

# The Midden

Armand Bayou Prairie by Chuck Snyder

Galveston Bay Area Chapter - Texas Master Naturalists

February 2021

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## President's Corner by Susette Mahaffey

Greetings to each of you!

With great hope and optimism, I am looking forward to 2021 and the opportunities awaiting us. We have left behind an exceedingly difficult and trying year, but there were highlights like new programs and projects to brighten the way. I hope that 2021 will bring new opportunities to us and that each of you is anticipating a new year in which we can see each other once again and perhaps gather to share Food, Fun, and Friendship!

The new year also begins a yearlong celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of our chapter. The first class was trained in the fall of 2001, and the chapter bylaws and officers were installed the next year. The 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee is planning something for each of the chapter meetings this coming year with the speaker following that presentation and business meeting. We will celebrate different aspects of the work of our chapter and recognize the people who have made possible the opportunities that we enjoy. The February chapter meeting will be a Founder's Day celebration, recognizing those who led the way to the formation of the chapter. We owe each of them a debt of gratitude for their vision and leadership! I hope that you will enjoy the programs that are being planned for the coming year.

The work of the chapter continues to move forward. The board met in January to set goals and plan for the new year. I will share an update with you about our goals for the year in an email before the February meeting. The Zoom team will continue to work to allow us to meet and continue with the projects that the chapter sponsors. We will expect updates on the COVID 19 guidelines with the passing of time. As the numbers change in our county, we will have more guidance as to what we may do, and the volunteer committee will keep you posted as more information is sent to us. We want each of you to be able to continue to enjoy the activities and time in nature that are meaningful to you. The first big activity for 2021 will be the Dolphin/ Loggerhead challenge. We will be hosting the event, and it will be done using a virtual format. More information will be shared with everyone as the time for the challenge gets closer. We hope that you will take this opportunity to enjoy the knowledge and skills of the youth across the states of Texas and Arkansas. It will be a great time for everyone.

In closing I wish each of you a healthy 2021 and hope that you find time to be joyful in the world that surrounds us!

"The environment is where we all meet; where we all have a mutual interest; it is the one thing all of us share." – **Lady Bird Johnson**



## Next Chapter Meeting

February 4

New Directions for Sea  
Turtle Conservation in Texas

By

Dr. Christopher Marshall  
Gulf Center for Sea Turtle  
Research  
TAMUG

Via Zoom

## Wetland Wanderings: Houston Zoo's Pantanal by Lana Berkowitz

For wetland wanderers, the Houston Zoo offers a not-so-muddy adventure with its new exhibit, South America's Pantanal.

The Pantanal is the world's largest wetland. The precious resource covers about 75,000 square miles, mostly in Brazil but also spreading into Bolivia and Paraguay. The diverse geographical area is a mix of forests, rivers, marshes and grasslands. It's an ecological paradise 10 times the size of the Florida Everglades and home to an estimated 11,000 species.



The Pantanal is like a giant bowl that fills with water during the rainy season and empties during the dry season, May to October. This year a massive fire during the dry season charred almost 20 percent of the Pantanal.

The fires started in 2019, but a shortfall of rain during the wet season allowed some fires to continue burning into the 2020 dry season and begin spreading again. Many of the fires were intentionally set to maintain pastures and got out of control. The smoke and fire scars are being documented with satellite imagery. In addition to the current damage to the land and death of animals, there are worries that as the rainy season returns, ashes that flow into the rivers will kill more.

The Houston Zoo is one of many groups working to safeguard the Pantanal. It partners with on-the-ground conservationists in South and Central America to study and protect jaguars, macaws, tapirs and other Pantanal inhabitants. The new exhibit aims to strengthen the zoo's conservation investment by offering visitors a chance to experience this ecosystem.

The zoo's slice of the Pantanal is a 4.2-acre showcase. Visitors are greeted by black-and-gold howler monkeys, golden lion tamarins and red-rumped agoutis, which clean up food scraps dropped by the monkeys. Look for Marlie, a howler monkey born Nov. 17. She is with mother Charlie in the exhibit, but I couldn't spot them on a recent visit.

Around the corner is a sunken forest with fish, stingrays, poison dart frogs, an emerald tree boa and stars of the exhibit: endangered giant river otters. The playful otters are more than 50 pounds and 5 feet in length. The fish seem to be swimming with the otters, but they are safely separated from the carnivorous otters by invisible panels.

Two aviaries represent wetland and savanna habitats with colorful birds. Among the inhabitants there are boat-billed heron, Guianan toucanet, blue-crowned motmot, Brazilian teal, wattled jacana, red shoveler, blue-gray tanager and red capped cardinal. The roseate spoonbill, one of our local favorites, also provides a bright spot. Look up to see the teardrop-shaped nests woven by a large flock of green oropendola.

Along the trail, the zoo re-creates flooded grassland, forest canopies and wetland habitats for about 50 species. There is also a replica of a shelter used by Brazilian pantanieros (cowboys).

Endangered species to look for include the blue-billed curassow, blue-throated macaw and Baird's tapir. Those on the threatened list include the white-spotted river stingray, giant anteater, greater rhea and jaguar.

