

TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST



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

President's Message, Ed Barrios

Hello fellow Naturalists, well December was so mild and then El Niño decided to make January miserable. Hopefully this month will go back to more seasonal conditions. As usual, volunteer opportunities are popping up everywhere. One of our major partners, the Texas Mid-Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex has ten schools that will be visiting in February and March. Bryan Adams, the Education Ranger, is always looking for new volunteers, so be sure and contact him if you have any interest in teaching 3rd, 4th and 7th graders from local schools. Contact Bryan at bryan_adams@fws.gov for information, or check our Events Calendar on the website for days "DEEP" is scheduled – "Discovery Environmental Education Program." Also I recently learned that the Gulf Coast Wildlife Rescue is looking for more volunteers. Please contact John Marshall (john-rosalee@houston.rr.com) for more details about the needs that they have. Then the annual Migration Celebration in April, one of the major events our chapter supports, is still looking for more volunteers. Contact me at evbarrios@houston.rr.com for details on how you can help. Of course there are other events on the calendar this month including Sea Center wetlands clean up (connie.stolte@tpwd.state.tx.us) and INEOS environmental education (cdodson5@houston.rr.com). Bottom line: be sure and check the calendar for volunteer opportunities, training and other items of interest to our organization. I hope everyone has an enjoyable month of volunteering and learning this month.

February Meeting, COT TMN
Wednesday, February 14, 2007

Social at 8:30 and meeting will begin at 9:00. Subject of the program is "**Feral Hog Damage on the Texas Mid-Coast NWR**" presented by John Boettiger, Photographer; Mark Hazelrigg, Trapper; and Jennifer Sanchez, USFWS.

Treasurer's Report
Jerry Eppner

A THANK YOU - Well, we're off to another fiscal year for the Cradle of Texas Chapter, and I would like to acknowledge the efforts of our 2006 Treasurer, Jan Kater, in keeping our financial house in order. Jan's penchant for detail and his efforts to make sure every transaction both into and out of our financial books was accurately recorded has made my job as incoming Treasurer much easier. So, Jan, thanks for your efforts on behalf of our chapter.

CHAPTER FINANCES UPDATE – The chapter ended 2006 with a reduction in our bank balance of \$111.50 to \$2723.36. If you take into account a 2006 training program fee of \$130 that was submitted in 2007, then we just about broke even. That is the good news. The bad news is that this was only possible with the implementation of chapter dues which brought in \$450 prior to January 1 and a private donation of \$200 to cover the cost of binders for the fall intern class. Without these two cash inputs, the chapter would have lost almost a quarter of our financial assets in one year, an unsustainable situation. In past years, the fall intern training class has generated enough extra cash to allow the chapter to function without a dues assessment. But as the chapter has grown, so has our cash flow requirements. Needless to say our chapter membership approved the implementation of annual dues just in time. **To date only about 60% of the membership has paid their dues. Dues were payable in full January 1**, so we need to ask that the remaining members submit their dues as soon as possible so that the chapter has enough cash to run smoothly. If you have not paid your dues yet, you may send a check made out to TMN-COT to either Texas Cooperative Extension – Brazoria County, 21017 CR 171, Angleton, TX 77515 or to Jerry Eppner, TMN-COT Treasurer, 233 Huckleberry, Lake Jackson, TX 77566. Jerry will also be at the February COT General Meeting to collect cash or check payments.

Reminder from Chapter Host, Jerry Krampota

The following members signed up to bring refreshments to the February meeting: Phyllis Gerdes, Pam West and Gerald Forrest. If for some reason you are unable to provide refreshments this month; please contact me at 281-585-3249 or jkrampota@hotmail.com.

Trail Guide Brochure for the San Bernard Live Oak Laura Brandes

The trail guide brochure for the "San Bernard Live Oak" is in its 4th revision which includes clip art. I am awaiting Jennifer's "OK" to take the master to a printer for 500 copies to be prepared for "Migration Celebration 2007". This will give a carry-over supply until the USFWS makes their decision and prints a sufficient quantity for the SBNWR. There will be recognition of the TMN-COT and The Friends for their participation and support of this document.

With all the recent rains, the SBNWR staff has noted that the trail is impassible even with the boardwalk in place. They are going to have to bring in a sufficient layer of sand and add some additional boardwalk footage to make the trail accessible to the "San Bernard Live Oak". Jennifer hopes that this will be done in time for the MC07.

