



Black-eyed Susans by Verva Densmore

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## President's Corner by Gene Fisseler

I'm a fan of Guy Clark and his music. He was a Texas singer songwriter who grew up in Monahans and Rockport. His music falls into the genre called Americana. Good stuff. He pursued his craft in a workmanlike manner. His biography describes a regular guy who went to his office every morning and wrote, rewrote, edited, and honed his songs. Some emerged on his records. Some didn't. He had a job to do, and he did it.

I recently heard one of his songs which caused me to think of the many master naturalists I know. The song's title is "The Cape". In three verses it tells the story of a kid who climbed up on top of the garage with flour-sack cape tied around his neck. His plan was to leap off the roof and fly, I assume like Superman. As you can imagine, it didn't work. In the next verse, the kid has grown up, still trying to achieve his dreams. And the final verse describes the same fellow, now much older, as continues to try to fly. The closing lines of the song include, *"He's one of those who knows that life is just a leap of faith. Spread your arms and hold your breath and always trust your cape...He did not know he could not fly. So he did."*

Most of the master naturalists I know are attempting and achieving things through their volunteer service that is totally new in their life experience. Our educational backgrounds and careers rarely align with the work we pursue as naturalists. We're engineers, real estate professionals, doctors, educators, attorneys, energy experts, astronauts, and accountants. I imagine we're pretty good at that stuff. We're comfortable designing things, selling property, healing patients, teaching folks, interpreting the law, providing sources of power, living in microgravity, and whatever it is that accountants do.

**Next Chapter Meeting**

June 6

Light Right to Bring Back the Night  
By  
Debbie Moran  
Houston Astronomical Society & Dark Sky Advocate

At Extension Office\* and via Zoom

None of that prepares us for nursing sea turtles, monitoring water quality, restoring habitats, working with kids, identifying migratory raptors, studying Bottlenose dolphins, controlling invasive species, or investigating monarch butterflies and fireflies. These things are outside of our comfort zones. We might as well be attempting to fly by jumping off the garage roof. But we do it. And we do it pretty well. We're some of those who've learned that life is a leap of faith. Sometimes we just spread our arms, hold our breath, and remember to trust our cape. We don't care that we might not be able to do these things that we try.

We do not know we cannot fly. So, we do.



## Women in Nature: Celia Hunter by Meade LeBlanc

Celia Hunter was raised a Quaker on a farm in western Washington during the Great Depression. Her practice of actively listening to, and looking for the good in each person, friend or foe, is a Quaker trait. She would have been surprised to learn that her Quaker upbringing might later help her become one of America's greatest conservationists of Alaskan lands. In fact, she has been called Alaska's modern era John Muir.

Hunter's introduction to Alaskan wilderness came courtesy of her World War II service. After learning to fly, at the age of 21, she joined the Women Air Force Service Pilots (WASPs). Women pilots were allowed to fly planes from factories to training centers and shipping ports throughout the Lower 48, but the military did not let women deliver planes to Alaska and that piqued her curiosity. After the war, she and good friend and fellow WASP Ginny Wood decided that they would get to Fairbanks on their own "just to see what the fellows had been talking about."

The pair arranged to fly a couple of airplanes from Seattle to Fairbanks, and soon were working as flight attendants on the first ever tourist trips to the remote coastal towns of Nome and Kotzebue. Not long after, the two, along with Wood's new husband, started a simple camp in a wilderness setting that would encourage appreciation for the natural world. They applied for a Homestead Act claim on land along the western boundary of Denali National Park, and in 1952, Camp Denali was open for business. "Although the term had not yet been invented, Camp Denali was probably the first eco-tourism venture in Alaska, possibly the U.S.," Hunter once wrote. Camp Denali was sold in 1975 and now lies within Denali National Park.

As their business grew, so did their deep respect and love for the natural world. They found themselves increasingly involved in efforts to protect Alaska's wilderness areas. In 1960, Hunter and others formed the Alaska Conservation Society (ACS), Alaska's first statewide conservation organization. They pushed for the creation of the Arctic National Wildlife Range, (what would later be renamed the Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge), an area of 19.6 million acres, which President Eisenhower created shortly before leaving office.

