

Mid-Coast **UPDATE**

Newsletter of the Mid-Coast Chapter, Texas Master Naturalists

SEPTEMBER 2021
FALL ISSUE



*Our mission: Education,
Outreach, Service*

UPCOMING

Mid-Coast Chapter Board
Meeting
October 9

*All members are welcome to
attend.*

Mid-Coast Chapter Meeting
November 13
Details to be announced

*22nd Annual
Texas Master Naturalist
Program Annual Meeting
October 21-24
Irving Texas*

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plant sale
By gpr crane

this year and in spite of the heat, we grew

ten Texas star hibiscus, coral beans

wild wooly wolfberry out in the yard

(a couple confined in their pots, that's hard)

plus turk's cap out the wazoo with the rain

they reign, they bloom, get butterflies intent

we propagated greatly chiltepin

called bird pepper, tis food, with heat obscene

(and beans tomatoes habaneros squash

eggplant, we eat it all, with wine we wash

it down.) but all the rest we grew for us

us t.m.n.-ers riding the best bus

of eco-friendly folks a-makin' fuss

fuss for environment, hurrah! (don't cuss.)

This poem was inspired by the Annual Native Plant Sale volunteer work of Chapter Members, Rusty and Denise Crane. They've been at it since 2019!

Mid-Coast Chapter
President
Bob Cunningham's
Message



*“We are “Being the Change”
indeed, even in these
challenging circumstances!”*

Towards the end of August we wondered when the hummingbird migration would get going here in Rockport. A week later we noticed the crossvines beginning to bloom, and sure enough the hummers arrived within the week. Presto, the marvelous coordination of nature!

Would that this Covid virus was so predictable. After holding our Board meeting live in July, we were back to a virtual Chapter meeting a month later. But what a meeting! Almost half our active members attended, with a great overview on entomology and lots of good discussion.

At this writing the Native Plant Sale is still ahead. This event not only is our main fundraiser for the year, but also a major opportunity for our members to come together for good fellowship and good work. Plus it affords great engagement with the public. Kudos to all who participated, and big thanks to Donna Bailey and Janet Cunningham for their strong leadership.

TMN's annual meeting is still ahead in Dallas/Fort Worth with presentations running Oct 21-24. In-person registration expires on October 2nd, but virtual registration is open right through October 24th. Always a broad and deep resource for a variety of environmental topics, and a handy way to earn AT credits for certification before the end of the calendar year! All registrations include full access to recordings of all technical sessions for up to 6 months after the event. Check it out online at <https://txmn.tamu.edu/2021-annual-meeting/> or through the link to TMN's site at the bottom of the Chapter's homepage.

While on the TMN site, you might note the new option for a TMN-branded license plate, with \$22 of every purchase going to support the state program. TMN also continues to offer the monthly TMN Tuesday and Be the Change presentations; in consideration of the Covid situation, watching these live or recorded events qualify for AT credits through the end of this year.

As encouraged by TMN's recent initiative for greater attention to Diversity-Equity-Inclusion issues, our Chapter is forming a committee to explore how we might improve our welcoming outreach to underserved communities across the breadth of our area and to a wider demographic. If you're interested, I'd recommend watching the July 20th online “Be The Change” presentation to hear about how other chapters are proceeding with this evaluation of their current programs. Please contact me directly if you are interested in participating in this initiative.

Finally, we remain hopeful for a long-delayed in-person Chapter meeting on November 13th with potluck lunch. But our first priority is safety and comfort level of our membership, so expect a poll of your preferences a couple weeks ahead. And please remember that our upcoming Board meeting on October 9th is open to any interested members.

As always, check out the Minutes from our August meeting for news on a host of other activities: <https://midcoast-tmn.org/members-landing/minutes/>. For such a comparatively small chapter, our members are engaged in such a wide ranging scale of volunteering! We are “Being the Change” indeed, even in these challenging circumstances!

