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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

An Airy Earth Day Report: CPC Terrestrials Do the Ground Work at a Windy Brazos Bend



In wind gusts up to 30 mph, Margaret Thuesen, above, signs up a potential chapter member. Ron Morrison, right, gives a quick trail-trimming lesson to one of a string of young boys.



Naming Names:

We Go For Simplicity

The contest for naming our chapter newsletter went to a second, tie-breaking ballot in March when chapter members found *The Coastal Prairie Observer* and *The Coastal Prairie Reporter* equally fetching. In the spirited, email run-off, in which a number of votes arrived decorated with exclamation points, and a couple included sighing comments about the tameness of our choices, the tally was very close again: 12 votes for *The Reporter*, a contest entry from Staci Hobbet, versus 10 for *The Observer*, from Peggy d'Hemecourt. Though the reasons for our ultimate choice will, like all election results, remain impenetrable, *The Reporter* was the only name on the ballot with a motto: “Covering and Recovering the Coastal Prairie.” A worthy goal.

Coastal
Prairie
Reporter



See what's in this issue:



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Next CPR
Deadline:
July 20th

Earth Day was airy in 2007. April 14th dawned cool and blustery and progressed to downright cold and windy, making it a challenge for CPC volunteers to stay warm.

The weather trimmed attendance at Brazos Bend State Park's annual event, but those who ventured out made for a festive crowd, and CPC's booth attracted about 100 people, many of them kids drawn by our colorful animal-camouflage test and a trail-trimming exhibit made by Ron Morrison.

“The boys like those big loppers,” Ron said as a couple of cub scouts manned their positions and took a whack at pruning a sample branch.

Overall attendance was about 2000, down from last year's 3000, reported Sharon Hanzik, Park Naturalist. The number of vendors and exhibitors was very healthy, though, and all volunteers worked hard to keep visitors both well-fed and entertained in an educational way.

CPC shared its booth with Cradle of Texas members Georgia Monnerat, Tom Morris, and Rainbo Johnson. CPC members who worked part or all of the day were: Ed Plant, Margaret Thuesen, Lisa Krotzer, Staci Hobbet, Nancy Sparrow, and Ron Morrison. Don Johnson manned the Pond Life exhibit.

--SH

Cody Dennison has stayed close to home. He's the Extension Agent in Waller County, where he grew up, and though he's only 32, he's seen his home ground change from rural to suburban. Most of that change has taken place in the last ten years. The heart of the county is now "forty miles from the fourth largest city in the most powerful nation on Earth," he says.



Acting as liaison between the older residents, a conservative bunch, and the more liberal newcomers, has become a critical part of his multi-faceted job. City dwellers come looking for "the country life," he says, but then they "make their land look like a park in Houston. They're running off the wildlife they want to enjoy."

They want services too, an animal control facility, for instance, Cody says, which the long-term residents resist. "They tell me, 'Animals come around and you just shoot them.'" There's also talk of a waste dump, and a recycling center. But many of the older residents don't want anything to change. "And the existing problems could still be handled the old way," Cody says, -- if we weren't growing."

This clash of cultures, along with the county's long-simmering racial tensions, make for "a spirited political community," he says.

On top of his official duties, which recently included helping cook and serve 6,000 pounds of meat at a 4-H fundraiser, Cody is completing a Master's degree in Agriculture Science from Texas A&M University, Kingsville Campus. He's also dating a woman he knew in high school, Jonnie Ann, who's training to be a nurse. They're both so busy that they recently met in the parking lot at the bank and talked for a while.

"It's all the time we had," he says.

To contact Cody, call 979-826-7651 or email, c-dennison@tamu.edu.

--SH

CPC Member in the Spotlight: Wendy Talkington

Wendy Talkington doesn't live up to her fine Dickensian name. She's not chatty. She chooses her words and concepts with care, reflecting her deep and lifelong training in science and mathematics, which led her to become an actuary in her professional life and a Texas Master Naturalist on the side. She's a little more masterful than most, though: She teaches CPC's Ecology unit, which will be the first course on the syllabus this Fall in recognition of its central importance in TMN instruction. She's one of the few lay instructors on the schedule.

"I've always been fascinated by inner-connectedness," she says, "by that delicate balance in nature. It's a miracle to me."

She came to CPC already well-versed in her subject, and was tapped as an instructor when she and her sister, Peggy d'Hemecourt, were helping plan CPC's first training class in 2004. "Peggy said to me, 'Hey, you could teach this!'"

The idea both excited and intimidated her at first, she says. As she built her presentation, she realized that the real challenge would be in crunching it down to a narrow time-slot without making it a "brain-dump." There was just too much to say, too many important concepts to present.

