



MAY 2020

Chapter News

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

It is getting more difficult (by the day), to address our chapter in the terms of glowing accomplishments and praises with which we typically are lauded from March through June.

From the Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuges organization, we have April's Migration Celebration Kick-off Dinner, and Migration Celebration festivities at San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge, Spring Fling at Gulf Coast Bird Observatory's Quintana Neotropical Bird Sanctuary, and any number of spring bird/nature festivities that we normally participate in throughout the vernal equinox—all of course cancelled due to COVID-19.

Remember, there will be no chapter meeting in May (virtual or face-to-face). We **will** have a chapter meeting in June, and as of this moment, it will be a virtual meeting.

I talked to Bryan Frazier about the needs of Brazoria County Parks Department, and I will follow up with him so that we can identify VT opportunities they have.

I have also had several conversations with Mary Pearl Meuth at the State office about the immediate future of TMNs, and from reading between the lines, it's possible that face-to-face meetings may not begin again until June 5, 2020, but it could be even longer—perhaps September 1, 2020.

At this point, she is still counting on holding the Annual Meeting at the OMNI Hotel in West Houston, October 16 to 18, and our chapter is making preliminary plans to coordinate the photo contest along with other involvement.

That's all I have for now. Hope to see you all soon.

Best Regards,
Bill

P. S. Some people have said that I do not smile enough. I will have you know that behind that mask is one of the world's best smiles!



Bill Ahlstrom is the president of the Cradle of Texas Chapter. He can be reached at ahlstrom@tmn-cot.org.

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The Texas Master Naturalist program is coordinated by the Texas A&M AgriLIFE Extension Service and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept. Texas Master Naturalist programs serve all people without regard to socio-economic level, race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.

Masthead photo by Charles Jesse Miller Jr. taken at Brazoria NWR.

Texas Master Naturalist Program
Cradle of Texas Chapter
Chapter News – May 2020

RECOMMENDATION ...

Stay in the know! Subscribe to the State TMN Listserve at <http://txmn.org/staying-connected/sign-up-for-tmn-listserv/>

**Texas Master Naturalist Program—Cradle of Texas Chapter
General Meeting and Advanced Training**

Wednesday, May 13, 2020

Via email meeting invite to Texas AgriLIFE Extension Service's
Microsoft Teams Meeting license

8:30 AM – 9:00 AM	Fun and Fellowship Snack Team: Oron Atkins, Marty Cornell, Mel McKey, Sheree Muzny, Larry Peterson, Regina Tippet
9:00 AM – 9:45 AM	General Membership Meeting <i>[This meeting is approved for 1.00-hour volunteer time plus travel up to 1.00 hour]</i>
9:45 AM – 10:00 AM	Nature Notes Speaker: Not scheduled Topic: Not scheduled
10:15 AM – 11:15 AM	Advanced Training Speaker: Ruby Lewis, COT Member and Outreach Director Topic: "Safety for Outreach Events" <i>[Hours for Advanced Training (AT) TBD at close of meeting]</i>

CANCELLED

NOTE: Stay tuned for information and instructions via email and the June *Chapter News* in order to “attend” June’s virtual General Meeting.

MEMBERSHIP DATA REPORT by Dave Brandes, Data Manager

Congratulations to those achieving awards or recertification as of April 30:

Initial Certification

Joel Cobb

Recertification

James Calvert	Jimmy Salinas
Carolyn May-Monie	Luanne Salinas
Debbie Nance	Brenda Stitt
Jim Nance	Cindy Vincent

Impact Data YTD—30 April 2020*

1622 Adults 5340 Youth 6962 Total

Hours Totals YTD—30 April 2020

5145 Hours VT 973 Hours AT

* No impact in April due to COVID-19 event cancellations.

TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST 2020 ANNUAL MEETING and CALL FOR PROPOSALS



Planning for the 21st TMN Program Annual Meeting is well underway. As it is being held in Houston, the COT chapter is one of several “host” chapters involved in supporting the meeting. While registration is not yet open, information about the meeting is available at <https://txmn.org/2020-annual-meeting/>.

