

TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST



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

Presidents Message, Ed Barrios

First, congratulations to TMN-COT members Barbara Burkhardt, Jerry Eppner, Carol Jones and Katherine Laney for winning the 2006 Scholastic Bowl! I was on vacation during the event and read in Sunday's FACTS that the "Nerdy Naturalist Team" had won the event. I wanted to include this accolade in the newsletter and include the photo that *The Facts* published.



It is important to get positive publicity for our organization since we are relatively unknown to most of the public.

Next I would like to encourage you to attend the Texas Master Naturalist Annual Meeting October 20-22, 2006 at Mo Ranch in Hunt, TX. I've been to this event the last two years and plan to go again this year. There are some very interesting Advanced Training topics and the setting in the hill country is beautiful. Plus you get to meet people from other chapters and understand their accomplishments and challenges. Last year 10 of our TMN-COT members attended and there were about 250 TMN members present. This year we will be submitting another poster for our Environmental Education and Partner support efforts. Michelle Haggerty, State TMN Coordinator, has heard about our initiative to update our Partner Agreements and thinks that this activity should be shared. So Carolyn May-Monie and I will be in a discussion session talking to the other chapters about our activity. Also Carolyn and Michelle have submitted updating

the Partner Agreements initiative to the MN National Convention in Flagstaff this November. If the talk is selected, Carolyn and I will attend the convention with Michelle (I'm going for moral support of course). This is great recognition for the work Carolyn has done on this and for our chapter for initiating the project.

Finally, Bryan Adams of the Mid-Coast Wildlife Refuges has published the schedule for the upcoming Discovery Environmental Education Program (DEEP). This activity represents the largest number of volunteer hours for our chapter. Please go to our website and you can find the schedule on the calendar of events – Neal has added each of the sessions. If you would like to volunteer, contact Bryan at Bryan_Adams@fws.gov.

NERDY NATURALIST WIN FIRST EVER SCHOLASTIC BOWL COMPETITION, Barbara Burkhardt, Captain, "The Nerdy Naturalist"

A fund raiser, benefiting the Brazosport Planetarium and the Center for the Arts and Sciences was held on Saturday, August 27. Twenty teams, representing different organizations and schools competed for the title of champions. The "Nerdy Naturalist" team, representing the Cradle of Texas Chapter, Texas Master Naturalist, won the competition with a total score of 114 points. Representing the COT were Jerry Eppner, Carol Jones, Katherine Laney and Barbara Burkhardt.

Second place, with a total of 107 points, went to "UB313". Judi James, Denis James (COT member) Bryan Adams, and Sasha Tarrant were members of this team.

Third place went to "the fActors", David Hill, Melissa Goosen, Craig Afritz and Phillip White, representing the Center Stages thespian group.

The big winners for the evening were the teams from local schools. The generous underwriters of the event awarded prizes of \$2500.00 (first) to "The Brainy Bunch" from Brazoswood High School. Second place \$1000.00 went to another Brazoswood team, "Shooting for the Stars". Third place, \$500.00 was won by the Angleton High School Team, "4 Brains are Better than 1". The money will be used to support school projects.

It was a great evening with over \$2500.00 being raised to support the planetarium and The Center. Everyone on the team had a lot of fun and learned that we actually had to know some facts. We thank the members of the COT who came out to support and cheer us on.

Can anyone give us the formula for the surface area of a sphere? We need to prepare to defend our championship next year.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER...flock together...unless they are Turkey Vultures.
Birding Notes by Jan Kater

But Black Vultures do flock together...most of the time! One day that Jean and I were hosts on a bus-full of fourth graders at the Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge Discovery Center, we spotted a large black somewhat amorphous bird at the water's edge, presumably feasting on some dead animal. Even from our distance of about 100 yards, the large black bird was easy to identify as a vulture. But, because of the bouncing bus and the fact that the vulture had its head down behind some local shrubbery, and maybe partially inside the body of its felicitous find, even with binoculars it was not easy to determine whether it was a Black Vulture or a Turkey Vulture. Both have distinctive faces. Black Vultures have black faces and heads, and Turkey Vultures have red faces and heads. Neither has feathers on its face or head. But we couldn't see its face or head! So, what conclusion could we come to about its identity?

Based on the fact that the vulture was alone, and that it had found a meal that was probably rather hard to find among the shrubs, our preliminary reasoning indicated that it was a Turkey Vulture. Its being alone was significant because Turkey Vultures seldom hunt with another vulture, Turkey or Black. Whereas Black Vultures almost always travel in groups. I saw a group of three Black Vultures the other day flying a somewhat military flight pattern around a cell phone tower in the large parking lot at Brazosport College, landing one at a time on the tower until all three were accommodated. Soon they relocated to the two arms of a parking lot lamp, all three in a row. They were apparently enjoying their tour of the parking lot as a group. Once settled on the arms of the lamp, they stayed awhile observing and possibly eavesdropping on the students that passed below. They gave the impression of being a socially adapted group, not afraid of their fellow creatures even if they didn't understand their language.