On the day I visited, the jaguar named Tesoro was easy to spot. He was sleeping on a sunny ledge by a plaque that says he was born in 2014 and prefers to be alone.

The exhibit doesn't have a giant armadillo, a shy, nocturnal animal, which is vulnerable to extinction in South America. The zoo is supporting researchers who are placing cameras in burrows to learn more about the armadillos' habits and ways to protect them. However, there is a life-size replica of the giant armadillo for photo ops.

## Prairie Ponderings: What is Grass? by Diane Humes

"Sedges have edges and rushes are round", goes the basic botanical ditty for identifying those tricky look-alikes. Charriss York added the grad student version, including that, "Grasses are hollow from the node to the ground." This goes for St. Augustine grass and big bluestem, bamboo and sideoats grama, the 2021 TMN recertification pin.

Aside from mowing the lawn every week, what is grass, anyway? How does it fit with all the other plants? Why should we care?

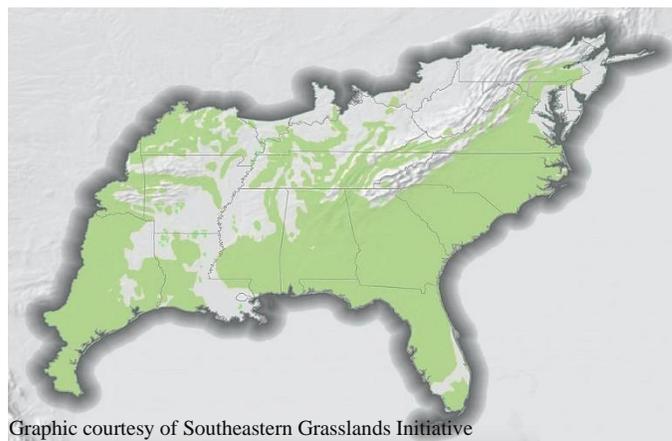
All 12,000 species of grasses belong to the Poaceae or grass family. They are monocots, mostly herbaceous - not woody - and die back to the ground each season. In other words, their growing tissues - meristems - are stored underground and in the bases of leaves, which is why grasses are extremely resistant to fire, mowing, and herbivory; they laugh when we burn the prairie and send up new leaves to green the land in two weeks, snort back at herbivores and taunt your lawnmower.

Grasses have narrow leaves with parallel veins. Grasses are flowering plants, although their flowers are inconspicuous and small. Grass stems, called culms, are round and generally hollow, except for the bulges where leaves attach, which are the nodes. Grasses are wind-pollinated and produce lots of pollen.

Grasses are found on all continents - even Antarctica! In fact, grasses make up 26% of all plant life on Earth. Grasses are the most economically important group of all the flowering plants, producing all the grains we eat - wheat, corn, rye, barley, oats, sorghum, and rice. Grasses (bamboo, straw) are used for building material, in place of wood. Grasses hold and build soils and have the most widespread distribution and largest number of individuals of any group of plants.

Plants, those chlorophyll-containing, oxygen-producing, energy-trapping machines, appeared on Earth in their simplest forms over 400 million years ago. They diversified, grew, and spread, but stayed simple for about 300 million years, until the flowering plants - Angiosperms - arrived on the scene. Flowering plants evolved about 100 million years ago from a common gymnosperm ancestor and diversified explosively. They now comprise at least 300,000 known species; the true number of species is unknown. Grasses are the most recent members of this evolution, proliferating large swathes of grassland habitat within the last 10 million years.

The graphic below shows regions of the Southeast that historically supported large areas of grasslands and associated open, grassy woodlands. The northern boundary is formed by the southern limit of glaciation during the Ice Ages and the western boundary is the eastern edge of the Great Plains.



Graphic courtesy of Southeastern Grasslands Initiative

Part of the secret for the importance and spread of grasses comes from the evolution of a biochemical photosynthetic pathway - C4, differing from the ancestral C3 - whereby plants using it withstand hotter temperatures, more sunlight, lower nitrogen and CO<sub>2</sub> levels, and are drought resistant. Within the Poaceae, the C4 pathway evolved independently about twenty times; nearly half of all grasses are warm season (C4) grasses - the backbone of the prairie. Cool season grasses, and most plants, use the C3 pathway which cannot beat C4 plants in times of drought, but may be better adapted to high atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> levels. Time will tell.

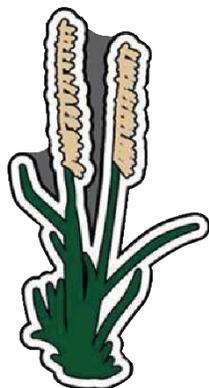
The list of familiar prairie C4 species includes much of the ABNC transect list: Big, Little, Bushy, Silver, and Broomsedge bluestems, Eastern gama, Yellow Indian, Switch, and Sugar Cane Plume grasses, Brownseed and Florida paspalum, plus Bermuda grass and carpet grass - the wild and the weedy.

Our prairies are ancient only when measured against human lifespans. Grasses evolved to live in the hot, dry, sunny open spaces, where fires and lower rainfall kept the trees at bay. Herbivores - large and small - learned to eat grass, which thrived under all that munching. Grasslands and herbivores spread around the globe together.

