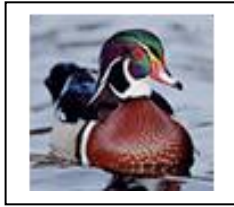


Wood Duck Whistler



East Texas Chapter Master Naturalists

April 2020 Volume 20, Issue 4



Some Concerns on COVID-19

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Right now we are quite concerned with how COVID-19 affects us as many have gotten sick and some have died, never mind the economic problems and cabin fever. Another concern goes back to the roots of the virus itself.

SARS-CoV 2 is a member of the coronaviruses and is zoonotic, which means it can pass between animals and people. Scientists still struggle against the unknown while they study the virus to learn more. Relationships between reservoir species, intermediate species, hosts that get sick, and their identity in the first place are still being worked out.

Documented cases of pet dogs and cats also show onset of symptoms or a lack of

symptoms depending on individuals. (See <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19/sars-cov-2-animals-including-pets> on the American Veterinary Medical Association website for details.) These animals had been living with people who had themselves contracted the virus.

It doesn't stop there. Maybe you have heard of the tiger in the Bronx Zoo of NYC likely infected by a zookeeper before he showed symptoms. Ferrets, used as models of how respiratory illnesses work in people for the similarity of how it affects both species, are susceptible like cats to getting sick with COVID-19.

This makes me wonder about the possibility of other

animals being infected and what it means. Pets may not be as likely to pass the disease to people, but they are affected.

According to research published in Science (see the above link), not all animals are equally susceptible to the virus. For the few kinds that were tested, dogs, pigs, chickens, and ducks seem to be less likely to get it. While transmission between pets and people might be less worrisome, transmission between animals could be easier such as between pet ferrets and native species.

The CDC and AVMA recommend taking steps to prevent pets from getting infected just like with us. But I wonder what steps we need to take to prevent taking this to wildlife. We need to protect them too.



Yucca blooms in the Wildscape Garden at the Nature Center



Coyote

(All photos submitted were taken by iNaturalist user charlottewatsonanders.)



Bristle thistle bud and large crane fly with dewdrops.



Primrose-leaved violet

Social Distance BioBlitz (4/5/20) by Charlotte Sanders

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I started at 7:15 AM on Sunday documenting observations for the global bioblitz. The weather was overcast but pleasant. Most of my morning's observations were covered in heavy dew. The effects were stunning, and I marveled at all the beauty. What a way to spend the day out enjoying Nature!

After I had covered most of the front of our property, I started walking along our county road. Hubby finally drove the mule down the road to find me to see if I planned to come eat lunch. I had not even walked half of a mile from our mailbox. Wow, there was so much to see with all the wildflowers, grasses and trees. After lunch and resting for a while I wanted to walk the property behind our house down to one of the creeks. Jay decided to go along with me. I think he knew not to fuss at me for stopping often to take photos on the road clearing we had a friend make with his bulldozer. I found several large Red Imported Fire Ant mounds. As soon as I kicked the top off one the area was swarming. I was able to get good documentation. The mosses and ferns were lovely. Once along the creek I found several varieties of fungi that I had never seen. I am always happy to find a Primrose-leaved Violet when I walk in the woods.

I wanted to walk through the heavily wooded section back to the house, but Jay did not. I had

previously walked through the woods several times, so he agreed to go through all the greenbrier and undergrowth with me. We found many things to document and Jay even got excited about several of them.

I always take many photos of my observations. It took me several days to cull through and download all of them to iNaturalist. I saw birds including the American Crow, Blue Jay, Mourning Dove, White-throated Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Brown-headed Cowbird, and at the end of the day the Ruby-throated Hummingbird scout finally came to one of the feeders. That morning as I walked back to the house for lunch, I saw two Coyotes running through the pasture across the road from our house. Fortunately, I was able to get a good photo before they disappeared into the woods. The Fox Squirrels and Eastern Gray Squirrel made their usual appearance under the trees in front of the house seeking birdseed. They added mammals which included both tracks and scat of Wild Boars. The Red Imported Fire Ants and a member of the Large Crane Fly species were the insects that I observed. I had observations of the Loblolly Pine, Blackjack Oak, Smooth Sumac, Water Oak, American Sweetgum, Sassafras, Winged Elm, Red Mulberry, and Eastern Red Cedar trees. I also documented fungi, mosses, lichens, and grasses and flowers too numerous to count.
(continued next page)