A Few Tips for the Interpretive Guide

Phil & Rebecca Stapleton

One of our favorite TMN volunteer activities is being Interpretive Guides. We have had the good fortune to be Roving Interpretive Guides at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge and Naturalist Hike Leaders at Red Rock State Park in Sedona, Arizona. While these locations are strikingly different, the guests we encounter are much the same, wanting to enjoy the beauty of the area and learn as much as they can while visiting. We spend most of our hike in Sedona discussing local geology, medicinal plants, ancient peoples of the area and wildlife. Our mission at ANWR is a bit different in that we really want to introduce visitors to the plants and wildlife on the refuge. One of the complaints we hear the most at ANWR is “I don’t see any wildlife”! We make it a personal goal to make sure the people we encounter see and learn about the plants and wildlife while visiting.

What does it take to be an Interpretive Guide? First of all, you need to enjoy and be comfortable talking to visitors. Make sure you greet the visitors and introduce yourself as a volunteer. If you know us, you know we’re not particularly shy people and really love showing off the refuge to folks. A minor but important tip we learned from Dr McAlister during our TMN initial training is to take off those sunglasses. You want to make a personable and open impression with visitors and hiding behind sunglasses doesn’t work. People like to make eye contact.



To be able to “interpret,” you really need to do your homework about the area you are representing. Fortunately, there are excellent reference materials on the history, plants and wildlife for ANWR and we have several very knowledgeable members in our chapter that are always glad to share what they know. It also helps to have a few little known interesting facts, such as...did you know that a large adult alligator can grow on as little as 50 pounds of food a year and can live without eating for over a year? That’s usually my response when folks ask why that alligator staring down a whistling duck across Jones Lake doesn’t eat the duck. Just because they can doesn’t mean they are hungry or want to exert the effort. Another interesting alligator fact...did you know an alligator can run up to 35 miles per hour, and you can’t? That fact comes in handy when folks want to venture too close to an alligator.

We like to get to our location and set up our spotting scope and check out the surrounding area for wildlife that are not very visible to the casual observer. Almost without fail, we’ll spot wildlife that most visitors would not otherwise have noticed. We also come armed with our bird books to make sure we have correctly identified any new birds that may be making their way through during the spring and fall migrations...particularly all those different ducks.

Know your audience. Most of the visitors are very inquisitive and want to learn all they can about the area. There are some though, who want solitude during their visit. Serious birders come to mind, particularly during the migration periods. They don’t want to talk to anyone...just scan the area for birds and then move on. They are pretty easy to spot.



A few other tips to keep in mind:

Don’t be afraid to say you don’t know. Don’t make stuff up; besides the fact that it’s wrong, you don’t know the expertise of your audience.

Don’t talk about politics or religion no matter how hard they try to get you to. Believe me, we have had some folks who really insisted. Remember while you represent TMN and other entities such as ANWR, you are apolitical.

Give up the argument...after several attempts to explain that a Great Egret isn’t a Whooping Crane, if they want to believe it’s a Whooping Crane...so be it.



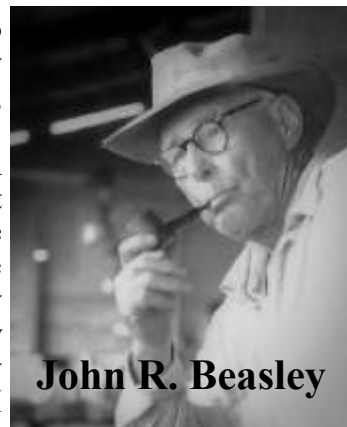
Dress appropriately according to who/where you are representing and be prepared for your environment. While at ANWR, we wear their volunteer shirts and name badges, as well as our TMN badges. In south Texas, our environment usually means heat, humidity, sun and mosquitos. Bring plenty of sunscreen, water, mosquito spray and a good hat and footwear. Above all else, relax and enjoy your time in the field.

A Grandson's Remembrance of Beasley's Eight Acres (The story behind Bent Oaks Rookery Park)

By Tom Beasley

Word came in 2017 that the City of Rockport had acquired a tract of land situated between Highway 35 and Little Bay known to our family as the "Eight Acres." The word "Rockport" was virtually synonymous with the "Eight Acres" to our way of thinking because to us they were one and the same. Going to Rockport meant going to the Eight Acres. This special place was purchased in the mid-1940's by my paternal grandfather, John R. Beasley. This "remembrance" was prompted by the sale of Eight Acres to the City of Rockport. Rockport is indelibly etched in the individual and collective consciousness of the Beasley family. Our interest in the Eight Acres is more than sand, shell, gnarled, wind-twisted oaks – it is a story about that which has value and worth, it is a reflection of a humble man who was determined to make a difference, and it is an enduring testimony to his unwavering tenacity.

