

The Naturalist

Volume 10 Issue 11

November 1, 2025



The mission of the Master Naturalist Program is "to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers who provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the state of Texas."

Contents of This Newsletter

President's Corner
Cyanobacteria and Algae in Texas Barrier Island Wetlands
Flour Bluff Wetlands Wonderland Project
Photos of the KEDTV Kid's Fest
The Toughest Scout Challenge
Ringing the Closing Bell and Raising Awareness
Gaharitrema droneni
Wildlife Watch: Captured by Camera
Christmas Bird Counts – Get Involved
Texas Master Naturalist 2025 Annual Meeting Post-Event Recap
Upcoming Events
Who Did What in October



The Naturalist

President's Corner

by Michele Connolly

It has been a busy and fun October. As you will see in other articles in this newsletter, a large group of us participated in the Toughest Scout Challenge and attended the annual State Conference in College Station.

One of my favorite things about being a Master Naturalists is the friendships I have developed. In my career I have had many work friends, but often when I left that job or obtain a new position, those work friendships fade. With this program, it's so different. It's a group of us that volunteer together on our own time and by choice. It's similar to work friends I have had but with deeper connections that do not have an expiration date. I truly feel like I have made friends for life and that's not always easy when you are older.

As my last term as President ends, I am a little sentimental of all the growth that has happen in our chapter over the past four years. You all are the best and it's such a pleasure to get to be around you and do amazing things in nature.

See you outside sometime soon!



Cyanobacteria and Algae in Texas Barrier Island Wetlands

by Randy Bissel

Don't miss November's Meeting Speaker – **Zahra Hassan of the Harte Research Institute** will be speaking on the cyanobacteria mats on the back side of Padre and Mustang Islands. **Tuesday, November 18, 2025, 7 pm, South Texas Botanical Gardens**



Cyanobacteria "mat" at Packery Flats

True algae and cyanobacteria are both photosynthetic organisms common along the barrier islands of the Texas Gulf Coast, but they represent two very different branches of life.

Cyanobacteria are the oldest photosynthetic life forms on Earth, pioneering the exchange of carbon dioxide for oxygen through photosynthesis more than 2.5 billion years ago, a process that forever changed the atmosphere and made complex life possible. While sometimes called "blue-green algae," they are in fact bacteria, and today they are easy to spot on the bay side of Mustang Island—at places like Packery Flats—where they form dark, slimy mats across tidal flats and marsh edges. These mats not only fix nitrogen and feed into the wetland food web but also support grazers such as fiddler crabs, which rely on the cyanobacteria and microalgae that coat the sediment surface.

In contrast, **TRUE algae** are eukaryotes with nuclei and chloroplasts, and they are just as visible on the beach side of Mustang Island, where seasonal rafts of brown algae (Sargassum) wash ashore carrying small crabs, shrimp, and fish that once sheltered within them. Green algae such as Ulva (sea lettuce) blanket tidal flats, and red algae like Gracilaria form dense mats in lagoons and estuaries, while diatoms bloom in the shallow bays of Laguna Madre, supporting shrimp, oysters, and sportfish. People benefit from these algae—whether through harvested products like agar, fertilizers, and biofuels, or through their crucial roles in stabilizing wetlands, fueling fisheries, and producing oxygen.

By recognizing that **cyanobacteria are bacteria** while **algae are eukaryotic protists and plants**, we naturalists can better understand the living fabric of Texas's barrier island ecosystems, from the bay flats to the open Gulf beaches.

The Naturalist

Flour Bluff Wetlands Wonderland Project

by Chad Huckabee

During the past decade, volunteers from our chapter have partnered with Flour Bluff ISD providing expertise and guidance for the fourth-grade bird club, intermediate school Junior Master Naturalist, countless classroom visits, Intermediate School Nature Garden and Grounds (coordinated by Cindy Frank) and joint programs with our affiliated outdoor education sites.

