastic. No fool, he quickly recognized the commercial potential of the odd stuff he'd concocted from phenol and formaldehyde, slapped a patent on it, and christened it Bakelite. Bakelite was cheap, strong and durable, and before long it had taken a thousand shapes, such as radios, telephones, clocks and billiard balls. The U.S. government even considered making one cent coins out of it when World War II caused a copper shortage. A hundred years later there are more than 300 plastic resins that are used in our homes, automobiles, businesses, and industry. Plastics have transformed our consumer society and our lives.

They also make up a rapidly-growing segment of the municipal solid waste stream. Plastics have gone from less than 1% of the waste stream in 1960 to 11.3% in 2003. The largest category of plastics is containers and packaging (e.g., soft drink bottles, water bottles, shampoo bottles, lids). Plastics are also found in durable goods such as appliances and furniture and non-durable goods such as diapers, trash bags, cups, utensils and medical devices. They're everywhere.

To make plastic recycling easier, the Society of the Plastic Industries introduced a plastic resin coding system in 1988 that is still in use today. The six most commonly used plastics for food and beverage containers have a triangle on the bottom. In that triangle is a number from 1 to 6, which indicates the plastic resin used to make the container. A "7" indicates that the plastic resin is "Other" than the top six. It could be almost anything. Most recycling programs take numbers 1 and 2 and some, such as the Ft. Bend Center, take 1 through 7.

Plastics are collected from municipal and drop off recycling programs. The collected plastics are sorted at a Material Recovery Facility (MRF) by resin type usually by hand, baled, and sent to a reclaimer. The reclaimer will try to eliminate trash and dirt from the plastic with a water bath. After washing it is ground into small flakes. A flotation tank then further separates contaminants. The flakes are dried, melted, filtered and formed into pellets. The pellets are shipped to a product manufacturer where they are made into new plastic products.

Some interesting figures about plastics in our waste stream: In 2003, the U.S. generated 26.7 million tons of plastic waste. In that year, the most recent for which EPA data is available, plastics had a 3.9 percent recycling rate. The U.S. generated 11 million tons of plastics in the municipal waste stream as containers and packaging, with an additional 6 million pounds as nondurable goods, and 8 million pounds as durable goods.

What we need is an equal addiction to recycling.



CPC Member Bill Petty welcomes all TMNs to help at the Ft. Bend Co. Recycling Center, a VSP activity.

Resources for more plastics information:

Fort Bend County Recycling and Environmental Center, Rosenberg, 281-633-7581

American Plastics Council
The Society of the Plastics Industries
www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/visitmuseum/galleries/plasticity.aspx

Dr Susan Mossman, "Early Plastics: Perspectives 1850-1950"

Ft. Bend County Recycling Center, 1200 Blume Road, Rosenberg, Texas 77471; 281-342-5226; <http://www.co.fort-bend.tx.us/getSitePage.asp?sitePage=5693>.

Accepts plastics numbered 1-7 and others on approval (bring them!)

TMNs may volunteer any day the center is open: Mon, Tues, Thurs, and Sat, 8am – 4 pm. Help is always needed with sorting materials and customer education.

Native Clouds of Red

Possumhaw Holly brightens winter landscape

by Mary Beth McCaughey



One of my favorite plants is spectacular this time of year. I first became familiar with Possumhaw Holly (*Ilex decidua*) when I began spending time in Rosenberg with the Master Gardener program. It was early February when I noticed what seemed to be clouds of red berries along the edges of the wooded areas visible from the Southwest Freeway and Hwy 90A as I traveled between Sugar Land and Rosenberg. Not being a native Texan, I wondered what sort of plant could produce such a beautiful effect.

After doing some research, I realized that I was admiring Possumhaw Holly. This large shrub or small tree attracts attention because of its unique presentation of red, orange and yellow fruit, which appear when the foliage drops in November or early December. The berries usually remain all winter unless they're spied by cedar waxwings, blue jays, robins or other birds. Then, of course, they're eaten fast.

While beautiful in a natural setting along the edge of a wooded or swampy area, this holly makes a great accent in the urban landscape also. It will grow in a variety of soil conditions and will take sun or part shade, though in full sunlight growth is more dense and fruiting is heavier. It has an upright, spreading habit—averaging 20' x 15'. It will tolerate poor drainage quite well, but will thrive in dry conditions also.

Like all hollies, a male plant is needed to pollinate the female plants, or they won't bear fruit. If you live near an area where Possumhaw is native, you're in luck. But out of its range you'll have to plant a male as well, although other berrying hollies have been known to act as pollinators also.

