

Coastal Prairie Chapter Courier

Volume 13 Issue 8 – September 2025

“Red-shouldered hawk
shows itself Today and speaks to
the swirling energies that are
facing us Today.

It will cause us to want to be
scattered and unable to focus.

So remember to stay on
target and slow your thoughts;

We are all capable of doing
this we just have to be mindful
of it.”

Spiritual and Totem Insight -
Bear Medicinewalker, Spiritual
Adviser, and Holly Jenkins



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COVER PHOTO

Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo
 lineatus*) riding the bull in
 Seabrook, Texas | Photo by Tom
 Zaal

EDITOR TEAM

This issue was crafted by Co-Editor,
Jo Cosbey. Have a great story for
 the October issue? Submit by
September 25 to:

#submissions-courier on Slack or
Submissions@coastalprairie.org to
 reach everyone on the Editor Team.
<https://txmn.org/coastal/monthly-coastal-prairie-courier/>



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.

President's Message

Susan Walther, TMNCPC President



What does it mean to be a Texas Master Naturalist? At its heart, it's not just a title. It's a ***personal journey of discovery, growth, and purpose.***

About a week ago, each of the members of our chapter's Fall 2025 training class set off on their journey to become Texas Master Naturalists at the first training session. It was a truly joyful occasion, and I was deeply moved to see the room filled not just with our newest chapter members, but also with many of the people who will support and accompany them on the first steps of their journey: mentors, training team members, and presenters.

Each of the class members shared some of their personal history and reasons for beginning this journey. The stories were wonderfully unique, and yet common themes emerged: a lifelong love of the natural world; a love of teaching, serving others, and sharing knowledge; an interest in learning more and developing a deeper understanding of nature. Several people mentioned that as busy adults, they have felt pulled away from nature and want to regain that connection. One said privately, ***"I feel like my soul was waiting for this."***

The journey of a Texas Master Naturalist does not have an ending; it's a ***lifelong path*** that unfolds in ways we never quite expect. Although formal training may mark the beginning, for most of us this is only the first step into a much deeper transformation.

As we each progress through our Master Naturalist journey, we discover ***new aspects of ourselves.*** We learn to see differently, to slow down and observe the tiny details in a wildflower, insect, or bird call. We find confidence in sharing what we've learned with others. We surprise ourselves by trying new things, serving alongside new people, or stepping up to lead a project or event.

There's a special kind of joy in realizing ***you are still growing, and still capable of learning, changing, and contributing in meaningful ways.*** The personal fulfillment and exhilaration that comes from stretching ourselves and stepping outside our comfort zones is what keeps so many of us engaged year after year.

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September Chapter Program: Thursday, September 4 @ 7 PM
 “Ecotoxicology 101” Presented by Dr. Cindy Howard
Jan Peterson, TMNCPC Programs Director



What happens when chemicals collide with nature? Dr. Cindy Howard, Department Chair of Environmental Sciences and Professor of Biology and Environmental Science, College of Science and Engineering will help us to understand the answer. Whether you're new to the topic or deeply invested in protecting Texas' natural heritage, this program, designed for curious minds and conservation advocates, will deepen your understanding and inspire action.



Dr. Cindy Howard

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.

Please plan to arrive at 6:00 PM for refreshments and social time. The program begins at 7:00 PM and will also be streamed live via Zoom by our Information Technology team. Visit the chapter program page for the Zoom link.

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



Cindy grew up in

northeast Ohio and earned a B.A. in zoology from Miami University in Ohio. She moved to Houston for a job with the Southwest Research Institute (SwRI), monitoring benthic macroinvertebrate and fish communities in Trinity and Galveston Bays and the Louisiana outer continental shelf. While at SwRI, Cindy helped develop one of the first labs in the state devoted to evaluating the effects of pollutants on natural populations. She later moved on to the UT Health Science Center while completing graduate studies at UH Clear Lake, then UT School of Public Health. She has been a faculty member in environmental science and biology at UH Clear Lake for 35 years, where she teaches ecology, toxicology, environmental biology and tropical rainforest ecology courses. Cindy conducts ecological and ecotoxicological research with students in the saltmarshes of Galveston Bay and the wilds of the Amazon rainforest. She is a Galveston Bay Area Master Naturalist and leads ecotours for college students and TMNs in the Brazilian Amazon.

