

The Midden

Armand Bayou by Robbie Lowe

Galveston Bay Area Chapter - Texas Master Naturalists

August 2024

Table of Contents

Women in Nature: Anna Comstock	2
Invasive spotlight: Chinese Privet	3
Dog Days of Summer Reading List	4
Tom Solomon Earns 30,000 Hours	6
Camp Wild 2024	6
Jim Duron Earns 30,000 Hours	7
Heritage Book Study	7
Aug/Sept Activities	8

President's Corner by Gene Fisseler

In May, I met the author of one the best books I've read in recent years, Jack Davis' book, *The Gulf: The Making of An American Sea* published in 2017. I picked up a copy later, having heard what a terrific read it is. And it was. Terrific, that is. Check it out.

I showed up to the event way early. About an hour. The author arrived a full half hour early. His handlers had been with him since lunch, so a new face, even mine, was welcome. So, we got to visit a bit.

Davis is a professor of history and sustainability studies at the University of Florida. I knew that before I met him. At least I'd read those words. But upon meeting and talking with him, it was immediately obvious that this guy was easy going, accessible, and immediately likable. When I was in college, just before electricity, I had exactly two profs like Davis - instructors with whom I enjoyed an occasional beer while discussing the finer points of the Laplace Transform or the intricacies of a proper titration.

We quickly established that we have much in common. Davis and I are just a few months apart in age, both products of medium-sized southern cities. He and I grew up fairly independently as boys did in the '50s and '60s. In the summertime, we were up at dawn, out of the house by 8 am, fed lunch courtesy of some friend's mom, and home again just in time for dinner. Davis writes Pulitzer Prize-winning books. I read them.

More importantly, our perspectives on conservation issues are similar. As kids, we never saw a bald eagle in the wild or a brown pelican at the shore. American alligators were almost gone due to overhunting, poaching, and habitat loss. Whooping cranes numbered fewer than 50 when we were in grade school. Our exposure to nature was through National Geographic Magazine or spending time at a nearby fishing spot.

Importantly, our views on the successes of the US EPA and the Endangered Species Act compare favorably. Because of them, we agreed, all the above-mentioned birds and animals have made impressive comebacks along with river otters and gray wolves. And we acknowledged the efforts of thousands of non-profits and private citizens that were important to these environmental recoveries over the past five decades.

The point of all this is that we should recognize that, today in Galveston County, master naturalists also contribute to this impressive record. As citizen scientists, our work adds to the bank of knowledge supporting future environmental successes. We each have our part to do and, while it may seem small or insignificant, it is not. The things we do every day - each sea turtle we return to the Gulf, all the bat voices we record, every prairie plant or wetland plant we nurture, and the numerous kids we inspire - together these move the ball forward, sometimes a little or maybe a lot. And that's something of which we can be proud. So, how about you all give yourselves a pat on the back!

Next Chapter Meeting

August 1

Wild Houston - Exploring a
World-Class Biodiversity
Hotspot

By

Suzanne Simpson
Author & Certified Ecologist
with Ecological Society of
America

At Extension Office*
and via Zoom

Women in Nature: Anna Botsford Comstock by Meade LaBlanc

Late in the 1890s, young people were migrating to urban areas in search of employment. Rural agricultural communities in New York were concerned about these changes and the impact it would have on farming. The Nature Study Movement grew out of the idea that if people were educated about natural sciences, they would be interested in staying in rural areas. Cornell's College of Agriculture was granted funding to develop a pilot program, and Anna Comstock's career as a nature educator began.

Her program took students and other teachers out of the classroom and into nature, with hands-on learning and first-hand observations. Although many parents and teachers objected to the idea of teaching about the outdoors, arguing that it was frivolous, unproductive, and a waste of time, the initiative soon grew into a nationwide teacher-education program administered by Cornell University. Anna Comstock developed study guides and instructional booklets and helped train teachers.