"It was like, 'Tell us about World History in an hour and fifteen minutes,'" she says. This year, she'll be given more time, and she plans to make use of it.

"You hear all these ecological terms everywhere," she says. They're thrown around in the press. "Habitat, niche, ecosystem. And we think we know what they mean – without knowing the nuances." She wants CPC students to understand the terms as an ecologist understands them. "They have so much more meaning."

She credits her father, as Peggy d'Hemecourt does too, for her early, abiding interest in natural history. She remembers 20 Red Sliders in a back-yard kiddy-pool that her dad sunk into the ground as a giant terrarium and turtle hospital. One of the turtles had been hit by a car. "We were doing rehab before we knew what it was," she says.

See **Talkington**, page 12



Wendy Talkington, CPC member and ecology instructor

"I've always been fascinated by interconnectedness."

**More
Profiles**

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Margo McDowell, who also answers to Mac, is Ft. Bend County's coordinator for the Master Naturalist and Master Gardener programs. When you ask her what she likes best about her job, she answers, smiling, "You are." She's a consummate people person.

It's a good thing, too. Her office is just inside the door of the County Extension Office in Rosenberg, and people wander in and out all day with questions and requests, complaints, gossip, and little offerings, such a baby food jar containing what seems to be an albino wasp, or a three-inch grasshopper, or the webby cocoon of a moth.

She keeps everything, which gives her office a cheerful, welcoming look, and she greets all visitors warmly, whether they bring her a Dobson fly or a request for the latest bylaws. Even in the rare moments when she's alone, it's never quiet in her office. Email pops in constantly, triggering Bugs Bunny to comment, via the speakers on her PC, "You've got troubles, Mac!"

A native of Saginaw, Michigan, Mac came to Texas more than 25 years ago. Her first job was in a law office and she loved the work. "I was lucky to get a job there," she says of the firm, which specialized in maritime and admiralty law. The firm apparently felt lucky too, allowing her to train on the job as a paralegal, and Mac stayed for 18 years. Then the commute got to her.

"I just couldn't drive to the Galleria any more," she says, still sounding weary at the idea. She'd also discovered the Master Gardeners, which led her to her current job in 1999.

Given the leeway to make whatever she wanted of her new position, she has become the ultimate go-to person for MNs and MGs by working "hand-in-hand" with volunteers and the county agents. She's active in both organizations as a volunteer as well: She became a Master Gardener in 1997, and a Master Naturalist in 2004 as member of the founding class of CPC.

It's more than a full-time job. She acknowledges this, smiling. "I have reaped so much benefit from the Master Naturalists and Master Gardeners," she says.

The opposite is also true. An often-heard phrase at CPC is, "Ask Mac." It's excellent advice.

--SH

"I have reaped so much benefit from the Master Naturalists."



Great Blue Heron
March, 2007
by Ron Morrison.

The Rippert Report

by Linda Rippert



The Happy Days of Spring are upon us, and I hope you are all enjoying these wonderful days.

It is time for me to start reminding all members that I am waiting for your reports of Advanced Training hours and Volunteer Service Project hours. There are a number of members who send their hours faithfully every month—but not nearly enough of you! Please don't make me beg for your reports. I don't like begging.

I do not have any new certifications or accomplishments to report to you at this time. Therefore I'm going to discuss some of the aspects

See Rippert, pg 12

Weekly Farmers' Market Means 'Fresh' the Way Webster's Defines It

“Grocery stores don't even know where their stuff comes from anymore.”



Bob Roenigk, Manager,
Creekfield Farmers Market in
Needville

Five years ago, when Bob Roenigk and his wife founded their garden center for vintage roses in Needville, they determined that they would go fully organic. The business thrived from the beginning, drawing avid, environmentally-aware rose gardeners from all across the region with its stock of 200 antique varieties. As he got to know his customers, Roenigk noted one sentiment that came up again and again in conversation: This is great but we need a farmers' market around here too.

Bob agreed, and he took a big step beyond agreement: Last August, he founded the Creekside Farmers' Market on the south side of Needville, and committed to keeping it open on Thursdays year-round, a rarity in the Houston area. After almost a year of operation, he's had to cancel the market only twice when heavy rains prevented his vendors from harvesting their crops.

In that year, Bob has become a passionate proponent of local food and a spokesman for the cause of down-sizing the nation's industrial food process.

“The vast majority” of farmers in the Houston area, “are mono-croppers,” he says. “A&M teaches that. You grow rice or corn -- mass farming,” which leaves the farmer vulnerable to whatever price is being offered for his single product at harvest time. Roenigk's market vendors, eight or ten of whom show up weekly, operate in an entirely different mode. They typically grow several kinds of produce – lettuce, herbs, tomatoes, broccoli -- and “they're planting and harvesting every month.”