And now it is down to us to keep it all going without fire, herbivores, or wide-open spaces!

## 2021 Re-cert Pin: Sideoats Grama by Diane Humes

The identity of our Texas Master Naturalist 2021 re-certification pin was unveiled at the October Annual Meeting: the state grass of Texas, sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*). As soon as you complete your annual 8 hours of advanced training and 40 hours of volunteer service, you may wear it with pride. When someone asks about your new pin, here are a few things you can say.



First, what about that name? 'Gramma' refers to a pasture grass; grama grasses provide fine forage for grazing animals. The 'sideoats' flowers hang sideways from the stem, also reflected in the species name *curti* and *pendula* - Latin for 'short' and 'hanging'. A fairly large genus of American plants, *Bouteloua*, was named for two Spanish botanists of the 19th century, Esteban and Claudio Boutelou.

It is a very great honor to have an entire genus named after you. Along with many other works, the brothers Boutelou published *Tratado De Las Flores: En Que Se Explica El Método De Cultivar Las Que Sirven Para Adorno De Los Jardines (Treatise on flowers: in which the method of cultivating those used to adorn the gardens is explained)*. This work from 1801 is considered "a work important to modern civilization" and has been, therefore, republished by *Scholar Select*.

So, sideoats grama (Boo-ta-loo-a curt-a-pen-du-la) is an important grass for grazers, with distinctive short, hanging flower spikelets, named for a pair of Spanish botanists - a fun name to know and say.

It is also an important grass for Texas, especially considering that 60% of Texas is grassland.

Sideoats grama is a warm season grass, that is, it uses the C4 photosynthetic pathway, well-adapted to the prairie environment. Once established and deep-rooted, it is tolerant of fire, grazing, and drought. An important range plant, it offers good grazing for a variety of animals, good seed, denning and nesting material for birds. A larval host plant for Dotted Skipper and Green Skipper butterflies, it also provides food and cover for Wild turkeys.

A long-lived perennial grass, sideoats grama grows vigorously and is often used to re-seed disturbed grasslands. It is beautiful, with brilliant orange anthers in its purple inflorescences. It is tough, like Texans, and grows happily in nearly every soil type throughout the state. In 1971 it was designated the state grass of Texas.

Unfortunately for us, sideoats grama likes neither deep shade nor humidity, and especially not "wet feet". So, it isn't seen often on our prairies, but it's pretty tough, so try a little seed in that sunny spot in the garden. Look for it on road trips throughout Texas - you'll see it everywhere, now that you know what to look for.

## Safety: Brrrr, It's Cold Outside (Sometimes) by Meade LeBlanc

During a recent Simpson's episode, three characters mentioned that they had winterized their cars, which included a few things we don't usually worry about - installing snow tires, winter windshield wipers, and carrying emergency supplies in the trunk. Those of us who have lived "up North" have fond, or maybe not so fond, memories of those days. However, several items make sense any time of year, even in our climate: check coolant levels, keep the gas tank at least half full, carry tools and a first aid kit.

In addition to car care, think about personal safety precautions. We don't have blizzards, but we do have cold weather - usually cold and wet, plus wind. As master naturalists, we spend a lot of time outdoors, so for your personal winter safety, here are a few reminders:

- Most importantly, dress so you can stay warm and dry, in layers so you can adjust throughout the day. You don't need to layer up like Charlie

Brown, but be sure to wear warm waterproof shoes, warm gloves, and something to cover your head.

- Do not ignore shivering. That's a sign your body is losing heat, and it's time to get warmed up.
- Exposure to extreme cold can lead to hypothermia, a medical emergency when the body's core temperature drops below 95 degrees. Warning signs include shivering, confusion, feeling tired or drowsy, memory loss and slurred speech. This is most likely to occur when you are wet and cold; it is important to get warmed up right away and into dry clothes.
- Frostbite is an injury caused by freezing. Under very cold conditions, your blood flow may deliver insufficient heat to your tissues - usually of your extremities, like fingers, nose, ears, or toes. The

skin in these areas may look white or greyish, feel firm or waxy, or feel numb. If you or anyone in your group experiences this, get the area warmed right away to avoid permanent damage. A quick way to warm cold fingers is to place them under your armpits; take advantage of your core warmth.

- Finally, do not overexert yourself outdoors. Your body is already working hard to keep warm, so take it easy doing what you are doing out there, take breaks when you feel tired, and return home safely.

On the prairie, in the wetlands, or at the beach, plan to stay comfortable and safe. Warm up quickly and thoroughly back at home with a hot shower, warm dry clothes, and a hot drink. See you outside!



## Herons by Rebekah Gano

During the cooler months, I enjoy watching a great variety of water birds that frequent my neighborhood's ponds. Ospreys dive for fish, egrets stalk along the edges, whistling ducks congregate in sheltered areas, roseate spoonbills sift in the shallows, and occasionally, a bald eagle makes a grand appearance as it soars overhead. Aside from the large flocks of ibises and ducks, the most abundant birds are herons.

A fitting heron description might be: a long and thin wading bird. Herons have long legs with long toes that are not webbed. Most also have long necks that s-curve in flight. Additionally, herons have long, pointed beaks.