She described the goal of nature study as something more than learning observation, but also developing an understanding of one's place in the larger universe: "Nature-study is, despite all discussions and perversions, a study of nature; it consists of simple, truthful observations that may, like beads on a string, finally be threaded upon the understanding and thus held together as a logical and harmonious whole. Therefore, the object of the nature-study teacher should be to cultivate in the children powers of accurate observation and to build up within them understanding."

Anna was born in a log house in Otto, New York, in 1854. She was the only child in a family that had fruit orchards, grew their own vegetables, and raised cattle, pigs, sheep, and poultry. Anna's Quaker mother spent time teaching her about the natural world, including birds, wildflowers, insects and trees.

After high school, Anna enrolled in Cornell, where she studied botany and zoology. She met her husband, John Henry Comstock, when she took the entomology class he was teaching. After they married in 1878, she dropped out of Cornell, and began illustrating his lectures and publications. At first, she just looked at the insects under a microscope and drew what she saw. Then she studied wood engraving at Cooper Union in New York and made hundreds of engravings for John's *Manual for the Study of Insects*. Some of her engravings were also exhibited and won prizes.

Anna returned to Cornell and completed her degree in natural science. She became the first female professor at Cornell but was demoted to lecturer due to opposition

from trustees over the appointment of a woman. However, she was eventually promoted to assistant professor, and later to full professor of natural science.

In the early 1900s, Anna and John started the Comstock Publishing Company, which had as its motto: "Nature through Books." They co-wrote several books: *Insect Life* (1897), and *How to Know the Butterflies* (1904) and she wrote and illustrated several on her own: *Ways of the Six-Footed* (1903), *How to Keep Bees* (1905), *The Pet Book* (1914), and *Trees at Leisure* (1916).



Her best-known book was a collection of her study guides and booklets, collected and published as *The Handbook of Nature Study* in 1911. The book, which runs over 900 pages, has been reprinted over twenty times and became a standard for use in the classroom for decades. Throughout her book, Anna emphasized the rewards of direct observation of the natural world, writing, "I want to cultivate the child's imagination, love of the beautiful, and sense of companionship with life out-of-doors."

Her writing style, descriptive and lighthearted, may explain the lasting popularity of her handbook. Here is an

example: "Whoever first said 'blind as a bat' surely never looked a bat in the face, or else he would not have said it. The deep-set observant eyes are quite in keeping with the alert attitude of the erect, pointed ears; while the pug nose and the pink wide-open bag of a mouth set with tiny, sharp teeth, give this anomalous little animal a deliciously impish look."

Modern field guides and nature journaling can draw a direct line back to Anna's work. The original 900-page tome has been divided up into 8 separate volumes and color photos have been added, making them easier to take into the field and more useful for study.

Perhaps the quote from her landmark book that is most applicable to Texas Master Naturalists is: "Out-of-door life takes the child afield and keeps him in the open air, which not only helps him physically and occupies his mind with sane subjects but keeps him out of mischief. It is not only during childhood that this is true, for love of nature counts much for sanity in later life."

Anna continued teaching at Cornell until 1922, and edited *Nature-Study Review* from 1917 to 1923. She collected a long list of accolades both during her life and posthumously. In 1888 she was one of the first four women admitted to Sigma Xi, a national honor society for the sciences. She was inducted into the National Wildlife Federation Conservation Hall of Fame, included on the League of Women Voters' 1923 list of America's dozen most outstanding women, and earned an honorary doctorate from Hobart College.

Anna was even memorialized in a Girl Scout Song, sung at Camp Comstock, located along Cayuga Lake in New York:

"Anna Botsford Comstock to thy name we sing, as we sit 'round the campfire each night, and gladly, in chorus, our voices to sing as o'er head the heavens shine bright. And the work that you've done, we will still carry on, with hearts that are steady and true. 'Neath the hills and the trees by the lake that you loved, we will always remember you!"

