Galveston Bay Area Chapter - Texas Master Naturalists April 2026

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Next Chapter Meeting

April 2

Texas Native Grasses

By

Hayden Taylor
Assistant Director
Texas Native Seeds

At Extension Office*
and via Zoom

President's Corner by Mary Dobberstine

As I write this, our Spring 2026 Training Class is about to begin – one of the most important and meaningful things we do as a Texas Master Naturalist chapter.

Training is truly the core output of our program. It's how we fulfill our mission: helping our neighbors understand, appreciate, and care for the natural resources of our region. Every new class represents new energy, new curiosity, and new stewards for Galveston Bay's lands, waters, wildlife, and native plants.

This year, we're again offering evening classes, continuing a format that has helped make training accessible for those with daytime work and family commitments. Our Training Class Directors, Julie Massey and Gene Fisseler, have assembled an outstanding schedule filled with rich and engaging topics – Sea Turtles, Prairie Ecology, Wetland Ecology, Insects, Oysters, Birds, Cephalopods, Monarchs, Bats, and Marsh Ecology along with field experiences at Sea Center Texas, High Island, Armand Bayou Nature Center, and Galveston Island State Park.

Just reading through the class topics makes me smile as I remember my own time in training - the excitement of learning something new each week, the aha moments, and the pure joy of discovering how much there is to learn about the natural world around us.

That experience doesn't happen by accident.

The details of running a training class take a village. Members help recruit, mentor, welcome, coordinate logistics, keep things running smoothly – and yes, keep everyone fed and energized! Thank you to everyone helping and for investing your time and heart in the future of our chapter.

If you haven't been involved yet, I encourage you to consider how you might support the class this year or in the future – in big ways or small. A friendly welcome, a few hours of help, or simply sharing your enthusiasm can make a lasting difference.

Training is where our story begins – and where the members of the next generation of naturalists find their place. Thank you for being part of the community that makes it all possible.

Local People. Local Knowledge. Local Service.
Celebrating 25 years of caring for our natural resources.

See you at the April 2nd Chapter Meeting!

Women in Nature: Alice Eastwood by Meade LeBlanc

Most of the buildings in San Francisco were on fire, damaged, or both. It was 1906 and a major earthquake had just hit. Amid the chaos, one woman knew what she needed to do: Alice Eastwood, curator of the Botany Department, ran into the California Academy of Sciences building, which was damaged but not yet on fire. She climbed the broken marble stairs to the herbarium. Luckily, she had stored the type specimens, those that serve as official representations of a species, separately from the main collection. She used a rope (some say her apron) to lower them down the window to a friend.Alice then commandeered a wagon to move more than 1,000 valuable type specimens to safety before the California Academy of Sciences building burned down.


Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Reflecting on the event, Alice said: “Not a book [from my department] was I able to save, nor a single thing of my own, except my favorite lens, without which I should feel helpless... My own destroyed work I do not lament, for it was a joy to me while I did it, and I can still have the same joy in starting it again.” And start again she did, once the building was rebuilt. When Alice eventually retired, she had increased the collection to over 340,000 specimens.

Alice was born in Toronto, Canada on January 19,1859, the eldest of 3 siblings. When she was six years old, her mother died and the children were placed in the care of various relatives. Alice was sent to live with Uncle Helliwell, an experimental horticulturalist, and she learned plant names and studied the botany books he gave her. Later she was moved to Toronto's Oshawa Convent where she expanded her knowledge under the guidance of an elderly French priest-gardener, Father Pugh.

When Alice was 14, her father reunited the family in Denver, Colorado. By then she was in high school and had no time for botany. In addition to her schoolwork, Alice looked after her younger siblings and helped to support the family. She was valedictorian of her class and received two botany books at graduation: Porter and Coulter’s *Synopsis of the Flora of Colorado* (1874) and Gray’s *Manual of the Botany of the Northern United States: Including the District East of the Mississippi and North of North Carolina and Tennessee* (1867).