None of these has had the potential impact as the restoration projects at the Intermediate school and the FBISD Wetlands Education Center. With the support of the Intermediate School Principal and the past four district superintendents, whom we have worked and laid the groundwork for an outdoor education facility like no other in the country.

With over 100 acres that encompasses 8 ecosystems, this project has the potential to provide STMN volunteers opportunities throughout the next decade and beyond. Currently, logistics are difficult. Volunteers willing to work are limited to times Cindy and I are available. Access to the Intermediate School Garden which has storage is limited by security issues, while access to the wetlands is generally accessible, but has no storage facilities.



Beginning in January 2026, we will conduct regular workdays at both the Nature Garden at the Intermediate School and at the Wetlands. The Intermediate School Workdays will remain the **last Sunday afternoon of each month**. The Wetlands workday will be the **second Sunday afternoon each month**.

Time of day will vary depending on Daylight Savings Time. Besides a small contingent of TMN volunteers, we have had both FB National Honor Society and Science National Honor Society students helping. Their supervising is chapter member Jennifer Pshigoda. Other regular helpers are my son, Josh, Rick Martin, Lewis and Suzanne Smith, Cindy Frank and others intermittently.



(continued)

I work in the wetlands most evenings. If you are available and interested in evening work, the timetable will change from 4 to 6:30 to 3 to 5:30 with the time change coming up this weekend. I can deliver tools, or you can bring your own as you learn or choose a task to do.

The tasks that can be done include but are not limited to the following:

- Picking up trash
- Clearing dead grass in walkways
- Clearing up thorn shrub (Lotebush, Colima, Mesquite, and Spiny Hackberry)
- Applying herbicide to guinea grass (if you have had AT training for that)
- Conducting insect, bird, reptile, and plant surveys on property



The next Wetlands Workday will be Sunday November 9 from 3 pm to 6 pm. Wear hard sole shoes, jeans, hat, long sleeve shirt, and gloves. We will continue to work on clearing guinea grass from thorn-shrub mound, dig or cut off Colima, Lotebush, Mesquite and Spiny Hackberry regrowth and chemically treat ground remainder with basal bark herbicide mixture, pick up trash and haul grass piles to street.

Any time kids are at the Wetlands, you must check-in through Campus Police (Lance Howard). FB Police Department is located on Waldron Road just past Purdue stop light on the right side of the road. You should have already filled in the on line background check for the district.



The Naturalist

Photos of the KEDTV Kid's Fest

by Richard Martin



The Naturalist

The Toughest Scout Challenge

by Cindy Frank

On Friday, October 3, 2025, the South Texas chapter of Texas Master Naturalists was offered the opportunity to participate in the Toughest Scout Challenge. Our own Chelise Hyatt works for the Scouting association and had someone who offered a sponsorship, and Chelise asked if we wanted to form a team.

We had ABSOLUTELY no clue what we were getting into. We just knew we needed to form a team of six folks who would show up at Camp Karankawa between 7:30-8:30 that morning and compete in various events.

Michele Connolly, Mike Wenzel, and I were “in” from the start. New member-in-training, Daniel Garcia, said he would like to compete, and his wife, Monica, came along to be our cheerleader. Patti Baker and Melodi Wells completed our six-person team, and Melodi’s husband and a friend came to help too.

Prior to the event, we had to come up with a team name and we decided that we would be called the Wild Roadrunners. When we got to the dining hall that morning, we found a table with a placard with our team’s name, a pole, a piece of canvas, a small white pumpkin, and some permanent markers. We were told that we had to design a team flag, which would be drawn on the canvas and attached to the pole, and that flag would be with us all day. The pumpkin was to be decorated as our mascot.

Yikes! Even after all my nature journaling classes, I still cannot draw a stick figure. Draw a roadrunner? No way.

But Daniel pulled out his phone, found a picture of a roadrunner, and started sketching our flag. And it was beautiful. So beautiful that it won the award for being the best flag!

