

# *the paddlefish* ***the paddlefish***

Vol. 8 No. 7

Cypress Basin Texas Master Naturalist Chapter Newsletter

July 2016

## ***Mission of the Texas Master Naturalist***

***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.***

## **2016 OFFICERS**

**Stella Barrow - President**

**Betty Morgan - Vice President**

**Kristi Thomas - Secretary**

**Charles Gillis – Treasurer**

**Linda Richtsmeier – Membership Chairman**

**Pat Sawyer and Michael Mathews - Webmasters**

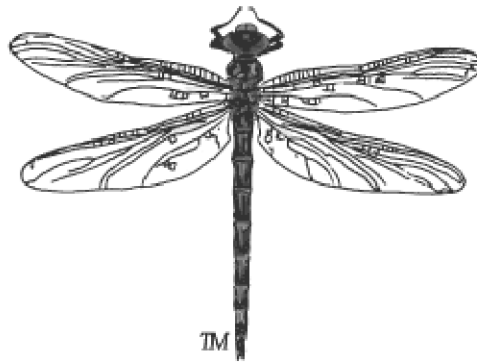
**Vanessa Adams Neace - Advisor**

**Doug Weir -Advisor**

## **ANNOUNCEMENT**

**NO MEETING IN JULY**

# Snippets from Stella



July 2016

Hello Friends!

First things first – we are **NOT having** a July meeting scheduled for July 11. Folks are on vacation; have grandchildren visiting; not an awful lot going on and it's too darn hot!

Our monthly work day is still scheduled for Saturday, July 16<sup>th</sup>. I want to suggest we work two locations: the refuge and the butterfly garden. Both need our attention. Some of you have been helping at the butterfly garden and it was suggested that we use it as another opportunity on our scheduled work days. So, let's start early – 8:00 am – because by 10 or 11 it is almost too hot to be outside. Bring loppers, saws, gloves for the refuge and garden tools, rakes, gloves for the butterfly garden. And WATER!

The Annual Meeting – just so you know a few things to look forward to when you go; Dr. Carl Turner (yes, our own), Lee Eisenberg (Morley Hudson Greenhouse), Marnie Rout and Bob Hudson (ecoVerdant) are making presentations. What a representation from East Texas!!

Finally, the paddle trails. Yes, it's hot, but we really must give them some attention. We can discuss and make plans at work day at the refuge. If you can be on the paddle trail team, please meet me on the 16<sup>th</sup> in the classroom for a planning and work session.

Thanks for all you do!!

SB

**CYPRESS BASIN TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST  
MEETING JUNE 13, 2016  
MINUTES**

**ATTENDING:** 27 members – Kristi Thomas, Linda Richtsmeier, David Skinner, Michael Mathews, Ted and Stella Barrow, Tom Walker, Steve and Susan Sedberry, Pam Andrews, Marge West, Becky Gullette, Floyd and Ellen Anderson, Nancy Rheay, Carl and Diane Turner, Sue Simmons, Bill Huddleston, Pat and ViAnn Sawyer, Kay Watson, Angela and Victor Ledger, Carol Fox, Becky Gullette, Mickie Moore, and Vanessa Neace (advisor).

**CALL TO ORDER:** Meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by President Stella Barrow.

**PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES:** Minutes from prior meeting were unanimously accepted with a motion by Linda, seconded by Ellen.

**TREASURER REPORT:** Charles discussed and gave an overview of the treasurer's report, which was in the newsletter of approximately \$8,274 in bank, with not many expenses reported for the month. Full detail provided in the newsletter; with a motion by Linda, seconded by Susan, the report was unanimously approved.

**GENERAL ITEMS: OLD BUSINESS**

**RED RIVER CHAPTER VISIT:** Per Stella, dates of September 16th and 17th have been confirmed, will finalize details in July for bird walk, pontoon boats, and Susan to head up food committee. Looking for someone to do a brief summation on Giant Salvinia because on pontoon boat tour leaving from Shady Glade, it will be encountered. Will be signup sheets for help, and may need that help the night of the meeting on the 16th and/or Sat. the 17th for lunch, etc.

**PHOTO TOUR/CLASS:** Set date for second class on 7/16, probably starting at 8 a.m. due to heat. Michael will be sending emails out regarding.