Alice taught at her former high school for ten years, exploring the terrain around Denver during summer vacations, using the $475 annual salary she saved from her teaching job. Alice learned to ride a horse so she could reach remote areas and wore field outfits of button-down skirts she fashioned from heavy denim nightclothes. She did not carry a weapon, even though she travelled by herself. The plants she collected - nearly 400 species - became the foundation for the herbarium at the University of Colorado Boulder.

Alice wrote the first book about the flora of the region, *A Popular Flora of Denver, Colorado*, published in 1893. Its publication caught the attention of Mary Katharine Brandegee, Curator of the Botany Department at the California Academy of Sciences, who wanted to retire and needed an assistant. She hired Alice to become co-curator of the Academy's herbarium, where she stayed until retiring herself in 1949 at the age of 90.

After the earthquake, and before the Academy had a new building, Alice traveled to Europe and other US regions to study herbaria. She visited the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, the British Museum, the National Museum of Natural History of Paris, and the New York Botanical Garden, among others. In 1912, the new Academy was completed at Golden Gate Park. She returned to her job as curator and set out to rebuild the collection, visiting the mountains, valleys and deserts where she had originally obtained specimens. She traveled all over the American West, from Alaska to Arizona. This time, the first set of each collection was sent to the Academy and duplicates were exchanged with other institutions.

During her career, Alice published more than 300 articles, served as editor for the biological journal *Zoe*, and founded a journal, *Leaflets of Western Botany* (1932-1966) with fellow botanist Thomas Howell. She named 395 plant species, including *Penstemon moffatii*, honoring Colorado railroad builder David Moffat, who issued her a free rail pass for her early expeditions.

Alice stayed engaged with young people well into her later years, teaching weekly classes to young botanists at Golden Gate Park. At the age of 90, she compared field notes with Peter Raven, then a 10-year-old plant enthusiast, who became a world famous botanist and director of the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis.

Alice Eastwood has 17 recognized species named for her and three genera: *Aliciella*, *Eastwoodia* and *Eastwoodiella*. In addition, the California Academy of

Sciences named the Alice Eastwood Herbarium and the Eastwood Hall of Botany for her and Humboldt County designated a redwood grove the Alice Eastwood Memorial Grove, in recognition for her efforts to save the redwoods in California. The Tamalpais Conservation Club, of which she had been a founder and a past president, named Camp Alice Eastwood after her.

Robert C. Miller, of the California Academy of Sciences, described Alice as "young at ninety-four because all her life she was studying, inquiring, learning, exploring…a blithe, ageless spirit living in a world of discovery forever new." She died in San Francisco on October 30, 1953, at the age of 94.

A Strong Showing for the 2026 Scholarship by Gene Fisseler

In January, members of the Galveston Bay Area Chapter scholarship committee reviewed applications from local students…and this year's response exceeded expectations. GBAC received 17 applications for the 2026 scholarship, with more than half from college-bound seniors at Clear Creek, Clear Lake, Clear Springs, and Ball High. Other applicants are currently studying at Texas A&M University at Galveston, University of Houston-Clear Lake, Lee College, Texas A&M University, and University of Texas at Austin. Most are undergraduates, with several graduate students, including one Ph.D. candidate.

Applicants reported impressive volunteer service with organizations familiar to many chapter members, including Armand Bayou Nature Center, Galveston Bay Foundation, Artist Boat, and others. Essays reflected a strong understanding of the environmental challenges facing the Upper Texas Gulf Coast.

The committee awarded the $2,000 scholarship to Lily McGilbery, a Lee College student studying conservation and ecology. Many may know Lily from her years volunteering at Armand Bayou Nature Center, where she has supported prairie plantings, land management, and youth eco-camps. Her essay thoughtfully addressed habitat loss and restoration opportunities. If you see Lily, please congratulate her…she is a wonderful representative of our next generation of environmental stewards.


Photo by Chuck Snyder

Living with the Bay: Understanding Our Coastal Waters by Jane Downs

The recent (February) freezing weather and strong winds had those of us who keep our boats in the area scrambling to drain water lines, adjust dock lines, and discover just how far the water can retreat. A surprise for many longtime residents is that Galveston Bay is shaped more by wind than by tides. Because the bay is shallow, strong winds can literally push water from one end to the other, raising water levels on one shoreline while exposing mudflats on another. That's why water levels sometimes look "wrong" even when the tide chart insists everything is fine.