According to the National Wildlife Foundation, egrets are just a sub-type of herons. The NWF says, when compared to other herons, egrets' bills are usually slightly thinner, and their chest feathers are not as "shaggy". During breeding season, egrets are known for their impressive plumes. Egrets are most easily identified by their white feathers.

In the Houston area, there are ten common species of herons, including the egrets. Aside from feather coloration, the best way to tell egrets and herons apart is usually to look at the size and the color of their bills and legs. (If you look back at the December 2020 *Midden*, you can practice your heron and egret identification skills.)

That said, it can be difficult to tell certain species of herons apart. The largest herons are the great egret and the great blue heron. *National Geographic: Birds of North America* states that the great blue heron has an impressive 6-foot wingspan and is 46 inches tall, about 7 inches taller than the great egret. The main challenge is

that there is a white morph of the great blue heron. The best way to tell it from a great egret is to look at the legs; white-morph blue herons have yellow legs (most blue herons have gray legs), while great egrets have black legs.



Photo by Alan Wilde

It is often easy to identify the green heron, black-crowned night heron, and yellow-crowned night heron, since they are smaller, more compact herons. With their shorter necks and legs, these herons look somewhat stocky. The night herons can be found searching for food during the day or night. Green herons are often the hardest to find, given that they are small and generally shy. Another bird ID challenge is that immature green, black-crowned, and yellow-crowned herons are brown with white spots. They look very similar to each other and to American bitterns.

Herons of all types hunt for food with their long bills. They are meat eaters that dine on fish, crabs, amphibians,

mice, insects, and a variety of pond invertebrates. Occasionally, they nab the young of other bird species. Herons are born hunters! Different types of herons prefer different foods and different hunting styles. Many stand very still, blending in with sticks and reeds, until an animal swims close enough to snatch. Great egrets are known for methodically stalking their prey. Snowy egrets use their yellow toes to entice fish to swim nearby. The fish think the egret toes are worms, but if the snowy egret is both patient and quick enough, it will be the one who gets a meal.

One giveaway that a heron is nearby is a loud squawk. Heron calls are often raspy, deep “kwock” noises. They call to each other, often seeming to argue about who gets to fish in a certain spot. They also squawk in warning - or sometimes it seems annoyance - when another animal gets too close.

Come spring, the herons and egrets head to their breeding grounds. Almost all will roost in trees, some in large colonies and others with only their mates. They will construct nests with sticks, and both parents will usually

care for the young. As summer progresses and the young birds grow, the herons will more frequently visit areas away from their nesting grounds, including the ponds in my neighborhood, where I will enjoy their graceful presence again.



Photo by Larry Brasfield

## 2020 AT Summary by Verva Densmore

The only constant is change....

On March 4, 2020, seventy master naturalists sat in the conference room at Carbide, shoulder to shoulder, unmasked, enjoying an excellent presentation on Mammals of the Upper Texas Coast. It was a time of community, a time of innocence. We listened, we snacked, we visited and we learned. And then everything changed. 2020 will always be remembered as the year of COVID. But, as my mother always said: bad things happen -- it's how you react to them that shows what you're made of.

As everyone knows, our Zoom team led by Maureen Nolan-Wilde and Chuck Snyder, our Advanced Training team led by Ellen Gerloff, and the Heritage Book Study led by Madeleine Barnes got busy; in the 9 months after things went virtual, they provided 35 Zoom presentations for 49.50 AT hours. They were honored for their creativity, imagination, hard work, and commitment with Chapter Service and Making a Difference awards at the annual Treasures of the Bay ceremony. Congratulations and thank you to these teams.

One measure of the difference they made can be seen by looking at our current number of recorded AT hours for the chapter which exceeds 2019 by 21%; 2019 had 3485 for the full year compared with 4231 hours reported just through 12/9/2020 with more to come.

With a vaccine on the way we may see a light at the end of the tunnel and I'm confident that we'll return to face-to-face meetings in 2021. The first months, however, will remain virtual. Still, even after we go back to the classroom, we won't ignore the successes of 2020. Zoom actually worked great for some of the presentations and it allowed people from far away locations to participate as instructors and participants—who can forget the excellent raptors training session by Erich Neupert, presented from Blackland Prairie Raptor Center in Dallas, for example.

So, if how we react to hard times is the measure of a group, I sincerely believe this chapter of the Texas Master Naturalists should be proud of how everyone reacted. And, if you have suggestions for future classes, please share your ideas with Ellen Gerloff at [egerloff@sbcglobal.net](mailto:egerloff@sbcglobal.net). Finally, as always, continue to watch your email for information on upcoming classes.

♥ Happy Valentines Day ♥

## Tom Solomon Earns 25,000 Hours! by Diane Humes

Tom Solomon joined the Galveston Bay Area Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists in 2005. Right away he got busy working with collecting and propagating plants for prairie restoration, beginning at Armand Bayou Nature Center, then adding San Jacinto State Park, Sheldon Lake State Park, and others. He has been a tireless seed collector, and he grows seedlings of all kinds (at many area greenhouses) for organizations around the Galveston and Houston area.