Possumhaw Holly is native from Maryland to Florida and west to Texas and Mexico. In addition to the beautiful seasonal display of color, including this plant in your landscape will attract a variety of birds. You've got to love that in a plant!

Sources:

<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/extension/newsletters/hortupdate/nov01/art1nov.html>

<http://www.usna.usda.gov/Gardens/faqs/HolliesWinter.html>

<http://williamson-tx.tamu.edu/AG/landscapedemos/plantmaterial/trees20.html>

A Cold, Wet Day For the Christmas Bird Counters

Rain, following by chilly high winds didn't prevent over 40 participants, including several CPC members, from enjoying the 23rd Christmas Bird Count at Brazos Bend State Park on December 15. The results were down about 5-10% at 136 species. This was likely due to the birds being more sensible than our participants in keeping out of the weather.

American Woodcock, Peregrine Falcon, Yellow-throated Vireo, Yellow-breasted Chat, Least Flycatcher and a number of Common Goldeneye were special treats but it was Stephan Lorenz and the sighting (and photograph) of an American Redstart which made him the winner of the "Big Bird" award for the event.

CPC members who attended: Bill Godley, Jeanette Bergen, Kurt Bundy, and Staci Hobbet.

The barbecue afterward was enjoyed by all. A date was set for the 2008 count: Saturday, December 20.

– Bill Godley



David Heinicke, in green, led a count team made up of TMNs Jeannette Bergen (CPC) left, Kurt Bundy (CPC), and Carol Ramsayer (GCC) at BBSP on a frigid December 15th.

Oak Prairie Field Notes

Your Tenants are Coming; Time to Clean House

By Greg Pleasant, Biologist
Texas Parks & Wildlife Department

February is the time to clean and repair your bluebird boxes for the new nesting season.



During this time, clean out any old nest material that has been in place over the winter. Also, repair any damage that may have enlarged the entrance hole and be sure that a predator guard is in place. The use of a sticky pest barrier on the pole below the nest box can help prevent fire ants from reaching your fledglings. A product called Tangle Foot can be ordered on line or is available at some nurseries.

Once the bluebird box is cleaned out, start monitoring the bluebird box at regular intervals to determine how productive your boxes are and to observe any problems that may develop. The monitoring process can be rewarding by seeing the boxes that you installed being used.

Starting in March, you can check boxes once a week and continue to do so through July. To check a box, tap the box before opening it so the female can leave if she is inside. She will return after a short time. While monitoring, look for evidence of nest building, eggs, or any other signs of bird

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Letter FROM the Editor



Dear Colleagues,

As some of you know, my husband and I will be leaving Texas in late March to return to our permanent home in the San Francisco Bay area. We've never had a temporary assignment feel quite as temporary as this one: our four years here passed in a flash. My time as one of your colleagues has been briefer still, about 17 months, and for my sake – because I've enjoyed it so much – I really regret that brevity. Thanks to all of you for making me feel so welcome from my first contact with the chapter, and for working so generously with me in my capacity as Communications Chair. My duties are being taken over by our Vice-President, Nancy Sparrow, whose energy and enthusiasm really impress me. We're working together to make the transition as smooth as possible.

I'll stay in touch. I've paid my dues for 2008 (have you?) and will remain on the email distribution list. I'll be keeping track of CPC activities that way, as well as via the website and the CPR, and I hope you'll drop me a line if you feel inspired. You've all become my friends, and I'll miss you. I can't replace you in California. Thanks for sharing your warm hearts, your keen minds, and your endless creativity with me.

My best wishes to all y'all
(how's that for a Californian?)
staci Hobbet
rshob@comcast.net

A Word From Cheryl



Hello Everyone,

Wow this New Year is off and running like gang busters, filled with AT and VSP events, beginning with a great first chapter meeting of the year (Mary Anne Weber's presentation on the cranes of Texas), to Dennis Jones' ornithology class, then to chapter events like the Katy Home and Garden show, the Green Home and Garden Workshop, and the TMN Camp-out at Brazos Bend. It makes me tired to just write them all down. And that's not all. Take a look at our calendar. It's packed. There's something for everyone.

Speaking of which, this year we're looking forward to field trips and speakers to suit all our needs. We have a new chapter-wide project with something for everyone: water education, guided by Tricia Bradbury (see page 1). Our "Wanted Alive" series has broadened to include snakes. We haven't chosen the topic for the next flier in the series. Maybe you'll come up

with it. Keep the Katy Prairie Conservancy in mind too. Grace Liggett, (Class of 2007) is leading our Native Seed Farm team there, and KPC offers many other opportunities too, as does Brazos Bend.

