

Texas Master Naturalists ROLLING PLAINS CHAPTER

NEWSLETTER

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April 2014

Galveston Oil Spill Threatens Crucial Bird Refuge

By Christine Dell'Amore, National Geographic
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A barge that spilled 168,000 gallons (635,000 liters) of oil Saturday into Galveston Bay is threatening a refuge that's crucial habitat for thousands of birds, experts say.



An oil containment boom cuts across a sandbar covered with birds on Pelican Island near Galveston, Texas.
PHOTOGRAPH BY SMILEY N. POOL, HOUSTON CHRONICLE VIA AP

The government's cleanup efforts began immediately, with 24 response vessels working to skim the oil and to stop the leak from the damaged

barge, which was carrying more than 900,000 gallons (3.4 million liters) of oil.

About 69,000 feet (21,000 meters) of oil-absorbing boom have been placed around the site of the spill and along sensitive shorelines, according to the Coast Guard.

At least 50 oiled birds have been discovered so far, though the number will likely be much higher as rescuers expand their search, said Richard Gibbons, conservation director of Houston Audubon.

The animals are taken to a wildlife rehabilitation facility established by Unified Command, a network of agencies overseeing the cleanup.

The spill occurred when the barge collided with a ship in the Houston Ship Channel near Texas City, on the western coast of Galveston Bay.

The area is about a mile (0.62 kilometer) from the Bolivar Peninsula, which is home to the Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary, a preserved area of marshy mudflats that's home to a variety of geese, ducks, herons, and other waterbirds.

The sanctuary has been designated by bird-advocacy organizations as a Globally Significant Important Bird Area and is part of the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network.

E LOCALS

APRIL 1: Rolling Plains Chapter will not meet at its regular time or place due to New Master Naturalist Training. Next regularly scheduled meeting will be May 6th at River-Bend. 7:00 pm

MARCH 11-MAY 8: Master Naturalist Training Classes. **Location:** Bolin Science Hall room 213 at MSU **Time:** 7:00 p.m.

The Texas General Land Office has deployed a bird rehabilitation trailer in the area for quick response to affected wildlife, according to the Coast Guard.

Compared with the 2010 Gulf oil spill, which oiled hundreds of birds, "this is a tiny amount of oil in comparison—but it is very, very close to a lot of very, very important places" for birds, Gibbons said.

The proximity to the sanctuary, he said, "makes it something we have to be diligent with."

Protecting Bolivar

The Bolivar Peninsula, which lies east of the collision, has not been directly impacted by the oil so far. Winds and currents have pushed much of the oil south toward Pelican Island, where the oil is coating rocks along the shoreline.



A dead bird covered with oil lies near the Houston Ship Channel on Sunday.
PHOTOGRAPH BY MELISSA PHILLIP, HOUSTON CHRONICLE VIA AP

Shorebirds that sit on rocks, such as gulls; wading birds like the ruddy turnstone; and ducks are being hit hard there, Gibbons said. (See National Geographic's pictures of waterfowl.)

Right now, Houston Audubon's main priority is keeping the oil away from Bolivar.

"We're concerned about all the birds that are oiled, but we have the most control and responsibility for our own property," Gibbons said, referring to the fact that a coalition of bird groups manage the Bolivar Flats sanctuary.

To that end, responders are using hazing cannons—guns that produce loud bangs—on a thin levee of land called the Texas City Dike, which juts into the bay directly west of Bolivar. The hope is that the sounds will keep birds from flying or swimming toward the peninsula.

Ironically, Gibbons said, Bolivar Flats is an ideal location for birds because of the Houston Ship Channel.

The ships' movements break up the bay's natural currents, so there's less disturbance of sand on the beaches, which in turn allows for more crabs, clams, and other tiny creatures—birds' favorite prey—to thrive.

Why Oil Is Toxic to Birds

Oil harms birds in two ways: internally and externally.

Oil-soaked birds vigorously preen their feathers to remove the toxic crude, accidentally ingesting it,

which can cause internal ailments.

"Try removing crude oil from your arm with your mouth and not getting any of it into your body," J. V. Remsen, Jr., an ornithologist and a professor at Louisiana State University's Department of Biological Sciences in Baton Rouge, said in an earlier interview.

"How much damage has already been done [by the time the bird is rescued]? That's the big unknown in all of this rehabilitation."

Externally, oil degrades the birds' waterproofing oils, allowing cold water to touch their skin and

making the animals vulnerable to hypothermia, especially in cold regions, said Nils Warnock, then of the Oiled Wildlife Care Network in California and now with Audubon Alaska, in an earlier interview.