[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.”]

Continued from [previous page](#)

Each volunteer finds a unique rhythm. Some of us discover that we thrive in front of a group; others feel most at home quietly restoring habitat or collecting citizen science data. **There is no one path.** And that's the beauty of it. Education, Outreach, and Service aren't requirements, they are opportunities. They are invitations to explore what excites us and to use those passions to make a difference.

So, wherever you are on your Master Naturalist path — brand new, deeply seasoned, or somewhere in between — **take time to enjoy the journey.** Celebrate the continuous growth, the friendships, the small victories, and the big questions that keep you curious. In the Texas Master Naturalist community, **the journey is the destination.**

See you outside!



Membership Minute

*Sari Garfinkle and Constance Rossiter,
TMNCPC Membership Co-Directors*



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



Initial Certification

Masood Murtuza – 2025 Spring
Ryan Pham – 2024 Fall
Claire Williams – 2024 Fall



2025 Recertification

(99 members recertified)
Liz Baldwin – 2025 Spring
Richard Guajardo – 2025 Spring
Marilyne Malone – 2020 Fall
Gary Moore – 2010
Tierra Ortiz-Rodriguez – 2022 Fall
Diane Russell – 2011
Randall Schmidt – 2021 Fall
Jim Stepp – 2021 Spring
Sharon Watson – 2021 Spring
Elaine Whiteley – 2021 Fall
Fran Wilcox – 2022 Fall



250 Hour Milestone

Ellen Bynum – 2024 Spring
Elaine Whiteley – 2021 Fall



500 Hour Milestone

Harold Carlson – 2024 Spring
Jo Cosbey – 2024 Fall



5,000 Hour Milestone

Shannon Westveer – 2019



2025 Pollinators for
Texas Grant Winner
Susan Walther



I'm very pleased to announce that **our chapter has won a 2025 Pollinators for Texas Grant for \$4000!** The winning project, named **"The Pollinator Path at Nina's Garden,"** will install a series of signs along the pathway in and around Nina's Garden and the nearby pocket prairie wildflower areas. Congratulations and thanks go to Karen Brisch (project lead for this grant) and to Monica Taylor (project lead for the grant we received in 2024 for Nina's Garden at Cullinan Park) for their work on the grant application. Thanks also to **all our Cullinan Park volunteers** that are doing such great work on all our chapter-managed natural areas there! The Pollinators for Texas Grant project is funded by H-E-B and administered by the Texas Master Naturalist Program.

We hope that the Pollinators for Texas Grant program will be offered in future years! If you have a project in mind that could be a good candidate for a future grant, please begin to flesh out the details of your ideas in the next few months so that you will be ready when a new grant application period opens up!

All the details of the program are at <https://txmn.tamu.edu/pollinators-for-texas/>

Pollinators for Texas a partnership with





Volunteer Service —September Highlights

Jan Poscovsky, TMNCPC Volunteer Director

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

[TeamUp Website September Calendar](#)

Signature Project Seabourne Creek Nature Park (SCNP), Rosenberg: 7:30 AM - 10:30 AM, Wednesdays and 1st and 3rd Saturdays which fall on 9/3, 9/6, 9/10, 9/17, 9/20 and 9/24

Public Outreach Monthly Mindful Nature Walk rotating between parks. This month at Cullinan, Sugar Land: 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM, 1st Saturday which falls on 9/6

Public Outreach Monthly TMN Story Time for Children rotating between parks. This month at Cullinan, Sugar Land: 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM, 1st Saturday which falls on 9/6