Michele decorated our pumpkin and named it “Rick.” Rick and the flag went everywhere we went that day. Monica kept us in line, moving along, and made sure both the flag and pumpkin were in all our pictures.



The Naturalist

The Toughest Scout Challenge

(continued)

But where did we go? We learned that we would be competing in things that the Scouts normally get to do at camp. We walked from one event site to another – some events were timed, others were scored. Some things required six participants, some less. We figured out that some of the twenty or so teams had been doing this for many years in a row. Team members on other teams were very serious about the competition, and it appeared that some practicing had taken place. Since we were clueless, we sure as heck hadn't been practicing anything. I am very sure that I was the oldest participant; the average age was probably 30-35, and most were males. (I think it is designed as a team-building exercise for things like corporations. Kleberg Bank, HEB, Onyx Engineering, and AEP were some of the participants.)

What were the events? Paddle board relay race (in the swimming pool), canoe relay race (in the much-depleted Lake Corpus Christi), archery (Mike did great for his first time using a bow and arrow), shotgun clay target shooting, .22 rifle target shooting (I aced that – I had not touched a rifle in 30+ years, so I was pretty darned proud of myself), tomahawk throwing (Michele was our star in this event), a Ropes course challenge (thank goodness Melodi knew something about this!), first aid stretcher race (could have been way more complicated than it was – figured out how to ask the right questions before starting to build our stretcher), fire building (hooray for Melodi again on this one), golf challenge, log hoist, museum scavenger hunt, and a photo scavenger hunt (which Monica took charge of).



The Naturalist

The Toughest Scout Challenge

(continued)

At the end of the day, we finished in 12th place. Not first, but certainly not last. We were tired, but each one of us had a blast, and I think we would fight someone who tried to take our place when this event comes around next year.

And though we were the “new kids on the block”, when we were all back in the dining hall while results were being tabulated, I heard “Wild Roadrunners” from the microphone on the stage. I heard it again, and pointed to myself. The guy in charge nodded, and motioned for me to come to the front. Mike went with me. When we got to the stage, the man asked if we were Master Naturalists, to which we proudly answered, “Yes.” And he pointed to a very large, red-headed centipede. Over 150 people were there, but WE were the ones asked to take care of a critter on stage! Mike got two Styrofoam cups out of the trash, and I used the toe of my shoe to nudge it out of the flag it crawled up in. Mike captured it and relocated him outside. Hooray for us!!!

Chelise has told me that we will have a sponsorship again next year. Daniel has assured us we will have matching team shirts next time. We now know we can enlist more folks; we just have a limit of no more than six people in any one event. Think about what you might be able to add to our Master Naturalist team, and consider spending an awesome day at Camp Karankawa with us. (Possible team name for next year: Bodacious Bobcats?)



The Naturalist

Ring the Closing Bell and Raising Awareness

by Monica Garcia

On October 24, 2025, I had the incredible honor of representing Citi at the New York Stock Exchange to ring the closing bell in celebration of Disability Employment Awareness Month. As the Product Manager for Assistive Technologies, I have the privilege of working closely with employees who have disabilities or are neurodiverse—ensuring they have the tools and technology they need to thrive. I also lead our local Disability and Neurodiverse Inclusion Network in San Antonio, where we foster education, awareness, and allyship across our workplace. Standing on that historic platform in New York, surrounded by leaders and advocates who share this passion, was a truly humbling and exhilarating experience. In that moment, I felt an overwhelming sense of pride—not only for the work I do, but for everyone who has helped make inclusion and accessibility a visible, celebrated part of corporate culture.

What I love most about my work is that it's rooted in the same spirit of service that drew me to the Texas Master Naturalists. Whether I'm helping an employee find the right assistive technology to succeed or volunteering to preserve and restore our natural spaces, both are acts of giving back to something larger than myself. Each effort strengthens a community—one in the workplace and one in nature—but both share a common thread of compassion, stewardship, and connection. My day at the NYSE reminded me that when we lift others up, whether it's through accessibility, conservation, or inclusion, we create a ripple effect that reaches far beyond what we can see.



