

TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST



CRADLE OF TEXAS CHAPTER Chapter News – April 2007 Editor, Mary Helen Israel

President's Message, Ed Barrios

Greetings Naturalists! Well, March was again was one of our busiest months for volunteering, with the local school districts having many environmental education field trips at many of our partner organizations. One of our partners, the Mid-Coast National Wildlife Refuge, is about to have their major event of the year – the 13th annual Migration Celebration on April 13th, 14th and 15th. This year's event will be at the San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge and with good weather, could draw more than 1,000 visitors. (Our last major partner event, Sea Center Nature Day drew 600 visitors.) There are many great events that your children or grandchildren would love plus there are many lectures that qualify for advanced training.

Tickets are still available for a fundraising dinner on Friday the 13th. The after-dinner advanced training talk will be about bats followed by a bat netting session and a night walk. Go to our website to find a detailed schedule of all the events on Friday, Saturday and the special "Amazing" events on Sunday that require pre-registration. Many of our members are involved in supporting this event. With events this large, there are always volunteers that have last-second conflicts. We could use some backups to cover these unexpected cancellations. If you are interested in supporting this event, please let me know. Finally, whether you go as a volunteer or as a visitor, please wear your TMN-COT name badge. This gives us great advertising with the public and could get us a few new members.

April Meeting, COT TMN Wednesday, April 11, 2007

Social at 8:30 and meeting will begin at 9:00. Subject of the program is WILDSCAPES, presented by Marc Klym, Director of Texas Wildscapes Program, Texas Parks and Wildlife.

Reminder from Chapter Host, Jerry Krampota

The following members signed up to bring refreshments to the April meeting: Dave and Laura Brandes and Kirby Rapstein. If for some reason you are unable to provide refreshments this month; please contact me at 281-585-3249 or jkrapota@hotmail.com.

Report from Training Co-Chairs Dave and Laura Brandes

We are looking for any and all TMN State Curriculum binders that are used with the intern classes. The tuition for the Fall 2007 Intern class is being raised to \$145 with a rebate if they complete their TMN Certification within the time allotted. To increase enrollment, we are asking current COT members who have the State curriculum material and are not using it, to consider donating it to the organization for training and/or reference purposes. You will get an acknowledgement of your donation for 2007 tax purposes. The new Interns will have the option to lease/purchase these State curriculum binders on a first-come-first-served basis with all monies going to the TMN-COT. Highlights and margin notes are not a problem if you choose to donate a once-used binder.

David and/or Laura Brandes will collect the donated State Curriculum binders at the April, May and June General Meetings. We will notify the Treasurer of your donation so that you get the proper tax-deductible documentation.

Caution!! Birds Crossing – Birding Notes by Jan Kater

What's going on at the far end of Canna Lane! Looks like a bunch of white chickens crossing the road! As I proceeded slowly by car on Canna Lane toward Medical Drive, the drove of "white chickens" stopped walking across the road. Cautiously they eyed my approach – and a number took to the air. Aha! Cattle Egrets!

Cattle Egrets aren't the only white birds you'll see in that area, but they are the white birds you are most likely to see there in large numbers. This time of year they are rather dirty looking. But they aren't really dirty. What we're seeing are the telltale breeding season buff splotches on various parts of their bodies, including the back of their heads. Snowy Egrets, White Ibises, and Great Egrets are other white birds I've seen there.

Also common are birds of a variety of colors - like Curlews, Cormorants, Scissor Tails, Loggerhead Shrikes, White-tailed Kites, Great Blue Herons, Yellow-crowned Night Herons (doing a day shift), Turkey Vultures, Black-necked Stilts, Crows, Grackles, and sea gulls and hawks of various sorts. Some of these fellow birds enjoy Cattle Egrets in their diet. I've seen a small hawk making a meal out of a Cattle Egret, standing over its prey with a wary eye cocked to detect approaching competition for the remains of its catch.

I've asked myself, "Do Cattle Egrets prefer to walk rather than fly?" Just watching them you might come to that conclusion. But, no, they are master fliers. Kenn Kaufman reports that they originated in Africa, but have migrated in all directions – even to Australia. We know them from their migration to Latin America and thence to North America. Kaufman also notes that they were unknown in this area before 1952.

If you wonder why they are called Cattle Egrets, look for them in a farm environment. You'll see them walking behind farm animals, whose motion causes the insects to fly up from the grass and into the bills of the Egrets. And not only do they follow animals, but they also follow tractors and mowing machines. Actually, the Egrets' own motion walking through the grass stirs up flying insects too!

The day I saw the Cattle Egrets flying, their characteristics made it clear they were not Snowy Egrets – although somewhat of a look-alike cousin. The Cattle Egrets' black feet, lighter legs, and yellow bills gave them away. "Snowies" have yellow feet, black legs, and black bills, and are usually seen harvesting food from still water venues like other Egrets and Herons. However, Snowy Egrets will also feed on insects found in open fields.

Though they may roost near water, and sometimes eat critters associated with still water areas, Cattle Egrets usually spend their days hunting insects in the fields. You won't find them standing stock-still like a Great Egret or a Yellow-crowned Night Heron, waiting to make a quick thrust with their bills to catch a water creature.

The demure Cattle Egrets get along with a wide variety of other species, and often migrate to areas where other species live year-round. They exemplify this motto: Keep walking around and making friends, and you'll probably find a number of ways to stir up opportunities for a meal!

Attachments:

- Attachment #1 - Advanced Training Opportunities - April-May 2007
- Attachment #2 - Minutes of General Membership Meeting of March 14, 2007