

TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST



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

President's Message, Ed Barrios

Greetings Master Naturalists

Well, the school year is about to end and as usual, our environmental education programs are at full steam. Sea Center, INEOS, ConocoPhillips and the Mid-Coast National Wildlife Refuges are all very busy for the next two weeks. If you are involved in the environmental education programs, you start to feel like a teacher and look forward to a lower level of activity during the summer months. Then after a few months of lower activity you start looking forward to the next school year. (Sounds like an addiction or maybe worse.)

We still do not have the final numbers on the Migration Celebration, but estimated attendance was 1,075 people over the 3-day event and for the second year in a row the event made a profit estimated to be \$2,000. Not a huge amount, but enough to buy supplies for the environmental education programs at the refuges. Thanks again for the great support by TMN-COT members.

Finally, at the General meeting next week we will be asking for your input on quarterly social events for the chapter. Generally, they will be potluck and the chapter will provide the meat for the main dish. More details next week.

May Meeting, COT TMN Wednesday, May 9, 2007

Social at 8:30 and meeting will begin at 9:00. The program is Linda Knowles who will be speaking about native plants. Linda has been the president of Houston Native Plant Society for three years.

Reminder from Chapter Host, Jerry Krampota

The following members signed up to bring refreshments to the April meeting: Ed Barrios, Ruby Lewis, and Marty Cornell. If for some reason you are unable to provide refreshments this month; please contact me at 281-585-3249 or jkrampota@hotmail.com.

**COT Texas Master Naturalist Awards
April 2007
Tom Morris, Membership Chair**

Re-Certification – 8hrs AT and 40 hrs VT

2006

Barbara Bruyere*

Paula Jacobs*

Sherry Summers*

2007

Barbara Burkhardt

Gerald Forrest

Janet Clemenson

Rainbo Johnson

Justina Dent

Jim Renfro*

Carl Dodson

Kerry Magee*

Mickey Dufilho

Silver Award – 500 Hrs

Kermit Schlameous

Gold Award – 1000 Hrs

Tom Morris

*Absent previously

In addition to awards, I think a few numbers might be of interest to some:

As of end of March 2007 YTD:

Certifications:	0
Re-Certifications:	18
No. of Members reporting hrs	30
No. of Volunteer hrs:	2,032
No. of AT hrs:	252
Active Members:	79
Members Trained to Date:	118
No. of VT Hrs from Inception	48,278
No. of AT Hrs from Inception	5,696

Do Vultures Have Fun Flying?

Birding Notes by Jan Kater

On the 21st of September 2006, a strong breeze was blowing off the water at Freeport in the late morning and freshening up the temperature in the towns immediately to the north. I live in Lake Jackson and was enjoying the smell of the sea breeze that was sweeping our city. As I left the north-northwest J. C. Penney area of the Brazos Mall front parking lot, I noticed a Turkey Vulture diving in a northerly direction from about 40 feet up in the air above the Discount Tire store. When he was about five feet off the ground, gaining forward speed as he leveled out, he climbed into a 180 degree turn that ended with his flying into the wind. This slowed him down, but he gained altitude in a hurry, benefiting from the lifting of the wind he was facing. And all this without once flapping his wings! And then he repeated the maneuver - several times! He was obviously having fun with the wind!

There's a 40-foot wide grassy area above which he was giving me this aerial show, stretching about three times that distance north and south to the east of the Academy store parking lot. I drove closer to the Academy side of the grassy area and saw there was another Turkey Vulture already on the ground, standing in a clear space in the parking lot. She was pulling off the fleshy parts of a squirrel that had been run over. My car was not moving, but another car approached the area where the meal was being eaten, and spooked the vulture, causing her to fly over to the grassy area where she landed under some small trees.