**NEW REFUGE TRAIL:** Grant with Friends of Refuge - any volunteers to help write? (Per Charles, Eric says that all we could do on workday would be to trim existing trails due to all the problems with recent rains. Kay asked if could start on existing trails, and Charles thinks so.) Won't know until end of month if get grant for the \$5,00 applied for, could revise application and send in on new walking trail, but this is due the first of July. Becky and Charles expressed interest in brainstorming with Stella about.

**EAB STATUS:** Let's find those wasp nests! Nest in Longview has been bulldozed. Per Vanessa, if you could get out and scout around and you find confirmed mounds, Alan will come out and train us, which will take 30-45 minutes. If you find one, don't dig in it, take a picture, send to Vanessa or go online and search; are active in early morning.

**PADDLEFISH FESTIVAL:** What other things have we done? Camp Fern, Becky and Darrell went out last year, will take tracks set, Project Wild, Deadly Links, hope to get binoculars from Collins and let do bird watching, lasts from 9:30 to 12:20, roughly. If interested in helping, see Becky tonight, or call. ViAnn spent 3 days helping at summer camp for Collins. David made bluebird boxes for all of them. Pollinator garden - ViAnn installed four raised boxes and replanted annual plants, which are doing well. David is working with 4-H and Master Gardeners. Kay is working with HS in Linden, her hometown, and Pam is working on Headstart garden in Jefferson, which are all good examples of ways to work within our communities. Linda reminded when you go out she needs the count of the people that you deal with.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

**FISHING LINE PROJECT:** Roger's info - <https://mrrp.tamu.edu/downloads/MRRP-Volunteer%20Agreement.pdf> - order indoor/outdoor bins, monofilament lines only. Roger has asked for more info re decals and construction, and if anyone interested. He will talk to COE and to someone at boat launch and Hwy 43 bridge. Sue would be interested in 43 bridge location. Will talk to him about it in July, there is an extra form to fill out to be able to do that, link included.

**ANNUAL MEETING:** Sponsoring \$250 event this year - please plan to go, coming up in October, Lake Conroe. Usually much further away, so as soon as we find out about registration Stella hopes many will plan to go.

**NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY MEETING:** Thursday, 6/23 at Saint Mary's Catholic Church, - Allen Smith speaking on EAB at 7 p.m., would be AT.

**BOOKS FOR SALE:** 2016 class members using uncorrected proof, so if any of you want one is new book and doesn't have index, will be \$10 per copy.

**NEW PROJECTS:** Executive board met and we're reminded that there is a form to fill out for new project proposals, Michael to make one change and it will go live and is on the website.

**OCTOBER POSSIBLE EVENT:** Group discussed possibility of renting large movie screen to have outdoor movie, "Something in the Woods" that was filmed at Tom's place. Could watch at refuge, set up telescope and project moon and stars, October 8th is a Saturday. Usually \$2,000, getting a reduced price and Friends of Refuge would go in half. Becky suggested "Drive-in Moonvie", could pass out recruitment materials, possibly make a little video of what we do. Becky motioned for vote, Sue seconded, unanimously approved to move ahead and investigate possibility.

**OFFICERS:** Per Stella, begin thinking about this. Elections will be in October with installation at November meeting, awards ceremony, family social. Should have slate to you by end of October. Betty is stepping down as new class director, Jill is considering and would like a team member in that respect.

**2016 CLASS BOARD REPRESENTATIVE:** Asked Marge to be rep so she will be meeting with others quarterly.

**2017 CLASS:** Will try to recruit for 2017, classes will start in Jan., beat the bushes to bring on board. Reminded to take as many pictures and videos of things we do and send to Michael, we need more before, during, and after on projects to use for recruitment. This is an area where we could improve.

**OPPORTUNITY AT COLLINS ACADEMY:** Libby is leaving, should we do something for her? Last day end of June, grant winding down. Ideas - Caddo Lake book, or price of membership to TMN were suggestions.

**WORK DAY:** Saturday 6/18, per Vanessa, signage needs cleaning. Stella will pick a day and send an email, student staying at classroom and Vanessa advised about keys. Vanessa says keep in mind maintaining paddling trails necessary, by next meeting could make progress.

**ADVANCED TRAINING:** Stella conducted a very informative presentation about wildflowers, focusing on bluebonnets and others.

