


Coastal Prairie Chapter **Courier**

January 2025 — Volume 13 Issue 1

A close-up photograph of a Great Egret standing on a sandy beach. The bird is facing right, and its long, yellow beak is holding a small, dark-colored fish. The bird's head is white with a black stripe through its eye, and its neck is long and slender. The background is a sandy beach with some small green plants.

“He who searches for
spring with his knees in
the mud finds it, in
abundance.”

Aldo Leopold (1887-1948)

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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

A great blue heron catches a large fish at Seabourne Creek.

Photo credit: Hoiman Low



EDITOR TEAM

This issue was crafted by Co-Editor, **Shannon Westveer**. Have a great story for the February issue? Submit by **January 25** to:

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<https://txmn.org/coastal/monthly-coastal-prairie-courier/>

President’s Message

by Susan Walther, TMNCPC President



New Year’s Day is the perfect time to reflect on the past year and look ahead to the next. Texas Master Naturalist Coastal Prairie Chapter had an incredible year in 2024!

- We held two training classes that brought many awesome new members to our chapter, two of whom will be serving on the Board in 2025.
- We continued great support to our signature project **Seabourne Creek Nature Park** with 135 volunteers providing over 6,000 hours of service to tend and improve the many different park habitats. We held two successful and fun Seabourne Nature Day outreach events and dozens of other public outreach events: bird hikes, insect walks, nature walks, and more. *Park visitors notice our volunteer work and appreciate all we do to make it a place of natural beauty!*
- We continued our fantastic twice-monthly outreach events at the **Houston Museum of Natural Science in Sugar Land** (HMNS-SL) and have more great plans for 2025.
- We provided volunteer service at Brazos Bend State Park, J.B. Harrison Long Point Ranch, Long Acres Ranch, Cullinan and Memorial Parks in Sugar Land, Buffalo Run Park in Missouri City, and many others.
- We supported the Ag’Tivity Barn outreach at the Fort Bend County Fair, reaching hundreds of students and families.
- We began holding **Chapter Meetings via Zoom** so that we can better share information with all members.
- We held monthly programs with many great speakers and topics in a hybrid format: in-person and live via zoom to maximize our public outreach.
- We celebrated our chapter’s 20th anniversary. From the beginnings in 2004, we’ve grown to 233 current members.



Looking forward to 2025, we welcome three new members to the Board of Directors. Constance Rossiter (Class of Spring 2024) and Sari Garfinkle (Class of Fall 2023) as Membership Co-Directors and Pam Jackson (Class of Spring 2024) as State Representative. A sincere thanks goes to our outgoing Membership Co-Directors Jan and Kevin Kolk and outgoing State Representative Hoiman Low for their years of dedicated service both on the Board and into the future.

The Board will continue work to improve our chapter in 2025. As our chapter grows, we face new challenges

*Continued
[next page](#)*

January Chapter Program: Thursday, January 9 @ 7 PM

Innovative Intros: Animal Ambassador Engagement

Presented by Emily Essa and Sierra Merritt

By Jan Peterson, TMNCPC Programs Director



To truly inspire

conservation, people must feel connected to nature and recognize the vital role every living organism plays in the web of life. At the [Houston Humane Society Wildlife Center](#) (HHSWC), ambassador animals — non-releasable wild animals with incredible stories — help to bridge this connection.

While physical contact with ambassadors was once thought essential to fostering understanding, new research and a focus on animal welfare have guided us toward a no-touch policy. This approach prioritizes our animals' health and happiness without diminishing the guest experience. Our ambassadors thrive, and we hope to inspire other facilities to adopt similar animal-first practices.



Sierra Merritt (above) and Emily Essa (below, right) join us for the first program of 2025

Continued from [previous page](#)

and opportunities, such as how to improve member satisfaction, engagement, and retention. We need to continue our excellent support of Seabourne Creek Nature Park, HMNS-SL, and the other parks we volunteer at while also expanding our volunteer opportunities throughout our entire service area. We particularly recognize the need to increase our chapter's presence in Waller and Wharton Counties. I encourage all our chapter members to share your thoughts on these and other chapter-improving topics with me or another board member, and to attend our chapter and board meetings.

I'm so proud of our chapter, of each of you as volunteers, and of all we do. By all working together we can do even more to serve the Texas Master Naturalist mission in our communities!

See you outside! ~ Susan Walther

Emily Essa has been Lead Educator at HHSWC since 2022, and she has personally seen to many of the positive changes made to the ambassador program.

