

The Midden

Photo by Steve Upperman

Galveston Bay Area Chapter - Texas Master Naturalists

April 2012

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Spring is Near - Go Outside by Diane Humes, President 2012

Spring is coming soon! We've had some good rains, deep cracks in the ground are filled in and - what a relief - the drought seems to be over for now. Warm temperatures and good sunshine are making plants grow and we will be seeing a riot of wildflowers soon - most welcome after such a long, hot, dry spell. Spring is a great time to notice the flowers and, maybe, learn the names of some plants new to you.

Spring means bird migration. Many of us celebrate by watching the "pretty birds", others count the fiercer species for the hawk watch, or attend Feather Fest to celebrate all things bird. Some do it all. This is a great time to be outside enjoying nature's glories.

Turtle Patrols on Galveston beaches are gearing up, thanks in great part to members of our chapter who didn't want to give up on the effort. Other opportunities abound to go outside and play at Sheldon Lake SP prairies and wetlands, Galveston Island SP, Armand Bayou Nature Center, Texas City Prairie Preserve and Horseshoe Marsh. There may also be a Beach Cleanup this spring - got to get the beach ready for turtles! Also, look for the AT offerings coming up. No lack of things to do.

On a sad note, Barbara Nowakowski passed away in February. A master naturalist for many years and ABNC volunteer, she had more energy and strength than any three of us, loved the birds, the plants, and the prairie. We miss you, Barbara.

The 2012 MN Training Class is going strong, with 22 awesome, energetic class members. The class is going well and everyone seems to be enjoying the Food, Fun, and Friendship. Please choose a Thursday to join the class and meet the group or make sure to attend the April Chapter meeting with class members.



Ready for the Wetlands!

Photo by Helle Brown

Next Chapter Meeting

April 5th

Bats

By

Diana Foss
Texas Parks and Wildlife

At Walter Hall Park

Prairie Ponderings by Dick Benoit

Prairies can only be restored by concerned, knowing, committed people that put their minds, hearts, hands and backs to the task. As Margaret Mead stated, "A small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed it's the only thing that ever has."

The stewardship of prairies in the Galveston Bay Area is indeed accomplished by such a group of persons. I would like to focus on one such person who has recently left us. Barb Nowakowski was indeed a person who put herself in my hall of modern prairie pioneers. We hope to capture her dedication with the following images.



The prairie restoration effort survived one of the toughest droughts in our area and is making great progress with the renewed rainfall.

Armand Bayou Nature Center has hardly skipped a beat with twenty volunteers showing up many of the Prairie Fridays. The newly refitted greenhouse is at capacity and the outside area is ready for an expansion.

Sheldon Lake State Park has also with its multichapter workers have continued restoration on Tuesdays. They are working around a new road construction.

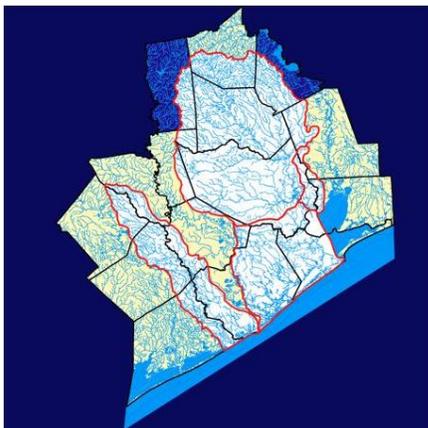
Texas City Prairie Preserve has continued expanding its efforts also. Jim Duron has now a crew of a dozen helpers to pot and plant.

Our Project of the Year, which is involved with Artist Boat at **Galveston Island State Park**, has worked over a dozen mornings establishing prairies and dunes.

Our other Project of the Year, which involves the **Bolivar Horseshoe Prairie** and Houston Audubon, has spent one day a month planting and potting with our members and Audubon members.

Wetland Wanderings by Diane Humes

In the Houston-Galveston 13-county area, most of us live within one mile of a stream, river, or bayou. Not surprising, when you realize that our area has 16,000 miles of stream channels. Our problem, however, is that 66 % of our streams are "impaired" for bacterial counts exceeding recommended limits for contact recreation. This means levels too high for swimming or any other activity that might result in ingestion of water.



The map from Jeff Taebel at H-GAC shows miles of stream channels.