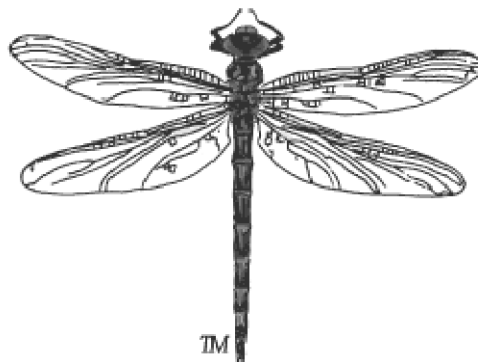
ADJOURNMENT: at 7:45 p.m.

VOLUNTEER HOURS: 1.0 hour

ADVANCED TRAINING: .25

PLUS YOUR TRAVEL:

Submitted by Kristi Thomas, Secretary

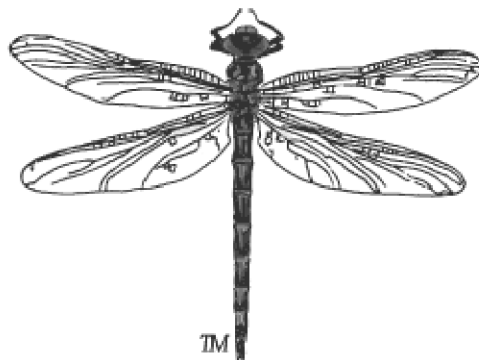


# Financial Report for June 2016

Submitted by Charles Gillis, Treasurer

Beginning Bank Balance 06/01/16		\$8,274.85
Less: Expenses		
AgriLife supplies	\$ 264.79	
Training Material	19.64	
New Class Expense	102.42	
Sponsor Annual Meeting	<u>250.00</u>	<u>-636.85</u>
<u>Ending Bank Balance, 06/30/16</u>		<u>\$7,638.00</u>
Dedicated Funds – Regatta	\$3,191.28	
Undedicated Funds	<u>4,446.72</u>	
Ending Bank Balance, 06/30/16		<u>\$7,638.00</u>
Less: Outstanding Checks		
AgLife Supplies		-112.86
Available Balance		<u>\$7,525.14</u>

Note: Some of the AgriLife Supplies expenses were for items for members and the chapter will be reimbursed.



# Becoming a Birder is Incredibly Easy Except for the Hard Part

## 4 Stages of Learning

by Michael Mathews

I was late becoming a birder. Oh, there was always some interest, but never strong. It was just another feature of nature, that I, as a biologist and naturalist, wanted to have some familiarity. My real focus was on herps, reptiles and amphibians. Actually, it started with snakes, gradually began to include lizards, then turtles and on to frogs, toads & salamanders. Mammals were in the picture, too. By the time I was around 12 or 13, my bedroom and backyard was like a zoo - cages and aquariums everywhere. I didn't ignore birds for I did come up with lots of "abandoned" birds that I ended up raising. Of course, I know now that few of those birds were really abandoned, but was ignorant of that fact then. I "raised" a couple of Blue Jays, a Mockingbird, two Crows, a Turkey Vulture, and numerous Sparrows.



Later, as a biology student and then as a biologist, I was in the field a lot. While none of my work involved birds, I always made a point of getting to know the local species. Honestly, all I cared about were the more commonly seen species and it was just a mild curiosity.

I should add that I was doing a lot of photography back then as well. Birds were rarely a target for my cameras. I was mainly taking slides and photos of herps, flowers, insects, spiders and lots of scenics. Most of my gear was suited for close up photography and not birding.

Then I got away from biology for years. A couple of years ago, I sort of retired and made some rather drastic lifestyle changes. One of the results from that was getting back "into" nature and photography. I moved back to east Texas and found myself suddenly fascinated with birds. There was still a bit of interest in herps, but not strong. Instead, I found myself buying all the Field Guides to Birds, replacing my old editions and adding a bunch of new ones that I had never seen.

Soon I made a little photo ID "guide" to the local birds I was seeing. It was more for myself than anything else, but I did share it with some people that I met at Lake O' the Pines in an RV park. It was very limited but did have the most common species.

I knew that I had a lot to learn but I was beginning to feel like I was a birder.

My camera equipment was limited. As a matter of fact when I first got back to east Texas, I had a Nikon D60 with a 18-55mm zoom. Decent camera but not really suitable for birding. Before long I ended up with a Nikon D3300 (had to buy a camera after temporarily losing my D60 and that was the best one they had). It had the same lens 18-55mm zoom. Before long I upgraded to a 55-200mm. Then to a 18-300mm.