Sierra Merritt has been the Education Animal Coordinator since 2020 where she is responsible for training and caring for the center's collection of native animal ambassadors.



Our programs are always **FREE and open to the public**, held at the Rosenberg Civic Center, 3825 TX-36, Rosenberg, TX 77471. Thanks to the TMNCPC information technology team, they are also streamed **LIVE** remotely via Zoom. The **1-hour program begins at 7:00 PM**.

The [Texas Master Naturalist](#) program is sponsored by [Texas Parks and Wildlife Department](#) and [Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service](#).

[TMNCPC members in attendance should record their Advanced Training (AT) hours under "AT: Chapter Meeting-Coastal Prairie" and the VSP hours for the following business meeting under "Chapter Business: Chapter Meeting."]

2024 Holiday Party Scrapbook

Photos by Cee Cee Parker, Class of Fall 2024



LEFT: Constance Rossiter joins the 2025 Board; **BELOW LEFT:** 2024 Executive Committee is reelected by unanimous vote, from left: Vice President **Joyce Tipton**, Secretary **Kerry Padilla**, President **Susan Walther**, and Treasurer **Carrie Dolezal**; **BELOW:** Outgoing Membership Director **Jan Kolk** MC's awards, milestones, and certifications while **Susan Walther** has some meeting fun with 120+ in attendance



MEMBERS ONLY: More chapter photos are linked in Members Only; search "2024 Holiday Party" to see them all!



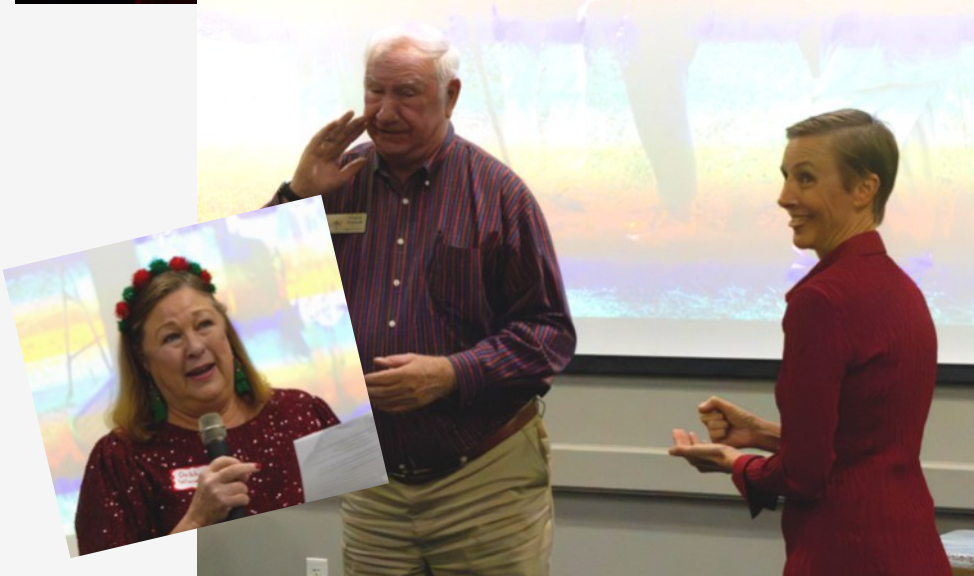
Clockwise from above:
Dominic and Lisette Dottavio visit with members at their table; **Lucy Randel** brought her spouse, **Chuck**, as did many others; longtime member, **Margo Johnson** with past member **Kathy Moore**, happy to be there together; Honorary member (Class of 2005) **Karl Baumgartner** with newer members **Monica Taylor** and **Stacy Kmetz**

*Continued
 next page*

2024 Holiday Party Scrapbook (Cont'd)

Photos by Cee Cee Parker, Class of Fall 2024

Continued from [previous page](#)



Clockwise from top of page:

Fellowship and home-cooked potluck are worth the drive; **Joe Garcia** and **Lesley Hagen**; **Sandra Brown**, **Katie Sallean**, and **Randolph Watson**; **Susan Walther** hugs party coordinator, **Jan Peterson**; Grand Poobah, **Jim Butcher**, awards the blue donut(s) to **Mary and Don Parkhouse**; **Debby Wendt** MC's a 20th Anniversary trivia contest; trivia winners **Jim Butcher** and **Shannon Westveer** break a tie with good ole' Rock-Paper-Scissors