"It's like surfing in the northern Pacific," he said. "If your wet suit gets a hole, you're going to be cold fast."

It takes weeks or even months for the birds' waterproofing to be naturally replenished. The long recovery time further stresses the animals and reduces space in rehab facilities for incoming patients.

Where Will the Oil Go?

Most of the oil slick seems to be heading southwest down the Texas coast, away from Bolivar. It could go all the way down to Padre Island National Seashore—and that would be good news, Gibbons said.

That's because the longer oil stays in saltwater, the more it's eaten by bacteria. Eventually, the thick, sticky stuff becomes well-formed, easy-to-collect tarballs that are less likely to harm birds.

UPDATE 1

Search Continues for Wildlife Affected by Weekend Oil Spill

AUSTIN –Texas Parks and Wildlife Department personnel are continuing to look for wildlife affected following the Saturday oil spill in the Houston Ship Channel.

As of Sunday, three birds were taken to a private wildlife rehabilitation service field station for rehabilitation and three birds were found dead. More oiled birds are expected to be found.

Monday, teams of state and federal biologists were checking eastern Galveston Island, Pelican Island and the Bolivar peninsula looking for other affected wildlife.

According to TPWD personnel on the scene, Bolivar Flats is currently a potential hotspot, since it is a significant refuge for birds. Expectations are that oiled birds will fly there and with decreasing temperatures, more impact on birds is expected. High tides could impact further as habitats become inundated.

In addition to the field work underway, TPWD staff are participating in the incident command operation in Texas City and assisting with response activities for reported impacted wildlife.

Chapter Activities for March 2014

Photos by Terry McKee



Above: During the first class, trainees heard from Penny Miller and Rusty the screech owl, representing our chapter partner Wild Bird Rescue.



Above: Members of the Rolling Plains Chapter would like to welcome the 2014 class of trainees to the Texas Master Naturalist program: Betty Bowles, Marianne Bowles, Karen Grundy, Elizabeth Hawley, Michelle Howard, Lauren Jansen, Carol Lunsford, Kim Mason, Norman Mason, June McKee, Kay Murphy, Ray Douglass, Warren Reid, Judy Snyder and Mary Webber.



Above: New trainees joined chapter members as they worked on habitat improvement at a workday at Wild Bird Rescue March 22. **Right:** During a break in the work, trainees received a tour of WBR and learned about the rehab center's effort to care for injured birds.

TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST, Rolling Plains Chapter Spring 2014 – TRAINING AGENDA

Natural Resource Conservation Service perspective on grassland ecology and management	Jerry Payne NRCS office (retired)	April 1 7:00-9:00 pm Bolin 213
Introduction to Archeology	Patti Hamilton Texas Master Naturalist TX Archeology Society	April 3 7:00-9:00 pm Bolin 209
Field trip 2 Grassland and wildflower morphology and ecology	Paul Dowlearn Wichita Valley Nursery	April 5 9:00 am-noon River Bend
Vertebrate biology overview including historical biogeography with mammals as a model with functional morphology and geographic variation	Dr Ray Willis Professor of Biology MSU	April 8 7:00-9:00 pm Bolin 213

Overview of local geology and soils, stratigraphy, lithologies fossils and minerals geologic features of north Texas	Dr. Jonathan D Price Ph.D Assistant Professor of Geology Midwestern State University	April 10 7:00-9:00 pm Bolin 209
Herpetology with general discussion of local amphibians and reptiles	Dr. Charles Watson Professor of Biology MSU	April 15 7:00-9:00 pm Bolin 213
Field trip 3 Hackberry Flat, Frederick, OK to observe wetland ecology and migratory waterfowl	Chapter Master Naturalists ODWC biologist Kelvin Schoonover and staff	April 19 8:00-noon car pool
Entomology overview including common local insects	Dr. Roy Vogtsberger associate professor Dept of Biology, MSU	April 22 7:00-9:00 pm Bolin 213
Arachnology Study of spiders	Dr. Roy Vogtsberger MSU	April 24 7:00-9:00 pm Bolin 209
Field Trip 4 Lake Arrowhead State Park Invasives, zebra mussel	Robert Mauk TPWD fisheries biologist	April 26 9:00 am-noon
Mycology Study of fungus	Dr. James Masuoka Assistant professor Biology Dept, MSU	April 29 7:00-9:00 pm Bolin 213
Ecological concepts with a discussion concerning biomes, trophic levels and energy movement through succession stages.	Rebecca Dodge associate professor geosciences program, MSU	May 1 7:00-9:00 pm Bolin 209
Chapter meeting	Rolling Plains Chapter	May 6 7:00 p.m. River Bend
Interpretive, volunteer opportunities & communication Evaluation/ test, wrap up	Jim Hensley Rolling Plains Chapter President	May 8 7:00-9:00 pm Bolin 209

Lake Arrowhead State Park Drought Days

When: Last Sunday of Every Month

What is it??