Hunter went on to serve as Executive Secretary of ACS for the next decade. One of the first efforts was to halt the building of a massive dam on the Yukon River that would have created a lake 300 miles long, flooded numerous Native villages and individual homesites, and destroyed millions of acres of land needed by waterfowl and wildlife. Hunter and others showed that the project was not only devastating to the environment but was also a

huge waste of money because it was so costly and so much bigger than anything Alaska could use.

Project Chariot was the second battle that the ACS fought: a proposal to use a nuclear bomb to blast a harbor out of the northwest Arctic coast near the Native village of Pt. Hope. Members from the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) courted Alaska's leaders by claiming there would be benefits of experimenting with atomic technology and creating a deepwater port in the shallow seas of Northwest Alaska. However, academics at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks were not so easily convinced and demanded to know how the AEC could predict what damage a nuclear blast would inflict since they knew nothing about the existing conditions of the land and its people.

"That was how they got the first environmental investigation - the first Environmental Impact Statement investigation," Hunter said. "This was ten years before NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) became law under [President] Nixon. What they found really pulled the plug out from under the project, because it was one of the richest areas in Alaska."

"They thought that they could push everybody around, and they suddenly discovered they were up against an informed citizenry..." Hunter explained. "This is how close the U.S. and Alaska came to having their own Chernobyl catastrophe."

ACS took on many other challenges: removing bounties on wolves and fighting other dams, as well as working on community projects such as preserving open spaces in Fairbanks, building trails, and improving alternative transportation. Residents in many Alaskan communities soon started local ACS chapters to fight issues in their own backyards.

In the 1970's, Hunter's work took her to the national stage. She was offered a position on the Governing Council of the Wilderness Society, becoming the group's president and, later, executive director, making her the first woman to head a national environmental organization.

While at The Wilderness Society, she found herself involved in the biggest, and most successful, conservation battle in Alaska's history: getting Congress to pass the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. It created 10 new national parks and expanded three others, for a total of 43.6 million acres in newly protected parkland. The act doubled the size of the national refuge system, adding 53.7 million acres in nine new refuges and six existing ones. The 56 million acres

of new wilderness in Alaska tripled the amount of land in the country now getting the highest level of protection.



Conservation efforts did not end here. Next Hunter started a new foundation that would focus on fundraising and promote networking among Alaska conservation groups. The Alaska Conservation Foundation started small, but by 2004, it had raised more than \$7 million. Along the way, it has supported a wide range of groups including Alaskans for Responsible Mining, the Renewable Energy Alaska Project, Alaska Community Action on Toxics, the Alaska Marine Conservation Council, the Alaska Conservation Alliance, and Alaska Conservation Voters.

Hunter served on the Alaska Conservation Foundation Board of Trustees for over 18 years. Her leadership and inspiration were also highly valued by other groups. She served on numerous other boards, including the Alaska Natural History Association, The Nature Conservancy, and Trustees for Alaska.

In 1991, Hunter was conferred the highest award by the Sierra Club, The John Muir Award, for a lifetime of dedicated conservation work, a distinguished record of

achievement in national or international conservation causes.

In 1998, Hunter was presented the highest award by the Wilderness Society, The Robert Marshall Award, for her long-term service to and notable influence upon conservation and the fostering of an American land ethic.

In 2001, The Alaska Conservation Foundation presented Hunter and Wood with the first ever Lifetime Achievement Award, the cornerstone of the Alaska Conservation Hall of Fame. The ACF has an endowment fund named for Celia M. Hunter that offers scholarships to young people interested in an environmental career.

Hunter never stopped exploring the place she loved either. She continued to fly planes over the Alaskan bush. She hiked, kayaked, camped, and marveled at the immense natural beauty around Camp Denali. She argued tirelessly for preservation of natural spaces, and generously gave speeches and radio interviews praising fellow conservationists.

On December 1, 2001, Hunter spent the day cross-country skiing near her home in Fairbanks before spending the evening writing letters and sending faxes to Congress in support of conservation causes. That night, Hunter died peacefully in her sleep.