Membership Minute

By Jan and Kevin Kolk, TMNCPC Membership Co-Directors



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



Initial Certification

Cee Cee Parker –2024 Fall
Starla Lawhon –2024 Spring



2024 Recertification

(134 members recertified)

Rick Adams – 2011
Lori Foux –2022 Fall
Jean Greenhalgh – 2014
Angela LeDoux – 2019
Amber Leung – 2015
C.J. McDaniel – 2015
Aki Nomi – 2023 Spring
Peter Parsons – 2019
Amy Phan – 2020 Spring
Randall Schmidt – 2021 Fall
Ruth Smith – 2024 Fall
Cindy Starks – 2023 Spring
Doug Stewart – 2022 Spring
Pelin Unal – 2022 Fall
Elaine Whiteley – 2021 Fall



250 Hour Milestone

Susan Brodmerkel – 2024 Spring
Constance Rossiter – 2024 Spring



2,500 Hour Milestone

Margo Johnson – 2015

Spring Training Day Classes February 22 to May 3

Spring Training 2025 opens for enrollment **January 7**. You too can become a Master Naturalist™. Tell your friends!

<https://txmn.org/coastal/coastal-prairie-chapter-training-class/>



2025 Chapter Dues ... *DUE*

MEMBERS ONLY: Make sure your email address

in the [VMS](#) is current! **2025 Annual Dues Invoice** will be sent 2nd week of January to all members who posted hours in 2024. All standard forms of payment are accepted.

NEW! Membership Co-Directors Sari and Constance

Next issue Membership Minute will be brought to you by 2025 Membership Co-Directors **Constance Rossiter** and **Sari Garfinkle**. *Welcome to the Board!*

Stop by the **TMN Coastal Prairie Chapter outreach table** at the [Brazos Home and Garden Show](#) on Friday, Saturday and Sunday — January 24-26. Learn how you can nurture nature at home!



On the main stage, **Shannon Westveer** will be presenting *Living Soil* and *Plant For the Babies!* to attendees Friday and Saturday. Watch for times to be announced on our website calendar as soon as they are selected.

Volunteer Service — January Highlights

By Jan Poscovsky, TMNCPC Volunteer Director



Before departing to serve, check our website calendar for last minute changes, cancelations, or other information.

<https://txmn.org/coastal/events/month/2025-01/>

Signature Project Seabourne Creek Nature Park (SCNP), Rosenberg: 8:00 – 10:30 AM Wednesdays and 1st and 3rd Saturdays which fall on 1/4, 1/8, 1/15, 1/18, 1/22 and 1/29

Signature Project Monthly Bird Hike at SCNP, Rosenberg: 8:00 – 10:30 AM 1st Wednesday of each month which falls on 1/1

Cypress Creek (Katy Prairie) Christmas Bird Count, Katy/Cypress: Wednesday 1/1

NEW! Houston Audubon's Entergy Natives Nursery Workday, High Island: 9:00 AM – Noon 2nd Thursday of each month which falls on 1/9

Nature Day Planning Meeting, via Zoom: 6:00 – 7:00 PM Monday 1/6

Harrison-Burr New Year Bird Count, Wharton: 7:00 AM – 4:30 PM Saturday 1/11 ([registration and waiver](#) required)

Coastal Prairie Conservancy Seed Cleaning Pizza Party, Houston: 6:30 – 8:30 PM Wednesday 1/22

Chapter Meeting, via Zoom: 7:00 – 8:30 PM 3rd Wednesday which falls on 1/15 (see [#announcements](#) channel on Slack for JOIN link)

Coastal Prairie Conservancy Indiangrass Preserve, Katy: 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM Tuesdays, Fridays, and 2nd Saturdays of each month which fall on 1/3, 1/7, 1/10, 1/11, 1/14, 1/17, 1/21, 1/24, 1/28, and 1/31

Long Acres Ranch LCISD 8th Grade Field Trip, Richmond: 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM Friday 1/17 and 1/24 (see [SignUp Genius](#) for both opportunities)

Willow Fork Pollinator Garden Workday, Katy: 9:00 – 11:00 AM Saturdays which fall on 1/4, 1/11, 1/18 and 1/25

Lawther-Deer Park Prairie, Deer Park: 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM 4th Saturday of each month which falls on 1/25

Public Outreach Nature Walk at SCNP, Rosenberg: 8:00 – 9:00 AM 3rd Sunday of each month which falls on 1/19

