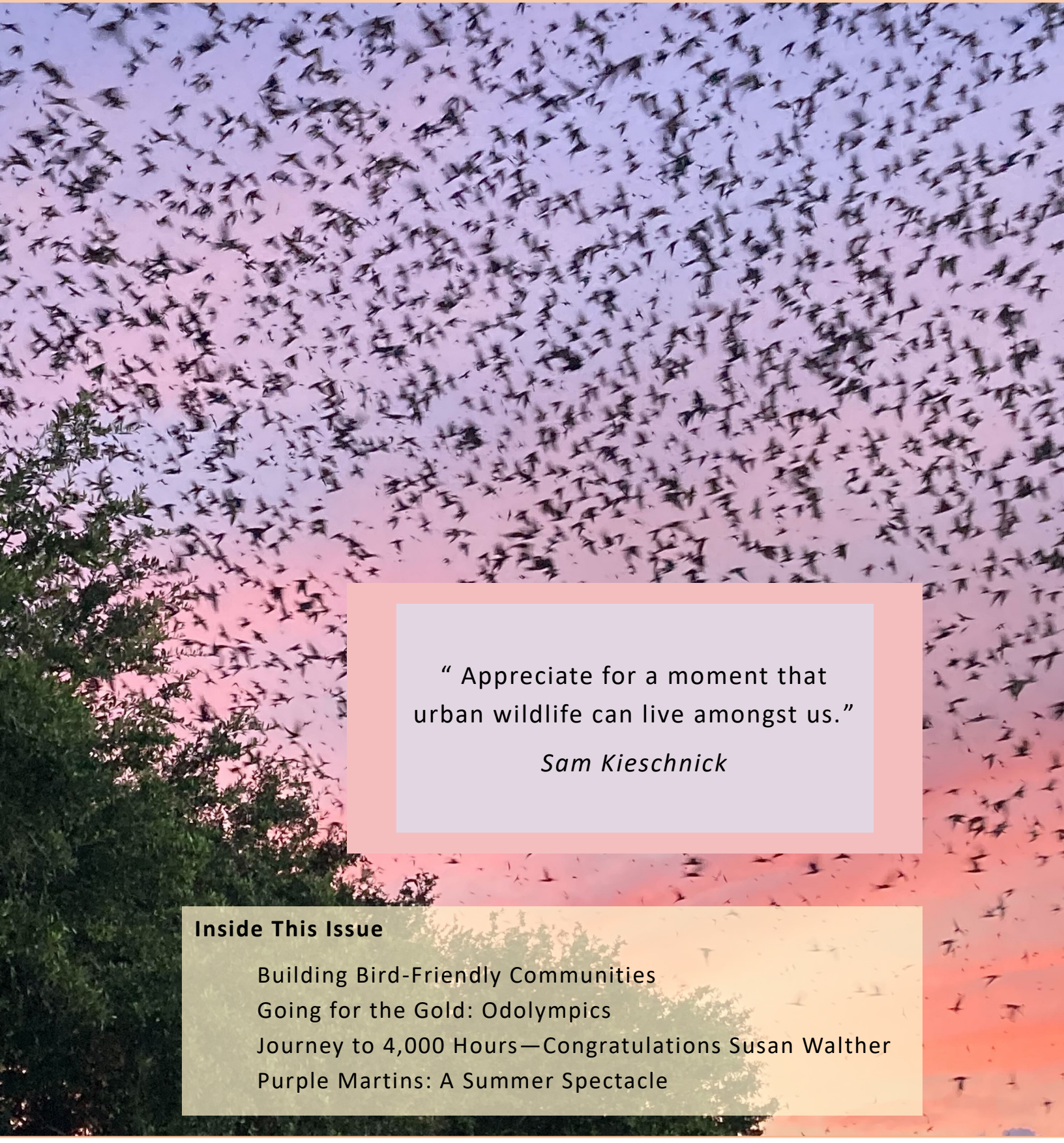


Coastal Prairie Chapter **Courier**

September 2024 — Volume 12 Issue 9



“ Appreciate for a moment that
urban wildlife can live amongst us.”

Sam Kieschnick

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The Texas Master Naturalist Program's mission is to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the State of Texas.