The Naturalist

Gaharitrema droneni

By Chuck Blend

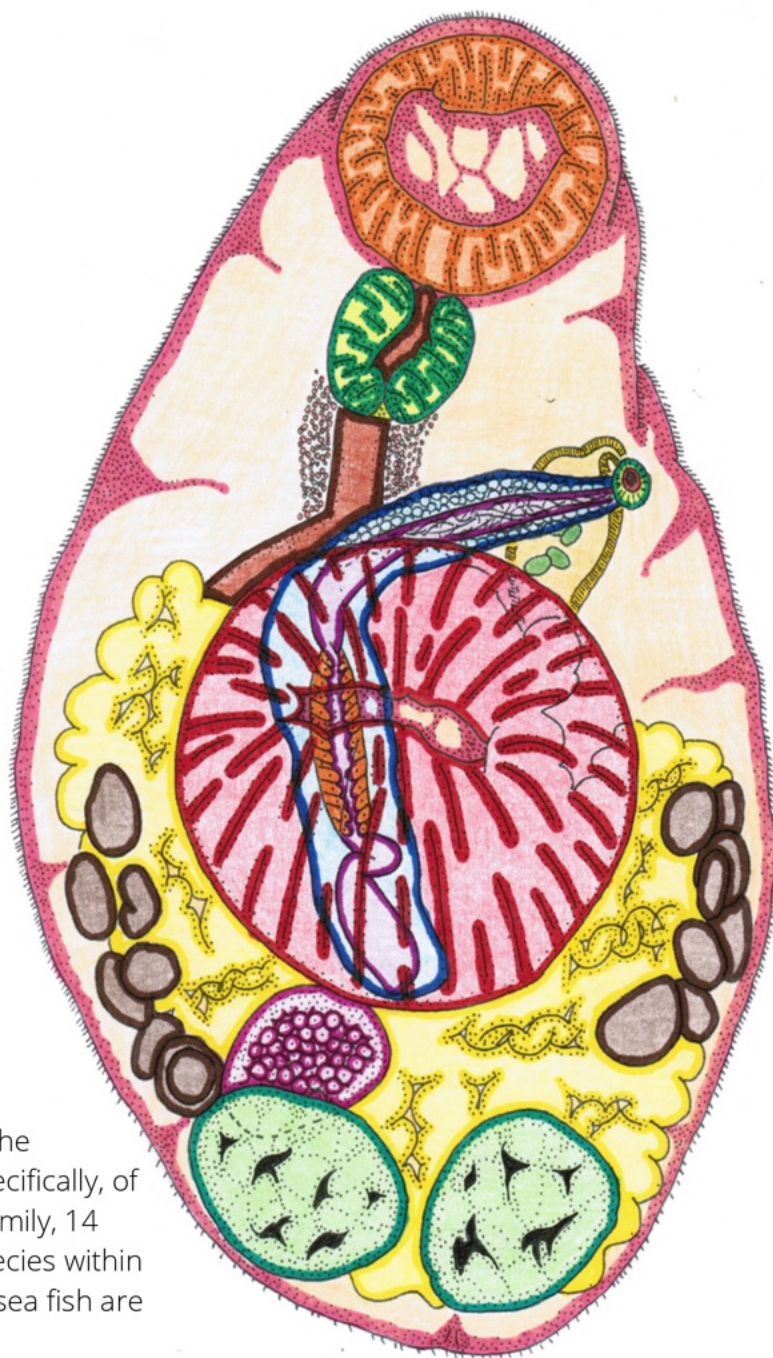
Gaharitrema droneni n. gen., n. sp. (Digenea: Zoogonidae: Lepidophyllinae) is described from the intestine of the pudgy cuskeel, *Spectrunculus grandis* (Günther, 1877) (Ophidiiformes: Ophidiidae), collected at 2,800 m depth from the northeastern Pacific Ocean off Oregon.