Wood, who outlived her close friend by a decade, remarked after Hunter's passing: "At 82, she had slowed down but not in her zest for life, or involvement in issues. What a loss. What a graceful exit of a well-lived and long life."

Just days before she died, she spoke in a radio interview about what being a conservationist meant; that it required real work and sacrifice to protect the places we love. "I want to leave with you the idea that change is possible," Hunter said. "But you're going to have to put your energy into it."

## Botany: Plants Are Precious by Mike Petitt

I don't know much botany, but I know a lot more than I did six years ago when I went through the GBAC training class. At that time, I was introduced to Emmeline Dodd's Botany: Plants Are Precious program. I am not going to pretend to provide a recapitulation of this program here. Suffice it to say, it was fun then gaining some appreciation of botanical structure, and it was fun recently reviewing this knowledge and putting it to work with assessment of botanical samples. And of course, we enjoy gathering with our fellow chapter members in an intellectual exercise. This was one of our first post-COVID in-person ATs. It is easy to forget how engaging

it is to gather with friends and pursue a complex topic with an excellent presenter.

By the time you are reading this we will have had another in-person botanical foray, this time on taxonomy presented by Emmeline Dodd and Cindy Howard. This will no doubt be another special afternoon. Keep an eye out for future invitations to in-person events that you would like to attend.

I appreciate the efficiency of webinars, but there is no substitute for gathering for an in-person event

## Fuzzy Caterpillars by Rebekah Gano

“Hairy is scary” I was told soon after I arrived in Texas and visited various nature centers. Hairy vines often mean poison ivy, and hairy caterpillars could pack a nasty sting. Those are helpful tips, but the more time I spent in nature, the more I wondered: when is hairy actually scary? So many fuzzy caterpillars are not dangerous, while others might just cause a mild reaction to those with sensitive skin. Which ones should a naturalist really watch out for, and which ones could be held or picked off with bare hands?

First of all, only a small percentage of caterpillars are dangerous. Any caterpillar could potentially crawl across a human without stinging. The hollow, venom-containing setae along the backs and sides of even the most dangerous larvae have to be activated via contact to release the toxin. In some caterpillars, it is the setae (hairs) themselves that embed into skin and cause itching. Other caterpillars look like they have barbs or spikes but are actually harmless.

Here is an overview of a few of the most common hairy caterpillars in our region.

**Considered Most Dangerous:** Puss moth or Flannel moth (Asp) caterpillars - *Megalopyge opercularis* or *Megalopyge crispata*



Photo by M. Merchant, Texas A&M University

These densely hairy caterpillars are teardrop shaped and usually brownish. Flannel moth caterpillars prefer woody plants and are most common in the fall. After a sting, hairs should be removed with tape or scraped off with a card. The venom can cause burning, itching, blisters, and a red spot. Sensitive individuals could have more adverse reactions.

**Dangerous:** Tussock moth caterpillars - Lymantriidae family



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Most tussock moths have tufts on their abdomens that stick out farther than the other hairs. They also have disk-shaped yellow, orange, red, or white defensive glands on their middle abdomen segments. The bright colors serve as a warning: do not touch! This is the only North American caterpillar known to cause rare instances of human death; though, it normally does not cause as much of a reaction as the asp. Tussock moth caterpillars are diurnal feeders and eat a variety of foods, so they are commonly seen.

**Mostly Harmless:** Salt marsh caterpillars - *Estigmene acrea*



Photo courtesy of butterflysandmoths.org

Salt marsh caterpillars are among the most commonly seen species in the Gulf coast region. They vary in color, from whitish yellow to black. Some are striped or spotted, but they can be distinguished by bumps on their bodies that hold setae (hairs) in groups. They are mostly soft instead of bristly. These caterpillars eat a great variety of plants and may be best known for their ability to crawl quickly along the ground. They pupate in leaf litter. Thankfully, these common crawlers do not have a painful sting. Their hairs cause an itchy allergic reaction to very few people.