There is one volunteer plus myself from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. for the MC07 Trail activity. The plan is to have a Greeter at the head of the trail that will distribute the trail guide and note that knowledgeable guides are located along the trail to assist the visitors. The trail guides will be responsible for 1-4 markers; therefore, three additional volunteers are needed. One volunteer will be assigned to just the champion tree. Facilities and refreshments will be available at the trail head.

If you have any questions please contact lbrandes@houston.rr.com.

Nature Day at Sea Center Texas Connie Stolte

Sea Center Texas and Texas Cooperative Extension will be hosting a Nature Day at Sea Center Texas in Lake Jackson on March 3, 2007 from 10 am until 4 pm. Texas Master Naturalist volunteers are needed to assist in several areas. There will also be 45 minute seminars available for advanced training opportunities from 10 am to 2 pm in the Sea Center Texas conference room.

The COT chapter will man a booth that needs about 4 folks to assist with manning the exhibit. Exhibit time is from 10 am to 4 pm. If you are available to help, please contact Marty Cornell at 979-297-2235 or by email marty-carole@houston.rr.com.

Families attending the nature day event will be able to participate in a nature scavenger hunt from 10 am until 12 noon. Five volunteers are needed to assist visitors with finding items in the wetland area. Volunteers are encouraged to bring binoculars and field guides. Sea Center has youth binoculars and a few field guides that visitors can borrow during the event. If anyone is interested in assisting with the scavenger hunt please contact Connie Stolte at 979-299-1808 ext 23 or by email at connie.stolte@tpwd.state.tx.us.

Farewell Good Caracara Friend Birding Notes by Jan Kater

Many of us have known the nesting pair of Caracaras, living at the Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge Big Slough Recreation Area, who regularly patrolled the expanse of wetland prairie east of Teal Pond. Gliding close to the ground, and often disappearing into the grass to investigate some promising movement that might yield a timely meal, they put on quite a show for our excited school children on the Cross-Trails bus tours.

I got to know the Caracaras last spring during my first Birds-by-Bus tour assignment as a volunteer docent. The pair frequently hunted together, and perched in the lone tree close to the road at the northeast corner of the pond, or somewhere in the east-west line of trees paralleling the road just north of the pond. And, they often surveyed their domain from the height of the "T" roost next to the water pump on the road southwest of Teal Pond – the male standing watch and the female resting by his side. One got the feeling that the north end of the refuge was their territory, and that they felt very much at home there. And the children were impressed by the beauty of the Caracaras, who were generally visible sometime during the bus tour.

However, during the bus tours last fall, I did not see the Caracaras north or east of Teal Pond. One day on the way to the refuge, I saw a Caracara barreling along the west side of County Road 523 about 15 feet above the ground. And, on the way home, I saw one making a similar flight going north. Another day, I saw a pair on the side of the highway, just north of Oyster Creek, apparently finishing off some carrion. Before I reached them, one took off and flew in front of the car, well ahead of me. I remember thinking that speeding cars are a danger to any bird eating or flying close to the highway.

And then – another day, another sighting. But a sad one. On my way home, at the western edge of the road, I saw one of the pair standing watch over its fallen mate, one of whose wings stood straight up over its motionless body. What a confused look on the face of the survivor whose silent grief would touch the heart of any of his human friends! I called Roy Morgan to see if the Gulf Coast Wildlife Rescue organization could play a part in the next step to honor these animal friends. He arranged for someone to take a rescue box to retrieve the fallen bird in case it was still alive or, if not, to let GCWRescue determine if the remains would be useful for research or educational purposes.

Apparently Caracaras are monogamous, as the loyalty of the surviving mate indicated. Was the bereaved bird one of the pair that was so in evidence last spring at Teal Pond? We have only circumstantial evidence to indicate that it was. Since then I have heard that there is a nesting pair at the refuge on the Salt Lake public fishing area road. I was glad to know that BNWR would still be blessed by the beauty and dignity of these magnificent birds. Certainly those of us who had grown to feel a special friendship with the original pair will cherish the memory of the two Caracaras who graced our Birds-by-Bus program near Teal Pond and enriched the lives of hundreds of school children.

Advanced Training Opportunities Roy Morgan

Attachment #1 lists Advanced Training opportunities in the upcoming months in nearby areas. For more information on each opportunity, see Contact listed.

CRADLE OF TEXAS OFFICERS	
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Webmaster	Neal McLain
Newsletter Chair	Mary Helen Israel
Sponsors:	Connie Stolte (TP&W) and Rich Tillman (Texas Cooperative Extension)

Attachments (posted separately):

#1 - Advanced Training Opportunities - February-March 2007

#2 - Minutes of General Membership Meeting of January 10, 2007