Bacterial counts are measured in *E. coli* colony forming units (cfu) because *E. coli* is a specific indicator of human or animal wastes. Our problem is not really surprising, considering that our part of Texas has most of the water AND most of the people. We are not alone; in the U.S., the EPA estimates that 60% of all waters are impaired for bacteria. Most people live within 10 miles of a water body.

Some years ago a study on White Oak Bayou used Bacterial Source Tracing - a DNA test - to determine the sources of bacteria. It was found that the three highest contributors were, in order, people, dogs, and chickens. Every stream or bayou is unique, but the "people" problem suggests septic system, sewage treatment, or infrastructure, ie sewage pipe, issues. These are difficult for individuals to address, but what about dogs?

Dog populations can be estimated: community population ÷ 2.67 persons/household × 0.361 dog

owners/household \times 1.6 dogs/dog owner = number of dogs / community. For the City of Houston, with a population of 2.1 million in the 2010 census, this suggests probably 454,000 dogs. The metro Houston area population is 6 million, with a calculated 1.3 million dogs, and probably not a single one uses the toilet! It is safe to assume, that a good portion of their feces must enter a bayou directly as runoff every time it rains, thus contributing greatly to the bacterial problem.

So, if everyone picked up after Fido, a large part of the bacterial problem might be solved. What about wildlife? They also contribute to the problem. Unlike wildlife, however, dogs are something each owner can do something about. Surely, the chicken issues can't be as hard to solve as people and dogs!.

Biology of Beachcombing by Jamie Ashby

"I'll never look at a Galveston beach in the same way again!" This was an enthusiastic comment overheard by one of the 39 beach lovers who attended The Biology of Beachcombing on Saturday, February 11, at Carbide Park. This informative and entertaining advanced training session was led by Nathan Veatch and Bill Ashby.

Attendees were treated to an interesting presentation which included hands-on experiences with shells and sea beans commonly found on Galveston beaches, and also represented on the sand table at the Nature Center at Galveston Island State Park. Seeds of southern swamp lily (*crinum americanum*), and seedlings of black mangrove (*avicennia germinans*) were also provided to take and plant. This training session is highly recommended for those who wish to increase their knowledge of the flotsam and jetsam of Galveston Island.

Nathan ended the workshop with a valuable new link. <http://coldfusion.tamug.edu/>. TAMUG is hosting a new Parks and Wildlife web based Identification Guide to Marine Organisms of Texas which includes photos and information on various species.



Saving the State Insect – Monarch Butterfly by Vic Madamba

The Monarch Butterfly is the Texas State Insect; large, strong, one of a kind and its bright bold distinct reddish orange and black with specks of white makes it a beautiful and dramatic insect. "Don't Mess with Texas", on signs along highways and byways is almost synonymous with the Monarchs' coloring: "Don't Mess with me, I'm poison". The milkweed they eat as caterpillars contain cardiac glycosides which are retained in the adult exoskeleton, making them undesirable meals to other insects, most birds and some mammals.

Although having a self-protection system within their body, the strength and endurance to migrate over large bodies of water and land mass from several hundred to several thousands of miles of flight; Monarchs do have



disadvantages. Throughout their complete metamorphosis to adult, monarchs have several hundred predators, including humans. Their numbers continue to decline as their habitats gradually decrease, increased use of herbicides, diseases and recently discovered protozoan parasite called *Ophryocystis elektroscirra*, Oe for short. Since Oe has to live, grow and multiply within the host, it's considered an obligate protozoan parasite, which only infects monarch and queen butterflies.

“Saving the State Insect - Monarch Butterfly”, a workshop held 14 February 2012, at the Texas City Prairie Preserve, provided the opportunity to learn more about and what Master Naturalist can do about Oe. The guest speaker was Ms Dara Satterfield, from the Odum School of Ecology, University of Georgia. Ms Dara Satterfield was visiting San Antonio, Texas, and graciously accepted an invitation to speak to the Master Naturalist in hopes to spark interest and recruit volunteers for Project Monarch Health, a program to sample Monarchs for *Ophryocystis elektroscirra* (Oe) wintering along the Texas Gulf Coast.