**Mostly Harmless:** Yellow bear caterpillars (Virginian tiger moth) - *Spilosoma virginica*



Photo courtesy of bugguide.net

These caterpillars also vary greatly in color, and they darken as they age. They have long, soft hairs, some of which stand out far beyond the main hairs along the body. They look very similar to salt marsh caterpillars but with longer hairs in some places. Like salt marsh caterpillars, yellow bears eat a variety of plants, do not have a venomous sting, and do not usually cause an allergic reaction.

**Harmless:** Forest tent caterpillars - *Malacosoma disstria*



These furry caterpillars usually reside in masses on the bark of trees during the day and feed at night. They are easily identified by their blue color, along with white footprint-like spots down their back.

**Poisonous not Venomous - Generally Harmless:** Gulf fritillary, Zebra, Question mark, Mourning cloak and related caterpillars - Brushfoots - Nymphalidae



Photo by Mary Keim, Florida Wildflower Foundation

Many of these caterpillars eat toxic plants, so they are poisonous if eaten. Their often-bright colors warn animals not to taste. The flexible spines are not true bristles and do not contain venom. They are safe to handle, except in cases of extremely sensitive skin.

**Other Dangerous Caterpillars:** If you want to learn more about potentially dangerous caterpillars, research the Giant leopard moth and many other tiger moth caterpillars. Saddleback, slug, imperial moth, and cecropia moth caterpillars also potentially could be harmful.

Many caterpillars look alike, especially to the untrained eye, so the saying that “hairy is scary” is generally good advice. Given that caterpillars often change color and density of setae between instars (See how the salt marsh caterpillar changes each time it sheds its skin), it is even more challenging to identify some species. However, knowing the main venomous species and a few of the harmless ones as well makes working outside in caterpillar-filled areas less confusing.

***The Midden Deadline***  
for the next issue

**June 24**



## Sylvan Beach Spring Hawk Watch 2024 by Lynn Wright

The 29<sup>th</sup> season of the Sylvan Beach Spring Hawk Watch ended on April 30. From March 1 to April 30, 75 volunteers watched the skies for migrating raptors, watching in groups for over 173 hours.

Disappointingly, this year's total count for migrating raptors - 7,009 - was below average. Most of those birds were Broad-winged Hawks (6,426). The highest counts were recorded on March 26 (3,189), April 3 (1,190), and April 11 (915) - all days with winds out of the northwest. Winds the rest of April were unfavorable (out of the southeast and south) so raptors were pushed more towards central Texas than the coast and Sylvan Beach.

This season watchers recorded more Sharp-shinned Hawks (46) than in the recent past and more than average Swallow-tailed Kites (24). In contrast, counters recorded few Mississippi Kites (46), because of unfavorable winds and rain, although they normally arrive in the Galveston Bay area in large numbers the last week in April. Black Vultures (134), Turkey Vultures (150), Cooper's Hawks (52) and Swainson's Hawks (52) counts were consistent with past years' numbers.

Daily counts are entered into HawkCount, the Hawk Migration Association of North America's Raptor Migration Database. You can view Sylvan Beach Hawk Watch data at [www.hawkcount.org](http://www.hawkcount.org).

Hawk watchers see a lot of fun sights, which this year included Wood Storks, local Swainson's Hawks doing a courtship cartwheel, large flocks of Anhinga (some with Broad-winged Hawks in the same kettle), local raptors like Red-shouldered Hawks, Crested Caracaras, and Bald Eagles, a parking lot Killdeer and bluebird family in plain view.



Thank you hawk watchers for watching the skies for raptors! We are already looking forward to next year!

## Rescue to Release – A Milkweed Story by Linda Kuhn

In spring of 2022, members of the Clear Lake Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT) identified two large fields of approximately 4+ acres on both sides of Shoreacres Blvd and Hwy 146 containing abundant and diverse nectar producing flowers. This site, owned by the Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT) looked like a possible "waystation" within the Gulf Coast Migratory Pathway for monarch butterflies, although its mowing schedule seemed too frequent.

TXDOT granted NPSOT members permission to access the property and assess the plant community, which they did by conducting a "bio-blitz" using iNaturalist (iNat). Volunteers entered nearly 1500 observations into the iNat app which were then reviewed and validated by local experts. This work revealed that the site contained thousands of green milkweed (*Asclepias viridis*) plants, many of which were large plants estimated to be at least 10 years old!