Also available on that page is a “Call for Proposals” posting that invites interested members to submit proposal(s) for sessions offered at the meeting. State is also seeking vendors, and an application is available on the webpage at <https://txmn.org/files/2020/02/Vendor-Info-and-Application-Form-2020.pdf>.

Hogs Gone Wild

By John Boettiger, as excerpted from his presentation scheduled for the cancelled April General Meeting

Sus scrofa, or as it is known in southeast Texas, the wild feral hog, is an invasive species that arrived in Texas in 1689 (after having been introduced into the Americas by Christopher Columbus in 1498 and then introduced into the present-day states of Florida, Georgia, and North and South Carolina in 1593). A hog (pig) becomes “feral” when it has been free from domestic captivity for one generation.

Currently, feral hogs roam freely in almost all the 254 counties of Texas, with the greatest concentrations in areas with plentiful water, food and shelter and fewer people, and specifically the coastal areas of Texas.

Feral hogs are omnivores (will eat almost anything, as do humans and dogs) and extremely prolific. A female can conceive her first litter at eight months of age and has a gestation period of only 115 days; therefore, she could have four litters of four to six “shoats” (babies) by the end of her second year. It is realistic to believe that a prolific, well fed sow (female) could conceive as many as 15-20 shoats before age two and more than 30 shoats before she reaches three years of age.

PIG (*Sus scrofa*) SHOAT (piglet)



Since they eat almost anything, for example, grain, bird eggs, baby animals, rose buds, pecans and carrion, feral hogs cause significant damage to crops, levies, field animals (sheep and goats), ground-nesting birds (bobwhite quail and turkeys), residential yards and landscaping, and beneficial wildlife (whitetail deer) through a combination of wallowing, rooting, trampling, fecal contamination to human food crops (such as spinach, lettuce, squash, watermelon) and by killing and/or eating whitetail deer fawns and field animals.

Hogs cause damage to grass lands by rooting, wallowing & trampling

Wallowing

Rooting

Trampling

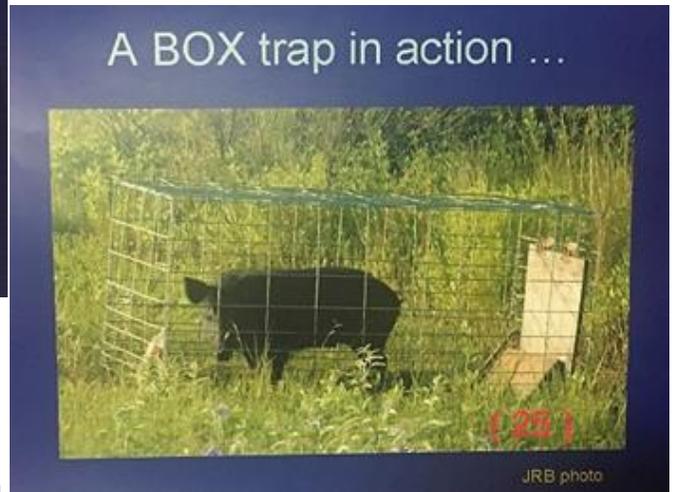


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Hogs Gone Wild Continued



Groups of pigs of various ages and parents that travel and feed together are called sounders. A sounder usually contains two older sows and young of various ages. Males are usually with females only during breeding. Sounders are generally a mix of various male-female pairings. Younger pigs vary in color from white to black and spotted to banded.



These animals have four continuously-growing and self-sharpening tusks (two each on the top and the bottom). They have very poor eyesight, no sweat glands, and very keen senses of hearing and smell. Populations in Texas are estimated at 8-10 million with more than half living and breeding on the Coastal Prairies. The State of Texas considers these invasive animals predators, and there is no closed hunting season on hogs. They are effectively “harvested” by any method—most often hunting and trapping. As of September 1, 2019, a hunting license is not required to harvest hogs (but landowner approval is required).

Our two major National Wildlife Refuges (Brazoria and San Bernard) have many animals for your “social distancing” viewing pleasure! Go out and see/photograph alligators, various ducks and birds, whitetail deer, bobcats, and of course, feral hogs!



Photos by John Boettiger.

