

# Coastal Prairie Chapter Courier

August 1, 2021 Volume 9, Issue 8



## *Inside This Issue*

*Chapter member Diane Russell Honored  
Willow Fork Butterfly Garden  
Journey of a Naturalist*



Diane Russell

We are a group of trained volunteers who share our appreciation and knowledge of nature with the community through outreach, education, and conservation/restoration projects



## President's Message



Fellow Chapter Members,

*The heat is on!*

August is here, and so is the Texas heat.

*"Heat is required to forge anything. Every great accomplishment is the story of a flaming heart."*

*– Mary Lou Retton, Retired U.S. Olympic Gymnast, Olympic Gold Medalist, and adopted Texan*

*Our chapter continues to forge new accomplishments with commitment, passion, and knowledge.*

*COVID-19 Status*

Fort Bend County's [COVID-19 community risk level](#) remains at yellow—"low/moderate risk." More detailed information can be found at the [county's pandemic website](#).

Effective July 27, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](#)) updated its [recommendations for fully vaccinated people](#) recommending that everyone wear a mask in indoor public settings in areas of substantial and high transmission, regardless of vaccination status:

- "If you are fully vaccinated, you can participate in many of the activities that you did before the pandemic.
- To maximize protection from the Delta variant and prevent possibly spreading it to others, wear a mask indoors in public if you are in an area of substantial or high transmission..."

According to the [CDC COVID Data Tracker site](#), Fort Bend, Waller, and Wharton counties are listed as areas of high transmission.

The TMN state program's [COVID Safety and Response Guidelines](#) remain unchanged. We will send out updated information as it becomes available.

*Chapter Presidents' & Advisors' meeting update*

There was no July meeting. Our next meeting is scheduled for Monday, August 9. I will send out a report summarizing what was discussed.

*Moving forward*

Our partnership with the Houston Museum of Natural Science (HMNS) continues to develop. We held our first hybrid—Zoom and in-person—chapter meeting at the Sugar Land campus in July. We also plan to hold our August 5 chapter meeting there using a hybrid format as well. More information to follow.

We are also talking with the Fort Bend County Parks and Recreation about partnering in the development of Daily Park in Simonton.

Seabourne Nature Fest (SNF) 2021 planning continues. Much more information will be forthcoming in the next few days. Stay tuned!

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### Cover Photo

**Monarch Caterpillar**

By Susan Walther

*Please send chapter events and nature-related articles, photos, and items of interest to the chapter to [Lynn Trenta](#) by the 29<sup>th</sup> of the month. Suggestions for the newsletter are also welcome. Thanks.*

Lynn Trenta,  
Courier Editor

## President's Message *(Continued)*

The [22nd Texas Master Naturalist Program Annual Meeting](#) planning is ramping up. This year's meeting will follow a hybrid format. Registration will open the first week of August, and it will be held the weekend of Thursday through Sunday, October 21–24, with plenty of activities throughout the event.

*We continue to grow, adapt, and most importantly — have fun!*

*Continue to stay safe. As always, contact me with any questions, concerns, and suggestions.*

*All the best,*

*Bert Stipelcovich*

[bert@coastalprairie.org](mailto:bert@coastalprairie.org)

713-540-2378



## The Membership Minute *By Jan and Kevin Kolk, TMN Membership Directors*

**Congratulations** to the following members who recently achieved certifications and milestones:

### Initial Certification

- *Debbie Ellis (Spring, 2021)*
- *Aida Pita (Fall, 2020)*
- *Lucy Moyer (Spring, 2021)*
- *Sharon Watson (Spring, 2021)*
- *Pat Drilling (Fall, 2020)*
- *Janis Peterson (Spring, 2021)*
- *Lucy Randel (Spring, 2021)*



### 2021 Recertification (47 members recertified so far)

- *Jamie Fairchild*
- *Diane Russell*
- *Susie Doe*
- *Jerry Trenta*
- *Ron Masters*

### 250 Hour Milestone

- *Peter Parsons*
- *Johanna DeYoung*
- *Paula Dittrick*

### 5000 Hour Milestone

- *Diane Russell*



*Certification/Recertification/Milestone pins will continue to be mailed as they are earned until we are able to resume in-person meetings.*

## August 5 Chapter Program: "Pollinator Gardening"

By Nancy Greig, founding director of the Cockrell Butterfly Center



Ms. Greig will talk about pollinator gardening including explaining the floral characteristics of plants that will attract butterflies, bees, moths, hummingbirds, etc. She will also provide general suggestions for successful gardening with and for insects. [More information](#). This is a Zoom presentation. All meetings of our chapter are free and open to the public. Advance registration is required. Check back here a day or two before the presentation for the registration link. After registering, you will receive an email with further details. The program begins at 6pm.

## Diane Russell Reaches Her 5000-Hour Milestone!

Diane Russell has reached that rare achievement in our chapter of accumulating 5000 hours of VSP time! She has participated in so many aspects of our chapter and in so many activities that it was inevitable that she would reach this milestone!