The site was in danger, however, because TXDOT planned to excavate seventy-five percent of it for stormwater detention under an existing US Army Corp of

Engineers (USACOE) permit associated with the Hwy 146 expansion project. TXDOT held property to be used for highways and highway expansion - not for conservation. All those thousands of milkweed plants, favored by endangered monarch butterflies, would be destroyed! The team scrambled to develop a rescue plan.

Our research told us that green milkweed was almost impossible to transplant without cutting the plant's large below-ground tuber root. Previous rescuers reported that the excavation process was so traumatic to the plants that they had not survived and would likely not survive. These plants were going to die if we did nothing. With nothing to lose, we planned the first attempt to collect several plants to determine whether we could dig them up without damaging the tuber root and if they would survive transplanting.

With TxDOT's permission, we slowly and methodically removed five large milkweed plants, photo documenting and labeling each plant - from this we developed our extraction/rescue protocol. To our great surprise - all the

initial five survived excavation and transplanting with no damage to the tuber. Thus, we had a methodology that would work, but there were soooo many plants to rescue.



Photo by Linda Kuhn

We knew we could not get them all, so we set a goal to get TXDOT to help us save one hundred intact healthy plants. Thankfully, TXDOT agreed to remove the plants of our choice, re-pot and transport them to a holding area of our choice. If they survived, these plants would be replanted in areas with public access suitable for milkweed. We agreed to share our extraction protocol, flag the plants to be removed and be on site to help the TXDOT contractor. In the meantime, TXDOT agreed to allow us on the site to remove whatever plants we could on our own.

The many challenges involved in achieving maximum success included, extremely hard ground that the sharpest of shovels could not cut, large and heavy root balls, undesirable weeds and grasses accompanying the

root ball, the hard and slow work during the summer heat of 2023, and very short timeline! We were going to have to change our protocol and get additional help excavating the plants.

We sent the call out for help, and we got it from an amazing crew of Texas Master Naturalists who agreed to help dig the plants. Within a few hours they had extracted over one hundred plants. Armand Bayou Nature Center (ABNC) agreed to hold and care for the plants until we determined if they would survive and if they could be transplanted.

When the plants started arriving at ABNC it became very clear the enormous root balls had to go, so we altered the protocol to soak the plants and remove all the associated soil - effectively creating a bare-root transplant. We then repotted the bare tuber in fresh potting soil at ABNC. Placed in a shady area and watered regularly, all survived.

The team then kicked into "rinse and repeat" mode... we all watched for rain at the site. If there was rain, we ran out the next morning and began digging for plants again. One morning the tractors began grading the first quadrant, scraping the vegetation and top few inches of soil away - our hearts sank with the news .... our rescue mission seemed to be over.

However, a few weeks later, we decided to go out to the site and see what it looked like. It was amazing, with small leaves of green milkweed everywhere - like a gold mine. We dug and dug, then we dug some more.... We dug until we ended up with 500+ green milkweed plants!

To date this project has provided 200+ green milkweed to the Houston Buffalo Bayou Monarch project, 30 plants to Moody Gardens, which agreed to replace all of its tropical milkweed with green and other native milkweed species, plus plants to Galveston Island State Park. We hope to share the story of our success and methodology to inspire other people interested in rescuing milkweed. It can be done, and the monarch butterfly cannot be saved unless we protect and save its host plant.

## Quintessential Southern Beauty by Diane Humes

Southern magnolia, (*Magnolia grandiflora*), belongs to the Magnolia family - Magnoliaceae - which has an ancient lineage with fossils and other evidence suggesting an origin 130 million years ago - near the base of the evolution of flowering plants - angiosperms. Magnolia family floral characteristics suggest similarities with both gymnosperms and other primitive angiosperms. Members of this group occur throughout the world; ranges have contracted and/or expanded due to major

geologic events such as ice ages, continental drift, and mountain formation.

Using all current evidence and analysis, taxonomists believe that the family consists of 219 species, currently divided into two genera - *Magnolia*, which has 217 species and *Liriodendron* (tulip trees) which has two species. *Magnolia* species are beetle pollinated with

seeds dispersed by birds; *Liriodendron* species are bee-pollinated with seeds wind-dispersed.

