

Mid-Coast Chapter



May 2023

Save the Dates

**Board of Directors Meeting
July 8, 10 AM**

*All members are welcome to attend.
Bauer Exhibit Building, 305 Henry
Barber Way, Port Lavaca, TX
77979*

**Chapter Meeting
August 12, 10 AM**

*Watch for details on the Mid-Coast
Chapter Website Calendar*

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Chapter Members Help Share Bay with Thousands of Students

By Brigid Berger



To keep the Texas Floating Classroom's mission afloat when Covid shut down school outings and "dry-docked" trips on the boat, Captain Whitney Curry developed the Traveling Bay program. If the students couldn't come to the bay, she'd bring the bay to the students. She and her husband, Captain Bryan Curry, built a boat-shaped, wheeled touch-tank system, and developed relationships with schools throughout the mid-coast and up the watersheds. By the end of the 2021-22 school year, the Traveling Bay was visiting 40 schools and reaching over

6,000 students. And by then, student field trips had resumed and the *RV Archimedes* hosted 15 schools making 60 trips.

It was clear that not only could Captain Whitney use assistance, but this was the type of service that screamed "Texas Master Naturalist"! The call was put out for help specifically in the Victoria area since the Traveling Bay was making trips to nearly all the schools in that district and surrounding districts. The call was answered by six enthusiastic members, many of whom are retired teachers: Rebecca Bootzin, Beth Hudson, Janet McCrea, Susie Starnes, Linda Swickheimer, and Janie von Dohlen.

To learn the job, Captain Whitney brought the Traveling Bay to the Victoria Library on February 20 for a training day. The volunteers learned how to unload, transport, and reload the touch tanks, bay animals, and equipment to and from the van, and how to set up & take down the touch tanks and items for the touch table. As Captain Whitney went through her lessons and talking points, the volunteers began to learn not only about the bay animals but the challenges they face and the actions that the students would be called on to take to help protect the animals and their habitat.



The primary learning was, “people will protect what they love” so the mission of each lesson is to help the students fall in love with at least one of the animals. This is done by showing students how to touch and hold the animals safely, for both the animal and the student. In many cases, this means coaching them to overcome their fear. Holding a blue crab with large pinchers is no small feat. But once a student does this, they are not only in love, but they also leave with a sense of pride and accomplishment which makes for an experience they will remember for a lifetime.

The partnership between the Texas Floating Classroom and our Mid-Coast Chapter has been extremely effective. In this past spring semester with our chapter members help, the Traveling Bay reached over 6,000 students and 300 adults. Our Master Naturalists not only gave of their time and effort but also admit that they received. Each one has expressed their enjoyment and marvel at this incredible program and opportunity. “I admit, I had as much fun as the students with the Floating Classroom interaction,” wrote Linda Swickheimer in an email to me.

The opportunity to help will continue through the summer not only as the Traveling Bay visits summer camps but also with the additional opportunity to help on the boat, the RV Archimedes, taking trips out of Corpus Christi. Captain Whitney and I are extremely pleased and grateful for the outstanding service provided by my fellow chapter members! If you would like to join the crew, contact brigid-berger61@gmail.com or 713-825-1929.



Mid-Coast Chapter President Bob Cunningham's Thoughts

Bob Cunningham
President, Mid-Coast Chapter

We've enjoyed a lovely long springtime with abundant foliage, flowers, bugs and birds. In their wisdom—so much smarter than most of us humans—the migratory monarchs and birds mostly have moved North to cooler climes ahead of approaching summer. And notwithstanding our love of the natural world outdoors, many of us will embrace modern air-conditioning to get through the hot season! To those members who love the

heat of summer, good on you, but I'll never understand how you do it!

As we reach midyear, leadership transition is of particular importance for our Chapter. We are a comparatively small chapter hovering at 100 members, so we rely on virtually everyone to help run the operation! Every member in good standing (that is, all of us current in dues!) is eligible to serve as a director, while any certified member can serve as an officer.

This is my third and definitively LAST year as president, and someone else needs to take the reins! Please contact me if you have any interest. It's actually one of the easier jobs—delegation is your friend!—once the last of the Chapter's governing documents is revised next month.

