



Naturalist Notes

President's Note

Hello Gulf Coast Members,

Wow ! April and May have been busy months for naturalists.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the activities with our chapter and with our Sponsors and Associates.

May 13th was the final day of our Spring 2019 training class. Congratulations to our recent graduates ! Welcome to our 21 newest members, some of whom have been attending our chapter meetings.

Please say hello if you see them at meetings and around town volunteering.

Thank you to our wonderful training committee for coming together to make this another great session.

Our Training Director, Bonnie Brown, will start the application process for our Fall 2019 session this Summer. If you know anyone who is interested in our training classes, please ask them to send an email to Bonnie and she will add them to her contacts list. new.class.director@txgcmn.org

See you soon,

Julia Trimble, President
Texas Master Naturalist - Gulf Coast Chapter
julia.trimble@txgcmn.org



Outreach Events - left Irmi Willcockson at WaterWorks Festival; right Virginia Livingston at Willow Waterhole Music Fest. We used the watershed materials at both events.



credit Becca Phillips

Organism of the Month

Neotropic Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*)

Originally described by Willem Piso in 1658 after traveling in Brazil, neotropic cormorants are found year round throughout central and south America, and north into Texas. Breeding can occur as far north as southern New Mexico.

Diving primarily from the surface, neotropic cormorants catch small fish under water. They surface and swallow their prey. Unlike other cormorants, they can also hunt by plunge diving. This behavioral flexibility, along with its tolerance of human disturbance, allows neotropic cormorants to live in a variety of habitats. Its call reminds people of pigs, several uncomplimentary nicknames allude to this (eg Pato cerdo - "Pig duck").

In the 1960's, the US population declined severely. The reasons for this are unclear, perhaps related to coastal development and pesticide use. Since 1970, populations have fluctuated but are generally increasing, both in number and size of breeding colonies and in range.

Sources: <https://birdsna.org/Species-Account/bna/species/neocor/introduction>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neotropic_cormorant
https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Neotropic_Cormorant/lifehistory

Associate Spotlight



The Wildlife Center of Texas

The Wildlife Center of Texas is a wildlife hospital that rehabilitates and releases injured, ill, and orphaned Texas wildlife. They have an oiled wildlife and emergency response team, and educate hundreds of members of the public every year through outreach.

Receiving no funding from any government agency, they are a non-profit organization, funded 100% by private donations. They take in more than 10,000 wild animals (consisting of more than 300 species) a year for rehabilitation and release.

The Wildlife Center opened in 2007, when the already established organization Wildlife Rehab and Education formed a partnership with the Houston SPCA. At that time, an empty showroom was purchased and converted into the first hospital. A small paid staff plus a remarkable crew of volunteers built caging, set up rooms, and made great use of the space for more than 10 years.

In 2016, the Houston SPCA broke ground on their expanded Campus For All Animals, which includes a state-of-the-art brand new hospital for the Wildlife Center. The doors were opened in 2018 and it continues to grow and admit more animals each year.

What kind of animals are brought to the Wildlife Center? It depends on the time of year! In Winter, mostly injured adult animals. Spring and Fall is baby squirrel season. Summertime? Lots and lots of baby birds. And opossums big and small most of the year.

Volunteers are an important factor in its success. If you are interested in volunteering at the Wildlife Center of Texas, please go to their website, click on the *volunteer* tab and fill out an application. You must go through orientation first, and will then be trained how to care for animals on-site.



Address: 7007 Katy Rd Houston TX 77024 **Website:** www.wildlifecenteroftexas.org

Houston Places First in the US and Third Globally for Species Diversity During the Annual Global City Nature Challenge

5/13/2019– Houston, TX – Citizen Scientists in The Greater Houston and Galveston area competed in the Third Annual City Nature Challenge and won first place in the United States for most species identified during April 26-29, 2019. The Houston participants identified 3,367 species of flora and fauna from backyards to city parks to wildlife refuges and sanctuaries. The city took third place globally with Cape Town and Hong Kong coming in first and second respectively.

“The Houston-Galveston region is truly unbeatable because of our unique mix of habitat including urban prairie remnants, forested bayous, and coastal wetlands,” said Sarah Flournoy, Bird-Friendly Communities Program Manager at Houston Audubon. “The City Nature Challenge is the perfect opportunity for people of all ages to connect to nature close to home and to celebrate the wild spaces that are so vital in our dense urban environment.”

During the City Nature Challenge, cities around the world compete to see which urban area has the most nature and the most engaged residents by posting observations on iNaturalist, an online Citizen Science effort to document species. This year’s City Nature Challenge included 159 cities around the world with almost one million observations recorded.

“Our rich local ecosystems are certainly underrecognized strengths that help us mitigate flooding, cool the city, and provide many health benefits to our residents. The City Nature Challenge results show that we in the Houston-Galveston region have world class natural richness that is worth protecting and enhancing,” said Jaime González, Houston Urban Conservation Programs Manager at The Nature Conservancy in Texas.

“With a newly released United Nations report signaling that over a million species are at threat of extinction, it’s important to track local species and monitor them over time,” states González. “The City Nature Challenge is a great event to spotlight the amazing diversity of wildlife, plants, and ecosystem of the Houston-Galveston region and work together to protect these natural treasures for our kids and grandkids.”