Taxonomists of the Angiosperm Phylogeny Group (APG) meet regularly and continue to use every tool to decipher the story of plant life on Earth. With geological time frames, large datasets and, conversely, large data gaps, this is a daunting task. APG IV completed its last revision in 2016, but the work continues, so stay tuned for revised details. In the meantime, let's narrow the focus to the Gulf Coast and our corner of Texas.

Southern magnolia is the state tree of Louisiana and Mississippi and is a majestic tree species of the southern Gulf Coast, growing from South Carolina south to mid-Florida and west to East Texas. Native to bottomlands and moist wooded areas, in southeast Texas it usually grows in well-drained soil on stream banks or borders of river swamps, as an understory tree. It is most associated with sweetgums, beeches, yellow poplars, southern red oaks, white oaks, mockernut and pignut hickories.

This tree is large, pyramidal in shape and evergreen, growing up to 80 feet or more in height with a trunk up to 4 feet in diameter. Its spreading branches often reach the ground in open settings. The large leathery green leaves are simple and alternate, six to eight inches long and two to three inches wide, elliptical or oval in shape, with prominent midribs. Leaves are glossy on the upper surface, rusty-colored and pubescent on the underside; they remain on the tree for about two years, when they turn brown and dehisce (botany-speak for "fall off").



Springtime shows off the tree's true glory when the huge - six to eight inch across - pure white, showy and fragrant cup-shaped flowers open. Flowers are 'perfect', meaning contain both male and female parts. Gardeners throughout the South prize the flowers, but many consider the leaves "messy". When the tree drops its old leaves, it is creating its own mulch, so why not take advantage of it and sweep them back under the branches?

Flowers bloom from spring into summer; in the fall cone-shaped upright pods mature carrying many bright red fleshy seeds which may be propagated to grow more plants, if not eaten by the bird multitudes - wild turkeys, cedar waxwings, mockingbirds, orioles, jays, northern cardinals, titmice, thrushes, warblers, finches thrashers, chickadees, grosbeaks, crows, sparrows, nuthatches, vireos, woodpeckers and wrens - or mammals - squirrels, opossums and rabbits - that enjoy them.

In fact, this is a great tree for wildlife; many species shelter within its leaves and branches. The pair of Eastern screech owls is back in our nest box, and it has taken us over a year to realize that the male has probably been a permanent resident of the Southern magnolia this whole time. He is perfectly camouflaged under the leaves and his rusty plumage and size makes him blend into the scenery like a pile of old brown leaves.



Horticulturalists were quick to note the landscape value of this tree and have hybridized and crossed it for decades, creating a bounty of varieties for purchase, such as: 'Bracken's Brown Beauty,' 'Alta,' 'Glen St. Mary,' 'Majestic Beauty,' 'Timeless Beauty,' 'Victoria,' 'Little Gem' (a dwarf variety), 'DD Blanchard', 'Teddy Bear', 'Kay Parris', 'Claudia Wannamaker', 'Jane', 'Ann', 'Edith Bogue', 'Cairo', 'Charles Dickens', 'Gloriosa', 'Hasse', 'Lanceolata', 'Praecox Fastigiata', 'Samuel Sommer' and 'Victoria'. None of these looks quite like the Southern magnolia; they are usually shorter, have different color blooms and bloom times, smaller leaves - just different. As landscape trees they are usually pruned up like "lollipops".

All magnolias can be pruned, but only during the growing season, as they do not heal well when dormant. I was given a true Southern magnolia by a friend and planted it in my yard. It is the only non-horticultural variety magnolia in my area and the only one that has been allowed to grow naturally. It is also about the only tree still alive after our freezes; I truly believe that improper pruning stressed the other varieties so much they could



not survive. I give the same answer to each guy in a truck who comes by and wants to trim up my trees: "NO".

If you want to see the superb beauty of a Southern magnolia in spring, consider walking the grounds of Bayou Bend, Ima Hogg's home on Memorial Drive in Houston, now a museum open to the public. I took inspiration from Miss Ima and told my magnolia to grow up to be just like hers.