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ON THE COVER

Purple Martins at sunset
 Photo credit: Susan Brodmerkel



EDITOR TEAM

The September issue was crafted by Co-Editors **Pam Jackson** and **Raji Mahesh**

Have a great story for the October issue? Submit by **September 25** to:

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President's Message

by *Susan Walther, TMNCPC President*



I am so happy to welcome the month of September, and with it the transition from summer to fall! This is a great opportunity to look at some of the activities we have coming up in the months ahead.

Our Fall 2024 training class has begun, running from August 24 to November 5. A warm welcome to all of our new class members and thank you to the training team and mentors who will help these folks succeed and find their place in the Texas Master Naturalist program. Everyone, please get to know our newest chapter members by *wearing your name tags* and introducing yourself at our in-person events and volunteer opportunities.

Speaking of in-person events, try not to miss our September 5 program! Amber Leung will give us practical steps we can take to create bird-friendly environments to support the native birds in our communities in her talk "Building Bird-Friendly Communities with Houston Audubon: How to Attract and Support Native Birds Wherever You Live, Work, and Play." If you cannot make it to the live event at the Rosenberg Civic Center, we will have a zoom option.

Is Citizen Science your thing? You can participate in the [Odolympics Bioblitz](#) survey of dragonflies and damselflies from September 7 to 15. And our popular first-Wednesday [bird hikes at Seabourne Creek Nature Park](#) will resume on October 2.

The [Texas Master Naturalist Annual Meeting](#) will be held in San Marcos on October 24-27. If you plan to attend this awesome gathering of TMNs from around the state, be aware that the registration deadline is September 29.

Our next Nature Day at Seabourne Creek Nature park will be on November 9. At this family-friendly outreach event we will use many different activities and crafts to help share our love of nature with members of the public.

Save the Date of Thursday December 5, our chapter's annual Holiday Party, at the Rosenberg Civic Center. This gathering will be extra special

Continued [next page](#)

September Chapter Program: Thursday, Sep 5, at 7 PM Building Bird-Friendly Communities with Houston Audubon: How to Attract and Support Native Birds Wherever You Live, Work And Play by Amber Leung

By Jan Peterson, TMNCPC Programs Director



Birds are not only beautiful and fascinating creatures, but they are also essential components of our healthy ecosystem. Despite their importance, bird populations across the United States have faced a staggering decline, with an estimated loss of 3 billion birds since the 1970s. This alarming trend highlights the urgent need for collective action to protect and restore bird populations.

Join Amber Leung of Houston Audubon as she delves into the factors driving this decline and explores how we can make a difference. Whether you live in an urban area, suburban neighborhood, or rural setting, there are practical steps you can take to create bird-friendly environments.

Anyone can play a role in safeguarding these vital species for future generations. Ms. Leung will equip you with the knowledge and tools to attract and support native birds wherever you live, work, and play, ensuring that their songs and presence remain a cherished part of our world for years to come.

Amber Leung is the Nature Programs Manager for Houston



Audubon. She teaches about birds and the rest of the natural world at the Edith L Moore Nature Sanctuary in Houston.

Her love for the natural world was nurtured from an early age through camping and hiking adventures with her family in Austin. Her passion for birding took flight during a coastal ornithology course while pursuing a BS in Marine Sciences at Texas A&M University in Galveston. In 2015, Amber became a certified Texas Master Naturalist and went on to serve two terms as president of the Coastal Prairie Chapter. She is deeply committed to promoting the importance of all aspects of a healthy ecosystem, particularly those that are often overlooked.

In her free time, Amber enjoys cultivating a native plant garden, creating wildlife-inspired art, and immersing herself in nature, where she delights in observing birds and reptiles.

Coastal Prairie Chapter programs are free and open to the public. This program will be held in person at the Rosenberg Civic Center, 3825 TX-36, Rosenberg, TX 77471. A virtual option is available (information below). The program begins at 7 PM and doors open at 6PM for social time and refreshments. Chapter members and the public may also attend via Zoom. Please follow the [Monthly Program](#) link to register.

President's Message
Continued from [previous page](#)

this year as we will also celebrate our chapter's 20th anniversary!

