

The Midden

Westcave Preserve by Chuck Snyder

Galveston Bay Area Chapter - Texas Master Naturalists

December 2024

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President's Corner by Gene Fisseler

As we close out another year of activity, training, and volunteering, I pondered drafting this year-end message. It occurred to me that y'all might rather read what other folks think of what you do as Texas Master Naturalists. So, I asked them.

Dave Sharp, Chair of Exploration Green Conservancy board, writes, *"TMNs bring Exploration Green to life! We rely on you to lead our tree, shrub, and wetland planting efforts, and to conduct engaging educational experiences for children and adults. You keep our green space natural by removing invasive species. We even have five TMNs on our Board of Directors! Dedicated volunteers like you ensure that we meet our objective of "Welcoming Nature to our Neighborhood."*

This is what Bob Stokes, Galveston Bay Foundation President, has to say. *"Whether leading restoration projects in the field, surveying birds at our Sweetwater Preserve, or assisting with our water quality and educational programs, GBAC's contributions are indispensable to our work at GBF. You significantly enhance our capacity every day, year after year, empowering staff and working alongside us to achieve our conservation goals. We are grateful for your unwavering commitment to our mission, which strengthens our efforts and inspires action to safeguard the Bay for further generations."*

Over at Armand Bayou Nature Center, Executive Director Tim Pylate offers this. *"We are so grateful for our Texas Master Naturalists! They have a major impact on every aspect of our operation, but their most visible contribution is the restoration of 900 acres of meticulously curated and unadulterated Texas Coastal Tallgrass Prairie. They are preserving Texas' ecological heritage and then sharing that knowledge with others. I learn something every time I spend time with a TMN."*

Remember the Texas Department of Parks & Wildlife acoustic bat monitoring project we supported this year? Read what Texas Nature Trackers Biologist Craig Hensley shared. *"I have worked for many years with TMNs from across the state of Texas, and just like GBAC chapter members that jumped in feet first with the BAT Project, the work that TMNs do for conservation and education in Texas is unparalleled. TMNs get things done, making positive differences in their communities. Texas Nature Trackers is proud to partner with TMNs, sharing our love the natural world and commitment to positive change for the state's flora and fauna, and, ultimately, for everyone."*

And 2024 marked another successful year of the Thunderbirders after-school birding club at Clear Lake City Elementary School. Check out what teacher Ms. Funderburk has to say about working with Chapter member Eowyn Johnson on her campus. *"Eowyn is such a huge asset to our Thunderbirders club here at CLCE. She is extremely knowledgeable when it comes to bird species identification and describing attributes of each bird. She gets our students excited to learn more about bird species that live in our community."*

Next Chapter Meeting

December 5

Annual Awards
Celebration
And
Officer Election

In person only

Wayne Johnson
Community Center
At Carbide Park

Women in Nature: Mary Sophie Young by Meade LeBlanc

The late 1800s and early 1900s saw a boom in plant collecting and preservation in Texas and herbaria were formed at many universities, including Texas Christian University, Sam Houston State University and Mary Hardin-Baylor. In fact, this period was considered the golden age of plant collecting in America. Mary Sophie Young was a pioneer of Texas botany and the first curator of the University of Texas's new herbarium in 1912. She was one of the few women involved in collecting at that time, in a field dominated by men.

Young was born in Glendale, Ohio in either 1870 or 1872 to father, Charles Huntington, an Episcopalian minister, and mother, Emma Adams Young. Unusual for a woman of that time, she used her mother's last name. Her early life was shaped by being the youngest child, and the only girl, among seven older brothers. She often forced them to play with her. "I knew that [if] I ever offended once, I should be barred from going again," Young said of playing outdoors with them, "and though I was wearied many a time to the point of exhaustion, I would have died rather than admit it to them." Such early fortitude would come in handy during a career collecting plant specimens in the wilds of Texas.

She attended Wellesley College, receiving a bachelor's degree in 1895. After teaching at various schools in Missouri, Illinois and Wisconsin, Young attended the University of Chicago in 1900, where she received her Master's of Science degree in 1907 and her PhD in 1910. Young began her teaching career at the University of Texas as a botany tutor, was promoted to the position of instructor the following year, and soon gained tenure.

Under her leadership as the herbarium curator, she saw the collection increase from approximately 2,500 to about 16,000 specimens, 10,000 of which were specimens she collected. She traveled throughout the Austin area, maintaining extensive logs of the materials she collected. Students often accompanied her on these trips. The city's location straddles a diverse border between Eastern and Western flora and provided many previously uncatalogued specimens

Two publications resulted from her research on Austin plants. She frequently addressed herself in her business correspondence for these publications as "M.S. Young," which led others to believe she was a man. Apparently, she took some pleasure in this misunderstanding.