Greg Simmons and Sally Scroggs also are stepping down after three years as directors of the Initial Training Class program. During their tenure, they've identified great teachers and forged relationships with fantastic venues, streamlined the process with virtual and field sessions, and brought in ambassadors for virtually every training session. So the load is much lighter for a new director stepping into that role. Please contact me or them if you have an interest in this critical work that keeps our chapter growing.

Linda Shirey resigned as Advanced Training Director after several years of great service. Modelling membership commitment, Debbie Kucera volunteered to take on this position. We thank Linda for her splendid service and welcome Debbie as she steps up!

Finally, we need to fill the Hospitality position, which coordinates the three Chapter potluck events held at the annual meeting in November, and at Orientation and Graduation sessions of the training class. Our membership typically supports these events with generous contributions of food and good fellowship, so the Hospitality chair mostly carts around the housekeeping supplies and ensures we have coffee and/or iced tea! Please contact me or Dee Mahaffey (Membership Director) or Janet Cunningham to volunteer.

Chapter leadership succession and envisioning our future, including creating a new Technology Director position and new procedures for funding member-initiated projects, will be major topics at the next Board meeting on July 8th. Please come and join in our considerations; or better, come and volunteer to take a leadership role!

Your directors have devoted many hours grappling with merging our current Policies & Procedures Manual into a revised Chapter Operating Handbook under a new framework issued by TMN. Kris Kirkwood is owed special recognition for coordinating the whole project and its seemingly infinite details! A draft will be circulated to membership for your comments ahead of the July 8th meeting when the new COH will be considered for approval by the Board.

Lastly, please check the TMN website for details on the 2023 Annual Meeting to be held in McAllen from October 12th through 15th. Registration will open the first week of August, but hotel bookings are open now. For more information on the details visit the website [here](#).

During this Summer season please remember what we all learned in our own training classes: dress appropriately, wear a hat, apply sunscreen and insect repellent, and drink plenty of fluids! Stay safe!

Congratulations to Captain Whitney Curry, Texas Floating Classroom (chapter partner) on winning the 2023 TEEA, Environmental Educator of the Year award. Watch a short video of her accomplishments [here](#).



From Left to right: Captain Bryan Curry, Captain Whitney Curry, Chapter members Allan and Brigid Berger.

From the Archives

Huge Soapberry Tree gets Texas Forest Service Care

By: NORMA MARTINEZ, Managing Editor

Published: Friday, September 10, 2010, 12:12 PM CDT The Rockport Pilot

Concerns about the health of the state and national champion Western Soapberry Tree in Rockport sent representatives from the Texas Forest Service (TFS) to vaccinate the tree.

The champion tree is located at a home at 1622 Cherry St., now owned by Diane and Steve Tucker. When the tree was confirmed in 2003 as the champion, the home was owned by Viola McNorton.

The TFS confirmed the dimensions of this largest known Western Soapberry (*Sapindus drummondii*) tree which is named in the Texas Big Tree Registry, which includes the listing of the largest specimen of every tree species found in Texas.

Trees in the registry are compared by a tree index which combines trunk circumferences in inches with total height in feet, plus one-quarter of the average crown spread in feet. The champion tree has increased its circumference by three inches to 111; but has lost height, it is now 51 feet tall. It's crown spread also has been reduced to 61.5 feet.

The tree's status as a national champion, however, is not what brought TFS officials and Texas Master Naturalists to the home.

An invasive pest known as the soapberry borer was first reported in Travis County in 2003 as infesting western soapberry trees. Since then, trees infested with the insect have been detected in 40 counties, including near or within cities including Corpus Christi.

The TFS conducted several injection trials and trapping locations up and down the coast for the Soapberry Borer. As a result, officials wanted to provide awareness about the insect as well as training and educational outreach to local residents.

On Friday, Sept. 3, Dr. Ron Billings and Dr. Don Grosman met with other TFS officials and local master naturalists at the home on Cherry Street to use a product called Tree-age, a product designed to protect against the insect.

Also in attendance were Peter Smith, TFS partnership coordinator—Texas Big Tree Registry Coordinator; Paul Johnson, TFS Urban forester; and Salvador Alemany, TFS Regional Urban forester.

Local Master Naturalists present to watch and gain knowledge about the process are Ray and Kris Kirkwood and Frankie and T.J. Fox. All four are officers of the local Master Naturalist chapter.

