



Member News

December 2018

Winter Delights



Carolina Chickadee

Do you need to take a break from all the holiday shopping, cooking, wrapping, partying, and all else the season brings? Fly away from all the stress and join the birds! There are several ways you can do this with the Mid-Coast Texas Master Naturalists.

Next week the Christmas Bird Counts begin. If you participate, you will enjoy peace, quiet, comradery and adventure. We have several experts in our chapter, including Bob Friedrichs, Brent Ortego, Paul Swacina, and Claudia Dorn who are organizing and compiling data from

the counts. It's a great chance to gain knowledge from your expert peers.

If you don't have time now to do a bird count, you can go on the monthly bird surveys the last Friday of the month at Aransas Wildlife Preserve. Or, you can go on the weekly ones at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. See our MCTMN Website Calendar for more details.

My husband, Joe, and I experienced a real treat this quarter. Phil Wildfang arranged a tour of the Rockport/Fulton Bird Rescue Center. We are planning a project there to build paths between the outdoor rehabilitation keeps with the help of Phil, Bill Burge, and others.

We were impressed both with the center and Phil, who we got to know at the Aquarium at Rockport Harbor. However, we did not realize how much he has contributed to nature

behind the scenes. Read more about him in this newsletter.

Finally, now is the time to recruit for our 2019 class. Most members come from word of mouth from current Mid-Coast Texas Master Naturalists or from our website. Help us out by spreading the word!

Editor, Pat Garland

Happy Holidays to you and yours.



Phil Wildfang, Working for Conservation

Unless you have volunteered for the Aquarium at Rockport Harbor or have been involved with Wings Rescue Center (WRC), you may not have had the pleasure of meeting one of our long-standing members, Phil Wildfang (photo below).



In a 30-year career, Phil was the director for about 50 healthcare centers in Oklahoma providing services to special needs children. One day Phil's wife, Jean, was offered a position in Fairbanks, Alaska as a Captain in the Air Force medical corps serving as a nurse practitioner. After discussing the move with their grown children, Phil and Jean headed to their new adventure in Fairbanks.

Phil volunteered on the board of the Northern Alaska Environmental Center and chaired a local Sierra Club Group, which were his first real experiences in nature and conservation, other than his natural love of the outdoors. The Wildfangs loved living in Alaska and extended their stay several times. Finally, after 12 years in Alaska, they returned to the lower 48 because of the failing

health of Phil's father and Jean's mother.

Phil spent a lot of time along the Texas Gulf Coast and always thought Rockport would be a good place to retire. After tending to family issues in Oklahoma, the Wildfangs decided to retire and make Rockport their permanent home.

Phil learned about the Mid-Coast Texas Master Naturalists from Gay Hejtmancik, who worked at the Aquarium at Rockport Harbor. Phil joined the Chapter in 2012 and loved the training program.

When visiting Matagorda Island during the training, Phil was astounded by the amount of plastic on the beaches. He further learned the dangers discarded plastic can present to the marine and bird population. He decided to take this as a cause and along with other concerned citizens of Rockport developed a PowerPoint presentation to raise public awareness on the problems plastics cause in the marine environment.

While working at the Aquarium, Phil became interested in the tanks and equipment and taking care of the water and health of the marine life there. Soon, he became indispensable to the Aquarium and eventually saved many of the fish and marine life when the Hurricane Harvey hit.

About two years ago, Phil was approached by Kay Adams to help start a bird rescue center in Rockport to serve Aransas County, which was no longer served by the Amos Rehabilitation Keep (ARK) in Port Aransas. She asked Phil to serve on the Board of Rockport/Fulton Wings Rescue Center (WRC). Phil agreed and worked with Kay and the Board to move a donated building to the 1-

acre lot WRC purchased. The building and the land were renovated and cleared to include a bird hospital, incubator, cages for injured birds, and outside keeps for rehabilitating birds.

The ARK used to rescue about 100 birds from this area. In the first year the WRC rehabilitated 300 birds, and this year rescues have already exceeded 450. Kay has many plans for expansion and improvement of the center (shown below).



Kay and her team have had to refer raptors to ARK or other facilities. Recently, they hatched barn owls from some eggs given to Kay by firemen who found them after fighting an oil refinery fire in Annville. Although five eggs were in the nest, only two hatched. Miraculously, one survived and volunteer Verba Hibbard became its temporary mama until it had to be sent to ARK, because Wings does not yet have a raptor permit. Almost \$5,000 was raised from donors recently to build a raptor enclosure.

Phil continues to work with Wings Rescue. He is also working to bring the Aquarium at Rockport Harbor back, which is greatly missed by visitors and residents alike. Although he no longer records all his hours, he says, "I love being a Texas Master Naturalist and will continue to be a dues-paying member as long as they will have me." We think Phil Wildfang is a keeper!



Christmas Bird Counts

Up through the 19th century, many North Americans participated in the tradition of Christmas "side hunts", in which they competed at how many birds they could kill, regardless of whether they had any use for the carcasses and of whether the birds were beneficial, beautiful, or rare. In December 1900, the U.S. ornithologist Frank Chapman, founder of Bird-Lore (which became Audubon magazine), proposed counting birds on Christmas instead of killing them.

On Christmas Day of that year, 27 observers took part in the first count in 25 places in the United States and Canada, the count totaling 18,500 individual birds belonging to 90 species. Since then the counts have been held every winter, usually with increasing numbers of observers.

The greatest number of bird species ever reported by any U.S. location in a single count is 250, observed on December 19, 2005 in the Matagorda County-Mad Island Marsh count circle around Matagorda and Palacios, Texas. More recently in the 2017 count, Matagorda County reported 220 species, ranking it number one for the 11th year. in a row and 25th time overall.