For at least six generations the Beasley family has been closely connected to the Texas coast, a legacy I believe can be traced back to John C. Beasley, I, (my great-grandfather). He was raised in the Virginia Tidewater region. As a young man, he reportedly rode horseback from Virginia to Texas, arriving in Rockport in 1876. He had a law degree from the University of Virginia. Nevertheless, his first job in Rockport was teaching school. During John C's first year in Texas, Rockport reportedly experienced a major storm, and as a result, he moved to Beeville, where he opened a law practice in 1877. He married Anna Mary Gramman. They had three sons: John R. (my grandfather), Robert Jones Beasley and Browne Beasley. My grandfather joined the practice with great-grandfather, the firm being called Beasley & Beasley. My father, John C. Beasley II, came into the firm in the late 1930's, my brother, John W. Beasley, joined the firm around 1970, and I was added in 1975. I am one of John R.'s grandsons.



John R. Beasley

In spite of his move to Beeville, the interest of the first John C. in the coast never waned. John R. was even more intensively tied to the Gulf waters than his father. John R. purchased the Eight Acres as a coastal property for his family. John R. was married to Lillian Scott, and they had five children. Lillian Scott Beasley died on June 21, 1953 while at the Eight Acres. John R. never remarried, living until March 1, 1970. In 1973 the Eight Acres were conveyed to family members, Scottie and James Ferguson, Jr. The Fergusons graciously made the Eight Acres available to Beasley family members and friends for countless family gatherings and celebrations. The chief architect of the Beasley family's ties to Rockport was and will always be John R. His acquisition of the Eight Acres translated into a reliable coastal home-base for generations of Beasleys, providing the opportunity to learn about, enjoy and value the Gulf of Mexico, Rockport and environs.

My family spent countless hours in and around Little Bay, crabbing, wade fishing, learning to throw a cast net for finger mullet or using a push net for bait shrimp, or rowing a skiff over to Frandolig Island. That island, proper, was strictly off-limits. We could get *to the island*, but we were to never set foot *on the island*. One rationale for this policy was the supposed presence of rattlesnakes. While danger from snakes may have been a real possibility, in retrospect, I imagine it had more to do with the myriad nesting birds, including many that were at ground-level. Protection of those birds and their nests was a non-negotiable priority!

Time and space do not permit a full review or listing of all of the projects, activities, experiences, meaning or import of the Eight Acres in the lives of the of those of us privileged to use, enjoy and care for this unique place. John R. ("Papaw" to his grandchildren) undoubtedly had in mind a fishing camp, and that it was from the time he first acquired this property until it was sold to the City of Rockport. But somewhere along the way it became much more than that.

For some it was ant bites, jellyfish stings, mosquito welts, sunburns, barnacle scrapes, imbedded grass burs and other wounds suffered during coastal recreation. For others, it was malfunctioning fishing reels, broken-off snap swivels, stingrays scurrying underfoot, boats taking on too much water, motors that wouldn't start, flat tires, and the like. And yet, in every instance someone was always present with the appropriate salve, spray, medicine, treatment, bandage, tweezers, parts, gear, equipment and solutions, and the knowledge, skill and willingness to help so that all was made right and well. The Eight Acres taught us how to adapt, how to deal with the unexpected, how to work together. But more than anything else, it confirmed the unrestrained importance of family, and how much effort is needed to hold family, especially extended family, together. Visions of the Eight Acres and all those remarkable times come flooding back from time to time.

For me and Karole one of the greatest gifts of the Eight Acres occurred when we took our own children as youngsters through the same screen doors and over the same cement porches, kitchens and bedrooms that were there for me when I was their age. It was dressing them in long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and big hats and slathering on lots of sunscreen for a day of fishing, even when the kids were little. No fishing in bathing suits or other careless attire. This was serious business! It meant rising well before dawn, making sure all was ready, and then doing our best to put fish in the boat. The actions, skills and tactics that I observed in my grandfather, father, aunts and cousins, indeed the culture of valuing and enjoying Rockport, I imparted to my own children, and that perspective has been and always will be at the heart of Beasley gatherings in Rockport.