******The current US National champion *Sapindus Saponaria* var. *drummondii* is located in southern Johnson County, Kansas but it is still going strong as Texas' biggest Western Soapberry.



Gathering for the vaccination of the champion Western Soapberry tree are, from left, Texas Forest Service officials Paul Johnson, Peter Smith, Dr. Don Grossman, Homeowner Diane Tucker, Salvador Alemany, and Dr. Ron Billings. Photo by Norma Martinez



Call for Entry

Nature Journal Show

Lockett Gallery
Art Center of Corpus Christi

The Mid-Coast and South Coast Chapters of the Texas Master Naturalist Program are presenting a Nature Journal Show.

Eligibility: Open to all talents from beginner to advanced levels

Media: Open to all mediums

- *Nature Journals will be displayed under plexiglass cases.*
 - *Individual Nature Journal Artwork will be hung on the walls.*
- They should be matted and framed using plexiglass not glass as per Art Center rules.*

Entry Fee: Free

Submission Due: June 15, 2023

Exhibition Date: July 4- July 29, 2023

Kid's Corner

To promote the love of nature and journaling to all ages.
Educational public outreach with hands-on instructions!

Contact Rebecca Stapleton at (602) 312-8263 for further information.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/284659968379039/search/?q=nature%20journal>

HELP WANTED

A new section of the Mid-Coast Chapter Newsletter is in the works and we need experts or anyone who wants to submit information. This new section is going to be known as Specimen Spotlight. It will be a focus section on one or two animals, plants, or geographical features of our region to share with others. It doesn't have to go into great detail but just the basics so we can share with others. Pictures, scientific names, and other interesting facts or information about it. A small paragraph or two to give others some new understanding or maybe something they didn't know about the topic before. This can be of any topic that is of interest to you—share your knowledge!

And you get to Report the work that you do for this this project as PO: Incidental—you never know who you will influence through your effort!

Make sure to send all submissions, no matter how small you think they may be to me at either anakiri@gmail.com or newsletter@midcoast-tmn.org.

Spring 2023 Surveys of Monarchs & Milkweeds at Big Tree Natural Area

In April and May, an enthusiastic group of chapter members and parks staff surveyed the Big Tree Unit of Goose Island State Park for Monarch butterflies, milkweeds, and pollinator plants. We tallied a healthy population of *Zizotes* milkweeds, estimated at 260 plants in a 30-acre area. In addition, a great variety of native wildflowers and other pollinator plants were found. Monarch butterflies, on the

other hand, were few and far between, with only one adult and one caterpillar detected.



Surveying for Monarchs, milkweeds, and pollinator plants

The *Zizotes* and Monarch locations were mapped and the data provided to the Goose Island State Park staff for planning and educational purposes. Results were also submitted to iNaturalist and Journey North. An interesting exercise was attempting to identify plants using the iNaturalist Seek app – a hit-and-miss proposition as the app is still “learning” Texas Coastal Bend plants.

The low number of Monarchs sighted may be a result of fewer Monarchs migrating this spring, as warm and dry conditions contributed to a 22% decline in the Mexico wintering population, compared to the previous winter. The size of the wintering population, of course, is correlated to the breeding success of the multiple generations that migrate in stages through Texas and the southern U.S., to the northern states and provinces. The importance of Texas to the Monarch population cannot be understated!



*Monarch caterpillar on Big Tree *Zizotes* milkweed*

By observing the butterflies at Big Tree Natural Area and other sites in the area, we are gaining a better understanding of Monarch habitat and pollinator plant preferences. Such knowledge can be important for designing restoration projects to assist in the recovery of the endangered Monarch population. The presence of spring wildflowers is crucial, many which are annuals that must be allowed to re-seed in order to return year after year (*hold off on the mowing!*).

Equally important are fall pollinator plants, as we typically see more Monarchs in the fall than in the spring. Important fall plants include sunflowers, goldenrods, mistflowers, frostweeds and, not to be forgotten, native milkweeds, which are both host plants and excellent for pollinators. What plants do you have in your yard?

The Mid-Coast Chapter is involved in several habitat restoration, management, and monitoring projects in the Texas Coastal Bend region. Important contributions continue to be made by members Brigid Berger, Vickie Wilson, Neli Spurrell, and the Plant Sale Committee. For more information, you can contact Patrick Hartigan at pdhartigan4321@gmail.com.