The new genus was distinguished by its pyriform or spindle-shaped body, smooth testes and ovary, narrow ceca that reach with the vitellarium into the hindbody, an unspecialized ventral sucker, non-filamented eggs, a claviform cirrus pouch, and an unpocketed ejaculatory duct and metraterm, and the new genus lacks circumoral spines.

In our paper, we presented updated keys to the 3 subfamilies of the Zoogonidae Odhner, 1902, as well as to the genera of the Cephaloporinae Yamaguti, 1934 and the Lepidophyllinae Stossich, 1903. A listing of the parasites known from *S. grandis* was also presented in this paper. This study documented the third family of digeneans (Zoogonidae) known to parasitize *S. grandis*, and it is a new host record (i.e., the first zoogonid reported from this host species).

We discussed the relatively impressive presence of the Zoogonidae and their hosts within the deep sea. Specifically, of the 35 genera we recognized within this digenean family, 14 (40%) have deep-sea representatives. At least 37 species within 27 genera and 19 families within 11 orders of deep-sea fish are known to harbor zoogonids.

Furthermore, of the 37 known deep-sea fish species parasitized by zoogonids, only 5 (13.5%) harbor 2 or more zoogonid species; the remaining 32 (86.5%) harbor only 1 parasite species each, indicating strong host specificity. Finally, the dietary ecology of *S. grandis* was presented, allowing us to speculate that *Gaharitrema droneni* may be utilizing gastropods and polychaetes as well as *S. grandis* to complete its life cycle in the deep sea.



The full paper can also be found
by scanning the QR code below:

The Naturalist

Wildlife Watch: Captured by Camera

By Mike Wenzel

Welcome to this month's edition of Wildlife Watch, where I share some of the fascinating birds and wildlife captured by my game cameras—both locally and beyond.

I recently moved my trail camera to a new location and, as always, found some familiar faces—and one new visitor!

First up is a buck playing a little peek-a-boo with the camera. The velvet has now come off his antlers, which means it won't be long before the "boys" start sorting out who will be this year's king of the place.

Next on the lineup is what at first glance looked like a chupacabra! The image was quick and blurry, but after a second look, it turned out to be a cow moving through the area. I've found that cattle often use the same trails as our local wildlife. I've also discovered that cows love to scratch themselves on trail cameras—why, I have no idea—but in this case, the result was a bunch of upside-down photos!

Our next guest is a first for our place in Wilson County—a skunk! I had no doubt they were around, but I'd never actually captured one on camera until now. Judging by his raised tail, he didn't seem too happy with whatever might have been following him. I'd love to someday catch a photo of a skunk actually spraying another critter—that would be quite the shot (pun intended)!

The final picture comes from the feeder. At first glance, it looked like a deer was giving a cottontail rabbit a stern talking-to—maybe something along the lines of, "Don't eat it all! Leave some for us!" Considering the deer's size and impressive set of antlers, I imagine the rabbit didn't argue much.

That's all for this month! I encourage everyone to set out a trail camera—even if it's just in your backyard. You'd be amazed at what's moving around out there that we rarely get to see or interact with.



The Naturalist

Christmas Bird Counts – Get Involved

By Chad Huckabee

The 126 years of Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) Will be held between December 14 until January 5. The CBC began in 1900, this event occurs in over 20 countries, mostly in the Americas. Christmas Bird Counts are a data snapshot of species of birds counted at each site by teams of citizen scientists.

Each count site consists of a 15-mile diameter circle and is organized by a count compiler. Count volunteers are assigned different parts of the circle to walk, drive, boat or sit to identify and count birds in their zone. These results are then totaled by the compiler and are sent to a designated database. Results for any site or year can be accessed through Houston Audubon Society's Website.