The President's Message by Paul Wick

What a month! I hope that you and yours have been safe and healthy through this ordeal. I know that many have suffered business and economic hardships. The coronavirus pandemic has affected all of us in various ways and will likely continue to limit us somewhat for a while. Many of us are still deciding what we can do to deal with this. Hopefully the plan to reopen our communities will be successful and without complications.

Fortunately, as master naturalists, there is still much of the natural world and the outdoors that we can enjoy. The CDC, among other experts, says that being physically active and enjoying open spaces are good ways to keep healthy and relieve stress.

If you have found the time, I hope that you have checked out some of the many advanced training and volunteer service opportunities that our chapter offers. I am

happy to see that more webinar offerings have become available for our new class to finish their training. Thanks to Beverly Guthrie for her diligence in working this out.

Our plans for chapter meetings and chapter activity days are still uncertain as we await directives from the various agencies that impact our chapter.

Be safe out there!



Social Distance BioBlitz (continued) by Charlotte Sanders

I would like to thank fellow Master Naturalists, distractedbygrasshoppers, cosmiccat, and phototime for your assistance in identifying my observations and correcting those I had identified incorrectly. I know who all three of you are...wink, wink!

I think the stats for the Socially Distance BioBlitz are amazing. There were 348 of us who participated and made 12,756 observations in 3,090 species! There were

1,119 people who helped with identifications which totaled 20,403... Plants were #1, Arachnids were #2, and Birds were #3 of the observations made.

I was flabbergasted when I saw that johndreynolds, a professor in Vancouver British Columbia, made 372 observations in 193 species in the one-day event. I must admit that I was thrilled with my mere 94 observations.

There will be another Socially Distance BioBlitz on 5/3/20. Check it out on iNaturalist and join the fun.



Wild boar scat



Red Mulberry with bloom



Moss and resurrection fern

Book Reviews by Lance Homeniuk

(Delayed from last month.)



Clip art

March is monograph month; at least for this column. If you are unfamiliar with the term a monograph is a short study on a single topic. Think of a chapter excerpted from a textbook and printed between its own covers. And I have three, very different, examples for you.

Enjoying Squirrels More (Or Less) by

Howard Youth, a special publication from Bird Watcher's Digest, 1997. This is a 32 page paperback booklet aimed at the birders out there who sometimes find themselves in a greater or lesser adversarial role towards the cute little rodents, or "tree rats". Basic biology, ecology, management (both pro and con) and "War Stories" are treated in their own short chapters. My favorite heading is the chapter on the nine species, "Profiles in Furrage". No



apologies were offered to JFK. You squirrel lovers out there (Doug*, you know who you are) will appreciate this handy little booklet. But so will bird feeder-defenders because strategies are offered to allow you to coexist with the furry horde. I picked it up for \$2.50 from the Purple Dragon bookstore in Derby, KS, which, alas, is no longer with us.

*For an in-depth study of the role of this character, refer to my as-yet unwritten doctoral dissertation "UP as Ulysses – the modern quest for love and eco-salvation in an age of loss and destruction: Volume 1 in a classical education from Homer to Disney/Pixar via Warner Bros and Saturday morning cartoons."

Poison Ivy by James B. McNair, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, 1938. I inherited this little gem when I

moved into my classroom in 1993. Only eleven pages long, not including endpapers, it has been recovered between heavy cardstock sheets. Identified inside and outside the cover as "Botany Leaflet 12 second edition."

It has 3 full-page B&W photos, a pen & ink illustration, and two microphotographs along with a written description of the plant. But most of the text discusses aspects of the "poison" and its remedies and treatments. The oil "urushiol" is not mentioned; the active substance always being referred to as sap. A short paragraph on eradication passes on the USDA's recommendation of "spraying with kerosene or sodium arsenic solution or treating cut stems with sulfuric acid". Those were less nuanced times!