Specimen Spotlight

Cowpen Daisy



By: Ele Chew

Cowpen Daisy, a great all-around pollinator plant, blooms from March to November.

Its gray-green leaves, which are triangular in shape with toothed margins, emit a unique odor.

It is drought-tolerant and can thrive in various soils and gets its name “cowpen” because it easily sprouts in disturbed areas.

The leaves and flowers contain the chemical galegine, which is poisonous to animals, and the plant was used by Native Americans to treat skin ailments and spider bites. Galegine is also known to possess antioxidant, antimicrobial, antidiabetic, and antiviral activities. The antidiabetic drug Metformin is a synthetic form of galegine.

Painted bunting

Passerina ciris

By Bobbie Lee



Mature Male Painted Bunting

The adult male is without question a very colorful bird with brilliant blue head, green back, red rumps and bellies. The adult female and the immature male are the same bright yellow-green overall color.

They eat seeds for the majority of the year but change up their diet during breeding season to include insects. Painted buntings will also visit bird feeders for easy seeds.

They tend to breed in areas of dense brush next to thick, grassy areas or woodland edges. The nest tend to be around 3-6 feet off the ground but can be as high as 50 feet if there is no vegetation low to the ground. Some common plants that the birds will nest around include elm, mesquite, mulberry, oak, pine, Spanish moss, myrtle, greenbrier, and Osage-

orange. They tend to lay around 3-4 eggs and it takes about 11-12 days for incubation with 9 days of nestling. The females also tend to stay in riparian thickets, shrubby areas and the open woodlands throughout the year.

The males will sing a sweet musical song to attract their mates but also to defend their territories from others. The territory range of a male Painted bunting is around 3 acres and the male will fight other males by grappling, pecking, or striking at them with their wings. They are still fairly common but their populations are declining by about 33% from 1966 to 2019.



Female Painted Bunting

Remember anyone who submits any information for this section can report it as PO: Incidental as we never know who we will influence through this! Let's share what we know and help inspire others.

CHAPTER MEMBERS' AWARD PHOTOS



CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

May Chapter Meeting Features Shorebirds on World Migratory Bird Day

Forty-six chapter members and two guests attended the May 13 Chapter Meeting in the Rec Hall at Goose Island State Park. Sam Wolfe, Shorebird Biologist at Manomet and Sara Rock, Park Ranger Interpreter were the presenters. Sam provided an overview of the research being done on shorebirds and shorebird identification. Sara provided details about Goose Island SP and the shorebirds found throughout the park. The presentations were not only interesting and informative but also very relevant to the importance of day as May 13 was World Migratory Bird Day and the 100th anniversary of Texas Parks. Both presentations can be found on the chapter’s YouTube channel “Texas Master Naturalist Mid-Coast Chapter”.



May 2023 General Meeting
Brigid Berger showing Sara Rock & Carla Rinche a
decorator crab.



VOLUNTEER HERE!

Celebrate the Beauty of Colonial Waterbirds:

Audubon Field Trip #13 (Spring 2023) - Aransas County

Saturday, June 10, 2023, beginning 8:00:00 AM—3 excursions

Rockport Beach Park Boat Ramp, Rockport

Report as AT: Single Presentation

Rockport rookery tour, skimmer nesting site; highlight: breeding colonial waterbirds; also nesting shorebirds that breed in south Texas and Little Bay. Co-leader and boat captain, David Newstead (CBBEP). The three excursions will last approximately 1 hour each.

Notify our field trip leader, Gene Blacklock, that you would like to go on this field trip by texting him at 361-558-1829 to providing your name(s) and cell phone number(s) and get directions.

As of now, only 2 people are signed up. First-come, first-served for reservations. Note that before they can accommodate the first excursion, they must be guaranteed 6 participants, same for second group as well as for the 3rd. Example: 6 must be confirmed for 8 am boat tour; following that, 6 for the 9 am tour and so on. Tentative schedule for boat tours: 8 am; 9 am; 10 am. During the rookery tours via boat, all other trip participants will be observing the birds in and around Little Bay Park, including the breeding skimmer and gull colony, and hoping to see the Sooty Tern.