Galveston Bay doesn't look or act the same year-round. Winter cold fronts can flip the bay overnight, stirring bottom sediments and changing the water's color by morning. In other words, the bay is never still. That familiar brown-green color isn't pollution; it's motion made visible. Clay particles stay afloat for a long time, especially after storms or cold fronts. Those same particles carry nutrients that fuel plankton, which in turn support shrimp, crabs, and fish. In Galveston Bay, murky water often means the bay is doing exactly what it's supposed to do.

Along the upper Texas coast anglers know a quiet truth: fishing often gets better after a cold front moves through our area. This isn't luck--it's physics and biology working together. In short, a front "resets" the bay. Water that may have been stratified and sluggish becomes energized, and marine life responds quickly. For fish, it's opportunity, and they don't waste it.

Galveston Bay isn't meant to be clear, calm, or predictable. Its shifting colors and moods are signs of a working estuary---one shaped by wind, weather, and time. To live near the bay is to live with motion and it's important to learn what the bay is telling us.

Save All the Pieces by Diane Humes

Last fall, between Thanksgiving and Christmas, my husband and I visited our son in Madison, WI, which I always like because the city is so walkable and close to nature, with great food and a casual, environmental vibe (and our son, of course.) The atmosphere befits the homes of Aldo Leopold, first professor of wildlife ecology, John Muir, "Father of the National Parks" and founder of the Sierra Club, who was a student at the university, briefly, and Wisconsin Senator (and Governor) Gaylord Nelson, creator of the first Earth Day in 1970.

On this trip outdoor temperatures plunged to negative digits; we deleted hikes from our agenda and opted for movies, concerts and museums, specifically, the Chazen Art Museum on the campus of the University of Wisconsin (UW). This inspiring little museum is home to a varied and beautiful .art collection with a particularly impressive and huge (84 X 96 inch) oil painting at the top of the staircase by Wisconsin artist and naturalist, Tom Uttech, who paints the wild north country which he loves, then frames his art with natural materials.

This amazing painting, *Nin Mamakadendam,* depicts a myriad of dragonflies, butterflies and birds streaming through the air. Its detail is breathtaking and greatly reminds me of our experiences at the Smith Point Hawk Watch last fall. We watchers experienced two weeks in which dragonflies and lovebugs inhabited airspace in three dimensions and defied counting, description or photography. Uttech, however, captured his experience magnificently by painting it on canvas. He says that "the best response to my paintings would be for you to march right out of the gallery and go straight to the wildest piece of land you can find and sit down to let it wash over you and tell you secrets."

As I write this, the Sylvan Beach Spring Hawk Watch is beginning - our chapter's annual time to be outside and enjoy counting as many individuals of each species as we can, always hoping to catch great flights of raptors. Sitting at Hawk Watch is one exciting way to ponder how many species might live on Earth and how many individuals of each species. Experts predict various numbers of species - anywhere from 5 million to 8.7 million or 11 million or billions - many of these may not have been discovered yet. As to numbers for each species, that is also a moving target; it has been known for over a century that even a very common species can decline in numbers or become extinct for a variety of reasons - usually due to human activities.

In 1948, reacting to planetary chaos and destruction during World War II and fearing the great potential for species losses, a large network of scientists, organizations, states and countries formed the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Its stated mission is to protect nature by encouraging international cooperation while providing scientific knowledge and tools to guide conservation. In 1964 the IUCN began keeping the Red List of Threatened Species - a world guide to the health of the planet. Take note of this organization; if a species has been "red-listed," it is officially a species in trouble.

NOTE: Currently, there are more than 172,600 species on The IUCN Red List, with more than 48,600 species **threatened with extinction**, including 44% of reef building corals, 41% of amphibians, 38% of trees, 38% of sharks and rays, 34% of conifers, 26% of mammals, 26% of freshwater fishes and 11.5% of birds. And the need may be greater than we know; seems our own government has recently withdrawn all governmental support for the

IUCN, although full removal from the agreement may take some time. Stay tuned.