At that, the male approached the now abandoned eating spot and touched down doing a fast step to match his ground speed with his airspeed to keep from falling over. As his speed slowed, he collapsed his wings and came to a stop in front of the remains of the squirrel. But the presence of moving cars in the area caused him to depart rapidly, with enough altitude to cross over the driveway safely and join his mate under the trees. I'm identifying his mate as "her", since Turkey Vultures often hunt with their mates, or alone. I'm assuming that the smaller bird I saw eating first was a female because of her smaller size. Black Vultures generally fly in groups, and often sit in groups on the ground. John Marshall, our COT member, reported that one of the recovering Black Vultures at the Gulf Coast Wildlife Rescue was given a male name until it laid an egg!

How can we tell the difference between Turkey Vultures and Black Vultures? Turkey Vultures have red featherless heads, longer tails, a pronounced dihedral angle in their wings when soaring, and transparent looking tips and trailing edges of their wings when seen from below. Black Vultures have black featherless heads and necks, handsome 6 inch patches of white feathers on the top and bottom of each wing tip, and a less noticeable dihedral wing angle when soaring. There is a further contrast in that their flying is more labored because of their chunkier size and smaller wing surface area per pound of weight. Nevertheless, if a strong wind is blowing, Black Vultures can soar quite gracefully with a minimal need to flap their wings. And, they probably have just as much fun flying as does a Turkey Vulture when the wind gives a strong assist!

ADVANCED TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES May - June 2007

The TMN-COT Advanced Training Committee has reviewed AT opportunities listed on nearby TMN Chapter websites and has approved the advanced training opportunities listed in Attachment #1. If you find other opportunities not listed that you would like to attend, please submit an *Approval Form for Advanced Training*. This form can be downloaded from the FORMS page of the COT website.

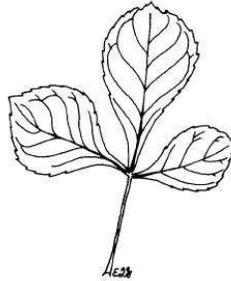
BETTY BROWN UNIT BIRDING and NATURE TRAIL by Neal McLain

CHURCHILL - March 24, 2007. Members of the Cradle of Texas Chapter assisted the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service construct a birding and nature trail through the new Betty Brown Unit of San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge. Other volunteer organizations included Friends of River San Bernard and Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuges. Several unaffiliated volunteers also participated, including Mary Ruth Rhodenbaugh, County Commissioner representing Precinct 4.



The trail construction crew gathers around the new entrance sign at the Betty Brown unit. Photo by Keith Ramos.

Besides constructing the trail, volunteers also erected an entrance sign and investigated the local flora and fauna. COT Member Kirby Rapstein and USFWS staffer Thomas Adams compiled a species list of plants near the trail. Kirby reports finding "several small trees that were in bloom and had trifoliate leaves like poison ivy," but neither he nor Thomas could identify them. Several days later, however, the trees had gone to seed and Kirby was able to identify them. They turned out to be Common Hoptrees (*Ptelea trifoliata*, L), also known as Stinking-ash or Wafer-ash. Kirby notes that Common Hoptrees are grown commercially in Pennsylvania for beer production.



Foliage of Common Hoptree.

Source: Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson. *Common Hoptree*. USDA Forest Service, Fact Sheet ST-530, October 1994. <<http://hort.ufl.edu/trees/PTETRIA.pdf>>.

Kirby led a tour of the new trail during Migration Celebration. He reports a curious coincidence: several of the tour members were residents of Pennsylvania.

The ten-acre Betty Brown Unit is the latest addition to the San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge. It's located on County Highway 819B, and fronts directly onto the San Bernard River. The new trail connects a small parking lot to the riverfront.

The property was donated to USFWS by FOBWR members Lolita and Bob Muhm. The name "Betty Brown" is a traditional name for the property, although its origin is unknown.

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):

- Attachment #1 - Advanced Training Opportunities - May-June 2007
- Attachment #2 - Minutes of Board Meeting of May 2, 2007
- Attachment #3 - Minutes of General Membership Meeting of April 11, 2007