She has contributed artwork to our Seabourne T-Shirts and to our Seabourne Nature Fest Poster. She has served as chapter secretary, vice-president and president and devoted many hours to these offices. Below are some statements from a few of her fellow chapter members and photos from the 10 years she has been a member of our chapter. A huge congratulations, Diane!



I first met Diane when she was going thru the T.M.N. initial training. I knew when she seemed to appreciate my jokes that she was a kindred spirit. The better I came to know her the more impressed I was with her knowledge of nature, her dedication to the Chapter and her personality. I was Chapter President then and I did not have to look far to find a candidate to replace me. It took a while but I finally convinced her to get outside her comfort zone and run for the office. She did and served us admirably in that post. Among other things we share is a February 17th birthday. Each year to celebrate we send the same birthday card back and forth to each other. Diane, congratulations to you for being only the second person in the Chapter to attain 5,000 hours. *Jim Butcher*

Diane and I were in the 2011 TMNCPC Class and therefore were newbies at the same time. Diane asked the best questions in the class and was a lot of fun! She was immediately selected to be secretary on the board and became one of the most influential members in the chapter, serving as secretary, vice-president, and president. Diane was already volunteering at Katy Prairie Conservancy when she joined the chapter. Outreach was her specialty, mainly teaching children about Monarch butterflies. She even created her own caterpillar suit that enabled her to illustrate how the Monarch caterpillar develops into its chrysalis (see photo). She volunteered at the Holy Rosary Catholic School and taught the preschool children at her church. She headed up the crafts at SNF and took on the Seabourne butterfly garden as well. Diane is one-of-a-kind and a valuable member of our chapter. Congratulations! *Lynn Jrenta*



## Diane Russell Reaches Her 5000-Hour Milestone! *(continued)*

Diane as my mentor has been an inspiration. From her impromptu outreach programs, her humorous Fred Astaire caterpillars, and her continuing education, curiosity and wonder about all things nature, she is an amazing mentor and friend. Diane is a true gift to the chapter and beyond. Congratulations on 5000 hours! *Angela LeDoux*



Congratulations, Dr. Russell, on reaching your 5000 hour milestone!! I am so grateful to have met you through the TXMN program. You have provided leadership to me and many others with your deep knowledge of butterflies, skill in outreach, service attitude, AMAZING artistic talent, and ability to have fun (breakdancing, anyone?). I am a great admirer. Let's celebrate Diane! *Jamie Fairchild*



One of my greatest pleasures of being a Master Naturalist with the Coastal Prairie Chapter, was meeting such wonderful people. Diane Russel is a perfect example. Diane is a lifelong learner, and she's also very curious about many things. She digs deep to understand them. Nothing is too complicated for Diane! She loves to share what she has learned and that made her so wonderful at outreach. Diane is also a very talented artist. She is such an asset to our chapter. An extra bonus is that she has a wicked sense of humor!!! And I'm proud to call her my friend. *Donna Pisani*





## Volunteer Service Projects Highlights *By Johanna DeYoung, TMNCPC VSP*

*With COVID-19 Delta variant quickly on the rise, we must continue to safely participate in VSP opportunities! Fort Bend County continues in the Yellow COVID-19 status.*

*Reminder: No more than 20 hours of VSP service outside of Fort Bend, Waller, and Wharton Counties may be counted toward certification or recertification.*

### **CURRENT STATUS**

*4/13/2021: Fort Bend County moved COVID-19 category from Orange "Moderate/Significant Risk" to Yellow "Low/Moderate Risk". Per K. P. George*

*Attendance at Events and Entertainment*

*"Attend events only with proper physical distancing practices in place. Opt for small to medium size events (<50 people) to avoid large group settings."*

*Outdoor Entertainment*

*"Continue good personal protective measure such as facial coverings and physical distancing. Consider events that are less crowded and have better controls to keep you safe, such as capped numbers of attendees and good cleaning practices."*

*5/21/2021: Texas A&M AgriLife Extension issued the following update:*

*"The following considerations should direct how the Texas Master Naturalist Program will operate for the foreseeable future.*

*Considerations for all TMN Activities:*

*It is very important to know and follow all federal, state, county and local COVID guidelines/restrictions before conducting TMN Activities. Beyond these, please consider the following in planning gatherings:*

*1. Virtual meeting platform tools are useful and should remain an important consideration for planning meetings and events.*

*2. For any indoor or outdoor activities that do occur in-person, masks and social distancing considerations are encouraged.*

*Please note regarding vaccines: Our program and agencies currently have no legal authority to develop policy based on private health information (HIPAA laws) at this time and we don't anticipate the program drafting its own policy or allowances, etc. addressing whether individuals (members or the public) with vaccines can/cannot participate in any TMN activities and where, when and how.*

*Texas Master Naturalist members or members of the public should not be asked about their vaccination status.*

*Chapters may encourage persons in program settings to continuing following CDC guidance.*