Interestingly, it is possible that the trees at Bayou Bend originated along Armand Bayou. In his account *Catching*

*the Tide on Old Middle Bayou*, Jean West describes the Martyn Farm - now Armand Bayou Nature Center - and the old magnolia tree growing near the bayou. The tree was "at least 4 feet through the trunk and 50 feet tall." The family collected the seeds and propagated and sold the plants in Houston. Said Jean West, "that old tree in the field has family all over River Oaks, Shady Acres and in the Heights and Spring Branch."

Perhaps my tree is related, also!

## Happy Spring, Master Naturalists! by Brandi Keller

Normally, when spring arrives, I find myself discussing topics like planting annuals, proper mulching techniques, and identifying lawn weeds. However, true to the essence of spring which symbolizes renewal, I am starting afresh closer to the water, coastal wildlife, and the issues that promote a healthy and robust coastline.

I am thrilled to be dual appointed as the Coastal & Marine Resources Agent here in Galveston County between Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and Texas Sea Grant. My role involves assessing the county's priorities and developing tailored programs to address them. Over the next few months, I'll be meeting with stakeholders throughout the area to familiarize myself with these priorities... and some of those meetings will be with you, the volunteers.

I have spent the last seven years with the AgriLife Extension - Harris County office as the Residential Horticulture Agent and Master Gardener Program Coordinator. In addition to creating and being part of many programs, my oversight of the Master Gardener program has provided me with countless memories with a fantastic group of volunteers. It is only fitting that more experiences and memories await with yet another great group that is the Galveston Bay Area Master Naturalists.

Originally from Ohio, I made my way to Texas via Wales, UK and Virginia Beach while serving in the United States Navy. Afterward, I returned to Ohio before eventually settling in the Houston area. Throughout my travels, I have always kept a pulse on our coastlines, either as a landscape designer, a volunteer, a birder, or a curious explorer of the outdoors.

Years before moving to the state, my husband and I would align our visits to his parents with FeatherFest and spring migration. It's where I spotted my first painted bunting! However, I was no newbie to warblers, having spent a few springs at the Biggest Week in American Birding at Magee Marsh along Lake Erie in Ohio, located just north of my hometown.

When gifted with enough time, I love to incorporate nature and art. One of my last committed horticulture programs was Making Art from the Garden for the Texas Master Gardener State Conference in April. I will, no doubt, be recalibrating it to naturalist-related projects in the future.



While my interests include birds, art, sea turtles (I used to visit NOAA when it had the public program), invertebrates, marine mammals, seafood, and beachcombing - I'm mindful that alongside the positives, there are areas that require improvement. This improvement stems from fostering public awareness of our coastal environment, actively engaging with local stakeholders, and delivering research-based educational programs to our communities.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service's mission is to provide quality, relevant outreach and continuing education programs and services to the people of Texas. Texas Sea Grant's mission is to improve the understanding, wise use, and stewardship of coastal and

marine resources, all the things Master Naturalists have been supporting.

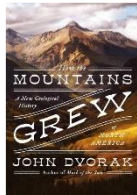
As the Galveston County Extension agent, my role is to assist you as an advisor in your efforts to bolster our local county outreach. Please don't hesitate to inform me about interesting discoveries you find (on the prairies, wetlands, and on the beach), meaningful interactions with the community, or important requests where I could help.

Check out and spread the word of my new [Galveston County Coastal & Marine Resources Facebook page](#). In addition, I'll pass along a link to my newsletter as soon as it is developed.

I want to express my sincere gratitude for your dedication to our community. Your volunteerism embodies the spirit of service that makes Galveston County thrive. I am truly excited to work with you and look forward to the positive impact we will make together. Thank you for all you do!

## Heritage Book Study by Cheryl Barajas

Summer is here and what better time to take a good book with you on vacation! Our summer read (June, July and August) is *How the Mountains Grew - A New Geological History of North America*.



The author, John Dvorak received his PhD in planetary geophysics in 1979 from the California Institute of Technology. He then went on to work for the U. S. Geological Survey on earthquakes and volcanoes. Currently, he operates one of the large telescopes at the summit of Mauna Kea in Hawaii.

