



Naturalist Notes

President's Note

It's finally October and we are beginning to see a break from what seems like the never-ending heat and humidity. As I write this, the first cold front of the fall has moved in and we will briefly have a need for long sleeved shirts and jackets.

As we personally prepare for the coming season, be it our house or our yard or garden, think about what resources are needed for our outdoor creatures. Those beautiful fallen leaves are an excellent natural mulch that many organisms could use. Squirrels will need them for their treetop nests. Ground-dwelling insects will need them as cover when severe or wet weather moves in. Look around your yard and decide if you could leave a small brush pile which so many animals could utilize in the coming months. Finally, consider leaving the long-spent flower stems standing. Many of our solitary native bees may have already used them as nesting sites for their overwintering larva. Embrace the visual interest all of this will provide and watch it change with the seasons.

Welcome to autumn, everyone!!

Cheers,
Rebecca Lloyd, President
Gulf Coast Chapter



Congratulations, Lan Shen!

Lan Shen was strongly recommended by her peers for her work in public service in conservation of native plant seeds and promotion of their use. She receives the **Nancy Benedict Award** for this service. Lan leads multi-institutional seed collecting trips. These trips are often the 'ah-ha' moment for folks just getting connected to the beauty and vulnerability of the prairie, and they often become prairie champions from that point on. These trips also allow people from different groups to bond socially as part of a bigger movement. The seeds have been used in highly prominent pocket prairies like MD Anderson Prairie, Buffalo Bayou Park's meadows, and the UH Shasta Prairie.

Native Plant Society of Texas

Recent Outreach Events



Irmi Willcockson and Rucha Moharir from Citizen’s Environmental Coalition of Houston presented at Citelum Groupe EDF. We talked about how to limit air pollution by making better choices as a family and gave out native plants (provided by Citelum) to the families that attended.



TJ Butler and Irmi Willcockson presented his tracks, scat, and skull booth to participants in a TPWD event at McLean Park in Lake Jackson. Kids and adults enjoyed touching the replica skulls and taking home cast tracks.



“October, baptize me with leaves! Swaddle me in corduroy and nurse me with split pea soup. October, tuck tiny candy bars in my pockets and carve my smile into a thousand pumpkins. Oh autumn! Oh teakettle! Oh grace!”

Rainbow Rowell, “Attachments”



Organism of the Month

Beaver (*Castor canadensis*)

Beavers are large, primarily nocturnal, semiaquatic rodents. Beavers average 45 pounds. While beavers have been unwelcome in some North American cities, they seem to be ok in Buffalo Bayou Park. Although many beavers build dams, our beavers live in the bank of Buffalo Bayou, probably west of the 610 loop. Their lodges have an underwater entrance and an above ground hole to allow air circulation.

Beavers mate for life, and both parents participate in rearing the young. Young beavers learn from their parents, and help out with stashing food and maintaining the lodge. Beavers are territorial, and defend their territory aggressively against other adults.

Beavers fell trees both for building dams and for food. Beavers like younger trees, and along Buffalo Bayou felled many sycamore saplings. As rodents, their front teeth grow continuously. The outside enamel contains iron, making the teeth appear orange. This makes the outside tougher than the inside, so their teeth are self-sharpening.

Sources: Wikipedia, <https://buffalobayou.org/blog/beavers-in-the-park/>



Left - beaver tracks, credit Alisa Kline; top - beaver swimming near downtown, credit Ethelyn Kuldell; bottom - sycamore sapling eaten by beavers, credit Alisa Kline.