Public Outreach Monthly Nature Walk at SCNP, Rosenberg: 8:00 AM - 9:00 AM, 3rd Sunday which falls on 9/21

Public Outreach Monthly Insect Hike at SCNP, Rosenberg: 9:00 AM - 11:00 AM, 4th Thursday which falls on 9/25

Public Outreach Houston Museum of Natural Science in Sugar Land: 10:30 AM - 3:30 PM, 2nd and 4th Saturdays which fall on 9/13 and 9/27 and Garden Workday, 3rd Thursday from 8:00 AM - 10:00 AM which falls on 9/18

Board Meeting, via Zoom: 7:00PM - 9:00PM, 3rd Wednesday which falls on 9/17

Coastal Prairie Conservancy Indiangrass Preserve, Katy: 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM, Tuesdays, Fridays, and 2nd Saturdays of each month which fall on 9/2, 9/5, 9/9, 9/12, 9/13, 9/16, 9/19, 9/23, 9/26 and 9/30

Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR Garden Day, Eagle Lake: 8:00 AM - 12:00 PM every Friday which fall on 9/5, 9/12, 9/19 and 9/26

Harris County Precinct 4 Bird Survey at Archbishop Joseph A. Fiorenza Park, Houston: 7:30 AM - 11:00 AM, 4th Monday which falls on 9/22

AG'Tivity Barn Fort Bend County Fair, Rosenberg: 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM on 9/29 and 9/30

John Paul Landing Weekly Bird Hike, Cypress: 7:30 AM - 10:30 AM, every Thursday, which fall on 9/4, 9/11, 9/18 and 9/25

Willow Fork Pollinator Garden Workday, Katy: 8:00 AM - 10:00 AM, every Saturday of each month which fall on 9/6, 9/13, 9/20 and 9/27

Willow Waterhole Monthly Bird Survey, Houston: 7:00 AM - 9:00 AM every 3rd Saturday which falls on 9/20

Kolter Elementary Pollinator Garden Workday, Houston: 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM 2nd Saturday of each month which falls on 9/13

Bolivar Flats Beach Ramble, Bolivar Flats: 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM 1st Saturday of the month which falls on Saturday 9/6

Lawther-Deer Park Prairie, Deer Park: 8:00 AM - 12:00 PM 4th Saturday Workday which falls on 9/27

Brock Adventure Park Canoe and Kayak Clean-up, Houston: 7:00 AM - 12:00 PM on 9/4

Gulf Coast Bird Observatory Hummingbird Festival, Lake Jackson: 8:00 AM - 12:30 PM on 9/13 and 9/20

Kleb Woods Hummingbird Festival, Tomball: 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM on 9/13

Join Us at Seabourne Creek!

The public is always invited to participate in our fun and educational monthly hikes and walks. We invite you to get out and join TMNCPC members as we commune with nature. Check our calendar to find the dates and times for our Bird Hikes, Plant Walks, Nature Walks and Insect Hikes. [TMNCPC Event Calendar](#)





Moth Camp in Weimar

Jean Stipelcovich and Sari Garfinkle



Every July, iNaturalist's National Moth Week Project lights up the night with a global celebration of moths. Data collected by citizen scientists help researchers track moth populations. This year, Coastal Prairie moth enthusiasts hunted moths at all



Shari Lewis in a blacklight set-up | Photo by Sari Garfinkle

their favorite haunts to contribute to the iNaturalist project. One night, they descended on Monarch Woods in Weimar, Texas for a fun adventure. Armed with white sheets, an Ikea portable clothes closet, blacklights, and the iNaturalist app, these citizen scientists set up six stations over four acres to document the dazzling diversity of moths fluttering through the Post Oak Savannah acreage.

