



FEBRUARY 2021

Chapter News

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Harbinger of Spring

Every morning as I make coffee, I look out my kitchen window and check the feeders. I have been so surprised to see one of the harbingers of spring, the American Robin, under the feeders. They seemed to have shown up earlier than I remember, and in larger numbers. Normally, I find them in the front yard, looking for worms. I guess the worms are currently unavailable and the robins have been scavenging for insects under my feeders the entire month of January. Along with the robins on the ground, my feeders have been crowded with American Goldfinches since December. I have read both species are here in large numbers and a bit early because of scarcity of food in their northern ranges. For whatever reason, they lift my spirit with the thought of an early Gulf Coast spring, the promise of COVID vaccinations, and the hope we soon resume many activities we all enjoy.

First Virtual Advanced Training Day

Thank you Bonus AT Training Day Team for a well-organized and highly informative day. Thank you to the presenters for such well-prepared talks that were entertaining and instructive. Attendees learned much and were inspired to be more observant and consider implementing new ideas and knowledge into their own activities. Congratulations training team Bob Whitmarsh, Daveyon Edwards, Lisa Myers, Larry Peterson, Kristine Rivers and Rose Wagner for a job well done.

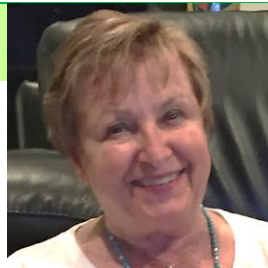
COVID-19 Guidelines

COVID restrictions are still in place, and guidelines have not changed since the last report. We will not have any indoor group activities, and outdoor activities require all volunteers and public participants to wear masks and social distance by at least 6 feet.

2021 Marks COT's 20th Anniversary

This year is the 20th anniversary of our chapter. A celebratory event is being planned under the leadership of Rose Wagner. We are hoping by the end of the year, we will be able to celebrate our anniversary in person. In 2001, 11 volunteers, including new advisors Rich Tillman with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, and Connie Stolte, Director of Sea Center Texas, were trained as the first COT Master Naturalists. Founding members were Susan Conaty, Justina Dent, Phil Huxford, Mary Helen Israel, Denis James, Carol Jones, Kirby Rapstein, Lynne Ray, Connie Stolte, Sherry Summers, and Rich Tillman. In the ensuing years, these 11 volunteers have contributed 31,645 volunteer hours and have 1,792 hours of advanced training. I know we all look forward to commemorating 20 years developing a corps of dedicated volunteers who help to "nurture nature" wherever they volunteer. *Continued on page 4*

Mickey Dufilho is the president of the Cradle of Texas Chapter. She can be reached at dufilho@tmn.org.



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<https://facebook.com/TMN.COT>

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The Texas Master Naturalist program is coordinated by Texas A&M AgriLIFE Ext. Svce. and Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept. TMN 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. at BNWR.

REMINDER

Save the Dates for FOBWR Refuge Saturdays:

3/13 BNWR Discovery Center	4/10 Dow Woods
3/27 Bobcat Woods Trail	4/24 Hudson Woods Trail
4/3: Fundraiser lunch, McLean Pk	5/8 Cannan Bend Recreation Area

Texas Master Naturalist Program
Cradle of Texas Chapter
Chapter News – February 2021

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

Wednesday, February 10, 2021, 9 AM

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

9:00 AM – 9:10 AM	Welcome and Meeting Participation Notes
9:10 AM – 9:30 AM	Nature Notes Speaker: Kathy Pittman Topic: "Ringtails"
9:30 AM – 10:15 AM	Advanced Training Speaker: Jennifer Wilson, USFWS Topic: "Managing Black Rails and Their Environment" <i>[Hours for Advanced Training (AT) TBD at close of meeting]</i>
10:15 AM – 11:00 AM	General Membership Meeting <i>[Hours for Volunteer Time (VT) TBD at close of meeting]</i>



Jennifer Wilson

Jennifer Wilson, USFWS, has worked as a refuge biologist at the Texas Mid-coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex since 1999. Her responsibilities include habitat-management recommendations, habitat restoration, research, and surveys or monitoring.

