



Naturalist Notes

President's Note

Hello Gulf Coast Chapter.

Thank you to all who volunteered at and attended our 2019 Wildlife in the City Workshop. It was a great success !

We will have some great speakers at our 2019 Chapter meetings. You may have heard that the Houston Arboretum will be under construction the latter part of the year. We are still scheduled to have our monthly meetings there, every month through December. We may have to make a few adjustments to the space, but we will try to keep everything as on schedule and convenient a possible. We love meeting at the Arboretum and it will continue to be our home base.

Happy Almost Spring ! I look forward to seeing you all at events and advanced training classes.

Julia Trimble, President
Texas Master Naturalist - Gulf Coast Chapter
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credit Irmi Willcockson

Trees are sanctuaries. Whoever knows how to speak to them, whoever knows how to listen to them, can learn the truth. They do not preach learning and precepts, they preach, undeterred by particulars, the ancient law of life.

A tree says: A kernel is hidden in me, a spark, a thought, I am life from eternal life. The attempt and the risk that the eternal mother took with me is unique, unique the form and veins of my skin, unique the smallest play of leaves in my branches and the smallest scar on my bark. I was made to form and reveal the eternal in my smallest special detail.

Hermann Hesse
Baeume, Betrachtungen und Gedichte


Organism of the Month
Gulf Coast Toad (*Bufo nebulifer*)

This common toad occurs in a wide range of habitats along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, from Veracruz, Mexico to Mississippi. Adults are 2-4 in long, with well defined cranial crests and triangular parotid glands. The dorsal color varies from almost black to brownish yellow, with a broad dark stripe down each side, with a light stripe just above it. The male's throat is yellow-green, while the female's is not pigmented. If you find a toad in your yard, it is most likely a Gulf Coast Toad.



credit Irmi Willcockson

Gulf Coast Toads feed on insects attracted to light sources and are most active at twilight. Breeding takes place in many different pools, including roadside and irrigation ditches.

In contrast to Gulf Coast Toads, Houston Toads are found only in places with sandy soils and an overstory of trees. Houston Toads have been extirpated from Houston since the 1970's.

Sources: Herps of Texas, iNaturalist


Squirrel Nesting Season Has Arrived

The Spring mating season for all of Houston's tree squirrel species has begun. You may have noticed a change in their behavior, and they are beginning to build new nests or reinforce their nests from last year.

A springtime squirrel nest may be as simple as a small cluster of twigs and leaves in the "crook" of a tree, a a snug nest inside a hollowed out tree trunk or even in the crevices that palm fronds create where they sprout from the tree. Even without their nest disturbed, baby squirrels occasionally fall out of their nest, or entire nests may come down during storms and heavy rain.

Preventing problems for you and squirrels

Now is the time to check the perimeter of your home for potential entrances for wildlife. Repairing and securing openings now may save you from headaches later!

Because squirrel nests may be in trees or under palm fronds, please consider this in the next few months when you trim your trees or even when you see others having theirs trimmed. Your neighbors may not be aware of what to look for.

What to do if you find a baby squirrel

If you find a baby squirrel on the ground and it appears unhurt, it is ok to leave it for less than an hour at the base of its nest tree. Watch from a distance. If its mom does not return and move it within an hour, it is ok to intervene. Same goes if it is cold or appears injured. Being rescued is its best chance of survival. Put the little guy in an empty shoebox or similar kind of container with a soft cloth.

DO NOT feed the baby squirrel. **It must be kept warm** and transported to a wildlife rehabilitator as soon as possible. If you are not able to get it where it needs to go **within 24 hours**, call and ask for advice about what to do next.

Tips for keeping a baby squirrel warm: A "rice sock" works great. Take a tube sock and fill it with a cup or two of dry rice, tie a knot in the top. Microwave the "rice sock" for 30 - 45 seconds, and place it in the box with the infant squirrel. Unfortunately, the heat does not last very long and the sock has to be reheated occasionally. A heating pad set on low, under the box, works too. Be sure to place the box half-on/half-off so it may crawl off the heated area if it gets too hot. It can stay this way overnight, but needs to get to a wildlife rehabilitator the next day at the latest.

Note: A squirrel that is old enough to have its eyes open and is active may need to be secured in a container that is more sturdy than a cardboard box, like a small pet carrier.