Public Outreach Insect Hike at SCNP, Rosenberg: 9:00 – 11:00 AM 4th Thursday of each month which falls on 1/23

Public Outreach Houston Museum of Natural Science at Sugar Land: 10:30 AM – 3:30 PM 2nd and 4th Saturdays 1/11 and 1/25; **Garden Workday,** 9:00 – 11:00 AM 3rd Thursday which falls on 1/16 (see [SignUp Genius](#) for both opportunities)



Bolivar Flats Beach Ramble, Port Bolivar: 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM 1st Saturday of the month which falls on 1/4

Kolter Elementary Pollinator Garden Workday, Houston: 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM 2nd Saturday of each month which falls on 1/11

John Paul Landing Weekly Bird Hike, Houston: 8:30 AM – 11:30 AM Thursdays which fall on 1/2, 1/9, 1/16, 1/23 and 1/30; **Pollinators in Science:** 1:00 – 2:00 PM Wednesday 1/29

Harris County Precinct 4 Bird Survey @ Archbishop Joseph A. Fiorenza Park, Houston: 7:30 AM – 12:00 PM 4th Monday which falls on 1/27

Hodge Podge Decoupage

By Shannon Westveer, *Courier* Co-Editor



AFTER



Buffalo Run Pollinator Prairie Pocket enjoyed post-Beryl maintenance and addition of 70 perennial grasses and forbs with mulching. THANK YOU volunteers! (Photos by S. Westveer and L. Woods)



BEFORE

BELOW: December 17-19, Shannon Westveer and volunteers instructed and demonstrated principles of edaphology for many homeschoolers at partner Long Acres Ranch — the Soil Food Web. [Build a Soil 'Zine!](#) (Photos: S. Westveer)

Along with a ruby dragonfly pin and presidential pin, which **Shannon Westveer** and **Susan Walther** received at the TMN Annual Conference, each **4,000 hour milestone** recipient receives a signed letter from the White House and a Lifetime Achievement Certificate ... both signed by the president himself. These framed certificates were given at the holiday party. (Photos by Cee Cee Parker)



Birds and Birding

By Shannon Westveer, *Courier* Co-Editor

BIRDING BY THE NUMBERS

96 MILLION people in the U.S. engage in birdwatching!

That is... **3 IN 10** Americans **37%** of the U.S. population (16 years+)

Where are people birdwatching?

Total birders: 96 million (16 years of age and older)

95% 91 MILLION **BACKYARD BIRDERS** (35% of the population)

44% 43 MILLION **TRAVELING BIRDERS** (16% of the population)

Divisional Distribution of Birders by Region of Residence: 2022

Region	Percentage
Pacific	13%
New England	5%
Middle Atlantic	10%
East North Central	15%
West North Central	17%
South Atlantic	20%
West South Central	17%
Mountain	7%

How much do birders spend?

Birders spent an estimated **\$14.5 billion** on their trips and **\$93 billion** on equipment and land.

Total economic output: \$279 billion

This project was supported by Multistate Conservation Grant #20AP00134, funded from the Wildlife Restoration Fund and the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund, and jointly managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, *Birding in the United States: A Demographic and Economic Analysis, Addendum to the 2022 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation.*

<https://www.fws.gov/story/2024-12/birdwatching-america>



The **Bald Eagle** is now the United States' national bird. *Read all about it!*

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/biden-signs-bill-officially-anointing-bald-eagle-as-national-bird-of-u-s>

Juvenile bald eagle soars at Seabourne Creek Nature Park
Photo credit: Hoiman Low



RIGHT: A young **vermillion flycatcher** attacks his reflection at Anahuac NWR (Photo: Sari Garfinkle)

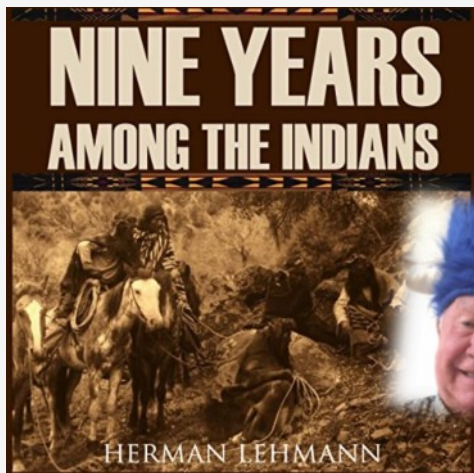


BELOW: **Jan and Kevin Kolk** lead the December 5 bird hike at Seabourne Creek Nature Park on Kevin's birthday, until rain sent everyone home (Photo: Hoiman Low)