With the weather starting to cool down and the number of our activities starting to heat up, you can keep up to date on all that is going on via our chapter Slack, our [website](#) and its [calendar](#), and the weekly bulletin.

See you outside!

Membership Minute

By Jan and Kevin Kolk, TMNCPC Membership Co-Directors



Congratulations! to our numerous certification and milestone achievers. *Way to go!*

Initial Certification

Monte Hambleton — 2024 Spring

2024 Recertification

Joe Garcia — 2022 Spring

Greg Hurley — 2020 Fall

Howard Kanelakos — 2024 Spring

Randy Kepner — 2024 Spring

Diane Russell — 2011

Wen Sherrill — 2019

Mike Walsh — 2023 Fall

500-Hour Milestone

Nancy Jones — 2020 Spring

Monica Taylor — 2023 Fall

4000-Hour Milestone

Shannon Westveer—2019

6000-Hour Accomplishment

Jerry Trenta—2017



Welcome Our Newest Members ... Class of Fall 2024



Lucas Bowers

Nicole Bride

Karen Brisch

Karen Bueker

Cindy Chapman

Kristin Comaduran

Jo Ann Cosbey

Shalise Cruseturner

Cindy Dunn

Susan Gregory

Nathan Heilman

Nisa Khan



Jessica Malowitz

Madison Meagher

Cee Cee Parker

Jacob Perry

Ryan Pham

Saundra Salter

Carolyn Skarzynski

Ruth Smith

Mary Trimble

Vanessa Weidman

Carolyn Whitlow

Claire Williams



Volunteer Service — September Highlights

By Jan Poscovsky, TMNCPC Volunteer Director



Prior to attending an event, check our website calendar for last minute changes, cancelations, or other information.

<https://txmn.org/coastal/events/month/2024-09/>

Signature Project Seabourne Creek Nature Park

(SCNP), Rosenberg: 8:00 AM– 10:00 AM

Wednesdays and 1st and 3rd Saturdays which fall on 9/4, 9/7, 9/11, 9/18, 9/21 and 9/25

Public Outreach Nature Walk Seabourne Creek

Nature Park, Rosenberg: 8:00 AM– 9:00 AM

3rd Sunday which falls on 9/15

Public Outreach Monthly Plant Walk Seabourne

Creek Nature Park, Rosenberg: 8:30AM —

10:30AM on 9/14

Public Outreach Houston Museum of Natural Science

at Sugar Land: 10:30 AM – 3:00 PM, 2nd and 4th Saturdays which fall on 9/14 and 9/28 and Garden Workday, 3rd Thursday from 9:00 AM – 11:00 AM which falls on 9/19

Public Outreach Monthly Insect Hike at SCNP,

Rosenberg : 9:00 AM – 11:00AM, 4th Thursday which falls on 9/26.

Chapter Meeting followed by Chapter Board Meeting

via Zoom: 7:00PM – 8:00 PM 3rd Wednesday which falls on 9/18

Coastal Prairie Conservancy Indiangrass Preserve,

Katy: 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM, Tuesdays, Fridays, and 2nd Saturdays of each month which fall on 9/3, 9/6, 9/10, 9/13, 9/14, 9/17, 9/20, 9/24 and 9/27

Kleb Woods Hummingbird Festival, Tomball : 9:00

AM – 3:00 PM on Saturday, 9/14

Harris County Precinct 4 Bird Survey at Archbishop

Joseph A. Fiorenza Park, Houston : 7:30 AM – 11:00 AM, 4th Monday which falls on 9/23

WOW Expo to learn about the Bat and Butterfly

WOWs: 1:00 PM – 2:00 PM on Tuesday 9/24

John Paul Landing Weekly Bird Hike: 7:30

AM–11:00 AM on Thursdays which falls on 9/5, 9/12, 9/19 and 9/26

Willow Fork Pollinator Garden Workday: 8:30

AM – 12:00 PM on Saturdays which fall on 9/7, 9/14, 9/21 and 9/28

Kolter Elementary Pollinator Garden Workday:

9:00 AM – 12:00 PM, 2nd Saturday of each month which falls on 9/14

Bolivar Flats Beach Ramble: 10:00 AM – 12:00

PM, 1st Saturday of the month which falls on 9/7

JOIN US!

