

TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST



CRADLE OF TEXAS CHAPTER Chapter News –March 2007

Editor, Mary Helen Israel

President's Message, Ed Barrios

Greetings Fellow Naturalists! As many of you know, Jerry Eppner, Barbara and Ellis Burkhardt and I went to Costa Rica with Kathy Adams Clark and Gary Clark on a bird-photography trip last month. John and Rosalee Marshall were also scheduled to go but unfortunately they had to cancel at the last minute due to illness. It was a great trip not only for the wonderful birds -- final bird count was 220+ species -- but also for the incredible tropical plants. In Gary's "Nature" column in the Houston Chronicle on March 10th, he talks about the trip and there is a great picture of the resplendent quetzal that many of us were able to see. It is truly a magnificent bird and we were lucky he and his mate put on such a show for us and in plain view. If you ever get a chance to visit Costa Rica, do so. It's a beautiful place for naturalists.

Nature Day at Sea Center was a great success with just over 600 people attending. Many of our members volunteered leading the many events for the public. As a reminder, do not forget the advanced training on mushrooms this Wednesday, March 14. I understand it is going to be a very good talk. Finally, we are getting closer to the 2007 Migration Celebration on April 13, 14, and 15. We still need some volunteers, so please let me know if you are interested in helping out. Plus consider entering your prize photos in the photo contest -- it is not about winning but about sharing some of your great shots with everyone. Finally, there still are tickets for sale for the dinner before the talk on bats on Friday night, the 13th. Happy volunteering!!

March Meeting, COT TMN Wednesday, March 14, 2007

Social at 8:30 and meeting will begin at 9:00. Subject of the program is "Mushrooms" by Teri MacArthur. Teri has been a member of the Texas Mycological Society for 15 years and a Master Naturalist for 6 years. She is currently serving as President of the Heartwood Chapter. She has a special interest in mushrooms and talking to youth about the many ways fungi benefit the environment.

Treasurer's Report Jerry Eppner

CHAPTER FINANCES UPDATE – Available cash funds for the chapter totaled around \$3300 as of the first week in March. The level of these funds will begin to decrease as we begin to fund the fall intern training and the normal operating expenses of the chapter. As reported in the February general membership meeting, the implementation of dues has come at a very good time for the chapter, allowing us to better maintain a financially healthy cash flow.

However, to date only about 70% 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 they can maintain the privileges of a member-in-good-standing. 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 March COT General Meeting to collect cash or check payments. If for some reason, you are unable to pay the \$10 annual dues amount, please contact Jerry so he understands your intent.

Reminder from Chapter Host, Jerry Krampota

The following members signed up to bring refreshments to the March meeting: Bill Brown, Carl Dodson and Mickey Dufilho. If for some reason you are unable to provide refreshments this month; please contact me at 281-585-3249 or jkrapota@hotmail.com.

Outreach, Marty Cornell

Booth Duty Volunteers Needed

April affords us several opportunities to recruit new members into our chapter, as we will set up our COT exhibit at three venues. Two of these will occur on the same day, Saturday, April 14th: Migration Celebration at the San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge, and Earth Day at Brazos Bend State Park. At SBNWR, we will need four volunteers to share shifts at our booth. At BBSP, we will need two volunteers, as COT will share the Master Naturalist booth with the Coastal Prairie Chapter.

The following weekend, on Saturday, April 21st, the City of Lake Jackson is hosting their first annual EnviroFest at the Brazosport Mall, and four COT members will be needed to staff our booth.

COT Texas Master Naturalist Awards
March 2007

Re-Certification – 8 hrs AT and 40 hrs VT

2006

Barbara Bruyere
Paula Jacobs
Sherry Summers

2007

Dave Brandes	Susan Severance
James Calvert	Ruby Lewis
Jim Renfro	Kerry Magee
Kermit Schlameus	Clyde Zilliox*

*Absent previously

A Young Roseate Spoonbill in the Middle of the Road, and Elsewhere
Birding Notes by Jan Kater

Yes, and I have witnesses! The bus driver and I, and 17 young'uns and a teacher from Northside School, were making the last of three afternoon bus trips at the Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge January 11th, when at the north end of Teal Pond we came upon what looked like a small lone Roseate Spoonbill intent on picking up some tidbits scattered in the road. It portrayed a youthful innocence by its small size and lack of fear. It paid us no mind, but kept on picking up whatever it was that had its attention with no apparent concern for the approaching school bus. It followed the trail of goodies off of the roadbed into the grassy margin as the bus slowly crept by.

What edibles could it have discovered that kept it so entranced? Kaufman says it can pick up beetles on dry ground with its outsized spoonbill – even reach down into cracks in the soil. When it's near water it uses its bill to sift out edibles in the water by swishing it back and forth just below the surface. It also likes crayfish, shrimp, and crabs. Perhaps fishing for strainable food and crustaceans is its preferred way of getting something to eat, but it showed us how adaptable it was when we saw it lunging on something quite a ways from Teal Pond.