Book Corner

By TMNCPC Various Members



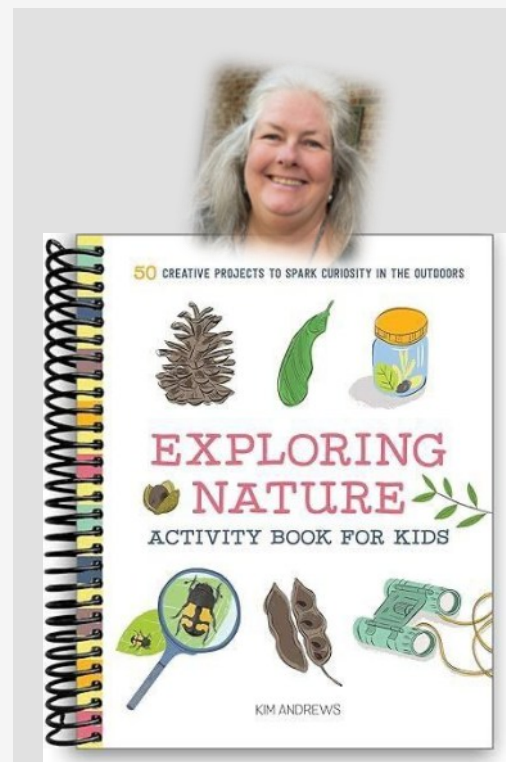
Nine Years Among the Indians by Herman Lehmann (review by Jim Butcher, aka The Grand Poobah)



The saga describes the exploits of a young German farm boy in the Texas Hill Country kidnapped by a band of Apaches around 1870. Herman

explains how he and his brother were carried off by a war party and — after years of indoctrination — exiled to spend his life as a hermit. He was later accepted into a band of Comanches headed by Quanah Parker.

There is much action as his tribe fought against soldiers, Mexicans, Rangers, and other native tribes. There was much scalping involved, of course, as well as anecdotal information about the customs and practices of his group. This is very informative and a quick read of only 98 pages. It is highly recommended for my fellow nature lovers also fascinated by colorful Texas history.



Exploring Nature, Activity Book for Kids with 50 Creative Projects to Spark Curiosity in the Outdoors by Kim Andrews (review by Lisa Sanders, Advanced Training Director)

Here is an excellent book for kids for nature exploring. I can personally verify that 2 out of 10 children agree this is a great book. That endorsement comprises 100% of the sample population for this study. It's like a mini TMN curriculum!

“May you always keep your sense of wonder, explore often, and stay forever wild.”

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/resources/education-and-teaching-materials/soil-biology-primer>

Soil Biology Primer by Soil and Water Conservation Society (review by Shannon Westveer)



As an evangelist and educator of best soil conservation and protection principles, particularly the mutualism between most plants and fungi, learning about the organisms — starting with plants and the soil “FBI” — that jump start soil ecology could not be better illustrated in just a few pages. The best place to get yours is at the link above; it costs around \$18 plus shipping. It is an excellent introduction to terrestrial Earth’s life operating system. Living, healthy soil is what sustains us.