It has been noted that if a Turkey Vulture and a lone Black Vulture face off on the ground around a potential meal, the Turkey Vulture is more likely to win the contest and eat alone. However, if a group of Black Vultures approaches a lone Turkey Vulture eating a carrion meal on the ground, the group of Black Vultures usually succeeds in chasing the lone Turkey Vulture away and in taking over its meal. Adult Turkey Vultures give the impression that they are larger than adult Black Vultures – even if they are marginally lighter in weight. Adult Turkey Vultures have longer wings than do adult Black Vultures, and their tails are longer. These facts may give them a psychological advantage in scaring off one-on-one competition for a meal.

Turkey Vultures are reputed to have a much more discerning sense of smell. Someone discovered that a portion of its brain is more highly developed for this skill than is the brain of a Black Vulture. Thus, the Turkey Vulture would be more likely to smell an inconspicuous dead fish on the bank of the wetlands pond than would a Black Vulture.

As for visual identification, the Turkey Vulture is more likely to have a brown-black feather coloring than the Black Vulture, which is more uniformly black. And, if the bird we saw had taken off to fly elsewhere, we would have noticed whether the wing beats were labored or more confidently executed. Labored wing beats are characteristic of Black Vultures, even when they are soaring and needing to

maintain altitude. Turkey Vultures have more wing surface and give the impression of flying more effortlessly. Viewed from below, Black Vultures wings are all black except for the wing tips that have large white patches at the base of the primaries, whereas Turkey Vultures have silver-gray trailing edges on their wings but black wing tips.

Here's another bit of information in identifying which vulture you may be looking at. Take a look at the range maps in your bird ID books. Of the two vultures, only the Turkey Vulture range map shows a breeding area in the northern states, with a large year-round area in the middle and southern states. Whereas the Black Vulture range map shows only a year-round area in the southern states with no presence in many of the northern states, and no separate breeding area anywhere. On the www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/BirdGuide website, the year-round range for both birds extends southward below the United States, down to the southern ends of Chile and Argentina.

Let me add a word of caution about identifying birds precisely. The different descriptions in the various bird ID books can be confusing. So, concentrate on the characteristics of the bird you are looking at. You may want to average the book-described characteristics of a particular bird with what you are seeing. The season, similar species, the age of the bird, and geographic area differences may influence what you see. But while you are looking at a bird, you are the expert for that bird.

If you have time, please let me know your observations at jankater@sbcglobal.net. Bird-watchers of a feather flock together!

COT TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST AWARDS
AUGUST 9, 2006

Certification – 8 hrs AT and 40 hrs VT

Monica Krancevic	Davie McCaskill*
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Re-Certification – 8 hrs AT and 40 hrs VT

Ed Barrios	Bill Brown
Marty Cornell	Jerry Krampota
Paula Jacobs (2005)*	Rich Jespersen
Joan Simonsen	Carole Wenny

Bronze Award – 250 hrs

Paula Jacobs*	Carole Wenny
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Silver Award – 500 hrs

Gold Award – 1000 hrs

Marty Cornell

*Absent previously

WIKIMAPIA, By Neal McLain

Google and Wikipedia have joined forces to create a new mapping website called "Wikimapia." It combines satellite images from Google with a database of "places" created by volunteers. Although Wikimapia has only existed for a few weeks, it already contains an enormous number of "places" scattered across the planet.

To see how Wikimapia works, go to <http://www.wikimapia.org/> and look for a little white box in southeast Texas. Click on it, and it'll take you a satellite image of Houston, where you'll see more white boxes. Each of these boxes highlights a "place" that some volunteer has created and described. Click on any white box to read the description.

You can zoom in for a closer view, or zoom back for a wider view, by clicking on the plus and minus signs on the left side of the screen. From Houston, you can navigate south into Brazoria County by dragging the image with your mouse. Click anywhere on the map (but outside of any white box), and hold your mouse button down. You'll be able to drag the image anywhere on the face of the earth.

Once you get to southern Brazoria County, you'll find more white boxes. Several of them highlight our chapter's partner organizations: the state parks, the National Wildlife Refuges, GCBO, and SCT. You'll also find places like the Center for Arts and Sciences, Peach Point WMA, the Neotropical Bird Sanctuary, and Stahlman Park, that the 2007 Training Class will be visiting on its afternoon field trips.

Click on any white box to read the description. You can add your own comments to the description by selecting "Menu," then "Edit this page." After you edit it, click "Save."

You can also add a new place. Find the place you want, center it on your computer screen, click "Wikimapia," then "Add new place." A white box will appear in the center of your screen. Grab the corners with your mouse to move the sides of the box, then click "Save." The new place will appear as an "upcoming" place, which means Wikimapia won't accept it as final until several other volunteers have voted to approve it. But you get to cast the first vote!

Unfortunately, there's no white box to highlight the Extension Office in Angleton because of the poor resolution of the satellite image at that location. Hopefully this situation will improve in the coming months as Google acquires new satellite imagery.

Finally, a personal note. I created and described the places mentioned above; if you'd like to add any comments, feel free to edit them. But don't blame me for all of the places shown -- I didn't create the place for that shrimp boat in the Gulf!

Discovery Center at Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge

Note the white box highlighting this building as a Wikimapia "place."
Credit: Satellite image from Wikimapia; Copyright 2006 by Google, Inc.
<http://tinyurl.com/fnb8z>



Please send newsletter contributions and comments to mh-israel@sbcglobal.net

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