Soon, 80% of my photos were of birds. I was seeing more species and learning more about them. I was actually feeling a little confident about my progress, but I did realize there were so many birds that I didn't know. However, I knew all of the common ones near me and was learning the others. I thought I was fairly good at finding birds. My eyesight is not great and that really is a handicap, but I thought I was doing okay.

Then, one day, my friend, fellow naturalist & photographer, Kristi Thomas, said she had invited the NETFO (Northeast Texas Field Ornithologist) group to have a birding trip on Lake O' the Pines. She asked if I wanted to go. Of course, I said yes.

Goodness, did that change things.

The trip was lead by Peter Barnes and there were only a handful of others who joined us on a very cold day on the lake. Most of them were also photographers and sported huge telephoto lenses and very nice Canon cameras. It was obvious that they were really "into it". But that was just the beginning. It did not take long to find that I was in the presence of a whole different world of birding. Peter was amazing with his knowledge and ability to quickly spot the odd and unusual. He was also very patient with explaining how you could tell it was this type rather than that type, showing the field marks and differences. Kristi and I were close to the same level in our birding knowledge and we appreciated the information and education. Ah, but it had just started.

I was doing my best to spot different birds, but this group was incredible. Where I saw a speck on the water, they spit out the name of the bird without pause. Just as my eyes would start to focus on the next speck, one or two of them would spit out the name of that bird. To say that I was impressed is an understatement. I just sat back and tried to remember as much as I could.

What a learning experience. Not that I learned a lot of new birds, but I did learn a few. What I learned was that there is a whole different level of birding; a whole skill set that I had not even imagined. Even though, I had been out with expert birders in the past, it was in a different setting and it was not with a group of mildly competitive birders who obviously enjoyed being the first to spot this species or that one.

Kristi Thomas, fellow blogger here on ETN, had an impact as well. Her interests in birding and photography also were a factor in developing more of my interest in birding and photography. Our activities with the Cypress Basin Chapter of Texas Master Naturalist brought us together often and we started working on some projects involving birding, birds and photography. As mentioned, she was also the one who invited me to the first NETFO trip.



Before long, I had decided to get more serious about birding and photography. Kristi and I developed a Bird Photo ID guide for birds of Lake O' the Pines and we will be expanding that. We have several other projects in the works that involve birds and birding. I jumped into photography with both feet and made a major upgrade in equipment. In particular, I added a Nikon D800 and a Nikon 200-500 zoom. In March and April, I averaged over 200 photos a day - mostly of birds. Yes, you could say that "I got into it".

So what did that do for me? Well, it did get me more enthused and in a funny way I was encouraged and discouraged at the same time. Encouraged seeing how much more there was to see and discouraged by how much more I had to learn. That made me think of the Four Stages of Learning which was part of a motivation course that I taught when I was a corporate trainer many years ago. It is an absolutely accurate way of describing the paths that one must go through to become knowledgeable and competent in any area.

So, how do the Four Stages of Learning apply to birding. Here is my personal path and thoughts about the stages including where I am and where I think I will eventually be.

Stage One - Unconsciously Incompetent. This is where you start with birding. You know a few birds but you are completely unaware of how much you don't know. It all looks pretty simple. Just pick up a book, look at the pictures and learn all about the birds. You don't have a clue about what you don't know. It all just sounds like so much fun and you can't wait to get out in the woods and ID every bird in every tree.

Stage Two - Consciously Incompetent. It does not take long to reach this stage. This is where you are when you have bought the books, glanced through the pictures and learned a few names. Then you went out into the field or woods and started trying to ID the birds you were seeing. You may have even tried to ID a few birds by their sounds. It did not take you long to realize that you really don't know much at all. It is almost overwhelming that there are so many species of birds out there and at times it seems like they all look and sound alike. There are a lot of doubts here of whether you will ever learn to spot many of the birds, ID many of the ones you spot; and ever hear a bird song that you are absolutely sure belongs to a certain species. Many birders never get out of this stage and there is nothing wrong with that. It takes a certain level of dedication, time and effort to get to the next level. There is plenty of fun at this level even though it can be a little frustrating at times.