The excellent presentation covered what is Oe, how to sample for Oe, how to record the samples and where to send the samples. Several Master Naturalist attendees

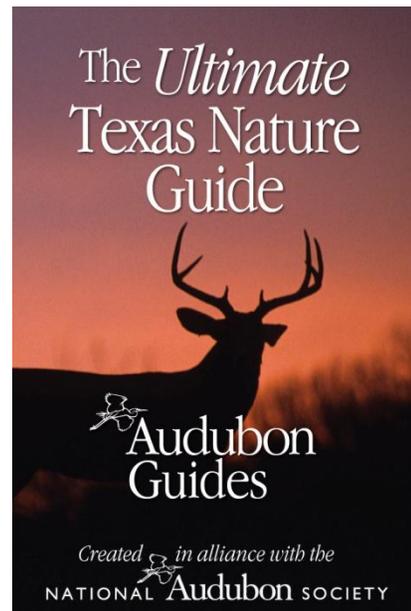


were able to practice with live Monarch Butterflies provided by, Julie Moncur and Linda Garren, Master Gardeners Precinct 2, and Vic, AT Project Leader, while others practiced with ornamental-like butterflies. We would like to thank Dara Satterfield for presenting the workshop on short notice, Rita T. Smith for the beverages and to all those that brought yummy refreshments. The workshop was a success with 9 new Project Monarch Health Oe volunteers. Those interested in joining this project, please contact; Vic at: vik-n-rumi@att.net.

Review of “The Ultimate Nature Texas Guide” by Scott Buckel

I have enjoyed using many different devices over the years and I just picked up an iPhone, while I have had an iPad for some time now. I really like these devices as I find them very useful. A few months ago John Sharp showed me an app “The Ultimate Nature Texas Guide” for Audubon. This app has information on the birds, butterflies, fishes, insects and spiders, seashells, reptiles and amphibians, trees, wildflowers, mammals and seashore creatures of Texas. This app is in the series they refer to as the Ultimate Nature Series and these apps are available for iPhone, iPad, android, HP touch pad, and Nook so you do not need an Apple device to use these apps.

The app has a number of ways one can search to identify a flower, plant or creature. You can search by shape, by family, by name and there is an advanced search as well. The advanced search allows one to set a number of different parameters to identify your subject. I kind of like the advanced search, but it seems that if you add to many parameters you may not get an answer. I have found if that happens, start removing parameters and you will get a list of possibilities. When one is trying to identify a subject there is a reference icon that will lead you to text that will give definitions and information about



that group, for example it will describe the various parameters used to categorize flowers. The reference will also give one lots of different types of information.

Another useful feature is the app will create journals that will record your observations and will allow you to share your observations with others. This has been very useful as I have been posting my observations of Monarchs for the Journey North website. Just touch the sighting icon below the information and it will record the time, date and GPS coordinates. My only criticism is you need to email the sighting to yourself to get the GPS coordinates via Google maps. I have been sending myself an email with

the sightings and once a month or so I will enter the information on the Journey North website which makes the entire process much simpler. I just wish I could get the coordinates without having to email the observation.

Overall, I have found this app to be easy to use and it has loads of great information. All in all this is a very nice reference book you can carry with you all of the time.

Daytime Phenomena by Allan Treiman

On January 12, Master Naturalist chapter members travelled to the Lunar and Planetary Institute for an evening AT course on sky phenomena. Our speaker was Allan Treiman, husband of our 'dictator for life', Diane Humes. Allan showed us many kinds of lights in the sky - all formed from sunlight falling on raindrops and ice crystals.

Rainbows form from light passing through raindrops - each of which splits the sunlight into a rainbow of color. Sunlight hitting ice crystals is more complicated and

beautiful. The most common phenomena are sundogs - bright spots in thin clouds $\sim 22^\circ$ away from the sun (the distance between spread out thumb and pinkie finger at arm's length).

Rarer, but still seen in Houston, is the circumzenithal arc - a 'rainbow' arc straight overhead. Those are probably pretty common, but no one ever looks straight up. So..., look up occasionally from your grasses and insects - you'll see something wondrous in the sky.

Diurnal Raptors by Diane Humes

The annual Raptor Workshop hosted by GBAC-TMN was held on March 5, 2012 at the extension office. As usual, the evening included food, fun, and friendship; our speaker was Dick Benoit. Dick has observed and counted raptors during migration for over 30 years in Michigan and Texas.

