

TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST



CRADLE OF TEXAS CHAPTER Chapter News – December 2006 Editor, Mary Helen Israel

President's Message, Ed Barrios

Seasons Greetings Master Naturalists! First I would like to wish everyone a very Happy Holiday season and hope that everyone will be able to spend time visiting, eating and celebrating with your family and friends. Second I would like to thank all of you for the many hours of volunteer work that you have done during the year. Tom Morris tells me we will come in at about 12,000 hours – assuming everyone turns in their hours. These volunteer hours represent a tremendous commitment to the environment and to the citizens of Brazoria County! The last state data we have is for 2004 when 27 chapters reported. Based on that data, only two chapters in Texas logged in more hours than we did but 13 chapters had trained more members. You should all feel proud about the level of commitment you are demonstrating. Finally, I hope you are able to make the annual meeting and the Third Annual Hog Wild party following the meeting. I will send a separate email on that shortly.

December Meeting, COT TMN Wednesday, December 13, 2006

The annual meeting, which includes election of officers, will be Wednesday, December 13 at the County Extension office. Social at 8:30 and meeting will begin at 9:00. Following the meeting, at 12:00 p.m. the Third Annual Hog Wild Holiday Party will be held at 325 Timbercreek Drive in Lake Jackson.

COT Texas Master Naturalist Awards November, 2006

Re-Certification - 8 hrs AT and 40 hrs VT
Sandy Jespersen

Bronze Award - 250 hrs
Kermit Schlameus

Silver Award - 500 hrs
Roy Morgan Lynne Ray

Platinum Award - 2500 hrs
Justina Dent

Nominating Committee Report

The Cradle of Texas Nominating Committee places the following names forward as candidates for the 2007 Cradle of Texas Master Naturalist Board of Directors.

President - Ed Barrios
Vice- President - Justina Dent
Treasurer - Jerry Eppner
Secretary - Barbara Burkhardt
State Representative - Ellis Burkhardt

Nominations can be made from the floor on the day of election. Elections will be held at the COT Annual Meeting on December 13, 2006

2006 Nominating Committee
Carl Dodson
Jim Renfro
Tom Morris

SCHOOL FIELD TRIP TRAINING at BRAZOS BEND STATE PARK Thursday, January 25, 2007 9:30 am – 3:30 pm

Every year Brazos Bend State Park hosts thousands of local school children on educational field trips. Because of the large numbers of children and limited park staff, we rely heavily on volunteers to assist with these groups. In an effort to train volunteers to assist with school field trips at Brazos Bend State Park, this training is offered once per year. The training will cover educational techniques, grade level curriculums, tips for dealing with large groups of children, trail interpretation techniques and general park information & rules. This year we will be implementing new "TEKS"-based school field trips modeled on the Texas Education Agency's mandated essential knowledge and skills for each grade level.

This will make this year's training more in-depth than in years past. The training will be divided into classroom and outdoor sessions. Please dress appropriately for the weather and bring a sack lunch. This training is offered to Brazos Bend volunteers, park staff and members of local Texas Master Naturalist Chapters. After completing the training you will be asked to observe several school field trips at the park. When you are comfortable with the program you will be asked to lead a school group on your own. This training is offered free of charge.

Since space is limited, the class is open only to those that intend to assist with school field trips at Brazos Bend State Park.

If you are going to attend this free training please contact David Heinicke (david.heinicke@tpwd.state.tx.us) or Sharon Hanzik (Sharon.hanzik@tpwd.state.tx.us).

GCBO Habitat Restoration Work Cecilia Riley

The Gulf Coast Bird Observatory has committed to two restoration projects in Brazoria County to benefit neotropical migrant birds. This area has proven to be one of the major flyways used by migrant songbirds in both spring and fall. We would like to complete both projects by spring of 2007.

Lake Jackson Sanctuary

The 35-acre site of the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory headquarters was officially donated to GCBO in 2004 by Dow Chemical Company. The property, which contains sizable tracts of remnant bottomland hardwood forest characteristic of the Columbia Bottomlands, sits squarely in the path of most neotropical migrants (according to radar studies by Dr. Sidney Gauthreaux). Historically, this property has been used as a recreation site for Oyster Creek employees of Dow. Over time, large trees were removed, forest understory was removed, and the character of the remaining forest was changed. Removal of forest allowed Brown-headed Cowbirds to enter forest-edge areas and parasitize the nests of forest-dwelling birds. Removal of large trees allowed the spread of exotic plants which out-compete native vegetation.