The public is always invited to participate in our fun and educational monthly hikes and walks. We invite you to get out and meet TMNCPC members as we commune with nature.

Nature Day
Autumn in the Arboretum

FREE EVENT!
Saturday, November 9, 2024 • 10am-2pm

Join us for a delightful day outdoors at the Arboretum!

Face painting • Tree-related crafts
Scavenger hunts • Tree Talk information booth

T E X A S Hosted by: Texas Master Naturalist™ • Coastal Prairie Chapter
www.coastalprairie.org • info@coastalprairie.org • 832-225-6936

Master Naturalist™
Coastal Prairie Chapter

Rosenberg TEXAS

TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

Going for the Gold: Odolympics September 7–15

By Sari Garfinkle, TMNCPC Class of Fall 2023



Insect life cycles and lifestyles vary. Some insects are always out and about, while others are secretive.

Traditionally, academics and serious enthusiasts went out into the field to observe and record. This approach allowed them to study target organisms in depth but limited how much data could be collected. Enter the Bioblitz, where citizen scientists amass tons of raw data that can then be sorted through and analyzed by experts.

For odonates, that's achieved through the Odolympics. Twice a year, Odonata Central asks people who live in the Western Hemisphere to report the dragonflies and damselflies they encounter. Observations are posted directly to Odonatacentral.org or to the Odolympics Project at iNaturalist.org. The dates shift each year. Over time an annual map will emerge that reflects each species' geographic distribution and flight dates.

Olympians, even Odolympians, must prepare for competition. Most of the 104 species observed in the Houston metropolitan area are easy to identify, but some can be a little tricky. Here's a little refresher course.

Since dragonflies and damselflies require water to reproduce, they're most likely to be

observed at or near aquatic environments. Each species has a preference: still water or moving, wetlands, bog or ocean.

Some prefer to stay low, perching horizontally on the ground or in the grasses. Some like trees, and others spend most of their time flying. Most are active during the day, but a few species prefer dawn and dusk. Look everywhere.

The easiest way to distinguish dragonfly from damselfly is to look at the wings. At rest, dragonflies hold their wings away from the body. Usually that means perpendicular to the abdomen, but some like to hold their wings forward.

Damselflies hold their wings together, folded above the abdomen. Spreadwings, a subset of damselflies, hold their wings at a 45° angle.



At rest, damselflies hold their wings together above the abdomen. Bluets, like this familiar bluet, position their wings low

Be sure that your odonate really is an odonate. Antlions, fishflies, dobsonflies, and owlflies have big wings and are commonly mistaken for dragonflies and damselflies. An easy way to rule them out is to look at antennae. The odonate's are tiny and barely



Like most clubtails, the narrow-striped forceptail's abdomen widens to form a "club" at the end. Markings on the face, thorax, and abdomen are also characteristic of this group.

visible, whereas the others' antennae are easy to see without magnification and have distinctive shapes. *Continued [next page](#)*



Spreadwings are aptly named. Perched, they spread their wings out, but not all the way. The unusual thoracic markings help ID it.

Going for the Gold: Odolympics September 7–15

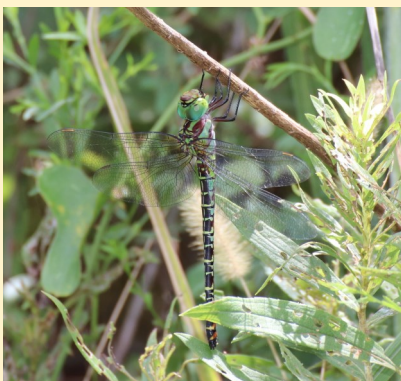
By Sari Garfinkle, TMNCPC Class of Fall 2023



A checkered setwing perches wings forward in a pose characteristic of all our setwings. The patches on its wings, red face and eyes, and abdominal markings distinguish it from Black and Swift Setwings.

Continued from [previous page](#)

When you post your finds, iNaturalist's Computervision (CV) will suggest an ID. Before clicking agree, be sure that your odonate resembles the CV suggestion.