Young's favorite location for collection, however, was West Texas, where she ventured during summer vacations in 1914, 1915, 1916 and 1918. (She spent the summer of 1917 collecting in the Panhandle.) It was not acceptable for a lone woman to make such a difficult

journey, so she would hire a young man, usually a university student, to accompany her. She collected specimens from ferns, grasses, cacti, large trees, and sedges.



Photo courtesy of Texas State Historical Association

She kept extensive journals about her first trip to West Texas, in 1914. That year she was accompanied by 17-year-old Carey Tharp, the younger brother of her colleague, B. C. Tharp. Written on lined pages, with tiny handwriting, she shed light on the difficulty of traveling in the region in the early 20th century. The journal begins on August 2, 1914, the day the pair arrived by train in Marfa, Texas. Mary had spent \$8.00 for a suit and \$6.00 for a pair of shoes, and that seems to be what she wore for the entire trip.

Next, she bought a pair of burros and a wagon. She describes the wagon as follows: "When the carriage arrives, it strikes us dumb with admiration...The lines are rope, and there are a few scraps of strap and wire about the harness here and there to add variety. The buggy is without a top, though it had one once, and there is just enough paint to show that it once was painted black. There were once rubber tires, but now only the places where they used to be remain as evidence of former splendor. However, money was never better spent than the ten dollars on that precious buggy."

The journal goes on to describe the day-to-day logistics of their travels: setting up a base camp in an abandoned ranch house, finding the way home after taking a wrong turn in a canyon, sleeping in abandoned adobe huts or under their buggy, and asking ranchers to sell them food. When they ran low on food, they supplemented their stores by hunting: "Well, we had jack rabbit for supper! It is good exercise to eat jack rabbit - it gives you an appetite. Jack rabbit should always be served with tooth picks. Jack rabbit is economical, one piece two inches in diameter and half an inch thick will last an average man all day if he chews constantly and his jaws can stand the strain... I am going to try stewing some of what is left.

(We have had four meals already and it isn't half cooked yet and we threw away some.) Maybe if we soak it all night and boil it all day we shall be able to chew the juice, but I don't know."

Her field book accounts also provide a sense of the flora and geography of Texas at the time: "We reached the base of the first rock bluff and found ourselves quite able to walk along on the level, ... Botanically, it is quite different than what I have seen. It was beautifully painted with orange, yellow, and gray lichens, and decorated in every crevice with very many plants, ferns, selaginellas, liverworts, beside more hardy crevice plants. Pine trees appear in some of the more broken portions as apparent crevice plants. The talus slope at the base was a tangle of grapevines, wild tobacco (?) mentzelia, composites of various kinds that concealed the rocks..." She gives the reader a sense of what it was like to encounter these plants for the very first time.

Young and her assistant managed to collect 1,700 plant specimens in the mountains, deserts and rivers of the Trans-Pecos. Many of the plants were previously unknown and some of them were later described as new species. Unfortunately, her career was cut short in 1919 when doctors found late-stage cancer. She died within months of her diagnosis, at the age of 46.

After her death, her friend and fellow botanist Dr. B.C. Tharp published the manuscript for her ongoing project, "The Seed Plants, Ferns and Fern Allies of the Austin Region" (about 720 taxa). In the preface, he writes: "It represents six years of as intensive collection as was possible for an enthusiastic, energetic, and thoroughly capable person who was doing at the same time a full share of teaching work. With exceptional skill Dr. Young has in it not only blazed a trail; she has actually builded [sic] a highway."

Beach Heroes 2024 by Kathleen McClean

The Beach Heroes team led by Maureen Nolan-Wilde kicked off their 2024-2025 season in August by matting over 600 pieces of artwork created by Galveston ISD elementary students for display in the annual Beach Heroes Exhibit. The colorful works showcase the students' creative commitment to publicize the need to combat plastic pollution to preserve Galveston beaches and wildlife. The team also undertook the formidable task of choosing four outstanding pieces that would be featured in the 2024 Beach Heroes notecard set. The talented students earning this honor and their representative schools are Mia Patt, L.A. Morgan; Gabriela Maupin, Burnet; Jaqueline Guevera, L.A. Morgan; and Keyler, Burnet.

Many teachers in Galveston ISD reach into their own pockets to provide basic supplies for their students, so it was like Christmas in September when Wayne and Alice O'Quinn made a special delivery to Crenshaw and Burnet Elementary Schools this past September. The loot, consisting of gifts of paper towels, Kleenex, and art supplies generously donated recently by the Galveston Bay Area Master Naturalists, was enthusiastically and gratefully received. It's not too late to contribute; contributions of said supplies can be dropped off at Carbide or at any future chapter meetings. The Beach Hero team will happily drop the donations off during one of their upcoming school outreach presentations. In addition to the school supplies, each school participating in the Beach Hero Art Project in 2024 will receive copies of *The Beach Hero* and *Sea Turtles of the Gulf Coast*, kindly donated and written by Jane Downs, GBAC Class of 2023.