Lighter Side

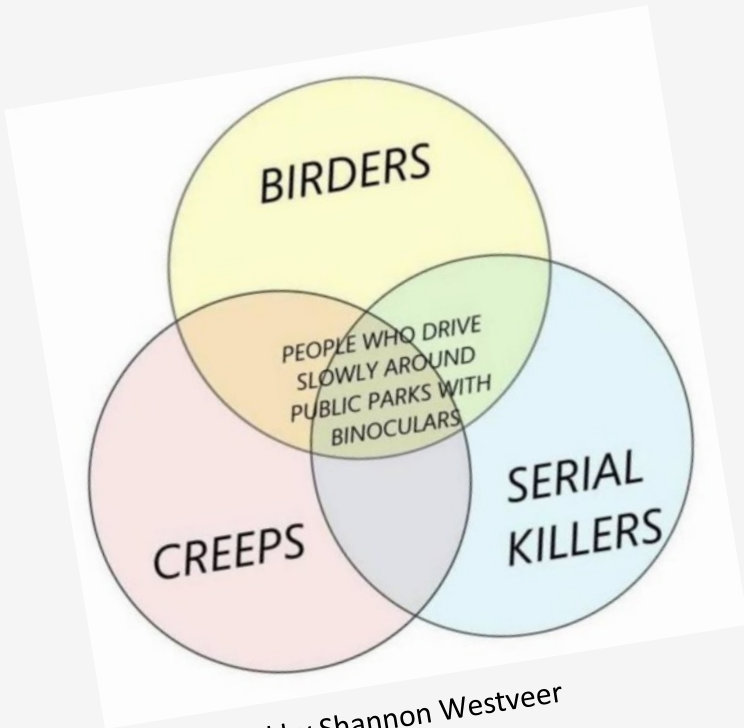
By TMNCPC Various Members



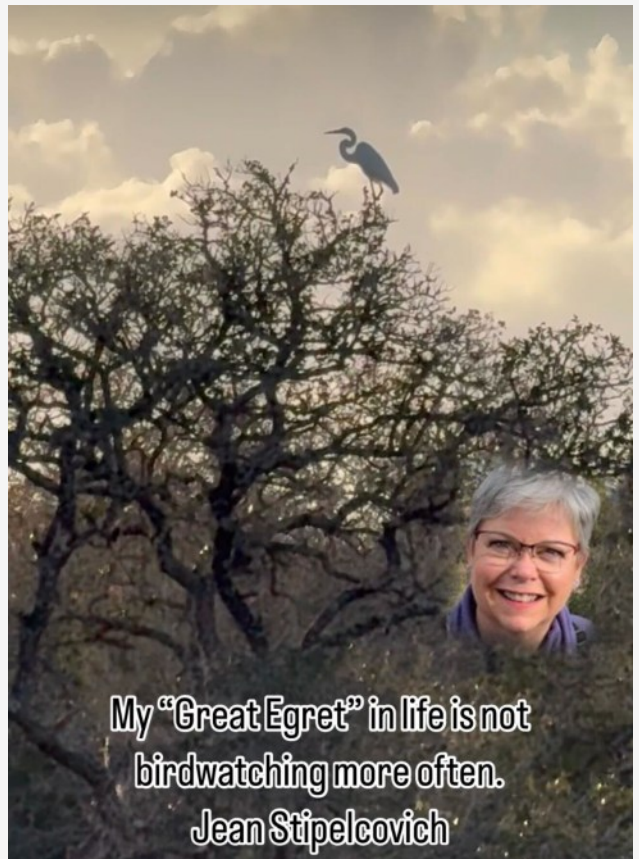
This great egret feasting on lizards in Epcot's model railroad was a big hit with visitors; Shared by Susan Walther



Shared by Shannon Westveer



Shared by Shannon Westveer



My "Great Egret" in life is not birdwatching more often.
Jean Stipelcovich

Elected Officers

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

NEW! Board of Directors

Past-President [Terri Hurley](#)
 Membership [Constance Rossiter](#)
 and [Sari Garfinkle](#)
 Programs [Jan Peterson](#)
 Communications [Tom Zaal](#)
 Volunteers [Jan Poscovsky](#)
 Advanced Training [Lisa Sanders](#)
 New Class Spring [Lisa Sanders](#)
 New Class Rep. Jacob Perry
 Info. Tech. [Bert Stipelcovich](#)
 State Rep. [Pam Jackson](#)
 Seabourne Creek Jerry Trenta and
 Randolph Watson

TPWD / AgriLife Chapter Advisors

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



Courier Scavenger Quiz

1. Which member spotted the 199th species of bird at Seabourne, and which bird was it? ([May 2017, Page 4](#))
2. How many members recertified in 2015? How many of those can you count are still active today? ([February 2016, Page 3](#))
3. Who is the Ms. Claus pictured who eventually became a TMNCPC the following year? ([January 2023, Page 15](#))
4. What bird family was raised at Seabourne in 2015? Is this the same tree that brought up a family of great horned owls in 2024 only to be cut down soon afterward for development? ([August 2015, Page 6](#))
5. Putting Down Roots is annual outreach for partner Coastal Prairie Conservancy. Could this be the inaugural event? ([December 2014, Page 3](#))
6. Someone pictured at the Nature Fest event became a TMNCPC member In 2023. Can you find him/her? ([November 2018, Page 3](#))

How many can you correctly identify? Flip through each issue to get a glimpse of our chapter's past. (Answers below.)

1. Amber Leung and mourning warbler; 2. hawk and yes; 5. Yes; 6. Monica Taylor
 42 and 16; 3. Lisa Sanders; 4. Swainson's



T E X A S

Master Naturalist™
 Coastal Prairie Chapter



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