*There shall be NO EFFORT (including casual comments made publicly or privately) to DISCOURAGE the use of face coverings or any COVID related safety precaution. Those who wish to wear masks and practice COVID protocols should be respected and their wishes supported."*

*3/2/2021: Texas Governor Greg Abbott issued Executive Order No. GA-34 noting changes in COVID-19 restrictions. These changes, which included lifting the mask mandate and opening businesses to 100%, took effect on 3/10/2021. Governor Abbott encouraged the continuation of wearing masks when maintaining a physical distance cannot be maintained.*

### **VSP Opportunities**

#### **Reminder: "Plastic Free July: TMN Report Hours"**

*Opportunity Description: Reduce, Recycle, Reuse Activities for Plastic Free July. Prior to obtaining one (1) hour of VSP time, complete the TMNCPC Plastic Free July Tally Form (found in Slack in the Forms Channel) with your best estimates from July 1-31, 2021, and email it to [judi.laraine.harrington@gmail.com](mailto:judi.laraine.harrington@gmail.com) by August 6, 2021."*

*Remember to complete the TMNCPC Plastic Free July Tally Form and send it to Judy Harrington on/before 8/6/2021.*

*Continued on next page--*

## Volunteer Service Projects Highlights *(Continued)*

### **VSP Opportunities Continued**

#### **Seabourne Volunteer Days**

TMN COVID-19 Precautions: "For any indoor or outdoor activities that do occur in-person, masks and social distancing considerations are encouraged."

Fort Bend County COVID-19 Yellow Precautions: "Continue good personal protective measure such as facial coverings and physical distancing. Opt for small to medium size events (<50 people) to avoid large group settings."

For bump ups, prairie planting, nursery maintenance, and/or trail maintenance, please contact Jerry Trenta, Seabourne director (713-898-4769 [jerrytrenta@txtrentas.com](mailto:jerrytrenta@txtrentas.com))

For demo garden work, please contact Lynn Trenta, (832-646-4769 [ltrenta50@gmail.com](mailto:ltrenta50@gmail.com))

For bird sanctuary work, please contact Bill Johnson, (281-734-3349 [rxrelo@aol.com](mailto:rxrelo@aol.com))

For butterfly garden work, please contact Katie Sallean, (713-502-5701 [katie@coastalprairie.com](mailto:katie@coastalprairie.com))

[VSP hours to be recorded in VMS under the category "SCNP-7 Habitats Public Access: TMN Report Hours"]

#### **Seabourne Garden Group**

Zoom meetings and field trips include the education committee meetings (signage is under this), and program meetings that offer information for members. For those interested, please contact Jan Kolk, Lynn Trenta or Katie Sallean.

[VSP hours to be recorded in VMS under the category "SCNP-7 Habitats Public Access: TMN Report Hours"]

#### **Texas Master Naturalist's 2021 Virtual Volunteer Fair**

The idea of the Virtual Volunteer Fair (VVF) developed during the COVID-19 pandemic. After two successful VVFs, TMN is offering a third. The TMN virtual fair is an opportunity for TMN partner conservation organizations to present service projects that need volunteers from a distance or virtually!" Mark your calendars for 8/31/21 and/or 9/1/2021. For more information, please check out on the website - <https://txmn.tamu.edu/virtual-volunteer-fair-august-2021/>.

[VSP hours to be recorded in VMS under the category: "TMN Virtual Volunteer Service Fair: TMN Report Hours"]

(See article page 9)

On Saturday, 7/17/2021, Sandra Brown, Jim Butcher, and Johanna DeYoung hosted a TMNCPC table at the Fort Bend Museum Grand Re-Opening event. Some 85 visitors stopped at the TMNCPC table to take in the EnviroScape Watershed/Non-Point Source 3D education model WOW and to learn about our TMNCPC. This WOW demonstrates how storm water runoff can carry pollutants through the watershed to a pond, lake, river, bay or ocean. The visitors, especially the children, were enthralled with the presentation. Graciously, Jim provided on-the-job training of this WOW. Some three visitors signed up to learn more about TMNCPC opportunities.

Please continue to check the website calendar, Slack, and the TMNCPC Members Only Facebook page for VSP updates. If there is no existing VSP description fitting a potential VSP opportunity, please request and complete a VSP Proposal Form. In turn, the VSP Committee, Terri Hurley, Charris Powers, Lynn Trenta, and Johanna DeYoung, will review the proposal and determine if it qualifies as a VSP opportunity.

If you are aware of VSP opportunities, have questions about VSP opportunities, or unsure how to record a VSP opportunity, please contact Johanna DeYoung (832-689-4877/[johanna@coastalprairie.com](mailto:johanna@coastalprairie.com)).

# Willow Fork Park Pollinator Garden A Family and Wildlife Friendly Garden in Cinco Ranch

By Diane Russell



In 2017, a 32-acre park, developed by the Willow Fork Drainage District in collaboration with Katy ISD, was officially opened just north of Cinco Ranch High School. As their website says, "...the park provides residents a high-quality recreational environment, improving what was 32 acres of flat land into a multipurpose environment with compelling topographical undulations, multipurpose open lawns, paved trails, a lake, and more than 15 species of trees. Additional park features include free Wi-Fi, educational signage, solar-powered lighting, boardwalks, a pedestrian bridge, playground, disc golf, bio swales, dog waste stations, and a pavilion facility with restrooms, picnic tables and grills."