What to wear and bring, park fee, bathroom availability, birds of special interest, other information: [Visit here](#)

The Texas Master Naturalist Program Wants Your Stories

I reached to Mary Pearl on how we can get involved in the 25th anniversary and got this response: “To celebrate our 25th Anniversary, we are hosting a year-long storytelling project to highlight our wonderful TMN members and their conservation volunteer work across the state.

We want to know! What inspired you to become a TMN member? Do you have a favorite TMN in-the-field memory? What has been your most meaningful project, community outreach, or conservation event? What does nature mean to you? Use these questions as inspiration for your creative brainstorming or feel free to use them as a direct prompt.

You’ll have two options to share your experiences as a Master Naturalist: either through video or words (written story and/or poetry). Please choose one format per story. You’re welcome to share more than one story if you’d like to try each format (just submit the form again!). To send us your story, please fill out the form below.”

Here is the link to submit and stories that have been submitted, [thus far](#)

Report as CB: Chapter Business with "State Meeting" in the admin dropdown.

Note***TMN will be showcasing the Doc and Martha video on social media!

WRITE FOR THE NEWSLETTER

Submit photos, articles, volunteer opportunities and anything you think fellow chapter members would have interest in seeing or reading. Get VS credit for your time. Report as Chapter Business (CB), Communications, and describe as newsletter submission work.

Email Newsletter Submissions to: Bobbie Lee newsletter@midcoast-tmn.org

ADVANCED TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Gardening for Monarchs & Other Wildlife Using Native Plants

Virtual 2-day workshop—Wednesday, June 21 and 23, 2023, 8:00 am–3:30 pm

Cost is \$55

Report as AT: Single Presentation

You will learn to design, install, and maintain your own monarch and all-pollinator-friendly native garden that also benefits other native wildlife, choosing the proper native plants for your ecoregion. You will also learn to use your new native garden(s) as an environmental educational tool in urban and suburban areas. This interactive two-day workshop will be hosted online (via Zoom) on June 21 (8:00 am-3:30 pm CDT), and June 23 (8:00 am-3:30 pm CDT). More information and [registration](#)

AT: Master Volunteer Entomology Specialist Training

Virtual—Every Tuesday & Thursday 09/05/2023–10/31/2023 from 10:00 am–12:00 pm

Fee: \$120 includes a kit with field guides, insect ID materials, loupe, & other tools related to the course and topics

Report as AT: Specific Project

Learn from experts in the field of urban, medical, landscape, and vegetable entomology, and much more.

The purpose of the Entomology Specialist program is to provide advanced training whereby Master Naturalists and Master Gardeners can support or expand specific county educational programs of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. This course consists of 17 sessions on various entomological topics (insect identification, butterflies, native pollinators, pests of turf, vegetables, trees, home, medical entomology, and more!).

Registrants will receive a kit of guides and tools via U.S. mail. After completing Specialist training, volunteers are expected to serve as a local county resource and contribute volunteer service by training other Master Naturalists or Master Gardeners and the public.

[Agenda](#)

*Information and the link to join virtually will be emailed to you after registration. More information & [registration](#)

CHAPTER RESOURCES

OFFICERS FOR 2022

President - Bob Cunningham
Vice President - Bill Burge
Secretary - Ele Chew
Treasurer - Julie Hejducek

BOARD MEMBERS

Advanced Training Director - Linda Shirey
Communications Director - D'Ann Williams
Membership Director - Dee Mahaffey
Training Class Directors- Greg Simmons & Sally Scroggs
Projects - Ray Kirkwood
Immediate Past President - Claire Barnhart
Chapter Advisor– Trey Barron
Class Rep 2022 - Laura Anderson

Committees and Contacts

Newsletter - Bobbie Lee
Website Editor - Kris Kirkwood
Webmaster - Ray Kirkwood

Volunteer Project Leaders

Mad Island Marsh Preserve - Brigid Berger
San Antonio Bay Partnership - Allan Berger
Linda S. Castro Nature Sanctuary - Laura Clark or Vickie Wilson

Sponsor Contacts - Texas AgriLife Extension Service

Aransas County - Ginger Easton–Smith
Calhoun County - RJ Shelly
Matagorda County - Nicole Pilson

Sponsor Contacts - Texas Parks & Wildlife Department

[TPWD Website](#)

Michelle Haggerty, Texas Master Naturalist Program Coordinator

[MCTMN Website](#)

[MCTMN Facebook page](#)

[MCTMN Instagram](#)