She has been involved with multiple universities in research with black rails and yellow rails and assisted with writing the *Eastern Black Rail Species Status Assessment*, in preparing the 4(d) Rule (see below), and has assisted with some aspects of recovery planning.

Eastern black rail—final 4(d) rule

The interim 4(d) rule generally applies the prohibitions of Code of Federal Regulations to ensure that private landowners, state agencies and others are not unduly burdened by regulations that do not further the conservation of a species. Such a rule is often used to clarify or simplify what forms of "take" are prohibited for a threatened species. See tinyurl.com/mukdgu8x

NOTES:

- Stay tuned for information and instructions via email in order to “attend” the February virtual General Meeting.
- Missing meetings because of trouble logging in? We miss you too! Contact John O’Connell at john.oconnell@ag.tamu.edu.

MEMBERSHIP DATA REPORT by Dave Brandes, Data Manager

Congratulations on achieving the following milestone as of January 31, 2020:

1000 VT Hours Milestone
Bob Whitmarsh

Impact Data YTD—31 January 2021

124 Adults 12 Youth 136 Total

Hours Totals YTD—31 January 2021

1,073 Hours VT 276 Hours AT

Totals for 2020 will be finalized 45 days after 31 December 2020.

A NOTE FROM OUR LIBRARIAN, DEB NANCE

I wish I were more a scientist than simply a person who loves the natural world, but one of the things I enjoy reading every week is a nature news roundup by my blogging friend, Dorothy Borders: [The Nature of Things](#).

She calls her news roundup [This Week in Birds](#), and since the January 29 blog is #436, it appears that she has been doing this for quite some time.

From the January 29 blog, I learned about [the latest research on how to plant milkweed to help monarch butterflies; a new study that reaffirms ice loss is on pace to drive worst-case sea-level change](#); and recent developments about endangered and threatened animals.

She is also not a scientist, but she shares information about what is going on in the natural world in ways that are factual but also easy for the layperson to understand.



The Nature of Things

Books, gardens, birds, the environment, politics, or whatever happens to be grabbing my attention today.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Continued from Page 1

A Rare Sighting

This snowy owl (right) visited New York City's Central Park on January 27. The last time a snowy owl visited NYC was in 1890. This predator normally makes its home in the Artic tundra, so this sighting is "a mega-rarity" for Central Park. Why was she there? No one really knows. Maybe she was hungry for a New York fold-over pizza. Sounds good to me.

Interesting Factoid

A bird's eye takes up about 50 percent of its head; our eyes take up about 5 percent of our head. To be comparable to a bird's eyes, our eyes would have to be the size of baseballs.



Photo by Maryté Mercado

RICHWOOD PARK RENAMED TO HONOR JANET JACKSON-ELLIS AND GARRY ELLIS

Excerpt from *The Facts*; 31Dec2020 & 7Jan2021 by Addison Howell



Photo by *The Facts*



Photo by Ann McLain

RICHWOOD — After more than 50 years of dedication to the city, Garry and Janet Ellis were honored with a park named for them. Ellis Park, formerly Richwood Municipal Park, was introduced in a ribbon-cutting ceremony on December 30, 2020.

"It is very humbling that they chose us because we all worked on this," Janet Ellis said. "It took a village. It was quite an honor."

Janet is involved with Keep Richwood Beautiful and Daughters of the American Revolution, among other organizations, and Garry is a Korean War Veteran and a member of the National Honor Guard. Both are members of the Cradle of Texas Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists.

"The Ellises have volunteered with Keep Richwood Beautiful for at least 14 years; they go to almost every event," said Kimberly Mayer, Keep Richwood Beautiful executive director. "Garry is a member of the American Legion, Janet volunteers with numerous organizations and is very active in her church." Boykin has known the couple personally for several years.