Another lesson from Rockport is the inevitability of change. Sometimes it is gradual, almost imperceptible. On other occasions, it bursts forth without warning. The story of the Eight Acres includes both. For more than 70 years, it was home away from home to multiple generations of our family. But nothing lasts

forever, at least not in the configuration we have known. The Eight Acres remains, but no longer is it under the stewardship of our family. That responsibility now falls upon the City of Rockport, and in that respect, I am confident that our Papaw would be pleased, especially if this singular property is properly conserved.

Although John R. was an accomplished attorney, a capable outdoorsman and a generous spirit, his credentials as an independent-minded conservationist are truly his hallmark. In the Rockport area, primarily in Copano and Aransas Bays, he focused on the destruction of living oyster reefs that were being converted into a cheap source of road construction material. In his view, the well-being of the bay system was being sacrificed so the paving companies could make bigger profits. He considered the bays to be the property of all the people, and although a staunch fiscal conservative, he did not approve of converting public assets (the oyster reefs) into profit for private companies. More importantly, John R. knew the value of the reefs as essential for a healthy, productive bay system. Consequently, he worked tirelessly to end the destruction of reef-marine habitat.

John R. had keen powers of observation and organization. As the result of a lifetime devoted to study, research, inquiry, advocacy, enjoyment, and deep affection for the coastal environment, he amassed what is likely the largest personal library related to coastal issues and concerns, much of it focused along the central and southern Texas Gulf Coast in general, and the Rockport area in particular. This collection was originally housed at the United States Marine Fisheries Laboratory in Port Aransas, Texas, but through the generous support of Jim and Scottie Ferguson, this important collection was eventually relocated to the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin.

Three excerpts from the Briscoe Center's guide page reveal much about John R. and his uncompromising focus on the coastal environment. First, in the Organization section we find: *"Original order maintained. Indexes are those that Beasley created for each group of materials. Finding aid reflects the numbering system and subject access of the indexes."*

From the Biographical Note we are told: *"Beasley was a Bee County attorney whose avocation was the study of the Texas Gulf Coast and the protection of its waters and marine life; was Beeville's first mayor after incorporation in 1908 and who, in the 1960s, campaigned against the construction of a bypass around Beeville. As founder and sole member of the organization Independent Texas Coastal Research for the Common Good, he corresponded with elected officials, government agencies, marine biologists, sportsmen, and outdoor editors of major Texas newspapers espousing his causes. He wrote briefs in protest of applications for shell dredging permits and lobbied against all forms of commercial interests that he believed were detrimental to the ecosystems of the Gulf of Mexico. In the course of his work, he amassed this large collection of research materials, most of which he meticulously indexed."*

The Scope and Contents section summarize the John R. Beasley Papers: *"Correspondence, notes, literary productions, reports, printed materials, maps, charts, tables, photographs, and clippings document John R. Beasley's interest in the Texas coast of the Gulf of Mexico and his advocacy for the protection of the environment and marine life of the area. Much of the material reflects his extensive campaign against oyster shell dredging operations in the Texas bays. Other materials are evidence of his collaboration with sport fishing enthusiasts against commercial fishing interests. His work for the National Seashore designation for Padre Island is documented by correspondence with Senator Ralph Yarborough, sponsor of the successful legislation, and other materials. Some personal papers such as reminiscences of fishing trips are included in the collection."*

As mentioned above, the Padre Island National Seashore project was a matter of greatest importance for John R. He and Effie Joe (Jo) Adkins [who died in 2016 at more than 98 years of age] attended meetings of all sorts, including those of city councils, commissioner courts and the like, over the length and breadth of south Texas, where they made the case for establishing what is now known as Padre Island National Seashore. Their goal was to cultivate as much public support for the national seashore as possible. This support was critical due to intense lobbying efforts by those seeking to commercially develop this stretch of pristine shoreline. The counter to the hotel, motel and develop-at-any-cost crowd, according to Jo, was an old country lawyer from Beeville and a housewife who doubled as his driver and secretary (Jo's characterization, not mine). After more than a decade of work and preparation the park was dedicated on April 8, 1968. It is billed as "The Longest Stretch of Undeveloped Barrier Island in The World." Neither John R. nor Jo have ever been recognized outside of Beeville, for their determined efforts to protect and preserve this unique stretch of national seashore. John R. died on March 1, 1970, less than two years after the park's dedication.