Anyone interested in seeing how the lake levels have fallen to historically low levels are welcome to come out to Lake Arrowhead State Park and see the issue firsthand.



Park Interpreter, Joey Hendrix will be present at 10:00 AM and 2:00 PM to talk about how the drought has impacted the local area.

Entrance fees are waived for those wishing to see the drought's effect on Lake Arrowhead. All other fees still apply.

Texas Master Naturalist Annual Meeting

October 24-26 2014

Mo Ranch in Hunt, Texas

The dates and location for the next Texas Master Naturalist State meeting has been announced. Be sure and put these dates on your calendar. Registration for lodging fills up fast as this is a popular event, so begin your decision if you'd like to attend and clear your calendars.

I have attended the last several years and really enjoy getting together with TMNs from across the state of Texas. Last year, 2013 was the largest gathering thus far with around 455 attendees.

Just so you have an idea of some of the workshops and classes that I've attended during my 4 or 5 years that I've attended the state meeting here are some:

- Monarch monitoring
- Dragon fly study
- Night time interpretation
- Amphibian Watch
- Hummingbird update and projects
- Insect workshop
- Growing Up Wild workshop
- Building Rain Barrels
- All about bees
- and many more....

Typically it seems there are around 40 different workshops, field trips to choose from. These will count as Advanced Training and also there are opportunities to get volunteer hours as this conference success depends on the volunteers and instructors.

Hope you will plan on attending the state convention this year. The price to attend varies each year. The schedule and registration tends to be announced in late August/September.

See more at: <http://heartwoodtmn.org/forums/general-discussion/texas-master-naturalist-state-meeting-2014-news#sthash.zZTwDcRO.dpuf>



Upcoming Workshop May 16-17, 2014

Texas Amphibian and Mussel
Watch Train the Trainer Workshops
Fort Worth Nature Center
9601 Fossil Ridge Road
Fort Worth, TX 76135

Registration Required. Fee \$10 for materials per workshop.

Learn how to identify amphibian and freshwater mussel species and participate in scientific research as members of an important Texas Nature Tracker Partnership. Sponsored by the Fort Worth Nature Center and the Cross Timbers Texas Master Naturalist Chapter. Texas Amphibian Watch will be held on May 16, 6:00-10:00 p.m. and Texas Mussel Watch will be held on May 17, 9:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. *Texas Master Naturalist Approved Advanced Training*. CPE and TEEAC credit available for educators.

Contact the Fort Worth Nature Center at 817-392-7410 for information and registration.



18th Annual Birding Classic: April 15 – May 15, 2014

The world's biggest, longest and wildest birdwatching tournament is statewide!

Thanks to all of the teams, sponsors, and event partners who made 2013 an outstanding success. Please join us for the 2014 Birding Classic, April 15-May 15, 2014. It promises to be even bigger and better than ever before!!

Select your team's tournament category based on your age, your ability and how much time you have to go birding. Just find some friends and family to form your team, select the tournament that fits your lifestyle, register your team, and start counting birds.

How to Participate gives you a step-by-step guide to

help you enter your team.

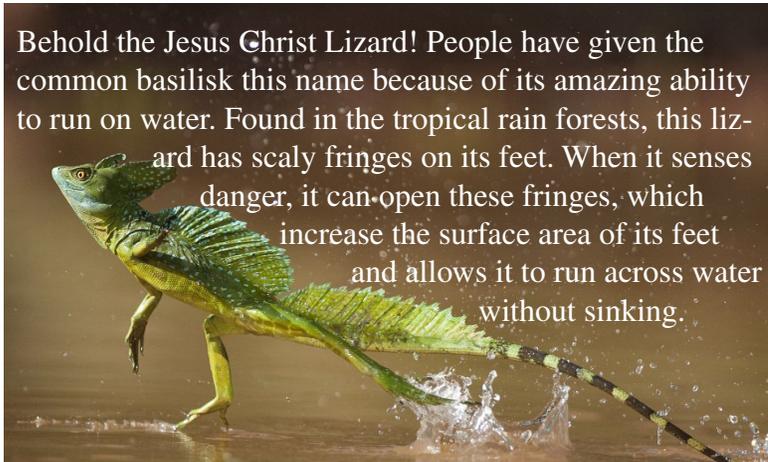
Visit Tournament Advice and Sponsorship Tips for tips on mentoring youth teams, advice from former winners on how to run a successful Big Day or the Weeklong tournament, pointers on birding with blind or visually impaired birders, and even advice on finding team sponsors to save you some money in registration fees.