“They can make money doing this. Good money,” Bob says, surveying the compact and colorful market on a recent Thursday afternoon. Lines of customers formed at some of the booths.

Roenigk has been talking to some of the bigger landowners in the area, and some are showing early signs of interest. Their imagination is caught by the flexibility and profit that a dependable weekly market might offer them.

Residents in the area are already sold, and many customers show up religiously on Thursdays to buy bagfuls of fresh produce, breads, chicken, raw dairy products, and chef-prepared foods.

The prices look high to a shopper accustomed to HEB and Kroger, but Roenigk is quick to point out the difference in quality between grocery-store produce and his vendors'. Most 'fresh' produce in grocery stores is at least a week old, he says, while produce available in the market stalls was all harvested within the last 24 hours. No distributors, resellers or importers, and very little loss of quality and nutrition.

“Grocery stores don't even know where their stuff comes from anymore,” Roenigk says, making the point that they can hardly vouch for its quality. At his market, consumers talk directly to the grower, an old-fashioned concept that Roenigk feels we must re-establish in our local economy, not only because the food tastes better and is better nutritionally, but because it's safer: you know who grows your food – your neighbors -- and you can ask them exactly how they grow it.

The Farmers' Market is open every Thursday year-round from 4 to 7 pm. For directions and further information see: <http://creeksidefarmersmarket.com/>. Roenigk writes a lively, informative e-newsletter as well, in which he previews what's available each week. Sign-up online, via email: bob@vintagerosery.com, or call 281-844-6109.



Farmers and customers at the weekly market

-SH

Canebrake Goes For Broke After a Seven-year Gig

A Canebrake rattlesnake (*Crotalus horridus atricaudatus*) was released in late March at Brazos Bend State Park after a seven-year stint in the Nature Center where it was used as part of the Park's natural history education program.

David Heinicke, one of BBSP's staff naturalists, handled the snake, maneuvering it carefully into a bucket from its terrarium, where it had grown so big that merely cleaning its quarters had become a dangerous challenge.

"I'd get the head in and the tail would hang out, or I'd get the tail in and the head would hang out, or I'd get the head and tail in and the middle would hang out," he

said.

To Nature Center visitors, the snake looked positively rotund. No mystery there: it had seven years of room service. Heinicke delivered up dead mice at regular intervals, which the snake dispatched with little caloric expenditure. Life in the wild was going to be a big change, Heinicke said.

A second circumstance pushed Heinicke to release the snake. A smaller one had recently come to him from another nature center, and there was little point in keeping two. Along with several Park volunteers, he transported the snake to an isolated area near the front of the Park and released it on March 30th.

How did it react?

"It looked kind of stunned," reported Jerry Zona, one of the observers.

The canebrake rattlesnake isn't common anymore. The efficient, voracious feeding habits of feral pigs have put it and many snake populations in danger. In addition, the canebrake's favored habitat, dense canebrake thickets, are mostly gone. Brazos Bend State Park still has a couple of small stands, Heinicke said.

Can the rattlers repopulate the Park? The newly-released snake isn't tagged in any way, so the most Heinicke can do is hope for the best. "The free lunch is over," he said.

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The moment of release.

*Is the canebrake rattler a true subspecies or a geographical variation of the timber rattlesnake? Experts are divided. The species name is *Crotalus horridus*, the subspecies name *C. horridus atricaudatus*. A rusty brown stripe down the spine, clearly visible above, distinguishes the latter.*

Photo by Jerry Zona

President's Message

by Cheryl Sedivec

Greetings Everyone,

It's spring! I love spring. I love walking around my yard and looking at what new plants have sprung up, figuring out where I can plant new things and what to plant this year in that one spot where everything always dies during the winter. I'm thrilled that the pond, formerly the pit, is now finally full of water, frogs and dragonflies. Not so thrilled that another part of the yard has been a swamp since January.

Walking through my yard also gives me time to reflect. Time to think about how spring is a time of change and growth. Time to think of how our chapter is growing and maturing. For me, spring is always a good opportunity to take the time to reflect on what has worked in the past and what hasn't. It's a time to focus on what makes our chapter tick and how to continue to make our chapter grow, become more vibrant and more vital to the community.

The Training Committee has already met twice and has a list of about 50 people who are interested in taking our fall course. One task has been to re-order and re-focus the classes. This fall there will be a stronger emphasis on ecological concepts. That class, taught by CPC member Wendy Talkington, has been moved to the first week and given a bigger time slot. All the rest of the classes will tie back to the ecological concepts learned in the first class.

The Advanced Training committee is planning two of our own advanced training classes. These classes will help our chapter learn about topics which are of importance to all of us.