"I knew Garry for many years while I was with the fire department and Janet taught at Gladys Polk for many years and had most of my kids as students," he said. "People do not realize how important volunteering is in our cities. Organizations like volunteer fire departments, beautification efforts, city council, they build pride in the city and they are the lifeblood."

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

By Kathy Pittman

This month our member spotlight is on **Angela Griffin**, one of our new members from the 2020 Intern Class.

Angela and her husband live near Pearland in an unincorporated area of Brazoria County. Her birthday is February 8, and she is retired with a background in market research, human resources, and education. A mother of three grown children, Angela was a Troop leader with both the Girl Scouts and the Boy Scouts and supported her son in earning the Eagle Scout Rank.

Angela wanted to become a Texas Master Naturalist because “I was born a lover of all things nature, and I love to educate youth and adults in various biology-related topics. I always want to learn as much as I can and be outdoors! I like meeting and making friends that enjoy nature, too.”

Angela enjoyed the intern class sessions and was an enthusiastic student. Since completing training, she finds that she is more attentive to detail when it comes to all things “Naturalist” in her life. She says, “I just want to learn as much as I can

and be involved as much as I can in various projects and volunteer opportunities and use what I’ve learned to teach others and make our spaces more environmentally friendly.”

Angela has several hobbies and interests outside of the TMN program. She is Vice President of Programming for the NASA-Brazoria ZTA Alumnae Group and recently signed up for the Pearland Volunteer Emergency Response Team (VERT), as she is Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) trained. Angela is also CPR and First Aid trained. In addition, she also enjoys cooking and trying new recipes, crafting, and stays active by walking, participating in Body Pump classes, and bicycling. Angela tried axe throwing this past year and she absolutely loved it!

Angela’s advice for someone considering becoming a Master Naturalist is: “Just do it! Jump in and start volunteering right away. Don’t be afraid to answer questions (in class) incorrectly because we learn from our mistakes. Have fun and never stop learning!”



Left: Tiny juvenile frog; Above: Broadbanded Water Snake, Frankie Carter Randolph Park. Photos by Angela Griffin.



#TMNTuesdays

FEBRUARY 2021

TEXAS MASTER NATURALISTS



Photo by: Maureen Nolin-Wilde, Galveston Bay Area Chapter



Photo by: Linda Swickheimer, Mid-Coast Chapter



Photo by: Allison Copony, Heartwood Chapter

What's New This Month?

February is already here! A new month means a new #TMNTuesday speaker session, and we can't wait for Dr. Doug Tallamy to share his stories and his inspiration with you, especially if this is your first time hearing him speak. Remember that you can view recordings of each session at txmn.tamu.edu/tmntuesdays if you ever can't make it!

Now that spring is almost here, it's time to start planning for your outdoor space and how you can make a difference for the betterment of native species, healthier ecosystems, and even wildlife corridors--all in your very own backyard! There's no better teacher to get you started than Dr. Doug Tallamy, who's 2020 New York Times Best Seller, 'Nature's Best Hope,' inspires just that.

February 9, 12pm

<https://tinyurl.com/TMNTuesdayRegister>

"Being with people who care about nature and who want to educate the future generations that will take our places is the most important thing."

ZACH CHAPMAN, CROSS TIMBERS CHAPTER



Featured Speaker: Dr. Doug Tallamy

Doug Tallamy is a professor in the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware, where he has authored 103 research publications and has taught insect related courses for 40 years. Chief among his research goals is to better understand the many ways insects interact with plants and how such interactions determine the diversity of animal communities. Doug has received many awards for his work, and his new book 'Nature's Best Hope' is a New York Times Best Seller. <http://www.bringingnaturehome.net/>

TXMN.TAMU.EDU

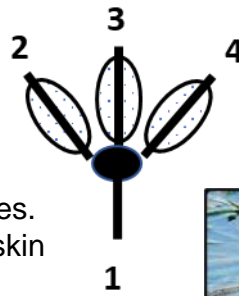
MEET THE FEET by Peggy Romfh

Bird feet-design variations exist to support walking, climbing, grabbing, or swimming functions of each bird. Almost all aquatic birds that swim have webbed feet.