As president of the Friends of Willow Fork, Neil Stillman initiated various nature-based events in the park, which is where I met him as a representative of the TMNCPC. We discussed creating a butterfly garden. Shortly thereafter, Neil approached the Willow Fork Board of Directors for approval. They worked out a design, and before I could turn around, infrastructure for our garden was in place, complete with a fresh soil, mulch, a gravel walking path and irrigation, all partially encircled by a log fence. Its Grand Opening and ribbon-cutting was June 22, 2019, at which time I presented a program explaining how this area had once been part of the Katy tall grass prairie, and the need to provide habitat for pollinators to offset development of the area.



Neil Stillman

Photos by Houston Chronicle



Diane Russell



Photos by Diane Russell



Angela LeDoux

So now we had a gorgeous but empty area, awaiting some magic. Over the course of the next year, Neil, his wife Rita, future Chapter member Angela LeDoux, other volunteers and I began planting the garden. With Drainage District funds, Neil purchased mature plants. Susie Martin from the TMN Gulf Coast Chapter, invited us to her backyard to take dozens of native plants for the garden. Many people donated natives from their own yards. Over 120 plants had gone in by late summer, 2020.

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## Willow Fork Park (Continued)

*Despite all this effort, the garden looked rather barren, but we were learning what was and was not working there. The garden is exposed to strong drying winds and harsh sun all day. Our smaller plants struggled to survive these conditions with their poorly developed root systems, and rabbits also helped themselves to the young vegetation, and it seemed like more disappeared than survived. Our garden looked pretty bare still! I overheard one visitor mumbling about the cost of the garden for so little outcome!*



*Over the following winter and spring, a more robust sprinkler system and additional fencing were added and more surrounding trees were planted as a wind break. Boy scouts built us a small pergola to sit in. Neil brought in informational signage for the public to understand what the garden was about. We continued to plant more mature plants throughout the spring of 2021. Chapter and community members joined in the effort, including Vicki Broussard, Ginny Schiermann, Bruce Vest, Anna Palomino, and Helen Poole. Thanks to the TMN Coastal Prairie Chapter and Wen Sherrill for donating mature plants at this time! Angela is currently building the Willow Fork Park Garden Project on iNaturalist so that we can have a record of the pollinators that come to the garden. We are excited to welcome one of our Chapter's newer members, Sharon Lewis, to this effort with her knowledge and expertise on pollinator insects. I also want to thank Shannon Westveer for the many insights she has given me to improve my understanding of the complex relationships between insect pollinators and plants.*

*Continued on the next page--*



*Photos by Diane Russell*



## Willow Fork Park (Continued)

As of this summer, our garden is on its way to becoming our dream come true. So many butterflies, bees, moths, wasps, flies and beetles are discovering the host and nectar plants they need for survival. Human visitors regularly go out of their way to thank us for the work we are doing. Families visit and want to know all about the plants and insects they are looking at, and we are provided with constant outreach opportunities every time we work there. I fully expect this garden to be a unique community gem by next year. As Susie Marten explained, "The first year a garden sleeps, the second year it creeps, and the third year it leaps." Watch out, 2022! Other Chapter members are always welcome to join us - just contact me or Angela, especially if you live in the Katy/Cinco Ranch area.



American bumblebee



Inornate pyrausta moth

Photos by Diane Russell



Stink Bug Hunter



Phaon crescent

## CHAPTER OUTREACH

### July 4 Celebration Event at Seabourne

By Johanna DeYoung, TMNCPC VSP Director



**The Family 4th Celebration Event took place, as planned, on July 4th! Our TMNCPC Crew, Jim Butcher, Naomi Brown, John Rouane, Margo Johnson, Bill Johnson, James Stepp, Andrea Morgenstern, Mark Morgenstern, Debbie Ellis, Shanyn Zink and I, arrived in a downpour and set up WoW exhibits under the gazebo in light rain. Good News: The Bat WoW and Debbie Ellis' soon-to-be Butterfly Wow were well received with 155 individuals stopping at our tables. With Shanyn working as a "Sentinel" as people approached the gazebo, people came into the gazebo looking for the Bat and Butterfly WOWs. A four-year-old child came upon the Butterfly WOW and exuberantly exclaimed, "WOW"!!!! She was over the top taken by the Butterfly WOW! Bad News: Due to fear of lightning/thunder that could have spooked the horses, the horse drawn wagon rides were cancelled. Dealing with inclement weather and learning scripts/information, the Wagon Masters remained in good spirits in spite of the fact they were unable to execute their assignments.**



Johanna DeYoung, VSP Director and Debbie Ellis (l) Butterfly Display(r)  
Photo John Vindekilde