The Communication Committee has done tremendous work on the website and newsletter. The calendar on the website is easy to use, up to date, and lots of

information. We now also have a carpooling and event sign-up. These features greatly help in our communications with one another.

Volunteer Service Projects are underway with some planning and focusing. That committee is considering a speaker's bureau and revamping the VSP form.

The Membership Committee says 'SEND ME YOUR HOURS!!!! Aside from that, there's a movement underway at the state level to develop a better, more standardized timesheet.

The Programs Committee is thinking of new topics and field trips. This June it's planning on an evening picnic at Reagan Ranch. We're hoping that either David Heinicke or Sharon Hanzik of Brazos Bend State Park will be able to join us and tell us about all the sounds and sights we'll be seeing.

None of this can happen without you. We welcome your ideas. During this period of growth and focusing, I would love to hear your thoughts, comments and ideas. Don't be afraid to share them even if you think they aren't worthwhile. As one of our members reminded me recently: There aren't any stupid ideas. Your idea could lead to other ideas or other possibilities.

This is our chapter, let's commit to helping it grow.

Cheers,

Cheryl





Otters are happy, they love to play
Romping and rambling the day away.

A nice long slide down the river bank
To wrestle, to chase, a good tail yank!

There was one otter that liked to sit still.
He had no energy; he could not find the will.

A nice enough fellow, this lone, lazy chap
Found his greatest joy in taking a nap!

A day in the sun when he could snooze
Is the kind of day he would choose.

Stretched out nicely in the soft green grass
Away the hours of the day he'd pass.

Chasing and wrestling went on all around
His brothers and sisters would happily clown.

No one would bother this lazy otter.
No one would approach him, not even his father!

They just let him be, not because he was boring.
They wouldn't go near his awful snoring!

Whenever he'd wake with his stomach rumbling
Down to the river, he'd go tumbling.

He'd manage enough to catch a few fish.
Then back to his napping, his one true wish!

Sharon Hanzik is a TPWD Naturalist/Wildlife Interpreter at Brazos Bend State Park. Her job includes a lot of work with school-age children with the goal of helping them to form a deep appreciation of the natural world. Poetry is one way of reaching them, she has found. This is the second in a series of animal poems she has allowed CPR to use.

Your Chapter Wants You

Nominating Committee Searches for Candidate

Our chapter is currently without a Secretary, which is an elected position. As a result, the Nominating committee is looking for a member of the chapter who would be willing to serve as Secretary through the end of 2007. We'd like to nominate someone and hold a chapter election within the next several weeks, if possible.

I understand that everyone is busy but this job is key to the operation of the chapter. I'd appreciate if each of you would consider whether you could serve in this role.

Basically, the Secretary is responsible for attending monthly Board meetings (which are held in the morning on the third Thursday of every month) and then publishing the minutes of Board meetings. In addition, they send out email notification of chapter meetings. The full list of responsibilities can be found in the Operations Manual.

All of the time spent on CPTMN Secretary duties is considered Volunteer Time and counts towards recertification hours each year. A general estimate of time required to do the job each month is approximately 2 hours for the Board meeting, another hour or two to compile and edit Board meeting minutes along with time spent on emails to the chapter about meetings.

If you're interested in the position or if you'd like to know more about what the Secretary job involves, please let me know immediately at mccaugheymb@aol.com or 281-565-4658.

Thanks, in advance, for giving some thought to serving as Secretary for the Coastal Prairie Chapter. I hope to hear from you!

--Mary Beth McCaughey

The beautiful weather this time of year beckons us outside to enjoy the cool breezes and moderate humidity – before the full onslaught of summer. I didn't grow up here, but as a naturalist and an avid gardener I've learned to appreciate the periods of temperate weather and also to tolerate the extreme heat and humidity of summer that comes with living on the coastal prairie. I guess you could say I've adapted – thanks to the advent of air conditioning!

Realizing what it takes to exist in this climate has made me appreciate the plants that are native to this part of Texas. In order to have thrived here since before the area was settled, plants had to be drought tolerant and able to take periods of wet, they had to be resistant to common insects and pests and they had to be able to thrive in heavy clay soils. It's not easy, but thankfully there are many, many plants that are native here. They are part of the balance of nature, providing food and habitat for birds and other animals.

This time we'll look at two plants not often found in urban landscapes, but ones you might recognize from a walk in the woods or a visit to a park this time of year.

Herbertia (*Herbertia lahue*)

Herbertia is a member of the Lily family (Iridaceae) that grows in both clay and sandy soils in the grasslands of eastern and coastal Texas. This small iris (mature height normally 6"-8") grows in sunny, grassy places where it is often hidden unless the grass is short. It can form extensive colonies to make a carpet of lavender-blue in the spring. The blossoms of Herbertia open in the morning and close by mid-afternoon, with each flower lasting only a day. The two-inch flowers are formed by six tepals. The three outer tepals are wide-spreading, pale to deep violet, whitish near the base, with violet spots bordered with purple. Inner tepals are much smaller, dark purple at the base and pale violet at the tip. The colony blooms for one to two weeks in late April and early May. Once the colony has bloomed out, the seed has ripened, and the bulb is renewed, Herbertia disappears until the following spring.