(continued on page 9)

Venomous Snakes of East Texas by R. Dale Wade

Well, it is that time of year. Folks in the suburbs are finding snakes in their backyards, their garages, or slithering across their driveways. Their immediate response is to grab a hoe, or a shovel, or whatever is at hand and beat it until it is dead. As the saying goes, "the only good snake is a dead snake". Totally false! I understand the reaction, but, the fact is, a dead snake is not nearly as good as a live one. Y'all are killing more beneficial than harmful ones. Let's take a look at that.

There are only four venomous snakes common to the Pineywoods of East Texas: three types of pit vipers (rattlesnakes, copperheads, and cottonmouths) and the coral snake. Pit vipers are named for the small opening between the eye and the nostril on each side of the head that senses heat from warm-blooded prey. It is very observable

giving the head a triangular appearance. (However, some non-venomous snakes flatten out the head when threatened as a menacing look.)

There are two simple rules in dealing with snakes in your yard. First, stay calm and be observant. Secondly, walk away slowly. Snakes do not chase people. Also, you should know the venomous snakes in our region first, then you can learn about the other commonly seen ones. Here is how to identify each.

Rattlesnakes

This is the most identifiable as it is the only pit viper with a rattle on the tail-end. When threatened, it coils up, lifts its tail, and shakes the rattle as a warning. Although there are as many as fifteen varieties in Texas, the most common for East Texas is the Timber Rattlesnake (*Crotalus horridus*), aka Canebreak rattlesnake, found in

wooded areas and wet bottomlands. A thick-bodied adult averages 4-1/2 feet in length, colored brown or tan with wide, dark cross bands, and an entirely black tail. Not all snakes heard "rattling" are rattlesnakes. Some non-venomous snakes move their tails swiftly among the leaves to imitate a rattling sound.

Copperhead

Of the three subspecies the Southern Copperhead (*Agkistrodon contortrix contortrix*) is most prevalent in East Texas. About 20-30 inches long these are masters at camouflage. Their tan or pale brown bodies are well marked with an hourglass band, broader on the sides and narrow on top. They prefer piles of leaves and decaying logs as cover. This is the one most commonly found around your yard.

(continued next page)



Timber Rattlesnake



Southern Copperhead



Cottonmouths/ Water Moccasins



Cottonmouth

The Cottonmouth (*Agkistrodon piscivorus*) has a very thick body with an average length 3-1/2 feet. When threatened their mouths open widely showing the cotton-white inside, thus the name. At birth their color is similar to that of a copperhead. As they mature the pattern darkens to all but invisible. They are nearly invisible in water, and, yes, they can bite underwater. Generally, they will lie motionless or run from a threat. Still, one must be careful as Cottonmouth venom is worse than a Copperhead's. As the alternate name indicates, Water Moccasins generally stay around water's edge, like ponds, swamps, and lakes.

Coral Snakes

The Coral Snake (*Micrurus fulvius*

Venomous Snakes of East Texas (continued) by R. Dale Wade

tener), aka North American Cobra due to being of the same family as cobras, is about 18 to 20 inches long. It is most distinctive with its bands of red, yellow, and black. The large red band is bordered on either side by narrow yellow bands, thus, "red and yellow kill a fellow". Common more to southeastern than northeastern Texas, one finds them in woodlands and the coastal plains. (Having said that, Mission Tejas State Park just posted a picture of one just last week.) They are extremely venomous. However, they rarely bite (accounting for less than 1% of snake bites annually), do not strike like rattlers, and have an inefficient venom delivery system.

Remember, the only *good* human is an *educated* human. Here are some safety tips.

1. Always be aware of your immediate surrounding as snakes blend well.
2. Keep a well-manicured yard. Remove piles of rocks, dead or decaying wood, and leaves. Avoid snake "repellents" as they do not work.
3. Wear protective leather gloves, boots, and long pants when clearing debris from your yard.
4. Keep bird seed and other foods that attract rodents tightly secured. If you attract the prey, you will attract the predator.
5. If you sense a snake is nearby, freeze until you find it, then, back away slowly. Snakes will retreat given the chance, unless surprised or cornered.
6. Never pick up a "dead" snake by hand. A dead snake may envenomate by reflex action.
7. Most snake bites occur when a person is trying to kill the snake. Leave it be and it will go away.