GCBO would like to do a complete forest inventory, remove exotic and invasive plants, and restore the native understory. This would increase the desirability of the land as a stable and productive stopover for migrants, especially those that utilize understory habitat. Large cleared areas should be reforested to pre-occupation conditions. This site has also suffered from damage due to feral hogs. Recently, a volunteer has hunted off the hogs so further damage should be eliminated. Most of the trails and two of the hummingbird gardens received extensive rooting and other damage. The trails need to be mechanically raked and leveled, and the beds will be replanted and mulched. The trail systems in this forest are used for educational and recreational purposes, and it is GCBO's goal to be able to show the public true Columbia Bottomland hardwood forest, and its importance to migrant birds.

Quintana Island

GCBO has been actively acquiring property on Quintana Island, which is an extremely important stopover site for migrants that cross the Gulf of Mexico. The organization has begun restoration efforts on a few of the vacant lots (which are now primarily pasture). Our plan is to create and restore habitat that migrants can use to stop, rest, and feed. Barrier islands are critical stopovers for migrants, especially in inclement weather. Much barrier island habitat has been altered or lost to subsidence and coastal erosion. Only through creation and maintenance of salt-tolerant native vegetation tracts can these remaining islands be used as "fire-escapes" for birds that cross the Gulf and encounter bad weather.

GCBO would also like to acquire more lots for restoration. These additional contiguous lots are not suitable for development, and it is hoped that Freeport LNG will assist with these acquisitions to help create buffer habitat to their facilities.

Work Plans

Quintana Lots

- Plant initial trees and create water feature (an extremely important component of fire-escape habitats). This has begun and is near completion.
- Develop a plan that includes a plant list and a design for plant location.
- Locate and plant additional trees & fruiting native shrubs.
- Construct raised soil beds around trees to provide an initial substrate for understory plants.
- Purchase and plant native high-value food plants utilized by migrants.
- Install drip water lines to each newly planted tree/shrub cluster.
- Monitor and track habitat usage by all bird species.

Listed here are the preferred plants for use at Quintana. We will make some adjustments based on availability. We have located a number of possible native plant sources.

Trees: Live Oak, Green Hawthorn, Sugar and Spiny Hackberry, Texas Ebony, Lime Prickly Ash, Huisache, Toothache (Hercules Club).

Understory plants: Yaupon, Wax Myrtle, Arrow wood Viburnum, Barbados cherry, Hamelia patens, Mexican Plum, Turk's Cap, Texas Persimmon, Salvia

GCBO Bottomland Sanctuary

- Survey property and flag exotic plants to be removed.
- Purchase appropriate herbicides and remove exotics.
- Develop a plan that includes a plant list and a design for plant location for forest understory and edge buffers.
- Plant new understory vegetation.
- Install water recirculation feature in newly-created one-acre marsh to improve water quality.
- Create plan for reforestation of cleared areas targeting a two-acre demonstration prairie site.
- Purchase trees and plant in cleared areas.
- Rebuild trails and hummingbird gardens damaged by feral hogs.
- Remove asphalt from the old boat ramp and restore this habitat section of about 0.5-acres to pre-ramp conditions.
- Monitor and track habitat usage by all bird species.

Listed here are the preferred plants for use at the GCBO bottomland sanctuary. We will make some adjustments based on availability. We have located a number of possible native plant sources.

Trees: Live Oak, Green Hawthorn, Sugar Hackberry, Shumard Oak, Pecan, Redbud, Black Willow.

Understory plants: Yaupon, Wax Myrtle, Arrow wood Viburnum, Barbados cherry, Hamelia patens, Mexican Plum, Turk's Cap, Texas Persimmon, Salvia

Camp Mohawk Trail Project Jerry Krampota

As you know, this project won third place at the state conference at Mo Ranch in October. I would like to thank every one who helped with the project. It was a great joint effort with a lot of "old" and "new" Naturalists and we were able to pull the project together under a real time squeeze.

Thanks to the original efforts of the class of 2003 who took on the project of identifying all the plants at the Camp Mohawk site. This project had long been completed but most of these "old" members came back to the site on numerous occasions in September and early October to help the other Naturalists, including several of the class of 2006, pick the most unique typical/native plants that were selected to be placed in the trail guide. There were many to choose from and a major challenge was to restrict the trail map to only those plants which we had room to include.