If you are looking for a new adventure, this book will give you many new geological wonders to visit. The author starts with Mount Rushmore and the Black Hills of South Dakota. Why are the Black Hills in the middle of the continent, away from all the other mountain ranges. Why

is it one of the youngest mountain ranges in North America?

Or you can travel to Morton, Minnesota where there is a low rocky knoll which happens to be the oldest rock in the United States. This rock is called the Morton Gneiss and has beautiful swirls of pinks and blacks.

These are only a couple of the geological wonders in the U.S. and Canada. For anyone interested in learning more about how our beautiful mountain ranges formed and why some are changing, check out this book.

Please join us on June 10<sup>th</sup>, July 8<sup>th</sup> and August 5<sup>th</sup> at 1pm via Zoom. If you would like to be added to the Book Study Group, please email me at [cherylbarajas9@gmail.com](mailto:cherylbarajas9@gmail.com). We would love to see you there!

## Plastic-Free July by Emily Morris

As Texas Master Naturalists, reducing our plastic waste should be a daily concern, but since 2011, the month of July has been set aside for plastic-waste awareness worldwide. During "Plastic Free July," the Plastic Free Foundation encourages participants worldwide to say "No" to single-use plastic (SUP). The [plasticfreejuly.org](http://plasticfreejuly.org) website provides a 1+-minute video about how to avoid SUPs, a link to sign up for the Plastic Free July (PFJ) challenge, and a Pesky Plastics Quiz that collects data about participants' **current** waste habits. A follow-up quiz is promised for August to see how participant habits changed because of the PFJ challenge.



Locally, this special emphasis on plastic waste gives Texas Master Naturalists an opportunity to model and explain the importance of reducing the production and use of single-use plastics in our community. Won't you join in this challenge? Click the link above or scan the QR code with your smartphone camera to learn more.



## June and July Activities

### ADVANCED TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

**Chapter Meeting** - June 6; Light Right to Bring Back the Night  
Presenter: Debbie Moran; Houston Astronomical Society & Dark Sky Advocate  
6pm Social, 6:30pm Meeting, 7pm Speaker  
At Extension Office\* and via Zoom; 1 hour AT

#### Texas Dragon Flies

Tuesday, June 18 at 2pm via Zoom  
Presenter: Wizzie Brown

#### Itchy Business

Wednesday, July 10 at 6pm via Zoom  
Presenter: Amy Martin

#### Owls

Wednesday, July 17 at 6pm via Zoom  
Presenter: Martin Hagne

#### Ongoing

##### Heritage Book Study Group

First Monday of every month via Zoom; 2 hours AT  
Contact: Cheryl Barajas [cherylbarajas9@gmail.com](mailto:cherylbarajas9@gmail.com)  
See Pg. 10 for meeting dates and books.

### STEWARDSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

For a complete list of stewardship activities, see our chapter website, <https://txmn.org/gbmn/what-we-do/>.

### EDUCATION - OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES

For a complete list of education - outreach activities see our chapter website, <https://txmn.org/gbmn/what-we-do/>.

**Partner and Associate Programs** - Many organizations sponsor guided walks and education programs or need volunteers to staff their nature center. Go to <http://txmn.org/gbmn/partners/> for the list, then click on the link to the organization's website.

### CHAPTER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

**Calendar** - <https://txmn.org/gbmn/events/month/> Includes meetings, AT and volunteer activities

**Board** - <https://txmn.org/gbmn/board-of-directors/>  
Contact information for the Board of Directors. **Board Meetings** - usually first Tuesday of each month (via Zoom), verify on the calendar

**Committees** - <https://txmn.org/gbmn/board-of-directors/>  
Contact information for the Committee Chairs

**Volunteer Service** - <https://txmn.org/gbmn/volunteer-service/> Volunteer Opportunities

**Advanced Training** - <https://txmn.org/gbmn/advanced-training/>

**Midden Archives** - <https://txmn.org/gbmn/> Go to The Midden on the top menu.

**Facebook** - <https://www.facebook.com/gbactmn>



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### *The Midden*

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