Invasive Spotlight: Chinese Privet by Madeleine K. Barnes

Have you walked among the trees in our local fields, parks and natural areas and noticed a spring-blooming shrub with white fragrant flowers in the understory? The spotlight this time is on a terrestrial invasive plant species, the Chinese privet (*Ligustrum sinense*).



Chinese privet is a perennial evergreen shrub also commonly called small leaf privet or Chinese ligustrum. Growing near streams, fencerows, and forests, Chinese privet has spreading branches with young twigs covered with very small, fine hairs which you can spot with a hand lens. The leaves are opposite, with short petioles, and the blades can be 2 inches long, ovate to elliptic. They are usually rounded at the tip, may have a small notch, and taper to the base and have smooth margins. These shrubs produce white flowers that can be strongly

fragrant, about 3/8 inch wide in narrow clusters up to 4 inches long on branchlets, and these blooms appear normally from March to May. Their fruit is small, berrylike, looking bluish black, 1/4 inch in length to 3/16 inch in width, hanging in clusters and can last well into winter unless eaten.

Chinese privet is an aggressive and problematic invasive species, as it forms dense thickets in bottomland forests, along fencerows, in fields and right-of-ways. Growing in both sun and shade and tolerating both wet and dry conditions ensures its survival, while displacing and outcompeting native species. It does not do well in standing water for long periods. Chinese privet colonizes through root sprouts, increasing its density, and is spread widely by birds and other animals that feed on the fruits and pass the seeds in different locations. A single mature plant can produce thousands of viable seeds. No wonder this species is so successful as an invasive!

As their common name suggests, these plants are native to China and were introduced into the US in the 1850's as an attractive ornamental. Unfortunately, they escaped cultivation and are currently found in 23 states, mainly in the South. While they are very invasive, Chinese privets do provide food for birds, bees, and habitat for spiders and other wildlife.

Current management and removal methods recommend herbicide, either foliar spray for small plants or cutting down of larger plants and application of a penetrant to

the stump. A more natural method is tree-girdling which has been effective even for plants bearing fruit, although very labor intensive. Best of all is to avoid planting or to remove them as soon as you identify them. If small, they can be manually pulled or dug up. Be sure to remove all the roots or privets will regrow. If the plants are fruit bearing, then it is necessary to remove the clusters of fruit and bag and dispose of them in the dumpster or waste bins. In rural areas burning may be an available option to destroy the seeds and the plants. Without their fruits, the plants can also be eaten by sheep and goats.

Here are a few suggestions for native alternatives to the Chinese privet for your garden or natural area: wax

myrtle (*Morella cerifera*), yaupon (*Ilex vomitoria*), Carolina laurelcherry (*Prunus caroliniana*), evergreen sumac (*Rhus virens*), Texas barometer bush (*Leucophyllum frutescens*), and wild crapemyrtle (*Malpighia glabra*).

I hope this has given you a better understanding of one of the invasive species impacting our natural resources. It certainly has made me more aware of how dominant they are in the landscape.

A quote from TPWD - "Proud Texans Plant Texas Natives."

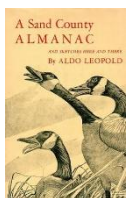
Dog Days of Summer Reading List by Diane Humes

*Priam saw him first, with his old man's eyes,
A single point of light on Troy's dusty plain.
Sirius rises late in the dark, liquid sky
On summer nights, star of stars,
Orion's Dog they call it, brightest
Of all, but an evil portent, bringing heat
And fevers to suffering humanity.
Achilles' bronze gleamed like this as he ran.* Homer, Iliad.

Sirius, the Dog Star, brightest star in the night sky, glitters above us in the southern sky in winter, below and to the left of Orion. But, as noted by Homer, the ancient astronomers watched for its rising at dawn in late summer and believed it a portent of sudden thunderstorms, unbearable heat, drought, fever, mad dogs and bad luck - the dog days of summer.