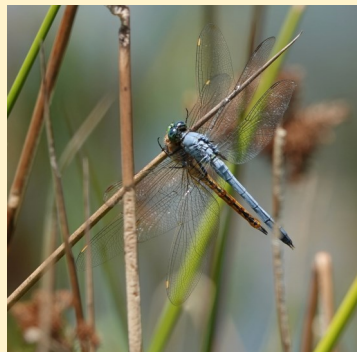
This regal darter illustrates the long abdomen, complex markings, and hanging perch style typical of her family. Darters are fliers and spend most of their time in the air.

Consider physical traits such as body shape, color, markings, wing position, and eye placement. Look at the range map. These may be flying insects, but a dragonfly seen only in Europe is unlikely to be seen in Texas.



Like all skimmers, this eastern pondhawk's eyes touch above the nose. Photo credits: Sari Garfinkle

Dead or alive, every specimen counts. If you encounter an odonate eating another odonate, post your picture(s) twice, so that each species is notated.



It's a dragon eat dragon world. A chalky-blue eastern pondhawk munches on a tan wandering glider, destined to wander no more. The same picture can be used twice to post both individuals.

More information about this bioblitz can be found at [Odolympics 2024](#). In order for your Odolympics information to be counted in iNaturalist, you must sign up for the "Odolympics Sep 2024" project.

Happy hunting!!



Like darners, cruisers are fliers with long abdomens that hang-perch at rest. Most have brilliantly colored eyes and a brown body. A single stripe adorns the thorax.

Resources:

[Odonatacentral.org](#)

Free dragonfly ID app from OC

[iNaturalist.org](#)

[Texas Dragons and Damsels FB](#)



Journey to 4000 Hours - Congratulations Susan Walther!

By Joyce Tipton, TMNCPC Vice President



So, what kind of super powers does it take to reach the 4,000-hour milestone? Turns out it's not super powers, it's persistence and passion. Susan first signed up for a TMNCPC training class in 2009 and had to step away before class even started. At that time, classes were only conducted during the day and only on weekdays. With two children at home and a full-time job as a professional engineer, she realized that the training options offered at that time just didn't work for her. Then her company sent her on overseas assignments, making it really impossible. In 2011 with Susan back in the States, the Coastal Prairie Chapter had begun to include weekend sessions in the training class making it feasible to do, even though still challenging. She made it through, graduating in 2011, and achieving her certification in 2012.

The next challenge was how to get those 40 hours of VSP and 8 hours of AT per year! Continuing with a full-time, high-commitment job and kids in sports and all kinds of other weekend activities - it wasn't easy. She squeezed in working at Seabourne, volunteering at Nature Fest, and doing outreach at

the Fort Bend County Fair AG'Tivity Barn. She loved attending the chapter programs and chapter meetings when time allowed. Yet it was tight getting those hours in. When Lynn Trenta looped her in to produce the chapter bulletin and serve as Communications Co-chair, Susan found the opportunity she needed to achieve her hours during her available time. She also discovered that the role provided great insight into what was happening in the chapter and the vast volunteer opportunities. She felt a part of it all!

So how did Susan decide to become a certified Texas Master Naturalist in the first place? Back in 2000, she realized that she needed nature in her busy life. She began volunteering at Brazos Bend State Park on her few free weekends and continued that until 2005. She learned that many of the volunteers there were also Texas Master Naturalists and that piqued her interest. With her discovered love of nature, she and husband Rodney bought a small ranch near Columbus. Susan describes enjoying and managing their own piece of nature as life-changing!

Continued [next page](#)



Journey to 4000 Hours - Congratulations Susan Walther!

By Joyce Tipton, TMNCPC Vice President



Continued from [previous page](#)

As the children graduated and then Susan retired, she chose to serve the Texas Master Naturalist Coastal Prairie Chapter in leadership roles. She served as secretary, vice president, and now our esteemed president! Even with working on their ranch, keeping up two houses, and babysitting grandchildren and a grand dog, Susan gives so much of herself in this incredibly busy, very critical position. She is diligent, thoughtful, organized, and listens to the chapter members. She has been unafraid to make changes based on chapter member input, such as our change in chapter meeting format.

