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**President's Corner** by Mary Dobberstine

This month, I want to take a moment to spotlight the work our chapter supports in gardens and prairies.

It's easy to admire a garden in bloom or a sweep of grasses moving in the wind. But what isn't always visible is the depth behind that beauty—planning, training, and steady care over time. This is just a snapshot, not a complete list, but a reminder of the meaningful work our members bring to the landscape every day.

Recently, our members participated in Advanced Training with the Native Prairies Association of Texas at the Deer Park Prairie Preserve. Member Jenny Dudley reflected: "This prairie was new to me and such a gem! The tour guides were fantastic, and so were my fellow chapter members who ask great questions and notice things I would've missed. Four-star field trip!" That sense of discovery, of noticing more, carries forward into everything we do.

Through H-E-B grant support, we are planting with intention at Exploration Green Phase 3 and the Clear Lake Islamic Center—creating spaces that support pollinators and reconnect people to native landscapes. (For more information, contact Lynn Porfirio and Mohammed Nasrullah.)

Across the region, prairie work continues in steady, meaningful ways—removing invasive species, collecting seed, and restoring what once defined this place. In League City, the prairie named for our founder, Dick Benoit, stands as both a legacy and a responsibility we continue to carry forward. (For that site, contact Lisa Hardcastle; for broader prairie work, Jim Duron.)

Some of this work is quiet and precise, like the effort to document the endangered Texas Prairie Dawn, coordinated by Jan Culbertson—a reminder that even the smallest details matter.

And in places like Bayside Regional Park, this work becomes something people can feel—an award-winning space where restoration and community meet. (For more information, contact Sandy Parker.)

Taken together, this is what our work looks like. Thoughtful. Ongoing. Rooted in care. As we continue through our 25th year, this is our story: **Local People. Local Knowledge. Local Service.**

A sincere thank you to the members whose dedication and care make this restoration work possible.

See you at the June 4 Chapter Meeting!

**Next Chapter Meeting**

June 4

Arboviruses in Southeast Texas

By

Alan Barrett  
Adjunct Professor  
University of Texas Medical Branch

At Extension Office\*  
and via Zoom

## Women in Nature: Dr. Elzada Clover by Meade LeBlanc

Perhaps a woman named Clover is destined to become a botanist. In 1935 Elzada Urseba Clover was indeed one of the first women to earn a PhD in Botany. However, she was not interested in “lady like” plants with fragrant scents or beautiful flowers. Her passion, and her dissertation topic, was cacti. This choice would lead her to one of the most notorious expeditions undertaken by a woman scientist in her time.

Clover was born in 1897 in Nebraska, one of nine children. She began her career as a public-school teacher in 1919, first in Nebraska and later in south Texas. In 1930, Clover began her college career, graduating from Nebraska State Teachers College before furthering her studies at The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. There she received her MS in 1932 and her PhD in 1935. Her doctoral thesis was a study of the lower Rio Grande Valley vegetation, specifically the cacti.

She joined the University faculty as a botany instructor and assistant curator of the botanical gardens, where she established the cactus and succulent areas. She made a number of trips throughout the Southwest in search of native plant species to add to the collection, starting with the Colorado Plateau area of Utah, which is in the southeastern part of the state, home to some of the most spectacular landscapes, including Arches, Canyonlands, Bryce Canyon, Capitol Reef, and Zion National Parks.

Clover then turned her attention to the flora of the Grand Canyon in Arizona, one of the last frontiers left to study. She wrote, “This part of the West is inaccessible because of a complete lack of roads and trails. It has never been explored botanically and for that reason everything collected will be of interest.” The university initially gave her some funding for the trip, expecting that some of the specimens would be used for the collection. She first planned a trip by pack mule but soon realized that method would not be viable in the difficult terrain.

During a plant collecting trip in Mexican Hat, Utah, she met Norm Nevills who had a Colorado River boat company and saw an opportunity to boost his profile as a river guide for tourists. He agreed to take on the expedition. Nevills would build and guide the boats and find a couple of men to help. Clover would bring two students she was mentoring: Lois Jotter and Eugene Atkinson. When the university heard of this plan, it withdrew its offer of funding, considering this trip too dangerous. Each member of the group then had to come up with \$400 for their share of the expenses.