Habitat conservation grants awarded are funded through Event Sponsorship and registration fees. The birds are counting on you!

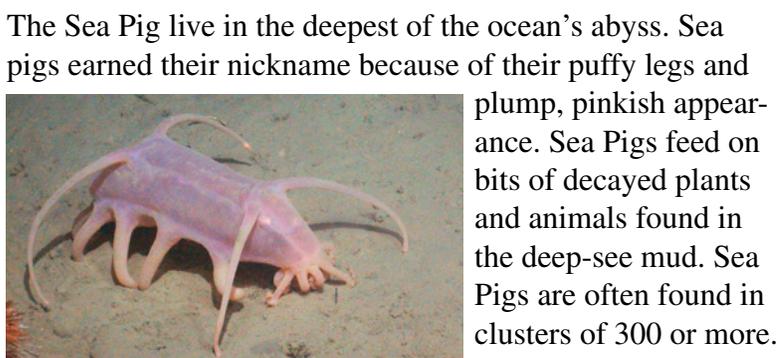
Have questions? Visit the contact section to talk directly to Birding Classic staff.



No, it's not a snake, It's a giant earthworm from Australia. The giant Gippsland earthworm, with its purple head and bluish body, averages 3 feet long and 1 inch in diameter. It has been known to reach lengths of 10 feet.



Behold the Jesus Christ Lizard! People have given the common basilisk this name because of its amazing ability to run on water. Found in the tropical rain forests, this lizard has scaly fringes on its feet. When it senses danger, it can open these fringes, which increase the surface area of its feet and allows it to run across water without sinking.



The Sea Pig live in the deepest of the ocean's abyss. Sea pigs earned their nickname because of their puffy legs and plump, pinkish appearance. Sea Pigs feed on bits of decayed plants and animals found in the deep-see mud. Sea Pigs are often found in clusters of 300 or more.

Invasive Spotlight: "Bastard Cabbage"

Bastard cabbage is native to the Mediterranean, northern Africa, central Europe and temperate Asia. This species was introduced through contaminated seed mixes. It is an annual herbaceous plant that grows from 1 to 5 feet in height and has a large taproot. Leaves are deep green, lobed, wrinkled and can have a reddish cast.



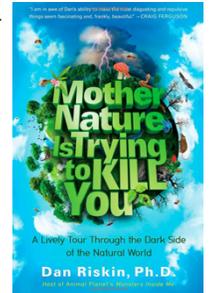
Bastard cabbage flowers from early spring into summer, bearing clusters of small, showy yellow flowers at the tips of its branches. Seeds from this plant germinate early in the growing season and quickly establish a blanket of leafy rosettes forming a monoculture. The dense patches easily outcompete seeds and seedlings of native plants, especially the beloved bluebonnet.

To learn more and watch a short video about the impact of bastard cabbage in Texas, follow the link to view the Plant Avengers - Ecosystem's Mightiest Heroes by Commander Ben. http://www.texasinvasives.org/plant_database/detail.php?symbol=RARU

RESOURCE CORNER

Mother Nature Is Trying to Kill You

by Dan Riskin
 Hardback: 272 pages
 ISBN-10: 1476707545
 ISBN-13: 978-1476707549
 Price:\$24.99



It may be a wonderful world, but as Dan Riskin (cohost of Discovery Canada's Daily Planet) explains, it's also a dangerous, disturbing, and disgusting one. At every turn, it seems, living things are trying to eat us, poison us, use our bodies as their homes, or have us spread their eggs. In *Mother Nature Is Trying to Kill You*, Riskin is our guide through the natural world at its most gloriously ruthless.

Using the seven deadly sins as a road map, Riskin offers dozens of jaw-dropping examples that illuminate how brutal nature can truly be. From slothful worms that hide in your body for up to thirty years to wrathful snails with poisonous harpoons that can kill you in less than five minutes to lustful ducks that have orgasms faster than you can blink, these fascinating accounts reveal the candid truth about "gentle" Mother Nature's true colors.

Riskin's passion for the strange and his enthusiastic expertise bring Earth's most fascinating flora and fauna into vivid focus. Riskin makes unexpected discoveries not just about the world all around us but also about the ways this brutal world has shaped us as humans and what our responsibilities are to this terrible, wonderful planet we call home.

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