Susan is upbeat, friendly, and thoughtful. She has a positive attitude about everything she does, whether it is clearing brush or directing the chapter board members. She is always positive and every time she comes by the native plant garden, she always gives me a big thank you!" - Lynn Trenta

"Susan is a rare leader—thoughtful yet decisive, caring yet firm, forward thinking yet in the moment, Her approach to leadership is marked by a profound respect for all perspectives, ensuring that every voice is heard and valued. Her quickness to recognize and praise the achievements of others further underscores her leadership style, making her not just a leader, but a mentor and cheerleader for all involved. She also exhibits that rare ability: grace under pressure. We are so blessed to have her as our president." - Bert Stipelcovich

As we congratulate Susan on her accomplishment, I hope members will also be inspired by her journey as they seek to find their own opportunities to "be the change!"



Congratulations Terri Hurley!

Terri Hurley (2017 class) was recently awarded the President's Volunteer Services Award. This award, signed by President Joe Biden, acknowledges and celebrates the role volunteers play in making America the great country it is. It was presented by Coastal Prairie Chapter President, Susan Walther. Thank you Terri for all you do to make our world a better place.



Photo credit: Rodney Walther

Purple Martins: A Summer Spectacle

By Amber Leung, TMNCPC Class of 2015



Purple Martins, our largest swallow, spend their time demonstrating impressive aerial acrobatics as they eat and drink on the wing. While it's sadly not true that they eat a significant



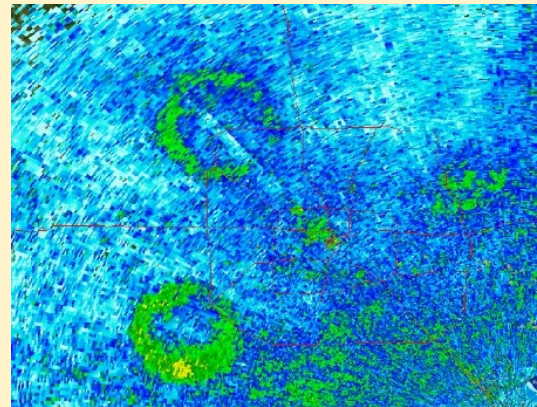
Photo credit: Hoiman Low

number of mosquitoes, they DO consume as many as 2,000 flying insects a day. They're also the only bird that relies almost entirely on people to provide artificial nest houses. With the nesting season now over, don't worry if your Purple Martin houses now sit empty. You can safely store them away so that they don't give a boost to non-native Starlings or House Sparrows.

Once their young leave the nest, the stage is set for one of the most awe-inspiring natural spectacles of the late summer months. By day, they fly alone to snatch insects on the wing, but in the early evenings they start to gather and swoop low over the trees in dizzying numbers to spend their nights in safety. To some, it may look like a scene from *The Birds*, but it is a finely-coordinated dance as each bird perfectly maintains their appointed spot in the wheeling flock. As the sun sets, with numbers up to the tens or hundreds of thousands, they settle into a group of parking lot trees.

It may seem counter-intuitive, but some of the best roosting spots for these large late-summer flocks are in the most urban of spaces. This helps keep them safer from predators. One such roost is estimated to host 100,000 birds and is now gathering in Stafford at the parking lot of The Fountains. A dense double-row of oak trees plays

host to the impressive numbers each evening. When the morning comes, they take off all at once in numbers so dense it shows up as an expanding doughnut on weather radar! These birds disperse over many miles to resume their free aerial pest control for another day. As September fades into October, their numbers will dwindle as they depart to repeat the same evening spectacles in the cities of their wintering grounds in South America.



Purple Martins as seen on radar.

Houston Audubon has a free watch party on September 7 at The Fountains, but the Purple Martins can be seen there any evening around sunset.

Purple Martin / *Progne subis*

Habitat

LAKES & PONDS

Purple Martins forage in towns, cities, parks, open fields, streams, wet meadows, beaver ponds, and other open areas.

Food

INSECTS

A year-round insectivore, the Purple Martin eats flying insects such as beetles, dragonflies, crickets, butterflies, and wasps at altitudes often exceeding 150 feet (sometimes 500+ feet!)

Nesting

CAVITY

Males & females visit several cavities before selecting a nest site; usually a birdhouse, gourd, dead tree, or building. East of the Rocky Mountains, they only nest in manmade birdhouses.