South Texas Master Naturalist is fortunate to have our own section of the Corpus Christi CBC. The Nueces Delta Preserve is this site. Its minicompiler is Chad Huckabee. Teams of 6 organize themselves and select a predetermined zone within which they count. Ideally, teams consist of all skill levels from very good birders to novices just beginning their birding career.

The Delta Preserve is a tricky place to conduct the count. When dry conditions prevail, most areas are accessible, but in wet conditions the zones may have limited access. The size of each zone varies from small, walkable areas 10 to 20 acres to large areas of many hundreds of acres that are accessible by roads. Details of zones, weather and road warnings will be provided a day or two before the NDP event.

CBCs are fun events. It is a period to look at birds intensely, count and record them. Each team is provided with a map of the zone they chose, description of bird species they may encounter in that zone, a bird checklist, a team list of volunteers and a rare bird report form. I will be asking for NDP volunteers in early December.

Teams may be prearranged, but each team must include a strong birder and a novice. New participants may come at the beginning and adopt a team or be adopted on a team. In a separate a list of Coastal Bend CBCs and the compiler's contact phone or email if you want to participate in multiple counts. Done correctly, this is an exhaustive process. Birding etiquette must be followed.

Coastal Bend Christmas Bird Counts

By Chad Huckabee

The following list of CBCs was obtained from the Houston Audubon Society Website. This list only includes the counts in Coastal Bend. If you are interested in other areas of Texas, those lists are available on the Houston site. If you have participated in any of these counts, you will likely be contacted by the compiler.

Aransas NWR: Laura Bonneau
laura_bonneau@fws.gov ??? (Federal shutdown)

Corpus Christi: 12/20 Compiler Larry Jordan<lawrencemjordan@hotmail.com>
NDP of the count above minicompiler is Chad Huckabee

Corpus Christi-Flour Bluff: 12/14, compiler is Larry Jordan <lawrencemjordan@hotmail.com>

Guadalupe River Delta-McFaddin Family Ranches: 12/18, Brent Ortego brentortego@hotmail.com

Jackson-Calhoun Counties: 12/27, Bob Friedrichs
bird.fried@gmail.com or 925-998-7052

Kenedy County-Wind Turbines: 1/5, Beau Hardegree
<beau_hardegree@fws.gov> or 361-533-6054

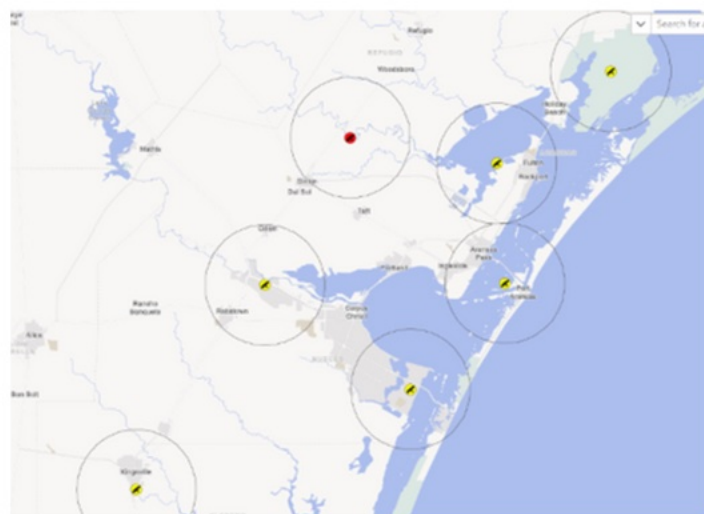
Kingsville: 1/3 Janice Travis
muddyboots85@gmail.com

Port Aransas: 12/15, Joan Holt joanholt@utexas.edu

Rockport: 1/4, Claudia Dorn catbirdorn@gmail.com

Victoria: 12/22, Bob Friedrichs bird.fried@gmail.com
or 925-998-7052 bird.fried@gmail.com

Welder Wildlife Refuge: 12/19, Angie Arredondo
aarredondo@welderwildlife.org



The map above shows the most common local CBC circles.