## CHAPTER OUTREACH *(Continued)*

### Fort Bend County Museum Reopens

By Johanna DeYoung, TMNCPC VSP Director



*Thanks to John Vindekilde for the photos of the Grand Re-Opening of the Fort Bend Museum which took place 7/17/2021.*

*Sandra Brown, Jim Butler, and Johanna DeYoung hosted a TMNCPC table at this event. Some 85 visitors stopped at our table to take in the EnviroScape Watershed/Non-point Source 3D education model WOW and to learn about our TMNCPC. This WOW demonstrates how storm water runoff can carry pollutants through the watershed to a pond, lake, river, bay, or ocean. The visitors, especially the children, were enthralled with the presentation. Graciously, Jim provided on-the-job training of this WOW. Some three visitors signed up to learn more about TMNCPC opportunities.*





## Invasive Plants *By Paula Dittrick, TMNCPC Website Blogmaster*



SCNP Prairie photo by Lynn Trenta



KR Bluestem photo by Paula Dittrick

*Prairie restoration efforts at Seabourne Creek Nature Park are a multiyear process that involves replacing invasive grasses and other undesired plants with native grass and wildflowers more beneficial to wildlife. The 164-acre Seabourne has several undesirable plants that Prairie Coastal Chapter members are working diligently to control.*

*TMNCPC Seabourne director Jerry Trenta notes several introduced grasses live at the park. Undesirable grasses include King Ranch bluestem (*Bothriochloa ischaemum* var. *songarica*), windmill grass (*Chloris cantherae*), dallis grass (*Paspalum dilatatum*), bahia grass (*Paspalum notatum*) and vasey grass (*Paspalum urvillei*). This article discusses KR, windmill, and vasey.*

*TMNCPC's signature project is SCNP, which was original Texas Coastal Prairie until it was converted into a cotton field and later became a park. The Rosenberg City Council acquired the land in 1993. In June 2009, the council authorized TMNCPC to restore a 20-acre plot to native prairie. In 2010, TMNCPC members planted eastern gamagrass and bushy bluestem using a borrowed tractor and no-till drill.*

### **KR bluestem**

*"King Ranch bluestem is a bunchgrass that grows in tufts with erect or spreading culms (stems) 18-48 inches tall," reports the Texas Invasive Species Institute. KR's spikelets featuring a reddish-purple color are a distinguishing field mark.*

*The ecological threat is that KR reduces insect diversity, which in turn reduces the diversity of grasslands. Scientists believe KR also contributed to reduced rodent diversity. Another ecological threat is the red-streaked leafhopper, which uses KR as a host plant. This leafhopper can carry a phytoplasma, which potentially could declinate U.S. sugarcane crops, the Texas Invasive Species Institute said. The red-streaked leafhopper has caused significant sugarcane damage in Thailand.*

*KR's native origin is the Atlantic coasts of Europe to Pacific shores of Asia. Ranchers introduced KR to Texas, thinking it helped prevent erosion and possibly be useful as a foraging grass. But for cattle, KR is a poor-quality grass, yielding only 7-10% crude protein. Digestible nutrients and palatability also are low, researchers say.*

*Meanwhile, KR bluestem has proved impossible to contain, spreading across much of Texas and into other southern states.*

*Management options for eradication of KR bluestem are mowing, controlled burning, tilling, and herbicides, but eradication or even management is difficult because KR bluestem grows along roads from Harlingen to Jasper, according to Texas Invasive Species Institute. For more information you can look at Texas AgriLife Extension article at [https://cdn-ext.agnet.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ERM-036\\_-Introduced-Bluestem-Grasses-Management-on-Native-Lands.pdf](https://cdn-ext.agnet.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ERM-036_-Introduced-Bluestem-Grasses-Management-on-Native-Lands.pdf)*

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## Invasive Plants (Continued)

### Windmill and Vasey

Another invasive at Seabourne is windmill grass (*Chloris cantherae*), but the taxonomists are the process of deciding whether it should in fact be called *Stapfochloa cantherae*.

Susie Doe notes that Kew Plants of the World Online (and therefore iNaturalist) was the only authority as of June to have accepted this new name.

Its common name is Paraguayan windmill grass, and it is an introduced species in the US (mainly to TX, LA, SC and a few other states). Its native range is from Southern Brazil to N. Argentina.



Paraguayan Windmill Grass photo by Susie Doe

Texas Master Naturalists also work to control vasey grass (*Paspalum Urvillei*) at Seabourne.

The Texas Invasive Species Institute describes vasey grass as "Densely tufted robust perennial [grass]; culms 1-2 m tall, erect, glabrous, basally thickened; sheaths carinate upwards, lower ones pubescent, purplish; upper ones glabrous, green, 8-27 cm long; ligule very conspicuous (3-) 5-8 (-12) mm long, membranous; blades linear, acute, 12-55 cm long, 4-15 mm wide, flat, hairy at base; panicles 10-40 cm long, of 6-25 crowded racemes, these erect or ascending, 5-13 cm long, apical ones shorter than basal ones; spikelets paired, on rachises about 0.8 mm wide, elliptic ovate, broad, subacute, 2-3 mm long; glume and sterile lemma subequal, slightly apiculate, thin, ovate, 3-nerved, green to greenish-purple, pilose-ciliate; fertile lemma 1.6 mm long."