Behavior

AERIAL FORAGER

Purple Martins fly with quick flaps and glides, outlining big circles in the sky as they hunt insects, rarely landing on the ground. Adults form flocks as soon as nestlings fledge, and congregate in large roosts throughout the winter.

Conservation

LOW CONCERN

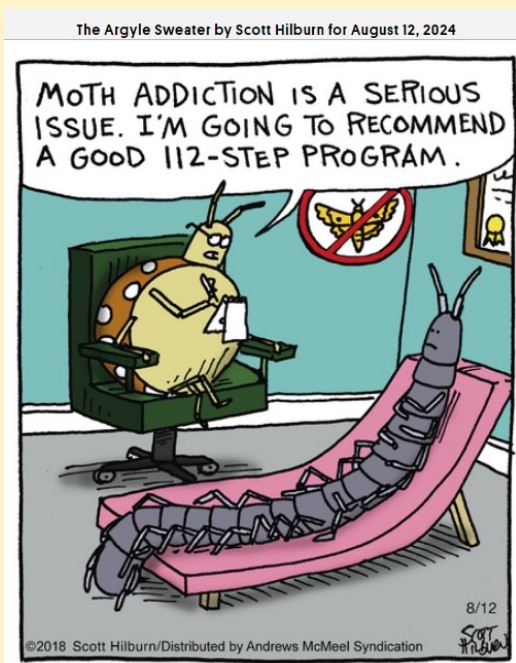
The estimated global breeding population of Purple Martins is 9.3 million. Logging practices that remove dead trees reduce nesting habitat for martins, but humans have helped counteract declines by putting up nest boxes. Introduced species often take over martin houses and injure or kill eggs and nestlings. Like other species, Purple Martins are also sensitive to cold weather snaps as well as the use of pesticides.



INFORMATION FROM [ALLABOUTBIRDS.ORG](#)

The Lighter Side

TMNCPC Various Members



Shared by Margo Johnson

Donut Blues



Lisa receiving the blue donut from the Grand Poobah
Photo credit: Jim Butcher

Lisa Sanders received the unexpected dubious award for assembling the training materials at the Annex in time for the mentors to pick up and deliver to our newest members before Session 1.

She remarked it was a "complete and thrilling surprise!"

Elected Officers

President [Susan Walther](#)
 Vice President [Joyce Tipton](#)
 Secretary [Kerry Padilla](#)
 Treasurer [Carrie Dolezal](#)

Board of Directors

Past-President [Terri Hurley](#)
 Membership [Jan](#) and [Kevin Kolk](#)
 Programs [Jan Peterson](#)
 Communications [Tom Zaal](#)
 Volunteers [Jan Poscovsky](#)
 Adv. Training Lisa Sanders
 New Class Fall [Shannon Westveer](#)
 New Class Rep. Becky Jones
 Info. Tech. [Bert Stipelcovich](#)
 State Rep [Hoiman Low](#)
 Seabourne Creek Jerry Trenta and
 Randolph Watson

TPWD / AgriLife Chapter Advisors

Prgm. Coordinator [Brandy Rader](#)
 Fort Bend Ag Agent TBD

Nature's Way

*Neither hail nor floods nor winds nor heat
 will prevail until the Archway mission's complete.
 Neither sedges nor clay, nor lack of organics
 will cause our motley crew to panic.
 We've years of mowing and herbicides to transform
 to nurture with Nature, a biome is born.
 Visions of Bluestem and Muhly with bees
 Fall grasses blowing gently in a Seabourne breeze
 It's just around the corner, come join and believe
 as we tackle the rhizomes on soft padded knees.
 No hedges of sedges, only frogfruit for edges.
 We'll spade in the shade adding organics and leaves.
 Gaining practical wisdom as Nature speaks.
 With words of rain and intense summer heat,
 'Learn the land' she says, and walk with me.
 I cannot be rushed, nor hushed, nor forced.
 I care not for your budgets or human workforce.
 Listen and learn, watch how to reclaim
 from what is and isn't possible to tame.
 As Nature responds to rebalance with reason,
 We are humbled to live,
 lessons learned in due season.
 By Lisa Sanders*



TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST™ COASTAL PRAIRIE CHAPTER

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