Boating the Grand Canyon was a rare event in the 1930s. Only a few men had done it successfully. The trip

would be extremely difficult, promising extreme temperatures, dangerous wildlife, challenging water rapids and uncharted territory. The press had a field day, calling the expedition reckless. One headline proclaimed: “Six Set To Defy the Colorado’s Boiling Terror.”



The trip took 43 days and traversed over 600 miles from Green River, Utah to Lake Mead on the Arizona-Nevada border near Las Vegas. During this trip, Clover wrote, *“It was just a part of the day’s work to make a flying leap for shore, to climb steep cliffs after plants, and to get photographs.”*

For the women, a typical day was waking before dawn to make breakfast for the men, collecting a few specimens before getting into the three small manmade boats, then helping line the boats around rapids if they were too dangerous to navigate, making camp and dinner for the men, and then finally making notes and pressing plants in the evening.

On July 3, 1938, Clover wrote: “Lois and I pressed plants. It took until 10 o’clock at night. We were to have breakfast ready at 6:00 a.m. We got up at 4:30, had breakfast ready, and bedrolls done by 6. Men are all sleeping hard. I photographed them and then played “I can’t get him up” on the harmonica.” Both women seemed to accept this division of labor. On another morning Clover wrote: “The men depend on Lois and me for so many little things. Mirrors, combs, finding shirts, first aid, etc. Just as men always have since Adam.”

Despite numerous hardships along the way, the group made it safely to Lake Mead, making Clover and Lois the first women to complete a river run of the Grand Canyon. The excellent book *Brave the Wild River* by Melissa Sevigny describes their journey.

By the end of the trip Clover and Jotter had identified five different plant zones and over fifty species. They also found four previously unidentified species. The trip was for science, but they also made history while they were at it.

Clover continued to teach botany and study plants in the years that followed. She traveled on the San Juan River, a major tributary of the Colorado River, and Havasupai Canyon in Arizona. Later research trips took her to Haiti,

Mexico and Guatemala. None of these trips was noted as requiring running river rapids.

In 1967 she retired and moved back to the Rio Grande Valley, where she died in 1980. Her legacy lives on in the Matthaei Botanical Gardens in Ann Arbor, where a Prickly Pear cactus with vibrant green pads covered in spines greets visitors at the door. Further beds contain plants including a dagger cactus and an old man cactus, grown from specimens she brought back from her travels.

## Beach Heroes Recognized by H-GAC by Kathleen McClean

2026 is beginning quite auspiciously for the Beach Heroes Project as the program was awarded a Certificate of Recognition from the Parks and Natural Areas Roundtable group of the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) at its 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Parks and Natural Areas Awards on February 6, 2026.

The Parks and Natural Areas (PNA) Roundtable's mission is to "assist in the development of public policy initiatives to expand parks and natural areas in the 13-county H-GAC region for the improved quality of life, habitat, and water quality." The Parks and Natural areas rewards program was established in 2006 to "highlight best practices and innovative approaches to parks planning and implementation." The categories of consideration are Planning, Process and Policy Tools or Programming either in Projects Over or Under \$500,000.

The Beach Heroes project is being recognized in the Programming Category for Projects under \$500,000.

For those who might be wondering (as I was) what type of organization the Houston-Galveston Area Council is, it is an independent coalition of local governments which seeks to anticipate and solve area-wide problems in a collaborative fashion. It maintains a wide scope of programs and services including economic development, disaster preparedness, environmental and community planning. The region of interest to H-GAC comprises 13 counties in the Gulf Coast area, including Harris and Galveston Counties. This means the Beach Heroes Project stood out for its innovation in a region comprising 12,500 square miles and populated by over six million people! Congratulations, Beach Heroes!!