Some still call it that! And here we are, preparing to ride out the hottest days of the year, not to mention the stormiest. So, what would a master naturalist do? Should we escape with a good book and wait it out? What might we choose?

You must get up early to see Sirius in the morning and Aldo Leopold (1887 - 1948), founder of wildlife ecology and restoration ecology, was an early riser. Leopold had purchased a run-down old farm along the Wisconsin River where he and his family practiced restoring the land and enjoyed learning about the natural world surrounding them. Rising each day well before his family, Leopold took his coffee cup, notebook and pen to sit outside The Shack, as they dubbed their residence, the former chicken coop, to record the daily and seasonal occurrences of plants and animals - the seasonal phenology.



He wrote about many of his personal and professional observations in *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), a deceptively simple little

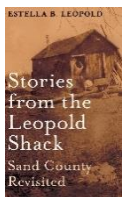
book in which he describes most eloquently "the land ethic" - his thoughts about the human place within the biological community. Leopold said, "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

Translated into 14 languages and now in its 75th year of publication, *A Sand County Almanac* has inspired millions of people everywhere. Dog days of summer or not, every master naturalist should read this book.

Aldo and Estella Leopold had five children - Starker, A. Luna, Nina, A. Carl, and Estella - who continued their father's legacy while studying wildlife, hydrology, conservation, plant physiology and palynology, respectively. Interestingly, as adults they also each made for themselves a version of The Shack, where they studied their own land and its restoration.



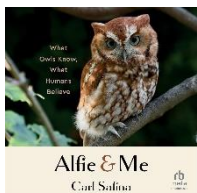
Image courtesy of Aldo Leopold Foundation



Estella Leopold, the youngest Leopold child passed away recently at age 97 but published a book in 2016 detailing the family's experiences: *Stories from the Leopold Shack: Sand County Revisited*. She adds context and perspective to *A Sand County Almanac*. Prepare to be inspired by her book and her father's.

She describes the day her father died fighting a wildfire on the neighbor's property; this is the final event of her book's first section. She then recounts how each of the siblings added throughout their lives to the knowledge about sense of place they all had growing up. Her sister Nina continued bird and plant observations near The Shack; her data shows that the birds arrive, and plants now bloom a full two weeks earlier than their father had recorded!

The Shack and greatly expanded surrounding lands are now managed by the Aldo Leopold Foundation. Its mission is to "form a roadmap for the future in which society deeply values, understands, and actively pursues the stewardship of our precious environment" and provide tools for creating strong leaders for conservation at every level. You may visit and tread the Leopold family paths, perhaps to ponder your own sense of place.



Carl Safina, Ocean Conservancy founder and author of several fine books about ocean critters, connected with "his place" during the pandemic lockdown through a bedraggled ball of fluff - an Eastern screech owl - that needed all his skills in wildlife

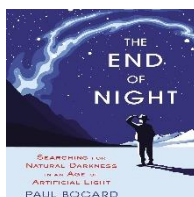
rehabilitation to stay alive. Naming the owl Alfie, he recounted the owl's long and complicated recovery in *Alfie & Me*.

Alfie is wild; she has since raised several broods of owlets in the Safina yard, yet also remains a member of the family. Thinking deeply about the connections between humans and wild animals, particularly Alfie, Safina questions why humans, especially in Western societies, feel themselves separate from and even above nature. Admittedly not a philosopher, he believes it began with Plato, whose teachings stressed the purity of mind and thought above the material and natural world and placed humans above all else.

If so, how do we overcome 2000+ years of separation from nature and learn to celebrate our place within it? Where is your place? As Edward Abbey said, "This is the most beautiful place on earth. There are many such places. Every man, every woman carries in heart and

mind the image of the ideal place, the right place, the one true home, known or unknown, actual or visionary."