One conservation endeavor that did not have a happy outcome from John R.'s perspective, was the sale and development of Frandolig Island. Not only was Frandolig Island directly across Little Bay from the Eight Acres, it was a thriving rookery, especially for shorebirds. He allied with Jo and conservation icon, Connie Hagar, to oppose this project in an effort to maintain this important, well-protected nesting area but the battle to save Frandolig was lost to development. What a beautiful irony it is that the Eight Acres, preserved and protected from development for more than seventy years through the efforts of John R. and his family, is maintained as a conservation zone and bird rookery! While the microenvironment is not precisely the same as Frandolig, the continued use of the Eight Acres by various bird species confirms that it has become a favored venue for nesting activities. Papaw is smiling, and undoubtedly so are Jo Adkins and Connie Hagar!



Blue Herons nesting at Bent Oaks Rookery Park

"Twig Transfer" Photo By Cissy Beasley

VOLUNTEER

MCTMN Volunteers Assist GISP With Hummer Feeders



MCTMN Volunteers Kim Gaddy, Ernie Schertz, Linda Swickheimer and Bill Burge have been assisting Goose Island State Park with Hummingbird Feeders during the fall migration. Each day one member of the team checks two different locations with five feeders each for empty feeders or ones that have been knocked down by squirrels or racoons. Feeders are cleaned, refilled, and rehung. It's not a big task, but Sarah Affeldt (aka Ranger Sarah), our sponsor, appreciates the help: *"I am very thankful to the Mid-Coast Chapter volunteers for maintaining the hummingbird feeders at Goose Island State Park during this year's fall migration. Providing a respite for hummingbirds as they pour in from their grueling migration aligns with the conservation goals of Texas State Parks and TPWD, but the time required to set up, clean, refill, and properly maintain a dozen hummingbird feeders can be taxing on park operations. It is a huge weight off of our shoulders to have MCTMN volunteers ready & willing to help the park, and hummingbirds, out in this way!"*

Adopt A Loop

Chapter Member, Sandra Garcia is keeping it clean at Ransom Road Park as part of "Adopt a Loop". Natalie Woolfrey, also of our chapter is the contact for more information about this project.



Rockport Post Office Pollinator Garden

Jane Moore, D'Ann Williams, and Vickie Wilson, all Mid-Coast Texas Master Naturalists and board members of Keep Aransas County Beautiful, are setting up 3 pollinator gardens in the Rockport area.

The Rockport Post Office front landscape was in very poor shape when a plan was developed to make it an educational pollinator garden. It is still in the development stage but has already come a long way. Bill Burges supplied monarch milkweed host plant seeds and Vickie grew 8 plants that were just added to the garden. Some of the nectar plants were already established a year ago.

We hope this will be very educational. Every time we come to water plants and take care of the garden, we get stopped and asked questions about our plants.

The other two gardens were established last year at the north and south monuments in Rockport when they were re-built after Hurricane Harvey.

These gardens are not as accessible to human visitors but are plenty accessible to the butterflies, bees, and birds.

Patrick Hartigan has advised the group with suggestions and ideas. We were able to transplant some zizotes milkweed from Francis Frizzell's yard. We were excited to say this was a total success and will be able to do this again.

We also have purchased pollinator plants from the Mid-Coast Texas Master Naturalist native plant sale.



Plant Sale

The MCTMN native plant sale, held at the HummerBird Celebration in Rockport, is our Chapter's only fundraiser, and this year was a huge success! We had many plants propagated by our members, and ordered plants from two nurseries, Native Texas Nursery in Austin and Heep's Nursery in Harlingen. While this event requires a lot of planning for several months before the sale, it all went smoothly with the help and hard work of many of our Chapter Members. We want to give a huge "shout out" to Liz Smith for the use of her yard as a plant-sale staging area. With so many beautiful plants sold, we netted over \$6,000!!! Thanks to everyone for making it a great success!

Donna Bailey and Janet Cunningham
Plant Sale Co-chairs