In 1972, bird watchers noted the complete absence of peregrine falcons east of the Mississippi - absent due to multiple causes including use of DDT. Since those days, their numbers have increased and organizations and individuals have made it their business to count all raptors and track population trends.

Dick Benoit described the diurnal raptors of Galveston Bay to prepare prospective and returning hawk watchers for the spring migration count. He spoke of identification tips and challenges of counting raptors during migration. Migration begins now; birds are "all dressed up and ready to go" after the vernal equinox. The hawks take advantage of rising thermals and avoid going over bodies of water.

Hawk watch sites are Sylvan Beach, for a north wind, and Little Cedar Bayou Park, for a southerly wind, both in



La Porte. We count hawks during March and April. Be there, prepared for sun, wind, cold, hot, and, perhaps, a great day with thousands of hawks overhead!

What Would a Master Naturalist Read? by Diane Humes

Our Chapter's Mission Statement says that we are "dedicated to the conservation, preservation and restoration of our natural resources and the promotion of ecological education for all". In order to fulfill our mission, we strive to further our own ecological educations. Realizing that this is a vast undertaking and no one can learn it all, it could be quite a lot of fun to try! Maybe it is time to begin "spring training".

Where would a master naturalist begin? I always start with books. In addition to sixteen "-ologies" constituting natural history listed in our Chapter Operating Handbook, there is a huge body of beautiful, insightful writing to inspire and educate us. Several years ago the magazine *Conservation*, then *Conservation in Practice*, polled its readers to find their "100 Best Conservation Books". One hundred makes an impressive list - a nice round number for a "tenner" on steroids! I compared various lists and managed to find a Top 10 of books for a master naturalist.

Between the classicists and activists there is a surprising degree of consensus, and the two clear winners within the top four are Rachel Carson and Aldo Leopold, for *Silent Spring* and *A Sand County Almanac*, considered the most influential conservation books written. *Silent Spring* eloquently describes the effects of chemical pesticides which caused an outcry against the chemical DDT that changed law and policy and marked the beginning of the environmental movement. In *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold journaled the natural world in rural Wisconsin for a year, with comments on the need to create a "Land Ethic" in order to preserve the soil, water, plants and animals - the land.

Next are *Desert Solitaire* by Edward Abbey and *Walden* by Thoreau. In *Desert Solitaire*, for which he became an icon of environmental activists, Abbey described the beauty of the desert during his three seasons as a Utah park ranger and decried its exploitation by oil and mining businesses and tourists. Thoreau went to his cabin at Walden Pond to find simplicity, "to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived...to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life...and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion."

The final six books in my "tenner" list speak of issues of the land and place, modern man's changing of the

landscape, observations and curiosity, discoveries under every rock. Authors are Mary Austin, Charles Darwin, Marc Reisner, Michael Soule, Terry Williams and Edward O. Wilson. So what is a Master Naturalist to read? Too many choices, and I just ordered five more books! Begin with *Silent Spring* and *A Sand County Almanac*. Then read *The Future of Life* by Edward O. Wilson, the greatest naturalist of our time.

The Future of Life begins with a letter from Wilson to Thoreau, describing today's issues, "Dear Henry...The race is now on between the technoscientific forces that are destroying the living environment and those that can be harnessed to save it. We are inside a bottleneck of overpopulation and wasteful consumption. If the race is won, humanity can emerge in far better condition than when it entered, and with most of the diversity of life intact...In order to pass through the bottleneck, a **global land ethic** is urgently needed...one based on the best understanding of ourselves and the world around us that science and technology can provide...We will be wise to listen carefully to the heart, then act with rational intention and all the tools we can gather and bring to bear."

In addition, and not in the Top 10, are two much-loved children's books considered highly influential nature writing to share with small humans of your acquaintance: *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett, a story of the healing discovered through caring for a garden, and *The Lorax*, by Dr. Seuss. *The Lorax* witnesses environmental chaos brought about by destruction of "truffula trees" and becomes the one who "speaks for the trees", as we are learning to do for trees, prairies, and wetlands.