Speaking of outreach, the Galveston Bay Master Naturalists performed their first presentation of the Beach Heroes season to an inquisitive group of second, third and fourth graders at Ambassador Prep Academy in October. Visual aid, photography, tech support, and impact data gathering were provided by Margaret Dodge and Wayne and Alice O'Quinn, while Maureen Nolan-Wilde, Lynn Smith, Sharon Tirpak, and Bruce Niebuhr led a discussion on the detrimental consequences plastic pollution has on the health of sea life. The budding artists were invited to become Beach Heroes by spreading the word to help keep Galveston beaches clean and to illustrate their message in an artistic form. The highlight of the presentation was Carlos Rios leading the students around the school library in a joyful Turtle Dance.



The Beach Heroes have several more presentations scheduled at Parker, Crenshaw, Austin, and Burnet Elementary Schools through the spring of 2025. Volunteers are always welcome; check the GBAC calendar for future dates. The 2024 Beach Heroes notecards can be purchased at the chapter meetings for \$10. Proceeds benefit the Beach Heroes Art Project.

Year of the Dragonflies by Rebekah Gano

Officially, it's the year of the Dragon on the Chinese calendar, but it seems to me that in the Houston area it has been the year of the Dragonflies! Populations of other insect species may have been diminished by Hurricane Beryl and other storms, but the dragonflies have been out in droves!

From spring throughout the wet summer and into the dry fall, higher than usual catches of dragonfly nymphs have turned up in dip net excursions. Last week's inexperienced field trip group at Armand Bayou Nature Center caught an amazing 15 nymphs in about 15 minutes!

At first the field trip participants thought they were catching water spiders, but I had them count the legs (6 not 8) and explained that the nymphs are immature dragonflies. They will spend anywhere from two months to over five years in the water, with the average nymph spending one to three years in the water. Then, they metamorphose, climbing out of the water and shedding their skin to reveal the familiar winged adult dragonflies known for zipping through the sky in the summer.

Clouds of dragonflies have been spotted in the Texas Gulf Coast area over the summer. They are particularly fond of hovering around ponds, where they catch insect meals on the fly and find suitable mates. The females will lay their eggs in the water so that future generations may soar around the same ponds someday. Dragonflies will travel several miles from ponds in search of meals, and we humans have been grateful for the voracious predators that consume mosquitoes and gnats that thrived in the warm, rainy part of the year.

For me, the highlight of the dragonfly year was witnessing fall dragonfly migration for the first time. Thousands of dragonflies zipped over my neighborhood the evening of September 28, 2024. They were all heading the same direction, along with some small flocks of egrets and ibises. The dragonflies flew consistently across the entire sky for at least 20 minutes, until they tapered off at the end and just a could be spotted, still heading the same way. I eventually snapped out of my trance and ran to get my phone to take a video but given the minimal evening light and quality of my phone's camera, I couldn't tell what kind of dragonflies were in the sky.

Green darner (*Anax junius*) dragonflies come from as far away as Canada in the late summer or fall and continue to travel into Mexico or Central America. Swarms heading in a generally southward direction are likely to be green darners. These may have been the fast flyers that I saw, but given that the dragonflies were not

heading south, it's probable that they were a different species.



Photo by Judy Gallagher

The dragonflies I saw were following the breeze in a mostly northern direction. Most likely they were another area dragonfly migrant, the wandering glider (*Pantala flavescens*), which follows warm air currents, circulating the globe and laying eggs in puddles. (Their nymphs are the exceptionally speedy growers who can mature in two months.) The wandering glider, also known as the globe skimmer, travels throughout its lifetime (up to 6,000 km) and is especially known for its travel in large groups in autumn.



Photo by Pierre Deviche

Continue to keep your eyes open for dragonflies this fall. The warm weather has kept them zipping through the air and crawling in the mud at the bottom of ponds. Check out the evening sky for clouds of dragonflies too. You never know when a group might migrate over your neighborhood!

2024 State Meeting Recap by Cindy Howard

The 2024 TMN State Meeting in San Marcos was a great experience for the 20 GBAC chapter members who attended. It was also a record-breaker - 130 registered in the first hour, 382 in the first day and eventually 636 for the meeting!



Photo by Rich Sommer

The meeting started on Thursday 10/24 with our gang doing field trips on habitat restoration, birds, and central Texas geology and geological history, among others. Thursday evening, we visited the Meadows Center for Water and the Environment and viewed the fragile San Marcos Springs (and some cool fish!) from historical glass-bottom boats. The opening reception at the Meadows Center featured Tex-Mex and local microbrews by a TMN.