A Concrete Accomplishment By Oron Atkins

The final part of the Bobcat Woods Trail USFWS/FOBWR project at San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge was concrete work that had been on hold for approximately two years as no contractor was willing to quote on the work or do the work for the budgeted amount. The recent fall in price of concrete and willingness of one contractor to do even more work than was originally planned meant that work could proceed.

Below are notes and photos provided by Oron Atkins, FOBWR project manager of the trail project.

Trail Update 4-14-20—350 feet of form boards were set today with the dirt bed finished and compacted. All of the grass has been scraped for remaining sections of sidewalk to be installed. We received four more loads of fill dirt today for the levee corner area near the Wolfweed observation platform. A total of about 40 loads of dirt will be needed in this area. The Galvan work crew size increased today from seven to eight.

On a very bright note, the refuge is seeing a lot of visitors throughout the day, many of them youngsters.



Trail Update 4-16-20—Black poly, expansion joints, and construction joints were installed for over 375 feet of prepared form bed. Construction and expansion joints alternate. The expansion joint material used is treated 1x4s. I found it interesting that the contractor installs a 3/16" thick shim across the top length of the 1x4s, which will be flush with the top of the concrete. After the concrete is set, the shim is removed, leaving a cavity, which will be filled with a flexible polymer that helps protect the wood from decay over time. This technique was not in our spec, but is included by the contractor at no additional cost.

Of the 375 feet prepared, 240 feet now have the completed rebar grid in place: 3/8" rebar on 12" centers.

Eight people worked in the crew today, and work is scheduled tomorrow to continue installing the rebar grid. The plan is still to make the first concrete pour on Monday, 4/20.

Almost forgot to mention my "friend" I spotted along the boardwalk—about five feet long and proud of his new skin (freshly shed).



Continued next page

A Concrete Accomplishment Continued

Trail Update 4-18-20—Got part of the workday in before a 1:30 P.M. rain shower messed up ground conditions. No new photos today because the morning was spent laying out and tying rebar in the form beds completed yesterday. Approximately 600 feet of rebar mat have been completed, and we are near the end of the form beds completed.

Weather permitting, tomorrow’s plan will be to construct forms using plywood for the curved sections of sidewalk. The plan is still to make the first concrete pour on Monday, 4/20. Forty more loads of dirt are also scheduled for delivery on Monday. Most of this material will be used to construct the sidewalk form bed elevating to the top of the levee at the Wolfweed observation platform.

Trail Update 4-21-20—Wrecked out and cleaned concrete residual from all form boards from yesterday’s pour.

Resumed installing form boards southward from the end of yesterday’s pour toward the pavilion. Also continued with ground prep on the sidewalk section at Wolfweed observation platform.

The plan forward is to complete the sidewalk form bed running from the previous north to south pour to the pavilion, then across the road from the pavilion running east to west up to the Wolfweed observation platform. Next concrete pour for these sections may be Friday, 4/24 or Saturday, 4/25.



Trail Update 4-24-20—The last two days have been spent preparing form beds for the next concrete pour today. Completed sidewalk form bed work, including rebar on north/south levee run to the pavilion, sidewalk east/west run located across the road (south from the pavilion) and ramping up to the Wolfweed observation platform. These two sections represent 600+ feet of sidewalk and will require 60-70 yards of concrete. The plan will be to pour all or the majority depending on how the trucks are running. As with the first pour, three additional concrete finishers will be brought in to assist.



The plan going forward is to begin form bed work for the final leg of sidewalk running east from the pavilion and tying into the south end of the boardwalk and the road crossing south of the pavilion. Weather permitting, we should be able to make this final pour by the latter part of next week.

Trail Update 4-25-20—About 65 yards poured, completing the north/south levee run to the pavilion then across the road running west to the Wolfweed observation platform.

A small crew will be out tomorrow for a half day to continue prep for the final pour (likely Thursday),

which will complete the loop from the pavilion and tie into the south end of the boardwalk.



Continued next page

A Concrete Accomplishment Continued

Trail Update 4-27-20—A five-man skeleton crew worked a half day Sunday wrecking forms from the sidewalk levee run poured on Saturday, and seven men worked today. They spent the morning wrecking the rest of the forms from the Saturday pour and the balance of the day erecting forms for the last leg of sidewalk running from the pavilion eastward and tying into the south end of boardwalk.