Before the sun dipped below the horizon, Master Naturalists gathered together for snacks and fellowship. They donned proper attire and perfumed

themselves with insect repellent to protect themselves from the hordes. Darkness fell, and each black light station glowed brightly. Soon, a parade of moths arrived, drawn to the hypnotic and inviting lights. Big, little, microscopic. Bright, dark, white, black, and every color in between. The vibrant orange-spotted flower moth, the well-camouflaged diabolical fungus moth, and the huge but very friendly Carolina sphinx. With smartphones and cameras in hand, they documented moths, insects, and beetles, making sure to capture important field marks. As well-trained citizen scientist observers, they understood that expert identifiers need all the details.



Orange-spotted flower moth | Photo by Sari Garfinkle

The night wasn't just about science—it was a blast! Laughter echoed as they marveled at moths with quirky names like exasperating platynota moth, exposed bird-dropping moth, and red-necked



Scorpion | Photo by Sari Garfinkle

peanutworm moth. Seasoned moth hunters guided and helped newcomers, showing them how to identify species, and report their finds to iNaturalist. Those who joined a scorpion hunt learned that scorpions glow blue-green under blacklight!

Everyone marveled

at the spider spinning a huge orb web between the trees.

The party ended around two in the morning. Over one hundred species of moths were documented, many new to the county, all while Texas Master Naturalists bonded over a shared love for nature. National Moth Week's

iNaturalist project made it easy to contribute to science, and for these friends, that summer evening was indeed a moth-filled celebration.



Shannon Westveer's mothstache, a Carolina sphinx | Photo by Sari Garfinkle



Standing: Deb McMullen, Sari Garfinkle, Ute Welk, Susan Brodmerkel, Chris Weidman, Vanessa Weidman, Shannon Westveer, Jean Stipelcovich

Sitting: Erik Wolf, Hoiman Low, Susie Doe, Shari Lewis, Constance Rossiter, Bert Stipelcovich | Photo by Jean Stipelcovich



Franken Tree

Jim Butcher, TMNCPC Class of 2008

I have been dealing with Osage orange trees, *Maclura porifera*, for many years at Seabourne Nature Park, but I have never seen anything like this. It all started in a section of the new Arboretum known as the "Girl Scout Hill". I noticed that some of the initial tree plantings had failed. An early Chapter motto was "fail fast, fix fast". I got permission and funding from Jerry Trenta and ordered 5



bare root specimens from Michigan. They were all 16 to 18 inches tall. . I planted them in March 2024. In just 17 months, this one tree has exceeded a height of 18 feet. It truly found a happy place. No fertilizer was applied. Mother nature always seems to surprise us. The Grand Poobah now has a grand tree. Be sure to visit the trees the next time you are at the park.

**Hey! Missing the Lighter Side?
Go to the Humor Channel on Slack**



Gulf Coast Bird Observatory E-News

Bill Johnson, TMNCPC Class of 2010

Lots of information here on activities our members can enjoy. Margo and I frequently go to the Hawk Watch, as well as the Hummingbird event. This year, we will go on the 20th of September in Lake Jackson. Both events are informative and should qualify for advanced training. <https://www.gcbo.org/>



Getting to Know Your Seabourne Creek Prairie Plants - IV

Susie Doe, TMNCPC Class of 2008



Asclepias is the name given in 1753 by Carl Linnaeus to the genus which contains over 200 species of milkweeds native to North America, South America, and the southern half of Africa. Some species have been introduced

to Europe, parts of Asia, and Australia. In Texas, we have ~56 species native to the state, and 1 non-native species, *A. curassavica*, native to parts of Mexico and south to South

America*. Within our chapter's counties, there are 7 species commonly found here, and another 6 species can be found in areas on the edges of what I call 'my area'/'our area'.