I also want to remember our accomplishments over the last year. As you know, we won the statewide Exemplary Project of the Year award for our communications efforts at the TMN Annual Meeting last October, and got our beneficial insect flier on TPW website. Good accomplishments, and we spent a lot of hours on our multiple projects in 2007, totaling 2,988 hours plus 682.75 hours of associated travel. The State of Texas values these hours at approximately \$18.00/hour for a grand total of \$66,073.50. In my opinion, \$18.00/hour is far short our value, but none the less, we accomplished a great deal of work this year. Great job, everyone!

While I know most of us hate reporting hours and would rather be doing other things (me too) this is a necessary task. It helps keep Sonny and Michele employed and gives the MN program clout with the State, which will in turn keep us a viable organization.

I'd like to thank all of our out-going officers and committee chairs. They've all made great contributions to our chapter during their time in office. To our new officers and committee chairs, welcome. I appreciate all of the enthusiasm, energy and time that you have contributed to making our chapter a success.

This coming year should offer something for everyone. If you have an idea, share it with us. We'd like to hear it. Together we can make 2008 another successful year.

Cheryl

Thanks to Our Contributors

Articles and photographs from inside and outside of our chapter are again featured in this edition of CPR. Warm thanks to all.

Contributors: Tricia Bradbury, Amy Burt, John Cotterell, Chuck Duplant, Bill Godley, Grace Liggett, Jenn Mantei, Mary Beth McCaughey, Bill Petty, Ed Plant, Greg Pleasant, Linda Rippert, Cheryl Sedivec, Nancy Sparrow, Jerry Zona. All articles without a byline are by Staci Hobbet.

Photo credits: page 1: Board meeting by S. Hobbet, Wood duck courtesy of Jerry Zona; pages 2-4: S. Hobbet; page 5: McCaughey article, see her 'Sources', bird count by S. Hobbet; page 6: bluebird courtesy of Chuck Duplant, S. Hobbet by Jenn Mantei; pages 7 & 9 by S. Hobbet; page 10 Blue-wing Teal in fog courtesy of Jerry Zona; Pondhawk by S. Hobbet, page 11.

The CPR is published quarterly in February, May, August, and November. Submissions are enthusiastically welcomed. Send them to Nancy Sparrow, sparrnan@co.fort-bend.tx.us.

See our calendar: coastalprairie.org

Regularly-scheduled events

Every Friday

Trail Trimming with Ron Morrison (VSP), 8:30 am
Location: BBSP

Every Saturday

Recycling (VSP), 8 am
Location: Ft. Bend Recycling Center, Rosenberg

Twice/month, Friday and Sunday

Bird hikes by Bill Godley (AT), 8 am
Location: BBSP 40 Acre Lake

Once/month, Wednesday

Rocking Horse Environment Club (VSP), 4 pm
Location: Fulshear

Special Events

Feb 6, Wednesday

Global Warming Lecture (AT), 7 pm
Location: Nature Discovery Center, Bellaire
Lecturer: LaVerne Williams, Environment Assoc.

Feb 8, Friday

Green Home & Garden Workshop
Registration deadline is today

Feb 8, Friday

CPC Fund-raiser Workshop (VSP), 10 am
Location: Richmond
We'll make clay items to raise funds.

Feb 8-10, Friday and Sunday

Birds of Prey Program (AT), times vary
Location: BBSP Dining Hall
Lecturer: 'Eagle Lady' Doris Mager,

Feb 10, 17 & 24, Sundays

Native Seed Nursery Work Days (VSP), 9 am
Location: KPC
The goal is to generate seeds necessary for Coastal Prairie restoration efforts in our area

Feb 16, Saturday

Green Home & Garden Workshop (AT), 9 am
Harris Co. AgriLife Extension Office, Houston
CPC co-hosts this annual event with the Gulf Coast Chapter to interest and inform people about safe and eco-friendly ways to garden and maintain their homes. Registration deadline: 8 Feb.

Feb 29, Friday

School Hike Leaders' Certification, 9:30 am
Location: BBSP Nature Center
Certifies TMNs to lead school kids on nature hikes at BBSP

Mar 5-8, Wednesday - Saturday

Ranching & Wildlife Expo (AT), 10:30 am
Reliant Arena
Educational seminars related to ranching and wildlife

Mar 6, Thursday

Chapter Meeting: 'Life History of Alligators' (AT & VSP), 7 pm
Location: Bud O'Shieles Community Center, Rosenberg
Lecturer: Dennis Jones, Asst Superintendent, BBSP

Mar 17, Monday

SKYWARN Severe Weather Spotter Training (AT), 6:30 pm
Location: Ft. Bend Annex, Rosenberg
Trainees learn to watch the skies during severe weather.