There is an alternative form of paddle power that occurs in coots, grebes, and some phalaropes. Instead of a webbed foot, they all have lobes of skin on either side of toe digits 2-4.

We first observed lobed toes in the American coots found along the Texas Coast. Because we usually just observed them in the water, we were quite amazed when we saw the wide lobes on the toes. The lobes aid in swimming or balancing in the mud.

Recent studies with grebes have shown that the lobes on the toes function much like the hydrofoil blades of a propeller. If you have ever watched a grebe dive under water but surface a short time later much farther in a pond than you thought it possible to swim so quickly, you realize how efficient lobed feet can be for swimming. Both eared grebes, which winter in Brazoria County, and pied-billed grebes have lobed feet.



Lobed foot structure



American Coot



Above: Eared grebe with toes splayed during a dive and eared grebe swimming on the surface of the water.



Although some species of phalaropes that winter at sea have lobed toes, the Wilson's phalarope, commonly seen in Brazoria County, is more terrestrial and has only small flanges on its toes.

Photos by P&P Romfh

FOBWR's DOW WOODS BOARDWALK TRAIL REPAIR

By Oron Atkins, Project Manager

12 January 2021—Two boardwalk sections on the north concrete loop are in need of repair. This morning, David Heinicke, Tom Taroni, Chip Sweet, George Valadez and I met at the trail head at 9 A.M. To work on the longer, 75-foot section. By 11:30 A.M., we had removed all edge-rail boards, deck boards and stringers. A good number of the stringers were rotted along with several ground posts. The plan is to replace the rotted ground posts, all the stringers, and reuse existing, composite deck boards. Also planning to install stringer saddle supports where we can and additional ground posts on one end of the boardwalk for improved structural support. A materials list has been prepared and submitted to the Mid-coast Refuge office for procurement. If materials are available, we will resume work on this section on 1/14.



14 January 2021—David Heinicke, Tom Taroni, Chip Sweet, George Valadez and I got off to a chilly 7:30 A.M. start. Curtis brought the requested construction materials, UTV and generator. Our first task was to haul construction materials to the worksite, which took three trips with the UTV and a very tight squeeze in several places along the concrete sidewalk.

By end of workday, we installed four new ground posts on the east end of the substructure, which for some reason previously had none. We also replaced between eight and ten ground posts that were either rotted or too short to adequately secure the stringers. To extract the old posts, we installed a lag bolt into the post, then used a hi-lift jack to jack it out of the ground (reference pic with Chip grunting). Worked great. Completed installation of both outside stringers that were secured with screws, then lag bolts. Next, we installed all the 2x6 stringer saddles beneath the outside stringers. Previous construction method did not incorporate stringer saddles.

All photos by Oron Atkins.

Continued next page

FOBWR's DOW WOODS BOARDWALK TRAIL REPAIR Continued

15 January 2021—David Heinicke, Tom Taroni, Chip Sweet, George Valadez and I had another chilly, 7:30 AM start. We installed the two, remaining, intermediate stringer runs and miscellaneous blocking to complete the sub-structure. All the composite deck boards removed were reinstalled in their same relative position. This section is now complete except for the 2x4 composite edge, but they are in bad shape and breaking in places where previous screws were installed. We will use the surplus, 2x4 composite board from the Bobcat Woods boardwalk. This boardwalk section is in good shape for foot traffic this weekend.



18 January 2021—David Heinicke, George Valadez, Chip Sweet, Tom Taroni (below, from left) and I continued work today. The composite edge boards were installed on the 75-foot section, which is now complete. We removed the edge boards and decking from the shorter, 60-foot section and determined materials needed for repair. With materials on hand, we installed several ground posts and outside stringers. As with the first section, all stringers are to be replaced along with several ground posts. We also plan to change the configuration a bit in the center of the run so the composite decking will make a better transition. Again, as with the first section, we will also install stringer saddles and blocking where needed to stiffen the substructure.