The Naturalist

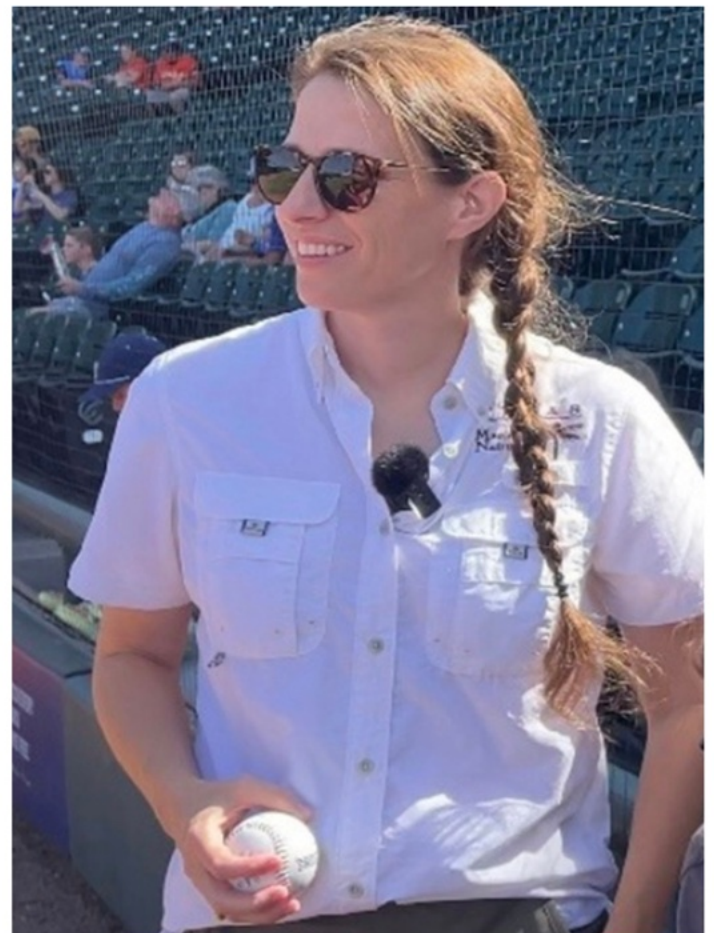
Texas Master Naturalist 2025 Annual Meeting Post-Event Recap

by Holly Ahern

Scan the QR Code
to view the full list
of awards and
recipients!



Cindy Frank - 10,000 Service Hours Milestone Award



Holly Ahern - Second Place in Video Contest
"Night at the Ballpark"



The Naturalist

Texas Master Naturalist 2025 Annual Meeting Post-Event Recap

(continued)



Ann Flanagan - 1st Place in Photography x2!



Ann Flanagan - 1st Place in Photography
WILDLIFE - birds - "Osprey"



Ann Flanagan - 1st Place in Photography
WILDLIFE - reptiles & amphibians - "Hatchlings"

2026 Certification Pin:
Bobcat!



The Naturalist

AT: Science Thursday

November 6

In person presentation at the Hopkins Library

TOPIC: From Winter Chill to Summer Bloom:
Microbial Life in our Coastal Waters

By Dr. Yajuan Lin



Blucher Bunch

Every Monday & Thursday



Volunteer Opportunity



Volunteer Opportunity

November 7 in Kingsville



Volunteer Opportunity



Scan the QR Code
to for more info
& to apply:



The Naturalist

AT: Opportunity

December 6

This is the FREE all-day December 6 field trip (bus) from TAMUCC to Rockport (lecture and field experiences) and then to Port A (on the pier) that [Randy] mentioned in the last meeting. Likely 3-4 hours of AT for TMNs. Space is very limited, so sign up now. tx.ag/CoastalFlooding25

Coastal Flooding Field Session and Workshop: Past, Current and Future

Saturday, December 6
8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m



Explore Coastal Flooding in the Coastal Bend!