I've observed small clumps of Herbertia on walks at Brazos Bend State Park and the Nash Ranch but it wasn't until I come upon a field of them in bloom at Duhacsek Park in Sugar Land that I came to fully appreciate the beauty of this plant. I was fortunate to be in the park one day when the Herbertia was in bloom across several acres of open area – it was as if there was a lavender cloud hovering several inches above the ground. Really beautiful!

Continued on next page



Herbertia (*Herbertia lahue*)



Photos by Pacific Bulb Society

Woolybucket Bumelia (*Sideroxylon lanuginosum*)

Sideroxylon lanuginosum is known by a variety of common names, including Woolybucket Bumelia, Chittamwood, and Coma. Until recently the plant was classified as *Bumelia lanuginosa*, which is why the plant is often referred to as Bumelia.

Bumelia is a deciduous tree that grows to a height of 80 feet and can be found in open woods or along fence rows in all areas of Texas except the High Plains. The nearly evergreen leaves are thick and usually dark green on the upper surface and fuzzy white or gray underneath. Lanuginosum means "having soft, downy hairs", in reference to the hair on the leaf undersides and twigs of this species (the unfurled leaves in early spring are the wooly buckets). Small white flowers bloom in mid-summer and have a sweet and penetrating fragrance. Inch long, oval blue-black berries ripen in the fall making the tree a favorite of birds seeking food and shelter. The twigs are often armed with thorns at the tips. Cut

wood exudes a milky sap. Bumelia is in the same family (Sapote) as the tropical sapodilla tree (*Manilkara zapota*) which is the source of the chicle used in chewing gum. Children of early pioneers sometimes chewed the sap that oozed from cracks and wounds in the bark of Bumelia trees.

Val Fogal was the first to identify the Bumelias at Duhacsek Park during some of our early explorations. She and her husband Rob have at least one of them growing along the creek on their property in Fort Bend County.



Sources and further information: USDA Plants Database: <http://plants.usda.gov>, Pacific Bulb Society: <http://pacificbulbsociety.org>, Aggie Horticulture: <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu>

Thanks to Our Contributors

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

Photo credits in addition to those listed with the articles:

Page 1, alligator eye, Adam Britton, who gave CPR permission to use any of his photos at crocodilian.com, which is an excellent resource for gator info; page 2, Wendy Talkington by Peggy d'Hemecourt; page 3, Great Blue Heron by Ron Morrison; page 5, Canebrake rattlesnake by Jerry Zona; page 6, otter by Chuck Duplant; page 10, Margaret Morrison by Ron Morrison; spider by Chuck Duplant; Lady bugs courtesy of TAMU; page 13 Scissortailed Flycatcher by Randall Hobbet. All other photos by Staci Hobbet.

and an invitation to everyone else

Contributors: Tricia Bradbury, Sharon Hanzik, Mary Beth McCaughey, Margo McDowell, Margaret Morrison, Linda Rippert, Cheryl Sedivec.

Regional and Seasonal Coverage

Both the Coastal Prairie Reporter and our website 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 take a look at our Newsbriefs section on our home page, you'll quickly see how easy this can be. The Newsbrief on dragonflies, for instance, consists 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 little piece of the coastal prairie.

Staci Hobbet, Editor

The Channel-Surfer Challenge

A personal essay by Tricia Bradbury



With this essay, Tricia initiates a Q&A column on how to approach those truly nature-challenged people you meet as a TMN. Send your questions to her at: Triciabrad@aol.com.



THE HUMAN CONDITION We've forgotten our place in nature

I was expressing to a friend my frustration at my husband's habit of constantly changing the radio station in the car. My friend said, "He doesn't like music. He just likes songs." That same concept is true with some people and nature. You have probably run across folks who think enjoying nature is an à la carte process. They plant flowers, but get irritated when the bees show up for the nectar. They put food out for the birds, but get mad when the squirrels want to eat, too. They move to waterfront property then complain about the ducks, alligators, snakes, and aquatic plants. They don't like the entire playlist of nature. They just want to pick a song or two. As Texas Master Naturalists, I feel that one of our responsibilities is to serve as "connectors". We need to help people who see humans *against* nature realize that humans are *part of* nature. Everything is connected. We have to show them the connection.