Stage Three - Consciously Competent. When you get here, it will be after a lot of hard work, study and time in the field, but then you will recognize many if not most of the birds you see AND hear. If you don't know what they are, your eye is really trained to spot the key marks and easily ID them with your field guide. If you can't tell the species, you can tell by the shape of the body, its size, its bill and behavior that it is probably in this or that group. Then you can easily get out the guide and narrow it down to species. This stage does not come easy. You must really be dedicated to get here. It is not likely to happen very fast and indeed many birders and would be birders may never reach this stage. It does take a lot of effort; a lot of dedication; and a lot of interest. Being competitive may play a role. Who are we kidding? If you are really a birder and are the competitive life lister type, you will be much more likely to reach this stage and will do so much faster than someone who just loves birds and birding.

Stage Four - Unconsciously Competent. Here we have people like Peter Barnes who really don't have to think about it much at all. When they see a bird, they usually know what it is without a doubt. Same with just two or three faint notes from a bird calling. They know what it is. They don't have to think about it. It just all comes without effort. That doesn't mean that they won't occasionally have to get out the field guide or anything like that, but it is usually for a very unusual species or color variant. Even then, their knowledge has already automatically guided them right to the correct group. Their identification of most birds by sight or sound is automatic. They know what they are doing without thinking about.

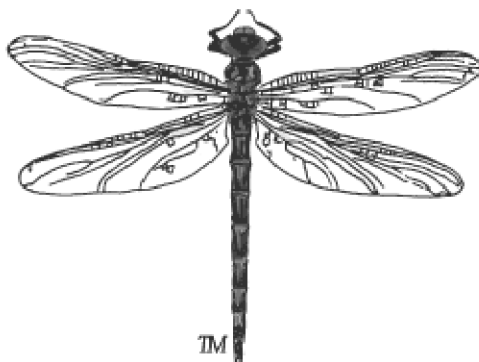
So where am I in the scheme of things? Am I still as competitive and driven as I was in business (and everything else back "then")? Well, there is a bit of the competitiveness but not near as much. I am more into enjoying than accomplishing. Now that doesn't mean you can't do both for the true competitor enjoys the competition. I, these days, am only mildly competitive and more with myself than with others. I want to learn; I want to be a knowledgeable birder for my own purposes; and I have always been driven - even if with a little less gusto these days.

Oh, but I skipped the part about where I am. Without a doubt I am Consciously Incompetent. I am all too aware of what I don't know and just how huge that amount really is. Is that a problem? Well, yes in a way for I don't like being incompetent in anything. If I get "into" something, I want to be good at it. I am not sure I am driven enough to hurry into the next stage, Consciously Incompetent, but I do believe I will get there. I think part of my issue is that I want to be a good naturalist which means being at least fairly knowledgeable about everything in nature. I want to know more trees, more wildflowers, as well as increase my knowledge of birds.

Of course, as I write that I know I really am more interested in birds right now than anything else in nature. It is by far the biggest part of my activities and my primary interest in nature. All trips I plan now are birding trips; my hikes are birding hikes; and much of my camera gear is now focused on birding. (Yes, yes, I saw the pun). What else would make me stand out in the slippery, wet mud shortly after dawn this morning for more than an hour taking over 200 pictures of an elusive bird - just trying to get one really good image? I was hungry and it was rather uncomfortable with the squishy wet mud filling my shoes, but there was no thought of stopping. The only thing I was thinking was that I hoped my phone didn't ring and scare off the Yellow-billed Cuckoos that were playing hide and seek with me in the thick leaves of a Sycamore tree.

So, yes, I am a birder. I am a Consciously Incompetent one, but I am getting better.

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# CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**July:** NO Cypress Basin Chapter Monthly Meeting scheduled

**July 16:** Saturday Work Day at Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge and Head Start Butterfly Garden 8 a.m.

**October 21-23:** Annual TMN State Meeting, Montgomery

## 2016 MEETING DATES

January 11  
February 8  
March 14\*  
April 11  
May 9  
June 13\*  
July 11  
August 8  
September 12\*  
October 10  
November 14\*\*

\*Pot Luck

\*\* Family Social &  
Awards

## 2016 WORK DAYS

January 16  
February 13  
March 19  
April 16  
May 14  
June 18  
July 16  
August 13  
September 17  
October 15  
November 19

Cypress Basin members are encouraged to submit articles for the monthly newsletters. Original articles of interest to members are greatly appreciated. Items for Events and Notices are welcomed. Submissions are due on the first Saturday of each month.

Contact Betty by email @ [bgmorgan46@yahoo.com](mailto:bgmorgan46@yahoo.com) or mail to: 100 Lakeview Circle, Jefferson, TX 75657.