Organized by the National Audubon Society, the annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) takes a snapshot of bird populations in locations across the Western Hemisphere, creating a database that Audubon shares with federal, state and private authorities. This count influences allocation of conservation dollars, land management decisions, and wildlife policy.

Counts have identified a decline in many common birds, including the northern bobwhite. The counts have also helped document the recovery of bald eagles and increases in waterfowl populations thanks to conservation efforts.



The CBC events welcome birders of all skill levels. Organizers pair novices with experienced birders, giving them the opportunity to pass on their knowledge. Participants discover new areas and often see rare and unusual birds.

Unpredictable weather, other wildlife, remote locations, and wild vegetation make each count an adventure. Brent Ortego, Mid-Coast Texas Master Naturalist, commented in an article for Texas Parks and Wildlife Magazine, "To me, a lot of the adventure is being able to access property that's not available otherwise." Brent has been a longtime compiler for the Matagorda count and is retired from TPWD.

Bob Friedrichs, another Mid-Coast member and experienced birder compiles the Jackson-County and Victoria CBC's. He explained that the bird counts can include surveying from a boat. Bad weather like rain, fog, or high winds and waves can present challenging and sometimes unsafe birding conditions. He stated, "We need to use good judgement before launching the boat."

When asked why the Matagorda Island Bird count has been so successful, Bob speculated that there are three factors: 1) Diversity of habitat with the Colorado River, beach areas, gulf, agriculture, riparian areas, grazing areas, and fish farms, 2) Access to private lands like the nuclear plant and water cooling ponds, and 3) more than 100 people take part in that CBC from the surrounding areas.

YOU CAN PARTICIPATE TOO!

- Aransas NWR, December 19, Whooping Cranes, Green-tailed Towhees, Harris's Sparrows, Burrowing Owls, Mountain Plovers, Rough-legged Hawks. Contact Paul Swacina at pswacina.pjlaw@gmail.com
- Guadalupe River Delta-McFaddin Family Ranches, December 20, Unique fun count that provides access to property not available otherwise. Contact Brent Ortego at brentortego@hotmail.com
- Jackson-Calhoun Counties, December 27, The circle includes bay and estuarine habitat along rivers and creeks, Point Comfort, Formosa Plastics, ALCOA, and the Tejano Wetland near La Ward. Contact Bob Friedrichs at bird.fried@gmail.com
- Powderhorn, December 18, Includes the Wildlife Management Area, Port O'Connor, Indianola, Matagorda Island, Magic Ridge, Matagorda Bay, Powderhorn Lake and Espiritu Santo Bay. Contact Daniel Walker at Daniel.walker@tpwd.texas.gov
- Rockport, TX, December 28, Live Oak Peninsula, Port Bay, SH188, Bayside, Mission Bay and most of Copano Bay. Contact Claudia Dorn at catbirddorn@gmail.com
- Victoria, TX, December 22, Our 41st Anniversary! Riverside Park, Saxet Lakes, multiple private ranches and Victoria proper. Contact Bob Friedrichs at bird.fried@gmail.com
- Welder Wildlife Refuge, December 17, At the Wildlife Foundation near Sinton. Green Kingfishers, Le Conte's Sparrows, American Bittern, White-tipped Dove. Plain Chachalaca.

Now Recruiting for Class of 2019

Mid-Coast Texas Master Naturalists are now recruiting for the Class of 2019. The most important source for new members is word of mouth. You can help us by reaching out to friends and acquaintances about the class.



Left- Barrier Island,
Casting the net

Below-Mid-Coast
Ecology, On the
trail



We have 13 applications for the class and are in the process of getting training fees in order to confirm each attendee. Please remind your recruits that space in the class is confirmed upon receipt of the class fee, which is required by January 10, 2019.



Alligator at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge

Bob Cunningham, Bill Burge, and Rob Snider have been working very hard on the schedule. They have incorporated changes, based on previous trainee input.

Mid-Coast Chapter – Texas Master Naturalists

2019 Initial Training Schedule

- **Orientation**—Sat February 02, 2019; 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Bauer Exhibit Building, Calhoun County Fairgrounds, Port Lavaca
- **Mid-Coast of Texas Ecology**—Sat February 09, 2019; 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.
Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, Austwell
- **Archaeology-Early People / Herpetology**—Sat February 16, 2019; 9:00 am. to 3:30 p.m.
Museum of the Coastal Bend, Victoria
- **Upland Ecology**—Sat March 9, 2019; 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Welder Wildlife Foundation, near Sinton, San Patricio County
- **Coastal Prairie and Wetland Ecology**—Sat March 16, 2019; 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Mad Island Marsh Preserve, Collegeport, Matagorda County
- **Bay Ecology**—Sat March 30, 2019; 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Port O'Connor library multi-purpose room and Boggy Nature Park
- **Interpreting Nature / Research Vessel**—Sat April 13, 2019; 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Goose Island SP, Rockport / R/V Archimedes at Texas State Aquarium, Corpus Christi
- **Barrier Island Ecology**—Sat May 4, 2019; 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Mustang Island SP & Padre Island National Seashore
- **Riverine & Riparian Ecology**—Sat May 11, 2019; 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
Fennessey Ranch, near Bayside, Refugio County
- **Native Plants / Entomology / Graduation**—Sat June 1, 2019; 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Coletto Creek Reservoir & Park, between Victoria & Goliad

Classes are set to begin on Saturday, February 2 with a member potluck and end on June 1 with a celebratory potluck for the new graduates. All members are invited to come, bring a dish and meet our new trainees.

Right- Welder Class under the trees