We were fortunate to have camera and computer professionals on our team who were able to take the field data and compose it into an attractive, readable brochure. Finally, we cannot forget the team that put together the attractive presentation for the state conference at Mo Ranch. Though the project still has a few loose ends to wrap up, I am grateful for all the individual efforts that were successfully combined to complete the project in a very timely fashion.

Vultures – more birding notes from Jan Kater and John Marshall December 2006

Jan's fascination with the lives of vultures and other birds keeps these birding notes coming to our COT Newsletter, and John Marshall's experience with the socially-developed Black Vultures and other birds and animals he has met at the Gulf Coast Wildlife Rescue gives us first hand insight into their behavior. We both welcome input from other volunteers about birds and animals you have come to know (send your notes to jankater@sbcglobal.net), or you can submit your essays to Mary Helen Israel, Newsletter Chairman, at mh-israel@sbcglobal.net. Let's keep these reminiscences coming each month – they're meant to show the enjoyable and instructive intercommunication between our members and the wildlife around us. And they may attract new membership trainees to join the fun at next fall's class!

John writes: I fed the animals at Dana's today. As I reported earlier there is a single (used to be a pair) non-releasable vulture and her most recent sibling, from last year, I think. The pair is frequently joined by the next to last baby, usually about meal time. This morning there were six birds out there, all totally fearless of me and all looking for a

handout. One vulture even followed me from cage to cage as I was completing my task for the morning and envy rained supreme when I fed the non-releasable hawks. Yes, the vultures got a handout too. But all six were still there when I left!

Now if you think vultures are interesting animals, you should meet a pelican. These may be my all time favorite bird. For whatever reason they accept humans as caregivers and even act as if they are happy to see you! Their trust is complete. Interestingly, when the time comes to release them back into the wild -- they fly away and never look back!

Jan comments: We look forward to hearing more about John's pelicans' antics while they are guests at Wildlife Rescue! Another person reported to me that Black Vultures at the GCWRescue are sometimes as friendly with their caregivers as a pussy cat. But the experts say that vultures don't have a voice box capable of giving out a purring sound! Too Bad!

Vultures often seem to be "everywhere you look" in the sky. And when you spot a "cloud" of vultures, you can be sure that they are mostly Black Vultures. Turkey vultures usually travel alone or in pairs or threes. And, since Turkey Vultures have a well developed sense of smell, they can find their meals quickly from a low altitude or from great heights. At the same time Turkey Vultures are masters of using updrafts to climb high and soar for miles! Without flapping their wings once! Black Vultures, who have virtually no sense of smell, often fly high (with considerable flapping of their wings) to keep track of Turkey Vultures whose carrion feasts they will then try to steal by outnumbering their red-headed cousins on the ground! But carrion is not a vulture's only source of food. All vultures eat large insects, fish stranded in shallow pools, bird eggs, young birds, and other small animals. And they can be seen scavenging in piles of fresh garbage.

Poem by Susan Severance
Presented at Class of 2006
Graduation

Hurry and get to class for nine
Get settled in and ready to dine
On donuts, strawberries, cookies and such
Then listen to the lecture and experience so much
More than I ever thought I could learn
Of insects, reptiles, plants, birds
Archaeology, wetlands, forest and seashore
Eat lunch and can't wait to get out the door
For the field trip and to practice what taught
Be it seining in the sea or wading in mud
I didn't think this course would be so good
Time passes like the wink of an eye
Leaving just the question "Why"
Why does the course have to end so soon?
I don't want to graduate, let's extend the course until June.

CRADLE OF TEXAS OFFICERS

President	Ed Barrios
Vice President/Program Secretary	John Boettiger
Treasurer	Jan Kater
State Representative	Barbara Burkhardt
Past President	Carl Dodson
Membership Chair	Tom Morris
Training Chair	Marty Cornell
Volunteer Service Chair	Carolyn May-Monie
Resource Library	Jim Renfro
Advanced Training Coordinator	John Thayer
Outreach Chairman	Jane & Jerry Eppner
Chapter Hosts	Jerry Krampota & Archie Pratt
Web-site Manager	Neal McLain
Newsletter Chairman	Mary Helen Israel
Sponsors:	Connie Stolte (TP&W) and Rich Tillman (Extension)

Attachments:

#1 - Minutes of the November 20, 2006 Board Meeting [PDF].

#2 - *"Reconnecting With Partners"* [PPT]