There are no native Texas species that could be confused with vasey grass, the Texas Invasive Species Institute said. Vasey grass came from South America. It was introduced to the United States and now can be found across many states besides Texas: Alabama, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.



Vasey Grass photo by Lynn Trenta

## Journey of a Naturalist #2

### Cycle of Life or The Problem is the Solution or other?

By Lucy Randel, TMNCPC spring class 2021

As a master naturalist on a landscape committee for an HOA that oversees 52 acres of esplanades and public areas, I face challenges and opportunities. Maintenance for our neighborhood tree planting projects, for example, is governed by agreements with Harris County, City of Houston, Houston Parks Board (HPB) and Meyerland Community Improvement Association. All parties do not always share a common vision or commitment. Since the HOA is most closely tied to the neighborhood, they often get the complaints, and sometimes the work, related to other parties not meeting expectations.

In just the past month the HOA has taken on duties for each of the others with respect to trees in this one area, right at the entry to the neighborhood.

- Three connected detention basins were installed with the HOA caring for the ones on the median and neighborhood side while HPB manages the one closest to the bayou. Well, HPB's approach was to mow around 23 young wax myrtles to the point that invasive grasses were in some case taller than the trees.
- Dying trees on city property on the neighborhood side of the sound wall should be removed by COH. However, their turnaround can be several months. Butt rot low on the trunk of one hackberry tree made it susceptible to toppling over, while large branches had been falling from oak and elm trees.
- Harris County hired contractors to plant and maintain the trees planted at these basins for two years. Many trees were planted too deep and the watering schedule is not adequate for all the microclimates in the project.

The trick is how to address these issues in the most sustainable manner without bumping up the costs for the homeowners. Hazardous tree removal was deemed a priority and the grasses needed management to allow the wax myrtles to survive. Contractors were called in. We had not really addressed the last item, though, other than by an e-mail reminding the county that it had gotten really dry again. An adage I first heard in permaculture classes was "the problem is the solution" and I wondered how that could apply here. Enter the cycle of life, soil building and wood chips!

Dead trees meet baby trees. After a few emails and a site visit, the arborist agreed to deliver a truckload of wood chips from the removal site to the planting site about a mile away at no extra charge. The added mulch will reduce evaporation while adding organic matter to the compacted soil. And the grass cuttings from the mowing will add to the biomass near the bayou side basin, with perhaps a personal touchup to get the grass out of the tree branches. We also hope to continue the cycle of life by adding some seedlings to the area where the dead trees once stood. As for the deep planting, I am addressing that one tree at a time.



Dying water oak (*Quercus nigra*) with falling branches



Butt rot observed on hackberry (*Celtis laevegata*). Brittle Cinder (*Kretzschmaria deusta*), is a fungus and plant pathogen that attacks broad leaved trees through root injuries. When trees are located in lawns, care to prevent damage from weed whackers and lawnmowers is important to avoid injury from pathogens and pests.



Wax myrtles (*Myrica cerifera*) enveloped by grasses

# BLASTS FROM THE PAST

Collected By Lynn Trenta, Courier Editor



*The top photos are of the hog corral to catch feral hogs we had in Seabourne in 2014 and a trapped hog. Bill Johnson is talking to visitors on Earth Day at the bird sanctuary in April 2019. Donna Pisani and Jimmie Brannon are holding a speckled king snake in the two bottom photos. I am not sure of the photographers for these, except for the ones of Donna and Jimmie, that are ones I took.*