## The Mistake(s) on the Lake and Happy Earth Day #56 by Diane Humes

I grew up in Michigan and unabashedly consider myself to be from there, although I was born in California and have lived other places, including here in the Galveston Bay Area for the last 35 years. I know that Michiganders refer to Cleveland, OH as "the mistake on the lake" and it's funny, but why do they say that? Since learning about two weird and distinctive things that happened there, I have a few ideas. First, however, some words about a major pet peeve of mine - helium balloons.

Helium is the second element in the periodic table and is mainly produced by nuclear fusion of hydrogen by the Sun - Helios - but is also a by-product of natural gas production here on Earth. It is lighter than air, so balloons inflated with helium "float," and is inert, so safer than inflating with explosive hydrogen gas. Discovered over one hundred years ago, helium has distinctive industrial uses and contributes hugely to the lucrative party balloon industry - a \$3+ billion global business selling you latex or mylar balloons for your every whim.

Balloons are pretty and fun, but disastrous when let loose into the environment. They certainly do not follow your loved ones up to heaven; instead, they return to Earth and entangle wildlife and (mostly) do not bio-degrade. So, you could call them fancy forms of pollution, which I do when I pick them out of trees or riverbanks. As of this writing, 11 states have banned balloon releases: California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Nevada, Rhode Island, Tennessee and Virginia. California also passed a Foil balloon sales ban, which goes into effect after the phase-in period: 2027. Another 17 states: Arizona, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Washington, and Wisconsin are considering bans.

What does this have to do with Cleveland? The United Way of Cleveland organized Balloonfest'86, planning for a world record balloon release of 1.5 million balloons on September 27, 1986. This was a fundraising event and was planned meticulously, except for one thing - the weather. Inside the structure built to hold the balloons - 3 stories high and covering a whole city block - 2500 high school volunteers filled the balloons with helium (and received free t-shirts!) For photos, go to <https://rarehistoricalphotos.com/cleveland-balloons-1986/>.

The *Guinness Book of World Records* (1988) recognized the event as a world record, "largest ever mass balloon release", with 1,429,643 balloons launched, but no longer keeps measurements of balloon releases, so don't even try!

More than 100,000 people gathered for the event and it was a spectacular show. The balloons lifted off, but instead of rising into the atmosphere, thereby to float around for days, deflate and return to land someplace else, all 1.4 million of them collided with an approaching cold rainstorm, which pushed them all back to the ground and into Lake Erie, fully inflated, clogging everything. It was a mess for days, with balloons sloshing in Lake Erie all the way to Canada and back. With damages and lawsuits, the event was a net loss for its organizers. (That is the second mistake Cleveland will never make again!)

The first mistake happened in June 1969 when the Cuyahoga River caught fire - not actually for the first time, either! This highly industrialized river, flowing from Akron to Lake Erie, had been grossly polluted for decades and had burned at least 13 previous times. The largest fire had occurred in 1952, had flames five stories high and caused over \$1 million in damages.



Photo courtesy of the National Archives

A Kent State University Environmental Symposium described the river:

*The surface is covered with the brown oily film observed upstream as far as the Southerly Plant effluent. In addition, large quantities of black heavy oil floating in slicks, sometimes several inches thick, are observed frequently. Debris and trash are commonly caught up in these slicks forming an unsightly floating mess. Anaerobic action is common as the dissolved oxygen is seldom above a fraction of a part per million. The discharge of cooling water increases the temperature by 10 to 15 °F [5.6 to 8.3 °C]. The velocity is negligible, and sludge accumulates on the bottom. Animal life does not exist. Only the algae Oscillatoria grows along the piers above the water line. The color changes from gray-brown to rusty brown as the river proceeds downstream. Transparency is less than 0.5 feet [0.15 m] in this reach. This entire reach is grossly polluted.*

In 1969 while Cleveland’s new mayor, Carl Stokes, was trying to figure out how to begin rehabilitating the river, *Time* magazine ran an article about the burning river, using a picture from the 1952 fire, which was dramatic. Suddenly, the issue got traction, particularly after coming on the heels of the disastrous January 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill, with its pictures of oiled, dead and dying beaches and sea creatures. In 1972 Randy Newman wrote a song about the fire, *Burn On, Big River, Burn On*.