Participants are invited to an educational event exploring the science and challenges of coastal flooding in the region, featuring interactive field sessions along the bay and beachfront.

Where: TAMU Corpus Christi
Natural Resources Center
6300 Ocean Dr.,
Corpus Christi, TX 78412

Audience:

Open to all participants

Dress: Closed-toe shoes and cold weather clothing for outdoor activities.

Lunch & water provided.

Registration required. Sign-up via the QR code or link:



tx.ag/CoastalFlooding25

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension is an equal opportunity employer and program provider. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension provides equal opportunities in its programs and employment to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating.

The Naturalist

Who Did What in October

by Cindy Frank

(total volunteer hours for month = 1,327.00)

(total people seen for month = 921 adults + 1,611 youth)

ARK-PO – Paula Baker

ARK-RM – Kathy Cima, Brad Stockman

Blucher Park-RM – Bibi Dalrymple, Sharon Heilman, Sue Barley, Florence Tissot, Lillian Bass

CC Museum-PO – Steve Schiwetz

CC Museum-RM – Chuck Blend, Christy Blend, Steve Schiwetz

Citizen Science-FR – Cindy Frank, Phil Woods, Randy Bissell

Community Presentations-DO – Randy Bissell

Community Service-TG – Bibi Dalrymple, Steve Cook, Chad Huckabee

ComPartServ-PO – Cindy Frank, Cherie Heimann, Rick Martin, Nada Martin, Aracely Negrete, Chad Huckabee, Josie Gunter, Melodi Wells, Monica Garcia, Daniel Garcia, George Gardiner, Patti Baker, Mike Wenzel, Jean Meadors, Cindy Hannifen, Ingeborg Holt, Hope Warne

Flour Bluff-DO – Chad Huckabee, Grace Lopez, Cindy Frank

Flour Bluff-PO – Cindy Frank, Chad Huckabee, Denise Beaman

Flour Bluff-RM – Cindy Frank, Jennifer Pshigoda, Chad Huckabee, Janice Knezek, Rick Martin, Nada Martin, David Major

Lake CCSP-PO – Josie Gunter, Katie Heuermann

Mustang Island SP-PO – Phil Woods

Mustang Island SP-RM – Randy Bissell

NDP-DO – Phil Woods, Cindy Frank, Toni Briscoe

NDP-PO – Jean Meadors

NDP-RM – Chad Huckabee

OBWPNC-PO – Liz Abel, Bryan Tilley, Leslie Albrecht

OBWPNC-RM – Ingeborg Holt, Margaret Cleaves

Packery Channel Sanctuary-RM – Bibi Dalrymple

PINS-PO – Monica Garcia

PINS-RM – Toni Briscoe

Port A Nature Preserve-PO – Cindy Frank, Phil Woods, Paula Baker, Cherie Heimann

Port A Nature Preserve-RM – Cindy Frank, Liz Abel

Public CleanUp-RM – Michele Connolly, Patti Baker, Kathy Cima, Brad Stockman, Hope Warne, Pat Clark, Sue Barley, Morgan Pyle, Ron Collier

STBGNC-OT – Ric Garces

STBGNC-RM – Adel Casiano, Pat Clements, Margaret Cleaves

Texas Water Quality-FR – Randy Bissell

TSA-PO – Patti Baker

TSA-RM – Patti Baker

TSC-RM – Patti Baker

UTMSI-PO – Jenny Dailey, Ann Flanagan, Kathy Cima, Brad Stockman

WWF-DO – Phil Woods



TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION

The members of Texas A&M AgriLife will provide equal opportunities in programs, activities, education and employment to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, age, national origin, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity and will strive to achieve full and equal employment opportunities throughout Texas A&M AgriLife.

Do you have something you would like to contribute to the newsletter?

Please send it to
chelise.hyatt@scouting.org.