By 2014, Tom had earned 10,000 hours of volunteer service - equivalent to five years of full-time work. At that time only two other Texas master naturalists had reached that level of service - our own Dick Benoit plus one other. By mid-2016, Tom had reached the 15,000 volunteer hour milestone before the state organization even had a pin for this pinnacle of success!

As you have learned by now, Tom does not slow down; before 2020 came to a close, he surpassed 25,000

volunteer hours!! Please congratulate him when you see him. Of course, he will be on a prairie and will most likely be carrying a flat of plants or adding seeds to his stash.

Good job, Tom. Thanks for all you do. Keep our leaders at TMN HQ on their toes, again!



Photo by Chuck Snyder

## Attracting Purple Martins to Your Yard by Doris Heard

Would you enjoy being a landlord to some wonderful neighbors who are very social, entertaining and helpful in controlling insects while doing aerial acrobatics around your yard in the evenings?



Photo used under CC license

By installing a Purple Martin house in your yard, you will not only be inviting these delightful migratory native song birds to nest in your yard, but you will be helping to support a bird species that is in serious decline. These birds are in the swallow family and are communal cavity nesters. For hundreds of years, they have learned that being near humans helps to protect their nest, and they have come to rely on humans to provide nest boxes. They have site fidelity, so if you provide proper housing in an open area, these adults will take up residence, breed and return year after year to raise their young.

When their babies (sub-adults) return the following spring, they will be looking for new nesting sites. It is easy to be a landlord, and you might end up enjoying numerous houses in your yard.

The video below was taken by Anne Frischkorn who started with one house and eight Purple Martins nesting. She is now planning to install another house to welcome more than fifty martins to her yard this spring. Watch this video to see what delightful entertainment her family enjoys in the early evening hours.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWQQaUDWuo4>

Purple Martins migrate 5,000 to 7,000 miles from South America each spring and the male scouts begin arriving in the Houston area early in February. Females lay 3 - 5 eggs that hatch in 14 days. These nestlings will be ready to fledge in around 30 days practicing flight skills, catching insects and socializing. It won't be long before you notice that the martins will be gone during the daytime and only return home in the evenings. They are going to "staging areas" where they gather with other martins during the daytime.

From July to September, Houston's Purple Martins form large flocks and roost together in preparation for migration to South America. They spend their day feeding on insects and around sunset they gather for a spectacular show before settling into trees for the night. Houston Audubon has regular viewing events at a pre-migratory roost located at the Fountains Shopping Center

in Stafford. It is a fun event for the entire family as thousands of birds gather overhead at sunset. For more information: <https://houstonaudubon.org/programs/all-age-groups/purple-martins.html>

If you decide to install a house in your yard, below are some tips to help you be a successful landlord:

- The pole you purchase should be 10 to 20 feet tall, anchored in concrete and at least 30 feet away from tall trees providing a clear flight path to the house. Being near a water source such as a swimming pool, lake, or pond works well. You need to be able to raise and lower your house on the pole to check on the nests and to catch problems early. You can preload some dry pine needles in the compartments. You will need predator protection on the pole to keep out raccoons and snakes. The protection can be a canister, netting or even Vaseline applied to the pole. The birds seem to know that human and even dog activity below their house provides additional protection from predators.
- Houses can be purchased online, but you need to be aware that many are not assembled. The house you select should have the special crescent shaped entrance holes that help prevent European Starlings from entering the compartments.



Photo by Wendy Reistle

- You should be able to open each compartment to clean and check it. The martin nests are flat and need to stay dry - a raised floor, good drainage, and supply of pine needles will help. If sparrows start building in one of the cavities, immediately remove their nesting material. It is easy to recognize a

sparrow's nest, because they build messy nests that fill up the entire compartment. Be aware: sparrows do not give up easily, and this is important because if not stopped, they will eventually take up all the compartments and run off the martins.

- From September to the end of January, lower the house on the pole, clean the compartments, and close up each entrance. You can leave the house low on the pole for the winter.
- Gourds, plastic or home grown, can also be used as nesting sites. Make sure they are at least 8" in diameter and have drainage holes in the bottom.
- If needed, recordings of Purple Martins are available online that can be played near your new house to attract the martins.



Photo used under CC license

For more information and houses for sale this is an excellent resource: <https://www.purplemartin.org>

Below is a link to a Zoom presentation about martins with Mary Anne Weber, Houston Audubon Director of Education and Matt Fendley of University of Houston Clear Lake. It is an hour long, but it is worth watching, if you plan to install a house.

<https://www.facebook.com/houstonaudubon/videos/645614052824059>

## 2021 Board of Directors

Elected	
President	Susette Mahaffey
Vice President	Mike Petitt
Treasurer	Cindy Liening
Secretary	Pam House

Sponsor	Julie Massey
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Appointed	
Service Director	Jo Monday
Training Director	Ellen Gerloff
Membership Director	Patty Trimmingham
New Class Director	Janet Mason
Communications Director	Maureen Nolan-Wilde
Training Class Rep.	Kristie Huffman
Training Class Rep.	Walter Meyer

## The Bird Lady of Rockport by Meade LeBlanc

No doubt you have heard of the "Birdman of Alcatraz". There was even a movie about the amateur ornithologist who cared for birds in Leavenworth Prison and also on Alcatraz. Right here in Texas, we also had a famous amateur ornithologist, by the name of Connie Hagar. She wasn't in prison, and she didn't have a movie about her, but she was indeed a legend in the area.