A one-foot wide by two-foot deep trench was dug, extending from the road, crossing slough culverts, then 150 feet westward towards the pavilion. Due to its proximity to the ditch, this trench, when filled with concrete, will serve as a formidable footing for the sidewalk on the north ditch side and protect from under wash over time.

Trail Update 4-28-20—Eight men worked today setting 252 feet of sidewalk forms from the northeast corner of the pavilion, then running eastward to the slough culverts.

Approximately 90% of the form beds for this run were also completed. Also, 150 feet of rebar stirrups were tied into the configuration then placed into the one-foot wide by two-foot deep trench on the north side of the sidewalk parallel to the ditch. Once in place, the rebar grid will be tied into the stirrup run.

The contractor also provided two galvanized shapes (6"x 8"x 6' long) that were placed under the forms in the low area to prevent rainwater ponding on the sidewalk's south side. The contractor was notified that the six to seven trucks needed for this last pour would probably not be available until Monday. This, coupled with the probability of a 4/29 rain delay, has postponed our pour schedule until next Monday, 5/4.



Trail Update 4-30-20—Eight men again worked on the sidewalk. The balance of forms were set, form beds completed, and black plastic installed from the pavilion to south end of boardwalk. Most of the expansion and construction joints were installed on this run. As on the west side of culverts, a one-foot by two-plus foot trench was dug to serve as a sidewalk footing on the east side of culverts running the short distance toward the south end of boardwalk. The road crossing the south pavilion side was excavated and forms set tying the levee

sidewalk run to the Wolfweed observation platform sidewalk run. Installation of the 3/8" rebar grid, beginning at pavilion running eastward toward the south end of boardwalk, was begun. This last run of sidewalk has been the most complex: North-side trench excavations for sidewalk footing were needed due their proximity to the ditch and slough. This, and a lost day due to rain, has pushed our last concrete pour to 5/4. Friday and possibly Saturday will be needed to complete form work and general clean-up of the area.

Continued next page

A Concrete Accomplishment Continued

Trail Update 5-1-20—We now have a Bobcat Trail “loop.” The final pours were made today, tying in the recently-completed sidewalk at the pavilion, then running east, crossing the slough, and tying into the south end of the boardwalk. Also, the six-inch thick concrete-road crossing that runs south of the pavilion was poured and ties into the sidewalk running west and up to the Wolfweed observation platform. All looks good.

Galvan’s Construction will be taking a break from our project tomorrow to prep another job but will be back at our location Wednesday to wreck out forms on today’s pours, to apply caulking atop the one foot by four-foot expansion joints, and to perform final clean-up.



Editor’s note...

Thank you, Oron Atkins, for your indefatigable dedication in bringing this project to fruition. Because of your hard work and that of your crew of volunteers, USFWS personnel, suppliers and contractors, we and thousands of others will have a more accessible and enjoyable opportunity to view nature’s abundance at San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge.

BRAZORIA COUNTY HISTORY: THE LITTLE CHURCH BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD

By Neal McLain

If you were a member of the Cradle of Texas Chapter Class of 2012 or any previous class, and you volunteered at Brazoria NWR, you may have seen this little abandoned church. Driving southeast on SH332, it stood at the intersection of CR226.

But it's gone now.

Originally built in 1931 as a church, it was subsequently converted into a private residence, and it then stood abandoned for several years. In 2012, the owner of the underlying land, The Dow Chemical Company, ordered the building razed. All that remains today are the trees and utility poles that stood nearby.

Shortly before the building was razed, Michael Bailey (curator, Brazoria County Historical Museum), Dan Kessner (a local historian), and I visited the building at the invitation of Dow.

A few historic artifacts were salvaged and are now in the collection of the Brazoria County Historical Museum. These items include the granite marker, formerly located on the northeast exterior wall, and one window and one door.



Satellite View

Image by Google.



Granite marker

Photo by Dan Kessner.