Book Review

The Secret Life of Flies

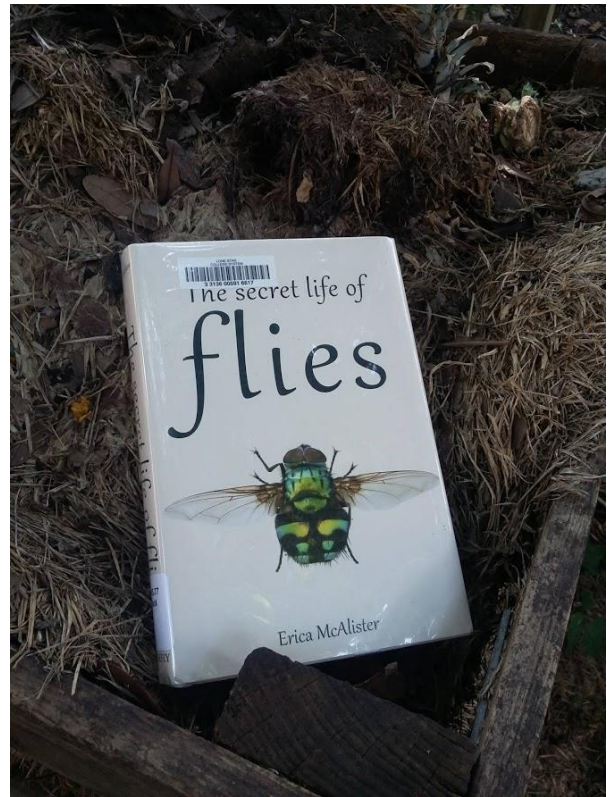
Erica McAlister, 2017

Firefly Books and Harris County Public Library

Erica McAlister is enthusiastic, enthusiastic about flies. All flies, anywhere, everywhere, at any stage of the life cycle. "To me, the fly is one of nature's greatest marvels, and I have been fascinated by them since childhood.." (Introduction) After introducing the life cycle, the book is divided into chapters by what the flies eat, such as detritus, dead animals, or plants. The first few chapters have enough asides and digressions to be hard to follow, the latter chapters are more organized. That said, the overall impression I came away with is that there are lots of different fly species, many yet to be described, which have many ways of eating and procreating.

As McAlister is the curator of diptera (2 wings, flies) at the Natural History Museum in London, she has a strong focus on UK species. However, she has travelled extensively, and so includes many American as well as tropical species. The book includes some beautiful pictures of unusually shaped fly species.

I recommend this book with some reservation. It tackles a subject few books do, flies, and does so with a great depth of firsthand knowledge and enthusiasm. The loosely organized writing in each chapter makes for rougher reading than many other non-fiction books I've read. I've chosen to review it but have not put it on my Amazon wish list.



Nature Journaling Workshop Nov 9th, 1-3 pm at Sheldon Lake State Park

Irmi Willcockson is leading this experience as part of the Creation Care Team at her church. All are invited, please register so there will be enough materials. <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/nature-journaling-at-sheldon-lake-state-park-tickets-75967897025>

Yellow-Crowned Night Heron Is Official Bird of Houston

9/25/2019 – Houston, TX – Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner alongside Houston Audubon’s Executive Director, Helen Drummond, proclaimed the Yellow-crowned Night-Heron as the official Bird of Houston. In an effort to increase awareness of the birds around us, Houston Audubon coordinated the Bird of Houston contest, where Houstonians voted on their favorite local bird through a series of bracket rounds. Over 60 bird species were originally nominated, leading to the final round which pitted the Attwater’s Prairie-Chicken against the Yellow-crowned Night-Heron.

“The Yellow-crowned Night Heron is an excellent species to represent the Bayou City. This bird is found in Houston year-round, with higher numbers present from March to October,” said Helen Drummond, Houston Audubon Executive Director. “Houstonians can see this striking bird foraging along the bayous, in our salt marshes, and even along roadways, hunting for crawfish and other crustaceans. This species even breeds and raises its young in Houston, with nesting sites scattered across the city, instilling neighborhood pride for those fortunate enough to have large rookeries present.”

Photo courtesy of Houston Audubon



Chapter Elections Dec 5th - Vice President and Treasurer

Election day for the Gulf Coast Chapter Board of Directors Officer 2020-2021 term is Thursday, December 5 at the Chapter meeting.

The two available Board of Director Officer positions are

Vice President and Treasurer

If you are interested in running or know of a member you would like to nominate, please send the name(s) to Julia Trimble at julia.trimble@txgcmn.org or Mary Ellen Taylor at maryellen.taylor@txgcmn.org ****before Dec 1st****.

Each nominee will receive a notification with a description of the position.

There are also other ways to join the board and volunteer to help our chapter:
Directors, Committee Chairs, Committee members

Contact Julia for more information.