Martha Conger Neblett, nicknamed Connie, was born in Corsicana in 1886, and learned to identify different birds at a young age, as she and her sister strolled around their yard with their father. Her mother wanted her to learn to embroider and sing, but her father encouraged her to get outdoors and explore nature. As she got older, she and her sister Bert kept lists of birds, butterflies, wildflowers and shrubs in the area. In 1923, the sisters organized a Nature Club and banded birds for the U S Biological Survey.

By 1928, Connie began keeping a pocket-sized journal of all the birds she saw, a practice she would continue for over 35 years. The diminutive birdwatcher was usually dressed in a skirt and blouse, with coordinated jewelry, a practice she adopted after her brother took a picture of her in baggy trousers. She noted bird sightings, migration patterns, calls, flight movements, color, behavior, population numbers, and other information. Her notebooks have been an important source of data for ornithologists for many years.

After vacationing in Rockport several times to soak in the medicinal saltwater baths, she told her husband, Jack Hagar, that she would like to live there and study the shorebirds. So, in 1935, the couple moved there and bought an eight-unit cottage rental business. From then on, she spent her days exploring the shorelines, oak groves, pastures, and bay fronts in the area, only taking a break to have lunch with her husband every day. She recorded all kinds of bird behavior, and once said, "I don't feel that I know a bird until I know it in any plumage and the way it acts. I cannot understand how some people are satisfied to have a bird pointed out to them, then just put it down on a list and go away without studying it."

Connie published articles, but as an amateur and a woman, her accounts were not always taken seriously by the mostly male scientific set, especially because she claimed to spot birds not previously documented in the area. Noted research biologist, Harry Oberholser, spent several days quizzing her to exhaustion before convincing himself she knew what she was talking about. Other elite birders and naturalists followed, including Roger Tory Peterson, of Peterson Birding Guide fame. Skeptical at first, after spending time with Connie, they ended up believers of her knowledge and skill. She

hosted many birders and is considered the main person to put birding in Rockport on the map.

She continued birding into her late 80s, and when her eyesight failed, she could still identify birds by their sounds and shapes. Connie died in 1973 in a nursing home in Rockport at the age of 87.



Her time in Rockport was indeed fruitful. She added at least 25 new species to the state list and discovered that nine hummingbird species migrate through Texas. Connie even recorded seeing an Eskimo curlew several times in the early 1950s, a bird that is now feared extinct and for which there is a bronze sculpture at Galveston Island State Park.

Connie is well remembered in Rockport. There are two nature preserves maintained by the Friends of Connie Hagar, as well as a Connie Hagar Wildlife Sanctuary and a six-acre Connie Hagar Cottage Sanctuary at the site of the original rental cottages, dedicated in 1995 as the first site on the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail. The Rockport-Fulton HummerBird Celebration, which has been going on for more than 30 years, is a tribute to her contribution to studies of hummingbirds. You can read more about Connie in, *The Life History of a Texas Birdwatcher: Connie Hagar of Rockport* by Karen Harden McCracken, published by Texas A&M University Press.

The National Audubon Society paid tribute to Connie Hagar: "...You opened our eyes to that great miracle of the natural world, the migration of birds. You enriched our knowledge by patient, open-minded, and courageous observation and reporting of the facts --so many of them at first unbelievable. In your selfless devotion to the truths of nature, you have literally discovered the link between heaven and earth. You stood so straight among the wind-bent trees of your coast that you saw what others before you failed to see."

## Unique AT on Single-Use Plastics by Emily Morris and the Green Team

Sitting on the deck of a gently rocking motorboat off the coast of Costa Rica, the two marine biologists worked in concert with tweezers and a firm grip to remove an object from the nostril of an olive ridley sea turtle. Initially thinking it was a tube worm blocking the turtle's airway, the researchers soon discovered the object was a 5-inch-long plastic straw firmly imbedded in its nostril. That was the scene from the documentary *Straws* that generated the most conversation during the advanced training led by the chapter's Green Team this fall.

As Texas Master Naturalists, we are learning about the permanence of single-use plastics (SUPs) and the harm they cause to the natural environment. The GBAC Green Team is committed to transforming and modeling "the way GBAC and its members think about, use and dispose of plastic and other waste material," as per our mission statement. With that in mind, the Green Team plans to lead a few plastic-focused, video-based discussions a year. We hosted our first advanced training (AT) session in October. It had an interactive format, where participants watched the documentary *Straws* on their own time and then attended a Zoom meeting to discuss their thoughts on the film and how we as Texas Master Naturalists can make a change in our plastic-coated world.

This unique Zoom AT featured registration, so that we could limit attendance, and breakout rooms to provide engaging small-group discussion. As a result, the subsequent AT was lively and produced thoughtful input on how we, as master naturalists and individuals, can limit or avoid using SUPs. (AT is earned during the discussion portion, NOT when viewing the film.)