For years articles have been written lamenting the fact that people are no longer connected to the land. Educators in the 7-square mile city of San Francisco which borders the Pacific Ocean say many children living there have never seen the ocean. Kids can describe the Amazon rainforest in detail, but have never taken a walk in the woods. They like playing indoors because, as one fourth grader put it, "that's where all the electrical outlets are."

Author and child-advocacy expert Richard Louv's latest book hypothesizes that many kids suffer from Nature-Deficit Disorder that may actually be the cause of some learning and behavioral problems. What exactly is the nature-deficit disorder? Richard Louv defines it this way:

"It's the cumulative effect of withdrawing nature from children's experiences, but not just individual children. Families too can show the symptoms - increased feelings of stress, trouble paying attention, feelings of not being rooted in the world. So can communities, so can whole cities. Really, what I'm talking about is a disorder of society - and children are victimized by it."

World-renowned physicist Fritjof Capra, co-founder

in 1995 of The Center for Ecoliteracy, perceives the most pressing environmental problem today as an absence of ecoliteracy. He defines "ecoliteracy" as appreciating how every action we take has an impact upon the "web of life."

The Dutch phenomenological historian, Jan Hendrik van den Berg, writes about our "estrangement from the world".

Many feel our planet's ecological health is directly related to the mental health of its inhabitants. Ecopsychologists, a group of individuals made up of ecologists, psychologists and environmentalists, are working to bring this concept to the public's awareness, in the belief that our destructive environmental behaviors stems from our sense of disconnection to the natural world. They believe that if we recover our sense of connection to our natural world, we will begin to be more environmentally conscious people.

The problem of people not even realizing their place in the whole of nature is well documented, yet it still takes us by surprise when someone says, "**I've seen some large birds wading near our lakes and suspect they have been eating our fish. Can we eliminate these birds?**"

How do we as Master Naturalists deal with people who to our minds just don't have a clue? Our initial response may be frustration or a flip retort or even a snort of derision. We have to stop for a moment and realize that not all people have had the opportunity to learn about the world around us. Many of them don't even realize their ignorance. In fact, those people seem to be the norm!! They don't have the training or the perspective we have. We are uniquely qualified to help these people. We have the power to help them connect with nature.

As Texas Master Naturalists, we are part of a statewide corps of well-informed volunteers who provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within our communities for the State of Texas. Basically, our purpose is to learn as much as we can then share that knowledge with others. Jump at the chance to take part in educational activities. Some experts say the baby boomer generation offers the most hope in getting folks reconnected since they are the last generation that truly played outside and had a connection to nature. Interact with people of all ages—it's not only the children who need to be taught.

So the next time someone says, "**What if cormorants are eating the fish?**" instead of looking at them like they have two heads, take a moment to explain that cormorants are a dark-colored long-necked diving bird whose diet consists of fish so it makes sense that they would take a fair number of fish from our lakes. They can dive down to 25 feet in pursuit of fish. You may also throw in the fact that, unlike most water birds, their feathers are not waterproof so they perch in trees and spread their wings to dry them. Make learning fun.

"For in the end, we will conserve only what we love. We will love only what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught." -Baba Dioum

Confessions of a Master Artificialist

Margaret Morrison, an economist, and wife of CPC Member Ron Morrison, speaks out on being married to a TMN

Don't get me wrong. I recycle and take the bus. And when my husband Ron wanted to become a Master Naturalist I thought it was a great idea. You should all be very proud of what you are doing. But I have to admit that I don't always get it. When Ron's Dad was teaching his little boy to fish in the swamps of Georgia, I was learning to navigate the subways in Boston. I was in college before I learned that pigs were not pink and shiny.

Not saying Ron wasn't always a bit eccentric, but that talent seems to have been enhanced as a Master Naturalist. A spider the size of a cell phone followed Ron home from Brazos Bend one day. She lived on our patio on a windshield-sized web. Ron bought live crickets for her and made some kind of sauce or potion with more ingredients than I use at Thanksgiving. I can't say I liked hearing those crickets waiting to get embalmed by a spider. Fortunately, I hate crickets even more than spiders. I was so relieved when Ron told me she would only live a year. I was afraid it was going to be like all those other "pets" we had that seemed to thrive on neglect and lived forever just for spite. There was that cute little rabbit who gained twenty pounds and lived in a cage in our backyard for ten years atop bunny-poo mountain. Then a cat so mean that we eventually gave her a room of her own so she could shred the furniture in privacy. So spider pets are looking better. I wonder how long gnats live.

The absolute best part of the Master Naturalist program is the people who do it. Not only have we met some wonderful new friends, but we learned that two 30 year friends had been in this program for some time. I'm pretty sure they didn't tell me because they knew I wouldn't understand. We met Don and Penny Johnson about thirty years ago when we moved to Houston. Penny, like me, is one of those baby boomer overachievers. First, Penny did the Master Gardener's program. Still afraid her volunteer resume needed padding, she became a Master Naturalist, and then a Master Composter! I hate to ask how you get forty volunteer hours in composting. She would have loved Bunny Poo Mountain.