Continued next page

FOBWR's DOW WOODS BOARDWALK TRAIL REPAIR Continued



19 January 2021—(Photo left) With materials arriving at 10:15 A.M., Tom Taroni, George Valadez and I started later this morning. We replaced a few more ground posts and installed most of the stringers from each end up to the midpoint transition.



20 January 2021—Chip Sweet, George Valadez (pictured left), and I completed the substructure to include the modified transition and all decking on the second boardwalk on the concrete loop.



21 January 2021—Tom Taroni, Oron Atkins, Chip Sweet, and George Valadez (pictured below from left), installed the edge boards, completing the second boardwalk on the Dow Woods Trail. We cleaned up the work area, hauled away materials for disposal, and stacked useable materials at the restroom. We toured the Bayou Loop, checking the boardwalk foot bridges and observation platform, and all need degree of repair. We will probably get started on them next week.



Continued next page

FOBWR's DOW WOODS BOARDWALK TRAIL REPAIR Continued

22 January 2021—Tom Taroni and I began repair work on the Bayou Loop boardwalks today. All three-foot bridges and the observation ramp/platform need some degree of repair. We started with the observation ramp/platform. We removed the edge rail boards and decking to assess needed repairs. Several of the ground posts need to be replaced due to top rot, but the biggest issue found was that the perimeter stringers on the platform were not initially tied into each other at the corners, so over time the middle of the platform sank into the ground. None of the ramp or platform stringers showed significant signs of rot, but most will need to be replaced due to the severe “bowing” from lack of support. The plan is to replace existing ground posts where needed and install at least four additional ground posts for support. New stringers plus stringer saddles will be installed such that all joints are tied into each other. Materials need to be ordered and delivered before more progress can be made.

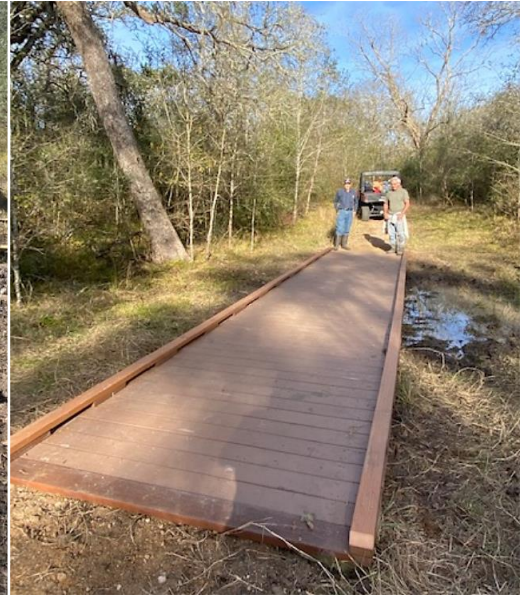


26 January 2021—Chip Sweet, George Valadez, Tom Taroni and I completed work on the Bayou Loop observation platform today. Curtis delivered the materials requested at 7:30 AM. We replaced all but a few of the original ground posts on both platform and ramp and installed several additional ground posts where we felt increased support was needed. We also added stringer saddles to the platform stringers and platform end of the ramp. Then, we installed the original composite decking we had removed. Lastly, we reinstalled the original edge boards. Cleaned up the work area and called it a day.



Continued next page

FOBWR's DOW WOODS BOARDWALK TRAIL REPAIR Continued



27 January 2021—David Heinicke, Chip Sweet, George Valadez, Tom Taroni and I started and completed all work on the 36-foot walk bridge just north of the observation platform. We removed the composite edge boards and decking and found that most of the substructure had significant rot so replaced all but a few ground posts. Also, new stringers were installed, and stringer saddles were installed in two areas at the center of the walk bridge. Original composite decking was reinstalled, and new composite edge rail boards were installed. Another long day...