(continued on page 9)

A Rock Hound Goes to School

by Becky Whisenant



Forget it's a cliché; it is completely true that the future lies in the young. If you want to be a bridge between influencing the future and cherishing the past, do not miss an opportunity to spend time with the kids. You may get to pass something on.

With this thought in mind, I offer my time and modest knowledge of geology and rocks to local educators. The sole purpose of the 5 or so assorted boxes of carefully wrapped mineral specimens, fossils, rocks and artifacts which reside in my closet is education.

I coordinate with the teacher a few weeks ahead about the day, time, grade level and number of students, then on the scheduled day, I pull out the boxes, lights, a mag glass, visual aids and my flash drive loaded with a carefully prepared PowerPoint.

The audience on February 25th was six classes of 178 sixth graders fresh out of a unit on earth science which emphasized Tectonic Plate theory, landforms, types of rocks and the forces which affect them all. My purpose was three-fold: expound on the unit objectives, plant a seed of delight and curiosity in their minds, and have a good time talking about something I love. I will take any excuse to discuss the coolness factor of rocks.

We discussed the geologic time chart and the fact that most of the present day landforms we reside on in the great state of Texas were formed during the Cretaceous period, approximately 65 MYA (million years ago). We examined Texas aquifers, mineral deposits, geophysical landforms, even population density and determined that the consistent theme of all of them was the geology under our feet.

Per the request of the teacher, we reviewed the tectonic plates, geologic processes caused by their activity and the resulting progression of stages in the rock cycle.

Children are still very tactile and I believe a touch is worth a thousand words. The opportunity to feel the rough, fossilized cell structure of a carnivore dinosaur bone makes a much more lasting impression than filling in the blank on a test. Comparing the angles of naturally faceted crystal faces on various minerals shows a very practical application of math and chemistry. Holding in your hand an ammonite that lived 70 MYA in the inland sea whose shoreline you cross on the way to Six Flags is pretty cool.

It's really not about hammering home bullet points or definitions. Crowd control and group behavior modification can be done at another time. The takeaway here is not the ability to recite a body of knowledge. My goal is to let everybody get their hands on something real and gritty (and maybe even poop) and see how many attention spans you can hold long enough to plant some seeds of wondering. So that, long after you are gone and they are grown, the memory of that unusual "rock lady" and the stuff she brought to science class will make somebody want to know more.

Your mission, should you decide to accept it, is to enter the fray. I encourage you to find your forte and share it. Brush up on your knowledge or just take a script. The kids don't care. They do care that you came.

Volunteer Service Projects by R. Dale Wade

If you need some Volunteer Service Hours (VSH), you should have attended February's meeting. Our own Chapter Master Naturalists representing ten or so projects gave a brief overview. Project specific tables were set up around the room with copious amounts of information. We visited with members on everything from iNaturalist to DFW Wildlife Coalition to the Longview Arboretum.

Are you aware that there is a myriad of opportunities approved for VSH? Here is a quick rundown: 8 Citizen Science Projects, 7 TPWD/Agrilife Projects, 8 Community Service Projects, 2 Outreach Projects, and 10 seasonal Projects. That totals to 35 ongoing service opportunities without even counting those special projects that pop up on occasion. Oh yeah, remember that your contribution to the monthly newsletter, Wood Duck Whistler, counts, too.

Check out the East Texas Chapter website for details and contact information.



Venomous Snakes
of East Texas
by R. Dale Wade
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If you are interested in additional information, check out the facts at the sites as follows:

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
<https://tpwd.texas.gov/education/kids/wild-things/wildlife/texas-poisonous-venomous-snakes>

Herps of Texas
<http://www.herpsotexas.org/view/snakes>

TPW Magazine May 2015
https://tpwmagazine.com/archive/2015/may/ed_2_vipers/

Texas Snake ID
http://www.texasnakeid.com/North_TX_venomous.html

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has an excellent list of Dos and Don'ts for safety around snakes.
(<https://tpwd.texas.gov/education/resources/texas-junior-naturalists/benature-safe/venomous-snake-safety>)

All photos from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Special thanks to Paul Crump, Herpetologist, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, for his review of this article.