## Plant of the Month

Photos by Jerry Trenta, TMNCPC Past President and Seabourne Director



**Slender Rosinweed**

*Silphium gracile*

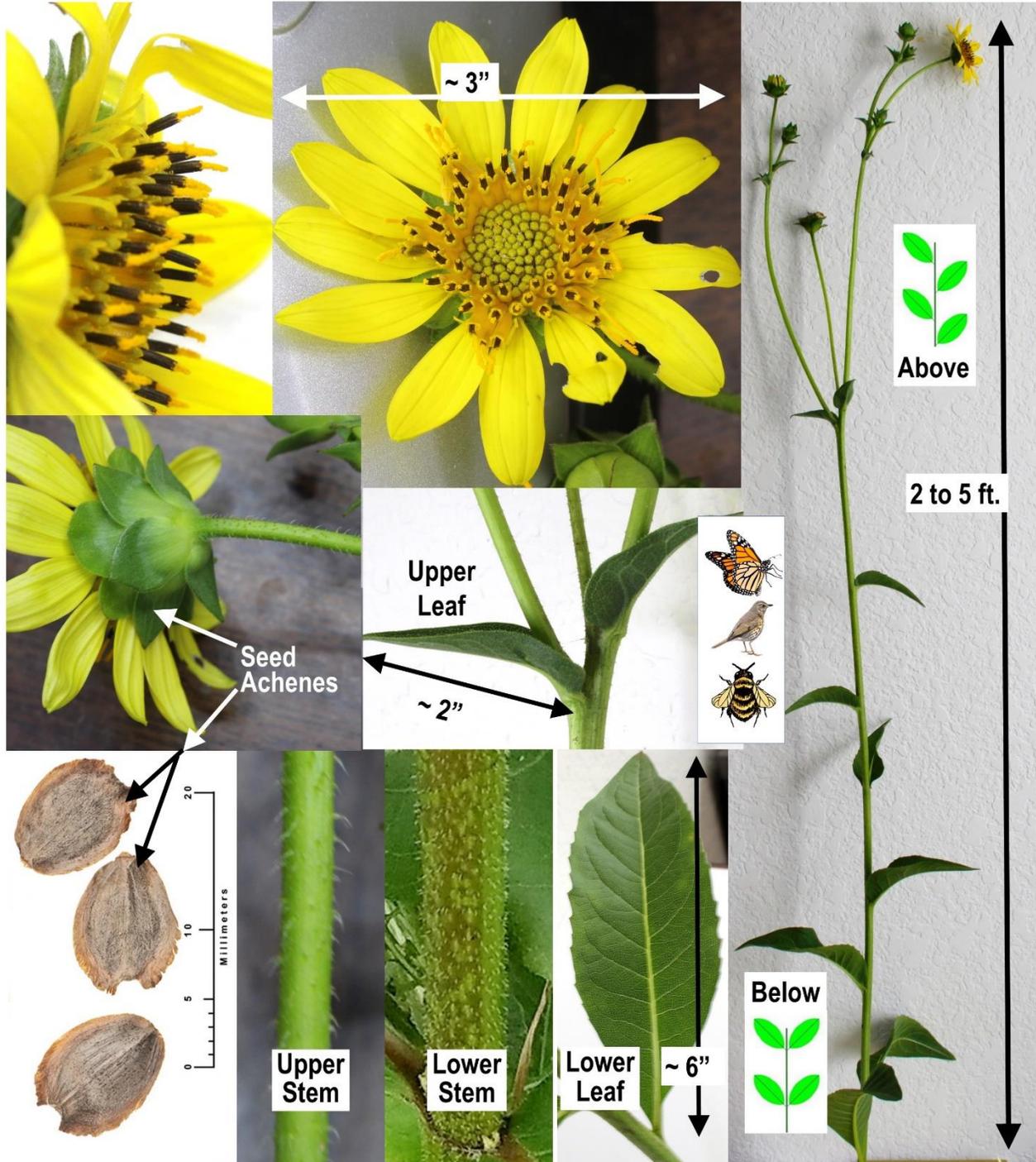
Simpson Rosinweed

Family: **Asteraceae (Aster)**

Perennial

Flowers: **May - Sep**

Seed Collection: **Jun - Oct**





## Seabourne News *(Continued)*

### Butterfly Garden News and Photos *By Lynn Trenta, Courier Editor*

*The butterfly garden at Seabourne got a face lift! The stone borders were raised and cemented and it looks great! Susan Walther took this wonderful photo of a Monarch caterpillar on milkweed in the garden. The fall obedient plants are blooming and look fantastic!*



### Seabourne Volunteers Brave the July Heat

*As we face the relentless heat of summer, Seabourne volunteers are continuing the work that is needed at our signature project. Elizabeth Greene helped boy scouts bump up plants and Jan Kolk and Charris Powers removed invasive plants in the Houston Wilderness pollinator area, which we are in the process of reviving. Volunteers have been helping in the prairies and the gardens as well.*



*Photos by Lynn Trenta*



### Help Wanted at Seabourne

*We are in need of chapter members who want to help us:*

- *Get rid of invasive plants at Seabourne, especially in the prairie and the Houston Wilderness pollinator area. This group does not need to come out every week and can regulate its own timeline.*
- *Manage the nursery –this involves weeding and organizing the pots. This also does not to be done weekly.*
- *Participate in the Arboretum group –this involves watering and labeling the trees as well as helping organize our yearly tree planting.*

*Please contact [Jerry Trenta](#) if you are interested in being a part of these 3 important task forces.*

## In Our Own Backyards and Other Places

### Carolina Wrens *Photos and Text by Diane Eismont*

*Keep your eyes open for Carolina Wren nests in a host of places you wouldn't expect to see them - like the deer feeder arm in the photo, which shows an egg (laid the end of June) and a mother bird.*

*Carolina Wrens are "cavity nesters" and their nests are composed of twigs, mosses, bark, rootlets, leaves and lined with other soft, fine materials.*

*We have also found nests in a gas grill, a post hole digger, hose caddies and open barn cabinets. The eggs are pink and white with brown marks. Usual incubation time is about two weeks with two nests per year.*

*On July 17, I saw a pair still enthusiastically gathering nesting material from my flower garden and flying off with it together.*