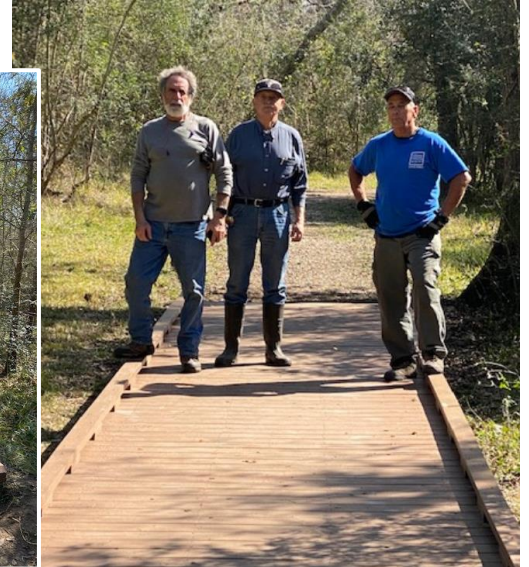
28 January 2021—David Heinicke, Chip Sweet, George Valadez, Tom Taroni and I started addressing the next Bayou Loop Bridge—~45 feet long. We removed all composite edge rail and decking to inspect the substructure, of which the first six feet of the east end had completely deteriorated. We ended up replacing over half of the ground posts and all the stringers. We also installed stringer saddles across most of the ground posts and added stringer blocking on the ends where saddles were not installed.

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FOBWR's DOW WOODS BOARDWALK TRAIL REPAIR Continued



29 January 2021—David Heinicke, Chip Sweet, Tom Taroni and I continued work on the Bayou Loop bridge. We installed the composite decking, reusing what we had removed. We also installed the composite edge rails, so the bridge is now fully functional. However, we ran short of stainless-steel deck screws, so each deck board is currently secured with four screws instead of eight. Next up is finishing the screws and then dismantling the last of the bridges. (Note: Brief lunch breaks are allowed...)



30 January 2021—(Left) Tom Taroni and I finished up the deck board screws from yesterday. Next, we began work on the last of the six, composite-deck structures on the combined loops. This 60-foot bridge is the longest, and as with the others, it is bowed and has undulations along its length, indicating stringer-integrity loss. We removed the outside composite edge rails and half of the deck-board screws.

1 February 2021—(Right) David Heinicke, Chip Sweet, Tom Taroni and I removed all composite deck boards from the 60-foot bridge and assessed the substructure. All of the old stringers were removed and replaced. A dozen ground posts were replaced, and stringer saddles were added for additional support.



FOBWR's DOW WOODS BOARDWALK TRAIL REPAIR Continued



2 February 2021—Chip Sweet and Tom Taroni (pictured left) and I continued work on the 60-foot bridge. We installed all the lag bolting on the substructure and began installing the composite decking.



3 February 2021—Today, David Heiniche, Dick Schaffhausen, Tom Taroni and I completed the 6th and last mini project on the Dow Woods trail loops (see photo right). We installed the remaining composite deck boards and edge rail on the last walk bridge. The area was cleaned up and all scrap wood hauled to an adjacent parking area for pick up. Surplus, new material was also stacked in another area for pick up. Many thanks to everyone involved in this effort.

PHOTOGENIC CRITTERS

By John Boettiger

Images taken via John Boettiger's game cameras located about 250 miles west / northwest of Lake Jackson.



This Blue Runner, about 12-feet long, finishes off a Diamondback Rattlesnake about 5-1/2 feet long. Photo taken in Duval County, 2018.

A DAY OF BIRDING AT QUINTANA, BRYAN AND SURFSIDE BEACHES By Kathy Pittman



All images taken on January 16, 2021.



Cradle of Texas Chapter Board

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- Instructions <https://txmn.org/tmncot/organization/email-lists/>
- 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.