Federal and state governments keep species lists (shared with IUCN), including those endangered or threatened within their jurisdictions. A species thus designated needs protection and further study, along with habitat protection and/or restoration. This can require a tremendous amount of work by many people; success is not guaranteed. The Ivory-billed Woodpecker was tentatively declared Extinct in 2021 by the US Fish and Wildlife, but this decision is not final. Some less commonly known endangered Texas species are the Comal Springs Dryopid Beetle, the Peck's Cave Arthropod, Texas Blind Salamander, Comal Springs Riffle Beetle, Fountain Darter, San Marcos Salamander and Texas Wild Rice.

> "*The IUCN Red List tells us where we ought to be concerned and where the urgent needs are to do something to prevent the despoliation of this world. It is a great agenda for the work of conservationists*."
>
> **Sir David Attenborough**

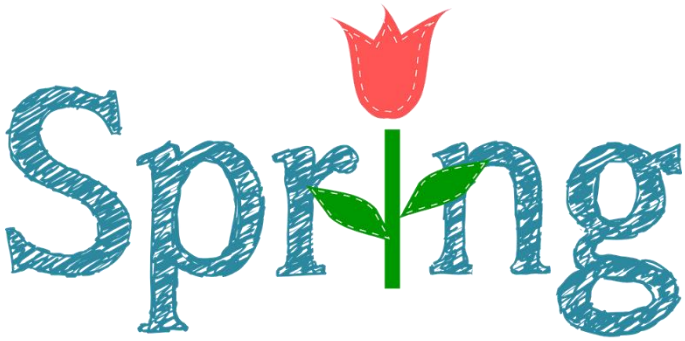
Our Texas Master Naturalist re-certification pins have often commemorated Texas' threatened or endangered species as well as Texas' many and varied habitats: Texas Salamander (2009), Texas Horned Lizard (2011), Monarch Butterfly (2013), Guadalupe Bass (2016), Kemp's ridley sea turtle (2017), Ocelot (2018), Golden-cheeked warbler (2019), American Bumblebee (2020) and the 11 eco-regions of Texas, as depicted on our 2023 re-cert pin - home to many native creatures dependent on them. These species (and habitats) are among the most critically endangered in Texas, along with Whooping cranes, Texas kangaroo rats, and black bears - all red-listed species - possible candidates for future re-cert pins?

Our work is informed by the work of Aldo Leopold, first professor of wildlife ecology, a position created for him at UW, where he also directed the UW Arboretum. He wrote *A Sand County Almanac,* which has been in print since 1948, now translated into 14 languages. I was given a copy of this book in my training class; it should be read often by all of us. He writes about the "land ethic," his idea that man is not separate from the land.

Leopold witnessed a time of rapid man-made change to the land and feared that much was being lost, probably forever. He thought that it would take creative use of the same tools to restore wildlife as had used to destroy it: the ax, the plow, the cow, fire and gun. He began the first experiment in prairie restoration by enlisting Civilian Conservation Corps members to rescue plants from prairie land being developed and install them at the UW Arboretum - a former dairy farm - now home to a grand prairie. Restoration and monitoring continue to this day. As he wrote, "The first rule of intelligent tinkering is to keep all the pieces."

Saving all the pieces includes species AND their habitats! This seems like a tall order when we see all the pieces being gobbled up, not just tossed aside. But, we have, at last count, 18,000 trained master naturalists in Texas, ready, willing and able to jump in and help. We also know that conservation works; without it many more species would have been lost. I have just had the distinct pleasure of attending a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Wolfberry Whooping Crane Sanctuary, 3300 newly purchased acres for the endangered whooping cranes who need more space on their wintering grounds on the Texas coast!! The success of this Texas project by the International Crane Foundation is beyond exciting and happening on our watch.

So, listen to Tom Uttech and Aldo Leopold and go outside - maybe your back yard and branch out from there. Journal, count, draw, identify - you must see it before you can learn it. And, as Barron Rector, master naturalist organization founder, always said, "If you can't name it, you don't know it." With all of us working and learning together, we will make a difference.