Our June chapter meeting speaker, Debbie Moran from the Houston Astronomical Society, described the unwitting ways we are destroying our beautiful place with light pollution. She spoke about glare, light intensity and ambient light color impacting our safety and security - endangering ourselves and wildlife. She referenced the apocalyptic disaster of migrant birds crashing into Galveston buildings at night: - see our chapter's response in: *The Midden*, August 2017, Galveston Bay Injured Bird Response Team. I remembered a good book about dark skies and our global connections to nature and place.



Paul Bogard, in his book *The End of Night* (2013) details his global search for dark places at night to learn how they are being preserved and why. For example, in Paris and London, where ancient monuments abound, designers thoughtfully set up city

lights to retain the historical ambiance yet maintain safety. Said Paris' architect of light, François Jousse, "The secrets are very simple. Blend light with the surroundings. Don't annoy the birds, the insects, the neighbors or the astronomers. If City Hall gave me money to do whatever I want, I'd teach people about the beauty of light."

Most of us would appreciate that sentiment; we cannot enjoy a starry night sky that even our parents or grandparents knew, let alone Homer. Could you find Sirius? What about the Big Dipper and the North Star? Have you ever seen the Milky Way - while hearing wolves howl?

Dark night skies are vital to wildlife, as we are still learning and Bogard describes. In the U.S. dark skies are mostly found west of the Mississippi River; they are definitely "big and bright" in Texas parks, which have embraced the ideals of the International Dark Sky organization. Find the darkest skies in Big Bend NP and Big Bend Ranch SP. Seek very dark skies at: Barton Warnock Visitor Center, Devils River SNA, Seminole Canyon SP and Historic Site, Devil's Sinkhole SNA, Kickapoo Cavern SP, Caprock Canyons SP and Trailway, and Copper Breaks SP. Don't forget your favorite state park: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department lists dark sky (Bortle) ratings for all its parks; the lower the number, the darker the night sky.

Dog days of summer no longer portend evil times; go outside and discover your beautiful place and be inspired by these good books!

Tom Solomon Earns 30,000 Hours! by Diane Humes

Tom Solomon joined our chapter in 2005. Right away he got busy working with collecting and propagating plants for prairie restoration, beginning at Armand Bayou Nature Center, then adding San Jacinto State Park, Sheldon Lake State Park, and others. He has been a tireless seed collector and grows seedlings of all kinds (at many area greenhouses) for many organizations around the Galveston and Houston area.

Please congratulate Tom when you see him. Of course, he will be on a prairie and will most likely be carrying a flat of plants or adding seeds to his stash.

Good job, Tom. Thanks for all you do



Camp Wild 2024 by Mary Ross

Camp Wild is a free, five-day long program that has been held the first week of June at Galveston Island State Park for the last 20-plus years. Camp Wild is organized by the Friends of Galveston Island State Park in partnership with the Galveston Bay Area Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists that provides volunteers to help make Camp Wild a wonderful experience for every camper.

This year, Camp Wild was held June 3-7, 2024, from 8am-1pm. More than 70 volunteers and youth counselors welcomed 66 students who had completed fourth grade. The students came from 8 Galveston area elementary schools. Every one of our volunteers, including 10 youth counselors, cheerfully donated their time and shared their experiences with the campers and without them Camp Wild would not be possible.

stewards who understand the importance of preserving habitat and maintaining the environment for all to enjoy.



This year's many activities included: kayaking, fishing, fish printing, sun printing, archery, creating a habitat in a jar, birding, crabbing, enjoying a raptor and bird show, seining, learning the impact that oysters have by filtering our bay waters, learning the importance and impact of our watersheds to our environmental survival, locating, digging up and properly transporting sea turtle eggs, learning how stranded dolphins are transported to a rescue and treatment facility, enjoying ranger-led nature walks and Bay Discovery through the coastal salt marsh, learning about the wildlife and common shells found on our beaches, and the impact of trash on our environment (while picking up beach trash). At the end of each day, campers participated in various team activities.