The documentary *Straws* details the history, proliferation and hazards of straws, and what we can do to avoid and eliminate their use "one straw at a time". Participants considered the ice-breaker question "what word comes to mind when you hear the word plastic?" Their responses are illustrated in the word-cloud image that accompanies this article. Once divided into the breakout rooms, each group discussed seven questions. In addition to the question about the most moving scene in the documentary, others included: What ideas did you see in the film that we can use in our chapter's outreach programs? What strategies do you use or know about that replace SUP's in your home or daily activities?

As always, GBAC Master Naturalists shared some innovative responses to questions discussed in the breakout rooms. Several attendees suggested using beeswax cloths instead of plastic wrap, and having an AT session on how to make those cloths; using glass and silicone covers instead of resealable plastic bags; reusing empty flour, sugar and pet-food bags; using

toothpaste tablets; finding outlets that will refill soap and shampoo bottles; and bringing your own to-go containers to restaurants. To educate others and spread the word, members suggested including reusable items in the training class goodie bags, posting these and other innovative ideas on the GBAC Facebook page, and featuring articles about solutions to plastic waste in *The Midden*.

After reconvening in the large group to share responses, the AT wrapped up with a personal pitch against another convenient SUP: disposable ball-point pens. Links accompanying this article will lead you to a PowerPoint recording <https://youtu.be/Fo4DZOCgBEc> on choosing fountain pens as a reusable alternative to ballpoint pens, and a video <https://youtu.be/0LPiPNxr90g> showing how to refill - and thus reuse - fountain pen cartridges, which are designed to be disposable.

If you weren't able to make the AT session, you still can view the documentary. Check with your local library or other video services. Whether or not you view *Straws*, ask yourself: "What strategies do I use or know about that can replace SUP's in home or daily activities?", and then see how you can make a difference in your own home and community.



### We'd like to know...

The Green Team would like to know what GBAC-TMN members do to eliminate or avoid plastic, or what you do to keep it out of the landfill. Please click this link <https://tinyurl.com/plasticuses2> to access this single-question survey.

Take a picture of your efforts to eliminate or avoid plastic and send it to [gbacgreenteam@gmail.com](mailto:gbacgreenteam@gmail.com), and we may post your picture along with the chapter's responses in a future Midden article. - Green Team

## Treasures of the Bay Recipients 2020

Each year our chapter recognizes outstanding service and contributions to natural resource restoration and education efforts with the "Treasures of the Bay Awards."

The recipients who were recognized at the December chapter meeting are:

**Dick Benoit Leadership Award** - Diane Humes

**Beth Cooper Service Award** - Pam House

**Non-Profit Award** - Gulf Center for Sea Turtle Research at Texas A&M Galveston

**Sara Snell Education Award** - Cindy Howard

### Chapter Service Awards

Madeleine Barnes

Gene Fisseler

Susetta Mahaffey

Patty Trimmingham

Robin Kendrick-Yates

2020 Training Class team

Janet Mason

Cindy Howard

Ellen Gerloff

Cindy Liening

Jo Monday

Chuck Snyder

Maureen Nolan-Wilde

GBAC Facebook Knowledge Sharing Team

Lynn Wright

John Wright

Scott Buckel

Elisha Hehir

Elizabeth Hehir

Advanced Training Team

Ellen Gerloff - chair

Madeleine Barnes

Lisa Belcher

Frank Budny

Mary Christian

Verva Densmore

Emmeline Dodd

TJ Fox

Gene Fisseler

Cindy Howard

Mel Measeles

Bruce Niebuhr

Chuck Snyder

Mike Wehrman

### Making a Difference Awards

Maureen Nolan-Wilde

Chuck Snyder

2020 Zoom Team

Chris Anastas

Verva Densmore

Gene Fisseler

Robin Kendrick-Yates

Cindy Liening

Janet Mason

Patty Trimmingham

Mike Wehrman



## Heritage Book Study - Review of *One More Warbler: A Life with Birds*

by Madeleine K. Barnes



*One More Warbler: A Life with Birds* is an autobiographical account of a Texas birder, Victor Emanuel. Many of you may already be familiar with him or may have heard of him. What I have chosen to write about is why I think his book is worth your time to read, whether you are a birder, have some interest in learning about birds, or are just curious as to how this book may relate to you as a master naturalist.

I am going to begin with the end in mind. Let me explain what this means as it applies to the book study for those who have not participated in this advanced training opportunity. Besides reading and discussing each book in detail, there are three TMN required questions for discussion: what is this all about, how does it relate to our work as naturalists, and how does it challenge or inform me - basically how can I apply this knowledge?

What is this book about? Victor Emanuel is a generalist when it comes to birds and he began his lifelong interest as a child. He is not an ornithologist; neither does he have any degrees as a scientist, other than Political Science. He decided early on that his interest in birds was not limited to specific attributes; he was concerned with all birds, their behavior, movement and patterns, environment, identification, counts, etc. In his story he outlines an amazing list of birds - in Texas, other states, and internationally - that he endeavored to learn as much as possible about and to identify. Along his journey he met many people and writes about how important mentors were to him as a youth, sharing their knowledge and interest with him.