Julia Trimble



Where to bring orphaned squirrels

The Wildlife Center of Texas is open 7 days a week.
Address 7007 Katy Road Houston TX 77024
No appointment is necessary. If you have questions, you may call 713 861-9453
If no one answers the phone, ** leave a message**. Calls are returned as soon as possible.



credit Katherine Willcockson

Member Profile - Jane Wood

Jane was part of the Fall 2017 training class, and first certified in April 2018.

“I heard about Master Naturalists from a Master Gardener friend and I jumped on the opportunity to learn and have more excuses to get outside. I have been retired from an IT Management role with ExxonMobil since 2012.

Living along Buffalo Bayou near downtown, I get out and walk most every day. One of my first

volunteer opportunities was with the Buffalo Bayou Partnership helping with the trail hikes, boat rides, and the Waugh Bridge Bat Team. Harvey profoundly affected my interest in our waterways, watersheds, water management and prairie conservation. I head out to the Katy Prairie to get a big step into nature, the birds, native grasses, working the trails, and the prairie recovery efforts. Growing up on a farm in Maryland next to the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, I knew about the Whooping Cranes, eagles and other endangered species being studied. I could hear the whoopers from my second floor window. The sandhill cranes are in residence now on the prairie. And I have a barn owl I call Katy that I check on when I volunteer.

I enjoy active travel vacations including horse trekking, photography, and birding. I am a member of the training committee and speaker's bureau. I attend Native Plant Society and Houston Audubon meetings and seminars and give a helping hand with the native plant nurseries. I love our community of nature lovers and leaders and feel right in my element.

I have found that a love of history goes hand in hand with a love of nature. I am intrigued with the concept that what we see today is not the way it has always looked. In order to understand nature, we must take a step back to the way things were before the European settlers arrived. Back to our native landscape. If we take care of our country, it will take care of us. “

ASSOCIATE SPOTLIGHT

Houston Museum of Natural Science



The Houston Museum of Natural Science is one of the premier natural science museums in the US. Among its permanent collection are two halls of special interest to Texas Master Naturalists, the Farish Hall of Texas Wildlife and the Hamman Hall of Texas Coastal Ecology. Both were installed in 2014, and have proven extremely popular for visitors. Especially in the Spring, many elementary schools book tours through one or both halls to support their curriculum.

Volunteers, called docents, are always welcome. After an application and interview, new volunteers undergo mandatory general training. Additional training depends on the volunteer's area of interest, and includes tours given by experienced docents as well as 'shadowing', observing an experienced docent giving a tour. After completing training, a docent receives a badge and can sign up to volunteer for tours and other events.

Some of the reasons I love to volunteer at HMNS:

- 1) Flexibility. I can sign up for as many or as few tours as I want. If there are no tours scheduled, I can also staff a touch cart, a station that allows visitors to handle a variety of artifacts. (No, the armadillo is NOT alive)
- 2) Fun. I love seeing visitors of every age learn something new. Even if it's just one small thing.
- 3) Weather independent. Too cold, hot, wet to be out? The museum is open, and visitors will enjoy interacting with you.
- 4) Fellow Docents. Docents come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, and we enjoy learning from each other.
- 5) Continuing education opportunities. From regularly scheduled trainings to brown bag lunches to adult education lectures, the museum offers a wide variety of learning opportunities for docents. Many are free, some are discounted, all are good.
- 6) Free parking. During the school year, parking is generally available in the garage, during the summer parking is generally offsite.

Texas Wildlife attracts a large number of children and families, and tours are mostly for elementary school ages. A willingness to interact with visitors of all ages is important.

For more information, please contact Lynn Pettijohn Wisda, Director of Volunteers at lwisda@hmns.org.

Exploration Green Wins ULI Houston's People's Choice Award

The 12th annual program honored the city's most compelling and innovative real estate projects. A jury of national real estate experts from Colorado, Atlanta, and Virginia reviewed projects submitted by a nomination panel of local real estate leaders. Emancipation Park won in the Open Space Category.

Exploration Green, the 200-acre nature park on the site of the old Clear Lake City Golf Course, won the People's Choice Award.

I would like to thank the many volunteers who continue to bring this beautiful park to life.

Jerry Hamby



Jerry Hamby and George Kyame near the outflow of Phase 1. George is the part-time Land Steward at Exploration Green.



Black-bellied whistling ducks flying over Exploration Green