*Cleveland, city of light, city of magic  
 Cleveland, city of light, you're calling me  
 Cleveland, even now I can remember  
 'Cause the Cuyahoga River goes smoking through my dreams*

The time was suddenly right for people and government to begin cleaning it all up. Federal and state governments created the Clean Water Act, the Environmental Protection Agency. the Great Lakes Water Quality

Agreement and Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, for starters. The very first Earth Day, brainchild of Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson and planned in the



format of a nationwide environmental teach-in to raise awareness about air and water pollution, was held on April 22, 1970. It was hugely successful - attended by 20 million people - and we're still celebrating!

What we do on the land, we read in the water; nobody wants to see another river catch fire. Happy Earth Day #56, April 22, 2026!

## GBAC 25th Anniversary Logo by Sheron Evans

Our Galveston Bay Area Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists is commemorating its 25th anniversary in 2026! This significant milestone reflects a quarter century of dedication, learning and service to conservation and our natural world by chapter members past and present.

Chapter members have created this new logo as a visual celebration of the hard work, passion and community spirit that have defined us since our founding. Rather than a simple design, our logo thoughtfully illustrates and represents some of the many meaningful projects and initiatives chapter members have undertaken over the years. Our 25th anniversary logo tells our story.

As you take a closer look at the logo, we invite you to see how many of the individual species you can recognize. Challenge yourself to connect each plant, animal and background image to at least one specific conservation or stewardship project. (Many can be linked to more than one.) With 25 years of caring for Kemp's Ridley sea turtles, Monarch butterflies, migrating hawks, fireflies, wildflowers, prairies, wetlands and dragonflies, this could be a daunting task, but a fun and rewarding way to reflect on the incredible breadth of work our chapter is accomplishing. See page 8 for ideas to get you started.

In addition to all the stewardship, this logo represents an impressive amount of Food, Fun and Friendship - the fuels keeping us going! May it all last forever.



**“There's nothing wrong with enjoying looking at the surface of the ocean itself, except that when you finally see what goes on underwater, you realize that you've been missing the whole point of the ocean. Staying on the surface all the time is like going to the circus and staring at the outside of the tent.” - Dave Barry**

## Sylvan Beach Spring Hawk Watch 2026 Season by Lynn Wright

The 31st season of the Sylvan Beach Spring Hawk Watch wrapped up on April 30, 2026, and what a testament to dedication it was. Over 65 volunteers took to the skies (well, watched them) in teams logging more than 185 hours of observation from March 1 through April 30.

This year's headline wasn't the total raptor count; it was the wind. Or rather, the lack of the right kind. Hawk migration along the upper Texas coast is intimately tied to northwest winds, which push migrating raptors toward the coast and funnel them past Sylvan Beach. This spring, northwest winds materialized on only a single day, March 15, too early for the Broad-winged Hawks that typically make up the bulk of our counts. For the remainder of the season, winds carried a persistent easterly component (southeast, east, and northeast), nudging raptors inland toward central Texas instead.

The raptors were flying - just not over us. Bentsen Rio Grande Valley State Park, the only other spring hawk watch site in Texas, recorded 26,540 Broad-winged Hawks and 8,061 Mississippi Kites this season. The migration was real and robust; Sylvan Beach simply wasn't in its path.



Against that backdrop, the season's total of 935 migrating raptors, compared to the previous five-year average of 12,630, makes perfect sense. Counts for our four most common species were all well below average: 448 Broad-winged Hawks, 176 Turkey Vultures, 92 Black Vultures, and 65 Mississippi Kites. The bright spot? Swallow-tailed Kites, always a crowd favorite, came through at double their historical average, with 30 counted this season.



Beyond the official raptor tally, hawk watchers were treated to an entertaining supporting cast. Local raptors including Swainson's Hawks, Red-shouldered Hawks, and Bald Eagles made appearances, while non-raptor migrants added color and variety: Baltimore Orioles, Summer and Scarlet Tanagers, Indigo Buntings, Roseate Spoonbills, Wood Storks, Anhinga, White Ibis, and sweeping flocks of White Pelicans. And in a first for the watch, a Black-necked Stilt joined the proceedings, a small but satisfying milestone for the species list.