For Texas books and the Gulf Coast country, try Roy Bedichek's *Adventures with a Texas Naturalist* and *Karankaway Country*, or *Land of Bears and Honey*. *A Natural History of East Texas*, by J.D. Truett and D. Lay. Also not in the Top 10, they beautifully describe life in a country nearly gone, yet its echoes can still teach us about "our place", the Galveston Bay Area of Texas. As Aldo Leopold said, "If the individual has a warm personal understanding of land...he will see land as a community of which he is only a member, albeit now the dominant one. He will see the beauty, as well as the utility of the whole, and know the two cannot be separated. We love (and make intelligent use of) what we have learned to understand."

The entire list will be on the chapter website: please create your own Top 10!

Abbey, Edward	<i>Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness</i>
Carson, Rachel	<i>Silent Spring</i>
Leopold, Aldo	<i>A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There</i>
Thoreau, Henry David	<i>Walden: Or, Life in the Woods</i>
Austin, Mary	<i>Land of Little Rain</i>
Darwin, Charles	<i>Voyage of the Beagle</i>
Reisner, Marc	<i>Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water</i>
Soulé, M. E.	<i>Conservation Biology: An Evolutionary-Ecological Perspective</i>
Williams, Terry Tempest	<i>Refuge</i>
Wilson, E. O.	<i>The Future of Life</i>

Heritage Book Study Group by Nelda Tuthill

The GBA TMN Heritage Book Study Group will meet April 2, May 7, and June 4 to discuss *Aransas: A Naturalist's Guide* by Wayne and Martha McAlister.

A reviewer of the book says "Widely known as the wintering grounds of the world's largest wild flock of endangered whooping cranes, the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge attracts thousands of visitors to the Texas Gulf Coast each year, from casual birdwatchers to professional scientists. This naturalist's guide offers a comprehensive overview of the natural and cultural history of Aransas, taking an ecological approach to show how the plants, animals, land and sea form a living web that sustains an amazing diversity of creatures. Individual chapters discuss the land itself, the whooping

cranes and other endangered species, game animals, introduced species, mammals, birds, herptiles, fish, invertebrates, and woody and herbaceous plants. With this information, visitors to the refuge and everyone interested in the natural history of the Texas Gulf Coast will enrich their knowledge of this environmentally crucial region."

The Group meets the first Monday of the month at Texas City Prairie Preserve 10AM - 12N. Attending members earn two (2) hours advanced training hours.

For information contact Elsie Smith at 409-945-4731, Rita Smith 409-762-7763 or Nelda Tuthill 713-882-6792.

Texas Wildflowers

From the pine woods to the prairies,
From the Panhandle to the sea,
You'll find the Texas wildflowers
In marvelous carpentry.

Such magic tints of colors,
Pale pinks and dainty blues,
No artist's palette can match them
In all their radiant hues.

The Texas sun has kissed them;
To Heaven they lift their eyes;
Beauty and Peace is brings them,
And Freedom under Texas skies.

*By Gertrude Whitehouse
In Texas Flowers in Natural Colors
By Eula Whitehouse
1936, 1948 SMU Press*

Guppies from Julie

Dolphin Challenge, the regional competition for national Ocean Sciences Bowl, brought high school students from across the state to Texas A&M Galveston (TAMUG) for the competition! The National Ocean Sciences Bowl (NOSB) is a nationally recognized and highly acclaimed high school academic competition that provides a forum for students to test their knowledge of the marine sciences including biology, chemistry, geography, physics, geology, social sciences and technology.

Friday night, the students relaxed and enjoyed pizza, s'mores and crabbing in the moonlight at the TAMUG Wetland Center!

Saturday morning - competition day - found Master Naturalists sporting blue and white Dolphin Challenge t-shirts roaming the halls of TAMUG - ready for the competition to begin!

Students with the buzzers in hand and Master Naturalist officials in place - the day long ocean sciences quiz bowl began! Master Naturalists served as officials in every competition room - doing everything from scorekeeping, rules judge, science judge time keeper and runners!

The students were impressive with their knowledge and really appreciated Master Naturalists for volunteering to make the day a success!

In the end, the showdown was between Langham Creek and Sanger High Schools! After two rounds in the finals, Langham Creek High won! Dawson High School, from Pearland, won the Ralph Rayburn Sportsmanship Award!

The students gave Master Naturalists a huge cheer in the awards ceremony in thanks for all your contributions and for providing the much needed snacks during the day!

On behalf of Texas Sea Grant, I would like to thank you for your continued support of Dolphin Challenge! Thank you!

Master Naturalists once again "Making a Difference in the World!"