Camp Wild aims to foster curiosity, knowledge, and appreciation for the natural world. The focus is on developing the next generation of environmental

A special thanks go out to the activity leaders, team and youth counselors who led each of our 6 color teams.

Also, thanks to the planning team members who worked beginning last October to prepare for Camp Wild, and Lynn Smith and her food team who kept everyone fueled.

Camp Wild is always looking for volunteers and instructors to help in the planning and execution of this

event. Camp Wild 2025 planning meetings will begin this September so if you are interested in volunteering next year or enrolling any family member completing the 4th grade in 2025, please contact Mary Ross at: rossmary711@gmail.com.

Jim Duron Earns 30,000 Hours! by Diane Humes

Jim joined the chapter (Class of 2008) and has worked hard ever since. In addition to working tirelessly to grow prairie plants, Jim worked for many hours tracking the chapter's hours and smoothing our transition to the VMS system before committing himself "full-time" to prairie restoration. You'll see Jim in all kinds of weather pushing a wheelbarrow, pulling weeds, planting pots, watering, mowing, planning, leading. He does it all and he does it with an even temper and a generous attitude.

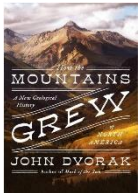
Please congratulate Jim when you see him. He is usually in the plant nursery caring for his "babies."

Thank you, Jim, for all you do!



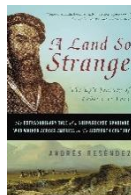
Photo by Pattu-Frimingham

Heritage Book Study by Cheryl Barajas



Our August 5 book discussion will conclude with *How the Mountains Grew- A New Geological History of North America* by John Dvorak. We are learning so many new things about the history of Earth and how it was formed. It is truly a fascinating read.

On September 9, we will begin a discussion on *A Land so Strange: The Epic Journey of Cabeza de Vaca* by Andres Resendez. In 1528, a group of men set out from Spain to colonize Florida. But the expedition went horribly wrong. Of the 300 men who started on the journey, only 4 survived. We will learn how they endured and how many years they spent searching for their way back home!



Our book discussions are always on Zoom and start at 1pm. If you would like to be added to our group- please contact me at cherylbarajas9@gmail.com. We would love to see you there!

The Midden

Published bimonthly by the Galveston Bay Area Chapter - Texas Master Naturalists. The purpose of *The Midden* is to inform, communicate and educate chapter members and the community. If you have an article that contributes this purpose or want to join the team, please contact Diane Humes, treimanhumes@gmail.com.

Texas AgriLife Extension Service
4102 B Main (FM 519) Carbide Park
La Marque, TX 77568

The Midden is posted on the GBAC-TMN chapter website: <https://txmn.org/gbmn/> two weeks prior to chapter meetings. Archived issues also on chapter website. If you prefer to receive *The Midden* in hard copy and are not currently receiving it, please contact Tammy Bird at tammy.bird@ag.tamu.edu.

Midden Team

Diane Humes, Editor	Madeleine K. Barnes
Verva Densmore	Sheron Evans
Rebekah Gano	Meade LeBlanc
Carolyn Miles	Chuck Snyder



August and September Activities

ADVANCED TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Chapter Meeting - August 1; Wild Houston - Exploring a World-Class Biodiversity Hotspot

Presenter: Suzanne Simpson

6pm Social, 6:30pm Meeting, 7pm Speaker

At Extension Office* and via Zoom; 1 hour AT

Meadows Center

Wednesday, Sept 11 at 2pm via Zoom; 1.5 hours AT

Presenter: Dr Robert Mace

Ongoing

Heritage Book Study Group

First Monday of every month via Zoom

2 hours AT

Contact: Cheryl Barajas cherylbarajas9@gmail.com

See Pg. 7 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>

TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension provides equal opportunities in its programs and employment to all persons, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating.



The Midden Deadline
for the next issue

August 26



More Info: <https://txmn.tamu.edu/2024-annual-meeting/>

*Extension Office = Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service – Galveston County Office (Carbide Park)