How does it relate to our work as naturalists? Victor began leading birding tours, building his expertise and recognized that others wanted to learn and experience what he knew and what he could show them. He developed the world's largest birding ecotourism business - leading tours while mentoring and training staff who shared his interests in birds and birding. In addition, Victor began holding youth camps for young birders to share his passion and "give back" the mentoring that had benefited him. As naturalists, we also share our passion for nature and our goal to educate youth and adults through numerous volunteer projects and Camp Wild.

How does it challenge or inform me? How can I apply what I learned from this book to my work as a naturalist? Victor educated himself about birds and learned from others in order to develop his birding knowledge. He writes about experiences that motivated him and

encourages others with insights. We do the same through the TMN training curriculum and the advanced training opportunities that we participate in that enable us to share our interest and our knowledge with others to help them understand and appreciate nature.

Victor described a birding experience in his book. Referring to a record 671 species identified during a Christmas bird count, he stated, "That day, Kenn Kaufman exhibited two of the key characteristics of any good birder on a Christmas count - perseverance and endurance." The quote underlines two important characteristics of naturalists as well - perseverance and endurance. This is another good book for your reading and learning. For more information about Victor Emanuel, try watching the following videos:

Victor Emanuel Profile - Texas Parks & Wildlife [Official], Nov. 26, 2019

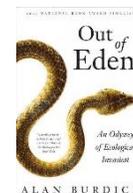
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnY7P90PVjo>

Appreciating Birds & Nature More with Victor Emanuel, August 7, 2020 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-4\\_7IEulxk&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-4_7IEulxk&feature=emb_logo)



Our next Zoom AT meeting will be on Monday February 1 to begin our discussion of *The Sea Around Us* by Rachel Carson with the first half, pages 1-128. On March 1, we will meet to discuss the second half of the book, pages 129-256. If you want to join us for either or both of these AT

opportunities, please contact Madeleine Barnes at [Mad2Btmn@aol.com](mailto:Mad2Btmn@aol.com) to be added to the list for additional information and receive the Zoom meeting link and password. For April/May, our reading selection will be *Out of Eden: An Odyssey of Ecological Invasion* by Alan Burdick.



We welcome your participation each month for two hours on the first Monday of the month starting at 10am for these AT meetings. Please note that we welcome anyone to participate whether you are TMN certified, recertified, or just want to remain a chapter member. We look forward to seeing you and let us know if you have read any good naturalist books lately. Happy trails!

***The Midden Deadline***

**February 22**

## February and March Activities

### ADVANCED TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

**Chapter Meeting** - February 4; New Directions for Sea Turtle Conservation in Texas  
Presenter - Dr. Christopher Marshall, head of Gulf Center for Sea Turtle Research, TAMUG  
6:15 Social, 7:00 Meeting, 7:30 Speaker  
Via Zoom; ~1 AT hour

**Diurnal Raptors of Galveston Bay Area**  
February 22, Monday, at 2pm via Zoom  
Presenters - Lynn and John Wright; ~1 AT hour

**Marine Mammal Stranding Network**  
March 18, Monday, at 2pm via Zoom  
Presenter - Heidi Whitehead; ~1 AT hour

**Ongoing**  
**Heritage Book Study Group**  
First Monday of every month via Zoom  
10am-noon; 2 hours AT  
Contact: Madeleine Barnes 281-474-9406  
See Pg. 11 for meeting dates and books.

### STEWARDSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

For a complete list of stewardship activities, see our chapter website, <https://txmn.org/gbmn/what-we-do/>.

### EDUCATION - OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES

For a complete list of education - outreach activities see our chapter website, <https://txmn.org/gbmn/what-we-do/>.

**Partner and Associate Programs** - Many organizations sponsor guided walks and education programs or need volunteers to staff their nature center. Go to <http://txmn.org/gbmn/partners/> for the list, then click on the link to the organization's website.

### CHAPTER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

**Calendar** - <https://txmn.org/gbmn/events/month/> Includes meetings, AT and volunteer activities

**Board** - <https://txmn.org/gbmn/board-of-directors/>  
Contact information for the Board of Directors. **Board Meetings** - usually first Tuesday of each month (via Zoom), verify on the calendar

**Committees** - <https://txmn.org/gbmn/board-of-directors/>  
Contact information for the Committee Chairs

**Volunteer Service** - <https://txmn.org/gbmn/volunteer-service/> Volunteer Opportunities

**Advanced Training** - <https://txmn.org/gbmn/advanced-training/>

**Midden Archives** - <https://txmn.org/gbmn/> Go to The Midden on the top menu.

**Facebook** - <https://www.facebook.com/gbactmn>



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### *The Midden*

Published bimonthly by the Galveston Bay Area Chapter - Texas Master Naturalists. The purpose of *The Midden* is to inform, communicate and educate chapter members and the community. If you have an article that contributes this purpose or want to join the team, please contact Diane Humes, [treimanhumes@gmail.com](mailto:treimanhumes@gmail.com).

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*The Midden* is posted on the GBAC-TMN chapter website: <https://txmn.org/gbmn/> two weeks prior to chapter meetings. Archived issues also on chapter website. If you prefer to receive *The Midden* in hard copy and are not currently receiving it, please contact: Julie Massey, [julie.massey@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:julie.massey@ag.tamu.edu).

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