We came back three days later in our car to see if we could determine what it had been eating, but only saw dark pieces of stone that were mixed in with the ground rocks used to maintain the auto roads of the refuge.

The same lone Spoonbill appeared to still be around, although somewhat east of where we saw it three days earlier. It was not alone this time, but was in the company of a Great Egret, both standing on the other side of Big Slough. The Egret seemed to be a protective presence, while pursuing its own agenda from about four feet away. Soon another birdwatcher approached from the west on foot, keeping a stand of Great Reed

Grass between him and the pair of birds. The Great Egret spotted him, hastily walked over to the Spoonbill, and then took off followed by the Spoonbill in a formation of two, apparently to escape the perceived threat of the approaching birdwatcher.

We were seeing what appeared to be an informal fellowship between these two birds. I had seen small groups of Spoonbills in the spring standing around with white Ibises. On one occasion a formation of four birds – two Spoonbills and two Ibises – flew by in a straight line, easy to identify by the different configuration of their bills. Conclusion? Birds of a different feather sometimes fly together!

New Volunteer Opportunity Barbara Burkhardt

The habitats at GCBO headquarters and Quintana Neo-tropical Bird Sanctuary are being upgraded to enhance and restore conditions for use by wildlife. The COTMN have agreed to help our GCBO partner with this project. Both properties are in primary locations during the annual migration of neotropical birds and are open to the public. The properties are also used for educational purposes and will offer ideas on ways to enhance personal property for wildlife habitat. The areas will also offer opportunities to educate the public on good gardening practices and "water wise (xeriscape)" gardening. Gardens are not created in a day or even a year, so I anticipate the project will take two to three years to complete plantings.

Gardening can be hard work. However, there are many levels of physical activity required and a level to fit different volunteers needs can be met. These activities include:

1. Research plant materials suitable for (a) a woodland garden (b) a pond side garden and (c) a sea side garden on the Texas Gulf Coast. Plants should be low maintenance.
2. Enhance beds already established at GCBO and create new beds at the Quintana site (funds provided by GCBO).
3. Purchase selected plants (funds provided by GCBO) and place them in gardens.
4. Design and help with installation of plant irrigation system. (Funds provided by GCBO.)
5. Basic maintenance until plants are well established.

The Brazosport Birders and the Houston Audubon Society are also involved with improving some of the areas at Quintana. Our location will be several lots right next to the Quintana City Hall.

Below are some of the areas at **GCBO** headquarters that need improvement. I will add the Quintana photos within the next two weeks. I hope the photos will give you some inspiration. Remember, it doesn't all have to be done in the next three months, but we should make a start. If you are interested in helping with the project, in whatever manner, please send me an e-mail, bburkhardt@sbcglobal.net.

GCBO Entrance Beds

Personal THOUGHT: In all of these areas, I would like to see us strive for a balance between good wildlife habitat and a good garden design. We don't have to have a wildscape in order to have good wildlife habitat. This is just my opinion, but I have carried this through with my personal garden.

Some people are turned off by too much "unkemptness". This would be a prime opportunity to educate the public on how to create a balance that benefits both the habitat and the gardener.



This bed is to the left of the entrance to GCBO offices. Some of the plants have not made it through the winter. Plants need to be added and consideration should be given to enlarging the bed or combining it with another small bed not shown in this photo.

The wetlands can be seen in the background. An area to the left of this picture is poorly drained and would be good for bog plants.



This area is across from the entrance to the GCBO headquarters. It contains a small water pond. This area is shaded in the morning and only receives sun in the late afternoon. The shrubs at the back of the bed are Ligustrum and should be removed, if possible. However, they provide cover for the birds. The bed needs some good shade plants added.

There are other beds in this area with a variety of sun conditions.

Star Gazer Garden

The name is derived from the small, metal sculpture in the garden (arrow). This is a good opportunity to do research and create a wood side garden.



“Star Gazer Garden”

(1) This area is to the rear of the GCBO headquarters. It is in a clearing next to Buffalo Camp Bayou, at the head of a woodland trail. This area will receive broken shade, with some direct sun late in the afternoon. There will be a small pond and bog garden at the far end of this area.



(2) This is the far end of the “Star Gazer Garden” that contains the pond and bog garden. This is backed by a low berm. The entrance to the forest trail can be seen in the background.

A second small bed can be seen at lower right. This area has a lot of hummingbird feeders during fall migration. This open area is also used to place nets for bird banding.

Wetland/Rill Area



The area along the rill, into the large pond, is in pretty good shape. A few plants could be added. There is also a large area on top of the pond levee, which could be developed.

There are plants along the edges of the pond. We could consider adding some water lilies to the pond, or others that would provide cover for fish. This needs careful research to prevent introduction of an invasive species.



This area is at top of the rill. The plants in this area are in pretty good shape. Some further research on water or bog plants would be good to augment this area and the area in the “Star Gazer Garden”.

There is also a small island in the wetland (arrow). We need to consider what types of plants would be appropriate for shelter and food on this small space.

CRADLE OF TEXAS OFFICERS

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