The Midden

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For comments on this issue or to suggest content for future issues, please contact **Nathan Veatch at 281-480-6985** or by e-mail at nveatch@swbell.net.

Midden Editorial Team

Steve Alexander	Chair
Nathan Veatch	Editor
Diane Humes	
Carolyn Miles	

The Midden Deadline For the June Issue

May 5th

If you have Advanced Training or Volunteer Opportunities, please submit information to Verva Densmore, rhdensmore@yahoo.com



Improving Lives. Improving Texas.

Texas AgriLife Extension Service programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability, or national origin. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Court of Texas cooperating.



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Brenda Hesse



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Cipriano Romero



Chris Roper



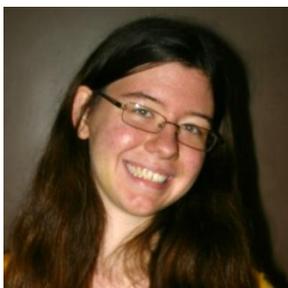
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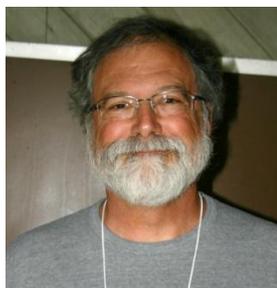
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April and May Activities

ADVANCED TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Chapter Meeting April 5th

Presenter: Diana Foss will cover Bats
6:30 Social, 7:00 Presentation, 8:00 business meeting
Walter Hall Park 1 Hour AT

Estuarine Smorgasbord - April 28th

9 am - Noon 3 Hours AT
GISP - Nature Center
In depth study of marsh ecology
Presenters-Steve Alexander
Register with Emmeline Dodd txdodd@aol.com

Ongoing

Galveston Island State Park
Beginning in mid-March. 10 am at the Welcome Center
Every Saturday- Beach Explorations
Every Sunday- Bay Explorations
Tours 1 to 1 ½ hours long. Bring water and family.

Heritage Book Study Group

First Monday of every month. Texas City Prairie Preserve
10am-Noon 2 hours AT
Contact: Elsie Smith (409)945-4731
We are currently reading: *Matagorda Island: A Naturalist Guide* by Wayne and Martha McAlister

STEWARDSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Texas Adopt a Beach - April 28th

Help clean debris off of the beach
Bolivar Peninsula, Exact time to be determined
Carpools will be available
Register with Tamberlyn Maggiolino,
tamberlyn2002@yahoo.com

Ongoing Activities:

Tuesdays -

- Sheldon Lakes State Park, Contact: Tom Solomon
crandtr@sbcglobal.net
- Texas City Prairie Preserve, Contact: Jim Duron
wishkad@yahoo.com

Wednesdays - Wetland Restoration Team, Contact:

Marissa Sipocz m-sipocz@tamu.edu

Thursdays - Horseshoe Marsh Prairie, third Thursday of

each month, 9 - Noon. Contact: Tom Solomon
crandtr@sbcglobal.net

Fridays - Prairie Friday, ABNC, 9 - Noon. Contact: Dick

Benoit RBenoitTEX@aol.com

EDUCATION-OUTREACH VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Bay & Island Adventures - Volunteers teach six in-class hands-on modules on a once a month basis in Dickinson

and Galveston Schools. Presenters and helpers are needed for eleven 4th and 5th grade classes. Contact: Sara Snell snellsw@verizon.net.

Education and Outreach Committee - Lots of work to do and we can use your help developing a speakers bureau; responding to requests for exhibit booths, fieldtrip guides and presenters, planning Camp Wild and Treasures of the Bay; and developing a library of education-outreach materials. Contact Sara Snell snellsw@verizon.net.

Partner and Associate Programs - Many organizations sponsor guided walks and education programs or need volunteers to man their nature center. Go to www.gbamasternaturalist.org click on "Volunteer Opportunities," then click on "Partners, Sponsors and Associates" for the list, then click on their website for information and contact.

BOARD AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Board Meetings - April 3rd, May 1st, May 29th
2-4 at the Extension Office

Committee Meetings

Communication - May 1st
9-Noon at Extension office
Advanced Training - April 16th, May 21st
10-Noon at Extension office
Education/Outreach - No meetings scheduled.
Stewardship - Meets quarterly
Next meeting in April