I still don't get Don. He paid \$40 for 25 termites. Twice. Seems like a Master Naturalist would know that there were lots of free termites in Texas.

Because of you, a generation of city folks will grow up with a better appreciation of their environment and make better decisions because of it. But it is way too late for me.

PS. Don, Insect specimens – not the best hostess gift.



"A spider the size of a cell phone followed Ron home from Brazos Bend one day.



Wanted: Alive

Beneficial Insects Flier Gets Rave Reviews and Offer of Support From TPWD



The flier text for Lady Beetles says it is Wanted "for eating aphids, mealy bugs, spider mites and more."

Cheryl Sedivec reports that the chapter's Wanted: Alive flier for beneficial insects is getting a fine welcome from many sectors. It's been a popular give-away at recent educational functions, such as the Earth Day celebration at Brazos Bend State Park; and the Galveston Bay Chapter of TMN as well as the Native Plant Society's Houston Chapter have asked for permission to use and distribute the flier themselves, which CPC has granted. Text crediting CPC will remain on the flier.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has also picked up the flier for use on its website, and has offered to help with printing and distribution in the future. The flier is already available online at http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/publications/nonpwdpubs/media/mnBeneficial_insects.pdf.

A preliminary run of about 125 full-color 8.5 X 11" fliers is now being arranged through CPC member Don Johnson.

A Wanted: Alive flier for snakes is being developed by Margo McDowell and Val Fogal. Anyone interested in designing a flier in this series should contact them or Cheryl Sedivec. -- SH

A Countryman in the Big City

our newest chapter advisor

Mark Countryman is the new “horticulture guy” at the Ft. Bend County Extension Office, a job that includes acting as chapter advisor to CPC. He started his new job just last December after running his own landscape business for 17 years outside of Dallas. If relocating to arch-rival-city Houston has been a problem, he’s not saying so, though he’ll feel more at home here once his family joins him this summer. “We’re trying to sell a business and a house,” he says, “and the kids are still in school.”

He says he looks forward to integrating his work with CPC’s, and he can already see that there’s a lot of overlap. His main interest, he says, is in helping move the public toward an understanding that we must work with nature, not against it.

“Birds, frogs, and gators were here a long time before we were,” he says. “Farmers and rural people have a much better understanding of this,” he says.

His work locally with Homeowners’ Associations has been illustrative of this. Many are “incredibly strict” about what kind of landscaping they will allow. “They want everything manicured,” he says, pointing out that “about five species” of trees are all you find in most housing developments. “God forbid we get some kind of disease in live oaks. It’d wipe them all out.”

Developers also plant trees too close together, he says, “for immediate impact.” He wants to see more native plants, and a more enlightened attitude on the part of developers -- and then he hopes they’ll have the patience to let time make its own impact. “You need to find some compromise, make some concessions,” he says.

To contact Mark, call 281 342 3034, or email him at MACountryman@ag.tamu.edu. --SH



Spell That For Me?

our wetlands & waterfowl expert



David Lobpries, who is one of CPC’s advisors, has one of those last names that people need to hear again and again before they get it down. “It’s like low-price,” he says affably, as if it’s part of the name itself. Now if only there were a similar mnemonic device for the spelling. You’re on your own there.

David’s title is ‘Natural Resource Specialist’ for Texas Parks and Wildlife, but the natural resource closest to his heart is waterfowl. He grew up in Garwood in the Fifties and Sixties, and has been away from this region as little as possible since. As a boy, hunting with his dad and working at his father’s waterfowl processing plant, he developed a “major interest” in water birds and the wetlands that support them, he says, justly proud of what he’s accomplished in that sphere with the TPWD. He had a hand in founding the Texas Prairie

Wetlands Project about 15 years ago, a coalition of government and private groups that helped defeat a proposal to build a regional airport in the prairies west of Houston. In turn, this organization helped give rise to the Katy Prairie Conservancy.

Because of his wetlands expertise, the CPC training committee has asked him to teach the topic to its 2007 class in September, which pleases him, and he says he’s eager “to get you all involved with our work activities.”

There’s a lot of work to be done. In his years in the region, which he knows intimately from both the land and the air, he says he’s seen “drastic, drastic changes.” He worries about the effects of land fragmentation. “Big landowners had a good land ethic,” he says. But large farms and ranches have been broken up by commercial pressures and generations of Last Wills and Testaments.

“We have a new type of landowner now,” David says. “They want to do good, but they have 50 acres instead of thousands,” and that makes for a fragmented land that’s harder and harder to manage.