Book Reviews
by Lance Homeniuk
(continued from page 4)

The Big Thicket of East Texas: Its History, Location and Description. By Claude A. McLeod, The Sam Houston Press, Huntsville, TX 1967. An associate professor at Sam Houston State at the time, McLeod has provided us with an invaluable picture of the Big Thicket in time and place. Much had already been lost, pines prior to 1935, and the post-war harvest of hardwoods. But much more has been lost since 1967, though Lance Rosier, who was still living at the time, and others achieved an increasing degree of protection as they raised awareness of the ecological treasure that the Big Thicket is. I remember where I was and some of the names and events that impinged on my consciousness in 1967, and the Big Thicket was not even a blip. At that time all I knew of Texas was Fess Parker (Davy Crockett) at the Alamo and his (Jim Coates) boys Tommy Kirk (Travis) and Kevin Corcoran (Arless) with Spike (Old Yeller). None of the scenery looked like anyplace in the National Preserve I have been to.

The two most valuable parts of the monograph are the map of the original coverage on pages 14 & 15 and the lists of plants on pages 10-12 and in the appendix. Comparing these to modern maps and botanical community lists (range of beech trees, for example) may yield much insight into the extent that change has occurred. I do have a more recent guide to Big Thicket flora and I intend, some rainy day, to compare the two. I fear whatever losses had occurred by 1967 pale in comparison to what has happened since, though Lance Rosser and others worked a marvel to get as much of the Big Thicket preserved in the intervening years.

2020 Officers & Committee Chairs

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Wanda Rauscher – Vice President
Bob Lumpkins – Secretary
Phil Guthrie – Treasurer
Lance Homeniuk – Immediate Past President

Mike Price – Volunteer Service Projects Director
Beverly Guthrie – Advanced Training Director

Vickie Hoppis – Membership
Beverly Guthrie – Training Director
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Jan Barth – Historian/Archivist
Vacant – Librarian
Karen Rueb-Hall – Hospitality
Quita Russell – Hospitality
Terry Smitherman – Hospitality

Lindsey Smith – Communications Dir
Kathy Riffe – Public Relations
R. Dale Wade – Website
Greg Marshall – Social Media
Tamara Kratzer - Newsletter Editor

Kevin Herriman - TPWD Advisor
Clint Perkins – Agrilife Extension Agent-Smith County Advisor

Monthly Programs

We meet the **Fourth** at 308 N Broadway Bring a friend.
Thursday in Tyler Invite a guest.
at the Discovery Join us at **6:30 PM** Everyone is
Science Place Annex for socializing before welcomed.
Bldg our meeting.

Directions and Dues

East Texas Chapter
Master Naturalists
Meeting Facility:
**Discovery Science
Place Annex Bldg
308 N Broadway Ave
Tyler, Texas 75702**

Directions:
On Broadway Ave on the left from the south or right from the north in downtown Tyler near Line Street (N of Locust)

Please send \$20.00 individual (\$35.00 couple)
Annual Chapter dues
to:
ETCMN Attn: Treasurer
Box 131184
Tyler, TX 75713-1184

Your news, stories, comments, photos, and ideas are needed. Tell us about where you volunteer and what you're doing,

Deadline is 15th of every month!

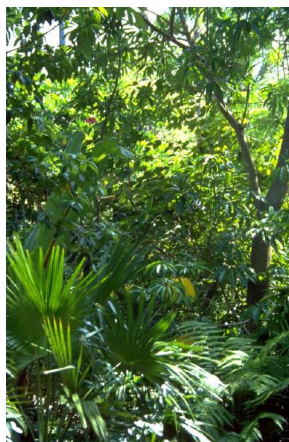
Please send items to Tamara Kratzer.



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