Mar 18, Tuesday

Millennium Seed Bank Project (AT), 10 am
Location: Sugar Land Community Center
Lecturer: Michael Eason, botanist, on this global plant conservation initiative

Mar 30, Saturday

PrairieECOconnections (AT), 9 am
Location: KPC Field Office
A series of interpretive natural history courses about the Coastal Prairie

April 3, Thursday

Pond Life Lab (AT), 10 am
Location: BBSP Nature Center
Hosted by CPC, Glen Kilgore, an advance student of invertebrate aquatic life will teach the basics of critter identification.

April 12, Saturday

Chapter Field Trip (AT), 4 pm
Location: CPC member Karl Baumgartner's property in Rosenberg
Houston Audubon's Mary Anne Weber will lead an owl prowl. Other details TBA.

April 19, Saturday

PrairieECOconnections (AT), 9 am
Location: KPC Field Office
A series of interpretive natural history courses about the Coastal Prairie

A Student No More



Editor's Note: In the last CPR, we ran brief profiles of several of our new students. Grace missed the deadline, so her profile appears below. No longer a CPC student, Grace now leads CPC's team at KPC's Native Seed Nursery.

Grace Liggett... I was born in the middle of June in Aransas Pass, Texas fifty one years ago. As a child I loved being outdoors in nature. From playing "Indians" with my brother and sneaking around in the woods, startling snakes, to climbing to the top of a tree to watch the ants, squirrels and birds coming and going, I spent most of my time observing nature in all her glories. If my mother was looking for me, you could be sure she looked up in my favorite tree first, then probably under the house where I might be catching ants for my horned toad, Dino. As I got older and my world expanded, unbeknownst to my mother, I spent a lot of time on the roof with my brother or friends contemplating the universe. Who knew that when I was 51, I'd finally figure out what I want to be when I grow up? I want to be a Master Naturalist and continue to explore and protect the wondrous beauty of our fragile planet. The only real difference between my attitude as a child and now is that now I consciously understand what an incredible living organism our Earth is and I appreciate her and all her amazing creatures. My wish is to continue to learn, while doing my small part to help our planet, share that knowledge and hopefully ignite a spark in others so that they in their turn will pass on their knowledge and that spark to others. For the one truth I know without a shadow of doubt is that we are starstuff and are all connected one to another. We must learn to work together to understand our universe and protect our mother Earth.

"Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass under trees on a summer's day, listening to the murmur of the water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is by no means a waste of time." ~J. Lubbock

Bluebirds, continued from page 6

activity. Record when nest building begins, when and how many eggs are present, and when and how many birds hatch. Be watchful of non-native birds such as House Sparrows building nests. House sparrow nests are not as well built as those of bluebirds and the nest are littered with fecal material. You can remove the nest of house sparrows, but by law you may not remove the nests of native species like wrens, titmice, swallows, and chickadees.

During the monitoring process there are several periods in which you must be careful not to disturb the box. The first period is during the first three days of egg laying, do not disturb the female during the morning hours since this is when laying occurs. Just remember that when you see nest construction nearly completed, start checking the box in the afternoon. The second period in which you should not disturb is the 3 day period just before you expect the birds to fledge. Bluebirds normally fledge when they are 17-20 days old, so to be safe do not check on them after about day 14. A disturbance at this time can cause the young to fledge prematurely, in which they are vulnerable to predators.

After the young birds leave, clean out the nest material so re-nesting can occur. Bluebirds will build new nests on top of old ones and successfully bring off broods. The problem with this is that the second nest is higher in the box and can be more easily reached by a predator like a cat or raccoon. After the last brood leaves in late summer, leave nesting material in the box over the winter. This old material provides insulation for birds taking refuge in the box on cold winter nights. During cold weather, many individuals may 'pile-up' in a single box to stay warm.

Some facts on bluebirds:

- All three species of bluebirds may be found in central Texas during winter. The 3 species are the Eastern Bluebird, Western Bluebird, and Mountain Bluebird.
- Territories range from 2-25 acres and are defended by males and females.
- The bluebird decline was mainly due to scarcity of nest cavities, habitat changes, competition with non-native species, and pesticide use.
- Clutch size range from 3-6 eggs, with birds laying 2-3 clutches per season.
- Bluebirds feed mainly on insects but will feed on fruit and berries when insects are scarce.

If you would like to contact your local biologist, see our website at: <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/wildlifebiologist>.

News Notes From Around the Chapter

New Officers Elected in December

Our Chapter election for 2008 was held at the annual meeting in December, electing the officers and committee chairs listed below. Congratulations to all.