To contact David, call 832 595 8999, or email dlobpries@fbns.net.

--SH

Upcoming Events

See coastalprairie.org for the latest event information

Thursday May 3

Chapter Meeting: 'Edible Plants'
6:30 pm, Waller Co. Fairgrounds
Speaker: Cody Dennison, Waller Co Extension Agent
For details: coastalprairie.org calendar or contact Tom Kanak, tkanak@hotmail.com.

Wednesday, May 9

City of Sugar Land's H2O Expo

3:30 – 6:30 p.m.
Oyster Creek Park
4033 State Highway 6 South. An afternoon of water-related education events in honor of National Water Week.

Mid-May

Trans-Texas Quail Count, George Ranch
7-9 a.m.

CPC volunteers will assist with a quail count on a five-mile route to survey quail populations and habitat. This is a state-wide effort, headed by the TMNs, with results going into a TAMU database. Training will precede the survey.
Details TBA

Saturday June 2

Chapter Field Trip: Reagan Ranch, Waller Co.
Details TBA

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 Center
<http://fortbend-tx.tamu.edu/>

Waller County Extension Center
<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/

Talkington, continued from page 2

Her father not only knew a lot about the outdoors, he had a gift of perspective too, which Wendy likes to recall. One day during the summer, she says, her brother Thomas came running home from the nearby creek, shouting, "I got bit by a snake!"

She and Peggy knew what to do: Call Dad at work.

"How does he look?" Dad asked calmly.

They gazed at their sweaty, red-faced brother. Actually, he looked pretty normal.

"Well, that's good," said Dad. "Call me back if anything happens."

Wendy's father is ill now, and in need of his children's care. The responsibility has kept Wendy too busy to devote the time to CPC that she had formerly. But she's looking forward to CPC's classes in September.

"I enjoy it," she says. "I've really learned a lot."



Wendy cites a dozen websites as important ecology resources. Her favorites:

<http://www.emc.maricopa.edu/faculty/farabee/BIOBK/BioBookTOC.html>

<http://www.physicalgeography.net/fundamentals/contents.html>

For a full list, email her at wendytalkington@msn.com.

--SH

Rippert, continued from page 4

of my job as pertain to the reporting of your hours of service.

1. You are expected to make sure the Advanced Training and/or Volunteer Service hours you are reporting have already been approved by the AT and/or VSP committees before you turn in those hours.

2. I can accept your reports via email as Excel or Microsoft Word files or by snail mail to my home address as per our membership list (handwritten or typed either way, just legible please).

3. If you feel you have completed your hours for certification or recertification, please let me know that when you send your hours so I can double-check and can announce your accomplishments to the entire membership.

That's the really fun part of this job.

4. If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at: rippert@pdq.net or call me at 281-495-0189.

It is a pleasure to be an active member of CPTMN.

Living Up to Our Name Now That We Have One

Regional, Seasonal, Educational Coverage is the Goal

We have a name for our newsletter: The Coastal Prairie Reporter. Now what we need are a few more reporters out on the coastal prairie to tell our readers about CPC's activities and impact.

This isn't an intimidating job. You're enthusiastic about your work as a TMN. You tell your family and friends about it. Tell us too. You have a newsletter and a website at your fingertips, and an editorial staff willing to help you translate your enthusiasm quickly and easily into a paragraph, a column, an essay, or a feature. You don't have to write a word if you don't want to. Just send us an email or pick up the phone. Give us your ideas and impressions. Tell us what you've learned.

Alternately, send us your photographs. They can be of birds, insects, turtles, plants, people – anything pertinent to our interests and our work as Master Naturalists. What's 'pertinent?' If it's regional, seasonal, and educational, we're interested. Did you get a great photo of an American Rubyspot on a blade of grass? A migrating Osprey in a treetop? A kid utterly entranced by your native wildflower presentation? Send it in with a few lines about the subject. We'll take it from there.

Here's to living up to our name: The Coastal Prairie Reporter.

Staci Hobbet,
Editor

Contact me at rshob@houston.rr.com, or 281 242 8405.



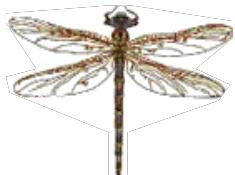
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Interested in Becoming a Coastal Prairie Master Naturalist?



Classes will begin in September, 2007.

To add your name to
the interest list, please send an email to:

classes@coastalprairie.org

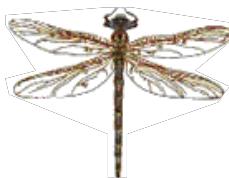
Or call the Chapter office: 281 633 7042.
provide your name, home address, home phone number
and email address

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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