Friday 10/25 and Saturday 10/26 we all attended AT classroom sessions from an amazing 143 choices. Four chapter members presented ATs: Mohammed and Ruth Nasrullah on DEI, Scott Buckel on event photography and Cindy Howard on eco-succession. We gathered lots of ideas for future ATs for our chapter too!

But it was the Saturday evening awards ceremony where our chapter really shined. Chuck Snyder was recognized for 4000 hours of service, Mike Pettit for 5000 hours of service and - in a brand-new category created just for them - Tom Solomon and Jim Duron were honored for each achieving 30,000 hours of service! No one from any other chapter has come close to this level of service. In the Chapter Projects category, Eowyn Johnson and her team took 3rd place for their project "Thunderbirders and Beyond: Youth Birding Clubs". In the photography voting, Robbie Lowe won a 3rd place ribbon in Reptiles and Amphibians; and in Chapters at Work/Play, Leda Parker won 3rd and Laura Clark took 2nd place. Congratulations, all of our chapter award winners!

Now for 2025.... Our 2025 recertification pin will be the Greater Roadrunner and our 2025 TMN State Meeting will be held in Aggieland (College Station) October 16-19. The State Meeting is a wonderful, invigorating weekend full of food, fun and friendship - hope you can attend next year.

Heritage Book Study by Cheryl Barajas

We are almost at the end of another year, and we have read so many great books. We started the year reading about prairies and how to design your yard; then we moved on to Insects and birds. During the summer, we discussed all the fascinating geological formations that can be found in North America. In addition, we have read about the adventures of Cabeza de Vaca.

In December/January we will discuss *The Nature of Nature* by Enric Sala. Enric Sala wants to change the world. His assertion is that once we appreciate how nature works, we will understand why conservation is economically wise and essential to our survival.



If you would like a sneak peek at next year's book selections, please see below!

2025 Heritage Book Study Calendar

February 3rd and March 3rd
Sand County Almanac by Aldo Leopold

April 7th and May 5th
The Comfort of Crows by Margaret Renke

July 7th and August 4th
Goodbye to a River by John Graves

September 8th and October 6th
Mask of the Sun by John Dvorak

November 3rd and December 1st
Pilgrim at Tinker Creek by Annie Dillard

Happy Reading!

Recording Your Volunteer Hours by Sharon Tirpak

You have volunteered by staffing a public outreach event at Armand Bayou Nature Center, leading an interpretive beach walk at Galveston Island State Park, participated in a monthly bird count, walked the beach for sea turtle patrol. Now what? You can check the current list of Volunteer Opportunities which is on the Chapter website under the "Report Your Hours" tab. If you are still unsure of which opportunity to use you can email Sharon Tirpak, the Volunteer Services Director, at volunteerservicedirector@gbactmn.org.



If you know the Opportunity that applies to your service, but don't have that Opportunity in your personal list you can email Tracy Walpole, the Membership Director at membership@gbactmn.org. Tracy will add the activity you need.

Volunteer hours should be reported in VMS as soon as possible and preferably by the end of the month that you volunteered.

In Memoriam: Members Lost in 2024 by Carolyn Miles

With much sadness , we reflect on the passing of four of our chapter members Since November 2023.

Louise Bell (Fall 2004)	
Kenneth Russell (Spring 2004)	

Shirley Coffman (Spring 2003)	
Terry Gaustad (Spring 2015)	

Haiku Challenge

Need a fun activity to do when stuck inside due to the summer heat? The Midden Team would like to challenge you to write haikus for future Middens!

A haiku is a form Japanese poetry consisting of three short lines that do not rhyme that traditionally evoke natural imagery .

Famous example from Matsuo Basho:

An old silent pond,
A frog jumps into the pond,
splash! Silence again.

Send your poems to *The Midden* editor, Diane Humes, at treimanhumes@gmail.com

Traditional Structure

- There are only three lines, totaling 17 syllables.
- The first line is 5 syllables.
- The second line is 7 syllables.
- The third line is 5 syllables like the first.
- Punctuation and capitalization are up to the poet.
- A haiku does not have to rhyme, in fact usually it does not rhyme at all.
- It can include the repetition of words or sounds

(Source: yourdictionary.com)

Watch for your haikus in future Middens highlighted in blue boxes

State Meeting Winning Photos



Congratulations!

December and January Activities

ADVANCED TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

None is currently scheduled.

Ongoing

Heritage Book Study Group
First Monday of every month via Zoom
2 hours AT
Contact: Cheryl Barajas cherylbarajas9@gmail.com
See Pg. 5 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 Deadline

for the next issue

December 30



The Midden

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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 the extension office at 281-534-3413.

Midden Team

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Birds at my feeder
A hawk watching from a tree
Whoosh, birds and hawk gone.

By Beth Frohme

Make a difference
In the world and in your life
Share fun, food, and friends

By Doris Heard