If this season taught us anything, it's that hawk watching is as much about understanding weather and geography as it is about counting birds. One good northwest wind can change everything. We'll be back in 2027, eyes on the sky and fingers crossed for a favorable flow.



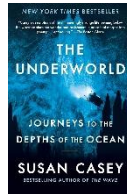
Daily counts are entered into HawkCount, the Hawk Migration Association's Raptor Migration Database. You can explore Sylvan Beach Hawk Watch data at [www.hawkcount.org](http://www.hawkcount.org).

## Heritage Book Club by TJ Fox



The Book Study has just finished a two-month read of *Not the End of the World: How We Can Be the First Generation to Build a Sustainable Planet* by Hannah Ritchie. During June and July, we will be reading and discussing *The Underworld: Journeys to the Depths of the Ocean* by Susan Casey.

The deep sea, generally defined as the ocean below 200 meters (656 feet), is a dark, cold, high-pressure environment covering 98% of the planet's living space - the biosphere - by volume, yet for all human history the deep ocean has been a source of wonder and terror, an unknown realm that evoked a singular, compelling question: What's down there?



We now know that it is a place of soaring mountains, smoldering volcanoes, and valleys 7,000 feet deeper than Mount Everest is high, where tectonic plates collide and separate, and extraordinary life forms operate under different rules. Far from a dark void, the deep is a vibrant realm that's home to pink gelatinous predators and shimmering creatures one hundred feet long and ancient animals with glass skeletons and sharks that live for half a millennium—among countless other marvels.

Susan Casey is a premiere chronicler of that aquatic world. She traversed the globe, joining scientists and explorers on dives to the deepest places on the planet, interviewing the marine geologists, marine biologists, and oceanographers who are searching for knowledge in this vast unseen realm.

Susan takes us on a fascinating journey through the history of deep-sea exploration, from the myths and legends of the ancient world to storied shipwrecks we can now reach on the bottom, to the first intrepid bathysphere pilots, to the scientists who are just beginning to understand the mind-blowing complexity and ecological importance of the quadrillions of creatures who live in realms long thought to be devoid of life.

Join us on the first Monday of June and July at 1:00pm as we discuss this book.

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

**June 29**

## *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](mailto:treimanhumes@gmail.com).

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### **Midden Team** - Diane Humes, Editor

Peggy Antone	Madeleine K. Barnes
Verva Densmore	Sheron Evans
Rebekah Gano	Meade LeBlanc
Carolyn Miles	Chuck Snyder



## June and July Activities

### ADVANCED TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

**Chapter Meeting** - June 4; Arboviruses in Southeast Texas

Presenter: Alan Barrett

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

At Extension Office\* and via Zoom; 1 hour AT

### Bats of Texas

Tuesday, June 2 at 6pm via Zoom

Presenter: DeAndra Ramsey

### Trash Rules

Wednesday, July 1 at 2pm via Zoom

Presenter: Diane Humes

### Ongoing

#### Heritage Book Club

First Monday of every month via Zoom; 2 hours AT

Contact: TJ Fox, [tj.fox39@gmail.com](mailto: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/>

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

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



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### 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Logo Ideas

**Butterfly** - Monarch Butterfly Monitoring Project

**Sea Turtle** - Turtle Patrols, GCSTR Rehab Hospital

**Hawk** - Hawk Watch; Various Bird Counts

**Bats** - Bat Acoustic Monitoring, Waugh Drive Bat Colony

**Fireflies** - Armand Bayou Glow Patrol

**Wildflowers** - Bayside Regional Park Garden

**Prairie Restoration** - Dick Benoit Prairie; Prairie Friday

**Dragonfly** - Master Naturalist's mascot

**Wetland Restoration** - Willow Waterhole, Exploration Green

**Bayou** - Water testing, Trash cleanups