898 people in the Houston-Galveston area contributed to this year’s Challenge. Eric Keith of Raven Environmental Services, Inc. and Andy Newman of Resource Environmental Solutions, LLC were the top local observers. The top species observed was the beautiful wildflower *Oenothera speciosa*, also known locally as Pinkladies or Buttercup.

The Houston City Nature Challenge is organized by Houston Audubon, The Nature Conservancy in Texas, and Texas Parks and Wildlife. To view 2019 results, click on <http://citynaturechallenge.org/>

Established in 1969 as an autonomous, self-supporting chapter of the National Audubon Society, Houston Audubon Society’s mission is to advance the conservation of birds and positively impact their supporting environments which it accomplishes through acquiring and maintaining critical habitat as bird sanctuaries, providing education programs and nature experiences for children and adults, and advocating policy and management actions in support of the mission. Houston Audubon owns and manages 17 nature sanctuaries encompassing 3,400 acres across the Greater Houston and Galveston regions and became an Accredited Land Trust in 2017. To learn more, visit www.houstonaudubon.org

The Nature Conservancy is a global conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. We are tackling climate change, conserving lands, waters and oceans at an unprecedented scale, providing food and water sustainably and helping make cities more sustainable. Working in 72 countries, we use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. To learn more, visit www.nature.org or follow [@nature_press](https://twitter.com/nature_press) on Twitter.

Beth Boone, Houston Audubon



City Nature Challenge 2019

TEAM HOUSTON-GALVESTON

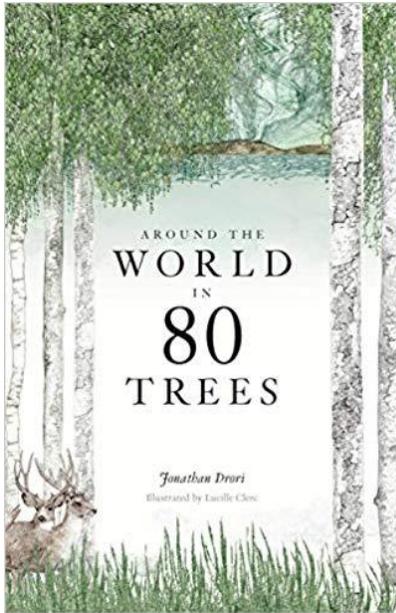
#1 USA #3 WORLD SPECIES OBSERVED	3,286 SPECIES OBSERVED 24,534 OBSERVATIONS
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NATURE TRACKERS
TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE

CITY NATURE CHALLENGE IS ORGANIZED BY

CALIFORNIA ACADEMY OF SCIENCES | **NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM**
LOS ANGELES COUNTY



Book Review

Around the World in 80 Trees

2019, Jonathan Drori, illustrated by Lucille Clerc

To anyone who feels a connection to trees and to Master Naturalists in particular, the title, Around the World in 80 Trees, is bound to be intriguing. After all, it's about trees around the world. But out of approximately 60,000 distinct species of trees, how do you choose 80 to highlight?

The author writes: "For me, the most satisfying tree stories are the ones in which a piece of plant science has surprising human ramifications.... I have chosen the 80 tales in this book for their interest and diversity, but they illustrate only a tiny fraction of the myriad ways in which trees and humans interact."

This book is a good read and a good reference for the amazing diversity of trees. Here are a few examples of the wide range of plant physiology you will come across in this book and of some of the connections with humans:

- London Plane (*Platanus x acerifolia*) - "...the multiplication sign in the scientific name denotes a hybrid, in this case between the American sycamore and the Oriental plane, which is native to southeastern Europe and southwestern Asia". It is found all over London and elsewhere and has endured because of its ability to withstand air pollution. It is "...an excellent example of heterosis, or 'hybrid vigor', whereby offspring of two species or varieties that have each been isolated and inbred can show remarkable vitality and strength."
- Frankincense (*Boswellia sacra*) of biblical fame is found northern Somalia, Yemen and Oman. Each winter flower "...has five creamy petals and ten pale-yellow stamens surrounding a recent spot that changes color from yellow to dark red, signaling to pollinators that their work on that flower has been successful and that they should go on to another for nectar. If the tree is wounded, tears of white or pale-yellow frankincense, a mixture of resin and water-soluble gums, are exuded from special ducts ... It is this substance, which releases a fresh, balsamic fragrance when heated over glowing charcoal, that is *Boswellia's* claim to fame."
- The Sève Bleue (*Pycnanandra acuminata*) of the French territory of New Caledonia "...holds an astonishing fifth of the entire world's known deposits of nickel." "Sève bleue means 'blue sap', and a remarkable 11 per cent of the sticky latex...can be nickel." "The sève bleue sequester nickel by forming a complex compound with citric acid, which it shunts into latex, out of the way of vital cell processes." It "...appears to use the nickel as a cheap poison to repel insects..."
- Red Mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*) "...grows along coasts from the eastern side of tropical America to West Africa." Red mangrove sap can be almost salt-free, thanks to a desalination system that runs on solar power....Engineers have mimicked this 'ultra-filtration method for commercial desalination.' Black mangrove, another tropical species, excretes salt, leaving its leaves powdery white. "..., left to themselves, mangroves can stabilize the coastline, protect against storm surges and even conjure new land from the sea."

Bob Romero



Bald Cypress, Live Oak, Red Maple, Pecan
credit Irmi Willcockson

Today I stood taller from walking among the trees. Willa Cather