The genus *Asclepias* and related genera were once considered a separate family, Asclepiaceae, but they have now been incorporated into the larger Apocynaceae, the dogbane family (which includes a fair number of garden plants, such as plumeria, oleanders, star jasmine, mandevilla, and vincas, as

well as our native *Amsonia repens* (aka creeping bluestar). All *Asclepias* species produce cardiac glycosides (cardenolides) contained within their milky sap, which exudes from the plants'

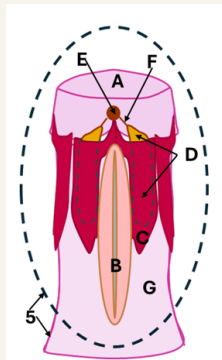


Figure 2. Gynostegium (5.) consists of: (A) **stigmatic disc** (top of the column); (B) **stigmatic slit** surrounded by the **stigmatic ridge** (opens to the column's ovary chamber); (C) **anther** (with 2 **pockets**, one on either side of the stigmatic ridge); (D) **pollinium** (one in each anther pocket); (E) **corpusculum** or gland; and (F) **translators** (which attached each pollinium to the corpusculum).



Figure 1. Varying Flower Shapes, Sizes, and Color of *Asclepias* flowers

tissues when damaged; so, one should always be mindful when handling these plants - do not let the sap get into your eyes, nose, or mouth! While toxic, sometimes fatal to humans and many animals, there are other animals, such as monarch butterflies, which purposely eat the plants to get these toxic substances into their bodies. When toxin-susceptible predators get a taste of a monarch they learn to stay away from them (and other species that mimic their color patterns).

What makes milkweeds truly special is their flower structure and the pollination mechanism employed. Most milkweed flowers have an 'hourglass' shape. The 5 sepals and 5 petals are usually reflexed back towards the pedicels; this forms the lower half of the 'hour-glass'. (See Figure 1). Note that in *A. viridis* and *A. asperula* the petals are not reflexed, forming a cup-shape instead.

Protruding above the petals is a central column which houses the ovaries. The column consists of stigmatic ridges with 5 slits opening to the chamber inside. The 5 two-pocketed anthers are fused to the

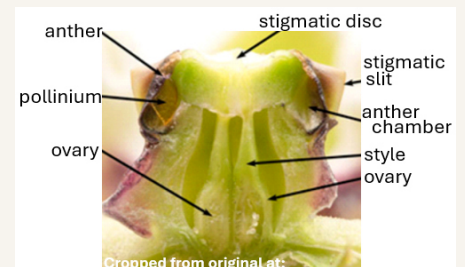


Figure 3. Cross section on a gynostegium

each pocket pair straddling one of the stigmatic ridges. *Asclepias* species do not produce loose, individual pollen grains, but rather a coherent packet of a mass of pollen grains called a pollinium, which is transferred as one unit to another plant. Each anther

* *Asclepias curassavica* has been introduced into the US by horticulturalists & monarch enthusiasts in an ill-fated attempt to help the Monarch butterfly. We have learned that this species should not be planted here, as it harbors *Ophryocystis elektroscirrha* (OE), which infects butterflies causing serious, often lethal malformations.

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Getting to Know Your Seabourne Creek Prairie Plants - IV ...cont

Susie Doe, TMNCPC Class of 2008



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pocket holds one pollinium, which is tethered across the stigmatic slit to the pollinium of its paired anther pocket by two strings called translators attached to a small structure known as the corpusculum or gland. (See Figures 2 and 3). This entire structure is known as the gynostegium. Subtending the gynostegium (but above the petals) is a special structure known as the corona, made up of 5 hoods (or cups), each with a horn protruding from it. (See Figure 4). This structure is what forms the upper half of the flower's hourglass shape. Hoods and horns come in a variety of colors, shapes, sizes, and lengths. (See Figure 5).

Knowing the flower structure allows us to discuss the remarkable pollination mechanism employed by *Asclepias* species. Insects are attracted, as in many other species of plants, by provision of a nectar reward. *Asclepias* species make plenty of nectar, which is presented in the cup-like hoods of the corona. In order to reach the nectar, insects must perch precariously on top of the flower, and all would be easy if only standing on those horns was easy. However, these structures are covered in a waxy coating, making them slippery (as are the stigmatic ridges). As the insects maneuver around the flower to get the right purchase, they slip and slide, and often a leg (or even two) will slide down and into the stigmatic slit. So, the insect must now pull its leg out if it is to continue its life (weak ones may not be able to do so). Most insect legs have plenty of small, stiff hairs, so as the insect pulls its leg up and out, it hooks the pollinia packet and pulls it out of the anther pocket. The insect is now stuck with pollinia on its legs. (See Figure 6). This fly had probably visited several flowers already.