*Carolina Wrens are found in eastern Texas year 'round and are avid insect hunters - especially with young! They are credited with being voracious consumers of boll weevils during the weevils' period of hibernation. They also come to feeders as shown in the second photo.*

*Males and females have the same color plumage and both gesticulate actively with their tails. A joy to watch!*



## In Our Own Backyards and Other Places *(Continued)*



### A Snakeskin Saga *By Nancy Jones*

*I wanted to take advantage of my trip to the park and get a little work done - something easy, so I did a bit of straightening up in the potting area, mostly straightening up the pots and stuff on the shelves. Below are photos of 4 snake skins I found behind the pots. iNaturalist did not identify them, but my best uneducated guess is they are rat snakes. Three photos are of Big Guy. He was a little over 6 feet long (yes, I carry a measuring tape in my purse - never know when it will come in handy.) If you stretch Big Guy out, he might be closer to 7 feet. I could not get all of him in one photo, so 3 of the photos are of him. Finding the skins did not cause me to flee, but I was a bit uneasy moving things around on the shelves, so I didn't get it all done; looks better though.*

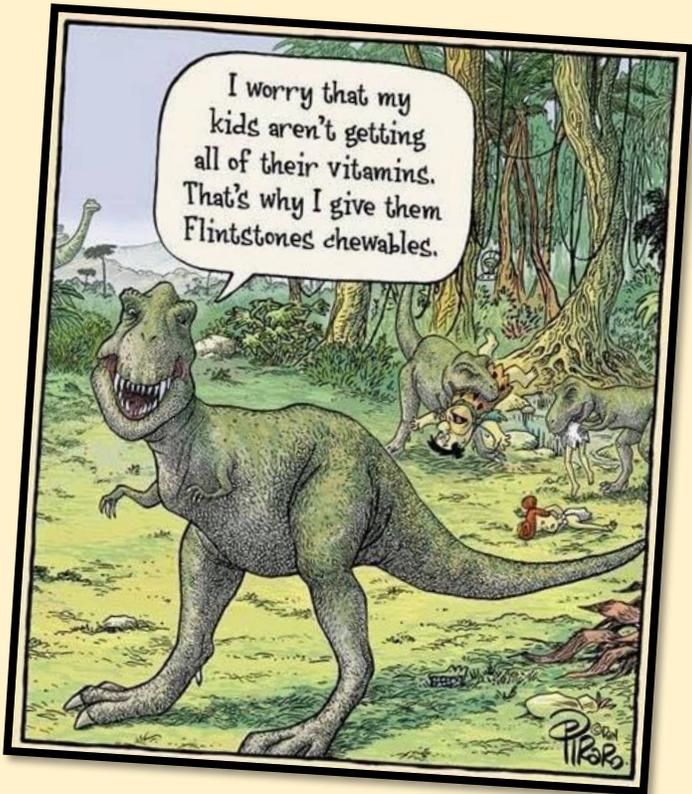
# The Lighter Side



**MAYBE MONEY DOESN'T BUY HAPPINESS,  
BUT I'M ACCEPTING DONATIONS TO TEST THAT THEORY.**

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English Humour and Images



The Far Side



## TMNCPC 2021 Board Members

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We are on the Web!

See us at:

[www.coastalprairie.org](http://www.coastalprairie.org)

*I hope those participating were able to cut down their plastic consumption in new and exciting ways! It seems like such an overwhelming problem, but if every person made just a small change, the effects would ripple out into the world. The last tip I leave you with is don't be afraid to fail! There are so many ways to cut single-use plastic from your everyday life, but not all of them work for each person. Shampoo bars work AMAZINGLY in my hair, but I have many friends who can't use them at all. I've tried the plastic-free deodorant and it does NOT work for me at all (every type has left me with either a rash or it doesn't work and in this heat, I need something that works).*

*Everyone's journey to plastic reduction is going to look different - and it should, because we are all unique with different needs. If something you try doesn't work out, that's okay! You can always try something new. For those looking to make the switch to shampoo bars, I highly recommend the ones from The Yellow Bird Company. They're bars are big, affordable, and made with responsible sourced products (not to mention waste free packaging). You can also get a great one at Target from Love Beauty & Planet - they have two and both come in a recyclable box for about \$5*

*Don't forget to email [me](#) your tracking sheets by August 6 so I can report your hours (and our successes!) You can find the tracker on the [#forms](#) channel!*

**Our Chapter Facebook Page is at**  
[TXMN Coastal Prairie Chapter Facebook](#)

To post photos and information, email  
[Paula Kolmar](#) or [Robbin Mallett](#)

**Also, share our chapter Facebook entries with your friends on your Facebook Page**

We also have a **Chapter-Only** Facebook Page that allows chapter members to post items. You can join by going to the website below and clicking on "Join". The administrator will allow you access. This is for chapter members only.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1882734648662315/?ref=bookmarks>

## COASTAL PRAIRIE CHAPTER OF THE TEXAS MASTER NATURALISTS

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