ERECTED TO THE GLORY OF GOD
BETHEL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
IN MEMORY OF
JAMES THOMAS STRATTON, SR.
BY HIS DAUGHTER
CARRIE S. BROCK
A.D. 1931



Northeast elevation

Photo by Neal McLain.



View from the south

Photo by Neal McLain.



Entrance



Southwest elevation

Photos by Neal McLain.

Continued next page

BRAZORIA COUNTY HISTORY: THE LITTLE CHURCH BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD

Continued



View from west



Southeast elevation with boarded-up window



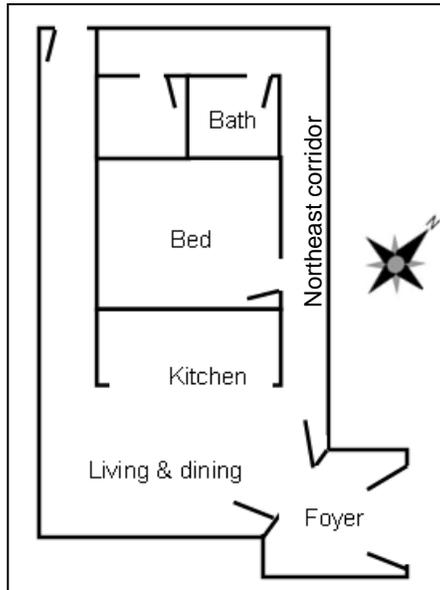
Southeast window interior view



Roof structure as seen from kitchen



Kitchen



Floor plan of interior walls added during conversion to residence



Northeast corridor showing interior wall of residence



Exterior luminaire



Gate detail



The site today

All photos on this page by Neal McLain.

OBITUARY: THOMAS ERVIN SMITH

March 31, 1931—April 5, 2020

Tom Smith's work in conservation spanned 62 years and resulted in the establishment and expansion of hundreds of wildlife refuges, conservation areas and conservation easements. During his 36-year career with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, he personally directed and successfully completed the purchase of more than one million acres of land in the Western United States as additions to the National Wildlife Refuge System. He received numerous awards including the Department of the Interior's Distinguished Service Award and the President's Public Service Award from The Nature Conservancy.



to work to form partnerships with state and local agencies, non-profit conservation organizations, corporations and landowners to conserve thousands of acres of land for wildlife throughout the western states.

Thomas was preceded in death by his wife of 52 years, Helen Smith, and son, Glen Smith. He is survived by his daughter Jean Smith Chavez (Matthew) of Austin, Texas, and granddaughter

Erica Gibson (Stephen Cohen) of Portland, Oregon.

Remembrances may be made to: Cradle of Texas Conservancy, Land Conservation Fund, 300 S. 15th Street, West Columbia, Texas 77486

Donations: Cradle of Texas Conservancy, Land Conservation Fund, 300 S. 15th Street, West Columbia, Texas 77486

Reprinted from dignitymemorial.com.

GREAT WILDLIFE PROTECTOR RIDES INTO THE SUNSET

By Brandt Mannchen. Reprinted from Sierra Club Lone Star Chapter, Houston Group, 22 April 2020

Recently, Tom Smith, a retired U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employee, died. The Houston Sierra Club gave Tom a Special Service Award in 2004 for his work acquiring land for the National Wildlife Refuge System. Almost any National Wildlife Refuge in the western U.S. and in Texas has Tom's imprint on it. He was that good, that dedicated, and that omnipresent.

I remember meeting Tom for the first time in 1982 as the State of Texas attempted to ... take Matagorda Island from the National Wildlife Refuge System for which it was meant to be given. Tom deftly waded through federal and state political wars and provided a steady hand so that ultimately, Matagorda Island retained its federal ownership and the State of Texas [could] set up Matagorda Island State Park on that federal public wildlife land. Truly, [Tom] was an exemplar of ... a "public servant" ...

Tom was also a mentor and friend to Mike Lange, who followed in Tom's footsteps and has acquired Columbia Bottomlands Ecosystem lands and other coastal Texas habitats for almost 30 years. Tom helped Mike with his work and indeed, almost to the

end, was trying to set-up new deals to protect wildlife lands. One of Tom's rules of life was patience. When Mike got restless about a land deal because it was not happening, Tom would say, "Don't worry Mike, we'll get it eventually!"