Figure 6. *Merodon equestris* (a Syrphid Fly) with lots of pollinia attached to its legs. Photo by Lloyd Davidson, @2015, at <https://bugguide.net/node/view/1031859> (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd-nc/1.0/>).

Though insects will try to get rid of these pesky pieces of luggage, they usually give up, heading off to the next yummy nectar meal at another milkweed flower. Here again, slipping and sliding will occur, and legs will get stuck in the stigmatic slits, pulling the pollinia in as well. In pulling their legs out, the pollinia will dislodge and will remain inside the stigmatic chamber (and who knows, if the corresponding anthers still have their pollinia, the insect may get a new one). Once inside the stigmatic chamber the pollinium mass will begin to disintegrate, and the pollen grains will find their way to the ovules within the ovary where fertilization will occur. *Asclepias* plants produce plenty of seeds, so this seemingly suspect method appears to work quite well.



Figure 4. Profile View of Flower - (1.) Petal; (2) Column; (3) Hood; (4.) Horn; (5.) Gynostegium (upper part of the column)

For more interesting info and good photos, check out "[Milkweed Pollination: A Series of Fortunate Events](#)" by Chris Helzer, Prairie Ecologist. He also has several other interesting posts about other topics related to milkweeds. Also Monarch Watch has an interesting article about milkweed on their website at <https://monarchwatch.org/bring-back-the-monarchs/milkweed>.

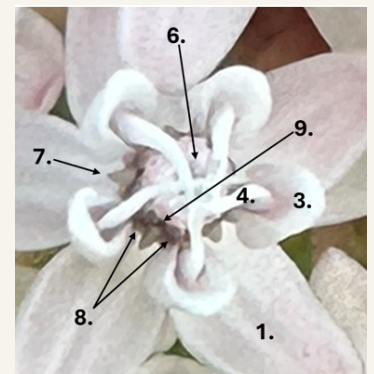


Figure 5. Top View of Flower - as for Figure 4 - (6.) Stigmatic Disc (top of the gynostegium); (7.) Stigmatic ridge with stigmatic slit; (8.) Paired anther pockets containing the pollinia; (9.) Corpusculum attached via translators to the 2 pollinia in the paired anther pockets

Next month, I will discuss the various species of *Asclepias* found in our area.



ATTENTION Butterfly Enthusiasts!

Sunday, October 5 is the **2025 North American Butterfly Association Butterfly Count** at Brazos Bend State Park. Coastal

Prairie Chapter MEMBERS: look for the **SignUp Genius**. Over the next few weeks, core teams will be formed for citizen science at our home state park. TMN leads, species identifiers, and photographers for each trail group are a higher experience level. Others will fill in each of 6 separate trail teams. This is what we TMNs are uniquely trained for, no matter your experience level.

It's fun counting with more people on the team! There will be a **\$3 fee per person** collected at the start of the count 9 AM / paid to NABA upon data submission for each member of the team. Count compiler Shannon Westveer will meet at Hale Lake Pavilion with all teams at 1 PM for lunch and results tally.

If you are interested in helping to survey the community of adult Lepidopterans, reply to the post at **#partner-bbsp** or **#proj-citizen-science** on Slack or email Shannon, shannon@coastalprairie.org directly. Time in the field (including travel up to the time spent) all counts as volunteer service project hours. The more the merrier. *Thank you!*



Ruth Love,
Class of Spring 2025,
receives the “Dubious
Achievement Award” – aka
the Blue Donut – for working
at the Demo Garden at
Seabourne during the
sweltering August heat.



T E X A S



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