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

April 27

Top Ten Fungi Quiz by Meade LeBlanc

1.

5.

8.

2.

6.

9.

3.

7.

10.

4.

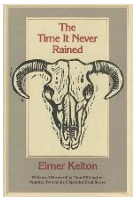
Possible Answers

____ Stinking Orange Oyster
____ False Turkeytail
____ Beechwood Woodwart
____ Ringless Honey Mushroom
____ Hairy Hexagonia
____ Lynx Paw Oyster
____ Common Greenshield Lichen
____ Beech Rooter
____ Column Stinkhorn
____ Crowded Parchment

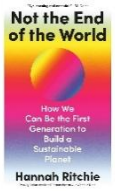
(Answer key on the back cover.)

Photos by Meade LeBlanc

Heritage Book Club by TJ Fox



Our March discussion covered Elmer Kelton's novel, *The Time It Never Rained,* centered around the long Texas drought of the 1950s. If you have not read the book, I urge you to do so. As extreme weather events occur with greater frequency, we need to understand how people have reacted to them in the past. Additionally, it is a well-written and satisfying book to read.



During April and May, we will discuss a book by Hannah Ritchie, *Not the End of the World.* I must confess I have just started to read the book. While the reviews paint a picture of a mixed bag, I am trying to stay positive.

Excerpts from various reviews include:

"This is a very good book and a much-needed antidote to the confident prognostications of doom and gloom".

"The text deals with eight very important subjects; sustainability, air pollution, climate change, deforestation, food, wildlife, ocean plastics and overfishing. In all cases the text is encouraging and offers hope, but it offers hope through action, some individual action, but lots of collective action through government and international policy." This could prove a big stumbling block, in my opinion, as that is a big ask in the political climate of today's world. [TJF]

Bill Gates in reviewing the book writes: "Hannah Ritchie's *Not the End of the World* is an essential antidote to environmental doomsday-ism."

Gates continues, "A key way she does this is by tackling a word I don't usually love, sustainability, head-on. As she explains it, there's a misconception that the world was once sustainable, and that it's been getting less and less so over time. But from the UN's definition—"meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"—it's clear that there are two parts to this concept. Sustainability requires making sure everyone today can live a good, healthy life and not degrading the environment in a way that takes away opportunities from people tomorrow."

He continues, "…she uses facts to tell a surprisingly optimistic and often counterintuitive story, one that completely contradicts the doomsday-ism in most climate change conversations."

This is a data-driven, pragmatic book which is going to be a challenge to read. However, it's important for us as master naturalists to try to understand what is happening to Earth's environment and to explore the insights and opinions of knowledgeable individuals.

Join me and other book club members on the first Monday of April and May to share your views on this book.

April and May Activities

ADVANCED TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Chapter Meeting – April 2; Texas Native Grasses
Presenter: Hayden Taylor
6pm Social, 6:30pm Meeting, 7pm Speaker
At Extension Office* and via Zoom; 1 hour AT

No additional confirmed AT at the time of publication

Ongoing

Heritage Book Club
First Monday of every month via Zoom; 2 hours AT
Contact: TJ Fox, tj.fox39@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/.

CHAPTER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Calendar - https://txmn.org/gbmn/gbac-events-calendar/
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/

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Sea Grant Texas
Science At Work For Texans
http://TexasSeaGrant.org

Master Naturalist ™

The Midden

The Midden is published bimonthly by the Galveston Bay Area Chapter - Texas Master Naturalists to inform, communicate and educate chapter members and the community about our natural world and serve as an archive of chapter activities. To submit an article or join the team, please contact Diane Humes, treimanhumes@gmail.com.

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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.

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Answers to Fungi Top Ten Quiz

1. Column Stinkhorn
2. Lynx Paw Oyster
3. Crowded Parchment
4. Beech Rooter
5. Stinking Orange Oyster
6. False Turkeytail
7. Ringless Honey Mushroom
8. Hairy Hexagonia
9. Common Greenshield Lichen
10. Beechwood Woodwart

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