After Tom retired, he worked for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, which is set up to acquire lands to add to the National Wildlife Refuge System. Look at Anahuac, McFaddin, Texas Point, San Bernard, Brazoria, Aransas, and other National Wildlife Refuges in our area, and Tom's brilliant work is hidden but was crucial for their existence and expansion.

Our hearts and sympathies go to Tom's daughter, Jean, and the rest of his family and friends. Tom lived his life in selfless service to the public. He did not care about headlines about himself, only results [that] protected wildlife lands. Our hats are off to Tom and the way he protected and made our community and federal public lands better. If we know Tom, right now he is advising "the one upstairs" about which public lands should be protected from climate change. What a man!!!

© [Sierra Club 2020](#)

COT members past, present and future owe Tom Smith an incalculable debt of gratitude.

A NOTE OF NATURE LEVITY



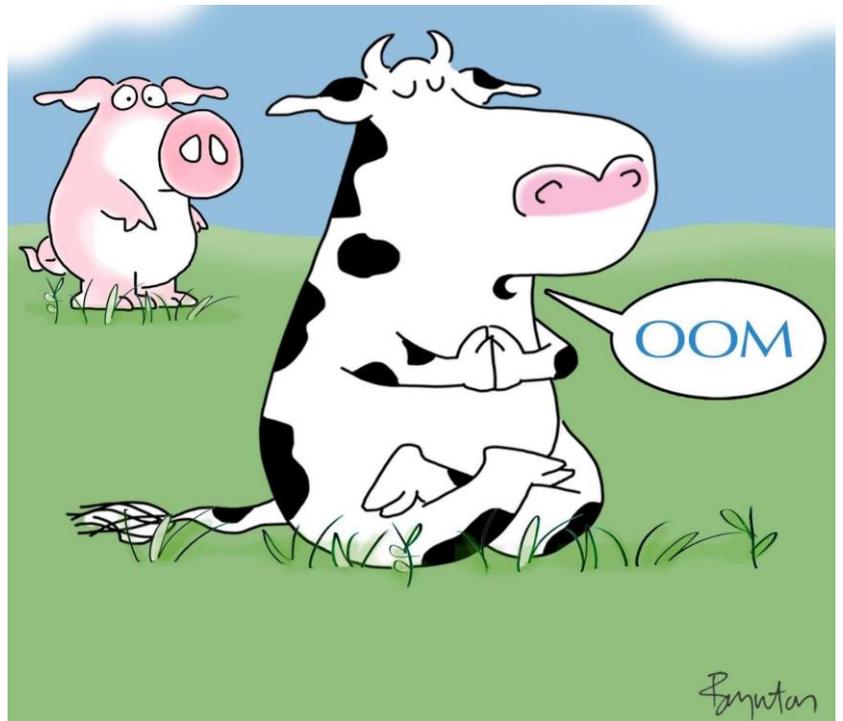
Sluggo thought he had found the bluebird of happiness, but it turned out to be the grackle of contempt. © David Zinn



Recently (not) seen at Quintana Neotropical Bird Sanctuary...



Bob loved the outdoors. He wound up with quite a collection.



© Sandra Boynton

Cradle of Texas Chapter Board

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Master Naturalist Email Lists

TMN-COT Chapter list

- Instructions http://tmn-cot.org/Email_Lists/index.html
- Send messages to TMN-COT@googlegroups.com
- Message Archive <http://tinyurl.com/TMN-COT-Mail>
- All messages are sent immediately.

State Master Naturalist list

- Instructions <http://txmn.org/staying-connected/sign-up-for-tmn-listserv/>
- Subscribe listserv@listserv.tamu.edu
- All messages are held for moderation by the TMN State Coordinator.

Chapter News is published monthly on Monday before the General Meeting by the Texas Master Naturalist Cradle of Texas Chapter. Submissions are welcome; submission deadline is 5:00 PM on Thursday before the General Meeting. Send submissions by email to *Chapter News* Editor at news@tmn-cot.org. Submissions may be edited for clarity and spacing.