President – Cheryl Sedivec
Vice President – Nancy Sparrow
Secretary – Carrie Sample
Treasurer – John Cotterell

VSP: Amy Bradford and Margo McDowell
AT: Tricia Bradbury and Ed Plant
Communications: Staci Hobbet
Training: Kurt Bundy
Membership: Linda Rippert

Training Committee Reviews 2007 Class and Plans Changes

The Training Committee wrapped-up its work in early December by meeting to discuss what went well and what could stand improving about the Chapter's training program. A lengthy list of ideas was created, including new venues, new instructors, and a greater emphasis on outdoor learning. Kurt Bundy, class of 2007, will chair the Training Committee in 2008. If you're interested in volunteering, Kurt would be happy to hear from you: kurtbundy@gmail.com.

Linda Rippert's Annual Report Now Posted On Website

Our chapter's annual report of its activity, required by TMN-HQ, was submitted by Membership Chair Linda Rippert in January and is available on our website (coastalprairie.org) in the 'Government' section, which you'll see in the green index pane on the homepage. Some of the highlights are below.

Members' Awards in 2007:

Pins honoring 250 hour hours went to Valerie Fogal, Staci Hobbet, Don Johnson, Jeff McMullan, Ron Morrison, and Linda Rippert;

500 hour pins went to Peggy d'Hemecourt and Ron Morrison;

Cheryl Sedivec won a 1,000 hour pin.

Other honors: Both Ron Morrison and Carrie Sample won gold-badge service awards from Brazos Bend State Park where they volunteer regularly. These are coveted annual awards in several categories. Ron won the 'Conservation' award; Carrie the 'Education' award.

Our chapter won the state-wide 'Exemplary Project' award at the TMN meeting in San Antonio in October for its communications efforts. A \$400 cash prize has recently been received by the Chapter, and will be put toward publication of our fliers, according to President Cheryl Sedivec.

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Ornithology Class Flies High With Full Enrollment

Dennis Jones' Ornithology class at BBSP drew full enrollment for both the Tuesday and Saturday sessions, taking in 46 attendees from three TMN chapters: CPC, COT and GC. The class will continue in February. CPC members attending: Karl Baumgartner, Jim Brannon, Cody Dennison, Peggy d'Hemecourt, Val Fogal, Don and Penny Johnson, Ron Morrison, Linda Rippert, Carrie Sample, Gloria Scheel, Frank Seay, and Cheryl Sedivec.

Our Vols at Katy Home & Garden Show Troll for Future TMNs

The attendance was down this year at the Katy Home & Garden Show January 26-27, an annual event for CPC, but our volunteers worked hard to interest attendees in our booth and the TMN organization by handing out brochures. CPC members who helped: Tricia Bradbury (who gave a presentation on cats in the garden), Amy Bradford, Jim Brannon, Amy Burt, A B Gartman, Carrie Sample, Nancy Schaaf, Gloria Scheel, Cheryl Sedivec, and Karen Showalter.

Good Crop for Green Home & Garden Workshop

This workshop, a joint project of CPC and Gulf Coast Chapter, is drawing registrants at a better clip than last year. As of January 20, 27 people had signed up. There's still room for more. See our calendar for details if you don't know about this very informative – and enjoyable – event that teaches people about eco-friendly practices.

Texas Cooperative Extension 'Cooperative' No More

An official name-change took place on January 1st, converting what we'd all come to know as the Texas Cooperative Extension to the Texas AgriLife Extension Service, complete with a new logo, which you'll note on the final page of the CPR. The TMNs operate under the dual aegis of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service and the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. We're requested to refrain from using nicknames for the organization when we speak of it in public in order to engrain this new brand. Though it may be a mouthful, try to say, 'Texas AgriLife Extension Service' as you extol TMNs and our activities in the community.

Our Chapter Partners

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

Texas Master Naturalists

<http://masternaturalist.tamu.edu>

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

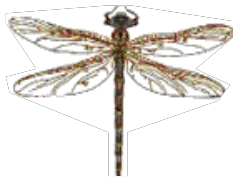
www.tpwd.state.tx.us/

University of Houston System at Sugar Land

<http://www.sugarland.uh.edu/>



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Interested in Becoming a Coastal Prairie Master Naturalist?

Our annual training course will begin in September, 2008.
Deadline for application is in late August.
For more information, please contact us:

classes@coastalprairie.org

Or call the Chapter office: 281 633 7042.
provide your name, home address, home phone number
and email address. We'll contact you promptly.

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.

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

David S. Lobpries
Wildlife Division
Natural Resource Specialist IV



Coastal Prairie Master Naturalists
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